

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 1 of 65

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- SD News Watch: Weekly newspapers in South Dakota bucking media trends](#)
- [5- Despite Collecting 11 Hits, Groton Locke Electric Falls to Northville](#)
- [6- EarthTalk - Electric Vehicle](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: Supreme Court wetlands decision has SD water advocates worried](#)
- [9- Weather Pages](#)
- [13- Daily Devotional](#)
- [14- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [15- Subscription Form](#)
- [16- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [17- News from the Associated Press](#)

Groton Community Calendar

Monday, June 19

Senior citizens meet at 1 p.m. at the Groton Community Center.

Pantry open from 11 a.m. to 3 p.m. at the Groton Community Center.

June 19: Goulash, Green Beans, garlic toast, acini depepi fruit salad.

Jr. Teener at Aberdeen Smitty's, 2 games, 5:30 p.m.; Softball at Warner (U8 6:00, U10 7:00 (Black/Pink), U12 8:00); U10R/B at Britton, 5:30 p.m., 2 games; U8 Blue at Britton, 2 games, 5:30 p.m.

Tuesday, June 20

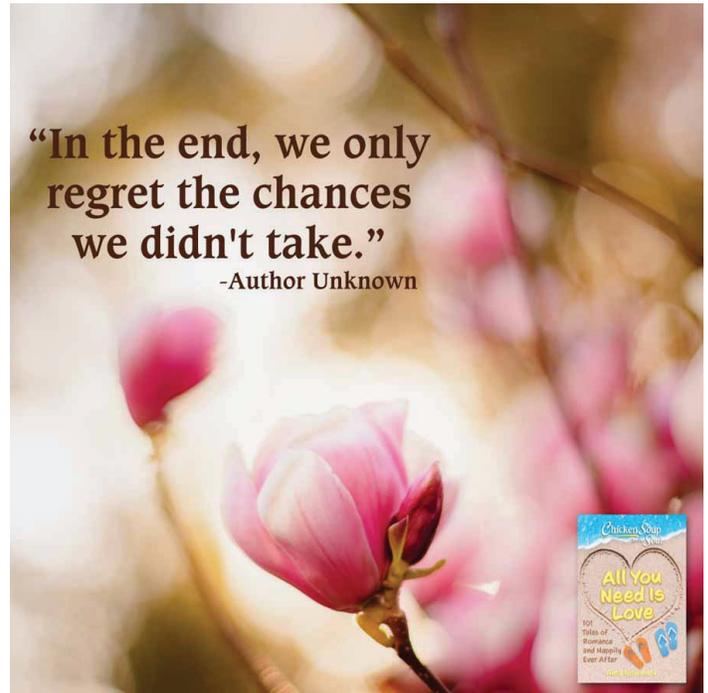
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Pantry, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m. at Groton Community Center

Senior Menu: Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, oriental blend vegetables, peaches, whole wheat bread.

U12BB at Doland, 8 p.m.; U10B/W at Webster, 2 games, 6 p.m.; U8 R&B at Webster, 6 p.m., 2 games; T-Ball scrimmage, 6 p.m.

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



Wednesday, June 21

Senior Menu: Turkey sub sandwich, lettuce and tomato, macaroni salad, watermelon.

Jr. Legion hosts Hamlin, 1 game, 8 p.m.; Legion hosts Hamlin, 1 game, 6 p.m.; June 21: U10R/W hosts Borge, 2 games, 5:30 p.m.; U8 Red hosts Borge, 5:30 p.m., 2 games; Softball at Clark (U8 at 6 p.m.)

Thursday, June 22

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, corn, apple juice, mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.

Jr. Teener host Webster, 2 games, 5:30 p.m.; June 22: U12BB vs. Borge 12 at Aberdeen North Complex, 2 games, 5:30 p.m.; Softball hosts Mellette (U10 6:00 DH (Pink/White); U12 6:00 DH)

Friday, June 23

Senior Menu: Tuna salad croissant, pea and cheese salad, mixed fruit.

Softball at Webster (U12 6:00 DH); T-Ball Gold hosts Andover, 6 p.m.; Jr. Legion at Lake Norden, 1 game, 7 p.m.; Legion at Lake Norden, 1 game, 5 p.m.

CLOSED: 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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Broton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 2 of 65



**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

Weekly newspapers in South Dakota bucking media trends

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

One heartbreaking phone call in November 2021 sums up the depth of devotion Jill Meier and other weekly newspaper editors across South Dakota feel toward keeping their communities informed.

Meier took the call while working at the Brandon Valley Journal and learned that her 83-year-old mother had died at a hospital in Minnesota. The call came on a Monday, a day when Meier and others in the weekly news business are on deadline to get their papers ready to be printed each Tuesday.

"I had to deal with my grief a little bit, but I still had to get that paper out," Meier, 59, recalled in an interview. "So, I still sat here and put that darn paper together, even knowing my mom was no longer with us. But that's kind of what you do when you have this job."

Amid all the reported doom and gloom about the decline of the newspaper industry in America, many weekly newspapers are bucking the downward trends by surviving and in many cases thriving, even as fewer people consume local news in print.

South Dakota, in particular, is a stronghold in the weekly news industry, with one of the highest per-capita rates of weekly newspaper publications in the country, according to David Bordewyk, executive director of the South Dakota Newspaper Association.

As a state with 66 counties, South Dakota has 94 weekly newspapers in operation, almost all outside the population centers of Sioux Falls, Rapid City and other urban areas.

Though they face many of the same headwinds as daily papers — including increased production and distribution costs, staffing challenges and increasing competition from digital news and advertising sources — weekly newspapers continue to be a critical source of news, information and advertising for rural residents of South Dakota.

"Their role is as important as it's always been, maybe even more so," Bordewyk said.

"There is a role that these newspapers play in the sustainability of their communities, whether it be economically, culturally or socially, and it's all connected to keeping residents of those communities informed about what is going on."

The past few decades have been brutal for the American newspaper industry as a whole, creating in some cases what researchers at the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill have deemed "news deserts," where residents do not have access to any local news source.

More than 1 in 5 newspapers in the U.S. closed in the past 15 years, and half of all journalism jobs



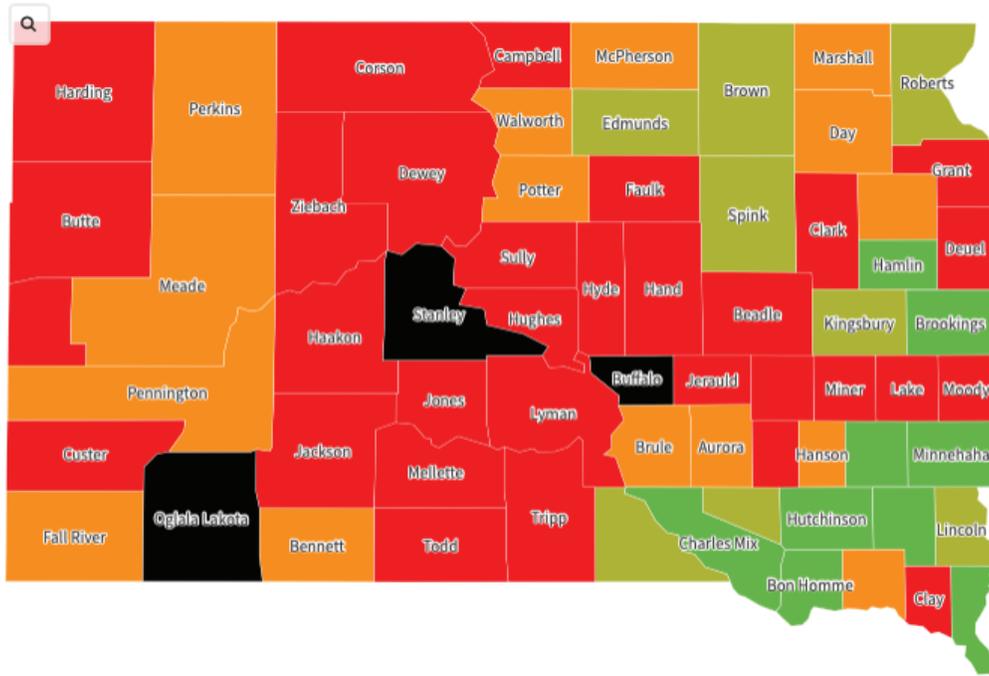
Jill Meier, publisher/editor of the Brandon Valley Journal newspaper, smiles for a selfie outside the newspaper offices in Brandon. (Photo: Courtesy Jill Meier)

Broton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 3 of 65

South Dakota newspapers by County as of 2022

0 1 2 3 4 5



Source [UNC School of Journalism and Media](#) • Graphic by Michael Klinski / SD News Watch

have disappeared during that time. In the U.S., 200 counties now have no local paper, and more than 7,000 newspapers are labeled as “ghosts” of their former products due to cutbacks, according to UNC.

Data from the federal Bureau of Labor Statistics reveal the depth of the decline in the number of journalists working to gather news in South Dakota. According to the bureau, the number of journalists working in any capacity in the state fell from 490 in 2006 to 250 in 2016 to 200 in 2021.

Local newspaper key to a community's strength

The lack of newspapers creates fundamental problems for communities because, as the university

reports, “the fate of communities and the vitality of local news ... are intrinsically linked.”

The research has also pointed to an increasing divide of access to news among the “haves” and “have-nots” in relation to greater difficulty of lower-income people to obtain quality local news.

Bordewyk said a local newspaper serves as a key source of cohesion in communities, especially rural areas and small towns that don't have other media in place.

“It's sort of the grease in a community's engine,” he said. “It keeps things running smoothly as a barometer of what is happening in terms of agriculture, businesses, local government, education and what's happening in the town.”

South Dakota has 11 traditional daily newspapers, as it has for decades, but many have lost vast circulation, experienced deep staff cuts and reduced publication days. Like other states, South Dakota has seen growth in the development of non-profit news organizations, such as News Watch, and other mainly digital news outlets.

Things are turning around for some weeklies

Weekly papers, meanwhile, have seen a slower decline in the number of publications, from 128 in 1995 to 94 now.

Weekly paid circulation has also fallen by roughly half over the past four decades, from a high of about 200,000 in 1980 to 100,000 now, which equates to about 250,000 individual readers, Bordewyk said.

Like many businesses, newspapers suffered hard financial times during the COVID-19 pandemic as advertisers could not afford to spend on promotion. And production and distribution became far more challenging.

According to the Pew Research Center, 360 U.S. newspapers closed from 2019 to 2022, which came on top of 2,400 closures documented back to 2004.

In the post-pandemic era, many weekly newspapers are seeing stabilized revenues or at least slowing de-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 4 of 65

clines, though an inability to find staff remains a major ongoing challenge, some newspaper operators told News Watch.

One recent hit has come from rapidly rising postal rates, which have jumped by 30% over the past three years and are a big expense for publications that mostly mail papers to their subscribers.

Weekly newspapers continue to seek new revenue sources or ways to expand on secondary sources, such as increasing commercial print jobs, publishing more special sections, or partnering with community or civic groups to produce new products. Some have also installed website paywalls to push paid online subscriptions and access.

A community paper run by the community

While South Dakota has largely bucked the trend of mass newspaper closures, the state is also home to an experiment — so far successful — that could provide a new way for newspapers to survive in a challenging financial and staffing environment.

The concept, now underway in Kingsbury County, west of Brookings, uses mostly volunteer labor from within the local community to run and fill a local weekly newspaper and website with content.

When two well-established neighboring weekly papers in Lake Preston and De Smet were facing closure in 2020, a group of community members stepped in to buy, rebrand and relaunch the papers as the Kingsbury Journal, which serves the county as a whole, rather than the individual towns within it.

Other than three part-time employees, the newspaper and website are produced by unpaid volunteers within the region.

After three years in operation, the paper has 1,300 print subscribers and sees heavy and steadily increasing use of its website, both by locals and people who live out of town, said Sheryl Downes, office manager at the journal.

"It's going well. It's actually going excellent, and the paper is enjoyed by many people," said Downes. "We have great subscription numbers, a great following, and the many volunteers who make our paper what it is."

While the volunteer model continues to evolve, the normal for-profit business model for weekly papers in South Dakota remains individual or group ownership and a small staff that hustles and works long hours to keep an eye on local government, report on local schools and sports, and provides coverage and an advertising venue for local businesses.

Balance between cheerleader and watchdog

Most weekly newspapers run with skeleton staffs, often led by one person or a family that is staunchly committed to remaining financially viable and informationally relevant in their communities.

At the heart of the weekly newspaper is the editor, who sometimes works alone or with a very small staff to make news coverage choices, report articles and take photographs and complete the design of the paper and website while also serving as a community representative of the newspaper.

Bordewyk said running the editorial department of a weekly paper can be one of the trickiest jobs in journalism.

"A good newspaper editor has to maintain a balance between being the No. 1 cheerleader in a community as well as the No. 1 poker and prodder about what is right or wrong in the community. And that's



Dave Bordewyk is the director of the South Dakota Newspaper Association. (Photo: Submitted via Poynter)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 5 of 65



The first edition of the Kingsbury Journal in 2020.

(Photo: Kingsbury Journal via Facebook)

all the more difficult when you still have to live in that community," he said.

"You don't want to cheerlead too much, but you don't want to poke people in the eye with a hot stick either."

Bordewyk, who lobbies the state Legislature on behalf of daily and weekly newspapers, said the state needs a strong news media in order to prevent potential breakdowns in the social, educational and business fabric of a community.

"I would argue that a newspaper is as important to the viability and sustainability of a community as whether it got a new factory or had new jobs coming to town," Bordewyk said. "Without that continuity that a good newspaper can provide, things can fall apart or break down in ways that are not anticipated or certainly not intended."

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

ABOUT BART PFANKUCH



Bart Pfankuch, Rapid City, S.D., is the content director for South Dakota News Watch. A Wisconsin native, he is a former editor of the Rapid City Journal and also worked at newspapers in Florida. Bart has spent more than 30 years as a reporter, editor and writing coach.

Despite Collecting 11 Hits, Groton Locke Electric Falls to Northville

Groton Locke Electric fell 5-4 to Northville on Sunday despite out-hitting them 11 to eight.

Northville got on the board in the second inning. Mcsoleman singled on a 1-2 count, scoring one run.

Waltman led things off on the mound for Northville. The ace lasted three innings, allowing seven hits and three runs while striking out three.

Groton Locke Electric tallied 11 hits in the game. Austin Jones, Alex Morris, Dalton Locke, and Brian Hansen each had multiple hits for Groton Locke Electric. Jones went 3-for-4 at the plate to lead Groton Locke Electric in hits. Groton Locke Electric was sure-handed in the field and didn't commit a single error. Spencer Locke had the most chances in the field with 15.

Northville tallied eight hits. Maxfield, Faonelua, and Stahl each collected multiple hits for Northville.

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: What are the environmental and other pros and cons of ditching the gas guzzler for an electric vehicle (EV)?

-- S.H., Washington, DC

Transportation accounts for almost a third of all U.S. greenhouse gas emissions, making the switch to EVs a welcome change for environmental advocates. But is ditching your old conventional wheels for a shiny new EV really the best thing for the planet? To evaluate how eco-friendly a car is, you should consider the environmental impacts of its three life stages: its creation, operation and disposal.

Studies conclude that manufacturing a vehicle accounts for around 25 percent of its lifetime carbon footprint. Making a car creates a lot of pollution as raw materials have to be extracted, transported and manufactured. In fact, according to the environmental consulting firm Ricardo, 46 percent of an EV's total carbon footprint is generated before it even travels a mile. Keeping your old car eliminates the environmental effect of manufacturing a vehicle.

An important question arises: Do the negative environmental impacts of manufacturing EV batteries outweigh the benefits? A report by CarbonBrief concludes that EVs have a smaller carbon footprint than used gasoline cars in about four years and a smaller carbon footprint than new ones in around two years. EVs also benefit the environment by eliminating tailpipe emissions and having better fuel economies than gasoline-powered cars. And while the sustainability of EVs ultimately depends upon the mix of renewable energy in the grid where you live, even with the current renewable energy percentage, driving EVs tends to be beneficial. The more renewable energy you charge your car with, the better: So consider choosing your utility's greener options or purchasing Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs).

EVs themselves pose a bit of a difficulty when it comes to responsible disposal. Recycling EV batteries can be difficult as the design and chemicals vary greatly from one battery to another. Most batteries aren't even designed to be recycled. While much is being done to address this issue, it remains a significant contributor to toxic waste.

Financially speaking, according to a report by GetJerry, EVs cost an average of \$56 per month more to insure than gasoline-powered cars. They are also more expensive to repair. But in spite of these down sides, operating an EV comes with certain economic benefits. It can help you evade the ever-increasing gas prices and the ever-increasing maintenance needs of an aging gas-powered vehicle. It also may be eligible for tax incentives and credits. And prices of battery EVs are seeing significant reductions: According to EVI-USA, "Experts expect that their prices will be at par with diesel or petrol vehicles between 2025 and 2027."

To conclude, over their full life, electric and hybrid vehicles have significantly lower carbon footprints than normal cars. But, EVs tend to be a bit more expensive. If investing in one is out of reach, you can reduce your transport-related issues by walking, biking or using public transport whenever possible.



Is ditching your old conventional wheels for a shiny new EV really the best thing for the planet?

Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Supreme Court wetlands decision has SD water advocates worried

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JUNE 18, 2023 6:00 AM

A recent U.S. Supreme Court wetlands decision may have implications for wetlands in South Dakota, which has a law that says state environmental regulations and rules cannot be more strict than federal ones.

A wetland is generally viewed as an area of land that is covered or soaked with water for at least part of the year. On May 25, the Supreme Court determined that the federal Clean Water Act only applies to wetlands that are always connected via surface water to "navigable" waters, such as rivers or lakes that have enough water volume and depth for boat travel. That decision came in response to a lawsuit from an Idaho couple who disputed the Clean Water Act's applicability to their building plans.

Conservation groups react

Many conservation groups disagree with the ruling. They point out that a wetland does not need a surface water connection to interact with other water. For example, preliminary findings from a study showed the Big Sioux River is exchanging water with underground aquifers near Watertown via subsurface connections.

"This ruling defies science, the law and common sense," said Jared Mott, conservation director for the Izaak Walton League of America, which advocates for healthy wildlife and habitats, and clean water.

Jim Murphy is the director of legal advocacy for the National Wildlife Federation. He has worked on Clean Water Act issues for more than two decades and has represented environmental organizations before the U.S. Supreme Court. He said the decision will "scale back regulations and make it easier for development to occur."

"The decision disincentivizes producers to conserve wetlands where selling the area to a developer previously wasn't an option," Murphy said. "Because that wetland was previously protected."

Wetlands purify water by trapping sediment, pollutants and livestock waste. Wetlands can also absorb large amounts of water, helping mitigate flood risks. And they provide essential habitats for numerous species.

Impact in South Dakota

Some wetland advocates worry the Supreme Court's decision means states are now in charge of protecting many of the wetlands that are no longer protected by the Clean Water Act.

"And that's not great, given the state's relatively hands-off approach to water regulations," said Jay Gilbertson, who manages the East Dakota Water Development District, based in Brookings.

That is a view shared by Brad Johnson, president of South Dakota Lakes and Streams and a former chairman of the state Board of Water and Natural Resources.

"Only in the most egregious cases does the state use the enforcement tools they have," Johnson said.



The sun sets on a wetland northwest of Hartford, South Dakota. (Joshua Haiar/SD Searchlight)

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 8 of 65

"The state will always side with agriculture, not the environment."

Gilbertson and Johnson are also concerned about a state law that says no environmental rule "may be more stringent than any corresponding federal law, rule, or regulation governing an essentially similar subject or issue."

"And so, is the Supreme Court's definition of a wetland now the state's?" Gilbertson asked.

The state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources "is still evaluating the full impact" of the Supreme Court opinion, department spokesperson Brian Walsh said in an emailed statement. He said the opinion "does provide welcome clarity on the federal government's authority under the Clean Water Act, which we believe is a victory for South Dakota and our agricultural community."

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, issued a statement following the Supreme Court's decision. Johnson said the decision "is a huge win for rural America. Navigable waters cannot include every small puddle, stream, and ditch. I'm glad our agricultural producers will finally have some certainty. I'll continue working with my colleagues in Congress to prevent the Biden Administration from placing overly burdensome regulations on our producers."

Aspects of federal impact uncertain

Wetlands in South Dakota have been afforded protection under state administrative rules that define wetlands as "areas inundated or saturated by surface or ground water at a frequency and duration sufficient to support, and that under normal circumstances do support, a prevalence of vegetation typically adapted for life in saturated soil conditions, including swamps, marshes, bogs, and similar areas." The rules require a federal permit to fill wetlands, and the permits are issued by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers rather than state regulators.

The corps generally has had authority over wetlands with multiple kinds of connections to lakes and rivers, including underground or temporary connections. However, given the Supreme Court's new definition of what constitutes a connection, it's unclear if the corps will continue overseeing wetlands that do not have a permanent surface connection.

"We have had minimal to no guidance at this point," said Steve Naylor, South Dakota wetland program manager with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. "It's just too early to tell."

Travis Entenman, managing director of Friends of the Big Sioux River in Sioux Falls, said in a statement that while it is too early to know the precise ramifications, "Overall, this will be a big blow to water quality protections and a serious narrowing of the Clean Water Act."

Some wetlands are unlikely to be impacted, according to Todd Frerichs, of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in South Dakota. Those include wetlands that have been voluntarily protected by easements, publicly owned wetlands, and those protected because of a federal requirement that says farmers who convert wetlands risk losing eligibility for agricultural subsidies.

Frerichs said the Fish and Wildlife Service protects about 750,000 acres of wetlands in the state, including about 600,000 through voluntary agreements with landowners.

"Changes and debates about the Clean Water Act do not not impact these easements," Todd Frerichs said.

