

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 1 of 78

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Newsweek Bulletin](#)
- [3- Weekly Round\[s\] Up](#)
- [5- Sound of Freedom to be played in Groton](#)
- [6- Community Transit Letter](#)
- [7- SD SearchLight: South Dakota one of six states without anti-hazing laws](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Post-election audit rules spark debate on voter intent](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Senators probe foreign ownership of ag land; Rounds measure would ban several countries](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: GOP presidential hopefuls tear into each other and absent Trump at second debate](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: U.S. Senate moves on short-term spending bill in struggle to avoid shutdown days away](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [23- Daily Devotional](#)
- [24- 2023 Community Events](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)

Thursday, Sept. 28

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, broccoli and cauliflower blend, fruit, cookie, whole wheat bread.

Parent-Teacher Conference, 1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

Cross Country at Sisseton, 4 p.m.

Junior High Volleyball hosts Britton-Hecla, 7th at 4 p.m., 8th at 5 p.m.

Junior High Football at vs. Clark/Willow Lake at Clark, 4:30 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 29

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tri-tators, peas and carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Faculty In-Service, no school.

Football at Webster Area, 7 p.m.

Youth Football at Webster, 5 p.m.



Saturday, Sept. 30

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

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

Girls Soccer at Garretson, 1 p.m.

Youth Football at Waubay Jamboree

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

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

World in Brief

was found in an apartment in the city on Monday.

North Korea adopted a constitutional amendment to enshrine the country's status as a nuclear weapons power, with leader Kim Jong-Un calling for "exponentially boosting" weapons production to counter what he called U.S. provocations.

The de facto government of the breakaway Nagorno-Karabakh region of Azerbaijan has announced that it will dissolve all state institutions and cease to exist on January 1 after Azerbaijani forces took control of the region in a military operation last week.

The Portland Trail Blazers agreed to trade Damian Lillard to the Milwaukee Bucks in a move that ends the NBA star's 11-year run with the franchise. He will play alongside two-time MVP Giannis Antetokounmpo.

Shares of heavily indebted Chinese property giant Evergrande and two of its subsidiaries were suspended after a report that its chairman was under police surveillance, raising fears about the developer's future amid liquidation risks.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Kyiv claims it shot down 34 out of 44 drones launched by Russia overnight as Ukrainian troops held off attacks by Russian forces trying to regain lost positions in the country's east. "We had an extremely difficult night," Andriy Raikovych, Kirovohrad's governor, said. There were no casualties.

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

The weekly initial jobless claims report, revised GDP growth figures for the second quarter, and pending home sales figures are due at 8:30 a.m. ET.

Fed Gov. Lisa Cook will speak at the Minorities in Banking Forum at 1 p.m. ET. Markets will also watch for Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell's comments during a town hall with educators at 4 p.m. ET..

Talking Points

"This had nothing to do with the protests. What we had tonight was a bunch of criminal opportunists take advantage of a situation," Interim Philadelphia Police Commissioner John Stanford in a news conference after large groups looted stores and damaged properties following a protest.

"Crooked Joe Biden is back like a wretched old vulture trying to finish off his prey. Under Joe Biden ... the workers of America — to put it nicely — are getting screwed. I want a future that protects American labor, not foreign labor.' Donald Trump told striking UAW automakers on Wednesday.

I do not want my children or any children in the world to ever know what genocide is, or even hear the word. I fear that my voice is not being heard. Our pleas are met by talk of geopolitical interests—and by a crushing indifference that gives aid and comfort to aggressors wherever they may be. As a new mother, I appeal to the world on behalf of all the women, children, and men who share my situation: the world cannot and must not be silent to the genocide against Nagorno-Karabakh." Mother of two and native of Nagorno-Karabakh, Maria Aghajanyan, on why she's fleeing the Armenian-populated enclave.

Judge Tanya Chutkan denied Donald Trump's motion to have the judge recused from his federal election interference case in Washington, D.C., court, saying the statement provided no "reasonable basis to question the court's impartiality."

A world without cigarettes is possible. Approximately 9 out of 10 adult smokers don't quit. These smokers deserve access to better alternatives to continued smoking. Learn more.

Baltimore Police have arrested Jason Billingsley, the man wanted in the death of tech CEO Pava LaPere, whose body

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 3 of 78



Things are picking up here in Washington as we get back in the swing of being in session. I was able to see so many South Dakotans this past week from each side of the state and many places in between. We talked about consolidation in the meat packing industry, immigration and the H-2B program, Avian Influenza and cybersecurity. In between

meeting with South Dakotans, I attended hearings, classified briefings and other meetings. It was a busy week, and we have a couple of busy weeks ahead, as well. More on that in my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakota groups I visited with: Members of the Livestock Marketing Association; members of the National Turkey Federation; members of the National Association of Trailer Manufacturers; Associated General Contractors of South Dakota; leaders from Impact Aid schools in South Dakota; and Dr. José-Marie Griffiths, President of Dakota State University.

Met with South Dakotans from: Batesland, Beresford, Bonesteel, Box Elder, Canton, Chamberlain, Custer, Dupree, Fort Pierre, Huron, Lake Andes, Lead, Madison, Martin, McIntosh, McLaughlin, Mission, Mobridge, Pierre, Philip, Rapid City, Sioux Falls, Sisseton, St. Onge, Timber Lake, Tyndall, Wagner, Wall, Webster and Winner.

Meetings this past week: Cara Abercrombie, nominee for Assistant Secretary of Defense; members of the National Independent Automobile Dealers Association; Dragoş Tudorache, member of the European Parliament; Chris Cartwright, President and CEO of TransUnion; Derek Chollet, nominee for Under Secretary of Defense for Policy; Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy; Mitch Krebs, CEO of Coeur Mining; and HRH Al Hussein Bin Abdullah II, Crown Prince of Jordan.

I had many opportunities to do one of my favorite things this week: talk about Artificial Intelligence (AI)! I gave the keynote address at the Global Emerging Technology Summit and spoke at an event hosted by the National Science Foundation. I also participated in an AI panel hosted by DLA Piper.

We also had our weekly Senate Bible Study (Matthew 22:21 was our verse of the week) and our weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast (Senator Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota was our speaker).

Greatest Generation Commemorative Coin Act: My bipartisan bill, the Greatest Generation Commemorative Coin Act, was signed into law last July. This bill authorized the creation of commemorative coins to be produced and sold by the U.S. Mint. The proceeds will go to the Friends of the National World War II Memorial to perform necessary maintenance and repair work at the memorial and provide enhanced educational and commemorative programming to the millions of people who visit annually.

This past week, we unveiled the designs for the coins in a ceremony at the National World War II Memorial here in Washington. You can view the designs and read more about the coins here.

Headline of the week: Rounds introduces bills to enhance cyber resources for rural, ag communities – Rapid City Journal

Votes taken: 11 – Most notable was our vote to confirm Gen. C.Q. Brown as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I voted yes to confirm his nomination.

Hearings: Two – one in the Select Committee on Intelligence, and one in Banking, Housing and Urban Affairs. Our Banking committee hearing was on Artificial Intelligence in Financial Services, where I was able to give the opening remarks. You can watch a clip of that here.

Topic discussed: The biggest talk on Capitol Hill this past week was related to the potential government shutdown, with government funding set to expire after September 30. Government shutdowns have a negative impact on American families and our military. This coming week, the Senate will vote on a short-term funding bill that will keep the government funded until November 17. This would allow both Chambers of Congress time to work through the appropriations process. The Senate Appropriations Committee has

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 4 of 78

already passed all 12 appropriations bill out of committee on a bipartisan basis. We expect that all these bills will come to the floor for votes in the coming weeks.

Overall, this situation underscores the need to reform the entire budget process, which has only worked properly in four of the past forty-seven years. While we can all agree that we need to get a handle on government spending and our national debt, shutting down the government is not the way to go about it.

Classified briefings: Two – both of these were related to the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Brandon, Brookings, Chamberlain, Rapid City and Sioux Falls. Steps taken this past week: 56,514 steps or 25.6 miles.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 5 of 78

JIM CAVIEZEL



S O U N D O F

FREEDOM

A FILM BY ALEJANDRO MONTEVERDE

BASED ON THE INCREDIBLE TRUE STORY

ANGEL STUDIOS PRESENTS A SANTA FE FILMS PRODUCTION AN EDUARDO VERÁSTEGUI PRODUCTION "SOUND OF FREEDOM" JIM CAVIEZEL WITH MIRA SORVINO AND BILL CAMP
CASTING BY DEANNA BRIGIDI, CSA MUSIC BY JAVIER NAVARRETE EDITED BY F. BRIAN SCOFIELD DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY GORKA GÓMEZ ANDREU AEC PRODUCED BY EDUARDO VERÁSTEGUI
EXECUTIVE PRODUCED BY JAIME HERNÁNDEZ WRITTEN BY ROD BARR & ALEJANDRO MONTEVERDE DIRECTED BY ALEJANDRO MONTEVERDE angel.com/freedom

ANGEL
STUDIOS

Sunday, Oct. 1 - 6:30 p.m.
C & MA Church, 706 N. Main St., Groton
Tickets are \$5 at the door for Teens and Adults
A children's movie/activity will be provided
downstairs for ages 12 and under

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 6 of 78



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



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota one of six states without anti-hazing laws

As college begins around the country, safeguards are uneven

BY: AMANDA HERNÁNDEZ - SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 3:17 PM

Max Gruver spent the early morning hours of Sept. 14, 2017, heavily intoxicated and passed out on a couch inside the Phi Delta Theta chapter house at Louisiana State University.

He had been forced to repeatedly chug 190-proof Diesel liquor in a hazing ritual called "Bible Study," during which pledges are quizzed on fraternity facts. The incident caused Gruver, a freshman majoring in political communications, to inhale his own vomit into his lungs.

By the time fraternity members finally sought medical aid the next morning, Gruver's pulse was weak and they couldn't tell if he was breathing. Gruver's blood alcohol level was .495, more than six times Louisiana's legal driving limit, when he died from what an autopsy concluded was "acute alcohol intoxication with aspiration." He was 18.

As college students begin a new semester this fall, many will participate in rituals to bring in new members of a Greek fraternity or sorority, a sports team or other club. Sometimes, the initiations involve heavy alcohol use or physical assaults. Although awareness of hazing and its dangers has grown significantly, it still happens.

In June, New Mexico State University agreed to pay \$8 million to settle a lawsuit over hazing allegations in the men's basketball program. Democratic Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham said she will be introducing anti-hazing and abuse legislation next year. In July, Northwestern University fired its head football coach after an investigation found widespread hazing on the team. And Boston College suspended its swim and dive team this month following hazing allegations.

At least 44 states and the District of Columbia have anti-hazing laws in place, most recently Ohio in 2021 and Pennsylvania in 2018. Kentucky and Washington strengthened their laws this past legislative session. Six states — Alaska, Hawaii, Montana, New Mexico, South Dakota and Wyoming — have none, according to StopHazing, an anti-hazing advocacy and research organization.

SD bill failed; state laws differ

A bill to define criminal hazing passed the South Dakota Senate in 2022 but failed in a House committee. Sen. Michael Rohl, R-Aberdeen, was the sponsor. During a committee hearing, he distributed information about hazing incidents that occurred at schools including his alma mater, Drake University, in Iowa.

"It's absolutely not acceptable in any capacity to think that institutionalized bullying is acceptable," Rohl said during his testimony on the bill.

Wednesday, Rohl said some permissive attitudes among legislators toward hazing contributed to the bill's demise. He did not re-introduce the bill this year but said he'd be willing to support a bill next year if somebody in the House would sponsor it.

State anti-hazing laws, most of which were approved in the past 15 years, differ in their definitions and the criminal penalties they impose. Depending on the state, participating in hazing activities may result in a fine, misdemeanor charge or a felony charge if the hazing results in serious bodily harm or death.

Some experts and anti-hazing advocates say the penalties in some states aren't harsh enough to deter organizations from participating in hazing. And even in states that have laws, incidents like the one that left Max Gruver dead don't necessarily lead to serious criminal charges.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 8 of 78

Four former LSU students and ex-members of Phi Delta Theta were indicted in connection with Gruver's death. Three of them faced misdemeanor hazing charges, while the fourth faced a felony charge of negligent homicide. The university also banned Phi Delta Theta from its campus until at least 2033.

Gruver's parents — Rae Ann and Stephen Gruver — pressed for stiffer penalties for hazing, prompting Louisiana to enact the Max Gruver Act in 2018, which made hazing that results in serious bodily harm or death a felony; introduced a statewide definition of hazing; and mandated that hazing incidents and disciplinary actions taken against members of student groups be reported to the respective host institutions.

"It's unfortunate that with the death of our son — it took that to get Louisiana to change their laws," Stephen Gruver told Stateline. "It's something that can be prevented; this never should have happened to our son."

Since then, the Gruvers, along with parents of other hazing victims, have advocated for stricter state and federal penalties for hazing and greater transparency when such incidents occur.

"If you don't have a strong enough law, it's not a deterrent for these kids and they're just going to keep on being bad actors because they just don't care," Stephen Gruver said.

Hazing's wide reach

Hazing, a practice rooted in tradition and camaraderie, has long been a controversial and pervasive issue on college campuses. While hazing incidents have garnered significant national attention over the past decade, the earliest account of hazing is believed to date back to the fourth century — when Plato observed young boys playing "practical jokes" on other students in school, according to a book written by journalist and anti-hazing advocate Hank Nuwer. The first anti-hazing law in the United States was enacted in New York in 1894.

In the U.S., more than 280 people allegedly have died due to hazing since 1838, according to the U.S. Hazing Deaths Database. The database is maintained by Nuwer. Hazing deaths are not currently tracked by any U.S. government entity.

In 2017, the year of Gruver's death, at least six other young adults also died a result of alleged hazing activities. Between 2018 and 2021, at least 23 people allegedly died due to hazing activities. No hazing deaths were reported in 2022.

According to a 2008 study by two University of Maine professors, more than half of college students involved with student organizations experience hazing, which often involves "alcohol consumption, humiliation, isolation, sleep-deprivation, and sex acts." The study, which is considered the most comprehensive analysis of hazing in the United States, also found that about 47% of students come to college having already experienced hazing.

"Hazing is prevalent throughout society. It's not just a college thing. It's really seen anywhere that there's a differing power dynamic," Todd Shelton, the executive director of the Hazing Prevention Network, told Stateline. Hazing appears in settings such as high schools, other student groups, the military and professional workplaces.

In many states, hazing carries misdemeanor charges — a fact that some advocates argue does little to effectively deter hazing incidents.

"Where hazing is a minor misdemeanor, it's not taken seriously by law enforcement because it's not worth the effort to prosecute," Shelton said. "One of the biggest hurdles is getting the penalty or statute to match the seriousness of the crime."

In Kentucky, Lofton's Law was signed into law in March, increasing the penalty for hazing that leads to death or serious physical injury to a Class D felony, punishable by up to five years in prison. Reckless participation in hazing can result in a misdemeanor.

And in Washington state, the Sam Martinez Stop Hazing Law, which was passed unanimously and signed into law in May, makes hazing a gross misdemeanor instead of a misdemeanor; if the hazing results in substantial bodily harm, it rises to a felony. The law bumps up penalties for hazing from a maximum of 90 days to up to a year — and up to five years for the felony charge.

Washington became the 15th state to elevate hazing to a felony if it causes severe injury or death.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 9 of 78

"For the first time we're talking about hazing in a very real way. There's been a culture of secrecy, in my view, of hazing for many, many years," Rep. Mari Leavitt, a Democrat who wrote the bill, said in an interview with Stateline. "Students will recognize that there is a pretty significant consequence for choosing to behave in these barbaric activities and it can change the trajectory of their lives."

The new law follows the passage of Sam's Law in 2022, named after the same student, which updated the definition of hazing and required universities and colleges, as well as fraternity and sorority chapters, to make hazing investigation records public.

"The more that people are aware, and willing to talk about it and willing to report what they see, that will start to change that culture of secrecy to something that holds people accountable and also is transparent in terms of what's happening across states," Leavitt said.

Anti-hazing movement

In 15 states, a major weakness in the anti-hazing law, according to StopHazing, is the absence of a "consent clause," which asserts that an individual's willingness to participate in potentially hazardous actions — as when a student agrees to a certain activity — does not protect those involved from hazing charges. Some anti-hazing laws explicitly spell out that consent is not a defense.

"The consent clause ... is really important in terms of documenting hazing and having policy be really effective," said Elizabeth Allan, the principal of StopHazing and a professor of higher education at the University of Maine. Allan co-wrote the 2008 national study on hazing.

Advocacy groups also have been pushing for national anti-hazing legislation to establish uniform definitions and penalties.

Proposed federal legislation, originally known as the Report and Educate About Campus Hazing Act, or REACH Act, was initially introduced in Congress in 2021. This year, it is set to be reintroduced under a new name, the Stop Campus Hazing Act. The legislation encompasses a range of transparency and prevention measures, including mandatory public reporting of hazing incidents and the implementation of comprehensive prevention programs.

"Hazing is often underreported, underrecognized and it's really not being taken as seriously as it should be given the harmful impact that it has on individuals and communities," said Jessica Mertz, the executive director of the Clery Center, a nonprofit dedicated to promoting campus safety.

Among Greek fraternities and sororities, discussions around cracking down on hazing have gained momentum. Still, critics argue that most state anti-hazing laws should impose tougher penalties on national Greek life organizations and institutions, rather than individuals.

"As a founding member of the Anti-Hazing Coalition, the North American Interfraternity Conference and our member fraternities advocate for stronger federal and state hazing laws to increase criminal penalties and provide greater transparency to hold individuals accountable when found to be involved in hazing," Judson Horras, CEO of the North American Interfraternity Conference, said in a statement.

"While in this partnership, we have seen stronger state laws passed in over a dozen states and are encouraged by the introduction of the bipartisan Stop Campus Hazing Act in the 118th Congress last week," the statement said.

A 2020 paper by a Penn State University professor and published in the Journal of College and University Law underscores this argument. Law professor Justin J. Swofford argues that for legislation to be most effective in deterring future hazing injuries and deaths, there must be greater criminal and civil penalties imposed on both schools and fraternities.

However, some voices within the Greek life community question whether genuine change is achievable. Lucy Taylor, who disaffiliated from Alpha Phi at the University of Maryland and hosts "SNAPPED," a podcast exploring Greek life, suggests that change within Greek organizations can often appear performative.

These initiatives may encompass disciplinary committees, mandatory anti-hazing programs or even the hiring of security teams, Taylor said.

"They make it seem like change is happening, but those things that they're doing to create change don't actually have any power. If they wanted hazing to be gone, it would have been gone years ago," Taylor

said. "They don't do anything or they don't do what they're intended to do, and the hazing culture just becomes even more secret.

"The more secret it becomes, the worse it gets."

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

Amanda Hernández covers criminal justice for Stateline. She has reported for both national and local outlets, including ABC News, USA Today and NBC4 Washington.

Post-election audit rules spark debate on voter intent Auditors hope to avoid turning election spot checks into full-blown recounts

BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 7:31 PM

The perceived daylight between the terms "manual count" and "hand count" proved contentious during discussions of post-election audit rules that inched closer to implementation on Wednesday in Pierre.

The rules represent South Dakota's first foray into post-election audits, which are routinely done in most states. Creating such an audit process was a key campaign issue for Secretary of State Monae Johnson, elected last November after she narrowly bumped incumbent Steve Barnett from the Republican ticket.

The state Legislature endorsed the audits last winter, setting the stage for a series of rule-making meetings conducted by the state Board of Elections.

Wednesday's meeting represented one of the last steps toward the finalization of those rules, which will guide the county auditors who will now be expected to form and manage audit boards to spot-check election results.

The rules approved Wednesday will need a hearing before the Legislature's Rules Review Committee in November before they take effect.

Rachel Soulek, the secretary of state's election coordinator, told board members that the post-election audit rules were drafted using the state's existing rules for recounts.

"This is something the auditors and election officials are used to seeing," Soulek said.

The post-election audits, however, are not meant to be stand-ins for full recounts. The law passed by legislators notes that the results of the audit could lead to a recount if discrepancies greater than the margin of victory are discovered between the audited ballots and the tabulation machine results. At that point, auditors would notify the candidates involved, who'd be able to request recounts.

Auditors: Don't say 'hand count'

The recount issue animated some of the concerns presented by county auditors prior to Wednesday's meeting.

Auditors wanted "hand count" references replaced by "manual count."

Board members struggled to see the difference, but Harding County Auditor Kathy Glines testified that invoking the term "hand count" could tie post-election audit boards to a set of rules about hand counts that are used to guide recounts.

Those rules require reviewers to look for voter intent on questionable ballots, effectively turning post-election audits into far more involved and contentious recounts.

"The audit is to make sure that the tabulators are reading the ballots correctly," Glines said. "It's not a recount."

Minnehaha County Auditor Leah Anderson, however, who did not sign on to the auditors' list of suggested changes, said she's concerned that the words "manual count" could be interpreted to mean "counted by another machine."

"There are auditors that may think that they could do a transitive audit, which we talked about in the summer study, where you use a different tabulator," Anderson said.

Soulek told the board that the intent of lawmakers, who used the words "manually counted" in the audit law, was to have ballots hand-counted during a post-election audit. That's why the proposed rules referenced hand counting, she said, "just to make that clear."

A version of the auditors' requested change in verbiage found its way into the final set of rules, but an

attempt to draw a clear line between post-election audits and recounts with a focus on voter intent failed.

The board voted to use terms like "manually counted" in place of "hand counted" and its various iterations across the rule set. The initial vote to do so in one section of the rules was 4-3, with Johnson, Rapid City's Mike Buckingham and Gettysburg's John Lake opposed.

Shortly thereafter, board member Scott McGregor attempted to add a definition of manual counting with language to make clear that the recount rules wouldn't apply to hand counts performed by post-election auditors.

That motion failed 4-2.

Buckingham moved to define manual counting as "counting other than by electronic device," effectively making the words "manual" and "hand" interchangeable. Johnson supported that change, which passed.

Controversy trails post-election audit talks

Hand counting has been the subject of controversy in South Dakota. Electoral activists, some of whom testified throughout Wednesday's nearly daylong hearing, have alleged that tabulation machines are unreliable and compromise election integrity.

Commissioners in Tripp County ordered that county's auditor to hand count ballots in last fall's general election, a move Auditor Barb Desersa decried as stressful, unnecessary and a sign of a troubling loss of trust in the electoral process.

Shortly after the election, Desersa told South Dakota Searchlight that a county tabulation machine she'd been barred from using caught human error in the county's vote tallies.

The post-election audit rules have gone through several rounds of public comments. Similar to previous meetings on the matter, election activists lodged multiple complaints about the rules on Wednesday. Elkton's Rick Weible, for example, argued that post-election audits ought to involve divining voter intent.

The Legislature's Rules Review Committee is expected to hold a hearing on the post-audit rules on Nov. 7.

John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.

Senators probe foreign ownership of ag land; Rounds measure would ban several countries

BY: SAMANTHA DIETEL - SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 5:18 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. senators said during a Wednesday hearing that foreign ownership of U.S. farmland is a national security threat that should be further examined.

The U.S. Senate Committee on Agriculture, Nutrition and Forestry discussed foreign ownership of the nation's agricultural lands, with testimony from experts and Senate colleagues who have been taking the lead on the issue.

"Food security is national security," said U.S. Sen. Jon Tester, a Montana Democrat, who told the committee about his work to limit foreign ownership of farmland.

Tester said foreign adversaries such as China, Russia, Iran and North Korea should not be allowed any claim to U.S. soil.

In 2021, the U.S. Department of Agriculture reported that foreign investors held about 40 million acres of U.S. agricultural land. This is about 3% of the total amount.

"That's more than the entire state of Iowa," Sen. Joni Ernst, an Iowa Republican, said.

The USDA also reported Canada as the largest foreign investor in 2021 with 12.8 million acres, or 31% of foreign-held acres. The Netherlands, Italy, the United Kingdom and Germany, the other top foreign investors, collectively had 12.4 million acres, according to the report.

China had approximately 383,935 acres, or under 1% of foreign-held land in the U.S., according to the USDA report.

Foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land has increased by 66% since 2010, Chairwoman Debbie Sta-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 12 of 78

benow, a Michigan Democrat, said.

State restrictions on foreign ownership

Earlier this year there was growing bipartisan support in Congress for limiting foreign ownership of U.S. agricultural land, but there are currently no federal restrictions. The issue is also widely discussed at the state level.

Foreign ownership of U.S. land is currently restricted in 24 states, including Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Minnesota, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia and Wisconsin.

Eleven of these states enacted foreign ownership laws during the 2023 legislative session, according to the National Agricultural Law Center. Those states include Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Idaho, Louisiana, Montana, North Dakota, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah and Virginia.

Harrison Pittman, the National Agricultural Law Center director at the University of Arkansas System Division of Agriculture, said there are "really not very many states left that haven't had at least one or more proposals at the state level" to restrict foreign land ownership.

Sens. Tammy Baldwin, D-Wis., James Lankford, R-Okla., and Mike Rounds, R-S.D., joined Tester to speak about their efforts to improve farmland security when it comes to foreign investors.

In July, the Senate passed Rounds' amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act, which sets defense policy. If enacted, his amendment would ban China, Russia, North Korea and Iran from purchasing U.S. farmland and agricultural businesses.

