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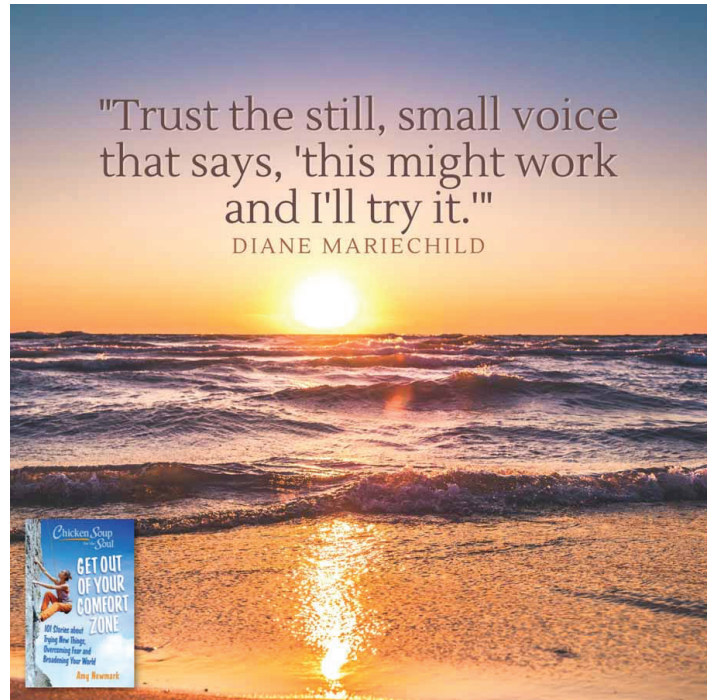
Wednesday, Aug. 16

Senior Menu: Beef stew, biscuit, Waldorf salad, muffin, tomato juice.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton Ad Council, 7 p.m.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Thursday, Aug. 17

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, broccoli/cauliflower blend, fruit, cookie, whole wheat bread.
Boys Golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA "Do Day", 1:30 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460



"Trust the still, small voice that says, 'this might work and I'll try it.'"

DIANE MARIECHILD

Friday, Aug. 18

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tri-tators, peas and carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Girls Soccer hosts Belle Fourche, 4 p.m.
Boys Soccer hosts Belle Fourche, 6 p.m.
Football hosts Aberdeen Roncalli, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 19

Girls Soccer hosts St. Thomas More, 11 a.m.
Boys Soccer hosts St. Thomas More, 1 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 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

World in Brief

offenses in Britain over “grossly offensive racist messages,” sent in a WhatsApp group between 2018 and 2022—several which reportedly referenced Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Clashes between rival militias in Libya’s capital killed at least 27 people and left residents trapped in their homes Tuesday, authorities said.

The entire police department of Goodhue, Minnesota has resigned because of issues with the city’s pay, leaving the town without functioning law enforcement.

North Korean officials are criticizing a U.N. Security Council meeting coming up on Thursday that will focus on human rights within the country. U.S. Ambassador to the U.N. Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced the meeting last week.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukraine has captured the key strategic village of Urozhaine in the south-east of the country, after reports that Russian troops had retreated from the area. The village has played a key role in Russia’s defense against Ukraine’s ongoing counteroffensive..

TALKING POINTS

“I don’t feel any satisfaction. I feel great, you know, just great, profound sadness that we have a former president who has been indicted for so many charges that went right to the heart of whether or not our democracy would survive,” former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton said of the criminal indictments facing former President Donald Trump.

“I would caution people that it’s going to be a very long time before any growth or housing can be built. And so, you would be pretty poorly informed if you try to steal land from our people and then build here,” Hawaii Gov. Josh Green said in a warning to people exploring real estate opportunities on Maui following the wildfire devastation of Lahaina.

“There’s so much stigma, still, that is surrounding all of this. When you’re talking about lawmakers making decisions that basically dictate who or who not someone can love or how or how not someone can dress, it’s concerning on not just the level that it threatens the LGBTQIA+ communities but on a level that it threatens humanity and that it jeopardizes individualism and identity,” Greta Van Fleet singer Josh Kiszka said of his concerns about coming out publicly during a recent interview with Rolling Stone..

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

President Joe Biden will be marking the one-year anniversary of the Inflation Reduction Act by delivering remarks at the White House about the law’s economic impacts.

An emergency hearing on Democratic presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr.’s censorship lawsuit against Google is scheduled to take place at 2 p.m. ET in San Jose, California.

The FIFA Women’s World Cup semifinals continue today in Australia as England takes on Australia at 6 a.m. ET.

Target is scheduled to hold its 2023 second-quarter earnings call starting at 8 a.m. ET.

Netflix is expected to debut Depp v. Heard, a new docuseries about last year’s defamation trial between actors Johnny Depp and Amber Heard.

The first victims of Hawaii’s deadly wildfires have been named as the death toll increased to 106 overnight, with hundreds more still missing and less than half of the devastated areas on Maui searched.

Private 2nd Class Travis King reportedly told North Korean officials he entered their country illegally last month because he “harbored ill feeling against inhuman maltreatment and racial discrimination within the U.S. Army,” according to North Korea’s state news agency.

Six retired police officers have been charged with criminal

Pickleball court talk continues, text messaging on hold

by Elizabeth Varin

Concerns about the city's newly-built and currently cracked pickleball court came up again at Tuesday's City Council meeting.

Discussion began about repairing fencing at the pickleball court and swimming pool area that had been damaged when wind hit some banners near the top of the fence, causing posts to lean over. Vosika Fencing estimated repair costs at \$524,677.

The fencing company also said banner advertising on the swimming pool fence should not structurally affect the current fence, as it has 2-and-a-half inch fence posts, said Councilman Brian Bahr. However, future banners should have perforated holes to allow wind through.

Other fencing in the area near the basketball court, though, needs to be looked at and possibly torn down, he said.

"It's leaning," he said. "It's tilting."

Mayor Scott Hanlon said he would talk with Public Works Coordinator Terry Herron about taking out that portion of fencing.

The conversation quickly turned to the condition of the pickleball court, which has cracked as weather has changed from winter to spring.

Resident Loren Locken asked if the company that put in the court would be returning to fix the cracks that have developed along the surface of the court.

The company has said they plan to return in August, though the month seems to be going by quickly, Bahr said. The builders plan to grind down anywhere there are cracks on the court and fill them in.

"Next spring, no matter what, if they don't grind it down, the humidity will get beneath it and bubble up again," he said. "It's a system for Arizona where it's dry. That's what it is."

Councilman Kevin Nehls asked if it wouldn't make more sense to have the contractor come back in the spring, as repairs before winter may just be destroyed over winter with harsh weather conditions.

If the city waits, said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich, it won't get reimbursed for the costs. The project has to be closed out by the end of this calendar year as it is grant funded.

Once winter weather arrives, it would make sense to put up gates to keep kids with bikes and others off of the surface, Nehls said. It may help preserve the surface of the court.

Text messages on hold for city

The council plans to hold off on automated text message services for the city.

While discussion continued about TextMyGov, a system that would allow the city to text residents and vice versa, the council reached a consensus to wait and see what other options are available.

"The main goal of this is not to replace so much of what we do (with the current call system), but to alleviate the amount of personal calls we get," Heinrich said.

Currently the city uses One Call Now from OnSolve to get time-sensitive messages to residents, like outdoor watering restrictions and garbage pickup schedule changes. That can cost between \$120 and \$200 per call, and there is no paper trail showing who received the message, he said.

TextMyGov, in contrast, would allow residents to text message the city and receive automated responses, as well as allow residents to report issues immediately.

The company priced out the subscription costs for the city of Groton, and, even with a \$500 discount on setup fees, it would cost the city \$1,000 for the initial setup and \$3,000 per year for the subscription to the service, Heinrich said. And while there was a positive response from community members on a Facebook post from the city about the idea, it wasn't nearly as popular as discussion surrounding a design for a new park safe room design.

Council members seemed unsure of moving forward with the expense. Mayor Scott Hanlon advised that maybe the city should wait a year or so and "see what technology does in the next year."

The price point was a sticking factor for council members.

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"It just seems like it's a lot more money than the One Call we're currently using," said Councilman Jon Cutler.

Heinrich added that he could discuss different options with other city administrators at the upcoming South Dakota Municipal League Annual Conference in October.

Park safe room donation options discussed

The city is looking at possible donations to help fund the new park bathroom and safe room facility.

At the council's last meeting Aug. 1, architect Dean Marske asked the council if it would want to seek some private donations to help fund the new park safe room project. The facility would house the women's, men's and family restrooms, showers, a utility room and standing room that would act as an emergency tornado shelter. The building could cost as much as \$630,000, though federal and state emergency funding would cover most of the eligible costs for the tornado shelter portion of the building.

"At the last Chamber (of Commerce) meeting, Topper (Tastad) mentioned the possibility of similarly to how we did the pool, we could do a brick donation to help fund the safe room," Heinrich said.

It's unclear whether the city or chamber would spearhead the donation drive, he added.

Councilman Bahr presented concerns about vandalism possibilities. While the pool is staffed while open and fenced in while closed, the park is not, and donation bricks could be dug up or vandalized.

Councilman Cutler added the city could look to acid etch names into the pre-cast walls of the building, which would solve that issue.

In other action:

- The police department is getting a new Tahoe. The council authorized the city to purchase the new vehicle to replace the current 2017 Ford that has recently been given the police department problems and needed repairs. "It's a necessary part of our city to have adequate police equipment," said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich. "He (Police Chief Stacy Mayou) already has his name in the bin. He just needs us to pull the pin on it." The vehicle replacement will cost about \$57,000, though some price adjustments may be made.

- The council approved the 2020-2021 audit, which found a couple issues including a lack of timely bank reconciliation and a "significant risk" that city management could manipulate financial statements to conceal fraud. Finance Officer Heinrich said since he was hired, the city has changed how it does bank reconciliations, which would address the first concern. The second concern is common in smaller cities, but it could come down to more of a trust factor. "I don't believe I've given you a reason (to be concerned), and I don't plan to," he told the council.

- The city is moving forward to purchase a Bobcat skid steer. After comparing four machines, the lowest bid came from the Bobcat dealer at \$38,675, said Public Works Coordinator Terry Herron. The council authorized the city to purchase the new vehicle, with talks now shifting to a new truck with a plow.

- The council approved going out to bid for a new two-year cash rent lease agreement for the Groton City Airport.

Hubsch is business manager



Becky Hubsch, formerly the business and health teacher for Groton, is the school's new business manager, replacing Mike Weber who retired at the end of this school year.

"After I graduated from Summit High School, I attended SDSU and received my Bachelor's Degree in education," Hubsch explained. "Following that I attended USD to get a non-profit management degree. I finished my education through an online course at Western Governors, Millcreek, Utah, where I received a Master's Degree in Business Administration."

"I worked for six years for the Summit School District where I was the business manager and grant proposal writer," she stated. "Following that I was employed by GROW South Dakota, a statewide non-profit organization that provides programs and loan products to advance housing, community, and economic development."

"This coming year will be my third year working for the Groton Area School District," Hubsch said. "I had been the business and health teacher here for two years."

"I enjoyed my job here but decided that I could best help the school by taking over the job as the district's business manager," she explained.

"My husband, a physical therapist in Webster, and I have two children to keep us busy and active," Hubsch stated.

- Dorene Nelson

Hubbart is science and health teacher



Brittany Hubbart, Aberdeen, will be the new freshmen science and health teacher in charge of the new lab, the internship instructor and supervisor for seniors serving internships as well as the oral interp coach for the Groton Area School District this coming school year.

"I graduated from Emery High School and started my post high school education at SDSU where I received a Bachelor's of Science in Athletic Training and a Master's of Science in health, physical education, and recreation," Hubbart listed.

"I then obtained my teaching certificate at Dakota State University, Madison, SD, in order to teach in public schools," she smiled. "I taught for eight years, teaching 6th grade science last year in Aberdeen."

"I was an athletic trainer at Presentation College for five years before returning to the classroom as an instructor in the athletic training education program there," Hubbart explained.

"Part of my job here is actually a new program based upon a grant that Becky Hubsch, the school's new business manager, had applied for and received approval for last year," she said. "The grant paid for the remodel of a classroom and the purchase of two mannequins and one SynDaver named Toni."

"The SynDaver, a synthetic mannequin, creates ultra high-fidelity medical simulation models and replacement of live patients," Hubbart explained. "The SynDaver is kept in a water tank to maintain the feel of human skin and simulates a real body and body parts."

"This advanced technology will help me give students in medical terminology, sports medicine, and the new CNA course the hands-on skills needed to excel in healthcare related fields," she added.

- Dorene Nelson

Malsom is reading, social studies and English teacher



Brooke Malsom, Aberdeen, SD, is the new 6th grade reading, social studies, and English teacher in the Groton Area School District for the upcoming school year. She and Lance Hawkins flip flop their students so each has about 20 at a time.

"I'm a graduate of Aberdeen Central High School," Malsom stated, "but attended college in Valley City, ND."

"I chose Valley City State University so that I could continue with my interest and subsequent success in track," she explained. "I received my Bachelor's Degree in elementary education with a minor in middle school education."

"Since this is my first year of teaching, I decided to apply to a smaller school than those in Aberdeen," Malsom smiled. "I wanted to experience the small school feel."

"Due to my high school and college success in track, I am also the head cross country coach and will assist with junior high track," she said. "I currently coach gymnastics at the Aberdeen Gymnastics Association."

"I also help with the Kids CrossFit program at CrossFit Rails," Malsom explained. "This program helps develop the child's overall fitness and physical ability."

"I have always enjoyed participating in sports so I want to help children to learn various activities which will help them in their future," she smiled. "Strong, confident kids today become contributing and successful adults tomorrow."

"I recently became engaged to Chance Torrence, and we are planning a September 2024 wedding," Malsom stated. "My fiancé teaches sixth grade also but at Holgate Middle School in Aberdeen."

- Dorene Nelson

Fischbach is first grade teacher



Caitlyn Fischbach, originally from Aberdeen, will be a first grade teacher at Groton Area Elementary School. She and Julie Milbrandt will each have 19 students in their care this coming year.

"I'm a graduate of Northwestern High School where I was lucky to be on the school's varsity volleyball team," Fischbach smiled. "I now live and work in Aberdeen."

"I attended Valley City State University where I majored in elementary education," she explained. "I went to college here because of its excellent education and volleyball programs."

"I received my Bachelor's Degree in elementary education from Valley City State," Fischbach stated, "but I was able to do my student teacher in Groton under Heather Rowen, the third grade teacher."

"Under Mrs. Rowen's guidance, I not only learned a lot, but I also found the perfect spot for my first teaching position," she smiled. "It was this experience that helped me to decide where to apply for a full-time job."

"Of course the size of the Groton School system was also a deciding factor in where I really wanted to teach," Fischbach said. "Having attended a small

school influenced this decision too."

"During last year's school year I got to know not only the teachers but also many of the students since I subbed for all of the elementary grades," she stated. "I'm really looking forward to the coming school year and am excited to meet my students and other new teachers."

"Currently I'm working for the Youth Development Center at the Aberdeen YMCA," Fischbach explained. "This center helps kids reach their full potential, learn how to live a healthier life, and as a result, strengthen their community."

- Dorene Nelson

Swenson is junior high math teacher



Eric Swenson will be the new junior high math teacher for the Groton Area School District. For the past four years, he had been teaching seventh and eighth grade math and Algebra I at Roncalli in Aberdeen.

"My job here in Groton is to teach four junior high math classes, one intro to business class, and one study hall," he listed.

"I'm originally from Rapid City, graduating from Rapid City Central High School," Swenson explained. "After high school I first attended Mount Marty College for one and one-half years where I played baseball."

"Next I decided to attend Western Dakota Technical University, Rapid City, where I attended for one semester," he said. "I had decided to try criminal justice as my major."

"Keeping criminal justice as my goal, I switched to Northern State University where I received a Bachelor's Degree in Sociology," Swenson stated.

"I worked for Meyers Tractor Salvage for four years followed by eight months as an Aberdeen City Police Officer," he explained.

"My next goal was getting a Master's Degree in Education from Northern. Now I'm working on a different Master's degree, this time in administration to become a school principal."

"My wife Chelsea, a tattoo artist in Aberdeen, and I have an eight year old son," Swenson said. "We are both involved in SPURS and currently live on the SPURS property."

"I do some maintenance and help a little with the ten or so horses that are kept in the SPURS barn and pastures," he listed. "My wife is more involved in the project than I am."

- Dorene Nelson

Hanna is elementary special ed teacher



Sadie Hanna, a 2014 graduate of Groton High School, is returning to the Groton Area School District, this time as an elementary special education teacher.

"After I graduated from Groton High School, I enrolled at Northern State University and graduated in 2018," Hanna explained. "Although I wanted to be a full-time teacher, I started working as a reading tutor at May Overby where I had previously done my student teaching."

"In 2019-2020 I worked full time as a tutor," she said. "I found that it was very rewarding work, helping children who struggled to read."

"My real educational goal was to be a special education teacher, so this opportunity here in Groton is exactly what I was looking for," Hanna smiled.

"As a reading tutor, I worked with groups of 4 or 5 students, but here in Groton I'll be working primarily with about twenty students in the 4th and 5th grades," she listed.

"I have a passion for helping young students reach their full potential," Hanna stated. "I'm looking forward to my new students and being 'back home' where I received my own education," she admitted. "I am also working online toward getting my Master's Degree."

Sadie's family includes her twin sister Sydney, the Refuge Manager for Sand Lake; her mother Nina Kunkle, the office manager for Modern Day Healthcare in Aberdeen; and her stepfather Jim Kunkle, who works for Climate Control.

- Dorene Nelson



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Appeals court: Chamberlain must reimburse family for special education

BY: JOHN HULT - AUGUST 15, 2023 2:31 PM

A three-judge panel on Tuesday affirmed a ruling from a South Dakota judge ordering the Chamberlain School District to pay \$100,000 for the out-of-state placement of a child with special needs.

The Steckelberg family sued the central South Dakota district over its failure to find "appropriate placement" for their son, who is now grown, near the end of his academic career.

By fifth grade, the boy had been diagnosed with Pediatric Acute Onset Neuropsychiatric Syndrome (PANS), obsessive compulsive disorder, Tourette's and random tic disorder, according to court documents.

By the 2018-19 school year, he had been removed from the classroom for repeated behavioral incidents. He was meant to be learning remotely. His parents told the district that the arrangement wasn't working, but the district did not find another place for the student.

His parents eventually found a program at a Utah school called Kaizen Academy that caters to children with issues similar to their son's.

This spring, U.S. District Judge Lawrence Piersol in Sioux Falls affirmed an order from a hearing examiner, who had ordered the district to pay for the boy's tuition and his family's travel.

Piersol agreed that the district was obliged to offer "Free and Available Public Education" under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act.

The 8th Circuit Court of Appeals took up the matter in oral arguments on June 15. In its appeal, the school district had argued that it shouldn't be ordered to pay for travel. It also said that Kaizen Academy wasn't, legally speaking, an "appropriate" educational facility because it focused on behavioral issues as much as education.

The judges disagreed. While at the Academy, they wrote, the boy "completed different classes and, importantly, did well enough to graduate and move on to college."

"All things considered, the Academy was an appropriate placement," Judge Jonathan Kobes wrote.

The decision was unanimous.

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.

COMMENTARY

The holy Sturgis trinity: Noem, Jesus and family **Governor sells sanitized version of rowdy annual motorcycle rally**

SETH TUPPER

A warning to all non-South Dakotans: If you bring your family to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally expecting to meet Jesus, you're likely to be disappointed. Maybe even offended.

That public service announcement has become necessary to correct the record after a glowing assessment of the rally's rectitude last week from Gov. Kristi Noem.

She started her weekly newspaper-style column on Friday with this observation: "I didn't think I'd find so much Jesus at the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally." That was in reference to a pancake breakfast hosted by a religious organization.

She went on to describe the rally as "an event for the whole family."

As she published those words, the 2023 rally was on its way to piling up 11 deaths from fatal crashes,

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127 total traffic accidents, 120 drunken driving arrests, 401 drug arrests, one officer-involved shooting, and five arrests for attempted sexual exploitation of a minor or attempted enticement of a minor.

One rallygoer is charged with making terrorist threats after authorities allegedly found him in possession of several guns, body armor, bomb-making materials, an object that appeared to be a pipe bomb, and a manifesto that included descriptions of murder, mass killings and crimes against children.

Noem was apparently looking past all that when she described the rally as a celebration of "faith, family, and Freedom" (she and her aides often type that last word with a capital "F," which I can only assume is the result of a gubernatorial decree or a broken keyboard).

As a writer, I do have to give Noem points for creativity. Her lead sentence was an attention-grabber, and her Disney-like description of the rally was strikingly original.

But I've been to the rally, so I know that if you go there looking for Jesus, you'll probably also encounter plenty of crude language, crass commercialism, binge drinking and near-to-total nudity.

The focus of Noem's column was the "unsung heroes" who deal with all of that craziness — religious groups, mechanics, law enforcement officers and first responders. Indeed, a lot of people do a lot of thankless work to limit the problems that come with cramming hundreds of thousands of people into a pocket of western South Dakota for 10 days.

Noem vaguely acknowledged some of those problems. As a preface to her gratitude for law enforcement, she wrote, "Anyone who has been to the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally knows that it can get rowdy. That's part of the fun — until it goes too far." Additionally, while thanking first responders, Noem referenced the "bizarre incidents" they encounter during the rally.

She didn't offer any specifics, so I'll provide a few examples.

While covering past rallies as a journalist, I wrote about a man who brought a crew of naked, body-painted women to solicit donations for a dubious-sounding charity. Afterward, he fled without paying the group's hotel bill, stiffing the establishment for more than \$17,000.

I wrote about another man who claimed to be leading a "Bikers for Trump" political movement. Under persistent questioning, he acknowledged that he was simply selling T-shirts emblazoned with that slogan and putting the money in his pocket, rather than sending it to the Trump campaign or any pro-Trump political organization.

And I have covered dozens of heartbreakingly senseless fatal accidents, most of them described by authorities as a "failure to negotiate a curve," which is often code for a middle-aged, inexperienced motorcyclist driving straight through a bend in the road and into an embankment or ditch.

I've had my own share of close calls in the rally-snarled traffic that afflicts all areas of the Black Hills, including an instance when a motorcyclist whipped around a highway curve in the wrong lane and headed straight for the vehicle carrying me, my wife and my kids. We narrowly avoided a head-on collision.

Having said all of that, I'll acknowledge there are good things that come with the rally. Money gets raised for legitimate charities. Local people pad their incomes by taking rally jobs or renting out their homes. Old friends from around the country reunite for a few days of concerts, campfires and scenic drives.

It's a mixed bag, for sure. As long as our safety isn't jeopardized, those of us who live in the Black Hills but aren't motorcycle enthusiasts tend to view the whole thing as merely an annual annoyance to endure.

I would never begrudge anybody the Freedom — of the capital "F" variety, of course — to attend the rally if they so choose, as long as they do so lawfully.

But trying to sell a sanitized image of the rally as a holy family pilgrimage? That's just Dumb with a capital "D."

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

Lithium exploration planned near Hill City

BY: SETH TUPPER - AUGUST 15, 2023 12:31 PM

A company looking for lithium in the Black Hills is planning another drilling project, this time near the southern edge of Hill City.

The company is SDO Services, the South Dakota subsidiary of Swiss-based Midwest Lithium.