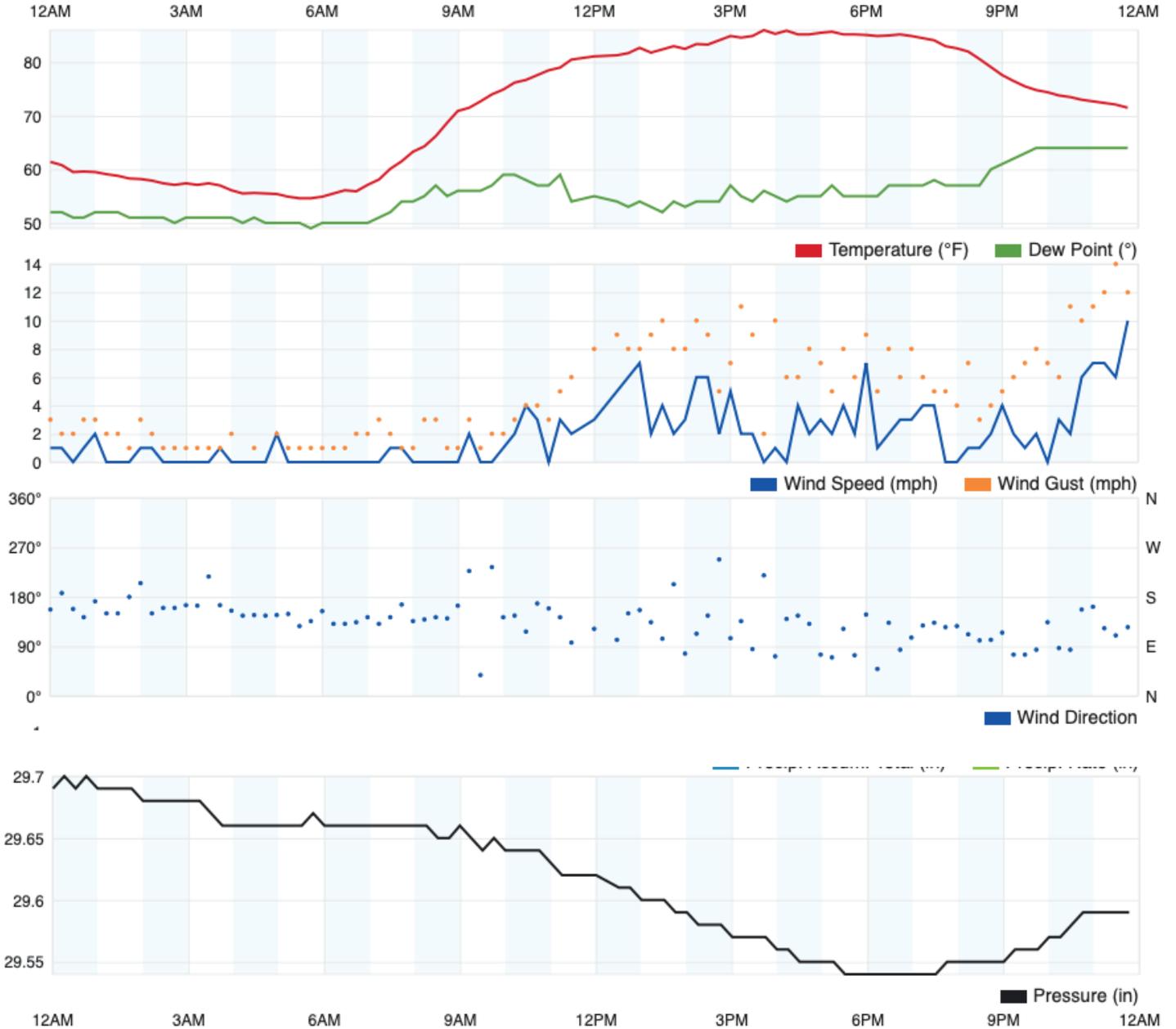
EDITOR'S NOTE: Brad Johnson, who is quoted in this story, has worked periodically as a freelance reporter and commentary writer for South Dakota Searchlight.

Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 9 of 65

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs

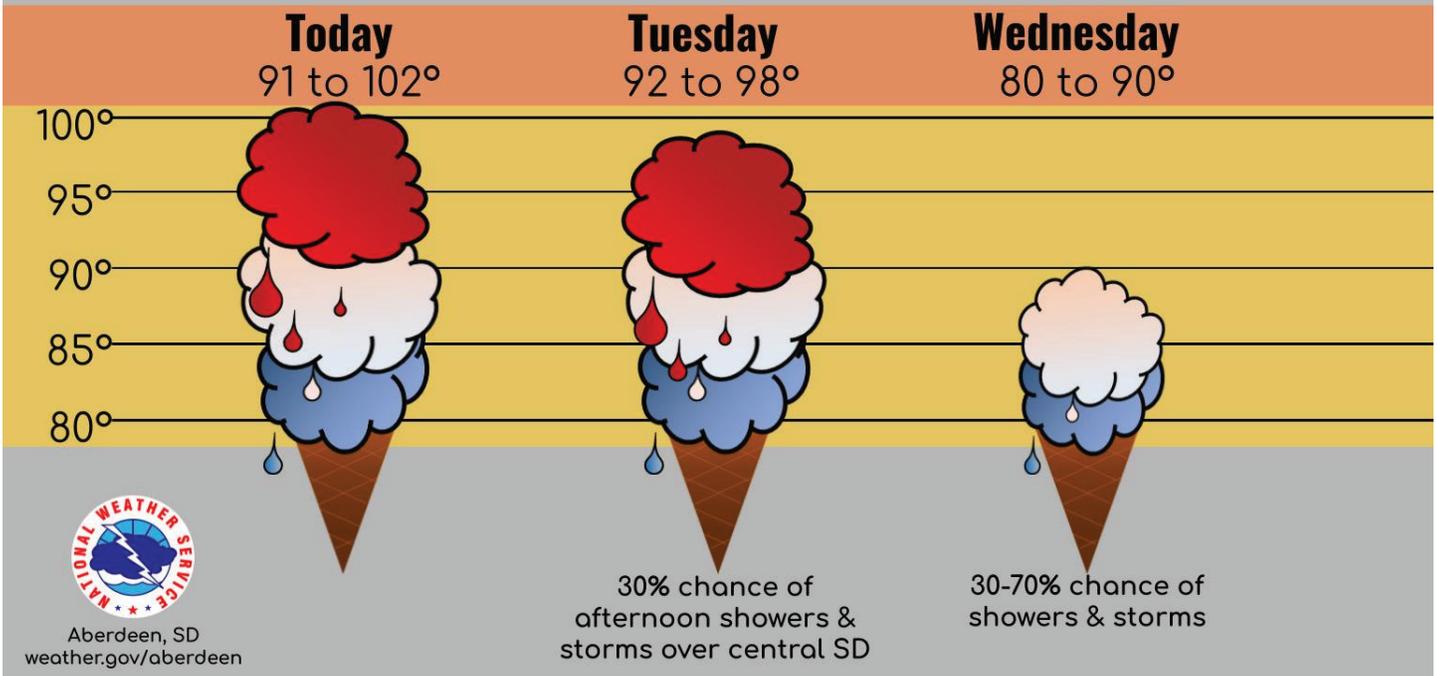


Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 10 of 65

Juneteenth	Tonight	Tuesday	Tuesday Night	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday
						
Hot	Clear and Breezy	Hot and Breezy	Chance T-storms and Breezy	Chance T-storms then Showers Likely	Chance T-storms then Showers Likely	Showers Likely
High: 96 °F	Low: 73 °F	High: 97 °F	Low: 71 °F	High: 88 °F	Low: 65 °F	High: 83 °F

HOT through Tuesday



The hot weather will continue through Tuesday, with temperatures back into the 90s to near 100 degrees. Temperatures will return to the 80s Wednesday through the rest of the week. Expect a 30 percent chance of shower and thunderstorms over central South Dakota Tuesday afternoon. Chances for showers and thunderstorms will increase Tuesday night through at least Wednesday.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 12 of 65

Today in Weather History

June 19, 1894: A tornado moved NNE, passing 12 miles northwest of Bowdle, ending in extreme south-eastern Campbell County. A child was killed, and the mother and four other children were severely injured. A man was killed in another home, and his wife was injured. Fourteen homes were damaged or destroyed. Clothes were said to be torn to shreds and scattered for miles. This tornado was estimated to be an F3.

June 19, 1931: A tornado moved east from just south of St. Lawrence, passing south of Wessington. Buildings were destroyed on eight farms. Two farms were said to be wiped out, house and all. A woman was injured as she tried to rescue chickens. Cattle, horses, and over 100 hogs were killed. This tornado had an estimated strength of an F3.

June 19, 2013: Slow moving thunderstorms brought some large hail along with very heavy rains and flash flooding to parts of northeast South Dakota. One thunderstorm produced quarter hail and winds over 50 mph, which caused significant damage to a bean field along with damaging the siding of the house south of Wilmot in Roberts County. Several roads in Wilmot had water running over them for several hours. Over three inches of rain caused water to go over a part of Highway 123 south of Wilmot. The heavy rain of three to four inches brought many flooded roads in and around Veblen in Marshall County.

1794: A violent tornado commenced west of the Hudson River in New York. The tornado traveled through Poughkeepsie then crossed the border into Connecticut where it went through the towns of New Milford, Waterbury, North Haven, and Branford. It then continued into Long Island Sound. The tornado did extensive damage, and the funnel was reported by one observer to look like the "aurora borealis."

1835 - A tornado tore through the center of New Brunswick NJ killing five persons and scattering debris as far as Manhattan Island. The tornado provided the first opportunity for scientists to study firsthand the track of such a storm. (David Ludlum)

1938 - A cloudburst near Custer Creek, MT, (near Miles City) caused a train wreck killing forty-eight persons. An estimated four to seven inches of rain deluged the head of the creek that evening, and water flowing through the creek weakened the bridge. As a result, a locomotive and seven passenger cars plunged into the swollen creek. One car, a tourist sleeper, was completely submerged. (David Ludlum)

1972 - Hurricane Agnes moved onshore near Cape San Blas FL with wind gusts to 80 mph, and exited Maine on the 26th. There were 117 deaths, mainly due to flooding from North Carolina to New York State, and total damage was estimated at more than three billion dollars. Up to 19 inches of rain deluged western Schuylkill County PA. The rains of Hurricane Agnes resulted in one of the greatest natural disasters in U.S. history. Agnes caused more damage than all other tropical cyclones in the previous six years combined (which included Celia and Camille). (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1988 - Temperatures soared above 100 degrees in the central U.S. for Father's Day. Fifteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date. Severe thunderstorms in Minnesota and Wisconsin produced softball size hail near River Falls WI, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Menomonie WI. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Fourteen cities reported record high temperatures for the date as searing heat spread from the southwestern deserts into the High Plains Region. Record highs included 98 degrees at Billings, MT, 107 degrees at Valentine, NE, and 112 degrees at Tucson, AZ. (The National Weather Summary)

1990 - What would eventually be known as the "Inland Hurricane" stuck south central Kansas. This storm system produced a swath of 65 to 120 mph winds across six counties and caused \$80 million dollars in damage. The peak recorded wind gust was 116 mph, which reaches low-end category 3 on the Saffir-Simpson hurricane wind intensity scale. On the enhanced Fujita Scale the 116mph winds would be rated an EF2. The storm knocked out power to all the Wichita TV stations, and they were off the air for hours. All but one of the Wichita Radio Stations, including the Wichita NOAA Weather Radio Station KEC-59, was knocked off the air. (National Weather Service Wichita)

2006 - Up to 11 inches of rain fell in the Houston, Texas area, causing widespread flash flooding. The Houston Fire Department rescued more than 500 people from flood waters, but no serious injuries or fatalities were reported.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 13 of 65

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHERE THEY BELONG

Once I asked an appliance repairman to come to church with me. "No," he responded. "The church is full of hypocrites."

"Great!" I responded. The man was startled. Continuing, I said, "That's exactly where they belong. Let's join them. I'm sure they won't mind."

If I understand it correctly, a hypocrite is someone who says one thing and does another. Or as a friend once said to me, "A hypocrite is a person who does not walk their talk. They profess what they do not possess."

Many who do not want to attend church say the reason they refuse to do so is because the church is full of hypocrites. For as long as I can remember that has been a frequent excuse for many. As I see it, it is a great reason for them to attend! They already know the difference between the saved and the unsaved. The saved are expected to behave like Jesus and the unsaved person, who says he sees hypocrisy in Christians, already knows what is expected of him if he turns his life over to God for salvation.

We need to extend a warm welcome to those who use "the hypocrite excuse" as a reason not to attend church. Jesus said that He came to call sinners to be saved. Those who believe that they are already good enough will have a difficult time admitting they are sinners. But the hypocrite already knows he is "one!"

Prayer: Lord, help me to live a life that will be an example, not an excuse, for people to seek You. May I live my life consistent with the example of Your Son, Jesus! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For the Son of Man came to seek and save those who are lost. Luke 19:10



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

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 14 of 65

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

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 15 of 65

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Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 16 of 65



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.16.23

4 24 34 45 57 19

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$300,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 16
DRAW: Mins 30 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.17.23

4 23 26 35 36 8

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$4,180,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 31 Mins 30
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.18.23

6 12 14 17 41 15

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 46 Mins 31
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.17.23

7 8 16 21 29

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$107,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 46
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.17.23

8 12 21 33 51 14

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 15 Mins 31
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.17.23

2 12 45 61 64 26

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$380,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 15 Mins 31
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Blinken meets Chinese President Xi in bid to ease soaring US-China tensions

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met with Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday as he wrapped up a two-day high-stakes visit to Beijing aimed at easing soaring tensions between the countries.

The meeting at the Great Hall of the People had been expected and was seen as key to the success of the trip, but neither side confirmed it would happen until a State Department official announced it just an hour beforehand.

In footage of the meeting released by state broadcaster CCTV, Xi is heard to say “The two sides have agreed to follow through on the common understandings President Biden and I have reached in Bali.”

In earlier meetings between Blinken and senior Chinese officials, the two sides expressed willingness to talk but showed little inclination to bend from hardened positions on disagreements ranging from trade, to Taiwan, to human rights conditions in China and Hong Kong, to Chinese military assertiveness in the South China Sea, to Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Xi said that the two sides had made progress and reached agreements on “some specific issues” without elaborating. “This is very good,” Xi said.

“I hope that through this visit, Mr. Secretary, you will make more positive contributions to stabilizing China-US relation,” Xi added.

Despite Blinken’s presence in China, he and other U.S. officials had played down the prospects for any significant breakthroughs on the most vexing issues facing the planet’s two largest economies.

Instead, these officials have emphasized the importance of the two countries establishing and maintaining better lines of communication.

Blinken is the highest-level U.S. official to visit China since President Joe Biden took office, and the first secretary of state to make the trip in five years. His visit is expected to usher in a new round of visits by senior U.S. and Chinese officials, possibly including a meeting between Xi and Biden in the coming months.

Blinken met earlier Monday with China’s top diplomat Wang Yi for about three hours, according to a U.S. official.

China’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs wrote in a statement that Blinken’s visit “coincides with a critical juncture in China-U.S. relations, and it is necessary to make a choice between dialogue or confrontation, cooperation or conflict,” and blamed the “U.S. side’s erroneous perception of China, leading to incorrect policies towards China” for the current “low point” in relations.

It said the U.S. had a responsibility to halt “the spiraling decline of China-U.S. relations to push it back to a healthy and stable track” and that Wang had “demanded that the U.S. stop hyping up the ‘China threat theory’, lift illegal unilateral sanctions against China, abandon suppression of China’s technological development, and refrain from arbitrary interference in China’s internal affairs.”

The State Department said Blinken “underscored the importance of responsibly managing the competition between the United States and the PRC through open channels of communication to ensure competition does not veer into conflict.”

In the first round of talks on Sunday, Blinken met for nearly six hours with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang after which both countries said they had agreed to continue high-level discussions. However, there was no sign that any of the most fractious issues between them were closer to resolution.

The two sides both said Qin had accepted an invitation from Blinken to visit Washington but Beijing made clear that “the China-U.S. relationship is at the lowest point since its establishment.” That sentiment is widely shared by U.S. officials.

Blinken’s visit comes after his initial plans to travel to China were postponed in February after the shoot-

down of a Chinese surveillance balloon over the U.S.

A snub by the Chinese leader would have been a major setback to the effort to restore and maintain communications at senior levels.

Biden and Xi had made commitments to improve communications "precisely so that we can make sure we are communicating as clearly as possible to avoid possible misunderstandings and miscommunications," Blinken said before leaving for Beijing.

And Biden said over the weekend that he hoped to be able to meet with Xi in the coming months to take up the plethora of differences that divide them.

In his meetings on Sunday, Blinken also pressed the Chinese to release detained American citizens and to take steps to curb the production and export of fentanyl precursors that are fueling the opioid crisis in the United States.

Xi offered a hint of a possible willingness to reduce tensions on Friday, saying in a meeting with Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates that the United States and China can cooperate to "benefit our two countries."

Since the cancellation of Blinken's trip in February, there have been some high-level engagements. CIA chief William Burns traveled to China in May, while China's commerce minister traveled to the U.S. And Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan met with senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Wang Yi in Vienna in May.

But those have been punctuated by bursts of angry rhetoric from both sides over the Taiwan Strait, their broader intentions in the Indo-Pacific, China's refusal to condemn Russia for its war against Ukraine, and U.S. allegations from Washington that Beijing is attempting to boost its worldwide surveillance capabilities, including in Cuba.

And, earlier this month, China's defense minister rebuffed a request from U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for a meeting on the sidelines of a security symposium in Singapore, a sign of continuing discontent.

Russian court starts trial of opposition leader Navalny that could keep him locked up for decades

MELEKHOVO, Russia (AP) — A Russian court on Monday opened a new trial of imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny that could keep him behind bars for decades.

The trial is taking place at a maximum security prison in Melekhovo, 250 kilometers (150 miles) east of Moscow, where Navalny — the Kremlin's arch foe — is serving a nine-year sentence for fraud and contempt of court.

Navalny, 47, who exposed official corruption and organized major anti-Kremlin protests, was arrested in January 2021 upon returning to Moscow after recuperating in Germany from nerve agent poisoning that he blamed on the Kremlin.

Navalny has said that the new extremism charges which he rejected as "absurd" could keep him in prison for another 30 years. He said an investigator told him that he would also face a separate military court trial on terrorism charges that could potentially carry a life sentence.

Trump and other Republicans conjure a familiar enemy in attacking Democrats as 'communists'

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Lashing out after his arraignment on federal charges last week, Donald Trump took aim at President Joe Biden and Democrats with language that seemed to evoke another era: He was being persecuted, he said, by "Marxists" and "communists."

Trump has used the labels since he first appeared on the political scene, but it lately has become an omnipresent attack line that also has been deployed by other Republicans. The rhetoric is both inaccurate and potentially dangerous because it attempts to demonize an entire party with a description that has long been associated with America's enemies.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 19 of 65

Experts who study political messaging say associating Democrats with Marxism only furthers the country's polarization — and is simply wrong: Biden has promoted capitalism and Democratic lawmakers are not pushing to reshape American democracy into a communist system.

That hasn't mattered to Trump and other Republicans, who for years have used hyperbolic references to the associated political ideologies to spark fears about Democrats and the dangers they supposedly pose.

Hours after pleading not guilty in federal court, Trump told a crowd of his supporters at his golf club in Bedminster, New Jersey, that Biden, "together with a band of his closest thugs, misfits and Marxists, tried to destroy American democracy."

He added, "If the communists get away with this, it won't stop with me."

He again hit on the Marxist theme days later during a telephone rally with Iowa voters. The comments came after numerous campaign emails and social posts in recent months in which Trump has claimed that Biden's America could soon become a "third world Marxist regime" or a "tyrannical Marxist nation."

Other Republicans have piled on with similar messaging. Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene last week took to Twitter to lambast what she called the "CORRUPT AND WEAPONIZED COMMUNISTS DEMOCRAT CONTROLLED DOJ." Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, Trump's closest rival for the GOP presidential nomination, has argued the U.S. risks falling victim to "woke" ideology, which he has defined in interviews as a form of "cultural Marxism."

Experts say there is a long history of U.S. politicians calling opponents Marxist or communist without evidence — perhaps most infamously the late Sen. Joseph McCarthy, who led efforts to blacklist accused communists in the 1950s.

In a country that has historically positioned itself against Marxism, "red-baiting is as American as apple pie in political communications," said Tanner Mirrlees, an associate professor at Ontario Tech University in Canada who has researched political discourse about "cultural Marxism."

The attacks are carefully constructed to hit voters emotionally, said Steve Israel, a former U.S. congressman from New York who studied political messaging as chair of the House Democratic Policy and Communications Committee.

"Democrats tend to message to the part of the brain that is about reason and empirical evidence," he said. "Republicans message to the gut."

For some Hispanic Trump supporters who gathered outside the federal courthouse in Miami where the former president was arraigned, the charges evoked memories of political persecutions their family members had once escaped.

"This is what they do in Latin America," said Madelin Munilla, 67, who came to Miami as a child when her parents fled Fidel Castro's Cuba.

She carried a poster with a photo of Biden alongside Castro, Venezuela's Nicolas Maduro and Nicaragua's Daniel Ortega — leftist leaders whose jailing of opponents has driven immigration to south Florida for decades.

Unlike the U.S., which has a tradition of respect for the rule of law and constitutional separation of powers, the judiciary in many parts of Latin America lacks the same independence. In a region where corruption flourishes, poorly paid prosecutors and judges are routinely caught doing the bidding of powerful politicians seeking to settle scores or derail criminal investigations.

A surge in immigration from Southeast Asia after the Vietnam War also brought a population of staunchly anti-communist voters, some of whom have aligned with the Republican Party in part because of its forceful messaging on the issue.

Yet opposing an actual regime that suppresses individual freedom and opposes a free market economy is different from the way many Republicans use these terms now — to falsely claim Marxists are U.S. society's ruling class.

"Bluntly, there is no empirical ground beneath the Republican claim that Marxists rule the big institutions of American society," Mirrlees said.

Other Republicans, from DeSantis to Texas Sen. Ted Cruz, have used another term, "cultural Marxism,"

to characterize fights for gender or racial equity that they argue are “woke” and threaten a traditional American way of life. Cruz used it in the title of his book.

Though the term has become popular among mainstream Republicans, it has a darker past. Experts say the concept of “cultural Marxism” posing a threat was historically spread by antisemitic and white supremacist groups.

For most voters who hear candidates say someone is communist or Marxist, the true meaning may matter less than the negative associations with the terms, said James Gardner, a University at Buffalo law professor who focuses on election law.

“The tactic seems to be to pick an adjective that most people think describes something bad and try to associate it with the person you are denigrating,” he said.

Still, while railing against communists and Marxists may be effective at animating voters who form the Republican base, it may not be an effective strategy in next year’s general election, Israel said.

That’s because it doesn’t as easily sway moderate and independent voters who don’t see evidence that ties Democrats to those ideologies.

“Moderate voters may succumb to the Republican argument that Democrats are for more spending, but they’re not going to fall for the argument that Democrats are Marxists,” Israel said. “The Republicans are overplaying their hand.”

Associated Press writer Joshua Goodman in Miami contributed to this report.

The Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP’s democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Gunbattle in Jenin: 3 Palestinians killed, 29 others wounded in Israeli raid in West Bank

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli helicopter gunships struck targets Monday in the occupied West Bank as a gunbattle raged in the city of Jenin between Israeli troops and militants, killing three Palestinians, including a 15-year-old boy, officials said.

The violence marked a rare use of Israeli airpower in the territory. During the clashes, Palestinian militants detonated a roadside bomb next to an Israeli military vehicle. At least 29 Palestinians were wounded, six seriously, and Israeli media said a number of Israeli soldiers were hurt.

The escalation was the latest in more than a year of near-daily violence that has wracked the West Bank.

The Israeli military said troops came under fire during an arrest raid in Jenin and shot back at Palestinian gunmen. Israeli media reported that multiple Israeli troops were wounded in the fighting but did not provide more details.

“As the security forces exited the city, a military vehicle was hit by an explosive device, damaging the vehicle,” the army said, adding that helicopters “opened fire toward the gunmen in order to assist in extraction of the forces.”

Unconfirmed amateur video footage from Jenin appeared to show a roadside explosive targeting an Israeli armored vehicle. Another video posted online appeared to show Israeli military helicopter launching a rocket during the ongoing army operation.

