

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 1 of 79

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- NewsWeek Bulletin](#)
- [3- We the People column](#)
- [5- Nehls Yard and Moving Sale](#)
- [6- SD SearchLight: Deputy cleared of misconduct in death of Native American man in Lake Andes jail](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: Texas native with lengthy theft sentence earns commutation endorsement from parole board](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: Park Service opposes Johnson's Mount Rushmore Protection Act, calling it 'unnecessary'](#)
- [11- Weather Pages](#)
- [15- Daily Devotional](#)
- [16- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [17- Subscription Form](#)
- [18- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [19- News from the Associated Press](#)



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

Sunday, July 16

St. John's Lutheran worship with communion at 9 a.m.; Zion Lutheran worship with communion at 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.

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

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

United Methodist: Conde worship at 8:30 a.m., coffee hour 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship at 10:30 a.m. Amateurs host Miller, 6 p.m.

Monday, July 17

Senior Menu: Chicken Tetrastine, mixed vegetables, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

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

Senior Citizens Meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.

Softball at Mellette (U10 at 5:30 p.m. DH, U12 at 7:30 p.m. (DH)

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.

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Groton Daily Independent
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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 2 of 79

The Bulletin by Newsweek

JULY 10, 2023

World in Brief

drinks and sugar-free versions of food is a "possible" cause of cancer, but is still safe in limited quantities, the World Health Organization said.

India is set to launch its third moon mission, Chandrayaan-3, as the country seeks to establish its position in space exploration and become the first country to land on the Moon's south pole.

Australia appointed veteran economist Michele Bullock to lead the Reserve Bank of Australia, the first woman to lead the central bank in its 63-year history.

Lisa Marie Presley's cause of death, the only child of rock 'n' roll legend Elvis Presley, has been revealed. She died of a small bowel obstruction in January.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Kyiv has received U.S.-provided cluster munitions, which have been banned in more than 100 countries. Meanwhile, the Institute for the Study of War's recent map showed that Russia has lost much of the land it once controlled in the northern positions of Ukraine..

TALKING POINTS

"I don't really want to engage in the specifics, except to say that, it's not our goal to be involved in a culture war. Our goal is to continue to tell wonderful stories and have a positive impact on the world. You know, we are a preeminent entertainer in the world, and we're proud of our track record there. The notion that Disney is in any way sexualizing children, quite frankly, is preposterous and inaccurate," CEO Bob Iger said during an interview with CNBC.

"Nobody wants a work stoppage, but if our leadership is saying that the deal isn't fair, then we gotta hold strong until we get a deal that's fair for working actors. It's the difference between having health care and not for a lot of actors. And we gotta do what's right by them," actor Matt Damon told reporters shortly before he and the rest of the Oppenheimer cast left their film's London premiere in solidarity with the Hollywood writers' and actors' strike..

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

Today marks International Non-Binary People's Day.

The team behind xAI, Elon Musk's new artificial intelligence company, will be answering questions during a Twitter Spaces chat.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds is expected to sign a new bill into law that would ban most abortions after about six weeks of pregnancy. The bill is already facing challenges in court.

Tucker Carlson is slated to host this year's FAMiLY Leaders Summit in Des Moines, Iowa. Former Vice President Mike Pence, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis and South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott are among the 2024 GOP presidential candidates expected to attend the Christian conservative event.

On Saturday, Turning Point Action's annual conference kicks off in West Palm Beach, Florida. This year's speaker list includes former President Donald Trump, Tucker Carlson and conservative commentator Charlie Kirk, among others.

Russian President Vladimir Putin will be "laughing" at NATO's inaction over admitting Ukraine into the alliance, Boris Bondarev, a former U.N. representative for Russia, told Newsweek.

A Supreme Court petition could upend hundreds of cases related to the Jan. 6 Capitol riot if the Court's conservative majority decides to hear an appeal from rioter Edward Lang.

The Biden Administration believes Chinese-backed hackers gave the Chinese government insights ahead of Secretary of State Antony Blinken's visit to Beijing, CNN reported.

An artificial sweetener, aspartame, widely used in diet

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

Constitution Does Not Shield Presidents from Defamation Suits

The Justice Department's announcement this week that the Constitution does not shield presidents from civil lawsuits stemming from a president's defamatory remarks represents two important victories—one for constitutionally limited government and the other for individuals who could be destroyed by the words of the nation's chief executive.

The DOJ's declaration clarified its position on the broad question of immunity for former President Donald Trump against a lawsuit filed by the writer E. Jean Carroll, who says that Trump raped her in a Manhattan department store dressing room decades ago.

For three years, the DOJ, under both Republican and Democratic leadership, had contended that Trump was acting within the scope of his presidential duties when he denied sexually assaulting Ms. Carroll. That position protected Trump, as it would other federal employees, from civil lawsuits when acting in their official capacity.

In this week's court filing, however, the DOJ declared that new evidence had surfaced since Trump left office, including the fact that the jury in a recent civil trial in New York found the former president liable for sexually assaulting Ms. Carroll 30 years ago.

The new facts indicated that Trump, in his derogatory comments against Ms. Carroll in 2019, was motivated by a "personal grievance," stemming from events that occurred many years before his presidency. His comments were, indeed, made through official channels often used by presidents in communicating with the media, and thus within the category of "work context." However, the DOJ emphasized that the allegations of Ms. Carroll that prompted Trump's response related to a "purely personal incident"—the alleged sexual assault in a department store. Trump's remarks did not reflect a desire to "serve the United States Government."

The question of whether former President Trump was engaged in "official acts" when responding to Ms. Carroll's allegations of sexual abuse is critical to the character and disposition of the case. After Ms. Carroll filed suit, the DOJ, under the leadership of Attorney General William Barr, invoked a federal law that substitutes the government as the defendant when a federal official is sued for official acts, which leads to the dismissal of the case.

But the presiding federal district court judge, Lewis Kaplan, rejected the DOJ's invocation of the federal statute on grounds that Trump's remarks bore "no relationship to the official business of the United States." That seemed clear, of course, but Trump's legal team filed a round of appeals with the result that the case ultimately returned to Judge Kaplan.

Judge Kaplan asked the DOJ to weigh in a second time on the question of whether Trump's comments were related to official business, or merely an exercise in "personal grievance." The department's filing declared on the face of the new evidence that Trump was not covered by the federal statute.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 4 of 79

The DOJ rightly cited two factors for its reversal. It invoked a D.C. Court of Appeal's clarification of the statute about what qualifies as "public work." The court held that it is determined in part by "the subjective state of mind of the employee," that official responses to press questions don't always qualify and that the professional purpose can be so "insignificant" as to be irrelevant. It also cited the recent verdict of a New York jury that found Trump sexually abused and defamed Ms. Carroll, and the fact that he has since been accused of defaming her again in response to the verdict.

It was relatively easy for the DOJ to conclude that there was little, if any official conduct in Trump's derogatory comments about Ms. Carroll. That conclusion represents a victory for constitutionally limited government and the rights and reputations of American citizens.

Imagine a different outcome, one that would permit the federal government to intervene and substitute itself in a civil lawsuit against a president who has defamed a citizen. In such a world, a president, acting with total immunity from liability, might destroy the reputations of men and women with impunity. In such a world, there would be little, if any, protection for critics of the president. Imagine the chilling effect on dissident speech and then imagine the effect on our democracy.

The Framers of the Constitution created a limited presidency that was subject to the rule of law, one devoid, as James Wilson declared, of "privileges not annexed to the character of any other citizen." This principle includes the denial to the president of authority to defame citizens of the United States.

Yard and Moving Sale

Saturday, July 15th

Sunday, July 16th

8AM to 4PM

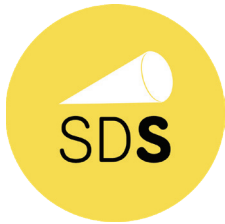
40801 134th St, Groton

3/4 mile east of County Dumpster Site
at Junction of US Hwy 12 & County Hwy 12E.

Alot of items!

- Household items
- Yard & Garage Items
- Fishing equipment
- Men's, Women's and Girl's Clothing
- Purses, Shoes
- Herb Books
- New Tupperware
- Canning jars

Most items - just make a reasonable offer.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Deputy cleared of misconduct in death of Native American man in Lake Andes jail

County lacked training, protocols for identifying drug overdoses

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 13, 2023 5:56 PM

The Charles Mix County sheriff's deputy who arrested Robert "Berta" Enoch before his death by overdose in a Lake Andes jail will not be reprimanded for his actions.

That was the decision of the South Dakota Law Enforcement Officers Standards Commission on Thursday in Pierre during a hearing for 31-year-old Jon Werkmeister.

Enoch, a 35-year-old Native American man, was found unresponsive in his cell on April 3. Werkmeister lacked the training to identify signs of a drug overdose, and the Charles Mix County Jail lacked a drug overdose policy, which left him unprepared to respond when Enoch began to show signs of medical distress, commissioners found. The commission also found that Werkmeister had not acted with racist intent or treated Enoch differently than other inmates because of previous encounters or bad blood.

It was disclosed during the hearing that Werkmeister has two adopted Native American children, and he'd never met Enoch – who was staying in Charles Mix County but did not live there – before taking him to the jail.

Enoch was on parole and had lost touch with his parole officer at the time he was taken into custody. He'd stayed in Sioux Falls for a time, but he'd lost contact with friends and family for weeks. His family learned that he'd been staying in Lake Andes about a week before his death.

One friend named Tracii Barse, a former inmate who found sobriety in prison and now helps other former inmates on the outside, said that Enoch had committed to turning himself in just days before his arrest. He'd secured a place in a drug treatment program with the help of Barse and Enoch's parole officer.

"I said, 'Bro, all you've got to do is sit in jail for 24 hours,'" Barse recalled telling Enoch about 48 hours before his arrest.

Attorney General Marty Jackley, an ex-officio member of the commission, told South Dakota Searchlight that Charles Mix County Sheriff Randy Thaler's moves to institute a drug overdose policy and to train his deputies and correctional officers show that the agency has made good faith efforts to address the issues raised by Enoch's death.

"I would say from just a general totality of the circumstances, training was discussed in terms of how it could be better with respect to that jail, and the sheriff is doing just that – additional policies and procedures and additional training," Jackley said.

Werkmeister picked Enoch up on April 3 for disorderly conduct. At the jail, Enoch began to show signs of a seizure, with his head bobbing and his feet turning purple. A correctional officer and Werkmeister checked on Enoch, but Werkmeister told the commission he didn't recognize the signs of a seizure.

Another correctional officer later administered CPR when Enoch was found unresponsive. He was pronounced dead at a Wagner hospital. His death certificate lists methamphetamine toxicity as his cause of death.

During the hearing, Werkmeister said that he didn't "have a clue" what to make of Enoch's behavior when the correctional officer asked him to take a look in the cell.

Jackley said the commission took that into account.

"To me, when he said 'I don't have a clue,' he was saying 'I didn't know what to do,'" Jackley said.

The commission also heard concerns that Enoch may have been combative or could have become com-

bative if taken to a hospital.

"There was testimony that if somebody's combative, the hospital doesn't want that, because law enforcement is really better equipped to deal with someone who's combative than the hospital is," Jackley said.

Since Enoch's death, Sheriff Thaler – who, like Werkmeister, said he didn't recognize purple fingers or toes as signs of an overdose – brought in medical staff to train officers on the signs and symptoms of overdoses.

Jackley said the incident highlights the importance of training for correctional officers and staff, particularly given the prevalence of drugs like methamphetamine in South Dakota.

"If a jail has a facility dedicated to individuals that are either intoxicated by alcohol or controlled substances, there will need to be added awareness and training associated with how to address medical-related conditions," he said.

News that Werkmeister was cleared of unbecoming conduct for an officer did not come as a surprise to Barse.

"To be honest, I was expecting something like this," Barse said Thursday by phone.

Barse and a cousin to Enoch were recently granted authority over Enoch's estate. They've been working to get back Enoch's vehicle, which had been left on the road and was later seized by law enforcement, to give it to Enoch's son.

Barse said they'd all but given up on closure in the death, at least until he learned of Thursday's hearing. The family held a second funeral ceremony on June 23, because the ground where the grave is located had yet to thaw at the time of an April ceremony.

Now, Barse said, he expects to push for accountability. Barse told South Dakota Searchlight that two inmates jailed in Charles Mix County on April 3 had reached out to tell him that they'd heard Enoch begging for help, but that was months ago.

"We put him in the ground. We were all kind of like, 'OK, well, nothing's gonna happen, so now we're just gonna pray with each other and keep going forward, keep each other sober and heal together,'" Barse said. "We had given up, honestly, but now I'm not going to. This is a big sign for me."

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

Texas native with lengthy theft sentence earns commutation endorsement from parole board

Concerns about restitution payments hung over discussion of early release

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 13, 2023 4:02 PM

SIOUX FALLS — A Texas native who bilked his business partners out of more than \$169,000 in 2005 could walk free if Gov. Kristi Noem signs off on a commutation recommended Thursday by the Board of Pardons and Paroles.

Should the governor endorse the board's 5-2 recommendation for clemency, 60-year-old Rex Gard would be able to begin paying his restitution bill.

Gard and his family members appealed for mercy over Microsoft Teams on Thursday, with his brother promising him an oil fields job that would pay the 17-year South Dakota inmate between \$4,000 and \$5,000 a month.

Gard's 65-year sentence for a non-violent offense was relatively unique in its severity, parole board members pointed out. Unlike some charged with grand theft in business-related theft schemes, Gard didn't use most of the ill-gotten gains to purchase sports cars, gamble or otherwise bolster his own financial situation.

Instead, he told the board, he took money from his two partners in a limited liability company focused on construction work to make business purchases without his partners' knowledge. He also wrote bad

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 8 of 79

checks and ducked tax liabilities.

He'd used the money to buy new equipment for the company, including heavy machinery, "new tools, new everything," Gard claimed, in hopes of setting the business up for success.

"I overspent," Gard said. "Failure was not an option for me at that point. My ego wouldn't let me consider anything else."

Gard was booted from the LLC and indicted on a flurry of theft-related charges. He was ultimately sentenced to four 10-year sentences and one nine-year sentence for forgery. The sentences were set to run consecutively, meaning the next 10-year prison term would begin upon completion of the last. Under that sentence, he's not eligible for parole until 2031, and his sentence wouldn't be complete until 2069.

Board members Patricia Meyers and Kirsten Aasen, both lawyers, each noted that the stiffness of the sentence for a non-violent offense was unusual.

During a back-and-forth with Aasen over Gard's potential to repay the debt, Meyers even suggested that some cases like Gard's wind up being handled in civil court.

"Five consecutive sentences for forgery ..." Meyers said.

"It seems excessive," Aasen said.

"It's really excessive," Meyers said.

The losses from the thefts were excessive, too, according to Aasen and other board members. Gard was also sentenced as a habitual criminal. The \$169,000 restitution figure framed Thursday's clemency discussions, alongside concerns about his ability to pay it.

The job reportedly waiting for him on the outside could conceivably help him pay off the debt. Gard and his brother grew up working in the Texas oil fields with their father. His brother said he now owns an oil field services company, which would put the inmate in line for a higher rate of pay at his first post-prison job than many parolees.

Board members peppered Ken Gard with questions on his brother's potential role, how much he stood to earn and how much he'd reasonably be able to pay in restitution each month with the salary. Aasen questioned Rex Gard about the physicality of the work, wondering if he'd be able to hold the job long enough to pay off the bill.

Ken Gard assured the board that one of his vendors had committed to employing his brother, and that the salary would be significant enough to make a dent in the debt.

The pay could be as high as \$5,000 a month, he said, so his brother would be able to pay "anywhere from \$500 or \$800-\$900 a month" toward restitution and still have enough "to pay his bills and put food on the table."

Ken Gard and his wife, Gard's adult son and a longtime family friend each pledged in turn to offer financial help or a place to stay. Ken Gard and his wife said they'd take in Rex initially and let him stay without paying rent.

At \$500 a month, it would take nearly three decades to pay off his restitution bill – far longer than he'd be under the thumb of the parole board if he's granted clemency.

That issue was a source of heartburn for some board members. In order to release Gard, the body had two options: recommend commuting all of his sentences to shorter terms to make him eligible for release, or recommend commuting all but one, keeping him – and his payment behavior – under the purview of the board until as late as 2029.

Board staff Stacy Cole told the group that Gard would need to sign a contract with the state's Obligation Recovery Center. That agency would set the terms of repayment and continue to hound Gard until the debt is paid, she said.

That wasn't quite enough for Peter Lieberman, a retired judge and board member who ultimately abstained from the clemency vote because it carried no minimum monthly payment requirement.

"I've seen these things float out there, and the payments just slow to a dribble," Lieberman said.

Board member Chuck Schroyer moved to make Gard parole-eligible immediately by commuting each sentence to five years. Schroyer and Meyers each said that releasing Gard to a supportive family and a

job that would allow him to begin making payments is preferable to keeping him in prison.

"I just don't see any reason to keep him sitting here any longer," Schroyer said.

Jan Steele, Vaughn Beck and chair Myron Rau joined Schroyer and Meyers in voting to recommend commuting Gard's sentence. Aasen and Ken Albers voted against it.

The recommendation now goes to Gov. Kristi Noem for review.

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

Park Service opposes Johnson's Mount Rushmore Protection Act, calling it 'unnecessary'

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 13, 2023 3:13 PM

The National Park Service, which manages the preservation and upkeep of Mount Rushmore in the Black Hills, testified in opposition to South Dakota Rep. Dusty Johnson's "Mount Rushmore Protection Act" on Thursday — not because the agency disagrees with the bill's intent, but because the agency views the bill as "unnecessary."

NPS Deputy Director for Congressional and External Relations Michael Reynolds testified in front of the House Committee on Natural Resources, adding that the bill's language, which is meant to protect the national memorial from being altered, changed, destroyed or removed, could unintentionally threaten the agency's ability to care for the memorial.

"We share the goals of what's happening with the protection of Mount Rushmore in perpetuity," Reynolds said.

If the bill does move forward through Congress, Reynolds said he'd prefer to collaborate on amendments with the Mount Rushmore State's sole representative to change the wording of the bill — since maintenance requires removing vegetation or making small alterations to clean and maintain the carving throughout the year. But Johnson said that's unnecessary, since preventing maintenance is not the intent of the bill.

"If we decide there is case law that complicates or calls into question some weakness of our statutory proposal, then we're open to changing it," Johnson said.

This is the third time Johnson has introduced the Mount Rushmore Protection Act. The bill would restrict the federal government from changing the name of the memorial (named after a New York City attorney who visited the Black Hills in 1884) or changing it in any way — whether by removing a president or adding a president to the memorial (which former President Donald Trump has discussed) — without approval from Congress.

Johnson cited a federal board's decision in 2016 to change South Dakota's tallest mountain and the highest point east of the Rockies from Harney Peak, after an army officer accused of massacring Native people, to Black Elk Peak, after an Oglala Lakota holy man.

Johnson said the decision did not adequately consider the input of South Dakotans, but in reality, the U.S. Board on Geographic Names did consider reams of testimony from South Dakotans before making its decision. That decision was cheered by some South Dakotans and criticized by others.

Johnson fears something similar could happen to Mount Rushmore, in part because of the presidents represented.

"These are imperfect men," said Johnson, a Republican. "They're not up on the monument because of their imperfections, they're up on that monument because of their strengths, because of the values they brought to our country, the vision they had for how we can build a more perfect union — not perfect yet, but every day part of an endeavor to become more perfect."

Some Native American organizations and tribal leaders in South Dakota have publicly called for the removal of Mount Rushmore in recent years, saying that the granite formation also known as Tunkasila Sakpe Paha in Lakota, or Six Grandfathers Mountain, is a spiritually important location and belongs to the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 10 of 79

tribes that make up the Great Sioux Nation, the Oceti Sakowin, under the broken Fort Laramie Treaty.

Ben & Jerry's Ice Cream most recently called for the return of the Black Hills to the Lakota in an online post on the Fourth of July.

State Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, testified in support of the bill.

She said although there has been criticism of the "tribute to democracy" because it's on "stolen land," the U.S. Supreme Court settled the dispute in its 1980 decision in *United States v. Sioux Nation of Indians*. The court did not award any land back to the tribes but did make an award of \$105 million. That money has grown exponentially with interest but has not been accepted by the tribal nations, which have since taken a position that accepting the money would threaten their continued push for the return of the land.

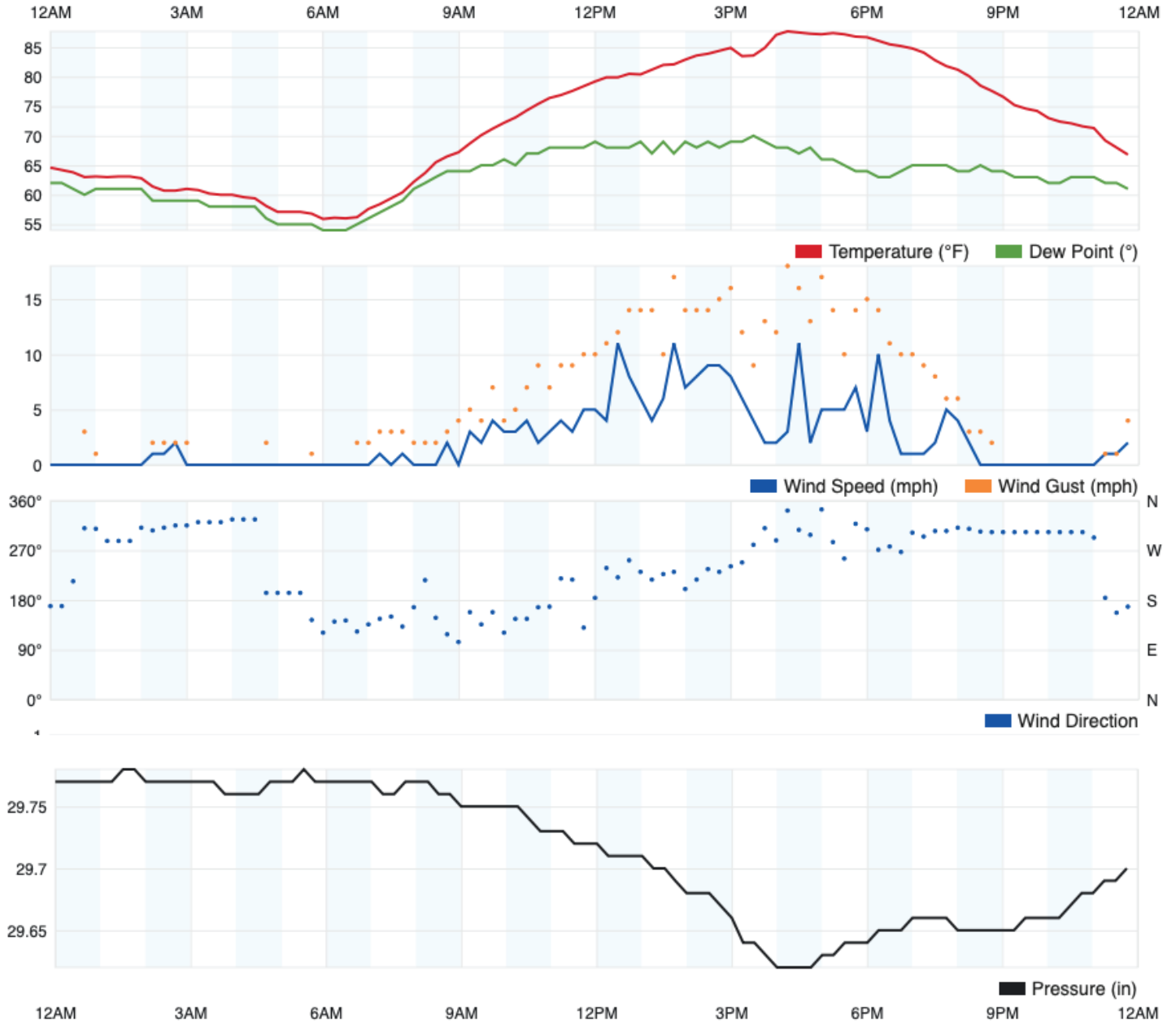
"Changing Mount Rushmore will not change our past," Duhamel said.

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

Groton Daily Independent








Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 11 of 79

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

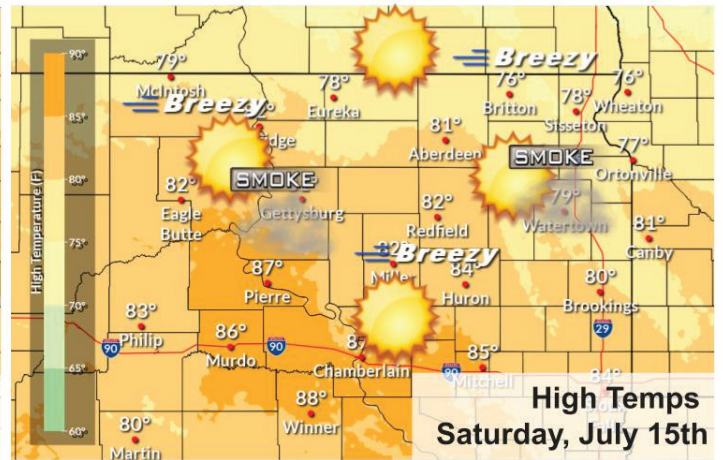
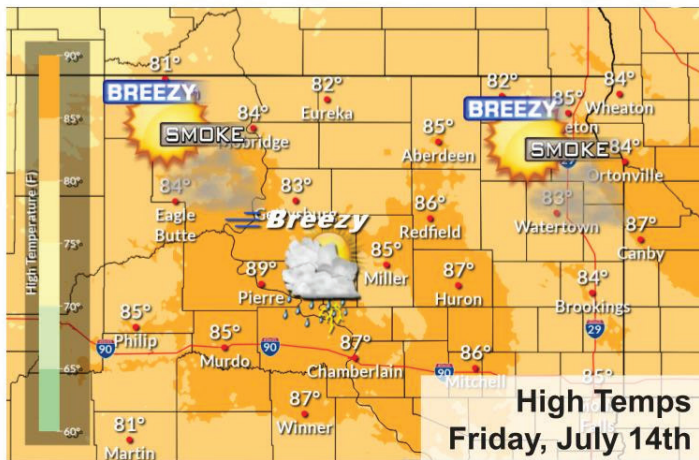
Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 12 of 79

Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Areas Smoke then Slight Chance T-storms	Slight Chance T-storms then Areas Smoke	Areas Smoke and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy then Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 85 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 80 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 76 °F

Seasonable Heading Into The Weekend

Look for breezy northwest winds and slightly cooler conditions each of the next couple of days. Isolated to widely scattered showers and thunderstorms will continue to possible today.

There will be at least a 24 to 36 hour window of time from today through Saturday when Canada wildfire smoke will be present, both near the surface and aloft. People with breathing difficulties and sensitivity to smoke should take the necessary precautions today and Saturday.



