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No GDI Tomorrow Morning

We are heading to Rapid City on a quick trip for Julianna's graduation. I will not be taking a computer with (imagine that!) so there will be no paper Tomorrow morning.

Wednesday, Aug. 30

School Breakfast: Egg bake.
School Lunch: Cheese nachos.
Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked sweet potatoes, creamed peas, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

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



Thursday, Aug. 31

School Breakfast: Pop tarts.
School Lunch: Sloppy Joes (new recipe), tater tots.
Senior Menu: Breaded chicken breast on bun, sliced tomato, fruit, cucumber salad, Mandarin oranges.
Cross Country at Redfield, 10 a.m.
Volleyball hosts Sisseton, 6 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 1

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, mashed potatoes, sauerkraut, fruit, 3 bean salad.
No School
Soccer at Dakota Valley: Boys at 4 p.m., girls at 5 p.m.
Football vs Dakota Hills Coop at Waubay, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 2

CLOSED: Common Cents Community Thrift Store

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

World in Brief

arrest, claiming that his victory in Saturday's presidential election was illegitimate. All state institutions have been suspended and the borders sealed.

Crews in Hawaii are finishing their search for victims of the Maui wildfires, with authorities still unable to give a definitive death toll. The number of dead stands at 115, but 1,000-1,100 people are estimated still missing by the FBI.

The California Assembly passed a bill to ban caste discrimination with a near-unanimous vote (55-3), inching closer to becoming the first U.S. state to enact such a law. The bill will now move to the Senate, where its earlier version had passed.

Australians will vote on October 14 to decide whether to change the constitution to recognize the country's Indigenous people, the first referendum in 24 years.

Canada has warned its LGBTQ+ citizens against traveling to the U.S. over fears that they may face discrimination. The advisory did not mention specific states but recommended checking "relevant state and local laws" when planning trips.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russia has accused Ukraine of attacking half a dozen of its regions with drones, in what appears to be one of the biggest aerial attacks in Russia since the conflict started. An attack on an airport in Pskov has reportedly damaged four military transport planes, and all flights have been canceled.

TALKING POINTS

"I think he's very good. I think he's really distinguished himself. He's starting to get out there a little bit; he's getting a little bit controversial. I've got to tell him to be a little bit careful because some things you have to hold in just a little bit," former President Donald Trump told conservative political commentator Glenn Beck when asked if he would consider making fellow GOP presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy his 2024 running mate.

"[Prime Minister Narendra Modi of India] should look into this. He went to the BRICS Summit recently and met the Chinese president. Now this map has come out. So, he should be asked this question. It breaks our hearts. What Rahul Gandhi said is true that China has transgressed in Ladakh. China is attempting to enter Arunachal Pradesh. If [the Indian government] have courage, conduct a surgical strike on China," said Sanjay Raut, who represents Maharashtra in India's upper house of parliament.

What to Watch in the Days Ahead

Former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrio could face the longest prison sentence when a judge hands down a verdict today for his role in the Jan. 6 Capitol attack as part of efforts to keep Donald Trump in power following the 2020 election.

It's a busy day for economic events, with ADP employment, revised GDP figures, trade data, and pending home sales due from 8:15 a.m. ET. Private payrolls are expected to rise by 200,000 in August after rising more than expected by 324,000 in July.

President Joe Biden will host a meeting on the federal government's ongoing efforts to assist Maui County with its wildfire recovery efforts.

A Super Blue Moon will rise in the sky tonight. The moon event, which has been named because it is the second full supermoon in a month, last occurred in 2018 and isn't expected to happen again until 2037.

A "This is Our Reality" walkout will be taking place at 1 p.m. ET at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill following the on-campus fatal shooting of a faculty member on Monday. UNC Young Democrats, Students Demand Action, and March for Our Lives are co-hosting the demonstration.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis urged residents to follow orders and "get to higher ground in a safe structure" as tropical storm Idalia rapidly intensified into a Category 4 hurricane. "You really got to go now," he said. Read below for more on Idalia.

Buster Murdaugh, the only living son of disgraced South Carolina attorney Alex Murdaugh, told Fox News that his family's story has become "completely inflamed in the media" and that "there's no escape" from the impact.

Military officers in Gabon, Africa, have claimed they have seized power and placed President Ali Bongo under house

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Netters beat Ipswich

Groton Area's volleyball team won two of three matches Tuesday night in Ipswich with the varsity and junior varsity teams winning.

In the varsity match, it was tied 13 times and there were five lead changes. Groton won, 25-22, 25-16 and 25-20. Groton Area had an 11-point rally in the second set while Ipswich had a seven point rally in the first set.

Anna Fjeldheim led Groton Area with 13 kills, eight digs and one ace serve. Rylee Dunker had six ace serves, two kills and a block. Sydney Leight had 18 digs, seven kills and an ace serve. Lydia Meier had three kills, Faith Traphagen a kill and a block, Laila Roberts a kill, Carly Guthmiller had three assists and an ace serve and Elizabeth Fliehs had 23 assists.

Ipswich was led by Gabby Wald with six kills and three ace serves, Marley Guthmiller had six kills, Kaylin Onken had two kills and an ace serve, Reagan Bowers had two kills and Natalie Crissman had a kill and an ace.

The varsity match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Locke Electric.

Groton Area won the junior varsity match, 25-15 and 25-16. Chesney Weber had four kills and two ace serves, Emma Kutter had three kills and a block, Jaedyn Penning had two kills and an ace serve, Jerica Locke had a kill and two ace serves, Kella Tracy had two ace serves, a kill and a block, Sydney Locke had an ace serve and Talli Wright had a kill. The junior varsity match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Weber Landscaping.

Ipswich won the C match, 25-22 and 25-18. Emerlee Jones had six kills and two ace serves, Taryn Traphagen had four kills, Avery Crank had two ace serves, Leah Jones had a kill and Liby Althoff had a kill.

Groton, now 1-1 on the season, will host Sisseton on Thursday with the C match starting at 5 p.m.

- Paul Kosel

Simon takes seventh at Aberdeen Invite

Groton Area's boys golf team went to Lee Park in Aberdeen on Tuesday. Carter Simon placed seventh with a 76, Brevin Fliehs was 11th with a 77, Logan Pearson was 44th with a 101 and Jace Johnson was 50th with a 103.

Watertown won the team title with a four under par and a team score of 280. After that it was Pierre with 298, Roncalli 310, Aberdeen Central 319, Milbank 340, Groton Area 357, Redfield 376, Aberdeen Central JV 388, Huron 390 and Moberg-Pollock 407. Sisseton had an incomplete team.

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Groton Community Transit

P.O. Box 693
205 E. 2nd Ave.
Groton, SD 57445

Dear Groton family,

Thank you, Thank you, for your loyalty and support through all of these years! We appreciate everyone of you!!

Although we have tried our best to keep the expenses low, our operating costs have increased significantly due to global factors in recent times. After carefully reviewing the finances, we have made a tough decision of increasing our transportation prices.

The change will take effect on Oct. 1, 2023 our rides within the town of Groton will be \$2 per ride, \$4 roundtrip. And, medical rides to Aberdeen from Groton will be \$20 roundtrip. Until then, you can take benefit of the old prices. We will honor old prices till Sept. 30, 2023!

We also offer a discounted pass for \$30 which includes 22 one way rides within Groton area!

We are a non-profit transportation service for the needs of all age groups of people!

As always, thank you for your loyalty and we thank you for your understanding and continued support!

Sincerely,

Dam Hansen & Eugenia Strom

Groton Transit

Steve Smith, Sherry Koehler, Topper Tostad, Dick Kolker

Operation CARE set for Labor Day Weekend

Deaths from traffic crashes in South Dakota are up nearly 15 percent from this time last year. That's why as Labor Day weekend nears, the South Dakota Highway Patrol (SDHP) will be working alongside law enforcement agencies in Operation CARE (Crash Awareness Reduction Effort) to decrease traffic crash fatalities.

From September 1st to 4th, law enforcement statewide will unite in a high-visibility enforcement effort aimed at reducing serious injuries and fatalities on our state's roadways. In dedication to protecting the lives of residents in their communities, you'll see officers working together this holiday weekend reminding motorists to drive safe.

"The goal of this effort is to bring attention to safe driving practices, to put a stop to the current trend of fatalities and work together to protect all roadway users. In 2023, 90 individuals have already lost their lives to motor vehicle crashes, 40 in the last eight weeks alone. That is unacceptable," said SD Highway Patrol Superintendent, Colonel Rick Miller. "Those individuals are people's loved ones that won't be going home to their families."

The SDHP reminds drivers and passengers to wear a seat belt, pay attention, drive the speed limit, and never drive impaired.

The SDHP is part of the SD Department of Public Safety.

Lawrence County Fatal Crash (August 24)

What: One Motorcycle Fatal Crash

Where: Nemo Road and Job Corps Place, 3 miles northwest of Nemo, S.D.

When: 1:54 p.m., Thursday, August 24, 2023

Driver No. 1: Female, 59, Fatal injuries

Vehicle No. 1: 1998 Harley Davidson FLSTS Heritage

LAWRENCE COUNTY, S.D.- One person died Monday evening from injuries sustained in a single motorcycle crash Thursday afternoon (August 24), 3 miles northwest of Nemo, S.D.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 1998 Harley Davidson was traveling northbound on Nemo Road and attempted to pass a road grader in a no passing zone at Nemo Road and Job Corps Place. A car came around the corner from the opposite direction.

The driver of the motorcycle lost control and came to a final rest behind the road grader along the right shoulder of the road. She became separated from the motorcycle and received life threatening injuries.

The 59-year-old female driver of the Harley Davidson was life-flighted to Rapid City Monument Health Hospital. She passed away from injuries sustained in the crash on Monday evening August 28.

She was not wearing a helmet.

Governor Noem Leads Governors Urging Congress to Address Nationwide Prescription Drug Shortage

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem led ten of her fellow Republican governors in urging Congress to address the nationwide shortage of prescription drugs. Governor Noem and her colleagues submitted a letter to leadership in the U.S. Senate and House of Representatives. The letter was addressed to Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy (R-CA), Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-NY), House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries (D-NY), and Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY).

“A widespread and long-lasting shortage of critical drugs has been impacting the United States of America for years,” wrote Governor Noem and her colleagues. “Many of the most used prescription drugs in the country are facing extensive shortages – drugs like albuterol, amoxicillin, and chemotherapy drugs...To create real change, the states need Washington to take action.”

Governor Noem and her fellow Republican governors call on Congress to consider adding the following important policy solutions to any upcoming legislation aimed at addressing drug shortages:

Transparency in the pharmaceutical manufacturing chain from sourcing raw materials to the finished product, including country of origin labeling;

Increased diversity in the manufacturing of generic medications with regards to both raw materials and final manufacturing;

Require transparency from the FDA related to shortages and events that cause supply disruption;

Extending useful life of medications when appropriate by re-examining FDA guidance related to expiration dates;

Waivers to allow purchasing of medications from Canada to expand our supply chain capability quickly;

Creation of a regulatory environment that is more favorable to U.S. manufacturing to include instituting shorter “cure periods” for U.S. manufacturing plants; and,

Requiring a risk assessment of foreign source active pharmaceutical ingredients.

“Congress needs to improve the inspection process for manufacturers to decrease the risk that everyday Americans are currently facing,” continued Governor Noem and her colleagues. “These practical steps toward greater transparency and flexibility will ensure safety and dependability in our pharmaceutical supply chain.”

Governor Noem has been a leader in combatting the shortage of prescription drugs. In May, Governor Noem signed Executive Order 2023-07, which required the South Dakota Department of Health (DOH) to investigate the cause of the prescription drug shortage and recommend action to be taken back to the governor. With the results of that study, Governor Noem announced that DOH will be expanding its medical caches to help combat the shortage of prescription drugs in July.

The following Republican governors joined Governor Noem in signing the letter: Arkansas Governor Sarah Sanders, Indiana Governor Eric Holcomb, Iowa Governor Kim Reynolds, Mississippi Governor Tate Reeves, Missouri Governor Mike Parson, Montana Governor Greg Gianforte, Nevada Governor Joe Lombardo, New Hampshire Governor Chris Sununu, Texas Governor Greg Abbott, and Wyoming Governor Mark Gordon.

DANR and DOH Announce Air Quality Alert for South Dakota

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

The alert is in effect through Thursday, August 31, 2023, or until conditions improve.

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

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

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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

ACLU is 'RZHELL' with state over specialized plate denials

Organization demands changes in evaluation of requests

BY: SETH TUPPER - AUGUST 29, 2023 3:59 PM

It's OK to be a "HELLCAT," but not a "HELLBOY." Don't tell anybody to "HLDMYBR," but it's fine to go on a "BEERRUN." And don't say "IH8U," but "YUH8ME" is acceptable.

Those are some of the inconsistencies in state government's evaluation of specialized vehicle license plate requests, according to the American Civil Liberties Union of South Dakota. The ACLU sent a letter to state officials Tuesday citing what the organization described as actual examples of approvals and denials.

"Unfortunately, the state is censoring the free speech protected by the First Amendment and is inserting its own voice in the place of the citizens' voices of South Dakota," said Andrew Malone, ACLU of South Dakota staff attorney, in a news release.

The letter demands that the state Motor Vehicle Division, within 14 days, approve applications that have been denied on the grounds of carrying "connotations offensive to good taste and decency" since Aug. 1, 2022 (the ACLU told South Dakota Searchlight later that the date has no particular significance, but represents about a year's worth of denials). The letter also demands that the state refrain from using the quoted rationale to deny any future applications.

The letter specifically mentions the example of Lyndon Hart, whose application for a "REZWEED" plate was initially denied and later approved. Hart runs a business called Rez Weed Indeed that supports and promotes the legal selling and use of medical and recreational marijuana on Native American reservations, the ACLU letter says.

"The MVD's violation of free speech creates an actionable claim under federal law by Mr. Hart and those whose personalized plate applications are being denied," the letter states. It does not say a claim or any litigation has been filed.

A news release from the ACLU further notes, "The 8th Circuit U.S. Court of Appeals has ruled that license plates are a legitimate place for personal and political expression, and courts throughout the country have struck down laws similar to South Dakota's."

The state Motor Vehicle Division is part of the Department of Revenue.

"Due to threat of litigation which this press release contains, DOR will not be commenting," said department spokesperson Kendra Baucom in an email reply to South Dakota Searchlight.

The ACLU also sent the letter to the state Attorney General's Office, which told Searchlight it has received the letter and is reviewing it.

According to the ACLU, the state has denied 2,135 personalized plate applications during the past five years, including 673 — about a third of the denials — for "connotations offensive to good taste and decency." That language is included in state law as an acceptable rationale for denying specialized plate requests.

The ACLU says a state policy further specifies that plate requests will be denied if they contain, among other things, "vulgar words, terms or abbreviations" that are "offensive or disrespectful of a race, religion, color, deity, ethnic heritage, gender, sexual orientation, disability status or political affiliation," or "words or terms that support lawlessness, unlawful activities, or that relate to illegal drugs or paraphernalia."

The law and the policy are violations of the First and 14th amendments to the U.S. Constitution, the ACLU alleges. Included in those amendments are the rights of free speech, due process and equal protection under the law.

"Here," the ACLU letter says, "the South Dakota MVD has stifled the freedom to speak one's mind, thus

suppressing an important recognized liberty of all South Dakotans, including Indigenous Peoples.”

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

Huron electric co-op members throw support behind pro-East River board members

BY: JOHN HULT - AUGUST 29, 2023 4:26 PM

Member-owners of a small electric distribution cooperative in eastern South Dakota have elected three new board members after a nearly three-year legal saga that saw the former leadership attempt to break off its contract with a Madison-based power supplier.

It's the second board election in as many years in which Dakota Energy's member-owners opted to back candidates who opposed the move to separate from East River Electric Cooperative.

Dakota Energy has a contract to buy power from East River until 2075. Lengthy contracts are typical for nonprofit electric cooperatives, which rely on the stability of decades-long commitments from partners to finance large-scale infrastructure projects.

Starting around 2019, board members for Dakota Energy began to work with co-op management on a plan to break the co-op's long-term contract with East River in favor of a Colorado-based company called Guzman Energy. The dispute landed first in state court, then federal court, with Dakota Energy leadership demanding that East River produce a contract buyout number. Dakota Energy later sued several member-owners for attempting to force a vote on the contract.

Dakota Energy lost its case in federal court, then later lost its appeal to the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals. The ruling set a precedent for co-ops with similar contract language at a time when some co-ops around the country have begun to look for ways to bolster their renewable energy portfolios, save money for members with market-priced power, or both.

Last year, Dakota Energy member-owners ousted three incumbents in favor of board members opposed to the Guzman talks. They pointed to concerns about transparency from management over the talks, among other issues.

On Tuesday, voters again chose candidates who'd earned support from opponents of the Guzman deal, including some who had been sued by Dakota Energy.

Chase Binger, the current board president, was not up for reelection in a slate with just one incumbent: Steve Peterson.

Co-op members elected Brian Bonebright over Paula Kleinsasser, 390-173; Brian Baum over Jim Keeter 365-196; and Doug Schaefer over Peterson, 390-167.

Bonebright told South Dakota Searchlight on Monday that he respects the other candidates, but hoped whomever won would push for openness with members on any potential changes in the co-op's direction.

“The members have a right to know what's going on,” Bonebright said.

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.

Biden administration chooses first 10 drugs for Medicare price negotiations

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - AUGUST 29, 2023 4:19 PM

WASHINGTON — Medicare can now negotiate lower prices for 10 common high-price drugs, cutting out-of-pocket costs for an estimated 9 million seniors and saving taxpayers billions, the Biden administration said Tuesday.

Medicare will begin this year to negotiate with the manufacturers of popular medications used to treat blood clots, diabetes, heart disease, rheumatoid arthritis, chronic kidney disease, psoriasis, blood cancers, Crohn's disease and ulcerative colitis.

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Enrollees will begin to see lower prices in 2026.

The prescription drug negotiations are a result of last year's Inflation Reduction Act, a massive spending package that contained measures to reduce prescription drug prices, subsidize climate change reduction technology and adjust the corporate tax rate.

"For far too long, Americans have paid more for prescription drugs than any major economy. And while the pharmaceutical industry makes record profits, millions of Americans are forced to choose between paying for medications they need to live or paying for food, rent, and other basic necessities. Those days are ending," President Joe Biden said in a statement Tuesday.

About 9 million enrollees in Medicare's Part D prescription drug coverage program spent \$3.4 billion out of pocket in 2022 on the 10 drugs selected for negotiation, according to a report released Tuesday by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

The 10 drugs are: Eliquis, Enbrel, Entresto, Farxiga, Imbruvica, Januvia, Jardiance, multiple Fiasp and NovoLog insulin products, Stelara and Xarelto.

Democrats hailed the announcement of the selected drugs. The party held majorities in both the House and Senate when Congress passed the Inflation Reduction Act along party lines in August 2022.

"For years politicians promised to take on the big drug companies and empower Medicare to negotiate lower drug prices for consumers. With the Inflation Reduction Act Democrats have delivered. Soon millions of Americans will see lower prices on some of the most expensive and widely used prescription drugs," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York said in a statement Tuesday.

Sen. Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, said in a statement that his constituents "should never have to make the choice between life-saving medication or putting food on the table."

"I am proud to have stood tough against large pharmaceutical corporations and successfully demand that they stop unnecessarily jacking up prices on folks across the state. Montanans sent me to Washington to deliver results, and I will continue to take on anyone to lower costs," he said.

Of the nearly 66 million Americans enrolled in Medicare, 52 million are enrolled in the Part D prescription drug coverage plan, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services enrollment dashboard.

The Inflation Reduction Act also made common adult vaccines, including shingles and TDAP, free for certain Medicare enrollees. Monthly insulin costs for Medicare enrollees were also reduced to \$35 for Part D beneficiaries as part of the IRA, and beginning in 2025 annual out-of-pocket prescription drug costs will be capped at \$2,000.

The law's prescription drug provisions, including the government's new ability to negotiate what it pays for certain drugs, is expected to reduce the federal deficit by \$129 billion by 2031, according to a Congressional Budget Office analysis.

The government will choose 15 additional Part D-covered drugs in 2025 to negotiate lower prices beginning in 2027. Several more Part D and Part B drugs will be phased in for negotiations through 2029.

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

Three years after landmark ruling, Congress silent on tribal jurisdiction

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - AUGUST 29, 2023 1:51 PM

After a 2020 U.S. Supreme Court ruling defined much of Eastern Oklahoma as a Native American reservation, limiting state jurisdiction over tribal citizens, Congress has taken little interest in addressing the issues the tribes and state officials say the court decision has raised.

