

Groton Daily Independent

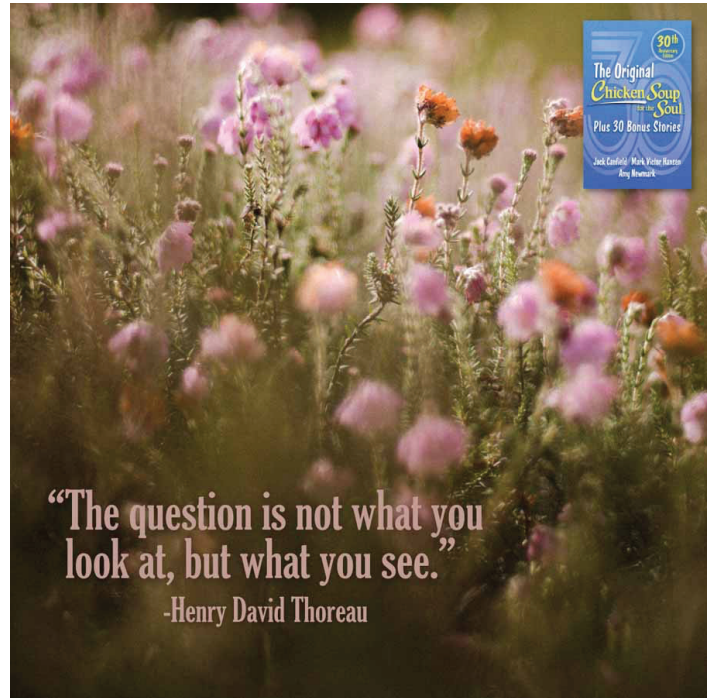
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Saturday, July 15

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. ago 1 p.m.
Jr. Legion at Brookings (vs. Harrison, 1 p.m.; vs. Brookings, 3 p.m.)
U10BB State Tourney in Parker

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



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.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

JULY 10, 2023

World in Brief

killings known as the Gilgo Beach murders. Authorities said Heuermann is facing first- and second-degree murder charges linked to three of the victims.

UPS intends to train nonunion employees who could fill in for union workers if a nationwide strike begins on August 1. The 340,000 workers that Teamsters represents say they will strike if the contract disputes are not resolved by the end of this month.

JetBlue announced it will "wind down" its partnership with American Airlines next week after a federal judge ruled the airlines' business alliance harms industry competition.

Popular artificial sweetener aspartame, widely used in diet 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.

A 20-year-old woman has been arrested on federal drug charges in connection with the death of actor Robert De Niro's grandson, according to AP.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, an explosion at the Ural Electrochemical Combine uranium enrichment plant in the Russian Novourals region on Friday prompted the country's state nuclear corporation to publish a statement to ease fears over a potential nuclear incident.

TALKING POINTS

"Recent revelations in the Twitter Files and Missouri v. Biden show how deeply institutionalized government censorship has become. It is dressed up in euphemisms like, 'working with our partners in tech,' but make no mistake, this is a systematic program to control what Americans can say and think. As such, it is antithetical to democracy. In a democracy, the people tell the government what to think, not the other way around," 2024 Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. said ahead of his anticipated testimony next week at a House select subcommittee hearing.

"We urge the U.S. side to stop being so wound-up and anxious, respect the common aspiration of the international community, stop provoking an arms race, and work with other countries to jointly preserve enduring peace and security in the outer space," Senior Colonel Tan Kefei of China's Ministry of National Defense said while discussing America's alleged "militarization of space."

"This is an inflection point in our industry. Actors and writers in large numbers have lost their ability to make a living. For our industry to survive that has to change. For actors that journey starts now," actor George Clooney told CNN as actors with the SAG-AFTRA union began striking on Friday..

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAY AHEAD

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

On Sunday, Vice President Kamala Harris will be in Chicago to speak at the annual convention hosted by the Rainbow PUSH Coalition, the social justice organization founded by Rev. Jesse Jackson.

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Groton Summer Fest Photos



Pictured here are some of the Groton Lions Club members and volunteers that helped make Summer Fest 2023 a success! Pictured in back, left to right, are Ron and Kathryn Rehfuss, David Pigors, Karyn Babcock, Nancy Larsen and Nancy Radke; in front, left to right, are April Abeln, Topper Tastad and Katelyn Nehlich. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

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Groton Legion Post #39 presented the colors prior to the National Anthem sung by a recording by Julianna Kosel. Pictured are Bruce Babcock and Steve Dresbach. (Photo courtesy April Abeln)

Three food vendors served at Summer Fest- Incredible Edibles, Scott D's and Beauty Brew. (Photos courtesy April Abeln)



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Children enjoyed Jump Zone Inflatables, sponsored by the Groton American Legion Post #39, at Groton's 7th Annual Summer Fest! (Photos courtesy April Abeln)

Over 80 show cars present in the Groton City Park on July 9th for the Groton Lions Club 7th Annual Summer Fest! (Photos courtesy April Abeln)



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Summer Fest church service was presented by Pastor Jetto and members of the C&MA Church. (Photos courtesy April Abel)

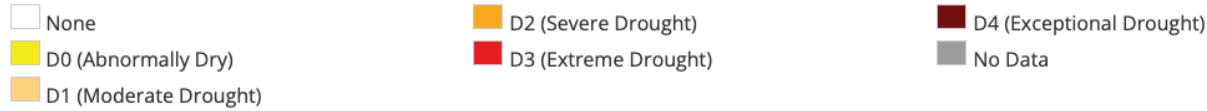
Summer Fest volunteers hard at work! (Photos courtesy April Abel)



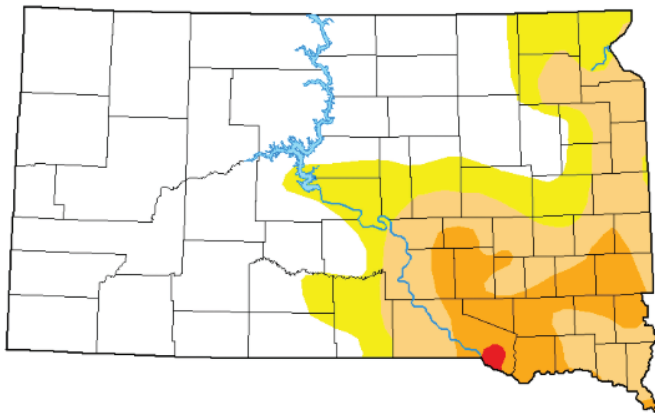
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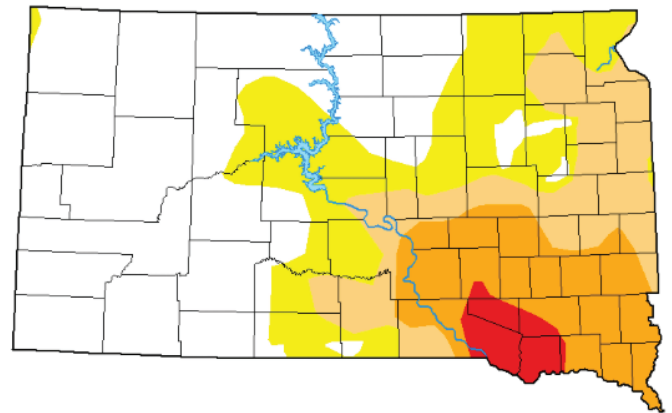
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



July 11



July 4

Heavy rainfall soaked much of south-central and southwestern Kansas, with 4 to locally 8 inches observed in many areas. Significant drought reduction resulted, although some degree of longer-term dryness remained in most locations. Eastern Nebraska, southeastern South Dakota, eastern Colorado, and a few other parts of Kansas received moderate to locally heavy rains, prompting substantial if less-widespread improvement in those areas. In addition, parts of Wyoming continued to benefit from the exceptionally wet and (in higher elevations) snowy winter, so D0 and D1 areas were again whittled down slightly. In contrast, moderate drought (D1) expanded in both the northwestern and northeastern sections of North Dakota, where persistently below-normal precipitation has been observed for the past few months. Although more improvement than deterioration occurred last week, exceptional drought (D4) remained over parts of southeastern Kansas, portions of west-central and north-central Kansas, and a few patches in eastern Nebraska.

Brown County 4-H Fashion Revue Results

The 2023 Brown County 4-H Fashion Revue was held Tuesday July 11 . The event was held at the Brown County 4-H Office. There was one participant this year.

Karelyn Farrand of Aberdeen was the judge. Models are judged on the following criteria: the fit of the garment, the accessories, the individual's modeling ability, the construction of the garment; and the garments cost and care. Each model was given a ribbon placing. All participants are invited to represent Brown County at the South Dakota State Fair as well as during 4-H Night at the Brown County Fair on Thursday, August 17, under the Ken's tent starting at 6:00 pm.

RESULTS:

Senior:

Purple Ribbon: Ashlynn Warrington

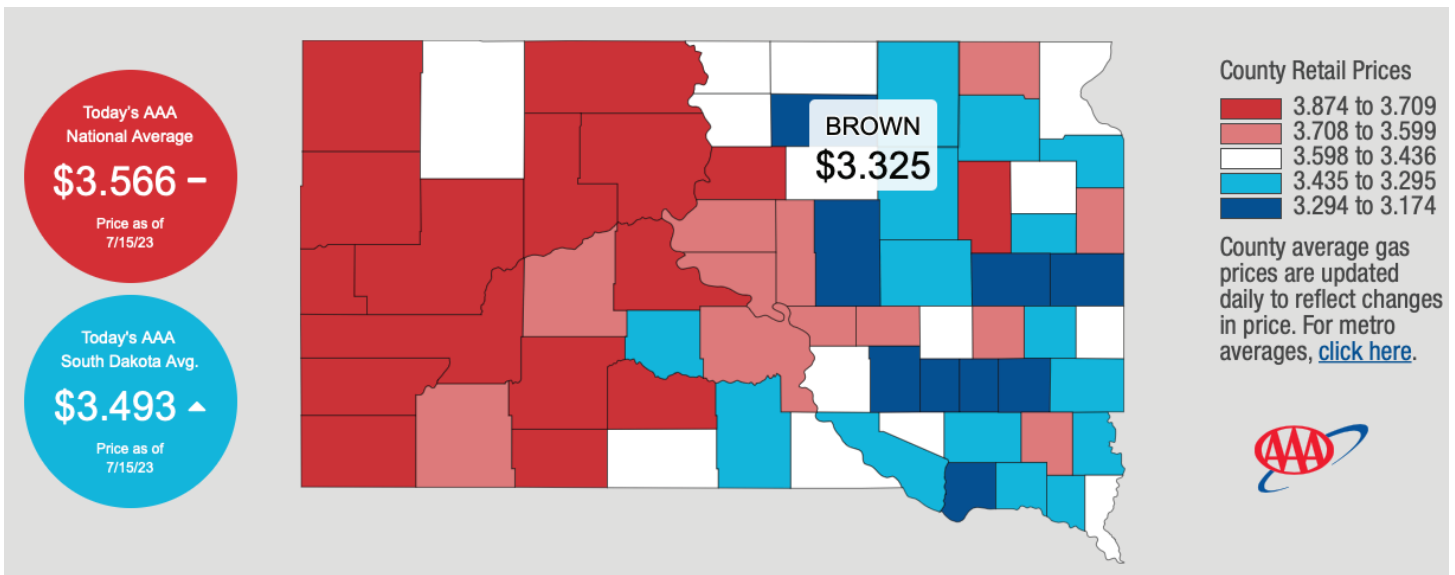
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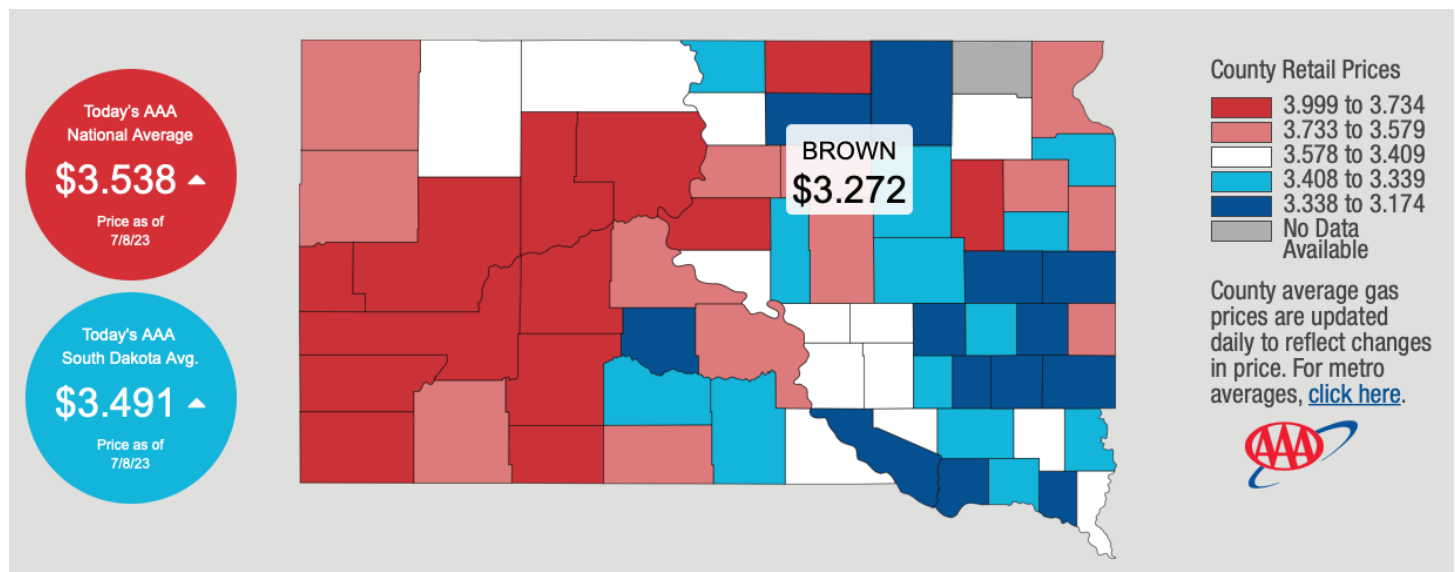
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.493	\$3.658	\$4.129	\$3.671
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.489	\$3.649	\$4.127	\$3.674
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.491	\$3.668	\$4.139	\$3.676
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.445	\$3.615	\$4.063	\$3.733
Year Ago Avg.	\$4.606	\$4.784	\$5.266	\$5.320

This Week

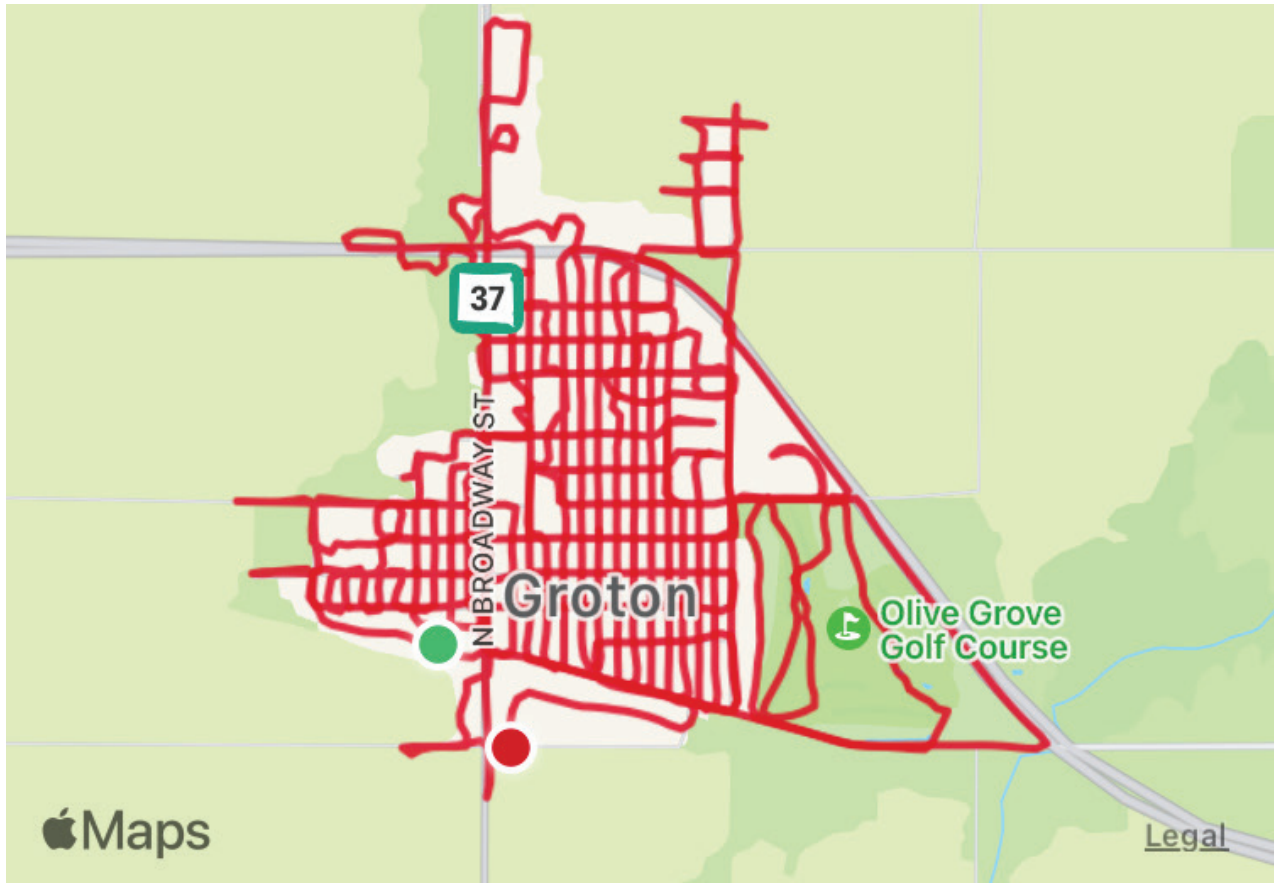


Two Weeks Ago



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Adult mosquito control was conducted Friday night in Groton. The wind was light out of the WNW and temperature was in the mid to upper 60s. 9.4 gallons of Evolver 4x4 was used in the control.

SUMMARY

35.40

Distance
(mi)

3:00:51

Duration

Air quality impacts your health

Avoid spending time outdoors when air quality is poor.



weather.gov/airquality

DANR and DOH Announce Air Quality Alert for South Dakota

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) issued an air quality alert for areas of South Dakota where smoke from wildfires in Canada is forecasted to settle this weekend. The smoke may cause low visibility and increased fine particulate matter (PM2.5) pollution. The South Dakota Department of Health (DOH) advises that these levels may be a concern to public health and provides additional resources to make an informed decision on personal healthcare choices.

The alert is in effect through Saturday, July 15, 2023, or until conditions improve.

Elderly citizens, young children, and individuals with respiratory problems are the most susceptible to the smoke. All people should avoid excessive physical exertion and minimize outdoor activities during periods of low visibility caused by the wildfire smoke. People are also encouraged to keep indoor air clean by closing windows and doors.

Air pollution can aggravate heart and cardiovascular disease as well as lung diseases like asthma and COPD. When the air quality is unhealthy, people with these conditions may experience symptoms like chest pain, shortness of breath, wheezing, coughing, or fatigue. Anyone concerned about health effects related to poor air quality should contact their health care provider.

DANR provides air quality data on the department's website for several locations in South Dakota. Hourly PM2.5 values greater than 35 microgram per cubic meter ($\mu\text{g}/\text{m}^3$) are a concern to public health.

Individuals may track the real time PM2.5 concentrations by visiting DANR's website at <https://denravweb.sd.gov/AirVision/default.aspx> or EPA's website at <https://www.airnow.gov/>.

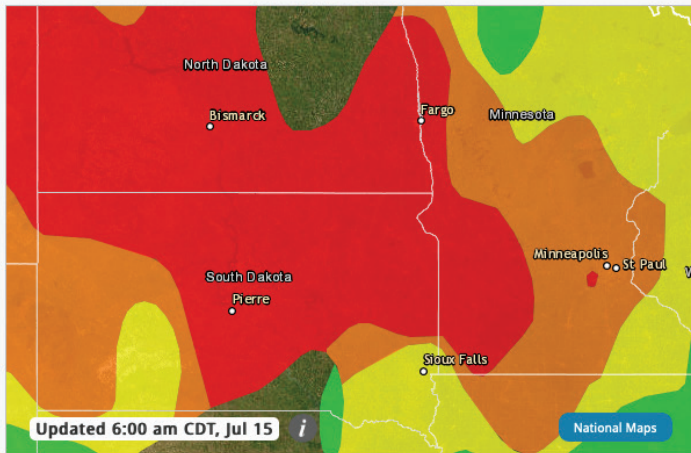
For an easy-to-use outdoor activity and air quality guide created by the EPA and CDC visit <https://www.airnow.gov/sites/default/files/2018-09/air-quality-and-outdoor-activity-guidance-2014.pdf>.

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Current Air Quality



Primary Pollutant
This pollutant currently has the highest AQI in the area.

PM2.5 **157** Unhealthy

People with heart or lung disease, older adults, children and teens – take any of these steps to reduce your exposure:

- Avoid strenuous outdoor activities.
- Keep outdoor activities short.
- Consider moving physical activities indoors or rescheduling them.

Everyone else – take any of these steps to reduce your exposure:

- Choose less strenuous activities (like walking instead of running) so you don't breathe as hard.
- Shorten the amount of time you are active outdoors.
- Be active outdoors when air quality is better.

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**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

July 18, 2023, 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity for Public Comment
4. Discuss possible action on Resolution #33-22 – Moratorium
5. Discuss Resolution on Co2/Eminent Domain
6. Public Hearing for Special Malt Beverage License – SD Snow Queen Festival
7. First Reading of Ordinances #247, #248, #249 & #250 – Rezones
8. Scott Bader, P & Z Director - Approve Planning & Zoning Board Changes & Recognize Darwin Bettmann for 15 years of service
9. Stacy Gossman – Update on buildings and properties at business locations
10. Dirk Rogers, Highway Superintendent – Discuss Federal Local Bridge Program and Dept. Update
11. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes from July 11, 2023
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Travel Requests
 - e. Lottery Permit
 - f. Fireworks Permit
 - g. Set Hearing Date/Authorize Advertising for Alcoholic Beverage Temporary Permits for Special Events
Public Hearing
12. Other Business
13. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
14. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission - Presentations may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board)

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at <https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>

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.

USDA Forest Service invests \$2,040,000 to restore forests, reduce wildfire risk in Colorado, South Dakota, and Wyoming

Good Neighbor Authority leverages state and Bipartisan Infrastructure Law funds to accomplish critical work on national forests and grasslands

LAKEWOOD, Colorado, July 14, 2023 – Today, the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s Forest Service announced that it is investing \$2,040,000 in projects to reduce wildfire risk and restore healthy forests through the Good Neighbor Authority.

Made possible by the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, the investments will fund the following projects:

Colorado:

- San Isabel National Forest - Goals are to reduce hazardous fuels around Blue and Bear Lake Campground area. \$75,000
- White River National Forest – The primary purpose is to reduce fuel loading adjacent to private/county lands providing defensible space to communities and firefighter safety in the Boulder Creek and Frisco Backyard project areas. \$1,015,000
- White River National Forest - Funds will be used to reduce fuel loading across a landscape affected by mountain pine beetle epidemic. Improve forest resiliency by increasing age class and forest structure diversity at the stand level in the Swan Mountain project area. \$20,000

South Dakota:

- Black Hills National Forest - This funding will support a state forester who can assist with timber sale preparation, as well as resource surveys for upcoming projects. Additionally, it will enable the State of South Dakota to facilitate access to hard-to-reach Forest Service parcels that need vegetation treatment. \$480,000

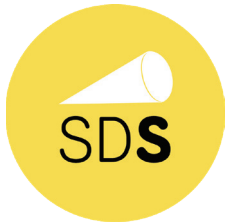
Wyoming:

- Bighorn National Forest – The project will fund a Wyoming State Forestry Department seasonal forester position to provide the Forest Service assistance from the State of Wyoming. The State of Wyoming will provide forestry personnel to assist with the pre-National Environmental Policy Act silviculture work, implementation of timber sales, and implementation of timber stand improvement activities. \$150,000
- Medicine Bow/Routt National Forest - The primary purpose of the Sandstone North project is to reduce hazardous fuels around private property and along Hwy 70, which is a major wildfire suppression fuel break in the Sierra Madre Range. This project also serves to enhance the aspen stands and associated wildlife habitat in the area. \$300,000

“We look forward to working with our state partners on these projects. In the Rocky Mountain Region, the work will primarily focus on reducing hazardous fuels and assisting with timber sale preparation,” said Regional Forester Frank Beum, “and combined, all of the projects will enhance forest and watershed health while providing job opportunities in rural communities.”

Working with states through collaboratives and Good Neighbor Authority agreements strengthen partnerships, enhance shared stewardship, and prioritize and advance work to improve forests conditions and protect communities based on state and federal management plans.

Established by Congress in 2014, Good Neighbor Authority provides the Forest Service a simple and straightforward way to enter into management agreements with states, tribes and counties. Today, the Good Neighbor Authority is essential in pooling federal, state, Tribal, and county resources to complete more forest, rangeland, and watershed restoration work on national forests and grasslands.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

International hires & 'grow your own' programs: Schools seek solutions to teacher shortage

Work visas bring dozens of Filipino educators to some districts

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 14, 2023 4:10 PM

Oglala Lakota County schools had zero applications for more than 25 open teacher positions earlier this year.

Superintendent Connie Kaltenbach said the school district advertised the positions for months locally, across the state and nationally. But there weren't any bites.

So she turned to the international market. Starting this fall, 26 Filipino teachers will join the southwestern South Dakota school district — which is roughly 14% of the current certified staff in the district.

Oglala Lakota isn't the only school district in the state to turn up zero applicants for a teaching position. Schools across the state — ranging from rural districts to larger schools — face a teacher shortage.

As of the end of June, the South Dakota Teacher Placement Center showed 410 teacher openings in the state were unfilled. Nearly 70 of those positions were for special education or early childhood education positions. South Dakota had 10,699 public school teachers in 2022, according to the National Center for Education Statistics.

If districts don't fill those positions, they could be forced to increase student to teacher ratios, which could risk safety and increase stress in classrooms; fill classrooms with teaching aids to step in for qualified teachers; or close and consolidate schools throughout the district.

"It's like going to the doctor and sitting in the ER hoping to get cured, but a doctor never shows up," said Rob Monson, executive director of School Administrators of South Dakota. "You might get a nurse, but you don't actually have that experienced, trained and certified doctor you were expecting."

