

Groton Daily Independent

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Groton Community Calendar

Friday, June 30

Senior Menu: Chili, corn bread, coleslaw, vanilla pudding.

Softball hosts Clark (U8 at 6:00); T-Ball B&G Scrimmage, 6 p.m.

Saturday, July 1

Amateurs host Redfield DQ, 7 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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“When you forgive, you in no way change the past--but you sure do change the future.”

-Bernard Meltzer



Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store is Closed

Sunday, July 2

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.

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

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

United Methodist: Worship with communion (Conde at 8:30 a.m., Groton at 10:30 a.m., coffee hour at 9:30 a.m.)

Monday, July 3

Senior Menu: Chicken and rice casserole, mixed vegetables, chocolate pudding with bananas, whole wheat bread.

Food Pantry Closed

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

The Supreme Court has unanimously ruled that workers should have less difficulty seeking religious accommodations, siding with an evangelical Christian postal worker who sued the USPS after his request to take Sundays off for religious reasons was denied.

A grand jury in Texas has declined to indict rapper Travis Scott in a criminal investigation into the deadly crowd crush at the 2021 Astroworld festival, in which 10 people were killed.

At least 14 people have died of heat-related causes in the U.S. as temperatures rose to dangerous levels in parts of the South and Midwest. More than 100 people have died in Mexico over the past two weeks.

A jury has acquitted Scot Peterson, the former sheriff's deputy who was accused of taking cover instead of protecting Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School students during the deadly Parkland shooting in 2018.

The International Monetary Fund has reached a staff-level agreement with Pakistan worth \$3 billion, a deal that lowers the risk of a default and could help stabilize the economy. The deal is subject to approval by the IMF board in July.

Marijuana will become legal in the state of Maryland on Saturday. Adults aged 21 and older will now be able to purchase cannabis at a dispensary for their own recreational use.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the loss of a "high-value" Russian aircraft during the Wagner Group mutiny is likely to have a negative effect on Russia's ability to carry out operations in the air and on land, the U.K. Defense Ministry said..

TALKING POINTS

"With let-them-eat-cake obliviousness, today, the majority pulls the ripcord and announces 'colorblindness for all' by legal fiat. But deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life. And having so detached itself from this country's actual past and present experiences, the Court has now been lured into interfering with the crucial work that UNC and other institutions of higher learning are doing to solve America's real-world problems," Associate Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson said in her dissenting opinion for the Supreme Court's ruling on affirmative action.

"For a company to hire a trans person and then not publicly stand by them is worse, in my opinion, than not hiring a trans person at all, because it gives customers permission to be as transphobic and hateful as they want. And the hate doesn't end with me. It has serious and grave consequences for the rest of our community," transgender activist Dylan Mulvaney said of the backlash to her partnership with Bud Light.

"Despite what was said by the defense in this case, there's no excuse for running away. We watched him turn tail from that building. We watched him stand there as if he were a narrator instead of seeking out the threat, stopping the massacre that was going on inside that building," Tony Montalto, the father of Parkland shooting victim Gina Montalto, said after a jury found former sheriff's deputy Scot Peterson not guilty of felony child neglect..

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

Rep. George Santos of New York is scheduled to attend a 12 p.m. ET status conference for the wire fraud and money laundering charges filed against him in May. Santos has pleaded not guilty.

Today is the deadline the International Brotherhood of Teamsters set for UPS to avoid a worker strike by presenting a final and "best" contract offer. If a deal is not made, a nationwide strike could begin by August 1.

Actor Harrison Ford's Indiana Jones returns today as the franchise's final installment, Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny, hits theaters.

Former President Donald Trump is scheduled to deliver remarks in celebration of Independence Day on Saturday in Pickens, South Carolina. Gov. Henry McMaster and Senator Lindsey Graham are also expected to speak.

Spain will assume the floating Council of the European Union presidency from Sweden on Saturday. Spain will hold the presidency for six months before passing it next to Belgium.

DANR Announces Nearly \$60 Million for Statewide Environmental Projects

PIERRE, S.D. – Thursday, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) announced the Board of Water and Natural Resources has approved \$59,884,841 in grants and loans for drinking water, wastewater, storm water, and solid waste projects in South Dakota.

The \$59,884,841 total includes \$14,908,940 in grants and \$45,975,901 in low-interest loans including \$8,964,400 in principal forgiveness to be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources

"I am pleased to announce this financial assistance is available," said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. "Safe and reliable water, wastewater, and solid waste infrastructure helps protect our environment and strengthen communities for our kids and grandkids."

Funds were awarded from DANR's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program, American Rescue Plan Act, and the Solid Waste Management Program to the following:

Belle Fourche received a \$287,192 Solid Waste Management Program loan for a pre-shredding machine and baler to reduce waste at their landfill. This will improve operations and extend the useful life of the landfill. Previous funding was awarded for this project in January 2023. The terms of the loan are 3 percent for 20 years.

Bear Butte Valley Water received a \$1,500,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$300,000 in principal forgiveness for several improvement projects including 20 miles of water mainline, construction of a new deep well as a second water source, and installation of a new ground storage reservoir, booster station, and site piping and appurtenances to address system deficiencies. Funding was previously awarded for this project in April 2022. The terms of the loan are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Big Sioux Community Water System received a \$2,200,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to increase capacity and improve customer pressure in the Lake Madison area by installing three segments of new water main. The terms of the loan are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Brown County received a \$92,500 Solid Waste Management Program grant to purchase a new loader for its landfill facility. These funds and local funds will cover the project cost.

Chancellor received a \$1,450,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,233,000 in principal forgiveness for replacement of existing sanitary sewer and to extend the storm sewer trunk line to improve the inflow and infiltration issues within the community. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Chancellor also received a \$906,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$770,100 in principal forgiveness for distribution improvements including new PVC pipe water main, water services replacement within the right of way, curb stops, fire hydrants, and valves. The loan terms are 3 percent for 30 years.

Centerville received a \$1,412,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan for construction of a water tower to replace existing storage standpipe, which has exceeded its useful life for a steel water storage tank. The loan terms are 2.75 percent for 30 years.

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Cresbard received a \$1,912,410 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,625,000 in principal forgiveness to replace water mains, valves, and hydrants to address system wide water loss. This funding is in addition to previous funding awarded in March 2021. The loan terms are 2.75 percent for 30 years.

Hartford received a \$490,800 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct a new water main to improve resiliency and increase water quality and quantity to its users. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Henry received a \$2,000,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$865,000 in principal forgiveness to clean and televise its collection system and replace or reline mains, service pipe, and manholes to update its system. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Henry also received a \$2,000,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,405,000 in principal forgiveness to replace cast iron water main with PVC pipe, install hydrants and service lines, and construct a new ground storage tank. The loan terms are 0 percent for 30 years.

Huron received a \$83,500 Solid Waste Management Program grant to purchase a new hook truck and six roll off containers. These are critical components of the new community drop off area planned for the new transfer station facility. These funds and local funds will cover the project costs.

Lake Norden received a \$500,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace the north lift station and repair the wastewater treatment lagoons. The bids have come in higher than the estimate, and the city is looking for additional funding. Funding was previously awarded in March 2021. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Madison received a \$109,560 Solid Waste Management Program grant to purchase land for a new restricted use site facility because the current site is nearing capacity. These funds and local cash will cover the project costs.

Milbank received a \$12,500,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to improve the water supply and treatment system, including upgrading existing wells, adding new wells, upgrading pumps, and improving treatment capability. The terms of the loan are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Minnehaha Community Water Corp received a \$4,670,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to upgrade existing control panels at water treatment plants having reached the end of their useful life and new pipeline to add capacity to the distribution system. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Mitchell received an additional \$5,000,000 of Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loans with \$1,000,000 principal forgiveness for construction of a 2.5 million-gallon ground storage tank and associated pump station and chemical feed facility, and modifications to the water distribution system. Additional funding was awarded previously in January 2022. The loan terms are 1.875 percent for 30 years.

North Sioux City received a \$580,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to provide a connection between the city water distribution system and the Dakota Dunes Community Improvement District system to increase redundancy and storage capacity. This will also allow for more extensive maintenance to their respective towers with less risk of pressure issues. The terms of the loan are 3 percent for 20 years.

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Philip received a \$1,040,830 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan in additional funding to complete the improvements to the wastewater and storm sewer infrastructure in the Northeast area of the city and on Stewart Avenue. Additional funding was awarded previously in April 2022. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Philip also received a \$800,342 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan for the installation of new storm sewer pipe, storm sewer manholes, connection to the existing storm sewer, and new curb and gutter. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Saint Lawrence received a \$1,138,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$967,300 in principal forgiveness to re-line and replace existing wastewater lines and place riprap at the lagoon. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Saint Lawrence also received a \$940,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$799,000 in principal forgiveness to repair the existing ground storage tank, replace water lines, and to install new water lines to loop the system. The loan terms are 3 percent for 30 years.

Spearfish received an additional \$3,648,327 of Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loans for the construction of an additional well and new water storage tank to increase capacity for users. Additional funding was awarded previously in June 2022. The loan terms are 1.625 percent for 30 years.

WEB Water Development Association received a \$14,623,380 American Rescue Plan Act grant to construct parallel transmission mains. The project includes installation of 50 miles of 42- to 54-inch pipe to assist in the increased transmission of water. This project is part of the Water Investment in Northern South Dakota regionalization project with WEB Water Development Association, the city of Aberdeen, and BDM Rural Water System. Additional funding was previously awarded in September 2022.

The American Rescue Plan Act provides grants for eligible water, wastewater, storm water, and non-point source projects. The state of South Dakota is making a historic investment in infrastructure by

GROTON'S EVENTS



July 4 Firecracker
Tourney at Olive
Grove Golf Course

July 9 Summer
Fest/Car Show at
the City Park



July 20 Summer
Downtown Sip &
Shop

July 20 Pro Am
Tourney at Olive
Grove Golf Course



Aug. 4 Wine on Nine
at Olive Grove Golf
Course

Aug. 10 Family Fun
Fest

COME SPEND A WEEKEND IN GROTON!

- 5 camping spots with full-service hookups
- play centers and permanent corn hole boards
- swimming pool with slide and diving board
 - 3 diamond baseball complex
- 9-hole golf course • bowling alley

GROTON
Chamber Of Commerce

120 N Main St., Groton, SD 57445

605-397-8422

GrotonChamber.com

dedicating \$600 million of American Rescue Plan Act funding for local water and wastewater infrastructure grants.

The Solid Waste Management Program provides grants and loans for solid waste disposal, recycling, and waste tire projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated funding for the Solid Waste Management Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program, funded in part by revenues from the Petroleum Release Compensation Tank Inspection fee and the sale of lotto tickets, provides grants and loans for water, wastewater, and watershed projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated water and waste funding for the Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The State of South Dakota and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fund the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Programs, which provide low-interest loans for wastewater, storm water, water conservation, nonpoint source projects, and public drinking water system projects. The programs are funded through a combination of federal appropriations, loan repayments, and bonds.

The board approved the funding at Thursday's meeting in Pierre.

Gov. Noem's "Evil Foreign Governments" Bill Goes into Effect July 1 **Signs Executive Order**

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Noem's "Evil Foreign Governments" bill, SB 189, will go into effect on July 1st. The bill restricts state and local governments from contracting with six "Evil Foreign Governments." The prime sponsors of this legislation were Sen. Jim Stalzer (R-11) and Rep. Tyler Tordsen (R-14).

"With this legislation, South Dakota will continue to be a beacon of Freedom to the rest of the nation," said Governor Noem. "We are ensuring that our taxpayers' dollars are not being used as revenue streams for Evil Foreign Governments. South Dakota will always put the security of our people first, and we will continue to preserve Freedom for generations to come."

Governor Noem signed the bill in March at the 114th Fighter Wing at Joe Foss Field in Sioux Falls. You can find photos from the bill signing event [here](#).

Governor Noem also signed Executive Order 2023-10, which rescinds the following two Executive Orders: Executive Order 2004-06 established the Research and Commercialization Council to provide oversight for the division of research commercialization; and,

Executive Order 2023-02 was signed by Governor Noem in January to restrict state and local governments from contracting with the following "Evil Foreign Governments:" the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Cuba, the Islamic Republic of Iran, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela.

Governor Noem also signed Executive Order 2023-06 in May to ban Tencent from state government devices and instruct the commissioner of the Bureau of Information Technologies to create a blacklist of other similarly dangerous applications to state security.

With the enactment of the "Evil Foreign Governments" bill, along with the continuing protection of Executive Order 2023-06, Executive Orders 2004-08 and 2023-02 are no longer necessary.

National Guard Tuition Reimbursement Goes into Effect July 1

PIERRE, S.D. – The bill to provide 100% tuition reimbursement for members of the South Dakota National Guard attending college in-state, HB 1039, will go into effect on July 1st.

"The members of the South Dakota National Guard are some of the strongest and bravest men and women in the country. They have proven that time and time again," said Governor Noem. "They're the kind of folks we want to stay in South Dakota to earn an education, participate in our booming economy, and raise a family. This new law will help them do just that."

Governor Noem signed the 100% tuition reimbursement bill at the Range Road Armory in Rapid City.

SDDOT Transit Office Earns Federal Transit Administration (FTA) Grants Dedicated to Advancing Local Projects

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Transportation (SDDOT) has received three grants totaling \$2,603,378 to support local transit agencies' buses and bus facilities. The communities impacted by these grants are Aberdeen, the Black Hills, Brookings, Huron, and Pierre.

"It is significant that the SDDOT Transit Office was awarded three sizable discretionary grants in collaboration with the transit agencies we work with daily across the state," said Joel Jundt, Secretary of Transportation. "Earning these substantial grant awards demonstrates our shared goal, hard work, and dedication to working together to provide excellent services for the people of South Dakota."

These grants are supported by the U.S. Department of Transportation's Federal Transit Administration's Grants for Buses and Bus Facilities and Low- and No-Emission (Low-No) Vehicle programs.

Grant Awards:

SDDOT, on behalf of Aberdeen Ride Line and Community Transit of Watertown/Sisseton Inc., will receive grant funding in the amount of \$1,006,750 for nine new alternative, ethanol-fueled buses to reduce tailpipe emissions in the city of Aberdeen and 15 counties. The new buses will improve safety and reliability and reduce maintenance costs while also providing a more comfortable passenger ride.

SDDOT, on behalf of the Brookings Area Transit Authority, will receive grant funding in the amount of \$320,000 for a new bus storage facility to help improve safety and transit services. The project will include an office area, bus storage, restrooms, and a wash bay, providing much needed operation space.

SDDOT, on behalf of River Cities Public Transit (Pierre), Prairie Hills Transit (the Black Hills), and People's Transit (Huron), will receive grant funding in the amount of \$1,276,628 to buy nine low-emission propane buses and conversion equipment to reduce tailpipe emissions and enhance energy conservation.

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Cameras, Fines coming to Groton's county dumpster site

According to Mike Scott from the Brown County Landfill, the dumpster site east of Groton has been overly abused in recent weeks and changes are coming. Scott said that people are dumping stuff on the ground and leaving items that are not permitted. Scott told the Groton Daily Independent that a camera has been ordered and once implemented, \$100 fines will be imposed for violators. "It's just sick what the public thinks they can put here. Then we have to clean it up," Scott said. "We are picking up almost 2 trailer loads a week that are placed on the ground or illegal materials placed in the containers."



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MATERIALS NOT ACCEPTED:

COUCHES	DEHUMIDIFIERS	TIRES
RECLINERS	REFRIGERATORS	TREE BRANCHES OF ANY SIZE!
MATTRESSES	AIR CONDITIONERS	SHINGLES / CONSTRUCTION DEBRIS
COMMERCIAL / BUSINESS WASTE	WASHERS / DRYERS	LARGE LUMBER / PALLETS
ASH FROM STOVES / FIREPLACES ETC.	STOVES / DISHWASHERS	ROCK / CONCRETE
LIQUIDS (WASTE OIL, PAINT)	STEEL & WOOD POSTS / WIRE	GRASS / LEAVES / GARDEN RESIDUE

DON'T DUMP IT HERE IF IT WON'T FIT IN A GARBAGE BAG!!!

NO SCAVENGING QUESTIONS: 626-4019 / 380-0111



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**HELP
WANTED!**

Farm Hand Wanted

Farm hand (Groton, Brown, South Dakota): Plant, cultivate & harvest crops. Apply fertilizers & pesticides. Operate, maintain and repair farm equipment. Repair fences and farm buildings. Follow all work and food safety protocols. Req: 6 mns rel exp. Mail resume to Shawn Gengerke Farms, 12702 406th Ave., Groton, SD 57445.

Help Wanted

THE GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT has openings for the following certified positions for the 23-24 school year: K-12 Vocal Music Teacher, HS Agriculture Teacher/FFA Advisor. Applicants should complete and submit the certified staff application form along with a current cover letter, resume, and three letters of recommendation. All materials should be submitted to Joe Schwan, Superintendent PO Box 410 Groton, SD 57445. EOE

For Sale

2010 Hitchhiker Discover America 345 Uk 5th wheel trailer, 36 feet long, 3 slides, \$17,000 or best offer. Can be seen at 715 N 2nd Street, Groton by calling 605-216-6468.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Missing or murdered Indigenous persons liaison aims to build trust, peace of mind

South Dakota-based federal prosecutor selected to oversee efforts across Great Plains

BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 29, 2023 7:47 PM

If you know something about a missing or murdered Indigenous person, Troy Morley wants to take your call.

That's the first and perhaps the most important message the assistant U.S. attorney for the District of South Dakota has for those learning about his just-announced ascension to Missing or Murdered Indigenous Persons (MMIP) liaison for the Great Plains.

There are no set directives for the new position, aside from a charge from U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland to harness the resources of the U.S. Justice Department to crack down on high levels of violence in Indian Country. Morley will continue to prosecute other cases, but will devote more time to his liaison work in the coming months. He works out of an office in Pierre.

Success may eventually be measured in investigations and prosecutions or a reduction in calls about missing or murdered Native Americans, Morley said, but the most important benchmark is the one he and his fellow federal prosecutors see as critical to any improvements in public safety: trust.

"I want these communities to have that peace of mind to know that they have a place to turn on issues that matter," Morley said.

Growing attention to MMIP

Morley's role puts him in league with nine other new MMIP coordinators and attorneys around the country, whose appointments were announced Wednesday.

In his region, which covers North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Wyoming and Alaska, Morley will be responsible for building and expanding relationships with tribal officials and local law enforcement, as well as making sure tips on major MMIP cases are prioritized by federal prosecutors.

The move is among a host of recent efforts at the federal level to deal with the backlog of MMIP investigations, including a July 2022 directive from Garland to prioritize public safety in tribal communities. It comes shortly after the formation of a two-person MMIP task force by Interim South Dakota Attorney General Mark Vargo last year to educate law enforcement across the state and consult on investigations on state land. The pair have continued their work since Attorney General Marty Jackley took office this January.

Morley, an enrolled member of the Turtle Mountain Band of Chippewa, said MMIP cold cases have been and remain a priority for federal prosecutors in South Dakota, who have jurisdiction on major crimes on Native American land. Morley recently charged 57-year-old Jay Adams Jr. with first-degree murder for the 1992 beating death of an underage girl in Roberts County.

Gregg Peterman, a supervisory assistant U.S. Attorney for South Dakota and veteran of Indian Country prosecutions, was among those who helped shepherd a case that drew 18- and 15-year sentences for two Kyle men in the 2016 shooting death of Gary Little Bull Jr.

"These cases stay open," Peterman said. "They aren't just sitting on a shelf collecting dust."

Solving cases, however, means building trust with victims and witnesses, who sometimes feel pressure not to work with law enforcement. That's a roadblock nearly anywhere, Peterman said, but one that can be particularly acute within small, close-knit Native communities.

Morley and Peterman both said that building trust means showing up – sometimes with no agenda at all.

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"You can't work in Indian Country if you expect to do it all with phone calls and meetings in Rapid City, Pierre or Aberdeen," Morley said.

South Dakota approach to outreach

That investigatory advice doubles as a directive in South Dakota. U.S. Attorney Alison Ramsdell has at least one of her 24 prosecutors assigned to each of seven tribal areas – four of South Dakota's nine tribal nations are combined across two of them – and those prosecutors are required to visit their respective communities on a monthly basis.

Ramsdell applied to locate one of the MMIP liaisons in South Dakota at the same time she requested two additional Indian Country specialists for her district. Each of those positions were approved, and Ramsdell aims to fill those positions soon.

Showing up "is something we do exceptionally well in South Dakota," she said, and it's an approach and a message she hopes to see Morley carry into his work as liaison.

"I would feel like it's a success if we can replicate what we do in South Dakota across the Great Plains region," she said.

That's why Morley intends to begin his work by building relationships, he said. There are long lists of missing or murdered people that circulate online, he said, but those numbers include people such as run-aways whose parents report their disappearance but not their return. They also sometimes include people thought to be murdered, but an investigation revealed an accidental death or an overdose.

Some family members "will never accept the conclusions we come to," Morley said, but he hopes the expanded emphasis on MMIP by the Justice Department and efforts of liaisons like himself will help convince Native communities that crimes against Indigenous people are taken seriously.

That work extends to the investigation into the precursors of violence, such as drug dealing, domestic violence or child abuse, and to working closely with tribal or Bureau of Indian Affairs officers as quickly as possible once a call comes in.

For now, though, the starting point is the front seat of a vehicle. Morley expects to spend many of the coming months traveling from place to place, getting reacquainted with communities he's known for years and learning as much as he can about the communities he knows little about.

Those with concerns needn't wait to see him pull up to a coffee shop, though. His bio and email address, along with the contact information for the other Indian Country prosecutors in his office, are online for anyone to find.

"If someone has information to share, call me," Morley said.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux falls Argus Leader.

COMMENTARY

Independent press at stake in debate over journalism legislation

DAVID BORDEWYK

JUNE 29, 2023 6:40 PM

Freedom and independence took center stage in the American colonies this summer 247 years ago when 56 brave men signed a document that would have all but meant their execution if arrested by King George's army. Today, Americans share in the luxury of celebrating those ideals that help define our great nation.

Speaking of independence, a bill pending in Congress would support a free, independent press and its vital role in our nation.

Now more than ever, we need a robust, independent press. We need journalism that supports civil civic engagement and community-building. Unfortunately, those very news media organizations that do this important journalism are under great financial strain in part because of the Big Tech platforms Google and Facebook.

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The Journalism Competition and Preservation Act (JCPA) would allow news media organizations such as newspapers and broadcast outlets to collectively negotiate with Google and Facebook for fair compensation for use of our news content. These Big Tech platforms are the dominant distributors of news content, reaping tremendous financial benefit without fair compensation to those who create the news content. Google and Facebook also capture the majority of U.S. digital advertising revenue, leaving local news providers with scraps. In part, this is driving a decline in the number of bona fide local news outlets across our country.

"For too long, Big Tech has profited from using news content on their platforms, without paying the creators of that content," said News/Media Alliance President & CEO Danielle Coffey. "The JCPA will give small and local publishers a seat at the table and channel critical revenue to them to help sustain the high-quality journalism Americans need and depend on."

The South Dakota Newspaper Association and its 105 member newspapers support JCPA. Granted, not every small community newspaper would see a direct financial benefit if JCPA became law, but a rising tide lifts all boats, and the bill could help sustain quality journalism at all levels in our country.

This legislation is not a government bailout. There is no taxpayer money involved. This bill would allow a temporary exemption under federal antitrust laws for local journalism providers to collectively negotiate with Google and Facebook.

Is this legislation the only solution for all that ails local journalism in our country? No, but the JCPA bill would be an important piece and it would demonstrate that our government reaffirms the role a free, independent press has in our democratic society.

This idea is not unique to the United States. Australia and most recently Canada have approved similar legislation. Facebook is paying Australian news publishers for use of their news content.

The JCPA has bipartisan support. The Senate Judiciary Committee on June 15 approved the bill with a 14-7 vote. We ask Sens. John Thune and Mike Rounds and Rep. Dusty Johnson to take a close look at this bill. The independence of a free and robust press in our country may be at stake.

EDITOR'S NOTE: South Dakota Searchlight is an associate member of the South Dakota Newspaper Association. David Bordewyk is executive director of the South Dakota Newspaper Association, which represents the state's 105 newspapers.

'This is not a normal court,' says Biden as GOP opponents praise affirmative action ruling

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JUNE 29, 2023 3:20 PM

WASHINGTON — Thursday's U.S. Supreme Court decision that effectively scrambles the role affirmative action plays in the college admissions process cannot let the country slide "backwards," President Joe Biden said just hours after the majority justices released their opinion.

Meanwhile, Republicans seeking to challenge him in 2024 praised the decision. Issues of race and higher education will likely play a role in the 2024 presidential race, with attacks on identity, race and sexuality already permeating the U.S. political landscape.

Biden called the decision to end affirmative action at Harvard and the University of North Carolina "severely disappointing" and urged higher education admissions officials to retool criteria to consider "adversity a student has overcome when selecting among qualified applicants."

Biden also ordered the Department of Education to analyze what practices promote inclusive and diverse student populations and which do not, including "practices like legacy admissions and other systems that expand privilege instead of opportunity." Many elite universities give preference to the children of alumni.

According to a fact sheet released by the administration Thursday, both the departments of Education and Justice will release guidance to universities within 45 days that will "provide clarity" on what admissions practices remain lawful.

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"The only people who benefit from the system are the wealthy and the well connected," Biden said from the White House. "The odds have been stacked against working people for much too long. We need a higher education system that works for everyone."

Court's reversal of precedent

The decision to overturn both a private and public institution's use of affirmative action marks the second time in as many terms that the high court has bucked established precedent.

The court has held for 45 years a late 1970s decision that allowed race to be one of several admissions criteria.

Last summer, the conservative majority court, in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, overturned the landmark 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that guaranteed the constitutional right to abortion as well as the 1992 *Planned Parenthood v. Casey* decision that preserved federal abortion protections but with some restrictions.

The affirmative action decision was another earthquake. "Today, the court once again walked away from decades of precedent as (the) dissent has made clear," Biden said Thursday, referring to the dissenting opinion written by the three liberal justices, Sonia Sotomayor, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson — though Jackson recused herself from the Harvard portion of the decision because of her ties to the institution.

"This is not a normal court," Biden said in response to a shouted question from a reporter about the Congressional Black Caucus' statement Thursday that the high court has "thrown into question its own legitimacy."

2024 implications

Thursday's Supreme Court decision now further magnifies identity and cultural politics surrounding postsecondary education, whereas schisms over childhood and adolescent education have taken much of the spotlight of late.

Education in the K-12 setting has been a particular battleground for conservatives who have sought to regulate gender identity in school sports, framed access to instruction materials and school budgets — already accessible and public — as a "Parental Bill of Rights," and have fixated on curriculum, books and poems dealing with race and slavery.

Former President Donald Trump issued a statement calling the Supreme Court decision "a great day for America."

"People with extraordinary ability and everything else necessary for success, including future greatness for our country, are finally being rewarded. This is the ruling everyone was waiting and hoping for and the result was amazing. It will also keep us competitive with the rest of the world. Our greatest minds must be cherished and that's what this wonderful day has brought. We're going back to all merit-based—and that's the way it should be!" he said.

Trump's former vice president and 2024 presidential contender Mike Pence told NBC News that affirmative action in university admissions is no longer relevant.

"There may have been a time 50 years ago when we needed to affirmatively take steps to correct long-term racial bias in institutions of higher education ... I can tell you, as the father of three college graduates, those days are long over," Pence said.

Nikki Haley, former governor of South Carolina and Trump appointee as U.S. representative to the United Nations, hailed the court's decision.

"The world admires America because we value freedom and opportunity. The Supreme Court reaffirmed those values today. Picking winners and losers based on race is fundamentally wrong. This decision will help every student — no matter their background — have a better opportunity to achieve the American Dream," the 2024 presidential candidate said in a statement issued immediately following the decision.

U.S. Sen. Tim Scott of South Carolina, who is also running in the Republican presidential primary, echoed Trump's sentiment and said the decision marked "a good day for America."

"This is the day where we understand that being judged by the content of our character, not the color

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of our skin, is what our Constitution wants," Scott said on Fox News, invoking a line from civil rights leader Martin Luther King, Jr.'s "I Have a Dream" speech. "We are continuing to work on forming this more perfect union. Today is better than yesterday, this year, better than last year, this decade better than last decade."

