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M-P VB Schedule Change

The Mobridge/Pollock volleyball match has been moved to Monday, October 2nd. C game will be at 4pm, JV game at 5pm, Varsity to follow

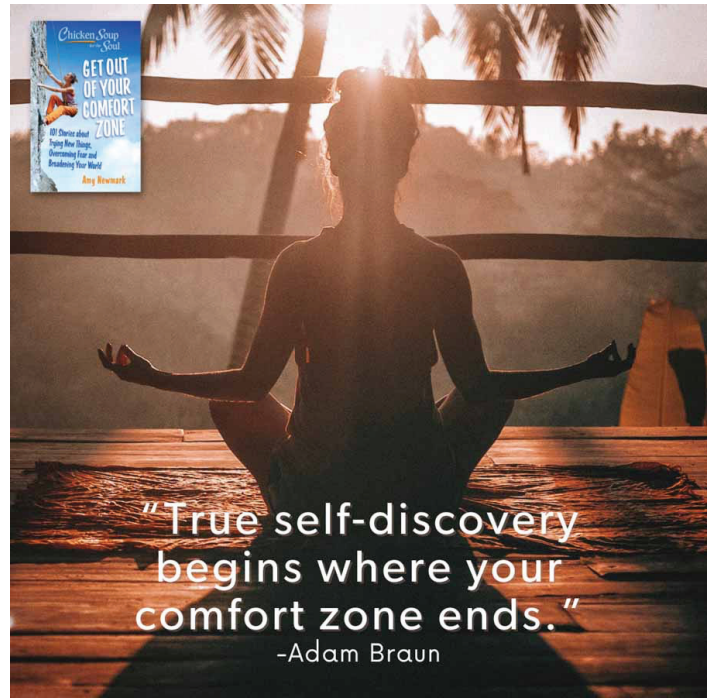
JH will now play M/P at home on Monday, September 11th with both 7th and 8th grade at 5pm

Death Notice: Marilyn Goodman

Marilyn Goodman, 90, of Groton passed away August 24, 2023 at Avantara Groton. No formal services will be held.

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

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton
The recycling trailer is located west of the city shop. It takes cardboard, papers and aluminum cans.
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Friday, Aug. 25

School Breakfast: Biscuits.

School Lunch: Lasagna hot dish, corn.

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

Football at Redfield, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Aug. 26

Girls Soccer at Vermillion, 1 p.m.

Boys Soccer at Vermillion, 2:30 p.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, open 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 27

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.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.

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

of developing into a tropical depression over the next week, potentially bringing storm conditions to Florida.

New York Gov. Kathy Hochul urged President Joe Biden to expedite work permits for newcomers and provide financial assistance to help her state absorb an influx of migrants that have overwhelmed shelters and strained resources.

Chinese leader Xi Jinping and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi agreed to de-escalate tensions at the disputed border during an in-person meeting on the sidelines of the BRICS Summit in South Africa.

Three-time WWE world champion Bray Wyatt died at the age of 36. The wrestler had been dealing with an undisclosed health issue since February.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Ukrainian forces carried out a "special operation" on the occupied Crimean peninsula, approaching the settlements of Olenivka and Mayak in the western region on waterborne vessels, Ukraine's military intelligence forces said. It comes as Kyiv marks the country's independence from Moscow's control more than three decades ago..

TALKING POINTS

"Parents, not government, are in the best position to work with their children on important life decisions, and no parent signs up to co-parent with the government. In fact, the rights of parents are one of our oldest and most fundamental liberty interests," Virginia Attorney General Jason Miyares said in an opinion requiring school boards to uphold Virginia Gov. Glenn Youngkin's new policies for how transgender students are to be treated in classrooms.

WHAT TO WATCH IN THE DAYS AHEAD

Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell will deliver his flagship speech at the Jackson Hole Summit in Wyoming at 10:05 a.m. ET, amid much better economic conditions than last year. But he could signal higher rates for longer in a speech closely watched by global markets.

Today is the last day to claim part of Facebook's \$725 million payout to its users affected by a privacy breach between May 24, 2007, and December 22, 2022. The social media company is accused of sharing user data with third parties without permission.

The Los Angeles Chargers wrap up their preseason slate of the National Football League with a trip to Levi Stadium in Santa Clara, California, at 10:00 ET with a game against the San Francisco 49ers. The game will be aired on NFL Network. KPIX 5 and The CW will broadcast the matchup in the greater Bay Area and other parts of California.

The European Union's Digital Services Act comes into effect, forcing large websites and social media platforms like TikTok, Google and Facebook to take sweeping steps to protect users against harmful content or face billions in fines.

Vice President Kamala Harris and second gentleman Douglas Emhoff will reportedly host the Las Vegas Aces at the White House to celebrate the team's 2022 WNBA Championship title. President Joe Biden and First Lady Jill Biden were previously scheduled to welcome the team.

Donald Trump has reportedly sold his signature Mar-a-Lago luxury residence in Florida, according to a Zillow listing which said the resort was purchased on August 4—weeks before the former president voluntarily turned himself in at Fulton County jail in Georgia. Read more about Trump turning himself in below.

Maui County is suing Hawaiian Electric, accusing the utility company of not initiating power shutoffs before the deadly wildfires despite dangerous weather conditions.

The National Hurricane Center is monitoring an area of low pressure in the Caribbean Sea that has a 70% chance

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GDILIVE.COM

GT
Groton
Area Tigers



Football

Friday, Aug. 25, 2023

at Redfield



**Redfield
Pheasants**

Football Game Sponsored by

John Sieh Agency
Dacotah Bank
Groton Chamber
Bierman Farm Services
Locke Electric
Bary Keith
BK Custom Ts
Krueger Brothers
Groton Ford
Blocker Construction
Full Circle Ag
S & S Lumber

Hamlin pulls out 3-2 win over Groton Area

Fans were treated to a fantastic volleyball match in a nicely cooled Groton Area Arena Thursday evening as Hamlin pulled out a 3-2 win. When you add the scores all up, both teams scored 109 points. The match was tied 26 times and there were 21 lead changes in event that was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM.

Groton Area won the first set, 25-20. The second set went extra points as Hamlin pulled out a 27-25 win. The Chargers got the upper hand of the match with a 25-21 third set win. Groton Area rallied late, scoring eight unanswered points down the stretch of the fourth match with Rylee Dunker having two ace serves at the end as Groton tied them match with a 25-22 win. Hamlin had a six-point lead in the fifth set, but Groton came back to take the lead, 13-12, but the Chargers got the last three points for the win.

Three players hit double figures for Groton's scoring with Rylee Dunker having 12 kills, three blocks and there ace serves, Anna Fjeldheim had 16 kills, 18 digs and five ace serves, Sydney Leicht had 12 kills and 11 digs, Lydia Meier had six kills, Elizabeth Fliehs had two kills an 45 assists, Faith Traphagen had two kills and a block, Carly Guthmiller had 27 digs, two assists, one kill and two ace serves, Laila Roberts had two ace serves, Chesney Weber had two kills and Jaedyn Penning and Emma Kutter each had a kill.

Addison Neudendorf led the Chargers with 13 kills, seven ace serves and three blocks. Marissa Baudon had seven kills and two ace serves, Emily Everson had nine kills, Grace Opdahl had five ace serves, Tiahna Temple had a block and a kill and Jayci Trowbridge had one ace serve.

Groton's next opponent is at Ipswich on Tuesday. Ipswich last night lost to Highmore/Harrold in game scores of 25-16, 30-28 and 25-19.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 2-0, with game scores of 25-15 and 25-10. That match was also broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Kellie Locke and family. Talli Wright had three kills and one ace serve, Emma Kutter had four kills and one ace serve, Taryn Traphagen had one kill, Jaedyn Penning had five kills and two ace serves, Sydney Locke had four ace serves, Kella Tracy had six kills and Chesney Weber six ace serves and three kills.

Groton Area won the C match, 24-26, 25-17 and 15-6.

Varsity game sponsors on GDILIVE.COM were John Sieh Agency, Dacotah Bank, Groton Chamber, Bierman Farm Services, Locke Electric, Bary Keith, BK Custom Ts, Groton Ford, Blocker Construction, Full Circle Ag and S & S Lumber.

- Paul Kosel

Names Released in Jackson County Fatal Crash

What: Two-vehicle crash
Where: I 90, mile marker 140, 12 miles west of Kadoka, S.D.
When: 12:46 p.m., Monday, August 21, 2023

Driver No. 1: Jacob Jumper, 22, Stanwood, WA., Minor injuries
Vehicle No. 1: 1996 Toyota Camry

Driver No. 2: Donell Red Bear, 39, Fort Thompson, S.D., Serious Non-Life-Threatening injuries
Vehicle No. 2: 2004 Chevrolet Trailblazer
Passenger in Vehicle No. 2: Rikki Voice, 35, Box Elder, S.D., Life Threatening injuries
Passenger in Vehicle No. 2: Female Minor, 7, Fort Thompson, S.D., Life Threatening injuries
Passenger in Vehicle No. 2: Male Minor, 11, Fort Thompson, S.D. Fatal injuries

JACKSON COUNTY, S.D.- A Fort Thompson, S.D., boy has been identified as the person who died Monday afternoon in a two-vehicle crash 12 miles west of Kadoka, S.D.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 1996 Toyota Camry, and a 2004 Chevrolet Trailblazer were both driving on Interstate 90 near mile marker 140 in Jackson County. The Camry struck the back of the Trailblazer which caused it to enter the median and roll. The Camry came to rest in the south ditch.

The driver of the Camry, Jacob Jumper, age 22, sustained minor injuries and was taken by ambulance to the Philip Hospital.
He was wearing a seatbelt.

The driver of the Trailblazer, Donell Red Bear, age 39, sustained serious non-life-threatening injuries and was taken by ambulance to the Philip Hospital.

There were three passengers in the Trailblazer.

The 35-year-old passenger of the Trailblazer, Rikki Voice, sustained life-threatening injuries. She was taken by ambulance to the Philip Hospital and then flown by Black Hills Life Flight to Rapid City Monument Health Hospital.

The 7-year-old female minor passenger of the Trailblazer sustained life-threatening injuries. She was taken by ambulance to the Philip Hospital and then flown by Black Hills Life Flight to Rapid City Monument Health Hospital.

The 11-year-old male minor passenger of the Trailblazer sustained fatal injuries.

Restraint use by occupants of the Trailblazer remains under investigation.

South Dakota's Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

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Kory is turning 40

Come join in on the fun

Saturday, August 26, 2023

At 4:00 at the Other Place Bar in Andover, SD





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Navigator asks Public Utilities Commission to shoot down county pipeline rules

'The goal was not to kill the project,' county commissioner says

BY: JOHN HULT - AUGUST 24, 2023 8:17 PM

South Dakota counties have taken extraordinary steps to interfere with state-level permitting for two carbon dioxide pipelines, a pipeline representative told the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission on Thursday.

The assertion was part of a PUC hearing at which the commission is being asked to preempt and overrule pipeline-related rules enacted by several South Dakota counties since last year.

Moody and Minnehaha are among the counties to have enacted new rules on buffer zones between underground pipelines and homes, schools and cities, and each had a lawyer present on Thursday in Pierre. Each county's ordinance came in response to public concerns about the two pipeline projects, which would carry carbon gas from ethanol plants in the upper Midwest away for underground sequestration.

The pipeline companies would be eligible for billions in federal tax credits, and the sequestered gas would help ethanol producers sell their products in states with tight carbon emission reduction goals.

Navigator CO2 Ventures was recently subject to more than a week of scrutiny during a PUC hearing on its pipeline proposal that could lead to an approval or denial of a pipeline permit in South Dakota. That decision's meant to come on Sept. 6.

This week's hearing came as Navigator asked the PUC to overrule county zoning ordinances for multi-county pipelines.

The decision could impact Navigator and a similar project from Summit Carbon Solutions, whose PUC permit hearing is set to begin next month.

"The several counties are now taking it upon themselves to set a Balkanized energy and transmission policy for the State, a task that has been, is supposed to be (and should be) left to this Commission," Navigator's legal team wrote in its brief on the matter.

Pipeline rep: County interference bad for project, residents

On Thursday, the first of two possible days of testimony in Pierre on the preemption issue, commissioners heard testimony on county ordinances enacted by Minnehaha and Moody counties.

Navigator's Monica Howard testified until 5 p.m. during the nearly 10-hour hearing. She told commissioners she's been involved in pipeline siting discussions for more than 20 years, she'd "permitted in the majority of states," and that the South Dakota counties' decisions stand out nationwide.

In other states, Howard said, county concerns "have all been related to above-ground facilities and pieces of the pipeline infrastructure that have the potential to interfere with land use."

Underground pipelines don't interfere with land use, Howard said.

The buffer zones enacted in Minnehaha County, she said, would make it all but impossible for Navigator to move ahead with its project on a reasonable timeline.

Some provisions are restrictive to the point of unworkable, she said. Rules requiring a setback measured from the pipeline to the property line of large parcels of land, for example, might work against the county's goals of keeping the pipeline a purportedly safe distance from homes with human residents.

"It forces us to avoid large parcels with one person on them," Howard said. "Complying with the ordinance would put us closer to two residences than we were beforehand."

Just north of Minnehaha County, Moody County first passed, then extended, a moratorium on pipeline

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construction. It then passed an ordinance requiring a 1,500 foot setback from "schools, daycares, churches, dwellings, manufactured homes and all permitted Concentrated Animal Feeding Operations."

As in Minnehaha County, she said, the ordinance would make it difficult to route the pipeline at all, and would put the pipeline closer to sensitive areas than its original route.

"Instead of being somewhere a landowner would like us to be, we might wind up in their drain-tiled field," Howard said of Moody County's ordinance. Drain tile is a system of underground perforated pipes that carry excess water away from farm fields.

Opponents: pipelines not banned

Lawyers for the landowners who oppose the project and the two targeted counties let loose a flurry of objections to the exhibits presented by Navigator this week to make its case for preemption of county authority.

They objected to plume modeling maps from Navigator that show how far carbon gas would extend in the event of a catastrophic rupture. Commissioners voted to make it public, but called it incomplete and said it would need to be redone if the pipeline were permitted and built.

Brian Jorde, the lawyer for landowners, pushed Howard on the source of the plume map and argued that its conclusions aren't reliable or complete. He made similar arguments about maps from Navigator showing new routes the pipeline would be forced to take in the face of the county ordinances, and about a document outlining Navigator's position on how many additional miles of pipe the company would need to build if the county rules stay in play.

The documents, Jorde said, were attempts by Navigator to sneak opinions onto the PUC docket.

"This is an argument they're putting into an exhibit here ... these are not precise for what they're asking for, which is an incredibly high bar," Jorde said. "They're asking to overrule the counties."

Most of the exhibits were entered into evidence in spite of such objections.

Alex Hagen, the lawyer for Minnehaha County, challenged Navigator's assertion that its ordinance would scuttle the pipeline.

Hagen noted that the county's setback requirements, if met, would allow Navigator to build its pipeline as a "special permitted use" project. The company could also get waivers to those setback requirements from 29 Minnehaha County landowners along Navigator's desired pipeline route who live within them.

Even if it weren't able to do either of those things, Navigator could apply for a conditional use permit. Doing so would put the question before the county zoning board, then the county commission.

"This doesn't block you from proceeding to build the pipeline," Hagen said.

Hagen also asked Howard to confirm that her company has not attempted to seek waivers, nor has it begun the conditional use permitting process. Instead, it challenged the ordinances at the PUC level.

Moody County attorney Paul Lewis tore through a similar line of questioning, asking Howard several times if his county's rules block Navigator's pipeline. Lewis, like Hagen, referenced maps Howard had offered to show alternative routes.

Under intense questioning from Lewis, Howard conceded that the ordinance's restrictions don't completely wipe Navigator off the Moody County map.

"A pipeline could be threaded through Moody County," Howard said.

'You're making me out to be a toddler'

Navigator attorney James Moore had a chance to follow-up after the county lawyers questioned Howard. He returned to the issue of 29 waivers the company would need in Minnehaha County.

"If one of those 29 people says 'no' ... what is your remedy?" Moore said.

In Minnehaha County, Howard said, the company would be pushed into the conditional use permitting process and put the project's future in the hands of county commissioners.

Objecting landowners in Moody County, she said, would shut down the multibillion dollar, multi-state pipeline project.

Jorde, the lawyer for landowners, tried to get Howard to admit that Navigator could easily reroute its pipeline either around Minnehaha County or within it, that the company could've asked the 29 landowners

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for waivers and hasn't, and that Navigator could ask for an extension from the PUC.

"Don't you agree that Navigator is solely responsible for the timeline?" Jorde asked, more than once, on one occasion noting that an entity seeking a permit can ask for a delay from the PUC.

"We could draw this out for 15 years if we wanted to," Howard said, "But we wouldn't want to do that."

Jorde also asked Howard multiple times why it hasn't "simply asked the 29 landowners" in Minnehaha County for waivers to be sure the ordinance would actually make it "impossible" to comply with the PUC's expectations in a timely fashion.

Howard accused Jorde of misrepresenting her testimony and underestimating the difficulty of connecting and negotiating with landowners.

"You're making me out to be a toddler throwing a temper tantrum," Howard said. "You're undermining me, and you're undermining the entire process and the reason we're here."

Kristen Edwards, the staff attorney for the PUC, asked Howard about her interactions with the counties. The company shared some of its plans and documents, but not all of them. For example, it presented the distances it believed a carbon plume would travel in an emergency, which formed the basis for Navigator's suggestions on setbacks for Minnehaha County commissioners, but it did not share the plume modeling maps until Thursday's PUC hearing.

Moody County, Howard said, did not request plume modeling.

"If they did, they did not ask us," Howard said.

Under questioning from Edwards, Howard said there were times in Moody County that Navigator was not always allowed to present their position in meetings on pipeline rules.

She also told Edwards that moving the pipeline route to comply with Moody County's rules would be impractical and potentially impact more landowners.

"Our ability to move the route is extremely limited," Howard said.

Howard also told Edwards that she's only been involved in two pipelines across two decades that were denied permits, and that counties almost never have a say in a project's permitting.

County: we listened, compromised

Minnehaha County Commissioner Joe Kippley took the stand in Pierre shortly after 5 p.m.

Moore, questioning on behalf of Navigator, pushed Kippley on the purpose of the ordinance. Counties are empowered to manage development on their land, but Navigator argues that the ordinances go far beyond that, aiming to protect public safety despite what it describes as a low-risk project. Howard also said several times on Thursday that an underground pipeline upon or near which the land can be developed doesn't impact county land use planning.

Kippley testified that his county's ordinance was primarily about land use planning. He called safety a secondary effect, but admitted that "a large portion of the testimony received from various members of the public involved safety."

Kippley was also questioned on his unsuccessful attempt to lower the setback requirements, based on carbon pipeline safety guidelines in an emergency management guidebook from the federal Pipeline and Hazardous Materials Safety Administration.

That manual cites 330 feet as a "safe" distance, Kippley said. The ordinance ultimately required far higher setbacks for schools, churches and cities. Moore read Kippley his own testimony on the day of the ordinance vote, which essentially had the commissioner saying that the 330-foot number was based on a document, not an arbitrary number.

"That's still my position today," Kippley said.

Minnehaha County made concessions in its ordinance based on Navigator's feedback, Kippley said, though it didn't take all of the company's advice.

"I'm sure a pipeline company would prefer the number zero, but that number came from conversations with a number of different stakeholders," Kippley said.

Public Utilities Commissioner Gary Hanson asked Kippley if he believes his county's ordinance makes pipelines impossible.

"The goal was not to kill the project," Kippley said. "Nothing in this ordinance is impossible. It would just go to a conditional use permit and we would go through that public hearing process."

Commissioners did not make a decision on overruling counties on Thursday. The hearing is set to continue Friday morning.

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.

Third SD nursing home to close in 2023 as Legislature studies long term care sustainability

Facility's losses run in the millions, CEO says in open letter

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - AUGUST 24, 2023 3:34 PM

A third South Dakota nursing home will close this year — citing short staff, rising costs and years of insufficient Medicaid reimbursement. More than 15 South Dakota nursing homes have closed since 2017.

The Bennett County Nursing Home in Martin operated at a loss of over \$1.3 million in the first six months of 2023, CEO and Bennett County Hospital Administrator Michael Christensen wrote in an open letter to local newspaper The Lakota Times. The nursing home will close on Oct. 13.

The facility is part of the Bennett County Hospital system, which offers pharmaceutical, hospital, ambulance and home health services for the rural Pine Ridge Reservation area. The organization is building a new hospital, and Christensen said closing the nursing home will ensure the organization can survive and continue serving the community.

"We need to make a drastic change," Christensen wrote, to avoid a situation that "could cause the entire organization to go under."

The facility said it will help its 33 residents find new care "as close to home as possible" before it closes. The 48-bed facility had a 68.75% occupancy rate as of Aug. 3, 2022. The closest nursing homes to Martin include the White River Health Care Center, about 76 miles away, and the Oglala Sioux Lakota Nursing Home, about 50 miles away in Rushville, Nebraska.

The Bennett County Nursing Home is ranked among the nation's worst along with five other South Dakota facilities. It has been cited for three deficiencies in the last year and has been fined nearly \$79,000 since 2021.

The nursing home has a staff turnover rate of 94.4% while the average state nursing home staff turnover rate is 52.9%. The nursing home has relied heavily on costly and temporary travel nurses, with only a few local nurses working at the facility. The letter also said nursing homes like Bennett County have seen expenses rise 1,064% since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"Our costs have skyrocketed as we have to pay higher and higher rates for nurses from out of our state to care for our residents," Christensen wrote.

Medicaid is a joint federal-state health insurance program for low-income people. South Dakota has historically been one of the lowest paying states for average Medicaid base rates. In 2019, South Dakota paid the lowest in the country for average Medicaid base payments at \$125.51 per resident, per day — 62.6% of the national average.

About 97% of the Bennett County Nursing Home residents are covered by Medicaid, Christensen said. Christensen wrote that the organization feels "the agony" of the decision and is "heartbroken that South Dakota has chosen to set such low rates that have not kept up with the increasing business costs."

"We are among the lowest reimbursed nursing homes in America's lowest reimbursing state or territory," Christensen wrote. "As of March 2023, 26,514 nursing homes in America and our state are paid more than we are by Medicaid to care for residents with the same needs. As much as 400% more."

The Legislature approved an increase to a 100% Medicaid cost reimbursement rate for community sup-

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port providers that rely on government funding, such as nursing homes, during the 2023 legislative session. But an industry expert has said the increase means the reimbursement will cover only about 92% of the cost for the next year, because service costs aren't updated frequently enough to address inflation and other factors. The Legislature revisits and sets reimbursement rates each session.

And last session's help has come too late for nursing homes like Bennett County, according to South Dakota Health Care Association Executive Director Mark Deak.

"As our state's population continues to age in the years to come, we must make sure we are doing all we can to preserve access to long term care across our state," Deak wrote in an emailed statement.

The U.S. Census Bureau estimates that more than 27% of South Dakota's population will be over age 60 in seven years — an increase of 38% from 2012.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, introduced a bill last session that would have required a yearly updated cost report for nursing homes and other community service providers, and introduced a bill that would have required lawmakers to reimburse community service providers at 100% every year.

Both were rejected by the Senate, but lawmakers agreed to sign a letter of intent with the state Department of Social Services and the Governor's Bureau of Finance and Management to annually update information to determine reimbursement rates for providers.

The Legislature is currently studying the long term care crisis in the state, planning to introduce legislation for the next legislative session (which begins in January) and recommendations to address problems — including much of what Bennett County cited as reasons for closing.

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.

Trump booked at Georgia jail on 13 charges related to 2020 election

BY: JILL NOLIN, ROSS WILLIAMS AND STANLEY DUNLAP - AUGUST 24, 2023 7:35 PM

ATLANTA — Former President Donald Trump was booked and quickly released at the Fulton County Jail Thursday evening during a trip from New Jersey to Atlanta that played out on primetime TV and capped a drama-filled day outside the facility.

Trump's sprawling motorcade arrived at the jail at about 7:30 p.m. And he was released after about 20 minutes on a \$200,000 bond agreement that bars him from threatening or intimidating anyone involved in the case — including on social media where the former president is prolific.

He is accused of violating Georgia's RICO Act and a litany of other charges tied to efforts to overturn the election in a state where he lost by nearly 12,000 votes.

The Fulton County indictment represents Trump's fourth this year and the first where his mugshot was taken. He faces 13 charges in Georgia, where he is accused of working with his allies to try to overturn the 2020 presidential election.

Trump has dismissed the charges as politically motivated and claims he genuinely believed the 2020 presidential election was rigged and stolen. The former president, who is the front-runner in the GOP race to challenge President Joe Biden next year, called the indictments a form of "election interference."

"We did nothing wrong at all, and we have every right — every single right — to challenge an election that we think is dishonest, and we think it's very dishonest," Trump said during brief remarks to some reporters outside the jail Thursday.

But he is accused of taking his challenge too far. The Fulton County indictment handed up by a grand jury last week alleges that Trump and 18 others were part of a "criminal organization" that tried to illegally overturn the 2020 election results through a fake elector plot.

Twelve of the 19 defendants have been booked this week, including the surrender of Trump's former chief of staff, Mark Meadows, earlier in the day Thursday. Trump's former personal attorney, Rudy Giuliani, turned himself in Wednesday.

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The remaining seven, including a state senator who served as an "alternate" elector, have until noon Friday to surrender.

Georgia's election results were confirmed three times, including one recount that was done by hand. A state-led investigation and multiple lawsuits also failed to turn up the widespread fraud Trump has long falsely claimed thwarted his bid for a second term. Trump's own Attorney General in 2020 told the former president that he'd lost Georgia's election and there was no evidence of fraud.

Thursday also brought a flurry of legal filings about the venue for some of the defendants and the pace of the trial.

A Georgia state judge has scheduled an Oct. 23 racketeering trial for Kenneth Chesebro, who was an attorney for the Trump campaign. Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis asked the judge, Scott McAfee, Thursday to schedule the trial for all 19 defendants on that date, an unexpectedly quick turnaround Willis proposed in response to Chesebro's demand for a speedy trial.

McAfee ruled Thursday the trial date would only apply to Chesebro.

Chesebro is accused of violating Georgia's RICO Act and committing other offenses as part of a scheme to appoint false electors. In Georgia he allegedly supplied the documents alternate GOP electors signed that said they appropriately cast the state's 16 electoral ballots for Trump.

'I have seen no real crime'

Outside the jail, Trump's fans outnumbered his critics as his most ardent backers traveled from all over the country to line up along Rice Street in a show of support. A throng of reporters from all over the world gathered outside the county jail to observe the historic moment.

Many of Trump's fans said the former president's growing rap sheet – on top of two impeachment proceedings – is only making them more skeptical of the claims of his wrongdoing.

"Racketeering is about stealing money and stuff like that. That makes no sense," said west Cobb County resident Jerry Ramsey, citing legal experts who have appeared on Fox News. "If you show me that some real crime was committed, then I might change my mind. But I have seen no real crime."

Ramsey argues that Trump did what anyone else would do after coming up short in an election.