School districts, state agencies and educators across South Dakota are taking steps to address the teacher shortage — both immediately and in the long term. Methods include hiring teachers internationally, offering workforce housing in rural and tribal areas, encouraging applications to a state program to convert paraprofessionals into teachers, and recruiting high school students to enter the teaching profession.

But Monson described those as "stopgap measures."

More needs to be done to regain respect for the profession in South Dakota — including removing political pressures on teachers and administrators, and competing with surrounding states regarding teacher salaries and money invested in schools, Monson said.

Any of those efforts will likely take a decade before South Dakota starts to make headway on its teacher shortage, he added.

"There is no silver bullet in any of this," Monson said. "It's a lot of different ideas and plans and trial and error."

Professional work visas offer short term solution for teacher needs

The Filipinos starting at Oglala Lakota this year aren't the only international teachers in the state. Dozens are used in other school districts such as Todd, Bennett and Sisseton.

The international hires have been a resource used by public and private schools for years through the J-1 visa program, which is a cultural exchange program allowing international college students, researchers, teachers and other professionals to live and work in the United States for a limited amount of time. Teachers are allowed up to five years in the United States. There is no cap on the number of J-1 visas the country awards each year.

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At Oglala Lakota, the school district hires the teachers through a third party company, Teach Quest — at no cost to the school aside from paying the international teachers their salaries, Kaltenbach said. The company operates in South Dakota, California, Arizona, Oregon and New Mexico, though Teach Quest did not respond to questions about how many teachers are based in South Dakota and how the operation is funded.

And because of the program, the district has 20 to 30 applications to pick from rather than one or two applications for a position.

"I don't think we have enough people currently in our state to fill the pipeline and open positions," Monson said. "It's awfully tough to incentivize someone from Montana, Minnesota or Wyoming to come to South Dakota and be a teacher with our pay. Unless they're moving home or their spouse is moving to South Dakota, there are lots of reasons why someone wouldn't want to come to South Dakota to teach."

The average teacher salary is \$53,628 in Montana (44th in the nation), \$64,184 in Minnesota (18th), and \$60,819 in Wyoming (23rd), according to the National Educators Association. The average teacher salary in South Dakota is \$50,592, which is 49th in the nation. Mississippi is last at \$47,902.

Most of the incoming Filipino teachers have master's degrees, Kaltenbach said. They've all been teaching for at least two years and speak proficient English, she added.

The average base salary for a teacher in the Philippines is 274,801 Philippine pesos per year, according to Indeed — about \$5,000 a year. The starting salary at Oglala Lakota County Schools is \$53,580 — and with the experience most of the Filipino teachers are bringing, they can make closer to \$65,000. It's an incentive to travel thousands of miles and live away from their families for years in remote areas of South Dakota.

But there are challenges to the program. Roberta Bizardie, superintendent of Todd County Schools, said the district uses roughly 20 Filipino teachers out of about 200 instructional staff. The international hires still have language barriers with children and staff depending on their fluency and accent.

The teachers also can't earn a driver's license until they've been in the United States for six months, and many choose not to get one in order to avoid paying for a car and gas, making commuting in rural districts difficult. And it's difficult to find housing in rural areas — especially on tribal land — so school districts try to provide workforce housing that's close to the school buildings.

Deb Boyd, a Todd County School Board member, said she has heard mixed opinions from parents and community members about international teachers. The primary concern is language barriers from accents — especially at the elementary school level — followed by a concern about turnover.

Filipino teachers are limited to five years in the district — unless they stay another way, such as marrying a local resident.

Boyd said the visa hires are a short-term solution and can't be the end-all-be-all solution because of the turnover.

The challenges are still worth it to address the teacher shortage in Bizardie's district, she said.

"They're a very dedicated group of teachers," she said. "They go above and beyond and are eager to learn more and learn about our people, the Lakota people and our traditions, and share theirs."

State program offers path to train established teaching aids

Teacher work visas are meant to plug holes while working on longer term solutions, superintendents say, such as training teaching aides already in classrooms to become accredited teachers.

The Oglala Lakota County Schools offered a "grow your own" program for decades, from the '80s to the late 2000s.

"It was a way to get local people, who you know will be here their whole lives, involved and become needed teachers," Kaltenbach said.

The program produced several teachers who have remained in the district for decades, Kaltenbach said. While successful, the program ran out of funding.

The district picked the program back up earlier this year, just months before the state Department of Education announced it would begin its own paraprofessional training program. While the state will focus on teaching aides becoming teachers, the Oglala Lakota program will also offer pathways for teachers

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interested in earning their special education certification, which is a high need across the state.

In the state program, selected participants will take virtual classes in the evenings at discounted rates through Northern State University or Dakota State University over two years while they work as aides during the work day.

"This won't entirely solve the shortages school districts are experiencing now," said Secretary of Education Joseph Graves in a news release announcing the program, "but if we can knock that number down by a third, that is definitely significant."

The program will train 90 teacher aides from more than 50 school districts to become fully certified teachers.

Bizardie said 10 of Todd County's paraprofessionals applied for the state program — three of them were accepted into the program. She believes the program will be especially helpful for rural and tribal communities, explaining how some of her open teaching positions are in small communities miles away from more populated areas of the reservation.

"If you're not from the reservation, that's not something you'd find attractive," Bizardie said. "But if a paraprofessional went to this small school, lived here her whole life and is committed and invested in that community, you'll have that teacher forever."

Aside from the training program, the state department has also made other changes to address teacher needs, such as paying student teachers in the classroom. Student teachers weren't previously paid.

The state also offers scholarships for college students studying to fill critical teaching needs, such as special education, music, math and science, language arts, and English as a second language.

The Critical Teaching Needs Scholarship Board awarded over \$10,000 to 13 applicants at its board meeting this month as an incentive for students to stay and work as a critical need teacher for five years after graduation, surpassing \$1 million in funding since the program was created in 2014.

Investing in the next generation of teachers

Over 60% of teachers work within 15 miles of the high school they graduated from, according to a Stanford University study.

To Travis Lape, that means the state and school districts should invest in their current students rather than trying to entice out-of-staters or international workers as a solution.

So Lape, who is the innovation programs director at Harrisburg School District, started a South Dakota Educators Rising chapter in 2016. The organization is similar to other high school career clubs, such as FFA (Future Farmers of America) or HOSA (Health Occupations Students of America), but it focuses on recruiting high schoolers to explore education professions.

The organization hosts learning expos to introduce students to South Dakota universities; state conferences featuring competitions in lesson planning and delivery, public speaking, job interview skills and ethical dilemmas; and a signing day — when student members commit to the university of their choice with photos and a celebration, similar to athletics signing days.

Lape hopes to track the number of students who participate in signing days and then finish their teaching degrees and work in South Dakota.

The state chapter has grown to 35 local chapters and over 275 student members.

"If we're going to attack the teacher shortage, we need to look at our kids and invest in them so they feel valued and have a place," Lape said.

Additionally, Educators Rising spearheaded an initiative to allow high school students throughout the state to study and work toward a Child Development Associate credential before they graduate. That means those students will be able to enter the workforce with a credential and nearly 500 hours of supervised early childhood education work under their belts.

The initiative will not only expose students to teaching in classroom settings, but could also be a step to help address the child care shortage across the state as well, Lape said.

"We can pour into all these programs for learning," Lape said, "but this shortage is going to continue to be a vicious cycle if we only work to fix the situation right now instead of investing in our kids and teach-

ers differently and investing in the long term of how to grow teachers differently.”

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.

South Dakota Supreme Court: ‘Stand your ground’ law not retroactive

Minnesota native had argued for the right to a self-defense immunity hearing

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 14, 2023 4:01 PM

Less than 24 hours into his first visit to Sioux Falls, Minnesota native Ramon Deron Smith shot and killed Larry Carr Jr. and wounded two others.

A little over two years later, a state law took effect that lets those charged with a crime of violence make a self-defense claim before a trial – and avoid one altogether if a judge rules in their favor.

Smith maintained all through his 2022 trial that he'd only fired in self-defense. The jury nonetheless convicted Smith of second-degree murder and three counts of aggravated assault. He's now serving a life sentence in a Sioux Falls prison.

Shortly after that conviction, Smith appealed to the South Dakota Supreme Court, hoping to reverse his conviction on the grounds that he'd been denied a self-defense hearing, and that prosecutors unfairly allowed testimony about his status as a felon with a firearm.

Circuit Court Judge Bradley Zell ruled that Smith didn't have the right to an immunity hearing for the 2019 crime, and that the disclosure of his status as a felon barred from firearm possession wasn't enough to declare a mistrial.

This week, the state's high court issued a ruling that could keep Smith behind bars for the rest of his life, unless he files a successful appeal or receives a pardon or commutation.

The justices ruled that the “stand your ground” law did not apply in his case, because the shootings occurred before its passage. They also ruled that the mention of his status as a felon – he'd only recently been released from prison in Minnesota when the shooting occurred – did not unfairly prejudice the jury.

Lawyers for both sides had agreed not to reference his felon status at trial, but a Sioux Falls police detective mentioned it from the witness stand.

That wasn't enough to meet the threshold for overturning a conviction, the justices decided. Smith was able to present his self-defense claim, and jurors were instructed not to consider his revoked right to possess firearms when evaluating the veracity of his self-defense claim.

That the self-defense claim failed to sway the jury was more a measure of the weakness of the claim than any disclosure about his gun rights, the court ruled.

On the day of the murder, Smith grabbed a handgun and left an apartment to confront a group of people who'd been making threats on social media.

“The fact that Smith was prohibited from possessing a firearm because of his status as a felon, but chose to arm himself before leaving the apartment, was at best tangential to the question of whether Smith acted reasonably for the purpose of self-defense,” the decision says.

As to the question of the state's “stand your ground” law, the justices said the law was not written to apply retroactively. As such, Smith was not entitled to the kind of immunity hearing now being used in South Dakota courtrooms by people with self-defense claims.

“In view of this Court's determination that the statute did not apply retroactively, no question remains whether the circuit court erred in denying Smith's request for a hearing,” the justices wrote.

The ruling was unanimous, and authored by Chief Justice Steven Jensen.

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.

Johnson votes yes on defense bill that targets abortion access, trans health, racial equity

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - JULY 14, 2023 1:29 PM

The U.S. House approved Friday an annual defense authorization bill loaded with GOP rollbacks of Pentagon policies on abortion and transgender health care, as well as efforts to boost racial equity.

Republican amendments targeting social policy issues turned a typically bipartisan measure preserving the nation's military security into another front for the culture wars, similar to those that have gripped many state legislatures. The bill passed 219-210, with mostly GOP support, including a yes vote from Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota.

The bill is called the National Defense Authorization Act, or NDAA.

"The NDAA is necessary to ensure our nation's military remains the strongest in the world," Johnson said in a news release after the vote. "This bill gives our nation's defense the resources it needs and cuts unnecessary programs that distract from the goal of our military to protect and defend. The NDAA's passage is a huge win for America."

Four Republicans and four Democrats crossed party lines to vote with the majority of the other party. Five members did not vote.

The four Republicans who voted against the bill are all members of the conference's right wing: Andy Biggs and Eli Crane of Arizona, Ken Buck of Colorado and Thomas Massie of Kentucky.

The Democrats who voted yes all hail from swing or Republican districts: Donald G. Davis of North Carolina, Jared Golden of Maine, Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington and Gabe Vasquez of New Mexico.

Republicans approved dozens of contentious amendments, including to block funding to reimburse service members' travel for an abortion. The bill would also disallow military health care professionals from performing transition-related health care for transgender service members, and eliminate Pentagon positions related to diversity, equity and inclusion.

In a triumphant Friday morning news conference, members of the far-right House Freedom Caucus said their successful amendments were part of a drive to remove the Biden administration's insertion of social policy into the Defense Department.

"We're talking about going from crazy to normal," Scott Perry, the Pennsylvania Republican who chairs the group, said.

"To save America, conservatives need to hold the line," Colorado Republican Lauren Boebert said. "We need to continue to push back against the Biden administration's woke agenda. We saw many victories yesterday doing exactly that."

But many Democrats took to the House floor to complain that Republicans' focus on social issues weakened the bill's military substance by hurting recruitment and troop cohesion. The amendments sent an unwelcome message to people of color, women and LGBTQ+ people serving in the military, they said.

"They are putting culture wars over national security," Rep. Elissa Slotkin, a Michigan Democrat, said during debate Thursday on an abortion-related amendment.

The bill had seemed likely to attract overwhelming bipartisan support before Thursday, when Republicans successfully added amendments on abortion and more, prompting Democratic leaders to declare they would not support the package.

It is highly unlikely the bill will pass the Democrat-controlled U.S. Senate with the divisive social policy measures attached.

The defense bill, which Congress has passed annually for more than six decades, sets policy and authorizes funding levels for the Defense Department.

The fiscal 2024 bill would authorize \$886.3 billion for defense programs, including a 5.2% pay raise for service members and an increase to housing allowances, and make other national security policy updates that the House Armed Services Committee nearly unanimously approved on a bipartisan 58-1 vote last month.

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Bipartisan background

Support across the aisle, including from the many lawmakers with military installations in their districts, has been a hallmark of the annual defense authorization bill.

In the previous three years, the legislation received votes from at least 295 House members. The last time it passed the House with only one party's support was 2019, when all Republicans voted against it in a House controlled by Democrats.

President Joe Biden's administration strongly supported the bill as it passed out of committee, according to a July 10 statement of administration policy from the White House.

After lawmakers added several noncontroversial amendments Wednesday and early Thursday, key Democrats, including Armed Services Committee ranking member Adam Smith of Washington, said they were poised to support the bill, predicting that more than 300 colleagues of both parties would join them.

But Smith — who wound up voting against the defense measure — warned on Wednesday he might oppose it if Republicans attached some "extreme right-wing" amendments they were proposing.

Thursday, Smith said the base bill had demonstrated a commitment to national defense and to service members.

But "that bill no longer exists," he said.

"What was once an example of compromise and functioning government has become an ode to bigotry and ignorance," Smith said in a statement.

'All the theatrics'

The House rejected other controversial amendments, including several meant to reduce military aid to Ukraine in that country's war with Russia.

Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican who chairs the powerful House Rules Committee, noted before debate on the most contentious amendments began Thursday that he opposed some of the amendments Democrats objected to, and predicted they would not pass, leaving "95% of the bill... exactly what came out of the House Armed Services Committee."

He urged critics to focus on the national defense core of the bill.

"We're gonna have all the theatrics and all the flailing of arms — that's part of the process too," Cole said. "But at the end of the day, almost all this bill is supported by the majority of both sides of the aisle."

Tuberville credited

The House Freedom Caucus extracted major gains from House Speaker Kevin McCarthy at the beginning of this Congress and said Friday they would continue to use that leverage after their success with the Pentagon bill.

Boebert and U.S. Rep. Matt Gaetz, a Florida Republican, credited Alabama Republican Sen. Tommy Tuberville's ongoing blockade of Defense Department nominees over the Pentagon's abortion policy for inspiring the House members.

"I do not believe we would have achieved the Republican unity in the House, but for the courage of Senator Tuberville," Gaetz said.

DOD abortion policy

The House adopted, 221-213, an amendment from Texas Republican Ronny Jackson that would block funding for a Defense Department policy to reimburse service members for travel expenses related to seeking an abortion.

"This illegal, Biden-endorsed policy has no place in our military," Jackson said. "Taxpayer money provided to DOD is intended to provide for our national defense and our national security, not to promote and support the Biden administration's radical and immoral pro-abortion agenda."

Jackson called the policy an effort to sidestep the U.S. Supreme Court's ruling last year in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that removed the federal right to an abortion. The ruling allowed states to set their abortion policies, spurring many led by Republicans to enact severe restrictions on the procedure.

Since the *Dobbs* decision and subsequent state restrictions, active military members serving in states

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with strict abortion restrictions must travel to seek reproductive services. The Defense Department policy was meant to help address that.

Jackson's amendment would make it more difficult for some service members to get an abortion, Texas Democrat Veronica Escobar said.

"My colleagues want to ensure that the enlisted women of the United States military and their family members who live in Republican states where abortion has been banned are forced to carry a pregnancy to term even in the case of rape and incest," she said.

Two Republicans, Pennsylvania's Brian Fitzpatrick and California's John Duarte, voted against the amendment. Henry Cuellar, an anti-abortion Democrat from Texas, voted in favor. Six members did not vote.

Trans health care

Nearly along party lines, the House also approved amendments from Republicans Matt Rosendale of Montana and Ralph Norman of South Carolina to block funding for health care for transgender service members.

Both made it clear that they thought transgender people should not serve in the military.

"The question that must be asked is whether having trans individuals makes the United States a more lethal force and whether it helps recruit the best and most effective talent for the United States military," Rosendale said. "And the answer to that is a clear and resounding no."

"If you don't know if you're a man or a woman, you shouldn't be going to war," Norman said.

Democrats objected to both.

"The ignorance contained in these comments is really breathtaking," Smith said of Rosendale.

"No matter how capable, no matter how qualified you are, we're going to make it impossible for you to serve, primarily because of the colossal ignorance that a lot of people have about what transgender means," he said.

Trans people have served in the military "for years," said Sara Jacobs, a California Democrat with a trans brother.

"It's mind boggling that we would want to deter and discriminate against a group of people who have proven their patriotism and deep commitment to our country," Jacobs said. "We're facing steep military recruitment and retention challenges. This amendment will worsen this crisis by pushing transgender service members out of the military. And that's because gender-affirming care is necessary and medically backed."

Both votes were again nearly party line, with the exceptions of Duarte voting with Democrats and Cuellar with Republicans. Seven members didn't vote on the Rosendale amendment and eight didn't vote on the Norman amendment.

The House also adopted an amendment from Boebert that would prohibit the Department of Defense Education Activity, a school system for children of service members in the United States and 11 foreign countries, from keeping in its libraries pornography or books that "espouse radical gender ideology."

All Republicans present voted in favor, as did Cuellar and Davis.

Diversity, equity and inclusion

Norman offered an amendment to eliminate any positions in the Pentagon or service branches that promote diversity, equity and inclusion, a trend in the private workforce to hire and retain employees of diverse racial, gender and sexual orientation backgrounds.

The measure was adopted 214-213. All Democrats present and Republicans Fitzpatrick, Don Bacon of Nebraska, Lori Chavez-DeRemer of Oregon and Michael R. Turner of Ohio voted against.

Texas Republican Chip Roy authored another amendment to ensure the Pentagon does not create any such position. That measure was adopted 217-212, with Chavez-DeRemer and Fitzpatrick joining all Democrats in voting no.

Roy also brought an amendment to ban Department of Defense Education Activity schools from teaching certain curricula on race in the U.S., including that founding documents were racist.

Nine Democrats — Cuellar, Davis, Jared Golden of Maine, Willy Nickel of North Carolina, Chris Pappas of New Hampshire, Gluesenkamp Perez and Kim Schrier of Washington and Jake Auchincloss and Seth

Moulton of Massachusetts — joined all Republicans in favor of the amendment. Democrat Brendan Boyle of Pennsylvania voted present.

The chamber rejected an amendment from Virginia Republican Bob Good to block any funding to implement the recommendations of a commission Congress created in 2020 to propose new names for military bases named after Confederate figures.

The amendment failed 177-253, with 41 Republicans crossing party lines to vote with every Democrat present.

“These monuments are supposed to reflect our values,” Smith said. “This is not a value we should be reflecting. And oh, by the way, this is why we still need diversity, equity and inclusion programs, to try to educate people on these very fundamental facts that they ought to know.”

— *The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.*

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

Changes in state election laws have little impact on results, new study finds

BY: ZACHARY ROTH - JULY 15, 2023 6:00 AM

In recent years, U.S. politics has been consumed by partisan fights over states' election policies.

But a new study by two political scientists is causing a stir by finding that state legislators' changes to election laws — both those that tighten election rules in the name of integrity, and those that loosen rules to expand access — have almost no impact on which side wins.

“Contemporary election reforms that are purported to increase or decrease turnout tend to have negligible effects on election outcomes,” write the authors, Justin Grimmer and Eitan Hersh, political scientists at Stanford University and Tufts University, respectively, in “How Election Rules Affect Who Wins,” which was published online as a working paper June 29.

These laws, the authors write, “have small effects on outcomes because they tend to target small shares of the electorate, have a small effect on turnout, and/or affect voters who are relatively balanced in their partisanship.”

That doesn't mean these laws don't matter. Many advocates, as well as the authors themselves, say there are plenty of reasons beyond partisanship to care about voting policy — not least the effect some can have on non-white voters.

“If we can take the temperature down on some of these issues and separate the partisan consequences from some of the other consequences, the public discussion would actually be a lot better,” Hersh said in a phone interview. “Right now, it seems like one of the reasons this stuff is toxic is because every minor thing, from having mail voting to having voter ID, is treated as some democracy-ending reform. And I think that's quite dangerous.”

Indeed, Grimmer and Hersh's conclusion, which is largely supported by other recent research, is at odds with the behavior of much of the political and advocacy worlds.

In recent years, the parties and outside groups have poured countless dollars and hours into the battles over voting, seeking to gain an electoral edge, stop their opponents from getting one, or fight voter suppression. Now, some are asking: What does the emerging consensus that these laws have minimal effects on election outcomes mean for that ongoing work?

Elections bill in House

The study appears just as a heated debate is flaring again in Congress over the partisan and racial impact of recent voting laws.

On July 10, at a U.S. House Administration Committee field hearing in Atlanta, Republican lawmakers unveiled the American Confidence in Elections Act, new legislation that would tighten voting rules in nu-

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merous ways.

To make the case for the measure, the GOPers repeatedly criticized Democrats for predicting that Georgia's 2021 election law, which imposed stricter rules on several types of voting, would suppress votes, especially among minorities. ("The left lied," declared a GOP video on the issue that was shown at the hearing.)

Republicans noted that the state's turnout in fact went up last year — though Democrats countered that Black turnout had gone down relative to white turnout.

Grimmer, a senior fellow at the Hoover Institution, served as an expert witness for Georgia in its defense of the law after the state was sued by the U.S. Department of Justice and voting-rights groups.

Meanwhile, some in the trenches of the voting wars reject the new study's conclusions out of hand.

"Republicans are targeting the rules of voting because they know they matter," said the Democratic super-lawyer Marc Elias — who filed the first lawsuit against the Georgia measure — in a statement to States Newsroom. "Studies of cherry-picked practices from years and decades ago may be interesting to some political scientists but they don't solve the problem of armed vigilantes at drop boxes or states changing laws to make voter registration more difficult."

As the conventional wisdom has it, laws that restrict access tend to help Republicans, since those most likely to be blocked or deterred by stricter rules — often racial minorities, students, renters and low-income Americans — lean Democratic. And laws that make voting easier, the idea goes, tend to boost Democrats, since the people likely to be helped by them similarly lean Democratic.

Indeed, Republican-led states have lined up to pass restrictive new voting laws, while fighting Democratic efforts to pass expansive laws. Democrats have done the reverse — including raising hundreds of millions of dollars to file court challenges to the GOP's measures. And at election time, both sides have mobilized vast armies of volunteers to hunt for fraud, or protect voting rights, at the polls.

Politicians have been quick to blame election rules for defeats. Hillary Clinton has said, with little evidence, that between 27,000 and 200,000 Wisconsin voters "were turned away from the polls" in the 2016 presidential election because of the state's ID requirement. Former President Donald Trump has gone much further, frequently blaming his 2020 loss on loose voting rules that, he falsely claims, enable fraud.

Advocates and much of the media have likewise prioritized the issue, seeing a chance to hold powerful actors accountable, protect or expand access to the political process, or spotlight a set of urgent challenges to U.S. democracy.

But Grimmer and Hersh describe this Sturm und Drang — at least the part that's focused on partisan outcomes — as a tempest in a teapot.

"The caustic rhetoric that suggests the partisan stakes for election administration reform are very high is detached from empirical reality," Grimmer and Hersh write. "Even very close elections are decided by margins larger than the magnitude of election reforms we examine in this paper."

Little evidence of impact on results

Though that finding may surprise political operatives, advocates, and journalists, academic experts say it's very much in sync with existing research on the issue — making the Grimmer-Hersh study much harder to dismiss as an outlier.

Scholars have struggled to find evidence that changes like early voting and election-day registration have significantly boosted turnout. (One possible exception is mail voting, where at least one recent study did find significant effects, while others didn't.)

Nor have most studies found that even very controversial restrictive measures do much to lower voting rates. A 2019 paper released by the National Bureau of Economic Research found that strict voter ID laws "are unlikely to have a meaningful impact on turnout or election outcomes." And a paper published this year by two Notre Dame political scientists found that ID laws "motivate and mobilize supporters of both parties, ultimately mitigating their anticipated effects on election results."

The Grimmer-Hersh study tries to clarify why the partisan effects are so negligible. Unlike most earlier studies, it doesn't look only at one type of law — voter ID laws, for example — but rather on the entire category of election laws that might affect turnout, including both those that make voting harder and

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those that make it easier.

The authors give an example of a hypothetical law that imposes additional requirements for voting, targeting Democratic-leaning groups.

The requirements target 4% of the electorate, and cause a 3 percentage-point decline in turnout among this group — figures that the authors say are consistent with the effects of real laws. The result would be a 0.12 percentage point drop in overall turnout.

That's already small, but because that group is likely to be around 60% Democratic, not 100%, the swing toward Republicans would be even smaller, just 0.011 percentage points. Only the very closest elections in history would be affected by a swing that tiny.

Even laws that contain several prongs that affect voting in different ways are still likely to affect results only in the very tightest elections, the authors write. North Carolina's omnibus elections bill currently moving through the legislature there is an example, though it isn't mentioned in the study.

In one section that may raise the hackles of voting-rights advocates, the authors note that there has been no significant turnout decline in the mostly Southern states that were affected by the Supreme Court's 2013 ruling in *Shelby County v. Holder*, which removed the requirement for those states to have their election changes pre-approved by the federal government, to ensure they don't hurt minority voting. In fact, they say, voting rates among non-whites have increased since the ruling.

Advocates and journalists — including this one! — have poured resources into documenting the slew of restrictive new rules, from voter ID laws to reductions in polling sites, that were imposed in the wake of *Shelby*, at times painting the onslaught as an urgent crisis of democracy.

Even far-reaching structural reforms that go beyond targeted measures like voter ID may not do much to affect election outcomes, the paper suggests.

