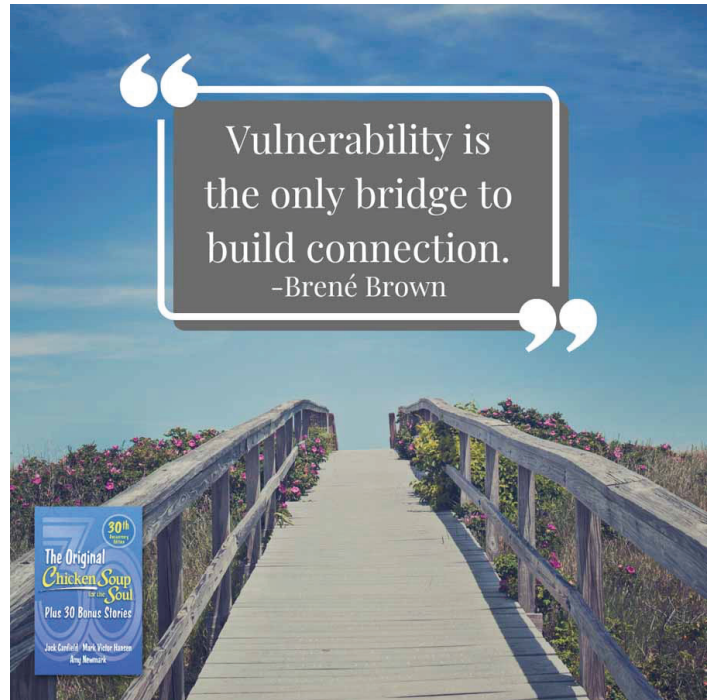


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Groton Community Calendar

Thursday, July 6

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, broccoli and cauliflower blend, fruit, cookie.

U8 R&B hosts Hannigan/Borge, DH, 5:30 p.m.

City Council meeting, 7 p.m.

Friday, July 7

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tri-tators, peas and carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Jr. Teeners at Vern Jark Memorial Tournament in Aberdeen

U12 State Tournament at Webster

T-Ball Scrimmage (B&G), 6 p.m.

Saturday, July 8

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

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

Avantara Summer Event, 10 a.m. to 2 p.m.

Jr. Teeners at Vern Jark Memorial Tournament in Aberdeen

U12 State Tournament at Webster

Sunday, July 9

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 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: Conde worship at 8:30 a.m., coffee hour 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship at 10:30 a.m.

Groton Summer Fest/Car Show, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., City Park

Amateurs at Northville, 5 p.m.

Jr. Teeners at Vern Jark Memorial Tournament in Aberdeen

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

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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

GROTON'S EVENTS



July 4 Firecracker
Tourney at Olive
Grove Golf Course

July 9 Summer
Fest/Car Show at
the City Park



July 20 Pro Am
Tourney at Olive
Grove Golf Course

July 20 Summer
Downtown Sip &
Shop



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

Groton Jr. Legion Loses Lead Early in Defeat

Groton Jr. Legion watched the game slip away early and couldn't recover in a 12-6 loss to Watertown JR Legion on Wednesday. Watertown JR Legion scored on a single by Talan Jurgens in the first inning, a sacrifice fly by Blake Davis in the second inning, a single by Mitch Olson in the second inning, and a fielder's choice by Markus Pitkin in the second inning.

Groton Jr. Legion collected one hits and Watertown JR Legion had 11 in the high-scoring affair.

In the first inning, Watertown JR Legion got their offense started when Jurgens singled on the first pitch of the at bat, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Legion put up three runs in the sixth inning. Groton Jr. Legion big bats were led by Brevin Flihs and Braxton Imrie, who all drove in runs.

Watertown JR Legion scored four runs in the second inning. Watertown JR Legion's big inning was driven by a single by Olson, a sac fly by Davis, and a fielder's choice by Pitkin.

Jackson Espland pitched Watertown JR Legion to victory. Espland went two innings, allowing zero runs on zero hits and walking zero.

Korbin Kucker took the loss for Groton Jr. Legion. The righthander lasted two innings, allowing three hits and five runs while striking out one.

Colby Dunker led Groton Jr. Legion with one hit in three at bats.

Watertown JR Legion tallied 11 hits on the day. Olson, Max Dylla, Jurgens, and Pitkin each managed multiple hits for Watertown JR Legion. Olson went 3-for-3 at the plate to lead Watertown JR Legion in hits. Jurgens led Watertown JR Legion with two stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with ten stolen bases.

Groton Jr. Legion Takes a Tough Blow From Watertown JR Legion

It was a tough day on Thursday for Groton Jr. Legion, who lost 10-0 to Watertown JR Legion

One bright spot for Groton Jr. Legion was a single by Braxton Imrie in the first inning.

Max Dylla led the Watertown JR Legion to victory on the mound. The pitcher surrendered zero runs on three hits over four innings, striking out five and walking one.

Caden Mcinerney took the loss for Groton Jr. Legion. Mcinerney surrendered three runs on three hits over two innings, walking zero.

Korbin Kucker led Groton Jr. Legion with two hits in two at bats.

Jackson Espland went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Watertown JR Legion in hits. Watertown JR Legion was sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Cole Hansen made the most plays with five.

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Groton Jr. Teeners Goes Down on Final Play Against W.I.N.

Groton Jr. Teeners fell to Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern 13-12 on Wednesday on the final play of the game. The game was tied at 12 with Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern batting in the bottom of the seventh when Brayden singled on a 1-2 count, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Teeners fell behind by seven runs in the fifth inning, but then tried to fight back. Groton Jr. Teeners scored six runs in the failed comeback on a double by Karson Zak, a single by Shaydon Wood, a single by Alex Abeln, an error, and a single by Easton Weber.

In the first inning, Groton Jr. Teeners got their offense started. Ryder Schelle doubled on a 0-1 count, scoring one run.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern scored eight runs in the fifth inning. The offensive firepower by Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern was led by Gage, Easton, Bekket, Lincoln B, Brayden, and Lincoln K, all sending runners across the plate with RBIs in the inning.

Logan was credited with the victory for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern. Logan pitched one inning, allowing two runs on two hits, striking out two and walking zero. Gage threw two innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Ethan Kroll toed the rubber for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The pitcher allowed eight hits and nine runs over four and a third innings, striking out three. Weber threw two and a third innings in relief out of the bullpen.

Brayden started the game for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern. The ace lasted four innings, allowing seven hits and five runs while striking out four.

Groton Jr. Teeners totaled 15 hits. Abeln, Weber, Schelle, Zak, and Gavin Kroll each managed multiple hits for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. Abeln led Groton Jr. Teeners with three hits in five at bats.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern collected ten hits. Logan and K each racked up multiple hits for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern.

Groton Jr. Teeners Fall Short to W.I.N.

Groton Jr. Teeners opened up scoring in the first inning. Groton Jr. Teeners scored one run on a stolen base.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern evened things up at two in the bottom of the first inning when Noah singled on a 3-2 count, scoring one run.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern pulled away for good with two runs in the third inning. In the third Alec singled on a 2-0 count, scoring one run and Noah singled on a 0-2 count, scoring one run.

Lincoln K took the win for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern. K lasted five innings, allowing one hit and three runs while striking out 12.

Braeden Flihs took the loss for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The righty surrendered two runs on three hits over two innings, striking out two and walking zero.

Karson Zak started the game for Groton Jr. Teeners 14U. The pitcher surrendered two runs on three hits over two innings, striking out two and walking one.

Easton Weber went 1-for-2 at the plate to lead Groton Jr. Teeners in hits. Tristin McGannon led Groton Jr. Teeners with two stolen bases, as they ran wild on the base paths with six stolen bases.

Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern racked up six hits on the day. Noah and Logan all collected multiple hits for Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern. Warner-Ipswich-Northwestern didn't commit a single error in the field. Lincoln B had the most chances in the field with 13.

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Partial Volleyball Schedule

The volleyball schedule is still in the works. Here is what is posted so far:

8/24/23 hosts Hamlin 7:30 PM
C Game 5pm, JV 6pm, Varsity 7:30pm
9/7/23 @ Aberdeen Roncalli 5:00 PM
5:00 7th Grade/C, 6:00 8th Grade/JV, 7:30 Varsity
Aberdeen Catholic Schools
9/16/23 Hamlin Invitational
9/19/23 @ Warner 6:30 PM
7th/C @ 5:15; 8th/JV @ 6:30; Varsity to follow
Warner High School
9/26/23 hosts Great Plains Lutheran 7:00 PM
5:00 C, 6:00 JV
10/17/23 hosts Northwestern 7:00 PM
7th & C @ 5:00, 8th & JV @ 6:00, V @ 7:00 VOLLEY FOR THE CURE
10/20/23 @ Redfield 5:00 PM
C & 7th-5:00 pm; JV & 8th-6:00 pm; Varsity to follow
Redfield Jr-Sr High School Greeno Gym

Football Schedule

8/18/23 hosts Aberdeen Roncalli 7:00 PM
8/25/23 @ Redfield 7:00 PM
Redfield Pheasants Football
9/1/23 @ Dakota Hills 7:00 PM
Wilmot High School
9/8/23 hosts Clark/Willow Lake 7:00 PM
9/15/23 hosts Deuel 7:00 PM (Homecoming Game)
9/22/23 @ Sisseton 7:00 PM
Sisseton High School
9/29/23 @ Webster Area 7:00 PM
Webster Area Sports Complex
10/13/23 hosts Mobridge-Pollock 7:00 PM



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-23



Photo from KSFY featuring Charle Imrie who was deployed to help out after Hurricane Harvey hit in 2017.

Fruit of the Spirit

Ladies Luncheon & Program

Wednesday, July 12 at Noon

Bethesda Lutheran Church, Bristol

Silent Auction 10:30 - 11:30

Door Prizes

Charla Imrie from The American Red Cross

will be the guest speaker

Advance tickets required \$15.00

Call Kay Espeland 605-492-3507 or

Jane Goehring 605-290-1420



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State predicts no trouble at future Rushmore fireworks, despite clash in 2020

BY: SETH TUPPER - JULY 5, 2023 5:37 PM

Protesters physically clashed with law enforcement officers the last time there was a fireworks display at Mount Rushmore, but state officials are telling the federal government there's no reason to believe something similar would happen again.

The state Department of Tourism applied Wednesday to the U.S. Department of the Interior for a special use permit to conduct a fireworks display next year, on or around the Fourth of July. The Interior Department includes the National Park Service, which manages Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

The application form includes a series of yes-or-no questions. One of the questions asks, "Is there any reason to believe there will be attempts to disrupt, protest or prevent your event?" The state Tourism Department checked the box for "no."

The most recent fireworks display at Mount Rushmore, which was attended by then-President Donald Trump, was on July 3, 2020. Protesters blocked a checkpoint for the ticketed event and engaged in a physical altercation with sheriff's deputies and National Guard soldiers.

Twenty people were arrested on various charges that were later dropped after an agreement was reached with prosecutors. The protesters criticized Trump's policies and advocated for the return of land that Native Americans lost to broken treaties, including the Black Hills and Mount Rushmore.

Each year since, the Department of the Interior has rejected the state's fireworks permit applications. Gov. Kristi Noem has sued, unsuccessfully, to overturn the decisions.

Noem announced the state's latest application Wednesday, saying in a news release that she will "keep fighting."

"The Biden administration has consistently denied us the ability to celebrate our nation's freedom with fireworks," Noem said.

State Tourism Department spokesperson Katlyn Svendsen fulfilled South Dakota Searchlight's request for a copy of the most recent application Wednesday, but did not immediately respond to further questions.

Prior to Noem's collaboration with Trump to bring fireworks back to Mount Rushmore in 2020, there hadn't been a fireworks display at the memorial in more than a decade. Federal officials had ended the displays because of wildfires started by fireworks embers falling in the surrounding forest, litter from exploded fireworks that lingered for years afterward, and groundwater pollution caused by chemicals in the fireworks.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

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Gannett policies change the face of journalism in South Dakota

DANA HESS

On June 5, journalists at two dozen newspapers across seven states went on strike for the day to show their disapproval of Gannett board chairman and chief executive officer Mike Reed.

Journalists were protesting the state of their trade at the Gannett newspapers where they work. Their ability to do that work has gone downhill since the company's purchase by GateHouse Media in 2019. The purchase created a publishing behemoth, still known as Gannett, which owns USA Today and more than 200 daily newspapers in the United States. Unfortunately, the purchase also created a debt behemoth resulting in cutting newsroom staffs by 50% in four years, drastic decreases in local news coverage and, perhaps not coincidentally, a 70% drop in the company's share price.

The protest was to no avail as Reed was easily reelected chairman. While the protest fizzled, Gannett's draconian policies are helping to reshape the journalism landscape in South Dakota.

There are three Gannett newspapers in this state: the Sioux Falls Argus Leader, the Aberdeen American News and the Watertown Public Opinion. The staffs have been cut so drastically at those newspapers that it would not cause much of a crowd if their news staff started picketing. Interestingly, it's their readers who are up in arms and calling for a change in the way newspapers do business in South Dakota.

The support for that change was evident in the last legislative session when lobbyists for the South Dakota Newspaper Association had to fight off two attempts to make online start-up news sites in Sioux Falls and Aberdeen eligible to publish legal notices. Currently, newspapers with second-class mailing permits may print paid legal notices from their city and school district. County governments must publish their notices in up to three newspapers in that county.

Legislators from Sioux Falls and Aberdeen, who spoke in favor of the bills to change legal notice eligibility, testified about drastic cutbacks in local news coverage by their local papers. A look at those three newspapers during the week of the strike by their Gannett colleagues shows that readers in those communities have a genuine gripe.

That week, June 5-11, showed exactly no local news stories in the Aberdeen American News. None. There were a few front-page stories written by the Argus Leader, and all the "local" sports coverage came from stories written by the Watertown Public Opinion's lone sports reporter, who, by the looks of his many contributions, may be the hardest working reporter in South Dakota journalism.

The Public Opinion was hardly better, with one local front-page story that week that looked to have been written by a freelancer. At least it has robust sports coverage.

Part of the reaction to smaller newspaper staffs has been the growth of nonprofit newsrooms. The week in question, all three Gannett newspapers made use of multiple stories by South Dakota News Watch and South Dakota Searchlight, both of which allow free republication of their stories.

The Argus Leader's newsroom has been reduced in size, but it's still active, with local stories on the front page every day that week. It had local sports coverage, but often stories appeared in the paper days



In order to be an official newspaper in South Dakota, newspapers need to have at least eight hours of office hours open to the public. This was posted at the door of the Aberdeen American News. When looking inside, all you see is an empty desk. (Photo by Paul

Kosel)

after the event had taken place.

It's hard to figure out Gannett's business plan for these newspapers. With advertising down and subscriptions dwindling nationwide, their inattention to their own communities will likely cause them to lose access to the steady stream of income provided by public notices.

The effort to make changes to the laws governing who is eligible to publish public notices is proceeding. The South Dakota Newspaper Association's members recently voted to change the organization's bylaws to allow online-first publications to become eligible for membership. Count on work going on this summer and fall to get legislation ready for the 2024 session that expands the pool of publications eligible to publish legal notices.

If the law concerning the eligibility for publishing legal notices is changed, it will be one way of assuring three communities that they may be able to invest their public notice budgets in publications that work to satisfy their hunger for local news.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

Supply chain struggles complicate cities' transition to electric vehicles

Sioux Falls had hoped for more gas-electric hybrids

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 5, 2023 12:30 AM

Morgan Jackson would love to get a few more gas-electric hybrids for the Sioux Falls Police Department. The SFPD's four hybrids are 25-37% cheaper to fuel than the rest of the fleet. That's no small savings for police cruisers, which average 30,000 miles a year. Non-hybrids burn up an average of \$43,000 a month in fuel.

That's why the city was set to buy more hybrids in 2022, and even publicized its intent to do so.

But Jackson, the city's fleet manager, wasn't able to land a single one.

"Ford's having supply chain problems right now," Jackson said.

Jackson's not alone.

Two of the Minnesota cities Jackson looked to for information about electric fleet vehicles in recent years have also struggled with wait time, although those cities hope to step beyond gas-electric hybrids and toward fully electric options.

Wait times for all fleet vehicles have grown in recent years through supply chain struggles and a shortage of computer chips. The issue can be compounded with electric vehicles. They typically cost more to buy, but can save taxpayers money long-term in fuel and maintenance as they help cities with carbon footprint reduction goals meet their targets.

For taxpayer-funded operations, there are plenty of issues with electric vehicles beyond wait times.

Fleet managers like Jackson in cities across the Upper Midwest have concerns about the availability of charging stations and the cost to install them for city vehicles, as well as about vehicle performance and battery life in cold temperatures.

Even after clearing those hurdles, the prospect of electric transition hinges as much on availability as willingness. If the price is too high and the wait time is too long, municipal fleets can't take advantage.

"We're chomping at the bit to get them, but we're going to wait to make sure it's cost effective for us," said Dan Solheid, fleet manager for the city of Woodbury, Minnesota.

Cost, performance considerations

Woodbury was among the cities Sioux Falls contacted before purchasing its first all-electric vehicle in December, a Nissan Leaf for the Health Department.

A news release from the city said the pilot program would serve to test the fuel efficiency and durability

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of the \$32,651 sedan, as compared to vehicles of similar sizes.

It's too early to come to any conclusions on the Leaf, Jackson said, but there is at least one encouraging sign: It's cost the city \$8 to fuel for its first 663 miles on the road.

"That would have been \$72 in gas," Jackson said.

The Health Department was a good place to start, Jackson said, since department employees don't drive as many miles as other city employees and don't need to haul heavy equipment.

Bloomington, Minnesota, bought two Nissan Leafs in 2019. They're used by restaurant inspectors, who rarely drive more than 50 miles a day, according to fleet manager Michael Keim.

Lower fuel costs have been a benefit, Keim said, but there are other savings. Electric vehicles have simpler engines with just a few dozen parts total. Internal combustion engines, by comparison, have around 200.

Tires are the primary maintenance concern for EVs, Keim said, as tires wear out regardless of the engine type.

"There are still maintenance items, but it's a lot less maintenance. No oil changes, no tune-ups, no drive belts," Keim said. "It's just a lot less complexity."

The upfront cost was higher for the EVs, Keim said, but they cost 24 cents a mile to power, versus 45 cents for a traditional vehicle. The break-even point for cost will come at around 35,000 miles, Keim said.

Black Hills State University has an all-electric Chevrolet Bolt for its professors to use on trips between campuses in Rapid City and Spearfish. It also installed charging stations at each campus to allow for charging between classes, and the stations are available for anyone else in their respective communities.

The pilot has been a success thus far, said Debbie Liddick, BHSU's assistant director of facilities and sustainability.

"We save about 260 gallons of gas a year by driving this vehicle," Liddick said.

The Bolt, which is painted with BHSU colors, is also helping the university advertise its presence as it hits sustainability targets. The EV reduces the university's carbon footprint by 2.5 tons of carbon dioxide every year.

"An average family produces 5.7 tons of CO2 a year," Liddick said. "It's saving quite a bit."

Options for electric fleets

There are three categories of electric vehicles on the market in the U.S.:

Gas-electric hybrids: Vehicles with gas-powered and electric engines. Batteries charge when traveling down hills, and the electric power supplements the gasoline engine. They cannot be plugged in.

Plug-in hybrids: Vehicles with gas-powered engines that only kick on when the on-board battery power runs out. The batteries are charged by plugging in, as well as while going downhill.

All electric: Vehicles without an internal combustion engine. The batteries can be charged slowly with a typical household outlet, but more quickly at rapid charging stations.

Sioux Falls and BHSU aren't the only taxpayer-funded operations in South Dakota with one or more of them. Brookings has used a plug-in hybrid SUV for two years, with employees of various departments taking turns behind the wheel. Aberdeen's police department, like its counterpart in Sioux Falls, has folded gas-electric hybrids into its fleet, and the cost savings helped the department cope with high fuel prices last summer.

There are limits to what each type of vehicle can do, though. Most all-electric vehicles lose significant range in the winter or summer months through heater or air conditioner use. Smaller models like a Leaf or Bolt don't have the space for the kind of equipment home inspectors or parks and recreation employees need to haul from site to site.

Police vehicles, which usually stay running all through a patrol officer's shift, have even more specific needs. Chevrolet recently announced its first police pursuit-rated electric vehicle, the 2024 Chevy Blazer, and Ford offered a police-grade version of its F-150 Lightning in 2023.

Solheid, the fleet manager for Woodbury, said the lack of pursuit-rated EVs – as well as the higher up-front cost – has been a holdup for his city's police department.

"I won't put any patrol officer into a vehicle that isn't a police pursuit-rated vehicle, from the drive train

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to the brakes to the suspension,” Solheid said.

In the interim between all-electric and all-gas, Woodbury has opted for plug-in Mitsubishi Outlander hybrids for use across various departments. They can travel 35-40 miles on battery power before the gas engine kicks in, though it will also kick in occasionally to keep the fuel in the tank from going bad.

Woodbury recently added charging stations with the help of Xcel Energy for its plug-ins, in part to get a better sense of how much electricity it takes to run them. The utility paid for the stations, Solheid said, in exchange for a \$300 annual fee per vehicle and a data sharing agreement.

That data will help Solheid to determine how much the vehicles actually save – something he can’t easily quantify for his city’s chosen electric option.

“They’ll show that they’re getting 45 to 65 miles to the gallon, but we don’t have a good calculator on how much the electric is costing us,” he said.

The charging stations are also to get employees used to driving electric.

“Plug-in hybrids do a great job getting staff acclimated to plugging in and getting over all those range anxiety issues,” he said. “We haven’t had anyone drive off with the cord plugged in yet, so that’s good.”

Wait times, future needs

Woodbury was ready to go a step further with all-electric vehicles, but struggled with wait times for Ford F-150 Lightning pickups last year. Solheid then looked into electric Chevrolet Silverado pickups, but the prices for the fleet version of that model were too high.

Bloomington ordered eight F-150 Lightnings for its home inspection and engineering crews last year, Keim said, but there’s about a year-long wait for them.

Keim has steered clear of plug-in hybrids, in part because they have some of the same maintenance costs of a gasoline vehicle, but not all the benefits. Unlike gas-electric hybrids or gasoline-powered cars, they can’t take advantage of waste heat from the engine to keep city employees comfortable while idling in the cold.

“With the style of driving that they do, they wouldn’t build up the heat in the wintertime when they needed to warm up the cab,” Keim said.

Keim and Solheid also talked about the importance of faster charging stations as a preparation for the future, but tearing up the ground beneath and laying cable can be a significant expense. Bloomington paid \$15,000 to install two chargers, but will partner with Xcel – similar to Woodbury – for its next set of fast chargers.

Solheid hopes the industry continues to explore charging options for municipal fleets, especially for employees who might travel far afield from the city garage. A company called Beam offers mobile solar arrays for charging on the go, for example, but that technology is too expensive for his city at this point.

The Woodbury fleet manager also sees potential in hydrogen vehicles, particularly for larger vehicles like snowplows, and thinks a mix of fuel sources is inevitable as the nation transitions to lower-carbon fuel sources.

“Don’t rule out hydrogen,” Solheid said. “Hydrogen fuel cells are an up-and-coming thing. And you know, the only byproduct of that is water.”

Factors like charging station costs, energy costs and basic utility from department to department will likely come into play in South Dakota, as well.

Jackson said Sioux Falls will always do its homework and crunch numbers before it moves toward renewable transportation options. The police department hybrids have proven their worth, he said, even though the wait times put them out of reach.

As for the next steps, Jackson expects to listen and learn from other cities and crunch the numbers before moving forward.

In the end, he said, dollars and cents will be the guide.

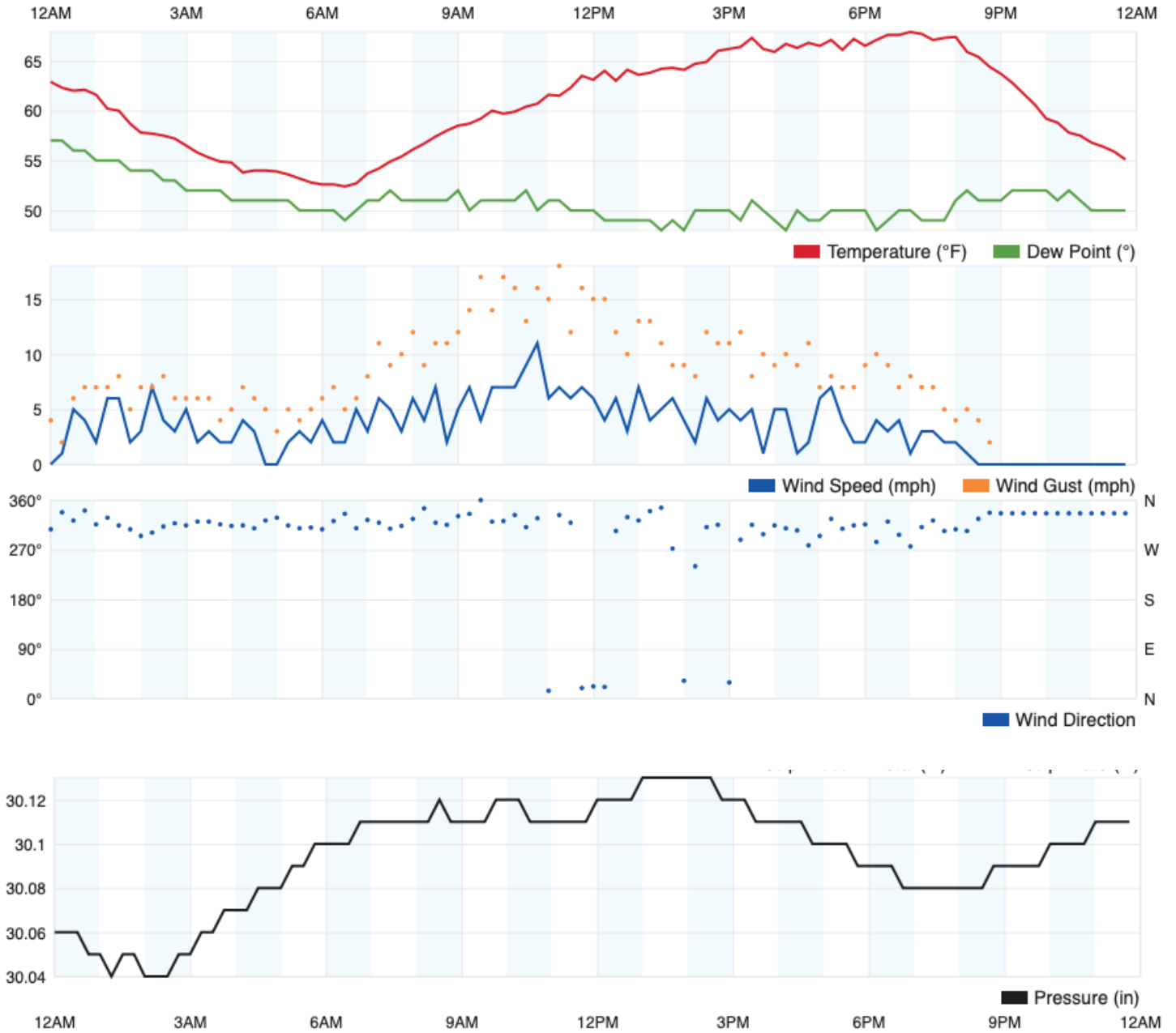
“I’m a big proponent of making sure we’re being fiscally thrifty with our taxpayer money,” Morgan said.

