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Groton Community Calendar

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

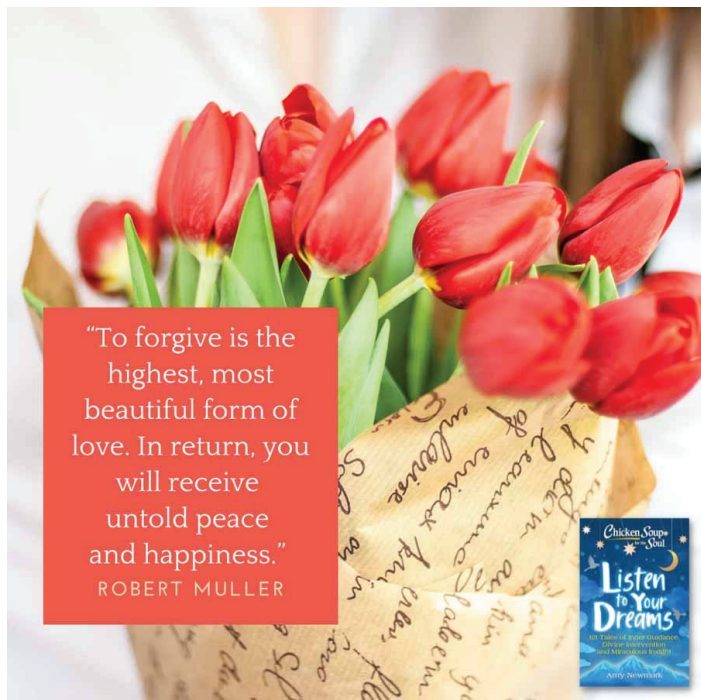
U12 State Tournament at Webster

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

Groton Daily Independent

PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



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.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 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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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JULY 07, 2023

World in Brief

federal murder and hate crime charges after targeting Hispanic shoppers in the attack.

Six people have died, and dozens more have been injured in an overnight fire at a retirement home in Milan. Three people remain in intensive care.

27 people have been hospitalized after a crash involving a double-decker tour bus and a city bus in Manhattan on Thursday evening, officials have confirmed.

George Tickner, a founding member and rhythm guitarist of the rock group Journey, has died at the age of 76, his former bandmates have confirmed.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, the White House is set to announce a controversial package of cluster munition for Ukraine, despite numerous countries having banned such weapons due to their potential for causing civilian casualties.

TALKING POINTS

"I think, you know, identifying Donald Trump as really being a pioneer in injecting gender ideology into the mainstream, where he was having men compete against women in his beauty pageants, I think that's totally fair game. Because he's now campaigning saying the opposite: That he doesn't think that you should have men competing in women's things like athletics," Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said on conservative commentator Tomi Lahren's podcast when asked about a recent campaign ad attacking the former president for his history with the LGBTQ+ community.

"Many questions remain at the end of the court's latest term regarding its reputation, credibility, and 'honorable' status. I'm sorry to see Chief Justice Roberts end the term without taking action on the ethical issues plaguing the court," Senate Judiciary Committee Chairman Dick Durbin said as calls for Supreme Court ethics reform continue.

"Geez, Donald Trump Jr. is a bit of a sore loser. His dad lost an election fair and square—but he says it was stolen. Now he's trying to blame the Australian government for his poor ticket sales and canceled tour. Donald Trump Jr. has been given a visa to come to Australia. He didn't get canceled. He's just a big baby, who isn't very popular," Australian Home Minister Clare O'Neil said in a series of tweets that have since been deleted.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

The closely watched employment report for June is due at 8:30 a.m. ET. Economists predict nonfarm payrolls to increase by about 225,000 jobs after surging to 339,000 in May.

President Joe Biden is slated to discuss a "significant" announcement about health cost savings today at the White House. Biden will travel to London on Saturday ahead of the 74th NATO Summit taking place next week in Lithuania. He is expected to meet with King Charles III and Prime Minister Rishi Sunak while in the United Kingdom.

Donald Trump will hold a campaign event in Council Bluffs, Iowa. He is expected to speak at 1 p.m. CDT following an Agriculture Policy Panel Discussion at the Mid-America Center. Trump will visit Las Vegas on Saturday to speak at a Nevada Volunteer Recruitment Event.

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen has hit out at China's "unfair economic practices" and called for market reforms at the start of her four-day diplomatic visit to Beijing.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis claimed his presidential campaign has received "record fundraising" unmatched in the "history of modern presidential politics" when pressed by Fox News on his 28-point opinion poll deficit against Donald Trump.

The white gunman who killed 23 people in a 2019 mass shooting at an El Paso Walmart is expected to be sentenced today. 24-year-old Patrick Crusius has pleaded guilty to 90

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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

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GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6 School Board Meeting

July 10, 2023 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3 CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approval of minutes of June 12, 2023 school board meeting as drafted or amended.

2. Approval of year ending (FY2023) district bills.

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.

2. Approval of June 2023 Financial Report, Custodial Accounts, and Investments.

3. Authorize Business Manager to make necessary Contingency Fund transfers to cover year-ending deficit accounts in General Fund.

4. Approve Supplemental Budget to Capital Outlay and Special Education pursuant SDCL13-11.3.2.

5. Approval of June 2023 School Lunch Report.

6. Approval of June 2023 School Transportation Report.

7. Administrative Reports: (a) Superintendent's Report; (b) Principal's Reports; (c) Business Manager Report

ADJOURN

ANNUAL REORGANIZATION BUSINESS:

1. Call to Order with members present.

2. Installation of incumbent board member, Grant Rix, and new board member Heather Lerseth-Fliehs followed by

election of president and vice president as well as appointments to the various "ad hoc" committees.

3. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

8:00 PM – DISTRICT BUDGET HEARING – Revenue & Expenditures – Line Items CONSENT AGENDA:

1. Approve June 2023 District bills for payment.

2. Designate legal counsel/school attorney...Rodney Freeman of Churchill, Manolis, and Freeman of Huron.

3. Designate Business Manager as custodian of all district accounts.

4. Approve engagement letter for Eide Bailly to conduct FY2023 school district audit.

5. Authorize Business Manager to continue existing funds and establish new accounts and to invest and reinvest

funds in local institutions which serve the greatest advantage to the District and set business manager bond.

6. Authorize Business Manager to publish staff salaries.

7. Designate official bank depository... Dacotah Bank.

8. Adopt Groton Area School District Policy Manual with such revisions as previously approved.

9. Adopt Special Education Comprehensive Plan.

10. Authorize office personnel to administer Custodial Funds & NSLP (school lunch) funds, with oversight by business office management.

11. Authorize superintendent to administer or direct federal programs, with Consolidated Application (Title programs) and related ESSA compliance issues assigned to building principals.

12. Appoint superintendent to act as Asbestos Compliance Officer.

13. Authorize superintendent or designee to close school in emergency situations or inclement weather.

14. Authorize superintendent or designee to institute NSLP & School Breakfast Agreement.

15. Adopt Food Safety Plan, HACCP-Based Standard Operating Procedures.

16. Authorize superintendent or designee to institute ASBSD school bus mutual assistance pact.

17. Authorize business manager to transfer petty cash and incident payment funds (SDCL 13-18-16/17).

18. Approve peripheral sports and other volunteer school workers such as chain gang, line judges, Booster Club/PAC workers, assistant coaches, volunteer coaches, volunteer drivers, school board members etc. to be included in the school's worker's compensation insurance coverage.

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NEW BUSINESS:

1. Consider approval of sale of 1.0 acre of land in SW quarter of section 14 of Oak Gulch Township (former school site of Oak Gulch School District).
2. Cast ballots for SDHSAA Board of Directors
 - a. Division I Representative
 - b. Division III Representative
3. Approve hiring Brooke Malsom, Head Cross Country Coach, for the 2023 season.
4. Open and approve newspaper quotes and designate official newspaper for FY2023.
5. Open and approve diesel/gas quotes.
6. Set dates and time for regular school board meetings.
7. Appoint board member to serve as voting member of the North Central Special Education Cooperative Governing Board for 2023-2024 school year.
8. Set salaries for board members...presently at \$50/meeting; \$75/meeting for chairman; mileage as applicable.
9. Set rate for substitute teachers for 2023-2024 school year...recommend \$130/day [Currently \$130/day].
10. Set rate for substitute bus drivers for 2023-2024 school year...recommend \$90/day [Currently \$90/day].

11. Establish activity admission & school lunch prices for 2023-2024.

		<u>Recommendations</u>
Admission:	Adult - \$5; Doubleheader - \$6	No Change
	Adult 10-punch ticket - \$45	No Change
	Adult All-Activities Pass - \$75	No Change
	1 st -12 th grade - \$4	No Change
	1 st -5 th grade activity ticket - \$25	No Change
	6 th -12 th grade activity ticket - \$30	No Change
Breakfast	JrK-5 - \$2.50; 6-12 - \$3.00; Adult - \$3.25	No Change
Lunch	JrK-5 - \$3.25; 6-12 - \$3.75; Adult \$4.50	No Change
Second Milk	\$0.50	No Change

12. Set rate for OST services for 2023-2024 school year.

ADJOURN

Service Notice: Robert "Jack" Oliver



Private graveside services for Robert "Jack" Oliver, 79, of Aberdeen and formerly of Groton were held at Union Cemetery, Groton. Father David Janes officiated.

Jack passed away at his home in Aberdeen on July 2, 2023.

Robert John Oliver was born on November 15, 1943 in Aberdeen to Robert and Imo-Jeanne (Healy) Oliver.

Celebrating his life is his wife Margaret "Maggie" Oliver of Aberdeen, Todd (Sharon) Oliver of Little Rock, Arkansas, Chad (Stacy) Oliver of Groton, grandchildren, Tyler, Jaden and Jackson, his sister Bette (John) Cochran of Evanston, Illinois and sister-in-law, Sandra Oliver of Sioux Falls.

Preceding him in death were his parents and his brother, Richard Oliver.

Streets, summer make for short Groton City Council meeting

Street chip sealing, Summer Fest and movie nights at the library were discussed at Thursday's Groton City Council meeting.

Almost half of the council were absent for the meeting, which was rescheduled from its normal Tuesday date because of the July 4 holiday. Present at City Hall were Council members Karyn Babcock, Jason Wambach and Shirley Wells, along with Mayor Scott Hanlon, City Attorney Drew Johnson, Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich and other department leaders. Councilman Brian Bahr joined the meeting via phone.

While some items on the agenda were skipped or postponed to later meetings, Wastewater Superintendent Dwight Zerr presented the public works report to the council, including a map showing which streets are set to be chip sealed this summer.

For north-south oriented roads, that includes North First Street between Railroad Avenue and East Fourth Avenue, North Second Street between Railroad Avenue and East Third Avenue, North Second Street between East Seventh Avenue and Highway 12, North Third Street between East Seventh Avenue and Highway 12, North Fourth Street between East Sixth Avenue and East Ninth Avenue and North Fifth Street between East Ninth Avenue and East 10th Avenue.

East-west oriented roadwork includes stretches on East Second Avenue between Highway 37 and North Main Street, East Third Avenue between Highway 37 and North Main Street, East Sixth Avenue between North Fourth Street and North Sixth Street, East Seventh Avenue between North Fourth Street and North Sixth Street, East Ninth Avenue between North First Street and North Main Street, East 10th Avenue between Highway 37 and North Fourth Street (not including North Main Street) and East 11th Avenue between North First Street and North Fourth Street (not including North Main Street).

Prep work for the chip sealing should be completed within the next couple of weeks, Zerr said.

Concerns about equipment replacement and sewer system issues also cropped up at the meeting.

The city was notified last fall about an emergency sewer discharge bringing the city out of compliance with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency and South Dakota Department of Natural Resources regulations. Those agencies are getting more strict on those issues, and it's something the city will have to look into improving soon.

"It's not going to be cheap, I'm sure," Zerr said.

Councilman Wambach replied, "Yeah, but it's not cheap being out of compliance at some point."

Zerr said he will continue looking into potential solutions, but there will be things that need replacing soon, like the wastewater lift station.

"We've been trying to do it piecemeal," he said. "But if we're going to do a big project, we'll have to do something about that lift."

Technology Specialist Paul Kosel also updated the council on a problem with a pipeline at the city swimming pool.

A pipe broke under the building at the swimming pool, and there was water coming out of the concrete, he said. That pipe feeds the geysers in the kiddie pool area, and it has been turned off until something is done to fix the pipe.

"The question remains do we want to try and fix them or not," Kosel said. "Because that's going to be a huge expense because they're under the concrete."

New library option discussed

The Wage Memorial Library may soon host movie nights.

Librarian and Assistant Finance Officer Kellie Locke is looking into whether the library could host movie nights, said Councilwoman Babcock. The library would need either a projector screen or a large television to show those movies.

It would allow the library to continue scheduled reading times into the fall and allow for fun activities when it's cold outside, Babcock said.

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Summer Fest approaching

Topper Tastad reminded the council that the Lions Club is sponsoring the seventh annual Summer Fest from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday at the Groton City Park.

There will be a 9 a.m. church service, a car show, vendors and more, he said.

Comfort station designs still a concern

Discussion continued about preferred designs for a tornado shelter/bathroom facility at the city park.

While decisions were not finalized, the council reviewed the three options presented to the council at its last meeting in June.

Option No. 1 includes two-toned pre-cast concrete walls, trusses and a gable roof. The trusses and roof would be added on top of a concrete shell that makes up the tornado shelter.

Option No. 2 includes a single-color pre-cast concrete shell with a flat roof that includes an overhang. Option No. 3 would be the same single-color pre-cast concrete shell, but the flat roof would not include any overhang.

A recent poll of residents on Facebook showed many preferred option No. 1, with option No. 2 coming in second, said Councilwoman Karyn Babcock.

Councilman Brian Bahr responded, "Yeah, but No. 1 is the most expensive, and we'd have a \$50,000 roof."

Much of the costs for the main comfort station facility is expected to come from the Federal Emergency Management Agency. However, Bahr said, cosmetic additions like the gable roof would have to be covered by city funding.

Council members compared option No. 3 to a jail or mausoleum.

While cosmetic upgrades would be shouldered by the city, in the long term it will make the city park more appealing, said Councilwoman Shirley Wells.

Babcock agreed.

"It's a one-time deal though, so we have to make sure (it looks nice)," she said.

The comfort station is set to be back before the council at its next meeting in July, where officials anticipate presenting a breakdown of what costs would be covered by grant funding and what would have to fall to the city.

- The council voted to keep legal advertisements in the Groton Independent and keep banking with Dacotah Bank. "We've had good luck with them, so I suggest we stay with them," Mayor Scott Hanlon said. Councilman Brian Bahr agreed: "I'm OK with that. Keep everything the status quo."

- The city council approved a replat of the site that houses the Groton historic jailhouse. However, a request to transfer ownership of the property where the jailhouse sits was tabled until the replat has been finalized with the county and filed with the Brown County Register of Deeds.

- The council approved language for a temporary use agreement to use the new city park sound system. The agreement includes a \$500 deposit to cover any damage to the sound system while it is leased out, as well as an agreement to act in a responsible manner concerning noise levels and times of use.

- Electric Utility Supervisor Todd Gay told the council about problems with one of the lights at the baseball field. "It's falling over, and it needs work," he said. "We had to replace one of the breakers last week because it wasn't working." It is something the city will need to address, though Gay said he hopes to get through the rest of the year with what is currently there.



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 Receives Presidential Disaster Approval for Spring Flooding

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Kristi Noem announced today that South Dakota has received a Presidential Disaster Declaration that allows the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help South Dakota local governments in the counties of Brown, Clark, Codington, Day, Faulk, Grant, Hand, Marshall, Potter, and Roberts, as well as the Lake Traverse Indian Reservation.

On June 2nd, Governor Kristi Noem signed Executive Order 2023-08, which declared a disaster in the impacted counties. An estimated \$2,305,362 in qualifying costs were incurred during the flooding in those counties listed.

Federal resources will help with recovery from infrastructure damage sustained as a result of severe spring flooding.

Above normal seasonal snowfall and unusually cold late spring conditions resulted in a persistent and unusually deep snowpack into early April. In the second week of April temperatures became abnormally warm, surging to the 70s and 80s. This resulted in a period of very rapid snowmelt and both river and overland flooding. As a result of the flooding, many roads were not suitable for travel. Ten counties and one reservation suffered severe impacts to public infrastructure.

Gov. Noem Establishes the America 250th South Dakota Commission

PIERRE, S.D. – Governor Noem signed Executive Order 2023-11 to establish the America 250th South Dakota Commission. The purpose of this commission is to prepare for the celebration of the 250th anniversary of the United States of America in 2026.

“Our United States of America is the greatest nation to ever exist in the history of the world. In less than three years, we’re turning 250. This momentous occasion deserves a year-long celebration worthy of our great country,” said Governor Noem. “I am looking forward to working with the America 250th South Dakota Commission to commemorate our history. Together, we will cherish our founding principles and celebrate our Freedoms.”

The America 250th South Dakota Commission will plan, encourage, develop, coordinate, and promote observances and activities to be held in South Dakota in honor of the 250th anniversary of our nation’s beginning.

Governor Noem may appoint as many members as she deems necessary to carry out the directives of the commission. This will include:

- Cabinet Secretaries, or their designee;
- Director of the State Historical Society, serving as chairperson;
- The State Librarian;
- Representative(s) from the Board of Regents;
- Representative(s) of the Historical Society Foundation;
- Members appointed by the governor representing the geographic and cultural diversity of the state;
- Representative(s) and senator(s) of the state legislature;
- Representative(s) of local history organizations; and,
- Any other interested representative(s) deemed necessary by the governor.

The America 250th South Dakota Commission will complete its work and be dissolved and repealed on March 31, 2027, with a prior report to the governor that will be maintained in the State Archives for a potential tricentennial commission to use in preparation for its work in 2076.

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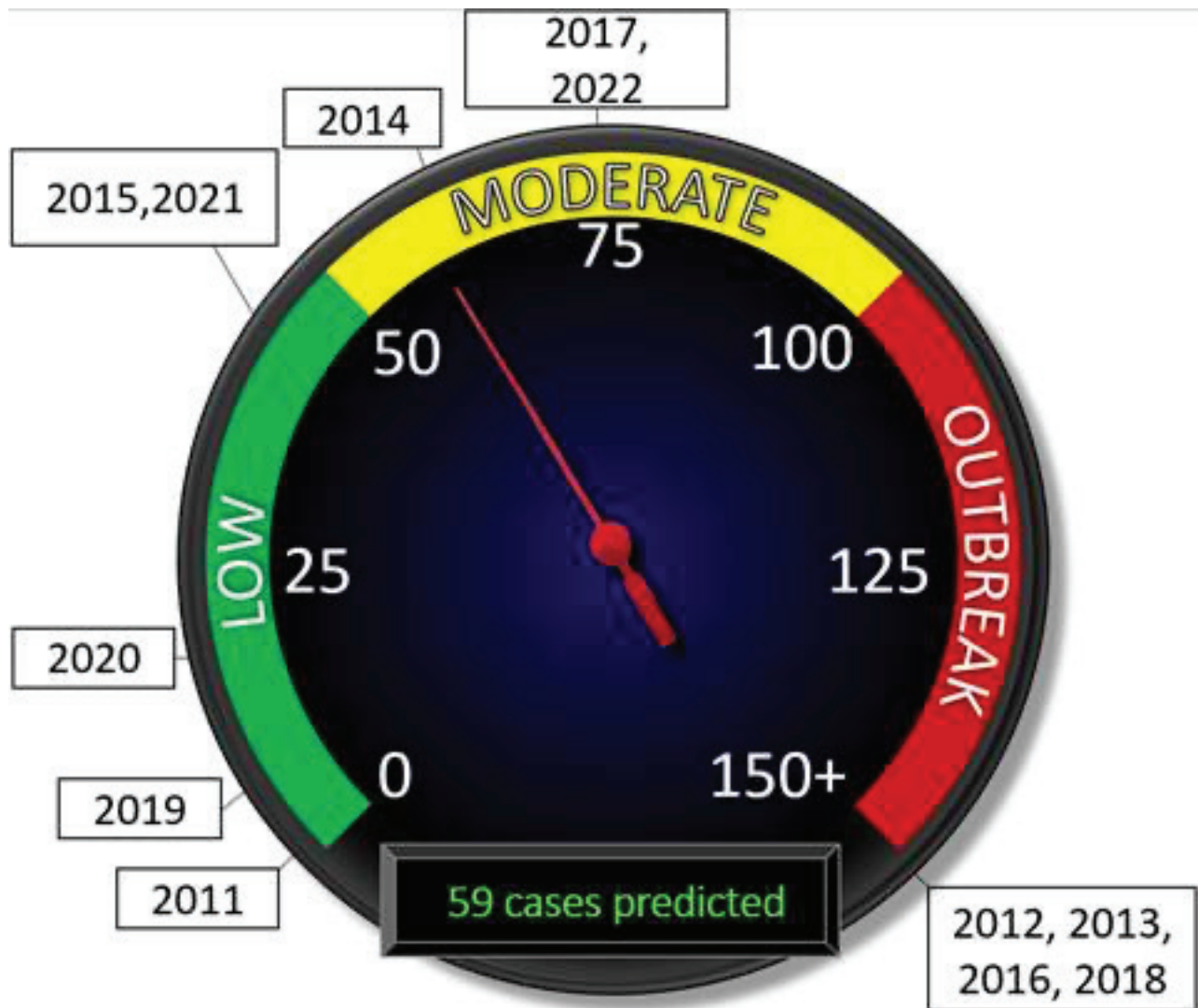
West Nile Update – South Dakota, July 06, 2023

2 human cases reported (Jerauld, Sanborn)

3 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brown, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of June 27): 13 cases (AZ, GA, IA, LA, MO, NE, OR, SC, SD, WY)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2023, South Dakota (as of July 05)





Rattlesnake season leads to close calls, some bites and need for precautions

Abbey Stegenga

South Dakota News Watch

Cooler spring temperatures, clouds and rain this year likely slowed South Dakota prairie rattlesnake activity. But as temperatures warm, they're sure to make themselves seen — and heard.

"If you are almost stepping on it, you just jump in the air and do a dance. I mean, I think you could levitate," said Black Hawk resident Shelby Nester.

Nester encountered his first rattlesnake of 2023 on May 10 when he joined Xtreme Dakota Bicycles on a group ride along Centennial Trail near Sturgis.

Nester said a biker spotted the rattlesnake on the side of the trail as he waited for the rest of the group to catch up. The snake did not slither off until the majority of the bikers passed.

On May 25, Mindy Daley, who lives in Piedmont, was making her way down the Flume Trail near Rockerville when her friend pushed her out of a rattlesnake's path. The snake didn't rattle at her until she backed away.

"I was probably an inch or two from stepping on it," she said.

With rattlesnake season underway in South Dakota, snake experts say knowing more about prairie rattlers and their habits is the best way to avoid a bite.

South Dakota's sole venomous snake

"Snakes like to be outside and active in the same temperatures people want to be out and active in," said Terry Phillip, snake curator at Reptile Gardens outside of Rapid City.

The prairie rattlesnake inhabits grassy, rocky or wooded areas mainly west of the Missouri River but lives across the state. However, it is impossible to know exactly where people may encounter them, as adult snakes can travel up to 10 miles from their den in a hunt for prey or a mate, said Brian Smith, a Black Hills State University biology professor and snake expert.

Prairie rattlesnakes tend to be most active during the spring through the fall, but the animals are cool tolerant, he said.

"They will come out in fairly cool weather, like down to 50 degrees or more if they can get out and bask a little bit and warm their body temperature up," Smith said.

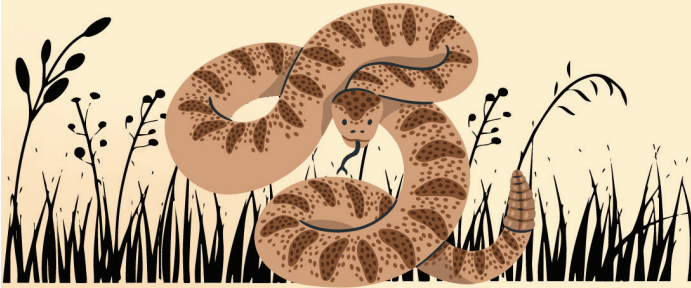
Prairie rattlers can be found in both rural and urban areas, Phillip said.

