

Groton Daily Independent

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Wednesday, July 12

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu hot dish, broccoli and carrots, pears, chocolate pudding, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Campfire night, 7 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Olive Grove: Kid's Lessons; Men's League

Jr. Teener Regional Tournament, TBD

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

Thursday, July 13

Senior Menu: Salisbury steak, mashed potatoes, carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.

Jr. Teener Regional Tournament, TBD

Softball hosts Webster (U8 at 6 p.m., U10 at 6 p.m. DH, U12 at 7:30 p.m. DH)

T-Ball Black at Andover, 6 p.m.

Friday, July 14

Senior Menu: Hamburger gravy, mashed potatoes, green beans, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Jr. Legion hosts Aberdeen Smitty's, DH, 5:30 p.m. U10BB State Tourney in Parker

Saturday, July 15

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

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.

Jr. Legion at Brookings (vs. Harrison, 1 p.m.; vs. Brookings, 3 p.m.)

U10BB State Tourney in Parker

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

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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The Bulletin by Newsweek

JULY 10, 2023

World in Brief

yang warned to shoot down a U.S. spy plane that fly over its land.

Famed journalist Bob Woodward released audio recordings of his extensive conversations with Donald Trump, in which the former president insisted that COVID-19 "came out of China" and claimed the pandemic cost him the 2020 election.

Leslie Van Houten, one of Charles Manson's cult followers, has been released from a prison in California after serving more than 50 years behind bars for her participation in the 1969 murders of Leno and Rosemary LaBianca.

Farmers Insurance said it will no longer offer coverage in Florida amid the growing threat of extreme weather, leaving tens of thousands of residents without home or auto policies.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky will meet with NATO leaders, a day after Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg said that Kyiv could only join the alliance once "conditions" are met. Meanwhile, Russia has launched at least 15 drones to attack Kyiv for the second night in a row

TALKING POINTS

"That's the only thing that we can rely on, be hopeful. President [Joe] Biden spoke to us and gave us a promise to do whatever it takes. He talked to us as a parent, and he told us he understands our pain," said Ella Milman, the mother of detained American journalist Evan Gershkovich, during an interview with Good Morning America's George Stephanopoulos.

"My name is Rep. Meisha Mainor and today I made the decision to leave the Democrat Party. I represent a blue district in the city of Atlanta so this wasn't a political decision for me. It was a MORAL one. I will NEVER apologize for being a black woman with a mind of my own," Georgia state Rep. Meisha Mainor said in announcing her decision to join the Republican Party.

"I was fortunate enough to attend the Lab School due to the generous contributions of UCLA donors, and my experience profoundly transformed my worldview. I am proud to have the chance to pass on my experience to those who might otherwise miss out on this opportunity, and to help create a program that will help guide the next generation of climate warriors," actor Leonardo DiCaprio said in announcing the Leonardo DiCaprio Scholarship and Climate Justice Education Program, both of which are for the elementary school he once attended..

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

The inflation report for June is due at 8:30 a.m. ET. Economists expect the year-on-year headline consumer price index to fall to 3.1% from 4%, while core inflation (excluding volatile items like food and energy) to slip to 5% from 5.3%. The report could give clues on whether the Federal Reserve will raise interest rates during its July 26 meeting.

President Joe Biden is expected to deliver remarks on how the U.S. and allied nations are supporting Ukraine as the 2023 NATO Summit in Lithuania winds down.

FBI Director Christopher Wray is scheduled to testify at a House Judiciary Committee oversight hearing. "Manhattanhenge" returns to New York City this evening as the sun sets in perfect alignment with Manhattan's east-west street grid.

The G7 is set to sign a long-term security arrangement with Ukraine on the sidelines of the NATO summit in Lithuania, offering defense equipment and cybersecurity protection, as well as bolstering military training.

Iowa's Republican-led legislature passed a bill to ban most abortions after around six weeks of pregnancy during a special session. Gov. Kim Reynolds said she would sign the measure on Friday.

Donald Trump has lashed out at the Justice Department after the agency ruled that he is not immune from a \$10 million defamation lawsuit filed by E. Jean Carroll.

North Korea has fired a suspected intercontinental ballistic missile off its east coast, just days after Pyong-



FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

Galatians 5:22-23



Photo from KSFY featuring Charla 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

Brown, Beadle, and Minnehaha Counties Mosquito Pool First West Nile Detection of Season

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Health has confirmed the first West Nile virus (WNV) mosquito pools have been detected in Brown, Beadle, and Minnehaha Counties. State officials urge the public to take simple steps to protect themselves and their families against WNV which can cause fever, headaches, rash, swollen lymph nodes and muscle and joint aches.

“Given the increased time spent outdoors and activities occurring during the summer, protecting yourself from mosquito bites remains important to avoid West Nile infection,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, State Epidemiologist for the Department of Health. “Simply using bug spray or limiting activities between dusk-to-dawn hours can reduce your infection risk significantly.”

The first two human cases of WNV in 2023 were reported in Sanborn and Jerauld Counties. South Dakota has reported more than 2,750 human cases and 49 deaths since WNV was first reported in 2002. Every county has reported cases.

Individuals and families can reduce their risk by taking the following actions:

Apply mosquito repellents (DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, 2-undecanone, param-menthane-diol or IR3535) to clothes and exposed skin. Limit exposure by wearing pants and long sleeves in the evening; Limit time outdoors from dusk to midnight when mosquitoes are most active. *Culex tarsalis* are the primary carrier of WNV in South Dakota;

Remove standing water that gives mosquitoes a place to breed. Regularly change the water in birdbaths, outside pet dishes and drain water from other flowerpots and garden containers and stay away from areas near standing water; and

Support local mosquito control efforts.

Personal precautions are especially important for those at high risk for severe illness from WNV are individuals over 60 years of age, pregnant women, transplant patients, individuals with cancer, diabetes, hypertension and kidney disease. Individuals experiencing symptoms like severe or unusual headaches should see their physicians.

“This year, nearly 200 South Dakota cities, counties and tribes will share \$500,000 in grants intended to control mosquitoes and prevent West Nile virus,” added Dr. Clayton.

All applying communities received funding with grants ranging from \$500 to \$20,000. Grant awards were based on the population of the applying jurisdiction and its history of human WNV cases through 2022. This reimbursement grant helps alleviate some of the costs the help control mosquitos that pose a risk of the West Nile virus.

Groton Jr. Teeners Can't Hold Up Against Selby

Groton Jr. Teeners had trouble keeping up with Post 100 14U in a 14-1 loss on Tuesday.

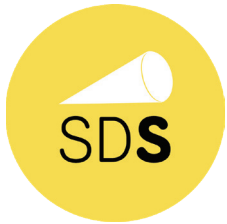
Post 100 14U scored seven runs in the seventh inning. The big inning for Post 100 14U came thanks to singles by Keegan Russell, Houston Hauge, Peyton Lutz, and Xavier Hobert and walks by Tristan Thompson and Luke Fiedler.

Fiedler got the win for Post 100 14U. Fiedler allowed three hits and one run over seven innings, striking out one.

Nick Groeblichhoff took the loss for Groton jr. Teeners 14U. The pitcher surrendered seven runs on eight hits over five and a third innings, striking out four.

Easton Weber, Tristin Mcgannon, and Ryder Schelle each collected one hit to lead Groton Jr. Teeners 14U.

Post 100 14U scattered 14 hits in the game. Hobert, Russell, and Thatcher Kihne each collected multiple hits for Post 100 14U. Hobert went 4-for-5 at the plate to lead Post 100 14U in hits. Post 100 14U didn't commit a single error in the field. Hobert had eight chances in the field, the most on the team.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Regulators to begin review of NorthWestern Energy's proposed 16% rate increase

Commission has six months to study plan before interim hike goes into effect

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 11, 2023 4:54 PM

A company that provides electricity to 64,680 South Dakota customers wants to raise its rates by about 16%.

South Dakota's Public Utilities Commission voted Tuesday to give itself six months to study the rate proposal.

It would be a jump of \$19.14 per month on an average residential customer's bill, although the increase would affect commercial and industrial customers, too. The company stands to gain about \$31 million in annual revenue from the higher rates.

Commissioner Gary Hanson said completing the analysis in six months will be difficult.

"We just do not have enough time," Hanson said Tuesday during a meeting in Pierre. He said regulators usually do not complete rate-increase reviews in the initial six-month window.

If the six-month period passes without a decision, NorthWestern Energy could increase its rates at least temporarily while the PUC continues its review. That's called an "interim" rate increase.

The commission and staff could then continue their review for up to another six months. At that time, the commission could vote on the increase. If the increase is pared back, customers could get refunds for the extra amounts they paid during the interim period.

The PUC staff consists of six analysts and two staff attorneys. When they evaluate an investor-owned utility's rate proposal, they gather information on company operating expenses, employee benefits, executive compensation, corporate advertising, the cost of generation and transmission facilities, and other factors. The PUC staff also requests and analyzes opinions from outside experts, and asks questions of the parties in the case.

During a recent Xcel Energy rate case, the PUC staff sent the company 343 questions. The review went longer than six months, so the company was allowed to conduct an 18% interim rate hike. The commission later pared the increase back to 6%. Customers received refunds for the extra money they paid while the 18% increase was in effect.

Commissioner Chris Nelson recently told South Dakota Searchlight he plans to propose "something" next winter during the state's annual legislative session to address the legal framework that allows for interim rate hikes.

"I have to start to ask myself, does that interim rate law need to be tweaked? I think that's something we should have a discussion on," Nelson said at a recent hearing for Xcel Energy.

In the NorthWestern rate case, the company said it has faced increasing costs, including the addition of a 58-megawatt natural gas plant in Huron, which is part of \$267 million in electricity investments since NorthWestern's last rate review in December 2014. The company is also considering construction of a more than \$1 billion nuclear plant in the state.

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.

Biologists search for clues on why fish population has declined in Lewis & Clark Lake after 2011 flood

BY: PAUL HAMMEL - JULY 11, 2023 4:04 PM

LINCOLN, Nebraska — Nebraska and South Dakota fisheries biologists are studying why fish populations have declined in popular Lewis & Clark Lake since the flooding of 2011.

Populations of emerald shiners — the primary forage fish in the Missouri River reservoir — haven't recovered, and neither have walleye, despite more than 100 million fry and fingerlings being stocked there since 2014.

So biologists with the game commissions in both states, along with a student from the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, continue to tag and track walleye and sauger in the Missouri River between Fort Randall and Gavins Point Dams, in Lewis and Clark Lake and in the Missouri River below Yankton.

Biologists even enlisted the help of Mike Hamsa of Yutan, a fishing guide, who helped catch 56 fish to tag. Since 2021, 201 fish have been tagged as part of a study of fish movement.

The fish sport metal jaw tags, but also have acoustic transmitters implanted in their abdomens. Fifteen receivers spaced every five miles along the river record any fish that passes within a half mile.

So far, 44 of the tagged fish have been caught and 39 harvested. Two fish have been caught three times.

Will Radigan, a University of Nebraska-Lincoln graduate student, is doing the field work for the project. One of his findings is that some fish are moving through Gavins Point Dam, which might help explain the drop in fish population.

Many fish were washed through the dam during the flooding of 2011, washing away many forage fish that sustain sport fish like walleye.

During peak sampling, it was discovered that more than 20,000 fish and larval fish per hour pass through the dam, though more than 90% were freshwater drum.

Anglers catching tagged fish are asked to call the conservation agency in their state to report the tag number. If they harvest the fish, they are asked to recover the transmitter and return it as well.

In Nebraska, anglers should report tag numbers to the Northeast District Office in Norfolk at (402) 370-3373. In South Dakota, anglers may call the Game, Fish and Parks office in Chamberlain at (605) 734-4548 or go online to <https://gfp.sd.gov/forms/fishtag/>.

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Paul Hammel is the senior reporter for the Nebraska Examiner. He has covered the Nebraska Legislature and Nebraska state government for decades. He started his career reporting for the Omaha Sun and was named editor of the Papillion Times in 1982. He later worked as a sports enterprise reporter at the Lincoln Journal-Star. He joined the Omaha World-Herald in 1990, working as a legislative reporter, then roving state reporter and finally Lincoln bureau chief. Paul has won awards from organizations including Great Plains Journalism, the Associated Press and Suburban Newspapers of America. A native of Ralston, Nebraska, he is vice president of the John G. Neihardt Foundation and secretary of the Nebraska Hop Growers.

U.S. Department of Agriculture to spend \$300M to boost climate data in farming, forestry

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JULY 12, 2023 5:45 AM

The U.S. Department of Agriculture will spend \$300 million to better measure the effectiveness of techniques to lower carbon emissions in farming and forestry, the department said Wednesday.

The funding comes from a \$20 billion allocation for climate-smart agriculture in the climate and social policy law Democrats in Congress passed along party lines and President Joe Biden signed last year.

It will be used to establish standards and reporting networks to give farmers and foresters better data to inform their climate practices, Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said on a Tuesday call with reporters previewing the announcement.

Agriculture and forestry are key sectors in advancing Biden's climate agenda, Vilsack said. Biden has set a goal of reducing carbon emissions by at least 50% from 2005 levels by 2030.

"But to do that, we've got to get the science and innovation right," Vilsack, a former governor of Iowa, said. "We have to have accurate, reliable measurements of the impact and effect of the changes and the practices that we're embracing.

"We get those from constantly monitoring those practices and making sure that we're reporting them and verifying those results. That's going to allow us to know what works and, frankly, what doesn't."

About 10% of total U.S. greenhouse gas emissions in 2021 came from agriculture, according to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The department will establish a soil carbon monitoring and research network, create a greenhouse gas research network, expand data management infrastructure and improve models and other tools for measuring greenhouse gas outcomes, according to a USDA statement.

The agriculture sector already collects data and provides estimates on carbon emissions and sequestration, said Bill Hohenstein, the director of the USDA's Office of Energy and Environmental Policy. But existing data collection is done haphazardly, leaving some areas uncovered and others with only out-of-date information, he added.

The national networks will allow for sharing high-quality information, Vilsack said.

"This is going to put a finer point on our ability to collect information and data. It's going to allow us to better coordinate that information," Vilsack said. "It's going to allow us to accumulate more information from a variety of sources, not just what's happening on the ground."

More accurate data could also help make a stronger case for continuing to fund agriculture programs dedicated to climate solutions as lawmakers write a new farm bill this year, Vilsack said.

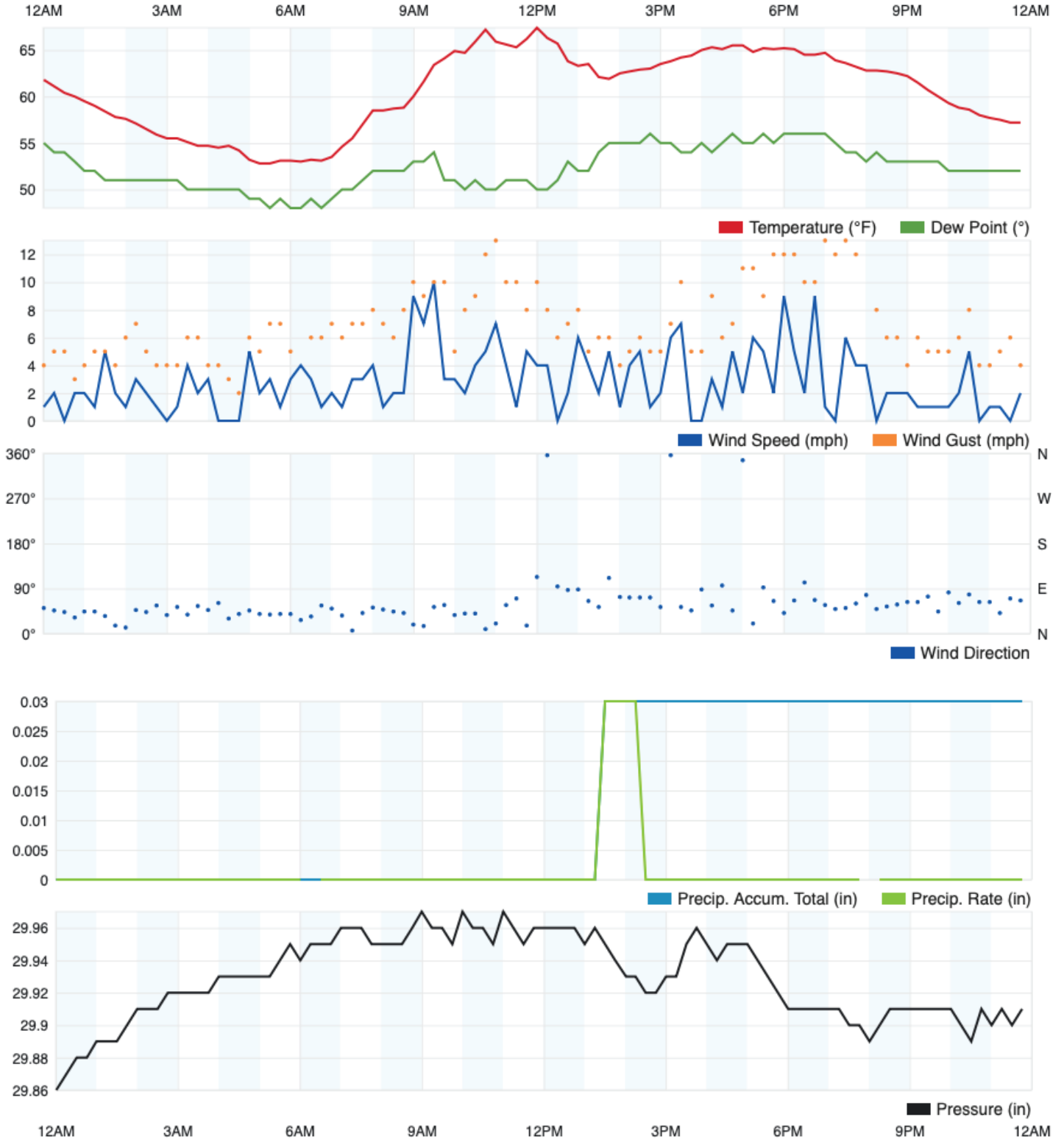
The spending is part of a larger federal strategy on greenhouse gas measurement and monitoring for agriculture and forestry that the Biden administration plans to introduce Wednesday, Vilsack said.

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
20%			30%			
Slight Chance T-storms then Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Chance T-storms	Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 79 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 86 °F	Low: 60 °F	High: 84 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 82 °F



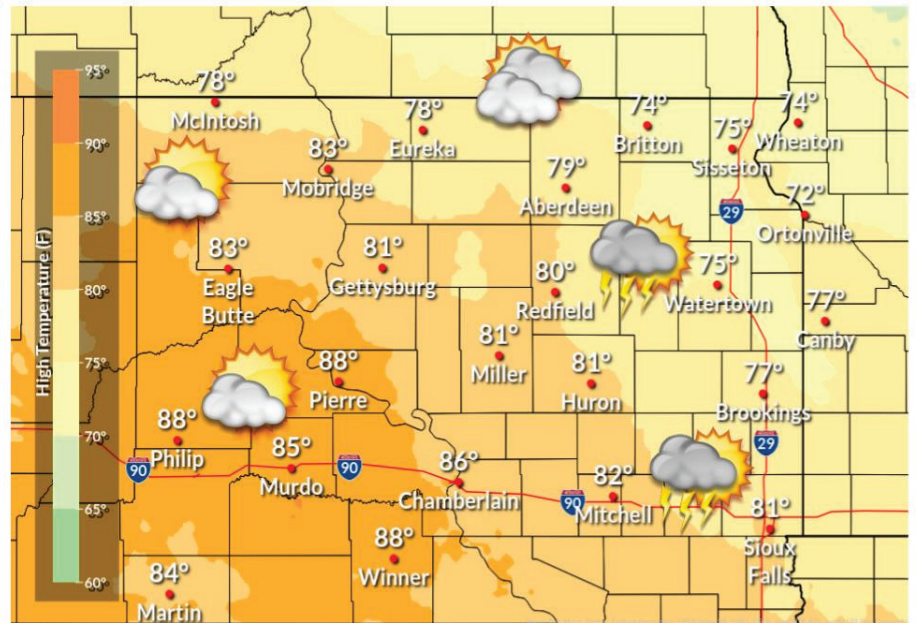
Today's Weather Outlook

July 12, 2023
4:21 AM

Showers and thunderstorms possible through midday across the James Valley and points east into west central MN.

Cloudy skies through the morning with clearing from west to east through the afternoon.

Afternoon high temperatures near to slightly below seasonal normals for mid-July.



NORR National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Showers and a few thunderstorms will be possible through the morning hours across parts northeast South Dakota into west central Minnesota. However, drier conditions should become more prevalent across the area later today into tonight. Although cloudy skies will hold tough through the morning, there will be a better chance to see some sunshine through the afternoon. Temperatures will be mild but still at or just shy of average highs for this time of year.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 68 °F at 10:41 AM

Low Temp: 53 °F at 5:10 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 5:49 PM

Precip: : 0.19

Day length: 15 hours, 27 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 107 in 1936

Record Low: 40 in 1941

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.37

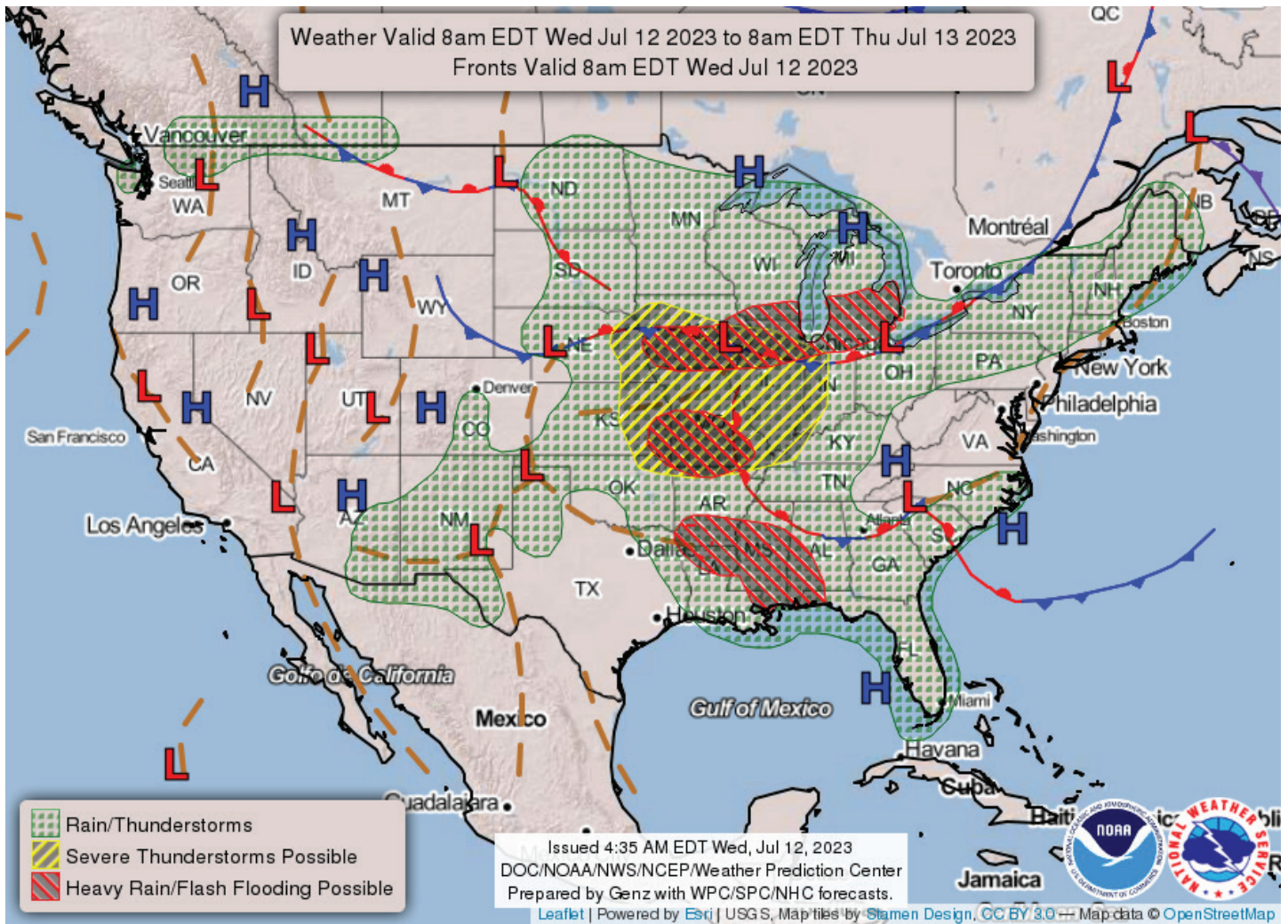
Precip to date in July.: 1.32

Average Precip to date: 12.38

Precip Year to Date: 12.67

Sunset Tonight: 9:22:00 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:55:00 AM



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Today in Weather History

July 12, 1993: A thunderstorm dumped up to four inches of rain in 30 minutes, 25 miles west of Pierre. This storm washed hay into big blocks up to five feet high. The heavy rains also caused water to spill over an irrigation dam. Another severe thunderstorm occurred over Dewey County and produced strong winds, damaging hail, and flooding rains which destroyed crops and hay fields. The storm knocked out windows and screens in the Lantry area. Runoff from the storm rushed through the streets of Eagle Butte causing water damage to homes and businesses. Water was reported flowing four to five feet deep through a cafe. High winds also tipped over a house trailer.

July 12, 2004: Hail up to the size of softballs fell in and around Onaka, in Faulk County, damaging vehicles, farm equipment, and homes. Lightning struck a house in Britton starting a fire in the attic, which resulted in significant damage to the home. High winds along with hail up to the size of baseballs caused some structural, vehicle, crop, and tree damage in and around Astoria and Toronto in Duel County.