The Israeli military rarely uses aircraft in its operations in the occupied West Bank. Israeli media reported that it was the first use of an attack helicopter in the territory since the Palestinian uprising in the early 2000s.

The Palestinian Health Ministry identified those killed as Khaled Asasa, 21, Qassam Abu Sariya, 29, and 15-year-old Ahmed Saqr, and said at least six others were seriously wounded in the shootout.

Hussein al-Shekh, a senior Palestinian official, accused Israel of waging “a fierce and open war” against

the Palestinian people and said President Mahmoud Abbas would make "unprecedented decisions" in an upcoming emergency meeting.

Egypt's Foreign Ministry condemned what it called Israel's "continued escalation against the Palestinians," saying it only further inflamed the situation and undermined efforts to reduce regional tensions.

Israel and the Palestinians have been gripped by months of violence, focused mainly in the West Bank, where some 123 Palestinians have been killed this year. The city of Jenin has been a hotbed of Palestinian militancy.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, along with east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip. The Palestinians seek those territories for a future independent state.

Israel has been staging near-nightly raids in the West Bank in response to a spasm of Palestinian violence early last year. Palestinian attacks against Israelis have surged during that time.

Israel says most of the dead were militants, but stone-throwing youths protesting the incursions and others not involved in confrontations have also been killed.

Palestinian attacks against Israelis have killed at least 20 people this year.

UN complains Russia won't let aid workers into areas hit by dam collapse in southern Ukraine

By SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The United Nations has rebuked Moscow for allegedly denying its aid workers access to Russian-occupied areas affected by the recent Kakhova dam collapse in southern Ukraine, which stranded residents, threatened power supplies and caused an environmental calamity as the war approaches 16 months.

The U.N. humanitarian coordinator for Ukraine, Denise Brown, said in a statement late Sunday that the organization has engaged with Moscow and Kyiv, each of which occupies parts of the southern Kherson region where the dam and reservoir are located, to address the "devastating destruction" caused by the breach.

The Russian government "has so far declined our request to access the areas under its temporary military control," Brown said.

"We urge the Russian authorities to act in accordance with their obligations under international humanitarian law," her statement added.

Exclusive drone photos and information obtained by The Associated Press indicate Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to blow up the dam, which was under Russian control, earlier this month.

The explosion occurred as Ukraine mustered for a counteroffensive. Kyiv's forces have intensified attacks along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line recently.

The dam lies on the Dnieper River, which forms the front line between Russian and Ukrainian forces on the eastern and western banks, respectively. Some analysts saw the dam breach as a Russian effort to thwart Ukraine's counteroffensive in the Kherson region.

The U.K. Defense Ministry said Monday that Russia has recently redeployed several thousand troops from the banks of the Dnieper to buttress its positions in the Zaporizhzhia and Bakhmut sectors, which reportedly have seen heavy fighting.

The move "likely reflects Russia's perception that a major Ukrainian attack across the Dnieper is now less likely" following the dam's collapse, it said in a tweet.

Ukrainian Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar says Kyiv's forces have liberated a total of eight settlements in the course of two weeks on the Berdyansk and Melitopol axes of their counteroffensive in the country's southeast.

Ukrainian forces have advanced up to seven kilometers (four miles) into territory previously held by Russia, she claimed.

It was not possible to independently verify battlefield claims by either side.

Russia attacked south and southeast Ukraine overnight with cruise missiles and self-exploding drones, Ukraine's Air Force reported Monday. Four Kalibr missiles and four Iranian-made Shahed drones were shot down, it said.

According to regional officials, the southern province of Odesa and the southeastern Dnipropetrovsk region were targeted by the attack. No casualties or damage were immediately reported.

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

A high-profile French nun is inspiring hope for Catholic women. But can she really bring change?

By NICOLE WINFIELD and TRISHA THOMAS Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — In her years running Catholic youth programs in France, Sister Nathalie Becquart often invoked her own experience as a seasoned sailor in urging young people to weather the storms of their lives. "There's nothing stronger than seeing the sunrise after a storm, the flat calm of the sea," she says.

That lesson is especially applicable to Becquart herself as she charts the global church through an unprecedented — and at times, tempestuous — period of reform as one of the highest-ranking women at the Vatican.

Pope Francis named the 54-year-old nun as the first female undersecretary in the Vatican's Synod of Bishops office in 2021. Since then, she has been crisscrossing the globe as the public face of his hallmark call to listen to rank-and-file Catholics and empower them to have a greater say in the life of the church.

That process, which comes to a head in October with a big assembly, reaches a crucial point Tuesday with the publication of the working document for the meeting. It is shaping up as a referendum on the role of women in the church of the third millennium.

Becquart, who has overseen a canvassing of ordinary Catholics about their needs from the church and hopes for the future, says the call for change is unambiguous and universal, with demands that women have greater decision-making roles taking center-stage at the meeting, or synod.

"There is this unanimous call because women want to participate, to share their gifts and charism at the service of the church," Becquart said in an interview with The Associated Press in her offices just off St. Peter's Square. "It's about how could we be men and women together in this society, in this church, with this vision of equality, of dignity, reciprocity, collaboration, partnership."

For a 2,000-year-old institution that by its very doctrine bars women from its highest ranks, Francis' synodal process has sparked unusual optimism among women who have long felt they were second-class citizens in the church. Predictably, the prospects of change have provoked a strong backlash from conservatives, who view the synod as undermining the all-male, clerical-based hierarchy and the ecclesiology behind it.

Becquart and Francis aren't daunted and see the criticism, fear and alarm as a good sign, that something big and important is underway.

"Of course there is resistance," Becquart says, chuckling. "If there is no resistance, that means nothing is happening or nothing is changing."

But she also puts it in perspective: "If you look at all the history of the reform of the church, where you have the strongest resistance or debated points, it's really usually a very important point."

Francis, the 86-year-old Argentine Jesuit, has already done more than any modern pope to promote women by changing church law to allow them to read Scripture and serve on the altar as eucharistic ministers, even while reaffirming they cannot be ordained as priests. He has changed the Vatican's founding constitution to allow women to head Vatican offices and made several high-profile female appointments, none more symbolically significant than Becquart's.

As undersecretary in the Synod of Bishops, Becquart was de facto granted the right to vote at the upcoming October synod — a right previously held by men only. After years of complaints by women, who had been allowed to participate in synods only as nonvoting experts, auditors or observers, Francis not

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 23 of 65

only gave Becquart a voting role, but expanded the vote to laypeople in general.

In April, the Vatican announced that 70 non-bishops would be voting alongside the successors of the apostles in October, and that half of them were expected to be women. While these represent less than a quarter of the bishop votes, the reform was nevertheless historic and a reflection of Francis' belief that church governance doesn't come from priestly ordination but by specific jobs entrusted to the baptized faithful.

Becquart has long held leadership roles in the French church, where she ran the bishops' youth evangelization program. A graduate of Paris' top HEC business school, Becquart says she has drawn strength from the women who preceded her at the Vatican and in her own religious community, the Xaviere Sisters, a Jesuit-inspired, Vatican II-era missionary congregation that she joined at age 26.

From them and her grandmother, who was widowed while pregnant with her fourth child, Becquart says she learned that women "carry on this message that life is stronger than death, and that even in the greatest difficulties, crises and sufferings, there is a possible path, especially when you are not alone."

It's a lesson she applies when sailing and leading spiritual retreats at sea. "There will be good weather and bad weather, quiet seas and then big waves," she said. But eventually, the storm will end.

"That's our life and that's the life of the church," she added.

Australia's ambassador to the Holy See, Chiara Porro, has praised Becquart's leadership style, recalling how she managed a room full of bishops during the Oceania phase of the synod consultation process. Becquart's presence as a female Vatican envoy traveling to Fiji to brief Pacific bishops on the pope's agenda signaled a paradigm shift, Porro said.

"She doesn't have any preconceived objectives or outcomes. For her, no issues are off-limits, I think, and that's very important because people feel that they can bring up what they want to discuss," she said.

Veteran Vatican-watchers, however, caution that even with women taking on high-profile appointments and winning the right to vote at the October synod, the men still run the show.

"All the reforms that have been made to date on governing at the Vatican, in my opinion, are just appearances," said Lucetta Scaraffia, a church historian who participated in a 2016 synod and wrote a scathing account of her marginalized role in "From the Last Row." Her experiences — of being forced to go through a metal detector and check in each day while the bishops waltzed in unimpeded — were emblematic.

"I realized how the Catholic Church really was another world and what it means for women to be non-existent. To actually not exist," she said.

Jean-Marie Guenois, chief religious affairs correspondent for Le Figaro, who has known Becquart for years, says her role at the Vatican and in the synod process would be revolutionary "if it marked a paradigm shift in the Catholic Church where women would achieve parity of power in government."

"We're a long way from that," he said, while nevertheless calling Becquart's position "simply prophetic."

"Prophets are often discreet but firm, opposed but determined to move forward," said Guenois, author of the forthcoming book "Pope Francis: The Revolution."

"The patriarchal culture of the Catholic Church is explained by theological and historical reasons that go back thousands of years," he said. "It takes more than 20 months to change the habits of 20 centuries."

Americans mark Juneteenth with parties, events and quiet reflection on the end of slavery

By BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS, ED WHITE and ADRIAN SAINZ Associated Press

Detroit (AP) — Americans across the country this weekend celebrated Juneteenth, marking the relatively new national holiday with cookouts, parades and other gatherings as they commemorated the end of slavery after the Civil War.

While many have treated the long holiday weekend as a reason for a party, others urged quiet reflection on America's often violent and oppressive treatment of its Black citizens. And still others have remarked at the strangeness of celebrating a federal holiday marking the end of slavery in the nation while many Americans are trying to stop parts of that history from being taught in public schools.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 24 of 65

"Is #Juneteenth the only federal holiday that some states have banned the teaching of its history and significance?" Author Michelle Duster asked on Twitter this weekend, referring to measures in Florida, Oklahoma and Alabama prohibiting an Advancement Placement African American studies course or the teaching of certain concepts of race and racism.

Monday's federal holiday commemorates the day in 1865 when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they had been freed — two years after the Emancipation Proclamation was issued during the bloody Civil War.

On Juneteenth weekend, a Roman Catholic church in Detroit devoted its service to urging parishioners to take a deeper look at the lessons from the holiday.

"In order to have justice we must work for peace. And in order to have peace we must work for justice," John Thorne, executive director of the Detroit Catholic Pastoral Alliance, said to the congregation at Gesu Catholic Church in Detroit.

Standing before paintings of a Black Jesus and Mary, Thorne said Juneteenth is a day of celebration, but it also "has to be much more."

It was important to speak about Juneteenth during Sunday Mass, the Rev. Lorn Snow told a reporter as the service was ending.

"The struggle's still not over with. There's a lot of work to be done," he said.

Most Black Americans agree, according to a recent poll. A full 70% of Black adults queried in a AP-NORC poll said "a lot" needs to be done to achieve equal treatment for African Americans in policing. And Black Americans suffer from significantly worse health outcomes than their white peers across a variety of measures, including rates of maternal mortality, asthma, high blood pressure and Alzheimer's disease.

Although end-of-slavery celebrations are new in many parts of the country, in Memphis, where the slave trade once thrived, the Juneteenth holiday has been celebrated since long before it became a designated federal holiday in 2021. The Tennessee Legislature passed a bill earlier this year making it a state holiday, as well.

Festivities there include a multi-day festival including food, music, arts and crafts, and cultural exhibitions in a tree-lined park in the city's medical district. The Memphis park once held an equestrian statue and the grave of slave trader and Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest. The statue and the body were moved in recent years.

Memphis is home to the National Civil Rights Museum located at the site of the old Lorraine Motel, the former Black-owned hotel where the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was killed in 1968. The museum is offering free admission on Monday to mark the holiday. At the museum, visitors can hear recorded speeches from civil rights leaders including King, Fannie Lou Hamer, Medgar Evers and others.

Ryan Jones, the museum's associate curator, said Juneteenth should be celebrated in the U.S. with the same emphasis that July 4 receives as Independence Day.

"It is the independence of a people that were forced to endure oppression and discrimination based on the color of their skin," Jones said.

The Juneteenth holiday, Jones said, should also be viewed as more than a day when people attend parties and cookouts. In fact, he said, it is a time to reflect on the past.

"It acknowledges the sacrifices of those early civil rights veterans between World War I and World War II, and of course in the modern society, the protests, the demonstrations, the non-violence, the marches," Jones said.

As Americans gathered to mark the holiday, it wasn't without incident. In a Chicago suburb late Saturday night, one person was killed and 22 were injured in a shooting still being investigated Sunday by police. One witness said the party in the parking lot of a Willowbrook, Illinois, strip-mall was a Juneteenth celebration.

The White House released a statement Sunday afternoon, saying: "The President and First Lady are thinking of those killed and injured in the shooting in Illinois last night. We have reached out to offer assistance to state and local leaders in the wake of this tragedy at a community Juneteenth celebration."

The holiday observance continues Monday with Vice President Kamala Harris appearing on a CNN special with musical guests including Miguel and Charlie Wilson.

Schools and federal buildings will be closed Monday.

A spate of weekend mass shootings leaves 6 people dead and dozens injured across the US

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

A spate of weekend mass shootings and violence across the U.S. killed at least six people, including a Pennsylvania state trooper, and left dozens injured.

The shootings follow a surge in homicides and other violence over the past several years that experts say accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic. They happened in suburban Chicago, Washington state, central Pennsylvania, St. Louis, Southern California and Baltimore.

"There's no question there's been a spike in violence," said Daniel Nagin, a professor of public policy and statistics at Carnegie Mellon University. "Some of these cases seem to be just disputes, often among adolescents, and those disputes are played out with firearms, not with fists."

Researchers disagree over the cause of the increase. Theories include the possibility that violence is driven by the prevalence of guns in America, or by less aggressive police tactics or a decline in prosecutions for misdemeanor weapon offenses, Nagin said.

As of Sunday evening, none of the weekend events fit the definition of a mass killing, because fewer than four people died at each location. The figure does not include the shooter. However, the number of injured in most of the cases matches the widely accepted definition for mass shootings.

Here's a look at the shootings this weekend:

WILLOWBROOK, ILLINOIS

At least 23 people were shot, one fatally, early Sunday in a suburban Chicago parking lot where hundreds of people had gathered to celebrate Juneteenth, authorities said.

The DuPage County sheriff's office described a "peaceful gathering" that suddenly turned violent as a number of people fired multiple shots into the crowd in Willowbrook, Illinois, about 20 miles (32 kilometers) southwest of Chicago.

A motive for the attack wasn't immediately known. Sheriff's spokesman Robert Carroll said authorities were interviewing "persons of interest" in the shooting, the Daily Herald reported.

A witness, Markeshia Avery, said the celebration was meant to mark Juneteenth, Monday's federal holiday commemorating the day in 1865 when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they had been freed, two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

"We just started hearing shooting, so we dropped down until they stopped," Avery told WLS-TV.

The White House issued a statement calling the violence a tragedy and saying the president was thinking of those killed and injured. Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said in a statement that he was monitoring the investigation.

"Gathering for a holiday gathering should be a joyful occasion, not a time where gunfire erupts and families are forced to run for safety," Pritzker said.

WASHINGTON STATE

Two people were killed and two others were injured when a shooter began firing "randomly" into a crowd at a Washington state campground where many people were staying to attend a nearby music festival on Saturday night, police said.

The suspect was shot in a confrontation with law enforcement officers and taken into custody, several hundred yards from the Beyond Wonderland electronic dance music festival.

A public alert advised people of an active shooter in the area and advised them to "run, hide or fight."

The festival carried on until early Sunday morning, Grant County Sheriff's Office spokesman Kyle Foreman said. Organizers then posted a tweet saying Sunday's concert was canceled.

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

One state trooper was killed and a second critically wounded just hours apart in central Pennsylvania

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 26 of 65

on Saturday after a gunman attacked a state police barracks.

The suspect drove his truck into the parking lot of the Lewistown barracks about 11 a.m. Saturday and opened fire with a large-caliber rifle on marked patrol cars before fleeing, authorities said Sunday.

Lt. James Wagner, 45, was critically wounded when he was shot after encountering the suspect several miles away in Mifflintown. Later, Trooper Jacques Rougeau Jr., 29, was ambushed and killed by a gunshot through the windshield of his patrol car as he drove down a road in nearby Walker Township, authorities said.

The suspect was shot and killed after a fierce gunbattle, said Lt. Col. George Bivens, who went up in a helicopter to coordinate the search for the 38-year-old suspect.

"What I witnessed ... was one of the most intense, unbelievable gunfights I have ever witnessed," Bivens said, lauding troopers for launching an aggressive search despite facing a weapon that "would defeat any of the body armor that they had available to them."

A motive was not immediately known.

ST. LOUIS

An early Sunday shooting in a downtown St. Louis office building killed a 17-year-old and wounded nine other teenagers, the city's police commissioner said.

St. Louis Metropolitan Police Commissioner Robert Tracy identified the victim who was killed as 17-year-old Makao Moore. A spokesman said a minor who had a handgun was in police custody as a person of interest.

Teenagers were having a party in an office space when the shooting broke out around 1 a.m. Sunday.

The victims ranged from 15 to 19 years old and had injuries including multiple gunshot wounds. A 17-year-old girl was trampled as she fled, seriously injuring her spine, Tracy said.

Shell casings from AR-style rifles and other firearms were scattered on the ground.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

A shooting at a pool party at a Southern California home left eight people wounded, authorities said Saturday.

Authorities were dispatched shortly after midnight in Carson, California, south of Los Angeles, KABC-TV reported.

The victims range in age from 16 to 24, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said in a statement. They were taken to hospitals and two were listed in critical condition, the statement said.

Authorities said they found another 16-year-old boy with a gunshot wound when they responded to a call about a vehicle that crashed into a wall nearby.

BALTIMORE

Six people were injured in a Friday night shooting in Baltimore. All were expected to survive.

Officers heard gunshots in the north of the city just before 9 p.m. and found three men with numerous gunshot wounds. Medics took them to area hospitals for treatment.

Police later learned of three additional victims who walked into area hospitals with non-life-threatening gunshot wounds.

The wounded ranged in age from 17 to 26, Baltimore Police Department spokesperson Lindsey Eldridge said.

Amazon, Marriott and other companies vow to hire thousands of refugees in Europe

By COURTNEY BONNELL AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Multinational companies including Amazon, Marriott and Hilton pledged Monday to hire more than 13,000 refugees, including Ukrainian women who have fled the war with Russia, over the next three years in Europe.

Just ahead of World Refugee Day on Tuesday, more than 40 corporations say they will hire, connect to work or train a total of 250,000 refugees, with 13,680 of them getting jobs directly in those companies.

"Every number is a story of an individual family who left everything, seeking safety, seeking protection

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 27 of 65

and wanting to be able to rebuild as quickly as possible," said Kelly Clements, U.N. deputy high commissioner for refugees. "So the commitments that businesses are going to make on Monday are absolutely essential."

She says 110 million people have been displaced worldwide, with an estimated 12 million from Ukraine, nearly half of whom are living in Europe after the continent's largest movement of refugees since World War II.

The hiring push in Europe was organized by the Tent Partnership for Refugees, a nonprofit founded by Chobani CEO Hamdi Ulukaya that connects businesses and refugees, and is being unveiled at a gathering in Paris. The group's first summit in the U.S. last year led to commitments to hire 22,725 refugees.

In the new round, Amazon leads the pack, vowing to hire at least 5,000 refugees over the next three years in Europe, followed by Marriott and Hilton with 1,500 each, Starbucks and ISS with 1,000 each, and smaller commitments from brands like Adidas, Starbucks, L'Oreal, PepsiCo and Hyatt.

"This is good for us as a company because the opportunity to add diversity to our workforce will continue to make us a stronger company," said Ofori Agboka, Amazon vice president overseeing human resources. "With diversity brings innovation, creativity, different insights."

He said the vast majority of jobs will be hourly roles at fulfillment and storage centers and in transport and delivery.

Amazon announced 27,000 job cuts earlier this year, part of a wave of layoffs after tech companies ramped up hiring during the COVID-19 pandemic. Those layoffs primarily affected salaried office jobs, Agboka said.

Daria Sedihi-Volchenko fled Kyiv last year and now works in Warsaw, Poland, as a senior program manager for an Amazon Web Services program providing free tech training for Ukrainians. She says about 40% of those in the program have no tech background.

"I went through the same way as many of our learners ... are going through," she said. "I had to learn, and I took a commitment on my interview. I said that 'OK, if we can agree and I can start working for you, I promise to learn Polish and I promise to learn technical skills.'"

A year ago, Sedihi-Volchenko woke up to explosions from Russia's invasion.

"I was terrified. I was so scared for Ukraine, for the nation, for the future, for my own life," she said. "But also that was a shocking moment when I understood that everything in my life is changing."

She began living in basements but left as Russian forces approached Kyiv. She drove 40 hours to reach Moldova, thankful that she "didn't drive on a single land mine and nobody shot into my car."

She went to Poland to find work, embarking on an IT path after working as a project manager for government ministries and as an economist in Ukraine.

Companies are hoping refugees can fill staffing needs after the economy bounced back from the pandemic. In Europe, unemployment is at its lowest since the euro currency was introduced in 1999.

"We're seeing record levels of demand for our properties across many markets here in Europe," Marriott International CEO Anthony Capuano said. "And so we are hiring aggressively to make sure we can accommodate our guests as demand ramps up."

Marriott's jobs will largely be hourly positions like housekeepers, kitchen staff and front desk attendants.

European nations have welcomed Ukrainians, and while Clements applauded opening schools, workplaces and other opportunities to them, she said the same should be offered to others fleeing conflict and crises in places like Syria, Sudan and Afghanistan.

Sedihi-Volchenko knows the challenges ahead for refugees, even as some companies offer help with language skills, counseling and training. Job listings can be difficult to decipher, and like her, they may have difficulty securing a stable internet connection or work clothes.

"It's important to give a refugee just time to learn the language, but the person can start working because if you bring experience with IT systems or finance or project management or any other area, naturally, you understand, it's not so much about the language. You understand the flow of work," she said.

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

caused hardships.

KCNA didn't say whether Kim spoke during the plenary meeting of the Workers' Party Central Committee. Koo Byongsam, spokesperson for South Korea's Unification Ministry, said it would be highly unusual for Kim to sit through such a high-profile party meeting without a public speech. Koo said the apparent lack of a Kim speech might stem from the satellite launch failure and North Korea's lack of economic achievements.

Wyndham Clark plays big and becomes a major champion at the US Open

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In the city of stars, Wyndham Clark had his own script in mind in the U.S. Open. In front of him was Rory McIlroy, one of golf's biggest talents who looked ready to end his perplexing nine-year drought in the majors. Next to him in the final group Sunday was Rickie Fowler, a Southern California native who returned from a three-year slump and was poised to finally win his first major.

Clark carried a message from his late mother — "Play big," she always told him — and the belief he could compete with anyone on any stage.

No stage was bigger than a U.S. Open on the edge of Beverly Hills. That's where Clark delivered clutch saves, a signature shot that gave him control and the steady nerves to hold off McIlroy and become a major champion.

"I feel like I belong on this stage," Clark said after closing with an even-par 70 for a one-shot victory over McIlroy. "Even two, three years ago when people didn't know who I was, I felt like I could still play and compete against the best players in the world."