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.

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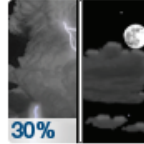



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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday
						
Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms then Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Slight Chance T-storms
High: 78 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 75 °F	Low: 54 °F	High: 77 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 85 °F



Severe Weather Threat Overview

July 6, 2023
4:51 AM

Details

Thunderstorms spread from western SD into central SD this evening. Storms will diminish in intensity overnight as they move into eastern SD.

Tornado Potential

Very Low Low Medium High

Max Hail Size

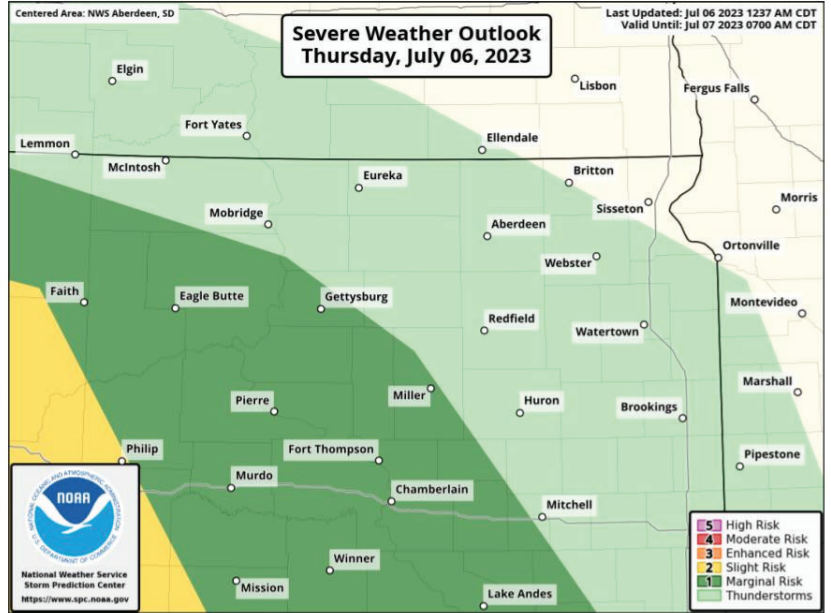
Dimes **Quarters** Golfball Baseball

Max Wind Speed

< 60 mph **60-70 mph** 70-80 mph > 80mph

Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low **Low** Medium High



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Temperatures will warm into the mid to upper 70s today. Thunderstorms are expected to develop across western South Dakota and then spread east into central South Dakota this evening. A few of these storms could become strong to severe. Scattered storms are again possible on Friday.

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Thunderstorm Timing

July 6, 2023
4:56 AM

Timing Highlights

Thunderstorms spread from western SD into central SD this evening. Storms will diminish in intensity overnight as they move into eastern SD.

Cities At Greatest Risk

The greatest risk for **strong to isolated severe storms** is across portions of central SD, including in Pierre, Murdo, Chamberlain, Eagle Butte and Gettysburg

Probability of Precipitation Forecast

	7/6 Thu				7/7 Fri								7/8 Sat		
	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am
Aberdeen				5	15	15	35	35	50	50	50	15	15	0	0
Britton					5	10	35	35	50	50	50	15	15	5	5
Brookings	0	0	5	5	10	20	65	80	80	75	40	15	15	5	5
Chamberlain	5	5	15	45	60	70	75	70	45	15	15	10	10	5	5
Clark				5	15	35	60	60	60	40	40	10	10	5	5
Eagle Butte	0	10	25	30	30	30	25	15	30	30	30	10	10	0	5
Ellendale				0	5	5	25	25	55	55	55	15	15	0	0
Eureka			0	10	25	10	15	15	55	55	55	10	10	0	5
Gettysburg		0	10	25	40	30	25	25	40	40	40	10	10	0	0
Huron		0	5	20	45	60	75	75	75	35	20	15	15	5	5
Kennebec	0	5	25	30	40	55	55	50	50	30	30	10	10	0	0
McIntosh	0	0	20	20	25	15	10	10	45	45	45	5	5	0	5
Milbank					0	15	50	50	50	45	45	15	15	10	10
Miller		0	5	25	40	50	60	60	60	35	35	15	15	5	5
Mobridge			10	20	25	20	15	15	40	40	40	5	5	0	0
Murdo	5	10	25	25	35	45	45	35	35	25	25	5	5	0	0
Pierre	0	5	20	30	35	40	45	25	25	25	25	5	5	0	0
Redfield			0	10	25	40	55	55	55	40	40	10	10	0	0
Sisseton					0	5	40	40	45	45	45	15	15	5	5
Watertown					10	30	60	60	60	45	45	15	15	5	5
Webster				0	5	20	50	50	50	40	40	15	15	5	5
Wheaton					0	0	35	35	45	45	45	15	15	5	5

Don't see your city? Check out weather.gov/forecastpoints

*Table values in %
**Created: 4 am CDT Thu 7/6/2023
***Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 68 °F at 7:01 PM

Low Temp: 52 °F at 6:30 AM

Wind: 21 mph at 11:02 AM

Day length: 15 hours, 35 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 115 in 1936

Record Low: 42 in 1942

Average High: 84

Average Low: 59

Average Precip in July.: 0.70

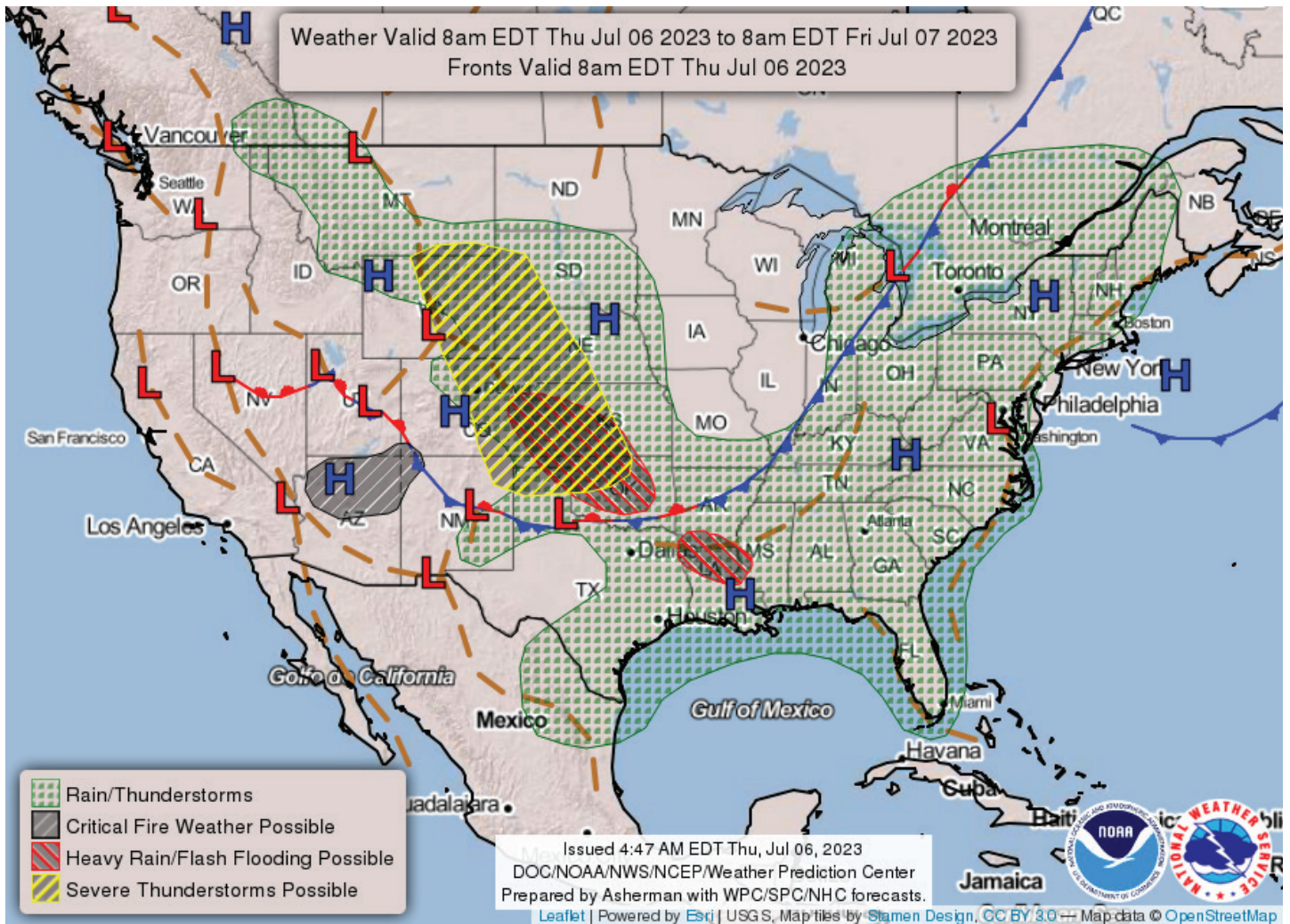
Precip to date in July.: 1.09

Average Precip to date: 11.71

Precip Year to Date: 12.44

Sunset Tonight: 9:25:03 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50:04 AM



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Today in Weather History

July 6, 1963: A farmer died near Waubay, in Day County, when the barn was destroyed while he was inside. Winds of 110 mph were recorded at FAA in Watertown before the roof and wind instruments were blown away.

July 6, 1982: A severe thunderstorm produced a series of five microbursts over Sioux Falls. The microbursts caused extensive damage. Winds were estimated to have reached 125 mph, and the Airport recorded a peak gust of 82 mph. Damage, which was heaviest in the south-central and northeast sections of the city, included thousands of trees uprooted or damaged. Several semi-trailers were blown over, critically injuring one man and slightly injuring two others. Several other minor injuries occurred mainly from flying glass. Five cars were rolled over by the high winds, and several others damaged flying debris. Damage at the airport included a portion of a hangar roof blown off and three light aircraft flipped over.

July 6, 1994: Widespread rainfall of over 6 inches fell in Dewey, Potter, and Faulk Counties, causing damage to roads and flooded basements and fields. A teenage girl escaped injury when her car was washed away by the waters of a swollen creek about 5 miles east of Gettysburg. Some total storm amounts include; 6.80 inches in Orient; 6.70 at Faulkton; 5.80 in Milbank; 5.48 in Big Stone City; 5.02 in Ipswich; 4.50 in Gettysburg; 4.17 in Webster; 4.12 near Onaka; 4.02 in Leola; and 3.97 in Britton.

1893: A violent tornado killed 71 persons on its forty-mile track across northwestern Iowa. Forty-nine persons were killed around Pomeroy, where eighty percent of the buildings were destroyed, with most leveled to the ground.

1928: A seven-inch hailstone weighing 1.5 pounds fell in Potter Nebraska. With a circumference of 17 inches, this appeared to be the largest hailstone in the world at that time.

1985 - Lightning struck a large transformer in Salt Lake County sending a 200 foot fireball into the air and blacking out almost the entire state for up to five hours. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - Thunderstorm rains during the mid morning hours, and again during the evening, produced major flash-flooding at Leavenworth, KS. The official rainfall total was 10.37 inches, but unofficial totals exceeded twelve inches. At nearby Kansas City, the rainfall total of 5.08 inches was a daily record for July. (Storm Data)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather in twenty-one states east of the Rockies, with severe weather reported in Kentucky and Indiana for the second day in a row. A thunderstorm produced more than five inches of rain in one hour near Reynolds, IL. Rochester, NY, was soaked with 3.25 inches, a record 24 hour total for the month of July. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thirty-six cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 98 degrees at International Falls, MN, and 101 degrees at Flint, MI, equalled all-time records. Highs of 96 degrees at Muskegon, MI, and 97 degrees at Buffalo, NY, were records for July. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather prevailed in the southwestern U.S. Ten cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including Las Vegas, NV, with a reading of 115 degrees. Hanksville, UT, reached 112 degrees, Bullhead City, AZ, hit 120 degrees, and Death Valley, CA, soared to 126 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

REACH OUT

Years ago Ben Franklin Stores were a major, successful retail chain. Many of their customers came from rural areas to shop for their needs. One observant employee overheard some customers describing the difficult time they had in getting to one of the stores to shop. He discussed the problem with Franklin and recommended to him that he open some stores in rural areas. When his suggestion was rejected, he resigned and began building stores closer to the people.

As a result of his vision, Sam Walton's name is known around the world and Wal-Mart stores are everywhere. He did not expect people to come to him. So, he went to the people!

One day Jesus said to Simon, "Now, go out where it is deeper and let down your nets and catch some fish." Initially, Simon was hesitant, saying that he and his co-workers had already tried that and it did not work. Then, after thinking for a moment, he said to His Lord, "But if You say so, I'll let them down again." And when he followed the advice of Jesus, the results were simply amazing.

Jesus left a command for each of us to obey: "Go into the world and make disciples!" Fish never come to the fisherman - the fishermen always go where the fish are. Skepticism and disobedience to Christ's command have ended many opportunities to reach out to win the lost. Like Sam Walton, we must go to the people with God's message of love, mercy, grace, salvation, and hope.

Prayer: Father, may we reach beyond our homes, our churches, and "our world," to find those whom You love and died for. May we do all that we can to win the lost. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, "Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch." Simon answered, "Master, we've worked hard all night and haven't caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets." When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. Luke 5:1-11



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.04.23

21 33 54 61 67 12

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$427,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.05.23

9 21 38 39 48 8

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$5,230,000

NEXT 2 Days 14 Hrs 51
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.05.23

8 16 26 30 38 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 6 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.05.23

4 15 22 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$137,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 6
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.05.23

10 19 47 50 53 26

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 35
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.05.23

17 24 48 62 68 23

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$590,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 35
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press

Madison Daily Leader. July 2, 2023.

Editorial: Local employers adding creativity to hiring

With record low unemployment in South Dakota and Lake County, there is understandable frustration among area employers who have been challenged to fill open positions. But some are being creative in hiring, and we're encouraged by their results.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson was in Madison last week and spent time at Manitou's operations in the southwest part of the city. Plant Manager Jeff Minnaert told Johnson about some of the employee recruiting efforts going on. Manitou has traditionally had a male-dominated factory floor, but the number of women in the Madison and Yankton plants has increased from one person to 40. Roughly 10% of Madison's factory jobs are now held by Hispanic U.S. citizens. Manitou has bilingual employees to help non-English speakers and has converted instructions and signage to pictures rather than words.

Other local employers have looked farther away geographically in their recruiting. We know of local businesses hiring people from North Carolina and Arizona and moving them to Madison.

Some employers have worked with the South Dakota corrections system for new employers. John Hult of South Dakota Searchlight wrote last week that more than 50 persons in state custody have been trained and certified in precision machining, welding and construction technology. The Department of Corrections partnered with Lake Area Technical College, Southeast Technical College and Western Dakota Technical College to train the graduates. And more inmates are taking coursework and gaining hands-on experience.

We've seen local employers become more active in working to bring legal immigrants to Lake County to fill unfilled jobs. Obtaining work visas can be a challenging process, but it's worth the effort for some employers.

Some local businesses are offering more flexibility in hours to attract new workers. Some workers can join the workforce if employers can accept times of day when school or family responsibilities allow for employment. Others are even recruiting workers from out of state who would continue to live elsewhere but fill local jobs remotely.

We're inspired by the extra effort put forward by local employers to get through the labor shortage. Their success will pay off for their companies and the community.

END

Russian cruise missile attack on Ukraine city of Lviv kills 4 people and injures dozens

By MSTYSLAV CHERNOV Associated Press

LVIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia fired cruise missiles Thursday at a western Ukraine city far from the front line of the war, killing at least four people in an apartment building in what officials said was the heaviest attack on civilian areas of Lviv since the Kremlin's forces invaded the country last year.

The nighttime attack destroyed the roof and the top two floors of a residential building, injuring 34 people. Emergency crews with search dogs went through the rubble.

The youngest victim was 21 years old and the oldest was 95, according to Maksym Kozytskyi, head of Regional Military Administration.

"This woman survived the Second World War but, unfortunately, she didn't survive" Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, Kozytskyi said.

Debris and wrecked parked cars lined the street outside the building, which overlooks a small neighborhood park with swings and climbing frames amid trees.

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Lviv Mayor Andriy Sadovyi said around 60 apartments and 50 cars in the area of strike were damaged. He announced two days of official mourning.

U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Bridget Brink described the attack as "vicious."

"Russia's repeated attacks on civilians are absolutely horrifying," she tweeted.

Ukraine's air force reported it intercepted seven of the 10 Kalibr cruise missiles that Russia fired from Black Sea toward the Lviv region and its namesake city — more than 800 kilometers (500 miles) away — around 1 a.m. Thursday.

The Kremlin's forces have repeatedly hit civilian areas during the war, though Russian officials say they choose only targets of military value.

Lviv is near the western border with Poland and is more than 500 kilometers (300 miles) from the front lines of the war in eastern and southern Ukraine, where Kyiv's counteroffensive to dislodge Russian forces is in its early stages.

Sadovyi, the mayor, addressed residents in a video message, saying the attack was the largest on Lviv's civilian infrastructure since the beginning of last year's invasion.

"Russians are hitting us. That's how they love us. I'm sorry for those people who were killed. They were young. So sorry for them," said Ganna Fedorenko, a local resident, holding her hands crossed on her chest. She received injuries on her face, and an adhesive plaster turned red with blood on her right cheek. "This is terrible. They hit civilians."

The Ministry of Internal Affairs said 64 people had to leave their homes.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy promised "a response to the enemy. A tangible one."

He went later Thursday on an official trip to Bulgaria at the invitation of its new pro-Western government, with talks about weapon supplies on the agenda.

Ukrainian air force updates about the missiles' course during the night showed they flew to the Kyiv region first, then turned west toward Lviv. Russia often changes the route of their missiles and drones to find weak spots in Ukraine's air defenses.

In the early days of the war, Lviv served as a main transit point for millions of refugees from different parts of the country that crossed the border to Europe. Hundreds of thousands of Ukrainians from the east and south remained in the calmer and safer Lviv.

Like the rest of the country, Lviv suffered power outages when Russia fired hundreds missiles over the winter, aiming to destroy Ukraine's energy system. However, the attacks in the city were not as frequent as in the capital Kyiv, and Thursday's strike was a deep shock for many in the city.

Ukrainians shared messages of support on social media for Lviv residents.

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

Belarus leader claims Wagner chief is in Russia, adding uncertainty about his fate after revolt

By ANNA FRANTS Associated Press

MINSK, Belarus (AP) — The mercenary leader who led a short-lived mutiny against the Kremlin is in Russia and his Wagner troops are in their field camps, the president of Belarus said Thursday, raising new questions about the deal that ended the extraordinary challenge to President Vladimir Putin's rule.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko's claim could not be independently verified, and the Kremlin refused to comment on Yevgeny Prigozhin's whereabouts. It was not clear if traveling to Russia would violate the deal, which allowed the Wagner chief to move to Belarus in exchange for ending the rebellion and a promise of amnesty for him and his troops.

Few details of the agreement brokered by Lukashenko have emerged. Last week, Lukashenko said the mercenary leader was in Belarus. Russian media later reported he was seen at his offices in St. Petersburg, a sign that the deal may have allowed him to finalize his affairs in Russia.

On Thursday, Lukashenko told international reporters that the mercenary leader was in St. Petersburg

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and Wagner's troops were in their camps. He did not specify the location of the camps, but Prigozhin's mercenaries fought alongside Russian forces in eastern Ukraine before their revolt and also have bases on the Russian territory.

Asked about where Prigozhin is, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refused to comment, but reaffirmed that the deal that ended the mutiny envisaged his move to Belarus.

Lukashenko said his government offered Wagner, a private military contractor that has sent troops around the world to fight for Russia's interests, the use of Belarusian military camps but the company had not made a final decision.

He also said that Prigozhin has been given back the cash and weapons that were confiscated by Russian authorities.

Russian online newspaper Fontanka posted videos and photos of Prigozhin's opulent mansion in Russia's second-largest city and some personal items. It also published a collection of selfies that showed him posing in various wigs and foreign uniforms, an apparent reflection of Wagner's deployments to Syria and several African countries.

Asked if Prigozhin and his mercenaries would eventually move to Belarus, Lukashenko answered evasively that it would depend on the decisions of the Wagner chief and the Russian government. The Belarusian leader said he doesn't think the mercenaries' presence in Belarus would lead to the destabilization of his country and said any Wagner troops there would be required to sign a contract with Belarusian authorities that would outline conditions and limitations of their actions.

He dismissed the suggestions that the mercenaries could attack Ukraine from Belarusian territory, which Russian troops used as a staging ground ahead of their invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Moscow has also maintained military presence in Belarus.

During their short revolt, Prigozhin's mercenaries quickly swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there before marching to within about 200 kilometers (125 miles) of the Russian capital. Prigozhin described it as a "march of justice" to oust the Russian defense minister and the General Staff chief.

The Wagner fighters faced little resistance, smashing occasional roadblocks and downing at least six helicopters and a command post aircraft, killing at least 10 airmen.

When the deal was struck, the Wagner chief ordered his troops to return to their camps.

The abortive rebellion represented the biggest threat to Putin in his more than two decades in power, exposing his weakness and eroding the Kremlin's authority.

Lukashenko said he warned Prigozhin that he and his troops would be destroyed if they failed to make a deal to end their mutiny and that Belarus would send a brigade to help protect Moscow.

"It was necessary to nip it in the bud. It was very dangerous, as history shows," Lukashenko said.

Asked about the deployment of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus, Lukashenko said they are intended to deter any aggression against the country. Putin and Lukashenko both have said that some of them already have been moved to Belarus.

"These weapons serve strictly defensive purposes," he said, adding that if Belarus faces an aggression, "the answer will come instantly."

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen visits China as part of efforts to soothe strained relations

BEIJING (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen arrived in Beijing on Thursday for meetings with Chinese leaders as part of efforts to revive relations that are strained by disputes about security, technology and other irritants.

Yellen planned to focus on stabilizing the global economy and challenging Chinese support of Russia during its invasion of Ukraine, Treasury officials in Washington told reporters ahead of the trip.

The secretary was due to meet with Chinese officials, American businesspeople and members of the public, according to Treasury officials. They gave no details, but said Yellen wouldn't meet Chinese leader

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Xi Jinping.

Yellen follows Secretary of State Antony Blinken, who met Xi last month in the highest-level U.S. visit to Beijing in five years. The two agreed to stabilize relations but failed to agree on improving communications between their militaries.

Yellen earlier warned against economic decoupling, or disconnecting U.S. and Chinese industry and markets. Businesspeople have warned the world might split into separate markets, slowing innovation and economic growth, as both governments tighten controls on trade in technology and other goods deemed sensitive.

Yellen said earlier the two governments "can and need to find a way to live together" in spite of their strained relations over geopolitics and economic development.

The most recent flareup came after President Joe Biden referred to Xi as dictator. The Chinese protested, but Biden said his blunt statements about China are "just not something I'm going to change very much."

Relations have been strained by disputes over technology, security, China's assertive policy abroad and conflicting claims to the South China Sea and other territory.

Washington has tightened restrictions imposed by Biden's predecessor, Donald Trump, on Chinese access to processor chips and other U.S. technology on security grounds.

Ties became especially testy after a Chinese surveillance balloon flew over the United States in February and was shot down.

This week, Beijing responded to U.S. technology controls by announced unspecified curbs on exports of gallium and germanium, two metals used in making semiconductors, solar panels, missiles and radar.

Earth's average temperature matches record high set a day earlier

By SETH BORENSTEIN and MELINA WALLING Associated Press

Earth's average temperature on Wednesday remained at an unofficial record high set the day before, the latest grim milestone in a week that has seen series of climate-change-driven extremes.