The 5-4 decision in *McGirt v. Oklahoma* held that lands the federal government granted to the Muscogee Nation before statehood had never been disestablished as reservations.

That ruling, and subsequent decisions in lower courts, meant that Oklahoma had no authority over lands the state's Five Tribes controlled covering upwards of 40% of the state's geographical area, at least when it came to enforcement of major crimes.

The ruling exposed a growing divide between Republican Gov. Kevin Stitt, a citizen of Cherokee Nation

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first elected in 2018, and the state's tribes. And despite a clear judgment from Justice Neil Gorsuch, who authored the McGirt decision, that Congress is the only body that can change tribal boundaries, federal lawmakers have shown little interest in doing so.

Stitt has cast the decision as an existential danger to half the state.

"Right now, we're in a fight for the very fabric of our state," he said at his Aug. 24 State of the State address in Tulsa.

Tribal leaders, meanwhile, see the ruling more as an enlargement of scope — causing a ballooning in tribal court cases, for example — than a fundamental shift in their existing sovereignty.

Landmark ruling

The McGirt decision was considered a landmark for tribal sovereignty.

The 5-4 court, led by Gorsuch, ruled that the Muscogee Nation still held jurisdiction over the land guaranteed to it as a condition of the nation's westward move in the early 1800s.

Because only tribes themselves and the federal government have authority on tribal lands, the state conviction in McGirt was thrown out. Jimcy McGirt, a Seminole citizen convicted of sexually assaulting his wife's 4-year-old granddaughter while on Muscogee territory, was quickly re-convicted in federal court.

A slew of treaties promised sovereign land to the Muscogee people. Without an explicit reversal from Congress, those 19th-century treaties are still valid, Gorsuch said, training his avowed "textualism" toward tribal sovereignty. The legal approach is oft-used by conservative jurists to argue, for example, that there is no constitutional right to abortion or that few restrictions on gun ownership are consistent with the founders' intent.

"Because Congress has not said otherwise, we hold the government to its word," he wrote.

The ruling was soon applied to all of Oklahoma's Five Tribes — the Cherokee, Chickasaw, Choctaw, Muscogee and Seminole — who were all part of a policy of "Indian removal" from their homelands in Georgia, Florida, Tennessee and Alabama in the early 1800s.

The ruling did not fundamentally shift the rights of the tribes, who already held agreements with state, county and municipal governments to allow for co-governance, Cherokee Nation Attorney General Sara Hill said in a phone interview in August.

But it did expand the scope of tribal authority. Cherokee tribal courts went from having between 50 and 100 criminal cases per year to nearly 4,000, Hill said.

And in the short term at least, the McGirt ruling gave many Oklahomans a jolt.

"A lot of people in Oklahoma I think were caught off-guard by this idea that they lived in an Indian reservation," Hill said. "It has definitely created an opportunity to take issues involving Indian country and try to turn them into divisive issues."

Native peoples in Oklahoma are more integrated with non-Native residents than in states such as South Dakota that have "true reservations," Stitt said in Tulsa.

As recently as 2016, Chickasaw Nation Gov. Bill Anoatubby testified to the U.S. House Subcommittee on Indian, Insular and Alaska Native Affairs that "there are no reservations in Oklahoma."

Though issues remain, the novelty has since largely passed, Hill said.

Disputes over jurisdiction

With the McGirt decision holding that much of the eastern part of the state is a legal reservation, the governor and tribes are now involved in disputes over what that means for who has jurisdiction over that half of the state.

The post-McGirt landscape threatens the state's capacity to enforce laws, collect income taxes or charge fees for vehicle registration and other routine functions, Stitt has said. Lawsuits have challenged the state's authority to collect income tax and Tulsa's authority to impose speeding tickets on tribal citizens.

Stitt says he is working to maintain a state where laws apply equally regardless of race, and in a way that is fair to citizens of the state who largely use the same roads, schools and other services.

But that view diminishes tribal contributions to the state, tribal leaders have said.

"That sort of overlooks the fact that tribal citizens in the state pay property taxes," Hill said. "They pay

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sales taxes. The tribes themselves produce massive revenues to the state via gaming ... It overlooks the incredible contribution that tribes make."

The issue dominates Oklahoma policy discourse — and continues to divide tribal communities and the governor.

"There is a storm of injustice that needs to be faced head-on," Stitt said in his State of the State address. "There are some that want to ignore the last 116 years of state investments and jurisdiction. They want to turn Tulsa and Eastern Oklahoma into a reservation."

Tribal leaders took exception to the comments. Guests watching the address at a table hosted by Osage Casino & Hotel walked out in protest, Osage Nation communications director Abby Mashunkashey confirmed in an email. Osage Chief Standing Bear was not in attendance, but the nation supported the guests' decision, Mashunkashey said.

"The Governor's statements were slanted, disrespectful and minimize the massive contributions Tribal Nations make to Oklahoma, of which we are also citizens," Edward Gray, the Osage Casino general manager, said in a statement.

"Gov. Stitt's shameful description of tribes simply exercising rights as sovereign nations dating back to before the founding of the United States as 'a storm of injustice' is breathtaking, even coming from him," Cherokee Principal Chief Chuck Hoskin Jr. said in a statement.

No action in Congress

Two years after *McGirt*, the Supreme Court ruled on another Oklahoma tribal case that limited the scope of *McGirt*. In the 2022 decision, *Oklahoma v. Castro-Huerta*, the 5-4 court held that the state could prosecute non-Native people on tribal lands.

Gorsuch, in a dissent, noted that Congress passed laws relating to other states' criminal jurisdiction in reservations within state borders. There is a process for states to gain that power, but it wasn't followed in Oklahoma, he said.

Oklahoma has never asked Congress for state-specific legislation authorizing criminal jurisdiction on tribal land, as Kansas, Iowa and other states have.

Congress has thus far declined to intervene following the *McGirt* decision, and doesn't appear ready to act in the near future.

"I don't necessarily think that there's the political will in Congress to move that at this time," Stitt spokeswoman Abigail Cove said. "I mean, look at the effort it takes to even appropriate."

A bill introduced in 2021 by U.S. Rep. Tom Cole, an Oklahoma Republican and citizen of the Chickasaw Nation, would have set a framework for state law enforcement compacts with the Chickasaw and Cherokee Nations, while explicitly maintaining the bill would not diminish tribal jurisdiction.

The bill had support from the tribes involved, but Cole did not introduce it this Congress. A spokesperson for Cole did not return a message seeking comment.

"Congress has not taken any action on this," Miranda Dabney, a spokeswoman for U.S. Rep. Kevin Hern, a Republican, wrote in an email last week in response to questions about Hern's position on the issue.

A spokeswoman for U.S. Sen. James Lankford provided statements the Republican gave at the time of the *McGirt* and *Castro-Huerta* decisions, but did not answer questions about the current state of the issue. The other members of the all-Republican Oklahoma congressional delegation did not respond to messages seeking comment.

While the Cherokee and Chickasaw supported the Cole bill, tribes don't see congressional action as strictly necessary, Hill said.

Tribes have worked for decades with cities, counties and the state to juggle overlapping jurisdiction. "We did not just magically appear here when *McGirt* was decided," Hill said. "We have always been here."

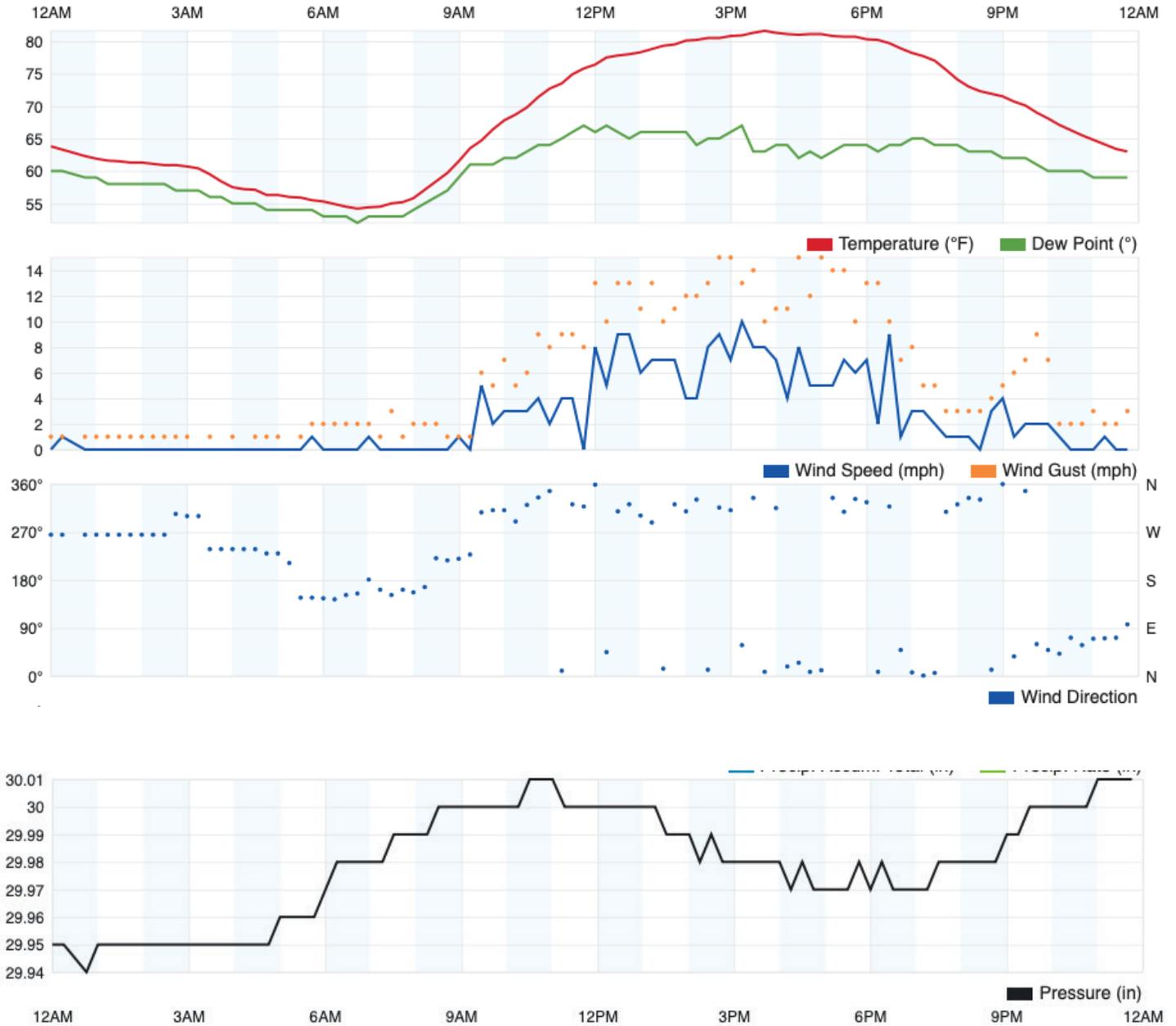
Further agreements could solve many of the issues Stitt has raised, she said. Americans understand different jurisdictions set their own laws, such as when rules of the road shift between state lines, Hill said.

"We actually are really used to this idea that rules can in fact change, regardless of whether you live in Indian Country," Hill said. "It's really not that complicated."

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
Patchy fog between 7am and 8am. Otherwise, sunny, with a high near 84. Light and variable wind becoming southeast 8 to 13 mph in the morning. Winds could gust as high as 21 mph.	Smoke and Breezy	then Sunny and Breezy	Mostly Clear	Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Hot
High: 84 °F	Low: 68 °F	High: 88 °F	Low: 60 °F	High: 89 °F	Low: 62 °F	High: 93 °F

Above Normal Temperatures Through Friday
Well Above Normal Temperatures This Holiday Weekend

Today	Thursday	Friday
Highs: Low 80s East to Mid 90s West	Highs: Mid 80s North to Low 90s South	Highs: Upper 80s North to Mid 90s South
Winds: SE 10-15 increasing to 15-30	Winds: S/SW 20-30 diminishing to 10-20	Winds: E/SE 5-15

Maximum Temperature Forecast

	9/2 Sat	9/3 Sun	9/4 Mon	9/5 Tue	Maximum
Aberdeen	94	98	92	80	98
Britton	91	95	91	81	95
Brookings	95	97	95	85	97
Chamberlain	101	102	95	85	102
Clark	93	96	92	82	96
Eagle Butte	94	95	85	75	95
Ellendale	92	95	90	79	95
Eureka	92	95	87	76	95
Gettysburg	93	95	87	76	95
Huron	99	101	97	86	101
Kennebec	99	100	93	83	100
McIntosh	93	94	82	73	94
Milbank	95	98	96	86	98
Miller	94	97	91	81	97
Mobridge	93	95	85	76	95
Murdo	98	100	90	81	100
Pierre	100	101	93	84	101
Redfield	95	98	92	84	98
Sisseton	92	96	92	83	96
Watertown	95	98	95	85	98
Webster	90	93	90	81	93
Wheaton	93	95	94	84	95

*Table values in °F

Areas of smoke will continue to plague parts of the area today as winds increase out of the southeast. Windiest conditions will set up across the Missouri Valley today and then shift east tonight and remain strong across the James Valley and points east during the day Thursday. Temperatures will continue to run above normal through the end of the week before abnormally hot temps return for the holiday weekend.

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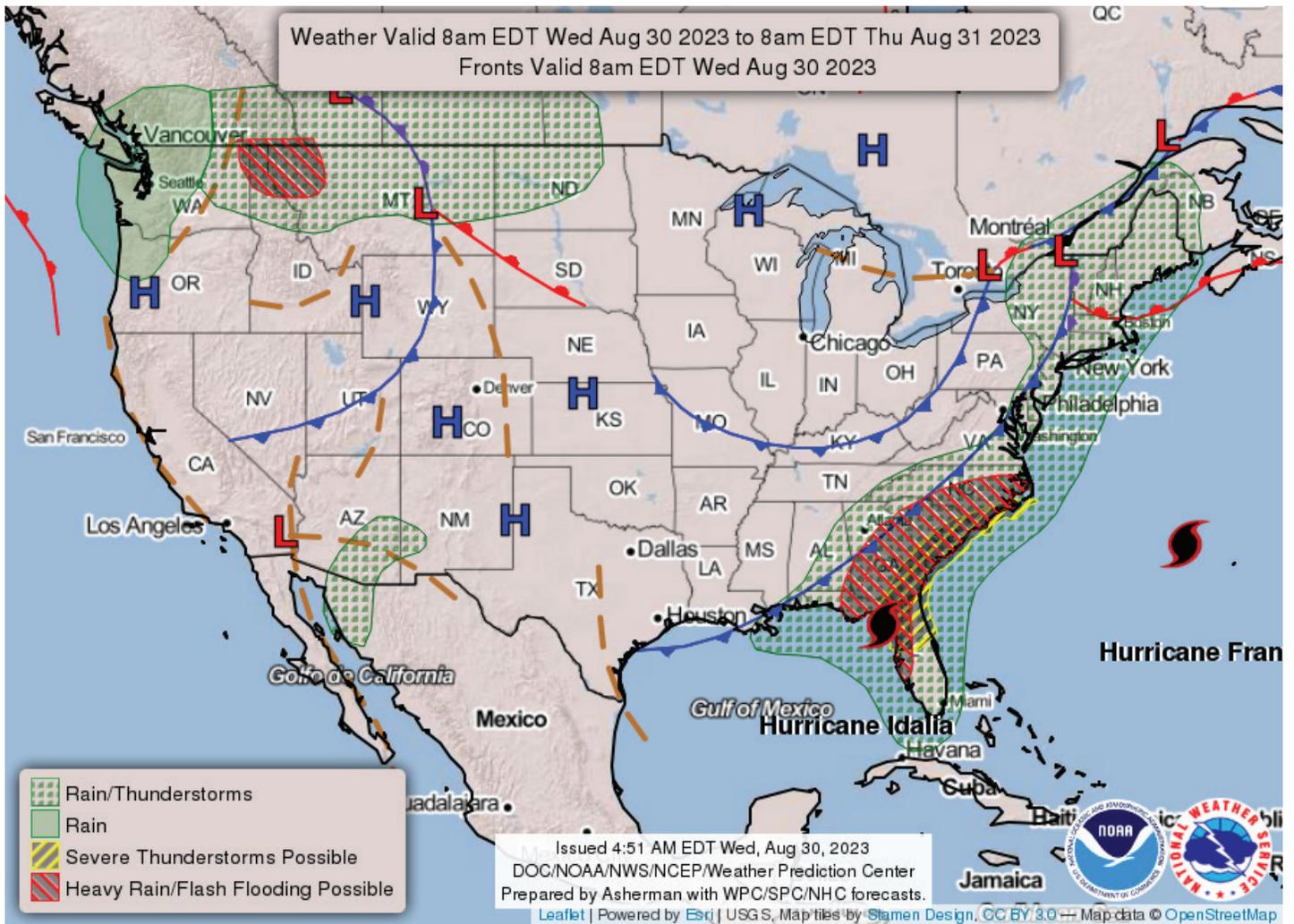
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 3:42 PM
Low Temp: 54 °F at 6:38 AM
Wind: 18 mph at 2:51 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 25 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 100 in 1898
Record Low: 37 in 2003
Average High: 80
Average Low: 53
Average Precip in Aug.: 2.17
Precip to date in Aug.: 5.92
Average Precip to date: 16.27
Precip Year to Date: 18.59
Sunset Tonight: 8:16:00 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:51:15 AM



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Today in Weather History

August 30, 1979: A thunderstorm rolled over Ellsworth Air Force Base bringing almost 60 mph winds to the area.

1776 - General Washington took advantage of a heavy fog to evacuate Long Island after a defeat. Adverse winds kept the British fleet from intervening. (David Ludlum)

1838: A major tornado, possibly the worst in Rhode Island history, passed south of Providence. It uprooted and stripped trees of their branches, unroofed or destroyed many houses, and sucked water out of ponds. The tornado barely missed a local railroad depot, where many people were waiting for a train. The tornado injured five people.

1839 - A hurricane moved from Cape Hatteras NC to offshore New England. An unusual feature of the hurricane was the snow it helped produce, which whitened the Catskill Mountains of New York State. Considerable snow was also reported at Salem NY. (The Weather Channel)

1982 - A tropical depression brought torrential rains to portions of southern Texas. Up to twelve inches fell south of Houston, and as much as eighteen inches fell southeast of Austin. The tropical depression spawned fourteen tornadoes in three days. (David Ludlum) Record cold gripped the northeastern U.S. Thirty-one cities in New England reported record lows, and areas of Vermont received up to three inches of snow. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Eight cities in California and Oregon reported record high temperatures for the date, including Redding CA and Sacramento CA where the mercury hit 100 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms drenched Georgia and the Carolinas with heavy rain, soaking Columbia, SC, with 4.10 inches in three hours. Fresno CA was the hot spot in the nation with a record high of 109 degrees. Duluth MN tied their record for the month of August with a morning low of 39 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front produced large hail in Montana and North Dakota during the evening and early nighttime hours. Hail three inches in diameter was reported 20 miles south of Medora ND, and thunderstorms over Dawson County MT produced up to three inches of rain.

2002: Typhoon Rusa dumps torrential rains across South Korea, causing widespread flooding from the 30th through September 1st. Typhoon Rusa was the most powerful typhoon to hit South Korea since 1959. Nearly 90,000 people were evacuated. The province of Gangwon was hit the hardest, where an estimated 36 inches of rain fell in less than 48 hours. The torrential rains flooded nearly 36,000 homes. The Korean Defense Ministry reported flood waters submerged 16 jet fighters and 622 military buildings and facilities at Kangnung airbase.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

"WHY DIDN'T YOU ASK ME?"

Henry Ford was always the center of attention. It seemed that people could never get enough information about him or what he was doing. On one occasion he purchased a very large insurance policy. It made the headlines in a Detroit newspaper.

One of his friends, an insurance salesman, read the article and called Mr. Ford. "Why," he asked, "didn't you purchase the policy from me?"

"Because," came the answer, "you didn't ask me."

All of us have the same needs. No doubt that God "wired us" with the same needs so we can understand one another so we would know how to help each other. We are quick to help others when we know that they have physical or emotional needs because our needs are similar to ours. It comes naturally. But the greatest need that each of us has is a spiritual need: To know Jesus Christ as Savior and enthrone Him as Lord. We must always consider this basic need.

It's difficult for most individuals to ask for help. However, when they do, it is a good place to begin to build a relationship so that we can eventually ask life's most important question: Do you know Jesus Christ as your Savior? If we ask, God will open the door for us to witness His love.

