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Wednesday, Sept. 6

Senior Menu: Baked cod, parsley buttered potatoes, coleslaw, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

St. John's Lutheran Bible Study, 2:45 pm.; Confirmation, 3:45 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.; Confirmation, 6 p.m.; League, 6:30 p.m., Youth Gathering meeting, 7 p.m.

Groton Chamber meeting, noon, at City Hall
Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm

Groton Chamber meeting, noon, at City Hall
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Sept. 7

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meatsauce, tossed salad with dressing, pears, garlic bread.

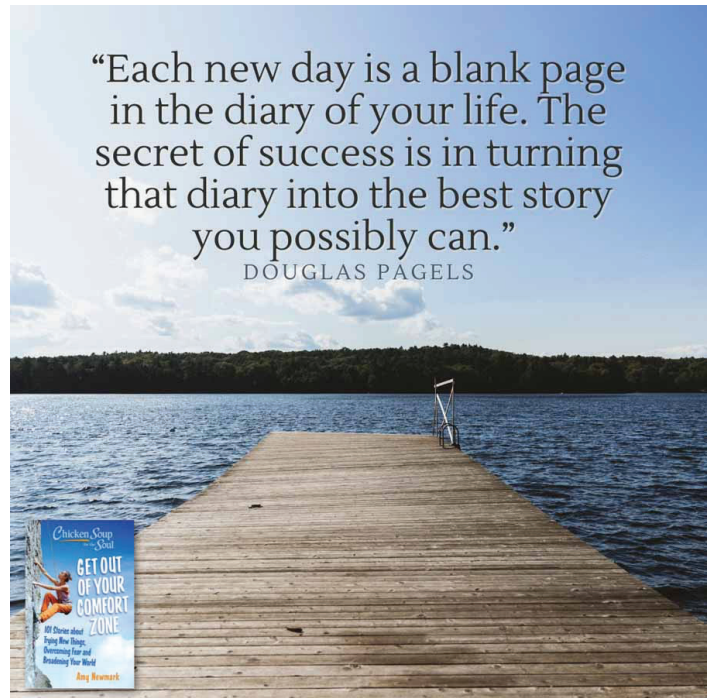
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

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

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

"Each new day is a blank page in the diary of your life. The secret of success is in turning that diary into the best story you possibly can."

DOUGLAS PAGELS



Boys golf invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course.
Volleyball at Aberdeen Roncalli: (7th/C at 5 p.m., 8th/JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow)

Friday, Sept. 8

Senior Menu: Ham salad croissant, tomato spoon salad, pineapple tidbits, cookie, peas.

Youth Football, hosts Clark, 5 p.m.

Football hosts Clark/Willow Lake, 7 p.m.

Family Fun Fest, 3:30 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., downtown Groton

Death Notice: Jennifer Furman

Jennifer Furman, 45, of Groton passed away September 3, 2023 at her home. Services are pending with Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

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Full time shift supervisor opening at Ken's Food Fair, Groton SD.

Looking for a hard working self motivated individual with leadership skills and willing to take on responsibilities.

Pay will depend on experience. Benefits available will discuss at interview.

Apply at Ken's in Groton SD.

City Council reviews projects: pickleball court, signage at swimming pool, sewer system

by Elizabeth Varin

While some repairs are in the works at the pickleball court near the swimming pool, some are concerned that it may not be enough.

The City Council discussed repairs made near the court, including replacement of a fence, banners on the swimming pool fence and pickleball court fixes.

The pickleball court itself has had cracks form in the concrete, and the company that built it was brought in to fix those issues.

"With the repairs they've done, I'm happy with most of them," said Councilman Brian Bahr. "But I walked around, and there are some cracks they haven't addressed. ...

"I think what they're doing is pretty good, but they've got to address these," he said.

More concerns were brought up about banners that had to be moved after winds damaged one of the fences there.

Mayor Scott Hanlon said he's had some people ask about the signs that are now on the fence between the pool and Main Street. Some said they would like the banners moved and some want them to stay.

Councilwoman Karyn Babcock said she sees both sides. Some like the banners on the fence as it provides some privacy for those at the pool. However, some residents near the pool don't want to see those banners every day.

"If it was me, and I lived on that side where I had to look at those signs, I feel like I'd have billboards out my window," Babcock said.

The fence wasn't put there to be a billboard, she said. It's something the city is making money on by having the banners on display.

"Why can't we put them back where they were?" she asked.

There wouldn't be enough room on the new fence next to the pickleball courts to have all of the banners, Hanlon said. And the banners can't be placed in two rows like before as it creates a problem with the wind.

Councilman Jason Wambach said no matter where the banners end up being placed, they don't need to be as big as they are now. If the signs aren't on the fence between the pool and Main Street, what options would the city have for a privacy fence, he asked.

Babcock said there are likely some options, but it would make more sense for those who have reached out with concerns about the banners to go to the council meeting and express their concerns there. That way those questions could be discussed.

In addition to fencing concerns, some have asked about having an indoor pickleball court to utilize in the winter, Babcock said. They had asked about using the community center, but the ceiling is too low.

Having a pickleball court option indoor would make for a nice winter sports option, she added.

"Shoveling is a nice winter sport too," joked Hanlon.

Bahr said the best option he could see would be the elementary school gymnasium.

Sewer system upgrades needed

Another project that may take center stage soon is updates to the city's waste water system.

Improvements to the system are going to have to come before the city can look at any new housing projects, Waterwaster Superintendent Dwight Zerr.

The city will also have to push to enforce the new sump pump policy to keep the sewer system from being overwhelmed, he said. Even one house pumping water from sump pumps into the sewer system can have an impact.

"It's affecting not just you," he said. "It's affecting everyone in town."

The city will need to look at possible funding sources to upgrade the sewer system, Zerr told the board. The state sent two letters to the city this year of incidents where the city's system was out of compliance. That could be explained by some of the big storms this past year, but the federal Environmental Protection

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Agency is pushing the state to enforce regulations more strictly.

"Eventually, we're going to have to spend some money," he said.

In other action:

- No decision came about whether to have more trees planted in the boulevard. The council discussed whether to have more trees planted in the public spaces between roadways and private property lots in town. The city will look into what other towns allow for trees before creating a policy. Some cities, like Aberdeen, have a list of acceptable trees for boulevards. The Aberdeen list includes Northern Catalpa, Common Hackberry, Northern Acclaim Honeylocust, Shademaster Honeylocust, Skyline Honeylocust, Ohio Buckeye, Kentucky Coffeetree, Northern Pin Oak, Ironwood, Quaking Aspen, Bur Oak, American Linden, Accolade Elm, Princeton Elm, Autumn Gold Gingko and Emerald Lustre Maple.

- Discussion about the airport and the park saferoom was postponed as no updates were available.

- The council approved transferring \$300,000 from the electric account to two other city budget line items. A total of \$237,500 will go into debt service and \$62,500 will go into the airport line item. The transfer won't affect any department, but is more of a way to clean up the city's books, said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich.

- Four area events are set to take place this weekend. The Family Fun Fest was rescheduled from July to this Friday from 3:30-5:30 p.m. in downtown Groton. The Airport Fly-In takes place Saturday and Sunday at the airport five miles north of town. East of Groton, the James Valley Threshing Show is scheduled for Friday, Saturday and Sunday at Threshermen's Park in Andover. Saturday will also see activity within the town as the Groton Citywide Rummage Sale takes place from 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.

- The city will accept sealed bids for a list of items declared surplus. That includes three booster pumps, 42-inch zero-turn mowers, a 1988 GMC Sierra single-axle truck and a 1940s Allis Chalmers Blade.

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SDFBCA Coaches Poll - Week 2

11AAA

Sioux Falls Lincoln – 99 (17)
Bishop O’Gorman – 76 (3)
Sioux Falls Jefferson – 75 (2)
Harrisburg – 43
Brandon Valley – 30
RV: Sioux Falls Washington 4

11AA

Pierre – 105 (21)
Tea – 79
Yankton – 61
Watertown – 42
Sturgis – 11
RV: Aberdeen Central, Huron, Spearfish 5

11A

Dell Rapids – 103 (20)
Canton – 66 (1)
West Central – 62
Dakota Valley – 41
Lennox – 16
RV: Sioux Falls Christian 8, Milbank 7

11B

Winner – 77 (13)
Sioux Valley – 65 (3)
Bridgewater/Emery-Ethan – 45 (1)
Elk Point-Jefferson – 27
Hot Springs – 17
RV: Tri Valley 13, Deuel 6, WWSSC 4, Mount
Vernon-Plankinton 1

9AA

1. Parkston (22) 114 3-0
2. Hamlin (2) 88 3-0
3. Howard 48 2-1
4. Elkton-Lake Benton 40 3-0
5. Wall 27 2-1
RV: Hanson, Stanley County, Freeman/Marion/
Freeman Academy, Bon Homme (1)

9A

1. Canistota (15) 106 3-0
2. Warner (8) 97 2-0
3. Wolsey-Wessington (1) 42 2-1
4. Philip 36 2-0
5. Harding Co./Bison 30 3-0
RV: Gregory, Alcester-Hudson

9B

1. Faulkton Area (21) 113 3-0
2. De Smet (2) 93 2-1
3. Hitchcock-Tulare (1) 48 2-1
4. Herreid/Selby Area 33 2-1
5. Corsica-Stickney 27 2-1
RV: Avon, Dell Rapids St. Mary, Potter Co

BECOME A MEMBER!

OVER 85 YEARS OF OUTSTANDING PERFORMANCES



**Aberdeen
Community
Concert
Association**



**Vox Fortura:
International Pop-op Quartet**
Friday, September 15, 2023 at 7:00 pm



**Ireland's Greatest Showman feat.
David Shannon: Irish Tenor**
Monday, October 23, 2023 at 7:00 pm



The Starlets: Pop Female Trio
Thursday, February 22, 2024 at 7:00 pm



SD Jazz Festival Concert
Thursday, February 29, 2024 at 7:30 pm



**Shaun Johnson & The Big Band
Experience**
Thursday, April 25, 2024 - 7:00 pm

\$75 Adults | \$25 Students | \$155 Family/Grandparents

Concerts will be held in the Johnson Fine Arts Center Harvey & Cynthia Jewett Theater at Northern State University 1200 S. Jay Street.

ACCA Memberships can be purchased at Interior Design Concepts located at 21 N. Main Street or online at the ACCA website. All dates are subject to change. Check tickets for concert time.

WWW.ABERDEENCOMMUNITYCONCERTS.ORG

Varsity netters take down Webster in three sets

Groton's areas volleyball teams won four of the matches Tuesday at Webster.

The seventh grade team won, 25-15 and 25-18, the eighth grade team won, 25-20 and 25-11, the C team lost, 19-25, 25-18 and 10-15, the junior varsity team won, 25-12 and 25-10, and the varsity team won, 25-23, 25-12 and 25-14.

The varsity team had 35 kills towards its 75 points as Anna Fjeldheim led the Tigers with 11 kills, Sydney Leicht had nine kills, one assisted block, one ace serve and 16 digs; Faith Traphagen had seven kills and one assisted block, Lydia Meier had six kills and one assisted block, Rylee Dunker had four kills, one assisted block and one ace serve; Carly Guthmiller had four ace serves and 27 digs and Elizabeth Flihs had two kills.

The first set was tied 12 times and there were five lead changes before Groton pulled out the two-point win, 25-23. Carly Guthmiller served for 11 straight points in the second set as the Tigers went on for the 25-12 win. Groton Area had several rallies in the third set for the 25-14 win.

The 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 and Locke Electric.

Jaedyn Penning led the Tigers in the junior varsity win with 12 kills while Talli Wright had two kills and four ace serves, Emma Kutter had three kills, Sydney Locke three ace serves, Kella Tracy had two kills, Emerlee Jones and Taryn Trapahgen each had a kill and Jerica Locke had an ace serve. The junior varsity match was broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Adam and Nicole Wright.

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, September 7, 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.

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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

Custer County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: U.S. Highway 16A / Washington Street, Custer, S.D.

When: 10:44 a.m., Tuesday, September 5, 2023

Driver No. 1: Female, 78, Not injured

Vehicle No. 1: 2017 Subaru Outback

Passenger: Male, 79, Not injured

Driver No. 2: Male, 67, Fatal injuries

Vehicle No. 2: 2022 Genuine Scooter Company Buddy moped

Passenger No. 2: Female, 74, Fatal injuries

CUSTER COUNTY, S.D.- Two people died this morning in a two vehicle crash in Custer, S.D.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2017 Subaru Outback was stopped at the stop sign on Washington Street at its intersection with U.S. Highway 16A in Custer, S.D. At the same time, a 2022 Genuine Scooter Company Buddy moped was traveling eastbound on US 16A toward Washington St.

The Subaru Outback pulled out in front of the moped. The moped was not able to avoid a collision and struck the front driver's side of the Outback. The driver and passenger of the moped became separated from the vehicle.

The 78-year-old female driver of the 2017 Outback was not injured. She was wearing a seatbelt.

The 79-year-old male passenger of the 2017 Outback was not injured. He was wearing a seatbelt.

The 67-year-old male driver of the 2022 Buddy moped sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene. He was wearing a helmet.

The 74-year-old female passenger of the 2022 Buddy moped sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

10,700 South Dakotans enroll in student loan repayment program; Thune files opposition measure

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - SEPTEMBER 5, 2023 3:17 PM

WASHINGTON — More than 4 million federal student loan borrowers — including 10,700 in South Dakota — are enrolled in the Biden administration's new repayment program, according to figures released Tuesday by the Department of Education.

With the pause of more than three years on federal student loan repayments coming to an end in October, and the Supreme Court's summer decision to strike down the White House's one-time debt relief program, the Department of Education has rolled out several repayment and loan forgiveness programs. One of those initiatives is the Saving on A Valuable Education, or SAVE, plan that for some borrowers could result in no monthly payments.

"Our top priority is to support borrowers as they prepare to return to repayment with the tools and resources that they need," Jason Miller, deputy director for management at the Office of Management and Budget, said on a call with reporters Tuesday.

The new income-driven repayment plan calculates payments based on a borrower's income and family size and forgives balances after a set number of years. The Department of Education has estimated that most borrowers will save about \$1,000 per year under the new plan.

Borrowers who are currently in the Revised Pay as You Earn plan, will automatically be enrolled in the SAVE program.

Democrats, such as U.S. Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, are expecting legal challenges.

"While there will be those that will challenge this in court, the administration has carefully crossed the legal t's and dotted the legal i's," Schumer said in a statement following the opening of applications for the SAVE program on Aug. 22.

Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, announced Tuesday that he joined several Republican colleagues to introduce a Congressional Review Act resolution aimed at overturning the income-driven repayment rule. Thune said the rule is unfair to people who never incurred student loan debt, either because they paid their own way through college or never attended.

"Instead of creating a real plan to lower the costs of higher education, President Biden continues to propose budget-busting student loan bailouts," Thune said in a news release.

So far, the states with the highest number of borrowers enrolled in the program are Texas, with 345,800, California with 331,600, Florida with 291,100, New York with 212,800 and Pennsylvania with 170,200.

James Kvaal, the undersecretary of Education, said no borrowers will owe payments if they make \$15 an hour while supporting a family, and that borrowers will not see their balances grow due to unpaid interest "as long as they keep up with their payments."

"We're not just lowering payments for today's borrowers, we're helping entire families and communities, and we're making paying for college more affordable for millions of future students," Kvaal said.

Borrowers who have defaulted on their student loans at any point will be able to enroll into the SAVE program through the Fresh Start program, which is a one-time program for those who have defaulted on federal student loan repayment.

Even though the pause on federal student loans is set to end in October, borrowers will still have a year

of leniency to begin repayments, but interest will accrue starting this month. The program starts Oct. 1 and will extend until Sept. 30 of next year.

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

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

Jackley calls for study and new laws to protect children from AI exploitation

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - SEPTEMBER 5, 2023 11:00 AM

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley and colleagues from 53 states and territories are asking congressional leaders to create an expert panel on how artificial intelligence is to used to exploit children.

"Artificial intelligence has its benefits, but there is also potential for serious harm that we are now experiencing with several investigations in South Dakota," Jackley said Tuesday in a news release.

That serious harm includes "deepfakes" that use real children's voices and photographs taken from social media to create computer-generated child pornography, Jackley said.

The request for Congress to study AI's impact on children comes from the National Association of Attorneys General. In a letter, the association is urging Congress to create an expert commission and to take steps to protect children.

Earlier this year, a Rapid City man was sentenced to six years in federal prison for the possession of computer-generated child pornography. The charges in that case included obscene visual representations of the sexual abuse of children.

South Dakota Searchlight found earlier this year that the visual representation law had been applied eight times in South Dakota since 2000. Four of those cases were filed in 2022, with two others filed in 2017 and 2018, and the remaining two filed against a single defendant in 2003. The recent cases involved computer-generated imagery; some of the older cases involved comics and drawings.

Each of the cases landed in federal court, because it's currently the only option for prosecutors who uncover electronic imagery of child exploitation. Jackley is calling for action to address that at the state level.

"We will be working with legislators to address 'deepfakes' and to make AI generated child pornography a crime in South Dakota," he said.

The next state legislative session begins in January.

Job growth exceeds economists' expectations as unemployment inches up

BY: CASEY QUINLAN - SEPTEMBER 3, 2023 7:00 AM

The labor market is stable and healthy, economists and policy experts say, although the unemployment rate ticked up in the month of August.

The Bureau of Labor Statistics' report released Friday showed that unemployment rose to 3.8% in August from 3.5% in July. Meanwhile the economy added 187,000 jobs, above expectations of 170,000 jobs from economists polled by Reuters. In July, 157,000 jobs were added.

Although a rise in the unemployment rate may look foreboding, it's actually an indication of people looking for work in a more attractive labor market with higher wage growth and employers who may be more willing to offer more job flexibility, said Mike Konczal, a director at the Roosevelt Institute, a progressive think tank. Those factors may have appealed to people who were returning to the labor market after some time away.

"We saw that the unemployment rate went up, basically entirely because the labor force expanded. The labor force is people looking for a job and working. And in particular, among the unemployed, people who

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are new entrants to the labor market, were the ones who drove it," Konczal said.

The number of jobs the economy added this month is also cause for confidence in the job market, even if it is slowing down.

"For this stage of recovery where unemployment has been below 4% for well over a year, that level of job growth is pretty remarkable. You would probably only need like 100,000 [jobs added] to keep up with the population growth," Konczal said.

Wages inched up 0.2% in August compared to 0.4% in July. Overall, wage growth rose 4.3% over the past 12 months. Although wage growth is still strong and higher on a three-month basis than it was before the pandemic, Konczal said it's lower than a year and a half ago when the Federal Reserve was concerned it would fuel inflation.

The Fed raised the key interest rate in July, making it the highest in more than two decades. It is considering raising it again to continue fighting inflation to bring it down to its target of 2% from its current rate of 3.2%.

Economists and policy experts caution that a rate hike from the Fed could hurt some of the gains workers made during the recovery.

"We should be concerned about the labor market softening too fast given that there's been a lot of rate hikes," Konczal said. "We know housing is still probably going to slow again."

Economists and policy advocates also are closely tracking the unemployment rate in the Black community, which fell to a record low of 4.7% in April, before seeing two consecutive months of increases. It hit a high of 6% in June, and currently stands at 5.3% in the August jobs report.

Before the jobs report on Friday, Katherine Gallagher Robbins, senior fellow at the National Partnership for Women & Families, told States Newsroom in an email: "While the economy is still very good, there are signs – such as the trends in Black women's employment, as well as the fact that the number of jobs added in July (187,000) was significantly below the average monthly gains for the prior 12 months (312,000) – that indicate a slowing. We have long maintained that rate hikes – which disproportionately impact marginalized workers – are not the right tool for fighting inflation. To me the most recent trends make that even more clear."

The Bureau of Labor Statistics also revised those 187,000 jobs in July down to 157,000 jobs.

The marginalization and discrimination against Black people in the U.S. economy is one of the reasons that economists look at Black unemployment and other relevant labor data as an indicator of where the economy is headed, economic research has shown. Black workers ages 25 to 54 faced higher unemployment earlier and for a more sustained period than white workers in the Great Recession, according to a 2020 analysis from the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas.

Konczal said, "The Fed has indicated that it is comfortable with unemployment going up a little bit to fight inflation in different ways. And I think there's good reason and empirical reason to think Black unemployment might increase first. It is still something to watch with concern."

Bilal Baydoun, director of policy and research at Groundwork Collaborative, said the strong labor market has provided more opportunities for labor organizing this year. There have been 251 labor actions from January to Aug. 30, according to Cornell's strike tracker.

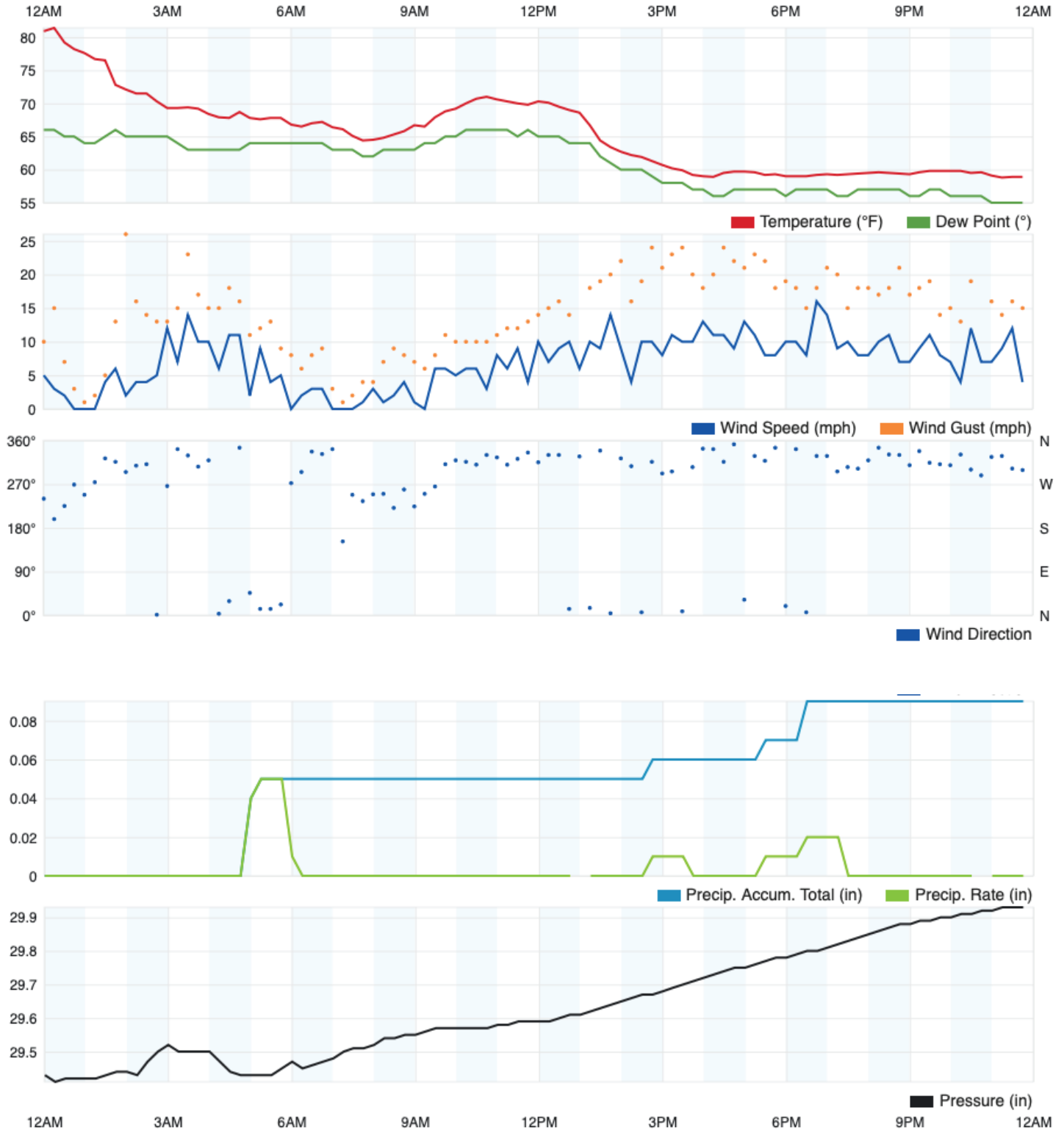
"This is a historic opening for workers not just to make progress against the pandemic economy and the pandemic recovery, but also against the pre-pandemic economy. The rise in labor activity spurred by a tight labor market is very promising," he said. "And the Fed is threatening to stifle a lot of that progress, which is curious because merely years ago, the very workers that we almost exclusively refer to as essential are proving to be ever expendable in Fed policymaking."

Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Thursday	Thursday Night	Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
						
Areas Smoke	Areas Smoke then Mostly Clear	Sunny	Mostly Clear	Sunny	Partly Cloudy	Chance Showers
High: 72 °F	Low: 43 °F	High: 79 °F	Low: 52 °F	High: 82 °F	Low: 55 °F	High: 71 °F

Lingering Smoke



*Northeast South Dakota
& Western Minnesota
Upper 60s & Low 70s*



*Central South Dakota
Low to Mid 70s*



weather.gov/aberdean
September 6, 2023 3:28 AM



Wildfire smoke will linger across the area today, but otherwise sunny skies and temperatures mainly in the low to mid 70s

Smoke from Canadian Wildfires is expected to linger across the area today.

Protect Yourself from Wildfire Smoke...

- ✓ Check local air quality reports at [airnow.gov](https://www.airnow.gov)
- ✓ Stay indoors if air quality is poor
- ✓ Keep windows and doors closed
- ✓ Check on sensitive groups such as people with cardiovascular or respiratory diseases



**Wildfires Are
A Health Risk.**

Smoke from wildfires can...