Many predicted that the 1993 National Voter Registration Act, which has added millions to the rolls by requiring motor vehicles departments and other state agencies to offer registration, would help Democrats, the authors note. ("Who wins under this bill?" asked Rep. Spencer Bachus, an Alabama Republican, during the debate over the measure. The law, he answered, "will result in the registration of millions of welfare recipients, illegal aliens, and taxpayer-funded entitlement recipients. They'll win.")

In fact, the authors write, the law had essentially no partisan impact.

'Beyond the voting wars'

Still, some critics note that many high-profile elections these days, including presidential elections, are decided by razor-thin margins. In both of the last two presidential elections, the winner won three pivotal states by 1.2 percentage points or less — in 2020, it was 0.7 percentage points or less. (And that's leaving aside Florida 2000, a unicorn event that was so close that almost everything made a difference.)

"[U]sing the Hersh-Grimmer framework, some of these laws would've had a plausible chance of swinging the 2016 presidential election because the election was so close," said Jacob Grumbach, a professor of political science at the University of Washington, via email. "I could understand people might think that's a big deal."

Hersh acknowledged it's possible that a multi-pronged law, or a set of laws acting together, could cause a swing that big. But he argued that because of the high level of uncertainty involved in the analysis, there's no reliable way to predict what the partisan effects of a given law will be.

"Yeah, collectively these small policies could aggregate," Hersh said. "But no one knows how they aggregate. Even the ones that liberals call suppression."

"There's no way lawmakers can sit around and be like, 'OK, we're going to do these six things and this is going to help Democrats or Republicans,' and actually know what they're talking about," Hersh added.

The authors also acknowledge more than once that there are plenty of valid reasons to worry about election policies that have nothing to do with results — "such as whether they make voting convenient, more secure, more cost effective, and whether they are motivated by discriminatory intent." All of those effects would be important to pay attention to, even if they didn't have a partisan impact.

In fact, both Grimmer and Hersh stressed in interviews that one goal of the paper was to encourage a

focus on these other issues by making questions of partisanship recede.

"States should be seeking out policies that they think will improve the functioning of elections," said Grimmer. "And they can be comforted knowing that when they make those changes, it's not going to end up with wild swings in partisan balance."

Others see a different take-away from the paper.

David Nickerson, a political science professor at Temple University in Philadelphia, was involved in a project that looked at the impact of stadium voting, which took place in the 2020 election at over 48 professional sports stadiums as a convenience measure during the pandemic. Nickerson said project organizers hoped that when they showed stadium voting has no partisan effect, Republican officials would drop their opposition to it.

But that didn't happen, Nickerson said. The experience suggests to him that differences over how elections should be run — and in particular over how easy or hard voting should be — are as much about ideological principle as they are about political advantage.

"You'll even hear Republicans openly say they think voting should be harder, and you should only vote if you really want to and care and are committed — which I can't imagine a Democratic official saying," Nickerson said. "It's a different worldview."

Michael Morse, a professor at the University of Pennsylvania Carey Law School, said the study should lead advocates to focus relatively less on laws that affect the individual voting experience, like most voter ID laws, and more on structural issues, like getting more people on the voter rolls, or stopping gerrymandering.

"We have a limited amount of resources for reform," Morse said. "The agenda for reform should be informed by this type of empirical political science."

Indeed, the reality that election laws barely affect results is a good thing for building bipartisan coalitions for voting rights, Morse added.

"I would like the public discussion of these issues to be less partisan," he said. "It's the only way forward beyond the voting wars."

Zachary Roth is the National Democracy Reporter for States Newsroom.

More than 800,000 student loan borrowers to have debt forgiven, White House announces

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JULY 14, 2023 11:00 AM

WASHINGTON — The Department of Education and the White House announced Friday that more than 800,000 federal student loan borrowers will have their remaining debt wiped out.

The \$39 billion in debt relief will come through fixes to mismanagement of the agency's income-driven repayment plans. Many long-time borrowers, including those who had been making payments for 20 years or more, were denied relief they were eligible for under the repayment plans. Qualified payments that were made were not accounted for.

"For far too long, borrowers fell through the cracks of a broken system that failed to keep accurate track of their progress towards forgiveness," U.S. Secretary of Education Miguel Cardona said in a statement.

Starting Friday, the Department of Education will begin to notify those 804,000 borrowers of their forgiveness, and within 30 days their debts will be wiped out.

The plan includes borrowers with Direct Loans or Federal Family Education Loans held by the department (including Parent PLUS loans of either type) who have reached a forgiveness threshold specified by the department.

"By fixing past administrative failures, we are ensuring everyone gets the forgiveness they deserve, just as we have done for public servants, students who were cheated by their colleges, and borrowers with permanent disabilities, including veterans," Cardona said.

A 2022 NPR investigation found numerous problems with the agency's handling of IDR plans, which are meant to help low-income borrowers. Loan servicers failed to keep track of borrowers' progress toward

forgiveness and payment histories were not properly transferred from one loan servicer to another.

Under IDR, after 20 years of payments, a borrower's loan plan should be forgiven. But a 2021 report from the National Consumer Law Center found that more than 4 million borrowers had been making payments for at least 20 years, but only 32 had their debts canceled under the plan.

Because of this issue, the Department of Education announced in 2022 that it would conduct an adjustment and fix past inaccuracies.

The Department of Education in early January announced its plans to overhaul the income-driven repayment plan.

Under the new plan, monthly payments would decline to 5% of a borrower's income — down from 10% — and the repayment timeline for loan forgiveness would be decreased to 10 years from 20 or 25 if the initial loan is less than \$12,000.

The announcement Friday followed the Supreme Court's decision in late June to strike down the Biden administration's student debt relief program that would have canceled up to \$20,000 in student loan debt for some borrowers.

The Department of Education is now going through a rulemaking process to cancel that student loan debt under the Higher Education Act, an action likely to face the same legal challenges as the initial debt relief program.

Under the Biden administration, the Department of Education has canceled about \$116 billion in student loan debt for borrowers who were misled by for-profit institutions, borrowers with disabilities and those with loans through Public Service Loan Forgiveness.

More than 43 million Americans have student loan debt, and the Federal Reserve estimates that the total U.S. student loan debt is more than \$1.76 trillion.

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U.S. House Republicans pass overhaul of federal elections system out of committee

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JULY 14, 2023 8:56 AM

WASHINGTON — On a party-line vote, the U.S. Committee on House Administration on Thursday night passed a bill that would enact strict new voting laws for states, such as requiring copies of IDs for voting by mail, and set penalties for states that allow voting by noncitizens in local elections.

The 224-page bill, H.R. 4563, was approved 8-4, and contains provisions similar to those passed in many Republican-led states since the 2020 election.

The chair, Republican Rep. Bryan Steil of Wisconsin, said the measure establishes a "common sense election integrity" standard that is similar to those in states with recently passed voter overhaul bills, such as Georgia. Many Democrats and voting rights advocates have criticized the Georgia voting law for its strict voting requirements, arguing that it would disproportionately harm voters of color.

"Two years ago, Georgia implemented their election integrity reform," Steil said. "The data shows voter participation increased under the new law. Georgia experienced record midterm turnout in 2022. The left is still falsely claiming election integrity leads to voter suppression."

The top Democrat on the committee, Rep. Joe Morelle of New York, slammed the House bill for "catering to the demands of election deniers," and said it will not increase voter access to the ballot.

"Americans can take solace in the fact that this bill will never become law," Morelle said.

While the overhaul has a chance of passage in the Republican-controlled House, it's likely to die in the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim majority.

There are currently 100 Republican co-sponsors of the bill, including GOP House Speaker Kevin McCarthy of California. No Democrats are backing it.

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Amendments offered

During the markup, Democrats unsuccessfully offered more than a dozen amendments that would lengthen early voting to two weeks, expand access to voting by mail and require reporting of digital ads to the Federal Election Commission, among other election-related measures.

Republicans argued that states should have the ability to run their own elections without interference from the federal government.

"The government closest to the people is best to serve its needs, and our states are the ones who should be deciding specific policies, specific procedures and practices they will implement and utilize," Republican Rep. Laurel Lee of Florida said in support of the bill.

Lee previously served as Florida's secretary of state and facilitated the state's elections.

One amendment from Democratic Rep. Derek Kilmer of Washington was included in a unanimous vote. That amendment related to special election requirements ensuring the continuity of Congress, should there be a mass casualty event.

"Our existing rules would leave us without a functional government for a period of several months while special elections occur," he said.

He said that under current law, states are required within 49 days to hold special elections. The amendment would authorize a study to see if states could meet those requirements if there is a mass casualty event.

Vote by mail

Democratic Rep. Terri Sewell of Alabama unsuccessfully offered several amendments that would expand voting access, such as same-day voter registration, establishing Election Day as a federal holiday, extending early voting to weekends and establishing automatic voter registration.

None of her amendments were adopted. Republicans argued that states should handle early voting, and the federal government should not impose those requirements.

Steil also argued that federal workers have many days off already and that there's no guarantee that people would actually vote on the holiday.

Sewell said she was also concerned about state legislatures passing laws with strict voting requirements.

"We saw unprecedented voter turnout in the 2020 election. Rather than responding to increased voter participation with welcoming arms and pro-voter policies, states enacted laws that roll back access and aim to erect roadblocks to the ballot box," she said.

Sewell said the bill makes voting harder, similar to the states that have passed laws following the 2020 presidential election.

The bill would require that voters who request mail-in ballots to include a copy of their ID with their application.

There's a large body of research that has found that strict voter ID laws disproportionately impact voters of color.

Kilmer said voting by mail should not be a partisan issue. He pointed out that his state only votes by mail and has done so since 2011, and that all eligible voters in his state are automatically registered to vote.

"It's been widely embraced," he said of voting by mail in his state.

The bill also requires that every two years, states send the federal Election Assistance Commission a report that lists inactive voters and registered voters who voted in at least one of the prior two consecutive general elections.

The bill would also bar states from using federal funds to partner with a nongovernmental organization in voter registration drives or voter mobilization, "including registering voters or providing any person with voter registration materials, absentee or vote-by-mail ballot applications, voting instructions, or candidate-related information, on the property or website of the agency."

D.C. elections

The bill also takes aim at the District of Columbia, which is home to more than 700,000 residents. Because of its status as a district, D.C. has one House member who has no voting status in Congress, similar to Puerto Rico and four other U.S. territories.

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The bill would set voting laws for D.C., overriding any laws passed by the Council. For example, the bill would require voter IDs for someone to vote in D.C., which is currently not a requirement in D.C. elections, and would prohibit the city from using ranked choice voting.

The bill also includes mandatory audits and requires the District to conduct an audit within 30 days after each election.

"I find it to be incredulous to tell the citizens of D.C. what they can and cannot do when they are larger than a lot of the states that get two senators and get representatives," Sewell said, adding that D.C. needs statehood.

The bill also would repeal an amendment passed by the D.C. Council in 2022 to allow noncitizens to vote in local elections. California, Maryland and Vermont have similar laws, and the bill would set requirements for those states who have laws to allow noncitizens to vote in local elections.

For example, under the bill, states that allow noncitizens to participate in local elections would need to have a separate voter roll for noncitizens who are registered and there would be a 30% reduction in federal payments to any state or local jurisdictions that permit voting by noncitizens. Those states would also be barred from receiving any federal funding to implement certain election administration activities.

The bill text says that "[i]t is the sense of Congress that" even if a state has sovereign authority, "no State should permit non-citizens to cast ballots in State or local elections."

The bill also clarifies that states have the authority to remove noncitizens from voter rolls. Some non-citizens have been found on voter rolls, but it's usually by mistake — for example, when the state will automatically register an individual who is getting a driver's license even if they apply for a license with a work visa or green card, as NPR reported happening in Pennsylvania.

"[A]llowing non-citizens to cast ballots in American elections weakens our electoral system, directly and indirectly impacts Federal policy and funding decisions and candidate choice through the election of State and local officials, dilutes the value of citizenship, and sows distrust in our elections system," according to the bill text.

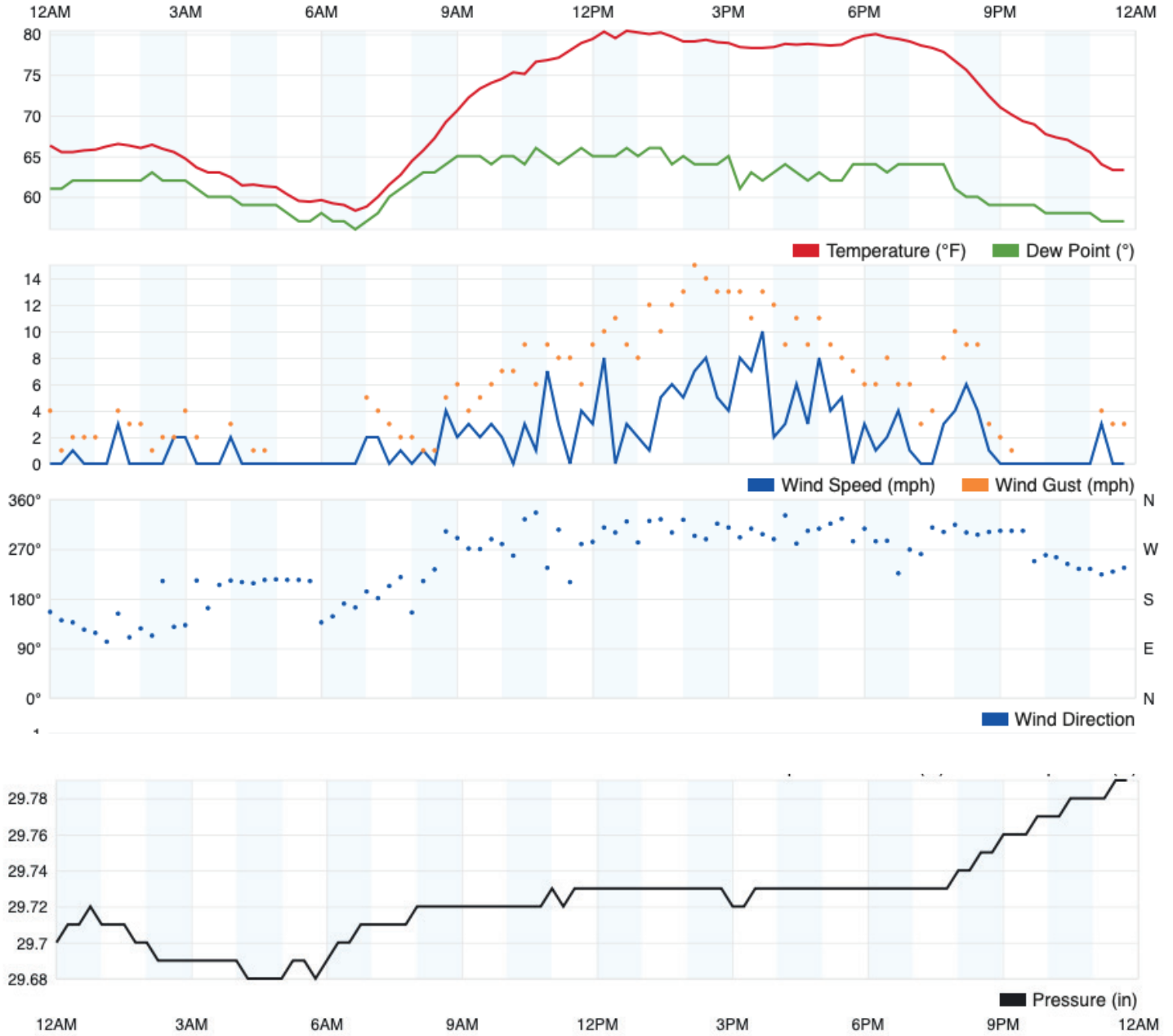
The bill would also require a district court to notify the chief election official of the state and the state attorney general if an individual is turned away from serving on a jury because they are not a citizen.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

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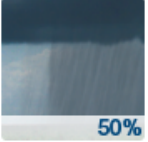
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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Areas Smoke and Breezy	Partly Cloudy	Areas Smoke then Mostly Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Chance Showers	Chance Showers
High: 78 °F	Low: 56 °F	High: 78 °F	Low: 49 °F	High: 77 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 80 °F



Chance of Moisture & Temperatures

July 15, 2023
4:46 AM

	Probability of Thunder Forecast														Maximum Temperature Forecast						
	7/15 Sat		7/16 Sun		7/17 Mon		7/18 Tue		7/19 Wed		7/20 Thu		7/21 Fri		7/15 Sat	7/16 Sun	7/17 Mon	7/18 Tue	7/19 Wed	7/20 Thu	7/21 Fri
	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am	12pm	12am
Aberdeen	0	5	5	0	0	5	20	20	20	10	5	5	5	10	79	79	78	81	87	83	86
Britton	0	10	5	0	0	0	15	20	15	10	10	5	5	10	74	73	74	77	83	79	82
Brookings	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	25	20	10	10	0	5	10	79	78	75	77	83	79	82
Chamberlain	0	0	0	0	5	10	40	10	20	10	5	0	10	15	86	87	84	84	88	86	87
Clark	5	10	5	0	0	5	20	25	20	10	5	0	5	5	75	74	73	76	81	78	80
Eagle Butte	0	10	5	5	5	15	45	15	15	5	5	10	10	15	82	82	82	84	87	83	86
Ellendale	5	5	5	0	0	0	20	20	20	10	5	5	5	10	75	75	76	77	84	80	83
Eureka	0	5	5	0	0	5	25	20	20	10	5	5	10	15	77	76	77	79	84	80	84
Gettysburg	5	5	5	0	5	10	40	15	15	10	5	10	10	15	79	79	80	80	86	82	85
Huron	0	0	10	0	5	5	30	15	15	5	5	5	10	10	83	83	79	80	87	83	85
Kennebec	0	10	5	5	5	15	40	15	20	10	5	10	10	15	86	86	85	86	88	85	87
McIntosh	5	5	5	0	5	15	35	15	15	5	5	10	10	15	77	77	79	81	82	80	84
Milbank	0	10	5	5	0	0	5	25	15	15	10	0	5	5	77	76	75	78	85	80	82
Miller	0	10	10	0	5	10	35	15	15	10	5	5	10	10	81	81	79	79	86	82	84
Mobridge	5	5	5	0	5	10	40	15	15	5	5	10	10	15	81	81	83	84	87	83	87
Murdo	0	15	5	5	5	15	30	10	15	10	5	10	15	15	85	86	86	86	88	85	87
Pierre	0	10	5	0	5	10	40	15	20	5	5	10	10	15	87	88	87	87	91	88	85
Redfield	5	10	10	0	0	5	25	20	20	10	5	5	10	10	81	81	79	80	87	83	86
Sisseton	5	10	5	0	0	0	10	20	20	15	10	5	5	5	75	75	75	78	85	80	83
Watertown	5	10	5	0	0	0	10	25	20	10	10	0	5	5	77	76	75	78	83	80	82
Webster	0	10	10	0	0	0	15	30	20	10	10	0	5	10	74	73	73	76	82	78	80
Wheaton	5	10	5	0	0	0	5	15	20	20	10	5	0	5	74	73	74	78	83	79	83

While wildfire smoke has the main headline through Sunday, the precipitation forecast shows the best chance for rainfall shows up between Monday night and Tuesday night. Cooler than normal high temperatures for most of the region this weekend will trend back to closer to normal during the second half of the upcoming week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 81 °F at 12:52 PM

Low Temp: 58 °F at 6:40 AM

Wind: 15 mph at 2:13 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 23 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 114 in 1931

Record Low: 41 in 1912

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.69

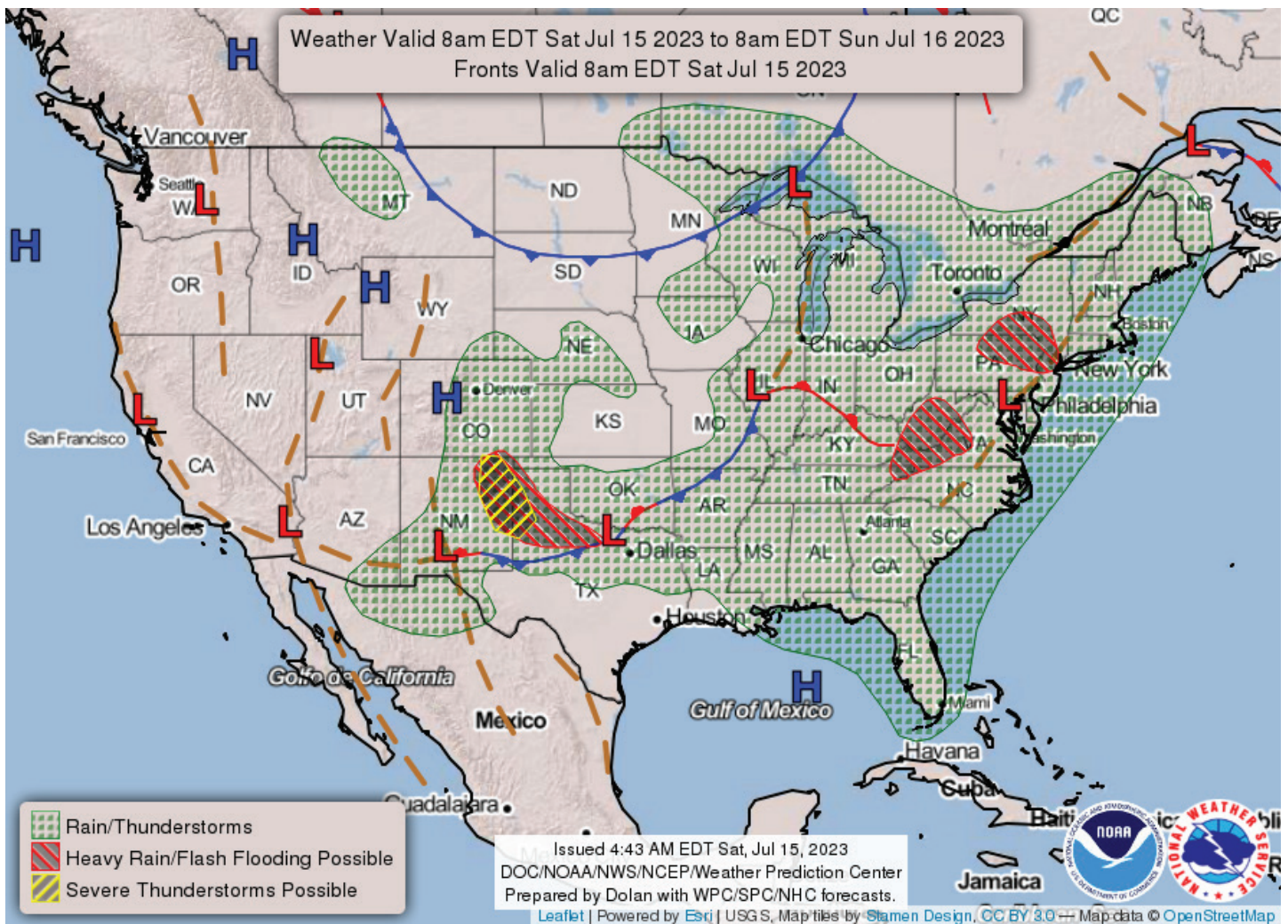
Precip to date in July.: 1.32

Average Precip to date: 12.70

Precip Year to Date: 12.67

Sunset Tonight: 9:19:58 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:57:47 AM



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Today in Weather History

July 15, 1885: The first of three damaging tornadoes hit 7 miles NNE of Highmore, Hyde County, and moved to the northeast. Two small homes were destroyed before the funnel turned to the east, then northeast and north before lifting. This tornado was estimated to have an F2 strength and was seen in all directions for 20 miles. The second tornado appeared to be motionless 3 miles east of Harrold, and then moved east to Holabird, in Hyde County, where it destroyed two homes and dissipated. A third tornado, this one with an estimated F3 strength, formed to the west of Highmore and moved east into town, then lifted about 4 miles east of town. Three homes were destroyed, and about 20 other buildings were damaged at Highmore. A farmer was killed 2 miles east of town. Losses totaled about \$55,000, which included many new buildings, including a church and a skating rink.

July 15, 1986: Thunderstorms brought locally heavy rainfall to portions of Walworth to Marshall Counties. Three inches of rain in an hour and a half was reported in extreme northwest Marshall County. The highest rainfall amount was seven inches southeast of Bowdle. The rains caused lowland flooding, with water over several roads in Marshall County, including Highway 10, two miles east of Britton. In Britton, 3.86 inches of rain was reported.

July 15, 2006: Record heat occurred across central and north central South Dakota and into parts of northeast South Dakota. Afternoon high temperatures ranged from 105 to as high as 120 degrees. Record highs were set at Pierre, Mobridge, Kennebec, and Timber Lake. Pierre set a new all-time record high of 117 degrees, and Mobridge tied their all-time record high of 116 degrees. Kennebec and Timber Lake both hit a record high temperature of 112 degrees. The coop observer station 17 miles west-southwest of Fort Pierre tied the state record high temperature with 120 degrees. Other high temperatures for the day were 116 degrees at Onida and Mission Ridge, 114 degrees at Murdo, 112 degrees at Redfield and Blunt, 111 degrees at Stephan, 110 degrees at Conde and Gann Valley, and 109 degrees at Aberdeen.

July 15, 2011: A large upper-level high-pressure area built over the region bringing sweltering and humid conditions. This heat was the worst to hit the area since July 2006. Beginning on Friday, July 15th and persisting through Wednesday, July 20th, many locations experienced high temperatures in the 90s to lower 100s, with low temperatures in the 70s at night. Also, humidity levels rose to extreme levels. Surface dew point temperatures in the 70s and lower 80s brought extreme heat index values of up to 110 to 125 degrees. The dew points were some of the highest ever recorded in the region on July 17th. The dew point at Aberdeen tied the previous record with 82 degrees. Sisseton also tied their record with 83 degrees. Watertown came a degree shy of matching their record with 80 degrees.

The prolonged heat took its toll on livestock with fifteen hundred cattle perishing during the heat. Numerous sports and outdoor activities were canceled. Some of the highest heat index values included; 110 degrees at Mobridge; 111 degrees at Watertown; 113 degrees at Miller and Gettysburg; 114 degrees at Wheaton and Faulkton; 116 degrees at Pierre; 118 degrees at Sisseton; and 121 degrees at Aberdeen. The highest heat index value occurred at Leola with a temperature of 98 degrees and a dewpoint of 82 degrees, and the heat index hit 125 degrees. Click [HERE](#) for more information.

1888: The Bandai volcano erupts on the Japanese island of Honshu on this day in 1888, killing hundreds and burying many nearby villages in ash.

1901: The city of Marquette, Michigan set their all-time record high temperature with 108-degree reading.