Prayer: Help us, Father, to be aware of the needs of others and in Your name help them when we can. But let us never forget their most important need: salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Hearing this, a man sitting at the table with Jesus exclaimed, "What a blessing it will be to attend a banquet in the Kingdom of God!" Luke 14:15-24



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
- 09/08/2023 Family Fun Fest 3:30-5:30pm
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/09-10/2023 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 09/10/2023 Emmanuel Lutheran Church Sunday School Rally 9:00am
- 09/10/2023 7th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 4-6pm
- 09/15/2023 Homecoming Parade
- 10/13/2023 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes, Live & Silent Auctions at Olive Grove Golf Course 4pm-close
- 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:
08.29.23

9 39 52 61 63 25

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$85,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 21
DRAW: Mins 8 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.28.23

16 33 34 39 46 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$9,110,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 36 Mins 7
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.29.23

9 24 32 42 43 16

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 51 Mins 7
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.26.23

1 9 14 17 20

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$26,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 51 Mins 7
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.28.23

23 24 48 61 64 4

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 20 Mins 8
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.28.23

4 6 25 55 68 26

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$386,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 20 Mins 8
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Miller, 25-20, 25-18, 23-25, 19-25, 15-7

Alcester-Hudson def. Scotland, 26-24, 25-19, 25-18

Baltic def. Beresford, 25-7, 25-12, 25-6

Bon Homme def. Andes Central/Dakota Christian, 25-19, 25-22, 25-11

Britton-Hecla def. Tri-State, N.D., 25-18, 22-25, 25-17, 25-22

Burke def. Winner, 25-16, 25-14, 25-18

Canistota def. Gayville-Volin High School, 22-25, 25-12, 25-23, 24-26, 15-9

Chester def. McCook Central/Montrose, 25-7, 25-10, 25-23

Colman-Egan def. Arlington, 25-22, 25-21, 7-11

Dell Rapids St. Mary def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 16-25, 25-22, 25-3, 27-29, 15-7

Dell Rapids def. Elk Point-Jefferson, 25-20, 25-21, 25-11

Douglas def. Custer, 25-21, 25-16, 25-8

Elkton-Lake Benton def. Castlewood, 25-20, 25-21, 21-25, 25-21

Estelline/Hendricks def. Sisseton, 27-25, 25-19, 25-18

Ethan def. Kimball/White Lake, 23-25, 25-23, 24-26, 26-24, 15-8

Faulkton def. Sully Buttes, 25-20, 24-26, 25-12, 25-22

Flandreau def. Florence/Henry, 25-21, 25-19, 25-19

Freeman Academy/Marion def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-20, 25-14, 25-19

Hamlin def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-14, 20-25, 25-21, 25-23

Hankinson, N.D. def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-9, 25-11, 25-21

Harding County def. New England, N.D., 25-21, 25-16, 25-17

Harrisburg def. Yankton, 25-17, 25-17, 25-5

Hettinger/Scranton, N.D. def. Lemmon High School

Hill City def. Spearfish, 25-18, 30-32, 22-25, 25-20, 15-11

Hills-Beaver Creek, Minn. def. Viborg-Hurley, 21-25, 24-26, 30-28, 25-14, 15-9

Hitchcock-Tulare def. Redfield, 26-24, 25-12, 25-22

Hot Springs def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-16, 25-20, 25-17

Huron def. Mitchell

James Valley Christian def. Highmore-Harrold, 25-22, 25-20, 25-20

Lennox def. Vermillion, 25-19, 25-23, 25-22

Leola/Frederick def. Langford, 25-21, 26-24, 25-18

Lyman def. White River, 17-25, 25-16, 25-15, 32-30

Marshall, Minn. def. Watertown, 25-22, 25-23, 25-22

McLaughlin def. Dupree, 26-24, 25-23, 26-24

Milbank def. Deuel, 25-18, 25-14, 25-13

Mobridge-Pollock def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-12, 25-21, 25-20

Parkston def. Avon, 25-23, 15-25, 25-21, 22-25, 15-10

Pine Ridge def. St. Francis Indian, 25-14, 25-22, 25-13

Platte-Geddes def. Todd County, 25-11, 25-13, 25-11

Rapid City Christian def. Alliance, Neb., 25-15, 25-23, 25-14

Rapid City Stevens def. Rapid City Central, 25-20, 25-20, 25-16

Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Sioux Falls Roosevelt, 23-25, 25-16, 25-14, 25-11

Sioux Falls O'Gorman def. Brandon Valley, 22-25, 25-13, 22-25, 25-12, 16-14

Sioux Falls Washington def. Sioux Falls Lincoln, 25-20, 25-21, 25-19
Sioux Valley def. Parker, 25-16, 25-11, 27-25
South Border, N.D. def. North Central Co-Op, 20-25, 25-23, 25-21, 15-25, 15-9
St. Thomas More def. Sturgis Brown, 18-25, 25-16, 26-24, 25-18
Stanley County def. Chamberlain
Tea Area def. West Central, 25-15, 25-15, 25-20
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Menno, 13-25, 25-23, 13-25, 25-14, 15-11
Wagner def. Mt. Vernon/Plankinton, 23-25, 25-10, 25-22, 25-19
Wall def. Jones County, 25-23, 26-24, 25-12
Warner def. Webster, 25-21, 25-13, 25-16
Wessington Springs def. Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op, 7-25, 25-20, 25-23, 25-14
Wilmot def. Waubay/Summit, 25-21, 25-15, 25-15
Wolsey-Wessington def. DeSmet, 25-17, 25-15, 25-18

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

Pope heads to Mongolia to minister to its few Catholics and complete centuries-old East-West mission

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — When Pope Francis travels to Mongolia this week, he will in some ways be completing a mission begun by the 13th-century Pope Innocent IV, who dispatched emissaries east to ascertain the intentions of the rapidly expanding Mongol Empire and beseech its leaders to halt the bloodshed and convert.

Those medieval exchanges between Roman pope and Mongolian khan were full of bellicose demands for submission and conversion, with each side claiming to be acting in the name of God, according to texts of the letters that survive.

But the exchanges also showed mutual respect at a time when the Catholic Church was waging Crusades and the Mongol Empire was conquering lands as far west as Hungary in what would become the largest contiguous land empire in world history.

Some 800 years later, Francis won't be testing new diplomatic waters or seeking to proselytize Mongolia's mostly Buddhist people when he arrives in the capital Ulaanbaatar Friday for a four-day visit.

His trip is nevertheless a historic meeting of East and West, the first-ever visit by a Roman pontiff to Mongolia to minister to one of the tiniest, newest Catholic communities in the world.

"In a way, what's happened is that both sides have moved on," said Christopher Atwood, professor of Mongolian and Chinese frontier and ethnic history at the University of Pennsylvania. "Once upon a time, it was either/or: Either the world was ruled by the pope, or the world was ruled by the Mongol Empire. And now I think both sides are much more tolerant."

Officially, there are only 1,450 Catholics in Mongolia and the Catholic Church has only had a sanctioned presence since 1992, after Mongolia shrugged off its Soviet-allied communist government and enshrined religious freedom in its constitution. Francis last year upped the Mongolian church's standing when he made a cardinal out of its leader, the Italian missionary Giorgio Marengo.

"It is amazing (for the pope) to come to a country that is not known to the world for its Catholicism," said Uugantsetseg Tungalag, a Catholic who works with Mother Teresa's Missionaries of Charity in a nursing home in the capital. "When the pope visits us, other countries will learn that it has been 30 years since Catholicism came to Mongolia."

The Mongol Empire under its famed founder Genghis Khan was known for tolerating people of different faiths among those it conquered, and Francis will likely emphasize that tradition of religious coexistence when he presides over an interfaith meeting Sunday. It was after all, one of Genghis Khan's descendants, Kublai Khan, who welcomed Marco Polo into his court in Mongol-ruled China, providing the Venetian mer-

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chant with the experiences that would give Europe one of the best written accounts of Asia, its culture, geography and people.

Invited to Francis' interfaith event are Mongolian Buddhists, Jewish, Muslim and Shinto representatives as well as members of Christian churches that have established a presence in Mongolia in the last 30 years, including the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, which officially claims more than 12,500 members in Mongolia in 22 congregations.

In a message to Mongolians ahead of his visit, Francis emphasized their interfaith traditions and said he was travelling to the "heart of Asia" as a brother to all.

"It is a much-desired visit, which will be an opportunity to embrace a Church that is small in number, but vibrant in faith and great in charity; and also to meet at close quarters a noble, wise people, with a strong religious tradition that I will have the honor of getting to know, especially in the context of an interreligious event," Francis said Sunday.

Aside from the historic first, Francis' trip holds great geopolitical import: With Mongolia sandwiched between China and Russia, Francis will be travelling to a region that has long been one of the thorniest for the Holy See to negotiate.

Francis will fly through Chinese airspace in both directions, allowing him a rare opportunity to send an official telegram of greetings to President Xi Jinping at a time when Vatican-Chinese relations are once again strained over the nomination of Chinese bishops.

As Russia's war in Ukraine and China's crackdown on religious minorities grind on, Francis will be visiting a relatively neutral player but one that is striving to show its regional importance in the shadow of its two powerful neighbors, said Manduhai Buyandelger, a professor of anthropology at MIT and a Mongolia scholar.

"I think Mongolia is a very safe arena for the pope to land to demonstrate his outreach, as well as to show Mongolia's belonging on equal stage with the rest of the world," she said from Ulaanbaatar.

Mongolia's environmental precariousness, climate shocks and the increasing desertification of its land are likely to be raised by the pope, given he has made combatting climate change and addressing their impacts on vulnerable peoples a priority of his 10-year pontificate.

Mongolia, a vast, landlocked country historically afflicted by weather extremes, is considered to be one of the most affected by climate change. The country has already experienced a 2.1-degree Celsius (3.8-degree Fahrenheit) increase in average temperatures over the past 70 years, and an estimated 77% of its land is degraded because of overgrazing and climate change, according to the U.N. Development Program.

The cycles of dry, hot summers followed by harsh, snowy winters are particularly devastating for Mongolia's nomadic herders, since their livestock are less able to fatten up on grass in summer before cold winters, said Nicola Di Cosmo, a Mongolian historian and professor of East Asian Studies at the Institute for Advanced Study in Princeton, New Jersey.

"If these events become more and more common and more frequent ... this change interferes with this very delicate pastoral economy, which is a delicate balance between the resources of the grassland and the animals using those resources," Di Cosmo said.

Already, many of Mongolia's herders, who comprised about a third of the population of 3.3 million, have abandoned their traditional livelihoods to settle around Mongolia's capital, stressing social services in a country where already nearly 1 in 3 people live in poverty.

More recently, Mongolia has turned to extraction industries, particularly copper, coal, gold, to fuel the economy, which gets more than 90% of its export revenue from minerals. Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Francis would likely refer to this trend in his remarks; Francis has frequently spoken out about the harm caused by extraction industries, particularly on the natural environment and local populations.

Munkh-Erdene Lkhamsuren, a professor of anthropology at the National University of Mongolia, said he hoped Francis would speak out about "predatory" Western mining companies which, he said, together with Mongolian officials, are robbing Mongolia of its natural wealth.

In December, hundreds of people braved freezing cold temperatures in the capital to protest corruption in Mongolia's trade with China over the alleged theft of 385,000 tons of coal.

The government has declared 2023 to be an "anti-corruption year" and says it is carrying out a five-part plan based on Transparency International, the global anti-graft watchdog that ranked Mongolia 116th last year in its corruption perceptions index.

"It is well known fact that most common Mongolians now see their country as a victim of a neo-colonialism," Lkhamsuren said.

Mutinous soldiers in Gabon say they've ousted president whose family has ruled for 55 years

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DAKAR, Senegal (AP) — Mutinous soldiers in Gabon said Wednesday they were seizing power to overturn the results of a presidential election, seeking to remove a president whose family has held power for 55 years, and crowds took to the streets to celebrate.

The coup attempt came hours after the central African country's President Ali Bongo Ondimba, 64, was declared winner of an election marred by fears of violence.

Within minutes of the announcement, gunfire was heard in the center of the capital, Libreville. Later, a dozen uniformed soldiers appeared on state television and announced that they had seized power.

Crowds in the city took to the city's streets to celebrate the end of Bongo's reign, singing the national anthem with soldiers.

"Thank you, army. Finally, we've been waiting a long time for this moment," said Yollande Okomo, standing in front of soldiers from Gabon's elite republican guard.

Shopkeeper Viviane Mbou offered the soldiers juice, which they declined.

"Long live our army," said Jordy Dikaba, a young man walking with his friends on a street lined with armored policemen.

There was no word from the president, and his whereabouts were not immediately clear.

The soldiers intended to "dissolve all institutions of the republic," said a spokesman for the group, whose members were drawn from the gendarme, the republican guard and other elements of the security forces.

French mining company Eramet said it was ceasing all operations in Gabon, and that it has begun procedures to ensure the safety of its staff and facilities. The company's subsidiaries in Gabon operate the world's largest manganese mine, and a rail transport company.

The private intelligence firm Ambrey said all operations at the country's main port in Libreville had been halted, with authorities refusing to grant permission for vessels to leave.

One morning flight at Libreville's Léon-Mba International Airport already had been delayed early Wednesday morning. A man who answered a number listed for the airport told The Associated Press that flights were cancelled on Wednesday.

The coup attempt came about one month after mutinous soldiers in Niger seized power from the democratically elected government, and is the latest in a series of coups that have challenged governments with ties to France, the region's former colonizer. Gabon's coup, if successful would bring the number of coups in West and Central Africa to eight since 2020.

In his annual Independence Day speech Aug. 17, Bongo said "While our continent has been shaken in recent weeks by violent crises, rest assured that I will never allow you and our country Gabon to be hostages to attempts at destabilization. Never."

Unlike Niger and two other West African countries run by military juntas, Gabon hasn't been wracked by jihadi violence and had been seen as relatively stable. But nearly 40% of Gabonese ages 15-24 were out of work in 2020, according to the World Bank.

Bongo acknowledged the widespread frustration over rising costs of living in his Aug. 17 speech, and listed measures his government was making to contain fuel prices, make education more affordable, and stabilize the price of baguettes.

Gabon is a member of the OPEC oil cartel, with a production of some 181,000 barrels of crude a day, making it the eighth-largest producer of oil in sub-Saharan Africa. It is home to over 2 million people, and

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is slightly smaller than the U.S. state of Colorado.

At a time when anti-France sentiment is spreading in many former colonies, the French-educated Bongo met President Emmanuel Macron in Paris in late June and shared photos of them shaking hands.

France has 400 soldiers in Gabon leading a regional military training operation. They've not changed their normal operations today, according to the French military.

French Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said Wednesday: "We are following the situation in Gabon closely."

The mutinous officers vowed to respect "Gabon's commitments to the national and international community."

When asked about Gabon Wednesday, the EU's top diplomat, Josep Borrell said it would be discussed by EU ministers this week. Defense ministers from the 27-nation bloc are meeting in Spain on Wednesday, and foreign ministers on Thursday. Borrell will chair both meetings, and Niger will also be a focus.

"If this is confirmed, it's another military coup, which increases instability in the whole region," he said.

Bongo's family has long-standing ties to former colonial ruler France, dating to the four-decade presidency of his late father Omar Bongo. These have come under legal scrutiny in recent years.

Several members of the Bongo family are under investigation in France, and some have been given preliminary charges of embezzlement, money laundering and other forms of corruption, according to French media reports, driven in part by a broader push for justice by non-governmental organizations that have long accused multiple African heads of state of embezzling public funds and hiding them in France.

Bongo was seeking a third term in elections this weekend. He served two terms since coming to power in 2009 after the death of his father who ruled the country for 41 years. Another group of mutinous soldiers attempted a coup in January 2019, while Bongo was in Morocco recovering from a stroke, but they were quickly overpowered.

In the election, Bongo faced an opposition coalition led by economics professor and former education minister Albert Ondo Ossa, whose surprise nomination came a week before the vote.

Every vote held in Gabon since the country's return to a multi-party system in 1990 has ended in violence. Clashes between government forces and protesters following the 2016 election killed four people, according to official figures. The opposition said the death toll was far higher.

Fearing violence, many people in the capital went to visit family in other parts of the country before the election or left Gabon altogether. Others stockpiled food or bolstered security in their homes.

After last week's vote, the Central African nation's Communications Minister, Rodrigue Mboumba Bisawou, announced a nightly curfew from 7 p.m. to 6 a.m., and said internet access was being restricted indefinitely to quell disinformation and calls for violence.

NetBlocks, an organization tracking internet access worldwide, said internet service saw a "partial restoration" in Gabon after the coup.

Air attack kills 2 in Kyiv while Russia accuses Ukraine of biggest drone attack of the war

By SUSIE BLANN and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian officials on Wednesday accused Ukraine of launching what appeared to be the biggest nighttime drone attack on Russian soil since the war began 18 months ago. The Kremlin's forces also hit Kyiv during the night with what Ukrainian officials called a "massive, combined attack" that killed two people.

Drones struck hit an airport in western Russia's Pskov region near the border with Estonia and Latvia, damaging four Il-76 transport aircraft that can carry heavy machinery, Russian state news agency Tass reported, citing emergency officials.

The airport strike, which was first reported minutes before midnight, started a massive fire, the regional governor and local media reported. Unconfirmed media reports said up to 20 drones may have targeted the airport.

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More drones were shot down over the Oryol, Bryansk, Ryazan and Kaluga regions, as well as the region surrounding the Russian capital, according to the Defense Ministry. Three main Moscow region airports — Sheremetyevo, Vnukovo and Domodedovo — temporarily halted incoming and outgoing flights.

Aerial attacks on Russian soil have escalated in recent months as Ukraine pursues a counteroffensive to drive the invading forces out of its territory. Ukraine has increasingly targeted Russia's military assets behind the front lines in the country's east and south. The Kremlin has repeatedly accused the Ukrainian military of also launching drones toward Moscow.

Russia, meanwhile, used drones and missiles in its biggest bombardment of Ukraine's capital in months, Ukrainian authorities said.

Two people were killed and another person was injured by falling debris, Serhiy Popko, the head of the Kyiv military administration, wrote on Telegram.

Russia launched Shahed exploding drones at the city from various directions and then followed with missiles from Tu-95MS strategic aircraft, Popko said. It was unclear how many were launched, but Popko called the attack the biggest on the capital since the spring.

In the aftermath, Kyiv resident Iryna Oblat pointed to debris in the street and shattered windows in surrounding buildings.

"Look where it hit, look what happened to the house," she told The Associated Press. "Garages are on fire. We don't know how many cars and garages were destroyed because firefighters and police won't let us in."

In Russia, Pskov regional Gov. Mikhail Vedernikov ordered all flights to and from the airport in the region's namesake capital canceled for the day so the damage could be assessed during daylight.

Footage and images posted on social media showed smoke billowing over the city of Pskov and a large blaze. Vedernikov said there were no casualties, and the fire has been contained.

Pskov was the only region reporting substantial damage. In Kaluga, one drone was brought down and another hit an empty oil reservoir, causing a fire that was quickly extinguished, Gov. Vladislav Shapsha reported. Residential windows were shattered, Shapsha said.

In the Bryansk region, Gov. Alexander Bogomaz said six drones were downed overnight. One of them damaged an administrative building, he said, prompting a brief fire. Two were targeting a television tower, but were brought down. Russian media earlier on Wednesday cited local residents as saying they heard a loud explosion.

Two drones were downed over the Oryol region, Gov. Andrei Klychkov said. Two more were downed over the Ryazan region and one over the Moscow region, officials said.

The Oryol and Kaluga regions border Bryansk, and the Moscow region sits on top of Kaluga. Pskov, however, is about 700 kilometers (434 miles) north of Russia's border with Ukraine, and was described by Russian media and military bloggers as an unlikely target.

Also early Wednesday, Russian-installed officials in Crimea, which Moscow annexed from Ukraine in 2014, reported repelling an attack of drones targeting the harbor of the port city of Sevastopol.

Fuel depots and airfields have been hit in drone attacks on Crimea or Russian-held regions that Moscow officials have blamed on Kyiv.

There was no immediate comment from Ukrainian officials, who usually refuse to take responsibility for any attacks on Russian soil.

Explosions in Ukraine were also reported in the southern city of Odesa and the Cherkasy region.

Ukraine's air defenses destroyed 28 cruise missiles and 15 of 16 Iranian-made Shahed attack drones targeting the capital and multiple regions across the country overnight, the Ukrainian air force said in its daily Telegram update on Wednesday.

It said 43 weapons were downed in Kyiv, Zhytomyr, Cherkasy and the Odesa and Mykolaiv regions in the south of the country. The statement did not say what happened to the other drone.