"Here in Georgia, he just called and said 'Would y'all recount the vote?' If I lost an election, I'd do the same thing," he said.

Ray Worth, who lives in Carroll County, said he came out Thursday to "support freedom, the ability for us to speak freely." He called Trump "an advocate for free speech."

Worth said he doesn't expect any evidence to come out that will convince him that Trump ran afoul of the law. He argues Trump was simply questioning the election results.

"You're allowed to do that. This is a free country. It's called freedom. You're allowed to say what you feel is actually true. I believe what I feel is true, and he does too," Worth said.

Trump's brief jailhouse visit capped a long, intensely hot August day filled with circus-like energy. Some people were wearing costumes, including multiple "Uncle Sams" and some rats and a wolf that represented the anti-Trump crowd.

Several hours prior to the anticipated arrival of former President Trump, protesters were squaring off with dueling chants and shouting verbal jabs at one another. The sometimes-profane chants included calls to lock up Biden and Trump.

During the late afternoon, members of the Black Trump group were joined by self-proclaimed Mayor of Magaville rapper Forgiato Blow and others for an impromptu jam session featuring songs like Blow's "Trump Saved the USA."

Georgia Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene showed up at the jail as Trump's plane was landing at Hartsfield-Jackson International Airport, fresh off her trip to Wisconsin to serve as a surrogate for Trump at the first GOP presidential debate that he snubbed.

Greene swapped out her profile on social media with a mock mugshot in a show of solidarity, she told Right Side Broadcasting Network, a conservative network. "I'm ashamed of Georgia," Greene said in the friendly interview.

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But it wasn't all Trump supporters outside the county jail on Rice Street.

One anti-Trump group outside the jail on Thursday was the Republicans Against Trump, also known as RAT. Its members wore black and white striped prison jumpsuits and full rat costumes. Their leader, Domenic Santana, said they want to see Trump held accountable for attempting to disrupt Georgia's election process.

Meanwhile, Nadine Seiler flew down this week from Maryland to witness the historic arrest of Trump.

One of the few anti-Trump demonstrators to show up Thursday led to testy verbal confrontations with Trump supporters as she carried a banner proclaiming "Finally, Trump Arrested."

"He tried to steal the vote of Black and brown people," Seiler said. "That's why he's here because he tried to disenfranchise Black and brown voters."

Georgia Recorder Editor John McCosh contributed to this report.

This story was originally published by the Georgia Recorder, which like South Dakota Searchlight is part of States Newsroom, a network of news bureaus supported by grants and a coalition of donors as a 501c(3) public charity. Georgia Recorder maintains editorial independence. Contact Editor John McCosh for questions: info@georgiarecorder.com. Follow Georgia Recorder on Facebook and Twitter.

Jill Nolin is a reporter for the Georgia Recorder. She has spent nearly 15 years reporting on state and local government in four states, focusing on policy and political stories and tracking public spending. She has spent the last five years chasing stories in the halls of Georgia's Gold Dome, earning recognition for her work showing the impact of rising opioid addiction on the state's rural communities. She is a graduate of Troy University.

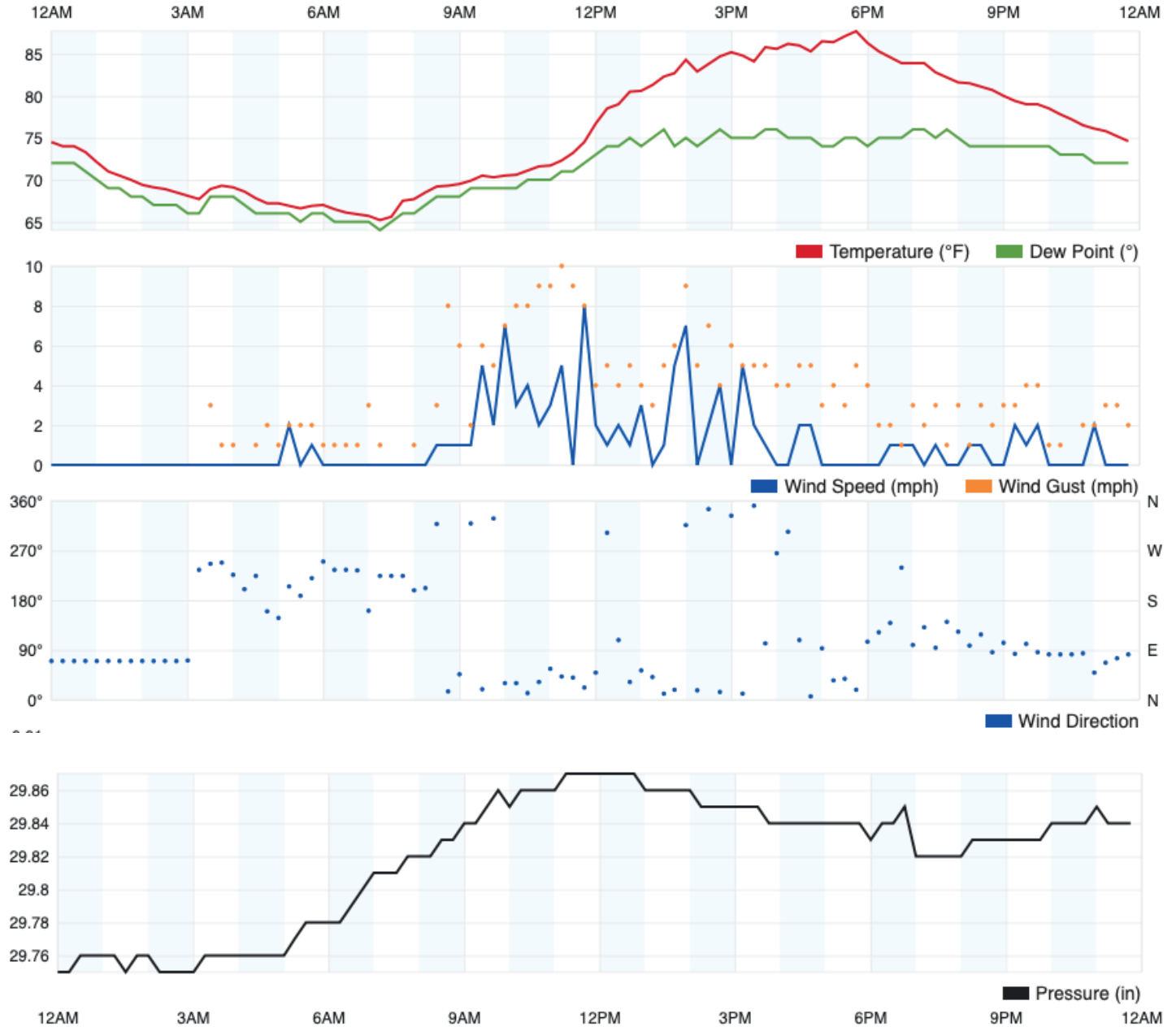
Before joining the Georgia Recorder, Ross Williams covered local and state government for the Marietta Daily Journal. His work earned recognition from the Georgia Associated Press Media Editors and the Georgia Press Association, including beat reporting, business writing and non-deadline reporting.

Stanley Dunlap, senior reporter for the Georgia Recorder, has covered government and politics for news outlets in Georgia and Tennessee for the past decade. The Georgia Associated Press Managing Editors named Stanley a finalist for best deadline reporting. The Tennessee Press Association honored him for his reporting on the disappearance of Holly Bobo.

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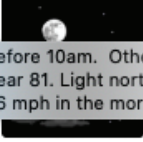





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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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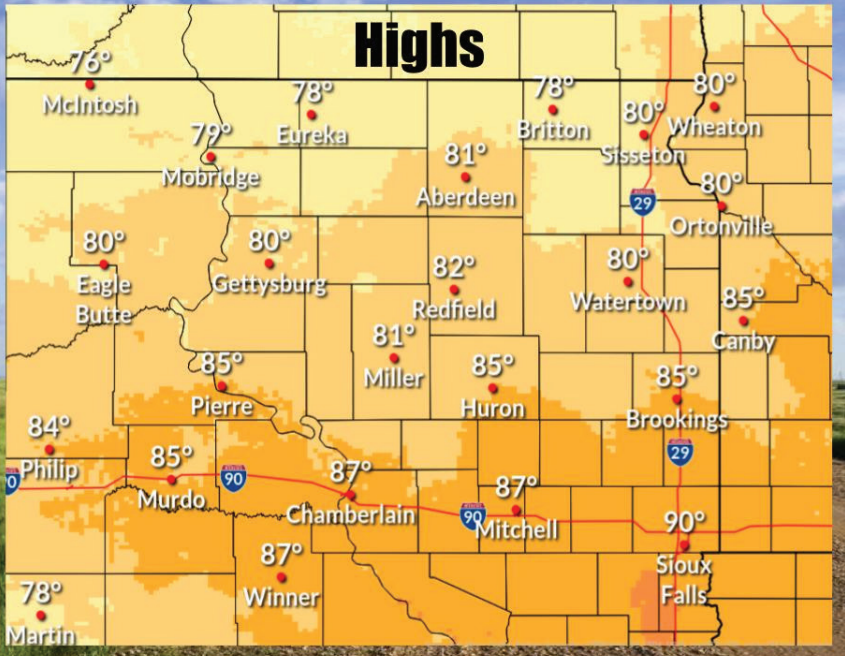
Today	Tonight	Saturday	Saturday Night	Sunday	Sunday Night	Monday
						
Today: Patchy fog before 10am. Otherwise, sunny, with a high near 81. Light north wind increasing to 11 to 16 mph in the morning.						
Patchy Fog then Sunny	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny
High: 81 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 74 °F	Low: 53 °F	High: 81 °F	Low: 57 °F	High: 76 °F




Drier & Cooler Air Moves In Today

August 25, 2023
2:46 AM

	8/25 Fri															
	7am	8am	9am	10am	11am	12pm	1pm	2pm	3pm	4pm	5pm	6pm	7pm	8pm		
Aberdeen	65	67	68	67	65	62	59	58	57	56	56	56	57	57		
Britton	66	67	69	68	66	63	59	58	56	56	56	56	57	58		
Brookings	67	68	68	69	69	69	68	66	64	63	61	59	58	57		
Chamberlain	67	68	69	70	69	67	65	62	59	57	56	56	56	57		
Clark	67	68	70	70	69	68	66	63	60	58	56	56	56	56		
Eagle Butte	62	61	59	56	54	51	49	47	47	48	48	49	49	50		
Ellendale	64	65	65	65	62	59	57	56	55	54	55	55	56	57		
Eureka	63	64	64	62	59	56	54	53	53	53	52	53	54	55		
Gettysburg	65	65	65	63	62	59	56	54	53	52	52	53	53	54		
Huron	68	68	70	70	70	69	67	64	61	59	58	57	57	57		
Kennebec	66	67	68	68	67	65	62	59	57	55	54	54	54	55		
McIntosh	57	56	54	53	53	52	51	51	52	51	52	52	52	53		
Milbank	68	70	70	71	70	70	68	66	62	58	58	58	58	58		
Miller	66	68	69	70	68	66	65	62	59	57	57	56	56	57		
Mobridge	62	62	62	60	58	57	55	54	52	52	52	52	52	54		
Murdo	64	64	64	64	63	59	57	54	52	50	49	49	48	50		
Pierre	65	65	65	65	64	61	58	55	53	52	51	51	51	52		
Redfield	68	68	70	71	68	67	65	62	59	57	57	57	57	58		
Sisseton	66	67	68	69	68	66	64	60	58	57	57	57	58	58		
Watertown	67	68	70	70	69	69	68	65	61	59	57	56	56	56		
Webster	66	67	68	69	67	65	64	60	57	55	55	55	56	56		
Wheaton	65	67	68	68	67	66	63	58	57	56	56	57	57	57		





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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Look for a refreshing change to the humidity today! Much closer to seasonal temperatures and levels of humidity are anticipated through the weekend as well.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 5:47 PM

Low Temp: 65 °F at 7:12 AM

Wind: 10 mph at 11:12 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 41 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 101 in 1926

Record Low: 38 in 1896

Average High: 82

Average Low: 54

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.81

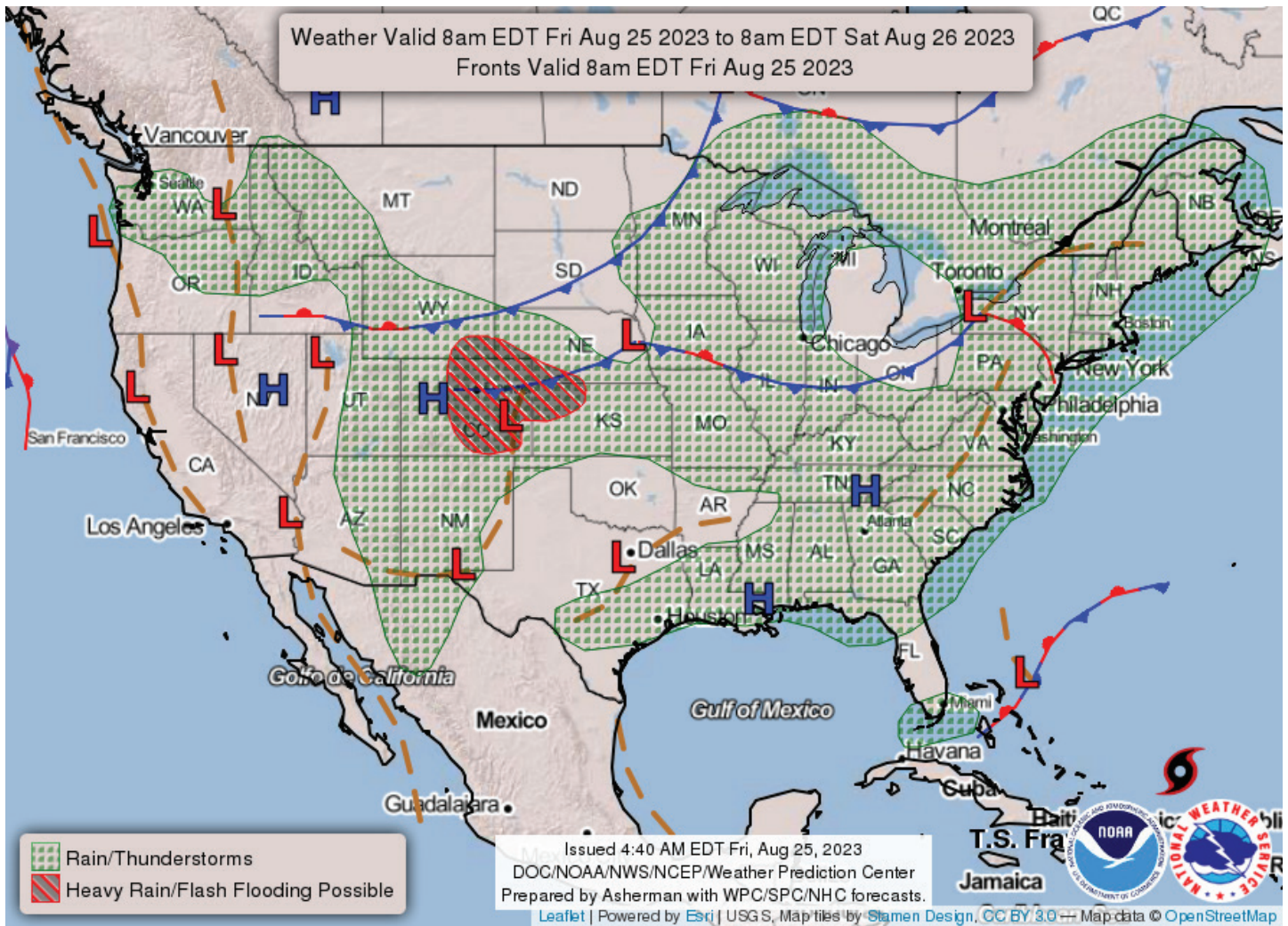
Precip to date in Aug.: 5.92

Average Precip to date: 15.91

Precip Year to Date: 18.59

Sunset Tonight: 8:25:02 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:45:09 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 25, 1990: Severe thunderstorms moved across central and northeastern South Dakota produce golf ball size hail and wind gusts exceeding 60 mph. One storm produced a weak F0 tornado between Bowdle and Roscoe in Edmunds County.

1814: In the early afternoon, a strong tornado struck northwest Washington D.C. and downtown. The severe tornadic storm arrived the day after the British Troops had set fire to the Capitol, the White House, and other public buildings. The storm's rains would douse those flames. The tornado did major structural damage to the residential section of the city. The tornado's flying debris killed more British soldiers than by the guns of the American resistance. The storm blew off roofs and carried them high up into the air, knocked down chimneys and fences and damaged numerous homes. Some homes were destroyed. It lifted two pieces of cannon and deposited them several yards away. At least 30 Americans were killed or injured in the heavily damaged buildings, and an unknown number of British killed and wounded.

1885 - A severe hurricane struck South Carolina causing 1.3 million dollars damage at Charleston. (David Ludlum)

1940 - New Jersey experienced its coldest August morning of record, with lows of 32 degrees at Layton and Charlotteburg. (The Weather Channel)

1948: One of the worst tornadoes to strike New Zealand occurred at Hamilton on this day. This estimated F2tornado killed three people, injuring dozens, and destroying or severely damaging almost 150 houses and 50 business premises in Hamilton and Franklin.

1987 - Morning thunderstorms produced heavy rain in eastern Nebraska and southwestern Iowa. Stanton IA reported 10.50 inches of rain. Water was reported up to the handle of automobiles west of Greenwood NE. Rainfall totals for a two day period ranged from 7 to 14 inches across southwestern Iowa. Crop damage was in the millions for both states. Subsequent flooding of streams in Iowa the last week of August caused millions of dollars damage to crops, as some streams crested ten feet above flood stage. (Storm Data)

1988 - Seven cities in California reported record high temperatures for the date, including Sacramento with an afternoon reading of 104 degrees. Thunderstorms produced locally heavy rains in Arizona. Chino Valley was drenched with 2.50 inches of rain in just thirty minutes washing out a couple of streets in town. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms drenched Spencer, IN, with 4.10 inches of rain in three hours causing extensive street flooding. Evening thunderstorms in eastern Kansas produced up to six inches of rain around Emporia, and four inches of rain in just forty-five minutes near Parsons, and also produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Lake Melvern. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - Katrina becomes a hurricane just before landfall in south Florida between Hallandale Beach and North Miami Beach. Maximum sustained winds at the time of landfall were near 80 mph. There were eleven fatalities in South Florida, including four by falling trees. More than 1.3 million customers lost electrical services, and preliminary insured loss estimates ranged from \$600 million to \$2 billion in the state of Florida (Associated Press).

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE WOMEN AT THE TOMB

The women which had come with Him out of Galilee followed and saw where His body was laid. There, Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the Mother of Joses, sat in front of the tomb.

The others returned and prepared spices and ointments. But on the Sabbath they rested according to the commandment.

On the morrow, the day after the Preparation, the chief priests and the Pharisees came to Pilate saying, "Sir we remember that the deceiver said while still living, 'After three days I will rise again.' Give orders, therefore, to make the tomb secure until the three days, lest the disciples coming, steal Him and say to His people, 'He was risen from the dead' the last error would be worse than the first!"

Pilate said to them, "You have a guard, go and make it as secure as you know how."

They went therefore, and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting a guard.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to realize that Your presence and power can never be limited by any work of man. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Pilate said to them, "You have a guard, go and make it as secure as you know how." They went therefore, and made the tomb secure, sealing the stone and setting a guard. Mark 16, Matthew 28, Luke 24



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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.22.23

1 12 26 36 50 7

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$52,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 43 Mins 31
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.23.23

9 11 29 38 39 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$8,870,000

NEXT 1 Days 14 Hrs 58
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.24.23

5 30 35 40 41 7

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 13 Mins 31
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.23.23

9 11 17 21 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$23,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 31 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.23.23

18 25 38 56 61 19

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 42
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.23.23

25 30 32 33 55 20

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$345,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 42
DRAW: Mins 32 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Redfield, 25-10, 25-21, 25-17
Alcester-Hudson def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-18, 25-21, 25-14
Andes Central/Dakota Christian def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-22, 25-21
Arlington def. Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op, 25-19, 25-11, 26-24
Avon def. Freeman, 19-25, 25-15, 25-13
Belle Fourche def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-7, 25-11, 25-7
Bridgewater-Emery def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-8, 25-14, 25-15
Britton-Hecla def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-19, 21-25, 25-15, 25-19
Burke def. Colome, 25-18, 25-7, 25-8
Castlewood def. Hitchcock-Tulare, 25-22, 25-17, 26-24
Chester def. Ethan, 25-10, 25-21, 25-22
Colman-Egan def. Baltic, 19-25, 25-19, 21-25, 25-21, 15-10
Dakota Valley def. Yankton, 25-23, 25-19, 25-23
Dell Rapids def. West Central, 25-11, 25-21, 25-19
Deubrook def. DeSmet, 25-16, 25-8, 25-18
Deuel def. Webster, 18-25, 20-25, 25-19, 25-18, 25-9
Faith def. Lemmon High School, 25-18, 25-21, 25-22
Faulkton def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-8, 25-14, 25-13
Florence/Henry def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-14, 25-16, 25-15
Garretson def. Beresford, 25-15, 25-14, 25-20
Hamlin def. Groton Area, 20-25, 27-25, 25-21, 22-25, 15-13
Harrisburg def. Brandon Valley, 25-16, 25-20, 19-25, 25-21
Highmore-Harrold def. Ipswich, 25-16, 30-28, 25-19
Leola/Frederick def. Waubay/Summit, 25-14, 25-13, 25-5
Madison def. Flandreau, 25-22, 25-20, 25-18
Menno def. Centerville, 21-25, 25-11, 22-25, 25-17, 15-9
Milbank def. Sisseton, 25-14, 25-21, 25-18
Miller def. Winner, 20-25, 27-25, 25-18, 25-23
North Central Co-Op def. Potter County, 25-18, 25-18, 25-21
Northwestern def. Wolsey-Wessington, 25-21, 25-21, 25-22
Oldham-Ramona/Rutland def. Howard, 25-15, 25-21, 25-21
Parkston def. Chamberlain, 25-23, 25-8, 25-12
Platte-Geddes def. Hanson, 25-15, 25-13
Rapid City Christian def. Douglas, 25-16, 25-22, 25-17
Sanborn Central/Woonsocket def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-10, 26-24
Scotland def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-20, 22-25, 25-20, 25-9
Sioux Falls Christian def. Tea Area, 25-16, 25-13, 25-9
Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-15, 25-19, 25-17
Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Sioux Falls O'Gorman, 25-12, 25-19, 25-17
Sioux Valley def. Clark/Willow Lake, 25-12, 25-19, 25-20
St. Thomas More def. Hot Springs, 25-18, 25-13, 25-14
Tri-Valley def. Parker, 25-21, 22-25, 26-24, 25-20
Valentine, Neb. def. Bennett County, 25-14, 25-15, 25-21

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Wagner def. Vermillion, 25-9, 25-18, 25-12
Warner def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-7, 25-7, 25-17
Wilmot def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-19, 25-21, 26-24

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

Europe is cracking down on Big Tech. This is what will change when you sign on

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Starting Friday, Europeans will see their online life change.

People in the 27-nation European Union can alter some of what shows up when they search, scroll and share on the biggest social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram and Facebook and other tech giants like Google and Amazon.

That's because Big Tech companies, most headquartered in the U.S., are now subject to a pioneering new set of EU digital regulations. The Digital Services Act aims to protect European users when it comes to privacy, transparency and removal of harmful or illegal content.

Here are five things that will change when you sign on:

YOU CAN TURN OFF AI-RECOMMENDED VIDEOS

Automated recommendation systems decide, based on people's profiles, what they see in their feeds. Those can be switched off.

Meta, owner of Facebook and Instagram, said users can opt out of its artificial intelligence ranking and recommendation systems that determine which Instagram Reels, Facebook Stories and search results to show. Instead, people can choose to view content only from people they follow, starting with the newest posts.

Search results will be based only on the words they type, not personalized based on a user's previous activity and interests, Meta President of Global Affairs Nick Clegg said in a blog post.

On TikTok, instead of being shown videos based on what users previously viewed, the "For You" feed will serve up popular videos from their area and around the world.

Turning off recommender systems also means the video-sharing platform's "Following" and "Friends" feeds will show posts from accounts users follow in chronological order.

Those on Snapchat "can opt out of a personalised content experience."

Algorithmic recommendation systems based on user profiles have been blamed for creating so-called filter bubbles and pushing social media users to increasingly extreme posts. The European Commission wants users to have at least one other option for content recommendations that's not based on profiling.

IT'S EASIER TO FLAG HARMFUL CONTENT

Users should find it easier to report a post, video or comment that breaks the law or violates a platform's rules so that it can be reviewed and taken down if required.

TikTok has started giving users an "additional reporting option" for content, including advertising, that they believe is illegal. To pinpoint the problem, people can choose from categories such as hate speech and harassment, suicide and self-harm, misinformation or frauds and scams.

The app by Chinese parent company ByteDance has added a new team of moderators and legal specialists to review videos flagged by users, alongside automated systems and existing moderation teams that already work to identify such material.

Facebook and Instagram's existing tools for reporting content are "easier for people to access," said Meta's Clegg, without providing more details.

YOU'LL KNOW WHY YOUR POST WAS TAKEN DOWN

The EU wants platforms to be more transparent about how they operate.

So, TikTok says European users will get more information "about a broader range of content moderation decisions."

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"For example, if we decide a video is ineligible for recommendation because it contains unverified claims about an election that is still unfolding, we will let users know," TikTok said. "We will also share more detail about these decisions, including whether the action was taken by automated technology, and we will explain how both content creators and those who file a report can appeal a decision."

Google said it's "expanding the scope" of its transparency reports by giving more information about how it handles content moderation for more of its services, including Search, Maps, Shopping and Play Store, without providing more details.

YOU CAN REPORT FAKE PRODUCTS

The DSA is not just about policing content. It's also aimed at stopping the flow of counterfeit Gucci handbags, pirated Nike sneakers and other dodgy goods.

Amazon says it has set up a new channel for reporting suspected illegal products and content and also is providing more publicly available information about third-party merchants.

The online retail giant said it invests "significantly in protecting our store from bad actors, illegal content and in creating a trustworthy shopping experience. We have built on this strong foundation for DSA compliance."

Online fashion marketplace Zalando is setting up flagging systems, though it downplays the threat posed by its highly curated collection of designer clothes, bags and shoes.

"Customers only see content produced or screened by Zalando," the German company said. "As a result, we have close to zero risk of illegal content and are therefore in a better position than many other companies when it comes to implementing the DSA changes."

YOUR KIDS WON'T BE TARGETED WITH DIGITAL ADS

Brussels wants to crack down on digital ads aimed at children over concerns about privacy and manipulation. Some platforms already started tightening up ahead of Friday's deadline, even beyond Europe.

TikTok said in July that it was restricting the types of data used to show ads to teens. Users who are 13 to 17 in the EU, plus Britain, Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and Liechtenstein no longer see ads "based on their activities on or off TikTok."

It's doing the same in the U.S. for 13- to 15-year-olds.

Snapchat is restricting personalized and targeted advertising to users under 18.