The average global temperature was 17.18 Celsius (62.9 degrees Fahrenheit), according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer, a tool that uses satellite data and computer simulations to measure the world's condition. That matched a record set Tuesday, and came after a previous record of 17.01 Celsius (62.6 degrees Fahrenheit) was set Monday.

While the figures are not an official government record, "this is showing us an indication of where we are right now," said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Sarah Kapnick. And NOAA indicated it will take the figures into consideration for its official record calculations.

Scientists generally use much longer measurements — months, years, decades — to track the Earth's warming, but the daily highs are an indication that climate change is reaching uncharted territory.

While some countries had colder weather than usual, high-temperature records were surpassed this week in Quebec and Peru.

In North Grenville, Ontario, the city turned ice hockey rinks into cooling centers as temperatures Wednesday hit 32 degrees Celsius (90 degrees Fahrenheit), with humidity making it making it feel like 38 degrees (100 degrees Fahrenheit).

"I feel like we live in a tropical country right now," city spokeswoman Jill Sturdy said. "It just kind of hits you. The air is so thick."

Beijing reported nine straight days last week when the temperature exceeded 35 degrees Celsius (95 degrees Fahrenheit), and ordered a stop to all outdoor work Wednesday, as the temperature reached 41 degrees Celsius (106 degrees Fahrenheit).

On Wednesday, 38 million Americans were under some kind of heat alert, Kapnick said.

Scientists have warned for months that 2023 could see record heat as human-caused climate change, driven largely by the burning of fossil fuels like coal, natural gas and oil, warmed the atmosphere. They also noted that La Nina, the natural cooling of the ocean that had acted as a counter, was giving way to El Nino, the reverse phenomenon marked by warming oceans.

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"A record like this is another piece of evidence for the now massively supported proposition that global warming is pushing us into a hotter future," said Stanford University climate scientist Chris Field, who was not part of the calculations.

One of the largest contributors to this week's records is an exceptionally mild winter in the Antarctic, according to data from the Climate Reanalyzer. Parts of the continent and nearby ocean were 10-20 degrees Celsius (18-36 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than averages from 1979-2000.

"Temperatures have been unusual over the ocean and especially around the Antarctic this week, because wind fronts over the Southern Ocean are strong pushing warm air deeper south," said Raghu Murtugudde, professor of atmospheric, oceanic and earth system science at the University of Maryland and visiting faculty at the Indian Institute of Technology, Bombay.

Chari Vijayaraghavan, a polar explorer and educator who has visited the Arctic and Antarctic regularly for the past ten years says global warming is obvious at both poles, and threatens the region's wildlife as well as driving ice melt that raises sea levels.

"Warming climates might lead to increasing risks of diseases such as the avian flu spreading in the Antarctic that will have devastating consequences for penguins and other fauna in the region," Vijayaraghavan said.

University of Maine climate scientist Sean Birkle, creator of the Climate Reanalyzer, said the daily figures are unofficial but a useful snapshot of what's happening in a warming world.

Even though the dataset used for the unofficial record goes back only to 1979, Kapnick said that given other data, the world is likely seeing the hottest days in "several hundred years that we've experienced."

More frequent, and more intense heat waves disrupted life around the world and caused life-threatening temperatures.

Dr. Hans Henri P. Kluge, regional director for Europe at the World Health Organization, said climate change was attacking the continent "in a big way" which had the potential to wind back 50 years of progress in public health.

Large parts of India and Pakistan faced a days-long heat wave in June that killed over 100 people across the two countries. Temperatures subsided in the last week as the monsoon rains began.

Associated Press reporter Sibi Arasu in Bengaluru, India, contributed to this report.

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.

Meta takes aim at Twitter with the launch of rival app Threads

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

Meta has unveiled an app called Threads to rival Twitter, targeting users looking for an alternative to the social media platform owned — and frequently changed — by Elon Musk.

Threads is billed as a text-based version of Meta's photo-sharing app Instagram that the company says provides "a new, separate space for real-time updates and public conversations."

It went live late Wednesday in Apple and Google Android app stores, with CEO Mark Zuckerberg saying 10 million people had signed up in the first seven hours. There were some early glitches, including Zuckerberg's posts — or Threads as they're dubbed — not loading in several places including the United Kingdom, India and Lebanon. But his replies to other users did appear.

Threads launched in more than 100 countries — including the U.S., Britain, Australia, Canada and Japan — and has already drawn celebrity users like chef Gordon Ramsay, pop star Shakira and actor Jack Black as well as accounts from Airbnb, Guinness World Records, Netflix, Vogue magazine and other media outlets.

The Twitter-like microblogging experience suggests that Meta Platforms has been gearing up to directly challenge the platform after Musk's tumultuous ownership has resulted in a series of unpopular changes that have turned off users and advertisers.

Zuckerberg said in some early replies on Threads that he's focused on making the app "a friendly place,"

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which will "ultimately be the key to its success."

"That's one reason why Twitter never succeeded as much as I think it should have, and we want to do it differently," he wrote.

On Threads, there are buttons to like, repost, reply to or quote a thread, and users see the number of likes and replies that a post has received.

Posts are limited to 500 characters, which is more than Twitter's 280-character threshold, and can include links, photos and videos up to five minutes long.

Despite that, Meta said its "vision is that Threads will be a new app more focused on text and dialogue, modeled after what Instagram has done for photo and video."

Instagram users will be able to log in with their existing usernames and follow the same accounts on the new app. New users will have to set up an Instagram account.

Meta emphasized measures to keep users safe, including enforcing Instagram's community guidelines and providing tools to control who can mention or reply to users.

Meta's new offering, however, has raised data privacy concerns.

Threads could collect a wide range of personal information, including health, financial, contacts, browsing and search history, location data, purchases and "sensitive info," according to its data privacy disclosure on the App Store.

Twitter co-founder Jack Dorsey pointed it out in a snarky tweet saying, "All your Threads are belong to us" that included a screenshot of the disclosure. Musk replied "yeah."

One place Threads won't be rolled out is in the European Union, which has strict data privacy rules.

Meta has informed Ireland's Data Privacy Commission that it has no plans yet to launch Threads in the 27-nation bloc, commission spokesman Graham Doyle said. The Irish watchdog is Meta's main privacy regulator for the EU because the company's regional headquarters is based in Dublin.

The company is working on rolling the app out to more countries but pointed to regulatory uncertainty for its decision to hold off on a European launch.

Analysts said its success is far from guaranteed, citing Meta's track record of starting standalone apps that were later shut down. Also in question is whether it's the right move for Meta, which announced tens of thousands of layoffs over the past year amid a tech industry slowdown.

Zuckerberg also has been focusing on the metaverse, investing tens of billions of dollars in the virtual reality concept.

Meta risks "spreading itself too thin," said Mike Proulx, a research director at Forrester, a global market research company. "Meta is banking on a moment in time amidst peak Twitter frustration. However, this window of opportunity is already flooded with Twitter alternatives including Bluesky, Mastodon, Spill, Post, News and Hive, which are all competing for Twitter's market share."

Even so, Threads could be a fresh headache for Musk, who acquired Twitter last year for \$44 billion.

He's made a series of changes that have triggered backlash, the latest being daily limits on the number of tweets people can view to try to stop unauthorized scraping of potentially valuable data. He also is now requiring paid verification for users to access the online dashboard TweetDeck.

Musk's rivalry with Zuckerberg could end up spilling over into real life. In an online exchange the two tech billionaires seemingly agreed to a cage match face-off, though it's unclear if they will actually make it to the ring.

Amid the Threads launch, Musk responded to a tweet showing a screenshot of him saying he deleted Instagram in 2018 because it was "weak sauce."

"It is infinitely preferable to be attacked by strangers on Twitter, than indulge in the false happiness of hide-the-pain Instagram," he said.

Father of the bride and teen who tried to save friend among 5 killed in Philadelphia shooting

By CLAUDIA LAUER and BEATRICE DUPUY Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A father who was preparing to walk his eldest daughter down the aisle. An aspiring actor who appeared as an extra in the “Creed” movie franchise. A teenager who tried to help a wounded friend. These are the stories of those killed in the all-too-familiar thrum of another mass shooting.

Five people in a working-class neighborhood of Philadelphia were gunned down Monday in what became the deadliest among a rash of U.S. shootings that occurred around the July Fourth holiday. A gunman in a ski mask and body armor appeared to fire on people at random while they were on the street or in a car, authorities said.

Ralph Moralis, 59; Joseph Wamah Jr., 31; Dymir Stanton, 29; Lashyd Merritt, 21; and DaJuan Brown, 15, were killed in the shooting. Four others, including two 2-year-old boys, were also wounded.

The alleged shooter was arraigned Wednesday on multiple charges including five counts of murder.

The victims’ families remain shattered as they now cope with the feeling of senseless loss.

RALPH MORALIS: THE “GO-TO-GUY”

Ralph Moralis’ daughter was to be married Sunday. But instead of focusing on the joy of her wedding day, she is now planning her father’s funeral, said Karen Gleason, his sister-in-law.

All the joy they had been feeling leading up to the momentous occasion was torn away when Moralis was shot outside the childhood home where he lived. The entire family, including Moralis’ two brothers, have not stopped crying since hearing the news.

“It’s unfathomable,” she said. “It’s so unbelievable that you can’t even go out your front door.”

The 59-year-old had been prepping for weeks on what he would wear, making sure he wouldn’t mess up during his first child’s wedding rehearsal. Moralis was always the one willing to go out of his way to help.

“He was the go-to-guy whether you needed a bike put together for one of the kids or his cousin was saying: ‘I need to get to Florida. Can you drive me?’” she said. “He would do that. He was just there always for family and always willing to help.”

JOSEPH WAMAH JR.: ASPIRING ACTOR WITH DEEP ARTISTIC TALENT

Joseph Wamah Jr. knew acting was his calling. The 31-year-old studied psychology at Chestnut Hill College but he became active in the local Philadelphia acting community, said close friend Terrance Harden. He even got a role as an extra in one of the “Creed” movies, starring Michael B. Jordan.

Harden, who has known Wamah since high school, said the two bonded over their love of filmmaking. Before Wamah was found dead inside a home early Tuesday, Harden had imagined the two would grow old as friends and achieve the level of success that they both wanted for each other.

“With such a great attitude, such a positive outlook on life, it almost seems like good fortune ought to come your way,” he said. “That’s why it was so hard to believe that this could have happened to him.”

Wamah’s twin sister Josephine and another sister, Jasmine, were full of anger Wednesday as they spoke at a news conference of a brother who had a smile and hug for everyone.

“I just still can’t believe that my brother is gone. And I just don’t understand why this happened. He was a kind soul. He was nice to everyone,” Josephine Wamah said.

Wamah also loved to cook — despite having little culinary talent. But his real gift was as an artist, his sisters said.

“He had the worst cooking. We still ate it because he just... he tried. He couldn’t cook, but he could sketch his butt off,” Josephine Wamah said. “It was so detail-oriented and so passionate. It was so rooted and down to earth. It was just spiritual. You could feel this man’s emotions in every brushstroke.”

Josephine Wamah said she plans to find all of her brother’s artwork and share his talent with the world.

“I just don’t understand how someone could just do that to my brother. I really loved him,” she said.

LASHYD MERRITT: A GOOD KID

Lashyd Merritt’s mother told WPVI-TV in Philadelphia that her son was a good kid who loved his family, especially his nieces and nephews. He loved buying them gifts at Christmas.

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Marie Merritt said Lashyd Merritt, who would have been 22 in September, was out buying a snack while on a work break Monday.

"I don't understand why people just — whatever anger they have within themselves— I don't understand why someone in the neighborhood would have that type of stuff, like guns -- I don't understand that," Marie Merritt said. "And you're just taking good people away,"

She wants the suspected shooter to "rot in jail." She also is thinking about how her son would feel.

"(My heart) is broken. I feel him saying, 'Why me?'"

DAJUAN BROWN: KILLED WHILE HELPING A FRIEND

DaJuan Brown's mother, Nashaya Thomas, told WCAU-TV her teenage son was walking to a store when gunfire started. Brown was helping a 13-year-old friend who had been shot twice in the legs when he was gunned down.

He was someone people couldn't help but fall in love with.

"He lost his life trying to do a selfless act," she said, "and that's how he was when he was here."

Dupuy reported from New York City.

French justice is working overtime and the mood is stern after thousands of teen arrests

By JADE LE DELEY and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

CRETEIL, France (AP) — At 19, he was the oldest of the group of teens accused of lobbing Molotov cocktails at the police station of their suburban hometown.

"Why?" the judge asked Riad, who was taken into custody after he was identified in video surveillance images of the group from June 29, the second night of nationwide unrest following the police shooting of another suburban teenager outside Paris.

"For justice for Nahel," Riad said. Slumped and slightly disheveled after five nights in jail, he said he didn't know about the peaceful march organized by Nahel Merzouk's family. He explained the cellphone photo of him holding a Molotov cocktail was "for social media. To give an image."

In all, more than 3,600 people have been detained in the unrest across France since the death of Nahel on June 27, with an average age of 17, according to the Interior Ministry. The violence, which left more than 800 law enforcement officers injured, has largely subsided in recent days.

French courts are working overtime to process the arrests, including opening their doors through the weekend, with fast-track hearings around an hour long and same-day sentencing.

The prosecutor noted that Riad had learned where to acquire incendiary devices on Snapchat, the social network which the French government has singled out along with TikTok as fueling the unrest. Riad's lawyer noted his record was clean, and he was blamed for no significant damage or any injuries.

By the end of Tuesday, Riad's sentence was fixed: three years, with a minimum of 18 months behind bars, barred from his hometown of Alfortville for the duration of the term.

He collapsed on the stand: "I'm not ready to go to prison. I'm really not ready." He threw a furtive kiss at his mother as he was led away.

Outside the packed courtroom, a pair of girls asked someone exiting what sentence he'd received. "Three years? That's insane!" one exclaimed.

But the mood in France is stern after unrest that officials estimate caused 1 billion euros (more than \$1 billion) in damage. The killing of 17-year-old Nahel came during a June 27 traffic stop. The shooting, which was captured on video, immediately stirred up long-simmering tensions between police and young people — nearly all minorities, and overwhelmingly French-born — in housing projects and disadvantaged suburbs.

Justice Minister Eric Dupond-Moretti issued an order on Friday that demanded a "strong, firm and systematic" judicial response. Hearings began the next day, as the unrest continued into the night.

"This is not hasty justice. The message I want to send is that justice is functioning normally in the face of an exceptional situation," said Peimane Ghaleh-Marzban, the president of the tribunal in Bobigny.

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By Tuesday night, a total of 990 people had gone before a tribunal and about a third received jail terms, according to the government spokesman Olivier Veran. A third of those detained were minors, he said.

"You have many first-time offenders — people who are not deep in delinquency, many minors in school who don't (engage in) habitual criminal activity," Ghaleh-Marzban said.

The U.N. rights office said the unrest showed it was time for France to reckon with its history of racism in policing, rather than just lash out in punishment, saying the government needed to ensure use of force "always respects the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, nondiscrimination, precaution and accountability."

Many French lawmakers demand the maximum — and fast.

Olivier Marleix, a lawmaker from the conservative Republicans party, called for all the cases involving the unrest to be handled within 100 days.

"Not to punish this would be an injury to all our law enforcement. Not to punish this would be a failure to understand the gravity of the threat to France," he said Tuesday in the National Assembly.

The officer accused in the death of 17-year-old Nahel, meanwhile, is charged with voluntary homicide but has yet to appear in a courtroom or even have a court date set.

Rayan, an 18-year-old man detained with a group of about 30 young people throwing fuel on his local police station, was accused of filming a 14-second video of incendiaries being hurled at the building in Kremlin-Bicetre. In the footage, he cries out "Light them up!"

It was the first time he'd ever been arrested. He was taken to Fleury-Merogis prison, the European Union's largest, and he wept on the stand on Tuesday. Prosecutors, who accused him of tripping a police officer while fleeing, asked for a 30-month sentence and for him to be barred from his hometown.

"I'm a good person. I've never had a problem with police. I have a family, I work," he said, burying his face in his hands. "I don't even know what I'm doing here."

His brief hearing ended with a 10-month suspended sentence. His parents picked him up the same night from prison to take him home.

Sylvie Corbet contributed to this report from Paris.

An EU mission in Gaza once represented hope. Today, it is a symbol of a sputtering Western vision

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — It's been 16 years since the borders of the Gaza Strip slammed shut after Hamas militants seized control of the territory.

The takeover forced the European Union to withdraw monitors who had been deployed at a Gaza border crossing to help the Palestinians prepare for independence. Yet the EU has regularly renewed funding for the unit since then, most recently late last month.

The continued existence of the unit known as EUBAM is an extreme example of the West's willingness to keep pumping hundreds of millions of dollars a year into the moribund vision of a two-state solution between Israel and the Palestinians.

Proponents say this approach remains the best chance for securing an eventual peace deal. Critics argue that opting for such costly conflict management helps keep a 56-year-old Israeli military occupation in place and allows Europe and the U.S. to avoid making the hard political decisions needed to end the conflict.

This week's deadly Israeli raid of a West Bank militant stronghold and previous eruptions of violence also underscore the limits of international efforts to contain the conflict.

"The international community, in my view, understands the reality that the two-state solution is gone," said Marwan Muasher, a onetime Jordanian foreign minister and former ambassador to Israel. "It does not want to acknowledge this publicly, because acknowledging it publicly is going to have to force the international community to start talking about alternatives, all of them problematic."

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Muasher, now a vice president at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, is unusual among his peers. The legions of diplomats and politicians who have devoted their careers to Mideast peacemaking remain committed to the two-state vision, even as the ground around them has shifted.

"I am still a believer," said Ehud Olmert, the former Israeli prime minister who led the last round of substantive peace talks with Palestinian leaders before leaving office in 2009.

"There is no other solution. Everything else is almost inevitably a prescription for disaster," Olmert said.

The two-state approach has guided international diplomacy since the 1993 Oslo peace accords between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization. The interim accords were meant to lay the groundwork for the establishment of a Palestinian state alongside Israel.

Palestinians seek the West Bank, east Jerusalem and the Gaza Strip, areas Israel captured in the 1967 Mideast war, for their state. The land between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River, made up of pre-1967 Israel and the occupied lands, is populated in roughly equal parts by Palestinians and Israeli Jews. Pollsters predict an eventual Palestinian majority because of higher birth rates.

Proponents of partition say it would create a democratic Israel with a clear Jewish majority in defined borders and enable Palestinians to realize their national aspirations.

Without partition, the default is an apartheid-like reality in which a shrinking Jewish minority controls a growing Arab majority with few political rights. Leading rights groups say an apartheid system is already in place.

Since the Oslo accords 30 years ago, the U.S. and EU have spent billions of dollars on development projects and direct aid to the Palestinian Authority to promote the two-state vision. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell both pledged support for a partition deal.

Yet the West has little to show for its efforts. Peace initiatives led by successive U.S. presidents were derailed by violence, Israeli settlement expansion and mutual distrust.

Hamas, shunned by the West as a terrorist group, has fought four wars against Israel and remains entrenched in Gaza. The Palestinian Authority, which governs semi-autonomous enclaves in the West Bank, is weaker than ever. Israel's far-right government opposes Palestinian independence and is racing to expand a settler population that has ballooned to over 700,000 people.

Preoccupied with the war in Ukraine and its rivalry with China, the Biden administration has done little more than condemn Israeli settlement plans and call for de-escalation.

Recent opinion polls show that only about one-third of Israelis and Palestinians still favor a two-state solution.

Even some members of the Palestinian Authority, which has the most to gain from independence, have begun to speak publicly about equal rights between the river and the sea, rather than two states.

"The basis for us is ending the occupation, obtaining freedom," said Mahmoud Aloul, an aide to President Mahmoud Abbas. He said it does not matter if the conflict ends with two states or a single binational state for Israelis and Palestinians.

In academic and human rights circles, many now speak about a "one-state reality" – in which Israel wields overall control over Palestinians. Muasher said given this environment, it is time for the world to focus on Palestinian human rights instead of unrealistic peace plans.

Ines Abdel-Razek, executive director of the Palestine Institute for Public Diplomacy, an advocacy group, said calls for a two-state solution are "comfortable" for the international community, but insincere.

She said that if the U.S. were serious about peace, it would force Israel to reverse its settlement enterprise. Instead, she said, Washington gives Israel billions in military aid, allows settlement groups to raise funds in the U.S., engages with institutions promoting the annexation of the West Bank and pushes for normalization with other Arab countries.

"The problem is the dire gap and hypocrisy between the discourse and then the policies and practices that are put in place," she said.

Nearly a generation ago, when EUBAM was established, Palestinian statehood hopes hadn't yet been crushed.

The unit was set up after Israel's withdrawal from Gaza in 2005. The border monitors helped the Pal-

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estinian Authority run the territory's Rafah crossing with Egypt, while coordinating with Israel. It had 130 workers and helped some 2,700 people cross the border each day.

Florin Bulgariu, the current director of EUBAM, said the initial agreement included plans to help the Palestinians develop a seaport, airport and take over additional border crossings.

Those plans came crashing down when Hamas won Palestinian parliament elections in 2006 and took control of Gaza in 2007, driving out Abbas' forces. The EU shuttered the Rafah operation but still maintains a scaled-down office in Israel.

With a staff of 18 and a budget of 2.5 million Euros a year, EUBAM helps train Palestinian officials in the West Bank to spot counterfeit documents, use X-ray technology and stop drug and weapons smuggling.

"The idea is for the PA to be fully prepared to take over the Rafah crossing point when the time comes," he said, acknowledging that the odds of this happening anytime soon are nonexistent. Some of this training has bolstered PA border agents in the West Bank as well, he said.

Bulgariu said he is proud of what the mission has accomplished but also frustrated "because I cannot share or implement all what I know."

Yet he remains committed to the EU's two-state vision. "This is the only solution that might work in the end, separate borders, everyone with his own business," he said.

83,000 Hawaii homes dispose of sewage in cesspools. Rising sea levels will make them more of a mess

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — The town of Hauula packs hundreds of homes into a narrow strip of land sandwiched between verdant, towering cliffs of the Koolau mountain range and the Pacific. But the stunning views obscure an environmental problem beneath the ground.

This rural part of the island of Oahu is not connected to city sewers — and waste from toilets, sinks and showers is mostly collected in hundreds of pits called cesspools.

With climate change, rising seas are eroding Hawaii's coast near homes with cesspools. Sea rise also is pushing the island's groundwater closer to the surface, allowing the cesspool effluent to mix with the water table and flow into the ocean. And scientists say cesspool pollution may even percolate into streets and parks in low-lying former wetlands in the future.

"We want proper sanitation as much as anybody wants it. We don't want our children swimming in an ocean of bacteria," said Dotty Kelly-Paddock, president of the Hauula Community Association. "It's got to change."

Hawaii has 83,000 cesspools — more than any other state — and about 20% are less than 1 kilometer (0.6 mile) from shore. Six years ago, Hawaii mandated removal of all cesspools by 2050.

The task is daunting and costly, but scientists warn that problems from this unsanitary complication of island life will only be exacerbated by global warming.

Cesspools sprang up across Hawaii during years of rapid growth and now are everywhere from old sugar plantation towns to the posh Honolulu enclave Black Point.

Most homes with cesspools are in neighborhoods without sewers. In theory, the ground gradually filters bacteria and pathogens in effluent from them.

But rising seas and more intense storms are encroaching on coastal properties, as happened last year when a house collapsed onto a beach along Oahu's North Shore surfing mecca. Some coastal erosion removes sand surrounding cesspools and pulls sewage out to sea.

Cesspools that are inland are sometimes so close to aquifers that sewage pollutes them and can travel through springs to beaches and the ocean.

When researchers placed dye in shoreline cesspools in the town of Puako on the Big Island for a 2021 study, it emerged in coastal springs only nine hours to three days later, said Tracy Wiegner, a University of Hawaii-Hilo marine science professor.

Honolulu's municipal government, responsible for all of Oahu, plans to eliminate nearly 1,000 of the island's 7,500 cesspools by spending \$50 million to run sewer lines to an Ewa Beach neighborhood. The project mainly will be funded by tax-exempt municipal bonds.

The city is also studying ways to connect homes in Haleiwa, Kahuku and Waimanalo — coastal towns with many cesspools. But Roger Babcock, director of Honolulu's Department of Environmental Services, said it won't be feasible to lay sewer lines everywhere.

The city is already spending \$2.7 billion, under an agreement with the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, to upgrade two wastewater treatment plants and reduce sewage spills.

Even with its hundreds of cesspools, the scenic seaside town of Hauula is not currently on the city's list for a sewer line study.

Kelly-Paddock, the community association president, said many of its nearly 4,000 residents work two or three jobs to keep food on the table and stay in their homes. She doesn't know how they'll pay to convert their cesspools.

The solution for many Hawaii communities will require significant spending, said Wiegner, the marine science professor.

"We know this is a problem. Everybody wants to solve it," she said. "But finding the money to make it happen is really challenging."

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.

This version of the story corrects the spelling of the last name of Juliet Willetts.

Toxic gas leak in South Africa has killed 16 people, including 3 children, police say

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME and GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — At least 16 people, including three children, were killed by a leak of a toxic nitrate gas being used by illegal miners to process gold in a settlement of closely packed metal shacks, South African police and local officials said late Wednesday.

Emergency services initially announced that as many as 24 people might be dead in the Angelo settlement in Boksburg, a city on the eastern outskirts of Johannesburg. But police and Gauteng Province Premier Panyaza Lesufi later said the number of deaths had been confirmed as 16 after a recount of the bodies.

"It's not a nice scene at all. ... It's painful, emotionally draining and tragic," Lesufi, who visited the scene, was quoted as saying in news reports.