1951 - The Kaw River flood occurred. The month of June that year was the wettest of record for the state of Kansas, and during the four days preceding the flood much of eastern Kansas and western Missouri received more than ten inches of rain. Flooding in the Midwest claimed 41 lives, left 200 thousand persons homeless, and caused a billion dollars property damage. Kansas City was hardest hit. The central industrial district sustained 870 million dollars property damage. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1980 - Lightning struck a large broiler house in Branford, FL, and the ensuing fire broiled 11,000 nearly ready broilers. Firemen were able to save a few thousand chickens, however. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Cool air invaded the High Plains Region. Eight cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Sheridan, WY, with a reading of 37 degrees. Thunderstorms developing along the cold front in the central U.S. produced 6.5 inches of rain at Fort Dodge, IA, and 2.5 inches in one hour at St. Joseph MO. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Dakotas, including baseball size hail at Aberdeen, SD, and softball size hail near Fullerton, ND. Thunderstorms produced heavy rain in Arkansas and northeastern Texas, with 6.59 inches reported at Mesquite, TX, in just an hour and fifteen minutes. Garland, TX, reported water up to the tops of cars following a torrential downpour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms over eastern Kansas deluged McFarland with more than six inches of rain. Afternoon thunderstorms in Wyoming produced up to eighteen inches of dime size hail near Rock Springs, along with torrential rains, and a three foot high wall of mud and water swept into the town causing more than 1.5 million dollars damage. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in Oklahoma and Arkansas, deluging Dardanelle, AR, with 3.50 inches of rain in less than twenty minutes. About seventy cows were killed when lightning struck a tree in Jones County, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: An intense heat wave affected much of the Midwest for a 4-day period beginning on this day. The worst effects of the heat were noted in the Chicago metropolitan area, where 583 people died from the heat. Temperatures across the region reached as high as 104 degrees, overnight lows on falling to the upper 70s to low 80s. Dew point temperatures in the upper 70s to low 80s created heat indexes peaking at 125 degrees. Electricity and water usage reached record levels, causing periodic outages.

1996: Hurricane Bertha makes landfall near Wrightsville Beach, NC with maximum winds of 105 mph, but the storm surge dealt the most devastation. The U.S. Virgin Islands, along with North Carolina, were declared federal disaster areas. Surveys indicate that Bertha damaged almost 2,500 homes on St. Thomas and St. John. For many, it was the second hit in the ten months since Hurricane Marilyn devastated the same area. The primary effects in North Carolina were to the coastal counties and included storm surge flooding and beach erosion, roof damage, piers washed away, fallen trees and damage to crops. Over 5,000 homes were damaged, mostly from storm surge. Storm total rainfall amounts ranged from 5 to 8 inches along a coastal strip from South Carolina to Maine. Overall, as many as 12 deaths resulted with 8 in the U.S. and territories.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

TODAY

A young Marine was leaning against the side of his tank early one morning during the Korean War. He was slowly and cautiously eating beans from a can with his penknife. It was cold and foggy and damp and the silence was deafening and frightening.

A reporter, aware of the impending battle, softly asked, "If I were God and could give you anything you wanted, what would you ask for?"

After a lengthy pause, he answered, "Today!"

All that any of us can really have is today. Few of us, however, realize the importance of "today" - and the value of the gift that "today" offers us.

The Psalmist said, "Teach us to make the most of our time..." Time is a gift, and we must be aware of each tick of the clock and moment of the day. Once gone, time can never be reclaimed or recycled or returned. What we have done with "today" becomes a part of history.

Realizing the significance of time and the uncertainties of life should help us put our priorities in order. The first priority is our relationship with God. Is it all that it can be? Is there more of God's love that I can discover? Second is our responsibility to others. Is there someone, somewhere who needs God's love and salvation? Who is my "one" to love today? And, finally, do I need to make things right, first with God, and then with others? Today is the day to seize!

Prayer: Lord, help us to understand the value of time and not waste one minute. May we use each moment of every day wisely realizing "it's all we can be sure of!" In Jesus' Name, Amen.



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.11.23

10 17 33 51 64 5

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$560,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 2
DRAW: Mins 47 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.10.23

3 26 30 47 51 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$5,600,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 17 Mins 47
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.11.23

3 21 24 28 35 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 32 Mins 47
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.08.23

6 14 26 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$144,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 32 Mins 47
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.10.23

21 30 37 41 56 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 1 Mins 47
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.10.23

2 24 34 53 58 13

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$725,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 1 Mins 47
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Few US adults support full abortion bans, even in states that have them, an AP-NORC poll finds

By **GEOFF MULVIHILL** and **LINLEY SANDERS** Associated Press

The majority of U.S. adults, including those living in states with the strictest limits on abortion, want it to be legal at least through the initial stages of pregnancy, a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds.

The poll was conducted in late June, one year after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, undoing a nationwide right to abortion that had been in place for nearly 50 years.

While the laws have changed over the past year, the poll found that opinions on abortion remain much as they were a year ago: complex, with most people believing abortion should be allowed in some circumstances and not in others. Overall, about two-thirds of Americans say abortion should generally be legal, but only about a quarter say it should always be legal and only about 1 in 10 say it should always be illegal.

By 24 weeks of pregnancy, most Americans think their state should generally not allow abortions.

That's true for 34-year-old Jaleesha Thomas, of Chicago. "I'd rather the person abort the baby than harm the baby or throw the baby out or anything," she said in an interview. But she said that around 20 weeks into pregnancy, she thinks abortion should not usually be an option. "When they're fully developed and the mother doesn't have any illnesses or anything that would cause the baby or her to pass away, it's like you're killing another human," she said.

Thomas' state allows abortion until the fetus would be viable, generally considered to be around 24 weeks, and has become a destination for people from neighboring Kentucky, Missouri, Wisconsin and other places with travel bans for abortions.

The poll finds that 1 in 10 Americans say they know someone who has either been unable to get an abortion or who has had to travel to get one in the last year, since the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* — and that this is especially common among young people, people of color and those living in states where abortion is banned at all stages of pregnancy.

Nearly half the states now allow abortion until between 20 and 27 weeks but bar it later than that in most cases. Before the end of *Roe*, almost every state fell in that range. Now, abortion is banned — with varying exceptions — at all stages of pregnancy in 14 states, including much of the South.

The poll found that 73% of all U.S. adults, including 58% of those in states with the strictest bans, believe abortion should be allowed at six weeks of pregnancy. Just one state currently has a ban in effect that kicks in around then. That's Georgia, where abortion is banned once cardiac activity can be detected — around six weeks and before women often know they're pregnant. Ohio and South Carolina have similar bans that are not being enforced because of court action, and Florida has one that hasn't taken effect.

About half of Americans say abortions should be permitted at the 15-week mark, though 55% of those living in the most restrictive states say abortion should be banned by that point.

And by 24 weeks, about two-thirds of Americans, including those who live in states with the fewest restrictions, say it should be barred.

While most GOP-controlled state governments have been pushing for more abortion restrictions, the poll finds that there's not always support for doing so. Nationally, about 4 in 10 people said it was too difficult to access abortion in their community, compared with about a quarter who think it's too easy.

Robert Green, an 89-year-old politically independent rancher in Wyoming, where a judge has put on hold a ban on abortion throughout pregnancy, said he's supported abortion rights since before the 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision. "There's a lot of reasons," he said. "Not the least of which: The people who don't want kids and go on and have them — the kids usually suffer for it."

People in states with the strictest bans were slightly more likely to say abortion was too difficult to ac-

cess compared with those living in the least restrictive states. Overall, about half of Democrats say it's too difficult, compared with 22% of Republicans.

And women were more likely to say access was too challenging in their area. For both Republicans and Democrats, there was not much of a gender divide on the topic: About half of both Democratic men and women found it too challenging, and around 2 in 10 GOP men and women did. But nearly half of independent women thought so, compared with about one-third of independent men.

The poll of 1,220 adults was conducted June 22-26 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

NATO deepens ties with Ukraine but doesn't set clear path for membership

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, LORNE COOK and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — NATO leaders gathered Wednesday to launch a highly symbolic new forum for ties with Ukraine, after committing to provide the country with more military assistance for fighting Russia but only vague assurances of future membership.

U.S. President Joe Biden and his NATO counterparts will sit down with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy in the new NATO-Ukraine Council, a permanent body where the 31 allies and Ukraine can hold consultations and call for meetings in emergency situations.

The setting is part of NATO's effort to bring Ukraine as close as possible to the military alliance without actually joining it. On Tuesday, the leaders said in their communique summarizing the summit's conclusions that Ukraine can join "when allies agree and conditions are met."

"Today we meet as equals," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Wednesday at a joint news conference with Zelenskyy. "I look forward to the day we meet as allies."

The ambiguous plan for Ukraine's future membership reflects the challenges of reaching consensus among the alliance's current members while the war continues, and has frustrated Zelenskyy even as he expressed appreciation for military hardware being promised by Group of Seven industrial nations.

"The results of the summit are good, but if there were an invitation, that would be ideal," Zelenskyy said, through a translator.

Despite his disappointment, the Ukrainian leader was more conciliatory on Wednesday than the previous day, when he harshly criticized the lack of a timeline for membership as "unprecedented and absurd."

"NATO needs us just as we need NATO," he said alongside Stoltenberg.

Ukraine's future membership was the most divisive and emotionally charged issue at this year's summit. In essence, Western countries are willing to keep sending weapons to help Ukraine do the job that NATO was designed to do — hold the line against a Russian invasion — but not allow Ukraine to join its ranks and benefit from its security during the war.

"We have to stay outside of this war but be able to support Ukraine. We managed that very delicate balancing act for the last 17 months. It's to the benefit of everyone that we maintain that balancing act," Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo said Wednesday.

Latvian Prime Minister Krisjanis Karins, whose country lies on NATO's eastern flank and has a long, troubled history with Russia, said he would have preferred more for Ukraine.

"There will always be a difference of flavor of how fast you would want to go," he said. However, Karins added, "at the end of it, what everyone gets, including Ukraine, and what Moscow sees is we are all very united."

Amanda Sloat, senior director of European affairs for the U.S. National Security Council, defended the summit's decisions.

"I would agree that the communique is unprecedented, but I see that in a positive way," she told reporters on Wednesday.

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Sloat noted that Ukraine will not need to submit a "membership action plan" as it seeks to join NATO, although she said "there are still governance and security sector reforms that are going to be required." The action plan is usually a key step in the process that involves advice and assistance for countries seeking to join.

Symbols of support for Ukraine are common around Vilnius, where the country's blue-and-yellow flags hang from buildings and are pasted inside windows. One sign cursed Russian President Vladimir Putin. Another urged NATO leaders to "hurry up" their assistance for Ukraine.

However, there's been more caution inside the summit itself, especially from Biden, who has explicitly said he doesn't think Ukraine is ready to join NATO. There are concerns that the country's democracy is unstable and its corruption remains too deeply rooted.

Under Article 5 of the NATO charter, members are obligated to defend each other from attack, which could swiftly draw the U.S. and other nations into direct fighting with Russia.

Defining an end to hostilities is no easy task. Officials have declined to define the goal, which could suggest a negotiated ceasefire or Ukraine reclaiming all occupied territory. Either way, Putin would essentially have veto power over Ukraine's NATO membership by prolonging the conflict.

Wednesday's commitments will include a new G7 framework that would provide for Ukraine's long-term security.

The British foreign ministry said the G7 would "set out how allies will support Ukraine over the coming years to end the war and deter and respond to any future attack." The ministry added that the framework marks the first time that this many countries have agreed to a "comprehensive long-term security arrangement of this kind with another country."

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said in a statement that supporting Ukraine's "progress on the pathway to NATO membership, coupled with formal, multilateral, and bilateral agreements and the overwhelming support of NATO members will send a strong signal to President Putin and return peace to Europe."

Sloat said the commitments will show Russia "that time is not on its side."

Moscow reacted harshly to the G7 plan.

"We consider this extremely ill-judged and potentially very dangerous," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters. He added that "by providing security guarantees to Ukraine, they're infringing on Russia's security."

Although international summits are often tightly scripted, this one has seesawed between conflict and compromise.

At first leaders appeared to be deadlocked over Sweden's bid for membership in the alliance. However, Turkey unexpectedly agreed to drop its objections on Monday, the night before the summit formally began. The deal led to boasts of success from leaders who were eager for a display of solidarity in Vilnius.

"This summit is already historic before it has started," Stoltenberg said.

Erdogan has not commented publicly on the deal, over Sweden's membership, even during a Tuesday meeting with Biden where Biden referenced "the agreement you reached yesterday."

However, Erdogan appeared eager to develop his relationship with Biden.

The Turkish president has been seeking advanced American fighter jets and a path toward membership in the European Union. The White House has expressed support for both, but publicly insisted that the issues were not related to Sweden's membership in NATO.

Associated Press writers Karl Ritter and Liudas Dapkus contributed to this report.

Pence would ban abortions when pregnancies aren't viable. His GOP rivals won't say if they agree

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — In a Republican presidential field full of opponents to abortion rights, Mike Pence stands out in his embrace of the cause.

The former vice president, who is seeking the White House in 2024, is the only major candidate who supports a federal ban on abortion at six weeks, before many women know they're pregnant. He has advocated pulling from the market a widely used abortion pill that has a better safety record than penicillin and Viagra. And he's implored his Republican rivals to back a 15-week federal ban as a minimum national standard, which several have not done.

In a recent interview, Pence went even further, saying abortion should be banned when a pregnancy isn't viable. Such a standard would force women to carry pregnancies to term even when doctors have determined there is no chance a baby will survive outside the womb.

"I'm pro-life. I don't apologize for it," Pence said in the interview. "I just have heard so many stories over the years of courageous women and families who were told that their unborn child would not go to term or would not survive. And then they had a healthy pregnancy and a healthy delivery."

Doctors disputed Pence's characterization, saying there are conditions that are always incompatible with life and others where the chance of survival is so slim that most patients, when previously given the choice, concluded that continuing the pregnancy wasn't worth the suffering, grief or risk.

Pence, however, says he's undeterred.

"I want to always err on the side of life," he said. "I would hold that view in these matters because ... I honestly believe that we got this extraordinary opportunity in the country today to restore the sanctity of life to the center of American law."

Those comments place Pence firmly to the right of the rest of the 2024 presidential field and alone among GOP candidates, who largely declined to take a stance on the issue. And they drew alarms from obstetricians and doctors who specialize in high-risk pregnancies and say nonviable pregnancies are far more common than people realize. They range from ectopic pregnancies, when an embryo implants somewhere other than the uterus, to deadly birth defects and other severe pregnancy complications.

Banning abortions in these cases, doctors say, leads to outcomes that are both cruel and put women's lives and mental health at risk.

"One of the things that you cannot understate is the difficulty for a woman to carry a nonviable pregnancy," said Alan Peaceman, professor emeritus of obstetrics and gynecology at Northwestern University's Feinberg School of Medicine. "It is psychological torture to go out in the world, for people to see your pregnancy — and people will come up to you and want to talk about your pregnancy. And that puts the woman in a terrible position that nobody should be in unless they chose to be in that position."

Once an issue largely hidden from public view, nonviable pregnancies have gained attention since the Supreme Court ended the constitutional right to an abortion last year, ushering in a wave of bans and restrictions in Republican-led states. Those moves have implications not only for unwanted pregnancies but also for cases where women receive heartbreaking diagnoses, often when they're months along into pregnancies that were deeply desired.

In states like Texas, Florida and Louisiana, women have described the anguish of being denied abortions even when they know their babies will be stillborn or die shortly after birth. Some have had to wait until they developed life-threatening infections for intervention. Others have spent thousands of dollars to travel to states where the procedure is still allowed.

Sarah Prager, a professor of obstetrics and gynecology at the University of Washington Medical Center, said she and her colleagues have seen a steady stream of patients coming from states where abortions are now banned. About 11% of those patients, she said, have received a serious diagnosis, including cases where there is no chance of the fetus surviving.

"They are often absolutely shocked to learn that the abortion laws also prohibit them from being able

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to get care to be safe," she said, "even though they knew these laws were in place in this state."

Spokespeople for former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis declined to say whether they back Pence's position. Trump, the early front-runner, has repeatedly said he backs exceptions in cases of rape, incest and the life of the mother and has blamed hard-line abortion stances for costing the party in last year's midterm elections.

DeSantis, who is polling a distant second, signed a six-week ban in Florida that includes an exception for fatal fetal abnormalities, along with rape, incest and to save the mother's life. He has declined to say whether he supports a federal ban.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott's campaign pointed to an article that did not address the question of unviable pregnancies. A spokesman for former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley said only that she "will sign pro-life legislation that includes exceptions for rape, incest, and for the life of the mother," suggesting she, too, may be opposed to an exception for nonviable pregnancies — but declined to clarify.

Pence's push to end abortion puts him at odds with the majority of Americans who are broadly opposed to the Supreme Court's *Roe v. Wade* reversal.

While most favor at least some restrictions, a majority of U.S. adults say abortion should be legal during the first weeks of pregnancy, even in states with the strictest limits, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

But Pence, an evangelical Christian, for whom the issue is deeply personal, argues restricting abortion is "more important than politics" and calls it the "cause of our time."

As he works to appeal to conservatives in states like Iowa, Pence also points to the issue as one that distinguishes him from his GOP rivals, contrasting himself with "some people in this field now who want to relegate this issue to just a debate among the states."

Pence does say he has "always supported" exceptions for rape, incest and to save the life of the mother, though he told an Indiana anti-abortion group in 2010 that he believed, "Abortion should never be legal," and later that it should only be legal to save the "life of the mother."

There are a number of fetal conditions in which doctors generally agree there is "truly zero probability for a healthy outcome," including anencephaly, a severe neural tube defect in which the skull doesn't form and the brain is exposed, said David Hackney, a spokesperson for the Society for Maternal-Fetal Medicine and a high-risk obstetrician in the Cleveland area.

"The chances of survival are absolute zero ... no matter what Mike Pence says," he said. In such cases, he said, "it feels absurd" for people to be "forced against their will to carry pregnancies to term."

But other cases are grayer. Take premature rupture of membranes, when the water breaks early, often in the second semester, leaving a fetus without the amniotic fluid that protects it and supports the development of organs, including the lungs. In those cases, survival generally depends how early the rupture has occurred.

Hackney said with early membrane rupture, "you do have rare survivors," but that "exceedingly poor prognosis" comes with a litany of risks, including hemorrhaging, blood loss and dangerous infection, which can cause permanent infertility, shock and sepsis as women wait to deliver or qualify for abortions under "life of the mother" exceptions.

That's what happened to Savita Halappanavar, the 31-year-old woman who died in Ireland in 2012 of sepsis after she was denied an abortion, prompting the country to overturn its longstanding ban.

Rachel Neal is a fellow with Physicians for Reproductive Health and an OB-GYN in Georgia, where abortion is outlawed after cardiac activity is detected, around six weeks. While the state provides an exception in cases in which the "physician determines, in reasonable medical judgment, that the pregnancy is medically futile," she said water breaking in the late second trimester would typically not be covered.

That means women who previously had the choice to end their pregnancies early now either have to leave the the state or wait to deliver a baby that will likely die immediately or shortly after birth, while putting themselves at high risk of infection that could impact their ability to get pregnant again.

"It's completely uncharted territory," Neal said. "Before all of this, almost nobody chose this. ... It was

very uncommon that someone would choose to wait ... because realistically any outcome that would result in a live birth is so slim."

Nine states with abortion restrictions explicitly exempt cases of lethal fetal anomalies, according to the Guttmacher Institute, a research group that supports abortion rights. Even in states with such exemptions, however, doctors say there can be confusion.

Some states have developed lists for what qualifies as a fatal fetal condition, but doctors say they will never fully capture every potential diagnosis. And most states do not have such lists, leaving definitions up for interpretation.

"How lethal does it have to be?" Peaceman asked. "Does it have to die within the first few hours? Or the first 30 days?"

At the same time, doctors in some states risk felony convictions that can carry five or 10 years of mandatory prison time if others dispute their interpretations of what some complain are overly broad and confusing rules.

Eric Scheidler, the executive director of the Pro-Life Action League, a nonprofit that advocates against abortion, accused "politically motivated physicians" of focusing on "edge cases" to "maintain a broad abortion license" and in some cases "deliberately misunderstanding what the law says in order to create this narrative that we have to have complete abortion license or we'll have physicians caught in a quandary."

Nonetheless, he said he thinks candidates should focus on the majority of abortions that involve unwanted pregnancies.

"I really want to see these candidates talk about where we have areas of broad consensus," he said. "I would encourage political candidates to espouse positions that are widely held. ... I don't want to get hung up on these very rare cases."

Iowa Republicans pass bill banning most abortions after about 6 weeks, governor to sign on Friday

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — Iowa's Republican-led Legislature passed a bill banning most abortions after roughly six weeks of pregnancy during a marathon special session Tuesday that continued late into the night. Gov. Kim Reynolds immediately said in a statement she would sign the bill on Friday.

The bill passed with exclusively Republican support in a rare, one-day legislative burst lasting more than 14 hours over the vocal — and sometimes tense — objections from Democratic lawmakers and abortion advocates protesting at the Capitol.

Just after 11 p.m., lingering protesters in the gallery booed and yelled "shame" to state senators in the minutes after the bill was approved.

Reynolds ordered the rare session after the state Supreme Court declined in June to reinstate a practically identical law that she signed in 2018.

"The Iowa Supreme Court questioned whether this legislature would pass the same law they did in 2018, and today they have a clear answer," Reynolds said in a statement. "The voices of Iowans and their democratically elected representatives cannot be ignored any longer, and justice for the unborn should not be delayed."

Abortion is currently legal in Iowa up to 20 weeks of pregnancy. The legislation will take immediate effect with the governor's signature on Friday. It will prohibit almost all abortions once cardiac activity can be detected, which is usually around six weeks of pregnancy and before many women know they are pregnant.

Preparations were already underway to quickly file legal challenges in court and get the measure blocked, once Reynolds signs it into law.

"The ACLU of Iowa, Planned Parenthood, and the Emma Goldman Clinic remain committed to protecting the reproductive rights of Iowans to control their bodies and their lives, their health, and their safety — including filing a lawsuit to block this reckless, cruel law," ACLU of Iowa Executive Director Mark Stringer said in a statement.

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In the meantime, Planned Parenthood North Central States has said they will refer patients out of state if they're scheduled for abortions in the next few weeks. The organization, the largest abortion provider in the state, will continue to provide care to patients who present before cardiac activity is detected.

There are limited circumstances under the measure that would allow for abortion after that point in a pregnancy where cardiac activity is detected — such as rape, if reported to law enforcement or a health provider within 45 days; incest, if reported within 145 days; if the fetus has a fetal abnormality "incompatible with life;" and if the pregnancy is endangering the life of the pregnant woman.

For much of the morning and afternoon, chants from abortion advocates echoed through the rotunda and could be heard from rooms where state representatives and senators were meeting in the morning and afternoon. Members of the public for and against the bill alternated conveying their viewpoints to lawmakers from both chambers for nearly four hours in total.

Sara Eide of the Iowa Catholic Conference encouraged lawmakers to vote in favor.

"The unborn child is a distinct human life with her own value, with her own DNA, and with her own right to life and right to legal protections," she said. "As a state and as a society, we should commit ourselves to protect all vulnerable populations wherever we find them."

Hilary McAdoo, a fertility nurse, said her two daughters motivated her to voice her opposition Tuesday.

"Just because a person has the ability to become pregnant does not mean they should be forced to become a mother," she said. "The people before me want to govern women's bodies without understanding how they work."

McAdoo called the six-week cutoff "impossible and irresponsible."

Laws such as Iowa's ban abortion when a "fetal heartbeat" can be detected, a concept that does not easily translate to medical science. That's because at the point where advanced technology can detect that first visual flutter, the embryo isn't yet a fetus, and it doesn't have a heart. An embryo is termed a fetus beginning in the 11th week of pregnancy, medical experts say.

A district court found the 2018 law unconstitutional in 2019 based on rulings by the U.S. Supreme Court and Iowa's Supreme Court that had affirmed a woman's fundamental constitutional right to abortion.

After both bodies overturned those rulings last year, the governor sought to reinstate the 2018 law. But the state's high court deadlocked last month without ruling on the merits of an abortion ban, leaving the law permanently blocked.

And so Reynolds called lawmakers back to Des Moines.

Democratic lawmakers proposed amendments to the language to expand the exceptions, which were swiftly rejected.

"Iowa women are less free than they were a week ago and it's because of the work of Republicans in the legislature and the governor," said House Minority Leader Jennifer Konfrst, who voiced concern that there will be instant chaos and confusion if and when the bill is signed into law.

"We will spend every day between now and Election Day letting voters know that the Republican Legislature was too extreme, went too far and voted against the interests of everyday Iowans," she added.

Most Republican-led states have drastically limited abortion access in the year since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* and handed authority on abortion law to the states. More than a dozen states have bans with limited exceptions and one state, Georgia, bans abortion after cardiac activity is detected. Several other states have similar restrictions that are on hold pending court rulings.

Milan Kundera, Czech writer and former dissident, dies in Paris aged 94

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Milan Kundera, whose dissident writings in communist Czechoslovakia transformed him into an exiled satirist of totalitarianism, has died in Paris at the age of 94, Czech media said Wednesday.

Kundera's renowned novel, "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," opens wrenchingly with Soviet tanks rolling through Prague, the Czech capital that was the author's home until he moved to France in 1975. Weaving together themes of love and exile, politics and the deeply personal, Kundera's novel won critical acclaim, earning him a wide readership among Westerners who embraced both his anti-Soviet subversion and the eroticism threaded through many of his works.

"If someone had told me as a boy: One day you will see your nation vanish from the world, I would have considered it nonsense, something I couldn't possibly imagine. A man knows he is mortal, but he takes it for granted that his nation possesses a kind of eternal life," he told the author Philip Roth in a New York Times interview in 1980, the year before he became a naturalized French citizen.

In 1989, the Velvet Revolution pushed Communists from power and Kundera's nation was reborn as the Czech Republic, but by then he had made a new life — and a complete identity — in his attic apartment on Paris' Left Bank.

To say his relationship with the land of his birth was complex would be an understatement. He returned to the Czech Republic rarely and incognito, even after the fall of the Iron Curtain. His final works, written in French, were never translated into Czech. "The Unbearable Lightness of Being," which won him such acclaim and was made into a film in 1988, was not published in the Czech Republic until 2006, 17 years after the Velvet Revolution, although it was available in Czech since 1985 from a compatriot who founded a publishing house in exile in Canada. It topped the best-seller list for weeks and, the following year, Kundera won the State Award for Literature for it.

Kundera's wife, Vera, was an essential companion to a reclusive man who eschewed technology — his translator, his social secretary, and ultimately his buffer against the outside world. It was she who fostered his friendship with Roth by serving as their linguistic go-between, and — according to a 1985 profile of the couple — it was she who took his calls and handled the inevitable demands on a world-famous author.

