

Groton Daily Independent

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Death Notice: Ruth Pray

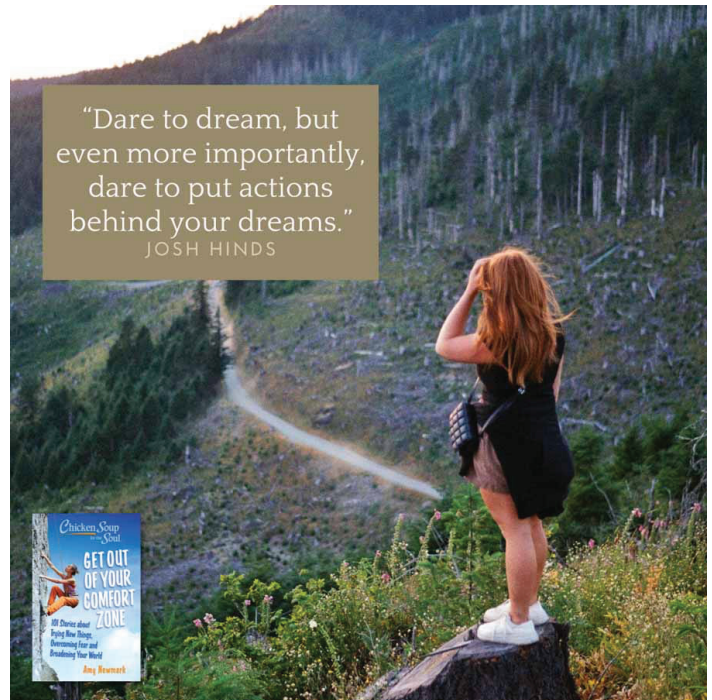
Ruth Pray, 95, of Groton passed away August 18, 2023 at Bethesda Home of Aberdeen. Services are pending for Thursday with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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.

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

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



Sunday, Aug. 20

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Worship at Avantara, 3 p.m.
United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Monday, Aug. 21

Senior menu: Lasagna rotini, spinach salad with dressing, ambrosia fruit salad, cookie, whole wheat bread.
Faculty In-Service
The Pantry at Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Senior Citizens meet at the Groton Community Center, 1 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Former President Donald Trump is choosing to skip the first GOP presidential primary debate in Wisconsin to instead be interviewed by former Fox News host Tucker Carlson, according to The New York Times. Meanwhile in New York, a federal judge has denied Trump's request to delay his second defamation trial brought by writer E. Jean Carroll. The trial is slated to begin in January.

Residents of the capital of Canada's Northwest Territories were fleeing by plane and car as wildfires approached, the latest in the country's worst-ever wildfire season. The

deadline to evacuate Yellowknife has now passed, though evacuation flights may continue to be available through Saturday depending on need and availability.

The National Hurricane Center has issued its first-ever tropical storm watch for California as Hurricane Hilary approaches. Hurricane conditions are expected in Baja California through Sunday and tropical storm conditions are possible when Hilary crosses into southern California on Sunday, according to the latest forecasts.

Nearly 1,000 federal officials are in Hawaii assisting with Maui wildfire response efforts, according to FEMA. The \$5.6 million in federal aid approved thus far is expected to grow in the days and weeks ahead. Local authorities have confirmed at least 111 fatalities. Hundreds more remain missing.

The U.S. Department of Justice is requesting a 33-year prison sentence for former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio, according to court documents reviewed by The Associated Press.

U.S. President Joe Biden, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Kishida Fumio are celebrating stronger ties between their three nations following a trilateral meeting at Camp David.

British nurse Lucy Letby has been found guilty of murdering seven babies and attempting to murder a further six while working on a hospital ward in 2015 and 2016, making her the U.K.'s most prolific killer of babies in modern times.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is monitoring a new, highly mutating lineage, named BA.2.86, of the virus that causes COVID-19. The variant has been detected in the U.S., Denmark, and Israel.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, a Russian commander overseeing troops in Ukraine's Donetsk region is calling for the war's front lines to be frozen, suggesting on Telegram that Russian troops cannot "win Ukraine militarily" in the "near future." Meanwhile, the U.S. is extending Ukrainians' temporary protected status in America for another 18 months, now lasting through mid-April 2025..

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

The final two matches of the FIFA Women's World Cup take place this weekend. Australia and Sweden will compete for third place today in a match scheduled to begin at 4 a.m. ET. On Sunday, Spain and England will compete in the final starting at 6 a.m. ET.

GOP presidential candidates Vivek Ramaswamy and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie will be among the Republicans expected to deliver remarks today as conservative talk radio host Erick Erickson's three-day The Gathering conference wraps up in Atlanta.

Some of the top track and field athletes from around the world will convene Saturday in Budapest to celebrate the start of the 2023 World Athletic Championships. This year's competitions will run through August 27.

People in Ecuador will vote Sunday in their country's presidential election. The election comes less than two weeks after one candidate, journalist Fernando Villavicencio, was assassinated.

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Cavaliers shut down Tigers in opening gridiron game

Aberdeen Roncalli scored two touchdowns in the third quarter to edge past the Groton Area Tigers in the opening game of the football season. The game was played Friday at Doney Field in Groton.

The first score resulted in an interception and a few plays later, Brody Weinmeister would score on a 25 yard run with 8:14 left in the third quarter. The Cavaliers would score again with 1:20 left in the third quarter on a Weinmeister six yard run. Both PATs were kicked by Aiden Fisher.

Both teams had eight first downs and neither team had a fumble. Penalties were costly for the Tigers with eight for 55 yards while Roncalli had just two for 25 yards.

In rushing, Groton Area had 21 carries for 61 yards with Korbin Kucker having 11 carries for 54 yards, Taylor Diegel had two for eight and Lane Tietz had seven for three yards. The Cavaliers had 42 carries for 149 yards with Weinmeister having 11 carries for 74 yards, Kaden Larson had three for 37 yards, Zane Backous had 18 for 34 yards, Aiden Fisher had two for six yards and Cade Young had three for two yards.

In passing, Lane Tietz completed 11 of 29 passes for 73 yards and one interception and Korbin Kucker completed one of two for 35 yards. Receivers were Keegen Tracy with three catches for 55 yards, Diegel had three catches for 23 yards, Colby Dunker had three for 15 yards, Brevin Flihs had one for 10 yards and Ryder Johnson had one for five yards.

Roncalli's Zane Backous completed six of 12 passes for 96 yards. Receivers were Weinmeister with two catches for 53 yards, Jett Johnson had one for 33 yards, Keegan Stewart had one for nine yards and Fisher had one for six yards.

Defensive leaders for Groton Area were Flihs with 11 tackles, Christian Ehresmann had seven tackles, Logan Ringgenberg had six tackles and one sack, Karter Moody had four tackles and one sack and Jaeger Kampa had one sack. The Cavaliers were led by Fisher with seven tackles while Noah Kramer had six tackles and one interception and Weinmeister had five tackles.

Groton Area will travel to Redfield on Friday while the Cavaliers will host Deuel.

The game was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by John Sieh Agency, Dacotah Bank, Groton Chamber, Bierman Farm Services, Locke Electric, Dan Richardt at Groton Ford, Krueger Brothers, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bahr Spray Foam, BK Custom Ts & More, Groton Ford and Greg's Repair.



Lane Tietz has a quarterback keeper before before this Roncalli defender grabbed his jersey to stop him. (Photo by Paul Kosel)



Brevin Flihs looks for an opening and gains a few yards. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

DANR and DOH Announce Air Quality Alert for South Dakota

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

The alert is in effect through Sunday, August 20, 2023, or until conditions improve.

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

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

DANR provides air quality data on the department's website for several locations in South Dakota. Hourly PM2.5 values greater than 35 microgram per cubic meter (ug/m3) are a concern to public health.

South Dakota Board of Regents plans for a strong future

PIERRE, S.D. – Recognizing rapidly evolving changes in the higher education landscape, the South Dakota Board of Regents (BOR) is taking steps to ensure the state's public universities continue to capitalize on enrollment opportunities and supply the workforce of tomorrow.

"We have a strong public university system in South Dakota, but there are challenges on the horizon for higher education nationally, and we want to make sure our system is proactive in maintaining its competitive advantage," said BOR Executive Director Nathan Lukkes. "We need to do our diligence to make certain we continue to provide students with an exceptional education at a competitive cost."

This week, the BOR system requested the development of a strategic framework to identify future opportunities and vulnerabilities of its six universities. The report will identify potential methods to manage and analyze South Dakota's public universities' financial and programmatic sustainability, ensuring continued institutional health in the years to come.

The partnering organization will thoroughly understand current higher education trends and provide detailed analysis and enrollment forecasting by college, department, and program level to optimize future operations of the six BOR institutions. Each BOR university has unique goals and specializations, and this analysis will help capitalize on those characteristics and provide direction to inform the management of each campus and implementation of strategic programming plans.

"In South Dakota, we have six vibrant universities," said BOR President Tim Rave. "Each campus is doing incredible work that directly influences our state's economy. With the information we receive from this study, we can further tailor those efforts and create a dynamic and lasting impact."

This effort comes in continuation of efficiency actions like the BOR Strategic Plan and the 2019 Legislative Senate Bill 55 Taskforce. Once complete, the comprehensive report will summarize the results with clear and actionable recommendations for South Dakota's public university system. These measures will focus on improving the financial resilience of the public university system and offering continuing opportunities for students.

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BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA

REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY

August 22, 2023, 8:45 A.M.

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

- Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
- Approval of Agenda
- Opportunity for Public Comment
- Consent Calendar
- Approval of General Meeting Minutes from August 15, 2023
- Claims
- HR Report
- Claim Assignment
- Travel Requests
- Plats
- Set Hearing Date/Authorize Publication – Ord. 256 – Solar Energy Systems
- Other Business
- Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
- Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

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

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

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

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

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

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

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

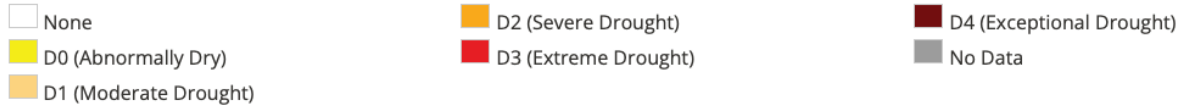
Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

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

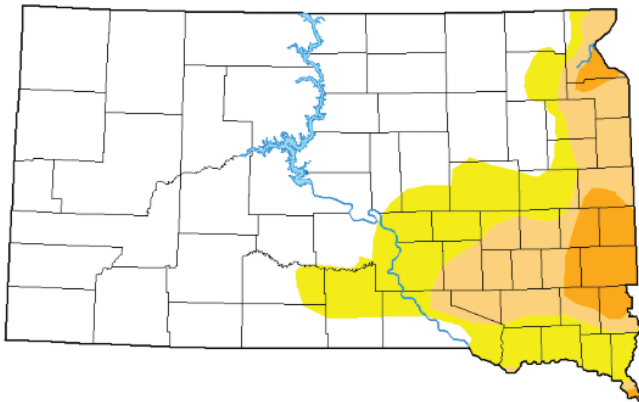
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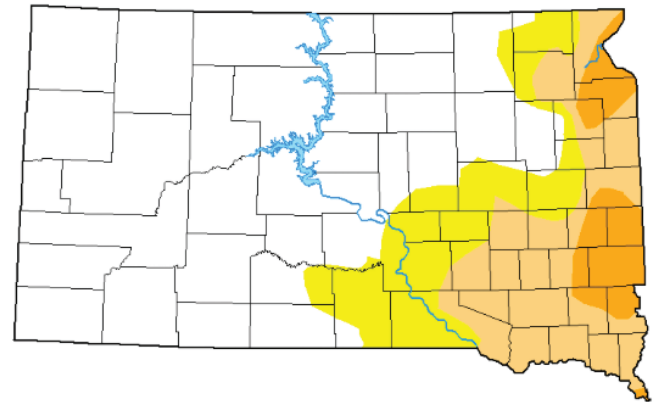
Drought Classification



Drought Monitor



August 15



August 8

Eastern parts of the High Plains saw the benefits of this week's precipitation along with below-normal temperatures. Kansas saw heavy precipitation continue from last week, bringing further improvements to the east and central regions. Areas near Kansas City saw upwards of 3 inches of precipitation, while the southeast areas received 4 to 7 inches of rain, carrying over improvements seen in Oklahoma. Some improvements occurred along parts of the Nebraska-South Dakota border. Both southeast and northeast South Dakota saw improvement from heavy rainfall and improving soil moisture. This improvement bled over in southeast North Dakota, where areas of D0 were removed due to heavy precipitation. Little precipitation was received further north. Continual soil moisture and streamflow impacts led to D1 and D2 expansions. Southeastern Colorado received spotty precipitation, adding to the already-degrading conditions and resulting in expansion of D1 and D0.

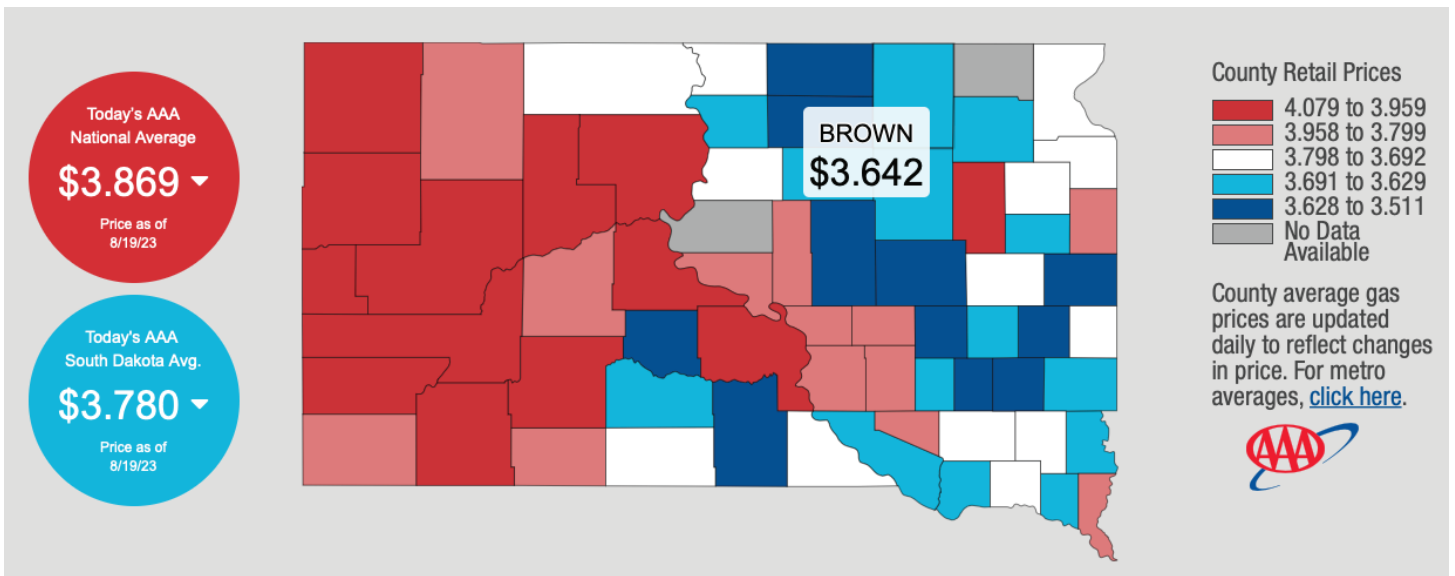
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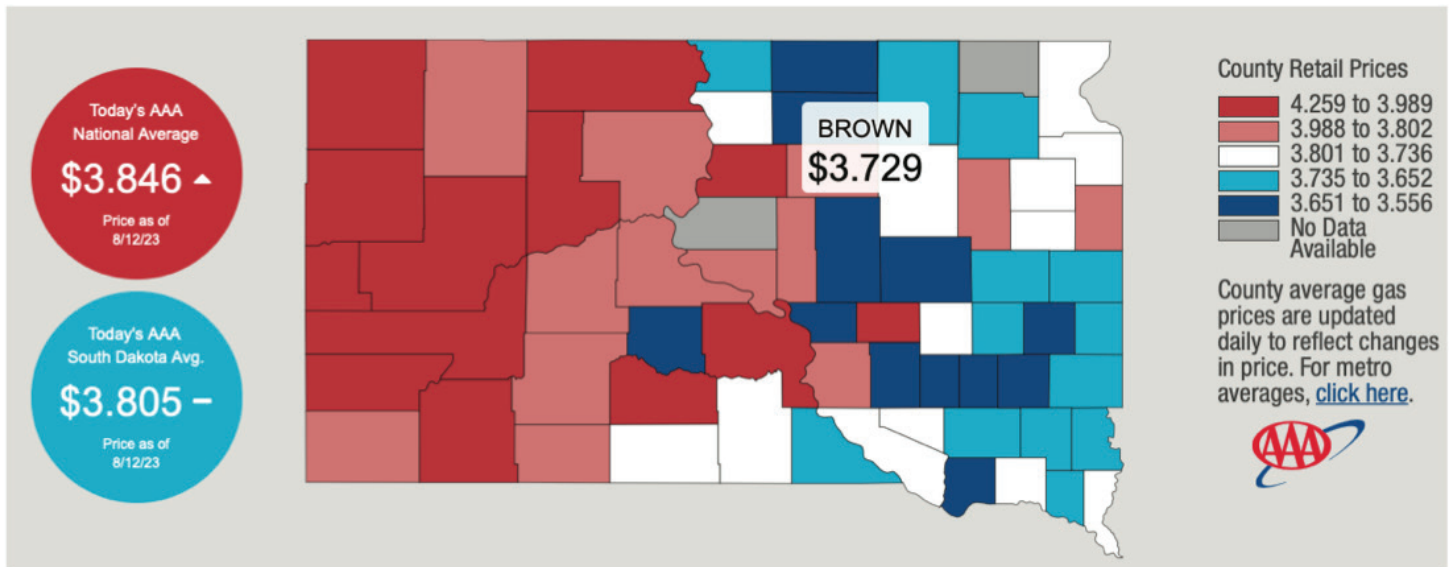
South Dakota Average Gas Prices

	Regular	Mid-Grade	Premium	Diesel
Current Avg.	\$3.780	\$3.965	\$4.415	\$4.132
Yesterday Avg.	\$3.791	\$3.966	\$4.416	\$4.129
Week Ago Avg.	\$3.805	\$3.958	\$4.425	\$4.076
Month Ago Avg.	\$3.496	\$3.656	\$4.128	\$3.691
Year Ago Avg.	\$3.890	\$4.081	\$4.566	\$4.792

This Week



Two Weeks Ago





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

COMMENTARY

The biggest thing you've never heard of: How EROS changed the world from a cornfield

August marks 50th anniversary of data hub for seminal satellite program

JOHN HULT

The U.S. Geological Survey's Earth Resources Observation and Science (EROS) Center is celebrating its 50th anniversary.