National Weather Service Aberdeen, SD

Updated: July 14, 2023 4:52 AM

The weather pattern will continue to permit a handful of sporadic afternoon showers or thunderstorms today and Saturday amid a northwest breeze. The pattern is also steering wildfire smoke, originating from Canada, into this region. It's possible that some of this smoke could be thick enough to reduce near ground visibility at times. Also, look for a gradual draw down in temperature over the next couple of days.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 13 of 79

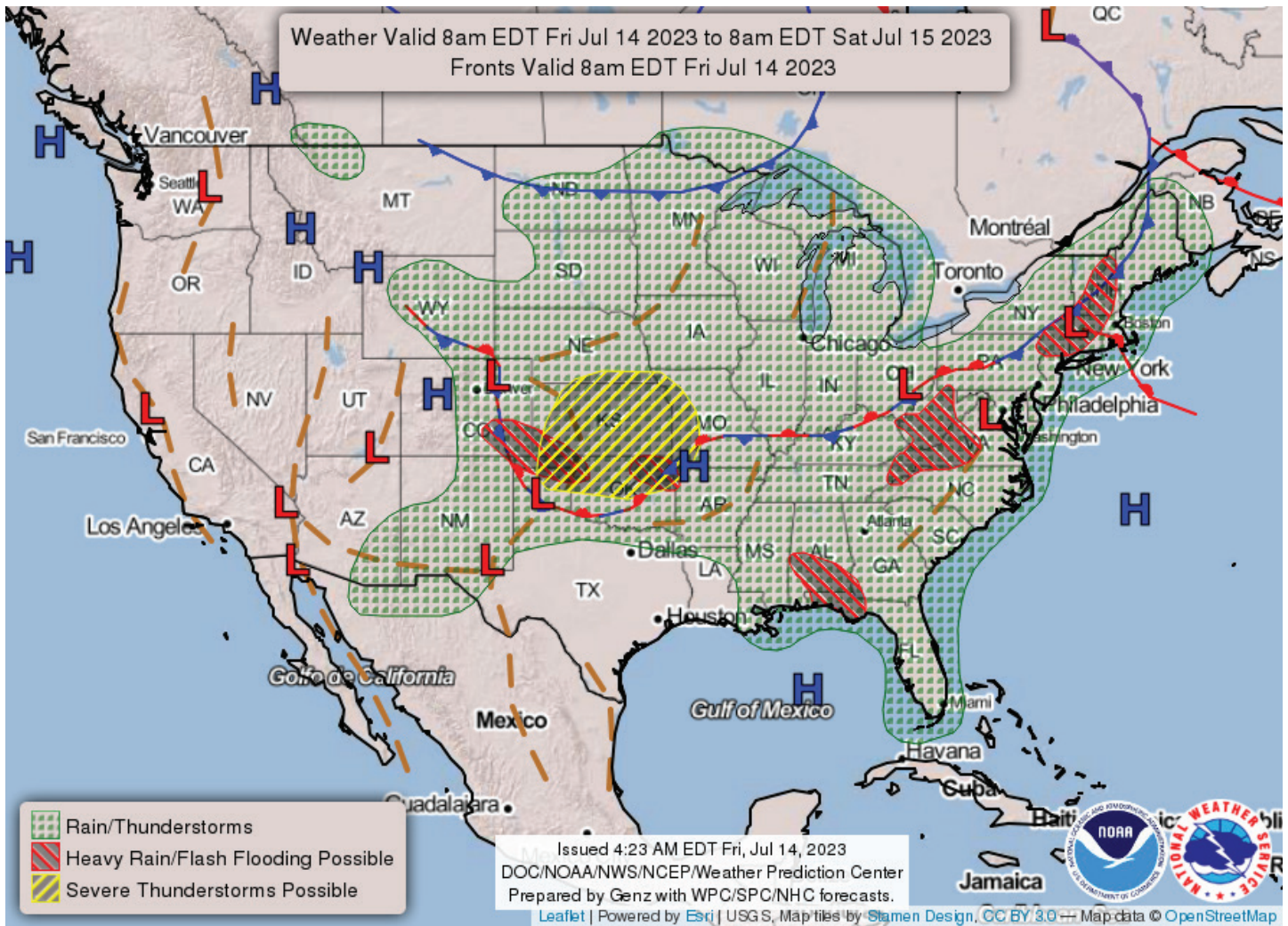
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 6:18 PM
Low Temp: 54 °F at 6:41 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 1:13 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1931
Record Low: 42 in 1967
Average High: 85
Average Low: 60
Average Precip in July.: 1.59
Precip to date in July.: 1.32
Average Precip to date: 12.60
Precip Year to Date: 12.67
Sunset Tonight: 9:20:41 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:56:50 AM

Day length: 15 hours, 24 minutes



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 14 of 79

Today in Weather History

July 14, 1970: A line of severe thunderstorms raced across southeast South Dakota into northwest Iowa causing extensive damage. The line of storms produced widespread high winds and large hail. The hail averaged quarter to hen egg size although some areas received stones the size of softballs and winds over 70 mph were not uncommon. The most extensive damage from the storms extended from Mitchell through Parker to near Beresford. Spotty areas reported 100% crop damage. In Lincoln County, the hail caused an estimated \$8 million in crop damage and \$2 million in property damage. In the town of Marion, the hail was so large that it punched holes in some roofs.

July 14, 2009: A line of storms moving across north-central South Dakota during the early morning hours on the 14th became heavy rainfall producing thunderstorms for northeastern South Dakota. Rainfall amounts of 2 to 5 inches caused mainly localized flooding. However in Grant County, a 20 foot wide by a 17-foot deep culvert on 468th Avenue in Twin Brooks was washed away by flash flooding. The Grant County Highway Department said fixing the channel would cost more than \$40,000.

1936 - Extreme heat prevailed across the central U.S. as severe drought raged from Texas to the Dakotas. Record high temperatures were established in sixteen states that summer, including readings as high as 120 degrees in the Great Plains Region. On this particular date, afternoon highs for 113 stations across the state of Iowa averaged 108.7 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1957 - Hail, with some stones up to an inch in diameter, covered the ground to a depth of three inches ruining crops in the Bath area of New Hampshire. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Severe thunderstorms in Iowa produced eight inches of golf ball size hail near Grafton, IA, completely stripping corn stalks in the area. Hail caused more than a million dollars damage to crops in Worth County and Mitchell County, and another million dollars damage in Ada County and Crawford County. Unseasonably cool weather prevailed in the Great Plains Region. Eight cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Duluth, MN, with a reading of 37 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in the Northern Atlantic Coast Region during the afternoon and evening hours. Thunderstorms also spawned a rather strong tornado near Westtown, NY, and drenched Agawam, MA, with four inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather from eastern New Mexico to central Nebraska. One hundred soldiers were injured by flying debris and collapsing tents during a thunderstorm near Trinidad, CO. Thunderstorms in Colorado produced wind gusts to 77 mph at La Junta. Early morning thunderstorms produced torrential rains over parts of Louisiana, with 7.50 inches at Carencro, and 5.85 inches at Morgan City. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1995: On the evening of Friday, July 14th, thunderstorms producing severe weather were occurring over Upper Michigan and adjacent portions of Ontario near Sault Saint Marie. By late evening the storms had evolved into a bowing line just northwest of the Mackinac Bridge. At 10:17 PM EDT, the thunderstorm gust front hit the bridge, and a gust to 90 mph was measured. Sustained winds of 80 mph continued on the bridge for ten more minutes. Thus began the intense "Ontario-Adirondacks Derecho" that would cause hundreds of millions of dollars' worth of damage, several deaths, and many injuries as it raced southeast from the northern Great Lakes to the Atlantic coast.

2005 - Death Valley had 7 consecutive days (July 14-20) with high temperatures equal to or above 125 degrees.

2006: Tropical Storm Bilis tracks across northern Taiwan before making landfall in southeastern China's Fujian province with maximum sustained winds near 65 mph. The storm causes at least 575 deaths in Fujian, Guangdong, and Hunan provinces and direct economic losses near \$3.3 billion.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHAT IF IT'S YOUR LAST DAY?

A radio talk show host asked his audience an interesting question. "If you knew that this was the last day of your life, what would you do?" The responses were overwhelming and most enlightening.

The first caller said, "I'd hurry to an organ donor bank and make sure that some worthy persons would benefit from my body parts."

Another said, "I would crowd everything that I thought was fun in this, my last day. I'd want to go out laughing."

The third caller said, "I would phone all of my friends and tell them how much I appreciated all that they had done for me. I'd want each of them to know how much our friendship meant."

Finally, one said, "I'd want to take time to be alone with God and pray and make sure that my heart is right with Him. I'd want Him to know how much I was looking forward to meeting Him, too."

Although it is not a pleasant thought, we each have a date with death. Few know the day or the hour. But we all know for certain that there is life after this life.

Prayer: Father, "Now is the acceptable time" for us to be sure that Your Son is our Savior and Lord. May we live in light of eternity, making the most of each moment. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For God says, "At just the right time, I heard you. On the day of salvation, I helped you." Indeed, the "right time" is now. Today is the day of salvation. 2 Corinthians 6:2



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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 16 of 79

2023 Community Events

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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 17 of 79

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 18 of 79



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.11.23

10 17 33 51 64 5

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$560,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 47 Mins 48
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

3 5 18 22 36 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$5,790,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 2
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.13.23

19 20 21 22 25 12

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 17 Mins 48
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

3 10 15 27 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$153,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 17
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

42 49 54 62 63 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 46
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.12.23

23 35 45 66 67 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$875,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 46
DRAW: Mins 48 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 19 of 79

News from the  Associated Press

Editorial Roundup: South Dakota

By The Associated Press undefined

Madison Daily Leader. July 11, 2023.

Editorial; Inmate training should be reconsidered

We read three articles recently about programs inside jails and prisons to help inmates get the training and skills they need to work once they are released.

While some people may think of many inmates spending the rest of their days behind bars, the truth is that the vast majority of inmates in South Dakota jails and the penitentiary system will be released.

One of the articles was published by South Dakota News Watch about a program in Pennington County (Rapid City) called IGNITE, which uses motivational techniques to encourage inmates to sign up for education, counseling and job training run by a paid coordinator but provided in person or virtually by educators and experts within the local community.

The IGNITE program has a number of benefits, including reducing violence in jails, reducing worker shortages on the outside, and lowering the likelihood of returning to jail once released.

Another article was in the Wall Street Journal about California's plan to turn San Quentin State Prison into a center for inmate rehabilitation. San Quentin is one of the nation's most notorious prisons (Charles Manson was housed there, and 421 prisoners have been executed).

The third piece was an op-ed written by a retired college professor who now teaches classes in a penitentiary. He describes how inmates have embraced learning even better than his former college students, often because they consider learning a great break from the monotony of prison life.

Training inmates for life on the outside is not a new idea...it's likely been going on in the United States since the country was founded. But there have been various forces over time that seem to push prisons back to simply incarceration cells. There may be political influences, overcrowding, understaffing, prisoner behavior issues and uprisings that cause training to take a back seat.

The profile of today's inmates is clearly different in the past: there are many more cases of addiction, mental health breakdowns, and problems stemming from lack of parenting or supervision as children. There tend to be severe shortages of the mental health or addiction counselors, so that inmates aren't at a baseline condition where they could get a high school equivalency diploma or work skills needed.

We can safely say there is no easy path or perfect program that works for everyone. But we've been impressed with recent results and encourage both state corrections officials and local law enforcement officials to keep exploring methods for helping inmates develop the abilities to live crime-free and productive once they are out.

END

Death Valley visitors drawn to the hottest spot on Earth during ongoing US heat wave

By TY O'NEIL Associated Press

DEATH VALLEY NATIONAL PARK, Calif. (AP) — As uninviting as it sounds, Death Valley National Park beckons.

Even as the already extreme temperatures are forecast to climb even higher, potentially topping records amid a major U.S. heat wave, tourists are arriving at this infamous desert landscape on the California-Nevada border.

Daniel Jusehus snapped a photo earlier this week of a famed thermometer outside the aptly named Furnace Creek Visitor Center after challenging himself to a run in the sweltering heat.

"I was really noticing, you know, I didn't feel so hot, but my body was working really hard to cool my-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 20 of 79

self," said Jusehus, an active runner who was visiting from Germany. His photo showed the thermometer reading at 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.8 degrees Celsius).

Most visitors at this time of year make it only a short distance to any site in the park — which bills itself as the lowest, hottest and driest place on Earth — before returning to the sanctuary of an air-conditioned vehicle.

This weekend, the temperatures could climb past 130 F (54.4 C), but that likely won't deter some willing to brave the heat. Signs at hiking trails advise against venturing out after 10 a.m., though nighttime temperatures are still expected to be over 90 F (32.2 C). The hottest temperature recorded at Death Valley was 134 F (56.6 C) in July 1913, according to the park service.

Other parks have long-standing warnings for hikers. At Grand Canyon National Park in Arizona, officials are cautioning people to stay off the trails for most of the day in the inner canyon, where temperatures can be 20 degrees hotter than the rim.

In west Texas, Big Bend National Park near the Rio Grande is expected to be at least 110 F (43.3 C). The National Weather Service has said it's best to just stay off the trails in the afternoon.

The precautions vary across parks and landscapes, said Cynthia Hernandez, a National Park Service spokesperson. Certain trails might be closed if conditions are too dangerous. Alerts and restrictions are posted on websites for individual parks, Hernandez said.

Preliminary information from the park service shows at least four people have died this year from heat-related causes across the 424 national park sites. That includes a 65-year-old man from San Diego who was found dead in his vehicle at Death Valley earlier this month, according to a news release.

Death Valley National Park emphasizes self-reliance over expectations of rescue. While rangers patrol park roads and can assist motorists in distress, there's no guarantee lost tourists will get aid in time.

More than 1.1 million people annually visit the desert park, which sits over a portion of the California-Nevada border west of Las Vegas. At 5,346 square miles (13,848 square kilometers), it's the largest national park in the Lower 48. About one-fifth of the visitors come in June, July and August.

Many are tempted to explore, even after the suggested cutoff times. Physical activity can make the heat even more unbearable and leave people feeling exhausted. Sunbaked rocks, sand and soil still radiate after sunset.

"It does feel like the sun has gone through your skin and is getting into your bones," said park Ranger Nichole Andler.

Others mentioned feeling their eyes drying out from the hot wind sweeping through the valley.

"It's very hot. I mean, especially when there's a breeze, you would think that maybe that would give you some slight relief from the heat, but it just really does feel like an air blow dryer just going back in your face," said Alessia Dempster, who was visiting from Edinburgh, Scotland.

Death Valley is a narrow, 282-foot (86-meter) basin that is below sea level but situated among high, steep mountain ranges, according to the park service's website. The bone-dry air and meager plant coverage allows sunlight to heat up the desert surface. The rocks and the soil emit all that heat in turn, which then becomes trapped in the depths of the valley.

The park's brownish hills feature signage saying "heat kills" and other messaging, such as a Stovepipe Wells sign warning travelers of the "Savage Summer Sun."

Still, there are several awe-inspiring sites that draw tourists. Badwater Basin, made up of salt flats, is considered the lowest point in all of North America. The eye-opening 600-foot (183-meter) Ubehebe Crater dates back over 2,000 years. And Zabriskie Point is a prime sunrise viewing spot.

Eugen Chen from Taiwan called the park "beautiful" and an "iconic ... very special place."

Josh Miller, a visitor from Indianapolis who has been to 20 national parks so far, shared that sentiment.

"It's hot, but the scenery is awesome," he said. ___ Associated Press writer Terry Tang in Phoenix contributed to this story.

Striking actors will begin picketing alongside writers in fight over the future of Hollywood

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Striking screen actors will begin picketing alongside writers in New York and Los Angeles on Friday in what has become the biggest Hollywood labor fight in decades.

The double-barreled strike will shut down the small number of productions that continued shooting in the two months since screenwriters stopped working.

Many actors made a show of solidarity on the writers' picket lines, including Fran Drescher, the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists president and former star of "The Nanny." The union's 65,000-member actors' branch will now formally join them as fellow strikers.

The two guilds have similar issues with studios and streaming services. They are concerned about contracts keeping up with inflation, residual payments in the streaming era and putting up guardrails against the use of artificial intelligence mimicking their work on film and television shows.

The famous faces of Oscar and Emmy winners will likely be seen with some regularity on picket lines, adding star power to the writers' demonstrations outside studios and corporate offices.

No talks are planned, and no end is in sight for the work stoppage, the first time both guilds have walked off sets since 1960. During that strike, then-actor Ronald Reagan was SAG's leader.

Drescher delivered a fiery rebuke of studios and streaming services when announcing union leaders' unanimous vote to strike Thursday.

"We had no choice. We are the victims here. We are being victimized by a very greedy entity," Drescher said. "I am shocked by the way the people that we have been in business with are treating us. I cannot believe it, quite frankly: How far apart we are on so many things. How they plead poverty, that they're losing money left and right when giving hundreds of millions of dollars to their CEOs."

The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which represents employers including Disney, Netflix, Amazon and others, has lamented the walkout, saying it will hurt thousands of workers in industries that support film and television production.

The actors' strike will impact more than filming. Stars no longer will be allowed to promote their work through red carpet premieres and personal appearances, campaign for Emmy Awards or take part in auditions or rehearsals.

While international shoots technically can continue, the stoppage among U.S.-based writers and performers is likely to have a drag on those, too.

The writers' strike brought the immediate shutdown of late-night talk shows and "Saturday Night Live," as well as several scripted shows that have either had their writers' rooms or production paused, including "Stranger Things" on Netflix, "Hacks" on Max, and "Family Guy" on Fox. Many more are sure to follow them now that performers also have been pulled.

This article corrects a previous version with a misspelling of the name of former U.S. President Ronald Reagan, who was the SAG leader during a 1960 strike.

For more on the Hollywood strikes, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/hollywood-strikes/>

GOP White House hopefuls face mounting pressure to stop Trump in Iowa

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — As the six-month sprint to the Iowa caucuses begins, the sprawling field of Republican presidential candidates is facing growing pressure to prove they can become serious challengers to former President Donald Trump.

The urgency is particularly acute for Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who entered the race in May with expecta-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 22 of 79

tions that he would quickly become Trump's top rival. For now, however, he has struggled to generate the level of enthusiasm that Trump commands from the GOP base, contributing to uncertainty that DeSantis will become the threat to the former president that he was once billed to be.

"That's what DeSantis wanted to be. It's possible he may be that still," said Gentry Collins, a seasoned Iowa and national Republican strategist who ran Mitt Romney's 2008 caucus campaign. "But it sure doesn't look like that to me — it's become clear that there isn't room for another alternative to Trump."

DeSantis is among six White House hopefuls who will be in Iowa on Friday to appear at the Family Leadership Summit, one of many events that will be held in the state in the coming weeks as voters begin to more seriously consider their options. Trump is not attending, opening him to criticism from some Republicans that he's ignoring the forums that are a staple of Iowa presidential politics.

Trump has swung through the state multiple times in recent weeks and will return Tuesday.

There's still time for any of the contenders to mount a more robust challenge to Trump. But the Iowa Republican Party's recent announcement that the caucuses would take place on Jan. 15 — weeks earlier than the past three open contests — reinforced the reality that candidates aiming for a turnaround are on a timeline.

Beyond DeSantis, Tim Scott is being closely scrutinized. The South Carolina senator has impressed many with an agenda that is every bit as conservative as the one offered by Trump or DeSantis. But some say Scott is distinguishing himself with an aggressive outreach strategy paired with an upbeat message.

"The reason (Scott is) making inroads is he's doing the real hard work of retail politics in Iowa, doing small groups with pastors and churches and leading to bigger and bigger meetings and venues," said Mike Demastus, a Des Moines evangelical pastor who has met several times with Scott and sat in on private meetings between other candidates and politically active clergy. "That's why the needle is moving for him."

LaTomah Hauff, a retired speech pathologist who lives in Sioux City, is not ready to commit to a candidate. But she is a regular attendee at candidate events in her part of western Iowa and has added Scott to her short list of favorites.

"He's very passionate about what he believes," she said. "And there is hope and optimism in what he says."

Still, Trump is the undisputed leader in Iowa, similar to the grip he holds on Republicans nationally. That makes Iowa particularly crucial for anyone hoping to stop the former president. Given the relatively early date of the caucuses next year, a strong win by Trump in Iowa could put him in a commanding position heading into the following contests.

"There's no question Donald Trump is winning Iowa right now," said Josie Albrecht, a former top Iowa GOP Statehouse communications adviser who is advising the state party but is neutral in the 2024 campaign. "I think there has been a lot of support for him for many years, and that's a hard wall to crack."

Trump is eagerly embracing the lofty expectations. His campaign is bullish on Iowa, banking on his longstanding support in a state he easily carried twice in general elections, combined with an aggressive digital outreach that includes a focus on nontraditional conservative voters.

Yet Trump faces some vulnerabilities, including a feud with Iowa's popular governor, Kim Reynolds, over her refusal to formally endorse his campaign. And while many in the party view recent indictments in New York and Florida as politically motivated, they nonetheless risk becoming a liability that rivals may try to exploit.

In a memo shared last month with donors to the influential network started by Charles and David Koch, Michael Palmer, who leads the group's data and polling operation, argued against what he called "the myth of Trump inevitability." He wrote that a significant number of Trump voters remain open to a Republican alternative, while citing public polling that indicates DeSantis may be a stronger general election candidate against Biden.

But a central challenge for Republicans is to hone a message that resonates with voters who back have backed Trump, but are open to others in 2024.

Americans for Prosperity, the political arm of the Koch brothers operation, is working to explicitly undermine Trump in Iowa and other early-contest states. Since February, an army of AFP's paid staff and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 23 of 79

volunteers has been knocking thousands of doors a week in Iowa raising questions about Trump's chances in a general election, the group's state director Drew Klein said.

That approach has concerned some in the GOP. Cedar Rapids Republican Bernie Hayes, chairman of the GOP in Iowa's second most populous county, said he was shocked when Klein told people last week they shouldn't back Trump in the caucuses.

"Why would you speak against him where there's a big percentage of people who support Donald Trump?" said Hayes, who is also a member of the state Republican Party central committee and publicly neutral. "That message is going to lose big time."

Candidates who are the most blunt in knocking Trump aren't making inroads in Iowa. New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, for instance, hasn't visited the state as a 2024 candidate and is not among the summit speakers Friday. He is instead focusing his energy on the more libertarian voters in New Hampshire.

The super PAC supporting DeSantis, meanwhile, has prioritized promoting the governor without attacking Trump, which advisers say turns off his past supporters.

DeSantis appears to be shifting his early-state strategy to some degree. After largely holding journalists at bay, he's holding what's being described as a press conference Tuesday in South Carolina.

While multiple candidates are hoping for comebacks, DeSantis may ultimately be best positioned for a long slog against Trump. He will almost certainly have the resources to stay in the nomination fight long after Iowa Republicans cast their votes. His campaign said he raised \$20 million in the first six weeks after his announcement; the super PAC claimed \$130 million over the same period.

And while some would-be DeSantis donors have raised concerns, others are moving away from Trump in favor of the governor. They include Tim Michels, the 2022 Republican candidate for governor in neighboring Wisconsin. The construction magnate, who was endorsed by Trump ahead of his midterm loss last fall, attended a DeSantis fundraiser in a Milwaukee suburb Tuesday, according to three people who were at the event but weren't authorized to speak for Michels.

Michels, through a spokesman, didn't return a message for comment.

The fundraiser hosts included Republican mega-donors Dick and Liz Uihlein, who raised money for Trump in Wisconsin and donated to efforts to get him elected in 2016 and 2020. Neither attended the fundraiser, but they were listed on the invitation, among many other locally notable Republicans.

But any recovery for DeSantis will almost certainly be grounded in a strong showing in Iowa. And some in the state say he has the opportunity by continuing to stoke conservative outrage related to rights for transgender people and racial equality.

"People like what they hear from him," said Demastus, the Des Moines pastor. "He is speaking evangelical love language, protecting our children, pushing back against the woke ideology."

Peoples reported from New York. Associated Press writer Scott Bauer in Madison, Wisconsin, contributed.

Putin says he offered Wagner mercenaries the option to keep operating as a single unit

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he offered mercenaries from the Wagner private military company the option of continuing to serve as a single unit under the same officer when he met with them five days after the group's abortive revolt last month that posed the most serious threat to his 23-year rule amid the war in Ukraine.

In remarks to the business daily Kommersant published Friday, Putin described a Kremlin event attended by 35 Wagner commanders, including the group's chief, Yevgeny Prigozhin, on June 29. He said that he talked to them about their actions in Ukraine, their mutiny — which he denounced as an act of treason in a televised address to the nation — and offered them various alternatives for future service.

Putin told Kommersant that one option would see Wagner keep serving under the same commander

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 24 of 79

who goes by the call name Gray Hair, a man who has led the military company's operations in Ukraine for the past 16 months.

"All of them could have gathered in one place and continued to serve," Putin told the newspaper, "And nothing would have changed for them. They would have been led by the same person who had been their real commander all along."

Putin said that many Wagner commanders nodded in approval when he made his proposal, but Prigozhin, who was sitting in front and didn't see their reaction, quickly rejected the idea, responding that "the boys won't agree with such a decision."

Putin didn't mention where and in what numbers Wagner could be deployed, or say what proposal Wagner commanders eventually accepted, if any.

The Russian president has previously said that Wagner troops had to choose whether to sign contracts with the Russian Defense Ministry, move to neighboring Belarus or retire from service.

Putin's remarks came in a quick interview with a Kommersant reporter who has chronicled Putin's activities since his ascent to power and has special access to the president. His comments could be part of efforts to denigrate Prigozhin while trying to maintain control over Wagner mercenaries and secure their loyalty.

The Russian president has previously said that Prigozhin's company has received billions of dollars from state coffers, and said that investigators would look at whether any of the funds had been stolen, a warning to Prigozhin that he could face financial crime charges.

State-controlled media have posted videos and photos of Prigozhin's opulent mansion in Russia's second-largest city that showed stacks of cash, gold bars and fake passports. The images appeared to be part of the authorities' smear campaign against the Wagner chief, who has postured as an enemy of corrupt elites even though he has owed his wealth to Putin.

Putin also noted that Wagner has operated without legal basis.

"There is no law on private military organizations. It simply doesn't exist," he told Kommersant, adding that the government and the parliament have yet to discuss the issue of private military contractors.

During the revolt that lasted less than 24 hours on June 23 and 24, Prigozhin's mercenaries quickly swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there without firing a shot, before driving to within about 200 kilometers (125 miles) of Moscow. Prigozhin described the move as a "march of justice" to oust Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and General Staff chief Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who demanded that Wagner sign contracts with the Defense Ministry by July 1.

The mutiny faced little resistance and fighters downed at least six military helicopters and a command post aircraft, killing at least 10 airmen. Prigozhin called his mercenaries back to their camps after striking a deal to end the rebellion in exchange for an amnesty for him and his mercenaries, and permission to move to Belarus.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko, who brokered the deal that ended the mutiny, has said that Prigozhin was in Russia while Wagner's troops were in their field camps. He didn't specify the location of the camps, but Prigozhin's mercenaries fought alongside Russian forces in eastern Ukraine before their revolt and also have bases on Russian territory.

Asked if Prigozhin and his mercenaries would eventually move to Belarus, Lukashenko said it would depend on the decisions of the Wagner chief and the Russian government.

While the fate of Prigozhin and the terms of the agreement remain cloudy, the Defense Ministry said Wednesday that Wagner was completing the handover of its weapons to the Russian military.

Their disarming of Wagner reflects efforts by Russian authorities to defuse the threat they posed, and also appears to herald an end to the mercenary group's operations on the battlefield in Ukraine, where Kyiv's forces are engaged in a counteroffensive.

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

Man drowns in home in Vermont's 1st recorded flooding death

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

A man who died as a result of a drowning accident in his home is Vermont's first death related to recent storms and historic flooding, the state's emergency management agency said.

Stephen Davoll, 63, of Barre, died on Wednesday, said Mark Bosma, spokesperson for Vermont Emergency Management.

The Office of the Chief Medical Examiner investigated the death, in cooperation with local police, Bosma said in a news release late Thursday afternoon. He said Vermonters are urged to continue to take extra care as they return to their homes and repair damage.

"The loss of a Vermonter is always painful, but it is particularly so this week," Vermont U.S. Sen. Peter Welch said in statement.

It was the second flood-related death stemming from a storm system and epic flooding in the Northeast this week. The first was in New York — a woman whose body was found after she was swept away in Fort Montgomery, a small Hudson River community about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of New York City.

More rain came through the region Thursday evening. There were no reports of any flash flooding from the storm, the emergency management agency said. A tornado warning was issued for parts of the state and Vermont. There were high winds, but no confirmation of a tornado and no major damage reports.

As floodwaters receded, the good news was that there were no new rescue missions, dams were holding up and more roads reopened. The bad news was that the storms aren't over. More rain was expected Friday, Sunday, and into next week.

"The period we are more concerned about is Sunday because that could be more widespread and heavier, but not nearly on the scale of what we saw earlier in the week," National Weather Service meteorologist Seth Kutikoff said.

Gov. Phil Scott said it's important for Vermonters to be vigilant, and that includes not going into the water.

"We've seen many pictures on social media of kids swimming in floodwaters. This is not typical rainwater — it's filled with chemicals, oil, waste, and more. It's simply not safe," he said.

Other New England states to the south were also drying out, including Connecticut, where officials warned boaters and others about dangerous debris in the Connecticut River, including large trees. A dock with several boats attached was washed away in Glastonbury, just south of Hartford, and was seen floating down the river a few towns away.