The writings of Kundera, whose first novel "The Joke" opens with a young man who is dispatched to the mines after making light of communist slogans, was banned in Czechoslovakia after the Soviet invasion of Prague in 1968, when he also lost his job as a professor of cinema. He had been writing novels and plays since 1953.

"The Unbearable Lightness of Being" follows a dissident surgeon from Prague to exile in Geneva and back home again. For his refusal to bend to the Communist regime the surgeon, Tomas, is forced to become a window washer, and uses his new profession to arrange sex with hundreds of female clients. Tomas ultimately lives out his final days in the countryside with his wife, Tereza, their lives becoming both more dreamlike and more tangible as the days pass.

Jiri Srstka, Kundera's Czech literary agent at the time the book was finally published in the Czech Republic, said the author himself delayed its release there for fears it would be badly edited.

"Kundera had to read the entire book again, rewrite sections, make additions and edit the entire text. So given his perfectionism, this was a long-term job, but now readers will get the book that Milan Kundera thinks should exist," Srstka told Radio Praha at the time.

Kundera refused to appear on camera, rejected any annotation when his complete published works were released in 2011, and would not allow any digital copies of his writing. In a June 2012 speech to the French National Library — which was re-read on French radio by a friend — he said he feared for the future of literature.

"It seems to me that time, which continues its march pitilessly, is beginning to endanger books. It's because of this anguish that, for several years now, I have in all my contracts a clause stipulating that they must be published only in the traditional form of a book, that they be read only on paper and not

on a screen," he said. "People walk in the street, they no longer have contact with those around them, they don't even see the homes they pass, they have wires hanging from their ears. They gesticulate, they should, they look at no one and no one looks at them. I ask myself, do they even read books anymore? It's possible, but for how much longer?"

His loyalty to the printed word meant that it was possible for readers to find criticism and biographies of Kundera to download, but not his works themselves.

Despite his fierce protection of his private life — he gave only a handful of interviews and kept his biographical information to a bare minimum — Kundera was forced to revisit his past in 2008, when the Czech Republic's Institute for the Study of Totalitarian Regimes produced documentation indicating that in 1950, as a 21-year-old student, Kundera told police about someone in his dormitory. The man was ultimately convicted of espionage and sentenced to hard labor for 22 years.

The researcher who released the report, Adam Hradilek, defended it as the product of extensive research on Kundera.

"He has sworn his Czech friends to silence, so not even they are willing to speak to journalists about who Milan Kundera is and was," Hradilek said at the time.

Kundera said the report was a lie, telling the Czech CTK news agency it amounted to "the assassination of an author."

In a 1985 profile — which is among the longest and most detailed on record, and examines Kundera's life in Paris — the author foreshadowed how much even that admission must have pained him.

"For me, indiscretion is a capital sin. Anyone who reveals someone else's intimate life deserves to be whipped. We live in an age when private life is being destroyed. The police destroy it in Communist countries, journalists threaten it in democratic countries, and little by little the people themselves lose their taste for private life and their sense of it," he told the writer Olga Carlisle. "Life when one can't hide from the eyes of others — that is hell."

North Korea fires its first ICBM in 3 months after making threat over alleged US spy flights

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea test-fired its first intercontinental ballistic missile in three months on Wednesday, days after it threatened "shocking" consequences to protest what it called provocative United States reconnaissance activity near its territory.

Some experts say North Korea likely launched its developmental, road-mobile Hwasong-18 ICBM, a type of solid-fuel weapon that is harder to detect and intercept than its liquid-fuel ICBMs. North Korean leader Kim Jong Un previously called the Hwasong-18 his most powerful nuclear weapon.

The missile, fired from North Korea's capital region around 10 a.m., flew about 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) at a maximum altitude of 6,000 kilometers (3,730 miles) before landing in waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan, according to South Korean and Japanese assessments. They said the missile was launched at a high angle in what observers say was an apparent attempt to avoid neighboring countries.

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said the missile flew for 74 minutes — the longest flight time recorded by any weapon launched by North Korea. The previous record of 71 minutes was registered during the test flight of the liquid-fuel Hwasong-17 ICBM last year.

South Korea's military called the launch "a grave provocation" and urged North Korea to refrain from additional launches. Matsuno denounced North Korea's repeated missile launches as "threats to the peace and safety of Japan, the region and international society."

In a trilateral phone call, the chief nuclear envoys of South Korea, Japan and the U.S. agreed to sternly deal with North Korean provocations and boost their coordination to promote a stronger international response to the North's nuclear and missile programs, according to Seoul's Foreign Ministry.

The launch came while South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida

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were attending the NATO summit in Vilnius, Lithuania. In an emergency meeting of South Korea's security council convened by video in Lithuania, Yoon warned North Korea would face more powerful international sanctions due to its illicit weapons programs.

North Korea's ICBM program targets the mainland United States, while its shorter-range missiles are designed to hit U.S. regional allies like South Korea and Japan.

Since 2017, North Korea has performed a slew of ICBM tests, but some experts say the North still has some technologies to master to possess functioning nuclear-armed missiles capable of reaching major U.S. cities.

The North's ICBM test in April was the first launch of the Hwasong-18. After that launch, Kim said the missile would enhance the North's counterattack capabilities and ordered the expansion of his country's nuclear arsenal to "constantly strike extreme uneasiness and horror" in its rivals.

Missiles with built-in solid propellants would be easier to move and hide, making it difficult for opponents to detect their launches in advance. All of North Korea's previous ICBM tests used liquid fuel.

Kim Dong-yub, a professor at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul, said Wednesday's launch appeared to be the North's second flight-test of the Hwasong-18.

Earlier this week, North Korea released a series of statements accusing the U.S. of flying a military spy plane close to its soil.

In a statement Monday night, Kim's sister and top adviser, Kim Yo Jong, warned the United States of "a shocking incident" as she claimed that the U.S. spy plane flew over the North's eastern exclusive economic zone eight times earlier in the day.

The U.S. and South Korea dismissed the North's accusations and urged it to refrain from any acts or rhetoric that raised animosities.

"I would just say that we continue to urge (North Korea) to refrain from escalatory actions," Matthew Miller, a spokesperson for the U.S. State Department, said Tuesday. "As a matter of international law, (North Korea's) recent statements that U.S. flights above its claimed exclusive economic zone are unlawful are unfounded, as high seas freedoms of navigation and overflight apply in such areas."

North Korea has made numerous similar accusations over U.S. reconnaissance activities, but its latest statements came amid heightened animosities over North Korea's torrid run of weapons tests since the start of last year. Some observers say the North wants to use an expanded weapons arsenal to wrest greater concessions in eventual diplomacy with its rivals.

"Kim Yo Jong's bellicose statement against U.S. surveillance aircraft is part of a North Korean pattern of inflating external threats to rally domestic support and justify weapons tests," said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor at Ewha University in Seoul. "Pyongyang also times its shows of force to disrupt what it perceives as diplomatic coordination against it — in this case, South Korea and Japan's leaders meeting during the NATO summit."

Kim Dong-yub, the professor, said Wednesday's launch was likely made under the North's previously scheduled weapons build-up programs to hone Hwasong-18 technologies, rather than a direct response to the NATO gathering or the alleged U.S. spy plane flight.

The Hwasong-18 is among an array of high-tech weapons that Kim Jong Un has vowed to introduce to deal with what he called escalating U.S. military threats. Other weapons on his wish-list are an ICBM with multi-warheads, a spy satellite and a nuclear-powered submarine. In late May, North Korea's launch of its first spy satellite ended in failure, with a rocket carrying it plunging to the ocean soon after liftoff.

Some experts say North Korea might ramp up weapons tests around July 27, the date for the 70th anniversary of the signing of an armistice that ended the 1950-53 Korean War. North Korea calls the date "the V-Day" or "the War Victory Day."

"Pyongyang might be manufacturing tensions ahead of its Victory Day to further strengthen solidarity domestically after having failed its first spy satellite launch in May, and then justifying future provocations by first unleashing a stream of threats and harsh rhetoric about U.S. spy planes," said Duyeon Kim, an adjunct Senior Fellow with the Center for a New American Security.

U.N. Security Council resolutions ban North Korea from engaging in any launches using ballistic technolo-

gies. But China and Russia, both permanent members of the council, blocked the U.S. and others' attempts to toughen U.N. sanctions on North Korea over its recent ballistic missile tests.

Yamaguchi reported from Tokyo.

Thai diplomat meets with Suu Kyi in detention in Myanmar and says she wants to join talks on crisis

By JIM GOMEZ and EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Thailand's top diplomat said Wednesday that he met with ousted Myanmar leader Aung San Suu Kyi in detention over the weekend and she conveyed her openness to engage in talks to resolve the crisis gripping her strife-torn nation.

Thai Foreign Minister Don Pramudwinai is the only government official outside of Myanmar known so far to have met with Suu Kyi since she was detained with other officials when the army seized power from her elected government on Feb. 1, 2021.

He told his counterparts in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, who are meeting in Indonesia's capital, that Suu Kyi was in good health when he met with her for more than an hour on Sunday.

"She encourages dialogue," Don told reporters in Jakarta when asked what message Suu Kyi conveyed to him. "Obviously we're trying to find a way to settle with Myanmar."

The military takeover and the crackdown on the armed resistance to it plunged the country into deadly chaos. Western and European governments, including the United States, have imposed sanctions on Myanmar's military government and demanded the immediate release of Suu Kyi and other political detainees.

Nay Phone Latt, a spokesperson for the National Unity Government — Myanmar's main opposition organization, which views itself as the country's legitimate government — told The Associated Press that the information about the meeting between the Thai foreign minister and Suu Kyi raised questions, and Myanmar's people are uncertain that it actually took place.

He added that the military junta's attempt to try to use the influence of Suu Kyi at this time is indirectly admitting that they are no longer in a good situation concerning the country's political crisis.

Suu Kyi, 78, is serving a total of 33 years imprisonment after being convicted on a raft of charges that her supporters and rights groups say were politically motivated in an attempt to discredit her and legitimize the military's takeover while preventing her from returning to politics.

A legal official from Myanmar who insisted on anonymity for fear of being punished by the authorities because he is not authorized to release information about Suu Kyi's legal proceedings told the AP that Suu Kyi's lawyers on Wednesday submitted appeal arguments to the Supreme Court on her behalf for the five corruption cases where she was found guilty.

The Myanmar crisis is at the top of the agenda of the ministerial meetings of ASEAN, a 10-nation bloc that includes Myanmar and Indonesia, which is the group's chairman this year.

ASEAN has been under international pressure to address the crisis, and it again banned Myanmar's generals from attending ASEAN foreign ministerial meetings in Jakarta after the military government largely ignored an emergency plan to take steps to end the crisis.

The generals responded by accusing ASEAN of violating the bloc's bedrock principles of nonintervention in each other's domestic affairs.

Don told reporters Tuesday that his government wanted to see "all ASEAN members" back in the group, without elaborating, a stance that deviates from the regional bloc's position of not recognizing the military government and banning its attendance at the top-level meetings of the group.

Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi said Wednesday that ASEAN would continue to focus on the five-point peace plan, suggesting Myanmar's generals wouldn't be allowed back to the regional bloc's ministerial and leaders' summits unless they substantially comply with the plan.

When asked by reporters to comment on Don's meeting with Suu Kyi, Marsudi, who was hosting the

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war — an idea they say he got from a twisted reading of the Beatles' song "Helter Skelter."

Decades after his conviction, Manson would continue to taunt prosecutors, parole agents and others, sometimes denying any role in the killings and other times boasting of them. He told a 2012 parole hearing: "I have put five people in the grave. I am a very dangerous man."

He died in 2017 after spending nearly 50 years in prison. He was 83.

— Susan Atkins, convicted of the Tate, LaBianca and Hinman murders, was a teenage runaway working as a topless dancer in a San Francisco bar when she met Manson in 1967.

The Tate-LaBianca murders went unsolved for months until Atkins, who was in jail on unrelated charges, boasted to a cellmate about her involvement.

At trial, she testified she was "stoned on acid" and didn't know how many times she stabbed Tate as the actress begged for her life. Atkins, who became a born-again Christian in prison and denounced Manson, tearfully recounted that confrontation during a parole hearing years later.

She died in prison of cancer in 2009. She was 61.

— Leslie Van Houten, a former high school cheerleader and homecoming princess, saw her life spiral out of control at 14 following her parents' divorce.

She turned to drugs and became pregnant but said her mother forced her to abort the fetus and bury it in the family's backyard.

Van Houten met Manson at an old movie ranch on the outskirts of Los Angeles where he had established his so-called "family" of followers.

She didn't take part in the Tate killings but accompanied Manson and others to the LaBianca home the next night. She has described holding down Rosemary LaBianca with a pillowcase over her head as others stabbed LaBianca dozens of times. Then, ordered by Manson follower Charles "Tex" Watson to "do something," she said she picked up a knife and stabbed the woman more than a dozen times.

Van Houten, 71, earned bachelor's and master's degrees in counseling while in prison and led several prison programs to help rehabilitate fellow inmates. She was repeatedly recommended for parole, but two governors — first Jerry Brown and then Gavin Newsom — blocked her release.

However, she was finally freed after Newsom announced last week that he wouldn't pursue efforts to keep her behind bars.

— Patricia Krenwinkel was a 19-year-old secretary when she met Manson at a party. She left everything behind three days later to follow him, believing they had a budding romantic relationship.

After he became abusive and bartered her for sex, she said she twice tried to leave him but followers brought her back, kept a close watch on her and kept her high on drugs.

She testified at a 2016 parole hearing that she repeatedly stabbed Folger, then stabbed Leno LaBianca in the abdomen the following night and wrote "Helter Skelter," "Rise" and "Death to Pigs" on the walls with his blood.

Krenwinkel, 75, remains in prison. Krenwinkel contends she is a changed person but was denied parole more than a dozen times. She was finally recommended for parole last year but Newsom reversed the decision.

— Charles "Tex" Watson was a college dropout from Texas when he arrived in California in 1967 seeking "satisfaction through drugs, sex and rock 'n' roll," as he explains on his website.

He recalled meeting Manson at the house of Beach Boys drummer Dennis Wilson after seeing Wilson hitchhiking and giving him a ride home.

Watson, 77, led the killers to the Tate estate, shot to death Parent as he was attempting to leave and took part in the killings that night and the next at the LaBianca home.

He became a born-again Christian in prison and formed a prison ministry in 1980 that he continues to lead. Watson, who has authored or co-authored several books while in prison, maintains he has changed and is no longer a danger to anyone. He has repeatedly been denied parole.

THE VICTIMS

— Sharon Tate, 26, was a model and rising film star after her breakout role in the 1966 film "Valley of

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the Dolls." She was 8 1/2 months pregnant when she was attacked, and she pleaded with her killers to spare her unborn son.

Tate's mother, Doris, became an advocate for victims' rights in California and was instrumental in a 1982 law that allows family members to testify about their losses at trials and parole hearings.

Her younger sister, Debra, also dedicated her life to victims' rights and testified at countless parole hearings for the killers, demanding they never be released.

Tate's husband, director Roman Polanski, was out of the country the night of the killings and has said it took him years to recover from the grief of losing his wife and baby.

— Jay Sebring, a hairdresser to Hollywood's stars, was Tate's former boyfriend and also begged the killers to spare her unborn child. He was shot, kicked in the face and stabbed multiple times.

Sebring had transformed the male haircare industry after graduating from beauty school in Los Angeles, and his clients included Warren Beatty, Steve McQueen, Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. He founded Sebring International in 1967 to market hair products and to franchise his salons internationally.

— Wojciech Frykowski and Abigail Folger had dined with Tate and Sebring earlier that night.

The 32-year-old Frykowski was a friend of Polanski's from Poland and an aspiring screenwriter. An autopsy found he was stabbed more than 50 times and shot twice.

His 25-year-old girlfriend was the heir to the Folger coffee fortune. She managed to escape the house but was tackled on the front lawn and stabbed 28 times.

— Steven Parent, a recent high school graduate planning to attend college in the fall, had dropped by a guest house on the property to visit the estate's 19-year-old caretaker, a casual acquaintance named William Garretson. He was leaving the property when Watson confronted him at the front gate and shot him to death.

Garretson, who was briefly taken into custody, returned to his native Ohio soon after the killings. Except for his testimony during the murder trial, he rarely spoke publicly about that night. He died of cancer in 2016.

— Leno and Rosemary LaBianca, who owned a chain of Los Angeles grocery stores, had no connection to Sharon Tate or her glamorous friends.

Their home was chosen at random by Manson, who tied them up and then, before leaving, ordered his followers to kill them. Among the weapons used was a chrome-plated bayonet.

OTHER PROMINENT PLAYERS

— Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, 74, a Manson "family" member who was not implicated in the Tate-LaBianca murders, was sentenced to prison for pointing a handgun at President Gerald Ford in 1975. Since her release in 2009, she has lived quietly in upstate New York.

— Linda Kasabian, the trial's key witness, was granted immunity from prosecution. She had accompanied the killers to the Tate house but was posted outside as a lookout. In that position she said she saw some of the killings.

The next night she remained in a car outside the LaBianca house as Manson tied up the victims, then left with him as the others stayed to kill them.

The 20-year-old moved in with the "family" a few weeks before the killings and fled immediately after. She turned herself in to authorities after the others were arrested. Kasabian later changed her name and lived out of sight for decades. She died on Jan. 21 in Tacoma, Washington. She was 73.

— Bruce Davis, 80, was convicted of taking part in the Hinman and Shea murders but was not involved in the Tate-LaBianca killings.

He testified at his 2014 parole hearing that he attacked Shea with a knife and held a gun on Hinman while Manson cut Hinman's face with a sword. "I wanted to be Charlie's favorite guy," he said. Parole panels have repeatedly recommended his release, but governors have blocked it.

— Steve "Clem" Grogan, 71, once a ranch hand at the old movie ranch where Manson had located his followers, was sentenced to life in prison for taking part in Shea's murder. In 1977 he told authorities where Shea's body was buried.

Grogan was paroled in 1985 and moved to northern California.

John Rogers retired from The Associated Press in 2021.

France's anti-immigration far right gets boost from riots over police killing of teen

By ELAINE GANLEY Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Widespread riots in France sparked by the police killing of a teenager with North African roots have revealed the depth of discontent roiling poor neighborhoods — and given a new platform to the increasingly emboldened far right.

The far right's anti-immigration mantra is seeping through a once ironclad political divide between it and mainstream politics. More voices are now embracing a hard line against immigration and blaming immigrants not only for the car burnings and other violence that followed the June 27 killing of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk, but for France's social problems as well.

"We know the causes" of France's unrest, Bruno Retailleau, head of the conservative group that dominates the French Senate, said last week on broadcaster France-Info. "Unfortunately for the second, the third generation there is a sort of regression toward their origins, their ethnic origins."

Retailleau's remarks, which drew accusations of racism, reflect the current line of his mainstream party, The Republicans, whose priorities to keep France "from sinking durably into chaos" include "stopping mass immigration."

"As soon as we want to be firm," Retailleau said Tuesday on RTL radio, "they say, 'Oh la la. Scandal! The fascists are arriving! You're like the National Rally,'" the main far-right party. "We're sick of being politically correct."

His response marked the latest fracture in a crumbling concept dubbed the "Republican Front," under which French parties, whatever their political color, used to stand together against the far right.

By linking immigration to the riots, Retailleau violated France's near-sacred value of universality by which all citizens, whatever their origin, are recognized only as French.

The far right appeared to capitalize on a sudden shift in the national mood to make further inroads: Shock and horror at Merzouk's death quickly morphed into shock and horror at the violent unrest, which spread from the outskirts of major urban areas to cities to small-town France. In just four days, an extreme-right crowdfunding campaign raised more than 1.5 million euros (\$1.6 million) for the family of the police officer accused of killing Nahel.

Far-right figures have long blamed immigration from majority Muslim North Africa, and some immigrants' failure to assimilate into French culture, for France's social problems.

"We suffer an immigration that is totally anarchic," the National Rally's Marine Le Pen, the leading far-right figure in France, said last week on France 2 television. She claimed the riots were the work of "an ultra-majority of youth who are foreign or of foreign origin," and said there was "a form of secession of these youths from French society."

Le Pen's critics note that successive French governments have failed to integrate new arrivals, and that communities with immigrant backgrounds face disproportionately higher poverty, unemployment and deep-seated discrimination.

But the far-right leader's voice resonates ever more loudly in France. Le Pen has spent years scrubbing up the image of her National Rally, and gained a powerful perch in parliament in legislative elections a year ago with 88 lawmakers. Le Pen now sits at the heart of institutional France.

Le Pen's party has progressively anchored itself among French voters. She won more than 41% in the runoff presidential vote last year.

"There are practically no more categories of the population immune to a (far-right) vote," polling agency Ifop said after a recent survey showing a steady rise in voters who have cast a ballot for Le Pen's party.

President Emmanuel Macron's centrist government took a tough line against the recent violence, but disputes Le Pen's characterization of those who rioted, with Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin stressing

that only 10% were foreigners. At a Senate hearing last week, he noted that some children with immigrant roots enter the police force.

Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne criticized the GoFundMe campaign for the police officer's family as unhelpful in tense times. But its success appeared to reflect a clamor for security, another prize issue of the far right.

Jean Messiha, a former official in the National Rally and the upstart hard-right Reconquest party, called the enormous response to the fund that he started a "tsunami" in support of law enforcement officers "who in a certain way fight daily so that France remains France."

The French far right has many faces, inside and outside the political sphere, ranging from the National Rally to Eric Zemmour's Reconquest, whose vice president is Le Pen's niece Marion Marechal. Both Zemmour and Marechal espouse the racist "great replacement" theory that there is a plot to diminish the influence of white people and replace cultures, particularly through immigration.

On France's fringe is an ultra-rightist movement, which includes conspiracy theorists, whose potential for violence worries authorities.

"The terrorist risk it engenders has grown in recent years within Western democracies — France, in particular," Nicolas Lerner, head of France's internal security agency, DGSI, said in a rare interview published in Le Monde newspaper. The ultras believe, he said, that they must do the job of the state in protecting Europe from terrorists and the "great replacement," and one way to do that is to "precipitate a clash to have a chance to win while there is still time."

Ten attacks have been thwarted by people from the fringe movement since 2017, he noted.

Mainstream politics is not inoculated.

The tone of political discourse, even in mainstream politics, can contribute to forging ultra rightists, Lerner warned.

"Last year's presidential and legislative elections ... marked by debates reflecting traditional concerns of the far right, notably on migratory issues, had a tendency to channel energy," he said.

Russia's threat to pull out of Ukraine grain deal raises fears about global food security

By COURTNEY BONNELL AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Concerns are growing that Russia will not extend a United Nations-brokered deal that allows grain to flow from Ukraine to parts of the world struggling with hunger, with ships no longer heading to the war-torn country's Black Sea ports and food exports dwindling.

Turkey and the U.N. negotiated the breakthrough accord last summer to ease a global food crisis, along with a separate agreement with Russia to facilitate shipments of its food and fertilizer. Moscow insists it's still facing hurdles, though data shows it has been exporting record amounts of wheat.

Russian officials repeatedly say there are no grounds for extending the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which is up for its fourth renewal Monday. It's something they have threatened before — then have twice gone on to extend the deal for two months instead of the four months outlined in the agreement.

The U.N. and others are striving to keep the fragile deal intact, with Ukraine and Russia both major suppliers of wheat, barley, vegetable oil and other food products that countries in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia rely on. It has allowed Ukraine to ship 32.8 million metric tons (36.2 million tons) of grain, more than half of it to developing nations.

The deal has helped lower global prices of food commodities like wheat after they surged to record highs following the invasion last year, but that relief has not reached kitchen tables.

Russia's exit would cut off a source for World Food Program aid for countries at risk of famine, including Somalia, Ethiopia and Afghanistan, and compound food security problems in vulnerable places struggling with conflict, economic crisis and drought.

"Russia gets a lot of good public will for continuing this agreement," said Joseph Glauber, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. "There would be a cost to pay in terms of public

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perception and global goodwill, I think, as far as Russia is concerned" if the deal isn't extended.

The amount of grain leaving Ukraine already has dropped, with Russia accused of slowing joint inspections of ships by Russian, Ukrainian, U.N. and Turkish officials and refusing to allow more vessels to join the initiative.

Average daily inspections — meant to ensure vessels carry only food and not weapons that could aid either side — have fallen from a peak of 11 in October to just over two in June.

That has led to a decline in grain exports, from a high of 4.2 million metric tons in October to 1.3 million in May, a low for the year-old initiative. They rose to 2 million in June as shipment sizes grew.

If the deal isn't extended, "the countries that had relied on Ukraine for their imports are going to have to look at other sources for imports, very likely Russia, which is something that I imagine Russia was intending," said Caitlin Welsh, director of the Global Food and Water Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The U.N. has been negotiating with Russia to stick with the initiative, with spokesman Stephane Dujaric saying Monday that top officials are "doing whatever we can to ensure the continuation of all of the agreements."

Ukraine's Infrastructure Ministry said Tuesday on Facebook that the final two ships are loading grain — heading for Egypt — while 29 vessels are waiting in the waters off Turkey because Russia has refused to allow their inspection.

"Ukrainian agricultural products play a significant role in global food security," Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said. But "for the past few months, the grain corridor has been practically closed."

Russia insists the agreement hasn't worked for its own exports, blaming Western sanctions for hindering financing and insurance.

While sanctions don't effect food and fertilizer, Moscow is seeking carveouts from restrictions on the Russian Agricultural Bank, as well as movement on its ammonia, a key ingredient in fertilizer, to a Ukrainian Black Sea port. But the ammonia pipeline has been damaged in the war, the U.N. said.

"There is still time to implement the part of the agreements that pertains to our country. So far, this part has not been fulfilled," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters last week. "And so at the moment, unfortunately, we don't see any particular grounds for extending this deal."

Russia, however, has increased its wheat exports to all-time highs following a large harvest. Shipments went from 33 million metric tons in 2021 to 44 million metric tons last year to expectations of 46 million this year, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's shipments have fallen by around 60%, from 19 million tons in 2021 to predictions of about 7 or 8 million tons this year — a big hit to its agriculture-dependent economy.

With less from Ukraine and more from Russia, the world's available wheat stocks are the same as in 2021 — and there is enough of it to go around, said Peter Meyer, head of grain analytics at S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Europe and Argentina are expected to boost wheat shipments, while Brazil saw a banner year for corn, of which Ukraine is also a major supplier. Meyer wouldn't expect more than a temporary bump to grain prices on world markets if the Black Sea deal isn't renewed.