Michael Schlumpberger works in Rapid City as Midwest Lithium's chief operating officer. The company's previously announced drilling plan, at a location 2 miles from Mount Rushmore, drew criticism from a local environmental advocacy group.

Schlumpberger said the company will listen to any concerns that may arise about the new drilling plan's proximity to Hill City.

"We're happy to work with concerns from citizens," he said. "This is a historic mine there, but again, we're always open to what we can do to reduce our impact."

Schlumpberger said the company has no start date yet for either drilling project.

The new plan includes up to 80 holes as deep as 850 feet each. Sixteen drilling areas are planned, each measuring about 50 feet by 70 feet, with up to five holes per area.

The drilling sites are just south of the Hill City limits within a 20-acre parcel owned by the Crossed Sabers limited partnership. The partnership was formed in 2012 by Frank "Rudy" Henderson, a former legislator and state Supreme Court justice, and his wife, Norma, both of whom are now deceased but have numerous living descendants.

Details of the drilling plan are included in an "exploration notice of intent" filed with the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources. There is no permit required for exploratory drilling in South Dakota, but state regulators can impose restrictions on drilling plans. Those restrictions often aim to protect cultural and archaeological resources, and to require the plugging of drill holes and the restoration of land to a natural-looking condition.

SDO Services is looking for a lithium-bearing mineral called spodumene in the area of the former Mateen Mine, one of the places lithium was mined decades ago in the Black Hills for use in glass, medicine, ceramics, greases and other items. The growing modern demand for lithium is driven by its use in batteries for electric vehicles and other devices.

SDO Services previously filed notice of its intent to drill up to 55 holes in the area of the former Etta lithium mine, about 2 miles northwest of Keystone and 2 miles northeast of Mount Rushmore National Memorial.

Another company, Australia-based Longview Minerals, filed notice last year of its intent to drill up to 100 holes about 4 miles south of Custer. According to the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources, Longview has begun exploration activities on that site.

The department said last month that an operator named Cody Schad is conducting the only active mining for lithium in the state. Schad has four licensed pegmatite mine sites in Custer County and one in Lawrence County. He has not reported any lithium mining at the Custer sites, the department said, but he's removed 15,000 tons of pegmatite from the Lawrence County site to sell as lithium-bearing material.

South Dakota does not impose severance taxes on lithium. A state Senate committee rejected a bill last winter that would have imposed a tax similar to those already imposed on "energy minerals" such as coal, oil, natural gas and uranium.

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

Farm bill timeline in flux as a messy September for Congress nears

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - AUGUST 15, 2023 3:43 PM

WASHINGTON — The roundtables, listening sessions and appearances at farm shows have largely wrapped up and lawmakers tasked with reauthorizing the nation's agriculture and nutrition programs are comparing notes and beginning to draft the massive, multi-year farm bill.

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The 2018 version expires Sept. 30, just as many urgent priorities compete for floor time in Congress — namely the government funding bills that, if not passed by Oct. 1, could mean a partial government shutdown.

The expansive agricultural and food policy bill covers farmer safety net programs, conservation and sustainability incentives, international trade, rural area development, and food and nutrition programs for low-income earners — the last of which by far accounts for the largest portion of the bill. The legislation is one of Congress' omnibus packages, meaning it's made up of numerous provisions from many lawmakers.

Staff working on the respective House and Senate agriculture committees expect a roughly \$1.5 trillion price tag over the next decade, according to the Congressional Budget Office baseline scores for SNAP and mandatory farm programs.

Both parties have rallied around ways to make the government safety net more reliable for farmers facing rising production costs. Differences surface when discussing the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as SNAP, or food stamps, and how to spend conservation and climate dollars earmarked in last year's Inflation Reduction Act.

While the outlook for when the farm bill reaches the floor is "murky," committee leadership "has committed to bipartisanship," said a Republican House aide knowledgeable about Rep. Glenn "GT" Thompson's negotiations. The aide did not want to be identified because of ongoing discussions.

Thompson, of Pennsylvania, chairs the House Committee on Agriculture.

Some worry that despite Thompson's goal for bipartisanship, the omnibus to continue America's farm and food programs will become another battleground for far-right lawmakers.

If Congress does not pass a final farm bill by the end of September, lawmakers will likely enact program extensions as they have in the past. Aides say the situation becomes more worrisome if lawmakers cannot finish the omnibus by the end of the calendar year.

"Once it leaves his committee it's at the mercy of the Rules Committee and right now the Freedom Caucus is — not just with the farm bill, and not just with the agriculture appropriations — but pretty much every bill going through, (they have) some of their unrealistic demands on required amendments," said Chandler Goule, CEO of the National Association of Wheat Growers.

"I'm worried it's going to not only stall the farm bill, but it's also going to make the farm bill a partisan bill, which is not good for anyone in agriculture," he said.

Food assistance

Nutrition initiatives were added to the farm bill in the early 1970s, expanding the scope of the legislation that previously focused on support for certain commodities, including corn, wheat, soybeans, cotton, dairy and others.

Nutrition programs are projected to comprise 84% of the 2023 farm bill, compared to the 76% in the Agriculture Improvement Act of 2018, the official name of the most recent omnibus. The increase reflects pandemic-related spending and an adjustment to benefits meant to better reflect grocery store prices.

While the farm bill authorizes policy, a separate agriculture appropriations process greenlights the dollars for farmers and SNAP, as well as the Food and Drug Administration. Talks to advance the funding bill collapsed before lawmakers left for August recess as far-right conservatives pushed to ban the availability of mifepristone, the abortion pill.

Cutting SNAP funding in the agriculture appropriations bill is also a target for the GOP-led House.

Among the Republican proposals are "right-sizing" funding to reflect pre-pandemic levels and adjusting the administration's Thrifty Food Plan, which increased benefits to match healthy food prices.

Another proposal Democrats are criticizing is limiting state waivers that allow certain adults to be exempt from work requirements because of labor market conditions. Currently 13 states, the District of Columbia and two territories have statewide waivers.

They include: Alaska, Arizona, California, Connecticut, District of Columbia, Guam, Hawaii, Illinois, Louisiana, Michigan, Nevada, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Pennsylvania and the U.S. Virgin Islands.

Another 16 states have partial waivers in certain areas.

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The GOP already moved the needle this year on SNAP work requirements when House Leader Kevin McCarthy of California won a provision in the debt ceiling deal to increase the work rules age ceiling from 49 to 55 for adults without dependents.

As for the farm bill debate, "Mr. Thompson has been clear: he is not interested in further debate of the age of someone participating in a work requirement," the GOP aide said.

Democrats are warning McCarthy and GOP leadership that inserting the SNAP debate into the farm bill process could hamper progress.

"The continued threat of making additional changes to SNAP eligibility and benefits is not helpful and even undermines Chairman Thompson as he works with his Democratic and Republican membership to bring a bipartisan farm bill out of the Agriculture Committee," wrote the committee's ranking member, David Scott of Georgia, in an Aug. 7 letter co-signed by two dozen Democratic colleagues.

Aside from work rules, the GOP would like to see some policy changes in the farm bill's SNAP title, including more resources directed toward fraud prevention and "health and wellbeing," or restricting what people can buy with SNAP benefits, according to the Agriculture Committee.

The United Council on Welfare Fraud, a group representing state and county investigators, met with GOP lawmakers multiple times this year ahead of farm bill negotiations to push for more robust prevention of underground SNAP benefits trading and complex retail skimming schemes that strip benefits from recipients' EBT cards.

"You have legitimate people who go to buy milk and groceries for their children and they have a zero balance on their card," said Dawn Royal, the group's director and past president.

"In recognizing that there are legitimate victims, the government decided to reissue benefits on those cards to the victims up to twice and that's great, right. So now mom can buy milk for her children and that's great, but they (the government) did nothing to prevent it," she said.

The USDA spends less than 1% on fraud prevention and prosecution, according to the group.

Farmer safety net

Another major area of concern for the farm bill among GOP leaders is updating guidelines that trigger risk protection programs for several commodities, including wheat, corn, soybeans, rice, peanuts, sugar and dairy.

Farmers and lawmakers maintain the prices — referred to as reference prices — are outdated. Despite market fluctuations, severe drought or natural disasters, the protections aren't set in motion until crop prices drop to a certain level.

"Everything we're doing on the farm now costs a whole lot more money when it comes to planting the crop. But the reference prices for when some type of disaster program would kick in haven't changed. So it's much more costly to put a crop in and to protect that crop," said Josh Gackle, a North Dakota soybean farmer and vice president of the American Soybean Association.

Prices have to dip to \$8.50 per bushel before government coverage begins. Gackle says in North Dakota it costs him \$12 per bushel to produce the crop.

"The data that was used (for reference prices) goes back to 2012. The world is very different now than it was in 2012," Sen. John Boozman told Agri-Pulse in an April interview.

"So I can tell you, there is not going to be a farm bill that I vote for that doesn't take care of the safety nets," continued the Arkansas Republican who is the ranking member of the Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry.

Boozman is also eyeing "producer focused" policies in the trade title of the bill, said Patrick Creamer, the committee's communications director for the minority.

The senator wants to focus on "things that really impact farmers, whether it's market access overseas or research to help increase their crop yields," Creamer said.

Democrats agree that farmer safety net programs are falling short. However, they want expanded protection for crops — like apples, for example — that are outside of the major commodities.

"Both program crops and specialty crops have to have some kind of safety net and access to whether

it's (for) conservation research, anything that will make those farmers profitable and able to stay in business," said a Democratic House aide who did not want to be identified because of ongoing negotiations.

The Senate returns Sept. 5. The House returns Sept. 12.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

South Dakota one of three states where tribal health workers are eligible to be paid like peers

Elsewhere, Medicaid programs don't pay for health representatives on tribal land

BY: JAZMIN OROZCO RODRIGUEZ - AUGUST 15, 2023 2:00 PM

FALLON, Nev. — Linda Noneo turned up the heat in her van to ward off the early morning chill that persists in northern Nevada's high desert even in late June. As the first rays of daylight broke over a Christian cross on the top a hill near the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone colony, she drove toward her first stop to pick up fellow tribal members waiting for transportation to their medical appointments.

Noneo is one of four community health representatives for the Fallon Paiute-Shoshone, which the tribe said includes about 1,160 enrolled members. The role primarily involves driving tribal members to their health appointments, whether in Fallon, a city of just under 10,000, or Reno, more than 60 miles west. Noneo said she and her colleagues have also taken patients as far away as Sacramento, California, and Salt Lake City, round trips of nearly 400 and 1,000 miles, respectively.

Public health experts contend the role Noneo and others like her fill is an integral part of ensuring people receive the care they need, especially for chronic illnesses, by helping close gaps in areas with medical provider shortages. Besides transporting patients to their appointments, community health representatives provide health education, patient advocacy, and more. Noneo said she and her colleagues spend a lot of time helping young mothers and elders, checking on the latter, taking them to get groceries, or delivering their medication.

Yet, most state Medicaid programs don't recognize or pay for services offered by health workers, such as Noneo, who work on tribal lands. That's despite their work being essentially the same as that of "community health workers" in nontribal communities, a classification many state Medicaid programs cover.

In Nevada, that disparity recently changed when the state began allowing workers on tribal lands to qualify for Medicaid reimbursement as community health workers. Tribal leaders say the Medicaid payments supplement existing personnel funding by covering the individual services the workers provide. That in turn should allow tribes to train and hire more community health representatives, which could expand health and support services for tribal members.

Only two other states, South Dakota and Arizona, treat community health representatives serving Native American populations as eligible for the same Medicaid reimbursement as their similarly named counterparts in nontribal areas, according to Michelle Archuleta, a community health representative program consultant for the federal Indian Health Service. However, she said, the tribes the CHRs work for have not begun billing the states' Medicaid programs.

The Community Health Representative program, established by Congress in 1968, is among the nation's oldest community health workforces. It's jointly funded by each tribe and the IHS, an agency within the Department of Health and Human Services responsible for providing health care to members of federally recognized tribes. As of 2019, more than 1,600 of these tribal linchpins worked in the United States, according to the IHS.

Last year, the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services approved Nevada's plan to make community health workers who complete training and certification requirements eligible for Medicaid reimbursement when they assist with chronic disease management and prevention.

And in December, leaders with the Nevada Community Health Worker Association helped tribes make sure their community health representatives would receive the necessary training for certification. The

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association would “fully support” tribal clinics submitting their community health representative training for recognition in the state and it would not require a change to state law, said Jay Kolbet-Clausell, program director for the group. For now, community health representatives are receiving double training to be able to file for Medicaid reimbursement.

Training and certification requirements for community health workers vary widely by state and employer, as workers are often hired by hospitals, local organizations, health departments, or Federally Qualified Health Centers. But a movement has been emerging across the country to bring more uniformity to those requirements and formalize the roles, said Sweta Haldar, a policy analyst with the Racial Equity and Health Policy program at KFF.

As part of this process, states are expanding coverage for community health workers under Medicaid. According to a brief Haldar co-authored, 28 of 47 states, and Washington, D.C., reported having policies that allow Medicaid reimbursement for services provided by community health workers. Arkansas, Georgia, and Hawaii did not respond to KFF’s survey.

“There’s a really robust evidence base that is growing every day that community health worker interventions can be effective in reducing health disparities, particularly in communities of color,” Haldar said.

Studies have also shown that community health worker programs are effective in improving health outcomes for people with chronic conditions and that they reduce health care costs.

Soon after Nevada implemented its program, about 50 community health representatives completed the requirements. Another cohort of 20 finished the curriculum later, said Kolbet-Clausell. The goal is for those who have completed the recent training to help their peers through it, they said.

Even before the tribal workers were included in the community health workforce, one of its greatest strengths was its diversity, Kolbet-Clausell said. In Nevada, the 2022 student group was made up of greater shares of people who are American Indian or Alaska Native, Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, Black, Hispanic, or from rural areas than the state’s general population. They said it’s likely one of the most diverse health programs in the state.

Community health representatives such as Noneo are typically tribal or community members themselves, which, public health experts say, allows them to connect more easily with the patients they serve and better connect them to health care.

For example, the first person she picked up that June morning was her cousin, who had a 6 a.m. dialysis appointment.

Kolbet-Clausell said they’re optimistic about the growing workforce and the support it’s getting from state leaders.

“Five, six years ago, there was a lot more resistance,” they said, because lawmakers saw the efforts to expand the community health workforce as simply spending more money. “But this actually just benefits rural communities as much as it benefits underserved urban communities. It serves everyone.”

Back in Fallon, Noneo reflected on her 27 years as a community health representative for her tribe as she prepares to retire in September. She has been there with her fellow tribal members through important and hard times in their lives — like driving an expectant mother to Reno to deliver a baby, taking people to receive treatment for mental health crises and addiction, and bringing patients to their dialysis treatments on her week off around Christmas so they wouldn’t miss their appointments.

The most challenging part of the job, she said, is experiencing the loss of someone she has regularly seen and provided years of services for.

“We all have compassion,” she said. “In this kind of job, you have to have that.”

After decades of shuttling patients, Noneo has the work down to a steady and familiar rhythm. Four hours after dropping off her cousin for dialysis, Noneo picked her up at the clinic as she dropped off the next dialysis patient. On a clipboard, she logged the hours and mileage for each appointment.

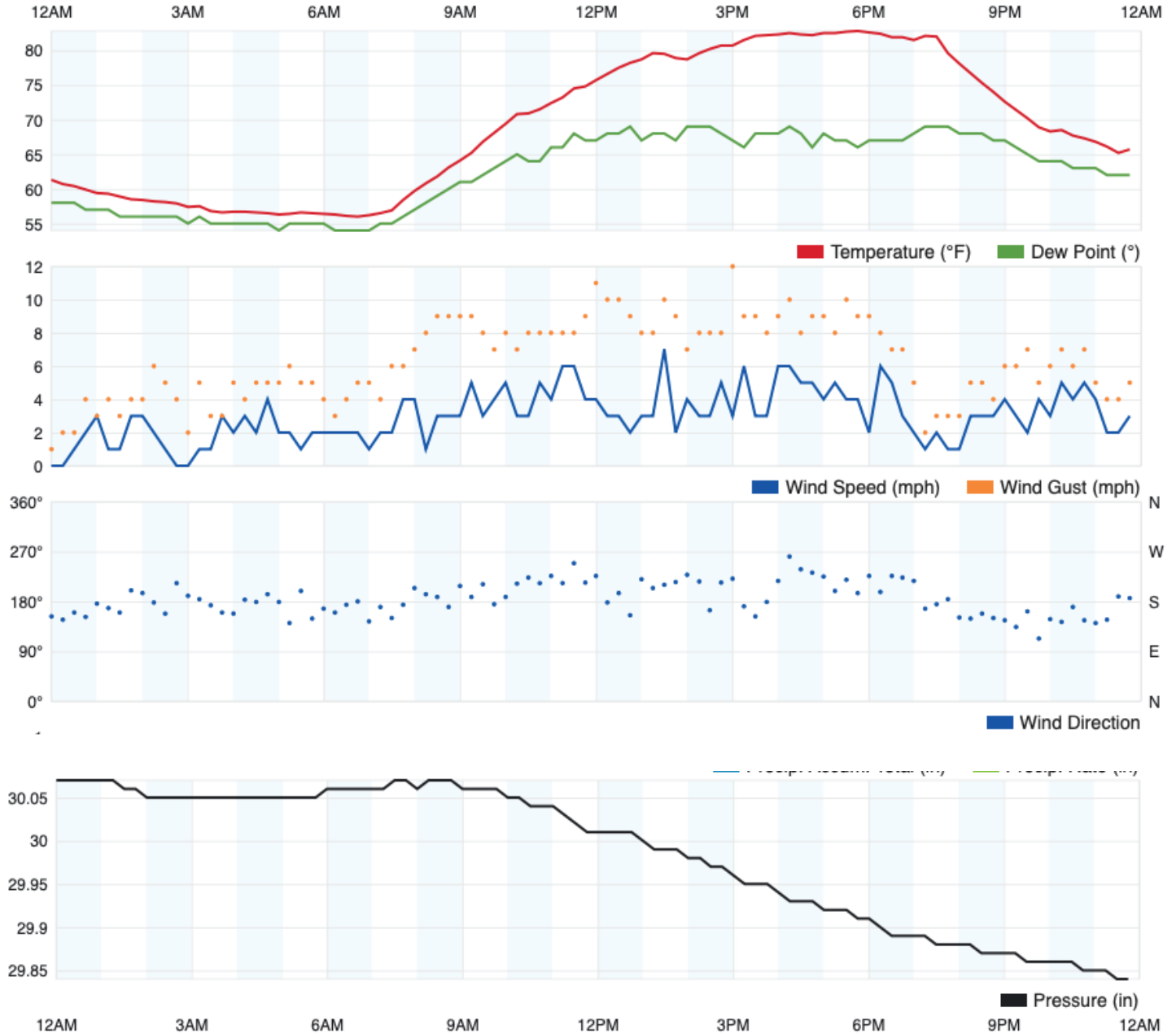
KFF Health News, formerly known as Kaiser Health News (KHN), is a national newsroom that produces in-depth journalism about health issues and is one of the core operating programs at KFF — the independent source for health policy research, polling, and journalism.

Jazmin Orozco Rodriguez is a Nevada correspondent for KFF Health News.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather






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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Sunny then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear and Breezy then Clear	Sunny	Clear	Sunny and Windy	Mostly Clear and Breezy then Partly Cloudy	Hot
High: 90 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 76 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 89 °F	Low: 68 °F	High: 91 °F



Above Average Temperatures on the Way

<u>Today</u>	<u>Thursday</u>	<u>Friday</u>
		
88-98°F	75-83°F	85-104°F
Scattered clouds, cold front passes dry	Breezy in the morning, dry and cooler	Windy becoming hot



We will get a little bit of a sneak peak of the warm to hot temperatures to come today before a cold front moves through. No precipitation is expected with this frontal passage. Temperatures Thursday will be much cooler. Moving into the weekend temperatures heat up.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 83 °F at 5:04 PM

Low Temp: 56 °F at 6:34 AM

Wind: 12 mph at 2:57 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 07 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1988

Record Low: 42 in 1897

Average High: 83

Average Low: 57

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.15

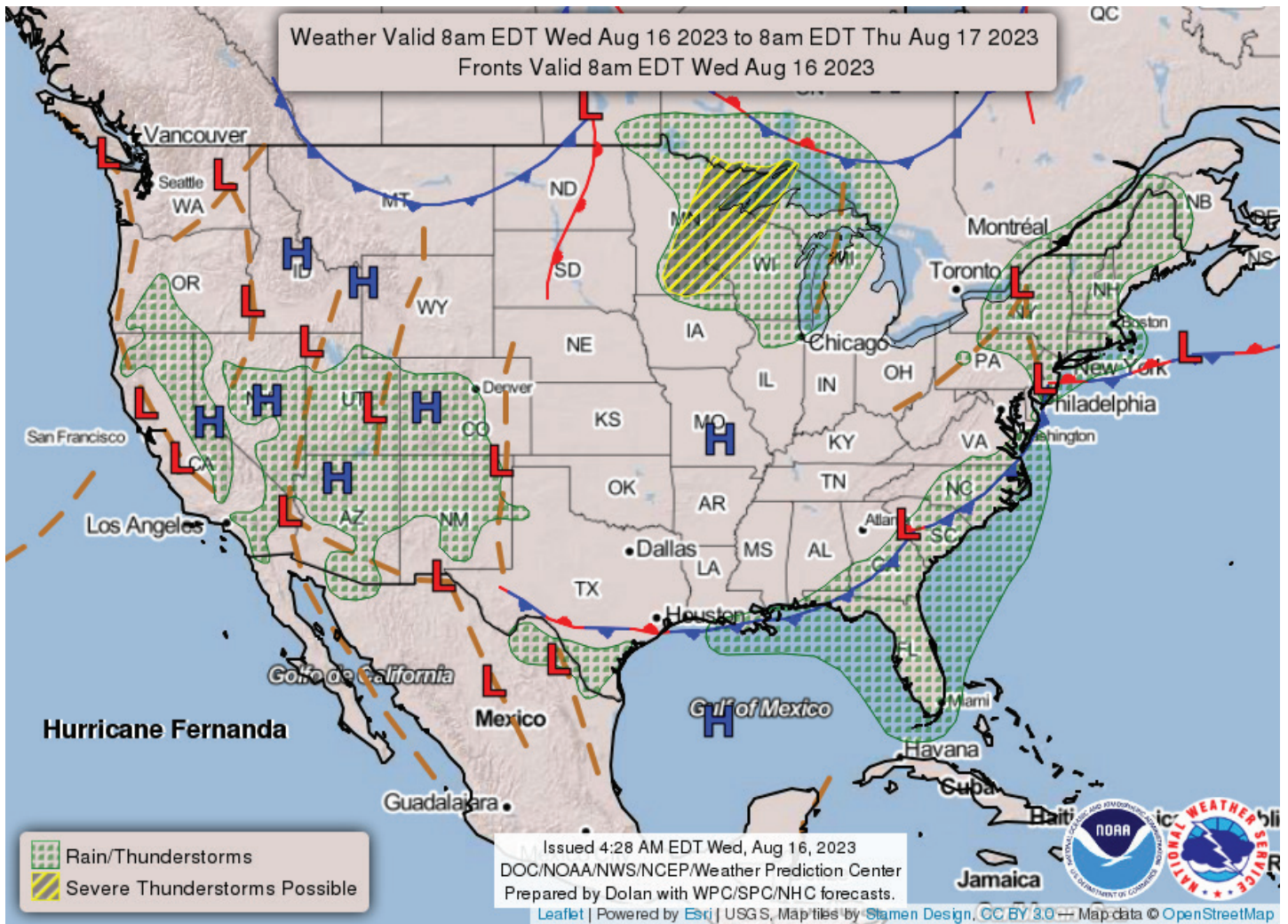
Precip to date in Aug.: 5.92

Average Precip to date: 15.25

Precip Year to Date: 18.59

Sunset Tonight: 8:40:24 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:34:11 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 16, 1986: Thunderstorm winds gusted to 60 mph in Forestburg, in Sanborn County. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph uprooted trees and damaged buildings in the northern part of Hanson County. On several farms, barns, garages, silos, and small buildings were destroyed. The worst affected area was south of Epiphany where large steel sheds were damaged, and a roof was blown in.