National security threat seen

In his testimony, Rounds referenced recent examples of China's land ownership near military bases. In 2020, a Chinese company planned to build a wind energy farm project two miles from Laughlin Air Force base in Del Rio, Texas, Rounds said.

Rounds and other senators said they were concerned about the attempt of a Chinese company to build a corn milling plant on farmland near an Air Force base outside of Grand Forks, North Dakota.

Senators also cited the purchase of Smithfield Foods by a Chinese company as a point of concern.

"Who controls our farmland is really important and honestly, my concern is also with who controls many other parts of our food system, including our seeds, meat processing and grocery stores," said Sen. Cory Booker, a New Jersey Democrat. "This is all part of our national security."

Stabenow said U.S. national security "depends on a food system that is safe, secure, affordable, abundant and resilient."

"As foreign entities continue their acquisitions of U.S. food and agricultural assets, American farmers and families deserve to know that these transactions receive proper scrutiny," Stabenow said.

Data gaps

David Ortega, as associate professor of agricultural, food and resource economics at Michigan State University, said foreign ownership of agricultural land potentially could increase land prices and push farmers out of the market.

However, Ortega said there is "no clear evidence" that foreign ownership is making U.S. farmland prices rise.

Baldwin said that foreign investors holding U.S. farmland can put domestic food supply and local communities at risk.

"And right now, we don't know the full extent of the risk at hand," Baldwin said.

She said outdated reporting systems and a lack of auditing at both state and federal levels need to be addressed.

Last year, Baldwin worked with Sen. Charles Grassley, an Iowa Republican and member of the Agriculture panel, to pass the Farmland Security Act of 2022 as part of the fiscal 2023 omnibus appropriations bill.

This law requires the USDA to update its paper report system for filing foreign investments in agricultural land to an online, public database.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 13 of 78

The USDA must also report to Congress on the impacts of foreign ownership of agricultural land on family farms, rural communities and the domestic food supply, Baldwin said.

Gloria Montañó Greene, USDA's deputy under secretary for farm production and conservation, told senators that while Congress did direct the USDA to modernize its foreign investment reporting system within three years, the USDA "was not provided funding to implement these requirements."

Instead, the USDA posted Excel data spreadsheets in June for each year from 2011 to 2021, Greene said. Ernst said the Agricultural Foreign Investment Disclosure Act, which became law in 1978, must be modernized to "increase reporting, strengthen oversight and send a strong message to our adversaries that American farms are not their playground."

"Enforcement of reporting requirements has been inconsistent and at times lax," Ortega said. This is attributed to low staffing at the agency level, he said.

"While passing our legislation was a step in the right direction, Congress can and must do more," Baldwin said.

Lack of progress on the farm bill

Baldwin and Grassley are teaming up again to pass a new version of their proposal, the Farmland Security Act of 2023, which Baldwin said "will go even further in addressing foreign activity in our domestic agriculture marketplace."

Baldwin urged the committee to include this legislation in the next farm bill.

Ernst said she was frustrated that there has not been "meaningful progress" on the farm bill.

The current farm bill is set to expire at the end of the week.

"I really think this is a shame," Ernst said.

She said she hears from farmers and ag leaders that there needs to be more "farm" in the farm bill, and that they are concerned about the increase in foreign investment in American farmland.

Possible consequences

Ortega said that implementing restrictions on U.S. agricultural land ownership could result in retaliation by other countries.

Trade relations could be affected, Ortega said, and used China as an example. He said China is the largest export market for the U.S. when it comes to agricultural and food products.

Specifically, China imports soybeans, corn and grains from the U.S., Ortega said, as well as other consumer-oriented products.

"In my view, it would be far easier for China to find new sources of these products than it would be for American farmers to find new export markets," Ortega said. "So I think it's important to also be aware of potential trade impacts."

Samantha Dietel is a reporter intern in Washington, D.C. She is pursuing a degree in journalism at the University of Missouri-Columbia. She has previously covered the Missouri legislature in Jefferson City as a reporter for the Columbia Missourian.

GOP presidential hopefuls tear into each other and absent Trump at second debate

BY: JACOB FISCHLER AND ROBIN OPSAHL - SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 11:51 PM

The candidates polling from second to eighth in the race for the Republican nomination for president largely agreed on policy, fought over their records and took aim at former President Donald Trump at their second debate of the year Wednesday night.

Trump, who leads polls of the race by substantial margins, skipped the event at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley, California, hosted by FOX Business, as he did for the first debate last month.

With Trump absent, the remaining major candidates spent much of the rest of the night largely espousing the same conservative positions on a host of issues: Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, former Vice President Mike Pence, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, former New Jersey

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 14 of 78

Gov. Chris Christie, South Carolina U.S. Sen. Tim Scott and biotech entrepreneur Vivek Ramaswamy.

They criticized the Biden administration for what they called lax enforcement of the Southern border, decried a rise in crime and promised to be tougher on China. They promoted charter schools and rejected gender-affirming health care for transgender people. They pledged to reduce the size of the federal government and reverse President Joe Biden's policies meant to transition away from fossil fuel use.

Confronted by moderators on the last question of the evening about how they planned to overcome their substantial polling deficits, DeSantis said voters in early states would make their own choices, regardless of polls.

In the latest FiveThirtyEight average of polls, Trump was the choice of 54% of GOP primary voters, with DeSantis a distant second at 13.8%.

UAW strike

The second Republican presidential debate coincided with United Auto Workers holding strikes in multiple states at American vehicle manufacturing facilities, including Ford, General Motors and Stellantis, for high pay, fewer hours per week and improved benefits. Another stipulation is ensuring manufacturing workers maintain job security during the industry transition to electric vehicles.

Democrats' climate, taxes and social policy law provides tax credits for some electric vehicles, a policy Burgum criticized Wednesday.

Both Biden and Trump held events in Michigan this week, with Biden becoming the first sitting president to join a picket line with UAW workers at a Ford facility in Detroit Tuesday, and Trump holding an event just before the debate Wednesday at Drake Enterprises, a non-union auto parts shop, with some UAW members in attendance.

In the first question of the night, debate moderators asked Scott if he would fire the striking UAW workers if given the power. While the South Carolina Republican said the president does not have the power to fire private sector employees, he said Biden should be using his time elsewhere.

"We must make sure that we honor the commitments that we make," Scott said. "And one of the ways that we do that: Do not overpromise and underdeliver, and leave the taxpayers on the hook. I'll say this, Joe Biden should not be on the picket line. He should be on the Southern border working to close our Southern border."

Ramaswamy said that the UAW workers should be striking at the White House instead of at manufacturing plants, because Americans' fiscal woes come from "disastrous economic policies" passed in the nation's capital.

"We needed to deliver economic growth in this country," Ramaswamy said. "Unlock American energy – drill, frack, burn coal, embrace nuclear energy, put people back to work by no longer paying them more money to stay at home, stabilize the U.S. dollar itself and rescind a majority of those unconstitutional federal regulations that are hampering our economy. That is how we unleash American exceptionalism."

Christie and – briefly – DeSantis knock Trump

Trailing in the polls, two candidates – Christie and DeSantis – sought to bring Trump into the conversation, blasting the former president for skipping the debate.

Both mentioned Trump early, about 15 minutes into the debate.

Asked who was to blame for the impending partial shutdown of the federal government, Christie said everyone in Washington. He added that Trump should shoulder some blame for adding to the national debt during his four years in the White House and blasted Trump for being missing from the debate stage.

"Donald Trump, he hides behind the walls of his golf clubs and won't show up here to answer questions like all the rest of us are up here to answer," Christie said. "He puts \$7 trillion on the debt. He should be in this room to answer those questions."

DeSantis piled on.

"Donald Trump is missing in action," DeSantis said. "He should be on this stage tonight. He owes it to you to defend his record."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 15 of 78

Later, Christie spoke directly to the camera as he imagined Trump watching on television.

"You're not here tonight because you're afraid of being on the stage and defending your record," he said. "You're ducking these things. And let me tell you what's going to happen. You keep doing that, no one up here is going to call you Donald Trump anymore. We're gonna call you Donald Duck."

In a statement, Trump campaign senior advisor Chris LaCivita said the Republican National Committee should cancel future debates in deference to the former president.

"Tonight's GOP debate was as boring and inconsequential as the first debate, and nothing that was said will change the dynamics of the primary contest being dominated by President Trump," LaCivita said. "The RNC should immediately put an end to any further primary debates so we can train our fire on Crooked Joe Biden and quit wasting time and money that could be going to evicting Biden from the White House."

CBS News later reported LaCivita said Trump would also skip the next debate, scheduled for November in Miami.

Ramaswamy, Haley tussle

One candidate on stage, Ramaswamy, drew most of the attacks from his competitors, following the large share of attention he grabbed in the first debate.

In perhaps the most heated moment of Wednesday's debate, Haley criticized Ramaswamy, the only candidate who has not held elected office and who spent much of the first debate attacking the other candidates.

Moderators asked Ramaswamy about joining the social media service TikTok. China critics in the U.S. have voiced concerns about the platform's Chinese parent company, saying it presents a national security risk to provide the company user data on Americans. Congress banned the app on government devices this year.

Ramaswamy defended his move, saying it was necessary for Republicans to speak to young people.

Haley, a foreign policy hawk, jumped in.

"Every time I hear you, I feel a little bit dumber for what you say," she told Ramaswamy, adding that he was naively downplaying the threats TikTok poses. "What they're doing is, 150 million people are on TikTok. That means they can get your contacts, they can get your financial information, they can get your emails."

Scott also directed attacks at Ramaswamy, saying his biotech businesses did business with China's Communist Party.

And Haley and Scott scuffled over their records on spending.

Scott said he supported an amendment to the Constitution to require the federal government to run a balanced budget.

Haley said Scott's rhetoric didn't match his record in Congress, which controls federal spending.

"He's been there 12 years and he hasn't done any of that," she said.

Scott later said that as South Carolina governor, Haley raised gas taxes and accepted federal spending.

"Talk about someone who has never seen a federal dollar she doesn't like," he said.

Immigration center stage

One of the lengthier segments of the debate centered on immigration policy and border security, with the candidates nearly unanimously voicing criticisms of the Biden administration's approach and pledging to block illegal migration.

Haley said Biden "waved the green flag" to encourage migration to the United States.

Christie said Biden "is doing nothing about enforcing" the law at the border. But Christie sounded one of the softer notes on immigration of the evening, saying those who seek to move to the country legally should be welcomed to help fill 6 million job openings.

Ramaswamy said he would "militarize" the border and eliminate birthright citizenship for the children of immigrants in the country without authorization — a position certain to be challenged under the Constitution's 14th Amendment.

DeSantis also said he would "use the U.S. military to go after the Mexican drug cartels."

The candidates said a porous border with Mexico was to blame for the supply of illegal drugs like fentanyl.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 16 of 78

Haley also tied immigration to crime in U.S. cities including Philadelphia, though data shows immigrants who entered the country illegally are much less likely to be arrested for violent crime.

Trump and abortion

Trump came under fire from some members of the GOP following a September interview on MSNBC's "Meet the Press," where he said he does not support the call for a 15-week federal abortion ban advocated by other candidates in the 2024 Republican field.

In Iowa, the former president said that the issue of abortion was one of the issues causing Republicans to lose ground in elections, pointing to the 2022 midterms when a predicted "red wave" failed to come to fruition in many states.

All ballot measures voted on in states following the fall of *Roe v. Wade*, in both red and blue states, supported access to the medical procedure.

Trump also criticized DeSantis, for signing into law a so-called "fetal heartbeat" measure that would prohibit most abortions after six weeks of gestation.

"I mean, (DeSantis) is willing to sign a five-week and six-week ban," Trump said in the interview. "I think what he did is a terrible thing and a terrible mistake."

The Florida governor on Wednesday night defended the state law he signed, as well as saying Republicans who oppose abortion rights did not need to cede ground on abortion in order to win elections.

"I reject this idea that pro-lifers are to blame for midterm defeats," DeSantis said. "I think there's other reasons for that. The former president ... He should be here explaining his comments, to try to say that pro-life protections are somehow a terrible thing."

Christie said that he could use his experience as governor of a traditionally Democratic state to advocate and sign abortion laws as chief executive.

"What you need is a leader who can talk to people and make them understand that if you're pro-life, you have to be proactive for the entire life, not just the nine months in the womb," Christie said. "And we talked a lot about fentanyl tonight. We haven't spoken one moment about treatment, but we need to make sure that for the drug-addicted 16-year-olds who are in the county lockup, their life is precious too. ... if you're pro-life, you've got to be pro-life for the entire life."

Pence and Obamacare

Pence was asked about his claim before taking the vice presidency that he would repeal the mandates imposed by the health care law President Barack Obama signed in 2010, with the debate moderators saying that these promises were not kept during the Trump presidency.

While the former vice president first answered by discussing his support for the federal death penalty for mass shooters, Pence later said that he believes that continuing the Affordable Care Act is "one of the choices" available moving forward.

He compared his approach to that of his former running mate, Trump, who he said wants to consolidate power in the presidency and executive branch.

"It's my intention to make the federal government smaller by returning to the states those resources and programs that are rightfully theirs under the 10th Amendment of the Constitution," Pence said.

"That means all Obamacare, all of housing funding, all of HHS funding — all of it goes back to the states. We'll shut down the federal Department of Education, we'll allow states to innovate. We're going to revive federalism in America, and states are going to help bring America back."

DeSantis, when asked about the large numbers of people who are not insured, said that lack of health care coverage is a symptom of "national decline" in the American economy. DeSantis linked rising insurance costs to "Bidenomics."

"What we need to do with health care is recognize our health care (system) is putting patients at the back of the bus," DeSantis said. "We have big pharma, big insurance and big government, and we need to tackle that, and have more power for the people and the doctor-patient relationship."

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 17 of 78

Robin Opsahl is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering the state Legislature and politics. Robin has experience covering government, elections and more at media organizations including Roll Call, the Sacramento Bee and the Wausau Daily Herald, in addition to working on multimedia projects, newsletters and visualizations. They were a political reporter for the Des Moines Register covering the Iowa caucuses leading up to the 2020 presidential election, assisting with the Register's Iowa Poll, and reporting on Iowa's 4th District elections.

U.S. Senate moves on short-term spending bill in struggle to avoid shutdown days away

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - SEPTEMBER 27, 2023 6:50 AM

"This bipartisan CR is a temporary solution — a bridge towards cooperation and away from extremism," Schumer said. "And it will allow us to keep working to fully fund the federal government and spare American families the pain of a government shutdown."

Schumer urged lawmakers to approve the stopgap spending bill later this week, saying the continuing resolution "is a bridge, not a final destination."

The CR, Schumer said, is intended to give the House and Senate more time to reconcile the differences between the 12 annual, full-year government funding bills.

The stopgap bill also includes funding security and humanitarian assistance to Ukraine and money for natural disaster recovery, Schumer said.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell urged his fellow Republicans to support the short-term funding bill and not press for a partial government shutdown.

"In order for work on appropriations to continue uninterrupted, Congress needs to extend government funding by the end of this week," the Kentucky Republican said. "The sooner Congress keeps the lights on, the sooner these important conversations can resume."

"The clearest path forward is a standard short term continuing resolution," McConnell said.

Kentucky's other senator, Rand Paul, has said more than once that he will not give the consent needed for the Senate to quickly pass the short-term spending bill. Paul is opposed to additional aid to Ukraine.

DOD, Ukraine

The Senate legislation would provide \$4.5 billion for the U.S. Defense Department as well as \$1.65 billion for the U.S. State Department and U.S. Agency for International Development to send assistance to Ukraine.

Ongoing disaster recovery would be bolstered with \$6 billion in additional spending for the Federal Emergency Management Agency's disaster relief fund.

The funding is significantly less than the \$24 billion for Ukraine and \$12 billion for FEMA the Biden administration asked Congress to provide in a supplemental spending request it released in August.

The short-term spending bill would prevent wildland firefighters from receiving a pay cut that would otherwise begin on Oct. 1.

The bill would extend several expiring authorizations, including for the Federal Aviation Administration, which would go until the end of the year, and the National Flood Insurance Program, which would be extended through Nov. 17.

Senators voted 77-19 on Tuesday evening to advance the 79-page bill toward final passage.

House GOP starts debate

U.S. House Republicans also made some progress Tuesday over funding the government, though not toward reaching agreement on the continuing resolution that they need to pass this week.

The House voted to begin debate on the Agriculture-FDA, Defense, Homeland Security and State-Foreign Operations government spending bills. The vote was 216-212. Georgia Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene was the sole GOP lawmaker to vote against the procedural step.

McCarthy said during the Tuesday evening press conference that he planned to put a GOP continuing resolution on the floor later this week that also includes border security provisions. That spending proposal was released earlier this month and hasn't yet garnered the support needed to go to the floor.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 18 of 78

Any House CR wouldn't be able to pass the Senate unless it could attract the support of at least 60 senators, making it unlikely the proposal would become law.

McCarthy also chastised senators who back aid to Ukraine, saying if they want to "focus on Ukraine and not focus on the Southern border, I think your priorities are backwards."

Biden on Monday criticized McCarthy for not adhering to the spending caps agreement the two reached when they brokered a debt limit deal in May.

"We made a deal. We shook hands. We said, 'This is what we're going to do,' and now they're reneging on the deal, which is not much of a surprise these days," Biden said.

Americans, he said, shouldn't allow the GOP to stay in power if they can't avoid a partial government shutdown.

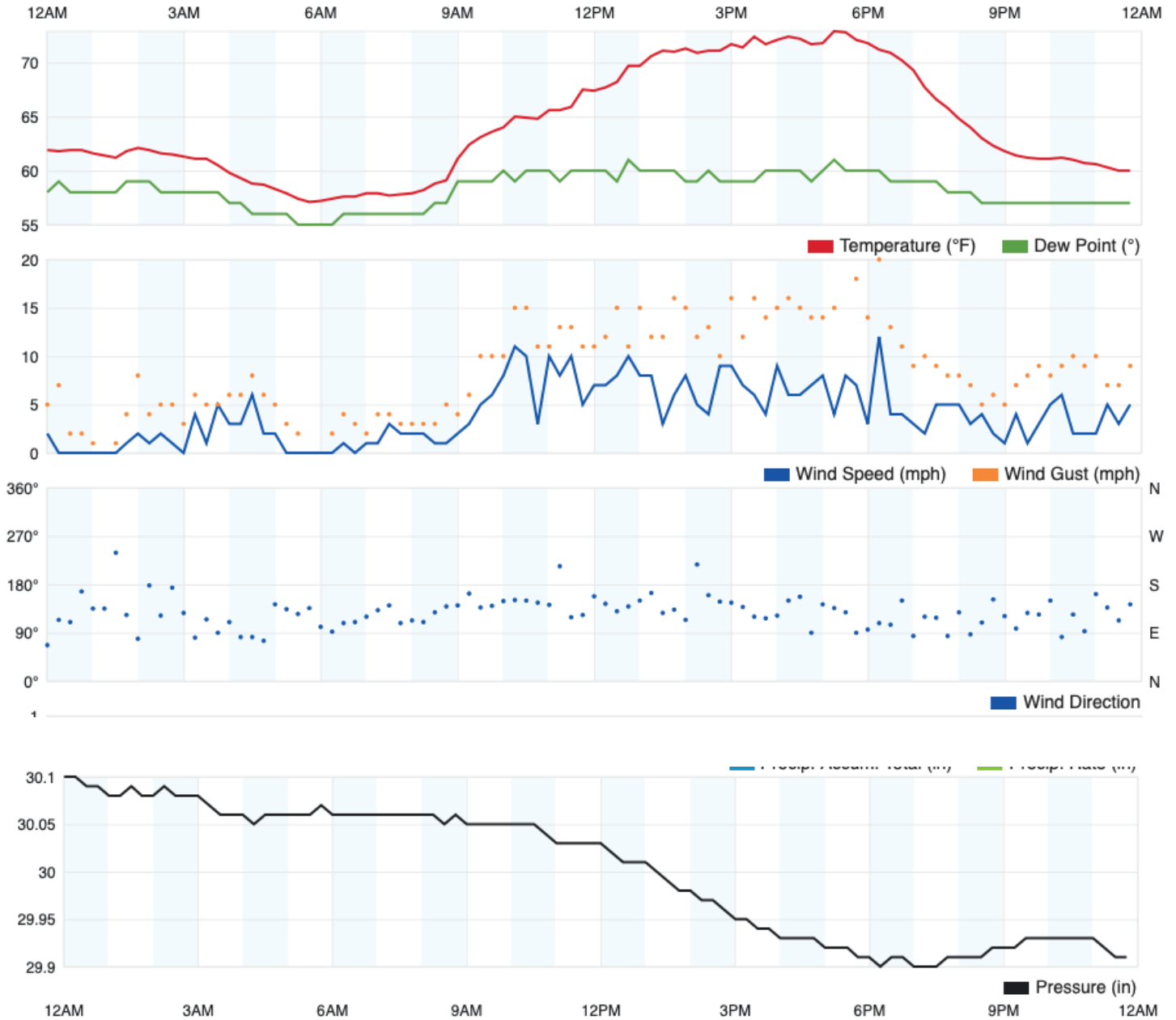
"Funding the government is one of the most basic fundamental responsibilities of the Congress," Biden said. "And if Republicans in the House don't start doing their job, we should stop electing them."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 19 of 78

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 20 of 78

Thu Sep 28	Fri Sep 29	Sat Sep 30	Sun Oct 1	Mon Oct 2	Tue Oct 3	Wed Oct 4
76°F	70°F	77°F	82°F	80°F	72°F	67°F
56°F	53°F	65°F	64°F	56°F	51°F	51°F
SSE	NE	NE	S	S	S	SW
25 MPH	12 MPH	17 MPH	19 MPH	16 MPH	16 MPH	13 MPH
	60%				30%	30%

Severe Weather Threat Overview

September 28, 2023 4:32 AM

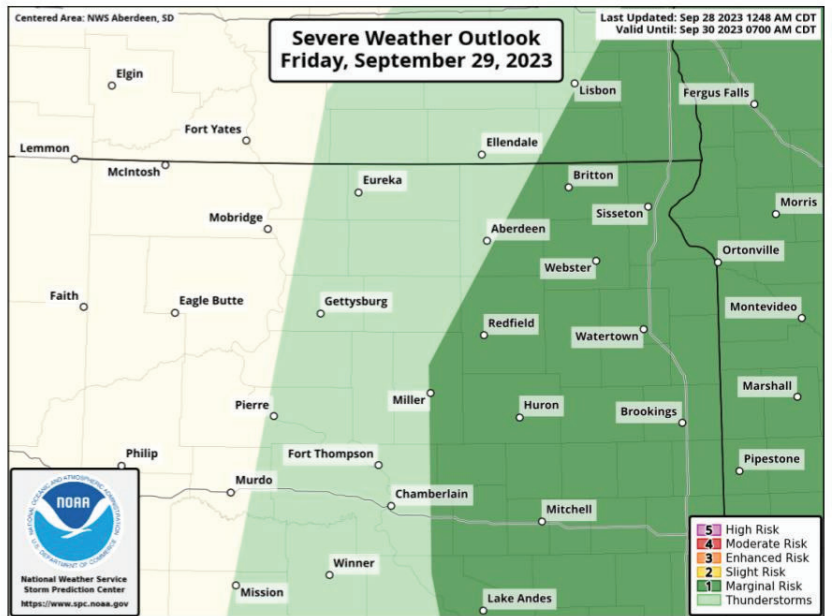
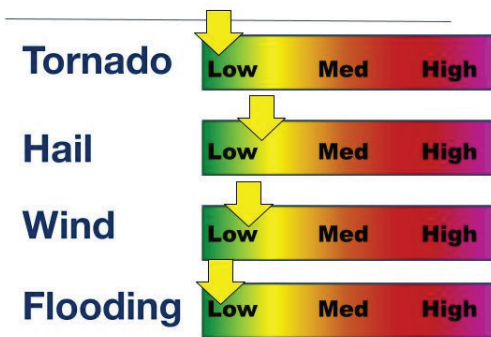
Friday morning through early evening

Timing/Location

Elevated, fast moving storms will develop early Friday and push northeast across eastern South Dakota through the course of the morning and into the afternoon.

Hazards

Main threat from any of the stronger storms will be hail and damaging winds.