- ...hurt your eyes
- ...irritate your lungs
- ...and worsen respiratory illness

 weather.gov

Canadian wildfire smoke lingers across the area today with nothing really to push it out with air quality that is forecast to remain unhealthy. More info can be found at <https://www.airnow.gov/>

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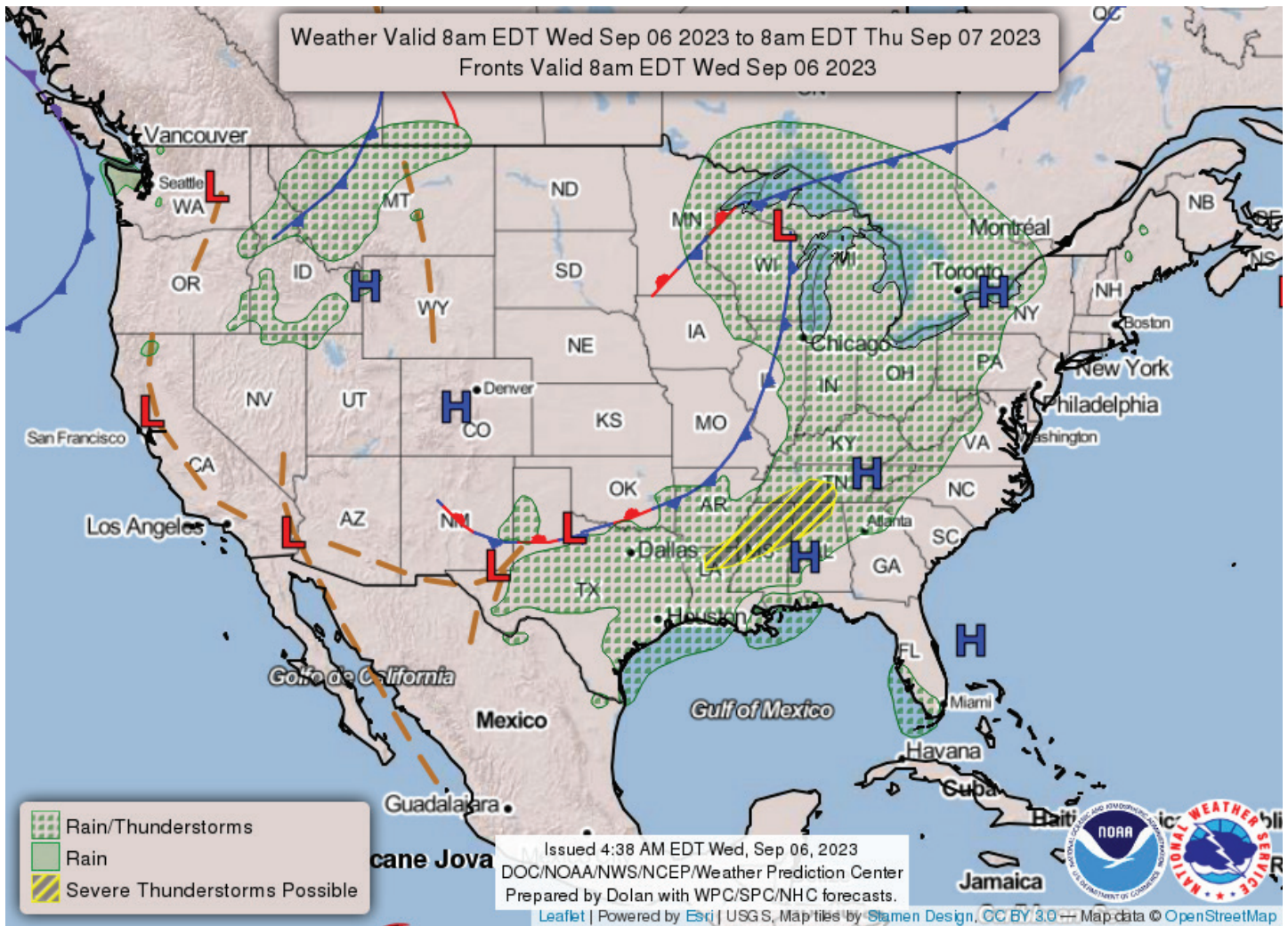
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 81.4°F at 12:15 AM
Low Temp: 58.9 °F at 11:30 PM
Wind: 26 mph at 2:00 AM
Precip: : 0.09

Day length: 13 hours, 4 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1970
Record Low: 32 in 1956
Average High: 79
Average Low: 51
Average Precip in Sept.: .41
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.09
Average Precip to date: 16.75
Precip Year to Date: 18.68
Sunset Tonight: 8:02:57 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59:45 AM



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Today in Weather History

September 6, 2000: Eight miles southwest of Miller, ninety mph winds destroyed three barns and a small garage along with severely damaging a creeper feeder and an enclosed trailer. Another building was moved from its foundation and damaged. An empty school bus was rolled several times before it came to rest atop a fence. Also, a window was broken out of the house.

1667: The "dreadful hurricane of 1667" is considered one of the most severe hurricanes ever to strike Virginia. On the first, this same storm was reported in the Lesser Antilles. The hurricane devastated St. Christopher as no other storm had done before. The "great storm" went on to strike the northern Outer Banks of North Carolina and southeastern Virginia. Area crops (including corn and tobacco) were beaten into the ground. 1776: Called the Pointe-à-Pitre hurricane, this storm is one of the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes on record. While the intensity and complete track are unknown, this storm struck Guadeloupe on this day, killing 6,000.

1881: Forest fires in "The Thumb" of Michigan and Ontario resulted in "Yellow Day" over the New England states. Twenty villages and over a million acres burned in Michigan. The smoke from these fires caused the sky to appear yellow over several New England cities. Twilight appeared at noon on this day.

1929 - Iowa's earliest snow of record occurred as a few flakes were noted at 9 AM at Alton. (The Weather Channel)

1933: The remnant low of the Treasure Coast Hurricane dumped 10.33" of rain in Charleston, which is the second-highest 24-hour rainfall total on record for the downtown station. The storm produced wind gusts of 51 mph and also spawned a tornado near the city.

1987 - Thunderstorms produced more than seven inches of rain in Georgia. Four persons drowned, and two others suffered injury, as three couples attempted to cross Mills Stone Creek at Echols Mill in their automobile. Smoke from forest fires in California and Oregon spread across Utah into western Colorado. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably cool weather prevailed across the north central and northeastern U.S. Thirty cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Saint Joseph MO with a reading of 38 degrees. A low of 44 degrees at Indianapolis IN was their coolest reading of record for so early in the season. The mercury dipped to 31 degrees at Hibbing MN and Philips WI. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - An early afternoon thunderstorm produced wind gusts to 104 mph at Winterhaven, FL, flipping over four airplanes, and damaging five others. The high winds also damaged a hangar and three other buildings. A cold front produced strong winds and blowing dust in the Northern High Plains, with gusts to 54 mph reported at Buffalo SD. Powerful Hurricane Gabrielle and strong easterly winds combined to create waves up to ten feet high along the southern half of the Atlantic coast. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2003: Hurricane Isabel was first named on September 6th, 2003. It would reach Category 5 status and eventually make landfall in North Carolina as a Category 2.

2017: Category 5 Hurricane Irma affected the US Virgin Island and Puerto Rico. Maximum sustained winds were at 180 mph when the storm hit St. Thomas & St. John. Catastrophic damage was reported over the US Virgin Island & significant damage over Puerto Rico, especially over Culebra.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

SOMETHING TO "CROW" ABOUT!

Early each morning, often before the sun rises, a "rooster" who lives nearby sends a message announcing to his neighbors that "a new day has arrived - get up and go."

For some, this is unwelcomed news. But for others it is an announcement that a new day has dawned, and there are new opportunities to serve and honor God.

How "roosters" got their name is interesting. All birds - and chickens are considered birds - "roost" at night. So, the one that wakes up first and "leaves the roost" and begins to "crow" is considered "the" rooster. What makes a rooster crow is not known. But how a rooster crows, is.

A rooster never crows with his neck bent and his head down. Whenever he crows, he lifts up his head proudly as if he is thanking his Creator. Roosters never crow with their heads bent.

Psalm 111:1 reminds me of the cry of a rooster as a good way to begin each day. "Praise the Lord! I will extol the Lord with all my heart." Why? The Psalmist then gives thirteen reasons:

"Great are the works of the Lord."

"Glorious and majestic are His deeds."

"His righteousness endures forever."

"The Lord is gracious and compassionate."

"He provides food for those who fear - stand in awe - of Him."

"He has shown His people the power of His world."

"The words of the hands are faithful - trustworthy - steadfast - upright - just - and He provides redemption."

Prayer: How great You are, Heavenly Father, for Your great gifts. Without shame or hesitation, we shout of Your greatness every day! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Praise the LORD. I will extol the LORD with all my heart in the council of the upright and in the assembly. Great are the works of the LORD; they are pondered by all who delight in them. Psalm 111:1-2



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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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.05.23

3 43 50 51 65 13

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$0

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 7
DRAW: Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.23

10 17 33 51 52 10

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$9,500,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 22 Mins 17
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.05.23

3 23 24 31 48 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 37 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.02.23

2 9 28 30 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$32,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 37 Mins 16
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.23

1 29 45 47 51 7

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 6 Mins 17
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.23

1 26 32 46 51 13

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$461,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 6 Mins 17
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the  Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

Aberdeen Roncalli def. Florence/Henry, 25-13, 25-20, 25-19
Belle Fourche def. St. Thomas More, 19-25, 25-19, 26-24, 25-19
Bridgewater-Emery def. Menno, 17-25, 20-25, 25-16, 25-19, 15-11
Brookings def. Tea Area, 25-22, 18-25, 25-14, 25-23
Canistota def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-17, 25-12, 25-19
Canton def. Parker, 25-8, 25-15, 25-14
Castlewood def. Waverly-South Shore, 25-13, 25-16, 25-10
Chester def. Baltic, 27-25, 25-13, 25-15
Clark/Willow Lake def. Wilmot, 25-16, 25-9, 25-9
Corsica/Stickney def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-15, 25-16, 25-22
DeSmet def. Deuel, 25-19, 25-20, 16-25, 25-17
Douglas def. Hill City, 21-25, 25-23, 18-25, 25-22, 15-9
Elk Point-Jefferson def. West Central, 25-24, 25-18, 25-27, 25-18
Estelline/Hendricks def. Colman-Egan, 23-25, 25-16, 25-22, 23-25, 15-3
Freeman def. Centerville, 25-20, 27-25, 21-25, 25-18
Gayville-Volin High School def. Scotland, 25-18, 22-25, 25-18, 25-15
Great Plains Lutheran def. Milbank, 25-13, 14-25, 11-25, 26-24, 15-6
Groton Area def. Webster, 25-23, 25-13, 25-14
Harding County def. Bowman County, N.D., 25-16, 28-26, 25-15
Highmore-Harold def. Sunshine Bible Academy
Hot Springs def. Red Cloud, 25-19, 25-12, 25-19
Iroquois/ Lake Preston Co-op def. Flandreau Indian, 25-9, 25-6, 25-7
Langford def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-21, 25-20, 25-23
Lemmon High School def. McIntosh, 25-4, 25-11, 25-14
Leola-Frederick High School def. Redfield, 25-16, 25-20, 25-19
Lyman def. Colome, 25-22, 25-22, 25-22
McLaughlin def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-22, 25-17, 26-24
Mobridge-Pollock def. North Central Co-Op, 25-13, 25-18, 25-17
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Ethan, 26-28, 23-25, 25-20, 25-19, 15-9
Northwestern def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-21, 25-19, 25-21
Philip def. Jones County, 25-15, 25-21, 24-26, 25-17
Pierre T F Riggs High School def. Mitchell, 25-18, 19-25, 25-15, 25-20
Pine Ridge def. Lakota Tech, 25-21, 12-25, 25-16, 20-25, 15-13
Potter County def. Timber Lake, 25-17, 25-19, 19-25, 25-22
Rapid City Christian def. Spearfish, 25-21, 25-17, 25-23
Santee, Neb. def. Marty Indian, 25-17, 22-25, 25-15, 25-18
Sioux Falls Christian def. Madison, 25-23, 25-10, 25-23
Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Sioux Falls Washington, 25-21, 25-22, 25-21
Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Brandon Valley, 21-25, 12-25, 25-20, 25-21, 15-10
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Alcester-Hudson, 25-21, 25-8, 25-22
Sioux Valley def. McCook Central/Montrose, 25-22, 25-17, 25-14
Sisseton def. Hankinson, N.D., 13-25, 25-20, 25-18, 15-25, 15-11
Sully Buttes def. Ipswich, 25-23, 25-20, 25-19

Tiropa Zina Tribal def. Waubay/Summit, 25-18, 26-24, 22-25, 28-26
Vermillion def. Bon Homme, 25-21, 25-18, 23-25, 15-25, 15-13
Wagner def. Platte-Geddes, 25-22, 26-24, 26-24
Warner def. Miller, 25-18, 25-16, 25-16
Watertown def. Huron, 25-20, 25-21, 25-23

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

As More Investors Choose Lower Cost Exchange-Traded Funds, Why Do Mutual Funds Remain So Popular?

Liam Gibson | Wealth of Geeks undefined

At the start of the millennium, total ETF assets under management in the U.S. sat at around \$100 billion but have since hurtled on to reach \$7 trillion in 2021. While nothing is certain in investing, the trend of investors pouring more money into exchange-traded funds (ETFs) and pulling cash out of mutual funds continues unabated.

ETFs have become the darling of financial media, with a chorus of industry pundits sounding the death knell for mutual funds as ETF adoption soars to new levels. Yet, looking beyond the headlines and to internet traffic paints a different picture. According to Google Trends data, Americans search for mutual funds more often than ETFs.

Before the pandemic, the number of searches for mutual funds was typically double the rate for ETFs. Since the pandemic, the gap has narrowed somewhat, with ETFs typically trailing search volume for mutual funds by less than 50%. However, the notable gap in search volume persists, and ETFs have never registered more search results than mutual funds in any given month.

States where searches for mutual funds are most popular include interior states such as North Dakota, South Dakota, Iowa, Wyoming, and Wisconsin.

Coastal states lead in interest for ETFs, with Vermont, New York, New Jersey, Colorado, and Florida among the leading states for ETF search volume search queries. However, even in these states, searches for mutual funds still outweigh total searches for ETFs, albeit by a smaller margin.

The findings raise questions over the appeal of investment vehicles as financial advisors across the U.S. consider what drives interest between the two asset classes.

The Growth of ETFs

ETFs have come a long way since visionary investors like Jack Bogle helped pioneer them decades ago. Launching in relative obscurity in the early 90s, the first funds like the SPDR S&P 500 ETF (SPY) that tracks the S&P 500 Index, moved from relative obscurity to gaining significant momentum in the 2000s.

The secular trend has reshaped the investing landscape, with ETF issuers like Vanguard and BlackRock emerging as industry giants and releasing an ever more varied stream of new themed funds. However, despite the dizzying growth of ETFs, their main rival – mutual funds – exert staying power.

“Despite the growing popularity of ETFs, mutual funds continue to hold their ground as a preferred investment option for many investors,” says Jorey Bernstein, CEO and Founder of Bernstein Investment Consultants. “The familiarity, range of investment options, and the presence of financial advisors promoting mutual funds contribute to their sustained popularity in today’s world.”

The Dominance of Mutual Funds in 401(k) Plans

ETFs may be favored when individual investors invest their savings independently, but they may be weighted less heavily in employer-sponsored retirement plans like 401(k) plans. Mutual funds remain deeply embedded into the retirement savings vehicles system.

“Most Americans, young and retired, hold their investments in retirement accounts like 401(k) plans. 401(k) plans rarely allow ETFs and primarily use mutual funds for investing, so that can definitely account for more searches for mutual fund tickers than ETFs across all states and even ages,” says Doug “Buddy” Amis, CFP, CLU, and President at Cardinal Retirement Planning.

However, this ongoing reliance on mutual funds could be to the detriment of savers.

Unfortunately, the financial services industry has often relied on more expensive mutual fund share classes for retirement plans (e.g., with higher costs from revenue sharing to cover the plan expenses)," says Amis. "You might be surprised if you search your mutual fund name and find your share class is not only more expensive than ETFs, it is loaded with 12b-1 fees and more."

Yet fees are what money managers live on, which means many managers are happy to keep things as they are.

Jonathan Bird, CFP, wealth advisor of Farnam Financial, says the public general ignorance of ETFs is not an accident. "I've talked with thousands of investors during my career, and roughly one of five could tell you what ETF stands for or how their trading differs from mutual funds," he said. "Mutual funds get the most advertising because this is where asset managers generate the highest fees. Follow the money!"

Could a New Breed of 'Active' ETFs Dethrone Mutual Funds?

Active ETFs have been growing as an asset class in recent years as investors move beyond the orthodoxy of purely passive investing that has characterized the ETF movement for decades. Unlike traditional ETFs designed to automatically track the performance of a diverse basket of stocks that infrequently change, active ETFs often invest in fewer stocks traded more frequently by human portfolio managers who decide which stocks to buy.

Lower fees, little to no discounts on net assets value, and streamlined accessibility through exchanges have formed a trifecta of factors that have made these funds alluring more investors, according to Financial Times' David Stevenson.

The U.S. leads in ETF adoption compared to other regions like Europe, where most ETFs tend to be heavily concentrated in the ESG (environmental, social, and corporate governance (ESG), and fixed-income space.

Data from Morningstar shows that capital is flowing into actively managed ETFs faster than passive ETFs and actively managed mutual funds this year.

"The rise of actively managed ETFs offers a potential 'third path' that combines the advantages of mutual funds and ETFs, providing investors more options and flexibility in their investment strategies," says Bernstein.

If the sun really does set on mutual funds, most investment industry professionals would rather active ETFs take their place than passive funds. The former's higher fees (usually 0.5-0.9% per annum) will allow them to keep their nests nicely feathered.

One thing is clear: the proliferation of new investment vehicles has lowered the cost of entry to investing. It is ultimately to the advantage of investors who have more choice than ever about where to put their money.

This post was produced by Wealthtender and syndicated by Wealth of Geeks.

Conservative book ban push fuels library exodus from national association that stands up for books

By MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

CHEYENNE, Wyo. (AP) — After parents in a rural and staunchly conservative Wyoming county joined nationwide pressure on librarians to pull books they considered harmful to youngsters, the local library board obliged with new policies making such books a higher priority for removal — and keeping out of collections.

But that's not all the library board has done.

Campbell County also withdrew from the American Library Association, in what's become a movement against the professional organization that has fought against book bans.

This summer, the state libraries in Montana, Missouri and Texas and the local library in Midland, Texas, announced they're leaving the ALA, with possibly more to come. Right-wing lawmakers in at least nine other states — Arizona, Georgia, Illinois, Louisiana, Mississippi, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota and Wyoming — demand similar action.

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Part of the reason is the association's defense of disputed books, many of which have LGBTQ+ and racial themes. A tweet by ALA President Emily Drabinski last year in which she called herself a "Marxist lesbian" also has drawn criticism and led to the Montana and Texas state library departures.

"This is the problem with the American Library Association, it has changed from an organization that helped communities and used common sense into one that just promotes a view," said Dan Kleinman, a blogger and longtime ALA critic.

Widely disputed books over the past couple years include Maia Kobabe's graphic memoir "Gender Queer," Juno Dawson's "This Book Is Gay," and Toni Morrison's "The Bluest Eye," the ALA points out.

In northeastern Wyoming's Campbell County, a coal-mining area where former President Donald Trump got 87% of the vote in 2020, library board meetings have been packed and often heated for over two years now.

After a local outcry over a drag queen story hour and an unsuccessful attempt to prosecute library officials over books in the library's children's section, a library board with several new members appointed by the County Commission withdrew from the ALA last year.

"We were the first library in nation to do this. And now it has progressed to something to something I couldn't even have imagined," library board member Charles Butler said. "And all we were ever worried about was the sexualization of children."

The nonprofit American Library Association denies having a political agenda, saying it has always been nonpartisan.

"This effort to change what libraries are, or even just take libraries away from communities, I think, is part of a larger effort to diminish the public good, to take away those information resources from individuals and really limit their opportunity to have the kinds of resources that a community hub, like a public library, provides," said Deborah Caldwell-Stone, director of the American Library Association's Office of Intellectual Freedom.

The ALA won't say how many libraries are members of the group but denied any "mass exodus."

The troubles come as individual membership in the ALA is down 14% since 2018 to about 49,700, the lowest since 1989, according to figures on the organization's website. The ALA attributes the decline to suspended library conferences during the pandemic.

While librarians pride themselves about being open to different perspectives and providing access to different kinds of materials, political leaders telling them to part with the ALA runs against that, said Washington University in St. Louis law professor Gregory Magarian.

Magarian has been following Missouri's departure from the ALA amid a debate over who may take part in local library "story hours" and new state rules that seek to limit youth access to certain books deemed inappropriate for their age.

"When you see state governments kind of replacing that type of control by librarians with greater control by politically motivated, politically ambitious, politically polarized government officials, I think that's really troubling for the prospects for free access to ideas," Magarian said.

In Campbell County, recent library policy changes remove the ALA's "Library Bill of Rights," which states: "A person's right to use a library should not be denied or abridged because of origin, age, background, or views."

The new policy says the library system takes seriously keeping "obscene sexually explicit or graphic materials" out of youth sections and can apply that priority in the routine "weeding" of damaged, unused and out-of-date books.

When library Director Terri Lesley expressed doubts about doing that, the board asked her to resign. After she refused, the board voted 4-1 to fire her.

"If we just start moving books, it is really putting the library staff in a bad position legally," Lesley said at a library board meeting just before her firing July 28. "This raises First Amendment concerns with no right to appeal or challenge books that have been weeded."

She singled out MassResistance, an anti-LGBTQ+ group, and Liberty Counsel, a conservative legal ad-

vocacy group, for working together on the library policy changes, a claim supported by a July 19 post on the MassResistance website.

Lesley won an ALA award last year for “notable contributions to intellectual freedom” and “personal courage in defense of freedom of expression.” She did not return a message seeking comment and Butler and ALA officials declined to comment on her firing.

“People should be running their own libraries based on common sense, community standards and the law,” said Kleinman, the ALA critic and blogger. “And if library directors don’t want to go along with that? Goodbye.”

Kleinman last month launched an alternative to the ALA, the World Library Association, which he said will offer new policy guidelines for libraries.

“We’re going to return things to commonplace, community standards,” Kleinman said.

Butler and Campbell County Library Board Chairwoman Sage Bear, who did not return phone and email messages seeking comment, have joined as “team members” of the World Library Association. Butler said he hoped the new association will eventually offer librarian continuing education that Campbell County can no longer provide through the ALA.

So far, state library associations — private, professional organizations that resemble the American Library Association, but on a state level — are sticking with the American Library Association. Wyoming librarians don’t always see eye-to-eye with the ALA but the Wyoming Library Association has no plans to cut ties, President Conrado Saldivar said.

Wyoming librarians are being “constantly critiqued” but they — not the ALA — are the ones who control their collections based on community needs, Saldivar added.

“ALA is not telling our library workers, our collection development librarians, you have to have this book in your library collection,” Saldivar said.

Republican Gov. Mark Gordon looks to be on the same page, criticizing as a “media stunt” a recent letter from 13 state lawmakers and Wyoming’s secretary of state asking him to pull the Wyoming State Library from the ALA.

“The letter implies that Wyoming citizens — Wyoming parents — are not capable of deciding how best to govern themselves and need the self-appointed morality police to show them the way,” Gordon said in a statement.

He called for discussion about the ALA’s “organizational drift” but is keeping the Wyoming State Library in the ALA, at least for now. Whether still more states and communities decide to leave remains to be seen amid what Caldwell-Stone described as a new push to question the group’s very existence.

“We have to question whose agenda is served by taking away library service from the people and taking away the liberty to make one’s own choices about one’s own reading,” she said. “Because that’s what we’re here for.”

Blinken visits Kyiv in show of support for Ukraine’s efforts to push out Russia’s forces

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.S. Secretary of State Anthony Blinken arrived in Kyiv on an unannounced visit Wednesday, hours after Russia launched its first missile attack in a week against the Ukrainian capital.

Blinken’s trip aimed to assess Ukraine’s 3-month-old counteroffensive and signal continued U.S. support for Kyiv’s efforts to drive out the Kremlin’s forces as some Western allies are expressing worries about progress after 19 months of war, according to U.S. officials.

After arriving in Kyiv, Blinken laid a wreath at the city’s Berkovetske cemetery to commemorate members of the Ukrainian armed forces who lost their lives defending the country.

He is expected to meet with President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, and Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba to discuss the ongoing counteroffensive and reconstruction efforts.

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On the train journey to Kyiv, Blinken met with Danish Prime Minister Mette Frederiksen, also on an official visit, to discuss the war. Blinken thanked her for Denmark's leadership in a coalition training Ukrainian pilots on F-16s and for promising to donate the fighter jets to Ukraine, according to State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller.

Washington officials said there will be discussions of alternative export routes for Ukrainian grain following Russia's exit from the Black Sea Grain Initiative and its frequent bombardment of port facilities in the Odesa region, from which most grain is transported abroad.

Those alternatives may include new overland routes, or ships hugging coastlines to keep out of international waters where they could be targeted by Russia's navy.

Blinken's visit is expected to include the announcement of new military aid of between \$175 million to \$200 million. Another, larger military assistance package is expected later this week.

Other issues, including support for Ukraine's war-torn economy will be discussed, building on Blinken's June announcement in London of \$1.3 billion in aid to help Kyiv rebuild, with a focus on modernizing its energy network, which was bombarded by Russia last winter.

Overnight, Russia fired cruise missiles at Kyiv in the first aerial attack on the capital since Aug. 30, according to Serhii Popko, the head of Kyiv's regional military administration.

Debris from a downed missile struck the premises of a business in Kyiv, causing a fire and damage to the company's equipment. No casualties were reported.

In the Odesa region, meanwhile, one person was killed in a Russian missile and drone attack that hit Izmail port. The attack damaged grain elevators, administrative buildings and agricultural enterprises, local authorities said.

The trip to Blinken's fourth visit to Ukraine since the war began, including one very brief excursion over the Polish-Ukrainian border in March 2022, just a month after the Russian invasion.

However, it will be the first time America's top diplomat spends the night in Ukraine's capital since he visited Kyiv in January 2022, before the invasion.

U.S. officials said Blinken's decision to stay overnight in Kyiv is intended to send a symbolic signal of American support for Ukraine as the 18-month-old war drags on.

Shared priorities will be discussed with the state of Ukraine's counter-offensive high on the agenda, a senior U.S. State Department official briefed reporters ahead of the trip, speaking on condition of anonymity in line with protocols.

The official highlighted the importance of being "well-aligned" on how Ukrainians see developments on the ground many weeks into the fight, which Kyiv's troops launched in June.

Blinken's visit comes after some of Ukraine's allies have privately expressed concern that Ukrainian troops may fail to reach their objectives.

While the U.S. has been concerned by certain day-to-day battlefield setbacks, U.S. officials said, they are still generally encouraged by Ukraine's handling of the military situation, particularly its air defense capabilities in knocking down Russian drones aimed at Kyiv.

Blinken aims to get a view on how the counter-offensive is progressing and what kind of support is required in the current phase of the battle, including materials to break through dense Russian defense lines while the winter season looms. Air defense will also continue to be a priority, the official said.

This summer's swelter was a global record breaker for high heat ever measured, meteorologists say

By JAMEY KEATEN and SETH BORENSTEIN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — Earth has sweltered through its hottest Northern Hemisphere summer ever measured, with a record warm August capping a season of brutal and deadly temperatures, according to the World Meteorological Organization.

Last month was not only the hottest August scientists ever recorded by far with modern equipment, it was also the second hottest month measured, behind only July 2023, WMO and the European climate

service Copernicus announced Wednesday.

August was about 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 degrees Fahrenheit) warmer than pre-industrial averages. That is the threshold that the world is trying not to pass, though scientists are more concerned about rises in temperatures over decades, not merely a blip over a month's time.

The world's oceans — more than 70% of the Earth's surface — were the hottest ever recorded, nearly 21 degrees Celsius (69.8 degrees Fahrenheit), and have set high temperature marks for three consecutive months, the WMO and Copernicus said.

"The dog days of summer are not just barking, they are biting," United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said in a statement. "Climate breakdown has begun."

So far, 2023 is the second hottest year on record, behind 2016, according to Copernicus.

Scientists blame ever warming human-caused climate change from the burning of coal, oil and natural gas with an extra push from a natural El Nino, which is a temporary warming of parts of the Pacific Ocean that changes weather worldwide. Usually an El Nino, which started earlier this year, adds extra heat to global temperatures but more so in its second year.

Climatologist Andrew Weaver said the numbers announced by WMO and Copernicus come as no surprise, bemoaning how governments have not appeared to take the issue of global warming seriously enough. He expressed concern that the public will just forget the issue when temperatures fall again.

"It's time for global leaders to start telling the truth," said Weaver, a professor at the School of Earth and Ocean Sciences at the University of Victoria in Canada. "We will not limit warming to 1.5 C; we will not limit warming to 2.0 C. It's all hands on deck now to prevent 3.0 C global warming — a level of warming that will wreak havoc worldwide."

Copernicus, a division of the European Union's space program, has records going back to 1940, but in the United Kingdom and the United States, global records go back to the mid 1800s and those weather and science agencies are expected to soon report that the summer was a record-breaker.

"What we are observing, not only new extremes but the persistence of these record-breaking conditions, and the impacts these have on both people and planet, are a clear consequence of the warming of the climate system," Copernicus Climate Change Service Director Carlo Buontempo said.

Scientists have used tree rings, ice cores and other proxies to estimate that temperatures are now warmer than they have been in about 120,000 years. The world has been warmer before, but that was prior to human civilization, seas were much higher and the poles were not icy.

So far, daily September temperatures are higher than what has been recorded before for this time of year, according to the University of Maine's Climate Reanalyzer.

While the world's air and oceans were setting records for heat, Antarctica continued to set records for low amounts of sea ice, the WMO said.