If you're like most South Dakotans, EROS is the most important building you've never heard of. If you know it at all, there's a strong chance you live in the Sioux Falls area and a slim chance you actually understand what happens there.

That's in spite of how hard my coworkers and I tried to change that between 2018 and last year, when good fortune and a call from Searchlight Editor Seth Tupper pulled me out of public relations and back into journalism.

That EROS remains mysterious is perhaps a sad commentary on our work, though I think we occasionally did some great stuff.

The sadder thing is this: The EROS you don't know about represents, unquestionably, South Dakota's most effectual long-term contribution to the global scientific community, and arguably its most impactful to the world at large. It's not even close.

Doubt it? You shouldn't. I'm biased, but I'm not wrong.

It's no exaggeration to say that anyone with a map on their smartphone has a little piece of EROS in their pocket. To be clear, EROS doesn't make smartphone apps. Ironically enough, cell phone reception at EROS, which is 18 miles from Sioux Falls and surrounded by cornfields, is atrocious.

My point is this: The technology behind satellite-derived measurements of the Earth's surface and the means to understand them – the technology that makes it possible for you to go back in time to watch glaciers recede, lakes fill or drain, or track wildfire damage – started with the Landsat satellite program and EROS.

Gambits, greased palms and happy accidents

To defend this bold claim, I need to take you back to 1966. That was three years before the first moon landing, a time when the attention of the public and scientific community was fixed on looking into outer space, not down from it.

That was the year former USGS Director William Pecora convinced Department of Interior Secretary Stewart Udall to announce the agency's intention to launch a satellite to monitor the Earth's surface.

They didn't tell NASA, though. Instead, they issued a press release announcing their plans, which served to force NASA's hand into a partnership that's held fast since. NASA builds the satellites; USGS owns them after launch and archives the data.

The first satellite, called the Earth Resources Technology Satellite, was launched in 1972. It was renamed "Landsat" in 1979.

It carried something called a "multispectral scanner (MSS)," designed by a whip-smart toughie named Virginia Norwood, who managed a team of men in a time when she was often the only woman in rooms filled with engineers. Norwood's device measured energy across multiple bands of the electromagnetic spectrum. Our eyes can only see red, green and blue light, but the MSS could "see" infrared and other

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bands, like a vampire bat, bed bug or a Predator from an action movie.

The MSS wasn't even meant to be the primary imaging tool on that first satellite. It was supposed to be a camera, with the MSS as a backup. The camera broke, which turned out to be just fine. Scanning the spectrum offered more useful data than pictures anyway. Current Landsats have nine spectral bands and two thermal ones (awfully handy for studying urban heat).

But let's get back to South Dakota.

In order to "catch" all that spectral data, the program needed a home somewhere within a narrow oval of Midwestern land between Kansas City and Fargo. The idea was to pick a place that would allow for the collection of data on either end of the country. The early satellites couldn't store data, so the options were catch it or lose it.

Sioux Falls won the EROS race for two reasons beyond geography. First, South Dakota Sen. Karl Mundt was a pal of then-President Richard Nixon. Second, the Sioux Falls Development Foundation offered to give the USGS 300 acres of property free of charge.

Mayor Paul TenHaken praised their vision at a Friday reception at EROS, though he admitted that "we probably wouldn't give away 300 acres today."

In August of 1973, the doors flung open, and the EROS employees who'd worked out of a temporary office in downtown Sioux Falls walked in to begin building the field of satellite-based land change science.

Rapid advancements

Norwood, who I met in 2021, about two years before her death, was surprised by how quickly her idea began to help humanity understand its planet.

By the mid-1970s, scientists were using Landsat data to monitor crop health, after a wheat crisis caused the price of the grain to spike. When Mount St. Helens erupted in 1980, Landsat was able to peer beyond the visible to track the damage and recovery. In 1986, the Chernobyl nuclear disaster struck, and Landsat imagery was used to put the lie to Soviet assertions that it had been a minor event.

CBS News showed up for that.

Here's the place in the story where I mention that EROS is about a lot more than Landsat. It has aerial photos dating back to the 1930s, data from NOAA and NASA satellites, declassified satellite photos from the 1960s and on and on.

All that imagery has contributed to more science than I have space to write about. There's the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, which helps the U.S. Agency for International Development intervene with food aid in developing countries before people starve to death.

There's the Hazards Data Distribution System and International Charter Space and Major Disasters, which have EROS ingesting and distributing imagery from natural and man-made disasters worldwide to emergency responders in the U.S. and around the world.

There are land cover databases, which define which parts of the country are cropland, forested, urban and the like and how they've changed over time. The first one ever made and the most widely used ones today were born at EROS under the guidance of South Dakota Hall-of-Famer Dr. Tom Loveland. EROS is also a partner in LANDFIRE, a land cover map with a dizzying array of detail on land cover, but also on potential fuels.

Lately, a lot of attention has been paid to evapotranspiration (ET), especially in semi-arid areas of the Western U.S. ET is the combined measurement of evaporation and transpiration, a measurement of water use efficiency that can help guide water use on farm fields.

Landsat can measure that at a wide scale. In a country that gets so much of its produce from places like California that don't have a drop of water to waste, that's a big deal.

The biggest deal of all came in 2008, when the USGS decided to stop charging for Landsat data.

That pushed other government agencies to open up their data. It also made it possible for companies like Google to ingest every image in the EROS archive, and for researchers to start analyzing decades of data. That's the imagery you'd see on your phone, by the way, although the close-up stuff comes from commercial providers.

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Data use exploded after 2008. At Friday's anniversary reception, a scientist and Interior Department official named Annalise Blum appeared in a video to remind the staff and inform the guests that the decision to open up the archive and let others build with it and from it has translated into \$3.45 billion in annual economic activity across the globe.

What's next?

I'd be dishonest if I didn't admit that Landsat has lost some of its luster since then. It's still the most well-known and one of the most widely used data sources, but it's not alone anymore.

Its satellites gather moderate resolution imagery in a world awash in higher-resolution stuff. It collects new imagery every eight days between its two operational satellites, while the European Space Agency's Sentinel-2 satellites, which collect higher-resolution data, get new stuff every five.

Commercial companies like Planet, which launch satellites the size of bread loaves by the hundreds, will sell you new imagery every day.

At the risk of being uninvited to EROS alumni gatherings, I'll admit to telling my current coworkers that it's now easier to find and download quick-and-dirty versions of American satellite imagery from the European satellite portal. For higher resolution stuff, I recommend the clunkier USGS interface, which has more and better stuff in a harder-to-understand format.

Real smart people don't download data at all anymore, by the way. The entire Landsat archive is now in the cloud, and you can work with it all without downloading a thing.

But here's the thing: All that work stands on a foundation built in Sioux Falls, and that work remains critical to a remote sensing world that's changed so much since 2008.

EROS still catches data, fixes it, shares it and studies it, and that's incredibly important work. Landsat is often referred to as the "gold standard" of satellite calibration, the data to which other satellite data is compared for accuracy. To do science over time and trust the results, every pixel of satellite data needs to be in the right place and measure the same thing every single time.

That's really, really hard. To illustrate, imagine standing at the end of your block and taking a photo of a stop sign at the other end. Now imagine that you mark your spot, run around the block and take the same photo. Now imagine doing that 10 times. The chances that every pixel in every photo lines up exactly no matter how closely you zoom in are essentially zero.

Satellites circle the world, not the block. They're hundreds of miles up, too, and they never stop to breathe or aim as they go.

The people at EROS were among the first to try and figure that out, and they're still some of the best. People from all over the world would show up regularly during my time there to compare notes on the math magic behind it.

It's also important to remember how important "free" is. Landsat has international ground stations and partners all over the world, sometimes in countries that could scarcely afford to pay a private company to collect data.

In remarks Friday, EROS Center Director Pete Doucette addressed the program's place in the changing marketplace it helped create. He pointed to a 1:20 scale model of Landsat 9, the newest school bus-sized satellite in orbit, and told the crowd it stands as a symbol of what came before and what's coming next.

A lot of modern satellites are the size of the model.

"Landsat 9 is probably the end of an era for that size of satellite," he said.

Landsat Next, the successor to Landsat 9, will collect data across more spectral bands and will have a six-day revisit time, he told them.

It's a far different project than the ones that built EROS. Put that together with the proliferation of other data sources, Doucette said, and there's a fair bit of uncertainty ahead.

But then he pointed to a picture of Landsat 6, the one Landsat that never achieved orbit due to a fuel system problem. Risk has always been a part of the EROS story, he said.

As for the "cubesats" now watching the planet, he said, "we view these new and emerging systems with opportunity."

"We don't fear them, and we don't feel we have to compete with them," he said. "We relish the availability of that, because it complements what we can do. We are the Earth Resources Observation and Science Center, right? So anything that expands our ability to observe the Earth is something we need to consider as scientists."

So yes, satellite data is everywhere. Private companies, universities, even high school classrooms can now buy and build satellites. Those satellites can hitch a ride on a rocket packed like a Boeing Airbus with other paying satellite passengers and join the thousands of satellites already in orbit.

It's truly amazing.

And 50 years ago, South Dakotans you've never met at a place you've probably only heard of were among the first to lay the groundwork to make that reality.

Whatever the future holds for EROS, that's a past worth celebrating.

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.

Higher taxes and fees fix hundreds of bridges, but some local governments don't participate

Challenges remain as BIG program funds improvements

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - AUGUST 18, 2023 6:41 PM

In 2015, nearly 25% of locally owned bridges in South Dakota were in poor condition.

Eight years later, more than \$142 million in taxpayer funding has been spent on 500 local bridge improvement grants through a state program. As of 2022, the number of locally owned bridges in poor condition had decreased by 46 while the number in good condition had increased by 138, but about 20% of the counties in the state had never received a grant.

Trying to fix the state's bridges is like swimming upstream, said Mike Vehle, a former state legislator who led the effort to create the state's Bridge Improvement Grant program. The state is making progress, but bridges are still aging and "getting worse all the time."

"It's a slow go," Vehle said.

Legislators created the BIG program in 2015 with a bill that generated millions of dollars in additional funding for roads and bridges across the state through increases in gas taxes, excise taxes and license plate fees. It was a monumental effort — taking seven years for Vehle to convince the public and other lawmakers that higher taxes and fees would be worth it.

As Vehle looked at it, South Dakotans could either start paying slightly higher taxes and fees immediately, or pay a much higher price for crumbling bridges and infrastructure in the future.

Now, Vehle serves on the South Dakota Transportation Commission, which awards bridge improvement grants to counties and cities across the state.

Vehle said the program has been successful. It's putting the state — and the counties participating in the program — in a better position than if the program didn't exist, he said.

"If we wouldn't have done this, we would really be in a hole," Vehle said.

BIG is a 'critical local government program,' officials say

South Dakota has about 5,700 publicly owned bridges, around 3,900 of which are owned by local governments. Most of those local bridges were built before 1980, and 93% of the bridges from that era are in poor or fair condition.

About 75% of the bridges statewide that are in poor condition, based on square feet, are owned by local governments.

"We have an aging infrastructure in our local government systems," said Mike Behm, director of planning and engineering for the state Department of Transportation. Behm presented the data earlier this summer to legislative members of a study committee on county funding and services.

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The summer study focuses on regionalization and consolidation of county services, how the state can partner with counties to make mandated services more affordable, and an analysis of county funding models and revenues.

The state has awarded nearly 500 bridge improvements grants since 2016 — 120 for replacement, 95 for preservation and 283 for preliminary engineering.

The program has been “very successful” in Black Hills-based Lawrence County, said state Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish. When he was elected to the Lawrence County Commission seven years ago, the county hadn’t built a new bridge in nearly 10 years.

Since then, the county has received over a dozen grants from the program.

“Without the BIG program, we wouldn’t have been able to afford them,” Deibert said. “... I think without it we would have had bigger problems.”

The program is a two-step process, Behm told South Dakota Searchlight. Preliminary studies allow local governments to have a firm understanding of the work and cost of a project. There’s no timeline associated with the awards, so local governments can plan and apply for replacement and rehabilitation grants when they’re ready.

Local governments have to “have some skin in the game” to qualify for the program, Vehle said. Counties must fund 20% of the projects, implement a wheel tax and have a five-year transportation plan. The qualifications are similar for cities, but without the wheel tax requirement.

In the most recent round of BIG applications, eight cities submitted nine applications and 28 counties submitted 65 applications. All cities that applied were awarded grants, while 22 of the 28 counties to apply received a total of 28 awards.

The program takes \$7 million annually from license plate fees and non-commercial vehicle fees and puts it toward grants. The state Department of Transportation also sets aside \$8 million of state highway funds each year for the program.

While that’s typically \$15 million available for the program, the state Transportation Commission this year reallocated \$1.4 million from prior projects and budgeted an additional \$25 million for the program, raising the total state funds available to \$41.4 million.

Additionally, \$75 million in federal funds was allocated to the BIG program last month that can be used through the 2027 fiscal year.

Secretary of Transportation Joel Jundt said the grants are a “critical local government program” in a news release announcing the latest rounds of grants.

Rural, small counties can still struggle to afford BIG program

Fifty grants have been awarded to 20 cities in South Dakota since the program began, ranging from Blunt to Hot Springs to Sioux Falls.

Thirteen of South Dakota’s 66 counties haven’t participated in the BIG program, and some others have only received one or two awards since the program started. County officials may dislike the wheel tax requirement, counties might not have many locally owned bridges, or they might not have bridges in bad enough shape to repair.

Harding County in the northwest corner of the state only has a few local bridges. Most have passed inspection, and the county hasn’t participated in the BIG program to study them further. The county is one of five that doesn’t have a wheel tax.

“We’d love to participate,” said Charlie Verhulst, chairman of the county commission, “but we think passing a wheel tax is just another tax, and we don’t think we’d meet all the criteria since we don’t have a high traffic count.”

Grants are awarded based on a point system which takes into account the bridge’s condition, impact on users (multiplying the average daily traffic with the detour length in miles), local financial commitment and other planning considerations.

If the county of about 1,300 residents passes a wheel tax and doesn’t receive a grant, taxpayers — especially rural ranchers and farmers who haul livestock and crops on semis and tractors with lots of wheels

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— would bear the burden without a payoff, Verhulst reasoned.

Verhulst also said it's unfair that cities don't have to implement a wheel tax or some other comparative tax to participate.

Vehle said that's a fair point, saying if there's one thing he'd change, he would prevent cities in counties without a wheel tax from applying for the program.

"I screwed up on that," he acknowledged.

Clay County, in the southeastern corner of the state, was awarded grants for the first time earlier this year. While the county has had a wheel tax in place for years, it didn't have a transportation plan. The county is also the smallest in South Dakota by area, limiting its taxable property.

"Access to funding is really critical, even if your share of the project is only 20%, when you only have one major source of revenue," said Betty Smith, Clay County commission chair.

South Dakota counties have limited means of revenue collection — they can't implement sales taxes like the state or municipalities, and their annual property tax increases are capped at 3% or the rate of inflation (whichever is lower).

Buffalo County, in central South Dakota, applied for its first grant earlier this summer after passing a wheel tax a few years ago to qualify for the program. Six of the county's seven bridges were built in 1975, and one bridge has an estimated repair cost of \$1.5 million, said Buffalo County Commission Chairwoman Dawn Cable.

That bridge is in "desperate need," she added. The county has placed load limits on the bridge, which is essential for farmers and ranchers.

"I just pray to God everyday somebody doesn't disregard those load limits," Cable said.

Buffalo County commissioners were hesitant to establish a wheel tax for years, Cable said. While there are over 1,800 residents in the county, only 179 form the county's tax base and would pay the wheel tax since the rest of the residents live on the Crow Creek Indian Reservation.

Part of the solution to make it easier for rural, small-population counties to participate in programs like BIG or properly fund their government, Cable said, is to open other streams of revenue for counties, whether that's implementing a sales tax or allocating some state alcohol tax dollars to county governments.

It's becoming a bigger issue as costs for construction, public safety and staff salaries increase — and it's something the summer study is meant to address. Construction costs alone have "inflated terribly" over the past few years, Vehle added.