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, also a GOP contender in the 2024 race, published a two-sentence post on Twitter that read: "College admissions should be based on merit and applicants should not be judged on their race or ethnicity. The Supreme Court has correctly upheld the Constitution and ended discrimination by colleges and universities."

According to the Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics, overall college enrollment rates among 18- to 24-year-olds decreased in almost every race category from 2010 to 2021, except for Pacific Islanders.

Despite the decrease, college enrollment among the Asian American population remained higher than all other races.

The left-leaning Center for American Progress in 2020 analyzed enrollment declines among various racial groups and compared them with demographic data trends tracked by the U.S. Census Bureau.

The drop in college enrollment among white young adults is "worrisome," the authors write, "but compared with those of Black students, they are not as disproportionate relative to population changes."

The authors also recommended that states and institutions examining the drop in white students "take a closer look at whether these declines may be greater among some subgroups ... such as those who live in rural areas or those who are first-generation students."

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

Summer wildfire threat could imperil unexpected US regions: the Northeast and Midwest

BY: ALLISON WINTER - JUNE 29, 2023 9:42 AM

WASHINGTON — In a summer of drought, smoke and haze, wildfires could flare up in unusual locations in the United States over the next few months — including New England and the Midwest, according to federal forecasters.

"The predominant threat looks to be the Northeast, which is not normal," said Jim Karels, the fire director for the National Interagency Fire Center, the federal center in Boise, Idaho that coordinates the national response to wildland fires. "This year it looks like there is potential for elevated fire conditions all the way into August, from Minnesota to Maine and down along the Eastern Seaboard."

As wildfires continued in Canada, Chicago, Detroit and other parts of the Midwest and Great Lakes experienced poor air quality in late June, and by the last days of June it had encompassed some East Coast cities as well.

The Fire Center's recent summer outlook forecasts atypical wildfire activity also for the northern tier of the United States, but a reprieve across much of the West, which has in recent years been scorched by above-average fire activity. That's thanks, in part, to an unusually wet winter and record snowpack.

In a standard year, the lush green days of midsummer would be a quiet season for wildfires in the Midwest and Northeast. The regular wildfire seasons for these regions are early spring and early fall, before new growth has started in the spring and after the summer heat has dried out grasses and leaves that can fuel a fire.

The elevated fire danger this summer is due to the dry spring and forecasts for more hot, dry weather this summer.

"It is unusually dry for early June in the Great Lakes and there are above-normal temperatures. That is what is exacerbating the situation," said Steve Marien, a meteorologist and the Eastern Area Fire Weather Program Manager for the National Park Service. "There is quite a bit of drought either in development or in place ... especially in the northeastern quarter of the US. It's abnormal for this early in the summer."

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A June 22 update from the U.S. Drought Monitor shows a map blotted in drought warnings from Virginia to Vermont and over much of the Midwest. The East Coast has “abnormally dry” to “moderate drought” conditions. Wisconsin, Minnesota and Michigan’s lower peninsula are in moderate drought. And Kansas, Missouri and Nebraska have large areas of extreme drought.

That’s highly unusual for this time of year, but Marien says conditions can change. Further drought could develop in parts of the Midwest and Northeast, or with some luck, rain could restore the region over the coming months.

But recent rains that cooled the mid-Atlantic around the days of the summer solstice were not enough to bring the region out of moderate drought.

Fire analysts use data and forecasts from the National Forest Service and National Weather Service to make the wildfire forecast, which they update monthly to help direct firefighting resources.

The unusual fire patterns could place a strain on some federal firefighting resources, which are usually centered in the West over the summer. The National Interagency Fire Center helps coordinate where to strategically place air tankers, helicopters and other resources.

“It evolves around fire threats — weekly and daily we are looking at what resources we have and what is available,” said Karels, the fire director from NIFC.

Fires scorch North Carolina, Michigan

Already, unexpected blazes have ravaged parts of the East Coast and Midwest.

A campfire in Grayling, Michigan, on June 3 sparked a fire that burned for four days. It consumed 2,400 acres and prompted evacuations before it was contained.

Nationwide, as of June 22 there were 12 large fires in four states: New Mexico, Washington, Arizona and North Carolina, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

In North Carolina, a prescribed burn June 13 raged out of control, burning tens of thousands of acres and growing big enough to be seen from space. The air pollution from the fire caused red alert air quality warnings.

A prescribed or controlled burn is a tactic that forest managers use to try to mimic natural wildfire patterns in a controlled setting — letting fire burn some debris in a forest and then putting out the blaze. The N.C. Wildlife Resources Commission conducted the prescribed burn, and the N.C. Forest Service responded to assume command of the fire. It is now 100 percent contained.

The National Weather Service issued warnings in June for critical fire risk in Michigan, Pennsylvania and New Jersey. And Michigan, Minnesota, Wisconsin and the East Coast states have seen multiple air quality alerts due to hazy skies, increased ground level ozone and particulate dust.

Climate change

The smoke lifted from some of the record-breaking bad air quality days that New York, Philadelphia, Detroit and Chicago experienced earlier this summer, when particulates from wildfires in Canada brought gray and orange skies reminiscent of the Star Wars planet of Tatooine. But by the last days of June, it had returned.

With parts of Canada and the United States at risk for an unusually active fire season this summer, the Midwest and Eastern United States could be in for more unusual fire activity and the air pollution that comes with it.

“There will be more air pollution days because of wildfires, no doubt about that,” said Andy Hoell, a research meteorologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, known as NOAA. “Where they start, where they burn and also the weather patterns will determine how bad it will be in certain areas.”

There are three main ingredients that create a wildfire: fuel (grasses, plants, leaves, trees, and anything that burns), ignitions (from humans or lightning), and dry conditions.

Wildfire smoke contains fine particles of smoke and soot. The particles naturally move on air currents, and the heat of wildfires can push smoke higher into the atmosphere, helping it to travel longer distances. Weather patterns like wind, pressure systems and rain can affect where the smoke from a wildfire travels.

Wildfire is a natural part of forest ecology. But the size and number of recent wildfires is not the norm.

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As climate change brings hotter, drier weather, wildfire seasons are getting longer and more intense. And some of the fires are burning hotter and longer because there is so much dry fuel available to feed the flames.

"By generally any metric we look at around the world, wildfires are getting worse, burning larger areas more severely at higher elevations, and burning over longer periods of the year." said Kristina Dahl, the principal climate scientist for the Climate & Energy program at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

It is not a linear trend, since some years are better than others. But the area burned by wildfires has doubled in Canada since the 1970s and quadrupled in the Western United States in that same time. Longer, drier summers have erased the concept of a "fire season" and turned it into a "fire year" in some parts of the arid West.

"In the case of any one particular year it can be hard to say because there is a lot of variability from year to year, but we know that the increase in heat extremes, for example, that the Midwest has seen, are linked to human-caused climate change," said Dahl.

Worsening fires have created a climate-fire feedback, as carbon dioxide from the fires spews into the atmosphere.

A study published in the journal *Science Advances* found that wildfires in the North American boreal forests — like those aflame in Canada this month — have the potential to play an outsized role in future fire-related emissions. Boreal forests contain roughly two-thirds of stored global forest carbon.

Wildfires in these forests could contribute 12 gigatons of carbon dioxide emissions into the atmosphere over the next three decades, according to peer-reviewed research from scientists at the Union of Concerned Scientists, Woodwell Climate Research Center and Tufts University. That amount is equivalent to the annual emissions of 2.6 billion fossil fuel-powered cars.

In another study, researchers determined emissions from the 2020 wildfires in California could have wiped out the gains the state had made in greenhouse gas reductions since 2003.

"In order to prevent wildfires from growing worse in the future, one of the most important things we can do is reduce carbon emissions and wean ourselves from fossil fuels" said Dahl. "The more we emit going forward, the more we can expect wildfires to continue to worsen, big picture and long terms."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story has been updated to reflect a correction. An earlier version of the story misstated which agency in North Carolina conducted a prescribed burn.

Allison Winter is a Washington D.C. correspondent for States Newsroom, a network of state-based nonprofit news outlets that includes the Alaska Beacon.

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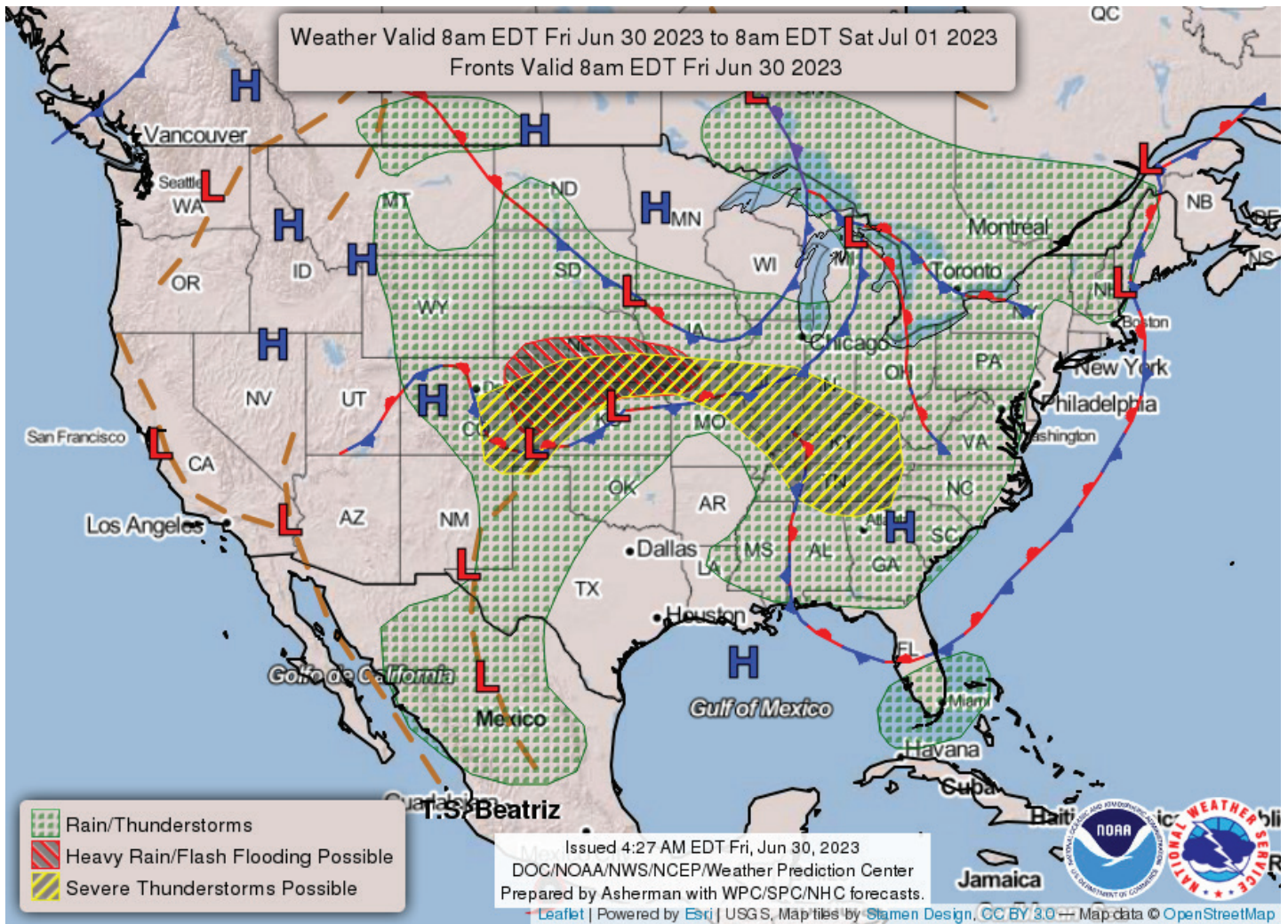
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 86 °F at 6:02 PM
Low Temp: 63 °F at 6:04 AM
Wind: 12 mph at 5:38 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 41 minutes

Today's Info

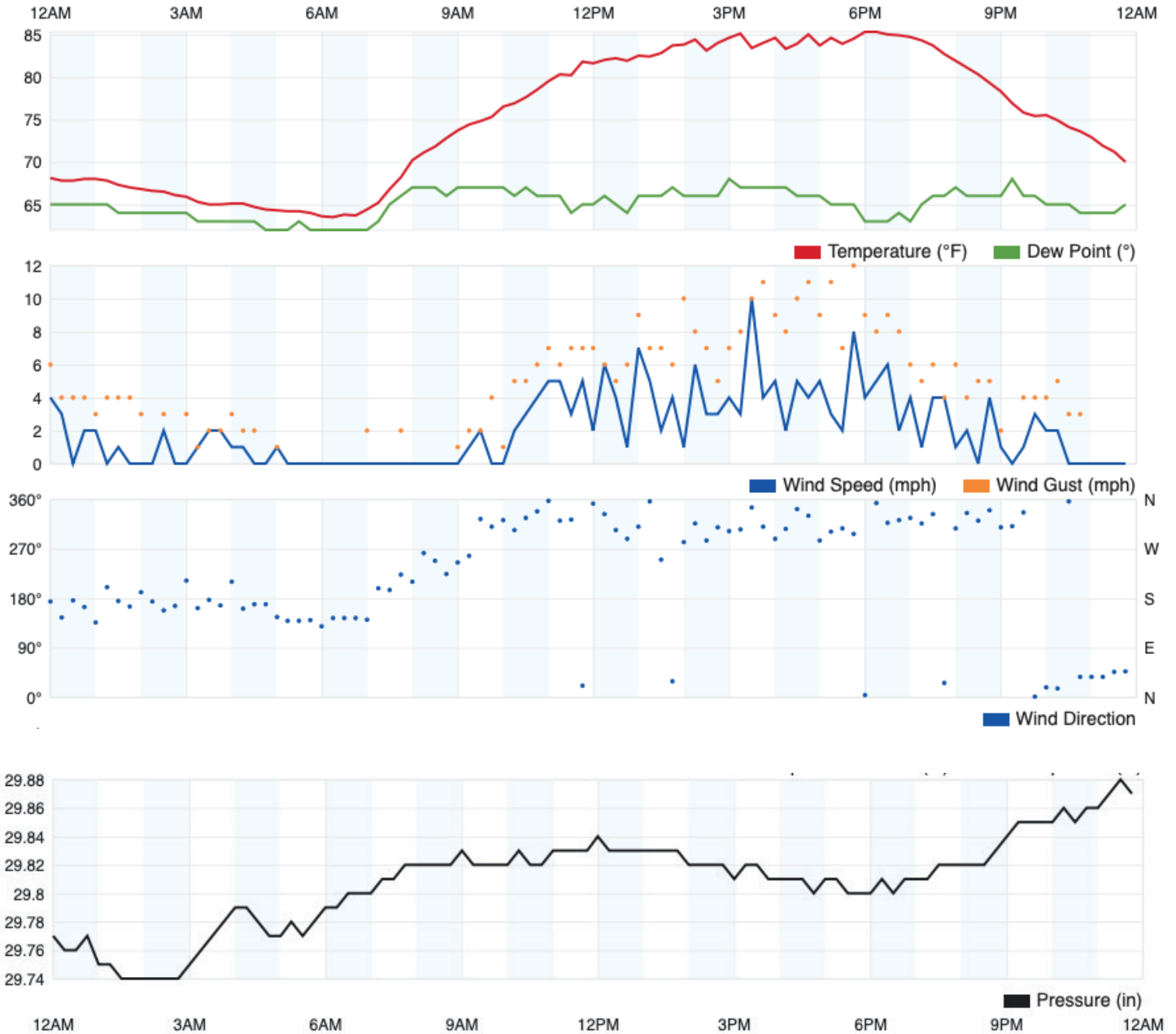
Record High: 104 in 1931
Record Low: 38 in 1918
Average High: 84
Average Low: 58
Average Precip in June.: 3.76
Precip to date in June.: 3.44
Average Precip to date: 11.01
Precip Year to Date: 11.35
Sunset Tonight: 9:26:39 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:46:05 AM



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Hot	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms
High: 85 °F	Low: 61 °F	High: 87 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 92 °F	Low: 65 °F	High: 90 °F



The Weekend Outlook

June 30, 2023
2:01 AM

Slight chances for showers/storms, overall mainly dry

Today

➤ Chance of afternoon/evening showers/storms. Highs in the 80s



Saturday

➤ Mainly dry, Highs in the 80s



Sunday

➤ Hot, Highs upper 80s to mid 90s



	6/30 Fri				7/1 Sat				7/2 Sun					
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	5	5	8	10	9	6	5	3	5	3	6	7	7	6
Britton	2	7	10	10	9	5	3	2	3	5	7	7	6	5
Brookings	3	6	8	8	8	6	5	3	5	7	8	9	9	6
Chamberlain	7	7	9	9	9	6	6	3	3	6	7	8	8	7
Clark	6	6	7	9	8	6	6	6	5	6	7	8	8	7
Eagle Butte	7	9	9	10	7	7	9	9	7	8	9	9	10	10
Ellendale	6	6	8	9	9	6	5	3	5	5	6	7	7	6
Eureka	2	6	8	10	10	8	6	5	6	8	8	8	9	9
Gettysburg	8	9	9	10	10	8	8	8	7	9	9	9	10	10
Huron	6	6	6	7	8	6	6	5	3	5	7	8	8	7
Kennebec	6	6	8	9	9	6	6	5	5	6	8	8	7	6
McIntosh	2	5	6	8	7	6	6	5	5	6	8	10	10	9
Milbank	5	8	10	10	9	6	5	5	5	6	7	8	7	5
Miller	5	6	6	8	8	6	6	6	5	6	6	7	8	7
Mobridge	5	6	8	9	8	7	6	5	5	6	8	9	8	8
Murdo	7	7	8	10	10	8	7	6	6	6	6	6	6	8
Pierre	6	6	7	8	8	6	6	5	5	6	6	6	6	6
Redfield	5	6	6	8	8	6	5	5	5	3	5	6	7	6
Sisseton	6	8	10	10	9	6	5	3	5	6	6	7	7	6
Watertown	3	7	9	10	10	7	5	3	3	6	7	8	8	5
Webster	3	7	10	10	9	6	3	0	1	6	7	7	7	5
Wheaton	6	8	10	10	10	6	3	2	5	6	6	7	7	5

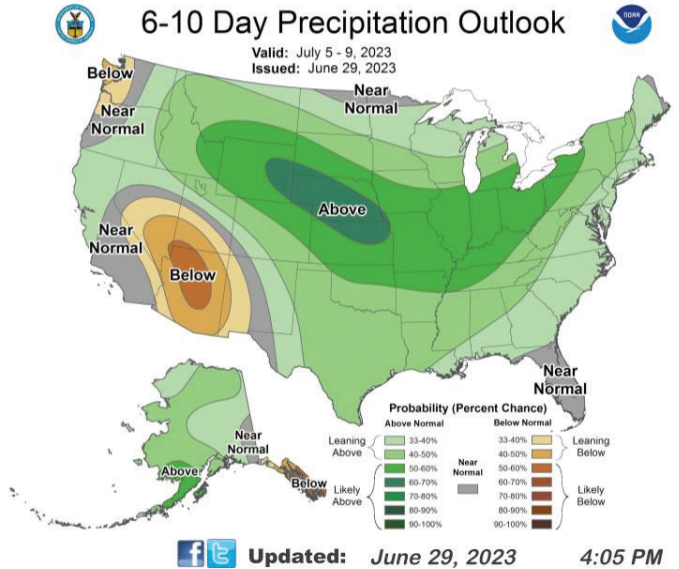
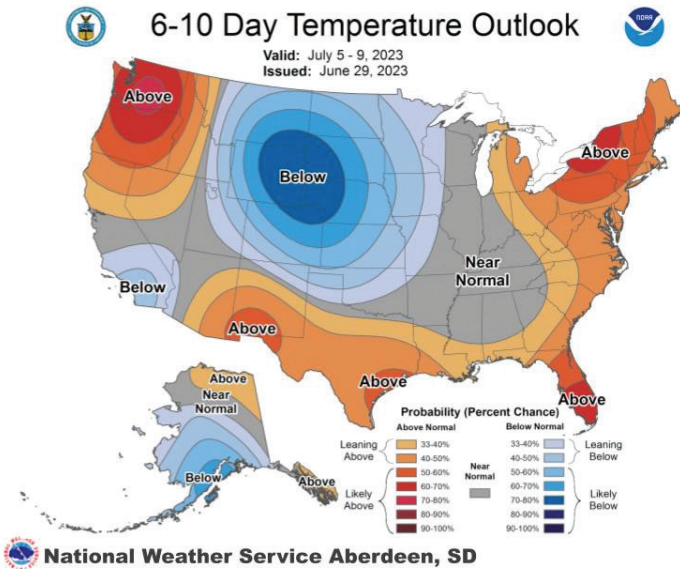


National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Weekend Outlook

July 4th - 9th 2023 Outlook

The large-scale weather pattern will favor cooler temperatures and wetter conditions than climatological normals on the whole from Independence Day through the rest of that week across c/ne SD and wc MN (*but July 2nd & 3rd looks hot*). The maps below show the probability (percent chance) for this. Normal highs during this time range between ~81° & 87°.



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Today in Weather History

June 30, 1991: Thunderstorms dropped over 2 inches of rain over Brown, Marshall, and Roberts County. The rain washed out many county roads and flooded low-lying areas. Several streets were impassable in Aberdeen. Officially, Aberdeen recorded 1.91 inches of rain.

June 30, 1992: An F2 tornado lifted a roof off a house 18 miles east of Pierre. A barn was destroyed, and power lines and trees were downed. Also, an estimated wind gust of 61 mph was observed 5 miles west of Miller in Hand County.

1792: The first recorded tornado in Canadian history struck the Niagara Peninsula between Foothill and Port Robinson, leveling some houses and uprooting trees between the communities.

1886 - The second destructive hurricane in nine days hit the Apalachicola-Tallahassee area. (David Ludlum)

1900: The combination of high winds and the presence of wooded fuel-filled cargo helped to spread fire on the Hoboken Docks in New Jersey. The fire began when cotton bales caught fire and spread to nearby volatile liquids. The fire killed at least 300 people and was seen in New York City.

1912: An estimated F4 tornado ripped through Regina, Saskatchewan, Canada on this day. The storm became the deadliest tornado in Canada's history as it killed 28 people along a rare, 18.5-mile track from south to north.

1942 - The temperature at Portland, OR, hit 102 degrees, an all-time record for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1972 - The entire state of Pennsylvania was declared a disaster area as a result of the catastrophic flooding caused by Hurricane Agnes, which claimed 48 lives, and caused 2.1 billion dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Hot weather prevailed in the Pacific Northwest, with readings above 100 degrees reported as far north as southern British Columbia. Yakima, WA, reported a record high of 100 degrees, while temperatures near the Washington coast hovered near 60 degrees all day. Thunderstorms prevailed from southwest Texas to New England. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph at Gettysburg, PA, killed one person. High winds and large hail caused more than five million dollars damage to property and crops in Lancaster County, PA. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in eastern Kansas drenched Worden with 12.21 inches of rain, and a wall of water two to four feet deep swept through Lone Star, KS, flooding every home in the town. Up to ten inches of rain was reported southeast of Callaway, NE. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 75 mph at Winfield, KS. Seventeen cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Duluth, MN, with a reading of 36 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Winnfield, LA, reported 22.52 inches of rain in three days, and more than thirty inches for the month, a record for June. Shreveport LA received a record 17.11 inches in June, with a total for the first six months of the year of 45.55 inches. Thunderstorms also helped produce record rainfall totals for the month of June of 13.12 inches at Birmingham AL, 14.66 inches at Oklahoma City, OK, 17.41 inches at Tallahassee FL, 9.97 inches at Lynchburg, VA, and more than 10.25 inches at Pittsburgh, PA. Pittsburgh had also experienced a record wet month of May. (The National Weather Summary)

1999: Mount Baker, Washington closed out a record snowfall season both for the United States and the verifiable world record as the seasonal total from July 1, 1998, to June 30, 1999, finished with 1,140 inches.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

IT'S ABOUT THE RIGHT CHOICE

Mountain climbing was a driving force in the life of Tim Hansel. On one of his expeditions he fell seventy feet and landed on his back and neck. The damage was severe and extensive. He fractured most of the vertebrae from his neck down his spine, crushed most of his discs, tore ligaments, and broke many ribs. It was a miracle that he survived.

Following his accident, after multiple surgeries and many consultations, he was given less than an 8 percent chance that he would ever walk again. But he refused to give up. He persevered, forced himself to walk, ride a bicycle and even play tennis. His experience with God led him to found Summit Express, a unique ministry to provide encouragement to others.

Throughout the remaining years of his life, he was never free from pain. Once, in desperation, he prayed "Lord, I feel almost dismembered this morning from outrageous pain. Here I am, with my desire to be agile and free, barely able to get out of my chair. Teach me to live in new ways, Oh Lord. Teach me and show me Your ways in the midst of this."

What gave him such trust in God? "The joy of the Lord is your strength."

Prayer: Lord, give us Your strength and power to overcome the trials and tragedies of life. May we trust in You, with faith, hope, and confidence to meet our every need. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Do not grieve, for the joy of the LORD is your strength. Nehemiah 8:10



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

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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.27.23

8 34 35 41 52 12

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$368,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 11 Mins 56
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.28.23

9 28 33 43 47 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$4,780,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 26
DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.29.23

5 24 28 38 46 8

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 41 Mins 56
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.28.23

2 11 17 29 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$124,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 41
DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.28.23

27 33 48 64 69 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 10
DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.28.23

19 25 34 57 68 4

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$493,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 10
DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

600 arrested and 200 police officers hurt on France's 3rd night of protests over teen's killing

By SYLVIE CORBET, JOHN LEICESTER and ALEX TURNBULL Associated Press

NANTERRE, France (AP) — Protesters erected barricades, lit fires and shot fireworks at police who responded with tear gas and water cannons in French streets overnight as tensions grew over the deadly police shooting of a 17-year-old that has shocked the nation. More than 600 people were arrested and at least 200 police officers injured as the government struggled to restore order on a third night of unrest.

Armored police vehicles rammed through the charred remains of cars that had been flipped and set ablaze in the northwestern Paris suburb of Nanterre, where a police officer shot the teen identified only by his first name, Nahel. A relative of the teen said his family is of Algerian descent.

The unrest extended as far as Belgium's capital Brussels, where about a dozen people were detained during scuffles related to the shooting in France and several fires were brought under control.

In several Paris neighborhoods, groups of people hurled firecrackers at security forces. The police station in the city's 12th district was attacked, while some shops were looted along Rivoli street, near the Louvre museum, and at the Forum des Halles, the largest shopping mall in central Paris.

In the Mediterranean port city of Marseille, police sought to disperse violent groups in the city center, regional authorities said.

Similar incidents broke out in dozens of towns and cities across France.

Some 40,000 police officers were deployed to quell the protests. Police detained 667 people, the interior minister said; 307 of those were in the Paris region alone, according to the Paris police headquarters.

Around 200 police officers were injured, according to a national police spokesperson. No information was available about injuries among the rest of the population.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin on Friday denounced what he called a night of "rare violence." His office described the arrests as a sharp increase on previous operations as part of an overall government efforts to be "extremely firm" with rioters.

The French government has stopped short of declaring a state of emergency — a measure taken to quell weeks of rioting around France that followed the accidental death of two boys fleeing police in 2005. Yet Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne suggested Friday the option is being considered.

President Emmanuel Macron left early from an EU summit in Brussels, where France plays a major role in European policymaking, to return to Paris and hold an emergency security meeting Friday.

The German government on Friday said it's monitoring the unrest in France "with some concern" but that it was up to French authorities and the public there to tackle the issue.

The police officer accused of pulling the trigger Tuesday was handed a preliminary charge of voluntary homicide after prosecutor Pascal Prache said his initial investigation led him to conclude "the conditions for the legal use of the weapon were not met." Preliminary charges mean investigating magistrates strongly suspect wrongdoing but need to investigate more before sending a case to trial.