Teams were searching the area looking for other casualties deep into the night. The bodies of the victims remained lying on the ground hours after the leak was reported around 8 p.m. as emergency services waited for forensic investigators and pathologists to arrive to process the scene. The bodies were still there at 3 a.m.

"We can't move anybody. The bodies are still where they are on the ground," said emergency services spokesperson William Ntladi.

A forensic investigator was seen covering the body of a small child with a blanket. Another body could be seen covered in a white cloth with a shoe sticking out. It lay under a strip of yellow police tape cordoning off the area.

Police said the three children killed were 1, 6 and 15. Two people were taken to the hospital for treatment, police said.

Boksburg is the city where 41 people died after a truck carrying liquefied petroleum gas got stuck under a bridge and exploded on Christmas Eve.

Ntladi said Wednesday's deaths were caused by a nitrate gas that leaked from a gas cylinder being kept

in a shack. He said the cannister had emptied out in the leak and teams were able to begin going over an area stretching out 100 meters (yards) from the cylinder to check for more casualties.

Investigators were searching through narrow alleys between shacks, cast into darkness by the lack of streetlights — a common situation in the deeply impoverished informal settlements found in and around South Africa's cities. Six police cars, an armored vehicle and one ambulance were parked at the entrance to the Angelo settlement.

Ntladi said the information authorities had indicated the cylinder that caused the leak was being used by illegal miners to separate gold from dirt and rock.

Lesufi, the Gauteng premier, tweeted videos of the dusty inside of a shack where at least four gas cylinders can be seen on metal stands. The video also shows what Lesufi said was the cylinder responsible for the leak lying on the floor next to the entrance of the shack.

Authorities didn't say if the illegal miners they believed to be responsible for the gas leak were among the casualties.

Illegal mining is rife in the gold-rich areas around Johannesburg, where miners go into closed off and disused mines to search for any deposits left over.

Mining fatalities underground are also common and the South African government department responsible for mining announced recently that at least 31 illegal miners were believed to have died in a gas explosion in a disused mine in the city of Welkom in central South Africa. The cause was methane gas, the mining department said.

Wednesday's tragedy was likely to stoke more anger at illegal miners, who are often migrants from neighboring countries, operate in organized gangs and are blamed for bringing crime into neighborhoods.

Violence against illegal miners erupted last year and raged for days in an area west of Johannesburg after a group of 80 men, some of whom were believed to be illegal miners, were charged with gang raping eight women who were working on a TV shoot at a disused mine.

Imray reported from Cape Town, South Africa.

More AP Africa news: <https://apnews.com/hub/africa>

Guantanamo detainees tell first independent visitor about scars from torture and hopes to leave

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — At the U.S. detention center at Guantanamo Bay, the aging men known by their serial numbers arrived at the meeting shackled. Every single one told the visitor — for many the first independent person they had talked to in 20 years — “You came too late.”

But they still talked, about the scant contacts with their families, their many health problems, the psychological and physical scars of the torture and abuse they experienced, and their hopes of leaving and reuniting with loved ones.

For the first time since the facility in Cuba opened in 2002, a U.S. president had allowed a United Nations independent investigator, Fionnuala Ní Aoláin, to visit.

She said in an interview with The Associated Press that it's true she came too late, because a total of 780 Muslim men were detained there following the 9/11 terrorist attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people, and today there are just 30 remaining.

The United Nations had tried for many years to send an independent investigator, but was turned down by the administrations of George W. Bush, Barack Obama and Donald Trump.

Ní Aoláin praised President Joe Biden's administration for allowing “critical voices” into the facility. And she expressed hope other governments that have barred U.N. special investigators will follow Biden's example.

The Belfast-born law professor said she believes the cross-section of “high-value” and “non-high value” detainees she met with — the Biden administration gave her free rein to talk to anyone — “recognized

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the importance of sitting in a room with me.”

“But I think there was a shared understanding that at this point, with only 30 of them left, while I can make recommendations and they will hopefully substantially change the day-to-day experience of these men, the vast majority of their lives was lived in a context where people like myself and the U.N. had no influence,” she said.

Ní Aoláin, concurrently a law professor at the University of Minnesota and at Queens University in Belfast, said she has visited many high-security prisons during her six years as a U.N. human rights investigator, including some built for those convicted of terrorism and related serious offenses.

But “there is really no population on Earth like this population that came to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, in the circumstances in which they came, rendered across borders,” she said.

In her report issued June 26, Ní Aoláin said even though the attacks on Sept. 11, 2001, were “crimes against humanity,” the treatment of the detainees at Guantanamo was unjustified. The vast majority were brought there without cause and had no relationship to the terrorist attacks, she wrote, adding that all of the men still alive suffer from psychological and physical trauma.

The Biden administration, which has said it wants to close the Guantanamo facility, said in a statement attached to the report that Ní Aoláin’s findings “are solely her own” and “the United States disagrees in significant respects with many factual and legal assertions” but it will carefully review her recommendations.

In last week’s interview with the AP, Ní Aoláin talked about what she saw on a personal level.

She said all U.S. personnel are required to address detainees by their internment serial number, not their name, which she called “dehumanizing.”

Ní Aoláin said she is especially concerned about three detainees who have not been charged and “live in a complete legal limbo,” which is “completely inconsistent with international law.” Of the others, 16 have been cleared to leave but haven’t found a country willing to take them and 11 still have cases pending before U.S. military commissions.

When the detainees were brought to meet her, they were shackled, which she said is not standard procedure even for those convicted of terrorism. Under international law, she said, people cannot be shackled except for imperative security reasons, and in her view at Guantanamo it should be prohibited and used only as a last resort in exceptional circumstances.

“You’re dealing with an elderly vulnerable population who are incarcerated,” Ní Aoláin said.

“These men, because they are torture victim survivors, they have difficulties concentrating, they have challenges with recurrent memory, somatic pain. Many of them struggle with mobility and other issues,” including permanent disabilities, traumatic brain injuries, chronic pain and gastrointestinal and urinary problems, she said.

Ní Aoláin said force feeding has been an ongoing practice in response to their hunger strikes, which along with suicidal ideas and self-harm “speak to the core finding of this report — which is the deep and profound despair of individuals who’ve been held without trial for 20 years, have not seen their family members, have had no access to the outside world” except their lawyers until she visited in February for four days.

Practices like using restraints cause added psychological distress for many of the detainees, she said.

For the report, Ni Aoláin also interviewed victims, survivors and families of those killed on 9/11, and she met with some of the 741 men who already had been released from Guantanamo, including approximately 150 resettled in 29 countries. The rest returned home, and 30 men have since died.

What the men still at Guantanamo and those who have been released need most, she said, “is torture rehabilitation — every single one — and the U.S. is a leader in torture rehabilitation.”

She welcomed Biden’s “extraordinary statement” on June 26, the International Day in Support of Victims of Torture, reaffirming U.S. opposition “to all forms of inhumane treatment and our commitment to eliminating torture and assisting torture survivors as they heal and in their quests for justice.”

“That tells me ... there is a capacity to remedy here,” she said. Rehabilitation is critical for all torture victims, she said, but also “for ourselves, because that’s what democracies do. ... We look at our past, we take it onboard, and we address it, because democracies are self-correcting.”

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Ní Aoláin called the communal meals and communal prayer for all detainees — which the U.S. emphasizes — very important.

“The men themselves are enormously important to each other in their rehabilitation,” she said. “There is an enormous bond of support and fraternity and care amongst these men for each other.”

Ní Aoláin noted the detainees have some privileges — they are able to watch television and read books — and there are language classes, some opportunities to learn about computers and art lessons.

She said she was “really gratified” the Biden administration recently decided to allow detainees to take as much of their artwork “as is practicable” when they leave.

“This creative work is enormously important to these men,” she said, noting that a detainee who recently returned to Pakistan had an art exhibition in Karachi some weeks ago.

Among the many recommendations Ní Aoláin’s report makes is for torture rehabilitation and additional education and training, especially for those cleared to leave.

“These men are going to go out into the world,” she said. “Many of them were young men when they were detained and rendered to Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. They’re now old men, middle-aged men, who have to figure out how to go back into life, and many of them have huge anxieties” about providing for their families and about being fathers after so many years.

Biden is heading to South Carolina to show his economic agenda is keeping even red states humming

By AAMER MADHANI and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is heading to South Carolina on Thursday to make the case that economic measures he pushed through Congress despite stiff Republican opposition are helping to keep the deep red state — and others that voted for Donald Trump in 2020 — humming.

Ahead of Biden’s visit to a state that he lost by nearly 12 percentage points in 2020, White House officials argued that if Republicans had their way, South Carolina, like many other Republican-controlled states, would have lost out on billions of dollars in investments and thousands of jobs.

Biden will use his visit to showcase a new clean energy manufacturing partnership between solar firm Enphase Energy and manufacturer Flex Ltd. that is projected to create 600 jobs in the state and 1,200 more throughout the country.

Enphase, which is making a \$60 million investment to open up six new manufacturing lines, including two in South Carolina, is benefitting from tax incentives included in Biden’s \$370 billion Inflation Reduction Act that passed last August.

The White House on Wednesday castigated Republicans for voting against the legislation and subsequent efforts to claw back tax incentives included in the bill.

“Republicans in Congress, including every Republican representative from South Carolina, want to threaten these investments, jobs and economic opportunities by repealing — repealing the Inflation Reduction Act, which actually helps the American people,” White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said. “But as the president said in his first inauguration, he’s the president for all Americans. It doesn’t matter if you’re in a red state or a blue state.”

Republican Rep. Joe Wilson, who represents an area that will benefit from Enphase’s new investment, took to Twitter after the law was approved on a party-line vote to say it passed to “the detriment of American families,” calling it a “waste” of money. Wilson also voted in April to overturn the clean energy tax credits in the legislation that incentivized the Enphase investment.

The White House also took note of another South Carolina Republican, Rep. Nancy Mace, congratulating the Charleston Area Regional Transportation Authority for winning nearly \$26 million to build and repair clean energy transportation projects under the \$1 trillion infrastructure legislation. She voted against the bill.

Sen. Tim Scott, who is running for the 2024 GOP presidential nomination, also voted against the infrastructure bill, saying it included “reckless spending on unrelated pet projects.”

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The visit to South Carolina — a state that hasn't supported a Democrat in a general presidential election since Jimmy Carter's 1976 win — comes less than a week after Trump, the leading contender for the 2024 Republican nomination, visited the small town of Pickens for a rally that drew tens of thousands of people.

"By showing up in a red state and making the case for how even those who aren't going to vote for him have benefitted from his policies, Biden is starting to make clear the real choice for that small universe of swing voters," said Josh Freed, who heads the climate and energy program at the center-left group Third Way.

The White House is making a big push to show progress under "Bidenomics" as soaring inflation eases, unemployment remains near historic lows and Biden's battle for reelection heats up.

Biden has seen his public approval rating — and public sentiment about his handling of the economy — dragged down by stubborn inflation that hit a 40-year high last summer.

"What is 'Bidenomics'? It is the inflationary Washington spending, costly regulations, and regressive taxes touted by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris," Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming, chairman of the Senate Republican Conference, wrote in a memo on Wednesday. "These policies are making everyday essentials more expensive, hollowing out family savings and driving interest rates higher."

Still, White House officials are embracing ownership of the economy, arguing that legislative action during the first two years of the Democratic administration has kept the economy strong in the face of headwinds caused by the war in Ukraine and the coronavirus pandemic. Biden also argues his legislative wins have set the scene for further growth if voters give him four more years.

Private companies have committed more than \$500 billion in investment in manufacturing throughout the country since Biden took office. South Carolina, which has a 3.1% unemployment rate, has seen \$11 billion in new investment in manufacturing and clean energy since the start of the Biden administration, according to a White House tally.

South Carolina has only a single Democrat — Rep. Jim Clyburn — in its congressional delegation and no Democrats in statewide-elected office in more than a decade.

But the state has long been a place of personal and political importance to Biden: Kiawah Island, near Charleston, has been the site of family vacations, as well as decision-making in the run-up to his presidential campaigns.

South Carolina Democrats also gave a pivotal win to then-candidate Biden's struggling 2020 effort. An endorsement from Clyburn, then the highest-ranking Black member of the House, helped boost Biden to a decisive primary win that revived a flagging campaign and build the momentum that propelled him through a series of Super Tuesday wins.

The party's national prominence has risen — most recently when the Democratic National Committee made South Carolina the first voting state on its 2024 presidential primary calendar.

South Carolina Democratic Party Chairwoman Christale Spain said that Biden, by making his pitch in the state, is making good on his pledge to be a president for all Americans, not just those who supported his campaign.

"The president has always made South Carolina a priority, and we're here to support him and we're excited about mobilizing voters for his reelection," Spain said during a conference call with reporters.

Kinnard reported from Columbia, S.C.

Trump valet charged in classified documents case set again for arraignment after earlier delays

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — A valet for Donald Trump accused of helping the former president hide classified documents from federal authorities is due back in a Florida court on Thursday after an earlier appearance was postponed because of a canceled flight.

Walt Nauta, who was charged alongside Trump in June in a 38-count indictment alleging the mishandling

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Researchers also found bacteria levels in the ocean exceeded state health standards in front of 81% of the Puako homes sampled.

Public health officials warn exposure to sewage can cause gastroenteritis, diarrhea, conjunctivitis and skin infections. A 2020 Hawaii Department of Health report said little is known about how bacteria and viruses are carried through waters in wet tropical regions where people swim year round, but it said Hawaii had twice the rate of difficult-to-treat superbug MRSA infections than the national average.

Environmental scientist Daniel Amato coordinates volunteers who test water quality at 24 sites across Oahu for the Surfrider Foundation every two weeks. He said it's difficult to prove that cesspools are the source of the bacteria the team finds but bacteria levels are high where there are many cesspools.

Sewage in the ocean — from cesspools and other sources — also harms coral reefs that support marine life and tourism.

The nitrogen in wastewater acts like fertilizer for non-native seaweeds that dominate once-diverse coral reefs. This reduces food for native fish and hurts reef health.

Scientists say some feces-laced groundwater may come up through storm drains and the soil as rising sea levels lift the groundwater above it. This aspect of climate change is most likely to occur first in extremely low-lying areas where coastal wetlands have been filled in and built over.

"When the water table rises, as it will and as it does already, that's going to be extremely polluted water right there in our communities, in the midst of our communities — on the roads, on the sidewalks, in the backyards," said Chip Fletcher, interim dean at the School of Ocean and Earth Science and Technology at the University of Hawaii-Manoa. "That is going to represent a massive health threat."

Elevated groundwater is already contributing to chronic flooding in a Honolulu industrial area.

Mapunapuna — home to auto body shops, a vehicle rental store and scrap metal yards — was once a wetland and is sinking. Several streets regularly flood even when it's sunny and hasn't rained. At high tide, water covers roads and sidewalks.

Shellie Habel, a coastal geologist with the University of Hawaii's Climate Resilience Collaborative, said parts of Waikiki in Honolulu could exhibit such flooding in a decade or two. The world-famous beach resort visited by millions of tourists a year was also built on former wetlands.

There are no cesspools in Waikiki, but there are some in the watershed of the Ala Wai Canal bordering the district.

Hawaii property owners have 27 years to hook up to sewer lines or convert cesspools to a cleaner method of disposal. Those without nearby sewer mains may consider installing a septic tank, which stores solid waste and has a connected leach field to gradually filter wastewater through the soil.

But experts say rising sea levels and groundwater will prevent leach fields from filtering sewage in many coastal lots. A 2018 report by Florida's Miami-Dade County found 1,000 septic systems there were already failing due to high groundwater levels.

The solution to such problems is not a simple one. The uncertainty created by climate change makes it harder for policymakers to decide where to install sewers, said Juliet Willetts, a professor at the University of Technology Sydney's Institute for Sustainable Futures.

"We can no longer definitely predict there'll be floods this often or whatever," she said. "We just have ideas about what it might be."

Honolulu City Council member Matt Weyer said his constituents are concerned about cesspool conversion costs, with estimates running \$10,000 to \$50,000 per property.

His largely rural district includes Hauula, Oahu's North Shore and most of the Oahu cesspools scientists say most urgently need to be closed.

In March, the state offered \$5 million in grants of up to \$20,000 each to help property owners. The money ran out in just two weeks.

of classified documents, is set to be arraigned before a federal magistrate in Miami. That was to have happened twice before already, but he has struggled to retain a lawyer licensed in Florida to represent him.

Trump pleaded not guilty during his June 13 arraignment to charges including willful retention of national defense information. But Nauta's arraignment was postponed that day because he did not have with him a defense attorney authorized to practice in Florida. It was pushed back again last week when a flight from New Jersey he was to have taken was canceled after being delayed on the tarmac for hours.

The indictment filed by special counsel Jack Smith and his team of prosecutors accuses Nauta of conspiring with Trump to conceal records that he had taken with him from the White House after this term ended in January 2021.

Prosecutors allege that Nauta, at the former president's direction, moved boxes of documents bearing classification markings so that they would not be found by a Trump lawyer who was tasked with searching the home for classified records to be returned to the government. That, prosecutors said, resulted in a false claim to the Justice Department that a "diligent search" for classified documents had been done and that all documents responsive to a subpoena had been returned.

Nauta is a Navy veteran who fetched Trump's Diet Cokes as his valet at the White House before joining him as a personal aide at Mar-a-Lago. He is regularly by Trump's side, even traveling in Trump's motorcade to the Miami courthouse for their appearance earlier this month and accompanying him afterwards to a stop at the city's famed Cuban restaurant Versailles, where he helped usher supporters eager to take selfies with the former president.

Tucker reported from Washington.

Relatives of El Paso Walmart shooting victims seek justice, saying they're down but not out

By MORGAN LEE and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — A brother who traveled more than 1,000 miles to confront his sister's killer. An uncle of an orphaned 4-year-old whose parents died while shielding the boy from the spray of bullets. A wife whose husband was gunned down at her side while their 9-year-old granddaughter looked on.

Nearly four years after a white gunman killed 23 people at a Walmart in El Paso in a racist attack that targeted Hispanic shoppers, relatives of the victims are packing a courtroom near the U.S.-Mexico border this week to see Patrick Crusius punished for one of the nation's worst mass shootings.

The sentencing phase, which began Wednesday and continues Thursday, is the first time families have had the opportunity to address Crusius face-to-face since the Aug. 3, 2019, shooting.

Crusius, 24, is expected to receive multiple life sentences in federal prison after pleading guilty to 90 murder, weapons and hate crime counts in February. He could also still receive the death penalty under separate charges in state court.

In their own words, here is what the sentencing means to some of the relatives:

FORGIVENESS AND FAILURE

Family members credit Jordan Anchondo and Andre Anchondo with shielding their 2-month-old child Paul in the store during the attack, in which they were both killed.

Tito Anchondo, Andre's brother, said he will forgive Crusius but also wants to explain to him why what he did was a failure.

Less than a half-hour before the attack, Crusius posted an online rant against a supposed "invasion" of Texas by Hispanics and warned they would take over the government and economy.

"He set out to hurt people because he said Hispanics were taking over. I just want him to know his efforts were in vain," Anchondo said. "Yeah, we lost a lot of people. ... The ones that are still here, we're still pushing forward."

His nephew turned 4 in May. Anchondo said the boy has begun to understand the loss of his parents and grapples with it on special occasions, such as Father's Day, and at the sight of family portraits.

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Paul Jamrowski, Jordan's father, said it was excruciating Wednesday to sit in the same courtroom as Crusius. He said he forgives Crusius and is grateful that his grandchildren can rely on each other.

He is unsure, however, whether justice can ever really be served.

"These lives will never be brought back to life, so how is that justice?" Jamrowski said. "And who's to say what justice is? What we do is we try to deal with it as every other family has, which is to continue to go on with your life."

'YOU DIDN'T KNOCK US OUT'

Dean Reckard said he has nothing to say to the man who killed his younger sister, Margie Reckard.

But he still came all the way from Omaha, Nebraska, with his wife to hear what other families have to say to the gunman. The sight of Crusius being led into the courtroom Wednesday left Reckard convulsing and wiping tears from his eyes.

Hilda Reckard, Dean's wife, said they made the trip in order to "stand up to hate."

"I just think that us coming here is to take a stand," she said. "You knocked us down, you didn't knock us out."

'EVIL DOES EXIST OUTSIDE STORYBOOKS'

Among the first to address Crusius was the family of David Johnson, including his widow, her grown daughter and a granddaughter who witnessed the attack.

Each spoke of enduring daily trauma from the death of a man remembered as a loving grandfather who liked to cook, watch NASCAR racing and spend time with his grandkids playing with Lincoln Logs.

"He was always my rock and my strength, and you took him from me," Stephanie Melendez, Johnson's daughter, told Crusius. "You stole my daughter's safety and you changed my life forever. ... You showed her evil does exist outside of storybooks."

Kathleen Johnson, David's wife, who was at his side when he was killed, asked the court to deliver the maximum penalty available. She said she grapples with depression, anxiety, anger and night terrors.

"He was shot at close range by a coward, and there was his innocent blood, everywhere," Johnson said. "I don't know when I'll be the same. ... The pain you have caused is indescribable. I want you to know that you cannot take away the memory of David Johnson and the joy he brought to this family."

WAITING FOR THE DEATH PENALTY

Albert Hernandez, who lost sister Maribel Campos and brother-in-law Leonardo Campos in the shooting, is not interested in speaking in court for now.

He prefers to do so only after Crusius faces a trial that could result in the death penalty, which prosecutors intend to seek in the separate state proceeding.

"This is just a stepping stone for him to be brought to justice," Hernandez said. "I'm going to wait until after trial, at the end."

Other mass shootings in Texas since the Walmart attack have also weighed on Hernandez, including last year's massacre at an elementary school in Uvalde that left 19 children and two teachers dead.

"It's not about vengeance," Hernandez said. "It has to do with punishment, and appropriate punishment."

Weber reported from Austin.

Cameraman at Yankee Stadium injured by wild throw from Orioles shortstop Gunnar Henderson

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A cameraman was injured Wednesday night at Yankee Stadium and taken to the hospital after he was hit in the head by a wild throw from Baltimore Orioles rookie shortstop Gunnar Henderson.

Positioned right next to the New York Yankees' dugout on the first-base side, Pete Stendel of YES Network was struck by a hurried throw from Henderson, who fired high to first as he tried to complete a

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double play in the fifth inning.

After the game, YES said Stendel was conscious and undergoing tests in the hospital. No further updates were expected from the network Wednesday night.

"Every time that a ball goes over the first baseman or even a foul ball from the hitter, you don't want to see it going towards a fan. It just happened to be in the wrong spot, and I hope he's doing all right," Henderson said following his team's 6-3 victory. "My prayers go out to him. I'm just thankful for the guys that rushed over there to him to help him."

The game was delayed about 17 minutes as the Yankees' athletic training staff and medical personnel tended to Stendel in the camera well. Baltimore players came off the field and waited in their dugout as Yankees and Orioles, including Henderson, watched in obvious concern at a hushed ballpark.

"That was scary. I think I speak for all of us when I say our thoughts are with him. Hope he's doing all right and he's feeling better and we see him back here soon," Yankees outfielder Jake Bauers said. "He had a pretty bad reaction when he got hit, so it was scary to see."

Stendel was strapped onto a stretcher and carted off the field, raising and wagging two fingers to loud applause from the crowd of 36,022 as he was driven along the warning track behind home plate.

"It was good to see him obviously coherent and obviously raise his hand," Yankees manager Aaron Boone said. "It was very scary. ... Just hope he's OK."

Baltimore manager Brandon Hyde also said it was a frightening scene that was "awful" to be a part of. "He gave the peace sign coming off the field but that was tough to watch and hopefully he's OK," Hyde said.

Orioles starter Dean Kremer was given several warmup pitches before the game resumed. Henderson was charged with an error that allowed Anthony Volpe to reach second base. He scored on Kyle Higashio's two-out single to give New York a 2-0 lead.

After the game, Henderson was asked if he was shaken up.

"I'm doing pretty fine. Yeah, it sucks that happened to him, but it's just trying to play the game hard. Sometimes that happens," he said.

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

US releases video of Russian fighter jets harrassing American drones over Syria

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Russian fighter jets flew dangerously close to several U.S. drone aircraft over Syria on Wednesday, setting off flares and forcing the MQ-9 Reapers to take evasive maneuvers, the Air Force said.

U.S. Air Forces Central released a video of the encounter, showing a Russian SU-35 fighter closing in on a Reaper, and later showed a number of the so-called parachute flares moving into the drone's flight path. The flares are attached to parachutes.

Lt. Gen. Alex Grynkeiwich, commander of 9th Air Force in the Middle East, said three of the U.S. drones were operating over Syria after 10:30 a.m. local time, on a mission against the Islamic State group which was not detailed, when three of the Russian aircraft "began harassing the drones."

In a statement, Grynkeiwich said one of the Russian pilots moved their aircraft in front of a drone and engaged the SU-35's afterburner, which greatly increases its speed and air pressure. The jet blast from the afterburner can potentially damage the Reaper's electronics, and Grynkeiwich said it reduced the drone operator's ability to safely operate the aircraft.

"Russian military aircraft engaged in unsafe and unprofessional behavior while interacting with U.S. aircraft in Syria," he said, adding that the actions threaten the safety of the U.S. and Russian forces. "We urge Russian forces in Syria to cease this reckless behavior and adhere to the standards of behavior expected

of a professional air force so we can resume our focus on the enduring defeat of ISIS.”

Army Gen. Erik Kurilla, head of U.S. Central Command, said in a statement that Russia’s violation of ongoing efforts to clear the airspace over Syria “increases the risk of escalation or miscalculation.”

About 900 U.S. forces are deployed to Syria to work with the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces battling the Islamic State militants there. No other details about the drone operation were provided, and it’s not clear where over Syria the incidents took place.