Meta in February stopped showing Facebook and Instagram users who are 13 to 17 ads based on their activity, such as following certain Instagram posts or Facebook pages. Now, age and location are the only data points advertisers can use to show ads to teens.

UK: Russian mercenary chief's likely death could destabilize his private army

By The Associated Press undefined

Britain's defense ministry said Friday that the presumed death of Russian mercenary leader Yevgeny Prigozhin in a plane crash could destabilize the Wagner Group, whose brutal fighters were feared in Ukraine, Africa and Syria and conducted a brief but shocking mutiny in Russia.

Prigozhin, who was listed among those on board, was eulogized Thursday by Russian President Vladimir Putin, even as suspicions grew that Putin was behind a Wednesday crash that many saw as an assassination.

Russian authorities have not yet confirmed Prigozhin's death.

The British ministry wrote that "It is highly likely that he is indeed dead." However, it noted that "he is known to exercise exceptional security measures."

"The demise of Prigozhin almost certainly would have a deeply destabilizing effect on the Wagner Group. His personal attributes of hyperactivity, exceptional audacity, a drive for results and extreme brutality permeated Wagner and are unlikely to be matched by any successor," the ministry wrote in a statement.

Wagner mercenaries were key elements of Russia's forces in its war in Ukraine, particularly in the monthslong fight to take the city of Bakhmut, the conflict's most grueling battle. Wagner fighters also have played a central role projecting Russian influence in global trouble spots, first in Africa and then in Syria.

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A preliminary U.S. intelligence assessment concluded that the plane was downed by intentional explosion. One of the U.S. and Western officials who described the initial U.S. assessment said it determined that Prigozhin was "very likely" targeted and that the explosion falls in line with Putin's "long history of trying to silence his critics."

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment, did not offer any details about what caused the explosion, which was widely believed to be vengeance for the mutiny in June that posed the biggest challenge to the Russian leader's 23-year rule.

Pentagon spokesman Gen. Pat Ryder said there was "no information to suggest" that a surface-to-air missile took down the plane. He declined to say whether the U.S. suspected a bomb or believed the crash was an assassination.

The jet crashed Wednesday soon after taking off from Moscow, carrying Prigozhin, six other Wagner members, and a crew of three, according to Russia's civil aviation authority. Rescuers found 10 bodies, and Russian media cited anonymous sources in Wagner who said Prigozhin was dead. But there has been no official confirmation.

President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters Wednesday, said he believed Putin was likely behind the crash. "I don't know for a fact what happened, but I'm not surprised," Biden said. "There's not much that happens in Russia that Putin's not behind."

The passenger manifest also included Prigozhin's second-in-command, whose nom de guerre became the group's name, as well as Wagner's logistics chief and at least one possible bodyguard.

It was not clear why several high-ranking members of Wagner, including top leaders who are normally exceedingly careful about their security, would have been on the same flight. The purpose of their trip to St. Petersburg was unknown.

Russian authorities have said the cause of the crash is under investigation.

In his first comments on the crash, Putin said the passengers had "made a significant contribution" to the fighting in Ukraine.

"We remember this, we know, and we will not forget," he said in a televised interview with the Russian-installed leader of Ukraine's partially occupied Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin.

Putin recalled that he had known Prigozhin since the early 1990s and described him as "a man of difficult fate" who had "made serious mistakes in life, and he achieved the results he needed — both for himself and, when I asked him about it, for the common cause, as in these last months. He was a talented man, a talented businessman."

Russian state media have not covered the crash extensively, instead focusing on Putin's Thursday remarks to the BRICS summit in Johannesburg via video link and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Sergei Mironov, the leader of the pro-Kremlin Fair Russia party and former chairman of the upper house of the Russian parliament, said on his Telegram channel that Prigozhin had "messed with too many people in Russia, Ukraine and the West."

"It now seems that at some point, his number of enemies reached a critical point," Mironov wrote.

Numerous opponents and critics of Putin have been killed or gravely sickened in apparent assassination attempts, and U.S. and other Western officials long expected the Russian leader to go after Prigozhin, despite promising to drop charges in a deal that ended the June 23-24 mutiny.

Prigozhin was long outspoken and critical of how Russian generals were waging the war in Ukraine, where his mercenaries were some of the fiercest fighters for the Kremlin. For a long time, Putin appeared content to allow such infighting, but Prigozhin's brief revolt raised the ante.

His mercenaries swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there without firing a shot. They then drove to within about 200 kilometers (125 miles) of Moscow and downed several military aircraft, killing more than a dozen Russian pilots.

Putin first denounced the rebellion as "treason" and a "stab in the back," but soon made a deal that saw an end to the mutiny in exchange for an amnesty for Prigozhin and his mercenaries and permission for them to move to Belarus.

Now, many are suggesting the punishment has finally come.

What is Stockholm syndrome? It all started with a bank robbery 50 years ago

By KARL RITTER and JAN M. OLSEN Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — It's a common term these days, deployed to describe the bond that victims of kidnappings or hostage situations sometimes develop with their captors: "Stockholm syndrome." And it got its name 50 years ago this week, during a failed bank robbery in Sweden's capital.

The Stockholm syndrome — initially dubbed "Norrmlalmstorg syndrome," after the square where the bank heist took place — has since been used in connection with hostage-takings around the world, including the kidnapping of newspaper heiress Patty Hearst in the 1970s.

Here's a look at Stockholm syndrome and how it got its name.

WHAT IS STOCKHOLM SYNDROME?

It refers to the bond that can develop between hostages and their captors in hostage-taking and kidnapping situations. In some cases, hostages may develop sympathies for their captors and their cause — and even turn against the police. Rather than a diagnosis of a disorder, experts describe it as a psychological coping mechanism used by some hostages to endure being held captive and abused.

HOW DID IT GET ITS NAME?

The term can be traced back to Swedish criminologist and psychiatrist Nils Bejerot, who advised police in a standoff during a bank robbery in the Swedish capital in August 1973. During the standoff, some of the hostages appeared to side with the hostage-takers and against the police, a phenomenon Bejerot called "Norrmlalmstorg syndrome." Internationally, it became known as Stockholm syndrome.

Bejerot's daughter, Susanne says her father, who died in 1988, never thought the term would gain such traction worldwide. "He didn't understand that it would become such a big thing," she said Wednesday.

WHAT HAPPENED DURING THAT BANK ROBBERY?

On Aug. 23, 1973, convicted thief Jan-Erik Olsson, 32, tried to rob a bank in downtown Stockholm while on furlough from prison. Police responded quickly, and a standoff ensued.

Olsson, armed with a submachine gun, took four bank employees hostage and demanded 3 million kronor, a bulletproof vest and a getaway car. He also demanded that his former jail mate, Clark Olofsson, be released from prison and brought to the bank. Authorities agreed.

The drama played out on live television in Sweden as police tried to persuade Olsson and Olofsson to surrender. Even Prime Minister Olof Palme got involved in the negotiations.

At one point, a hostage, Kristin Enmark, told Palme over the telephone that she was afraid of the police, not of the two criminals. She appealed to authorities to meet their demands. Enmark later said she had developed a bond with Olofsson, whom she saw as the guarantor of her safety.

Two police officers were injured with gunshot wounds during the standoff, which ended on Aug. 28 when police, using tear gas, stormed the bank, arrested Olsson and Olofsson and freed the hostages.

WHAT ARE OTHER EXAMPLES OF STOCKHOLM SYNDROME?

One of the most well-known cases happened the following year, 1974, when Patty Hearst, the 19-year-old granddaughter of a wealthy newspaper magnate was kidnapped in the United States by the Symbionese Liberation Army, an unknown armed revolutionary group.

Two months later, questions concerning Hearst's ties to her captors — and the notion of Stockholm syndrome — arose after Hearst declared her allegiance to the SLA, denounced her family and posed for a photograph carrying a weapon in front of the SLA flag. She was arrested in 1975 and was sentenced to seven years in prison. President Jimmy Carter commuted her sentence in 1979. She was later pardoned by President Bill Clinton.

Stockholm syndrome has also been applied in the context of victims of domestic violence or childhood sexual abuse who develop connections with their abusers.

REAL OR MYTH?

Stockholm syndrome isn't listed as a diagnosis by the American Psychiatric Association's Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders or the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Related Health Problems. Some experts question whether it's a psychological condition at all or just a survival strategy — rational choices made by some people as they face extreme danger.

In the U.S. some law enforcement experts have said the phenomenon is rare and overpublicized by the media. But it still features frequently in popular culture, including books, films and music, and has entered the English lexicon as an informal term for people who forge unexpected bonds with others who treat them badly.

Stockholm syndrome inspired movies like the 2013 thriller "Labor Day" with Kate Winslet, Josh Brolin and Gattlin Griffith and the 2018 film "Stockholm" with Ethan Hawke and Noomi Rapace. The latter recounted the failed 1973 bank heist. It's also the title of songs by bands including One Direction, Muse and Blink-182.

One image, one face, one American moment: The Donald Trump mug shot

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

A camera clicks. In a fraction of a second, the shutter opens and then closes, freezing forever the image in front of it.

When the camera shutter blinked inside a jail in downtown Atlanta on Thursday, it both created and documented a tiny inflection point in American life. Captured for posterity, there was a former president of the United States, for the first time in history, under arrest and captured in the sort of frame more commonly associated with drug dealers or drunken drivers. The trappings of power gone, for that split second.

Left behind: an enduring image that will appear in history books long after Donald Trump is gone.

"It will be forever part of the iconography of being alive in this time," said Marty Kaplan, a professor at the University of Southern California Annenberg School of Communications.

In the photo, Trump confronts the camera in front of a bland gray backdrop, his eyes meeting the lens in an intense glare. He's wearing a blue suit, white shirt and red tie, his shoulders squared, his head tilted slightly toward the camera. The sheriff's logo has been digitally added above his right shoulder.

Some of the 18 others charged with him in Georgia smiled in their booking photos like they were posing for a yearbook. Not Trump. His defiance is palpable, as if he's staring down a nemesis through the lens.

NOT LIKE ANY OTHER PHOTOGRAPH

Trump facing charges is by now a familiar sight of 2023 to Americans who watched him stand before a judge in a New York courtroom or saw watercolor sketches from the inside of federal courthouses in Miami and Washington, where cameras aren't allowed.

This is different.

As Anderson Cooper put it on CNN: "The former president of the United States has an inmate number." P01135809, to be exact. But until he surrendered to face charges of trying to steal the 2020 election in Georgia, his fourth indictment this year, he avoided having to pose for the iconic booking photo like millions accused of crimes before him.

Never mind that Trump, like all Americans, is innocent until proven guilty in court; the mug shot, and all it connotes, packs an extra emotional and cultural punch.

A mug shot is a visceral representation of the criminal justice system, a symbol of lost freedom. It permanently memorializes one of the worst days of a person's life, a moment not meant for a scrapbook. It must be particularly foreign to a man born into privilege, who famously loves to be in control, who is highly attentive to his image and who rose to be the most powerful figure in the world.

"'Indictment' is a sort of bloodless word. And words are pale compared to images," said Kaplan, a former speechwriter for Vice President Walter Mondale and Hollywood screenwriter. "A mug shot is a genre. Its frame is, 'This is a deer caught in the headlights. This is the crook being nailed.' It's the walk of shame moment."

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HE IS ALREADY LEVERAGING THE MOMENT

Trump is unlikely to treat the mug shot as a moment of shame as he seeks a second term in the White House while fighting criminal charges in four jurisdictions. His campaign has reported a spike in contributions each time he's been indicted.

And the imagery itself? Trump hasn't shied away from it. In fact, his campaign concocted one long before it became real.

Months before he was photographed in Georgia on Thursday evening, his campaign used the prospect of a mug shot as a fundraising opportunity. For \$36, anyone can buy a T-shirt with a fake booking photo of Trump and the words "not guilty." Dozens of similar designs are available to purchase online, including many that appeal to Trump's critics.

Now they have a real one to work with. Within minutes of the mug shot's release, Trump's campaign used it in a fundraising appeal on its website. "BREAKING NEWS: THE MUGSHOT IS HERE," reads the subject line of the campaign's latest fundraising email, which advertises a new T-shirt with the image. And this quote: "This mugshot will forever go down in history as a symbol of America's defiance of tyranny."

In a show of solidarity, U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene posted to X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, a photo of herself smiling broadly in front of a gray background, the sheriff's logo in the top left corner to mimic the jail's style — essentially her DIY mug. "I stand with President Trump against the commie DA Fani Willis," she said, a swipe at the Fulton County, Georgia, district attorney who persuaded a grand jury to indict Trump.

Recent history is full of politicians seeking political dividends from their booking photos. They've offered large smiles or defiant smirks and tried to make the best of their predicament.

Yet this is one of just 45 presidents in all of U.S. history — not only someone who held the keys to the most powerful government in the world, but who held a position that for many these days, both at home and overseas, personifies the United States. To see that face looking at a camera whose lens he is not seeking out — that's a potent moment.

"There's a power to the still image, which is inarguable," said Mitchell Stevens, a professor emeritus at New York University who has written a book about the place imagery holds in modern society and how it is supplanting the word.

"It kind of freezes a moment, and in this case it's freezing an unhappy moment for Donald Trump," Stevens said. "And it's not something he can click away. It's not something he can simply brush off. That moment is going to live on. And it's entirely possible that it will end up as the image that history preserves of this man."

Nerve agents, poison and window falls. Over the years, Kremlin foes have been attacked or killed

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — The attacks range from the exotic — poisoned by drinking polonium-laced tea or touching a deadly nerve agent — to the more mundane of getting shot at close range. Some take a fatal plunge from an open window.

Over the years, Kremlin political critics, turncoat spies and investigative journalists have been killed or assaulted in a variety of ways.

None, however, has been known to perish in an air accident. But on Wednesday, a private plane carrying a mercenary chief who staged a brief rebellion in Russia plummeted into a field from tens of thousands of feet after breaking apart.

Assassination attempts against foes of President Vladimir Putin have been common during his nearly quarter century in power. Those close to the victims and the few survivors have blamed Russian authorities, but the Kremlin has routinely denied any involvement.

There also have been reports of prominent Russian executives dying under mysterious circumstances, including falling from windows, although whether they were deliberate killings or suicides is sometimes

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difficult to determine.

Some prominent cases of documented killings or attempted killings:

ATTACKS ON POLITICAL OPPONENTS

In August 2020, opposition leader Alexei Navalny fell ill on a flight from Siberia to Moscow. The plane landed in the city of Omsk, where Navalny was hospitalized in a coma. Two days later, he was airlifted to Berlin, where he recovered.

His allies almost immediately said he was poisoned, but Russian officials denied it. Labs in Germany, France and Sweden confirmed Navalny was poisoned by a Soviet-era nerve agent known as Novichok. Navalny returned to Russia and was convicted this month of extremism and sentenced to 19 years in prison, his third conviction with a prison sentence in two years on charges he says are politically motivated.

In 2018, Pyotr Verzilov, a founder of the protest group Pussy Riot, fell severely ill and also was flown to Berlin, where doctors said poisoning was "highly plausible." He eventually recovered. Earlier that year, Verzilov embarrassed the Kremlin by running onto the field during soccer's World Cup final in Moscow with three other activists to protest police brutality. His allies said he could have been targeted because of his activism.

Prominent opposition figure Vladimir Kara-Murza survived what he believes were attempts to poison him in 2015 and 2017. He nearly died from kidney failure in the first instance and suspects poisoning but no cause was determined. He was hospitalized with a similar illness in 2017 and put into a medically induced coma. His wife said doctors confirmed he was poisoned. Kara-Murza survived, and his lawyer says police have refused to investigate. This year, he was convicted of treason and sentenced to 25 years in prison.

The highest profile killing of a political opponent in recent was that of Boris Nemtsov. Once deputy prime minister under Boris Yeltsin, Nemtsov was a popular politician and harsh critic of Putin. On a cold February night in 2015, he was gunned down by assailants on a bridge adjacent to the Kremlin as he walked with his girlfriend in a death that shocked the country. Five men from the Russian region of Chechnya were convicted, with the gunman receiving up to 20 years, but Nemtsov's allies said their involvement was an attempt to shift blame from the government.

FORMER INTELLIGENCE OPERATIVES

In 2006, Russian defector Alexander Litvinenko, a former agent for the KGB and its post-Soviet successor agency, the FSB, felt violently ill in London after drinking tea laced with radioactive polonium-210, dying three weeks later. He had been investigating the shooting death of Russian journalist Anna Politkovskaya as well as the Russian intelligence service's alleged links to organized crime. Before dying, Litvinenko told journalists the FSB was still operating a poisons laboratory dating from the Soviet era.

A British inquiry found that Russian agents had killed Litvinenko, probably with Putin's approval, but the Kremlin denied any involvement.

Another former Russian intelligence officer, Sergei Skripal, was poisoned in Britain in 2018. He and his adult daughter Yulia fell ill in the city of Salisbury and spent weeks in critical condition. They survived, but the attack later claimed the life of a British woman and left a man and a police officer seriously ill.

Authorities said they both were poisoned with the military grade nerve agent Novichok. Britain blamed Russian intelligence, but Moscow denied any role. Putin called Skripal, a double agent for Britain during his espionage career, a "scumbag" of no interest to the Kremlin because he was tried in Russia and exchanged in a spy swap in 2010.

SLAIN JOURNALISTS

Numerous journalists critical of authorities in Russia have been killed or suffered mysterious deaths, which their colleagues in some cases blamed on someone in the political hierarchy. In other cases, the reported reluctance by authorities to investigate raised suspicions.

Anna Politkovskaya, the journalist for the newspaper Novaya Gazeta whose death Litvinenko was investigating, was shot and killed in the elevator of her Moscow apartment building on Oct. 7, 2006 — Putin's birthday. She had won international acclaim for her reporting on human rights abuses in Chechnya. The gunman, from Chechnya, was convicted of the killing and sentenced to 20 years in prison. Four other Chechens were given shorter prison terms for their involvement in the murder.

Yuri Shchekochikhin, another Novaya Gazeta reporter, died of a sudden and violent illness in 2003. Shchekochikhin was investigating corrupt business deals and the possible role of Russian security services in the 1999 apartment house bombings blamed on Chechen insurgents. His colleagues insisted that he was poisoned and accused the authorities of deliberately hindering the investigation.

YEVGENY PRIGOZHIN AND HIS LIEUTENANTS

Wednesday's plane crash that is presumed to have killed Yevgeny Prigozhin and top lieutenants of his Wagner private military company came two months to the day after he launched an armed rebellion that Putin labeled "a stab in the back" and "treason." While not critical of Putin, Prigozhin slammed the Russian military leadership and questioned the motives for going to war in Ukraine.

On Thursday, a preliminary U.S. intelligence assessment found that the crash that killed all 10 people aboard was intentionally caused by an explosion, according to U.S. and Western officials. The officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment. One said the explosion fell in line with Putin's "long history of trying to silence his critics."

In his first public comments on the crash, Putin appeared to hint there was no bad blood between him and Prigozhin. But former Kremlin speechwriter turned political analyst Abbas Gallyamov said: "Putin has demonstrated that if you fail to obey him without question, he will dispose of you without mercy, like an enemy, even if you are formally a patriot."

Maui County sues power company, saying utility did not turn off electricity during deadly wildfires

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Maui County sued Hawaiian Electric Company on Thursday over the fires that devastated Lahaina, saying the utility negligently failed to shut off power despite exceptionally high winds and dry conditions.

Witness accounts and video indicated that sparks from power lines ignited fires as utility poles snapped in the winds, which were driven by a passing hurricane. The Aug. 8 fires killed at least 115 people and left an unknown number of others missing, making them the deadliest in the U.S. in more than a century.

Hawaii Electric said in a statement it is "very disappointed that Maui County chose this litigious path while the investigation is still unfolding."

The lawsuit said the destruction could have been avoided and that the utility had a duty "to properly maintain and repair the electric transmission lines, and other equipment including utility poles associated with their transmission of electricity, and to keep vegetation properly trimmed and maintained so as to prevent contact with overhead power lines and other electric equipment."

The utility knew that high winds "would topple power poles, knock down power lines, and ignite vegetation," the lawsuit said. "Defendants also knew that if their overhead electrical equipment ignited a fire, it would spread at a critically rapid rate."

A drought in the region had left plants, including invasive grasses, dangerously dry. As Hurricane Dora passed roughly 500 miles (800 kilometers) south of Hawaii, strong winds toppled at least 30 power poles in West Maui. Video shot by a Lahaina resident shows a downed power line setting dry grasses alight. Firefighters initially contained that fire, but then left to attend to other calls, and residents said the fire later reignited and raced toward downtown Lahaina.

With downed power lines, police or utility crews blocking some roads, traffic ground to a standstill along Lahaina's Front Street. A number of residents jumped into the water off Maui as they tried to escape the flaming debris and overheated black smoke enveloping downtown.

Dozens of searchers in snorkel gear this week have been combing a 4-mile (6.4-kilometer) stretch of water for signs of anyone who might have perished. Crews are also painstakingly searching for remains among the ashes of destroyed businesses and multistory residential buildings.

For now, the number of confirmed dead stands at 115, a number that the county said is expected to rise.

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Maui County on Thursday released eight additional names of people who have been identified, including a family of four whose remains were found in a burned car near their home: 7-year-old Tony Takafua; his mother Salote Tone, 39; and his grandparents Faaoso Tone, 70, and Maluifonua Tone, 73.

The FBI and Maui County police are still trying to figure out how many others might be unaccounted for. The FBI said Tuesday there were 1,000 to 1,100 names on a tentative, unconfirmed list.

"Our primary focus in the wake of this unimaginable tragedy has been to do everything we can to support not just the people of Maui, but also Maui County," Hawaiian Electric's statement said.

Hawaiian Electric is a for-profit, investor-owned, publicly traded utility that serves 95% of Hawaii's electric customers. It is also facing several lawsuits from Lahaina residents as well as one from some of its own investors, who accused it of fraud in a federal lawsuit Thursday, saying it failed to disclose that its wildfire prevention and safety measures were inadequate.

Maui County's lawsuit notes other utilities, such as Southern California Edison Company, Pacific Gas & Electric, and San Diego Gas & Electric, have procedures for shutting off power during bad windstorms and said the "severe and catastrophic losses ... could have easily been prevented" if Hawaiian Electric had a similar shutoff plan.

The county said it is seeking compensation for damage to public property and resources in Lahaina as well as nearby Kula.

Other utilities have been found liable for devastating fires recently.

In June, a jury in Oregon found the electric utility PacifiCorp responsible for causing devastating fires during Labor Day weekend in 2020, ordering the company to pay tens of millions of dollars to 17 homeowners who sued and finding it liable for broader damages that could push the total award into the billions.

Pacific Gas & Electric declared bankruptcy and pleaded guilty to 84 counts of manslaughter after its neglected equipment caused a fire in the Sierra Nevada foothills in 2018 that destroyed nearly 19,000 homes, businesses and other buildings and virtually razed the town of Paradise, California.

Spain soccer chief will face an emergency meeting as reports say he will resign for kissing a player

By JOSEPH WILSON Associated Press

BARCELONA, Spain (AP) — The president of the Spanish soccer federation faces an emergency meeting of its general assembly on Friday amid media reports that he will hand in his resignation following an uproar for kissing a Women's World Cup champion.

Luis Rubiales is expected to stand before representatives of Spain's regional federations, clubs, players, coaches and referees in Madrid at noon local time and local media say he is stepping down.

The federation has refused to comment on repeated requests from The Associated Press for confirmation of Rubiales' decision to go that was reported late Thursday.

Rubiales, 46, is under immense pressure to leave his post since he grabbed player Jenni Hermoso and kissed her on the lips without her consent during the awards ceremony following Spain's 1-0 victory over England on Sunday in Sydney, Australia.

FIFA, soccer's global governing body and organizer of the Women's World Cup, opened a disciplinary case against him on Thursday. Its disciplinary committee was tasked with weighing whether Rubiales violated its code relating to "the basic rules of decent conduct" and "behaving in a way that brings the sport of football and/or FIFA into disrepute."

That move by FIFA came after Spain's acting Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said that Rubiales' attempt to apologize, which came after he initially insulted his critics, was unconvincing and that "he must continue taking further steps" to be held accountable.

Spain's Higher Council of Sports, the nation's governing sports body, pledged it would act quickly to consider various formal complaints filed against Rubiales to see if he had broken Spain's sports law or the federation's own code of conduct that sanction sexist acts. If so, Rubiales would face being declared unfit to hold his office by Spain's Administrative Court for Sports.

As if the forced kiss was not enough, Rubiales had shortly before grabbed his crotch in a lewd victory gesture from the section of dignitaries with Spain's Queen Letizia and the 16-year old Princess Sofía nearby.

The combination of the gesture and the unsolicited kiss has made Rubiales a national embarrassment after his conduct was broadcast to a global audience, marring the enormous accomplishment of the women who played for Spain.

Hermoso, a 33-year-old forward and key contributor to Spain's title, said on a social media stream "I did not like it, but what could I do?" about the kiss during a locker-room celebration immediately after the incident.

The first attempt to respond to the scandal was a statement it released in the name of Hermoso in which she downplayed the incident. Later, a local media report by sports website Relevo.com said that the federation had coerced her to making the statement. The federation has denied this to The AP.

On Wednesday, Hermoso issued a statement through her players' union saying it would speak on her behalf. The union said it would do all it could to ensure that the kiss does "not go unpunished."

Rubiales has received no public support from any major sports figure and united political parties from both the left and right are calling for him to resign.

Visitors to Lincoln Memorial say America has its flaws but see gains made since March on Washington

By NATHAN ELLGREN and GARY FIELDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Fencing and construction workers greet visitors to the Lincoln Memorial, signaling that — for the moment — the monument to the nation's 16th president is a work in progress.

And so is the nation Abraham Lincoln saved and the dream that Martin Luther King Jr. envisioned at its steps nearly 60 years ago at the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom.

The spectrum of visitors to the Lincoln and MLK memorials and the African American Museum of History and Culture ranges from a 10-year-old elementary school student born in Colombia to a 70-something college advisor and retired military veteran. At least one visitor was at the original march as a child. They agree that portions of King's speech have become a reality while some remain unrealized. Several note as well that the gains took a multiracial coalition to achieve.

Washington Resident and 1963 March Participant

Diane Miller was 12 years old when her mother gathered up Miller and her siblings "and had us march from 3rd and R Street down to the reflecting pool, which I think is about five miles," the now 72-year-old said. "On that day it was just exciting to merge into groups coming out of different streets, marching all the way down here."

Miller, who intends to participate in the 60th anniversary, said she especially remembers the diversity of the crowd. "To be honest it was the first time I saw a group of Anglo-Saxons or white people," she said. "It was my first time realizing all white people were not against black people. So it was a joyous occasion for me to participate."

Miller, who was on a vacation Bible school field trip with People's Congregational United Church of Christ, said she reflects on that day and believes much of what King spoke of has come to pass, but there are still battles. "We're still trying to integrate into a society that did not accept us in the beginning."

The future, she said, lies with the young people. "It's very important that we encourage our youth today to continue to build themselves stronger."