The shooting, captured on video, shocked France and stirred up long-simmering tensions between police and young people in housing projects and other disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The detained police officer's lawyer, speaking on French TV channel BFMTV, said the officer was sorry and "devastated." The officer did what he thought was necessary in the moment, attorney Laurent-Franck Lienard told the news outlet.

"He doesn't get up in the morning to kill people," Lienard said of the officer, whose name has not been released as per French practice in criminal cases. "He really didn't want to kill."

Prache, the Nanterre prosecutor, said officers tried to stop Nahel because he looked so young and was driving a Mercedes with Polish license plates in a bus lane. He allegedly ran a red light to avoid being stopped then got stuck in traffic.

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The officer who fired the shot said he feared he and his colleague or someone else could be hit by the car as Nahel attempted to flee, according to Prache.

Nahel's mother, identified as Mounia M., told France 5 television that she's angry at the officer who killed her only child, but not at the police in general. "He saw a little, Arab-looking kid, he wanted to take his life," she said, adding that justice should be "very firm."

"A police officer cannot take his gun and fire at our children, take our children's lives," she said.

Nahel's grand-mother, who was not identified by name, told Algerian television Ennahar TV her family has roots in Algeria.

Algeria's foreign affairs ministry said in a statement Thursday that grief is widely shared in the North African country.

Anti-racism activists renewed complaints about police behavior.

"We have to go beyond saying that things need to calm down," said Dominique Sopo, head of the campaign group SOS Racisme. "The issue here is how do we make it so that we have a police force that when they see Blacks and Arabs, don't tend to shout at them, use racist terms against them and in some cases, shoot them in the head."

Race was a taboo topic for decades in France, which is officially committed to a doctrine of colorblind universalism. But some increasingly vocal groups argue that this consensus conceals widespread discrimination and racism.

Deadly use of firearms is less common in France than in the United States, although 13 people who didn't comply with traffic stops were fatally shot by French police last year. This year, another three people, including Nahel, have died under similar circumstances. The deaths have prompted demands for more accountability in France, which also saw protests against racial injustice after George Floyd's killing by police in Minnesota.

The protests in France's suburbs echoed 2005, when the deaths of 15-year-old Bouna Traoré and 17-year-old Zyed Benna led to three weeks of riots, exposing anger and resentment in neglected housing projects. The boys were electrocuted after hiding from police in a power substation in Clichy-sous-Bois.

In Geneva, the U.N. human rights office said it was concerned by the teen's killing and the subsequent violence and urged that allegations of disproportionate use of force by authorities in quelling the unrest be swiftly investigated.

"This is a moment for the country to seriously address the deep issues of racism and racial discrimination in law enforcement," spokesperson Ravina Shamdasani told reporters.

Shamdasani said the U.N. Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination expressed concern in December about "the frequent use of identity checks, discriminatory stops, the application of criminal fixed fines imposed by the police or law enforcement agencies, that they said disproportionately targets members of certain minority groups."

Corbet and Leicester reported from Paris. Jeffrey Schaeffer and Aurelien Morissard in Nanterre; Raf Casert in Brussels, Claire Rush in Portland, Oregon, Frank Jordans in Berlin and Angela Charlton in Paris contributed to this report.

Supreme Court's affirmative action ruling leaves colleges looking for new ways to promote diversity

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court has sent shockwaves through higher education with a landmark decision that struck down affirmative action and left colleges across the nation searching for new ways to promote student diversity.

Leaders of scores of universities said Thursday that they were disappointed by what they see as a blow to diversity. Yet many also voiced optimism that they would find new ways to admit more Black and Hispanic students, despite evidence that eliminating the practice often leads to steep enrollment decreases

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among them.

President Joe Biden said he disagreed with the decision and asked the Education Department to explore policies that could help colleges build diverse student bodies. He also pushed against policies like legacy preferences — admissions boosts given to the children of alumni — that tend to help white, wealthy students.

"We should never allow the country to walk away from the dream upon which it was founded," Biden told reporters. "We need a new path forward, a path consistent with the law that protects diversity and expands opportunity."

Yet evidence from states that previously outlawed affirmative action show it will be a daunting challenge.

As an alternative to affirmative action, colleges from California to Florida have tried a range of strategies to achieve the diversity they say is essential to their campuses. Many have given greater preference to low-income families. Others started admitting top students from every community in their state.

But years of experimentation — often prompted by state-level bans on considering race in admissions — left no clear solution. In states requiring race-neutral policies, many colleges saw enrollment drops among Black and Hispanic students, especially at selective colleges that historically have been mostly white.

At Amherst College, officials had estimated going entirely race-neutral would reduce Black, Hispanic and Indigenous populations by half.

"We fully expect it would be a significant decrease in our population," said Matthew McGann, Amherst's director of admission, earlier this year.

Facing a conservative Supreme Court that appeared skeptical from the start, colleges have been preparing for a rollback. Some were considering adding more essays to get a better picture of an applicant's background, a strategy invited in Thursday's Supreme Court ruling.

"Nothing prohibits universities from considering an applicant's discussion of how race affected the applicant's life, so long as that discussion is concretely tied to a quality of character or unique ability that the particular applicant can contribute to the university," Chief Justice John Roberts wrote for the court's conservative majority.

Other colleges were planning to boost recruiting in racially diverse areas, or admit more transfer students from community colleges.

The court took up affirmative action in response to challenges at Harvard University and the University of North Carolina. Lower courts upheld admission systems at both schools, rejecting claims that the schools discriminated against white and Asian American applicants. But at Supreme Court arguments in late October, all six conservative justices expressed doubts about the practice, which had been upheld under Supreme Court decisions reaching back to 1978, and as recently as 2016.

Nine states already have banned affirmative action, starting with California in 1996 and, most recently, Idaho in 2020.

After Michigan voters rejected it in 2006, the University of Michigan shifted attention to low-income students.

It sent graduates to work as counselors in low-income high schools. It started offering college prep in Detroit and Grand Rapids. It offered full scholarships for low-income Michigan residents. More recently, it started accepting fewer early admission applications, which are more likely to come from white students.

Despite those efforts, the share of Black and Hispanic undergraduates hasn't fully rebounded from a falloff after 2006. And while Hispanic enrollments have been increasing, Black enrollments continued to slide, going from 8% of undergraduates in 2006 to 4% now.

The campus is drawing more low-income students, but that hasn't translated to racial diversity, said Erica Sanders, director of undergraduate admissions at Michigan.

"Socioeconomic status is not a proxy for race," Sanders said.

At the same time, some of Michigan's less selective colleges have fared better. At nearby Eastern Michigan University, the number of students of color increased, reflecting demographic shifts in the state. It illustrates what experts say is a chilling effect seen most acutely at selective colleges — students of color see fewer of their peers at places like Ann Arbor, prompting them to choose campuses that appear more

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welcoming.

Growing up in Ann Arbor, there was an expectation that Odia Kaba would attend the University of Michigan. When her application was deferred, she started at Eastern Michigan with plans to transfer to Ann Arbor her sophomore year.

By then, Kaba was getting daily texts from her sister, who attended U-M, describing the microaggressions she faced as a Black student on campus. Rooms went silent when she walked in. She was ignored in group projects. She felt alone and suffocated.

"Why would I go to U of M?" Kaba, 22, remembers thinking. "I'm just going to be stuck with people that don't look like me, can't relate to me, and with no way to escape it."

Kaba stayed at Eastern Michigan and graduated with a degree in quantitative economics this year. Even though it's a mostly white campus, Kaba said she found pockets of diversity that helped make her comfortable.

"I'm in economics, which is a white male-dominated space. But I can walk out of the classroom and be surrounded by my people, and I just feel safe," she said.

The University of California also saw enrollment slides after a statewide ban in 1996. Within two years, Black and Hispanic enrollments fell by half at the system's two most selective campuses, Berkeley and UCLA. The system would go on to spend more than \$500 million on programs aimed at low-income and first-generation college students.

It also started a program that promises admission to the top 9% of students in each high school across the state, an attempt to reach strong students from all backgrounds. A similar promise in Texas has been credited for expanding racial diversity, and opponents of affirmative action cite it as a successful model.

In California, the promise drew students from a wider geographic area but did little to expand racial diversity, the system said in a brief to the Supreme Court. It had almost no impact at Berkeley and UCLA, where students compete against tens of thousands of other applicants.

Today at UCLA and Berkeley, Hispanic students make up 20% of undergraduates, higher than in 1996 but lower than their 53% share among California's high school graduates. Black students, meanwhile, have a smaller presence than they did in 1996, accounting for 2% of undergraduates at Berkeley.

Opponents of affirmative action say some states have fared well without it. After Oklahoma outlawed the practice in 2012, the state's flagship university saw "no long-term severe decline" in minority enrollments, the state's attorney general told the Supreme Court.

It pointed to a recent freshman class at the University of Oklahoma that had more Hispanic, Asian and Native American students than in 2012. The share of Black students fell, but it wasn't far from flagship universities in other states that allow affirmative action, the state said.

Still, many colleges expect racial diversity could take a hit. With affirmative action struck down, colleges fear they will unknowingly admit fewer students of color. In the long run, it can be self-perpetuating — if numbers fall, the campus can appear less attractive to future students of color.

That's a problem, colleges say, because racial diversity benefits the entire campus, exposing students to other worldviews and preparing them for a diverse workforce.

Beyond race, the decision has the impact to reshape other admissions policies. To draw more underserved populations, experts say colleges may need to do away with policies that advantage white students, from legacy preferences and early admission to standardized test scores.

The Associated Press education team receives support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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Trump and DeSantis are among the 2024 GOP hopefuls set to appear at the Moms for Liberty gathering

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, the main rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, are scheduled to speak Friday at the annual gathering of Moms for Liberty, a two-year-old group that has fiercely opposed instruction related to race and gender identity in the nation's classroom.

The group, which has quickly become a force in conservative politics, advocates "parental rights" in education, but an anti-hate watchdog has labeled it "extremist" for allegedly harassing community members, advancing anti-LGBTQ+ misinformation and fighting to scrub diverse and inclusive material from lesson plans.

Former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and DeSantis' wife, Casey DeSantis, also are slated to address the group Friday at the downtown Philadelphia hotel hosting the conference. Former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy are set to give remarks on Saturday.

Their attendance underscores the influence of a group that didn't exist two years ago. Since then, it has made connections with powerful GOP organizations, politicians and donors to become a major player in 2024.

The group has transformed from three Florida moms opposing COVID mandates in 2021 to claiming 285 chapters across 45 states. Along the way, it has found a close ally in DeSantis, who was presented with a "liberty sword" at the group's first annual meeting last year and has signed multiple bills that Moms for Liberty supported.

Beyond remarks from the candidates and other speakers, the summit will feature strategy sessions on such topics as "protecting kids from gender ideology" and "comprehensive sex education: sex ed or sexualization."

Parent activists and LGBTQ+ advocacy organizations have said they plan to protest outside the conference, citing the Southern Poverty Law Center's designation of the group as an "anti-government extremist" organization.

Others mentioned recent incidents, including an Indiana Moms for Liberty chapter publishing an Adolf Hitler quote in its newsletter before apologizing and removing it, and a Tennessee chapter complaining about lessons on Black civil rights figures Martin Luther King Jr. and Ruby Bridges.

Several historical associations, state senators, activists and employees at Philadelphia's Museum of the American Revolution pleaded unsuccessfully with the museum to cancel a welcome event for the conference planned for Thursday night.

"The very history that we're presenting within the walls of the museum is a more diverse and therefore more accurate telling of history," said Trish Norman, an assistant curator at the museum who protested the event. "And Moms for Liberty is notorious for erasing LGBTQ voices and Black voices from history."

The museum told the AP that "because fostering understanding within a democratic society is so central to our mission, rejecting visitors on the basis of ideology would in fact be antithetical to our purpose."

Several groups were set to rally against the meeting in downtown Philadelphia on Friday. Among them was People for the American Way's "Grandparents for Truth" campaign, which the organization says mobilizes grandparents and other supporters "who are fighting for the next generation's freedom to learn."

One such grandparent, Maureen Carreño, said she wasn't taught a diverse history as a child and wants something different for her five grandkids.

"I would hope that we teach the totality of history. And yes, it might make you feel a little bad or sad or something, but that's part of history," she said.

Moms for Liberty co-founder Tiffany Justice said the protesters "obviously don't know very much about our organization," and if they wanted to, "they could have come to the summit instead of standing on the street."

Though Moms for Liberty says it is nonpartisan, it has largely drawn conservative support. The group

also has fought to elect conservative candidates to school boards around the country.

While the group's status as a 501(c)4 nonprofit means it doesn't have to disclose its funders, its public donors include conservative powerhouses such as the Heritage Foundation and the Leadership Institute, a national political training organization.

Patriot Mobile, a far-right Christian cellphone company paying to sponsor Trump's remarks at the conference, has a PAC that has spent hundreds of thousands of dollars in an effort to take charge of Texas school boards.

Mom for Liberty's Florida-based PAC also has received a \$50,000 donation from Julie Fancelli, a Republican donor whose family owns Publix grocery stores and who helped fund Trump's Jan. 6 "Stop the Steal" rally, according to House Jan. 6 committee findings. Fancelli didn't respond to a request for comment.

Anti-vaccine activist Robert F. Kennedy Jr., who is running in the Democratic presidential primary, had been scheduled to speak at the group's summit, but his "campaign told us his schedule changed," Justice said.

Kennedy's press team said he dropped out "for family reasons." Hours later, Kennedy said during a town hall with NewsNation that he "made a mistake by accepting that invitation" and that once he learned of Moms for Liberty's positions on LGBTQ+ issues, he "declined to go."

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.

Families of tens of thousands missing in Syria draw some hope from new UN push to find loved ones

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and GHAIETH AL-SAYED Associated Press

IDLIB, Syria (AP) — In her small apartment in opposition-held Idlib in northwest Syria, Umm Mohammed is depressed and lethargic. But when her phone rings or someone knocks on the door she becomes suddenly alert. Maybe, finally, her husband has come back.

In 2013, Syrian soldiers broke into the couple's home in Damascus as they were having breakfast, she said. She and her husband had previously taken part in anti-government protests.

"They beat him up in front of my young daughter" and then took him away, said Umm Mohammed, or "mother of Mohammed," the name of her oldest son. She did not want to give her own full name for fear the authorities would harm her husband if he is still alive.

The only news she has received about him since that day came in 2015, when someone claimed to have seen him in the Syrian military intelligence's 248 Branch prison — which former detainees and human rights groups have called a torture center.

"When someone is martyred, they're buried and you know they're dead," she said, sitting on floor cushions. "In this case, you don't know and you'll always be wondering."

Her husband is among more than 130,000 people believed to have gone missing in Syria since the 2011 uprising against President Bashar Assad that quickly turned into a civil war. Their families, trapped in painful uncertainty for years, might now have reason for hope.

The U.N. General Assembly voted Thursday to form an independent international institution to search for the missing in Syria in both government and opposition-held areas.

The resolution was adopted by the 193-member world body on a vote of 83-11 with 62 abstentions. The countries voting for the resolution included the United States and other Western nations. Syria and key allies Russia, Iran, and China opposed the move. Arab countries that in recent months rekindled ties with Damascus abstained, except for Assad skeptics Qatar and Kuwait, which endorsed the move.

Some of the missing are believed to be languishing in government prisons. Others were taken by non-state armed groups. Others are buried in mass graves, which have been found on both sides of the front line.

The newly created institution would collect information from families, Syrian civil society organizations, whistle blowers, U.N. agencies and through inquiries to the Syrian government and authorities in opposition-

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held areas.

The resolution gives three months for U.N. officials to set up the institution's structure and start recruiting staff.

There have been long-standing demands to investigate the fate of the missing, from the families and from human rights activists.

Hanny Megally, a member of a commission set up by the U.N. in 2011 to investigate human rights violations in Syria, said he hopes a single team focusing on the missing could encourage more whistle blowers to come forward, and could collect scattered data from rights groups.

In recent years, whistle blowers and defectors have come forth with some information, including the so-called Caesar photos, a trove of 53,000 images taken in Syrian prisons and military hospitals. The photos showed the bodies of detainees with signs of torture.

A video shot in the Damascus suburb of Tadamon in 2013 revealed the fate of dozens of Syrians who went missing. The video showed Syrian security agents leading blindfolded men into a pit, shooting them and setting the bodies on fire.

The Caesar photos allowed some families to identify missing loved ones. The leak also enabled European courts to try and convict former Syrian military officers who were seeking asylum in European countries for their involvement in forced disappearances and torture.

Setting up an international body would be a significant move in a region scarred by war, where tens of thousands of families in neighboring countries are waiting for information about their loved ones.

In Lebanon, family members of some 17,000 people kidnapped by sectarian militias during its 1975-1990 civil war are dying of old age, never knowing the fate of their loved ones. In Yemen, despite recent prisoner swaps between Saudi Arabia and Iran-backed Houthi rebels, human rights groups say hundreds are still missing.

In Iraq, over 43,000 people remain missing since a U.S.-led invasion in 2003 toppled dictator Saddam Hussein, followed by a ferocious civil war and the rise of the Islamic State extremist group. The UN set up an investigation in 2017 into human rights abuses by the militant group, including enforced disappearances, which led to the discovery of over a dozen mass graves.

Setting up an investigative body for Syria's missing "might set a precedent for addressing the suffering of different people in different parts of the world," said Wafaa Mustafa, whose father Ali disappeared in July 2013 in Damascus. Mustafa had joined her father, an outspoken Assad critic, in protests.

Mustafa, who welcomed the vote, is one of many Syrian civil society activists who have spent years campaigning for international action on the missing.

Investigating their fate should also pave the way for addressing other human rights issues in Syria, including the dire conditions for political prisoners. "A lot should be happening, a lot should be done in parallel to this institution," Mustafa said.

In the Kurdish-held city of Qamishli in northeast Syria, Hamed Hemo believes that an investigation could uncover the fate of his missing son.

Hemo has turned his living room into a shrine for his son, Ferhad, a journalist who went missing after IS militants kidnapped him and a colleague, Masoud Aqil, in 2014. Aqil, released in a prisoner swap, relocated to Germany. Ferhad never came home.

"To this day our lives have completely changed," Hemo said, taking a drag from his cigarette. "His mother once weighed 70 kilos (154 pounds), and she's dropped to 40 (88 pounds)."

Islamic State's so-called "caliphate" once stretched across large areas of Syria and Iraq, but the extremists lost their last hold on the land in 2019.

Thousands of captured IS fighters are held in prisons run by Kurdish-led forces who Hemo believes could provide information about the missing.

Umm Mohammad is less hopeful of getting information about her husband from Syrian authorities.

Assad has denied holding political prisoners, labeling the opposition as terrorists. Direct cooperation with Syria by investigators could also be difficult as it does not extradite its citizens.

"What's he going say?" she wondered. "All those people I detained were killed under my custody?"

—
Chehayeb reported from Beirut. Associated Press writer Fay Abuelgasim contributed to this report from Beirut, and Hogir Al Abdo from Qamishli, Syria.

The US flies nuclear-capable bombers in a fresh show of force against North Korea

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The United States flew nuclear-capable bombers to the Korean Peninsula on Friday in its latest show of force against North Korea, days after the North staged massive anti-U.S. rallies in its capital.

The long-range B-52 bombers took part in joint aerial drills with other U.S. and South Korean fighter jets over the peninsula, South Korea's Defense Ministry said in a statement. The bombers' flyover is the latest in a series of temporary U.S. deployments of strategic assets in South Korea in response to North Korea's push to expand its nuclear arsenal.

Two weeks ago, the U.S. deployed a nuclear-powered submarine capable of carrying about 150 Tomahawk missiles to South Korean waters for the first time in six years. The USS Michigan's arrival came a day after North Korea resumed missile tests to protest previous U.S.-South Korean drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal.

The South Korean Defense Ministry said the B-52 bombers' deployment boosted the visibility of U.S. strategic assets to the peninsula. It said the allies have been demonstrating their firm resolve to strengthen combined defense postures and will continue joint drills involving U.S. strategic bombers.

On Sunday, more than 120,000 North Koreans participated in mass rallies in Pyongyang to mark the 73rd anniversary of the start of the Korean War. During the rallies, officials and residents delivered speeches vowing "merciless revenge" against the United States over the war while accusing the U.S. of plotting an invasion on North Korea.

The Korean War ended with an armistice, not a peace treaty, leaving the peninsula in a technical state of war. The U.S. stations about 28,000 troops in South Korea as deterrence against potential aggression by North Korea.

Since its June 15 launches of two short-range ballistic missiles, North Korea hasn't performed any further public weapons tests. But the U.S. bombers' deployment could prompt it to launch weapons again in protest.

Enhancing "regular visibility of U.S. strategic assets" to the Korean Peninsula was part of agreements reached between U.S. President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol during their summit in Washington in April. Biden stated at the time that any North Korean nuclear attack on the U.S. or its allies would "result in the end of whatever regime" took such action.

Since the start of 2022, North Korea has carried out more than 100 missile tests in a bid to enlarge its arsenal of nuclear-capable missiles targeting the U.S. mainland and South Korea. The allies have responded by expanding their military exercises.

In late May, a North Korean launch of a rocket carrying its first spy satellite ended in failure, with the rocket plunging into waters soon after liftoff. North Korea has since repeatedly said it would attempt a second launch, saying it's crucial to build space-based surveillance system to cope with what it calls U.S. hostility.

They envision the world's tallest flagpole in this Maine town. Instead of uniting, it is dividing

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

COLUMBIA FALLS, Maine (AP) — Lobster boat engines rumble to life in quiet coves. Lumberjacks trudge deep into the woods. Farmers tend expanses of wild blueberries. Maine's Down East region is where the sunlight first kisses a U.S. state's soil each day, where the vast wilderness and ocean meet in one of the last places on the East Coast unspoiled by development.

Which makes it a striking backdrop to one family's bold vision for the region: a flagpole jutting upward from the woodlands toward spacious skies — the tallest one ever, reaching higher than the Empire State Building. And atop it? A massive American flag bigger than a football field, visible from miles away on a clear day.

To promoters, the \$1 billion project, funded in part by donations, would unite people of all political stripes and remind them of shared values in an era of national polarization. Here's how Morrill Worcester, founder of Worcester Wreath, tells it: "We want to bring Americans together, remind them of the centuries of sacrifice made to protect our freedom, and unite a divided America."

So far, the project — called the Flagpole of Freedom Park — has done precisely the opposite. In Columbia Falls, population 485, the place closest to the patch of land where the pole would rise, the debate has laid bare community and cultural flashpoints.

Does the quiet area want the visitors it would bring? Would the massive undertaking scar the landscape? How do you balance development and environmentalism? How do traditional industries fare alongside service-economy jobs?

And perhaps most significant of all: How does an American town demonstrate its love of country in an era when even the Stars and Stripes themselves have been politicized?

The flagpole alone is an audacious proposal. It would be 1,461 feet tall, surpassing the Empire State Building, with elevators bringing people to observation decks where they could see clear to Canada. Frets one resident: "It's like putting the Eiffel Tower in the Maine wilderness."

But that isn't all. Morrill Worcester envisions a village with living history museums telling the country's story through veterans' eyes. There would be a 4,000-seat auditorium, restaurants and monument walls with the name of every deceased veteran dating to the Revolution. That's about 24 million names. Slick presentations showed what amounted to a patriotic theme park, replete with gondolas to ferry visitors around.

In Columbia Falls, many were stunned by the scale. It would require paving over woods for parking spaces and construction of housing for hundreds, maybe thousands of workers, potentially transforming this oasis into a sprawl of souvenir shops, fast-food restaurants and malls.

From overhead, the landscape here remains a sprawling green canopy. Below are dozens of streams, ponds and lakes brimming with trout and historic runs of Atlantic salmon. Deer, moose, black bears, beaver and fisher cats wander the forest floor. Interspersed with the woods are wild blueberry barrens.

"This is the last wilderness on the East Coast," says Marie Emerson, whose husband, Dell, is a beloved native son, a longtime blueberry farmer and university research farm manager.

She says it's that rugged coast and pristine wilderness that makes this corner of the world special, and a large development could destroy woodlands and wild blueberry barrens that have been here 10,000 years, with Native Americans being the first stewards. She asks: "Do you want to kill the goose that laid the golden egg?"

Yet not all is gold. Tourists flock here in the summer to escape cities, pollution and noise, and to enjoy clean air and dark starry skies. But behind the beauty lies a region where many are struggling.

Logging, blueberry picking and lobstering don't always provide year-round employment; resourceful residents supplement incomes by digging for clams or collecting balsam tips for wreath-making. The region

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vies for the state's highest jobless and poverty rates. The county's residents are among the state's oldest, and it is dealing with rampant abuse of opioids.

There's a joke people tell around here. It goes something like this: We may send lobsters, blueberries and wreaths to the world, but our biggest export is young people looking for work.

Worcester's unique-to-America story of pride, patriotism and hubris begins at Arlington National Cemetery and the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier, where sacrifices represented by headstones left an impression when he was a boy.

He never forgot, even as he built his wreath-making company. In 1992, he began providing thousands of balsam wreaths to adorn headstones at Arlington. That continued quietly for years until photos showing the cemetery wreaths against a backdrop of snow went viral. The annual effort became so big that its nonprofit spinoff, Wreaths Across America, run by his wife, now provides more than 1 million wreaths to military cemeteries and gravesites.

It has made this corner of the world synonymous with patriotic fervor. Motorists entering Columbia Falls encounter flags and phrases of the Pledge of Allegiance spaced along U.S. 1. A welcome proclaims, "Columbia Falls, Home to Wreaths Across America."

Few question the family's motives. But as the wreath program grew, some became skeptical. To them, it looked like Worcester had hitched his cart to a sacred cow — the nation's veterans.

Worcester unveiled his even grander gesture last year. Yes, he briefed local officials first. But most residents learned of details when, in an act of classic American showmanship, he and his sons staged a formal announcement with flashy graphics showing the flagpole rising — wait for it — 1,776 feet above sea level.

"Most people were, let's say, shocked to see that it was that large," says Jeff Greene, a contractor and one of the town Select Board's three members.

There was a bigger problem. The proposed site is not technically in Columbia Falls. The 10,000-acre plot is in a neighboring township overseen by a state agency. Worcester's solution: push through the Legislature a bill to let residents vote to annex the land.

He also landed in hot water months later when the Maine Department of Environmental Protection accused Worcester Holdings of constructing Flagpole View Cabins — more than 50 of them — without necessary permits.

Town residents began taking sides. Some saw a soft-spoken man trying to provide much-needed jobs and doing something good. Others saw a businessman accustomed to getting his way, trying to ram his version of America down others' throats. Patriotism, they said, isn't measured by the height of a flagpole. And divisive political discourse seeping into the local discussion? That's not great, either, says Greene.

"What we're desperately in need of in this area in the country, or in the world as a whole, is the ability to listen to somebody you disagree with in an attempt to find something of value," he says, adding: "Even if you disagree with them."

On a recent day, Charlie Robbins found himself deep in the woods alongside Peaked Mountain Pond. The silence was broken by chirping birds, the gentle breeze and the gurgling of water flowing into a stream that feeds the Machias River, where endangered Atlantic salmon return.

In the distance stood a hill rising several hundred feet at the far end of the pond. That's where the flagpole would loom above the landscape, topped with an observation tower with blinking lights cutting through the dark stillness of night.

"It would be out of place," says Robbins, a retired Maine Department of Transportation worker who enjoys hunting and fishing, accompanied by his dogs, German pointers Max and Libby. His Eiffel Tower comparison notwithstanding, he doesn't question the motives of the flagpole. "It's just different than my vision," he says. "I hunt and fish the area. I don't like the crowds. It's kind of selfish, but that's the way I feel."

Many agree. In March, residents overwhelmingly approved a six-month moratorium on large developments to give the town time to develop the needed rules and regulations. Until they figure it out, no flagpole. No giant flag. No patriotic theme park.

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Still, it's a delicate matter to criticize the flag, which intersects with fault lines in a country where politicians have wrapped themselves in red, white and blue.

During one town meeting, a resident said she didn't like the idea of waking up each morning and looking out her window to see a giant flagpole. Her comment struck a nerve.

"That didn't sit too well with me," says Peter Doak, puffing on a pipe in the kitchen of his house, which was built in the 1700s. "Maybe one day we'll wake up to the hammer and sickle flying up there," he growls, describing the flag of the former Soviet Union.