"Antarctic sea ice extent was literally off the charts, and the global sea surface temperature was once again at a new record," WMO's secretary-general, Petteri Taalas, said in a statement released to the media. "It is worth noting that this is happening BEFORE we see the full warming impact of the El Nino event, which typically plays out in the second year after it develops."

The death toll from fierce storms and flooding in Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria rises to 8

ISTANBUL (AP) — The death toll from severe rainstorms that lashed parts of Greece, Turkey and Bulgaria increased to eight Wednesday after rescue teams located the body of a missing vacationer who was swept away by flood waters that raged through a campsite in northwest Turkey.

A flash flood at the campsite near the border with Bulgaria carried away bungalow homes. Hundreds of homes and workplaces in several neighborhoods in Istanbul, Turkey's largest city, also were inundated during Tuesday's storms.

At least five people died, three at the campsite and two in Istanbul, authorities said. Rescuers were still searching for three people reported missing at the campsite.

The victims in Istanbul included a 32-year-old Guinean citizen who was trapped inside his basement apartment in the low-income Kucukcekmece district, Turkish broadcaster HaberTurk TV reported. The other was a 57-year-old woman who died after being swept away by the floods in another neighborhood, the private DHA news agency reported.

The surging flood waters affected more than 1,750 homes and businesses in the city, according to the Istanbul governor's office. They included a line of shops in the Ikitelli district, where the deluge dragged parked vehicles and mud into furniture stores, destroying the merchandise, DHA reported.

The floods also engulfed a parking area for containers and trucks on the city's outskirts where people found safety by climbing on the roof of a restaurant, Turkish media reports said.

In Greece, a record rainfall caused at least one death near the central city of Volos and at least five people were reported missing. The fire department said the man was killed when a wall buckled and fell on him.

Authorities banned traffic in Volos, the nearby mountain region of Pilion and the resort island of Skiathos.

In Bulgaria, a storm caused floods on the country's southern Black Sea coast, leaving two people dead. Three others were missing. TV footage showed cars and camper vans being swept out to sea in the southern resort town of Tsarevo.

Authorities declared a state of emergency in the town and urged people to move upstairs as water swamped the ground floors of some hotels.

The AP Interview: Harris says Trump can't be spared accountability for Jan. 6

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris said Wednesday that those responsible for the effort to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election and the ensuing violence at the U.S. Capitol must be held accountable — even if that means Donald Trump.

"Let the evidence, the facts, take it where it may," Harris said in an interview with The Associated Press in Jakarta, Indonesia, where she was attending a regional summit.

Federal prosecutors have indicted Trump, the frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, for his efforts to cling to power in 2020. The former president also has been charged in Georgia in a scheme to subvert the will of voters who elected Democrat Joe Biden instead of giving Trump a second term.

"I spent the majority of my career as a prosecutor," Harris, who served as California's attorney general before moving to Washington as a U.S. senator. "I believe that people should be held accountable under the law. And when they break the law, there should be accountability."

The White House has been circumspect in addressing the issue of Trump's criminal charges in order to avoid any whiff of political meddling in the work of prosecutors. But Biden and Harris have been outspoken about what they view as the very real danger to American democracy the aftermath of the 2020 election exposed.

"Democracies are very fragile," the vice president said in the AP interview. "They will only be as strong as our willingness to fight for it."

Harris is representing the United States at a summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in place of Biden.

The president's absence disappointed some, but the White House emphasized that it remained committed to the region, which Harris reiterated in her interview.

"We as Americans, I believe, have a very significant interest, both in terms of our security but also our prosperity, today and in the future, in developing and strengthening these relationships," she said.

Southeast Asia is a critical arena for the rivalry between the U.S. and China, particularly when it comes to the South China Sea. One-third of global shipping traverses its waters.

Beijing recently released a new government map that emphasizes its disputed territorial claims to the sea. "It's a violation of the law. And that's where I put that map," Harris told the AP.

ASEAN has struggled to make progress on issues such as the military coup in Myanmar, but Harris said the organization “absolutely” remains a critical forum.

“The fact that so many leaders are convening in this one place at the same time to address some of the biggest challenges facing our world is a sign of strength of both the commitment that each nation has to the coalition and the potential for collaboration,” she said.

Harris sounded a strong warning about reports that Russia was talking with North Korea about obtaining weapons for its invasion of Ukraine, calling the possible alliance “ill-advised.”

“Russia has been levied a strategic failure,” she said. “Their aggressive, unprovoked actions in Ukraine have resulted in a situation where the aura and myth of the Russian military has now been dispelled.”

Harris dismissed concerns about Biden’s age even though he’s widely seen as too old for office. A recent AP/NORC poll showed that 77% of Americans and 69% of Democrats think he’s too old for a second term.

Harris is next in line to the presidency, a position that increased scrutiny of her as she serves with a president who would be 86 at the end of a potential second term. Some Republican presidential hopefuls claim that a vote for Biden would really end up being a vote for Harris — and not in a good way.

“I see him every day. A substantial amount of time we spend together is in the Oval Office, where I see how his ability to understand issues and weave through complex issues in a way that no one else can to make smart and important decisions on behalf of the American people have played out,” she said. “And so I will say to you that I think the American people ultimately want to know that their president delivers. And Joe Biden delivers.”

Harris described the idea of possibly stepping into the role of president as “hypothetical” but said she was ready.

“Joe Biden is going to be fine, so that is not going to come to fruition,” she stated. “But let us also understand that every vice president — every vice president — understands that when they take the oath they must be very clear about the responsibility they may have to take over the job of being president.”

Harris added, “I’m no different.”

Kim Jong Un may travel to Russia to meet Putin again. Will he take a plane or the train?

By KIM TONG-HYUNG and HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un’s possible trip to Russia might be like his first one in 2019 — a rattling, 20-hour ride aboard a green-and-yellow armored train that is a quirky symbol of his family’s dynastic leadership.

In what would be his first foreign travel since the start of the pandemic, United States officials say Kim may visit Russia this month for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, possibly to advance talks on North Korean arms sales to refill Russian reserves drained by its war on Ukraine.

According to U.S. reports, a potential venue for their meeting is the eastern city of Vladivostok, the site of their first meeting in April 2019, where Putin is expected to attend the annual Eastern Economic Forum that takes place on the campus of the Far Eastern Federal University from Sunday to Wednesday.

How Kim, the 39-year-old authoritarian leader, would get there is a focus of media attention.

While Kim has used planes more frequently than his famously flight-averse father, he has also used his family’s armored train for his previous meetings with Putin, Chinese President Xi Jinping, and then-U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018 and 2019, reviving an old symbol that has long been part of the Kim dynasty’s lore.

Putin, for his part, now prefers to avoid airplanes and travel on a special armored train since his decision to invade Ukraine in early 2022, according to Gleb Karakulov, a defector from Putin’s secretive elite security service.

Kim’s earlier meeting with Putin required a daylong trip that began at the North Korean capital of Pyongyang and chugged over the country’s aging railways along the eastern coast before crossing a border

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river into Russia.

Kim went to China four times from 2018 to 2019 to meet Xi — two of them by his train and the other two by his private Russian-made jet. In June 2018, he borrowed a Chinese Boeing 747 plane to fly to Singapore for his first summit with Trump, reportedly because his jet was deemed unsafe. For his second meeting with Trump in February 2019 in Hanoi, Vietnam, Kim took his train for a two-and-half day trip.

Kim's meetings with Xi and Putin surrounded his high-stakes diplomacy with Trump, where he attempted to leverage his nukes for badly needed economic benefits. The Kim-Trump diplomacy eventually collapsed after their Hanoi meeting.

Since closing his country's borders in early 2020 to guard against the COVID-19 pandemic, Kim hasn't met any foreign leader.

Kim's possible second trip to Russia could signal a restart of a summit-driven diplomacy and may be followed by a trip to China for a meeting with Xi, said Yang Moo-jin, president of the University of North Korean Studies in South Korea.

Kim's father, Kim Jong Il, made about a dozen trips abroad during his 17-year rule, almost all to China and all by train. North Korea's state media said that Kim Jong Il died of a heart attack during a train trip in 2011.

According to an account published in 2002 by Konstantin Pulikovskiy, a Russian official who accompanied Kim Jong Il on a three-week trip to Moscow a year earlier, the train carried cases of expensive French wine and passengers could feast on live lobster and pork barbecue.

The train's most important feature, however, would be security. According to South Korean media reports, North Korea has 90 special carriages in total and operates three trains in tandem when a leader is traveling — an advance train to check the rails, the train with the leader and his immediate entourage, and a third train behind for everyone else. High-tech communication equipment and flat-screen TVs are installed so a leader can give orders and receive briefings.

A life-size mock-up of one of the train's carriages is on permanent display at a mausoleum on the outskirts of Pyongyang where the embalmed bodies of Kim Jong Il and his state-founding father, Kim Il Sung, lie in state.

It's not immediately clear whether Kim Jong Un would choose to travel to Russia on a train again when he seems equally comfortable with flying. When Kim jetted off to the northeastern Chinese city of Dalian in May 2018 for his second meeting with Xi, he became the first North Korean leader to fly abroad in 32 years. The last time a North Korean leader had publicly gone abroad by air had been Kim Il Sung's flight to the Soviet Union in 1986.

Schooled for several years in Switzerland, Kim Jong Un is believed to have traveled by air often as a teenager. Since taking office upon his father's death in December 2011, Kim had also occasionally flown inside North Korea. Kim's official plane is a remodeled version of the Soviet-made IL-62. North Korea calls it "Chammae-1," named after the goshawk, North Korea's national bird.

South Korean media say the plane can fly at a maximum speed of 900 kilometers (560 miles) per hour and carry about 200 people. Its maximum flight range is about 9,200 kilometers (5,700 miles) but it has reportedly never flown that far. State media said Kim was aboard Chammae-1 when he reviewed air force planes taking part in combat aeronautics contests and inspected construction work in Pyongyang.

Some analysts are skeptical whether Kim's meeting with Putin would happen next week on the sidelines of the Eastern Economic Forum because he and his predecessors have preferred one-on-one summitry when making their rare trips abroad.

Still, there are growing expectations for a meeting as it's clear Kim's and Putin's interests are aligning in the face of their deepening, separate confrontations with the United States.

A national program in Niger encouraged jihadis to defect. The coup put its future in jeopardy

By SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

NIAMEY, Niger (AP) — It took months of convincing before the former jihadi commander decided to defect, trading in his guns and wealth for amnesty and a chance to live with his family.

Before leaving the Islamic State group, Mouhamadou Ibrahim was told by Niger's government that his wife and children would be cared for, that he'd be welcomed into the community and that he would not face charges, as long as he provided intelligence about the militants and urged other jihadis to come home.

But those promises were made before mutinous soldiers ousted Niger's democratically elected president, putting the national program to reintegrate former jihadis into society at risk. For Ibrahim, 40, the coup has upended months of work and the relationships he built with Niger's security forces — and now he wonders whether he should return to fight with the extremists.

Since President Mohamed Bazoum was overthrown by members of his presidential guard in July, the future of the program has been unclear. The military regime hasn't indicated whether it will continue the efforts, jeopardizing the fate of hundreds of former jihadis who returned and rely on government support. The initiative was put in place in 2016 under Bazoum, then interior minister, to stem the violence linked to al-Qaida and the Islamic State group that has for years plagued parts of Niger and the wider Sahel region, an expansive area south of the Sahara Desert.

About 1,000 former jihadis have returned since its inception, according to Boubacar Hamidou, an official with the government arm that leads it. Jihadis are vetted and given psychological assessments. If accepted to the program, they receive a monthly stipend plus paid housing and the option to integrate into the army; learn a trade such as carpentry, mechanics or sewing; or work in the public sector, Hamidou said.

Programs to reintegrate jihadis are controversial because of challenges to implement them and the risks that people won't remain loyal once they've defected. Conflict experts say a strong foundation of trust is key. Critics of the Niger program say it needs improved vetting, better care of returning jihadis and more work with communities to accept them.

Niger was seen as one of the last democratic partners in the Sahel that western countries could work with to beat back the growing insurgency, with the U.S., France and other European countries pouring hundreds of millions of dollars into shoring up and training the military.

The defection program and Bazoum's efforts to dialogue with some jihadi groups were seen as an alternative to those military solutions — and it yielded some positive results, Niger experts and officials say.

Out of Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, three of the Sahel countries hit hardest by jihadi violence, Niger was the only one to see an improvement in its security, with attacks on civilians decreasing by nearly 50%, in the first six months of this year compared with the previous six months, according to the Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project. Analysts say the defection program played a part.

"Bazoum understood military solutions alone weren't working, and that's why Niger was starting to get traction," said Elizabeth Shackelford, a foreign policy fellow at the Chicago Council on Global Affairs. "But the coup leaders called it weak and look set to return to a military-only approach, even though that was failing."

She and other experts worry the junta will abandon the dialogue Bazoum started and exacerbate the grievances driving insurgency.

The junta didn't respond directly to questions from The Associated Press about whether the program would continue. But activist Insa Garba Saidou, who assists Niger's military rulers with their communications and is in direct contact with them, said parts of the program would likely remain while others end — in particular, the option for former jihadis to join the military.

"You cannot take a terrorist and put him in the army just like that, just because he claims he has let down his arms," Saidou said.

But the military has been a strong draw. Out of nearly 160 former jihadis who returned as part of a two-

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most of Syria east of the Euphrates River, including key oil fields, with government forces and Iranian-backed militias positioned just across the river on the western bank. The region's Arabs have roles in both the SDF and the administration but have long resented the Kurdish control.

The clashes involve the Syrian Democratic Forces and an allied faction, the Arab-led Deir el-Zour Military Council. The trigger was the Aug. 27 arrest by the SDF of the council's commander Ahmad Khbeil, better known as Abu Khawla. The SDF accused Khbeil of criminal activity, corruption and of opening up contacts with the Damascus government and Iranian-backed militias.

Fighting broke out between the SDF and Khbeil's loyalists, who were then joined by hundreds of Arab tribesmen in battles that spread and left tribesmen in control of several villages outside the city of Deir el-Zour. At least 90 people have been killed and dozens wounded.

Kurdish leaders accuse Iranian-backed militias and the Syrian government of fomenting the violence. Speaking to The Associated Press, SDF spokesman Farhad Shami denied local Arab fighters joined the clashes, saying it was fighters loyal to Damascus who crossed the river.

"Iran and Assad regime want to depict this unrest as a result of an ethnic conflict between Arabs and Kurds," Elham Ahmad, the leader of the Syrian Democratic Council, the political wing of the SDF, wrote on X, formerly known as Twitter. Their ultimate aim, she said, was to force U.S. troops to leave.

But some warn the violence reflects local Arab resentment of Kurdish domination. Opposition activists said contacts were underway with tribal leaders to reach a cease-fire.

"This is an unprecedented escalation between SDF and Deir el-Zour residents," says Omar Abu Layla, a Europe-based activist who heads the Deir Ezzor 24 media outlet, which covers news in the region.

"This is an indication of the bad policy implemented by the SDF and wrong calculations by the Americans," said Abu Layla. He said the solution could be to name a replacement for Khbeil and give Arabs more influence in local councils.

If the fighting endures, it could deepen Kurdish-Arab rifts. That could open the door for IS remnants to attempt a comeback.

The U.S. military has called for an end to the fighting, warning that "distractions (from opposing IS) create instability and increase the risk of Daesh resurgence," using the Arab acronym for the Islamic State group.

Over the weekend, a meeting was held among SDF figures, tribal leaders and U.S. officials, including Maj. Gen. Joel Vowell, the commander of Operation Inherent Resolve, which oversees U.S. military operations against IS, the U.S. Embassy announced. It said they agreed on the "importance of addressing the grievances of residents" in Deir el-Zour, avoiding civilian deaths and the need for de-escalation as soon as possible.

The SDF pushed ahead in their offensive over the weekend, capturing two villages and surrounding the main Arab tribesmen's stronghold in Diban. SDF chief commander Mazloum Abdi told a local news agency that the U.S.-led coalition helped with aerial support during the offensive, but the U.S. military did not confirm or deny when contacted by The Associated Press.

IS once controlled large parts of Iraq and Syria but was defeated after a long, grueling war led by the U.S. and allies including the SDF. The radical group lost its last sliver of land in eastern Syria in 2019, but its fugitive cells hiding in the region have continued low-level attacks, killing dozens over the years.

Myles B. Caggins III, senior fellow at the New Lines Institute, said the clashes "present an opportunity for ISIS cells that nest in the Euphrates River Valley to emerge."

The violence also could give an opportunity for Damascus and Iran, pushing their demands for the Americans to leave.

The commander of the pro-government Baqir Brigade militia, Khaled al-Hassan, told an Iranian media outlet that the violence "is a new uprising by Syrians against the American occupation and its militias," referring to the SDF.

During a recent visit to Iran, Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Mekdad warned that "American occupation forces should withdraw ... before they are forced to do so."

In mid-July, dozens of Arab tribesmen and members of the pro-government National Defense Forces

held a rally in Deir el-Zour province that was attended by a Russian general.

"The end of American forces will be at the hands of Arab tribesmen who stand behind the Syrian army," an NDF commander said during the ceremony.

In March, a suspected Iranian-linked drone attack hit a U.S. base, killing a contractor and wounding another, along with five American troops. American warplanes responded with airstrikes on sites used by groups affiliated with Iran's Revolutionary Guard. President Joe Biden said the U.S. would respond "forcefully" to protect its personnel.

"Iran, Russia, and the Syrian regime have a shared interest in the departure of U.S. forces from Syria," according to a report released last month by The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank.

Crucial for Tehran, Iran has had a land corridor of allies linking it to the Mediterranean Sea ever since Syrian forces and Iranian-backed militias captured areas along the border with Iraq from IS in 2017.

Last week's clashes came after Lebanese and Arab media outlets reflecting Iran's point of view claimed that the Americans intended to sever that link by capturing the strategic border town of Boukamal.

The coalition's commanding general, U.S. Maj. Gen. Matthew McFarlane denied the reports. "The coalition is not preparing for military operations to cut off anybody except Daesh," he said.

But Iran and its allies say any attempt to close the Iraq-Syria border is a red line.

"I see that closing the gate between Damascus and Baghdad as a declaration of war," said Syrian political analyst Bassam Abu Abdullah, whose comments usually reflect the government's point of view.

Sri Lanka government to investigate allegation of intelligence complicity in 2019 Easter bombings

By KRISHAN FRANCIS Associated Press

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka (AP) — Sri Lanka's government will appoint a parliamentary committee to investigate allegations made in a British television report that Sri Lankan intelligence had complicity in the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 269 people.

Labor Minister Manusha Nanayakkara told Parliament on Tuesday that details on the investigation will be announced soon.

A man interviewed in the Channel 4 videos released Tuesday said he arranged a meeting between a local Islamic State-inspired group and a top state intelligence official to hatch a plot to create insecurity in Sri Lanka and enable Gotabaya Rajapaksa to win the presidential election later that year.

Azad Maulana was a spokesman for a breakaway group of the Tamil Tiger rebels that later became a pro-state militia and helped the government defeat the rebels and win Sri Lanka's long civil war in 2009.

Rajapaksa was a top defense official during the war, and his older brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, had been defeated in the 2015 elections after 10 years in power.

A group of Sri Lankans inspired by the Islamic State group carried out the six near-simultaneous suicide bombings in churches and tourist hotels on April, 21, 2019.

The attacks killed 269 people, including worshippers at Easter Sunday services, locals and foreign tourists, and revived memories of frequent bombings during the quarter-century war.

Fears over national security enabled Rajapaksa to sweep to power. He was forced to resign last year after mass protests over the country's worst economic crisis.

In the Channel 4 program, Maulana said he arranged a meeting in 2018 between IS-inspired extremists and a top intelligence officer at the behest of his boss at the time, Sivanesanathurai Chandrakanthan, the leader of the rebel splinter group-turned-political party.

Maulana said Chandrakanthan had met the group in prison while in detention on allegations of murder and found they could be useful to create insecurity in the country.

Maulana told Channel 4 that he himself did not participate in the meeting but that the intelligence officer told him later that creating insecurity was the only way to return the Rajapaksa family to power.

After security camera footage of the bombings was released, Maulana recognized the faces of the attackers carrying bomb-laden backpacks as those whom he had arranged to meet with the intelligence

officer, Maulana said in the program.

Channel 4 reported that Maulana had been interviewed by U.N investigators and European intelligence services over his claims.

Neither Chandrakanthan or Rajapaksa has commented on the claims.

Pro-Rajapaksa lawmaker Mahindananda Aluthgamage rejected the claims in the documentary. He told Parliament that Rajapaksa had no reason to set off bombs or use suicide bombers to get elected because public support was already on his side as shown by the result of local elections held in 2018.

Things to know about aid, lawsuits and tourism nearly a month after fire leveled a Hawaii community

By GENE JOHNSON, JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and AUDREY McAVOY Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — Nearly a month after the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century killed at least 115 people, authorities on Maui are working their way through a list of the missing that has grown almost as quickly as names have been removed.

Lawsuits are piling up in court over liability for the inferno, and businesses across the island are fretting about the loss of tourism.

Government officials from Maui County Mayor Richard Bissen to President Joe Biden have pledged support, and thousands of people have been put up in hotels and elsewhere as they await clearance to visit and inspect the properties where they once lived.

Here's a look at things to know about how the recovery in Lahaina is taking shape following the Aug. 8 disaster:

HOW MANY PEOPLE DIED?

The official confirmed count stands at 115, a figure that has not changed since Aug. 21. But many more names remain on a list of people who are considered unaccounted-for, and it is unclear whether the toll of the deceased will rise — or whether we will ever truly know how many perished.

Maui County Police Chief John Pelletier has repeatedly pleaded for patience as authorities try to verify who is missing, who has been accounted for and who has died.

Officials have also sometimes clouded the situation. Police on Aug. 24 released a "credible" list compiled by the FBI of 388 who had not been accounted for, people for whom authorities had a first and last name and a contact number for whoever reported them missing.

Many of them, or their relatives, came forward to say they were safe, resulting in the removal of 245 names last Friday. Some others are known to have died in the fire, but their remains have not yet been identified.

Gov. Josh Green said the number of missing would drop to double digits with Friday's update, but when police released it, there were 263 newly added names for a new total of 385.

Over the weekend Green posted a video on X, formerly known as Twitter, seeking to clarify, saying, "The official number has been 385 ... but there are only 41 — 41 active investigations after people filed missing persons reports."

WHO'S RESPONSIBLE?

Official investigations will aim to determine the cause of the fire and review how officials handled it. But about a dozen lawsuits have already been filed blaming Hawaii Electric Company, the for-profit, investor-owned utility that serves 95% of the state's electric customers.

Among the lawsuits is one by Maui County accusing the utility of negligently failing to shut off power despite exceptionally high winds and dry conditions.

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

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Other lawsuits have come from residents who lost their homes. On Monday the father of a 57-year-old woman who died while trying to escape the fire filed suit against defendants including Maui County, the state and Hawaiian Electric.

Representatives for the county didn't immediately return a message seeking comment on that complaint. The state said it was reviewing it, and Hawaiian Electric declined to comment.

A law firm that filed a proposed class action against Hawaiian Electric and Maui County asked a court Tuesday to add multiple telecommunications companies and private and state landowners to the original lawsuit.

Lawyers representing Lahaina residents and business owners claim that cable TV and phone companies overloaded and destabilized some utility poles which snapped in high winds, helping cause the fire.

HOW IS THE GOVERNMENT HELPING PEOPLE?

Much of the immediate disaster relief aid has been organized by community members, such as a supply distribution center operating out of a Hawaiian homestead community in Lahaina where most of the homes survived.

Hawaii U.S. Sen. Brian Schatz said during remarks Tuesday on the Senate floor that federal support must continue.

"It's our responsibility here in Congress to provide relief — in any way that we can, for as long as people need it," he said.

As of Monday night, 5,852 people were staying at 24 hotels around Maui serving as temporary shelters, according to the county.

At the hotels, they're receiving American Red Cross services including meals, mental health support and financial assistance.

More than 1,000 Federal Emergency Management Agency personnel have been on Maui helping survivors, Schatz said.

FEMA will also need to complete "one of the most complex debris removal operations in its history," he said, which may take as long as a year and cost up to a billion dollars.

Gov. Green said in a video on social media Monday that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has cleared more than 200 parcels.

"This is important because we can start getting people back to inspect their own land and get some closure soon," he said.

FEMA has given up to \$19.4 million of assistance, Green said.

Help is also coming from the rich and famous: Oprah Winfrey and Dwayne Johnson have committed \$10 million to make direct payments to people on Maui who are unable to return to their homes through a new fund they announced last week.

SHOULD TOURISTS VISIT MAUI?

Officials said last week that the visitor traffic to the island has dropped 70% since Aug. 9, the day after Lahaina burned. Maui relies heavily on tourism for jobs, and the economy is reeling.

Lahaina's restaurants and historic sites, once popular tourist draws, are now charred ruins. Large resort hotels farther up the west coast of Maui were spared but are now housing displaced residents.

Authorities are encouraging travelers to visit the island and support the economy, but ask that they avoid west Maui and instead stay in other areas like Kihei and Wailea.

Celebrities like Native Hawaiian actor Jason Momoa and Aerosmith singer and Maui homeowner Steven Tyler are also among those urging people to visit.

"Everything's beautiful, except we gotta come there and make it more beautiful, OK?" Tyler said during a weekend concert in Philadelphia.

Texas AG Ken Paxton's impeachment trial begins with a former ally who reported him to the FBI

By JAKE BLEIBERG and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The impeachment trial of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton is underway with live television coverage, a former aide who reported him to the FBI on the witness stand and his wife watching from her desk in the state Senate but prohibited from participating.

But how much Paxton himself will take part in the historic trial that resumes Wednesday is up in the air. Facing the gravest threat yet to his political future, Paxton left the start of the proceedings early and cannot be compelled to testify over accusations of corruption that have dogged one of Texas' most powerful figures for years.

The trial could last weeks and is beginning with testimony from Paxton's former second-in-command, the first in a potentially long line of onetime allies who could help Republican impeachment managers build their case that Paxton should be permanently removed from office.

Paxton pleaded not guilty Tuesday but did not return for opening arguments, when his attorneys sharply criticized the impeachment and urged Republican senators to acquit.

"I have one simple ask: Do the right things," attorney Dan Cogdell said Tuesday. "And the right thing is to vote not guilty."

The testimony of Jeff Mateer, an evangelical Christian lawyer who describes himself as far to the political right, underscores how Paxton's impeachment is a rare instance of a party seeking to hold one of its own accountable in a bitterly partisan age. Mateer was the first witness called by impeachment managers and was expected to return to the stand Wednesday.

If convicted, Paxton could be barred from elected office in Texas. Senators on Tuesday rejected numerous motions to dismiss the charges against Paxton, who is not required to attend all the proceedings.

"Mr. Paxton should be removed from office because he failed to protect the state and instead used his elected office for his own benefit," said Republican state Rep. Andrew Murr, one of the House impeachment managers.

"In Texas we require more from our public servants than merely avoiding being a criminal," he said.

Paxton was not the only one who left the first day of the proceedings early: Although the start of the trial was carried live by some Texas stations and his supporters lined up before sunrise outside the Capitol, empty seats in the Senate gallery outnumbered onlookers by the end.

For years many Texas Republicans have resisted criticizing or facing head-on the litany of legal troubles surrounding Paxton, who has remained popular among the hard right by aligning himself closely to Trump and rushing his office into lawsuits that have halted priorities of the Biden administration.

At the heart of the case are accusations that Paxton abused his office to help one of his donors, Austin real estate developer Nate Paul, who was indicted this summer on charges of making false statements to a bank to secure more than \$170 million in loans.

Paxton attorney Tony Buzbee said Paxton "gave nothing of significance" to Paul and framed the proceedings as an attempt to overturn the will of voters.

The Republican-led House voted 121-23 to impeach Paxton in May, with the 20 articles of impeachment including abuse of public trust, unfitness for office and bribery. The vote immediately suspended Paxton and made him only the third sitting official in Texas' nearly 200-year history to be impeached.