1777: The Battle of Bennington, delayed a day by rain, was fought. The rain-delayed British reinforcements and allowed the Vermont Militia to arrive in time, enabling the Americans to win a victory by defeating two enemy forces, one at a time.

1909 - A dry spell began in San Bernardino County of southern California that lasted until the 6th of May in 1912, a stretch of 994 days! Another dry spell, lasting 767 days, then began in October of 1912. (The Weather Channel)

1916 - Altapass, NC, was deluged with 22.22 inches of rain in 24 hours to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Afternoon and evening thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather from Oklahoma to Wisconsin and Lower Michigan. Thunderstorms in central Illinois produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Springfield which toppled two large beer tents at the state fair injuring 58 persons. Thunderstorms also drenched Chicago IL with 2.90 inches of rain, making August 1987 their wettest month of record. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing along a slow moving cold front produced severe weather from North Dakota to Lower Michigan during the day. Nine tornadoes were sighted in North Dakota, and thunderstorms also produced hail three inches in diameter at Lakota ND, and wind gusts to 83 mph at Marais MI. Thirty-seven cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Rockford IL with a reading of 104 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Late afternoon and evening thunderstorms in the Central High Plains Region produced golf ball size hail at La Junta CO, Intercanyon CO, and Custer SD. Afternoon thunderstorms over South Texas drenched Brownsville with 2.60 inches of rain. Fair skies allowed viewing of the late evening full lunar eclipse from the Great Lakes Region to the Northern and Central Plains Region, and across much of the western third of the country. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1992: One of the most destructive United States hurricanes of record started modestly as a tropical wave that emerged from the west coast of Africa on August 14. The wave spawned a tropical depression on August 16, which became Tropical Storm Andrew the next day.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

WORKING WITH GOD

George Washington Carver was a botanist, educator, inventor, and scientist. As the son of a slave, he was aware of the difficulty facing farmers, knowing that they needed more than cotton for their fields. He became interested in peanuts. Soon he realized that there was no market for them. Needing help, he turned to God, in prayer.

One day he prayed, "Mr. Creator, why did You make the peanut?"

Later in life he said: "God led me into the laboratory and together we got down to work." Before he died, his research and influence produced over 300 products from peanuts including cosmetics, dyes, plastics, gasoline, and nitroglycerine. He published many books, including one with over 100 recipes using peanuts.

James has an interesting bit of advice. He said, "If you need wisdom - if you want to know what God wants you to do, ask Him and He will gladly tell you." True wisdom begins with respect for God and His laws, leads to right living in the sight of God, and enables us to align our goals with the goals God has for us. When we do this, we honor God, and in His time, He will honor us. We may begin with something as small as a peanut, but only God knows where it will end.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to look to You for Your wisdom and insight in all that we do, knowing it is always available. And, also give us patience and perseverance to work with You for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: If you need wisdom, ask our generous God, and he will give it to you. He will not rebuke you for asking. James 1:5



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
- 08/10/2023 Family Fun Fest, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday after Labor Day)
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Golf Tournament
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm (working day on or closest to Halloween)
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm (Thanksgiving)
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes & Holiday Party
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.15.23

18 39 42 57 63 7

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 51

DRAW: Mins 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.14.23

1 26 31 33 50 8

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$8,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 6 Mins 59

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.15.23

1 21 23 28 30 7

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 21 Mins 59

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.12.23

13 18 19 29 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 21 Mins 59

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.14.23

2 23 42 61 68 26

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 50 Mins

DRAW: 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

08.14.23

32 34 37 39 47 3

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$236,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 50 Mins

DRAW: 59 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

ISG Reinforces Its Commitment to South Dakota With A New Office In Pierre

PIERRE, S.D., Aug. 15, 2023 /PRNewswire/ -- Within weeks of expanding its Sioux Falls footprint to The Bancorp Building at Cherapa Place, architecture, engineering, environmental, and planning firm ISG further strengthens its ability to support South Dakota communities by opening an office in Pierre. This new location will boost the firm's ability to serve clients throughout central and western South Dakota.

ISG has several projects underway in Pierre/Ft. Pierre, including the South Dakota Cultural Heritage Center renovations and the Fort Pierre Tatanka Trail improvements. With locations throughout the Midwest, ISG's accessibility, capacity, and expertise serve government entities, developers, municipalities, school districts, and many other organizations. The firm is especially eager to bring value to central South Dakota municipalities through its on-call engineering professionals who provide services that support daily and long-term infrastructure needs.

The expansion represents a significant milestone in ISG's growth. Development Strategist Steve Watson shares, "opening an office in Pierre is a great opportunity for ISG. We are excited to further develop local relationships and better support existing clients in central South Dakota by increasing in-person access to our team. This location also enables us to reach new partners throughout the State who can benefit from our expertise."

President David Doxtad is eager to continue the firm's momentum in South Dakota, "we have had an office in South Dakota for over five years and have felt tremendous support from clients throughout the State. I look forward to bringing our services closer to them and giving our team the opportunity to foster deeper connections within Pierre."

Current ISG South Dakota employees include alumni from the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology, Augustana University, South Dakota State University, and Southeast Technical College. The firm is committed to making tomorrow better than today and looks forward to expanding coverage and providing services that cater to the unique needs of South Dakota communities.

The Pierre Economic Development Corporation was a helpful resource while ISG evaluated a new Pierre office. "Any time a respected company decides to expand their operations to Pierre, it validates our message that this is a great place to do business," says PEDCO COO Jim Protexter. "Since ISG's expertise is in services that often precede development and investment, that tells me more good things are coming our way."

Russia hits Ukrainian grain depots again as a foreign ship tries out Kyiv's new Black Sea corridor

By HANNA ARHIROVA and SUSIE BLANN Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia resumed its targeting of grain infrastructure in Ukraine's southern Odesa region, local officials said Wednesday, using drones in overnight strikes on storage facilities and ports along the Danube River that Kyiv has increasingly used for grain transport to Europe after Moscow broke off a key wartime export deal through the Black Sea.

At the same time, a loaded container ship stuck at the port of Odesa since Russia's full-scale invasion more than 17 months ago set sail and was heading through the Black Sea to the Bosphorus along a temporary corridor established by Ukraine for merchant shipping.

Ukraine's economy, crunched by the war, is heavily dependent on farming. Its agricultural exports, like those of Russia, are also crucial for world supplies of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other food that developing nations rely on.

After the Kremlin tore up a month ago an agreement brokered last summer by the U.N. and Turkey to

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ensure safe Ukraine grain exports through the Black Sea, Kyiv has sought to reroute transport through the Danube and road and rail links into Europe. But transport costs that way are much higher, some European countries have balked at the consequences for local grain prices, and the Danube ports can't handle the same volume as seaports.

Odesa Gov. Oleh Kiper said the primary targets of Russia's overnight drone bombardment were port terminals and grain silos, including at the ports in the Danube delta. Air defenses managed to intercept 13 drones, according to Kiper.

It was the latest attack amid weeks of aerial strikes as Russia has targeted the Danube delta ports, which are only about 15 kilometers (10 miles) from the Romanian border. The Danube is Europe's second-longest river and a key transport route.

Meanwhile, the container ship departing Odesa was the first vessel to set sail since July 16, according to Oleksandr Kubrakov, Ukraine's deputy prime minister. It had been stuck in Odesa since February 2022.

The Hong Kong-flagged Joseph Schulte was traveling down a temporary corridor that Ukraine asked the International Maritime Organization to ratify. The United States has warned that the Russian military is preparing for possible attacks on civilian shipping vessels in the Black Sea.

Sea mines also make the voyage risky, and ship insurance costs are likely to be high for operators. Ukraine told the IMO it would "provide guarantees of compensation for damage."

Last Sunday, a Russian warship fired warning shots at a Palau-flagged cargo ship in the south Black Sea. According to Russia's Defense Ministry, the Sukru Okan was heading northwards to the Ukrainian Danube River port of Izmail.

Ship-tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press confirmed that the Joseph Schulte was steaming south.

The Joseph Schulte is carrying more than 30,000 tons of cargo, with 2,114 containers, including food products, according to Kubrakov.

He said the corridor will be primarily used to evacuate ships stuck in the Ukrainian ports of Chornomorsk, Odesa and Pivdennyi since the outbreak of war.

On the war's front line, Ukrainian officials claimed another milestone in Kyiv's grinding counteroffensive, with Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar saying troops have retaken a village in the eastern Donetsk region.

The village of Urozhaine is near Staromaiorske, a hamlet that Ukraine also claimed to have recaptured recently. The claims could not be independently verified.

Ukraine appears to be trying to drive a wedge between Russian forces in the south, but it is up against strong defensive lines and is advancing without air support.

Also Wednesday, the Russian military said it shot down three drones over the Kaluga region southwest of Moscow and blamed the attack on Ukraine. No damage or casualties were reported.

Nigeriens call for mass recruitment of volunteers as the junta faces possible regional invasion

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — Nigeriens are preparing for a possible invasion by countries in the region, three weeks after mutinous soldiers ousted the nation's democratically elected president.

Residents in the capital, Niamey, are calling for the mass recruitment of volunteers to assist the army in the face of a growing threat by the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS, which says it will use military force if the junta doesn't reinstate the deposed President Mohamed Bazoum. ECOWAS has activated a "standby force" to restore order in Niger after the junta ignored a deadline to reinstate and release Bazoum.

The initiative, spearheaded by a group of locals in Niamey, aims to recruit tens of thousands of volunteers from across the country to register for the Volunteers for the Defense of Niger, to fight, assist with medical care, and provide technical and engineering logistics among other functions, in case the junta needs help, Amsarou Bako, one of the founders, told The Associated Press Tuesday.

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"It's an eventuality. We need to be ready whenever it happens," he said. The recruitment drive will launch Saturday in Niamey as well as in cities where invasion forces might enter, such as near the borders with Nigeria and Benin, two countries, which have said they would participate in an intervention. Anyone over 18 can register and the list will be given to the junta to call upon people if needed, said Bako. The junta is not involved, but is aware of the initiative, he said.

Regional tensions are deepening as the standoff between Niger and ECOWAS shows no signs of defusing, despite signals from both sides that they are open to resolving the crisis peacefully. Last week the junta said it was open to dialogue with ECOWAS after rebuffing the bloc's multiple efforts at talks, but shortly afterwards charged Bazoum with "high treason" and recalled its ambassador from neighboring Ivory Coast.

ECOWAS defense chiefs are expected to meet this week, for the first time since the bloc announced the deployment of the "standby" force. It's unclear when or if the force will invade, but it would probably include several thousand troops and would have devastating consequences, say conflict experts.

"A military intervention with no end in sight risks triggering a regional war, with catastrophic consequences for the vast Sahel that is already plagued by insecurity, displacement and poverty," said Mucahid Durmaz, senior analyst at Verisk Maplecroft, a global risk intelligence company.

Niger was seen as one of the last democratic countries in the Sahel region south of the Sahara Desert, and a partner for Western nations in the effort to beat back growing jihadi violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group. France, the former colonial ruler, and the United States have approximately 2,500 military personnel in the region which train Niger's military and, in the case of France, conduct joint operations.

Since the coup, France and the U.S. have suspended military operations and jihadi attacks are increasing. At least 17 soldiers were killed and nearly two dozen wounded in an ambush by extremists in the Tillaberi region, said the ministry of defense on state television Tuesday. The attack occurred Tuesday afternoon when a military detachment was traveling between Boni and Torodi villages. The wounded have been evacuated to Niamey.

Coups in the region have been rampant and the one in Niger is seen by the international community as one too many. But analysts say the longer this drags on, the probability of an intervention fades as the junta cements its grip on power, likely forcing the international community to accept the status quo.

A diplomatic solution is likely; the question is how much military pressure is applied to make it happen, a Western official who was not authorized to speak to the media told The AP.

On Tuesday United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken said there was still space for diplomacy to return the country to constitutional rule and said the U.S. supported ECOWAS' dialogue efforts, including its contingency plans.

The new U.S. ambassador to Niger, Kathleen FitzGibbon, is expected to arrive in Niamey at the end of the week, according to a U.S. official. The United States hasn't had an ambassador in the country for nearly two years: some Sahel experts say this has left Washington with less access to key players and information.

"The U.S is in a difficult situation with no good choices," said Michael Shurkin, a senior fellow at the Atlantic Council and director of global programs at 14 North Strategies. "It either sticks to a principled position and pushes for democracy while alienating the junta and risk pushing it into Russia's arms, or we give up on principle and work with the junta in the hope of salvaging a productive working relationship," he said.

While regional and western countries scramble for how to respond, many Nigeriens are convinced they'll soon be invaded.

The details of Niger's volunteer force are still vague, but similar initiatives in neighboring countries have yielded mixed results. Volunteer fighters in Burkina Faso, recruited to help the army battle its jihadi insurgency, have been accused by rights groups and locals of committing atrocities against civilians.

Bako, one of the heads of the group organizing Nigerien volunteers, said Niger's situation is different.

"The (volunteers in Burkina Faso) are fighting the Burkinabe who took weapons against their own brothers ... The difference with us is our people will fight against an intrusion," he said.

An abandoned desert village an hour from Dubai offers a glimpse at the UAE's hardscrabble past

By NICK EL HAJJ Associated Press

AL-MADAM, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Nestled in sand dunes an hour's drive from the skyscrapers of Dubai, a desert village abandoned in the 1990s stands as an eerie relic of the rapid urbanization of the United Arab Emirates.

Built in the 1970s to house semi-nomadic Bedouin, the village of al-Ghuraifa was abandoned two decades later as oil wealth transformed the country into a global hub of commerce and tourism, home to the futuristic cities of Dubai and Abu Dhabi.

In recent years, the ghost village near the town of al-Madam in the Sharjah emirate has become something of a tourist attraction, offering an escape from the concrete jungles of the coastal cities and a glimpse at the Emirates' hardscrabble past.

The village, which comprises two rows of homes and a mosque, "can teach us a lot of the modern history of the UAE," said Ahmad Sukkar, an assistant professor at the University of Sharjah who is part of a team researching the site.

It was built as part of a public housing project after the 1971 formation of the United Arab Emirates, a federation of seven sheikhdoms. The discovery of oil 13 years earlier was just starting to reshape the country.

The village housed around 100 members of the al-Ketbi tribe, Sukkar said. They were one of several Bedouin tribes that until then had led a semi-nomadic existence, raising animals, traveling among the desert oases and visiting Dubai and Abu Dhabi when they were small port towns reliant on fishing and pearl diving.

The modern cement houses, built to ease the transition to settled life, featured local flourishes. The interior walls were brightly colored, and some were adorned with mosaics. The homes also featured spaces where village elders could host local councils, known as "majalis" in Arabic. One house had wallpaper depicting a lush green landscape, a stark contrast to the monotonous sandscape outside.

It's unclear what exactly sparked the exodus just two decades after the homes were built.

In local lore, the residents were driven away by evil spirits, but Sukkar says it's more likely that they left to seek a better life in the UAE's fast-growing cities. The village had limited access to electricity and water, and was buffeted by sandstorms. Families would have also had to contend with a long commute across the desert to reach government jobs and schools in Dubai.

Nowadays the desert is slowly reclaiming the village. Drifts of sand have blown into the homes, and in some rooms, they obscure walls and nearly reach the ceiling. Only the mosque remains as it was, thanks to regular sweeping by maintenance workers from nearby al-Madam.

Some descendants of the camel-mounted Bedouin who once plied the desert sands still reside in the Emirates' rural stretches, though many now live in cities with glimmering skyscrapers, cavernous, air-conditioned malls and a sprawling network of modern highways. Expatriates from all corners of the earth make up the vast majority of the UAE's population, and some have taken an interest in its humbler past.

On a recent day, tour guides could be seen leading groups of visitors through the abandoned village. It's also been the setting for music videos and social media posts featuring the foreign models, fancy cars and displays of opulence for which Dubai is now best known.

"I wonder why they left," said Nitin Panchal, an Indian expatriate visiting the site. "Could it be a genie, could be black magic? We'll never know."

The municipality recently installed fencing around the perimeter, along with a security gate, garbage bins and a parking lot. Past visitors had left graffiti, scraped décor from the walls and climbed atop fragile roofs for photos.

The new measures have drained some of the mystery from the site and raised the prospect of it becoming yet another tourist attraction in a country filled with them.

Danny Booth, an expatriate from the Isle of Man, a British Crown Dependency in the Irish Sea, said he

had decided to "come and have a look before things start to change here."

"Sometimes these places are better left undisturbed, as they lose their charm when they become crowded," he said.

Death toll from devastating Maui fire reaches 106, as county begins identifying victims

By CLAIRE RUSH, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press LAHAINA, Hawaii (AP) — Federal officials sent a mobile morgue with coroners, pathologists and technicians to Hawaii to help identify the dead, as Maui County released the first names of people killed in the wildfire that all but incinerated the historic town of Lahaina a week ago and killed at least 106 people.

A week after the fires started, some residents still had with intermittent power, unreliable cellphone service and uncertainty over where to get assistance.

Some people walked periodically to a seawall, where phone connections were strongest, to make calls. Flying low off the coast, a single-prop airplane used a loudspeaker to blare information about where to get water and supplies.

Just two victims have been named so far, while the county said it has identified three more and will release the names after notifying the next of kin.

"It's going to be a very, very difficult mission," U.S. Department of Health and Human Services deputy assistant secretary Jonathan Greene said. "And patience will be incredibly important because of the number of victims."

A portable morgue unit arrived Tuesday morning with more than 22 tons of supplies and equipment needed for victim identification and processing remains, such as mortuary examination tables and X-ray units.

Crews using cadaver dogs have scoured about 32% of the area, the County of Maui said in a statement Tuesday. The governor asked for patience as authorities became overwhelmed with requests to visit the burn area.

Maui Police Chief John Pelletier renewed an appeal for families with missing relatives to provide DNA samples. So far 41 samples have been submitted, the county statement said, and 13 DNA profiles have been obtained from remains.

The governor warned that scores more bodies could be found. The wildfires, some of which have not yet been fully contained, are already the deadliest in the U.S. in more than a century.

When asked by Hawaii News Now if children are among the missing, Green said Tuesday: "Tragically, yes. ... When the bodies are smaller, we know it's a child."

He described some of the sites being searched as "too much to share or see from just a human perspective."

Another complicating factor, Green said, is that storms with rain and high winds were forecast for the weekend. Officials are mulling whether to "preemptively power down or not for a short period of time, because right now all of the infrastructure is weaker."

The local power utility has already faced criticism for not shutting off power as strong winds buffeted a parched area under high risk for fire. It's not clear whether the utility's equipment played any role in igniting the flames.

Hawaiian Electric Co. Inc. President and CEO Shelee Kimura said many factors go into a decision to cut power, including the impact on people who rely on specialized medical equipment and concerns that a shutoff in the fire area would have knocked out water pumps.

Green has said the flames raced as fast as a mile (1.6 kilometers) every minute in one area, fueled by dry grass and propelled by strong winds from a passing hurricane.

The blaze that swept into centuries-old Lahaina last week destroyed nearly every building in the town of 13,000. That fire has been 85% contained, according to the county. Another blaze known as the Upcountry

fire was 75% contained as of Tuesday evening.

The Lahaina fire caused about \$3.2 billion in insured property losses, according to calculations by Karen Clark & Company, a prominent disaster and risk modeling company. That doesn't count damage to uninsured property. The firm said more than 2,200 buildings were damaged or destroyed by flames, with about 3,000 damaged by fire or smoke or both.

Even where the flames have retreated, authorities have warned that toxic byproducts may remain, including in drinking water, after the flames spewed poisonous fumes. That has left many unable to return home.

Victoria Martocci, who lost her scuba business and a boat, planned to travel to her storage unit in Kahalui from her Kahana home Wednesday to stash documents and keepsakes given to her by a friend whose house burned. "These are things she grabbed, the only things she could grab, and I want to keep them safe for her," Martocci said.

President Joe Biden said Tuesday that he and first lady Jill Biden would visit Hawaii "as soon as we can" but he doesn't want his presence to interrupt recovery and cleanup efforts. During a stop in Milwaukee to highlight his economic agenda, Biden pledged that "every asset they need will be there for them."

The two victims identified were Lahaina residents Robert Dyckman, 74, and Buddy Jantoc, 79.

Lahaina resident Kekoa Lansford helped rescue people as the flames swept through town. Now he is collecting stories from survivors, hoping to create a timeline of what happened. He has 170 emails so far.

The scene was haunting. "Horrible, horrible," Lansford said Tuesday. "You ever seen hell in the movies? That is what it looked like. Fire everywhere. Dead people."

Clashes between rival militias in Libya leave 27 people dead, authorities say

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — Clashes between rival militias in Libya's capital killed at least 27 people and left residents trapped in their homes Tuesday, unable to escape the violence, medical authorities said.

The fighting appears to be the most intense to shake Tripoli this year. In addition to the 27 deaths, over 100 people were injured in the fighting, Libya's Emergency Medicine and Support Center, a medical body that is deployed during humanitarian disasters and wars, said early Wednesday.

The clashes erupted late Monday between militiamen from the 444 brigade and the Special Deterrence Force, according to local media. Tensions flared after Mahmoud Hamza, a senior commander of the 444 brigade, was allegedly detained by the rival group at an airport in Tripoli earlier in the day, the reports said.

It is unclear how many of the dead were militiamen or civilians. The Red Crescent did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Throughout the fighting Tuesday, the Health Ministry urged the warring sides to allow ambulance and emergency teams to enter the affected areas, primarily in the south of the city, and for blood to be sent to nearby hospitals.

OPSGroup, an organization for the aviation industry, said late Monday that a large number of aircraft departed from Tripoli due to the clashes. Inbound flights were being diverted to the nearby city of Misrata, it said.

The escalation follows months of relative peace after nearly a decade of civil war in Libya, where two rival sets of authorities are locked in a political stalemate. Longstanding divisions have sparked several incidents of violence in Tripoli in recent years, although most have been over in a matter of hours.

In a statement Tuesday, the U.N. mission in Libya said it was following with concern "the security incidents and developments" and called for an immediate end to the ongoing clashes.

Both of Libya's rival administrations also condemned the fighting in separate statements Tuesday. The House of Representatives, which is based in the eastern city of Benghazi, blamed its rival, the Tripoli-based government, for the violence.

The U.S. and British embassies in Libya issued statements expressing concerns over the violence. The United States called for an "immediate de-escalation in order to sustain recent Libyan gains toward stabil-

ity and elections," the American Embassy said.

The oil-rich country has been divided since 2014 between rival administrations in the east and the west, each supported by an array of well-armed militias and different foreign governments. The North African nation has been in a state of upheaval since a 2011 NATO-backed uprising toppled and later killed longtime dictator Moammar Gadhafi.