Storms will move quickly across the area between early Friday morning through the early evening hours. Strongest storms will be capable of producing hail and gusty winds.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 21 of 78

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 73 °F at 5:16 PM

Low Temp: 57 °F at 5:38 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 6:12 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 55 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 2021

Record Low: 18 in 1951

Average High: 70

Average Low: 42

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.86

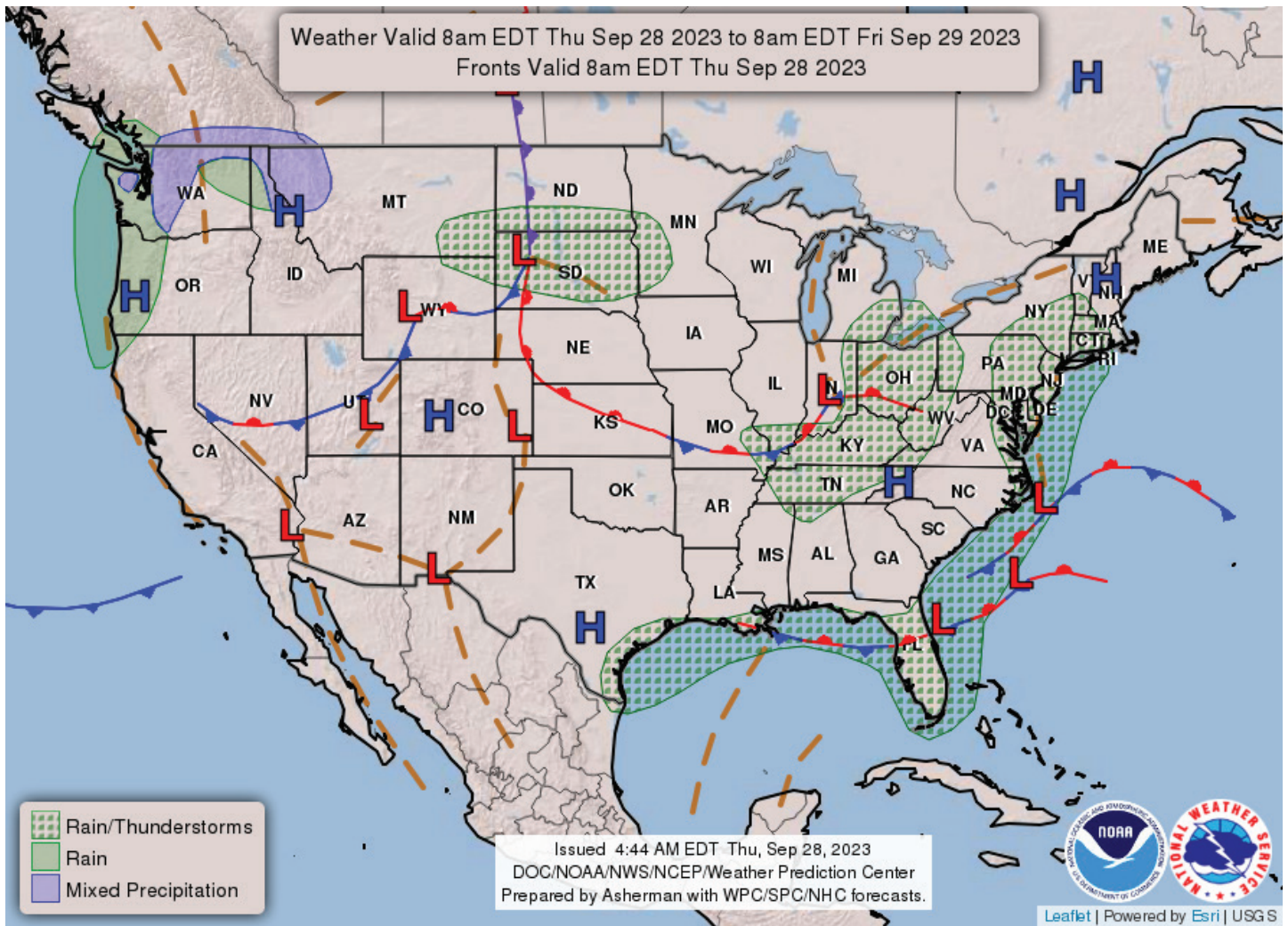
Precip to date in Sept.: 2.79

Average Precip to date: 18.20

Precip Year to Date: 21.38

Sunset Tonight: 7:20:36 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:26:42 AM



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 22 of 78

Today in Weather History

September 28, 1951: During the early morning hours, near-record to record cold covered central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. Temperatures across the area fell into the upper teens and 20s. Aberdeen recorded a record low of 18 degrees; Kennebec dropped to 20 degrees, Pierre fell to 21 degrees while Timber Lake had a record low of 23 degrees. The overnight low in Mobridge was 23 degrees, 24 degrees at Watertown, and 26 degrees at Sisseton.

1836 - The first of three early season snows brought four inches of snow to Hamilton, NY, and two inches to Ashby MA. (David Ludlum)

1837: The first recorded storm to rake the entire Texas coast was Racer's Storm, named for a British sloop of war which encountered the system in the extreme northwestern Caribbean on September 28th. It is remembered as one of the most destructive storms of the nineteenth century due to its extreme duration and 2000 mile path of destruction.

1874: A strong category 1 hurricane went by Charleston and Georgetown, South Carolina. The tide was unprecedented height, inundating the entire riverfront of the city of Charleston.

1893 - Albuquerque, NM, was soaked with 2.25 inches of rain, enough to establish a 24 hour record for that city. (The Weather Channel)

1929: A hurricane-spawned tornado hit Fort Lauderdale, Florida. While the path length of this estimated F2 tornado was 0.8 miles, it caused 16 injuries.

1917 - A hurricane hit Pensacola, FL. Winds gusted to 95 mph, and the barometric pressure dipped to 28.50 inches. Winds at Mobile AL gusted to 75 mph. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms produced up to ten inches of rain in southern Kansas and north central Oklahoma overnight. The Chikaskia River rose 2.5 feet above flood stage at Blackwell OK during the day causing flooding in Kay and Grant counties of north central Oklahoma. Early morning thunderstorms in the Lower Rio Grande Valley of Texas produced 3.07 inches of rain in six hours at McAllen. Thunderstorms produced up to six inches of rain in southeastern Texas later in the day. (National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a cold front in the central U.S. produced severe weather from northern Texas to the Lower Missouri Valley during the late afternoon and evening hours. Hail three inches in diameter was reported at Nolan TX, and wind gusts to 80 mph were reported at Lawrence KS. Thunderstorms drenched downtown Kansas City MO with up to four inches of rain, leaving some cars stranded in water six feet deep. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms over northeastern Florida drenched Jacksonville with 4.28 inches of rain between midnight and 6 AM EDT. Unseasonably cool weather prevailed in the northeastern U.S. Five cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Binghamton NY with a reading of 30 degrees. Morning lows were in the 20s in northern New England. Unseasonably mild weather prevailed in the northwestern U.S., with afternoon highs in the upper 70s and 80s. In Oregon, Astoria reported a record high of 83 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1998: On the morning of September 28th, Hurricane George made landfall near Biloxi, Mississippi with maximum winds of 110 mph and a minimum pressure of 964 mb, making it a Category 2 hurricane. After landfall, Georges moved very slowly across southern Mississippi and weakened to a tropical depression by the morning of the 29th when the center was about 30 miles north-northeast of Mobile, Alabama. The storm dissipated near the northeast Florida/southeast Georgia coast by the morning of October 1, 1998.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 23 of 78

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

SITTING UP OR LYING DOWN?

A Red Cross representative was contacting local churches for planning purposes in the event of a disaster. Answering the phone, the pastor said, "Please, Ma'am, How may I help you?"

"I'm calling on behalf of the Red Cross," she said, "and I would like to know how many people might be able to lie down and sleep in your facilities in the event of a disaster."

Thinking for a moment about what might be possible, he responded with a smile, "I don't know how many might be able to lie down and sleep comfortably, but I know that about nine hundred sleep sitting upright every Sunday morning."

Sleeping in church is a byproduct for many tired Sunday morning worshipers. Whether it is a sermon that is not mentally challenging or spiritually stimulating or the result of insufficient sleep or rest is not the point. We go to church to worship God and recognize our need to gather together in His name. We set aside time and things when we attend church that normally concerns us and focus minds and hearts on the greatness of our Creator - His holiness, power and grace, and our unworthiness, our need for His grace, and our dependence upon Him to meet our every need.

Gathering together for worship is our duty and responsibility and must be done with a sense of expectation, eagerness, and excitement.

Prayer: Lord, may we enter into Your presence with praise and thanksgiving, coming together to honor Your goodness, grace, and glory. May we do so with expectations. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Everything on earth will worship you; they will sing your praises, shouting your name in glorious songs. Psalm 66:4



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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 24 of 78

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 25 of 78

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 26 of 78



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.26.23

15 30 35 42 60 16

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$267,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 12
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.27.23

21 22 25 46 50 1

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$2,400,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 15
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.27.23

15 26 31 33 38 10

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 30 Mins 11
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.27.23

21 23 30 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 30
DRAW: Mins 11 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.27.23

10 25 51 52 63 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 59
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.27.23

1 7 46 47 63 7

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$925,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 59
DRAW: Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Video appears to show American soldier who crossed into North Korea arriving back in the US

By MATTHEW LEE, KIM TONG-HYUNG and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

The American soldier who sprinted into North Korea across the heavily fortified border between the Koreas two months ago arrived back in the U.S. early Thursday, video appeared to show.

Pvt. Travis King's release was secured with the help of ally Sweden and rival China, the White House said Wednesday. North Korea abruptly announced earlier that day that it would expel the soldier.

While officials have said King is in good health and the immediate focus will be on caring for him and reintegrating him into U.S. society, his troubles are likely far from over.

King, who had served in South Korea, ran into the North while on a civilian tour of a border village on July 18, becoming the first American confirmed to be detained in the isoin nearly five years. At the time, he was supposed to be heading to Fort Bliss, Texas, following his release from prison in South Korea on an assault conviction.

He has been declared AWOL from the Army. In many cases, someone who is AWOL for more than a month can automatically be considered a deserter.

Punishment for going AWOL or desertion can vary, and it depends in part on whether the service member voluntarily returned or was apprehended. King's handover by the North Koreans makes that more complicated.

Video aired Thursday by a Texas news station appeared to show King walking off a plane in San Antonio. Dressed in a dark top and pants, he could be seen speaking briefly with people waiting on the tarmac. He shook hands with one before being led into a building.

On Wednesday, Swedish officials took King to the Chinese border, where he was met by U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns, the Swedish ambassador to China, and at least one U.S. Defense Department official.

He was then flown to a U.S. military base in South Korea before being returned to the U.S.

It was not clear why the North — which has tense relations with Washington over Pyongyang's nuclear program, support for Russia's war in Ukraine and other issues — agreed to turn him over or why the soldier fled in the first place.

Biden administration officials insisted they provided no concessions to North Korea to secure his release.

Analysis: American soldier's release from detention was quick by North Korean standards

By KIM TONG-HYUNG Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Maybe it never made sense for North Korea to hold on to Pvt. Travis King.

Just over two months after he sprinted into North Korea across the heavily fortified inter-Korean border, King was put on a plane back to America after the North released him into U.S. custody.

Several recent American detainees had been held for over a year — 17 months in the case of Otto Warmbier, an American college student who was arrested during a group tour. Warmbier was in a coma when he was deported, and later died.

King's case was unique, not least because he was one of the 28,500 American troops stationed in South Korea to deter potential aggression from the nuclear-armed North.

There had been speculation that North Korea would try to maximize the propaganda value of an active duty U.S. soldier who voluntarily crossed into its territory, reportedly because he was disillusioned with racism in the military and American society.

The North has often been accused of using American detainees as bargaining chips, but Biden admin-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 28 of 78

istration officials said they made no concessions to secure King's release.

Pyongyang did not provide a detailed explanation when it announced the expulsion. In a brief report, the official Korean Central News Agency said King confessed to illegally entering the North because he harbored "ill feeling against inhuman maltreatment and racial discrimination" within the U.S. Army and was "disillusioned about the unequal U.S. society."

It had attributed similar comments to King before, and verifying their authenticity is impossible. Some previous foreign detainees have said after their releases that declarations of guilt while in North Korean custody were made under coercion.

The North may have simply decided that King was more trouble than he was worth.

Analysts say the 23-year-old's legal troubles could have limited his propaganda value. At the time he crossed the border in July, King was supposed to be heading to Fort Bliss, Texas, following his release from prison in South Korea on an assault conviction.

As a low-ranking serviceman, King was clearly not a meaningful source of U.S. military information. The North would have been unable to justify the costs of providing him food, accommodation, security guards and translators, especially when it was uncertain what it would get from the United States amid stalled diplomacy.

"North Korea is actually good at doing the math on these things," said Moon Seong Mook, a retired South Korean brigadier general who participated in past military talks with the North.

"They concluded that the longer he stays, the more of a burden he becomes."

Pyongyang probably also didn't want to wait out a protracted negotiation with the U.S. Considering their prolonged diplomatic freeze, any gain was unlikely to be worth the trouble of dragging out his detention.

North Korea likely spent much of King's 71 days in custody weighing his potential as a propaganda asset. In the end, KCNA's brief description of King's supposed frustrations with American society and the U.S. military was all the North was going to get out of him, said Hong Min, an analyst at Seoul's Korea Institute for National Unification.

King's release comes as North Korean leader Kim Jong Un actively boosts his partnerships with Moscow and Beijing as he tries to break out of diplomatic isolation and insert Pyongyang into a united front against Washington.

Some experts say Kim's push, highlighted by a recent trip to Russia that sparked Western worries about a possible arms deal, signals a deeper shift in North Korea's foreign policy away from efforts to pry concessions out of Washington.

"Releasing King, in this manner, underwrites Pyongyang's ongoing statements of disinterest in diplomacy with Washington more credibly," said Ankit Panda, an expert with the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

"When North Korea still valued concessions and diplomacy with the United States, it appeared to view American citizens as a somewhat useful bargaining chip," said Panda. "Their statement makes no effort more broadly to link King's deportation with broader diplomatic or strategic concerns."

Unauthorized crossings across the Demilitarized Zone separating the Koreas are extremely unusual, and King was the first American soldier to do it in decades. Previous soldier defectors, like Charles Jenkins or James Dresnok in the 1960s, were treated by Pyongyang as propaganda assets, showcased in leaflets and films attacking the U.S. and praising the North's regime.

Other Americans were detained, publicly condemned and handed harsh penalties based on confessions of anti-state activities they later said were coerced. Freeing them often required lengthy backdoor negotiations and high-profile U.S. officials flying into Pyongyang to secure their release.

King's case was different in many ways.

King's legal troubles and the intense media coverage surrounding his dash across the border zone likely made it difficult for Pyongyang's propaganda writers to craft a story about a disillusioned U.S. soldier escaping evil imperialists, Hong said.

"Everyone knew why it happened and everyone saw how it happened," he said.

Hong said King's swift release also reflects North Korean efforts to present itself as a responsible govern-

ment that abides by international norms and laws, and may be meant to answer criticism about its human rights record as it seeks to build a more assertive diplomatic profile.

During a session of North Korea's rubber-stamp parliament this week, Kim Jong Un called for the country to take a larger role in a coalition of nations confronting the United States in a "new Cold War," KCNA said Thursday.

"I think the only reason they would have considered keeping (King), was the discrimination angle, to be able to put a face to counter-criticisms of America's human rights situation," said Jenny Town, a senior fellow at the Stimson Center in Washington and director of the North Korea-focused 38 North website.

"But that doesn't seem to have been compelling enough for them to let him stay."

Unauthorized foreigners are always a sensitive matter for North Korea, which worries about them "polluting" citizens' minds with subversive ideas, said Leif-Eric Easley, a professor of international studies at Ewha Womans University in Seoul.

They can also become an international diplomatic liability, especially if their health suffers in the harsh conditions of detention, like Warmbier.

"Fortunately for Pvt. Travis King, the Kim regime appears to have decided to take only limited propaganda gains from his case and deport him before he causes any more trouble," Easley said.

Half of Nagorno-Karabakh's population flees as the separatist government says it will dissolve

By AVET DEMOURIAN Associated Press

YEREVAN, Armenia (AP) — The separatist government of Nagorno-Karabakh announced Thursday that it will dissolve itself and the unrecognized republic will cease to exist by the end of the year, and Armenian officials said more than half of the population has already fled.

That is after Azerbaijan carried out a lightning offensive to reclaim full control over its breakaway region and demanded that Armenian troops in Nagorno-Karabakh lay down their weapons and the separatist government dissolve itself.

A decree to that effect was signed by the region's separatist President Samvel Shakhramanyan. The document cited an agreement reached last week to end the fighting under which Azerbaijan will allow the "free, voluntary and unhindered movement" of Nagorno-Karabakh residents and disarm troops in Armenia in exchange.

Nagorno-Karabakh is a region of Azerbaijan that came under the control of ethnic Armenian forces, backed by the Armenian military, in separatist fighting that ended in 1994. During a six-week war in 2020, Azerbaijan took back parts of the region along with surrounding territory that Armenian forces had claimed during the earlier conflict.

Following the latest offensive and a cease-fire agreement brokered by Russian peacekeepers, Azerbaijan and Nagorno-Karabakh separatist authorities have begun talks on "reintegrating" the region back into Azerbaijan. Azerbaijani authorities have pledged to respect the rights of ethnic Armenians in the region and restore supplies after a 10-month blockade. Many local residents, however, fear reprisals and have decided to leave for Armenia.

By Thursday morning, more than half of Nagorno-Karabakh's population — 66,500 people — had fled to Armenia, and the influx continues with unabating intensity, according to Armenian officials.

The massive exodus began on Sunday evening, and the only road linking Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia quickly filled up with cars that created an hourslong traffic jam. On Monday night, a fuel reservoir exploded at a gas station where people seeking to leave were lining up for gas that due to the blockade had been in short supply. At least 68 people were killed and nearly 300 injured, with over 100 more still considered missing.

It isn't immediately clear if any of the ethnic Armenians that have populated the region will remain there. Shakhramanyan's decree on Thursday urged Nagorno-Karabakh's population — including those who left — "to familiarize themselves with the conditions of reintegration offered by the Republic of Azerbaijan, in order

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 30 of 78

to then make an individual decision about the possibility of staying in (or returning to) Nagorno-Karabakh.”

On Thursday, Azerbaijani authorities charged Ruben Vardanyan, the former head of Nagorno-Karabakh’s separatist government who was arrested a day earlier, with financing terrorism, creating illegal armed formations and illegally crossing a state border.

Azerbaijani officials said Vardanyan, a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia, was detained as he was trying to cross into Armenia from the breakaway region along with thousands of others. He was escorted to Azerbaijan’s capital, Baku. His arrest appeared to indicate Azerbaijan’s intention to quickly enforce its grip on the region.

Vardanyan moved to Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022 and served as the head the regional government for several months before stepping down earlier this year.

Long a city that embraced cars, Paris is seeing a new kind of road rage: Bike-lane traffic jams

By JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Ring, ring! It’s rush hour on Paris’ Sébastopol Boulevard, and the congestion is severe — not just gas-guzzling, pollution-spewing, horn-honking snarls but also quieter and greener bottlenecks of cyclists jockeying for space.

Until four years ago, motorists largely had the Paris thoroughfare to themselves. Now, its bike-lane jams speak to a cycling revolution that is reshaping the capital of France — long a country of car-lovers, home to Renault, Citroen and Peugeot.

This revolution, like others, is also proving choppy. A nearly decade-long drive by Socialist Mayor Anne Hidalgo to turn Paris from a city hostile for cyclists — except those racing the Tour de France — into one where they venture more safely and freely has become so transformative that bikes are steadily muscling aside motor vehicles and increasingly getting in each other’s way. And more bike lanes are coming for next year’s Paris Olympics — part of an effort to halve the event’s carbon footprint.

Already, on some Paris boulevards, bikes outnumber cars at peak times. Cycle congestion, with wheel-to-wheel lines of riders ringing their bells and sometimes losing their cool, is becoming a headache.

“It’s the same feeling as the one I had when I was younger, with my parents driving their car, and it was like traffic jams all over the place. So now it’s really a bike traffic jam,” said Thibault Quéré, a spokesperson for the Federation of Bicycle Users. “But it’s kind of a good difficulty to have. Especially when we think about what Paris used to be.”

From a measly 200 kilometers (125 miles) in 2001, cyclists now have more than 1,000 (620 miles) of tailor-made bike paths and marked routes to roam, City Hall says. Motor vehicles have been barred entirely from some roads, most notably a River Seine embankment that used to be a busy highway. It’s become a central Paris haven for cyclists, runners, families and romantics since Hidalgo closed it to motor traffic in 2016.

Farther north, the twin-lane bike path on Sébastopol Boulevard has become one of Europe’s busiest since its inauguration in 2019. It saw a record 124,000 weekly users in early September, according to tracking by pro-bike group Paris en Selle (“Paris by saddle”). Traffic there now regularly surpasses London’s busiest cycleways and at its busiest even approaches the numbers of popular cycle routes in Amsterdam.

North-south Sébastopol empties into another busy east-west route on Rue de Rivoli that passes the Louvre. It also saw record daily and weekly numbers in September, Paris en Selle’s tracking shows.

Add to the mix none-too-thrilled motorists, scooters wriggling through traffic, pedestrians trying not to get squished and construction that seems to have popped up almost everywhere in Paris’ sprint to the Olympics, and negotiating the busiest streets by bike can feel akin to playing Mario Kart — but with real-life dangers and consequences.

Many cyclists, some clearly new and still feeling their way around, seem to think red lights and road rules don’t apply to them. Paris’ removal of for-hire electric scooters following a city referendum in April also is driving some ex-users to biking.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 31 of 78

"Paris has become unlivable. No one can stand each other," bike-rider Michel Gelernt said as he wound his way past whistle-blowing traffic officers and yelling motorists on Concorde plaza, the French Revolution decapitation site of King Louis XVI in 1793.

A former motor-scooter and public-transport user, the retiree switched to cycling during the COVID-19 pandemic and has kept the habit. He uses Velib' — Paris' bike-sharing system, in its 16th year — to get around for 80% of his trips.

"Everyone behaves selfishly," grumbled Gelernt, who's in his 70s. "The traffic is a lot worse than it was."

That said, he and others can't dispute that flows of bikes are better for health and the environment than the noxious pollution that still often blankets Paris. France's government blames atmospheric pollution for 48,000 premature deaths nationwide per year.

In a landmark decision, a Paris court in June awarded 5,000 euros (\$5,300) in compensation to two families with children who were sickened by air pollution, suffering from asthma and other health issues when they lived near the capital's car-choked ring road. The court ruled the French state was at fault.

Hidalgo cites pollution as a prime motivation for her drive to increase bike use, squeeze out emission-spewing vehicles and make "a Paris that breathes." Re-elected in 2020, her second five-year "Bike Plan" budgets 250 million euros (\$260 million) in additional investments by 2026. That's 100 million euros more than on her first-term bike plan. Most of it is earmarked for more cycle routes and parking.

City Hall says all Olympic venues in the city will be bike-accessible for the July 26-Aug. 11 Paris Games, on a 60-kilometer (nearly 40-mile) cycle network.

So Olympic fans will be able discover what growing numbers of Parisians are learning: Experiencing the city by bike can rekindle love for its charms.

Behind busy thoroughfares are countless quieter streets that embrace cyclists with sights, sounds and smells that are too easily missed by car. And for a start-the-day jolt to energize the senses without over-priced espresso, try bouncing along the cobblestones of the Champs-Élysées on any crisp morning.

"It's a feeling of freedom, rather than being in the Metro, sitting down or in the heat," said Ange Gadou, 19, a convert who previously relied on rental e-scooters before Paris banished them.

"There's nothing about it I don't like."

Food prices are rising as countries limit exports. Blame climate change, El Nino and Russia's war

By ANIRUDDHA GHOSAL, EVELYNE MUSAMBI and JOEAL CALUPITAN Associated Press

How do you cook a meal when a staple ingredient is unaffordable?

This question is playing out in households around the world as they face shortages of essential foods like rice, cooking oil and onions. That is because countries have imposed restrictions on the food they export to protect their own supplies from the combined effect of the war in Ukraine, El Nino's threat to food production and increasing damage from climate change.

For Caroline Kyalo, a 28-year-old who works in a salon in Kenya's capital of Nairobi, it was a question of trying to figure out how to cook for her two children without onions. Restrictions on the export of the vegetable by neighboring Tanzania has led prices to triple.

Kyalo initially tried to use spring onions instead, but those also got too expensive. As did the prices of other necessities, like cooking oil and corn flour.

"I just decided to be cooking once a day," she said.

Despite the East African country's fertile lands and large workforce, the high cost of growing and transporting produce and the worst drought in decades led to a drop in local production. Plus, people preferred red onions from Tanzania because they were cheaper and lasted longer. By 2014, Kenya was getting half of its onions from its neighbor, according to a U.N. Food Agriculture Organization report.

At Nairobi's major food market, Wakulima, the prices for onions from Tanzania were the highest in seven years, seller Timothy Kinyua said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 32 of 78

Some traders have adjusted by getting produce from Ethiopia, and others have switched to selling other vegetables, but Kinyua is sticking to onions.

"It's something we can't cook without," he said.

Tanzania's onion limits this year are part of the "contagion" of food restrictions from countries spooked by supply shortages and increased demand for their produce, said Joseph Glauber, senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute.

Globally, 41 food export restrictions from 19 countries are in effect, ranging from outright bans to taxes, according to the institute.

India banned shipments of some rice earlier this year, resulting in a shortfall of roughly a fifth of global exports. Neighboring Myanmar, the world's fifth-biggest rice supplier, responded by stopping some exports of the grain.

India also restricted shipments of onions after erratic rainfall — fueled by climate change — damaged crops. This sent prices in neighboring Bangladesh soaring, and authorities are scrambling to find new sources for the vegetable.

Elsewhere, a drought in Spain took its toll on olive oil production. As European buyers turned to Turkey, olive oil prices soared in the Mediterranean country, prompting authorities there to restrict exports. Morocco, also coping with a drought ahead of its recent deadly earthquake, stopped exporting onions, potatoes and tomatoes in February.

This isn't the first time food prices have been in a tumult. Prices for staples like rice and wheat more than doubled in 2007-2008, but the world had ample food stocks it could draw on and was able to replenish those in subsequent years.

But that cushion has shrunk in the past two years, and climate change means food supplies could very quickly run short of demand and spike prices, said Glauber, former chief economist at the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

"I think increased volatility is certainly the new normal," he said.