"Markets just adapt extremely quickly," he said. "The fact of the matter is that the global grain markets, they balance each other out."

Ukraine can send its food by land or river through Europe, so it wouldn't be completely cut off from selling grain, but those routes have a lower capacity than sea shipments and have stirred disunity in the European Union.

"We are a cat running out of lives in this situation," said Simon Evenett, professor of international trade and economic development at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. "It only takes one thing to go wrong before we're into trouble."

While the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's food price index has fallen below the record highs it hit when Russian troops entered Ukraine, food costs were already high because of COVID-19, conflict and drought.

ministerial meetings, declined to answer. She instead highlighted the more than 100 engagements Indonesia as ASEAN leader has so far done this year with rival groups in Myanmar to foster dialogue, which she said could lead to the easing of tensions and violent confrontations in Myanmar.

"ASEAN is still very concerned and condemns the high number of acts of violence," Marsudi said. "ASEAN urges all parties to resolve or to stop acts of violence, especially those resulting in civilian victims of bombings of public facilities, including schools and hospitals."

More than 3,750 civilians, including pro-democracy activists, have been killed by security forces and nearly 24,000 arrested since the military takeover, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, a rights group that keeps tallies of arrests and casualties.

It's too early to tell if the rare access to Suu Kyi granted by Myanmar's military government to Don would eventually lead to talks between her camp and the ruling generals. The military government had earlier refused requests by ASEAN special envoys to meet her.

Asked if he considered his meeting with Suu Kyi a breakthrough, Don said it appeared to be a positive development.

Thailand supports ASEAN's approach of seeking the Myanmar military government's compliance with the five-point peace plan, Don said. But he told reporters without elaborating that his meeting with Suu Kyi was "an approach from the friends of Myanmar. We would like to see peaceful settlement."

Two Southeast Asian diplomats involved in the meetings in Jakarta told the AP that Thailand was taking extra steps to help ease the crisis out of fear that an escalation of the violence could drive large numbers of refugees from Myanmar into Thai territory. The two diplomats spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the sensitive issue publicly.

Ninie Karmini in Jakarta, and Grant Peck in Bangkok, contributed to this report.

The Manson 'family': A look at key players and victims in the cult leader's killings

By ROBERT JABLON and JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — In 1969, Charles Manson dispatched a group of disaffected young followers on a two-night killing rampage that terrorized Los Angeles. The killings remain etched in the American consciousness.

On Tuesday, Leslie Van Houten was released after spending more than 50 years in prison for two of those murders. She's the only one of Manson's followers who participated in the infamous Tate-LaBianca murders to go free.

Members of the Manson "family" arrived at the Hollywood Hills home of Sharon Tate on Aug. 8, 1969, where they stabbed, beat and shot to death the young actress and her friends — celebrity hairstylist Jay Sebring, coffee heiress Abigail Folger and aspiring screenwriter Wojciech Frykowski. As they made their way to the house, they encountered a teenager, Steven Parent, who had been visiting an acquaintance at the estate's guesthouse, and shot him to death.

The next night, Manson led a handful of followers, including Van Houten, to the home of wealthy grocer Leno LaBianca and his wife, Rosemary. Manson tied up the couple and left the others to kill them.

Manson and his followers also killed two others — musician Gary Hinman and Hollywood stuntman Donald "Shorty" Shea — in separate, unrelated attacks

In the decades since, some of Manson's followers have died while others remain behind bars.

THE KILLERS

— Charles Manson was a petty criminal who had been in and out of jail since childhood when he re-invented himself in the late 1960s as a guru-philosopher. He targeted teenage runaways and other lost souls, particularly attractive young women he used and bartered to others for sex.

He sent them out to butcher LA's rich and famous in what prosecutors said was a bid to trigger a race

Then Russia's war helped push up the costs to produce food — including energy, fertilizer and transportation.

In developing nations increasingly relying on imported food, from Kenya to Syria, weakening currencies are keeping local prices high because they are paying in U.S. dollars.

"With approximately 80% of East Africa's grain being exported from Russia and Ukraine, over 50 million people across East Africa are facing hunger, and food prices have shot up by nearly 40% this year," said Shashwat Saraf, the International Rescue Committee's regional emergency director for East Africa.

"It is vital for the international community to not only forge a long-term deal but also build durable solutions to tackle food insecurity," he said.

AP reporter Daria Litvinova in Tallinn, Estonia, and Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

See AP's complete coverage of the war in Ukraine at <https://apnews.com/hub/russia-ukraine> and the food crisis at <https://apnews.com/hub/food-crisis>.

Charles Manson follower Leslie Van Houten released from prison a half-century after grisly killings

By CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Charles Manson follower Leslie Van Houten, a former homecoming princess who at 19 helped carry out the shocking killings of a wealthy Los Angeles couple at the direction of the violent and manipulative cult leader, walked out of a California prison Tuesday after serving more than 50 years of a life sentence.

Van Houten, now 73, "was released to parole supervision," the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation said in a statement.

She left the California Institution for Women in Corona, east of Los Angeles, in the early morning hours and was driven to transitional housing, her attorney Nancy Tetreault said.

"She's still trying to get used to the idea that this real," Tetreault told The Associated Press.

Days earlier Gov. Gavin Newsom announced he would not fight a state appeals court ruling that Van Houten should be granted parole. He said it was unlikely the state Supreme Court would consider an appeal.

The 1969 slayings and subsequent trials captivated the nation during an era of strife marked by the Vietnam War, the Civil Rights Movement and the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert F. Kennedy.

At a parole hearing in 2016, Van Houten said the murders were the start of what Manson believed was a coming race war he called "Helter Skelter," after the Beatles song. He had his followers prepare to fight and learn to can food so they could go underground and live in a hole in the desert, she added.

Van Houten was sentenced to death in 1971 for helping Manson's group carry out the killings of Leno LaBianca, a grocer in Los Angeles, and his wife, Rosemary. Her sentence was later commuted to life in prison when the California Supreme Court overturned the state's death penalty law in 1972. Voters and state lawmakers eventually reinstated the death penalty, but it did not apply retroactively.

The LaBiancas were killed in their home, and their blood was smeared on the walls afterward. Van Houten later described holding Rosemary LaBianca down with a pillowcase over her head as others stabbed her. Then, ordered by Manson follower Charles "Tex" Watson to "do something," Van Houten said, she picked up a knife and stabbed the woman more than a dozen times.

The slayings happened the day after Manson followers killed actress Sharon Tate and four others. Van Houten did not participate in the Tate killings.

She is the first Manson follower who took part in the killings to walk free.

Van Houten is expected to spend about a year at a halfway house, adjusting to a world changed immeasurably by technology in the past half-century.

"She has to learn to use the internet. She has to learn to buy things without cash," Tetreault said.

"It's a very different world than when she went in."

Van Houten, who will likely be on parole for about three years, hopes to get a job as soon as possible, Tetreault said. She earned a bachelor's and a master's degree in counseling while in prison and worked as a tutor for other incarcerated people.

Van Houten was found suitable for parole after a July 2020 hearing, but her release was blocked by Newsom, who maintained she was still a threat to society.

She filed an appeal with a trial court, which rejected it, and then turned to the appellate courts. The Second District Court of Appeal in May reversed Newsom's rejection of her parole in a 2-1 ruling, writing that there was "no evidence to support the Governor's conclusions" about Van Houten's fitness for release.

The judges took issue with Newsom's claim that Van Houten did not adequately explain how she fell under Manson's influence. At her parole hearings, she discussed at length how her parents' divorce, her drug and alcohol abuse and a forced illegal abortion led her down a path that left her vulnerable.

They also disputed Newsom's suggestion that her past violent acts were a cause for future concern were she to be released.

"Van Houten has shown extraordinary rehabilitative efforts, insight, remorse, realistic parole plans, support from family and friends, favorable institutional reports, and, at the time of the Governor's decision, had received four successive grants of parole," the judges said. They also noted her "many years" of therapy and substance abuse counseling.

The dissenting judge who sided with Newsom said there was some evidence Van Houten lacked insight into the heinous killings.

Newsom was disappointed by the appeals court decision, his office said.

"More than 50 years after the Manson cult committed these brutal killings, the victims' families still feel the impact," the governor's office said in a July 7 statement.

In all, Van Houten had been recommended for parole five times since 2016. All of those recommendations were denied by either Newsom or former Gov. Jerry Brown.

Cory LaBianca, Leno LaBianca's daughter, said last week that her family was heartbroken by the possibility that Van Houten could be released.

Anthony DiMaria, whose uncle Jay Sebring was killed along with Tate, said Tuesday her release was devastating to all the victims' families, who "collectively suffer the pain and loss" caused by the Manson cult.

Van Houten, a former high school cheerleader and homecoming princess, saw her life spiral out of control at 14 following her parents' divorce. She turned to drugs and became pregnant but said her mother forced her to abort the fetus and bury it in the family's backyard.

Van Houten became the youngest of Manson's followers when they met at an old movie ranch on the outskirts of Los Angeles where he had established his so-called family of followers.

Manson died in prison in 2017 of natural causes at age 83 after nearly half a century behind bars. Watson and fellow Manson follower Patricia Krenwinkel have each been denied parole multiple times. Krenwinkel was recommended for parole last year, but that was rejected by Newsom. Another follower, Susan Atkins, died in prison in 2009.

Vermont slowly turns to recovery after being hit by flood from slow-moving storm

By LISA RATHKE Associated Press

ANDOVER, Vt. (AP) — Floodwaters receded in Vermont cities and towns pummeled by a storm that delivered two months of rain in two days, allowing officials to focus on recovering from a disaster that trapped residents in homes, closed roadways and choked streets and businesses with mud and debris.

In the capital city of Montpelier, where streets were flooded Tuesday by the swollen Winooski River, officials said that water levels at a dam just upstream appeared to be stable.

"It looks like it won't breach. That is good. That is one less thing we have to have on our front burner,"

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Montpelier Town Manager Bill Fraser said.

Fraser said the dam remains a lingering concern but with the water receding the city was shifting to recovery mode. Public works employees were expected out Wednesday to start removing mud and debris downtown and building inspections will start as businesses begin cleaning up their properties.

The slow-moving storm reached New England after hitting parts of New York and Connecticut on Sunday. Some communities received between 7 and 9 inches (18 centimeters and 23 centimeters) of rain. Towns in southwest New Hampshire had heavy flooding and road washouts, and the Connecticut River was expected to crest above flood stage Wednesday in Hartford and towns to the south.

In Vermont's capital, brown water from the Winooski had obscured vehicles and all but the tops of parking meters along picturesque streets lined with brick storefronts whose basements and lower floors were flooded. Some residents of the city of 8,000 slogged their way through waist-high water Tuesday; others canoed and kayaked along main streets to survey the scene.

Bryan Pfeiffer canoed around downtown to check out the damage and was appalled by what he saw. The basement of every building — including the one where he works — and the lower levels of most were inundated. Even the city's fire station was flooded.

"It's really troubling when your fire station is under water," Pfeiffer said.

Similar scenes played out in neighboring Barre and in Bridgewater, where the Ottauquechee River spilled its banks.

Vermont Gov. Phil Scott said floodwaters surpassed levels seen during Tropical Storm Irene. Irene killed six people in Vermont in August 2011, washing homes off their foundations and damaging or destroying more than 200 bridges and 500 miles (805 kilometers) of highway.

The flooding has already caused tens of millions of dollars in damage throughout the state. There have been no reports of injuries or deaths related to the flooding in Vermont, where swift-water rescue teams aided by National Guard helicopter crews performed more than 100 rescues, Vermont Emergency Management said Tuesday.

One of the worst-hit places was New York's Hudson Valley, where a woman identified by police as Pamela Nugent, 43, died as she tried to escape her flooded home with her dog in the hamlet of Fort Montgomery.

Atmospheric scientists say destructive flooding events happen more frequently as storms form in a warmer atmosphere, and the planet's rising temperatures will only make it worse.

In Vermont, more rain was forecast Thursday and Friday, but Peter Banacos, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said the state will be spared any further torrential downpours.

Much of the focus turned to reopening roadways, checking on isolated homeowners and cleaning out mud and debris from water-logged businesses.

"We sustained catastrophic damage. We just really took the brunt of the storm," Ludlow Municipal Manager Brendan McNamara said as he assessed the flood's impact around the town of 1,500 people.

Among the losses was the town's water treatment plant. Its main supermarket remained closed. The main roadway through town had yet to be fully reopened and McNamara couldn't begin to estimate how many houses had been damaged. The town's Little League field and a new skate park were destroyed, and scores of businesses were damaged.

"Thankfully we got through it with no loss of life," McNamara said. "Ludlow will be fine. People are coming together and taking care of each other."

Colleen Dooley returned to her condominium complex in Ludlow on Tuesday to find the grounds covered in silt and mud and the pool filled with muddy river water.

"I don't know when we'll move back, but it will certainly be awhile," said Dooley, a retired teacher.

President Joe Biden, attending the annual NATO summit in Lithuania, declared an emergency for Vermont and authorized the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help coordinate disaster relief efforts and provide assistance.

FEMA sent a team to Vermont, along with emergency communications equipment, and was prepared to keep shelters supplied if the state requests it. The agency also monitored flooding in Massachusetts,

Connecticut and New Hampshire, regional spokesperson Dennis Pinkham said.

Kathy McCormack in Concord, New Hampshire; Michael Hill in Albany, New York; and Mark Pratt, Michael Casey and Steve LeBlanc in Boston contributed.

Hollywood actors agree to mediation, but strike may be unavoidable

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Unionized Hollywood actors on the verge of a strike have agreed to allow a last-minute intervention from federal mediators but say they doubt a deal will be reached by a negotiation deadline late Wednesday.

"We are committed to the negotiating process and will explore and exhaust every possible opportunity to make a deal, however we are not confident that the employers have any intention of bargaining toward an agreement," the Screen Actors Guild -American Federation of Radio and Television Artists said in a statement Tuesday night.

The actors could join the already striking Writers Guild of America and grind the already slowed production process to a halt if no agreement is reached with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers. The sides agreed to an extension before the original contract expiration date on June 30, resetting it to Wednesday at 11:59 p.m.

Growing pessimism surrounding the talks seemed to turn to open hostility when SAG-AFTRA released a statement Tuesday night.

It came in response to a report in Variety that a group of Hollywood CEOs had been the force behind the request for mediation, which the union said was leaked before its negotiators were informed of the request.

The AMPTP declined comment through a representative. It's not clear whether federal mediators have agreed to take part, but such an intervention would presumably require more time than the hours left on the contract.

"The AMPTP has abused our trust and damaged the respect we have for them in this process," the SAG-AFTRA statement said. "We will not be manipulated by this cynical ploy to engineer an extension when the companies have had more than enough time to make a fair deal."

Issues on the table in the talks include residual pay and the threat of unregulated use of artificial intelligence.

'Succession' likely to lead Emmy nominations, but Hollywood strikes could cloud ceremony

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — HBO may dominate Wednesday morning's Emmy nominations with its elite trio of "Succession," "The White Lotus" and "The Last of Us," but the dominant theme darkening the scene is the ongoing writers strike and the looming possibility that actors may soon join them.

"Succession" and its deeply dysfunctional dynasty of one-percenters is a lock to be nominated for best drama, which it has won two of the past three years. It's nearly as certain to have multiple nominees across the acting categories, with stars Brian Cox, Jeremy Strong and Kieran Culkin probable for best actor nods and Sarah Snook a likely frontrunner among the best actress nominees.

The show led last year with 25 nominations for its third season, and given the Emmys' soft spot for series' final seasons, it could see a similar number for its concluding fourth.

"The White Lotus" and "The Last of Us" are also probably shoo-ins for best drama, a category that HBO has won in six of the last eight years, fending off offerings from upstart streaming services.

Bella Ramsey and Pedro Pascal, the duo on a fungus-filled quest in "The Last of Us," are favorites to

get lead acting nominations. And the cursed vacationers at a Sicilian resort from the second season of "The White Lotus" could crowd the supporting categories, especially on the actress side, where Jennifer Coolidge, Aubrey Plaza and Meghann Fahy could all be competing against one another.

Contenders in the comedy categories are wildly diverse and the field is wide open, from acclaimed shows including "Barry," "The Bear" and "Abbott Elementary," to beloved series and past top Emmy winners like "Ted Lasso" and "The Marvelous Mrs. Maisel."

"Community" star Yvette Nicole Brown and Television Academy Chair Frank Scherma will announce the nominees.

But the possibility of an industry debilitated by two strikes could dampen any joy for those nominated, and could put the damper on the ceremony scheduled for September 18 on the Fox network.

The work walkout from the writers who are essential to most awards telecasts is now in its 10th week, and with no negotiations planned, there's no end in sight.

The actors union's contract with the consortium of studios, streaming services and production companies that hire them expires just hours after the nominations are announced, and a strike could follow if no agreement is reached. While last-minute deals often happen and the two sides could talk past the deadline, a strike from performers would leave the Emmys without its primary cast members, and could also eliminate promotional interviews and events that nominees do during the run-up.

Smuggler sentenced to prison for deaths of 39 Vietnamese migrants who suffocated in truck in UK

By BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A Romanian man who was part of an international human smuggling ring was sentenced Tuesday to more than 12 years in prison for the deaths of 39 migrants from Vietnam who suffocated in a truck trailer on their way to England in 2019.

Marius Mihai Draghici was the ringleader's right-hand man and an "essential cog" in an operation that made huge profits exploiting people desperate to get to the U.K., Justice Neil Garnham said in the Central Criminal Court, known as the Old Bailey.

Victims, who paid about 13,000 pounds (\$16,770) for so-called VIP service, died after trying in vain to punch a hole in the container with a metal pole as the temperature inside exceeded 100 degrees F (38.5 C). Their desperation as they struggled to breathe was captured in messages they tried to send loved ones and recordings that showed "a growing recognition they were going to die there," Garnham said.

There was no escape and no one could hear their cries, prosecutors said.

Their final hours "must have entailed unimaginable suffering and anguish," prosecutor Bill Emlyn Jones said Tuesday.

A young mother wrote a message to loved ones that was never sent: "Maybe going to die in the container. Cannot breathe any more."

The 28 men, eight women and three children ranged in age from 15 to 44 and about half hailed from Nghe An province in north-central Vietnam. The victims included a bricklayer, a restaurant worker, a manicure technician, an aspiring beautician and a college graduate.

A married couple, Tran Hai Loc and Nguyen Thi Van, were found lying side by side Oct. 23, 2019, in the container that had been shipped by ferry from Zeebrugge, Belgium to Purfleet, England.

Draghici, 50, pleaded guilty last month to 39 counts of manslaughter and conspiracy to assist unlawful immigration.

He's the fifth person to be sentenced in the case in the U.K. Four other gang members were imprisoned in 2021 for terms ranging from 13 to 27 years for manslaughter. The stiffest sentence went to ringleader Gheorghe Nica, 46.

Another 18 people were convicted in Belgium, where the Vietnamese ringleader was sentenced to 15 years in prison. Others got one- to 10-year prison terms.

Draghici was "shocked and horrified with what occurred," defense lawyer Gillian Jones said in court.

But he, like the others involved in the conspiracy, had "immediately abandoned the plan and melted away in the night," after another man opened the truck container and discovered the dead bodies, Emlyn Jones said.

Draghici and Nica both fled to Romania, where Draghici was later arrested.

Family members of the victims who had gone into debt to fund the travel said they were crushed by the loss.

The parents of Nguyen Huy Hung, 15, who was on his way to live with his parents in the U.K. and wanted to be a hairdresser, learned of the tragedy on social media.

"We did not believe it was the truth until we saw his body with our own eyes," his father said. "We felt numb and that feeling lasted for many weeks later."

Vermont hit by 2nd day of floods as muddy water reaches the tops of parking meters in capital city

By LISA RATHKE Associated Press

ANDOVER, Vt. (AP) — A storm that dumped up to two months of rain in two days in Vermont and other parts of the Northeast brought more flooding Tuesday to communities that included the state capital, where officials said that river levels at a dam just upstream appeared to be stable.

Muddy brown water from the Winooski River flowed Tuesday through the capital of Montpelier, obscuring vehicles and all but the tops of parking meters along picturesque streets lined with brick storefronts whose basements and lower floors were flooded. Some residents of the city of 8,000 slogged their way through the waist-high water; others canoed and kayaked along main streets to survey the scene. Shopkeepers took stock of damaged or lost goods.

Montpelier Town Manager Bill Fraser said the dam remains a lingering concern but that the city was shifting to a recovery mode, with water receding and public works employees expected Wednesday morning to start removing mud and debris from downtown streets. Building inspections will start as businesses begin cleaning up their properties.

"The dam did not spill over. The water in the dam is still up there but it stabilized. We are feeling like the water going over the spillway of the dam is not an imminent threat," Fraser said. "It looks like it won't breach. That is good. That is one less thing we have to have on our front burner."

There were other signs of hope as Vermont rivers crested and flood waters receded, allowing officials to begin assessing the damage and the scope of the clean-up ahead. The flooding has already caused tens of millions of dollars in damage throughout the state.

"It's heartbreaking because you know all these businesses are losing inventory, and this person just clearly just lost their car," said state Sen. Anne Watson, noting a parked vehicle inundated with water in Montpelier. Similar scenes played out in neighboring Barre and in Bridgewater, where the Ottauquechee River spilled its banks.

Bryan Pfeiffer, a biologist who has lived in the Montpelier area for four decades, canoed around the downtown area to check out the damage and was appalled by what he saw. The basement of every building — including the one where he works — and the lower levels of most were inundated. Even the city's fire station was flooded.

"It's really troubling when your fire station is under water," Pfeiffer said.

Vermont Gov. Phil Scott said flood waters surpassed levels seen during Tropical Storm Irene. "Irene killed six people in Vermont in August 2011, washing homes off their foundations and damaging or destroying more than 200 bridges and 500 miles (805 kilometers) of highway.

The sun was out Tuesday and more sunshine was expected Wednesday. More rain was forecast Thursday and Friday but Peter Banacos, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service, said the state will be spared any further torrential downpours.

"We sustained catastrophic damage. We just really took the brunt of the storm," Ludlow Municipal Manager Brendan McNamara said, as he assessed the flood's impact around the 1,500 person town.

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"I talked to people today that said my house is gone. Thankfully we got through it with no loss of life," he said, adding the damage was worse than Tropical Storm Irene. "Ludlow will be fine. People are coming together and taking care of each other. We've been here before and we will get through it."

Among the losses was the town's water treatment plant. Its main supermarket remained closed. The main roadway through town had yet to be fully reopened and McNamara couldn't begin to estimate how many houses had been damaged. The town's Little League field and a new skate park were destroyed, and scores of businesses were damaged.

Colleen Dooley returned to her condominium complex in Ludlow Tuesday to find the grounds covered in silt and mud and the pool filled with muddy river water. A wooden pool deck had been carried about 300 feet (100 meters) by flood waters; the adjacent Black River was still raging.

"I don't know when we'll move back, but it will certainly be awhile," said Dooley, a 59-year-old retired teacher.

One woman was swept away in New York on Monday. There have been no reports of injuries or deaths related to the flooding in Vermont, where swift-water rescue teams aided by National Guard helicopter crews have done more than 100 rescues, Vermont Emergency Management said Tuesday.

That included an "extremely high-risk rescue" by a visiting New Hampshire team of a person who decided to drive around a barricaded road, said Mike Cannon of Vermont Urban Search and Rescue. "The car was washed off the roadway almost into the river," he said.

Dozens of roads and highways were closed, including many along the spine of the Green Mountains. There were fewer flood warnings and advisories than on Monday, and most were concentrated in the north of the state. Road crews cleared debris Tuesday, reopening Interstate 89 as it follows the Winooski River between Montpelier and Middlesex.

The slow-moving storm reached New England after hitting parts of New York and Connecticut on Sunday. Some communities received between 7 and 9 inches (18 centimeters and 23 centimeters) of rain. Towns in southwest New Hampshire had heavy flooding and road washouts, and the Connecticut River was expected to crest above flood stage Wednesday in Hartford and towns to the south.

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administrator Richard Spinrad said Tuesday that 13.7 million people were under inland flooding alerts on Tuesday. Atmospheric scientists say destructive flooding events happen more frequently as storms form in a warmer atmosphere, and the planet's rising temperatures will only make it worse.

President Joe Biden, attending the annual NATO summit in Lithuania, declared an emergency for Vermont and authorized the Federal Emergency Management Agency to help coordinate disaster relief efforts and provide assistance. He also spoke with the governor and Sen. Bernie Sanders.

FEMA sent a team to Vermont, along with emergency communications equipment, and is prepared to keep shelters supplied if the state requests it. The agency also is monitoring flooding in Massachusetts, Connecticut and New Hampshire, regional spokesperson Dennis Pinkham said Tuesday.

One of the worst-hit places was New York's Hudson Valley, where a woman identified by police as Pamela Nugent, 43, died as she tried to escape her flooded home with her dog in the hamlet of Fort Montgomery.

The U.S. Military Academy at West Point was pounded with more than 8 inches (20 centimeters) of rain that sent debris sliding onto some roads and washed others out.

Multiple rescue crews were positioned in Montpelier, where dispatch, police and fire operations were relocated to a water treatment plant after heavy flooding at City Hall and the police and fire departments. Also, the radio towers they use for emergency calls were not functional, Police Chief Eric Nordenson said.

Shelters were set up at churches, town halls and the Barre Municipal Auditorium, where delivering food to the more than 200 people taking refuge there — including those forced to evacuate from two area homeless shelters — was a challenge.

"We're trying to find paths to get supplies in to them," said John Montes, American Red Cross of Northern New England regional disaster officer.

and Mark Pratt, Michael Casey and Steve LeBlanc in Boston contributed.

Bank of America hit with \$250M in fines and refunds for 'double-dipping' fees and fake accounts

By KEN SWEET and MICHELLE CHAPMAN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Bank of America will reimburse customers more than \$100 million and pay \$150 million in fines for "double-dipping" on overdraft fees, withholding reward bonuses on credit cards and opening accounts without customer consent.

Combined, it is one of the highest financial penalties in years against Bank of America, which has largely spent the last 15 years trying to clean up its reputation and market itself to the public as a bank focused on financial health and not on overdraft fee income and financial trickery.