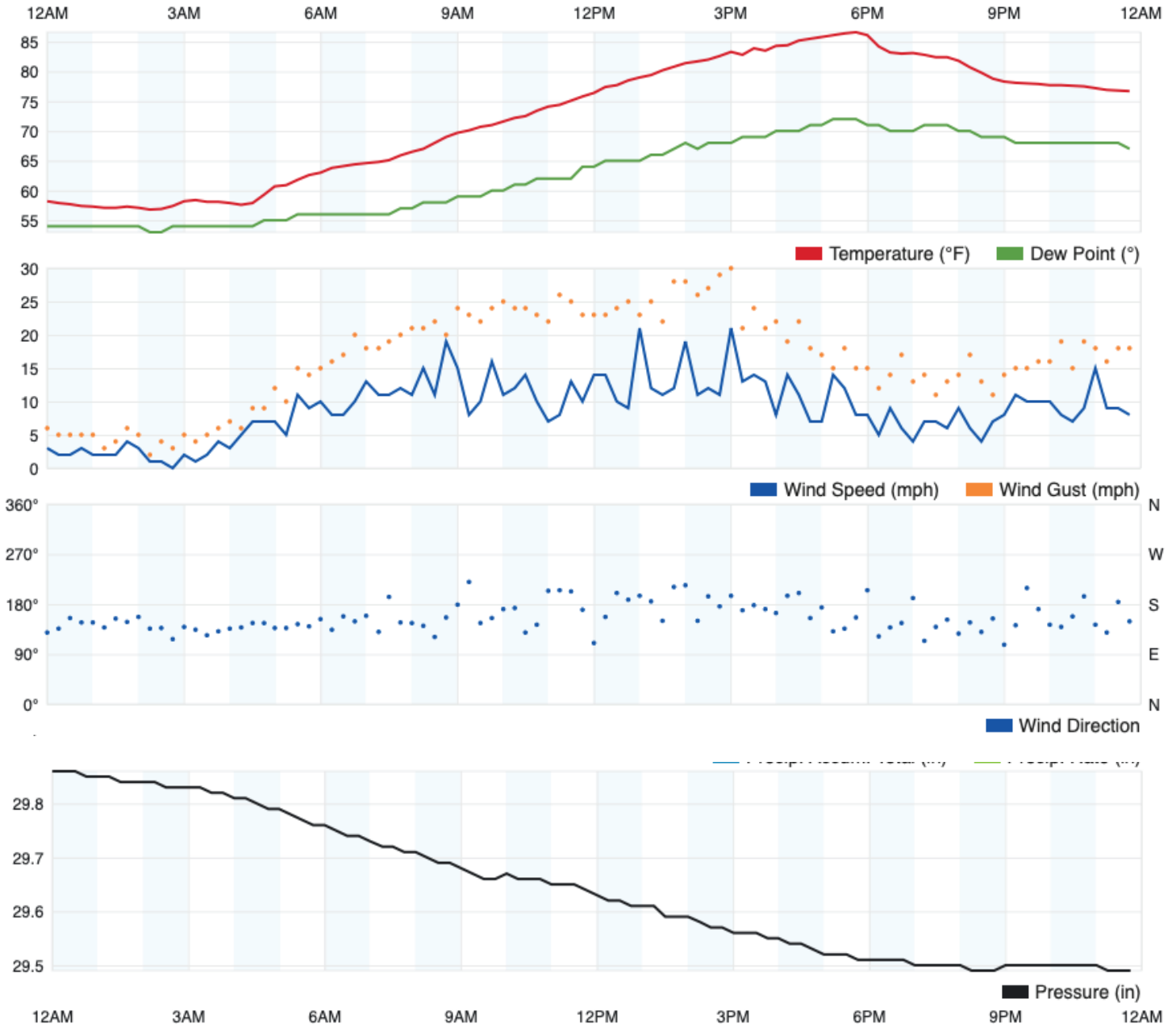
"We're all sitting here," Vehle said, "scratching our heads about what to do about it."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather



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Today	Tonight	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday	Monday Night	Tuesday
						
Sunny then Haze and Breezy	Haze and Breezy	20% Slight Chance Showers then Slight Chance T-storms	Mostly Cloudy	Partly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Hot
High: 92 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 71 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 87 °F	Low: 63 °F	High: 93 °F

HOT TODAY, COOLER TOMORROW

Today



85-94

Some surface smoke moves through

Sunday



69-78

Chance for some showers west river



Today continues our above average temperatures trend with highs in the high 80s to high 90s. The "feels like" temperature may briefly exceed 100 degrees in areas east of a line from Sisseton to Watertown. Please take precautions if you are going to be outside today. Sunday is expected to be cooler with a chance of showers and non-severe thunderstorms west river.

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Expansive Heat Wave Redeveloping

August 18, 2023
4:41 PM



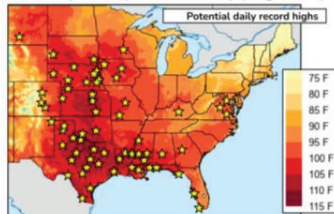
Key Messages for Expansive U.S. Heat Wave

Updated Aug 18, 2023
3:00 PM CDT

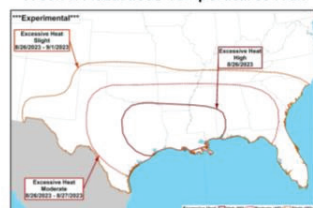
Dangerous heat will redevelop this weekend and next week in the Central and Southeast U.S.

- Dangerous heat will continue to intensify and expand into the Plains states on Friday and Saturday, with numerous daily high temperature records expected, especially in the Central Plains and Texas.
- The heat wave will then continue to expand on Sunday and early next week to include much of the Central and Southeast U.S. Some locations in the Midwest may see their hottest day of the year so far this weekend, and portions of the South Central U.S. and Gulf Coast may further extend their record number of hours with a heat index reading of at least 110°F.
- The prolonged nature of the heat wave, combined with very warm overnight temperatures will limit relief from the oppressive daytime heat and compound overall heat impacts.
- Excessive heat is anticipated to focus over the southeastern quadrant of the country next week. The greatest risk of excessive heat is for eastern Texas and parts of the Gulf Coast States.

Hottest Temps Friday to Wednesday (Aug 18-24)



Week 2 Hazardous Temperatures Risk



Pertinent Information

- Dangerous heat will redevelop over the central and southeast US this weekend and next week
- The Dakotas and Minnesota will experience some of this heat and humidity, but **NOT** to the extent of areas further south.
- Nevertheless, stay cool and hydrated if out and about in the **HOT** August sun!



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

For more information go to:
www.wpc.noaa.gov, www.cpc.ncep.noaa.gov and www.weather.gov

Weather Prediction Center
& Climate Prediction Center



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 87 °F at 5:38 PM

Low Temp: 57 °F at 2:12 AM

Wind: 30 mph at 2:53 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 58 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1976

Record Low: 34 in 2004

Average High: 83

Average Low: 56

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.37

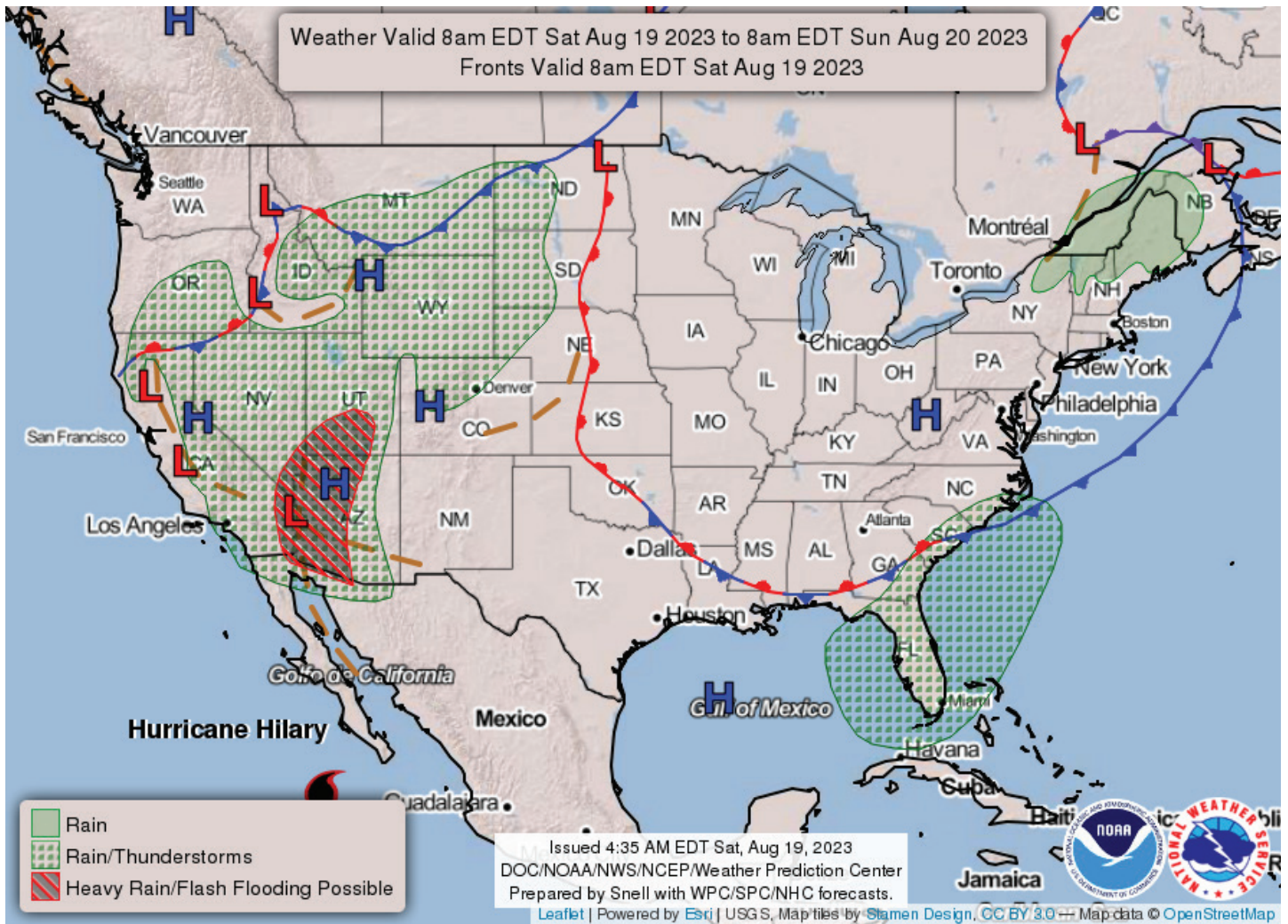
Precip to date in Aug.: 5.92

Average Precip to date: 15.47

Precip Year to Date: 18.59

Sunset Tonight: 8:35:25 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:37:50 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 19, 1899: An estimated F3 tornado passed 3 miles north of Clear Lake. The tornado killed a man by flying debris as five homes, and many barns were destroyed.

August 19, 1983: Between 0155 and 0330 CST, thunderstorm winds blow through Brown County. At 0155, an estimated 64 mph wind gust was observed on the southeast corner of Warner. A 60 mph wind gust was measured at the Aberdeen Airport at 0218. By 0330 an estimated wind gust of 75 mph was observed in Ordway.

August 19, 1991: A thunderstorm produced about five inches of rain, strong winds, and hail in Ridgeview, Dewey County. Three-grain bins were blown over. One of the bins hit a house causing considerable damage. Wind gusts were estimated to be 60 mph. High winds continued into Sully and Hughes Counties.

1788 - A small but powerful hurricane inflicted great havoc upon forests along a narrow track from New Jersey to Maine. A similar storm track today would cause extreme disaster in the now populated area. (David Ludlum)

1890: An estimated F3 tornado hit South Wilkes-Barre, Pennsylvania. About 400 buildings were destroyed in the industrial and more impoverished residential section of town. The death toll was 16 and damage was estimated at \$400,000.

1896: The famous Cottage City (Oak Bluffs) waterspout occurred off Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. The vortex was 3,600 feet high, formed three times, and was well photographed.

1969 - 'Never say die' Camille let loose a cloudburst in Virginia resulting in flash floods and landslides which killed 151 persons and cause 140 million dollars damage. Massies Hill VA received 27 inches of rain. (David Ludlum)

1986 - The temperature at San Antonio, TX, soared to an all-time record high of 108 degrees. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Thunderstorms moving out of southeastern Nebraska spread severe weather into eastern Kansas and western Missouri during the day. Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced hail three inches in diameter at Albion, and high winds which downed a large tent at Waterloo injuring a dozen persons. Thunderstorms in Kansas produced baseball size hail northwest of Topeka, and wind gusts to 80 mph at Fulton. Ten persons were injured in a thunderstorm at Princeton KS, and damage to crops in southern Franklin County KS was estimated at 3.5 million dollars. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Raleigh, NC, reported a record hot temperature reading of 103 degrees. Afternoon thunderstorms in Oklahoma produced wind gusts to 75 mph in southern Pittsburgh County. Thunderstorms in Indiana produced 4.50 inches of rain at Morgantown. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms deluged southeastern Delaware with six to ten inches of rain in four to six hours, with local reports of 13 to 20 inches of rain. Twenty-six major roads were closed or damaged, and fourteen bridges were washed out. Flooding caused nearly four million dollars damage to local businesses. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

REACHING OUT - REACHING UP

It was a bitterly cold Sunday morning. People were walking as fast as they could from the parking lot to the steps that led into the sanctuary. Standing next to the entrance was a poorly dressed man with his hat pulled down over his eyes and his collar held tightly around his neck as he tried to keep warm. His clothes were shabby and his shoes well worn. He appeared destitute, hopeless, and to those entering the church, unimportant. No one stopped to offer help.

The church members filled the pews, the choir took their seats, and the organist started the prelude. As the people sat waiting for the service to begin, they suddenly let out a gasp as they saw "that man" who was outside the church walk down the aisle, stand behind the pulpit, and remove his tattered clothes, and stand silently. It was their pastor.

Opening his Bible he read, "I was hungry and you gave me nothing to eat, thirsty and you gave me nothing to drink, a stranger and you did not invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me."

Every day God places opportunities to serve Him before us and around us. These opportunities do not require wealth or skills, intelligence or power. They simply require eyes that are open, a mind that is alert, and a heart that is sensitive to the needs of others.

Opportunities create obligations. To refuse to help others is to refuse to help God.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to see what You see, to feel what You feel, and then do what You would have us to do when we see others who need help. Open our hearts! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And he will answer, "I tell you the truth, when you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me." Matthew 25:42-46



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:
08.18.23

10 20 29 44 66 11

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$33,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.16.23

14 18 31 37 43 2

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$8,200,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 3 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.18.23

7 8 25 36 46 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 18 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.16.23

3 5 19 24 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 18 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.16.23

15 22 44 49 63 26

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 47 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.16.23

9 11 17 19 55 1

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$264,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 47 Mins 58
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli 14, Groton Area 0

Alcester-Hudson 51, Centerville 18

Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan 43, Baltic 0

Britton-Hecla 20, Great Plains Lutheran 16

Canistota 55, Irene-Wakonda 0

Chester 40, Garretson 0

Corsica/Stickney 60, Gayville-Volin High School 30

DeSmet 40, Castlewood 12

Dell Rapids St. Mary 38, Waverly-South Shore 12

Deubrook 22, Estelline/Hendricks 6

Deuel 26, Clark/Willow Lake 8

Elk Point-Jefferson 48, Parker 6

Faulkton 24, Ipswich 6

Flandreau 14, McCook Central/Montrose 0

Freeman/ Marion/ Freeman Academy Co-op 56, Burke 19

Hamlin 54, Florence/Henry 0

Hitchcock-Tulare 50, Northwestern 0

Howard 26, Hanson 0

Leola/Frederick 26, Herreid/Selby Area 0

Lyman 36, Jones County 16

Parkston 60, Kimball/White Lake 14

Potter County 68, Newell 30

Rapid City Christian 44, Lead-Deadwood 0

Stanley County 42, Sully Buttes 20

Timber Lake 32, Lemmon/McIntosh 6

Viborg-Hurley 54, Sunshine Bible Academy 0

Wagner 39, Miller/Highmore-Harrold 28

Webster 20, Mobridge-Pollock 6

Winner 8, Tri-Valley 0, 3OT

Wolsey-Wessington 50, Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op 0

Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central 36, Mt. Vernon/Plankinton 8

Some high school football scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

Natural history museum closes because of chemicals in taxidermy collection

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — A South Dakota museum has closed after almost 40 years over concerns that the chemicals in its taxidermy collection could endanger visitors and staff, the affiliated zoo announced Thursday.

The Great Plains Zoo said Thursday that it has closed the Delbridge Museum of Natural History in Sioux Falls. The zoo's CEO Becky Dewitz said strong chemicals were used in the taxidermy process and that tests found detectable levels of those chemicals in the museum, KELO-TV reported. It wasn't an easy

decision to close the museum but it's the right one, she said.

"The specimens were harvested in the 1940s through the 1970s. Prior to the 1980s, it was common to use strong chemicals in the taxidermy process all over the world for preservation of the hides," the zoo said in a statement on its website.

The museum's collection of animals on display was one of the largest in the region. Sioux Falls businessman Henry Brockhouse assembled the collection that includes animals from six continents over several decades. Photos of the collection show an elephant, giraffe, rhinoceros, zebras and other animals.

Sioux Falls attorney C.J. Delbridge bought the collection in 1981 and donated it to the city to establish the Delbridge Museum of Natural History in 1984.

"As the specimens continue to age, there is more potential for chemical exposure," it added. "Out of an abundance of caution," the city and zoo decided to decommission the collection. Dewitz said this process will take a long time because a number of the animals are now endangered and protected under federal law.

The zoo and city will work with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to safely dispose of the taxidermy mounts, a process that is expected to take several months.

A scramble of last-ditch diplomacy aims at finding a peaceful solution to Niger's deepening crisis

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — A delegation from regional nations is expected to arrive in Niger in a last-ditch diplomacy effort to reach a peaceful solution with mutinous soldiers who ousted the country's president last month.

The representatives from the West African regional bloc, ECOWAS, could arrive in the capital, Niamey, as early as Saturday and would join efforts by United Nations Special Representative for West Africa and the Sahel, Leonardo Santos Simao, who came on Friday, in trying to facilitate a resolution to the ongoing crisis.

On Friday U.N. spokesman, Stephane Dujarric, said Simao would meet with the junta and other parties to try and facilitate a swift and peaceful resolution to Niger's crisis.

"What we want to see is a return to the constitutional order. We want to see the liberation of the president and his family and restoration of his legitimate authority," he said.

ECOWAS ordered the deployment of a "standby force" on August 10 to restore constitutional rule in the country.

The soldiers who overthrew Niger's democratically elected President Mohamed Bazoum in July have quickly entrenched themselves in power, rebuffed most dialogue efforts and kept Bazoum, his wife and son under house arrest in the capital.

On Friday, ECOWAS commissioner for peace and security, Abdel-Fatau Musah said 11 of its 15 member states agreed to commit troops to a military deployment saying they were "ready to go" whenever the order was given.

The 11 countries don't include Niger itself and the bloc's three other countries under military rule following coups: Guinea, Mali and Burkina Faso. The latter two have warned they would consider any intervention in Niger an act of war. On Friday, Niger's state television said that Mali and Burkina Faso had dispatched warplanes in a show of solidarity to the country.

Friday's announcement is the latest in a series of empty threats by ECOWAS to forcefully restore democratic rule in Niger, say conflict analysts.

Immediately after the coup, the bloc gave the junta seven days to release and restore Bazoum, a deadline that came and went with no action.

"The putschists won't be holding their breath this time over the renewed threat of military action," said Ulf Laessing, head of the Sahel program at the Konrad Adenauer Foundation, a think tank. Meanwhile, the mutinous soldiers are cementing their rule and appointing loyal commanders to key units while ECOWAS has no experience with military action in hostile territory and would have no local support if it tried to intervene, he said.