Food prices worldwide, experts say, will be determined by the interplay of three factors: how El Nino plays out and how long it lasts, whether bad weather damages crops and prompts more export restrictions, and the future of Russia's war in Ukraine.

The warring nations are both major global suppliers of wheat, barley, sunflower oil and other food, especially to developing nations where food prices have risen and people are going hungry.

An El Nino is a natural phenomenon that shifts global weather patterns and can result in extreme weather, ranging from drought to flooding. While scientists believe climate change is making this El Nino stronger, its exact impact on food production is impossible to glean until after it's occurred.

The early signs are worrying.

India experienced its driest August in a century, and Thailand is facing a drought that has sparked fears about the world's sugar supplies. The two are the largest exporters of sugar after Brazil.

Less rainfall in India also dashed food exporters' hopes that the new rice harvest in October would end the trade restrictions and stabilize prices.

"It doesn't look like (rice) prices will be coming down anytime soon," said Aman Julka, director of Wenderby India Private Limited.

Most at risk are nations that rely heavily on food imports. The Philippines, for instance, imports 14% of its food, according to the World Bank, and storm damage to crops could mean further shortfalls. Rice prices surged 8.7% in August from a year earlier, more than doubling from 4.2% in July.

Food store owners in the capital of Manila are losing money, with prices increasing rapidly since Sept. 1 and customers who used to snap up supplies in bulk buying smaller quantities.

"We cannot save money anymore. It is like we just work so that we can have food daily," said Charina Em, 32, who owns a store in the Trabajo market.

Cynthia Esguerra, 66, has had to choose between food or medicine for her high cholesterol, gallstones and urinary issues. Even then, she can only buy half a kilo of rice at a time — insufficient for her and her husband.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 33 of 78

"I just don't worry about my sickness. I leave it up to God. I don't buy medicines anymore, I just put it there to buy food, our loans," she said.

The climate risks aren't limited to rice but apply to anything that needs stable rainfall to thrive, including livestock, said Elyssa Kaur Ludher, a food security researcher at the ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore. Vegetables, fruit trees and chickens will all face heat stress, raising the risk that food will spoil, she said.

This constricts food supplies further, and if grain exports from Ukraine aren't resolved, there will be additional shortages in feed for livestock and fertilizer, Ludher said.

Russia's July withdrawal from a wartime agreement that ensured ships could safely transport Ukrainian grain through the Black Sea was a blow to global food security, largely leaving only expensive and divisive routes through Europe for the war-torn country's exports.

The conflict also has hurt Ukraine's agricultural production, with analysts saying farmers aren't planting nearly as much corn and wheat.

"This will affect those who already feel food affordability stresses," Ludher said.

Donald Trump skipped the GOP debate again. This time, his rivals took him on directly

By WILL WEISSERT, STEVE PEOPLES and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

SIMI VALLEY, Calif. (AP) — Several of Donald Trump's rivals stepped up their attacks against him in Wednesday's second Republican presidential debate, urgently trying to dent the former president's commanding primary lead during an event that often seemed like an undercard without him.

Trump went to Michigan, aiming to capitalize on the autoworkers' strike in a key state that could help decide the general election. His competitors, meanwhile, were asked by Fox Business moderators at the Ronald Reagan library in California to participate in a reality show-style game where they would write who else onstage they would vote "off the island." They refused.

The debate's tone was far removed from a campaign that's been driven by Trump's attacks on his rivals and democratic institutions as well as his grievances about a litany of criminal indictments and civil cases targeting him and his businesses. The moderators did not ask about the indictments or why the people onstage were better qualified than Trump, instead posing questions about issues including education, economic policy and the U.S.-Mexico border.

The candidates often went after Trump on their own, hoping to distinguish themselves at a critical moment with less than four months before the Iowa caucuses launch the presidential nomination process. Trump has continued to dominate the field even as he faces a range of vulnerabilities, including four criminal cases that raise the prospect of decades in prison.

"He should be on this stage tonight," said Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is attempting to establish himself as the leading Trump alternative despite recent struggles to break out from the rest of the pack. "He owes it to you to defend his record where they added \$7.8 trillion to the debt. That set the stage for the inflation we have now."

Several others blistered Trump for not showing up, a departure from the first debate, when the field mostly lined up behind former president. DeSantis said just a few minutes in that President Joe Biden was "completely missing in action from leadership. And you know who else is missing in action? Donald Trump is missing in action."

Former New Jersey Gov. Chris Christie, who has built his campaign around criticizing Trump, said the former president "hides behind the walls of his golf clubs and won't show up here to answer questions like all the rest of us are up here to answer."

Even Vivek Ramaswamy, the entrepreneur who has declared Trump to be the "best president of the 21st century," distanced himself and argued he was a natural successor.

"Yes, I will respect Donald Trump and his legacy because it's the right thing to do," he said. "But we will unite this country to take the America First agenda to the next level. And that will take a different generation to do it."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 34 of 78

Trump gave a lengthy prime-time speech in suburban Detroit that continued into the start of the debate. The crowd booed when he referenced the debate. He joked, "We're competing with the job candidates," and poked fun at his rivals for not drawing crowds as large as his.

Even hours before the debate began in Simi Valley, about 40 miles northwest of downtown Los Angeles, the first group of supporters for any campaign to arrive waved Trump flags and put up a banner reading "Trump, our last hope for America and the world."

His rivals seemed to sense his command over the field on Wednesday and did their best to change the direction of the race.

"Donald, I know you're watching. You can't help yourself," Christie said. "You're ducking these things. And let me tell you what's going to happen. You keep doing that, no one here's going to call you Donald Trump anymore. We're going to call you Donald Duck."

Nikki Haley, the former South Carolina governor and United Nations ambassador, drew larger crowds and new interest after the first debate. Her team raised expectations prior to Wednesday's debate ahead of an expected campaign swing in Iowa.

Haley didn't single out Trump but instead picked multiple fights with Ramaswamy, as she did in August. She assailed him for creating a campaign account on TikTok, the social media app that many Republicans criticize as a possible spy tool for China.

"Honestly, every time I hear you, I feel a little bit dumber for what you say," Haley said.

Haley also fought with Sen. Tim Scott, her fellow South Carolinian and once her pick to fill the state's open Senate seat. As Scott accused Haley of backing a gas tax as South Carolina governor and upgrading the curtains in her office as United Nations ambassador, Haley responded, "Bring it, Tim."

After a first debate in which he assailed rivals and derided the rest of the field as "bought and paid for," Ramaswamy tried to show a softer side when Haley and others went after him. After Haley's attack on his use of TikTok, Ramaswamy said, "I think we would be better served as a Republican Party if we're not sitting here hurling personal insults."

DeSantis sniped at Ramaswamy and so did Pence, suggesting that he'd failed to vote in many past elections. North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum steered clear of Ramaswamy, but repeatedly jumped in to answer questions he wasn't asked to get himself more screen time in the debate's early going. He repeatedly shouted for attention from the left end of the stage, leading a moderator to threaten to cut his microphone.

In one awkward exchange, two candidates made references to sex in talking about teachers unions. "When you have the president of the United States sleeping with a member of the teachers union, there is no chance that you can take the stranglehold away from the teachers union," Christie said at one point, referencing first lady Jill Biden's teaching career and longtime membership in the National Education Association.

A short time later, Pence turned to Christie: "I've been sleeping with a teacher for 38 years. Full disclosure." His wife, Karen, is a teacher.

The night concluded with the moderators noting that it was unlikely a divided field could stop Trump, but then asking candidates to say who they would vote off the island, an apparent reference to the "Survivor" reality show. The proposed game didn't get far as DeSantis suggested it was insulting.

Former Arkansas Gov. Asa Hutchinson was the only candidate not on the second debate's stage after qualifying for the first one. He too headed to suburban Detroit, saying, "Donald Trump is here in Detroit tonight because he wants to avoid a debate."

Wednesday's site was symbolic given that Reagan has long been a Republican icon whose words and key moments still shape GOP politics today.

But in addition to fighting with the library's leaders, Trump has reshaped the party and pushed it away from Reagan. The second debate's participants were largely respectful of all that Reagan stood for — but also didn't distance themselves much from Trump's major policy beliefs.

Democrats, meanwhile, argued the debate didn't matter. Biden was in California at the same time, raising money in the San Francisco Bay Area for his reelection campaign, which at the moment is likely to be a rematch with Trump.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom was in Simi Valley representing the Biden campaign and offering zingers to reporters about the debate, saying it was like a junior varsity or minor league game.

"This is a sideshow by any objective measure," Newsom said in an interview.

First congressional hearing on Maui wildfire to focus on island's sole electric provider and grid

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

Hawaii's top public utility officials and the president of Hawaiian Electric are expected to testify Thursday in a congressional hearing about the role the electrical grid played in last month's deadly Maui wildfire.

Members of a U.S. House Energy and Commerce subcommittee are expected to question the utility officials about how the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century began — and whether the electrical grid in Lahaina was safe and properly maintained.

The fire killed at least 97 people and destroyed more than 2,000 buildings, mostly homes. It first erupted at 6:30 a.m. on Aug. 8, when strong winds appeared to cause a Hawaiian Electric powerline to fall, igniting dry brush and grass near a large subdivision.

Among those expected to testify are Hawaiian Electric CEO Shelee Kimura, Hawaii Public Utilities Commission Chair Leodoloff Asuncion Jr. and Hawaii Chief Energy Officer Mark Glick.

Energy and Commerce Committee chair Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers; Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee chair Rep. Morgan Griffith; and Energy, Climate and Grid Security Subcommittee chair Rep. Jeff Duncan — all Republicans — questioned Kimura, Asuncion and Glick about the cause of the fire in a letter sent Aug. 30.

The letter included 10 questions about the sequence of events on the day of the fire, efforts to mitigate fire risks posed by the electrical grid, the fire investigation and other issues. The lawmakers said that a complete understanding of how the fire started is needed to ensure it doesn't happen again anywhere in the U.S.

"Information is also coming to light about actions taken — or not taken — by implicated entities in hardening and modernizing the electric grid of Maui," they wrote in the letter.

In written testimony provided to the committee before the hearing, Kimura focused on the challenges of providing electricity on an isolated island chain, and her feelings of responsibility and connection with the people of Hawaii. She did not discuss any fire mitigation efforts the utility has taken or provide new details about the events surrounding the fire.

"It was difficult to leave my island home this week when the disaster response efforts are still ongoing. It feels like leaving your family in their time of need. But I hope that as I carry out my kuleana here, it helps you carry out your important kuleana," Kimura wrote, using a Hawaiian word that she said loosely translates to having a deep sense of responsibility that is both an obligation and a privilege.

She also wrote that running the utility requires a complex and consequential balance of pursuing safe, reliable power at a reasonable cost.

Hawaiian Electric serves about 70,000 customers on Maui and nearly half a million customers statewide, including the Department of Defense, which is its largest customer.

"We all want to learn about what happened on August 8 so that it never happens again," Kimura wrote.

Kimura has acknowledged that Hawaiian Electric's downed lines caused the initial fire, but she wrote that the fire department said it extinguished that blaze and that the lines had been de-energized for more than six hours when the fire flared up in the same area again. She called the 3 p.m. blaze the "Afternoon Fire," implying it was separate from the morning blaze.

"The cause of this Afternoon Fire that devastated Lahaina has not been determined," she wrote. "We are working tirelessly to figure out what happened, and we are cooperating fully with federal and state investigators."

Whether the lines were fully de-energized — meaning they were not transmitting any electrical voltage —

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 36 of 78

might still be in question, however. At least one Lahaina resident told the Associated Press that their power came back on around 2 p.m., and Maui Police Chief John Pelletier has said that his officers were trying to keep people from driving over live power lines later that afternoon as residents fled the burning town.

Asuncion Jr., the chair of the Hawaii Public Utilities Commission, said in written testimony that the PUC began tying Hawaiian Electric's power rates in part to its performance in 2021, moving away from a traditional method of setting rates based on the cost of providing service.

The switch was designed to help the utility commission to determine whether it was functioning as intended by creating "stringent oversight mechanisms," and allowed the commission to penalize Hawaiian Electric for poor reliability. It also was intended to give Hawaiian Electric more flexibility to manage funds in the way the company thinks will best meet objectives, Asuncion wrote.

Asuncion said the PUC is working with Hawaiian Electric to identify and implement any needed operating changes for high-wind days, and is reviewing the company's approach to whether power lines should be built above or below ground.

"The devastation of the August wildfires should never happen again," Asuncion wrote. "In thinking about this priority, the Commission aims to ensure to the greatest extent possible that electric utility operations, infrastructure, and equipment in Hawaii are safe, reliable, and resilient to natural disasters such as wildfires, hurricanes, and flooding."

Hawaii has only two electric utilities: Hawaiian Electric, which is the sole provider for Maui, and Kauai Island Utility Cooperative.

Residential electricity in Maui costs about 43 cents per kilowatt-hour — that's three times the national average, he said, with the average monthly bill reaching about \$216 in 2022. The utility's financial integrity is related to its ability to provide the level of maintenance and upgrades that are critical for a safe electrical grid, he said.

Glick, the chief energy officer for Hawaii's State Energy Office, also submitted written testimony detailing some efforts to identify the risk of wildfires and other natural disasters to the energy grid, and plans to eventually create a microgrid system, where small portions of the electrical grid could be shut off for safety reasons while keeping the rest of the system operational.

At US Antarctic base hit by harassment claims, workers are banned from buying alcohol at bars

By NICK PERRY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — From Sunday, workers at the main United States base in Antarctica will no longer be able to walk into a bar and order a beer, after the federal agency that oversees the research program decided to stop serving alcohol.

McMurdo Station will not be going entirely dry, the National Science Foundation confirmed. Researchers and support staff will still be able to buy a weekly ration of alcohol from the station store. But the policy shift could prove significant because the bars have been central to social life in the isolated environment.

The changes come as concerns grow that sexual misconduct has been allowed to flourish at McMurdo. An investigation by The Associated Press last month uncovered a pattern of women who said their claims of harassment or assault were minimized by their employers, often leading to them or others being put in further danger.

In some of the cases outlined by the AP, alcohol played a role. But the NSF told the AP the changes involving alcohol were related to morale and welfare at the base, and were not aimed at preventing sexual harassment or assault.

Under the new rules taking effect Sunday, workers will be able to order only alcohol-free drinks at McMurdo's two main bars, Southern Exposure and Gallagher's. They will still be able to bring their own alcohol to drink at the bars. A third venue which also served alcohol, the Coffee House, will become entirely alcohol-free but will now stay open for workers to visit any time of the day or night.

The current alcohol ration allows Antarctic workers to buy up to the equivalent of 18 beers each week,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 37 of 78

or three bottles of wine, or a 750 milliliter (25 ounce) bottle of spirits.

The NSF said it's also instituting several new measures during the current southern hemisphere spring and upcoming summer that are aimed at preventing sexual harassment and assault at the base, where typically around 70% of workers are men. These include enhanced training, a new survey to collect data and monitor trends, and visits to the ice from experts.

Karen Marrongelle, the NSF's chief operating officer, said it was committed to ensuring a safe environment wherever science or education was conducted.

"We will not rest until we are confident that every member of the Antarctic community feels safe and supported," she said in a statement.

The NSF published a report in 2022 in which 59% of women said they'd experienced harassment or assault while on the ice, and 72% of women said such behavior was a problem in Antarctica. Last year, the NSF created an office to deal with such complaints, provided a confidential victim's advocate, and established a 24-hour helpline.

The AP investigation found a pattern of problems at McMurdo. One woman who reported a colleague had groped her was made to work alongside him again. Another woman who told her employer she was sexually assaulted was fired two months later. Another woman said bosses at the base downgraded her allegations from rape to harassment.

After the AP published its investigation, the NSF sent a message to U.S. Antarctic Program workers.

"We know that it can be difficult to hear these accounts. It is for us," the NSF wrote in the email, which was obtained by the AP. "These are not experiences we want anyone to have within the USAP (or anywhere else in the world)."

The email outlined the new anti-harassment measures the NSF planned to implement and offered resources for support.

Jennifer Sorensen, who told the AP she was raped at McMurdo in 2015, said the NSF had tried unsuccessfully before to blame alcohol for the high rates of sexual misconduct at the base.

"They know full well that all the rationing or denial of alcohol sales being forced on us isn't going to do a damn thing," she said.

If the NSF and lead contractor Leidos were serious about stopping sexual misconduct, they should start believing survivors and ensure they aren't retaliated against, she said. They should also stop rehiring perpetrators, she added.

"Alcohol can obviously blur the lines of consent, there's that issue at play, but overwhelmingly, sexual assault has occurred even when neither party has been consuming alcohol, as was the case with me," Sorensen said. "So it's definitely not going to eliminate the problem."

Sorensen said that if the NSF wants to reduce drinking, it should provide alternative diversions, such as the bowling alley, ceramic studio and greenhouse which used to be features at McMurdo but have disappeared due to budget cutbacks.

Britt Barquist, who said she was groped at McMurdo in 2017, said in an email it was positive that the NSF was making an effort to improve the culture at the base. But she remained concerned that incidents were still being swept under the rug when it put a contracting company's primary objectives at risk.

"For example, my incident took place during work hours, at a job site, no alcohol involved, and was corroborated and reported through official channels," Barquist wrote. "I was later told by my company's HR that I would have to work with the perpetrator again because his job was mission-critical and there was no one else to fill his role. None of these new policies implemented by the NSF would prevent that from happening again."

The NSF and Leidos have declined to answer questions about Barquist's case, or others highlighted in the AP's report.

Under another new initiative to improve morale, the NSF said it will be expanding internet access through the satellite network Starlink, allowing workers to stay better connected to people back home. Starlink is run by SpaceX, the company founded by Elon Musk.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 38 of 78

The NSF first foreshadowed impending changes to its alcohol policies in a blog post early last month, and said it first told workers about the new anti-harassment measures in mid-August.

The AP sent the NSF a detailed list of questions about its investigation in early June and has continued to correspond since, including asking for any planned changes to address sexual harassment and assault. The NSF never listed any planned changes to alcohol policies.

"Because these changes are related to morale and welfare and not sexual assault/harassment prevention, we did not mention this program initiative in our previous response," the NSF said in a statement.

A government shutdown is nearing this weekend. What does it mean, who's hit and what's next?

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The federal government is just days away from a shutdown that will disrupt many services, squeeze workers and roil politics as Republicans in the House, fueled by hard-right demands, force a confrontation over federal spending.

While some government entities will be exempt — Social Security checks, for example, will still go out — other functions will be severely curtailed. Federal agencies will stop all actions deemed non-essential, and millions of federal employees, including members of the military, won't receive paychecks.

A look at what's ahead if the government shuts down on Oct. 1.

WHAT IS A GOVERNMENT SHUTDOWN?

A shutdown happens when Congress fails to pass some type of funding legislation that is signed into law by the president. Lawmakers are supposed to pass 12 different spending bills to fund agencies across the government, but the process is time-consuming. They often resort to passing a temporary extension, called a continuing resolution or CR, to allow the government to keep operating.

When no funding legislation is enacted, federal agencies have to stop all nonessential work and will not send paychecks as long as the shutdown lasts.

Although employees deemed essential to public safety such as air traffic controllers and law enforcement officers still have to report to work, other federal employees are furloughed. Under a 2019 law, those same workers are slated to receive backpay once the funding impasse is resolved.

WHEN WOULD A SHUTDOWN BEGIN AND HOW LONG WILL IT LAST?

Government funding expires Oct. 1, the start of the federal budget year. A shutdown will effectively begin at 12:01 a.m. Sunday if Congress is not able to pass a funding plan that the president signs into law.

It is impossible to predict how long a shutdown would last. The Democratic-held Senate and Republican-controlled House are working on vastly different plans to avert a shutdown, and House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is struggling to win any support from hard-right conservatives to keep the government open.

Many are bracing for a stoppage that could last weeks.

WHO DOES A SHUTDOWN AFFECT?

Millions of federal workers face delayed paychecks when the government shuts down, including many of the roughly 2 million military personnel and more than 2 million civilian workers across the nation.

Nearly 60% of federal workers are stationed in the Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs and Homeland Security.

While all of the military's active-duty troops and reservists would continue to work, more than half of the Department of Defense's civilian workforce, which is roughly 440,000 people, would be furloughed.

Across federal agencies, workers are stationed in all 50 states and have direct interaction with taxpayers — from Transportation Security Administration agents who operate security at airports to Postal Service workers who deliver mail.

U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg has said new training for air traffic controllers will be halted and another 1,000 controllers in the midst of training will be furloughed. Even a shutdown that lasts a few days will mean the department won't hit its hiring and staffing targets for next year, he said.

"Imagine the pressure that a controller is already under every time they take their position at work, and

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 39 of 78

then imagine the added stress of coming to that job from a household with a family that can no longer count on that paycheck," Buttigieg said.

Beyond federal workers, a shutdown could have far-reaching effects on government services. People applying for government services like clinical trials, firearm permits and passports could see delays.

Some federal offices will also have to close or face shortened hours during a shutdown.

Businesses closely connected to the federal government, such as federal contractors or tourist services around national parks, could see disruptions and downturns. The travel sector could lose \$140 million daily in a shutdown, according to the U.S. Travel Industry Association.

Lawmakers also warn that a shutdown could rattle financial markets. Goldman Sachs has estimated that a shutdown would reduce economic growth by 0.2% every week it lasted, but growth would then bounce back after the government reopens.

Others say the disruption in government services has far-reaching impacts because it shakes confidence in the government to fulfill its basic duties. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce warned, "A well-functioning economy requires a functioning government."

WHAT ABOUT COURT CASES, THE WORK OF CONGRESS AND PRESIDENTIAL PAY?

The president and members of Congress will continue to work and get paid. However, any members of their staff who are not deemed essential will be furloughed.

The Supreme Court, which begins its new term Monday, would be unaffected by a short shutdown because it can draw on a pot of money provided by court fees, including charges for filing lawsuits and other documents, court spokeswoman Patricia McCabe said.

The rest of the federal judiciary also would operate normally for at least the first two weeks of October, said Peter Kaplan, a spokesman for the judiciary.

Even in a longer shutdown, the entire judiciary would not shut down, and decisions about what activities would continue would be made by each court around the country. The justices and all federal judges would continue to be paid because of the constitutional prohibition on reducing judges' pay during their tenure, according to the Congressional Research Service.

Notably, funding for the three special counsels appointed by Attorney General Merrick Garland would not be affected by a government shutdown because they are paid for through a permanent, indefinite appropriation, an area that's been exempted from shutdowns in the past.

That means the two federal cases against Donald Trump, the former president, as well as the case against Hunter Biden, the son of President Joe Biden, would not be interrupted. Trump has demanded that Republicans defund the prosecutions against him as a condition of funding the government, declaring it their "last chance" to act.

HAS THIS HAPPENED BEFORE?

Prior to the 1980s, lapses in government funding did not result in government operations significantly shuttering. But then-U.S. Attorney General Benjamin Civiletti, in a series of legal opinions in 1980 and 1981, argued that government agencies cannot legally operate during a funding gap.

Federal officials have since operated under an understanding they can make exemptions for functions that are "essential" for public safety and constitutional duties.

Since 1976, there have been 22 funding gaps, with 10 of them leading to workers being furloughed. But most of the significant shutdowns have taken place since Bill Clinton's presidency, when then-Speaker Newt Gingrich and his conservative House majority demanded budget cuts.

The longest government shutdown happened between 2018 and 2019 when then-President Trump and congressional Democrats entered a standoff over his demand for funding for a border wall. The disruption lasted 35 days, through the holiday season, but was also only a partial government shutdown because Congress had passed some appropriations bills to fund parts of the government.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO END A SHUTDOWN?

It's the responsibility of Congress to fund the government. The House and Senate have to agree to fund the government in some way, and the president has to sign the legislation into law.

The two sides are deeply entrenched and nowhere near reaching a deal to avert a shutdown. But if the shutdown lasts for weeks, pressure will build to end the impasse, particularly if active-duty military members miss pay dates on Oct. 13 or Nov. 1. If the wider public starts seeing disruptions in air travel or border security as workers go unpaid, it will further goad Congress to act.

Congress often relies on a so-called continuing resolution, or CR, to provide stopgap money to open government offices at current levels as budget talks are underway. Money for pressing national priorities, such as emergency assistance for victims of natural disasters, is often attached to a short-term bill.

But hardline Republicans say any temporary bill is a non-starter for them. They are pushing to keep the government shut down until Congress negotiates all 12 bills that fund the government, which is historically a laborious undertaking that isn't resolved until December, at the earliest.

Trump, who is Biden's top rival heading into the 2024 election, is urging on the Republican hardliners. If they are successful, the shutdown could last weeks, perhaps even longer.

NY Attorney General Letitia James has a long history of fighting Trump, other powerful targets

By ANTHONY IZAGUIRRE Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Letitia James fixated on Donald Trump as she campaigned for New York attorney general, branding the then-president a "con man" and "carnival barker" and pledging to shine a "bright light into every dark corner of his real estate dealings."

Five years later, James is on the verge of disrupting Trump's real estate empire after a judge ruled Tuesday that he defrauded banks, insurers and others by exaggerating the value of assets on paperwork used for deals and securing loans.

The ruling shifts control of some of Trump's companies to a court-appointed receiver, meaning he could lose control of prized properties like Trump Tower, a sprawling suburban estate, office buildings and more.