BofA must refund \$100 million to customers, pay \$90 million in penalties to the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau and \$60 million to the Office of the Comptroller of the Currency. "Bank of America wrongfully withheld credit card rewards, double-dipped on fees, and opened accounts without consent," said CFPB Director Rohit Chopra, in a statement. "These practices are illegal and undermine customer trust."

Empowered by a broad mandate from the White House, Chopra and the bureau have focused heavily in the past year on the issue of "junk fees" — fees charged to Americans that are often seen as unnecessary or exploitative by banks, debt collectors, airlines and concert venues. Banks such as BofA, JPMorgan Chase, Wells Fargo and others have been a target for the bureau under the Biden administration.

Part of the fines and penalties come because Bank of America had a policy of charging customers \$35 after the bank declined a transaction because the customer did not have enough funds in their account, the CFPB said. The agency determined that the bank double-dipped by allowing fees to be repeatedly charged for the same transaction.

The fees often came when customers had routine monthly transactions, like a gym membership. If a customer had too low of a balance to cover the transaction, it would be declined and BofA would charge the customer a \$35 fee. The business, who hasn't been paid, often would recharge the customer's account, resulting in another \$35 non-sufficient funds fee.

The bank ended this practice last year, but will still have to repay customers who got charged before the policy was changed.

BofA has been cutting down on its reliance on overdraft fee revenue for more than a decade, and cut how much it charges customers for an overdraft to \$15 last year. Brian Moynihan, the bank's CEO and chairman, told The Associated Press in 2022 that under these new policies, overdraft fee income was down 90% from 2021. The bank said that it voluntarily reduced overdraft fees and eliminated all non-sufficient fund fees in the first half of last year.

Bank of America also offered people cash rewards and bonus points when signing up for a card, but the CFPB said the bank illegally withheld promised credit card account bonuses.

The CFPB also found that, since at least 2012, Bank of America employees illegally applied for and enrolled consumers in credit card accounts without their knowledge or authorization. It is a similar to, but smaller than, a charge that was made against Wells Fargo, which paid billions in fines after it was determined that the San Francisco bank opened millions of unauthorized bank accounts in order to meet unrealistic sales goals.

In 2014 the CFPB ordered Bank of America to pay \$727 million for illegal credit card practices. Last year it was ordered to pay a \$10 million civil penalty over unlawful garnishments. Also in 2022, the CFPB and OCC fined Bank of America \$225 million and required it to pay hundreds of millions of dollars in redress to consumers for botched disbursement of state unemployment benefits at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Native American leaders visit site of archeological dig to find remains of boarding school students

By TRISHA AHMED and CHARLIE NEIBERGALL Associated Press

GENOA, Neb. (AP) — A grandmother wearing beaded necklaces of bright red, yellow and blue watched Tuesday as archeologists searched a remote site in central Nebraska for the remains of children — including her aunt — who died decades ago at a former Native American boarding school.

The search for a hidden cemetery near the former Genoa Indian Industrial School in Nebraska gained renewed interest after hundreds of children's remains were discovered at other Native American boarding school sites across the U.S. and Canada in recent years, said Dave Williams, the state's archeologist whose team is digging at the site.

The dig in Genoa began Monday and is expected to last through the week. Williams said they have yet to uncover any human remains.

"I came today to witness the dig because I had an aunt who died here, Mildred Lowe, in 1930, and she never came home. So I'm here to find out if they find any bones and how we're going to go about identifying and all of that," said Carolyn Fiscus, the woman in beads who is a member of the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska.

"As a tribal member and elder and grandma, I'm interested," Fiscus continued. "I've got a lot of spiritual and emotional investment in this. And my mom too, who's now passed away. That's why I'm here."

The school was part of a national system of more than 400 Native American boarding schools that attempted to assimilate Indigenous people into white culture by separating children from their families, cutting them off from their heritage and inflicting physical and emotional abuse.

Newspaper clippings, records and a student's letter indicate at least 86 students died at the school in Genoa, most due to diseases such as tuberculosis and typhoid. At least one death was blamed on an accidental shooting.

Researchers have identified 49 of the children killed but have not been able to find names for the other 37. The bodies of some of those children were returned to their homes but others are believed to have been buried on the school grounds at a location long forgotten.

Judi gaiashkibos, a member of the Ponca Tribe and the executive director of the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs, also visited the site. Her mother attended the school in the late 1920s, and gaiashkibos has been involved in efforts to find the cemetery for years.

She said it's difficult to spend time in the community where many Native Americans suffered, but that the search can help to heal and bring the children's voices to the surface.

"The remains are from a lot of different tribal nations. So they will be the ones that determine if they stay in the ground and if they have like a mass memorial, or if they want to try to exhume all of them and do DNA testing or anything else," gaiashkibos said.

The school, about 90 miles (145 kilometers) west of Omaha, opened in 1884 and at its height was home to nearly 600 students from more than 40 tribes across the country. It closed in the 1930s and most buildings were demolished long ago.

In an effort to find the cemetery, dogs trained to detect the odor of decaying remains searched the area last summer and indicated there could be a burial site in a strip of land bordered by a farm field, railroad tracks and a canal. In November, ground-penetrating radar showed it was an area consistent with graves, but there will be no guarantees until researchers finish digging, Williams said.

If the dig reveals human remains, the State Archeology Office will continue to work with the Nebraska Commission on Indian Affairs to decide on next steps.

Last year, the U.S. Interior Department — led by Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of Laguna Pueblo in New Mexico and the first Native American Cabinet secretary — released a first-of-its-kind report that named hundreds of schools the federal government supported to strip Native Americans of their cultures and identities.

At least 500 children died at some of the schools, but that number is expected to reach into the thou-

sands or tens of thousands as research continues.

Sunshine Thomas-Bear, a member of the Winnebago Tribe and the cultural preservation director for the tribe, also visited the archeological site on Tuesday. She said her father was a Native American boarding school survivor, and that trauma from the institutions has rippled across generations.

"I want to help heal my people, let them know I'm watching. If anything's found, then I will report back," Thomas-Bear said. "It's all a work in progress. This is one single step."

Ahmed reported from Minneapolis. Scott McFetridge in Des Moines, Iowa, contributed to this report.

NATO chief says no timetable set for Ukraine's membership; Zelenskyy calls that 'absurd'

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, SEUNG MIN KIM and KARL RITTER Associated Press

VILNIUS, Lithuania (AP) — NATO leaders said Tuesday that they would allow Ukraine to join the alliance "when allies agree and conditions are met" — a pronouncement that came just hours after President Volodymyr Zelenskyy blasted the organization's failure to set a timetable for his country as "absurd."

Instead, alliance leaders decided to remove obstacles on Ukraine's membership path so that it can join more quickly once the war with Russia is over.

"We reaffirmed Ukraine will become a member of NATO and agreed to remove the requirement for a membership action plan," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg told reporters, referring to a key step in the process that involves advice and assistance for countries seeking to join.

"This will change Ukraine's membership path from a two-step path to a one-step path," Stoltenberg said.

Although many NATO members have funneled arms and ammunition to Zelenskyy's forces, there is no consensus among the 31 allies for admitting Ukraine into NATO's ranks.

Zelenskyy pushed back sharply against the decision as he headed to the annual NATO summit in Vilnius.

"It's unprecedented and absurd when a time frame is set neither for the invitation nor for Ukraine's membership," Zelenskyy tweeted. "While at the same time, vague wording about 'conditions' is added even for inviting Ukraine. It seems there is no readiness to invite Ukraine to NATO or to make it a member of the Alliance."

NATO membership would afford Ukraine protection against a giant neighbor that annexed its Crimean Peninsula almost a decade ago and more recently seized vast swaths of land in the east and south. Joining NATO would also oblige Kyiv to reform its security institutions, improve governance and curb corruption — work that would also ease the country's path into the European Union.

Asked about Zelenskyy's concerns, Stoltenberg said the most important thing now is to ensure that his country wins the war, because "unless Ukraine prevails there is no membership to be discussed at all."

The broadside from Zelenskyy could renew tensions at the summit shortly after it saw a burst of goodwill following an agreement by Turkey to advance Sweden's bid to join NATO. Allies hope to resolve the seesawing negotiations and create a clear plan for the alliance and its support for Ukraine.

The Ukrainian president, who was to meet Wednesday with U.S. President Joe Biden and other NATO leaders, expressed deep frustration in an emotional speech in downtown Vilnius.

"Today I started my journey with faith in solutions, with faith in strong partners, with faith in NATO ... in a NATO that does not hesitate, that does not waste time and does not look over their backs at any aggressor," Zelenskyy said.

"I would like this faith to become confidence, confidence in the decisions that we deserve, all of us — every soldier, every citizen, every mother, every child," he said. "Is that too much to ask?"

Sharp divisions have emerged within the alliance over Ukraine's desire to join NATO, which was promised back in 2008 even though few steps were taken toward that goal.

In addition, the Baltic states — including Lithuania, which is hosting the summit — have pushed for a strong show of support and a clear pathway toward membership for Ukraine.

However, the United States and Germany urged caution. Biden said last week that Ukraine was not ready

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to join. Members of NATO, he told CNN, need to "meet all the qualifications, from democratization to a whole range of other issues," a nod toward longstanding concerns about governance and corruption in Kyiv.

In addition, some fear that bringing Ukraine into NATO would serve more as a provocation to Russia than as a deterrence against aggression.

Concretely, NATO leaders decided to launch a series of multiyear programs to bring Ukraine's Soviet-era military equipment and doctrines up to modern standards so the country can operate fully with the alliance.

On Wednesday, the leaders and Zelenskyy are set to launch a new, upgraded forum for their cooperation: a NATO-Ukraine Council, where all parties can convene crisis talks if their security is threatened.

To fast-track its future membership, the leaders agreed to do away with a membership action plan for Ukraine, a program often seen as mandatory for aspiring nations to undertake.

Known in NATO parlance as a MAP, the action plan involves a tailor-made package of advice, assistance and practical support for countries preparing to join NATO. Bosnia, for example, is currently taking part in one.

Pressed by reporters to say what kind of conditions are being placed on Ukraine joining, Stoltenberg said: "We want modern defense and security institutions."

The dispute over Ukraine stands in contrast to a hard-fought agreement to advance Sweden's membership. The deal was reached after days of intensive meetings, and it's poised to expand the alliance's strength in Northern Europe.

"Rumors of the death of NATO's unity were greatly exaggerated," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters triumphantly on Tuesday.

According to a joint statement issued when the deal was announced, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan will ask Turkey's parliament to approve Sweden joining NATO.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban, another holdout, is expected to take a similar step. Hungary's foreign minister said Tuesday that his country's ratification of Sweden's NATO membership was now just a "technical matter." Erdogan has not yet commented publicly.

The outcome is a victory as well for Biden, who has touted NATO's expansion as an example of how Russia's invasion of Ukraine has backfired on Moscow.

Finland has already become the 31st member of the alliance, and Sweden is on deck to become the 32nd. Both Nordic countries were historically nonaligned until the war increased fears of Russian aggression.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told reporters that NATO's expansion is "one of the reasons that led to the current situation."

"It looks like the Europeans don't understand their mistake," Peskov said. He warned against putting Ukraine on a fast track for NATO membership.

"Potentially it's very dangerous for the European security. It carries very big risks," Peskov said.

Erdogan met with Biden on Tuesday evening but remained mum on the deal to advance Sweden's membership in NATO.

Although Biden made a reference to "the agreement you reached yesterday," Erdogan said nothing about it. It was a conspicuous omission from Erdogan, who has not commented on the issue publicly during the summit.

However, Erdogan appeared eager to develop his relationship with Biden. He said previous meetings were "mere warm-ups, but now we are initiating a new process."

The Turkish president has been seeking advanced American fighter jets and a path toward membership in the European Union. The White House has expressed support for both, but publicly insisted that the issues were not related to Sweden's membership in NATO.

The Biden administration has backed Turkey's desire to buy 40 new F-16s as well as modernization kits from the U.S.

Biden is on a five-day trip to Europe, with the NATO summit as its centerpiece.

After the summit ends Wednesday, he will travel to Helsinki. On Thursday, he will celebrate Finland's recent entry into NATO and meet with Nordic leaders.

Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani, Zeke Miller, Lisa Mascaro and Darlene Superville in Washington, Justin Spike in Budapest, Hungary, and Lorne Cook in Vilnius, Lithuania, contributed to this report.

Supreme Court Justice Sotomayor's staff prodded colleges and libraries to buy her books

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — For colleges and libraries seeking a boldfaced name for a guest lecturer, few come bigger than Sonia Sotomayor, the Supreme Court justice who rose from poverty in the Bronx to the nation's highest court.

She has benefited, too — from schools' purchases of hundreds, sometimes thousands, of the books she has written over the years.

Sotomayor's staff has often prodded public institutions that have hosted the justice to buy her memoir or children's books, works that have earned her at least \$3.7 million since she joined the court in 2009. Details of those events, largely out of public view, were obtained by The Associated Press through more than 100 open records requests to public institutions. The resulting tens of thousands of pages of documents offer a rare look at Sotomayor and her fellow justices beyond their official duties.

In her case, the documents reveal repeated examples of taxpayer-funded court staff performing tasks for the justice's book ventures, which workers in other branches of government are barred from doing. But when it comes to promoting her literary career, Sotomayor is free to do what other government officials cannot because the Supreme Court does not have a formal code of conduct, leaving the nine justices to largely write and enforce their own rules.

"This is one of the most basic tenets of ethics laws that protects taxpayer dollars from misuse," said Kedric Payne, a former deputy chief counsel at the Office of Congressional Ethics and current general counsel for the Campaign Legal Center, a nonpartisan government watchdog group in Washington. "The problem at the Supreme Court is there's no one there to say whether this is wrong."

Supreme Court staffers have been deeply involved in organizing speaking engagements intended to sell books. That is conduct prohibited for members of Congress and the executive branch, who are barred under ethics rules from using government resources, including staff, for personal financial gain. Lower federal court judges are also instructed to not "lend the prestige of the judicial office to advance" their "private interests."

In a statement, the Supreme Court said it works with the justices and their staff to ensure they are "complying with judicial ethics guidance for such visits."

"When (Sotomayor) is invited to participate in a book program, Chambers staff recommends the number of books (for an organization to order) based on the size of the audience so as not to disappoint attendees who may anticipate books being available at an event," the court said.

The documents obtained by AP show that the justices' conduct spans their conservative-liberal split. Besides book sales, appearances by the justices were used in hopes of raising money at schools, which often invited major contributors to the events. Justices also lent the allure of their high office to partisan activity.

In 2019, as Sotomayor traveled the country to promote her new children's book, "Just Ask!," library and community college officials in Portland, Oregon, jumped at the chance to host an event.

They put in long hours and accommodated the shifting requests of Sotomayor's court staff. Then, as the public cost of hosting the event soared almost tenfold, a Sotomayor aide emailed with a different, urgent concern: She said the organizers did not buy enough copies of the justice's book, which attendees had to purchase or have on hand in order to meet Sotomayor after her talk.

"For an event with 1,000 people and they have to have a copy of Just Ask to get into the line, 250 books is definitely not enough," the aide, Anh Le, wrote staffers at the Multnomah County Library. "Families purchase multiples and people will be upset if they are unable to get in line because the book required

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is sold out.”

It was not an isolated push. As Sotomayor prepared for commencement weekend at the University of California, Davis law school, her staff pitched officials there on buying copies of books in connection with the event. Before a visit to the University of Wisconsin, the staff suggested a book signing.

At Clemson University in South Carolina, school officials offered to buy 60 signed copies before a 2017 appearance; Sotomayor’s staff noted that most schools order around 400. Michigan State University asked Sotomayor to come to campus and in 2018 spent more than \$100,000 on copies of her memoir, “My Beloved World,” to distribute to incoming first-year students. The books were shipped to the Supreme Court, where copies were taken to her chambers by court workers and signed by her before being sent to the school.

Sotomayor, whose annual salary this year is \$285,400, is not alone in earning money by writing books. Such income is exempt from the court’s \$30,000 restriction on outside yearly pay. But none of the justices has as forcefully leveraged publicly sponsored travel to boost book sales as has Sotomayor, according to emails and other records reviewed by the AP.

Such promotional efforts risk damaging the Supreme Court’s public standing further by placing an individual justice above the institution itself, said J. Michael Luttig, a former federal appeals court judge who has pushed for the justices to adopt a formal code of conduct.

“I have never believed that Supreme Court justices should write books to supplement their judicial incomes,” said Luttig, who was considered for the Supreme Court by President George W. Bush. “The potential for promotion of the individual justices over the Court at the reputational expense of the Court as an institution, as well as the appearance of such, is unavoidable.”

Sotomayor’s publisher, Penguin Random House, also has played a role in organizing her talks, in some cases pressing public institutions to commit to buying a specific number of copies or requesting that attendees purchase books to obtain tickets, emails show. The publisher has had several matters before the court in which Sotomayor did not recuse herself.

“Justice Sotomayor would have recused in cases in which Penguin Random House was a party, in light of her close and ongoing relationship with the publisher,” the Supreme Court said in a statement. “An inadvertent omission failed to bring Penguin’s participation in several cases to her attention; those cases ultimately were not selected for review by the Court. Chambers’ conflict check procedures have since been changed.”

A person close to Sotomayor, who insisted on anonymity to discuss the justice’s book dealings, said that Sotomayor “has not and will not profit from sales” of her memoir beyond the \$3.1 million advance that she received and that doing so would “require purchases of hundreds of thousands of additional books, more than double the purchases to date.”

Sotomayor, however, continues to earn royalties — at least \$400,000 since 2019 — from sales of her children’s literature, including “Just Ask!,” her second best-selling book, which was the promotional focus of the 2019 event held in Portland, emails and records show.

That summer, after an aide to Sotomayor first contacted Portland Community College to gauge its interest in hosting a book talk, officials at the Oregon school called it an “exciting possibility.” Officials committed to spending \$1,000 to host the event. Co-host Multnomah County Library pledged an additional \$1,500.

Costs associated with the event spiked to more than \$20,000 by the time it was held in September 2019. Emails show Supreme Court staff, including Le, a longtime legal assistant to the justice and graduate of the community college, closely controlled the run-of-show, requesting the largest venue possible, while managing minor details such as the placement of stairs or approving the TV camera angles that would be used.

As the talk neared, Le shifted her focus to books, which were offered for sale online to those who obtained tickets to the free event.

“Can you please show me the screen where people can purchase books?” Le wrote library staffers as they prepared to make the tickets available. “Are you just placing Just Ask ... on the portal or all of the Justice’s books.”

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When the free tickets were quickly snapped up, she asked library officials to publicize that those who could not get tickets could still meet the justice if they purchased a book.

"Please also let them know that they can attend the signing line to meet the Justice even if they are not able to attend the event," Le wrote in an Aug. 26, 2019, email.

A day later, she followed with another email, concerned that not enough of the people who got tickets had also purchased a book. Records indicate that the roughly 550 free tickets made available to the public (the rest were reserved for VIP guests) resulted in the advance purchase of only 28 books.

"Is there a reminder going out that people need to purchase a book at the event or bring a book to get into the signing line?" Le wrote. "Most of the registrants did not purchase books."

Still, when she found out event organizers had only purchased 250 copies of Sotomayor's book, she sent an email telling library officials that the quantity was "definitely not enough."

A library staffer emailed back, "Maybe you should communicate with (Sotomayor's publisher) and the book sellers about your concerns?"

A library spokesman, who was also included on the emails, declined to comment.

In its statement, the Supreme Court said judicial ethics guidance "suggests that a judge may sign copies of his or her work, which may also be available for sale" so long as there is "no requirement or suggestion that attendees are required to purchase books in order to attend."

"Justice Sotomayor's Judicial Assistant has worked with the Justice's publisher to ensure compliance with these standards, and at no time have attendees been required to buy a book in order to attend an event," the court statement read. "Asking whether attendees were reminded that they must either buy or bring a book in order to enter a signing line at an event would in no way conflict with the standard outlined above."

Some institutions that bought Sotomayor's books initiated the purchases on their own, raising the prospect of high-volume orders with the court as they extended the invitation to host her.

In 2018, Michigan State spent \$110,000 for 11,000 copies of "My Beloved World," to distribute to incoming first-year students after selecting it for an annual reading program with the city of East Lansing.

"Her biography is really just kind of, for lack of a better term, a rags-to-riches story. I mean, she came from very humble beginnings and became a Supreme Court justice," East Lansing Public Library director Kristin Shelley told the AP, explaining the book selection.

The books were shipped to the Supreme Court, scores of cartons at a time, to be signed by Sotomayor.

"Hello Supreme Court team: Good news!" a Penguin Random House worker emailed court staff. "The order that Anh and I have been waiting for from Michigan State University is in! They are going to be ordering a total of 11,004 HC (hard cover) copies. But don't panic. We will not be delivering 11,004 copies to the Supreme Court at one time."

When university officials mistakenly thought they might be missing 20 boxes of books they had ordered, Le expressed surprise, writing, "I literally prepped the boxes and had my aides count the books before signing. I even have a spreadsheet noting how many books were signed each day."

Other colleges have made similar purchases. The University at Albany in New York bought about 3,700 copies before a 2017 appearance. Stony Brook University in New York ordered roughly 3,900 copies in 2018 for use in a first-year reading program.

When the subject arose of how many Sotomayor books Clemson should purchase before a 2017 visit, school officials worried 60 might be too many to sign. Sotomayor's legal assistant reassured them it would not be a problem because "most institutions order in the ranges of 400 and up."

Other justices have benefited from similar arrangements. But how much they have made from individual schools or events is difficult to assess because the justices only report lump-sum earnings at year's end.

Justice Clarence Thomas has collected about \$1 million since 2006. Stephen Breyer, who retired in 2022, reported roughly \$700,000 in royalty income in the past two decades. Justice Neil Gorsuch has disclosed more than \$900,000 since his 2017 confirmation. Justice Amy Coney Barrett, who was confirmed in 2020, received a reported \$2 million advance for a forthcoming book. Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson signed a book deal, but the amount of her advance was not public.

In Sotomayor's case, her staff routinely brought up books in emails as trip details were discussed. "Depending on quantity and if they get hardcover or paperback, she will sign them," Le told a professor at the UC Davis law school, which arranged to host her for commencement weekend in 2018. "She is signing over 11,000 for one school right now," Le added with a smiling emoji, apparently referencing Michigan State's purchase.

The law school ultimately ordered 410 signed copies of "My Beloved World," after Le broached the idea of ordering copies. But one law school official took issue after a colleague relayed what he said was a question from Sotomayor's staff about setting up a book table during graduation festivities.

"I'm not sure this is a good idea, have we ever allowed other speakers to sell or offer their books (that we have purchased for guests)?" Kelley Weiss, the law school's head of marketing and communications, wrote to the dean. "I think having a table of her books could be out of place," she added. Weiss declined to comment to the AP.

Then planning took a turn. Weeks before the ceremony, Sotomayor fractured her shoulder and canceled her appearance. The school in turn canceled its \$6,500 book order and sought a refund.

Still, Sotomayor's office inquired to make sure.

"Is it for sure that UC Davis would like to move forward with canceling?" Le emailed. "I have the books on hold in storage and have not done anything with them."

In about a month, the cancellation was processed.

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With player stylists and Gucci collabs, MLB eyes a fresh look with younger fans

By SALLY HO Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Ronald Acuña Jr. topped off a Barbiecore 'fit with a jeweled chain of his own likeness. Adley Rutschman leaned more "Kenergy" in a leafy gold ensemble. Though there were some flashy stand-outs, many of the suits were safe and serious at Major League Baseball's red carpet show on Tuesday.

The event came hours before the All-Star Game and featured baseball's top players strutting through Seattle's famous Pike Place Market with their spouses, kids and moms in tow, and giving their best looks to the hundreds of adoring fans gathered.

Yet what was really on display was MLB's quest for the crown of cool.

The fan-friendly event is as much an homage to baseball's iconic place in street style — from the game's signature caps and jerseys to the classic tees — as it is an indication that MLB is increasingly staking its claim on fashion as an entry to new audiences and pop culture reverence.

"MLB gave me a stylist for this game," said Corbin Carroll, a 22-year-old Seattle native turned Arizona Diamondbacks' breakout rookie. "The outfit's kind of cool. Definitely, it's not something I would pick out for myself, but I'm kind of excited to show that off."

Like a good many Gen Zer — which includes those born in the late 1990s and early 2000s — Carroll described his off-duty style as more casual than high fashion: "Athleisure, not too many logos, plain, a nice good fit."

On the red carpet — which was actually a hot magenta pink — Carroll stuck with neutral colors, wearing a white blazer, black shirt and tan pants, styled with Nikes, sunglasses and a mullet.

But it's no coincidence that MLB is tapping the young, mixed-race player as a style ambassador for its All-Star Red Carpet Show.

The league has for years suffered from the same audience problem. There is a perception that baseball

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is so steeped in American tradition that it may be a stodgy game targeted to old-timers — namely, white fans — who still track scores by hand in the stands.

“Sometimes perception becomes reality, but it’s just never been accurate. Look at the young people — they’ve always been here,” said Noah Garden, MLB’s chief revenue officer. “We always want to attract younger fans. It’s the foundation of any business.”

So MLB has been trying to liven up its image for years, watching with wonder as the NBA’s cultural dominance grew alongside the basketball stars who have been cemented as style kings among celebrity athletes, along with their sneakers, suits and streetwear.

The NBA is the No. 1 brand preference for Gen Z across sports institutions, said Brandon Brown, a sports management professor at New York University, in part because the game and its savvy players are so heavily tied to urban hip-hop culture and self-representation — things this generation so identifies with.

Not since the Seattle Mariners’ own Hall of Famer Ken Griffey Jr. — with his signature and very ’90s backwards baseball cap — has there truly been an MLB player seen as a cross-cultural superstar who could make a splash with just his outfits, Brown said.

“He (was in) a bunch of different mediums to speak to a multitude of audiences,” Brown said. “MLB is probably still looking for their next superstar in modern culture.”

Today, baseball officials are keen to encourage their players to shine in the same way, too, knowing the ticket to loyal fans can be found off the field — perhaps at a much-hyped red carpet show built to pop on social media.

“It’s a really important event. The players really embrace it, too,” Garden said. “It’s to highlight our best players and bringing them closer to the fans.”