Veteran, Academic Adviser and Pastor

Tommie Babbs, 72, an academic advisor for the State University of New York at Buffalo served more than three decades in the military. The positives he has seen predate King's speech, especially the diversity of the people who struggled alongside King. "A lot of white people took blows like we did. A lot of white people sacrificed. So this was an American movement."

He thought a major step came when Barack Obama was elected president — twice. "You know, it wasn't

that day. He talked about how he might share that with students at his school. "I got kids who won't see it," he said.

The women's basketball team coach at Truett McConnell University in Cleveland, Georgia, said the words of the speech while inspiring, also brought "a lot of emotions. There's a heavy feeling to it, just thinking of the timeline and what was going on."

Italian leader tones down divisive rhetoric but carries on with pursuit of far-right agenda

By FRANCES D'EMILIO Associated Press

ROME (AP) — When Giorgia Meloni was running to become Italy's first far-right head of government of the post-war era, she steeped her winning campaign in the sharply ideological rhetoric of national sovereignty, "traditional families" and fear of migrants.

Since taking office in September, Premier Meloni has toned down the bombast reflected in the slogans she shouted last year at a rally in Spain for a far-right ally — "Yes to natural families! No to LGBT lobbies!" But her government and her party's lawmakers are still pursuing multiple far-right policies, including refusing to allow the names of some same-sex parents' to be on their children's birth records, broadening restrictions on surrogate pregnancies and even seeking to ban foreign words from government documents.

Her administration's fervor now finds expression in policies promoted by ministries and in legislation pushed by lawmakers from her Brothers of Italy party, the political group with neo-fascist roots that she co-founded a decade ago.

Meanwhile, Meloni has largely stayed above the ideological fray, as she did earlier this month during a bitter flap over the role of neo-fascist militants in Italy's deadliest-ever terror attack — the 1980 bombing of Bologna's train station.

The names of the 85 dead are enshrined on a plaque in the station that calls them victims of "fascist terrorism." In a commemorative speech, Italian President Sergio Mattarella noted that the attack's "neo-fascist matrix" has been established by trial convictions.

But to the anger of Italy's left, Meloni's anniversary statement omitted any mention of the neo-fascist origins behind the bombing. Opposition leaders pointed out that while she was still a lawmaker, Meloni pushed for efforts to determine the masterminds of the attack, seemingly raising questions about the judicial verdicts.

Then a few days after the anniversary, the communications director for the Rome area's right-wing governor, who won election with Meloni's support, cast more doubt on whether the bombing was the work of convicted neo-fascist terrorists.

Lazio Gov. Francesco Rocca told reporters that Meloni "wasn't happy" about the revisionist comments by his communications aide, who has a record of showing sympathy for far-right extremists. But the premier herself avoided making any public comment, and the aide kept his job.

During the campaign, Meloni kept her distance from Benito Mussolini's dictatorship, declaring that "the Italian right has handed fascism over to history for decades now."

But she proudly defends a potent party symbol — a flame in the red, white and green colors of the Italian flag. The flame has its roots in the neo-fascist Italian Social Movement, which was founded by Mussolini nostalgists right after World War II. Brothers of Italy embedded the symbol into its own emblem.

Amid the bombing anniversary furor, a front-page cartoon in the *Corriere della Sera* newspaper depicted an alarmed-looking Meloni as the tricolor flame threatened to scorch her.

In real life, the premier appears politically unscathed by ideological squabbles. Opinion surveys indicate that Brothers of Italy is the most popular party among eligible voters, with polls showing it has close to 30% support. That's 4 percentage points higher than what the group got in the 2022 election.

Staying above the fray is part of Meloni's strategy and style, said Columbia University political theory professor Nadia Urbinati.

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In contrast to her right-wing coalition partner, League party leader Matteo Salvini, who daily churns out photos of himself on social media, Meloni "is not everywhere. She doesn't want to have this kind of populist aura," Urbinati said in a telephone interview. "But she wants to shape the state according to her ideology."

Urbinati noted that one of the first moves by Meloni's government was a crackdown on rave parties and similar gatherings, "based on what they define as anarchy."

Building on Meloni's campaign pledge to defend what she called traditional families, the premier's administration moved to limit recognition of parental rights to only the biological parent in families with same-sex parents.

Local offices of the Interior Ministry ordered city halls to stop automatically recording both parents when same-sex couples have children. That left non-biological parents unable to carry out everyday family tasks such as picking up children from school or dealing with pediatricians without written permission from their partners.

Last month, Parliament's lower chamber also approved widening restrictions on surrogate pregnancy. The bill essentially reintroduced legislation that Meloni, in the previous legislature, had unsuccessfully proposed while an opposition lawmaker.

Under the bill now working its way through Parliament, it would be a crime for any Italian — in same-sex or heterosexual relationships — to use surrogate maternity abroad. For years, it has been a crime only in Italy, and so far never prosecuted.

Raising Italy's birthrate, one of the world's lowest, is a key Meloni political plan. Her minister of agriculture, Francesco Lollobrigida, who is also her brother-in-law, inflamed political debate last spring when he warned in a speech against "ethnic substitution" by migrants.

"Italians are having fewer children — and the reasoning goes — let's substitute them with someone else," Lollobrigida said, dismissing any idea that immigrants would be a way to boost the population.

The government plans to spend millions of euros in European Union money to build more day care centers to ease burdens on working parents, but that goal has fallen behind schedule.

Also awaiting action in Parliament is proposed legislation to ban the use of foreign words in government documents and forbid state universities from offering English-only courses. If the bill in "defense of identity" passes, violators would risk fines as high as 100,000 euros (\$110,000).

It is an idea reminiscent of Mussolini, whose first moves in power included purging Italian language of foreign words, even on restaurant menus, and establishing stiff fines for violations.

Critics of the proposed ban quickly pointed out that passage would erase part of a title held by a Brothers of Italy senator. Sen. Adolfo Urso, who serves in Meloni's Cabinet, is minister of enterprises and made in Italy. The last three words of the official title are in English.

A CIA-backed 1953 coup in Iran haunts the country with people still trying to make sense of it

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Seventy years after a CIA-orchestrated coup toppled Iran's prime minister, its legacy remains both contentious and complicated for the Islamic Republic as tensions stay high with the United States.

While highlighted as a symbol of Western imperialism by Iran's theocracy, the coup unseating Prime Minister Mohammad Mossadegh — over America's fears about a possible tilt toward the Soviet Union and the loss of Iranian crude oil — appeared backed at the time by the country's leading Shiite clergy.

But nowadays, hard-line Iranian state television airs repeated segments describing the coup as showing how America can't be trusted, while authorities bar the public from visiting Mossadegh's grave in a village outside of Tehran.

Such conflicts are common in Iran, where "Death to America" can still be heard at Friday prayers in Tehran while many on its streets say they'd welcome a better relationship with the U.S. But as memories of the coup further fade away along with those alive during it, controlling which allegory Iranians see in

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it has grown more important for both the country's government and its people.

"Maybe the U.S. did this out of fear of the emerging power of the Soviet Union, but it was like wishing for an earthquake to get rid of a bad neighbor," said Rana, a 24-year-old painter who like some others who spoke to The Associated Press gave only her first name for fear of reprisals. For Iranians, "the rancor has never melted."

The August 1953 coup stemmed from U.S. fears over the Soviet Union increasingly wanting a piece of Iran as Communists agitated within the country. The ground had been laid partially by the British, who wanted to wrest back access to the Iranian oil industry, which had been nationalized earlier by Mossadegh.

Though looking initially like it failed, the coup toppled Mossadegh and cemented the power of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi. It also lit the fuse for the 1979 Islamic Revolution, which saw the fatally ill shah flee Iran and Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini usher in the theocracy that still governs the country.

Today, several who spoke to the AP about the coup and possible relations with the U.S. put it in the context of Iran's ailing economy, which has been battered by years of sanctions after the collapse of its 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Lower tensions with the U.S. "will bring more money for my business," said Hossein, 47, who runs a canteen for cab drivers in southern Tehran. "Now taxi drivers spend less compared to the past years and it is because of these bad relations, sanctions."

"I know about this bitter history but it should come to end sometime soon," added Majid Shamsi, who works as a parcel carrier in central Tehran. "Young people in Iran seek a better life and it cannot come as a result of enmity with" the U.S.

Even during increasingly common protests by teachers, farmers and others in Iran, some of the regular chants include: "Our enemy is here; they lied to us (that the enemy) is the U.S."

"Iran today should accept a deal with the U.S. like what it did to release dual nationals," added teacher Reza Seifi, 26. "I need it for my better future, for a better future for all."

But like with the exchanges with the U.S., there are limits to how far Iran's government will go in remembering Mossadegh.

Last weekend, State television's English-language Press TV aired a segment with a journalist standing on Mossadegh Street in northern Tehran. However, over the last 20 years, police have restricted access to those wanting to visit his grave in his ancestral home in the village of Ahmadabad, some 90 kilometers (55 miles) northwest of Tehran. In the village, tall walls and a locked gate keep those wanting to pay their respects out, while officers question those who look like they don't live there.

Some found other ways to mark the 70th anniversary of the coup.

"I could not go to his grave to pay tribute but I have visited the graves of his supporters and allies like Hossein Fatemi," said Ebrahim Nazeri, 32, as he, his wife and two children stood at the graveside of Fatemi, Mossadegh's foreign minister who was executed after the coup. "He was a hero like Mossadegh."

Another visitor to Fatemi's grave, teacher Ehsan Rahmani simply said that "the U.S. planted hatred in the hearts of Iranians" through the coup.

For Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the 1953 coup represents what he views as the continued threat from the U.S., whether that be from economic sanctions or the nationwide protests that have gripped Iran after the death last year of Mahsa Amini.

On Thursday, Khamenei told members of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard that Washington had planned to overthrow the country's theocracy through a coup like in 1953 through its military. Iran carried out mass executions and purges of its regular military after the revolution.

"The enemies tried to undermine and paralyze the revolution by creating continuous crises," Khamenei said, according to a transcript on his official website. "They then plotted to put an end to the revolution with a measure similar to the coup that took place on August 19, (1953). However, the (Guard) thwarted it. This is the reason why the enemies have so much hatred and animosity towards the" Guard.

The Guard's chief, Gen. Hossein Salami, in reply, vowed to "expel" American forces from the region. His remarks came amid a major American military buildup in the Persian Gulf, with the possibility of U.S.

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troops boarding and guarding commercial ships in the Strait of Hormuz, through which 20% of all oil shipments pass.

However, some remain hopeful Iran could reach a détente with the U.S., as it recently did with Saudi Arabia.

"I dream that the supreme leader allows talks and better relations with the U.S.," said Mohsen, 29, a furniture shop salesman in northern Tehran. "He allowed the restoration of ties with Saudi Arabia. He can allow the same for the U.S."

GOP support for gun restrictions slips a year after Congress passed firearms law

By COLLEEN LONG and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican support for gun restrictions is slipping a year after Congress passed the most comprehensive firearms control legislation in decades with bipartisan support, according to a poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

That's led to a gap between Democrats and the GOP on the issue of guns that has widened in the last year. Democrats have consistently outpaced Republicans and independents in their belief that gun laws in the U.S. should be strengthened, but GOP support has dropped even further behind, the poll found.

Most Democrats, 92%, want gun laws made stronger, in line with their views in a UChicago Harris/AP-NORC poll conducted in July 2022. But Republican desire for more expansive legislation has dropped to 32% from 49% last summer and independents' support also declined slightly to 61% from 72%.

"We've tried to legislate things for years without a lot of success, and I don't really think law and regulation are the answer to our problems," said Robert Lloyd, 57, of Booneville, Arkansas, who is a registered Republican but says he has "lost faith in both sides." "I think our problems go way beyond guns."

Yet despite the political divide, both sides believe it's important to reduce mass shootings that plague the nation, the poll found. Majorities of Americans say they would support some additional restrictions on guns, particularly background checks and red flag laws, which allow law enforcement to remove weapons from a person believed to be a danger to themselves or others.

Even with GOP and independent headwinds on more restrictions, lawmakers could still find support: Enforcing background checks on all potential gun buyers earns bipartisan support, with 93% of Democrats and 68% of Republicans in favor.

The AP-NORC poll highlights the complicated feelings Americans have around guns, particularly as the U.S. is on track to hit a record-high number of mass shootings in one year, gun violence is up in cities around the nation and President Joe Biden is vying for reelection next year and is pushing a platform restricting guns that was all but politically unthinkable for fellow Democrats as recently as Barack Obama's term.

"I have grandkids now, and they both have bulletproof backpacks to go to school," said Democrat Gina Suits, 58 of Brookfield, Wisconsin, outside Milwaukee. "I really feel stricter gun laws and the banning of assault weapons needs to happen. It's our children."

"If you really believe in gun laws, vote," she said. "So we can get people in to make laws to save our children."

Biden has said the law passed last year after a deadly mass shooting in a Uvalde, Texas, elementary school didn't go far enough. He's routinely called for banning so-called assault weapons, a political term to describe guns most often used in mass shootings with the capacity to kill a lot of people quickly.

The issue even came up in the GOP presidential debate Wednesday night, when two of the eight candidates onstage were asked how they would manage an increase in school shootings. Neither talked about gun control. Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie said he'd send violent criminals to prison. Technology entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy said he'd put more police officers on the streets.

Overall, stricter gun laws are desired by a majority of Americans, regardless of what the current gun laws are in their state. That desire could be tied to some Americans' perceived impact of what fewer guns

could mean for the country — namely, fewer mass shootings. As of Monday, there have been at least 33 mass killings in the U.S. so far in 2023, leaving at least 163 people dead, not including shooters who died, according to a database maintained by the AP and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

That puts the country on a faster pace for mass killings than in any other year since 2006, according to the database, which defines a mass killing as one in which four or more people are killed, not including the perpetrator, within a 24-hour period.

“I don’t think anybody should own a gun,” said independent April Gambrell, 47, who is married to a police officer and lives outside Tampa, Florida. Her husband has weapons at home in a locked safe, but she said it doesn’t make her feel much safer and she worries about people who are untrained to use guns. “I don’t think it’s safe. It’s horrible that kids have to be brought up in this world today, and instead of talking out your problems, people want to use a weapon.”

More than eight in 10 Americans (85%) say it’s extremely or very important to them to prevent mass shootings, with bipartisan commitment to this idea, according to the poll. Nearly all Democrats (95%) and 81% of Republicans say it’s important to reduce mass shootings.

Any partisan divide appears to come down to whether people believe gun-restricting measures will ultimately prevent the attacks. Overall, though, 59% of Americans expect that if it were harder for people to legally obtain guns in the United States, there would be fewer mass shootings. Democrats are especially convinced of this (83%), with just one-third of Republicans in agreement. About half of Republicans, 54%, say that making it more challenging for people to legally access firearms would make “no difference” to the number of mass shootings in the country.

The 2022 law toughened background checks for the youngest gun buyers, sought to keep firearms from domestic violence offenders and aimed to help states put in place red flag laws that make it easier to take weapons away from people judged to be dangerous.

Those efforts remain popular. Along with overwhelming support for expanding federal law to require background checks on all potential gun buyers, red flag laws are also broadly popular, with 7 in 10 Americans favoring courts being permitted to prevent people who are considered a danger to themselves or others, but have not been convicted of a crime, from owning a gun.

And a majority, 58%, want a nationwide ban on the sale of AR-15 style rifles, which can rapidly fire many rounds and is routinely used in mass shootings, while 42% favored a law that would let trained teachers and administrators carry a gun at school.

South Carolina abortion ban with unclear ‘fetal heartbeat’ definition creates confusion, doctors say

By JAMES POLLARD Associated Press/Report for America

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — When the South Carolina Supreme Court upheld a ban on most abortions this week, the majority wrote that they were leaving “for another day” a decision on when, exactly, the “fetal heartbeat” limit begins during pregnancy. Doctors practicing under the strict law cannot similarly punt on that question.

Physicians say the statute’s unclear guidance is already chilling medical practice at the few abortion clinics that operate in the conservative state. With potential criminal charges hanging in the balance, most abortions are being halted as doctors wrestle with the murky legal definitions.

“These medical definitions they tried to put forward are legislative and put forward by people who don’t practice medicine,” said Dr. Dawn Bingham, chair of the South Carolina section of the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, or AGOC. “This language creates uncertainty among medical providers who may be unsure they’re legally allowed to terminate a pregnancy.”

South Carolina and Georgia are the only two states with such bans on the books. An Ohio court is weighing another one, and a six-week ban is pending in Florida.

In South Carolina, the measure passed by the Republican-dominated General Assembly bans abortion after what it calls a “fetal heartbeat” is identified. The law defines that term as “cardiac activity, or the

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a fluke. It was intentional," he said. "That made me trust America, believe in America, believe in the ideal of America."

Babbs said his hope is that people will judge one another by their character and that is achieved through communication. "Once we get to know each other, once we have a conversation with each other, once we talk to each other, then color seems to go away."

Visiting the city with other military veterans, the Buffalo resident Air Force veteran, said there have been dark times, including the race-related shooting in 2022 at the Tops supermarket in Buffalo that left 10 people dead and several others wounded. The incident was sparked by racial hatred but "it backfired because it brought so many white people together with Black people." People of all races and ethnicities helped, he said.

Civil Rights Attorney

Cynthia Robbins, who declined to give her age, was on the church field trip with Miller. She became a civil rights attorney because "I believed that Martin Luther King's dream can be a reality. I believe that the arc of history does bend toward justice."

That fight is critical now with the growth of white supremacists and hate movements and actions, such as the curtailing of part of the Voting Rights Act and the use of affirmative action in providing equal opportunities.

Her own dream is people will embrace King's message and see that there is still work to do and that the fight for justice is not about one race or another. "I think the most important thing of Martin Luther King's work to me is that it is a continuous effort that we must continue to press on, that we can't take justice for granted."

Incoming College Freshman

Zahir Harris, 18, visiting the District with the Village Initiative Project out of Bridgeport, Connecticut, said he remembers hearing King's March on Washington speech in middle school. The movement behind that march, he said, is unfinished but he can see its successes in his own life as he walks around freely, eats where he wants, and chooses a college freely. Minorities did not have that advantage during King's time, he said.

From Colombia to Greenville, South Carolina

For Tomas Galeano, 10, it was his first visit to Washington, D.C., here with his parents from their home in Greenville, South Carolina.

Born in Colombia, his family moved to the U.S. three years ago. When he looks at the memorial he thinks of freedom. "Here in the United States, everyone can have their freedom. It doesn't matter who they are or what they have gone through."

He knows of King through school and watching and listening to YouTube and he credits the late civil rights leader for how he is treated. "When I started school, I was really nervous about how people would react to me about being from different country," he said. "But, I was really impressed and happy from what it turned out because everybody treated me with respect and equality."

He said students need to be taught more about the late leader and to live as he did: "Try your best. Try your hardest. Never give up."

The Dream Speech

About a mile from the steps where King spoke the type-written speech he read from that day is on loan to the African American Museum of History and Culture. Small groups walk up to the display in the "Defending Freedom, Defining Freedom" gallery almost reverently. One or two visitors stay there reading every word.

Jan Gunning, 74, professor emeritus in economics at the Vrije Universiteit in Holland, lived in D.C. decades ago and worked at the World Bank. "It's one of the great speeches in history," he said, adding that while the written words are impressive it is King's oral delivery that makes the speech memorable. "The power is in the way he spoke, the way he brought the crowd with him."

Asmatiek Fields, 34, was star-struck by the chance to see the speech that King created and read from

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steady and repetitive rhythmic contraction of the fetal heart, within the gestational sac." Medical professionals can usually detect cardiac activity around six weeks of pregnancy, which is before most people know they are pregnant.

That language is clinically inaccurate according to medical consensus, which holds that such "cardiac activity" is not a heartbeat and an embryo has not yet become a fetus at that stage. A 2013 University of Leeds study determined that the four clearly defined chambers in the heart that appear from the eighth week of pregnancy remain "a disorganized jumble of tissue" until around the 20th week.

South Carolina's law requires that providers perform an ultrasound on any patient seeking an abortion, display the images and record a description of any present "fetal heartbeat." But the justices left legally undecided the question of whether "cardiac activity" and the described "rhythmic contraction of the fetal heart" refer to the same point or two separate points in a pregnancy.

From a medical standpoint, the ACOG says that while electronic impulses signifying "cardiac activity" can be recognized early on, an actual heart is not detectable by ultrasound until roughly 17 to 20 weeks of gestational age.

Charleston-based OB-GYN Jessica Tarleton said the presence of the word "or" between the terms in the law's language creates two different definitions and is "vague." It always takes lawyers some time to put together advice following any restrictions on abortion, she added.

"Defining a structure as a heart would put the definition later in pregnancy than earlier when you would see rhythmic contractions of some kind of cardiac structure," she said.

In his dissent, South Carolina Supreme Court Chief Justice Donald Beatty questioned how doctors and their lawyers could comply with the law without "a determination of this key point."

State Senate Majority Leader Shane Massey, a Republican, dismissed the idea that the definitions lack precise guidelines for medical professionals. He said the state has long required that doctors perform ultrasounds to provide an opportunity for patients to see the images before having an abortion.

"Now it just says if there is cardiac activity that is present on that ultrasound — if you can hear the heart beating — then you can't perform that abortion," Massey told reporters Wednesday.

On Thursday, abortion providers filed a petition for a rehearing based on what they called the ambiguity arising from the definition of "fetal heartbeat." While some South Carolinians will remain eligible for abortions under the law, Planned Parenthood attorney Catherine Humphreville predicts widespread confusion resulting from the ruling.

In the meantime, doctors have been cancelling abortion appointments.

A handful of the 30 or so people scheduled for abortions Wednesday had been served at a Planned Parenthood location in Columbia when the ruling was delivered. The remaining appointments got put on hold, according to Dr. Katherine Farris, chief medical officer of Planned Parenthood South Atlantic.

The Center for Reproductive Rights reported similar postponements at another clinic upstate, and Farris heard the same from colleagues in hospitals.

Abortion providers who violate the law could face felony charges carrying up to two years in prison and the loss of professional licenses. That threat has them interpreting these types of laws very conservatively, according to Tarleton, meaning many abortions have stopped altogether.

"In the setting of very high penalties," Farris said, "the only option for providers is to pause as we try to figure this out."

Fed Chair Powell could signal the likelihood of high rates for longer in closely watched speech

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

JACKSON HOLE, Wyoming (AP) — When Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell delivers a high-profile speech Friday in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, many analysts think he could make one thing clear: That the Fed plans to keep its benchmark interest rate at a peak level for longer than had been expected.

Powell isn't likely to say whether the Fed will continue raising rates. But he may signal that any rate cuts

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are unlikely until well into next year. The central bank has already helped drive inflation down from painfully high levels. But Fed officials have said they need to keep rates high to further slow borrowing and spending and reduce inflation to their 2% target.

The Fed chair's speech — at an annual conference of central bankers — comes at a time of heightened uncertainty about the economy and interest-rate policies. Businesses are still hiring, and consumer spending has remained resilient even while inflation has eased from a peak of 9.1% in June 2022 to 3.2%.

At the same time, "core" inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, has remained elevated at 4.7% despite the Fed's streak of 11 rate hikes beginning in March 2022. And by raising its key rate from near zero to a 22-year high of 5.4%, the Fed has made borrowing much more expensive for consumers and businesses. Soaring mortgage rates, for example, have contributed to a 22% drop in home sales through the first seven months of 2023 compared with the same period last year, causing a potential headwind for the economy.

Though overall inflation has steadily dropped, the mixed economic picture has in some ways left Powell in a tougher position than he faced in Jackson Hole last year, when he delivered a blunt warning about the Fed's plans to keep rapidly raising rates to fight inflation.

Now, the Fed faces a more subtle challenge: How to navigate a narrow path requiring it to slow growth and further cool inflation without derailing the economy and causing a recession. Economists call this rare outcome a "soft landing."

Many analysts say that despite the progress the Fed has made so far, Powell can't afford to let down his guard and say anything that would sound like a declaration of victory. They instead expect him to signal that he intends to keep rates at high levels for as long as needed. Even if the Fed's policymakers don't further increase borrowing costs, they're unlikely to reduce them anytime soon.

A year ago in Jackson Hole, Powell had warned that the Fed's coming rate hikes would "bring some pain to households and businesses, " likely in the form of job losses and potentially a recession. Raghuram Rajan, an economist at the University of Chicago and a former head of India's central bank, suggested that if Powell is tempted this year to swing the other way and predict a "painless disinflation," he should avoid doing so.

"The notion that we've shifted from a painful disinflation to painless disinflation would undercut the Fed," Rajan said. "It would suggest they don't have the stomach" to do what's needed to tame inflation.

Surprisingly, despite the Fed's aggressive rate hikes, the U.S. unemployment rate stands exactly where it did when Powell spoke last year: 3.5%, barely above a half-century low. Still, Rajan said he doubts the Fed can achieve its 2% inflation goal without causing some rise in unemployment. A higher jobless rate would likely slow wage growth and ease inflation pressures. When layoffs spread, workers are typically less able to gain big pay raises.

In an interview this week, Raphael Bostic, president of the Federal Reserve's Atlanta branch, said he favors keeping the Fed's key rate at its current level at least well into next year. In June, when the 18 members of the Fed's rate-setting committee last issued their quarterly projections, they predicted that they would raise rates once more this year.

That expectation might have changed in light of milder inflation readings the government has issued in recent weeks. The Fed's policymakers will update their interest rate projections when they next meet Sept. 19-20.

"We are just going to have to stay restrictive for quite a while," Bostic said, "until we are sure, sure, sure, sure, sure that inflation is not going to bounce off and bubble up far away from our target."

Bostic said he thinks the Fed's benchmark rate is currently high enough to restrain the economy and cool inflation over time. But he added that he isn't "even contemplating a cut until the latter part of 2024."

In his speech Friday, Powell may sound a similar message: That even as the Fed nears the end of its cycle of rate hikes, it won't ease up in its mission to conquer inflation.

Another key figure at the Jackson Hole conference — Christine Lagarde, president of the European Central Bank — will deliver a speech on Friday as well. Analysts expect Lagarde to seek to keep the ECB's

options open at its next meeting in September. Investors increasingly expect the ECB to refrain from a rate hike at that meeting.

Retired police sergeant who killed 3 at California bar shot his estranged wife first, officials say

By EUGENE GARCIA, AMY TAXIN and JOHN ANTCZAK Associated Press

TRABUCO CANYON, Calif. (AP) — The retired police sergeant who opened fire during a lively Wednesday evening at a popular Southern California biker bar had traveled from Ohio to confront his estranged wife, shooting her in the face before turning his gun on the crowd, authorities said.

John Snowling killed three people, including his wife's dining companion and a man who approached him as Snowling retrieved additional guns from his truck, and wounded six others, Orange County Sheriff Don Barnes said Thursday. He was fatally shot by deputies within minutes of the rampage.

The shooting unfolded as a cover band entertained guests during the bar's popular weekly spaghetti night. Snowling entered the bar, walked up to Marie Snowling and immediately shot her without saying a word, authorities said. Some patrons froze and others ran as bullets flew inside the bar before Snowling went out to the parking lot and continued to fire, witnesses and authorities said.

As the shooting began, M Street band keyboardist Mark Johnson hid behind a speaker with his wife, singer Debbie Johnson.