1916 - A dying South Atlantic Coast storm produced torrential rains in the southern Appalachian Mountains. Altapass, NC, was drenched with more than 22 inches of rain, a 24 hour rainfall record for the state. Flooding resulted in considerable damage, particularly to railroads. (David Ludlum)

1954 - The temperature at Balcony Falls, VA, soared to 110 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - The Big Thompson Creek in Colorado flooded for the second time in seven years, claiming three lives, and filling the town of Estes Park with eight to ten feet of water. (The Weather Channel)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WHAT NOW?

Each afternoon an old farmer and his Labrador retriever would walk to the train station, sit down together, and wait for the train to arrive at three o'clock. When the engine appeared, the dog would jump up, wag his tail, wait for the train to get closer, and then race alongside it.

One day a stranger said to the farmer, "That's a crazy dog you got there, mister. Does he actually think he can catch that train?"

"Nope," said the farmer. "And he wouldn't know what to do with it if he did."

We often behave like that dog. We see things that are larger than life itself and go after them in hot pursuit. We might conquer them or they might actually conquer us. But in the end, most of them have no eternal value to us.

In His message about worry, Jesus advised us not to be concerned about worldly things - things that are here today and gone tomorrow. He warned that "these worldly things dominate the minds of unbelievers." Now, that's an interesting way to look at our lives if we want to test the importance of our faith and who or what we believe in!

Our focus then as believers? "Seek the Kingdom of God above all else." When our priorities are with God's, we will no longer chase things that really do not matter.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to trust in You, believing that You know what we need and will supply it. May we focus on Your Kingdom above all else, today and every day. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need. "So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today. Matthew 6:25-34



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

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2023 Community Events

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.14.23

10 24 48 51 66 15

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$640,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[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 DRAW: 14 Hrs 56 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.14.23

6 8 16 19 45 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 11 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.12.23

3 10 15 27 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$153,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 11 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.12.23

42 49 54 62 63 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 40 Mins 58 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 DRAW: 15 Hrs 40 Mins 58 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Officer killed and 2 police injured in shooting that also left suspect dead on a North Dakota street

By JACK DURA and SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

FARGO, N.D. (AP) — One police officer died and two others were critically injured after a suspect began shooting on a busy street in Fargo, North Dakota, on Friday afternoon, police said.

Officers returning fire killed the suspect during the shooting that occurred before 3 p.m. A civilian also was seriously wounded, police said in a late-night statement that provided no details on a possible motive.

The Fargo Police Department said the investigation is ongoing and withheld the identities of the officers and the suspect pending notification of their families.

North Dakota Attorney General Drew Wrigley said the state Bureau of Criminal Investigation was working with federal, state and local law enforcement in response to a "shooting incident" but provided no details.

Fargo police will provide more details during a press conference scheduled for 3:30 p.m. Saturday at Fargo City Hall, said Gregg Schildberger, the city's chief communications officer.

"We sincerely are asking for your patience and our community's patience and understanding as the Fargo Police Department works through this incident," Schildberger said Friday evening.

"This is very difficult on all of us," Schildberger said. "We appreciate all the messages from the community that have been given to us in support of our officers."

Sanford Medical Center Fargo spokesperson Paul Heinert said in an email that the hospital received patients stemming from the shooting and updates on their conditions would come from the Fargo police.

Multiple witnesses said a man opened fire on the police officers before other officers shot him. Shortly afterward, officers converged on a residential area about 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) away and evacuated residents while gathering what they said was evidence related to the shooting.

Witnesses reported seeing and hearing gunshots in the area. Shannon Nichole told KFGO Radio she was driving at the time.

"I saw the traffic stop and as soon as I drove, shots were fired and I saw the cops go down," Nichole said. "My airbag went off and the bullet went through my driver's door."

A man grabbed her and said they needed to get out of the area, Nichole said.

Chenoa Peterson told The Associated Press that she was driving with her 22-year-old daughter when a man pulled out a gun and began firing at police: "He proceeds to aim it and you just hear the bullets go off, and I'm like, 'Oh, my God! He's shooting!'"

Peterson's first instinct was to pull over and try to help, but having her daughter there convinced her to leave. "It's weird knowing that if you were 10 seconds earlier you could have been in that," she said.

Surveillance video provided by Fargo resident Allison Carlson captured the rapid sounds of gunfire.

Bo Thi was working alone at a nail salon near the shooting scene when she heard what sounded like fireworks or a motorcycle backfiring. She said gunshots didn't cross her mind at the time.

Police and other agencies across the region posted sympathies for Fargo police on Facebook.

"Thinking of our brothers and sisters in Fargo," a post from the South Dakota Fraternal Order of Police said.

The Glenwood Fire Department in Minnesota posted, "Please keep the blue lights shining to show our support of not only our local law enforcement, but also those affected by today's events!"

Ballentine reported from Columbia, Missouri. Associated Press writers Lisa Baumann in Bellingham, Washington, and Alina Hartounian in Phoenix contributed to this report.

Fire department rescues ducklings from storm drain in South Dakota

By TRISHA AHMED Associated Press/Report for America

A South Dakota fire department rescued three ducklings that were stuck in a storm drain near a highway ramp.

The Rapid City Fire Department posted photos of the rescue on Thursday on Facebook and wrote: "The crew was able to climb in the drain and rescue the ducklings successfully! There seemed to be no fowl play."

One photo captures two fuzzy ducklings wading inside the storm drain when the crew arrived. Other photos show firefighters descending a silver ladder into the drain and setting up a hose. Finally, a crew member climbs back up the ladder with a duckling in hand.

"A person who lives in that area noticed that a mama duck kept walking around in the street in the same spot. That person investigated, found ducklings in the storm drain," and called the fire department for help, Battalion Chief Calen Maningas said.

Seven people from the fire department went to rescue the baby birds, he said.

Captain Tyler Powell was one of them. He said the drain was filled with water, runoff and debris.

"There were different culverts that came into that drain. And every time we went down to try and grab the ducklings, they would swim into one of the other culverts and hide from us," Powell said.

The team figured out where the culverts ended, Powell said, so they set up a hose and strategically sprayed water to flush the ducks out to the other side — and into the hands of the waiting firefighters who handed the birds up to each other and placed them in a cardboard box above ground.

Powell said the ducklings were fine throughout the rescue.

The firefighters left the ducklings with the person who originally called about them. That person hoped the mother duck would return so he could give the ducklings back to her, Maningas said.

Trisha Ahmed is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on under-covered issues. Follow Trisha Ahmed on Twitter: @TrishaAhmed15

Drought conditions in South Dakota are improving thanks to recent rainfall and cooler temperatures

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Drought and dry conditions in South Dakota are improving thanks to recent rainfall and cooler temperatures.

This week's U.S. Drought Monitor report shows only around 25% of South Dakota is still under varying degrees of drought conditions, with just a small pocket of Charles Mix County in extreme drought. The dry conditions are concentrated in southeastern and eastern South Dakota.

Just three weeks ago, around 75% of South Dakota was in drought. Now 63% of the state has normal conditions.

And South Dakota is in better shape than most other Midwestern states. Drought conditions are widespread in Iowa, Nebraska and Missouri. Significant portions of those states are in extreme or exceptional drought.

State Climatologist Laura Edwards told South Dakota Public Broadcasting that recent weather changes are good news for the state's crops.

"I think the rain in addition to the cooler than average temperatures we've seen over the last couple weeks, you know for most of July, really has improved or reduced the stress on especially corn and soybeans," Edwards said. "And so, we're seeing much improved crop conditions in the corn and soybean areas."

Next week could bring above-average temperatures, she said, but she hopes the rain will be enough to keep crop conditions stable.

Mega Millions jackpot grows to \$640 million, among highest in lottery game's history

By The Associated Press undefined

The Mega Millions top prize has grown again to an estimated \$640 million after there was no winner of the lottery's latest giant jackpot.

The numbers drawn late Friday night were: 10, 24, 48, 51, 66 and gold Mega Ball 15.

The estimated \$640 million jackpot in the next drawing would only be distributed to a winner who chooses an annuity paid over 29 years. Nearly all grand prize winners opt to take a cash payout, which for Tuesday night's drawing is an estimated \$328 million.

The jackpot is the seventh largest in the game's history, Mega Millions said in a statement.

Four tickets matched all five white balls to garner the second prize level in the drawing. A ticket sold in South Carolina included an optional multiplier making it worth \$2 million. Two tickets in California and one in North Carolina also were second-tier winners, Mega Millions said.

Despite the game's long odds of 1 in 302.6 million, players continue to purchase tickets as the size of the grand prize grows.

The last time a Mega Millions player hit the top prize was April 18.

Mega Millions is played in 45 states as well as in Washington, D.C., and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Why allowing Ukraine to ship grain during Russia's war matters to the world

By COURTNEY BONNELL AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Agreements that the United Nations and Turkey brokered with Ukraine and Russia to allow food and fertilizer to get from the warring nations to parts of the world where millions are going hungry have eased concerns over global food security. But they face increasing risks.

Moscow has ramped up its rhetoric, saying it may not extend the deal that expires Monday unless its demands are met, including ensuring its own agricultural shipments don't face hurdles.

The Black Sea Grain Initiative has allowed 32.8 million metric tons (36.2 million tons) of food to be exported from Ukraine since last August, more than half to developing countries, including those getting relief from the World Food Program.

If the deal isn't renewed, "you will have a new spike for sure" in food prices, said Maximo Torero, U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization chief economist. "The duration of that spike will depend a lot on how markets will respond."

The good news is some analysts don't foresee a lasting rise in the cost of global food commodities like wheat because there's enough grain in the world to go around. But many countries are already struggling with high local food prices, which are helping fuel hunger.

Here's a look at the crucial accord and what it means for the world:

WHAT IS THE GRAIN DEAL?

Ukraine and Russia signed separate agreements in August 2022 that reopened three of Ukraine's Black Sea ports, which were blocked for months following Moscow's invasion. They also facilitated the movement of Russian produce amid Western sanctions.

Both countries are major global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other affordable food products that Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia rely on. Ukraine is also a huge exporter of corn, and Russia of fertilizer — other critical parts of the food chain.

Interrupted shipments from Ukraine, dubbed the "breadbasket of the world," exacerbated a global food crisis and sent prices for grain soaring worldwide.

"One major agricultural producer is waging war on another major agricultural producer, which is affecting the price of food and fertilizers for millions of people around the world," said Caitlin Welsh, director of the Global Food and Water Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

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The deal provides assurances that ships won't be attacked entering and leaving Ukrainian ports. Vessels are checked by Russian, Ukrainian, U.N. and Turkish officials to ensure they carry only food and not weapons that could help either side.

Meant to be extended every four months, the deal was hailed as a beacon of hope amid war and has been renewed three times — the last two for only two months as Russia insisted its exports were being held up.

WHAT HAS IT ACCOMPLISHED?

The deal helped bring down global prices of food commodities like wheat that hit record highs after Russia invaded Ukraine.

As the war caused food and energy costs to surge worldwide, millions of people were thrown into poverty and faced greater food insecurity in already vulnerable nations.

Once the grain deal was struck, the World Food Program got back its No. 2 supplier, allowing 725,000 metric tons (800,000 tons) of humanitarian food aid to leave Ukraine and reach countries on the precipice of famine, including Ethiopia, Afghanistan and Yemen.

"It is a pretty unique phenomenon to have two warring parties and two intermediaries agree to establish this sort of corridor to get humanitarian products — which is ostensibly what this is — out to markets that need it most," said John Stawpert, senior manager of environment and trade for the International Chamber of Shipping, which represents 80% of the world's commercial fleet.

WHAT THREATENS THE DEAL?

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Moscow wouldn't extend the grain deal unless the West fulfills "the promises given to us."

"We have repeatedly shown goodwill to extend this deal," Putin told reporters Thursday. "Enough is enough."

He said he wants an end to sanctions on the Russian Agricultural Bank and to restrictions on shipping and insurance that he insists have hampered agricultural exports.

Some companies have been wary of doing business with Russia because of sanctions, but Western allies have made assurances that food and fertilizer are exempt.

"It's not uncommon in situations like this for countries to use whatever levers they have to try and get sanctions regimes changed," said Simon Evenett, professor of international trade and economic development at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres sent a letter to Putin this week proposing to ease transactions through the agricultural bank, a spokesperson said.

Russian "claims that its agriculture sector is suffering are countered by the reality" that production and exports are up since before the war, Welsh said.

Russia exported a record 45.5 million metric tons of wheat in the 2022-2023 trade year, with another all-time high of 47.5 million metric tons expected in 2023-2024, according to U.S. Department of Agriculture estimates.

WHO IS AFFECTED?

The International Rescue Committee calls the grain deal a "lifeline for the 79 countries and 349 million people on the frontlines of food insecurity."

East Africa, for instance, has seen both severe drought and flooding, destroying crops for 2.2 million people who depend on farming for their livelihoods, said Shashwat Saraf, the group's regional emergency director for East Africa.

"It is critical that the deal is extended for a longer term to create some predictability and stability," he said in a statement.

Countries that depend on imported food, from Lebanon to Egypt, would need to find suppliers outside the Black Sea region, which would raise costs because they are further away, analysts say.

That would compound costs for countries that also have seen their currencies weaken and debt levels grow because they pay for food shipments in dollars.

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For low-income countries and people, food “will be less affordable” if the grain deal isn’t renewed, World Food Program chief economist Arif Husain told reporters.

WHAT ABOUT UKRAINE?

Ukraine’s economy depends on agriculture, and before the war, 75% of its grain exports went through the Black Sea.

It can send its food by land or river through Europe, so it wouldn’t be cut off from world markets if the grain deal ends, but those routes have a lower capacity than sea shipments and have stirred anger from farmers in neighboring countries.

Nonetheless, the Ukrainian Grain Association wants to send more grain through the Danube River to neighboring Romania’s Black Sea ports, saying it’s possible to double monthly exports along that route to 4 million metric tons.

Ukraine’s wheat shipments have fallen by more than 40% from its pre-war average, with the USDA expecting 10.5 million metric tons exported in the coming year.

Ukraine has accused Russia of slowing down inspections of ships and preventing new ones from joining the initiative, leading to a drop in its food exports from a high of 4.2 million metric tons in October to 2 million in June.

WHAT ELSE AFFECTS FOOD SUPPLY?

Fallout from the pandemic, economic crises, drought and other climate factors affect the ability of people to get enough to eat.

There are 45 countries that need food assistance, the Food and Agriculture Organization said in a July report. High domestic food prices are driving hunger in most of those countries, including Haiti, Ukraine, Venezuela and several in Africa and Asia.

While drought can also be a problem for major grain suppliers, analysts see other countries producing enough grain to counterbalance any losses from Ukraine.

Besides Russia’s huge exports, Europe and Argentina are increasing wheat shipments, while Brazil saw a banner year for corn.

“These markets adapt and producers adapt — and boy, the wheat and corn markets have adapted very, very quickly,” said Peter Meyer, head of grain analytics at S&P Global Commodity Insights.

AP reporter Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations contributed.

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

Ons Jabeur plays Marketa Vondrousova in the Wimbledon women’s final

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — Ons Jabeur or Marketa Vondrousova will become a first-time Grand Slam champion when they play each other in the Wimbledon women’s final.

They go into Saturday’s title match with a combined record of 0-3 in major finals.

The No. 6-seeded Jabeur, a 28-year-old from Tunisia, was the runner-up at the All England Club and at the U.S. Open last season.

She is the only Arab woman or North African woman to participate in a Grand Slam singles final.

The unseeded Vondrousova, a 24-year-old from the Czech Republic, lost in the 2019 French Open final as a teenager.

She is the first unseeded finalist at Wimbledon since Billie Jean King made it that far in 1963.

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

A new bar in Dubai is offering 'gourmet water' infused with minerals to 'suit your mood'

By NICK EL HAJJ Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — First, it was the banana-randomberry-wheat grass smoothies. Then the cold brew, triple-shot, something-milk lattes, the German-word craft beers, the small-batch, barrel-aged Prohibition cocktails.

Now a new bar in Dubai, the Middle Eastern hub of all things cutting-edge, is serving "gourmet water." Thirty varieties of it.

The Aqua Water Bar by Luqel harvests its water the old-fashioned way — from the faucet. The government says tap water is safe to drink and meets international standards, though many Dubai residents prefer bottled water.

Then they use a micro-dosing system designed by the German water filtration company Luqel to inject minerals. They offer to match the mineralization of high-end water brands, catering to all types of water fans, Alpine or Arctic-sourced.

"Our water sommeliers have designed the drinks to suit your needs and mood," says Roia Jabari, the managing director. "We can give you the perfectly mineralized recipe."

"Runners Heaven," which is high in sodium and potassium, is designed for joggers recovering from the scorching desert heat. "Vegan's Choice" offers minerals that could be lacking in a strictly herbivorous diet. Customers can fill up their bottles with any of the mineral blends for around 50 cents per 500 milliliters (16 fluid ounces) or pay more for mocktails.

It's not an entirely new concept.

Bottlers have long marketed water extracted from natural springs or remote mountains. Coke and Pepsi got in on the action years ago, adding sweeteners and fizz as they competed with Evian and Perrier, blurring the lines between water and soda.

Such products have grown popular as consumers embrace healthier lifestyles and treat tap water with often justified suspicion.

Bottled water is the most widely consumed beverage in the United States, with the average American drinking 46.5 gallons a year, compared to 36 gallons of soft drinks, according to the Beverage Marketing Corporation, a consulting group. But it's rare to find a bar that specializes in water, rather than offering it free of charge to patrons who overindulge in alcohol.

A water bar serving what it said was heavily filtered New York City tap water opened in the city's East Village in 2012, prompting a torrent of criticism. Another briefly opened in Washington, DC in 2019, to less than rave reviews. Neither appears to have stayed open for very long.

But Dubai, an ultra-modern metropolis built on desert sands, could be fertile ground for the trend.

Alcohol is available in bars and clubs in the United Arab Emirates, the federation of seven sheikhdoms that includes Dubai, but the Muslim country has a large population of teetotalers. As a hub of international commerce, it draws the wealthy, fitness-conscious types who underpin the wellness industry.

Jabari insists that the water bar, although frequented by suited businessmen who work in the surrounding Dubai Media City, is not only for wealthy patrons, saying the water, costing 2 dirhams or 54 U.S. cents per 500 milliliter (or around 16.9 fl oz), isn't too expensive.

In a nod to sustainability, customers can either fill their bottles or purchase reusable ones starting at around \$2.50. "One of the things that are like scraping a chalkboard for me is seeing people walking around with plastic bottles," said Jabari.

The early response appears positive, with the bar boasting a Google rating of 4.6 stars based on around a dozen reviews.

"(The water) was actually different," said Bilal Rizvi, who stopped in to try it out this week. "It's pretty good. The turmeric water was a blast."

Jabari says her favorite drink, the virgin mojito mocktail, is also quite popular. "It's got a twist of cucumber and lime in it, a hint of sweetness, with the agave and honey."

The San Diego, California-born interior designer, who has lived in the UAE for 24 years, designed the bar with a water theme. Bubble-shaped lights illuminate the blue and white tones of the décor. In an ode to her heritage, the bar also serves Persian cuisine.

She hopes to expand the business, seeing room for growth in Dubai's parched neighbors. "Saudi Arabia is a huge market for us. I believe that Abu Dhabi is our next step."

Long Island serial killer probe not over after architect is charged in 3 of 11 deaths

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — Authorities on Long Island are vowing to continue investigating a string of killings known as the Gilgo Beach murders after charging an architect in the deaths of three of the 11 victims.

Rex Heuermann, 59, is accused of killing Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman and Amber Costello over a decade ago. He is also considered the prime suspect in the death of another woman, Maureen Brainard-Barnes.

Their bodies were bound and hidden in thick underbrush along a remote beach highway across the bay from the Massapequa Park community where Heuermann has lived all his life. Investigators have said it's unlikely just one person killed all the victims.

"We're going to continue to work, investigate, and try to get a small measure of closure for all the victims' families," Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney said.

Heuermann, 59, was arrested late Thursday, a year and a half after authorities formed an interagency task force with investigators from the FBI, as well as state and local police departments, aimed at solving the case. He was charged Friday.

Heuermann was first identified as a suspect in March 2022, when detectives linked him to a pickup truck that a witness reported seeing when one of the victims disappeared in 2010. In March, detectives recovered Heuermann's DNA from a pizza crust he discarded and matched it to evidence found on one of the victims, authorities said.

"They never stopped working and will continue to work tirelessly until we bring justice to all the families involved," Suffolk County police Commissioner Rodney Harrison said.

Heuermann was ordered jailed without bail after his lawyer entered a not guilty plea on his behalf at an arraignment Friday in state court in Riverhead. In denying bail, Judge Richard Ambro cited "the extreme depravity" of Heuermann's alleged conduct.

Heuermann's lawyer, Michael Brown, said his client told him: "I didn't do this."

Investigators were continuing to search Heuermann's home, about a 25-minute drive across a causeway spanning South Oyster Bay to the sandy stretch known as Gilgo Beach where the remains were found in 2010 and 2011.

Most of the victims were young women who had been sex workers. Their deaths long stumped investigators, and the mystery fueled immense public attention and led to a 2020 Netflix film, "Lost Girls."

Efforts to deceive are a top concern among state election officials heading into 2024

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Efforts to deceive the public about voting and elections remain a top concern for state election officials as they dig into preparations for the 2024 election.

Misinformation and the emergence of generative artificial intelligence tools to create false and misleading content were cited in interviews with several secretaries of state gathered recently for their national conference. Other top concerns were staffing and the loss of experienced leaders overseeing elections at the local level. The officials were gathered in Washington, D.C., for the annual summer conference of the National Association of Secretaries of State.

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"The cliché here is true," said Minnesota Secretary of State Steve Simon, a Democrat. "You hope for the best, but plan for the worst. So, we're planning for the worst, which is that multiple communications channels will be filled with false and misleading information."

State election officials in Michigan and Colorado said they were particularly concerned about the rise of AI and the implications of it being misused by foreign adversaries seeking to meddle in U.S. elections. They pointed to altered videos, known as deepfakes, that rely on facial mapping and AI to make it appear that real people are saying things they never said.

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold said she convened a working group in her office to game out potential risks, after a 2020 presidential election that was marred by false claims and attacks on voting. Michigan Secretary of State Jocelyn Benson said state and federal regulations requiring disclosures of AI-generated content are needed along with boosting public awareness.

"We can't necessarily put the genie back in the bottle, but we can educate citizens about how to receive that information," said Benson, a Democrat. "And it becomes much easier if there are disclaimers alongside it that says, hey, this is fake."

Some state election officials said they would not be deterred by a recent court order by a federal judge in Louisiana that limited federal agencies when it comes to contacting social media companies about content deemed false or deceptive with a few exceptions. On Friday, an appeals court temporarily paused the order.

"The injunction doesn't apply to state officials, so I'm going to keep talking to whoever the hell I want to talk to," said Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes, a Democrat. "If you know somebody is out there lying and it hurts voters, they're literally telling voters the wrong day or the wrong places to vote, literally giving them bad information on purpose, you should be able to shut that down because that's interfering with the voter's right to vote."

Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose and others pointed to various ways of combating misinformation that don't involve communicating with social media companies. LaRose, a Republican, mentioned one instance in which his staff took a social media post that was spreading misinformation, added a "false" label across it and reposted it while contacting local news to ensure they were aware the original post was not true.

"We've worked to actively combat false information, but the way we do it is by spreading copious amounts of truth," LaRose said.

West Virginia Secretary of State Mac Warner, a Republican, praised the federal court ruling and said he was more concerned about the federal government being the one to spread false information. He said he is supportive of efforts by House Republicans to investigate federal agencies over their activities ahead of the 2020 presidential election.

"I think this is the big story going and it far outweighs all this other stuff that we're talking about here at this conference with regards to cybersecurity and, you know, trusted sources, and on and on," Warner said. "The federal government shouldn't be in there telling Americans what they can and can't hear, see, believe, Google, that sort of thing. So hopefully we're gonna get it straightened out."

Chris Krebs, the former director of the U.S. Cybersecurity Infrastructure Security Agency during the Trump administration, has defended the work his agency did in 2020. In a social media post after the court order, Krebs said his agency only connected state and local election officials with social media companies and did not filter or review any content.

Officials in Pennsylvania and Kentucky both cited staffing as a concern. In Pennsylvania, there has been considerable turnover among those overseeing local elections, driven largely by retirements and increased stress. Al Schmidt, a Republican appointed as Pennsylvania's chief election official, said the risks are many and the margin for error is small.

"The most dangerous thing is when you lose experienced election workers, you lose institutional memory, you lose all that experience, and it's replaced by people who are less experienced and who are more likely to make a mistake — and to make a mistake in an environment where every mistake is being perceived as being deliberate or malicious," he said.

The multi-day conference was the first since several Republicans announced plans earlier this year to leave a bipartisan effort aimed at improving the accuracy of voter lists and identifying fraud, prompting

consternation from their Democratic counterparts.

The decisions were made as the Electronic Registration Information Center, more commonly known as ERIC, was targeted by conspiracy theories surrounding its funding and purpose. Republicans cited other reasons for their exit and have been working on an alternate system for sharing data among individual states.

Several Democratic officials said they were uninterested in any alternative to the ERIC system, which still includes a few Republican-led states. They expressed hope that large-population states like California and New York, who are not currently part of ERIC, will join.

Kentucky Secretary of State Michael Adams, a Republican, said he is exploring his state's options. A court order requires the state to participate in ERIC, according to Adams, but several surrounding states and Florida, where many of his state's residents retire, are leaving or do not participate.

"Even if ERIC were hunky-dory, I still need to find ways to get information from 30-plus states that aren't in ERIC," Adams said.

The conference largely avoided controversial subjects during panel discussions, focused instead on sharing best practices. Several officials said partisan divisions are set aside so they can collaborate on improving elections.

Warner said a Michigan official approached him to talk about efforts in West Virginia to improve voting among active-duty military, and Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab said he planned to talk with his staff about plans to assist voters with hearing impairments after learning of Minnesota's efforts.

"There's still so much more that we agree on than what we disagree on," said New Mexico Secretary of State Maggie Toulouse Oliver, a Democrat. "And we're all a bunch of thieves at the end of the day -- we steal ideas from each other and it's like that's a really cool program, I want to do that in my state."

The Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Why a single senator is blocking US military promotions and what it means for the Pentagon

By MARY CLARE JALONICK and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Alabama Sen. Tommy Tuberville is waging an unprecedented campaign to try to change Pentagon abortion policy by holding up hundreds of military nominations and promotions, forcing less experienced leaders into top jobs and raising concerns at the Pentagon about military readiness.