Among the league’s most fashion-forward players: Mariners star Julio Rodríguez, 22, whose red carpet outfit for Tuesday was handmade in Italy and paid tribute to Seattle. The reigning American League Rookie of the Year works with a personal shopper.

“What do you think about when you think about Seattle? You think a little bit about the trees, the lakes and all those things — the beautiful summer. So, it’s going to go towards that,” Rodríguez said.

The look, complete with a pair of exclusive Alexander McQueen sneakers, was crafted by Ethan Weisman, the founder of Pantheon Limited Custom Clothiers. Sports fans have certainly seen Weisman’s looks before. He’s the man behind Ezekiel Elliott’s head-turning crop-top tuxedo at the 2016 NFL draft.

Garden said MLB’s forays into fashion are not really about merchandising revenue, as its high-end collaborations with the likes of Gucci don’t sell for volume.

“There’s very limited quantities. It allows us to reach out to a very specific part of the fan base,” Garden said. “It’s a closer association with non-traditional brands.”

It’s such a coveted supply that some players have even called the front office asking for a piece of MLB’s limited edition Gucci collection, Garden said.

So lest you believe the unstylish rumors, there actually has been many short stops in baseball’s history with fashion.

There’s been official collaborations with brands ranging from preppy Ralph Lauren to niche streetwear label Supreme. Baseball’s long-established role as fashion inspiration is thanks in part to the league’s pioneering sale of replica jerseys. It was a socially-conscious decision to celebrate the league-wide No. 42 jersey on Jackie Robinson Day.

And the strategic licensing of the famous New York Yankees logo globally has arguably, to borrow the words of iconic rapper Jay-Z, “made the Yankee hat more famous than a Yankee can.” In fact, MLB’s fashion efforts are a major part of their international marketing plan, lately leaning into France’s affinity for fashion to break into the wider European market.

“What they’re tapping into is a kind of a cultural capital that’s not financial. It’s about the fans. It’s about nostalgia,” said Erin Corrales-Diaz, a Toledo Museum of Art curator who wrote a book about the baseball jersey and the sport’s influence on fashion. “Fashion has always been a part of the sport, even if it hasn’t always been articulated.”

Even so, MLB may still have its work cut out for it as several All-Star players acknowledged they were less than fluent in fashion ahead of Tuesday's show. Houston Astros' Kyle Tucker and Los Angeles Dodger Clayton Kershaw were among the many ballplayers sporting the safest of suits and who said they weren't big into fashion.

"It's not my forte," Kershaw said.

Carroll of the Diamondbacks also flashed a shy smile describing his first time working with a stylist and first time doing any red carpet event.

"I might be more nervous for that than the game," Carroll said.

AP Sports Writer Kristie Rieken contributed.

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

Humans' impact on the earth began a new epoch in the 1950s called the Anthropocene, scientists say

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

From climate change to species loss and pollution, humans have etched their impact on the Earth with such strength and permanence since the middle of the 20th century that a special team of scientists says a new geologic epoch began then.

Called the Anthropocene — and derived from the Greek terms for "human" and "new" — this epoch started sometime between 1950 and 1954, according to the scientists. While there is evidence worldwide that captures the impact of burning fossil fuels, detonating nuclear weapons and dumping fertilizers and plastics on land and in waterways, the scientists are proposing a small but deep lake outside of Toronto, Canada — Crawford Lake — to place a historic marker.

"It's quite clear that the scale of change has intensified unbelievably and that has to be human impact," said University of Leicester geologist Colin Waters, who chaired the Anthropocene Working Group.

This puts the power of humans in a somewhat similar class with the meteorite that crashed into Earth 66 million years ago, killing off dinosaurs and starting the Cenozoic Era, or what is conversationally known as the age of mammals. But not quite. While that meteorite started a whole new era, the working group is proposing that humans only started a new epoch, which is a much smaller geologic time period.

The group aims to determine a specific start date of the Anthropocene by measuring plutonium levels at the bottom of Crawford Lake.

The idea of the Anthropocene was proposed at a science conference more than 20 years ago by the late Nobel Prize-winning chemist Paul Crutzen. Teams of scientists have debated the issue since then and finally set up the working group to study whether it was needed and, if so, when the epoch would start and where it would be commemorated.

Crawford Lake, which is 79 feet (29 meters) deep and 25,800 square feet (24,000 square meters) wide, was chosen over 11 other sites because the annual effects of human activity on the earth's soil, atmosphere and biology are so clearly preserved in its layers of sediment. That includes everything from nuclear fallout to species-threatening pollution to steadily rising temperatures.

There are distinct and multiple signals starting around 1950 in Crawford Lake showing that "the effects of humans overwhelm the Earth system," said Francine McCarthy, a committee member who specializes in that site as an Earth sciences professor at Brock University in Canada.

"The remarkably preserved annual record of deposition in Crawford Lake is truly amazing," said U.S. National Academies of Sciences President Marcia McNutt, who wasn't part of the committee.

The Anthropocene shows the power — and hubris — of humankind, several scientists said.

"The hubris is in imagining that we are in control," said former U.S. White House science adviser John Holdren, who was not part of the working group of scientists and disagrees with its proposed start date, wanting one much earlier. "The reality is that our power to transform the environment has far exceeded

our understanding of the consequences and our capacity to change course.”

Geologists measure time in eons, eras, periods, epochs and ages. The scientific working group is proposing that Anthropocene Epoch followed the Holocene Epoch, which started about 11,700 years ago at the end of an ice age.

They are also proposing that it starts a new age, called Crawfordian after the lake chosen as its starting point.

The proposal still needs to be approved by three different groups of geologists and could be signed off at a major conference next year.

The reason geologists didn't declare the Anthropocene the start of a bigger and more important time measurement, such as a period, is because the current Quaternary Period, which began nearly 2.6 million years ago, is based on permanent ice on Earth's poles, which still exist. But in a few hundred years, if climate change continues and those disappear, it may be time to change that, Waters said.

“If you know your Greek tragedies you know power, hubris, and tragedy go hand in hand,” said Harvard science historian Naomi Oreskes, a working group member. “If we don't address the harmful aspects of human activities, most obviously disruptive climate change, we are headed for tragedy.”

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Senators call for Supreme Court to follow ethics code like other branches of government

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, ERIC TUCKER and BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

The chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, responding to Associated Press investigative stories on the Supreme Court, said Tuesday it was time for the justices to bring their conduct in line with the ethical standards of other branches of government.

“If they just establish the basic standards of every other branch of government, it would give us much more confidence in their integrity,” Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., said. He commented in Vilnius, Lithuania, where he was attending the NATO summit as part of the U.S. delegation.

The AP published stories showing that Justice Sonia Sotomayor, aided by her staff, has advanced sales of her books through college visits over the past decade; that universities have used trips by justices as a lure for financial contributions by placing them in event rooms with wealthy donors, and that justices have taken expenses-paid teaching trips to attractive locations that are light on actual classroom instruction.

The series comes after stories over the past six months that have raised ethical concerns about the activities of the justices. Durbin and other lawmakers in Washington have announced a vote next week on legislation that would require the court to adopt an ethics code. While the measure is unlikely to pass, it sends a signal of discontent about the court.

The nation's highest court operates without an ethics code, instead following what Chief Justice John Roberts has referred to as a set of foundational “ethics principles and practices.”

Asked Tuesday about the AP stories, Sen. Richard Blumenthal, D-Conn., who also sits on the Judiciary Committee, called them “powerful reports” that amount to a “drip-by-drip-by-drip indictment of a Supreme Court that seems answerable to no one for ethical breaches.

“The chief justice really ought to be taking these into account for the sake the court and the country because the Supreme Court will no longer exist as a truly viable institution if it continues the failure to face the need for a code of ethics,” he said.

In contrast, Sen. John Cornyn, R-Texas, another member of the Judiciary Committee, said he believes

Congress should leave the ethics issue to the court and that the Democrats' pursuit of ethics reform "is part of a long-standing assault against the court that the left feels is undermining a lot of things they've accomplished over the years by judicial action. To me, that's the motivating factor."

"I think it's a co-equal branch of government we don't have jurisdiction over. Secondly, I think this is part of a false narrative that the court is out of control and needs Congress to save it," Cornyn said.

Kathleen Clark, a law professor at Washington University in St. Louis and an expert in legal ethics, said the latest reporting reveals the extent to which "ethics problems at the Supreme Court is an equal opportunity scandal.

"It's not just about Clarence Thomas and (Samuel) Alito," Clark said, referring to earlier media reporting about the two conservative justices. "It's an institutional rather than individual problem."

_____ Megerian reported from Vilnius, Lithuania. AP writer Kevin Freking in Washington contributed to this report.

Trump can be held liable in writer's defamation lawsuit after Justice Department reverses course

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Justice Department on Tuesday said that Donald Trump can be held personally liable for remarks he made about a woman who accused him of rape — a reversal of its position that Trump was protected because he was president when he made the remarks.

In a letter filed with the judge presiding over a defamation lawsuit that columnist E. Jean Carroll brought in Manhattan federal court in 2020, the department says it no longer has "a sufficient basis" to conclude that Trump was motivated in his statements about Carroll's claims by more than an insignificant desire to serve the United States.

Previously, the department had agreed with Trump's attorneys that he was protected from the lawsuit by the Westfall Act, which provides federal employees absolute immunity from lawsuits brought over conduct occurring within the scope of their employment.

In May, a jury awarded Carroll \$5 million in damages after concluding that Trump sexually abused her in 1996 at a midtown Manhattan Bergdorf Goodman store and then defamed her last fall with comments he made about her and her claims. While the jury concluded Trump sexually abused Carroll, it rejected her rape claim.

The trial resulted from a lawsuit Carroll brought last November after New York state temporarily allowed victims of sexual abuse to make civil claims for attacks that occurred even decades earlier.

In the government's letter, U.S. lawyers cited the jury's verdict, Trump's October deposition and new claims Carroll has since made that Trump defamed her again with comments he made during a CNN town hall a day after the verdict.

The letter gives fresh fuel to Carroll's original defamation lawsuit, which had been delayed by appeals over whether Trump could be held liable for statements he made while president.

The original claims are scheduled for trial next January and stem from comments Trump made in 2019 after Carroll first went public with her claims about being sexually attacked by Trump in a memoir.

Carroll's lawyer, Robbie Kaplan, welcomed the DOJ submission, saying it was one of the "last obstacles" to the lawsuit reaching trial.

"We are grateful that the Department of Justice has reconsidered its position," she said in a statement. "We have always believed that Donald Trump made his defamatory statements about our client in June 2019 out of personal animus, ill will, and spite, and not as President of the United States."

Lawyers for Trump did not immediately comment.

Earlier in the day, Carroll's lawyers filed papers challenging a counterclaim in the defamation lawsuit by Trump's lawyers who maintained that Carroll had defamed him with comments she made after the May verdict — in part because she repeated statements that he had raped her.

The lawyers wrote that his counterclaim was "nothing more than his latest effort to spin his loss at trial."

They said the sexual abuse Trump was found liable for was equivalent to rape under some criminal statutes and would require him to register for the rest of his life as a sex offender if it had been a criminal claim.

The Associated Press typically does not name people who say they have been sexually assaulted unless they come forward publicly, as Carroll has done.

Supreme Court justices and donors mingle at campus visits. These documents show the ethical dilemmas

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas headlined a 2017 program at McLennan Community College in Texas, his hosts had more than a speech in mind. Working with the prominent conservative lawyer Ken Starr, school officials crafted a guest list for a dinner at the home of a wealthy Texas businessman, hoping an audience with Thomas would be a reward for school patrons — and an inducement to prospective donors.

Before Justice Elena Kagan visited the University of Colorado's law school in 2019, one official in Boulder suggested a "larger donor to staff ratio" for a dinner with her. After Justice Sonia Sotomayor confirmed she would attend a 2017 question-and-answer session at Clemson University and a private luncheon, officials there made sure to invite \$1 million-plus donors to the South Carolina college.

The Associated Press obtained tens of thousands of pages of emails and other documents that reveal the extent to which public colleges and universities have seen visits by justices as opportunities to generate donations — regularly putting justices in the room with influential donors, including some whose industries have had interests before the court.

The documents also reveal that justices spanning the court's ideological divide have lent the prestige of their positions to partisan activity, headlining speaking events with prominent politicians, or advanced their own personal interests, such as sales of their books, through college visits.

The conduct would likely be prohibited if done by lower court federal judges. But the Supreme Court's definition of banned fundraising is so narrow — simply an event that raises more than it costs or where guests are asked for donations — that it does not account for soliciting contributors later while reminding them of the special access they were afforded.

"The justices should be aware that people are selling access to them," said University of Virginia law professor Amanda Frost, an ethics expert. "I don't think they are naive, but they certainly have been putting themselves in situations where people can credibly claim, 'I'm giving you access,' or 'I'm going to fundraise off my claimed closeness or access.' And that is a problem."

In a statement responding to questions, the Supreme Court said: "The Court routinely asks event organizers to confirm that an event at which a Justice will speak is not a fundraiser, and it provides a definition of 'fundraiser' in order to avoid misunderstandings."

"The Court then follows up with event organizers to elicit further information as appropriate," the statement said. "The Court's practice has been useful: Justices have declined to be featured at events even though event organizers expressly told Chambers that the events were not fundraisers, following additional inquiry by the Court that confirmed them to be fundraisers."

Still, the revelations come at a fraught moment for the court, which by constitutional design settles disputes that set fundamental boundaries in American life. The court's integrity is being questioned because of concerns about ethics abuses by justices and polarizing court rulings, including last year's decision overturning *Roe v. Wade*. A 2022 survey put trust in the court at a 50-year low, with just 18% expressing a great level of confidence.

At the heart of some of the questions now being raised about the court is the fact that it operates without a formal code of conduct, leaving justices with no "common reference point," said retired federal Judge Jeremy Fogel, an appointee of President Bill Clinton.

"Without one, you don't have an agreed-to set of rules and it becomes a question of, 'Am I bothered by this?' or 'Is this OK with me?'" said Fogel, who led an agency within the federal judiciary tasked with educating judges on ethics matters. "That then gets refracted through a political lens and leads to ques-

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tions of legitimacy. That's a real problem."

Lower court federal judges are generally barred from engaging in fundraising, political activity and "lending the prestige of judicial office" to advance a judge's own "private interests."

But Supreme Court justices are asked only to adhere to what Chief Justice John Roberts, in a statement signed by all nine members of the court, referred to in April as a set of "ethics principles and practices." The justices provide only a limited accounting of expenses-paid travel and sometimes neglect to disclose events altogether.

The court has long benefited from the presumption that the justices, who this year were paid \$285,400 -- Roberts earned more -- have chosen public service over far more lucrative opportunities.

But that perception has started to crack after reporting this year by news media exposed ethical lapses, including investigations by ProPublica showing that Thomas repeatedly accepted luxury vacations -- including a \$500,000 trip to Indonesia in 2019 from Harlan Crow, a billionaire businessman, Republican donor and longtime friend.

The scrutiny has spurred calls for an ethics code and greater transparency for justices' travel. To fill in some of the information gaps, the AP used more than 100 public records requests to obtain details including identities of donors and politicians invited to private receptions as well as about perks for trips portrayed as academic.

Beyond public institutions, the AP also contacted more than 100 private schools, organizations and charities where the justices spoke, but those institutions are not subject to public records laws and most declined to provide details.

At least one justice, Sotomayor, seemed keenly aware of the peril of being in a setting with donors. Early in her Supreme Court tenure, she rejected a suggestion that she dine with major contributors to the University of Hawaii during a 2012 visit.

"No, the Justice will not do a private dinner at a 'club' with Mr. Boas who is a donor of the Law School," an aide wrote to school officials, referring to Frank Boas, a longtime benefactor.

"Canon 2(B) of the Code of Conduct for U.S. Judges provides that a judge 'should avoid lending the prestige of judicial office to advance the private interests of the judge or others,'" the aide added. "The Justice is fastidious about following this guideline."

Before Sotomayor's 2017 visit to Clemson, her staff advised a preference against donors at a luncheon. But the invitation list nonetheless included guests who had given millions of dollars to the school -- some of them posed for photos with the justice -- and internal discussions in emails show officials viewed the visit as an opportunity to generate money for a university humanities board. That again shows the ways in which the court's narrow definition of fundraising has allowed the justices to be used to spur donations.

"We're hoping the visibility of this visit will drive awareness," Donna Dant, a senior development director, wrote a Clemson alumni relations official. "And ultimately, generate resources."

Brian O'Rourke, another alumni relations official, wrote: "When you say \$1M donors, please be sure to include our corporate donors at that level too." An English professor, Lee Morrissey, who helped organize the visit, commenting on the visit's higher-than-expected costs, described it as a "'takes money to make money' moment." Contacted later, he said he did not mean that literally but rather was referring to the general prospect of greater attention for the humanities' program.

Asked about the event, Clemson spokesman Joe Galbraith told the AP in a statement that it was not a fundraiser and that there were no "solicitations of donations requested in association with the visit."

Among the justices who are in demand, Thomas is very popular with conservatives. Officials at McLennan Community College saw him as having special appeal to a certain class of donors.

"I had a few other thoughts about people who might be appropriate to invite to the Clarence Thomas dinner, mainly because they are wealthy conservative Catholics who would align with Clarence Thomas and who have not previously given," Kim Patterson, the executive director of the McLennan Community College Foundation, wrote in an email.

In September 2017, Thomas visited Waco, Texas, to be interviewed by Starr, a longtime friend and a

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former independent counsel whose investigation of Clinton's sexual misconduct made him a household name in the 1990s.

Some school faculty were skeptical of the invitation, but plans moved forward, with the school scheduling a public interview, a book signing and two private dinners.

Starr's widow, Alice, defended the practice on the grounds that requests for donations were separate from the visit, though wealthy targets of the university's fundraising efforts were invited.

"It is not giving to the Clarence Thomas event," she said in a recent interview. "It is giving to the college at a later date because they were treated with courtesy and (invited) to a very special event. Every single college in America does that. And if they don't, they are not fundraising."

"Friendraising" is what it's called," she added. "And then you do the big ask hopefully later."

One of those friends, it was hoped, would be Crow.

"May Alice and I share this with Harlan Crow? As you well know, he'll want to connect with the Justice if at all possible," Ken Starr, who died last year, emailed a court official. (Crow and his wife declined the invitation). Crow did not respond to requests for comment.

The roughly 100 invitees included locally prominent business people, political leaders, lawyers and donors to the school and the GOP. Guests were shuttled aboard buses to the Mediterranean-style mansion of local businessman Clifton Robinson, which boasts 26 marble columns and sweeping views of Lake Waco. They dined on crab cake bites, beef tenderloin and citrus salmon, school records show.

The school ordered enough copies of Thomas' 2007 memoir, "My Grandfather's Son," for each couple, plus hundreds more for a signing after Thomas' lecture.

At the time of the event, Robinson served on the board of directors of Hilltop Holdings, a private equity company with a pending case in federal court. Last year, the Supreme Court declined to take up the case, a favorable outcome for National Lloyds Insurance Co., a Hilltop subsidiary that Robinson started.

Robinson said he sat next to Thomas at the dinner but never discussed the case. "I was just on the board. I have no idea about that," he said.

The day after the dinner, Thomas attended a more intimate meal with several school officials, the Starrs, Robinson, and a half-dozen other guests. The college declined to identify those people, citing guidance from the Texas attorney general's office that allows higher education institutions to withhold donors' names.

Thomas was far from alone in attending events where donors were invited.

As University of Colorado law school officials developed a dinner guest list before a 2019 Kagan visit, one organizer proposed a larger "donor to staff ratio" while a second said she was open to suggestions about which "VIP donors" the school "would like to cultivate relationships with."

A university spokesperson said in a statement that there were "no solicitations" connected to the event and that no gifts were made as a result of it.

Sometimes, a trip by a justice has included both traditional lecturing and mingling with donors. In January 2020, Thomas mixed a four-day teaching assignment at the University of Florida's law school with gatherings involving university donors and political figures.

The school arranged for its athletic association's private Embraer Phenom 300 jet to fly to Washington to ferry Thomas and his former law clerk Kathryn Mizelle, at a cost of more than \$16,800. In a statement, a university spokeswoman called the chartered flight "standard practice" for many invited speakers "for whom air travel is necessary."

Thomas and Mizelle taught a course on religion and the First Amendment and met with students. The justice also attended VIP events with school donors, according to agenda materials from the school.

Former Burger King CEO John Dasburg, a onetime university trustee, and his wife, Mary Lou, were among those included, school records show. The couple has collectively given about \$600,000 to Republican candidates for federal office.

Dasburg said that they attended at the invitation of the law school dean and that he asked Thomas to sign a book on First Amendment rights and used the occasion to discuss a dissenting opinion by Thomas that he admired -- from a 2000 case upholding Colorado restrictions on protests outside abortion clinics.

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Thomas and Mizelle, a 2012 graduate of the law school, extended their stay into the weekend to attend a gathering of a Florida branch of the Federalist Society, a conservative legal group whose deep-pocketed donors have helped orchestrate the Supreme Court's shift to the right.

In a crowded ballroom at a Disney World resort, tributes for Thomas were effusive. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who helped introduce Thomas and is now pursuing the Republican presidential nomination, called him the "greatest living justice." Afterward, Thomas and DeSantis dined at a steakhouse with conservative legal activist Leonard Leo, who has helped seat multiple conservative justices on the court, according to a person familiar with the dinner. The dinner was first reported by CNN.

That September, President Donald Trump nominated Mizelle to the federal bench, despite a rating of "not qualified" from an American Bar Association committee.

In 2014, Thomas visited the University of Texas at Tyler for a lecture and dinner sponsored by a group of donors to then-Republican Rep. Louie Gohmert, who in 2020 spearheaded a lawsuit that sought to empower Vice President Mike Pence to overturn the presidential election that Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden.

Thomas posed for photographs with guests at a private reception before a dinner sponsored by Louise Herrington Ornelas, a major school donor. Among those invited were Gohmert, local oil executives and industry lawyers, and longtime Republican Party supporters.

"Justice Thomas was a wonderful speaker and helped us just by his presence," said Rodney Mabry, who was the school's president at that time, in an interview. "Through the dinner, he helped raise money."

Thomas was not alone in having a political tinge to some of his travel.

In September 2016, Sotomayor visited Colorado for a series of speeches and book events not listed on her financial disclosure, making it unclear who paid for her travel. A stop in Denver at Metropolitan State University was made at the behest of longtime friend Polly Baca, a Democratic activist, emails show.

Baca, a former Colorado state legislator and Democratic National Committee official, solicited \$15,000 in contributions from nonprofit groups, philanthropists, Democratic donors, law firms and corporations to help offset the \$30,000 cost.

The sponsors gained admission to a private reception with Sotomayor, where local dignitaries and school donors mingled. Baca said she did not recall raising money for the event.

There have been times when it seems that a justice gives the appearance of repaying a political favor.

Less than six months after Justice Neil Gorsuch was sworn in as Trump's first Supreme Court nominee, thanks in no small part to the efforts of then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, Gorsuch was featured at an event that organizers hoped would help eventually raise money for an academic center at the University of Kentucky law school honoring one of McConnell's closest friends, the late U.S. District Judge John Heyburn II.

Looking to reach the initiative's \$3.5 million endowment goal, Martha Heyburn, the judge's widow and founder of the Heyburn Initiative, developed a fundraising document for potential donors that highlighted media coverage from an earlier appearance by Roberts and teased a forthcoming visit by Gorsuch.

The university "has not announced (publicly) that Justice Gorsuch will be the speaker, so please keep this information confidential," the document states.

University spokesman Jay Blanton said in a statement that the event was not a fundraiser and "that was not the intent of the events in any way."

After Gorsuch's public talk, the agenda called for Gorsuch and McConnell, R-Ky., to dine with a small private group before a reception at the university president's house.

Records show that among those present for the reception was a major Republican donor and owner of one of the nation's largest coal-mining companies, Joe Craft III, and his wife, Kelly, who would serve as Trump's ambassador to Canada and this year unsuccessfully sought the Republican nomination for governor.

The couple has donated at least \$13.3 million to Republican candidates and causes at the federal level since 2010.

Craft was then mounting an aggressive effort to push Trump's Environmental Protection Agency to strip away some regulation of the industry. Last year, the Supreme Court's conservative majority issued a 6-3 ruling limiting the EPA's authority to curb carbon dioxide emissions from power plants.

The Crafts have donated millions of dollars to university programs. But Kelly Craft said the couple did not know Gorsuch or speak with him.

"I can assure you, there was nothing discussed," she said.

In its statement to the AP, the court said, "Justices exercise caution in attending events that might be described as political in nature, following guidance in the Code of Conduct which cautions judges against engaging in political activity. Merely attending an event where an elected official might also be in attendance — such as several of the events described in your email — does not necessarily render the event impermissibly political in nature."

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Jury decides 2014 document found in Aretha Franklin's couch is a valid will

By ED WHITE Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — A document handwritten by singer Aretha Franklin and found in her couch after her 2018 death is a valid Michigan will, a jury said Tuesday, a critical turn in a dispute that has turned her sons against each other.

It's a victory for Kecalf Franklin and Edward Franklin whose lawyers had argued that papers dated 2014 should override a 2010 will that was discovered around the same time in a locked cabinet at the Queen of Soul's home in suburban Detroit.

The jury deliberated less than an hour after a brief trial that started Monday. After the verdict was read, Aretha Franklin's grandchildren stepped forward from the first row to hug Kecalf and Edward.

"I'm very, very happy. I just wanted my mother's wishes to be adhered to," Kecalf Franklin said. "We just want to exhale right now. It's been a long five years for my family, my children."

Aretha Franklin was a global star for decades, known especially for hits like "Think," "I Say a Little Prayer" and "Respect." She did not leave behind a formal, typewritten will when she died five years ago at age 76.

But documents, with scribbles and hard-to-decipher passages, emerged in 2019 when a niece scoured the home for records.

In closing arguments, lawyers for Kecalf and Edward Franklin said the fact that the 2014 papers were found in a notebook in couch cushions did not make them less significant.

"You can take your will and leave it on the kitchen counter. It's still your will," Charles McKelvie told the jury.

Another lawyer, Craig Smith, pointed to the first line of the document, which was displayed on four large posters in front of the jury.

"Says right here: 'This is my will.' She's speaking from the grave, folks," Smith said of Franklin.

Kecalf and Edward had teamed up against brother Ted White II, who favored the 2010 will. White's attorney, Kurt Olson, noted the earlier will was under lock and key. He said it was much more important than papers found in a couch.