The retired school principal comes from a seafaring family stretching back across five generations, including Naval officers. He broke ranks and joined the Army. He was a Green Beret in Vietnam. Criticizing Old Glory sounds unpatriotic to him and others who served — and to families who lost loved ones to war.

"To say that the flagpole with the United States flag on it is an eyesore, I don't particularly like it," he says. "But they don't mind looking out the window at cellphone towers or the windmills."

Morrill Worcester isn't saying much about it all these days. The Worcester family declined repeated requests for interviews. In a statement, the family said the project will move forward — while leaving the door open to changes.

The family is buoyed by support and donations — though it won't say how much money — and respects the wishes of town residents who want more time to study the proposal, Mike Worcester, one of Morrill Worcester's sons, said in a statement to The Associated Press.

"As we refine our plans," the statement said, "we remain committed to our vision, and remain more confident than ever that our evolving plan will result in a place where all Americans can celebrate our country's history of service together."

And so the project stands for now, frozen by administrative moratorium — a curious moment in the life of a town, and a glimpse into how the love of home and of country can be powerful, and can sometimes be at odds.

Doak, the army veteran, knows Morrill Worcester as a humble but determined man. And though Worcester never served in the military, no one questions his patriotism. Each week, Worcester stands alongside U.S. 1 waving flags alongside a group of residents, even in blizzards and rain.

Doak describes his friend as a visionary. He frames it like this: People thought Walt Disney World, built in a Florida swampland, was a crazy idea. They thought Mount Rushmore was outlandish. Both are now treasured.

"I'm gonna tell you right now, he's gonna build that flagpole," Doak says. "So why shouldn't it be Columbia Falls?"

David Sharp covers Maine for the AP. Follow him on Twitter at http://twitter.com/David_Sharp_AP

Heat waves like the one that's killed 14 in the southern US are becoming more frequent and enduring

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Heat waves like the one that engulfed parts of parts of the South and Midwest and killed more than a dozen people are becoming more common, and experts say the extreme weather events, which claim more lives than hurricanes and tornados, will likely increase in the future.

A heat dome that pressured the Texas power grid and killed 13 people there and another in Louisiana pushed eastward Thursday and was expected to be centered over the mid-South by the weekend. Heat index levels of up to 112 degrees (44 Celsius) were forecast in parts of Florida over the next few days.

Eleven of the heat-related deaths in Texas occurred in Webb County, which includes Laredo. The dead ranged in age from 60 to 80 years old, and many had other health conditions, according to the county medical examiner. The other two fatalities were Florida residents who died while hiking in extreme heat

Africa were made 100 times more likely by human-caused climate change.

Deaths and widespread hospitalizations were caused by searing heat wave that broiled parts of southern Asia in April with temperatures of up to 113 degrees (45 Celsius) was made at least 30 times more likely by climate change, according to a rapid study by international scientists.

Associated Press writers Adrian Sainz in Memphis, Tennessee; Michael Goldberg in Jackson, Mississippi; Jim Salter in St. Louis, Missouri; Curt Anderson in Miami, Florida; and Sara Cline in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, contributed.

How Mecca is the lynchpin for Saudi Arabia's hospitality and tourism drive

By RIAZAT BUTT and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

MECCA, Saudi Arabia (AP) — Billboards line the Umm Al Qura highway leading to the Grand Mosque in Mecca, displaying manicured public spaces, glass-fronted stores and sleek towers. It's part of a \$26 billion project to bring more Muslims to the holy city's high-end hotels, residences, retailers and restaurants.

As this year's Hajj wraps up Friday, bringing the annual pilgrimage closer to its pre-pandemic size, Mecca is being rapidly pushed to an even grander scale. An ambitious plan to reshape the economy aims to bring in more than 30 million religious tourists a year by 2030, and for tourism to contribute up to \$80 billion, or 10% of GDP, as the kingdom reduces its reliance on oil.

The government is homing in on religious tourism because the demand already exists. Saudi Arabia is home to Islam's two most sacred cities, Mecca and Medina.

Muslims around the world are required by their faith to perform the Hajj pilgrimage to Mecca at least once in their lives if they are able. Millions more come for the Umrah, a lesser pilgrimage that can be done any time during the year. Together, the Hajj and Umrah drew some 20 million pilgrims in 2019, before the pandemic.

Neighboring Dubai and Qatar can never compete with this offering, even as they host global events and major sporting competitions.

Tourism currently contributes 4.45% to Saudi Arabia's GDP. Although there are no official figures on how much revenue the Hajj generates, it is considered to be upward of \$12 billion.

"Saudi Arabia never has to worry about foreign competition, as there is only one Mecca and only one Medina," said Bahrain-based economist Omar Al-Ubaydli. "This is a great foundation for building a successful income source. Enabling people to shop, visit museums, attend conferences while performing Umrah is a great strategy for income growth."

For more than a decade, furious development has transformed the center of Mecca with fields of towers surrounding around the Grand Mosque, housing the Kaaba, Islam's holiest site. Facing the mosque's main entrance is the centerpiece, the monumental Makkah Royal Clock Tower, the fourth tallest building in the world. Makkah is an alternative spelling of the city's name.

Hotels within walking distance or a view of the Grand Mosque charge eye-watering amounts during the Hajj and Ramadan seasons. The best spots are already taken by a Pullman, a Raffles, and other luxury hotels.

So companies are targeting areas northwest and northeast of the Grand Mosque. And Umm Al Qura Road is ripe for development.

Behind the bright billboards along the highway are a jumble of cranes, craters and piles of grey rubble in the ongoing construction of the \$26 billion Masar Makkah development project. The plan is to lay down a 3.5-kilometer-long (2-mile) swath of hotels, residential buildings, parks and malls leading up to the Grand Mosque area. Local media report that the company leading the project demolished thousands of homes and paid out more than \$2.9 billion in compensation to their residents over a period of five years.

On the other side are low-rise and dingy pilgrim lodgings, budget eateries, and tiny stores crammed

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with pilgrimage essentials -- a world away from the shiny and upscale future for Mecca envisioned by Saudi Arabia. Scores of pilgrims, mostly from developing countries, sit on the sidewalks. The curb appeal improves the closer you get to the Grand Mosque.

The Associated Press reached out to several Saudi officials and construction firms with detailed questions about religious tourism and plans to develop Mecca's hospitality sector but received no response.

At a press conference this week in Mecca, Hajj Ministry spokesman Ayedh al-Ghweinim spoke about the work taking place, saying the government "is always keen to develop the Hajj and Umrah experience and improve the services provided." He said development is ongoing "to keep pace with the numbers" of pilgrims coming from abroad and "provide an exceptional experience."

Twenty-seven projects, each valued at \$25 million or more, are underway in Mecca, according to the Global Data Construction Intelligence Centre. Of these, 13 are in the hospitality, retail and residential sectors, and the rest in transport.

Other multi-billion-dollar projects of tower complexes, like Jabal Omar and Thakher Makkah, talk about "lively, all-inclusive communities" and "balanced spirituality."

The attempt to blend religious tradition and innovation requires sensitive handling by Saudi Arabia's leadership, as well as the developers and companies moving in. Mecca is revered by Muslims around the world as the place where the Prophet Muhammed was born and preached 1,400 years ago. Any perceived harm to the sanctity of the holy sites, even unintentional, could upset the faithful.

At the same time, Saudi Arabia's leadership wants to emphasize the modern, new Mecca by showing off the grandiose new construction and projects in the pipeline. At the 24-hour Starbucks near the Grand Mosque, a \$25 jute shoulder bag shows the clock tower and neighboring high-rises alongside the coffee chain's logo. Branding for Vision 2030, the economic diversification program, is everywhere.

Mecca residents have mixed feelings about the dramatic transformation of the city.

"It is not the Mecca that we know," said Fajr Abdullah Abdul-Halim, a 57-year-old who was born and raised in the city but now lives in Jeddah. Her family used to live near the Grand Mosque. Now both the homes are gone. "Before, there were neighborhoods near the Grand Mosque, but now it is mostly towers and overpasses."

Old neighborhoods like Ayyad, Sad, Jarwal and Shweika, have been remodeled to absorb the increased capacity for religious tourism.

Abdul-Halim said although locals want to live in the city, the construction work has pushed them to the outskirts. "People say it's better to move out for better schooling and work."

An Egyptian chef who has worked in Mecca for six years is happy about the new developments and the prospect of wealthier tourists because it means more business for his restaurant. But he acknowledges it comes at a cost, with low-paid laborers from Bangladesh and Myanmar being some of the hardest hit as they get priced out of more neighbourhoods.

Wide-reaching demolitions have also redefined certain parts of the city.

Misfalah, just south of the Grand Mosque, was an area the chef loved to visit as it was where his favourite African restaurant was located. It went with the demolitions, he said, speaking on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisal in a country where any perceived criticism of authorities can bring severe repercussions.

Another Egyptian, who has lived in Mecca for over a decade and spoke anonymously for the same reason, welcomes the near-constant construction and development because of its positive effect on the economy. The investment has led to new restaurants, hotels, shops and better infrastructure. He has been paid good money to work on projects across the city.

But he worries that the luxury hotels could become a distraction from the religious experience synonymous with Mecca. "Maybe when people come they will forget about the Kaaba ... and focus on the buildings and highways," he said.

Jeffery reported from Cairo.

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Ukraine aims to wear down and outsmart a Russian army distracted by infighting

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The ambush had been postponed three times before Ukrainian commanders decided one recent night that conditions were finally right. Cloaked in darkness, a battalion of Kyiv's 129th brigade pressed ahead, advancing stealthily on unsuspecting Russian soldiers.

By the time the Russians situated along the front line realized they were under attack, it was too late. Ukraine's recapture of the small village of Neskuchne in the eastern Donetsk region on June 10 encapsulates the opening strategy of a major counteroffensive launched earlier this month. Small platoons bank on the element of surprise and, when successful, make incremental gains in territory and battlefield intelligence.

"We had a few scenarios. In the end, I think we chose the best one. To come quietly, unexpectedly," said Serhii Zherybylo, the 41-year-old deputy commander of the battalion that retook Neskuchne.

Across the 1,500-kilometer (930-mile) front line, Ukrainian forces are attempting to wear down the enemy and reshape battle lines to create more favorable conditions for a decisive, eastward advance. One strategy could be to try to split Russia's forces in two so that the Crimean Peninsula, which Moscow illegally annexed in 2014, is isolated from the rest of the territory it controls.

Ukraine's troops were given a boost of morale last week by an armed rebellion in Russia that posed the most significant threat to President Vladimir Putin's power in more than two decades. Yet how the revolt by Wagner Group mercenaries under the command of Russian warlord Yevgeny Prigozhin affects the trajectory of the war remains to be seen.

The infighting is a major distraction for Russia's military and political leaders, but experts say the impact on the battlefield so far appears minimal.

For the past four days, Ukraine has stepped up operations around the eastern city of Bakhmut, which Wagner forces seized after months of intense fighting and then handed over to Russian soldiers, who continue to lose some ground on their southern flank.

Along the front line, however, the strength of the Russian military remains unchanged since the revolt.

It is not clear where Ukraine will attempt to decisively punch through, but any success will rely on newly formed, Western-equipped brigades that are not yet deployed. For now, Russia's deeply fortified positions and relative air superiority are slowing Ukraine's advance.

Military experts say it is hard to say who has the advantage: Russia is dug-in with manpower and ammunition, while Ukraine is versatile, equipped with modern weaponry and clever on the battlefield.

But with the autumn muddy season only four months away, some Ukrainian commanders say they are racing against time.

"Although Ukrainian forces are making small and steady gains, they do not yet have the operational initiative, meaning they are not dictating the tempo and terms of action," said Dylan Lee Lehrke, an analyst with the British security intelligence firm Janes.

"This has led some observers to claim the counteroffensive is not meeting expectations," Lehrke said. But it was never going to resemble Ukraine's blitzkrieg liberation of the eastern Kharkiv region last year, he said, because "Russian forces have had too long to prepare fortifications."

Russian authorities say Ukraine has suffered substantial losses since the start of the counteroffensive — 259 tanks and 790 armored vehicles, according to Putin, whose claims could not be independently verified. Grinding battles are being waged in multiple combat zones.

A catastrophic dam collapse last month in the southern Kherson region has altered the geography along the Dnieper River, giving Ukrainians more freedom of movement there. Russian military bloggers claim a small group of Ukrainian fighters are making gains in the area, although Ukrainian officials have not confirmed these reports.

Across the agricultural plains of the southeastern Zaporizhzhia region, Ukrainian troops backed by tanks, artillery and drones appear to be chipping away more decisively against Russian positions.

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Ukrainian troops would deal a severe blow to Russian forces if they managed to regain access to the Sea of Azov from this direction, effectively cutting off Moscow's land bridge to Crimea. It's too early to determine whether this is a realistic goal.

They are still a long way off.

In an underground command center on the front, a Ukrainian Special Forces commander with the call sign "Hunter" stares intently at an aerial view of the lush green battlefield.

His servicemen have just stormed an enemy position, but the return fire is constant. Russians blast rockets into the air, while his fighters hide and wait for orders.

Hunter directs the drone operator to shoot.

On the screen, a huge plume of black smoke swells in the air. A hit, he says.

The battle here will only get harder, analysts say.

Ukrainian troops are still several kilometers from Russia's main defensive lines. As they penetrate deeper into occupied territory, the fighters will have to contend with Russian defenses organized in a diagonal pattern, 10 kilometers deep in some areas, including minefields, anti-tank ditches and pyramid-shaped obstacles known as "dragon's teeth."

And with each advance, they become more vulnerable to Russian air attacks.

At least 130 square kilometers (50 square miles) of land has been regained in the south since the start of the counteroffensive, Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Malyar said this week.

It's not the pace many hoped for.

A U.S. official familiar with the Biden administration thinking said the counteroffensive is a "long slog" that is testing Ukrainian forces in ways that few other episodes of the 16-month old war have. The official, who was not authorized to comment and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said that there never was expected to be a "D-Day moment," but that the early going suggests the pace of the counteroffensive will be "tough and challenging" for the Ukrainians.

Unlike some of the earlier battles in the war, in which Russian forces showed little resistance or even fled the battlefield, Ukrainian forces are currently facing stiff resistance, the official said.

In the northeast, Russian forces have stepped up offensive operations in the direction of the Kreminna forest near Lyman with the aim of securing a buffer to prevent incursions close to Moscow's supply lines, said Lehrke. But it may well have a secondary aim — of forcing more Ukrainian deployments, he said.

The dense forested area has proven to be notoriously difficult terrain.

"The Russians have sabotage groups going into the woods and there have been cases where they enter behind the first line of Ukrainian defenses," said Pavlo Yusov, a press officer with the National Guard's Thunderstorm brigade, currently in Lyman.

Col. Volodymyr Silenko, a commander of the 30th Mechanized Brigade operating near Bakhmut, pays no mind to criticism over the pace of attacks. It's much more important to focus on how the adversary is thinking and responding, he said.

"A war is not a competition of raw force and strength of weapons and people, it's more about who's more cunning," he said.

Silenko knows the Russians watch his men, the same way he watches theirs; Moscow sees their movements, how they change, how they evolve.

"Our job is to outsmart them," he said.

Deception was a key part of Ukraine's most significant battlefield success to date, last fall's "Kherson ruse." By making it appear that the city of Kherson was the main target of that counteroffensive, Ukrainian forces were able to swiftly retake the northern Kharkiv region.

"That was a master class in deception," said Lehrke. "Whether they can do the same this time remains to be seen."

Associated Press journalists Evgeniy Maloletka contributed from Donetsk region, Mystyslav Chernov contributed from Zaporizhzhia, and Amer Mahdani contributed from Washington.

In workaholic Japan, 'job leaving agents' help people escape the awkwardness of quitting

By YURI KAGEYAMA Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — In Japan, a nation reputed for loyalty to companies and lifetime employment, people who job-hop are often viewed as quitters. And that's considered shameful.

Enter "taishoku daiko," or "job-leaving agents." Dozens of such services have sprung up in the last several years to help people who simply want out.

"Imagine a messy divorce," says Yoshihito Hasegawa, who heads Tokyo-based TRK, whose Guardian service last year advised 13,000 people on how to resign from their jobs with minimal hassles.

People often stick with jobs even when they're unhappy, feeling as if they are "kamikaze" sacrificing their lives for the greater good, he said, comparing his clients to pilots sent on suicide missions in the closing days of World War II.

"It's the way things are done, the same way younger people are taught to honor older people," he said. "Quitting would be a betrayal."

Founded in 2020, Guardian, a taishoku daiko service, has helped various people, mostly in their 20s and 30s, escape less painfully from jobs they want to quit. That includes people who worked in a Shinto shrine, a dentist's office and law firm to convenience store and restaurant staff.

Nearly half of Guardian's clients are women. Some work for a day or two and then discover promises of pay or work hours were false.

Guardian charges 29,800 yen (\$208) for its service, which includes a three-month membership in a union that will represent an employee in what can quickly turn into a delicate and awkward negotiation process in Japan.

Generally, Guardian's clients have worked for the small and medium-sized businesses that employ most Japanese. Sometimes people working for major companies seek help. In many cases, bosses have a huge say over how things are run and sometimes simply refuse to let a worker leave, especially since many places are shorthanded to begin with, given the Japan's chronic labor shortage.

Japanese law basically guarantees people the right to quit, but some employers used to an old-style hierarchy just can't accept that someone they have trained would want to walk away. Those tackling the quitting battle who were interviewed for this story used terms like "fanatics," "bullies" and "mini-Hitlers" to describe such bosses.

Conformist "workaholic" pressures in Japanese culture are painfully heavy. Workers don't want to be seen as troublemakers, are reluctant to question authority and may be afraid to speak up. They may fear harassment after they quit. Some worry about the opinions of their families or friends.

Although most of Guardian's clients prefer to be anonymous, a young man who goes by the online name of Twichan sought help after he was criticized for his sales performance and became so depressed he thought about killing himself. With Guardian's help he was able to quit in 45 minutes.

Taku Yamazaki, who went to a different taishoku daiko, said his former employer was a subsidiary of a major IT vendor and he knew his departure would be complicated and time-consuming because he was doing well there.

"I felt a certain amount of gratitude toward the place I was leaving, but I wanted to switch gears mentally and move forward as soon as possible," he said.

When people fill out taishoku daiko online forms, an automated reply comes within minutes, with a more personal reply promised within one working day.

Lawyer Akiko Ozawa, whose law firm advises job-leavers although usually it represents companies, acknowledged it may be hard to believe people can't just pick up and leave.

"But switching jobs is a major challenge in Japan that requires tremendous courage," said Ozawa, who has written a book on taishoku daiko. Given the shortage of workers in Japan, finding and training replacements is tough and bosses sometimes erupt in outrage when someone resigns.

"As long as this Japanese mindset exists, the need for my job isn't going away," said Ozawa, who charges

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at Big Bend National Park.

Scientists and medical experts say such deaths caused by extreme heat will only increase in the U.S. each summer without more action to combat climate change that has pushed up temperatures, making people especially vulnerable in areas unaccustomed to warm weather.

"Here in Boston we prepare for snowstorms. Now we need to learn how to prepare for heat," said Dr. Gaurab Basu, a primary care physician and the director of education and policy at the Center for Climate, Health, and the Global Environment at Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health.

Planting more trees to increase shade in cities and investing in green technology like heat pumps for home cooling and heating could help, Basu said.

Extreme heat already is the deadliest of all weather events in the United States, including hurricanes, tornadoes, wildfires and flooding.

"Heat waves are the deadliest because they affect such large areas and can go on for days or weeks," said Joellen Russell, a climate scientist who teaches at the University of Arizona in Tucson and is currently on a Fulbright scholarship in Wellington, New Zealand. "And they catch people by surprise."

Phoenix, the hottest large city in America, faces an excessive heat warning headed into the weekend. Dangerously hot conditions are forecast from Saturday through Tuesday, including temperatures of 107-115 degrees (41.6-46.1 Celsius) across south-central Arizona.

"Arizona already understands heat to a certain extent, but it's getting hotter for us, too," said Russell. "That means a lot of people will continue to die."

Counting heat deaths has become a science in Arizona's Maricopa County, which includes metro Phoenix. The county tallied 425 heat-associated deaths last year, a 25% increase over 2021.

Located in the Sonoran Desert, Maricopa County counts not just deaths due to exposure but also deaths in which heat is among several major contributing factors, including heart attacks and strokes.

The county's Office of the Medical Examiner updates suspected and confirmed heat-associated deaths every week through the warm season, which runs from May through October. So far this season, there have been six heat-associated deaths in Maricopa County, home to nearly 4.5 million people.

Dr. Sameed Khatana, a staff cardiologist at the Philadelphia VA Medical Center and assistant professor at the University of Pennsylvania's Perelman School of Medicine, said deaths in which heat contributed significantly to fatalities from causes like heart failure should also be considered to provide a more complete picture.

Khatana participated in research published last year that suggested that from 2008 and 2017 between 13,000 to 20,000 adult deaths were linked to extreme heat, about half due to heart disease.

Older people and those with diabetes, obesity, heart disease and other serious health conditions are most at risk, he said.

"Hurricanes, flooding and wildfires are very dramatic," said Khatana. "Heat is harder to see and especially affects people who are socially isolated or living on the margins."

The city of Phoenix's Office of Heat Response and Mitigation has opened summertime shelters for homeless people, operates cooling centers in libraries and other community spaces to help people get out of the sun and distributes bottled water, hats and sunscreen. The city also has a "Cool Callers" program with volunteers dialing vulnerable residents who ask to be checked on during hot periods.

Even the Phoenix Zoo is taking measures to cool off the monkeys, big cats and rhinos, spraying them with water, delivering frozen treats, and providing shaded areas and cooled water pools.

Extreme heat deaths are a global problem.

Mexican health authorities this week said there have been at least 112 heat-related deaths so far this year, acknowledging for the first time the deadliness of a recent heat wave that President Andrés Manuel López Obrador previously dismissed as an invention of alarmists.

The report released Wednesday also shows a significant spike in heat-related fatalities in the last two weeks. So far this year, Mexico's overall heat-related deaths are almost triple the figures seen in 2022.

A flash study released this spring said record-breaking April temperatures in Spain, Portugal and northern

65,000 yen (\$450) for her service. "If you are so unhappy that you're starting to feel ill, then you should make that choice to take control over your own life."

Another quitting service, Albatross, offers a "MoMuri," or "can't stand it anymore" service, charges a 22,000 yen (\$150) fee for full-time workers, and a bargain 12,000 yen (\$80) fee for part-time workers.

Workplace problems have existed all along, but people now realize they can get help online, said its founder, Shinji Tanimoto.

"They tell us they couldn't sleep at all before, but they can finally sleep all they want," he said of MoMuri's customers. "Users thank us all the time. Some cry tears of joy."

One person wanted to quit working at a pet salon where workers were secretly kicking the animals. Another wanted to quit job in a dental office where the staff weren't using new gloves for each patient.

Many are women working as nurses or caretakers who are asked to stay until a replacement is found, but end up still working in the jobs a year later, he said.

Toshiyuki Niino founded Exit Inc., a frontrunner in the taishoku daiko sector, in 2018, after encountering a boss who constantly yelled at him. Another threatened to kill him.

He quit both jobs, and saw an opportunity.

"I am proud I started this genre of work," he said.

Exit charges 20,000 yen (\$140). Now that employers understand what taishoku daiko is, it can be over in 15 minutes, once resignation papers are on their way.

Niino, who says he never once expressed an opinion in school, blames the Japanese educational system for turning out obedient workers who are unable to assert themselves.

He's thinking about branching out to include mental health counseling, job referrals and perhaps an overseas expansion.

Niino laughs, recounting how one of his own employees used a rival agency to resign and then went on to set up his own taishoku daiko company.

"It's best if you yourself can say you want to quit," he said.

Exit online: <https://exitinc.jp/en/>

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

Deputy acquitted of all charges for failing to act during deadly Parkland school shooting

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — A Florida sheriff's deputy was acquitted Thursday of felony child neglect and other charges for failing to act during the 2018 Parkland school massacre, concluding the first trial in U.S. history of a law enforcement officer for conduct during an on-campus shooting.

Former Broward County Deputy Scot Peterson wept as the verdicts were read, while the fathers of two students murdered at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School on Feb. 14, 2018, stared straight ahead and quickly left the courtroom. The jury had deliberated for 19 hours over four days.

After court adjourned, Peterson, his family and friends rushed into a group hug as they whooped, hollered and cried. Kevin Bolling, Peterson's private investigator, chased after lead prosecutor Chris Killoran and said something. Killoran turned and snapped at him, "Way to be a good winner" and slapped him on the shoulder. Members of the prosecution team then nudged Killoran out of the courtroom.

"I got my life back. We've got our life back," Peterson said as he exited the courtroom, his arm around his wife, Lydia Rodriguez, and his lawyer, Mark Eglarsh. He has insisted that he would have confronted the shooter Nikolas Cruz, but because of echoes, he didn't know where the shots were coming from. "It's been an emotional roller coaster for so long."

He also said people should never forget the victims.

"Only one person was to blame and it was that monster (Cruz)," Peterson said. "It wasn't any of the law enforcement who was on that scene. ... Everybody did the best they could with the information we had."

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Peterson said he hopes to one day sit down with the Parkland parents and spouses — some of whom have publicly called him “the coward of Broward.” He wants to tell them “the truth,” that he did everything he could.

“I would love to talk to them. I have no problem,” he said. “I’m there.”

But two fathers who watched the verdict, Tony Montalto and Tom Hoyer, had no interest in meeting with Peterson. Montalto’s 14-year-old daughter Gina was killed on the first floor; Hoyer’s 15-year-old son Luke died next to her. Peterson was not charged in connection with their deaths because they happened before he reached the building. The men believe Peterson knew Cruz’s location, but put his safety ahead of the students’ and staff’s.

“No. No. Bring me my daughter back,” Montalto said about meeting with Peterson. “We’ll all trade anything to get our kids back. The spouses, they who lost someone, they want them back, too. And if that’s not going to happen, why do we need to talk to this failure? He didn’t do the right thing. He ran away.”

Hoyer said he didn’t think Peterson would tell them the truth.

The campus deputy at Stoneman Douglas, Peterson had been charged with failing to confront shooter Cruz during his six-minute attack inside the three-story 1200 classroom building that left 17 dead.

His charges were in connection to the six killed and four wounded on the third floor, who were shot more than a minute after he approached the building. Prosecutors did not charge Peterson in connection with the 11 killed and 13 wounded on the first floor before he arrived. No one was shot on the second floor.

Prosecutors were using a novel legal theory against Peterson, that as the school’s assigned deputy he was legally a “caregiver” to its students — a requirement for him to be guilty of child neglect. Florida law defines a caregiver as “a parent, adult household member or other person responsible for a child’s welfare.” If jurors found Peterson was a caregiver, they also would have had to agree he failed to make a “reasonable effort” to protect the children or failed to provide necessary care.

He could have received nearly 100 years in prison, although a sentence even approaching that length would have been highly unlikely given the circumstances and his clean record. He also could have lost his \$104,000 annual pension.

Prosecutors, during their two-week presentation, called to the witness stand students, teachers and law enforcement officers who testified about the horror they experienced and how they knew Cruz was in the 1200 building. Prosecutors also called a training supervisor who testified Peterson did not follow protocols for confronting an active shooter.

During his two-day presentation, Peterson’s attorney, Eigarsh, called several deputies who arrived during the shooting and students and teachers who testified they did not think the shots were coming from the 1200 building. Peterson did not testify.

Eigarsh also emphasized the failure of the sheriff’s radio system during the attack, which limited what Peterson heard from arriving deputies.

He called the verdict “a victory for every law enforcement officer in this country” and said the prosecution was “political.”

“How dare prosecutors try to second-guess the actions of honorable, decent police officers,” Eigarsh said.

But Broward State Attorney Harold F. Pryor, an elected Democrat, stood by his office’s decision to prosecute Peterson.

“As parents, we have an expectation that armed school resource officers — who are under contract to be caregivers to our children — will do their jobs when we entrust our children to them and the schools they guard,” Pryor said in a statement. “They have a special role and responsibilities that exceed the role and responsibilities of a police officer. To those who have tried to make this political, I say: It is not political to expect someone to do their job.”