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"Niger is a very fragile country that can easily turn, in case of a military intervention, into a failed state like Sudan," said Laessing.

ECOWAS used force to restore order in member countries in 2017 in Gambia after longtime President Yahya Jammeh refused to step down after he lost the presidential election. But even in that case, the move had involved diplomatic efforts led by then-presidents of Mauritania and Guinea while Jammeh appeared to be acting on his own after the Gambian army pledged allegiance to the winner of the election, Adama Barrow.

But many residents in the capital say they're preparing to fight back against a forceful ECOWAS intervention.

On Saturday, thousands of people in Niamey lined up outside the main stadium to register as volunteers, fighters and to help with other needs in case the junta requires support. Some parents brought their children to sign up, others said they'd been waiting since 3 a.m, while groups of youth boisterously chanted in favor of the junta and against ECOWAS and the country's former colonial ruler France.

"I am here for the recruitment to become a good soldier. We are all here for that," said Ismail Hassan a resident waiting in line to register. "If God wills, we will all go," he said.

Events organizer Amsarou Bako claimed that the junta was not involved in finding volunteers to defend the coup, although it is aware of the initiative.

The humanitarian situation in the country is also on the agenda of the U.N.'s West Africa and Sahel special representative.

Before the coup, nearly 3 million people were facing severe food insecurity and hundreds of thousands were internally displaced, according to CARE, an international aid group. Economic and travel sanctions imposed by ECOWAS after the coup coupled with the deteriorating security will have dire consequences for the population, the group said.

Before, Western countries saw Niger as one of the last democratic nations it could partner with to beat back a growing jihadi insurgency linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group and have poured millions of dollars of military aid and assistance into shoring up Niger's forces.

Since the coup, former jihadis told The Associated Press that militants have been taking advantage of the freedom of movement caused by suspended military operations by the French and the U.S. and a distracted Nigerien army that is focusing efforts on the capital.

Last week, at least 17 soldiers were killed and 20 injured during an ambush by jihadis. It was the first major attack against Niger's army in six months. A day later, at least 50 civilians were killed in the Tillaberi region, by extremists believed to be members of the Islamic State group, according to an internal security report for aid groups seen by the AP.

"While Niger's leaders are consumed by politics in the capital, the drumbeat of lethal jihadist attacks goes on in the countryside," said Corinne Dufka a political analyst who specializes in the Sahel region.

"The recent attacks should motivate all parties to work for as speedy and inclusive a transition as possible so they can get back to the crucial business of protecting civilians from the devastating consequences of war. In due time, Nigeriens and her partners should look long and hard at why and how democracy in Niger faltered," she said.

Chinese military launches drills around Taiwan as a 'warning' after a top island official went to US
BEIJING (AP) — The Chinese military launched drills around Taiwan on Saturday as a "stern warning" over what it called collusion between "separatists and foreign forces," its defense ministry said, days after the island's vice president stopped over in the United States.

Taiwanese Vice President William Lai's recent trip to Paraguay to reinforce relations with his government's last diplomatic partner in South America included stops in San Francisco and New York City. The mainland's ruling Communist Party claims democratic Taiwan as part of its territory and says it has no right to conduct foreign relations.

A spokesperson for China's Eastern Theater Command said in a brief statement that the military exercises involved the coordination of vessels and planes and their ability to seize control of air and sea spaces.

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It was also testing the forces' "actual combat capabilities," Shi Yi said. The drills in the waters and airspace to the north and southwest of Taiwan were a warning over provocations from pro-Taiwan independence forces and foreign forces, he added.

The command released footage of the drills online that showed soldiers running, as well as military boats and planes.

State media CCTV reported that missile-equipped boats and fighter jets were involved in the operation and that units worked together to simulate the surrounding of Taiwan.

Taiwan's defense ministry said on the social media platform X, formerly known as Twitter, that its forces detected 42 Chinese military aircraft starting from 9 a.m. on Saturday. It said 26 of them crossed the mid-line of the Taiwan Strait, an unofficial boundary considered a buffer between the island and the mainland. Eight vessels also took part in the joint combat patrol, it said.

Taiwan deployed aircraft and vessels and activated land-based missile systems in response to the drills and was closely monitoring the situation, the ministry said.

The ministry also strongly condemned what it called the "irrational, provocative moves" in a separate statement. It said its military would stand ready in the face of the threats posted by the Chinese army, adding that its forces have "the ability, determination and confidence to safeguard national security."

It posted a video on Facebook that showed previous military drills and said the Chinese military exercises reflected a militaristic mentality.

Taiwan and China split in 1949 following a civil war that ended with the ruling Communist Party in control of the mainland. The self-ruled island has never been part of the People's Republic of China, but Beijing sees Taiwan as a breakaway province to be retaken by force if necessary.

China's official Xinhua news agency on Saturday reported that an unnamed official in China's Taiwan Work Office strongly condemned what it called further collusion between Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party and the U.S. and said it was a "new provocative move."

The official pointed to the stopovers in the U.S., an interview Lai gave to news outlet Bloomberg and his meeting with U.S. officials in Paraguay, the report said. The official said Lai had used "Taiwan independence" rhetoric in the interview.

The official also accused Lai of using his stopovers in the U.S. to sell out the interests of Taiwan to seek gains in the island's election, and described him as a "troublemaker who will push Taiwan to the dangerous brink of war," the report added.

Lai is his party's candidate for the 2024 presidential election in January.

Taiwan's foreign minister, Joseph Wu, wrote on the X platform that China "has made it clear it wants to shape" the island's national election, and attached the command's statement and the Xinhua report in his post. "It's up to our citizens to decide, not the bully next door," he wrote.

China's largest military drills in recent years were in response to former U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan last August. It fired missiles over the island in a significant escalation and the military exercises disrupted trade lanes in the Taiwan Strait and forced airplanes to reroute their flights.

In April, Chinese forces held large-scale combat readiness drills in the air and waters around Taiwan in response to President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with current U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy.

Zelenskyy visits NATO candidate Sweden for 1st time since full-scale war with Russia

STOCKHOLM (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is visiting Sweden on Saturday — his first visit to the country since Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine last year, the Swedish government said.

It said Zelenskyy will meet Swedish government officials in Harpsund, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of Stockholm. He will also meet Sweden's King Carl XVI Gustaf and Queen Silvia at a palace in the area.

Sweden abandoned its longstanding policy of military nonalignment to support Ukraine with weapons and other aid in the war against Russia. It also applied for NATO membership but is still waiting to join the alliance.

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Meanwhile, Russian President Vladimir Putin visited top military officials in the Russian city of Rostov-on-Don near the Ukrainian border.

The Kremlin said that Putin listened to reports from Valery Gerasimov, the commander in charge of Moscow's operations in Ukraine, and other top military brass at the headquarters of Russia's Southern Military District.

The exact timings of his visit were not confirmed, but state media published video footage that appeared to be filmed at night, showing Gerasimov greeting Putin and leading him into a building. The meeting itself was held behind closed doors.

Putin's visit was the first since the Wagner mercenary group's attempted mutiny in June, which saw the group's fighters briefly take control of Rostov-on-Don.

During June's short-lived revolt, Wagner head Yevgeny Prigozhin repeatedly denounced Gerasimov, who serves as chief of the general staff of the Russian armed forces, and Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu for denying supplies to his fighters in Ukraine.

Prigozhin claimed that the uprising was not aimed at Putin but at removing Gerasimov and other top brass who he claimed were mismanaging the war in Ukraine.

Ukraine this week has claimed counteroffensive gains on the southeastern front, regaining control of the village of Urozhaine in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region on Wednesday.

The leader of the Russian battalion fighting to maintain control of Urozhaine called for "freezing the front" on Thursday, claiming his troops "cannot win" against Ukraine.

"Can we bring down Ukraine militarily? Now and in the near future, no," Alexander Khodakovsky said in a video posted to Telegram.

Overnight into Saturday, Ukraine's air force said, it shot down 15 out of 17 Russian drones targeting Ukraine's northern, central and western regions.

The deputy governor of the western Khmelnytskyi region, Serhii Tiurin, said two people were wounded and dozens of buildings damaged by an attack.

In the northwestern Zhytomyr region, a Russian drone attack targeted an infrastructure facility and caused a fire, but no casualties were reported, said Gov. Vitalii Bunechko.

Maui town ravaged by fire will 'rise again,' Hawaii governor says of long recovery ahead

By BOBBY CAINA CALVAN, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press LAHAINA, Hawaii (AP) — Hawaii Gov. Josh Green said Friday that what's rebuilt from the ashes of the devastating wildfires on Maui will be determined by the people.

"Lahaina will rise again," Green said during a livestreamed evening address from Honolulu. The seaside town will be rebuilt as a living memorial to those lost — a number that increased by three on Friday to 114 — while preserving and protecting Native Hawaiian culture, he said.

His wife, Jaime Kanani Green, stood next to him and cried as she described Lahaina as a vibrant community rich in history and culture.

"Tragically it took less than a single day for us to lose Lahaina in the deadliest fire our country has seen in more than a century," she said.

Native Hawaiians and others from Lahaina said earlier Friday they worry Hawaii's governor is moving too quickly to rebuild what was lost while the grief is still raw.

"The fire occurred only 10 days ago, and many people are still in shock and mourning," Tiare Lawrence, who grew up in Lahaina, said at an emotional news conference organized by community activists.

They called on Green to give residents time to grieve, provide community leaders with recovery decision-making roles and comply with open-records laws amid distrust in the government response to the disaster.

In Green's address, he attempted to allay their concerns, while noting that rebuilding will take years of work and billions of dollars.

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"Let me be clear," he said. "Lahaina belongs to its people and we are committed to rebuilding and restoring it the way they want."

Earlier this week, Green said he would announce details of a moratorium on land transactions in Lahaina to prevent people from falling victim to land grabs. But his Friday address didn't provide details, other than saying he directed the state attorney general to "impose enhanced criminal penalties on anyone who tries to take advantage of victims by acquiring property in the affected areas."

Since the flames consumed much of Lahaina, locals have feared a rebuilt town could become even more oriented toward wealthy visitors.

"The governor should not rush to rebuild the community without first giving people time to heal, especially without including the community itself in the planning," Lawrence said. "Fast-track development cannot come at the cost of community control."

The coalition of activists, under the umbrella of a group calling itself "Na Ohana o Lele: Lahaina," were especially concerned about the impact of development on the environment and noted how mismanagement of resources — particularly land and water — contributed to the quick spread of the fire.

There was no word Friday on who would replace the Maui Emergency Management Agency administrator who abruptly resigned after defending a decision not to sound outdoor sirens during the fire.

Herman Andaya had said this week that he had no regrets about not deploying the system because he feared it could have caused people to go "mauka," a Hawaiian term that can mean toward the mountains or inland.

"If that was the case, then they would have gone into the fire," Andaya explained. He stepped down Thursday, a day later.

Andaya's resignation letter was brief and had no mention of the health reasons that county officials cited for his resignation.

"I appreciated the opportunity to head this agency for the last 6 years," he wrote. "I have enjoyed working for the agency and am grateful for the support provided me during my tenure as administrator."

The county released Andaya's resignation letter Friday after The Associated Press requested a copy.

The decision to not use the sirens, coupled with water shortages that hampered firefighters and an escape route clogged with vehicles that were overrun by flames, has brought intense criticism.

While crews sifted through ashes and rubble in Lahaina, scenes of normalcy continued in other parts of Maui, even if the tragedy hung heavy over the island.

Off the coast of Kihei on Friday morning, a holiday marking Hawaii's statehood, paddlers in outrigger canoes glided through Maalaea Bay about 20 miles (32 kilometers) south of Lahaina. Fishermen cast their lines from knee-deep water. And beachgoers strolled along the sand.

Green reiterated a plea for visitors not to go to West Maui. "However, all other areas of Maui and the rest of Hawaii are safe and open to visitors and continue to welcome and encourage travel to our beautiful state, which will support the local economy and speed the recovery of those who have already suffered so much," he said.

More than 60% of the disaster area had been searched, Green said Friday, adding that he expects the number of dead to increase each day of the search.

Six forensic anthropologists with the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency are assisting in gathering and identifying human remains, the Pentagon said in a statement Friday. The group is experienced in verifying DNA from long-lost service members, many of whom died as long ago as World War II.

The lack of sirens has emerged as a potential misstep, part of a series of communication issues that added to the chaos, according to reporting by The Associated Press.

Hawaii has what it touts as the largest system of outdoor alert sirens in the world, created after a 1946 tsunami that killed more than 150 on the Big Island. Its website says they may be used to alert for fires.

Hawaii Attorney General Anne Lopez said earlier Thursday that an outside organization will conduct "an impartial, independent" review of the government's response.

The cause of the wildfires is under investigation. But Hawaii is increasingly at risk from disasters, with wildfire rising fastest, according to an AP analysis of FEMA records.

"We will get to the bottom of exactly how the fire started, how our emergency procedures and protocols need to be strengthened, how we can improve our defenses to protect us in the future," Green said.

Corrine Hussey Nobriga said it was hard to lay blame for a tragedy that took everyone by surprise, even if some of her neighbors raised questions about the absence of sirens and inadequate evacuation routes.

The fire moved quickly through her neighborhood, though her home was spared.

"One minute we saw the fire over there," she said, pointing toward faraway hills, "and the next minute it's consuming all these houses."

Authorities hope to empty crowded, uncomfortable group shelters by early next week, said Brad Kiersman, vice president for disaster operations with the American Red Cross. Hotels also are available for eligible evacuees who have been sleeping in cars or camping in parking lots, he said.

Contracts with the hotels will last for at least seven months but could easily be extended, he said. Service providers at the properties will offer meals, counseling, financial assistance and other disaster aid.

The governor has said at least 1,000 hotel rooms will be set aside. In addition, Airbnb said its nonprofit wing will provide properties for 1,000 people.

Ernesto and Adoracion Garcia, who moved from the Philippines a decade ago, joined a dozen other relatives in two time-share apartments at the Hyatt Regency in Kaanapali after being left homeless by the fire.

They were thankful that they would no longer be staying at shelters, after fleeing the flames.

Green, who was an emergency room doctor before becoming governor, described meeting survivors. He said one woman was seven months pregnant and told him she's not sure how she'll make it to her next medical appointment.

"Tears in her eyes," Green recalled, "she told me she intends to name her baby Faith."

Rail whistleblowers fired for voicing safety concerns despite efforts to end practice of retaliation

By JOSH FUNK AP Business Writer

OMAHA, Neb. (AP) — Hours before a Norfolk Southern train derailed in Ohio and erupted in fire in February, a judge ruled a former railroad employee could proceed with a lawsuit claiming he had been harassed for years by managers who said he reported too many flaws in rail cars he inspected and had his job changed after reporting an injury.

Richard Singleton's case against Norfolk Southern was settled for an undisclosed amount after the judge said he had enough evidence to go to trial over whether he was disciplined for reporting safety violations that slowed trains passing through a Macon, Georgia, railyard.

The settlement provided relief for Singleton, but does little for residents near East Palestine, Ohio, who worry about possible health effects from the accident's toxic blaze. That derailment and others since inspired nationwide fears about railroad safety.

Lawyers and unions representing rail workers say there is an industry-wide pattern of retaliation against workers like Singleton who report safety violations or injuries. They contend workers often run afoul of managers who don't want to jeopardize their bonuses, and retaliation discourages other workers from speaking up.

Rail safety has been in the spotlight since the Feb. 3 Ohio derailment, with Congress and regulators proposing reforms. But little has changed, apart from railroads promising to install 1,000 more trackside detectors to spot mechanical problems and reevaluate their responses to alerts from those devices.

"Since Wall Street took them over, railroads have put productivity ahead of safety," lawyer Nick Thompson argued earlier this year on behalf of a fired engineer. He pointed to recent derailments in Ohio and Raymond, Minnesota. "People are being killed, towns are being evacuated, rivers are being poisoned, all in the name of profit."

The railroads are working to eliminate such practices with policies prohibiting retaliation and myriad ways for workers fearful of retribution to report safety concerns, either directly to a manager or anonymously through an internal hotline.

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Statistics from the Occupational Health and Safety Administration show the number of single-year whistleblower complaints filed against big railroads declined from the 218 reported in 2018 to 96 last year.

"I have zero tolerance for retaliation. And I've made that very clear. And in fact, the culture that we're creating at Norfolk Southern is one of transparency and one in which people are encouraged to raise their hand and say they've got an issue," CEO Alan Shaw said.

Other major railroads, including BNSF, Union Pacific, CPKC, Canadian National and CSX, echoed that sentiment in statements and said they encourage employees to report safety concerns.

Whistleblower cases represent a small fraction of the workforce numbering more than 100,000 nationwide. But even a handful of cases can instill fear among employees and have a chilling effect on safety reporting.

Long before Mike Ratigan was fired from CSX in New York last year after refusing to help circumvent federal safety standards or ignore railcar flaws, he said he saw other workers sanctioned. Those disciplinary cases became a "deer head" for managers: a trophy that sent a clear message.

"It says, if we can do it to him, we can do it to you," Ratigan said.

OSHA says 793 whistleblower complaints were filed between 2018 and the end of July, with Norfolk Southern leading all railroads with 257. Union Pacific and CSX weren't far behind with nearly 200 complaints apiece, while another 113 were reported at BNSF. The numbers are much smaller at the Canadian railroads partly because much of their operations are north of the border.

More than half of the complaints were dismissed after OSHA reviews. But that doesn't tell the full story because some dismissed cases become federal lawsuits that can lead to multimillion-dollar judgments against railroads. OSHA's decisions also can be appealed, with 87 cases settled before OSHA decided if they had merit.

The Associated Press reviewed dozens of whistleblower cases and found a similar pattern. When they weren't bound by confidential settlement agreements, former railroad workers discussed how managers didn't want them to report too many safety violations because they would slow trains. Some ex-employees prevailed in court, but they all faced tough battles against massive companies with billions of dollars in annual profits and armies of lawyers.

Mike Elliott was fired in 2011 after he went to the Federal Railroad Administration with safety concerns other workers reported to him in his capacity as Washington state's top safety official with the Brotherhood of Locomotive Engineers and Trainmen union. The FRA responded with a special inspection that found 357 defects, angering his BNSF bosses.