"We were here to see what the jury would rule. We'll live with it," Olson said after the verdict.

The jury found that the 2014 version was signed by Aretha Franklin, who put a smiley face in the letter 'A.'

There still will be discussions over whether some provisions of the 2010 will should be fulfilled and whether Kecalf Franklin could become executor of the estate. Judge Jennifer Callaghan told all sides to file briefs and attend a status conference next week.

Franklin's estate managers have been paying bills, settling millions in tax debts and generating income

through music royalties and other intellectual property. The will dispute, however, has been unfinished business.

There are differences between the 2010 and 2014 versions, though they both appear to indicate that Franklin's four sons would share income from music and copyrights.

But under the 2014 will, Kecalp 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.

The older will said Kecalp, 53, and Edward Franklin, 64, "must take business classes and get a certificate or a degree" to benefit from the estate. That provision is not in the 2014 version.

White, who played guitar with Aretha Franklin, testified against the 2014 will, saying his mother typically would get important documents done "conventionally and legally" and with assistance from an attorney. He did not immediately comment after the verdict.

The sharpest remarks of the trial came from Smith, who represented Edward Franklin. He told the jury White "wants to disinherit his two brothers. Teddy wants it all."

Kecalp Franklin sat near White during the trial but they did not appear to speak to each other.

"I love my brother with all my heart," Kecalp said outside court when asked if there was a rift.

Aretha Franklin's other son, Clarence Franklin, lives under guardianship in an assisted living center and did not participate in the trial.

Follow Ed White on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/edwritez>

In Ukraine, civilians train in survival skills to cope with dangers from Russia's war

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In a cramped municipal building in a residential area of the Ukrainian capital, a group of people take turns training to shoot using a replica of a machine gun with the help of a weapons training simulator relying on virtual reality.

The nearly 20 participants — all of them civilians and most of them women — have never held a weapon before.

With Russia's war on Ukraine now in its 17th month, the Kyiv City Administration has opened up training for civilians who want to learn survival skills, including how to shoot, provide first aid and recognize land mines. These and other skills could be used in a hostile environment provoked by missile strikes and other man-made disasters.

In a dark room with tightly closed blinds, the unreal poof-poof sounds of the replica weapons are heard. People enthusiastically ask the instructors how to hold their weapons properly and ask to try one more time.

"I am more than 45 years old. As soon as the opportunity arose, I decided that I needed to refresh some skills and learn something new," said Kyiv resident Lada Bondarenko. She was especially impressed by the instructor's lecture on possible land mine threats.

It was a reminder that the Kyiv region, although not currently on the front lines of the war, is still at major risk because of mines left behind by the Russians who briefly occupied areas on the outskirts of the capital in the early days of the war.

While the fighting on the front lines is now largely in stalemate, indiscriminate Russian missile attacks continue to hit residential areas, wreaking havoc and causing almost daily casualties across the country.

Several days after the registration on the city's website was opened, more than 2,000 people had signed up for the training, around 70% of them women, said the deputy director for Kyiv's municipal security, Mykhailo Shcherbyna.

"The main goal is for people to learn how to survive and how to respond to these military threats that exist," he explained.

According to Shcherbyna, by educating people, local authorities try to prevent more casualties in the future. "The war continues, and we don't know what the next threats will be."

In his opinion, one of the reasons why most of those who signed up for the training are women is because a large number of men are already at the front. Also, many women come so that these skills will help them protect not only themselves but their children.

But men, too, attend with the protection of their children in mind.

"I came to be able to explain to my children that there are mines that can tear off arms, legs and take life," said Vitalii Sumin, aged 38.

His house is located in nearby Irpin, an area in the northwestern outskirts of the capital where fierce battles took place last spring. When the Russians retreated last March, many land mines were left in the area, which now could be deadly dangerous, hidden in the grass.

Vitalii's wife couldn't attend the training in person, so he transmitted it online while she stayed at home with their 2-year-old child. Next time, he plans to bring the whole family to the training, especially his 13-year-old, he said.

According to the Ministry of Internal Affairs, around 174,000 square miles (451,000 square kilometers) in Ukraine are potentially contaminated with mines, about the size of the U.S. state of Florida.

On Tuesday, local authorities held the first such training for civilians. Previously, they mostly trained people who worked in municipal services. In the early days of the war, they taught people basic skills so they could start fighting immediately.

According to Shcherbyna, the deputy chief of municipal security, last year they taught about 15,000 people, and approximately 3,000 of them joined the army.

Instructor Yevhen Naumov said that Russia's invasion showed that the threat from Ukraine's biggest neighbor would not disappear easily. In his opinion, by attending this training, people were preparing for the possibility that this war could last for a long time.

Associated Press writer Illia Novikov contributed to this report.

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

Microsoft can move ahead with record \$69 billion acquisition of Activision Blizzard, judge rules

By MATT O'BRIEN undefined

A federal judge has handed Microsoft a major victory by declining to block its looming \$69 billion takeover of video game company Activision Blizzard. Regulators sought to ax the deal saying it will hurt competition.

U.S. District Judge Jacqueline Scott Corley said in a ruling that the merger deserved scrutiny, noting it could be the largest in the history of the tech industry. But federal regulators were unable to show how it would cause serious harm and wouldn't likely prevail if they took it to a full trial, she wrote.

The Federal Trade Commission, which enforces antitrust laws, "has not raised serious questions regarding whether the proposed merger is likely to substantially lessen competition" between video game consoles or in the growing markets for monthly game subscriptions or cloud-based gaming, Corley said.

A ruling favorable to Microsoft was not a surprise after the company's lawyers had the upper hand in a 5-day San Francisco court hearing that ended late last month. The proceeding showcased testimony by Microsoft Chief Executive Officer Satya Nadella and longtime Activision Blizzard CEO Bobby Kotick, who both pledged to keep Activision's blockbuster game Call of Duty available to people who play it on consoles — particularly Sony's PlayStation — that compete with Microsoft's Xbox.

"Our merger will benefit consumers and workers. It will enable competition rather than allow entrenched market leaders to continue to dominate our rapidly growing industry," Kotick said in a written statement after Tuesday's ruling.

The FTC had asked Corley to issue an injunction temporarily blocking Microsoft and Activision from closing the deal before the FTC's in-house judge can review it in an August trial.

Both companies suggested that such a delay would effectively force them to abandon the takeover

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agreement they signed nearly 18 months ago. Microsoft promised to pay Activision a \$3 billion breakup fee if the deal doesn't close by July 18.

The FTC hasn't said whether it will appeal Corley's ruling.

"We are disappointed in this outcome given the clear threat this merger poses to open competition in cloud gaming, subscription services, and consoles," FTC spokesperson Douglas Farrar said in a prepared statement. "In the coming days we'll be announcing our next step to continue our fight to preserve competition and protect consumers."

The decision is a setback for the FTC's heightened scrutiny of the technology industry under Chairperson Lina Khan, who was installed by President Joe Biden in 2021 because of her tough stance on what she sees as monopolistic behavior by tech giants such as Amazon, Google and Facebook parent Meta.

Another judge rebuffed the FTC's attempt earlier this year to stop Meta from taking over the virtual reality fitness company Within Unlimited. And on Thursday, Khan is expected to face tough questioning from Republicans in Congress who have called her to testify at a House hearing about the commission's record of enforcement actions as well as her management of the agency staff.

Corley, herself a Biden nominee, expressed skepticism about the FTC's case during the proceedings, particularly about the hypothetical harms caused if Microsoft were to remove Call of Duty from rival platforms or offer a subpar experience on competing consoles.

"The gist of the FTC's complaint is Call of Duty is so popular, and such an important supply for any video game platform, that the combined firm is probably going to foreclose it from its rivals for its own economic benefit to consumers' detriment," Corley wrote in her ruling.

But she said the FTC hadn't make a strong case that Microsoft would likely pull Call of Duty from rival Sony's PlayStation. As antitrust investigations and legal challenges mounted in the U.S. and around the world, Microsoft pledged that Call of Duty would appear on Nintendo's Switch console, Nvidia's cloud gaming service and other platforms for at least a decade.

In that way, the "scrutiny has paid off," Corley concluded in her ruling, repeating a message she relayed to regulators in the courtroom last month.

"In many ways you won," Corley had told the FTC's lead trial attorney on the case, James Weingarten.

"I don't think we won," Weingarten responded, saying there was no evidence that the "hastily agreed to" contracts would sufficiently protect the market.

Microsoft valued the deal at \$68.7 billion when it announced the acquisition in early 2022, "inclusive of Activision Blizzard's net cash," though Microsoft agreed to pay \$95 in cash for each share of the game-maker, closer to \$75 billion.

Shares of Activision Blizzard Inc. jumped more than 11% Tuesday on the ruling, a high for the year.

The ruling removes the biggest, but not the only obstacle, to the merger.

A number of other countries and the European Union have approved the Activision Blizzard takeover, but it still faces opposition from the U.K.'s Competition and Markets Authority. The company was set to challenge that decision at a tribunal hearing scheduled for later this month but the FTC's ruling appeared to have forced a rethink.

The British regulator and Microsoft both said Tuesday they have jointly applied to put the hearing on hold while they work out a way to resolve their differences so that the deal can go ahead.

"We stand ready to consider any proposals from Microsoft to restructure the transaction in a way that would address the concerns" outlined in the merger decision, the CMA said in a prepared statement.

Microsoft President Brad Smith said in a statement that the company is looking to modify its transaction "in a way that is acceptable to the CMA," though it disagrees with the agency's concerns.

Canadian regulators are also investigating the transaction and have concluded it is "likely to result" in preventing or lessening competition, according to a letter to Microsoft filed in the U.S. case late last month that echoed the FTC's concerns.

In the U.S., advocates for tougher antitrust enforcement are urging the FTC to ask an appeals court to pursue an emergency stay of Corley's decision so that a trial can proceed. Some are calling attention to a perceived conflict of interest involving the judge's son, who works for Microsoft. Corley disclosed the

relationship in court.

"The fact that Judge Corley's son works for Microsoft taints the outcome at a time when judicial ethics are top of mind for many," said a prepared statement from Lee Hepner, legal counsel at the American Economic Liberties Project.

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

Olympic champion Caster Semenya wins human rights case but testosterone rules may remain for years

By GERALD IMRAY AP Sports Writer

Champion runner Caster Semenya won a potentially landmark legal decision for sports on Tuesday when the European Court of Human Rights decided she was discriminated against by rules in track and field that force her to medically reduce her natural hormone levels to compete in major competitions.

But the two-time Olympic champion's success after her two failed appeals in sports' highest court in 2019 and the Swiss supreme court in 2020 came with a major caveat. The ruling didn't strike down the rules and the world track and field body said soon after it was released that the contentious testosterone regulations would "remain in place."

While the 32-year-old Semenya is fighting to be allowed to run again without restrictions, that might still take years, if it happens at all. It's unlikely she'd be able to go for another gold in the 800 meters at next year's Olympics in Paris. Next month's world championships, where she has won three titles, are almost certainly not an option.

The South African athlete's legal challenge has taken five years so far and it could take equally as long for the process of rolling back the cases through the different courts.

Tuesday's ruling, although significant and a victory for Semenya, only opened the way for the Swiss supreme court to reconsider its decision. That might result in the case going back to the Court of Arbitration for Sport in Lausanne. Only then might the rules enforced by world track body World Athletics be possibly removed.

Still, Semenya's lawyers said the victory established an important principle.

"Caster has never given up her fight to be allowed to compete and run free," Semenya's lawyers said in a statement. "This important personal win for her is also a wider victory for elite athletes around the world. It means that sporting governance bodies around the world must finally recognize that human rights law and norms apply to the athletes they regulate."

In a 4-3 ruling by a panel of judges, the Strasbourg, France-based human rights court said "serious questions" over the "validity" of the international athletics regulations were "left open" in Semenya's previous challenge at sports court CAS. In her second appeal, the Swiss supreme court had failed to respond to "serious concerns" of discrimination, the European rights court said.

Semenya has been barred by the rules from running in her favorite 800-meter race since 2019 because she has refused to artificially suppress her testosterone. She has lost four years of her career at her peak.

World Athletics showed no sign of changing its position in the wake of the verdict, saying two hours after it was released that the rules would stay.

"We remain of the view that the ... regulations are a necessary, reasonable and proportionate means of protecting fair competition in the female category as the Court of Arbitration for Sport and Swiss Federal Tribunal both found," World Athletics said.

World Athletics also said it would be "encouraging" the government of Switzerland to appeal. Switzerland was the respondent in the case because Semenya was challenging her last legal loss in the Swiss supreme court. Switzerland's government has three months to appeal.

The Swiss government was also ordered to pay Semenya 60,000 euros (\$66,000) for costs and expenses.

The ruling could ultimately have repercussions for other high-profile Olympic sports like swimming, which also has rules barring female athletes with high natural testosterone. Soccer, the world's most popular

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sport, is reviewing its eligibility rules for women and could set limits on testosterone.

While Semenya has been at the center of the highly emotive issue of sex eligibility in sports for nearly 15 years and is the issue's figurehead, she is not the only runner affected. At least three other Olympic medalists have also been impacted by the rules that set limits on the level of natural testosterone that female athletes may have. World Athletics says there are "a number" of other elite athletes who fall under the regulations.

There are no testosterone limits in place for male athletes.

Semenya's case is not the same as the debate over transgender women who have transitioned from male to female being allowed to compete in sports, although the two issues do have crossover.

Semenya was identified as female at birth, raised as a girl and has been legally identified as female her entire life. She has one of a number of conditions known as differences in sex development, or DSDs, which cause naturally high testosterone that is in the typical male range.

Semenya says her elevated testosterone should simply be considered a genetic gift, and critics of the rules have compared it to a basketballer's height or a swimmer's long arms.

While track authorities can't challenge Semenya's legal gender, they say her condition includes her having the typical male XY chromosome pattern and physical traits that make her "biologically male," an assertion that has enraged Semenya. World Athletics says Semenya's testosterone levels give her an athletic advantage comparable to a man competing in women's events and there needs to be rules to address that.

Track has enforced rules since 2019 that require athletes like Semenya to artificially reduce their testosterone to below a specific mark, which is measured through the amount of testosterone recorded in their blood. They can do that by taking daily contraceptive pills, having hormone-blocking injections, or undergoing surgery. If athletes choose one of the first two options, they would effectively need to do it for their entire careers to remain eligible to compete regularly.

Semenya has fought against the regulations and has refused to follow them since 2019, saying they were discriminatory.

The European Court of Human Rights agreed and also said there was a violation of Semenya's right for her private life to be respected. It also found for Semenya on another point of her appeal, that she hadn't been given "effective remedy" for her claims of discrimination.

"Serious questions as to the validity" of the testosterone rules had been left unanswered, the rights court said, including over any side effects from the hormone treatment athletes would have to undergo, the difficulties in them remaining within the rules by trying to control their natural hormone levels, and the "lack of evidence" that their high natural testosterone actually gave them an advantage anyway.

That last point struck at the heart of the regulations, which World Athletics has always said is about dealing with the unfair sports advantage it says Semenya has over other women.

Going against the international track body, South Africa's national track federation said it was "delighted" with Tuesday's verdict.

The rules have been made stricter since Semenya launched her case at the European rights court and athletes now have to reduce their testosterone level to an even lower mark. The updated regulations also apply to every event and not just Semenya's favored race range between 400 meters and one mile, which they did previously.

Semenya won gold in the 800 meters at the 2012 and 2016 Olympics but was prevented from defending her title at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 because of the regulations.

AP Sports Writer Graham Dunbar contributed to this report.

AP Sports: <https://apnews.com/sports> and https://twitter.com/AP_Sports

A grand jury sworn in Tuesday could decide whether Trump is charged over Georgia's 2020 election

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A grand jury that was sworn in Tuesday in Atlanta will likely consider whether criminal charges are appropriate for former President Donald Trump or his Republican allies for their efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss in Georgia.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has been investigating since shortly after Trump called Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in early 2021 and suggested the state's top elections official could help him "find 11,780 votes," just enough needed to beat Democrat Joe Biden.

The 2 1/2-year investigation expanded to include an examination of a slate of Republican fake electors, phone calls by Trump and others to Georgia officials in the weeks after the 2020 election and unfounded allegations of widespread election fraud made to state lawmakers.

Willis, a Democrat, is expected to present her case before one of two new grand juries being seated Tuesday. She has previously suggested that any indictments would likely come in August.

Here's how that process would work:

WAIT. WASN'T THERE ALREADY A GRAND JURY IN THIS CASE?

Yes. About a year into her investigation, Willis took the unusual step of asking for a special grand jury. She said at the time that she needed the panel's subpoena power to compel testimony from witnesses who otherwise might not be willing to talk to her team. That special grand jury was seated in May 2022 and was released in January after completing its work.

It was essentially an investigative tool and didn't have the power to indict. Instead, it issued subpoenas and considered testimony from about 75 witnesses, as well as other evidence, before drafting a final report with recommendations for Willis.

While part of that report was made public in February, the judge overseeing the special grand jury said any recommendations on specific charges for specific people would remain secret for the time being. The panel's foreperson said in media interviews later that month that they recommended indicting numerous people, but she declined to name names.

Willis isn't bound by the special grand jury's recommendations.

WHO MIGHT WILLIS BE EYEING FOR POSSIBLE CHARGES?

Willis sent letters last summer warning certain people — including the state's fake electors and former New York mayor and Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani — that they could face charges in the case. Some of the fake electors have since reached immunity deals with Willis' team. While she hasn't said one way or the other whether she would seek charges against Trump, Willis has repeatedly said no one is above the law.

Willis is a fan of Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, and there have been hints she'll use it in this case. The RICO Act allows prosecutors to bring charges against multiple people that they believe committed separate crimes while working toward a common goal.

HOW COMMON ARE REGULAR GRAND JURIES?

Very. There are generally two grand juries seated in Fulton County in each two-month term of court. They usually meet every week — one on Mondays and Tuesdays and the other on Thursdays and Fridays. Their work takes place behind closed doors, not open to the public or to news media.

Grand jurors must be U.S. citizens who are at least 18 years old and must live in the county where they serve. Each grand jury is made up of 16 to 23 people and up to three alternates — at least 16 must be present for cases for the grand jury to hear any evidence or take any official action.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING GRAND JURY SELECTION?

A total of 96 potential grand jurors showed up at the Fulton County courthouse Tuesday. Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney explained what a grand jury does and asked basic questions to the group to make sure everyone was eligible to serve.

McBurney then called on members of the group one by one and asked them to say whether they were "ready to serve" or if they had a hardship that should prevent them from serving. Afterward, McBurney, Willis and members of her team began meeting privately with people who cited a hardship to decide

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whether they would be excused.

Then McBurney read out 26 names — 23 grand jurors and three alternates — to serve on Grand Jury A, which will meet Mondays and Tuesdays, and 26 names for Grand Jury B, which will meet Thursdays and Fridays. It's unclear which one of those grand juries would hear Willis' election case.

The district attorney and her team then met with the grand jurors behind closed doors before McBurney returned to the room to swear in the grand jurors and give them instructions.

WHAT HAPPENS WHEN THE CASE IS PRESENTED TO THE GRAND JURY?

Georgia law requires an indictment from a grand jury to prosecute someone in most felony cases — things like murder, aggravated assault, robbery and other crimes. When prosecutors present a case, they're trying to convince the grand jurors that there is probable cause that one or more people committed crimes and to get the grand jurors to sign off on bringing charges against them.

For each case, prosecutors read or explain the potential indictment and then call witnesses or present any other evidence. Any witnesses who testify must swear an oath to tell the truth.

Often in Georgia, the only witnesses the grand jury hears from are law enforcement officers, including investigators for the district attorney's office. They can tell the grand jurors what they've learned in their investigation, including what suspects or witnesses have said and what other evidence they have.

Members of the grand jury are allowed to question witnesses.

In general, a person who is named as a defendant on the potential indictment cannot be called to testify before the grand jury.

HOW DO GRAND JURY DELIBERATIONS WORK?

After the case has been presented, only members of the grand jury can be in the room for deliberations. They discuss the case and vote on whether to return a "true bill" or a "no bill." A "true bill" means the grand jurors have voted to indict because they think there is probable cause to believe that the person accused committed the alleged crimes. A "no bill" means the grand jurors don't believe the person committed the alleged crimes or there isn't enough evidence to indict.

At least 16 grand jurors must participate in the voting, and an indictment requires 12 of them to vote in favor of charges.

The grand juror oath in Georgia requires jurors to "keep the deliberations of the Grand Jury secret unless called upon to give evidence thereof in some court of law of this State."

WHAT HAPPENS AFTER GRAND JURORS VOTE?

If a grand jury votes to bring charges, the indictment must be presented in open court by the grand jury or the sworn grand jury bailiff in a courtroom where a judge and the clerk are present. Then it is filed in the clerk's office and is a public document. Soon after that, those charged will be booked and have their first court appearances.

If the grand jury votes against indicting anyone, prosecutors can present the case again to a different grand jury. But if two grand juries vote not to indict on the same charges, prosecutors generally cannot try again to get an indictment on those charges.

IF TRUMP IS INDICTED, CAN HE STILL RUN FOR PRESIDENT?

Yes. Neither an indictment nor a conviction would prevent Trump from running for or winning the presidency in 2024.

He has already been indicted twice this year in other cases. He faces 34 felony charges in New York state court accusing him of falsifying business records in a hush money scheme over allegations of extramarital sexual encounters. And he faces 37 felony charges in federal court in Florida accusing him of hoarding classified documents and refusing government demands to give them back.

In addition, a Justice Department special counsel is investigating his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election in multiple states, as well as the events leading up to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

A fire destroyed millions of veterans' records. 50 years later, families are still seeking answers

By ALLEN G. BREED, RANDY HERSCHAFT Associated Press

The apocalyptic scene is still burned into Mike Buttery's memory 50 years later: Black smoke billowing from the top floor of the Military Personnel Records Center; bits of paper wafting through the air as dozens of firefighters tried desperately to stem the inferno.

"They'd hit it (the paper) with the water, and the water would knock it back up in the air, and then it would float around some more out there," Buttery, then a janitor at the center, recalls of the wind-whipped paper swirling around the massive six-story building outside Saint Louis.

As he watched from a safe remove, Buttery could only think of the millions of veterans — like himself — whose records were being consumed and "how in the world would they get their benefits."

"It immediately went through my mind that those people were losing whatever history there was of their service," Buttery, who served with the Army in northern Vietnam, said during a recent interview from his home in a rural area southwest of the city.

The July 12, 1973, fire in Overland, Missouri, consumed an estimated 16 to 18 million personnel files, the vast majority covering the period just before World War I through 1963. It's believed to be the largest loss of records in one catastrophe in U.S. history.

It is an event that dogged untold veterans, forcing them to fight once more — this time for benefits, medals and recognition they'd earned. It echoes to this day — in the struggles of families seeking to document the achievements and sacrifices of loved ones, or to bury them with full military honors; and in the efforts of conspiracy theorists, still searching for proof of a nefarious plot behind what government investigators long ago wrote off as most likely the careless act of a single man.

More than anything, it highlights the monumental, ongoing effort to reclaim the history that, at the time, seemed irretrievably lost.

—
If the records center was meant to inspire awe, mission accomplished.

"Its size is difficult to comprehend, even when one is inside," Walter W. Stender and Evans Walker, who were with the Federal Records Centers, wrote in a 1974 article in *The American Archivist* titled, "The National Personnel Records Center: A Study in Disaster."

"The sheer bulk alone makes a strong impression on the viewer, and the vast scale tends to overwhelm the quiet St. Louis suburban community of Overland where the building rises on a seventy-acre site," they wrote. "The building, 728 feet long, 282 feet wide, six stories high, presents an impassive façade to the world with its rather bland curtain wall of glass and aluminum."

Built for the Department of Defense in 1956, the facility was later turned over to the National Archives and Records Service, then part of the General Services Administration. By the time of the fire, the military records center and a nearby one for civilian records had been merged into the National Personnel Records Center.

Walker and Stender, then assistant archivist for the records centers, said the 1.6 million-square-foot building "reflected careful planning." But "in actual function," they concluded, "it was not a successful records center."

There were some sprinklers on the first and second floors, but none in the stacks, and no firewalls between records storage areas.

A rash of fires in the previous year prompted the government to conduct a study of the facility, which was released in the fall of 1972.

"The study concluded that the facility was at high risk for a devastating fire, pointing to the storage containers (cardboard, not metal), the lack of overhead sprinklers, and the ebb-and-flow of employee hours as three particular concerns," according to a recent blog post by Jessie Kratz, Historian of the National Archives.

Less than a year later, Kratz noted, the worries were validated: the center was "vastly unprepared for fire."

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Buttery says that was apparent, even to a janitor.

"It was so hot and so dry," Buttery says of the file areas.

"All that paper was packed in cardboard boxes on metal shelving," says Bill Elmore, a janitor assigned to the sixth floor. "Basically, from the floor to the ceiling."

The former Air Force crew chief, who was working there under a veteran readjustment program, was nearing the end of his eight-hour shift when he overheard a man pounding on the doors. The man, whom a guard described as having "long hippie-type hair," shouted that smoke was pouring out of the upper floor windows.

It was 12:11 a.m., July 12.

Elmore noticed a fellow janitor and veteran, Terry Davis, sprinting up the stairs. He followed, hoping to reach the firehoses near the escalators.

What he saw is "etched in my memory."

"I saw Terry running back towards the very door I had just opened with a scared look on his face," Elmore says. "And a wall of smoke moving behind him faster than he could run."

Elmore, Buttery and the others watched from a grassy hill as the windows exploded.

"There was a glow from the top of that building that was just, I mean, it was right up against the clouds," says Buttery. "There was nothing that was going to stop it, that fire. It had too much fuel."

According to a GSA investigation, janitor John Staufenbiel was the last person known to have been on the sixth floor. It was 12:05 a.m.

Neither he nor two other custodians who later joined him on the freight elevator reported smelling smoke "or seeing any signs of fire," the report said.

The fire was not declared officially extinguished until the morning of July 16.

It had burned so hot that steel-reinforced concrete columns on the sixth floor buckled, portions of the collapsed roof slab supported only by file cabinets. So much water was poured on the fire that holes had to be knocked in the outer walls to let it drain; eventually, bulldozers were hoisted onto the fifth floor, and what was left of the top story was shoved off the side.

The search for a cause would be daunting. But arson was already front and center.