Montalto said if the jurors believe Peterson acted appropriately, they should get him hired at their children’s schools.

Security videos show that 36 seconds after Cruz’s attack began, Peterson exited his office about 100 yards (92 meters) from the 1200 building and jumped into a cart with two unarmed civilian security guards.

They arrived at the building a minute later.

Peterson got out of the cart near the east doorway to the first-floor hallway. Cruz was at the hallway's opposite end, firing his AR-15-style semiautomatic rifle.

Peterson, who was not wearing a bullet-resistant vest, didn't open the door. Instead, he took cover 75 feet (23 meters) away in the alcove of a neighboring building, his gun still drawn. He stayed there for 40 minutes, long after the shooting ended and other police officers had stormed the building.

Peterson spent nearly three decades working at schools, including nine years at Stoneman Douglas. He retired shortly after the shooting and was then fired retroactively.

Cruz's jury could not unanimously agree he deserved the death penalty. The 24-year-old former Stoneman Douglas student was then sentenced to life in prison.

Elián González two decades on: From focus of international tug-of-war to member of Cuba's congress

By ANDREA RODRÍGUEZ Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — Elián González has the same big, expressive eyes he did 23 years ago when an international custody battle transformed him into the face of the long-strained relations between Cuba and the United States.

Now 29, González is stepping into Cuban politics. He recently entered his country's congress with hopes of helping his people at a time of record emigration and heightened tension between the two seaside neighbors.

"From Cuba, we can do a lot so that we have a more solid country, and I owe it to Cubans," he said during an exclusive interview with The Associated Press. "That is what I'm going to try to do from my position, from this place in congress — to contribute to making Cuba a better country."

González has given only a handful of interviews since he was unwittingly thrust into the geopolitical spotlight as a boy. In 1999, at just 5 years old, he and his mother were aboard a boat of Cuban migrants headed toward Florida when the boat capsized in the Florida Straits. His mother and 10 others died while González, tied to an inner tube, drifted in open water until his rescue.

Granted asylum under U.S. refugee rules at the time, González went to live with his great uncle, a member of the Cuban exile community in Miami that is often a center of fierce criticism of Cuba's government. In Cuba, his father begged then-President Fidel Castro for help. Castro led protests with hundreds of thousands of people demanding little Elián's return. Anti-Castro groups in Miami pressed for him to stay in the U.S.

The tug-of-war quickly gained the world's attention and became emblematic for the testy feelings between the two neighboring nations. Then-U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno ruled the boy should be returned to his father, but González's relatives refused. AP photojournalist Alan Diaz captured the moment when armed immigration agents seized González in a Miami home, and the photo later won a Pulitzer Prize.

"Not having my mom has been difficult, it has been a burden, but it has not been an obstacle when I have had a father who has stood up for me and been by my side," González told AP.

He is a father himself now, of a 2-year-old daughter. He works for a state company that facilitates tourism to the island nation his mother left, underscoring the alternate track his life has followed since his homecoming.

What's more, he recently became a lawmaker.

In April, González was sworn in as a member of Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power, effectively Cuba's congress. He represents Cárdenas, a town in Matanzas province about 80 miles east of Havana where he lived until his mother took him to sea. He still lives in the province.

Dressed in black pants and T-shirt, with a discreet braided bracelet on his right hand and his wedding ring on his left, González was interviewed in Havana's Capitol, the renovated seat of congress.

"I think the most important thing is that I have grown up like other young people. I have grown up in

Cuba," he said.

For years, his father made it nearly impossible to get close to the child. From afar, the boy could sometimes be seen playing with other children or accompanying his father to political events. Castro would visit him on his birthday.

Over the years, González was a military cadet and later became an industrial engineer. Because Cuba's congressional positions are unpaid, he will continue to work his tourism job.

The legislative body has faced criticism for lacking opposition voices and for carrying out the agenda set by the country's leadership.

González's legislative term comes amid historic emigration from the crisis-stricken Caribbean island, as many young Cubans seek a new life in the U.S. — just as his mother did.

It also comes at a moment of heightened tensions between the two nations. There have been allegations that Cuba hosted a Chinese spy base, which Cuba adamantly denies. Meanwhile, Cuba claims Biden has yet to ease tough policies enacted by Donald Trump that target the island, while the U.S. points to resumption of some flights and sending of remittances.

Amid a deepening political and energy crisis in Cuba, González cast blame on decades of American sanctions stifling the island's economy as the root of many of Cuba's problems, echoing many in the government. He said he believes in Cuba's model of providing free access to education and health services among other things, but acknowledged there is a long way to go for that to be perfected.

Despite harsh prison sentences doled out by Cuban courts, punishments defended by the communist government, González said his people have the right to demonstrate. But he added that the causes of current crises should be analyzed before condemning the state.

He also had kind words for the hundreds of thousands of Cubans who, like his mother, chose to emigrate. "I respect all those who made the decision to leave Cuba, I respect those who do so today, just as I do my mom," he said. "My message will always be that (those who leave) do all they can to ensure that Cuba has a status (without sanctions) equal to any country in the world."

France mobilizes tens of thousands of police to head off unrest after police fatally shot a teenager

By SYLVIE CORBET, JOHN LEICESTER and ALEX TURNBULL Associated Press
NANTERRE, France (AP) — France mobilized tens of thousands of police officers Thursday in an effort to head off widespread urban rioting following the deadly police shooting of a 17-year-old that shocked the nation, with commuters rushing home before transport services closed early to avoid being targeted by rioters.

Protesters in some cities set fires in the streets as the night progressed. The police officer accused of pulling the trigger Tuesday was handed a preliminary charge of voluntary homicide after prosecutor Pascal Prache said his initial investigation led him to conclude "the conditions for the legal use of the weapon were not met."

The detained police officer's lawyer, speaking on French TV channel BFM-TV, said the officer was sorry and "devastated." The officer did what he thought was necessary in the moment, attorney Laurent-Franck Lienard told the news outlet.

"He doesn't get up in the morning to kill people," Lienard said of the officer, whose name has not been released. "He really didn't want to kill. But now he must defend himself, as he's the one who's detained and sleeping in prison."

Despite government appeals for calm and vows that order would be restored, smoke billowed from cars and garbage set ablaze in the Paris suburb of Nanterre following a peaceful afternoon march in honor of the teen identified only by his first name, Nahel.

After a morning crisis meeting following violence that injured dozens of police and damaged nearly 100 public buildings, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said the number of officers in the streets would more than quadruple, from 9,000 to 40,000. In the Paris region alone, the number of officers deployed was

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more than doubled to 5,000.

"The professionals of disorder must go home," Darmanin said. While there's no need yet to declare a state of emergency — a measure taken to quell weeks of rioting in 2005 — he added: "The state's response will be extremely firm."

There were 100 arrests nationwide Thursday night, according to a national police spokesperson, as officials reported scattered clashes in cities across the country despite the stepped-up deployments.

In the usually tranquil Pyrenees town of Pau in southwestern France, a Molotov cocktail was thrown at a new police office, national police said. Vehicles were set on fire in Toulouse and a tramway train was torched in a suburb of Lyon, police said. Paris police said its officers made 40 arrests Thursday, some on the margins of the largely peaceful memorial march for the teen and others elsewhere.

The interior minister had reported 180 arrests nationwide before Thursday.

Bus and tram services in the Paris area shut down before sunset as a precaution to safeguard transportation workers and passengers.

The town of Clamart, home to 54,000 people in the French capital's southwest suburbs, said it was taking the extraordinary step of imposing an overnight curfew from Thursday through Monday, citing "the risk of new public order disturbances." The mayor of Neuilly-sur-Marne announced a similar curfew in that town in the eastern suburbs.

Marseille, the port city in the south of France, saw the beginnings of unrest Thursday evening, with several hundred young people roaming the city center and setting fire to trash containers, including in front of the region's main administrative building, police said. Around 1 a.m. local time, regional officials tweeted that police were trying to disperse violent groups in the city center. Police said they had made 28 arrests, though they gave no time frame.

The unrest extended even to Brussels, where about a dozen people were detained during scuffles related to the shooting in France. Police spokeswoman Ilse Van de Keere said that several fires were brought under control and that at least one car was burned.

The shooting captured on video shocked the country and stirred up long-simmering tensions between police and young people in housing projects and other disadvantaged neighborhoods.

The teenager's family and their lawyers haven't said the police shooting was race-related and they didn't release his surname or details about him.

Still, his death inflamed raw nerves in neighborhoods that have welcomed generations of immigrants from France's former colonies and elsewhere. Their France-born children frequently complain they are subjected to police ID checks and harassment far more frequently than white people or those in more affluent neighborhoods.

Anti-racism activists renewed their complaints about police behavior.

"We have to go beyond saying that things need to calm down," said Dominique Sopo, head of the campaign group SOS Racisme. "The issue here is how do we make it so that we have a police force that when they see Blacks and Arabs, don't tend to shout at them, use racist terms against them and in some cases, shoot them in the head."

Prache, the Nanterre prosecutor, said officers tried to stop Nahel because he looked so young and was driving a Mercedes with Polish license plates in a bus lane. He allegedly ran a red light to avoid being stopped then got stuck in traffic. Both officers involved said they drew their guns to prevent him from fleeing.

The officer who fired a single shot said he feared he and his colleague or someone else could be hit by the car, according to Prache. The officers said they felt "threatened" as the car drove off.

He said two magistrates are leading the investigation, as is common in France. Preliminary charges mean investigating judges strongly suspect wrongdoing but need to investigate more before sending the case to trial.

On Wednesday night, violence raged in the streets for a second night, with protesters shooting fireworks and hurling stones at police in Nanterre, who fired repeated volleys of tear gas.

As demonstrations spread to other towns, police and firefighters struggled to contain protesters and

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extinguish blazes. Schools, police stations, town halls and other public buildings were damaged from Toulouse in the south to Lille in the north, with most of the damage in the Paris suburbs, according to a national police spokesperson.

Fire damaged the town hall in the Paris suburb of L'Île-Saint-Denis, not far from the country's national stadium and the headquarters of the Paris 2024 Olympics.

Darmanin said 170 officers had been injured in the unrest but none of the injuries was life-threatening. The number of civilians injured was not immediately released.

The scenes in France's suburbs echoed 2005, when the deaths of 15-year-old Bouna Traoré and 17-year-old Zyed Benna led to three weeks of nationwide riots, exposing anger and resentment in neglected, crime-ridden suburban housing projects. The two boys were electrocuted after hiding from police in a power substation in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois.

The violence this time spread faster than in 2005, although it hasn't matched the nationwide scale and sustained intensity of those riots. There were contradicting accounts about what happened to the two teens in 2005, while the video of Nahel's shooting immediately galvanized anger. Social media that didn't exist two decades ago has also amplified unrest this time.

French President Emmanuel Macron held an emergency security meeting Thursday about the violence. "These acts are totally unjustifiable," Macron said at the beginning of the meeting, which aimed at securing hot spots and planning for the coming days "so full peace can return."

Macron also said it was time for "remembrance and respect" as Nahel's mother called for a silent march Thursday that drew a large crowd to Nelson Mandela Square, where he was killed.

Some marchers had "Justice for Nahel" printed on the front of their T-shirts. "The police kill" read one marcher's placard.

"I'm afraid of what might come next," said marcher Amira Taoubas, a mother of four boys, the eldest aged 11. "I'd like it to stop and that it never happens again. It's just not possible to die like this, for no reason. I wouldn't want it to happen to my own children."

Bouquets of orange and yellow roses marked the site of the shooting.

Videos of the shooting shared online show two police officers leaning into the driver-side window of a yellow car before the vehicle pulls away as one officer fires into the window. The videos show the car later crashed into a post nearby.

Deadly use of firearms is less common in France than in the United States, though several people have died or sustained injuries at the hands of French police in recent years, prompting demands for more accountability. France also saw protests against racial profiling and other injustice in the wake of George Floyd's killing by police in Minnesota.

A police spokesperson said 13 people who didn't comply with traffic stops were fatally shot by police last year. This year, three people, including Nahel, have died in similar circumstances.

Corbet and Leicester reported from Paris. Oleg Cetinic, Christophe Ena and Jeffrey Schaeffer in Nanterre; Angela Charlton in Paris; Brian Melley in London and Jocelyn Noveck in New York contributed to this report.

In rural India, summer's heat can be deadly. Ambulance crews see the toll up close

By RAJESH KUMAR SINGH, PIYUSH NAGPAL and SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BANPUR, India (AP) — Siren blaring, Sunil Kumar Naik's ambulance tore across a dry and rocky countryside blasted by dangerous midday heat, rushing to check on a vomiting and dizzy 30-year-old man with possible heat stroke. As soon as they reached the man's village, Naik's paramedic partner guided the stricken man into the ambulance, then checked his pulse and oxygen levels as Naik sped back to the public hospital.

With barely a moment to drink some water and splash their faces, the men were dispatched again, this time to pick up a pregnant woman who had gone into labor as the temperature soared to 43 degrees Celsius (109.4 Fahrenheit). And so went another furious 12-hour shift in India's increasingly deadly sum-

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mer, when Naik and paramedic Jitendra Kumar sometimes find themselves hurrying to as many as twice the usual number of calls.

Extreme heat is fast becoming a public health crisis in India, with more than 150 people dying during the latest brutal heat wave in June. Prolonged heat waves, sometimes classified as a slow-onset disaster, are one of the deadliest consequences of global warming that India faces. The government estimates nearly 11,000 people have died during heat waves this century, yet experts say such figures are likely a vast undercount.

Banpur, a village of about 13,000, lies in the mostly poor Bundelkhand region deep in India's interior. It's arid and stony, with little tree cover to protect people in one of the nation's hottest regions. Naik and Kumar make up one of two ambulance crews that cover the village and surrounding area, carrying patients to the government-run public health center. The state and federal governments help fund the not-for-profit ambulance service, making it a free lifeline for patients.

"I consider every patient my family member. I don't care if it is hot or if I am hungry, I go on a mission to get the patient out and transport them to the hospital," said Naik, whose only protection from the heat and dry, hot winds is a white cotton towel wrapped around his head. "It is difficult for me driving the vehicle in extreme heat, but it is nothing compared to the hardships of a patient in a medical emergency."

Health experts say the heat can kill slowly — and quickly. The quick way could be through simple heat stroke, while a slower death may result when people who already have serious health conditions suffer through extended heat, said Dileep Mavalankar, former head of the Indian Institute of Public Health, Gandhinagar.

Mavalankar was instrumental in developing India's first heat action plan, for the city of Ahmedabad in 2013, three years after more than 1,300 people died during a heat wave there. The plan set out guidelines that included issuing a heat alert when temperatures rose past 41 degrees Celsius (105.8 Fahrenheit), educating people such as outdoor laborers, farmers and others exposed to heat about the risks they face, and providing resources to local health centers and hospitals to deal with heat-related illnesses.

"When a cyclone happens, everyone is on alert, and they act immediately but there is little awareness or action to deal with extreme heat," Mavalankar said. "There needs to be a media blitzkrieg, local governments should warn people to stay indoors and make their hospitals ready to deal with heat-related cases," he said.

Aditya Valiathan Pillai of the Centre for Policy Research, a New Delhi think tank, recently studied India's readiness to respond to extremely hot weather. He said such plans — which include cooling centers and health care assistance — are essential to saving lives.

Climate experts say that heat waves are here to stay, and India needs to prepare better to deal with their consequences. 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.

Yet poorer regions like Uttar Pradesh, where Banpur lies, may have a plan on paper but not the ability to carry it out.

"The afflicted population is vulnerable because it lacks resources and has insufficient infrastructure to handle severe temperatures," said Anjal Prakash, a research director at the Indian School of Business, Hyderabad and author of several U.N. climate reports. "The construction of efficient early warning systems, public awareness campaigns about heat-related hazards, the provision of adequate healthcare facilities, and targeted assistance to vulnerable populations are only a few steps that need to be taken immediately."

In Banpur, the paramedic Kumar shares lodging in guest quarters at the hospital with several others. With only an old fan for cooling, he's frequently sweating before his work day begins. The ambulance has air conditioning, but it is "no match for the temperature outside," Kumar said.

He and Naik skip lunches most days. When they find time, they eat under whatever shade they can find. They earn a little more than \$150 a month, hardly enough to support their families given rising costs. Naik has three young children and Kumar sends most of his income to his wife and parents, who live 350 kilometers away.

Despite the hardships, they make the best of what they say is a difficult job.

"I feel proud of my work," Kumar said. "The more critical the patient, the more challenging it becomes for us to save their life. I feel happy that I can save lives and help people." _____

Arasu reported from Bengaluru, India.

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Rapper Travis Scott will not face criminal charges in deadly crowd surge at Texas festival

By JUAN LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A Texas grand jury declined to indict rap superstar Travis Scott in a criminal investigation of a deadly crowd surge at the 2021 Astroworld festival, where some spectators were packed so tightly they could not move their arms or even breathe, his attorney and prosecutors said Thursday.

Lawyer Kent Schaffer confirmed that the Harris County grand jury had met and decided not to indict his client on any criminal charges stemming from the concert.

"He never encouraged people to do anything that resulted in other people being hurt," Schaffer said, adding that the decision is "a great relief."

Circumstances of the deaths limited what charges prosecutors were able to present before the grand jury, eliminating potential counts such as murder, manslaughter and criminally negligent homicide, said Alycia Harvey, an assistant district attorney with the Harris County District Attorney's Office.

That left prosecutors to focus on possible counts of endangering a child in connection with the deaths of the two youngest concertgoers, ages 9 and 14, she added.

"The grand jury ... found that no crime did occur, that no single individual was criminally responsible," Harris County District Attorney Kim Ogg said.

The Nov. 5, 2021, crowd surge in Houston killed 10 young festivalgoers who ranged in age from 9 to 27. The official cause of death was compression asphyxia, which an expert likened to being crushed by a car.

Roughly 300 people were injured and treated at the scene, and 25 were taken to hospitals.

Houston police and federal officials have been investigating whether Scott, concert promoter Live Nation and others had sufficient safety measures in place.

During a news conference Thursday afternoon after the grand jury's decision, police presented various details from their investigation including a timeline of events during Scott's performance, the location at the concert site where the deaths occurred and video showing areas where crowds of people collapsed on each other.

But Police Chief Troy Finner declined to say what the overall conclusion of his agency's investigation was or whether police should have stopped the concert sooner. Finner said police plan to make the more than 1,000-page report in the case public so people can read all the information investigators reviewed.

"The chief of police is not going to get up here and point fingers at anybody. I respect the grand jury's decision. I simply want people to read (the offense report), read the entire investigation and everybody will see, very, very complicated," Finner said.

Schaffer said he feels sympathy for those who were killed at the festival and their families.

"But Travis is not responsible," Schaffer said. "Bringing criminal charges against him will not ease their pain."

The grand jury declined to indict five other people, including festival manager Brent Silberstein. An attorney for Silberstein did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

More than 500 lawsuits were filed over the deaths and injuries at the concert, including many against Live Nation and Scott. Some have since been settled.

Kevin Haynes, a Houston attorney whose firm is representing hundreds of people injured at the concert, said he was disappointed by the grand jury's decision but the civil cases will continue "to ensure responsible parties are held accountable in the ongoing pursuit of justice."

About 50,000 people attended the festival.

A 56-page event operations plan for the event had detailed protocols for various dangerous scenarios including a shooting, bomb or terrorist threats and severe weather. But it did not include information on what to do in the event of a crowd surge.

In November, a task force unveiled a new agreement that local officials, public safety agencies and promoters said will clearly outline the responsibilities of all parties involved in such events to ensure they are safe.

Finner said Thursday that elevated platforms are now mandatory at such shows and they will be staffed by Houston police, firefighters and others who will all have authority to halt an event if they see problems.

Similar crushes have happened all over the world, from a soccer stadium in England to the hajj pilgrimage in Saudi Arabia to Halloween festivities in the South Korean capital. Most people who die in crowd surges suffocate.

Find the AP's coverage of the Astroworld festival: <https://apnews.com/hub/astroworld-festival-deaths>

Man wanted on Jan. 6 charges arrested with weapons near Barack Obama's Washington home

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A man armed with explosive materials and weapons, and wanted for crimes related to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, was arrested Thursday in the Washington neighborhood where former President Barack Obama lives, law enforcement officials said.

Taylor Taranto, 37, was spotted by law enforcement a few blocks from the former president's home and fled, though he was chased by U.S. Secret Service agents. Taranto has an open warrant on charges related to the insurrection, two law enforcement officials said. The officials were not authorized to speak publicly about an ongoing case and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

They said Taranto also had made social media threats against a public figure. He was found with weapons and materials to create an explosive device, though one had not been built, one of the officials said.

No one was injured. It was not clear whether the Obamas were at their home at the time of his arrest.

Metropolitan Police arrested Taranto on charges of being a fugitive from justice. The explosives team swept Taranto's van and said there were no threats to the public.

Taranto was a U.S. Navy veteran and a webmaster for the Republican Party in Franklin County, in Washington state, according to the Tri-City Herald newspaper. He told the newspaper in an interview last year that he was volunteering for the Republican Party.

It wasn't clear what, exactly, Taranto is accused of doing in the riot, where supporters of then-President Donald Trump smashed windows of the Capitol and beat and bloodied police officers in an effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

More than 1,000 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Capitol riot. Over 600 of them have pleaded guilty, while approximately 100 others have been convicted after trials decided by judges or juries. More than 550 riot defendants have been sentenced, with over half receiving terms of imprisonment ranging from six days to 18 years.

Biden talks Supreme Court and Russia but also media and McCain in rare network interview

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden rarely gives network interviews, and when he sat down in the MSNBC studio on Thursday, it came at an especially busy time, with the Supreme Court having just overturned the use of affirmative action in college admissions and in the aftermath of a revolt in Russia.

The nearly 20-minute conversation addressed those matters. But it also veered heavily into topics like criticism of the media and light-hearted discussion of the late Arizona Republican Sen. John McCain, who was a friend of Biden's.

When Donald Trump was president, he was criticized for giving interviews to sympathetic media outlets where the questions were often soft and even fawning. Biden, meanwhile, has done far fewer formal interviews than his immediate predecessors. His last network interview was in early May and also on MSNBC.

This time, interviewer Nicolle Wallace, who was White House communications director under President George W. Bush and worked on McCain's 2008 presidential campaign, kicked things off by noting how unusual it was for a sitting president to appear in a network studio.

"The president of the United States is here. Really. At the table," Wallace began, before telling Biden, "This is very exciting for us." Biden responded, "It's exciting for me."

The president said the Supreme Court had "done more to unravel basic rights and basic decisions than any court in recent history," pointing to its decision Thursday on affirmative action and its overturning of the constitutional right to abortion last summer.

"I just find it so out of sorts with the basic value system of the American people," Biden said.

He said he did not support the idea of expanding the number of Supreme Court justices, as a number of progressives have urged him to do.

He also spoke about his reelection campaign, acknowledging, "I know the polling numbers are not good." He noted that many polls once suggested he wouldn't win the 2020 Democratic presidential primary or defeat Trump in that year's general election, and they didn't indicate that Democrats would have a stronger-than-expected showing in last year's midterms.

The president then spoke at length about the media, saying, "This is not a criticism of the press. It's an observation. There's a lot to be worried about around the world, and talking to a lot of reporters, they tell me — I'm going to be careful what I say here — a number of reporters have indicated that there's no editors anymore, on what they do."

"Huh," responded Wallace, as Biden continued that he'd been told by some reporters that they are under pressure to build their personal brands, finally concluding, "I just think there's a lot changing."

Wallace asked about the Russian revolt and what the U.S. knew. Biden responded, "We knew things ahead of time," but said he couldn't say what. Wallace followed up, "Did you worry that Trump might have tipped him off, had he still been president?" She was apparently asking whether Trump would have warned Russian President Vladimir Putin of the mercenary leader's plans for the rebellion against Russia's military leaders.

"Oh, God," Biden said. "I don't know. I don't think about that very often."

The president spoke a bit more about Russia's war in Ukraine. Wallace eventually referenced McCain and asked, "What do you think he would think of his Republican Party?"

"I don't think he'd think much of it," Biden said, but quickly added, "I don't know that."

Wallace concluded by again noting the rarity of Biden's in-studio appearance, adding, "Consider it your chair. Consider it an open invitation. There are going to be a lot of things on people's minds, and I hope you'll look at this as a place where you can come and talk about anything that's on your mind."

"Well, I will," Biden said.

MSNBC declined to comment on the interview afterward.

Later Thursday, Biden attended New York fundraisers to collect donations for his reelection campaign. But the visit to New York, where MSNBC's studio is located, was an official one — meaning taxpayers

funded at least parts of it.

"It's a mixed — mixed travel trip with official and political — political portions," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre told reporters aboard Air Force One on the way to New York.

Asked what the official part of the trip was, Jean-Pierre responded, "You all are always criticizing the president for not doing enough interviews — right?"

"He's going to New York, and we took the opportunity to go in studio," Jean-Pierre said. "It's his first in-studio interview."

Anti-gang community defense activist Hipólito Mora slain in Mexico

By FABIOLA SÁNCHEZ and MARK STEVENSON Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The leader of an armed civilian movement that once drove a drug cartel out of the western Mexico state of Michoacan has been killed, authorities confirmed Thursday.

Tributes quickly rolled in for slain "self defense" leader Hipólito Mora. He was one of the last surviving leaders of Michoacan's armed vigilante movement, in which farmers and ranchers banded together to expel the Knights Templar cartel from the state between 2013 and 2014.

Mora was one of the few fighters to remain in his hometown after the struggle, tending to his lime groves. But Mora complained in recent years that many vigilante forces were later infiltrated by the cartels and that gang violence was worse than ever.

"He was a man who could not be corrupted, a natural leader, an authentic voice," said Rev. Gregorio López, a Roman Catholic priest who accompanied and participated in the self-defense movement of that time. All the leaders of the movement were in constant danger, and López was known for wearing a flak vest while celebrating Mass.

Because of the dangers and threats Mora faced — a son was killed by a drug gang in 2014 — he normally traveled in an SUV with bulletproofing, along with a small guard detail, some of them former vigilantes who had been hired as police officers.

The Michoacan state prosecutors office said unidentified gunmen cut off Mora's vehicle and his bodyguards' pickup on a street in his hometown of La Ruana. They opened fire, riddling Mora's vehicle with bullets, and then set it afire, the office said.

Three other men, believed to be members of his security detail, were also killed. Prosecutors said one of the four corpses matched Mora's description.

Gov. Alfredo Ramírez wrote in his social media accounts that "we deeply regret the cowardly killing of Hipólito Mora," adding: "We will get to the bottom of what happened and justice will be done."

Guillermo Valencia, a leader of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Michoacan, said in a statement that Mora was "a man who deserved to be in the history books, not killed the way he was." He "never ceased in the struggle," Valencia said.

In 2022, Mora told The Associated Press that the situation in Michoacan had become worse than when he led farmers from his hometown in the fight to expel the Knights Templar cartel in 2013. That cartel was largely disbanded, but it was replaced by the Viagras cartel, also known as Carteles Unidos, which has gone on to kidnap, kill and extort money from farmers and businesses.

"In terms of safety, we are worse than ever," Mora said in 2022 following a meeting with senior government officials in Mexico City to demand more protection for Michoacan.

He complained the federal government had been fighting an incursion by the Jalisco cartel into the state, but had done little to combat the homegrown cartels.

"They have to fight all the cartels, not just one," Mora said.

Mora's criticism was "spot on," noted Falko Ernst, a senior analyst at the International Crisis Group, who said the government's strategy has been "to team up with the Carteles Unidos and push the Jalisco Cartel offensive back."

Such a short-term strategy — one pursued by successive state and federal administrations — has not

brought peace to Michoacan, and Mora's slaying is an illustration of that, Ernst said.

"That Hipolito has been under threat for this long, and has been so publicly a number of times like a stone in the shoe of successive governments, that he would perish now, so long after the original uprising, just underlines how acute the actual situation still is," Ernest said.

The first time journalists from AP interviewed Mora in 2013, he and his followers in La Ruana had been cut off from the outside world by Knights Templar gunmen.

Tired of the gang's kidnappings, threats and demands for protection payments, along with it decreeing when farmers could harvest their limes, who they could sell them to and what price they would get, townspeople rose up in arms.