In Vermont, communities were cleaning up from the floods that were more destructive in some places than 2011's Tropical Storm Irene and regarded as the worst natural disaster since the 1927 floods, which killed dozens of people and caused widespread destruction.

Transportation officials were moving equipment to areas that were considered more flood-prone to prepare for more storms as they continued to evaluate damage, including to rail lines. Amtrak and other railroad service has been suspended.

Scott submitted a request for a major disaster declaration to President Joe Biden. "It's separate from, and in addition to, the federal emergency declaration the president already signed" on Tuesday, he said. If approved, the declaration would provide federal support for recovering communities.

In Vermont's small state capital of Montpelier, where the swollen Winooski River had flooded downtown, the elevator at City Hall was damaged, making the building inaccessible, spokesperson Evelyn Prim said.

"Cleanup from the hazardous floodwater damage in City Hall is expected to take several months. Because of this, City Hall will be closing until further notice," she said.

Offers of help poured in, including free pet food from an animal shelter in Morrisville and a donation collection for water and nonperishable food items at the University of Vermont. A Vermont Main Street Flood Relief Fund was set up to help small businesses and the Vermont Community Foundation established a fund to help longer-term efforts for people and communities. An annual concert, the Do Good Fest in Montpelier, will be livestreamed and act as a fundraiser.

"One of the defining truths about Vermont is that Vermonters look out for one another," said Dan Smith,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 26 of 79

the foundation's CEO. "We saw it during the pandemic; we saw it during Tropical Storm Irene."

McCormack reported from Concord, New Hampshire. Associated Press reporters Lisa Rathke in Marshfield, Vermont, David Collins in Hartford, Connecticut, and Michael Casey in Boston contributed to this report.

France celebrates Bastille Day with pomp, a tribute to India and extra police to prevent new unrest

By ANGELA CHARLTON and YUCEF BOUNAB Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France is celebrating its national holiday Friday with whizzing warplanes and a grand Bastille Day parade in Paris — and with more than 100,000 police deployed around the country to prevent a new outbreak of unrest in underprivileged neighborhoods.

This year, the annual events celebrating the start of the French Revolution on July 14, 1789 come in the wake of the nation's most serious rioting in nearly 20 years, following the fatal police shooting of a teen with North African roots that laid bare anger over entrenched inequality and racial discrimination.

India is the guest of honor at this year's Bastille Day parade, with Prime Minister Narendra Modi watching in the VIP tribune alongside French President Emmanuel Macron. About 240 Indian troops led the march down the Champs-Élysées before thousands of French forces, and French-made Indian warplanes joined the traditional flyby above the event.

France often showcases international partners on Bastille Day, and the choice of India comes as France looks to further strengthen cooperation on fighting climate change, military sales and the strategic Indo-Pacific region. But human rights were missing from the vast agenda, despite concerns raised by European lawmakers, rights groups and others.

Russia's war in Ukraine — central to last year's Bastille Day celebrations — echoed in this year's events as well. Vehicles on display included the Caesar anti-missile batteries that France is providing to Ukraine, and Ukrainian officials were invited to join Macron in the VIP seats.

On the eve of France's national day, Macron gave a posthumous Legion of Honor award to a French journalist killed in Ukraine earlier this year, Arman Soldin of news agency Agence France-Presse.

The Bastille Day parade includes 6,500 people marching, 94 planes and helicopters, 219 ground vehicles, 200 horses and 86 dogs. Celebrations are held in towns and cities around France, which are meant to celebrate France's ideals of "liberty, equality and fraternity."

But the motto rings hollow for many people living in neglected housing projects who trace their roots to former French colonies and struggle with lack of opportunity and day-to-day racism. These issues came to the fore after the police killing of 17-year-old Nahel Merzouk last month in the Paris suburb of Nanterre during a traffic stop.

The fatal shooting at point-blank range, captured on video, sparked several days of clashes with police, burning of buildings and vehicles and looting of stores in cities and towns around France.

Macron hasn't directly addressed the issues raised by the killing of Merzouk, focusing instead on supporting towns that saw damage in rioting. A presidential aide said that the recent violence had "no impact" on plans for the Bastille Day parade, but said the celebrations come "at a time when it is necessary to reaffirm national cohesion."

Fighter jets in formation passed over Merzouk's hometown of Nanterre in Bastille Day rehearsals this week. On Friday, they zipped past Nanterre on their way toward the Arc de Triomphe and the political and military elite gathered on the Place de la Concorde, a plaza meant to celebrate national harmony.

Bracing for more violence around Bastille Day, when unrest tends to spike every year, France's government deployed an exceptional 130,000 police Thursday and Friday. Fireworks were banned in several towns, including Nanterre, after they had been used to target police in the recent rioting.

Overnight Thursday to Friday, the Interior Ministry reported 97 people arrested in urban violence and 218 cars set alight around the country. That was slightly lower than last year.

Youcef Bounab reported from Nanterre.

Moves at a small border village hike Israel-Hezbollah tensions at a time of regional jitters

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

KFAR CHOUBA, Lebanon (AP) — The little village of Ghajar has been a sore point between Israel and Lebanon for years, split in two by the border between Lebanon and the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights. But after a long period of calm, the dispute has begun to heat up again.

Israel has been building a wall around the half of the village in Lebanese territory, triggering condemnation from the Lebanese militant force Hezbollah, accusing Israel of moving to annex the site. A recent exchange of fire in the area raised alarm that the dispute could trigger violence.

The growing tensions over Ghajar add to the jitters along the Lebanese-Israeli border, where Israel and Iranian-backed Hezbollah fought a destructive 34-day war in the summer of 2006. The two sides have studiously avoided outright battle ever since, despite frequent flare-ups of tension -- but each constantly says a new conflict could erupt at any time.

The dispute over a small village in the green hills where Lebanon, Israel and Syria meet brings a new point of worry amid broader unrest. The West Bank has seen increased bloodshed the past week, with a major two-day offensive that Israel says targeted Palestinian militants. Within Israel, moves by the hard-right government to overhaul the judicial system have sparked large anti-government protests.

"This is Lebanese land, not Israeli," said Lebanese shepherd Ali Yassin Diab, pointing to the half of Ghajar being enclosed by the Israeli wall as he grazed his sheep and goats nearby. Members of the U.N. peacekeeping force UNIFIL watched from a distance. In the early 2000s, Yassin used to take his herds to drink at a pond there but has since been cut off.

The village's division is an unusual byproduct of the decades of conflict between Israel and its neighbors.

Ghajar was once part of Syria but was captured by Israel in the 1967 Mideast war as part of Syria's Golan Heights, which Israel occupied and later annexed, with little world recognition.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Ghajar's population expanded north into nearby Lebanese territory, held by Israel in its 18-year occupation of southern Lebanon. When Israel withdrew from Lebanon in May 2000, U.N. surveyors delineating temporary borders ruled that Ghajar's northern part was in Lebanon, its southern part in the Golan, dividing it in two.

Six years later, Israeli troops moved into the northern part of Ghajar during the Israel-Hezbollah war. They have occupied it since and a fence was installed preventing people from entering it from Lebanon. Under the truce that ended the 2006 fighting, Israel agreed to withdraw from Ghajar, but it wanted to clinch an arrangement to keep Hezbollah from entering the village.

In a statement to the Associated Press on Friday, the Israeli Foreign Ministry said Israel recognizes the line dividing the village in 2000 but said that following the division, "Hezbollah established itself in the village" and attempted an abduction of an Israeli soldier.

Most of Ghajar's around 3,000 residents hold Israeli nationality — some of them alongside Lebanese — and they largely identify as Syrians.

Last year, Israel started erecting a concrete wall around the northern part of the village. It also began encouraging Israeli tourism to the village. In its statement, the foreign ministry said that the wall "is on the same route as the fence that was in place before" around the village.

In apparent reply to the near finishing of the wall, Hezbollah set up two tents nearby, including one in the area of Chebaa Farms, which both Israel and Lebanon claim as its territory. It is not clear what is inside the tents.

Israel filed a complaint with the United Nations, claiming the tents were several dozen meters (yards) inside of Israeli territory. Hezbollah says the tents are in Lebanese territory.

On Monday, UNIFIL's commander relayed an Israeli request to Lebanon's caretaker prime minister and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 28 of 79

parliament speaker to remove the tent. They responded that Israel should withdraw its troops from the Lebanese part of Ghajar, according to Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bouhabib.

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said in a speech Wednesday night that Israel cordoned off Ghajar before Hezbollah set up its tents.

"Over the past days, it became clear that they (Israel) have annexed it," Nasrallah said. He added: "The land of Ghajar will not be left for Israel, and certainly not Chebaa Farms and Kfar Chouba," another border area claimed by both countries.

A female resident of Ghajar, speaking to the AP on condition of anonymity due to security concerns, said the villagers consider themselves Syrian but their main concern "is to stay in Ghajar, in this village, living in peace and security. No matter under who rules."

"There is a (border) line that was drawn by the United Nations. Why are they allowed to cross it while we as Lebanese citizens cannot?" Mohammed Rammal, the mayor of the nearby Lebanese border village of Oddeissi, said of Israel's presence in Ghajar.

Last week, an anti-tank missile was fired from Lebanon near Ghajar, with some fragments landing in Lebanon and others inside Israeli territory. Israel fired shells on the outskirts of the nearby village of Kfar Chouba.

On Wednesday, an explosion elsewhere near the border slightly wounded at least three Hezbollah members. Nasrallah said the case is still under investigation. Late last month, Hezbollah said it shot down an Israel drone flying over a village in southern Lebanon.

On Monday, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu met with President Joe Biden's special envoy for energy, Amos Hochstein, during which they discussed "regional issues," according to the Israeli prime minister's office.

Some Israeli media said Netanyahu and Hochstein, who helped last year broker a maritime border deal between Israel and Lebanon, discussed tensions along the border with Lebanon.

"We continue to monitor and engage with authorities in Lebanon and Israel on the issue of Ghajar," UNIFIL spokeswoman Kandice Ardiel said. She added that UNIFIL has repeatedly called on Israel to stop its works north of the line and that Israel's occupation of northern Ghajar violates the U.N. Security Council resolution that ended the 2006 war.

Israel considers Hezbollah its most serious immediate threat, estimating it has some 150,000 rockets and missiles aimed at Israel.

During a tour by an Associated Press team near Ghajar this week, more patrols by U.N. peacekeepers and the Lebanese army along the border were visible. Residents in nearby villages appeared defiant and going on with life as usual during the summer season, when many expatriates come to spend time with their families.

In Lebanese media, many analysts say neither side wants a new war. But Lebanese political analyst Faisal Abdul-Sater warned that the situation is very dangerous as Israel and Hezbollah are on alert.

"Whoever fires the first shot will bear the responsibility for the consequences," he said.

AP correspondent Josef Federman contributed to this report.

US sets a grim milestone with new record for the deadliest six months of mass killings

By STEFANIE DAZIO and LARRY FENN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Slain at the hands of strangers or gunned down by loved ones. Massacred in small towns, in big cities, inside their own homes or outside in broad daylight. This year's unrelenting bloodshed across the U.S. has led to the grimmest of milestones: The deadliest six months of mass killings recorded since at least 2006.

From Jan. 1 to June 30, the nation endured 28 mass killings, all but one of which involved guns. The death toll rose just about every week, a constant cycle of violence and grief.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 29 of 79

Six months. 181 days. 28 mass killings. 140 victims. One country.

"What a ghastly milestone," said Brent Leatherwood, whose three children were in class at a private Christian school in Nashville on March 27 when a former student killed three children and three adults. "You never think your family would be a part of a statistic like that."

Leatherwood, a prominent Republican in a state that hasn't strengthened gun laws, believes something must be done to get guns out of the hands of people who might become violent. The shock of seeing the bloodshed strike so close to home has prompted him to speak out.

"You may as well say Martians have landed, right? It's hard to wrap your mind around it," he said.

A mass killing is defined as an occurrence when four or more people are slain, not including the assailant, within a 24-hour period. A database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University tracks this large-scale violence dating back to 2006.

The 2023 milestone beat the previous record of 27 mass killings, which was only set in the second half of 2022. James Alan Fox, a criminology professor at Northeastern University, never imagined records like this when he began overseeing the database about five years ago.

"We used to say there were two to three dozen a year," Fox said. "The fact that there's 28 in half a year is a staggering statistic."

But the chaos of the first six months of 2023 doesn't automatically doom the last six months. The remainder of the year could be calmer, despite more violence over the July Fourth holiday weekend.

"Hopefully it was just a blip," said Dr. Amy Barnhorst, a psychiatrist who is the associate director of the Violence Prevention Research Program at the University of California, Davis.

"There could be fewer killings later in 2023, or this could be part of a trend. But we won't know for sometime," she added.

Experts like Barnhorst and Fox attribute the rising bloodshed to a growing population with an increased number of guns in the U.S. Yet for all the headlines, mass killings are statistically rare and represent a fraction of the country's overall gun violence.

"We need to keep it in perspective," Fox said.

But the mass violence most often spurs attempts to reform gun laws, even if the efforts are not always successful.

Tennessee Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, had urged the General Assembly in the wake of the Nashville school shooting to pass legislation keeping firearms away from people who could harm themselves or others, so-called "red flag laws," though Lee says the term is politically toxic.

Getting such a measure passed in Tennessee is an uphill climb. The Republican-led Legislature adjourned earlier this year without taking on gun control, prompting Lee to schedule a special session for August.

Leatherwood, a former executive director of the Tennessee Republican Party and now the head of the influential Southern Baptist Convention's public policy arm, wrote a letter to lawmakers asking them to pass the governor's proposal.

Leatherwood said he doesn't want any other family to go through what his children experienced at the time of the shooting when they were in kindergarten, second grade and fourth grade. One of his kids, preparing for a recent sleepaway camp, asked whether they would be safe there.

"Our child was asking, 'Do you think that there will be a gunman that comes to this camp? Do I need to be worried about that?'" Leatherwood said.

The Nashville shooter, whose writings Leatherwood and other parents are asking a court to keep private, used three guns in the attack, including an AR-15-style rifle. It was one of at least four mass killings in the first half of 2023 involving such a weapon, according to the database.

Nearly all of the mass killings in the first half of this year, 27 of 28, involved guns. The other was a fire that killed four people in a home in Monroe, Louisiana. A 37-year-old man was arrested on arson and murder charges in connection with the March 31 deaths.

Despite the unprecedented carnage, the National Rifle Association maintains fierce opposition to regulating firearms, including AR-15-style rifles and similar weapons.

The couple was supposed to celebrate their first wedding anniversary in June. But instead, Skalska works on a painting — the only place where they can be together again.

"A man is carrying a girl across a field of wheat that has been cut, and I imagine that he is carrying her so that she does not prick her legs," says Skalska, 24, describing her artwork.

Her voice occasionally breaks into sobs as she speaks. "To others, I may seem like an ordinary person. But no one knows what's happening inside," she says. "It's impossible to escape."

The art project was launched in January by Olena Sokalska, who lost her husband years ago in a car accident and says she understands the emotional journey of widowhood.

When she spoke to AP reporters in June, approximately 40 widows were participating in the art project.

"It's called 'Alive' because the girls should feel alive since they all feel lifeless right now," she explains. "When you paint, you only think about that. And I thought these women should have some time for themselves."

The project is free to join and local artists volunteer their time to guide the women as they express their sorrows on canvas.

A Facebook community for the project has over 1,000 participants. "And the community keeps growing," says Sokalska, noting the tragedy of what that means to many.

"They find themselves in a complete void. It's like a black hole and nobody truly understands what a woman who has lost her husband feels," she says.

Oksana Kordina and her husband, Andrii Volkov, had been married for almost 10 years when the war began. On the morning of February 24th, 2022, the day Russia invaded Ukraine, Volkov gathered his belongings and got dressed. Oksana prepared a first-aid kit for him. He walked to the military office as Kyiv reeled with shock from the invasion.

He died nine days later defending the capital.

More than a year later, Kordina says she still has not recovered emotionally. "I'm not a creative person, but I realized I needed to try something," she says, explaining her decision to try painting.

"This pain is impossible to explain or convey," she says.

Recently, she rediscovered a lake near Kyiv that her husband had loved dearly. The couple had gone there together before, but she had forgotten the way and struggled to find it for a long time. Now she visits it regularly.

Her painting depicts the lake surrounded by green trees, reflecting the soft light of dawn. A ginger cat painted in the left corner of the canvas appears lonely and contemplative against the backdrop of nature.

"I walk to the lake and dream just like this cat," she says. "And it feels like he's there with me."

Efrem Lukatsky contributed to this story.

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

How DOJ made different death penalty decisions in the Pittsburgh synagogue and Texas mall massacres

By MICHAEL TARM AP Legal Affairs Writer

CHICAGO (AP) — Two separate shootings 2,000 miles (3,218 kilometers) apart. One killed 11 at a Pittsburgh synagogue. The other killed 23 at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. Both were motivated by racial hate. Both involved gunmen who later claimed mental illness.

But earlier this year, the Justice Department authorized the death penalty only for the case in Pittsburgh, where jurors will soon answer the weightiest of questions: Should Robert Bowers be put to death?

Bowers' trial is in the penalty phase after his June conviction for the 2018 antisemitic attack. A federal judge last Friday gave Patrick Crusius the maximum available sentence for the 2019 Walmart attack on Hispanics: life in prison. He pleaded guilty after the department took a death sentence off the table.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 31 of 79

Contrasting decisions in such similar cases illustrates the department's murky, often baffling and seemingly inconsistent death penalty policies. Department decision-making and the criteria it favors are also shrouded in secrecy.

So how do those decisions get made and by whom?

BIDEN'S JUSTICE DEPARTMENT

President Joe Biden campaigned in part on a promise to abolish the U.S. death penalty. While he has taken no steps to fulfill that, his Justice Department has made some notable changes.

In 2021, Garland announced a moratorium on federal executions while a review of execution procedures is completed. However, it doesn't stop prosecutors from seeking death sentences.

The department also withdrew permission for death sentences in 24 out of 29 cases authorized by prior administrations.

And the department hasn't authorized death penalties for any of around 400 new indictments during Biden's presidency that carried capital sentences. But it's still mulling whether to authorize a death sentence for Payton Gendron, a white supremacist who killed 10 Black people at a Buffalo, New York, supermarket in 2022.

WHAT HASN'T CHANGED UNDER BIDEN?

Critics of the department single out an enigmatic department division, the Capital Case Section. With just nine career attorneys and one administrator, it assists U.S. attorney's offices with capital cases and plays a vital role advising department review committees, which vote on recommending death sentences, although Attorney General Merrick Garland has the final say.

Though many were hired under other administrations, all current staff worked in the section under President Donald Trump, who oversaw a historic six-month spree of 13 federal executions. Richard Burns, the team's leader, became section chief during Trump's term.

Critics argue that carryover contributes to an unwelcome continuity.

The department has fought as hard under Biden as under Trump to defeat all bids by some 40 inmates on federal death row in Terre Haute, Indiana, to have their death sentences tossed on racial bias and other grounds.

"I don't think it's a surprise that in the absence of any declared policy in the White House and having the same staff at the Capital Case Section that you do not have wholesale changes," said Robert Dunham, a Temple Law School adjunct professor and former director of the Death Penalty Information Center.

Monica Foster, chief federal defender at the Indiana Federal Community Defenders office, argues the section has a vested interest in pushing for some capital cases to be greenlighted.

"Without death penalty cases, they have no reason for being," said Foster, who has clashed with section attorneys in court.

The section, she said, once simply ferried documents to review committees but now assumes a more active role, conducting research and interviews to prepare for death penalty decisions.

"They can end up steering the outcome," Foster said.

Justice Department spokesman Scottie Howell said Foster's claim and other allegations about the section are false, adding that department staff "make all decisions based on the facts and the law and hold themselves to the highest standards."

MENTAL HEALTH, OTHER FACTORS IN DEPARTMENT DECISIONS

An Associated Press review of court filings and Biden-era staff guides offers clues about what influences the Justice Department's decisions. They suggest the department is most likely to OK death sentences for racist and terrorist attacks and when victims' families support it.

Changes to department guidance also specify mental illness can count against approving death sentences, which is a departure from Trump-era guidance. At least two inmates executed under Trump had severe mental illnesses.

The guidance was central to the Crusius decision, with department attorneys accepting he had schizoaffective disorder. They rejected claims Bowers' psychotic episodes pointed to schizophrenia.

In April court filings explaining its Bowers decision, the department noted most victims' families wanted

Bowers to die if convicted. The department also sought its own mental evaluation of Bowers before the final decision on authorization. The defense refused, saying prosecutors wouldn't assure them Bowers' exam statements would not be used at trial. Government mental health experts were given access to Bowers just before trial.

Responding to criticism, the department also denied its decision was inconsistent with those concerning Crusius and others, saying Bowers' shooting stood apart because older victims were uniquely vulnerable and the crime occurred in a house of worship. The judge in the Bowers case ultimately agreed.

WHAT ELSE IS KNOWN ABOUT THE SPECIAL DIVISION?

A 2016 gender discrimination lawsuit from a former section employee against the Justice Department offered further insight into the secretive Capital Case Section. During litigation of the suit, which was later dismissed, ex-staffers accused the section of being disorganized and one accused a section attorney of withholding interview notes in Andrew Rogers' case.

While in federal prison, Rogers killed a fellow prisoner in 2013 in a bid to get executed and avoid the drudgery of life behind bars. He told homicide investigators: "If I get the death penalty, I'll take it with a smile." Obama's Justice Department authorized the death penalty for him.

Foster, representing Rogers in a 2018 bid to vacate the authorization, cited the allegations made in the gender discrimination suit. She contended the withheld notes from interviews with a prison psychologist and others would have proved Rogers' mental illness.

Just days before a 2019 hearing in Rogers' case to examine claims of section misconduct deriving from the discrimination suit, the department rescinded the death sentence authorization.

Foster said it did so to avoid a scheduled hearing that could have proven the allegations, and that the defense was obliged to end the case by letting Rogers plead guilty and receive a life sentence.

A 2020 department filing said an Office of Professional Responsibility investigation found no wrongdoing by the section attorney in Rogers' case. The attorney still works in the section.

The department never publicly released an OPR report on that investigation.

A Nov. 21, 2022, OPR letter to Foster obtained by the AP says the 114-page report addressed, among other things, whether department attorneys "conducted a biased investigation to unduly influence the Attorney General" to authorize the death penalty for Rogers.

The letter says the report concluded there was no "professional misconduct" on grounds the defense ultimately received helpful evidence before Rogers pleaded guilty, even if it was received late.

But the letter also says the report found a department attorney "knowingly made a false statement to defense counsel," and one failed "to follow a supervisor's direction to disclose attorney notes to the defense" and displayed "general inattention to the case."

CHANGES CAN'T HAPPEN WITHOUT BIDEN

Death penalty foes say Biden's department should be judged by the standard Biden set himself and should oppose all executions, including Bowers'.

But blame for failures to make good on Biden's pledge to end the federal death penalty should be directed up the command chain, Dunham said.

"If Joe Biden doesn't want the federal death penalty, or is stuck with one and wants to make it fairer, then he and Justice Department (political appointees) need to take steps to bring that about," he said.

___ Follow Michael Tarm on Twitter at <https://twitter.com/mtarm>

Iowa's restrictive abortion measure faces legal challenge as governor prepares to sign it into law

By HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — An Iowa judge on Friday afternoon will consider a request to postpone the state's new ban on most abortions after about six weeks of pregnancy, just as Gov. Kim Reynolds is scheduled to sign the measure into law in front of 2,000 conservative Christians barely a mile away.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 33 of 79

The split screen punctuates a bitter battle between abortion advocates and opponents in Iowa that has dragged on for years and will likely, for now, remain unresolved as the courts assess the law's constitutionality.

Abortion is currently legal in Iowa up to 20 weeks of pregnancy but will be far more restricted when Reynolds puts pen to paper Friday — unless or until the district court judge issues a temporary hold.

The new legislation prohibits 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. The bill passed with exclusively Republican support late on Tuesday at the conclusion of a rare, 14-hour special legislative session.

The legal challenge was filed Wednesday morning by the ACLU of Iowa, Planned Parenthood North Central States and the Emma Goldman Clinic.

The new measure will be considered in the context of decisions by the U.S. Supreme Court and Iowa's Supreme Court last year, when both reversed themselves on rulings that had affirmed a woman's fundamental constitutional right to abortion.

Those decisions prompted Reynolds to ask the court to reinstate her blocked 2018 law, which is nearly identical to the new one. The state's high court deadlocked last month, prompting Reynolds to call lawmakers back to the Iowa Capitol.

"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 Tuesday in a statement. "Justice for the unborn should not be delayed."

Planned Parenthood North Central States said Wednesday they are preparing to have to refer patients to other states if the law isn't blocked but are hopeful there will not be an interruption in their services.

"We are seeking to block the ban because we know that every day this law is in effect, Iowans will face life-threatening barriers to getting desperately needed medical care — just as we have seen in other states with similar bans," Rita Bettis Austen, legal director for the ACLU of Iowa, said in a statement.

As of Wednesday, 200 patients were scheduled for abortions at Iowa Planned Parenthood or the Emma Goldman Clinic this week and next, according to the court filings. Most of them past the six-week mark in their pregnancies.

There are limited circumstances under the measure that would allow for abortion after the point in a pregnancy where cardiac activity is detected: 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"; or if the pregnancy is endangering the life of the pregnant woman.

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.

Guatemala's struggle with corruption thrust into international spotlight by election meddling

By SONIA PÉREZ D. and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — The Guatemalan government's clumsy interference with its presidential election has turned a global spotlight on a country whose struggles with rampant corruption had received limited international attention.

President Alejandro Giammattei was deeply unpopular at home, but other than occasional statements of reprobation from the United States and Europe, had managed to consolidate his control of the justice system with little consequence.

It was a dramatic transformation for a country that until four years ago hosted an aggressive and productive anti-corruption effort supported by the United Nations. But since that mission was forced out by Giammattei's predecessor, the president had systematically put in loyalists to replace prosecutors and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 34 of 79

judges who led that fight against graft. Even those who had grown critical of the zealous anti-corruption effort now concede the country is much worse off now.

Then came the June 25 presidential election, which produced a shock for Guatemalans and outside observers. Heading into the vote, all polls indicated there would be a runoff between a narrow spectrum of candidates between the right and extreme right.

But with the number of null votes, many cast in protest, beating out all the 22 candidates, the progressive Seed Movement's Bernardo Arévalo came in second, ensuring his participation in an Aug. 20 runoff. Suddenly, there was a real possibility of choice for Guatemalans who want to change the status quo

Katya Salazar, executive director of the Due Process Foundation, said Arévalo's surprise support was "a demonstration of the dissatisfaction" in the Central American country and that shook the entrenched power structure right up to the president.

"I think that fear clouded him, blinded him, and I think he thought that it would be the same as always," Salazar said.

Late Wednesday, a federal prosecutor announced the Seed Movement had been suspended for allegedly violating election laws in forming. Prosecutors followed up on Thursday morning by raiding the offices of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal just hours after it certified the election results that put Arévalo in the runoff.

The uproar was immediate. In addition to statements of concern from the United States, European Union and Organization of American States, criticism came from other Latin American governments as well as Guatemala's most powerful private business association.

Even Arévalo's runoff opponent, conservative Sandra Torres, joined in, announcing that she would suspend her campaign activities in solidarity because the competition was uneven while authorities pursued the Seed Movement.

Torres' UNE party has been a key force in allowing Giammattei to advance his legislative agenda, but it appeared she felt the attack on the Seed party could undermine her own candidacy.

"We want to demonstrate our solidarity with the voters of the Seed party and also with those who came out to vote," she said. "As a candidate, I want to compete under equal conditions."

Not long after that, the Constitutional Court, the country's highest tribunal, provided another blow, granting the Seed Movement's request for a preliminary injunction against a lower court's suspension of its legal status. That quickly, if temporarily, lowered tensions.

Giammattei, who was barred by law from seeking reelection, kept out of sight. His office issued a statement saying it respects the separation of powers and would not be involved in any judicial processes.

Hundreds protested in front of the Attorney General's Office in the afternoon.

"We are fed up with the corruption in Guatemala," said Adolfo Grande, a 25-year-old repair technician. "We want them to let us choose and not to impose who they want."