Senators in both parties — including Republican Leader Mitch McConnell — have pushed back on Tuberville's blockade, but Tuberville is dug in. He says he won't drop the holds unless majority Democrats allow a vote on the policy.

For now, the fight is at a stalemate. Democrats say a vote on every nominee could tie up the Senate floor for months. And they don't want to give in to Tuberville's demands and encourage similar blockades of nominees in the future.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer has said that holding up the promotion of military leaders, most of whom have dedicated their lives to protecting the country, "is one of the most abominable and outrageous things I have ever seen in this chamber, witnessed by the fact that no one has ever had the temerity, the gall to do this before."

Here's what to know about the clash over Pentagon policy.

TUBERVILLE'S BIG GAMBLE

Approving military nominations and promotions has long been one of the most bipartisan duties of the Senate. But the Alabama Republican shattered that norm with his blanket hold, which the Pentagon says has already stalled more than 260 nominations of senior officers and could balloon to 650 by the end of

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the year.

Tuberville, a former college football coach who has closely aligned himself with former President Donald Trump since he was elected in 2020, has showed few signs of letting up.

Democrats have repeatedly gone to the Senate floor to try and call up the nominations. But Tuberville has objected each time.

Tuberville says he won't drop the holds until there is a vote on the Pentagon policy. But he hasn't introduced legislation to overturn it and insists that debate on amendments to change the policy wouldn't count.

Instead, he has proposed a very specific, unusual strategy: Democrats should introduce their own bill on the policy and hold a vote.

Democratic leaders such as Schumer, who support the existing policy, say it's up to the GOP.

"The onus is on Republican senators to prevail on Senator Tuberville and get him to back off his reckless pursuit," Schumer said this week.

THE POWER OF ONE

In the Senate, one senator can hold up nominations or legislation even if the other 99 want it to move forward.

Generally, leaders in the majority party get around this by holding a series of votes to move a measure and dispense of the hold. It just takes some additional time on the Senate floor.

But Tuberville's blockade is unique because there are hundreds of military nominations and promotions, and Democratic leaders would have to hold roll call votes on every single one of them to get around the hold. It's a decades-long tradition for the Senate to group military promotions together and approve them by voice vote, avoiding lengthy roll calls.

So Tuberville has put the Senate in a bind. The chairman of the Senate Armed Services Committee, Sen. Jack Reed, D-R.I., said this week that voting on the more than 260 military nominations through the regular procedure would take 27 days with the Senate working "around the clock" or 84 days if the Senate worked eight hours a day.

WHAT IT MEANS FOR THE PENTAGON

In addition to hundreds of one-, two- and three- star generals and admirals, the holds delay the confirmation of the Pentagon's top leaders — who make up the Joint Chiefs of Staff, including the chairman.

Already, the U.S. Marine Corps is without a confirmed leader for the first time in a century. And by law, the current Joint Chiefs chairman, Army Gen. Mark Milley, will step down at the end of September, and the current Army chief will leave his post in early August. The nominees to succeed them have had hearings, but no votes.

The Pentagon and lawmakers opposed to Tuberville's actions say the holds create a trickle-down effect that is hurting military readiness, preventing scores of officers from moving to new jobs, either as nominees or staff members. They argue that less experienced leaders are being forced to step in.

Speaking this week about the acting commandant of the U.S. Marine Corps, Gen. Eric Smith, Tuberville says he believes the holds will have "minimal effect" on his ability to lead in an acting capacity.

"There may be a delay in his planning guidance, and yet he cannot move into the commandant's residence, but there is little doubt about General Smith's ability to lead effectively," Tuberville said.

THE ABORTION POLICY

After the Supreme Court overturned the nationwide right to abortion, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin issued new policy last October that he said would ensure all troops have access to reproductive health care.

In a memo, Austin said service members and their families were worried they may not get equal access to health care, including abortions. And as many states began to impose more abortion restrictions, he noted that service members who often must move for various missions or training would be forced to travel further, take more time off work and pay more to access reproductive health care.

The problem, Austin said, would create extraordinary hardship and "will interfere with our ability to recruit, retain, and maintain the readiness of a highly qualified force."

He ordered the department to allow troops and dependents, consistent with federal law, to take time off and use official travel to get to other states for reproductive care not available locally. That care includes

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in vitro fertilization and other pregnancy aids that also may not be accessible close by.

The policy does not fund abortions. Under federal law, Defense Department facilities can perform abortions only when the life of the mother is at risk or in cases of rape or incest, and those instances have been extremely rare. According to the department, there were 91 abortions performed in military medical facilities between 2016 and 2021.

BIPARTISAN PUSHBACK

The impasse in confirmations fueled sharp debates this week during Senate Armed Services Committee hearings. A parade of lawmakers also took to the Senate floor to complain.

At a hearing this week for Air Force Gen. CQ Brown Jr., Biden's pick to replace Milley as the next Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Sen. Tim Kaine warned that service members may choose to leave the military if they see their careers blocked.

"I would urge all of my colleagues to turn away from the path that we're on where we are disrespecting and punishing people because we're unhappy with policies in the military that these individuals had nothing to do with," said Kaine, D-Va.

Tuberville has faced opposition from his side of the aisle, as well.

McConnell said in May that he opposes Tuberville's blockade. And several Republican senators said this week that they were hoping to find a way to persuade the senator to drop the holds.

"I think all of us are concerned — we want to get these key positions filled," said South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Senate Republican.

In the House, Republicans passed a wide-ranging defense bill on Friday that would reverse the new abortion policy. But Tuberville has said that's not enough to get him to drop the holds.

SO, NOW WHAT?

Austin called Tuberville on Friday to discuss the holds, shortly after President Joe Biden told reporters that Tuberville is jeopardizing national security and being "totally irresponsible."

Through a spokeswoman, Tuberville said he was "grateful" for the call and he would discuss the matter with Austin again next week.

It's unclear, though, if they can find compromise. Tuberville has said repeatedly that he will keep his hold until there is a vote.

"We need a vote on this policy on the floor," he said Wednesday. "I don't know whether it would pass. It may. I don't care. I just want the American people to have a say-so in this, not the Pentagon."

On the picket lines with Hollywood's actors and writers, from LA to New York

By ANNA FURMAN, KRISTA FAURIA and LESLIE AMBRIZ Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — It's a "Strike Girl Summer."

So read a picket sign as the sidewalks of Hollywood and midtown Manhattan teemed with actors on Day 1 of their strike, protesting alongside the writers who have been at it since May.

Together, the two guilds have ground the entertainment industry to a halt. On both coasts, though, there was a buoyant mood in the air as picket lines were reinvigorated by the support of some of the 65,000 actors who comprise SAG-AFTRA (98% of members voted to approve a strike back in June). This is Hollywood's biggest labor fight in six decades, and the first dual strike since 1960, reigniting the fervor against the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers just as a historic heat wave hits Southern California.

Outside the Warner Bros. studios in Burbank, California, throngs of protesters chanted: "Fists up, curtains down, LA is a union town." Food trucks flanking organizers' tents served churros, boba tea and cold lemonade to protesters baking in the midday heat that reached 98 degrees Fahrenheit (36.7 Celsius).

But the oppressive sun didn't dampen the mood. Demonstrators spritzed each other with water and danced to reggaeton music as passersby in cars honked in support of signs like: "Honk if your boss is overpaid."

Parents on the picket line hoisted their children over their shoulders and pushed toddlers in strollers,

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Argentine stores and restaurants in cities like Gualeguaychú, Concordia and Colón.

But there's a downside for Uruguayan businesses along the border: In the provinces of Salto, Paysandú, Río Negro and Soriano, municipal authorities say 170 stores closed in the first five months of this year. Businesses still open complain they hardly have any customers.

With about \$100 apiece, the four friends planned to get their hair done, buy clothing, gasoline and other goods and eat out in Gualeguaychú, in Entre Rios province, which for more than a year has been a shopping mecca for Uruguayans looking for deals. Back in Uruguay, Ferreira, 29, said that same \$100 would "get your hair done and not much else."

Uruguayan businesses just across the border are finding it hard to compete with such bargains.

"Everything is very quiet," said Susana Guerrero, owner of a shop that sells cheese and sweets in Salto. "I lost an employee and I did not replace him."

Guerrero went to Gualeguaychú on an exploratory trip and now sees why Uruguayans are going there to shop. The price differences between the two countries can be staggering. A liter of sunflower oil that costs \$5 in Uruguay is 50 cents in Argentina. A jar of skin-care cream that costs \$10 in Uruguay can be had for a dollar across the border. And a liter of gasoline in Uruguay is close to \$2. In the Argentine province of Entre Rios it is 52 cents.

"Yes, it's cheap and we can't fight it," Guerrero said.

Fray Bentos storefronts, meanwhile, are covered with signs offering specials in a bid to attract customers.

"This year sales have dropped by 40% or more," said Alicia Nedor, who works in a pharmacy. She said the sector is seeing its worst crisis in decades.

Nedor, 70, said several small businesses have closed in Fray Bentos and the big ones have laid off staff.

Cross-border bargain hunters also hail from neighboring Chile, Paraguay and Brazil. In Uruguay, industry representatives have called the phenomenon a "border pandemic" and even the country's president has acknowledged the problem.

"The prices of goods in Argentina are extremely cheap, and naturally its neighbors consume where it is cheaper for them," President Luis Lacalle Pou said in early May. "This creates an imbalance. We have applied measures, but it is not enough."

The government then introduced additional measures, including tax breaks for Uruguayan businesses and a 5-kilogram limit on what Uruguayans returning from Argentina can bring with them. But business leaders say the controls are not applied and are demanding a "zero-kilo" border policy, something that Lacalle Pou has rejected.

Lacalle Pou said the government will seek to make sure contraband doesn't cross the border, but added that "it is impossible to solve the exchange rate problem with Argentina."

The Catholic University of Uruguay has even developed a Border Price Indicator for the Argentine city of Concordia, some 200 kilometers (125 miles) north of Gualeguaychú. According to its latest data from May, it is 59% cheaper to buy a basket of food, drinks, clothing and household products in Concordia than in the Uruguayan town of Salto.

The price gap reflects the devaluation of the Argentine peso, which has lost 47% of its value against the U.S. dollar at the official rate so far this year.

Argentina has struggled with inflation multiple times over the last century. Its current crisis started in 2018 but has worsened in the past year and a half, said María Castiglioni, director of C&T Asesores Económicos. The inflation problem arose from several factors, she said, including government overspending and problems in monetary policy.

The country doesn't have funds to solve its overspending because it has lost access to the international debt market after multiple defaults on its loans. The loss of access means other countries do not feel confident lending money to Argentina.

As this debt crisis arose, the government turned to the country's central bank for assistance. In an effort to sustain the economy, the central bank hasn't stopped printing pesos — which has led to the devaluing of the peso. The increase in the flow of pesos also led to ballooning inflation that Argentinians are

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experiencing every day.

On holidays and weekends, long lines of cars wait to cross the General San Martín International Bridge that crosses the Uruguay River and joins Argentina's Gualeguaychú with Fray Bentos in Uruguay.

Between June 30 and July 4, which included the first days of the southern winter vacation for Uruguayans, more than 100,000 people left Uruguay for Argentina, most of them through the three border crossings in Entre Ríos. The majority were Uruguayans, although there were other nationalities. Uruguay has a population of about 3.4 million people.

"Here in Gualeguaychú you find all of Fray Bentos shopping," laughed Carolaine Sololuce, one of Ferreira's friends. "It's nice to come, because of all the activity, the stores"

Sololuce was happy because she bought a pair of pants for 9,000 Argentine pesos, or \$18 on the black market. In Fray Bentos, the pants would have cost \$48.

Claudio Gatt, who owns the hair salon Ferreira and her friends went to, said that since the economic crisis caused by the coronavirus pandemic in 2020 and 2021, the flow of Uruguayans into Argentina has been like oxygen.

"If they were not here, sales would drop by a minimum of 50%," he said.

Signs reading "dollars accepted" hang in store windows in Gualeguaychú and its main streets are filled with visitors from different parts of Uruguay. Half of the purchases of medicines and cleaning supplies in the city are by Uruguayans, according to a local business chamber.

"We are going to become Uruguayans pretty soon," said Sixto Fernandez, a 68-year-old Argentine retiree. "You go to the supermarket and it's always full. They're everywhere, they're like ants."

In a supermarket parking lot, Diana Rocco, 30, loaded several bags of cleaning products and groceries into her car. She was pleased with the mangoes she bought for half of what they would have cost in Uruguay.

Rocco, who is from the Uruguayan town of Palmitas, said she plans to return to Gualeguaychú because her salary as a security guard is barely enough to cover her expenses back home.

For Alejandro Ramos, a 49-year-old Argentine teacher who lives in Gualeguaychú, the problem is not the Uruguayans, because "they come and buy legally."

The problem "is us," he said. "We first have to realize that we are an economic disaster in this country."

The Iowa caucuses are six months away. Some Republicans worry Trump may be unstoppable

By JILL COLVIN and STEVE PEOPLES Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — He's been indicted twice. Found liable for sexual abuse. And he's viewed unfavorably by about a third of his party. But six months before Republicans begin to choose their next presidential nominee, former President Donald Trump remains the race's dominant front-runner.

Early leaders don't always go on to win their party's nomination, but a growing sense of Trump's inevitability is raising alarms among some Republicans desperate for the party to move on. Some described a sense of panic — or "DEFCON 1," as one put it — as they scramble to try to derail Trump and change the trajectory of the race. But there's no clear plan or strategy on how to do that and Trump's detractors aren't rallying around a single alternative candidate yet.

"They're very concerned," former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan said of fellow Republican leaders who share his view that renominating Trump would be a disaster for the party next November. Hogan, whose fears his own, described a moment of realization that, "Oh my gosh, we really could have Trump as the that an unwieldy Republican field would only benefit Trump persuaded him to opt out of a campaign of nominee."

"People expected us to have made more progress than we have at this point," he said as polling shows Trump routinely besting his closest rival by 20 to 30 points or more.

To be sure, the six months that remain until the Iowa caucuses can be an eternity in politics, where races can turn in a matter of weeks or days. And Trump faces glaring vulnerabilities, including the ongoing state and federal investigations into his efforts of overturn the 2020 election and the possibility that he could end up in the unprecedented position of standing trial while simultaneously mounting a campaign.

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But even critics acknowledge the outside events that many were counting on to dent Trump's standing — namely his criminal indictments in New York and Florida — have not hurt him. In fact, the charges led some voters who were entertaining an alternative to return to Trump's camp.

"The indictments have actually helped Donald Trump with the Republican primary voters," said Art Pope, a North Carolina GOP donor who is supporting former Vice President Mike Pence, but nonetheless believes the charges, particularly in New York, were unfounded.

Meanwhile, anti-Trump Republicans have yet to coalesce around an alternative, as Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has struggled to build momentum, leaving many still waiting to see whether another viable alternative might emerge from the pack. South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott has drawn growing attention.

Several groups that oppose Trump's candidacy have begun to spend big money on efforts to weaken his support, even if they have yet to rally around another candidate. Win It Back PAC, a new independent super PAC with ties to the conservative Club For Growth Action, invested \$3.6 million this month on a new ad that features a purported Trump supporter who has grown tired of the former president's antics.

"I love Donald Trump, I love what he did," he begins. But "he's got so many distractions ... and I'm not sure he can focus on moving the country forward."

The conservative Americans for Prosperity Action, which is part of the network founded by the billionaire Koch brothers, has also sought to undermine Trump through door knocking and phone calls. The group says it has found in conversations with voters that Trump's support is softer than most assume and that even those who identify as Trump supporters are concerned about his electability in a general election and open to an alternative.

Their mailers to voters in early states have focused on that message, including one that features photos of Trump and President Joe Biden and asks recipients, "Is it worth the risk?"

While officials with the group acknowledge that they are facing pressure to rally around a non-Trump candidate, they say they are focused now on laying "the foundation" for a Trump alternative to emerge.

"We've got to move on from Trump," said Drew Klein, the group's state director. "That's where most of the people we're talking to are as well. They're not necessarily locked in with a candidate, but they know we've got to move on."

Not everyone, however, agrees with the anti-Trump strategy. Former GOP pollster Frank Luntz, who has been running focus groups in Iowa, warned such messaging "makes it more likely that Trump wins because it turns him into a victim."

He said he's found Republican voters are open to an alternative, but want someone who will deliver on Trump's promises.

"The moon and the stars will need to be aligned for Trump to be defeated," he said. "And it will be done by the candidate that supports the Trump agenda but opposes the lack of success."

Political trajectories can change in an instant, particularly after voting begins. During the 2008 campaign, the eventual GOP nominee, Arizona Sen. John McCain, didn't emerge as the race's frontrunner until his January 2008 win in the New Hampshire primary. And then-Sen. Hillary Clinton appeared to have a clear advantage for the Democratic nomination, only to be overtaken by Barack Obama, after voting began.

But no former president has mounted a run after losing reelection in the modern era. And Trump maintains a fervent hold on a portion of the party. Indeed, it was eight years ago this month when the then-reality star and political newcomer began to pull ahead in the polls, surpassing rival Jeb Bush to move into first place — a position he'd hold until he won the nomination.

Ralph Reed, a longtime Republican strategist who is the chairman of the evangelical Faith and Freedom Coalition, said Trump remains in the "strongest position" of any candidate, but still believes the race "will be competitive and hard fought."

"No one should take any state for granted, no one should take this primary for granted because anything can happen and often does," he said. "Almost every front-runner has a near-death experience."

Critics and rival campaigns point to what they perceive as a growing list of Trump campaign missteps, particularly in Iowa, where he has criticized the state's popular governor, Kim Reynolds, for her seemingly

cozy relationship with DeSantis while purporting to be neutral. He's also skipped a pair of GOP gatherings that attracted most of his top rivals.

As his rivals spent Friday in Iowa at the Family Leadership Summit, Trump was heading to Florida, where he will have the stage largely to himself at the annual Turning Point Action conference, a gathering of thousands of young conservatives.

While DeSantis has had a years-long relationship with organizer Charlie Kirk and had been featured at last year's event alongside Trump and received a warm welcome from the crowd, DeSantis turned down the group's invitation, citing a scheduling conflict.

"You only have a few opportunities in the the grand scheme of an election cycle to get in front of major groups and all the media and to pass up this opportunity to lay out your vision for America I just think is one of the biggest mistakes," said Tyler Bowyer, the COO of Turning Point Action.

Asa Hutchinson, the former Arkansas governor who is among those challenging Trump for the nomination, said he still believes that Trump can be beaten. But he said two things have to change.

"First, candidates like myself have to be very clear that Donald Trump is not the right direction for our country or our party," he said. Second: "The voters have to realize we can't win in 2024 and it will be a devastating loss for the GOP ... up and down the ballot if Donald Trump is our nominee. And that, I believe, will be understood by the voters as time goes."

Vermont starts long road to recovery from historic floods, helped by army of volunteers

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

The Marshfield Village Store, which sits at the junction of two country highways in a tiny Vermont town, has become a little bit of everything in recent days as residents struggle to recover from historic floods that battered the state.

First the shop in Marshfield, about 45 miles (70 kilometers) east of the state's biggest city, Burlington, served as a shelter for about three dozen people. By Friday it was a distribution center for much-needed fresh water and a go-to for supplies.

"We're about to start putting it out more formally, if there are other folks who haven't been able to get the support that they need yet, so that we can get equipment and volunteers to them, emergency medication, work on their properties, that's where we're at right now," said Michelle Eddleman McCormick, the store's general manager.

Storms dumped up to two months' worth of rain in a couple of days in parts of the region earlier this week, surpassing the amount that fell when Tropical Storm Irene blew through in 2011 and caused major flooding. Officials called this week's flooding the state's worst natural disaster since floods in 1927, and some suggested storms like this showed the impacts of climate change.

The flooding has been blamed for one death: Stephen Davoll, 63, drowned in his home Wednesday in Barre, a central Vermont city of about 8,500 people, according to Vermont Emergency Management spokesman Mark Bosma. He urged people to continue taking 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," 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 upstate New York, where a woman was swept away by floodwaters in Fort Montgomery, a small Hudson River community about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of New York City.

President Joe Biden on Friday approved Vermont Gov. Phil Scott's request for a major disaster declaration to provide federal support.

Many communities have been in touch with Vermont emergency management officials, but state officials said Friday they hadn't yet heard from about two to three dozen of them. National Guard troops were

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sent to establish contact. The state also announced centers will open to help flood survivors recover this weekend in Barre and Ludlow, a southern Vermont ski village.

Most emergency shelters have emptied, with fewer than 70 people remaining. The focus has shifted to providing food and water and repairing infrastructure, including dozens of closed roads. State officials estimated 23 water treatment plants were either flooded or discharged untreated sewage into waterways.

Ludlow residents have mostly returned home and were able to get electricity and water, Municipal Manager Brendan McNamara said. All roads into town previously cut off by flooding are now accessible.

But plenty of challenges remained. The post office and wastewater treatment plant were heavily damaged. The main grocery store and several restaurants were closed due to damages. In their place, scores of pop-up pantries emerged to provide fresh meals. The community center has served as a clearinghouse for water, food and medicines donated by volunteers streaming into town.

"You walk up and down the street, and any place that wasn't hit has a sign out front — free food. Please come and get," McNamara said. "That tells me we have one heck of a community."

Farms also were hit hard, just after many growers endured a hard freeze in May.

It's expected to "destroy a large share of our produce and livestock feed," Vermont Agriculture Secretary Anson Tebbetts said at a news conference. "In our hilly state, some of our most fertile farmland lies in the river valleys, and countless fields of corn, hay, vegetables, fruit and pasture were swamped and buried."

It was too soon to determine damage costs, he said.

Scott and other officials praised the throngs who volunteered for the recovery effort.

"I've been inspired by the thousands of Vermonters, businesses and organizations who have reached out, wanting to help," the governor said. "As we transition to recovery, we know we'll need all the help we can get."

As of Friday about 5,200 people statewide had registered to help relief efforts through the state emergency management agency and an online volunteer recruitment effort, according to Philip Kolling, director of SerVermont.

"What we are doing does not even begin to capture all of the volunteers being organized through local organizations, towns and informal networks, and we encourage those local efforts as they often can address critical needs more quickly," Kolling said.

Some volunteers offered to drive for the charity Meals on Wheels or take people to medical appointments, others to assist with general cleanup.

In Ludlow, Calcutta's restaurant was preparing meals for first responders, volunteers and anyone else who might need one. The large banquet room was set up with cots, water and toiletries.

"There's plenty of work that needs to be done to get us back to normal," said Michael Reyes, who works for a hospitality group that owns the restaurant.

The state is bracing for more wet weather expected to hit Sunday and Tuesday.

"We don't know the extent of some of these storms," Scott said.

McCormack reported from Concord, New Hampshire. Associated Press reporters Lisa Rathke in Marshfield and Michael Casey in Boston contributed.

Vegas could break heat record as tens of millions across US endure scorching temperatures

By KEN RITTER and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — Visitors to Las Vegas on Friday stepped out momentarily to snap photos and were hit by blast-furnace air. But most will spend their vacations in a vastly different climate — at casinos where the chilly air conditioning might require a light sweater.

Meanwhile, emergency room doctors were witnessing another world, as dehydrated construction workers, passed-out elderly residents and others suffered in an intense heat wave threatening to break the city's all-time record high of 117 degrees Fahrenheit (47.2 degrees Celsius) this weekend.

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high-fiving one another with signs that reflected defiant lyrics from Olivia Rodrigo's new single, "Vampire," and were packing "Big Strike Energy."

"The jig is up," said Fran Drescher, president of SAG-AFTRA and once the titular star of "The Nanny" at SAG's press conference Thursday. "The entire business model has been changed by streaming, digital, A.I. If we don't stand tall right now, we're all going to be in trouble."

The infusion of SAG members' support was noted by comedian and writer Adam Conover, a member of SAG and WGA who serves on the latter's negotiating committee.

"If you are gaining momentum like we are 70-odd days into a strike, you are going to win," Conover said. "You know, the companies' strategy with the writers guild when we go on strike is to starve us out and wait, not even talk to us for months because they expect us to bleed support. Yet, look at this — our picket lines are more full than ever and now have another union on strike with us."

SAG and WGA last went on simultaneous strikes more than six decades ago.

"What we won in 1960 was our health and pension plans, and the existence of residuals," Conover said. Now, executives "are facing the fact that not only are they getting no new scripts, they cannot shoot anything until they come back and make a fair deal, not with one union but with both unions."

Zora Bikangaga, also a member of both guilds, called Friday's picket "invigorating," and a testament to how the issues writers are facing are "pervasive across the entire industry."

While the industry's business model has undergone major changes in the decades since the last strike, actors say their rates and contracts haven't evolved to match inflation and other changes.

"They use the gig economy as a way to say, 'This is how you can be more independent,' when in fact what it does it diminish the value and strength of organized labor," said actor Ron Song, who appeared on Amazon Freevee's "Jury Duty," which was nominated this week for four Emmys.

Former co-stars and acquaintances alike reunited at demonstrations. Some hadn't seen each other since the coronavirus pandemic started more than three years ago.

The first full day of the dual strike was marked by high energy — joy and unity mixed with anger and frustration.

For actor Stacey Travis, who has actively been involved in SAG-AFTRA for years, the decision to strike was not taken lightly.

"It feels extraordinary and it feels sad," she said of the moment. "It's very difficult on everyone, so we've always taken it incredibly seriously. So it's only when we're backed up against the wall and we have no options that we find ourselves here."

"It's all of it for me," said actor Peter Carellini about the reason for striking. "It's A.I. It's residuals. It's the fact that Bob Chapek, Bob Iger, David Zaslav are making untold millions in bonuses while writers and actors are going to the Emmys with negative bank accounts."

Bargain-hunting Uruguayans are flocking to Argentina as its peso slides. Back home, shops struggle

By ALMUDENA CALATRAVA Associated Press

GALEGUAYCHÚ, Argentina (AP) — On a recent cross-border shopping trip, four friends from Fray Bentos, Uruguay, visited the nearby Argentine city of Gualeguaychu, where they could afford to live lavishly and snap up eye-popping bargains.

Thanks to a huge disparity in the two South American countries' currencies, Stella Ferreira and a friend treated themselves to a low-cost pampering at a hair salon, while two other friends hunted around for stylish but inexpensive pants.

With its economy faltering, Argentina's peso has plunged against the U.S. dollar and its annual inflation is 115.6%, one of the highest rates in the world. In contrast, Uruguay's economy is more stable, with low inflation and a stronger currency.