For James, a Democrat, it's just the latest joust with a powerful foe.

Here's a look at her political background and some of her biggest cases:

LAWSUITS AGAINST TRUMP

James began investigating Trump just about as soon as she took office as attorney general in 2019.

She launched several lawsuits against the Republican's administration over his immigration and environmental policies when he was in the White House. James inherited an ongoing state lawsuit against Trump's charitable foundation, filed before she took office, and steered it to a settlement that included a \$2 million fine.

She filed another civil lawsuit against Trump last year, alleging that his company deceived banks, insurers and others by overvaluing assets and his net worth on financial paperwork.

"It's the art of the steal," she said when announcing the case against Trump, turning the title of Trump's book "The Art of the Deal" against him.

A judge in New York on Tuesday sided with James, ruling Trump and his company committed fraud and ordering some of his business licenses to be rescinded as punishment.

The ruling, if it stands after an expected appeal, could make it impossible for Trump to do business in New York and would strip him of the ability to make strategic and financial decisions over some of his properties in the state.

Trump has long criticized James' legal volleys as political theater designed to catapult her to fame. He slammed the most recent ruling in a series of social media posts, calling it a "POLITICALLY MOTIVATED WITCH HUNT."

The Republican has also complained that her comments about him, prior to her election, show she never intended to be fair.

ANDREW CUOMO

In 2021, James oversaw an investigation of New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, who had been accused by

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 41 of 78

multiple women of sexual harassment.

The inquiry led to a remarkable downfall for the once-rising star in the Democratic party. Lawyers hired by James concluded that 11 women were telling the truth when they said Cuomo touched them inappropriately, commented on their appearance or made suggestive comments about their sex lives.

Cuomo says he was the target of an overzealous #MeToo persecution and alleged that James used the investigation to further her own political aspirations.

James ran a brief campaign for governor after Cuomo resigned but abandoned the bid after a few weeks, saying she would instead seek a second term as attorney general. She has dismissed Cuomo's claim that her investigation of him was motivated by politics.

NATIONAL RIFLE ASSOCIATION

Since 2020, James has been leading a lawsuit against the National Rifle Association in a case that accuses its leaders of financial mismanagement.

Her lawsuit accused some of the NRA's leaders of using the gun advocacy group to enrich themselves and associates. As attorney general, James has regulatory power over tax-exempt nonprofits, and she cast the legal battle against the NRA as an effort to protect the organization from itself.

Critics, though, claimed James — a proponent of gun control — was trying to silence the nation's strongest voice of gun owners.

She initially sought to have the NRA dissolved. A judge rejected that idea, but allowed the lawsuit to continue.

POLITICAL BACKGROUND

James won a 2018 election for attorney general in New York, becoming the first Black woman elected to statewide office, the state's first Black attorney general and the first woman elected to the post. (A female predecessor, Barbara Underwood, was appointed.) She won reelection as attorney general in 2022 after ditching her short-lived campaign for governor.

Prior to that, James was the New York City Public Advocate, a role intended to help people navigate and resolve issues with government services and serve as a watchdog over City Hall.

The job made James a familiar fixture in the city, often appearing at crime scenes, news conferences and other events to amplify the concerns of city residents.

She has also served in the City Council and worked as a public defender and an assistant state attorney general. She graduated from Lehman College in the Bronx and earned her law degree from Howard University in Washington.

Biden making defending democracy a touchstone in his reelection campaign — and a rejoinder to Trump

By SEUNG MIN KIM and JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — On the anniversary of the Jan. 6 Capitol riot, President Joe Biden stood in early 2022 at the literal epicenter of the insurrection and accused Donald Trump of continuing to hold a "dagger" at democracy's throat. Biden closed out the summer that same year in the shadow of Philadelphia's Independence Hall, decrying Trumpism as a menace to democratic institutions.

And that November, as voters were casting ballots in the midterm elections, Biden again sounded a clarion call to protect democratic institutions, warning that their underpinnings remained under threat.

Biden on Thursday will make his fourth in a series of presidential addresses about the state of democracy, a cause that is a key motivator and a touchstone for him as he tries to remain in office even in the face of low approval ratings and widespread concern from voters about his age.

The location for this speech, as was the case for the others, was deliberately chosen: It will be near Arizona State University, which houses the McCain Institute, named after the late Arizona Sen. John McCain — a friend of Biden and the 2008 Republican presidential nominee who spent his public life denouncing autocrats around the globe.

Now, as Biden slowly ramps up his reelection campaign, his core focus on democracy is increasingly

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 42 of 78

intertwined with the political dynamics that are confronting him. His likeliest 2024 opponent, former President Donald Trump, continues to spread falsehoods about the results from the 2020 election and is battling unprecedented criminal charges stemming in part from those lies.

Those challenging Trump for the GOP presidential nomination have largely avoided challenging his election falsehoods and his allies on Capitol Hill are only becoming more emboldened as Trump eggs them on, including toward a looming government shutdown that appears all but inevitable.

In closed-door fundraisers, Biden has opined at length about his case for reelection, imploring supporters to join his effort to "literally save American democracy," as he described it to a gaggle of wealthy donors earlier this month in New York.

"I'm running because we made progress — that's good — but because our democracy, I think, is still at risk. And I mean it," Biden said. "I don't think it's hyperbole to suggest that. Because our most important freedoms — the freedom to choose, the freedom to vote, the freedom to be — the right to be who you are, to love who you love — is being attacked and shredded today, right now."

Advisers see Biden's continued focus on democracy as not only good policy, but also good politics. Campaign officials have pored over the election results from last November, when candidates who denied the 2020 election results did not fare well in competitive races, and point to polling that showed democracy was a highly motivating issue for voters in 2022.

Candidates who backed Trump's election lies and were running for statewide offices with some influence over elections — governor, secretary of state, attorney general — lost their races in every presidential battleground state.

A senior White House official, granted anonymity to preview Biden's Thursday remarks, said his Arizona address will highlight the "importance of America's institutions in preserving our democracy and the need for constant loyalty to the U.S. Constitution." His appearance at the center that honors McCain will also tie into the theme, with Biden set to urge Americans to "never walk away from the sacrifices generations of Americans have made to defend our democracy."

In few states does Biden's message of democracy resonate more than in Arizona, which became politically competitive during Trump's presidency after seven decades of GOP dominance and later became a hotbed of efforts to overturn or cast doubt on Biden's victory there.

Republican state lawmakers used their subpoena power to get ahold of all the 2020 ballots and vote-counting machines from Maricopa County, then hired Trump supporters to conduct an unprecedented partisan review of the election. The widely mocked spectacle confirmed Biden's victory but fueled unfounded conspiracy theories about the election.

Later, the GOP-controlled board of supervisors in one rural county refused to certify the midterm election results, forcing a judge to intervene. The state has seen an exodus of election workers.

And last November, voters up and down the ballot rejected Republican candidates who repeatedly denied the results of the 2020 election. Kari Lake, the GOP gubernatorial candidate, has never conceded her loss to now-Gov. Katie Hobbs and is preparing a bid for the U.S. Senate next year. Republican Senate candidate Blake Masters and Mark Finchem, who ran for secretary of state, also repeated fraudulent election claims in their respective campaigns.

Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., who defeated Masters, appeared at a campaign rally in November alongside former President Barack Obama, who in his remarks framed the race in Arizona as a battle to protect democracy. That message, Kelly now says, not only resonated with members of his own party but independents and moderate GOP voters.

"I met so many Republicans that were sick and tired of the lies about an election that was two years old," Kelly said. "They were just done with it, and they did not appreciate folks who were running for high offices just lying about it."

Indeed, Republicans privately concede that the election-denialism rhetoric that dominated their candidates' message — as well as the looming specter of Trump — damaged their efforts to retain the governor's mansion and flip a hotly contested Senate seat, according to three Republican officials who worked in statewide races last cycle.

The issue of democracy resonated more in Arizona than in other competitive states, and to have candidates deny basic facts on elections helped reinforce claims from Democrats about GOP extremism on other, completely separate issues, said the Republican officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to candidly describe the party's shortcomings last year. Though Trump-animated forces in the party dominated public attention, many Republican voters were concerned about other issues such as the economy and the border and did not want to focus on a past election result.

Arizona Rep. Ruben Gallego, who is seeking the Democratic nomination in next year's Senate race, said a democracy-focused message also is particularly important to two critical blocs of voters in the state: Latinos and veterans, both of whom Gallego said are uniquely affected by election denialism and the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection.

"You know, we come from countries and experiences where democracy is very corrupt, and many of us are only one generation removed from that, but we're close enough to see how bad it can be," Gallego said. "And so Jan. 6 actually was particularly jarring, I think, to Latinos."

On Thursday, Biden is set to speak at a performing arts center on the shore of Tempe Town Lake, a once-dry riverbed that has become an oasis for outdoor recreation in the desert. The lake is the centerpiece of the Rio Salado Project, a riverbed revitalization plan that McCain advocated for until his death.

House Republicans are set to make their case for Biden impeachment inquiry at first hearing

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republicans have insisted for months that they have the grounds to launch impeachment proceedings against President Joe Biden. On Thursday, they will begin formally making their case to the public and their skeptical colleagues in the Senate.

The chairmen of Oversight, Judiciary, and Ways and Means will hold the opening hearing of their impeachment inquiry by reviewing the constitutional and legal questions surrounding their investigation of Biden and what they say are links to his son Hunter's overseas businesses.

"Based on the evidence, Congress has a duty to open an impeachment inquiry into President Biden's corruption," Rep. James Comer, the Oversight chairman, said in a statement this week.

Comer added that the committee plans to "present evidence uncovered to date and hear from legal and financial experts about crimes the Bidens may have committed as they brought in millions at the expense of U.S. interests."

It's a high-stakes opening act for Republicans as they begin a process that can lead to the ultimate penalty for a president, punishment for what the Constitution describes as "high crimes and misdemeanors." This is all while they face a resistance in the Senate from Republicans who are worried about the political ramifications of another impeachment — and who say Biden's conviction and removal from office is a near impossibility.

But House Republicans say they are only investigating and have made no final decision on impeaching the president.

The hearing Thursday will not feature witnesses with information about the Bidens or Hunter Biden's business work. Instead, it will be a soft launch of sorts with testimony from outside experts in tax law, criminal investigations and constitutional legal theory.

Democrats, who decry the investigation as a political ploy aimed at hurting Biden and helping Donald Trump as he runs again for president, said they plan to bring Michael Gerhardt, a law professor who has appeared as expert on two previous impeachment efforts.

In the run-up to the hearing, Republicans were touting a tranche of new documents and bank records that detail wire transfers from a Chinese businessman to Hunter Biden in 2019. Hunter Biden had listed his father's address on the wire transfer form, which Republicans said provided a clear link to the president.

Abbe Lowell, an attorney for Hunter Biden, said the address on the wire transfer, which he says was a loan, was listed to the president's Delaware home only because it was the address on Hunter Biden's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 44 of 78

driver's license and "his only permanent address at the time."

"Once again Rep. Comer peddles lies to support a premise — some wrongdoing by Hunter Biden or his family — that evaporates in thin air the moment facts come out," Lowell said in a statement.

Republicans have been investigating Hunter Biden for years, since his father was vice president. And while there has been questions raised about the ethics around the family's international business, none of the evidence so far has proven that the president, in his current or previous office, abused his role, accepted bribes or both.

House Republicans are also looking into the Justice Department investigation in Hunter Biden's taxes and gun use that began in 2018. Two IRS whistleblowers came forward to Congress in the spring with claims that department officials thwarted their efforts to fully investigate Hunter Biden and his business dealings and the agents faced retaliation when they pushed back.

The claims have since been disputed by IRS and FBI agents who worked on the case.

The central focus of the testimonies have been surrounding an Oct. 7, 2022 meeting that agents from both the IRS and FBI had with David Weiss, U.S. attorney for Delaware, who has been charged with investigating Hunter Biden.

Gary Shapley, a veteran IRS agent who had been assigned to case, testified to Ways and Means committee in May that Weiss said during that meeting that he was not the "deciding person whether charges are filed" against Hunter Biden.

Two FBI agents who were in attendance told lawmakers this month that they have no recollection of Weiss saying that.

But Republicans have pointed to a failed plea deal over the summer as proof that Hunter Biden received preferential treatment because of who his father was.

Rep. Jason Smith, R-Mo, the chair of the Ways & Means committee, said that their investigation has shown that "Biden family were afforded special treatment that no other American would receive were they not the son of the President of the United States."

The impeachment inquiry hearing is taking place as the federal government is days away from what is likely to be a damaging government shutdown that would halt paychecks for millions of federal workers and the military.

Democrats say they plan to use the impending fiscal disaster to question Republicans' priorities.

"Three days before they're set to shut down the United States government, Republicans launch a baseless impeachment drive against President Biden," Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on Oversight, said Wednesday. "No one can figure out the logic of either course of action."

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy announced the impeachment inquiry this month after he yielded to mounting pressure from his right flank to take action against Biden or risk being ousted from his leadership job.

On Tuesday, McCarthy said the latest bank records showing payments from Chinese individuals to Hunter showed that the president lied during his presidential campaign that no one in his family took money from China.

"President Biden had lied to Americans again," McCarthy told reporters this week.

The hearing Thursday is expected to be the first of many as House Republicans explore how this inquiry will end and whether or not they have the full support of the conference to bring and pass charges against Biden on the House floor. Regardless, any articles of impeachment would then be sent to the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim 51-49 majority.

"It really comes to how do you prioritize your time?" Sen. John Cornyn, a Republican member of leadership, told The Hill recently. "I don't know of anybody who believes (Senate Majority Leader) Chuck Schumer will take it up and actually have a trial and convict a sitting president."

Hollywood actors to resume negotiations with studios next week, as protracted writers strike ends

By MARK KENNEDY and ANDREW DALTON AP Entertainment Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — With the Hollywood writers strike over, actors will now get a shot at cutting their own deal with studios and streaming services.

The Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Radio and Television Artists announced Wednesday night that strike negotiations with studios would resume Monday. The guild said several studio executives will attend, much as they did during marathon sessions last week that helped bring the nearly five-month writers strike to an end.

Monday is the same day that network late-night hosts will return to the air.

Bill Maher led the charge back to work by announcing early Wednesday — hours after writers became free to work again — that his HBO show “Real Time with Bill Maher” would be back on the air Friday. By mid-morning, the hosts of NBC’s “The Tonight Show Starring Jimmy Fallon” and “Late Night with Seth Meyers,” ABC’s “Jimmy Kimmel Live,” and “The Late Show With Stephen Colbert” on CBS had announced they’d also return, all by Monday. “Last Week Tonight” with John Oliver was slated to return to the air Sunday.

Comedy Central’s “The Daily Show,” which had been using guest hosts when the strike hit, announced Wednesday that it would return Oct. 16 “with an all-star roster of guest hosts for the remainder of 2023.” The plans for “Saturday Night Live” were not immediately clear.

The strikes have had a “catastrophic” impact on late-night television viewing, according to the research firm Samba TV. Without Colbert, Fallon and Kimmel proving fresh, topical material, the broadcast networks have seen late-night viewership declines of between 40% and 50%, Ashwin Navin, Samba TV co-founder. “It remains to be seen how late night will rebound to its previous relevance,” he said.

Fallon, Meyers, Kimmel, Colbert and Oliver spent the latter part of the strike teaming up for a popular podcast called “Strike Force Five” — named after their personal text chain and with all proceeds benefiting their out-of-work writers. On Instagram on Wednesday, they announced “their mission complete.”

Scripted shows will take longer to return due to the actors strike, which showed its first signs of a solution with the renewed plans to talk. There had previously been no official contact between SAG-AFTRA and the alliance of studios that negotiates contracts since their strike began July 14.

The first resumption of talks in the writers strike last month went poorly, and it was another month before the two sides tried again. But when the talks resumed last week it was just five days before a deal was reached.

Board members from the writers union approved that contract agreement with studios on Tuesday night, bringing the industry at least partly back from a historic halt in production that stretched nearly five months.

Maher had delayed returning to his talk show during the ongoing strike by writers and actors, a decision that followed similar pauses by “The Drew Barrymore Show,” “The Talk” and “The Jennifer Hudson Show.”

The three-year agreement with studios, producers and streaming services includes significant wins in the main areas writers had fought for — compensation, length of employment, size of staffs and control of artificial intelligence — matching or nearly equaling what they had sought at the outset of the strike.

The union had sought minimum increases in pay and future residual earnings from shows and will get a raise of between 3.5% and 5% in those areas — more than the studios had initially offered.

The guild also negotiated new residual payments based on the popularity of streaming shows, where writers will get bonuses for being a part of the most popular shows on Netflix, Max and other services, a proposal studios initially rejected. Many writers on picket lines had complained that they weren’t properly paid for helping create heavily watched properties.

On artificial intelligence, the writers got the regulation and control of the emerging technology they had sought. Under the contract, raw, AI-generated storylines will not be regarded as “literary material” — a term in their contracts for scripts and other story forms a screenwriter produces. This means they won’t be competing with computers for screen credits. Nor will AI-generated stories be considered “source” material, their contractual language for the novels, video games or other works that writers may adapt

into scripts.

Writers have the right under the deal to use artificial intelligence in their process if the company they are working for agrees and other conditions are met. But companies cannot require a writer to use artificial intelligence.

House Speaker McCarthy is back to square one as the Senate pushes ahead to avert a federal shutdown

By LISA MASCARO and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the Senate marches ahead with a bipartisan approach to prevent a government shutdown, House Speaker Kevin McCarthy is back to square one — asking his hard-right Republicans to do what they have said they would never do: approve their own temporary House measure to keep the government open.

The Republican speaker laid out his strategy Wednesday behind closed doors, urging his unruly Republican majority to work together. He set up a test vote for Friday, one day before Saturday's shutdown deadline, on a far-right bill. It would slash federal spending by 8% from many agencies and toughen border security but has been rejected by Democrats and his own right-flank Republicans.

"I want to solve the problem," McCarthy told reporters afterward at the Capitol.

But pressed on how he would pass a partisan Republican spending plan that even his own right flank doesn't want, McCarthy had few answers. He rejected outright the Senate's bipartisan bill, which would fund the government to Nov. 17, adding \$6 billion for Ukraine and \$6 billion for U.S. disaster relief while talks continue. Instead, he insisted, as he often does, that he would never quit trying.

Congress is at a crossroads days before a disruptive federal shutdown that would halt paychecks for millions of federal workers, leave 2 million active duty military troops and reservists to work without pay, close down many federal offices, and leave Americans who rely on the government in ways large and small in the lurch.

President Joe Biden in California at a meeting of the President's Council of Advisors on Science and Technology said Wednesday he didn't think a federal shutdown was inevitable.

"I don't think anything is inevitable when it comes to politics," he said.

But later at a fundraiser in San Francisco, Biden said of McCarthy: "I think that the speaker is making a choice between his speakership and American interests."

As the Senate pushes ahead in bipartisan fashion, McCarthy is demanding that Biden meet to discuss border security measures. But the speaker has little leverage left with the White House without the power of his House majority behind him. The White House has panned his overtures for talks after McCarthy walked away from the debt deal he and Biden reached earlier this year that is now law.

On the other side of the Capitol, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer warned of the right-wing extremes that "seem to exult in shutting down government."

The Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell was in rare agreement with the Democratic leader, urging his House colleagues to consider the Senate's stopgap approach, known as a continuing resolution, or CR, and move off the shutdown strategy.

McConnell said that he, too, would like to do something about the "Democrats' reckless spending" and boost border security. But he said, "these important discussions cannot progress" if the functions of government "end up being taken hostage."

When McConnell mentioned a vote against the bill would mean voting against pay for border patrol agents and others, it sparked a response from Biden on social media.

"You know, I agree with Mitch here. Why the House Republicans would want to defund Border Patrol is beyond me," Biden wrote.

With the Senate expected to spend the rest of this week working to pass its bill over the objections of Sen. Rand Paul, R-Ky., and others on the right flank. Like their House colleagues, the conservative senators

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 47 of 78

want to halt aid to Ukraine and push for steeper spending cuts, all action in Congress is crushing toward a last minute deadline.

The federal government would begin to shut down if funding is not secured by Sunday, Oct. 1, the start of the new fiscal year.

A new economic assessment from Goldman Sachs estimated a federal shutdown would subtract 0.2 percent points from fourth-quarter GDP growth each week it continues, according to a report issued Wednesday.

Running out of options, McCarthy revived the border security package he first tried to attach to a temporary government funding bill earlier this month. But he still faces a handful of hard-right holdouts led by Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., who say they won't vote for any CR, denying a majority for passage.

It's late in the process to be pushing the border security provisions now, as McCarthy tries to salvage the strategy. He is seeking to shift blame to Biden and Democrats for not engaging in an immigration debate about the record flow of migrants at the Southern border with Mexico.

Facing holdouts in his own ranks, McCarthy is trying to cajole his hard-right members who have refused to vote for any temporary spending bill — even with the border provisions. He told reporters, "I don't understand where somebody would want to stand with President Biden on keeping an open border and not keep government open."

The holdouts are determined to force the House to debate and pass all 12 individual funding bills for all the various government agencies. It's a grinding weeks-long process with no guarantee the bills will even pass with days to go before a shutdown.

"If that means we close and we shut down, that's what we're going do," said Rep. Andy Ogles, a Tennessee Republican who wants the House to vote on all 12 bills, as he exited the morning Republican meeting.

On Wednesday the House slogged through debate over four of those bills — to fund Defense, Homeland Security, Agriculture and State and Foreign Operations.

One amendment to gut \$300 million for Ukraine was backed by 104 Republicans, more than ever as resistance to war funding grows, but it — and another like it — overwhelmingly failed. One from Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene to cut the Defense Secretary's salary to \$1 was approved without dissent.

But late at night, facing the prospect that the Defense bill would fail with any Ukraine aid intact, the Republicans held an emergency Rules meeting to strip the \$300 million — a stunning maneuver that the committee's top Democrat called "pathetic," since the House had already decided the issue.

Republicans defended the action, saying the Ukraine money, which is routine and separate from Biden's larger request for funds, now will be voted on separately — and will likely pass with overwhelming support.

Lawmakers are prepared to work into the weekend, but one leading Republican, Rep. Steve Womack of Arkansas, said he believed Congress was headed towards a government shutdown.

"Somebody is going to have to flinch or break, or there will have to be something negotiated," he said.

But the hard-right is threatening to oust McCarthy if he joins with Democrats and Womack, who is not among the holdouts, explained such a move could be "problematic for the speaker."

While the White House has said it's up to McCarthy and the House Republicans to "fix" the problem they have created, Biden's chief rival in the 2024 election, Donald Trump, is urging the right flank to fight for steep spending cuts. If Republicans don't get what they want, Trump the former president says, they should "shut it down."

FDA advisers vote against experimental ALS treatment pushed by patients

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health advisers voted overwhelmingly against an experimental treatment for Lou Gehrig's disease at a Wednesday meeting prompted by years of patient efforts seeking access to the unproven therapy.

The panel of Food and Drug Administration experts voted 17-1 that drugmaker Brainstorm's stem cell-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 48 of 78

based treatment has not been shown effective for patients with the fatal, muscle-wasting disease known as ALS, or amyotrophic lateral sclerosis. One panel member abstained from voting.

While the FDA is not bound by the vote, it largely aligns with the agency's own strikingly negative review released earlier this week, in which staff scientists described Brainstorm's application as "scientifically incomplete" and "grossly deficient."

"Creating false hope can be considered a moral injury and the use of statistical magic or manipulation to provide false hope is problematic," said Lisa Lee, a bioethics and research integrity expert from Virginia Tech, who voted against the treatment. The lone positive vote came from a panel member representing patients.

Wednesday's public meeting was essentially a longshot attempt by Brainstorm and the ALS community to sway FDA's thinking on the treatment, dubbed NurOwn.

Brainstorm's single 200-patient study failed to show that NurOwn extended life, slowed disease or improved patient mobility. But FDA agreed to convene the panel of outside advisers after ALS patients and advocates submitted a 30,000-signature petition seeking a public meeting.

In the last year, the FDA has approved two new drugs for ALS, after a nearly 20-year drought of new options. The approvals followed intense lobbying by advocacy groups.

FDA leaders have recently emphasized a new level of "regulatory flexibility" when reviewing experimental treatments for fatal, hard-to-treat conditions, including ALS, Alzheimer's and muscular dystrophy.

But the agency appears unwilling to overlook the failed study results and missing information in Brainstorm's submission, including key details on manufacturing and quality control needed to establish the product's safety.

"It really is a disease that needs a safe and effective treatment and there are a lot of other prospects out there that we need to encourage. Approving one like this would get in the way of that," said Dr. Kenneth Fischbeck of the National Institutes of Health.

ALS destroys nerve cells in the brain and spinal cord needed to walk, talk, swallow and — eventually — breathe. Most people die within three to five years of their first symptoms.

More than a dozen people spoke during a public comment session Wednesday, including ALS patients, their family members and physicians who implored FDA to grant approval. Several speakers presented before-and-after videos showing patients who participated in Brainstorm's study walking, climbing stairs and performing other tasks that they attributed to NurOwn.

"When Matt is on Nurown it helps him, when he's off of it he gets worse," said Mitze Klingenberg, speaking on behalf of her son, Matt Klingenberg, who was diagnosed with ALS in 2018.

The FDA is expected to issue a decision on the therapy by Dec. 8.