Russia earns less from oil and spends more on war. So far, sanctions are working like a slow poison

By DAVID McHUGH AP Business Writer

The Russian ruble's wobble in value has exposed a crack in President Vladimir Putin's fortress economy, a vulnerability quickly plastered over by the Kremlin's economic team in a move that allowed the currency to regain its footing, at least for now.

Yet the patch — an emergency interest rate increase — cannot hide the dilemma at the heart of the Russian economy: how to fund the military while not undermining the national currency and overheating the economy with corrosive and politically embarrassing inflation.

Life in Moscow presents a facade of normality despite sweeping sanctions tied to the war in Ukraine and the departure of hundreds of name-brand Western companies.

Outdoor seating at restaurants and bars on the popular Bolshaya Nikitskaya street were packed on a recent evening with well-dressed residents enjoying balmy August weather. Loud music from DJs boomed from a nearby courtyard eatery. Malls haven't changed at first glance, but where Zara and H&M once stood, shoppers find new clothing brands Maag and Vilet.

And doughnut seller Krunchy Dream could easily be mistaken for the Krispy Kreme that once stood in its place in Evropeisky mall, even the branding is similar. In the absence of Apple Pay, banks provide stickers with a chip that enables mobile payment.

Key economic gauges are also in normal ranges. Unemployment is low, economic growth is better than many had expected and inflation is moderate by Russian standards — at 4% in July — though hard on those with limited incomes.

People in Moscow — where criticism of the military can bring jail time and some only provided their first names — expressed a mix of unease and resignation.

Retiree Vladimir Cheremesyev, 68, recalled that the troubles after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 were delayed by several years.

"I think that although I am a pensioner, and there is not much income, I don't feel much yet," Cheremesyev said, "but there is anxiety — sometimes my blood pressure rises."

Others noted how prices constantly changed.

Yuliana, a 38-year-old entrepreneur, was more concerned: "Our condition has deteriorated sharply, it's no good. ... It won't end today or tomorrow, and not the day after tomorrow. I think more than one generation will pay for this story."

For businesses in need of supplies, they're turning to alternatives.

Andrei Lavrov, owner of the Smile Atelier dental clinic, said he's had to get sutures and silicone from Asia because he uses "quite a lot" of imported materials.

"But, by the way, no disaster happened," he said. "If something is no longer supplied, then it is easily replaced through parallel channels."

Some Russian-made sutures are "very high-quality material," he said, as local industry picks up the slack: "A certain substitution is taking place."

Still, imports to Russia are rebounding as goods come through nearby countries such as Kazakhstan and Armenia, avoiding sanctions. Government spending on the military and social programs is spreading cash to people and companies, who are using some of it on imported products.

Labor shortages, stemming from people leaving the country, also are supporting salaries, while government-subsidized mortgages help maintain real estate activity.

Some blows to the economy are obvious, particularly the auto industry after Western manufacturers abandoned their Russian businesses. But Chinese vehicle imports are gaining ground.

Foreign travel is painfully expensive and limited by visa and airline bans, though the rich manage as always and those with modest incomes couldn't afford it to begin with.

When it comes to the pressure on the ruble, Russia, one of the world's biggest oil suppliers, is earning less from selling its oil because of Western sanctions. That's narrowing the country's trade surplus with

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the rest of the world because Russian people and companies also are buying more products from abroad.

Earning more from exports than what is spent on imports typically supports the ruble. While the shrinking trade surplus has led the currency to steadily decline, Moscow has benefited because a weaker exchange rate actually helps the government pay its bills.

That's because dollars earned from oil can be exchanged for a larger amount of rubles to spend on government agencies, workers' wages and pensions.

But Russia's currency dipped too far for the Kremlin's liking — below 100 rubles to the dollar on Aug. 14, a psychologically important level. It prompted the central bank to carry out a large emergency interest rate hike of 3.5 percentage points aimed at cooling local demand for imports. The currency rose to 92 to the dollar in the days following the rate hike but has steadily slipped since; it traded at 95.5 to the dollar on Tuesday.

While weaker than last year's levels of about 60 rubles to the dollar, the lower exchange rate isn't a crisis yet, if a freefall can be avoided.

The Kremlin has worked to sanctions-proof the economy following the annexation of Ukraine's Crimea Peninsula in 2014. It also shifted food production to local companies by banning EU imports and pushed manufacturers to source parts locally.

Thanks to oil earnings, the government has negligible debt and robust reserves, though about half of that stockpile has been frozen by sanctions.

Longer term, however, Russia's economy is facing a "slow burn" under pressure from sanctions and Putin's war spending, said Robin Brooks, chief economist with the Institute of International Finance.

"The dilemma is, on the one hand, he has to spend a lot of money — fighting a war is super expensive," Brooks said. "How do you square the circle between needing cash and hiking interest rates to keep the picture from spiraling out of control? In my view, there is no good solution."

Russian oil faces Western bans and a price cap that the Group of Seven democracies imposed on sales to other nations. The G7 could "make this tradeoff much harder for Putin" by lowering the price cap from \$60 to \$50, reducing Russia's oil earnings, Brooks said.

That "would put even more pressure on the ruble, it would put more pressure on Russia's central bank to raise interest rates, and it would make that tradeoff much harder," he said.

In the short term, the ruble's decline is "not a sign that Russia is about to run into a major financial crisis," says Chris Weafer, CEO and Russian economy analyst at consulting firm Macro Advisory Partners.

With no foreign investment in the currency, the Kremlin can influence the exchange rate simply by telling state-controlled exporters when to sell foreign currency for rubles, Weafer said. On top of that, prices for Russian oil have risen recently, shrinking the discounts it had to give customers in India and China.

Hiking interest rates to boost the ruble "throttles the private economy — or the part of the economy that is not related to the war and the defense industries — so that enough resources are left over for the war to continue," said Janis Kluge, a Russian economy expert at the German Institute for International and Security Affairs in Berlin.

"It's a clear prioritization of the government of this war over the welfare of households," he said.

Longer term, Putin's choices will erode economic growth and put more long-term stress on the ruble, Kluge said. Without foreign investment needed to make complex goods, Russia will produce less of what it needs on its own and import more.

"And this will mean that going forward, Russian citizens will not be able to afford the same level, the same lifestyle as in past years," Kluge said.

India protests China's land claim ahead of the G20 summit President Xi Jinping is expected to attend

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press Writer

NEW DELHI (AP) — India is protesting a new Chinese map that lays claim to India's territory ahead of next week's Group of 20 summit in New Delhi, a foreign ministry official said, exacerbating tensions during a three-year military standoff between the two nations.

The timing of the protest is key, as Chinese President Xi Jinping is expected to attend the summit of industrialized and developing countries.

"We reject these claims as they have no basis. Such steps by the Chinese side only complicate the resolution of the boundary question," the External Affairs Ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said in a statement on Tuesday.

He said India on Tuesday formally lodged the objection through diplomatic channels with the Chinese side on the so-called 2023 "standard map" of China that lays claim to India's territory.

The version of the Chinese map published on the website of the Ministry of Natural Resources clearly shows Arunachal Pradesh and the Doklam Plateau, over which the two sides have feuded, included within Chinese borders, along with Aksai Chin in the western section which China controls but India still claims.

Indian External Affairs Minister Jaishankar Subramanyam also dismissed China's claim in a television interview on Tuesday night.

"Making absurd claims on India's territory does not make it China's territory," Jaishankar said.

China recently refused to put visas in the passports of officials from Arunachal Pradesh state in India's northeast, using a stapled-in certificate instead. It also refuses to recognize India's sovereignty over its part of Kashmir and declined to send a delegation to a G20 meeting in Srinagar in May.

Last week, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi informally spoke to China's President Xi on the sidelines of the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, where Modi highlighted New Delhi's concerns about their unresolved border issues.

India's foreign ministry said the two leaders agreed to intensify efforts to de-escalate tensions at the disputed border between them and bring home thousands of their troops deployed there.

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.

"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," the Chinese Foreign Ministry said after the two leaders' meeting.

Indian and Chinese military commanders had met earlier this month in an apparent effort to stabilize the situation. A border, dubbed the "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.

Logging is growing in a Nigerian forest home to endangered elephants. Rangers blame lax enforcement

By TAIWO ADEBAYO Associated Press

OMO FOREST RESERVE, Nigeria (AP) — Roaring chainsaws sent trees crashing to the ground, and bare-chested men hacked away at the branches beside a muddy road. Others heaved logs onto a truck, where they were tied in place with wire.

The work was similar on the other side of the road, with a timber-laden truck coughing dark plumes of smoke as it pulled away. This was miles into the conservation zone of Omo Forest Reserve in southern Nigeria, a protected area where logging is prohibited because it's home to threatened species like African elephants, pangolins and white-throated monkeys. But forest rangers, seeing the impunity, were hesitant to act.

"We see people we arrested and turned over to the government back in the forest, and they get emboldened," ranger Sunday Abiodun told The Associated Press during a recent trip to the reserve.

Conservationists say the outer region of Omo Forest Reserve, where logging is allowed, is already heavily deforested. As trees become scarce, loggers are heading deep into the 550-square-kilometer conservation area, which is also under threat from uncontrolled cocoa farming and poaching.

Conservationists and rangers blame the government for not enforcing environmental regulations or adequately replanting trees, impeding Nigeria's pledge under the Paris climate agreement to maintain places like forests that absorb carbon from the atmosphere.

The government of Nigeria's southwestern Ogun state, which owns the reserve, denied failing to enforce regulations. In a statement, it said it's replanting more trees than are being cut down.

The forest's gatekeepers and those processing the wood both dispute that assertion, insisting trees are disappearing.

Sawmillers get annual permits from the government to cut down trees until their designated area is completely deforested. Then they can apply for a new section. They say the permit fee of 2 million naira (\$2,645) is intended to cover the government's costs to replace trees but that this rarely occurs.

"The government is not replanting," said Owolabi Oguntimehin, a sawmiller in Ijebu, a nearby town that has over 50 sawmilling companies relying on the reserve. "It is not our responsibility to replant because the government collects the fee from us."

Besides problems with replanting, authorities don't enforce tree removal standards, even when loggers get permits, according to forest guards, who are employed by the state government.

Joseph Olaonipekun, a guard, said officials from Ogun state's forestry department used to mark trees that could be cut and ensure "strict" enforcement to prevent others from being removed. But that's no longer done, he said.

"By implementing selective logging, the adverse effects on the biodiversity of an area can be minimized while also providing the opportunity for young trees to continue growing," Nigerian ecologist Babajide Agboola said. "This method allows for a more sustainable approach to logging and forest management."

Trees such as Cordia wood, mahogany and gmelina are disappearing from the forest's periphery, according to both sawmillers and reserve gatekeepers.

"There has to be massive reforestation so that the conservation zone will not be dismantled," Agboola said.

But forest rangers hired by the nonprofit Nigerian Conservation Foundation, which is the government's partner in managing the conservation zone, have found it a challenge to protect against illegal logging in off-limits areas.

They say loggers harvesting trees in the conservation zone brag about bypassing regulations by paying off government officials.

"We want the government to support us in preserving the forest," ranger Johnson Adejayin said. He echoed his colleagues in calling for strict enforcement and sanctions, "so that the loggers do not come back to continue their illegal acts and boast that with money they can avoid punishment."

The Nigerian economy, Africa's largest, heavily relies on agriculture, forestry and other land uses. These

industries, which are responsible for 25% of Nigeria's greenhouse gas emissions, provide jobs for the majority of people in agrarian communities around the reserve.

As a result, there is debate about the political will to enforce environmental sustainability when livelihoods are at stake.

That factor should be considered, said Wale Adedayo, chairman of the Ijebu East local government area where a significant part of the forest is located. He advocated for a reduction of the conservation zone to give more land to locals to farm and log.

But he also acknowledged that "there is a lot of deforestation" that should be reversed to ensure Nigeria's contribution to fighting climate change.

For its part, the state government said "it is incorrect" to blame the pressure to make a living "when loggers illegally find their way into the conservation area to steal parts of the conserved trees."

Adedayo said logging in protected areas "is not possible without the connivance of the civil servants."

The government's forest guards have seen it first hand.

"There is too much corruption in this forest caused by greed and poverty," Olaonipekun said. "When we say, 'Don't go there,' some go through higher authorities to defy us, and we are helpless."

The government, meanwhile, has delayed formally declaring the conservation area a wildlife sanctuary to protect it from threats like logging, farming and poaching, said Emmanuel Olabode, who manages the Nigerian Conservation Foundation's wildlife conservation project in the forest.

The foundation's rangers are focused on nearly 6.5 square kilometers of strictly protected land where elephants are believed to live and has been designated a Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO.

"It is left to the government to enforce the regulations," said Olabode, who supervises the foundation's rangers.

Loggers even have resorted to violence to ensure their timber supply. Olabode recounted when assailants with assault rifles attacked a rangers' patrol base in 2021, and loggers just kept cutting trees.

"Our rangers escaped with injuries, and we notified the authorities, but nothing was done, and we have not gone back there due to security concerns," Olabode said, adding that the area is now unprotected.

The government says it plans to employ the military and police to combat illegal operators. It urges loggers who follow the rules to "fight their members who are into illegalities."

As Trump and Republicans target Georgia's Fani Willis for retribution, the state's governor opts out

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Some Republicans in Washington and Georgia began attacking Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis immediately after she announced the Aug. 14 indictment of former President Donald Trump for conspiring to overturn the 2020 presidential election results. But others, including Gov. Brian Kemp, have been conspicuous in their unwillingness to pile on.

Kemp, who had previously survived scathing attacks from Trump over his refusal to endorse the former president's false claims about the election, declined to comment on the indictment of Trump and 18 others at a conservative political conference hosted by radio host and Kemp ally Erick Erickson.

Noting that he had been called before a special grand jury to testify during the investigation, Kemp stated forcefully that Democratic President Joe Biden was the rightful winner of Georgia's 16 electoral votes and said swinging the spotlight to Trump's legal troubles would be a mistake.

"Democrats want us to be focused on things like this, so we're not focused on Joe Biden's record," Kemp told Erickson on Aug. 18.

Trump, meanwhile, has kept up a withering assault on both Willis and Kemp.

"Governor Kemp of Georgia is fighting hard against the impeachment of the crooked, incompetent & highly partisan D.A. of Fulton County, Fani Willis, who has allowed murder and other violent crime to MASSIVELY ESCALATE," the former president wrote Aug. 21 on his Truth Social platform. "Crime in Atlanta is WORST

Kemp, Burns and Republican Lt. Gov. Burt Jones name the commission's five-member investigative panel to examine complaints. They also name a three-member hearing panel that decides on charges filed by the investigative panel.

Some district attorneys, not including Willis, are already suing to overturn the law. Barring court intervention, people can begin filing complaints on Oct. 1 for alleged misconduct occurring after July 1.

Such complaints could relieve political pressure on Georgia Republicans.

"District Attorney Fani Willis has demonstrated that she is nothing more than a liberal activist attempting to bend the law to fit a narrative that she has spent an egregious amount of taxpayer resources to craft," state Sen. Jason Anivitarte wrote on social media, encouraging people to bring complaints.

But if the commission's first act is to pursue Willis, critics say that will prove that it's nothing but a political tool to enforce GOP rule in Georgia.

DeKalb County District Attorney Sherry Boston, a Democrat and plaintiff in the suit challenging the law, told The Associated Press Monday that using the commission against Willis would confirm that it's what its opponents warned it would be — "an assault on prosecutorial independence and the latest attempt to subvert democracy in Georgia."

Ex-Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío to be sentenced for seditious conspiracy in Jan. 6 attack

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Proud Boys national leader Enrique Tarrío is set to be sentenced on Wednesday for a failed plot to keep Donald Trump in power after the Republican lost the 2020 presidential election, capping one of the most significant prosecutions in the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Prosecutors are seeking 33 years behind bars for Tarrío, who had already been arrested and ordered to leave Washington, D.C. by the time Proud Boys members joined thousands of Trump supporters in storming the Capitol as lawmakers met to certify Democrat Joe Biden's 2020 electoral victory. But prosecutors say he organized and led the group's assault from afar, inspiring followers with his charisma and penchant for propaganda.

Tarrío was a top target in one of the most important Capitol riot cases prosecuted by the Justice Department. He and three lieutenants were convicted in May of charges including seditious conspiracy — a rarely brought Civil War-era offense that the Justice Department levied against members of far-right groups who played a key role in the Jan. 6 attack.

"Using his powerful platform, Tarrío has repeatedly and publicly indicated that he has no regrets about what he helped make happen on January 6," prosecutors wrote in a court filing.

The Justice Department has also recently charged Trump with conspiring to subvert American democracy, accusing the Republican of plotting in the days before the attack to overturn the results of the election that he lost. The Tarrío case — and hundreds of others like it — function as a vivid reminder of the violent chaos fueled by Trump's weeks of lies around the election and the extent to which his false claims helped inspire right-wing extremists who ultimately stormed the Capitol to thwart the peaceful transfer of presidential power.

Trump, who is the Republican frontrunner for the 2024 nomination, insists he did nothing wrong. His trial is set for March 4.

Prosecutors have recommended 33 years in prison for Tarrío, 39, of Miami — nearly twice as long as the harshest punishment that has been handed down so far in the Justice Department's massive Jan. 6 prosecution. The longest prison sentence so far went to Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes, who got 18 years for seditious conspiracy and his conviction on other charges.

U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly isn't bound by prosecutors' recommendation when he sentences Tarrío and separately sentences former Proud Boys chapter leader Ethan Nordean on Wednesday in Washington's federal courthouse — which sits within view of the Capitol. Later this week, Kelly is scheduled to

sentence three other Proud Boys members who were convicted by a jury in May after a trial alongside Tarrío and Nordean.

Tarrío, Nordean, Joseph Biggs and Zachary Rehl were convicted of seditious conspiracy. A fifth Proud Boys member, Dominic Pezzola, was acquitted of seditious conspiracy but convicted of other serious charges.

Prosecutors also recommended prison sentences of 33 years for Biggs, 30 years for Rehl, 27 years for Nordean and 20 years for Pezzola.

Tarrío's lawyers denied the Proud Boys had any plan to attack the Capitol, and argued that prosecutors used Tarrío as a scapegoat for Trump, who spoke at the "Stop the Steal" rally near the White House on Jan. 6 and urged his supporters to "fight like hell."

In urging the judge for a lenient sentence, Tarrío's lawyers noted in court papers that he has a history of cooperating with law enforcement. Court records uncovered in 2021 showed that Tarrío previously worked undercover and cooperated with investigators after he was accused of fraud in 2012.

Tarrío's lawyers urged the judge "to see another side of him — one that is benevolent, cooperative with law enforcement, useful in the community, hardworking and with a tight-knit family unit and community support."

Police arrested Tarrío in Washington two days before the riot on charges that he defaced a Black Lives Matter banner during an earlier rally in the nation's capital, but law enforcement officials later said he was arrested in part over concerns about the potential for unrest during the certification. He complied with a judge's order to leave the city after his arrest.

On Jan. 6, dozens of Proud Boys leaders, members and associates were among the first rioters to breach the Capitol. The mob's assault overwhelmed police, forced lawmakers to flee the House and Senate floors and disrupted the joint session of Congress for certifying Biden's electoral victory.

Tarrío picked Nordean and Biggs to be his top lieutenants on Jan. 6 and created an encrypted Telegram group chat for group leaders to communicate, according to prosecutors. The backbone of the case against Tarrío and other Proud Boys leaders was messages that they privately exchanged before, during and after the Jan. 6 attack.

"Make no mistake ... we did this," Tarrío wrote to other group leaders.

Tarrío also posted encouraging messages on social media during the riot, expressing pride for what he saw unfold at the Capitol and urging his followers to stay there. He also posted a picture of rioters in the Senate chamber with the caption "1776."

Several days before the riot, a girlfriend sent Tarrío a document entitled "1776 Returns." It called for storming and occupying government buildings in Washington "for the purpose of getting the government to overturn the election results," according to prosecutors.

More than 1,100 people have been charged with federal crimes related to the Capitol attack. More than 600 of them have been sentenced, with over half receiving terms of imprisonment.

Nordean, of Auburn, Washington, and Rehl, of Philadelphia, led local Proud Boys chapters. Biggs, of Ormond Beach, Florida, was a self-described Proud Boys organizer. Pezzola was a group member from Rochester, New York.

Unclear how many in Lahaina lost lives as Hawaii authorities near the end of their search for dead

By AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Crews in Hawaii have all but finished searching for victims of the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century, authorities said Tuesday, and it is unclear how many people perished.

Three weeks after the fire devastated Maui's historic seaside community of Lahaina, the count of the dead stands at 115. But an unknown number of people are still missing.

Officials suggested that responders likely have already recovered any remains that are recognizable as such, and they are shifting the response to focus on removing hazardous waste and making the area safe for residents to begin returning.