He won in only his seventh start in a major — his previous best was a tie for 75th — and it came six weeks after he captured his first PGA Tour title at Quail Hollow.

"It's gone faster than I thought as far as just starting to do some stuff mentally that I've never done before, but I feel like I'm one of the best players in the world," Clark said "Obviously this just shows what I believe can happen."

The final act was two putts from 60 feet on the 18th hole at Los Angeles Country Club, and the 29-year-old Clark pumped his fist when it settled a foot away. He tapped that in for a par, maybe the easiest shot he had all day.

Left in his wake was a collection of big names.

Scottie Scheffler, the No. 1 player in the world, couldn't catch him. Neither could British Open champion Cameron Smith. Fowler was playing in the final group of a major for the third time. Clark was playing in the final round of a major for the third time, and the previous two occasions he was done in time for lunch.

Clark let loose his emotions at the end, looking to the blue sky in tears and covering his face with his cap as he sobbed on the green.

He thought about quitting golf a decade ago when he struggled with the loss of his mother, Lise, to breast cancer. She was who kept him steady in good times and bad. He was thinking about her all week for all kinds of reasons.

"My mom lived in LA for a few years and I've had some people come up to me and show pictures of my mom when they knew her back in her 20s and early 30s when she was living here," said Clark, who was born in Denver. "So it was kind of a special vibe all week being here in LA. My parents got married at Riviera Country Club. I have some roots a little bit in this area.

"All I really wish is that my mom could be here and I could just hug her and we could celebrate together. But I know she's proud of me."

For McIlroy, it was more disappointment in his quest to end nine years without a major.

He opened with a birdie and didn't make another the rest of the way. McIlroy played a final round that typically wins a U.S. Open — 16 pars, one bogey. Just not this one. Even as Clark showed signs of cracking during the rugged closing stretch, McIlroy missed fairways and didn't give himself any reasonable birdie

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 29 of 65

chances.

It was similar to St. Andrews last summer at the British Open, when he hit every green and couldn't buy a putt. Instead, he'll face more questions about when he'll win another major.

"When I do finally win this next major, it's going to be really, really sweet," McIlroy said. "I would go through 100 Sundays like this to get my hands on another major championship."

Scheffler missed too many putts early on the back nine and needed help from Clark and McIlroy that never arrived. He also closed with a 70 to finish third, a month after a runner-up finish in the PGA Championship.

Fowler set a U.S. Open record with 23 birdies, but just like so many other majors when he had a chance, he was in reverse before he ever got going — three bogeys in the opening seven holes. He never made up the ground and shot 75.

This day belonged to Clark, who showed remarkable poise and self-belief, not to mention an extraordinary short game and a fairway metal he won't soon forget.

Already with a two-shot lead, he was a yard away from an easy birdie on the par-5 eighth when his approach hit a steep bank of the barranca to the left. Barely able to see his golf ball, Clark took a whack and the ball advanced a few inches deeper into thick grass.

He hammered it again, this time over the green, 70 feet away down a firm and scary putting surface. He chipped that to 3 feet to escape with bogey.

"That up-and-down was the key to the tournament," he said.

More such shots followed. On the par-3 ninth, he was on the bank of a bunker and chipped away from the flag, using the slope expertly to get it to within 7 feet for another big save. And then he clipped a pitch from a tight lie left of the 11th green to 4 feet for par.

The signature shot was his fairway metal from 282 yards on the par-5 14th to 20 feet that set up a two-putt birdie, giving Clark a three-shot lead with four to play.

But he made the only bogey of the day on the par-3 15th, then found a bunker left of the 16th fairway and whacked his hand on his putter when he missed a 7-foot par putt. His lead down to one shot, he got up-and-down from left of the 17th green to keep the lead.

The USGA allowed thousands of fans to circle the fairway short of the 18th green with so few grandstands, creating a big theater for Clark's finish.

Fowler, still chasing his first major, returned to the 18th green to hug Clark.

"I went back in there and just said, 'Your mom was with you. She'd be very proud,'" Fowler said.

Clark finished at 10-under 270 and along with \$3.6 million — his second such cash prize in the last six weeks — he moves to No. 2 in the Ryder Cup standings.

Smith shot 67 to finish fourth. Tommy Fleetwood became the first player with two rounds of 63 in the U.S. Open and finished in a tie for fifth with Fowler and Min Woo Lee (67). Fleetwood also shot 63 at Shinnecock Hills in the final round of 2018.

That was a fitting finish in one respect — a U.S. Open that had the lowest 18-hole scores on Thursday (Fowler and Xander Schauffele at 62) ended with the lowest scoring average for 72 holes (71.76) in U.S. Open history.

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

Biden to hold 4 fundraisers in San Francisco area as he revs up 2024 campaign

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden ramps up his reelection effort this week with four fundraisers in the San Francisco area, as his campaign builds up its coffers and lays strategic foundations for 2024.

In the back half of June, Biden's campaign will have over 20 fundraisers involving the president, Vice President Kamala Harris, first lady Jill Biden and second gentleman Douglas Emhoff, according to a person involved in Biden's travel plans who insisted on anonymity to discuss the schedule.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 30 of 65

More than half of the fundraisers are with the president, who will also be traveling to New York, Maryland and Illinois. Biden hit the themes of his campaign at a Friday fundraising event in Connecticut, saying his goal is to do more to tell voters about his legislative accomplishments with infrastructure, computer chip production and programs for responding to climate change, among other policies.

"There's a lot we've done," Biden said Friday. "We just got to let many people know we've done it and be straight with people. Just be as straight as we can."

The fundraising blitz follows Biden's first campaign rally on Saturday in Philadelphia, where he was endorsed by key unions — the event highlighting a pivotal constituency in the largest population center of a critical battleground state. It was meant as an early display of enthusiasm for Biden's campaign, and a venue for him to interact directly with voters before he spends much of the rest of the month meeting with deep-pocketed benefactors.

The flurry of engagements comes ahead of the end of the fundraising quarter at the end of the month — and Biden's campaign finance report in July will provide the first test of Democratic donor enthusiasm for his reelection effort.

Biden, unlike Trump and other 2024 GOP contenders, has not revealed any clues about his fundraising haul since declaring his candidacy in April. And his campaign launch was timed to avoid having to file a campaign finance report for the first quarter, a historically rough fundraising period.

For the first time in U.S. elections, Biden has joint fundraising agreements with all 50 state Democratic parties and the branch in Washington, D.C., an arrangement that can help maximize donations while minimizing expenses in the early months of the campaign. It's part of a broader effort to unite a diverse Democratic coalition behind Biden as the Republicans undergo what could be a large and divisive primary.

"While MAGA Republicans burn cash in their primary, competing for whose agenda is the most extreme, the president's campaign will be capitalizing on the opportunity to raise significant resources," said Biden's campaign manager Julie C. Rodriguez, referring to Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" slogan.

Separately, Rodriguez is traveling across the U.S. to meet with donors, local officials and community leaders to help align the coalition. Along with other campaign officials, the tour begins in Atlanta and will include Boston, Minneapolis, Philadelphia, Los Angeles and St. Louis.

Not all of Biden's time in San Francisco will be devoted to the campaign. On Monday, he'll go to the Lucy Evans Baylands Nature Interpretive Center and Preserve in Palo Alto, California. He plans to tour the coastal wetland area and announce \$600 million for projects to address climate change, according to the White House.

20 years after invasion, Iraqis still waiting to come to US

By REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ammar Rashed has a stack of letters from U.S. troops attesting to his work during some of the most dangerous days of the Iraq War. But six years after he applied to immigrate to the United States under a program for interpreters who helped America, he is still waiting.

"You don't have to keep me and my family suffering for, for years waiting," said Rashed during a Skype interview from Jordan, where he lives. "It's really frustrating."

Rashed is among thousands of Iraqis, many of whom risked their lives by working closely with Americans during the war and its aftermath, trying to enter the U.S. An estimated 164,000 Iraqis already have found homes in America.

U.S. officials cite multiple reasons for the delays, including an attack on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, a hack of a refugee database, the COVID-19 pandemic and cuts to the refugee program under then-President Donald Trump.

Sometimes the process is slowed as applicants struggle to prove their ties to the U.S.

Mohammed Subhi Hashim al-Shafeay, his wife and four children have been in limbo for a dozen years while he tries to document his work for a U.S. security contractor at the Iraqi Justice Ministry.

They are living as refugees in Jordan. But al-Shafeay cannot work and cannot afford to send his oldest

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 31 of 65

child, a high school senior, to college. His youngest children feel resented at school because Iraqi refugees this year were exempt from paying school fees, unlike low-income Jordanians.

"This is not a life. We want a future for our children," he said.

The U.S. invasion in 2003 unleashed a vicious sectarian war that engulfed Iraq. Then militants seized large swaths of territory. Iraqi forces reclaimed their country in intense fighting, but huge challenges remain, including rampant corruption, a lack of basic services, continued violence and more than 1 million people still internally displaced. Between the invasion and this year, as many as 300,000 Iraqis were killed along with more than 8,000 U.S. military, contractors and civilians.

Recognizing the role Iraqis played in helping the U.S., as well as the violence they faced for it, the U.S. established ways to help them emigrate.

According to the State Department, 106,000 have applied for a program, known as direct access program, intended for people affiliated with the U.S. such as those who worked for an American nongovernmental organization. There are also about 100 Iraqis who applied for a more narrow special immigrant visa program for Iraqis who worked directly for or on behalf of the U.S. government. That program stopped accepting applications in 2014, but applications already in the pipeline are still being processed.

Rashed applied under yet another route, which allows for 50 visas a year for interpreters who have a recommendation from a general.

Almost since the beginning there have been complaints the process to come to America takes too long. Multiple administrations have considered making the programs more efficient without compromising security.

The State Department declined requests for an interview for this story. But in reports, U.S. officials noted steps such as added staff to speed up visa processing. The embassy in Iraq's capital just reopened limited consular services last fall after closing for three years following a 2019 attack. The government also noted the toll that the pandemic took on its visa processing around the world and the shifting of federal resources to the crisis in Ukraine. The U.S. refugee program, which endured historic cuts under Trump, only in recent months has started to show signs of recovery.

In January 2021, the U.S. suspended the direct access program after three people were charged with stealing information from a U.S. refugee database to fraudulently help Iraqis trying to emigrate. The program was not restarted until March of last year. At the time it reopened, the U.S. said it was "committed to ensuring those who sacrificed their own safety for our collective interests have an opportunity to seek refuge in the United States."

For the Iraqis still waiting, it can be confusing.

Al-Shafeay said he was hired by a U.S. contractor to work as a bodyguard for the Iraqi Justice Ministry from 2003 to 2006, when he left Iraq. He said he has been told the holdup is confirming his employment, but it is challenging so many years later and from afar.

He and his wife are worried about their children. Jordan has played host to tens of thousands of Iraqi refugees over the years, but those refugees face challenges getting authorization to work, especially in major professions, and are essentially barred from becoming citizens. Al-Shafeay questions what future his family has there. The family relies on handouts from aid groups.

Al-Shafeay said the family is scared to ever go back to Iraq because a former in-law, who is now a member of an Iranian-backed militia, has repeatedly threatened them. His oldest child is a high school senior but barely leaves his room. He says there is no point in studying because his parents cannot afford the university fees in Jordan.

Ali Al Mshakheel is a former Iraqi journalist now living in Maine. He said he hears almost daily from Iraqis in America trying to assist family or friends still in Iraq. Al Mshakheel himself has four siblings and a father whom he has been trying to help emigrate. During the program's suspension, he wrote an op-ed calling on the Biden administration to unfreeze it. Even now he sees little progress.

Both Rashed and al-Shafeay still want to come to the U.S.

Rashed spent most of his life in Iraq. Now, it is too dangerous for him there due to the work he did for the American military. He said he worked with U.S. troops in 2008 who were fighting the Mahdi Army —

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 32 of 65

supporters of Muqtada al-Sadr. But now, as al-Sadr has become an important political figure, his supporters are increasingly in positions of power. Rashed is both a Jordanian and Iraqi citizen, but he does not see a future for his children in Jordan.

"I need them to live better with a better nation and a better future," he said.

The people working to help him are frustrated, too. Rashed's lawyer, Wes Pickard, said Rashed completed his consular interview in 2019. At that time, there was a reasonable expectation that the process to get his visa would move quickly after that.

Since then Rashed's been stuck in what's called "refused for administrative processing" — background checks — with little indication as to when the process will be finished.

Jennifer Patota, a lawyer for the International Refugee Assistance Project, said there are a number of reasons why people could be stuck in background checks — their name is similar to someone else's that the government has suspicions over, for example.

Kevin Brown worked with Rashed over two tours in Iraq and wrote him a letter of recommendation. Now retired from the military and living in Connecticut, Brown said it is frustrating to hear that someone he worked with so closely — "his right hand man" — is still waiting.

Brown said he would love for Rashed to become an American citizen "But if he can't be, I'd like to know why."

Associated Press reporters Karin Laub and Omar Akour in Amman, Jordan, and Qassim Abdul-Zahra in Baghdad contributed to this report.

What if things could turn out differently? How the multiverse got into our heads and didn't let go

By TED ANTHONY AP National Writer

"Let's do things differently this time."

Those are the first words you hear at the beginning of this month's "Spider-Man: Across the Spider-Verse," an otherworldly meditation on multiple realities and how our lives might unfold. The message is clear from the get-go: We have choices. Things could be malleable. You are you, sure. But wait — you might also be you and you and you.

The world is a stressful, sometimes lonely place — and more so at a moment when "It wasn't supposed to be this way" has become a not-uncommon mantra. But what if things could turn out another way? What if, somewhere, they had? Enter the realm of the multiverse and alternate realities, one of the most glorified canvases in popular culture's recent years — and a repository for the ache and longing of living in an era of uncertainty.

Alternate universes are everywhere these days, as the long-delayed opening weekend of "The Flash" attests with its regret-streaked, history-changing storyline (and its multiple variations of Batman). There is a deep hunger, it seems, for exploring possibilities — for seeing what might have been if just one thing had unfolded differently.

"The cultural assumption used to be that the world we live in is the way it is, and that's the only way it could be," says Douglas Wolk, who read 27,000 Marvel comics from across the decades for his book, "All of the Marvels."

"What has happened in culture," Wolk says, "is that people are saying, 'Well, no. This consensus reality is not how things have to be.'"

THE MULTIVERSE HAS A RICH HISTORY — OR HISTORIES

The notion of exploring life's twists and turns through alternate timelines has been around for a while, albeit in varying guises.

"It's a Wonderful Life," the quintessential Christmas movie from 1946, sent the affable George Bailey tumbling into a timeline where he'd never been born to reveal his true impact. "You've been given a great gift, George — a chance to see what the world would be like without you," he's told by his wannabe

North Korea calls failed spy satellite launch 'the most serious' shortcoming, vows 2nd launch

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Top North Korean officials vowed to push for a second attempt to launch a spy satellite as they called their country's first, and failed, launch last month "the most serious" shortcoming this year and harshly criticized those responsible, state media reported Monday.

In late May, a North Korean rocket carrying a military reconnaissance satellite crashed soon after liftoff, posing a setback to leader Kim Jong Un's push to acquire a space-based surveillance system to better monitor the United States and South Korea.

The failed launch and North Korean efforts to modernize its weapons arsenal were discussed extensively at a three-day ruling party meeting that ended Sunday, with the presence of Kim and other top officials.

A lengthy Korean Central News Agency dispatch on the meeting didn't clearly say who spoke, but said a report to the meeting "bitterly criticized the officials who irresponsibly conducted the preparations for (the) satellite launch."

The report set forth tasks for officials and scientists to learn the lessons of the failed launch, find what caused the rocket's crash and make a successful launch in a short span of time, KCNA said.

It didn't say exactly when North Korea might attempt a second launch. But South Korea's spy agency earlier told lawmakers that it would likely take "more than several weeks" for North Korea to determine what went wrong in the failed launch.

North Korea monitoring groups haven't reported any purges or dismissals of scientists or others involved in the failed launch.

A spy satellite is among several high-tech military assets Kim has publicly vowed to acquire to cope with what he calls U.S.-led hostility. Other weapons systems Kim wants to possess are a multi-warhead missile, a nuclear submarine, a solid-propellant intercontinental ballistic missile and a hypersonic missile.

Since the start of 2022, North Korea has carried out more than 100 missile tests, some of which were related to developing a spy satellite and other powerful weapons on Kim's wish list.

During the meeting, Politburo members also analyzed the "extremely deteriorating security situation" in the region caused by the "reckless war moves" of North Korea's rivals, the report said, apparently referring to the expanded U.S.-South Korea military drills.

The United States and South Korea have been expanding their military drills in response to North Korea's advancing nuclear arsenal and warn that any attempt to use nuclear weapons would result in the end of Kim's government.

The Politburo members set down unspecified "important tasks" for strengthening solidarity with countries that are "opposed to the U.S. brigandish strategy for world supremacy," KCNA said.

North Korea has pushed to boost relations with Russia, including defending its military action in Ukraine. It says Russia is protecting itself against the West's "hegemonic policy."

The North has also sought to build on its ties with China, its main ally and economic lifeline that is locked in an intensified strategic rivalry with the United States over trade, technology and regional influence.

Russia and China, both veto-holding permanent members of the U.N. Security Council, have repeatedly blocked attempts by the U.S. and others to toughen U.N. sanctions on North Korea over its missile tests.

The party meeting also discussed efforts to improve North Korea's struggling economy, which experts say has been further strained by pandemic-related border closures.

KCNA said there has been some progress in efforts to boost agricultural output and revive production in metal and chemical industries, though it acknowledged unspecified shortcomings. KCNA claimed progress in the construction field, citing a project to build tens of thousands of new homes in the capital, Pyongyang.

It's virtually impossible to verify the claims by the North, one of the most secretive countries in the world. Experts say there are no signs of social unrest or famine in North Korea despite the pandemic-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 34 of 65

guardian angel, Clarence.

In the decades since, that notion has accelerated — a rise in stories that consider events both fictional and real, extrapolating different choices.

What if the South had won the Civil War (“CSA: The Confederate States of America”)? What if Germany and Japan had won World War II (“The Man in the High Castle”)? What if John F. Kennedy hadn’t been assassinated (“11/22/63”)? What if the Soviets had beaten the Americans to the moon (“For All Mankind”)? What if 9/11 had played out very differently (“The Mirage”)?

Fictional worlds are more malleable, though, and can yield more content. So it is that imaginary characters — particularly beloved ones with established stories — are toyed with in books, TV shows and movies that airlift them out of one life and into another. It’s a concept that cuts across genres, from rom-com (1998’s “Sliding Doors,” where missing a train splits a young woman’s life into diverging paths) to near-musical (2019’s “Yesterday,” where a budding musician tumbles into a universe where the Beatles never existed).

You have the reality where Spider-Man never married Mary Jane Watson (Marvel Comics’ “Brand New Day”); the universe where one variant of Doctor Strange has gone insane (“Doctor Strange and the Multiverse of Madness”); the universe where a Ben Affleck Batman never existed but the Michael Keaton Batman stuck around and got old (“The Flash,” which we’re not spoiling since this was in the trailers).

And you have the “mirror universe” of “Star Trek,” whose dark and aggressive Terran Empire reveals the baser instincts of beloved characters. Not to mention the recent spate of “Trek” movies, which unfold in yet another reality, splintered when an aging Spock went back in time.

“It’s a way to explore a problem that’s never actually happened in the main story,” sums up Nic Lemire, 13, a California teenager who co-hosts an occasional podcast called “Marvel Mondays” with his mother, former Associated Press film critic Christy Lemire.

One crowning example of multiverse success: Last year’s “Everything Everywhere All at Once,” which showed all the different lives that Michelle Yeoh’s main character might have lived — with the point being that across the multiverse, her family remains a family. It won seven Academy Awards, including best picture.

Whatever the subject matter, these works are united by one theme: There are always possibilities, for better and for worse, and exploring them is entertaining, enlightening and escapist. That’s no small thing in a post-COVID world facing the ravages of extreme climate events, persistent racism, the rancor of political polarization and the rise of artificial intelligence — a planet where convulsive change can seem the only constant.

“Fictions have implicitly done what alternate universes seem to be doing more lately: letting us explore some reality that’s not actual, for the purpose of learning about the actual world,” says Hannah Kim, an assistant professor of philosophy at Macalester College who has researched why the multiverse resonates.

“We’re bombarded with things that seem arbitrary, random,” she says. “The number of difficult developments the past few years — the pandemic, political upheaval, effects of climate change, etc. — leave the anxiety-riddled person with the nagging feeling that this all could have been otherwise.”

IT’S A LUCRATIVE BUSINESS MOVE, TOO

Exploring the question of “what if” continues to be lucrative — to the point where there’s an entire Marvel show exploring alternate realities called “What If...?” And while multiple universes are starting to feel spread thin as a plot device, the trope isn’t going away any time soon in our single world, where reality is constantly called into question.

After all, if you can remix popular characters in multiple properties while retaining the potential for a reset in a “prime universe,” what is there to lose? Well, there’s one thing: If everything is reversible, unlike real life as we know it, how high can the stakes really be?

“It narratively lets you have your cake and eat it, too — you can kill off the character, have an emotional death scene and then bring the character back from another universe,” says Matt Ruff, whose 9/11 novel, “The Mirage,” posits an alternate universe that flips aggressors, victims and prejudices. In its reality, it was Christian extremists who attacked the Twin Towers of the “United Arab States” in Baghdad.

“If everything’s possible, the choices are less interesting. The consequences don’t matter all that much,” Ruff says. “Part of engaging in the real world is engaging with the fact that there’s no magical solution.”

That, though, may be precisely why the notion resonates. Human beings have always wanted to try on other outfits, other outcomes, maybe even other lives. That's what stories are about. Could we be hurtling toward a narrative era — the immersive equivalent of choose-your-own-adventure stories — where all possibilities are on the table?

Technology has enabled people to obtain most anything — customized, to boot — from the world's bounty within 48 hours. Who in the network television days of the 1980s could have imagined that streaming would bring thousands of television shows and movies to our eyeballs with the push of a button? So why not thousands of stories with thousands of possible endings for characters and plotlines? What does that do to our relationship with our stories?

"You are looking at a piece of a bigger cultural picture that provides a constant barrage of cultural images that reinforce this idea that we can be better versions of ourselves," says David Newman, a sociologist at Colgate University who has written a book on second chances. "People want to believe that when we have a problem, the problem is fixable."

There's one Marvel Comics offshoot, something called "Marvel 1602," which chronicles a universe in which Earth's mightiest superheroes existed at the beginning of the 17th century. In it, Reed Richards, the leader of the Fantastic Four, proposes something.

"I posit we are in a universe which favors stories," he says. "A universe in which no story can ever truly end; in which there can only be continuances."

However it might play out, that's a universe full of possibilities. And judging from the past two decades in the popular culture of human beings, it's good business as well to keep on asking: What if?

Ted Anthony, director of new storytelling and newsroom innovation for The Associated Press, has been writing about American culture since 1990. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/anthonyted>

More than 1 million dropped from Medicaid as states start post-pandemic purge of rolls

By DAVID A. LIEB and ANDREW DeMILLO Associated Press

More than 1 million people have been dropped from Medicaid in the past couple months as some states moved swiftly to halt health care coverage following the end of the coronavirus pandemic.