His future is now in the hands of a Senate stacked with ideological allies and a presiding judge, Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who loaned \$125,000 to his last reelection campaign. One member of the Republican majority in the chamber is his wife, Sen. Angela Paxton, but while she can attend the trial, she is barred from voting on whether to convict or acquit.

A two-thirds majority — or 21 senators — is required for conviction, meaning that if all 12 Democrats vote against Paxton, at least nine Republicans would have to join them.

Peter Bowen, 74, drove from Houston at 3:30 a.m. to be in line at the Senate before sunrise Tuesday. He said Paxton, who was reelected to a third term last November, was impeached because of his support

year pilot program in the hard-hit Tillaberi region in February, 80% signed up to join the army, according to an aid worker involved in the project. The person wasn't authorized to speak to the media and gave AP the details on condition of anonymity.

If the junta ends the program, or even parts of it, former fighters could be arrested. That would erode trust and create fissures within communities that have accepted defectors, said Aneliese Bernard, a former U.S. State Department official who helped establish the Niger program.

The discreet talks Bazoum's government facilitated with jihadis led to a decline in attacks — and if that stops, defectors are likely to return to fight, Bernard added.

"Reintegrated defectors as well as would-be ones might go back to the conflict," she said. "It will undoubtedly lead to more people joining or rejoining jihadist groups."

Three former jihadis shared their fears about the future with AP. They returned from fighting through the program and live in Niamey, the capital, with their families. Each said they can't go back to their home villages for fear of reprisal for what they'd done — and they've also been warned by active jihadis not to return to their former groups or risk being killed for defecting.

Ibrahim and the other two men returned as part of the program that launched last year in Tillaberi. Ibrahim told AP he initially joined the Islamic State group as a fighter after the group overtook his village and started killing people. He wanted to protect his community, he said, and thought that by joining, he could direct the group to spare lives there.

He described rising in the ranks as a combatant and commanding around 60 people. Life with the jihadis was good, and he often raked in \$830 a week from selling stolen goods. While he said he didn't subscribe to the jihadi ideology, he initially agreed with criticism of Niger's government and the neglected development in rural areas where soldiers didn't protect civilians when attacked.

But eventually, the brutality got to him, he said: "Slaughtering people is like drinking water for them."

He watched members of his group turn on each other and kill those believed to be traitors. A defector convinced him it would be better for his family if he left.

Now, Ibrahim is a leader tasked with recruiting defectors himself.

He told AP he's convinced more than 200 jihadis to come back and has done reconnaissance missions with the military, helping to locate militants and leading to arrests.

Before the July 26 coup, he said, he spoke daily with security forces. But since then, he hasn't had contact, and no one's come to check on the dozens of former jihadis living in Niamey. He doesn't know whether he'll get his stipend of about \$250 or whether his rent will be paid.

"You have a job and a plan and you can feed your family. But when that stops, you think about a lot of things," Ibrahim said. "If you don't have a job, it can push you to do anything."

Fighting between rival US-backed groups in Syria could undermine war against the Islamic State group

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The weeklong clashes between rival U.S.-backed militias in eastern Syria, where hundreds of American troops are deployed, point to dangerous seams in the coalition that has kept a lid on the defeated Islamic State group for years. That could be an opportunity for the radical group to reemerge.

The violence also points to rising tensions between Kurds who dominate the region and the mainly Arab population, opening the door for Syrian President Bashar Assad and his allies, Russia and Iran, to try to make inroads in an oil-rich territory where they seek to drive out U.S. troops and restore Damascus' rule.

Eastern Syria has largely been off the world's radar, particularly in the United States. But the U.S. has had some 900 troops stationed there alongside an unknown number of contractors ever since the defeat of the Islamic State group in 2019. The troops, who first arrived eight years ago, work alongside the Syrian Democratic Forces, an umbrella group of militias dominated by Kurdish fighters.

At the same time, a U.S.-supported Kurdish-led administration has governed parts of northern Syria and

for Trump and voters have already made clear where they stand on the allegations.

"We all knew about them, and we elected him. What they are doing is taking away the vote of the majority of the people of Texas," Bowen said.

The trial will likely bring forth new evidence. But the outline of the allegations against Paxton has been public since 2020, when eight of his top deputies reported him to the FBI, setting off an investigation that remains ongoing.

India's prime minister uses the G20 summit to advertise his global reach and court voters at home

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Major roads in New Delhi are teeming with giant posters and billboards announcing India's presidency of this week's summit of the Group of 20 nations. And one leader's picture — smiling benignly from every traffic circle — stands out from the rest: Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Modi is also on the front page of major newspapers, and Indian TV channels are flashing his picture, accompanied by the Hindi word "Vishwaguru" — a leader of the world. In public speeches, his ministers are touting him as a steward of a surging India.

It is an unabashed homage to the populist prime minister and staunch Hindu nationalist, who is celebrated by his supporters and by his party as someone who is leading a developing nation of more than 1.4 billion people to a bright new future.

But this advertising blitz also displays the personal ambitions of Modi, who in the past has used the optics of New Delhi's growing geopolitical clout and foreign policy triumphs to consolidate power. Experts say while India's presidency of the summit represents a moment of pride for the country, Modi's government has also used it to market the leader's image and elevate his party's prospects ahead of a national vote scheduled for next year.

"Modi is positioning himself as a global statesman, a global thought leader ... and the voice of a rising India. And all of this, I believe, is designed to feed into the Modi personality cult, which is a very expertly created, very well marketed cult, designed to appeal to a demographic which will be very swayed by these promises of rising India," said Sagarika Ghose, a political analyst.

The Sept. 9-10 summit, which groups the world's 19 wealthiest countries plus the European Union, is particularly important for Modi ahead of the 2024 election, and a strong show will allow his ruling Hindu nationalist party to project power domestically.

Ahead of the summit, historical monuments, airports and major landmarks are projecting this year's G20 logo — an image of a globe inside a lotus, using the colors of the Indian flag. The opposition says it is no coincidence that the lotus is also the election symbol of Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party.

Indian officials have also conducted events showcasing India's contributions to the world, including yoga and a highly successful government-run digital transactions system. Schools have been told to hold quiz competitions regarding the G20. And Modi himself, during his periodic radio talk show called "Maan Ki Baat," or "Straight from the Heart," said "the month of September is going to witness the potential of India."

Meanwhile, his ministers have made it clear that the prime minister is to be credited for the summit.

"If G20 has come to the country during his (Modi's) time and it is completed with success, then he must get the credit," his powerful home minister, Amit Shah, told a wire service in February.

The rotating presidency of the G20 is mostly symbolic and the summit's success often depends on a final communique. This time, however, none of the several meetings held in India has yet produced one, with deadlock persisting over wording on Russia's war in Ukraine.

Nonetheless, the Modi government has gone into high gear, promoting India as a bridge to the developing world and arguing it is well-placed to tackle issues of climate change, terrorism and the debt crisis. His administration is also highlighting India's position as a growing power courted by major Western countries, particularly after U.S. President Joe Biden's state visit in June.

Along the way, Modi's government has also presented him as the man responsible for India's economic

successes, including its advancements in solar power, digital payments technology and its recent feat of making a successful uncrewed landing near the south polar region of the moon, which is seen by Indians as a major foreign policy triumph.

India's foreign policy has seen significant strides under Modi, but he remains a divisive figure at home, with critics calling him an enabler of assaults on India's democratic and religious freedoms and its independent institutions. And even though his government has managed to finely balance its position on Russia's war in Ukraine, the resurgent opposition says it has done very little to counter a belligerent China after a border dispute between the two Asian powers led to deadly clashes in 2020.

Still, Modi enjoys massive popularity among his supporters who see him as a leader taking India to the global stage.

"This is the first time the world has come to know that India can take a stand for herself. India will do what is in the interest of India," said Ajay Sahai Jasra, a media professional who is a Modi voter.

Milan Vaishnav, director of the South Asia Program at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, said "the transition that Modi is trying to effect is to turn India into a big and important country," marking an "important shift ... in the nature of domestic politics in India."

"I do think there is a general sense among the populace that India is reclaiming an important leading role on the global stage," Vaishnav said.

Globally, though, this sentiment is quite nascent.

A recent Pew Research Centre survey of over 30,000 people across 24 countries, conducted between February and May, showed 40% saying they lacked confidence in Modi to do the right thing in world affairs, while 37% were confident that he would.

Ghose, the political analyst, said the G20 publicity is also ignoring much deeper problems India is facing under Modi, "like backsliding of democracy, restrictions on human rights activists, the jailing of dissenting voices and the muzzling of the media."

Yet, the summit will be beneficial for Modi, she said.

"He will be rubbing shoulders with President Joe Biden. He will be in the company of other global leaders. I think it will help him going forward into the elections of 2024," Ghose said.

Legal fights over voting districts could play role in control of Congress for 2024

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Democrats got a potential boost for the 2024 congressional elections as courts in Alabama and Florida ruled recently that Republican-led legislatures had unfairly diluted the voting power of Black residents.

But those cases are just two of about a dozen that could carry big consequences as Republicans campaign to hold onto their slim majority in the U.S. House of Representatives. Another trial alleging racial violations in voting districts got underway Tuesday in Georgia, where Democrats also hope to make gains, while voting rights advocates in Ohio decided to drop a legal challenge to that state's congressional districts — providing a bit of good news for Republicans.

Legal challenges to congressional districts also are ongoing in Arkansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, New Mexico, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas and Utah. And new districts seem likely in New York and North Carolina, based on previous court actions.

Though much remains to be settled, there's a good chance congressional districts will be changing in numerous states.

It's likely that "a significant number of voters will be voting for a different person than they voted for in 2022," said Doug Spencer, an election law professor at the University of Colorado who manages the All About Redistricting website.

Republicans currently hold a 222-212 majority in the U.S. House, with one vacancy in a previously Democratic-held seat.

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Boundaries for the nation's House districts were redrawn in all states before the 2022 election to account for population changes noted in the 2020 census. In some states, majority party lawmakers in charge of redistricting manipulated lines to give an edge to their party's candidates — a tactic known as gerrymandering. That triggered lawsuits, which can take years to resolve.

The court battle in Alabama, for example, already has lasted about two years since the legislature approved U.S. House districts that resulted in six Republicans and just one Democrat, who is Black, winning election in 2022. In June, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld a lower court's finding that the map likely violated the federal Voting Rights Act by failing to provide Black residents — who comprise 27% of the state's population — an opportunity to elect their preferred candidates in two districts.

Alabama lawmakers responded in July by passing a revised map that maintained only one majority-Black district but boosted the percentage of Black voters in a second district from about 30% to almost 40%. A federal judicial panel on Tuesday decided that wasn't good enough. But Republican Attorney General Steve Marshall's office said it will again ask the U.S. Supreme Court to review that decision.

Ongoing lawsuits in Georgia and Louisiana are using similar arguments to push for additional districts where Black voters could have more power. Democrats stand to gain because a majority of Black residents tend to vote for Democrats instead of Republicans.

A Florida redistricting case decided Saturday by a state judge also involved race, though it relied on provisions in the state constitution instead of the Voting Rights Act. That judge said the U.S. House map enacted by GOP Gov. Ron DeSantis diminished Black voters' ability to elect their candidate of choice in northern Florida. The judge directed Florida lawmakers to draw a new congressional map — a ruling that is likely to be appealed before it's carried out.

The litigation in southern states is "more of a racial representation issue than it is a political representation issue," said Michael McDonald, a political science professor at the University of Florida who specializes in elections and redistricting. "But we can't escape the political consequences, because we have a very closely balanced House of Representatives at the moment."

Though Democrats stand to gain from court challenges in Alabama, Florida, Georgia and Louisiana, Republicans appear poised to pick up seats in North Carolina, which also has experienced a series of legal twists.

North Carolina currently is represented in Congress by seven Democrats and seven Republicans after the state Supreme Court — under a Democratic majority — struck down the Republican legislature's map as an illegal partisan gerrymander and instead allowed a court-drawn map to be used in the 2022 election.

While that case was on appeal to the U.S. Supreme Court, voters elected a Republican majority to the North Carolina Supreme Court. Those judges in April reversed the previous ruling and declared there was no constitutional prohibition on partisan gerrymandering. The state's GOP-led legislature is expected to pass new districts that favor their candidates before the 2024 election.

A similar reversal could benefit Democrats in New York, where a state appeals court in July ordered an independent redistricting commission to start work on a new set of U.S. House districts that could be used in the 2024 election.

The New York commission had failed to reach a consensus before the 2022 election, leading to maps drawn by the Democratic-led legislature that were struck down as an unconstitutional gerrymander and replaced with court-approved maps. Republicans fared better under those maps, picking up several suburban New York City seats that could be put back into play if the districts are redrawn again.

Political observers also had been keeping an eye on Ohio, where the state Supreme Court previously ruled that Republican-drawn maps were unconstitutional. Despite that, those districts were allowed to be used in the 2022 election, and Republicans won 10 of the state's 15 U.S. House seats.

The U.S. Supreme Court in June ordered the state court to take another look at the case. But voting rights groups on Tuesday told the state court that they are willing to accept the current districts in order to avoid "the continued turmoil brought about by cycles of redrawn maps and ensuing litigation."

Though lawsuits have become common after each decennial redistricting, they can lead to confusion

among voters if congressional districts get changed after only a few years.

"It does undermine a little bit the theory of representative democracy if you don't even know who represents you election to election," Spencer said. "It's another reason why these redistricting games are so problematic."

Proud Boys' Enrique Tarrío gets record 22 years in prison for Jan. 6 seditious conspiracy

By MICHAEL KUNZELMAN, LINDSAY WHITEHURST and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — Former Proud Boys leader Enrique Tarrío was sentenced Tuesday to 22 years in prison for orchestrating a failed plot to keep Donald Trump in power after the Republican lost the 2020 election, capping the case with the stiffest punishment that has been handed down yet for the U.S. Capitol attack.

Tarrío, 39, pleaded for leniency before the judge imposed the prison term topping the 18-year sentences given to Oath Keepers founder Stewart Rhodes and one-time Proud Boys leader Ethan Nordean for seditious conspiracy and other convictions stemming from the Jan. 6, 2021, riot.

Tarrío, who led the neofacist group as it became a force in mainstream Republican circles, lowered his head after the sentence was imposed, then squared his shoulders. He raised his hand and made a "V" gesture with his fingers as he was led out of the courtroom in orange jail garb.

His sentencing comes as the Justice Department prepares to put Trump on trial at the same courthouse in Washington on charges that the then-president illegally schemed to cling to power that he knew had been stripped away by voters.

Rising to speak before the sentence was handed down, Tarrío called Jan. 6 a "national embarrassment," and apologized to the police officers who defended the Capitol and the lawmakers who fled in fear. His voice cracked as he said he let down his family and vowed that he is done with politics.

"I am not a political zealot. Inflicting harm or changing the results of the election was not my goal," Tarrío said. "Please show me mercy," he said, adding, "I ask you that you not take my 40s from me."

U.S. District Judge Timothy Kelly, who was appointed to the bench by Trump, said Tarrío was motivated by "revolutionary zeal" to lead the conspiracy that resulted in "200 men, amped up for battle, encircling the Capitol." Noting that Tarrío had not previously shown any remorse publicly for his crimes, the judge said a stiff punishment was necessary to deter future political violence.

"It can't happen again. It can't happen again," the judge repeated.

Tarrío and three lieutenants were convicted in May of seditious conspiracy and other crimes after a months-long trial that served as a vivid reminder of the violent chaos fueled by Trump's lies about the election that helped inspire right-wing extremists like the Proud Boys and the Oath Keepers.

Prosecutors had sought 33 years behind bars for Tarrío, describing him as the ringleader of a plot to use violence to shatter the cornerstone of American democracy and overturn the election victory by Joe Biden, a Democrat, over Trump, the Republican incumbent.

Prosecutor Conor Mulroe told the judge that the Proud Boys came dangerously close to succeeding in their plot — and noted that "it didn't take rifles or explosives."

"There was a very real possibility we were going to wake up on Jan. 7 in a full-blown constitutional crisis," Mulroe said, with "300 million Americans having no idea who the next president would be or how it would be decided."

Tarrío wasn't in Washington, D.C., when Proud Boys members joined thousands of Trump supporters, who smashed windows, beat police officers and poured into the House and Senate chambers as lawmakers met to certify Biden's victory. But prosecutors say the Miami resident organized and led the Proud Boys' assault from afar, inspiring followers with his charisma and penchant for propaganda.

Tarrío's lawyers denied the Proud Boys had any plan to attack the Capitol or stop the certification of Biden's victory. They 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."

Tarrio's younger sister, fiancé and mother tearfully urged the judge to show mercy before the sentence was imposed. Tarrio took off his glasses and wiped his eyes as he listened to his mother speak.

The defense asked for no more than 15 years in prison, arguing that their client should not be punished as harshly as the Oath Keepers' Rhodes, who was present on Capitol grounds on Jan. 6.

Defense attorney Nayib Hassan told reporters after the hearing that they will appeal.

Tarrio's lawyers described him as a "keyboard ninja," who was prone to "talk trash," but had no intentions of overthrowing the government. The Proud Boys' only plans that day were to protest the election and confront left-wing antifa activists, attorney Sabino Jauregui told the judge.

"My client is no terrorist," Jauregui said. "My client is a misguided patriot."

Tarrio had been arrested two days before the Capitol riot on charges that he defaced a Black Lives Matter banner during an earlier rally in the nation's capital, and he had complied with a judge's order to leave the city after his arrest.

The judge agreed with prosecutors that the Proud Boys' crimes could be punished as "terrorism" — increasing the recommended sentence under federal guidelines. But he ultimately sentenced the Proud Boys to shorter prison terms than those sought by prosecutors.

The backbone of the government's case was hundreds of messages exchanged by Proud Boys in the days leading up to Jan. 6 that prosecutors say showed how the extremists saw themselves as revolutionaries and celebrated the Capitol attack, which sent lawmakers running into hiding.

The judge pointed to Tarrio's messages cheering on the Capitol attack and the Proud Boys' role in it.

"Make no mistake," Tarrio wrote in one message. "We did this." In another post as the Proud Boys swarmed the Capitol, Tarrio commanded: "Do what must be done." In a Proud Boys encrypted group chat later that day someone asked what they should do next. Tarrio responded, "Do it again."

He is the final Proud Boys leader convicted of seditious conspiracy to receive his punishment. Three fellow Proud Boys found guilty by a Washington jury of the rarely used sedition charge were sentenced to prison terms ranging from 15 to 18 years.

The Justice Department is appealing the 18-year prison sentence of Rhodes, the Oath Keepers founder, who was convicted of seditious conspiracy in a separate case, as well as the sentences of other members of his antigovernment militia group that were lighter than what prosecutors had sought. Prosecutors had requested 25 years in prison for Rhodes.

Schools are cutting advisers and tutors as COVID aid money dries up. Students are still struggling

By HANNAH DELLINGER and MATT BARNUM of Chalkbeat and COLLIN BINKLEY of The Associated Press undefined

DETROIT (AP) — Davion Williams wants to go to college. A counselor at his Detroit charter school last year helped him visualize that goal, but he knows he'll need more help to navigate the application process.

So he was discouraged to learn the high school where he just began his sophomore year had laid off its college transition adviser — a staff member who provided extra help coordinating financial aid applications, transcript requests, campus visits and more.

The advisers had been hired at 19 schools with federal pandemic relief money. In June, when Detroit's budget was finalized, their jobs were among nearly 300 that were eliminated.

"Not being able to do it at this school is kind of disappointing," Williams said in August at a back-to-school event at Mumford High School.

An unprecedented infusion of aid money the U.S. government provided to schools during the pandemic has begun to dwindle. Like Williams' school, some districts already are winding down programming like expanded summer school and after-school tutoring. Some teachers and support staff brought on to help kids through the crisis are being let go.

The relief money, totaling roughly \$190 billion, was meant to help schools address needs arising from COVID-19, including making up for learning loss during the pandemic. But the latest national data shows

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large swaths of American students remain behind academically compared with where they would have been if not for the pandemic.

Montgomery County schools, the largest district in Maryland, is reducing or eliminating tutoring, summer school, and other programs that were covered by federal pandemic aid. Facing a budget gap, the district opted for those cuts instead of increasing class sizes, said Robert Reilly, associate superintendent of finance. The district will focus instead on providing math and reading support in the classroom, he said.

But among parents, there's a sense that there remains "a lot of work to be done" to help students catch up, said Laura Mitchell, a vice president of a districtwide parent-teacher council.

Mitchell, whose granddaughter attends high school in the district, said tutoring has been a blessing for struggling students. The district's cuts will scale back tutoring by more than half this year.

"If we take that away, who's going to help those who are falling behind?" she said.

Districts have through September 2024 to earmark the last of the money provided by Congress in three COVID relief packages. Some schools have already started pulling back programming to soften the blow, and the next budget year is likely to be even more painful, with the arrival of what some describe as a "funding cliff."

In a June survey of hundreds of school system leaders by AASA, The School Superintendents Association, half said they would need to decrease staffing of specialists, such as tutors and reading coaches, for the new school year. Half also said they were cutting summer-learning programs.

As the spending deadline looms, the scope of the cuts is not yet clear. The impact in each district will depend on how school officials have planned for the aid's end and how much money they receive from other sources.

State funding for education across the country has been generous of late. But states may soon face their own budget challenges: They also received temporary federal aid that is running out.

Many school officials are bracing for the budget hit to come. In Shreveport, Louisiana, officials say next year they might have to cut some of the 50 math teachers they added to double up on math instruction for middle schoolers.

Schools there added the teachers after identifying deep learning gaps in middle school math, and there's evidence it helped, with a 4-point increase in math scores, officials say. But at a cost of \$4 million, the program will be in jeopardy.

"Our money practically is gone," Superintendent T. Lamar Goree said.

Some researchers have questioned whether the money was sufficient or sustained enough to address the deep declines in learning. But with a recent deal limiting federal spending increases in education, more money from Congress will not be forthcoming.

Meanwhile, some lawmakers and commentators have pointed to anemic academic recovery to suggest schools didn't spend the COVID relief money wisely in the first place.

Experts district officials had wide discretion over how to spend the money, and their decisions have varied widely, from HVAC upgrades to professional development. "Some of the spending was very wise, and some of it looks, in hindsight, to have been somewhat foolish," said Lori Taylor, an education finance researcher at Texas A&M University.

To date, there is limited research on whether the federal money has helped address learning loss. One recent study of eight districts' summer school programs found no impact on reading scores but improvements in math. Since only a fraction of students in each district attended, this made only a small contribution to learning recovery, though.

School officials insist the money has made a difference.

"I wonder what the counterfactual would have been if we didn't have the money," said Adriana Publico, the project manager for COVID relief funds at Washoe County School District in Reno, Nevada. "Would students have been even worse off? I think so."

The Washoe system has cut hours for after-school tutoring in half this year and eliminated teacher coaches from many elementary schools. The district just finished a dramatically expanded summer school

program, but officials aren't sure if they'll be able to afford to continue it next summer.

Some school systems are trying to maintain COVID-era additions. In Kansas City, Missouri, district officials say they're planning to keep a number of the positions that were added with federal money, including intervention teachers and clinicians who work with students who have experienced trauma. The district will be able to do so, said CFO Erin Thompson, because of higher property tax revenue.

"This might not be as bad as what we thought," she said. "We're optimistic at this point."

In Detroit, which received a windfall of federal COVID money, district officials say they budgeted carefully to avoid steep cuts when the money runs out. This included earmarking more than half of their federal relief — some \$700 million — for one-time building renovations to aging campuses across the city.

But ultimately, officials said some reductions were necessary. Expanded summer and after-school programs have been phased out, in addition to the hundreds of staff positions, like the college advisers.

"In an ideal world, I would rather have college transition advisers," said Superintendent Nikolai Vitti. "But it's another example of making hard decisions."

EPA delays new ozone pollution standards until after 2024 election

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Environmental Protection Agency is delaying plans to tighten air quality standards for ground-level ozone — better known as smog — despite a recommendation by a scientific advisory panel to lower air pollution limits to protect public health.

The decision by EPA Administrator Michael Regan means that one of the agency's most important air quality regulations will not be updated until well after the 2024 presidential election.

"I have decided that the best path forward is to initiate a new statutory review of the ozone (standard) and the underlying air quality criteria," Regan wrote in a letter to the EPA advisory panel last month. The letter cites "several issues" raised by the panel in a recent report that "warrant additional evaluation and review."

The review, which will last at least two years, will "ensure that air quality standards reflect the latest science in order to best protect people from pollution," Regan said.

Regan's decision avoids a potentially contentious, election-year battle with industry groups and Republicans who have complained about what they consider overly intrusive EPA rules on power plants, refineries, automobiles and other polluters.

The delay marks the second time in 12 years that a Democratic administration has put off a new ozone standard prior to an election year. Former President Barack Obama shut down plans to tighten ozone standards in 2011, leading to four-year delay before the standards were updated in 2015.

Paul Billings, senior vice president of the American Lung Association, called EPA's decision "profoundly disappointing" and a missed opportunity to protect public health and promote environmental justice. A recent report by the lung association showed that minority communities bear a disproportionate burden from ground-level ozone, which occurs when air pollution from cars, power plants and other sources mixes with sunlight. The problem is particularly acute in urban areas.

Billings called the ozone rule "the public health cornerstone of the Clean Air Act," adding that "millions of people will breathe dirty air for many more years" as a result of the delay. An increased number of asthma attacks, sick days and even premature death are likely to occur, he and other public health advocates said.

Raul Garcia, vice president of policy and legislation for Earthjustice, called the delay "shameful" and unjustified. "The science tells us we are long overdue," Garcia said.

Democratic lawmakers also were disappointed. "Inaction threatens public health and puts those with underlying conditions such as asthma or lung disease, at an elevated risk," said Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse. He and 51 other Democrats had urged swift action on a new rule.

"Unfortunately we've seen the process for updating the ozone standards repeatedly swept up in political games that risk lives," the lawmakers said in an Aug. 7 letter to EPA.

Conor Bernstein, a spokesman for the National Mining Association, applauded EPA's decision "not to race ahead with an unnecessary revision of the ozone standards," which have not been changed since 2015.

The current standard was reaffirmed in December 2020 under then-President Donald Trump.

Bernstein, whose members produce coal and other fossil fuels, urged officials to reconsider other regulations that he said target coal-fired power plants and endanger reliability of the electric grid. "It's clear — and deeply alarming — that EPA (does not) understand the cumulative impact its rules will have on the grid and the nation's severely stressed power supply," he said.

A spokeswoman for the American Petroleum Institute, the top lobbying group for the oil and gas industry, said current ozone limits are among the most stringent in the world. "Any tightening of the standard could impact energy costs, threaten U.S. energy security and impact businesses and American consumers," spokeswoman Andrea Woods said in an email.

The EPA's decision comes after two advisory panels — the EPA's Clean Air Scientific Advisory Committee and the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council — urged the agency to lower the current ozone standard of 70 parts per billion.

"Based on the scientific evidence currently available, it is concluded that the level of the current standard is not protective with an adequate margin of safety," the EPA panel said in a June report. A limit of 55 to 60 parts per billion "is more likely to be protective and to provide an adequate margin of safety," the panel said.

Lianne Sheppard, a University of Washington biostatistics professor who chairs the scientific advisory panel, said Regan's decision was "his alone" to make.

"However, I am disappointed, given the robust scientific evidence that ozone is harmful to public health and welfare," she told E&E News last month.

The White House environmental justice council, meanwhile, cited the "horrible toll of air pollution" and its disproportionate effect on minority communities. In a letter to the White House, co-chairs Richard Moore and Peggy Shepard said the problem is "compounded by the inadequate monitoring and enforcement in many of our communities."

Moore is co-director of Los Jardines Institute in Albuquerque, New Mexico, while Sheppard is co-founder and executive director of WE ACT for Environmental Justice in New York City.

Tomas Carbonell, a top official in EPA's Office of Air and Radiation, said the report by the scientific panel left EPA with little choice but to launch a comprehensive review even though all but one panel member supported a stricter ozone standard.