Germany's Cabinet is set to approve a plan to liberalize rules on cannabis possession and sale

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Germany's Cabinet is set to approve a plan to liberalize rules on cannabis, setting the scene for the European Union's most populous member to decriminalize possession of limited amounts and allow members of "cannabis clubs" to buy the substance for recreational purposes.

The government's approval, expected on Wednesday, is billed as the first step in a two-part plan and will still need approval by parliament. But it's a stride forward for a prominent reform project of Chancellor Olaf Scholz's socially liberal coalition, though significantly short of the government's original ambitions.

Health Minister Karl Lauterbach is to give details of the finalized legislation on Wednesday. His most recent public proposal foresees legalizing possession of up to 25 grams (nearly 1 ounce) of cannabis for recreational purposes and allowing individuals to grow up to three plants on their own.

German residents who are 18 and older would be allowed to join nonprofit "cannabis clubs" with a maximum 500 members each. The clubs would be allowed to grow cannabis for members' personal consumption.

Individuals would be allowed to buy up to 25 grams per day, or up to 50 grams per month — a figure limited to 30 grams for under-21s. Membership in multiple clubs would not be allowed. The clubs' costs would be covered by membership fees, which would be staggered according to how much cannabis members use.

Officials hope their plan will help push back the black market, protect consumers against contaminated products and reduce drug-related crime.

"We are not creating a problem," Lauterbach said earlier this year. "We are trying to solve a problem."

The center-right opposition disagrees, arguing that the government is pressing ahead with legalizing a risky drug despite European legal obstacles and expert opinion. An organization representing German judges says the plan is likely to increase rather than decrease the burden on the judicial system and could even increase demand for black-market cannabis.

Some advocates of legalization aren't happy either.

"What we're getting from the health minister is overregulation, a continued stigmatization of cannabis users and a much too tight regulatory corset, which simply makes it impossible for many, many (cannabis clubs) to work," said Oliver Waack-Jürgensen, who heads the Berlin-based High Ground "cannabis social club" founded last year. He is also on the board of a national association representing such clubs.

The government has said it plans to follow the new legislation by mapping out a second step — five-year tests of regulated commercial supply chains in select regions, which would then be scientifically evaluated.

That's far short of its original plan last year, which foresaw allowing the sale of cannabis to adults across the country at licensed outlets. It was scaled back following talks with the EU's executive commission.

Lauterbach has said Germany doesn't want to emulate the model of the neighboring Netherlands, which combines decriminalization with little market regulation. He has said Germany hopes to set an example for Europe.

Dutch authorities tolerate the sale and consumption of small amounts of the substance at so-called coffeeshops but producing and selling large amounts of it, necessary to keep the coffeeshops supplied, remains illegal. Amsterdam, long a magnet for tourists wanting to smoke weed, has been cracking down on coffeeshops.

The Dutch government, meanwhile, has launched an experiment it says aims to "determine whether and how controlled cannabis can be legally supplied to coffeeshops and what the effects of this would be."

Approaches elsewhere in Europe vary. In Switzerland, authorities last year cleared the way for a pilot project allowing a few hundred people in Basel to buy cannabis from pharmacies for recreational purposes. The Czech government has been working on a plan similar to Germany's to allow sales and recreational use of cannabis, which isn't finalized.

Denmark's capital, Copenhagen, has proposed legalizing weed but has been turned down by parliament. France has no plans to liberalize its strict cannabis rules.

Who wants to fly over Taliban-held Afghanistan? New FAA rules allow it, but planes largely avoid it

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Two years after the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the United States has begun easing rules that could allow commercial airlines to fly over the country in routes that cut time and fuel consumption for East-West travel.

But those shortened flight routes for India and Southeast Asia raise questions never answered during the Taliban's previous rule from the 1990s to the months after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks.

How, if at all, do you deal with the Taliban as they block women from schools and jobs, and engage in behavior described by United Nations experts as potentially akin to "gender apartheid?" Can airlines manage the risk of flying in uncontrolled airspace over a country where an estimated 4,500 shoulder-launched anti-aircraft weapons still lurk? And what happens if you have an emergency and need to land suddenly?

Who wants to fly over such a country? The OPSGroup, an organization for the aviation industry, recently offered a simple answer: "No one!"

"There's no ATC service across the entire country, there's a seemingly endless list of surface-to-air weaponry they might start shooting at you if you fly too low, and if you have to divert then good luck with the Taliban," the group wrote in an advisory, using an acronym for air traffic control.

Still, the possibility of overflights resuming would have a major impact on carriers.

Though landlocked, Afghanistan's position in central Asia means it sits along the most direct routes for those traveling from India to Europe and America. After the Taliban takeover of Kabul on Aug. 15, 2021, civil aviation simply stopped, as ground controllers no longer managed the airspace. Fears about anti-aircraft fire, particularly after the 2014 shutdown of Malaysian Airlines Flight 17 over Ukraine, saw authorities around the world order their commercial airliners out.

In the time since, airlines largely curve around Afghanistan's borders. Flights rush through Afghan airspace for only a few minutes while over the sparsely populated Wakhan Corridor, a narrow panhandle that juts out of the east of the country between Tajikistan and Pakistan, before continuing on their way.

But those diversions add more time to flights — which mean the aircraft burns more jet fuel, a major expense for any carrier. That's why a decision in late July by the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration caught the industry's eye when it announced flights above 32,000 feet (9,750 meters) "may resume due to diminished risks to U.S. civil aviation operations at those altitudes."

The FAA, which oversees rules for America-based airlines, referred questions about what fueled the decision to the State Department. The State Department did not respond to requests for comment. However, a State Department envoy has met multiple times with Taliban officials since the U.S. and NATO withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Taliban officials likewise did not respond to repeated requests for comment from The Associated Press over the lifting of the restrictions.

For now, outside of Afghan and Iranian carriers, it does not appear that any airline is taking chances over the country. Part of that comes from the risk of militant fire, as Afghanistan has been awash in aircraft-targeting missiles since the CIA armed mujahedeen fighters to fight the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Afghanistan also may still have Soviet-era KS-19 anti-aircraft guns, said Dylan Lee Lehrke, an analyst at the open-source intelligence firm Janes.

The FAA says it believes flights at or above 32,000 feet remain out of reach of those weapons, even if

fired from a mountain top.

United Airlines runs a direct flight to New Delhi from Newark, New Jersey, that uses the Wakhan Corridor and could be shortened by an overflight.

"In accordance with current FAA rules, United operates Newark to New Delhi flights over a small section of Afghanistan where air traffic control is provided by other countries," United spokesman Josh Freed told the AP. "We do not plan to expand our use of Afghan airspace at this time."

Virgin Atlantic flies over the corridor for its New Delhi flights as well. The United Kingdom has yet to change its guidance telling carriers to stay out of nearly all of Afghan airspace. Virgin Atlantic said it makes "ongoing dynamic assessments of flight routings based on the latest situation reports and always following the strict advice set out by the U.K."

American Airlines and Air India also use the Wakhan Corridor route. Those carriers did not respond to requests for comment.

Despite the lack of interest now, airlines in the past used the route heavily. A November 2014 report from the International Civil Aviation Organization noted that from near-zero flights in 2002, overflights grew to over 100,000 annually some 12 years later. Before the Taliban takeover, the government charged each flight \$700 in fees for flying over the country — which could be a significant sum of cash as Afghanistan remains mired in an economic crisis.

And there is precedence for collecting overflight fees and holding them. After the 2001 U.S.-led invasion, authorities ended up releasing some \$20 million in frozen overflight fees to Afghanistan's fledgling government.

In the Taliban's telling, however, they already are profiting from the limited overflights they see. Private Afghan television broadcaster Tolo quoted Imamuddin Ahmadi, a spokesman for the Transportation and Aviation Authority Ministry, as saying that Afghanistan had earned more than \$8.4 million from overflight fees in the last four months.

"Any flight which is crossing Afghan airspace should pay \$700," Ahmadi said. "As the flights increase, it benefits Afghanistan."

The ministry also said it received the money from the International Air Transport Association, a trade association of the world's airlines. However, IATA told the AP in a statement that its contract with Afghanistan to collect overflight fees "has been suspended since September 2021" to comply with international sanctions on the Taliban.

"No payments have been made since that date," it said.

North Carolina GOP seeks to override governor's veto of bill banning gender-affirming care for youth

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press/Report for America

RALEIGH, N.C. (AP) — Transgender rights take center stage in North Carolina again Wednesday as GOP supermajorities in the General Assembly attempt to override the governor's vetoes of legislation banning gender-affirming health care for minors and limiting transgender participation in school sports.

The state House will hold the first of two votes Wednesday afternoon in a bid to enact the bills over Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper's opposition. If House Republicans quickly muster the votes needed, the Senate might aim to complete the override with a decisive final vote Wednesday evening, the Senate leader's office said.

The GOP holds veto-proof majorities in both chambers for the first time since 2018, affording Republicans a clear path to consider certain LGBTQ+ restrictions that had not previously gained traction in North Carolina. Initial votes indicate Cooper's vetoes of both bills are likely to be overridden.

If the Republicans who control the General Assembly are successful, North Carolina would become the 22nd state to enact legislation restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for trans minors — though many of those laws are facing court challenges.

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The North Carolina bill would bar medical professionals from providing hormone therapy, puberty-blocking drugs and surgical gender-transition procedures to anyone under 18, with limited medical exceptions. If the bill is overridden, the legislation would take effect immediately, though minors who had started treatment before Aug. 1 could continue receiving that care if their doctors deem it medically necessary and their parents consent.

Gender-affirming care is considered safe and medically necessary by the leading professional health associations, including the American Academy of Pediatrics, the American Medical Association and the Endocrine Society. While trans minors very rarely receive surgical interventions, they are commonly prescribed drugs to delay puberty and sometimes begin taking hormones before they reach adulthood.

Another bill scheduled for its first override vote Wednesday in the House would prohibit transgender girls from playing on girls' middle school, high school and college sports teams.

Bill supporters argue that legislation is needed to protect the safety and well-being of young female athletes and to preserve scholarship opportunities for them. But opponents say it's discrimination disguised as a safety precaution and would unfairly pick on a small number of students.

Local LGBTQ+ rights advocates are already bracing in expectation of both bills becoming law and have vowed to challenge the gender-affirming care ban in court.

Trump enjoys strong support among Republicans. The general election could be a different story

By JILL COLVIN and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After every new indictment, Donald Trump has boasted that his standing among Republicans only improves — and he has a point.

Nearly two-thirds of Republicans — 63% — now say they want the former president to run again, according to new polling from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That's up slightly from the 55% who said the same in April when Trump began facing a series of criminal charges. Seven in 10 Republicans now have a favorable opinion of Trump, an uptick from the 60% who said so two months ago.

But in a crucial warning sign for the former president and his supporters, Trump faces glaring vulnerabilities heading into a general election, with many Americans strongly dug in against him. While most Republicans — 74% — say they would support him in November 2024, 53% of Americans say they would definitely not support him if he is the nominee. Another 11% say they would probably not support him in November 2024.

The findings bolster the arguments of some of Trump's rivals for the Republican nomination who laud his tenure as president, but warn that he can't win in a general election when he must compete for votes beyond the GOP base. Trump lost the popular vote in the 2016 campaign, attaining the presidency only by winning a majority in the Electoral College. He lost to Democrat Joe Biden by an even larger 7 million-vote margin in 2020, a defeat he has falsely attributed to widespread voter fraud.

Some Republicans who are pushing the party to move past Trump argue his standing with the broader public has only deteriorated since the last presidential election, dragged down by his role in sparking the violent Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol and the constant turmoil that surrounds him, epitomized by his unprecedented legal woes.

"There is a meaningful number of voters who have voted for Trump twice and can't vote for him again after all of this," said Sarah Longwell, an anti-Trump Republican strategist who has been running focus groups with GOP voters.

A spokesman for Trump's campaign did not respond to a request for comment on the dynamics described in the poll, which was conducted before Trump was charged late Monday in Georgia in a sprawling 98-page indictment that accuses him and 18 others of a criminal conspiracy to overturn the results of that state's 2020 election. He now faces a whopping 91 total felony charges in cases brought in Georgia, New York, Washington, D.C., and Florida.

Adding to Trump's headwinds, the poll found that opposition to Biden's reelection is not as deeply en-

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trenched. The 80-year-old president, who faces only nominal rivals in a Democratic primary, faces skepticism among voters, particularly over his age. But just 43% of Americans say they would definitely not support him in a general election, with another 11% saying they probably wouldn't.

Meanwhile, the charges in Georgia and Washington have turned Trump's attention back to his grievances about the last election — something aides and allies have spent months urging Trump to limit focusing on at his events.

Hours after the Georgia indictment was made public, he announced plans on his social media site to hold an event next Monday at his New Jersey golf club to unveil a new "report" that would offer "irrefutable" proof of election fraud.

Federal and state election officials and Trump's own attorney general have said there is no credible evidence that the election was tainted. The former president's allegations of fraud were also roundly rejected by courts, including by judges Trump appointed. And in Georgia, the state at the center of his latest indictment, three recounts were conducted after the election — each of which confirmed his loss to Biden.

While Trump's appeals resonate among GOP voters, they are less popular among the independents and swing voters he will need to win over in a general election and were blamed for some GOP losses in the 2022 midterm elections.

"Trump needs to embody the voters' grievances and not his own grievances," Longwell said. "Anytime he's talking about 2020 he's looking backward and the voters get more excited about looking forward."

As Trump's legal woes intensify, other Republican presidential hopefuls have spent the past week courting voters at the Iowa State Fair, a rite of passage in a more traditional era of politics. While Republicans at the fair were largely supportive of Trump, there was some evidence of concern about the political impact of the indictments.

Rich Stricklett, a Republican and Trump supporter from Bondurant, Iowa, echoed Trump's dismissal of the charges as a "witch hunt."

"I do think it's politically driven to knock out a candidate that's a threat to the current president," he said. "I think that's what they're trying to do is make sure that I don't go out and vote for him because he's got that hanging over his head."

While Stricklett pointed to polls showing indictments appear to have helped Trump in the primary, he said he is worried about the potential impact.

"What I'm concerned about," he said, "is that it'd be enough that he wouldn't win."

Mary Kinney, a Republican from Des Moines who caucused for Trump in 2016, was also critical of the charges.

"It seems like they are just throwing anything at the wall to see if it will stick because they are so afraid of him," she said.

But as Kinney eyes the next election, she's planning to support South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott in the caucuses, arguing that it's time for the party to move forward with a next-generation candidate.

"I think people are just done with it," she said. "It's time to move on. I think people are trying to move forward from 2020."

But others warn that it would be premature to assume Trump's legal woes will lead to his political downfall. Former Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker, who ran against Trump in the 2016 GOP primary, said he was skeptical that the onetime president would face political consequences from the courtroom dramas.

"Anybody else, circumstances would be much different," he said. "But one of the key things that President Trump has done well on is kind of positioned this as, 'They're going after me because I dared to take on the machine, I dared to take on the swamp, I dared to take on the establishment.'"

Walker said he believes there are many voters — "not only in the primary, but a lot of swing voters ... who've been let down so many times" and "want someone who's not afraid of anyone. So in some ways, this makes the point that he just may be doing right for the average American because the left is out to get him."

Former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a Trump ally who blasted the charges as "disgusting," predicted

During the 20 years the Taliban were out of power, Brown said 6 million girls got an education, becoming doctors, lawyers, judges, members of parliament and cabinet ministers.

Today, he said, 2.5 million girls are being denied education, and 3 million more will leave primary school in the next few years, "so we're losing the talents of a whole generation."

Brown urged global action and pressure — not just words — to convince the Taliban to restore the rights of women and girls.

"We have not done enough in the last two years," he said. "I don't want another year to go by when girls in Afghanistan and women there feel that they are powerless because we have not done enough to support them."

North Korea asserts US soldier Travis King crossed border after becoming disillusioned with America

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea asserted Wednesday that a U.S. soldier who bolted across the heavily armed Korean border last month did so after becoming disillusioned with the inequality of American society and racial discrimination in its Army.

It was North Korea's first official confirmation of detention of Pvt. Travis King, who had served in South Korea and sprinted into the North while on a civilian tour of a border village on July 18. He became the first American confirmed to be detained in the North in nearly five years.

The official Korean Central News Agency, citing an investigation by relevant North Korean authorities, reported that King told them he decided to enter North Korea because he "harbored ill feelings against inhuman mistreatment and racial discrimination within the U.S. Army."

The report said King also expressed his willingness to seek refuge in North Korea or a third country, saying he "was disillusioned at the unequal American society."

KCNA is a propaganda outlet and its content is carefully calibrated to reflect North Korea's official line that the United States is an evil adversary.

The report said North Korea's investigation into King's "illegal" entry would continue. Verifying the authenticity of the comments attributed to King in North Korea's state media is impossible.

The United States, South Korea and others have accused North Korea of using foreign detainees to wrest diplomatic concessions. Some foreign detainees have said after their releases that their declarations of guilt while in North Korean custody were made under coercion.

A U.S. Defense Department official, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter, said the U.S. had no way to verify North Korea's claims about King. The official said the Pentagon was working through all available channels to bring King back to the U.S.

"This is 100% North Korean propaganda in its element. King, as an American citizen held in North Korea, has no sway in how (North Korea) chooses to cast its narrative," said Soo Kim, an expert with Virginia-based consultancy LMI and a former CIA analyst.

"As for King's release, his fate rests in North Korea's hands. Perhaps the regime will try to 'bargain' King's life in exchange for financial concessions from the U.S. More than likely, negotiations won't be easy, and terms will be dictated by Pyongyang," she said.

The soldier's family said his mother, Claudine Gates, is appealing to North Korea to treat her son humanely.

"She's a mom worried about her son and would be grateful for a phone call from him," family spokesman Jonathan Franks said in the statement. "Lastly, she has been in touch with the Army this evening and appreciates a (Defense Department) statement that it remains focused on bringing Travis home."

Tae Yongho, who was a minister at the North Korean Embassy in London before his defection in 2016, speculated North Korea might release King eventually because it didn't immediately express its intentions of accepting King as refugee in the North and spoke about a third country resettlement. Tae, now a lawmaker in South Korea, also cited North Korea's description of King as an illegal entrant, rather than

someone who "voluntarily" entered the North.

Tae earlier said North Korea would be reluctant to hold a low-ranked soldier like King for long because he won't provide it with high-profile U.S. intelligence and would require high costs and resources to manage his life.

Some analysts have said North Korea might try to tie King's release to the U.S. cutting back its military activities with South Korea, amid heightened animosities between the wartime foes.

North Korea has conducted more than 100 weapons tests since the beginning of last year, many of them in the name of issuing warnings over the expansion of U.S.-South Korean military drills that it views as an invasion rehearsal. Next Monday, the allies are to begin major annual drills, which North Korea views as an invasion rehearsal.

The leaders of the U.S., South Korea and Japan are also expected to announce plans for expanded military cooperation on ballistic missile defense in the face of North Korea's evolving nuclear threats when they meet for a trilateral summit at Camp David on Friday, according to U.S. officials.

On Tuesday, North Korea slammed U.S.-led plans for an open U.N. Security Council meeting on its human rights record as "despicable" and only aimed at achieving Washington's geopolitical ambitions.

North Korean Vice Foreign Minister Kim Son Gyong said the council must first deal with the American human rights issue, calling the United States a depraved "empire of evils." In a statement carried by state media, Kim accused the U.S. of fostering racial discrimination, gun-related crimes, child maltreatment and forced labor.

King, 23, was among about 28,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea as deterrence against potential aggression from North Korea. At the time he joined the civilian tour and crossed the border, he was supposed to be heading to Fort Bliss, Texas, following his release from prison in South Korea on an assault conviction.

U.S. officials say he has been declared AWOL, which can be punished by confinement in the brig, forfeiture of pay or dishonorable discharge with the severity based on their time away and whether they were apprehended or returned on their own.

The U.S. and North Korea, which fought during the 1950-53 Korean War, are still technically at war since that conflict ended in a truce, not a peace treaty. They have no diplomatic ties and Sweden provided consular services for Americans in past cases, though Swedish diplomats reportedly have not returned to North Korea since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

McCarthy floats stopgap funding to prevent a government shutdown at the end of next month

By STEPHEN GROVES and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

Washington (AP) — Congressional leaders are pitching a stopgap government funding package to avoid a federal shutdown after next month, acknowledging the House and Senate are nowhere near agreement on spending levels to keep federal operations running.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy raised the idea of a months-long funding package, known as a continuing resolution, to House Republicans on a members-only call Monday evening, according to those familiar with the private session and granted anonymity to discuss it.

On Tuesday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the two leaders had spoken about such a temporary measure. It would extend federal funding operations into December to allow more time to work on the annual spending bills.

"I thought it was a good thing that he recognized that we need a CR," Schumer, D-N.Y., told reporters on a call.

"We hope that our House Republicans will realize that any funding resolution has to be bipartisan or they will risk shutting down the government," he said.

A stopgap measure that would keep government offices running past the Sept. 30 end of the fiscal year is a typical strategy while the Republican-held House and Democrat-held Senate try to iron out a long-term

budget agreement. The government's new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1, when funding approval is needed to avert closures of federal offices.

But this year, the task may prove more politically difficult. McCarthy will need to win over a large portion of his Republican colleagues to pass the stopgap bill or risk political blowback from staunch conservatives if he leaves them behind and cuts a bipartisan deal with Democrats.

Conservatives, including many from the House Freedom Caucus, are usually loathe to get behind short-term funding measures as they push for steeper spending cuts, using the threat of a shutdown as leverage.

Foretelling the political dynamics ahead, many in Congress are bracing for a shutdown.

"It's clear President Biden and Speaker McCarthy want a government shutdown, so that's what Congress will do after we return in September. Everyone should plan accordingly," Republican Rep. Tony Gonzales posted on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, shortly after the Monday Republican call.

Democrats alongside President Joe Biden don't necessarily want a shutdown, but they would be quick to blame Republicans for instigating it — arguing that Republicans are the ones driving for spending reductions.

All sides had agreed to budget levels during the recent debt ceiling negotiations when Biden and McCarthy struck a deal that established topline spending levels. But McCarthy's GOP majority rejects those amounts.

White House deputy press secretary Olivia Dalton was asked Tuesday on Air Force One if Biden is worried about a government shutdown.

"We worked in good faith to negotiate a bipartisan budget agreement a couple of months ago," Dalton said.

"We've upheld our end of the bargain. They've upheld theirs, so far. We can expect that to continue."

The White House had no immediate comment on whether Biden would sign a short-term resolution.

"We don't believe that there's any reason we should have to have a government shutdown, that congressional Republicans should bring us to that point," Dalton said. "We think that we can work together to meet the needs of our country and the urgent needs that we've put forward."

Along with deeper spending reductions, House Freedom Caucus members have also pushed to tie the government's budget to conservative policy priorities on immigration and security at the U.S. border with Mexico, as well as at the Department of Justice.

Some Freedom Caucus members have embraced the idea of a government work stoppage to force lower spending, though many Republicans disagree with that approach.

Republican Rep. David Joyce, who sits on the Appropriations Committee and oversees its subcommittee on Homeland Security, said in a statement, "Republicans must come together to advance these bills because we cannot risk a government shutdown. When we shut down our government, we communicate to our adversaries that America is vulnerable and threaten the security of our nation."