LA County sheriff calls video of deputy tackling woman ‘disturbing,’ opens inquiry

By STEFANIE DAZIO Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The Los Angeles County sheriff says a bystander’s cellphone footage showing a deputy violently tackling a woman while she filmed a man being handcuffed, then pepper-spraying her in the face, is “disturbing,” and community groups on Wednesday called for the department’s new chief to hold his agency accountable.

The June 24 incident in the city of Lancaster follows several cases that have drawn scrutiny to the department amid allegations of excessive use of force by its deputies. It’s also testing the reform efforts of the new sheriff, Robert Luna, a former Long Beach police chief who has vowed to overhaul the nation’s largest sheriff’s department since taking it over in December after defeating incumbent Alex Villanueva.

Both officers were pulled off field duty, Luna said during an afternoon news conference, and could face discipline ranging from letters of reprimand all the way up to dismissal if misconduct is found. He didn’t identify the deputies.

Luna said he didn’t learn about the encounter until six days after it occurred. The department released footage from the deputies’ body-worn cameras on Monday.

Luna said he had seen the body-camera video as well as bystander video that spread on social media. “It’s disturbing. There’s no ifs and buts about it,” the sheriff said.

The Associated Press’ efforts to reach the bystander Wednesday were not immediately successful.

The sheriff said his department has opened an investigation into the deputies’ use of force and had notified the county’s Civilian Oversight Commission and also federal monitors, who are overseeing reforms that the department agreed to in 2015. That agreement settled federal allegations that deputies in the Antelope Valley, including Lancaster, had engaged in excessive use of force and racially-biased policing that included disproportionately stopping or searching Blacks and Latinos.

The couple, whose names were not released, reportedly matched the descriptions of robbers targeting a grocery store in Lancaster, 72 kilometers (45 miles) northeast of Los Angeles, the sheriff’s department said. The body-cam video shows the man sitting on a large rock outside the store and holding a cake before deputies handcuff him as the woman stands a few feet away filming the encounter.

One deputy is seen tackling the woman to the ground. “Get on the ground!” he can be heard shouting as he pins her down with his knee on her neck and shoulder. “Stop or you’ll get punched in the face!”

The woman is heard yelling “I can’t breathe!” as the deputy is seen pepper-spraying her in the face. She screams, “I didn’t do nothin’!” and the man repeatedly tells the other deputy that she has cancer.

At his news conference, Luna said the deputies were responding to a robbery in progress after receiving a 911 call from a store employee saying that two customers were assaulting “loss prevention employees.”

Stores hire such employees to deter shoplifters and damage.

Luna said it appeared that the man and woman were both involved in the confrontation inside the market but that their relationship wasn’t clear.

The woman was treated at a hospital after complaining of pain to her eyes after being pepper-sprayed, and she also had scrapes to her arms, the sheriff said.

The man was arrested and cited for resisting for delaying an officer, petty theft or attempted petty theft and interfering with a business, while the woman was cited for assaulting an officer and battery after assaulting loss prevention personnel, Luna said.

It wasn't immediately clear whether they had lawyers who could comment for them.

Tom Yu, an attorney representing the deputy who tackled the woman, says his client took her "down to the ground due to her being resistant."

"Deputies are trained to take suspects who resist to the ground in order to gain compliance and to safely handcuff the suspect," Yu said in an email on Wednesday.

Yu said his client "approached" the woman to detain her. She replied, "you can't touch me," the lawyer said.

"This was the beginning of the ensuing use of force," Yu wrote.

Yu also declined to release his client's name, reiterating that the department had not done so either.

Villanueva's tenure was tainted by accusations that so-called deputy gangs proliferated under his watch. The groups are accused of a variety of misconduct dating back decades, from controlling sheriff's stations and the jails, to harassing other deputies and the communities they police, to harming or fatally shooting civilians as part of gang rituals.

Villanueva resisted efforts from the county's inspector general and a civilian oversight commission to address the cliques. The former sheriff downplayed their role in the department and refused to answer the commission's subpoenas to testify about the gangs under oath.

The department was years behind other police agencies in outfitting its deputies with body-worn cameras, bringing them on board in 2020. The neighboring Los Angeles Police Department, in contrast, first gave the technology to its officers in 2016.

Associated Press news researcher Randy Herschaft in New York contributed to this report.

Trump posted what he said was Obama's address, prosecutors say. An armed man was soon arrested there

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump posted on his social media platform what he claimed was the home address of former President Barack Obama on the same day that a man with guns in his van was arrested near the property, federal prosecutors said Wednesday in revealing new details about the case.

Taylor Taranto, 37, who prosecutors say participated in the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol, kept two firearms and hundreds of rounds of ammunition inside a van he had driven cross-country and had been living in, according to a Justice Department motion that seeks to keep him behind bars.

On the day of his June 29 arrest, prosecutors said, Taranto reposted a Truth Social post from Trump containing what Trump claimed was Obama's home address. In a post on Telegram, Taranto wrote: "We got these losers surrounded! See you in hell, Podesta's and Obama's." That's a reference to John Podesta, the former chair of Hillary Clinton's 2016 Democratic presidential campaign.

Taranto also told followers on his YouTube live stream that he was looking to get a "good angle on a shot," prosecutors said.

A federal defender representing Taranto did not immediately return a phone message seeking comment. But in a motion seeking to have him released pending trial, the lawyer wrote that Taranto was not a flight risk, had a family in Washington state and had served in Iraq before being honorably discharged from the U.S. Navy.

"Mr. Taranto has been available and in plain sight for the last two and a half years," wrote the lawyer, Kathryn D'Adamo Guevara.

According to the Justice Department's detention memo, Taranto's wife told investigators that he had come to Washington this time because of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy's offer earlier this year to produce unseen video of the Jan. 6 attack. Taranto already faces four misdemeanor counts related to the Capitol assault, when prosecutors say he joined the crush of rioters who broke into the building and made his way to the entrance of the Speaker's Lobby outside the House chamber.

Since then, prosecutors say, Taranto has been active online, posting a Facebook video of himself in the Capitol that day and endorsing a conspiracy theory that the death of Ashli Babbitt — who was fatally shot by a Capitol Police officer as she began to climb through the broken part of a door leading into the Speaker's Lobby — was a hoax.

The FBI had been monitoring Taranto's online activities because of his involvement in the riot, and began searching for him last Wednesday after he asserted on his YouTube livestream that he was in Gaithersburg, Maryland on a "one-way mission" and intended to blow up the National Institute of Standards and Technology.

The following day, he continued his livestream from the Washington neighborhood where Obama lives — an area heavily monitored by the U.S. Secret Service — and said that he was looking for "entrance points" and wanted to get a "good angle on a shot," according to the detention memo.

Officials said he was spotted by law enforcement a few blocks from the former president's home and fled, though he was chased by Secret Service officers.

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

Nevada secures \$285M opioid settlement with Walgreens, bringing total settlements to \$1 billion

LAS VEGAS (AP) — The state of Nevada has reached a \$285 million settlement with Walgreens regarding the pharmacy chain's role in the opioid epidemic, the state's top lawyer announced Wednesday.

The last in a series of multiyear settlements with pharmaceutical companies, retailers and others, it pushes Nevada's total anticipated payments stemming from opioid claims to \$1.1 billion, state Attorney General Aaron Ford's office said in a news release. Nevada is among numerous states that have reached settlements now totaling more than \$50 billion nationwide.

"When I first took office as attorney general, I made it clear that seeking justice for those harmed by the opioid epidemic was one of my top priorities," Ford said.

Walgreens had no comment on the settlement, a company spokesman said in an email to The Associated Press on Wednesday.

Walgreens is the final defendant named in a lawsuit the state filed in 2019, Ford's office said.

The \$285 million settlement will be paid over 15 years and will be split between the state and the signatories of the One Nevada Agreement, a coalition of Nevada county and city governments, Ford said.

The state will retain about \$98.1 million, which will be placed in a fund that was created to help finance opioid recovery programs through the state Department of Health and Human Services. The coalition will receive about \$116.2 million.

The state reached a \$193 million agreement with Teva Pharmaceuticals in June and a \$152 million deal with CVS in May.

Much of the more than \$50 billion obtained through settlements nationwide is to be used to deal with an overdose crisis linked to more than 100,000 deaths a year in the U.S.

Last year, CVS agreed to pay state and local governments nearly \$5 billion to settle lawsuits over the toll of opioids. But Nevada did not join in that litigation in order to pursue the single-state settlement, Ford spokesperson John Sadler said.

Nevada joined another multistate settlement with three of the nation's largest opioid manufacturers in April 2022 totaling \$232 million over nearly two decades.

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Tuesday set an unofficial record for the hottest day on Earth. Wednesday may break it.

By MELINA WALLING and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

The planet's temperature spiked on Tuesday to its hottest day in decades and likely centuries, and Wednesday could become the third straight day Earth unofficially marks a record-breaking high. It's the latest in a series of climate-change extremes that alarm but don't surprise scientists.

The globe's average temperature reached 62.9 degrees Fahrenheit (17.18 degrees Celsius) on Tuesday, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer, a common tool based on satellite data, observations, and computer simulations and used by climate scientists for a glimpse of the world's condition. On Monday, the average temperature was 62.6 degrees Fahrenheit (17.01 degrees Celsius), setting a record that lasted only 24 hours.

For scientists, it's a sweaty case of I-told-you-so.

"A record like this is another piece of evidence for the now massively supported proposition that global warming is pushing us into a hotter future," said Stanford University climate scientist Chris Field, who was not part of the calculations.

On Wednesday, 38 million Americans were under some kind of heat alert, said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Sarah Kapnick. She said the global heat is from a natural El Nino warming of the Pacific that heats up the planet as it changes worldwide weather on top of human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

Even normally cooler communities are feeling the heat. In North Grenville, Ontario, the city turned ice-hockey rinks into cooling centers as temperatures Wednesday hit 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius), with humidity making it making it feel like 100.4 degrees (38 degrees Celsius).

"I feel like we live in a tropical country right now," city spokeswoman Jill Sturdy said. "It just kind of hits you. The air is so thick."

THE RECORD HIGHS ARE UNOFFICIAL BUT SIGNIFICANT

University of Maine climate scientist Sean Birkle, creator of the Climate Reanalyzer, said the daily figures are unofficial but a useful snapshot of what's happening in a warming world. Think of it as the temperature of someone who's ill, he said: It tells you something might be wrong, but you need longer-term records to work like a doctor's exam for a complete picture.

While the figures are not an official government record, "this is showing us an indication of where we are right now," said National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration chief scientist Sarah Kapnick. And NOAA indicated it will take the figures into consideration for its official record calculations.

Even though the dataset used for the unofficial record goes back only to 1979, Kapnick said that given other data, the world is likely seeing the hottest day in "several hundred years that we've experienced."

Scientists generally use much longer measurements — months, years, decades — to track the Earth's warming. But the daily highs are an indication that climate change is reaching uncharted territory.

JUST HOW HOT IS IT?

With many places seeing temperatures near 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.8 degrees Celsius), the new average temperatures might not seem very hot. But Tuesday's global high was nearly 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit (a full degree Celsius) higher than the 1979-2000 average, which already tops the 20th- and 19th-century averages.

High-temperature records were surpassed this week in Quebec and Peru. Beijing reported nine straight days last week when the temperature exceeded 95 degrees Fahrenheit (35 degrees Celsius). Cities across the U.S. from Medford, Oregon, to Tampa, Florida, have been hovering at all-time highs, said Zack Taylor, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service.

Alan Harris, director of emergency management for Seminole County, Florida, said that they've already exceeded last year in the number of days they've had their extreme weather plan activated, a measure initiated when the heat index will be 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42.22 degrees Celsius) or greater.

"It's just been kind of brutally hot for the last week, and now it looks like potentially for two weeks,"

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Harris said.

In the U.S., heat advisories include portions of western Oregon, inland far northern California, central New Mexico, Texas, Florida and the coastal Carolinas, according to the National Weather Service Weather Prediction Center. Excessive heat warnings are continuing across southern Arizona and California.

SOME POPULATIONS ARE AT RISK, BUT MANY ARE STILL OUTDOORS

Higher temperatures translate into brutal conditions for people all over the world. When the heat spikes, humans suffer health effects — especially young and elderly people, who are vulnerable to heat even under normal conditions.

"People aren't used to that. Their bodies aren't used to that," said Erinanne Saffell, Arizona's state climatologist and an expert in extreme weather and climate events. "That's important to understand who might be at risk, making sure people are hydrated, they're staying cool, and they're not exerting themselves outside, and taking care of those folks around you who might be at risk."

Overall, the heat means something a little different to everyone.

In West Texas, it's cool wraps and Gatorade for construction workers, said Joe Staley, a job site superintendent for a company that builds wastewater treatment plants. In Portland, it's extra water on backyard vegetable gardens, said Martha Alvarado. In Minnesota, it's a difficult workout on the family vineyard thanks to extra humidity for Joe Roisen.

In Dallas, the heat also means a sense of camaraderie for musician Sam Cormier, who often plays outdoors. Apartment dwellers with their windows open step out to bring him a drink. People are still walking around outside, even with the weather, and he plays with just his guitar, which is lighter than other equipment. He'd rather be outside sweating, he said, than inside on a computer.

HOW WE GOT HERE, AND WHERE WE'RE GOING

NOAA's Kapnick said the global heat is from a natural El Nino warming of the Pacific that heats up the globe as it changes worldwide weather on top of human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and gas.

"Not all records are meant to be broken. In almost every corner of our planet, people are facing the brunt of unprecedented heat waves," said United Nations Environment Programme Director Inger Andersen. "We ignore science at our own peril. ... It is the poorest and most vulnerable that continue to suffer from our inaction."

The highs come after months of "truly unreal meteorology and climate stats for the year," such as off-the-chart record warmth in the North Atlantic, record low sea ice in Antarctica and a rapidly strengthening El Nino, said University of Oklahoma meteorology professor Jason Furtado.

Wednesday may bring another unofficial record, with the Climate Reanalyzer again forecasting record or near-record heat. Antarctica's average forecast for Wednesday is a whopping 4.5 degrees Celsius (8.1 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than the 1979-2000 average.

Because humanity hasn't stopped pumping heat-trapping gases into the air, future generations will look back at the summer of 2023 as "one of the coolest of the rest of your life," said Texas A&M climate scientist Andrew Dessler.

Borenstein reported from Washington, and Walling from Chicago. Follow them on Twitter at @borenbears and @MelinaWalling.

Follow AP's climate and environment coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-and-environment>.

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Quran burnings have Sweden torn between free speech and respecting minorities

By KARL RITTER and JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — A Quran burning and a string of requests to approve protests involving the destruction of more holy books have left Sweden torn between its commitment to free speech and its respect for religious minorities.

The clash of fundamental principles has complicated Sweden's desire to join NATO, an expansion that gained urgency after Russia's invasion of Ukraine but needs the approval of all current members. Turkey has blocked Swedish accession since last year, citing reasons including anti-Turkish and anti-Islamic protests in Stockholm.

Then, last week, an Iraqi Christian immigrant burned Islam's holy book outside a Stockholm mosque during the major Muslim holiday of Eid al-Adha, an act that the man said displayed his feelings about the Quran.

The burning triggered widespread condemnation in the Islamic world. And along with similar recent protests by a far-right activist, it sparked a debate in Sweden about the limits of freedom of speech. Now, Swedish police say they have received new requests for demonstrations by individuals who want to burn the Quran, as well as the Torah and the Bible.

Muslim countries have urged Sweden to enact bans and Pakistan's prime minister, Shehbaz Sharif, called for a daylong protest to defend the sanctity of Islam's holy book on Friday, when Pakistan's parliament will discuss Quran burning.

Even some liberal commentators in Sweden argue that the protests should be regarded as hate speech, which is outlawed in the country when it targets ethnicity or race. But many in Sweden say criticizing religion, even in a manner that is considered offensive by believers, must be allowed and that Sweden should resist pressure to re-introduce blasphemy laws, which were abandoned decades ago in this predominantly Lutheran but highly secularized Scandinavian nation.

"It is a very serious situation for Sweden," said Magnus Ranstorp, a terrorism expert who is strategic advisor for the Center for Societal Security at the Swedish Defense University.

President Joe Biden welcomed Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson to the White House Wednesday and reiterated his belief in the importance of Sweden joining NATO.

"I want to reiterate the United States fully, fully, fully supports Sweden membership in NATO," Biden said from the Oval Office. "The bottom line is simple, Sweden is going to make our alliance stronger."

Stockholm police on Wednesday said they had received two new applications for book-burning protests in the capital: one from an individual who wants to burn the Quran outside a mosque and another from someone who wants to burn the Torah and the Bible outside Israel's Embassy.

A third request that involves "setting a religious text on fire" had been filed in the southern city of Helsingborg, local police chief Mattias Sigfridsson told The Associated Press.

Police have not yet decided on the requests.

"In Sweden, we have the freedom of expression. We also respect people who have a different opinion and the fact that it may hurt some feelings. We have to look at the law. That is what we do," Sigfridsson said.

Stockholm police tried to stop Quran-burning protests earlier this year but were overruled by a court that said such actions were protected by Swedish law.

Citing that decision, police allowed the protest last week where the man identified in Swedish media as a Christian from Iraq burned the Quran outside a mosque in Stockholm on Eid al-Adha. Muslim leaders in Sweden deplored the incident but the strongest reactions were in the Middle East. The Swedish Embassy in Baghdad was briefly stormed by angry protesters. The Organization for Islamic Cooperation condemned the act and criticized Swedish authorities for allowing it. Iran held back on sending a new ambassador to Stockholm and Pakistan asked the U.N. Human Rights Council to schedule a special session on the issue. Outside the Muslim world, Pope Francis also lamented the incident.

Meanwhile, the Swedish government issued a statement saying it "strongly rejects the Islamophobic

act committed by individuals in Sweden," adding that it "in no way reflects the opinions of the Swedish Government."

That elicited criticism from several commentators in Sweden, who said the government needs to stand up for freedom of speech and refrain from passing judgment on individual protests.

"I think it is exceptional and extremely inappropriate for the government ... to criticize an individual demonstration carried out by a person who, by all accounts, has stayed within the bounds of the law, who has only used his constitutional freedom of expression," Nils Funcke, a prominent Swedish freedom of speech advocate, told public broadcaster SVT.

Sweden worries the situation is starting to resemble the fury Denmark faced from Muslim countries in 2006 following the publication of newspaper caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad. Danish consulates and embassies were burned and the cartoonists faced death threats from radical Islamists. Danish officials' attempts to explain how such caricatures were protected under freedom of speech were widely dismissed in the Muslim world.

Ranstorp said the timing of the latest Quran-burning protest, just as Swedish and Turkish officials were getting ready to hold talks about Sweden's NATO bid this week, was suspicious.

"We have foreign powers, like Russia for example, which spread information in Arabic about this. We have Turkey, which is using it for leverage in the NATO debate," Ranstorp said.

The Iraqi man behind the protest told Swedish media it was aimed at Islam and not Sweden's NATO application.

The Swedish Security Service has warned of Russian interference in Swedish society.

"In general, the Swedish Security Service sees how authoritarian states, like Russia, use proxies in order to destabilize or influence Swedish public opinion and decision-making," agency spokesman Adam Samara said.

Previously non-aligned Sweden and neighboring Finland rushed to apply for NATO membership after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year. Russia responded with warnings of "serious military-political consequences" that would require "retaliatory steps by the Russian federation."

Finland joined NATO in April. Turkey and Hungary are the only NATO countries that have not yet ratified Sweden's accession.

Olsen contributed from Copenhagen, Denmark and Munir Ahmed contributed from Islamabad, Pakistan.

UN records the highest number of 'grave violations' against children in conflicts

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Children experienced the highest number of "grave violations" in conflicts verified by the United Nations in 2022, with the conflicts between Israeli and Palestinians and in Congo and Somalia putting the most youngsters in peril, the U.N. children's agency said Wednesday.

UNICEF also expressed particular concern about their plight in Haiti, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Mozambique and Ukraine, where Russia has been put on the U.N. blacklist.

"Grave violations" include the recruitment and use of children by combatants, killings and injuries, sexual violence, abductions, and attacks on schools and hospitals.

Omar Abdi, UNICEF's deputy executive director, told the U.N. Security Council the more than 27,000 grave violations, up from 24,000 the previous year, are the highest number verified by the U.N. since its monitoring reports began in 2005. The number of conflict situations "of concern" was also the highest — at 26.

Since the report, Abdi said, a serious conflict has erupted in Sudan where over 1 million children have been displaced by violent conflict and the U.N. has received reports that hundreds have been killed and injured. He also said UNICEF expects an increase in Palestinian children affected due to recent escalations in violence.

Government and parties to conflicts are not fulfilling their commitments to protect children, and "mean-

ingful and unambiguous action" is needed, the UNICEF official said.

In his yearly report to the council late last month, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres put Russian forces on the U.N.'s annual blacklist of countries that violate children's rights in conflict for killing boys and girls and attacking schools and hospitals in Ukraine.

But the U.N. chief did not put Israel on the blacklist for grave violations against 1,139 Palestinian children, including 54 killings last year — as supporters had hoped — saying the U.N. welcomed its "identification of practical measures including those proposed by the U.N." to protect children.

The U.N. special envoy for children in armed conflict, Virginia Gamba, told the council that the 27,180 grave violations in 2022 were carried out against 18,890 children and included 8,620 who were killed or injured, 7,622 who were recruited or used by governments or armed groups in conflicts, 3,985 who were abducted, 1,165, almost all of them girls, who were raped, forced into marriage or sexual slavery or sexually assaulted.

The United Nations also verified attacks on 1,163 schools and 647 hospitals, a 112% increase from 2021, she said.

While armed groups were responsible for 50% of grave violations, Gamba underscored that governments were the main perpetrators of the killing and maiming of children and of attacks on schools and hospitals.

Gamba said, for example, last year three girls were gang raped in South Sudan "during five days of terror," many boys were killed by an explosive device at a school in Afghanistan, a 14-year-old girl in Myanmar was abducted and burned alive, and an airstrike in Ukraine left a girl with amputated limbs.

"We must do more to prevent and protect our children from the ravages of armed conflict," she said.

U.S. deputy ambassador Jeffrey DeLaurentis said the report makes clear that the world's nations "have not done nearly enough to protect children from the impacts of conflicts." He said the United States is "keen" to see this issue "elevated, enhanced, and better integrated into all the work of the Security Council."

DeLaurentis accused Russia of committing crimes against humanity in Ukraine, including against children, pointing to the many youngsters deported to Russia and forcibly separated from their families. And "Russia's forces continue to attack areas where children are clearly present, including schools, hospitals and residential buildings," he said.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia accused Western media companies of cynically selecting the protection of children "for a dirty information campaign in order to slander the Russian Federation."

He accused Guterres of making "a political decision" to put Russian forces on the U.N. blacklist and not Ukrainian armed forces, insisting there is "no factual basis" to label Russia a violator of children's rights.

Nebenzia accused the Ukrainian military of killing and injuring children in Russian-occupied areas of Luhansk and Donetsk in the country's east since 2014 and said Moscow's complaints about Ukraine's actions have been ignored by the U.N. and others. He said Russia has established a parliamentary commission to investigate alleged crimes against children by the Ukraine.

Five dead in Philadelphia shooting that's nation's worst violence around July 4

By TASSANEE VEJPONGSA and RON TODT Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — A 40-year-old killed one man in a house before fatally shooting four others on the streets of a Philadelphia neighborhood, then surrendering to police officers after being cornered in an alley with an assault rifle, a pistol, extra magazines, a police scanner and a bulletproof vest, police said.

A 2-year-old boy and a 13-year-old were also wounded in the Monday night violence that made the working-class area of Kingsessing the site of the nation's worst violence around the July Fourth holiday.

Police called to the scene found gunshot victims and started to help them before hearing more shots. Some officers rushed victims to hospitals while others ran toward the gunfire and chased the firing suspect. Officers ultimately arrested the assailant in an alley, Police Commissioner Danielle Outlaw said at a news conference. The shooter had no connection to the victims before the shooting, she said.

"On what was supposed to be a beautiful summer evening, this armed and armored individual wreaked

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havoc, firing with a rifle at their victims seemingly at random," she said Tuesday afternoon.

Staff Inspector Ernest Ransom, the homicide unit commander, said witness interviews and video indicated that the suspect went to several locations in a ski mask and body armor, carrying an AR-15-style rifle.

"The suspect then began shooting aimlessly at occupied vehicles and individuals on the street as they walked," he said. The vehicles included a mother driving her 2-year-old twins home, and one was wounded in the legs and the other hit in the eyes by shattered glass.

Philadelphia police on Tuesday afternoon identified the victims as 21-year-old Lashyd Merritt, 29-year-old Dymir Stanton, 59-year-old Ralph Moralis and 15-year-old DaJuan Brown, all pronounced dead shortly after the Monday night gunfire; and 31-year-old Joseph Wamah Jr., who was found in a home early Tuesday, also with multiple bullet wounds.

Investigators believe Wamah was the first victim killed, but he wasn't found by family members until hours later, Ransom said.

A 2-year-old boy shot four times in the legs and a 13-year-old shot twice in the legs were in stable condition, as were a 2-year-old boy and a 33-year-old woman injured by shattered glass.

Police said the suspect is believed to have acted alone and there was no reason to believe anyone else was involved. Police and prosecutors said no charges were planned at this point against a second person taken into custody who is believed to have obtained a gun somewhere and fired back at the shooter.

"When you are under fire in a mass shooting, there are rights to protect others and rights to protect yourself," District Attorney Larry Krasner said.

Authorities asked for patience as they investigate every aspect of the shooting. That investigation, Outlaw said, "includes the 'why.'"