"When we're looking at our national air quality standards, there's really no way to cut corners around that process," Carbonell said in an interview.

The agency will convene workshops next spring to gather information and will release a review plan for action in late 2024, he said. A final decision could be years away.

An alarming humanitarian crisis and massive sexual violence wrack eastern Congo, UN official says

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The humanitarian situation in conflict-wracked eastern Congo has deteriorated alarmingly in the past 18 months with 8 million people in urgent need of assistance and women and girls subjected to sexual violence on a massive scale -- just in three provinces, a senior U.N. official said Tuesday.

Edem Wosornu, the U.N. humanitarian office's operations director who just returned from a trip to Congo with emergency directors from U.N. agencies and humanitarian organizations, said that what they saw and heard "was shocking, heartbreaking and sobering."

She said the situation in North Kivu, South Kivu and Ituri provinces "is frankly the worst situation we have ever seen," and that's in a country where more than 26 million people are hungry and need food.

Wosornu told a news conference that gender-based violence is "being perpetrated on a massive and distressing scale" with more than 35,000 survivors seeking access to treatment and services after attacks in just the first six months of 2023 in the three provinces. Given that only a fraction of survivors report gender-based violence, she said, "the number is likely to be higher."

Conflict has been simmering for decades in mineral-rich eastern Congo, where Wosornu said more than 130 armed groups are fighting mainly for control of land and mines though some groups are trying to protect their communities.

Fighting spiked in late 2021 when M23, a rebel group linked to neighboring Rwanda which was largely dormant for nearly a decade, resurfaced and started capturing territory. M23 rose to prominence in 2012 when its fighters seized Goma, eastern Congo's largest city on the border with Rwanda.

Recently, attacks by the Allied Democratic Forces, which is believed to have ties to the Islamic State extremist group, have also spiked along with intercommunal violence.

Gabriella Waaijman, global humanitarian director at London-based Save the Children International who was also on the trip, said Congo has the highest number of grave violations against children and one of the highest number of displaced people in the world — and the number of internally displaced people grew by a further one million this year.

The scale of suffering and insufficient funding have left humanitarian workers in the impossible situation every day of deciding whether to prioritize water, shelter or medical support for the constant stream of newly displaced people. And one result of the overwhelming needs is that thousands and thousands of children aren't able to go to school, she said.

The U.N. appealed for \$2.3 billion for humanitarian assistance for Congo this year but has received just one-third, \$764 million, Wosornu said, and it has been able to help just 1.4 million people, "a fraction of the number of people in need."

The executive directors group met with Congo's minister of humanitarian affairs and the military governors of Ituri and North Kivu and stressed the need to improve protection and security for civilians, the responsibility of national authorities to address escalating gender-based violence, and the critical importance of restoring peace which is what every person they met asked for, she said.

Waaijman said money is needed urgently to scale up humanitarian help and save lives, but what people really need is peace "and their government to step up and help them to return home safely or else provide them land so that they can be settled elsewhere and start anew."

Congo's vast mineral wealth has fueled war, displacement and hunger, she said, and particularly heart-breaking was to see the impact on eastern Congo's pygmy community, "one of the last hunter-gatherer communities left on earth."

"This community has lived in the equatorial jungle for thousands of years, taking from the land only what they need to survive nothing more," but the fight for cobalt, a key mineral for electric vehicle batteries, and diamonds for engagement rings in jungle areas is destroying their way of life "for good," Waaijman said.

The emergency directors met with pygmy members in displacement sites where she said they are struggling to survive, with not enough to eat in an unfamiliar environment, and "their rights completely trampled and no accountability."

Democrat Amo could be 1st person of color to represent Rhode Island in Congress after primary win

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

Former White House aide Gabe Amo could become the first person of color to represent Rhode Island in Congress after his win Tuesday in the crowded Democratic primary for the state's 1st Congressional District special election sent him on to the general election in the heavily Democratic state.

Amo, who grew up in Pawtucket the son of Ghanaian and Liberian immigrants, hopes to succeed former Democratic Rep. David Cicilline, who stepped down earlier this summer to become the president and CEO of the Rhode Island Foundation.

"This primary election shows that Rhode Islanders believe in a state where one of their sons, the son of two West African immigrants from Ghana and Liberia, could receive the love and investment of a community and go from serving the president of the United States ... to being the Democratic nominee for

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Congress for the 1st Congressional District," Amo told cheering supporters.

If elected, Amo said he would address "some of the critical needs of this country," whether it be preventing gun violence, addressing the climate crisis, strengthening Social Security or protecting reproductive freedom.

"At the end of the day, protecting people so that everyone has opportunity," he added.

Amo will square off against Gerry Leonard, a U.S. Marine veteran and political newcomer who defeated fellow Republican candidate Terri Flynn, a former town council member, to win the GOP primary Tuesday.

"We're excited here," Leonard told The Associated Press after winning.

"I'm looking forward with great anticipation of getting out and continuing to move around District 1 and meet Rhode Islanders. Tell them my message. Tell them my story and tell them what I intend to do for the state," he said. "We need to start sending leaders to Washington, D.C. that put principles before politics and service before self. That message will resonate."

Leonard faces a significant challenge in the general election in a state that has traditionally favored Democratic candidates.

Rhode Island Lt. Gov. Sabina Matos, who had hoped to become the first Latina elected to Congress from the state, congratulated Amo on his primary win.

"While I was hoping for a different outcome, tonight's results show that Rhode Islanders are ready for more diverse representation in Congress for the first time. We can all celebrate and take pride in this historic milestone for our state," she said in a statement.

During the campaign, Amo said he would fight to ban assault-style weapons, support funding for research into gun violence prevention at the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and implement universal background checks.

Amo also said he would fight against what he described as extremist Republican attempts to slash funding for Social Security and Medicare, work to codify Roe v. Wade into federal law, and fight for more legislation at the federal level to combat climate change.

Amo worked in the White House Office of Intergovernmental Affairs under President Barack Obama, acting as a liaison to governors and other state elected officials. After serving in the administration of former Rhode Island Gov. Gina Raimondo, Amo later returned to the Office of Intergovernmental Affairs, acting as a liaison for President Joe Biden to mayors and local officials.

Amo won the endorsement of former Democratic U.S. Rep. Patrick Kennedy, who represented the district from 1995 to 2011.

The prospect of an open seat in Congress initially drew the attention of dozens of possible candidates, particularly among Democrats.

Other Democrats on the ballot included former secretary of state candidate Stephanie Beaute, former U.S. Navy intelligence officer Walter Berbrick, Pawtucket state Sen. Sandra Cano, state Rep. Stephen Casey, and Spencer Dickinson.

The Democratic field also included Providence City Council member John Goncalves, state Democratic state senator Ana Quezada, former two-term state Rep. Aaron Regunberg, and Allen Waters, who challenged Ciciline in the general election as a Republican last year.

Regunberg had tried to position himself as the most progressive of the front-runners, winning the backing of Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Democratic U.S. Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and actress Jane Fonda.

Leonard has said he believes that Americans know how to live their lives better than government bureaucrats and professional politicians do.

The Republican has criticized "Bidenomics," saying Democratic President Joe Biden's economic plan hasn't helped ordinary citizens. He also said he favors a more limited government and supports U.S. efforts to aid Ukraine in its war against Russia, but said the U.S. also needs clear goals and an exit strategy.

Leonard also said he believes abortion should remain a state issue. He also said he is a strong proponent of term limits.

Leonard is a resident of Jamestown and a graduate of the Naval War College. He served for three de-

cedes in the Marines.

If elected, Leonard would become the first Republican to represent the 1st Congressional District since former Congressman Ron Machtley, who served from 1989-1995.

The general election will be held Nov. 7.

Tropical Storm Lee forms in Atlantic, forecast to become major hurricane heading to the Caribbean

SAN JUAN, Puerto Rico (AP) — Tropical Storm Lee formed Tuesday in the Atlantic Ocean and was forecast to become a major hurricane as it approaches the Caribbean by the weekend, forecasters said.

The storm was located some 1,230 miles (1,980) kilometers east of the Lesser Antilles Tuesday night. It had maximum sustained winds of 50 mph (85 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 16 mph (26 kph), according to the National Hurricane Center in Miami.

It was forecast to strengthen into an "extremely dangerous" hurricane by Friday as it moves over very warm waters and pass just northeast of the Caribbean region, the center said.

Preliminary forecasts are not predicting any landfall, although the center warned that "it is too early to determine exactly how close this system will be to the Leeward Islands."

Lee is the twelfth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, which runs from June 1 to Nov. 30.

In August, the National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration updated its forecast and warned that this year's hurricane season would be above normal. Between 14 to 21 named storms are forecast. Of those, six to 11 could become hurricanes, with two to five of them possibly becoming major hurricanes.

In the Pacific, Tropical Storm Jova continued strengthening well off the southwest coast of Mexico, but posed no threat to land. Jova had 70 mph (110 kmh) winds and was forecast to become a hurricane Wednesday, according to the National Hurricane Center. It was about 675 miles (1,085 kilometers) south of the southern tip of Baja California and moving west-northwest at 9 mph (15 kph).

Sen. McConnell's health episodes show no evidence of stroke or seizure disorder but questions linger

By LISA MASCARO and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell's health episodes show "no evidence" of a stroke or seizure disorder, the Capitol physician said Tuesday, but his statement still left questions about the apparent freeze-ups that have drawn concerns about the 81-year-old's situation.

McConnell returned to work at the Capitol after the summer recess, and his office released a letter from attending physician Brian P. Monahan concerning the long-serving Republican leader's health. The GOP leader froze up last week during a press conference in Kentucky, unable to respond to a question in the second such episode in a month.

Walking into the Senate on Tuesday, McConnell answered no questions as he smiled at reporters. He made only passing reference to the incident during a speech in the chamber, his voice somewhat muffled.

"One particular moment of my time back home has received its fair share of attention," McConnell said. "But I assure you August was a busy and productive month for me."

Asked later in the evening if he would holding his regular weekly press conference Wednesday, McConnell simply replied, "Yep."

The episodes have fueled quiet concern and intense speculation about McConnell's ability to remain the GOP leader. He suffered a concussion earlier this year when he fell and hit his head at a dinner in Washington. It has left him visibly slower in his speech and stride, and he appeared slimmer Tuesday. The letter was the second from the Capitol physician, who cleared McConnell to continue with his planned schedule after last week's incident.

"There is no evidence that you have a seizure disorder or that you experienced a stroke, TIA or movement disorder such as Parkinson's disease," Monahan wrote, using the acronym for a transient ischemic

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attack, a brief stroke.

But there was no elaboration as to what did cause the episodes. The doctor said the assessments entailed several medical evaluations including a brain MRI scan and "consultations with several neurologists for a comprehensive neurology assessment."

"There are no changes recommended in treatment protocols as you continue recovery from your March 2023 fall," the doctor said.

It all comes amid a swirl of health concerns in Washington, particularly as COVID-19 cases show signs of rising heading into fall. First lady Jill Biden tested positive for COVID-19 over the weekend, but President Joe Biden tested negative.

Many Republican allies have flocked to McConnell's side, ensuring the famously guarded leader a well of support. Rivals have muted any calls for a direct challenge to his leadership.

"When donkeys fly," GOP Sen. John Kennedy of Louisiana said when asked when McConnell would step down.

Sen. Mitt Romney, R-Utah, said he's supporting McConnell as leader: "We might lose from Mitch McConnell 20 seconds a day, but the other 86,380 seconds are pretty darn good."

And yet colleagues remained confused, concerned and hungering for a fuller explanation of the leader's health.

"If you're asking if I'm concerned about his health, yeah, of course I am," said Sen. Josh Hawley, R-Mo. "I'm also concerned about the amount of questions I get about it."

Hawley said during the month at home, he was asked repeatedly about McConnell's health everywhere he went across Missouri "at the State Fair, from business group leaders, farmers, I mean everyone."

Some senators appeared to question the physician's diagnosis. But the top potential successors to McConnell's leadership stood by him.

The No. 2 GOP leader Sen. John Thune of South Dakota said McConnell has his full support, as did the No. 3 GOP leader Sen. John Barrasso of Wyoming.

Republican Sen. John Cornyn of Texas, another potential leadership heir, said McConnell told him last week that while he's mentally rebounded from the concussion, physically it's been a little more difficult.

"It appears that it's harder to recover from a concussion when you're 81 years old than maybe he thought," Cornyn said. "But he feels like he's up to the task and I think that's the case."

Said Sen. Ted Cruz, R-Texas: "Age comes for us all. And Mitch is stubborn as a mule. And he's tough."

From the other side of the aisle, Democratic Sen. Dick Durbin, the party whip, spoke with McConnell after the GOP leader delivered his remarks in the Senate.

"He said, 'You know, I've taken every test they've thrown at me.' And he said that 'concussion can take its toll. So I'm going through recovering from a concussion,'" Durbin of Illinois told reporters afterward.

"And I told him I said I was glad to see him back, couldn't wait to disagree with him."

Opening the Senate, Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said of McConnell, "I'm glad to see him back and doing well."

McConnell will be central to the fall schedule as Congress returns from an extended summer break for a flurry of activity, most notably the need to approve funding to prevent any interruption in federal operations by Sept. 30, which is the end of the fiscal year.

Some House Republicans are willing to shut down the government at the end of the month if they are unable to enact steep spending restrictions that go beyond the agreement Biden reached with Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy earlier this summer.

In leading Senate Republicans, McConnell is viewed by the White House and Democrats as a pragmatic broker who is more interested in avoiding a messy government shutdown that could be politically damaging to the GOP.

McConnell has also made it a priority to ensure Ukraine continues to receive support from the U.S. as it battles Russia.

A \$40 billion funding package for Ukraine and U.S. disaster relief for communities hit by fires, floods and

other problems, including the fentanyl crisis, is being proposed by the White House, but it is being met with skepticism from some Republicans reluctant to help as much as Biden wants in the Ukrainian war effort.

McConnell's health has visibly declined since the concussion in March, after which he took some weeks to recover. His speaking has been more halting, and he has walked more slowly and carefully.

First elected in 1984, he became the longest serving Senate party leader in January. There were questions before his latest episode about whether he would run for re-election in 2026.

McConnell had been home in Kentucky at the time keeping a robust political schedule, speaking frequently to the public and press. Before freezing up last week, McConnell had just given a 20-minute speech with no issues.

Similarly, when he froze up during a press conference at the Capitol last month, he took a short break in his office and then returned to field about a half-dozen other questions and banter with the press.

No longer stranded, tens of thousands clean up and head home after Burning Man floods

By SCOTT SONNER, ED KOMENDA and GABE STERN Associated Press

RENO, Nev. (AP) — The traffic jam leaving the Burning Man festival eased up considerably Tuesday as the exodus from the mud-caked Nevada desert entered another day following massive rain that left tens of thousands of partygoers stranded for days.

A pair of brothers from Arizona who took their 67-year-old mother with them to Burning Man for the first time spent 11 hours into early Tuesday morning just getting out of the festival site about 110 miles (177 kilometers) north of Reno.

"It was a perfect, typical Burning Man weather until Friday — then the rain started coming down hard," said Phillip Martin, 37. "Then it turned into Mud Fest."

Event organizers began letting traffic flow out on the main road Monday afternoon — even as they urged attendees to delay their exit to help ease traffic. The wait time to exit Black Rock City was about 3.5 hours as of Tuesday at about 5 p.m., according to the official Burning Man Traffic account on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Roughly 36,000 people remained at the site Tuesday by mid-afternoon, organizers said.

The annual celebration of free spirits in one of the most remote places in America launched on a San Francisco beach in 1986 and has since grown in size and popularity. Nearly 80,000 artists, musicians and activists visit the Black Rock Desert every year to build a city of colorful themed camps, decorated art cars and guerilla theatrics in preparation for the ceremonial burnings of a towering, faceless effigy and a temple dedicated to the dead.

Most attendees travel to the stark desert for a week to express themselves with music and art, commune with nature, or "find themselves." Others visit the ancient lake bottom for a psychedelic party full of hallucinogens and nudity before the burning of the wooden effigy.

The event this year began Aug. 27 and was scheduled to end Monday morning, with attendees breaking down camps and cleaning up — until the rains came.

After more than a half-inch (1.3 centimeters) of rain fell Friday, flooding turned the playa to foot-deep mud — closing roads and forcing burners to lean on each other for help.

Burning Man emphasizes self-sufficiency, and many burners arrive in Black Rock Desert with limited supplies, expecting to face challenges in the form of brutal heat, dust storms — or torrential rains.

Disruptions are part of the event's recent history: Dust storms forced organizers to temporarily close entrances to the festival in 2018, and the event was twice canceled altogether during the pandemic.

Mark Fromson, 54, who goes by the name "Stuff" on the playa, had been staying in an RV, but the rains forced him to find shelter at another camp, where fellow burners provided him food and cover. Another principle of Burning Man, he said, centers on the unconditional giving of gifts with no expectation of receiving one.

After sunset Friday, Fromson set off barefoot through the muck for a long trek back to his vehicle — the

dense playa suddenly a thick clay that clung to his feet and legs. The challenge, he said, was the mark of a "good burn."

"Best burn yet," he said. "The old, crusty burners who have been out there for 40 years would just laugh at us with all the creature comforts we come onto the playa with."

The road closures came just before the first of the ceremonial fires were scheduled to begin Saturday night. Shortly thereafter, the fires themselves were postponed as authorities worked to reopen exit routes by the end of the Labor Day weekend.

"The Man" was torched Monday night, but the temple was set to burn at 8 p.m. Tuesday. By tradition, revelers leave the names of departed loved ones and other remembrances to be burned in the temple. For many, torching the temple has become the centerpiece of the burning — a more intimate, spiritual event than the rave-party-like immolation of the effigy.

The rain also posed significant challenges for authorities responding to emergency situations — including the death of a man identified as 32-year-old Leon Reece.

Due to the rain, access to the area where Reece was reported unresponsive was delayed, but authorities said it did not appear weather played a role in his death. A cause of death is pending the results of an autopsy, which can take six to eight weeks, according to the Pershing County Sheriff's Office.

Amid the flooding, revelers were urged to conserve their food and water, and most remained hunkered down at the site. Some attendees, however, managed to walk several miles to the nearest town or catch a ride there.

Many stuck at Burning Man turned to the official Black Rock City radio station — BMIR 94.5 FM — to issue pleas for rides to Reno, San Francisco and other neighboring cities. DJs informed listeners about what the stranded have with them — crates, bicycles, supplies — and offers to split fuel and food costs.

Alexander Elmendorf braved the harsh weather at a campsite set with trailers, RVs and an aerial rig. He was waiting Tuesday to clean up the debris left behind by the tens of thousands who exited the area.

"It's gonna be a lot of work for everyone involved," said Elmendorf, 36, who planned to stay until Friday to help with cleanup efforts. "And by that, I mean, get everything off the ground."

By Tuesday afternoon the ground had lost most of its moisture, which at one point you could build a mud-based snowman in, he said. Elmendorf, who has been to Burning Man three other times, said staff had essentially kicked the last burners out each year.

"No one's rushing anyone out this year," he said. "I think more so people are rushing themselves off."

Trump's comments risk tainting jury pool in federal election subversion case, special counsel says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Justice Department special counsel Jack Smith warned Tuesday that former President Donald Trump's "daily" statements threaten to taint a jury pool in Washington in the criminal case charging him with scheming to overturn the results of the 2020 presidential election.

Trump's provocative comments about both Smith's team and U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan — who is presiding over the case — have been a central issue since the indictment was filed last month. Prosecutors have repeatedly signaled their concerns about the impact of Trump's social media posts and Chutkan explicitly cautioned against inflammatory remarks from Trump that could intimidate witnesses or contaminate potential jurors.

The posts continued Tuesday both before and after the latest concern flared, with Trump earlier in the day circulating a New York Post story about Chutkan on his Truth Social platform and openly mocking the idea that she could be fair in his case. Later in the evening, he issued another post in which he attacked Smith as a "deranged" prosecutor with "unchecked and insane aggression."

Tuesday's complaint from the Justice Department underscores the extent to which Trump's social media attacks are testing the patience of prosecutors and risk exposing him to sanctions from the judge, who last week set a trial date of March 4, 2024, in an effort to keep the case moving. Trump has faced admo-

nitions in other cases, too, with a condition of his release in a separate prosecution in Atlanta being that he refrain from intimidating co-defendants, witnesses or victims in the case.

The subject surfaced again in a dispute over a motion that the Justice Department said it wanted to file under seal, with an accompanying redacted version to be filed on the public docket. Defense lawyers objected, countering that they were entitled time to review the Justice Department's filings and any proposed sealed exhibits before they could be docketed.

But prosecutors said it would untenable to take several weeks to decide whether "every ordinary filing that refers to Sensitive Materials may be docketed."

"Such a requirement would grind litigation in this case to a halt, which is particularly infeasible given the pressing matters before the Court — including the defendant's daily extrajudicial statements that threaten to prejudice the jury pool in this case, as described in the Government's motion," the Smith team wrote.

Chutkan set deadlines for next week for additional filings that she said may be filed under seal.

Trump faces three other prosecutions besides the federal election subversion case. He's charged with 18 other people in a state case in Atlanta with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election in Georgia; faces federal charges from Smith accusing him of illegally hoarding classified documents; and is accused in New York of falsifying business records in connection with a hush money payment to a porn actor.

What is green hydrogen and why is it touted as a clean fuel?

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Green hydrogen is being touted around the world as a clean energy solution to take the carbon out of high-emitting sectors like transport and industrial manufacturing.

The India-led International Solar Alliance launched the Green Hydrogen Innovation Centre earlier this year, and India itself approved \$2.3 billion for the production, use and export of green hydrogen. Global cooperation on green hydrogen manufacturing and supply is expected to be discussed by G-20 leaders at this week's summit in New Delhi.

WHAT IS GREEN HYDROGEN?

Hydrogen is produced by separating that element from others in molecules where hydrogen occurs. For example, water — well known by its chemical symbol of H₂O, or two hydrogen atoms and one oxygen atom — can be split into those component atoms through electrolysis.

Hydrogen has been produced and used at scale for over a century, primarily to make fertilizers and plastics and to refine oil. It has mostly been produced using fossil fuels, especially natural gas.

But when the production is powered by renewable energy, the resulting hydrogen is green hydrogen.

The global market for green hydrogen is expected to reach \$410 billion by 2030, according to analysts, which would more than double its current market size.

However, critics say the fuel is not always viable at scale and its 'green' credentials are determined by the source of energy used to produce it.

WHAT CAN GREEN HYDROGEN BE USED FOR?

Green hydrogen can have a variety of uses in industries such as steelmaking, concrete production and manufacturing chemicals and fertilizers. It can also be used to generate electricity, as a fuel for transport and to heat homes and offices. Today, hydrogen is primarily used in refining petrol and manufacturing fertilizers. While petrol would have no use in a fossil fuel-free world, emissions from making fertilizer — essential to grow crops that feed the world — can be reduced by using green hydrogen.

Francisco Boshell, an energy analyst at the International Renewable Energy Agency in Abu Dhabi, is optimistic about green hydrogen's role in the transition to clean energy, especially in cases where energy from renewables like solar and wind can't practically be stored and used via battery — like aviation, shipping and some industrial processes.

He said hydrogen's volatility — it's highly flammable and requires special pipelines for safe transport — means most green hydrogen will likely be used close to where it is made.

ARE THERE DOUBTS ABOUT GREEN HYDROGEN?

That flammability plus transport issues limit hydrogen's use in "dispersed applications" such as residential heating, according to a report by the Energy Transitions Commission, a coalition of energy leaders committed to net-zero emissions by 2050. It also is less efficient than direct electrification as some energy is lost when renewables are converted to hydrogen and then the hydrogen is converted again to power, the report said.

That report noted strong potential for hydrogen as an alternative to batteries for energy storage at large scale and for long periods.

Other studies have questioned the high cost of production, investment risks, greater need for water than other clean power and the lack of international standards that hinders a global market.

Robert Howarth, a professor of ecology and environmental biology at Cornell University in Ithaca, New York, who also sits on New York's Climate Action Council, said green hydrogen is being oversold in part due to lobbying by the oil and gas industry.

Boshell, of the International Renewable Energy Agency, disagreed. His organization has projected hydrogen demand will grow to 550 million tons by 2050, up from the current 100 million tons.

The International Energy Agency says production of hydrogen is responsible for around 830 million tons of carbon dioxide per year. Boshell said just replacing this so-called gray hydrogen — hydrogen produced from fossil fuels — would ensure a long-term market for green hydrogen.

"The first thing we have to do is start replacing the existing demand for gray hydrogen. And then we can add additional demand and applications of green hydrogen as a fuel for industries, shipping and aviation," he said.

Alaska couple reunited with cat 26 days after home collapsed into river swollen by glacial outburst

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, ALaska (AP) — A pair of Alaska teachers needed good news after they lost nearly all their possessions when their house collapsed into a river swollen by a glacial-outburst flood and their cat went missing.

Elizabeth Wilkins was holding onto hope that if any animal would survive the house falling into the Mendenhall River on Aug. 5, it would be Leo, the couple's resilient big-eyed, black-and-white cat who shows no fear of bears.

"I knew that he's pretty smart, and so I felt pretty confident that he would escape and be OK somewhere," she said.

That faith paid off 26 days after the flood when Tonya Mead posted a photo of Leo to the Juneau Community Collective Facebook page. Wilkins immediately knew it was Leo, the "COVID kitten" they rescued in 2020. She rushed to meet Mead.

"I just started walking down the street calling for him, and he just ran out and was like, 'Oh hey, here I am, you know, like, where have you been?' " she said.

The river flooding was caused by a major release of water from Suicide Basin, a Mendenhall Glacier-dammed lake in Juneau, that eroded the river bank.

Wilkins and her partner, Tom Schwartz, moved into the home shortly before the flood hit, but they were away on a mountain biking trip to Bend, Oregon.

Friends called and sent videos, warning their house was in danger of being washed away.

Ultimately, several homes were destroyed or partially destroyed, with others condemned or flooded. None of the destruction was as famous as the house being rented by Wilkins and Schwartz, with video of it collapsing into the river going viral.

The couple returned to Juneau three days later to sort out new living arrangements and to look for Leo.

They returned to the site of the house, calling out Leo's name and leaving food for him in the chicken coop.

By then, it seemed like everyone in Juneau was looking for him. There were plenty of sightings of Leo, but Wilkins said it appears that there are just many black-and-white unhoused cats in Juneau.

When he did turn up, he appeared to be in good health.

"Leo was a little thinner, but otherwise totally fine," Wilkins said. "He ate four cans of tuna and went outside to kill a mouse. I imagine that is how he survived."

She said it is amazing to have Leo back, though he currently is staying with a friend while they look for another place to live.

"It's super joyful because everyone in their community was looking for him, and it's nice to have some good news," she said.

And just like Leo, some of their other possessions are finding their way back to them, but not in as good of condition as the cat.

"People have been finding some things, like some of our clothes and pictures were in 4 feet (1.22 meter) of silt in someone's yard down the Mendenhall River," Wilkins said.

Oil prices spike as Saudi Arabia, Russia extend 1.3 million barrel a day oil cut through December

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Saudi Arabia and Russia agreed Tuesday to extend their voluntary oil production cuts through the end of this year, trimming 1.3 million barrels of crude out of the global market and boosting energy prices.

The dual announcements from Riyadh and Moscow pushed benchmark Brent crude above \$90 a barrel in trading Tuesday afternoon, a price unseen in the market since November.

The countries' moves could increase inflation and the cost for motorists at gasoline pumps. It also puts new pressure on Saudi Arabia's relationship with the United States, as President Joe Biden last year warned the kingdom there would be unspecified "consequences" for partnering with Russia on cuts as Moscow wages war on Ukraine.

Saudi Arabia's announcement, carried by the state-run Saudi Press Agency, said the country still would monitor the market and could take further action if necessary.

"This additional voluntary cut comes to reinforce the precautionary efforts made by OPEC+ countries with the aim of supporting the stability and balance of oil markets," the Saudi Press Agency report said, citing an unnamed Energy Ministry official.