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"We have wrapped up almost completely the search and recovery mission and moving into the next phase," Darryl Oliveira, the interim administrator of the Maui Emergency Management Agency, said at a news conference.

The next phase would be hazardous waste removal conducted by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, he said.

Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said urban search and rescue teams have "completed 100% of their area" but some search activity continues in the ocean off Lahaina.

The FBI is searching 200 yards (183 meters) out along a four-mile (6.4-kilometer) stretch of coastline, but no human remains have been found, he said. There are 110 missing persons reports filed with Maui police, and more than 50 of those remain open cases that are still actively being worked, he said.

Although the initial land search is complete, authorities may also use details from the missing person reports to go over areas again, he added.

"They say, 'My loved one was here' and this may be a data point and we can continue," Pelletier said. "In case there was a chance that something needs to be further looked at, we've got archeologists and we're gonna make sure that we can do that so, again, we do this the right way."

He asked for "trust and patience" as officials continue to identify remains and go through lists of the missing.

So far, authorities have identified and notified the loved ones of 45 of those killed. They have collected DNA from 120 people to identify the dead and continue to see more samples.

EPA teams will search for and remove by hand hazardous materials like paints, pesticides and batteries. Lahaina had a large number of lithium ion solar-powered energy storage batteries, which the agency will treat as though they are unexploded ordnance, said Steve Calanog, the EPA's incident commander.

Teams will remove large pieces of asbestos material, but any asbestos in ash will be addressed in the next cleanup phase, he said.

The EPA will mist an adhesive called Soiltac on the ash to prevent it from migrating into the ocean, Calanog said. The substance is "non-toxic, biodegradable and marine safe" and will degrade in two to three months, he said.

The EPA has integrated about 25 cultural observers into its teams so the agency "proceeds with caution, reverence and respect" in the town that was the capital of the former Hawaiian kingdom in the 1800s and home to Hawaiian chiefs for centuries.

"We all know of the rich, long, historic and cultural significance of Lahaina," Calanog said.

The EPA said in a news release it will take up to several months to remove household hazardous material, though the work could be finished sooner.

Later, Maui Mayor Richard Bissen said in a recorded message on Instagram that the EPA would ship the toxic debris it collects to the continental U.S.

"Those materials will not remain on Maui, nor will they remain in the state of Hawaii," Bissen said.

Maui County didn't sound its emergency sirens to warn residents of the fire when it spread on Aug. 8.

Darryl Oliveira, who took over as interim administrator of the Maui Emergency Management Agency on Monday, said sirens had not been used for wildfires in Hawaii before. But he said Maui, the state, and other Hawaii counties were working on new protocols to do so.

"We see tremendous value in incorporating more tools into our arsenal to keep the public aware and get them early warning," he said, adding that the current hurricane season is overlapping with extremely dry conditions on Maui and statewide.

In an early example of this, officials on Saturday sounded emergency sirens to warn residents of a brush fire near Kaanapali resort hotels in Lahaina. Firefighters quickly brought the fire under control.

Oliveira guided the Big Island through hurricanes and volcanic eruptions as the head of Hawaii County civil defense for many years.

He said one challenge was educating the public -- including tourists -- on what to do if they hear a siren sound to warn of a wildfire.

University of North Carolina graduate student left building right after killing adviser, police say

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM, GARY D. ROBERTSON and SARAH RANKIN Associated Press
CHAPEL HILL, N.C. (AP) — A University of North Carolina graduate student walked into a classroom building, shot his faculty adviser and quickly left, authorities said a day after the attack paralyzed campus as police searched for the gunman.

Tailei Qi, 34, was charged Tuesday with first-degree murder and having a gun on educational property in Monday's killing of Zijie Yan inside a science building at the state's flagship public university.

Chapel Hill police arrested Qi without force in a residential neighborhood near campus within two hours of the attack, UNC Police Chief Brian James said at a news conference.

Investigators were trying to determine a motive and searching for the gun, James said. He declined to specify where in Caudill Labs Yan was killed, saying officers are still looking at evidence. Qi was already gone when a team of officers reached the building, James said.

Yan was "a beloved colleague, mentor and a friend of so many on our campus and a father to two young children," UNC Chancellor Kevin Guskiewicz at the news conference.

On Wednesday afternoon, the school's iconic Bell Tower will ring in honor of Yan's memory and students are encouraged to take a moment of silence, he said. The school also canceled classes until Thursday.

Earlier Tuesday, Qi briefly appeared in Orange County Superior Court in Hillsborough. Judge Sherri Murrell ordered Qi to remain jailed without bond and scheduled his next court date for Sept. 18. After the hearing, Qi bowed to the judge, his Mandarin interpreter, public defender Dana Graves and the guards who took him away in handcuffs.

Graves left court without talking to reporters and did not immediately respond to an email seeking comment.

Yan was an associate professor in the Department of Applied Physical Sciences who had worked for the university since July 2019, Guskiewicz said Tuesday. He led the Yan Research Group, which Qi joined last year, according to the group's UNC webpage.

Yan was a respected and approachable professor and research adviser who was deeply knowledgeable about the field, said Wen Liu, a 2022 graduate who worked in the lab for three years.

He was somewhat reserved, yet always willing to answer questions with patience and respect and advise lab members who got stuck in their research, Liu said.

"For hours he would just be doing things and explaining along the way," said Liu, who was a "newbie undergrad in the field" at the time and also worked with Qi in the lab. Qi seemed passionate about research, curious about others' work and "pretty sociable," Liu said.

The lab's main goals were making and studying nanoparticles under the effect of light, using lasers, he said. The work has potential applications in medicine and other fields.

A since-deleted page on the school's website listed Qi as a graduate student in Yan's research group, with Yan as his adviser, though the police chief said their ties were still under investigation. Qi previously studied at Wuhan University in China before earning a masters in mechanical engineering at Louisiana State University in 2021.

The attack and hourslong lockdown terrified students and faculty who had returned last week for the start of the fall semester. On Tuesday, students pet therapy dogs on campus and chalked hearts, peace signs and messages of hope on walking paths.

Noel Harris, a senior journalism student, said she spent confusing and scary hours locked in a class reading news coverage, listening to police scanners and waiting for university updates about whether the danger had passed.

When an officer arrived, the class asked him to slide his badge under the door first, Harris said. The officer said they were safe but recommended they wait until an all-clear was issued. Soon after, Harris

recorded video of people climbing out of an adjacent building's windows, and she started to wonder "so is it really safe? What's going on?" she said.

She said Tuesday that she was still trying to understand why the students left through the windows of Phillips Hall, where math and other classes are held but no shots were fired.

"I felt myself just being scared and shocked, but then not shocked at the same time because it's like, this happens every day," Harris said.

Idalia strengthens over Gulf of Mexico and is now predicted to hit Florida as Category 4 hurricane

By DANIEL KOZIN Associated Press

CEDAR KEY, Fla. (AP) — Florida residents living in vulnerable coastal areas were ordered to pack up and leave Tuesday as Hurricane Idalia gained steam in the warm waters of the Gulf of Mexico and threatened to unleash life-threatening storm surges and rainfall.

Idalia also pummeled Cuba with heavy rains on Monday and Tuesday, leaving the tobacco-growing province of Pinar del Rio underwater and many of its residents without power.

Idalia had strengthened to a Category 2 system on Tuesday afternoon, with winds strengthening to 110 mph (177 kph) by Tuesday evening. The hurricane was projected to come ashore early Wednesday as a Category 4 system with sustained winds of at least 130 mph (209 kph) in the lightly populated Big Bend region, where the Florida Panhandle curves into the peninsula. The result could be a big blow to a state still dealing with lingering damage from last year's Hurricane Ian.

The National Weather Service in Tallahassee called Idalia "an unprecedented event" since no major hurricanes on record have ever passed through the bay abutting the Big Bend.

On the island of Cedar Key, Commissioner Sue Colson joined other city officials in packing up documents and electronics at City Hall. She had a message for the almost 900 residents who were under mandatory orders to evacuate. More than a dozen state troopers went door to door warning residents that storm surge could rise as high as 15 feet (4.5 meters).

"One word: Leave," Colson said. "It's not something to discuss."

Gov. Ron DeSantis repeated the warning at an afternoon news conference.

"You really gotta go now. Now is the time," he said. Earlier, the governor stressed that residents didn't necessarily need to leave the state, but should "get to higher ground in a safe structure."

"You can ride the storm out there, then go back to your home," he said.

Not everyone was heeding the warning. Andy Bair, owner of the Island Hotel, said he intended to "babysit" his bed-and-breakfast, which predates the Civil War. The building has not flooded in the almost 20 years he has owned it, not even when Hurricane Hermine flooded the city in 2016.

"Being a caretaker of the oldest building in Cedar Key, I just feel kind of like I need to be here," Bair said. "We've proven time and again that we're not going to wash away. We may be a little uncomfortable for a couple of days, but we'll be OK eventually."

Tolls were waived on highways out of the danger area, shelters were open and hotels prepared to take in evacuees. More than 30,000 utility workers were gathering to make repairs as quickly as possible in the hurricane's wake. About 5,500 National Guard troops were activated.

In Tarpon Springs, a coastal community northwest of Tampa, 60 patients were evacuated from a hospital out of concern that the system could bring a 7-foot (2.1-meter) storm surge.

Idalia's initial squalls were being felt in the Florida Keys and the southwestern coast of Florida on Tuesday afternoon, including at Clearwater Beach. Workers at beachside bars and T-shirt shops boarded up windows, children skim-surfed the waves and hundreds of people watched the increasingly choppy waters from the safety of the sand.

After landing in the Big Bend region, Idalia is forecast to cross the Florida peninsula and then drench southern Georgia and the Carolinas on Thursday. Both Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp and South Carolina Gov. Henry McMaster announced states of emergency, freeing up state resources and personnel, including

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IN NATION. She should be impeached for many reasons, not just the Witch Hunt (I did nothing wrong!)” There’s little evidence to support Trump’s claim that crime is escalating — the number of homicides has fallen sharply in Atlanta this year.

Other Georgia Republicans didn’t hesitate to assail Willis, with some joining Trump in the call to impeach the Atlanta-based prosecutor.

“Fani Willis should be ashamed of herself and she’s going to lose her job,” said Republican U.S. Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene of Georgia. “We’ll make sure of that.”

Greene spoke to reporters last Thursday outside the Fulton County Jail, shortly before Trump arrived by motorcade to submit to booking and a mug shot. That same day, House Republicans in Washington announced their own investigation of Willis.

By then, a few GOP lawmakers in Georgia were calling for a special session to impeach and remove Willis or defund her office. Others proposed amending the state constitution to let Kemp pardon Trump.

Both are longshot prospects.

Georgia’s General Assembly hasn’t impeached anyone in more than 50 years, and with Republicans holding less than the required two-thirds state Senate majority to convict Willis, they would have to persuade Democrats.

Colton Moore, a Republican state senator whose purist brand of conservatism wins him few allies, launched a petition for lawmakers to call themselves into special session, requiring signatures by three-fifths of both houses. That too would require some Democratic support.

Georgia voters amended the state constitution to shift pardon power from the governor to a parole board in the 1940s after a governor was accused of selling pardons. It would take a two-thirds vote of both houses to put a measure before voters to change that status, again requiring Democratic support.

And it’s not clear Kemp would pardon Trump even if he had that power. Kemp and Trump were on bad terms even before Kemp spurned Trump’s calls to overturn Georgia’s 2020 presidential election. And relations grew icier after Trump recruited former Sen. David Perdue for an embarrassingly unsuccessful Republican primary challenge to Kemp’s reelection in 2022. Kemp, like some other Republican governors, now openly argues that his party needs to move on from Trump.

At least one other top Georgia Republican, state House Speaker Jon Burns, is siding with Kemp in opposing a special session. In a letter to fellow Republicans, he squelched talk of a special session, writing that he wants to look toward “a positive vision that prepares for the bright future our children and grandchildren deserve.”

“All those charged are innocent until proven guilty, and I am certain both sides will ensure this matter is exhaustively considered through the courts,” Burns wrote, saying he wouldn’t comment further.

Burns’ comments drew the scorn of Amy Kremer, a suburban Atlanta Republican activist who helped organize the Jan. 6 “Stop the Steal” rally in Washington that spawned the assault on the U.S. Capitol.

“We need to flip these corrupt RINO seats to true conservatives who will actually work and fight for the people,” Kremer wrote on social media. “So embarrassing.”

Looking for other options to go after Willis, some Georgia Republicans are coalescing around a plan to seek her removal by a new state prosecutorial oversight commission that begins work on Oct. 1.

The Prosecuting Attorneys Qualifications Commission was created with the aim of disciplining or removing wayward prosecutors. Republicans fought hard for the law because they said some Democratic prosecutors were incompetent or coddling criminals, improperly refusing to prosecute whole categories of crimes, including marijuana possession.

Democrats retorted that Republicans were the ones politicizing prosecutions, and some viewed the law as Republican retribution against Willis. She criticized the measure as a racist attack after voters elected 14 nonwhite DAs in the state.

The law lets the commission sanction prosecutors for “willful misconduct in office” or “undue bias or prejudice against the accused or in favor of persons with interests adverse to the accused.” It’s unclear how the commission will interpret those terms, because it hasn’t created rules yet.

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hundreds of National Guard troops.

"We'll be prepared to the best of our abilities," said Russell Guess, who was topping off the gas tank on his truck in Valdosta, Georgia. His co-workers at Cunningham Tree Service were doing the same. "There will be trees on people's house, trees across power lines."

At 11 p.m. EDT Tuesday, Idalia was about 125 miles (201 kilometers) west of Tampa, the National Hurricane Center said. It was moving north at 18 mph (29 kph).

In Cuba, meanwhile, Idalia left more than 60% of Pinar del Rio's residents in the dark, state media reported.

"The priority is to reestablish power and communications and keep an eye on the agriculture: Harvest whatever can be harvested and prepare for more rainfall," President Miguel Díaz-Canel said in a meeting with government officials Tuesday.

More than 10,000 people had been evacuated to shelters or stayed with friends and relatives as up to 4 inches (10 centimeters) of rain fell. More than half of the province was without electricity.

State media did not report any deaths or major damage.

Idalia will be the first storm to hit Florida this hurricane season, but it's only the latest in a summer of natural disasters, including wildfires in Hawaii, Canada and Greece; the first tropical storm to hit California in 84 years, and devastating flooding in Vermont.

With a large stretch of Florida's western coast at risk for storm surges and floods, evacuation notices were issued in 22 counties, with mandatory orders for some people in eight of those counties. Many of the notices were for low-lying and coastal areas and for people living in mobile and manufactured homes, recreational vehicles or boats, and for people who would be vulnerable in a power outage.

Many school districts along the Gulf Coast were to be closed through at least Wednesday. Several colleges and universities also closed, including the University of Florida in Gainesville. Florida State University in Tallahassee said its campus would be closed through Friday.

Two of the region's largest airports stopped commercial operations, and MacDill Air Force Base on Tampa Bay sent several aircraft to safer locations. The Busch Gardens Tampa Bay theme park also planned to close. On Florida's Space Coast, on the other side of the peninsula from where Idalia is expected to make landfall, United Launch Alliance said Tuesday that it was delaying the launch of a rocket carrying satellites for U.S. defense and intelligence agencies.

Asked about the hurricane as he sat down for a meeting with Costa Rican President Rodrigo Chaves in the Oval Office on Tuesday, President Joe Biden said he had spoken to DeSantis and "provided him with everything that he possibly needs."

Ian was responsible last year for almost 150 deaths. Category 5 hurricane damaged 52,000 structures, nearly 20,000 of which were destroyed or severely damaged.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration recently said the 2023 hurricane season would be far busier than initially forecast, partly because of extremely warm ocean temperatures. The season runs through Nov. 30, with August and September typically the peak.

Floridians viewed Idalia's name with some concern since 13 Atlantic storm names beginning with "I" have been retired since 1955, according to the National Weather Service. That happens when a storm's death toll or destruction is so severe that using its name again would be insensitive.

Another concern was the presence of a rare blue supermoon, which can cause higher-than-normal tides.

Cedar Key was expected to be at low tide shortly after sunrise on Wednesday, with Idalia forecast to make landfall a few hours later. That's a bit of a relief since the water level would be higher if the storm surge arrived during a high tide, said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy.

"That definitely plays a role in coastal flooding," McNoldy said.

No. 2 House Republican Steve Scalise is diagnosed with blood cancer and undergoing treatment

WASHINGTON (AP) — Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 House Republican, said Tuesday he has been diagnosed with a form of blood cancer known as multiple myeloma and is undergoing treatment.

Scalise, 57, said he will continue to serve in the House. He described the cancer as “very treatable” and said it was detected early.

The Louisiana Republican was among several people wounded in 2017 when a rifle-wielding attacker fired on lawmakers on a baseball field in Alexandria, Virginia, outside Washington. Scalise was shot in the hip and endured lengthy hospitalizations, multiple surgeries and painful rehabilitation.

The cancer diagnosis came, Scalise said, after he had not been feeling like himself in the past week. Blood tests showed some irregularities and after additional screening, he said he was diagnosed with multiple myeloma.

“I have now begun treatment, which will continue for the next several months,” Scalise said in a statement. “I expect to work through this period and intend to return to Washington, continuing my work as Majority Leader and serving the people of Louisiana’s First Congressional District.”

Scalise also thanked his medical team and said he was “incredibly grateful we were able to detect this early and that this cancer is treatable.”

“I will tackle this with the same strength and energy as I have tackled past challenges,” Scalise said.

The White House said President Joe Biden called Scalise Tuesday afternoon to express his best wishes for a swift recovery.

Colleagues in the House and members of Louisiana’s congressional delegation offered Scalise and his family their encouragement in response to the announcement, some recalling his determination following the 2017 shooting.

“The same faith, family support, and internal strength that made Steve such an inspiration to others after he was shot will bring him through this illness and once more inspire us all,” said Sen. Bill Cassidy, R-La.

“I spoke with him today and he’s in good spirits, as nothing — not a gunshot and certainly not cancer — will stop him from accomplishing what he sets his mind to,” said House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif..

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre called the diagnosis “devastating news.”

“Our hearts and prayers go out to the congressman and his family,” Jean-Pierre said. “Clearly, he’s gone through a lot over the past couple of years.”

‘Breaking Bad’ stars reunite on picket line to call for studios to resume negotiations with actors

By KRISTA FAURIA Associated Press

CULVER CITY, Calif. (AP) — The cast of “Breaking Bad” has reunited to call upon Hollywood studios to resume negotiations with striking screen actors.

“We want you to come back to the table with us,” Bryan Cranston said in a plea to the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers outside Sony Pictures Studios on Tuesday.

Cranston was joined by Aaron Paul, Jesse Plemons and other members of the “Breaking Bad” universe in an effort to energize picket lines more than a month after SAG-AFTRA joined striking Hollywood writers.

Both guilds are seeking to address issues brought about by the dominance of streaming services, which have changed all aspects of production and pay in the industry.

“The way things were structured 10 years ago made a lot of sense and it made it more possible for journeymen-type actors, actors in the middle that are working just as a hard or harder,” Plemons said.

By its final season, which aired more than a decade ago, “Breaking Bad” was one of the most watched and highest rated cable TV shows ever.

The AMC hit series has achieved enduring popularity on Netflix, but its stars say that has not been reflected in their pay.

"I don't get a piece from Netflix on 'Breaking Bad' to be totally honest and that's insane to me," Paul said. "I think a lot of these streamers know that they have been getting away with not paying people a fair wage and now it's time to pony up."

Cranston said they chose Sony for their reunion as the studio behind the Emmy-winning hit, along with its spinoff projects, the AMC prequel series "Better Call Saul" and the Netflix film, "El Camino."

"We're not making them the enemy. They are not villains. These are people that we all will be working with once again at some point," Cranston said. "We just want them to see reality."

Several other casts have joined picket lines during the strike, including actors from "Parks and Recreation" and the cult hit "Jury Duty," drawing a link between popular shows and the actors' strike goals.

Cranston also affirmed SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher's recent comments to The Associated Press that these dual Hollywood strikes are galvanizing a broader movement throughout the country.

"Without organized labor, management will just keep stuffing their pockets. They don't and will not ever just go, 'You know what? I don't think this is being fair to those people. I'm going to pay them more.' It's just not what they do," he said.

Cast members of "Better Call Saul" were also on the picket lines, including Rhea Seehorn and Patrick Fabian, along with the series co-creator, Peter Gould, who has been on strike with the Writers Guild of America since May.

A new Titanic expedition is planned. The US is fighting it, says wreck is a grave site

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — The U.S. government is trying to stop a planned expedition to recover items of historical interest from the sunken Titanic, citing a federal law and an international agreement that treat the shipwreck as a hallowed gravesite.