Krasner said the suspect would face multiple counts of murder, as well as aggravated assault and weapons charges, and was expected to be denied bail.

Outlaw praised the bravery of officers who tended to victims and rushed them to hospitals as others "fearlessly ran toward the sounds of gunfire," and captured the suspect.

"Their swift actions undoubtedly saved additional lives," she said.

At a holiday weekend block party in Baltimore, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) to the southwest of Philadelphia, two people were killed and 28 others were wounded in a shooting. More than half of the victims were 18 or younger, officials said.

About four hours after the Philadelphia shooting, gunfire at a neighborhood festival in Fort Worth, Texas, killed three people and wounded eight.

Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney renewed his oft-repeated call to "do something about America's gun problem."

"A person walking down the city street with an AR-style rifle and shooting randomly at people while wearing a bulletproof vest with multiple magazines is a disgraceful but all-too-common situation in America," Kenney said. "I was today at Independence Hall where they wrote that Constitution, and the 2nd Amendment was never intended to protect this."

Krasner said that the morning after the shooting, he saw "completely empty streets" in the traumatized neighborhood on an otherwise beautiful morning.

"I saw every porch empty. I saw every door closed. I saw every curtain where there was a curtain pulled. I saw no kids playing," he said, describing a bicycle left on a corner, apparently untouched for 12 or more hours, "as if everybody understood what happened here was so horrible that for right now this is a desert, and for right now everything that we associate with celebrating Fourth of July is off."

Tim Eads said that on Monday night he heard fireworks, then gunshots, and saw police cars "flying by." His wife was on the second floor "looking out the bay window and saw the shooter actually coming down this street here behind me."

Eads saw the other man with a pistol who, he said, may have been firing at the shooter.

"He was using my car as a shield shooting out into the street," Eads said.

A resident named Roger who declined to give his last name said he and his family were eating in the

living room at about 8:30 p.m. when they heard eight to 10 gunshots.

"Everybody thought it was fireworks but ... been around here about three years so I heard it enough," he said. "I looked out the window and seen a bunch of people running."

He said he heard about four more shots and "thought it was the end of it." Ten minutes later, he said, police came "flying down here," and about five minutes later he heard rapid gunfire open up right outside the house.

The Philadelphia violence was the country's 29th mass killing in 2023, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University, the highest on record by this time in the year.

The number of people killed in such events is also the highest by this time in the year.

There have been more than 550 mass killings since 2006, according to the database, in which at least 2,900 people have died and at least 2,000 people have been hurt. ____

This story has been updated to correct the spelling of a victim's first name to DaJuan Brown, not Daujan. His name was misspelled due to incorrect information from Philadelphia police. It has also been updated to correct the age of Lashyd Merritt. Merritt was 21, not 20.

Toby Keith's shows at his Oklahoma music venue mark return to stage after revealing cancer diagnosis

NORMAN, Okla. (AP) — Country music star Toby Keith was back on stage over the Fourth of July weekend with his first shows since revealing last summer that he had been fighting stomach cancer.

Hundreds attended the native Oklahoman's pop-up concerts Friday and Saturday night in Norman, where he lives, The Oklahoman reports. He performed at Hollywood Corners, a 1920s roadhouse and service station that he bought and converted into a deli, bar and music venue.

Norman resident Joanna Hall, who attended Friday's show, told the newspaper that Keith put on a great performance and was "very thankful for everybody who showed up."

"He seemed a little taken aback that that many people were there," Hall said. "He was like, 'This was supposed to be a secret. ... This was a bigger secret than what I intended.'"

Keith's publicist confirmed that Keith and his Easy Money Band played for about two and a half hours both nights.

Last June, Keith said that he had been battling stomach cancer since fall 2021 and had already spent the past six months undergoing chemotherapy, radiation and surgery. Keith, who turns 62 this weekend, told The Oklahoman last month that he was continuing with chemotherapy, that his tumor had shrunk by a third and that his blood tests have looked good.

Rep. Adam Schiff, censured by GOP-led House, raises \$8.1 million for his California Senate race

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — U.S. Rep. Adam Schiff's Senate campaign said Wednesday that the California Democrat had raised \$8.1 million over the past three months, a period that includes his recent censure by the Republican-led House.

His team said that was a record for a Senate campaign for the April-through-June quarter of a year in which an election is not taking place. The 2024 race is to fill the seat of retiring Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein.

However, federal records show that Majority Leader Chuck Schumer's main campaign committee raised over \$11 million in the second quarter of 2021, a year when he was not facing reelection.

Schiff's campaign said in the announcement that the \$8.1 million amount represented "the most any Senate campaign nationwide has raised in Q2 of an off-cycle year, ever." Campaign communications director Marisol Samayoa said in an email the "record" amount referred to fundraising in open Senate contests,

where an incumbent is not running. That was not made clear in the statement announcing Schiff had set a "record."

"It would be accurate to say open" Senate contests, she wrote.

Schiff rose to national prominence as the lead prosecutor in then-President Donald Trump's first impeachment trial and has long been recognized as a prolific small-dollar fundraiser. His donations averaged \$34 from 144,000 donors across the country, and 98% of the contributions were \$200 or less, coming from every state and every county in California, according to the campaign.

It was not immediately clear how much of the three-month total came after or around the censure vote on June 21.

Schiff, first elected to Congress in 2000, represents parts of Hollywood and suburbs north of Los Angeles. He has been a frequent target of conservatives — Trump in particular — since the then-GOP-led House Intelligence Committee he served on started investigating Trump's ties to Russia in the 2016 election.

Schiff was censured on a party-line vote for comments he made during the investigations into Trump's ties to Russia. In and around the time of the censure vote, Schiff was a frequent presence in headlines and on TV. He made online fundraising pitches, including on the day of the vote when he urged supporters to "become a founding donor" of his Senate campaign.

He frequently used Trump as a foil, and in an online video, Schiff blamed Trump for helping engineer his censure. "We've already known that the GOP is completely unhinged and beholden to Donald Trump. Join me in fighting back," Schiff wrote in one online appeal.

Overall, Schiff has nearly \$30 million cash on hand for the 2024 race to fill the seat of retiring Democratic Sen. Dianne Feinstein, his campaign said. The large field of Democratic candidates includes two House colleagues, Reps. Katie Porter and Barbara Lee.

Schiff's figures have not yet been documented with the federal agency that oversees election fundraising. Those do not have to be submitted by campaigns until mid-July.

At the end of March, he led the Senate field in fundraising by a wide margin with nearly \$25 million in the bank.

Study says drinking water from nearly half of US faucets contains potentially harmful chemicals

By JOHN FLESHER AP Environmental Writer

TRAVERSE CITY, Mich. (AP) — Drinking water from nearly half of U.S. faucets likely contains "forever chemicals" that may cause cancer and other health problems, according to a government study released Wednesday.

The synthetic compounds known collectively as PFAS are contaminating drinking water to varying extents in large cities and small towns — and in private wells and public systems, the U.S. Geological Survey said.

Researchers described the study as the first nationwide effort to test for PFAS in tap water from private sources in addition to regulated ones. It builds on previous scientific findings that the chemicals are widespread, showing up in consumer products as diverse as nonstick pans, food packaging and water-resistant clothing and making their way into water supplies.

Because the USGS is a scientific research agency, the report makes no policy recommendations. But the information "can be used to evaluate risk of exposure and inform decisions about whether or not you want to treat your drinking water, get it tested or get more information from your state" about the situation locally, said lead author Kelly Smalling, a research hydrologist.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency in March proposed the first federal drinking water limits on six forms of PFAS, or per- and polyfluorinated substances, which remain in the human body for years and don't degrade in the environment. A final decision is expected later this year or in 2024.

But the government hasn't prohibited companies using the chemicals from dumping them into public wastewater systems, said Scott Faber, a senior vice president of the Environmental Working Group, an advocacy organization.

"We should be treating this problem where it begins, instead of putting up a stoplight after the accident," he said. "We should be requiring polluters to treat their own wastes."

Studies of lab animals have found potential links between PFAS chemicals and some cancers, including kidney and testicular, plus issues such as high blood pressure and low birth weight.

Federal and state programs typically measure exposure to pollutants such as PFAS at water treatment plants or groundwater wells that supply them, Smalling said. In contrast, the USGS report was based on samples from taps in 716 locations, including 447 that rely on public supplies and 269 using private wells.

The samples were taken between 2016 and 2021 in a range of locations — mostly residences but also a few schools and offices. They included protected lands such as national parks; residential and rural areas with no identified PFAS sources; and urban centers with industry or waste sites known to generate PFAS.

Most taps were sampled just once. Three were sampled multiple times over a three-month period, with results changing little, Smalling said.

Scientists tested for 32 PFAS compounds — most of the ones detectable through available methods. Thousands of others are believed to exist but can't be spotted with current technology, Smalling said.

The types found most often were PFBS, PFHxS and PFOA. Also making frequent appearances was PFOS, one of the most common nationwide.

Positive samples contained as many as nine varieties, although most were closer to two. The median concentration was around seven parts per trillion for all 32 PFAS types, although for PFOA and PFOS it was about four parts per trillion — the limit EPA has proposed for those two compounds.

The heaviest exposures were in cities and near potential sources of the compounds, particularly in the Eastern Seaboard; Great Lakes and Great Plains urban centers; and Central and Southern California. Many of the tests, mostly in rural areas, found no PFAS.

Based on the data, researchers estimated that at least one form of PFAS could be found in about 45% of tap water samples nationwide.

The study underscores that private well users should have their water tested for PFAS and consider installing filters, said Faber of the Environmental Working Group. Filters containing activated carbon or reverse osmosis membranes can remove the compounds.

The USGS study is "further evidence that PFAS is incredibly pervasive and folks who rely on private wells are particularly vulnerable to the harms caused by these chemicals," Faber said.

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.

UN nuclear agency chief says he's satisfied with Japan's plans to release Fukushima wastewater

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

FUTABA, Japan (AP) — The head of the U.N. atomic agency toured Japan's tsunami-wrecked Fukushima nuclear power plant on Wednesday and said he is satisfied with still-contentious plans to release treated radioactive wastewater into the Pacific Ocean.

International Atomic Energy Agency chief Rafael Mariano Grossi observed where the treated water will be sent through a pipeline to a coastal facility, where it will be highly diluted with seawater and receive a final test sampling. It will then be released 1 kilometer (1,000 yards) offshore through an undersea tunnel.

"I was satisfied with what I saw," Grossi said after his tour of equipment at the plant for the planned discharge, which Japan hopes to begin this summer. "I don't see any pending issues."

The wastewater release still faces opposition in and outside Japan.

Earlier Wednesday, Grossi met with local mayors and fishing association leaders and stressed that the IAEA will be present throughout the water discharge, which is expected to last decades, to ensure safety and address residents' concerns. He said he inaugurated a permanent IAEA office at the plant, showing its long-term commitment.

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The water discharge is not "some strange plan that has been devised only to be applied here, and sold to you," Grossi said at the meeting in Iwaki, about 40 kilometers (25 miles) south of the plant. He said the method is certified by the IAEA and is followed around the world.

The IAEA, in its final report on the Fukushima plan released Tuesday, concluded that the treated wastewater, which will still contain a small amount of radioactivity, will be safer than international standards and its environmental and health impact would be negligible.

Local fishing organizations have rejected the plan because they worry their reputation will be damaged even if their catch isn't contaminated. It is also opposed by groups in South Korea, China and some Pacific Island nations due to safety concerns and political reasons.

Fukushima's fisheries association adopted a resolution on June 30 reaffirming its rejection of the plan.

The fishery association chief, Tetsu Nozaki, urged government officials at Wednesday's meeting "to remember that the treated water plan was pushed forward despite our opposition."

Grossi is expected to also visit South Korea, New Zealand and the Cook Islands to ease concerns there. He said his intention is to explain what the IAEA, not Japan, is doing to ensure there is no problem.

In an effort to address concerns about fish and the marine environment, Grossi and Tomoaki Kobayakawa, president of the plant operator, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings, signed an agreement on a joint project to determine whether they are impacted by tritium, the only radionuclide officials say cannot be removed from the wastewater by treatment.

In South Korea, officials said in a briefing Wednesday that it's highly unlikely that the released water will have dangerous levels of contamination. They said South Korea plans to tightly screen seafood imported from Japan and that there is no immediate plan to lift the country's import ban on seafood from the Fukushima region.

Park Ku-yeon, first vice minister of South Korea's Office for Government Policy Coordination, said Seoul plans to comment on the IAEA findings when it issues the results of the country's own investigation into the potential effects of the water release, which he said will come soon.

China doubled down on its objections to the release in a statement late Tuesday, saying the IAEA report failed to reflect all views and accusing Japan of treating the Pacific Ocean as a sewer.

"We once again urge the Japanese side to stop its ocean discharge plan, and earnestly dispose of the nuclear-contaminated water in a science-based, safe and transparent manner. If Japan insists on going ahead with the plan, it will have to bear all the consequences arising from this," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said.

Grossi said Wednesday he is aware of the Chinese position and takes any concern seriously. "China is a very important partner of the IAEA and we are in close contact," he said.

A massive earthquake and tsunami on March 11, 2011, destroyed the Fukushima Daiichi plant's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt and contaminating their cooling water, which has leaked continuously. The water is collected, treated and stored in about 1,000 tanks, which will reach their capacity in early 2024.

The government and TEPCO, the plant operator, say the water must be removed to prevent any accidental leaks and make room for the plant's decommissioning.

Japanese regulators finished their final safety inspection last week, and TEPCO is expected to receive a permit within days to release the water.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, after meeting with Grossi, said Japan will continue to provide "detailed explanations based on scientific evidence with a high degree of transparency both domestically and internationally."

Associated Press video journalist Haruka Nuga in Tokyo and reporter Kim Tong-hyung in Seoul, South Korea, contributed to this report.

Man gets life sentence for raping 9-year-old Ohio girl who traveled to Indiana for legal abortion

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — A man who confessed to raping and impregnating a 9-year-old Ohio girl has been sentenced to life in prison in a case that became a national flashpoint on abortion rights because the girl had to travel out of state to end the pregnancy.

Gerson Fuentes, 28, was sentenced to life in prison, but his plea deal stipulates that he can seek parole after serving 25 to 30 years. He would then have to register as a sex offender.

Common Pleas Court Judge Julie Lynch, who was not required to approve the plea agreement, said the girl's family "begged" the judge to back it. Lynch called the deal a "very hard pill for this court to swallow."

"Anyone who's ever been in this courtroom for the last 20 years knows how this court feels about these babies, young people, being violated," Lynch said. "However, today, by the request of the family, this court will be sentencing without comment."

The maximum sentence would have been life without parole. Settling the case before trial will spare the survivor from having to testify in court.

Zachary Olah, an attorney who represented Fuentes, told The Columbus Dispatch after the hearing that his client has been cooperative since the beginning.

"He was anxious to get this resolved," Olah said.

The girl, who turned 10 before having the abortion, confirmed that Fuentes attacked her, Franklin County prosecutors have said, and Fuentes confessed to Columbus police detectives. DNA testing of the aborted fetus confirmed Fuentes was the father, prosecutors said.

Fuentes, who is from Guatemala and was living in Columbus, had been held without bond since his arrest. If he eventually wins parole, he would likely be deported given that authorities have said they have not found any evidence he is authorized to live in the U.S. legally.

The case gained national attention after Dr. Caitlin Bernard of Indianapolis said a 10-year-old child had to travel to Indiana to terminate a pregnancy because Ohio banned the procedure at the first detectable fetal heartbeat. Some 25 states have banned or restricted abortion since the Supreme Court struck down Roe, though many of the new laws are still being litigated.

Indiana's state Medical Licensing Board voted in May to reprimand Bernard, finding that she violated patient privacy laws when she told a newspaper reporter about the case, even without revealing directly protected information like the survivor's name or address.

The board rejected accusations from Indiana's Republican attorney general that Bernard violated state law by not reporting the child abuse to Indiana authorities. Board members also rejected a request to suspend the doctor's medical license. Instead, it fined Bernard \$3,000 for the violations, but issued no restrictions on her practicing medicine. — This story corrects the summary to reflect that Fuentes will be eligible for parole, not probation.

Ransomware criminals are dumping kids' private files online after school hacks

By FRANK BAJAK, HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and LARRY FENN Associated Press

The confidential documents stolen from schools and dumped online by ransomware gangs are raw, intimate and graphic. They describe student sexual assaults, psychiatric hospitalizations, abusive parents, truancy — even suicide attempts.

"Please do something," begged a student in one leaked file, recalling the trauma of continually bumping into an ex-abuser at a school in Minneapolis. Other victims talked about wetting the bed or crying themselves to sleep.

Complete sexual assault case files containing these details were among more than 300,000 files dumped online in March after the 36,000-student Minneapolis Public Schools refused to pay a \$1 million ransom. Other exposed data included medical records, discrimination complaints, Social Security numbers and

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contact information of district employees.

Rich in digitized data, the nation's schools are prime targets for far-flung criminal hackers, who are assiduously locating and scooping up sensitive files that not long ago were committed to paper in locked cabinets. "In this case, everybody has a key," said cybersecurity expert Ian Coldwater, whose son attends a Minneapolis high school.

Often strapped for cash, districts are grossly ill-equipped not just to defend themselves but to respond diligently and transparently when attacked, especially as they struggle to help kids catch up from the pandemic and grapple with shrinking budgets.

Months after the Minneapolis attack, administrators have not delivered on their promise to inform individual victims. Unlike for hospitals, no federal law exists to require this notification from schools.

The Associated Press reached families of six students whose sexual assault case files were exposed. The message from a reporter was the first time anyone had alerted them.

"Truth is, they didn't notify us about anything," said a mother whose son's case file has 80 documents.

Even when schools catch a ransomware attack in progress, the data are typically already gone. That was what Los Angeles Unified School District did last Labor Day weekend, only to see the private paperwork of more than 1,900 former students — including psychological evaluations and medical records — leaked online. Not until February did district officials disclose the breach's full dimensions, noting the complexity of notifying victims with exposed files up to three decades old.

The lasting legacy of school ransomware attacks, it turns out, is not in school closures, recovery costs or even soaring cyberinsurance premiums. It is the trauma for staff, students and parents from the online exposure of private records — which the AP found on the open internet and dark web.

"A massive amount of information is being posted online, and nobody is looking to see just how bad it all is. Or, if somebody is looking, they're not making the results public," said analyst Brett Callow of the cybersecurity firm Emsisoft.

Other big districts recently stung by data theft include San Diego, Des Moines and Tucson, Arizona. While the severity of those hacks remains unclear, all have been criticized either for being slow to admit to being hit by ransomware, dragging their feet on notifying victims — or both.

ON CYBER SECURITY, SCHOOLS HAVE LAGGED

While other ransomware targets have fortified and segmented networks, encrypting data and mandating multi-factor authentication, school systems have been slower to react.

Ransomware likely has affected well over 5 million U.S. students by now, with district attacks on track to rise this year, said analyst Allan Liska of the cybersecurity firm Recorded Future. Nearly one in three U.S. districts had been breached by the end of 2021, according to a survey by the Center for Internet Security, a federally funded nonprofit.

"Everyone wants schools to be more secure, but very few want to see their taxes raised to do it," Liska said.

Parents have instead pushed to use limited funds on things like bilingual teachers and new football helmets, said Albuquerque schools superintendent Scott Elder, whose district suffered a January 2022 ransomware attack.

Just three years ago, criminals did not routinely grab data in ransomware attacks, said TJ Sayers, cyberthreat intelligence manager at the Center for Internet Security. Now, it's common, he said, with much of it sold on the dark web.

The criminals in the Minneapolis theft were especially aggressive. They shared links to the stolen data on Facebook, Twitter, Telegram and the dark web, which standard browsers can't access. A handwritten note naming three students involved in one of the sexual abuse complaints was featured for a time on YouTube competitor Vimeo, which promptly took down the video.

The cybercrime syndicate behind the Los Angeles United attack was less brazen. But the 500 gigabytes it dumped on its dark web "leak site" remained freely available for download in June. They include financial records and personnel files with scanned Social Security cards and passports.

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The public disclosure of psychological records or sexual assault case files, complete with students' names, can fray psyches and thwart careers, psychologists say. One file stolen from Los Angeles Unified described how a middle-schooler had attempted suicide and been in and out of the psychiatric hospital a dozen times in a year.

The mother of a 16-year-old with autism recently got a letter from the San Diego Unified School District saying her daughter's medical records may have been leaked online in an Oct. 25 breach.

"What," Barbara Voit asked, "if she doesn't want the world to know that she has autism?"

IN A TRICKLE, THE EXTENT OF A BREACH EMERGES

The Minneapolis parents informed by the AP of the leaked sexual assault complaints feel doubly victimized. Their children have battled PTSD, and some even left their schools. Now this.

"The family is beyond horrified to learn that this highly sensitive information is now available in perpetuity on the internet for the child's future friends, romantic interests, employers, and others to discover," said Jeff Storms, an attorney for one of the families. It is AP policy not to identify sexual abuse victims.

Teachers, meanwhile, want to know why they have to call the district and report problems in order to receive the promised free credit monitoring and identity theft protection after their Social Security numbers were leaked.

"Everything they've learned about this is from the news," said Greta Callahan, of the Minneapolis Federation of Teachers.

Minneapolis Schools spokeswoman Crystina Lugo-Beach would not say how many people have been contacted so far or answer any other AP questions about the attack.

School nurse Angie McCracken had by early April already received 10 alerts through her credit card that her Social Security number and birth date were circulating on the dark web. She wondered about her graduating 18-year-old. "If their identity is stolen, just how hard is that going to make my kid's life?"

Despite parents' and teachers' frustration, schools are routinely advised by incident response teams concerned about legal liability issues and ransom negotiations against being more transparent, said Callow of Emsisoft. Minneapolis school officials apparently followed that playbook, initially describing the Feb. 17 attack cryptically as a "system incident," then as "technical difficulties" and later an "encryption event."

The extent of the breach became clear though when a ransomware group posted video of stolen data more than two weeks later, giving the district 10 days to pay the ransom before leaking files.

The district declined to pay, following the standing advice of the FBI, which says ransoms encourage criminals to target more victims.

SCHOOLS SPEND TECH BUDGETS ON LEARNING TOOLS, NOT SECURITY

During the COVID-19 pandemic, districts prioritized spending on internet connectivity and remote learning. Security got short shrift as IT departments invested in software to track student engagement and performance, often at the expense of privacy and safety, University of Chicago and New York University researchers found.

In a 2023 survey, the Consortium for School Networking, a tech-oriented nonprofit, found just 16% of districts had full-time network security staff, with nearly half devoting 2% or less of their IT budgets to security.

With a deficit in private sector cybersecurity talent, districts struggle to hang onto it. Districts who do hire someone often see them snatched away by businesses that can double their salaries, said Keith Krueger, CEO of the consortium.

Cybersecurity money for public schools is limited. As it stands, districts can only expect slivers of the \$1 billion in cybersecurity grants that the federal government is distributing over four years.

Minnesota's chief information security officer, John Israel, said his state got \$18 million of it this year to divvy among 3,600 different entities, including cities and tribal governments. State lawmakers provided an additional \$22.5 million in grants for cyber and physical security in schools.

Schools also want to tap a federal program called E-Rate that is designed to improve broadband connections to schools and libraries. More than 1,100 wrote the Federal Communications Commission after the Los Angeles Unified breach asking that E-Rate be modified to free up funds for cybersecurity. The FCC is

still considering the request.

It's already too late for the mother of one of the Minneapolis students whose confidential sexual assault complaint was released online. She almost feels "violated again."

"All the stuff we kept private," she said, "it's out there. And it's been out there for a very long time."

Russian journalist sustained a brain injury and fractures during a brutal beating in Chechnya

MOSCOW (AP) — A prominent Russian investigative reporter has received a brain injury and multiple fractures when she and a lawyer accompanying her were brutally beaten by unidentified assailants in the Russian province of Chechnya, her newspaper said Wednesday.

Novaya Gazeta journalist Elena Milashina and lawyer Alexander Nemov were attacked Tuesday soon after they arrived in Chechnya to attend the trial of the mother of two Chechen dissidents. Just outside the airport, their vehicle was blocked by three cars and a dozen unidentified masked attackers, who beat them with clubs and put guns to their heads. Milashina and Nemova were evacuated to Moscow for medical treatment later in the day.

Novaya Gazeta said that a medical examination of Milashina showed that she has sustained a brain injury and 14 fractures on her hands along with multiple other injuries. It released pictures of Milashina, showing both her hands bandaged, her face injured and her back covered by bruises from the beating.

Milashina said the assailants threatened to cut her fingers if she refused to give a password to unlock her phone and then beat her on her fingers with a plastic tube. "It was very painful. It felt like a burn," she said in a video released by Russian rights group Team Against Torture.

The attackers also shaved her head clean and doused green antiseptic on her, Milashina said. She noted that the attackers grabbed their equipment, but didn't touch cash and other valuables.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov has described the attack as "a very serious assault that warrants energetic measures" from law enforcement agencies and noted that President Vladimir Putin was informed about it.

Alexander Bastrykin, head of the Investigative Committee, the country's top state criminal investigation agency, ordered an investigation into the attack, and the committee's branch in Chechnya has opened an inquiry.

Chechnya's Moscow-backed strongman leader, Ramzan Kadyrov, who branded Milashina a "terrorist" in the past, said the regional authorities had launched an investigation and would track down the attackers.

The strong statements and a quick response from various Russian government agencies contrasted with a muted official reaction to previous attacks on Milashina and other journalists and human rights activists in Chechnya.