Death toll from devastating Maui fire reaches 101, Hawaii governor says

By CLAIRE RUSH, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii (AP) — A mobile morgue unit arrived Tuesday to help Hawaii officials working painstakingly to identify the remains of people killed in wildfires that ravaged Maui, as the death rose above 100 and teams intensified the search for more dead in neighborhoods reduced to ash.

Gov. Josh Green announced the confirmed death toll had risen from 99 to 101 in an afternoon video address, saying, "We are heartsick that we've had such loss."

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services deployed a team of coroners, pathologists and technicians along with exam tables, X-ray units and other equipment to identify victims and process remains, said Jonathan Greene, the agency's deputy assistant secretary for response.

"It's going to be a very, very difficult mission," Greene said. "And patience will be incredibly important because of the number of victims."

A week after a blaze tore through historic Lahaina, many survivors started moving into hundreds of hotel

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rooms set aside for displaced locals, while donations of food, ice, water and other essentials poured in. Crews using cadaver dogs have scoured about 32% of the area, the County of Maui said in a statement Tuesday. The governor asked for patience as authorities became overwhelmed with requests to visit the burn area.

Just three bodies have been identified, and officials expected to start releasing names Tuesday, according to Maui Police Chief John Pelletier, who renewed an appeal for families with missing relatives to provide DNA samples. So far 41 samples have been submitted, the county statement said, and 13 DNA profiles have been obtained from remains.

The governor warned that scores more bodies could be found. The wildfires, some of which have not yet been fully contained, are already the deadliest in the U.S. in more than a century. Their cause was under investigation.

When asked by Hawaii News Now if children are among the missing, Green said Tuesday: "Tragically, yes. ... When the bodies are smaller, we know it's a child."

He described some of the sites being searched as "too much to share or see from just a human perspective."

Another complicating factor, Green said, is that storms with rain and high winds were forecast for the weekend. Officials are mulling whether to "preemptively power down or not for a short period of time, because right now all of the infrastructure is weaker."

A week after the fires started, some residents remained with intermittent power, unreliable cellphone service and uncertainty over where to get assistance. Some people walked periodically to a seawall, where phone connections were strongest, to make calls. Flying low off the coast, a single-prop airplane used a loudspeaker to blare information about where to get water and supplies.

Victoria Martocci, who lost her scuba business and a boat, planned to travel to her storage unit in Kahalui from her Kahana home Wednesday to stash documents and keepsakes given to her by a friend whose house burned. "These are things she grabbed, the only things she could grab, and I want to keep them safe for her," Martocci said.

The local power utility has already faced criticism for not shutting off power as strong winds buffeted a parched area under high risk for fire. It's not clear whether the utility's equipment played any role in igniting the flames.

Hawaiian Electric Co. Inc. President and CEO Shelee Kimura said many factors go into a decision to cut power, including the impact on people who rely on specialized medical equipment and concerns that a shutoff in the fire area would have knocked out water pumps.

Green has said the flames raced as fast as a mile (1.6 kilometers) every minute in one area, fueled by dry grass and propelled by strong winds from a passing hurricane.

The blaze that swept into centuries-old Lahaina last week destroyed nearly every building in the town of 13,000. That fire has been 85% contained, according to the county. Another blaze known as the Up-country fire was 60% contained.

The Lahaina fire caused about \$3.2 billion in insured property losses, according to calculations by Karen Clark & Company, a prominent disaster and risk modeling company. That doesn't count damage to uninsured property. The firm said more than 2,200 buildings were damaged or destroyed by flames, with about 3,000 damaged by fire or smoke or both.

Even where the flames have retreated, authorities have warned that toxic byproducts may remain, including in drinking water, after the flames spewed poisonous fumes. That has left many unable to return home.

The Red Cross said 575 evacuees were spread across five shelters as of Monday. Green said thousands of people will need housing for at least 36 weeks. He said Tuesday that some 450 hotel rooms and 1,000 Airbnb rentals were being made available.

President Joe Biden said Tuesday that he and first lady Jill Biden would visit Hawaii "as soon as we can" but he doesn't want his presence to interrupt recovery and cleanup efforts. During a stop in Milwaukee to highlight his economic agenda, Biden pledged that "every asset they need will be there for them."

More than 3,000 people have registered for federal assistance, according to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, and that number was expected to grow.

FEMA was providing \$700 to displaced residents to cover the cost of food, water, first aid and medical supplies, in addition to qualifying coverage for the loss of homes and personal property.

The Biden administration was seeking \$12 billion more for the government's disaster relief fund as part of its supplemental funding request to Congress.

Green said "leaders all across the board" have helped by donating over 1 million pounds (450,000 kilograms) of food as well as ice, water, diapers and baby formula. U.S. Marines, the Hawaii National Guard, the Army Corps of Engineers and the Coast Guard have all joined the aid and recovery efforts.

Lahaina resident Kekoa Lansford helped rescue people as the flames swept through town. Now he is collecting stories from survivors, hoping to create a timeline of what happened. He has 170 emails so far.

The scene was haunting. "Horrible, horrible," Lansford said Tuesday. "You ever seen hell in the movies? That is what it looked like. Fire everywhere. Dead people."

Mother pleads guilty to felony child neglect after 6-year-old son used her gun to shoot teacher

By BEN FINLEY and DENISE LAVOIE Associated Press

NEWPORT NEWS, Va. (AP) — The mother of a 6-year-old boy who shot his teacher in Virginia pleaded guilty Tuesday to a charge of felony child neglect, seven months after her son used her handgun to critically wound the educator in a classroom full of students.

Prosecutors agreed to drop a misdemeanor charge of reckless storage of a firearm against Deja Taylor. As part of the plea agreement, prosecutors said they will not seek a sentence that is longer than state sentencing guidelines, which call for six months in jail or prison.

The crime is punishable by up to five years in prison. A judge will have full discretion when he ultimately decides the length of Taylor's sentence. A sentencing hearing is scheduled for Oct. 27.

The January shooting shocked the nation and roiled this shipbuilding city near the Chesapeake Bay. The case against Taylor is one of three legal efforts seeking accountability, including the teacher's \$40 million lawsuit that accuses the school system of gross negligence for failing to respond aggressively to multiple warnings the child had brought a gun to school that day.

Police said the first grader intentionally shot teacher Abby Zwerner as she sat at a reading table during a lesson. Zwerner, who was hit in the hand and chest, spent nearly two weeks in the hospital and has endured multiple surgeries.

Moments after the shooting, according to search warrants filed in the case, the child told a reading specialist who restrained him: "I shot that (expletive) dead," and "I got my mom's gun last night."

Police said the student brought the gun to school in his backpack, but it had been unclear exactly how the 6-year-old got the gun.

During Taylor's plea hearing Tuesday, prosecutor Joshua Jenkins said the boy told authorities he got the gun by climbing onto a drawer to reach the top of a dresser, where the gun was stored in his mother's purse. Those details were contained in a "stipulation of facts," a list of facts that both sides agree are true.

When police arrived at the school that day, they entered the classroom and saw the boy being restrained by the reading specialist, according to the stipulation of facts document Jenkins read aloud in court.

The boy used a profanity and said "I shot my teacher," before breaking free and punching the reading specialist in the face, the document states.

The gun was on the floor nearby. "My mom had that.I stole it because I needed to shoot my teacher," the boy said, according to the document.

The document said the boy had been diagnosed with a defiance disorder. He had previously taken his mother's car keys from her purse, which prompted her to put her keys in a lock box. But she continued to keep her gun in her purse, the document states.

The stipulation of facts also cited a report from Child Protective Services, which indicated the child had

they would "enrage the country" and help Trump, even in a general election.

"I think every American who cares about the rule of law should be enraged by what they saw," Gingrich said. "He'll be stronger and he'll win the general election."

UN envoy says ICC should prosecute Taliban for crimes against humanity for denying girls education

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The International Criminal Court should prosecute Taliban leaders for a crime against humanity for denying education and employment to Afghan girls and women, the U.N. special envoy for global education said.

Gordon Brown told a virtual U.N. press conference on the second anniversary of the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan on Tuesday that its rulers are responsible for "the most egregious, vicious and indefensible violation of women's rights and girls' rights in the world today."

The former British prime minister said he has sent a legal opinion to ICC prosecutor Karim Khan that shows the denial of education and employment is "gender discrimination, which should count as a crime against humanity, and it should be prosecuted by the International Criminal Court."

The Taliban took power in August 2021, during the final weeks of the U.S. and NATO forces' pullout after 20 years of war. As they did during their previous rule of Afghanistan from 1996 to 2001, the Taliban gradually reimposed their harsh interpretation of Islamic law, or Sharia, barring girls from school beyond the sixth grade and women from most jobs, public spaces and gyms and recently closing beauty salons.

Brown urged major Muslim countries to send a delegation of clerics to Afghanistan's southern city of Kandahar, the home of Taliban supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, to make the case that bans on women's education and employment have "no basis in the Quran or the Islamic religion" — and to lift them.

He said he believes "there's a split within the regime," with many people in the education ministry and around the government in the capital, Kabul, who want to see the rights of girls to education restored. "And I believe that the clerics in Kandahar have stood firmly against that, and indeed continue to issue instructions."

The Taliban's chief spokesman, Zabihullah Mujahid, brushed aside questions about restrictions on girls and women in an Associated Press interview late Monday in Kabul, saying the status quo will remain. He also said the Taliban view their rule of Afghanistan as open-ended, drawing legitimacy from Islamic law and facing no significant threat.

Brown said the Taliban should be told that if girls are allowed to go to secondary school and university again, education aid to Afghanistan, which was cut after the bans were announced, will be restored.

He also called for monitoring and reporting on abuses and violations of the rights of women and girls, sanctions against those directly responsible for the bans including by the United States and United Kingdom, and the release of those imprisoned for defending women's and girls' rights.

Brown said 54 of the 80 edicts issued by the Taliban explicitly target women and girls and dismantle their rights, most recently banning them from taking university exams and visiting public places including cemeteries to pay respects to loved ones.

He announced that the U.N. and other organizations will sponsor and fund internet learning for girls and support underground schools as well as education for Afghan girls forced to leave the country who need help to go to school.

"The international community must show that education can get through to the people of Afghanistan, in spite of the Afghan government's bans," he said.

Brown said there are a number of organizations supporting underground schools and there is a new initiative in the last few weeks to provide curriculum through mobile phones, which are popular in Afghanistan.

He wouldn't discuss details over concerns for the safety of students and teachers, "but there is no doubt that girls are still trying to learn, sometimes risking a lot to be able to do so."

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played with a gun at his grandmother's house last year.

"When interviewed in reference to that incident, (the boy) reported that he 'wanted to visit a gun range,'" according to the stipulation of facts.

After the shooting at Richneck Elementary School, Taylor told police she believed her gun was in her purse, secured with a trigger lock, according to search warrants. She said she kept the gunlock key under her bedroom mattress. But agents with Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives said they never found a trigger lock after conducting searches, according to federal court documents. The stipulation of facts also said there was no gun safe or trigger lock found during searches by authorities.

Dressed in a jean jacket and resting her left hand against her hip, Taylor did not speak during the plea hearing except to answer questions from the judge about whether she understood the proceeding. She spoke softly and was asked by the judge to raise her voice.

In June, Taylor pleaded guilty in a separate but related federal case to using marijuana while possessing a firearm, which is illegal under U.S. law.

Taylor was charged in April by prosecutors in Newport News with felony child neglect and a misdemeanor count of recklessly storing of a firearm.

Taylor's attorney, James Ellenson, said at the time that there were "mitigating circumstances," including her miscarriages and postpartum depression before the shooting. Ellenson said Tuesday he will address depression and anxiety issues at Taylor's sentencing hearing.

Taylor told ABC's "Good Morning America" in May that she feels responsible and apologized to Zwerner. "That is my son, so I am, as a parent, obviously willing to take responsibility for him because he can't take responsibility for himself," Taylor said.

Her son has attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder and was under a care plan that included a family member accompanying him to class every day, Ellenson said.

The week of the shooting was the first when a parent was not in class with him. The change was made because the boy had started medication and was meeting his goals academically, Taylor said.

"I just truly would like to apologize," Taylor said on the show.

Virginia's law on felony child neglect says any parent, guardian or other person responsible for the care of a child "whose willful act or omission in the care of such child was so gross, wanton, and culpable as to show a reckless disregard for human life" is guilty of a Class 6 felony.

Ellenson said in court Tuesday that the boy is now in the care of his great-grandfather.

The Taliban believe their rule is open-ended and don't plan to lift the ban on female education

By RIAZAT BUTT Associated Press

KANDAHAR, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban view their rule of Afghanistan as open-ended, drawing legitimacy from Islamic law and facing no significant threat, their chief spokesman said in an interview marking the second anniversary of the Taliban takeover of the country. He also indicated a ban on female education will remain in place.

Zabihullah Mujahid brushed aside any questions from The Associated Press about restrictions on girls and women, saying the status quo will remain. The ban on girls attending school beyond sixth grade was the first of what became a flurry of restrictions that now keep Afghan women from classrooms, most jobs and much of public life.

The Taliban seized power on Aug. 15, 2021, as U.S. and NATO forces withdrew from the country after two decades of war. To mark the anniversary, Tuesday was declared a public holiday. Women, largely barred from public life, didn't take part in the festivities.

In the southern city of Kandahar, the spiritual birthplace of the Taliban, military personnel posed with armored vehicles. Young men rode through the city on bicycles, motorcycles and cars, waving flags and brandishing weapons. Toddlers clutched small white Taliban flags bearing a photo of Defense Minister Maulvi Mohammad Yaqoob on the bottom right corner.

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In the capital, Kabul, pick-up trucks crammed with men and boys wound their way through the city. Men swarmed Martyrs Square, taking selfies and clambering onto a monument. Boys posed with rifles.

Over the past two years, it has become increasingly apparent that the seat of power is in Kandahar, the home of supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada, rather than the Taliban-led government in Kabul.

The interview with Mujahid took place late Monday in a TV studio on a rundown former military compound in Kandahar. The U.N. Mission in Afghanistan and local government departments are located nearby.

The Taliban spokesman arrived in a white SUV, accompanied by a guard and a driver. He spoke calmly and politely, falling back on Taliban talking points on issues like women's rights and international recognition.

"There is no fixed term for the Islamic government," he said of Taliban rule, which he claimed draws legitimacy from Islamic law, or Sharia. "It will serve for as long as it can and as long as the emir (the supreme leader) isn't removed for doing something that goes against Sharia."

Taking stock after two years, Mujahid said Taliban rule faces no threats from inside or outside the country. He claimed the current government is acting responsibly, and that Afghans crave consensus and unity. "There is no need for anyone to rebel," Mujahid said.

In a statement Tuesday, the Taliban government listed what it considered its accomplishments, including restoring a sense of personal safety and national pride.

The statement made no mention of the tens of thousands of Afghans who fled in the aftermath of the takeover or the severe economic downturn and deepening poverty as international aid dried up. At the same time, the Taliban appear to have settled in, avoiding internal divisions and even keeping their struggling economy afloat, in part by holding investment talks with capital-rich regional countries.

Mujahid was reluctant to discuss the restrictions on girls and women, brushing aside questions about the issue as repetitive and saying there was no point talking about it unless there were updates. He did suggest change was unlikely.

In conversations with foreign diplomats and aid officials, the Taliban typically avoid saying they oppose female education on principle, arguing instead that they need more resources and time to allow for gender segregation in classrooms and university campuses, in line with their interpretation of Sharia.

Mujahid presented this argument in the interview, noting that "everything will be under the influence of Sharia."

Asked why the Taliban aren't enlisting Muslim-majority countries with Sharia-based systems to restart female education, he said the Taliban don't need the help of others.

Akhundzada, the supreme leader, is seen as the leading force behind the classroom ban which was issued unexpectedly in March 2022, just as Kabul-based government ministers said they were preparing to allow girls from seventh grade and up to return to school.

Mujahid said there was disagreement among religious scholars on female education, and suggested that maintaining harmony among them was more important than getting girls and women back into classrooms.

Speaking to reporters in Washington, Secretary of State Antony Blinken insisted the path to a more normal relationship between the Taliban and other countries will be blocked "unless and until" the rights of women and girls were supported.

The prospect of international isolation and the lack of recognition as Afghanistan's legitimate government because of restrictions on women and girls isn't a pressing concern for the Taliban leadership, Mujahid said.

"Our interaction with China, Russia, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Pakistan and other countries in the region is official," he said. "We have embassies, travel, consulates. We have businesses. Traders come and go and transfer goods. These are all the things that mean the recognition of officialdom."

Aid agencies, rights groups and the U.N. this week issued statements condemning the Taliban's rule and warning of the humanitarian crisis gripping the Afghan population.

World Vision said the number of people in need of assistance has increased by around 5 million. It said 15 million people will face "crisis" levels of food insecurity this year, with 2.8 million in the "emergency" category, the fourth highest in the world.

An alliance of rights groups, including Amnesty International, said the Taliban should be pressured to end

violations and repression and should be investigated for alleged crimes under international law, including gender persecution against women and girls.

In Geneva, the World Health Organization expressed concern about Afghans' lack of access to basic health services. Spokeswoman Dr. Margaret Harris said 20% of the population suffer from mental health problems and 4 million from drug addiction and associated disorders.

"Most health facilities have poor infrastructure, and there are fewer qualified health care workers due to immigration, limits on women's movement and employment, and reduced funds to pay salaries and keep facilities open," Harris said.

Prosecutors in the Hunter Biden case deny defense push to keep gun charge agreement in place

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A legal showdown over the derailed plea deal for Hunter Biden continued Tuesday as prosecutors asserted that an agreement on a gun charge is dead along with the rest of the deal as the case makes a major shift into a special counsel investigation.

While the agreement that was supposed to have wrapped up the long-running investigation of President Joe Biden's son largely unraveled during a contentious court hearing last month, prosecutors said the two sides had continued to negotiate until the defense rejected their final counterproposal the day before U.S. Attorney David Weiss asked to be named special counsel.

Lawyers for Hunter Biden have argued that prosecutors reneged on an agreement on tax charges but said a separate agreement sparing him prosecution on a gun charge remains valid. The agreement on the gun charge also contains an immunity clause against federal prosecutions for some other potential crimes.

Prosecutors denied reneging on any deal. While the agreement on the gun charge was signed by a prosecutor, probation agents didn't sign it and so it never became valid, they argued.

The conflict is now in front of U.S. District Judge Maryellen Noreika, who is weighing the prosecution's motion to pull the tax misdemeanor charges they filed and potentially file them in another court like California or Washington.

Biden's defense attorney on the case, Christopher Clark, also filed to withdraw from the case Tuesday, saying that he could be called as a witness over the negotiation and drafting of the deal and cannot also act as his lawyer. He's been replaced by another Hunter Biden attorney, Abbe Lowell. He said in court documents that he wouldn't fight the prosecution's move to pull the tax charges.

The plea agreement had been decried as a "sweetheart deal" by Republicans who are pursuing their own congressional investigations into nearly every facet of Biden's business dealings and the Justice Department's handling of the case.

The agreement had originally called for Biden to plead guilty to failing to pay taxes on over \$1.5 million in income in both 2017 and 2018, and get probation rather than jail on the misdemeanor counts. A separate agreement was to spare him prosecution on the felony crime of being a drug user in possession of a gun in 2018 if he kept out of trouble for two years.

Attorney General Merrick Garland's surprise announcement last week of Weiss as special counsel raised fresh questions about the case ahead of the 2024 election. Hunter Biden's history of drug use and financial dealings have trailed the political career of his father.

The case comes against the backdrop of the Justice Department's indictments against former President Donald Trump — Joe Biden's chief rival in next year's election.

Trump has been indicted and is awaiting trial in two separate cases brought by special prosecutor Jack Smith. One is over Trump's refusal to turn over classified documents stored at his Mar-a-Lago estate. The other involves charges of fraud and conspiracy to overturn the 2020 election in the run-up to the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

In the case of Hunter Biden, prosecutors have not made any accusations or charges against the president

in probing the affairs of his son. House Republicans have been trying to connect Hunter Biden's work to his father, but have not been able to produce evidence to show wrongdoing.

Georgia case against Trump presents problems from the start, from jury selection to a big courtroom

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Putting 19 people on trial at the same time is a difficult assignment for any prosecutor — whether or not one of those defendants is a former president of the United States running to reclaim his old office.

The sprawling racketeering indictment returned this week by a grand jury in Atlanta presents a wide range of challenges. A big one is political: Finding jurors who don't have unshakeable opinions about Donald Trump and others in his orbit.

Beyond that, with so many defendants, prosecutors and defense lawyers will labor to keep the names and conflicting stories straight for those jurors over weeks or months. There will be countless legal details and basic logistics to argue or work out — even down to finding a courtroom big enough to fit everyone.

In an early example of the lengthy litigation ahead, lawyers for former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows filed a quick motion Tuesday to transfer the case from state to federal court. They said all the actions he took were in service to his White House role, foreshadowing an argument that the Constitution makes him immune from prosecution.

Trump himself tried a similar tack in New York — to move to federal court a state case charging him with falsifying business records. That bid was denied.

Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis has brought 10 other state racketeering cases since taking office in January 2021. As an assistant D.A., she used the racketeering law to successfully prosecute Atlanta public school educators in a test-cheating scandal. But in one of Willis' current cases, involving the rapper Young Thug, jury selection began in January and is still going more than seven months later.

This is bigger, unprecedented. Her office now takes on the huge challenge of pursuing 13 felony counts against a former president who is fighting three other criminal cases and leading the Republican field in the fight for the 2024 presidential nomination.

"Just because they have experience with it doesn't mean that it's easy," said Robert James, a former district attorney in neighboring DeKalb County who's now a defense attorney. "It's going to be slow, it's going to be methodical, laborious."

After investigating for more than two years, Willis used Georgia's racketeering law to charge Trump and 18 of his allies, alleging a wide-ranging conspiracy to keep him in power after his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden. Lawyers, aides and Republican Party activists are accused along with the former president.

Several of the defendants on Tuesday accused Willis of playing politics with the indictment.

"The Democrats and the Fulton County D.A. are criminalizing the practice of law," one of the defendants, lawyer Jenna Ellis, wrote Tuesday on Facebook. "I am resolved to trust the Lord and I will simply continue to honor, praise, and serve Him. I deeply appreciate all of my friends who have reached out offering encouragement and support."

Trump said he would release a report next Monday that would demonstrate "irrefutable" election fraud in Georgia, despite years of investigations and lawsuits not producing such evidence. Responded Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican: "The 2020 election in Georgia was not stolen. For nearly three years now, anyone with evidence of fraud has failed to come forward — under oath — and prove anything in a court of law."

In the indictment, Willis used Georgia's Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act to weave a complex narrative that implicates multiple people accused of committing separate crimes in pursuit of a common goal. Some of the actions alleged are not necessarily crimes in themselves but are portrayed as helping to further an overall illegal scheme.

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The grand jury issued arrest warrants and Willis has given the defendants until August 25 at noon to surrender. Each of the 19 defendants will also have an arraignment scheduled in the coming weeks.

Willis' RICO case in which rapper Young Thug is a defendant gives some insight into the challenges that can arise.

Some delays have been specific to that trial — transporting defendants housed in different jails to court each day, bringing contraband to court, the arrest of a defense attorney and a courtroom deputy. But jury selection, which began in January, is still going. That's partially because the trial is expected to last six to nine months, meaning a lot of prospective jurors have legitimate excuses for saying no.