The expedition is being organized by RMS Titanic Inc., the Georgia-based firm that owns the salvage rights to the world's most famous shipwreck. The company exhibits artifacts that have been recovered from the wreck site at the bottom of the North Atlantic, from silverware to a piece of the Titanic's hull.

The government's challenge comes more than two months after the Titan submersible imploded near the sunken ocean liner, killing five people. But this legal fight has nothing to do with the June tragedy, which involved a different company and an unconventionally designed vessel.

The battle in the U.S. District Court in Norfolk, Virginia, which oversees Titanic salvage matters, hinges instead on federal law and a pact with Great Britain to treat the sunken Titanic as a memorial to the more than 1,500 people who died. The ship hit an iceberg and sank in 1912.

The U.S. argues that entering the Titanic's severed hull — or physically altering or disturbing the wreck — is regulated by federal law and its agreement with Britain. Among the government's concerns is the possible disturbance of artifacts and any human remains that may still exist.

"RMST is not free to disregard this validly enacted federal law, yet that is its stated intent," U.S. lawyers argued in court documents filed Friday. They added that the shipwreck "will be deprived of the protections Congress granted it."

RMST's expedition is tentatively planned for May 2024, according to a report it filed with the court in June.

The company said it plans to take images of the entire wreck. That includes "inside the wreck where deterioration has opened chasms sufficient to permit a remotely operated vehicle to penetrate the hull without interfering with the current structure."

RMST said it would recover artifacts from the debris field and "may recover free-standing objects inside the wreck." Those could include "objects from inside the Marconi room, but only if such objects are not affixed to the wreck itself."

The Marconi room holds the ship's radio — a Marconi wireless telegraph machine — which broadcast the Titanic's increasingly frantic distress signals after the ocean liner hit an iceberg. The messages in Morse

code were picked up by other ships and onshore receiving stations, helping to save the lives of about 700 people who fled in life boats. There had been 2,208 passengers and crew on the Titanic's maiden voyage, from Southampton, England, to New York.

"At this time, the company does not intend to cut into the wreck or detach any part of the wreck," RMST stated.

The company said it would "work collaboratively" with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the U.S. agency that represents the public's interest in the wreck. But RMST said it does not intend to seek a permit.

U.S. government lawyers said the firm can't proceed without one, arguing that RMST needs approval from the U.S. Secretary of Commerce, who oversees NOAA.

The company has not filed a response in court. But in previous cases, it has challenged the constitutionality of U.S. efforts to "infringe" on its salvage rights to a wreck in international waters. The firm has argued that only the court in Norfolk has jurisdiction, and points to centuries of precedent in maritime law.

RMST reiterated that stance in a statement to The Associated Press on Tuesday, noting that the court granted its salvage rights three decades ago. Since then, the firm said it has recovered and conserved thousands of Titanic artifacts, which millions of people have seen.

"The company will continue its work, respectfully preserving the memory and legacy of Titanic, her passengers and crew for the future generations," RMST said.

In 2020, the U.S. government and RMST engaged in a nearly identical legal battle over a proposed expedition that could have cut into the wreck. But the proceedings were cut short by the coronavirus pandemic and never fully played out.

The company's plan then was to retrieve the radio, which sits in a deck house near the grand staircase. An uncrewed submersible was to slip through a skylight or cut the heavily corroded roof. A "suction dredge" would remove loose silt, while manipulator arms could cut electrical cords.

The company said it would exhibit the radio along with stories of the men who tapped out distress calls "until seawater was literally lapping at their feet."

In May 2020, U.S. District Judge Rebecca Beach Smith gave RMST permission, writing that the radio is historically and culturally important and could soon be lost to decay. Smith wrote that recovering the telegraph would "contribute to the legacy left by the indelible loss of the Titanic, those who survived, and those who gave their lives in the sinking."

A few weeks later, the U.S. government filed an official legal challenge against the 2020 expedition, which never happened. The firm indefinitely delayed its plans in early 2021 because of complications wrought by the pandemic.

Guatemala's president-elect faces legal challenges that seek to weaken him. Here's what's happening

By SONIA PÉREZ D. Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Guatemala's Aug. 20 presidential election has been bogged down in court and legal challenges despite the fact the results were clear: Progressive candidate Bernardo Arévalo won about 61% of the vote to conservative Sandra Torres' 39%. After weeks of uncertainty, the top electoral court finally certified Arévalo as the winner Monday.

But federal prosecutors are seeking to suspend his party, throwing into doubt whether he will have any support in congress. And Torres has filed court challenges seeking to overturn the election result, alleging fraud in the vote count — something none of the independent election observer groups reported.

How did it get so complicated?

FIRST, YOU HAVE TO UNDERSTAND CORRUPTION

Governmental corruption and impunity was so bad in Guatemala that in 2006 the country had to call in a United Nations-backed commission, known as CICIG, to combat it.

The commission's work led to some serious results: In 2015, Guatemala became one of the few countries

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in the world to force a sitting president, Otto Pérez Molina, to resign and immediately go to jail, along with his vice president.

The next elected president, Jimmy Morales — and much of Guatemala's political elite — decided things had gone too far. Morales kicked out CICIG in 2019.

THE HUNTERS BECOME THE HUNTED

Under current President Alejandro Giammattei and the attorney general he appointed, Consuelo Porras, the government has targeted criminal investigations not against corruption but against those who investigated and punished it.

Some 30 judges, magistrates and prosecutors involved in the investigation or processing of corruption cases have been forced to flee the country after facing legal action. Opponents and critics have also been targeted.

The U.S. government has cancelled Porras' U.S. visa, calling her actions unjustified.

WHAT DOES THIS HAVE TO DO WITH ARÉVALO?

Arévalo campaigned on one main pledge: cleaning up corruption. That made some in the current administration nervous at the all-too-real prospect of jail time.

Prosecutors claim they found evidence that some of the signatures gathered to register Arévalo's Seed Movement party were illegal. So Porras' office has requested the suspension of his political party — even though the law clearly says that can't be done during a campaign.

IS THIS 'LAWFARE'?

The term 'lawfare' is understood as the use of multiple prosecutions and lawsuits to intimidate, silence or discredit dissidents or opponents. Can it be applied to Guatemala's elections?

Consider this: Prosecutors and courts barred at least three of the most popular candidates from running in the first round on June 25 due to technicalities, in some cases ridiculously small.

And the attorney general's office raided the headquarters of the country's electoral authority hours after it certified the results of the first round to search and seize evidence from voter rolls related to the investigation of Arévalo's party.

IS THERE ANY MERIT TO PROSECUTORS' ALEGATIONS AGAINST ARÉVALO?

Prosecutors say one of the people who signed to register Arévalo's party in 2022 came forward to say his signature was falsified. And the attorney general's office said the names of 12 dead people were found among the 25,000 signatures and as many as 100 might have been falsified.

The office also claims some of the people collecting signatures were paid to do so — something that's legal and commonplace in the United States, for example. Arévalo's supporters say that's a small-potatoes argument for overturning millions of votes.

WHAT'S LIKELY TO HAPPEN?

Giammattei, who has sought to portray himself as above the fray of his attorney general's raids and prosecutions, has said he is willing to meet with Arévalo and fulfill the transfer of power to him Jan. 14.

There seems to be little that could be done to stop Arévalo from taking office, and his opponents' efforts now seem to be concentrated on ensuring he is a weak president with as little legislative support as possible.

Former congressman Roberto Alejos said prosecutors' decision to suspend Arévalo's party — which won 23 seats in congress — could at the very least prevent it from getting key committee assignments. But it's not just politics.

"What prosecutors are doing, intervening in the electoral process, is creating a great deal of legal instability," Alejos said, "and that could affect the economy, tourism, the rule of law and that could affect investment."

10 drugs targeted for Medicare price negotiations as Biden pitches cost reductions

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, TOM MURPHY and AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden touted the potential cost savings of Medicare's first-ever price negotiations for widely used prescription drugs on Tuesday as he struggles to convince Americans that he's improved their lives as he runs for reelection.

The drugs include the blood thinner Eliquis, diabetes treatment Jardiance and eight other medications. The negotiation process was authorized under the Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed last year, capping decades of debate over whether the federal government should be allowed to haggle with pharmaceutical companies.

Any lower prices won't take effect for three years, and the path forward could be further complicated by litigation from drugmakers and heavy criticism from Republicans.

But the effort is a centerpiece of Biden's reelection pitch as the Democrat tries to show Americans he's deserving of a second term because of the work he's doing to lower costs while the country is struggling with inflation. The drug negotiations, like many of Biden's biggest policy moves, will take time to play out, and his challenge is to persuade the public to be patient.

"For all of you out there, I get it, and millions of Americans get it," Biden said at the White House. "I promise you. I'm going to have your back and I'll never stop fighting for you on this issue."

He noted that he got "no help from the other team" — meaning Republicans — when it came to lowering prescription costs.

The drugs on the list announced Tuesday accounted for \$3.4 billion in out-of-pocket costs for Medicare patients last year.

The Medicare program paid more than \$50 billion for the drugs between June 1, 2022, and May 31, according to the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, or CMS.

That includes more than \$16 billion on Eliquis, a total that does not count discounts or rebates that are already negotiated for the drug. The drug from Pfizer and Bristol-Myers Squibb treats blood clots in the legs and lungs and reduces the risk of stroke in people with an irregular heartbeat called atrial fibrillation.

The diabetes treatments Jardiance from Eli Lilly and Co. and Boehringer Ingelheim and Januvia from Merck made the list. It also included Amgen's autoimmune disease treatment Enbrel and Entresto from Novartis, which is used to treat heart failure.

Other drugs on the list include AstraZeneca's diabetes and heart failure treatment Farxiga and three drugs from Johnson & Johnson: the blood thinner Xarelto, the blood cancer treatment Imbruvica and its biggest seller, Stelara, an IV treatment for psoriasis and other inflammatory disorders.

The list also includes several versions of Novo Nordisk's Fiasp, a fast-acting insulin taken around meals.

The announcement Tuesday is another significant step toward taming drug pricing under the Inflation Reduction Act, which was signed by Biden last year. The law also calls for a \$2,000 annual cap on how much people with Medicare have to pay out of pocket for drugs starting in 2025.

In addition, the law already caps out-of-pocket costs for insulin at \$35 a month for Medicare patients.

"We are here today with the firm belief that in the United States of America, no senior should have to choose between whether they fill their prescription or fill their fridge with food," Vice President Kamala Harris said.

For drugs on the list released Tuesday, the government aims to negotiate the lowest maximum fair price. That could help some patients who have coverage but still face big bills like coinsurance payments when they get a prescription.

About 9% of Medicare beneficiaries age 65 and older said in 2021 that they did not fill a prescription or skipped a drug dose due to cost, according to research by the Commonwealth Fund, which studies health care issues.

Currently, pharmacy benefit managers that run Medicare prescription plans negotiate rebates off a drug's price. Those rebates sometimes help reduce premiums customers pay for coverage. But they may not

directly change what a patient spends at the pharmacy counter.

The new drug price negotiations aim “to basically make drugs more affordable while also still allowing for profits to be made,” said Gretchen Jacobson, who researches Medicare issues at Commonwealth.

The federal government will benefit most from any lowered drug prices, noted Larry Levitt, an executive vice president for health policy at KFF, another non-profit that studies health care. But he said that if Medicare spends less on prescription drugs, then premiums for everyone with its drug coverage also should fall.

Drug companies that refuse to be a part of the new negotiation process will be heavily taxed.

The pharmaceutical industry has been gearing up for months to fight these rules. The lobbying group Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America said Tuesday that the drug list announcement stemmed from “a rushed process focused on short-term political gain rather than what is best for patients.”

“Many of the medicines selected for price setting already have significant rebates and discounts due to the robust private market negotiation that occurs in the Part D program today,” PhRMA CEO Stephen J. Ubl said in a statement.

PhRMA representatives also have said pharmacy benefit managers can still restrict access to drugs with negotiated prices by moving the drugs to a tier of their formulary — a list of covered drugs — that would require higher out-of-pocket payments. Pharmacy benefit managers also could require patients to try other drugs first or seek approval before a prescription can be covered.

PhRMA and several drugmakers have filed lawsuits over the administration’s plan.

Republican lawmakers also have blasted the Biden administration, saying companies might pull back on introducing new drugs that could be subjected to future haggling. They’ve also questioned whether the government knows enough to suggest prices for drugs.

CMS plans to meet this fall with drugmakers that have a drug on its list, and government officials say they also plan to hold patient-focused listening sessions. By February 2024, the government will make its first offer on a maximum fair price and then give drugmakers time to respond.

CMS aims to add 15 more drugs to its negotiation list for 2027 and another 15 for 2028. It then plans to add up to 20 more for each year after that.

Lawyers indicted with Trump say they were doing their jobs. But that may be a tough argument to make

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As John Eastman prepared to surrender to Georgia authorities last week for an indictment related to efforts to overturn the 2020 presidential election, he issued a statement denouncing the criminal case as targeting attorneys “for their zealous advocacy on behalf of their clients.”

Another defendant, Rudy Giuliani, struck a similar note, saying he was being indicted for his work as Donald Trump’s attorney. “I never thought I’d get indicted for being a lawyer,” he lamented.

The 18 defendants charged alongside Trump in this month’s racketeering indictment in Fulton County include more than a half-dozen lawyers, and the statements from Eastman and Giuliani provide early foreshadowing of at least one of the defenses they seem poised to raise: that they were merely doing their jobs as attorneys when they maneuvered on Trump’s behalf to undo the results of that election.

The argument suggests a desire to turn at least part of the sprawling prosecution into a referendum on the boundaries of ethical lawyering in a case that highlights anew how Trump’s own attorneys have become entangled over the years in his own legal problems.

But while attorneys do have wide berth to advance untested or unconventional positions, experts say a “lawyers being lawyers” defense will be challenging to pull off to the extent prosecutors can directly link the indicted lawyers to criminal schemes alleged in the indictment. That includes efforts to line up fake electors in Georgia and other states who would falsely assert that Trump, not Democrat Joe Biden, had won their respective contests.

“The law books are replete with examples of lawyers who were disciplined for claiming they were representing their clients,” said Barry Richard, who represented George W. Bush’s winning presidential cam-

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paigned in 2000 in a dispute ultimately decided by the Supreme Court. "Lawyers are required to follow very stringent rules of propriety. And there are certain things you can't do for your clients. You cannot tell the court facts you have reason to know are not true."

A more complicated question, though, is how far lawyers can go in advancing legal theories — even poorly supported ones — to achieve a desired outcome for a client, said Stephen Saltzburg, a George Washington University law professor and former Justice Department official.

"Bad lawyering" is in and of itself not a crime, nor is "testing the waters" of legal arguments, he said.

"The real question is, at what point does a lawyer who knows that the legal theory that that lawyer is espousing has never been accepted anywhere — when does the lawyer cross the line if the lawyer suggests sort of that it is OK, that it's clearly OK?" Saltzburg said. "And that's a fuzzy line."

Of course, attorneys are expected, as Eastman noted in his statement, to zealously represent clients — though he did privately acknowledge that he anticipated the Supreme Court might unanimously dismiss a legal theory he advanced that then-Vice President Mike Pence was entitled to reject the counting of electoral votes.

There's also a long history of election-related lawsuits, none more famous than the 2000 Florida fight between Democrat Al Gore and the Bush campaign. Justice Department counsel Jack Smith acknowledged as much in his own federal indictment against Trump, saying he was entitled like any candidate to file lawsuits challenging ballots and procedures and contest the results through other legal means.

But the Georgia indictment lists numerous acts in which prosecutors allege that lawyers went beyond conventional legal advocacy and engaged themselves in criminal activities.

It alleges, for instance, that former Justice Department official Jeffrey Clark — who has denied any wrongdoing — drafted a memo he wanted to send to Georgia officials falsely claiming that fraud had been identified that could have affected the election outcome in that state. It also accuses another lawyer, Sidney Powell, of plotting to illegally access voting equipment in a rural county in Georgia in an attempt to prove voting fraud claims.

And the indictment says multiple other lawyers — including Kenneth Chesebro, Giuliani and Eastman — were involved in discussions about enlisting fake electors in battleground states won by Biden in place of the legitimate ones. A lawyer for Chesebro has said that each allegation against him related to his work as an attorney; lawyers for Powell declined to comment Tuesday.

"The difference here is between recommending to the client that it may be possible to appoint electors other than those identified by the secretary of state, and then the client does it or doesn't do it," said Stephen Gillers, a legal expert at New York University. "It's different when the lawyer himself or herself proceeds to follow that advice."

He added: "The lawyer as actor, as opposed to the lawyer as advocate, gets less freedom to trespass on legal principles."

The Georgia case continues a pattern of Trump lawyers becoming sucked into his legal woes. His former lawyer and fixer, Michael Cohen, pleaded guilty in 2018 to arranging at Trump's direction a hush money payment to a porn actress who said she had an extramarital affair with Trump years earlier.

More recently, some of Trump's lawyers testified before a federal grand jury investigating his alleged mishandling of classified documents, with statements from one of those attorneys, M. Evan Corcoran, helping form the backbone of an indictment against Trump filed in June.

Richard, who represented the Bush campaign in 2000, said there was no fair comparison to those legitimate court challenges of that era and the alleged misconduct 20 years later. The fighting then was done in court, and once the Supreme Court ruled, the matter was considered resolved.

When it came to that decision, Richard said, "I remember people said to me, 'How is anybody going to govern after this?' I said, 'The Monday after this is over, everybody will go back to work, and everybody will acknowledge that we have a president' — and that's exactly what happened."

Russian mercenary boss Yevgeny Prigozhin is buried in private, ending his tumultuous journey

ST. PETERSBURG, Russia (AP) — A private burial was held for Yevgeny Prigozhin, ending a tumultuous journey from St. Petersburg street thug to Kremlin-financed mercenary leader, following a suspicious plane crash two months after his brief mutiny that challenged the authority of President Vladimir Putin.

His spokespeople said Tuesday a service took place behind closed doors, and directed “those who wish to bid their farewell” to the 62-year-old head of the Wagner private military contractor to go to the Pokrokhovskoye cemetery in his hometown. Their statement ended media speculation on where and when Prigozhin would be laid to rest, with his funeral shrouded in secrecy.

A wooden cross towered over his flower-covered grave. Nearby stood a Russian tricolor and a black Wagner flag. Russian media cited unidentified sources as saying Prigozhin was laid to rest Tuesday without any publicity, per his family’s wishes.

Members of the Russian National Guard were stationed along the fence at the cemetery, steering visitors away after it closed for the day.

Putin’s spokesman said the president would not attend the service. The Russian leader had decried the armed rebellion in June as “treason” and “a stab in the back.”

Russian state television, which for decades has served as the main source of information for the vast majority of Russians, barely covered the funeral at all.

One major channel, Russia 1, dedicated less than one minute of air time to it in its evening news bulletin, only to say that the funeral ceremony took place “without outsiders and the press at the request of the family” and that Prigozhin’s grave is right next to that of his father, who died in 1978. Another popular station, Channel One, ignored it completely in their evening news.

The secrecy and confusion surrounding the funeral of Prigozhin and his top lieutenants reflected a dilemma faced by the Kremlin amid swirling speculation that the crash was likely a vendetta for his June 23-24 uprising.

While it tried to avoid any pomp-filled ceremony for him, the Kremlin couldn’t afford to denigrate Prigozhin, who reportedly received Russia’s highest award for leading Wagner forces in Ukraine and was idolized by many of the country’s hawks.

Putin’s comments on Prigozhin’s death reflected that careful stand. He noted last week that Wagner leaders “made a significant contribution” to the fighting in Ukraine and described Prigozhin as a “talented businessman” and “a man of difficult fate” who had “made serious mistakes in life.”

Sergei Markov, a pro-Kremlin political analyst, noted that Prigozhin has become a legendary figure for his supporters who are increasingly critical of the authorities.

“Prigozhin’s funeral raises an issue of communication between the bureaucratic Russian government system that doesn’t have much political potential and politically active patriotic segment of the Russian public,” Markov said.

The secretive service “became the final stage of a special operation to eliminate him,” said Tatiana Stanovaya, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Russia Eurasia Center.

“Everything was as closed as possible, under full control of the security forces, with distracting maneuvers,” she said in a commentary on her Telegram channel.

The country’s top criminal investigation agency, the Investigative Committee, officially confirmed Prigozhin’s death on Sunday.

The committee didn’t say what might have caused Prigozhin’s business jet to plummet from the sky on Aug. 23, minutes after taking off from Moscow for St. Petersburg. Just before the crash, Prigozhin had reportedly returned from a trip to Africa, where he sought to expand Wagner Group’s activities.