The result has been a huge flow of shoppers from Uruguay throwing an economic lifeline to struggling

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Few places in the scorching Southwest demonstrate the surreal contrast between indoor and outdoor life like Las Vegas, a neon-lit city rich with resorts, casinos, swimming pools, indoor nightclubs and shopping. Tens of millions of others across California and the Southwest, were also scrambling for ways to stay cool and safe from the dangers of extreme heat.

"We've been talking about this building heat wave for a week now, and now the most intense period is beginning," the National Weather Service wrote Friday.

Nearly a third of Americans were under extreme heat advisories, watches and warnings. The blistering heat wave was forecast to get worse this weekend for Nevada, Arizona and California, where desert temperatures were predicted to soar in parts past 120 degrees Fahrenheit (48.8 degrees Celsius) during the day, and remain in the 90s F (above 32.2 C) overnight.

Sergio Cajamarca, his family and their dog, Max, were among those who lined up to pose for photos in front of the city's iconic "Welcome to Fabulous Las Vegas" sign. The temperature before noon already topped 100 F (37.8 C).

"I like the city, especially at night. It's just the heat," said Cajamarca, 46, an electrician from Brooklyn Park, Minnesota.

His daughter, Kathy Zhagui, 20, offered her recipe for relief: "Probably just water, ice cream, staying inside."

Meteorologists in Las Vegas warned people not to underestimate the danger. "This heatwave is NOT typical desert heat due to its long duration, extreme daytime temperatures, & warm nights. Everyone needs to take this heat seriously, including those who live in the desert," the National Weather Service in Las Vegas said in a tweet.

Phoenix marked the city's 15th consecutive day of 110 degrees Fahrenheit (43.3 degrees Celsius) or higher temperatures on Friday, hitting 116 degrees Fahrenheit (46.6 degrees Celsius) by late afternoon, and putting it on track to beat the longest measured stretch of such heat. The record is 18 days, recorded in 1974.

"This weekend there will be some of the most serious and hot conditions we've ever seen," said David Hondula the city's chief heat officer. "I think that it's a time for maximum community vigilance."

The heat was expected to continue well into next week as a high pressure dome moves west from Texas.

"We're getting a lot of heat-related illness now, a lot of dehydration, heat exhaustion," said Dr. Ashkan Morim, who works in the ER at Dignity Health Siena Hospital in suburban Henderson.

Morim said he has treated tourists this week who spent too long drinking by pools and became severely dehydrated; a stranded hiker who needed liters of fluids to regain his strength; and a man in his 70s who fell and was stuck for seven hours in his home until help arrived. The man kept his home thermostat at 80 F (26.7 C), concerned about his electric bill with air conditioning operating constantly to combat high nighttime temperatures.

Regional health officials in Las Vegas launched a new database Thursday to report "heat-caused" and "heat-related" deaths in the city and surrounding Clark County from April to October.

The Southern Nevada Health District said seven people have died since April 11, and a total of 152 deaths last year were determined to be heat-related.

Besides casinos, air-conditioned public libraries, police station lobbies and other places from Texas to California planned to be open to the public to offer relief at least for part of the day. In New Mexico's largest city of Albuquerque, splash pads will be open for extended hours and many public pools were offering free admission. In Boise, Idaho, churches and other nonprofit groups were offering water, sunscreen and shelter.

Temperatures closer to the Pacific coast were less severe, but still made for a sweaty day on picket lines in the Los Angeles area where actors joined screenwriters in strikes against producers.

In Sacramento, the California State Fair kicked off with organizers canceling planned horseracing events due to concerns for animal safety.

Employers were reminded that outdoor workers must receive water, shade and regular breaks to cool off.

Pet owners were urged to keep their animals mostly inside. "Dogs are more susceptible to heat stroke and can literally die within minutes. Please leave them at home in the air conditioning," David Szymanski,

park superintendent for Santa Monica Mountains National Recreation Area, said in a statement.

Meanwhile, the wildfire season was ramping up amid the hot, dry conditions with a series of blazes erupting across California this week, Wade Crowfoot, secretary of the Natural Resources Agency, said at a media briefing.

Global climate change is "supercharging" heat waves, Crowfoot added.

Firefighters in Riverside County, southeast of Los Angeles, were battling multiple brush fires that started Friday afternoon.

Stefan Gligorevic, a software engineer from Lancaster, Pennsylvania visiting Las Vegas for the first time said he planned to stay hydrated and not let it ruin his vacation.

"Cold beer and probably a walk through the resorts. You take advantage of the shade when you can," Gligorevic said. "Yeah, definitely."

Watson reported from San Diego. AP reporters John Antczak in Los Angeles, Anita Snow in Phoenix and Susan Montoya in Albuquerque, New Mexico contributed to this report.

Iowa law banning most abortions after about 6 weeks takes effect as judge weighs whether to block it

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — An Iowa ban on most abortions after about six weeks of pregnancy was signed into law Friday, forcing clinics to scramble to arrange out-of-state care for many women whose access immediately ended as a judge considered whether to temporarily put a hold on the law.

A court hearing took place Friday, but the judge said his ruling on whether to halt the new law as the courts assess its constitutionality will likely not come until Monday at the earliest.

Barely a mile away, Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds signed the measure into law in front of 2,000 conservative Christians.

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. That's a dramatic shift for women in Iowa, where abortion had been legal up to 20 weeks of pregnancy.

The ACLU of Iowa, Planned Parenthood North Central States and the Emma Goldman Clinic filed the legal challenge Wednesday and representatives spoke at the court hearing Friday.

After the hearing, District Court Judge Joseph Seidlin said he could not imagine "anything that would be more insulting to either side" than for him to "flippantly" rule from the bench Friday.

The split screen between Reynolds' signing and the court hearing 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 we gather here today, at this very moment, the abortion industry is in the court trying to prevent this law from taking effect and stop once again the will of the people," Reynolds said, before bringing lawmakers and others to the stage to sign the law. "But the passage of this legislation by even a wider margin this time sends an unmistakable message."

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

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.

"Patients' lives are deeply impacted every day that this law is allowed to stand," said Ruth Richardson,

president and CEO of Planned Parenthood North Central States. "Iowans will be harmed as they've lost the right to control their bodies and futures."

Planned Parenthood North Central States were helping patients reschedule their appointments in other states, if they wanted, but remained hopeful there would not be a long interruption in services. Richardson said there have been hundreds of phone calls to prepare patients amid the uncertainty.

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

One clinic stayed open until about 9:30 p.m. Thursday in an effort to provide abortion care to as many patients as possible before the new restrictions, their attorney said.

"I can only hope that all patients who had appointments this morning have gotten the care that they need and that they're not sitting at a health center right now," the clinics' attorney Peter Im said during Friday's court arguments.

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.

Ballentine contributed from Columbia, Missouri.

Jesse Jackson to step down as head of civil rights organization Rainbow PUSH

By GARY FIELDS, CLAIRE SAVAGE and TERESA CRAWFORD Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — The Rev. Jesse Jackson plans to step down from leading the Chicago civil rights organization Rainbow PUSH Coalition he founded in 1971, the organization announced Friday.

"Reverend Jesse Jackson is officially pivoting from his role as president of Rainbow PUSH Coalition. His commitment is unwavering, and he will elevate his life's work by teaching ministers how to fight for social justice and continue the freedom movement," the organization said in a statement. "Rev. Jackson's global impact and civil rights career will be celebrated this weekend at the 57th annual Rainbow PUSH Coalition convention, where his successor will be introduced."

The Rev. Janette Wilson, a senior adviser to Jackson and longtime staff member of the organization, told The Associated Press that the civil rights leader and two-time presidential candidate will address members Saturday about his decision.

Jackson, who will turn 82 in October, has remained active in civil rights in recent years despite health setbacks.

He announced in 2017 that he had begun outpatient care for Parkinson's disease two years earlier. In early 2021, he had gallbladder surgery and later that year was treated for COVID-19 including a stint at a physical therapy-focused facility. He was hospitalized again in November 2021 for a fall that caused a head injury.

Jackson, a protégé of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., broke with the Southern Christian Leadership Conference in 1971 to form Operation PUSH — originally named People United to Save Humanity — a sweeping civil rights organization based on Chicago's South Side.

The organization was later renamed the Rainbow PUSH Coalition with a mission ranging from encouraging corporations to hire more minorities to voter registration drives in communities of color. Its annual

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convention is set for this weekend in Chicago.

Jackson has long been a powerful voice in American politics.

Until Barack Obama's election in 2008, Jackson was the most successful Black candidate for the U.S. presidency, winning 13 primaries and caucuses for the Democratic nomination in 1988.

Jackson has helped guide the modern civil rights movement on a wide variety of issues, including voting rights and education.

He stood with the family of George Floyd at a memorial for the Black man murdered in 2020 by a white police officer, whose death forced a national reckoning with police brutality and racism. Jackson also participated in COVID-19 vaccination drives to battle hesitancy in Black communities.

Santita Jackson, one of his daughters, said in an interview that her father would not be vanishing. "While the flesh may not be willing, the spirit is," she said, adding that she hoped her father would provide a living history. "Dr. King gave him his assignment and he's been faithful to it in every iteration of his life. Many people have said Dr. King was the architect and Rev. Jackson was the builder."

One of his sons, U.S. Rep. Jonathan Jackson, told the Chicago Sun-Times that his father "has forever been on the scene of justice and has never stopped fighting for civil rights" and that will be "his mark upon history."

Chicago Mayor Brandon Johnson called Jackson "an architect of the soul of Chicago" in a statement Friday.

"Through decades of service, he has led the Rainbow PUSH Coalition at the forefront of the struggle for civil rights and social justice. His faith, his perseverance, his love, and his relentless dedication to people inspire all of us to keep pushing for a better tomorrow," said Johnson, who was endorsed by Jackson when he ran for mayor earlier this year.

Al Sharpton, president and founder of the National Action Network, said in a statement that he had spoken to Jackson on Friday morning and "told him that we will continue to glean from him and learn from him and duplicate him in whatever our organizations and media platforms are. Because he has been an anchor for me and many others."

Sharpton called Jackson his mentor, adding: "The resignation of Rev. Jesse Jackson is the pivoting of one of the most productive, prophetic, and dominant figures in the struggle for social justice in American history."

Fields reported from Washington, D.C. Savage is a corps member for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Long Island architect charged in 3 of the Gilgo Beach serial killings

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ, MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

RIVERHEAD, N.Y. (AP) — A Long Island architect was charged Friday with murder in the deaths of three of the 11 victims in a long-unsolved string of killings known as the Gilgo Beach murders after detectives pursuing a new lead say they matched DNA from a pizza he ate to genetic material found on the women's remains.

Rex Heuermann, who has lived for decades across a bay from where the remains were found, is charged with killing Melissa Barthelemy, Megan Waterman and Amber Costello. He is also considered the prime suspect in the death of a fourth woman whose body was bound and hidden in thick underbrush along a remote beach highway, authorities said.

Investigators have said over the years that it's unlikely one person killed all 11 victims.

Heuermann, 59, was arrested late Thursday amid a renewed investigation that first identified him as a suspect in March 2022, when detectives linked him to a pickup truck that a witness reported seeing when one of the victims disappeared in 2010.

In March, detectives tailing Heuermann recovered his DNA from pizza crust in a box that he discarded in a Manhattan trash can and matched it to a hair found on a restraint used in the killings, authorities said.

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Heuermann's lawyer entered a not guilty plea on his behalf Friday in state court in Riverhead. Judge Richard Ambro ordered him jailed without bail, citing "the extreme depravity" of his alleged conduct.

Heuermann's lawyer, Michael Brown, said they just learned about the charges Friday morning. Speaking to reporters after the arraignment, he said Heuermann told him: "I didn't do this."

Heuermann, wearing khaki pants and a gray collared shirt, did not speak in court.

Heuermann lives in Massapequa Park, a community just north of South Oyster Bay and the sandy stretch known as Gilgo Beach where the remains were found in 2010 and 2011. Most of the victims were young women who had been sex workers. Their deaths long stumped investigators, a mystery that fueled immense public attention and led to a 2020 Netflix film, "Lost Girls."

Determining who killed them, and why, vexed a slew of seasoned homicide detectives through several changes in police leadership. Last year an interagency task force was formed with investigators from the FBI, as well as state and local police departments, aimed at solving the case.

"Ladies and gentlemen, Rex Heuermann is a demon that walks among us — a predator that ruined families," Suffolk County police Commissioner Rodney Harrison said. "If not for the members of this task force, he would still be out on the streets today."

After connecting Heuermann to the pickup, prosecutors said, investigators were able to link him to other evidence, including burner cellphones used to arrange meetings with the slain women, and taunting calls that a person claiming to be the killer made to one of Barthelemy's relatives using her cellphone after she disappeared in 2009.

In recent months, Heuermann sought to keep tabs on the probe and "searched obsessively" on the internet for facts about the Gilgo Beach killings, including the names of women he's accused of killing, as well as podcasts and documentaries about the case, Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney said.

Tierney said authorities moved to charge Heuermann now with three of the killings "out of concern for this defendant fleeing and the danger to the community." They are continuing to work toward charging him in the death of a fourth victim, Maureen Brainard-Barnes.

Until his arrest, Heuermann continued to use burner phones, patronize sex workers and search the internet for sadistic materials, including sexually exploitative images of children, Tierney said. He also has permits for 92 guns, the prosecutor said.

"This is a day that is a long time in coming, and hopefully a day that will bring peace to this community and to the families — peace that has been long overdue," New York Gov. Kathy Hochul said during an unrelated appearance on Long Island.

The arrest came as a shock and a relief to some of the victims' relatives.

"I never thought they'd find this person," Barthelemy's cousin, Amy Brotz, said.

Law enforcement personnel converged Friday morning on Heuermann's home, a small red house about 40 miles (64 km) east of midtown Manhattan. Dozens of residents mingled alongside police and media, watching as a half-dozen investigators, some in protective suits, conferred outside the front porch, which was in disrepair, its roof propped up by 2-by-4s.

The home, where Heuermann has lived since childhood, belonged to a family that had long kept to themselves, neighbors said, noting that the dilapidated property seemed out of place among rows of single-family homes and well-kept lawns.

Barry Auslander said the man who lived in the house commuted by train to New York City each morning, wearing a suit and tie and carrying a briefcase.

"It was weird. He looked like a businessman," Auslander said. "But his house is a dump."

Heuermann, married with a daughter and a stepson, is a licensed architect with a Manhattan-based firm that, according to its website, has done store buildouts and other renovations for major retailers, offices and apartments.

"We're happy to see that they're finally active, the police, in accomplishing something. Let's wait and see what it all leads to," said John Ray, the attorney for the families of two other women whose remains were found, Shannan Gilbert and Jessica Taylor.

Gilbert's disappearance in 2010 triggered the hunt that exposed the larger mystery. A 24-year-old sex

worker, she vanished after leaving a client's house on foot in the seafront community of Oak Beach, disappearing into the marsh.

Months later, a police officer and his cadaver dog were looking for her body in the thicket along nearby Ocean Parkway when they happened upon the remains of a different woman. Within days, three other bodies were found, all within a short walk of one another.

By spring 2011, that number had climbed to 10 sets of human remains — those of eight women, one man and one toddler. Some were later linked to dismembered body parts found elsewhere on Long Island, making for a puzzling crime scene that stretched from a park near the New York City limits to a resort community on Fire Island and out to far eastern Long Island.

Gilbert's body was found in December 2011, about 3 miles (5 kilometers) east of where the other 10 sets were discovered.

Balsamo reported from Washington. Associated Press contributors include Jennifer Peltz, Bobby Caina Calvan, Michael R. Sisak and researcher Rhonda Shafner in New York and Sarah Brumfield in Silver Spring, Maryland.

GOP attorneys general shift the battle over affirmative action to the workplace

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS and GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Thirteen Republican state attorneys general are cautioning CEOs of the 100 biggest U.S. companies on the legal consequences for using race as a factor in hiring and employment practices, demonstrating how the Supreme Court's recent ruling dismantling affirmative action in higher education may trickle into the workplace.

The state attorneys general sent a letter to the CEOs on Thursday arguing that the controversial June ruling declaring that race cannot be a factor in college admissions — consequently striking down decades-old practices aimed at achieving diverse student bodies — could also apply to private entities, like employers.

"Treating people differently because of the color of their skin, even for benign purposes, is unlawful and wrong," they wrote. The GOP officials also suggested that Diversity, Equity and Inclusion programs could be a form of discrimination.

The letter and similar actions elsewhere have raised questions about the far-reaching consequences of the Supreme Court decision beyond higher education. But experts note the court's ruling itself doesn't directly change current employer obligations or commitments to DEI.

"The decision itself does not legally impact Title VII (of the Civil Rights Act), which is what governs employment discrimination or discrimination in the workplace," Greg Hoff, associate counsel of the HR Policy Association, told The Associated Press.

Hoff and others say the court's ruling only applies to higher education institutions and other entities that receive federal funding. They also note that affirmative action in college admissions is very different from DEI efforts in workplaces, which can include expanding outreach for new hires, creating employee resource groups for underrepresented workers, and reducing bias in hiring through such practices as "blind" applications.

"What we've been seeing a lot of since the decision came down is political opponents of DEI ... conflating affirmative action with DEI more broadly — because it serves their political purposes," said David Glasgow, executive director of the Meltzer Center for Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging at New York University's School of Law. "I think there's a lot of quite deliberate attempts to muddy the waters here."

Beyond DEI, affirmative action in the workplace is technically still upheld by Supreme Court precedent, Glasgow adds. But workplace affirmative action is rare, and he suspects today's court would likely overrule those cases if challenged, mirroring the college admissions decision.

While Thursday's letter doesn't mark legal action, experts expect future litigation down the road. The attorneys' general letter also isn't the first time officials have argued that the Supreme Court's ruling ap-

plies to private employers.

Last week, Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Arkansas, sent a letter to Target CEO Brian Cornell stating that the company's DEI program and "racial quota for hiring" was discriminatory while also pointing to the affirmative action ruling. Target did not immediately respond to The Associated Press' request for comment on Friday.

"They're starting with letters, but I don't think that they're bluffs," Temple University assistant professor of law Zamir Ben-Dan said. "It's going to be a problem."

The attorneys general said they would be paying attention to companies' practices in hiring employees and contractors — and called out companies including Airbnb, Facebook, Google, Goldman Sachs, Microsoft and Netflix for programs intended to increase racial diversity with hires and suppliers.

In response, employers may take steps to avoid litigation, Hoff and HR Policy Association president and CEO Tim Bartl said.

"The increased risk for employers is this increased risk of litigation as a result of the decision — but again, not because of any changing obligations under Title VII," Hoff said.

Tennessee Attorney General Jonathan Skrmetti, one of the signatories, said that the letter isn't a warning to companies as much as it is a heads-up that racial preferences could run afoul of the law. He added that the group decided to take action in part to respond to speculation about the Supreme Court ruling not applying to employment.

"The court was very clear," he said in a Friday interview. "The appropriate response to racial discrimination is not more racial discrimination."

Not all state attorneys general cheered last month's ruling or are eager to apply it outside college admissions. Only about half the nation's Republican AGs signed the letter. And Democrats have been condemning the Supreme Court's affirmative action ruling.

"For decades the Supreme Court has upheld targeted affirmative action programs to increase diversity in higher education," the co-chairs of the Democratic Attorneys General Association, Nevada's Aaron Ford and Delaware's Kathy Jennings, said in a statement June 29, calling that day's ruling "a major step backwards that tramples on those ideals."

Ben-Dan anticipates that the results of any action taken in the workplace to undercut DEI will mimic what already happened when affirmative action had previously been weakened in higher education, noting that enrollment for nonwhite students — particularly Black students — went down after California banned affirmative action in 1996, for example.

"I imagine that it's going to lead to a decline in racial diversity in workforces," he said.

A wave of political turbulence is rolling through Guatemala and other Central American countries

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Central America is experiencing a wave of unrest that is remarkable even for a region whose history is riddled with turbulence. The most recent example is political upheaval in Guatemala as the country heads for a runoff presidential election in August.

A look at various events roiling Central American countries:

Guatemala

Guatemala is locked in the most troubled presidential election in the country's recent history. The first round of elections in June ended with a surprise twist when little known progressive candidate Bernardo Arévalo of the Seed Movement party pulled ahead as a front-runner.

Now headed to an August runoff election with conservative candidate and top vote-getter Sandra Torres, Arévalo has thus far managed to survive judicial attacks and attempts by Guatemala's political establishment to disqualify his party. It comes after other moves by the country's government to manage the election, including banning several candidates before the first-round vote.

While not entirely unprecedented in a country known for high levels of corruption, American officials call the latest escalation a threat to the country's democracy.

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El Salvador

El Salvador has been radically transformed in the past few years with the entrance of populist millennial President Nayib Bukele. One year ago, Bukele entered an all-out war with the Barrio 18 and Mara Salvatruchas, or MS-13, gangs. He suspended constitutional rights and threw 1 in every 100 people in the country into prisons that have fueled allegations of mass human rights abuses.

The sharp dip in violence that followed Bukele's actions, combined with an elaborate propaganda machine, has ignited a pro-Bukele populist fervor across the region, with other governments trying to mimic the Bitcoin-pushing leader.

At the same time, Bukele has announced he will run for reelection in February next year despite the constitution prohibiting it. He has also made moves that observers warn are gradually dismantling the nation's democracy.

Nicaragua

President Daniel Ortega is in an all-out crackdown on dissent. For years, regional watchdogs and the U.S. government raised alarms that democracy was eroding under the leader of the Sandinista National Liberation Front. That came to a head in 2018 when Ortega's government began a violent crackdown on protests.

Most recently, Ortega forced hundreds of opposition figures into exile, stripping them of their citizenship, seizing their properties and declaring them "traitors of the homeland." Nicaragua has thrown out aid groups such as the Red Cross and a yearslong crackdown on the Catholic Church has forced the Vatican to close its embassy. The tightening chokehold on the country has prompted many Nicaraguans to flee their country and seek asylum in neighboring Costa Rica or the United States.

Honduras

President Xiomara Castro took office last year as the first female president of Honduras, winning on a message of tackling corruption, inequality and poverty. The wife of former President Manuel Zelaya, who was ousted in a military coup, she won a landslide victory.

But her popularity has dipped as many of her promises for change have gone unfulfilled. At the same time, the government has sought to mimic neighboring El Salvador's crackdown on gangs, responding fiercely to a grisly massacre in a women's prison in June.

Costa Rica

Once known as the land of "pura vida" and mild politics compared to the surrounding region, Costa Rica has seen rising bloodshed that threatens to tarnish the country's reputation as a secure haven. Homicides have soared as the nation has become a base for drug traffickers. President Rodrigo Chavez, who took office last year, has promised more police in the street and tougher laws to take on the uptick in crime.

At the same time, a migratory flight from Nicaragua has overwhelmed the country, which is known as one of the world's great refuges for people fleeing persecution. The government has since tightened its asylum laws.

Panama

Panama is headed into presidential elections in May, with simmering frustration at economic woes, corruption and insecurity acting as a potential harbinger for change. Any shift could have global significance due to Panama's status as a financial hub.

The nation has also become the epicenter of a steady flow of migration through the perilous jungles of the Darien Gap running along the Colombia-Panama border.

Belize

Belize is often seen as a place of relative calm in a region that is anything but. A former British colony named British Honduras, Belize's government system is still tightly tethered to the country. But Prime Minister Johnny Briceño has sought to distance his nation from the monarchy. The nation is also one of the few in the Americas that maintains formal ties with Taiwan amid a broad effort by China to pull support away from the island country by funneling money into Central America.

House Republicans push through defense bill limiting abortion access and halting diversity efforts

By LISA MASCARO and KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House passed a sweeping defense bill Friday that provides an expected 5.2% pay raise for service members but strays from traditional military policy with Republicans add-ons blocking abortion coverage, diversity initiatives at the Pentagon and transgender care that deeply divided the chamber.

Democrats voted against the package, which had sailed out of the House Armed Services Committee on an almost unanimous vote weeks ago before being loaded with the GOP priorities during a heated late-night floor debate this week.

The final vote was 219-210, with four Democrats siding with the GOP and four Republicans opposed. The bill, as written, is expected to go nowhere in the Democratic-majority Senate.

Efforts to halt U.S. funding for Ukraine in its war against Russia were turned back, but Republicans added provisions to stem the Defense Department's diversity initiatives and to restrict access to abortions. The abortion issue has been championed by Sen. Tommy Tuberville, R-Ala., who is singularly stalling Senate confirmation of military officers, including the new commandant of the Marine Corps.

"We are continuing to block the Biden administration's 'woke' agenda," said Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo.

Turning the must-pass defense bill into a partisan battleground shows how deeply the nation's military has been unexpectedly swept up in disputes over race, equity and women's health care that are now driving the Republican Party's priorities in America's widening national divide.

During one particularly tense moment in the debate, Democratic Rep. Joyce Beatty of Ohio, a former chairwoman of the Congressional Black Caucus, spoke of how difficult it was to look across the aisle as Republicans chip away at gains for women, Black people and others in the military.

"You are setting us back," she said about an amendment from Rep. Eli Crane, R-Ariz., that would prevent the Defense Department from requiring participation in race-based training for hiring, promotions or retention.

Crane argued that Russia and China do not mandate diversity measures in their military operations and neither should the United States. "We don't want our military to be a social experiment," he said. "We want the best of the best."

When Crane used the pejorative phrase "colored people" for Black military personnel, Beatty asked for his words to be stricken from the record.

Friday's vote capped a tumultuous week for House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., as conservatives essentially drove the agenda, forcing their colleagues to consider their ideas for the annual bill that has been approved by Congress unfailingly since World War II.

"I think he's doing great because we are moving through — it was like over 1,500 amendments — and we're moving through them," said Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga. She told reporters she changed her mind to support the bill after McCarthy offered her a seat on the committee that will be negotiating the final version with the Senate.

Democrats, in a joint leadership statement, said they were voting against the bill because Republicans "turned what should be a meaningful investment in our men and women in uniform into an extreme and reckless legislative joyride."

"Extreme MAGA Republicans have chosen to hijack the historically bipartisan National Defense Authorization Act to continue attacking reproductive freedom and jamming their right-wing ideology down the throats of the American people," said the statement from Reps. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, Katherine Clark of Massachusetts and Pete Aguilar of California.

The defense bill authorizes \$874.2 billion in the coming year for the defense spending, keeping with President Joe Biden's budget request. The funding itself is to be allocated later, when Congress handles the appropriation bills, as is the normal process.

The package sets policy across the Defense Department, as well as in aspects of the Energy Department,

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and this year focuses particularly on the U.S. stance toward China, Russia and other national security fronts. Republican opposition to U.S. support for the war in Ukraine drew a number of amendments, including one to block the use of cluster munitions that Biden just sent to help Ukraine battle Russia. It was a controversial move because the weapons, which can leave behind unexploded munitions endangering civilians, are banned by many other countries.