Dinora Sentés, a 28-year-old sociologist, said she supports the Seed Movement but was protesting in defense of Guatemala.

"It's not about defending a party but rather an entire country," she said. "We have so many needs in education, health, urgent necessities to attend to."

Arévalo thanked the Constitutional Court as well as the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which promised to defend the will of voters against government interference.

"The corrupt who have tried to steal these elections from the people today find themselves marginalized," he said. "Today we are starting the first day of the campaign."

Sherman reported from Mexico City.

"Joe Biden and Kamala Harris' constant efforts to gut the Second Amendment will not usher in safety for Americans; instead, it will only embolden criminals," NRA spokesman Billy McLaughlin said in a statement. "That is why the NRA continues our fight for self-defense laws. Rest assured, we will never bow, we will never retreat, and we will never apologize for championing the self-defense rights of law-abiding Americans."

Tito Anchondo's brother, Andre Anchondo, was among 23 people killed in a 2019 mass shooting at a Walmart in El Paso, Texas. The gunman was sentenced last week to 90 consecutive life sentences but could face more punishment, including the death penalty. The prosecution of the racist attack on Hispanic shoppers in the border city was one of the U.S. government's largest hate crime cases.

Andre Anchondo and his wife, Jordan, died shielding their 2-month-old son from bullets. Paul, who escaped with just broken bones, is now 4 years old.

Tito Anchondo said he feels like the country has forgotten about the El Paso victims in the years since and that not nearly enough has been done to stem the bloodshed. He worries about Paul's future.

"I hope that things can drastically change because this country is going down a very, very slippery slope; a downward spiral," he said. "It's just a little unnerving to know that he's eventually going to go to school with kids that also may bring a gun to school."

Dazio reported from Los Angeles.

For a group of Ukrainian women, painting is a form of therapy to help them cope with loss

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — In a sunlit art studio in Kyiv filled with easels and canvases, Iryna Farion puts the finishing touches on an oil painting with a predominantly dark color palette in shades of blue and brown.

The artwork depicts two intertwined trees held together by their roots, as though in embrace, and a radiant yellow sun shining against a moody blue background.

"I feel like it's me and my husband, who was killed in the war," Farion says of the trees. "They are like two souls, like two hearts, like one body."

Farion is among thousands of Ukrainian women who have lost their partners in the war Russia launched against their homeland nearly 17 months ago. Tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed on the battlefield — most of them men who once led ordinary lives before dropping everything to join the fight for their country.

Farion's husband, Oleksandr Alimov, died in December after being shot on the Donetsk front line. Overwhelmed with grief, she says she has found some consolation in painting alongside other women who lost their partners on the battlefield.

The women are part of an art therapy project called "Alive. True Stories of Love," which seeks to honor the memory of those who died while helping the women cope with the pain of their loss.

Alimov voluntarily joined the army in the early days of the war after working as an IT specialist for a well-known company. "I don't want us to live in a country where we are not free," Farion says her husband told her before going off to war. The couple had been together for 10 years.

She still wears her wedding ring, while his hangs around her neck on a chain. "I can't take off the ring yet," she says. "It feels better for me this way."

On a recent day, Farion visited the art studio with her friend Olesia Skalska, whose husband was killed in January. The two women initially met at a cemetery, a place where Ukrainian widows commonly find solace in each other's company and form friendships bound by shared grief.

Skalska's husband, Roman Skalskyi, 26, also voluntarily joined the military without prior combat experience.

"Of course, I supported him because he went to defend me and his whole family," she says.

Online, 'unalive' means death or suicide. Experts say it might help kids discuss those things

By JEFF McMILLAN Associated Press

When Emily Litman was in middle school, kids whose parents grounded them would blithely lament: "I just want to die." Now she's a middle school teacher in New Jersey, and when her students' phones and TikTok access are taken away, their out-loud whining has a 21st-century digital twist: "I feel so unalive."

Litman, 46, teaches English as a second language to students in Jersey City. Her students don't use — and perhaps have never even heard — English words like "suicide." But they know "unalive."

"These are kids who've had to learn English and are now learning TikTolish," Litman says.

"Unalive" refers to death by suicide or homicide. It can function as adjective or verb and joins similar phrasing — like "mascara," to mean sexual assault — coined by social media users as a workaround to fool algorithms on sites and apps that censor posts containing discussion of explicit or violent content.

Language has always evolved. New words have always popped up. Teenagers have often led the way. But the internet and online life pave the way for it to happen more quickly.

In this case, words created within a digital setting to evade rules are now jumping the fences from virtual spaces into real ones and permeating spoken language, especially among young people. Beyond being interesting linguistic footnotes, the terms suggest ways that kids can safely discuss and understand serious matters while using a vocabulary that science — and the adults in their lives — might see as too casual or dangerously naive.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, please call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline at 800-273-8255.

But don't get too worried, experts say. Such a shift is known as a "lexical innovation," says Andrea Beltrama, a linguistics researcher at the University of Pennsylvania. He and others say that while it might be jarring for non-TikTokkers to hear suicide and sexual assault discussed so euphemistically, it doesn't necessarily remove the seriousness from the conversation.

"Whoever says 'unalive' intends to communicate something about suicide, and knows that, and assumes that whoever is on the other end will be able to retrieve that intention," Beltrama says.

Suicide is the second leading cause of death among people ages 10-24, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and suicide rates for that age group increased more than 50% from 2000-2021.

Using "unalive" could actually make for more meaningful discussions among youths — giving them a sense of community and trust they couldn't have with adults who use the words "suicide" or "kill." Beltrama draws a parallel between "unalive" and how a saying like "Let's go Brandon" has become a way to express disdain for President Joe Biden without using the profane phrase that it's code for.

Like "Let's go Brandon" — which arose from a sports broadcaster's on-air mistranslation of a vulgar crowd chant about Biden at a NASCAR race — "unalive" took on, well, a life of its own. Political conservatives chummily co-opted "Let's go Brandon," and TikTokkers did the same with "unalive."

"'Unalive' is not only successful, but also seems to be creating almost this kind of solidarity or affiliation between groups of people who share this ability of decoding what 'Let's go Brandon' means," he says.

Dr. Steven Adelsheim, a Stanford University psychiatry professor and the director of the Stanford Center for Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing, also advises against overreaction.

"Young people are pretty savvy," Adelsheim says. "I think people understand what they're doing when they're using 'unalive' as a flip descriptor."

Amber Samuels, a 30-year-old therapist in Washington, D.C., who has used "unalive" in her own social accounts, says that she has heard clients use it and similar euphemisms in speech. To her, "it doesn't feel abnormal or unusual."

"I think when we avoid using specific language to talk about suicide and sexual assault, we risk contribut-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 37 of 79

ing to a culture of silence and shame surrounding these topics," Samuels says. "In the case of social media, though, it's the avoidance of using the actual, uncensored word that allows awareness and conversations to even be possible."

Lily Haeberle, 18, a senior at Indiana's New Palestine High School, says she recently heard a classmate jokingly refer to "re-activating" oneself after dying. It could be helpful, she says, to reserve words like "unalive" for such flippant references.

"I think they have sort of developed these alternative words as a means of still being able to joke about those types of things without it coming across in such a harsh way," Haeberle says.

It follows that a vanguard of youth culture — video gaming, in which characters are killed right and left and defeated players often cry, "I'm dead!" — has incorporated the term. Gamer forums and chat rooms are rife with references to "unliving" characters only to have them "respawned," or resurrected.

Dictionary.com — the hipper alternative to major English-language dictionaries that so far do not appear to address "unalive" in this sense — uses this example in its definition: "The point of the game is to unalive all enemies before losing your last life token."

Kids have always had their own slang, but today's adolescents are digital natives constantly barraged with information. Litman has mixed feelings about whether referring to suicide with "unalive" might help or hurt, but she's encouraged that kids are at least talking about it. Particularly, she says, if perceiving suicide as "unliving" might make a struggling youth more likely to ask for help.

"They're much more comfortable with these topics," she says, "than I would have been at their age."

Jeff McMillan, a longtime editor at The Associated Press, is also a member of the AP Stylebook editing team. Follow him on Twitter at <http://twitter.com/JeffMcMillanPA>

Americans are widely pessimistic about democracy in the United States, an AP-NORC poll finds

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Only about 1 in 10 U.S. adults give high ratings to the way democracy is working in the United States or how well it represents the interests of most Americans, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Majorities of adults say U.S. laws and policies do a poor job of representing what most Americans want on issues ranging from the economy and government spending to gun policy, immigration and abortion. The poll shows 53% say Congress is doing a bad job of upholding democratic values, compared with just 16% who say it's doing a good job.

The findings illustrate widespread political alienation as a polarized country limps out of the pandemic and into a recovery haunted by inflation and fears of a recession. In interviews, respondents worried less about the machinery of democracy — voting laws and the tabulation of ballots — and more about the outputs.

Overall, about half the country — 49% — say democracy is not working well in the United States, compared with 10% who say it's working very or extremely well and 40% only somewhat well. About half also say each of the political parties is doing a bad job of upholding democracy, including 47% who say that about Democrats and even more — 56% — about Republicans.

"I don't think either of them is doing a good job just because of the state of the economy — inflation is killing us," said Michael Brown, a 45-year-old worker's compensation adjuster and father of two in Bristol, Connecticut. "Right now I'm making as much as I ever have, and I'm struggling as much as I ever have."

A self-described moderate Republican, Brown has seen the United States falling short of its democratic promise ever since learning in high school that the Electoral College allows someone to become president while not winning the majority of national votes. But he's especially disappointed with Congress now, seeing its obsessions as not reflective of the people's will.

"They're fighting over something, and it has nothing to do with the economy," Brown said, singling out

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 38 of 79

the GOP-controlled House's investigation of President Joe Biden's son.

"Hunter Biden — what does that have to do with us?" he asked.

The poll shows 53% of Americans say views of "people like you" are not represented well by the government, with 35% saying they're represented somewhat well and 12% very or extremely well. About 6 in 10 Republicans and independents feel like the government is not representing people like them well, compared with about 4 in 10 Democrats.

Karalyn Kiessling, a researcher at the University of Michigan who participated in the poll, sees troubling signs all around her. A Democrat, she recently moved to a conservative area outside the liberal campus hub of Ann Arbor, and worried that conspiracy theorists who believe former President Donald Trump's lies that he won the 2020 election would show up as poll watchers. Her Republican family members no longer identify with the party and are limiting their political engagement.

Kiessling researches the intersection of public health and politics and sees many other ways to participate in a democracy in addition to voting — from being active in a political party to speaking at a local government meeting. But she fears increased partisan nastiness is scaring people away from these crucial outlets.

"I think people are less willing to get involved because it's become more contentious," Kiessling, 29, said.

That leads to alienation at the national level, she said — something she certainly feels when she sees what comes out of Washington. "When you have a base that's a minority of what general Americans think, but they're the loudest voices in the room, that's who politicians listen to," Kiessling said.

Polarization has transformed some states into single-party dominions, further alienating people like Mark Short, a Republican who lives in Dana Point, California.

"In California, I kind of feel that I throw my vote away every time, and this is just what you get," said Short, 63, a retired businessman.

The poll shows that the vast majority of Americans — 71% — think what most Americans want should be highly important when laws and policies are made, but only 48% think that's actually true in practice.

And views are even more negative when it comes to specific issues: About two-thirds of adults say policies on immigration, government spending, abortion policy and gun policy are not representative of most Americans' views, and nearly that many say the same about the economy as well as gender identity and LGBTQ+ issues. More than half also say policies poorly reflect what Americans want on health care and the environment.

Joseph Derito, an 81-year-old retired baker in Elmyra, New York, sees immigration policy as not representing the views of most Americans. "The government today is all for the people who have nothing — a lot of them are capable of working but get help," said Derito, a white political independent who leans Republican and voted for Trump. "They just want to give these people everything."

Sandra Wyatt, a 68-year-old retired data collection worker and Democrat in Cincinnati, blames Trump for what she sees as an erosion in democracy. "When he got in there, it was like, man, you're trying to take us back to the day, before all the rights and privileges everybody fought for," said Wyatt, who is Black, adding that she's voted previously for Republicans as well.

She sees those bad dynamics as lingering after Trump's presidency. "We always knew there was racism but now they're emboldened enough to go around and shoot people because of the color of their skin," Wyatt said.

Stanley Hobbs, a retired autoworker in Detroit and a Democrat, blames "a few Republicans" for what he sees as democracy's erosion in the U.S. He sees those GOP politicians as beholden to a cabal of big businesses and points to issues like abortion as examples of how the laws no longer represent the views of the majority of Americans.

He's trying to stay optimistic.

"It seems like this always happens in the U.S. and we always prevail," Hobbs said, recalling how American politicians sympathetic to Nazi Germany gained prominence before World War II. "I just hope we prevail this time."

Riccardi reported from Denver.

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.

FTC investigating ChatGPT creator OpenAI over consumer protection issues

By DAVID HAMILTON AP Business Writer

The U.S. Federal Trade Commission has launched an investigation into ChatGPT creator OpenAI and whether the artificial intelligence company violated consumer protection laws by scraping public data and publishing false information through its chatbot.

The agency sent OpenAI a 20-page letter requesting detailed information on its AI technology, products, customers, privacy safeguards and data security arrangements.

An FTC spokesperson had no comment on the investigation, which was first reported by the Washington Post on Thursday.

The FTC document the Post published told OpenAI the agency was investigating whether it has "engaged in unfair or deceptive privacy or data security practices" or practices harming consumers.

OpenAI founder Sam Altman tweeted disappointment that the investigation was disclosed in a "leak," noting that the move would "not help build trust," but added that the company will work with the FTC.

"It's super important to us that our technology is safe and pro-consumer, and we are confident we follow the law," he wrote. "We protect user privacy and design our systems to learn about the world, not private individuals."

The FTC's move represents the most significant regulatory threat so far to the nascent but fast-growing AI industry, although it's not the only challenge facing these companies. Comedian Sarah Silverman and two other authors have sued both OpenAI and Facebook parent Meta for copyright infringement, claiming that the companies' AI systems were illegally "trained" by exposing them to datasets containing illegal copies of their works.

On Thursday, OpenAI and The Associated Press announced a deal under which the AI company will license AP's archive of news stories.

Altman has emerged as a global AI ambassador of sorts following his testimony before Congress in May and a subsequent tour of European capitals where regulators were putting final touches on a new AI regulatory framework. Altman himself has called for AI regulation, although he has tended to emphasize difficult-to-evaluate existential threats such as the possibility that superintelligent AI systems could one day turn against humanity.

Some argue that focusing on a far-off "science fiction trope" of superpowerful AI could make it harder to take action against already existing harms that require regulators to dig deep on data transparency, discriminatory behavior and potential for trickery and disinformation.

"It's the fear of these systems and our lack of understanding of them that is making everyone have a collective freak-out," Suresh Venkatasubramanian, a Brown University computer scientist and former assistant director for science and justice at the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy, told the AP in May. "This fear, which is very unfounded, is a distraction from all the concerns we're dealing with right now."

News of the FTC's OpenAI investigation broke just hours after a combative House Judiciary Committee hearing in which FTC Chair Lina Khan faced off against Republican lawmakers who said she has been too aggressive in pursuing technology companies for alleged wrongdoing.

Republicans said she has been harassing Twitter since its acquisition by Elon Musk, arbitrarily suing large tech companies and declining to recuse herself from certain cases. Khan pushed back, arguing that more regulation is necessary as the companies have grown and that tech conglomeration could hurt the

economy and consumers.

A heat wave named Cerberus has southern Europe in its jaws, and it's only going to get worse

By DEREK GATOPOULOS and CIARAN GILES Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Tourists in central Athens huddled under mist machines and zoo animals in Madrid were fed fruit popsicles Thursday as southern Europeans suffered through a heat wave that was projected to get much worse heading into the weekend.

Temperatures in parts of Mediterranean Europe were forecast to reach as high as 45 degrees Celsius (113 F) starting Friday.

The high-pressure system affecting the region, which crossed the Mediterranean from north Africa, has been named Cerberus after the three-headed dog in ancient Greek mythology who guarded the gates to the underworld.

Officials in several countries were preparing emergency measures, cellphone alerts and adjustments to staffing levels.

In Athens and other Greek cities, working hours were changed for the public sector and many businesses to avoid the midday heat, while air-conditioned areas were opened to the public.

"It's like being in Africa," 24-year-old tourist Balint Jolan, from Hungary, told The Associated Press. "It's not that much hotter than it is currently at home, but yes, it is difficult."

Cerberus is being tracked by the European Space Agency, which warned that the heat wave will also be felt in parts of northern Europe.

"Italy, Spain, France, Germany and Poland are all facing a major heat wave, with temperatures expected to climb to 48 degrees Celsius on the islands of Sicily and Sardinia – potentially the hottest temperatures ever recorded in Europe" the agency said Thursday.

In the Arctic, a record high temperature of 28.8 degrees Celsius (83.8 degrees F) was measured at Slettness Fyr on the northern tip of the Norway, Norwegian meteorologists said Thursday. This tops a previous record from July 1964 when the thermometer reached 27.6 degrees Celsius (81.7 degrees F). The United Nation's World Meteorological Organization on Monday said global temperatures recorded in early July were among the hottest on record. As Spain's politicians fret about how the high temperatures might affect turnout in a general election this month, animals in Madrid's Zoo were being treated this week to frozen food to cool off amid the sweltering heat. Zookeepers fed pandas and bears with watermelon popsicles, seals with frozen sardines and lions with frozen buckets of meat. Television ads in Italy reminded city dwellers to look after their pets and check in regularly with elderly relatives. Authorities were awaiting an autopsy of a 44-year-old roadworker who collapsed near Milan and later died in hospital. Storms overnight felled trees in an Italian region bordering Slovenia and Austria, while baseball size hail fell in valleys near Bergamo in Lombardy.

Rainfall provided some respite in Croatia, but evacuation orders were issued in several areas as a wild-fire swept through coastal areas of the country. In North Macedonia, the high heat triggered a spike in emergency calls for health assistance, while residents in Kosovo, which is also landlocked, flocked to an artificial beach near the capital Pristina. Authorities in Cyprus urged the Mediterranean island's residents to avoid forest areas where wildfires could be caused unintentionally.

Meanwhile, emergency services in nearby Turkey also grappled with simultaneous fires and floods. Flooding in the northern Black Sea coast claimed three lives. In the southwest Milas region, 26 water-dropping planes and helicopters helped 600 firefighters contain a wildfire. "While there are heat and fires on one side of the country, there are floods and deluges on the other," Turkish Deputy Agriculture Minister Veysel Tiryaki said Thursday. "In our country as well as around the world, we are struggling with climate change."

___ Ciaran Giles reported from Madrid. Jovana Gec on Belgrade, Serbia Srdjan Nedeljkovic in Athens, Menelaos Hadjicostis in Nicosia Cyprus, Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen, Denmark, Andrew Wilks in Ankara, Turkey, Konstantin Testorides in Skopje, North Macedonia, Colleen Barry in Milan, Italy and Florent Bajrami

in Pristina, Kosovo, contributed to this report.

Vermont braces for more rain in wake of historic flooding

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

Vermont prepared for the next round of storms — and possibly a tornado — as people took advantage of calm weather Thursday to clean up from historic flooding that damaged thousands of homes, businesses and roads, and left some residents stranded.

As floodwaters receded, the good news was that there were no new rescue missions, dams were holding up and more roads reopened. The bad news was that strong thunderstorms were expected to move into parts of the state by Thursday night, which could cause more flash flooding, Gov. Phil Scott said at a news conference. Conditions could spawn a tornado, he said. And the state could get more heavy rain over the weekend.

“The period we are more concerned about is Sunday because that could be more widespread and heavier, but not nearly on the scale of what we saw earlier in the week,” National Weather Service meteorologist Seth Kutikoff said.

Scott said it’s important for Vermonters to be vigilant, and that includes not going into the water.

“We’ve seen many pictures on social media of kids swimming in floodwaters. This is not typical rainwater — it’s filled with chemicals, oil, waste, and more. It’s simply not safe,” he said.

New Hampshire, where some roads, towns and campgrounds were flooded in several western counties, was also in the latest storm’s path.

“We strongly encourage residents and visitors, especially campers staying at sites along rivers and streams, and campgrounds in low-lying parts, to know what to do if evacuation is needed,” said Robert Buxton, director of the state’s Homeland Security and Management agency.

Other New England states to the south were also drying out, including Connecticut, where officials warned boaters and others about dangerous debris in the Connecticut River, including large trees. A dock with several boats attached was washed away in Glastonbury, just south of Hartford, and was seen floating down the river a few towns away.

In Vermont, communities were cleaning up from the floods that were more destructive in some places than 2011’s Tropical Storm Irene and regarded as the worst natural disaster since the 1927 floods, which killed dozens of people and caused widespread destruction. Unlike that event, no injuries or fatalities have been reported with this week’s flooding.

Transportation officials were moving equipment to areas that were considered more flood-prone to prepare for the storms as they continued to evaluate damage, including to rail lines. Amtrak and other railroad service has been suspended.

One death in New York was blamed on the storm — a woman whose body was found after she was swept away in Fort Montgomery, a small Hudson River community about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of New York City.

Scott said he has submitted a request for a major disaster declaration to President Joe Biden. “It’s separate from, and in addition to, the federal emergency declaration the president already signed” on Tuesday, he said. If approved, the declaration would provide federal support for recovering communities.

In Vermont’s small state capital of Montpelier, where the swollen Winooski River had flooded downtown, the elevator at City Hall was damaged, making the building inaccessible, spokesperson Evelyn Prim said.

“Cleanup from the hazardous floodwater damage in City Hall is expected to take several months. Because of this, City Hall will be closing until further notice,” she said.

Offers of help poured in, including free pet food from an animal shelter in Morrisville and a donation collection for water and nonperishable food items at the University of Vermont. A Vermont Main Street Flood Relief Fund was set up to help small businesses and the Vermont Community Foundation established a fund to help longer-term efforts for people and communities. An annual concert, the Do Good Fest in Montpelier, will be livestreamed and act as a fundraiser.

"One of the defining truths about Vermont is that Vermonters look out for one another," said Dan Smith, the foundation's CEO. "We saw it during the pandemic; we saw it during Tropical Storm Irene."

McCormack reported from Concord, New Hampshire. Associated Press reporters Lisa Rathke in Marshfield, Vermont, David Collins in Hartford, Connecticut, and Michael Casey in Boston contributed to this report.

No fingerprints, DNA sample or leads from cocaine found at the White House, the Secret Service says

By COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — No fingerprints or DNA turned up on the baggie of cocaine found in a lobby at the White House last week despite a sophisticated FBI crime lab analysis, and surveillance footage of the area didn't identify a suspect, according to a summary of the Secret Service investigation obtained by The Associated Press. There are no leads on who brought the drugs into the building.

U.S. Secret Service agents found the white powder during a routine White House sweep on July 2, in a heavily trafficked West Wing lobby where staff go in and out, and tour groups gather to drop their phones and other belongings.

"Without physical evidence, the investigation will not be able to single out a person of interest from the hundreds of individuals who passed through the vestibule where the cocaine was discovered," Secret Service officials said in the summary.

It's most likely the bag was left behind by one of the hundreds of visitors who traveled in and out of the building over the weekend, according to a person familiar with the investigation who was not authorized to talk about an ongoing probe and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

The presence of cocaine at the White House prompted a flurry of criticism and questions from Republicans, who received a closed briefing Thursday on the results of the investigation.

"There is no equal justice," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy said Thursday. "Anything revolving around 'Biden, Inc.' gets treated different than any other American and that's got to stop."

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said President Joe Biden believed it was "incredibly important" for the Secret Service to get to the bottom of how the drugs ended up in the White House. The Secret Service is responsible for securing the White House and led the investigation.

Biden wasn't there at the time of the discovery. He was at Camp David with members of his family for the holiday weekend.

The complex was briefly evacuated as a precaution when the white powder was found. The fire department was called in to test the substance on the spot to determine whether it was hazardous, and the initial test came back negative for a biohazard but positive for cocaine.

The bag was sent for a secondary, more sensitive lab analysis. Homeland Security's National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center analyzed the item for any biothreats. Tests conducted at the facility came back negative.

The cocaine and packaging underwent further forensics testing, including advanced fingerprint and DNA work at the FBI's crime laboratory, according to the summary. The FBI also did chemical testing.

Meanwhile, Secret Service investigators put together a list of several hundred individuals who may have accessed the area where the drugs were found. Anyone who comes through the White House must give identifying information and pass through security before entering.

But the lab results didn't turn up latent fingerprints or DNA, so agents can't compare anything to the possible suspect pool. White House staff are fingerprinted; participants in tour groups are not.

Video of the West Executive street lobby entrance did not identify the person or provide any solid investigative leads, the Secret Service said.

The lobby is open to staff-led tours of the West Wing, which are scheduled for nonworking hours on the weekends and evenings. Those tours are invitation-only and led by White House staff for friends, family and other guests. Most staffers who work in the complex can request an evening or weekend tour slot,

but there is often a long wait list. There were tours on the day, a Sunday, the drugs were found, as well as on the two preceding days.

The Situation Room, located in the West Wing, where staffers would also drop their phones before entering, has been undergoing construction work and was not in use at the time the baggie was found, national security adviser Jake Sullivan said last week.

Associated Press writer Kevin Freking contributed to this report.

First over-the-counter birth control pill gets FDA approval

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal regulators on Thursday approved the nation's first over-the-counter birth control pill in a landmark decision that will soon allow American women and girls to obtain contraceptive medication as easily as they buy aspirin and eyedrops.

The Food and Drug Administration cleared once-a-day Opill to be sold without a prescription, making it the first such medication to be moved out from behind the pharmacy counter. The manufacturer, Ireland-based Perrigo, won't start shipping the pill until early next year, and there will be no age restrictions on sales.

Hormone-based pills have long been the most common form of birth control in the U.S., used by tens of millions of women since the 1960s. Until now, all of them required a prescription.

Medical societies and women's health groups have pushed for wider access for decades, noting that an estimated 45% of the 6 million annual pregnancies in the U.S. are unintended. Teens and girls, women of color and those with low incomes report greater hurdles in getting prescriptions and picking them up.

The challenges can include paying for a doctor's visit, getting time off from work and finding child care. "This is really a transformation in access to contraceptive care," said Kelly Blanchard, president of Ibis Reproductive Health, a nonprofit group that supported the approval. "Hopefully this will help people overcome those barriers that exist now."

Perrigo says Opill could be an important new option for the estimated 15 million U.S. women who currently use no birth control or less effective methods, such as condoms. They are a fifth of women who are child-bearing age.

But how many women will actually gain access depends on the medication's price, which Perrigo plans to announce later this year.

"The reason why so many of us worked tirelessly for years to get over-the-counter birth control pills is to improve access ... cost shouldn't be one of those barriers," said Dr. Pratima Gupta of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists.

Most older birth control pills cost \$15 to \$30 for a month's supply without insurance coverage.

Over-the-counter medicines are generally much cheaper than prescriptions, but they typically aren't covered by insurance.

Forcing insurers to cover over-the-counter birth control would require a regulatory change by the federal government, which women's advocates are urging the Biden administration to implement.

The FDA approval gives U.S. women another birth control option amid the legal and political battles over reproductive health, including last year's reversal of *Roe v. Wade*, which has upended abortion access across the U.S.

That said, Opill's approval is unrelated to the ongoing court battles over the abortion pill mifepristone. And anti-abortion groups have generally emphasized that they do not oppose contraceptives, which are used to prevent pregnancies, not end them.

However, that has done little to ease fears that contraception could someday become a target. When the Supreme Court overturned *Roe*, Justice Clarence Thomas wrote a separate opinion in which he explicitly called on his colleagues to put the high court's same-sex marriage, gay sex and contraception cases on the table.

In the last year, the FDA has faced pressure from Democratic politicians, health advocates and medi-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 44 of 79

cal professionals to improve access to birth control. The American Medical Association and other leading medical groups backed Opill's application for over-the-counter status.

Birth control pills are available without a prescription across much of South America, Asia and Africa.

Perrigo submitted years of research to the FDA to show that women could understand and follow instructions for using the pill. Thursday's approval came despite some concerns by FDA scientists about the company's results, including whether women with certain underlying medical conditions would understand that they shouldn't take the drug.