Also on Tuesday, a funeral was held at St. Petersburg’s Northern Cemetery for Wagner’s logistics chief Valery Chekalov, who was among the 10 people killed in the crash. Prigozhin’s second-in-command, Dmitry Utkin, a retired military intelligence officer who gave the mercenary group its name based on his own nom de guerre, also was killed.

A preliminary U.S. intelligence assessment concluded that an intentional explosion caused the plane to crash, and Western officials have pointed to a long list of Putin's foes who have been assassinated. The Kremlin rejected Western allegations the president was behind the crash as an "absolute lie."

Although both were from St. Petersburg, Prigozhin and Putin were not known to be particularly close.

Prigozhin, an ex-convict who earned millions and his nickname "Putin's chef" from lucrative government catering contracts, served Kremlin political interests and helped expand Russia's clout by sending his mercenaries to Syria, Libya, the Central African Republic and other countries. Wagner, one of the most capable elements of Moscow's forces, played a key role in Ukraine where it captured the Ukrainian eastern stronghold of Bakhmut in late May.

The crash came exactly two months after the brutal and profane mercenary boss launched a rebellion against the Russian military leadership. Prigozhin ordered his mercenaries to take over the military headquarters in the southern city of Rostov-on-Don and then began a march on Moscow. They downed several military aircraft, killing more than a dozen pilots.

Putin had vowed to punish the participants but hours later struck a deal that saw Prigozhin ending the mutiny in exchange for amnesty and permission for him and his troops to move to Belarus.

The fate of Wagner, which until recently played a prominent role in Russia's military campaign in Ukraine and was involved in a number of African and Middle Eastern countries, is uncertain.

Putin said Wagner fighters could sign a contract with the Russian military, move to Belarus or retire from service. Several thousand went to Belarus, where they are in a camp southeast of the capital, Minsk.

Native nations on front lines of climate change share knowledge and find support at intensive camps

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

PORT ANGELES, Wash. (AP) — Jeanette Kiokun, the tribal clerk for the Qutekcaq Native Tribe in Alaska, doesn't immediately recognize the shriveled, brown plant she finds on the shore of the Salish Sea or others that were sunburned during the long, hot summer. But a fellow student at a weeklong tribal climate camp does.

They are rosehips, traditionally used in teas and baths by the Skokomish Indian Tribe in Washington state and other tribes.

"It's getting too hot, too quick," Alisa Smith Woodruff, a member of the Skokomish tribe, said of the sun-damaged plant.

Tribes suffer some of the most severe impacts of climate change in the U.S. but often have the fewest resources to respond, which makes the intensive camps on combatting the impact of climate change a vital training ground and community-building space.

People from at least 28 tribes and intertribal organizations attended this year's camp in August in Port Angeles, Washington, and more than 70 tribes have taken part in similar camps organized by the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians across the U.S. since 2016.

They heard from tribal leaders and scientists and learned about a clam garden that is combatting ocean acidification. They visited the Elwha River, where salmon runs were recently restored after the Lower Elwha Klallam Tribe fought to have two dams torn down. They also learned how to make the most of newly available federal funds to add climate staff, restore habitats and reduce carbon emissions. And they set aside time to focus on cultural practices, such as cedar weaving, to unwind from the harsh realities of climate change.

"(What) this camp has done for us is to help us know that there is the network, there is a supporting web out there, that we can help one another," said Jonny Bearcub Stiffarm, a member of the climate advisory board for the Fort Peck Assiniboine and Sioux Tribes in Montana. "So we make new songs. We make new stories. We make new visions that we embrace for the positive outcome of our people. We make new warrior societies, new climate warrior societies."

Knowledge-sharing between tribes is not new. There were trade routes across North America before

colonization. During first contact, tribes on the East Coast would send runners as far west as possible to share the news, said Amelia Marchand, citizen of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation.

"This is kind of like a revitalization and an extension of that," she said.

Kiokun is one of only three fulltime employees for the Qutekcak Native Tribe. In 2022, a landslide cut off a major road and hurled debris into a bay, damaging a popular fishing spot for tribal elders, said Jami Fenn, the tribe's financial grant manager.

Out of last year's camp came a group made up of tribes and Native villages across the Chugach region in Alaska, including the Qutekcak Native Tribe, focused on responding to climate change. The group is now working to get a National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration grant so they can rebuild fish habitats ruined by the landslides and add liaisons with federal entities on climate change issues.

Camp participants include those first starting to consider actions to counter the effects of climate change to those who have long had plans in place.

The Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe in Washington attended for the first time last year. Soon after, they added a staff member focused on climate change, installed their first solar panels, and kicked off a friendly competition with the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation to see which could become carbon neutral by 2032. This year, the tribe co-hosted the camp.

Loni Greninger, Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe vice chair, said a comment from a participant last year had stuck with her, about how the Western red cedar — which is central to the tribe's cultural identity — could die off in the Pacific Northwest because of excessive heat due to climate change.

"To think about a world where there wouldn't be cedar anymore, where I can't smell it, where I can't touch it, where I can't work with it, where I can't weave with it, where I can't use it anymore. That caught my attention," she said. "I don't want to be in a world like that."

This year's camp had added urgency. The federal government has granted more than \$720 million through the Inflation Reduction Act to help tribes plan and adapt to climate change. But Marchand, from the Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians, said navigating these opportunities can be "overwhelming" for tribal staff juggling many responsibilities.

The training helps tribes see "what the low-hanging fruit is ... where they can leverage their energy," she said.

Near the end of the camp, each tribal team presented projects they were working on and discussed the impact of climate change.

The Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes in Montana was among the first tribes in the U.S. to develop a climate response plan, and the tribe's climate change advisory committee chairman willingly shared that with other camp attendees.

"You don't have to steal it, it's yours," Michael Durglo Jr. told the group. "Everything I have is yours."

The Qutekcak Native Tribe is planning a tribal youth climate camp in Alaska, and Durglo has already agreed to teach part of the six-week program.

Kiokun, the tribe's tribal clerk, also plans to help with this work.

"I think I've found a new passion," she said.

After Supreme Court curtails federal power, Biden administration weakens clean water protections

By MICHAEL PHILLIS, MATTHEW DALY and JOHN FLESHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration weakened regulations protecting millions of acres of wetlands Tuesday, saying it had no choice after the Supreme Court sharply limited the federal government's jurisdiction over them.

The rule would require that wetlands be more clearly connected to other waters like oceans and rivers, a policy shift that departs from a half-century of federal rules governing the nation's waterways.

Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Michael Regan said the agency had no alternative after the Supreme Court sharply limited the federal government's power to regulate wetlands that do not have

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a “continuous surface connection” to larger, regulated bodies of water.

Justices boosted property rights over concerns about clean water in a May ruling in favor of an Idaho couple who sought to build a house near a lake. Chantell and Michael Sackett had objected when federal officials required them to get a permit before filling part of the property with rocks and soil.

The ruling was the second decision in as many years in which a conservative majority on the high court narrowed the reach of environmental regulations.

“While I am disappointed by the Supreme Court’s decision in the Sackett case, EPA and Army (Corps of Engineers) have an obligation to apply this decision alongside our state co-regulators,” Regan said in a statement Tuesday.

The rule announced Tuesday revises a rule finalized earlier this year regulating “waters of the United States.” Developers and agriculture groups have long sought to limit the federal government’s power to use the Clean Water Act to regulate waterways, arguing the law should cover fewer types of rivers, streams and wetlands. Environmental groups have long pushed for a broader definition that would protect more waters.

The new rule is highly unusual and responds specifically to the Supreme Court ruling in the Sackett case. Typically, a rule is proposed, the public weighs in and then the federal government releases a final version. This rule changes existing policy to align with the recent Supreme Court decision and is final.

Damien Schiff, a senior attorney with the Pacific Legal Foundation who represented the Sacketts, said the Biden administration properly changed rules to eliminate unlawful criteria to protect wetlands. “Kudos to the agencies,” he said.

Still, Schiff said the rule ignored other ways that the court limited the reach of the Clean Water Act to protect certain streams and ditches. “I think this attempt to keep it vague, whether it is wisely strategic in a political sense, is just not legally sustainable,” he said.

A coalition of business groups was unhappy with the rule, too.

“Even worse, the agencies blocked public input and engagement in the revision process,” said Courtney Briggs, chair of the industry group Waters Advocacy Coalition in a statement.

The Supreme Court ruling was a win for developer and agriculture groups. It said federally protected wetlands must be directly adjacent to a “relatively permanent” waterway “connected to traditional interstate navigable waters,” such as a river or ocean.

They also must have a “continuous surface connection with that water,” Justice Samuel Alito wrote.

The court’s decision broke with a 2006 opinion by former Justice Anthony Kennedy that said wetlands were regulated if they had a “significant nexus” to larger bodies of water. That had been the standard for evaluating whether developers needed a permit before they could discharge into wetlands. Opponents had long said the standards was vague, hard to interpret and generally unworkable.

Justice Elena Kagan wrote in a separate opinion that the majority’s decision was political, improperly weakening regulatory powers Congress gave the federal government.

The rule issued Tuesday removes the “significant nexus” test from consideration when identifying tributaries and other waters as federally protected.

The amended rule should “provide clarity and a path forward consistent with the (Supreme Court) ruling,” the EPA said.

Because the sole purpose of the new rule is to amend specific provisions of the previous rule that were rendered invalid by the high court, the new rule will take effect immediately, the EPA said.

Julian Gonzalez, senior legislative counsel with Earthjustice, said the change is likely to weaken protections for ephemeral streams, which only flow after rainstorms and are especially common in the arid Southwest.

Kelly Moser, senior attorney at the Southern Environmental Law Center, said the new rule overturns decades of federal law and practice. “The rule, like the Sackett decision itself, severely restricts the federal government’s ability to protect critical waters including wetlands that shield communities from damaging floods and pollution.”

Reducing wetland protections “while two hurricanes are barreling off our coasts is nothing to celebrate,”

she added.

Michael Connor, assistant Army secretary for civil works, said that with publication of the revised rule, the Army Corps will resume issuing jurisdictional decisions that were paused after the Sackett decision. "Moving forward, the Corps will continue to protect and restore the nation's waters in support of jobs and healthy communities," he said in a statement.

In December, the Biden administration finalized its regulations basing them on definitions in place prior to 2015 that federal officials hoped were durable enough to survive a court challenge. They protected many small streams, wetlands and other waters and repealed a Trump-era rule that environmentalists said left far too many of those waterways unregulated.

In recent years, depending on the political party in the White House, the power of the Clean Water Act has varied sharply. The Obama administration sought to enlarge federal power to protect waterways. The Trump administration rolled them back as part of a broader curtailment of environmental regulations.

It's been a political issue, too. Earlier this year, Congress approved a resolution overturning the Biden administration's water protections. Republicans argued the White House had imposed rules that were a burden to businesses and agriculture and the Senate voted in favor 53-43, persuading four Democrats and Independent Sen. Krysten Sinema of Arizona to side with Republicans and vote in favor. Biden vetoed the resolution.

Man who killed 3 at a Dollar General in Jacksonville used to work at a dollar store, sheriff says

By SARAH BRUMFIELD, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

JACKSONVILLE, Fla. (AP) — The Jacksonville shooter used to work at a dollar store and stopped in at one before a security guard's presence apparently led him to instead target the Dollar General down the road, where he killed three people.

He worked at a Dollar Tree from October 2021 to July 2022, Jacksonville Sheriff T.K. Waters said at a news conference Monday. And, the sheriff said, he stopped at a Family Dollar store Saturday before pulling into a parking lot at Edward Waters University, where he donned tactical gear. He left when security approached.

"Based off what we saw: him stopping off at the Family Dollar and working at a Dollar Tree previously and then him going to Dollar General, that was his intent the whole time," Waters said. "Why that store? Still hard to tell."

In audio released Tuesday from a 911 call, the gunman's father said his son had stopped taking psychiatric medication and stayed in his room after dropping out of college and losing his job. Other records show the 21-year-old had encounters with police as a teenager, including one involving a suicide threat that led to an involuntary psychiatric evaluation.

Security footage from the Family Dollar shows him walking in and leaving a few minutes later with a small shopping bag. But after he reached his car, Waters said, a security guard pulled into the lot and the shooter left.

Waters believes the guard's presence deterred him. It appeared the shooter wanted to take action at the Family Dollar, but he got tired of waiting, Waters said.

Minutes later, the gunman made his way to the Dollar General in the predominantly Black New Town neighborhood and killed Angela Michelle Carr, 52, an Uber driver who was shot in her car; store employee A.J. Laguerre, 19, who was shot as he tried to flee; and customer Jerrald Gallion, 29, who was shot as he entered the store. The gunman then killed himself.

The Dollar Tree and Family Dollar chains have the same owner. Dollar General is a separate company.

Zachary Faison Jr., president of Edward Waters University, had said Monday that the security officer, tipped off by observant students, likely stopped the killer from carrying out his racist attack at the historically Black institution. When the officer approached the shooter's vehicle, the driver sped off, hitting a curb and narrowly avoiding a brick column, Faison said.

But Waters said he doesn't believe the university was the intended location for the rampage. He noted two African American males were in the vehicle next to the shooter's in the lot.

Jacksonville is home to nearly 1 million people, one third of whom are Black. The city elected its first Black mayor in 2011.

The weekend shooting happened as the city was preparing to commemorate what it calls Ax Handle Saturday, when a white mob used baseball bats and ax handles to beat peaceful Black demonstrators protesting segregation at a downtown lunch counter on Aug. 27, 1960.

Authorities identified the shooter as Ryan Palmeter, who they said was armed and ready to carry out an attack on Black people. During the attack, authorities said, Palmeter texted his father and told him to break into his room and check his computer.

Waters has said a journal Palmeter's father found in his room was "the diary of a madman" that made it clear he hated Black people.

Forty-five minutes after the shooting began, Palmeter's father called 911 to warn of upsetting messages he had discovered in his son's room, according to heavily redacted audio of the call released Tuesday by the sheriff's office in Clay County, outside Jacksonville.

Details given in the call about the writings, which authorities said included "homicidal and suicidal" threats, were removed from the audio.

During the nearly 10-minute phone call, Stephen Palmeter told the dispatcher that his son had stopped taking his psychiatric medication and rarely left his room since dropping out of a local college.

"He doesn't go anywhere," the father said. "He flunked out of Flagler College, moved home a couple years ago, had a job for awhile at Home Depot and lost that job, and pretty much has been living in his room."

Additional records released Tuesday by Clay County show Palmeter had at least two encounters with police as a teenager. In 2016, officers responded to a domestic violence call following a physical fight between Palmeter, then 14, and his 20-year-old brother.

The following year, Palmeter fled his parents' home on a bicycle, leaving behind a note indicating plans to take his own life because of stress and painful thoughts. He was taken into custody under a Florida law that allows involuntary psychiatric evaluations for up to 72 hours.

In his writings, Palmeter indicated he was by himself, Waters said Monday.

"I'll tell you, he didn't like anyone," the sheriff said. "He may say that someone he was all right with, and then later on, he will say something disparaging about that group of people. He didn't like government. He didn't like the left or right, if that's what we're talking about. He didn't like anything."

Florida has a so-called red flag law designed to seize guns from those in mental health crises, or who threaten violence, before they harm someone. Waters has said he doesn't think the system failed in Palmeter's case.

The writings should be released publicly in a week or two, he said.

Palmeter used two guns — a Glock handgun and an AR-15 style semi-automatic rifle. Authorities said the weapons were purchased legally this year despite once being involuntarily committed for a mental health exam.

The math problem: Kids are still behind. How can schools catch them up?

By ARIEL GILREATH of The Hechinger Report and JACKIE VALLEY of The Christian Science Monitor

On a breezy July morning in South Seattle, a dozen elementary-aged students ran math relays behind an elementary school.

One by one, they raced to a table, where they scribbled answers to multiplication questions before sprinting back to high-five their teammate. These students are part of a summer program run by the nonprofit School Connect WA, designed to help them catch up on math and literacy skills lost during the pandemic. There are 25 students in the program, and all of them are one to three grades behind.

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One 11-year-old boy couldn't do two-digit subtraction. Thanks to the program and his mother, who has helped him each night, he's caught up. Now, he says math is challenging, but he likes it.

Other kids haven't fared so well.

Across the country, schools are scrambling to catch up students in math as post-pandemic test scores reveal the depth of missing skills. On average, students' math knowledge is about half a school year behind where it should be, according to education analysts.

Children lost ground on reading tests, too, but the math declines were particularly striking. Experts say virtual learning complicated math instruction, making it tricky for teachers to guide students over a screen or spot weaknesses in problem-solving skills. Plus, parents were more likely to read with their children at home than practice math.

The result: Students' math skills plummeted across the board, exacerbating racial and socioeconomic inequities in math performance. And students aren't bouncing back as quickly as educators hoped, supercharging worries about how they will fare in high school and whether science, tech and medical fields will be available to them.

The Education Reporting Collaborative, a coalition of eight newsrooms, is documenting the math crisis facing schools and highlighting progress. Members of the Collaborative are AL.com, The Associated Press, The Christian Science Monitor, The Dallas Morning News, The Hechinger Report, Idaho Education News, The Post and Courier in South Carolina, and The Seattle Times.

Students had been making incremental progress on national math tests since 1990. But over the past year, fourth and eighth grade math scores slipped to the lowest levels in about 20 years, according to data from the National Assessment of Educational Progress, known as the "Nation's Report Card."

"It's a generation's worth of progress lost," said Andrew Ho, a professor at Harvard University's Graduate School of Education.

At Moultrie Middle School in Mount Pleasant, South Carolina, Jennifer Matthews has seen the pandemic fallout in her eighth grade classes. Her students have shown indifference to understanding her pre-algebra and Algebra I lessons.

"They don't allow themselves to process the material. They don't allow themselves to think, 'This might take a day to understand or learn,'" she said.

And recently students have been coming to her classes with gaps in their understanding of math concepts. Basic fractions, for instance, continue to stump many of them, she said.

Using federal pandemic relief money, some schools have added tutors or piloted new curriculum approaches in the name of academic recovery. But that money has a looming expiration date: The September 2024 deadline for allocating funds will arrive before many children have caught up.

Like other districts across the country, Jefferson County Schools in Birmingham, Alabama, saw students' math skills take a nosedive from 2019 to 2021. Leveraging pandemic aid, the district placed math coaches in all of their middle schools.

The coaches help teachers learn new and better ways to teach students. About 1 in 5 public schools in the United States have a math coach, according to federal data. The efforts appear to be paying off: State testing shows math scores have started to inch back up for most of the Jefferson County middle schools.

In Pittsburgh's school system, which serves a student population that is 53% African American, special education teacher Ebonie Lamb said it's "emotionally exhausting" to see the inequities between student groups. But she believes those academic gaps can be closed through culturally relevant lessons, and targeting teaching to each student's skill level.

Lamb said she typically asks students to do a "walk a mile in my shoes" project in which they design shoes and describe their lives. It's a way she can learn more about them as individuals. Ultimately, those connections help on the academic front. Last year, she and a co-teacher taught math in a small group format that allowed students to master skills at their own pace.

"All students in the class cannot follow the same, scripted curriculum and be on the same problem all the time," she said.

Adding to the challenge of catching kids up is debate over how math should be taught. Over the years, experts say, the pendulum has swung between procedural learning, such as teaching kids to memorize how to solve problems step-by-step, and conceptual understanding, in which students grasp underlying math relationships.

"Stereotypically, math is that class that people don't like. ... For so many adults, math was taught just as memorization," said Kevin Dykema, president of the National Council of Teachers of Mathematics. "When people start to understand what's going on, in whatever you're learning but especially in math, you develop a new appreciation for it."

Teaching math should not be an either-or situation, said Sarah Powell, a professor at the University of Texas at Austin who researches math instruction. A shift too far in the conceptual direction, she said, risks alienating students who haven't mastered the foundational skills.

"We actually do have to teach, and it is less sexy and it's not as interesting," she said.

In Spring, Texas, parent Aggie Gambino has often found herself searching YouTube for math videos. Giada, one of her twin 10-year-old daughters, has dyslexia and also struggles with math, especially word problems. Gambino says helping her daughter has proved challenging, given instructional approaches that differ from the way she was taught.

She wishes her daughter's school would send home information on how students are being taught.

"The more parents understand how they're being taught," she said, "the better participant they can be in their child's learning."

Even at a nationally recognized magnet school, the lingering impact of the pandemic on students' math skills is apparent. At the Townview School of Science and Engineering in Dallas, the incoming ninth graders in Lance Barasch's summer camp course needed to relearn the meaning of words like "term" and "coefficient."

"Then you can go back to what you're really trying to teach," he said.