Most got dropped for not filling out paperwork.

Though the eligibility review is required by the federal government, President's Joe Biden's administration isn't too pleased at how efficiently some other states are accomplishing the task.

"Pushing through things and rushing it will lead to eligible people — kids and families — losing coverage for some period of time," Daniel Tsai, a top federal Medicaid official recently told reporters.

Already, about 1.5 million people have been removed from Medicaid in more than two dozen states that started the process in April or May, according to publicly available reports and data obtained by The Associated Press.

Florida has dropped several hundred thousand people, by far the most among states. The drop rate also has been particularly high in other states. For people whose cases were decided in May, around half or more got dropped in Arkansas, Idaho, Kansas, Nevada, New Hampshire, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah and West Virginia.

By its own count, Arkansas has dropped more than 140,000 people from Medicaid.

The eligibility redeterminations have created headaches for Jennifer Mojica, 28, who was told in April that she no longer qualified for Medicaid because Arkansas had incorrectly determined her income was above the limit.

She got that resolved, but was then told her 5-year-old son was being dropped from Medicaid because she had requested his cancellation — something that never happened, she said. Her son's coverage has been restored, but now Mojica says she's been told her husband no longer qualifies. The uncertainty has

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 36 of 65

been frustrating, she said.

"It was like fixing one thing and then another problem came up, and they fixed it and then something else came up," Mojica said.

Arkansas officials said they have tried to renew coverage automatically for as many people as possible and placed a special emphasis on reaching families with children. But a 2021 state law requires the post-pandemic eligibility redeterminations to be completed in six months, and the state will continue "to swiftly disenroll individuals who are no longer eligible," the Department of Human Services said in statement.

Arkansas Gov. Sarah Huckabee Sanders has dismissed criticism of the state's process.

"Those who do not qualify for Medicaid are taking resources from those who need them," Sanders said on Twitter last month. "But the pandemic is over — and we are leading the way back to normalcy."

More than 93 million people nationwide were enrolled in Medicaid as of the most recent available data in February — up nearly one-third from the pre-pandemic total in January 2020. The rolls swelled because federal law prohibited states from removing people from Medicaid during the health emergency in exchange for providing states with increased funding.

Now that eligibility reviews have resumed, states have begun plowing through a backlog of cases to determine whether people's income or life circumstances have changed. States have a year to complete the process. But tracking down responses from everyone has proved difficult, because some people have moved, changed contact information or disregarded mailings about the renewal process.

Before dropping people from Medicaid, the Florida Department of Children and Families said it makes between five and 13 contact attempts, including texts, emails and phone calls. Yet the department said 152,600 people have been non-responsive.

Their coverage could be restored retroactively, if people submit information showing their eligibility up to 90 days after their deadline.

Unlike some states, Idaho continued to evaluate people's Medicaid eligibility during the pandemic even though it didn't remove anyone. When the enrollment freeze ended in April, Idaho started processing those cases — dropping nearly 67,000 of the 92,000 people whose cases have been decided so far.

"I think there's still a lot of confusion among families on what's happening," said Hillarie Hagen, a health policy associate at the nonprofit Idaho Voices for Children.

She added, "We're likely to see people showing up at a doctor's office in the coming months not knowing they've lost Medicaid."

Advocates fear that many households losing coverage may include children who are actually still eligible, because Medicaid covers children at higher income levels than their parents or guardians. A report last year by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services forecast that children would be disproportionately impacted, with more than half of those disenrolled still actually eligible.

That's difficult to confirm, however, because the federal Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services doesn't require states to report a demographic breakdown of those dropped. In fact, CMS has yet to release any state-by-state data. The AP obtained data directly from states and from other groups that have been collecting it.

Medicaid recipients in numerous states have described the eligibility redetermination process as frustrating.

Julie Talamo, of Port Richey, Florida, said she called state officials every day for weeks, spending hours on hold, when she was trying to ensure her 19-year-old special-needs son, Thomas, was going to stay on Medicaid.

She knew her own coverage would end but was shocked to hear Thomas' coverage would be whittled down to a different program that could force her family to pay \$2,000 per month. Eventually, an activist put Talamo in contact with a senior state healthcare official who confirmed her son would stay on Medicaid.

"This system was designed to fail people," Talamo said of the haphazard process.

Some states haven't been able to complete all the eligibility determinations that are due each month. Pennsylvania reported more than 100,000 incomplete cases in both April and May. Tens of thousands of

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 37 of 65

cases also remained incomplete in April or May in Arizona, Arkansas, Indiana, Iowa, New Mexico and Ohio.

"If states are already behind in processing renewals, that's going to snowball over time," said Tricia Brooks, a research professor at the Georgetown University Center for Children and Families. "Once they get piles of stuff that haven't been processed, I don't see how they catch up easily."

Among those still hanging in the balance is Gary Rush, 67, who said he was notified in April that he would lose Medicaid coverage. The Pittsburgh resident said he was told that his retirement accounts make him ineligible, even though he said he doesn't draw from them. Rush appealed with the help of an advocacy group and, at a hearing this past week, was told he has until July to get rid of about \$60,000 in savings.

Still, Rush said he doesn't know what he will do if he loses coverage for his diabetes medication, which costs about \$700 a month. Rush said he gets \$1,100 a month from Social Security.

In Indiana, Samantha Richards, 35, said she has been on Medicaid her whole life and currently works two part-time jobs as a custodian. Richards recalled receiving a letter earlier this year indicating that the pandemic-era Medicaid protection was ending. She said a local advocacy group helped her navigate the renewal process. But she remains uneasy.

"Medicaid can be a little unpredictable," Richards said. "There is still that concern that just out of nowhere, I will either get a letter saying that we have to reapply because we missed some paperwork, or I missed a deadline, or I'm going to show up at the doctor's office or the pharmacy and they're going to say, 'Your insurance didn't go through.'"

Lieb reported from Jefferson City, Missouri, and DeMillo from Little Rock, Arkansas. Also contributing were AP reporters Anthony Izaguirre in Tallahassee, Florida; Marc Levy in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania; and Arleigh Rodgers in Bloomington, Indiana. Rodgers 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.

Both sides suffer heavy casualties as Ukraine strikes back against Russia, UK assessment says

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia and Ukraine are suffering high numbers of military casualties as Ukraine fights to dislodge the Kremlin's forces from occupied areas in the early stages of its counteroffensive, British officials said Sunday.

Russian losses are probably at their highest level since the peak of the battle for Bakhmut in March, U.K. military officials said in their regular assessment.

According to British intelligence, the most intense fighting has centered on the southeastern Zaporizhzhia province, around Bakhmut and further west in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk province. While the update reported that Ukraine was on the offensive in these areas and had "made small advances," it said that Russian forces were conducting "relatively effective defensive operations" in Ukraine's south.

The Ukrainian military said in a regular update Sunday morning that over the previous 24 hours Russia had carried out 43 airstrikes, four missile strikes and 51 attacks from multiple rocket launchers. According to the statement by the General Staff, Russia continues to concentrate its efforts on offensive operations in Ukraine's industrial east, focusing attacks around Bakhmut, Avdiivka, Marinka and Lyman in Donetsk province, with 26 combat clashes taking place.

Donetsk regional Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko said that two civilians were killed, with a further three wounded in the past day.

Ukrainian officials said Russian forces also launched airstrikes on other regions of the east and south of the country.

One civilian was killed and four more wounded in Kherson province as a result of Russia's attacks, said regional Gov. Oleksandr Prokudin, while Zaporizhzhia regional Gov. Yurii Malashko said one person was wounded in Russian attacks that hit 20 settlements in the province.

Vladimir Rogov, an official with the Moscow-appointed administration in the partially occupied Zapor-

izhzhia region, said Sunday that Ukrainian forces had taken control of the village of Piatykhvatky on the Zaporizhzhia battlefield.

Serhiy Bratchuk, spokesperson of the regional government in the southwestern Odesa province, said Ukrainian forces destroyed a "very significant" ammunition depot near the Russian-occupied port city of Henichesk in nearby Kherson province.

"Our armed forces dealt a good blow in the morning," Bratchuk said in a video message on Sunday morning, posted to his Telegram channel.

Western analysts and military officials have cautioned that Ukraine's counteroffensive to dislodge the Kremlin's forces from occupied areas, using Western-supplied advanced weapons in attacks along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, could last a long time.

A group of African leaders carried out a self-styled "peace mission" to both Ukraine and Russia in recent days to try to help end their nearly 16-month-old war, but the visit ended on Saturday with no immediate signs of progress.

In other developments:

— Volodymyr Artyukh, the governor of Ukraine's northern Sumy region, which borders Russia, said a father and his son were killed by Russian shelling of the village of Bilopilya. Across the border, Ukrainian shelling hit three villages in Russia's Kursk region, said its governor Roman Starovoit.

— The death toll from flooding following the destruction of the Kakhovka dam has risen to 16 in Ukrainian-held territory, Ukraine's interior ministry said late Saturday, while Russian officials said 29 people died in territories controlled by Moscow.

Massive flooding from the destruction of the dam on June 6 devastated towns along the lower Dnieper River in Kherson province, a front line in the war. Russia and Ukraine accuse each other of causing the breach.

— As the deadline for all Russian volunteer formations to sign contracts with Russia's Defense Ministry approaches, widely seen as targeting Russia's Wagner mercenary group, Wagner leader and regular Kremlin critic Yevgeny Prigozhin said Sunday that 32,000 former prisoners had returned home after the end of their contracts with Wagner in Ukraine.

According to Prigozhin, 83 crimes were committed by those who had returned home, which he claimed was "80 times less" than the number committed by those released from prison over the same period without having served with Wagner.

Prigozhin toured Russian prisons to recruit fighters, promising pardons if they survived a half-year tour of front-line duty with Wagner. In an interview last month, Prigozhin said he had recruited 50,000 convicts, about 10,000 of whom were killed in Bakhmut.

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

Kamau, 'charismatic and iconic' African lion at California's Sacramento Zoo, dies at 16

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Kamau, the African lion who was a star attraction at California's Sacramento Zoo, has died at age 16, officials said.

The zoo said Kamau was euthanized Saturday, a day after the big cat was pulled off an exhibit because of declining health due to his advanced age.

The lion was considered elderly with worsening gastrointestinal problems, "and the difficult decision to proceed with humane euthanasia was made when medical treatment options failed to provide sufficient relief from his condition," the zoo said in a statement.

The statement called Kamau one of the zoo's "most charismatic and iconic animals."

He came to Sacramento from the San Diego Zoo in 2008 and in the years since attracted crowds who hoped to hear his impressive roar.

In 2014, the lion sired a litter of cubs. A few years later, his habitat doubled in size, and a glass viewing

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 39 of 65

wall allowed guests to get "nose-to-nose" with both Kamau and his mate, Cleo, the zoo said.

Cleo, now 18, is in good health. African lions typically live 10 to 15 years, the zoo said, but they can live up to 25 years in captivity.

Live updates | Wyndham Clark wins US Open by 1 shot over Rory McIlroy for 1st major title

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Follow along for live updates in the final round of the 123rd U.S. Open at Los Angeles Country Club.

CLARK WINS U.S. OPEN

Wyndham Clark has won the U.S. Open for his first major championship, beating Rory McIlroy by one shot at Los Angeles Country Club.

The 29-year-old from Denver was playing in just his seventh major and had never finished better than 75th. His even-par 70 was good enough to outlast four-time major champion McIlroy, who also shot 70.

Clark finished at 10-under 270. He tapped in for the victory, pumped his fists, hugged his caddie and then covered his face with his cap.

World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler also shot 70 and finished third, three shots back.

Clark had three early birdies to pull away from Rickie Fowler, who either shared the lead or had it outright through the first three rounds. Fowler shot 75 and faded to a tie for fifth.

WHAT TO KNOW:

- Fowler, McIlroy, Scheffler headline the final round in a U.S. Open full of possibilities
- Late three-putt drops Fowler into tie for lead heading into final round
- Dark finish perplexes U.S. Open co-leader Clark
- Scheffler gets into mix with late-round fireworks
- Unknown Nagano making a name for himself with great play at the U.S. Open

FOWLER'S 23 BIRDIES A RECORD

Rickie Fowler has set the record for birdies in a U.S. Open with 23.

He set the mark on his 68th hole at Los Angeles Country Club, but was still trailing Wyndham Clark by five shots at the time. Fowler has made 16 bogeys to go along with all those birdies.

Fowler made the record birdie putt from 10 feet on the par-5 14th hole, his second birdie of the day. He had made five bogeys in the final round to that point.

The previous record for birdies in a U.S. Open was 22 by Brendan Steele at Erin Hills in 2017.

Fowler and Clark started the day tied at 10 under, with Rory McIlroy a shot behind.

CLARK'S IN THE LEAD

The last group is on the course for the final round of the U.S. Open at Los Angeles Country Club, and Wyndham Clark has birdied the par-5 first hole to take a one-shot lead over Rickie Fowler and Rory McIlroy.

Clark hit a beautiful chip from just off the green to within 2 1/2 feet to set up his birdie. Fowler, who shared the third-round lead with Clark at 10-under, parred the first hole. They're both looking for their first major win.

Four-time major winner McIlroy also birdied the opening hole. McIlroy just missed his 33-foot try for eagle.

CLARK LEADS AT THE TURN

Wyndham Clark has a one-shot lead over Rory McIlroy with nine holes left in the U.S. Open at Los Angeles Country Club.

Clark played the front nine in 1 under and was 11 under for the championship as he made the turn.

The 29-year-old from Denver is seeking to win first major. He is playing in only his seventh major and

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 40 of 65

has never finished higher than 75th. Clark had three early birdies to pull away from Rickie Fowler, who either shared the lead or had it outright through the first three rounds. Fowler, who also has never won a major, bogeyed three of his first seven holes.

Clark also survived an encounter with LACC's unique barranca on No. 8, needing two shots to emerge from the tall grass near the green. His first attempt to chop out of it went just 8 inches.

TOMMY'S CHARGE

Tommy Fleetwood is on his way to another low number at the U.S. Open.

Fleetwood holed a long eagle putt on the par-5 14th hole for his second eagle of the round. He's now at 8-under par for his round with three holes remaining. The closing three holes are among the toughest at Los Angeles Country Club. Even so, he has a chance to join the barrage of record scoring for this U.S. Open.

Fleetwood five years ago matched the U.S. Open record with a 63 in the final round at Shinnecock Hills. That's no longer the record because Rickie Fowler and Xander Schauffele each had a 62 in the first round at LACC.

The sun was trying to break through the marine layer over Beverly Hills with the leaders still 30 minutes away from starting the final round.

UP FOR GRABS

The U.S. Open is up for grabs, and there are low scores available early in the final round.

At about the same time co-leaders Rickie Fowler and Wyndham Clark were arriving at Los Angeles Country Club for their afternoon tee times, PGA Tour rookie Austin Eckroat was making the turn after a record-tying 29 on the front nine.

Eckroat eagled the par-5 eighth hole to post the sixth 29 in U.S. Open history. The fifth came a day earlier by Tom Kim.

Eckroat vaulted into eighth place as he headed to the back nine. He was still six shots behind Clark and Fowler, each of whom will start at 10 under and are seeking their first major title.

One shot behind the leaders is Rory McIlroy, who is looking for his first major since 2014. World No. 1 Scottie Scheffler starts the day three shots out of the lead.

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

Longtime AP State Department reporter George Gedda dies at 82

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — George Gedda, a workhorse veteran of The Associated Press whose coverage of the State Department and international relations spanned more than four decades and played a major role in explaining U.S. foreign policy to the American public from Vietnam to Cuba, Afghanistan and Iraq, has died. He was 82.

Gedda was also the author of three books, including one on his time as an AP diplomatic correspondent, one on Cuba's communist revolution, and one on his first love, baseball. He died Sunday while in hospice care in Altamonte Springs, Florida, said Ellen James Martin, his former partner of 14 years. The cause was bladder cancer, she said.

Gedda had retired to central Florida in 2007 after a 41-year career at the AP, most of which was in Washington, beginning during Lyndon Johnson's administration and not ending until George W. Bush was president.

During his time in Washington, Gedda covered every secretary of state from Dean Rusk to Condoleezza Rice, carving out a niche for himself as an expert on Latin America and Cuba.

"You are a first-class professional and a role model for many who will follow you," Rice said in a handwritten note to Gedda on the occasion of his retirement. Rice said he had had an "exceptional career of service to our nation's founding principle — a free press."

The late Colin Powell, Rice's predecessor as secretary of state, also had fond memories of Gedda. "You played an invaluable role in helping the American people understand the issues of the day," Powell wrote.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 41 of 65

“Play Ball!”

From his perch at the State Department, the soft-spoken and unfailingly polite and patient Gedda made himself an invaluable partner for both fellow AP reporters and competitors, including his often irascible colleague and officemate, the late and legendary AP diplomatic correspondent Barry Schweid.

“For more than 30 years, George Gedda and I worked harmoniously and effectively together at the State Department covering the world for the AP,” Schweid said when Gedda retired. “He simply knew more than anyone else about the issues. And a lot of what he knew was stored in his mind, a bank of knowledge I found myself calling on regularly, especially in pressure situations.”

“No member of the State Department press corps was more respected,” said Schweid, who passed away in 2015. “No AP colleague was more selfless in sharing information and the workload. He was simply the best.”

Others had similar memories.

“As a colleague, George was a true gentleman and a superb correspondent,” said longtime NBC News correspondent and anchor Andrea Mitchell. “As a young correspondent he was a patient mentor to me and very welcoming when I was a newcomer to the beat.”

“George was the consummate AP professional,” said Jamie Rubin, who served as State Department spokesman during the Clinton administration, when Madeleine Albright was the country’s top diplomat. “I vividly remember whether I said something brilliant or not so brilliant he always got it exactly right. He always reported the facts without fear or favor. He was also a great travel buddy.”

Shaun Tandon, the current president of the State Department Correspondents Association, said Sunday: “For many of us who grew up aspiring to cover the State Department, George set the model — always diplomatic, but also unflappable and with an unmatched depth of knowledge. Today’s State Department press corps owes a debt of gratitude to George for making us what we are today — professionals dedicated to thorough and rigorous coverage of US foreign policy. His legacy lives on.”

A native of Valley Spring, New York, and 1962 graduate of Southern Methodist University, Gedda started with the AP in New York in 1965 after a two-year stint with the Peace Corps in Venezuela. He then moved to the AP statehouse bureau in Richmond, Virginia, where he spent two years wanting to cover sports before being promoted and returning briefly to AP headquarters on the international desk.

In September 1968, as the nation was still convulsed with the aftermath of the assassinations of Martin Luther King Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy, Gedda was transferred to the AP’s Washington bureau, where he spent the rest of his career often focusing on Western Hemisphere affairs.

Gedda made 31 trips to Cuba, most of which were reporting visits for the AP beginning in 1974. He was instrumental in the agency’s creation of its first bureau in Havana since the 1960s in 1999, and used those experiences as the basis for his 2011 book “Cuba: The Audacious Revolution.”

Cuba, he recalled in the preface to his book, made the biggest impression of the 87 countries he visited while covering various secretaries of state.

“At some point during my travels as a diplomatic correspondent, I concluded that perhaps no country was more interesting than Cuba,” he wrote. “All countries have their peculiarities and charms and rough edges but, to me, Cuba was in a class by itself.”

In 2014, Gedda published a memoir of his time as a diplomatic correspondent in a book titled “The State Department — More Than Just Diplomacy: The Personalities, Turf Battles, Danger Zones for Diplomats, Exotic Datelines, Miscast Appointees, the Laughs — And, Sadly, the Occasional Homicide,” which mixed humor with sharp insights into the conduct of American foreign policy and its often strange cast of characters.

But, his first book, published in 2009, was devoted to his primary non-professional passion — baseball — a love that began as a six-year-old in Long Island rooting for the Brooklyn Dodgers. “Dominican Connection: Talent from the Tropics Changes Face of National Pastime” explored the unusual success that athletes from the Dominican Republic have had in Major League Baseball.

Gedda is survived by his daughters Sara Gedda of Sorrento, Florida, and Deborah Gedda Force from Port St. Lucie, Fla.

Heat wave triggers big storms, power outages in US Southeast, raises wildfire concerns in Southwest

By SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

Forecasters warned people celebrating Father's Day outdoors to take precautions as triple-digit temperatures prompted heat advisories across much of the southern U.S., triggered thunderstorms that knocked out power from Oklahoma to Mississippi and whipped up winds that raised wildfire threats in Arizona and New Mexico.

A suspected tornado struck near Scranton, Arkansas early Sunday, destroying chicken houses and toppling trees onto homes, the National Weather Service said. There were no immediate reports of serious injuries.

Meteorologists said that dangerous and potentially record-breaking temperatures would continue into midweek over southern Texas and much of the Gulf Coast. Storms producing damaging winds, hail and possibly tornadoes could strike the lower Mississippi Valley.

"If you have outdoor plans this #FathersDay, don't forget to practice heat safety! Take frequent breaks, stay hydrated, NEVER leave people/pets alone in a car!" the weather service office in Houston said on Twitter.

Louisiana Gov. John Bel Edwards declared a state of emergency for north and central parts of his state after strong winds and severe weather caused widespread power outages on Saturday. On Sunday evening, more than 515,000 people were without electricity in Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, Arkansas, and Mississippi, according to PowerOutage.us.

Catherine Haley was hosting her six grandchildren, ages 7 to 13, in Shreveport, Louisiana when the storm knocked out electricity to her block and many surrounding neighborhoods. Haley, who has trouble breathing, said they draped damp towels around their necks to try and stay cool, but when the heat became unbearable the family took refuge at a cooling center set up by the city.

"I am so grateful. We tried the first day to stay at home and they were just so uncomfortable. And then I have COPD, and the heat really took effect on me as well," Haley, 64, said Sunday.

She said five of the grandchildren had just arrived from Houston for the summer when the storm hit, causing widespread damage. "Nice little welcome for them," she joked.

In Florida, the weather service issued another heat advisory Sunday, this time mainly for the Florida Keys. Forecasters said heat index readings - the combination of high temperatures and oppressive humidity - could reach between 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42 Celsius) and 112 degrees (45 C) in places such as Key Largo, Marathon and Key West.

"These conditions will cause increased risk of heat illness for people outdoors or in non-air conditioned spaces," the weather service said in a bulletin.

In the Southwest, where fire crews are battling multiple wildfires in Arizona and New Mexico, forecasters said triple-digit temperatures and gusty winds would lead to critical fire weather over the next couple of days. Sunday promised to be the hottest day of the year in Arizona, with highs up to 110 degrees (43.5 C) in Phoenix.

Winds were forecast to gust from 30 mph to 40 mph (48-64 kph) on Sunday east of Flagstaff, Arizona along the Interstate 40 corridor and up to 50 mph (80 kph) on Monday, creating potentially critical fire weather across much of northeast New Mexico.

A large brush fire that broke out Friday afternoon south of Tucson, Arizona shut down a state highway on Saturday. Arizona 83 reopened on Sunday and no homes were in immediate danger, authorities said.