Israel-based Brainstorm Cell Therapeutics' stock price has lost more than 90% of its value over the last year, falling to 39 cents per share before being halted ahead of Wednesday's FDA meeting.

US secures the release of the soldier who crossed into North Korea 2 months ago

By MATTHEW LEE, KIM TONG-HYUNG and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. has secured the release of a U.S. soldier who sprinted across a heavily fortified border into North Korea more than two months ago, and he is on his way back to America, officials announced Wednesday. U.S. ally Sweden and rival China helped with the transfer.

Left unanswered were questions of why North Korea — which has tense relations with Washington over the North's nuclear program, support for Russia's war in Ukraine and other issues — had agreed to turn him over and why the soldier had fled in the first place.

North Korea had abruptly announced earlier Wednesday that it would expel Pvt. Travis King — though some had expected the North to drag out his detention in hopes of squeezing concessions from Washington at a time of high tensions between the two countries.

"U.S. officials have secured the return of Private Travis King from the Democratic People's Republic

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 49 of 78

of Korea," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan said in a statement. "We appreciate the dedication of the interagency team that has worked tirelessly out of concern for Private King's wellbeing."

Officials said they did not know exactly why North Korea decided to expel King, but suspected Pyongyang determined that as a low-ranking serviceman he had no real value in terms of either leverage or information. One official, who was not authorized to comment and requested anonymity, said the North Koreans may have decided that King, 23, was more trouble to keep than to simply release him.

Swedish officials took King to the Chinese border, where he was met by the U.S. Ambassador to China Nicholas Burns, the Swedish ambassador to China, and at least one U.S. Defense Department official. Biden administration officials insisted they provided no concessions to North Korea to secure the soldier's release.

"We thank the government of Sweden for its diplomatic role serving as the protecting power for the United States in the DPRK and the government of the People's Republic of China for its assistance in facilitating the transit of Private King," Sullivan added.

King was flown to a U.S. military base in South Korea before being returned to the U.S.

His expulsion almost certainly does not end his troubles or ensure the sort of celebratory homecoming that has accompanied the releases of other detained Americans. He has been declared AWOL from the Army, which can mean punishment military jail, forfeiture of pay or a dishonorable discharge.

In the near term, officials said that their focus would be on helping King reintegrate into U.S. society, including helping him address mental and emotional concerns, according to a senior Biden administration official who briefed reporters on the transfer.

The soldier was in "good spirits and good health" upon his release, according to one senior administration official. He was to be taken to Brooke Army Medical Center at Fort Sam Houston in Texas, and was expected to arrive overnight, officials said.

King, who had served in South Korea, ran into North Korea while on a civilian tour of a border village on July 18, becoming the first American confirmed to be detained in the North in nearly five years.

At the time he crossed the border, King was supposed to be heading to Fort Bliss, Texas, following his release from prison in South Korea on an assault conviction.

After arriving on the Texas military installation, King is expected to undergo psychological assessments and debriefings. He will also get a chance to meet with family. King's legal situation remains complicated because he willingly bolted into enemy hands, so legally he would be in military custody throughout the process.

Sweden was the chief interlocutor with North Korea on the transfer, while China helped facilitate his transfer, administration officials said.

Biden administration officials expressed gratitude for China's assistance with the transfer but underscored that Beijing did not play a mediating role in securing King's release. The U.S. first learned through Swedish officials earlier this month that North Korea was looking to expel King. That information accelerated the effort to release King with Sweden acting on the United States' behalf in its talks with the North, an official said.

On Wednesday, the North's official Korean Central News Agency reported that authorities had finished their questioning of King. It said that he confessed to illegally entering the North because he harbored "ill feeling against inhuman maltreatment and racial discrimination" within the U.S. Army and was "disillusioned about the unequal U.S. society."

It had attributed similar comments to King before, and verifying their authenticity is impossible. Some previous foreign detainees have said after their releases that declarations of guilt while in North Korean custody were made under coercion.

The White House did not address the North Korean state media reports that King fled because of his dismay about racial discrimination and inequality in the military and U.S. society. One senior administration official said that King was "very happy" to be on his way back to the United States.

In an interview last month with The Associated Press, King's mother, Claudine Gates, said her son had reason to want to come home. She thanked the U.S. government on Wednesday for securing her son's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 50 of 78

release.

"Ms. Gates will be forever grateful to the United States Army and all its interagency partners for a job well done," Jonathan Franks, spokesperson for Gates, said in a statement.

King was among about 28,000 U.S. troops stationed in South Korea as deterrence against potential aggression from North Korea. U.S. officials had expressed concern about King's well-being, citing the North's harsh treatment of some American detainees in the past.

Both Koreas ban anyone from crossing their heavily fortified shared border without special permissions. The Americans who crossed into North Korea in the past include soldiers, missionaries, human rights advocates or those simply curious about one of the world's most cloistered societies.

While King was officially declared AWOL, the Army considered, but did not declare him a deserter, which is a much more serious offense. In many cases, someone who is AWOL for more than a month can automatically be considered a deserter, which means they intended to leave permanently.

Punishment for going AWOL or desertion can vary, and it depends in part on whether the service member voluntarily returned or was apprehended. King's turnover by the North Koreans makes that a more complicated determination.

North Korea's decision to release King after 71 days appears relatively quick by the country's standards, especially considering the tensions between Washington and Pyongyang over the North's growing nuclear weapons and missile program and the United States' expanding military exercises with South Korea. Some had speculated that North Korea might treat King as a propaganda asset or bargaining chip.

The U.S. has also publicly accused North Korea of providing munitions to Russia for its war with Ukraine and says that Moscow is pushing Pyongyang to provide even more military aid. Russian President Vladimir Putin and North Korean leader Kim Jong Un met for talks in Russia's Far East earlier this month.

Biden administration officials on Wednesday downplayed any idea that the release could augur a broader shift by Kim, but reiterated that the U.S. remains ready to engage the North with diplomatic talks.

Captive Americans have been flown to China previously. In other cases, an envoy has been sent to retrieve them.

That happened in 2017 when North Korea deported Otto Warmbier, an American college student who was in a coma at the time of his release and later died.

Over 50 arrested after mobs ransacked Philadelphia stores.

Dozens of liquor outlets are shut down

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Dozens of people faced criminal charges Wednesday after a night of social media-fueled mayhem in which groups of thieves, apparently working together, smashed their way into stores in several areas of Philadelphia, stuffing plastic bags with merchandise and fleeing, authorities said.

Police said they made at least 52 arrests. Burglary, theft and other counts have been filed so far against at least 30 people, all but three of them adults, according to Jane Roh, spokesperson for the Philadelphia district attorney's office.

The flash mob-style ransacking Tuesday night at dozens of stores including Foot Locker, Lululemon and Apple came after a peaceful protest over a judge's decision to dismiss murder and other charges against a Philadelphia police officer who shot and killed a driver, Eddie Irizarry, through a rolled-up window.

Those doing the ransacking were not affiliated with the protest, Interim Police Commissioner John Stanford said at a news conference, calling the group "a bunch of criminal opportunists."

At least 18 state-run liquor stores were broken into, leading the Pennsylvania Liquor Control Board to close all 48 of its Philadelphia retail locations and one in suburban Cheltenham on Wednesday. No employees were hurt Tuesday night, but "some were understandably shaken," said liquor board spokesperson Shawn Kelly.

The stores were "closed in the interest of employee safety and while we assess the damage and loss that occurred. We will reopen stores when it is safe to do so and when the damage is repaired," Kelly said.

Video on social media showed masked people in hoodies running out of Lululemon with merchandise

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 51 of 78

and police officers grabbing several and tackling them to the sidewalk. Photos of a sporting goods store at a mall showed mannequins and sneakers scattered on the sidewalk.

The thefts and unrest stretched from downtown to northeast and west Philadelphia, leaving smashed display windows and broken storefront coverings. Police said seven cars were stolen from a lot in the northeast. One of the cars had been recovered as of Wednesday afternoon.

Six businesses in a single retail corridor of North Philadelphia were looted, including three pharmacies, a hair salon, a tax preparation company and a cellphone store, according to the North 22nd Street Business Corridor, a business group.

Benjamin Nochum, the pharmacist and store manager at Patriot Pharmacy, said it was the third time since 2020 his business had been hit.

"When looters steal from us, what they don't seem to understand is that they are also stealing from our neighbors," Nochum said in a statement. "It makes you question how much longer you can hang on."

People appeared to have organized efforts on social media, according to Stanford, the interim police commissioner. Police are investigating "that there was possibly a caravan of a number of different vehicles that were going from location to location." Video posted to social media showed people hanging out of cars in a shopping center parking lot, appearing to yell directions to one another.

"This destructive and illegal behavior cannot and will not be tolerated in our city," said Mayor Jim Kenney, a Democrat, calling it a "sickening display of opportunistic criminal activity."

His administration is working with police to assess "which areas of the city may need increased coverage or additional resources," he said.

The chaos in Philadelphia was reminiscent of similarly brazen smash-and-grab thefts elsewhere, particularly in the San Francisco Bay Area, where organized groups of thieves, some carrying crowbars and hammers, have systematically targeted high-end stores.

There were a large number of young people in Philadelphia's downtown business corridor, called Center City, shortly before 8 p.m., and some officers stopped a group of males "dressed in black attire and wearing masks," according to a police news release.

At that time, reports and 911 calls came in about the Foot Locker store. When police arrived, they found it had been "ransacked in a coordinated attack," the news release said.

By 8:12 p.m., police responded to similar calls at Lululemon, where police wrestled a few suspects to the ground as people streamed out of the store. Some of the suspected thieves slipped past police and got away, according to video posted to social media.

Shortly afterward, calls directed police to the Apple Store, where thieves had forced their way in and made off with phones and tablets — then smashed them on the ground when they realized the devices were disabled and their alarms were going off, social media video showed. Some of the merchandise was recovered, according to a police news release.

No injuries were immediately reported, but CBS Philadelphia reported that a security guard was assaulted at the Foot Locker.

The thefts occurred the same day Target announced it will close nine stores in four states, including one in New York City's East Harlem neighborhood, and three in the San Francisco Bay Area, saying that theft and organized retail crime have threatened the safety of its workers and customers.

Rising poverty grips Argentina as runaway inflation takes its toll

By DÉBORA REY Associated Press

BUENOS AIRES, Argentina (AP) — With tired faces, residents of a homeless shelter in Argentina's capital pass through the main entrance and line up to receive a hot drink and a slice of cake for an afternoon snack.

Places like the Bepo Ghezzi Social Inclusion Center in the Parque Patricios neighborhood of Buenos Aires have seen demand soar as more people are struggling to make ends meet amid an annual inflation rate above 100%.

The portion of Argentines living in poverty reached 40.1% in the first six months of the year, according

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 52 of 78

to figures released Wednesday by the government's INDEC statistics agency. That is up from 39.2% in the second half of 2022.

"I was renting, and it increased. I couldn't afford it," said Lionel Pais, 37, who arrived at the shelter three weeks ago, just after the government devalued the Argentine peso almost 20%, setting off another surge in prices. "These sudden increases that occurred, the economic situation in the country, don't allow me to cover basic expenses."

For much of the 20th century, Argentina showed a social mobility dynamic that gave rise to a large middle class and made the country stand out in the region. But the good times derailed, and poverty has remained firmly above 25% the last two decades as the South American country stays mired in economic malaise. Prices soared 124.4% during the 12-month period through Aug. 31.

Sebastián Boned, 26, found himself calling the assistance hotline for people experiencing homelessness when his wages as a hotel receptionist no longer allowed him to cover the 80,000 pesos (\$218) he paid to live in a boarding house.

"It's a peaceful place," he said of the shelter.

But the clock for Boned, and all of the shelter's other residents, is ticking. These shelters guarantee housing for only three months. During that time, residents are given guidance on finding work and applying for a subsidy to help them with their rent.

"Most of them tell you their salary doesn't cover their needs," said Mercedes Vucassovich, a social worker who runs the Bepo Ghezzi center.

The median monthly income in Argentina was 87,310 pesos (\$237) during the second quarter of the year, according to INDEC. A typical family needs more than 280,000 pesos (\$765) to stay out of poverty.

In Morón, a suburb west of the capital, María de los Ángeles García and Adrián Viñas Coronel, along with their five children aged 3 months to 13 years, are renting a makeshift dwelling in a low-income neighborhood after spending six months on the streets. With an address, they can enroll their children in a public school.

Their only fixed income is about 90,000 pesos (\$245) a month in social assistance, of which they have to allocate 25% to rent.

"We have to work all day on the street because we don't have enough for food nor diapers for the kids," said García, 31.

Over the past few weeks, Economy Minister Sergio Massa, who is running for president, has unveiled a series of measures to try to help Argentines who have seen their purchasing power decimated. Most recently, he said those who are not formally employed and not already getting any form of welfare will receive 94,000 pesos (\$256) divided into two monthly payments, in October and November.

The measures come as Massa is trying to gain ground on right-wing populist Javier Milei, who leads in opinion polls ahead of the Oct. 22 presidential election. He says he will turn to dollarization to end inflation.

García and her family receive some help through the Corazon Azul NGO, which provides snacks, medical assistance and donations of goods to vulnerable people in the area.

Among them is Alejandro Heredia, 53, who sleeps on trains and collects cans to sell for recycling.

"When you think you're in a bad situation, it always gets worse than it already was," he said. "We've been like this for 40 years, and there have been several governments."

Judge Chutkan denies Trump's request to recuse herself in federal election subversion case

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan said Wednesday she won't recuse herself from Donald Trump's 2020 election interference case in Washington, rejecting the former president's claims that her past comments raise doubts about whether she can be fair.

Chutkan, who was nominated to the bench by President Barack Obama and was randomly assigned to Trump's case, said in her written decision that she sees no reason to step aside. The case, scheduled for

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 53 of 78

trial in March, accuses the Republican of illegally scheming to overturn his election loss to Democrat Joe Biden.

There's a high bar for recusal, and legal experts had widely considered Trump's request to be a long shot aimed at undermining the legitimacy of the case publicly that could only sour the relationship between the judge and the defense in court.

Lawyers for Trump did not immediately return an email seeking comment.

In seeking Chutkan's recusal, defense lawyers cited statements she had made in two sentencing hearings of participants in the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol in which they said she had appeared to suggest that Trump deserved to be prosecuted and held accountable. They said the comments suggested a bias against him that could taint the proceedings.

But Chutkan vigorously objected to the those characterizations of her comments.

"It bears noting that the court has never taken the position the defense ascribes to it: that former 'President Trump should be prosecuted and imprisoned,'" Chutkan wrote. "And the defense does not cite any instance of the court ever uttering those words or anything similar."

It's the second time Trump has tried unsuccessfully to get a judge removed from one of the criminal cases against him. Judge Juan Manuel Merchan, who is overseeing Trump's New York hush money criminal case, rejected similar demands that he step aside, saying he is certain of his "ability to be fair and impartial."

Chutkan has stood out as one of the toughest punishers of defendants charged in the Jan. 6 insurrection, in which a mob of Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol. Trump, the early front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, has personally assailed her on social media as he tries to make the case that the prosecution is politically motivated.

Federal special counsel Jack Smith's team said there was no valid basis to have Chutkan removed from the case. Like Chutkan, they said she never said that Trump was legally or morally to blame for the events of Jan. 6 or that he deserved to be punished.

Chutkan wrote in her order that though recusal is a valid step when merited, judges should not step aside "without cause," as she suggested the Trump lawyers were asking her to do.

Trump's team had pointed in their recusal bid to a sentencing hearing for a Jan. 6 defendant in which Chutkan said the rioters had "blind loyalty to one person who, by the way, remains free to this day." Chutkan wrote in her decision Wednesday that she was merely stating an "undisputed fact," — that Trump was free — "but it went no further."

Chutkan is also considering a request by Smith's team for a narrow gag order that would bar Trump from making "inflammatory" and "intimidating" comments about witnesses, lawyers and other people involved in the case. Trump's lawyers objected this week to that request.

Chutkan has scheduled trial to begin March 4, 2024, over the vigorous objections of defense lawyers who said that would not give them enough time to prepare. The case in Washington's federal court is one of four criminal cases confronting the former president as he seeks to regain the White House.

In Hollywood writers' battle against AI, humans win (for now)

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — After a 148-day strike, Hollywood screenwriters secured significant guardrails against the use of artificial intelligence in one of the first major labor battles over generative AI in the workplace.

During the nearly five-month walkout, no issue resonated more than the use of AI in script writing. What was once a seemingly lesser demand of the Writers Guild of America became an existential rallying cry.

The strike was also about streaming-era economics, writers room minimums and residuals — not exactly compelling picket-sign fodder. But the threat of AI vividly cast the writers' plight as a human-versus-machine clash, with widespread implications for other industries facing a radically new kind of automation.

In the coming weeks, WGA members will vote on whether to ratify a tentative agreement, which requires studios and production companies to disclose to writers if any material given to them has been generated by AI partially or in full. AI cannot be a credited writer. AI cannot write or rewrite "literary material." AI-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 54 of 78

generated writing cannot be source material.

"AI-generated material can't be used to undermine a writer's credit or separated rights," the proposed contract reads.

Many experts see the screenwriters' deal as a forerunner for labor battles to come.

"I hope it will be a model for a lot of other content-creation industries," said Tom Davenport, a professor of information technology at Babson College and author of "All-in on AI: How Smart Companies Win Big with Artificial Intelligence." "It pretty much insures that if you're going to use AI, it's going to be humans working alongside AI. That, to me, has always been the best way to use any form of AI."

The tentative agreement between the Writers Guild and the Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers, which negotiates on behalf of the studios, doesn't prohibit all uses of artificial intelligence. Both sides have acknowledged it can be a worthwhile tool in many aspects of filmmaking, including script writing.

The deal states that writers can use AI if the company consents. But a company cannot require a writer to use AI software.

Language over AI became a sticking point in the writers' negotiations, which dragged on last week in part due to the challenges of bargaining on such a fast-evolving technology.

When the writers strike began on May 2, it was just five months after OpenAI released ChatGPT, the AI chatbot that can write essays, have sophisticated conversations and craft stories from a handful of prompts. Studios said it was too early to tackle AI in these negotiations and preferred to wait until 2026.

Ultimately, they hashed out terms while noting that the outlook is certain to change. Under the draft contract, "the parties acknowledge that the legal landscape around the use of (generative AI) is uncertain and rapidly developing." The companies and the guild agreed to meet at least twice a year during the contract's three-year term.

At the same time, there are no prohibitions on studios using scripts they own to train AI systems. The WGA left those issues up to the legal system to parse. A clause notes that writers retain the right to assert that their work has been exploited in training AI software.

That's been an increasingly prominent concern in the literary world. Last week, 17 authors, including John Grisham, Jonathan Franzen and George R.R. Martin, filed a lawsuit against OpenAI alleging the "systematic theft on a massive scale" of their copyrighted books.

The terms the WGA achieved will surely be closely watched by others — particularly the striking members of the actors union, SAG-AFTRA.

"This is the first step on a long process of negotiating and working through what generative AI means for the creative industry — not just writers but visual artists, actors, you name it," says David Gunkel, a professor of media studies at Northern Illinois University and author of "Person, Thing, Robot."

Actors, on strike since July 14, are likewise seeking better compensation from streaming. But they are also demanding safeguards against AI, which can potentially use a star's likeness without his or her permission or replace background actors entirely.

Attempts to adopt AI "as a normal operating procedure" are "literally dehumanizing the workforce," actor Bryan Cranston said recently on a picket line. "It's not good for society. It's not good for our environment. It's not good for working-class families."

In other developments, SAG-AFTRA members voted overwhelmingly Monday in favor of a strike authorization against video game companies. The use of AI in gaming is a particularly acute anxiety for voice-over actors.

Some skeptics doubt whether the writers made significant headway on AI. Media mogul Barry Diller, chairman of the digital media company IAC, believes not enough was done.

"They spent months trying to craft words to protect writers from AI, and they ended up with a paragraph that protected nothing from no one," Diller told CNBC.

Robert D. Atkinson, president of the tech policy think tank Information Technology & Innovation Foundation, said limiting AI is unproductive.

"If we ban the use of tools to make organizations more productive, we are consigning ourselves to stagnation," Atkinson write on X, formerly known as Twitter.

What most observers agree on, though, is that this was just the first of many AI labor disputes. Gunkel expects to see both writers and studios continue to experiment with AI.

"We're so early into this that no one is able to anticipate everything that might come up with generative AI in the creative industries," Gunkel said. "We're going to see the need again and again to revisit a lot of these questions."

Michigan State fires coach Mel Tucker for bringing ridicule to school, breaching his contract

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

Michigan State fired Mel Tucker on Wednesday, saying the suspended football coach failed to present adequate reasons why he should not be fired for cause after having what he described as consensual phone sex with an activist and rape survivor.

The school said it terminated what's left of Tucker's \$95 million, 10-year contract for acknowledging actions that subjected the institution to ridicule, breaching his contract and moral turpitude.

Brenda Tracy, the activist and rape survivor, said Tucker sexually harassed her during the phone call in April 2022. Several months later, Tracy filed a complaint with the school's Title IX office.

Michigan State informed the 51-year-old Tucker that it planned to fire him on Sept. 18 and gave him a week to respond, which he did on Monday.

"Simply put, Mr. Tucker's response does not provide any information that refutes or undermines the multiple grounds for termination for cause set forth in the notice," athletic director Alan Haller said. "Instead, his 25-page response, which includes a 12-page letter from his attorney and a 13-page 'expert report,' provides a litany of excuses for his inappropriate behavior while expressly admitting to the problematic conduct outlined in the notice."

Messages seeking comment were left with Tucker's attorney and agent. He has acknowledged having phone sex with her but said it was consensual.

Michigan State's investigation was completed in July and a hearing scheduled for next week.

Attorney Jennifer Belveal said the school knew Tucker acknowledged during the investigation in March that he had had phone sex with Tracy.

"The notice, which is entirely premised on information you knew at least seven months ago, if not earlier, now affirms Tucker's belief that the investigation was never interested in the truth," she wrote.

She denied in a statement that Tucker's actions were acts of moral turpitude — "by any stretch of the imagination" — at the university that operates in the shadow of Larry Nassar's sexual abuse of more than 100 athletes.

Belveal also cited Tucker's "serious medical condition" in stating that the embattled coach reserves his right to fully respond to the university's planned firing when he's medically cleared.

Tucker asked for a medical leave for "a serious health condition" while he was suspended and the school denied the request, saying it was "unnecessary," according to his attorney.

The school told Tucker he would be fired for cause and without compensation for misconduct with Tracy, whom it considers a vendor because she was once paid to speak with the team, and gave him seven days to respond.

Tucker signed a \$95 million, 10-year contract in November 2021. If the school gets its way, he will lose about \$80 million he was due to make through Jan. 15, 2032.

Tracy's allegations were made public by USA Today earlier this month, and on the same day that the report was published, Tucker was suspended.

Tucker, who said he has been estranged from his wife for years and has two children, said the allegations against him are "completely false."

"I can only conclude that there is an ulterior motive designed to terminate my contract based on some other factor such as a desire to avoid any (Nassar) taint, or my race or gender," Tucker, who is Black, said in a response his attorney shared earlier this month.

Tracy is known for her work with college teams educating athletes about sexual violence. Michigan State paid her \$10,000 to share her story with the football team.

Tucker began his coaching career with Nick Saban as a graduate assistant for the Spartans in 1997. He returned to the school with one of the biggest contracts in college sports after leading Colorado for one season and serving as an assistant coach at Georgia, Alabama and Ohio State.

Tucker also worked in the NFL, leading the Jacksonville Jaguars as interim coach during the 2011 season. He was 20-14 in three-plus seasons at Michigan State, which he led to 11 wins in 2021, and his career record as a college football head coach is 25-21.

The Spartans (2-2, 0-1 Big Ten) play at Iowa (3-1, 0-1) on Saturday, and will be led by interim coach Harlon Barnett for a third game.

Deion Sanders still winning in Black community after first loss at Colorado

By ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writer

One of Trevon Hamlet's core memories from attending the University of Colorado is living on campus his freshman year and being able to count on one hand how many Black people he'd see in a day.

Hamlet, who played lacrosse at Colorado from 2014-19 and still lives in the area, was the only Black person on his team in a school where African American students made up less than 2% of the population. He said a lot of those Black students were athletes.

Four years after Hamlet graduated, Colorado's student makeup doesn't look much different. But football coach Deion Sanders has turned the Boulder campus into an unexpected cultural phenomenon, where the vivacity and early success of the team has forced the attention of even those who don't watch college football, with a lot of support coming from the Black community.

"There's so much Blackness that's involved in this, and it's the biggest story in the country," Hamlet said. "Although you have standard supporters from CU, you have so many different people that are now getting behind this, and it feels like there's people getting behind the Black community. Deion's really promoting the Black community. I feel like it's our turn."

Black creators are posting about Colorado football online. Black people all over the country are wearing Buffaloes gear and rooting for the team despite having no connection to Colorado other than pride and support for what Sanders is doing. Kids have tried to peek over the gates near the Buffaloes' practice facility for a glimpse at it all.

More than 7 million people watched the Buffaloes upset last year's national championship runner-up TCU in their season opener on Sept. 2, the most-watched college football game that day.

Colorado's first three games of the season were rated 77% higher among Black viewers than anywhere else in the country, according to data provided by ESPN research. Black viewers made up 23% of the audience for those games, compared with 15% for non-Colorado games.