"There's not a corner or a neighborhood or a street in Rapid City where I haven't been called in to capture a rattlesnake," he said. "Near the hospital, on pavement downtown, at Canyon Lake Park or below M



A sign warns hikers to be aware of rattlesnakes in Badlands National Park in South Dakota. (Photo: Shutterstock)

What to know about RATTLESNAKES



- ▶ Snakes are fairly abundant and if threatened, disturbed or startled, they can and will bite.
- ▶ While death remains rare, getting bit results in a painful emergency and a medical condition that almost always requires antivenin at a hospital
- ▶ Getting bit by a prairie rattler and receiving treatment can cost thousands in medical bills.
- ▶ Rattlesnake encounters tend to rise in pleasant weather conditions when both humans and snakes will be outside and active.

snakebites is vastly underreported because the bites receive little attention from media, and most victims recover quickly.

Across the United States, an estimated 7,000 to 8,000 snake bites are reported each year, and about five of those victims die, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Regardless of the current frequency in rattlesnake bites and encounters, an increase may await South Dakota in the future.

"The more we develop into the wild, the more access to the wild you're going to have," Phillip said. "The simple reality is that they're there, so the further we go out, the more often you're going to encounter wildlife, including mountain lions, bees and snakes."

Prairie rattlesnake bites are rarely fatal

Bites from prairie rattlesnakes are rarely fatal in humans because the snakes are relatively small and do not possess the amount and potency of venom required to quickly kill a human, Smith said. The speed with which medical treatment can now be provided also helps keep fatalities low, he said.

"Lethal bites are very rare for this species. Most lethal bites in the

Hill. They're found everywhere."

Phillip said prairie rattlers will usually, but not always, emit a rattling sound to warn people and animals they are nearby. However, according to Smith, the snakes do always have rattles, even if they don't always use them.

Typically, the snakes do not want to get near or bite any possible predators, including humans. But if annoyed or startled, the snakes that measure 20 to 30 inches can jut out a foot or more and bite.

Solid rattlesnake bite numbers are hard to come by

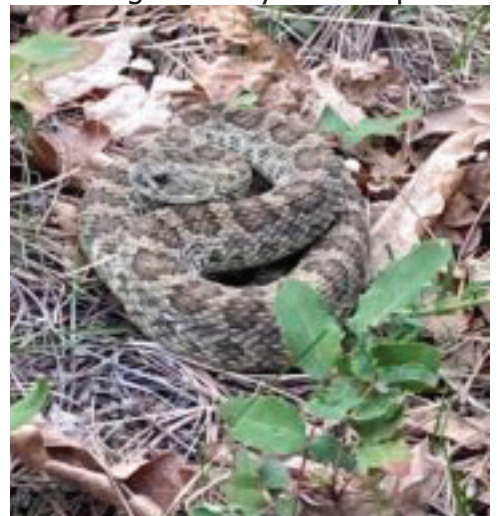
As of June 6, Dana Darger, Monument Health Rapid City Hospital's director of pharmacy, said the hospital had seen at least one rattlesnake bite patient this year.

Avera St. Mary's Hospital in Pierre and Avera Missouri River Health Center in Gettysburg have not had any snake bite patients in a few years, according to spokeswoman Sigrid Wald Swanson.

Without formal tracking of snake bites, concrete data are hard to come by. But in 2013, the state Department of Health performed a study showing that from 2000 through 2011, about 160 people were hospitalized due to venomous bites across the state.

Most bites took place in July, August and June. A majority occurred in counties west of and along the Missouri River, though five hospitalizations were reported in Minnehaha County, and four each in Yankton and Hughes counties during that 12-year time period.

Experts say the number of



Shelby Nester found his first rattlesnake of 2023 in May alongside the Centennial Trail near Sturgis. (Photo: Courtesy Shelby

Nester)

country come from Eastern and Western rattlesnakes. Their range begins at least 1,000 miles from us," Smith said.

Although Phillip and other snake experts say prairie rattlesnake bites are often the result of humans trying to kill or harass snakes, random encounters do occur:

- August 2014: A rattlesnake bit a 9-year-old boy from Black Hawk while he was walking to his campsite at Angostura Reservoir south of Hot Springs.
- August 2014: A rattlesnake bit a 2-year-old girl twice while she was playing in her family's yard near Ellsworth Air Force Base in Box Elder.
- June 2018: One of the burros in Custer State Park died after a rattlesnake bit its face.
- June 2018: While out for an evening stroll in a prairie pasture in eastern Wyoming, a prairie rattlesnake bit Lead-resident Derek Livermont on the ankle.
- June 2018: 70-year-old Lawrence Walters of Geneseo, Illinois, died after a rattlesnake bit him



Terry Phillip, snake curator at Reptile Gardens near Rapid City, said prairie rattlesnakes will rarely bite unless disturbed by humans. This snake measures about 20 inches in length. (Photo:

Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

RATTLESNAKE SAFETY TIPS



When hiking, wear boots and pants and keep eyes trained on the ground; listen for a snake's rattle.



Extra care is needed in areas near water sources or with rocky ledges or crevices.



If a snake is found, don't handle or kill it. Report snake's presence to authorities if on public trail.



If bitten, call 911 immediately and begin heading to a hospital while remaining calm.



Keep the wound at or above heart level if possible. Never apply a tourniquet.



Do not: Cut open the wound, try to suck out the venom or use alcohol or other tropical treatments.

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on the ankle while he was golfing at Elkhorn Ridge Golf Club south of Spearfish.

While the snake's venom contributed to Walters' death, it was not the primary cause, according to Marty Goetsch, the Lawrence County Medical Examiner at the time who listed Walter's cause of death as cardiac arrhythmia.

"If the rattlesnake hadn't bitten him, he probably would not have passed away," Goetsch said. "The individual had extensive heart issues and the rattlesnake bite was the beginning of a chain of events that unfortunately took his life."

Hospitals are ready with antivenom

Most hospitals in South Dakota are well-positioned to help someone who has been bitten by a prairie rattlesnake.

According to Darger, Monument Health's five West River hospitals carry roughly 120 vials of ANAVIP, an equine-derived antivenom. About 60 of those vials reside in Monument Health Rapid City Hospital while the rest are spread among the other four facilities in Sturgis, Custer, Lead-Deadwood and Spearfish.

Avera keeps 30 vials on hand at St. Mary's in Pierre and 10 at Avera Missouri River Health Center in Gettysburg, Wald Swanson said. Physicians remain in contact and can move patients or the antivenom to any group hospital in an emergency, Wald Swanson said.

Wald Swanson said one dose of ANAVIP consists of 10 vials administered over the first hour. Patients may receive additional doses every hour until the progression of symptoms stabilizes.

The prairie rattler venom consists of digestive enzymes that attack tissue in the victim, Smith said. Common symptoms include pain and swelling in the area of the bite, numbness in the lips and mouth, nausea and lethargy.

Patient costs can be steep after rattlesnake bites

Like a lot of medical products, the markup for patients is high.

Darger, who used to see a regular stream of snakebite patients while working in Pierre, joked that, "I used to say to them, 'If you get bit, leave me the keys for your Suburban.'"

The drug costs Monument Health about \$1,200 per vial, and each vial has roughly a three-year shelf life. Darger said Monument Health hospitals rarely have to dispose of outdated antivenom.

Treatment of a snakebite victim, depending on severity, often includes emergency room entry, delivery of antivenom and a hospital stay of a couple days for observation, Darger said.

Livermont said his hospital bill for emergency treatment and two vials of an antivenom known as Crofab at what was then Regional Hospital in Spearfish was \$27,000. Pharmaceuticals amounted to about \$10,000 of that cost.

Hikers run into rattlesnakes in South Dakota

An avid biker and hiker, spring rattlesnake sightings aren't unusual for Nester. On several occasions, he has glanced down during a bike ride and found a rattler coiled up in the middle of the trail.

Although he has run into a number of rattlesnakes in his 35 years in South Dakota, encountering the snakes still manages to instill a jolt of fear in him.

"Well, it'll make your heart stop for a second or four," Nester said with a laugh.

At the start of June, Nester found two rattlesnakes on a gravel road that had died after a vehicle struck them.

After moving to South Dakota in 2020, Daley said she accumulated hundreds of miles on the trails as she prepared for the Black Hills 100's 50K. During those miles of outdoor training, she never ran into a rattlesnake.

"If I saw one, I think I would react a little differently. But the



Mindy Daley and her son, Jaxon Daley. (Photo: Submitted)

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fact that I almost stepped on it and I didn't see it — and I hike a lot — is scary to me," Daley said.

Daley lives in a development in Piedmont. When she came home from her rattlesnake encounter, she received a message that said a rattlesnake was on her neighbor's driveway.

While Daley normally scans the ground as she hikes, she said she'll be more cautious on future excursions.

"Just be aware of your surroundings and aware of how you would get out. And thank God for my friend. I would've just walked by it, which means I would've sat there for who knows how long," Daley said.

With his first rattlesnake sighting of 2023 checked off, Nester plans to practice several safety precautions, like wearing boots and watching where he walks.

"I don't alter what I do because of them. But I definitely am pretty cautious if I'm stepping off trails, especially in grass where I really can't see what's below me," he said.

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



ABOUT

ABBEY STEGENGA

Abbey Stegenga joined South Dakota News Watch as a 2023 summer intern through the Scripps-Howard Fund. She studies journalism, English and Spanish at Augustana University in Sioux Falls.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Federal study detects 'forever chemicals' in three SD private wells **Nearly half of the nation's tap water contains PFAS, with urban areas more at risk, study finds**

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 6, 2023 4:10 PM

Rural water systems across the United States are less likely than urban areas to be contaminated with "forever chemicals" that may lead to health problems such as cancer, thyroid disease and high cholesterol, according to a study from the U.S. Geological Survey released Tuesday.

But the same study detected those chemicals in rural private wells in western South Dakota.

PFAS, or per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances, have been used in industry and consumer products since the 1940s and are dubbed "forever chemicals" because they don't break down easily or quickly in the environment or in the human body. The chemicals can be found in everything from firefighting foam to children's clothes to soil and water.

In March, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency proposed what would be the first national standard regulating levels of PFAS in drinking water. The proposal would cap certain types of PFAS at four parts per trillion — comparable to a few grains of salt in an Olympic-size swimming pool, experts say. The agency plans to release a finalized regulation by the end of the year.

The interim health advisories released by the EPA last year for types of PFAS known as PFOS and PFOA were "exceeded in every sample in which they were detected" by the USGS, a news release about the study read. The most frequently detected compounds were types of PFAS known as PFBS, PFHxS and PFOA.

Most of the tested systems in South Dakota were located on or near Native American Reservations in Dewey, Ziebach, Oglala Lakota, Bennett and Jackson counties, including 10 public supplies and 26 private supplies. Many of the locations from South Dakota were part of a previously published study on tap water pollutants, including PFAS, that was conducted in collaboration with several Northern Plains tribal nations.

Three South Dakota private wells tested positive for PFAS: two for PFBS at 2,700 parts per trillion and 13,200 parts per trillion, and one for PFBA at 84,000 parts per trillion.

The agency says it's the first comprehensive study of its kind on both public and unregulated private wells — giving average consumers information about the risks of PFAS when they grab a glass of water from their kitchen sink, said Kelly Smalling, the study's lead author and research hydrologist, in a news release. Over 700 volunteers tested the water from their kitchen sinks between 2016 and 2021, using kits sent to them by the agency. Then, the study tested the samples for 32 individual PFAS compounds.

The study's goal was to bridge the gap in understanding urban and rural water system contamination risks, since private well information is scarce compared to information on public water supplies.

"Most national testing programs ... do not include private wells and rarely capture information from rural communities (52 million rely on small water supplies serving less than 10,000 people)," the study read, "indicating data on PFAS exposure and potential human-health effects does not exist for over one-third of the U.S. population."

Some of those gaps may be addressed by the UCMR5, a national monitoring program which is currently underway and is expected to provide extensive information on PFAS in the country's drinking water for public supply consumers in the next few years. The federally funded initiative will test nearly 50 systems across South Dakota. A spokesman with EPA said the agency has not received validated sample results for the state yet, and that results will be publicly available later this year.

Private well owners make up about 14% of the U.S. population, the USGS study stated, and at least one

type of PFAS was detected in 20% of private well samples collected throughout the county. At least one PFAS was detected in 40% of the public supply samples. USGS scientists estimate 45% of the nation's tap water contains PFAS.

Testing is the only way to confirm the presence of contaminants in wells. South Dakotans interested in testing and treating private wells should contact their state and local officials for guidance, Smalling said.

Sioux Falls and its airport, which found PFAS-contaminated wells in 2013, are two of thousands of plaintiffs in a class action lawsuit against manufacturers of a toxic firefighting foam that used PFAS. Minnesota-based chemical and manufacturing giant 3M has agreed to a proposed \$10.3 billion settlement over PFAS contamination in public water systems across the United States.

The settlement, if approved by the court, would be broken into two phases, addressing current and future drinking-water claims brought by various public utilities. Sioux Falls has not yet answered questions about PFAS testing and mitigation by South Dakota Searchlight because it "does not comment on pending litigation," said Gregg Engler, senior assistant city attorney for Sioux Falls.

Makenzie Huber is a lifelong South Dakotan whose work has won national and regional awards. She's spent five years as a journalist with experience reporting on workforce, development and business issues within the state.

Hundreds rally in Pierre against eminent domain for carbon pipelines

Attendees urge Gov. Noem to call a special legislative session

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 6, 2023 2:42 PM

PIERRE — About 250 people descended on the state Capitol on Thursday, demanding a prohibition against carbon capture pipeline companies gaining access to land against a landowner's will.

Lawmakers, landowners and concerned citizens from across the political spectrum called on Republican Gov. Kristi Noem to call a special legislative session to address the issue. She did not attend the rally.

"Governor Noem, you say you stand with us," said rally speaker Ed Fischbach, an Aberdeen-area farmer whose land is near a proposed pipeline route. "We need your actions to speak louder than your words."

The rally comes amid a heated public debate over the expansion of carbon capture pipeline infrastructure.

Two pipelines that would pass through eastern South Dakota and multiple other states are designed to transport captured carbon dioxide produced at ethanol plants to underground storage sites in North Dakota and Illinois. The aim is to combat climate change by removing carbon from the atmosphere, where it traps heat. The projects are eligible for billions of dollars in federal tax credits, and could allow ethanol producers to sell their products in places with restrictive emissions standards.



Landowners Mark Lapka, left, and Jared Bossly (holding petitions with about 2,000 signatures) speak at the state Capitol in Pierre on July 6, 2023, demanding a prohibition against carbon capture pipeline companies gaining access to land against a landowner's will. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

The projects are eligible for billions of dollars in federal tax credits, and could allow ethanol producers to sell their products in places with restrictive emissions standards.

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However, critics argue that the use of a court process called "eminent domain" – which one of the pipeline companies is already pursuing, to gain land access from dozens of unwilling landowners – is a violation of property rights.

"This is going to set precedents," said Rep. Oren Lesmeister, D-Parade, in a speech to the crowd. "And if we don't stop this now, what's that going to mean for eminent domain for private gain in the future?"

Some attendees wore T-shirts that read "No eminent domain" and held signs asking "Gov. Noem, what if this was your land?" Some argued the use of eminent domain by carbon capture pipelines is improper, because carbon pipelines do not deliver a product for the public as some other eminent domain projects do, such as crude oil pipelines, water pipelines and electrical power lines.

Collin Duprel, who ran unsuccessfully as a Libertarian for Congress last year, told the crowd that lawmakers who failed to show up for the rally will have a tough time getting reelected.

"There's a lot of people who are missing," Duprel said. "They don't deserve to be in office anymore. We're drawing a line in the sand, today."

Chair of the South Dakota Freedom Caucus, state Rep. Aaron Aylward, R-Harrisburg, said in a press release he is committed to fighting for legislative action.

"Governor Noem: Our land and property rights are under attack, and the time for action is now," Aylward said. "By declaring a man-made emergency and convening a special legislative session, you can put an end to this assault on citizens' rights."

The governor can declare a special session, but so can two-thirds of the Legislature.

At the end of the rally, affected landowner Jared Bossly and state Rep. Karla Lems, R-Canton, delivered about 2,000 petition signatures calling for a special session to the governor's office.

Noem has not addressed protesters' calls for her to declare a special session but tweeted last week, "If the Legislature wants to call themselves into special session to change the law, I look forward to reviewing what they send to my desk."

There was a bill to prohibit eminent domain for carbon pipelines during last winter's legislative session. The bill passed the House but failed in a Senate committee.

House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, R-Pierre, did not attend the rally. He said in a statement that while he "led the charge for farmers and ranchers during this year's session," unless "we get agreement with the Senate on some proposals, we shouldn't call a special session and neither should the governor. It would be a waste of taxpayer dollars and legislator time."

"For my part, I'll be spending the next couple months working with senators to gather consensus on protecting landowners. I hope we get the job done," Mortenson said.

The carbon capture pipeline company using eminent domain, Summit Carbon Solutions, and its proponents have defended the process as a necessary step for ensuring the future of corn-based ethanol. They point out that the company has already negotiated easements with about 70% of impacted landowners in the state.

Summit Carbon Solutions did not reply to a request for comment on the calls for a special session. Both Summit and Navigator CO2 Ventures, the other company proposing a carbon pipeline through South Dakota, have permit hearings scheduled later this summer with the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission.

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

Iowa judge acquits South Dakota pipeline surveyor of trespassing charge

BY: JARED STRONG - JULY 6, 2023 6:10 PM

An Iowa district court judge dismissed a trespassing charge against a carbon dioxide pipeline company's land surveyor because there was no evidence he was told to avoid the property, according to court records.

Stephen James Larsen, 29, of Arlington, South Dakota, was part of a survey group that went onto private property in Dickinson County, Iowa, in August 2022. He was the only person cited for trespassing.

The survey work for Summit Carbon Solutions will help determine the path and depth of the company's proposed pipeline, which is set for a final permit hearing later this year.

State law allows the surveys after pipeline companies hold informational meetings about their proposals and send notices to landowners and tenants via certified mail.

Judges have differed in recent months about whether the law is constitutional, and one of the rulings has been appealed to the Iowa Supreme Court.

District Associate Judge Shawna Ditsworth did not address the constitutionality of the law in her recent ruling that acquitted Larsen of the trespassing charge.

"The State failed to bring forward any evidence that Mr. Larsen was told to previously leave the property or not to enter the property," Ditsworth wrote.

Instead, it was another group of presumed Summit surveyors who were told to leave in March 2022 by a tenant of the Dickinson County land, court records show.

A prosecutor argued that Larsen "had to have had notice" that he was not to go onto the land because of the previous encounter involving other people, but Ditsworth was unconvinced.

"Accordingly, the court concludes that a judgment of acquittal must be entered," she wrote.

Summit seeks to build a pipeline to transport captured carbon dioxide from ethanol plants in several states to North Dakota, where it will be sequestered deep in the ground.

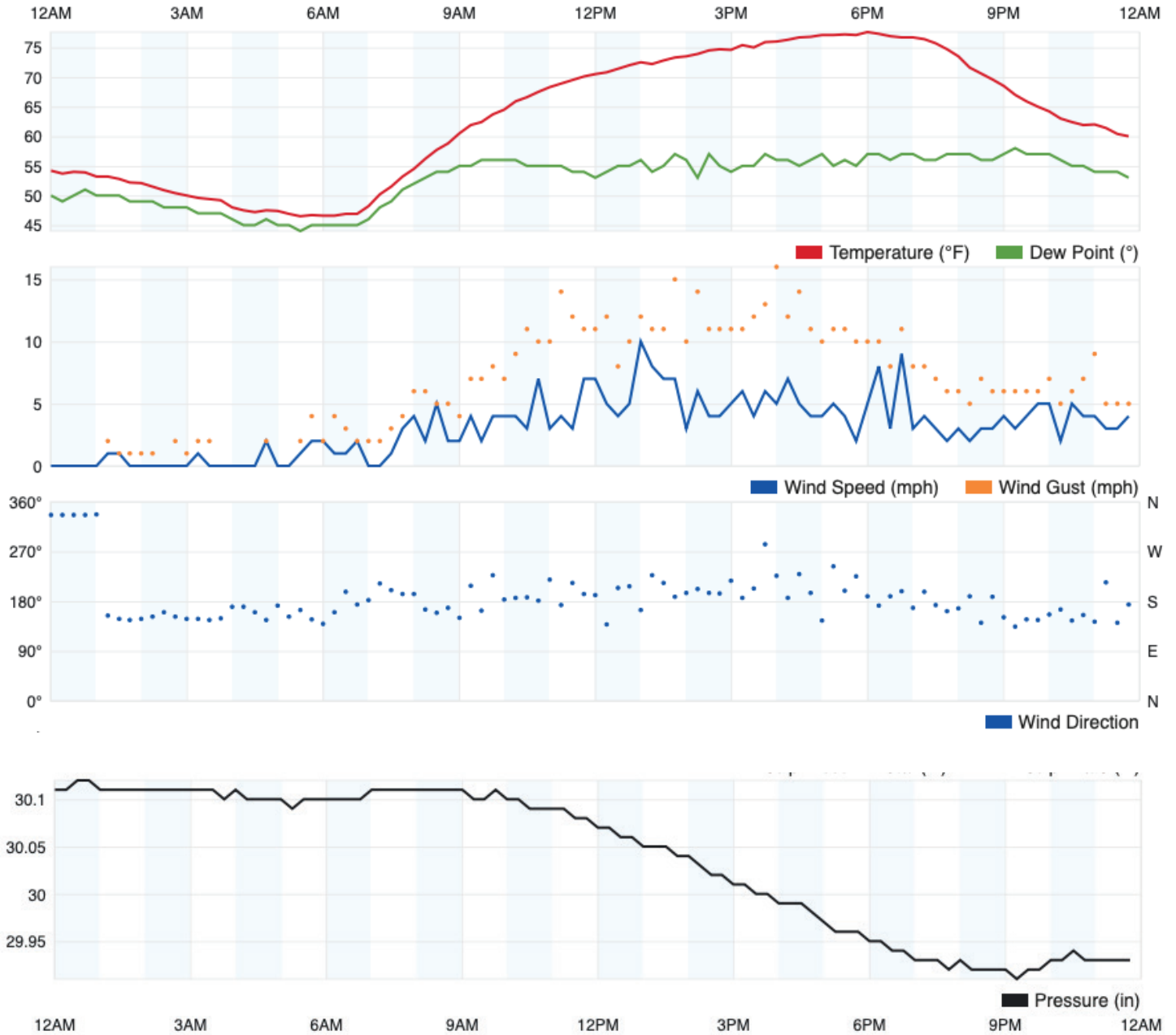
About 680 miles of pipe are included in its initial proposal that is under consideration by the Iowa Utilities Board. The project will be the subject of a final evidentiary hearing that is set to start in August. Summit plans to add another 31 miles of pipe to connect to an ethanol plant in northern Iowa.

Jared Strong is the senior reporter for the Iowa Capital Dispatch. He has written about Iowans and the important issues that affect them for more than 15 years, previously for the Carroll Times Herald and the Des Moines Register. His investigative work exposing police misconduct has notched several state and national awards. He is a longtime trustee of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which fights for open records and open government. He is a lifelong Iowan and has lived mostly in rural western parts of the state.

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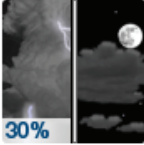





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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
 40%	 30%					
Chance T-storms	Chance T-storms then Partly Cloudy	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 76 °F	Low: 51 °F	High: 76 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 88 °F



Severe Weather Threat Today

July 7, 2023
5:39 AM

Details

Morning showers and weak storms give way to scattered strong to isolated severe storms along a cold front this afternoon and early evening.

Tornado Potential

Very Low Low Medium High

Max Hail Size

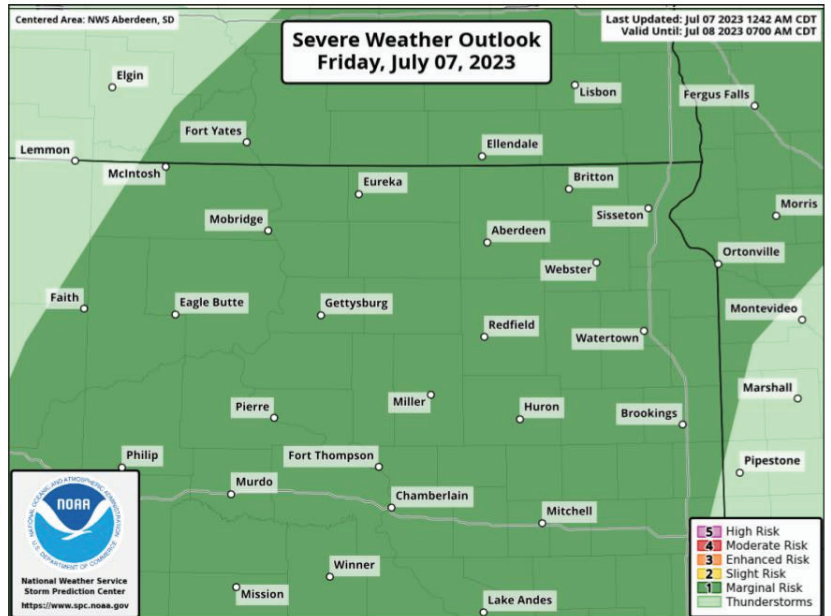
Nickels Quarters Golfball Baseball

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

Morning showers and weak storms across portions of central and northeastern South Dakota will give way to additional scattered strong to isolated severe storms along a cold front this afternoon and early evening across the area. A warm-up is then forecast Sunday into Monday.