Trying large racketeering cases like the Trump one tends to be more challenging for the defense than the prosecution since defense lawyers have to take care to disentangle their clients from other defendants who might be seen as more guilty.

"The government is presenting a big picture," said Barry Zone, a New York criminal defense lawyer who has been involved in multiple cases with large numbers of defendants. "So even if one person is less culpable than another, they'll be able to tell the story because they're telling the story as to multiple people."

It's easy for jurors to see defendants at a table as one group rather than as individuals, he said, so "the optics when you're trying multiple defendants is that they're all working together."

Though Fulton County prosecutors have painted the 19 defendants as jointly engaged in a criminal conspiracy, there's no question that those charged don't see themselves as a unified team. In the years since Trump and his allies sought to overturn the election results, some Trump associates have sought to disavow their past connections.

When Rudy Giuliani, a defendant in the Georgia case, met with Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith's team, he spoke in detail about fellow defendant Sidney Powell, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss a private meeting.

Some defendants may try to be tried separately from the former president.

"They don't want the evidentiary spillover from other people, which could tarnish them, and they won't want to be in the same courtroom as Trump because he'll be a polarizing figure with the jury," said Boston-based attorney Brian Kelly, who tried a number of RICO cases as a federal prosecutor.

And while a RICO conspiracy case may have advantages for the prosecution, it can also be unwieldy.

There will undoubtedly be "a lot of pretrial skirmishing," Kelly said. "There will be complex legal challenges made to the indictment itself and that takes time."

Things also will likely move slowly once the case gets to trial, with each defendant's attorneys having a chance to cross-examine every witness. And those extra examples of alleged wrongdoing that prosecutors are allowed to include to prove a broad scheme can also be a double-edged sword, said James, the former Georgia prosecutor.

"It's great because you can tell the whole story, but you have to prove the whole story," he said.

Legal complexities aside, the physical complications of trying so many people at once are daunting, said Danny Porter, a former district attorney in Gwinnett County, northeast of Atlanta. They may try to limit those present in the courtroom to the defendants, the lawyers for both sides and security officers. But that could run up against constitutional questions, Porter said.

"Georgia is a very strong state on the public's right to access to a courtroom," he said.

One option may be to find a "nontraditional" space, like an auditorium or convention center, Porter said, noting that a north Georgia district used a nearby civic center at the height of the coronavirus pandemic to accommodate social distancing requirements.

In deadly Maui wildfires, communication failed. Chaos overtook Lahaina along with the flames

By REBECCA BOONE, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and AUDREY MCAVOY Associated Press
WAILUKU, Hawaii (AP) — In the hours before a wildfire engulfed the town of Lahaina, Maui County officials failed to activate sirens that would have warned the entire population of the approaching flames and

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instead relied on a series of sometimes confusing social media posts that reached a much smaller audience.

Power and cellular outages for residents further stymied communication efforts. Radio reports were scarce, some survivors reported, even as the blaze began to consume the town. Road blocks then forced fleeing drivers onto one narrow downtown street, creating a bottleneck that was quickly surrounded by flames on all sides. At least 80 people have been confirmed dead so far.

The silent sirens have raised questions about whether everything was done to alert the public in a state that possesses an elaborate emergency warning system for a variety of dangers including wars, volcanoes, hurricanes and wildfires.

Hector Bermudez left his apartment at Lahaina Shores shortly after 4:30 p.m. Tuesday after the smell of smoke woke him up from a nap. He asked his neighbor if he was also leaving.

"He said, 'No, I am waiting for the authorities to see what they are going to do,'" Bermudez recounted. "And I said, 'No, no no, please go. This smoke is going to kill us. You have to go. Please. You gotta get out of here. Don't wait for nobody.'"

His neighbor, who is about 70 and has difficulty walking, refused.

Bermudez doesn't know if he survived.

Officials with Maui's Emergency Management Agency did not immediately respond Friday to questions about sirens and other communications issues.

Hawaii's Attorney General Anne Lopez said her office will be conducting a comprehensive review of decision-making and standing policies surrounding the wildfires.

"My Department is committed to understanding the decisions that were made before and during the wildfires and to sharing with the public the results of this review," she said in a statement Friday, adding that "now is the time to begin this process of understanding."

The Associated Press created a timeline of the wildfires, using information from multiple sources including the county's announcements, state and local Emergency Management Alerts and interviews with officials and survivors.

The timeline shows public updates on the fires were spotty and often vague, and much of the county's attention was focused on another dangerous, larger fire in Upcountry Maui that was threatening neighborhoods in Kula. It shows no indication that county officials ever activated the region's all-hazard siren system, and reveals other emergency alerts were scarce.

In the hours before the wildfires began, however, warnings about high winds were frequent and widely disseminated by the county and other agencies. A hurricane passing far to the south was expected to bring gusts of up to 65 mph (105 kph), residents were told on Monday.

The Upcountry fire started first, reported not long after midnight on Tuesday, and the first evacuations near Kula followed.

The fire near Lahaina started later, around 6:37 a.m. Tuesday. Some homes in Lahaina's most inland neighborhood were evacuated, but by 9:55 a.m. the county reported that the fire was fully contained. Still, the announcement included another warning that high winds would remain a concern for the next 24 hours.

The power also went out early that morning, leaving several thousand customers in the Lahaina/West Maui region and Upcountry without electricity. Several downed power lines required repair.

By 11 a.m., firefighting crews from several towns and the Hawaii Department of Lands had converged on the Upcountry fire, but wind gusts reaching 80 mph (129 kph) made conditions unsafe for helicopters. At 3:20 p.m., more Upcountry neighborhoods were evacuated.

The Lahaina fire, meanwhile, had escaped containment and forced the closure of the Lahaina Bypass road by 3:30 p.m. The announcement, however, didn't make it into a county fire update until 4:45 p.m. and didn't show up on the county Facebook page until nearly 5 p.m., when survivors say flames were surrounding the cars of families trapped downtown.

But while the Lahaina fire was spreading, Maui County and Hawaii Emergency Management Agency officials were making other urgent announcements — including a Facebook post about additional evacuations near the Upcountry fire and an announcement that the acting governor had issued an emergency

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proclamation.

In the Upcountry evacuation Facebook post at 3:20 p.m., Fire Assistant Chief Jeff Giese shared an ominous warning.

"The fire can be a mile or more from your house, but in a minute or two, it can be at your house," Giese said.

Mike Cicchino lived below the Lahaina Bypass in one of Lahaina's more inland neighborhoods. He went to his house at 3:30 p.m. and minutes later realized his neighborhood was quickly being enveloped by flames.

He yelled to the neighbor kids to get their mom and leave. He ran inside to collect his wife and the dogs they were watching. Cicchino, along with others in the neighborhood, then jumped in their cars to leave. He listened for announcements on his car radio, but said there was essentially no information.

The government's social media attention turned from Upcountry back to Lahaina at 4:29 p.m., when Hawaii EMA posted on X (formerly Twitter) that the local Maui EMA had announced an immediate evacuation for an inland subdivision in Lahaina. Residents were directed to shelter at the Lahaina Civic Center on the north side of town.

Just before 5 p.m., Maui County shared a new Lahaina fire report on Facebook: "Flareup forces Lahaina Bypass road closure; shelter in place encouraged."

Many were already running from the flames. Lynn Robison evacuated from her apartment near the waterfront's Front Street at 4:33 p.m.

"There was no warning. There was absolutely none. Nobody came around. We didn't see a fire truck or anybody," Robison said.

Lana Vierra left her neighborhood about a mile (less than 2 kilometers) away around the same time. Her boyfriend had stopped by and told her he'd seen the approaching fire on the drive.

"He told me straight, 'People are going to die in this town; you gotta get out,'" she recalled. There had been no sirens, no alerts on her cellphone, she said.

But access to the main highway — the only road leading in and out of Lahaina — was cut off by barricades set up by authorities. The roadblocks forced people directly into harm's way, funneling cars onto Front Street.

"All the locals were pigeonholed into Lahaina in that corner there, and I felt like the county put us into a death trap," Cicchino said.

Nathan Baird and his family escaped by driving past a barricade, he told Canadian Broadcaster CBC Radio.

"Traffic was all over the place. Nobody knew where to go. They were trying to make everybody go up to the Civic Center and ... it just didn't make sense to me," Baird said. "I was so confused. At first, I was like, 'Why are all these people driving towards the fire?'"

Cicchino and his wife became trapped by walls of flame as Front Street burned. They ran for the ocean, spending hours crouching behind the sea wall or treading water in the choppy waves, depending on which area felt safest as the ever-changing fire raged.

At 5:20 p.m., Maui County shared another Lahaina fire update on Facebook: Evacuations in one subdivision were continuing, but access to the main highway was back open.

The U.S. Coast Guard's first notification about the fires was when the search and rescue command center in Honolulu received reports of people in the water near Lahaina at 5:45 p.m., said Capt. Aja Kirksy, commander of Coast Guard Sector Honolulu.

The boats were hard to see because of the smoke, but Cicchino and others used cellphones to flash lights at the vessels, guiding them in.

Cicchino helped load children into the Coast Guard boats, and at one point loaned his cellphone — which had been stashed in his wife's waterproof pouch — to a member of the guard so they could contact fire crews. He said the rescue took hours, and he and his wife were finally brought out of Lahaina around 1 a.m. Wednesday.

Maui County Facebook posts around 8:40 p.m. Tuesday urged residents in the surrounding area who weren't impacted by the fires to shelter in place, and said smoke was forcing more road closures. A commenter pointed out the communication problems just before 9 p.m. "You do realize that all communication

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to Lahaina is cut off and nobody can get in touch with anyone on that side," the commenter wrote.

Riley Curran, who fled his Lahaina home after climbing up a neighboring apartment building to get a better look at the fire, doesn't think there is anything the county could have done.

"It's not that people didn't try to do anything. It's that it was so fast no one had time to do anything," Curran said. "The fire went from 0 to 100."

But Cicchino said it all felt like the county wasn't prepared and government agencies weren't communicating with each other.

"I feel like the county really cost a lot of peoples' lives and homes that day. I felt like a lot of this could have been prevented if they just thought about this stuff in the morning, and took their precaution," he said. "You live in a fire zone. They have a lot of fires. You need to prepare for fires."

The all-hazard sirens are tested each month to ensure they are in working order. During recent tests within two week of the fires they malfunctioned in three separate incidents in three counties. Maui's siren tone was too short, so officials repeated the test later that day, successfully.

Karl Kim directs the National Disaster Preparedness Training Center, a University of Hawaii-based organization that develops training materials to help officials respond to natural disasters.

Kim said it's too soon to know exactly how the warning and alert system might have saved more lives in Lahaina, and noted that wildfires are often more challenging to manage than volcanic eruptions, tsunamis and even earthquakes because they are more difficult to detect and track over time.

"I think it's a wake-up call," he said. "We have to invest more in understanding of wildfires and the threats that they provide, which aren't as well understood."

American industrial icon US Steel is on the verge of being absorbed as industry consolidates further

Associated Press undefined

With two bidders revealed in a matter of days and more in the wings, United States Steel Corp. — a symbol of American industrialization that for more than a century helped build everything from the United Nations building in New York City to the New Orleans Superdome — appears be on the cusp of being absorbed.

Here's what's happened so far, and how the acquisition of U.S. Steel could reshape steelmaking globally.

BIDDING WAR

After rejecting a \$7.3 billion buyout proposal from rival Cleveland-Cliffs on Sunday, U.S. Steel said it was considering its next move. On Monday, industrial conglomerate Esmark offered \$7.8 billion for the Pittsburgh steelmaker.

Shares of U.S. Steel soared more than 30% Monday with good odds that bids for the 122-year-old steel producer will head higher.

U.S. Steel says it has other offers to consider as well, and the company gave no timeline for if and when it might make any decision about selling itself.

A POTENTIAL GIANT

Cleveland-Cliffs said its proposal, first made on July 28, would create a company that would be among the 10 biggest steelmakers in the world and one of the top four outside of China, which dominates global steel production. Cleveland-Cliffs CEO Lourenco Goncalves said a tie-up between the two U.S. steelmakers would create "lower-cost, more innovative and stronger domestic supplier for our customers."

Goncalves said he's ready to continue talks with U.S. Steel despite its rejection of the company's initial offer.

Cleveland-Cliffs is the largest producer of flat-rolled steel and iron in North America. Acquiring U.S. Steel would further shrink the number of players in the U.S. steelmaking industry, which has experienced significant consolidation in recent years, including the two steelmakers at the center of developments this week.

The proposed acquisition would give Cleveland-Cliffs control of about 50% of the domestic flat steel market and 100% of blast furnace production, Citi analysts wrote in a note to clients. It would also create "close to a domestic monopoly" on auto body sheet steel and close to 100% of U.S. iron ore.

That will most certainly garner the interest of antitrust regulators who, under the Biden administration, have raised the bar for mergers in a number of industries. Automakers and other big buyers of steel will also likely push back over shrinking competition among U.S. steelmakers.

SOARING STEEL PRICES AND CONSOLIDATION

Soaring prices have helped fuel consolidation in the steel industry in this decade. Steel prices more than quadrupled near the start of the pandemic to near \$2,000 per metric ton by the summer of 2021 as supply chains experienced gridlock, a symptom of surging demand for goods and the lack of anticipation of that demand.

Cleveland Cliffs acquired AK Steel in 2019 right before steel prices began to spike and within a year, it acquired ArcelorMittal USA in 2020 for \$1.4 billion. U.S. Steel bought Big River Steel the following year.

Prices have settled back to around \$800 per metric ton, but that remains at the top end of the spectrum for steel prices over the past six years. An extended economic rebound, particularly in the U.S, has helped keep prices for flat-rolled steel elevated.

U.S. STEEL HISTORY

U.S. Steel has been a symbol of industrialization since it was founded in 1901 by J.P. Morgan, Andrew Carnegie and others, and the domestic steel industry dominated globally before Japan, then China, became the preeminent steelmakers over the past 40 years.

The company survived the Great Depression and became an integral part of U.S. efforts in World War I and II, supplying hundreds of millions of tons of steel for planes, ships, tanks and other military gear, in addition to steel for automobiles and appliances.

During the late 1970s and early 80s — amid an energy crisis and multiple recessions — U.S. Steel cut production and spun off many of its other businesses. With oversupply and an influx of lower-priced steel imports dragging down prices into the new century, the company reorganized in 2001 and separated its energy business, which became Marathon Oil Corp.

The 64-story U.S. Steel Tower still looms over the Pittsburgh skyline, but U.S. Steel is no longer its biggest tenant. That would be UPMC, a local health system, and its name is now at the top of the tower.

GLOBAL STEEL PRODUCTION

China and Chinese companies have come to dominate global steel production. Of the nearly 2 billion tons of steel produced annually across the globe, about 54% comes from China, according to the World Steel Association.

China's Baowu Group, a state-owned iron company based in Shanghai, churned out nearly 120 million metric tons of steel in 2021.

Cleveland-Cliffs and U.S. Steel combined that year produced almost 33 metric tons of steel, according to the World Steel Association. The combined entity would vault immediately to a top 10 steelmaker globally, but it will still be at the lower end of that list.

It would not alter the position of U.S. steelmaking as a whole, of course, which current ranks No. 4 behind China, India and Japan.

States that protect transgender health care now try to absorb demand

By JEFF McMILLAN and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

States that declared themselves refuges for transgender people have essentially issued an invitation: Get your gender-affirming health care here without fearing prosecution at home.

Now that bans on such care for minors are taking effect around the country — Texas could be next, depending on the outcome of a court hearing this week — patients and their families are testing clinics' capacity. Already-long waiting lists are growing, yet there are only so many providers of gender-affirming care and only so many patients they can see in a day.

For those refuge states — so far, California, Connecticut, Colorado, Illinois, Massachusetts, Maryland,

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Minnesota, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Washington and Vermont, plus Washington, D.C. — the question is how to move beyond promises of legal protection and build a network to serve more patients.

"We're trying our best to make sure we can get those kids in so that they don't experience an interruption in their care," said Dr. Angela Kade Goepferd, medical director of the gender health program at Children's Minnesota hospital in the Twin Cities. "For patients who have not yet been seen and would be added to a general waiting list, it is daunting to think that it's going to be a year or more before you're going to be seen by somebody."

Appointment requests are flooding into Children's from all over the country — including Texas, Montana and Florida, which all have bans. Requests have grown in a year from about 100 a month to 140-150. The program hopes to hire more staff to meet demand, but it will take time, Goepferd said.

More than 89,000 transgender people ages 13 to 17 live in states that limit their access to gender-affirming care, according to a research letter published in late July in the Journal of the American Medical Association, though not all trans people choose or can afford gender-affirming care.

Rhys Perez, a transmasculine and nonbinary 17-year-old, is preparing to move this month from Houston to Los Angeles to start college. The teen, who said they're "escaping Texas in the nick of time," said California's protection for gender-affirming care was one of the main factors in their decision on where to go for college.

Perez has just begun their search for a provider in Southern California but already has encountered several clinics with waits for an initial consultation between nine and 14 months. They were disappointed to learn they likely could not begin hormone replacement therapy until their sophomore year.

"Hormones and stuff, that was never something my family fully understood or supported, really," Perez said. "I figured it was best to wait until I move for college, but now it's frustrating to know I'm going to have to wait even longer."

"I wish I could start college as fully me," they said.

Initial sanctuary laws or executive orders were an emergency step to protect transgender people and their families from the threat of prosecution by more than 20 states that have restricted or banned such health care, advocates say. They generally do not contain provisions to shore up health systems, but advocates say that needs to be the next step.

"That's what we're hoping to set up over the next year to two years, is making sure that not only are we making this promise of being a refuge for folks, but we're actually living up to that and ensuring that folks who come here have access to care when they need it," said Kat Rohn, executive director of the LGBTQ+ advocacy group OutFront Minnesota.

Those efforts will likely need to involve legislators, governors, large employers, Medicaid plans and boards of medicine, said Kellan Baker, executive director of the Whitman-Walker Institute, the policy and education arm of a clinic with the same name in Washington, D.C.

"I would hope that it would be a comprehensive effort, that everyone at every level enacting these shield laws is aware that it's not just about making a promise of access on paper, but that it needs to be backed up by the availability of providers," Baker said.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, became the first governor to order the investigation of families of transgender minors who receive gender-affirming care, and legislators this year passed a ban on such care.

Whether that law takes effect on Sept. 1 will be decided by a state judge in Austin, who is hearing arguments this week in a lawsuit filed by families and doctors seeking a temporary injunction. The lawsuit argues the bill violates parental rights and discriminates against transgender teens. It is unclear when the judge will rule.

A plaintiff, identified only by the pseudonym Gina Goe, testified Tuesday about her 15-year-old transgender son's efforts to continue testosterone treatments: "I have reached out to a Colorado facility, but there is, like, a waiting list. ... There is going to be a gap in his medical care."

Ginger Chun, the education and family engagement manager at the Transgender Education Network of Texas, said she was in contact last year with about 15 families with trans family members. This year

already, she has talked to about 250 families, who are asking about everything from clarification on legislation to looking for ways to access care. Those who are looking for care outside Texas are encountering waiting lists.

The research published in JAMA found that Texas youths' average travel time to a clinic for gender-affirming care increased from just under an hour to over 7 1/2 hours.

"It's like a daily, ever-changing process to figure out where people can access care," Chun said.

Minnesota state Rep. Leigh Finke, a Democrat who sponsored a bill to protect gender-affirming care, predicts "thousands" of people will travel to the state for care within two years. She's also seeking solutions to the provider shortage and expects to take a closer look when the next legislative session begins in February.

"I'm not sure what as a legislature we can do to increase the number of people who provide a certain kind of medical care," said Finke, a transgender woman who represents part of the Twin Cities area. "I'm not sure as a policymaker what the mechanisms are to say we need more of one kind of specific health care provider, assuming that those exist. I'm certainly going to be interested in looking at them."

The number of providers nationwide is limited, and for many, it's not their full-time job. Minnesota, for instance, is home to 91 providers, according to a search on the website of the World Professional Association for Transgender Health. The state has 29,500 transgender people 13 and older, according to the Williams Institute, an LGBTQ+ think tank at the UCLA School of Law.

Dr. Katy Miller, the medical director of adolescent medicine for Children's Minnesota, estimates "probably at least hundreds of families" are moving to the Twin Cities for gender-affirming care.

"People are going to kind of extraordinary lengths, like pulling kids out of school, moving," Miller said.

In many ways, the quest for gender-affirming care parallels that of abortion access, for which people also cross state borders, sometimes under threat of prosecution. The main difference with gender-affirming care is that treatment is ongoing, generally for the rest of a person's life, so permanent access is key.

Anticipating long waits, some parents preemptively sought out gender-affirming care providers for a child, like Minnesota activist Kelsey Waits. Her 10-year-old transgender child, Kit, got into the system at a hospital that could eventually provide blockers or hormones so that they wouldn't have to start puberty without a doctor's support.

"A lot happens in puberty in one year," Waits said. "Just the stress of that on a family — the kids, the parents who are trying to find care for their child — it's a lot."

Russia unleashes a country-wide missile barrage on Ukraine as Putin addresses security conference

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces unleashed missiles across Ukraine early on Tuesday, killing and wounding civilians and damaging infrastructure. The barrage came just hours before top Russian military officials and their counterparts from allied countries in Asia, the Middle East and Africa gathered outside Moscow for a security conference.

Missiles struck cities from the east to west of Ukraine, including far behind front lines where Ukraine is fighting deeply entrenched Russian forces to regain territory occupied by Moscow almost 18 months into the war.

Russia has built heavily fortified defenses along the more than 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line where Ukraine has only made incremental gains since launching a counteroffensive in early June.

"Deliberate large-scale attacks on civilians. Solely for the sake of killing and psychological pressure," presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said on X, formerly known as Twitter, commenting on the latest Russian attacks.

Six Russian-launched missiles hit the western region of Lviv, wounding 19 people, including a 10-year-old child, Lviv Gov. Maksym Kozytskyi said. According to city authorities, the power grid and nearly 120 residential buildings were damaged.

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The Swedish bearings maker SKF confirmed three employees were killed overnight after its factory in Lutsk, north of Lviv, was hit by a missile strike. One person was killed in the east of Ukraine in Kramatorsk after Russian forces hit a food warehouse. In central Ukraine, a strike left parts of the city of Smila without access to water and also damaged a medical facility.

The barrage came a day after Russian forces unleashed a wave of missile and drone strikes on Odesa in the country's southwest.

Russian forces have pummeled Odesa, hitting facilities that transport Ukraine's crucial grain exports and also wrecking cherished Ukrainian historical sites. The repeated attacks on Odesa follow Moscow's decision to break off a landmark agreement that had allowed grain to flow from Ukraine to countries in Africa, the Middle East and Asia and help reduce the threat of hunger.

In Russia on Tuesday, Vladimir Putin addressed a security conference outside Moscow in a pre-recorded video statement, accusing the West of fueling the conflict "by pumping billions of dollars" into Kyiv and "supplying it with equipment, weapons, ammunition, sending their military advisers and mercenaries."

"Everything is being done to ignite the conflict even more, to draw other states into it," Putin said.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu sought to downplay the significance of the West's support for Ukraine, saying that despite that, Kyiv's forces "fail to achieve results on the battlefield."

On Thursday, Sweden announced a 3.4 billion-kronor (\$314 million) aid package consisting of ammunition for equipment from previous Swedish military assistance.