The prolonged closure took a toll on local businesses during what's usually a busy Father's Day weekend in an area with recreational lakes and reservoirs.

Dena Proez said the only business at her Corner Scoop ice cream shop along the highway in Sonoita was serving a few travelers who stopped to get updates on the fire "and feeding all the firefighters."

Much of Nevada was under a high-wind advisory with gusts up to 55 mph (88 kph) with blowing dust that could hamper visibility on highways, the weather service said.

Associated Press writers Kim Chandler in Montgomery, Alabama; Curt Anderson in St. Petersburg, Florida; and Christopher Weber in Los Angeles contributed to this report.

Parking lot party shooting leaves 1 dead and at least 22 people hurt in suburban Chicago

WILLOWBROOK, Ill. (AP) — At least 23 people were shot, one fatally, early Sunday during a gathering in a suburban Chicago parking lot that drew hundreds of people to celebrate Juneteenth, authorities said. TV news video showed the strip mall lot in Willowbrook filled with debris and police tape, about 20 miles (32.1 kilometers) southwest of Chicago. The DuPage County Sheriff's Office described it as a "peaceful gathering" to celebrate Juneteenth that suddenly turned violent as a number of people fired multiple shots into the crowd.

"We know of 22 victims injured and one victim killed by gunfire. Several other victims were also injured while attempting to flee the area," the sheriff's office said in a statement. Authorities didn't immediately release the conditions of those injured.

A motive for the attack wasn't immediately known, and no one was arrested by early evening. Sheriff's spokesman Robert Carroll said authorities were interviewing "persons of interest" in the shooting, the Daily Herald reported.

The Willowbrook shooting was just one in a string of weekend shootings across the U.S. that killed at least six people, including a Pennsylvania state trooper, and injured dozens. The shootings in Illinois, Pennsylvania, Washington state, Missouri and Maryland follow a surge in U.S. homicides over the past several years.

Police were at the strip mall before the shooting to monitor the gathering, but were called away because of a nearby fight, the sheriff's office said. "They heard gunshots and immediately returned to the scene," the sheriff's office said.

"We transported numerous victims from the scene. Others just walked into area hospitals," said Eric Swanson, deputy chief at the sheriff's office.

Rick Wagner, who lives nearby, said there were at least 300 people in the lot by 10:30 p.m. "We've had multiple conversations with police" about large groups meeting there, Wagner told the Daily Herald.

A witness, Markeshia Avery, said it was a Juneteenth celebration. Monday is the federal holiday commemorating the day in 1865 when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they had been freed — two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

"We just started hearing shooting, so we dropped down until they stopped," Avery told WLS-TV.

Another witness, Craig Lotcie, said: "Everybody ran, and it was chaos."

Illinois Gov. JB Pritzker said in a statement that he was monitoring the investigation.

"Gathering for a holiday gathering should be a joyful occasion, not a time where gunfire erupts and families are forced to run for safety," Pritzker said.

The White House released a statement Sunday afternoon, saying that the "President and First Lady are thinking of those killed and injured in the shooting in Illinois last night. We have reached out to offer assistance to state and local leaders in the wake of this tragedy at a community Juneteenth celebration."

At least 6 killed, dozens injured in weekend shootings across US

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

At least six people including a Pennsylvania state trooper were killed and dozens injured in a string of weekend violence and mass shootings across the U.S.

The shootings in suburban Chicago, Washington state, Pennsylvania, St. Louis, Southern California and Baltimore follow a surge in homicides and other violence over the past several years that experts say accelerated during the coronavirus pandemic.

"There's no question there's been a spike in violence," said Daniel Nagin, a professor of public policy

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 44 of 65

and statistics at Carnegie Mellon University. "Some of these cases seem to be just disputes, often among adolescents, and those disputes are played out with firearms, not with fists."

Researchers disagree over the cause of the increase. Theories include the possibility that violence is driven by the prevalence of guns in America, or by less aggressive police tactics or a decline in prosecutions for misdemeanor weapon offenses, Nagin said.

As of Sunday evening, none of the weekend events fit the definition of a mass killing, because fewer than four people died at each location. However, the number of injured in most of the cases does match the widely accepted definition for mass shootings.

Here's a look at the shootings this weekend:

WILLOWBROOK, ILLINOIS

At least 23 people were shot, one fatally, early Sunday in a suburban Chicago parking lot where hundreds of people had gathered to celebrate Juneteenth, authorities said.

The DuPage County sheriff's office described a "peaceful gathering" that suddenly turned violent as a number of people fired multiple shots into the crowd in Willowbrook, Illinois, about 20 miles southwest of Chicago.

A motive for the attack wasn't immediately known. Sheriff's spokesman Robert Carroll said authorities were interviewing "persons of interest" in the shooting, the Daily Herald reported.

A witness, Markeshia Avery, said the celebration was meant to mark Juneteenth, Monday's federal holiday commemorating the day in 1865 when enslaved people in Galveston, Texas, learned they had been freed — two years after the Emancipation Proclamation.

"We just started hearing shooting, so we dropped down until they stopped," Avery told WLS-TV.

WASHINGTON STATE

Two people were killed and two others were injured when a shooter began firing "randomly" into a crowd at a Washington state campground where people stayed to attend a nearby music festival on Saturday night, police said.

The suspect was shot in a confrontation with law enforcement officers and taken into custody, several hundred yards from the Beyond Wonderland electronic dance music festival.

A public alert advised people of an active shooter in the area and advised them to "run, hide or fight."

The festival carried on until early Sunday morning, Grant County Sheriff's Office spokesman Kyle Foreman said. Organizers then posted a tweet saying Sunday's concert was canceled.

CENTRAL PENNSYLVANIA

One state trooper was killed and a second critically wounded just hours apart in central Pennsylvania on Saturday after a gunman attacked a state police barracks.

The suspect drove his truck into the parking lot of the Lewistown barracks about 11 a.m. Saturday and opened fire with a large-caliber rifle on marked patrol cars before fleeing, authorities said Sunday.

Lt. James Wagner, 45, was shot and critically wounded after encountering the suspect several miles away in Mifflintown. Later, Trooper Jacques Rougeau Jr., 29, was ambushed and killed by a gunshot through the windshield of his patrol car as he drove down a road in nearby Walker Township, authorities said.

The suspect was shot and killed after a fierce gunbattle, said Lt. Col. George Bivens, who went up in a helicopter to coordinate the search for the 38-year-old suspect.

"What I witnessed ... was one of the most intense, unbelievable gunfights I have ever witnessed," Bivens said, lauding troopers for launching an aggressive search despite the fact that they were facing a weapon that "would defeat any of the body armor that they had available to them."

A motive was not immediately known.

ST. LOUIS

An early Sunday shooting in a downtown St. Louis office building killed a 17-year-old and wounded nine other teenagers, the city's police commissioner said.

St. Louis Metropolitan Police Commissioner Robert Tracy identified the victim who was killed as 17-year-old Makao Moore. A spokesman said a minor who had a handgun was in police custody as a person of

interest.

Teenagers were having a party in an office space when the shooting broke out around 1 a.m. Sunday. The victims ranged from 15 to 19 years old and had injuries including multiple gunshot wounds. A 17-year-old girl was trampled as she fled, seriously injuring her spine, Tracy said.

Shell casings from AR-style rifles and other firearms were scattered on the ground.

SOUTHERN CALIFORNIA

A shooting at a pool party at a Southern California home left eight people wounded, authorities said Saturday.

KABC-TV reported authorities were dispatched shortly after midnight in Carson, California, south of Los Angeles.

The victims range in age from 16 to 24, the Los Angeles County Sheriff's Department said in a statement. They were taken to hospitals, and two were listed in critical condition, the statement said.

Authorities said they found another 16-year-old boy with a gunshot wound when they responded to a call about a vehicle that crashed into a wall nearby.

BALTIMORE

Six people were injured in a Friday night shooting in Baltimore. All were expected to survive.

Officers heard gunshots in the north of the city just before 9 p.m. and found three men with numerous gunshot wounds. Medics took them to area hospitals for treatment.

Police later learned of three additional victims who walked into area hospitals with non-life-threatening gunshot wounds.

The wounded ranged in age from 17 to 26, Baltimore Police Department spokesperson Lindsey Eldridge said.

Russia had means, motive and opportunity to destroy Ukraine dam, drone photos and information show

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

BERISLAV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia had the means, motive and opportunity to bring down a Ukrainian dam that collapsed earlier this month while under Russian control, according to exclusive drone photos and information obtained by The Associated Press.

Images taken from above the Kakhovka Dam and shared with the AP appear to show an explosive-laden car atop the structure, and two officials said Russian troops were stationed in a crucial area inside the dam where the Ukrainians say the explosion that destroyed it was centered. The Russian Defense Ministry did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The dam's destruction led to deadly flooding, endangered crops in the world's breadbasket, threatened drinking water supplies for thousands and unleashed an environmental catastrophe. Ukrainian commanders say it also scuppered some of their plans to take Russian positions in a counteroffensive that is now in its early stages.

Each side has accused the other of destroying the dam, but the various Russian allegations — that it was hit by a missile or taken down by explosives — fail to account for a blast so strong that it registered on seismic monitors in the region.

Russia has benefited from the timing of the massive flooding that followed the explosion — though areas it occupies also experienced a deluge and the consequences may have been more extensive than expected.

In the region around the dam, the Dnieper River forms the front line between Russian and Ukrainian forces, with Russian ones in control of the dam itself.

Two Ukrainian commanders who had been in the area but at different locations told the AP that the rising waters quickly swamped their positions and Russian ones and destroyed equipment, forcing them to start all over again with their planning and leaving them facing a much larger distance to cover, all in mud. One spoke on condition of anonymity in order to reveal more frankly the extent of the problems caused by the rising waters.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 46 of 65

"It's a regular practice, to mine (places) before a retreat," said the other, Illia Zelinskyi, commander of Bugskiy Gard. "In this context, their actions were to disrupt some of our supply chains as well as complicate a crossing of the Dnieper for us."

In recent weeks, Ukraine's armed forces have reported limited gains in the beginnings of a counteroffensive to take back territory seized by the Russians since their invasion in February 2022.

Russian President Vladimir Putin himself indirectly acknowledged the advantage to his forces last week, although he maintained Russia's denials of responsibility: "This may sound weird, but nonetheless. Unfortunately, this disrupted their counteroffensive in that area."

Speaking before a meeting of military correspondents, he explained his use of the word "unfortunately" with bravado: "It would have been better if they had attacked there," he said. "Better for us, because it would have ended very badly for them, attacking there."

Kakhovka is one of a series of Soviet-era dams along the Dnieper River that were built to withstand enormous force, amounting to thousands of pounds of explosives. They were constructed in the wake of the infamous World War II "Dambusters" raids that destroyed German dams. Taking out the Möhne dam in 1943, for instance, required five 4.5-ton, specially made "bouncing bombs," according to the Imperial War Museum archives.

Ukraine is not believed to possess any single missile with that kind of power.

Sidharth Kaushal, a researcher with the London-based Royal United Services Institute, said the Ukrainians are not believed to have any missiles with a payload greater than about 1,100 pounds (500 kilograms).

Nor does it seem credible that Ukrainian commandos could have sneaked in thousands of pounds of explosives to blow the dam, which was completely controlled inside and out by Russian soldiers for months.

As recently as the day before the structure's June 6 collapse, Russians had set up a firing position inside the dam's crucial machine room, where Ukrhydroenergo, the agency that runs the dam system, said the explosion originated. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said as early as October 2022 that the dam was mined.

Zelinskyi, who is not related to the Ukrainian president, confirmed that the explosion seemed to come from the area where the machine room is located. He and an American official familiar with the intelligence both confirmed that Russian forces had been ensconced there for some time. The American spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive material.

The Institute for the Study of War, an American think tank that has monitored Russian actions in Ukraine since the war began, has assessed that "the balance of evidence, reasoning, and rhetoric suggests that the Russians deliberately damaged the dam."

In the days leading up to the single explosion, Ukrainian military drone videos showed dozens of Russian soldiers encamped on a bank of the Dnieper, relaxed as they walked back and forth to the dam with no cover — suggesting their confidence in their control of the area and especially the dam, which was strategically crucial.

The photos, taken from Ukrainian drone footage, obtained by the AP and dated May 28, showed a car parked on the dam, its roof neatly cut open to reveal enormous barrels, one with what appears to be a land mine attached to the lid and a cable running toward the Russian-held side of the river. It's not clear how long the car remained.

A Ukrainian special forces communications official, who also noted the car appeared to be rigged, said he believed the purpose of that was twofold: to stop any Ukrainian advance on the dam and to amplify the planned explosion originating in the machine room and destroy the top of the dam. The car bomb itself would not have been enough to bring down the dam. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to preserve operational secrecy.

The explosion detected at 2:54 a.m. local time registered on Norwegian seismic monitors at nearly magnitude 2. By comparison, a catastrophic explosion at Beirut's port that killed scores of people and caused widespread destruction registered at a 3.3 on the seismic scale and involved at least 500 tons of explosives.

"That means it's a significant explosion," said Anne Strømmen Lycke, CEO of the Norwegian earthquake

monitoring agency NORSAR.

Within a few minutes, water from the Kakhovka reservoir began cascading through the shattered dam, submerging the river's sand bar islands and flooding much of southern Ukraine, including Russian-controlled territory.

Immediately after the dam's collapse, some experts noted that the structure was in disrepair, which could have led to the breach. But the area most obviously in disrepair, a section of roadbed near the edge where Russian forces had detonated explosives to block a Ukrainian offensive last fall, was still intact days after most of the rest of the dam collapsed.

Ukraine's intelligence service released an intercepted conversation it said was between a Russian soldier and someone else in which the soldier said "our sabotage groups were there. They wanted to create a scare with the dam. It didn't quite go according to plan."

Hinnant reported from Paris. Aamer Madhani in Washington and Illia Novikov in Kyiv, Ukraine, contributed.

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

5 dead in house fire in rural North Carolina, investigation continues

BROADWAY, N.C. (AP) — Five people were killed in a house fire in a rural North Carolina town on Sunday, authorities said.

The Harnett County Sheriff's Office told news outlets that the cause of the fire in the Broadway community was under investigation, and it could provide few details.

Three adults and two juveniles died in the fire, investigators with the sheriff's office said.

Deputies blocked off the road leading to the house as fire officials investigated the cause.

Broadway is about 45 miles (72 kilometers) southwest of Raleigh.

Stalled contract jeopardizes relations between new Disney governing body and firefighters

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

ORLANDO, Fla. (AP) — After appointees of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis took over Walt Disney World's governing district earlier this year, its firefighters were among the few employees who publicly welcomed them with open arms.

But that warm relationship is in jeopardy as a new district administrator has reopened negotiations on a contract that was approved last month by the unionized firefighters, promising pay raises and more manpower.

A vote on the contract originally was targeted for last month during a meeting of the Central Florida Tourism Oversight District board of supervisors. But it was never brought up, and it did not appear on an agenda released ahead of the next meeting scheduled for Wednesday.

Under the three-year contract proposal overwhelmingly approved by 200 firefighters and first responders, annual starting pay for firefighters would increase to \$65,000, up from \$55,000. It also promised hiring up to three dozen firefighters and paramedics.

At several meetings since the DeSantis-appointed supervisors took their seats this spring, Jon Shirey, who leads the firefighters' union, praised them for visiting firefighters at their stations around the 39 square-mile (101 square-kilometer) Disney World property.

The firefighters looked forward to collaborating with the new supervisors and administrator after years of clashing with their Disney-supporting predecessors, and viewed the appointments as "an opportunity for a fresh start," he said.

"Almost overnight, a change occurred that we have never experienced — transparency, open dialogue,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 48 of 65

the ability to sit down and have our issues heard and felt listened to," Shirey told board members last month. "You have been able to build bridges that were long burned."

The feeling was mutual, with board chairman Martin Garcia saying last month that the supervisors were working with the firefighters to resolve their issues. Even so, Garcia made clear that the firefighters weren't the only district employees the board wanted to support.

"We also need to let the (other) employees know, we love you, too. We care about you. We love you as much as we love our firefighters," Garcia said.

But the delay in approving the contract has alienated the firefighters' union, which last year endorsed the gubernatorial reelection campaign of DeSantis, who recently launched a campaign for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination.

The old contract expired four years ago, and the firefighters declared an impasse last year when the district's board was still controlled by Disney supporters. The Reedy Creek Professional Firefighters, Local 2117 have warned for years that they are understaffed, which poses a safety risk as the central Florida theme park resort grows bigger.

Last month, District Administrator John Classe, who originally negotiated the new contract, was replaced by the board with Glenton Gilzean, a DeSantis ally who previously served as president and CEO of the Central Florida Urban League and will receive a \$400,000 salary in his new job. The district also is paying Classe to stay on as a special advisor.

Board spokesperson Alexei Woltornist said negotiations with the union were continuing, without explaining why they were reopened with a contract already approved by the firefighters and first responders.

"Administrator Gilzean is actively working with the fire department to finalize a deal that offers a competitive compensation package and gives firefighters the resources they need to protect the public," Woltornist said in an email to The Associated Press.

Officials with the firefighters' union did not comment.

While Gilzean may alienate the firefighters, whose support gave the DeSantis takeover some legitimacy, he may gain credibility with other constituencies within Disney's governing district and put some distance between himself and his predecessor, said Richard Foglesong, a Rollins College professor emeritus who wrote a definitive account of Disney World's governance in his book, "Married to the Mouse: Walt Disney World and Orlando."

"He's an unproven administrator, yet here he's showing he's no pushover when dealing with a cantankerous group, which frankly impresses me," Foglesong said.

The DeSantis appointees took over the Disney World governing board earlier this year following a year-long feud between the company and DeSantis. The fight began last year after Disney, beset by significant pressure internally and externally, publicly opposed a state law banning classroom lessons on sexual orientation and gender identity in early grades, a policy critics call "Don't Say Gay."

As punishment, DeSantis took over the district through legislation passed by Florida lawmakers and appointed a new board of supervisors to oversee municipal services for the sprawling theme parks and hotels. But before the new board came in, the company made agreements with previous oversight board members that stripped the new supervisors of their authority over design and construction.

Disney sued DeSantis and the five-member board, asking a federal judge to void the governor's takeover of the theme park district, as well as the oversight board's actions, on the grounds they were violations of company's free speech rights.

The board sued Disney in state court in an effort to maintain its control of construction and design at Disney World.

The district was created in 1967 when then-Florida Gov. Claude Kirk signed legislation authorizing it to regulate land use, enforce building codes, treat wastewater, control drainage, maintain utilities and provide fire protection at Disney World.

Such private governments aren't uncommon in fast-growing Florida, which has more than 600 community development districts that manage and pay for infrastructure in new communities.

Follow Mike Schneider on Twitter at @MikeSchneiderAP

Man stabs pit bull to death in Central Park after argument between dog walkers

Associated Press undefined

NEW YORK (AP) — A man stabbed a pit bull to death following a quarrel with the dog's owner in New York City's Central Park, officials said.

The seriously injured dog was transported to a local animal clinic, where he was euthanized after the stabbing Saturday evening, police said.

According to the New York Daily News, an argument broke out between the man and the woman when the assailant's unleashed dog began biting at the woman's pit bull. As she tried to separate the dogs, the man pulled out a switchblade and stabbed the pit bull mix.

No arrests were made as of Sunday. An investigation was ongoing.

US, China remain at odds on numerous issues as Blinken finishes first day of meetings in Beijing

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BEIJING (AP) — The United States and China have failed to overcome their most serious disagreements but were able to discuss them in a potentially constructive way and have agreed to continue talks, U.S. and Chinese officials said Sunday.

U.S. officials said Secretary of State Antony Blinken was able during a nearly 6-hour meeting to secure a visit to Washington by Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang. But both sides said advancement on the issues that divide them remains a work in progress while the Chinese foreign ministry said "the China-U.S. relationship is at the lowest point since its establishment."

China confirmed that Qin had accepted the invitation at a "mutually convenient time" but no date was set.

The State Department said that Blinken had stressed "the importance of diplomacy and maintaining open channels of communication across the full range of issues to reduce the risk of misperception and miscalculation."

The Chinese, meanwhile, restated their position that the current state of relations "does not serve the fundamental interests of the two peoples or meet the shared expectations of the international community," according to the foreign ministry.

Blinken, the highest-level American official to visit China since President Joe Biden took office, will have more senior level contacts with the Chinese on Monday, including potentially with Chinese leader Xi Jinping.

Despite Blinken's presence in the Chinese capital, the prospects for any significant breakthrough on the most vexing issues facing the planet's two largest economies was slim.

And neither side showed any inclination to back down on their entrenched positions.

Blinken's trip followed his postponement of plans to visit China in February after the shutdown of a Chinese surveillance balloon over the U.S.

The talks could pave the way for a meeting in the coming months between Biden and Xi. Biden said Saturday that he hoped to be able to meet with Xi in the coming months to take up the plethora of differences that divide them.

That long list includes disagreements ranging from trade to Taiwan, human rights conditions in China and Hong Kong to Chinese military assertiveness in the South China Sea and Russia's war in Ukraine.

In his meetings on Sunday, Blinken also pressed the Chinese to release detained American citizens and to take steps to curb the production and export of fentanyl precursors that are fueling the opioid crisis in the United States.

Blinken "made clear that the United States will always stand up for the interests and values of the Ameri-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 50 of 65

can people and work with its allies and partners to advance our vision for a world that is free, open, and upholds the international rules-based order," the State Department said.

The Chinese foreign ministry countered in its statement that "China hopes that the U.S. will adopt an objective and rational perception of China, work with China in the same direction, uphold the political foundation of China-U.S. relations, and handle unexpected and sporadic events in a calm, professional and rational manner."

Shortly before leaving Washington, Blinken emphasized the importance of the U.S. and China establishing and maintaining better lines of communication.

Biden and Xi had made commitments to improve communications "precisely so that we can make sure we are communicating as clearly as possible to avoid possible misunderstandings and miscommunications," Blinken said Friday.

Xi offered a hint of a possible willingness to reduce tensions, saying in a meeting with Microsoft Corp. co-founder Bill Gates on Friday that the United States and China can cooperate to "benefit our two countries."

Since the cancellation of Blinken's trip in February, there have been some high-level engagements. CIA chief William Burns traveled to China in May, while China's commerce minister traveled to the U.S. And Biden's national security adviser Jake Sullivan met with senior Chinese foreign policy adviser Wang Yi in Vienna in May.

But those have been punctuated by bursts of angry rhetoric from both sides over the Taiwan Strait, their broader intentions in the Indo-Pacific, China's refusal to condemn Russia for its war against Ukraine, and U.S. allegations from Washington that Beijing is attempting to boost its worldwide surveillance capabilities, including in Cuba.

And, earlier this month, China's defense minister rebuffed a request from U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for a meeting on the sidelines of a security symposium in Singapore, a sign of continuing discontent.

Underscoring the difficulties, China rejected a report by a U.S. security firm, that blamed Chinese-linked hackers for attacks on hundreds of public agencies, schools and other targets around the world, as "far-fetched and unprofessional"

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson repeated accusations that Washington carries out hacking attacks and complained the cybersecurity industry rarely reports on them.