The FDA's action only applies to Opill. It's in an older class of contraceptives, sometimes called minipills, that contain a single synthetic hormone and generally carry fewer side effects than more popular combination hormone pills.

Women's health advocates hope the decision paves the way for more over-the-counter birth control options and, eventually, for abortion pills to do the same.

An outside panel of FDA advisers unanimously voted in favor of the switch at a hearing in May where dozens of public speakers called for Opill's approval.

Dyvia Huitron was among those who presented, explaining how she has been unable to get prescription birth control more than three years after becoming sexually active. The 19-year-old University of Alabama student said she still isn't comfortable getting a prescription because the school's health system reports medical exams and medications to parents.

"My parents did not let me go on the pill," Huitron said in a recent interview. "There was just a lot of cultural stigma around being sexually active before you're married."

While she uses other forms of contraception, "I would have much preferred to have birth control and use these additional methods to ensure that I was being as safe as possible."

Advocates were particularly interested in Opill because it raised fewer safety concerns. The pill was first approved in the U.S. five decades ago.

"It's been around a long time, and we have a large amount of data supporting that this pill is safe and effective for over-the-counter use," Blanchard said.

Newer birth control pills typically combine two hormones, estrogen and progestin, which can help make periods lighter and more regular. But their use carries a heightened risk of blood clots, and they shouldn't be used by women at risk for heart problems, such as those who smoke and are over 35.

Opill has only progestin, which prevents pregnancy by blocking sperm from reaching the cervix. It must be taken around the same time daily to be most effective.

In its internal review published in May, the FDA noted that some women in Perrigo's study had trouble understanding the drug's labeling information. In particular, the instructions warn that women with a history of breast cancer should not take the pill because it could spur tumor growth.

Common side effects include irregular vaginal bleeding, headaches, dizziness and cramps, according to the FDA. The label also cautions that certain drugs can interfere with Opill's effectiveness, including medications for seizures, HIV and hypertension.

Perrigo executives said the company will spend the rest of the year manufacturing the pill so it can be available in stores early next year.

Follow Matthew Perrone on Twitter: @AP_FDWriter

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Hollywood actors join screenwriters in historic industry-stopping strike as contract talks collapse

By ANDREW DALTON and LESLIE AMBRIZ Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Leaders of Hollywood's actors' union voted Thursday to join screenwriters in the first joint strike in more than six decades, shutting down production across the entertainment industry after talks for a new contract with studios and streaming services broke down.

It's the first time two major Hollywood unions have been on strike at the same time since 1960, when Ronald Reagan was the actors' guild president.

In an impassioned speech as the strike, which begins at midnight, was announced, actors' union president and former "The Nanny" star Fran Drescher chastised industry executives.

"Employers make Wall Street and greed their priority and they forget about the essential contributors that make the machine run," Drescher said. "It is disgusting. Shame on them. They stand on the wrong side of history."

Hours earlier, a three-year contract had expired and talks broke off between the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers representing employers including Disney, Netflix, Amazon and others.

Outside Netflix's Hollywood offices, picketing screenwriters chanted "Pay Your Actors!" immediately after the strike was declared. Actors will begin picketing alongside writers outside studio headquarters in New York and Los Angeles on Friday.

"It looks like it's time to take down the MASKS. And pick up the SIGNS," Oscar-winner Jamie Lee Curtis said in an Instagram post with a photo of the tragic and comic masks that represent acting.

The premiere of Christopher Nolan's film "Oppenheimer" in London was moved up an hour so that the cast could walk the red carpet before the SAG board's announcement. Stars including Cillian Murphy, Emily Blunt and Matt Damon left the event once the strike was announced.

The strike — the first for film and television actors since 1980 — casts a shadow over the upcoming 75th Emmy Awards, whose nominations were announced a day earlier. Union rules prevent actors from doing any interviews or promotions around the awards, and they may not appear at the ceremony.

The strike rules also prevent actors from making personal appearances or promoting their work on podcasts or at premieres. And they are barred from do any production work including auditions, readings, rehearsals or voiceovers along with actual shooting.

While international shoots technically can continue, the stoppage among U.S.-based writers and performers is likely to have a drag on those too.

Disney chief Bob Iger warned the strike would have a "very damaging effect on the whole industry."

"This is the worst time in the world to add to that disruption," Iger said on CNBC. "There's a level of expectation that they have that is just not realistic."

A nearly two-week extension of the actors union contract, and negotiations, only heightened the hostility between the two groups. Drescher said the extension made us "feel like we'd been duped, like maybe it was just to let studios promote their summer movies for another 12 days."

Before the talks began June 7, the 65,000 actors who cast ballots voted overwhelmingly for union leaders to send them into a strike, as the Writers Guild of America did when their deal expired more than two months ago.

When the initial deadline approached in late June, more than 1,000 members of the union, including Meryl Streep, Jennifer Lawrence and Bob Odenkirk, added their names to a letter signaling to leaders their willingness to strike.

While famous names predominate, the strike also includes tens of thousands of little-known actors who scramble for small parts at sometimes meager pay. The union says modest-but-essential income streams including long-term residuals for shows they appear in have dried up.

Stakes in the negotiations included that kind of pay, which actors say has been undercut by inflation and the streaming ecosystem, benefits, the growing tendency to make performers create video auditions at

their own expense, and the threat of unregulated use of artificial intelligence.

"At a moment when streaming and AI and digital was so prevalent, it has disemboweled the industry that we once knew," Drescher said, drawing applause from her fellow union leaders. "When I did 'The Nanny' everybody was part of the gravy train. Now it's a vacuum."

The AMPTP said it presented a generous deal that included the biggest bump in minimum pay in 35 years, higher caps on pension and health contributions, and "a groundbreaking AI proposal that protects actors' digital likenesses."

"A strike is certainly not the outcome we hoped for as studios cannot operate without the performers that bring our TV shows and films to life," the group said in a statement. "The Union has regrettably chosen a path that will lead to financial hardship for countless thousands of people who depend on the industry."

SAG-AFTRA represents more than 160,000 screen actors, broadcast journalists, announcers, hosts and stunt performers. The walkout affects only the union's actors from television and film productions, who voted overwhelmingly to authorize their leaders to call a strike before talks began on June 7. Broadway actors said in a statement that they stand "in solidarity" with SAG-AFTRA workers.

The 11,500 members of the Writers Guild of America have been on strike since their own talks collapsed and their contract expired on May 2. The stoppage has showed no signs of a solution, with no negotiations even planned.

That strike brought the immediate shutdown of late-night talk shows and "Saturday Night Live," and several scripted shows, including "Stranger Things" on Netflix, "Hacks" on Max, and "Family Guy" on Fox, which have either had their writers' rooms or their production paused. Many more are sure to follow them now that performers have been pulled too.

Associated Press journalists Sian Watson in London, Krysta Fauria in Los Angeles, and Jake Coyle and Jocelyn Noveck in New York contributed to this story. For more on the Hollywood strikes, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/hollywood-strikes/>

Northwestern fires baseball coach Jim Foster amid misconduct allegations

EVANSTON, Ill. (AP) — Northwestern baseball coach Jim Foster was fired Thursday amid allegations of misconduct, three days after football coach Pat Fitzgerald was dismissed because of a hazing scandal.

Foster spent just one season as the Wildcats' coach. The move was announced in a brief statement from athletic director Derrick Gragg.

"Nothing will ever be more important to Northwestern than providing its students a place that allows them to develop in the classroom, in the community, and in competition at the absolute highest level, and building a culture which allows our staff to thrive," Gragg said.

"This has been an ongoing situation and many factors were considered before reaching this resolution. As the director of athletics, I take ownership of our head coaching hires and we will share our next steps as they unfold."

The Chicago Tribune and WSCR-AM reported this week that Foster led a toxic culture that prompted several assistant coaches to quit, and that his bullying and verbally abusive behavior prompted a human resources investigation by the university.

Northwestern went 10-40 under Foster. Assistant Brian Anderson, a former major leaguer who won a World Series ring with the Chicago White Sox in 2005, will take over as interim coach.

Fitzgerald was fired after a university investigation found allegations of hazing by 11 current or former players, including "forced participation, nudity and sexualized acts of a degrading nature," Northwestern President Michael Schill wrote.

Fitzgerald has maintained he was unaware of the hazing.

Guatemala's political turmoil deepens as 1 candidate is targeted and the other suspends her campaign

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemala sank deeper into political turmoil Thursday as an effort by prosecutors to discredit a progressive presidential candidate prompted his conservative opponent to suspend her campaign, citing a playing field that was no longer even.

The government's actions against candidate Bernardo Arévalo — first suspending his Seed Movement party, then raiding the country's election tribunal offices after it certified election results — sparked other objections as well, from within and outside Guatemala. U.S. officials called them a threat to the country's democracy.

By Thursday afternoon, those actions appeared to have backfired.

The Constitutional Court, which is Guatemala's highest tribunal, granted a preliminary injunction to the Seed Movement, blocking its suspension. Meanwhile, candidates left and right warned the government to let the voters prevail.

It was an outcome President Alejandro Giammattei likely did not expect when his administration decided to intervene in the June 25 election, which ended with Arévalo and conservative candidate Sandra Torres moving on to an Aug. 20 presidential runoff.

Arévalo dismissed the government's actions as illegal and said he would file complaints against the lower court judge, attorney general and special prosecutor for trying to keep him out of the race.

"What they are trying to do is simply sow doubt about our honesty," he said at a news conference Thursday, adding that the raid and party's suspension had a "clear political purpose."

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal issued an angry statement declaring it would safeguard Guatemala's democracy in the face of "any attempt to interfere with the electoral process."

Torres, whose UNE party has been a key force in allowing Giammattei to advance his legislative agenda, said she was halting her campaign activities to protest the government's actions. It was likely she realized Giammattei's missteps could sink her own candidacy.

"We want to demonstrate our solidarity with the voters of the Seed party and also with those who came out to vote," she said. "As a candidate, I want to compete under equal conditions."

She called on the president to show his face.

Giammattei's office issued a statement saying it respects the separation of powers and would not be involved in any judicial processes. Giammattei is prohibited by Guatemalan law from seeking reelection.

Arévalo was a surprise among the 22 candidates in the June 25 first-round election, getting 11.7% of the votes. In the days before the ballot, he had polled below 3% and was not among the top six or seven candidates, all of whom were considered to be on the conservative end of the political spectrum. Torres led the field with 15.8%. No candidate came close to exceeding the 50% threshold necessary to win outright, necessitating the August runoff.

A former diplomat and academic, Arévalo has framed himself as the candidate who would bring change to the country, while portraying Torres as someone who would likely maintain the status quo.

Arévalo also promised to bring back prosecutors and judges who were critical to the nation's fight against corruption but were forced out of the country under Giammattei's administration.

As the wait dragged on for certification of the election, anxiety grew that the government was looking for a way to change the results. First, several losing parties waged a legal challenge, leading the Constitutional Court to suspend the certification and order a review of hundreds of challenged polling place tallies. The review concluded with no change in the results.

Then late Wednesday, anti-corruption prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche announced the Seed Movement's suspension, an action that appeared to violate Guatemala's election laws, which prohibit suspending parties during an ongoing election. Curruchiche alleged the party violated the law while gathering the signatures it needed to form.

The day began Thursday with prosecutors raiding the offices of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal just

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 48 of 79

hours after it certified the election results. The Attorney General's Office said Thursday that the purpose of the raid was to seize evidence from the office responsible for voter rolls and party registration. A raid had also been expected to take place at the Seed Movement's party headquarters Thursday but that appeared unlikely after the high court's injunction.

The U.S. State Department previously accused Curruchiche and his boss, Attorney General Consuelo Porras, of obstructing corruption investigations in Guatemala, and put them both on its list of undemocratic actors.

Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Thursday that the U.S. government was "deeply concerned" by the actions of the Attorney General's Office, which he said threatened the legitimacy of the electoral process. "The will of the Guatemalan people, as expressed through the June 25 elections results, must be respected," he said.

A United Nations spokesperson said Secretary-General Antonio Guterres was watching developments in Guatemala with concern and urged all those involved to act responsibly and impartially.

Katya Salazar, executive director of the Due Process Foundation, a Washington-based nongovernmental group, said events playing out in Guatemala were the result of real fear among those in power that an Arévalo victory could threaten the impunity they enjoy.

That impunity comes from co-optation of the justice system, by appointing judges and an attorney general they trusted and chasing those in the justice system who had investigated corruption out of the country, she said.

"If you don't control the justice system, there is always going to be the concern that they open an investigation against you," she said.

On Thursday afternoon, several hundred people gathered outside the Attorney General's Office to protest attempts to suspend the Seed Movement.

Rosmarie Móvil, a 76-year-old vendor, said she came because she was tired of the government trampling the people's will.

"What we want to say more than anything is no to corruption, enough already," she said. "It makes you embarrassed to be Guatemalan because they steal from us, there's no justice, there's no health (care) and on top of it they want to take the democracy. Let there be spring now."

Associated Press writers Christopher Sherman in Mexico City and Edith M. Lederer in New York and AP Diplomatic Writer Matthew Lee in Washington contributed to this report.

Got Sriracha? The price for a bottle of Huy Fong's iconic hot sauce gets spicy with supplies short

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — It's not just you. Sriracha is hard to come by these days — at least for one popular brand.

The shortage of Huy Fong Foods' Sriracha, the beloved red hot sauce packaged in those green-capped bottles, isn't new — with the company pointing to a scarcity of chile pepper supply for several years now. And as frustrated fans continue to face store shelves missing the Huy Fong name, third-party resellers are punching up prices.

Huy Fong Sriracha, which used to go for under \$5 or \$10 a bottle, is now selling for shocking amounts in some listings posted to sites with vast third-party marketplaces — including Amazon, eBay and Walmart. Many are simply sold out.

For those still in stock, prices range depending where you look. As of Thursday morning, for example, ads for a single 17-ounce bottle on eBay stretched from around \$20 to a whopping \$150 — contrasting significantly with the price tags of other hot sauce brands, which don't appear to have the same level of supply troubles.

Huy Fong told The Associated Press this week that it continues to be beset by shortages of raw materi-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 49 of 79

als, echoing a similar scarcity last year when the company temporarily suspended sales of Sriracha and other popular products like Chili Garlic and Sambal Oelek.

Huy Fong said Wednesday that "limited production" resumed recently, although the California company didn't specify by how much or provide an estimate of when it believes suppliers will be able to deliver an adequate number of peppers.

"Because we do not sell directly to retail/market levels, we cannot determine when the product will hit shelves again and/or who currently has the product in stock," Huy Fong said in a prepared statement. "We are grateful for your continued patience and understanding during this unprecedented inventory shortage."

Here's what you need to know.

WHY IS THERE A HUY FONG SRIRACHA SHORTAGE?

Some experts say that Huy Fong's shortage is partially a consequence of climate change — pointing to weather shifts and extreme drought in Mexico and the U.S. Southwest, where Huy Fong sources all of its chile peppers.

"The main culprit here is a shortage of their primary ingredient, the red jalapeño chile pepper," said David Ortega, a food economist and associate professor at Michigan State University. "And that's due to climate change and the mega drought."

These peppers are typically grown under irrigation, with a lot of water drawn from the Colorado River — which has reached unprecedented low levels over recent years, Ortega said. The region has suffered insufficient rainfall and reduced run-off from snow pack.

Huy Fong's troubles with chile supply aren't new. When the company suspended sales last year, it pointed to a 2020 email warning of a chile pepper shortage, noting that a lack of supply had become more severe due to recent weather conditions.

But while climate change impacts agriculture as a whole, it's "not the whole story" for the current Huy Fong Sriracha shortage, said Stephanie Walker, extension vegetable specialist and professor at New Mexico State University. She speculates that Huy Fong may not have enough suppliers with different farmers — and could be looking to build relationships with new growers.

"Last year (Huy Fong) just couldn't get the jalapeños that they needed," said Walker, who also specializes in chile pepper breeding. She noted the contrast to other brands' supply. "It really does come down to relations that individual processors have with their grower base."

She added that it looks like this year will be a strong season for jalapeño and other chile growth in the region.

WHERE DOES HUY FONG GET ITS CHILE PEPPERS?

Huy Fong, which was founded decades ago by David Tran, currently sources its chile peppers from various farms in California, New Mexico and Mexico.

Before sourcing from these farms, California-based Underwood Ranches was Huy Fong's sole supplier for nearly 30 years. The partnership collapsed in 2017 following a financial dispute. Two years later, a jury determined that Huy Fong breached its contract with Underwood Ranches and also committed fraud — awarding Underwood \$23.3 million.

In a phone interview Thursday afternoon, Craig Underwood, owner of Underwood Ranches, disagreed with the drought and climate change explanations for Huy Fong's shortage — arguing that Tran "has not rebuilt his supply chain the way he needed to."

According to Underwood, there has continued to be a steady supply of jalapeño peppers from Mexico. Underwood Ranches, which now sells its own brand of Sriracha, also started producing red jalapeño peppers again this year — in part because of the Huy Fong shortage, he added.

"The demand for our product has increased rather dramatically," Underwood said.

PRICES SKYROCKET FROM

The erosion of Huy Fong's available supplies has rocked the prices of the brand's Sriracha that is still available. In many places, the bottles are simply sold out — giving leverage to resellers listing the now hard-to-find and highly sought-after product.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 50 of 79

Another market force at play is consumer behavior, in this case, hoarding. The panic around potentially losing access to a desired product leads many people to buy more than they would typically need, as was seen with toilet paper at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"People just stock up and that exacerbates the situation," said Ortega, also an expert in consumer decision-making. "You have an increase in demand for the product, on top of these supply shocks. And prices have really nowhere to go but up."

ARE OTHER HOT SAUCES FACING SHORTAGES?

There's a myriad of hot sauces, including other of Sriracha-style products, that remain easy to find at reasonable prices. Tabasco, for example, has created a page dedicated to helping customers find nearby stores that sell its brand of Sriracha — and notes that it's been able to scale production to "meet the majority of the of surge in demand" for its sauce.

There are a few possible explanations for this, experts say. Some speculate that Huy Fong has issues with its current chile suppliers. Other brands could also use different pepper variants and source from more farms. Some might also be in a position to tinker with recipes — but perfecting sauces take a long time, as would finding a new variant, experts say.

"Growing the crop in an area less affected by extreme weather or breeding new variants of the peppers that are more tolerant to heat and require less water, if possible, at all, would take years," Richard Howells, a supply chain expert at SAP, wrote in a blog post earlier this week.

Soda sweetener aspartame now listed as possible cancer cause. But it's still considered safe

By MARIA CHENG and JONEL ALECCIA Associated Press

The World Health Organization's cancer agency has deemed the sweetener aspartame — found in diet soda and countless other foods — as a "possible" cause of cancer, while a separate expert group looking at the same evidence said it still considers the sugar substitute safe in limited quantities.

The differing results of the coordinated reviews were released early Friday. One came from the International Agency for Research on Cancer, a special branch of the WHO. The other report was from an expert panel selected by WHO and another U.N. group, the Food and Agriculture Organization.

The Lyon, France-based cancer agency periodically reviews potential cancer hazards, but doesn't determine how likely they are to cause cancer in their evaluations which range from "possibly" carcinogenic to "probably" to cancer-causing.

Aspartame joins a category with more than 300 other possible cancer-causing agents, including things like aloe vera extract, Asian-style pickled vegetables and carpentry work.

The guidance on use of the sweetener, though, isn't changing.

"We're not advising consumers to stop consuming (aspartame) altogether," said WHO's nutrition director Dr. Francesco Branca. "We're just advising a bit of moderation."

Here's a look at the announcement:

WHAT IS ASPARTAME?

Aspartame is a low-calorie artificial sweetener that is about 200 times sweeter than sugar. It is a white, odorless powder and the world's most widely used artificial sweetener.

Aspartame is authorized as a food additive in Europe and the U.S. and is used in numerous foods, drinks such as Diet Coke, desserts, chewing gum, medications including cough drops and foods intended to help with weight loss. It's in tabletop sweeteners sold as Equal, Sugar Twin and NutraSweet.

Aspartame was approved in 1974 by the U.S. Food and Drug Administration with an acceptable daily intake of 50 milligrams per kilogram of body weight. According to the FDA, a person weighing 132 pounds (60 kilograms) would need to consume about 75 aspartame packets to reach that level.

U.N. experts evaluated the safety of aspartame in 1981 and set the safe daily limit slightly lower, at 40 milligrams of aspartame per kilogram.

David Spiegelhalter, an emeritus statistics professor at Cambridge University, said the guidance means

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 51 of 79

that "average people are safe to drink up to 14 cans of diet drink a day ... and even this 'acceptable daily limit' has a large built-in safety factor."

WHAT DID THE TWO GROUPS SAY?

WHO's cancer agency, IARC, convened its expert group in June to assess the potential of aspartame to cause cancer. It based its conclusion that aspartame is "possibly carcinogenic" on studies in humans and animals that found "limited" evidence that the compound may be linked to liver cancer.

In a separate evaluation, experts assembled by WHO and the food agency updated their risk assessment, including reviewing the acceptable daily intake. They concluded there was "no convincing evidence" at the currently consumed levels that aspartame is dangerous; their guidelines regarding acceptable levels of consumption were unchanged.

The move comes weeks after the WHO said that non-sugar sweeteners don't help with weight loss and could lead to increased risk of diabetes, heart disease and early death in adults.

SHOULD I BE CONCERNED ABOUT GETTING TOO MUCH?

Not as long as you don't exceed the guidelines. The FDA said scientific evidence continues to support the agency's conclusion that aspartame is "safe for the general population," when used within limits.

Almost any substance can be dangerous in excessive amounts, said David Klurfeld, a nutrition expert at the Indiana University School of Public Health-Bloomington.

"The dose makes the poison," said Klurfeld, who previously served on an IARC panel. "Even essential nutrients like vitamin A, iron and water will kill you within hours if too much is consumed."

SO WHAT SHOULD CONSUMERS DO?

WHO's Branca said it was acceptable for people to consume a "pretty large" amount of aspartame without suffering any ill effects. "High consumers" might want to cut back, he said.

Dr. Peter Lurie, executive director of the Center for Science in the Public Interest, which previously nominated aspartame for IARC review, said there's an easy choice for consumers.

"At least when it comes to beverages, our message is your best choice is to drink water or an unsweetened beverage," he said.

Most people, though, probably don't pay much attention to IARC evaluations. The agency has previously classified processed meat like hot dogs and bacon as cancer-causing, noting in particular its link to colon cancer. That move surprised even others in the scientific community — the U.K.'s biggest cancer charity reassured Britons that eating a bacon sandwich every so often wouldn't do them much harm.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR THE FOOD AND BEVERAGE INDUSTRY?

Food and beverage producers say there's no reason to avoid products with aspartame.

"There is a broad consensus in the scientific and regulatory community that aspartame is safe," the American Beverage Association said in a statement.

WHO's Branca said the agency advises food manufacturers in general to "use ingredients that do not require the addition of too much sugar." After the latest assessments of aspartame, Branca said that using sweeteners "is probably not the way forward."

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Biden proclaims NATO alliance 'more united than ever' in contrast to predecessor Trump

By SEUNG MIN KIM, CHRIS MEGERIAN and JARI TANNER Associated Press

HELSINKI (AP) — The itinerary included a NATO summit, a brief stop in the United Kingdom and a coda in the Finnish shoreline capital that included a news conference in the ornate Gothic Hall at the presidential palace.

The president was Donald Trump and the year was 2018. In July of that year, Trump had upended the annual gathering of the military alliance, criticized the British prime minister to the London tabloids and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 52 of 79

ultimately, in Helsinki, sided with Russian leader Vladimir Putin while casting doubt on his own intelligence community.

President Joe Biden's journey through Europe this week was nearly identical, but every point of his three-country tour was an unsaid yet indelible rebuke of his predecessor who tore through the continent a half-decade ago. It was a portrait of a leader whose ardent belief in international alliances will be part of his case for reelection, particularly if Biden faces a rematch against Trump and his opposing worldviews next year.

During Biden's concluding news conference in Helsinki, he took umbrage at a question about whether he could guarantee the United States would continue to be a reliable partner abroad, a query that conveyed allies' concerns about Trump, whose foreign policy disdained the same alliances Biden cherishes.

"Nobody can guarantee the future, but this is the best bet that anyone can make," Biden said of the U.S. commitment to the 74-year-old military alliance. When a Finnish journalist noted that Biden said no one could make guarantees, he testily responded: "Let me be clear, I didn't say ... we couldn't guarantee the future. You can't tell me whether you're going to be able to go home tonight. No one can be sure what they're going to do."

Voice raised, he declared, "I'm saying, as sure as anything can possibly be said about American foreign policy, we will stay connected to NATO -- connected to NATO, beginning, middle and end. We're a transatlantic partnership. That's what I've said."

His five-day trip to Europe — which wound through the United Kingdom, Lithuania and Finland — was meant to demonstrate the force of the international coalition against Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And Biden appeared confident he had accomplished that mission, proclaiming that he and other NATO leaders showed the military alliance "more united than ever."

Trump, in contrast, has often been dismissive of NATO. And in his news conference in Helsinki five years ago, he took issue with his own intelligence agencies' firm finding that Russia meddled in the 2016 U.S. election to his benefit, seeming to accept Russian President Putin's insistence that Moscow's hands were clean.

Though Ukraine's demand for an explicit path to NATO membership remained elusive, Biden emphasized that agreements with countries in the alliance would support Kyiv's long-term security even without its formal entry. During a meeting with Finnish President Sauli Niinistö earlier Thursday, Biden insisted that Zelenskyy "ended up very happy" despite his expressed frustrations at the lack of a clear timetable for Ukraine to join the alliance.

Biden and other administration officials also held what aides said were pivotal conversations with Turkey before that country this week dropped its objections to Sweden joining NATO. That paves the way for Sweden to become the 32nd member of the alliance, after Finland formally joined earlier this year.

During his brief stop in London, Biden repeatedly highlighted his close friendship with British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whom he has already met with six times despite Sunak assuming his position just last October. That relationship was a stark contrast to that of Trump, who arrived in London five years ago accused then-Prime Minister Theresa May of ruining what the United Kingdom stood to gain from the Brexit vote to leave the European Union, adding that her former foreign secretary, Boris Johnson, would make an "excellent" prime minister.

And in Helsinki, standing in the same position where his predecessor stood five years ago, Biden delivered a sharp rebuke of the Russian leader with whom Trump aligned on denying election interference.

"Putin's already lost the war. Putin has a real problem -- how does he move from here? What does he do?" Biden said during the news conference. "There is no possibility of him winning the war in Ukraine. He's already lost that war."

Trump, who is leading other Republican presidential hopefuls in polling, as well as some other candidates have continued to criticize Biden's actions abroad even as the incumbent president takes hawkish actions that have pleased other GOP officials.

For instance, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis said in a radio interview Wednesday with conservative radio host Howie Carr that he opposed Biden's controversial decision to send cluster bombs to Ukraine and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 53 of 79

said "right now you have an open-ended, blank check. There's no clear objectives for victory. And this is kind of dragging on and on."

But the contrast is the sharpest with Trump who accused Biden of "dragging us further toward World War III" with the president's controversial decision to send cluster munitions to Ukraine and in May, said the Democrat had "cowered to NATO" as he outlined his foreign policy platform.

It's a contrast that Biden is eager to make. While in office, he has heartily embraced the tenets of multilateralism that Trump shunned, speaking repeatedly of having to rebuild international coalitions after four tumultuous years led by his predecessor. The garrulous former Senate Foreign Relations Committee chairman is in his element at summits abroad, and speaks of how his background in international policy is proof positive that decades of experience on the world stage has mattered for the presidency.

Amid Biden's reelection campaign next year, the United States will be the host of the NATO summit in Washington as the military alliances marks its 75th anniversary — giving the U.S. president a natural domestic backdrop to tout his foreign policy vision before voters.

To be sure, foreign policy issues tend to fall far lower on the public's priority list than domestic and economic issues. In a December 2022 AP-NORC poll asking Americans to name up to five problems they think are most important for the government to be working on, only about 2 in 10 (18%) named at least one foreign policy related issue other than immigration, compared with large majorities naming at least one economic or domestic issue.

In the 2022 midterm election, just 2% of voters named foreign policy as the single most important issue facing the country when asked to choose from a list of nine issues.