Mora led a vigilante force in erecting improvised stone barricades and hanging banners on roads into town reading "S.O.S., Women and Children in Danger!"

After the vigilantes had held off the cartel alone for months, Mexican troops finally rolled in to rescue them. Mora led a rousing cheer, shouting: "This war has been won!"

That hope was dashed. Mora was even jailed briefly by the government, and he later ran unsuccessfully for congress and the governorship. He often talked about the sense he knew he might die, but never betray the movement.

Mora's last Facebook post came the day before he was killed, showing he had returned to his farm. It included a photo of him and a friend standing in a lime orchard.

"I'm taking care of my own business. I like the countryside," Mora wrote.

Italian police say the man filmed carving his name on the Colosseum is a tourist living in Britain

ROME (AP) — Italian police on Thursday said they believe the man filmed while engraving his name and that of his apparent girlfriend last week on the ancient Roman Colosseum is a tourist who lives in Britain.

The identification was made using photographic comparisons, Italian Carabinieri said in a press release. The statement did not provide the name of the suspect nor his whereabouts. When reached by phone, police said no further information could be given.

Italian officials have vowed to find and punish the tourist who carved "Ivan+Haley 23" on the the wall of the Colosseum in Rome, a crime that has resulted in hefty fines in the past.

The vandal was filmed in the act by an American tourist, Ryan Lutz of Orange, California, who posted the video on social media after he said Colosseum guards failed to show interest in his footage.

It was at least the fourth time this year that such graffiti was reported at the Colosseum, an act that carries fines up to \$15,000 and five years in prison.

Wall Street execs host Biden fundraisers as president closes out an end-of-quarter campaign blitz

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

NEW YORK (AP) — President Joe Biden closed out an end-of-quarter campaign blitz Thursday with a pair of Manhattan fundraisers hosted by Wall Street power brokers, a funding push designed to put Biden on strong financial footing for a 2024 White House contest expected to set spending records.

The pair of evening events are Biden's ninth and 10th fundraising receptions of the past two weeks, numbers matched by Vice President Kamala Harris, first lady Jill Biden and second gentleman Doug Emhoff. The Biden campaign has been mum before the July 15 reporting date about how much he has raised at the often freewheeling gatherings but is confident about the size.

"The reason I'm standing here is in large part because of you all," Biden said to a small crowd gathered in a high rise overlooking Central Park. "I'm not the essential man, but I represent the essential country."

The president is also marshaling the whole of the Democratic Party to dial for dollars, enlisting help from Govs. Gavin Newsom of California and J.B. Pritzker of Illinois as well as former President Barack Obama,

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among others.

Obama is featured in a new campaign video to encourage small-dollar online donations before Friday's donation deadline. Biden allies insist that despite polls showing lagging enthusiasm among the Democratic base for the 80-year-old president, his party is solidly behind him.

"I've been doing this for a really long time for a number of presidents and presidential candidates," said Jeffrey Katzenberg, the Hollywood mogul, major Democratic donor and co-chair of Biden's campaign. "I've never seen from top to bottom, the Democratic enterprise kick into gear this way, from President Obama, governors, senators, congressmen, just across the board — he's gotten outstanding support."

Aides say they are trying to motivate donors, especially small-dollar contributors, to dig deeper early on.

The recent blitz was also a function of Biden's official duties, Katzenberg said, adding that "his first, second and third job is to run the country." Biden had foreign trips in April and May, and the weeklong showdown over raising the nation's debt limit kept him in Washington. He is set to travel to Europe next month, giving the campaign a narrow window before the historically slow summer season to fit in donor events.

While the first quarter is widely viewed as a benchmark of campaign strength, Katzenberg said there is "no urgency right now" for Biden to raise or spend vast sums because he lacks a credible primary threat and the election is 16 months away. Still, Biden is aiming to make a statement with the early totals.

Katzenberg said there were "very optimistic signals" for the Biden campaign's ability to comfortably exceed its 2020 fundraising levels, including strong numbers of first-time Biden donors. Other campaign aides and allies have grown more bullish about the soon-to-be-reported total.

The president's fundraising events, closed to cameras and with limited media access, feature a far less guarded Biden than the public often sees. He sometimes uses them to test a new campaign line or dish out more candid remarks than in formal events.

On Thursday, he started as he often does, behind the lectern then shifting to a preferred handheld microphone. He talked about his climate agenda, leaning on the lectern as he talked about how he's brought both unions and environmentalists together to talk about climate change.

"Did you ever think that would happen?" he asked.

Other times, he roams the room and speaks more directly to guests. And he makes a personal nod to the hosts. On Thursday, he talked a lot about climate change — his host, Mark Gallogly, is a former hedge fund investor and climate activist.

During a May fundraiser at the New York home of Greek American shipping magnate George Logothetis, Biden noted that the lessons he learned from his family as a child weren't any different than "if my mom had been 'Bidenopoulos' instead of 'Finnegan'."

Though his aides make it a point not to engage with prospective 2024 opponents, Biden often does not shy away at these events from criticizing the Republican candidates, from Donald Trump on down.

"I've been stunned at the damage done by the last administration to us internationally and globally. I mean, I've been stunned how deep it goes," Biden said Tuesday evening in Chevy Chase, Maryland.

And this veiled reference to Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis during a fundraiser in Greenwich, Connecticut: "Did you ever think you'd go through a time when the No. 2 contender on another team was banning books?"

In New York, he criticized Republicans who voted against his spending bills, then tout the projects to constituents. When a baby squealed while Biden was talking about Republicans to Chicago donors Wednesday, the president said, "I don't blame you, kiddo."

Biden's sometimes rambling remarks are full of anecdotes about his lengthy time in public office, peppered with references to issues such as tougher gun restrictions and abortion rights that animate Democrats. In more intimate settings, where cameras are barred, the president can open up. For example, he made a rare reference to his personal views on abortion when speaking about the issue at a separate Chevy Chase fundraiser on Tuesday.

"I'm a practicing Catholic," Biden said. "I'm not big on abortion, but guess what? Roe vs. Wade got it right." At the same event, he misspoke when talking about the Ukraine war, referring instead to Iraq.

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At a fundraiser last week, Biden caused a diplomatic dust-up after calling Chinese President Xi Jinping a “dictator” — a comment coming hours after Secretary of State Antony Blinken had met Xi as part of a bid to thaw tensions between the countries. Biden insisted his remark would not affect that relationship.

“He wants to shake every hand and chat with everyone,” Katzenberg said. “When there’s something that is on his mind, he’ll say it — and you know, that’s what makes him authentic.”

Sometimes his fundraisers seem to prove his argument that the U.S. economy has been favoring the wealthy. His second New York venue on Thursday was a swank space called The Pool, where the guests sat on velvet seats and were served specialty donuts with gold leaf. Biden attended events in San Francisco near homes whose Zillow price listings were about four times higher than an average U.S. worker’s lifetime earnings.

“Mr. President, trust me, this is a fancy crowd,” Newsom said to polite laughter at one event. “I know these folks.”

Biden tries to draw connections to a blue-collar past, even as he touches on big-picture issues such as climate change, relations with China and the fate of democracy.

“How many of you are from smaller Midwestern towns?” he asked. “You know what happened when the factory closes. The soul of the community is lost. Not a joke.”

Breaking with the level of transparency followed by the Obama campaign when Biden was vice president, Biden’s campaign does not share the total amount raised from any individual event.

Those numbers will be shared when the campaign submits its filing to the Federal Election Commission in July, campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz said.

“We are encouraged by the strong response we are seeing from donors and our grassroots supporters, including a significant number of new donors since 2020,” he said in a statement.

Associated Press writers Colleen Long, Seung Min Kim and Josh Boak contributed to this report.

California reparations report urges action on housing discrimination and overpolicing

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — It was a report two years in the making — one that details how California, a state that never officially sanctioned slavery, can confront decades of policies that have kept Black residents from living in the neighborhoods they choose, being treated fairly at doctor’s visits and building generational wealth.

California’s reparations task force completed its work Thursday and turned more than 100 recommendations over to the Legislature, the first work of its kind in the U.S. The nearly 1,100-page document recommends the state formally apologize and suggests how to calculate monetary reparations.

Here’s what the task force examined:

HOUSING DISCRIMINATION

The report recounts California policies that have kept Black families from retaining property and living in certain neighborhoods. The effects of redlining, which led to Black families being denied home loans; and eminent domain, where residents’ property was seized by the government, still linger, the report states.

The panel recommended returning property unjustly seized from Black residents. It also urged lawmakers to offer property tax relief to African American homeowners living in historically redlined neighborhoods.

OVERPOLICING AND MASS INCARCERATION

The task force condemned policies and practices that have led to Black Californians being disproportionately stopped by police, killed by law enforcement or imprisoned.

Recommendations include ending the death penalty, banning cash bail, requiring anti-bias training for police officers and funding education for more African American prospective lawyers. The panel also called on lawmakers to bar searches by law enforcement based on a person’s consent alone.

HEALTH HARMS

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The committee urged lawmakers to address disparities in maternal mortality and treatment for substance abuse. Members also called for lawmakers to set aside money to research rising suicide rates among African American youth.

Another suggestion is to fund wellness centers in historically Black neighborhoods to address mental health issues and refer patients for psychiatric or medical care.

PAYMENTS

The recommendations include paying Black Californians who lived in the state while certain discriminatory policies were in effect. The task force voted to limit eligibility to people descended from free or enslaved Black people living in the United States by the end of the 19th century. The panel stopped short of endorsing a fixed dollar amount for individuals. But the members recommended calculations from economists projecting the state is responsible for more than \$500 billion for overpolicing, mass incarceration and housing discrimination.

AGENCY

The task force recommended creating an agency to implement and oversee reparations programs and help people research their family history to find out if they may be eligible for compensation.

NEXT STEPS

Any policy changes must come through legislation signed by the governor. State Sen. Steven Bradford and Assemblymember Reggie Jones-Sawyer, both Los Angeles-area Democrats on the task force, have both said they plan to introduce legislation. Bradford has previously cautioned that it would be difficult to get large cash payments approved.

Sophie Austin 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. Follow Austin on Twitter: @sophieadanna.

Ex-GOP Ohio House speaker sentenced to 20 years for role in \$60M bribery scheme; appeal expected

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

CINCINNATI (AP) — Former Ohio House Speaker Larry Householder was sentenced Thursday to 20 years in prison for his role in the largest corruption scandal in state history and taken immediately into custody, a judge declaring that “the court and the community’s patience with Larry Householder has expired.”

The 64-year-old Republican tensed only slightly as U.S. District Judge Timothy Black meted out the punishment, the maximum under the law, and appeared somewhat disoriented as U.S. Marshals placed him in handcuffs. He glanced back briefly at his wife, Taundra, who exited the courtroom with his Perry County Ducks Unlimited ball cap folded in her hands.

Ahead of his sentencing, Householder stood before Black to make a personal appeal for leniency, saying it was not himself that a harsh prison sentence would hurt most but his spouse of 40 years, his sons, grandchildren and friends.

“I wasn’t power hungry. I went home,” he said of his departure from the Ohio House between speaker-ships. Householder told the judge that he and his wife had given “every ounce of energy we have to make life better for others.”

In a blistering rebuke, Black threw back at Householder evidence counter to the family man image he had presented. He quoted Householder’s own statements, presented at trial, saying: “If you’re going to f--- with me, I’m going to f--- with your kids,” “we can f--- with him later” and “f--- him ‘til he’s dead.”

Black called Householder “a bully with a lust for power” whose scheme marked an “assault on democracy, the betrayal of everyone in Ohio.” That included the Ohioans who donated to, campaigned for and voted for Householder, the judge said.

“That wasn’t their way of just saying I like you or I support you. What they were saying is I’m choosing to trust you,” said Black. “They trusted you to do right by them, and you betrayed their trust.”

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Householder and lobbyist Matt Borges, a former chair of the Ohio Republican Party, were both convicted in March of a single racketeering charge each, after a six-week trial. Borges is set to be sentenced Friday.

Jurors found that Householder orchestrated and Borges participated in a \$60 million bribery scheme secretly funded by Akron-based FirstEnergy Corp. to secure Householder's power, elect his allies, pass legislation containing a \$1 billion bailout for two aging nuclear power plants owned by a FirstEnergy affiliate and then to use a dirty tricks campaign to stifle a ballot effort to overturn the bill.

Federal prosecutors had recommended Householder receive 16 to 20 years, holding in a sentencing memo that he "acted as the quintessential mob boss, directing the criminal enterprise from the shadows and using his casket carriers to execute the scheme." That strategy, they said, gave Householder "plausible deniability."

His own attorneys had recommended just 12 to 18 months, reporting to the judge that he is "a broken man" who has been "humiliated and disgraced" by the ordeal of his widely reported arrest, high-profile prosecution and seven-week trial by jury.

Outside the courthouse Thursday, U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio Ken Parker said the government was grateful for the judge's sentence.

"We heard Mr. Householder indicate that he keeps close his faith, his family and his friends. I would have added one more: He needs to keep close the Ohioans, if he is going to serve this state. That's what he left out," Parker said. "That's why he was here today and that's why the judge imposed the highest level of accountability under the statute."

Rachel Belz, CEO of the government watchdog group Ohio Citizen Action, expressed hope that Householder's sentence would help restore public trust and allow the voice of the people to be "heard and valued" by decision makers.

"Democracy does not allow our leaders to wield power without the opportunity for the people to exercise a check on that power," she said in a statement.

Householder was one of Ohio's most powerful politicians, a historically twice-elected speaker, before his indictment. After his July 2020 arrest, the Republican-controlled House ousted him from his leadership post, but he refused to resign for nearly a year on grounds he was innocent until proven guilty. In a bipartisan vote, representatives ultimately ousted him from the chamber in 2021 — the first such expulsion in Ohio in 150 years.

All told, five people and a dark money group have been charged so far for their roles in the scheme. A federal investigation remains ongoing.

During the trial, the prosecution called two of the people arrested — Juan Cespedes and Jeff Longstreth, who both pleaded guilty and are cooperating — to testify about political contributions they said were not ordinary, but rather bribes intended to secure passage of the bailout legislation. Generation Now, the 501(c) nonprofit through which much of the money flowed, also has pleaded guilty to racketeering.

Cespedes and Longstreth face up to six months in prison each under their plea deals. Neither has been sentenced.

The last person arrested, the late Statehouse superlobbyist Neil Clark, was heard on tape in the courtroom. Clark had pleaded not guilty before dying by suicide in March 2021.

All the alleged members of the conspiracy benefited personally from the scheme, using sums that an FBI agent described colloquially as "bags of cash" from FirstEnergy. Householder spent around \$500,000 of FirstEnergy money to settle a business lawsuit, pay attorneys, deal with expenses at his Florida home and pay off credit card debt. Another \$97,000 was used to pay staff and expenses for his 2018 reelection campaign.

Divided Supreme Court outlaws affirmative action in college admissions, says race can't be used

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday struck down affirmative action in college admissions, declaring race cannot be a factor and forcing institutions of higher education to look for new ways to achieve diverse student bodies.

The court's conservative majority effectively overturned cases reaching back 45 years in invalidating admissions plans at Harvard and the University of North Carolina, the nation's oldest private and public colleges, respectively.

The decision, like last year's momentous abortion ruling that overturned *Roe v. Wade*, marked the realization of a long-sought conservative legal goal, this time finding that race-conscious admissions plans violate the Constitution and a law that applies to colleges that receive federal funding, as almost all do.

Those schools will be forced to reshape their admissions practices, especially top schools that are more likely to consider the race of applicants.

Chief Justice John Roberts said that for too long universities have "concluded, wrongly, that the touchstone of an individual's identity is not challenges bested, skills built, or lessons learned but the color of their skin. Our constitutional history does not tolerate that choice."

From the White House, President Joe Biden said he "strongly, strongly" disagreed with the court's ruling and urged colleges to seek other routes to diversity rather than let the ruling "be the last word."

Besides the conservative-liberal split, the fight over affirmative action showed the deep gulf between the three justices of color, each of whom wrote separately and vividly about race in America and where the decision might lead.

Justice Clarence Thomas — the nation's second Black justice, who had long called for an end to affirmative action — wrote that the decision "sees the universities' admissions policies for what they are: rudderless, race-based preferences designed to ensure a particular racial mix in their entering classes."

Justice Sonia Sotomayor, the court's first Latina, wrote in dissent that the decision "rolls back decades of precedent and momentous progress."

Both Thomas and Sotomayor, the two justices who have acknowledged affirmative action played a role in their admissions to college and law school, took the unusual step of reading summaries of their opinions aloud in the courtroom.

In a separate dissent, Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson — the court's first Black female justice — called the decision "truly a tragedy for us all."

Jackson, who sat out the Harvard case because she had been a member of an advisory governing board, wrote, "With let-them-eat-cake obliviousness, today, the majority pulls the ripcord and announces 'colorblindness for all' by legal fiat. But deeming race irrelevant in law does not make it so in life."

The vote was 6-3 in the North Carolina case and 6-2 in the Harvard case. Justice Elena Kagan was the other dissenter.

Biden, who quickly stepped before cameras at the White House, said of the nation's colleges: "They should not abandon their commitment to ensure student bodies of diverse backgrounds and experience that reflect all of America," He said colleges should evaluate "adversity overcome" by candidates.

In fact, an applicant for admission still can write about, and colleges can consider, "how race affected his or her life, be it through discrimination, inspiration or otherwise," Roberts wrote.

But the institutions "may not simply establish through application essays or other means the regime we hold unlawful today," he wrote.

Presidents of many colleges quickly issued statements affirming their commitment to diversity regardless of the court's decision. Many said they were still assessing the impact but would follow federal law.

"Harvard will continue to be a vibrant community whose members come from all walks of life, all over the world," school President Lawrence Bacow said in a statement.

President Reginald DesRoches of Rice University in Houston said he was "greatly disappointed" by the

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decision but "more resolute than ever" to pursue diversity. "The law may change, but Rice's commitment to diversity will not," he said in a campus message.

Former Presidents Donald Trump and Barack Obama offered starkly different takes on the high court ruling. The decision marked "a great day for America. People with extraordinary ability and everything else necessary for success, including future greatness for our Country, are finally being rewarded," Trump, the current Republican presidential frontrunner, wrote on his social media network.

Obama said in a statement that affirmative action "allowed generations of students like Michelle and me to prove we belonged. Now it's up to all of us to give young people the opportunities they deserve — and help students everywhere benefit from new perspectives."

The Supreme Court had twice upheld race-conscious college admissions programs in the past 20 years, including as recently as 2016.

But that was before the three Trump appointees joined the court. At arguments in late October, all six conservative justices expressed doubts about the practice, which had been upheld under Supreme Court decisions reaching back to 1978.

Lower courts also had upheld the programs at both UNC and Harvard, rejecting claims that the schools discriminated against white and Asian American applicants.

The college admissions disputes were among several high-profile cases focused on race in America, and were weighed by the conservative-dominated, but most diverse court ever. Among the nine justices are four women, two Black people and a Latina.

The justices earlier in June decided a voting rights case in favor of Black voters in Alabama and rejected a race-based challenge to a Native American child protection law.

The affirmative action cases were brought by conservative activist Edward Blum, who also was behind an earlier challenge against the University of Texas as well as the case that led the court in 2013 to end use of a key provision of the landmark Voting Rights Act.

Blum formed Students for Fair Admissions, which filed the lawsuits against both schools in 2014.

The group argued that the Constitution forbids the use of race in college admissions and called for overturning earlier Supreme Court decisions that said otherwise.

Roberts' opinion effectively did so, both Thomas and the dissenters wrote.

The only institutions of higher education explicitly left out of the ruling were the nation's military academies, Roberts wrote, suggesting that national security interests could affect the legal analysis.

Blum's group had contended that colleges and universities can use other, race-neutral ways to assemble a diverse student body, including by focusing on socioeconomic status and eliminating the preference for children of alumni and major donors.

The schools said that they use race in a limited way, but that eliminating it as a factor altogether would make it much harder to achieve a student body that looks like America.

At the eight Ivy League universities, the number of nonwhite students increased from 27% in 2010 to 35% in 2021, according to federal data. Those men and women include Asian, Black, Hispanic, Native American, Pacific Islander and biracial students.

Nine states already prohibit any consideration of race in admissions to their public colleges and universities. The end of affirmative action in higher education in California, Michigan, Washington state and elsewhere led to a steep drop in minority enrollment in those states' leading public universities.

The other states are: Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Nebraska, New Hampshire and Oklahoma.

In 2020, California voters easily rejected a ballot measure to bring back affirmative action.

A poll last month by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed 63% of U.S. adults say the court should allow colleges to consider race as part of the admissions process, yet few believe students' race should ultimately play a major role in decisions. A Pew Research Center survey released last week found that half of Americans disapprove of considerations of applicants' race, while a third approve.

The chief justice and Jackson received their undergraduate and law degrees from Harvard. Two other

justices, Neil Gorsuch and Kagan, went to law school there, and Kagan was the first woman to serve as the law school's dean.

Every U.S. college and university the justices attended, save one, urged the court to preserve race-conscious admissions.

Those schools — Yale, Princeton, Columbia, Notre Dame and Holy Cross — joined briefs in defense of Harvard's and UNC's admissions plans.

Only Justice Amy Coney Barrett's undergraduate alma mater, Rhodes College, in Memphis, Tennessee, was not involved in the cases.

Associated Press writer Collin Binkley contributed to this report.

Christine King Farris, the last living sibling of Martin Luther King Jr., dies at 95

ATLANTA (AP) — Christine King Farris, the last living sibling of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., has died. Her niece, the Rev. Bernice King, tweeted that her "beloved aunt" died Thursday. She was 95.

For decades after her brother's assassination in 1968, Farris worked along with his widow, Coretta Scott King, to preserve and promote his legacy. But unlike her high-profile sister-in-law, Farris' activism — and grief — was often behind the scenes.

"She may not have always been on the line of the march, but that was true with a lot of the heroes of the Civil Rights Movement," said Marcellus Barksdale, a history professor at Morehouse College, of Farris in a 2009 interview with The Associated Press. "Because of the luminescence of Dr. King and Coretta Scott King, Christine kind of got dimmed by that, but she was no less important."

Farris was born Willie Christine King on Sept. 11, 1927, in Atlanta. She was the first child of the Rev. Martin Luther King Sr. and Alberta Christine Williams King.

Farris helped Coretta Scott King build The King Center and helped to teach Martin Luther King Jr.'s philosophy of nonviolent resistance. For years, her regal, dignified presence was a mainstay at the ecumenical service celebrating her brother's birthday at Ebenezer Baptist Church, where her grandfather and father also preached and where Farris remained a member.

The King Center tweeted Thursday that it mourns the loss of Farris, a founding board member, former vice-chair and treasurer, along with a photo of her.

Bernice King tweeted a photo of herself with Farris, writing, "I love you and will miss you, Aunt Christine."

Martin Luther King III tweeted that he, his wife and his daughter had been able to spend time with his aunt in her final days.

"Aunt Christine embodied what it meant to be a public servant. Like my dad, she spent her life fighting for equality and against racism in America," he tweeted. "She defied the odds that held back too many marginalized communities — going on to become a civil rights leader and acclaimed author. No stranger to adversity, Aunt Christine used the tragedies of the assassinations of her mother and brother to fight for change in America."

Farris outlived many of the people she loved, including her parents, her two brothers, her sister-in-law and her niece, Yolanda. She graduated from Spelman College in 1948 with a degree in economics on the same day Martin Luther King Jr. earned his degree in sociology from Morehouse College.

A decade later, Farris returned to Spelman, where she worked for more than 50 years. In 1960, she married Isaac Newton Farris. The couple had two children, Angela Christine Farris Watkins and Isaac Newton Farris Jr.

"Our hearts are heavy in Atlanta today, with the news that Christine King Farris has died," Mayor Andre Dickens said in a statement.

"Mrs. Farris was a force in her own right," Dickens said. "A champion of literacy and education, she taught at her alma mater, Spelman College, for nearly 50 years. As the last of the King siblings, she spent much of her life advocating for equality. She once said that her brother Martin simply gave us the blueprint, but

it was our duty 'to carry it out.'"

Farris wrote two children's books about her life, "My Brother Martin: A Sister Remembers Growing Up With the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr." and "March On! The Day My Brother Martin Changed the World."

In 2009, she wrote a memoir, "Through It All: Reflections on My Life, My Family and My Faith."

Farris often shared stories about her brother as a normal child and young man to make him and his achievements more accessible to people.

"They think he simply happened, that he appeared fully formed, without context, ready to change the world," she said.

The Supreme Court made big decisions this week and more are coming. Here's what you need to know

By JESSICA GRESKO and MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court is expected to announce major decisions Friday on President Joe Biden's student loan forgiveness program and a case that impacts gay rights. It's the court's final day before the justices go on their summer break.

Already this week the justices have released important decisions on other issues including affirmative action, voting rights and religious rights. The court's final opinions tend to be on some of the most contentious issues because writing those decisions often takes the longest.

Here's a look at the decisions the justices issued this week and those left to come:

STUDENT LOANS

The justices have yet to decide the fate of President Joe Biden's plan to wipe away or reduce student loans held by millions of Americans. When the court heard arguments in the case in February, the plan didn't seem likely to survive, though it's possible the justices could decide the challengers lacked the right to sue and the plan can still go forward.

Biden had proposed erasing \$10,000 in federal student loan debt for those with incomes below \$125,000 a year, or households that earn less than \$250,000. He also wanted to cancel an additional \$10,000 for those who received federal Pell Grants to attend college. The administration has said millions of borrowers would benefit from the program.

Regardless of what happens at the high court, loan payments that have been on hold since the start of the coronavirus pandemic three years ago will resume this summer.

GAY RIGHTS

A clash of gay rights and religious rights is also still to be decided by the court. The case involves a Christian graphic artist from Colorado who wants to begin designing wedding websites but objects to making wedding websites for same-sex couples.

State law requires businesses that are open to the public to provide services to all customers, but the designer, Lorie Smith, says the law violates her free speech rights. She says ruling against her would force artists — from painters and photographers to writers and musicians — to do work that is against their beliefs. Her opponents, meanwhile, say that if she wins, a range of businesses will be able to discriminate, refusing to serve Black, Jewish or Muslim customers, interracial or interfaith couples or immigrants.

During arguments in the case in December, the court's conservative majority sounded sympathetic to Smith's arguments, and religious plaintiffs have in recent years won a series of victories at the high court.

AFFIRMATIVE ACTION

The justices on Thursday struck down affirmative action in college admissions, declaring race cannot be a factor and forcing institutions of higher education to look for new ways to achieve diverse student bodies.

Previously, the Supreme Court had allowed the use of race in admissions in decisions reaching back to 1978. And it had twice upheld race-conscious college admissions programs in the past 20 years, including as recently as 2016.

Now, however, with a six-justice conservative majority, the justices overturned admissions plans at Harvard and the University of North Carolina, the nation's oldest private and public colleges, respectively.

Chief Justice John Roberts said that for too long universities have "concluded, wrongly, that the touch-

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stone of an individual's identity is not challenges bested, skills built, or lessons learned but the color of their skin. Our constitutional history does not tolerate that choice."

RELIGIOUS RIGHTS

The Supreme Court on Thursday used the case of a Christian mail carrier who didn't want to work Sundays to solidify protections for workers who ask for religious accommodations.

In a unanimous decision the justices made clear that workers who ask for accommodations, such as taking the Sabbath off, should get them unless their employers show doing so would result in "substantial increased costs" to the business.

The court made clear that businesses must cite more than minor costs — so-called "de minimis" costs — to reject requests for religious accommodations at work. Unlike most cases before the court, both sides in the case had agreed businesses needed to show more.

The justices didn't say whether the mail carrier should win his case, however. Instead, they sent the case back to lower courts for further review based on their decision.

VOTING

Earlier this week, on Tuesday, the justices ruled that state courts can act as a check on their legislatures in redistricting and other issues affecting federal elections, rejecting arguments by North Carolina Republicans that could have transformed contests for Congress and president.

The justices by a 6-3 vote upheld a decision by North Carolina's top court that struck down a congressional districting plan as excessively partisan under state law.