Most of those efforts to stop U.S. support for Ukraine failed. Proposals to roll back the Pentagon's diversity and inclusion measures and block some medical care for transgender personnel were approved.

GOP Rep. Ronny Jackson of Texas, who served as a White House physician, pushed forward the abortion measure that would prohibit the defense secretary from paying for or reimbursing expenses relating to abortion services.

Jackson and other Republicans praised Tuberville for his stand against the Pentagon's abortion policy, which was thrust into prominence as states started banning the procedure after the Supreme Court decision last summer overturning the landmark Roe v. Wade law.

"Now he's got support, he's got back up here in the House," Jackson said.

But it's not at all certain that the House position will stand as the legislation moves to the Senate, which is preparing its own version of the bill. Senate Democrats have the majority but will need to work with Republicans on a bipartisan measure to ensure enough support for passage in their chamber.

McCarthy lauded the House for gutting "radical programs" that he said distract from the military's purpose.

Democratic members of the House Armed Services Committee, led by Rep. Adam Smith of Washington state, dropped their support due to the social policy amendments.

Smith, who is white, tried to explain to Crane and other colleagues why the Pentagon's diversity initiatives were important in America, drawing on his own experience as a businessman trying to reach outside his own circle of contacts to be able to hire and gain deeper understanding of other people.

Smith lamented that the bill that the committee passed overwhelmingly "no longer exists. What was once an example of compromise and functioning government has become an ode to bigotry and ignorance."

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri, Stephen Groves and Mary Clare Jalonick contributed to this report.

NTSB looking at risk parked semis posed to Greyhound bus in fatal Illinois accident

By JIM SALTER and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Big rig driver David Chernow was hauling Jimmy Dean sausages on Interstate 70 when he had to stop for the night or risk violating federal regulations limiting driving time for truckers. An Illinois rest area was full, so Chernow parked on the wide shoulder of the exit ramp leading to it — a common practice for truck drivers.

Just before 2 a.m. Wednesday, Chernow was awakened to a frightening jolt that sent him airborne into his dash. He got out and saw the horror: A burning Greyhound bus jammed into his trailer, passengers pushing and kicking at windows trying to get out.

The accident near St. Louis killed three of the 22 bus passengers and left 14 other people, including the driver, injured. The National Transportation Safety Board is trying to determine what caused the bus to strike three parked rigs and will look at factors such as driver fatigue. Investigators also are specifically looking at the safety risks posed by trucks parked on ramps.

"It's absolutely an issue," NTSB board member Tom Chapman said.

An estimated 13 million trucks operate on U.S. roadways, and there aren't nearly enough overnight parking places at rest areas, truck stops or elsewhere to accommodate them. Meanwhile, federal regulations require electronic monitoring that tracks the driver's hours behind the wheel. Violations of "Hours of Service" regulations can result in fines, sometimes reaching thousands of dollars.

As a result, truckers nearing their hourly limits are often forced to find alternative spots to pull off for

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the night. Many opt for highway off-ramps, especially those at rest areas. The practice is illegal in Illinois and most states but police often look the other way, aware of the plight truckers face. Illinois State Police also are investigating the Greyhound crash and it isn't clear if truckers who were parked near the ramp could be ticketed.

Cherno, who helped pull passengers from the wreckage and extinguish a fire on the bus, insisted he was parked legally because he was far enough on the shoulder and from the highway entrance. He said there were no signs prohibiting parking along the ramp, as there are at some rest stops.

Had his night gone as planned he wouldn't have even been there, he said. Cherno told The Associated Press that he had hoped to make it to Troy, Illinois, to stop Tuesday night, but was at the end of his allowable 11 hours on the road.

"I was 15 minutes from Troy, but these electronic logs will violate you for driving 10 extra minutes to find a parking space," Cherno said.

Some trucking industry advocacy groups say the electronic monitoring has created a situation that compromises safety.

"Drivers run out of time on their clocks and have to find a safe place to park their rigs, and in most cases truck stops are full or they do not have enough time to make it to another location," said Michael Boston, president of the 35,000-member National Owner Operators Association.

Collin Long, director of government affairs for the Owner-Operator Independent Drivers Association, said truckers are often faced with parking on a ramp or finding a remote location off the highway, a spot that has its own dangers.

"We've had instances of drivers assaulted, murdered, robbed because they're parking in places they shouldn't be," Long said. "It puts them in a real no-win situation."

But others say electronic monitoring has helped make roadways safer by requiring rest for truckers. As much as it inconveniences Cherno, he fears that large trucking companies would take advantage of drivers if monitors were removed. But he favors flexibility.

Executive Director Zach Cahalan of the Truck Safety Coalition, which seeks to reduce deaths and injuries resulting from accidents involving trucks, said that before electronic monitoring, paper log books "were referred to as comic books commonly in the industry because they were fiction" and easy to falsify.

"The rules were always there and to blame people holding you accountable for rules that keep you and other people safe is absurd," Cahalan said.

Still, the number of people killed in accidents involving large trucks increased 10% in the first half of 2022 compared to the previous year, according to estimates released in January by the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration.

It isn't known how many accidents nationally involve parked trucks. Studies in two states found alarming numbers.

Last year, the California Department of Transportation released a study showing that from 2014 to 2018, 1,626 crashes in the state involved parked trucks, resulting in 131 deaths. A 2020 study by the Texas Department of Transportation found that from 2013 to 2017, 2,315 accidents involving parked trucks were blamed for 138 deaths.

A statement from the U.S. Department of Transportation acknowledged the truck parking shortage and said more than \$70 million has been invested under President Joe Biden's infrastructure law for truck parking facilities. Recent grants have included \$22.9 million to Texas, \$10.5 million to Louisiana, \$15 million to Florida and \$22 million to Tennessee.

Republican U.S. Rep. Mike Bost of Illinois sponsored legislation that seeks \$750 million over three years to build truck parking spaces across the nation.

As for electronic monitoring, Cherno would like to see some allowance so truckers can find safer parking even if it means going over the time limit by a few minutes. Bost agreed.

"The reality is we need to allow for common sense," Bost said.

___Hollingsworth reported from Mission, Kansas.

Appeals court pauses order limiting Biden administration contact with social media companies

By KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — A federal appeals court Friday temporarily paused a lower court's order limiting executive branch officials' communications with social media companies about controversial online posts.

Biden administration lawyers had asked the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New Orleans to stay the preliminary injunction issued on July 4 by U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty. Doughty himself had rejected a request to put his order on hold pending appeal.

Friday's brief 5th Circuit order put Doughty's injunction on hold "until further orders of the court." It called for arguments in the case to be scheduled on an expedited basis.

Filed last year, the lawsuit claimed the administration, in effect, censored free speech by discussing possible regulatory action the government could take while pressuring companies to remove what it deemed misinformation. COVID-19 vaccines, legal issues involving President Joe Biden's son Hunter and election fraud allegations were among the topics spotlighted in the lawsuit.

Doughty, nominated to the federal bench by former President Donald Trump, issued an Independence Day order and accompanying reasons that covered more than 160 pages. He said the plaintiffs were likely to win their ongoing lawsuit. His injunction blocked the Department of Health and Human Services, the FBI and multiple other government agencies and administration officials from "encouraging, pressuring, or inducing in any manner the removal, deletion, suppression, or reduction of content containing protected free speech."

Administration lawyers said the order was overly broad and vague, raising questions about what officials can say in conversations with social media companies or in public statements. They said Doughty's order posed a threat of "grave" public harm by chilling executive branch efforts to combat online misinformation.

Doughty rejected the administration's request for a stay on Monday, writing: "Defendants argue that the injunction should be stayed because it might interfere with the Government's ability to continue working with social-media companies to censor Americans' core political speech on the basis of viewpoint. In other words, the Government seeks a stay of the injunction so that it can continue violating the First Amendment."

In its request that the 5th Circuit issue a stay, administration lawyers said there has been no evidence of threats by the administration. "The district court identified no evidence suggesting that a threat accompanied any request for the removal of content. Indeed, the order denying the stay — presumably highlighting the ostensibly strongest evidence — referred to 'a series of public media statements,'" the administration said.

Friday's "administrative stay" was issued without comment by a panel of three 5th Circuit judges: Carl Stewart, nominated to the court by former President Bill Clinton; James Graves, nominated by former President Barack Obama; and Andrew Oldham, nominated by Trump. A different panel drawn from the court, which has 17 active members, will hear arguments on a longer stay.

Guatemala's corruption is thrust into international spotlight by the government's 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 rampant corruption that previously had received only limited international attention.

President Alejandro Giammattei was deeply unpopular at home, but other than occasional reprobation from the United States and Europe, had managed to consolidate his control of the justice system, completely upending a longstanding anti-corruption campaign in the country with little consequence.

The June 25 presidential election may have changed all that. In the days leading up to the vote, it appeared there would be a runoff between a small number of right and extreme right candidates, includ-

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ing Giammattei allies. But with a large number of null votes, many cast in protest, and a campaign that resonated especially with young Guatemalans, progressive candidate Bernardo Arévalo placed second, ensuring his participation in an Aug. 20 runoff.

Suddenly, it seemed there was a real possibility of choice for Guatemalans who want to change the status quo. That stunned the powers that be, who quickly reacted.

"I think that fear clouded him, blinded him," Katya Salazar, executive director of the Due Process Foundation, said of Giammattei. She added that Arévalo's surprise support was "a demonstration of the dissatisfaction" in the Central American country.

"I think he (Giammattei) thought that it would be the same as always," she said.

Late Wednesday, a federal prosecutor announced that Arévalo's party, the Seed Movement, had been suspended for allegedly violating election laws. 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.

At a news conference on Friday, special anti-corruption prosecutor Rafael Curruchiche defended his investigation as serious, objective and impartial. He said the inquiry had taken a year to complete and it was a coincidence that he announced it on the same day the Supreme Electoral Tribunal certified the election results.

"That idea they have that this case arises from political issues is completely false," Curruchiche said. "We don't get involved in political issues."

The prosecutor said his office's raid of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal on Thursday had produced very valuable information, but he did not go into specifics. He did say that the tribunal's own documents showed it was aware that 12 signatures collected by the Seed Movement when it was being established in 2018 were those of dead people, yet still allowed them to be registered.

"They didn't take their responsibility like they should have," he said.

Earlier Friday, the Attorney General's Office said in a statement that it was carrying out its duty to enforce the country's laws and not trying to interfere with the second round of voting or keep any candidate from participating in the runoff. Curruchiche said his investigation would continue.

The government's actions have triggered a domestic and international uproar. 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 former first lady Sandra Torres, joined in, announcing that she would suspend her campaign activities 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 to the Giammattei administration, granting the Seed Movement's request for a preliminary injunction against its suspension. 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.

His response had little effect on a population that witnessed how the president had dramatically transformed a nation that until four years ago had hosted an aggressive and productive anti-corruption effort supported by the United Nations. After Giammattei's predecessor forced out the U.N. mission that supported the fight against graft, the current president systematically forced out prosecutors and judges who were continuing that effort, replacing them with loyalists. Even those who had grown critical of the zealous anti-corruption effort concede the country is much worse off now.

Hundreds protested in front of the Attorney General's Office on Thursday 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 Sentes, 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.

How Lisa Marie Presley's weight-loss surgery contributed to her death

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

Lisa Marie Presley died after developing a small bowel obstruction, a severe complication of bariatric surgery years ago, according to an autopsy report released Thursday.

Experts say these types of complications are a known but rare risk after having weight-loss surgery. Here's what to know:

WHAT HAPPENED TO LISA MARIE PRESLEY?

The 54-year-old singer-songwriter and daughter of Elvis Presley was rushed to a Los Angeles-area hospital on Jan. 12 after being found unresponsive at home and died hours later.

The cause of death was from complications of a small bowel obstruction tied to previous bariatric surgery, the autopsy showed. Portions of Presley's bowel became trapped, or "strangulated," from scar tissue that formed following surgery, and she also had developed a severe buildup of acids in her blood.

WHAT IS BARIATRIC SURGERY? HOW COMMON IS IT?

Bariatric surgeries are operations performed on the stomach or intestines to spur weight loss. They're usually done in cases of moderate or severe obesity when other methods haven't worked.

There are several types of bariatric procedures, including those in which a portion of the stomach is removed or rerouted or when a band is placed around a part of the stomach to make it smaller.

It's not clear from the autopsy report which type of surgery Presley had, though experts said it was not a sleeve gastrectomy, which is the most common procedure.

About 263,000 bariatric surgeries were done in 2021, according to Dr. Marina Kurian, the president of the American Society for Metabolic and Bariatric Surgery. Only about 1% of people who qualify for the surgery receive it.

HOW RISKY ARE THESE OPERATIONS?

In general, bariatric surgery is "very safe," Kurian said. The risk of major complications is about 4% overall and the risk of death is about 0.1%, according to ASMBS.

"It's safer than gallbladder surgery," Kurian said.

WHAT COMPLICATIONS CAN HAPPEN?

Scar tissue, known as adhesions, can form after surgery or other trauma to the abdomen. That can lead to kinks and blockages in the intestine, said Dr. Thomas Inge, chief surgeon and a bariatric surgery expert at Lurie Children's Hospital in Chicago.

In Presley's case, it appeared that "she had a twist of her entire intestine," said Inge, who reviewed the autopsy report.

If that's not quickly fixed, the blockage cuts off the flow of blood to the intestine, causing the bowel to become "strangulated" and creating a cascade of potentially deadly problems. In Presley's case, it led to a toxic build-up of acids in her body and her heart stopped, the autopsy report said.

Presley reported abdominal pain and not feeling well the morning of her death, the report said. It's not clear if the pain was new.

Anyone who has had abdominal surgery to seek prompt treatment for pain, Inge said. If diagnosed early, it's possible to treat the problem.

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Trump asks top Georgia court to disqualify election probe prosecutor and toss grand jury report

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Lawyers for former President Donald Trump are asking Georgia's highest court to prevent the district attorney who has been investigating his actions in the wake of the 2020 election from prosecuting him and to throw out a special grand jury report that is part of the inquiry.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has been investigating since early 2021 whether Trump and his allies broke any laws as they tried to overturn his narrow election loss in Georgia to Democrat Joe Biden. She has suggested that she is likely to seek charges in the case from a grand jury next month.

Trump's Georgia legal team on Friday filed similar petitions in the Georgia Supreme Court and Fulton County Superior Court naming Willis and Fulton County Superior Court Judge Robert McBurney, who oversaw the special grand jury, as respondents. A spokesperson for Willis declined to comment. McBurney did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Trump's legal team — Drew Findling, Jennifer Little and Marissa Goldberg — acknowledged that the filings are unusual but necessary given the tight time frame. Willis has indicated she will use the special grand jury report to seek an indictment "within weeks, if not days." Two new regular grand juries were seated this week, and one is likely to hear the case.

"Even in an extraordinarily novel case of national significance, one would expect matters to take their normal procedural course within a reasonable time," the filings say. "But nothing about these processes have been normal or reasonable. And the all-but-unavoidable conclusion is that the anomalies below are because Petitioner is President Donald J. Trump."

The petitions seek to bar Willis and her office from continuing to prosecute the case. It also asks that the report produced by the special grand jury that had been seated in the case be tossed out and that prosecutors be prevented from presenting any evidence from the panel's investigation to a regular grand jury.

The filings ask that the courts stop "all proceedings related to and flowing from the special purpose grand jury's investigation until this matter can be resolved."

In a previous filing in March, Trump's lawyers made similar requests and asked that a judge other than McBurney hear their claims. Willis rejected the arguments as being without merit. McBurney kept the case and has yet to rule on the Trump team's requests.

That has left Trump "stranded between the Supervising Judge's protracted passivity and the District Attorney's looming indictment" with no choice other than to seek action from the Supreme Court, his lawyers wrote.

Willis opened her investigation shortly after Trump called Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger in January 2021 and suggested the state's top elections official could help him "find" the votes needed to overturn his election loss in the state. Last year, she requested a special grand jury, saying the panel's subpoena power would allow her to compel the testimony of witnesses who might otherwise be unwilling to talk to her team.

The special grand jury, which did not have the power to issue indictments, was seated last May and dissolved in January after hearing from 75 witnesses and submitting a report with recommendations for Willis. Though most of that report remains under wraps for now according to a judge's order, the panel's foreperson has said without naming names that the special grand jury recommended charging multiple

people.

Trump's lawyers, in their March filing, argued the special grand jury proceedings "involved a constant lack of clarity as to the law, inconsistent applications of basic constitutional protections for individuals being brought before it, and a prosecutor's office that was found to have an actual conflict, yet continued to pursue the investigation."

Willis argued in a response in May that those arguments failed to meet the "exacting standards" for disqualifying a prosecutor and failed to prove that due process rights had been violated or that the grand jury process was "tainted" or the law governing it unconstitutional.

In Friday's filings, Trump's attorneys said that Willis and McBurney had "trampled the procedural safeguards" for the rights of Trump and others who may be targeted by the investigation.

"The whole of the process is now incurably infected," they wrote. "And nothing that follows could be legally sound or publicly respectable."

Vermonters rush to dry out flooded homes and businesses with more storms on the horizon

By KATHY McCORMACK Associated Press

Vermonters worked Friday to dry out homes and businesses damaged by historic flooding but kept a wary eye on the horizon, with another round of storms forecast for the weekend.

Parts of the state got more rain on Thursday and about 14,000 customers at the height of the storm. More rain is expected on Sunday, and further out, next Tuesday.

"We don't know the extent of some of these storms," Gov. Phil Scott said at a news conference.

Storms dumped up to two months' worth of rain in a couple of days in parts of the region this week, surpassing the amount that fell when Tropical Storm Irene blew through in 2011 and caused major flooding. Officials called this week's flooding the state's worst natural disaster since floods in 1927.

The flooding has been blamed for one death — a man who drowned in his home in Barre, a city of about 8,500 people in central Vermont. Stephen Davoll, 63, died Wednesday, said Vermont Emergency Management spokesman Mark Bosma, who urged Vermonters 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 upstate New York, where a woman was swept away by floodwaters in Fort Montgomery, a small Hudson River community about 45 miles (72 kilometers) north of New York City.

President Joe Biden on Friday approved Scott's request for a major disaster declaration to provide federal support for recovering communities.

Many communities have been in touch with Vermont emergency management officials to discuss their needs, but state officials said Friday that they hadn't yet heard from about two to three dozen of them. National Guard troops were being sent to establish contact with them.

In addition to roads, homes and businesses, farms took a big hit, with the flooding coming soon after many growers endured a hard freeze in May.

It's expected to "destroy a large share of our produce and livestock feed," the state's agriculture secretary, Anson Tebbetts, said a news conference. "In our hilly state, some of our most fertile farmland lies in the river valleys, and countless fields of corn, hay, vegetables, fruit, and pasture were swamped and buried."

It was too soon to determine damage costs, he said.

Meanwhile, Scott and other officials talked about the many Vermonters who have been volunteering to help flood-affected areas.

"I've been inspired by the thousands of Vermonters, businesses and organizations who have reached out, wanting to help. As we transition to recovery, we know we'll need all the help we can get."

In Marshfield, a small community about 45 miles (72 kilometers) east of the state's biggest city, Burling-

ton, the Marshfield Village Store was used as a makeshift shelter one night during this week's flooding, housing as many as three dozen people.

On Friday, it was serving as a distribution point for clean water, as damage to a water main had left the town in need. And officials were still trying to reach people who might need help.

"We're about to start putting it out more formally, if there are other folks who haven't been able to get the support that they need yet, so that we can get equipment and volunteers to them, emergency medication, work on their properties, that's where we're at right now," said Michelle Eddleman McCormick, the store's general manager.

Philip Kolling, director of SerVermont, said as of Friday, about 5,200 people statewide had registered to help relief efforts through the state Emergency Management agency and an online volunteer recruitment effort.

"What we are doing does not even begin to capture all of the volunteers being organized through local organizations, towns, and informal networks, and we encourage those local efforts as they often can address critical needs more quickly," he said.

Some volunteers have offered drive for the charity Meals on Wheels or take people to medical appointments. Others have offered to help with general cleanup.

In the southern Vermont ski village of Ludlow, Calcutta's restaurant was getting two truckloads of food to prepare meals for first responders, volunteers, and anyone else who might need one. Many people were working on cleanup and fixing roads.

The large banquet room was set up with cots, water, and toiletries for anyone who was displaced.

"There's plenty of work that needs to be done to get us back to normal," said Michael Reyes, who works for a hospitality group that owns the restaurant.

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

UPS to train nonunion employees as talks stall with union for 340,000 workers and deadline nears

By MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writer

A little more than a week after contract talks between UPS and the union representing 340,000 of its workers broke down, UPS said it will begin training nonunion employees in the U.S. to step in should there be a strike, which the union has vowed to do if no agreement is reached by the end of this month.

UPS said Friday that the training is a temporary plan that has no impact on current operations.

"While we have made great progress and are close to reaching an agreement, we have a responsibility as an essential service provider to take steps to help ensure we can deliver our customers' packages if the Teamsters choose to strike," UPS said.

Last week both sides blamed the other for walking away from talks, which now appear to be at a stalemate with a July 31 deadline approaching fast.

Teamster-represented UPS workers voted for a strike authorization last month and union chief Sean O'Brien previously said that a strike was imminent. On Friday, O'Brien joined union workers in a picketing dry-run in Brooklyn, New York.

"UPS is making clear it doesn't view its workforce as a priority. Corporate executives are quick to brag about industry-leading service and even more quickly forget the Teamster members who perform that service," the Teamsters said Friday. "UPS should stop wasting time and money on training strikebreakers and get back to the negotiating table with a real economic offer."

The Teamsters represent more than half of the Atlanta company's workforce in the largest private-sector contract in North America. If a strike does happen, it would be the first since a 15-day walkout by 185,000 workers crippled the company a quarter century ago.

UPS has grown vastly since then and become an even more integral piece of the U.S. economy, with

consumers relying on swift delivery of most essential home items. Small businesses who rely on UPS could also be left looking for alternative shipping options if the company's remaining workforce wasn't able to meet demand during a strike.

Businesses have already begun to prepare for a strike, seeking alternate services for delivery, but the strike would likely lead to significant disruption given the scale at which UPS operates.

UPS delivers around 25 million packages a day, representing about a quarter of all U.S. parcel volume, according to the global shipping and logistics firm Pitney Bowes. That's about 10 million parcels more than it delivered each day in the years leading up to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Novak Djokovic and Carlos Alcaraz will meet in the Wimbledon final

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

WIMBLEDON, England (AP) — This was the moment. If Novak Djokovic was going to be stopped in the Wimbledon semifinals, if his much younger and harder-hitting opponent, Jannik Sinner, was going to turn things around Friday, the monumental comeback required would need to start immediately.

Djokovic knew it. Sinner knew it. The 15,000 or so Centre Court spectators knew it.

After taking the first two sets, Djokovic trailed 5-4 in the third, and a flubbed forehand made the game score 15-40 as he served. Two chances for Sinner to finally break. Two chances for him to actually take a set. Djokovic hit a fault, which drew some sounds of approval from the stands. Djokovic sarcastically used his racket and the ball to applaud the noise-makers, then flashed a thumbs up.

He can back up any such bravado. Djokovic simply does not lose at the All England Club lately. Or at any Grand Slam tournament, for that matter. So he calmly collected the next four points to claim that game, looked toward the crowd and mockingly pretended to wipe away a tear. Twenty minutes later, the match was over, and the 6-3, 6-4, 7-6 (4) victory over Sinner allowed Djokovic to close in on a record-tying eighth title at Wimbledon and fifth in a row.

"The third set could have gone his way," said Djokovic, who will meet No. 1-ranked Carlos Alcaraz for the trophy on Sunday. "It was really, really, just a lot of pressure."

Alcaraz showed off every bit of his many talents, including winning 17 of 20 points when he serve-and-volleyed, while beating No. 3 Daniil Medvedev 6-3, 6-3, 6-3 on Friday to make his way to his first final at the grass-court major tournament.

While Djokovic, a 36-year-old from Serbia, is pursuing a 24th Grand Slam singles championship, Alcaraz, a 20-year-old from Spain, seeks his second after winning the U.S. Open last September.

"What can I say? Everybody knows the legend he is," Alcaraz said about Djokovic. "It's going to be really, really difficult. But I will fight. ... I will believe in myself, I will believe that I can beat him here."

No one has managed to beat Djokovic at Wimbledon since 2017. And no one has managed to beat him at Centre Court since 2013.

Against Sinner, Djokovic repeatedly served himself out of potential trouble, saving all six break points he faced, to reach his ninth final at the All England Club. It's also his 35th final at all Grand Slam tournaments, more than any man or woman in tennis history.

As great as he is as a returner, as superb as his defense is — over and over, he would sprint and lean and stretch to get to a ball that extended a point until Sinner made a mistake — Djokovic possesses a serve that might be the part of his game he's improved the most over his career.

That showed Friday, and it's showed throughout this fortnight: In his half-dozen matches during the tournament, Djokovic has won 100 of his 103 service games and saved 16 of 19 break points.

"In the pressure moments, he was playing very good. Not missing," Sinner said. "That's him."

The age gap between Djokovic and Sinner, 21, was the largest between Wimbledon men's semifinalists in the Open era, which began in 1968. Djokovic would be the oldest champion at Wimbledon since professionals were first allowed to compete that year.

"I feel 36 is the new 26, I guess," Djokovic said. "It feels good."

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Sinner is the one who hit serves at up to 132 mph and pounded one fault that clanged against the speed readout board in a corner of the arena with such force it sounded as if he might have broken the thing. Of more concern to Sinner: It was followed by another fault in a service game he dropped to trail 2-1 in the second set.

In truth, talented as Sinner is, he didn't really generate any more frustration for Djokovic than chair umpire Richard Haigh did.

In one game in which Djokovic would face — and erase — a break point, he argued to no avail after forfeiting a point because Haigh called him for hindrance for letting out a lengthy yell while the ball was still in play. Moments later, Haigh issued Djokovic a warning for letting the serve-clock expire.

"It was a very stressful game for me to survive and to kind of storm through. It was super important," said Djokovic, who thought the hindrance call was incorrect after seeing a replay and Haigh needed to "recognize the moment a little bit more" instead of issuing the time warning. "Luckily for me, I stayed calm."

Indeed he did, continuing his bid to join Roger Federer as the only men to have won eight singles trophies at Wimbledon. Martina Navratilova won the women's championship nine times.