One of his managers confronted Elliott in the parking lot and jumped on the hood of his car, claiming Elliott punched him and tried to run him down. Elliott said he was acquitted of those allegations in a criminal case, but ultimately was fired.

That started a yearslong court fight that included countless motions and a six-day trial before a jury awarded him \$1.25 million and approved \$500,000 in legal fees. After an appeal to the 9th Circuit, the railroad finally paid him in 2018.

"It's a never-ending battle. They have the best lawyers. They have the best lobbyists and they have a lot of lobbyists. They have a lot of money, and you're up against it," Elliott said.

Dale Gourneau had a reputation as a "tenacious safety advocate" who may have written more "bad order" tags listing defects on railcars than anyone else in the Mandan, North Dakota, railyard where he worked for 18 years.

Gourneau pressed his managers to stop blocking employees from applying for corporate BNSF bonuses for finding broken railcar wheels. Not long after, he was written up for failing to properly stop his ATV before crossing the tracks in 2019. He was fired a few months later after the company alleged he violated the same rule a second time, even though he claimed to have followed the common practice of stopping several feet short of the tracks to avoid another set of tracks.

An administrative law judge ruled this spring that the discipline Gourneau received was merely pretext his managers conjured to fire him. The judge ordered BNSF to reinstate Gourneau and pay him \$578,659 in back pay and penalties.

BNSF is appealing and declined to comment on specific cases.

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For rail car inspector John Fulk, the situation got so bad that in 2011 he shot himself in the head in the parking lot of his workplace at a North Carolina Norfolk Southern railyard. His widow successfully argued in court that after being berated by managers for flagging too many cars for repairs, Fulk killed himself rather than face a disciplinary hearing and possible firing on trumped-up charges of trying to sabotage a train's braking system.

Fulk's case was allowed to move forward because he started the complaint process with regulators before his death. FRA investigators found numerous rule violations and his former coworkers told them Fulk had repeatedly been targeted by managers. But court documents say none of them would sign witness statements because they feared retribution. Norfolk Southern settled in 2015.

"Because of his adherence to FRA regulations, Mr. Fulk was subjected to abusive intimidation, disciplinary threats, and job threats by Norfolk Southern management," U.S. District Judge William Osteen wrote. "Although he reported these acts and omissions, Norfolk Southern never took action to stop such treatment."

City empties as thousands flee wildfire burning near capital of Canada's Northwest Territories

By TAMMY WEBBER and JIM MORRIS Associated Press

VANCOUVER, British Columbia (AP) — Residents heeded warnings to evacuate the capital of Canada's Northwest Territories as a large wildfire burned just outside the city of 20,000 Friday, while firefighters battled a growing fire that set homes ablaze in a city in British Columbia.

Thousands of people in Yellowknife drove hundreds of kilometers (miles) to safety, with authorities guiding motorists through fire zones, while others waited in long lines for emergency flights as the worst fire season on record in Canada showed no signs of easing.

Airtankers flew missions to keep the only route out of Yellowknife open. Meanwhile, a network of fire guards, sprinklers and water cannons was established to try to protect the city from the fire.

Fire Information Officer Mike Westwick told The Associated Press by phone Friday evening that the fire did not advance Friday and was still 15 kilometers (9 miles) northwest of the city, partly because cooler temperatures created less fire activity and cleared some smoke, allowing air tankers to safely fly and drop fire retardant.

Even so, "we've got the wrong kind of wind" in the forecast — gusty and from the west and northwest — and no rain, Westwick warned.

Shane Thompson, the territory's minister of environment and natural resources, said more than 19,000 people had left Yellowknife in less than 48 hours. About 15,000 went by car and 3,800 flew out.

"This is an amazing achievement to evacuate so many people safely," he said.

The fire, caused by lightning more than a month ago, is about 1,670 square kilometers (644 square miles) and "not going away anytime soon," Westwick said, adding that the blaze had jumped three different containment lines, fueled by dry weather and dense forests.

Gas stations that still had fuel were open Friday, though the city was virtually empty, with one grocery store, a pharmacy and a bar still open.

"It's kind of like having a pint at the end of the world," said Kieron Testart, who went door-to-door in the nearby First Nation communities of Dettah and NDilo to check on people. Indigenous communities have been hit hard by the wildfires, which threaten important cultural activities such as hunting, fishing and gathering native plants.

Hundreds of kilometers (miles) south of Yellowknife, homes were burning in West Kelowna, British Columbia, a city of about 38,000, after a wildfire grew "exponentially worse" than expected overnight, the fire chief said.

Premier David Eby declared a state of emergency for the province because of the rapidly evolving wildfire situation.

"We are in for an extremely challenging situation in the days ahead," Eby said at a new conference Friday

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evening.

He said the decree would give authorities a number of legal tools, including the power to prevent people from traveling into dangerous areas and ensure access to accommodations for evacuees and heavy equipment for fighting the fires.

Residents in West Kelowna had already been ordered to evacuate 2,400 properties, while an additional 4,800 properties were on evacuation alert. The BC Wildfire Service said the fire grew six times larger overnight and it stretched over 68 square kilometers (26 square miles).

Some first responders became trapped while rescuing people who failed to evacuate, said Jason Brolund, chief of the West Kelowna fire department, who said residents face another "scary night." There was no known loss of life.

"There were a number of risks taken to save lives and property last night," Brolund said at a news conference, describing how first responders had to rescue people who jumped into a lake to avoid the flames. "It didn't have to be that way."

Bowinn Ma, the province's minister of emergency management, said at a news briefing Friday afternoon that "we are still faced with great challenges."

"I was deeply horrified to witness the distressing images emerging from West Kelowna," she said. "The past 24 hours have been incredibly challenging for the people across the province."

In Yellowknife, emergency officials worried that conditions could change and propel the fire — one of hundreds raging in the territory — to the city limits.

Mayor Rebecca Alty said she understands the emotional roller-coaster being experienced by the city's residents.

"Unfortunately, the journey isn't done yet," she said. "The fire continues to approach and the uncertainty of when you'll be able to return will be difficult."

Alice Liske left Yellowknife by road with her six kids earlier this week because the air quality was so bad. She had worried if so many people could flee the city in such a short time.

"Not only that," she said, "but when we go back, what will be there for us?"

Canada has seen a record number of wildfires this year — contributing to choking smoke in parts of the U.S. — with more than 5,700 fires burning more than 137,000 square kilometers (53,000 square miles) from one end of Canada to the other, according to the Canadian Interagency Forest Fire Centre.

As of Friday morning, more than 1,000 wildfires were burning across the country, over half of them out of control.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau met with his incident response group Thursday. He asked ministers to work to ensure communication services remained available and said there would be no tolerance for price gouging on flights or essential goods.

About 6,800 people in eight other communities in the Northwest Territories had already evacuated their homes, including the small community of Enterprise, which was largely destroyed. Officials said everyone made it out alive.

A woman whose family evacuated the town of Hay River on Sunday told CBC that their vehicle began to melt as they drove through embers, the front window cracked and the vehicle filled with smoke that made it difficult to see the road ahead.

"I was obviously scared the tire was going to break, our car was going to catch on fire and then it went from just embers to full smoke," said Lisa Mundy, who was traveling with her husband and their 6-year-old and 18-month-old children. She said they called 911 after they drove into the ditch a couple of times.

She said her son kept saying: "I don't want to die, mommy."

Thousands under evacuation orders and some homes burn as wildfires race through Washington state

SPOKANE, Wash. (AP) — Fast-moving wildfires raced through Washington state on Friday, burning some homes and prompting evacuation orders for thousands of people in small rural communities.

One of the largest blazes, the so-called Gray Fire near Spokane in eastern Washington, began around noon and a few hours later had surged through 4.7 square miles (12 square kilometers) of grass, timber and wheat, pushed by 35-mph (56-kph) winds, according to the Washington State Department of Natural Resources.

Level 3, or "Go Now," evacuations were issued for Medical Lake, a community of about 4,800 people and some homes and other buildings had burned, authorities said, although it wasn't clear how many.

National Guard troops were called in to help evacuate patients and staff from Eastern State Hospital, a 367-bed psychiatric facility in Medical Lake.

Spokane County Sheriff John Nowels said deputies were "running from house to house" urging people to leave their homes, NBC News reported.

"We've had to rescue people by boat. We've had to rescue people by helicopter," Nowels said. "If you're in an evacuation area, leave. We have some folks who refused to leave. Fire then overtakes where they're at and they need to be rescued."

Evacuation orders also were issued for nearby Four Lakes, which has about 500 residents and a Level 2 evacuation alert, urging people to "Get Set" to evacuate, was issued Friday night for the city of Cheney, which has more than 13,000 residents. The alert included staff and students at Eastern Washington University, which is located in Cheney.

A second Spokane County blaze dubbed the Oregon Road Fire also prompted evacuations, the Department of Natural Resources said.

That fire broke out near Elk at around 4 p.m. and in only a few hours grew to some 3 square miles (8 square kilometers).

The region was scorched by triple-digit temperatures last week, leaving grasslands and wheat fields ready to burn, said Joe Smillie, spokesperson for the Department of Natural Resources.

"We haven't had any real rain all summer, basically," he said, and then a cooler weather front moved in Thursday, bringing with it gusty winds.

The National Weather Service had warned of "critical fire conditions," citing dry conditions and the potential for gusty winds that could cause new or existing fires to spread rapidly.

Authorities were calling in more aircraft and firefighters to battle the Gray Fire, which closed down Interstate 90.

South of Spokane, the Winona Fire in Whitman County had burned at least 7.8 square miles (20.2 square kilometers) of grass and brush and prompted evacuation orders for Winona, a tiny hamlet of about 50 residents.

"Cropland, range land, primary structure and secondary structures are threatened," the Department of Natural Resources said on social media.

The fires were among 36 blazes that erupted around the state in the past two days, although most were small and quickly contained, Smillie said.

There wasn't any immediate word on what sparked the blazes.

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rainfall record, said meteorologist Jeff Masters of Yale Climate Connections and a former government in-flight hurricane meteorologist.

President Joe Biden said the Federal Emergency Management Agency had pre-positioned staff and supplies in the region.

"I urge everyone, everyone in the path of this storm, to take precautions and listen to the guidance of state and local officials," Biden told reporters Friday at Camp David, where he is meeting with the leaders of Japan and South Korea.

Deputies with the Los Angeles Sheriff's Department announced warnings over public address systems and urged homeless people living in riverbeds and other potentially dangerous areas to move into shelters before the storm hits.

Authorities in the city were also helping arrange food, cots and shelters for people who needed them, officials said at an afternoon news conference.

Janice Hahn, chair of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors, said planning had been underway for several days, which included evacuation plans for the tourist destination of Santa Catalina Island, off the coast.

"I don't think any of us — I know me particularly — never thought I'd be standing here talking about a hurricane or a tropical storm," Hahn said.

Officials in Southern California were also re-enforcing sand berms, built to protect low-lying coastal communities against winter surf, like in Huntington Beach, which dubs itself as "Surf City USA."

In nearby Newport Beach, Tanner Atkinson waited in a line of vehicles for free sandbags at a city distribution point.

"I mean a lot of people here are excited because the waves are gonna get pretty heavy," Atkinson said. "But I mean, it's gonna be some rain, so usually there's some flooding and the landslides and things like that."

SpaceX delayed the launch of a satellite-carrying rocket from a base on California's central coast until at least Monday. The company said conditions in the Pacific could make it difficult for a ship to recover the rocket booster.

Storms don't usually hit Southern California because prevailing winds usually push them either due west into open ocean or northeastward into Mexico and other parts of the U.S. Southwest, according to experts.

"Almost all of them just go out to sea. That's why we never hear about them," said Kerry Emanuel, a hurricane professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

That's unlikely to happen with Hilary mostly because of a high pressure heat dome that is expected to bring triple digit heat indices in the Midwest and block the eastern turn, Masters said.

Michael Jackson sexual abuse lawsuits revived by appeals court

By ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — A California appeals court on Friday revived lawsuits from two men who allege Michael Jackson sexually abused them for years when they were boys.

A three-judge panel from California's 2nd District Court of Appeal found that the lawsuits of Wade Robson and James Safechuck should not have been dismissed by a lower court, and that the men can validly claim that the two Jackson-owned corporations that were named as defendants in the cases had a responsibility to protect them. A new California law that temporarily broadened the scope of sexual abuse cases enabled the appeals court to restore them.

It's the second time the lawsuits — brought by Robson in 2013 and Safechuck the following year — have been brought back after dismissal. The two men became more widely known for telling their stories in the 2019 HBO documentary "Leaving Neverland."

A judge who dismissed the suits in 2021 found that the corporations, MJJ Productions Inc. and MJJ Ventures Inc., could not be expected to function like the Boy Scouts or a church where a child in their care could expect their protection. Jackson, who died in 2009, was the sole owner and only shareholder

in the companies.

The higher court judges disagreed, writing that "a corporation that facilitates the sexual abuse of children by one of its employees is not excused from an affirmative duty to protect those children merely because it is solely owned by the perpetrator of the abuse."

They added that "it would be perverse to find no duty based on the corporate defendant having only one shareholder. And so we reverse the judgments entered for the corporations."

Jonathan Steinsapir, attorney for the Jackson estate, said they were "disappointed."

"Two distinguished trial judges repeatedly dismissed these cases on numerous occasions over the last decade because the law required it," Steinsapir said in an email to The Associated Press. "We remain fully confident that Michael is innocent of these allegations, which are contrary to all credible evidence and independent corroboration, and which were only first made years after Michael's death by men motivated solely by money."

Vince Finaldi, an attorney for Robson and Safechuck, said in an email that they were "pleased but not surprised" that the court overturned the previous judge's "incorrect rulings in these cases, which were against California law and would have set a dangerous precedent that endangered children throughout state and country. We eagerly look forward to a trial on the merits."

Steinsapir had argued for the defense in July that it does not make sense that employees would be legally required to stop the behavior of their boss.

"It would require low-level employees to confront their supervisor and call them pedophiles," Steinsapir said.

Holly Boyer, another attorney for Robson and Safechuck, countered that the boys "were left alone in this lion's den by the defendant's employees. An affirmative duty to protect and to warn is correct."

Steinsapir said evidence that has been gathered in the cases, which have not reached trial, showed that the parents had no expectation of Jackson's employees to act as monitors.

"They were not looking to Michael Jackson's companies for protection from Michael Jackson," the lawyer argued said.

But in a concurring opinion issued with Friday's decision, one of the panelists, Associate Justice John Shepard Wiley Jr., wrote that "to treat Jackson's wholly-owned instruments as different from Jackson himself is to be mesmerized by abstractions. This is not an alter ego case. This is a same ego case."

The judges did not rule on the truth of the allegations themselves. That will be the subject of a forthcoming jury trial in Los Angeles.

"We trust that the truth will ultimately prevail with Michael's vindication yet again," Steinsapir said Friday.

Robson, now a 40-year-old choreographer, met Jackson when he was 5 years old. He went on to appear in three Jackson music videos.

His lawsuit alleged that Jackson molested him over a seven-year period.

Safechuck, now 45, said in his suit that he was 9 when he met Jackson while filming a Pepsi commercial. He said Jackson called him often and lavished him with gifts before moving on to sexually abusing him.

The Associated Press does not typically name people who say they were victims of sexual abuse. But Robson and Safechuck have come forward and approved of the use of their identities.

The men's lawsuits had already bounced back from a 2017 dismissal, when Young threw them out for being beyond the statute of limitations. Jackson's personal estate — the assets he left after his death — was thrown out as a defendant in 2015.

San Francisco launches driverless bus service following robotaxi expansion

By TERRY CHEA Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — First came the robotaxis. Then the driverless buses arrived.

San Francisco has launched an autonomous shuttle service -- less than a week after California regulators approved the expansion of robotaxis despite traffic and safety concerns.

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The free shuttle will run daily in a fixed route called the Loop around Treasure Island, the site of a former U.S. Navy base in the middle of San Francisco Bay. The Loop makes seven stops, connecting residential neighborhoods with stores and community centers. About 2,000 people live on the island.

The all-electric vehicle, which doesn't have a driver's seat or steering wheel, is staffed with an attendant who can drive the bus with a handheld controller if necessary. The county is offering the shuttle service as part of a grant-funded pilot program to assess how autonomous vehicles can supplement the public transit system.

"Having the attendant on board makes everyone feel comfortable," said Tilly Chang, executive director of the San Francisco County Transportation Authority. "This is just a demonstration for now to see, what does it look like and how does it work to have a driverless shuttle in a low-volume, low-speed environment?"

San Francisco is one of a growing number of cities worldwide that are testing the safety and potential of self-driving vehicles to transform public transportation.

The shuttles are operated by Beep, an Orlando, Florida-based company that has run similar pilot programs in more than a dozen U.S. communities, including service at the Miami Zoo, Mayo Clinic and Yellowstone National Park.

"These shuttles are built for first-mile, last-mile, short connectivity routes. They're not intended to take the place of a bus system," said Beep project manager Shelley Caran. "The autonomous vehicle will have a better reaction time than a human and it will offer a more reliable service because they won't be distracted."

During a test ride Wednesday, the shuttle drove slowly and cautiously in autonomous mode. An attendant manually steered the vehicle around a utility truck that blocked part of the road.

"I didn't feel unsafe," said Dominic Lucchesi, an Oakland resident who was among the first to ride the autonomous shuttle. "I thought that it made some abrupt stops, but otherwise I felt like I was riding any other bus for the most part."

The boxy shuttle, which can sit up to 10 passengers, will operate 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. every day and circle the Loop every 20 minutes. The city has two shuttles — one can charge while the other ferries passengers.

The autonomous shuttle pilot project was launched after the California Public Utilities Commission voted to allow two rival robotaxi companies, Cruise and Waymo, to offer around-the-clock passenger service in San Francisco.

The approval came despite widespread complaints that the driverless taxis make unexpected stops, cause traffic backups and block emergency vehicles. On Wednesday, the city asked the commission to pause the robotaxi expansion.

Cruise, a subsidiary of General Motors, reported on social media that one of its robotaxis crashed into a city fire truck Thursday night, sending one passenger to the hospital.

Experts don't anticipate the same problems with driverless buses because they're expected to be staffed with drivers or attendants for the foreseeable future.

"Trained operators are going to be required even as we increase automation," said Nikolas Martelaro, autonomous-vehicle researcher at Carnegie Mellon University. "So the question there may not be how worried should someone be about losing their job versus what should they be thinking about the potential training that's required."