State-run Russian news agency Tass quoted Alexander Novak, Russia's deputy prime minister and former energy minister, as saying Moscow would continue its 300,000 barrel a day cut.

The decision "is aimed at strengthening the precautionary measures taken by OPEC+ countries in order to maintain stability and balance of oil markets," Novak said.

Benchmark Brent crude traded Tuesday above \$90 a barrel after the announcement. Brent had largely hovered between \$75 and \$85 a barrel since last October. A barrel of West Texas Intermediate, a benchmark for America, traded around \$87 a barrel.

White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan declined to comment on the market impact of the decision, though he said U.S. officials had regular contact with the kingdom. He added that Biden would look to utilize "everything within his toolkit" to assist American consumers.

"The thing that we ultimately stand for is a stable, effective supply of energy to global markets, so that we can in fact deliver relief to consumers at the pump, and we do this in a way that is consistent with the energy transition over time," Sullivan said.

Bob McNally, the founder and president of the Washington-based Rapidan Energy Group and a former White House energy adviser, said Saudi Arabia and Russia had "demonstrated their unity and resolve to proactively manage" the risk of oil prices potentially dropping in tougher economic conditions with their announcement Tuesday.

"Barring a sharp economic downturn, these supply cuts will drive deep deficits into global oil balances and should propel crude oil prices well above \$90 per barrel," McNally said.

The average gallon of regular unleaded gasoline in the U.S. stands at \$3.81, according to AAA, just

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under the all-time high for Labor Day of \$3.83 in 2012. However, gasoline demand typically drops for U.S. motorists after the holiday so it remains unclear what immediate effect this could have on the American market, AAA spokesman Andrew Gross said.

"I'm more concerned about what the rest of hurricane season may hold," Gross told The Associated Press. "A big storm along the Gulf coast could move prices dramatically here."

Hurricane Idalia just plowed through Florida and U.S. forecasters said Tuesday that Tropical Storm Lee in the Atlantic Ocean will become an "extremely dangerous" hurricane by Friday.

Meanwhile, higher gasoline prices can increase transportation costs and ultimately push the prices of goods even higher at a time when the U.S. and much of the world is already raising interest rates to combat inflation.

"The impact these cuts will have on inflation and economic policy in the West is hard to predict, but higher oil prices will only increase the likelihood of more fiscal tightening, especially in the U.S., to curtail inflation," said Jorge Leon, a senior vice president at Rystad Energy.

The Saudi reduction, which began in July, comes as the other OPEC+ producers have agreed to extend earlier production cuts through next year.

A series of production cuts over the past year has failed to substantially boost prices amid weakened demand from China and tighter monetary policy aimed at combating inflation. But with international travel back up to nearly pre-pandemic levels, the demand for oil likely will continue to rise.

The Saudis are particularly keen to boost oil prices in order to fund Vision 2030, an ambitious plan to overhaul the kingdom's economy, reduce its dependence on oil and to create jobs for a young population.

The plan includes several massive infrastructure projects, including the construction of a futuristic \$500 billion city called Neom.

But Saudi Arabia also has to manage its relationship with Washington. Biden campaigned on a promise of making the kingdom's powerful Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman a "pariah" over the 2018 killing of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi.

In recent months, tensions eased slightly as Biden's administration sought a deal with Riyadh for it to diplomatically recognize Israel.

But those talks include Saudi Arabia pushing for a nuclear cooperation deal that includes America allowing it to enrich uranium in the kingdom — something that worries nonproliferation experts, as spinning centrifuges open the door to a possible weapons program.

Prince Mohammed already has said the kingdom would pursue an atomic bomb if Iran had one, potentially creating a nuclear arms race in the region as Tehran's program continues to advance closer to weapons-grade levels. Saudi Arabia and Iran reached a détente in recent months, though the region remains tense amid the wider tensions between Iran and the U.S.

Higher oil prices would also help Russian President Vladimir Putin fund his war on Ukraine. Western countries have used a price cap to try to cut into Moscow's revenues. But those sanctions have seen Moscow be forced to sell its oil at a discount to countries like China and India.

Texas AG Ken Paxton pleads not guilty at impeachment trial and then leaves as arguments get underway

By JAKE BLEIBERG and PAUL J. WEBER Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — The historic impeachment trial of Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton began Tuesday with accusations of corruption that went unchecked for years and the Republican pleading not guilty as his party confronts whether to oust one of former President Donald Trump's biggest defenders.

But the day ended without Paxton around at all — he left and did not return after the state Senate overwhelmingly rejected his numerous attempts to dismiss the charges. His absence does not stop Texas' first impeachment trial in nearly 50 years but demonstrates the potential twists ahead in the coming weeks.

He was not the only one who left early: Although the start of the trial was carried live by some Texas stations and supporters of Paxton lined up before sunrise outside the Capitol, by the end empty seats in

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the Senate gallery outnumbered onlookers.

If convicted, Paxton could be barred from holding elected office in Texas.

"Mr. Paxton should be removed from office because he failed to protect the state and instead used his elected office for his own benefit," said Republican state Rep. Andrew Murr, one of the House impeachment managers leading the case against Paxton.

"In Texas, we require more from our public servants than merely avoiding being a criminal," he said.

In an era of bitter partisanship across the U.S., the trial is a rare instance of a political party seeking to hold one of its own to account for allegations of wrongdoing. For years many Texas Republicans have resisted criticizing or facing head-on the litany of legal troubles surrounding Paxton, who has remained popular among the hard right by aligning himself closely to Trump and rushing his office into lawsuits that have halted priorities of the Biden administration.

As the articles of impeachment were formally read aloud, Paxton's attorney, Tony Buzbee, answered by calling them untrue or incorrect and saying his client pleads not guilty. He later used his opening statements to launch into a litany of grievances against the news media, the Texas House of Representatives, which impeached Paxton in May, and the special prosecutors who have pursued him for years on state charges of securities fraud.

At the heart of the case are accusations that Paxton abused his office to help one of his donors, Austin real estate developer Nate Paul, who was indicted this summer on charges of making false statements to a bank to secure more than \$170 million in loans.

Buzbee said Paxton "gave nothing of significance" to Paul and framed the proceedings as an attempt to overturn the will of voters.

"What could be less democratic than only 30 people deciding who should be the attorney general of Texas," Buzbee said. "The Texas House took away the votes of the over 4 million people who voted for Ken Paxton."

In one victory for Paxton, the presiding officer ruled that he cannot be compelled to testify during the proceedings, which could last for weeks.

The first witness was Jeff Mateer, one of eight former Paxton aides who reported him to the FBI in 2020. His testimony was expected to continue Tuesday.

Paxton's political future is in the hands of the Senate, where the Republican majority includes his wife, underscoring the many entanglements of his case. Sen. Angela Paxton can attend the trial but is barred from voting on whether to convict or acquit.

Shortly before the trial began, Ken and Angela Paxton spoke for a few minutes on the Senate floor and shared a brief kiss.

The Republican-led House voted 121-23 to impeach Paxton in May. The 20 articles of impeachment include abuse of public trust, unfitness for office and bribery. The vote immediately suspended Paxton and made him only the third sitting official in Texas' nearly 200-year history to be impeached.

Paxton faces trial by a Senate jury stacked with ideological allies and a presiding judge, Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, who loaned \$125,000 to his last reelection campaign.

A two-thirds majority — or 21 senators — is required for conviction, meaning that if all 12 Senate Democrats vote against Paxton, they still need at least nine Republicans to join them.

Peter Bowen, 74, drove from Houston at 3:30 a.m. to be in line at the Senate before sunrise. He said Paxton, who was reelected to a third term last November, was impeached because of his support for Trump and voters have already made clear where they stand on the allegations.

"We all knew about them, and we elected him. What they are doing is taking away the vote of the majority of the people of Texas," Bowen said.

The trial will likely bring forth new evidence. But the outline of the allegations against Paxton has been public since 2020, when eight of his top deputies reported him to the the FBI.

The former aides — largely conservatives handpicked by the attorney general — told investigators that Paxton had gone against their advice and hired an outside lawyer to probe the FBI's allegations of wrongdoing by Paul. They also said Paxton pressured his staff to take other actions that helped Paul.

In return, Paul allegedly hired a former aide to a Republican state senator with whom Paxton acknowledged having had an affair and bankrolled the renovations of one of the attorney general's properties, a million-dollar home in Austin.

Federal prosecutors continue to examine Paul and Paxton's relationship, so the evidence presented during his impeachment trial poses a legal as well as a political risk to the attorney general.

After going to the FBI, all eight of Paxton's deputies quit or were fired. Their departures led to an exodus of other seasoned lawyers and saw the attorney general's office consumed by dysfunction behind the scenes.

61 indicted in Georgia on racketeering charges connected to 'Stop Cop City' movement

By R.J. RICO Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Sixty-one people have been indicted in Georgia on racketeering charges following a long-running state investigation into protests against a planned police and firefighter training facility in the Atlanta area that critics call "Cop City."

In the sweeping indictment released Tuesday, Republican Attorney General Chris Carr alleged the defendants are "militant anarchists" who supported a violent movement that prosecutors trace to the widespread 2020 racial justice protests.

The Aug. 29 indictment is the latest application of the state's anti-racketeering law, also known as a RICO law, and comes just weeks after the Fulton County prosecutor used the statute to charge former President Donald Trump and 18 other defendants.

The "Stop Cop City" effort has gone on for more than two years and at times veered into vandalism and violence. Opponents fear the training center will lead to greater militarization of the police, and that its construction in an urban forest will exacerbate environmental damage in a poor, majority-Black area.

Most of those indicted have already been charged over their alleged involvement in the movement. RICO charges carry a heavy potential sentence that can be added on top of the penalty for the underlying acts.

Among the defendants: more than three dozen people already facing domestic terrorism charges in connection to violent protests; three leaders of a bail fund previously accused of money laundering; and three activists previously charged with felony intimidation after authorities said they distributed flyers calling a state trooper a "murderer" for his involvement in the fatal shooting of a protester.

"The 61 defendants together have conspired to prevent the construction of the Atlanta Public Safety Training Center by conducting, coordinating and organizing acts of violence, intimidation and property destruction," Carr said during a news conference Tuesday.

In linking the defendants to the alleged conspiracy, prosecutors have made a huge series of allegations. Those include everything from possessing fire accelerant and throwing Molotov cocktails at police officers, to being reimbursed for glue and food for activists who spent months camping in the woods near the construction site.

Activists leading an ongoing referendum effort against the project immediately condemned the charges, calling them "anti-democratic."

"Chris Carr may try to use his prosecutors and power to build his gubernatorial campaign and silence free speech, but his threats will not silence our commitment to standing up for our future, our community, and our city," the Cop City Vote coalition said in a statement.

Republican Gov. Brian Kemp, meanwhile, praised the indictment, saying in a statement, "My top priority is and always will be keeping Georgians safe, especially against out-of-state radicals that threaten the safety of our citizens and law enforcement."

Protests against the training center escalated after the fatal shooting in January of 26-year-old protester Manuel Esteban Paez Terán, known as Tortuguita. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation has said state troopers fired in self-defense after Paez Terán shot at them while they cleared protesters from a wooded area near the proposed facility site. But the troopers involved weren't wearing body cameras, and activists have questioned the official narrative.

Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens and others say the 85-acre, \$90 million facility would replace inadequate training facilities, and would help address difficulties in hiring and retaining police officers.

Prosecutors trace the roots of the "Stop Cop City" movement back to May 25, 2020, the date George Floyd was murdered by police officers in Minneapolis, even though the resulting protests occurred months before officials announced plans for the training center. Long after the racial justice protests died down, "violent anti-police sentiment" persisted among some Atlantans and it remains one of the demonstrators' "core driving motives," according to the indictment.

Since 2021, numerous instances of violence and vandalism have been linked to the movement. Days after the killing of Paez Terán, a police car was set alight at a January protest in downtown Atlanta. In March, more than 150 masked protesters chased off police at the construction site and torched construction equipment before fleeing and blending in with a crowd at a nearby music festival. Those two instances have led to dozens of people being charged with domestic terrorism, although prosecutors previously admitted they've had difficulty proving that many of those arrested were in fact those who took part in the violence.

Among those charged with domestic terrorism in March near the music festival and indicted last week is Thomas Jurgens, a Southern Poverty Law Center staff attorney. Jurgens' lawyer has said his client wore a bright green hat — a well-known identifier used by legal observers — and his arrest alarmed many human rights organizations.

The law center called it an example of "heavy-handed law enforcement intervention against protesters." DeKalb County District Attorney Sherry Boston, a Democrat, mentioned her concerns about Jurgens' prosecution in announcing her June decision to withdraw from criminal cases connected to the movement, citing disagreements with Carr over how to handle the matters.

In addition to the 61 racketeering indictments, five of the defendants were also indicted on domestic terrorism and first-degree arson charges. Three previously charged leaders of the Atlanta Solidarity Fund, which has provided bail money and helped find attorneys for arrested protesters, were also each indicted on 15 counts of money laundering.

The case was initially assigned to Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee, the judge overseeing the racketeering case against Trump and 18 others. But McAfee recused himself, saying he'd worked with prosecutors on the case prior to his judicial appointment. Fulton County Superior Court Judge Kimberly Esmond Adams now oversees the case.

For small biz reliant on summer tourism, extreme weather is the new pandemic -- for better or worse

By MAE ANDERSON AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — For small businesses that rely on summer tourism to keep afloat, extreme weather is replacing the pandemic as the determining factor in how well a summer will go.

The pandemic had its ups and downs for tourism, with a total shutdown followed by a rush of vacations due to pent-up demand. This year, small businesses say vacation cadences are returning to normal. But now, they have extreme weather to deal with — many say it's hurting business, but more temperate spots are seeing a surge.

Tourism-related businesses have always been at the mercy of the weather. But with heat waves, fires and storms becoming more frequent and intense, small businesses increasingly see extreme weather as their next long-term challenge.

For Jared Meyers, owner of Legacy Vacation Resorts, with eight locations, including four in Florida, Hurricane Idalia's landfall Wednesday as a Category 3 storm led to a loss in revenue as he temporarily closed one resort and closed another to new guests. It also means a lengthy cleanup period to fix gutter and other damage and beach cleanup, including replanting of sea grass, sea grapes and other plants to protect against the next storm.

"Even when the hurricane doesn't hit directly, it wreaks havoc economically, emotionally — to those that

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have suffered previous losses — and to our way of life,” he said.

A lifelong Florida resident, he’s used to hurricanes, but fears their intensity is getting worse. In fact, the number of storms that intensify dramatically within 240 miles (385 kilometers) of a coastline across the globe grew to 15 a year in 2020 compared to five a year in 1980, according to a study published in Nature Communications.

“It does feel like and probably will continue to feel like we’re just hopping from one emergency to another based on climate change,” Meyers said.

For Steve Silberberg in Saco, Maine, who runs Fitpacking, a company that guides people on wilderness backpacking trips in national and state parks and forests, extreme weather is becoming a serious obstacle. National Park Service Research has shown that national parks are experiencing extreme weather conditions at a higher rate than the rest of the country because of where they’re located.

Historic snowfall in March at Yosemite -- followed by a wildfire -- affected one hike Silberberg had planned. Another hike was canceled due to unusually large snowfall rendering the Narrows — part of Zion Canyon in Zion National Park in Utah — impassable due to a high volume of meltwater. He had to cancel a trip to the Los Padres National Forest in California due to wildfires and subsequent flooding, which destroyed trails and made them impassable.

“We are quickly approaching a crossroads as to how to keep the business viable,” he said. “It seems that almost half of our trips are affected in some way by increasingly extreme weather events.”

Silberberg is trying to find ways to make climate change work for him, however. He is thinking about starting a company that helps people visit places that may disappear due to climate change, such as Glacier National Park in Montana or the Everglades in Florida, which is threatened by rising sea levels.

In Southern California this summer, businesses faced sweltering heat, followed by Tropical Storm Hilary.

“Definitely extreme weather is here to stay,” said Shachi Mehra executive chef and partner at Adya, Indian restaurant in Anaheim, California. The restaurant is located in the Anaheim Packing House, a food hall in a historic 1919 citrus-packing house near Disneyland.

The restaurant closed for a day proactively during Tropical Storm Hilary, losing a day of sales. Heat has been more of an issue, as business slowed in late July this summer during a surge in temperatures. Mehra said she suspects the heat is behind the slowdown since typically things start to slow in late August or September.

Media focus on extreme weather can hurt business, too. Dan Dawson, owner of Horizon Divers in Key Largo, Florida, saw business boom during the pandemic. Now it’s back to pre-pandemic levels. But when storms like Idalia close in, tourists flee — even though Dawson’s spot in Key Largo was 300 miles (480 kilometers) from where Idalia hit.

“Once a storm is coming close we stop diving and once it goes by it can take up to two weeks for tourists to come back, and that is if we don’t have any damage,” he said.

Still, in some places that offer a respite from the heat and storms, businesses are getting an unexpected bump.

At Little America Flagstaff, a hotel set in 500 acres (202 hectares) of private forest celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, temperatures in the 90s felt pleasant compared to the record-breaking heat in Phoenix, a two-hour drive to the south, which had temperatures of over 110 degrees Fahrenheit-plus (43.4 degrees Celsius) for 31 straight days.

“When you see temperatures rising to the amount they were in Phoenix you immediately saw, not just with our hotel but all the hotels in the area, our occupancies all went up,” said Fred Reese, the hotel’s general manager.

Similarly, at Mission Point Resort on Mackinac Island, a historic island in Lake Michigan that doesn’t allow cars, temperatures have hovered in the temperate 70s while other places around the country have seen triple-digit heat. That leaves Michigan tourists often rubbing elbows with visitors from other states.

“It has been brutally hot in most of the country and it has been very, very nice up here in northern Michigan,” said Liz Ware, sales and marketing executive and part of the family that owns Mission Point.

"And so we have seen a lot of people from the Texas, Florida, Georgia area coming up north to northern Michigan because it is so temperate up here."

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 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."

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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.

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.

Tropical Storm Hilary swirls northward packing deadly rainfall along Mexico's Baja coast

By JORDI LEBRIJA Associated Press

ENSENADA, Mexico (AP) — Tropical Storm Hilary swirled northward Sunday just off the coast of Mexico's Baja California peninsula, no longer a hurricane but still carrying so much rain that forecasters said "catastrophic and life-threatening" flooding is likely across a broad region of the southwestern U.S.

As of 8 a.m. Pacific time, Hilary was located about 220 miles (350 kilometers) south-southeast of San

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Diego, the National Hurricane Center reported. Hilary had maximum sustained winds of 70 mph (110 kph) and was moving northwest at 25 mph (41 kph).

The Mexican cities of Ensenada and Tijuana remained directly in the tropical storm's path, and meteorologists warned that despite weakening, the storm remained treacherous.

One person drowned Saturday in the Mexican town of Santa Rosalia, on the peninsula's eastern coast, when a vehicle was swept away in an overflowing stream. Rescue workers managed to save four other people, said Edith Aguilar Villavicencio, the mayor of Mulege township.

It was not immediately clear whether officials considered the fatality related to the hurricane, but video posted by local officials showed torrents of water coursing through the town's streets.

Forecasters said the storm expected to bring flash floods, mudslides, isolated tornadoes, high winds and power outages. Authorities issued an evacuation advisory for Santa Catalina Island, urging residents and beachgoers to leave the tourist destination 23 miles (37 kilometers) off the coast.

Elizabeth Adams, a meteorologist at the National Weather Service San Diego office, said rain could fall up to 3 inches (7.62 centimeters) an hour across Southern California's mountains and deserts, from late Sunday morning into the afternoon. The intense rainfall during those hours could cause widespread and life-threatening flash floods.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom proclaimed a state of emergency, and officials had urged people to finish their preparations before sundown Saturday. It would be too late by Sunday, one expert said.

The hurricane is the latest major climate disaster to wreak havoc across the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Hawaii's island of Maui is still reeling from last week's blaze that killed over 100 people and ravaged the historic town of Lahaina, making it the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century. In Canada, firefighters on Saturday continued to battle blazes during the nation's worst fire season on record.

Hilary already brought heavy rain and flooding to Mexico and the southwestern U.S. on Saturday, ahead of the storm's expected Sunday border crossing. Forecasters warned it could dump up to 10 inches (25 centimeters) — a year's worth of rain for some areas — in southern California and southern Nevada.

"This does not lessen the threat, especially the flood threat," Jamie Rhome, the U.S. National Hurricane Center's deputy director, said during a Saturday briefing to announce the storm's downgraded status. "Don't let the weakening trend and the intensity lower your guard."

Meteorologists also expected the storm to churn up "life-threatening" surf and rip currents, including waves up to 40 feet (12 meters) high, along Mexico's Pacific coast. Dozens sought refuge at storm shelters in the twin resorts of Los Cabos at the southern tip of the Baja peninsula, and firefighters rescued a family in San Jose del Cabo after the resort was hit by driving rain and wind.

In Tijuana, fire department head Rafael Carrillo voiced the fear at the back of everyone's mind in the border city of 1.9 million people, particularly residents who live in homes on steep hillsides.

"If you hear noises, or the ground cracking, it is important for you to check it and get out as fast as possible, because the ground can weaken and your home could collapse," Carrillo said.

Tijuana ordered all beaches closed Saturday, and set up a half dozen storm shelters at sports complexes and government offices.

Mexico's navy evacuated 850 people from islands off the Baja coast, and deployed almost 3,000 troops for emergency operations. In La Paz, the picturesque capital of Baja California Sur state on the Sea of Cortez, police patrolled closed beaches to keep swimmers out of the whipped-up surf.

The U.S. hurricane center posted tropical storm and potential flood warnings for Southern California from the Pacific coast to interior mountains and deserts as far north as eastern Oregon and Idaho. The San Bernardino County sheriff issued evacuation warnings for several mountain and foothill communities ahead of the storm, while Orange County sent out its own alert for anyone living in a wildfire burn scar in the Santa Ana Mountains' Silverado and Williams canyons.

Authorities in Los Angeles scrambled to get the homeless off the streets and into shelters, and officials ordered all state beaches in San Diego and Orange counties closed.

Across the region, municipalities ran out of free sandbags and grocery shelves emptied out as residents stockpiled supplies. The U.S. National Park Service closed California's Joshua Tree National Park and Mojave

National Preserve to keep visitors from becoming stranded amid flooding.

Major League Baseball rescheduled three Sunday games in Southern California, moving them to Saturday as part of split doubleheaders, and SpaceX delayed the launch of a satellite-carrying rocket from a base on California's central coast until at least Monday.

The White House said President Joe Biden had been briefed on the latest preparedness plans ahead of the hurricane's turn to the U.S. "I urge everyone, everyone in the path of this storm, to take precautions and listen to the guidance of state and local officials," he said.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency announced that it has officials inside California's emergency preparedness office and teams on standby with food, water and other help as needed.

Hilary on Friday had rapidly grown into an exceedingly dangerous Category 4 major hurricane, with its top sustained winds peaking at 145 mph (230 kph). Its winds dropped to 115 mph (185 kph) early Saturday as a Category 3 storm, before further weakening to 100 mph (161 kph) as a Category 2.

By Sunday it was moving north-northwest at 21 mph (33 kph). The hurricane brushed past Punta Eugenia on the Pacific coast and was expected to make landfall along a sparsely populated area of the peninsula south of the Pacific port city of Ensenada.

Meanwhile one of several budding storm systems in the Atlantic Ocean became Tropical Storm Emily on Sunday, according to the National Hurricane Center. It was located far from land, about 1,000 miles (1,615 kilometers) west-northwest of the Cabo Verde Islands with maximum sustained winds of 50 mph (85 kph). Emily was moving at about 10 mph (17 kph) in the open ocean.

Rain from Tropical Storm Hilary lashes California and Mexico, swamping roads and trapping cars

By DAMIAN DOVARGANES and JORDI LEBRIJA Associated Press

SAN DIEGO (AP) — Tropical Storm Hilary inundated streets across Mexico's arid Baja California Peninsula with deadly floodwaters Sunday before moving over Southern California, where it swamped roads and downed trees, as concerns mounted that flash floods could strike in places as far north as Idaho.

Hilary brought floods, mudslides, high winds, power outages and the potential for isolated tornadoes. The storm already dumped more than 6 inches (15.24 centimeters) of rain in some mountain communities and threatened more than an average year's worth of rain in inland desert areas.

Hilary made landfall along the Mexican coast in a sparsely populated area about 150 miles (250 kilometers) south of Ensenada Sunday, then moved through mudslide-prone Tijuana, threatening the improvised homes that cling to hillsides just south of the U.S. border. By Sunday evening, the storm had moved over San Diego and was headed north into inland desert areas.

As evening fell in California, the National Weather Service in Los Angeles warned of significant flooding risk throughout populous mountain areas along the coast northeast of Los Angeles.

"PLEASE ... STAY OFF THE ROADS," the agency posted on X, formerly known as Twitter.

Mud and boulders spilled onto highways, water gushed onto roadways and tree branches fell in neighborhoods from San Diego to Los Angeles. Dozens of cars were trapped in floodwaters in typically hot and dry Palm Desert and surrounding communities across the the Coachella Valley. Crews pumped floodwaters out of the emergency room at Eisenhower Medical Center in Rancho Mirage.

Hilary could wallop other Western states with once-in-a-century rains, with a good chance of it becoming the wettest known tropical cyclone to douse Nevada, Oregon and Idaho. Hilary was expected to remain a tropical storm into central Nevada early Monday before dissipating.

The Los Angeles Unified School District, the nation's second largest school system, said all campuses would be closed on Monday. San Diego schools postponed the first day of classes from Monday to Tuesday.

"There is no way we can compromise the safety of a single child or an employee, and our inability to survey buildings, our inability to determine access to schools makes it nearly impossible for us to open schools," Superintendent Alberto Carvalho said at a media briefing.

Southern California got another surprise in the afternoon as an earthquake with a preliminary magnitude

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of 5.1 hit near Ojai, about 80 miles (130 km) northwest of downtown Los Angeles, according to the U.S. Geological Survey. It was felt widely and was followed by smaller aftershocks. There were no immediate reports of major damage or injury, according to a dispatcher with the Ventura County Sheriff's Office.

Hilary is just the latest major climate disaster to wreak havoc across the U.S., Canada and Mexico. Hawaii's island of Maui is still reeling from a blaze that killed over 100 people and ravaged the historic town of Lahaina, making it the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century. Firefighters in Canada are battling that nation's worst fire season on record.

Beaches were closed across the Mexican cities of Ensenada and Tijuana while shelters were opened at sports complexes and government offices.

One person drowned Saturday in the Mexican town of Santa Rosalia when a vehicle was swept away in an overflowing stream. Rescue workers saved four other people, said Edith Aguilar Villavicencio, the mayor of Mulege township.

Mexican army troops fanned out across Mulege, where some of the worst damage occurred Saturday on the eastern side of the Baja Peninsula. Soldiers used bulldozers and dump trucks to help clear tons of boulders and earth clogging streets and roads that were turned into raging torrents a day earlier.

Power lines were toppled in many places, and emergency personnel were working to restore power and reach those cut off by the storm.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency. The Federal Emergency Management Agency said it has officials inside California's emergency preparedness office and teams on standby with food, water and other help.

To the north in Nevada, Gov. Joe Lombardo declared a state of emergency and activated 100 National Guard troops to assist with problems from predicted flooding in western Clark and Nye counties and southern Esmeralda County. In Arizona, wind gusts neared 60 mph (97 kph) in Yuma County, where officials gave out thousands of sandbags.

"I urge everyone, everyone in the path of this storm, to take precautions and listen to the guidance of state and local officials," President Joe Biden said. Biden said in a later statement that he was being briefed on the storm and was prepared to provide federal assistance.

The warnings from officials didn't keep everyone indoors. On Sunday morning in coastal Carlsbad, just north of San Diego, 19-year-old Jack Johnson and his friends kept an eye on the huge waves, determined to surf them at some point Sunday.