Milashina has long exposed human rights violations in Chechnya under Kadyrov's watch and has faced threats, intimidation and attacks. In 2020, she and a lawyer accompanying her were beaten by a dozen people in the lobby of their hotel. Last year, she temporarily left Russia after she was threatened by Chechen authorities.

The Kremlin has relied on Kadyrov to keep the North Caucasus region stable after two devastating separatist wars. International rights groups have accused his security forces of extrajudicial killings, torture and abductions of dissenters, but Russian authorities have stonewalled repeated demands to investigate and end abuses in Chechnya.

The Kremlin scrambled fighters from Chechnya to help protect Moscow from an abortive mutiny launched by mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin 11 days ago, but some commentators warned that Kadyrov's ambitions could also potentially pose a threat to federal authorities.

Despite the Kremlin's support, Kadyrov reportedly has had tense relations with some of Russia's law enforcement agencies. The angry reaction from officials and Kremlin-connected lawmakers who called for a tough response could signal authorities' intentions to cut the Chechen strongman down to size.

After secret documents leak, Pentagon plans tighter controls to protect classified information

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon on Wednesday announced plans to tighten protection for classified information following the explosive leaks of hundreds of intelligence documents that were accessed through security gaps at a Massachusetts Air National Guard base.

Airman 1st Class Jack Teixeira, 21, is accused of leaking the highly classified military documents in a chatroom on Discord, a social media platform that started as a hangout for gamers.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, in a memo released Wednesday, ordered all of the department's secured rooms where classified information is stored and accessed to be brought into compliance with intelligence community standards for oversight and tracking. The changes call for increased levels of physical security, additional controls to ensure documents aren't improperly removed, and the assignment of top-secret control officers to monitor users.

A senior defense official who briefed reporters on the new directives said the department is trying to increase accountability, using technology that can better track what workers are doing and what information they are accessing. But at the same time, the official said, defense leaders don't want to impede the ability to share critical information across the government when necessary.

Asked if the department is trying to limit the number of people who have access to classified information, the defense official said it is an effort to ensure that the department is properly determining what information each person may access and making sure that employees have a need to know the classified material they are reading.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity in accordance with Pentagon ground rules for the briefing.

In the memo, Austin also said the sensitive compartmented information facilities, or SCIFs, must be monitored to prevent the use of electronic devices inside the rooms. That effort would include "appropriate electronic device detection systems and mitigation measures" inside the secure areas, according to the memo.

According to authorities, Teixeira, who enlisted in the Air National Guard in 2019, began sharing military secrets first by typing out classified documents and later by removing classified documents from the base and taking them home to photograph them.

Teixeira worked as a "cyber transport systems specialist," essentially an IT specialist responsible for military communications networks, which gave him wide access to the military's classified computing networks.

The case highlighted the potential vulnerabilities the department faces as it works to safeguard classified information at military facilities across the globe that have varying security procedures and layers of protection, said the senior defense official.

"There wasn't a single point of failure," the official added.

Court filings in Teixeira's case revealed that Air National Guard supervisors warned him at least three times about improper access to classified information, but no further action to restrict his clearance or access was taken.

The official said one of the concerns the department found in its review was that facilities that were farther from headquarters had ambiguity on some of the military's classified information policies, such as when a security violation was required to be reported higher up the chain of command.

Teixeira pleaded not guilty last month to federal felony charges.

The stunning breach exposed to the world unvarnished secret assessments of Russia's war in Ukraine, the capabilities and geopolitical interests of other nations and other national security issues. It has led to sweeping security reviews looking at the large number of users who have access to top secret information, who is tracking them, and whether or not they have a need to know.

Austin also directed the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency to develop ways to more quickly

flag and communicate concerns to local commanders about personnel, such as by improving how “continuous vetting information” — any updated reports on criminal records, credit reports or other indicators that are tracked as part of background checks — can be more quickly shared to flag a potential security risk.

An estimated 4 million people hold U.S. security clearances, according to a 2017 report from the Office of the Director of National Intelligence. Of those, roughly 1.3 million are cleared to access top-secret information.

The Defense Department has previously been criticized for delays vetting new employees for security clearances and for over-classifying information. Officials have tried to balance those concerns against efforts to come up with ways to better protect the documents without further slowing down needed access to information, the official said.

More recent figures weren’t immediately available. But some lawmakers have long wanted to update the U.S. system of classifying information and add safeguards for how documents are stored and tracked.

Associated Press writers Nomaan Merchant and Eric Tucker contributed to this report.

France sees itself as blind to race. After a teen is killed by police, how does one discuss racism?

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NANTERRE, France (AP) — The race of the police officer who fatally shot a French teenager during a traffic stop last week hasn’t been disclosed, and there’s no reason why it would be. Officially, race doesn’t exist in France.

But the death of the French-born 17-year-old with North African roots, which sent rioters into the streets, has again exposed deep feelings about systemic racism under the surface of the country’s ideal of color-blind equality.

With his killing captured on video, what could be seen as France’s George Floyd moment has produced a very French national discussion that leaves out what many Americans would consider the essential point: color.

One can’t address race, much less racism, if it doesn’t exist, according to French policy. The Paris police chief, Laurent Nunez, said Sunday he was shocked by the U.N. human rights office’s use of the term “racism” in its criticism of French law enforcement. The police have none of it, he said.

France, especially white France, doesn’t tend to frame discussion of discrimination and inequality in black-and-white terms. Some French consider it racist to even discuss skin color. No one knows how many people of various races live in the country, as such data is not recorded.

“They say we are all French ... so for them, it’s racist to do something like that,” said Iman Essaifi, a 25-year-old resident of Nanterre, the Paris suburb where the teen, Nahel Merzouk, was killed.

While the subject of race remains taboo, Essaifi believes the events of the past week were a step toward speaking more openly about it. She noted that the people who marched in the streets of Nanterre after Nahel’s death were “not necessarily Arabs, not necessarily Blacks. There were whites, there were the ‘vrai Francais,’” — the “real French.”

France’s Constitution says the French Republic and its values are considered universal, meaning that all citizens have the same rights regardless of origin, race or religion.

Trying to discuss racial inequality without mentioning race leads to some linguistic gymnastics. Instead of terms like Black or mixed-race neighborhoods, French people instead often speak of “communities” or “banlieues” (suburbs) and “quartiers” (neighborhoods). They’re widely understood to mean often disadvantaged urban areas of housing projects and large immigrant populations.

Amid the unrest after Nahel’s death, such nonspecific language has ranged from supportive to insulting. Nanterre’s mayor, Patrick Jarry, spoke on Monday of the suburb “in all its diversity.” A statement last week by a large police union, the Alliance Police Nationale, described the rioters as “vermin.”

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Of course there's racism in France, some people said.

"For example, if your parents come from another country, even you are poorly accepted," said Stella Assi, a 17-year-old born in Paris who was passing by the city hall in Nanterre. "If I were white, that wouldn't happen."

The National Consultative Commission on Human Rights in its annual report to the government this week said racism is still "largely estimated and largely under-reported."

France's legacy of colonialism, largely in Africa and the Caribbean, plays out in some attitudes that continue generations later. More recently, migration has caused debate and division. The result is a government that openly addresses certain issues around race, but not necessarily in relation to its citizens' daily lives.

On Wednesday, for example, a court in France is scheduled to review a request for reparations for the descendants of enslaved people. And on a notice board in Nanterre, now scrawled with graffiti saying "Cops, get out of our lives," a city hall announcement from May advertised a ceremony commemorating the abolition of slavery.

Ahmed Djamai, 58, the president of an organization in Nanterre that connects youth with work opportunities, recalled being stopped by police recently and asked for his residence permit. He was born in France.

"Our second-, third- and fourth-generation children face the same problem when they go out to get a job," he said. "People lump them together with things that happen in the suburbs. They're not accepted. So, to date, the problem is social, but it's also one of identity."

The stunning procession of hundreds of men who walked from a mosque in Nanterre to the cemetery for Nahel's burial stood out in France not only because many were Black or Arab, but because even the demonstration of religious identity can be sensitive. In addition to being officially colorblind, France is officially secular, too.

Some people with immigrant roots fear that France's success stories of generations of assimilation under that policy are being lost amid the rioting and criticism.

Gilles Djeyaramane is a municipal councilor in Poissy, a town west of Paris. His French-born wife is of Madagascan origin. He was born in French Guiana, of parents from India, and moved to France when he was 18.

"I'm always saying to my children, 'Your mom and dad would never have met if France didn't exist,'" he said. "I'm not at all utopian. I know there's work to do in some areas. But we are on the right path."

Those who knew Nahel, and some who identify with him, said it's not fair to pretend that differences, and discrimination, don't exist. With anger, some pointed out that a funding campaign for the family of the police officer accused of shooting Nahel already topped 1 million euros (\$1.09 million).

The frustration and violence in many communities come from other issues as well, including the rising cost of living and policing in general. In 2021, Amnesty International and five other rights groups filed a class-action lawsuit against the French state alleging ethnic profiling by police during ID checks.

Dozens of organizations and political parties are calling for "citizens' marches" on Saturday across France to call for police reforms, saying that long-running tensions between officers and the people are part of a history of "systematic racism that runs through society at large."

Police officers reject accusations that some single out people because of their color. Officer Walid Hrar, who is of Moroccan descent and Muslim, said that if it sometimes seems that people of color are stopped more than others, it's a reflection of the mixed-race density of populations in disadvantaged urban neighborhoods.

In rural France, with fewer people with immigrant backgrounds, police also stop people but "they are called François, Paul and Pierre and Jacques," Hrar said.

But Mariam Lambert, a 39-year-old who said Nahel was a friend of her son, stressed the pressure of feeling that she and others, including fellow Muslims, had to muffle their identity.

"If I put a scarf on my head ... they would see me as from another world, and everything would change for me," said Lambert, who thinks she would be insulted in the streets. She spoke on the margins of a gathering at Nanterre city hall as events were held there and across France on Monday in support of authorities and a return to calm.

Lambert mused about moving to Morocco if France doesn't change. "There are plenty of people leaving," she said. "Because who protects us from the police?"

John Leicester and Nicolas Garriga contributed to this report from Paris.

Ukraine, Russia accuse each other of planning to attack Europe's biggest nuclear plant

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine and Russia accused each other Wednesday of planning to attack one of the world's largest nuclear power plants, but neither side provided evidence to support their claims of an imminent threat to the facility in southeastern Ukraine that is occupied by Russian troops.

The Zaporizhzhia Nuclear Power Plant has been a focus of fear since Moscow's forces took control of it early in the war. Ever since then, Moscow and Kyiv have traded blame for shelling the facility and accused each other of nuclear terrorism.

Regular power outages resulting from shelling made it impossible to operate the plant safely, and its six reactors have been shut down to minimize the threat of a disaster.

Over the last year, the U.N.'s atomic watchdog repeatedly expressed alarm over the possibility of a radiation catastrophe like the one at Chernobyl after a reactor exploded in 1986.

Ukraine has alleged more recently that Moscow might try to cause a deliberate leak in an attempt to derail Kyiv's ongoing counteroffensive in the surrounding Zaporizhzhia region. Ukrainian authorities accused Russia of blowing up a dam in southern Ukraine last month with a similar aim, while Moscow blamed Ukraine for its destruction.

Citing the latest intelligence reports, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy alleged Tuesday night that Russian troops had placed "objects resembling explosives" on top of several of the plant's power units to "simulate" an attack from outside.

"Their detonation should not damage power units but may create a picture of shelling from Ukraine," according to a statement from the general staff of Ukraine's armed forces.

The Associated Press reviewed high-resolution satellite imagery of the plant taken Monday and Wednesday. The photos showed no visible changes to the roofs of the six concrete containment domes covering the reactors at the plant, or nearby buildings.

The International Atomic Energy Agency has officials stationed at the Russian-held plant, which is still run by a Ukrainian staff that oversees crucial cooling systems and other safety features.

The facility's location in an area of intense fighting has put it at the mercy of stray shells or rockets, and the Russia-ordered evacuation of hundreds of local people in May deepened the anxiety. The IAEA has tried in vain to forge a deal on a security zone around the plant.

IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said his agency's most recent inspection of the plant found no activity related to explosives, "but we remain extremely alert."

"As you know, there is a lot of combat. I have been there a few weeks ago, and there is contact there very close to the plant, so we cannot relax," Grossi said during a visit to Japan.

Agency experts have requested additional access to the rooftops of two reactor units, as well as turbine halls and some parts of the cooling system at the plant to confirm the absence of explosives.

"Our experts must be able to verify the facts on the ground. Their independent and objective reporting would help clarify the current situation at the site, which is crucial at a time like this, with unconfirmed allegations and counter allegations," Grossi said in a statement.

In Russia, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov raised the specter of a potentially "catastrophic" provocation by the Ukrainian army at the nuclear plant, which is Europe's largest.

"The situation is quite tense. There is a great threat of sabotage by the Kyiv regime, which can be catastrophic in its consequences," Peskov said in response to a reporter's question about the plant. He also

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claimed that the Kremlin was pursuing “all measures” to counter the alleged Ukrainian threat.

Renat Karchaa, an adviser to Russian state nuclear company Rosenergoatom that controls the plant, said there was “no basis” for Zelenskyy’s claims of a plot to simulate an explosion. “Why would we need explosives there? This is nonsense” aimed at “maintaining tension,” Karchaa said Wednesday, according to the Interfax news agency.

Late Tuesday, Karchaa alleged in televised remarks that Ukraine’s military was planning to strike the plant overnight with ammunition laced with nuclear waste, but no such attack came.

Grossi said he was aware of both Kyiv’s and Moscow’s claims and reiterated that “nuclear power plants should never, under any circumstances, be attacked.”

“A nuclear power plant should not be used as a military base,” he said.

Last week, Ukrainian emergency workers held a drill to prepare for a potential release of radiation from the plant. In case of a nuclear disaster at the plant, approximately 300,000 people would be evacuated from the areas closest to the facility, according to the country’s emergency services.

Ukrainian officials have said the shut-down reactors are protected by thick concrete containment domes, and experts have said that the plant’s design allows it to withstand barrages.

A Russian attack on the plant would “probably not lead to the widespread dispersal of significant amounts of radiation” due to precautionary steps taken by the IAEA, according to the International Institute for Strategic Studies, a think tank.

“A blast at Zaporizhzhia would spread radiation and sow panic, but the actual off-site radiation risk would be relatively low,” the think tank said in a recent assessment, adding that wind might blow some radiation toward Russia.

The IISS charged that the most likely scenarios are a Russian-engineered explosion that exposes one of the reactor cores and starts a fire that burns spent fuel, or a blast involving the dry spent fuel on site that would carry the radiation far afield via wind. Neither of those scenarios would bring a disaster on the scale of Chernobyl or Fukushima, Japan’s tsunami-wrecked nuclear plant, it said.

Mark Wenman, a nuclear expert with London’s Imperial College, emphasized that the reactor containment buildings are robust, made from heavily reinforced concrete that is 1.2 meters (4 feet) thick and able to withstand earthquakes and aircraft impacts.

Because the plant’s reactors have been shut down for months, they are not generating much heat anymore, and the spent fuel held in cooling ponds is protected by the concrete containment structure, Wenman said.

Any cold fuel, which is stored in concrete and steel containers outside, is too cold to heat itself and cause a radioactive release, he added.

“It would take a very concerted effort to damage the containment building and cause any form of radioactive release from within,” Wenman said in a commentary. “Even then, the most notable isotope of concern to humans, iodine-131, has all gone due to the time elapsed since the reactors were operational. Overall the risks are still very small.”

Associated Press writers Michael Biesecker in Washington, Mari Yamaguchi in Okuma, Japan, and Danica Kirka in London contributed to this report.

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

US citizenship test changes are coming, raising concerns for those with low English skills

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — The U.S. citizenship test is being updated, and some immigrants and advocates worry the changes will hurt test-takers with lower levels of English proficiency.

The naturalization test is one of the final steps toward citizenship — a monthslong process that requires

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legal permanent residency for years before applying.

Many are still shaken after former Republican President Donald Trump's administration changed the test in 2020, making it longer and more difficult to pass. Within months, Democratic President Joe Biden took office and signed an executive order aimed at eliminating barriers to citizenship. In that spirit, the citizenship test was changed back to its previous version, which was last updated in 2008.

In December, U.S. authorities said the test was due for an update after 15 years. The new version is expected late next year.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services proposes that the new test adds a speaking section to assess English skills. An officer would show photos of ordinary scenarios – like daily activities, weather or food – and ask the applicant to verbally describe the photos.

In the current test, an officer evaluates speaking ability during the naturalization interview by asking personal questions the applicant has already answered in the naturalization paperwork.

"For me, I think it would be harder to look at pictures and explain them," said Heaven Mehreta, who immigrated from Ethiopia 10 years ago, passed the naturalization test in May and became a U.S. citizen in Minnesota in June.

Mehreta, 32, said she learned English as an adult after moving to the U.S. and found pronunciation to be very difficult. She worries that adding a new speaking section based on photos, rather than personal questions, will make the test harder for others like her.

Shai Avny, who immigrated from Israel five years ago and became a U.S. citizen last year, said the new speaking section could also increase the stress applicants already feel during the test.

"Sitting next to someone from the federal government, it can be intimidating to talk and speak with them. Some people have this fear anyway. When it's not your first language, it can be even more difficult. Maybe you will be nervous and you won't find the words to tell them what you need to describe," Avny said. "It's a test that will determine if you are going to be a citizen. So there is a lot to lose."

Another proposed change would make the civics section on U.S. history and government multiple-choice instead of the current oral short-answer format.

Bill Bliss, a citizenship textbook author in Massachusetts, gave an example in a blog post of how the test would become more difficult because it would require a larger base of knowledge.

A current civics question has an officer asking the applicant to name a war fought by the U.S. in the 1900s. The applicant only needs to say one out of five acceptable answers – World War I, World War II, Korean War, Vietnam War or Gulf War – to get the question right.

But in the proposed multiple-choice format, the applicant would read that question and select the correct answer from the following choices:

- A. Civil War
- B. Mexican-American War
- C. Korean War
- D. Spanish-American War

The applicant must know all five of the wars fought by the U.S. in the 1900s in order to select the one correct answer, Bliss said, and that requires a "significantly higher level of language proficiency and test-taking skill."

Currently, the applicant must answer six out of 10 civics questions correctly to pass. Those 10 questions are selected from a bank of 100 civics questions. The applicant is not told which questions will be selected but can see and study the 100 questions before taking the test.

Lynne Weintraub, a citizenship coordinator at Jones Library's English as a Second Language Center in Massachusetts, said the proposed format for the civics section could make the citizenship test harder for people who struggle with English literacy. That includes refugees, elderly immigrants and people with disabilities that interfere with their test performance.

"We have a lot of students that are refugees, and they're coming from war-torn countries where maybe they didn't have a chance to complete school or even go to school," said Mechelle Perrott, a citizenship coordinator at San Diego Community College District's College of Continuing Education in California.

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"It's more difficult learning to read and write if you don't know how to do that in your first language. That's my main concern about the multiple-choice test; it's a lot of reading," Perrott said.

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services said in a December announcement that the proposed changes "reflect current best practices in test design" and would help standardize the citizenship test.

Under federal law, most applicants seeking citizenship must demonstrate an understanding of the English language – including an ability to speak, read and write words in ordinary usage – and demonstrate knowledge of U.S. history and government.

The agency said it will conduct a nationwide trial of the proposed changes in 2023 with opportunities for public feedback. Then, an external group of experts — in the fields of language acquisition, civics and test development — will review the results of the trial and recommend ways to best implement the proposed changes, which could take effect late next year.

The U.S. currently has the easiest citizenship test compared to other Western countries — including Germany, Canada and the United Kingdom — according to Sara Goodman, a political science professor at the University of California, Irvine.

Goodman said she uses the following metrics to determine the difficulty of a test: the number of questions required to pass and the number of questions overall, the percentage of applicants who pass the test, the language level of the test, and whether or not questions with answers are made available to study before taking the test.

In the U.S. test, applicants must answer six out of 10 questions correctly to pass. About 96% of applicants pass the test, according to recent estimates. The test is at a "high beginner" level of English, Goodman said, and a question bank with answers is made available to study beforehand.

But in the German test, Goodman said applicants must answer 17 out of 33 questions correctly to pass. About 90% of applicants pass the test, according to recent estimates. The test is at an "intermediate" level of German, according to Goodman. And a question bank with answers is made available.

The Canada and United Kingdom tests are even harder, and a question bank is not provided in the latter, Goodman said.

Elizabeth Jacobs, director of regulatory affairs and policy at the Center for Immigration Studies — a nonprofit research organization that advocates for less immigration — said the proposed changes would make the U.S. citizenship test even easier for many people.

"We think that's in the wrong direction," Jacobs said on behalf of the organization.

The proposed multiple-choice format for the civics section would put the answer to each question in front of applicants, Jacobs said, and would get rid of the memory challenge that's in the current test.

Jacobs said her organization would prefer a test that includes more material and emphasizes American values, such as religious freedom and freedom of speech.

She added that most people who naturalize are not in the U.S. because of merit or refugee status, but because of family sponsorship, where someone in their family became a citizen before them and petitioned for them to naturalize.

Jacobs said having a stricter test would help ensure that new citizens integrate into American society — and the economy — with sufficient English language skills, as well as promote a healthy democracy with civics knowledge and engagement.

Not everyone agrees.

"Is it important for us to even have a civics test in the first place? I don't know the answer to that question," said Corleen Smith, director of immigration services at the International Institute of Minnesota, a nonprofit that connects immigrants to resources.

Smith said USCIS already evaluates whether applicants have past criminal histories, pay taxes and support their children financially.

"They're already evaluating that portion of your background. Is it also important to know this information about history and government and be able to memorize it?" Smith said, adding: "People that were born in the U.S. and are natural-born citizens — a lot of those folks don't know many of these answers to the history of government questions."

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More than 1 million people became U.S. citizens in fiscal year 2022 — one of the highest numbers on record since 1907, the earliest year with available data — and USCIS reduced the huge backlog of naturalization applications by over 60% compared to the year before, according to a USCIS report also released in December.

Trisha Ahmed 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 under-covered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

Layover, cramped seating, security lines: A day with players on a WNBA commercial flight

By DOUG FEINBERG AP Basketball Writer

Breanna Stewart knew where she wanted to go. Someone was in her way. During games, that's not a problem for the WNBA MVP. While boarding a commercial flight, it's a bit trickier.

On a recent connecting flight carrying the New York Liberty from Atlanta to Las Vegas, Stewart had to ask a man in the aisle seat to get up briefly so she could contort her 6-foot-4 frame through the row before settling in her window seat as the passengers in line behind her patiently waited. The man politely complied, perhaps unaware that one of the best players in the women's game would be sharing his overhead bin space for the next four hours.

Such is how it works for WNBA players. When flying, they're just like everybody else.

Unlike NBA teams that charter flights, WNBA teams primarily fly commercial per the collective bargaining agreement. The league has said it would cost about \$25 million to charter for the entire season or approximately \$2 million per team.

The Associated Press traveled last week with New York and got a firsthand look at the experience. During their cross-country trek, the Liberty won at Connecticut on Tuesday night, appeared to run out of gas in a lopsided blowout loss at Las Vegas on Thursday and beat Seattle 81-66 on Sunday after a couple of days off.

Stepping around people to get to her seat was part of a 13-hour day Wednesday for Stewart on the second leg of the road trip.

"It was an early day. Drop your bags off, get on the bus to go to the airport to transfer to Atlanta to get to Vegas," Stewart told AP on a shuttle to Las Vegas baggage claim. "I'm tired."

The long day began around 6:30 a.m. with Stewart dragging her luggage down to the hotel lobby in Connecticut. All of the Liberty's 65 checked bags had to be catalogued and loaded on a bus from Uncasville to Hartford for the team's 2,700-mile flight to Las Vegas — including a brief layover in Atlanta.

Stewart and her teammates don't fly economy, but the seats are still tight.

Players are in comfort seats or economy-plus to ensure extra leg room, per the CBA. That helps, but taller players like Stewart and her 6-6 teammate Jonquel Jones still find themselves in tight spaces sometimes. Not to mention 6-10 Han Xu, who wasn't on the road trip because she was playing with the Chinese national team in the Asia Cup.

Now they can upgrade to first class — on their own dimes.

"Those seats are cramped. I tried to get upgraded to first class to have more room but the flight was full," said Jones, who had to duck to even get on the plane. "It's by no means a great way for us to travel that way with a game on Tuesday and then another game Thursday."

Stewart, a Diamond Medallion member on Delta, was upgraded to first class for the trip from Hartford to Atlanta because of her status on the airline. She wasn't so fortunate on the second part of the trip — the four-plus hour flight from Atlanta to Las Vegas.

There are a few perks for players, but even some of those have a catch.

Once New York's 33-person travel party got to Bradley Airport in Connecticut, it was a seamless process with the Liberty operations staff efficiently unloading the bus in less than 3 minutes. A Delta representa-

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tive met them with all the bag tags and tickets.

With tickets in hand, players headed straight to security — but here's the catch: Though most had either TSA precheck or Clear status, foreign-born players don't have that option.

Jones, who is from the Bahamas, and Marine Johannes, who is French, usually have to go through regular security lines. Sometimes they get lucky, as the pair did Wednesday, when they were escorted through the priority line by a Delta representative.

The team spent about 50 minutes in the Connecticut airport waiting to board a flight to Atlanta. Bradley isn't a very busy airport and all the players were able to relax — even Stewart, who won four national championships in college at nearby UConn. Players sat quietly by themselves, checking cell phones or listening to music while others chatted with teammates.

Their flights were on time despite thunderstorms wreaking havoc on air travel last week but if there had been any cancellations, New York had its usual backup plan.