Djokovic got major title No. 22 at the Australian Open in January, and No. 23 at the French Open in June — his Wimbledon shoes have a small "23" stamped on the side — after getting past Alcaraz in the semifinals at Roland Garros.

If Djokovic wins Sunday, he will head to the U.S. Open in August with a chance at the first calendar-year Grand Slam by a man since Rod Laver in 1969.

With the main stadium's retractable roof shut because of rain outdoors, the grass was slick and slippery during Djokovic vs. Sinner. Sinner slipped on the very first point; Djokovic on the third. And it kept happening to both. They repeatedly smacked the soles of their shoes with their rackets to try to remove grass and dirt that got stuck in there.

Taking on Djokovic represented a significant rise in the level of competition for Sinner. Until Friday, not only had he not faced a single seeded player, but he had gone up against opponents with these rankings: 79th, 85th, 98th and 111th.

No one in the half-century history of computerized tennis rankings — men's and women's — has spent more weeks at No. 1 than Djokovic, who currently is No. 2. But that number does not reflect his form at the moment.

This was Djokovic's 46th major semifinal and Sinner's first, and that seemed obvious at the most crucial junctures.

Sinner was quite close to reaching that stage a year ago at the All England Club: He took a two-set lead in the quarterfinals against Djokovic, who came all the way back to win in five.

That sort of work was not required on this afternoon. Djokovic never let it come to that.

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

The story behind Barbenheimer, the summer's most online movie showdown

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

The very online showdown between Greta Gerwig's "Barbie" and Christopher Nolan's "Oppenheimer" all started with a date: July 21.

It's not uncommon for studios to counterprogram films in different genres on a big weekend, but the stark differences between an intense, serious-minded picture about the man who oversaw the development of the atomic bomb and a lighthearted, candy-colored anthropomorphizing of a childhood doll quickly became the stuff of viral fodder.

There's even some disagreement over whether it's "Barbieheimer" or "Barbenheimer" or "Boppenheimer" or yet another tortured portmanteau — a phenomenon on which the AP Stylebook has yet to offer guidance, but for the purposes of this article will be "Barbenheimer."

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It didn't hurt that both Nolan and Gerwig have very passionate and very online fandoms eager to join in. Never mind that many of those fans overlap — the memes, allegiances, and T-shirts were just too fun.

Both movies often trend on social media when the other releases a new asset — a trailer, a picture, an interview. On one level, it's a marketing department's dream. Awareness could not be higher, the conversation couldn't be louder, and neither film even has official reviews out yet.

"Barbenheimer" is a marketing gift borne out of social media and I think it's benefiting both films," said Paul Dergarabedian, the senior media analyst for analytics firm Comscore. "You're certainly aware of both movies in a more profound and compelling way than I think might have otherwise happened had they been released on different weekends."

AMC Theaters reported that 20,000 of its AMC Stubs members had purchased tickets for a double feature. If you're counting, that's 294 minutes of moviewatching. Even Margot Robbie — Barbie herself — and Tom Cruise, the star of another summer blockbuster, have started plotting the ideal "Barbenheimer" day.

"It's a perfect double bill," said Robbie at her movie's London premiere Wednesday. "I think actually start your day with 'Barbie,' then go straight into 'Oppenheimer' and then a 'Barbie' chaser."

Cruise — whose "Mission: Impossible – Dead Reckoning Part One" opened a little over a week before the "Barbenheimer" showdown — said at his premiere he'd plan to see both on their opening day, likely starting with "Oppenheimer," which seems to be the internet's preferred viewing order as well.

"Barbie" actor Issa Rae thinks there's a reason for that.

"I think that there's a very specific order that if you see them in. If you see 'Oppenheimer' last then you might be a bit of a psychopath," she diagnosed at the London premiere.

The showdown has made armchair marketing experts out of everyone, quick to scrutinize every move by Warner Bros. and Universal — as though it's possible to compare two extraordinarily different campaigns.

One has infinite opportunities for very pink, sparkly photo opportunities, whimsical brand partnerships for seemingly everything from underwear to pool floats, large-scale fan events with autograph signings and pop stars like Billie Eilish posting about the soundtrack. In other words, the "Barbie" campaign can go nuclear.

"Oppenheimer" has the bomb, the alluring mystery and the big screen hook, but it's not the kind of movie that lends itself to, say, a frozen yogurt collaboration.

Is the competition real, though, or just a meme? Some in Hollywood wondered if Warner Bros. plopped "Barbie" on the weekend as a slight to Nolan, who had opened many films for the studio in that corridor including "Inception" and "Dunkirk." He left Warner Bros. amid its controversial decision to send a year's worth of movies to streaming and made "Oppenheimer" with Universal instead. But a pointed box office war doesn't exactly make sense for a studio that has talked recently about wanting to lure Nolan back.

There is an unspoken code of conduct: Never badmouth another studio's film, publicly at least. This is partly decorum, especially when it comes to "box office showdowns" which all will say are a creation of the press and sideline spectators. But it's also rooted in some truth: The conventional thinking is that having eyes on one movie is good for other movies — you see their posters and trailers and on some level everyone benefits.

And social media has allowed movie stars to get in on the game, too. Following reports that Cruise was irked the latest "Mission: Impossible" was going to lose its IMAX screens to "Oppenheimer" after only a week, Cruise posted photos of himself and director Christopher McQuarrie standing in front of posters for "Indiana Jones and the Dial of Destiny," "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer," holding tickets for each.

"This summer is full of amazing movies to see in theaters. These are just a few that we can't wait to see on the big screen," Cruise's Instagram caption read.

The official accounts for "Indiana Jones," "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" responded with supportive notes. Gerwig and Robbie even followed with a similar photo series a few days later, which the official "Oppenheimer" Instagram account reposted in its stories. Charged with playing Oppenheimer, Cillian Murphy told the AP at his movie's London premiere that "of course" he'd be seeing "Barbie." The sporting cross-promotion between four studios — Universal, Warner Bros., Disney and Paramount — is something the film business has not quite seen before.

"Not only is Tom Cruise the biggest box office star in the world, but he's also an incredible ambassador

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for the movie theater, for the movie theater experience and boosting other movies," Dergarabedian said. "And that collegial atmosphere within the framework of what is seen as the very competitive box office derby is kind of a nice thing."

Still, everyone likes a No. 1 debut, and both "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" reportedly carry \$100 million production price tags (not including the millions spent on marketing). As far as box office tracking goes, "Barbie" has it in the bag with forecasts showing that it could open above \$90 million in North America. "Oppenheimer" meanwhile is tracking in the \$40 million range. Then there's the wild card of "Mission: Impossible 7's" second weekend, which could snag second place.

Still even with a second- or third-place start, "Oppenheimer" could be destined for a long, steady, profitable run into awards season. Adult audiences for R-rated movies are not often the ones who pack theaters the first weekend.

Back in 2008, in the midst of the recession, Warner Bros. and Universal faced off on the same July weekend with another Nolan film that went up against a lighthearted confection: "The Dark Knight" and "Mamma Mia!" — both of which went on to be enormously profitable (though Nolan did win the first weekend).

The bigger worry is that what's been heralded as Hollywood's post-pandemic comeback summer has had more ups and downs than anyone might have hoped. That's putting quite a bit of pressure on "Barbenheimer" to overperform and boost the lagging summer box office, which pales in comparison to the bigger issues facing the industry as actors join the writers on strike.

But with just over a week to go, it's still a source of amusement. Even "Barbie" co-star Will Ferrell threw the gauntlet in his winking way at the London premiere.

"I think the world maybe wants to see 'Barbie' a little bit more right now," Ferrell said. "Just saying!"

AP journalist Sian Watson contributed from London.

Hollywood's actors are joining screenwriters on strike. Here's why and what happens next

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollywood actors are joining screenwriters in the first dual strike from the two unions in more than six decades, with huge consequences for the film and television industry. Here is a look at how it has played out, why it's happening, and what could come next.

WHAT LED TO THE ACTORS STRIKE?

More than a month of talks on a new three-year contract between the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists and the studios, streaming services and production companies that employ them led to little progress, and the tone became openly hostile in the days before union leaders voted to begin a strike on Friday. A last minute intervention from a federal mediator didn't bridge the gap.

Union leaders say the streaming model that has taken over the industry in recent years has cheated actors of their share of income and funneled money to executives, and proposals of the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which represents the studios, streamers and production companies in negotiations, did not even begin to meet their needs.

A 12-day extension of the contract and the talks shortly before an initial deadline in late June brought some hope a deal would be reached, but the hostility only grew. "The Nanny" star Fran Drescher, who heads the union said it made them "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, 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.

WHAT DO THE ACTORS WANT?

For decades, an actor who appeared on a popular TV show like "Seinfeld" or "The Office" even once could count on getting royalty checks when the show appeared in reruns, bringing pay even at times they

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were unable to find work.

The streaming model has largely dried up that income, with residual payments untethered from a show or movie's popularity. Actors want a long-term share of that revenue.

The issue is one of many the actors have in common with writers. For both scribes and performers, the move to streaming and its ripple effects have also meant shorter seasons of shows with longer gaps between them, and therefore less work. They say inflation is outpacing the scheduled pay bumps in their contracts.

And both writers and actors fear the threat of unregulated use of artificial intelligence. The actors say studios want to be able to use their likenesses without having to hire them, or pay them.

Actors also say they're contending with the new and increasing burden of self-taped auditions — the cost of which used to be the responsibility of casting and productions.

The AMPTP said it presented actors a generous deal that included the biggest bump in minimum pay in 35 years and "a groundbreaking AI proposal that protects actors' digital likenesses." They say the union has "regrettably chosen a path that will lead to financial hardship for countless thousands of people who depend on the industry."

WHAT WILL STRIKING MEAN FOR ACTORS?

Union rules say actors are not to do any part of their jobs, which go far beyond actually shooting films and TV shows.

They are not allowed to make personal appearances or promote their work on podcasts or at premieres. They are barred from doing any production work including auditions, readings, rehearsals, voiceovers or wardrobe fittings.

Newly minted Emmy nominees can't publicly make their case for votes, nor appear at the ceremony, which is planned for September but is likely to be seriously scaled back or delayed.

They are instead expected to spend their days on picket lines, outside the corporate headquarters and production hubs of studios.

While big names including Matt Damon, Jamie Lee Curtis and Jessica Chastain have spoken out in favor of the strike and are likely to be the face of the picketing, SAG also includes tens of thousands of actors who struggle to find work and maintain income. More serious financial hardship likely lies ahead for them.

WHAT EFFECT WILL THE COMBINED STRIKES HAVE FOR VIEWERS?

Actors joining writers on strike will force nearly every U.S.-based show or film that hasn't already been shut down into hiatus. Forthcoming seasons of television shows are likely to be delayed indefinitely, and some movie releases will be pushed back. (Don't worry, the July 21 box-office showdown between "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" is still on.)

The writers' strike had an almost instant effect on late-night network talk shows, including NBC's "The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon," ABC's "Jimmy Kimmel Live!" and CBS's "The Late Show With Stephen Colbert," which all went on hiatus immediately. "Saturday Night Live" axed its last three episodes of the season.

In the two months since, many scripted television series have also shut down, including Netflix's "Stranger Things," Max's "Hacks," Showtime's "Yellow Jackets," and Apple TV+'s "Severance."

It may take longer to notice the actors' strike on the streaming menus on Netflix or Amazon Prime Video, though lovers of those outlets' original series will eventually have to wait longer than usual for their favorites to return.

Shoots outside the U.S., where different unions and contracts operate, can continue, as the British-based "House of the Dragon" will for HBO, though the strike is likely to have a secondary drag on those too.

And reality shows, game shows and most daytime talk shows will likely be unaffected.

HOW LONG MIGHT ALL THIS GO ON?

It's anyone's guess. After two months, there are no talks planned or imminent for the Writers Guild.

The longest previous writers' strike, in 1988, lasted five months. The most recent one, in 2007 and 2008, went on for about three months, as did the most recent actors' strike in 1980.

With both sides on strike together for the first time since 1960, and both facing so many of the same issues, they might find themselves jointly out of work for a long time.

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

By The Associated Press undefined

Russian President Vladimir Putin said he offered the Wagner private military company the option of continuing to serve as a single unit under their same commander after their short-lived rebellion, while some of the mercenaries were shown Friday in Belarus, possibly heralding the group's relocation there.

Putin's comments appeared to reflect his efforts to secure the loyalty of Wagner mercenaries, some of the most capable Russian forces in Ukraine, after the group's brief revolt last month that posed the most serious threat to his 23-year rule.

The fate of Wagner chief Yevgeny Prigozhin remains unclear since the June 23-24 armed rebellion and new cracks have appeared in the Russian military as the war grinds through its 17th month and Ukraine presses a counteroffensive against the invading forces.

In remarks published Friday in the business daily Kommersant, Putin for the first time described a Kremlin event attended by 35 Wagner commanders, including Prigozhin, on June 29, five days after the rebellion. He said he praised their efforts in Ukraine, deplored their involvement in the mutiny — which he previously denounced as an act of treason — and offered them alternatives for future service.

Putin told Kommersant that one option would see Wagner keep the same commander who goes by the call sign "Gray Hair" and has led the private army in Ukraine for 16 months. The commander, Andrei Troshev, is a retired military officer who has played a leading role in Wagner since its creation in 2014 and faced European Union sanctions over his role in Syria as the group's executive director.

"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 many Wagner troops nodded in approval at the proposal, but Prigozhin, who was sitting in front and didn't see their reaction, quickly rejected it, responding that "the boys won't agree with such a decision."

Putin didn't mention where and in what numbers Wagner could be deployed under his offer, or say what proposal the forces eventually accepted, if any. He said nothing about Prigozhin's role.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refused to elaborate on Wagner's future while speaking with reporters Friday.

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

Speaking to Kommersant, Putin emphasized that "rank-and-file soldiers of Wagner have fought honorably" in Ukraine, adding that "it's a cause for regret that they were drawn" into the mutiny.

Putin's remarks were to a Kommersant reporter who has special access to the president. They appeared to be part of efforts to denigrate Prigozhin while trying to maintain control over Wagner mercenaries and secure their loyalty.

Putin previously denied any links between the government and Wagner, and acknowledged after the mutiny that Prigozhin's company has received billions of dollars from the state. He noted that investigators would probe whether any of the funds had been stolen, a warning to Prigozhin that he could face financial crimes.

State-controlled media have posted videos and photos of Prigozhin's opulent mansion in St. Petersburg, including stacks of cash, gold bars and fake passports. The images appeared to be part of a smear campaign against the Wagner chief, who has portrayed himself as an enemy of corrupt elites even though he owes his wealth to Putin.

Putin also said Wagner has operated without legal basis.

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"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.

In the revolt that lasted less than 24 hours, 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 called it a "march of justice" to oust 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 ordered his mercenaries back to their camps after striking a deal to end the rebellion in exchange for an amnesty for him and his men, and permission to move to Belarus.

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

Lukashenko said his military could benefit from the private army's combat experience, and Belarusian state TV broadcast video Friday of Wagner instructors training Belarusian territorial defense forces at a firing range near Asipovichy, where a camp offered to Wagner is located. A Belarusian messaging app channel alleged Prigozhin spent a night at the camp this week and posted a photo of him in a tent.

The Belarusian Defense Ministry didn't say how many Wagner troops were in Belarus or specify if more will follow. Lukashenko has previously said it was up to Prigozhin and Moscow to decide on a move to Belarus. The Kremlin has refrained from comment.

Pentagon press secretary Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder said most mercenaries have remained in Russian-occupied areas of Ukraine, but added that "at this stage, we do not see Wagner forces participating in any significant capacity in support of combat operations in Ukraine."

While the fate of Prigozhin remains cloudy, the Defense Ministry said Wednesday that Wagner was completing the handover of its weapons to the Russian military. That appeared to show attempts by Russian authorities to defuse the threat posed by the mercenaries and also seemed to herald an end to the group's operations in Ukraine.

At the same time, new fissures have emerged in the military command. Maj. Gen. Ivan Popov, commander of the 58th army in the Zaporizhzhia region, a focal point in Ukraine's counteroffensive, said he was dismissed after speaking out about problems faced by his troops in what he described as a "treacherous" stab in the back.

Peskov, the Kremlin spokesman, refused to comment on Popov's remarks, referring questions to the Defense Ministry that also hasn't commented.

In the latest fighting, Ukraine said it shot down 16 Iranian-made Shahed drones launched overnight from Russia's southern Krasnodar region. The presidential administration said at least four civilians were killed and 10 wounded since Thursday.

In southern Russia, three drones were destroyed late Thursday while approaching the city of Voronezh, regional Gov. Alexander Gusev said, adding there were no injuries or damage.

A drone also crashed and exploded in Kurchatov, where the Kursk nuclear power plant is located, without causing any damage to key facilities, said regional Gov. Roman Starovoit.

And three people were wounded when a car exploded in a residential area of Belgorod, near the Ukraine border, according to regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba responded to suggestions this week by British Defense Minister Ben Wallace that Ukraine could show more "gratitude" for Western military aid. The remark was an "unfortunate misunderstanding on the part of the British minister," Kuleba said.

"No one has any reason to accuse us of any ingratitude. But the truth is that, sorry, we are at war," he said. "When we win, then I will say, 'thank you, the weapons were enough,' but while the struggle continues, the weapons are not enough."

Lolita C. Baldor in Washington and Yuras Karmanau in Tallinn, Estonia, contributed.

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

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 myself," 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 National 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 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.

Acropolis' midday closure leaves many tourists in the lurch as a heat wave lashes southern Europe

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS and LEFTERIS PITARAKIS Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Disgruntled tourists bemoaned the temporary closing of the Acropolis in Athens on Friday as Greek authorities proactively shut the world monument's gates between midday and early evening amid a heat wave that continues to grip southern Europe.

Red Cross staff handed out bottled water to tourists wilting in long lines hoping to beat the closure and scale the steps up to the gleaming Parthenon temple as temperatures were expected to peak above 40 degrees Celsius (104 Fahrenheit) in the Greek capital.

Some visitors were frustrated at being left in the lurch because they were unaware of Greek authorities' last-minute announcement of the Acropolis' closure at noon. One visitor said he was disappointed as his cruise ship would depart later in the day.

"I even bought a €50 ticket to skip the line to enter and I couldn't enter the place," Hector from Mexico told The Associated Press.

Others who beat the closing timewere elated despite the heat, like Sylvia from Colombia, who said she came prepared.

"We have water, we have some ventilators," she told the AP. "And I think it's always an amazing experience to be here."

Red Cross coordinator Ioanna Fotopoulou said paramedics on hand administered first aid to a number of tourists exhibiting symptoms of dehydration and experiencing fainting spells.

In Spain, people packed the beaches as the country enjoyed a short-lived respite from its second heat wave of the summer.

Temperatures were still expected to reach 40 degrees Celsius in at least 12 of Spain's 17 regions Friday, although that was down from a high of 45 degrees (113 Fahrenheit) that scorched the southeastern town of Albox on Wednesday.

Aemet, the Spanish state weather agency, says another heat wave is expected to start Sunday with highest temperatures yet to come.

In Italy, the country's health ministry on Friday warned residents of 10 cities from Bologna to Rome to avoid being out in the midday heat due to extreme temperatures. The same warning has been issued to another five cities in Sicily, Sardinia and Puglia for this weekend.

Temperatures in the country are expected to reach 12 degrees Celsius (53.6 Fahrenheit) above average in some areas this weekend.

On the island nation of Cyprus, in the southeastern Mediterranean, people clustered under air conditioning units and cooling fans set to full blast, as midday temperatures inland were forecast to hit a high of

43 C (110 Fahrenheit).

Temperatures weren't expected to go below 25 C (77 Fahrenheit) through the night, while humidity levels especially along the southern coastline were expected to reach an uncomfortable 65%.

The temperatures were forecast to hover at the same levels Saturday, with a small dip expected the following day.

The Forestry Service issued a "red alert", appealing to the public to take extra care and avoid using any machinery outdoors that could spark a fire.

In the capital, Nicosia, more than two dozen elderly people sought refuge at a dedicated heat shelter the municipality reserves for summer heat waves.

Councillor Elena Loucaidou told The Associated Press that many of the elderly who are on low incomes appreciate the opportunity to save on their electricity bill and enjoy the shelter's air-conditioned environs.

Yiannoula Phinikaridou, 78, was among them.

"In this heat wave, it's very helpful for us to come here, get refreshed with cold drinks that they offer us," she told Cypriot media. "It's very important for us low-income retirees to save on electricity."

The heat is taking a toll on the country's economic activity, particularly in the construction sector where laws oblige employers to offer workers frequent water breaks, shaded rest areas and even suspend work if temperatures hit specified high levels.

Cyprus Building Contractors Federation Director Yiannos Poubouris said most contractors adhere to the law, but that often translates to diminished productivity because of delays and additional pay to employees if they are required to work either very early or later in the day to avoid peak temperature hours.

For instance, cement pouring must be done either very early in the day or much later, meaning higher costs for contractors. Poubouris said there are no figures on lost productivity as it is difficult to gauge, but that the contractors expect this during summer time.

Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg weighed in on the high temperatures in a post on Twitter, saying global heat records should serve as an urgent wake-up call.

"Last week we experienced the hottest days ever recorded, many days in a row. We are also experiencing record high sea level temperatures and record low ice levels. This is an emergency."

AP writers Ciaran Giles in Madrid, Colleen Barry in Milan and Jan M. Olsen in Copenhagen contributed.

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.

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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-TikTokers 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 TikTokers 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 contributing 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-aling" 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 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

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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 Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

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

Today in History: July 15, Gianni Versace fatally shot in Miami Beach

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, July 15, the 196th day of 2023. There are 169 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 15, 1916, Boeing Co., originally known as Pacific Aero Products Co., was founded in Seattle.

On this date:

In 1834, the Spanish Inquisition was abolished more than 350 years after its creation.

In 1870, Georgia became the last Confederate state to be readmitted to the Union.

In 1913, Democrat Augustus Bacon of Georgia became the first person elected to the U.S. Senate under

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the terms of the recently ratified 17th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, providing for popular election of senators.

In 1975, three American astronauts blasted off aboard an Apollo spaceship hours after two Soviet cosmonauts were launched aboard a Soyuz spacecraft for a mission that included a linkup of the two ships in orbit.

In 1976, a 36-hour kidnap ordeal began for 26 schoolchildren and their bus driver as they were abducted near Chowchilla, California, by three gunmen and imprisoned in an underground cell. (The captives escaped unharmed; the kidnapers were caught.)

In 1996, MSNBC, a 24-hour all-news network, made its debut on cable and the internet.

In 1997, fashion designer Gianni Versace, 50, was shot dead outside his Miami Beach home; suspected gunman Andrew Phillip Cunanan (koo-NAN'-an), 27, was found dead eight days later, a suicide. (Investigators believed Cunanan killed four other people before Versace in a cross-country rampage that began the previous March.)

In 2002, John Walker Lindh, an American who'd fought alongside the Taliban in Afghanistan, pleaded guilty in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, to two felonies in a deal sparing him life in prison.

In 2016, Donald Trump chose Indiana Gov. Mike Pence, an experienced politician with deep Washington connections, as his running mate.

In 2019, avowed white supremacist James Alex Fields Jr. was sentenced to life in prison plus 419 years for killing one and injuring dozens of others when he deliberately drove his car into a crowd of anti-racism protesters during a rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.

In 2020, George Floyd's family filed a lawsuit against the city of Minneapolis and the four police officers charged in his death, alleging the officers violated Floyd's rights when they restrained him and that the city allowed a culture of excessive force, racism and impunity to flourish in its police force. (The city would agree to pay \$27 million to settle the lawsuit in March 2021.)

Ten years ago: Two days after a Florida jury acquitted George Zimmerman in the death of Trayvon Martin, Attorney General Eric Holder called the killing a "tragic, unnecessary shooting," and said the Justice Department would follow "the facts and the law" as it reviewed evidence to see whether federal criminal charges were warranted. (Federal authorities have yet to reach a decision in the case.) Miguel Angel Trevino Morales, the notoriously brutal leader of the feared Zetas drug cartel, was captured in the first major blow against an organized crime leader by Mexican officials.

Five years ago: President Donald Trump arrived in Finland for a summit with Russian President Vladimir Putin. Earlier, in an interview with CBS News, Trump named the European Union as a top adversary of the United States. France won its second World Cup title, beating Croatia 4-2 in the final in Moscow. Novak Djokovic (NOH'-vak JOH'-kuh'-vich) captured his fourth Wimbledon title, defeating Kevin Anderson; it was Djokovic's 13th major trophy, but his first in more than two years. A wildfire that killed a California firefighter forced the closure of a key route into Yosemite National Park.

One year ago: President Joe Biden exchanged a cordial fist bump with Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, but said he then raised the issue of the murder of writer Jamal Khashoggi, which U.S. intelligence had said the crown prince approved. Biden held a private meeting with the crown prince and other Saudi officials in hopes of repairing an important diplomatic relationship. Rescuers with sniffer dogs combed through debris in a central Ukrainian city looking for people missing after a devastating Russian missile strike that killed at least 23 people and wounded more than 100.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Patrick Wayne is 84. R&B singer Millie Jackson is 79. Rock singer-musician Peter Lewis (Moby Grape) is 78. Singer Linda Ronstadt is 77. Rock musician Artimus Pyle is 75. Arianna Huffington, co-founder of The Huffington Post, is 73. Actor Celia Imrie is 71. Actor Terry O'Quinn is 71. Rock singer-musician David Pack is 71. Rock musician Marky Ramone is 71. Rock musician Joe Satriani is 67. Country singer-songwriter Mac McAnally is 66. Model Kim Alexis is 63. Actor Willie Aames is 63. Actor-director Forest Whitaker is 62. Actor Lolita Davidovich is 62. Actor Shari Headley is 60. Actor Brigitte Nielsen is 60. Rock musician Jason Bonham is 57. Actor Amanda Foreman is 57. R&B singer Stokley (Mint Condition) is 56. Actor-comedian Eddie Griffin is 55. Actor Reggie Hayes is 54. Actor-screenwriter Jim Rash is 52. Rock

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musician John Dolmayan is 51. Actor Scott Foley is 51. Actor Brian Austin Green is 50. Rapper Jim Jones is 47. Actor Diane Kruger is 47. Actor Lana Parrilla (LAH'-nuh pa-REE'-uh) is 46. Rock musician Ray Toro (My Chemical Romance) is 46. Actor Laura Benanti is 44. Actor Travis Fimmel is 44. Actor Taylor Kinney is 42. Actor-singer Tristan "Mack" Wilds is 34. Actor Medalion Rahimi is 31. Actor Iain Armitage (TV: "Big Little Lies" "Young Sheldon") is 15.