Meanwhile, the national security advisers of the United States, Japan and the Philippines held their first joint talks Friday and agreed to strengthen their defense cooperation, in part to counter China's growing influence and ambitions.

This coincides with the Biden administration inking an agreement with Australia and Britain to provide the first with nuclear-powered submarines, with China moving rapidly to expand its diplomatic presence, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific island nations, where it has opened or has plans to open at least five new embassies over the next year.

The agreement is part of an 18-month-old nuclear partnership given the acronym AUKUS — for Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

Associated Press writer Seung Min Kim in Washington and Huizhong Wu in Taipei, Taiwan contributed to this report.

Pope Francis, back to Vatican routine post-surgery, says thanks to shouts of 'Long live the pope!'

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Two days after being discharged from the hospital, Pope Francis resumed his cherished Sunday custom of greeting the public in St. Peter's Square, expressing thanks for the comfort he received after surgery and thanking the crowd shouting "Long live the pope!"

Before launching into prepared remarks, Francis expressed gratitude for "affection, attention and friendship" and the assurance of "the support of prayer" during his hospitalization for June 7 abdominal surgery

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 51 of 65

at a Rome hospital to repair a hernia and remove increasingly painful scarring around his intestines.

"This human and spiritual closeness for me was a great help and comfort," Francis told some 15,000 people in the square. "Thanks to all, thanks to you, thanks from the heart."

The 86-year-old pontiff sounded a bit breathless and hoarse at times, but he gestured frequently with his hands for emphasis, adlibbed at times from the prepared speech, and clearly looked delighted to be back to his routine.

While the thousands of Romans, tourists and pilgrims who regularly turn out for the weekly noon appearance of the pope at a window of the Apostolic Palace usually applaud when they catch sight of the pope at the window, this time the public's applause seemed louder than usual. The three-hour surgery under general anesthesia had forced Francis to skip the Sunday appearance on June 11.

While his mood seemed uplifted to see the crowd below, including flag-waving nuns and tourists in sun hats on the hot, humid day, Francis turned somber as he noted that Tuesday marks World Refugee Day, an occasion promoted by the United Nations.

"With great sadness and so much sorrow I think of the victims of the very grave shipwreck that happened in recent days off the coast of Greece," Francis said. He was referring to the smugglers' overcrowded fishing boat, filled with hundreds of migrants, that sank in the Mediterranean Sea last week.

"It seems that the sea was calm," Francis said, seemingly expressing perplexity that such a grave tragedy could happen in those conditions.

"I renew my prayer for all those who lost their life, and I implore that, always, everything possible is done to prevent similar tragedies," the pontiff said.

Some of the 104 survivors said as many as 750 were aboard, leaving the possibilities that hundreds perished. Greek rescuers recovered 78 bodies. Questions persist whether the Greek coast guard could have intervened in time to prevent the capsizing.

He also prayed for the young students "victims of the brutal attack" on a school in western Uganda. The attack by suspected rebels on a school in Uganda killed 42 people, including 38 students in their dormitories. Several were abducted near the border with Congo.

Francis lamented "this struggle, this war all over the place. Let us pray for peace."

He also urged people to remember the "martyred people in Ukraine," following Russia's invasion last year. As he wrapped up his remarks and was about to leave the window, cries of "Long live the pope" in Italian rose from the crowd, and the pope quickly responded, "Thanks."

The pope's doctors have urged him to take it easy as much as possible even as he resumes his Vatican workload. Francis will receive Brazil's president on Wednesday afternoon, the Vatican has announced. But to ensure his convalescence can proceed well, Francis won't conduct the Wednesday general audience in St. Peter's Square.

In early August, Francis will make a pilgrimage to Portugal for a youth jamboree. At the end of that month, he flies to Mongolia for a visit that will see him be the first pontiff to go to that Asian country.

Cruising to Nome: The first U.S. deep water port for the Arctic to host cruise ships, military

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — The cruise ship with about 1,000 passengers anchored off Nome, too big to squeeze into the tundra city's tiny port. Its well-heeled tourists had to shimmy into small boats for another ride to shore.

It was 2016, and at the time, the cruise ship Serenity was the largest vessel ever to sail through the Northwest Passage.

But as the Arctic sea ice relents under the pressures of global warming and opens shipping lanes across the top of the world, more tourists are venturing to Nome — a northwest Alaska destination known better for the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race and its 1898 gold rush than luxury travel.

The problem remains: There's no place to park the big boats. While smaller cruise ships are able to dock,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 52 of 65

officials say that of the dozen arriving this year, half will anchor offshore.

That's expected to change as a \$600 million-plus expansion makes Nome, population 3,500, the nation's first deep-water Arctic port. The expansion, expected to be operational by the end of the decade, will accommodate not just larger cruise ships of up to 4,000 passengers, but cargo ships to deliver additional goods for the 60 Alaska Native villages in the region, and military vessels to counter the presence of Russian and Chinese ships in the Arctic.

It's a prospect that excites business owners and officials in Nome, but concerns others who worry about the impact of additional tourists and vessel traffic on the environment and animals Alaska Natives depend on for subsistence.

The expansion will "support our local economy and the local artists here, the Indigenous artists having access to the visitors and teaching and sharing our culture and our language and how we how we make our beautiful art," said Alice Bioff, an Inupiaq resident of Nome.

Bioff was a tour guide who greeted the Serenity's passengers when they arrived in 2016. One of the guests admired her cloth kuspuk, a traditional Alaska Native garment similar to a smock, and wanted to know if it was water resistant.

It wasn't, but the interaction inspired Bioff to create her own line of waterproof jackets styled like kuspuks. She now sells to tourists and locals alike from her own Naataq Gear gift store, a retail spot in the post office building, where about 20 Alaska Native artists offer ivory carvings, beadwork or paintings through consignment.

Studies show that cruise ship passengers typically spend about \$100 per day in Nome, city manager Glenn Steckman said.

With the expansion, he's hoping guests on larger cruise ships will extend their stays to experience more of Nome and the tundra, to view wild musk ox, or to sip a drink at the 123-year-old Board of Trade Saloon.

Climate change is making this all possible.

Nome, founded after gold was discovered in 1898, has seen six of its 10 warmest winters on record just in this century. The Bering Strait shipping lanes have gotten only busier since 2009, going from 262 transits that year to 509 in 2022.

"We're going to be the first deep-draft Arctic port but probably not going to be the last," Nome Mayor John Handeland said.

The Bering Sea ice on average reaches Nome in late November or December, about two or three weeks later than it did 50 years ago, said Rick Thoman, a climate specialist at the International Arctic Research Center at the University of Alaska Fairbanks.

In 2019, mushers in the Iditarod, who normally drive their dog teams on the Bering Sea ice to the finish line in Nome, were forced onto the beach because of open water. The ice season will only get shorter, Thoman said.

The existing port causeway was completed in the mid-1980s. The expansion will be completed in three phases and effectively double its size. The first part of the project is funded by \$250 million in federal infrastructure money with another \$175 million from the Alaska Legislature. Field work is expected to begin next year.

Currently three ships can dock at once; the expanded dock will accommodate seven to 10.

Workers will dredge a new basin 40 feet (12.2 meters) deep, allowing large cruises ships, cargo vessels, and every U.S. military ship except aircraft carriers to dock, Port Director Joy Baker said.

U.S. Sen. Dan Sullivan, an Alaska Republican, said the expanded port will become the centerpiece of U.S. strategic infrastructure in the Arctic. The military is building up resources in Alaska, placing fighter jets at bases in Anchorage and Fairbanks, establishing a new Army airborne division in Alaska, training soldiers for future cold-weather conflicts and has missile defense capabilities.

"The way you have a presence in the Arctic is to be able to have military assets and the infrastructure that supports those assets," Sullivan said.

The northern seas near Alaska are getting more crowded. A U.S. Coast Guard patrol board encountered seven Chinese and Russian naval vessels cooperating in an exercise last year about 86 miles (138 kilome-

ters) north of Alaska's Kiska Island.

Coast guard vessels in 2021 also encountered Chinese ships 50 miles (80 km) off Alaska's Aleutian Islands.

NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg last year warned that Russia and China have pledged to cooperate in the Arctic, "a deepening strategic partnership that challenges our values and interests."

Still, the prospect of Nome welcoming more tourists and a greater military presence bothers some residents. Austin Ahmasuk, an Inupiaq native, said the port's original construction displaced an area traditionally used for subsistence hunting or fishing, and the expansion won't help.

"The Port of Nome is development purely for the sake of development," Ahmasuk said.

This story corrects that Sullivan is a senator, not a representative.

Why Marty Walsh left the Biden administration to run the NHL players' union

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Hockey Writer

Marty Walsh wasn't a man in a hurry to leave the Biden administration.

Less than halfway through the president's term, Walsh was in a comfortable spot in the Cabinet as labor secretary. Then he got a call about an interesting opportunity: running the NHL Players' Association.

The former mayor of Boston and longtime Bruins fan was intrigued and earlier this year accepted the role as executive director. Now three months in, Walsh is trying to get to know players and what they care about most, learning about everything from the Arizona Coyotes' arena situation to the salary cap and future international competition.

"This job is more like being the mayor," Walsh said in a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press during the Stanley Cup Final in Las Vegas. "You wake up in the morning, you're planning on a smooth day and there's an issue that pops, and that's the issue of the moment. And then when that issue's over, there's another issue that comes right behind it. And if there's a celebration on anything, that celebration's short-lived because you're on to the next issue."

With the current collective bargaining agreement in place through the 2025-26 season, the most pressing issue concerns the Coyotes, set to go into a second season in a 5,000-seat rink on Arizona State's campus after a referendum for a new arena in Tempe failed.

Walsh has met more with Arizona's players than anyone else among the nearly 200 members he has spoken to so far.

"These are National Hockey League players playing in a college arena," Walsh said. "Players that are heading into the prime of their career now playing in this arena for a couple seasons — it's just not right. It's not good for the game."

When Walsh speaks to players, he finds out what they think is good or not so good for the game. Many, like Connor McDavid, prioritize returning to the Olympics after a lengthy absence and getting a World Cup of Hockey on the schedule, while others are more concerned with the cap going up and keeping escrow payments down.

Several months after helping the U.S. avert a nationwide rail strike, this job hearkens back to the days when Walsh was president of the Laborers' Union Local 223 in Massachusetts. With players aged 18-38 in various stages of their careers, he said the NHLPA membership is diverse in what it cares about, just like any other workplace.

"One thing I've learned quickly is that this truly is a union because every player has a different concern," Walsh said. "And I think it's important for me to get to know the membership so I can represent them the best I can, understanding the challenges they have."

Walsh, 56, also has gotten to know Commissioner Gary Bettman since taking over in March. They attended an event together at the Canadian Embassy in Washington in April and have met several times to discuss the cap, the Coyotes and more.

"To me, the vital signs seem good," Bettman told the AP recently. "We're getting better acquainted. I like him. I respect him. I think he's smart. I think he's going to be good for the players, and I look forward

to working with him.”

Walsh called it a “very cordial working relationship,” while acknowledging there will be disagreements ahead “that put us on two different sides of a fence — and we will have to deal with that when the time comes.” Collective bargaining talks in the coming years almost certainly will bring that conflict.

Kevin Shattenkirk, a veteran defenseman who was on the search committee, said Walsh was engaging and commanding right away and gave out his cellphone number to players to call any time after his first interview.

“Part of his pitch was that he was going to be readily available to players at any moment — any time that we needed him,” Shattenkirk said Sunday. “With his experience in working in labor unions, I think he knows how important that is. It’s important for the head of it to be accessible and also at the same time to be strong and powerful and know which way he’s leading his organization.”

For now, Walsh is trying to lead the way in preparing players for life after hockey and growing the game beyond the nearly \$6 billion in revenue. He watches football, basketball and baseball differently since shifting from politics to sports, thinking about what other leagues have done and how it might apply to the NHL.

Walsh is a fan of increasing interest in Sweden and other places in Europe with games there and wonders about opportunities for hockey in Latin American countries and among underserved populations in North America.

“We have teams like the Dallas Stars and the Coyotes and even the (Florida) Panthers to some degree: large Latino populations,” Walsh said. “You think of Boston — are we tapping into Latino population in Boston, New York, Chicago, places like that?”

Just getting a chance to tackle tasks like that excites Walsh, who said he still has a very strong, close friendship with Joe Biden. The president, when Walsh left in February, called him “one tough union chief” and a model for future labor secretaries.

This is just a different challenge, one that Walsh feels his entire career has prepared him for.

“There’s not many opportunities that probably could have come on my plate that I would’ve been like, ‘Oh, this is perfect,’” he said. “This is kind of my whole life coming full circle: labor movement, running a union, opportunities to grow the game, to be progressive in thinking as to how do we grow the game, how do we strengthen the union.”

AP NHL: <https://apnews.com/hub/nhl> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Attorney General Garland keeps poker face as firestorm erupts after Trump charges

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — On his first day as attorney general, Merrick Garland pledged a return to what he called the “norms” of the Justice Department and said he would work to eliminate the perception of political interference. But in the two years since he took office, the former federal judge has found himself in the middle of a political firestorm of historic proportions.

The case against Donald Trump — the first former president to face federal criminal charges — brought a crush of protesters to the Miami courthouse last week, as well as a torrent of social media broadsides from Trump and an onslaught of criticism from Republicans.

The decision to charge Trump, who is running for president again, is perhaps the most consequential in the history of the Justice Department. The ultimate call on that came from Garland, whose demeanor leans to the mild.

Even the day when prosecutors informed Trump about the charges was outwardly quiet in the halls of the stately Justice Department headquarters. That stillness carried into the night amid the furor unleashed when the former president broke the news on his social media platform.

It was hardly the first time that Garland had kept a poker face while under a high-profile glare. He had

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 55 of 65

stayed mum when his nomination for the Supreme Court by President Barack Obama in 2016 languished long enough to break a century-old record before it expired.

Garland spent two decades as a judge, and that experience seemed to come through in his folded hands and stoic expression when he made his public comments on Wednesday about the charges against Trump. The attorney general stressed that he had followed the rules and regulations for special counsels and he punctuated each word as he defended investigator Jack Smith as a "veteran career prosecutor."

"We live in a democracy. These kind of matters are adjudicated through the judicial system," Garland said as he took about three minutes worth of questions from two of the gathered reporters at the start of a meeting with U.S. attorneys on violent crime.

That repeated mantra of commitment to the rule of law has not soothed Republicans who are standing by the indicted former president and reframing the charges as an unfair political persecution.

Those close to Garland say he has long had a careful, thoughtful presence and does what is needed, with few outward displays of emotion. Still, this moment is likely not an easy one, said friend Robert Post, a professor at Yale Law School who first got to know Garland when they served as clerks together in the late 1970s.

"I'm sure he is saddened by the spectacle of a former president being indicted for the kinds of crimes that we see Trump indicted for," Post said. "He's the least partisan person that I know. He cares about the law first and foremost."

Smith's appointment as special counsel after Trump announced his 2024 presidential campaign was another effort to uphold Justice Department norms and the principle that the agency follows the facts and the law, not politics, said Anthony Coley, who previously served as Garland's chief spokesman at the department.

"For the attorney general, the rule of law is not just some lawyer's turn of phrase. For him, the rule of law is foundational element of our democracy," he said.

It was Smith, a former war crimes prosecutor, who stood up alone behind a podium the day after the Trump charges became public to declare: "We have one set of laws in this country and they apply to everyone."

That appearance also carried visual cues to the separation between Garland and Smith.

Smith did not speak from the neoclassical headquarters where Garland works, but held his news conference in the sleek building across town where he has been working. The special counsel attended the arraignment where Trump pleaded not guilty to illegally hoarding classified documents. Smith sat in the front row behind his team of prosecutors.

He is empowered to decide whether any charges should be brought, though Garland retains ultimate oversight of his work.

Trump announced on June 8 that he had been indicted, and according to the White House, Biden learned of the 37 felony counts against the former president through news coverage. Biden was asked the next day whether he had talked to Garland about the case. "I have not spoken to him at all," Biden told reporters. "I'm not going to speak to him."

Garland was confirmed by the Senate in March 2021 on a bipartisan vote, with both Democrats and Republicans saying he had the right record and temperament for the moment. He was a federal appeals court judge for more than two decades after a stint in the Justice Department where he earned a reputation for meticulous preparation in the prosecution of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing that killed 168 people.

Garland's handling of the release of another special counsel investigation was similarly low key. The review of the origins of the FBI's investigation of Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, carried out by special counsel John Durham, originally started under Trump. When it was completed under Garland, the report was released with few redactions.

Trump's last attorney general, Bill Barr, took a far different approach with the release of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into Russian election interference and Trump's campaign. Barr released his own memo on the report and later held a news conference largely favorable to Trump before making the

report public. The episode came during tumultuous years as Trump insisted that his attorney general and entire Justice Department be loyal to him personally, undermining its reputation for political independence.

Garland still will have to contend with more special counsel findings to come. Smith is investigating Trump's role involving the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021, and efforts to undo the 2020 election he lost to Biden.

Garland named a special counsel to investigate the presence of classified documents found at Biden's Delaware home and former Washington office that are from his time as vice president.

In announcing that move, Garland used phrasing identical to the Smith appointment, words that he used again in his brief comments after the indictment: "independence and accountability."

As Switzerland's glaciers melt, Alpine nation backs climate bill with net zero target for 2050

BERLIN (AP) — A majority of Swiss citizens on Sunday voted in favor of a bill aimed at introducing new climate measures to sharply curb the rich Alpine nation's greenhouse gas emissions.

Final results released by public broadcaster SRF showed that 59.1% of voters were in favor of the bill, while 40.9% voted against.

The referendum was sparked by a campaign by scientists and environmentalists to save Switzerland's iconic glaciers, which are melting away at an alarming rate.

Campaigners initially proposed even more ambitious measures but later backed a government plan that requires Switzerland to achieve "net zero" emissions by 2050. It also sets aside more than 3 billion Swiss francs (\$3.357 billion) to help wean companies and homeowners off fossil fuels.

The nationalist Swiss People's Party, which demanded the popular vote, had claimed that the proposed measures would cause electricity prices to rise.

Backers of the plan argued that Switzerland will be hard-hit by global warming and is already seeing the effects of rising temperatures on its famous glaciers.

"The supporters have reason to rejoice," Urs Bieri of the GFS Bern Institute told SRF. "But by no means everyone is in favor of the law. The argument with the costs has brought many 'no' votes."

Greenpeace Switzerland welcomed the result of the referendum.

"This victory means that at last the goal of achieving net zero emissions will be anchored in law. That gives better security for planning ahead and allows our country to take the path toward an exit from fossil fuels," said Georg Klingler, an expert on climate and energy at Greenpeace Switzerland.

"The result of the vote shows that the citizens of our country are committed to the aim of limiting global warming to 1.5 Celsius in order to preserve as much as possible our glaciers, our water reserves, our agriculture and our prosperity. I am very relieved to see that the lies disseminated by the opposite camp during the campaign did not sow the seed of doubt in people," he added.

Swiss glaciers experienced record melting last year, losing more than 6% of their volume and alarming scientists who say a loss of 2% would once have been considered extreme.

Experts such as Matthias Huss, a glaciologist at the Swiss Institute for Technology in Zurich, have taken to posting dramatic snapshots of retreating glaciers and rockslides from melting permafrost on social media to highlight the changes taking place in the Alps.

"Let's act as long as we can still prevent the worst," he recently wrote on Twitter. _____

Follow AP's coverage of climate issues at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-and-environment>

Miami's Francis Suarez bucking history as he tries to become first sitting mayor elected president

By SARA BURNETT Associated Press

In a 2024 Republican presidential field full of long-shot candidates, Miami Mayor Francis Suarez may be — on paper anyway — the longest long shot of all.

No sitting mayor has ever been elected U.S. president, a job that historically has been won by governors,

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 57 of 65

vice presidents, senators or Cabinet secretaries. Some former mayors have become commander in chief, but only after serving in higher-profile positions.

None of that has deterred Suarez, who announced his campaign this past week by talking up his experience leading the city of about 450,000 residents. Being a two-term mayor of Miami, he said, has helped him understand and confront issues facing most Americans, such as crime and homelessness. In the video for his kickoff, Suarez went for a run past his childhood home and his high school and spoke of his record of cutting taxes and expanding Miami's technology economy.

"In Miami, we stopped waiting for Washington to lead," Suarez said.

The 45-year-old corporate and real estate lawyer, a former president of the U.S. Conference of Mayors, is competing for the nomination against two other Florida residents — former President Donald Trump and Gov. Ron DeSantis. They have consistently been first and second, respectively, in early primary polling, well ahead of the rest of the field.

That has so far made it difficult for other candidates to break through. Among them are former Vice President Mike Pence, Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, radio host Larry Elder and businessman Vivek Ramaswamy.

Throughout U.S. history, just three presidents were former mayors, though each — Andrew Johnson, Grover Cleveland and Calvin Coolidge — held offices such as governor or vice president in between. And while this year's primary field is crowded and the odds for a sitting mayor long, there is recent precedent both for a mayor to become a major candidate and for a person without government experience at all to become president.

Trump, a businessman and former reality television star, is the only person elected president without ever having served in public office or in the military.

In the 2020 election cycle, Pete Buttigieg — the young mayor of South Bend, Indiana — was the biggest surprise success story of the Democratic primary. Known during the campaign as "Mayor Pete," he had a top finish in the leadoff Iowa caucuses and a close second-place finish in New Hampshire before flailing in more diverse states and dropping out to back Joe Biden.

When Biden won the presidency, he tapped Buttigieg to be his transportation secretary, and Buttigieg is now considered one of the party's most promising future presidential candidates.

Buttigieg leaned heavily into his experience as mayor in his campaign, including his own work to turn around a Rust Belt city that was once described as "dying" because of the shutdown of manufacturing. He liked to tell voters that Washington should run more like the best U.S. cities.

Voters appreciated that being a mayor is a hands-on job and that mayors are accountable to voters in a way that senators and governors are not, said Lis Smith, a senior adviser to Buttigieg's campaign who shaped his communications from the start. One of Buttigieg's favorite lines while campaigning was about how he frequently ran into his constituents at the grocery store. The fact that Buttigieg was not a product of Washington also "was very, very appealing to voters," Smith said.

"Republican and Democratic voters don't have a lot in common these days, but I think that one thing they do share is their distaste for Washington politics and Washington politicians," Smith said.

But Smith also warned that while mayors get to claim credit for all of the things that go right in their community, they also carry the responsibility for things that go wrong.

Buttigieg experienced that when a white South Bend police officer fatally shot a Black man, prompting the mayor to step away from campaigning so he could respond not just to the shooting but also to questions about racial inequality and tensions between Black residents and police in South Bend. That, Smith said, "by far was the toughest part" of his candidacy.

Suarez, the son of Miami's first Cuban-born mayor and the only Hispanic candidate in the race, believes he can help the party better appeal to Hispanic voters. He also promotes his relative youth compared with the rest of the field — most of whom range in age from their 50s to 70s — saying he represents "generational change" that America needs.

"It's time for a leader who can connect with segments of our country that Republicans have historically lost," Suarez said during a speech about his presidential campaign at the Ronald Reagan Library in California on Thursday night.