"It's really choppy out there, not really surfable yet, but I think we can find a good break somewhere later," Johnson said. "I can't remember a storm like this."

The weather service said tornadoes were possible in eastern San Diego County.

Death Valley National Park could get more rainfall from the storm than the area sees in an average year, officials said.

Meanwhile, one of several budding storm systems in the Atlantic Ocean became Tropical Storm Emily on Sunday, according to the National Hurricane Center. It was far from land, moving west in the open ocean. Also, Tropical Storm Franklin formed in the eastern Caribbean. Tropical storm watches were issued for the southern coasts of Haiti and the Dominican Republic.

In Sept. 1939, a tropical storm that roared into California ripped apart train tracks, tore houses from their foundations and capsized many boats, killing nearly 100 people on land and at sea.

Fierce storm in southern Brazil kills at least 21 people and displaces more than 1,600

SAO PAULO (AP) — At least 21 people died in southern Brazil due to a fierce storm that caused floods in several cities, authorities said Tuesday.

Rio Grande do Sul Gov. Eduardo Leite said the death toll is the state's highest due to a climate event. He said about 60 cities had been battered by the storm, which was classified as an extratropical cyclone.

Leite said 15 of the deaths occurred in one house in Mucum, a city of about 50,000 residents.

The Rio Grande do Sul state government said it had recorded 1,650 people made homeless since Monday night.

TV footage showed families on the top of their houses pleading for help as rivers overflowed their banks. The city hall at Mucum recommended that residents seek out supplies to meet their needs for the next 72 hours.

The governor said one of the dead was a woman who was swept away during a rescue attempt. "I regret the death of a woman in a rescue attempt over the Taquari river," Leite said in his social media channels. "The wire broke, she and a rescuer fell. Unfortunately the woman did not survive and the rescuer is seriously injured."

Rio Grande do Sul was hit by another extratropical cyclone in June, which killed 16 people and caused destruction in 40 cities, many of those around state capital of Porto Alegre.

United Airlines says the outage that held up departing flights was not a cybersecurity issue

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

United Airlines said Tuesday that a software update triggered a glitch that forced it to halt departures nationwide, briefly crippling one of the nation's biggest carriers on a busy travel day.

Federal officials said United crews had been unable to contact airline dispatchers through normal means. "A software update caused a widespread slowdown in United's technology systems," United said in a statement. The airline said it was not a cybersecurity issue.

The Federal Aviation Administration, which runs the nation's airspace, said United asked it to stop the airline's departures nationwide. The FAA said the issue was limited to United and its subsidiaries.

The ground stop — it did not affect planes already in the air, United said — lasted a little more than an hour.

By late afternoon Tuesday on the East Coast, United had canceled only seven flights, well below its average of about 16 per day over the busy Labor Day weekend, according to figures from tracking service FlightAware.

However, more than 350 United flights were delayed — 13% of the carrier's schedule, far more than rivals American, Delta and Southwest — on a day that many holiday vacationers were expected to fly home.

Southwest Airlines had a similar outage in April that grounded all departing flights for about an hour and caused more than 2,000 flights to be late.

The FAA caused all U.S. departures to be halted briefly in January when a system used to alert pilots to safety hazards failed. The agency blamed a contractor that it said accidentally deleted files while synchronizing the alert system and its backup.

Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg, who has criticized airlines for flight problems and other issues over the past year, posted Tuesday that the FAA was "receiving more information about the cause and scope of the issue, and DOT will make sure (United) meets its obligations to affected passengers."

The FAA is part of Buttigieg's Department of Transportation.

Shares of Chicago-based United Airlines Holdings Inc. fell on news of the ground stop and closed down 2.5%.

Colorado, Duke surge into the AP Top 25 after huge upsets; Florida State climbs into top five

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

No. 21 Duke and No. 22 Colorado moved into the Associated Press Top 25 college football poll Tuesday after scoring the biggest upsets of the opening weekend of the season and No. 4 Florida State jumped into the top five after its resounding victory over LSU in Week 1's marquee game.

Georgia remained No. 1 with 58 first-place votes and Michigan held steady at No. 2 with two first-place

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votes.

No. 3 Alabama moved up a spot and Florida State climbed four places and received the remaining three first-place votes after beating LSU, 45-24. The Seminoles are in the top five for the first time since the beginning of the 2017 season.

Ohio State rounded out the top five in the AP's first regular-season poll of the season.

LSU dropped nine spots to No. 15. Clemson, which was upset at Duke, fell 16 places to No. 25. TCU, which lost to Colorado, dropped all the way out of the rankings after being No. 17 in the preseason.

Colorado's victory as a three-touchdown underdog at TCU in coach Deion's Sanders debut was the story of the weekend, and now the Buffaloes are ranked for the first time since a brief stay in the 2020 season. The Buffs were also ranked for two weeks in 2018, but have only finished a season in the Top 25 once (2016) in the last 20 seasons.

"I don't care about no ranking," Sanders said. "I care about how we practice tomorrow. That's what I'm caring about right now. Ranking don't have a record, does it? Ranking don't have a record."

Sanders, the former NFL star and Florida State All-American, took over a team that went 1-11 last season and did an unprecedented roster makeover, with nearly 90 new players, 58 of them transfers. The new-look Buffs came away with a 45-42 victory on the road against the program that played in the national title game last season.

The rest of the top 10 was Southern California at No. 6, followed by Penn State, Washington, Tennessee and Notre Dame.

Duke capped the long Labor Day weekend of college football by knocking off Clemson 28-7 on Monday night in Durham, North Carolina. It was the Blue Devils' first victory against a team ranked in the top 10 since 1989 against a Clemson team ranked seventh.

In Year 2 under coach Mike Elko, perennial basketball powerhouse Duke is ranked for the first time in the AP college football poll since a one-week stint in 2018.

That season was also the last time Florida State made an appearance in the preseason Top 25. The Seminoles quickly faded that year, slipping into the worst stretch the program has had since the 1970s.

These Seminoles opened with their most impressive victory since coach Jimbo Fisher left for Texas A&M late in the 2017 season.

Coach Mike Norvell's team broke through last season, going 10-3 and finishing No. 11 in the country. The victory over LSU was the Seminoles' first against a team ranked in the top five since October 2014 at home against No. 5 Notre Dame.

POLL POINTS

Having Florida State near the top of the AP poll is a familiar sight, just not as much recently. The last time FSU was ranked this highly during the regular season was when it reached No. 2 in September 2016.

The Seminoles had one of the greatest stretches in college football history under coach Bobby Bowden from the late 1980s into the early 2000s. That included a record 14 straight seasons finishing in the top five and two national titles.

The Seminoles went three consecutive seasons (2019-2021) never being ranked, the longest streak of futility for the program since the mid-1970s, before turning it around in 2022.

Florida State's top-five ranking was its 240th since 1980, second only to Alabama with 281.

CONFERENCE CALL

Colorado's entry gives the beleaguered Pac-12 six ranked teams, the same number it finished with last season.

SEC — 6 (Nos. 1, 3, 9, 14, 20, 23).

Pac-12 — 6 (Nos. 6, 8, 12, 13, 16, 22).

Big Ten — 4 (Nos. 2, 5, 7, 19).

ACC — 4 (Nos. 4, 17, 21, 25).

Big 12 — 3 (Nos. 11, 15, 18).

American Athletic — 1 (No. 24).

Independent — 1 (No. 10).

RANKED vs. RANKED

No. 11 Texas at No. 3 Alabama. The game in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, will be the first regular-season meeting between Texas and Alabama with both ranked.

No. 20 Mississippi at No. 24 Tulane. The 64th meeting in the series will be the first since 1956 where both teams are ranked.

New book details Biden-Obama frictions and says Harris sought roles 'away from the spotlight'

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new book about Joe Biden portrays the president as someone whose middle-class upbringing helped foster a resentment of intellectual elitism that shaped his political career and sometimes caused strain with his onetime boss, Harvard-educated Barack Obama.

Biden, who spent eight years as Obama's vice president, told a friend that Obama couldn't even curse properly, according to "The Last Politician: Inside Joe Biden's White House and the Struggle for America's Future."

Released Tuesday and written by Franklin Foer, a staff writer for The Atlantic, the book says Biden said Obama was unable to deliver a "f— you" with "the right elongation of vowels and the necessary hardness of consonants; it was how they must curse in the ivory tower."

Now, as the president runs for reelection, the early frontrunner among Republicans is former President Donald Trump, whose supporters can sometimes resent the perceived elitism of Washington's political class — suggesting some overlap with Biden.

The anecdote also may resonate with Democrats. Ardent supporters of both Biden and Obama fondly recall the then-vice president telling Obama in a private aside that was captured on a hot mic, "This is a big f—ing deal," during the signing ceremony for Obama's signature health care law in 2010.

Foer's book offers a deep examination of Biden's first two years in office, which the author describes as encompassing a lot of "flailing" before the president began to cement his legacy through signature policy achievements and "creative diplomacy" that helped rally the world behind Ukraine in the face of Russia's invasion.

The 80-year-old Biden continues to face questions about his age, and Foer calls it "striking" that Biden attends few meetings or public events before 10 a.m. In private, Biden would "occasionally admit to friends he felt tired," the book says.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre was asked last week by a reporter citing an early excerpt from Foer's book if personal fatigue might help explain why Biden's morning schedule was often light. She responded, "That's a ridiculous assumption to make."

Jean-Pierre referred back to that exchange during her briefing with reporters at the White House on Tuesday, and provided updated comment, saying that administration officials had now "seen the context of the excerpt." She said the book was actually praising Biden for helping to push major legislation through Congress and unify global support around Ukraine.

It "seemed to be making the opposite overall point about how the value of his experience and wisdom resulted in rallying the free world against authoritarianism," she said.

Jean-Pierre also said "there's gonna be a range, always, a range of books that are about every administration" that would feature "a variety of claims."

"That's not unusual. That happens all the time," she said. "And we're not going to litigate here."

Foer's book also describes struggles by Vice President Kamala Harris to carve out a role for herself as Biden's No. 2 that have been well-documented previously. But Foer suggests Harris may have hurt her own cause in that area, initially asking to be in charge of relations with Scandinavia because it was "away from the spotlight."

The book reports that the vice president was initially excited about helping the administration tackle the root causes of immigration that have seen so many Central American migrants seeking asylum arrive

at the U.S.-Mexico border — but that she eventually began to accept conventional wisdom that it was a thankless assignment.

Foer's book says Biden tried to treat Harris more respectfully than he felt Obama often had treated him as vice president, calling her "the vice president" instead of "my vice president." But, during his early days in office, as Biden was convening his team to combat the coronavirus pandemic, Biden joked that the nation's top infectious disease expert, Dr. Anthony Fauci, should sit in the vice president's seat.

"The Last Politician" describes the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021. It says that when Biden's national security adviser, Jake Sullivan, relayed to the president that Afghan President Ashraf Ghani had fled the country, leaving Kabul to fall to the Taliban, Biden declared in frustration, "Give me a break!"

It also reports that former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton personally intervened to help many women whose work in Afghanistan made them potential targets for the Taliban. She directed a group of them to wear white scarfs so they could be identified by U.S. Marines guarding the Kabul airport, and unilaterally contacted world leaders to find places for their eventual evacuation flights to land.

The book says Clinton's call to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy drew a personal rebuke from Sullivan, former close advisor to Clinton, who told her "What are you doing calling the Ukrainian government?"

"I wouldn't have to call if you guys would," Clinton responded, according to Foer's book.

Prosecutors in all 50 states urge Congress to strengthen tools to fight AI child sexual abuse images

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The top prosecutors in all 50 states are urging Congress to study how artificial intelligence can be used to exploit children through pornography, and come up with legislation to further guard against it.

In a letter sent Tuesday to Republican and Democratic leaders of the House and Senate, the attorneys general from across the country call on federal lawmakers to "establish an expert commission to study the means and methods of AI that can be used to exploit children specifically" and expand existing restrictions on child sexual abuse materials specifically to cover AI-generated images.

"We are engaged in a race against time to protect the children of our country from the dangers of AI," the prosecutors wrote in the letter, shared ahead of time with The Associated Press. "Indeed, the proverbial walls of the city have already been breached. Now is the time to act."

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson led the effort to add signatories from all 50 states and four U.S. territories to the letter. The Republican, elected last year to his fourth term, told AP last week that he hoped federal lawmakers would translate the group's bipartisan support for legislation on the issue into action.

"Everyone's focused on everything that divides us," said Wilson, who marshaled the coalition with his counterparts in Mississippi, North Carolina and Oregon. "My hope would be that, no matter how extreme or polar opposites the parties and the people on the spectrum can be, you would think protecting kids from new, innovative and exploitative technologies would be something that even the most diametrically opposite individuals can agree on — and it appears that they have."

The Senate this year has held hearings on the possible threats posed by AI-related technologies. In May, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman, whose company makes free chatbot tool ChatGPT, said that government intervention will be critical to mitigating the risks of increasingly powerful AI systems. Altman proposed the formation of a U.S. or global agency that would license the most powerful AI systems and have the authority to "take that license away and ensure compliance with safety standards."

While there's no immediate sign Congress will craft sweeping new AI rules, as European lawmakers are doing, the societal concerns have led U.S. agencies to promise to crack down on harmful AI products that break existing civil rights and consumer protection laws.

In addition to federal action, Wilson said he's encouraging his fellow attorneys general to scour their

own state statutes for possible areas of concern.

"We started thinking, do the child exploitation laws on the books — have the laws kept up with the novelty of this new technology?"

According to Wilson, among the dangers AI poses include the creation of "deepfake" scenarios — videos and images that have been digitally created or altered with artificial intelligence or machine learning — of a child that has already been abused, or the alteration of the likeness of a real child from something like a photograph taken from social media, so that it depicts abuse.

"Your child was never assaulted, your child was never exploited, but their likeness is being used as if they were," he said. "We have a concern that our laws may not address the virtual nature of that, though, because your child wasn't actually exploited — although they're being defamed and certainly their image is being exploited."

A third possibility, he pointed out, is the altogether digital creation of a fictitious child's image for the purpose of creating pornography.

"The argument would be, 'well I'm not harming anyone — in fact, it's not even a real person,' but you're creating demand for the industry that exploits children," Wilson said.

There have been some moves within the tech industry to combat the issue. In February, Meta, as well as adult sites like OnlyFans and Pornhub, began participating in an online tool, called Take It Down, that allows teens to report explicit images and videos of themselves from the internet. The reporting site works for regular images and AI-generated content.

"AI is a great technology, but it's an industry disrupter," Wilson said. "You have new industries, new technologies that are disrupting everything, and the same is true for the law enforcement community and for protecting kids. The bad guys are always evolving on how they can slip off the hook of justice, and we have to evolve with that."

Wait times to exit Burning Man drop after flooding left tens of thousands stranded in Nevada desert

BLACK ROCK DESERT, Nev. (AP) — Wait times for tens of thousands of Burning Man partygoers trying to exit the mud-caked northern Nevada desert are beginning to decrease after flooded roads left them stranded there for days.

Event organizers said they started to let traffic flow out on the main road around 2 p.m. local time Monday — even as they urged attendees to delay their exit to help ease traffic. About two hours after the mass departure began, organizers estimated a wait time of about five hours.

By Tuesday morning, wait times had dropped to between two and three hours, according to the official Burning Man account on the social network X, formerly known as Twitter.

The annual gathering, which launched on a San Francisco beach in 1986, attracts nearly 80,000 artists, musicians and activists for a week-long mix of wilderness camping and avant-garde performances.

The festival had been closed to vehicles after more than a half-inch (1.3 centimeters) of rain fell Friday, causing flooding and foot-deep mud.

The road closures came just before the first of two ceremonial fires signaling an end to the festival was scheduled to begin Saturday night. The event traditionally culminates with the burning of a large wooden effigy shaped like a man and a wood temple structure during the final two nights, but the fires were postponed as authorities worked to reopen exit routes by the end of the Labor Day weekend.

Organizers had also asked attendees not to walk out of the Black Rock Desert about 110 miles (177 kilometers) north of Reno during that time as others had done throughout the weekend, including DJ Diplo and comedian Chris Rock.

"The Man" was torched Monday night while the temple is set to go up in flames 8 p.m. Tuesday.

The National Weather Service in Reno said some light rain showers could pass through Tuesday morning.

The event began Aug. 27 and had been scheduled to end Monday morning, with attendees packing up and cleaning up after themselves.

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"We are a little bit dirty and muddy, but spirits are high. The party still going," said Scott London, a Southern California photographer, adding that the travel limitations offered "a view of Burning Man that a lot of us don't get to see."

Disruptions are part of the event's recent history: Dust storms forced organizers to temporarily close entrances to the festival in 2018, and the event was twice canceled altogether during the pandemic.

At least one fatality has been reported, but organizers said the death of a man in his 40s wasn't weather-related. The sheriff of nearby Pershing County said he was investigating but has not identified the man or a cause of death.

President Joe Biden told reporters in Delaware on Sunday that he was aware of the situation at Burning Man, including the death, and the White House was in touch with local authorities.

The event is remote on the best of days and emphasizes self-sufficiency. Amid the flooding, revelers were urged to conserve their food and water, and most remained hunkered down at the site.

Some attendees, however, managed to walk several miles to the nearest town or catch a ride there.

Diplo, whose real name is Thomas Wesley Pentz, posted a video to Instagram on Saturday evening showing him and Rock riding in the back of a fan's pickup truck. He said they had walked 6 miles through the mud before hitching a ride.

"I legit walked the side of the road for hours with my thumb out," Diplo wrote.

Cindy Bishop and three of her friends managed to drive their rented RV out of the festival at dawn on Monday when, Bishop said, the main road wasn't being guarded.

She said they were happy to make it out after driving toward the exit — and getting stuck several times — over the course of two days.

But Bishop, who traveled from Boston for her second Burning Man, said spirits were still high at the festival when they had left. Most people she spoke with said they planned to stay for the ceremonial burns.

"The spirit in there," she said, "was really like, 'We're going to take care of each other and make the best of it.'"

Rebecca Barger, a photographer from Philadelphia, arrived at her first Burning Man on Aug. 26 and was determined to stick it out through the end.

"Everyone has just adapted, sharing RVs for sleeping, offering food and coffee," Barger said. "I danced in foot-deep clay for hours to incredible DJs."

A Trump-Biden rematch may be on the horizon in 2024, whether voters like it or not

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The end of Labor Day weekend would typically mark the start of a furious sprint to the Iowa caucuses as candidates battle for their party's presidential nomination. But as the 2024 campaign comes into greater focus, the usual frenzy is yielding to a sense of inevitability.

Among Republicans, Donald Trump is dominating the primary field, outpacing rivals with resumes as governors, diplomats and entrepreneurs that would normally prove compelling. The former president's strength comes despite — or perhaps because of — multiple criminal indictments that threaten to overshadow any serious debate about the future of the country. And for now, the tens of millions of dollars that Republican rivals are pouring into the race are doing little to diminish Trump's stature, fueling concerns among his GOP critics who fear the primary is essentially over before it begins.

As one troubled front-runner tightens his grip on the Republican nomination, President Joe Biden is on a glide path to victory on the Democratic side. The 80-year-old incumbent is facing only token opposition for the Democratic nomination despite concerns about his age and performance from many within his own party.

Whether voters like it or not, a Trump-Biden rematch may be on the horizon, raising the prospect of a deeply uncertain election season that only intensifies the nation's political divide. Already, Trump is skipping his party's presidential debates and his court appearances are sometimes drawing more attention

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than his campaign stops. And Biden has barely begun to campaign as he grapples with questions about his age and his son's legal challenges.

"I just can't imagine things markedly changing. So, it appears that past is prologue," California Gov. Gavin Newsom, a Democrat, said in an interview, praising Biden's record of achievement while warning his party against underestimating Trump's political strength.

Newsom said concerns about Biden's age "are fair game and the White House knows it."

"But if age equals results," he went on, "I'm looking forward to his 85th birthday."

On the Republican side, dread is building among some donors and party leaders who hoped conservative voters would move past Trump given the the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol he inspired and his serious legal challenges.

"A Trump-Biden rematch would be a disaster for the country. I'm very depressed about it," said Bobbie Kilberg, a prominent Republican donor who is supporting former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie. She said it's "scary" that so many voters in her party continue to support the former president. "I refuse to believe that Trump is our inevitable nominee."

There is time for the 2024 landscape to shift.

Four months remain before the first votes are cast in the Iowa caucuses and the general election is more than a year away. And recent history has plenty of examples of overlooked and seemingly overmatched candidates who proved the conventional wisdom wrong. Both Trump and Biden are among them.

There are also significant variables.

Abortion continues to scramble elections — even in GOP strongholds like Kansas, Kentucky and Ohio — as voters reject Republican efforts to restrict access to the procedure. A greater backlash is possible as the courts review access to a commonly used abortion pill.

And Trump is facing 91 felony charges in criminal proceedings unfolding in Washington, New York, South Florida and Atlanta. They involve everything from his handling of classified information to his efforts to overturn the 2020 election to orchestrating hush money payments to a porn actor.

The former president could be a convicted felon before the general election is decided next November. Still, party leaders — including most of his Republican primary opponents — have vowed to support him even if he's convicted. And nothing in the Constitution bars felons from assuming the presidency.

At the same time, Democratic officials are deeply concerned about the prospect of a third-party bid under the banner of No Labels, a centrist group backed by a \$70 million budget actively working to secure a place on the presidential ballot in at least 20 states this year.

Group leaders insist they would nominate a candidate next spring only as "an insurance policy" should Trump and Biden win their respective primaries, which appears increasingly likely. And then, No Labels would move forward only if it's certain that its presidential nominee wouldn't unintentionally help Trump win reelection.

Democratic leaders aren't convinced.

Several current and former elected officials have been in close contact with the organization, including Sen. Joe Manchin, D-West Virginia, former Utah Gov. Jon Huntsman and former Maryland Gov. Larry Hogan.

Louisiana Sen. Bill Cassidy, a Republican who says he supports No Labels' mission, did not rule out running as a No Labels presidential contender himself when asked during a recent interview.

"I don't want No Labels to run a candidate. I want the two parties to respond responsibly to the challenges before us," Cassidy said, indicating he wouldn't support Trump or Biden. He described a presidential bid of his own under the No Labels banner as a hypothetical he didn't want to comment on.

In ruling out Trump, the Louisiana Republican cited the criminal charges against the Republican former president, questions about his viability in the general election, and the former president's refusal to "be honest with the American people" about looming budget shortfalls in Social Security and Medicare.

Cassidy, a medical doctor, also raised concerns about Biden's physical and mental health. "He's just so obviously declining," he said.

Indeed, both Trump and Biden have glaring liabilities, according to a new poll by The Associated Press-

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NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Biden is "old" and "confused," and Trump is "corrupt" and "dishonest." Those were among the top terms Americans use when asked to describe each party's leading presidential candidates.

But leaders in both parties are willing to overlook such problems.

Young Democrats of America President Quentin Wathum-Ocama concedes that young voters aren't necessarily enthusiastic about a Trump-Biden rematch, but he hopes that Trump's polarizing candidacy will give Wathum-Ocama's party the energy Biden cannot.

"Yes, people want a younger generation of politicians. We've always talked about Joe Biden as — even he's said — as a transitional figure in our political life," he said. "As much as we're seeing folks, for whatever reason, may not be excited or whatever, to me, it comes back to democracy is on the line."

With virtually no exceptions, Democratic officials in Congress and in key states are publicly rallying behind Biden's reelection.

Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders, Biden's strongest challenger in the 2020 Democratic primary, endorsed Biden's reelection bid hours after it was announced this spring. Biden enlisted other would-be rivals for his national advisory board. The group includes Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif., Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker and Newsom.

Republicans have delighted in suggesting that Newsom plans to launch a primary challenge against Biden, something the California governor has repeatedly ruled out. That's even as Newsom teases the possibility of a high-profile debate against Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is among Trump's top Republican challengers.

Newsom said there would be a debate with the Florida governor, perhaps in November, although the camps are still working out the details.

"I get to do the one thing I look forward to doing more than anything else, and that's make the case for Joe Biden and what he's accomplished — and to do that one on one," he said of a DeSantis debate. "That's an opportunity, a platform I don't want to walk away from."

Meanwhile, in a show of confidence, the Trump campaign has already begun to pivot toward a general election matchup against Biden.

His team says he currently plans to skip all Republican presidential debates, sensing few consequences for skipping the first one last month. DeSantis, once thought to be a potent threat, has struggled to live up to expectations.

Trump's relationships across the party and his expansive political machine have made it extremely difficult for others to break through.

"The president benefits from having led the party for the last eight years," said Brian Jack, Trump's political director.

Trump is leading the fight for endorsements, winning the public backing of more members of Congress and statewide elected officials than the rest of the field combined.

The other candidates are also struggling to keep up with Trump's quiet campaign to control the delegate selection rules for individual state primaries. For example, Trump officials successfully pushed California Republicans to award all of the state's 169 delegates to the winner of their March 5 primary, instead of doling out delegates to multiple candidates based on the proportion of their vote.

The payoff for that work became clear late last week when a pro-DeSantis super PAC scaled back its operations in Nevada and other states that host Republican primary contests in March, including California, North Carolina and Texas.

Given Trump's overwhelming advantages, some of Trump's powerful allies have begun to call for other Republican presidential candidates to give up. Miami Mayor Francis Suarez ended his short-lived White House bid last week after failing to qualify for the opening debate. But at least eight high-profile opponents remain.

"It has been clear for months that President Trump will be the Republican nominee," said Rep. Elise Stefanik, the No. 3 House Republican. "This election is the most important election in our lifetime, and I will continue to call on Republicans to coalesce our entire party apparatus behind President Trump's campaign."

While Trump remains the clear front-runner, he holds a wider margin nationally than he does in some

of the early voting states. And influential Republicans there aren't ready to concede the nomination to Trump yet.

Gov. Chris Sununu of New Hampshire, which hosts the second Republican primary contest after Iowa, is working to boost Trump's GOP rivals, warning that Trump is too flawed to win the general election.

Former Iowa Gov. Terry Branstad, who served as Trump's ambassador to China, also has doubts about the former president's chances in the general election given the legal challenges that will play out for much of next year.

"The focus of the election ought to be on Biden and his record," Branstad said. "That's the thing that bothers me. It plays into the hands of the Democrats."

He added, "I think this thing is going to tighten up."

Even Trump isn't quite willing to say that he's already locked up the Republican presidential nomination.

"I don't want to say anything's over cause I don't say that," Trump said Friday on WABC. "I'm not a believer until it's over, right? As Yogi would say, 'Ain't over 'til it's over.'"

Math is hard — even for teachers. What if they conquered their math anxiety?

By ARIEL GILREATH of The Hechinger Report undefined

CHICAGO (AP) — In July, in a packed classroom in downtown Chicago, a group composed mostly of early elementary teachers and child care workers read a story about "Wendi," a fictional preschool teacher who loves reading but struggles in math.

Even though Wendi was drawn to early education, where "math was so easy," she still felt unsure of her skills. In the story, she decided to skip math concepts, leaving them for the teachers her students would have next year.

Across the room, people nodded their heads as they listened.

"I am Wendi. Wendi is me," said Ivory McCormick, a kindergarten teacher from Atlanta. Several other educators in the classroom identified with Wendi, and that was the point. Decades of research shows math anxiety is a common problem for adults, and surveys show it particularly affects women, who make up nearly 90% of elementary teachers in the United States.

Put simply, a lot of elementary school educators hate the prospect of teaching math, even when the concepts are beginner-level.

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.

At the Erikson Institute, a child-development-focused graduate school in Chicago, this annual summer math conference is a chance for teachers to assuage their anxiety. Participants explore how young children learn math and strategize activities they can do in the classroom.

Because math competencies build on each other, it's critical that students receive a solid foundation in the subject, experts say. The U.S. has long trailed many other developed countries in terms of student math performance, and scores tanked during the pandemic. Educators say helping teachers in the early grades gain confidence in math could be one key to unlocking America's post-pandemic math recovery.