Yet the conflict over competing visions of foreign policy are often dominating domestic politics. This week, the House is taking up a sweeping legislative package that sets defense policy for the Pentagon, and close Trump ally Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., proposed an amendment that would withdraw the U.S. from NATO.

Meanwhile, Sens. Tim Kaine, D-Va., and Marco Rubio, R-Fla., joined together to introduce a bill that would explicitly bar any U.S. president from leaving the military alliance without assent from Capitol Hill.

"NATO serves as an essential military alliance that protects shared national interests and enhances America's international presence," said Rubio, who ran against Trump for the GOP presidential nomination in 2016. "Any decision to leave the alliance should be rigorously debated and considered by the U.S. Congress with the input of the American people."

Sweden's clearer path to joining NATO this week was another foreign policy goal accomplished for Biden, whose administration steadily kept up their pressure and support for the move. Both Finland and Sweden abandoned a history of military nonalignment and sought to join NATO alliance after Russia invaded Ukraine last year, and in particular, Finland's admittance to NATO effectively doubled the alliance's border with Russia.

Sweden is poised to be admitted as NATO's 32nd member country after it pledged more cooperation with Turkey on counterterrorism efforts while backing Ankara's bid to join the European Union.

Biden's visit to Helsinki was unusual for another reason: Charly Salonijs-Pasternak, senior researcher at the Finnish Institute of International Affairs, noted that the trip marked a U.S. president coming to Finland to honor the country itself, rather than as a neutral location for meeting Russian leaders or other similar reasons.

He is the sixth U.S. president to visit Finland, a country of 5.5 million that has hosted several U.S.-Soviet and U.S.-Russia summits. The first involved President Gerald Ford, who would sign the so-called Helsinki Accords with more than 30 other nations in 1975.

"The fact that Biden has chosen to go specifically to Finland for Finland is symbolic and, in some ways, very concrete," Salonijs-Pasternak said. "It's a kind of deterrence messaging that only the United States can do."

In the Cold War era, Finland acted as a neutral buffer between Moscow and Washington, and its leaders played a balancing act between the East and West, maintaining good relations with both superpowers.

Finland and neighboring Sweden gave up their traditional political neutrality by joining the European Union in 1995 but both remained militarily nonaligned, with opinion polls showing a clear majority of their citizens opposed to joining NATO. That changed quickly after Feb. 24, 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine.

Associated Press writers Darlene Superville and Emily Swanson in Washington, and Michelle Price in New York contributed to this report.

Thousands of Ukraine civilians are being held in Russian prisons. Russia plans to build many more

By LORI HINNANT, HANNA ARHIROVA and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press ZAPORIZHZHIA, Ukraine (AP) — The Ukrainian civilians woke long before dawn in the bitter cold, lined up for the single toilet and were loaded at gunpoint into the livestock trailer. They spent the next 12 hours or more digging trenches on the front lines for Russian soldiers.

Many were forced to wear overlarge Russian military uniforms that could make them a target, and a former city administrator trudged around in boots five sizes too big. By the end of the day, their hands curled into icy claws.

Nearby, in the occupied region of Zaporizhzhia, other Ukrainian civilians dug mass graves into the frozen ground for fellow prisoners who had not survived. One man who refused to dig was shot on the spot — yet another body for the grave.

Thousands of Ukrainian civilians are being detained across Russia and the Ukrainian territories it occupies, in centers ranging from brand-new wings in Russian prisons to clammy basements. Most have no status under Russian law.

And Russia is planning to hold possibly thousands more. A Russian government document obtained by The Associated Press dating to January outlined plans to create 25 new prison colonies and six other detention centers in occupied Ukraine by 2026.

In addition, Russian President Vladimir Putin signed a decree in May allowing Russia to send people from territories with martial law, which includes all of occupied Ukraine, to those without, such as Russia. This makes it easier to deport Ukrainians who resist Russian occupation deep into Russia indefinitely, which has happened in multiple cases documented by the AP.

Many civilians are picked up for alleged transgressions as minor as speaking Ukrainian or simply being a young man in an occupied region, and are often held without charge. Others are charged as terrorists, combatants, or people who “resist the special military operation.” Hundreds are used for slave labor by Russia’s military, for digging trenches and other fortifications, as well as mass graves.

Torture is routine, including repeated electrical shocks, beatings that crack skulls and fracture ribs, and simulated suffocation. Many former prisoners told the AP they witnessed deaths. A United Nations report from late June documented 77 summary executions of civilian captives and the death of one man due to torture.

Russia does not acknowledge holding civilians at all, let alone its reasons for doing so. But the prisoners serve as future bargaining chips in exchanges for Russian soldiers, and the U.N. has said there is evidence of civilians being used as human shields near the front lines.

The AP spoke with dozens of people, including 20 former detainees, along with ex-prisoners of war, the families of more than a dozen civilians in detention, two Ukrainian intelligence officials and a government negotiator. Their accounts, as well as satellite imagery, social media, government documents and copies of letters delivered by the Red Cross, confirm a widescale Russian system of detention and abuse of civilians that stands in direct violation of the Geneva Conventions.

Some civilians were held for days or weeks, while others have vanished for well over a year. Nearly everyone freed said they experienced or witnessed torture, and most described being shifted from one place to another without explanation.

“It’s a business of human trafficking,” said Olena Yahupova, the city administrator who was forced to

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 55 of 79

dig trenches for the Russians in Zaporizhzhia. "If we don't talk about it and keep silent, then tomorrow anyone can be there — my neighbor, acquaintance, child."

INVISIBLE PRISONERS

The new building in the compound of Prison Colony No. 2 is at least two stories tall, separated from the main prison by a thick wall.

This facility in Russia's eastern Rostov region has gone up since the war started in February 2022, according to satellite imagery analyzed by the AP. It could easily house the hundreds of Ukrainian civilians who are believed detained there, according to former captives, families of the missing, human rights activists and Russian lawyers. Two exiled Russian human rights advocates said it is heavily guarded by soldiers and armored vehicles.

The building in Rostov is one of at least 40 detention facilities in Russia and Belarus, and 63 makeshift and formal in occupied Ukrainian territory where Ukrainian civilians are held, according to an AP map built on data from former captives, the Ukrainian Media Initiative for Human Rights, and the Russian human rights group Gulagu.net. The recent U.N. report counted a total of 37 facilities in Russia and Belarus and 125 in occupied Ukraine.

Some also hold Russian prisoners accused or convicted of a variety of crimes. Other, more makeshift locations are near the front lines, and the AP documented two locations where former prisoners say Ukrainians were forced to dig trenches.

The shadowy nature of the system makes it difficult to know exactly how many civilians are being detained. Ukraine's government has been able to confirm legal details of a little over 1,000 who are facing charges.

At least 4,000 civilians are held in Russia and at least as many scattered around the occupied territories, according to Vladimir Osechkin, an exiled Russian human rights activist who talks to informants within Russian prisons and founded Gulagu.net to document abuses. Osechkin showed AP a Russian prison document from 2022 saying that 119 people "opposed to the special military operation" in Ukraine were moved by plane to the main prison colony in the Russian region of Voronezh. Many Ukrainians later freed by Russia also described unexplained plane transfers.

In all, Ukraine's government believes around 10,000 civilians could be detained, according to Ukrainian negotiator Oleksandr Kononeko, based on reports from loved ones, as well as post-release interviews with some civilians and the hundreds of Ukrainian soldiers returned in prisoner exchanges. Ukraine said in June that about 150 civilians have been freed to Ukrainian-controlled territory, and the Russians deny holding others.

"They say, 'We don't have these people, it's you who is lying,'" Kononeko said.

The detention of two men from the Kherson region in August 2022 offers a glimpse at how hard it is for families to track down loved ones in Russian custody.

Artem Baranov, a security guard, and Yevhen Pryshliak, who worked at a local asphalt plant with his father, had been friends for over a decade. Their relationship was cemented when both bought dogs during the coronavirus pandemic, according to Baranov's common-law wife, Ilona Slyva. Their evening walks continued even after Russia seized their hometown of Nova Kakhovka — shy Baranov with a giant black Italian mastiff and Pryshliak with a toy poodle whose apricot fur matched his beard.

Their walk ran late the night of Aug. 15, and Pryshliak decided to stay at Baranov's apartment rather than risk being caught breaking the Russian curfew. Neighbors later told the family that 15 armed Russian soldiers swooped in, ransacked the apartment and seized the men.

For a month, they were in the local jail, with conditions relaxed enough that Slyva was able to talk to Pryshliak through the fence. Baranov, he told her, couldn't come out.

She sent in packages of food and clothes but did not know if they were reaching him. Finally, on Baranov's birthday, she bought his favorite dessert of cream eclairs, smashed them up, and slipped in a scrap of paper with her new Russian phone number scrawled on it. She hoped the guards would have little interest in the sticky mess and just pass it along.

A month went by, and the families learned the men had been transferred to a new prison in Sevastopol, in Crimea. Then the trail went dark.

Four more months passed. Then a call came from the family of a man they had never met but would

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 56 of 79

soon come to know well: Pavlo Zaporozhets.

Zaporozhets, a Ukrainian from the occupied Kherson region charged with international terrorism, was sharing a cell in Rostov with Baranov. Since he faced charges, he had a lawyer.

It was then that Slyva knew her gift of eclairs — and the phone number smuggled within them — had reached its destination. Baranov had memorized her number and passed it through a complex chain that finally got news of him to her on April 7.

Baranov wrote that he was accused of espionage — an accusation that Slyva scorned as falling apart even under Russia's internal logic. He was detained in August, and Russia illegally annexed the regions only in October.

"When he was detained, he was on his own national territory," she said. "They thought and thought and invented a criminal case against him for espionage."

Baranov wrote home that he was transported across prisons with his eyes closed in two planes, one of which had about 60 people. He and Pryshliak were separated at their third transfer in late winter. Pryshliak's family has received a form letter from the Rostov prison denying he is an inmate there.

The number of civilian detainees has grown rapidly over the course of the war. In the first wave early on, Russian units moved in with lists of activists, pro-Ukrainian community leaders, and military veterans. Melitopol Mayor Ivan Fedorov was taken when Russian forces seized control of his city but exchanged within a week for nine Russian soldiers, he said.

Then they focused on teachers and doctors who refused to work with the occupation authorities. But the reasons for apprehending people today are as mundane as tying a ribbon to a bicycle in the Ukrainian colors of blue and yellow.

"Now there is no logic," Fedorov said.

He estimated that around 500 Ukrainian civilians are detained just in his city at any time — numbers echoed by multiple people interviewed by the AP.

A Ukrainian intelligence official said the Russian fear of dissidents had become "pathological" since last fall, as Russians brace for Ukraine's counteroffensive. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the situation.

The AP saw multiple missing person notices posted on closed Ukrainian social media chats for young men seized off the streets. The messages, written in Ukrainian, describe detentions at gunpoint at home and on the street, with pleas to send information and emojis of hearts and praying hands.

The Geneva Conventions in general forbid the arbitrary detention or forced deportation of civilians, and state that detainees must be allowed to communicate with loved ones, obtain legal counsel and challenge allegations against them. But first they must be found.

After months writing letter after letter to locate Pryshliak, his sister-in-law Liubov thinks she knows why the prisoners are moved around: "So that the families cannot find them. Just to hide the traces of crimes."

SLAVES IN THE TRENCHES

Hundreds of civilians end up in a place that is possibly even more dangerous than the prisons: the trenches of occupied Ukraine.

There, they are forced to build protection for Russian soldiers, according to multiple people who managed to leave Russian custody. Among them was Yahupova, the 50-year-old civil administrator detained in October 2022 in the Zaporizhzhia region, possibly because she is married to a Ukrainian soldier.

Under international humanitarian law, Yahupova is a civilian — defined as anyone who is not an active member of or volunteer for the armed forces. Documented breaches of the law constitute a war crime and, if widespread and systematic, "may also constitute a crime against humanity."

But the distinctions between soldiers and civilians can be hard to prove in a war where Ukraine has urged all its citizens to help, for example by sending Russian troop locations via social media. In practice, the Russians are scooping up civilians along with soldiers, including those denounced by neighbors for whatever reason or seized seemingly at random.

They picked Yahupova up at her house in October. Then they demanded she reveal information about

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 57 of 79

her husband, taping a plastic bag over her face, beating her on the head with a filled water bottle and tightening a cable around her neck.

They also dragged her out of the cell and drove her around town to identify pro-Ukrainian locals. She didn't.

When they hauled her out a second time, she was exhausted. As a soldier placed her in front of a Russian news camera, she could still feel the dried blood on the back of her neck. She was going to give an interview, her captors told her.

Behind the camera, a gun was pointed at her head. The soldier holding it told her that if she gave the right answers to the Russian journalist interviewing her, she could go free.

But she didn't know what the right answers were. She went back to the cell.

Three months later, without explanation, Yahupova was again pulled outside. This time, she was driven to a deserted checkpoint, where yet another Russian news crew awaited. She was ordered to hold hands with two men and walk about 5 meters (yards) toward Ukraine.

The three Ukrainians were ordered to do another take. And another, to show that Russia was freeing the Ukrainian civilians in its custody.

Except, at the end of the last take, Russian soldiers loaded them into a truck and drove them to a nearby crossroads. One put shovels into their hands.

"Now you will do something for the good of the Russian Federation," he said.

And so Yahupova ended up digging trenches until mid-March with more than a dozen Ukrainian civilians, including business owners, a student, a teacher, and utility workers. She could see other crews in the distance, with armed guards standing over them. Most wore Russian military uniforms and boots, and lived in fear that Ukrainian artillery would mistake them for the enemy.

The AP confirmed through satellite imagery the new trenches dug in the area where Yahupova and a man on the Ukrainian crew with her said they were held. He requested anonymity because his relatives still live under occupation.

"Sometimes we even worked there 24 hours a day, when they had an inspection coming," he said.

The man also spoke with other Ukrainian civilians digging mass graves nearby for at least 15 people. He said one civilian had been shot for refusing to dig. Satellite imagery shows a mound of freshly-dug earth in the spot the man described.

The man escaped during a Russian troop rotation, and Yahupova also made her way out. But both said hundreds of others are still in the occupied front lines, forced to work for Russia or die.

When Yahupova returned to her home after more than five months, everything had been stolen. Her beloved dog had been shot. Her head ached, her vision was blurred, and her children — long since out of the occupied territories — urged her to leave.

She traveled thousands of miles through Russia, north to the Baltics and back around to the front line in Ukraine, where she reunited with her husband serving with Ukrainian forces. Earlier married in a civil ceremony, the two got wed this time in church.

Now safe in Ukrainian territory, Yahupova wants to testify against Russia — for the months it stole from her, the concussion that troubles her, the home she has lost. She still reflexively touches the back of her head, where the bottle struck her over and over.

"They stole not only from me, they stole from half the country," she said.

TORTURE AS POLICY

The abuse Yahupova described is common. Torture was a constant, whether or not there was information to extract, according to every former detainee interviewed by the AP. The U.N. report from June said 91% of prisoners "described torture and ill-treatment."

In the occupied territories, all the freed civilians interviewed by the AP described cramped rooms and cells, tools of torture prepared in advance, tape placed carefully next to office chairs to bind arms and legs, and repeated questioning by Russian's FSB intelligence agency. Nearly 100 evidence photos obtained by the AP from Ukrainian investigators also showed instruments of torture found in liberated areas of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 58 of 79

Kherson, Kyiv and Kharkiv, including the same tools repeatedly described by former civilian captives held in Russia and occupied regions.

Many former detainees spoke of wires linking prisoners' bodies to electricity in field telephones or radios or batteries, in a procedure one man said the Russians dubbed "call your mother" or "call Biden." U.N. human rights investigators said one victim described the same treatment given to Yahupova, a severe beating on the head with a filled water bottle.

Viktoriia Andrusha, an elementary school math teacher, was seized by Russian forces on March 25, 2022, after they ransacked her parents' home in Chernihiv and found photos of Russian military vehicles on her phone. By March 28, she was in a prison in Russia. Her captors told her Ukraine had fallen and no one wanted any civilians back.

For her, like so many others, torture came in the form of fists, batons of metal, wood and rubber, plastic bags. Men in black, with special forces chevrons on their sleeves, pummeled her in the prison corridor and in a ceramic-tiled room seemingly designed for quick cleaning. Russian propaganda played on a television above her.

"There was a point when I was already sitting and saying: Honestly, do what you want with me. I just don't care anymore," Andrusha said.

Along with the physical torture came mental anguish. Andrusha was told repeatedly that she would die in prison in Russia, that they would slash her with knives until she was unrecognizable, that her government cared nothing about a captive schoolteacher, that her family had forgotten her, that her language was useless. They forced captives to memorize verse after verse of the Russian national anthem and other patriotic songs.

"Their job was to influence us psychologically, to show us that we are not human," she said. "Our task was to make sure that everything they did to us did not affect us."

Then one day, without explanation, it was over for her and another woman kept with her. Guards ordered them to pack up, cuffed them and put them in a bus. The weight Andrusha had lost in prison showed starkly in the cast-off jacket that hung from her shoulders.

They were soon joined by Ukrainian soldiers held captive elsewhere. On the other side, Andrusha saw three Russian soldiers. Although international law forbids the exchange of civilians as prisoners of war, the U.N. report on June 27 said this has happened in at least 53 cases, and Melitopol Mayor Fedorov confirmed it happened to him.

A man detained with Andrusha in March 2022 is in captivity still. She doesn't know the fate of the others she met. But many former captives take it upon themselves to contact the loved ones of their former cellmates.

Andrusha recalled hours spent memorizing whispered phone numbers in a circle with other Ukrainians, on the chance one of them might get out. When she was freed, she passed them along to Ukrainian government officials.

Andrusha has since regained some of her weight. She talks about her six months in prison calmly but with anger.

"I was able to survive this," she said, after a day back in the classroom with her students. "There are so many cases when people do not return."

In the meantime, for loved ones, the wait is agony.

Anna Vuiko's father was one of the earliest civilians detained, in March last year. A former glass factory worker on disability, Roman Vuiko had resisted when Russian soldiers tried to take over his home in suburban Kyiv, neighbors told his adult daughter. They drove a military truck into the yard, shattered the windows, cuffed the 50-year-old man and drove off.

By May 2022, Vuiko was in a prison in Kursk, Russia, hundreds of kilometers (miles) away. All his daughter has gotten from him since is a handwritten letter, which arrived six months after he was taken away and four months after he wrote it. The standard phrases told his daughter nothing except that he was alive, and she suspects he has not received any of her letters.

"I think about it every day," she said. "It's been a year, more than a year. ... How much more time has

to pass?"

Arhirova reported from Kyiv. Contributors include Michael Biesecker in Washington, Illia Novikov in Kyiv, Mstyslav Chernov in Kherson and Evgeniy Maloletka in Zaporizhzhia.

The gunman who killed 11 people in a Pittsburgh synagogue is found eligible for the death penalty

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — The gunman who killed 11 people at a Pittsburgh synagogue in 2018 is eligible for the death penalty, a federal jury announced Thursday, setting the stage for further evidence and testimony on whether he should be sentenced to death or life in prison.

The government is seeking capital punishment for Robert Bowers, who raged against Jewish people online before storming the Tree of Life synagogue with an AR-15 rifle and other weapons in the nation's deadliest antisemitic attack. The jury agreed with prosecutors that Bowers — who spent six months planning the attack and has since expressed regret that he didn't kill more people — had formed the requisite legal intent to kill.

Bowers' lawyers argued that his ability to form intent was impaired by mental illness and a delusional belief that he could stop a genocide of white people by killing Jews who help immigrants.

Jurors reached the verdict after less than two hours of deliberation. As it was read, Bowers showed little reaction in keeping with his demeanor throughout the trial. In the courtroom gallery, survivors and victims' relatives heeded the judge's request to keep their emotions in check.

Testimony is now expected to shift to the impact of Bowers' crimes on survivors and the victims' loved ones.

"It has been nearly five years since 11 people were taken from us. They were beloved and valued family members, friends and neighbors. They cannot speak for themselves, and so their family members will speak for them," Maggie Feinstein, director of 10.27 Healing Partnership, a program helping survivors of the rampage and others who were impacted, said in a statement after the verdict.

Jeffrey Finkelstein, president of the Jewish Federation of Greater Pittsburgh, said his organization doesn't have a position on the death penalty, and that survivors and victims' relatives disagree about whether it should be applied. But he dismissed the defense claim that Bowers' action resulted from a diseased mind.

"This was an act of antisemitism, not an issue of mental illness," said Finkelstein, whose organization coordinates efforts by Jewish organizations and congregations to provide security and fight prejudice.

Bowers, 50, a truck driver from suburban Baldwin, killed members of three congregations who had gathered at the Tree of Life synagogue on Oct. 27, 2018. He also wounded two worshippers and five police officers.

Bowers was convicted last month on 63 criminal counts, including hate crimes resulting in death and obstruction of the free exercise of religion resulting in death. His attorneys offered a guilty plea in return for a life sentence, but prosecutors refused, opting instead to take the case to trial and pursue the death penalty. Most of the victims' families supported that decision.

If jurors decide Bowers deserves to die, it would be the first federal death sentence imposed during Joe Biden's presidency. Biden campaigned on a pledge to end capital punishment, but federal prosecutors continue to pursue the death penalty in some cases.

The penalty phase of Bowers' trial began June 26. Jurors heard weeks of technical testimony about Bowers' psychological and neurological states, with mental health experts for both sides disagreeing on whether he has schizophrenia, delusions or brain disorders that played a role in the rampage.

Bowers ranted incessantly on social media about his hatred of Jewish people before the 2018 attack and told police at the scene that "all these Jews need to die." He told psychologists who examined him afterward, including as recently as May, that he was pleased with the attack.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 60 of 79

New Light Congregation, which lost three of its members in the rampage, commended the jurors Thursday and said it trusted their judgment on a sentence. "Significant progress" has been made in the long fight against antisemitism, the congregation added in a statement, but "there is still work to be done. This trial is an important step in drawing a line between speech and action."

The sentencing now shifts to a more emotional stage, with jurors expected to hear about the pain and trauma Bowers inflicted on worshippers in the heart of Pittsburgh's Jewish community.

The prosecution will also present evidence about other aggravating factors — including that Bowers' rampage was motivated by religious hatred — while the defense will present mitigating factors that might persuade jurors to spare his life. The defense case could include pleas from his relatives.

To put him on death row, jurors will have to agree unanimously that the aggravating factors outweigh the mitigating ones.

In final arguments Wednesday, prosecution and defense lawyers took turns attacking the findings of the others' expert witnesses — doctors who testified about Bowers' mental condition and whether he could form the intent to commit the attack.

Prosecutor Soo Song said Bowers meticulously plotted the attack over a period of months..

"On Oct. 27, 2018, this defendant violated the safe, holy sanctuary that was the Tree of Life synagogue," she said. "He turned it into a killing ground."

But Bowers' defense lawyer, Michael Burt, cited expert witnesses to bolster the claim that a "delusional belief system took over his thinking," which left him unable to do anything but "following the dictates" of those delusional thoughts.

Burt argued that Bowers' ability to form intent was also impaired by schizophrenia and epilepsy.

Song denounced the idea that Bowers lacked control of his actions. She noted that Bowers told one of the defense's own expert medical witnesses that he meticulously planned the attack, considered other potential Jewish targets, and "regrets that he didn't kill dozens more." Song said Bowers described himself as calm and focused as he shot to kill.

U.S. Attorney Eric Olshan said Bowers wasn't delusional, but that he "just believes things that are repugnant."

Associated Press reporter Michael Rubinkam in northeastern Pennsylvania contributed to this report.

Associated Press religion coverage receives support through the AP's collaboration with The Conversation US, with funding from Lilly Endowment Inc. The AP is solely responsible for this content.

Andrew Tate sues his accusers in human trafficking case

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Controversial social media personality Andrew Tate and his brother are suing a Florida woman, saying she falsely accused them of imprisoning her in Romania, leading to their arrest there on human trafficking charges.

The widely followed former professional kickboxer and his brother, Tristan, are seeking at least \$5 million in the lawsuit, which was filed in Palm Beach County against the woman, her parents, another woman who lived at the Tates' Bucharest estate and a male friend of the woman.

The Tates say the five conspired to falsely accuse them of human trafficking and rape, costing them their freedom and millions of dollars in income from their lucrative social media, podcasting and business ventures. The lawsuit says the woman and her parents are residents of Palm Beach County, which is why it was filed there on Tuesday.

Romanian officials arrested the Tates in December and indicted them last month, saying the brothers forced seven victims into pornography and subjected them to physical violence. They remain under house arrest in Romania.

But attorneys Thomas Maniotis and Joseph D. McBride in their lawsuit say the Tates are the victims of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 61 of 79

the Florida woman. They call her "a professional con artist" and say she pursued a sexual relationship with Tristan Tate in order to move to Romania, then tried to defraud the brothers. When that failed, she conspired with the others to make false statements to Romanian and U.S. embassy authorities that led to the arrests, the attorneys say.

"At no point did the Tate brothers engage in human trafficking," the lawsuit says. The attorneys say the woman "is a serial liar, manipulator and schemer who exploits vulnerable, often wealthy men with good intentions for sexual, financial and emotional profit."

The Associated Press is not naming the woman or her parents because she is the alleged victim of sexual assault. No working phone numbers could be found for the family and no attorneys for them are listed in the court record. No one answered their door Thursday afternoon. The other woman lives in Great Britain and the male friend in Virginia.

Romanian investigators said in their indictment that the Tates and two Romanian women formed a criminal group in 2021 "in order to commit the crime of human trafficking" in that country, the United States and Britain.

Andrew Tate was banned from TikTok, YouTube and Facebook for alleged hate speech and misogynistic comments, including that women should bear responsibility for being sexually assaulted. But he remains quite popular on Twitter, with more than 7 million followers, many of them young men and schoolchildren.

Several women in Britain also are pursuing civil claims against Andrew Tate, alleging they were victims of sexual violence.

In a recent interview with the BBC, Tate denied spreading a culture of misogyny and accusations that he manipulated women for financial gain.

The British-American brothers were jailed for three months before being released to house arrest in March pending trial. Prosecutors also confiscated the Tates' assets, including 15 luxury cars, luxury watches and about \$3 million in cryptocurrency.

Investigators say the seven alleged victims were recruited with false declarations of love, but then forced to take part in pornography. The women were allegedly controlled by "intimidation, constant surveillance" and claims they were in debt.

But the Tates, in their lawsuit, paint a different picture. They say the Florida woman and all women who lived at their estate were free to come and go as they pleased, and closed-circuit security video can prove it.

After listing several other men they claim the Florida woman has defrauded or exploited, the Tates' attorneys say Tristan Tate met her through a dating application. He invited her to a Miami business event the Tates' company hosted in December 2021, and they had sex numerous times before Tristan Tate returned to Romania two weeks later, the lawsuit says.

It says the two kept in touch through texts, with the woman telling Tristan Tate she wanted to move to Romania and pursue internet modeling — a type of business the Tates have been involved with.

Tristan thought her modeling plans could work, but he tried to dissuade her, the lawsuit says. But in April 2022, "in the spirit of fun and adventure," he paid for the woman's flight to Romania.

The lawsuit says she stayed at the Tates' estate for two days, where the pair again had sex. She then moved, as agreed, to another nearby home, but had access to the estate. They say she only remained in the country six days.

"She was not restrained in her movement, never confined, never controlled by any person nor was she threatened in any manner and always had free will," the lawsuit says.

They say she soon conspired with the British woman she met at the estate to defraud them of \$200,000 by falsely claiming they needed it for "something important." When that failed, they say the Florida woman conspired with her male Virginia friend to contact the U.S. embassy to falsely say she and the other woman were being trafficked.

That led Romanian officials to raid the home where she was staying, beginning the investigation into the Tates, the lawsuit says.

Justice Kavanaugh seeks to dispel the notion that the Supreme Court is partisan

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. (AP) — Justice Brett Kavanaugh pointed to the mixed U.S. Supreme Court decisions this term as he sought Thursday to dispel notions that it is partisan, even after conservatives brought about the end of affirmative action in college admissions and struck down President Joe Biden's student loan debt relief program.

"The court is an institution of law. It's an institution of law not of politics, not of partisanship," Kavanaugh said at a judicial conference in Minnesota, in the first public remarks by a justice since the court recessed for the summer late last month.