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Probability of Precipitation Today

July 7, 2023
5:42 AM

Fri
8am 9am 10am 11am 12pm 1pm 2pm 3pm 4pm 5pm 6pm 7pm 8pm 9pm 10pm 11pm

Friday Details ➔

Morning showers and weak storms give way to scattered strong to isolated severe storms along a cold front this afternoon and early evening.

The Weekend and Beyond

Saturday	Sunday	Monday
72 to 80°	80 to 88°	84 to 92°

	Fri															
	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm	9pm	10pm	11pm
Aberdeen	10	20	15	10	5	15	20	25	40	45	40	25	10	10	5	5
Britton	5	10	10	10	10	15	20	30	45	45	35	30	25	25	20	10
Brookings	25	35	20	40	45	55	55	60	55	35	25	5	5	0	5	5
Chamberlain	55	55	35	35	25	25	25	25	15	20	10	0	5	0	0	0
Clark	60	70	80	80	75	60	45	15	15	20	15	15	10	5	10	10
Eagle Butte	5	0	5	0	0	10	20	25	25	25	20	15	10	10	5	5
Ellendale	5	5	5	5	5	25	45	60	65	50	35	25	15	10	5	0
Eureka	5	5	5	5	0	20	35	50	55	55	35	20	5	0	0	0
Gettysburg	20	20	15	10	5	15	20	30	45	50	35	20	5	5	0	0
Huron	75	85	60	75	80	65	45	50	30	20	15	5	5	0	0	0
Kennebec	60	30	20	10	10	10	10	10	15	15	15	10	5	5	5	0
McIntosh	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	5	0	0	0	0	0
Milbank	0	10	20	30	25	25	30	25	15	20	25	20	15	15	10	10
Miller	75	70	60	30	20	15	15	10	20	20	30	25	15	5	0	5
Mobridge	5	5	0	0	0	10	20	30	25	30	15	10	5	5	0	0
Murdo	30	25	20	5	5	5	10	15	10	10	10	10	10	5	5	0
Pierre	30	25	20	5	5	10	20	20	20	20	25	15	5	5	5	0
Redfield	75	75	75	65	35	25	15	15	20	20	25	20	15	10	5	5
Sisseton	5	5	15	20	25	25	20	25	30	45	40	35	30	30	20	10
Watertown	10	30	45	45	55	55	60	30	20	20	15	20	15	15	5	5
Webster	20	50	50	50	55	35	20	10	15	20	25	25	20	20	20	10
Wheaton	0	5	15	20	30	25	20	20	30	50	40	40	40	40	20	10

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: 78 °F at 6:00 PM

Low Temp: 46 °F at 5:28 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 3:57 PM

Day length: 15 hours, 34 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1936

Record Low: 43 in 1922

Average High: 85

Average Low: 59

Average Precip in July.: 0.82

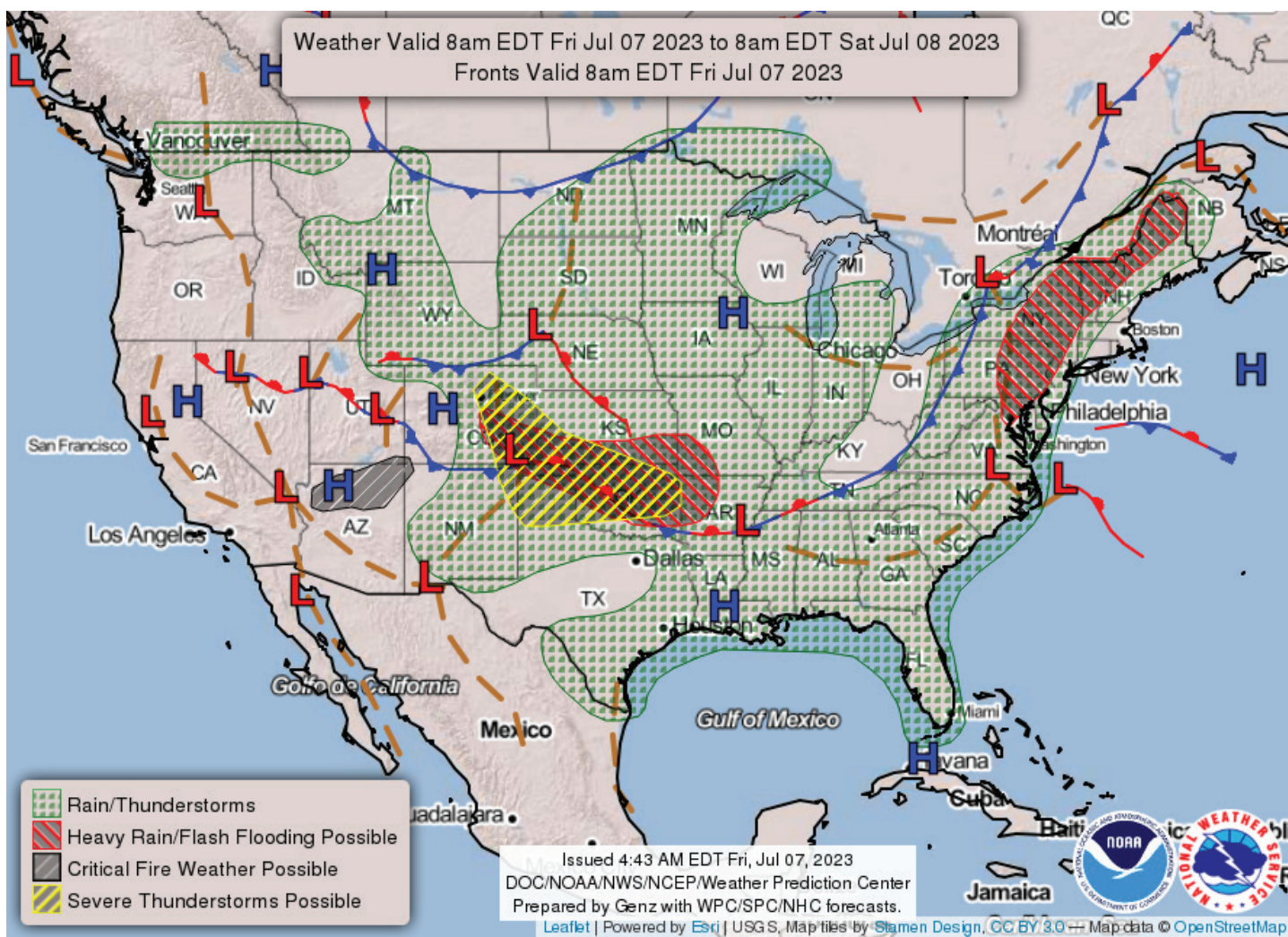
Precip to date in July.: 1.09

Average Precip to date: 11.83

Precip Year to Date: 12.44

Sunset Tonight: 9:24:38 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:50:49 AM



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Today in Weather History

July 7, 1959: A powerful and widespread windstorm began near Kadoka and moved northeastward across the state at a speed of 60 to 65 mph. Airplane hangers were damaged or destroyed at Murdo, Redfield, and Watertown. Fourteen barns were destroyed or severely damaged. Five trailer homes were overturned.

July 7, 1990: A teenager was injured by softball size hail while working in a field near Herreid. The large hail also injured many cattle in the area. Most homes and vehicles in town suffered damage. The Herreid School had 120 broken panes of glass.

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.

1905: The mercury soared to 127 degrees at Parker, Arizona to tie the state record established at Fort Mohave on the 15th of June in 1896. The current record for Arizona is 128 degrees set in Lake Havasu City on 6-29-1994.

1915 - A severe wind and thunderstorm caused heavy damage and 38 deaths in and near Cincinnati, OH. Many older buildings were demolished. The steamship Dick Fulton was overturned. (The Weather Channel)

1981 - Montana was in the midst of a snowstorm that dumped ten inches at Glacier National Park, and produced winds to 90 mph. Meanwhile, Denver, CO, set a record high with a reading of 101 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms spawned eight tornadoes in Colorado, and three in West Texas. Thunderstorms also produced softball size hail at Bula, TX. In the midst of a record thirty-nine day string of 100 degree days, the temperature at Tucson, AZ, dipped to 66 degrees, marking their third straight record low for the date. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thirty-eight cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date. Youngstown, OH, hit 100 degrees, and for the second day in a row, Flint, MI, reached 101 degrees, equalling all-time records for those two cities. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather during the day, with more than 100 reports of large hail and damaging winds from Ohio to Massachusetts and New Hampshire. Thunderstorm winds reached 90 mph in Sullivan County, NH, and golf ball size hail was reported in Pennsylvania. Twenty-four cities, mostly in the southwestern U.S., reported record high temperatures for the date. Afternoon highs of 105 degrees at Cedar City, UT, and 114 degrees at Moab, UT, were all-time records for those locations. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1991: During the early daylight hours of Sunday, July 7, 1991, a bow echo developed over southeast South Dakota and began racing east, producing very damaging winds. This bow echo was the start of a long-lived derecho that lasted 17 hours and affected areas from the Great Plains into western New York and Pennsylvania. Wind gusts in some places reached 80 to 100 mph. The strongest gust, 103 mph, was measured at Sioux Center, Iowa around mid-morning, and the roof of a school was blown off in nearby Orange City.

2004: A tornado occurred in the Rockwell Pass area of Sequoia National Park, California. Since the elevation of the tornado's ground circulation was approximately 3705 m (12,156 ft) MSL, this is the highest-elevation tornado documented in the United States.

2012: In Krymsk, Russia, nearly 11 inches of rain falls within a few hours on July 6th. The resulting flash floods occurred during the early morning hours on the 7. The flood wave, as high as 23 feet killed at least 172 people. The 10.83 inches is equivalent to three or four months' worth of precipitation in a typical year.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

REMAIN FAITHFUL

Years ago I fulfilled one of my lifelong dreams when I visited Yellowstone National Park. Many of my friends who had visited the park told me of the majesty and power of the geysers as they exploded into the air, sending steam and spray skyward.

The geyser that fascinated me the most, however, was not the largest geyser, nor the smallest geyser, nor did it spout water higher than the other geysers. It is the world's most famous geyser: Old Faithful! Its fame is found in its name because of its faithfulness.

There are times when we envy others for the power and prestige associated with their names or the skills and talents that God has given them. Perhaps we envy them because of their fame and notoriety. We may even resent them for the things that they can do and the things we cannot do. We become angry with God for blessing them more than we think He has blessed us. We become filled with jealousy and bitterness and believe that God has "His favorites." Not true! He gives us each of the talents we need to do what He has designed for us to do. It is not about His favorites but about our faithfulness.

In the final analysis, it's never about favorites but about our being faithful to Him, to do what He has called us to do with the talents and gifts He has given us. "He who is faithful," scripture reminds us, "will be given the Crown of Life."

Prayer: We ask, Father, that no matter what You call us to be or do, we will remain faithful to You at all times and in all places. Give us courage and commitment! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But if you remain faithful even when facing death, I will give you the crown of life. Revelation 2:10



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.04.23

21 33 54 61 67 12

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$427,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 2 Mins 57

DRAW: 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 1 Days 15 Hrs 17

DRAW: Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.06.23

5 7 11 12 40 5

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 32 Mins 56

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.05.23

4 15 22 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$137,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 32

DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.05.23

10 19 47 50 53 26

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 1

DRAW: Mins 56 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 1 Days 16 Hrs 1

DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Minnesota forest land linked to polygamous leader Warren Jeffs is up for sale

GRAND MARAIS, Minn. (AP) — A 40-acre plot of Minnesota forest land connected to a polygamous sect once led by Warren Jeffs is up for sale.

News that the property is back on the market, listed for \$189,000, relieved residents in the remote area near the town of Grand Marais, where some once feared the group would establish a new compound, the Star Tribune of Minneapolis reported Thursday.

The land has belonged since 2018 to Seth Jeffs via the Montana-registered entity Emerald Industries LLC. Seth Jeffs was convicted in 2006 of concealing his brother, Warren Jeffs, who was sentenced in 2011 to life in prison for sexually abusing underage members of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, whose members consider him a prophet. Seth Jeffs pleaded guilty to food stamp fraud in 2016 in a scheme to divert benefits to church members.

The FLDS split from the main Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, widely known as the Mormon church, after the latter renounced polygamy in 1890. Seth and Warren Jeffs' father, Rulon Jeffs, held leadership roles in the FLDS church for many years.

Property records show Seth Jeffs also bought 80.5 acres of land near Menomonie, Wisconsin, in 2020, which he continues to own. A call to a phone listing for him was not immediately returned Thursday.

A compound that he once led in South Dakota's Black Hills was bought at auction in 2019 by three former members who broke with the sect years ago. A judge had ordered it sold to pay for a lawsuit settlement.

Nothing was ever built on the Minnesota property, said Tim Nelson, Cook County's land services director. The county ordered Emerald Industries in 2019 to stop working on the site because of land-use and septic permit violations. The issues were resolved, but Seth Jeffs did not reapply after the permits expired.

"It's just a nice North Woods property," said real estate agent Jacob Patten, of Red Pine Realty, which has the listing.

US jobs report likely to show a solid gain, potentially complicating Fed's drive to cool inflation

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Another solid month of hiring in the United States is expected to be reported Friday, an outcome that would suggest no recession is near but could make it harder for the Federal Reserve to succeed in its drive to cool the economy and curb high inflation.

Employers are forecast to have added 205,000 jobs in June, according to economists surveyed by data provider FactSet. Though below recent monthly gains, that would amount to a healthy increase and reflect a historically high number of advertised job openings.

A continuation of robust hiring would underscore the economy's surprising resilience at a time when the Fed has jacked up its key interest rate by a sizable 5 percentage points — the fastest pace of rate hikes in four decades. Those increases have made mortgages, auto loans and other forms of borrowing significantly more expensive. Yet consumers are still increasing their spending, if modestly, providing the incentive for some companies to keep hiring and expanding.

Economists have projected that the unemployment rate dipped last month from 3.7% to 3.6%, near the lowest level in five decades.

Even a modest job gain for June would virtually cement the likelihood that the Fed will resume its rate hikes when it next meets later this month. Before pausing last month, the central bank had boosted its benchmark rate 10 straight times. Chair Jerome Powell said then that the Fed had skipped a rate hike so policymakers could take stock of what impact sharply higher borrowing costs have had on the economy.

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When they met in June, the Fed's policymakers indicated that they envisioned as many as two additional quarter-point rate hikes before year's end. Previously, Fed watchers had expected the officials to signal just one more rate increase this year. Their updated projections reflected the belief of many Fed officials that they need to do more to conquer inflation, which is down sharply from its peak, but at 4% is still well above the Fed's 2% target.

On Thursday, Lorie Logan, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas, suggested that persistently high inflation and "a stronger-than expected labor market" mean that borrowing costs will need to go still higher.

"I remain very concerned about whether inflation will return to target in a sustainable and timely way," Logan said in remarks at a central banking conference in New York. "And I think more-restrictive monetary policy will be needed."

Other Fed officials are looking for signs of what they describe as better balance in the job market, by which they mean the supply and demand for workers would become more equal. After the economy emerged from the pandemic, the number of available jobs surged above 10 million — the highest level on record. That burgeoning demand for labor coincided with millions of Americans dropping out of the workforce to retire, avoid COVID, care for relatives or prepare for new careers.

With companies struggling to fill numerous openings, many offered sharply higher pay and better benefits to attract or keep employees. Fed officials still worry that rising pay levels will keep inflation chronically elevated once companies pass on their growing labor costs by raising prices.

There has been some progress toward a better alignment of supply and demand: About 2 million people have started looking for work in the past seven months, and most of them have found jobs. As the supply of workers has improved, businesses say they are seeing more people apply for open positions. And the number of job openings dropped in May, a sign that demand for workers is gradually cooling, though it remains higher than in pre-pandemic times.

In another sign of a potential slowdown in the job market, fewer Americans are quitting their jobs to search for new positions. Quits had soared after the pandemic. Millions of Americans had sought more meaningful or better-paying jobs, stoking the pressure on companies to raise pay to keep their employees. In May, about 4 million Americans left their jobs, up from April's figure but below a peak of 4.5 million reached last year.

"As economic uncertainty has been growing, workers are a little less eager to switch jobs, which might indicate that the labor market will slow down," said Luke Pardue, an economist at Gusto, which makes payroll software for small- and medium-sized businesses.

Still, other recent reports suggest that the economy has continued to expand and that demand for workers remains high. On Thursday, a survey of service providers — including banks, restaurants and shipping companies — found that the sector expanded at a healthy clip in June and that services companies accelerated their hiring compared with May.

Also on Thursday, the payroll provider ADP reported an explosive increase in hiring by private employers in June — 497,000 added jobs. ADP's hiring figures, though, often diverge from the government's official data.

"Time and time again, economists and analysts have expected a strong slowdown to appear in the jobs numbers, which just hasn't materialized over the past six months," Pardue said. "Despite a lot of calls for a recession in the near term, the job market remains surprisingly resilient."

For the third time this week, Earth sets an unofficial heat record

By SETH BORENSTEIN and ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

Earth's average temperature set a new unofficial record high on Thursday, the third such milestone in a week that already rated as the hottest on record.

The planetary average hit 63 degrees Fahrenheit (17.23 degrees Celsius), surpassing the 62.9-degree mark (17.18-degree mark) set Tuesday and equaled Wednesday, according to data from the University

of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer, a tool that uses satellite data and computer simulations to measure the world's condition.

That average includes places that are sweltering under dangerous heat — like Jingxing, China, which checked in almost 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3 degrees Celsius) — and the merely unusually warm, like Antarctica, where temperatures across much of the continent were as much as 8 degrees Fahrenheit (4.5 degrees Celsius) above normal this week.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on Thursday issued a note of caution about the Maine tool's findings, saying it could not confirm data that results in part from computer modeling.

"Although NOAA cannot validate the methodology or conclusion of the University of Maine analysis, we recognize that we are in a warm period due to climate change," NOAA said.

Still, the Maine data has been widely regarded as another troubling sign of climate change around the globe. Some climate scientists said this week they weren't surprised to see the unofficial records.

Robert Watson, a scientist and former chairman of the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, said governments and the private sector "are not truly committed to address climate change." Nor are citizens, he said.

"They demand cheap energy, cheap food and do not want to pay the true cost of food and energy," Watson said.

Borenstein reported from Washington, and O'Malley from Philadelphia.

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.

US set to destroy its last chemical weapons, closing a deadly chapter dating to World War I

By ANDREW DeMILLO, THOMAS PEIPERT and DYLAN LOVAN Associated Press

RICHMOND, Ky. (AP) — At a sprawling military installation in the middle of the rolling green hills of eastern Kentucky, a milestone is about to be reached in the history of warfare dating back to World War I.

Workers at the Blue Grass Army Depot are close to destroying rockets filled with GB nerve agent that are the last of the United States' declared chemical weapons and completing a decadeslong campaign to eliminate a stockpile that by the end of the Cold War totaled more than 30,000 tons.

The weapons' destruction is a major watershed for Richmond, Kentucky and Pueblo, Colorado, where an Army depot destroyed the last of its chemical agents last month. It's also a defining moment for arms control efforts worldwide.

The U.S. faces a Sept. 30 deadline to eliminate its remaining chemical weapons under the international Chemical Weapons Convention, which took effect in 1997 and was joined by 193 countries. The munitions being destroyed in Kentucky are the last of 51,000 M55 rockets with GB nerve agent — a deadly toxin also known as sarin — that have been stored at the depot since the 1940s.

By destroying the munitions, the U.S. is officially underscoring that these types of weapons are no longer acceptable in the battlefield and sending a message to the handful of countries that haven't joined the agreement, military experts say.

"One thing that we're really proud of is how we're finishing the mission. We're finishing it for good for the United States of America," said Kim Jackson, manager of the Pueblo Chemical Agent-Destruction Pilot Plant.

Chemical weapons were first used in modern warfare in World War I, where they were estimated have killed at least 100,000. Despite their use being subsequently banned by the Geneva Convention, countries continued to stockpile the weapons until the treaty calling for their destruction.

In southern Colorado, workers at the Army Pueblo Chemical Depot started destroying the weapons in 2016, and on June 22 completed their mission of neutralizing an entire cache of about 2,600 tons of mustard blister agent. The projectiles and mortars comprised about 8.5% of the country's original chemical

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weapons stockpile of 30,610 tons of agent.

Nearly 800,000 chemical munitions containing mustard agent were stored since the 1950s inside row after row of heavily guarded concrete and earthen bunkers that pock the landscape near a large swath of farmland east of Pueblo.

The weapons' destruction alleviates a concern that civic leaders in Colorado and Kentucky admit was always in the back of their minds.

"Those (weapons) sitting out there were not a threat," Pueblo Mayor Nick Gradisar said. But, he added, "you always wondered what might happen with them."

In the 1980s, the community around Kentucky's Blue Grass Army Depot rose up in opposition to the Army's initial plan to incinerate the plant's 520 tons of chemical weapons, leading to a decadeslong battle over how they would be disposed of. They were able to halt the planned incineration plant, and then, with help from lawmakers, prompted the Army to submit alternative methods to burning the weapons.

Craig Williams, who became the leading voice of the community opposition and later a partner with political leadership and the military, said residents were concerned about potential toxic pollution from burning the deadly chemical agents.

Williams noted that the military eliminated most of its existing stockpile by burning weapons at other, more remote sites such as Johnston Atoll in the Pacific Ocean or at a chemical depot in the middle of the Utah desert. But the Kentucky site was adjacent to Richmond and only a few dozen miles away from Lexington, the state's second-largest city.

"We had a middle school of over 600 kids a mile away from the (planned) smokestack," Williams said.

The Kentucky storage facility has housed mustard agent and the VX and sarin nerve agents, much of it inside rockets and other projectiles, since the 1940s. The state's disposal plant was completed in 2015 and began destroying weapons in 2019. It uses a process called neutralization to dilute the deadly agents so they can be safely disposed of.

The project, however, has been a boon for both communities, and facing the eventual loss of thousands of workers, both are pitching the pool of high-skilled laborers as a plus for companies looking to locate in their regions.

Workers at the Pueblo site used heavy machinery to meticulously — and slowly — load aging weapons onto conveyor systems that fed into secure rooms where remote-controlled robots did the dirty and dangerous work of eliminating the toxic mustard agent, which was designed to blister the skin and cause inflammation of the eyes, nose, throat and lungs.

Robotic equipment removed the weapons' fuses and bursters before the mustard agent was neutralized with hot water and mixed with a caustic solution to prevent the reaction from reversing. The byproduct was further broken down in large tanks swimming with microbes, and the mortars and projectiles were decontaminated at 1,000 degrees Fahrenheit (538 degrees Celsius) and recycled as scrap metal.

Problematic munitions that were leaky or overpacked were sent to an armored, stainless steel detonation chamber to be destroyed at about 1,100 degrees Fahrenheit (593 degrees Celsius).

The Colorado and Kentucky sites were the last among several, including Utah and the Johnston Atoll, where the nation's chemical weapons had been stockpiled and destroyed. Other locations included facilities in Alabama, Arkansas and Oregon.

Kingston Reif, an assistant U.S. secretary of defense for threat reduction and arms control, said the destruction of the last U.S. chemical weapon "will close an important chapter in military history, but one that we're very much looking forward to closing."

Officials say the elimination of the U.S. stockpile is a major step forward for the Chemical Weapons Convention. Only three countries — Egypt, North Korea and South Sudan — have not signed the treaty. A fourth, Israel, has signed but not ratified the treaty.

Reif noted that there remains concern that some parties to the convention, particularly Russia and Syria, possess undeclared chemical weapons stockpiles.

Still, arms control advocates hope this final step by the U.S. could nudge the remaining countries to join.

But they also hope it could be used as a model for eliminating other types of weapons.

"It shows that countries can really ban a weapon of mass destruction," said Paul F. Walker, vice chairman of the Arms Control Association and coordinator of the Chemical Weapons Convention Coalition. "If they want to do it, it just takes the political will and it takes a good verification system."

DeMillo reported from Little Rock, Arkansas, and Peipert reported from Pueblo, Colorado.