Autonomous driving technology could make buses safer, but requiring drivers or attendants on-board could undermine one of their perceived advantages: reduced labor costs.

"We still have to find a market for them," said Art Guzzetti, vice president at the American Public Transportation Association. "We're doing it to make the trip better, more efficient, not to take the worker's job."

A neonatal nurse in a British hospital has been found guilty of killing 7 babies

By PAN PYLAS and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A neonatal nurse in a British hospital was found guilty Friday of murdering seven babies

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and trying to kill six others during a yearlong campaign of deception that saw her prey on the vulnerabilities of sick newborns and their anxious parents.

Following 22 days of deliberation, the jury at Manchester Crown Court convicted 33-year-old Lucy Letby of killing the babies, including two triplet boys, in the neonatal unit at the Countess of Chester Hospital in northwest England between June 2015 and June 2016. She will be sentenced on Monday.

"Parents were exposed to her morbid curiosity and her fake compassion," said senior prosecutor Pascale Jones. "Too many of them returned home to empty baby rooms. Many surviving children live with permanent consequences of her assaults upon their lives."

Her attacks, Jones said, were "a complete betrayal of the trust placed in her."

Families of the victims said they will "forever be grateful" to jurors who since last October had to sit through 145 days of "grueling" evidence.

In a joint statement read outside court, they also expressed their gratitude to all those who came to give evidence during the trial, which they described as "extremely harrowing and distressing" to listen to.

"To lose a baby is a heart-breaking experience that no parent should ever have to go through, but to lose a baby or to have a baby harmed in these particular circumstances is unimaginable," they said.

Letby's motives remain unclear, but the scale of her crimes points to intricate planning.

She was accused of deliberately harming the babies in various ways, including by injecting air into their bloodstreams and administering air or milk into their stomachs via nasogastric tubes. She was also accused of poisoning infants by adding insulin to intravenous feeds and interfering with breathing tubes.

The British government launched an independent inquiry soon after the verdicts that will look into the wider circumstances around what happened at the hospital, including the handling of concerns raised by staff.

"This inquiry will seek to ensure the parents and families impacted get the answers they need," Health Secretary Steve Barclay said. "I am determined their voices are heard, and they are involved in shaping the scope of the inquiry should they wish to do so."

One of the senior doctors at the Countess of Chester Hospital told the BBC he had repeatedly tried to raise the alarm about Letby but hospital executives failed to investigate the allegations.

Dr Stephen Brearley, the lead doctor in the neonatal unit, said the hospital tried to silence doctors who complained about Letby and delayed calling the police.

The jury of seven women and four men deliberated for 22 days before reaching the verdict. One juror was excused well into deliberations for personal reasons, and the judge later gave the remaining 11 jurors the option of reaching a verdict with 10 people in agreement instead of a unanimous decision.

Letby was found guilty of the seven murders and of seven charges of attempted murder relating to six children. She was cleared of two charges of attempted murder and the jury could not reach a verdict on several others.

Some of the verdicts were announced in court earlier in the month, but the judge imposed a ban on reporting them until deliberations were complete.

During the lengthy trial, prosecutors said the hospital in 2015 started to experience a significant rise in the number of babies who were dying or suffering sudden deteriorations in their health for no apparent reason. Some suffered "serious catastrophic collapses" but survived after help from medical staff.

Letby was on duty in all the cases with prosecutors describing her as a "constant malevolent presence" in the neonatal unit when the children collapsed or died. They said the nurse harmed the babies in ways that did not leave much of a trace, and that she persuaded her colleagues that the collapses and deaths were normal.

Police launched an investigation into the baby deaths at the hospital in May 2017 and Letby was eventually charged in November 2020.

"The last thing we expected to find was a suspect responsible for these deaths and non-fatal collapses," said the senior investigating officer, Detective Superintendent Paul Hughes.

"Turning up at the home of a family who have lost a baby, grieved for their loss and are trying to move

on from that is difficult enough, but having to tell them that someone who was meant to be caring for their little one could ultimately be responsible for their death — is not an easy task,” he added.

Letby testified for 14 days, proclaiming her innocence. During the trial, the defense argued that she was a “hard-working, dedicated and caring” nurse who loved her job and that the infants’ sudden collapses and deaths could have been due to natural causes, or in combination with other factors such as staffing shortages at the hospital or failure by others to provide appropriate care.

Letby fought back tears on Aug. 8 as the jury found her guilty of two counts of attempted murder and burst out crying as she left the courtroom. She was present again three days later when she was convicted of four murders and another two attempted murders.

She declined to be in the courtroom as additional verdicts were announced Friday and has indicated to the court she does not wish to appear in court Monday, nor to follow the sentencing hearing via videolink.

A note police found at Letby’s home after she was first arrested in 2018 will now stand as a chilling confession.

“I don’t deserve to live,” she wrote on a green sticky note shown in court. “I killed them on purpose because I’m not good enough to care for them.”

“I am a horrible evil person,” she wrote. “I AM EVIL I DID THIS.”

Republicans gather in city where Trump was indicted but mention former president gingerly, if at all

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — For much of the Republican presidential field, Donald Trump is the candidate who must not be named — or at least not criticized too harshly.

Multiple GOP White House contenders took the stage Friday in Atlanta, the city where the former president was most recently indicted and where he must surrender next week on racketeering charges related to the 2020 election. They dealt gingerly with the man they’re trying to catch in the 2024 GOP primary campaign.

Radio host Erick Erickson’s annual convocation of conservative leaders and activists mostly sidestepped the dominant figure in Republican politics. The Gathering, Erickson said, “is our time to come together and hear from people when they’re running for office, why should we vote for you ... what’s your vision.”

Trump dominates the primary polls and media attention despite criminal indictments for alleged actions before, during and after his presidency. Those four indictments seem to have hardened Trump’s support among core GOP voters, even as a majority of people in the United States disapprove of him. Many party loyalists who say they are open to alternatives aren’t necessarily enthusiastic about criticizing the former president.

The event offered a potential preview of how Trump may factor into the conversation when many of the same Republican contenders gather Wednesday for the first presidential debate of the 2024 campaign. Trump has signaled he might not attend, but the forum in Atlanta was a reminder that the former president is hard to avoid — even when he’s physically not present.

Former Vice President Mike Pence told a friendly audience that he has “real differences” with Trump “about the future of the country.” He nodded to the Capitol insurrection that is the focus of one of the pending indictments against Trump. He called it “that fateful day” and repeated that he fulfilled “my constitutional duty” — his way of affirming why he did not grant Trump’s wish of blocking Democrat Joe Biden’s Electoral College victory.

But before any of those carefully qualified statements, Pence said, “I always stood loyally by President Donald Trump.”

Nikki Haley, a former South Carolina governor and United Nations ambassador during the Trump administration, offered a critique by pairing it with a compliment.

“Trump did a good job of getting attention on China’s trade practices, but he didn’t do nearly enough on the fact that they have bought 400,000 acres of U.S. soil,” she said as part of a statement addressing the growing rivalry between Washington and Beijing.

Powerful Hurricane Hilary heads for Mexico's Baja. Rare tropical storm watch issued for California

By IGNACIO MARTINEZ and JULIE WATSON Associated Press

CABO SAN LUCAS, Mexico (AP) — Hurricane Hilary churned off Mexico's Pacific coast Friday as a powerful Category 4 storm threatening to unleash torrential rains on the mudslide-prone border city of Tijuana before heading into Southern California as the first tropical storm there in 84 years.

Forecasters warned the storm could cause extreme flooding, mudslides and even tornadoes across the region.

Hilary grew rapidly in strength early Friday before losing some steam, with its maximum sustained winds at 130 mph (215 kph) Friday night, down from 145 mph (230 kph). Nevertheless, it was forecast to still be a hurricane when approaching Mexico's Baja California peninsula on Sunday and a tropical storm when approaching Southern California later in the day.

Hilary was already disrupting life.

Major League Baseball rescheduled three Sunday games in Southern California, moving them to Saturday as part of split-doubleheaders. The National Park Service closed Joshua Tree National Park and Mojave National Preserve to keep people from becoming stranded amid flooding. Cities across the region, including in Arizona, were offering sandbags to safeguard properties against floodwaters.

No tropical storm has made landfall in Southern California since Sept. 25, 1939, according to the National Weather Service. The watch was posted for a wide swath of Southern California from the coast to interior mountains and deserts. The U.S. National Hurricane Center warned of potential threats to life and property.

The latest forecast pointed to Hilary making landfall along a sparsely populated area of the Baja peninsula Sunday, about 200 miles (330 kilometers) south of the Pacific port city of Ensenada.

As it moves north, it could bring heavy rains to Tijuana. Mayor Montserrat Caballero Ramirez said the city was tracking the storm closely and clearing out storm drains.

The sprawling border metropolis of 1.9 million people is particularly at risk of landslides and flooding, in part because of its hilly terrain. Shacks are perched on cliffs with little vegetation to hold soil in place. In addition, dozens of people live under tarps on the streets and in canals in flood zones, including migrants who arrive daily from various parts of the world.

The city was setting up four shelters in high-risk zones and warning residents in risky zones, Caballero Ramirez said.

"We are a vulnerable city being on one of the most visited borders in the world and because of our landscape," she said.

Mexico issued a tropical storm watch for parts of mainland Mexico and put 18,000 soldiers on alert.

On Friday night, Hilary was centered about 285 miles (460 kilometers) southwest of Cabo San Lucas, near the southern tip of the Baja peninsula. It was moving north-northwest at 13 mph (20 kph) and was expected to turn even more northward.

Some Cabo San Lucas schools were being prepared as temporary shelters, said Flora Aguilar, a city official.

In La Paz, the picturesque capital of Baja California Sur state on the Sea of Cortez, police patrolled closed beaches to keep swimmers out of the whipped-up surf. Schools were shut down in five municipalities.

It was increasingly likely that Hilary would reach California early Monday while still at tropical storm strength, though widespread rain was expected to begin as early as Saturday, the National Weather Service's San Diego office said.

Hurricane officials said the storm could bring heavy rainfall to the southwestern United States, dumping 3 to 6 inches (8-15 centimeters) in places, with isolated amounts of up to 10 inches (25 centimeters), in portions of southern California and southern Nevada.

"Two to three inches of rainfall in Southern California is unheard of" for this time of year, said Kristen Corbosiero, a University of Albany atmospheric scientist who specializes in Pacific hurricanes. "That's a whole summer and fall amount of rain coming in probably six to 12 hours."

The region could face once-in-a-century rains and there is a good chance Nevada will break its all-time

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Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis repeated his attacks on so-called "wokeness" and reminded attendees of his ongoing fight with entertainment giant Disney. The closest he came to confronting Trump was a call for the party to look ahead, and he did that with a swipe at familiar foils beyond the Republican fold.

"There's nobody that wants us to be looking backwards more than the Democrats and the media," he said, adding a seeming allusion to Trump's lies that his loss to Biden was rigged. "They would love to have us have to relitigate all this stuff from 2020," DeSantis said.

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott took a similar route, emphasizing his "optimism" about the "future" of the party and the country. Scott saved his presidential barbs for Biden.

New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, nearly alone among Republican hopefuls in criticizing Trump for his behavior and related legal peril, could shift the dynamics Saturday when he appears with Erickson. Entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy, making his first bid for public office, will appear as well.

Explained Whit Ayres, a national Republican pollster, "You can't win the nomination by attacking (Trump) frontally."

Ayres said the dynamics reflect the realities of the GOP primary electorate. About 10-15% are "Never Trumpers," Ayres said, while about 30-35% hardcore Trump supporters. The rest, half or a slim majority, "have doubts about his electability" in a general election but are still "reliable Republicans who voted for him twice," Ayres said.

As a Republican, "you can't call him unfit for office," Ayres said. "That's basically requiring half the party to admit they screwed up and put someone unfit for office into the Oval Office. That's just a psychological step too far for most people."

Brad Raymer, an attendee from Marietta, Georgia, was among the attendees who has cast two November ballots for Trump. But he called the Friday conversation refreshing.

"I don't want to hear any more about Trump," Raymer said. "It's good to hear these candidates' actual ideas."

Indeed, Erickson picked their brains on matters from the Ukraine war and trade policy to regulation of artificial intelligence. Still, those policy discussions largely yielded similar ideological positions — promises of smaller government, lower taxes, increased military spending — that are routine in any Republican forum.

Raymer acknowledged that those overlaps make Trump's "big personality" and "antics" stand out in a party he has dominated since launching his first presidential campaign eight years ago.

But Raymer said he knows plenty of Republicans who, unlike him, embrace Trump's "antics" or at least tolerate "his election lies" about 2020. "I try to tell them to see reason," he said, emphasizing that he accepted Biden's victory in Georgia and nationally.

Making a more muted version of the same argument was Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, who notably defied Trump in 2020 by certifying Biden's slate of Georgia electors. Erickson and others celebrated Kemp's 2022 reelection romp over Democratic star Stacey Abrams even after enduring Trump's public ire. They hailed Georgia's economy, crediting the governor, of course, rather than a Democratic administration in Washington.

Kemp himself urged Republicans to look ahead.

"You can believe whatever you want about the 2020 election. That is your right," Kemp said. But "if you're still mad about that," he continued, then "sign up to be a poll worker, be a poll watcher, get involved in the process, door knock, phone calls, do something that will help us win in 2024. Complaining is not going to help us."

It was all about Trump. Without a mention of his name.

Proud Boy on house arrest in Jan. 6 case disappears ahead of sentencing

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Authorities are searching for a member of the Proud Boys extremist group who disappeared days before his sentencing in a U.S. Capitol riot case, where prosecutors are seeking more than a decade in prison, according to a warrant made public Friday.

Christopher Worrell, 52, of Naples, Florida, was supposed to be sentenced Friday after being found guilty of spraying pepper spray gel on police officers, as part of the mob storming the Capitol as Congress was certifying Joe Biden's presidential victory on Jan. 6, 2021. Prosecutors had asked a judge to sentence him to 14 years.

The sentencing was canceled and a bench warrant for his arrest issued under seal on Tuesday, according to court records. The U.S. attorney's office for Washington, D.C., encouraged the public to share any information about his whereabouts.

Worrell had been on house arrest in Florida since his release from jail in Washington in November 2021, less than a month after a judge substantiated his civil-rights complaints about his treatment in the jail.

U.S. District Judge Royce Lamberth found Worrell's medical care for a broken hand had been delayed, and held D.C. jail officials in contempt of court.

His attorney William Shipley declined to comment. Phone numbers listed for Worrell and the woman named as his custodian during his house arrest were not functional.

More than three dozen people charged in the Capitol siege have been identified by federal authorities as leaders, members or associates of the Proud Boys, whose members describe it as a politically incorrect men's club for "Western chauvinists."

Former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío and three other members of the extremist group were convicted of seditious conspiracy in May.

A total of about 1,000 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Jan. 6 riot. More than 600 of them have pleaded guilty or been convicted after trials decided by a jury or judge. About 600 have been sentenced, with over half getting terms of imprisonment ranging from three days to 18 years.

US, Japan and South Korea agree to expand security ties at summit amid China, North Korea worries

By AAMER MADHANI, DARLENE SUPERVILLE and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

CAMP DAVID, Md. (AP) — President Joe Biden and the leaders of Japan and South Korea agreed Friday to expand security and economic ties at a historic summit at the U.S. presidential retreat of Camp David, cementing a new agreement with the allies that are on an increasingly tense ledge in relations with China and North Korea.

Biden said the nations would establish a communications hotline to discuss responses to threats. He announced the agreements, including what the leaders termed the "Camp David Principles," at the close of his talks with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida.

"Our countries are stronger and the world will be safer as we stand together. And I know this is a belief that all three share," Biden said.

"The purpose of our trilateral security cooperation is and will remain to promote and enhance peace and stability throughout the region," the leaders said in a joint statement.

Biden maintained, as have US, South Korean and Japanese officials, that the summit "was not about China" but was focused on broader security issues. Yet, the leaders in their joint summit concluding statement noted China's "dangerous and aggressive" action in the South China Sea and said they "strongly oppose any unilateral attempts to change the status quo in the waters of the Indo-Pacific."

Yoon noted in particular the threat posed by North Korea, saying the three leaders had agreed to improve "our joint response capabilities to North Korea's nuclear and missile threats, which have become sophisticated more than ever."

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He said as the three appeared before reporters that "today will be remembered as a historic day, where we established a firm institutional basis and commitments to the trilateral partnership."

Japan's Kishida said before the private talks that "the fact that we, the three leaders, have got together in this way, I believe means that we are indeed making a new history as of today. The international community is at a turning point in history."

The visitors spoke in their home languages, their comments repeated by a translator.

The U.S., Japan and South Korea agreed to a new "duty to consult" security pledge committing them to speak with each other in the event of a security crisis or threat in the Pacific.

The pledge is intended to acknowledge that they share "fundamentally interlinked security environments" and that a threat to one is "a threat to all," according to a senior Biden administration official. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity to preview the announcement.

Under the pledge, the three countries agree to consult, share information and align their messaging with each other in the face of a threat or crisis, the official said.

The Camp David retreat, 65 miles (104.6 kilometers) from the White House, was where President Jimmy Carter brought together Egyptian President Anwar Sadat and Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin in September 1978 for talks that established a framework for a historic peace treaty between Israel and Egypt in March 1979. In the midst of World War II, President Franklin Roosevelt and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill met at the retreat — then known as Shangri-La — to plan the Italian campaign that would knock Benito Mussolini out of the war.

Kishida and Yoon were mindful of Camp David's place in U.S. and world history, making repeated references to its past and now their place in it during their comments at the news conference after the meeting with Biden. The leaders arrived in Washington on Thursday and, as guests of Biden, on Friday were flown separately to Camp David on U.S. military helicopters like the ones Biden uses.

Biden's focus for the gathering was to nudge the United States' two closest Asian allies to further tighten security and economic cooperation with each other. The historic rivals have been divided by differing views of World War II history and Japan's colonial rule over the Korean Peninsula from 1910 to 1945.

But under Kishida and Yoon, the two countries have begun a rapprochement as the two conservative leaders grapple with shared security challenges posed by North Korea and China. Both leaders have been upset by the stepped-up cadence of North Korea's ballistic missile tests and Chinese military exercises near Taiwan, the self-ruled island that is claimed by Beijing as part of its territory, and other aggressive action.