Barasch wasn't surprised that the teens were missing some skills after their chaotic middle school years. The hope is that by taking a step back, students can begin to move forward.

When it comes to the Hollywood strikes, it's not just the entertainment industry that's being hurt

By KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — The company had struggled for years, tossed around by pandemic-induced production shutdowns that began in March 2020. Last year, though, business for Valentino's Costume Group had finally picked back up.

Hoping to capitalize on that good fortune, the shop moved in January to a North Hollywood space twice the size of its old building.

Then Hollywood's screenwriters and actors went on strike. Now, says co-owner Shon LeBlanc, Valentino's can no longer afford to pay its rent.

"My chest is tightening because the money is so tight," says LeBlanc, bemoaning the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers' apparent lack of urgency to try to reach an agreement with the unions. "When is the mayor going to step in and say, 'I'm ordering you guys to figure something out because you're about to collapse the economy in Los Angeles?'"

It has been well over 100 days since members of the Writers Guild of America stopped working, and more than a month since the actors union joined them. LeBlanc's is just one story of many detailing the financial ripple effects.

Few corners of the entertainment industry have been left unscathed

From studio rentals and set construction to dry cleaning for costumes and transportation to sets, it's hard to find a corner of the Los Angeles economy that has entirely escaped the reverberations.

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"A movie set in one day can generate tens of thousands of dollars," says Kevin Klowden, chief strategist with the Milken Institute, a think tank that researches social and economic issues. "Depending on the level of activity, it can be hundreds of thousands of dollars."

The last writers strike, more than 15 years ago, took three months to resolve and is conservatively estimated to have cost \$2.1 billion in lost output. This time around, the number will be harder to measure given how much production costs, locations and timelines have changed in recent years thanks to technological improvements and increased globalization.

"We tend to think of productions as sort of a self-contained thing," Klowden says, while in reality, a production often spans companies and even countries. Projects are often "shipped off" to New Zealand for the addition of visual effects, he cites as an example. "The larger a production is, the more likely you are to see a whole bunch of different tax credit mentions at the end."

Both guilds are seeking to address issues brought about by the dominance of streaming services, which have changed all aspects of production, from how projects are written to when they're released.

For the writers, the guild has said the use of small staffs, known as "mini rooms" (a riff on the notion of the "writers' room"), for shorter time periods has made a living income hard to achieve. Actors' concerns include protections on the use of artificial intelligence.

Although talks between the WGA and the AMPTP have resumed, there are no plans between the actors and studios to return to the bargaining table.

"I'm not really understanding what the silent treatment is," SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher told The Associated Press last week. "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."

In an earnings call at the beginning of August, Hudson Pacific executives tried to assuage concerns about the financial impact that the strikes are having on their businesses, while still conceding the reality behind those fears. The company owns both Quixote and Sunset Studios, two major equipment and studio rental companies in the entertainment industry.

"We're all hugely aware of the shrapnel around the industry in general and all of the residual businesses that are getting affected. It will start to feel fairly painful," warned its chair and CEO Victor Coleman in response to questions of how long the strikes may last. "It will be damaging. And I think everybody is very cognizant of that."

The fallout reaches beyond entertainment, into all corners of LA

The uncertain duration of the strikes looms large over every business feeling the financial effects, with fallout spreading well beyond the entertainment industry. Restaurants, coffee shops, even nail salons that neighbor major studios — they're all desperate for a quick resolution.

Patys Restaurant, a Toluca Lake staple that boasts regulars including Steve Carell and Adam Sandler, has seen a major slump in business from diners and catering orders, according to owner George Metsos. He cites lost businesses from obvious patrons — actors, writers, crew members — but also speaks of other regulars who aren't coming in: electricians, set carpenters and the drivers who stop in for breakfast on their way to work at the nearby valley studios.

Emmanuel Pelargos, who owns Astro Burger across the street from Paramount Studios in Hollywood, says the regular presence of writers and actors on the picket lines has not offset the decline in business from halted productions.

"They come in sometimes," he says of the picketers, "but it's mostly to use the bathroom."

Corrie Sommers, vice president of the Toluca Lake Chamber of Commerce, says the timing of the strikes — on the heels of financial recovery from the pandemic — hits small businesses particularly hard.

"The strike ... has just set everybody backwards again. Only this time, there's not the aid that is needed," Sommers says. "No one's saying, 'Here's some free money to bail you out. Here's some money to float you through.' That's not there anymore. And it's affecting everybody."

Sommers, also a real estate agent in the area, cites multiple clients who were interested in buying homes but changed their minds.

"I've personally had about five buyers in the last three months say, 'I'm going to have to wait until next

the AP in a June interview.

Arévalo easily beat Torres in the Aug. 20 presidential runoff. According to the official count, the progressive candidate obtained 60.9% of the valid votes cast, against 37.2% for the right-wing Torres. The party also won 23 seats in the 160-seat Congress.

His win has been the source of a legal back-and-forth between various governmental entities and courts, some staffed with officials who have been sanctioned by the United States on charges of corruption. He has faced allegations of voter fraud by Torres, legal challenges and more.

Eight days after the runoff, Torres still hasn't conceded defeat and outgoing President Alejandro Giammattei hasn't said anything about the latest developments.

"It's obviously another attempt to subvert Semilla's (the Seed Movement's) path to power," said Alex Papadovassilakis, a Guatemala-based investigator for InSight Crime focused on crime and corruption. "I think we're entering uncharted waters."

Arrest warrants for electoral officials and raids to the party's headquarters have also caused concern in the international community and among Guatemalans.

Earlier this week, the Organization of American States' human rights commission asked that Guatemala provide protection for Arévalo after reports emerged of a possible plot to kill him.

Arévalo's victory has left much of the country's political establishment reeling, while his supporters have held protests against attempts to thwart his taking office.

United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres expressed concern about the attempts to undermine the results of Guatemala's presidential election, a U.N. spokeswoman said earlier.

The 64-year-old son of former President Juan José Arévalo was born in Uruguay, where his father was in exile following the ouster in a 1954 CIA-backed coup of his successor President Jacobo Árbenz, whom the U.S. saw as a threat during the Cold War.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis faces Black leaders' anger after racist killings in Jacksonville

By STEVE PEOPLES and BRENDAN FARRINGTON Associated Press
TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Ron DeSantis scoffed when the NAACP issued a travel advisory this spring warning Black people to use "extreme care" if traveling to Florida.

The leading civil rights group argued that the state's loose gun laws and the Republican governor's "anti-woke" campaign to deny the existence of systemic racism created a culture of "open hostility towards African Americans and people of color."

Just three months later, DeSantis is leading his state through the aftermath of a racist attack that left three African Americans dead. Black leaders in Florida — and across the nation — say they're outraged by his actions and rhetoric ahead of the shooting.

"Gov. DeSantis has created and pushed a narrative of division and hate that is anti-Black," said Rev. Jeffrey Rumlin, pastor of The Dayspring Church in Jacksonville, where three Black people were gunned down at a Dollar General store over the weekend by a white man with a swastika emblazoned on his assault rifle.

Rumlin criticized DeSantis for not explicitly describing the killer as a racist at a Sunday vigil in Jacksonville. DeSantis was booed at the vigil, where he called the shooter "a major-league scumbag" and said, "We are not going to let people be targeted based on their race."

The Florida governor, also responding this week to a hurricane bearing down on much of his state, has confronted multiple challenges on race since launching his presidential campaign. He has been criticized by Republican rivals on Florida's new education standards on slavery while losing ground against former President Donald Trump, the front-runner in the GOP primary.

Ever defiant, DeSantis' team rejected suggestions that he did not adequately condemn the weekend shooting and has more broadly ignored the concerns of the state's African American community. The Republican governor scored an overwhelming reelection last fall that included flipping the traditional Democratic stronghold of Miami-Dade County, which has a majority Latino population. He made modest

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gains among Black voters.

"This shooting was a terrible tragedy, and it is reprehensible that The Associated Press has decided to collect and amplify false talking points as 'reporting' on this horrific event," said DeSantis campaign spokesman Bryan Griffin. "Ron DeSantis has condemned these racially motivated murders repeatedly in the strongest language possible. ... He will not tolerate racial hatred or violence in Florida, and we reject your politicization of this horrible event."

The tragedy cast a shadow across the Republican presidential campaign this week as candidates faced uncomfortable questions about the party's increasing appeal among white supremacists and the GOP's fight against so-called "woke" policies on race and gender. While DeSantis has not mentioned his "war on woke" in recent days, cultural issues have been the centerpiece of his campaign.

Virtually all of the candidates have embraced a similar message aimed at appealing to the GOP's white conservative base by downplaying the existence of racism in America and restricting LGBTQ rights. To win the general election next fall, the Republican nominee will likely need to appeal to a much more diverse group of voters. But the primary fight won't be decided for several months.

Sen. Tim Scott, one of three Black Republicans running for president, called on his party to speak out against the latest tragedy as he campaigned in his home state of South Carolina.

"I think we should all be standing up and saying that any act of violence against someone very purely because of the color of your skin is terrible," he told reporters. "We saw three African Americans die because of the color of their skin over the weekend. That's devastating."

He avoided answering directly when asked if the Republican Party has done enough to denounce white supremacist violence.

"The question is, have humans done enough to talk about racism and discrimination and the use of violence? And I think that's the responsibility of every single American — the Republican Party, Democrat Party, no party affiliation," Scott said.

In a radio interview with conservative commentator Hugh Hewitt, former United Nations ambassador Nikki Haley said there was no clear explanation for such violence.

"There's a lot of hate online with social media. We've got a lot of mental health issues. And you combine that with the rhetoric that is happening in America of division and just being able to hide behind something on social media and getting angry, it causes for a bad cocktail," said Haley, who was serving as South Carolina's governor when a racist gunman attacked a Black church and killed nine people. "And when you get that, people die."

Haley, whose parents immigrated to South Carolina from India, declared in her presidential announcement speech that America is not a racist nation.

Republicans have little political incentive to appeal to voters of color — in the primary phase of the presidential campaign, at least.

One-third of Americans (35%) say racism is "a very big problem" in the United States, according to a June poll from the Pew Research Center. Just 14% of Republicans see racism as a very significant issue compared with 55% of Democrats.

Meanwhile, one quarter of Republicans believe that being white hurts a person's ability to get ahead, according to an April study from the Pew Research Center. Republicans are about as likely to say that being Black helps (33%) a person's ability to get ahead in the U.S. as to say it hurts (34%) their ability to advance.

African American leaders have decried what they call a pattern of "policy violence" against people of color imposed by the DeSantis administration that reached a low point after the recent release of its public school curriculum on Black history.

Florida State House Democratic Leader Fentrice Driskell argued DeSantis' policies on race combine to embolden racists and extremists.

She pointed to the Republican governor's Stop-WOKE Act, which limits discussions of race in schools and businesses; his banning of diversity and equity inclusion at Florida colleges; and the newly approved Black history curriculum that suggests there were benefits to slavery. She also noted DeSantis' loosening of gun laws, including a new law that allows people to carry guns without a permit or training.

year because I don't know what's happening," she says.

While many on strike acknowledge the financial burdens on both peers in the industry and their neighbors outside of it, the writers are standing by their decision with renewed vigor on the picket lines after the much larger actors guild joined them.

Luvh Rakhe, a member of the WGA negotiating committee who has written for hit shows like "It's Always Sunny in Philadelphia" and "New Girl," is acutely aware of the financial costs. But he believes people across industries and professions know it is necessary.

"I don't think anyone is, like, blasé and happy about the momentary disruption to their lives," Rakhe says, "but they understand why it happened and what it is hoping to achieve."

Despite the burdens being placed on people in peripheral lines of work, many of them say there is a general sense of solidarity. LeBlanc, the Valentino's co-owner, continues to underscore his support, even amid the uncertain future of his 25-year-old business. (To answer his question, Los Angeles Mayor Karen Bass hasn't indicated she will intervene, but did say in a statement in early August that she is "ready to personally engage with all the stakeholders in any way possible to help get this done.")

To keep the shop afloat, Valentino's has started a GoFundMe to pay the rent for now. LeBlanc is hopeful that if they can raise enough money for the next month or so, Halloween and school productions starting back up will get them through the rest of the year.

"We do have things coming up," he has assured the landlord. "We just need to get some money in here to get us over the hump."

Guatemala progressive's presidential victory certified, but his party is suspended

By SONIA PÉREZ D. and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

GUATEMALA CITY (AP) — Progressive candidate Bernardo Arévalo was confirmed the winner of Guatemala's presidential election by the country's Supreme Electoral Tribunal on Monday, but the same day another government body ordered his political party suspended.

Arévalo has faced a slew of legal challenges and allegations of irregularities since his unexpected victory over a candidate favored by the country's conservative elite.

Arévalo appears certain to take office as president on Jan. 14, but it was not clear whether his Seed Movement lawmakers would be able to take their seats in the country's Congress.

Arévalo called the suspension ruling legally void and said his party would appeal it.

"As of this moment, no one can stop me from taking office on Jan. 14," he told a news conference.

The electoral registry's ruling arose from an investigation into the Seed Movement by Guatemala's attorney general's office for alleged irregularities in the gathering of signatures for its formation as a party.

If the Seed Party appeals the ruling, as promised, the case will be taken to the Supreme Electoral Tribunal.

The Tribunal outranks the electoral registry, so the victory by Arévalo and the seats won in parliament by Seed Movement lawmakers in the first round elections appear confirmed. But the impact of the suspension of their party would have is unclear.

The announcements come after one of the most tumultuous elections in the Central American nation's recent history, which has put to test Guatemala's democracy.

At a time when Guatemalans, hungry for change, have grown disillusioned with endemic corruption, Arévalo and other opponents of the country's elite faced waves of judicial attacks in an attempt to knock them out of the race.

Arévalo, the little-known son of a former president, shocked much of the country by emerging as a top contender in the first round of presidential voting. He failed to get enough support to win outright and headed to a runoff vote against former first lady Sandra Torres. His rise had come after a handful of other candidates were disqualified.

Arévalo rapidly gained support, campaigning on social progress and railing against corruption.

"This message generated, aroused hope, mobilized people who were fed up with corruption," he told

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"We've given warnings — don't pass this legislation because it will only inflame tensions, don't pass this bad bill because it will promote vigilantism, don't do this because it will divide our communities," Driskell said. "He has courted support from the far right. He plays footsies with it. This rhetoric was always going to lead to violence."

Democratic Rep. Angie Nixon, who represents the district where the weekend murders took place, oscillated between angry shouts, tears and profanity as she condemned DeSantis in an interview.

"He refuses to use the word Black. He refuses to call that man a racist. He calls him a scumbag. No!" Nixon said. "He's tiptoeing around the true issue because he's worried that his poll numbers will drop with the base of voters that he has religiously went after."

DeSantis derided the NAACP's travel advisory as a "political stunt" back in May when he launched his presidential campaign.

"Claiming that Florida is unsafe is a total farce," DeSantis said in a conversation with Elon Musk. "I mean, are you kidding me? You look at cities around this country, they are awash in crime. In Florida, our crime rate is at a 50-year low."

On Monday, NAACP President Derrick Johnson said DeSantis deserves real blame for the weekend shooting.

"What Gov. DeSantis has done is created an atmosphere for such tragedies to take place," Johnson said. "This is exactly why we issued the travel advisory."

All assembly lines at Toyota's auto plants in Japan have been shut down by computer problems

By YURI KAGEYAMA AP Business Writer

TOKYO (AP) — All 28 vehicle assembly lines at Toyota's 14 auto plants in Japan shut down Tuesday over a problem in its computer system that deals with incoming auto parts.

The automaker doesn't believe the problem was caused by a cyberattack but the cause is still under investigation, said spokeswoman Sawako Takeda.

Toyota said later that production will restart on Wednesday.

"We apologize for all the troubles we have caused," it said in a statement.

Toyota declined to say what models being produced might be affected.

The shutdown comes after a shortage of computer chips and other auto parts stalled production in Asian nations affected by social restrictions over the coronavirus pandemic.

The chips shortage woes had only recently started to ease for Japan's top automaker, which makes the Camry sedan, Prius hybrid, Lexus luxury brand.

Today in History: August 30, Thurgood Marshall confirmed as first Black Supreme Court justice

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Aug. 30, the 242nd day of 2023. There are 123 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Aug. 30, 2021, the United States completed its withdrawal from Afghanistan, ending America's longest war with the Taliban back in power, as Air Force transport planes carried a remaining contingent of troops from Kabul airport. After watching the last U.S. planes disappear into the sky over Afghanistan, Taliban fighters fired their guns into the air, celebrating victory after a 20-year insurgency.

On this date:

In 1861, Union Gen. John C. Fremont instituted martial law in Missouri and declared slaves there to be free. (However, Fremont's emancipation order was countermanded by President Abraham Lincoln.)

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In 1941, during World War II, German forces approaching Leningrad cut off the remaining rail line out of the city.

In 1945, U.S. Gen. Douglas MacArthur arrived in Japan to set up Allied occupation headquarters.

In 1963, the "Hot Line" communications link between Washington and Moscow went into operation.

In 1967, the Senate confirmed the appointment of Thurgood Marshall as the first Black justice on the U.S. Supreme Court.

In 1983, Guion (GY'-un) S. Bluford Jr. became the first Black American astronaut to travel in space as he blasted off aboard the Challenger.

In 1991, Azerbaijan (ah-zur-by-JAHN') declared its independence, joining the stampede of republics seeking to secede from the Soviet Union.

In 1992, the television series "Northern Exposure" won six Emmy Awards, including best drama series, while "Murphy Brown" received three Emmys, including best comedy series.

In 1993, "The Late Show with David Letterman" premiered on CBS-TV.

In 1997, Americans received word of the car crash in Paris that claimed the lives of Princess Diana, her boyfriend, Dodi Fayed (DOH'-dee FY'-ehd), and their driver, Henri (AHN'-ree) Paul. (Because of the time difference, it was August 31 where the crash occurred.)

In 2005, a day after Hurricane Katrina hit, floods were covering 80 percent of New Orleans, looting continued to spread and rescuers in helicopters and boats picked up hundreds of stranded people.

In 2007, in a serious breach of nuclear security, a B-52 bomber armed with six nuclear warheads flew cross-country unnoticed; the Air Force later punished 70 people.

Ten years ago: Indonesia's highest court upheld a death sentence for Lindsay Sandiford, a British woman convicted of smuggling \$2.5 million worth of cocaine into the resort island of Bali. Seamus Heaney, who won the Nobel Prize for literature and gained a global reputation as Ireland's greatest poet since William Butler Yeats, died in Dublin at age 74.

Five years ago: A Los Angeles man was arrested and charged with making a series of phone calls threatening to kill journalists at The Boston Globe for what he allegedly called "treasonous" attacks on President Donald Trump. (Robert Chain later pleaded guilty to seven counts of making threatening communications; he is scheduled for sentencing in September.) The president told Congress that he would be canceling pay raises that were due in January for most civilian federal employees, citing budget constraints.

One year ago: Mikhail Gorbachev, who as the last leader of the Soviet Union waged a losing battle to salvage a crumbling empire but produced extraordinary reforms that led to the end of the Cold War, making him one of the most important political figures of the 20th century, died at age 91. Ukraine claimed to have destroyed bridges and ammunition depots and pounded command posts in a surge of fighting in the Russian-occupied south, fueling speculation that its long-awaited counteroffensive to try to turn the tide of war was underway. Russia said it repelled the attack and inflicted heavy casualties. Charlbi Dean, a South African actor and model who had a breakout role in "Triangle of Sadness," which won the top prize at the Cannes Film Festival and would go on to be nominated for three Oscars, died at age 32.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Elizabeth Ashley is 84. Actor-turned politician Ben Jones is 82. Actor John Kani is 81. Cartoonist R. Crumb is 80. Olympic gold medal skier Jean-Claude Killy (zhahn-KLOHD' kee-LEE') is 80. Comedian Lewis Black is 75. Actor Timothy Bottoms is 72. Actor David Paymer is 69. Jazz musician Gerald Albright is 66. Actor Michael Chiklis is 60. Actor Michael Michele is 57. Country singer Sherrie Austin is 52. Rock singer-musician Lars Frederiksen (Rancid) is 52. Actor Cameron Diaz is 51. TV personality Lisa Ling is 50. Rock singer-musician Aaron Barrett (Reel Big Fish) is 49. Actor Raúl Castillo is 46. Actor Michael Gladis is 46. MLB pitcher Adam Wainwright is 42. Former tennis player Andy Roddick is 41. Singer Rachael Price (Lake Street Dive) is 38. Rock musician Ryan Ross is 37. Actor Johanna Braddy is 36. Actor Cameron Finley is 36.