US Forest Service and historically Black colleges unite to boost diversity in wildland firefighting

By TERRY TANG and GEORGE WALKER IV Associated Press

HAZEL GREEN, Ala. (AP) — Before starting college, Taylor Mohead had never been outside her hometown of Houston, Texas. Now, the recent Tuskegee University graduate is trekking around trees in Hazel Green, Alabama, in fire gear and sweltering heat.

The U.S. Forest Service intern is among 20 students from historically Black colleges or universities who are participating in a prescribed burn demonstration under instructors' supervision. They clear paths, light fires and make sure the embers are out when they're done. It's part of an apprenticeship program that will give them the credentials to hit the ground running toward a fire line.

It's a grueling way to spend summer break, but Mohead is relishing it. She never pictured herself fighting forest fires.

"Look at me. I'm really small. I'm really short. And then being a woman of color, that's something, too. I feel like that's more inspiring," Mohead said, grinning. "I got goosebumps right now."

The on-site fire academy is part of the 1890 Land Grant Institution Wildland Fire Consortium, a partnership between the U.S. Forest Service and a cluster of HBCUs comprised of Florida A&M University, Southern University in Louisiana, Tuskegee University and Alabama A&M University.

The recruitment effort comes as wildfire season around the U.S. grows due to climate change and minorities remain underrepresented in forestry and firefighting. The number of wildfires this year is below the 10-year average, but hot and dry conditions are raising the risk, according to the National Interagency Fire Center.

The idea for a consortium came during the pandemic to address a "mission critical area of the Forest Service," said Stephanie Love, the USDA Forest Service's national diversity student programs manager and an Alabama A&M alum. The initiative became official in 2021.

"These four HBCUs have some of the top agricultural programs at HBCUs in the nation. So, it just makes sense to align our efforts and move together in the same direction," Love said. "We're trying to create a pipeline of students who are pursuing this natural resources education and forestry and fire."

The hope is every student comes away with a foundation to chart one of many possible paths in forestry, ecology, agriculture or firefighting.

The consortium is building on top of a decadeslong relationship between Alabama A&M and the Forest Service. A USDA Forest Service Center of Excellence in Forestry was created at the school in 1993 to prepare students for jobs with the agency.

The Bulldogs established a nationally accredited firefighting team in 2009 made of students, called the FireDawgs. When class isn't in session, the FireDawgs are dispatched to wildfires or burn operations around the country.

The development programs that have come out of the Alabama-Forest Service collaboration are responsible for training two-thirds of Black foresters in the federal agency, said Love, who was in the first FireDawgs squad.

Diversity among the Forest Service's wildland firefighters has increased by 20% in the last decade, according to data collected by the agency. It has approximately 13,000 employees including firefighters and other staff who respond to wildfires. Between July 2010 and July 2022, white staffers fell from 86% to 66%.

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Black fire personnel have remained mostly around 1.3%. Black women make up around half a percent. The number of Hispanic staff has grown by 10%. Native Americans/Alaska Natives and Asians linger around 3% and 1%, respectively. Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders make up less than 1%.

The dearth of applicants of color may partly be due to a lack of awareness. They are not often encouraged to consider firefighting by guidance counselors or recruiters, said Terry Baker, CEO of the Society of American Foresters and its first Black leader. There also is a misconception that working outdoors isn't highly technical or doesn't require skill, he said.

Once students decide to study forestry or related fields, retaining them becomes the next challenge. Love said the Forest Service and HBCUs ensure there are mentorships, scholarships and internships.

Bradley Massey, an Alabama A&M junior and president of the school's forestry club, said the school sparked a passion he was missing. Massey said he was a student at Auburn University when he lost focus, working in retail back home in Huntsville before enrolling in Alabama A&M in 2021.

"As the school year progressed, that's when more information about the FireDawgs presented itself," Massey said in between running around in fire gear. "I wanted to just have experience and be able to make the most out of my college experience because I wasn't just going back for fun. I was going back for a purpose."

He has since accomplished feats like passing several firefighter work capacity tests including walking 3 miles (5 kilometers) in under 45 minutes while carrying a 45-pound (20-kilogram) pack. In October, he traveled to a conference in Boise, Idaho, where he went on field trips and talked with fire professionals and students from around the nation.

"I didn't want to leave," Massey said. "It was like going into Comic-Con and seeing all the cool stuff and just wanting to take many pictures ... I feel like it has helped me a lot in my career now."

Baker, of the Society of American Foresters, said the need for more firefighters will only increase as wildfires intensify with worsening climate change and droughts.

"If we're going to meet these challenges, we're going to have to have everyone," Baker said. "What does that mean to a profession that has been primarily white male?"

Black firefighters can feel intimidated and isolated in the field when they parachute into fires in predominately white communities or don't have other crew members of color around them, Baker said. He recalled fire scenes where "people became comfortable enough to openly say I was the first Black person they've ever met in real life that they didn't see on TV."

The current crop of students says it has been reassuring to meet HBCU alumni who have gone on to become fire or forestry professionals, noting there is something special about being in the field surrounded by classmates turned crew who look like them.

"It makes you more willing to go out there," Mohead said. "If you hit a road stop or obstacle, you have someone on your left who's probably been through it."

Terry Tang, who reported from Phoenix, is a member of The Associated Press' Race and Ethnicity team. Follow her on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/ttangAP>

Yellen appeals to China to revive talks and not let technology tensions disrupt ties

By JOE McDONALD AP Business Writer

BEIJING (AP) — Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen appealed to China's No. 2 leader not to let frustration over U.S. curbs on access to processor chips and other technology disrupt economic cooperation during a visit Friday aimed at improving strained relations.

Meeting with Premier Li Qiang, Yellen said Washington and Beijing have a duty to cooperate on issues that affect the world. She appealed for "regular channels of communication" at a time when relations are at their lowest in decades due to disputes over technology, security and other irritants.

Yellen is one of several senior U.S. officials due to visit Beijing to encourage Chinese leaders to revive

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interactions between governments of the two largest economies. Treasury officials said earlier she wouldn't meet with Chinese leader Xi Jinping and no breakthroughs were expected.

Yellen defended "targeted actions," a reference to curbs on Chinese access to advanced processor chips and other technology, saying they are needed to protect national security.

"You may disagree," Yellen said. "But we should not allow any disagreement to lead to misunderstandings that needlessly worsen our bilateral economic and financial relationships."

Yellen appealed for "healthy economic competition," a reference to complaints Beijing is stepping up use of subsidies and market barriers to protect its companies.

"A fair set of rules will benefit both of our countries," Yellen said. "We also face important global challenges where the United States and China have a duty to both countries but also to the world to cooperate."

Li expressed optimism that conditions might improve but gave no indication of possible changes in Chinese policies that have irked Washington and its trading partners.

Referring to a rainbow that was spotted after Yellen's plane landed Thursday in rainy weather, Li said, "after a round of wind and rain, we will definitely see more rainbows."

The Chinese finance ministry called Yellen's visit a "concrete measure" toward carrying out an agreement by Xi and President Joe Biden during a meeting in November to improve relations. It mentioned no initiatives and called on Washington to make the first move.

"There will be no winners in trade wars or 'decoupling and broken chains,'" the ministry said in a statement. "We hope the United States will take concrete actions to create a favorable environment for the healthy development of economic and trade relations."

U.S. curbs on Chinese access to technology threaten to delay or derail the ruling Communist Party's efforts to develop telecoms, artificial intelligence and other technologies. Xi accused Washington in March of trying to hamper China's development.

Beijing has been slow to retaliate, possibly to avoid disrupting its own tech industries. But this week, the government announced unspecified controls on exports of gallium and germanium, metals used in making semiconductors and solar panels. That announcement jolted South Korea and other countries that import from China.

Earlier Friday, Yellen criticized China's treatment of U.S. companies during a meeting with businesspeople.

U.S. and other foreign companies are uneasy about their status in China following raids on consulting firms, the expansion of a national security law and calls by Xi and other officials for greater self-sufficiency.

"I am communicating the concerns that I've heard from the U.S. business community — including China's use of non-market tools like expanded subsidies for its state-owned enterprises and domestic firms, and barriers to market access for foreign firms," Yellen said, according to a transcript released by her department.

Yellen again rejected suggestions Washington is trying to decouple, or separate the U.S. economy from China's.

Businesspeople have warned the world's two biggest economies might split into separate markets with incompatible products as Beijing and Washington tighten trade controls and tell companies to reduce reliance on each other. They say that will hurt economic growth and innovation.

"I have made clear that the United States does not seek a wholesale separation of our economies," Yellen told the businesspeople. "A decoupling of the world's two largest economies would be destabilizing for the global economy, and it would be virtually impossible to undertake."

Yellen defended U.S. export curbs as "premised on straightforward national security considerations and not undertaken to gain economic advantage over China."

Also Friday, Yellen met with the outgoing governor of China's central bank, Yi Gang, and former Vice Premier Liu He, previously her counterpart in finance talks, according to the Treasury.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, met with top leader 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.

The latest flareup came after President Joe Biden referred to Xi as a dictator. The Chinese government

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protested, but Biden said his blunt statements are “just not something I’m going to change very much.” Ties became especially testy after a Chinese surveillance balloon flew over the United States in February and was subsequently shot down.

Biden’s climate envoy, John Kerry, is scheduled to become the next U.S. official to visit China, next week. China and the United States are the world’s top emitters of climate-changing carbon, making whatever steps they take critical.

The trip will be Kerry’s first to China since it broke off climate discussions with the U.S. in August in retaliation for then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi’s travel to Taiwan.

Armed rebellion by Wagner chief Prigozhin underscores erosion of Russian legal system

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russia’s rebellious mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin walked free from prosecution for his June 24 armed mutiny, and it’s still unclear if anyone will face any charges in the aborted uprising against military leaders or for the deaths of the soldiers killed in it.

Instead, a campaign is underway to portray the founder of the Wagner Group military contractor as driven by greed, with only hints of an investigation into whether he mishandled any of the billions of dollars in state funds.

Until last week, the Kremlin has never admitted to funding the company, with private mercenary groups technically illegal in Russia. But President Vladimir Putin revealed the state paid Wagner almost \$1 billion in just one year, while Prigozhin’s other company earned about the same from government contracts. Putin wondered aloud whether any of it was stolen.

The developments around Prigozhin, who remains unpunished despite Putin’s labeling of his revolt as treason, underscored what St. Petersburg municipal council member Nikita Yuferev called the “gradual erosion of the legal system” in Russia.

Andrei Kolesnikov, senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center, writing about the mutiny in a column, concluded: “The fabric of the state is disintegrating.”

After Putin indicated the government would probe financial irregularities by Prigozhin’s companies, state TV picked up that cue.

Commentator Dmitry Kiselyov said Wagner and another company owned by Prigozhin earned over 1.7 trillion rubles (\$18.7 billion) through government contracts. Russian business daily Vedomosti cited a source close to the Defense Ministry as saying the earnings occurred between 2014 and 2023, years when both Prigozhin and Russian officials denied any ties to Wagner or even its existence.

“Big money made Prigozhin’s head spin,” Kiselyov said Sunday, saying the private army’s battlefield successes gave the mercenary boss “a feeling of impunity.”

One possible reason for Prigozhin’s mutiny, he said, was the Defense Ministry’s refusal to extend a multibillion-dollar contract with his legal catering company, Concord, to supply food to the army.

According to Kiselyov, Wagner earned 858 billion rubles from government contracts, while Concord earned another 845 billion. Those numbers were 10 times higher than what Putin gave last week.

Also unclear is whether Prigozhin will move to Belarus, Moscow’s closest ally, under a deal with the Kremlin to end the rebellion. Belarus’ authoritarian President Alexander Lukashenko said Thursday that Prigozhin was in Russia. The Kremlin refused comment.

Russian media on Wednesday — including popular state TV channel Russia 1 — showed video of searches of Prigozhin’s St. Petersburg offices and an opulent mansion he purportedly owned, complete with helipad and indoor swimming pool. They also showed a van with boxes of cash, as well as gold bars, wigs and weapons in the estate.

Russia 1 programs also alleged Prigozhin’s adult children amassed significant wealth through him and said the searches were a part of an ongoing investigation, contrasting his lifestyle to his anti-elite image.

“So it turns out, Yevgeny Prigozhin didn’t have enough and wanted more?” an anchor mused.

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The goal of these revelations is "to smear the person, show he is an oligarch," said Ilya Shumanov, Russia director for Transparency International, noting Prigozhin often made crude and plain-spoken attacks on the military leadership.

"And here they say that he's a billionaire, and all this (money) isn't his, it's from the (state) budget, and he was sitting on it, and there would have been no private military company without the Defense Ministry," Shumanov told The Associated Press.

The revelations raised questions of how the government could fund Wagner at all, given that laws prohibit mercenary activities, including funding and training private troops, that put the company in a legal gray area.

Until the rebellion, Putin always denied any link between the state and Prigozhin's mercenaries. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said as recently as 2020 that "there is no such thing as a private military company in Russian law," and that he wasn't aware of one.

By then, however, Wagner had sent its soldiers-for-hire to Syria and African countries as Russia expanded its global influence. By Prigozhin's own admission, his forces also operated in eastern Ukraine to support a separatist uprising and later fought there after the 2022 invasion.

Asked Monday about the legality of state funding for Wagner, Peskov refused comment.

Shumanov told AP that Wagner was likely funded either with cash through shell companies, or through government contracts via Prigozhin's other entities. How much is impossible to know, he noted, but added it was clear Putin's remarks "gave a green light" to investigate the Wagner chief's finances.

"I'd wait several weeks, and I think there will definitely be a reaction from the security forces in terms of Prigozhin and his economic activities," he said.

The Kremlin's message is that "we are dealing with a thief, a corrupt person, a thief and an oligarch, who went too far and stole money from the budget," Shumanov said: "This is a very clear explanation, and no one needs to be sacrificed except for Prigozhin."

Besides the finances, there is the matter of whether anyone will face prosecution for the deaths of the Russian troops who died at the hands of Prigozhin's fighters.

Russian media reported about 15 military troops were killed during the rebellion as thousands of his soldiers seized a military headquarters in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don, then headed for Moscow, shooting down military helicopters and other aircraft on what Prigozhin called his "march of justice."

At a June 27 Kremlin ceremony, Putin held a minute of silence to honor the dead, although he didn't say how many were killed.

A deal struck with Prigozhin to end the uprising stipulated that the Federal Security Service, or FSB, would drop charges against him and his fighters of mounting a rebellion. That agreement went against Putin's vow in a nationally televised address during the uprising to punish those behind it.

Instead, the Kremlin said Prigozhin agreed to end the mutiny and go to Belarus — a settlement that didn't sit well with some.

Yuferev, the St. Petersburg municipal council member, filed a request with the Prosecutor General's Office and the FSB, asking who would be punished for the rebellion.

Thousands of people "rolling toward Moscow on tanks shoot down aircraft, kill 15 troops. ... The president speaks, says: 'I will punish all of you, you are mutineers,' the FSB launches a case — and then nothing," he added.

He said authorities must respond in 30 days, and while he doesn't expect a substantive reply, he at least hopes to draw attention to this "erosion of the legal system of a state."

"It is very interesting what they will write there, how they will justify people committing an armed rebellion," Yuferev said.

Whether other charges will be filed is unclear. Prominent lawyer Ivan Pavlov told AP that mounting an armed rebellion is only one charge, and that Prigozhin may face others — especially since deaths occurred — but so far, "no one is talking about it."

Another topic drawing official silence is how the FSB — the successor agency to the feared KGB — failed

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to prevent the uprising, even though it routinely boasts of averting terrorist attacks, sabotage plots and other major crimes.

Russian security experts Andrei Soldatov and Irina Borogan said the FSB's Rostov department "barri-caded itself in its city headquarters," while its military counterintelligence operatives assigned to Wagner "did nothing."

After Prigozhin announced his intentions June 23 to act against Russia's defense minister, the FSB issued a statement urging Wagner fighters not to follow the rogue commander and for the troops "to detain him."

Soldatov and Borogan wrote in a recent article that such a call for the mercenaries to take that action was odd, since only law enforcement agencies and security services like the FSB have the power to detain people.

Mark Galeotti of University College, London, an analyst on Russian security affairs, said the rebellion tested previous assumptions that Putin could count on his security forces.

"Now, the first time there's a real challenge we actually see, security forces are willing to hang back and wait and see what happens," he told AP.

So far, there has been no negative impact on the FSB, which Galeotti called "Putin's favored institution," having been a former member.

Asked by AP during a conference call with reporters Monday why the FSB failed to stop the mutiny, Kremlin spokesman Peskov refused comment, except to say that such services "perform their functions, they do it properly."

He also noted Putin last week had praised soldiers, law enforcement and security officers and "expressed his gratitude" to them.

Twitter threatens legal action against Meta over its new rival app Threads

NEW YORK (AP) — Twitter has threatened legal action against Meta over its new text-based app called Threads, which has drawn tens of millions of users since launching this week as a rival to Elon Musk's social media platform.

In a letter Wednesday to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg, Alex Spiro, an attorney representing Twitter, accused Meta of unlawfully using Twitter's trade secrets and other intellectual property by hiring former Twitter employees to create a "copycat" app.

The move ramps up the tensions between the social media giants after Threads debuted Wednesday, targeting those who are seeking out alternatives to Twitter amid unpopular changes Musk has made to the platform since buying it last year for \$44 billion.

Meta spokesperson Andy Stone wrote Thursday on Threads: "No one on the Threads engineering team is a former Twitter employee — that's just not a thing."

In the letter, which news website Semafor first reported Thursday, Spiro said Twitter "intends to strictly enforce its intellectual property rights" and noted the company's right to seek civil remedies or a court injunction.

He said the letter marked a "formal notice" for Meta to preserve documents relevant for a potential dispute between the companies.

In a reply to a tweet about the possibility of legal action against Meta, Musk wrote: "Competition is fine, cheating is not."

The Associated Press reached out to Spiro on Thursday for further information. Twitter responded to an email seeking comment with a crude automated reply, its standard response to journalists.

New Twitter CEO Linda Yaccarino has not publicly commented on the letter but appeared to address Threads' launch.

"We're often imitated — but the Twitter community can never be duplicated," Yaccarino tweeted.

Some analysts say Meta's new offering, billed as a text-based version of the photo-sharing app Instagram, could be a significant headache for Twitter — pointing to the excitement surrounding Threads' launch and

impressive download numbers so far.

But success isn't guaranteed. Industry watchers point to Meta's track record of starting standalone apps that were later shut down and note that Threads is still in its early days.

Besides some glitches and gripes about missing features, Meta's new app also has raised data privacy concerns. While Threads launched in more than 100 countries, it is notably unavailable in the European Union, which has strict data privacy rules.

Drones sweep for sharks along New York's coast during rise in encounters with beachgoers

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN Associated Press

WANTAGH, N.Y. (AP) — Off the coast of Long Island, drones sweep over the ocean, patrolling the water for any danger that might lurk below the surface as beachgoers grow more vigilant because of a recent spate of shark encounters.

Over two days this week, five people reported being bitten by sharks at some of New York's most popular beaches, leading to heightened surveillance of the area's waters.

The sighting of a 10-foot (3-meter) shark on Thursday prompted officials to keep people out of the water at Robert Moses State Park, the same Long Island beach that delayed its opening July 4 after a drone spotted a group of 50 sand sharks off the coast.

"We are now more vigilant than ever," said George Gorman, the state's park director in Long Island. "We have drones in the sky that watch over the waters. We have lifeguards on WaveRunners that watch over the waters."

Just a few years ago, encounters with sharks were rare. But more recently, reports of sharks biting people have increased. Last year, eight people reported being bitten by sharks swimming in the shallows off Long Island's beaches.

"This year, we've already had five bites," Gorman said, "and the season has kind of just begun."

Even if the injuries have not been serious, he and others are concerned by the rise in shark sightings and encounters.

Cary Epstein, a lifeguard supervisor who pilots drones at Jones Beach, said the tiny battery-powered aircraft make three sweeps each day: once before opening, then sometime midday and a final round before the end of the day.

"Despite the nervousness over what's going on right now in New York, people swim in the ocean every day, and they have for centuries," he said. "But we do have to remember that we are cohabitating, and this is their house."

Drones provide an additional vantage point unavailable to lifeguards on the beach, Epstein said as he demonstrated how he uses the drones to patrol the waters off Long Island.

As he operated one of the drones from the beach, he stared into a small box equipped with controls and a display screen. The craft lifted off, hovering over the sand until it hurtled forward over the water and turned into a mere dot as it approached the horizon.

"When you're up in an elevated lifeguard station or a lifeguard stand, you can see up and you can see out, but you can't see straight down," Epstein said. "When we do have sharks that are eating on these fish, it's very, very clear to us. You could see it, no questions asked."

But, he warned, "just because you don't see something doesn't mean it's not there."

Just two months ago, Gov. Kathy Hochul announced the addition of 10 drones to its squadron, bringing the total to 18 that can be used to monitor shark activity along her state's beaches.

"With New Yorkers and visitors alike preparing to enjoy our beautiful Long Island beaches all summer long, their safety is our top priority," Hochul said in May. "This year we are taking further action to protect beachgoers by increasing surveillance to monitor for shark activity near beaches off the South Shore."

An increase in shark sightings might suggest a healthier ecosystem, some say. Cleaner waters allow the

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it was a first.

Quissac's unsettling experience last Friday night — and those of other out-of-the-way towns and villages also hit by unrest to varying degrees — set France's latest nationwide spasm of rioting apart from previous cycles of violence that have flared periodically in every decade since the 1980s.

Although typically referred to in France as "les violences urbaines" — urban violence — the unrest this time was no longer contained to blue-collar towns and cities' disadvantaged housing projects, places where anger at social and racial inequalities has festered.

Carried in part on the winds of social networks that have narrowed gaps between France's urban centers and its vast rural spaces, unrest also reached outward to touch places that escaped a similar nationwide wave of rioting in 2005.

IN SMALL TOWNS, A NAGGING QUESTION

Mayors of small towns where vehicles were torched, fires lit and police attacked are scratching their heads, trying to figure out: Why them? Why now? Why are France's big-city problems, which previously seemed far away, sinking roots into their peace and quiet, too?

"Why these incidents in a little town like ours?" asks the mayor of L'Aigle in Normandy, where fires were lit, cars torched and police chased around after small groups of suspects.

"In the press and even on the TV news, it was mainly Paris and its suburbs, Lyon and Marseille that were talked about. But when you look, there were also incidents in a certain number of small communities," the mayor, Philippe Van-Hoorne, says. "Unfortunately, the increase of uncivil behavior, of violence, is developing even in modest towns like ours ... It's very hard to solve."

By the government's count, more than 500 cities, towns and villages were affected this time after the police shooting of Nahel Merzouk in the Paris suburb of Nanterre on June 27. The French-born 17-year-old of north African descent was stopped by two officers on motorbikes who subsequently told investigators that he'd been driving dangerously in a bright yellow Mercedes. He died from a single shot through his left arm and chest. One officer is being held on a preliminary charge of voluntary homicide.

From Nanterre, violent protests spread with astounding speed and intensity. They quickly morphed into generalized mayhem that was relayed and celebrated on social networks. Much of the violence was concentrated in cities, large towns and their disadvantaged housing projects, leaving France once again grappling with its decades-old failure to better integrate generations of immigrants and their France-born children who complain of systemic discrimination.

But the staggering nationwide tallies of destruction — more than 6,000 vehicles and 12,400 trash bins set ablaze, more than 1,100 buildings attacked — weren't limited to previously recognized hotspots. This time, smaller communities were impacted, too.

In Quissac, investigators are searching for 4 people who scattered on foot after the firework attack, says the mayor, Serge Cathala. That incident aside, the only minor troubles Cathala can remember from his 28 years as an elected official are a few "very rare" trash fires and occasional daubs of graffiti. Quissac was spared by the longer nationwide rioting in 2005 that also started in Paris' outskirts.

"There's never really been acts of violence like this," the mayor says. "Now it's affecting the countryside."

Like other officials, including French President Emmanuel Macron, he suspects that videos of unrest on social networks encouraged copycat violence.

"It's one-upmanship," Cathala says. "A way of showing off."

AN AP TALLY SHOWS TOWNS IMPACTED NATIONWIDE

The Associated Press compiled a list of cities, towns and villages where officials reported unrest. It ended up with 297 names. Every letter of the alphabet was represented with the exceptions of U, X and Z.

They ranged from the commuter town of Achères — on a bend of the River Seine west of Paris that reported fires and destruction that forced the closure its town hall — to Yutz, near France's eastern borders with Germany and Luxembourg. There, a McDonald's was torched. Videos of the blaze were shared on social networks, hash-tagged Yutz and riots.