The Supreme Court has been reshaped by the three justices nominated by President Donald Trump, including Kavanaugh. Although Kavanaugh sided with the conservative majorities in the affirmative action and student loan rulings, as well as last summer's ruling overturning the nationwide right to abortion, he was also part of the mixed conservative and liberal majorities this term that backed Black voters in Alabama and preserved a federal law aimed at keeping Native American children with Native families.

And the term was marked by other notable surprises, rejecting conservative positions in a North Carolina redistricting case that could have reshaped elections across the country, while backing the Biden administration in a fight over deportation priorities.

"We have lived up, in my estimation, to deciding cases based on law and not based on partisan affiliation and partisanship," Kavanaugh said. "We don't caucus in separate rooms. We don't meet separately. We're not sitting on different sides of the aisle at an oral argument. ... We work as a group of nine."

Speaking to an audience of judges, attorneys and court personnel from the 8th Circuit, which stretches from Minnesota and the Dakotas south to Arkansas, Kavanaugh said he didn't fully appreciate until he joined the court how much time the nine justices spend alone with each other.

He estimated that they eat lunch together around 65 times a year.

"And the rule at lunch is you can't talk about work," he said. "It's a good rule. ... It builds relationships and friendships and then when we have tough cases — and we only really have tough cases — you have a reservoir of good will toward each of the other people."

Kavanaugh said he was warmly welcomed in his first term in 2018 by then-Justices Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Stephen Breyer, who were part of the court's liberal wing. He also praised his working relationships with the two newest justices, conservative Amy Coney Barrett and liberal Ketanji Brown Jackson.

Kavanaugh, who was the justice most often in the majority this term in divided cases, said the Supreme Court hears 60 to 70 cases a term and that only a relative few might get most of the attention. But he said there are lots of 9-0 decisions, and there can also be a lot of 7-2 and 6-3 decisions.

"All sorts of different lineups," he said. "And so I might be working with Sonia Sotomayor on the Andy Warhol case, while we disagree on a case on the competition clause. We're not going to let our relationship where we're working together on one suffer just because we disagree on the other. And that's going on with all nine of us on a daily basis."

Kavanaugh only briefly mentioned the ethics issues that have dogged some justices — including conservatives Clarence Thomas and Samuel Alito and the liberal Sotomayor — and potentially undermined public confidence in the court. He noted that Chief Justice John Roberts said in May that the justices were continuing to work on that as a group.

"That's accurate," he said. "I'm not going to add anything to what the chief justice has said on that topic."

Roberts offered no specifics at the time, and the justices have not adopted an ethics code.

Kavanaugh said people getting upset when the high court makes difficult decisions comes with the territory. He said the best the justices can do is try to be consistent, clearly explain their reasoning, and try to show that they actually are working as a team of nine on difficult cases instead of caucusing on a partisan basis.

"You shouldn't be in this line of work if you don't like criticism," he said. "Because you're going to get it."

And you're going to get a lot of it."

Guatemala's political turmoil deepens as 1 candidate is targeted and the other suspends her campaign

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemala sank deeper into political turmoil Thursday as prosecutors targeted a progressive presidential candidate who proved to be surprisingly popular, prompting his opponent to suspend her campaign, saying the playing field was no longer even.

The government's actions against candidate Bernardo Arévalo — first suspending his Seed Movement party, then raiding the country's election tribunal offices after it certified election results — sparked other objections as well, from within and outside Guatemala. U.S. officials called them a threat to the country's democracy.

By Thursday afternoon, those actions appeared to have backfired. Candidates left and right warned the government to let the voters' prevail — not likely what President Alejandro Giammattei expected when his administration decided to intervene in the June 25 election, which ended with Arévalo and conservative candidate Sandra Torres moving on to an Aug. 20 presidential runoff.

Arévalo dismissed the government's actions as illegal.

"What they are trying to do is simply plant doubt about our honesty," he told a news conference Thursday, adding that the raid and party's suspension had a "clear political purpose."

The Supreme Electoral Tribunal issued an angry statement declaring that it would safeguard Guatemala's democracy in the face of "any attempt to interfere with the electoral process."

Torres, whose UNE party has been a key force in allowing Giammattei to advance his legislative agenda, said she was halting her campaign activities to protest the government's actions. It was likely that she realized Giammattei's missteps could sink her own candidacy.

"We want to demonstrate our solidarity with the voters of the Seed party and also with those who came out to vote," she said. "As a candidate, I want to compete under equal conditions."

She called on the president to show his face.

Giammattei's office issued a statement saying that it respects the separation of powers and would not be involved in any judicial processes. It also said that in line with the law, it would make presidential security available to the presidential and vice presidential candidates participating in the runoff.

Arévalo was a surprise winner in the June 25 election, garnering 11.7% of the votes. In the days before the vote, he had polled below 3% and was not among the top six or seven candidates, all of whom were considered to be on the conservative end of the political spectrum. Torres obtained 15.8% of the vote. No candidate came close to exceeding the 50% threshold necessary to win outright, necessitating the August runoff.

A former diplomat and academic, Arévalo has framed himself as the candidate who would bring change to the country, while portraying Torres as someone who would likely maintain the status quo.

Arévalo also promised to bring back prosecutors and judges who were critical to the nation's fight against corruption but were forced out of the country under Giammattei's administration.

As the wait dragged on for certification of the election, anxiety grew that the government was looking for a way to change the results. First, several losing parties waged a legal challenge, leading Guatemala's highest court to suspend the certification and order a review of hundreds of challenged polling place tallies. The review concluded with no change in the results.

Then late Wednesday, Curruchiche announced the Seed Movement's suspension, an action that appeared to violate Guatemala's election laws, which prohibit suspending parties during an ongoing election. Curruchiche said the party allegedly violated the law while gathering the signatures it needed to form.

The day began Thursday with prosecutors raiding the offices of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal just hours after it certified the election results.

The Attorney General's Office said Thursday that the purpose of the raid was to seize evidence from

the office responsible for voter rolls and party registration. A raid was also expected to take place at the Seed Movement's party headquarters Thursday.

The U.S. State Department had already accused Curruchiche and his boss, Attorney General Consuelo Porras, of obstructing corruption investigations in Guatemala, and put them both on its list of undemocratic actors.

Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Thursday that the U.S. government was "deeply concerned" by the actions of the Attorney General's Office, which he said threatened the legitimacy of the electoral process. "The will of the Guatemalan people, as expressed through the June 25 elections results, must be respected," he said.

Usher's ex-wife wants to drain Georgia's largest lake, where a boater fatally struck her son

ATLANTA (AP) — The ex-wife of R&B singer Usher is calling to drain Georgia's largest lake, where her son was fatally injured 11 years ago.

Fashion designer Tameka Foster has collected more than 2,500 signatures for her online petition imploring officials to "drain, clean, and restore" Lake Sidney Lanier, to allow for safety improvements and the removal of hazardous debris and other obstructions.

Kile Glover, her 11-year-old son with Bounce TV founder Ryan Glover, died in July 2012 after a personal watercraft struck the boy as he floated in an inner tube on the lake.

"Draining, cleaning, and restoring Lake Lanier is not only necessary but also an opportunity to honor the memory of those who have lost their lives and prevent further tragedies," Foster wrote in her change.org petition, which she has also promoted on her Instagram page.

Located roughly an hour's drive northeast of Atlanta, Lake Lanier covers nearly 60 square miles (155 square kilometers) and has waters up to 160 feet (49 meters) deep. It's far from just a getaway for millions of boaters, anglers and other yearly visitors.

The lake provides drinking water for about 5 million people, according to the Chattahoochee Riverkeeper conservation group. And Buford Dam at the lake's southern end generates hydroelectric power for the metro Atlanta area.

The Army Corps of Engineers constructed Lake Lanier in the 1950s. The Corps' district office in Mobile, Alabama, which still operates the lake, did not immediately return phone and email messages seeking comment Thursday.

Heavy traffic on the lake has resulted in hundreds of boat collisions in the past three decades, according to the Georgia Department of Natural Resources. The agency reported more than 170 boating and drowning deaths between 1994 and 2018.

Foster and Usher married in 2007 and divorced two years later.

Meteorologists say Earth sizzled to a global heat record in June and July has been getting hotter

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

An already warming Earth steamed to its hottest June on record, smashing the old global mark by nearly a quarter of a degree (0.13 degrees Celsius), with global oceans setting temperature records for the third straight month, the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration announced Thursday.

June's 61.79 degrees (16.55 degrees Celsius) global average was 1.89 degrees (1.05 degrees Celsius) above the 20th Century average, the first time globally a summer month was more than a degree Celsius hotter than normal, according to NOAA. Other weather monitoring systems, such as NASA, Berkeley Earth and Europe's Copernicus, had already called last month the hottest June on record, but NOAA is the gold standard for record-keeping with data going back 174 years to 1850.

The increase over the last June's record is "a considerably big jump" because usually global monthly

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 65 of 79

records are so broad based they often jump by hundredths not quarters of a degree, said NOAA climate scientist Ahira Sanchez-Lugo.

"The recent record temperatures, as well as extreme fires, pollution and flooding we are seeing this year are what we expect to see in a warmer climate," said Cornell University climate scientist Natalie Mahowald. "We are just getting a small taste for the types of impacts that we expect to worsen under climate change."

Both land and ocean were the hottest a June has seen. But the globe's sea surface — which is 70% of Earth's area — has set monthly high temperature records in April, May and June and the North Atlantic has been off the charts warm since mid March, scientists say. The Caribbean region smashed previous records as did the United Kingdom.

The first half of 2023 has been the third hottest January through June on record, behind 2016 and 2020, according to NOAA.

NOAA says there's a 20% chance that 2023 will be the hottest year on record, with next year more likely, but the chance of a record is growing and outside scientists such as Brown University's Kim Cobb are predicting a "photo finish" with 2016 and 2020 for the hottest year on record. Berkeley Earth's Robert Rohde said his group figures there's an 80% chance that 2023 will end up the hottest year on record.

That's because it's likely only to get hotter. July is usually the hottest month of the year, and the record for July and the hottest month of any year is 62.08 degrees (16.71 degrees Celsius) set in both July 2019 and July 2021. Eleven of the first dozen days in July were hotter than ever on record, according to an unofficial and preliminary analysis by University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer. The Japanese Meteorological Agency and the World Meteorological Organization said the world has just gone through its hottest week on record.

NOAA recorded water temperatures around Florida of 98 degrees (36.7 degrees Celsius) on Wednesday near the Everglades and 97 degrees (36.1 degrees Celsius) on Tuesday near the Florida Keys, while some forecasters are predicting near world record level temperatures in Death Valley of around 130 degrees (54.4 degrees Celsius) this weekend.

NOAA global analysis chief Russ Vose said the record hot June is because of two main reasons: long-term warming caused by heat-trapping gases spewed by the burning of coal, oil and natural gas that's then boosted by a natural El Nino, which warms parts of the Pacific and changes weather worldwide adding extra heat to already rising global temperatures. He said it's likely most of June's warming is due to long-term human causes because so far this new El Nino is still considered weak to moderate. It's forecast to peak in the winter, which is why NOAA and other forecasters predict 2024 to be even hotter than this year.

While El Nino and its cooling flip side, La Nina, "have a big impact on year-to-year temperatures, their effects are much smaller over the long run than human-caused warming," said climate scientist Zeke Hausfather of Berkeley Earth and the tech company Stripe. "Back in 1998, the world had a super El Nino event with record global temperatures; today the temperatures of 1998 would be an unusually cool year. Human-driven climate change adds a permanent super El Nino worth of heat to the atmosphere every decade."

Global and Antarctic sea ice levels were at record lows in June, NOAA also said.

"Until we stop burning fossil fuels, this will only get worse," Climate scientist Friederike Otto of the Imperial College of London said in an email. "Heat records will keep getting broken, people and ecosystems are already in many cases beyond what they are able to deal with."

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

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Ons Jabeur is in a second consecutive Wimbledon final. She plays Marketa Vondrousova for the title

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — There was a time — a year ago; six months ago, even — that Ons Jabeur might not have recovered from the deficit she found herself in during the Wimbledon semifinals. Down a set. Down a break in the second set. So close to being just a game from defeat.

She credits a sports psychologist with helping her understand how to deal with those on-court situations, with managing to keep her focus, keep her strokes on-target. Thanks in part to that, and a steadiness down the stretch at Centre Court on Thursday, Jabeur is on her way to a second consecutive final at the All England Club and her third title match in the past five Grand Slam tournaments.

Now she wants to win a trophy. The sixth-seeded Jabeur earned the right to play for one again by beating big-hitting Aryna Sabalenka 6-7 (5), 6-4, 6-3.

"I'm very proud of myself, because maybe old me would have lost the match today and went back home already. But I'm glad that I kept digging very deep and finding the strength," said Jabeur, a 28-year-old from Tunisia who already was the only Arab woman and only North African woman to reach a major final.

"I'm learning to transform the bad energy into a good one," Jabeur said, explaining that she was able to get over the anger she felt after the first set. "Some things I have no control over: She can ace any time. She can hit the big serve, even if I have a break point. That's frustrating a bit. But I'm glad that I'm accepting it and I'm digging deep to just go and win this match — and, hopefully, this tournament."

To do that, Jabeur will need to get past Marketa Vondrousova, a left-hander from the Czech Republic, on Saturday. Vondrousova became the first unseeded women's finalist at Wimbledon since Billie Jean King in 1963 by eliminating Elina Svitolina 6-3, 6-3.

Like Jabeur, Vondrousova has been to a major final before. Like Jabeur, she's never won one, having been the runner-up at the 2019 French Open as a teen.

"We're both hungry," Jabeur said.

So far, Jabeur is 0-2 in Slam finals. She lost to Elena Rybakina at the All England Club last July and to Iga Swiatek at the U.S. Open last September.

Jabeur's win over No. 2 Sabalenka, the Australian Open champion in January, followed victories against three other major title winners: No. 3 Rybakina, No. 9 Petra Kvitova and Bianca Andreescu.

"I want to make my path worth it," Jabeur said.

Thursday's triumph, which came by collecting 10 of the last 13 games, prevented Sabalenka from replacing Swiatek at No. 1 in the rankings.

"I had so many opportunities," said Sabalenka, a 25-year-old from Belarus who was not allowed to compete at Wimbledon last year because all players from her country and from Russia were banned over the war in Ukraine. "Overall, I didn't play my best tennis today. It was just, like, a combo of everything. A little bit of nerves, a little bit of luck for her at some points."

Jabeur trailed 4-2 in the second set when she began to turn things around. But not before Sabalenka came within a point from leading 5-3 after Jabeur put a forehand into the net and fell onto her back on the grass of Centre Court.

She dusted herself off and broke to take that game and begin the comeback. When she delivered a backhand return winner to force the match to a third set, Jabeur held her right index finger to her ear, then raised it and wagged it as she strutted to the changeover.

Sabalenka's shots missed the mark repeatedly. She finished with far more unforced errors than Jabeur: The margins were 14-5 in the last set and 45-15 for the match.

"I was little bit emotionally down, then she was up," said Sabalenka, who hit 10 aces but also double-faulted five times.

A break put Jabeur up 4-2 in the third, but there was still some work to be done. Sabalenka, as powerful a ball-striker as there is on tour, erased four match points before Jabeur converted her fifth with a 103 mph ace.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 67 of 79

In the first semifinal, the 43rd-ranked Vondrousova reeled off seven consecutive games in one stretch against the 76th-ranked Svitolina, who returned from maternity leave just three months ago. After surprisingly beating Swiatek in the quarterfinals, she was trying to become the first woman from Ukraine to make it to the title match at a major tennis tournament.

Svitolina received loud support from thousands in the crowd at the main stadium — Ukraine's ambassador to Britain was in the Royal Box — as applause and yells echoed off the closed roof.

Svitolina says she plays more calmly nowadays, something she attributed to the dual motivations of playing for her baby daughter, who was born in October, and of playing for her home country, where the ongoing war began in February 2022, when Russia invaded with help from Belarus.

"It's a lot of responsibility, a lot of tension. I try to balance it as much as I can. Sometimes it gets maybe too much," Svitolina said. "But I don't want to (make it) an excuse."

Vondrousova missed about six months last season because of two operations on her left wrist. She visited England last year with a cast on that arm to enjoy London as a tourist and to watch her best friend and doubles partner, Miriam Kolodziejova, try to qualify for Wimbledon.

"It's not always easy to come back. You don't know if you can play at this level and if you can be back at the top and back at these tournaments," Vondrousova said. "I just feel like I'm just grateful to be on a court again, to play without pain."

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

In 'Oppenheimer,' Christopher Nolan builds a thrilling, serious blockbuster for adults

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Christopher Nolan has never been one to take the easy or straightforward route while making a movie.

He shoots on large-format film with large, cumbersome cameras to get the best possible cinematic image. He prefers practical effects over computer-generated ones and real locations over soundstages — even when that means recreating an atomic explosion in the harsh winds of the New Mexico desert in the middle of the night for "Oppenheimer," out July 21.

Though, despite internet rumors, they did not detonate an actual nuclear weapon.

And as for the biography that inspired his newest film, Kai Bird and Martin J. Sherwin's riveting, linear narrative "American Prometheus" was simply the starting point from which Nolan crafted a beguiling labyrinth of suspense and drama.

It's why, in his two decades working in Hollywood, Nolan has become a franchise unto himself — the rare auteur writer-director who makes films that are both intellectually stimulating and commercial, accounting for more than \$5 billion in box office receipts. That combination is part of the reason why he's able to attract Oscar winners and movie stars not just to headline his films, but also to turn out for just a scene or two.

"We've all been so intoxicated by his films," said Emily Blunt, who plays J. Robert Oppenheimer's wife, Kitty. "That exploration of huge themes in an entertaining way doesn't happen. It just doesn't happen. That depth, the depth of the material, and yet on this massive epic scale."

In the vast and complex story of the brilliant theoretical physicist who oversaw the Manhattan Project and the development of the atomic bomb during World War II, Nolan saw exciting possibilities to play with genre and form. There was the race to develop it before the Germans did, espionage, romance, domestic turmoil, a courtroom drama, bruised egos, political machinations, communist panic, and the burden of having created something that could destroy the world.

And then there was the man himself, beloved by most but hated by enough, who, after achieving icon status in American society, saw his reputation and sense of self annihilated by the very institutions that built him.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 68 of 79

"It's such an ambitious story to tell," said Matt Damon, who plays Gen. Leslie Groves Jr. "Reading the script, I had the same feeling I had when I read 'Interstellar,' which was: 'This is great. How the hell is he going to do this?'"

It's not so disconnected from Nolan's other films, either. As critic Tom Shone noted in his book about the director, "Looked at one way, Nolan's films are all allegories of men who first find their salvation in structure only to find themselves betrayed or engulfed by it."

Nolan turned to Cillian Murphy to take on the gargantuan task of portraying Oppenheimer. Murphy had already acted in five Nolan films, including the Batman trilogy, "Dunkirk" and "Inception," but this would be his first time as a lead — something he had secretly pined for.

"You feel a responsibility, but then a great hunger and excitement to try and do it, to see where you can get," said Murphy, who prepped extensively for six months before filming, working closely with Nolan throughout. "It was an awful lot of work, but I loved it. There is this kind of frisson, this energy when you're on a Chris Nolan set about the potential for what you're going to achieve."

It would be an all-consuming role that would require some physical transformation to approximate that famously thin silhouette. A complex, contradictory figure, Oppenheimer emerged from a somewhat awkward youth to become a renaissance man who seemed to carry equal passion for the Bhagavad Gita, Proust, physics, languages, New Mexico, philosophical questions about disarmament and the perfectly mixed martini. But Murphy knew he was in safe hands with Nolan.

"He's the most natural director I've ever worked with. And the notes that he gives to an actor, are quite remarkable. How he can gently bring you to a different place with your performance is quite stunning in such a subtle, low-key, understated way," Murphy said. "It can have a profound effect on the way you look at a scene from one take to another take."

Nolan wrote the main timeline of the film in the first person, to represent Oppenheimer's subjective experience.

"We want to see everything through Oppenheimer's point of view," Nolan said. "That's a huge challenge for an actor to take on because they're having to worry about the performance, the truth of the performance, but also make sure that that's always open to the audience."

The other timeline, filmed in black and white, is more objective and focused on Lewis Strauss (Robert Downey Jr.), a founding member of the Atomic Energy Commission and a supporter of the development of the more destructive hydrogen bomb.

"Oppenheimer" is Nolan's first R-rated film since 2002's "Insomnia," which after years of working exclusively in PG-13, he's comfortable with. It fits the gravity of the material.

"We're dealing with the most serious and adult story you could imagine — very important, dramatic events that changed the world and defined the world we live in today," Nolan said. "You don't want to compromise in any way."

Much of the filming took place in New Mexico, including at the real Los Alamos laboratory where thousands of scientists, technicians and their families lived and worked for two years in the effort to develop the bomb. Nolan enlisted many of his frequent behind-the-scenes collaborators, including his wife and producer Emma Thomas, cinematographer Hoyte Van Hoytema, composer Ludwig Göransson and special effects supervisors Scott Fisher and Andrew Jackson, as well as some newcomers like production designer Ruth de Jong and costume designer Ellen Mirojnick to help bring this world to life.

"It was a very focused set — fun set as well, not too serious. But the work was serious, the sweating of the details was serious," Blunt said. "Everyone needs to kind of match Chris' excellence, or want to."

When it came to recreating the Trinity test, Oppenheimer's chosen name for the first nuclear detonation, art and life blended in a visceral way.

"We wanted to put the audience there in that bunker," Nolan said. "That meant really trying to make these things as beautiful and frightening and awe inspiring as they would have been to the people at the time."

Though no real nukes were used, they did stage a lot of real explosions to approximate the blindingly bright atomic fire and mushroom cloud.

"To do those safely in a real environment out in the nighttime desert, there's a degree of discipline and

focus and adrenaline and just executing that for the film that echoes and mirrors what these guys went through on the grandest scale in a really interesting way," Nolan said. "I felt everybody had that very, very tight sense of tension and focus around all those shooting nights."

The weather also "did what it needed to do, as per history," Murphy said, as the wind picked up and whipped around the set.

"I'm rumored to be very lucky with the weather and it's not the case. It's just that we decide to shoot whatever the weather," Nolan said. "In the case of the Trinity test, it was essential, central to the story that this big storm rolls in with tremendous drama. And it did. That really made the sequence come to life."

He added: "The extremity of it put me very much in the mindset of what it must have been like for these guys. It really felt like we were out in it."

Then, of course, there is the experience of watching "Oppenheimer."

"When you're making a movie, I feel like you're on the inside looking out," Blunt said. "It's really overwhelming to see it reflected back at you, especially one of this magnitude. ... I just felt like my breastplate was going to shatter, it was so intense."

The hope is that when "Oppenheimer" is unleashed on the world, audiences will be as invested and will seek it out on the biggest screen they can find. The film has a run in IMAX theaters around the country, not something often afforded serious-minded, R-rated movies in the middle of the busy summer season. But this is also the essential Nolan impossibility. As more and more auteurs have had to compromise — to either go smaller or team with streamers to get the kind of budget they might once have had at studios, like even Ridley Scott and Martin Scorsese have had to do this year — Nolan continues to make his movies on the grandest scale.

"Each of his films has been revolutionary in their own way," Murphy said. "It's an event every time he releases a film, and rightly so."

Top general's dismissal reveals new crack in Russian military leadership

MOSCOW (AP) — A Russian general in charge of forces fighting in southern Ukraine has been relieved of his duties after speaking out about problems faced by his troops, a move that reflected new fissures in the military command following a brief rebellion by mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin.

Maj. Gen. Ivan Popov, the commander of the 58th army in the Zaporizhzhia region, which is a focal point in Ukraine's counteroffensive, said in an audio statement to his troops released Wednesday night that he was dismissed after a meeting with the military brass in what he described as a "treacherous" stab in the back to Russian forces in Ukraine.

Popov said the military leadership was angered by his frank talk about challenges faced by his forces, particularly the shortage of radars tracking enemy artillery, which resulted in massive Russian casualties.

"The top officers apparently saw me as a source of threat and rapidly issued an order to get rid of me, which was signed by the defense minister in just one day," he said. "The Ukrainian military has failed to break through our army's defenses, but the top commander hit us in the rear, treacherously and cowardly beheading the army at this most difficult moment."

Popov, who uses the call name "Spartacus," addressed his troops as "my gladiators" in the audio message released by retired Gen. Andrei Gurulev, who commanded the 58th army in the past and currently serves as a lawmaker. The 58th army consists of several divisions and smaller units.

The 48-year-old Popov, who has risen from platoon commander to lead a large group of forces, has encouraged his soldiers to come directly to him with any problems — an easygoing approach that contrasted sharply with the stiff formal style of command common in the Russian military. Russian military bloggers say he's widely known for avoiding unnecessary losses — unlike many other commanders who were eager to sacrifice their soldiers to report successes.

"I faced a difficult situation with the top leadership when I had to either keep silent and act like a coward,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 70 of 79

saying what they wanted to hear, or call things by their names," Popov said. "I didn't have the right to lie for the sake of you and our fallen comrades."

Many military bloggers argued that Popov's dismissal eroded troop morale at a time of relentless Ukrainian attacks. One blogger, Vladislav Shurygin, said it has dealt a "terrible blow to the entire army," while another, Roman Saponkov, described it as a "monstrous terror attack against the army's morale."

In a sign that many in Russian officialdom share Popov's criticism of the military leadership, Andrei Turchak, the first deputy speaker of the upper house of parliament and head of the main Kremlin party United Russia, strongly backed the general, saying that "the Motherland can be proud of such commanders."

Andrei Kartapolov, a retired general who heads the defense affairs committee in the lower house, also said the Defense Ministry should deal with the issues raised by Popov.

News of Popov's dismissal added to the blow that Russian troops received when another senior officer, Lt. Gen. Oleg Tsokov, was killed Tuesday by a Ukrainian missile strike.

Popov's remarks about the need to rotate his exhausted troops that have been fighting the Ukrainian counteroffensive since early June, reportedly angered General Staff chief Gen. Valery Gerasimov, who shrugged them off as panicky and promptly ordered his dismissal.

Gerasimov was shown meeting with military officers Monday in a video released by the Defense Ministry, the first time he was seen since last month's abortive rebellion by Prigozhin, who had demanded his ouster. The uproar fueled by Popov's dismissal could further erode the position of Gerasimov, who has faced broad criticism for his conduct of the fighting in Ukraine.

Pro-Kremlin political analyst Sergei Markov noted that Popov's statement echoed criticism of the top brass by Prigozhin. However, he added that the general's statement wasn't a rebellion, but instead a call for intervention by President Vladimir Putin.

"Such public disputes at the top of the Russian army isn't a show of force," he said.

During the June 24 revolt that lasted less than 24 hours, mercenaries from Prigozhin's Wagner Group quickly swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there without firing a shot before driving to within about 200 kilometers (125 miles) of Moscow.

Prigozhin called his mercenaries back to their camps after striking a deal to end the rebellion in exchange for an amnesty for him and his mercenaries and permission to move to Belarus.

The rebellion represented the biggest threat to Putin in his more than two decades in power and badly dented his authority, even though Prigozhin said the uprising wasn't aimed against the president but intended to force the ouster of Gerasimov and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu. The Wagner chief was harshly critical of their conduct of how they have conducted the action in Ukraine.

On Monday, the Kremlin confirmed Prigozhin and 34 of his top officers met with Putin on June 29, a startling announcement that raised new questions about the terms of the deal with Wagner. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Wagner's commanders pledged loyalty to Putin and said they were ready "to continue to fight for the Motherland."

Putin has said Wagner troops had to choose whether to sign contracts with the Defense Ministry, move to Belarus or retire from service. While details of the deal remain murky, uncertainty also has surrounded the fate of Gen. Sergei Surovikin, the deputy commander of the Russian group of forces fighting in Ukraine who reportedly had been detained for questioning about his ties to Prigozhin.

Speaking in Helsinki on Thursday after a NATO summit, U.S. President Joe Biden said he is not certain about what fate awaits Prigozhin.

"I'm not even sure where he is," Biden said. "If I were he, I'd be careful what I ate, I'd be keeping an eye on my menu. But all kidding aside ... I don't know. I don't think any of us know for certain what the future of Prigozhin is in Russia."