Yoon proposed an initiative in March to resolve disputes stemming from compensation for wartime Korean forced laborers. He announced that South Korea would use its own funds to compensate Koreans enslaved by Japanese companies before the end of World War II.

Yoon also traveled to Tokyo that month for talks with Kishida, the first such visit by a South Korean president in more than 12 years. Kishida reciprocated with a visit to Seoul in May and expressed sympathy for the suffering of Korean forced laborers during Japan's colonial rule,

The effort to sustain the trilateral relationship won't be without challenges.

Beijing sees the tightening cooperation efforts as the first steps of a Pacific-version of NATO, the transatlantic military alliance, forming against it. U.S. officials expect that North Korea will lash out—perhaps with more ballistic missile test and certainly blistering rhetoric.

Polls show that a solid majority of South Koreans oppose Yoon's handling of the forced labor issue that's been central to mending relations with Japan. And many in Japan fear that bolstering security cooperation will lead the country into an economic Cold War with China, its biggest trading partner. Biden's predecessor (and potential successor) Republican Donald Trump unnerved South Korea during his time in the White House with talk of reducing the U.S. military presence on the Korean Peninsula.

"If an ultra-leftist South Korean president and an ultra-right wing Japanese leader are elected in their next cycles, or even if Trump or someone like him wins in the U.S., then any one of them could derail all the meaningful, hard work Biden, Yoon and Kishida are putting in right now," said Duyeon Kim, an adjunct senior fellow at the Center for a New American Security's Indo-Pacific Security Program.

US readying plans to evacuate drone bases if necessary under Niger's new junta, commander says

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. is making precautionary plans to evacuate two key drone and counter-terror bases in Niger if that becomes necessary under the West African nation's new ruling junta, the Air Force commander for Africa said Friday.

That planning includes looking for U.S.-allied nations in the Saharan and Sahel regions, some of the world's most active areas for al-Qaida- and Islamic State-allied extremist groups, "that we could maybe partner up with, and then move our assets there," Air Force Gen. James Hecker told reporters in Washington.

Hecker stressed that there had been no decision from the Biden administration regarding whether the Niger military's July 26 overthrow of the country's democratically elected president would compel U.S. diplomats or security forces to leave the country.

U.S. bases there have been vital counter-terror posts in an unstable region that is seeing an increasing number of coups as well as encroachment by Russia's Wagner mercenary group. The U.S. presence includes air bases in Niamey, the capital, and in the remote city of Agadez on the southern edge of the Sahara.

If U.S. forces do leave, either following a decision by the Biden administration that it cannot work with the mutinous soldiers now leading the country or because the junta orders them out, "it obviously will have an effect" on U.S. intelligence and counterterrorism efforts, Hecker said.

"But of course what we hope for is that we have a peaceful diplomatic solution to this and we don't have to" leave, he said.

The head of Niger's presidential guard instigated the coup, and continues to confine President Mohamed Bazoum and his family in the presidential palace. U.S. diplomats say junta leaders have warned that Bazoum would be killed if Niger's West African neighbors intervene militarily to restore Bazoum to power. Bazoum took office in 2021, in the coup-prone country's first peaceful and democratic transfer of power since independence from France in 1960.

The U.S. has yet to formally call what happened in Niger a coup. That designation could compel Washington to cut many of the military and security ties between the two countries.

Hecker said he believed it would be "weeks or much longer" before U.S. officials would announce any kind of decision to evacuate, if it does come to that.

Niger had been one of a dwindling number of countries in West Africa's Sahara and Sahel regions neither ruled by a military-backed government nor aligned with Russian mercenaries.

Hecker gave no details on what countries the U.S. was considering as an alternate West Africa counter-terror post, if Niger became unworkable.

"We've just started looking at that," he said. American military officials "know where we would like the base to be, but more of that's going to be diplomatic" in terms of how it's decided.

The precautionary planning for evacuation, Hecker said, included scenarios where the Americans are able to move out at leisure and also where they have to depart in a hurry, taking only the most sensitive materiel.

George Santos says ex-fundraiser caught using a fake name tried a new tactic: spelling it backwards

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When the invitation to lunch at the Empire State Building first arrived last summer, some of George Santos' campaign staffers were wary.

The sender described himself as a deep-pocketed donor, eager to max out his contribution to the Republican congressional candidate. He signed the email Reyem Nad, an unfamiliar name in fundraising circles.

Within minutes, Santos says he discovered the truth: The message was from Sam Miele, a former fundraiser who had been fired from the campaign months earlier after he was caught soliciting donations

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under the alias Dan Meyer, then the chief of staff to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, who at the time was the Republican minority leader.

Santos said he interpreted the lunch invitation as an attempt by Miele to get a face-to-face meeting — one he could not get if he used his own name — where he could ask to rejoin the campaign.

"We realized, 'Oh ... Reyem Nad is Dan Meyer spelled backwards,'" Santos told The Associated Press on Friday, using an expletive to emphasize his surprise. "My staffers called the restaurant and figured out it was Sam."

Santos did not attend the meeting, but sent his then-treasurer, Nancy Marks, who informed Miele he was not getting his job back, according to his spokesperson, Gabrielle Lipsky.

Miele, 27, was arrested Wednesday on federal charges of wire fraud and aggravated identity theft for his alleged scheme to trick donors into giving money to Santos under Meyer's name. He pleaded not guilty. His attorney, Kevin Marino, declined to comment on the allegations, but said his client "looks forward to being exonerated at trial."

Prosecutors say Miele went to significant lengths to assume the false identity, setting up a dummy email address resembling Meyer's name as he reached out to more than a dozen donors between August and December of 2021. Santos said he was informed of the impersonation in late 2021 by the real Meyer, who has since retired, and he promptly fired Miele.

The alleged attempt to set up a meeting under a reverse-alias, which was first reported by Semafor, came more than six months later and was not part of the indictment. Santos described it as a "desperate and bizarre" move by Miele.

"It's like he's obsessive and compulsive on that name," Santos said. "You and I, if we got caught doing something stupid like that, the last thing we'd do is go anywhere near that name."

Meyer did not return a phone message requesting comment.

Santos, infamous for fabricating major parts of his life story during his run for office, is facing his own federal charges accusing him of duping donors, stealing from his campaign, lying to Congress about being a millionaire and collecting fraudulent unemployment benefits. He has pleaded not guilty. The charges could carry up to 20 years in prison.

He said he was not concerned about Miele cooperating with federal authorities, "since there is nothing to cooperate against."

Santos has blamed Marks, his former campaign treasurer, for some of the irregularities in his campaign finances, claiming she went "rogue."

After her resignation earlier this year, federal regulatory filings indicated she was replaced by Thomas Datwyler as treasurer. But Datwyler announced he had never agreed to work for Santos.

An aide who worked briefly in Santos' congressional office, Derek Myers, told staff of the House's ethics subcommittee that he got his job after sending hundreds of dollars in Venmo payments to the Republican's operations director, Vish Burra. Myers was let go after Santos' staff learned he had been charged with wiretapping in Ohio after publishing a recording of a trial.

Naysa Woomer, the former communications director for Santos who resigned in May, said the latest allegations about deceptive fundraising acts were par for the course in the scandal-scarred office.

"He surrounds himself with people who are in the business to obstruct," she said. "Not in the business to govern."

FEMA has paid out more than \$5.6 million to Maui survivors, a figure expected to grow significantly

By KEN SWEET and MAE ANDERSON The Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The Federal Emergency Management Agency said Friday it has approved more than \$5.6 million in assistance to nearly 2,000 households in Maui so far as the federal government tries to help survivors of the devastating wildfires.

The White House and FEMA approved a one-time payment of \$700 per household for needs like cloth-

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ing, food, or transportation. The agency will also pay to put survivors up in hotels and motels and says it has paid out \$1.6 million in rental assistance as of Friday.

The amounts are expected to grow significantly. Estimates are that thousands of buildings were damaged or destroyed in the fire, which consumed much of historic community of Lahaina. In the wake of the Northern California wildfire in 2018, which decimated the city of Paradise, FEMA paid out \$238 million in assistance.

FEMA said Wednesday that it will open a disaster recovery center in Maui in order to better and more quickly facilitate the distribution of aid.

Survivors need to register with FEMA to be eligible for the payout and other assistance. Roughly 4,400 Hawaii fire survivors have applied for so-called critical need assistance as of Wednesday afternoon, according to Jeremy M. Edwards, press secretary for FEMA.

Longer-term aid that could amount to thousands or tens of thousands of dollars will likely come with documentation requirements. Besides the hotel and motel programs and rental assistance, FEMA is offering Hawaii fire survivors home repair and personal property reimbursements and other needs that may not be covered by insurance, Edwards said.

"FEMA is committed to ensuring all disaster survivors receive every dollar of disaster assistance for which they are legally eligible," he said.

Karen Clark & Company, a prominent disaster and risk modeling company, estimates that more than 2,200 buildings were damaged or destroyed by fire with a total of more than 3,000 buildings damaged by fire or smoke or both. The risk firm calculates that the fire in Lahaina caused about \$3.2 billion in insured property losses.

The Small Business Administration, an independent agency of the U.S. government that provides support to entrepreneurs and small businesses, is urging businesses and non-profits affected by the wildfires in Maui to apply for low-interest federal disaster loans.

Businesses of all sizes and private nonprofit organizations in that region can borrow up to \$2 million to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate, machinery and equipment, inventory and other business assets.

The loans can also be used to make improvements to prevent future disaster damage.

"We're committed to providing federal disaster loans swiftly and efficiently, with a customer-centric approach to help businesses and communities recover and rebuild," said SBA administrator Isabella Casillas Guzman.

In addition, disaster loans up to \$500,000 are available to homeowners to repair or replace damaged or destroyed real estate. And homeowners and renters are eligible for up to \$100,000 to repair or replace damaged or destroyed personal property, including personal vehicles.

Interest rates can be as low as 4% for businesses, 2.375% for private nonprofit organizations and 2.5% for homeowners and renters with terms up to 30 years.

To apply for the aid or small-business loans, businesses and individuals can contact the Federal Emergency Management Agency at <https://www.disasterassistance.gov/>

Stem cells from one eye show promise in healing injuries in the other

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Phil Durst recalled clawing at his face after a chemical from a commercial dishwashing machine squirted into his eyes, causing "the most indescribable pain I've ever felt — ever, ever, ever."

His left eye bore the brunt of the 2017 work accident, which stole his vision, left him unable to tolerate light and triggered four to five cluster headaches a day.

Then he underwent an experimental procedure that aims to treat severe injuries in one eye with stem cells from the other.

"I went from completely blind with debilitating headaches and pondering if I could go another day — like really thinking I can't do this anymore" to seeing well enough to drive and emerging from dark places

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literally and figuratively, he said, choking up.

The 51-year-old from Homewood, Alabama, was one of four patients to get stem cell transplants as part of the first U.S. study to test the technique, which could someday help thousands. Though additional treatment is sometimes needed, experts say the stem cell transplant offers hope to people with few if any other options.

Results of the early-stage research were published Friday in the journal *Science Advances*, and a larger study is now underway.

The procedure is designed to treat "limbal stem cell deficiency," a corneal disorder that can occur after chemical burns and other eye injuries. Patients without limbal cells, which are essential for replenishing and maintaining the cornea's outermost layer, can't undergo corneal transplants that are commonly used to improve vision.

Dr. Ula Jurkunas, an ophthalmologist at Mass Eye and Ear in Boston who was the principal investigator for the study, said the experimental technique involves taking a small biopsy of stem cells from the healthy eye, then expanding and growing them on a graft in a lab at Dana-Farber Cancer Institute in Boston.

A couple of weeks later, they're sent back to be transplanted into the injured eye. Durst was the first patient to undergo the procedure.

"The great part of it is that we're using a patient's own tissue," not donor tissue the body might reject, Jurkunas said.

She said this method is better than a different procedure that takes a very large piece of stem cells from a healthy eye for use on an injured eye — but risks damaging the good eye.

Both of Durst's eyes were hurt in the accident, which happened while the former chemical company manager was visiting a client having problems with the dishwashing machine. For six to eight months, his overall vision was so bad his wife or son had to lead him around. But his right eye was less injured than his left and could provide stem cells for the transplant.

Jurkunas, who is also affiliated with Harvard Medical School, said Durst's 2018 surgery was the culmination of almost two decades of research, "so we felt immense happiness and excitement to finally do it."

All patients in the study saw their cornea surfaces restored. Durst and another patient were then able to get transplants of artificial corneas, while two others reported much-improved vision with the stem cell transplant alone. A fifth patient didn't get the procedure because the stem cells weren't able to adequately expand.

At this point, Durst said the vision in his right eye is nearly perfect but the vision in his left eye is blurry; he's scheduled for a different procedure in September to address that.

Jurkunas estimates about 1,000 people in the U.S. per year could potentially benefit from this sort of stem cell transplant, which has also been studied in Japan.

"There's definitely an unmet clinical need for this effort — there's no question," said Dr. Tueng Shen, an ophthalmology professor at the University of Washington who was not involved in the research. She added that doctors currently have no reliable source of cultivated limbal stem cells.

Researchers are finalizing the next phase of the clinical trial, which includes 15 patients. One is Nick Kharufeh, whose left eye was injured in 2020. He was watching fireworks being set off in the street when a spark hit his eyeball.

Kharufeh moved from California to Boston to take part in the study, and the 26-year-old real estate agent can see well enough to fly a small plane.

Though he's given up on plans of becoming a commercial pilot, "I still fly whenever I get back to California. I love it," he said. "I'm just really thankful that they gave me the opportunity to be part of the trial because it's really helped me out."

Miami Mayor Francis Suarez claims he's qualified for GOP presidential debate, but RNC can't confirm

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Miami Mayor Francis Suarez claimed on Friday that he has qualified for next week's Republican presidential debate and would become the ninth White House hopeful to meet the fundraising and polling thresholds required to participate in the opening face-off of the 2024 campaign.

But senior advisers with the Republican National Committee who spoke on the condition of anonymity to share internal discussions said later that Suarez had not yet officially met the criteria.

Suarez, 45 and the only Hispanic in the field, would be perhaps the least-known Republican on the stage Wednesday in Milwaukee. But with an audience expected of more than 10 million viewers, he said the debate will give him equal footing to contrast his personality against his higher-profile opponents. He argued that he is uniquely positioned to help the Republican Party reach out to Hispanic and younger voters in particular.

"Oftentimes, it's not policy because we agree, by and large about policy, right? It's personality, dynamism. It's the ability to connect," he told The Associated Press in an interview confirming his debate attendance.

So far, nine candidates say they have met the debate qualifications, although former President Donald Trump has indicated he may not attend. The RNC will not formally announce who will make the debate stage until next week. To qualify, candidates need to satisfy polling and donor requirements set by the Republican National Committee: at least 1% in three high-quality national polls or a mix of national and early-state polls and a minimum of 40,000 donors, with 200 in 20 or more states.

Suarez said he met the donor threshold earlier in the month and just hit the polling requirement of at least 1% in three high-quality national polls or a mix of national and early-state polls between July 1 and Aug. 21. It was unclear which specific polls he was referencing.

An RNC official, speaking on the condition of anonymity to disclose private conversations, said the committee notified the Suarez campaign on Thursday as a courtesy that he may reach the polling threshold, but did not explicitly confirm that he had qualified. Subsequently, RNC staff sent Suarez an email indicating that the committee had reserved 135 debate tickets for his campaign, as is the practice for all qualified candidates. The committee also sent Suarez the pledge to sign indicating he would support the eventual GOP nominee, as is required of all participants.

Suarez's campaign shared portions of the email from the RNC with the AP. After this story was published, the AP reviewed the full email exchange, which included a disclaimer that the tickets would be canceled if the candidate failed to meet the debate qualification material.

Since starting his campaign two months ago, Suarez has emerged as a fierce critic of Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, another presidential candidate, while largely avoiding direct criticism of Trump. The mayor hinted he may do the same of the debate stage.

In Friday's interview, Suarez dismissed questions about the latest Trump indictment, this one in Georgia for alleged racketeering related to the 2020 election.

"It's not something voters are talking about," he said before turning to his planned strategy for the debate. "From my perspective, I want to spend as little amount of time talking about the former president. He's capable of handling himself, defending himself."

Suarez indicated he would not shy away from questions about DeSantis.

Specifically, Suarez referenced a trove of documents posted online this week by a pro-DeSantis super political action committee offering detailed guidance for the governor's debate strategy.

Among other things, one strategy memo outlined "four basic must-dos." They call for DeSantis to defend Trump "in absentia in response to a Chris Christie attack," "hammer Vivek Ramaswamy in a response," state his own positive vision two to three times, and attack President Joe Biden and the media three to five times. Christie is a former New Jersey governor; Ramaswamy is biotech entrepreneur.

"The poor guy can't get out of his own way. You see the leaked memo. It's just one misstep after another," Suarez said of DeSantis, suggesting that DeSantis' divisive approach to leadership would be further

exposed during the debate.

"You've got to be able to create coalitions and you've got to bring people together. The country's broken divided, How are you going to unify the country? And I don't think he's displaying those characteristics," Suarez said.

The Miami mayor has been one of the more creative candidates in his efforts to boost his donor numbers to meet the debate thresholds.

He offered a chance to see soccer legend Lionel Messi's debut as a player for Inter Miami, saying donors who gave \$1 would be entered in a chance to get front-row tickets. Suarez also took a page from North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum's campaign playbook by offering a \$20 "Bidenomics Relief Card" in return for \$1 donations. A super PAC supporting Suarez launched a sweepstakes for a chance at up to \$15,000 in tuition, in exchange for a \$1 donation to Suarez's campaign.

Suarez said he assumes that Trump, the current front-runner, will not participate in the debate.

Trump has been threatening to boycott the event for weeks. He argues that it makes little sense for someone so far ahead in the polls at this point to subject himself to the inevitable onslaught of attacks. Trump said he would make an announcement this week and hinted at his thinking in a social media post Thursday evening.

"People know my Record, one of the BEST EVER, so why would I Debate?" he asked. "I'M YOUR MAN."

Trump's team has been discussing potential alternative programming, including the possibility of a competing interview with former Fox News host Tucker Carlson.