In Rugles, a Normandy village of 2,200, rockets were fired outside the Intermarché supermarket and

fires lit. In Port-Saint-Louis-du-Rhône in the south, where the River Rhône empties into the Mediterranean, a school minibus and about 30 trash bins were set ablaze, the town hall was graffitied and a gas bottle was used to batter the window of a clothing store on Avenue du Port, the mayor's office says.

Metz, in the east, lost a library to flames. Part of a sports complex earmarked for use as a training venue for the 2024 Paris Olympic Games was set ablaze in Macon, in Burgundy. A social center under construction in Sens, also in Burgundy, was burnt down.

Not all larger towns were hit hard. Colmar in the wine-making Alsace region, known for its pretty timber-framed houses and canals, saw car fires and a bank was "a little bit touched," says Mayor Eric Straumann. Still, even that limited unrest was "quite paradoxical," given Colmar's low unemployment rate of about 5%, he says.

In L'Aigle, three cars were torched, 18 fires lit and five store windows attacked, says its mayor, Van-Hoorne. He says police made seven arrests — five of them minors — and that some filmed their exploits on their mobile phones. Just another French town touched by seismic events of a national scale, and another indication that in the world of the 21st century, geography isn't always the insulating force it once was.

"When you analyze it all on a nationwide scale," Van-Hoorne says, "it's true that it raises questions."

AP journalist Sylvie Corbet contributed to this report.

Asian Americans feel particularly targeted by new laws criminalizing those who assist voters

By AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For a century, the League of Women Voters in Florida formed bonds with marginalized residents by helping them register to vote — and, in recent years, those efforts have extended to the growing Asian American and Asian immigrant communities.

But a state law signed by Gov. Ron DeSantis in May would have forced the group to alter its strategy.

The legislation would have imposed a \$50,000 fine on third-party voter registration organizations if the staff or volunteers who handle or collect the forms have been convicted of a felony or are not U.S. citizens.

A federal judge blocked the provision this week. But its passage reflects the effort by DeSantis, a Republican presidential candidate, and other GOP leaders to crack down on access to the ballot. Florida is one of at least six states, including Georgia and Texas, where Republicans have enacted voting rules since 2021 that created or boosted criminal penalties and fines for individuals and groups that assist voters. Several of those laws are also facing legal challenges.

In the meantime, voting rights advocates are being forced to quickly adapt to the changing environment. Before the ruling in Florida, for instance, the League of Women Voters started using online links and QR codes for outreach. It removed the personal connection between its workers and communities and replaced it with digital tools that are likely to become a technological barrier.

"If there's not access, in terms of language, we can't get to as many people, which particularly affects AAPI voters," Executive Director Leah Nash said, referring to the state's Asian American and Pacific Island population, which has grown rapidly and where more than 30% of adults have limited English proficiency. "If we just give someone our website or QR code to go register, we don't know for sure if they're doing it and we like to get as many people registered to vote as possible."

In states where penalties are getting tougher, the developments have sowed fear and confusion among groups that provide translators, voter registration help and assistance with mail-in balloting — roles that voting rights advocates say are vital for Asian communities in particular.

In a number of states, language barriers already hamper access to the ballot for a population that has been growing rapidly. Asian, Native Hawaiian and other Pacific Islander populations grew 35% between 2010 and 2020, according to Census data. The new laws in mostly Republican-led states are seen by many voting groups as another form of voter suppression.

"It's specifically targeting limited English proficiency voters, and that includes AAPI voters," said Meredyth

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Yoon, litigation director at Asian Americans Advancing Justice in Atlanta.

Yoon added that record turnout for the 2020 elections in Georgia influenced the Republican-dominated legislature to pass sweeping voter restrictions: "It's not a coincidence," she said.

In Texas, Republican Gov. Greg Abbott signed a bill in June that raises the penalty for illegal voting to a felony, upping it from a misdemeanor charge that was part of a sweeping elections law passed two years earlier.

Alice Yi, who is Chinese American, used to help translate in Austin, Texas, but said the new law isn't clear about whether good faith mistakes will be criminalized and worries that she could get into trouble by offering assistance.

Yi recalls being approached during a 2022 primary election by a man who was Vietnamese American and asked for help because he hadn't voted before and didn't speak English. She said she was immediately worried she could face consequences if she helped him.

"This is the fear I'm facing," she said.

Now, she said, she will help her father vote, but no one else.

But voting rights supporters like Ashley Cheng — also in Austin — remain committed to reaching Asian voters, despite the threat of jail time.

Cheng, the founding president of Asian Texans for Justice, recalls discovering her mother was not listed in the voter rolls when she tried to help her vote in 2018. They never found out why she wasn't properly registered. Advocates say this highlights flaws in the system and illustrates how volunteers are essential to overcoming them.

The group's own research has found that roughly two-thirds of Asian voters in Texas were highly motivated to vote in the 2022 midterm elections. Cheng said that desire amplified her enthusiasm to help the community get its votes counted.

"It's really easy to feel like, 'Oh, I would love to just like not try anymore,'" she said. "But, I think about people like my mom and so many others in the Asian diaspora who live in Texas who have that experience of wanting to vote but not being able to, for whatever reason, are not feeling like it's accessible."

For instance, some 34% of Asian American adults in Texas have limited English proficiency, according to 2022 data from Asian and Pacific Islander American Vote (APIA Vote), a nonpartisan Asian American and Pacific Islander advocacy group.

Farha Ahmed, an attorney in Texas, said the increased liability in helping these marginalized communities access the ballot box forced her to decide against continuing as an election judge, a position that administers voting procedures and settles disputes concerning election laws.

"There's not a lot of resources and there's not a lot of protection," said Ahmed, who lives in Sugarland, just outside Houston. "Election judges want to help make it easy for people to vote, but with these new laws in place, they're very unsure of where is their liability when they're really just trying to do their best to help."

Before Florida and Texas, Georgia lawmakers overhauled that state's election laws.

A section of Georgia's 2021 election bill made it a misdemeanor to offer a voter any money or gifts at polling places, a provision that included passing out water and snacks for those waiting in lines. Attempts to get a court to toss out the ban on snacks and water have so far been unsuccessful.

James Woo, the communications director at Asian Americans Advancing Justice-Atlanta, said he won't even get his parents a drink of water while helping them with their ballots.

"It's simple things like that, which would have been like a conversation starter or just like helping them throughout the process, might be viewed as like something illegal I'm doing," he said.

Associated Press writer Mike Schneider in Orlando, Florida, contributed to this report.

The Associated Press coverage of race and voting receives support from the Jonathan Logan Family Foundation. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Amid criticism over his war on gangs, El Salvador's President Bukele turns to sports

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

SAN SALVADOR, El Salvador (AP) — El Salvador President Nayib Bukele stood before tens of thousands of roaring sports fans with a message: I am not a dictator.

"They say we live in a dictatorship," Bukele said, but "ask bus passengers, people eating in restaurants, waiters. Ask whomever you want. Here in El Salvador, you can go anywhere and it's totally safe. ... Ask them what they think of El Salvador, what they think of our government, what they think of our supposed dictatorship."

In the opening ceremonies of the 2023 Central American and Caribbean Games, the remark was met with a burst of applause and, in some swathes of the remodeled stadium, chants of "Reelection!"

The games have offered Bukele — the bitcoin-pushing 41-year-old leader who has sparked a sort of populist fervor in his Central American nation and beyond — an opportunity to showcase a safer El Salvador in the largest international event here since his government entered an all-out war against gangs. But the competition also comes as Bukele is accused of systematic human rights violations for that same crackdown and as his government takes steps that eat away at the country's democracy.

Observers worry events including the games — drawing athletes from 35 countries across the region — will allow Bukele to save face internationally and show voters he has global support as he seeks reelection despite a constitutional ban on terms of more than five years.

Often referred to as "sportswashing" — the use of sports to divert attention from controversy and improve reputations amid wrongdoing — the tactic has been wielded by autocratic governments across the world for decades. The accusation was most recently slung at Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman for his investment in golf, the World Cup and other international sporting events.

"These are events that give oxygen to the government to distract attention from the huge problems we have and show a face of modernity to the world," said Eduardo Escobar, executive director of Acción Ciudadana, an independent political watchdog group in El Salvador.

A little more than a year ago, Bukele announced the nation would enter a state of emergency, a measure suspending constitutional rights in an effort to confront surging gang violence.

Since, the government has detained 70,000 people — about one in every hundred Salvadorans — imprisoning them with little access to due process. The government has labeled them gang members, though as few as 30% have clear gang ties, according to human rights group Cristosal's estimates.

The moves have been met with an avalanche of international criticisms, including by the Biden administration.

Simultaneously, crime in El Salvador has dipped to historic lows, and Bukele's approval has soared, holding strong at 90% in June, according to a CID Gallup poll. Bukeleism has gained traction from Colombia to Guatemala and the Dominican Republic as politicians seek to mimic him and cash in on his popularity.

The dip in violence opened the door for his government to host events including the games and the upcoming Miss Universe pageant. The opening ceremonies of the games flaunted the country's newfound status, with dances led by an AI-robot voice and a performance by American DJ Marshmello.

For Sel Ramirez, a Salvadoran who has spent decades jumping between his country and the United States after fleeing civil war in the '90s, it was like seeing an entirely new country. He's among many here embracing Bukele fervor — he occasionally even dresses up as the president and walks around the city center.

After Bukele's opening speech, Ramirez stood outside the stadium with a crowd awaiting for the leader's exit — a scene similar to those at Taylor Swift concerts. Yet steps away sit heavily armed soldiers and black armored cars with machine guns on tops.

"I wonder if he'll give me his autograph," mused Ramirez, his eyes glued to the door from which the

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president would later depart.

As the crowd waited, Defense Minister René Merino walked out to cheers. "El Salvador is a country in peace," he told The Associated Press. "We are open to the world." When asked by the AP about those imprisoned, he responded "no" and walked away.

Ahead of the games, Bukele's government slashed 70% of publicly elected positions, whittling down the number of congressional and local government seats. Bukele said the cuts would improve efficiency and crack down on corruption, the same reasons given for gutting El Salvador's courts in 2021.

Legal experts and other Salvadoran politicians say these are just the latest steps in a conquest to solidify power ahead of February's election.

"This is typical for autocratic governments," said René Hernández Valiente, former head of the country's constitutional court. "They are erasing the philosophies of our constitution."

The move will boost Bukele's control of congress by 22%, according to estimates by watchdog group Acción Ciudadana. Other candidates told AP it left them scrambling by reshuffling the rules months before the vote.

Bukele's party, Nuevas Ideas, made the announcement that he'd seek reelection days into the games, on Twitter. It was an anticipated yet controversial move. In the tweet, at 1 a.m. local time, the party declared itself "invincible."

In the following days, Bukele's Twitter account – his preferred means of communication, and a place where he once described himself as the world's "coolest dictator" – posted videos of soccer matches, photos of tanned surfers, and clips of his opening speech. He posted little about his reelection campaign.

The rise of social media has made it harder for leaders to present large sporting events as apolitical, but sportswashing usually works because athletic events are both highly visible and seen as a distraction from daily problems and politics, said Alan McDougall, a sports historian at the University of Guelph in Canada.

"Successfully hosting an international event can give a regime confidence to kind of to act with impunity. Sport is a bit of a shortcut way to win yourself, not even popularity, just an acceptance," said McDougall, who dates the use of athletics as a political tool to the 1930s, when a Mussolini-run Italy hosted the World Cup and the Olympics were held in Nazi Germany.

And while many in El Salvador celebrate a new reality marked by roaring stadiums and fireworks, those suffering amid Bukele's crackdown feel forgotten by the rest of their country.

Among them is activist and union leader Ingrid Escobar, 40. When she left home one day in late June with her two kids to run errands, she saw men waiting outside in a gray truck criminologists later identified as one used by government security forces. The sight has become familiar over the past three months. So, too, has the fear.

Unions, human rights groups, opposition politicians, researchers and journalists have said that as the election cycle heats up, Bukele's government has intensified intimidation tactics. One union of government workers says at least 15 organizers have been detained, accused of public disorder and gang ties. About half are still imprisoned, according to the union.

"The fear we have is that we'll be the next ones he arrests despite never having broken the law," Escobar said. "And for no reason other than we are denouncing the government, of being the voice of people who are too scared to speak out."

Bukele has said he'll open a new prison "for the corrupt," a label he often uses for opponents. Escobar worries that may mean her. She said she's received death threats on social media. She now uses different vehicles, takes different routes to work. She fears for her kids and tries to shield them.

That morning, she took a photo of the truck's license plate and sent it to a colleague. Her children asked why, and she fibbed: "Oh, because I like the car."

Miles away, gymnasts flipped before judges, swimmers dove from starting blocks, and runners leaped hurdles in the same stadium where Bukele made his speech.

Few knew about the radical changes the leader was making around them around them or the fears of everyday people like Escobar.

"I've heard a little bit," said Francisco Acuña, a 23-year-old gymnast from Costa Rica. "But I don't really

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small fish that sharks feed on to flourish. More small fish swimming closer to shore means more sharks nipping at their tails.

Prior to 2022, New York had only recorded a dozen unprovoked bites. Over the last decade, there were just four people bitten by sharks, according to data compiled by the International Shark Attack File, which tracks shark attacks around the world.

Florida is usually the country's leader in shark bites. There were 16 last year, which was twice as many as runner-up New York.

From his elevated perch on the sand at Jones Beach State Park on Thursday, lifeguard Carl Nowicki pointed his gaze out to sea, scanning the water for activity that might attract a hungry shark, such as large schools of bait fish.

"If a drone has spotted a shark, we won't alert the patrons until they're all of the water because we don't want them to freak out," he said. "We'll be very transparent once everyone's on the sand. We don't want to cause a panic at a beach."

Mike Berchoff, who was enjoying the sun and water at Jones Beach, goes into the water more cautiously these days. He doesn't want to be the next beachgoer to be bitten by a shark.

"I just go out up to my waist. That's about it," he said. "I don't go all the way out there."

He's seen more drones taking off lately, which he said provides some reassurance that beachgoers would be alerted of danger.

The first known encounter of the summer happened Monday, when a 15-year old girl felt a bite on her leg while swimming. At a different beach soon after, another teen had to paddle back to shore after something began nibbling on his toes.

A day later, on the Fourth of July, two men reported bites possibly by sharks in two separate encounters 60 miles (97 kilometers) apart.

This is not the same kind of horror that terrorized the fictional East Coast town of Amity Island in the terrifying movie thriller "Jaws."

For one thing, it's unlikely the marine animals involved in recent encounters were the fear-inducing great white sharks that linger in deeper waters and are rarely seen close enough to shore to be of real concern.

About a dozen species of sharks swim off the coast of Long Island, none of them considered particularly ferocious, including the sand sharks that are more common in the area and grow to nearly 15 feet (4.6 meters). Their sharp, jagged teeth might cause a fright, but the giant fish are usually docile and typically avoid human contact. A nursery for juvenile sharks is known to exist off Fire Island.

Sand sharks are unlikely to attack humans unless provoked, according to shark biologists. If they do interact with swimmers, it's usually unintentional.

France's small towns are reeling from the spread of rioting. 'Now it's affecting the countryside'

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — After a pleasant evening of wine-tasting — joyfully billed "Grapes and Friends!" — with a hundred or so people and oysters, charcuteries and cheeses, the mayor of the picturesque French town of Quissac was on his way home.

Then his phone rang: Urban unrest that was engulfing France after the deadly police shooting of a teenager on Paris' outskirts, hundreds of kilometers (miles) and a world away to the north, had careened into Quissac's tranquility, too.

In a quick hit-and-run, a small group of people — seemingly no more than four, the mayor says — bombarded the local gendarmes' barracks on Quai de la Gare road with powerful fireworks, denting its metal shutters and setting fire to a cypress tree. In the grander scheme of things, it wasn't much compared to orgies of destruction, arson, looting and rioting unleashed on multitudes of other communities across France in six nights of mayhem. Still, for the town of 3,300 people in the Gard region of southern France,

think about politics.”

AP journalist Salvador Melendez contributed to this report.

White gunman to be sentenced for killing 23 people in a racist Walmart attack in a Texas border city

By MORGAN LEE and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

EL PASO, Texas (AP) — The white Texas gunman who killed 23 people in a racist attack at a Walmart in 2019 is expected to learn his punishment Friday, after victims’ relatives berated him for days over the shooting that targeted Hispanic shoppers on the U.S.-Mexico border.

Patrick Crusius, 24, will likely be sentenced to multiple life terms in federal prison for committing one of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history. However, he could still face the death penalty in a separate case in a Texas state court that has yet to go to trial.

Crusius, who pleaded guilty in February to nearly 50 federal hate crime charges after federal prosecutors took the death penalty off the table, is not expected to make a statement before he is formally sentenced by U.S. District Judge David Guaderrama.

The sentencing phase was taking place not far from the El Paso Walmart where Crusius opened fire with an AK-style semiautomatic rifle. The attack came after Crusius ranted online, warning of a “Hispanic invasion of Texas.”

Some of the victims were citizens of Mexico. In addition to the dead, more than two dozen people were injured and numerous others were severely traumatized as they hid or fled.

Confronting Crusius face-to-face for the first time, several relatives of the victims looked him in the eye and mocked his motivations, telling him his racist pursuits failed.

Amaris Vega, whose aunt was killed and whose mother narrowly survived a softball-sized wound to the chest, railed at Crusius’ “pathetic, sorry manifesto” promising to rid Texas of Hispanics.

“But guess what? You didn’t. You failed,” Vega told him Thursday. “We are still here and we are not going anywhere. And for four years you have been stuck in a city full of Hispanics. ... So let that sink in.”

Margaret Juarez, whose 90-year-old father was slain in the attack and whose mother was wounded but survived, said she found it ironic that Crusius was set to spend his life in prison among inmates from racial and ethnic minorities. She garnered applause from other relatives and survivors in the courtroom as she celebrated their liberty.

“Swim in the waters of prison,” she told Crusius. “Now we’re going to enjoy the sunshine. ... We still have our freedom, in our country.”

One by one, family members this week described how their lives have been upended by grief and pain. Some forgave Crusius. One man displayed photographs of his slain father, insisting the gunman look at them.

Bertha Benavides’ husband of 34 years, Arturo, was among those killed.

“You left children without their parents, you left spouses without their spouses, and we still need them,” she told Crusius.

During the initial statements from victims, Crusius occasionally swiveled in his seat or bobbed his head with little sign of emotion. On Thursday, his eyes appeared to well up as victims condemned the brutality of the shootings and demanded Crusius respond and account for his actions. At one point, Crusius consulted with a defense attorney at his side and gestured that he would not answer.

The attack was the deadliest of a dozen mass shootings in the U.S. linked to hate crimes since 2006, according to a database compiled by The Associated Press, USA Today and Northeastern University.

Before the shooting, Crusius appeared consumed by the nation’s immigration debate, tweeting #Build-theWall and posts praising then-President Donald Trump’s hardline border policies. He went further in his rant posted before the attack, sounding warnings that Hispanics were going to take over the government and economy.

In the years since the shooting, Republicans have described migrants crossing the southern U.S. border as an "invasion," waving off critics who say the rhetoric fuels anti-immigrant views and violence.

As the sentencing phase got underway, some advocates for immigrant rights made new appeals for politicians to soften their rhetoric on immigration. Republicans, including Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, have pushed for more aggressive actions to harden the southern U.S. border.

The people who were killed ranged in age from a 15-year-old high school athlete to several elderly grandparents. They included immigrants, a retired city bus driver, teachers, tradesmen including a former iron worker, and several Mexican nationals who had crossed the U.S. border on routine shopping trips.

Two teenage girls recounted their narrow escape from Crusius' rampage as they participated in a fundraiser for their youth soccer team outside the store. Parents were wounded and the soccer coach, Guillermo Garcia, died months later from injuries suffered in the attack.

Both youths said they still are haunted by their fear of another shooting when they are in public venues. "He was shot at close range by a coward and there was his innocent blood, everywhere," said Kathleen Johnson, whose husband David was among the victims. "I don't know when I'll be the same. ... The pain you have caused is indescribable."

Weber reported from Austin, Texas.

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter mark 77th wedding anniversary at home in Plains, Georgia

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter are marking their 77th wedding anniversary with a quiet Friday at their south Georgia home, extending their record as the longest-married first couple ever as both nonagenarians face significant health challenges.

The 39th president is 98 and has been in home hospice care since February. The former first lady is 95 and has dementia. The Carter family has not offered details of either Jimmy or Rosalynn Carter's condition but has said they both have enjoyed time with each other and a stream of family members, along with occasional visits from close friends, in recent months.

"As we have looked back at their legacy, it has been really wonderful to see the outpouring of support and respect and love," grandson Jason Carter said recently. "That word love is really the one that defines certainly their personal relationship, but also the way they approach this world."

Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter have been on the American and international stage together for a half-century. What they described as "full partnership" began years earlier in the Carter family farm business before his political career and their decades of global humanitarian work since leaving the White House in 1981 and establishing The Carter Center the following year.

Through the center, Jimmy Carter conducted multiple diplomatic missions, working with the blessings of his Oval Office successors, even as he sometimes rankled them. The former president and center employees have monitored at least 114 elections across Asia, Africa and the Americas since 1989. They have recently turned their efforts to U.S. elections.

Among their public health outreach, the center's Guinea worm eradication program has nearly conquered the water-borne parasite once prevalent in the developing world. Known cases measured in the millions in the mid-1980s when Jimmy Carter set a goal of eradicating Guinea worm disease. There were fewer than two dozen cases in 2022 and, as of earlier this spring, the center had yet to document a case in 2023.

Rosalynn Carter, meanwhile, took her signature policy issue — mental health treatment and advocacy — beyond the White House and established an annual fellowship for journalists to concentrate on mental health reporting. She also advocated widely for better services for caregivers, a focus the Carter family highlighted earlier this year when they announced the former first lady had dementia.

Beyond the Carter Center, the couple became the most famous volunteers for Habitat for Humanity,

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the international outfit that builds, repairs and renovates homes for low-income people. The Carters first volunteered for Habitat in 1984, taking a bus from Georgia to the New York City worksite along with other volunteers. They would soon begin hosting annual builds bearing the former president's name, donning hardhats with volunteers into their late 80s and early 90s.

"Everything they've done is really just an extension of what they started and who they were in the White House," said Donna Brazile, a former Democratic Party chairwoman who got her start in politics on Carter's presidential campaigns. "Jimmy and Rosalynn Carter are just good, decent people."

The Carters married July 7, 1946, in their hometown of Plains. But their relationship extends to the cradle. Jimmy Carter's parents were friends of Rosalynn's parents. The future president's mother was the nurse who delivered Eleanor Rosalynn Smith at the Smith family home in 1927. "Miss Lillian" returned to the Smith home a few days later with her eldest son, preschooler Jimmy, to meet the new baby. The Carters moved to a farm in nearby Archery, just outside of Plains, not long after, though the Carter children and Smith children would continue to see each other at school in Plains.

Rosalynn would become a close friend of Jimmy's sister Ruth, who played the part of matchmaker during one of her elder brother's visits back home from the U.S. Naval Academy. Jimmy and Rosalynn married soon after he graduated. They left Plains with no intention of returning other than as visitors. But in 1953, James Earl Carter Sr. died, leaving behind the family's farming and warehouse enterprise. Without consulting Rosalynn, the young lieutenant decided to leave the Navy and move his young family back to Georgia.

The future president, who became an advocate for women's rights and nominated more women and non-white people to federal posts than any of his predecessors, later called it inconceivable that he did not consult his wife. Yet over the ensuing years, Rosalynn Carter became a key partner in the family business.

"I knew more on paper about the business than he did. He would take my advice about things," she told The Associated Press in a joint interview with her husband ahead of their 75th anniversary in 2021.

That continued in politics, as Rosalynn Carter proved herself a skillful campaigner and forceful policy advocate in her own right, overcoming her youthful shyness that the former president has depicted in his writing and painting.

"My wife is much more political," he said in the interview.

Beyond their longevity, both Carters credit their long marriage to open communication and their shared Christian faith.

"Every day there needs to be reconciliation," the former president said in 2021. "We don't go to sleep with some remaining differences between us."

The pair also have enjoyed hobbies together for years — sometimes even competitively. Before they became frail, they enjoyed playing tennis, hiking and cycling together. Both prolific writers, they sometimes raced to finish drafts of books. Fishing often involved competition, too, and they continued to fish into their 90s on their property in Plains. They added bird watching in recent decades as they slowed down physically.

For all their common joys, Rosalynn Carter added another component of a successful marriage. "Each should have some space," she said. "That's really important."

First GOP debate next month faces threats of boycott as lower-polling candidates scramble to qualify

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Seven weeks before the premiere debate of the 2024 GOP primary, anxiety is building that the event could prove messy and divisive for the party.