Then-No. 10 Oregon handed the Buffaloes their first loss in a 42-6 rout last Saturday that knocked the Buffaloes out of the AP Top 25. Looking at their schedule, more setbacks are likely — but Black support for Sanders and Colorado is as much about culture and representation as it is wins and losses. That game was the most-watched of the 2023 season, drawing 10.4 million viewers on ABC, and the Buffaloes have a highly anticipated matchup against No. 8 Southern California coming up Saturday.

Former athletes and celebrities have made appearances at Colorado's Folsom Field — from Pro Football Hall of Famers Michael Irvin and Terrell Owens to Kawhi Leonard and Kyle Lowry of the NBA. Before the rivalry game against Colorado State, Sanders walked out with the Grammy-winning rapper Lil Wayne.

"We don't really have very much of a Black community," said Reiland Rabaka, the director of the Center for African and African American Studies at Colorado. Boulder has an African American population of 1.1%. "I've been here for nearly 20 years. I've never seen anything like this."

Sanders, the former football and baseball star, has embraced stardom in a way unlike other athletes since he wore flashy sunglasses and layers of chains in his playing days, and he has carried that aura with

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 57 of 78

him as a coach. He speaks with a pastoral vibrato and has a contemporary-yet-principled coaching style, and he makes headlines with idiosyncratic sayings like: "I'm a monument, not a moment."

Sanders has also been vocal about issues that affect the Black community — including the need for more attention and resources to be poured into historically Black colleges and universities — and about his mission to inject a new culture into Colorado football. He's made it clear that he's not changing, no matter the amount of criticism that his coaching style has received.

"Not everybody wants to hear the truth all the time, but he tells the truth," said Washington Commanders offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, a tailback at Colorado from 1987-90 and still the Buffaloes' career rushing leader. "And the only thing he's doing, he's helping those young men by teaching them at an early age what accountability is about. And so that's what I admire about him."

Colorado won four conference championships from 1989-91 and 2001, as well as a national title in 1990. That was the last time that Darian Hagan, Colorado's quarterback from 1988-91, had seen so much excitement around the program before Sanders' arrival.

"I have a 78-year-old aunt, and she calls me after every game telling me how proud she is of our program and of Sanders," Hagan said. "Just to have a 78-year-old woman staying up late to watch football games, it tells you a lot about people and the belief that we have in him."

Sanders' early Colorado tenure conjures memories of pioneering college basketball coach John Thompson, whose Georgetown Hoyas were an anomaly on a predominantly white campus but garnered the unwavering support of the hip-hop and Black community.

The 6-foot-10 Thompson became the first Black coach to win an NCAA Division I basketball championship and was outspoken on social issues.

Sanders' Buffaloes aren't in the championship neighborhood yet, but like what happened at Georgetown, the momentum building at Colorado transcends sports.

"I was a DePaul fan growing up and I rooted for them," said Randall Crutcher, a former Creighton basketball player from the Chicago area. "But not when they played against John Thompson. I rooted for Georgetown. I'm rooting for the Black team."

Crutcher lives in an Omaha suburb and became a Nebraska football fan after attending college in the state, but he rooted against the Cornhuskers when they played the Buffaloes.

Colorado hired Sanders last December to turn around a dormant program that won one game in 2022. Sanders was coming off three successful seasons as the head coach at Jackson State, leading the Tigers to consecutive Southwestern Athletic Conference titles and putting a national spotlight on HBCUs and their culture.

For Hamlet, Sanders represents an assuagement of the stereotypes of what Black men can do to achieve success.

"Being in a school that's predominantly white, I've always felt that I had to change who I am to be successful," Hamlet said. "It's so nice to see a Black man do what he's doing — have so much influence, have so much power, so much authenticity — that shows that our culture does not have to be modified to be great."

Rabaka said Black people can see part of themselves in Sanders, who was raised in Fort Myers, Florida, mostly by his mother, and his ability to transform his life through sports.

What also will continue to resonate with people is Sanders' commitment to building up the Black community outside of football and embracing the same ideals of hip-hop culture, Rabaka added.

"Instead of dissing these young kids that come out of very similar conditions as Coach Prime did, he actually embraces them and just is challenging us to use our platforms progressively," Rabaka said. "So don't just help yourself, how about helping somebody else? And that fits in with the hip-hop aesthetic whenever we say, 'Each one teach one.' That's very basic to old school hip-hop culture."

US Sen. Bob Menendez pleads not guilty to pocketing bribes in a wide-ranging corruption case

By LARRY NEUMEISTER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press
NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. Sen. Bob Menendez of New Jersey pleaded not guilty on Wednesday to federal charges accusing him of pocketing bribes of cash and gold bars in exchange for wielding his political influence to secretly advance Egyptian interests and do favors for local businessmen.

Menendez led his wife, Nadine, who also pleaded not guilty in the case, by the hand out of the courtroom after the brief hearing in the lower Manhattan federal courthouse days after prosecutors unsealed an indictment alleging vast corruption by the Democrat. The couple ignored shouted questions from reporters as they left the courthouse. Menendez gave a tight-lipped smile as he stepped into a car.

A defiant Menendez has said allegations that he abused his power to line his pockets are baseless. He has said he is confident he will be exonerated and has no intention of leaving the Senate.

Still, calls for Menendez to resign continued to mount on Wednesday with Illinois Sen. Dick Durbin, the No. 2 Senate Democrat, saying "he should step down." More than half of Senate Democrats have now said that Menendez should resign, including fellow New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, speaking to reporters hours after Menendez's court appearance, did not call for Menendez to resign and said Menendez would address his Democratic colleagues on Thursday. "We all know that senators -- for senators, there's a much much higher standard. And clearly, when you read the indictment, Sen. Menendez fell way, way below that standard," said Schumer, D-N.Y.

Menendez spoke in court only when each defendant stood to acknowledge that they understood the charges against them. A lawyer entered the not guilty plea for Menendez, who was forced to step down as chairman of the powerful Senate Foreign Relations Committee after being indicted.

The senator was released on a \$100,000 bond, and he must surrender any personal passports but will be allowed to keep an official passport that would allow him to travel outside the U.S. for government business. The judge ordered him not to have contact outside of the presence of lawyers with his co-defendants except for his wife.

He also cannot talk about the case, outside of the presence of lawyers, with members of his Senate staff, Foreign Relations Committee staff or political advisers who have personal knowledge about the allegations. It was not immediately clear how those restrictions would affect his work.

Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin was approved Wednesday as the new chairman of the Foreign Relations panel.

It's the second corruption case in a decade against Menendez, whose last trial involving different allegations ended with jurors failing to reach a verdict in 2017.

Authorities say they found nearly \$500,000 in cash, much of it hidden in clothing and closets, as well as more than \$100,000 in gold bars in a search of the New Jersey home Menendez, 69, shares with his wife.

Menendez's wife was released on \$250,000 bond secured by her home in her Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. Prosecutors say she played a key role in collecting hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of bribes from three New Jersey businessmen seeking help from the longtime lawmaker.

Prosecutors allege repeated actions by Menendez to benefit the authoritarian government of Egypt. They say Menendez also tried to interfere in criminal investigations involving associates, in one case pushing to install in New Jersey a federal prosecutor who he believed he could influence to derail a case.

Two of the businessmen, Jose Uribe and Fred Daibes, also pleaded not guilty and were freed pending trial. They did not speak to reporters as they left the courthouse and their attorneys also declined to comment.

The third, Wael Hana, pleaded not guilty Tuesday to charges including conspiracy to commit bribery. Hana was arrested at Kennedy Airport on Tuesday after returning voluntarily from Egypt to face the charges, and was freed pending trial.

Menendez, in his first public remarks after last week's indictment, said on Monday that the cash found in his home was drawn from his personal savings accounts over the years and that he kept it on hand for emergencies.

One of the envelopes full of cash found at his home, however, bore Daibes' DNA and was marked with the real estate developer's return address, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutors said Hana promised to put Menendez's wife on his company's payroll in a low- or no-show job in exchange for Menendez using his influential post to facilitate foreign military sales and financing to Egypt. Prosecutors allege Hana also paid \$23,000 toward her home mortgage, wrote \$30,000 checks to her consulting company, promised her envelopes of cash, sent her exercise equipment and bought some of the gold bars that were found in the couple's home.

The indictment alleges repeated actions by Menendez to benefit Egypt, despite U.S. government misgivings over the country's human rights record that in recent years have prompted Congress to attach restrictions on aid.

Prosecutors, who detailed meetings and dinners between Menendez and Egyptian officials, say Menendez gave sensitive U.S. government information to Egyptian officials and ghostwrote a letter to fellow senators encouraging them to lift a hold on \$300 million in aid to Egypt, one of the top recipients of U.S. military support.

Prosecutors have accused Menendez of pressuring a U.S. agricultural official to stop opposing a lucrative deal that gave Hana's company a monopoly over certifying that imported meat met religious standards.

Montana judge temporarily blocks enforcement of law to ban gender-affirming medical care for minors

By AMY BETH HANSON Associated Press

HELENA, Mont. (AP) — A Montana law banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors is temporarily blocked, a state judge ruled Wednesday, just four days before it was to take effect.

Legislative debate over Montana's bill drew national attention this spring after Republicans punished Democratic Rep. Zoey Zephyr — the first transgender woman elected to the state's Legislature — for admonishing lawmakers who supported the bill.

District Court Judge Jason Marks agreed with transgender youth, their families and health care providers that the law passed by the 2023 Montana Legislature is likely unconstitutional and would harm the mental and physical health of minors with gender dysphoria, rather than protect them from experimental treatments, as supporters said it would.

The judge noted the same Republican-controlled legislature passed a law saying patients, including minors, have a right to receive treatment with experimental drugs — as long as it's recommended by a health care provider and they give consent.

Marks said he could only conclude the Legislature's stated intent in passing the law was "disingenuous" and it seemed more likely its purpose is to "ban an outcome deemed undesirable by the Montana Legislature, veiled as protection for minors."

"Today's ruling permits our clients to breathe a sigh of relief," Akilah Deernose, executive director of the ACLU of Montana, said in a statement. "But this fight is far from over. We look forward to vindicating our clients' constitutional rights and ensuring that this hateful law never takes effect."

The preliminary injunction remains in effect until a full trial can be held on the issue, but the state Department of Justice said it will appeal the injunction.

"We look forward to presenting our complete factual and legal argument to protect Montana children from harmful, life-altering medications and surgeries. Because of the irreversible and immediate harms that the procedures have on children we will be filing a notice of appeal today," spokeswoman Emilee Cantrell said in a statement.

Montana is one of at least 22 states that have enacted bans on gender-affirming medical care for minors and most face lawsuits. Some bans have been temporarily blocked by courts, while others have been allowed to take effect. The 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals is expected to rule this week on the gender-affirming medical care bans that were allowed to take effect in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 60 of 78

In Montana's case, transgender youth argued the law would ban them from continuing to receive gender-affirming medical care, violating their constitutional rights to equal protection, the right to seek health and the right to dignity.

Their parents said the law would violate their constitutional right to make medical decisions for their children and two medical providers said it would prevent them from providing effective and necessary care to their patients.

"Montana's ban is a direct assault on the freedom and well-being of transgender youth, their families, and their medical providers," Malita Picasso, staff attorney for the American Civil Liberties Union, said in a recent statement.

The law sought to prohibit the use of puberty blockers, cross-sex hormones and surgical treatments for gender dysphoria, while still allowing cisgender minors to receive puberty blockers to treat early puberty or surgical procedures to treat intersex conditions.

Treatments for gender dysphoria meet standards of care approved by major medical organizations including the American Medical Association and the American Academy of Pediatrics, the ACLU argued in its complaint.

Allowing the ban to take effect would cause irreparable harm to transgender minors who are receiving treatment, in part by exacerbating the anxiety and depression they feel because their body is incongruent with their gender identity, Picasso argued during a Sept. 18 hearing for the preliminary injunction.

The state countered that beginning the treatments put transgender children on a "path of no return" and continuing medical treatment.

"A child cannot possibly consent to the treatment that permanently and irreversibly changes secondary sex characteristics, nor can a child consent to future infertility and sterilization, future sexual dysfunction and a lifetime of hormone treatments and other forms of medicalization and resulting complications," Assistant Attorney General Michael Russell argued.

Zephyr said Wednesday that Republicans who voted for the ban didn't listen to the medical community or families of transgender children who testified during legislative committee hearings that gender-affirming care is life-saving care and silenced her for speaking out against the legislation.

"But now — five months after the legislature adjourned — the ruling is in and they must listen to the courts," Zephyr said in a statement.

Azerbaijan arrests the former head of separatist government after recapturing Nagorno-Karabakh

By AVET DEMOURIAN Associated Press

YEREVAN, Armenia (AP) — Azerbaijan said it arrested the former head of Nagorno-Karabakh's separatist government as he tried to cross into Armenia on Wednesday along with tens of thousands of others who have fled following Azerbaijan's 24-hour blitz last week to reclaim control of the enclave.

The arrest of Ruben Vardanyan was announced by Azerbaijan's border guard service. It appears to reflect Azerbaijan's intention to quickly and forcefully enforce its grip on the region after the military offensive that has prompted a rapid exodus of ethnic Armenians.

Vardanyan, a billionaire businessman who made his fortune in Russia where he owned a major investment bank, moved to Nagorno-Karabakh in 2022 and served as the head the regional government for several months before stepping down earlier this year.

The border guard service said Vardanyan was escorted to Azerbaijan's capital, Baku, and handed over to "relevant state bodies" that will decide his fate. It posted a picture of Vardanyan held by two border guards next to a helicopter.

Also Wednesday, Azerbaijan's Health Ministry said a total of 192 Azerbaijani troops were killed and 511 wounded during the offensive in Nagorno-Karabakh. One Azeri civilian also died in the hostilities, the ministry said.

Nagorno-Karabakh officials said earlier that at least 200 people on their side, including 10 civilians, were

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 61 of 78

killed and over 400 were wounded in the fighting.

The 24-hour Azerbaijani blitz involving heavy artillery, rocket launchers and drones forced the separatist authorities to agree to lay down weapons and sit down for talks on Nagorno-Karabakh's "reintegration" into Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan and separatist officials have since held two rounds of talks, but no details have been made available and prospects of "reintegration" of Nagorno-Karabakh's ethnic Armenian population into the mostly Muslim country have remained unclear.

Despite Azerbaijan's promises to respect the rights of the region's residents, they have rushed to flee the region en masse fearing reprisals.

More than 53,000 people, or about 45% of Nagorno-Karabakh's population of 120,000, had left the region for Armenia as of nightfall Wednesday, according to Armenian authorities.

Stepanakert, the region's capital, looked deserted Wednesday as remaining residents who don't have their own vehicles to leave the city gathered in the center, waiting for buses promised by the authorities. A horse and a donkey, apparently left behind by former owners, could be seen slowly walking together along an empty street.

Hours-long traffic jams were reported on Tuesday on the road out of Nagorno-Karabakh as residents hurried to leave, fearing Azerbaijan could shut the only road leading to Armenia.

An explosion Monday at a gas station near Stepanakert, where people were queuing to fuel up their cars before leaving for Armenia, killed at least 68 people, said Nagorno-Karabakh's human rights ombudsman, Gegham Stepanyan. An additional 290 were injured, and a total of 105 were considered missing as of Tuesday evening, he said.

The blast exacerbated already dire fuel shortages.

Tatev Mirzoyan, a 27-year-old resident of Stepanakert who arrived in the Armenian city of Goris with her family after a 28-hour drive, said they used fuel they had stashed for emergency purposes.

"We were seven in one little car," she said. "That was a horrible journey as people are in panic and nervous."

Mirzoyan said she and her family are planning to stay with her sister who lives in Yerevan, Armenia's capital, adding that she doesn't want to think about the future for now.

Some of her relatives are still searching for fuel to leave Nagorno-Karabakh, she said. "My cousin is still under siege in Martuni, she is waiting to be taken out to Stepanakert, and after that figure out what to do next."

Azerbaijan's swift onslaught followed a nine-month blockade of the road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia. Armenia charged that the closure denied basic food and fuel supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh's residents, while Azerbaijan countered by alleging that the Armenian government was using the road for mineral extraction and illicit weapons shipments to the region's separatist forces.

Anna Ayrapetyan, another Stepanakert resident who fled the region, said there was no alternative to leaving in the current desperate situation.

"People are suffering from hunger and the lack of electricity and gas," she said. "Hungry children is the worst thing a person can imagine."

She said she took only warm clothes and other necessities, leaving everything else behind.

Stepanakert is the "city where I was born and lived for nearly 25 years," she said. "Leaving behind all your life, your friends is horrible."

Grigory Sarkisyan, who lost his son in the fighting, said he only took some clothes and a pair of shoes. "We are leaving because Azerbaijanis have come to drive us from our homeland," he said.

Nagorno-Karabakh was an autonomous region within Azerbaijan during the Soviet times and it came under the control of ethnic Armenian forces backed by the Armenian military in a six-year separatist war that began in the waning years of the Soviet Union and ended in 1994.

Azerbaijan regained substantial territory, including parts of Nagorno-Karabakh, in a six-week war with Armenia in 2020 that ended with a Moscow-brokered truce and the deployment of 2,000 Russian peace-

keepers to monitor the region.

Russia, which has been Armenia's main sponsor and ally since the 1991 Soviet collapse, has also sought to maintain warm ties with Azerbaijan. But Moscow's clout in the region quickly faded as Russia's war in Ukraine diverted Moscow's resources and made it increasingly dependent on Azerbaijan's main ally, Turkey.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refused to comment on the arrest of Vardanyan, who renounced his Russian citizenship after moving to Nagorno-Karabakh.

An old car tire, burnt trees and a utility pole may be key in finding how the Maui wildfire spread

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, JENNIFER McDERMOTT and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

Melted remains of an old car tire. Heavily burned trees. A charred stump of an abandoned utility pole.

Investigators are examining these and other pieces of evidence as they seek to solve the mystery of last month's deadly Maui wildfire: How did a small, wind-whipped fire sparked by downed power lines and declared extinguished flare up again hours later into a devastating inferno?

The answer may lie in an overgrown gully beneath Hawaiian Electric Co. power lines and something that harbored smoldering embers from the initial fire before rekindling in high winds into a wall of flame that quickly overtook the town of Lahaina, destroying thousands of structures and killing at least 97 people.

But as investigators sift through blackened debris to explain the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century, one fact has become clear: Hawaiian Electric's right-of-way was untrimmed and unkempt for years, despite being in an area classified as being at high risk for wildfires.

Aerial and satellite imagery reviewed by The Associated Press show the gully has long been choked with thick grass, shrubs, small trees and trash, which a severe summer drought turned into tinder-dry fuel for fires. Photos taken after the blaze show charred foliage in the utility's right-of-way still more than 10 feet high.

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"The winds were blowing 90 miles an hour (145 kmh) downhill," Balagso told the AP. "From the time of reignition or rekindling to the time it passed my house, it was less than a minute."

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Hawaiian Electric has acknowledged its downed lines caused the initial fire but has argued in court filings it couldn't be responsible for the later flare-up because its lines had been turned off for hours by the time the fire reignited and spread through the town. The utility instead sought to shift the blame to Maui County fire officials for what it believes was their premature, false claim that they had extinguished the first fire. The county denies firefighters were negligent.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 63 of 78

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CLUES IN THE INVESTIGATION

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But AP reviewed more than 950 photos taken last month showing ATF and Maui investigators combing through the gully area, marking items with yellow tape, and examining splintered power poles, severed electrical lines and other evidence. The photos were given to the AP by Morgan & Morgan, a law firm suing Hawaiian Electric on behalf of residents who lost their homes.

Three fire science experts who examined the photos for the AP noticed several items that could be possible ignition sources for the rekindled fire. They include a heavily charred, hollowed 4-foot-tall stump of a utility pole that was marked with yellow tape, pulled from the ground with a crane and trucked to an evidence warehouse. Investigators also examined two heavily burned trees and piles of rocks strewn with trash, including the remains of an old car tire, its frayed steel belts poking through melted rubber.

While experts cautioned the right-of-way was full of places where embers could fester, they noted that these larger items stood out because the second fire erupted hours later, and stumps and roots have been known to keep embers glowing a long time, in some cases weeks.

"Obviously a quarter-inch diameter twig is probably not going to smolder for five hours because there's not going to be enough fuel," said Vyto Babrauskas, a New York-based expert on smoldering fires. "But a big thing like a tree stump or a power pole stump, certainly there's no reason it would be unable to smolder."

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By 10 a.m., firefighters deemed the 3-acre blaze "100 percent contained." Maui County lawyer John Fiske said firefighters continued to spray the area with 23,000 gallons of water, and after seeing no more smoke or flame, declared the fire "extinguished and left at 2:18 p.m.

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In 2018, a brush fire broke out nearby during high winds from a passing hurricane, destroying 21 buildings. Though officials were unable to conclusively determine a cause, a copy of the investigative report obtained by the AP said Hawaiian Electric's power lines couldn't be ruled out.

It's not clear when Hawaiian Electric last cleared the grass and shrubs from under its lines on the Kamehameha tract. But AP's review of public regulatory filings shows the company has a history of falling behind on what the electricity industry calls "vegetation management."

A 2020 audit of Hawaiian Electric by an outside consulting firm found the company failed to meet its goals for clearing vegetation from its rights-of-way for years, and the way it measured its progress needed to be fixed "urgently." The 216-page audit by Munro Tulloch said the utility tracked money it spent on clearing and tree trimming but had "zero metrics" on things that really mattered, such as the volume of vegetation removed or miles of right-of-way cleared.

Hawaiian Electric told the AP that since that audit it has "completely transformed" its trimming program, spending \$110 million clearing vegetation in the past five years, using detailed maps to find critical areas and tracking outages caused by trees and branches.

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Fourteen months later, that request is still pending.

"We are looking at every decision we made, every tactic we employed to act on the wildfire threat on Maui," the utility said in its statement. "Outside voices speak confidently about what happened and what we did or didn't do but the facts are that we took the threat seriously."

An old car tire, burnt trees and a utility pole may be key in finding how the Maui wildfire spread

By MICHAEL BIESECKER, JENNIFER McDERMOTT and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

Melted remains of an old car tire. Heavily burned trees. A charred stump of an abandoned utility pole.

Investigators are examining these and other pieces of evidence as they seek to solve the mystery of last month's deadly Maui wildfire: How did a small, wind-whipped fire sparked by downed power lines and declared extinguished flare up again hours later into a devastating inferno?

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 65 of 78

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 66 of 78

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Fire rips through Iraqi wedding hall, killing around 100 in shock to Christian community

By FARID ABDULWAHED and QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA Associated Press

MOSUL, Iraq (AP) — As they watched the bride and groom start their slow dance, Faten Youssef imagined the future wedding of her son, seated next to her at a reception table. Within moments, however, disaster struck when an inferno erupted that would leave nearly 100 dead in the northern Iraqi wedding hall.

As the dance began, a ring of pyrotechnics machines on the floor released fountains of sparks into the air. As the music played, ceiling panels above the machines burst into flames.

The around 250 panicked guests in the the Haitham Royal Wedding Hall in the predominantly Christian Hamdaniya area stampeded for the exits as flaming decorations and pieces of ceiling rained down on them.

Authorities on Wednesday said around 100 people were killed, with the toll expected to rise with at least 100 injured, including many critically burned. Authorities said highly flammable building materials contributed to the disaster. The tragedy Tuesday night was the latest to hit Iraq's Christian minority, which has dwindled to a fraction of its former size over the past decade in the face of militant attacks.

There was no official word on the cause of the blaze. But Kurdish television news channel Rudaw aired footage of the flames erupt from the ceiling over a chandelier as the spark machines jettied fireworks below.

"Flames started falling on us," Youssef told The Associated Press. "Things were falling down and blocked the way to the exit."

The guests, seated at long tables for the reception meal, rushed to the exits and the electricity went out. Youssef's son tried to pull her to safety as she held her daughter's hand. Youssef fell over onto the floor, right next to an elderly woman sprawled helplessly.

Youssef's son tried to kick open a jammed exit door but couldn't, she said. In the turmoil, her husband was missing. They managed to escape out another door, and once outside she found her husband had gotten out through the kitchen.

"It's like we were brought back to life, I still don't know how we survived," Youssef said.

Another guest, Nabil Ibrahim, happened to be outside with one of his sons getting fresh air when the fire broke out. His wife, daughter and other son were still inside. He and his son rushed in, "and I saw people burning and screaming," he recalled.

He and others tried to help people get out. He saw one unconscious woman being carried out, but later learned she died of suffocation. He eventually escaped through the kitchen and found the rest of his family outside.

With many trapped inside, someone brought a bulldozer and knocked a hole in the wedding hall wall, survivors said.

But by that time, "most of the people inside had died," Ibrahim said. Fortunately, many of the guests' children were outside playing in a nearby playground when the fire erupted. "If they'd all been inside, they would have died," he said.

It wasn't immediately clear if the bride and groom were among those hurt.

Ambulance sirens wailed for hours after the fire. Survivors arrived at local hospitals in bandages as staff worked to organize more oxygen cylinders. The hall was left scattered with torn clothes, children shoes and baby bottles, according to images on Rudaw and social media.

A Health Ministry official, speaking to the AP at midday Wednesday, put the death toll at 94 with around 100 people still receiving medical treatment. "The death toll is expected to rise as some are in critical condition," he said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to talk to the press. Interior Minister Abdul Amir al-Shammari earlier put the toll at 93 dead.