Chief Justice John Roberts authored the majority opinion, stating that "state courts retain the authority to apply state constitutional restraints when legislatures act under the power conferred upon them by the Elections Clause. But federal courts must not abandon their own duty to exercise judicial review."

The high court did, though, suggest there could be limits on state court efforts to police elections for Congress and president.

The practical effect of the decision in North Carolina is minimal in that the North Carolina Supreme Court, under a new Republican majority, already has undone its redistricting ruling.

Follow the AP's coverage of the U.S. Supreme Court at <https://apnews.com/hub/us-supreme-court>.

Expect a hot, smoky summer in much of America. Here's why you'd better get used to it

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The only break much of America can hope for anytime soon from eye-watering dangerous smoke from fire-struck Canada is brief bouts of shirt-soaking sweltering heat and humidity from a southern heat wave that has already proven deadly, forecasters say.

And then the smoke will likely come back to the Midwest and East.

That's because neither the 235 out-of-control Canadian wildfires nor the stuck weather pattern that's responsible for this mess of meteorological maladies are showing signs of relenting for the next week or longer, according to meteorologists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Weather Prediction Center.

First, the stuck weather pattern made abnormally hot and dry conditions for Canada to burn at off-the-chart record levels. Then it created a setup where the only relief comes when low pressure systems roll through, which means areas on one side get smoky air from the north and the other gets sweltering air from the south.

Smoke or heat. "Pick your poison," said prediction center forecast operations chief Greg Carbin. "The conditions are not going to be very favorable."

"As long as those fires keep burning up there, that's going to be a problem for us," Carbin said. "As long as there's something to burn, there will be smoke we have to deal with."

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Take St. Louis. The city had two days of unhealthy air Tuesday and Wednesday, but for Thursday “they’ll get an improvement of air quality with the very hot and humid heat,” said weather prediction center meteorologist Bryan Jackson. The forecast is for temperatures that feel like 109 degrees (42.8 degrees Celsius) — with 101 degree (38.3 degrees Celsius) heat and stifling humidity.

On Wednesday, the low pressure system was parked over New England and because winds go counter-clockwise, areas to the west – such as Chicago and the Midwest – get smoky winds from the north, while areas east of the low pressure get southerly hot winds, Jackson said.

As that low pressure system moves on and another one travels over the central Great Plains and Lake Superior, the Midwest gets temporary relief, Jackson said. But when low pressure moves on, the smoke comes back.

“We have this this carousel of air cruising around the Midwest, and every once in a while is bringing the smoke directly onto whatever city you live in,” said University of Chicago atmospheric scientist Liz Moyer. “And while the fires are ongoing, you can expect to see these periodic bad air days and the only relief is either when the fires go out or when the weather pattern dies.”

The stuck weather pattern is “awfully unusual,” said NOAA’s Carbin who had to look back in records to 1980 to see anything even remotely similar. “What gets me is the persistence of this.”

Why is the weather pattern stuck? This seems to be happening more often — and some scientists suggest that human-caused climate change causes more situations where weather patterns stall. Moyer and Carbin said it’s too soon to tell if that’s the case.

But Carbin and Canadian fire scientist Mike Flannigan said there’s a clear climate signal in the Canadian fires. And they said those fires aren’t likely to die down anytime soon, with nothing in the forecast that looks likely to change.

Nearly every province in Canada has fires burning. A record 30,000 square miles (80,000 square kilometers) have burned, an area nearly as large as South Carolina, according to the Canadian government.

And fire season usually doesn’t really get going until July in Canada.

“It’s been a crazy crazy year. It’s unusual to have the whole country on fire,” said Flannigan, a professor at Thompson Rivers University in British Columbia. “Usually it’s regional... not the whole shebang at once.”

Hotter than normal and drier air made for ideal fire weather, Flannigan said. Warmer weather from climate change means the atmosphere sucks more moisture out of plants, making them more likely to catch fire, burn faster and hotter.

“Fires are all about extremes,” he said.

And where there’s fire, there’s smoke.

Both high heat and smoky conditions are stressors on the body and can present potential challenges to human health, said Ed Avol, a professor emeritus at the Keck School of Medicine at University of Southern California.

But Avol added that while the haze of wildfire smoke provides a visual cue to stay inside, there can be hidden dangers of breathing in harmful pollutants such as ozone even when the sky looks clear. He also noted there are air chemistry changes that can happen downwind of wildfire smoke, which may have additional and less well-understood impacts on the body.

It’s still only June. The seasonal forecast for the rest of the summer in Canada “is for hot and mostly dry” and that’s not good for dousing fires, Flannigan said. “It’s a crazy year and I’m not sure where it’s going to end.”

Associated Press reporter Melina Walling contributed from Chicago.

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

Human remains have likely been recovered from the Titan submersible wreckage, US Coast Guard says

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

PORTLAND, Maine (AP) — Human remains have likely been recovered from the wreckage of the submersible that imploded during an underwater voyage to view the Titanic, the U.S. Coast Guard said Wednesday.

The news came hours after the announcement that debris from the Titan, collected from the seafloor more than 12,000 feet (3,658 meters) below the surface of the North Atlantic, had arrived in St. John's, Newfoundland. Twisted chunks of the submersible were unloaded at a Canadian Coast Guard pier.

Recovering and scrutinizing the wreckage is a key part of the investigation into why the Titan imploded last week, killing all five people on board. The multiday search and eventual recovery of debris from the 22-foot (6.7-meter) vessel captured the world's attention.

"There is still a substantial amount of work to be done to understand the factors that led to the catastrophic loss of the Titan and help ensure a similar tragedy does not occur again," Coast Guard Chief Capt. Jason Neubauer said in a statement released late Wednesday afternoon.

The "presumed human remains" will be brought to the United States, where medical professionals will conduct a formal analysis, Neubauer said. He added that the Coast Guard has convened an investigation of the implosion at the highest level. The Marine Board of Investigation will analyze and test evidence, including pieces of debris, at a port in the U.S. The board will share the evidence at a future public hearing whose date has not been determined, the Coast Guard said.

Neubauer said the evidence will provide "critical insights" into the cause of the implosion.

Debris from the Titan, which is believed to have imploded on June 18 as it made its descent, was located about 12,500 feet (3,810 meters) underwater and roughly 1,600 feet (488 meters) from the Titanic on the ocean floor. The Coast Guard is leading the investigation, in conjunction with several other government agencies in the U.S. and Canada.

Authorities have not disclosed details of the debris recovery, which could have followed several approaches, according to Carl Hartsfield, who directs a lab at the Woods Hole Oceanographic Institution that designs and operates autonomous underwater vehicles and has been serving as a consultant to the Coast Guard.

"If the pieces are small, you can collect them together and put them in a basket or some kind of collection device," Hartsfield said Monday. Bigger pieces could be retrieved with a remote-operated vehicle, or ROV, such as the one brought to the wreckage site by the Canadian ship Horizon Arctic to search the ocean floor. For extremely big pieces, a heavy lift could be used to pull them up with a tow line, he said.

Representatives for Horizon Arctic did not respond to requests for comment. The ROV's owner, Pelagic Research Services, a company with offices in Massachusetts and New York, is "still on mission" and cannot comment on the investigation, company spokesperson Jeff Mahoney said Wednesday.

"They have been working around the clock now for 10 days, through the physical and mental challenges of this operation," Mahoney said.

Analyzing the recovered debris could reveal important clues about what happened to the Titan, and there could be electronic data recorded by the submersible's instruments, Hartsfield said.

"So the question is, is there any data available? And I really don't know the answer to that question," he said Monday.

The Transportation Safety Board of Canada, which is conducting a safety investigation into the Titan's Canadian-flagged mother ship, the Polar Prince, said Wednesday that it has sent that vessel's voyage data recorder to a lab for analysis.

Stockton Rush, the Titan's pilot and CEO of OceanGate Expeditions, the company that owned the submersible, was killed in the implosion along with two members of a prominent Pakistani family, Shahzada Dawood and his son Suleman Dawood; British adventurer Hamish Harding; and Titanic expert Paul-Henri Nargeolet.

OceanGate is based in the U.S. and OceanGate Expeditions, a related company that led the Titan's dives to the Titanic, is registered in the Bahamas.

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The company charged passengers \$250,000 each to participate in the voyage. The implosion of the Titan has raised questions about the safety of private undersea exploration operations. The Coast Guard wants to use the investigation to improve the safety of submersibles.

This story was first published on June 28, 2023. It was updated on June 29, 2023, to make clear that the company that led the Titan's dives to the Titanic was registered in the Bahamas, but the Titan itself was not.

Associated Press writers Holly Ramer in Concord, New Hampshire, and Michael Casey in Boston contributed to this report.

In affirmative action and student loan cases, advocates fear losses for racial equality

By ANNIE MA and AARON MORRISON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As a Black student who was raised by a single mother, Makia Green believes she benefited from a program that gave preference to students of color from economically disadvantaged backgrounds when she was admitted over a decade ago to the University of Rochester.

As a borrower who still owes just over \$20,000 on her undergraduate student loans, she has been counting on President Joe Biden's promised debt relief to wipe nearly all of that away.

Now, the student loan cancellation plan could be dismantled by the U.S. Supreme Court, which on Thursday struck down affirmative action in college admissions. Both policies disproportionately help Black students. To Green and many other people of color, the efforts to roll them back reflect a larger backlash to racial progress in higher education.

"I feel like working people have been through enough — I have been through enough," said Green, a community organizer. "From a pandemic, an uprising, a recession, the cost of living price going up. I deserved some relief."

The rulings could also have political consequences among a generation of young voters of color who took Biden at his word when he promised to cancel debt, said Wisdom Cole, director of NAACP's youth and college program.

"Year after year, we have elected officials, we have advocates, we have different politicians coming to our communities making promises. But now it's time to deliver on those promises," he said.

The president's plan forgives up to \$10,000 in federal student debt for borrowers, and doubles the debt relief to \$20,000 for borrowers who also received Pell Grants. About half of the average debt held by Black and Hispanic borrowers would be wiped out, according to the White House. Six Republican-led states filed a legal challenge questioning whether the president, a Democrat, has authority to forgive the debt.

In the affirmative action cases, the court was considering the use of race-conscious admissions policies that many selective colleges have used for decades to help build diversity on their campuses. The cases were brought by a conservative activist who argues the Constitution forbids the use of race in college admissions.

The Rev. Al Sharpton called the ruling against affirmative action "a dagger in the back of Black America."

"The reality is race plays a factor in admissions, from pre-K to post-doctorate, and institutions just saw their best tool for fairness outlawed," Sharpton said.

The high court is expected to rule in the student loan case on Friday.

Both cases focus on policies that address historic racial disparities in access to higher education, as Black borrowers tend to take on disproportionately more debt to afford college, said Dominique Baker, an education policy professor at Southern Methodist University.

Backlash to racial progress tends to follow periods of social change and advancement, Baker said. In a study published in 2019, Baker found states were more likely to adopt bans on affirmative action when white enrollment at public flagship universities dropped.

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"These are policy tools that have an explicit aim around reducing the power of white supremacy," Baker said. The two court challenges, she said, can be seen "as linked backlash to two attempts towards racial justice."

Green, who grew up in a low-income household in Harlem, New York, graduated from Rochester with about \$40,000 in federal loan debt. Some of that was erased under a public service forgiveness program when she completed two terms with Americorps, and she whittled it down further with monthly installments until the government paused repayment due to the pandemic.

Green said she sees both court cases as connected to conservative attacks on diversity, equity and inclusion programs. Critics say opposition to such programs is rooted in questions of fairness and in white grievances over the advancement of nonwhite people.

"This is white supremacy at work," Green said. "This is a long tactic of conservative, white supremacist-leaning groups to use education and limit Black people's access to education, as a way to further control and oppress us."

In the 1960s and 1970s, many colleges developed affirmative action plans to address the fact that many predominantly white schools struggled to attract people from historically disadvantaged and underrepresented communities. Policies were also created to promote greater inclusion of women.

Since the late 1970s, the Supreme Court has three times upheld affirmative action in college admissions on grounds that institutions have a compelling interest to address past discrimination that shut nonwhite students out of higher learning. Justices have also agreed with arguments that more diverse student bodies promoted cross-racial understanding.

Affirmative action exists because Black people and people of color historically have not been able to rely on colleges, universities, and employers to enact admissions and hiring practices that embrace diversity, said Derrick Johnson, president of the NAACP.

"In a society still scarred by the wounds of racial disparities, the Supreme Court has displayed a willful ignorance of our reality," he said.

Some students and advocates worried how the ruling would affect diversity on campuses.

Tarina Ahuja, a rising senior at Harvard College, said being part of a diverse student body has been a crucial part of her undergraduate experience. She recalled classes where students discussed their lived experiences on topics such as police violence, colonialism and labor movements — discussions that would have fallen flat without a diverse range of student perspectives.

In anticipation of a ruling against race-conscious admissions, some colleges have been considering adding more essays to get a better picture of an applicant's background. Others have been planning to boost recruiting in racially diverse areas. But in states that have already banned affirmative action, similar efforts at selective colleges have largely failed to maintain diversity gains.

Jonathan Loc, a graduate student at Harvard who helped organize teach-ins in support of affirmative action, said that for students of color, it's impossible to speak about their lives without mentioning race, whether through hardships faced or simply their pride in their cultural heritage.

"I grew up as the son of refugees in a low-income community and a single parent family burdened with the model minority myth," he said. "But I think that that kind of narrative also helps me to be an Asian American focused on racial justice, focused on making sure that everyone who has a unique story related to their racial background or any background has that story heard."

It will be important for colleges to find ways to show they see the students as more than a number on paper, said Damon Hewitt, president and executive director of the Lawyers' Committee for Civil Rights Under Law.

"We need the schools to say, 'Look, the court says we can't consider race, but we still see you,'" said Hewitt, whose organization defended affirmative action before the Supreme Court in October.

The Associated Press education team receives support from the Carnegie Corporation of New York. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Annie Ma and Aaron Morrison are members of AP's Race and Ethnicity team. Follow Ma on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/anniema15>. Follow Morrison on Twitter: <https://www.twitter.com/aaronlmorrison>.

Saying strike is "imminent," UPS gets a Friday deadline from union to come up with a better contract

By MATT OTT AP Business Writer

Frustrated by an "appalling counterproposal" earlier this week, the head of the union representing 340,000 UPS workers said a strike is imminent and gave the shipping giant a Friday deadline to improve its offer.

The International Brotherhood of Teamsters walked away from negotiations Wednesday, demanding that UPS give its "last, best, and final offer" no later than June 30.

Teamsters officials did not say what time the Friday deadline was or what actions it might take if it is not met.

"The largest single-employer strike in American history now appears inevitable," said Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien, who accused UPS executives of hoarding profits instead of sharing them with workers.

"Executives at UPS, some of whom get tens of millions of dollars a year, do not care about the hundreds of thousands of American workers who make this company run," O'Brien said.

In a brief statement, United Parcel Service said it has offered significant changes to its initial financial proposal and that "Reaching consensus requires time and serious, detailed discussion, but it also requires give-and-take from both sides."

Negotiations on the national contract began in April. The current contract expires July 31.

Earlier this month, the Teamsters said 97% of unionized workers voted for a strike authorization, which the union urged to give it more leverage during negotiations with the company.

The Teamsters represent more than half of the company's workforce in the largest private-sector contract in North America. If a strike occurs, it would be the first since a 15-day walkout by 185,000 workers crippled the company a quarter century ago.

UPS has pushed back on those claims by boasting that it provides workers with industry-leading pay and benefits.

Unionized UPS workers are still upset about the current contract, which they feel was forced on them by prior union leadership in 2018 based on a technicality. The contract created two hierarchies of workers with different pay scales, hours and benefits. The union wants it eliminated.

Two weeks ago, the union and the company announced they reached a tentative agreement to equip more trucks with air conditioning equipment, a major sticking point. UPS said it would add air conditioning to U.S. small delivery vehicles purchased after January 1, 2024.

UPS delivers around 25 million packages a day, representing about a quarter of all U.S. parcel volume, according to the global shipping and logistics firm Pitney Bowes. That's about 10 million parcels more than it delivered each day in the years leading up to the pandemic.

UPS profits have soared since the pandemic began in 2020 as millions of Americans grew to rely on delivery to their doorsteps.

Annual profits at UPS in the past two years are close to three times what they were pre-pandemic. The Atlanta company returned about \$8.6 billion to shareholders in the form of dividends and stock buybacks in 2022, and forecasts another \$8.4 billion for shareholders this year.

AP Business Reporter Haleluya Hadero contributed to this report from New York.

Russian general is believed to be detained in aftermath of Wagner mutiny, AP sources say

By TARA COPP and NOMAAN MERCHANT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the deputy commander of the Russian group of forces fighting in Ukraine, is believed to have been detained days after mercenaries staged a revolt inside Russia, two people familiar with the matter told The Associated Press on Thursday, citing U.S. and Ukrainian intelligence assessments.

The people spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

It's not clear whether Surovikin faces any charges or where he is being held, reflecting the opaque world of the Kremlin's politics and uncertainty after the revolt.

But his reported detention comes days after Wagner Group mercenaries took over the military headquarters in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and were heading toward Moscow in what appears to have been an aborted insurrection.

Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin has spoken positively of Surovikin while criticizing the country's military brass and suggested that he should be appointed the General Staff chief to replace Gen. Valery Gerasimov. The New York Times this week reported that U.S. officials believe Surovikin had advance knowledge of Prigozhin's plan to stage the revolt.

The White House and the Kremlin declined to comment.

Surovikin, who has longtime links to Prigozhin, hasn't been seen since the start of the rebellion when he posted a video urging an end to it.

A Russian military blogger, the Moscow Times, and the Financial Times reported that Surovikin, who is also the commander of the Russian air force, has been arrested.

There has been intense speculation that some top military officers may have colluded with Prigozhin and may now face punishment for the mutiny that briefly sent a virtually unchallenged march toward Moscow that Putin has labeled treason and a "stab in the back."

Alexei Venediktov, former head of the Ekho Moskvy, a prominent independent radio station that was shut down by authorities after Moscow invaded Ukraine, said Surovikin and his close lieutenants haven't been in contact with their families for three days, but stopped short of saying that he was detained.

Another prominent military messaging channel, Rybar, which is run by a former Defense Ministry press officer, reported a purge in the ranks was underway as authorities looked into allegations that some could have sided with Prigozhin.

Surovikin has been linked to Prigozhin since when both were active in Syria, where Russia has waged a military action since 2015 to shore up Syrian President Bashar Assad's government and to help him reclaim territory after a devastating civil war.

While Prigozhin had unleashed expletive-ridden insults at Shoigu and chief of the General Staff Gen. Valery Gerasimov before last week's mutiny in which he demanded their ouster, he has continually praised Surovikin and suggested naming him to replace Gerasimov. When the rebellion began, however, Surovikin recorded a video urging a halt to the mutiny.

Earlier this week, The New York Times reported that U.S. officials believed that Surovikin had advance knowledge about the mutiny. Asked about that report, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov shrugged it off as part of "speculations and gossip."

On Thursday, Peskov refused to comment on whether Surovikin had been arrested.

Asked by the AP if the president still trusts Surovikin, he replied that Putin works with the defense minister and the chief of the General Staff and referred questions about officers to the Defense Ministry. He also referred all other questions about Surovikin and his status to the ministry.

As to whether Putin considers it necessary to dismiss military officials who had had links with Prigozhin, Peskov said "the issue isn't my prerogative, and I have nothing to say on that."

The bald, fierce-looking Surovikin, who was nicknamed "General Armageddon" by Western media for his

brutal tactics in Syria and Ukraine, was credited with shoring up Russian defenses after Moscow's retreat from broad areas of Ukrainian territory last fall amid a swift counteroffensive by Kyiv.

Named by Putin in the fall to lead Russian forces in Ukraine, Surovikin presided over the bombing campaign that targeted Ukraine's power plants and other vital infrastructure but failed to knock out power supplies.

In January, Putin replaced him with Gerasimov, putting the General Staff chief in charge of the Russian battle in Ukraine. Surovikin was demoted to the position of Gerasimov's deputy.

Gerasimov's own fate also is unclear after the abortive mutiny. While Shoigu showed up at several events attended by Putin, Gerasimov was mysteriously absent.

If a purge is indeed underway, it could destabilize the military chain of command and erode troop morale amid the early stage of Ukraine's latest counteroffensive and offer Kyiv a chance to reclaim more ground.

Older Americans can get RSV vaccine this fall after consulting their doctor, CDC says

By MIKE STOBBE and CARLA K. JOHNSON AP Medical Writers

Americans 60 and older can get a new RSV vaccine but should discuss it with their doctor first, U.S. health officials recommended Thursday.

The newly approved vaccines are expected to be ready in the fall, a time when flu shots and updated COVID-19 shots also will be available. Those eligible for the RSV vaccine should talk with their doctor to see if it is right for them, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said in a statement.

The CDC said adults with chronic heart or lung disease, weakened immune systems and those living in long-term care facilities are at higher risk for the respiratory infection.

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a common cause of cold-like symptoms but it can be dangerous for infants and the elderly. A surge last year filled hospitals with wheezing children. There's no vaccine yet for kids, but one for pregnant women to prevent illness in infants may be coming too, pending approval from the Food and Drug Administration.

On Thursday, Dr. Rochelle Walensky, the outgoing CDC director, signed off on a recommendation made last week by an advisory panel of outside experts for a single dose of the vaccines made by Pfizer and GSK. The FDA approved the shots last month for adults 60 and older.

The CDC panel initially considered a stronger recommendation that everyone 65 and older get the shot. But they weakened their endorsement after several members had questions about how well it works in the feeblest of patients, whether boosters will be needed and be effective, and the cost.

Drugmaker GSK told the panel that its RSV vaccine would be between \$200 and \$295. Pfizer has not disclosed a price. The vaccines may hold up over multiple seasons and it's not yet clear whether boosters will be recommended.

Others wanted a stronger endorsement for those 65 and older. Asking people to consult their doctor "is an absolute impediment" to getting more people vaccinated and an extra burden on health care providers, Robert Blancato, executive director of the National Association of Nutrition and Aging Services Programs, said Thursday.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Central US is now getting worst of the drought. Corn crops are stressed, rivers are running low

By JIM SALTER Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Mike Shane's Illinois farm got a nice soaking on May 8, shortly after he planted his corn crop. Since then, rain has been hard to come by.

Plenty of storms have ventured close only to fizzle out before making it to Shane's 200-acre spread near Peoria.

"It comes across the Mississippi River and then just disappears," Shane, 47, said. "My corn looks absolutely terrible right now." Without substantial rain soon, "I just don't see any hope for it," he said.

Heavy rain over the winter eased the drought in the West, but now the middle of the country is extraordinarily dry. Crops are stressed, rivers are running low, and cities and towns are anxiously hoping for a break in the weather.

Experts say the drought in the central U.S. is the worst since at least 2012, and in some areas, is drawing comparisons to the 1988 drought that devastated corn, wheat and soybean crops. This year, although temperatures have been generally mild through the spring and early days of summer, rainfall has been sorely lacking.

The U.S. Drought Monitor, operated by the federal government and the National Drought Mitigation Center at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, reports that nearly half of Kansas is in either extreme or exceptional drought condition — the highest drought designation. More than a quarter of Nebraska is in extreme drought, and 13% is in exceptional drought. Arid conditions permeate Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Michigan, Indiana, Missouri and Kentucky.

The frequency and intensity of droughts and rainfall are increasing due to burning fossil fuels and other human activity that releases greenhouse gases, according to data from a pair of satellites used to measure changes in Earth's water storage. The study was published in March in the journal *Nature Water*.

Adam Hartman, a meteorologist at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center, said some parts of the central U.S. have been experiencing extreme drought since the winter. In other states, "flash droughts" have popped up over the past 2-3 months.

"As a result you've see drastic losses in topsoil, subsoil moisture," Hartman said. "We've seen ground water levels start to lower as well. We've seen stream flows start to decline."

Crops are feeling the impact. The U.S. Department of Agriculture now rates only half of the U.S. corn crop as good or excellent — the lowest percentage since 1988. Nearly two-thirds of the nation's corn-growing areas are in drought.

"That gives us some indicator that we're seeing widespread stress on those crops throughout the Corn Belt," said Krista Swanson, an economist for the National Corn Growers Association.

If rains don't arrive soon, Swanson believes total yield could be down about 1 billion bushels from the original projection of 16.7 billion bushels.

That won't necessarily mean higher costs for consumers because much of the corn is used for feed, ethanol or is exported, Swanson said. The real impact is on the farmers.

"Their cost-per-acre is the same regardless of what they produce," Swanson said. "In these years where we have lower production, on the farmer side that's a challenge."

Water levels are dipping in rivers. The Mississippi River — especially from southern Illinois to the south — is extremely low in many spots. It was just last fall that the river reached or neared record low-water marks in several places, only to bounce back to flood levels in the spring, before the latest drought-fueled decline.

Lynn Muench, a senior vice president for the American Waterways Operators, which advocates for the tugboat, towboat and barge industry, said barge capacity is being voluntarily reduced on parts of the Mississippi River.

Losing capacity is a financial setback but operators are taking it in stride, Muench said.

"We're a flexible and resilient industry so we'll keep going," he said.

Colin Wellenkamp, executive director of the Mississippi River Cities and Towns Initiative, said many communities are on edge. The drought last fall cost river communities billions of dollars in losses due to increased energy and water purification costs, lost tourism revenue, commodity losses and other hits.

"Now we're right back into drought again," Wellenkamp said. So far, impact has been minimal, "but if we don't get relief in July, that's all going to change," he said.

On Shane's 200-acre farm, corn should be standing 10 feet tall by now. It's barely to his waist. The leaves are yellowed and Shane isn't certain the ears of corn are even developing.

"If that's the case, it's worthless," he said.

But farmers aren't giving up hope. Swanson said the El Nino weather pattern that has taken hold typically means more rain and better growing conditions in the central U.S.

"We could see more favorable weather over the next two months, which could have a positive impact," she said.

But even with El Nino, Hartman noted that the seasonal outlook for the summer months projects below-normal rainfall.

"This drought could stick around for a little bit," Hartman said.

Historic Arizona mining town backs copper project on land that Native American groups say is sacred

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

SUPERIOR, Ariz. (AP) — Growing up in a mining family that goes back generations, Mayor Mila Besich knew the Oak Flat Campground as the place where she attended union picnics as a girl and in earlier years her parents stood in a clearing to hear the World Series on the radio.

Now, Besich is overseeing Superior's fight to build a new copper project at Oak Flat amid worries about the town's economic future.

Today, the national forest land in the heart of Arizona's "Copper Corridor" is scattered with 20 rustic campsites among ancient oaks and a hand-painted sign that reads: "Protect Oak Flat, Holy Land." Buried deep underground is the world's third-largest deposit of copper ore, big enough to yield 40 billion pounds (18 billion kilograms) of the metal over 60 years.

Competing interests have ignited a tug of war between the town of about 3,000 people who want a huge copper mine built there for its economic benefits, and Native American groups that consider the land sacred and are fighting to protect it from disturbance.

"Our town is going to be the most affected," said the mayor. "What about our culture?"

Resolution Copper Mining, a joint subsidiary of U.K. and Australian mining giants Rio Tinto and BHP, hopes to build one of the world's largest underground copper mines at the site outside Superior, about 70 miles (113 kilometers) east of Phoenix. Managing partner Rio Tinto says the mine could satisfy a quarter of growing U.S. demand for copper used in electric vehicles and smartphones.

Resolution began the permitting process nearly a decade ago, but the project has been delayed amid legal and political wrangling between U.S. agencies and the nonprofit Apache Stronghold, which challenges a planned land swap that would make the project possible. The full U.S. 9th District Court of Appeals is considering Apache Stronghold's request to permanently halt the project, but the only thing stopping it now is the lack of a new environmental impact statement.

Two other lawsuits challenging the initial environmental review, one filed by the San Carlos Apache Tribe and the other by environmental groups, have gone nowhere since the U.S. government pulled the impact statement for more consultations.

Oak Flat is on Tonto National Forest property to be conveyed to Resolution under a land exchange that Congress approved in a 2014 rider to a must-pass defense bill.