Some candidates, like former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson, are struggling to meet fundraising and polling requirements to make it on stage. He and others are pushing back on a loyalty pledge the Republican Party is insisting candidates sign to participate. And the race's frontrunner, former President Donald Trump, is considering boycotting and holding a competing event instead.

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That's turning what is typically the highly anticipated opener of the election season into a source of uncertainty for the candidates and broader party. The frustration is particularly acute for candidates who hoped to use the forum as a powerful opportunity to confront Trump and try to blunt his momentum.

"If the outcome of all of these machinations is a very limited field and no Trump in the first debate, it's hard to see how that can be successful," Hutchinson said in an interview. Still, he said he was confident he will make it to the stage, even though he said he has only received contributions from "over" 5,000 donors.

"We're not there yet. We've got a ways to go. And we fully intend to get there," he said.

The Republican National Committee has said that, in order to participate in the Aug. 23 debate in Milwaukee, candidates must have received contributions from at least 40,000 individual donors, with at least 200 unique donors in 20 or more states. They also must earn at least 1% in three high-quality national polls, or a mix of national and early-state polls, between July 1 and August 21.

Candidates will also have to sign a pledge "agreeing to support the eventual party nominee," according to an RNC press release, and one agreeing not to participate in any non-RNC sanctioned debate for the remainder of the election cycle.

"Our criteria is very clear, we are ensuring quality polls are used to determine which candidates make the debate stage and we are confident that there will be enough polls for our candidates to qualify," said RNC spokeswoman Emma Vaughn.

The candidates who say they have qualified so far include Trump, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley and entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy. Some lesser-known candidates, such as conservative radio host Larry Elder, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum and Miami Mayor Francis Suarez, appear unlikely to make the cutoffs.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, who launched his campaign on June 7, has not yet released a tally of donors, but his campaign said it had raised "well into five digits" in the weeks since his announcement.

"Getting in late made it more difficult, but we're confident we'll get there," said Pence spokesman Devin O'Malley.

As part of that effort, the campaign focused on direct mail, aided by the list it has rented from Pence's nonprofit, Advancing American Freedom. That group had well over 40,000 donors, and Pence aides are hopeful those donors will also give to the former vice president's campaign.

He's also been holding a series of fundraisers, including one in Boston next week that will be hosted by top Massachusetts Republican donor Bob Reynolds, the CEO of Putnam Investments.

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who has also expressed confidence he will hit the benchmarks, has pitched himself as the candidate most qualified to directly take on Trump onstage. While Trump's threats to boycott have complicated that argument, Christie's campaign has nonetheless urged donors to give even \$1 to help him qualify.

Anthony Scaramucci, the financier who served briefly as Trump's White House communications director and is now supporting Christie, recently encouraged even those who have no intention of voting for the former New Jersey governor to nonetheless chip in.

"Whether you're a Republican or Democrat, whether you would vote for Chris or wouldn't vote for Chris, we need someone onstage to tell the truth and put a stop to this nonsense," he said during a recent podcast interview with the candidate.

ESPN host Stephen A. Smith has urged his followers to do the same. Smith told The Associated Press that he's not endorsing any candidate but feels it is "imperative to have Christie onstage for several reasons."

"Christie's presence will force both Trump and DeSantis to defend their positions in ways others may be unable to pull off," he said in an email, adding that watching Christie tussle with the likes of Trump and DeSantis would "be must-see TV, in my opinion."

At the same time, Christie has criticized Trump for threatening to boycott.

"He should show up because he owes it to the Republican Party and the voters of the Republican Party to stand up and defend his record," he said on CNN Thursday, urging viewers to visit his website, "donate to me, make sure I'm on that stage, because, if I am, I will raise those issues right to the president's face."

Trump, according to campaign officials, has yet to make a final decision on his plans. But he has indi-

cated both publicly and privately that he is not inclined to participate, and aides have been considering options for an alternative event.

DeSantis said Thursday night that he planned to participate in the debate “regardless” of Trump’s decision. “I hope everybody who’s eligible comes. I think it’s an important part of the process and I look forward to being able to be on the stage,” he said in an interview with Fox News.

This wouldn’t be the first time Trump has skipped a major GOP debate. During his 2016 campaign, Trump boycotted the final GOP gathering before the Iowa caucuses and instead held his own campaign event, a flashy telethon-style gathering in Iowa that was billed as a fundraiser for veterans. While the event earned him headlines and drew attention away from his rivals, Trump went on to lose the Iowa caucuses to Ted Cruz — a loss some supporters blamed on his debate decision.

In 2020, Trump pulled out of the second general election debate against Joe Biden after the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates sought to make it virtual because of the coronavirus pandemic. Trump had recently tested positive for COVID-19, but said he would only debate onstage.

Lower-polling candidates during the crowded Democratic primary voiced similar frustrations about the debate process in 2019. But this year’s GOP drama is unique in part because the party is requiring that candidates promise to support the eventual nominee, which has given pause to Trump’s fiercest critics.

The RNC has so far declined to release the actual language of the pledge it intends to make candidates sign. It is expected to be similar to 2016, when candidates had to affirm that, if they did not win the nomination, they would “endorse the 2016 Republican presidential nominee regardless of who it is” and not run as an independent or accept the nomination of any other party.

So far, only former Texas Rep. Will Hurd has said definitely that he will not sign the pledge because he refuses to support Trump if he becomes the eventual nominee.

Hutchinson, who said he wants to wait to see the pledge’s exact language, said he believes that everyone running should have the chance to appear.

“The first debate particularly should be an open affair where the candidates should be showcased,” he said.

RNC Chair Ronna McDaniel has repeatedly defended the criteria, which came after so many candidates ran in 2016 that debates had to be split in half — with lower-polling candidates participating in an earlier forum.

“Not everybody deserves to be on that debate stage,” she said in a recent interview on Newsmax.

Associated Press reporters Michelle L. Price in New York, Sara Burnett in Chicago and Meg Kinnard in Columbia, South Carolina contributed.

Iowa teen gets life with possibility of parole after 35 years for Spanish teacher’s beating death

By SCOTT McFETRIDGE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — The first of two Iowa teenagers who pleaded guilty to beating their high school Spanish teacher to death with a baseball bat was sentenced Thursday to life with a possibility of parole after 35 years in prison.

A judge sentenced Willard Miller after a sentencing hearing that lasted more than seven hours.

Miller and another teen, Jeremy Goodale, had pleaded guilty in April to the 2021 attack on Nohema Graber. The 66-year-old teacher was fatally beaten while taking her regular afternoon walk in a park in Fairfield.

In sentencing Miller, District Court Judge Shawn Showers acknowledged Miller’s young age but also noted he had “cut Nohema Graber’s precious life short,” devastating her family and the community.

“I find that your intent and actions were sinister and evil. Those acts resulted in the intentional loss of human life in a brutal fashion,” Showers said. “There is no excuse.”

As part of the plea agreement, prosecutors had recommended Miller receive a term of between 30 years and life in prison, with the possibility of parole. Goodale is to be sentenced later.

Before being sentenced, Miller said in court Thursday that he accepted responsibility for the killing and apologized to the Graber family.

"I would like to apologize for my actions, first and foremost to the family," he said. "I am sincerely sorry for the distress I have caused you and the devastation I have caused your family."

Miller also apologized to the Fairfield community, his own family, Goodale's family and the police.

"I'm realizing just the magnitude of my actions, and I know it's wrong and I knew it was wrong and yet I still carried through," he said. "I still did what I did, and I accept responsibility for that."

Ten of Graber's relatives either read or submitted victim impact statements that described the woman as kind, caring and devoted to her family, students and church. Several also blamed Miller and Goodale for the recent death of Graber's husband, who suffered from cancer but delayed treatment amid his depression over the murder.

"I hope you open your soul to the lord and maybe ask for forgiveness there first because you're on a spiral straight to hell," Graber's brother-in-law, Jim Graber said while staring at Miller.

Miller and Goodale killed Graber on Nov. 2, 2021, in a park where the teacher routinely walked after school. Prosecutors said the teens, who were 16 at the time, were angry at Graber because of a bad grade she had given Miller.

Under Goodale's agreement to plead guilty, prosecutors had recommended a sentence of between 25 years and life with the possibility of parole. Goodale's sentencing is scheduled for August, but his lawyers have sought a delay in the hearing.

Thursday's sentencing hearing at the Jefferson County Courthouse in Fairfield initially focused on investigators who described how officers found Graber's body. They also talked about social media postings that led them to question and then arrest Miller and Goodale. Prosecutors also played recordings of police interviews with both teens and displayed photographs of the crime scene, including graphic images of Graber's body.

Iowa Division of Criminal Investigation agent Trent Vileta recalled police finding Graber's body under a tarp in Chautauqua Park. A wheelbarrow and railroad tie had been placed over the tarp, making it hard to see the body, with only a shoe and a hand visible.

After pulling back part of the tarp, Vileta said the only significant injury to Graber appeared to be a severe head wound.

In the interview, Miller initially said he knew nothing about Graber's disappearance but later said he saw other people carrying her body in the park.

Goodale testified earlier that he and Miller had planned the killing for about two weeks and that both of them struck the victim and then hid her body. Goodale said Miller had initiated the plan. Miller admitted helping but denied hitting Graber.

The two were charged as adults, but because of their age they were not subject to a mandatory sentence of life without parole for first-degree murder. Miller is now 17 and Goodale is 18.

Fairfield, a city of 9,400 people, is about 100 miles (160 kilometers) southeast of Des Moines.

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.

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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 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."

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.

Belarus says Wagner chief who staged mutiny is in Russia, raising questions about Kremlin's strategy

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 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. But Russian media have reported he was recently seen at his offices in St. Petersburg.

It was not clear if Prigozhin's presence in Russia would violate the deal, which allowed the head of the Wagner Group military contractor to move to Belarus in exchange for ending the rebellion and a promise of amnesty for him and his troops. But the reports signaled that the agreement may have allowed him to finalize his affairs in Russia.

If that's true, it could suggest the threat posed by Prigozhin has not yet been fully defused and that the Kremlin is treading carefully with him until it can figure out what to do with troops who may still be loyal to him. Putin has said that Wagner troops can join the Russian military, retire from service or move to Belarus.

But much about the the agreement, which was brokered by Lukashenko, remains murky.

Last week, Lukashenko said the mercenary leader was in Belarus, but on Thursday he told international reporters that Prigozhin was in St. Petersburg and could also travel to Moscow if he wishes, while 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 Russian territory.

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

Asked where Prigozhin is, Putin spokesman Dmitry Peskov shrugged off the question, saying that the

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Kremlin has neither the desire nor the means to track his movements — but reaffirmed that the deal that ended the mutiny envisaged his move to Belarus.

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

The Kremlin has played down the fact that Prigozhin escaped punishment for his mutiny while other Putin critics have been met with harsh prison sentences, exile or even death, saying that the deal with the Wagner chief was necessary to avoid massive bloodshed.

The Belarusian leader shrugged off suggestions that Putin might order Prigozhin killed, saying: "If you think that Putin is so vicious and vindictive to finish him off, no, it's not going to happen."

On Wednesday, Russian online newspapers Fontanka and Izvestia posted videos and photos of Prigozhin's opulent mansion in Russia's second-largest city that showed stacks of cash and gold bullion. The images appeared to be part of the authorities' efforts to denigrate Prigozhin, who has postured as an enemy of corrupt elites even though he has owed his wealth to Putin.

A photo hanging in the mansion showed a lineup of decapitated heads. In one published image, an oversized souvenir sledgehammer could also be seen with the inscription "for important negotiations." The sledgehammer has become a symbol of Wagner after reports its troops used the tool to beat defectors to death.

The Russian media also published a collection of selfies that showed him posing in various wigs, fake beards 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 his country would lead to its destabilization 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.

Belarusian political analyst Valery Karbalevich argued, however, that Lukashenko could feel uneasy about Wagner's presence on his turf. "If this structure rebelled against its master once, it can do it again and again and march on Minsk instead of marching on Moscow," Karbalevich said.

The Belarusian president dismissed 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 a 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 his longtime foes — Russian defense minister Sergei Shoigu and the chief of the military's general staff, Gen. Valery Gerasimov, whose handling of the war in Ukraine he criticized.

The Wagner fighters faced little resistance, smashing occasional roadblocks. They also downed 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. It wasn't immediately clear whether Shoigu and Gerasimov retained Putin's favor after vanishing from public view during the mutiny, but so far they have kept their positions.

Lukashenko said he warned Prigozhin that he and his troops would be destroyed if they failed to make a quick 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, and the Belarusian leader reaffirmed Thursday that a "certain

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number" of them have been flown to Belarus and the rest will be delivered before the year's end.

Lukashenko said that Russia would consult him on any possible use of those weapons, adding that it could only happen in response to an act aggression by NATO against Russia or Belarus.

The Belarusian leader noted that "these weapons serve strictly defensive purposes."

He added: "Don't touch us, and we will never use these deadly weapons."

What is Threads? All your questions about Meta's new Twitter rival, answered

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Threads, a text-based app built by Meta to rival Twitter, is live.

The app, billed as the text version of Meta's photo-sharing platform Instagram, became available Wednesday night to users in more than 100 countries — including the U.S., Britain, Australia, Canada and Japan. Despite some early glitches, 30 million people had signed up before noon on Thursday, Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg said on Threads.

New arrivals to the platform include celebrities like Oprah, pop star Shakira and chef Gordon Ramsay — as well as corporate accounts from Taco Bell, Netflix, Spotify, the Washington Post and other media outlets.

Threads, which Meta says provides "a new, separate space for real-time updates and public conversations," arrives at a time when many are looking for Twitter alternatives to escape Elon Musk's raucous oversight of the platform since acquiring it last year for \$44 billion. But Meta's new app has also raised data privacy concerns, and is notably unavailable in the European Union.

Here's what you need to know about Threads.

HOW CAN I USE THREADS?

Threads is now available for download in Apple and Google Android app stores for people in more than 100 countries.

Threads was built by the Instagram team, so Instagram users can log into Threads through their Instagram account. Your username and verification status will carry over, according to the platform, but you will also have options to customize other areas of your profile — including whether or not you want to follow the same people that you do on Instagram.

Because Threads and Instagram are so closely linked, it's also important to be cautious of account deletion. According to Threads' supplemental privacy policy, you can deactivate your profile at any time, "but your Threads profile can only be deleted by deleting your Instagram account."

CAN I USE THREADS IF I DON'T HAVE AN INSTAGRAM ACCOUNT?

For now, only Instagram users can create Threads accounts. If you want to access Threads, you will have to sign up for Instagram first.

While this may receive some pushback, VP and research director at Forrester Mike Proulx said making Threads an extension of Instagram was a smart move on Meta's part.

"It's piquing (user) curiosity," Proulx said, noting that Instagram users are getting alerts about their followers joining Threads — causing more and more people to sign up. "That's one of the reasons why Threads got over 10 million people to sign up in just a seven hour period" after launching.

Still, Proulx added, maintaining momentum and continuing to capture user attention past the initial curiosity bump will be crucial down the line — noting "the long term nature of threads is what's going to ultimately predict its success or failure."

HOW IS THREADS SIMILAR TO TWITTER?

Threads' microblogging experience is very similar to Twitter. Users can repost, reply to or quote a thread, for example, and can see the number of likes and replies that a post has received. "Threads" can run up to 500 characters — compared with Twitter's 280-character threshold — and can include links, photos and videos up to five minutes long.

In early replies on Threads, Zuckerberg said making the app "a friendly place" will be a key to success — adding that that was "one reason why Twitter never succeeded as much as I think it should have, and

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we want to do it differently.”

IS TWITTER SEEKING LEGAL ACTION AGAINST META?

According to a letter obtained by Semafor on Thursday, Twitter has threatened legal action against Meta over Threads. In the letter, which was addressed to Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg and dated Wednesday, Alex Spiro, an attorney representing Twitter, accused Meta of unlawfully using Twitter’s trade secrets and other intellectual property by hiring former Twitter employees to create a “copycat” app.

Meta spokesperson Andy Stone responded to the report of Spiro’s letter on Threads Thursday afternoon, writing, “no one on the Threads engineering team is a former Twitter employee.”

Musk hasn’t directly tweeted about the possibility of legal action, but he has replied to several snarky takes on the Threads launch. The Twitter owner responded to one tweet suggesting that Meta’s app was built largely through the use of the copy and paste function, with a laughing emoji.

Twitter CEO Linda Yaccarino has also not publicly commented on Wednesday’s letter, but seemingly appeared to address Threads’ launch in a Thursday tweet — writing that “the Twitter community can never be duplicated.”

HASN’T THIS BEEN DONE BEFORE?

The similarities of Meta’s new text-based app suggests that the company is working to directly challenge Twitter. The tumultuous ownership has resulted in a series of unpopular changes that have turned off users and advertisers, some of whom are searching for Twitter alternatives.

Threads is the latest Twitter rival to emerge in this landscape following Bluesky, Mastodon and Spill.

HOW DOES THREADS MODERATE CONTENT?

According to Meta, Threads will use the same safety measures deployed on Instagram — which includes enforcing Instagram’s community guidelines and providing tools to control who can mention or reply to users.

Content warnings — on search queries ranging from conspiracy theory groups to misinformation about COVID-19 vaccinations — also appear to be similar to Instagram.

WHAT ARE THE 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.

Threads also isn’t available in the European Union right now, which has strict data privacy rules.

Meta informed Ireland’s Data Privacy Commission, Meta’s main privacy regulator for the EU, that it has no plans yet to launch Threads in the 27-nation bloc, commission spokesman Graham Doyle said. The company said it 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.

WHATS THE FUTURE FOR THREADS?

Success for Threads is far from guaranteed. Industry watchers point to Meta’s track record of starting standalone apps that were later shut down — including an Instagram messaging app also called “Threads” that shut down less than two years after its 2019 launch, Proulx notes.

Still, Proulx and others say the new app could be a significant headache for Musk and Twitter.

“The euphoria around a new service and this initial explosion will probably settle down. But it is apparent that this alternative is here to stay and will prove to be a worthy rival given all of Twitter’s woes,” technology analyst Paolo Pescatore of PP Foresight said, noting that combining Twitter-style features with Instagram’s look and feel could drive user engagement.

Threads is in its early days, however, and much depends on user feedback. Pescatore believes the close tie between Instagram and Threads might not resonate with everyone. The rollout of new features will also be key.

“The real test is not if we can build up a lot of hype, but if you all find enough value in the app to keep using it over time,” Instagram head Adam Mosseri wrote Thursday in a Threads post. He also acknowledged, as many users have already done, that there are “tons of basics” missing, including hashtags and

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direct messaging between users. "Full disclosure, it'll take time."

IS AP ON THREADS?

You can find AP News on Threads here.

AP Technology Writer Kelvin Chan contributed to this report from London.

Why the US is willing to send Ukraine cluster munitions now

By TARA COPP and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The United States has decided to send cluster munitions to Ukraine to help its military push back Russian forces entrenched along the front lines.

The Biden administration is expected to announce on Friday that it will send thousands of them as part of a new military aid package worth \$800 million, according to people familiar with the decision who were not authorized to discuss it publicly before the official announcement and spoke on condition of anonymity.

The move will likely trigger outrage from some allies and humanitarian groups that have long opposed the use of cluster bombs.

Proponents argue that Russia has already been using the controversial weapon in Ukraine and that the munitions the U.S. will provide have a reduced dud rate, meaning there will be far fewer unexploded rounds that can result in unintended civilian deaths.

Here is a look at what cluster munitions are, where they have been used and why the U.S. plans to provide them to Ukraine now.

WHAT IS A CLUSTER MUNITION?

A cluster munition is a bomb that opens in the air and releases smaller "bomblets" across a wide area. The bomblets are designed to take out tanks and equipment, as well as troops, hitting multiple targets at the same time.

The munitions are launched by the same artillery weapons that the U.S. and allies have already provided to Ukraine for the war — such as howitzers — and the type of cluster munition that the U.S. is planning to send is based on a common 155 mm shell that is already widely in use across the battlefield.

In previous conflicts, cluster munitions have had a high dud rate, which meant that thousands of the smaller unexploded bomblets remained behind and killed and maimed people decades later. The U.S. last used its cluster munitions in battle in Iraq in 2003, and decided not to continue using them as the conflict shifted to more urban environments with more dense civilian populations.

On Thursday, Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said the Defense Department has "multiple variants" of the munitions and "the ones that we are considering providing would not include older variants with (unexploding) rates that are higher than 2.35%."

WHY PROVIDE THEM NOW?

For more than a year the U.S. has dipped into its own stocks of traditional 155 howitzer munitions and sent more than 2 million rounds to Ukraine. Allies across the globe have provided hundreds of thousands more.

A 155 mm round can strike targets 15 to 20 miles (24 to 32 kilometers) away, making them a munition of choice for Ukrainian ground troops trying to hit enemy targets from a distance. Ukrainian forces are burning through thousands of the rounds a day battling the Russians.

Yehor Cherniev, a member of Ukraine's parliament, told reporters at a German Marshall Fund event in the U.S. this spring that Kyiv would likely need to fire 7,000 to 9,000 of the rounds daily in intensified counteroffensive fighting. Providing that many puts substantial pressure on U.S. and allied stocks.

The cluster bomb is an attractive option because it would help Ukraine destroy more targets with fewer rounds, and since the U.S. hasn't used them in conflict since Iraq, it has large amounts of them in storage it can access quickly, said Ryan Brobst, a research analyst for the Foundation for Defense of Democracies.

A March 2023 letter from top House and Senate Republicans to the Biden administration said the U.S. may have as many as 3 million cluster munitions available for use, and urged the White House to send

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the munitions to alleviate pressure on U.S. war supplies.

"Cluster munitions are more effective than unitary artillery shells because they inflict damage over a wider area," Brobst said. "This is important for Ukraine as they try to clear heavily fortified Russian positions."

Tapping into the U.S. stores of cluster munitions could address Ukraine's shell shortage and alleviate pressure on the 155 mm stockpiles in the U.S. and elsewhere, Brobst said.

IS USING THEM A WAR CRIME?

Use of cluster bombs itself does not violate international law, but using them against civilians can be a violation. As in any strike, determining a war crime requires looking at whether the target was legitimate and if precautions were taken to avoid civilian casualties.

"The part of international law where this starts playing (a role), though, is indiscriminate attacks targeting civilians," Human Rights Watch's associate arms director Mark Hiznay told The Associated Press. "So that's not necessarily related to the weapons, but the way the weapons are used."

A convention banning the use of cluster bombs has been joined by more than 120 countries, which agreed not to use, produce, transfer or stockpile the weapons and to clear them after they've been used. The U.S., Russia and Ukraine haven't signed on.

WHERE HAVE THEY BEEN USED?

The bombs have been deployed in many recent conflicts, including by U.S. forces.

The U.S. initially considered cluster bombs an integral part of its arsenal during the invasion of Afghanistan that began in 2001, according to HRW. The group estimated that the U.S.-led coalition dropped more than 1,500 cluster bombs in Afghanistan during the first three years of the conflict.

The Defense Department had been due by 2019 to stop use of any cluster munitions with a rate of unexploded ordnance greater than 1%. But the Trump administration rolled back that policy, allowing commanders to approve use of such munitions.

Syrian government troops often used cluster munitions — supplied by Russia — against opposition strongholds during that country's civil war, frequently hitting civilian targets and infrastructure. And Israel used them in civilian areas in south Lebanon, including during the 1982 invasion.

During the monthlong 2006 war with Hezbollah, HRW and the United Nations accused Israel of firing as many as 4 million cluster munitions into Lebanon. That left unexploded ordnance that threatens Lebanese civilians to this day.

The Saudi-led coalition in Yemen has been criticized for its use of cluster bombs in the war with the Iran-backed Houthi rebels that has ravaged the southern Arabian country.

In 2017, Yemen was the second deadliest country for cluster munitions after Syria, according to the U.N. Children have been killed or maimed long after the munitions originally fell, making it difficult to know the true toll.

In the 1980s, the Russians made heavy use of cluster bombs during their 10-year invasion of Afghanistan. As a result of decades of war, the Afghan countryside remains one of the most heavily mined countries in the world.

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN UKRAINE?

Russian forces have used cluster bombs in Ukraine on a number of occasions, according to Ukrainian government leaders, observers and humanitarian groups. And human rights groups have said Ukraine has also used them.

During the early days of the war, there were repeated instances of Russian cluster bombs cited by groups such as Human Rights Watch, including when they hit near a preschool in the northeastern city of Okhtyrka. The open-source intelligence group Bellingcat said its researchers found cluster munitions in that strike as well as multiple cluster attacks in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, also in the northeast.

More recently, in March, a Russian missile and drone barrage hit a number of urban areas, including a sustained bombardment in Bakhmut, in the eastern Donetsk region. Just west of there, shelling and missile strikes hit the Ukrainian-held city of Kostiantynivka and AP journalists in the city saw at least four injured people taken to a local hospital. Police said Russian forces attacked the town with S-300 missiles

and cluster munitions.