The Defense Ministry said Wednesday that mercenaries of the Wagner Group were completing the handover of their weapons to the Russian military, part of the Kremlin's efforts to defuse the threat it posed.

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

Religious freedom vs. 'gray water.' AP explains ruling favoring Amish families who shun septic tanks

By MARGERY A. BECK and STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

A long-running religious freedom case has come full circle, with a court ruling this week that a deeply conservative Amish community in Minnesota cannot be threatened with the loss of homes if its members don't install septic systems to dispose of their bath, laundry and dish water.

The state Court of Appeals on Monday found that members of the Swartzentruber Amish community in southeastern Minnesota don't need to install septic systems to dispose of "gray water," which is dirty water left from dishwashing, laundry, bathing, and other tasks not involving toilet waste. Two years ago, the U.S. Supreme Court reversed court rulings that had required the group to install septic tanks.

The Supreme Court ruling said governments can infringe on sincerely held religious beliefs only as a last resort and sent the case back to Minnesota, where the appellate panel ruled that state and local officials "failed to demonstrate a compelling state interest" to justify overriding the Amish families' religious freedom.

Here's a look at the legal dispute and the traditionalist religious community at the root of it.

Who are the Swartzentruber Amish?

The Amish are a Christian religious group that, based on its religious beliefs, shuns many modern technologies like electric and gas-powered machinery. Members are likely most recognizable by their use of horse-and-buggy transportation. There are more than 360,000 Amish in the U.S., and at least 32 states had an Amish population as of 2022, concentrated in the Midwest and East Coast states.

The Swartzentruber Amish are among the most restrictive concerning the use of technologies and eschew everything from tractors and refrigeration to phones and flushing toilets.

What is the dispute?

It's essentially about plumbing — specifically, the disposal of gray water. The Swartzentruber Amish do not have modern running water in their homes. Water arrives through a single line and is either pumped by hand or delivered by gravity from an external cistern.

In 2013, Fillmore County adopted an ordinance requiring most homes to have a septic system for the disposal of gray water. The Amish community sought an exemption "in the name of our Lord," explaining that their religion forbids the use of such technology. They also offered an alternative used in more than a dozen other states that would allow them to funnel gray water from their homes by pipes to earthen basins filled with wood chips to filter solids and grease from the water as it drains, similar to how a septic system would work.

But the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency refused, and filed an administrative enforcement action against 23 Amish families in Fillmore County, threatening criminal penalties, civil fines and even to force them from their homes if they didn't comply. State officials presented testimony from an expert in court that said the mulch basins would not be as effective and that the mulch would quickly clog with solids and grease, requiring frequent relocating of new mulch pits.

State courts acknowledged that the requirement for septic tanks systems burdened the Amish community's religious beliefs. But the courts also found that septic systems — not mulch basins — would be the least-restrictive means for the Amish families to meet the government's interest in protecting public health and the environment.

The case made it all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court in 2021, which found that Minnesota courts overstepped. It said the burden was on the government to prove that the mulch basins wouldn't work, not on the Amish to show they would. And it sent the case back to the Minnesota courts for reconsideration. Justice Neil Gorsuch wrote that if "the government can achieve its interests in a manner that does not burden religion, it must do so."

Is gray water really a problem?

Gray water is more hazardous to public health than it might sound, wastewater treatment expert Sara

Heger testified in the lawsuit over the Fillmore County septic system requirement.

Heger, a researcher at the University of Minnesota, acknowledged that gray water is less dangerous than toilet waste, or "black water." But gray water carries contaminants such as human fecal material, harmful bacteria and viruses, and a variety of chemicals, commercial soaps and detergents that contain nitrogen and phosphorous that pose environmental problems.

"Whatever might make you sick, that's also present in the gray water," she said.

The lower courts also found that while mulch basins may work in other states, the topography of Fillmore County — including fissures, fractures and sinkholes in the area's limestone bedrock — lends to more rapid travel of wastewater to ground and surface water than in other places.

If dumping gray water is occasional — like washing a car or wastewater by hunters and anglers — it poses very little risk, experts said. But large families produce much more wastewater where they live, testified Brandon Montgomery, with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency.

An attorney for the families, Brian Lipford, argued that it made little sense for the state to target his clients over gray water disposal when it allows their use of outhouses — where residents essentially relieve themselves in a hole dug into the ground.

But state officials argued there are already regulations in place governing outhouses that require them to be a certain distance from wells and other sources of water. It's the addition of water in wastewater, they argued, that has the potential to spread contaminants much further.

Is there a next step in the court fight?

Fillmore County Attorney Brett Corson is hoping to decide in the coming days whether to appeal to the Minnesota Supreme Court. He has 30 days from Monday's ruling to decide.

"We're just taking the chance to digest the decision and consider what we're going to do," he said.

Officials with the Minnesota Pollution Control Agency did not immediately respond to a request for comment on whether they'll appeal.

Corson said he recognizes the issue is important to both the county and to the Amish.

"In a county like ours, the Amish community is a big part of our community," he said. "They're our neighbors and friends. We work together. It's one of those things we have to make a solid decision on."

Russian lawmakers move to further restrict transgender rights in new legislation

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russian lawmakers on Thursday approved a toughened version of a bill that outlaws gender transitioning procedures, with added clauses that annul marriages in which one person has "changed gender" and bar transgender people from becoming foster or adoptive parents.

The bill received swift, unanimous approval of Russia's lower house of parliament, the State Duma, in its key second reading, and lawmakers scheduled the third and final reading for Friday. There is little doubt that the bill, a crippling blow to Russia's oppressed LGBTQ+ community, will be adopted amid the Kremlin's crusade to protect what it views as the country's "traditional values."

The bill bans any "medical interventions aimed at changing the sex of a person," as well as changing one's gender in official documents and public records.

New clauses added to the bill also amend Russia's Family Code by listing gender change as a reason to annul a marriage and adding those "who had changed gender" to a list of people who can't become foster or adoptive parents.

Lawmakers portray the measure as protecting Russia from "the Western anti-family ideology," with some describing gender transitioning as "pure satanism."

It has rattled the country's transgender community and has drawn criticism not only from LGBTQ+ rights advocates but from the medical community as well.

Lyubov Vinogradova, executive director of Russia's Independent Psychiatric Association, called the bill

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 73 of 79

"misanthropic" in an interview with The Associated Press. Gender transitioning procedures "shouldn't be banned entirely, because there are people for whom it is the only way to ... to exist normally and find peace with themselves," Vinogradova said in a phone interview.

The crackdown on LGBTQ+ people started a decade ago, when President Vladimir Putin first proclaimed a focus on "traditional family values," a move ardently supported — and fueled, to a certain extent — by the Russian Orthodox Church.

In 2013, the Kremlin adopted the first legislation restricting LGBTQ+ rights, known as the "gay propaganda" law that banned any public endorsement of "nontraditional sexual relations" among minors. In 2020, Putin pushed through a constitutional reform that outlawed same-sex marriage.

But the authorities ramped up their rhetoric about protecting the country from what it called the West's "degrading" influence after sending troops into Ukraine last year, in what rights advocates saw as an attempt to legitimize the war.

Lawmakers moved last year to ban "propaganda of nontraditional sexual relations" among adults. That initiative was quickly rubber-stamped, and by December 2022, any positive or even neutral representation of LGBTQ+ people in movies, literature or media was outlawed.

The bill to severely restrict trans rights came a few months after that.

Vinogradova was among two dozen lawyers, activists and psychiatrists who put their names to a review of the bill that deemed it unnecessary and harmful. The document pointed that the bill goes against Russia's existing laws, including its constitution.

Existing Russian regulations view gender transitioning procedures as medical treatment for "transsexualism," a psychiatric condition in accordance with the 10th version of the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems, a medical classification list by the World Health Organization that Russia follows.

So to ban gender transitioning procedures is to deprive people diagnosed with the condition of medical help in violation of the constitution and other Russian laws, according to the review.

"(Medical) professionals we're talking to believe it is absolutely unacceptable," Vinogradova said.

She rejected the state narrative that gender transitioning is something imposed on Russia by the West and noted that studies of transgender issues were being conducted since the 1960s in the Soviet Union, "and it was normal, no one was concerned by it, but now, it turns out, goes against our traditional values."

An online petition against the bill by Yana Kirey-Sitnikova, a transgender studies researcher, also mentions that gender-affirming care was available in the Soviet Union since the late 1960s and that transgender people were able to change gender markers in official documents as early as the 1920s.

"Medical and legal assistance to transgender people has a long history in the Soviet Union and Russia," said the petition, signed by over 7,200 people to date. It warned of "serious deterioration in the health and well-being of transgender people" if such assistance ceases to exist.

Nef Cellarius, coordinator of the peer counselling program at the LGBTQ+ rights group Coming Out, told AP that already high depression rates and suicide thoughts are likely to spike among transgender people once the bill is adopted. Another negative consequence of that could be the emergence of an unregulated black market of gender-affirming care, he said in a phone interview from Lithuania.

The new provisions on annulling marriages and banning adoption or guardianship over children leaves transgender people even more vulnerable, Cellarius said.

In some previous cases, officials did demand that a couple divorce before changing gender in documents, if such a change could lead to a same-sex marriage, which are illegal in Russia; but some were able to keep their marriage certificate, the activist said. Now all marriages in which one or both people have changed gender would be annulled.

There is one new provision, however, that might leave the window open for some transgender people, according to human rights lawyer Max Olenichev, who works with the Russian LGBTQ+ community. It allows for a "transitional period" for those who have undergone gender-affirming surgery but haven't yet changed gender in official documents to do so, Olenichev told AP in an interview from Prague.

"These transitional provisions will remain in place for an indefinite period of time, and people will be able to use them," Olenichev said, adding that even with this provision in place, "in essence, gender transitioning in Russia is banned."

Mass grave with at least 87 bodies found in Sudan's volatile Darfur region, United Nations says

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The bodies of dozens of people allegedly killed by Sudanese paramilitary forces and an allied militia have been uncovered in a mass grave in West Darfur, the United Nations said Thursday.

According to "credible information" obtained by the U.N. Human Rights Office, at least 87 people — some of them from the ethnic African Masalit tribe — were killed by the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and an affiliated Arab militia. Their bodies were dumped in a one-meter (around three-foot) grave just outside the West Darfur city of Geneina, the agency said.

Sudan has been rocked by violence since mid-April when tensions between the military and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces erupted into open fighting.

Darfur has been one of the epicenters of the 12-week conflict, morphing into an arena of ethnic violence with the paramilitary troops and allied Arab militias attacking the Masalit and other African ethnic groups.

The first 37 bodies were buried in the shallow grave on June 20, the U.N. agency said in a statement from Geneva. The next day, another 50 bodies were dumped at the same site. Seven women and seven children were among those buried.

RSF and Arab militia forced local residents to bury the bodies, the U.N. agency said. The killings took place between June 13 and June 21 in the Al-Madaress and Al-Jamarek districts of the city, following the violence that erupted in the aftermath of the assassination of West Darfur's governor, it added.

The governor, Khamis Abdalla Abkar, had accused the RSF and allied militias of attacking local communities across Geneina in an interview with Saudi-owned television station, Al-Hadath. Hours later he was abducted and killed under circumstances that remain unclear.

Over the past two months, the paramilitary and their allies rampaged through West Darfur, forcing hundreds of thousands to flee their homes, rights groups say. Just over 238,000 people have crossed the border into neighboring Chad, according to recent figures from the International Organization for Migration. Amid the pillaging, entire towns and villages in the province of West Darfur have been burned to the ground and looted.

News of the mass grave comes just days after Human Rights Watch called for the International Criminal Court to investigate atrocities in Darfur. In highlighting its call, it pointed to the "summary executions" of at least 28 Masalit tribesmen at the hands of RSF and allied Arab militias in the town of Misterei, also in West Darfur province.

The New York-based rights group said that several thousand members of the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces and their allies rampaged through Misterei on May 28 armed with assault rifles, rocket-propelled grenades and machine guns, before slaughtering its Masalit male inhabitants. A total of 97 people were killed in the attack, it said.

Darfur had been the scene of genocidal war in the early 2000s, when ethnic Africans rebelled, accusing the Arab-dominated government in Khartoum of discrimination. Former dictator Omar al-Bashir's government was accused of retaliating by arming local nomadic Arab tribes, known as Janjaweed, who targeted civilians.

JanJaweed fighters were folded into the RSF.

Associated Press writer Jamey Keaten contributed to this report from Geneva.

Little-known but efficient, a different way to heat and cool your house

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY Associated Press

Summers are famously humid in New York State, but life in the Maioli household has gotten more comfortable since the couple installed a new heating and cooling system — one that isn't well known yet in the U.S.

"My wife is pretty happy because in the summer we can keep it to as cold as we like," typically 69 or 70 F, said Joe Maioli, in Ontario, New York. In 2021, the couple installed a geothermal or ground source heat pump.

The units you see that look like box fans outside homes and businesses are the more common air-source heat pumps. They wring energy out of outdoor air for heat and soak up excess heat indoors and move it out when they're cooling. Geothermal heat pumps use underground temperatures, instead of outdoor air.

A major push is now underway to get people to consider ground-source heat pumps because they use far less electricity than other heating and cooling methods. "Ground-source heat pumps average about 30 percent less electricity use than air-source heat pumps over the course of the heating season," said Michael Waite, senior manager in the buildings program at the American Council for an Energy Efficient Economy.

"Cooling the house for a month is maybe \$10 worth of electricity, and this is the most efficient way to do it," said Maioli. During the coldest winter month, their highest heating bill was around \$70, he said.

To install ground-source systems, contractors bring in heavy equipment and drill to bury a loop of flexible piping several hundred feet deep in your yard. Water flowing through the loop takes advantage of the underground temperature, a pretty stable 55 F.

Indoors, often in the basement, a unit contains refrigerant — a fluid that can easily absorb a lot of heat. In summer, the water in the loop dumps heat into the ground. In winter, it pulls heat from the earth with amazing efficiency and moves it indoors.

"We really feel like we're on the right side of a megatrend," said Tim Litton, director of marketing communications for WaterFurnace, a geothermal manufacturer in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

With the better known air-source heat pumps, Litton said, outdoor parts can ice over in winter. Then the system has to pull heat from indoors to thaw them. There's also dirt, animals and debris.

WaterFurnace systems can be put in yards as small as 15 by 15 feet, he said. But the drilling rigs can't get in where homes are really close together.

There is "a lot of demand for geothermal right now," Mark Schultz, president of Earth River Geothermal in Maryland said, and the interest in reducing carbon emissions is a big motivator for customers. "They have electric vehicles in the driveway and solar panels on the roof," he said of the sites he goes out to bid.

In the Midwest, Litton sees a broad range of buyers. "We kind of span the entire political spectrum — whether you're a progressive environmentalist or a fiscal conservative," he said. "It's kind of nice in these divisive times to have something to agree on," he said.

The sticker prices for ground-source are higher than traditional systems. But in a stamp of approval for their efficiency, last year's Inflation Reduction Act highly incentivizes them, with a 30% tax credit. So a customer purchasing a \$30,000 system would end up paying \$21,000. If someone doesn't owe enough taxes in one year to benefit from that, they can carry it over to the next year. Nor is there any dollar limit on the credit, unlike for air-source units, which are capped at a \$2,000.

Some states are offering credits on top of that. In South Carolina, residents get another 25% credit, meaning a homeowner there could end up with a 55% discount off the initial cost. Some utilities offer incentives, too. South Carolina customers who have Blue Ridge Electric Co-op as their utility can get up to \$1,600 per ton for the system they install. A 5-ton heat pump installed in a 2,000 square foot home, for example, would get \$8,000 back from the utility.

People who live in places with cold winters and hot summers reap the biggest savings. Still, leaders at three companies interviewed cited initial cost as a barrier.

Corey Roberts lives on Long Island, NY, and installed a geothermal system made by Dandelion Energy

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 76 of 79

last July. He was renovating and needed a new heater and AC. He was also interested in sustainability. He opted for Dandelion after comparing the costs with a natural gas system.

"I can tell you the house is the coolest it's ever been and the heating is the steadiest we've ever had since we've been living here. We are very happy," Roberts said.

The upfront cost was an eye-popping \$63,500, far more than the \$27,000 natural gas option. But after the 30% federal tax credit plus a \$5,000 state tax credit for geothermal plus a rebate from his electric company, it was about \$32,000.

"Dandelion was only a \$5,000 difference to a conventional system. If you think about how long it takes to recover the costs in savings, it's quite quick," Roberts said.

The new system has attracted the interest of friends and neighbors.

"We have a lot of people on the street asking us how it works and we say it's just like magic. Water moves around a pipe in the ground and voilà, here we are heating and cooling. It's amazing," he said.

Dandelion, born out of a Google innovation lab in 2017, designs, installs, and maintains its own systems in New York, Connecticut, and Massachusetts. CEO Michael Sachse said the inspiration for the company was finding an affordable way to control temperature in the home without contributing to climate change.

"There are three main ways that individuals can reduce their carbon emissions: change what you drive, how much you fly, and how you heat and cool your house," said Sachse. "Particularly if you're in a place where the winters are cold, how you heat your home is going to have an enormous impact."

Dandelion is currently working on a partnership with Lennar Corp, one of the largest home builders in the country and thinks in the future, new homes will be built with geothermal instead of natural gas. He said Dandelion is currently identifying a community "where we can work on 100 or 200 homes at a time."

Litton also sees growth for WaterFurnace. Residential geothermal heat pumps currently make up just 1% of the U.S. heating and cooling market. But they're 20% of the European market, due to a long history of higher fossil fuel prices and more incentives.

Besides the cost, and the yard disruption, there can be permitting delays, partly because some jurisdictions aren't used to geothermal.

One further challenge is invisibility.

"You probably drove by several geothermal installations today and don't even know it because it's all underground," said Litton.

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.

Tourists are packing European hotspots, boosted by Americans

By COLLEEN BARRY Associated Press

VENICE, Italy (AP) — Tourists are waiting more than two hours to visit the Acropolis in Athens. Taxi lines at Rome's main train station are running just as long. And so many visitors are concentrating around St. Mark's Square in Venice that crowds get backed up crossing bridges — even on weekdays.

After three years of pandemic limitations, tourism is expected to exceed 2019 records in some of Europe's most popular destinations this summer, from Barcelona and Rome, Athens and Venice to the scenic islands of Santorini in Greece, Capri in Italy and Mallorca in Spain.

While European tourists edged the industry toward recovery last year, the upswing this summer is led largely by Americans, boosted by a strong dollar and in some cases pandemic savings. Many arrive motivated by "revenge tourism" — so eager to explore again that they're undaunted by higher fares and hotel costs.

Lauren Gonzalez, 25, landed in Rome this week with four high school and college friends for a 16-day romp through the Italian capital, Florence and the seaside after three years of U.S. vacations. They aren't concerned about the high prices and the crowds.

"We kind of saved up, and we know this is a trip that is meaningful," said Gonzalez, who works at a

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 77 of 79

marketing agency. "We are all in our mid-20s. It's a (moment of) change in our lives. ... This is something special. The crowds don't deter us. We live in Florida. We have all been to Disney World in the heat. We are all good."

Americans appear equally unperturbed by recent riots in Paris and other French cities. There was a small drop in flight bookings, but it was mainly for domestic travel.

"Some of my friends said, 'It's a little crazy there right now,' but we thought summer is really a good time for us to go, so we'll just take precautions," Joanne Titus, a 38-year-old from Maryland, said while strolling the iconic Champs-Élysées shopping boulevard.

The return of mass tourism is a boon to hotels and restaurants, which suffered under COVID-19 restrictions. But there is a downside, too, as pledges to rethink tourism to make it more sustainable have largely gone unheeded.

"The pandemic should have taught us a lesson," said Alessandra Priante, director of the regional department for Europe at the U.N. World Tourism Organization.

Instead, she said, the mindset "is about recuperating the cash. Everything is about revenue, about the here and now."

"We have to see what is going to happen in two or three years' time because the prices at the moment are unsustainable," she said.

The mayor of Florence is stopping new short-term apartment rentals from proliferating in the historic center, which is protected as a UNESCO heritage site, as mayors of Italy's other art cities call for a nationwide law to manage the sector.

Elsewhere, the anti-mass tourism movements that were active before the pandemic have not reappeared, but the battle lines are still being drawn: graffiti misdirected tourists in Barcelona away from — instead of toward — the Gaudi-designed Park Guell.

Despite predictable pockets of overtourism, travel to and within Europe overall is still down 10% from 2019, according to the World Tourism Organization. That is partly due to fewer people visiting countries close to the war in Ukraine, including Lithuania, Finland, Moldova and Poland.

In addition, Chinese visitors have not fully returned, with flights from China and other Asia-Pacific countries down 45% from 2019, according to travel data company ForwardKeys.

Tourism-dependent Greece expects 30 million visitors this year, still shy of 2019's 34 million record. Still, the number of flights are up so far, and tourist hotspots are taking the brunt.

The Culture Ministry will introduce a new ticketing system for the Acropolis this month, providing hourly slots for visitors to even out crowds. But no remedy is being discussed for the parking line of cruise ships on the islands of Mykonos and Santorini on busy mornings.

Spain's tourism minister, Héctor Gómez, called it "a historic summer for tourism," with 8.2 million tourists arriving in May alone, breaking records for a second straight month. Still, some hotel groups say reservations slowed in the first weeks of summer, owing to the steep rise in prices for flights and rooms.

Costs are growing as flights from the U.S. to Europe are up 2% from 2019 levels, according to ForwardKeys.

"The rising appetite for long-haul travel from America is the continued result of the 'revenge travel' boom caused by the pandemic lockdowns," said Tim Hentschel, CEO of HotelPlanner, a booking site. "Big cities within these popular European countries are certainly going to be busy during the summer."

Americans have pushed arrivals in Italian bucket-list destinations like Rome, Florence, Venice and Capri above pre-pandemic levels, according to Italy's hotel association, Federalberghi.

They bring a lot of pent-up buying power: U.S. tourists in Italy spent 74% more in tax-free indulgences in the first three months of the year, compared with same period of 2019.

"Then there is the rest of Italy that lives from Italian and European tourism, and at the moment, it is still under 2019 levels," Federalberghi president Bernabo Bocca said.

He expects it will take another year for an across-the-board recovery. An economic slowdown discouraged German arrivals, while Italians "are less prone to spending this year," he said.

And wallets will be stretched. Lodging costs in Florence rose 53% over last year, while Venice saw a 25% increase and Rome a 21% hike, according to the Italian consumer group Codacons.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 78 of 79

Even gelato will cost a premium 21% over last year, due to higher sugar and milk prices.

Perhaps nothing has encouraged the rise in tourism in key spots more than a surge in short-term apartment rentals. With hotel room numbers constant, Bocca of Federalberghi blames the surge for the huge crowds in Rome, inflating taxi lines and crowding crosswalks so that city buses cannot continue their routes.

In Rome and Florence, "walking down the street, out of every building door, emerges a tourist with a suitcase," he said.

While Florence's mayor is limiting the number of short-term rentals in the historic center to 8,000, no action has been taken in Venice. The canal-lined city counts 49,432 residents in its historic center and 49,272 tourist beds, nearly half of those being apartments available for short-term rental.

Inconveniences are "daily," said Giacomo Salerno, a researcher at Venice's Ca' Foscari University focusing on tourism.

It difficult to walk down streets clogged with visitors or take public water buses "saturated with tourists with their suitcases," he said.

Students cannot find affordable housing because owners prefer to cash in with vacation rentals. The dwindling number of residents means a dearth of services, including a lack of family doctors largely due to the high cost of living, driven up by tourist demand.

Venice has delayed plans to charge day-trippers a tax to enter the city, meant to curb arrivals. But activists like Salerno say that will do little to resolve the issue of a declining population and encroaching tourists, instead cementing Venice's fate as "an amusement park."

"It would be like saying the only use for the city is touristic," Salerno said.

AP reporters Aritz Parra in Rome, Derek Gatopoulos in Athens, Ciaran Gilles in Madrid, Angela Charlton in Paris and Kelvin Chan in London contributed.

Today in History: July 14, Billy the Kid shot and killed by Pat Garrett

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 14, the 195th day of 2023. There are 170 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 14, 2004, the Senate scuttled a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage, with 48 senators voting to advance the measure — 12 short of the 60 needed — and 50 voting to block it.

On this date:

In 1789, in an event symbolizing the start of the French Revolution, citizens of Paris stormed the Bastille prison and released the seven prisoners inside.

In 1798, Congress passed the Sedition Act, making it a federal crime to publish false, scandalous or malicious writing about the United States government.

In 1881, outlaw William H. Bonney Jr., alias "Billy the Kid," was shot and killed by Sheriff Pat Garrett in Fort Sumner in present-day New Mexico.

In 1912, American folk singer-songwriter Woody Guthrie was born in Okemah, Oklahoma.

In 1933, all German political parties, except the Nazi Party, were outlawed.

In 1945, Italy formally declared war on Japan, its former Axis partner during World War II.

In 1976, Jimmy Carter won the Democratic presidential nomination at the party's convention in New York.

In 1980, the Republican national convention opened in Detroit, where nominee-apparent Ronald Reagan told a welcoming rally he and his supporters were determined to "make America great again."

In 2009, disgraced financier Bernard Madoff arrived at the Butner Federal Correctional Complex in North Carolina to begin serving a 150-year sentence for his massive Ponzi scheme.

In 2015, world powers and Iran struck a deal to curb Iran's nuclear program in exchange for relief from

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 14, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 020 ~ 79 of 79

international sanctions.

In 2016, terror struck Bastille Day celebrations in the French Riviera city of Nice as a large truck plowed into a festive crowd, killing 86 people in an attack claimed by Islamic State extremists; the driver was shot dead by police.

In 2020, researchers reported that the first COVID-19 vaccine tested in the U.S. revved up people's immune systems as scientists had hoped; the vaccine was developed by the National Institutes of Health and Moderna Inc.

Ten years ago: Thousands of demonstrators across the country protested a Florida jury's decision the day before to clear George Zimmerman in the shooting death of Trayvon Martin. German Chancellor Angela Merkel, in a TV interview, called for tougher European and global rules on data protection amid fallout from recent revelations about U.S. surveillance programs.

Five years ago: Angelique Kerber beat Serena Williams in the women's final for her first Wimbledon title. A firefighter, Braden Varney, was killed while trying to prevent a wildfire near California's Yosemite National Park from spreading. Thousands of people in Scotland staged colorful, peaceful protests against Donald Trump as the U.S. president played golf at his Scottish golf resort at Turnberry ahead of his summit in Finland with Russian President Vladimir Putin.

One year ago: President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid stood side-by-side at a joint news conference and declared they would not allow Iran to become a nuclear power. They parted ways on how to get there, however, with Biden saying he still wanted to give diplomacy a chance while Lapid insisted that words alone wouldn't thwart Tehran's nuclear ambitions. Ivana Trump, the first wife of former President Donald Trump and mother of his three eldest children, died in New York City at age 73. The National Galleries of Scotland said a previously unknown self-portrait of Vincent Van Gogh was discovered behind another of the artist's paintings when experts took an X-ray of the canvas ahead of an upcoming exhibition.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Nancy Olson is 95. Former football player and actor Rosey Grier is 91. Actor Vincent Pastore is 77. Music company executive Tommy Mottola (muh-TOH'-luh) is 75. Rock musician Chris Cross (Ultravox) is 71. Actor Jerry Houser is 71. Actor-director Eric Laneuville is 71. Actor Stan Shaw is 71. Movie producer Scott Rudin is 65. Singer-guitarist Kyle Gass is 63. Actor Jane Lynch is 63. Actor Jackie Earle Haley is 62. Actor Matthew Fox is 57. Rock musician Ellen Reid (Crash Test Dummies) is 57. Rock singer-musician Tanya Donnelly is 57. Former child actor Missy Gold is 53. Olympic gold medal snowboarder Ross Rebagliati is 52. R&B singer Tameka Cottle (Xscape) is 48. Country singer Jamey Johnson is 48. Hip-hop musician "taboo" (Black Eyed Peas) is 48. Actor Scott Porter is 44. Actor/writer/producer Phoebe Waller-Bridge is 38. Rock singer Dan Smith (Bastille) is 37. Actor Sara Canning (TV: "The Vampire Diaries") is 36. Rock singer Dan Reynolds (Imagine Dragons) is 36.