"Once he started shooting, it was very indiscriminate," Mark Johnson said.

Snowling, 59, was a retired police sergeant with the Ventura Police Department in Southern California. His wife, Marie Snowling, had filed for divorce in December 2022, citing irreconcilable differences. The proceedings were ongoing and the case was scheduled for a mandatory settlement conference in November.

Married for more than three decades, they have two adult children.

Officials said John Snowling traveled from Ohio, where he had been living on a 7-acre property with his dog, according to his divorce lawyer, Tristan teGroen. It was unclear when he arrived in Southern California, where he still owns property in Camarillo. There was "no murmur of domestic violence or threats or anything like that from the other attorney," teGroen said.

John Snowling used two guns at the beginning of the shooting and then retrieved two more from his truck. All four — three handguns and a shotgun — were purchased legally, Barnes said.

Authorities identified one of the dead as John Leehey, 67, of Irvine, California. The other two weren't named, including the woman dining with Marie Snowling. After being shot, the woman exited the bar and was able to make it to the roadway before dying, Barnes said.

All nine people shot were adults. Marie Snowling was conscious and speaking but remained hospitalized Thursday, Barnes said.

Her father, William Mosby, of Lake Forest, told The Orange County Register, that John Snowling could not "deal with the divorce."

Kenneth H.J. Henjum, Marie Snowling's attorney, said in an email that her family was in shock and was requesting privacy.

John Snowling had worked for the police department in coastal Ventura, northwest of Los Angeles, from 1986 to 2014. Ventura Police Chief Darin Schindler issued a statement expressing condolences to the victims' families, the survivors and the responding deputies.

Cook's Corner has long been a place for motorcyclists to gather for bands, open-mic nights or just a cold beer after a long ride. It calls itself the oldest motorcycle bar in Southern California and sits at the intersection of two picturesque highways in an area of scrubby hills and bicycle trails. It attracts everyone from motorcycle riders on choppers to avid cyclists in Lycra and families with young children.

"It's a Disneyland for bikers," said Kamran Amiri, who has been a Cook's Corner regular for two decades.

Amiri, who was there Wednesday but left before the shooting, said the bar is "just full of the friendliest people" who go there to chat over a drink, listen to music or show off their motorcycles.

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Hours before the shooting, rows of motorcycles and bikes framed the gravel entrance. M Street had performed in Cook's Corner's outdoor area before, but this was the band's first time on the stage inside, Mark and Debbie Johnson said.

Two people in the crowd were celebrating birthdays, and the band promised a special song later in the evening, Debbie Johnson said.

It never came.

"We launched into our next song and somewhere in the middle of it this man just walks in, doesn't say a word, and just starts shooting," she said.

Some bargoers ran up a nearby hill.

Mark Johnson said that once the gunman went outside, he and about 30 others shut the doors and hunkered down inside. Johnson called 911.

"We opened the back gate to see where he was and he immediately started shooting," he said.

He and his wife said two of their fellow bandmembers were wounded and were expected to survive. The fifth member wasn't injured.

"I have never been so happy to see dozens of police cars heading my way," Debbie Johnson said. "We were fish in a very small barrel."

India's Modi and Chinese President Xi Jinping agree on efforts to de-escalate border tensions

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — India's prime minister and China's leader agreed Thursday to intensify efforts to de-escalate tensions at the disputed border between them and bring home thousands of their troops deployed there, according to an official from India's foreign ministry.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping met on the sidelines of a Johannesburg summit where the BRICS bloc of developing economies — Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa — invited six other countries to join the group, including Saudi Arabia and Iran. ,

India's Foreign Secretary Vinay Mohan Kwatra told Indian reporters that Modi, in an impromptu meeting with Xi, highlighted India's concerns about their unresolved border issues.

The disputed boundary has led to a three-year standoff between tens of thousands of Indian and Chinese soldiers in the Ladakh area. A clash three years ago in the region killed 20 Indian soldiers and four Chinese.

Kwatra said the two leaders agreed to intensify efforts but did not say anything about what Xi's response to Modi's expressed concerns or elaborate on details of what the Indian prime minister said.

The Chinese embassy in New Delhi later tweeted a foreign ministry statement saying that President Xi stressed that improving China-India relations served their common interests and was also conducive to peace, stability and development of the world and the region.

"The two sides should bear in mind the overall interests of their bilateral relations and handle properly the border issue so as to jointly safeguard peace and tranquility in the border region," it said.

Indian and Chinese military commanders had met last week in an apparent effort to stabilize the situation. A Line of Actual Control separates Chinese and Indian-held territories from Ladakh in the west to India's eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, which China claims in its entirety.

India and China had fought a war over their border in 1962. China claims some 90,000 square kilometers (35,000 square miles) of territory in India's northeast, including Arunachal Pradesh with its mainly Buddhist population.

India says China occupies 38,000 square kilometers (15,000 square miles) of its territory in the Aksai Chin Plateau, which India considers part of Ladakh, where the current faceoff is happening.

US intelligence says an intentional explosion brought down Wagner chief Prigozhin's plane

By EMMA BURROWS and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A preliminary U.S. intelligence assessment concluded that an intentional explosion caused the plane crash presumed to have killed a mercenary leader who was eulogized Thursday by Vladimir Putin, even as suspicions grew that the Russian president was the architect of the assassination.

One of the U.S. and Western officials who described the initial assessment said it determined that Yevgeny Prigozhin was "very likely" targeted and that the explosion falls in line with Putin's "long history of trying to silence his critics."

The officials, who spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment, did not offer any details about what caused the explosion, which was widely believed to be vengeance for the mutiny in June that posed the biggest challenge to the Russian leader's 23-year rule. Several of Prigozhin's lieutenants were also presumed dead.

Pentagon spokesman Gen. Pat Ryder said press reports that a surface-to-air missile took down the plane were inaccurate. He declined to say whether the U.S. suspected a bomb or believed the crash was an assassination.

Details of the intelligence assessment surfaced as Putin expressed his condolences to the families of those who were reported to be aboard the jet and referred to "serious mistakes" by Prigozhin.

The jet carrying the founder of the Wagner military company and six other passengers crashed Wednesday soon after taking off from Moscow with a crew of three, according to Russia's civil aviation authority. Rescuers found 10 bodies, and Russian media cited anonymous sources in Wagner who said Prigozhin was dead. But there has been no official confirmation.

President Joe Biden, speaking to reporters Wednesday, said he believed Putin was behind the crash, though he acknowledged that he did not have information verifying his belief.

"I don't know for a fact what happened, but I'm not surprised," Biden said. "There's not much that happens in Russia that Putin's not behind."

The passenger manifest also included Prigozhin's second-in-command, who baptized the group with his nom de guerre, as well as Wagner's logistics chief, a fighter wounded by U.S. airstrikes in Syria and at least one possible bodyguard.

It was not clear why several high-ranking members of Wagner, including top leaders who are normally exceedingly careful about their security, were on the same flight. The purpose of their joint trip to St. Petersburg was unknown.

At Wagner's headquarters in St. Petersburg, lights were turned on in the shape of a large cross, and Prigozhin supporters built a makeshift memorial, piling red and white flowers outside the building Thursday, along with company flags and candles.

In his first comments on the crash, Putin said the passengers had "made a significant contribution" to the fighting in Ukraine.

"We remember this, we know, and we will not forget," he said in a televised interview with the Russian-installed leader of Ukraine's partially occupied Donetsk region, Denis Pushilin.

Putin recalled that he had known Prigozhin since the early 1990s and described him as "a man of difficult fate" who had "made serious mistakes in life, and he achieved the results he needed — both for himself and, when I asked him about it, for the common cause, as in these last months. He was a talented man, a talented businessman."

Russian state media have not covered the crash extensively, instead focusing on Putin's remarks to the BRICS summit in Johannesburg via video link and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Several Russian social media channels reported that the bodies were burned or disfigured beyond recognition and would need to be identified by DNA. The reports were picked up by independent Russian media, but The Associated Press was not able to independently confirm them.

Prigozhin supporters claimed on pro-Wagner messaging app channels that the plane was deliberately

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downed.

Sergei Mironov, the leader of the pro-Kremlin Fair Russia party and former chairman of the upper house of the Russian parliament, said on his Telegram channel that Prigozhin had “messed with too many people in Russia, Ukraine and the West.”

“It now seems that at some point, his number of enemies reached a critical point,” Mironov wrote.

Russian authorities have said the cause of the crash is under investigation.

Anastasia Bukharova, 27, said she was walking with her children Wednesday when she saw the jet, “and then — boom! — it exploded in the sky.” She said she was scared it would hit houses in her village of Kuzhenkino and ran with the children. But the plane ended up crashing into a field.

“Something sort of was torn from it in the air,” she added.

Numerous opponents and critics of Putin have been killed or gravely sickened in apparent assassination attempts, and U.S. and other Western officials long expected the Russian leader to go after Prigozhin, despite promising to drop charges in a deal that ended the June 23-24 mutiny.

“It is no coincidence that the whole world immediately looks at the Kremlin when a disgraced ex-confidant of Putin suddenly falls from the sky, two months after he attempted an uprising,” said German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock, while acknowledging that the facts were still unclear.

“We know this pattern ... in Putin’s Russia — deaths and dubious suicides, falls from windows that all ultimately remain unexplained,” she added.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also pointed the finger: “We have nothing to do with this. Everyone understands who does.”

Soon after the plane went down, people on social media and news outlets began to report that it was a Wagner plane. Minutes after Russian state news agencies confirmed the crash, they cited the civil aviation authority as saying Prigozhin’s name was on the manifest.

Prigozhin was long outspoken and critical of how Russian generals were waging the war in Ukraine, where his mercenaries were some of the fiercest fighters for the Kremlin. For a long time, Putin appeared content to allow such infighting — and Prigozhin seemed to have unusual latitude to speak his mind.

But Prigozhin’s brief revolt raised the ante. His mercenaries swept through the southern Russian city of Rostov-on-Don and captured the military headquarters there without firing a shot. They then drove to within about 200 kilometers (125 miles) of Moscow and downed several military aircraft, killing more than a dozen Russian pilots.

Putin first denounced the rebellion as “treason” and a “stab in the back.” He vowed to punish its perpetrators, and the world waited for his next move, particularly since Prigozhin had publicly questioned the Russian leader’s justifications for the war in Ukraine.

Instead Putin made a deal that saw an end to the mutiny in exchange for an amnesty for Prigozhin and his mercenaries and permission for them to move to Belarus.

Now many are suggesting the punishment has finally come.

The Institute for the Study of War argued that Russian authorities likely moved against Prigozhin and his top associates as “the final step to eliminate Wagner as an independent organization.”

Abbas Gallyamov, a former speechwriter for Putin turned political consultant, said by carrying out the mutiny and remaining free, Prigozhin “shoved Putin’s face into the dirt front of the whole world.”

Failing to punish Prigozhin would have offered an “open invitation for all potential rebels and troublemakers,” so Putin had to act, Gallyamov said.

Videos shared by the pro-Wagner Telegram channel Grey Zone showed a plane dropping like a stone from a large cloud of smoke, twisting wildly as it fell, one of its wings apparently missing. A free fall like that typically occurs when an aircraft sustains severe damage. A frame-by-frame AP analysis of two videos was consistent with some sort of midflight explosion.

Mug shot of Donald Trump shows scowling former president during speedy booking at Atlanta jail

By ERIC TUCKER, KATE BRUMBACK and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A scowling Donald Trump posed for a mug shot Thursday as he surrendered inside a jail in Atlanta on charges that he illegally schemed to overturn the 2020 election in Georgia, creating a historic and humbling visual underscoring the former president's escalating legal troubles.

The booking photo instantly becomes part of the former president's legacy as he confronts criminal charges in four American cities while seeking to reclaim the White House. His aides swiftly seized on the image, fundraising off the first mug shot in American history of a former president as representative of the persecution they contend Trump is encountering. His opponents, meanwhile, are likely to use it to remind voters of dangers in electing a president facing dozens of felony charges.

Trump was released on \$200,000 bond and headed back to the airport for his return flight home to New Jersey, flashing a thumbs-up through the window of his sport utility vehicle as his motorcade left. Unrepentant but subdued after the brief jail visit, he again insisted that he "did nothing wrong" and called the case accusing him of subverting election results a "travesty of justice."

"If you challenge an election, you should be able to challenge an election," he told reporters on the airport tarmac.

Trump's surrender to law enforcement authorities, the fourth time this year, has by now become a familiar election-season routine in a way that belies the unprecedented spectacle of a former president, and current candidate, being booked on criminal charges. But his visit to Atlanta was notably different from the three past surrenders, unfolding at night and requiring him to visit a problem-plagued jail — rather than a courthouse.

And unlike in other cities that did not require him to pose for a mug shot, a booking photo of him was taken. It depicts Trump, wearing a navy suit and red tie, angrily scowling at the camera, his brows furrowed as he stares into the lens.

Before Trump's plane had crossed North Carolina, his campaign was already using the image to solicit contributions on a fundraising site. And for the first time since Jan. 8, 2021, he made a post on X, the website formerly known as Twitter, issuing a fundraising plea on the platform that prevented him from using his account after he helped spark the violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

"This mugshot will forever go down in history as a symbol of America's defiance of tyranny," said a Trump campaign fundraising email.

He also called into conservative TV channel Newsmax to talk about what he said had been "a very sad day for our country."

His jail visit created a remarkable split-screen visual during a 2024 Republican primary contest in which he remains the leading candidate, swiping the spotlight at least temporarily from his opponents and coming one day after a debate in Milwaukee where eight of his leading rivals sought to exploit Trump's absence by trying to stand out from the pack.

Trump landed in Atlanta around 7 p.m. and was driven to jail for the booking process. He offered a wave and thumbs-up as he descended the steps of his private plane.

He completed the process in a brisk 20 minutes, providing officials as is customary with his physical measurements: 6 foot 3 inches. 215 pounds. Blond or strawberry hair. And Trump, who for four years in the White House reveled in the title of "Mr. President," was given the inmate number of P01135809.

The Fulton County prosecution is the fourth criminal case against Trump since March, when he became the first former president in U.S. history to be indicted. Since then, he's faced federal charges in Florida and Washington, and this month he was indicted in Atlanta with 18 others — including his ex-chief of staff, Mark Meadows, and former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani — under a racketeering statute normally associated with gang members and organized crime.

District Attorney Fani Willis had given all of the defendants until Friday afternoon to turn themselves in at the main Fulton County jail.

Just ahead of his surrender, Trump hired a new lead attorney for the Georgia case.

Prominent Atlanta criminal defense attorney Steve Sadow replaced another high-profile criminal defense attorney, Drew Findling, who had represented Trump as recently as Monday when his bond terms were negotiated. But by Thursday Findling was no longer part of the team, according to a person with knowledge of the change who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the matter publicly.

Sadow said in a statement that "the president should never have been indicted. He is innocent of all the charges brought against him."

Trump has repeatedly denied wrongdoing. He said in a social media post this week that he was being prosecuted for what he described in capital letters as a "perfect phone call" in which he asked the Republican secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, to help him "find 11,780 votes" for him to overturn his loss in the state to Democrat Joe Biden.

The Fulton County jail where Trump surrendered has long been a troubled facility. The Justice Department last month opened a civil rights investigation into conditions, citing filthy cells, violence and the death last year of a man whose body was found covered in insects in the main jail's psychiatric wing. Three people have died in Fulton County custody in the past month.

He did not spend much time there. His attorneys and prosecutors had already agreed to a \$200,000 bond, plus conditions that include barring the former president from intimidating co-defendants, witnesses or victims in the case.

Charles Shaw, CEO of Foster Bail Bonds in metro Atlanta, said his company put up Trump's \$200,000 bond. Shaw said Trump paid his company 10% — or \$20,000 — which is customary for bail bondsmen to charge. Shaw said he doesn't know Trump, but that Trump's Atlanta defense attorneys have a close business relationship with his company.

Unlike in other jurisdictions, in Fulton County, arraignments — in which a defendant appears in court for the first time — generally happen after a defendant surrenders at the jail and completes the booking process, not on the same day.

That means Trump may have to make another trip to Georgia in the coming weeks though the Fulton County Sheriff's Office has said some arraignments in the case may happen virtually if the judge permits. Or Trump's arraignment could be waived.

Ohtani to keep playing, his future and impending free agency murky after elbow ligament injury

By GREG BEACHAM AP Sports Writer

ANAHEIM, Calif. (AP) — Shohei Ohtani already knew he had a career-altering tear in his elbow ligament when he roped a double to right in the fifth inning of the Angels' doubleheader nightcap on Wednesday.

After he hustled to second base, he was greeted by Elly De La Cruz. Cincinnati's 21-year-old rookie shortstop jokingly poked at the smiling Ohtani, essentially asking the two-way superstar, "Are you real?"

That's the question all of baseball has been asking about Ohtani for the past three seasons, ever since he returned from Tommy John surgery and redefined what's possible in this sport.

But the new injury to his ulnar collateral ligament is a merciless reminder that the 29-year-old Ohtani is, in fact, real — a baseball unicorn, but also an athlete challenging the limit of human potential and physiology.

Ohtani hit that limit earlier Wednesday when he abruptly left the mound after just 26 pitches in the doubleheader opener. Tests revealed a ligament tear that could require Ohtani to undergo a second Tommy John surgery, a circumstance that almost invariably worsens and shortens pitching careers.

Ohtani won't pitch again this season, but the Angels confirmed Thursday that he intends to keep playing as their designated hitter. The major league home runs leader traveled with the Angels to New York, where they'll begin the final 5 1/2 weeks of the regular season against the Mets on Friday night.

But Ohtani's long-term future, so sparkling and lucrative only a few hours before his injury, is now murky. Ohtani was about 11 weeks away from free agency — a contract increasingly likely to be worth more

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than \$600 million for two All-Star talents in one body. After spending six seasons with the perpetually disappointing Angels, he also had the chance to choose whatever team he believes will get him closer to winning a World Series.

While it's heartbreaking for the players and leaders who know him best, they also realize it's ridiculous to assume Ohtani can be stopped.

"If I was to bet on anybody bouncing back, he would be the guy," Angels general manager Perry Minasian said. "I believe he'll be back and he'll be able to do both again at a very high level."

A player can keep hitting with a torn elbow ligament, and he also can return to the plate several months after Tommy John surgery. Bryce Harper was back in the Phillies' lineup this May about five months after the procedure, and Ohtani was the Angels' DH throughout the 2019 season and again in 2020 — although those were the least impressive offensive seasons for Ohtani, who reportedly gets annoyed and over-prepares when he can only play one way.

That means Ohtani could keep up his pursuit of the homers title through September. He began Thursday with 44 homers while batting .304 with 91 RBIs and a major league-best 1.069 OPS.

The long-term picture is less clear, since nobody knows whether Ohtani will be able to pitch again, let alone at the elite level he has reached over the past three seasons. Jacob deGrom and Walker Buehler are currently working their way back from a second Tommy John surgery, while a few pitchers have returned fairly well from two such procedures, including Mike Clevinger, Jameson Taillon and Nathan Eovaldi.

Ohtani was considered a lock to win his second AL MVP award in three years before the injury. Missing the final six weeks on the mound seem unlikely to change that, particularly if Ohtani keeps hitting.

He's still easily the AL leader in wins above replacement — 8.5 to Corey Seager's 5.0 in second place, according to FanGraphs. Several online sportsbooks and Vegas oddsmakers stopped accepting bets on the AL MVP award three weeks ago.

Another MVP trophy would be a bittersweet end to a year that began with his remarkable performance in the World Baseball Classic. Ohtani struck out Mike Trout with the final pitch to secure Japan's championship.

The last few weeks have made it clear Trout and Ohtani might never get the chance to celebrate team success together. The Angels are essentially out of the playoff race for the ninth consecutive season after losing 16 of their 21 games since the trade deadline, and Trout is back on the injured list after his return from a seven-week absence with a broken hand lasted only one game this week.

The team's decision not to trade Ohtani — and to make several acquisitions near the deadline in an attempt to make the playoffs — made no impact on the Angels' fortunes, but the team hopes its unwavering support might be a factor in Ohtani's free-agent decision.

The Halos still will have plenty of more successful competitors for his services, although Ohtani's pitching injury will require recalculations by all parties.

The most logical contender has always been thought to be the Los Angeles Dodgers, who covet Ohtani's two-way skills and worldwide fame. But top executive Andrew Friedman is a relatively cautious bidder and calculating spender despite his star-studded team's hefty payroll.

While his overall price tag in free agency might drop, Ohtani's stated desire has always been to find the best organization for his unique needs and desires, not the biggest contract. Money isn't the biggest motivation for a player who already makes tens of millions in endorsement deals.

While Ohtani had unprecedented value for his two-way skills, he is still one of the elite hitters in baseball, with a power stroke and a tenacity that make him enormously valuable solely as a DH. He's also an international star with a fan base and sponsorship ties that make his presence particularly attractive and lucrative, as the Angels well know.

Even if they've only got 5 1/2 more weeks together, the Angels say they'll do whatever is best for their once-in-a-lifetime talent.

"I think he needs time to wrap his head around it, talk to the people close to him," Minasian said. "We're in the process of getting second opinions. Once the information is there, he'll make the right decision on what he wants to do, and we'll support him, whatever he decides."

Ramaswamy raises \$450,000 in first hours after Republican debate as campaigns try to seize momentum

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The first Republican presidential debate provided an opportunity for candidates to make their cases directly to a national audience, and some of that attention is translating into fundraising boosts.

Biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy has taken in \$450,000 since Wednesday night's debate, with an average donation of \$38, campaign spokeswoman Tricia McLaughlin told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Ramaswamy, a political newcomer who occupied center stage in the absence of current GOP front-runner Donald Trump, scored several memorable moments during the debate, criticizing some rivals as "super PAC puppets" who were using "ready-made, preprepared slogans" to attack him.

Ramaswamy, has largely been self-funding his campaign and raised more than \$7.7 million in the second quarter, finishing with more than \$9 million on hand.

At least one candidate, South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott, made a direct fundraising appeal onstage Milwaukee, asking viewers in his closing remarks to go to his campaign website "for more information or to make a contribution."

Former President Donald Trump, who is the early front-runner for the nomination, skipped the debate.

Other campaigns didn't immediately respond to messages Thursday about their post-debate fundraising, but some donors are talking.

After being briefed in Milwaukee by top campaign staffers for Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, donor Hal Lambert said he was pleased with his chosen candidate's performance.

"Everyone's extremely happy," Lambert said in an interview. "I think he did extremely well. I think he stayed out of the bickering on stage."

Pete Snyder, an investor and DeSantis donor, said the governor was "strong," and "forceful" and able to get his message out "without distraction."

The DeSantis campaign has not provided details about what it has raised, but Snyder said, "It's showing with the contributions that are coming in. We had a huge day."

A handful of candidates had gotten creative in their fundraising appeals in order to meet the Republican National Committee's 40,000 minimum unique donor requirement for debate participants. Some of the ploys worked, such as North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum's giveaway of \$20 "Biden Relief Cards" in exchange for donations as low as \$1.

World Series MVP Stephen Strasburg has decided to retire, AP source says

By HOWARD FENDRICH and STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — Washington Nationals pitcher Stephen Strasburg has decided to retire, ending a career that began as a No. 1 draft pick, included 2019 World Series MVP honors and was derailed by injuries, according to a person with knowledge of the situation.

The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity Thursday because Strasburg has not spoken publicly about his plans. The person told The AP that Strasburg is expected to hold a news conference before a game at Nationals Park next month.

The Washington Post first reported Strasburg's decision to retire, saying the announcement is expected to come Sept. 9.

"When healthy, he was one of the most dominant starting pitchers in the game," longtime teammate Ryan Zimmerman told The AP by phone Thursday. "You'd be hard-pressed to find someone who worked harder than he did. He deserves to be celebrated because he was a pretty special player. You could argue that he lived up to, or even exceeded, what was expected of a No. 1 pick."

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Strasburg, who turned 35 last month, had his career knocked off course and ultimately cut short by injuries after leading the Nationals to their first title in franchise history four years ago. He had surgery for thoracic outlet syndrome, a nerve and blood disorder that involved removing a rib and two neck muscles.

The right-hander has not pitched since June 9, 2022 — his only start that season, which lasted 4 2/3 innings before going back on the injured list. He has thrown only 528 pitches in the majors since signing a \$245 million, seven-year contract in December 2019 and did not report to spring training earlier this year after experiencing a setback.

"It's been tough, I'm sure, for him and his family and the guys in this clubhouse miss him and we wish nothing but the best for him and what's to come," Nationals pitcher Patrick Corbin said after a 6-5 win over the Yankees. "He's a big reason why we're here and a big reason why we have a championship ring."

Strasburg, featuring a 100-plus mph fastball, was touted as a generational talent before becoming the first pick in the 2009 draft, and he became one of the faces of Washington's franchise after making his anticipated debut on July 8, 2010. He struck out 14 batters and allowed two runs on four hits with no walks against the Pittsburgh Pirates to win a memorable game that became known as "Strasmas."

That night still sticks out to Zimmerman, the retired infielder who was the first draft pick by the Nationals after they moved from Montreal to Washington for the 2005 season and owner of most of the club's hitting records.

"To be the type of prospect that he was — in an age where everyone gets hyped up so much, you almost expect to be let down — and him being this next phenom, and then to actually do that in his first start, it was fun to be a part of that," Zimmerman said. "The electricity. The crowd. The excitement. All for a game in the middle of the season. It was like something I'd never really seen before."

Strasburg is owed just over \$150 million beyond this season on the \$245 million contract he signed in 2019, which set records for the most total money and annual salary given to a pitcher. It was unclear if the sides had negotiated a buyout.

After Strasburg had Tommy John surgery early in his career, the Nationals took heat for shutting him down late in the 2012 season, despite him being 15-6 with a 3.16 ERA. Without their ace, they lost to the St. Louis Cardinals in the NL Division Series.

The long-term benefit of the shutdown didn't emerge until October 2019, when Strasburg went 5-0 with a 1.98 ERA on Washington's championship run and won each of his two starts against Houston in the World Series.

Strasburg went 113-62 with a 3.24 ERA in 247 career regular-season starts in the majors, all with Washington. He was a three-time NL All-Star and led the National League in strikeouts with 242 in 2014 and in innings pitched with 209 in 2019, which turned out to be his last full season.

Fran Drescher says actors strike she's leading is an 'inflection point' that goes beyond Hollywood

By KRISTA FAURIA and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Fran Drescher believes that the walkouts that have shut down Hollywood are about something much bigger than the actors union she leads, or the writers striking alongside them, or the entertainment industry.

Drescher told The Associated Press the moment is about the entire world of work, and a larger stand against corporate leaders who value shareholders over the people who create their product.

"At some point you have to say no more," Drescher, the former "Nanny" star who is now president of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists, said in an interview at the union's headquarters Wednesday. "I think that it's taken on a bigger scope, it's greater than the sum of its parts. I think it's a conversation now about the culture of big business, and how it treats everybody up and down the ladder in the name of profit."

Drescher, 65, has been president of the actors guild since September of 2021, when she defeated "Stranger Things" actor Matthew Modine in a union election.