Just a month later, Donetsk Gov. Pavlo Kyrylenko accused Russian forces of attacking a town with cluster munitions, wounding one person. An AP and Frontline database called War Crimes Watch Ukraine has cataloged how Russia has used cluster bombs.

Britney Spears says Wembanyama's security struck her in Las Vegas, Spurs rookie says he was grabbed

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

LAS VEGAS (AP) — San Antonio Spurs rookie Victor Wembanyama said Thursday he believes Britney Spears grabbed him from behind as he was walking into a restaurant at a Las Vegas casino, and that the security detail he was with pushed the pop star away.

Wembanyama said he wasn't told that Spears was the person who grabbed him until hours later, and that he never actually saw her.

Spears, who filed a report with Las Vegas police, said in posts on Twitter and Instagram that the run-in was "super embarrassing," and denied grabbing Wembanyama, saying she only "tapped him on the shoulder to get his attention."

She said she had recognized him earlier in the evening and when seeing the No. 1 pick in this year's NBA draft — a 7-foot-3 French standout who is entering the NBA with as much acclaim as anyone since LeBron James 20 years ago — and she "decided to approach him and congratulate him on his success."

Spears said, "His security then back handed me in the face without looking back, in front of a crowd. Nearly knocking me down and causing my glasses off my face."

Police said a report was filed on an incident at the Aria Resort & Casino, but gave no further details.

Spears' attorney Mathew Rosengart declined comment, citing the police investigation.

Wembanyama said security advised him to not stop for anyone as he walked into the restaurant, mindful that pausing could cause a stir and allow a crowd to build.

"Something did happen, a little bit, when I was walking with some security from the team to some restaurant," Wembanyama said. "We were in the hall. There was a lot of people, so people were calling (at) me, obviously. There was one person who was calling me but we talked before with security.

"I couldn't stop. That person was calling me, 'Sir, sir,' and that person grabbed me from behind," Wembanyama said. "I didn't see what happened because I was walking straight and didn't stop. That person grabbed me from behind — not on my shoulder, she grabbed me from behind. I just know the security pushed her away. I don't know with how much force but security pushed her away. I didn't stop to look so I could walk in and enjoy a nice dinner."

Spears said in her social media posts that she gets swarmed by people all the time, including that same night, but her "security team didn't hit any of them."

TMZ first reported details of the event that took place Wednesday night near a restaurant at the casino. TMZ said Spears was in a group of four trying to enter a restaurant for dinner and that she "was swarmed by fans as she entered the casino." TMZ's account of the encounter with Wembanyama was similar to Spears'; the site said she tapped him on the shoulder and wound up being struck in the face and having her glasses knocked off.

"I didn't know for a couple hours, but when I came back to the hotel ... I thought it was no big deal, and then security of the Spurs told me it was Britney Spears," Wembanyama said. "At first, I was like, 'You're joking,' but yeah, it turns out it was Britney Spears. I never saw her face. I just kept walking straight."

He was unaware that the situation had made headlines until Thursday.

"I saw the news obviously this morning. I woke up to a couple of phone calls," Wembanyama said.

Wembanyama will make his NBA Summer League debut with the Spurs on Friday night in Las Vegas against the Charlotte Hornets. He signed some autographs for fans at the Aria on Wednesday night and did the same for a small number of onlookers as he entered a local high school for practice with the Spurs on Thursday morning.

AP Entertainment Writer Andrew Dalton in Los Angeles and Associated Press Writer Ken Ritter in Las Vegas contributed to this report.

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

A Texas man reported missing as a teen in 2015 was only missing for 1 day, police say

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — The case of a Texas man who was reported missing as a teenager in 2015 and found alive last week at a church took an unexpected turn Thursday when police revealed it all was a hoax — the man was only gone for a day, but he and his mother maintained the ruse for eight years by using false names.

Prosecutors did not file any charges against Janie Santana and her son, Rudolph "Rudy" Farias IV, but the investigation is continuing, Houston police detectives said. They gave few other details about where they believe the case could lead.

Santana's family said they suspected Farias was not missing and blamed Santana for keeping him away from them all these years.

"We're upset that (authorities) are not going to do anything," Pauline Sanchez Rodriguez, Farias' aunt, said as she and other family members stood outside Houston police headquarters.

Santana did not return a telephone call seeking comment Thursday.

The announcement came a week after police said they found Farias after receiving a call about a person lying on the ground in front of a southeast Houston church.

Authorities had not previously said where Farias spent the past eight years since he was reported missing as a 17-year-old who took his two dogs for a walk near his family's home in northeast Houston and never came back. Now 25, he was hospitalized after police found him last week, and detectives interviewed him and his mother on Wednesday.

Investigators concluded Farias returned home the day after he was reported missing but "the mother, Janie, continued to deceive police by remaining adamant that Rudy was still missing," Lt. Christopher Zamora said during a news conference.

During the past eight years, Farias and his mother had various interactions with officers, police said.

"During these contacts, fictitious names and date of births were given — misleading the officers — and Rudy would remain missing," Zamora said.

After Farias was reported missing, Houston police and Texas Equusearch, a civilian search and recovery team, looked for him without success, although his dogs were later found.

In the years following, there were several possible sightings of Farias, according to a private investigator hired by Santana a few months after he went missing. They included one sighting in 2018 that police responded to, but the investigation remained open as a missing person case.

Rodriguez said her late mother, Rosa Sosa Rodriguez, had been living with Santana and kept telling relatives that Farias was living in the house with them.

"My mom would always tell me, 'Rudy is here ... He's there. He's in that room,'" Rodriguez said. "And Janie said, 'No she's lying, she's losing it.'"

Zamora said Santana claimed the person friends and family were seeing was not Farias but her nephew, but "we disputed that."

Rodriguez and other family members also accused Santana of not presenting an accurate picture of herself to people and of not caring about family members.

Court records show Santana has used at least three different names and was accused of mistreating her mother while they lived together. During a 2020 dispute over her mother's guardianship, Santana's sisters accused her of forcing their mother to live in a home that had "animal urine and feces throughout"

and causing her to have "significant bed sores" because she "did not have a bed and slept on the couch."

In a 2011 affidavit filed in a court case in which Santana's marriage was declared "null and void" because a judge concluded she was married to another man at the time, Rodriguez said her sister "has always been a pathological liar. She lies about everything."

Rodriguez said she and other family members have yet to speak with Farias and they remain worried about him.

"I just want him safe," said Sylvia Sanchez Lopez, another aunt of Farias.

But Zamora, with the police department's Missing Persons Unit, said Farias was safe and he had decided to stay "with his mother by choice."

Police Chief Troy Finner said when Farias was reported missing, he was 17 years old, which is considered an adult in Texas. Now in his twenties, Farias is "a grown man," he said.

After police announced that Farias had been found, Santana released a statement saying, he "is receiving the care he needs to overcome his trauma, but at this time, he is nonverbal and not able to communicate with us." She also asked for privacy.

Finner declined Thursday to answer questions about the mental health of Farias or his mother and would not say what might have motivated their actions. He said police are "right at the beginning" of their investigation into what happened.

Police also said patrol officers responded to a burglary call Wednesday night at the family's home and that it is now part of their investigation.

Follow Juan A. Lozano on Twitter: <https://twitter.com/juanlozano70>

DeSantis raised \$20 million in the 6 weeks since announcing his presidential run, his campaign says

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis raised \$20 million in the first six weeks after he announced his run for president, his campaign said Thursday.

The formidable haul for DeSantis indicates a well of support despite a glitchy campaign launch on Twitter back in May. Still, polling shows he's in a distant second place for the 2024 Republican nomination behind former President Donald Trump.

Trump's campaign said Wednesday he raised \$35 million during the second quarter of the year, nearly double what he raised during the first three months of the year. The money was raised from April through June between his main campaign account and a joint fundraising account, which is used for expenses like paying his legal bills. Trump's fundraising has exploded since he was indicted in New York and Florida, and he faces additional investigations that could further juice his ability to raise money.

DeSantis has maintained a busy schedule of fundraising and campaigning in early primary states and beyond amid a deepening rivalry between him and Trump.

He sparked controversy last week with a video slamming Trump for his past support of gay and transgender people, which a prominent group of LGBT conservatives said "ventured into homophobic territory."

Never Back Down, a super PAC backing DeSantis, is separately raising money that will benefit the candidate. The group can't legally work with DeSantis but is orchestrating much of the on-the-ground organizing that can be crucial to victory in early primary states.

Other Republican presidential contenders have not yet released their fundraising numbers for the period from April 1 through June 30. Candidates have until July 15 to submit their filings to the Federal Election Commission.

The US will provide cluster munitions to Ukraine as part of a new military aid package: AP sources

By NOMAAN MERCHANT, LOLITA C. BALDOR and ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration has decided to provide cluster munitions to Ukraine and is expected to announce on Friday that the Pentagon will send thousands as part of a new military aid package worth up to \$800 million for the war effort against Russia, according to people familiar with the decision.

The decision comes despite widespread concerns that the controversial bombs can cause civilian casualties. The Pentagon will provide munitions that have a reduced “dud rate,” meaning there will be far fewer unexploded rounds that can result in unintended civilian deaths.

U.S. officials said Thursday they expect the military aid to Ukraine will be announced on Friday. The weapons will come from Pentagon stocks and will also include Bradley and Stryker armored vehicles and an array of ammunition, such as rounds for howitzers and the High Mobility Artillery Rocket System, known as HIMARS, officials said.

Long sought by Ukraine, cluster bombs are weapons that open in the air, releasing submunitions, or “bomblets,” that are dispersed over a large area and are intended to wreak destruction on multiple targets at once.

The officials and others familiar with the decision were not authorized to publicly discuss the move before the official announcement and spoke on condition of anonymity.

Ukrainian officials have asked for the weapons to aid their campaign to push through lines of Russian troops and make gains in the ongoing counteroffensive. Russian forces are already using cluster munitions on the battlefield and in populated civilian areas, U.S. officials have said.

According to the International Committee of the Red Cross, some cluster munitions leave behind “bomblets” that have a high rate of failure to explode — up to 40% in some cases. U.S. officials said Thursday that the rate of unexploded ordnance for the munitions that will be going to Ukraine is less than 3% and therefore will mean fewer threats left behind to civilians.

At Pentagon briefing Thursday, Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said he had no announcement to make about cluster munitions. He said the Defense Department has “multiple variants” of the munitions and “the ones that we are considering providing would not include older variants with (unexploding) rates that are higher than 2.35%.”

Ryder would not say whether Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has reached out to NATO counterparts to address some of their concerns on the use of cluster munitions. Ryder said the U.S. is aware of reports that indicate some munitions have higher unexploding rates.

If the decision was made to provide the munitions to Ukraine, he said the U.S. “would be carefully selecting rounds with lower dud rates, for which we have recent testing data.”

Asked how the cluster munitions, if approved, would help Ukraine, Ryder said they can be loaded with charges that can penetrate armor and fragment so they can hit multiple personnel — “a capability that would be useful in any type of offensive operations.” Ryder said the Russians have been using cluster munitions that have a very high dud rate.

Oleksandra Ustinova, a member of Ukraine’s parliament who has been advocating that Washington send more weapons, noted that Ukrainian forces have had to disable mines from much of the territory they are winning back from Russia. As part of that process, Ukrainians will also be able to catch any unexploded ordnance from cluster munitions.

“We will have to de-mine anyway, but it’s better to have this capability,” Ustinova said.

She credited Congress for pushing the administration over several months to change its position on the munitions.

Rep. Michael McCaul, chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, said the move was long overdue.

“Now is the time for the U.S. and its allies to provide Ukraine with the systems it needs from cluster munitions to F-16s to ATACMS in order to aid their critical counteroffensive. Any further delay will cost the

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lives of countless Ukrainians and prolong this brutal war," said McCaul, R-Texas.

The Army Tactical Missile System, known as ATACMS, would give Ukraine the ability to strike Russian targets from as far as about 180 miles (300 kilometers).

Army Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said last week that the U.S. has been thinking about providing the cluster munitions "for a long time."

"The Ukrainians have asked for it, other European countries have provided some of that, the Russians are using it," Milley said during a speech at the National Press Club.

Cluster bombs can be fired by artillery that the U.S. has provided to Ukraine, and the Pentagon has a large stockpile of them.

The last large-scale American use of cluster bombs was during the 2003 invasion of Iraq, according to the Pentagon. But U.S. forces considered them a key weapon during the invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, according to Human Rights Watch. In the first three years of that conflict, it is estimated the U.S.-led coalition dropped more than 1,500 cluster bombs in Afghanistan.

Proponents of banning cluster bombs say they kill indiscriminately and endanger civilians long after their use. Groups have raised alarms about Russia's use of the munitions in Ukraine.

A convention banning the use of cluster bombs has been joined by more than 120 countries who agreed not to use, produce, transfer or stockpile the weapons and to clear them after they've been used.

The United States, Russia and Ukraine are among the countries that have not signed on.

It is not clear how America's NATO allies would view the U.S. providing cluster bombs to Ukraine and whether the issue might prove divisive for their largely united support of Kyiv. More than two-thirds of the 30 countries in the alliance are signatories of the 2010 convention on cluster munitions.

Laura Cooper, a deputy assistant secretary of defense focusing on Russia and Ukraine, recently testified to Congress that the Pentagon has assessed that such munitions would help Kyiv press through Russia's dug-in positions.

____ AP Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee and Associated Press writer Tara Copp contributed to this report.

Missing 2-year-old girl is found dead in an overgrown Detroit alley, ending a massive search

LANSING, Mich. (AP) — A missing 2-year-old Michigan girl who disappeared during an attack on her mother was found dead nearly 100 miles (161 kilometers) away in Detroit, three days after she vanished.

Wynter Cole Smith's body was discovered Wednesday evening by FBI agents in an overgrown alley in a neighborhood on the east side of Detroit, ending a massive search along a major interstate between the city and the state capital.

"I am deeply saddened to report that the search for Wynter Cole Smith has come to an end," said Lansing police Chief Ellery Sosebee. "This investigation has moved from a missing child case to a homicide investigation."

Sosebee declined to offer more details, and he promised that the girl's family will get justice.

"This is not the outcome anyone had hoped for," Sosebee said.

Wynter lived with her mother in Lansing, 90 miles (145 kilometers) west of Detroit. Rashad Trice, 26, was suspected of taking Wynter late Sunday. Police said Trice stabbed the 22-year-old mother before leaving with her car and the child.

He is not the toddler's father, but her mother is a former girlfriend, authorities said.

Wynter wasn't with him when Trice was captured Monday in suburban Detroit following a police chase and crash. He was charged Wednesday with attempted murder and other crimes. Prosecutors announced Thursday that they have charged him with additional counts in connection with fleeing police, including attempting to disarm an officer and resisting an officer.

Trice was denied bond during a court hearing in Ingham County. He also is currently on probation for multiple crimes in Livingston County, including assault and resisting police, according to online Corrections Department records. It wasn't immediately known if he had a lawyer who could comment on the charges.

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Searchers fanned out Wednesday near a highway between Lansing and Detroit to look for the girl. Sosbee said divers, dogs, drones and helicopters were involved in the search, and the FBI posted a \$25,000 reward for information.

"Our teams were searching multiple areas across the state over and over again," said Devin Kowalski, who is in charge of the FBI in Detroit and announced the discovery of Wynter's body.

Wynter's family said in a statement that they are "heartbroken over the loss of our beautiful daughter, granddaughter, cousin, niece, and big sister."

"Wynter's brief but bright life was taken from her unnecessarily, and we will grieve her death forever," they added.

The family, which is planning a Friday evening vigil in Wynter's memory, said they have asked Michigan's Legislature and Gov. Gretchen Whitmer "to consider legislation that further ensures that multiple violent offenders remain in jail or prison, as they are tragically a threat to all of us."

Wisconsin governor's 400-year veto angers opponents in state with long history of creative cuts

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Wisconsin's governor attempted to lock in a school funding increase for the next 400 years by issuing a partial veto that angered his Republican critics and marks the latest creative use of the unique gubernatorial powers in the state.

Wisconsin allows governors to alter certain legislation by replacing words and letters wherever they see fit, and Gov. Tony Evers struck a hyphen and "20" to change the end date for a \$325 per-student spending increase from 2025 to 2425.

With those seemingly simple changes, Evers enacted four centuries of funding increases that cannot be undone unless a court strikes it down or a future Legislature and governor intervene.

"Everybody will shout and scream," said former Democratic Gov. Jim Doyle, "but he's got 'em."

Wisconsin governors have the most expansive partial veto power in the country because, unlike in other states, they can strike nearly any part of a budget bill. That includes wiping out numbers, punctuation and words in spending bills to sometimes create new law that wasn't the intention of the Legislature.

Evers' partial veto extends a school funding increase farther in the future — 402 years — than the United States has been a country — 247 years.

"It's creative for sure," said Bill McCoshen, a lobbyist who previously worked under former Gov. Tommy Thompson.

Creative, but not unprecedented.

Reshaping state budgets through the partial veto is a longstanding act of gamesmanship in Wisconsin between the governor and Legislature, as lawmakers try to craft bills in a way that are largely immune from creative vetoes. Vetoes, even the most outlandish, are almost never overridden because it takes a two-thirds majority of the Legislature to do it.

Republican Assembly Speaker Robin Vos, during a Thursday interview on WISN-AM, vowed to try, though he admitted it would be difficult.

Vos called Evers' 400-year veto "an unprecedented brand-new way to screw the taxpayer ... that was never imagined by a previous governor and certainly wouldn't by anybody who thinks there is a fair process in Wisconsin."

Former Republican Gov. Scott Walker in 2017 used his veto power to extend the deadline of a state program from 2018 to 3018. That came to be known as the "thousand-year veto." He also delayed the start date of another program by 60 years.

The Republican Thompson was known for his use of the "Vanna White" veto, named for the co-host of Wheel of Fortune who flips letters to reveal word phrases. Thompson holds the record for the most partial vetoes by any governor in a single year — 457 in 1991. Evers this year made 51.

Thompson said he would never fault a governor for using their partial veto power.

"People are saying, 'How can he do this?'" Thompson said of the Evers veto. "Well, he did it."

Wisconsin's partial veto is uniquely powerful because it allows the governor to change the intent of the Legislature, just as Evers did, said Kristoffer Shields, director of the Center on the American Governor at Rutgers University. Shields said he plans to cite the latest Evers veto when teaching about executive power.

"Many people in Wisconsin, I suspect, are surprised that the governor can do this," Shields said. "And now that we know he can do this, that can lead to changes."

Wisconsin's partial veto power was created by a 1930 constitutional amendment, but it's been weakened over the years, including in reaction to vetoes made by Thompson and Doyle.

Voters adopted constitutional amendments in 1990 and 2008 that took away the ability to strike individual letters to make new words — the "Vanna White" veto — and eliminated the power to eliminate words and numbers in two or more sentences to create a new sentence — the "Frankenstein" veto. Numerous court decisions have also narrowed the veto power.

Rick Esenberg, director of the conservative Wisconsin Institute for Law and Liberty, said he expected there to be a legal challenge to Evers' 400-year veto.

"This is just a ridiculous way to make law," Esenberg said.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court sided with Esenberg's group and undid three of Evers' partial vetoes in 2020, but a majority of justices did not issue clear guidance on what was allowed. Two justices did say that partial vetoes can't be used to create new policies. In August, the court flips from conservative to liberal control. That further clouds how it may rule on veto power, an issue that over the decades has drawn bipartisan support and criticism.

Even as questions about the legality of the veto swirl, conservatives are trying to benefit politically by arguing that the ever-increasing spending authority Evers enacted will open the door to higher property taxes.

"The veto would allow property taxes to skyrocket over the next 400 years," Republican Assembly Majority Leader Tyler August said in a statement. "Taxpayers need to remember this when getting their tax bills this December."

But Doyle, the former Democratic governor who issued nearly 400 partial vetoes over eight years, praised Evers for effectively restoring an automatic increase in school spending authority that had been in place starting in the 1990s. Doyle's successor, Walker, and the GOP-controlled Legislature removed it.

"What Governor Evers did was masterful and really important and something that everybody should have expected him to do," Doyle said. "I'm sure they're kicking themselves over why they didn't they see this little number thing."

2 New Jersey firefighters died battling a blaze deep in a ship carrying 1,200 vehicles

NEWARK, N.J. (AP) — Two firefighters were killed and five others injured battling a blaze that began deep inside a docked cargo ship carrying more than a thousand vehicles, officials said Thursday.

Responding firefighters found five to seven vehicles already on fire when they reached the 10th floor of the cargo ship at Port Newark around 9:30 p.m. Wednesday night. The blaze quickly extended to the 11th and 12th floors, and as firefighters were pushed back by the intense heat, two of them were lost, Newark Fire Chief Rufus Jackson said at a news conference at the port, where the fire was still burning early Thursday,

Firefighters weren't initially able to find their colleagues. Outside rescue companies from around the state were called in. Augusto "Augie" Acabou, 45, and Wayne "Bear" Brooks Jr., 49, were found and removed from the structure but unfortunately they lost their lives, Jackson said.

Three Newark firefighters and two Elizabeth firefighters were treated for injuries including smoke inhalation. All were expected to recover, but their names and details on their conditions were not disclosed.

Marine traffic trackers show the Italian-flagged Grande Costa d'Avorio, which was built in 2011, arrived from the Port of Baltimore several days earlier. Grimaldi Deep Sea said the fire broke out on the ship's 10th deck as its 28 crew members and local stevedores were completing the loading of more than 1,200

new and used cars, vans and trucks bound for West Africa.

The company's statement said the crew immediately activated on-board fire suppression procedures and the local firefighting service was alerted, triggering a prompt response that was crucial to containing and controlling the blaze. It also said that no electric cars nor hazardous cargo is on board, no fuel spills have been detected, and the stability of the ship was not been compromised.

The Grimaldi Group statement said the cause of the fire isn't known, but it will investigate in cooperation with authorities.

"Our hearts are heavy today as we mourn the loss of two Newark firefighters who made the ultimate sacrifice in the line of duty," Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy said in a statement.

Newark Mayor Ras Baraka called it "tragic for all firefighters who know what it means to go in a burning structure in a danger that you are going to have to experience when you do so."

Shipboard firefighting is a unique skill and Newark firefighters don't commonly face this kind of fire, Jackson said. He said they trained on ships before, but it was a vessel that had compartments and living quarters, not a ship like this.

"Although this is a difficult fire, a different type of fire, they're still willing to put themselves on the line for others," the chief said. "This is a unique service that we're in. We love what we do. We love each other and we protect each other. It's unfortunate when we have loss. This is a tragedy. This is something that I as a chief never want to face, but we have to be there, we have to be strong for the family at this point."

The National Transportation Safety Board said Thursday that it will investigate the ship fire, but the Coast Guard is taking the lead, said Jennifer Gabris, an NTSB spokeswoman. The NTSB has authority to investigate maritime accidents.

This story was corrected to reflect that company says 1,200 vehicles were on board, not 5,000 as the mayor said.

Recent events that indicate Earth's climate has entered uncharted territory

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

As a warming Earth simmered into worrisome new territory this week, scientists said the unofficial records being set for average planetary temperature were a clear sign of how pollutants released by humans are warming their environment. But the heat is also just one way the planet is telling us something is gravely wrong, they said.

"Heat sets the pace of our climate in so many ways ... it's never just the heat," said Kim Cobb, a climate scientist at Brown University.

Dying coral reefs, more intense Nor'easters and the wildfire smoke that has choked much of North America this summer are among the many other signals of climate distress.

"The increasing heating of our planet caused by fossil fuel use is not unexpected, but it is dangerous for us humans and for the ecosystems we depend on. We need to stop it, fast," said Stefan Rahmstorf of the Potsdam Institute for Climate Impact Research.

Some other recent "firsts" and events that indicate climate change has entered uncharted territory:

OCEAN WARMING

Most of the planet is covered by oceans, which have absorbed 90% of the recent warming caused by planet-warming gases such as carbon dioxide and methane. In April, global ocean temperature soared to 69.98 degrees Fahrenheit (21.1 degrees Celsius), which was attributed to the combination of greenhouse gas emissions and the early El Nino formation. Newly published data from the Copernicus Climate Change Service documented "exceptionally warm" ocean temperatures in the North Atlantic with "extreme" marine heat waves near Ireland, the U.K., and in the Baltic Sea.

WILDFIRE SMOKE

Several rounds of wildfire smoke originating from northern Canada brought dangerous air quality levels to eastern North America. The high levels of wildfire smoke have become familiar on the West Coast, but scientists say that climate change will make wildfires and smoke more likely and intense and that the East Coast will see more of it.