'Bidenomics' delivered a once-in-generation investment. It shows the pros and cons of policymaking

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — There are so many dots on the maps they blur into blobs — each one reflecting trillions of public and private dollars flowing in the U.S. this past year to build thousands of roads, bridges and manufacturing projects in communities large and small, in states red and blue.

They include an electric vehicle "battery belt" of manufacturing stretching from Michigan to Georgia, semiconductor fabrication plants in Arizona, Texas, Ohio and New York and broadband coming to Appalachia.

Taken together, they represent President Joe Biden's ambitious attempt to use the levers of government to chart a new era of domestic manufacturing, modernizing the U.S. to compete in the 21st century.

Packaged as "Bidenomics" by the White House, the effort is the product of three major bills approved in the last Congress that are also the president's hoped-for roadmap for reelection. Republicans have balked at what they said was unwarranted federal spending. The debate between those two views could go a long way toward determining who wins the White House and control of Congress in 2024.

On the ground, it's a mix of the promise and pitfalls of domestic policymaking beginning to take shape across the country.

"It's this whole new world of opportunity," said Monte Shaw, executive director of the Iowa Renewable Fuels Association, who said firms are investing millions of dollars to upgrade facilities and transform the ethanol industry.

Much like the development of the federal highway system in the 1950s or the space race to the moon in the 1960s, the undertaking is once in a generation. More recently, presidents have tapped Congress to deliver on their vision for social or fiscal policy, with the Affordable Care Act, or Obamacare, a decade ago and Trump's GOP tax cuts in 2017.

Now rounding year one, it remains a work in progress. The Inflation Reduction Act, the Chips and Science Act and the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act are coming into fruition at a time of economic churn and stubborn inflation in the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"We spent decades underinvesting," said Wendy Edelberg, a former chief economist at the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office and now a senior fellow in economic studies at the Brookings Institution think tank. "And so we have a lot of catching up to do."

Democrats see the trio of bills — two of which also drew bipartisan support from Republicans — as

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their calling card to voters ahead of the 2024 election, the tangible results of Biden's vision and tenure in the White House. For Republicans, many of whom voted against all three bills, Bidenomics is a powerful punchline about big government overreach.

"What is 'Bidenomics'?" said a memo circulated earlier this summer by Senate Republican Conference Chairman John Barrasso of Wyoming. "It is the inflationary Washington spending, costly regulations, and regressive taxes touted by Joe Biden and Kamala Harris," he said, referring to the vice president.

Economists acknowledge that while inflation has eased some from its pandemic spikes, the investments are adding to demand and price pressures, a factor in higher interest rates that can keep lending tight.

Donald Trump, the leading Republican candidate trying to oust Biden in 2024, defines Bidenomics in contrast to what he calls his own "boom" years in the White House.

"Bidenomics' is shorthand for 'I pay more for less,'" said Jack Pandol, communications director at the National Republican Congressional Campaign, the House GOP campaign arm.

Looking over the tiny dots on the maps being produced by the government and outside groups, the display of public and private investment is steadily coming into focus.

Propelled by a mix of direct funds and lucrative federal tax breaks, the legislation is also luring outside dollars to the table.

The White House said the federal policy has generated more than \$500 billion in private investment announcements flowing to the states – much of it in Republican-held congressional districts as companies invest where land is cheap and labor unions lag. Even Republicans who voted against the bills are now vying for credit.

The CHIPS bill alone has sparked some \$200 billion in domestic semiconductor manufacturing, according to the Center for American Progress, a liberal think tank, and industry estimates.

IRA's centerpiece, a \$400 billion federal investment to curb climate change, is standing up solar, electric vehicle and battery manufacturing, particularly in the Southeast region where Republicans dominate.

At the same time, provisions in the IRA will allow counties and local governments to tap into federal green energy production tax credits typically used by private entities, enabling them to develop projects on their own.

"What you're seeing is that counties are kind of the laboratories of innovation," Mark Ritacco, the chief government affairs officer at the National Association of Counties.

Biden is encouraging Americans to go see for themselves.

"Click onto Invest.gov, put in your location," he said recently in South Carolina. "You'll all see projects we're delivering in communities all across America."

In many ways, the undertaking reflects Biden's initial ideas when he took office for the "Build Back Better" agenda, which started as an industrial policy but morphed into a much-more unwieldy package of social programs that collapsed in failure.

Instead, the other three bills came into focus, as Congress surprised the skeptics to deliver legislation to passage.

The bipartisan infrastructure bill approved in 2021 poured money into repaving roads and building bridges, but it also pumped funds into public works projects nationwide.

That included money to upgrade drinking water systems in a nation where millions of Americans still have lead pipes and \$42 billion for broadband to connect some 8 million households to the internet – including 271,000 locations in West Virginia where Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito fought to ensure connectivity.

"We have a real opportunity to finally bridge the digital divide in West Virginia," she wrote in a summer op-ed.

While a similar bipartisan effort powered the CHIPS bill to passage, investing \$50 billion in semiconductors and science research, Democrats alone muscled the Inflation Reduction Act into law late over steep Republican opposition, which continues to this day.

The GOP-led House has tried to dismantle the IRA law, but as it begins to take hold in communities that

may become more difficult.

Gov. Kim Reynolds of Iowa and other Midwestern Republican lawmakers fought to preserve the tax break that home-state ethanol producers are already banking on to upgrade their facilities.

Biden has been increasingly eager to call out the political disconnect. The president announced plans to travel to the Georgia district represented by firebrand Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene that's home to a solar plant expansion.

He recently called out opposition from Republican Rep. Lauren Boebert of Colorado, whose district is home to a blade manufacturing plant for wind turbines.

Economist Jason Furman, a former Obama official now at Harvard, acknowledged the pressure the laws put on inflation, but he said they are rapidly focusing private industry investment.

"It does look like all three bills are catalyzing a lot of activity in a sort of larger and more rapid way than I would have expected," Furman said. "This feels to me the biggest thing that's happened to the half century."

Mar-a-Lago property manager pleads not guilty to charges in Trump's classified documents case

By CURT ANDERSON and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER undefined

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — Mar-a-Lago property manager Carlos De Oliveira pleaded not guilty on Tuesday to scheming with Donald Trump to try to delete security footage sought by investigators probing the former president's hoarding of classified documents.

An attorney for De Oliveira entered the plea on his behalf during a brief hearing in the Fort Pierce, Florida, federal court, where Trump is charged with illegally holding onto top-secret records at his Palm Beach club and thwarting government efforts to retrieve them.

It's the third court appearance for De Oliveira, who twice before had his arraignment postponed because he hadn't yet finalized a Florida-based attorney, which is required under court rules.

De Oliveira spoke only to answer the magistrate judge's questions, such as whether he understood the charges against him. De Oliveira and his new attorney, Donnie Murrell of West Palm Beach, walked out of the courthouse without speaking to reporters.

De Oliveira's arraignment comes a day after Trump was charged in a fourth criminal case. Monday night Trump and 18 allies were indicted in a case out of Fulton County, Georgia, over alleged efforts by him and his supporters to illegally meddle in the 2020 election in that state.

In the Mar-a-Lago case, Trump and his valet, Walt Nauta, were originally charged in June in one of two cases brought by special counsel Jack Smith. Smith has also charged Republican Trump in Washington with illegally conspiring to overturn his 2020 election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

An updated indicted unsealed late last month brought more charges against Trump and Nauta, and added De Oliveira to the Florida case. Trump is facing dozens of felony counts in the classified documents case, and Smith's new indictment included additional counts of obstruction and willful retention of national defense information.

Trump and Nauta have also pleaded not guilty. The former president has denied any wrongdoing.

De Oliveira, Trump and Nauta are facing charges that include conspiracy to obstruct justice in the case stemming from secret government documents found at Mar-a-Lago after Trump's presidency ended in 2021. De Oliveira is also charged with lying to investigators. Prosecutors allege he falsely claimed he hadn't even seen boxes moved into Mar-a-Lago after Trump left the White House.

The trial is scheduled to begin in May in front of U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon. If the date holds, it would follow close on the heels of a separate New York trial for Trump on dozens of state charges of falsifying business records in connection with an alleged hush money payment to a porn actor.

The allegations in the latest indictment focus on security footage prosecutors say Trump tried to have deleted after investigators sent a subpoena for it in June 2022. Prosecutors have not alleged the footage was actually deleted.

Prosecutors say De Oliveira asked an information technology staffer how long the server retained foot-

age and told the employee "the boss" wanted it deleted. When the employee said he didn't believe he was able to do that, De Oliveira insisted the "boss" wanted it done, asking, "What are we going to do?"

Video from Mar-a-Lago could ultimately become vital to the government's case because, prosecutors said, it shows Nauta moving boxes in and out of a storage room — an act alleged to have been done at Trump's direction and in effort to hide records not only from investigators but also from Trump's own lawyers.

Trump and 18 allies charged in Georgia election meddling as former president faces 4th criminal case

By KATE BRUMBACK and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Donald Trump and 18 allies were indicted in Georgia on Monday over their efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss in the state, with prosecutors using a statute normally associated with mobsters to accuse the former president, lawyers and other aides of a "criminal enterprise" to keep him in power.

The nearly 100-page indictment details dozens of acts by Trump or his allies to undo his defeat, including beseeching Georgia's Republican secretary of state to find enough votes for him to win the battleground state; harassing an election worker who faced false claims of fraud; and attempting to persuade Georgia lawmakers to ignore the will of voters and appoint a new slate of electoral college electors favorable to Trump.

In one particularly brazen episode, it also outlines a plot involving one of his lawyers to access voting machines in a rural Georgia county and steal data from a voting machine company.

"The indictment alleges that rather than abide by Georgia's legal process for election challenges, the defendants engaged in a criminal racketeering enterprise to overturn Georgia's presidential election result," Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, whose office brought the case, said at a late-night news conference.

Other defendants include former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows; Trump attorney and former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani; and a Trump administration Justice Department official, Jeffrey Clark, who aided the then-president's efforts to undo his election loss in Georgia. Other lawyers who advanced legally dubious ideas to overturn the results, including John Eastman, Sidney Powell and Kenneth Chesebro, were also charged.

Willis said the defendants would be permitted to voluntarily surrender by noon Aug. 25. She also said she plans to seek a trial date within six months and that she intends to try the defendants collectively.

The indictment bookends a remarkable crush of criminal cases — four in five months, each in a different city — that would be daunting for anyone, never mind someone like Trump who is simultaneously balancing the roles of criminal defendant and presidential candidate.

It comes just two weeks after the Justice Department special counsel charged him in a vast conspiracy to overturn the election, underscoring how prosecutors after lengthy investigations that followed the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol have now, two-and-a-half years later, taken steps to hold Trump to account for an assault on the underpinnings of American democracy.

The Georgia case covers some of the same ground as Trump's recent indictment in Washington, including attempts he and his allies made to disrupt the electoral vote count at the Capitol. But in its sprawling web of defendants — 19 in total — the indictment stands apart from the more tightly targeted case brought by special counsel Jack Smith, which so far only names Trump as a defendant.

In charging close Trump aides who were referenced by Smith only as unindicted co-conspirators, the Georgia indictment alleges a scale of criminal conduct extending far beyond just the ex-president.

The indictment, with charges under the state's racketeering law and language conjuring the seedy underworld of mob bosses and gang leaders, accuses the former president, his former chief of staff, Trump's attorneys and the ex-New York mayor of being members of a "criminal organization" and "enterprise" that operated in Georgia and other states.

The indictment capped a chaotic day at the courthouse caused by the brief but mysterious posting on a

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county website of a list of criminal charges that were to be brought against the former president. Reuters, which published a copy of the document, said the filing was taken down quickly.

A Willis spokesperson said in the afternoon that it was "inaccurate" to say that an indictment had already been returned but declined to comment further on a kerfuffle that the Trump legal team jumped on to attack the investigation's integrity.

Trump and his allies, who have characterized the investigation as politically motivated, immediately seized on the apparent error to claim that the process was rigged. Trump's campaign aimed to fundraise off it, sending out an email with the since-deleted document embedded.

In a statement after the indictment was issued, Trump's legal team said "the events that have unfolded today have been shocking and absurd, starting with the leak of a presumed and premature indictment before the witnesses had testified or the grand jurors had deliberated and ending with the District Attorney being unable to offer any explanation."

The lawyers said prosecutors presenting their case "relied on witnesses who harbor their own personal and political interests — some of whom ran campaigns touting their efforts against the accused."

Trump responded to the indictment Tuesday by announcing a news conference for next week to present yet another "almost complete" report on the alleged fraud he has yet to prove nearly three years after the 2020 election.

Many of the 161 acts by Trump and his associates outlined in the Georgia indictment have already received widespread attention. That includes a Jan. 2, 2021, call in which Trump urged Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger to "find" the 11,780 votes needed to overturn his election loss. That call, prosecutors said, violated a Georgia law against soliciting a public official to violate their oath.

It also accuses Trump of making false statements and writings for a series of claims he made to Raffensperger and other state election officials, including that up to 300,000 ballots "were dropped mysteriously into the rolls" in the 2020 election, that more than 4,500 people voted who weren't on registration lists and that a Fulton County election worker, Ruby Freeman, was a "professional vote scammer."

Giuliani, meanwhile, is accused of making false statements for allegedly lying to lawmakers by claiming that more than 96,000 mail-in ballots were counted in Georgia despite there being no record of them having been returned to a county elections office, and that a voting machine in Michigan wrongly recorded 6,000 votes for Biden that were actually cast for Trump.

In a statement, Giuliani did not respond directly to the allegations but called the indictment an "affront to American democracy" and "just the next chapter in a book of lies."

Also charged are individuals prosecutors say helped Trump and his allies on the ground in Georgia influence and intimidate election workers.

One man, Stephen Cliffgard Lee, was charged for allegedly traveling to Freeman's home "with intent to influence her testimony." Freeman and her daughter Shaye Moss testified to Congress last year about how Trump and his allies latched onto surveillance footage from November 2020 to accuse both women of committing voter fraud — allegations that were quickly debunked, yet spread widely across conservative media.

Both women, who are Black, faced death threats after the election.

The indictment also accuses Powell and several co-defendants of tampering with voting machines in Coffee County, Georgia, and stealing data belonging to Dominion Voting Systems, a producer of tabulation machines that has long been the focus of conspiracy theories. An attorney for Powell declined to comment.

According to evidence made public by the congressional committee investigating the Jan. 6 riot, Trump allies targeted Coffee County in search of evidence to back their theories of widespread voter fraud, allegedly copying data and software.

Besides the two election-related cases, Trump faces a separate federal indictment accusing him of illegally hoarding classified documents as well as a New York state case charging him with falsifying business records.

As indictments mount, Trump — the leading Republican candidate for president in 2024 — often invokes his distinction as the only former president to face criminal charges. He is campaigning and fundraising

around these themes, portraying himself as the victim of Democratic prosecutors out to get him.

Republican allies once again quickly rallied to Trump's defense. "Americans see through this desperate sham," House Speaker Kevin McCarthy wrote on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter.

Will Donald Trump show up at next week's presidential debate? GOP rivals are preparing for it

By STEVE PEOPLES and HANNAH FINGERHUT Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — He says he won't sign the pledge required to participate, but former President Donald Trump's Republican rivals are actively preparing as if he will be onstage for the GOP's first 2024 presidential debate next week.

Former Vice President Mike Pence is hosting mock debate sessions with someone playing the part of the former president. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis has been participating in weekly debate prep sessions for several weeks with an eye toward drawing clear contrasts with Trump. And Nikki Haley, the former ambassador to the United Nations, is planning to show she can stand up to bullies.

In all, eight Republican candidates have met the Republican National Committee's fundraising and polling thresholds required to qualify for the debate next Wednesday, Aug. 23, hosted by Fox News in Milwaukee. Trump is among them, although he has said publicly and privately that he's leaning against participating given his big lead in national polls and concerns about the Fox moderators.

Still, the former reality television star, who is a master at shaping media coverage, has yet to rule it out completely.

He is consumed this week with yet another criminal indictment, this one in Georgia, where prosecutors on Monday used a statute normally associated with mobsters to accuse Trump, lawyers and other aides of a "criminal enterprise" to overturn his 2020 election loss in the state. Even before the latest legal drama, he gave himself a way out of the debate last week when he told Fox News he would not sign a pledge, required of all participants, to support the GOP's eventual nominee.

Republican officials in and around rival campaigns believe Trump will end up on the debate stage regardless of the drama in the days leading up to the high-stakes affair.

"You've got to prepare for two contingencies: one where Trump shows up and one where he doesn't. It makes it more complicated," said Republican strategist Lanhee Chen, who has been in touch with multiple campaigns about their debate preparations. "For many voters, this will be their first introduction to the candidates. ... What they do on this one night may be more substantial than anything else they've done."

Pence has participated in roughly a half-dozen formal debate prep sessions to date, including at least one planned for this week in which a campaign aide previously close to Trump is playing the part of the former president, according to a Pence adviser who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal strategy.

Campaigning in Iowa over the weekend, Pence indicated he was prepared to confront Trump — and the rest of the large GOP field — on several issues, including abortion. Trump and DeSantis in particular have refused to say whether they would support a federal abortion ban, which Pence has promised to sign if given the chance.

The adviser said Pence is also prepared to stand up to Trump for his role on Jan. 6, 2021 — Pence has accused Trump of endangering his family in the attack on the U.S. Capitol — although Pence's team doesn't expect the Fox moderators to press debate participants on the issue.

"I've debated Donald Trump a thousand times. Just never with the cameras on," Pence said as he campaigned at the Iowa State Fair over the weekend.

And while Trump will be a major debate focus — whether he's there or not — several campaigns believe DeSantis may have the most to lose given his apparent status as Trump's strongest rival. DeSantis' team has done little to lower expectations, despite his struggle on the debate stage in Florida before last fall's reelection.

The DeSantis campaign is preparing him for nonstop attacks from Trump and the rest of the candidates,

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according to people familiar with DeSantis' planning who were granted anonymity to discuss strategy. The Florida governor is ready to highlight contrasts with Trump as well.

DeSantis has been participating in debate-related question and answer sessions at least once a week, having brought in experienced debate strategist Brett O'Donnell to assist.

While preparing for Trump to be on stage, the DeSantis campaign sees it as a win-win situation either way. If Trump shows up, DeSantis' team believes the Florida governor will have a significant opportunity to show contrasts with Trump that's better than anything he's tried using campaign ads or social media posts. And if Trump declines to participate, the campaign feels he'll look weak.

Trump's critics are quick to note that the former president lost support in 2016 after skipping the final presidential debate before voting began and ultimately finished second in the Iowa caucuses.

"Regardless of whether or not Donald Trump is afraid to debate, Ron DeSantis is looking forward to being onstage in Milwaukee talking about his plans to beat Joe Biden, reverse the decline in our nation and revive America's future," said DeSantis spokesman Andrew Romeo.

While much of the attention in the Republican Party's crowded presidential primary has gone to Trump and DeSantis, others are eyeing the nationally televised event as a prime opportunity to break out.

Haley's team acknowledges she isn't universally known, despite a resume that features two terms as South Carolina governor and a role in Trump's cabinet. An adviser, granted anonymity to discuss strategy, said the primary goal in her debate preparation has been to project that "Nikki is tough, she's going to stand up for America and she's going to stand up to bullies."

Haley made no mention of plans to go on the attack while speaking to reporters in Iowa over the weekend, but she did explain why she showed up to the state fair in a shirt that read, "Underestimate me, that'll be fun."

"This has been a part of who I am for as long as I can remember," Haley said. "I've been underestimated in everything I've ever done, but it's a blessing because it makes me scrappy. No one's going to outwork me in this race. No one's going to outsmart me in this race. We have a country to save, and I'm determined to do it."

Conservative entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, a 38-year-old political newcomer, is doing virtually no formal debate prep as he pursues a whirlwind campaign schedule, according to a senior adviser granted anonymity to discuss campaign strategy. The adviser said he'll spend the day before the debate playing tennis and spending time with family.

Ramaswamy's team says his "anti-woke" message won't change whether Trump is onstage or not.

"I will be unafraid to draw policy contrasts," Ramaswamy said in Iowa. "But I'm not personally attacking anybody in this race. Now, believe me, I'm somebody who holds my ground. ... So if somebody's going to come for me, come at your own peril. But I'm not in this race to take somebody else down. I'm in this race to lead us to our vision of what it means to be American."

To appear onstage, Trump must commit at least 48 hours before the Wednesday evening debate, according to criteria outlined by the Republican National Committee. The criteria also requires participants to sign a pledge promising to support the party's ultimate nominee.

"I wouldn't sign the pledge," Trump said on Fox News last week. "They want you to sign a pledge, but I can name three or four people that I wouldn't support for president. So right there, there's a problem."

Meanwhile, former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, a former Trump ally turned fierce Trump critic, has said Trump is "a coward" if he skips the debate.

Christie's allies are hoping Trump does attend, acknowledging that Christie's anti-Trump message would be much more powerful if he can look his opponent in the eyes.

"Obviously, one would prefer that Trump was on the stage. But if not, Trump's going to have to listen to two hours of people criticizing and critiquing, not only the fact that he didn't show up, but his failures while in office," said longtime Christie ally Bill Palatucci. "Chris has always said Trump will be there."

Russia's central bank makes huge interest rate hike to try to prop up falling ruble

By DASHA LITVINOVA and DAVID McHUGH Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Russia's central bank made a big interest rate hike Tuesday, an emergency move designed to fight inflation and strengthen the ruble after the country's currency reached its lowest value since early in the war with Ukraine.

The ruble has lost more than a third of its value since the beginning of the year as Moscow increases military spending and Western sanctions weigh on its income from energy shipments. The flagging currency does not mean the Russian economy is in freefall — though it is facing challenges, including rising prices for households and businesses, according to analysts who study Russia.

A lower exchange rate allows Moscow to transfer the dollars it earns from selling oil and natural gas into more rubles to pay pensions and run government agencies. But the drop in value went a bit too far, and officials are now tightening it up, analysts say.

While over time sanctions will erode long-term economic growth, the recently weaker ruble "does not imply an underlying economic crisis, it doesn't suggest Russia is about to fall off a cliff," said Chris Weafer, CEO of Macro-Advisory Partners.

The central bank hiked its key rate 3.5 percentage points to 12% after announcing a meeting of its board of directors a day earlier as the ruble declined.

The Russian currency passed 101 rubles to the dollar Monday, hitting the lowest level in almost 17 months. The ruble strengthened after the rate hike announcement but has since given up some of those gains to hit about 98 to the dollar.

The central bank says demand for goods has exceeded the country's ability to expand output, increasing inflation and affecting "the ruble's exchange rate dynamics through elevated demand for imports."

Until now, the ruble's decline suited the government because it increased the amount of rubles for each dollar of oil revenue, helping the Kremlin maintain spending on the military and social programs, Weafer said.

The government and the central bank have been able to manage the ruble's decline by telling energy exporters when to exchange their dollar earnings. "It is an entirely managed currency," Weafer said.

That intentional devaluation now "appears to be overdone. I think this is now the message from the central bank — the weakness was planned, but it's overdone and they want to pull it back," he said.

Sergei Guriev, provost and professor of economics at the Sciences Po institute of political studies in Paris, also said "there is no disaster" despite Russia's economy having "big problems" — such as the decrease in oil and gas revenue, capital fleeing the country, a budget deficit and the weaker ruble.

It was "politically important" for the Russian authorities to have the national currency at less than 100 rubles to the dollar, so once the ruble crossed that sensitive threshold this week, the central bank took action, Guriev said.