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But for many members and observers, the day she truly became president was July 13, when Drescher gave a rousing, fiery and for some inspiring speech at the news conference announcing that talks had broken off and a strike was about to begin.

She lashed out at the leaders of the studios and streaming services, saying "Shame on them. They stand on the wrong side of history."

Drescher told the AP that she had no intention of getting on a soap box that day. She was supposed to read a written statement, then take questions.

"I looked at it quickly and I said, 'You know what, I can't say this, I really feel like I have to speak from the heart,'" she said. "That just kind of came out of my mouth, and I'm glad that I was able to express myself as succinctly and sincerely and authentically as I did. And I think that it's fascinating when you speak from the heart, people are so responsive. Because I guess they see a lot of people that don't."

Drescher is the first president of the guild to preside over a film and TV actors strike since 1980. At the time, only one woman had led the union. Now, seven have, including three of the past five.

The Screen Actors Guild (it merged with AFTRA in 2012) has had plenty of famous presidents, from James Cagney to Ronald Reagan to Charlton Heston.

But few in recent decades have had as recognizable a name, face, voice or laugh as Drescher. She made her film debut with a tiny part in the 1977 John Travolta disco classic "Saturday Night Fever," and after many similar small but memorable roles, nearly always as brash New Yorkers, she starred for six seasons on the sitcom "The Nanny" from 1993 to 1999.

On the show, which she co-created, Drescher played Fran Fine, a character who becomes a children's caretaker for an upper-crust Manhattan family. The similarities between her character and herself went beyond her name: born and raised in Queens, New York, frank to a fault, and punctuating sentences with a nasal giggle.

She said the business has changed vastly since then.

"I'm very grateful that I got my big break during that time and not this time," Drescher said. "When I started on 'The Nanny' at CBS, that was still a family owned business. You knew who the owners were and you could talk to them. And everything has changed."

In a very different caretaking role today, she has a very different view.

"Now, when you have a business model where the CEOs are more connected to the shareholders and not to the people that actually make the product that they're selling," she said. "I think that you have a breakdown that is unsustainable."

The Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, the group representing the employers, recently restarted talks with the Writers Guild of America, whose members have been on strike for nearly four months. The negotiations have yielded little. Drescher says the AMPTP has yet to reach out to SAG-AFTRA leadership about resuming talks.

"I'm not really understanding what the silent treatment is," Drescher said. "It could be a tactical strategy to see if we they can wait us out until we lose our resolve and then they can make a better deal for themselves."

Drescher said nothing like that is going to happen.

"This is an inflection point," she said. "I don't think anybody that's in charge of the AMPTP quite understands that. "This is not like any past negotiation. We're in a whole new ball game. And if things don't change radically, quite frankly, I think that they're going to ultimately get very hurt by this strike."

CIA stairwell attack among flood of sexual misconduct complaints at spy agency

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

FAIRFAX, Va. (AP) — In a secluded stairwell at CIA headquarters last year, officer trainee Ashkan Bayatpour came up behind a colleague, wrapped a scarf around her neck and plainly spoke as he tried to kiss her on the mouth.

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"There are many uses for this," the woman recalls him saying. "This is what I want to do to you."

Bayatpour was convicted Wednesday of a state misdemeanor charge of assault and battery in a case that was remarkable for breaking through the CIA's veil of ultra-secrecy and playing out in a public courtroom where it has emboldened a sexual misconduct reckoning.

At least two-dozen women have come forward in recent months with their own complaints of abusive treatment within the CIA, telling authorities and Congress not only about sexual assaults, unwanted touching and coercion but of what they contend is a campaign by the spy agency to keep them from speaking out, with dire warnings it could wreck their careers and even endanger national security.

"There are harassers everywhere and bosses that try to cover them up," said Kristin Alden, a Washington attorney who represents some of the women who have filed complaints. "But the whole nature of intelligence work — the culture of secrecy and people working under assumed names — really elevates the chilling effect of retaliation and isolation that victims feel."

Details of Bayatpour's July 13, 2022, stairwell attack have not been previously reported but were confirmed by The Associated Press through court records and by several people familiar with the case who spoke on the condition of anonymity.

The 39-year-old Alabama native and former U.S. Navy intelligence officer has remained on the job for more than a year since the woman reported the assault to the CIA and nine months since she reported it to the FBI and local law enforcement.

Several of the woman's female co-workers attended Wednesday's proceedings, becoming emotional after Fairfax General District Court Judge Dipti Pidikiti-Smith found Bayatpour guilty, sentenced him to six months' probation and ordered him to surrender any firearms and stay away from the woman. His attorney has appealed.

The CIA declined to say whether Bayatpour has faced internal discipline, saying it does not comment on whether individuals are affiliated with the agency.

"This guilty verdict came despite and not because of the CIA," said Kevin Carroll, the attorney for Bayatpour's accuser. The AP does not identify victims of alleged sexual abuse or domestic violence.

"It is a gigantic problem that the agency has not yet begun to get its arms around," he added. "It's an environment where a lot of stuff is secret, and that attracts some bad actors."

Complaints to the CIA's Office of Equal Employment Opportunity about sexual harassment and discrimination this year have already doubled last year's total, detailing 76 separate incidents.

The top Democrat and Republican overseeing the CIA, Virginia Sen. Mark Warner and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, have called for a watchdog investigation and are considering hearings into why the agency has failed women in their ranks for so long. Since 2018, out of 290 total employment-related complaints, the agency has substantiated just a single case based on sex.

The congressional scrutiny prompted CIA Director William Burns in May to launch a series of reforms to streamline claims, support victims and more quickly discipline those behind misconduct. That includes hiring a psychologist steeped in victim advocacy to lead the agency's fledgling Sexual Assault Prevention and Response Office and replacing the leadership of the CIA office where many of the women say they were discouraged from making complaints.

"Our officers deserve no less than our laser sharp focus on ensuring they have a safe and secure work environment," said CIA spokeswoman Tammy Kupperman Thorp.

Congressional aides told the AP they have interviewed or had contact with at least two-dozen women CIA employees this year. They described misconduct ranging from lewd remarks about sexual fantasies at after-work happy hours to a case in which a senior manager showed up at a subordinate's house at night with a firearm demanding sex. Some of the incidents go back years and took place as officers were on risky covert missions overseas, while others took place at CIA headquarters.

An attorney for some of the women says one claims she was given alcohol on her first day at a new posting and then sexually assaulted by the most senior official. Another contends her supervisor told her on her first day of work that they were "soulmates" and followed up with text messages suggesting

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sexual trysts.

Washington attorney Kevin Byrnes said many of his clients were told they could not identify their attackers, go to law enforcement or even speak to family members about their claims due to national security concerns or the risk of divulging unspecified classified information.

"The CIA apparently believes that it is not subject to federal law," Byrnes said.

Other previously unknown cases of assault and harassment have surfaced in dozens of appeals filed by CIA employees with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, which enforces laws prohibiting workplace harassment based on sex.

They include the case of a female contractor who alleged she endured a "cycle of pressure and manipulation" by a CIA manager who gave her unsolicited gifts, harassed her by email and threatened to expose their relationship to her partner.

In another case, a female CIA employee said one of her co-workers repeatedly discussed bondage, sent her nude photos of women and threatened to get her security credentials revoked unless she had sex with him. Among the unwanted advances was an attempt at work by the co-worker to "airplane feed her pasta, which he spilled on her and then offered to clean up from the front of her shirt in an attempt to feel her breast."

"There's safety in numbers," said Ally Coll, a law professor at the City University of New York and founder of the Purple Method, a nonprofit that has advised Congress on how to strengthen anti-harassment rules at federal agencies. "When you learn that abuse is happening to others, you're more likely to report it and feel a sense of responsibility to help."

Prior to Bayatpour, the only other CIA employee publicly known to have been charged with sexual misconduct in recent years was a former officer fluent in Spanish and Mandarin who federal investigators have described as a "serial sexual offender."

Brian Jeffrey Raymond is alleged to have drugged and assaulted at least two-dozen women while they were unconscious over a 14-year period in which he worked for the agency in multiple countries. But Raymond was only discovered in 2020 after a naked woman he met on Tinder was spotted screaming for help from the balcony of his government-leased apartment in Mexico City.

When the FBI began investigating, they found on his smartphone hundreds of photographs and videos of 24 unconscious naked women. In some, Raymond can be seen opening the women's eyelids, groping and straddling them.

After Raymond withdrew a guilty plea for lesser crimes, a federal grand jury in Washington this year returned a 25-count superseding indictment alleging sexual abuse, coercion and transportation of obscene materials.

In Bayatpour's case, the woman told investigators that when she shouted for him to stop and attempted to flee, he tried a second time to wrap the scarf around her before grabbing her arm, pulling her toward him and kissing her cheek. Later, he messaged her: "You good?"

Bayatpour's attorney Stuart Sears acknowledged his client wrapped the scarf around woman in the stairwell but insisted his actions were intended in jest during a 40-minute walk together. The incident, he said, was "a joke that didn't land the way it was intended to land."

The victim reported the incident to the CIA within 48 hours, only to feel she was victimized again when the agency told her not to go to law enforcement or even tell her family. In an affidavit, she said that as a result of the attack she takes medicine for post-traumatic stress disorder, suffers suicidal thoughts and lives in fear of encountering her attacker in the cafeteria at work.

Said the woman's attorney Carroll: "It's completely unacceptable on every level for this guy to continue to be associated with the agency that I knew."

Firefighters in Greece struggle to control wildfires, including the EU's largest blaze

By ELENA BECATOROS Associated Press

ATHENS, Greece (AP) — Firefighters struggled Thursday against strong winds and hot, dry conditions to tame multiple wildfires ravaging Greece, including one in the country's northeast that officials say is the largest recorded in the European Union.

The wildfires have left 20 people dead over the last week. Eighteen of those, including two boys aged between 10 and 15, are believed to be migrants who crossed the nearby border with Turkey. Their bodies were found near a shack in a burnt forest area near Alexandroupolis in northeastern Greece. Sixty firefighters have been injured, fire department spokesman Ioannis Artopios said.

The wildfire in the Alexandroupolis region, burning for a sixth day, combined with smaller fires to create a massive blaze that consumed homes and vast tracts of forest and triggered multiple evacuations of villages and of the city's hospital.

With more than 730 square kilometers (282 square miles) burned, the Alexandroupolis blaze was the EU's largest on record, European Commissioner for Crisis Management Janez Lenarcic said on X, the social media platform formerly known as Twitter.

"We must continue strengthening national & collective prevention and preparedness efforts in view of more brutal fire seasons," he tweeted.

Elsewhere in Europe, fires in Spain's Canary Islands and northwestern Turkey were being brought under control, officials said.

Firefighters in Greece tackled 104 fires across the country in the 24 hours between Wednesday and Thursday evening, 69 of which were new wildfires, the fire department said.

One of the major blazes was on the outskirts of the Greek capital, where flames scorched homes on Wednesday and burned into the national park on Mount Parnitha, one of the last green areas near Athens. By Thursday night, the situation appeared somewhat improved, although firefighters were still dealing with flare-ups, the fire department said.

Greece's Climate Crisis and Civil Protection Minister Vassilis Kikilias said arson was to blame for some of the blazes near Athens.

"Some ... arsonists are setting fires, endangering forests, property and above all human lives," Kikilias said in a televised statement. "What is happening is not just unacceptable but despicable and criminal."

The minister said nine fires had been set in the space of four hours Thursday morning in the area of Avlona, in the northern foothills of Mount Parnitha.

"You are committing a crime against the country," Kikilias said. "We will find you. You will be held accountable to justice."

Police on Thursday arrested a 45-year-old man on suspicion of arson for allegedly setting at least three fires in the Avlona area. A search of his home revealed kindling, a fire torch gun and pine needles, police said.

With firefighting forces stretched to the limit, Greece has asked other European countries for assistance. Germany, Sweden, Croatia, Cyprus sent aircraft, while dozens of Romanian, French, Czech, Bulgarian, Albanian and Slovak firefighters have been helping on the ground.

Artopios, the Greek fire department spokesman, said 260 firefighters, including more than a dozen from France, battled the Parnitha fire supported by 10 planes and 11 helicopters. Bulgarian, Albanian, Romanian and Czech firefighters with vehicles were helping in the Alexandroupolis fire.

Greece suffers destructive wildfires every summer. The deadliest killed 104 people in 2018 in a seaside resort near Athens that residents had not been warned to evacuate. Authorities have since erred on the side of caution, ordering evacuations whenever inhabited areas are under threat.

In 2007, a series of devastating wildfires that affected mainly the southern Peloponnese region killed more than 70 people by the end of that summer and burnt around 2,700 square kilometers (1,040 square miles).

Last month a large wildfire on the resort island of Rhodes forced the evacuation of some 20,000 tour-

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ists. Days later, two air force pilots were killed when their water-dropping plane crashed while tackling a blaze on the island of Evia.

With their hot, dry summers, southern European countries are particularly prone to wildfires. EU officials have blamed climate change for the increasing frequency and intensity of wildfires in Europe, noting that 2022 was the second-worst year for wildfire damage on record after 2017.

In Spain's Tenerife, a fire that has scorched 150 square kilometers (58 square miles) was being brought under control.

Canary Island regional President Fernando Clavijo said Thursday the blaze had "not gained a single square meter" for the first time in over a week. Of the 12,000 people forced to evacuate their homes earlier in the week, only about 200 were still unable to return.

In Turkey, firefighters in the northwestern Canakkale province brought a wildfire under control Thursday, less than 48 hours after it erupted amid high temperatures and strong winds, Turkish Forestry Minister Ibrahim Yumakli said.

Yumakli said the fire, which had forced the evacuation of 11 villages, had affected 40 square kilometers (15 square miles) including 14 square kilometers (5.4 square miles) of agricultural land.

A firefighting volunteer who was injured and six other people who suffered from smoke inhalation were being kept under observation in hospitals, Yumakli said.

"We are extremely happy that there was no loss of life," Yamukli said. "However, we are heartbroken for other creatures of the ecosystem that were affected."

Shipping traffic through the Dardanelles Strait, a major maritime thoroughfare linking the Aegean Sea with the Sea of Marmara, was being partially restored to one lane only, after being completely suspended as fire-doubling aircraft use the waterway to pick up water.

Starbucks' Pumpkin Spice Latte turns 20, whether you like it or not

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

The seasonal drink that made pumpkin spice a star is turning 20. And unlike the autumn days it celebrates, there seems to be no chill in customer demand.

Starbucks' Pumpkin Spice Latte goes on sale Thursday in the U.S. and Canada, as it does each year when the nights start getting longer and the fall winds gather. It's the coffee giant's most popular seasonal beverage, with hundreds of millions sold since its launch in 2003. And it has produced a huge — and growing — industry of imitators flecked with cinnamon, nutmeg and clove.

In the year ending July 29, U.S. sales of pumpkin-flavored products reached \$802.5 million, according to Nielsen. That's up 42% from the same period in 2019. There are pumpkin spice Oreos, protein drinks, craft beers, cereals and even Spam. A search of "pumpkin spice" on Walmart's website brings up more than 1,000 products. A thousand products that smell or taste like, well, pumpkin pie.

For better — and, some might say, for worse — the phenomenon has moved beyond coffee shops and groceries and into the larger world. Great Wolf Lodge is featuring a Pumpkin Spice Suite at five of its resorts this fall, decked out with potpourri, pumpkin throw pillows and bottomless pumpkin spice lattes.

It has also spawned a vocal group of detractors — and become an easy target for parodies. Comedian John Oliver once called pumpkin spice lattes "the coffee that tastes like a candle." There's a Facebook group called "I Hate Pumpkin Spice" and T-shirts with slogans like "Ain't no pumpkin spice in my mug."

The haters, though, appear to be in the minority. Last year, Starbucks said sales of its pumpkin spice drinks — including newer offerings like Pumpkin Cream Cold Brew — were up 17% in the July-September period. And in a 2022 study of 20,000 Twitter and Instagram posts mentioning pumpkin spice, just 8% were negative, according to researchers at Montclair State University in New Jersey.

BEFORE THE LATTE: WHAT PUMPKIN SPICE WAS

It wasn't always this way.

Canned pumpkin and pie spices were relegated to the baking aisle when Starbucks began experimenting with an autumn drink that would replicate the success of the Peppermint Mocha, which took the winter

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holidays by storm in 2002. Customer surveys suggested chocolate or caramel drinks, but Starbucks noticed that pumpkin scored high for “uniqueness.” That would turn out to be prescient.

In the spring of 2003, a team gathered in a lab in Starbucks’ Seattle headquarters, bringing fall decorations to set the mood. They sipped espresso between bites of pumpkin pie, figuring out which spices most complemented the coffee. After three months, they offered taste tests; pumpkin spice beat out chocolate and caramel drinks.

Starbucks tested the Pumpkin Spice Latte in 100 stores in Washington, D.C., and Vancouver, British Columbia, that fall. The company quickly realized it had a winner and rolled it out across the United States and Canada the following fall. And in 2015, a watershed: The company added real pumpkin to the recipe.

These days, Starbucks’ Pumpkin Spice Latte has its own handle on X — formerly known as Twitter — with 82,000 followers, and a Facebook fan group called the Leaf Rakers Society with 43,000 members. And it has fans like Jon McBrine, who drinks black iced coffee for most of the year but eagerly awaits the latte’s return each fall.

“I love the flavor and I love the subculture that has evolved from this huge marketing campaign,” says McBrine, a graphic designer and aspiring author who lives in the Dallas area.

It’s hot through the end of October where he lives, so McBrine typically orders his with ice. But at least once a year, he gets a hot latte, savoring memories of the autumns of his childhood in Delaware.

“It’s part of getting into the season,” he says. “It’s almost like a ritual, even if you’re just waiting in the drive-thru.”

THE PUMPKIN SPICE LATTE AS SENSORY EXPERIENCE

Jason Fischer, an assistant professor at Johns Hopkins University who studies human perception through sight, sound and smell, says odor and flavor have a more direct route than other senses to the area of the brain that processes memories.

That’s due to evolution; humans needed to remember which foods were safe to eat. But it means smells and memories are closely linked.

Still, he said, people’s sense of smell can be malleable. In experiments, subjects have taken a sniff of something and described it in many different ways. But when they’re shown a label for that smell — say, “pumpkin spice” — their perceptions shift and their descriptions become more similar.

“Odors and sights go with certain places, like the aroma of pine and the crunching of needles beneath your feet,” he says. “They’re associated with a certain kind of experience. And then marketing taps into that, and it’s a cue for a product.”

Pumpkin spice doesn’t conjure happy memories for everyone. Kari-Jane Roze, who lives in Fredericton, Canada, loves many things about autumn, including back-to-school routines, changing leaves and hockey. But she’s not a fan of pumpkin pie or pumpkin bread — and she has a particular dislike for pumpkin spice lattes.

“The artificial flavor is disgusting,” says Roze, who works at New Brunswick Community College. “The only thing I do not like about fall is seeing everyone obsess over PSLs. Makes me want to shut off social media for a month.”

She won’t have to deal with those “PSLs” for long. The limited-time nature of the product is another thing that keeps customers hooked, marketing experts say. Last year, Starbucks’ holiday-themed drinks arrived on Nov. 3. And then, for devoted fans, the wait begins anew.

Dominican’s recovery, penguin peril and GOP denial: What to know about extreme weather now

By The Associated Press undefined

The Dominican Republic was starting to get back on its feet Thursday after Tropical Storm Franklin raked the island nation, with heavy flooding that killed at least two people. The storm knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of people and left more than 1.6 million without water.

Heavy rains elsewhere caused flooding in several parts of the U.S., including an Ohio highway where

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10 people were rescued from cars stranded in high water. In Michigan, flooded underground roadways blocked travelers from parts of Detroit Metropolitan Airport, and in Las Vegas, a fast-moving storm flooded parts of the city, including its famed strip.

Here's what else is happening related to extreme weather and the climate right now:

—Strong winds and hot, dry conditions made going difficult for firefighters battling multiple wildfires in Greece, including one in the northeast that officials say is the largest recorded in the European Union.

— A heat wave continued to broil the central and southeast United States, straining power grids and prompting safety warnings for people without access to air conditioning.

— The Brazilian Amazon has long been home to small and mid-sized sustainable businesses that use forest nuts, fruits and other products in a "bioeconomy." Now there's a push to scale these up both to protect the rainforest and to provide a livelihood for tens of millions of people who live in and near it.

—Loss of sea ice in one region of Antarctica has taken a devastating toll on emperor penguins, researchers say.

— China moved quickly to ban imports of seafood from Japan after that country began releasing its first batch of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant.

—Two months after a railroad bridge collapsed, dumping carloads of hazardous oil products into Montana's Yellowstone River, the cleanup workers are gone. But thick mats of tarry petroleum asphalt cover portions of sandbars, oil-speckled rocks and bushes line the shore and the wreckage of a tank car juts from the middle of the river.

—When eight Republican candidates for president were asked in a Wednesday night debate whether they believe humans are causing climate change, only one, former U.N. ambassador Nikki Haley, said climate change is "real."

—A range of Associated Press photos shows the destructive power of the wildfires that have been a defining feature in a summer of climate extremes worldwide.

QUOTABLE:

"The climate change agenda is a hoax. The reality is more people are dying of climate change policies than they actually are of climate change." — Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy.

Presidential debate shows how GOP candidates are struggling to address concerns about climate change

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The eight Republican presidential candidates on the debate stage were asked to raise their hands if they believed human behavior is causing climate change.

Not a single hand went up.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis shut down the question and attacked the "corporate media." Echoing the words of former President Donald Trump, Vivek Ramaswamy called climate change "a hoax" and a "wet blanket on our economy." Sen. Tim Scott, R-S.C., insisted that more serious environmental threats are coming from China, India and Africa.

Just one Republican, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, said during Wednesday night's debate in Milwaukee that climate change "is real."

A day later, frustrated leaders in the GOP's small but growing movement of environmental activists said their party must do better. In fact, some young conservatives confronted Ramaswamy at a gathering after the debate and told him his answer was particularly unhelpful.

"We're getting to a point where Republicans are losing winnable elections because they're alienating people that care about climate change," Christopher Barnard, the Republican president of the American Conservation Coalition, the largest conservative environmental group in the nation, said Thursday.

As the 2024 presidential contest begins in earnest, the Republican Party is struggling to reconcile rising concerns about climate change — especially young people — with the GOP's older base, which largely rejects climate science as a liberal conspiracy theory. Scientists overwhelmingly agree that heat-trapping

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gases released from the combustion of fossil fuels are pushing up global temperatures, upending weather patterns and endangering animal species.

Some Republican leaders have acknowledged they cannot ignore climate change altogether. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., has called for planting 1 trillion trees to help protect the environment. But the solutions long promoted by Democrats and environmental advocates — government action to force emissions reductions — remains a nonstarter with the GOP's presidential candidates.

"The climate change agenda is a hoax," Ramaswamy said during the debate, repeating the line for emphasis, even as some younger people in the audience booed. "The reality is more people are dying of climate change policies than they actually are of climate change."

None of Ramaswamy's competitors, eager to attack him on other issues during the two-hour debate, challenged him directly on climate, even after the debate moderators highlighted new evidence that climate change is causing major problems.

Former Vice President Mike Pence, who was silent on climate change during the debate, suggested on Thursday that it is largely a matter of messaging for the GOP.

"Look the climate is changing, but I believe the issue is what we do about it," Pence told The Associated Press, condemning Democratic-backed policies such as the so-called Green New Deal. "It's all just about communicating a different vision."

Meanwhile, conditions across the country and the world are creating new urgency for the GOP to take climate change seriously.

Heavy rains poured on Cleveland during the debate and Detroit flooded overnight. Wildfires in Canada have led to smoky, polluted air in much of the United States, while a catastrophic wildfire in Hawaii was the deadliest in more than a century. Southern California was hit with a tropical storm for the first time in decades.

But the biggest climate effect has been the heat.

July saw global daily and monthly temperatures hotter than modern equipment had ever recorded. Some scientists said it was the hottest in about 120,000 years, based on tree rings and other proxy records. The world's oceans have set records for heat, both on the surface and deeper, every month since spring. Florida saw 100-degree water and unprecedented coral bleaching.

The presidential debate "underscored the fact that one of the two parties (the GOP) not only refuses to act on the climate crisis, but refuses to even acknowledge it exists," University of Pennsylvania climate scientist Michael Mann said in an email. "It is a disqualifying position on the defining challenge of our time."

"The party will lose a huge chunk of voters, especially women and younger voters if it adopts this stance," he said.

Most people in the United States (62%) say the federal government is doing too little to reduce climate change, according to a September 2022 poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. Even as U.S. adults don't think the government is doing enough, there's a clear division among Republicans.

Half of Republicans under age 45 say the government isn't addressing climate change enough, compared with just 32% of older Republicans.

Younger Republicans also say they feel anxious when discussing climate change at a higher rate than older Republicans. An AP-NORC poll from April found that 17% of young Republicans said anxious describes how they feel when talking about climate change, compared with 7% of older Republicans.

Among Americans overall, those under 45 are twice as likely as those 45 and older to say they're anxious when talking about climate change (30% vs. 15%).

Barnard, of the American Conservation Coalition, said it was a win for conservative environmentalists that the climate question was even asked. But he said that his party must do better and he offered advice to the GOP's presidential class.

"You don't have to be the biggest climate champion," Barnard said. "If you just say, 'Climate change is real, and we're going to have some sort of solution,' that's enough for most voters."

Wagner plane crash seems intended to send a clear message to potential Kremlin foes

By The Associated Press undefined

When Yevgeny Prigozhin launched his armed rebellion that challenged the Kremlin, Western officials predicted Russian President Vladimir Putin would seek vengeance against the mercenary leader.

Two months to the day after the action that Putin labeled a "stab in the back" and "treason," those forecasts seem to have come true, in ruthless and menacing fashion.

Although authorities have not yet confirmed the deaths of Prigozhin and his top lieutenants from the Wagner private military contractor in Wednesday's plane crash northwest of Moscow, it sent an immediate chill through Russian official circles.

Even amid the uncertainty, the message was clear: Anyone who dares to cross the Kremlin will perish.

But even as the crash worked to restore an image of Kremlin authority that was badly crippled by the Prigozhin mutiny, it also sowed confusion and anger among Russian hard-liners, heralding perhaps other challenges to Putin as the war in Ukraine marked its 18th month.

Many see the events as a sign of an intensifying government meltdown.

"It's not a state, it's not Russia. It's just one sprawling mafia, one tentacle of which is colliding with others," said Dmitry Oreshkin, a professor at Free University in Riga, Latvia.

While authorities are unlikely to announce the cause of the crash anytime soon, Prigozhin's plane was seen plummeting from a large cloud of smoke, twisting wildly and missing a wing. One witness said the jet "exploded in the sky" and "something sort of was torn from it in the air."

Some Russian media speculated it was brought down by a bomb. Prigozhin's supporters claimed on their messaging app channels that it was shot down by an air defense system, bluntly accusing authorities of assassinating him. None of the allegations cited any evidence.

Oreshkin said the downing of a private jet seemed to be a strong message to scare Russian elites into submission.