An investigation found there had been 11 fires in the two and a half years leading up to the conflagration. Six of the incidents were classified as suspected arson, three "identified with careless smoking or disposal of smoking material."

Elmore says the FBI was clearly "looking for somebody to hang this thing on." At one point, he says agents led him to a small room and shut off the lights.

"And they turned one of those desk lights into my face, and they stood on the other side of the light in the dark room asking me questions," he says, including whether he'd smoked on the roof and about "any anti-war feelings or thoughts I might have."

Buttery says agents came to his home and "stayed almost half the night," questioning not only him, but his wife.

In addition to looking into reports of faulty fans and undersized extension cords, agents ran down tips that "dissident employees" or someone of Asian "extraction" might have been involved in the fire (the Vietnam War was still raging at the time).

According to a nearly 400--page, partially redacted FBI investigative file, a summer employee was quizzed about any "left-wing or militant-type individuals" employed there. Workers were grilled about their marijuana use.

Eventually, the probe turned to something far more mundane.

A custodian had been going around telling colleagues that he might have started the fire. They passed that on to investigators.

Three months to the day after the fire, the man confessed to agents: Around 11 p.m., he'd snuck up to the sixth floor to smoke and had stubbed out his cigarette on one of the shelves.

The man had been hired by a private organization that provided disabled workers for federal installations.

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U.S. Attorney Donald J. Stohr told the St. Louis Post-Dispatch that it would be difficult to prove intent.

The case was presented to a federal grand jury on Oct. 31, 1973. The panel declined to return an indictment.

Fires at the U.S. Capitol, and the War and Treasury Departments during the 19th century claimed uncounted records and objects from the republic's founding, and a 1921 blaze destroyed nearly the entire 1890 federal Census. But while each "helped to diminish the cultural heritage of this nation," Stender and Walker wrote, none equaled the 1973 inferno.

The center housed roughly 52 million Official Military Personnel Files, or OMPFs.

The OMPF is like a diary of a veteran's service, containing every duty station, award, promotion and disciplinary action from enlistment to discharge. It is a kind of one stop shop for veterans seeking a job, medical benefits, insurance or government loans.

These OMPFs can also contain items such as telegrams, letters, photographs and testimonials — sometimes hundreds of pages — that might not exist anywhere else.

Some files were lost from every branch of the service. But Army and Air Force records suffered most.

The flames consumed 80% of Army personnel files for people discharged between Nov. 1, 1912, and Jan. 1, 1960. For the Air Force, it's estimated that files for 75% of personnel discharged from Sept. 25, 1947, through Jan. 1, 1964, with names that began after "Hubbard, James," were lost.

The sixth floor was also home to what is commonly referred to as the VIP or — as Elmore has heard some call it — "secrets" vault.

In addition to the personnel files of all veterans working at the center, as well as those of close relatives who served, the vault held the records of "persons of exceptional prominence" or, as it's sometimes put, from "the famous to the infamous" — former presidents like Dwight D. Eisenhower and John F. Kennedy; gangster John Dillinger and serial killer Jeffrey Dahmer; actors Jimmy Stewart and Burt Lancaster; even Adolf Hitler's nephew, William, and a Navy mascot named Billy Goat.

"The intense heat of the fire turned the vault into a huge oven and roasted its total content to the consistency of slightly burned toast," a 1979 report from the Army Adjutant General's Office said. "Practically every paper in the vault came out with charred, blacked edges and almost complete loss of flexibility."

Of the records stored in the vault, 1,694 were destroyed or damaged.

Roughly 6.5 million records salvaged from the fire — known as "B" or "burned files" — are kept in climate-controlled warehouses to avoid any further degradation. They aren't disturbed unless someone requests them.

To the naked eye, many of the pages appear to be nothing but a "black smudge," says NPRC Director Scott Levins. But technicians can use infrared cameras to reveal what's beneath that charred mess.

When someone requests a file that was lost, research technicians comb morning reports, unit rosters, payroll lists and other source documents looking for proof of the veteran's service.

"We're looking for a date of entry, a separation and a character of service," says Levins. "And if we can find those three data points from official government records, then we can issue a document ... so veterans can get benefits."

To date, the center has partially reconstructed nearly 5.5 million records.

Given the periods involved, most of the veterans whose records were destroyed have likely died. Levins says historians and family genealogists seeking to fill out those veterans' histories are "the real pain point."

"I have helped countless families find answers, closure, and peace," says Chicago-based genealogist Jennifer Holik, who has been doing military research for more than a decade. "The fire has been a major obstacle to overcome."

Even before the grand jury closed the criminal case, an interagency committee had concluded that the fire's cause "Cannot be Determined."

But there are some who will never accept that it was an accident.

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One theory Levins has heard is that the fire was started to destroy records connected to Church of Scientology founder L. Ron Hubbard. Although the Air Force records destroyed began with "Hubbard, James," L. Ron Hubbard served in the Marine Reserves and Navy, and those files now reside in the "vault" area. (Technically no longer a vault, NPRC has an area in the stacks "with greater security controls which contain Specially Protected Holdings," Levins says.)

Some veterans have even suggested to Levins that the government set the fire "so they wouldn't have to pay my benefits."

One person who still thinks it might have been arson: Elmore.

"The fire was way too big, way too fast," he says.

Elmore was one of five people who reported the alleged smoker's admission to the FBI, but he never believed him.

"He wanted attention," Elmore says of the man. "Anything that he said to any of us, we all took with a huge grain of salt." (The Associated Press has learned the man's name but could not locate him or determine if he is still alive.)

Elmore, 75, can't help wondering if the fire might have been connected to Richard Nixon and the Watergate scandal. G. Gordon Liddy and E. Howard Hunt, leaders of the so-called plumbers who broke into Democratic National Committee headquarters at the Washington hotel, were both veterans.

Levins says there is no definitive list of what was inside the vault in 1973, but that the files of Liddy (Army) and Hunt (Army/Navy) are very much extant. Hunt's Army record was "impacted by the fire" and partially reconstructed," Levins says.

Following the fire, Buttery and Elmore helped launch a non-profit veterans service center in St. Louis that helped thousands of former service members find jobs and obtain benefits. Elmore later started a small business, since closed, helping veterans obtain their records.

The former janitors are still friends. But Buttery doesn't share his buddy's suspicions.

"I mean, a spark would have ignited, it would have been like a pile of leaves, pile of dry leaves," says Buttery, 71, who operates a construction business. "I think if anything, it was an accident."

In 2011, the same year Levins became director, the NPRC moved into a shiny, modern facility on the other side of St. Louis County. The old building, one story shorter than before, remains vacant.

A half century after the fire, Levins still has a team of around 20 people working full-time on about 6,900 fire-related cases.

If there was a silver lining to the fire, Levins says, it's that it led to advances in records management, storage and restoration.

The government pioneered vacuum-drying methods to salvage water-logged records, developing safety standards that were later adopted by the National Fire Protection Association.

The VA is methodically digitizing the center's paper records. Between that and redundant backup procedures, Levins is confident something like this can never happen again.

In 1995, a special task force of the National Archives and Records Administration — now an independent agency — concluded that military personnel files were "permanently valuable." Under a 2004 agreement with the Department of Defense, all OMPF's will eventually be turned over to NARA and "will never be destroyed," Levins says.

"I tell the veterans, 'In a sense, you've been immortalized, because your military record will be kept for the life of the republic,'" he says. "It will be kept for the same length of time as the United States Constitution."

Desperate Ukrainians take long and uncertain journey to escape Russian occupation

By SAMYA KULLAB and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — For Rima Yaremenko, the 5,000-kilometer (3,000-mile) odyssey to escape Russian occupation ended within sight of where it started. The 68-year old Ukrainian woman traversed several countries over six days only to settle across the river from her beleaguered hometown.

She came a long way by bus through Russia, Latvia, Lithuania and Poland to be this close. From the Ukrainian-controlled city of Kherson, where she now lives, the faint outline of Oleshky is visible from a distance. But the community with a prewar population of 25,000 may as well be a world away.

Yaremenko lived under Moscow's rule for 15 months, putting up with the rumble of constant shelling just be near her beloved home and blooming garden. Then it was gone after the destruction of the Kakhovka Dam in early June triggered catastrophic flooding and reduced the property to clay.

She faced a tough choice: endure homelessness as the war raged nearby or take the only way out — a long, circuitous and uncertain journey through Russia. "We didn't want to go, but once we were flooded, I decided there's nothing to stay for," she said.

Hundreds of others left, too, abandoning their water-logged homes to travel across vast sweeps of occupied land, past checkpoints that required nail-biting interrogations and through Russia's urban heartland, all to reach the borders of the European Union.

Now that they are beyond the reach of Russian authorities, the escapees offered rare firsthand accounts to The Associated Press of their lives under occupation and their harrowing escape from Kremlin-controlled territory. Some of them spoke on the condition that they be identified only by their first names because they still have relatives living in occupied territory.

As the two sides blamed each other for destroying the dam, water levels declined and thunderous artillery fire resumed. Fighting intensified along the Dnieper River, which marks the line between Kyiv and Moscow's battling armies. Russian allegations that Ukraine was responsible for the dam collapse were called into question by an AP investigation.

The constant shelling proved too much for those already struggling with homelessness and access to drinking water. Most did not have the money to rebuild. Occupation authorities offered a mere 10,000 rubles (\$100) in compensation.

"My house was unlivable. Everything was covered in mud. The water pipes were broken and dirty. There was sewage," said Lana, 43, who left Oleshky on June 19 and arrived in Kherson a little over a week later. "It was impossible to breathe. We were suffocating."

Residents initially hoped a quick Ukrainian counteroffensive would free them. But the longer they remained, the more they feared pressure to acquire Russian passports.

"Although the water receded, the calamity persisted," said Yevhen Ryschuk, Oleshky's exiled mayor, who is in contact with residents.

The AP spoke to nine people who left Oleshky from June 13 to July 1. The only way out of the occupied part of the Kherson region was through Crimea, which Russia illegally annexed in 2014.

Travelers had to be processed in the administrative town of Armyansk, where phones are inspected, email passwords collected and those suspected of collaborating with Ukrainian forces interrogated or detained, in some cases never to be seen again.

Some are unable to pass simply because they lost their documents and have no money, said Nelly Isaeva, director of Helping to Leave, an organization that works remotely to aid Ukrainians who are trapped on the east bank and want to escape.

"Young people left, and pensioners stayed," said Nataliia Skakun, 54, who recently left Oleshky with her husband, Serhii, and resettled in Mykolaiv, in the Kherson region.

A woman who remains in Oelshky said life under occupation has become harder over time.

The Russians "began to act more harshly than before," she said, speaking on condition of anonymity out of fear for her safety. Russian soldiers now check the documents of locals, for example, when visiting

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the market.

For that reason, the woman and her family avoid leaving the house. Many people get by on the food that remains after others leave. "They give us their stocks," she said.

Most townspeople who fled to Crimea continued their journey through the Russian province of Rostov-on-Don to Moscow and eventually made it to the Latvian border and then on to Lithuania. Many continued to Poland and crossed into Ukraine from there or stayed in refugee camps. AP also spoke to two people who traveled directly to Belgorod, which borders Ukraine's Sumy region.

In Armyansk, a 50-year-old woman named Alla was questioned: Do you support Russia's special military operation? Do you have contacts in the Ukrainian government? Who do you think exploded the dam?

She thought carefully about how to answer.

Alla had stayed because her 74-year-old arthritis-stricken mother didn't want to go. Unable to bear it any longer, she took all the precautions she could by deleting potentially suspicious contacts and messages. She even told the Russian soldiers she was going to Simferopol, the capital of the Crimean Peninsula, and no farther.

The last 15 months were the hardest of her life.

"Every day in Oleshky was a risk. Every day I thought about leaving, but I couldn't bring myself to make a decision. My mother is there, my house that we loved, that we dedicated most of our lives to build," she said.

A few months into occupation, the ruble was enforced as currency. Alla had to exchange her Ukrainian hryvnias with a 10% fee. The last time she tried to purchase diabetes medication at the hospital she was told to present Russian documents the next time.

She lost friends: Some accepted offers to acquire Russian passports and housing certificates to purchase apartments inside Russia. Two of Yaremenko's acquaintances did so too. "Our friends, for example, took the passports immediately. They say they feel it has become easier to live."

The flooding was the last straw. Scores of homes were damaged. Many buildings still standing are uninhabitable. The threat of waterborne disease loomed.

At the checkpoint, Alla looked up at the Russian soldier. I don't know who exploded the dam, she said, I just want peace. He let her through.

At the Latvian border, she was taken aside again and questioned in a room where a pair of handcuffs hung on a chair. Why leave? They asked. Why not wait for compensation? Why not look for a house in Russia?

Then they said they knew she had left her mother behind. If she dared return for her, they would not let her pass a second time, they warned.

"It was psychological pressure," she said.

Those with a history of collaboration took greater measures to hide their past.

Yuri, 28, a former journalist, buried his press credentials and wiped his phone contacts. For months, he had been passing coordinates of Russian army movements to friends connected to Ukrainian forces.

In Oleshky, he had found work in a shawarma shop frequented by Russian soldiers, he said. "Every day you leave your house and don't know if you'll come back," he said.

To survive, he was polite and struck up conversation with the soldiers. Some told him they would fight for the territory until the end. Others said they wanted to go home. He pretended to sympathize.

He was let through in Armyansk. Like so many others, he headed to the one place he felt most at home. Across the river, in the city of Kherson, where Russian bombardment is constant.

"It's absurd in a way," he said with a laugh. Only a few weeks ago, he could see the Ukrainian-controlled city from his building under occupation. "It was just 20 minutes between Oleshky and Kherson. Now it's three days."

This story has been updated to correct a description of the journey taken by many people fleeing. They first entered Latvia from Russia and then continued on to Lithuania.

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

Deadly flooding is hitting several countries at once. Scientists say this will only be more common

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY, BRITTANY PETERSON and DREW COSTLEY Associated Press

Schools in New Delhi were forced to close Monday after heavy monsoon rains battered the Indian capital, with landslides and flash floods killing at least 15 people over the last three days. Farther north, the overflowing Beas River swept vehicles downstream as it flooded neighborhoods.

In Japan, torrential rain pounded the southwest, causing floods and mudslides that left two people dead and at least six others missing Monday. Local TV showed damaged houses in Fukuoka prefecture and muddy water from the swollen Yamakuni River appearing to threaten a bridge in the town of Yabakei.

In Ulster County, in New York's Hudson Valley and in Vermont, some said the flooding is the worst they've seen since Hurricane Irene's devastation in 2011.

Although destructive flooding in India, Japan, China, Turkey and the United States might seem like distant events, atmospheric scientists say they have this in common: Storms are forming in a warmer atmosphere, making extreme rainfall a more frequent reality now. The additional warming that scientists predict is coming will only make it worse.

That's because a warmer atmosphere holds more moisture, which results in storms dumping more precipitation that can have deadly outcomes. Pollutants, especially carbon dioxide and methane, are heating up the atmosphere. Instead of allowing heat to radiate away from Earth into space, they hold onto it.

While climate change is not the cause of storms unleashing the rainfall, these storms are forming in an atmosphere that is becoming warmer and wetter.

"Sixty-eight degrees Fahrenheit can hold twice as much water as 50 degrees Fahrenheit," said Rodney Wynn, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service in Tampa Bay. "Warm air expands and cool air contracts. You can think of it as a balloon - when it's heated the volume is going to get larger, so therefore it can hold more moisture."

For every 1 degree Celsius, which equals 1.8 degrees Fahrenheit, the atmosphere warms, it holds approximately 7% more moisture. According to NASA, the average global temperature has increased by at least 1.1 degrees Celsius (1.9 degrees Fahrenheit) since 1880.

"When a thunderstorm develops, water vapor gets condensed into rain droplets and falls back down to the surface. So as these storms form in warmer environments that have more moisture in them, the rainfall increases," explained Brian Soden, professor of atmospheric sciences at the University of Miami.

Along Turkey's mountainous and scenic Black Sea coast, heavy rains swelled rivers and damaged cities with flooding and landslides. At least 15 people were killed by flooding in another mountainous region, in southwestern China.

"As the climate gets warmer we expect intense rain events to become more common, it's a very robust prediction of climate models," Soden added. "It's not surprising to see these events happening, it's what models have been predicting ever since day one."

Gavin Schmidt, climatologist and director of the NASA Goddard Institute for Space Studies, said the regions being hit hardest by climate change are not the ones who emit the largest amount of planet-warming pollutants.

"The bulk of the emissions have come from the industrial Western nations and the bulk of the impacts are happening in places that don't have good infrastructure, that are less prepared for weather extremes and have no real ways to manage this," said Schmidt.

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.

GOP confidence in 2024 vote count low after years of false election claims, AP-NORC poll shows

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

Few Republicans have high confidence that votes will be tallied accurately in next year's presidential contest, suggesting years of sustained attacks against elections by former President Donald Trump and his allies have taken a toll, according to a new poll.

The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll finds that only 22% of Republicans have high confidence that votes in the upcoming presidential election will be counted accurately compared to 71% of Democrats, underscoring a partisan divide fueled by a relentless campaign of lies related to the 2020 presidential election. Even as he runs for the White House a third time, Trump continues to promote the false claim that the election was stolen.

Overall, the survey finds that fewer than half of Americans — 44% — have "a great deal" or "quite a bit" of confidence that the votes in the next presidential election will be counted accurately.

While Democrats' confidence in elections has risen in recent years, the opposite is true for Republicans. Ahead of the 2016 election, 32% of Republicans were highly confident votes would be counted accurately — a figure that jumped to 54% two years later after Trump won the presidency.

That confidence level dropped to 28% a month before the 2020 election, as Trump signaled to voters that the voting would be rigged, and now sits at 22% less than 16 months before the next presidential election.

"I just didn't like the way the last election went," said Lynn Jackson, a registered nurse from El Sobrante, California, who is a registered Republican. "I have questions about it. I can't actually say it was stolen -- only God knows that."

Trump's claims were rejected by dozens of judges, including several he appointed. His own attorney general and an exhaustive review by The Associated Press found no evidence of widespread fraud that could have changed the results. Multiple reviews, audits and recounts in the battleground states where Trump disputed his loss confirmed Democrat Joe Biden's victory, including several overseen by Republican lawmakers.

Even so, Trump's attempts to explain his loss led to a wave of new laws in GOP-dominated states that added new voting restrictions, primarily by restricting mail voting and limiting or banning ballot drop boxes. Across the country, conspiracy theories related to voting machines have prompted many Republican-controlled local governments to explore banning machines from tallying votes in favor of hand counts.

The AP-NORC poll suggests that the persistent messaging has sunk in among a wide swath of the American public.

The survey found that independents — a group that has consistently had low confidence in elections — were also largely skeptical about the integrity of the 2024 elections. Just 24% have the highest levels of confidence that the votes will be counted accurately.

Chris Ruff, a 46-year-old unaffiliated voter from Sanford, North Carolina, said he lost faith in elections years ago, believing they are rigged to favor certain candidates. He also sees no difference between the two major parties.

"I don't vote at all," he said. "I think it only adds credibility to the system if you participate."

The conspiracy theories about voting machines, promoted through forums held around the country, also have taken a toll on confidence among Republicans even though there is no evidence to support them.

About four in 10 U.S. adults are highly confident that scanning paper ballots into a machine provides accurate counts. Democrats are about twice as confident in the process as Republicans — 63% compared to 29%. That marks a notable shift from a 2018 AP-NORC poll that found just 40% of Democrats were confident compared to 53% of Republicans.

Gillian Nevers, a 79-year-old retiree from Madison, Wisconsin, has worked as a poll worker and said she has confidence -- based on her experiences -- in the people who oversee elections.

"I have never seen any shenanigans," said Nevers, who votes Democratic. "The claims are unfounded

and ridiculous. Because they are being so widely projected, I think they have a lot of people worried who I don't think should be."

The conspiracy theories have led to death threats against election officials and an exodus of experienced workers. The attacks against voting machines have been especially dispiriting for election officials because of the testing and audits they perform before and after elections to ensure votes are recorded accurately. All states except Alabama and Wisconsin reported using a method referred to as logic and accuracy testing to confirm that voting machines were tabulating votes correctly before the 2022 midterm elections, according to a report by the U.S. Election Assistance Commission.

In most jurisdictions, any challenged result also can be checked against the paper ballots.

James Grove, a 74-year-old retiree from Sharon, Pennsylvania, is among the minority of Republicans who are confident votes will be counted accurately next year and said he does not believe the 2020 election was stolen.

"I think most of the elections are run pretty honestly," said Grove, who backed Trump in 2016 and 2020. "There are Republican election watchers and Democratic ones. And do I think the 2020 election was crooked? No, I really don't."

Among other poll findings:

— Most Republicans — 62% — are opposed to allowing people to vote using mailed ballots without an excuse, compared to just 13% of Democrats. Roughly seven in 10 Democrats support no-excuse mail voting.

— Requiring a photo ID to cast a ballot receives broad bipartisan support. Seven in 10 U.S. adults would favor a measure requiring voters to provide photo identification, including 87% of Republicans and 60% of Democrats.

— A slim majority of Americans — 55% — support automatically registering adult citizens to vote when they get a driver's license or other state identification.

— Four in 10 U.S. adults say eligible voters being denied the right to vote is a major problem in U.S. elections, but about as many Americans say the same about people voting who are not eligible. The perceived significance of each issue varies by political party: 56% of Republicans call illegal voting a major problem in U.S. elections, compared to 20% of Democrats. At the same time, 53% of Democrats say eligible voters being unable to vote is a major problem, compared to 26% of Republicans.

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

The poll of 1,220 adults was conducted June 22-26 using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 3.9 percentage points.

Today in History: Walter Mondale chooses Geraldine Ferraro as presidential running mate

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, July 12, the 193rd day of 2023. There are 172 days left in the year.

On July 12, 1909, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, allowing for a federal income tax, and submitted it to the states. (It was declared ratified in February 1913.)

In 1543, England's King Henry VIII married his sixth and last wife, Catherine Parr.

In 1812, United States forces led by Gen. William Hull entered Canada during the War of 1812 against Britain. (However, Hull retreated shortly thereafter to Detroit.)

In 1862, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill authorizing the Army Medal of Honor.

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In 1908, comedian Milton Berle was born Mendel Berlinger in New York City.

In 1965, the Beach Boys single "California Girls" was released by Capitol Records.

In 1967, rioting erupted in Newark, New Jersey, over the police beating of a Black taxi driver; 26 people were killed in the five days of violence that followed.

In 1974, President Richard Nixon signed a measure creating the Congressional Budget Office. Former White House aide John Ehrlichman and three others were convicted of conspiring to violate the civil rights of Daniel Ellsberg's former psychiatrist.

In 1984, Democratic presidential candidate Walter F. Mondale announced his choice of U.S. Rep. Geraldine A. Ferraro of New York to be his running-mate; Ferraro was the first woman to run for vice president on a major-party ticket.

In 1991, Japanese professor Hitoshi Igarashi, who had translated Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses," was found stabbed to death, nine days after the novel's Italian translator was attacked in Milan.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton, visiting Germany, went to the eastern sector of Berlin, the first U.S. president to do so since Harry Truman.

In 2003, the USS Ronald Reagan, the first carrier named for a living president, was commissioned in Norfolk, Virginia.

In 2016, with hugs and handshakes, Bernie Sanders endorsed Hillary Clinton for president during an appearance in Portsmouth, New Hampshire.

Ten years ago: Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano announced her resignation. A train carrying hundreds of passengers derailed and crashed outside Paris; at least six people were killed and dozens injured. NSA leaker Edward Snowden emerged from weeks of hiding in a Moscow airport, meeting with Russian officials and rights activists. The Texas Senate passed sweeping new abortion restrictions, sending them to Gov. Rick Perry to sign into law after weeks of protests and rallies that drew thousands of people to the Capitol.

Five years ago: After an emergency gathering of NATO leaders held to address his criticisms, President Donald Trump said the U.S. commitment to the alliance "remains very strong," despite reports that he had threatened to pull out in a dispute over defense spending. Trump then flew to Great Britain for his first visit as president. Syria's government raised its flag over the southern city of Daraa, the cradle of the 2011 uprising against President Bashar Assad, after rebels in the city surrendered. "Game of Thrones" led the way with 22 Emmy nominations; Netflix programs captured 112 nominations, taking away HBO's front-runner title.

One year ago: As a Russian offensive intensified in eastern Ukraine, authorities urged residents to evacuate for other, safer cities and towns in the west of the country, though many refused to leave, including pensioners worried they wouldn't have enough money to survive in a new location. Twitter sued Elon Musk to force him to complete the \$44 billion acquisition of the social media company after Musk said he was backing off his agreement to buy the company. (He would eventually become Twitter's owner in October of 2022.) Ann Shulgin, a pioneer of psychedelics in therapy, died at age 91.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Denise Nicholas is 79. Singer-songwriter Butch Hancock is 78. Fitness guru Richard Simmons is 75. Singer Walter Egan is 75. Writer-producer Brian Grazer is 72. Actor Cheryl Ladd is 72. Gospel singer Ricky McKinnie is 71. Country singer Julie Miller is 67. Gospel singer Sandi Patty is 67. Actor Mel Harris is 67. Actor Buddy Foster is 66. Rock guitarist Dan Murphy (Soul Asylum) is 61. Actor Judi Evans is 59. Rock singer Robin Wilson (Gin Blossoms) is 58. Actor Lisa Nicole Carson is 54. Olympic gold medal figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi is 52. Country singer Shannon Lawson is 50. CBS newsman Jeff Glor is 48. Actor Anna Friel is 47. R&B singer Tracie Spencer is 47. Actor Alison Wright is 47. Sen. Kyrsten Sinema, D-Ariz., is 47. Actor Steve Howey is 46. Actor Topher Grace is 45. Actor Michelle Rodriguez is 45. Actor Kristen Connolly is 43. Country singer-musician Kimberly Perry (The Band Perry) is 40. Actor Matt Cook (TV: "Man With a Plan") is 39. Actor Natalie Martinez is 39. Actor Bernard David Jones is 38. Actor TaRhonda Jones is 35. Golfer Inbee Park is 35. Actor Melissa O'Neil is 35. Actor Rachel Brosnahan is 33. Actor Erik Per Sullivan is 32. Olympic gold medal gymnast Jordyn Wieber is 28. Nobel Peace laureate Malala Yousafzai is 26.