A weaker ruble benefits the government but also means "higher costs for households and for certain parts of the Russian war machine," Guriev said.

"If you need to buy (weapon) components in Iran or circumvent sanctions through third countries, you need foreign currency," Guriev said. "That's why you have the budget deficit."

The rate hike came after President Vladimir Putin's economic adviser, Maksim Oreshkin, on Monday blamed the weak ruble on "loose monetary policy" in an op-ed, saying the central bank has "all the tools necessary" to stabilize the situation and that he expects normalization shortly.

By raising borrowing costs, the central bank is trying to fight price spikes as Russia imports more and exports less, especially oil and natural gas, with defense spending going up and sanctions taking a toll. Importing more and exporting less means a smaller trade surplus, which typically weighs on a country's currency.

Inflation reached 7.6% over the past three months, the central bank said. It also hiked rates 1 percentage point last month, saying inflation was expected to keep rising and the fall in the ruble is adding to the

risk. Its next meeting is planned for Sept. 15.

After Western countries imposed sanctions on Russia over the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the ruble plunged as low as 130 to the dollar, but the central bank raised its key interest rate to as high as 20% in the days afterward and enacted capital controls that stabilized the currency's value. It later began cutting rates.

Advocates sue federal government for failing to ban imports of cocoa harvested by children

By MARTHA MENDOZA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Child welfare advocates filed a federal lawsuit Tuesday asking a judge to force the Biden administration to block imports of cocoa harvested by children in West Africa that can end up in America's most popular chocolate desserts and candies.

The lawsuit, brought by International Rights Advocates, seeks to have the federal government enforce a 1930s era federal law that requires the government to ban products created by child labor from entering the U.S.

The nonprofit group says it filed the suit because Customs and Border Protection and the Department of Homeland Security have ignored extensive evidence documenting children cultivating cocoa destined for well-known U.S. candy makers, including Hershey, Mars, Nestle and Cargill.

The major chocolate companies pledged to end their reliance on child labor to harvest their cocoa by 2005. Now they say they will eliminate the worst forms of child labor in their supply chains by 2025.

"They will never stop until they are forced to," said Terry Collingsworth, International Rights Advocates' executive director. He added that the U.S. government has "the power to end this incredible abuse of African children by enforcing the law."

Spokespeople for CBP declined to comment on the suit, which was filed in the U.S. Court of International Trade. When asked more generally about cocoa produced by child labor, the federal agency said it was "unable to disclose additional information or plans regarding forced labor enforcement activities due to protections of law enforcement sensitive and business confidential information."

Cocoa cultivation by children in Cote d'Ivoire, also known as the Ivory Coast, as well as neighboring Ghana, is not a new phenomenon. Human rights leaders, academics, news organizations and even federal agencies have spent the last two decades exposing the plight of children working on cocoa plantations in the West African nations, which produce about 70% of the world's cocoa supply.

A 2019 study by the University of Chicago, commissioned by the U.S. government, found 790,000 children, some as young as 5, were working on Ivory Coast cocoa plantations. The situation was similar in neighboring Ghana, researchers found.

The U.S. government has long recognized that child labor is a major problem in the Ivory Coast. The Department of Labor reported in 2021 that "children in Côte d'Ivoire are subjected to the worst forms of child labor, including in the harvesting of cocoa and coffee."

The State Department in a recent report said that agriculture companies in the Ivory Coast rely on child labor to produce a range of products, including cocoa. The department said this year that human traffickers "exploit Ivoirian boys and boys from West African countries, especially Burkina Faso, in forced labor in agriculture, especially cocoa production."

To try to force companies to abandon cocoa produced by child labor, International Rights Advocates has sued some of the world's large chocolate companies over the use of child labor in harvesting cocoa beans. It lost a case before the Supreme Court in 2021. Several others are pending.

Pressured by lawmakers and advocates, major chocolate makers in 2001 agreed to stop purchasing cocoa produced by child labor. That goal, experts and industry officials say, has not been met.

"These companies kept saying, 'We can't trace it back.' That's BS," said former Sen. Tom Harkin, who led a push for legislation to reform the industry, but ended up agreeing to a protocol that allows corporations to regulate themselves. "They just won't do it because it will cost them money."

Harkin said Americans don't realize the treats they hand their children originate with child abuse.

"It's not just the chocolate you eat, it's the chocolate syrup you put on your ice cream, the cocoa you drink, the chocolate chip cookies you bake," he said.

The World Cocoa Foundation, which represents major cocoa companies, said it is committed to "improving livelihoods of cocoa farmers and their communities."

A Hershey spokesperson said the company "does not tolerate child labor within our supply chain." Cargill, Nestle and Mars did not respond to requests for comment. Their websites all describe their work to end child labor in cocoa plantations.

Ivory Coast officials have said they are taking steps to eradicate child labor but blocking imports of the nation's cocoa would devastate the nation's economy.

"We don't want to un-employ the whole country," said Collingsworth, the labor advocate who brought Tuesday's lawsuit. "We just want children replaced by adults in cocoa plantations."

Collingsworth was in the Ivory Coast investigating working conditions when he noticed children chopping through brush and harvesting cocoa. He pulled out a phone and took video and photographs of the boys and girls at work. He also stopped by a nearby processing facility and took a photos of burlap sacks with labels of U.S. companies.

International Rights Advocates decided to petition the CBP to block imports of the cocoa, filing a 24-page petition in 2020 asking the agency take such action. The petition contained what it said was photographic and other evidence detailing how the companies were violating the law.

Collingsworth said his group also provided CBP with interviews with children as young as 12 who said their wages were being withheld, and that they had been tricked by recruiters into working long hours on a false promise they would be given land of their own.

CBP failed to take any action on the petition, the lawsuit alleges.

Israel may uproot ancient Christian mosaic near Armageddon. Where it could go next sparks outcry

By ILAN BEN ZION Associated Press

TEL MEGIDDO, Israel (AP) — An ancient Christian mosaic bearing an early reference to Jesus as God is at the center of a controversy that has riled archaeologists: Should the centuries-old decorated floor, which is near what's believed to be the site of the prophesied Armageddon, be uprooted and loaned to a U.S. museum that has been criticized for past acquisition practices?

Israeli officials are considering just that. The proposed loan to the Museum of the Bible in Washington also underscores the deepening ties between Israel and evangelical Christians in the U.S, whom Israel has come to count on for political support, tourism dollars and other benefits.

The Megiddo Mosaic is from what is believed to be the world's earliest Christian prayer hall that was located in a Roman-era village in northern Israel. It was discovered by Israeli archaeologists in 2005 during a salvage excavation conducted as part of the planned expansion of an Israeli prison.

The prison sits at a historic crossroads a mile south of Tel Megiddo on the cusp of the wide, flat Jezreel Valley. The compound is ringed by a white steel fence topped with barbed wire and is used for the detention of Palestinian security inmates.

Across a field strewn with cow-dung and potsherds, the palm-crowned site of a Bronze and Iron Age city and ancient battles is where some Christians believe a conclusive battle between good and evil will transpire at the end of days: Armageddon.

For some Christians, particularly evangelicals, this will be the backdrop of the long-anticipated climax at the Second Coming, when divine wrath will obliterate those who oppose God's kingdom; it serves as the focus of their hopes for ultimate justice.

The Israel Antiquities Authority said that it will decide about the move in the coming weeks, following consultations with an advisory body.

"There's an entire process that academics and archaeologists are involved with," said IAA director Eli

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Eszkozo. The organization said that moving the mosaic from its original location was the best way to protect it from upcoming construction at the prison.

Jeffrey Kloha, the Museum of the Bible's chief curatorial officer, said a decision on the loan would be made solely by the IAA.

The museum "of course would welcome the opportunity to educate our thousands of visitors on important pieces of history such as this mosaic," he told The Associated Press via email.

Several archaeologists and academics have voiced vociferous objections to the notion of removing the Megiddo Mosaic from where it was found — and all the more so to exhibit it at the Museum of the Bible.

Cavan Concannon, a religion professor at the University of Southern California, said the museum acts as a "right-wing Christian nationalist Bible machine" with links to "other institutions that promote white evangelical, Christian nationalism, Christian Zionist forms."

"My worry is that this mosaic will lose its actual historical context and be given an ideological context that continues to help the museum tell its story," he said.

Others balk at the thought of moving the mosaic at all before academic study is complete.

"It is seriously premature to move that mosaic," said Matthew Adams, director of the Center for the Mediterranean World, an non-profit archaeological research institute, who is involved in digs at Tel Megiddo and the abutting Roman legionary camp of Legio.

Asked about criticisms of the Washington museum's practices, Kloha said, "Major museums and distinguished institutions committed to preserving history have had to grapple with cultural heritage issues, particularly in recent years."

"To be clear: Museum of the Bible is proud to have proactively launched research and a thorough review of items in its collections," he added. "The museum initiated returns where appropriate to countries of origin without obligation to do so and encourages other institutions to do the same."

Based on other finds found in the dig and the style of the letters in the inscriptions, IAA archaeologists have dated the mosaic floor to the third century — before the Roman Empire officially converted to Christianity and when adherents were still persecuted. Nonetheless, one of the donors who paid to decorate the ancient house of worship was a centurion serving in the adjacent Roman legionary camp.

The mosaic bears Greek inscriptions, among them an offering "To God Jesus Christ."

Since opening its doors in 2017, the Museum of the Bible has faced criticism over its collecting practices and for promoting an evangelical Christian political agenda. In 2018, it had to repatriate an ancient Mesopotamian tablet looted from Iraq and admit that several of the Dead Sea Scroll fragments in its collection were modern forgeries. American authorities also seized thousands of clay tablets and other looted antiquities from the museum's founder, Hobby Lobby president and evangelical Christian Steve Green, and returned them to Iraq.

The mosaic loan would reinforce ties between Israel and the museum. The museum sponsors two archaeological digs in Israel, has a gallery curated by the IAA. Kloha said the museum also is planning a lecture series featuring IAA archaeologists.

Evangelical Christians, whose ranks have been growing worldwide, have become some of Israel's most fervent supporters, donating large sums of money and visiting the country as tourists and pilgrims. In the U.S., they also lobby politicians in Congress in support of Israel.

Evangelicals, who make up more than a third of the world's estimated 2 billion Christians, say their affinity for Israel stems from Christianity's Jewish roots.

Some view the founding of Israel as fulfilling biblical prophecy, ushering in an anticipated Messianic age when Jesus will return and Jews will either accept Christianity or die. That tenet has generated unease among some Israelis, but politicians have embraced evangelical support for the state nonetheless.

Since its discovery, the mosaic has remained buried beneath the grounds of the Megiddo Prison. But in recent years the Israeli government has started advancing a multi-year plan to move the prison from its current location and develop a tourist site around the mosaic.

The Tel Megiddo archaeological site is already a major attraction for evangelical Christians visiting the

Holy Land. Busloads of pilgrims stop on their way to or from the Galilee to see the ruins of a biblical city and pray at the site where they believe the apocalypse will take place.

Neither the IAA nor the museum would discuss the exact terms of the loan proposal, but Eskozido suggested something similar to the decade-long global tour of a Roman mosaic found in the central Israeli city of Lod until Israel had completed a museum to house it.

Experts remain skeptical of uprooting the mosaic.

"Once you take any artifact outside of its archaeological context, it loses something, it loses a sense of the space and the environment in which it was first excavated," said Candida Moss, a theology professor at University of Birmingham who co-wrote a book about the Museum of the Bible.

Rafi Greenberg, a professor of archaeology at Tel Aviv University, said the proposal smacked of colonialism, where historically dominant powers have extracted archaeological discoveries from colonies.

"Even if Israel doesn't ever recognize itself as being a colony, it is actually behaving like one, which I find odd," he said. Greenberg said that archaeological finds "should stay where they are and not be uprooted and taken abroad to a different country and basically appropriated by a foreign power."

How the Georgia indictment against Donald Trump may be the biggest yet and other case takeaways

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

The fourth indictment of former President Donald Trump may be the most sweeping yet.

The sprawling, 98-page case unveiled late Monday night opens up fresh legal ground and exposes more than a dozen of Trump's allies to new jeopardy.

But it also raises familiar legal issues of whether the First Amendment allows a politician to try to overturn an election. Already, Trump and his supporters are alleging the indictment is the product of a politicized, corrupt process to hobble him as he competes for the GOP nomination to face President Joe Biden next year.

Here are some takeaways from Monday's indictment:

THE BIG ONE

This may be the last of the Trump indictments, but it was the big one. The indictment lists 18 defendants in addition to Trump, all joined together by Georgia's unusual anti-racketeering, or RICO, law.

Many of the defendants aren't even based in Georgia. The better-known defendants include former New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani and attorney Sidney Powell, who appeared in numerous hearings and on television spreading false claims about unfounded incidents of purported election fraud. Giuliani and Powell were among the unnamed co-conspirators in the federal indictment against Trump for his push to overturn the election that was released earlier this month.

Others, however, had to date escaped mention in charging documents, like Trump's then-chief of staff Mark Meadows, who was on the call during which Trump urged Georgia election officials to "find" him the votes he needed to be declared winner of the state.

Other defendants include Mike Roman, a Trump campaign official who the indictment alleges helped arrange slates of fake Trump electors whose votes Congress could count rather than those of the actual appointed ones for the winner of the election, President Joe Biden. Another person charged is Jenna Ellis, who has become a prominent conservative legal personality after working on the Trump campaign and helping spread Trump's false allegations of widespread fraud.

The charges also fall upon several Georgia players, including Ray Smith and Robert Cheeley, lawyers working for Trump in Georgia, and David Shafer, then the state GOP chairman, for serving as a fake Trump elector along with fellow co-defendants Shawn Still, then the state GOP finance chairman, and Cathleen Alston Latham.

A WIDER APPROACH

Critics may argue this is an overreach for a local prosecutor's office. But the Georgia RICO statute gives Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis' office the ability to construct a wide-ranging narrative by citing

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and charging other players in the alleged wrongdoing, even those out of state.

Some legal analysts think that Jack Smith, the federal prosecutor who filed the earlier charges against Trump for trying to overturn the election, didn't charge people identified as co-conspirators in his case, like Giuliani, because he is aiming for a trial as quickly – and with as much time as possible before the 2024 presidential election — as feasible.

Willis on Monday night said she hoped for a trial date in six months. But her office is taking a notably different, more sweeping approach from the more streamlined federal indictment. She vowed that she would seek to try all 19 defendants together.

THE FIRST AMENDMENT ARGUMENT

Trump is expected to employ a similar defense in both the earlier federal indictment and the Fulton County case. He and his supporters contend he's being charged simply for speaking up against what he saw as an unfair election and practicing politics as usual.

But it's not clear that defense will work.

Indeed, some of the 161 acts that prosecutors contend were part of the conspiracy to overturn may sound like protected political machinations in isolation – emails and texts about meetings of people contending to be Trump electors, tweets about alleged voter fraud, even the filing of a lawsuit in Georgia challenging the election outcome.

But the indictment argues they were all steps in what it calls "a conspiracy to unlawfully change the outcome of the election in favor of Trump." For example, it alleges that those fake elector meetings were part of an attempt to convince Georgia state lawmakers to "unlawfully" appoint the phony Trump electors, rather than the Biden ones they were bound to by law.

The indictment contends the tweets about phony voter fraud and even the lawsuit were part of a similar scheme. And, finally, it says some of the lies trying to persuade Georgia's top election official, Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, and Gov. Brian Kemp to declare Trump the victor could be considered another crime under state law, solicitation of violation of oath by a public officer.

DOCUMENT DRAMA

A document briefly posted to the Fulton County Clerk's Office website earlier Monday snagged the day's proceedings and gave Trump a window to further disparage the case against him.

People were still waiting to testify before the grand jury when Reuters reported on a document listing criminal charges to be brought against Trump, including state racketeering counts, conspiracy to commit false statements and solicitation of violation of oath by a public officer.

Reuters, which later published a copy of the document, said the filing was taken down quickly. A spokesperson for Willis said the report of charges being filed was "inaccurate," but declined to comment further. A statement subsequently released by the Fulton County courts clerk called the posted document "fictitious," but failed to explain how it got on the court's website.

Trump and his allies immediately seized on the apparent error to claim that the process was rigged. Trump's campaign aimed to fundraise off it, sending out an email with the since-deleted document embedded.

"The Grand Jury testimony has not even FINISHED — but it's clear the District Attorney has already decided how this case will end," Trump wrote in the email, which included links to give money to his campaign. "This is an absolute DISGRACE."

Trump's legal team said it was not a "simple administrative mistake." Rather, it was "emblematic of the pervasive and glaring constitutional violations which have plagued this case from its very inception," said lawyers Drew Findling, Jennifer Little and Marissa Goldberg.

TRUMP'S MOUNTING LEGAL BILLS

The sheer number of investigations, criminal cases and lawsuits brought against Trump are unprecedented for a former president. The same could be said for the tens of millions of dollars in legal fees paid out to attorneys representing him and his allies, straining the finances of his campaign.

An Associated Press analysis of recent fundraising disclosures shows Trump's political committees have paid out at least \$59.2 million to more than 100 lawyers and law firms since January 2021.

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The threat posed by this colossal drain of resources has led Trump's allies to establish a new legal defense fund, the Patriot Legal Defense Fund.

Massive explosion at a gas station in Russia's Dagestan kills 35 and injures scores more

MOSCOW (AP) — A massive explosion at a gas station in Russia's southern republic of Dagestan killed 35 people and injured scores more, Russian officials said Tuesday.

Russia's Health Ministry said 115 people were injured in the blast and subsequent fire, and 35 of them died, including three children.

A total of 65 of those injured, including 16 children, remained hospitalized as of midday Tuesday, the ministry said. Eleven people, including two children, were in grave condition.

The explosion occurred Monday night on the outskirts of Makhachkala, the region's capital. A fire started at a car repair shop and spread to a nearby gas station, triggering the blast.

Families of the dead will receive 1 million rubles (about \$10,000) each and the injured between 200,000 and 400,000 rubles (about \$2,000-\$4,000), Dagestan's authorities said. Russian state media said some of those injured would be airlifted to Moscow for treatment. Makhachkala is about 1,600 kilometers (990 miles) south of Moscow.

The authorities have begun a criminal investigation. Tuesday has been declared a day of mourning in Dagestan.

Also on Monday night, a blast in western Siberia killed two people and wounded five others. The explosion occurred at an oil mine in the Khanty-Mansiysk region late in the evening, authorities said.

The explosion in Dagestan was the deadliest in Russia since April 2022, when a fire at a defense research facility in Tver, a city 160 kilometers (100 miles) north of Moscow, killed 22 people and injured a dozen more.

A blast at a factory north of Moscow that makes optical equipment for Russia's security forces killed one person and injured 84 more earlier this month.

Today in History: August 16, Elvis Presley dies at 42

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Aug. 16, the 228th day of 2023. There are 137 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 16, 1977, Elvis Presley died at his Graceland estate in Memphis, Tennessee, at age 42.

On this date:

In 1777, American forces won the Battle of Bennington in what was considered a turning point of the Revolutionary War.

In 1812, Detroit fell to British and Native American forces in the War of 1812.

In 1861, President Abraham Lincoln issued Proclamation 86, which prohibited the states of the Union from engaging in commercial trade with states that were in rebellion — i.e., the Confederacy.

In 1948, baseball legend Babe Ruth died in New York at age 53.

In 1962, the Beatles fired their original drummer, Pete Best, replacing him with Ringo Starr.

In 1978, James Earl Ray, convicted assassin of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., told a Capitol Hill hearing he did not commit the crime, saying he'd been set up by a mysterious man called "Raoul."

In 1987, people worldwide began a two-day celebration of the "harmonic convergence," which heralded what believers called the start of a new, purer age of humankind.

In 2002, terrorist mastermind Abu Nidal reportedly was found shot to death in Baghdad, Iraq; he was 65.

In 2003, Idi Amin, the former dictator of Uganda, died in Jiddah, Saudi Arabia; he was believed to have been about 80.

In 2014, Missouri Gov. Jay Nixon declared a state of emergency and imposed a curfew in the St. Louis

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suburb of Ferguson, where police and protesters repeatedly clashed in the week since a Black 18-year-old, Michael Brown, was shot to death by a white police officer.

In 2020, California's Death Valley recorded a temperature of 130 degrees amid a blistering heat wave, the third-highest temperature ever measured.

Ten years ago: In a spacewalk lasting seven hours and 29 minutes, Russian cosmonauts rigged cable outside the International Space Station for a new lab that was due to arrive in a few months. A magnitude-6.5 earthquake struck near Seddon, New Zealand, bringing moderate damage to Wellington and the Marlborough region.

Five years ago: Aretha Franklin, the undisputed "Queen of Soul," died of pancreatic cancer at the age of 76. Newspapers across the country pushed back against President Donald Trump's attacks on "fake news" with a coordinated series of editorials in defense of a free press. The Pentagon said the Veterans Day military parade ordered up by President Trump wouldn't happen in 2018 and that officials were now looking at 2019; the announcement came hours after reports that the parade would have an estimated cost of \$92 million, more than three times the price first suggested by the White House.

One year ago: President Joe Biden signs Democrats' landmark climate change and health care bill. It was the "final piece" of the president's pared-down domestic agenda as he aimed to boost his party's standing with voters ahead of midterm elections. Explosions and fires ripped through an ammunition depot in Russia-annexed Crimea in the second suspected Ukrainian attack on the peninsula in just over a week. Russia blamed the explosions on an "act of sabotage" without naming the perpetrators. Wolfgang Petersen, a German filmmaker whose WWII submarine epic "Das Boot" propelled him into a blockbuster Hollywood career, died at age 81.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Ann Blyth is 95. Actor Gary Clarke is 90. Actor Julie Newmar is 90. Actor-singer Ketty Lester is 89. Actor John Standing is 89. Actor Anita Gillette is 87. Movie director Bruce Beresford is 83. Actor Bob Balaban is 78. Ballerina Suzanne Farrell is 78. Actor Lesley Ann Warren is 77. Rock singer-musician Joey Spampinato is 75. Actor Marshall Manesh is 73. Actor Reginald VelJohnson is 71. Former TV host Kathie Lee Gifford is 70. R&B singer J.T. Taylor is 70. Movie director James Cameron is 69. Actor Jeff Perry is 68. Rock musician Tim Farriss (INXS) is 66. Actor Laura Innes is 66. Singer Madonna is 65. Actor Angela Bassett is 65. Actor Timothy Hutton is 63. Actor Steve Carell (kuh-REHL') is 61. Former tennis player Jimmy Arias is 59. Actor-singer Donovan Leitch is 56. Actor Andy Milder is 55. Actor Seth Peterson is 53. Country singer Emily Strayer (The Chicks) is 51. Actor George Stults is 48. Singer Vanessa Carlton is 43. Actor Cam Gigandet is 41. Actor Agnes Bruckner is 38. Singer-musician Taylor Goldsmith (Dawes) is 38. Actor Cristin Milioti is 38. San Diego Padres pitcher Yu Darvish is 37. Actor Shawn Pyfrom is 37. Country singer Ashton Shepherd is 37. Actor Okieriete Onaodowan is 36. Country singer Dan Smyers (Dan & Shay) is 36. NHL goalie Carey Price is 36. Actor Kevin G. Schmidt is 35. Actor Rumer Willis is 35. Actor Parker Young is 35. Rapper Young Thug is 32. Actor Cameron Monaghan is 30. U.S. Olympic swimming gold-medalist Caeleb Dressel is 27. Singer-pianist Greyson Chance is 26.