"This is a demonstrative action," he said. "Prigozhin could have been quietly poisoned and he would have died of a heart attack, like many previous opponents of Putin or his generals. But apparently it was intended to serve as a show of uncompromising control over the situation."

Other Kremlin critics have died from poisoning in what the Russian opposition and the West described as targeted killings that had Putin's blessing, but none has been known to have perished in an air accident.

Former Putin speechwriter Abbas Gallyamov said the failure to punish Prigozhin initially had eroded Putin's authority, sending "an open invitation to any potential rebels and mutineers."

He said it could have taken two months to act because Prigozhin was well-protected by his security and Russian spy agencies were waiting for the right opportunity. "They could have worked on it for a long time and had the opportunity only now," Gallyamov said.

While acknowledging that all the facts are still unclear, German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said "the whole world immediately looks at the Kremlin when a disgraced ex-confidant of Putin suddenly falls from the sky, two months after he attempted an uprising."

Western officials had believed Prigozhin's days were numbered ever since the mutiny, noting that Putin would never forgive the humiliation.

For Putin "revenge is a dish best served cold," CIA Director William Burns said in July, describing the Russian leader as "the ultimate apostle of payback."

Prigozhin's jet was tracked flying among the cities of Moscow, St. Petersburg and Belarus in the weeks following the mutiny, and Wagner had raised its profile in Africa, hectic activity that led to speculation Putin considered the 62-year-old mercenary leader who over the years had won lucrative Kremlin contracts too valuable to discard quickly.

Earlier this week, Prigozhin released a video purportedly from an unknown desert location, claiming Wagner was "making Russia even greater on all continents, and Africa even more free." His mercenaries have been especially active in several African countries in recent years, extending Russia's influence and enriching it with mineral wealth.

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Some Russian media claimed Prigozhin could have hoped to persuade Putin to entrust him with expanding those projects, even though the Defense Ministry apparently sought to take them over. Others pointed out that he might have violated the deal with the Kremlin by trying to continue his business activities in Russia and boasting about his exploits in Africa in the latest video.

Alexander Baunov of the Carnegie Endowment said it's a signature tactic of dictatorial regimes to "bring an enemy or a traitor closer before destruction," as criminal clans do.

Oreshkin said authorities might have opted for using the plane crash to decapitate Wagner to prevent any threat his lieutenants might pose.

"It is clear that just removing one person is not enough, you need to remove his key people, because they probably had a Plan B in case of losing their boss," he said. "Therefore, the ideal option is to eliminate them all together, which, in fact, happened."

Those on the flight manifest included Dmitry Utkin, a former military intelligence officer who directed Wagner's operations, and Valery Chekalov, its security chief.

Alexei Mukhin, a pro-Kremlin political expert, said the crash gave Putin a "demonic aura that his opponents won't be able to ignore," noting that Kremlin foes abroad will feel increasingly unsafe.

Reports this week said Gen. Sergei Surovikin, who had links with Prigozhin, was dismissed as air force chief following what Russian media described as a two-month investigation into his possible connection to the mutiny — a signal authorities were methodically trying to uproot any dissent in the ranks.

While the jet crash certainly sent a message of toughness, Oreshkin warned it could have mixed results, creating confusion among hard-liners who admired Wagner's role in Ukraine and lauded Prigozhin's criticism of the military brass.

Roman Saponkov, a military blogger who had supported Prigozhin, predicted it will have "catastrophic consequences."

"People who issued that order don't understand the sentiments in the military," he said.

Some Kremlin supporters sought to shift blame for the crash to Ukraine, without offering evidence.

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst, alleged Kyiv authorities were behind it to rally support on the country's Independence Day, celebrated Thursday.

"It was Ukraine that killed Prigozhin," Markov said. "Prigozhin wasn't a problem for Putin."

But Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country had "nothing to do with this. Everyone understands who does."

Wagner was one of the most capable elements of Russia's forces but it has stopped playing any role in Ukraine after capturing the eastern stronghold of Bakhmut in May. Its remnants probably will be incorporated into the Russian military and lose much of their capability.

"It was the most capable Russian military unit that fought in Ukraine," Gallyamov said. "It's quite obvious that now after it's put under control of the incompetent top military brass, Wagner won't stand out from others."

Even if confirmed, Prigozhin's death probably wouldn't have an immediate impact on the battlefield, but it reflects escalating Russian infighting that could result in growing public dismay and eventually weaken Moscow's hand in the conflict.

Early expectations of victory in Ukraine gave way to increasing public fatigue in Russia, and "now the phase of disappointment begins, which will last a few months and appears irreversible," Oreshkin said.

Vivek Ramaswamy takes center stage, plus other key moments from the first Republican debate

By STEVE PEOPLES and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis have dominated the Republican presidential nomination fight for much of the year. Neither dominated the debate stage Wednesday night.

Trump, of course, decided to skip the GOP's opening presidential primary debate given his overwhelm-

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ing lead in the polls. DeSantis showed up, but he was overshadowed for much of the night by political newcomer Vivek Ramaswamy.

And there was no shortage of aggressive performances from the others on stage either. Former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley, former Vice President Mike Pence and former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie were aggressive when given the opportunity.

It took more than an hour for moderators to ask about Trump's legal battles, a discussion previewed with a video of the Atlanta jail where he will surrender on charges Thursday.

The former president scheduled counterprogramming with an interview aired on X, formerly known as Twitter, while his team suggested that the debate was essentially an audience to see who's best positioned to serve as his running mate.

Here are our takeaways from an action-filled night:

VIVEK GRABS THE SPOTLIGHT

At the center of the stage, and the center of the debate's hottest exchanges, was a 38-year-old man who no one expected to be there even a few months ago – a novice candidate and technology entrepreneur named Vivek Ramaswamy.

Though he's well behind Trump, Ramaswamy has crept up in recent polls, leading to his position next to DeSantis at center stage. And he quickly showed why when he showcased his ready-for-video, on-message approach — talking about how his poor parents moved to the U.S. and gave him the chance to found billion-dollar companies.

Then Ramaswamy started to throw elbows. At one point he declared, "I'm the only person on the stage who isn't bought and paid for." He slammed his rivals as "super PAC puppets" who were using "ready-made, pre-prepared slogans" to attack him.

He seemed to be betting that primary voters preferred something memorable said to something done. His rivals were having none of it.

"Now is not the time for on-the-job training," Pence said. "We don't need to bring in a rookie."

Christie cut in during one of Ramaswamy's most biting attacks. "I've had enough of a guy who stands up here who sounds like ChatGPT," Christie said, adding that Ramaswamy's opening line about being a skinny guy with a hard-to-pronounce name reminded him of former President Barack Obama — not a compliment on a Republican stage. Ramaswamy responded by asking Christie for a "hug," referencing when Obama visited Christie's state following Hurricane Sandy.

Haley attacked Ramaswamy's argument that the U.S. shouldn't support Ukraine in its defense against Russia's invasion. "Under your watch, you would make America less safe. You have no foreign policy experience and it shows," Haley told him, standing directly to his left.

NAVIGATING TRUMP

It took more than an hour for the candidates to confront the elephant not in the room.

And when they did, most of the participants raised their hands to say they'd support Trump even if he was convicted. That's after the moderators noted that Trump is facing more than 90 criminal counts in separate cases across four jurisdictions.

Ramaswamy vowed to pardon Trump if given the chance.

"Let's just speak the truth. President Trump, I believe, was the best president of the 21st century. It's a fact," Ramaswamy said.

Christie, a former U.S. attorney and frequent Trump antagonist, pushed back aggressively despite being drowned out at times by the audience's boos.

Even if people disagree with the criminal charges, Christie said, "The conduct is beneath the office of the president of the United States."

DIVIDE ON ABORTION POST-DOBBS

The Republicans on stage did not downplay their strong opposition to abortion rights when given the opportunity. But there was a clear divide among the candidates over whether to push for a federal abortion ban.

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Haley called on her opponents to be honest with voters that a federal law that imposes an abortion ban on all states would likely never get through the narrowly divided Congress. She said the issue should be sent back to the states. She also made a personal appeal.

"We need to stop demonizing this issue," Haley said. "We aren't going to put a woman in jail ... if she has an abortion."

On the other side: Pence, an evangelical Christian who has long fought against abortion rights. Both Pence and Scott openly endorsed a national ban on abortions at 15 weeks at least. Pence said that Haley's call to find consensus in the states "is the opposite of leadership."

"It's not a states-only issue. It's a moral issue," he said.

DeSantis, who signed a 6-week abortion ban into Florida law just this spring, didn't take a position on a federal ban when asked directly. He said he was "proud" to sign his state's abortion ban, which is one of the strictest in the nation.

Democrats were likely happy with the discussion. They already plan to make abortion a central issue in next fall's general election.

DESANTIS IN THE BACKGROUND

The Florida governor was the highest polling contender on stage. Yet at the debate, he seemed to slide into the background as Ramaswamy took most of the attacks and fought with others on stage.

DeSantis rarely waded into the back-and-forth, preferring to wait for a moment when he could give a lengthy statement. His critics – especially Trump – have hammered him for being awkward and wooden, and he had relatively few opportunities to dispel that impression.

That's not to say DeSantis didn't have strong moments. He grabbed hold of a question about liberal billionaire George Soros, a major donor to left-leaning causes and frequent conservative target. DeSantis noted he was the only person on the stage who's removed Democratic prosecutors who were elected with donations from Soros' network.

"As president, we are going to go after all of these people because they are hurting the quality of life," DeSantis said.

But even when DeSantis successfully walked the tightrope that has defined his campaign – avoiding direct Trump criticism while making a case for why he'd do the job better – he was brought down to Earth.

The candidates were asked whether Pence did the right thing by letting Congress certify Joe Biden's presidential election victory on Jan. 6, 2021. DeSantis was notably quiet and had to be asked twice by the moderators for his answer. "I've answered this, Mike did his duty, I've got no beef with him," DeSantis said, contending that Democrats wanted the GOP to talk about Jan. 6 while pivoting to the future, saying the election has to be about Jan. 20, 2025 – the day the next president is sworn in.

Bret Baier, one of the moderators, retorted, "Donald Trump is beating you by 30 to 40 points in the polls so it is an issue we have to face."

It's not clear whether DeSantis changed that dynamic. With roughly four months left to go until voting starts, he may not have many other big opportunities to do so.

THE LONE WOMAN ON STAGE

With eight candidates on the stage, it was a challenge to stand out. But one stood out immediately – Haley – because she was the only woman there and the only person not in a dark suit and Republican-red tie.

Haley quoted Margaret Thatcher about how women get things done while men talk, stressing the importance of educating girls and arguing that keeping transgender girls out of female sports was a woman's issue. "I am going to fight for girls all day long because strong girls become strong women and strong women become strong leaders," Haley said.

She also explicitly referenced the general election even as she remains a longshot in primary polls. Some of her most memorable moments came when she sparred with Ramaswamy on whether the U.S. should send weapons and funding to Ukraine.

REJECTION OF TRUMP'S FALSE ELECTION CLAIMS

Trump has almost made it a prerequisite for people vying for his party's nomination to claim that he won the 2020 election. In 2022, Republican candidates in several debates were quick to say they disbelieve

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the 2020 election results.

Not on Wednesday. Instead, candidate after candidate praised Pence – who may end up a witness in one of the federal prosecutions against Trump – for rejecting the former president’s pleas to halt Biden’s certification as the victor on Jan. 6. Only Ramaswamy declined to support Pence.

“Mike Pence stood for the constitution and he deserves not grudging credit but our thanks as Americans,” Christie said.

Pence has been attacked by Trump repeatedly and pursued by hecklers still angry that he didn’t try to keep Trump in office. While an Associated Press poll earlier this month found that 7 out of 10 Americans think Biden legitimately won the election, 57% of Republicans do not agree with that statement. That’s a reflection of both Trump’s repetition of his election lies and the way a conservative media world parrots those lies, or at least shies away from contradicting them.

Fox News recently paid \$787 million to settle a libel suit from voting machine firm Dominion Systems over airing lies about the 2020 election, so it was especially striking to hear such robust statements on the network, including Pence’s final statement about Trump.

“He asked me to put him over the Constitution,” Pence said of the former president, “and I chose the Constitution.”

AN UNRULY EVENT, AT TIMES

Things started off quietly as the candidates beat up on Biden’s economic policies. But when the participants turned against each other, Baier and fellow moderator Martha MacCallum struggled to control the action at times.

DeSantis helped set the tone early by rejecting the moderators’ request for candidates to raise their hands if they believed human behavior caused climate change.

“We’re not schoolchildren,” DeSantis charged. And the moderators abandoned their request.

At one point, Ramaswamy and Haley shouted over each other for more than 30 seconds when the conversation turned to foreign policy. The candidates waved their fingers at each other as they yelled. The moderators stayed silent.

Baier and MacCallum let the candidates drive the action for much of the night — which is typically what the audience wants, although there will be critics who would have preferred a more orderly affair.

Iran and Saudi Arabia are among 6 nations set to join China and Russia in the BRICS economic bloc

By GERALD IMRAY, MOGOMOTSI MAGOME and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Iran and Saudi Arabia were among six countries invited Thursday to join the BRICS bloc of developing economies in a move that showed signs of strengthening a China-Russia coalition as tensions with the West spiral higher.

The United Arab Emirates, Argentina, Egypt and Ethiopia were also set to enter BRICS from Jan. 1, 2024, joining current members Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa to make an 11-nation bloc.

The announcement came after two days of talks at a summit in Johannesburg involving Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, Chinese President Xi Jinping and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa. Russian President Vladimir Putin participated in the discussions virtually after his travel to the summit was complicated by an International Criminal Court arrest warrant issued against him over the war in Ukraine.

Putin welcomed the six countries by video link. He did not mention Wednesday’s plane crash that left Russian mercenary chief Yevgeny Prigozhin and some of his top lieutenants presumed dead.

While there has been momentum for a BRICS expansion for months - pushed largely by China and Russia - the five leaders were locked in closed-door discussions for two days Tuesday and Wednesday before emerging with an agreement on expanding and a list of countries on the last day of the summit.

BRICS is a consensus-based organization that needs all members to agree on decisions.

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The bloc was formed by Brazil, Russia, India and China in 2009 and added South Africa in 2010, making Thursday's announcement in the heart of Johannesburg's high-rise Sandton financial district its most significant decision in more than a decade.

Mohammad Jamshidi, the political deputy of Iran President Ebrahim Raisi, called joining BRICS a "strategic victory for Iran's foreign policy."

"Felicitations to the Supreme Leader of Islamic Revolution and great nation of Iran," Jamshidi wrote on X, the website formerly known as Twitter.

Raisi attended the summit, as did Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan, who said the oil-rich kingdom could be a leader of the bloc given its resources, wealth and access to the Red Sea and Persian Gulf.

However, in a twist, Saudi Arabia's membership appeared uncertain after Prince Faisal told the Saudi-owned broadcaster Al Arabiya later Thursday that the kingdom appreciated the invitation but would first study the details before the proposed Jan. 1 joining date and take "the appropriate decision."

BRICS currently represents around 40% of the world's population and more than a quarter of the world's GDP, with that set to increase. The potential new members include three of the world's biggest oil producers: Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Iran.

"This membership expansion is historic," Chinese leader Xi said. "It shows the determination of BRICS countries for unity and development."

"Over the years, China has stood in solidarity with developing countries through thick and thin."

Saudi Arabia and the UAE might provide new capital for BRICS' New Development Bank. However, economists also noted that Argentina and Egypt are the International Monetary Fund's two biggest debtors and have required bailouts.

Ethiopia, Africa's second most populous country with 120 million people, has been at odds with the U.S. and European Union over their criticism of the recent conflict in the country's Tigray region.

Argentinian President Alberto Fernández said that joining BRICS was "a new opportunity" that "strengthens us."

BRICS has a stated aim to amplify the voice of the Global South. All five current members and dozens of other developing countries represented at the summit repeatedly called this week for a fairer world order and the reform of international institutions like the United Nations, the IMF and the World Bank.

Many in the developing world view those institutions as Western-led and unfair to them and a stream of leaders made speeches Thursday calling for change.

While that sentiment and challenging the current international order is useful for China and Russia's geopolitical aims, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said in a speech to the BRICS summit that the calls for reform were valid.

He quoted figures that said, on average, African countries pay four times more for borrowing from international financial institutions than the United States and eight times more than the wealthiest European countries.

"Redesigning today's outdated, dysfunctional and unfair global financial architecture is necessary, but it won't happen overnight," Guterres said. "Yet we can and must take practical action now."

More than 20 countries had formally applied to join BRICS ahead of the Johannesburg summit and more than 20 others had expressed interest, indicating how the bloc might resonate with many as an alternative.

"Cooperation is key to our collective survival," Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed said.

South African officials pushed back against characterizations that BRICS was taking an anti-West turn under the influence of China and Russia. Putin and Xi laced their speeches with criticism of the U.S. and its allies earlier in the summit, although Xi did also call for a "lowering of the temperature" in reference to the geopolitical climate.

Putin used a 17-minute prerecorded address on the opening day of the meetings to lash out at the West over the financial sanctions imposed on Russia as punishment for its invasion of Ukraine.

The expansion of BRICS also appears to expand China and Russia's sphere of influence, especially in the Persian Gulf. While Saudi Arabia had been touted as a likely new member, Iran's inclusion wasn't expected.

In the end, three Gulf nations were in line to possibly join.

Until recently, the inclusion of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE together in the same economic or political organization would have been unthinkable, as tensions escalated following the collapse of Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal.

But the UAE became the first to reengage diplomatically with Iran, and Saudi Arabia and Iran announced they had reached a separate *détente* in March, notably with the help of Chinese mediation.

China has recently pushed for more of a presence in the Gulf and has sought closer relations with all three nations, particularly Iran, from which it has imported oil. Saudi Arabia and the UAE have also maintained relations with Russia amid the war on Ukraine, annoying the U.S., which has long provided security guarantees for the major oil-producing nations.

The U.S. and its Western allies clashed with Russia and Iran at the U.N. Security Council last month over Tehran's uranium enrichment and its reported supply of combat drones to Russia that are being used to attack Ukraine.

As research grows into how to stop gun violence, one city looks to science for help

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

KNOXVILLE, Tennessee (AP) — "That's where I got shot," said Rashaad Woods, nodding toward a convenience store in Knoxville's "gun zone." There were bullet holes in a church's walls. Nearby was a shuttered nightclub where some people were killed.

"There was a point in time I wasn't comfortable standing here," said Kodi Mills, 45. "But that time is passing."

The men work for Turn Up Knox, a year-old outreach program that mentors kids and defuses situations that could escalate into violence. It's a centerpiece of the Tennessee city's attempt to follow a science-based playbook in fighting a surge in shootings.

In recent years, research reviews have begun to conclude there's enough evidence to say which public health interventions prevent shootings, which do not, and which need more study. Knoxville is one of a growing number of cities teaming with researchers to develop an evidence-based plan to stop the bleeding.

Knoxville's program was in reaction to a dramatic rise in shooting deaths and includes policing changes and other efforts. However, it does not count on new gun restrictions. That was important, since Tennessee has repeatedly moved to loosen gun laws.

"I wanted to have answers," said Knoxville Mayor Indya Kincannon. "I wanted to be able to fix it."

Nearly non-existent not long ago, gun violence prevention research has experienced a small boom in the wake of mounting shooting deaths, expanded funding and burgeoning advocacy.

Two decades ago, only about 20 U.S. researchers were focused on gun violence prevention. Last fall, more than 600 gathered in Washington, D.C., for what's been described as the largest-ever national conference on the issue. An even bigger turnout is expected at a conference this fall.

Funding continues to be just a fraction of what is spent on other leading causes of death. Still, research has "just exploded" in the last few years, said Rebecca Cunningham, a gun violence researcher at the University of Michigan.

The work addresses the worst firearm violence in decades. Researchers estimate there were more than 48,000 firearm deaths last year, with gun-related homicide and suicide rates not seen since the early 1990s. Gunshots are now the leading cause of death of U.S. children and teenagers.

Though some big questions remain, there is a growing consensus about what programs and policies make a difference — and which don't.

According to an assessment by the Rand Corp., measures that work include laws that permit charging adults who let children have unsupervised access to guns, well-enforced background checks and policies that ban guns from people subject to domestic violence restraining orders.

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Measures that don't: stand-your-ground and concealed carry laws, which studies consistently show increase gun homicides, and gun buyback programs, which have been shown to have little, if any, effect on crime.

About 16% of Knoxville's population is Black, and about 40% live in poverty, many in East Knoxville, where firearm violence has surged.

As in other U.S. cities, violence escalated during the COVID-19 pandemic, when adults were out of work, kids were not in school and people were anxious.

"It was a very unsettled time," Mayor Kincannon said.

Before the pandemic, homicides hovered around 20 per year. That shot up to 38 in 2020 and rose again to 41 in 2021, giving Knoxville a gun homicide rate that rivaled Chicago's.

As shootings accelerated, Kincannon turned to Thomas Abt, whose book, "Bleeding Out," offers a plan for cities that includes having police and community organizations work together.

Crucially, Abt's program doesn't count on policymakers to take action to restrict gun access. That was appealing, because Tennessee's state government has been moving in the opposite direction.

In 2021, the state started letting people carry handguns — visibly, or concealed — without a permit. This year, the minimum age for carrying handguns dropped to 18.

Even after a mass shooting that killed three children and three staff at an elementary school in Nashville this year, the state Legislature's Republican majority fought calls for tougher gun laws. Two Black representatives who protested the inaction were expelled.

Gov. Bill Lee, a Republican, opened a special legislative session this week to address public safety. But many Republican lawmakers have spurned his centerpiece measure that would take guns away from people deemed an extreme risk to themselves or others.

Kincannon supports expanded background checks and other gun control measures, but said Knoxville's efforts are designed to make a difference "no matter what happens legislatively."

Several cities have begun looking to team up with gun violence prevention experts, including Muskegon, Michigan, which partnered with the University of Michigan.

Knoxville became the first city to sign up with Abt's program at the Center for the Study and Practice of Violence Reduction at the University of Maryland, which teamed with an outside researcher to analyze its violent crime.

The analysis contained a few surprises, said Knoxville Deputy Police Chief Tony Willis.

The average age of shooting suspects was 28, and for victims, 29, — an unexpectedly large proportion who were "much older than I expected," he said.

Only 12% of homicides were solely gang-related, much lower than anticipated, Willis said. That suggests gun violence is often a personal dispute that could be mediated or averted before shots are fired.

The research also supported police data showing most gun violence happened in a few "hot spots," mostly in East Knoxville, leading to a plan initially focusing police and community outreach to a nine-block area there.

The effort involves church leaders and a range of community organizations. There were also changes at the police department, including a new police chief, a detective unit focused only on homicides and shootings, and officers dedicated to patrolling in areas with many shootings.

A goal is to increase public trust in law enforcement, which had been low and sometimes abysmal. A particular low point occurred in 2021, when a police officer killed a student in a high school bathroom in East Knoxville.

"The community did, absolutely, raise concerns about policing. ... A lot of conversations are still happening, frankly," said LaKenya Middlebrook, the mayor's point person on the effort.

Kincannon said she knew police "couldn't do it alone."

"We would have someone get killed in broad daylight, with a lot of witnesses, but no one wanted to talk," she said. "That means we need more partnership in the community, to build trust."

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Even before the researchers' analysis was completed, the city funded Turn Up Knox, a nonprofit led by 32-year-old community activist Denzel Grant.

It uses ex-offenders, violence survivors and other community members to identify those most likely to be shot or to become shooters in the future. They mentor teenagers, operate a lawn service that gives jobs to kids and are teaching families how to mediate conflicts and deal with the trauma that follows shootings.

Sometimes, when someone is in danger of becoming the victim of a revenge shooting they give them a bus ticket to get out of town for a few days.

Such outreach can be pivotal if it's integrated with a trusted police force, responsive mental health services and other community efforts, Abt says.

It's too early to say if the steps so far are making a difference in Knoxville.

There were 36 homicides last year, down from the 41 the year before. But firearm homicides fell nationally last year, and experts aren't sure why. In the first six months of this year, Knoxville had 15 homicides, down from 18 in the same period last year.

Some experts have mixed feelings about the Knoxville approach.

Abt is "very respected" and focuses on immediate steps to reduce gun violence, but he doesn't emphasize longer-term programs to alleviate poverty and racial disparities, said Jim Mercy of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

The program also doesn't directly address gun suicides, which outnumber gun homicides.

Some East Knoxville residents note the area has few stores, and few safe places for kids to have fun, and limited opportunities for summer jobs.

"Kids should have something to do," said Chloe Isom, 41, who lost two sons to gun violence last year. JaBari, 16, was killed in September and 20-year-old Stephen two weeks later.

City officials have increased summer youth programs, serving hundreds of kids. But they acknowledge much still needs to be done and that Turn Up Knox needs more resources and training. Also, Kincannon faces a primary election on Tuesday.

"If she doesn't get re-elected, that's a scary situation," said Terry Walker-Smith, 58, who works with Turn Up Knox and lost two sons to gun violence, in 2007 and 2009.

Charlene Roberts' 25-year-old daughter, Jessie, was killed by a stray bullet in 2019 while sitting in a car at a North Knoxville fast-food drive-thru. Her son Kevin, 33, was killed in 2021 when gunfire erupted at a birthday party.

She is now raising Jessie's son, Princeton.

Princeton is a quiet, basketball-loving kid who just started sixth grade and looks a lot like his mother. On his bedroom wall is a framed certificate, "Brightest Smile Award," presented to him by a teacher a year before his mother was killed.

Besides losing his mother and uncle to violence, his father is in prison. Princeton has been bullied in school, his grandmother said. Princeton recalled a scary day when he saw people with guns just down the street.

"I wish they didn't allow people to have guns," he said. "I just don't want to get hurt one day."

His grandmother says he is resilient and "amazing," but he's also changed.

"He always had the biggest smile, just like his mother," she said. "It breaks my heart. He fakes a smile now. He don't have that smile anymore."

China bans seafood from Japan after the Fukushima nuclear plant begins its wastewater release

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

OKUMA, Japan (AP) — The tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant began releasing its first batch of treated radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean on Thursday — a controversial step that prompted China to ban seafood from Japan.

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People inside and outside the country protested the wastewater release, with Japanese fishing groups fearing it will further damage the reputation of their seafood and groups in China and South Korea raising concerns, making it a political and diplomatic issue.

In response to the wastewater release, Chinese customs authorities banned seafood from Japan, customs authorities announced Thursday. The ban started immediately and will affect all imports of "aquatic products" including seafood, according to the notice. Authorities said they will "dynamically adjust relevant regulatory measures as appropriate to prevent the risks of nuclear-contaminated water discharge to the health and food safety of our country."

Shortly after China's announcement, Tokyo Electric Power Company Holdings President Tomoaki Kobayakawa said the utility was preparing to compensate Japanese business owners appropriately for damages suffered by export bans from "the foreign government." He said China is a key trading partner and he will do his utmost to provide scientific explanations of the release so the ban will be dropped as soon as possible.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said Japan asked China to immediately lift the ban. "We will keep strongly requesting that the Chinese government firmly carry out a scientific discussion," Kishida said, pledging to protect the fisheries industry from reputational damage due to the release.