Suarez said Trump's absence would represent an "amazing" opportunity for Suarez.

"Just do the math, right? You're talking about nine versus eight, and of course it's the person who's No. 1 in the polls," Suarez said. "So I think the fact that you have someone like that that's not on the debate stage, for a guy like me, that's incredibly helpful."

In Hawaii, concerns over 'climate gentrification' rise after devastating Maui fires

By ISABELLA O'MALLEY and JENNIFER MCDERMOTT Associated Press

Kim Cuevas-Reyes, a 38-year-old cellphone store owner, snuck into Lahaina last Friday to see the remnants of her home with her own eyes. She took backroads and walked. What she saw stunned her.

"When you step into the house, it's like an inch or two of ash. There is nothing," she said, adding that she hopes to stay and rebuild her home and destroyed business and is in touch with the insurance company.

More than 3,000 buildings in Lahaina were damaged by fire, smoke or both. Insured property losses alone already total some \$3.2 billion, according to Karen Clark & Company, a prominent disaster and risk modeling firm.

With a housing crisis that has priced out many Native Hawaiians as well as families that have been there for decades, concerns are rising that the state could become the latest example of "climate gentrification," when it becomes harder for local people to afford housing in safer areas after a climate-amped disaster.

It's a term Jesse Keenan, an associate professor of sustainable real estate and urban planning at Tulane University School of Architecture, first started lecturing about in 2013 after he noticed changes in housing markets following extreme weather events.

Jennifer Gray Thompson is CEO of After the Fire USA, a wildfire recovery and resiliency organization in the western U.S., and worked for Sonoma County during the destructive Tubbs Fire in October 2017. Thompson said Maui is one of the "scariest opportunities for gentrification" that she's seen because of "the very high land values and the intense level of trauma and the people who are unscrupulous who will come in to try to take advantage of that."

Thompson predicted potential developers and investors will research who has mortgages and said Maui residents should expect cold calls. "You won't be able to go to a grocery store without a flyer attached to your car," she said.

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Hawaii Gov. Josh Green said Wednesday his state attorney general will draft a moratorium on the sale of damaged properties in Lahaina, to protect local landowners from being "victimized" by opportunistic buyers as Maui rebuilds.

Thompson said she supports that "wholeheartedly." But she acknowledged some people won't be able to afford to rebuild and will want to sell their land.

While one extreme weather event cannot be entirely blamed on climate change, experts say storms, fires and floods, which are becoming more damaging in a warming world, help make Hawaii one of the riskiest states in the country. Earthquakes, tsunamis and volcanoes, which are not related to climate change, also add to this risk.

According to an analysis of Federal Emergency Management Agency records by The Associated Press, there were as many federally declared disaster wildfires this month as in the 50 years between 1953 and 2003. Additionally, burned area in Hawaii increased more than fivefold since the 1980s, according to figures from the University of Hawaii Manoa.

Justin Tyndall, an assistant professor at the University of Hawaii Economic Research Organization, explained that Hawaii is the most expensive state to rent or own a home in the U.S. "by a considerable margin" with a median price single family home on Maui exceeding \$1 million. "Even in the condominium market on Maui, the median price is close to \$900,000, so there's really no affordable options throughout all out of the state," he explained.

Until now, when homeowners in Hawaii have considered climate change, Tyndall said, it's been coastal erosion, sea level rise and hurricanes, mainly. "Wildfire was something that was on people's radars. ... But obviously the extensive damage, most people didn't predict," he said. Fire needs to be taken more seriously now, he said.

Maui has stringent affordable housing requirements for new multifamily construction, Tyndall said. But the practical effect has been that very little housing gets built. So new supply is low, both for affordable housing and rentals at market rate, "which just makes housing more expensive for everyone," he said.

Tyndall said the Native Hawaiian community has been hit the hardest by the housing crisis and there has been a "huge exodus" due to this lack of affordable housing.

On Wednesday, the Indigenous-led NDN Collective issued a statement supporting community-led rebuilding for Lahaina, "in ways that center the values, ancestral connections to land and water, and Indigenous knowledge systems of the kānaka 'ōiwi, Native Hawaiian people."

After using the term in lectures, Keenan went on to popularize the concept of climate gentrification as a lecturer at Harvard University in 2018 and published a study that focused on Miami, where Black communities have historically lived at higher elevations because the wealthy wanted to live close to the beach. Now that seas are rising and higher ground is becoming more valuable, that's leading to disruption and displacement, Keenan said.

As with any gentrification, some people do see benefits.

"If you own a home, it's great — the value of your home goes up. But if you're a renter or a small business, your rent may go up to the extent that you become displaced over time," Keenan said.

With wildfires, areas that don't burn become more desirable, changing cost of living considerably. The 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, California, was an example of this as people moved down into the Central Valley to Chico where there is far less risk of wildfire, Keenan added.

"It led to massive displacement; rental costs increased significantly, a really huge shift. Everything from the school district to their transit system," he said.

Other examples are New Orleans after Hurricane Katrina and various cities in Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria, where many people could not afford to come back.

"The rebuilding of these spaces look very different from the types of communities that were living there before and what made them unique and special to begin with," said Santina Contreras, assistant professor at the University of Southern California's Sol Price School of Public Policy.

With respect to Maui, Contreras said there are many reasons to be concerned about climate gentrifica-

tion, given the island's natural beauty, history of development, high tourism demand and opportunity to build new hotels.

Not everyone finds the concept useful, though.

Katharine Mach, professor at the University of Miami Rosenstiel School of Marine, Atmospheric, and Earth Science, cautioned against immediately labelling a situation climate gentrification, because that makes it difficult to tease out the other factors such as decades of discrimination, racism and land use changes.

Climate change is overlaid on top of inequities in how we manage flooding or rebuild after fire, she said. "You can call that climate gentrification, but you could also say it's inequity in how we manage disasters in the United States."

Millions of old printed photos are sitting in storage. Digitizing them can unlock countless memories

By MICHAEL LIEDTKE AP Technology Writer

This may seem like a sad story because it begins with a boy with few memories of his father, who died when he was 7 years old. It's why Mitch Goldstone cherishes his only picture with his dad — a snapshot at Disneyland taken during the late 1960s, when the concept of people reflexively reaching for smartphone cameras in their pockets could only happen in Tomorrowland.

But this story, and the personal stories that follow, aren't sad at all. And a half-century later and more, Goldstone has done something with that memory.

He is pursuing a career focused on the joy of rediscovery. He and his longtime partner, Carl Berman, run ScanMyPhotos, part of a niche industry that specializes in turning the billions of analog slides, undeveloped negatives and printed pictures taken in the pre-smartphone era into digital treasure chests filled with memories that had been forgotten.

"There's nothing else like it, there are so few businesses doing something that makes people cry when they get the product back," Goldstone says. "Fortunately, they are usually happy tears."

Giving analog photos new digital life can resurface long-buried memories and make them feel fresh. It can bring back the roar of the water in old vacation snapshots, resurrect long-gone relatives in their prime and rekindle the warmth of a childhood pet's unconditional love. It can remind you of the intricacies of family relationships, summon forgotten moments and — perhaps best of all — make them easy to share.

It happened to me. I finally ended several years of procrastination and entrusted professionals to scan thousands of Kodachrome slides that I inherited from my 81-year-old dad when he died in 2019.

I hadn't been able to look at them — not from an emotional standpoint, but because I didn't have the proper equipment to peruse analog slides. Converting them into accessible digital media launched me on a journey back to my own childhood and the pasts of my parents, grandparents and great-grandparents. That, in turn, is giving me a better understanding of how I became me.

It's a phenomenon shared by other people who have taken the steps to preserve analog photos that were painstakingly shot in the decades before smartphones enabled people to routinely take pictures of everything.

It's not cheap. But if you have the \$200 to \$300 that it will likely cost to pay for the process — and if you can find the time to dig through musty boxes, drawers and garages — you may find a gateway to experiences like these.

AN ACTOR'S FINAL ENCORE

During his award-winning acting career, Ed Asner became famous for playing crusty yet lovable characters, with the most famous being Lou Grant — the newsroom boss in two popular TV series, "The Mary Tyler Moore Show" from 1970 to 1977 and an eponymous spinoff from 1977 to 1982. Asner also provided the voice for the curmudgeonly Carl Fredricksen in Pixar's 2009 animated film, "Up," that included a poignant scene about photography's power to rekindle memories.

After Asner died in 2021, a similar scene became real. His son, Matt, found hundreds of undeveloped negatives. He decided to get them digitized along with a storehouse of printed pictures.

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"I honestly didn't know what I was going to get back," Matt Asner says. "It's kind of overwhelming. It's like you get this treasure back that opens your eyes to a past that you sort of remember. But a lot of it you don't remember."

Looking at his dad's photos rekindled memories that Matt didn't realize had been buried in his subconscious. One day, Matt was gazing at some photos taken of him when he was 3 or 4 years old at a Southern California beach house that his father would rent for the family during the summer. One picture in particular opened the floodgates.

"There's this picture of me holding a dead fish, and I had this wild memory of finding it on the beach and keeping it with me for four days," the son recalls. "My mom finally threw it away when I was sleeping because it was stinking so much. That was a very strong memory that I had forgot."

The digital conversions of Ed Asner's old pictures also produced troves of other visual baubles, including one of the actor as a young man gazing introspectively at himself in a mirror — perhaps as he prepared for a role. Matt now shares some of his favorite pictures of his father on his Twitter account, but what he likes best is sending them around to relatives — something the digital format makes easy.

"Some of these pictures haven't been seen for 40, 50 or even 60 years," Matt Asner marvels. "It's like opening up a strange world for everyone and it draws you closer as a family. My dad and mom were sort of the glue for the whole family. Now, these photos replace some of the glue that has gone away."

A DIPLOMAT'S JOURNEY

After retiring in 2021 from a long career as a U.S. diplomat who worked all over the world, Lyne Paquette returned to her home in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, and retrieved from storage 12,000 images that she had taken from her film camera during her wide-ranging travels. After spending months sorting through them all, Paquette sent about 3,500 to be digitized.

When Paquette got them back, she found herself transported back to so many of the places where she had been assigned or visited — various countries in Central and South America, Australia, Germany, Bangladesh, Syria and Vietnam. While she loves looking back at all the good times with all the friends she made, some of her favorite images are of her late parents.

"It brings back so much happiness, but sometimes sadness," Paquette, 67, says. "I can see now: I have had a very, very rich life."

A WAR CORRESPONDENT'S PORTFOLIO

Russell Gordon worked in 20 countries as a photographer covering assignments that thrust him into wars, including the one in Bosnia. So yes, he accumulated a lot of analog pictures, slides and negatives in his career. He had 200 of his favorites digitized, including one-of-a-kind shots such as a photo of a fellow journalist in Afghanistan who was eventually assassinated by the man he was interviewing in the picture.

"I was like a kid at Christmas, waiting with such anticipation," says Gordon, 58, as he recalled the wait for the digital conversion.

He wasn't disappointed. The memories embedded in the photos are even more precious to him because he is afflicted with post-traumatic stress disorder after years of covering horrific wars. "I have a little bit of quality of life now, but my life is largely formed around nostalgia now," Gordon says. "So this is such a gift."

The experience has made him more convinced that anyone with analog images should digitize them as soon as they get a chance.

"Life happens and people die," he says, sighing. "When you are gone, unless you are leaving behind some money, the only thing you are leaving behind are some photos."

A GEOLOGIST'S DISCOVERY

Clifford Cuffey inherited a passion for geology and photography from his father, who died last year.

Those shared traits coalesced into Cuffey finding himself with more than 100,000 photos, including about 70,000 Kodachrome slides that he had taken from 1985 through 2009 using cameras outfitted with manual Olympus and Nikon lenses. Many of the pictures were taken during his trips revolving around his interest in geology — his chosen profession.

And his dad, a geology professor at Penn State University, had left behind similar pictures taken during

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summer trips when Cuffey and his brother used to tag along as kids. But there were also other photos devoted to hobbies, such as trains and railroads that don't even exist any longer, old pets and, of course family pictures.

Cuffey, 55, has spent more than \$20,000 digitizing the best of his analog photo collection to help fulfill his goal to set up a website focusing on geology. But the investment is also producing some real sentimental dividends.

"These were the fun things I did growing up," Cuffey says. "Every time I look at my scanned photos, I have a big smile on my face and I am super glad I did it."

SOME OPTIONS FOR GETTING YOUR OLD PHOTOS DIGITIZED

With so many pictures, slides and other visual media still limited to an analog, digitizing has turned into a cottage industry. As with any service or product, it's smart to do some research to determine which service sounds best for your needs. But here are a few places to tip.

—Based on its research, Consumers Guide Review recommends these as the best places: iMemories, LegacyBox and ScanMyPhotos. Other photo-scanning sites that have drawn positive reviews include GoPhoto, ScanCafe, Memories Renewed, ScanDigital, DiJiFi and Digital Memories.

—If you don't feel comfortable turning over your old photos to strangers or think the scanning services are too expensive, there are ways to do it yourself. But that takes some technical expertise, patience and the proper equipment.

—If you are an Amazon aficionado, the e-commerce site rounds up what it believes are some of the best products in its inventory. PC Magazine recommends these products. If you do some Googling and research through another search engine, you will find plenty of other suggestions to scan all those photos on your own.

Today in History: August 19, Caesar Augustus, Rome's first emperor, dies at 76

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Aug. 19, the 231st day of 2023. There are 134 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 19, 1960, a tribunal in Moscow convicted American U2 pilot Francis Gary Powers of espionage. (Although sentenced to 10 years' imprisonment, Powers was returned to the United States in 1962 as part of a prisoner exchange.)

On this date:

In A.D. 14, Caesar Augustus, Rome's first emperor, died at age 76 after a reign lasting four decades; he was succeeded by his stepson Tiberius.

In 1807, Robert Fulton's North River Steamboat arrived in Albany, two days after leaving New York.

In 1812, the USS Constitution defeated the British frigate HMS Guerriere off Nova Scotia during the War of 1812, earning the nickname "Old Ironsides."

In 1814, during the War of 1812, British forces landed at Benedict, Maryland, with the objective of capturing Washington D.C.

In 1848, the New York Herald reported the discovery of gold in California.

In 1934, a plebiscite in Germany approved the vesting of sole executive power in Adolf Hitler.

In 1942, during World War II, about 6,000 Canadian and British soldiers launched a disastrous raid against the Germans at Dieppe, France, suffering more than 50-percent casualties.

In 1955, torrential rains caused by Hurricane Diane resulted in severe flooding in the northeastern U.S., claiming some 200 lives.

In 1980, 301 people aboard a Saudi Arabian L-1011 died as the jetliner made a fiery emergency return to the Riyadh airport.

In 1987, a gun collector ran through Hungerford, England, 60 miles west of London, killing 16 people,

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including his mother, before turning his gun on himself.

In 2010, the last American combat brigade exited Iraq, seven years and five months after the U.S.-led invasion began.

In 2020, Kamala Harris accepted the Democratic nomination for vice president in a speech to the party's virtual convention, cementing her place in history as the first Black and South Asian woman on a major party ticket.

Ten years ago: Olympian runner Oscar Pistorius was indicted in Pretoria, South Africa, on charges of murder and illegal possession of ammunition for the shooting death of his girlfriend, Reeva Steenkamp, at his home on Valentine's Day 2013; Pistorius maintained he'd mistaken her for an intruder. (He was initially convicted of manslaughter, but that was overturned and replaced with a murder conviction by South Africa's Supreme Court. Pistorius is serving a 13-year prison sentence.) A train ran over a group of Hindu pilgrims at a crowded station in eastern India, killing at least 37 people.

Five years ago: Former CIA Director John Brennan, whose security clearance had been revoked by President Donald Trump, told NBC's "Meet the Press" that he was considering taking legal action to try to prevent Trump from removing clearances from other current and former officials. "Crazy Rich Asians," in its opening weekend in American theaters, was the top money-making film.

One year ago: A British man nicknamed one of the Beatles by his captives because of his English accent was sentenced to life in prison for his role in the deaths of four U.S. hostages captured by the Islamic State. Prosecutors said El Shafee Elsheikh is the most notorious member of the Islamic State ever to be convicted at trial in a U.S. court. A federal appeals panel ruled that the Justice Department under Attorney General William Barr improperly withheld portions of an internal memorandum Barr cited in publicly announcing that then-President Donald Trump had not committed obstruction of justice in the Russia investigation.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Debra Paget is 90. USTA Eastern Tennis Hall of Famer Renee Richards is 89. Former MLB All-Star Bobby Richardson is 88. Actor Diana Muldaur is 85. Actor Jill St. John is 83. Singer Billy J. Kramer is 80. Country singer-songwriter Eddy Raven is 79. Rock singer Ian Gillan (Deep Purple) is 78. Former President Bill Clinton is 77. Actor Gerald McRaney is 76. Actor Jim Carter is 75. Pop singer-musician Elliot Lurie (Looking Glass) is 75. Rock musician John Deacon (Queen) is 72. Bluegrass musician Marc Pruett (Balsam Range) is 72. Actor-director Jonathan Frakes is 71. Political consultant Mary Matalin is 70. Actor Peter Gallagher is 68. Actor Adam Arkin is 67. Singer-songwriter Gary Chapman is 66. Actor Martin Donovan is 66. Pro Football Hall-of-Famer Anthony Munoz is 65. R&B singer Ivan Neville is 64. Actor Eric Lutes is 61. Actor John Stamos is 60. Actor Kyra Sedgwick is 58. Actor Kevin Dillon is 58. Country singer Lee Ann Womack is 57. TV reporter Tabitha Soren is 56. Country singer-songwriter Mark McGuinn is 55. Actor Matthew Perry is 54. Country singer Clay Walker is 54. Rapper Fat Joe is 53. Olympic gold medal tennis player Mary Joe Fernandez is 52. Actor Tracie Thoms is 48. Actor Callum Blue is 46. Country singer Rissi (REE'-see) Palmer is 42. Actor Erika Christensen is 41. Actor Melissa Fumero is 41. Pop singer Missy Higgins is 40. Actor Peter Mooney is 40. Actor Tammin Sursok is 40. Olympic silver medal snowboarder Lindsey Jacobellis (jay-kuh-BEHL'-ihs) is 38. Actor J. Evan Bonifant is 38. Rapper Romeo is 34. Actor Ethan Cutkosky is 24.