EL NINO ARRIVES EARLY

The current El Nino — a period of warming Pacific Ocean waters — formed a month or two earlier than usual, replacing a La Nina that, with its cooling of Pacific waters, served as a damper on global temperatures. That means it will have more time than usual to strengthen. The World Meteorological Organization predicts there is a 98% chance that at least one of the next five years will be the warmest on record, beating 2016 when an exceptionally strong El Nino was present.

SHRINKING ANTARCTIC SEA ICE

Scientists are watching Antarctic sea ice shrink to record lows. The 4.5 million square miles (11.7 million square kilometers) covered by the sheet on June 27 was almost 1 million square miles (2.6 million square kilometers) less than average for that date for the period from 1981-2010, according to the National Snow and Ice Data Center.

Put another way, an area nearly four times the size of Texas was gone from the ice sheet.

Associated Press writer Seth Borenstein contributed from Washington.

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.

DeSantis defends anti-LGBTQ video shared by his campaign and calls it a 'fair game' attack on Trump

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis is defending an anti-LGBTQ video his campaign shared online that attacks rival Donald Trump for his past support of gay and transgender people, despite some of his fellow Republicans calling it homophobic.

DeSantis, in an interview Wednesday on the podcast of conservative commentator Tomi Lahren, did not address accusations that the video was homophobic but said the intent was "identifying Donald Trump as really being a pioneer in injecting gender ideology into the mainstream where he was having men compete against women in his beauty pageants."

"I think that's totally fair game because he's now campaigning, saying the opposite, that he doesn't think that you should have men competing in women's things like athletics," DeSantis said.

His presidential campaign shared the video on Twitter last week, on the last day of June's LGBTQ+ Pride Month, saying, "To wrap up 'Pride Month,' let's hear from the politician who did more than any other Republican to celebrate it."

The video was posted amid a growing conservative campaign against LGBTQ rights and celebrations. It highlighted some of Trump's past statements supporting LGBTQ people, including saying he'd be OK with transgender women competing one day in the Miss Universe pageant, which Trump owned at the time of those remarks.

It also featured dark images of DeSantis with lightning coming out of his eyes, headlines that said he signed a "draconian anti-trans bathroom bill" and images of muscular shirtless men and clips of Christian Bale in the 2000 movie "American Psycho," in which he plays a serial killer.

After the video was shared by the DeSantis War Room Twitter account on Friday, it drew immediate criticism. The Log Cabin Republicans, an organization dedicated to representing LGBT conservatives, called the video "divisive and desperate" and said it "ventured into homophobic territory."

Republican Richard Grenell, who served as Trump's national intelligence director and was the first openly

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gay Cabinet member in any administration, said the video was “undeniably homophobic.”

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, a Democrat who is openly gay, criticized the video during an interview on CNN on Sunday.

“I’m going to leave aside the strangeness of trying to prove your manhood by putting up a video that splices images of you in between oiled-up shirtless bodybuilders, and just get to a bigger issue that is on my mind whenever I see this stuff in the policy space, which is, again, who are you trying to help? Who are you trying to make better off?” Buttigieg said.

Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for Trump’s campaign, responded to the governor’s comments using a version of a derisive nickname Trump has been using for DeSantis, saying simply: “A desperate DeSanctus campaign, with a flailing candidate, in its last throes of relevancy.”

DeSantis’ campaign on Thursday declined to comment further or respond to the criticism.

The video comes as some conservatives have formed an increasingly vocal and hostile campaign against LGBTQ+ rights — from the backlash to corporations that have shown support for LGBTQ+ people to attempts to ban rainbow Pride flag displays, restrict drag shows, ban gender-affirming care for minors and restrict transgender athletes from competitive sports.

The movement has become a central point in the GOP presidential contest, with DeSantis in particular highlighting anti-LGBTQ+ legislation he’s signed and criticizing President Joe Biden for displaying the Pride flag at the White House.

Trump has pledged that, if elected to the White House again, he would sign executive orders that cut U.S. tax funding for schools pushing “transgender insanity” and health care providers offering gender-affirming care for minors.

Trump and DeSantis both frequently attack the participation of transgender women in women’s sports and label gender-affirming care for minors as “mutilation.”

Meta’s new Twitter rival app Threads gets tens of millions of sign-ups in its first day

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

Tens of millions of people have quickly signed up to Meta’s new app, Threads, as it aims to compete with Twitter — a sign that users are looking for an alternative to the social media platform that has undergone a series of unpopular changes since Elon Musk bought it.

Meta Platforms’ CEO Mark Zuckerberg said Thursday that 30 million people had registered for the app, including 10 million in the first seven hours of its launch Wednesday in the U.S. and over 100 other countries, including Britain, Australia, Canada and Japan.

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.”

Instagram users can log in with their existing usernames and follow the same accounts on the new app, giving Threads users a ready-made audience and an edge over other Twitter challengers like Bluesky and Mastodon.

“I think I’ll just see — I’ll keep Twitter for a while and then if everyone moves over there (to Threads), then I’ll probably move,” said Javi de Andreas, a 24-year-old researcher in London.

He added that Instagram “feels like a bit more reliable just in terms of nothing really changes.”

There was plenty of excitement among Threads users about the opportunity to make a fresh start on a new social media app, giving Threads a “first day of school” vibe.

Early adopters included celebrities like chef Gordon Ramsay, pop star Shakira and actor Jack Black as well as Airbnb, Guinness World Records, Netflix, Vogue magazine and other media outlets.

There were also glitches, annoyance about the lack of a chronological feed and gripes about missing features — raising the question of whether the initial burst of interest would lead to sustained growth that could pose a meaningful challenge to Twitter.

“The euphoria around a new service and this initial explosion will probably settle down,” said Paolo

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Pescatore, a technology analyst at PP Foresight. "But it is apparent that this alternative is here to stay and will prove to be a worthy rival given all of Twitter's woes."

Teething problems for Threads include Zuckerberg's posts — or Threads as they're dubbed — not loading in several countries. But his replies to other users did appear.

Instagram CEO Adam Mosseri acknowledged the early issues.

"The real test is not if we can build up a lot of hype, but if you all find enough value in the app to keep using it over time," Mosseri posted in a thread.

"And there are tons of basics that are missing: search, hashtags, a following feed" and direct messaging, he said. "We're on it," but "it'll take time."

Threads does have buttons to like, repost, reply to or quote a thread, and users see the number of likes and replies a post has received. Posts are limited to 500 characters, which is more than Twitter's 280-character threshold for most users, and can include links, photos and videos up to five minutes long.

Some questioned whether it made sense to seek to combine Twitter and Instagram users, which are two distinct online groups. Twitter is tailored for quick and short updates, while Instagram is best for visually creative posts.

"Some people will want to keep it separate from Instagram for numerous and very good reasons," Pescatore said. "This is something that Meta might have to address, which could halt its progress."

Meta's new offering also has raised data privacy concerns. The company has held off on rolling it out in the European Union, citing regulatory uncertainty.

The 27-nation EU has strict data privacy rules and is set to start enforcing a new set of digital rules aimed at clamping down on Big Tech companies and limiting what they can do with users' personal information.

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.

Threads poses a fresh headache for Musk, who acquired Twitter last year for \$44 billion. Analysts said combining Twitter-style features with Instagram's look and feel would drive user engagement.

Musk has 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.

Lavish tomb in ancient Spain belonged to a woman, not a man, new research shows

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When archaeologists first discovered the 5,000-year-old ornate tomb in Spain, they assumed it was for a man. It held a rock crystal dagger, ivory tusks and other lavish items. But now they've determined the remains are those of a woman, and all it took was two teeth.

The researchers used a new method of determining sex that analyzes tooth enamel. This technique, developed about five years ago, is more reliable than analyzing skeletal remains in poor condition, according to their study published Thursday in the journal *Scientific Reports*.

Most details about the life of the "Ivory Lady," as researchers dubbed her, remain a mystery but there are some clues.

"She was buried alone in a tomb with very special artifacts," said Leonardo Garcia Sanjuan, a co-author and archaeologist at the University of Seville in Spain. "That shows that she was a special person."

The tomb is located a few miles west of Seville, near Spain's southern coast, and was excavated in 2008. Archaeologists thought it contained a young man based on an examination of the poorly preserved bones and the fact that several precious items found in the tomb — including ostrich eggshells and amber along with the tusks and dagger — indicated that the individual held a high social status.

The new technique detects differences in the chemistry of tooth enamel between males and females and can be used even when full DNA is not available.

"This research provides one more piece of evidence questioning old historical narratives," said Alison Beach, an historian at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, who was not involved in the study. It shows that "it's not exclusively true that men have always been the most revered or held the most authority."

Marta Cintas-Pena, a co-author and archaeologist at the University of Seville, maintains a database of Copper Age burials found at 21 different archaeological sites on the Iberian Peninsula, which includes Spain and Portugal. It currently has records for 1,723 individuals.

"The Ivory Lady's burial stands out, head and shoulders, above everyone else — there is absolutely no known male or female burial that compares to hers," said Garcia Sanjuan.

For around 250 years after the Ivory Lady's burial, newer graves were built around hers — but always with a 100-foot (30-meter) buffer zone, he said. And around 80 years after her death, people reentered her tomb and placed additional votive objects inside, including the crystal dagger.

Researchers know little about the social or political structure of the society that she belonged to — which was roughly contemporaneous with the rise of the pharaohs in Egypt's Nile River Valley and with the construction of the first planned city on the banks of the Euphrates in Mesopotamia.

Katharina Rebay-Salisbury, a co-author and archaeologist at the University of Vienna in Austria, suspects the same misidentification might be true at other ancient tombs where researchers assumed, "Oh, this is a rich and prominent person, it must be a male."

Recently other researchers determined through DNA analysis that a decorated Viking warrior buried in Sweden was a woman, upending prior assumptions.

"If we go back and test, we will get a few more surprises," Rebay-Salisbury said.

Follow Christina Larson on Twitter at @larsonchristina

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Trump valet Walt Nauta pleads not guilty in classified documents case

By ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Donald Trump's valet, Walt Nauta, pleaded not guilty Thursday to charges that he helped the former president hide classified documents from federal authorities, appearing with a new Florida-based lawyer to represent him as the case moves forward.

Nauta was charged alongside Trump in June in a 38-count indictment alleging the mishandling of classified documents. His arraignment was to have happened twice before, but he had struggled to retain a lawyer licensed in Florida and one appearance was postponed because of his travel troubles.

Ahead of his arraignment, Nauta hired Sasha Dadan, a criminal defense attorney and former public defender whose main law office is in Fort Pierce, where the judge who would be handling the trial is based. She appeared in court with Nauta, alongside his Washington lawyer, Stanley Woodward, who entered the not guilty plea on his behalf.

Nauta answered, "Yes, Your Honor," when he was asked whether he had reviewed the indictment during the brief court appearance. He and his lawyers exited the courthouse after the arraignment and entered a Black Mercedes-Benz sedan without answering questions from reporters.

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 of the lawyer situation and then was pushed back again last week when a flight from New Jersey he was to have taken was canceled.

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

Prosecutors allege that Nauta, at the former president's direction, moved boxes of documents bearing

classification markings so 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.

The relocation of the boxes was captured on surveillance camera footage that the Justice Department had subpoenaed, and agents and prosecutors cited those actions as a basis for probable cause that a crime had been committed in their August warrant application to search Mar-a-Lago, according to newly unsealed information from the application.

Prosecutors say Nauta also misled the FBI during an interview with agents last year when he said he was unaware of boxes of documents having been brought to Trump's residence at Mar-a-Lago.

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, including traveling in Trump's motorcade to the Miami courthouse for their appearance earlier this month and accompanying him afterward 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.

United Methodists lose one-fifth of US churches in schism driven by growing defiance of LGBTQ bans

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

More than 6,000 United Methodist congregations — a fifth of the U.S. total — have now received permission to leave the denomination amid a schism over theology and the role of LGBTQ people in the nation's second-largest Protestant denomination.

Those figures emerge following the close of regular meetings in June for the denomination's regional bodies, known as annual conferences. The departures began with a trickle in 2019 — when the church created a four-year window of opportunity for U.S. congregations to depart over LGBTQ-related issues — and cascaded to its highest level this year.

Church law forbids the marriage or ordination of "self-avowed, practicing homosexuals," but many conservatives have chosen to leave amid a growing defiance of those bans in many U.S. churches and conferences.

Many of the departing congregations are joining the Global Methodist Church, a denomination created last year by conservatives breaking from the UMC, while others are going independent or joining different denominations.

Some 6,182 congregations have received approval to disaffiliate since 2019, according to an unofficial tally by United Methodist News Service, which has been tracking votes by annual conferences. That figure is 4,172 for this year alone, it reported.

Some annual conferences may approve more departures at special sessions later this year, according to the Rev. Jay Therrell, president of the Wesleyan Covenant Association, a conservative caucus that has advocated for the exiting churches. While most UMC congregations are remaining, many of the departing congregations are large, and denominational officials are bracing for significant budget cuts in 2024.

The numbers of exiting churches are higher than conservatives originally estimated, Therrell said.

Legal wrangles have largely been resolved over how much compensation the departing congregations must pay for their property and other financial obligations.

"For the most part, bishops and other annual conference leaders have been very gracious, and I deeply appreciate that," Therrell said. "There have been some small exceptions to that, and those are unfortunate, but we're grateful that cooler and calmer heads have prevailed."

Bishop Thomas Bickerton, president of the UMC's Council of Bishops, said the departures were disappointing.

"I don't think any of us want to see any of our churches leave," he said. "We're called to be the body of Christ, we're called to be unified. There's never been a time when the church has not been without conflict, but there's been a way we've worked through that."

But for those who want "to go and live out their Christian faith in a new expression, we wish God's blessings on them," he said.

The split has been long in the making, mirroring controversies that have led to splits in other mainline Protestant denominations. United Methodist legislative bodies, known as general conferences, have repeatedly reinforced bans on LGBTQ marriage and ordination, on the strength of coalitions of conservatives in U.S. and overseas churches.

But amid increased defiance of those bans in many U.S. churches, many conservatives decided to launch the separate Global Methodist Church, saying they believed the sexuality issues reflected deeper theological differences.

The departures have been particularly large in the South and Midwest, with states such as Texas, Alabama, Kentucky and Ohio each losing hundreds of congregations.

In some areas, United Methodists have designated "lighthouse" or similarly named congregations, with a mission for receiving members who wanted to stay United Methodists but whose churches were leaving. The GMC has begun planting new churches, including in areas where United Methodist congregations have remained in that denomination.

With these departures, progressives are expected to propose changing church law at the next General Conference in 2024 to allow for same-sex marriage and the ordination of LGBTQ people.

The United Methodist Church has about 6.5 million members in the United States and at least that many abroad, according to its website. The U.S. membership has been in steady decline, while the overseas membership has grown, particularly in Africa.

Therrell said there will be efforts at the 2024 General Conference to provide overseas churches a legal way to disaffiliate, similar to what U.S. congregations have had.

The GMC says about 3,000 churches so far have affiliated with the new denomination, with more expected.

Bickerton said it's time for United Methodists remaining in the denomination to refocus their work.

"Quite often, when you're pressed, you begin to exhibit creativity," he said. "We're pivoting away from what we were into what our next expression is going to be." Budgets will be smaller, but "this is our opportunity to refashion the church for relevance in the 21st century and really focus on evangelism."

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Aretha Franklin's sons battle over handwritten wills 5 years after her death

By ED WHITE Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — Five years after her death, the final wishes of music superstar Aretha Franklin are still unsettled. An unusual trial begins next Monday to determine which of two handwritten wills, including one found in couch cushions, will guide how her estate is handled.

The Queen of Soul, who had four sons, did not have a formal, typewritten will in place, despite years of health problems and efforts to get one done. But under Michigan law, it's still possible to treat other documents — with scribbles, scratch-outs and hard-to-read passages — as her commands.

The dispute is pitting a son against other sons. Ted White II believes papers dated in 2010 should mainly control the estate, while Kecalp Franklin and Edward Franklin favor a 2014 document. Both were discovered in Franklin's suburban Detroit home, months after her death from pancreatic cancer in 2018 at age 76.

"Does it surprise me that someone passed away before they had their ducks in a row? The answer is never," said Pat Simasko, who specializes in wills and estates and teaches elder law at Michigan State University College of Law.

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"This can be settled any time, on the steps, halfway through trial," he said. "And hopefully it will be. Going to a jury trial is a war."

Here's a look at the case:

FRANKLIN'S DEATH

Franklin was a global star for decades, known especially for hits like "Think," "I Say a Little Prayer" and "Respect." She was treated like royalty in death, her body transported in a 1940 Cadillac hearse to a Detroit museum where thousands of people visited in August 2018.

"She was the people's diva," sociologist Michael Eric Dyson said at the time.

It was immediately known that Franklin had died without a will, which meant her four sons likely would share assets worth millions, including real estate in suburban Detroit, furs, gowns, jewelry and future royalties from her works. A niece, Sabrina Owens, agreed to be personal representative or executor.

"My advice? Go slow, be careful and be smart," Franklin's friend, businessman Ron Moten, told the sons at the funeral.

WAIT — WHAT'S THIS?

Months later, in spring 2019, the estate was turned upside down. Owens reported that a handwritten will dated 2010 was found in a cabinet and another handwritten will, dated 2014, was discovered inside a notebook under cushions at Franklin's home.

There are differences between the documents, though they both appear to indicate the sons would share income from music and copyrights, which seems to make that issue less contentious than a few others.

"The interesting thing here ... is her legacy and the management of her legacy and her royalties and the operation of the Aretha Franklin business in the future. That's huge," Simasko said.

The older will lists White and Owens as co-executors and says Kecalf and Edward Franklin "must take business classes and get a certificate or a degree" to benefit from the estate.

But the 2014 version crosses out White's name as executor and has Kecalf Franklin in his place. There's no mention of business classes. Kecalf Franklin and grandchildren would get his mother's main home in Bloomfield Hills, which was valued at \$1.1 million when she died but is worth much more today.

"It's the crown jewel," said Craig Smith, attorney for Edward Franklin.

Aretha Franklin wrote in 2014 that her gowns could be auctioned or go to the Smithsonian Institution in Washington. She indicated in both papers that oldest son, Clarence, who lives under a guardianship, must be regularly supported.

"Two inconsistent wills cannot both be admitted to probate. In such cases the most recent will revokes the previous will," Charles McKelvie, a lawyer for Kecalf Franklin, said in a court filing in favor of the 2014 document.

But White's attorney, Kurt Olson, said the 2010 will was notarized and signed, while the later version "is merely a draft."

"If this document were intended to be a will there would have been more care than putting it in a spiral notebook under a couch cushion," Olson said.

INTENT IS KEY

Simasko, the law instructor, said final wishes can be fulfilled in Michigan through an informal will.

"If you're sitting there on a Sunday afternoon and you start handwriting your own wishes, the law allows it as long as the rules are followed: It's in your handwriting, it's dated and it's signed," he said.

For five years, Aretha Franklin's estate has been handled at different times by three executors. Owens quit in 2020, citing a "rift" among the sons.

She was succeeded by Reginald Turner, a local lawyer who also served as president of the American Bar Association. His last accounting in March showed the estate had income of \$3.9 million during the previous 12-month period and a similar amount of spending, including more than \$900,000 in legal fees to various firms.

Overall assets were pegged at \$4.1 million, mostly cash and real estate, though Franklin's creative works and intellectual property were undervalued with just a nominal \$1 figure.

The estate since 2020 has paid at least \$8.1 million to the Internal Revenue Service, which had a claim

for taxes after the singer's death, court filings show.

"The IRS claims took priority. The estate wasn't going anywhere until the IRS got paid off," Smith said.

Follow Ed White on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/edwritez>.

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."

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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.

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

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— 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.

“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.

Despite that, the inclination to convict with jail time appeared to prevail.

In Lyon, France’s second-largest metropolitan area by population, the prosecutor said Thursday that of 26 adults who have appeared before the fast-track courts so far, 22 were convicted and sentenced to jail, three requested more time to prepare a defense, and only one was acquitted. According to BFM television on Thursday, 76% of people in the fast-track trials were placed in detention.

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 the use of force “always respects the principles of legality, necessity, proportionality, nondiscrimination, precaution and accountability.”

Many French lawmakers demand the maximum penalty — and fast.

Olivier Marleix, a lawmaker from the conservative Republicans party, called for all 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.

Today in History: July 7, first female cadets at West Point

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 7, the 188th day of 2023. There are 177 days left in the year.

Today’s Highlight in History:

On July 7, 1976, the United States Military Academy at West Point included female cadets for the first time as 119 women joined the Class of 1980.

On this date:

In 1846, U.S. annexation of California was proclaimed at Monterey after the surrender of a Mexican garrison.

In 1865, four people were hanged in Washington, D.C. for conspiring with John Wilkes Booth to assassinate President Abraham Lincoln: Lewis Powell, David Herold, George Atzerodt and Mary Surratt, the first woman to be executed by the federal government.

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In 1898, the United States annexed Hawaii.

In 1930, construction began on Boulder Dam (later Hoover Dam).

In 1946, Jimmy Carter, 21, married Rosalynn (ROH'-zuh-lihn) Smith, 18, in Plains, Georgia.

In 1948, six female U.S. Navy reservists became the first women to be sworn in to the regular Navy.

In 1981, President Ronald Reagan announced he was nominating Arizona Judge Sandra Day O'Connor to become the first female justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1990, the first "Three Tenors" concert took place as opera stars Luciano Pavarotti, Placido Domingo and Jose Carreras performed amid the brick ruins of Rome's Baths of Caracalla on the eve of the World Cup championship.

In 2005, terrorist bombings in three Underground stations and a double-decker bus killed 52 victims and four bombers in the worst attack on London since World War II.

In 2010, Los Angeles police charged Lonnie Franklin Jr. in the city's "Grim Sleeper" serial killings. (Franklin, who was sentenced to death for the killings of nine women and a teenage girl, died in prison in March 2020 at the age of 67.)

In 2016, Micah Johnson, a Black Army veteran who served in Afghanistan, opened fire on Dallas police, killing five officers in an act of vengeance for the fatal police shootings of Black men; the attack ended with Johnson being killed by a bomb delivered by a police robot.

Ten years ago: A de Havilland DHC-3 Otter air taxi crashed after taking off from Soldotna, Alaska, killing all 10 people on board. Andy Murray became the first British man in 77 years to win the Wimbledon title, beating Novak Djokovic 6-4, 7-5, 6-4 in the final.

Five years ago: After two days of talks in North Korea's capital, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said he had commitments for new discussions on denuclearization, but North Korea said Pompeo's visit had been "regrettable" and that the United States was making "gangster-like" demands. High electricity demand amid a California heat wave left tens of thousands without power in Los Angeles.

One year ago: British Prime Minister Boris Johnson announced his resignation after droves of top government officials quit over the latest scandal to engulf him, marking an end to three tumultuous years in which he tried to bluster his way through one ethical lapse after another. A federal judge sentenced Derek Chauvin to 21 years in prison for violating George Floyd's civil rights, telling the former Minneapolis police officer that what he did was "simply wrong" and "offensive." James Caan, the curly-haired tough guy known to movie fans as the hotheaded Sonny Corleone of "The Godfather" and to television audiences as the dying football player in the classic weeper "Brian's Song," died at age 82.

Today's Birthdays: Musician-conductor Doc Severinsen is 96. Rock star Ringo Starr is 83. Comedian Bill Oddie is 82. Singer-guitarist Warren Entner of the Grass Roots is 80. Actor Joe Spano is 77. Pop singer David Hodo (The Village People) is 76. Country singer Linda Williams is 76. Actor Shelley Duvall is 74. Actor Roz Ryan is 72. Actor Billy Campbell is 64. Rock musician Mark White (Spin Doctors) is 61. Singer-songwriter Vonda Shepard is 60. Actor-comedian Jim Gaffigan is 57. R&B musician Ricky Kinchen (Mint Condition) is 57. Actor Amy Carlson is 55. Actor Jorja Fox is 55. Actor Cree Summer is 54. Actor Robin Weigert is 54. Actor Kirsten Vangsness is 51. Actor Troy Garity is 50. Actor Berenice Bejo (BEH'-ruh-nees BAY'-hoh) is 47. Actor Hamish Linklater is 47. Olympic silver and bronze medal figure skater Michelle Kwan is 43. Rapper Cassidy is 41. Country singer Gabbie Nolen is 41. Actor Ross Malinger is 39. Actor-comedian Luke Null (TV: "Saturday Night Live") is 33. Pop singer Ally Hernandez (Fifth Harmony) (TV: "The X Factor") is 30. Pop musician Ashton Irwin (5 Seconds to Summer) is 29. Country singer Maddie Font (Maddie and Tae) is 28.