The Japanese government and TEPCO say the water must be released to make room for the plant's decommissioning and to prevent accidental leaks. They say the treatment and dilution will make the wastewater safer than international standards and its environmental impact will be negligible.

Tony Hooker, director of the Center for Radiation Research, Education, Innovation at the University of Adelaide, said the water released from the Fukushima plant is safe. "It certainly is well below the World Health Organization drinking water guidelines," he said.

"It's a very political issue of disposing radiation into the sea," he said. "I understand people's concerns and that's because we as scientists have not explained it in a very good way, and we need to do more education."

Still, some scientists say the long-term impact of the low-level radioactivity that remains in the water needs attention.

In a live video from a control room at the plant, TEPCO showed a staff member turn on a seawater pump with a click of a mouse, marking the beginning of the controversial project that is expected to last for decades.

"Seawater Pump A activated," the main operator said, confirming the release was underway. TEPCO said an additional wastewater release pump was activated 20 minutes after the first. Plant officials said everything was moving smoothly so far.

In a statement Thursday, International Atomic Energy Agency Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi said, "IAEA experts are there on the ground to serve as the eyes of the international community and ensure that the discharge is being carried out as planned consistent with IAEA safety standards."

The United Nations agency also said it would launch a webpage to provide live data about the discharge, and repeated its assurance that the IAEA would have an on-site presence for the duration of the release.

The water release begins more than 12 years after the March 2011 nuclear meltdowns caused by a massive earthquake and tsunami. It marks a milestone for the plant's battle with an ever-growing radioactive water stockpile that TEPCO and the government say has hampered the daunting task of removing fatally toxic melted debris from the reactors.

The pump activated Thursday afternoon sent the first batch of the diluted, treated water from a mixing pool to a secondary pool 10 minutes later. It then moves through a connected undersea tunnel to go out 1 kilometer (0.6 miles) off the coast. Officials said the water moves at a walking speed and will take about 30 minutes to exit from the tunnel.

The operator checked data and the progress on a set of four monitors that show the water volume, pump conditions and any alerts.

TEPCO executive Junichi Matsumoto said Thursday's release was planned to start small in order to ensure safety.

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The wastewater is collected and partly recycled as cooling water after treatment, with the rest stored in around 1,000 tanks, which are already filled to 98% of their 1.37-million-ton capacity. Those tanks, which cover much of the plant complex, must be freed up to build the new facilities needed for the decommissioning process, officials said.

Final preparation for the release began Tuesday, when just one ton of treated water was sent from a tank for dilution with 1,200 tons of seawater, and the mixture was kept in the primary pool for two days for final sampling to ensure safety, Matsumoto said. A batch of 460 tons was to be sent to the mixing pool Thursday for the actual discharge.

Fukushima's fisheries, tourism and economy — which are still recovering from the disaster — worry the release could be the beginning of a new hardship.

Fukushima's current fish catch is only about one-fifth its pre-disaster level, in part due to a decline in the fishing population. China has tightened radiation testing on Japanese products from Fukushima and nine other prefectures, halting exports at customs for weeks, Fisheries Agency officials said.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said the release is indispensable and could not be postponed. He noted an experimental removal of a small amount of the melted debris from the No. 2 reactor is set for later this year using a remote-controlled giant robotic arm.

In 2021, the Japanese government announced plans to release the treated water to the sea. Then, on Sunday, Kishida made a rushed visit to the plant before meeting with fisheries representatives and pledging to support their livelihoods until the release ends.

The hurried timeline raised skepticism that it was made to fit Kishida's busy political schedule in September. But Economy and Industry Ministry officials say they wanted the release to start as early as possible and have good safety records ahead of the fall fishing season.

The March 2011 earthquake and tsunami destroyed the plant's cooling systems, causing three reactors to melt. Highly contaminated cooling water applied to the damaged reactors has leaked continuously to building basements and mixed with groundwater.

TEPCO plans to release 31,200 tons of the treated water by the end of March 2024, which would empty only 10 tanks because of the contaminated production of wastewater at the plant, though the pace will later pick up.

The downed Russian jet carried Wagner's hierarchy, from Prigozhin's No. 2 to his bodyguards

By The Associated Press undefined

The passenger manifest of the plane that went down in Russia is essentially a who's who of Wagner mercenaries, including its second-in-command, who baptized the group with his nom de guerre, as well as the logistics chief, a fighter wounded by U.S. airstrikes in Syria and at least one possible bodyguard.

And, of course, Yevgeny Prigozhin himself, Wagner's leader and mutineer, who many believed was a marked man after his short-lived uprising in June against the Russian military.

In all, the other passengers included six of Prigozhin's lieutenants, along with the three-member flight crew. For company leaders who were called out by the Kremlin as traitors to travel together on a single flight appeared to be an extraordinary breach of security. The purpose of the trip was unknown.

"The decision to put so many senior-level people on one plane was a poor decision, as key figures should always fly separately," said Lou Osborn, author of a forthcoming book on the mercenaries. "Prigozhin was feeling overconfident. He might have genuinely been made to feel like he was pardoned."

DMITRY UTKIN

For a long time, Utkin was believed to be the founder of Wagner, but many analysts now say that was a smokescreen for Prigozhin, who only recently acknowledged his leading role in the mercenary group.

Utkin, a retired special forces officer, a member of the GRU military intelligence service and a veteran of Russia's wars in Chechnya, was responsible for command and combat training, according to investigations by the Dossier Center and Bellingcat.

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Some of the few photos circulating of him indicate he had Nazi-style tattoos, and reports claimed that he loved Nazi symbols. His nom de guerre was Wagner, an apparent reference to German composer Richard Wagner, who was said to be Adolf Hitler's favorite, and that became the group's name.

Utkin was seen in a video broadcast from a Kremlin reception in December 2016, definitely linking Wagner to President Vladimir Putin despite his earlier denials that the group had any links to the government.

VALERY CHEKALOV

Chekalov served as Wagner's logistics mastermind. A longtime employee of Concord Holding — another Prigozhin company — he was in charge of managing mercenaries, securing weapons and running the oil, gas and mineral businesses in Syria and Africa, said Osborn, who is an investigator with All Eyes on Wagner, a project focusing on the group.

The U.S. sanctioned Chekalov for his ties to Prigozhin. The Wagner leader's travel arrangements were among his responsibilities, according to Russian media.

YEVGENY MAKARYAN

Makaryan fought with Wagner in 2018, when he was wounded in Syria after coming under withering U.S. airstrikes that killed dozens of Wagner fighters in what became known as the Battle of Khasham, according to the Dossier Center.

He remained a commander in the group, though little is known about his exact role.

Little is equally known about the other three Wagner fighters on the manifest, who included Alexander Totmin, Sergei Propustin and Nikolai Matuseiev. At least one of the men fought in a unit that became Prigozhin's source for securing personal bodyguards, according to the Dossier Center. They had been with the organization for years.

The flight crew was little-known but included a pilot, co-pilot and flight attendant.

Scores of women and girls were sexually assaulted after peace deal in Ethiopia's Tigray, study shows

By CARA ANNA Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Scores of women and girls in Ethiopia's northern Tigray region were sexually assaulted, often by multiple men alleged to be combatants, after a peace agreement last year ended the conflict there, according to a new study of medical records released on Thursday.

The youngest girl raped was 8 years old.

The Tigray conflict killed hundreds of thousands of people and left untold thousands of women and girls with the trauma of sexual assault.

At least 128 sexual assaults occurred after the peace agreement was signed last November, according to the study, which looked at records from the start of the conflict in November 2020 through June.

With most health facilities destroyed or looted as Ethiopian forces battled Tigray fighters, many women and girls were left without treatment for months. Some now have HIV or are raising the children of their rapists. Others live with incontinence or chronic pain, along with the cultural stigma around such attacks.

The study by Physicians for Human Rights and the Organization for Justice and Accountability in the Horn of Africa, along with a commentary in *The Lancet* medical journal, looked at more than 300 randomly selected medical records from Tigray health centers focused on helping survivors of sexual violence.

It is just a "small glimpse" of the toll, the authors say, and they fear the chance for justice will be lost if independent accountability efforts by the United Nations and others are shut down.

"All the community is a victim of sexual violence," a Tigray-based researcher into conflict-related sexual violence told *The Associated Press*. A collaborator on the study, he has spoken with hundreds of women and girls and said not one feels healed.

"Rape survivors, they are suffering the most," he said. Like many Tigrayans, he spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of retaliation from Ethiopian authorities.

At least 128 sexual assaults occurred after the peace agreement was signed last November, according to the study, which looked at records from the start of the conflict in November 2020 through this June.

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Overall, 76% of the 304 women and girls whose cases were reviewed were sexually assaulted by multiple people, often three or more. One was assaulted by 19 men.

In 94% of all cases, no condom was used. Many perpetrators also wielded guns, sticks or knives. Some women and girls were abducted for repeated assaults.

"They took her to their camp and raped her for six months," one medical record cited by the study says.

Almost all the women and girls said their attackers appeared to be members of a military group, often from neighboring Eritrea, whose soldiers fought alongside Ethiopian forces against Tigray fighters and allegedly remain in parts of western and northern Tigray.

The findings suggest that "these acts were neither isolated nor random but a systematic use of rape as a weapon of war," the study's authors write in The Lancet commentary.

Spokesmen for Ethiopia's and Eritrea's governments did not respond to requests for comment.

"It is absolutely horrifying and devastating to even read the narratives of the patients," Ranit Mishori, a senior medical adviser with Physicians for Human Rights, said in an interview. "The brutality didn't skip the children. Many were also raped by multiple perpetrators."

Mishori and her colleague, senior program officer Lindsey Green, expressed concern that independent efforts to understand the conflict's toll and bring accountability to the perpetrators are being weakened or shut down under pressure from authorities.

"Most disturbing to me is the lack of focus on these crimes," Green said.

Ethiopia's government is keen to re-engage with key partners such as the United States, the European Union and global financial institutions after the conflict. On Thursday, Ethiopia was announced as an incoming member of the BRICS economic bloc.

But Ethiopia has sharply criticized outside efforts to promote justice and accountability. An African Union human rights inquiry was quietly terminated earlier this year.

Now Ethiopia wants a United Nations inquiry ended, too, human rights experts say.

After a conflict marked by the blockade of the Tigray region of more than 5 million people, with internet and phone links severed and human rights researchers and journalists barred, the lack of independent inquiry means that the civilian toll could remain largely in the shadows as Ethiopia's government moves on.

"The world has accountability mechanisms, but almost everything is in the hands of diplomats and politicians, which is a recipe for failure," said Martin Witteveen, an international criminal law expert who worked with the government-created Ethiopian Human Rights Commission until early 2022. He says Ethiopia alone can hardly ensure accountability when its forces and allies committed most of the crimes.

Even now, the study says, survivors of sexual violence in Tigray are still coming forward, but others will never be known.

Transgender adults are worried about finding welcoming spaces to live in their later years

By ANDREW DeMILLO, LYNNE SLADKY AND LAURA BARGFELD Associated Press

FORT LAUDERDALE, Fla. (AP) — Rajee Narinesingh faced struggles throughout her life as a transgender woman, from workplace discrimination to the lasting effects of black market injections that scarred her face and caused chronic infections.

In spite of the roadblocks, the 56-year-old Florida actress and activist has seen growing acceptance since she first came out decades ago.

"If you see older transgender people, it shows the younger community that it's possible I can have a life. I can live to an older age," she said. "So I think that's a very important thing."

Now, as a wave of new state laws enacted this year limit transgender people's rights, Narinesingh has new uncertainty about her own future as she ages.

"Every now and then I have like this thought, like, oh my God, if I end up in a nursing home, how are they going to treat me?" Narinesingh said.

Most of the new state laws have focused attention on trans youth, with at least 22 states banning or

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restricting gender-affirming care for minors.

For many transgender seniors, it's brought new fears to their plans for retirement and old age. They already face gaps in health care and nursing home facilities properly trained to meet their needs. That's likely to be compounded by restrictions to transgender health care that have already blocked some adults' access to treatments in Florida, and sparked concerns the laws will expand to other states.

Transgender adults say they're worried about finding welcoming spaces to live in their later years.

"I have friends that have retired and they've decided to move to retirement communities. And then, little by little, they've found that they're not welcome there," said Morgan Mayfaire, a transgender man and the executive director of TransSOCIAL, a Florida support and advocacy group.

Discrimination can range from being denied housing to being misgendered and struggling to get nursing homes to acknowledge their visitation rights.

"In order to be welcome there, they have to go into the closet and deny who they are," Mayfaire said.

About 171,000 of the more than 1.3 million transgender adults in the United States are aged 65 and older, according to numbers compiled by the Williams Institute at the UCLA School of Law.

The growing population has brought more services such as nursing homes and assisted living centers that are geared toward serving the LGBTQ+ community, though such facilities remain uncommon. They include Stonewall Gardens, a 24-apartment assisted living center that opened in Palm Springs, California in 2015.

The center's staff are required to go through sensitivity training to help make the center a more welcoming environment for residents, interim executive director Lauren Kabakoff Vincent said. The training is key for making a more accepting environment for transgender residents and making them feel more at home.

"Do you really want to be moving into a place where you have to explain yourself and have to go through it over and over?" Vincent said. "It's exhausting, and so I think being able to be in a comfortable environment is important."

SAGE, which advocates on behalf of LGBTQ+ seniors, offers training to nursing homes and other elder care providers. The group trained more than 46,000 staff at 576 organizations around the country in the most recent fiscal year. But the group acknowledges that represents just a fraction of the elder care facilities around the country.

"We have a long way to go in terms of getting to the point where nursing homes, assisted living and other long-term care providers are prepared for and ready to provide appropriate and welcoming care to trans elders," said Michael Adams, SAGE's CEO.

The gap concerns Tiffany Arieagus, 71, an acclaimed drag performer in south Florida who also works in social services for SunServe, an LGBTQ+ nonprofit.

"I just am going on my 71 years on this earth and walking in the civil rights march with my mother at age six and then marching for gay rights," Arieagus said. "I've been blessed enough to see so many changes being made in the world. And then now I'm having to see these wonderful progressions going backwards."

A handful of states, including Massachusetts and California, have in recent years enacted laws to ensure that LGBTQ+ seniors have equal access to programs for aging populations and requiring training on how to serve that community.

But the push for restrictions on access to health care has brought uncertainty in other states. Florida's ban on gender-affirming care for minors also includes restrictions that make it difficult, if not impossible, for many adults to get treatment.

SAGE has seen a spike in the number of calls to its hotline following the wave of anti-transgender laws, and Adams said about 40% of them have come from trans seniors primarily in conservative parts of the country worried about the new restrictions.

The limits have prompted some trans adults to leave the state for care, with some turning to crowdfunding appeals for help. But for many trans seniors, such a move isn't as easy.

"You have the general fear, fear that is leading clinicians being concerned and perhaps stepping away from offering care, fear of trans elders of who is a safe clinician to go to," Dan Stewart, associate director of the Human Rights Campaign's Aging Equality Project, said.

Florida's law has already created obstacles for Andrea Montanez, LGBTQ immigration organizer at Hope Community Center near Orlando. Montanez, 57, said her prescription for hormone therapy was initially denied after the restrictions were signed. Montanez, who has been speaking out at Florida Medical Board meetings about the impact of the new state law, said she's worried about what it will be mean as she approaches retirement.

"I hope I have a happy retirement, but health care is a big problem," Montanez, who was eventually able to get her prescription filled, said.

For Tatiana Williams, 51, the restrictions are stirring painful memories of a time when she and other members of the transgender community had to rely on dangerous and illegal sources for gender-affirming medical care. Now the executive director of the Transinclusive Group in Wilton Manors, Florida, Williams remembers being hospitalized for a collapsed lung after receiving black market silicone injections for her breasts.

"What we don't want is the community resorting to going back to that," Williams said.

Still, older transgender adults say they see hope in how their generation is working with younger trans people to speak out against the wave of the restrictions.

"The community's going to take care of itself. It's as simple as that. We're going to find ways to take care of ourselves and we're going to survive this," Mayfaire said. "And as far as trans youth panicking over this, look to your elders."

Bans on diverse picture books? Young kids need to see their families represented, experts say

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

When Wes Brown sought out children's books for his two young sons, he made sure to seek titles that reflected the family he and his husband were building.

He found that in one called "The Family Book," a 2003 picture book by Todd Parr. It depicts families of all kinds: the traditional nuclear family, but also families with one parent or step-parents, as well as adoptive families and same-sex parents like Brown and his husband.

But across the country, books and lessons that represent different families and identities are increasingly the target of conservative pushback — even when they're for the youngest of learners. Parr's book for preschoolers and early readers is often among those challenged by parents and activists.

"It is important my kids are definitely exposed to that," Brown said. "What these parents are really doing is demonstrating how fragile their worldview is, that a children's book is enough to shatter it."

Efforts to ban books have been surging at school and public libraries. Of the bans targeting picture books, about three-quarters are books that address LGBTQ+ themes and roughly half are stories that mention race, said Kasey Meehan, Freedom to Read program director at PEN America.

"There's legislation out there that could lead to felony offenses and criminalization, (teacher) decertification," Meehan said. "When you see this threatening environment, more and more we see educators responding in an overly cautious approach, and that shows up in how they think about their classroom libraries."

Objections to the titles often involve arguments that they are not age-appropriate. In some of the many challenges Parr's book has faced over the years, opponents have taken issue with a line that reads, "Some families have two moms or two dads," saying it was not suitable for young children.

Educators and free-speech advocates said the books often simply acknowledge the existence of different identities. That's crucial, they say, to help young children develop empathy and an understanding of themselves — especially for children whose families include people of color or LGBTQ+ relatives.

The disputes have spilled over into classrooms. In Wake County, North Carolina, a preschool teacher resigned last year after an uproar over flashcards that depicted LGBTQ+ families, to teach colors based on the characters' clothing.

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In Alabama, Gov. Kay Ivey, a Republican, replaced the state's early childhood learning director in April over the use of a guide for preschool teachers. The governor denounced the guide as teaching "woke concepts" because of language about inclusion and structural racism.

The book comes from the National Association for the Education of Young Children — the nonprofit professional association for early childhood education, which accredits daycares and preschools. The fourth edition of the group's "Developmentally Appropriate Practice Book" says in part that children "begin to see how they are represented in society" in preschool and that the classroom should be a place of "affirmation and healing."

The Alabama official's ouster was the most prevalent example of how censorship and restrictions on teaching are extending beyond the K-12 sphere into early learning, said Leah Austin, president and CEO of the National Black Child Development Institute.

Research has found that children as young as 6 months old can perceive race-based differences. Limiting content denies children opportunities to learn about themselves, and to relate to other people, Austin said.

For young children, having access to books that interest them is also a crucial factor in becoming strong readers and battling disparities in literacy rates, said Michelle Martin, a youth and children's services professor at the University of Washington. Although the diversity of children's books has grown in recent years, representation is still lagging.

Martin recalled growing up in South Carolina, where her parents had to drink from segregated water fountains. As a child, she had little choice but to read books that depicted stories far removed from her experiences.

"There were really limited books that my generation had that reflected who we are," she said. "Those books are beginning to be much more widely published, and those are the ones that are being targeted."

In Florida, where Brown and his family live, Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis has pushed through legislation that bans mentions of gender identity and sexuality in classrooms for all grades, including public pre-K programs. Supporters of the law say parents, not teachers, should be broaching those subjects with their children.

For gay people of his generation, Brown recalled, building a family often felt like a remote possibility. When he and his husband first started dating in 2002, it was illegal in the state of Florida for gay couples to adopt a child.

"It was like a dream, but it's a dream that's so far off," he said. "It's like, 'I want to fly like Superman.' You don't even really think it's something you can have."

The couple revisited the question in their 30s and decided to pursue adoption. Brown said he and his husband know it is inevitable for their sons, now ages 5 and 7, to encounter questions about having two dads.

"These laws are actually not meant to keep people from talking about sexuality," he said "It is to prevent queer families from being talked about, the queer experience from being talked about. It is very much aimed at us."

Jailed WSJ reporter Evan Gershkovich's arrest is extended by a Moscow court, state news agency says

MOSCOW (AP) — A Moscow court ruled Thursday that Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich must stay in jail on espionage charges until the end of November, Russian state news agency Tass reported.

Gershkovich has been sitting in jail since the end of March when he was detained in the city of Yekaterinburg, almost 2,000km (1200 miles) east of Moscow, while on a reporting trip. The latest ruling means he faces spending at least eight months in prison.

Gershkovich, a 31-year-old U.S. citizen, arrived at the Moscow court Thursday in a white prison van and was led out handcuffed, wearing jeans, sneakers and a shirt. He appeared in court to hear the result of the prosecution's motion to extend his arrest from Aug. 30.

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Journalists outside the court were not allowed to witness the proceedings. Tass said the hearing was held behind closed doors because details of the criminal case are classified.

Russia's Federal Security Service said Gershkovich, "acting on the instructions of the American side, collected information constituting a state secret about the activities of one of the enterprises of the Russian military-industrial complex."

Gershkovich and his employer deny the allegations, and the U.S. government declared him to be wrongfully detained. His case has been wrapped in secrecy. Russian authorities haven't detailed what — if any — evidence they have gathered to support the espionage charges.

On Thursday, the Wall Street Journal said in a statement: "Today, our colleague and distinguished journalist Evan Gershkovich appeared for a pre-trial hearing where his improper detention was extended yet again. We are deeply disappointed he continues to be arbitrarily and wrongfully detained for doing his job as a journalist. The baseless accusations against him are categorically false, and we continue to push for his immediate release. Journalism is not a crime."

Earlier in August, U.S. Ambassador to Russia Lynne Tracy made her third visit to Gershkovich and reported that he appeared to be in good health despite challenging circumstances. He is being held at Moscow's Lefortovo prison, notorious for its harsh conditions.

Gershkovich is the first American reporter to face espionage charges in Russia since September 1986, when Nicholas Daniloff, a Moscow correspondent for U.S. News and World Report, was arrested by the KGB.

Analysts have pointed out that Moscow may be using jailed Americans as bargaining chips after U.S.-Russian tensions soared over the Kremlin's military operation in Ukraine. At least two U.S. citizens arrested in Russia in recent years — including WNBA star Brittney Griner — have been exchanged for Russians jailed in the U.S.

The Russian Foreign Ministry has previously said it would consider a swap for Gershkovich only in the event of a verdict in his trial. In Russia, espionage trials can last for more than a year.

Today in History: August 25, Allied forces liberate Paris

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Aug. 25, the 237th day of 2023. There are 128 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On August 25, 1944, during World War II, Paris was liberated by Allied forces after four years of Nazi occupation.

On this date:

In 1718, hundreds of French colonists arrived in Louisiana, with some settling in present-day New Orleans.

In 1875, Capt. Matthew Webb became the first person to swim across the English Channel, getting from Dover, England, to Calais (ka-LAY'), France, in 22 hours.

In 1928, an expedition led by Richard E. Byrd set sail from Hoboken, N.J., on its journey to Antarctica.

In 1958, the game show "Concentration" premiered on NBC-TV.

In 1980, the Broadway musical "42nd Street" opened. (Producer David Merrick stunned the cast and audience during the curtain call by announcing that the show's director, Gower Champion, had died earlier that day.)

In 1981, the U.S. spacecraft Voyager 2 came within 63,000 miles of Saturn's cloud cover, sending back pictures of and data about the ringed planet.

In 1985, Samantha Smith, 13, the schoolgirl whose letter to Yuri V. Andropov resulted in her famous peace tour of the Soviet Union, died with her father in an airliner crash in Auburn, Maine.

In 2001, R&B singer Aaliyah (ah-LEE'-yah) was killed with eight others in a plane crash in the Bahamas; she was 22.

In 2009, Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, the liberal lion of the U.S. Senate, died at age 77 in Hyannis Port, Massachusetts, after a battle with a brain tumor.

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In 2014, a funeral was held in St. Louis for Michael Brown, the Black 18-year-old who was shot to death by a police officer in suburban Ferguson.

In 2020, two people were shot to death and a third was wounded as 17-year-old Kyle Rittenhouse opened fire with an AR-15-style rifle during a third night of protests in Kenosha, Wisconsin, over the police shooting of a Black man, Jacob Blake. (Rittenhouse, who was taken into custody in Illinois the next day, said he was defending himself after the three men attacked him as he tried to protect businesses from protesters; he was acquitted on all charges, including homicide.)

Ten years ago: Syria agreed to a U.N. investigation into an alleged chemical weapons attack outside Damascus - a deal a senior White House official dismissed as "too late to be credible," saying the United States had "very little doubt" President Bashar Assad's forces used such weapons. Tokyo beat Chula Vista, California, 6-4 to win the Little League World Series in South Williamsport, Pennsylvania. Sixteen-year-old New Zealander Lydia Ko succeeded in defending her title at the Canadian Women's Open with a five-stroke victory over Karine Icher.

Five years ago: Republican Senator John McCain of Arizona, who had spent years as a prisoner of war in Vietnam before a 35-year political career that took him to the Republican presidential nomination, died at the age of 81 after battling brain cancer for more than a year. After initially threatening Hawaii as a Category 5 hurricane, Tropical Storm Lane began to break apart as it veered west into the open Pacific; rainfall totals from the storm on Hawaii's Big Island approached four feet.

One year ago: A judge ordered the Justice Department to make public a redacted version of the affidavit it relied on when federal agents searched the Florida estate of Donald Trump to look for classified documents. Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered a major buildup of his country's military forces in an apparent effort to replenish troops that have suffered heavy losses in six months of bloody warfare and prepare for a long, grinding fight ahead in Ukraine. Regulators approved California's plans to require all new cars, trucks and SUVs to run on electricity or hydrogen by 2035.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Tom Skerritt is 90. Author Frederick Forsyth is 85. Movie director John Badham is 84. Filmmaker Marshall Brickman is 84. R&B singer Walter Williams (The O'Jays) is 80. Actor Anthony Heald is 79. Rock singer-actor Gene Simmons is 74. Actor John Savage is 74. Country singer-musician Henry Paul (Outlaws; Blackhawk) is 74. Rock singer Rob Halford is 72. Rock musician Geoff Downes (Asia) is 71. Rock singer Elvis Costello is 69. Movie director Tim Burton is 65. Actor Christian LeBlanc is 65. Actor Ashley Crow is 63. Actor Ally Walker is 62. Country singer Billy Ray Cyrus is 62. Actor Joanne Whalley is 62. Rock musician Vivian Campbell (Def Leppard) is 61. Actor Blair Underwood is 59. Actor Robert Maschio is 57. Rap DJ Terminator X (Public Enemy) is 57. Alternative country singer Jeff Tweedy (Wilco) is 56. Actor David Alan Basche (BAYSH) is 55. Television chef Rachael Ray is 55. Actor Cameron Mathison is 54. Country singer Jo Dee Messina is 53. Model Claudia Schiffer is 53. Country singer Brice Long is 52. Actor Nathan Page is 52. Actor-writer-director Ben Falcone is 50. Actor Eric Millegan is 49. Actor Alexander Skarsgard is 47. Actor Jonathan Togo is 46. Actor Kel Mitchell is 45. Actor Rachel Bilson is 42. Actor Blake Lively is 36. Actor Josh Flitter is 29.