Then, briefly repeating his credentials as Miami's leader, he slipped for a moment into mayoral mode. "I believe this city needs more than a shouter or a fighter," Suarez said, apparently substituting "city" for "country."

"I believe it needs a servant. It needs a mayor."

Nearly 100 die as India struggles with a sweltering heat wave in 2 most populous states

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — At least 96 people died in two of India's most populous states over the last several days, officials said Sunday, with swaths of the country reeling from a sweltering heat wave.

The deaths happened in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh and eastern Bihar where authorities warned residents over 60 and others suffering various maladies to stay indoors during the daytime.

All the fatalities in Uttar Pradesh, totaling 54, were reported in Ballia district, some 300 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Lucknow, the state capital. Authorities found out most of those who passed away were over 60 years old and had preexisting health conditions, which may have been exacerbated by the intense heat.

S. K. Yadav, a medical officer in Ballia, said in the past three days, some 300 patients were admitted to the district hospital for various ailments aggravated by heat.

Due to the gravity of the situation, authorities canceled leave applications of medical personnel in Ballia and provided additional hospital beds in the emergency ward to accommodate the influx of patients.

Officials said most of the admitted patients are aged 60 and above, exhibiting symptoms of high fever, vomiting, diarrhea, breathing difficulties and heart-related issues.

R.S. Pathak, a resident of Ballia who lost his father on Saturday, said that he witnessed an increased flow of patients at the hospital's emergency ward while attending to his father.

"This has never happened in Ballia. I have never seen people dying because of the heat in such large numbers," he said. "People fear venturing out. The roads and markets are largely deserted."

Ballia, along with central and eastern Uttar Pradesh, is currently grappling with oppressive heat.

On Sunday, the district experienced a maximum temperature of 43 degrees Celsius (109 degrees Fahrenheit), surpassing the normal range by five degrees. The relative humidity was recorded at 25%, intensifying the effect of the heat.

Atul Kumar Singh, a scientist from the India Meteorological Department, or IMD, said temperatures across the state were presently above normal. He added, "no relief is expected in the next 24 hours."

The IMD issued an alert saying heat wave conditions would last until June 19 in parts of Uttar Pradesh.

The state's health minister, Brijesh Pathak, said that they have opened an investigation into the cause of death of "so many people" in Ballia.

In eastern Bihar, scorching heat has engulfed most of the state, leading to 42 deaths in the past two days. Among the fatalities, 35 occurred at two hospitals in the state capital of Patna where over 200 patients suffering from diarrhea and vomiting were being treated.

Patna recorded a maximum temperature of 44.7 C Celsius (113 F) on Saturday.

The main summer months — April, May and June — are generally the hottest in most of India, before monsoon rains bring in cooler temperatures.

But temperatures have become more intense in the past decade. During heat waves, the country usually suffers severe water shortages, with tens of millions of its 1.4 billion people lacking running water.

A study by World Weather Attribution, an academic group that examines the source of extreme heat, found that a searing heat wave in April that struck parts of South Asia was made at least 30 times more likely by climate change.

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 59 of 65

In April, the heat caused the death of 13 people at a government event in India's financial capital of Mumbai and prompted some states to close all schools for a week.

Associated Press writer Indrajit Singh in Patna, India contributed to this report.

Fowler, McIlroy, Scheffler headline the final round in a US Open full of possibilities

By EDDIE PELLIS AP National Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — At the top of the U.S. Open leaderboard there are two players each going for their first major title. That's about all they have in common.

Rickie Fowler has contended in majors, won nine tournaments across the globe and has long been one of golf's most recognizable players. Wyndham Clark is playing in only his seventh major and, no matter how he plays Sunday, this will mark the first time he's finished better than 75th.

"It's a little surreal to be in this situation," Clark said.

In a way, the player one shot behind them, Rory McIlroy, feels the same. He is trying to break a nine-year drought without a major. He starts the day one shot behind the leaders. Does the fact he's won four of these, including the 2011 U.S. Open at Congressional, give him an edge?

"I don't know," he said. "It's been such a long time since I've done it."

McIlroy is paired with Scottie Scheffler, who trails the leaders by three. With a win, he would join Tiger Woods as the only other player to win the U.S. Open while ranked No. 1.

On Saturday, Scheffler holed out for an eagle from the 17th fairway, and followed that with a birdie to put a deep dent in what had been a seven-shot deficit. It was a remarkable stretch, especially considering this is the U.S. Open, a tournament traditionally won with par saves, not fireworks.

But Los Angeles Country Club is a different sort of U.S. Open venue. It has produced two record scores of 62, four nine-hole scores of 30 and one 29. It is getting mixed reviews from the players.

"I'm not a big fan of this golf course, to be honest," Viktor Hovland said.

When the sun goes down Sunday, at least one player will love it.

Some things to watch for Sunday:

RICKIE FOWLER

Back in 2014, Fowler finished in the top 5 in all four majors. He won The Players Championship a year later and moved as high as fourth in the rankings. Two years ago, he had fallen to No. 185.

He would be taking the lead by himself into the final round were it not for a three-putt bogey on No. 18. That, plus Clark's birdie on the same hole drew them into a tie heading into the last 18 holes.

"It really doesn't matter," Fowler said of his late slip-up. "Having the lead, being one back, two back. You're going to have to play good golf tomorrow."

RORY'S BIG CHANCE

McIlroy hasn't won a major since the 2014 PGA Championship at Valhalla, which followed his British Open title at Hoylake that year. It was hard to imagine he would go some nine years without another.

McIlroy was tied for the 54-hole lead last summer at the British Open and he two-putted all 18 greens (16 pars, two birdies) for a 70 that allowed Cameron Smith to blow by him and capture the claret jug.

McIlroy hasn't exactly shined the last two weeks when he had a chance to win. He was tied for the 54-hole lead at the Memorial and shot 75 to finish four back. And then last week in the Canadian Open, he was two shots behind going into Sunday and shot 72 to finish five back.

TRICKY NO. 6

The most excitement at LA Country Club comes on the par-4 sixth, which plays downhill at about 300 yards. Some players are choosing to go for the green, but that involves hitting a blind tee shot over a tree that blocks the view of the green and getting the ball to land on a putting surface that measures only about 12 paces across.

The green is surrounded by LACC's famous barranca — a sandy gully that runs across the course and

is populated by ball-entangling grasses. A layout here gives these players a better chance at birdie. The hole ranks third-easiest through three rounds.

THE BIG FINISH

The front nine has two par 5s and has played nearly two shots easier than the back nine at LACC. Barring the exception — Scheffler's eagle-birdie finish comes to mind — the final three holes are all about hanging on.

The closing three holes average 518 yards and all play as a par 4.

Scheffler, Fowler and Clark are all under for the week on that three-hole stretch. McIlroy has played them in 2-over par.

AP Golf Writer Doug Ferguson contributed to this report.

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

Netanyahu says Israel will move ahead on contentious judicial overhaul plan after talks crumble

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Sunday his government intends to move ahead on contentious plans to change the country's judicial system after talks aimed at finding a compromise solution appeared to be crumbling.

The government's plans to overhaul the judiciary plunged Israel into one of its worst domestic crises ever earlier this year. Negotiations between the government and opposition parties somewhat alleviated the crisis with attempts to find a middle ground over proposed changes to the country's justice system.

Those talks were jolted last week over a crisis surrounding the powerful regular committee responsible for picking the country's judges. Opposition leaders said negotiations were frozen until the committee is formed.

At a meeting of his Cabinet on Sunday, Netanyahu said the opposition hadn't been negotiating in good faith and that his government would move ahead cautiously on the overhaul.

"This week, we will begin the practical steps. We will do them in a measured way, responsibly, but in accordance with the mandate we received to make corrections to the justice system," he said.

Netanyahu put the overhaul on hold in March after mass protests erupted in opposition to it. The decision to move ahead is likely to flare tensions and fuel the protest movement that has continued to demonstrate each Saturday, despite the plan being paused.

Protest leaders said they were ready for another round of demonstrations that would make sure "every attempt to harm Israel's democratic justice system will fail."

Opposition leader Yair Lapid, whose party had been negotiating with Netanyahu, said moving ahead unilaterally on the plan "will critically harm the economy, endanger security and rip the Israeli people to shreds."

Netanyahu's government, composed of ultranationalist and ultra-religious parties, faced harsh opposition to the overhaul plan when it was announced earlier this year. Leading economists, top legal officials and former defense officials warned of dangerous consequences to the country's future. Even Israel's chief international ally, the U.S., expressed concern.

The government says the plan is necessary to restore power to elected officials and weaken, what it says, is an interventionist Supreme Court.

Critics say the plan would upend Israel's delicate system of checks and balances and push the country toward authoritarianism.

Netanyahu backed down after mass spontaneous protests erupted and a general strike was called for after he fired his defense minister who dissented from the plan over widespread threats by military reservists to not show up for duty if the overhaul was approved.

The committee for appointing judges — which, among other things, approves the makeup of the Supreme Court — has been a central battleground in the overhaul plan.

Both the governing coalition and the opposition traditionally are represented on the nine-member committee. But proponents of the overhaul had demanded that the coalition control both positions, drawing accusations that Netanyahu and his allies were trying to stack the judiciary with cronies.

Last week, the Parliament appointed the opposition representative to the committee but the second vacancy was not filled, prompting a delay to when the committee can resume its work.

Each side accused the other of blowing up the talks with the results of the committee appointments.

The woman who founded Father's Day was a renegade, great-granddaughter says

By JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — You could call her the mother of Father's Day.

The late Sonora Smart Dodd launched the celebration of dads in 1910 in her hometown of Spokane, Washington. As a result, she is the one responsible for those annual gifts that run the gamut from embarrassingly silly-looking neckties to kids' finger paintings crafted with so much love by those tiny hands that they can bring a tear to the eye of even the most stoic father.

It's a tradition Dodd decided to start as she sat in a Spokane church on Mother's Day 1909, listening to a sermon about — what else? — Mother's Day.

"And it bugged her," Dodd's great-granddaughter, Betsy Roddy, told The Associated Press in 2017. "She thought, 'Well, why isn't there a Father's Day?'"

Dodd and her five younger brothers, after all, had been raised by their father after their mother died in childbirth in 1898.

William Jackson Smart became a farmer after fighting in the Civil War. He not only held down both parental roles but did it with "leadership and love," his daughter always said, and she believed he ought to get some credit.

"So she worked tirelessly with the local clergy and got the YWCA on board, and they had their first Father's Day in Spokane in 1910," said Roddy, displaying a copy of The River Press of Fort Benton, Montana, which reported on the event.

Although that story predicted the celebration would go nationwide by the next year, Father's Day was slow to catch on. So much so that Dodd spent the next 62 years lobbying everyone from presidents to retailers for support.

Finally, in 1972, President Richard Nixon declared the third Sunday of June a federal holiday honoring dads. Dodd, who died at age 96 in 1978, had lived to see her dream come true.

A Renaissance woman, the Mother of Father's Day was a painter, poet and businesswoman, running a funeral home with her husband while raising the couple's only son, a future father named Jack.

"I take a great deal of pride in that renegade spirit that she clearly had," said Roddy, marketing director for a large Los Angeles company.

Dodd's great-granddaughter inherited some of that spirit herself. Raised in Washington, D.C., she earned a bachelor's degree in English from Penn State before heading to Europe for several years of backpacking between studies at Vienna's Webster University, where she earned a master's degree in international business.

Moving to Los Angeles decades ago, she found her niche here in marketing and stayed, eventually moving into a Craftsman-style home on the city's west side, where she lives with her two dogs.

The only child of an only child and recently widowed after 24 years of marriage, Roddy never had children of her own. That not only leaves her with the title of Great-Granddaughter of Father's Day but also assures she is the last direct descendant of the holiday's creator.

Although she's always been well aware of that legacy, she's never talked about it publicly until now.

She began to get more involved after MyHeritage.com, the company that helps people trace family

histories, asked if she knew her family's story.

Learning that she did, MyHeritage dug up historical documents about Dodd that Roddy says even she and her mother didn't know existed. They are considering eventually turning over some of their artifacts to a museum.

As a child, Roddy said, she loved her great-grandmother deeply, visited her every year and treasures the poems, books and notes she gave her, including one welcoming her to the world on the year she was born. She still keeps it, in pristine condition, in a small box in her home.

Still, as a child, Roddy says, she took Father's Day largely for granted, concluding the elaborate celebration, including the special card for her great-grandmother, was just something her family did. Even as an adult, she's generally kept quiet about being the ultimate Father's Day insider, leaving it to her mother to spread the word.

But no more.

"It's time for me to pick up the baton and carry it proudly," she says with a smile. "I'm the last direct descendant. The legacy is here, which is an honor."

___ This story was first published in 2017. Rogers retired from The Associated Press in 2021.

Blinken kicks off meetings in Beijing on high-stakes mission to cool soaring US-China tensions

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

BEIJING (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken on Sunday kicked off two days of high-stakes diplomatic talks in Beijing aimed at trying to cool exploding U.S.-China tensions that have set many around the world on edge.

Blinken opened his program by meeting Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang for an extended discussion to be followed by a working dinner. He'll have additional talks with Qin, as well as China's top diplomat Wang Yi and possibly President Xi Jinping, on Monday.

Neither Blinken nor Qin made any substantive comments to reporters as they began the meeting at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse.

Despite Blinken's presence in the Chinese capital, prospects for any significant breakthroughs are slim, as already strained ties have grown increasingly fraught in recent years. Animosity and recriminations have steadily escalated over a series of disagreements that have implications for global security and stability.

Blinken is the highest-level American official to visit China since President Joe Biden took office and the first secretary of state to make the trip in five years.

Biden and Xi agreed to Blinken's trip early at a meeting last year in Bali. It came within a day of happening in February but was delayed by the diplomatic and political tumult brought on by the discovery of what the U.S. says was a Chinese spy balloon flying across the United States that was shot down.

The list of disagreements and potential conflict points is long, ranging from trade with Taiwan, human rights conditions in China and Hong Kong to Chinese military assertiveness in the South China Sea and Russia's war in Ukraine.

Blinken will also be pressing the Chinese to release detained American citizens and to take steps to curb the production and export of fentanyl precursors that are fueling the opioid crisis in the United States.

U.S. officials have said Blinken will raise each of these points, though neither side has shown any inclination to back down on their entrenched positions.

Shortly before leaving, Blinken emphasized the importance of the U.S. and China establishing and maintaining better lines of communication. The U.S. wants to make sure "that the competition we have with China doesn't veer into conflict" due to avoidable misunderstandings, he told reporters.

Biden and Xi had made commitments to improve communications "precisely so that we can make sure we are communicating as clearly as possible to avoid possible misunderstandings and miscommunications," Blinken said Friday.

Xi offered a hint of a possible willingness to reduce tensions, saying in a meeting with Microsoft Corp. co-

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 63 of 65

founder Bill Gates on Friday that the United States and China can cooperate to “benefit our two countries.”

“I believe that the foundation of Sino-U.S. relations lies in the people,” Xi said to Gates. “Under the current world situation, we can carry out various activities that benefit our two countries, the people of our countries, and the entire human race.”

Biden told White House reporters Saturday he was “hoping that over the next several months, I’ll be meeting with Xi again and talking about legitimate differences we have, but also how ... to get along.”

Chances for such a meeting could come at a Group of 20 leaders’ gathering in September in New Delhi and at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation summit in November in San Francisco that the United States is hosting.

Since the cancellation of Blinken’s trip in February, there have been some high-level engagements. CIA chief William Burns traveled to China in May, while China’s commerce minister traveled to the U.S. And Biden’s national security adviser Jake Sullivan met with Wang in Vienna in May.

But those have been punctuated by bursts of angry rhetoric from both sides over the Taiwan Strait, their broader intentions in the Indo-Pacific, China’s refusal to condemn Russia for its war against Ukraine, and U.S. allegations from Washington that Beijing is attempting to boost its worldwide surveillance capabilities, including in Cuba.

And, earlier this month, China’s defense minister rebuffed a request from U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin for a meeting on the sidelines of a security symposium in Singapore, a sign of continuing discontent.

Austin said Friday he was confident that he and his Chinese counterpart would meet “at some point in time, but we’re not there yet.”

Underscoring the difficulties, China rejected a report by a U.S. security firm, that blamed Chinese-linked hackers for attacks on hundreds of public agencies, schools and other targets around the world, as “far-fetched and unprofessional”

A Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson repeated accusations that Washington carries out hacking attacks and complained the cybersecurity industry rarely reports on them.

That followed a similar retort earlier in the week when China said Qin had in a phone call with Blinken urged the United States to respect “China’s core concerns” such as the issue of Taiwan’s self-rule, “stop interfering in China’s internal affairs, and stop harming China’s sovereignty, security and development interests in the name of competition.”

Meanwhile, the national security advisers of the United States, Japan and the Philippines held their first joint talks Friday and agreed to strengthen their defense cooperation, in part to counter China’s growing influence and ambitions.

This coincides with the Biden administration inking an agreement with Australia and Britain to provide the first with nuclear-powered submarines, with China moving rapidly to expand its diplomatic presence, especially in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific island nations, where it has opened or has plans to open at least five new embassies over the next year.

The agreement is part of an 18-month-old nuclear partnership given the acronym AUKUS — for Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

China’s spokesperson for the Foreign Ministry, Hua Chunying, issued a statement of cautious optimism as Blinken started his first day of meetings in Beijing.

“Hope this meeting can help steer China-U.S. relations back to what the two Presidents agreed upon in Bali,” she said in a statement on Twitter.

However, two U.S. officials downplayed hopes for major progress and stressed that the trip was intended to restore a sense of calm and normalcy to high-level contacts.

“We’re coming to Beijing with a realistic, confident approach and a sincere desire to manage our competition in the most responsible way possible,” said Daniel Kritenbrink, the top U.S. diplomat for East Asia and the Pacific.

Kurt Campbell, the top Asia expert at the National Security Council, said “intense competition requires intense diplomacy if we’re going to manage tensions. That is the only way to clear up misperceptions, to signal, to communicate, and to work together where and when our interests align.”

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 64 of 65

Associated Press writer Seung Min Kim in Washington and Huizhong Wu in Taipei, Taiwan contributed to this report.

Today in History: June 19, Senate approves Civil Rights Act

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, June 19, the 170th day of 2023. There are 195 days left in the year. This is Juneteenth.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 19, 1964, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was approved by the U.S. Senate, 73-27, after surviving a lengthy filibuster.

On this date:

In 1775, George Washington was commissioned by the Continental Congress as commander in chief of the Continental Army.

In 1865, Union troops arrived in Galveston, Texas, with news that the Civil War was over, and that all remaining slaves in Texas were free — an event celebrated to this day as "Juneteenth."

In 1910, the first-ever Father's Day was celebrated in Spokane, Washington. (The idea for the observance is credited to Sonora Louise Smart Dodd.)

In 1911, Pennsylvania became the first state to establish a motion picture censorship board.

In 1917, during World War I, King George V ordered the British royal family to dispense with German titles and surnames; the family took the name "Windsor."

In 1934, the Federal Communications Commission was created; it replaced the Federal Radio Commission.

In 1944, during World War II, the two-day Battle of the Philippine Sea began, resulting in a decisive victory for the Americans over the Japanese.

In 1953, Julius Rosenberg, 35, and his wife, Ethel, 37, convicted of conspiring to pass U.S. atomic secrets to the Soviet Union, were executed at Sing Sing Prison in Ossining, New York.

In 1975, former Chicago organized crime boss Sam Giancana was shot to death in the basement of his home in Oak Park, Illinois; the killing has never been solved.

In 1986, University of Maryland basketball star Len Bias, the first draft pick of the Boston Celtics, suffered a fatal cocaine-induced seizure.

In 1987, the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a Louisiana law requiring any public school teaching the theory of evolution to teach creation science as well.

In 2014, Rep. Kevin McCarthy of California won election as House majority leader as Republicans shuffled their leadership in the wake of Rep. Eric Cantor's primary defeat in Virginia.

Ten years ago: Afghan President Hamid Karzai (HAH'-mihd KAHR'-zeye) suspended talks with the United States on a new security deal to protest the way his government was left out of initial peace negotiations with the Taliban. President Barack Obama, speaking in front of Berlin's Brandenburg Gate, pledged to cut deployed U.S. nuclear weapons by one-third if Cold War foe Russia did the same. Actor James Gandolfini, 51, died while vacationing in Rome. Country singer Slim Whitman, 90, died in Orange Park, Florida.

Five years ago: The United States said it was pulling out of the United Nations' Human Rights Council, a day after the U.N. human rights chief denounced the Trump administration for separating migrant children from their parents; U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley cited longstanding U.S. complaints that the council was biased against Israel. Koko, a western lowland gorilla who was taught sign language at an early age as a scientific test subject and eventually learned more than 1,000 words, died at the Gorilla Foundation's preserve in California's Santa Cruz mountains at the age of 46. New York mayor Bill de Blasio said as of Sept. 1, police would start issuing summonses to people caught smoking marijuana in public rather than arresting them.

One year ago: The head of NATO warned that fighting between Russia and Ukraine could drag on "for years." British defense officials assessing the intense fighting in the Donbas region of Ukraine bordering

Groton Daily Independent

Monday, June 19, 2023 ~ Vol. 31 - No. 333 ~ 65 of 65

Russia said morale among troops on both sides was growing troubled. Witnesses in Ethiopia said more than 200 ethnic Amhara were killed in an attack in the country's Oromia region and blamed a rebel group, which denied it. George Lamming, a novelist and essayist who was among the giants of post-colonial Caribbean writing, died at age 94.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Gena (JEH'-nuh) Rowlands is 93. Hall of Fame race car driver Shirley Muldowney is 83. Singer Elaine "Spanky" McFarlane (Spanky and Our Gang) is 81. Nobel peace laureate Aung San Suu Kyi (soo chee) is 78. Author Sir Salman Rushdie is 76. Actor Phylicia Rashad is 75. Rock singer Ann Wilson (Heart) is 73. Musician Larry Dunn is 70. Actor Kathleen Turner is 69. Country singer Doug Stone is 67. Singer Mark "Marty" DeBarge is 64. Singer-dancer-choreographer Paula Abdul is 61. Actor Andy Lauer is 60. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson is 59. Rock singer-musician Brian Vander Ark (Verve Pipe) is 59. Actor Samuel West is 57. Actor Mia Sara is 56. TV personality Lara Spencer is 54. Rock musician Brian "Head" Welch (Korn) is 53. Actor Jean Dujardin is 51. Actor Robin Tunney is 51. Actor Bumper Robinson is 49. Actor Poppy Montgomery is 48. Alt-country singer-musician Scott Avett (The Avett Brothers) is 47. Actor Ryan Hurst is 47. Actor Zoe Saldana is 45. Former NBA star Dirk Nowitzki is 45. Actor Neil Brown Jr. is 43. Actor Lauren Lee Smith is 43. Rapper Macklemore (Macklemore and Ryan Lewis) is 41. Actor Paul Dano is 39. Texas Rangers pitcher Jacob DeGrom is 35. Actor Giacomo Gianniotti is 34. Actor Chuku Modu (TV: "The Good Doctor") is 33. Actor Atticus Shaffer is 25.