"If you look at how a child is doing with math when they enter kindergarten, that's the best way to predict how they're going to be doing with math later, all the way up through eighth grade," said Jennifer McCray, a research professor at Erikson.

When McCormick started teaching preschool in Atlanta five years ago, she felt anxious about teaching a subject she didn't feel confident in. "Math was something I always had to work really hard at, and it

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seemed like I never really got that much better at it," she said.

Teachers who doubt their math ability often worry they will transfer their math aversion onto impressionable students, educators say.

Math specialists say it is a pervasive issue in elementary classrooms, where educators are typically expected to teach every subject. It often leads to teachers spending less classroom time on math.

"I have some kids who say, 'Nan, we haven't done math for two weeks,'" said Nan McCormack, a retired teacher and math specialist who tutors young students online from her home in Chicago. "It's one of those subjects that teachers like to avoid and come up with an excuse, and think, if they don't get it now, they'll get it next year."

At the Erikson Institute's summer conference, teachers gained practice on concepts they'd use in their classrooms. They built large, 10-sided shapes out of colorful blocks, for example. The exercises benefited their own math skills, too.

"There's a misbelief that in order to teach early childhood math, you don't really need to know math well," Lauren Solarski, a consultant and coach with the Early Math Collaborative at Erikson, told the group of educators.

That doesn't necessarily mean early childhood teachers need to be experts in advanced geometry or algebra, said Lisa Ginet, director of program design and operations at Erikson. But it does mean they need to know how different lessons that may not seem to be related to math are connected to mathematical thinking and to topics students will learn as they get older.

It isn't a coincidence that a lot of early elementary teachers lack confidence in their own math abilities, McCray said. Sometimes, that's why they go into early education in the first place.

"There's this idea that you can probably do the least harm there," McCray said.

Avoiding high-level math courses was part of why Stacey Stevens switched her major to early childhood education in college. After she became a preschool teacher in Kentucky, she did a yearlong professional development session on math. Finally, she started to feel she truly understood how to teach it.

"I think that's what made me most passionate about it in preschool — I didn't want kids to grow up having the same struggles as me," said Stevens, who now works for the Kentucky Department of Education as the director of an early childhood regional training center. "I wanted them to understand that four triangles make a square: to actually see it and do it and not just be told that a triangle is a fourth of a square."

Before teachers step into classrooms, colleges also need to better prepare them to teach math, said Heather Peske, president of the National Council on Teacher Quality.

On average, most undergraduate and graduate teacher preparation programs do not spend as much time on elementary math content as NCTQ believes is necessary, according to the organization's 2022 analysis of these programs. The council's recommendations are based on studies that show teachers' math coursework in college is linked to student achievement.

"If we prepared them better, they would be stronger at both their math content knowledge as well as their ability to teach math, and this would reduce their anxiety and improve student outcomes," Peske said.

McCormick, the kindergarten teacher from Atlanta, moved up this year to teaching first grade. She credits her school's decision to hire a math specialist last year with helping change how she feels about teaching the subject.

"It was really hard in the beginning for me to find a connection to it — I was kind of just doing it because it was part of my job," McCormick said. "But this past year, I have kind of revamped my thoughts about what math can be and the ways that we teach it in order to make kids want to learn about it and be enthusiastic about it. Because the way we present it to them holds so much more weight than I think I ever realized."

Kim Jong Un and Putin may meet. What do North Korea and Russia need from each other?

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korean leader Kim Jong Un may travel to Russia for a summit with President Vladimir Putin, a U.S. official said, in a trip that would underscore deepening cooperation as the two isolated leaders are locked in separate confrontations with the U.S.

U.S. officials also said that Russia is seeking to buy ammunition from North Korea to refill reserves drained by its war in Ukraine. In return, experts said, North Korea will likely want food and energy shipments and transfers of sophisticated weapons technologies.

A meeting with Putin would be Kim's first summit with a foreign leader since North Korea closed its borders in January 2020. They met for the first time in April 2019, two months after Kim's high-stakes nuclear diplomacy with then-U.S. President Donald Trump collapsed.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu traveled to Pyongyang in July and asked Kim to send more ammunition to Russia, according to U.S. officials. Shoigu said Moscow and Pyongyang were considering holding military exercises for the first time.

It's unclear how far Kim and Putin's military cooperation could go, but any sign of warming relations will worry rivals like the U.S. and South Korea. Russia seeks to quash a Ukrainian counteroffensive and prolong the war, while North Korea is extending a record pace of missile tests to protest U.S. moves to reinforce its military alliances with South Korea and Japan.

Here's a look at what Kim's possible trip to Russia would mean:

WHAT DOES RUSSIA WANT FROM NORTH KOREA?

Since last year, U.S. officials have suspected that North Korea is providing Russia with artillery shells, rockets and other ammunition, many of which are likely copies of Soviet-era munitions.

"Russia is in urgent need of (war supplies). If not, how could the defense minister of a powerful country at war come to a small country like North Korea?" said Kim Taewoo, former head of Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification. He said Shoigu was the first Russian defense minister to visit North Korea since the 1991 disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Buying munitions from North Korea would be a violation of U.N. resolutions, supported by Russia, that ban all arms trade with the isolated country. But now that it faces international sanctions and export controls over its war in Ukraine, Russia has been seeking weapons from other sanctioned countries like North Korea and Iran.

North Korea has vast stores of munitions, but Du Hyeogn Cha, an analyst at Seoul's Asan Institute for Policy Studies, doubted whether it could swiftly send significant amounts to Russia, because the narrow land link between the countries can handle only a limited amount of rail traffic.

WHAT DOES KIM WANT IN RETURN?

Kim's priorities would be aid shipments, prestige and military technology, experts said.

"It would be a 'win-win' deal for both, as Putin is cornered over his exhausted weapons inventory while Kim faces pressure from the South Korea-U.S.-Japan trilateral cooperation," said Nam Sung-wook, a former director of the Institute for National Security Strategy, a think tank run by South Korea's spy agency. "Their needs are matched perfectly now."

Pandemic-era border closures have left North Korea with severe economic difficulties, and Kim is likely to seek supplies of food and energy to address shortfalls.

Kim will likely also trumpet expanding relations with Moscow as a sign that the country is overcoming its years of isolation. North Korean leaders have long valued face-to-face meetings with world leaders as signs of international importance and for domestic propaganda purposes.

Kim is likely also seeking Russian technology to support his plans to build high-tech weapons systems such as powerful long-range missiles, hypersonic ballistic weapons, nuclear-powered submarines and spy satellites, said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

It's unclear whether Russia would be willing to provide North Korea with advanced technologies related

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to nuclear weapons and ICBMs, Cha said. Russia has always tightly guarded its most important weapons technologies, even from key partners like China, he said.

HOW CLOSE COULD THE TWO COUNTRIES GET?

Shoigu told reporters Monday that Russia and North Korea were pondering the possibility of bilateral military exercise. Earlier, South Korea's spy agency told lawmakers that Shoigu appeared to have proposed a trilateral training exercise involving China.

Either way, it would be the North's first joint military drills with a foreign country since the end of the 1950-53 Korean War. The country has avoided training with a foreign military in line with its official "juche," or "self-reliance," philosophy.

Kim Taewoo, the former institute director, said expanding South Korea-U.S.-Japan security cooperation could prompt Kim Jong Un to break that taboo and hold drills with Russia and China for the first time.

But Nam, who is now a professor at Korea University, said North Korea won't likely accept the offer, as it could leave North Korea even more dependent on China and Russia.

Park Won Gon, a professor at Seoul's Ewha Womans University, said it's too early to predict what Kim's diplomacy could yield beyond making a show of defiance toward the United States.

"In any case, North Korea and Russia need to show that they're working together, that they're stepping up this cooperation," Park said. "There clearly are practical areas of cooperation, and also some symbolic aspects they want to show to the United States."

Fall Movie Preview: Hollywood readies for a season with stars on the sidelines

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Hollywood is at a standstill. Actors and screenwriters are months into a dual strike. Film sets are dark. But the movies are still coming — or, at least, most of them. Even if that means some potentially solitary red-carpet walks.

"I'm hoping I'm not promoting the movie by myself," says Nia DaCosta, director of the upcoming Marvel movie "The Marvels" (Nov. 10). "No one's there to see me, either. They're going to be like, 'Where's Brie Larson?'"

Though the ongoing actors and screenwriters strikes are casting a pall over the fall movie season and prompting some films to postpone, a parade of awards contenders and autumn blockbusters are on the way, nevertheless.

The fall has long been the preferred domain of filmmakers and auteurs, but this year that's doubly so. With cast members largely prevented from promotion duties, directors — whether helming an Oscar shoo-in or superhero blockbuster — are carrying the load, albeit very reluctantly.

"I think we're now in a new world," DaCosta says of the strike. "Everything that's happening is an existential search that our industry is doing. It won't be solved in one round of negotiations. But I'm hoping that the studios can end the strike soon and get us all back to work — to work for them."

Up until now, the ongoing stalemate has had a modest effect on late-summer movie releases. "Barbenheimer" carried theaters through August.

But now that the strikes have rounded Labor Day, with no end in sight, Hollywood's high season is imperiled. It has already robbed the Venice Film Festival of much of its star power and will soon do the same to the Toronto International Film Festival.

Can you launch an Oscar campaign without its potential nominee? How about a global spectacle without its cast? Everyone is hoping the strikes ends soon, but it's clear that, not long after COVID-19 upended the industry, the usual rhythms of the fall movie season have again been blown to smithereens.

Much is in flux. Taylor Swift is in. "Dune" is out. Release-date jockeying continues. But for many of the filmmakers releasing films in the coming months, even their own movies aren't the top concern.

"This fall is such an exciting time for movies. I just want to see every movie coming out," says Emerald

Fennell, whose high-society satire "Saltburn" opens Nov. 24. "But for the industry to be sustainable — for it to be much more accessible to people, for it to be better paid for everyone at every single level — that's the thing. That's the priority as far as I'm concerned."

Screenwriters have been on strike for four months. The guild's representatives began meeting with the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which negotiates on behalf of the studios, in August. But no breakthrough has followed. Instead, both sides have publicly sparred, dimming hopes that summer would end with a deal.

The Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists began its work stoppage on Jul 14. The AMPTP has yet to reengage the guild's leadership in talks.

As time has dragged on and picket lines have kept up the pressure, what may have once seemed like a disagreement over a handful of issues has swelled into a generational battle over the future of an industry remade by streaming and with new anxieties over AI.

For now, the strikes are leaving festival stages unusually bare and red-carpet premieres quiet or non-existent. Such a prospect has forced some films out of 2023, including two starring Zendaya. "Dune: Part Two" and "Challengers" have both postponed, as has the "Wonder" spinoff "White Bird."

Many of the fall's top titles have stayed put or shuffled backward, hoping resolution comes in early autumn. Those include late October releases like Martin Scorsese's "Killers of the Flower Moon" (in theaters Oct. 20) and November entries like the prequel "The Hunger Games: The Ballad of Songbirds & Snakes" (Nov. 17) and Ridley Scott's "Napoleon" (Nov. 22), with Joaquin Phoenix.

Meanwhile, the campaigns for some potential Academy Awards contenders such as Colman Domingo (George C. Wolfe's "Rustin"; in theaters Nov. 3, on Netflix Nov. 17) and Paul Giamatti (Alexander Payne's "The Holdovers"; in theaters Oct. 27, expands Nov. 10) will get underway without either present to take a bow.

To Payne, whose film co-stars newcomer Dominic Sessa and Da'Vine Joy Randolph, that loss is heart-breaking.

"Unlike stage actors or musicians in concerts who get to have that feeling of completion with the audience, in film we don't have that," says Payne. "The only time you can kind of tiptoe up to that feeling of having a communication with an audience is at a festival or an early screening. It would have been really luscious for Paul, Dominic, Da'Vine and all the actors to go and have that rush, seeing it with audience and hear the laughs."

NFL players follow musical passion to create songs featured on Madden 24 video game

By JONATHAN LANDRUM Jr. AP Entertainment Writer

SANTA MONICA, Calif. (AP) — When Miami Dolphins tackle Terron Armstead achieved his dream of being drafted into the NFL over a decade ago, he put his musical aspirations aside.

Many other pro football players did the same thing. But now, three powerhouses —the NFL, Interscope Geffen A&M Records and Electronic Arts Sports — have partnered to empower players to pursue their music dreams.

The result, an extended play project called "Crowd Control," is out Tuesday. The six songs were also inserted into Madden NFL 24, released last month. It's the first-time music made by NFL players appears in the video game franchise, now in its 35th year.

"I only knew the stigma of 'Shut up and play' and 'Do your day job,'" said Armstead, a four-time Pro Bowler. "I got away from music during the early years of my career. It was a void for me because music was a way to express myself. For them to create this opportunity, it's been great for us. This has really pushed and encouraged guys to be who they are."

Armstead is among five active players on "Crowd Control," which also features New York Giants tight end Darren Waller, San Francisco receiver Ray-Ray McCloud, free agent linebacker Melvin Ingram and Carolina

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Panthers receiver D.J. Chark Jr.

"People can't put us in a box," said Waller, whose great-grandfather was the legendary jazz artist Thomas "Fats" Waller. The Pro Bowler has already released four hip-hop albums — which showcased his talents as a rapper, producer and writer.

"Hopefully this opens up a lane for a lot of guys who want to pursue their passion," he continued. "This opportunity can be beneficial. It can spark a fire that hasn't been lit yet."

The players recorded the rap tracks alongside hip-hop artists including Rob49, Jay Rock, That Mexican OT and Lebra Jolie at Interscope Records' sprawling headquarters in Santa Monica, California. The project was executive produced by Derrick Milano, a Grammy winner who has worked with superstars like Justin Bieber, Megan Thee Stallion and Nicki Minaj.

"These dudes can rap," said Bas, a Grammy-nominated rapper who shared his musical expertise during the players recording sessions. "It's very unfair to pigeonhole anybody. People see like these big NFL players and they say 'Do your one job, tackle somebody or run that route.' But creativity is part of a healthy life. I know these guys have strict schedules, OTAs and camp. For them to put the time in, they're not on vacation. They're really trying to expand their craft. It's humbling to watch."

Many of the songs featured on "Crowd Control" were conceived in a songwriting session at Interscope this summer where NFL players worked with producers and artists.

"It's a nurturing space," said David Nieman, the senior vice president of sports and gaming at Interscope, which worked with EA Sports to curate the Madden NFL 22 soundtrack, which was the first-ever album release for the game. "There isn't a guard up when you hear about an athlete wanting to step into the music world. Our artists aren't stepping out onto the field. We're bringing them into our realm and showing them what we do great and trying to give them some of those tools."

The project came into fruition after an NFL Career Tour stop was hosted at Interscope's headquarters earlier this year. The day-long session featured executives from the music industry, interactive listening sessions and about 20 players who showed interest in the business of music — from marketing, producing and signing talent.

"It's really important that these guys have a chance to gain exposure to different industries and explore their gifts and talents that could go beyond the field while they're playing," said Ashley Smith, manager of player development for the NFL. She spearheads programs and initiatives for the league that provides resources for current and former players while helping them prepare for life after football.

Smith, whose brother Trey Smith is a lineman for the Kansas City Chiefs, is familiar with players' post-career plights.

"Often times when speaking with former players, which we call NFL legends, they talk about the difficulty of the transition," she said. "Regardless, if a guy comes out prepared for that, it's still somewhat of a loss identity. Our part is to help them. Whether you're retiring from the league or you're young in your 30s, there's still an opportunity to really develop and find out who you are as a football player, but also as a man and businessman."

Smith said there's hope to expand into different industries like technology and fashion.

"We want to guys to feel like the league cares," she said. "We want to do our best to make sure that they're educated, they're prepared and given the tools. We want them to develop the relationships that will help them take their careers as well as their lives to the next level."

McCloud called the program a "big step" in the right direction. He said the recording sessions instilled more confidence in him.

"A lot of times, athletes get a certain type of stereotype," said McCloud, who has owned his production company called Legend Tribe since he was 17. "It's a certain narrative we have to follow. When football ends one day, we need to have that second passion. We just want to follow our dreams. I'm living my first dream of playing in the NFL. But doing other things you love and fills your spirit creates a different type of feeling."

North Korea's Kim Jong Un may meet with Putin in Russia this month, US official says

By LOU KESTEN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S. official said Monday that North Korean leader Kim Jong Un may travel to Russia soon to meet with President Vladimir Putin as the Kremlin tries to acquire military equipment for use in its war in Ukraine.

The official, who was not authorized to address the matter publicly and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, said the U.S. expects Kim will make the trip within the month. The official said the U.S. isn't sure exactly where or when the meeting would take place, but the Pacific port city of Vladivostok would be a likely possibility given its relative proximity to North Korea.

National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson noted Monday that Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu traveled to Pyongyang recently and tried to persuade North Korea to sell artillery ammunition to Russia.

Watson said, "We have information that Kim Jong Un expects these discussions to continue, to include leader-level diplomatic engagement in Russia."

She added that the U.S. is urging North Korea "to cease its arms negotiations with Russia and abide by the public commitments that Pyongyang has made to not provide or sell arms to Russia."

Shoigu said Monday that the two countries may hold joint war games.

The New York Times first reported that Kim planned to meet with Putin in Russia this month.

The White House said last week that it had intelligence indicating that Putin and Kim swapped letters following Shoigu's visit. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the letters were "more at the surface level" but that Russian and North Korean talks on a weapons sale were advancing.

Congress returns to try to prevent a government shutdown while the GOP weighs an impeachment inquiry

By STEPHEN GROVES and MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — After months of struggling to find agreement on just about anything in a divided Congress, lawmakers are returning to Capitol Hill to try to avert a government shutdown, even as House Republicans consider whether to press forward with an impeachment inquiry into President Joe Biden.

A short-term funding measure to keep government offices fully functioning will dominate the September agenda, along with emergency funding for Ukraine, federal disaster funds and the Republican-driven probe into Hunter Biden's overseas business dealings.

Time is running short for Congress to act. The House is scheduled to meet for just 11 days before the government's fiscal year ends on Sept. 30, leaving little room to maneuver. And the deal-making will play out as two top Republicans, Sen. Mitch McConnell of Kentucky and Rep. Steve Scalise of Louisiana, deal with health issues.

The president and congressional leaders, including Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, are focused on passage of a months-long funding measure, known as a continuing resolution, to keep government offices running while lawmakers iron out a budget. It's a step Congress routinely takes to avoid stoppages, but McCarthy faces resistance from within his own Republican ranks, including from some hardline conservatives who openly embrace the idea of a government shutdown.

"Honestly, it's a pretty big mess," McConnell said at an event in Kentucky last week.

Here are the top issues as lawmakers return from the August break:

KEEPING THE GOVERNMENT OPEN

When Biden and McCarthy struck a deal to suspend the nation's debt ceiling in June, it included provisions for topline spending numbers. But under pressure from the House Freedom Caucus, House Republicans have advanced spending bills that cut below that agreement.

Republicans have also tried to load their spending packages with conservative policy wins. For example,

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House Republicans added provisions blocking abortion coverage, transgender care and diversity initiatives to a July defense package, turning what has traditionally been a bipartisan effort into a sharply contested bill.

But Democrats control the Senate and are certain to reject most of the conservative proposals. Senators are crafting their spending bills on a bipartisan basis with an eye toward avoiding unrelated policy fights.

Top lawmakers in both chambers are now turning to a stopgap funding package, a typical strategy to give the lawmakers time to iron out a long-term agreement.

The House Freedom Caucus has already released a list of demands it wants included in the continuing resolution. But they amount to a right-wing wish list that would never fly in the Senate.

The conservative opposition means McCarthy will almost certainly have to win significant Democratic support to pass a funding bill — but such an approach risks a new round of conflict with the same conservatives who in the past have threatened to oust him from the speakership.

Democrats are already readying blame for the House GOP.

"The last thing the American people deserve is for extreme House members to trigger a government shutdown that hurts our economy, undermines our disaster preparedness, and forces our troops to work without guaranteed pay," said White House spokesman Andrew Bates.

In a letter to his colleagues Friday, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer wrote that the focus when the Senate returns Tuesday will be "funding the government and preventing House Republican extremists from forcing a government shutdown."

It leaves McCarthy desperate to get the votes to keep government offices running and avoid the political blowback. As he tries to persuade Republicans to go along with a temporary fix, McCarthy has been arguing that a government shutdown would also halt Republican investigations into the Biden administration.

"If we shut down, all of government shuts it down — investigations and everything else — it hurts the American public," the speaker said on Fox News last week.

IMPEACHMENT INQUIRY

Since they gained the House majority, Republicans have launched a series of investigations into the Biden administration, with an eye towards impeaching the president or his Cabinet officials. They have now zeroed in on the president's son, Hunter Biden, and his overseas business dealings, including with Ukrainian gas company Burisma.

The inquiries have not produced evidence that President Biden took official action on behalf of his son or business partners, but McCarthy has called impeachment a "natural step forward" for the investigations.

An impeachment inquiry by the House would be a first step toward bringing articles of impeachment. It is not yet clear what that may look like, especially because the speaker does not appear to have the GOP votes lined up to support an impeachment inquiry. Moderate Republicans have so far balked at sending the House on a full-fledged impeachment hunt.

But Donald Trump, running once again to challenge Biden, is prodding them to move ahead quickly.

"I don't know how actually how a Republican could not do it," Trump said in an interview on Real America's Voice. "I think a Republican would be primaried and lose immediately, no matter what district you're in."

UKRAINE AND DISASTER FUNDING

The White House has requested more than \$40 billion in emergency funding, including \$13 billion in military aid for Ukraine, \$8 billion in humanitarian support for the nation and \$12 billion to replenish U.S. federal disaster funds at home.

The request for the massive cash infusion comes as Kyiv launches a counteroffensive against the Russian invasion. But support for Ukraine is waning among Republicans, especially as Trump has repeatedly expressed skepticism of the war.

Nearly 70 Republicans voted for an unsuccessful effort to discontinue military aid to Ukraine in July, though strong support for the war effort remains among many members.

It is also not clear whether the White House's supplemental request for U.S. disaster funding, which also includes funds to bolster enforcement and curb drug trafficking at the southern U.S. border, will be tied to the Ukraine funding or a continuing budget resolution. The disaster funding enjoys wide support

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in the House, but could be tripped up if packaged with other funding proposals.

LEGISLATION ON HOLD

The Senate is expected to spend most of September focused on funding the government and confirming Biden's nominees, meaning that major policy legislation will have to wait. But Schumer outlined some priorities for the remaining months of the year in the letter to his colleagues.

Schumer said the Senate would work on legislation to lower the costs of drugs, address rail safety and provide disaster relief after floods in Vermont, fires in Hawaii and a hurricane in Florida.

Senators will also continue to examine whether legislation is needed to address artificial intelligence. Schumer has convened what he is calling an "AI insight forum" on Sept. 13 in the Senate with tech industry leaders, including Meta's Mark Zuckerberg and Elon Musk, the CEO of X and Tesla, as well as former Microsoft CEO Bill Gates.

HEALTH CONCERNS

Senate Republicans will return next week to renewed questions about the health of their leader, McConnell.

McConnell, 81, faces questions about his ability to continue as the top Senate Republican after he has frozen up twice during news conferences in the last two months since falling and suffering a concussion in March. During the event in Kentucky last week, he fell silent for roughly 30 seconds as he answered a question from a reporter.

Dr. Brian Monahan, the Capitol's attending physician, said Thursday that McConnell is cleared to work. But the question of whether McConnell — the longest-serving party leader in Senate history — can continue as Republican leader has sparked intense speculation about who will eventually replace him.

Meanwhile, the health of California Democrat Sen. Dianne Feinstein, 90, has visibly wavered in recent months after she was hospitalized for shingles earlier this year. She suffered a fall at her San Francisco home in August and visited the hospital for testing.

And in the House, Rep. Steve Scalise, the No. 2 Republican, disclosed last week that 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 and described the cancer as "very treatable."

Today in History: September 6, President William McKinley fatally shot

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Sept. 6, the 249th day of 2023. There are 116 days left in the year.

Today's Highlights in History:

On Sept. 6, 1901, President William McKinley was shot and mortally wounded by anarchist Leon Czolgosz (CHAWL'-gawsh) at the Pan-American Exposition in Buffalo, New York. (McKinley died eight days later.)

On this date:

In 1909, American explorer Robert Peary sent a telegram from Indian Harbor, Labrador, announcing that he had reached the North Pole five months earlier.

In 1943, 79 people were killed when a New York-bound Pennsylvania Railroad train derailed and crashed in Philadelphia.

In 1949, Howard Unruh, a resident of Camden, New Jersey, shot and killed 13 of his neighbors.

In 1972, the Summer Olympics resumed in Munich, West Germany, a day after the deadly hostage crisis that left eleven Israelis, five Arab abductors and a West German police officer dead.

In 1975, 18-year-old tennis star Martina Navratilova of Czechoslovakia, in New York for the U.S. Open, requested political asylum in the United States.

In 1991, the Soviet Union recognized the independence of Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia.

In 1997, a public funeral was held for Princess Diana at Westminster Abbey in London, six days after her death in a car crash in Paris. In Calcutta, India, weeping masses gathered to pay homage to Mother

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Teresa, who had died the day before at age 87.

In 2001, in a dramatic shift, the Bush administration abandoned the Clinton-era effort to break up Microsoft.

In 2002, meeting outside Washington, D.C. for only the second time since 1800, Congress convened in New York to pay homage to the victims and heroes of September 11.

In 2006, President George W. Bush acknowledged for the first time that the CIA was running secret prisons overseas and said tough interrogation had forced terrorist leaders to reveal plots to attack the United States and its allies.

In 2007, opera star Luciano Pavarotti died in Modena, Italy, at the age of 71.

In 2013, NASA's robotic lunar explorer, LADEE, rocketed into space.

In 2017, Hurricane Irma, the most powerful hurricane ever recorded in the Atlantic to that point, pounded Puerto Rico with heavy rain and powerful winds; authorities said more than 900,000 people were without power.

In 2018, actor Burt Reynolds, one of Hollywood's biggest stars of the 1970s in films including "Deliverance" and "Smokey and the Bandit," died at age 82.

In 2021, actor Michael K. Williams, best known for his role on "The Wire," was found dead in his New York apartment at age 54.

In 2022, Liz Truss began her tenure as U.K. prime minister. She would resign just 49 days later.

Today's Birthdays: Comedian JoAnne Worley is 87. Country singer David Allan Coe is 84. Rock singer-musician Roger Waters (Pink Floyd) is 80. Actor Swoosie Kurtz is 79. Comedian-actor Jane Curtin is 76. Rock musician Mick Mashbir is 75. Country singer-songwriter Buddy Miller is 71. Actor James Martin Kelly is 69. Country musician Joe Smyth (Sawyer Brown) is 66. Actor-comedian Jeff Foxworthy is 65. Actor-comedian Michael Winslow is 65. Rock musician Perry Bamonte is 63. Actor Steven Eckholdt is 62. Rock musician Scott Travis (Judas Priest) is 62. Pop musician Pal Waaktaar (a-ha) is 62. Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie is 61. Television journalist Elizabeth Vargas is 61. Country singer Mark Chesnutt is 60. Actor Betsy Russell is 60. Actor Rosie Perez is 59. R&B singer Macy Gray is 56. Country songwriter Lee Thomas Miller (Songs: "The Impossible" "You're Gonna Miss This") is 55. Singer CeCe Peniston is 54. Actor Daniele Gaither is 53. Actor Dylan Bruno is 51. Actor Idris Elba is 51. Actor Justina Machado is 51. Actor Anika Noni Rose is 51. Rock singer Nina Persson (The Cardigans) is 49. Actor Justin Whalin is 49. Actor Naomi Harris is 47. Rapper Noreaga is 46. Actor Natalia Cigliuti is 45. Rapper Foxy Brown is 45. Actor Howard Charles is 40. Actor/singer Deborah Joy Winans is 40. Actor Lauren Lapkus is 38. Rock singer Max George (The Wanted) is 35.