The congressional vote sparked outrage among some Apaches over the site, which features ancient Emory oaks and their acorns and other plants they consider important to their culture and religion. Called Chi'chil Bildagoteel, the site is about an hour's drive from the San Carlos Apache Reservation and has been

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used for girls' coming-of-age celebrations.

Rio Tinto has said it would keep the campground open during the mine's first decades of operation. But Oak Flat could eventually collapse into a 1.8-mile (2.8-kilometer) crater when massive amounts of rock are removed from below.

Wendsler Nosie, a former San Carlos Apache tribal chairman and longtime activist, is the face of the Save Oak Flat campaign. He earlier fought unsuccessfully to stop a major telescope project on a site in southeastern Arizona that Apaches consider sacred: Mount Graham, or Dzil Nchaa Sí'an.

Nosie said he believes many townspeople quietly back his fight, but "they cannot openly show their support for me."

When he was recently confronted in an area restaurant by a mining company employee who accused him of endangering jobs, development and good schools, "I stood up and talked about how I'm fighting for land, the water, the earth, religion and our children," he said, prompting a group of diners to applaud and pay for his dinner.

While the San Carlos Apache leadership opposes the mine, some tribe members support it for the jobs it could generate amid high unemployment on the reservation.

"Oak Flat is not sacred," said Karen Kitcheyan-Jones, 64, a member who lives on the reservation. "There are many places on the reservation where we can gather acorns and have ceremonies."

Brenda Astor, Resolution's principal adviser for Native affairs and a San Carlos Apache member, noted that dozens of other enrolled members also work for the mining company.

Amid strong opposition to the project by some tribes and others, the Forest Service withdrew Resolution's original environmental impact statement for Oak Flat two years ago for additional consultations. No time frame has been announced. But once a new review is published, the formal transfer process can begin unless a federal court halts it.

U.S. Rep. Raul Grijalva of Arizona reintroduced legislation in March seeking to stop the land transfer, but it has not gained traction in Congress.

Rio Tinto says the mine would help create 3,700 jobs over the course of the project and boost state and local tax revenues by \$88 million to \$113 million a year.

That's a lot for a town still clawing back economically after the Magma copper mine first shut down in 1982, later opened for a few years, then closed for good in 1996. The closure devastated a community so small that it has no stoplight and can be traversed by car in just over three minutes.

Superior was originally established in 1882 as the town of Hastings when the big mine was the Silver King, producing silver. The former mining towns of Globe and Miami are nearby, burrowed into mountains studded with saguaro cactus.

Today, Superior still embraces its labor roots, a Democratic island in predominantly Republican Pinal County, said Besich, herself a Democrat.

More than a quarter of the town's residents live below the poverty line. Nearly 70% of the population is Hispanic, largely descendants of mining families who immigrated from Mexico or already worked in the area when it was still part of Mexico until the mid-1800s.

"We didn't cross the border, it crossed us," said Manny Guzman, whose family in the area goes back seven generations. His ancestor Manuelita Guzman (1844-1916) is buried in the Historic Pinal Cemetery, also the resting place of Wyatt Earp's common-law wife, Mattie Earp.

Guzman, president of the nonprofit economic development corporation Rebuild Superior, said he remains hopeful the mine will prevail, but finds the delays frustrating after spending innumerable hours debating the environmental review.

"There have been so many studies, so many roundtables," he said.

The talks have secured important gains for Superior, such as ensuring protection of the town's water supply and guaranteeing a minimum of \$120 million in revenue to pay for police and fire services over the course of the project if it goes forward.

"We have seen some pretty dramatic changes to the plan," said Vicky Peacey, Resolution's president and general manager. "It's important that a lot of voices are heard."

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Rio Tinto also agreed to permanently protect Apache Leap, the town's backdrop where local legend says some 75 Apaches leapt 400 feet (122 meters) to their death in the early 1870s rather than surrender to the U.S. cavalry.

Town manager Todd Pryor said Resolution provided \$2.25 million to help buy the old brick Superior High School that's being renovated to house the town hall, a library and activities for seniors, and threw in another \$1.29 million for an enterprise center to develop future entrepreneurs and teach people trades such as welding.

Officials in a town used to boom and bust cycles say they know they need to diversify their economy and can't count only on Resolution and its mine for their future.

They are developing local tourism, every March hosting a popular Apache Leap Mining Festival that includes a parade, chihuahua races and a mining competition with hand-sawing and jackleg drilling contests. Hundreds visit the town each August for the Prickly Pear Festival, with cactus fruit ice cream and margaritas.

But in a state that produces 70% of the nation's copper, and in a town where nearly everyone's parents and grandparents worked for the mines, the biggest bets for the future are on the extraction of ore.

"It's in our DNA," said Rick Cartier, the chamber of commerce president.

Associated Press writer Deepa Bharath in Oak Flat, Arizona, contributed to this report.

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Trump's GOP support dips slightly after his indictment over classified documents, AP-NORC poll finds

By JILL COLVIN and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump's criminal indictment on charges of mishandling government secrets appears to have dented his popularity among Republicans — but only slightly — according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Sixty percent of Republicans now have a favorable view of Trump, down slightly from 68% in April for the 2024 GOP presidential front-runner. The poll found 38% of Republicans have an unfavorable view of Trump, up from 30% in April.

The favorability decline suggests some Republicans could be growing weary of Trump's legal drama after he became the first former president in U.S. history to be indicted on federal criminal charges. Trump, who was also indicted on separate charges in New York this spring, pleaded not guilty this month to 37 felony counts accusing him of improperly storing classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago club in Palm Beach, Florida, concealing them from investigators and refusing to turn them over when subpoenaed.

Overall, Americans are more likely to have an unfavorable view of Trump than a favorable one, 63% to 33%, similar to April. The poll was conducted June 22-26, after the full indictment became public and after Trump's not guilty plea.

But the poll also points to challenges faced by Trump's GOP rivals in capitalizing on the situation and trying to change the dynamic of the nomination contest, where Trump remains the clear favorite. U.S. adults overall are slightly more likely than they were earlier in the year to believe the former president acted illegally in his handling of classified documents stashed at Mar-a-Lago. Just over half, 53%, now say he broke the law, compared with 47% in the April AP-NORC poll. But most of that increase is attributable to Democrats.

An overwhelming majority of Democratic voters, 84%, now say they think Trump broke the law in connection to the documents, compared with 75% who said so in April.

When it comes to Republicans, however, only about a quarter say Trump acted illegally in the Mar-a-Lago case, about the same as in April. An additional 29% said he acted unethically but did not do anything illegal,

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while 26% said they believe he did nothing wrong, with the rest saying they didn't know enough to say. They include Patty Faber, a registered Republican who lives north of Phoenix and was dismissive of the charges.

"It's a bunch of hooley," said Faber, 62, who runs an RV park. "Should he have taken all that stuff home? No. But other presidents have also taken things home." She noted that President Joe Biden and former Vice President Mike Pence were also found to have classified documents in their possession — though neither has been accused of trying to conceal the documents from or lying to investigators.

Still, Faber, who has supported Trump in the past, said that while she would be "ecstatic" to see him return to the White House, she would much prefer the party nominate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is currently a distant second in the polls.

"He has a better chance of winning the general election. Trump is carrying too much baggage now," she said.

Others' feelings were more complicated. Nancy Tobeck, 74, a Republican in Crossville, Tennessee, believes Trump may have broken the law. But if he did, she said, "I don't think it was deliberate."

"It's a hard one because I think he might have done something wrong by not giving them all over. But I also understand that he had things in there. So it's kind of half and half on that," she said. "I do believe that it is politically motivated, though."

Tobeck, who voted for Trump in 2016 and 2020, said the indictment had not changed her feelings about him because she had already soured on the former president after he refused to accept the results of the 2020 election.

Indeed, the numbers make clear the challenges faced by Trump's GOP rivals, who have struggled to respond to charges that would, in any other era, spell a candidate's demise.

While former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley called Trump's alleged actions "reckless" and Pence has said he "can't defend" the "very serious allegations," the candidates have also criticized the Justice Department for the charges, reflecting GOP voters' deep skepticism of federal law enforcement.

Besides the counts he faces in Florida, Trump was indicted in New York in March in connection to hush money payments made during the 2016 campaign to women who alleged sexual encounters with him. And he faces the possibility of additional charges in other jurisdictions.

In Georgia, a prosecutor is investigating efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election. And in Washington, special counsel Jack Smith continues to investigate Trump's election lies and their aftermath, including the violent riot at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

The poll finds half of U.S. adults believe Trump broke the law in his alleged attempt to interfere in Georgia's vote count during the 2020 presidential election. Slightly fewer, 45%, say his actions related to the Jan. 6 insurrection were unlawful.

Just 35% of U.S. adults say he acted illegally in allegedly covering up the hush money payments — a slight decrease from the 41% who said he had in April, just after the indictment in that case. In particular, 57% of Democrats now say Trump acted illegally in that case, down from 68% in April. Just 13% of Republicans say Trump acted illegally in that case, the same as in April.

Nearly all U.S. adults have read or heard at least a little about Trump's federal indictment, with Democrats being slightly more likely than Republicans to say they have heard a lot.

All that attention has proved a challenge for Trump's GOP rivals, who have been grappling with how to break into the spotlight.

Some voters are simply sick of the drama.

Paul Schwartz, 38, a truck driver from Pocatello, Idaho, identifies as an independent but voted for Trump in 2016 and 2020 because he saw him as the better of bad options.

While he says he's no fan of Trump — "I've always disdained the man," he said — Schwartz sees the indictment as nothing but a "witch hunt" and "mudslinging that has no point."

"I believe people are trying to swing opinions on things that are completely irrelevant to how someone governs the country," he said, arguing that what matters are candidates' positions on issues like abortion and immigration.

Plus, he said: "We know these are detestable human beings. They're politicians. That's a job requirement."

The poll of 1,220 adults was conducted June 22-26 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Belarus leader welcomes Wagner forces but others in the country see them as a threat

By The Associated Press undefined

As life in Russia returned to normal after an armed rebellion by a mercenary group, tensions were rising in and around its neighbor Belarus, where the exiled leader of the force and some of its fighters were settling in.

Moving to Belarus was part of the deal the Kremlin struck with Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner private military company, to end last weekend's rebellion that rattled Russia's leadership.

Prigozhin and his fighters escaped prosecution and were offered refuge in Belarus by authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko, who said his country could use their experience and expertise.

That doesn't sit well with the Belarusian opposition and guerrilla activists, who called Wagner fighters "a threat to the Belarusian people and (the country's) independence," and promised action.

"We're categorically against stationing Russian mercenaries in Belarus and are preparing a 'warm' welcome to Wagnerites in Belarus," said Aliaksandr Azarau, leader of the BYPOL guerrilla group of former military members, speaking in a telephone interview with The Associated Press from outside the country.

Neighboring Baltic countries also expressed concerns about how this would affect regional security. In a joint statement Wednesday, parliament speakers in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania urged the European Union to label Wagner a terrorist organization.

"The emergence of the Wagner mercenary group in Belarus could make the security situation on the eastern borders of NATO and the EU even more precarious," the statement read.

Lukashenko said those Wagner fighters who don't want to come under the command of the Russian Defense Ministry — one of the options offered to them by Russian President Vladimir Putin — can stay in Belarus "for some time" at their own expense.

He said he had offered them "an abandoned military unit" to set up camp, and promised to "help with whatever we can."

"We're looking at it pragmatically — if their commanders come to us and help us, (we get their) experience," Lukashenko said.

He didn't specify the facility's location, but Azarau said construction of a site for Wagner mercenaries was underway in Osipovichi, a city 230 kilometers (142 miles) north of the border with Ukraine, with Belarusian soldiers involved.

Residents of the city of 30,000 told AP they were rattled by the developments.

"There's military equipment in the streets and Belarusian servicemen — all residents are discussing the arrival of Wagnerites and, frankly speaking, we're panicking and are not happy about being neighbors with them," Inga, a 43-year-old doctor in Osipovichi, said by phone.

"I have teenage daughters. ... How will we live next to thugs, pardoned murderers and rapists?" said the woman, who spoke on condition of that she not be fully identified out of safety concerns.

The Kremlin promised not to prosecute Prigozhin for the rebellion after reaching an agreement that he would halt the uprising and go to Belarus. That came even though Putin vowed to punish those behind what he called treason and a "stab in the back."

Lukashenko has been Putin's closest ally, allowing Russia to use Belarus to send troops and weapons into Ukraine. He has welcomed a continued Russian military presence in the country and the deployment there of some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons.

But he has stressed that Prigozhin's fighters "will not be guarding any nuclear weapons."

Prigozhin himself arrived in Belarus on Monday, Lukashenko said, but his exact whereabouts are unknown. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has played down concerns that Wagner would pose a threat from Belarus. He said the mercenaries probably wouldn't go there in significant numbers and added that Ukraine's military believes security along their border will remain "unchanged and controllable."

According to an independent Belarusian military monitoring group, Belaruskі Hajun, Prigozhin met with Lukashenko several times this week to discuss his force in Belarus.

Prigozhin's private jet is based at the Machulishchy Air Base near Minsk. In February, Belarusian guerrillas attacked a Russian warplane parked there, infuriating Lukashenko.

Belaruskі Hajun confirmed Lukashenko met with Prigozhin in a residence on the shore of the Zaslavskoye reservoir, "where nonpublic negotiations are taking place with the participation of the entire Lukashenko family," said Anton Matolka, coordinator of the group. He did not elaborate but Lukashenko's sons are known to take a role in some government activities.

Guerrillas from BYPOL told AP they will resist Wagner fighters being stationed in Belarus and "stage acts" of sabotage at sites where mercenaries are housed.

"We will actively resist this, using all possible means," Azarau said.

NATO members Poland, Latvia and Lithuania, who share a 1,250-kilometer (775-mile) border with Belarus, said they will enhance security along the frontier because of the Wagner forces.

Belarusian opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhnaouskaya, who is in exile abroad, said having Wagner fighters in Belarus threatens the country's sovereignty. She noted it is taking place in the run-up to the NATO summit in Vilnius next month.

"The presence of criminal Prigozhin in Belarus is an illustration of how our country turned into a refuge for tyrants and nuclear threats," Tsikhanouskaya said.

Analysts believe that Lukashenko is using the situation as leverage to get more loans and funding from the Kremlin in return for his role as a savior of Russia from the mutiny.

"Lukashenko is a very experienced player, and he will ask Putin to pay for a favor he did for the Kremlin with new loans and economic concessions," Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich told AP.

"The Kremlin and Prigozhin ... used Belarus as part of their deal, and painlessly exiled the troublemaker there," Karbalevich said.

He believes that Lukashenko might use Prigozhin's presence in Belarus to "tickle Putin's nerves," but a long-term alliance between them is unlikely.

"Prigozhin showed that he is hard to control, and Lukashenko doesn't like risks and surprises," Karbalevich said.

Lukashenko has been careful throughout the Ukraine war, so the moving and housing of Wagner fighters will be happening in small batches, "with lots of caution and under strict control from Belarusian security services," Karbalevich said.

Associated Press writer Jari Tanner in Helsinki contributed.

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

Police release video of officer killing a neo-Nazi gunman and ending a mass shooting at a Texas mall

ALLEN, Texas (AP) — Police released video footage on Wednesday of an officer killing a neo-Nazi gunman, quickly ending a mass shooting that left eight people dead and seven others wounded at a Dallas-area shopping mall.

The edited five-and-a-half-minute video details the final moments of Mauricio Garcia, 33, after he unleashed a rain of bullets from an AR-15-style rifle at the Allen Premium Outlets on May 6.

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Those killed included three members of a Korean American family including a 3-year-old child, two young sisters, a security guard and an engineer from India.

Police haven't revealed a motive for the attack.

The shooting came in a year that has seen an unprecedented pace of mass killings.

The footage from a body camera worn by an Allen police officer starts off with the officer telling two children outside the mall to wear their seatbelts and be good.

Moments later, the sound of rapid gunfire erupts from the mall. The children and a woman with them run away as the officer radios in the report, grabs his rifle from his car and dashes toward the gunfire, the body camera footage shows.

As he runs, the panting officer shouts at people to move and get out. At one point, he tells the dispatcher, "I believe we've got a mass shooter" and shouts at the gunman to drop his weapon.

"I'm passing injured (people)," he adds.

The officer continues to run through the outside galleries of the outlet as the sound of gunfire bursts continues. About four minutes into the video, the officer opens fire with at least a half-dozen shots.

An instant later, the officer shouts: "Drop the gun!" and then reports: "I've got him down!"

Another officer then confirms the gunman is dead.

The video ends with the two officers standing next to the gunman's body, which is blurred out.

The video was released a day after a grand jury cleared the officer of wrongdoing, indicating that "the use of force was justified under Texas law," according to a police statement.

In the statement, Allen Police Chief Brian Harvey praised the officer.

"This video shows how quickly a routine interaction with the public turned into a life-and-death situation," Harvey said. "The officer recognized the danger, ran toward the gunfire and neutralized the threat — and for his actions, the Allen community is forever grateful."

Three members of a Korean American family were killed: Kyu Song Cho, 37; Cindy Cho, 35; and their 3-year-old son, James Cho. Their 6-year-old son was wounded.

Also killed were Aishwarya Thatikonda, 27; sisters Daniela Mendoza, 11, and Sofia Mendoza, 8; security guard Christian LaCour, 20; and Elio Cumana-Rivas, 32.

Garcia used one of eight legally purchased guns he had brought to the mall, authorities said.

The killer had no criminal record. An Army official told The Associated Press that Garcia failed to complete basic training about 15 years earlier and was kicked out for mental health reasons. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss personnel matters.

Garcia left a long trail of online posts describing his white supremacist and misogynistic views. He described mass shootings as sport and posted photos showing his large Nazi tattoos and a favorite passage in the "Hunger Games" books marked with a swastika drawn in green highlighter.

He was Latino, and he posted one cartoon image showing a Latino child at a fork in a road, with one direction labeled "act black" and the other, "become a white supremacist."

"I think I'll take my chances with the white supremacist," he wrote.

The AP Interview: Olympics boss vows Paris Games will be safe, says no resignations planned in probe

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

SAINT-DENIS, France (AP) — What was shaping up as a regular workday turned out to be anything but for the organizers of France's first summer Olympic Games in a century.

French anti-corruption police raided their bustling Olympic headquarters on the outskirts of Paris, arriving unannounced and accompanied by a magistrate from a French financial crimes prosecution unit that has made a habit of going after sports' rogues.

This time, they were zeroing in on twenty or so of the many hundreds of business contracts that Olympic organizers have signed as they race to prepare the French capital for 10,500 athletes and millions

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of spectators next year. The investigators were hunting for documents and information as they dig into suspicions of favoritism, conflicts of interest, and misuse of some of the billions of euros (dollars) being sunk into the Paris Games that open July 26, 2024.

Tony Estanguet, a former Olympic canoeing star with gold medals from the 2000, 2004 and 2012 Games, was at work in the Olympic HQ when police came knocking last week. The trim 45-year-old is the face and chief organizer of the Paris Games, presiding over a rapidly growing workforce whose preparations were progressing largely smoothly before investigators arrived with a judge's warrant.

"It's the first time this has happened to us, so we were surprised," Estanguet says. "We said, 'Yes, of course, take all the information you need.'"

"I am cooperating. There will surely be other stages. We'll surely have to reply to more questions. There will be more checks right up to the end, perhaps even after the Games," he acknowledges. "So I am ready for that and I know that it is part of this kind of adventure. We'll be inspected intensely, criticized hugely."

In a wide-ranging interview with The Associated Press, the Paris 2024 president vigorously defended colleagues whose homes also were searched. The two senior organizing committee executives for now face no allegations and are being looked at because they were involved in business decisions, Estanguet says. "There's no question of envisaging" their resignation "for the moment," he adds.

Estanguet insists that the two financial probes of Paris Games contract awards bear no comparison with corruption and ethics scandals that have for decades dogged the Olympic movement and its flagship money-spinning event, including the 2021 Tokyo Olympics and Rio de Janeiro's bribery-plagued Games of 2016.

"It's unfair to say that we're like the others," he says. "Unfortunately, things went off course in the past and I think we're all being lumped together a bit, although I can tell you that we're being very careful and everyone here has to be very careful because there is no room for error."

In the hour-long AP interview, Estanguet also addressed other issues crucial to the success of the first Olympics to host spectators again after the COVID-19 pandemic:

— Security preparations for the groundbreaking opening ceremony on July 26 will turn Paris into "the safest place in the world," he boldly predicts. Instead of a traditional stadium ceremony, Paris intends to showcase its iconic monuments with a waterborne extravaganza on a 6-kilometer (3 1/2-mile) stretch of the cleaned-up River Seine. Hundreds of thousands of spectators will mostly watch for free in the heart of the French capital, where Islamic extremists attacked twice in 2015, killing 147 people, including outside the national stadium.

"If you want to be safe, come to Paris for the opening ceremony," Estanguet says.

— With just a year to go, Paris still has a lot of unfinished work, and that's fine, he says. "There are lots of things that aren't ready. But that's normal. I used to be a top-level athlete. It's never good to be ready a year beforehand ... You have to be ready on gameday and arrive with the feeling that you're not quite ready. That way you fight, cling on, give everything to really be at your best," he says.

The probes led by France's financial prosecution service — the first opened in 2017, the second in 2022 — threaten to hang over organizers for the duration of the July-August Olympics and the Paralympic Games that follow into September. Investigators expect to spend months sifting through documents recovered in their searches of the Paris 2024 offices, the homes of Etienne Thobois, its director general, and Edouard Donnelly, executive director of operations. They also searched the HQ of the company delivering Olympic infrastructure, Solideo, and homes of some of its staff, according to a judicial official with knowledge of the investigations who wasn't authorized to discuss them publicly.

The official said the Paris court that would hear any case, if the prosecutors' probes get that far, also has no room on its calendar to hold a trial before September 2024.

Investigators do not suspect that bribes were paid or received, drawing a sharp distinction with the corruption probes that ensnared Tokyo and Rio, the official said. Instead, two police units that fight financial criminality are investigating about 20 Olympic-related contracts — some worth less than 1 million euros — for suspected violations of French laws governing conflicts of interest, contract dealings and use of public funds, the official said.

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Estanguet acknowledges that with an event so big and costly, it's a constant battle to keep tabs on everyone working to make it happen.

He detailed multiple layers of internal and external checks, including continuous scrutiny by state auditors, that he and other Olympic organizers work under in dealing with service providers and in handling their budget of 4.38 billion euros (US\$4.8 billion) — one of the largest chunks of the overall Paris Games spending approaching 9 billion euros. Paris 2024 says it has signed contracts with more than 1,500 companies so far.

No Paris 2024 employee awards contracts alone, "the decision is always collective," Estanguet says.

"From the outset, we've been very careful because we know we're watched and we know we're accountable. And vis-à-vis the French, we have this duty to be exemplary. Me, I have my image," says the former athlete who at the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics was chosen to carry France's tricolor flag.

"I believe in sport. It changed my life. I want to show that sport will change this country and that sport will be a success. And I don't want this adventure to be remembered as having been badly managed."

Paris chief correspondent John Leicester has covered eight summer and winter Olympics for AP. More AP coverage of the Paris Olympics: <https://apnews.com/hub/2024-paris-olympic-games> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

Today in History: June 30, ERA expires

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, June 30, the 181st day of 2023. There are 184 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 30, 1982, the proposed Equal Rights Amendment to the U.S. Constitution expired, having failed to receive the required number of ratifications for its adoption, despite having its seven-year deadline extended by three years.

On this date:

In 1918, labor activist and socialist Eugene V. Debs was arrested in Cleveland, charged under the Espionage Act of 1917 for a speech he'd made two weeks earlier denouncing U.S. involvement in World War I. (Debs was sentenced to prison and disenfranchised for life.)

In 1921, President Warren G. Harding nominated former President William Howard Taft to be chief justice of the United States, succeeding the late Edward Douglass White.

In 1934, Adolf Hitler launched his "blood purge" of political and military rivals in Germany in what came to be known as "The Night of the Long Knives."

In 1958, the U.S. Senate passed the Alaska statehood bill by a vote of 64-20.

In 1971, the Supreme Court ruled, 6-3, that the government could not prevent The New York Times or The Washington Post from publishing the Pentagon Papers. A Soviet space mission ended in tragedy when three cosmonauts aboard Soyuz 11 were found dead of asphyxiation inside their capsule after it had returned to Earth.

In 1985, 39 American hostages from a hijacked TWA jetliner were freed in Beirut after being held 17 days.

In 1986, the Supreme Court, in *Bowers v. Hardwick*, ruled 5-4 that states could outlaw homosexual acts between consenting adults (however, the nation's highest court effectively reversed this decision in 2003 in *Lawrence v. Texas*).

In 1994, the U.S. Figure Skating Association stripped Tonya Harding of the national championship and banned her for life for her role in the attack on rival Nancy Kerrigan.

In 2009, American soldier Pfc. Bowe R. Bergdahl went missing from his base in eastern Afghanistan, and was later confirmed to have been captured by insurgents after walking away from his post. (Bergdahl was released on May 31, 2014 in exchange for five Taliban detainees; he pleaded guilty to desertion and

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misbehavior before the enemy, but was spared a prison sentence by a military judge.)

In 2016, saying it was the right thing to do, Defense Secretary Ash Carter announced that transgender people would be allowed to serve openly in the U.S. military, ending one of the last bans on service in the armed forces.

In 2020, Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves signed a landmark bill retiring the last state flag bearing the Confederate battle emblem. Boston's arts commission voted unanimously to remove a statue depicting a freed slave kneeling at Abraham Lincoln's feet.

Ten years ago: Nineteen elite firefighters known as members of the Granite Mountain Hotshots were killed battling a wildfire northwest of Phoenix after a change in wind direction pushed the flames back toward their position. Addressing students at the University of Cape Town, South Africa, President Barack Obama declared that the future of the young and growing continent still rested in Nelson Mandela's vision for equality and opportunity. Inbee Park won the U.S. Women's Open in Southampton, New York, for her third straight major of the year.

Five years ago: Hundreds of thousands of people gathered for rallies and marches in hundreds of locations around the country, demanding an end to the separation of immigrant families who cross into the United States. In Portland, Oregon, skirmishes between right-wing and left-wing groups left four people hospitalized. In the Iranian city of Khorramshahr, an initially peaceful protest over water shortages turned violent as police and protesters clashed.

One year ago: Ketanji Brown Jackson was sworn in to the Supreme Court, shattering a glass ceiling as the first Black woman on the nation's highest court. The 51-year-old Jackson became the court's 116th justice, taking the place of a justice she once worked for, Stephen Breyer, whose retirement took effect as she took over. The same day, in a blow to the fight against climate change, the Supreme Court limited how the nation's main anti-air pollution law could be used to reduce carbon dioxide emissions from power plants. By a 6-3 vote, the court said that the Clean Air Act did not give the Environmental Protection Agency broad authority to regulate greenhouse gas emissions from power plants that contribute to global warming. West Coast powerhouses USC and UCLA announced they were planning to leave the Pac-12 for the Big Ten Conference in a surprising move that promised to lead to a major realignment of college sports.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Lea Massari is 90. Actor Nancy Dussault (doo-SOH') is 87. Songwriter Tony Hatch is 84. Singer Glenn Shorrock is 79. Actor Leonard Whiting is 73. Jazz musician Stanley Clarke is 72. Actor David Garrison is 71. Rock musician Hal Lindes (Dire Straits) is 70. Actor-comedian David Alan Grier is 67. Actor Vincent D'Onofrio is 64. Actor Deirdre Lovejoy is 61. Actor Rupert Graves is 60. Former boxer Mike Tyson is 57. Actor Peter Outerbridge is 57. Rock musician Tom Drummond (Better Than Ezra) is 54. Actor-comedian Tony Rock (TV: "Living Biblically") is 54. Actor Brian Bloom is 53. Actor Monica Potter is 52. Actor Molly Parker is 51. Actor Rick Gonzalez is 44. Actor Tom Burke is 42. Actor Lizzy Caplan is 41. Actor Susannah Flood is 41. Rock musician James Adam Shelley (American Authors) is 40. Country singer Cole Swindell is 40. R&B singer Fantasia is 39. Olympic gold medal swimmer Michael Phelps is 38. Actor Sean Marquette (TV: "The Goldbergs") is 35.