The buses that transported the team from Mohegan Sun stayed at the Connecticut airport until the Liberty's plane took off. Assistant general manager Ohemaa Nyanin said it's a common practice, adding that if something had gone wrong the Liberty would have bused back to New York where there were more flight options.

After the 2 1/2-hour flight to Atlanta, there was a short layover for their connecting flight. Players went to grab a quick cup of coffee or some food for the longer leg of the trip.

It helped that the team didn't have to traipse through the busy Atlanta airport for the connecting flight. It was only one gate over from the one where they landed.

Once the team finally arrived in Las Vegas nearly 12 hours after dropping their bags at that Connecticut hotel lobby, the players boarded a waiting bus while the staff headed for baggage claim to make sure all 65 bags made it to Nevada.

"We just let them be and do whatever they want," coach Sandy Brondello said of plans for the players. "Some of them watch film, some of them just sleep."

The wear-and-tear on players' bodies is one reason they have lobbied for charter flights, with New York paying a hefty price for ignoring the travel restrictions. The Liberty received a WNBA-record \$500,000 fine last year for using chartered flights in 2021 during the second half of that season.

However, the league has eased its stance this season, allowing teams that have scheduled games on back-to-back nights to use charter flights.

The WNBA also is allowing Mercury center Brittney Griner to use charter flights following her highly publicized arrest in Russia. She did travel commercially with the team last month and the 6-9 All-Star was harassed by a social media provocateur during an incident in Dallas.

The Liberty, like many WNBA teams, travel with security. During New York's trip to Las Vegas, only one fan came up and asked for a photo with guard Sabrina Ionescu.

Players have become more guarded as their celebrity status continues to rise.

"I've had guys come up and trash-talk me about how they could beat me one-on-one," Las Vegas Aces guard Chelsea Gray said. "Usually people are nice, but you can't be too careful nowadays."

Stewart believes the Liberty organization is doing what it can to make travel as easy as possible for the players, but with the health and safety of players at risk, she thinks more needs to be done.

"I don't think we're asking anything crazy," Stewart said. "We want to continue to be our best, and realizing that all the prehab and rehab and lifting and stuff we do for our bodies is just as equally important as the way that we travel and the ability to stretch our legs."

She added players have to "make sure we're not getting swollen from flying because that is a thing."

One consolation for the Liberty: This was their only road trip with a connecting flight.

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

A timeline of the New York Liberty's itinerary to Las Vegas during a recent 3-game WNBA road trip

By The Associated Press undefined

The New York Liberty's three-game road trip last week included multiple bus trips, two airplanes and three airports on the way from Connecticut to Las Vegas. The Associated Press traveled with the Liberty on their 13-hour trek to Las Vegas for Game 2 of the trip. Here is a look at their itinerary (All times are Eastern):

Monday:

— 12:30 p.m. Thirty-three person travel party boarded buses in New York bound for Mohegan Sun in Uncasville, Connecticut, for Tuesday night game against the Sun.

— 4 p.m. Liberty contingent arrives at Mohegan.

Tuesday:

— 11 a.m. Team participates in shootaround to prepare for Tuesday night's game.

— 7 p.m. Game against Connecticut tips off.

— 9 p.m. Game ends against Connecticut, with New York notching an 89-81 victory in the first game of the road trip.

Wednesday:

— 6:30 a.m. Players drop off their bags in the lobby of Connecticut hotel to be sent to the airport for trip to Las Vegas.

— 6:45 a.m. Liberty operations staff loads up the bus and heads to Hartford airport.

— 8:15 a.m. Players take bus for hour-long trip to airport.

— 11 a.m. Flight departs Hartford bound for Atlanta.

— 1 p.m. Flight lands in Atlanta and players have 40-minute window to get food before their connection is scheduled to depart.

-- 2 p.m. Connecting flight departs Atlanta for Las Vegas.

— 6 p.m. Team lands in Las Vegas and operations staff waits on bus for luggage to be loaded as players take another bus to team hotel.

— 7:30 p.m. Team checks into hotel in Las Vegas.

Thursday:

— 2 p.m. Team has shootaround to get ready for Las Vegas game.

— 10 p.m. Game against Aces tips off.

— 12 a.m. Game 2 of the road trip ends, Liberty lose 98-81 to the Aces.

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

A troubled new power plant leaves Jordan in debt to China, raising concerns over Beijing's influence

By ISABEL DEBRE Associated Press

ATTARAT, Jordan (AP) — Jordan's Attarat power plant was envisioned as a landmark project promising to provide the desert kingdom with a major source of energy while solidifying its relations with China.

But weeks after its official opening, the site, a sea of black, crumbly rock in the barren desert south of Jordan's capital, is instead a source of heated controversy. Deals surrounding the plant put Jordan on the hook for billions of dollars in debt to China — all for a plant that is no longer needed for its energy, because of other agreements made since the project's conception.

The result is fueling tensions between China and Jordan and causing grief for the Jordanian government as it tries to contest the deal in an international legal battle. As Chinese influence grows in the Middle East and America withdraws, the \$2.1 billion shale oil station has come to characterize China's wider model that has burdened many Asian and African states with crippling debt and served as a cautionary tale for the region.

"Attarat is a representation of what the Belt and Road Initiative was and has become," said Jesse Marks,

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a nonresident fellow at the Washington-based Stimson Center, referring to China's scheme to build global infrastructure and boost Beijing's political sway.

"Jordan evolves as an interesting case study not for China's success in the region but for how China engages in middle-income countries," he said.

First conceived some 15 years ago as a way to fulfill national ambitions of energy independence, the Attarat shale oil plant is now causing anger in Jordan because of its enormous price tag. If the original agreement holds, Jordan would have to pay China a staggering \$8.4 billion over 30 years to buy the electricity generated by the plant.

Laborers flown from rural China toil in the shadow of the giant station, some 100 kilometers (60 miles) south of Amman.

When Shi Changqing arrived in the Jordanian desert earlier this year from the Jilin province in China's northeast, fears were mounting in the workers' dormitories that the project could grind to a halt, leaving everyone in the lurch, the 36-year-old welder said.

"It's very strange to feel that, being from China, you are not wanted here," he said.

With its meager natural resources in a region awash with oil and gas, Jordan seemed to have drawn a losing ticket. Then in the 2000s, it struck shale oil trapped in the black rock that underlies the country. With the fourth-largest concentration of shale oil in the world, Jordan had high hopes for a big pay-off.

In 2012, the Jordanian Attarat Power Company proposed to the government to extract shale oil from the desert and build a plant using it to provide 15% of the country's electricity supply. The proposal fit the government's intensifying desire for energy self-sufficiency amid the turmoil of the 2011 Arab uprisings, company officials say.

But extraction proved expensive, risky and technologically challenging. As the project lagged, Jordan struck a \$15 billion agreement to import vast amounts of natural gas at competitive prices from Israel in 2014. Interest in Attarat waned.

Attarat Power Co. board member Mohammed Maaitah said he pitched the project the world over — from the United States and Europe to Japan and South Korea. No one bit, he said.

To Jordan's surprise, Chinese banks offered Jordan over \$1.6 billion in loans to finance the plant in 2017. A Chinese state-owned firm, Guangdong Energy Group, bought a 45% stake in the Attarat Power Co., turning the white elephant into the largest private enterprise to come out of President Xi Jinping's Belt and Road Initiative outside China, according to the company.

Guangdong Energy Group did not respond to requests for comment.

The investment was part of China's wider push into an Arab world hungry for foreign investment, experts say. The money for large infrastructure projects came with few political strings attached.

"China doesn't bring with it the baggage of the United States in that we actually have some concern about democratic processes, transparency, corruption," said David Schenker, a former U.S. assistant secretary of state for Middle East policy. "For authoritarian states, there's some appeal in China."

As talk grew of American unreliability, China turned to acquiring strategic assets in the Middle East, even in economically troubled states. It bought lots of Iraqi oil, tendered a port in northern Lebanon and poured money into President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi's new capital in Egypt.

With Syrian President Bashar Assad in 2017 gaining the upper hand in his country's civil war, China had an interest in investing in the Attarat project in neighboring Jordan as a springboard, anticipating a Syrian reconstruction boom that could unlock billions of dollars in investments, experts say.

Under their 30-year power purchase deal, Jordan's state-run electricity company will have to buy electricity from the now effectively Chinese-led Attarat at an exorbitant rate that means the Jordanian government would lose \$280 million annually, the treasury estimated. To cover the payments, Jordan would have to raise electricity prices for consumers by 17%, energy experts said — a severe blow to an economy already saddled with debt and inflation.

The extent of losses to China appalled the Jordanian government. Jordan's Ministry of Energy launched international arbitration against Attarat Power Co. in 2020 "on the grounds of gross unfairness."

When asked why Jordan had agreed to such a lopsided contract to begin with, Jordan's Ministry of En-

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ergy declined to comment, as did the National Electricity Co. As of June, hearings were being held at an arbitration tribunal of the Paris-based International Chamber of Commerce.

Musa Hantash, a geologist on the parliamentary energy committee, described the deal as the natural outcome of corruption and a lack of technical expertise.

"It's very difficult to convince these big companies to invest in Jordan. There are things to help certain people make a profit," he said, without elaborating.

American officials portrayed the Attarat contract as a case of Beijing's "debt trap diplomacy."

The Chinese Foreign Ministry declined to comment on the Attarat project. But it defended Beijing's investment in developing countries, denying allegations it ensnares partners in debt and arguing that China never compels "others to borrow from us forcibly."

"We never attach any political strings to loan agreements," the ministry said, urging international financial institutions to help provide debt relief.

Attarat Power said it expects a decision in the case later this year. Rulings by the world business organization are legally binding and enforceable.

Maaithah and other company officials dismissed Jordan's claims of unjustly inflated prices, accusing Jordan of backtracking on its agreement due to anti-China sentiment.

Since the first of two power units went live last fall, the Jordanian government has paid only half its monthly dues, Maaithah said.

In Jordan and other poorer Arab states allied with the U.S., the pace of Chinese investment in recent years has slowed.

Faced with pushback abroad and rising concerns at home, China is shifting its approach in the region, said Amman-based China expert Samer Khraïno, focusing on the oil-rich Persian Gulf. Wealthy states like the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia have no issue paying back China's big loans.

For now, Jordan appears unwilling to take any more chances with China.

In May, Jordan's telecommunications company Orange signed a new agreement for 5G equipment. It had long been a customer of Huawei, the Chinese telecoms giant under American sanctions.

This time, it chose Nokia.

Conservatives go to red states and liberals go to blue as the country grows more polarized

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

STAR, Idaho (AP) — Once he and his wife, Jennifer, moved to a Boise suburb last year, Tim Kohl could finally express himself.

Kohl did what the couple never dared at their previous house outside Los Angeles — the newly-retired Los Angeles police officer flew a U.S. flag and a Thin Blue Line banner representing law enforcement outside his house.

"We were scared to put it up," Jennifer Kohl acknowledged. But the Kohls knew they had moved to the right place when neighbors complimented him on the display.

Leah Dean is on the opposite end of the political spectrum, but she knows how the Kohls feel. In Texas, Dean had been scared to fly an abortion rights banner outside her house. Around the time the Kohls were house-hunting in Idaho, she and her partner found a place in Denver, where their LGBTQ+ pride flag flies above the banner in front of their house that proclaims "Abortion access is a community responsibility."

"One thing we have really found is a place to feel comfortable being ourselves," Dean said.

Americans are segregating by their politics at a rapid clip, helping fuel the greatest divide between the states in modern history.

One party controls the entire legislature in all but two states. In 28 states, the party in control has a supermajority in at least one legislative chamber — which means the majority party has so many lawmakers that they can override a governor's veto. Not that that would be necessary in most cases, as only 10 states have governors of different parties than the one that controls the legislature.

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The split has sent states careening to the political left or right, adopting diametrically opposed laws on some of the hottest issues of the day. In Idaho, abortion is illegal once a heartbeat can be detected in a fetus — as early as five or six weeks — and a new law passed this year makes it a crime to help a minor travel out of state to obtain one. In Colorado, state law prevents any restrictions on abortion. In Idaho, a new law prevents minors from accessing gender-affirming care, while Colorado allows youths to come from other states to access the procedures.

Federalism — allowing each state to chart its own course within boundaries set by Congress and the Constitution — is at the core of the U.S. system. It lets the states, in the words of former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, be “laboratories of democracy.”

Now, some wonder whether that’s driving Americans apart.

“Does that work as well in a time when we are so politically divided, or does it just become an accelerant for people who want to re-segregate?” asked Rob Witwer, a former Republican Colorado state lawmaker.

Colorado and Idaho represent two poles of state-level political homogenization. Both are fast-growing Rocky Mountain states that have been transformed by an influx of like-minded residents. Life in the two states can be quite similar — conversations revolve around local ski areas, mountain bike trails, and how newcomers are making things too crowded. But, politically, they increasingly occupy two separate worlds.

Witwer watched Colorado steadily swing to the left as affluent, college-educated people fled the coasts for his home state starting in the late 1990s. For two decades, it was one of the nation’s fastest-growing states, and during the Trump era it swung sharply to the left. Democrats control all statewide offices and have their largest majorities in history in the legislature, including a supermajority in the lower house.

In contrast, Idaho has become one of the nation’s fastest-growing states during the past decade without losing its reputation as a conservative haven. It has moved even more sharply to the right during that time and become a beacon to those, like the Kohls, fleeing blue states where they no longer feel welcome.

The states’ swings aren’t simply due to transplants, of course. The increasing clustering of Americans into like-minded enclaves — dubbed “The Big Sort” — has many causes. Harvard professor Ryan Enos estimates that, at least before the pandemic, only 15% of the homogeneity was due to people moving. Other causes include political parties polarizing on hot-button issues that split neatly on demographic lines, such as guns and abortion, and voters adopting their neighbors’ partisanship.

“A lot of this is driven by other sorting that is going on,” Enos said.

When Americans move, politics is not typically the explicit reason. But the lifestyle choices they make place them in communities dominated by their preferred party.

“Democrats want to live in places with artistic culture and craft breweries, and Republicans want to move to places where they can have a big yard,” said Ryan Strickler, a political scientist at Colorado State University-Pueblo.

But something may have changed as the country has become even more polarized. Businesses catering to conservatives fleeing blue states have sprouted, such as Blue Line Moving, which markets to families fleeing from blue states to Florida. In Texas, a “rainbow underground railroad” run by a Dallas realtor helps LGBTQ+ families flee the state’s increased restrictions targeting that population.

The switch might have been flipped during the coronavirus pandemic in 2020, which created a class of mobile workers no longer bound to the states where their companies were based. Those who are now mobile are predominantly white-collar workers and retirees, the two most politically engaged parts of the national population.

Mike McCarter, who has spearheaded a quixotic campaign to have conservative eastern Oregon become part of Idaho, said most people didn’t pay much attention to state government until the pandemic.

“Then it was like ‘Oh, they can shut down any church and they can shut down my kids’ school?’” McCarter said. “If state-level government has that much power, you’d better be sure it reflects your values, and not someone else’s values that are forced on you.”

The pandemic helped push Aaron and Carrie Friesen to Idaho. When the pandemic hit, they realized they could take their marketing firm remote from its base near Hilton Head, South Carolina. They’d always planned to return to the West, but California, where Aaron, now 39, was born and raised, was disqualified

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because of its cost and progressive politics.

The Friesens and their three children settled on Boise. They loved the big skies, the mountains rearing up behind the town, the plethora of outdoor activities.

And they liked Idaho's pandemic policies. When the Friesens visited, almost no one was wearing masks, which they took as a good sign — they were happy to mask up when sick, but found constant masking pointless.

"This was a place that had like-minded people," Carrie Friesen said.

The Friesens are happy with the direction of their new state and the abortion and transgender restrictions out of the latest legislative session. But they don't see themselves as part of what they called "the crazy right," referring to the families displaying Trump yard signs in the less-politically-mixed Boise suburbs. They like living close to the center of Boise, one of the more liberal areas in the state.

They try not to make too many decisions based on politics — to a point.

"With the temperature of politics nowadays, if people choose to move somewhere, they are going to choose to move to a place with like-minded people," Aaron Friesen said.

That's apparently been happening in Idaho, said Mathew Hay, who oversees a regular survey of new arrivals for Boise State University. Historically, transplants mirrored the conservative population's leanings, with about 45% describing themselves as "conservative," and the rest evenly split between liberal and moderate.

But something changed last year — the share of newcomers that said they lived in Idaho for the politics jumped to 9%, compared to 5% for long-timers. The percentage describing themselves as "very conservative" also rose.

When Melissa Wintrow rode her motorcycle across the U.S. in 1996, she was captivated by Idaho.

"It was this grounded, commonsense, reasonable group," Wintrow said. "Of course they were conservative, but they weren't going to say openly racist and homophobic things."

Now a Democratic state senator, Wintrow is aghast at how her adopted state has become more hardline.

"The state has just moved to a more extreme view," she said. "It's a certain group of people that is afraid their 'way of life' is diminishing in the world."

In Colorado, the reverse may be happening.

Bret Weinstein, owner of a realty firm in Denver, said politics has become the top issue for people buying a home.

"It's brought up in our initial conversations," Weinstein said. "Three years ago, we didn't have those conversations, ever."

Now, many entering the state tell him they're looking for a way to escape their red state — and homeowners leaving Colorado say they're fed up with it turning blue. Even within Colorado, Weinstein said, homebuyers are picking based on politics, with some avoiding conservative areas where debates on mask mandates and curriculum has dominated school board meetings.

One of those politically motivated migrants is Kathleen Rickerson, who works in human resources for Weinstein's firm. Rickerson, 35, lived in Minnesota for seven years, but during the pandemic grew weary of the blue state's vocal anti-masking, anti-vaccine minority.

Rickerson's parents and sister urged her to join them in Texas, but that was out of the question. Ready for a change, Rickerson instead zeroed in on Colorado. She moved to a Denver suburb in December 2021.

Cheered by the state's strong stance to protect abortion rights, Rickerson wants Colorado Democrats to go further.

"Colorado isn't as quick to take a stand on things, and I'd like to see that happen a bit more," she said.

That was a sentiment shared by Colorado progressives, who were frustrated their party didn't muscle through an assault weapons ban and other priorities of the left during the most recent legislative session.

"There is a point at which we need to stop acting like trying to get along with our enemies is going to preserve our institution," progressive state Rep. Stephanie Vigil said at the end of the session, after the chamber's Democratic leader said it was important that Republicans still feel like they have a voice.

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The increasing political homogeneity in states makes it harder for both parties to feel invested, said Thad Kousser, a political scientist at the University of California, San Diego.

"It gives one party the ability to move a state further when they're doing exactly what their constituency wants," he said.

The system works as a sort of escape valve, Kousser said, letting the majority in the state feel in power regardless of what's happening in Washington, D.C. But the local minority party gets shortchanged.

The Kohls felt shortchanged in California. They said they watched their native state deteriorate before their eyes, and no one was willing to fix the problems. Trash piled up with homeless encampments. Tax money seemed to go to immigrants who had entered the country illegally rather than U.S. citizens. Jennifer's mother qualified for government assistance due to her low income, but was on dozens of wait lists that were seven years long. Tim's police station, in a former hippie colony in the mountains running through West Los Angeles, was firebombed during the George Floyd protests in 2020.

The Kohls wanted to live in a red state, but Jennifer said they're not just party-line voters. A nurse, she hasn't registered with either party and has a wide range of beliefs, including that abortion is sometimes necessary.

"I believe so many different things," she said.

On balance, they feel more comfortable in a more conservative place.

"Here, the tax dollars naturally goes to the citizens, not the immigrants," said Tim Kohl, who can understand why Idaho is growing so fast. "Most of the people we've met here are from California originally."

In Denver, Dean has found other people who fled red states. She and her partner, Cassidy Dean, discovered that their neighbors fled Florida after the state's hard turn to the political right.

Leah Dean was a 19-year-old cosmetology college student in San Antonio in 2008 when she had an abortion. She chafed at the obstacles she faced — the state-mandated waiting period before the procedure, having to get a sonogram before the procedure — and became a committed Democratic activist. She met her partner at the Texas state party convention in 2016, and every year since then she's felt the Republican state legislature and governor make the state less and less hospitable to people like her.

Now in Colorado, she and her partner both work from home, telecommuting to their old Texas jobs. They have limited social outlets, but took care of that by throwing themselves into politics again, with Leah Dean becoming vice chair of Denver Democrats.

"It's also how we meet people," she said. "We don't have any other way to do that."

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Today in History: July 6, England's Richard III is crowned

By The Associated Press

Today is Thursday, July 6, the 187th day of 2023. There are 178 days left in the year.

On July 6, 1944, an estimated 168 people died in a fire that broke out during a performance in the main tent of the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus in Hartford, Connecticut.

On this date:

In 1483, England's King Richard III was crowned in Westminster Abbey.

In 1777, during the American Revolution, British forces captured Fort Ticonderoga (ty-kahn-dur-OH'-gah).

In 1854, the first official meeting of the Republican Party took place in Jackson, Michigan.

In 1885, French scientist Louis Pasteur tested an anti-rabies vaccine on 9-year-old Joseph Meister, who had been bitten by an infected dog; the boy did not develop rabies.

In 1933, the first All-Star baseball game was played at Chicago's Comiskey Park; the American League defeated the National League, 4-2.

In 1942, Anne Frank, her parents and sister entered a "secret annex" in an Amsterdam building where

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they were later joined by four other people; they hid from Nazi occupiers for two years before being discovered and arrested.

In 1945, President Harry S. Truman signed an executive order establishing the Medal of Freedom.

In 1957, Althea Gibson became the first Black tennis player to win a Wimbledon singles title as she defeated fellow American Darlene Hard 6-3, 6-2.

In 1988, 167 North Sea oil workers were killed when explosions and fires destroyed a drilling platform.

In 2015, Pope Francis received a hero's welcome in Guayaquil, Ecuador's biggest city, as he celebrated the first public Mass of his South American tour.

In 2016, Philando Castile, a Black elementary school cafeteria worker, was killed during a traffic stop in the St. Paul suburb of Falcon Heights by Officer Jeronimo Yanez. (Yanez was later acquitted on a charge of second-degree manslaughter.)

In 2020, the Trump administration formally notified the United Nations of its withdrawal from the World Health Organization; President Donald Trump had criticized the WHO's response to the coronavirus pandemic. (The pullout was later halted by President Joe Biden's administration.)

Ten years ago: A runaway train carrying crude oil derailed in eastern Quebec, igniting fires and explosions that destroyed much of the town of Lac-Mégantic and killed 47 people. An Asiana Airlines Boeing 777 from Seoul, South Korea, crashed while landing at San Francisco International Airport; of the 307 people on board Flight 214, three Chinese teens were killed. A solar-powered aircraft, the Solar Impulse, completed the final leg of a history-making cross-country flight, gliding to a smooth stop at New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport. Marion Bartoli won her first major title, defeating Sabine Lisicki 6-1, 6-4 in the Wimbledon final. Jimmie Johnson became the first driver in 31 years to sweep Daytona International Speedway.

Five years ago: The United States and China imposed tariffs on billions of dollars of each other's goods in what Beijing called the "biggest trade war in economic history." Japan's Justice Ministry confirmed that six followers of the Aum Shinrikyo doomsday cult had been hanged along with its leader, Shoko Asahara; they had been convicted of crimes including a 1995 sarin gas attack that killed 13 people and sickened thousands of others on the Tokyo subway system. A former Thai navy SEAL died while diving in flooded cave passageways to deliver supplies to 12 schoolboys and their soccer coach who'd been trapped for nearly two weeks.

One year ago: Authorities said a man charged with killing seven people at an Independence Day parade confessed to police that he unleashed a hail of bullets from a rooftop in suburban Chicago and then fled to the Madison, Wisconsin, area, where he contemplated shooting up an event there. The gunman instead turned back to Illinois, where he was arrested. A police officer armed with a rifle watched the gunman in the Uvalde elementary school massacre walk toward the campus but did not fire while waiting for permission from a supervisor to shoot, according to a newly released sweeping critique of the tactical response to the tragedy six weeks earlier.

Today's Birthdays: The 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is 88. Singer Gene Chandler is 83. Country singer Jeannie Seely is 83. Actor Burt Ward is 78. Former President George W. Bush is 77. Actor-director Sylvester Stallone is 77. Actor Fred Dryer is 77. Actor Shelley Hack is 76. Actor Nathalie Baye is 75. Actor Geoffrey Rush is 72. Actor Allyce Beasley is 72. Rock musician John Bazz (The Blasters) is 71. Actor Grant Goodeve is 71. Retired MLB All-Star Willie Randolph is 69. Jazz musician Rick Braun is 68. Actor Casey Sander is 68. Country musician John Jorgenson is 67. Former first daughter Susan Ford Bales is 66. Hockey player and coach Ron Duguay (doo-GAY') is 66. Actor-writer Jennifer Saunders is 65. Rock musician John Keeble (Spandau Ballet) is 64. Actor Pip Torrens is 63. Actor Brian Posehn is 57. Actor Robb Derringer is 56. Political reporter/moderator John Dickerson is 55. Actor Brian Van Holt is 54. Rapper Inspectah Deck (Wu-Tang Clan) is 53. TV host Josh Elliott is 52. Rapper 50 Cent is 48. Actors Tia and Tamera Mowry (MOHR'-ee) are 45. Comedian-actor Kevin Hart is 44. Actor Eva (EH'-vuh) Green is 43. Actor Gregory Smith is 40. Rock musician Chris "Woody" Wood (Bastille) is 38. Rock singer Kate Nash is 36. Actor Jeremy Suarez is 33. San Diego Padres infielder Manny Machado is 31. NBA star Zion Williamson is 23.