The official said 30 bodies have been identified by relatives, but the rest are too badly burned and will require DNA identification.

The disaster stunned Hamdaniya, a region of small towns with a mixture of Christians, Muslims and small minority religions in the Nineveh Plains outside the northern city of Mosul.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 68 of 78

Father Rudi Saffar Khoury, a priest at the wedding, said "It was a disaster in every sense of the word." The number of Christians in Iraq today is estimated at 150,000, compared to 1.5 million in 2003. Iraq's total population is more than 40 million.

Over the past two decades, Iraq's Christian minority has been violently targeted by extremists first from al-Qaida and then the Islamic State militant group. Although the Nineveh Plains, their historic homeland, was wrested back from the Islamic State group six years ago, some towns are still mostly rubble and lack basic services, and many Christians have left for Europe, Australia or the United States.

Iraq's prime minister ordered an investigation into the blaze. Interior Ministry spokesman Saad Maan said the primary forensic report described a "lack of safety and security measures" at the venue. Iraqi security forces arrested nine workers at the venue, said Abdullah Al-Jabouri, a security official who heads the Nineveh Operations Command.

One of the owners of the venue, Chonny Suleiman Naboo, blamed the fire on an "electrical fault in the ceiling." Speaking to the AP, he insisted the venue had "all the officials' approvals" and that his brother and the hall's supervisor would turn themselves in to authorities.

"We were attacked by residents and our cars were damaged because of what happened, and we're worried that our homes could be attacked too," Naboo said.

Civil defense officials quoted by the Iraqi News Agency said the wedding hall's exterior was covered with a highly flammable, low-cost type of "sandwich panel" cladding that is illegal in the country. The materials "collapse within minutes when the fire breaks out," civil defense said.

Experts say cheaper sandwich panels don't always meet stricter safety standards, and are especially dangerous on buildings without any breaks to slow or halt a possible blaze. That includes the 2017 Grenfell Fire in London that killed 72 people in the greatest loss of life in a fire on British soil since World War II, as well as multiple high-rise fires in the United Arab Emirates.

Similar panels have been blamed in several previous fires in Iraq. In July 2021, a blaze at a hospital in the Iraqi city of Nasiriyah that killed between 60 to 92 people was determined to have been fueled by sandwich panels.

Later Wednesday, hundreds of people gathered in a Christian cemetery in the area to attend funerals of some of the fire's victims. Coffins draped in white cloth, some decorated with flowers, were carried one after another into the cemetery. Mourners wept and waved portraits of the dead.

"Sadness has prevailed the town, it's as if there was a curfew imposed," Youssef said. "The town has transformed from happiness to grief and mourning."

She said her family vows never again to attend wedding parties.

"My son told me that if he gets married, he will never have an event like this - just a church ceremony," she said.

US allows Israeli citizens to travel to US visa-free as Israel joins a select group of countries

REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is admitting Israel into a select group of countries whose citizens are allowed to travel to the United States without getting a visa in advance.

The decision announced Wednesday comes despite Washington's concerns about the Israeli government's treatment of Palestinian Americans and marks a major accomplishment for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who has sparred frequently with the Biden administration.

Under the waiver program, as of Nov. 30, Israelis will be able to travel to the U.S. for business or leisure purposes for up to 90 days without a visa simply by registering with the Electronic System for Travel Authorization. But even if they are authorized to travel under that system, U.S. officials at the airport can still bar them from entering the country.

Israel had been facing a Saturday deadline, the end of the U.S. government's budget year, to gain admission to the program without having to requalify for eligibility next year.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 69 of 78

The Department of Homeland Security administers the program, which currently allows citizens of 40 mostly European and Asian countries to travel to the U.S. for three months without visas.

Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the agreement, after more than a decade of work, "will enhance our two nations' collaboration on counterterrorism, law enforcement and our other common priorities" and make the allies more secure.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken, in a joint statement with Mayorkas, cited enhanced "freedom of movement for U.S. citizens, including those living in the Palestinian Territories or traveling to and from them."

Israel's admission has been a priority for successive Israeli leaders. It comes as Netanyahu is facing months of mass protests against his proposed remake of Israel's judicial system that critics say will make the country less democratic.

"Today we mark an important and joyful moment for all citizens of Israel," Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said in a statement. "This will save you, citizens of Israel a lot of time, a lot of trouble and a lot of money."

He described the decision as "further evidence of the strong ties between Israel and the United States" and thanked President Joe Biden and other officials who helped make it possible.

Palestinian diplomats complained that the U.S. had allowed Israel into the program without the country fulfilling its commitments of equal treatment for Palestinian Americans. Palestinian advocacy groups have reported that even during the test phase of the visa waiver agreement, Palestinian Americans have faced discrimination and harassment by Israeli authorities at airports and checkpoints.

"At a time when the U.S. administration has repeatedly said that its goal is for Israel to provide the same opportunities of freedom, equality, prosperity and security for both Palestinians and Israelis, we expect the Biden administration to implement what it believes, works on and promises," the Palestinian Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Countries that want to take part in the visa program have to meet three critical benchmarks.

Israel met two of those benchmarks over the past two years: a low percentage of Israelis who applied for visas and were rejected and a low percentage of Israelis who have overstayed their visas. Israel had struggled to meet the third, for reciprocity that essentially means all U.S. citizens, including Palestinian Americans, must be treated equally when traveling to or through Israel.

Aside from the reciprocity requirement, which is disputed by some Palestinian American groups, a rejection of Israel would mean the country would have again had to meet U.S. standards for low rates of visa application refusals and visa overstays.

Israel had not met those criteria for years, but the numbers for both came down significantly in part due to coronavirus travel restrictions and an educational campaign in Israel sponsored by the U.S. Embassy and the Israeli government to discourage Israelis with questionable eligibility for visas from applying in the first place. Some officials said it was not clear whether Israel would have been able to meet those statistical standards in the next U.S. budget year.

Claiming national security reasons, Israel has long had separate entry requirements and screening processes for Palestinian Americans. Many complained that the procedures were onerous and discriminatory. Americans with Palestinian residency documents in the West Bank and Gaza Strip were largely barred from using Israel's international airport. Instead, like other Palestinians, they were forced to travel through either Jordan or Egypt to reach their destinations.

U.S. officials have stressed that Israel's status in the program will be constantly monitored and if it is seen to fall out of compliance, the special visa waiver status can be revoked.

But even before the announcement was official, the American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee said it had filed a federal lawsuit aiming to stop Israel from being allowed into the program. The group claims that despite American assertions, Palestinian Americans were still facing discrimination when traveling to Israel.

Iran says it has successfully launched an imaging satellite into orbit amid tensions with the West

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 70 of 78

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran claimed on Wednesday that it successfully launched an imaging satellite into space, a move that could further ratchet up tensions with Western nations that fear its space technology could be used to develop nuclear weapons.

Iran's Communication Minister Isa Zarepour said the Noor-3 satellite had been put in an orbit 450 kilometers (280 miles) above the Earth's surface, the state-run IRNA news agency reported. It was not clear when exactly the launch took place.

There was no immediate acknowledgment from Western officials of the launch or of the satellite being put into orbit. The U.S. military did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Iran has had a series of failed launches in recent years.

The most recent launch was carried out by Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, which has had more success. Gen. Hossein Salami, the top commander of the Guard, told state TV that the launch had been a "victory" and that the satellite will collect data and images.

Authorities released footage of a rocket taking off from a mobile launcher without saying where the launch occurred. Details in the video corresponded with a Guard base near Shahrud, some 330 kilometers (205 miles) northeast of the capital, Tehran. The base is in Semnan province, which hosts the Imam Khomeini Spaceport from which Iran's civilian space program operates.

The Guard operates its own space program and military infrastructure parallel to Iran's regular armed forces and answers only to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

It launched its first satellite into space in April 2020. But the head of the U.S. Space Command later dismissed it as a "tumbling webcam in space" that would not provide vital intelligence. Western sanctions bar Iran from importing advanced spying technology.

The United States has alleged that Iran's satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution and has called on Tehran to undertake no activity related to ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons.

The U.S. intelligence community's 2022 threat assessment claims the development of satellite launch vehicles "shortens the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology.

Iran has always denied seeking nuclear weapons, and says its space program, like its nuclear activities, is for purely civilian purposes. U.S. intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Iran abandoned an organized military nuclear program in 2003.

Over the past decade, Iran has sent several short-lived satellites into orbit and in 2013 launched a monkey into space. The program has seen recent troubles, however. There have been five failed launches in a row for the Simorgh program, another satellite-carrying rocket.

A fire at the Imam Khomeini Spaceport in February 2019 killed three researchers, authorities said at the time. A launchpad rocket explosion later that year drew the attention of then-President Donald Trump, who taunted Iran with a tweet showing what appeared to be a U.S. surveillance photo of the site.

Tensions are already high with Western nations over Iran's nuclear program, which has steadily advanced since Trump five years ago withdrew the U.S. from the 2015 nuclear agreement with world powers and restored crippling sanctions on Iran.

Efforts to revive the agreement reached an impasse more than a year ago. Since then, the IAEA has said Iran has enough uranium enriched to near-weapons grade levels to build "several" nuclear weapons if it chooses to do so. Iran is also building a new underground nuclear facility that would likely be impervious to U.S. or Israeli airstrikes. Both countries have said they would take military action if necessary to prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon.

Iran has expressed willingness to return to the 2015 nuclear deal, but says the U.S. should first ease the sanctions.

Deion Sanders' impact at Colorado raises hopes that other Black coaches will get opportunities

By CLIFF BRUNT AP Sports Writer

Floyd Keith has waited half a century for a Black coach with Deion Sanders' swagger and success to shake up college football.

The fanfare and hoopla surrounding the Colorado program since Sanders' arrival has been well documented, but Keith, who for more than a decade was executive director of the Black Coaches Association, hopes the spotlight leads to opportunities for more Black coaches.

Even with a loss at Oregon on Saturday that knocked the Buffaloes out of the AP Top 25, Sanders has the football world's attention. The 75-year-old Keith believes that includes decision-makers who typically have shied away from hiring Black coaches.

"There was maybe this model that everybody (thought they) had to follow," Keith said. "There was this blueprint of the way it's done. Well, I think Deion shattered that."

While there is optimism, there's also a healthy dose of skepticism. Sanders is a unicorn in many ways, so it's unclear if the whirlwind he has created will have coattails.

Keith never got the big break to become head coach at one of the major Division I programs, but he fought tirelessly for others. He was an assistant coach at Miami (Ohio) and Colorado in the 1970s before taking over as head coach at Howard, a historically Black university. He later was the head coach at Rhode Island, a Football Championship Subdivision program.

The battle he was fighting continues today.

There are just 14 Black head coaches roaming the sidelines at the 133 Football Bowl Subdivision programs while roughly half the players are Black. Just seven of the 69 Power Five head coaching jobs are held by Black men. Notre Dame's Marcus Freeman and Penn State's James Franklin are the only ones leading what would be considered traditional powerhouses.

Those jobs don't come open very often and Sanders didn't get one either.

He took over a Colorado program that won a single game last year and opened this season with victories over TCU, Nebraska and Colorado State, vaulting the Buffaloes into the national rankings while unapologetically being himself.

"Coach Prime" is usually the loudest and boldest person in the room, displaying a bravado Keith considers necessary because Black coaching talent has been overlooked for decades.

"What I judge is the results and what he's done," said Keith, who currently resides in Indianapolis. "I think he has taken — and I might be early in this — but I think what he's done now is he's opened the door for not only coaches of color, but coaches to be real. And I think that's a great thing."

Sanders' presence can't be ignored, and N. Jeremi Duru, director of the Washington College of Law's Sport & Society Initiative at American University, said Sanders' resume and swagger draws the attention needed to address the issue. Sanders was perhaps the greatest cornerback of all time, a Hall of Fame inductee at the college and pro levels and a Super Bowl champion — and was not shy about it.

Duru gives Colorado's leadership credit for making a move that other programs wouldn't. And he notes the results, which include record-setting television ratings.

"Who would have thought that Colorado, all the stakeholders involved in that program, would have chosen Deion?" Duru said. "And they did, and boy, are they profiting from it. It's an extraordinary turnaround. So it may be that other organizations are more willing to take that step than have been in the past."

Darryl Jacobs, executive director of Rising Coaches' DEI Alliance, said there are plenty of capable Black coaches out there, with many at HBCUs. He pointed out that Sanders lost both of his trips to the Celebration Bowl — considered the national championship game for HBCUs. Jackson State lost to South Carolina State and coach Oliver Pough in 2021, then to North Carolina Central and coach Trei Oliver in 2022.

Jacobs said losses like the one at Oregon will be rare for Sanders.

"This is probably the worst team Deion Sanders is going to have because by the time he corrects that offensive and defensive line and people are calling him, there's going to be talent there," he said. "The sky's

the limit for them. I wouldn't be surprised to see them competing for a national championship next year."

As Sanders succeeds, those who have fought similar battles applaud him. Washington Commanders offensive coordinator Eric Bieniemy, a star running back for Colorado's 1990 national championship team and former Colorado offensive coordinator, loves what he's seeing.

"As a Black man, obviously, I'm just proud of everything that he's accomplished," Bieniemy said. "It's been fun watching him do his thing, his way, and not apologize for anything that he has done or said or how his players have responded. It's been unique watching that process."

Ronald Reagan famously spoke of the 'ash heap of history.' So do several GOP candidates today

By THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

The words don't stir the collective national memory like, "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall."

But for students of Ronald Reagan's more notable speeches, "the ash heap of history" may ring a bell, one chiming regularly during the 2024 Republican presidential campaign.

Former South Carolina Gov. Nikki Haley has promised to send the People's Republic of China to the metaphorical refuse pile. Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis lists several policies he would consign there as president. Former Vice President Mike Pence simply wants the overturned abortion-rights decision in *Roe v. Wade* to stay put there.

As most Republican White House hopefuls gather Wednesday at Reagan's presidential library for a debate, expect to hear more homages to the "Great Communicator." The references — and the embrace of some of his rhetoric — reflect how the party has changed, as those seeking to portray themselves as heirs to Reagan's optimistic conservative vision also regularly resort to a style of attack and grievance more often associated with former President Donald Trump.

"If you understand American history, you see over and over and over again the capacity for this country to pull itself together," said Peter Robinson, a former White House special assistant and speechwriter who drafted Reagan's famous 1987 Berlin Wall speech. "That's fundamentally what Ronald Reagan grasped."

Like any savvy Republican candidate, Haley, DeSantis and Pence are wise to cull Reagan's speeches for turns of phrase, even if the references are unrecognized as such by most voters, Robinson and others who helped craft them say.

"Speechwriting in the Republican universe tends to start by reading Ronald Reagan's speeches," said Ken Khachigian, a White House speechwriter for Reagan who also drafted remarks for Reagan's 1980 and 1984 campaigns. "No candidate loses out by reading and becoming familiar with Reagan's speeches."

Even if the "ash heap speech" isn't well-known to voters, it was among Reagan's most significant addresses. It was delivered in June 1982 as Reagan, speaking to the British Parliament, called for nothing short of the total demise of the Soviet Union.

"What I am describing now is a plan and a hope for the long term, the march of freedom and democracy which will leave Marxism-Leninism on the ash heap of history," Reagan said in the ornate Royal Gallery of London's Palace of Westminster.

Reagan came into office with the United States facing soaring inflation, unemployment and interest rates. He had spent the first year of his presidency focusing primarily on the economy. He used the speech to Parliament to say the U.S. should take the offensive in the Cold War and to make a global push to end communism without military intervention, said Anthony Dolan, Reagan's chief speechwriter, whose draft Reagan had chosen over others.

"This was Reagan's first speech abroad and it was a great test for him," Dolan said. "It had such resonance with conservatives because there had been no similar call from Western statesmen."

Haley, who was Trump's U.N. ambassador, has come closer than her 2024 GOP rivals to using the term in its original context.

In an economic policy speech Friday in New Hampshire, Haley said, "Freedom has always been our se-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 73 of 78

cret weapon. It broke the Soviet Union's back without firing a shot. And freedom can lift America to new heights, leaving Chinese communism on the ash heap of history."

Haley had used a version of it during a speech two years earlier at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library. And a clip of a similar use of the term during her February announcement of her candidacy has been airing in a political ad across Iowa since last month.

In July, DeSantis promised during a social conservative conference in Des Moines to kill the federal government's effort to create digital currency. DeSantis described the effort as "a massive threat to American liberty and on Jan. 20, 2025, it goes to the ash heap of history in this country."

DeSantis often uses a variation, as he did at a fundraiser for Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird last month. In a regular refrain condemning teachings on race and gender in schools, he told the audience at the Dallas County fairgrounds west of Des Moines, "As president we'll be sure to leave the woke agenda in the dustbin of history where it belongs."

In a twist, DeSantis' modification actually echoes Russian revolutionary Leon Trotsky, who told his political rivals in 1917 to "go where you belong from now on, into the dustbin of history."

Reagan and other leading anti-communists were well-studied on the writings and speeches of Trotsky and Vladimir Lenin, Dolan said, making the line from Reagan's 1982 speech an unmistakable slap.

"We were laughing so hard because he had dared to turn their rhetoric back on them," Dolan said. "So, he quite deliberately was using it to throw it back in the communists' faces."

Among the GOP candidates running for president today, Pence most often cites Reagan. Pence notes his pride in advising the Trump administration's Supreme Court nominees "that sent Roe. v. Wade to the ash heap of history where it belongs," as he said during a meeting of thousands of evangelical conservatives in Des Moines on Sept. 16.

Pence attributes his conversion from Democrat to Republican to hearing Reagan speak in 1980, and often mentions using Reagan's Bible during his swearing-in as vice president in January 2017.

Vivek Ramaswamy, the 38-year-old biotech entrepreneur from Ohio who is also running for the White House, has used references from the Reagan era against Pence. During the GOP presidential debate in Milwaukee last month, Pence objected to Ramaswamy's claim that the United States was undergoing an "identity crisis." by saying, "We just need government as good as our people."

"It's not morning in America," Ramaswamy retorted, reviving a line from a memorable Reagan's 1984 reelection campaign ad that sought to demonstrate what the country had overcome in Reagan's first term. "We live in a dark moment."

Trump is skipping the California debate. Despite his stylistic differences with Reagan, Trump long ago adopted as his slogan "make America great again," a line from Reagan's Republican National Convention acceptance speeches in 1980 and 1984.

"Reagan's entire approach was somehow or other — almost the deep structure of the universe itself — that the underlying reality is good," said Robinson, the former Reagan speechwriter who is now a policy fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institute. "We need a renewal, and we begin by searching for a candidate who believes, as Reagan did, that it's possible, as indeed of course it is."

4 in 5 Black adults see racist depictions in the news either often or sometimes, says new study

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — In a new study, Black Americans expressed broad concerns about how they are depicted in the news media, with majorities saying they see racist or negative depictions and a lack of effort to cover broad segments of their community.

Four in five Black adults say they see racist or racially insensitive depictions of their race in the news either often or sometimes, according to the Pew Research Center.

Three years after George Floyd's killing triggered a racial reckoning in the news media, Pew took its first

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 74 of 78

broad-based look at Black attitudes toward the media with a survey of nearly 5,000 Black adults this past winter and follow-up focus groups.

The survey found 63% of respondents saying news about Black people is often more negative than it is toward other racial or ethnic groups, with 28% saying it is about equal.

"It's not surprising at all," said Charles Whitaker, dean of the Medill journalism school at Northwestern University. "We've known both anecdotally, and through my personal experience with the Black press, that Blacks have long been dissatisfied with their coverage.

"There's a feeling that Black Americans are often depicted as perpetrators or victims of crime, and there are no nuances in the coverage," Whitaker said.

That attitude is reflected in the Pew study's finding that 57% of respondents say the media only covers certain segments of Black communities, compared to 9% who say that a wide variety is depicted.

"They should put a lot more effort into providing context," said Richard Prince, a columnist for the Journal-isms newsletter, which covers diversity issues. "They should realize that Blacks and other people of color want to be portrayed as having the same concerns as everybody else, in addition to hearing news about African American concerns."

Advertising actually does a much better job of showing Black people in situations common to everybody, raising families or deciding where to go for dinner, he said.

Prince said he's frequently heard concerns about Black crime victims being treated like suspects in news coverage, down to the use of police mug shots as illustrations. He recently convened a journalist's roundtable to discuss the lingering, notorious issue of five Black men who were exonerated after being accused of attacking a white jogger in New York's Central Park in the 1980s.

During a time of sharp partisan differences, the study found virtually no difference in attitudes toward news coverage between Black Democrats and Republicans, said Katerina Eva Matsa, director of news and information research at Pew.

For example, 46% of Republicans and 44% of Democrats say that news coverage largely stereotyped Black people, Pew said.

Negative attitudes toward the press tended to increase with income and education levels, Matsa said. While 57% of those in lower income levels said news coverage about Black people was more negative than it was about other groups. That number jumped to 75% of wealthier respondents, the study found.

A large majority of those surveyed, young and old, expressed little confidence that things would improve much in their lifetime.

While 40% of survey participants said it was important to see Black journalists report on issues about race and racial inequality, the race of journalists wasn't that important about general news.

Prince said it's important for journalists to know history; he wrote on Monday about the idea of a government shutdown was raised in 1879 when former Confederates in Congress wanted to deny money to protect Black people at the polls, and how the filibuster started to prevent civil rights legislation.

At Northwestern, professors are trying to teach students of the importance of having a broader sense of the communities that they're covering, Whitaker said. Medill is also a hub for solutions journalism, which emphasizes coverage of people trying to solve societal problems.

"We're trying to get away from parachute journalism," he said.

Prince said there was notable progress, post-Floyd, in the hiring of Black journalists into leadership roles in the media. Unfortunately, the news industry continues to contract while social media increases in importance, he said.

"We're integrating an industry that's shrinking," he said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 75 of 78

Brooks Robinson Appreciation: In Maryland in the 1960s, nobody was like No. 5

By BEN WALKER Associated Press

ROCKVILLE, Md. (AP) — Hall of Fame third baseman Brooks Robinson died Tuesday at the age of 86. Among his many fans in Maryland during his playing days was Ben Walker, a young left-hander who would go on to cover baseball for The Associated Press for more than 40 years. Walker retired in March, but he wrote this appreciation of Robinson for the AP from his childhood home after hearing the news.

We still have a charmed patch of grass in our backyard, plucked from the very spot where Brooks made that play.

Growing up in Maryland in the 1960s, Brooks Robinson was a god. Every kid wanted to wear his No. 5. Even us lefties tried to play third base like him.

We imitated his aw-shucks Arkansas twang. We copied his relaxed, shoulders-bouncing jog off the field. If we could've worn a short-brimmed batting helmet like he did, we would've.

I was in fourth grade in 1966 when Mrs. Rogers gave our class a project to teach us how the post office worked. We were supposed to write a letter to someone and have them write back. Most students wrote to their grandparents or a classmate.

But I wrote to my beloved Baltimore Orioles, asking for Brooks Robinson's autograph.

Understandably, I didn't get anything back. So a few weeks later, my mom wrote to the team president, explaining that her son was in danger of getting a failing grade. She also added that I was a promising, 8-year-old pitcher and would never play for the Orioles if they didn't at least write back saying they got my letter.

Within days, a large envelope came to our mailbox in Rockville. Inside, a beautiful glossy picture of Brooksie with this signature: To Benjy. Good Luck. Brooks Robinson.

I have it in a frame now, a cherished part of my childhood.

That 1966 season was magical. We'd go hours early to Memorial Stadium to watch infield practice, mesmerized as Brooks made perfect throw after perfect throw to big Boog Powell at first base.

Boosted by the great Frank Robinson, the elegant Paul Blair and the smooth Jim Palmer, the Orioles won their first World Series championship. The famed picture of Brooks leaping across the diamond toward Dave McNally after the final out of sweeping the Dodgers, Brooks' sheer exhilaration, we all wanted to be him that October afternoon.

Five decades after I moved away from Maryland, my mom has preserved the door to my boyhood bedroom. It is covered with sports decals from back then and features a "Year of the Bird" sticker from that year. My friend KG, she calls it "the shrine" — I kind of feel that way now, with Brooks gone.

In the 1970 World Series, the whole baseball world got to see what we'd been watching for years in Baltimore.

My dad took me out of school to go to the clinching Game 5 against Cincinnati. We moved down from the upper deck in the late innings with the Orioles way ahead. We were sitting behind Baltimore's third base dugout when Brooks cemented his MVP performance by making a diving, backhanded catch on a liner by Johnny Bench.

Moments later, it was over and fans rushed onto the field to celebrate. My dad gave me an approving nod. Go ahead.

So I ran out there, too. And I had my spot picked out — I went to the edge of the grass near where Brooks landed in foul territory after thwarting Bench, and pulled up a small plot of sod.

That night, we planted it in the backyard, near an oak tree. I wish I could say it was the shiniest, frothiest, greenest piece of grass of all time. It wasn't. That didn't matter, it was where Brooks had been.

I'm sure the remnants of the original sprouts are long gone. But we still point toward the spot, knowing the legacy of Brooks and certain our appreciation for what he meant will grow there forever.

Parents in the neighborhood often praised Brooks as much for his humility as his home runs. I saw that

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 76 of 78

first-hand in 1983 when I was preparing to cover his first-ballot induction into the Hall of Fame.

I called him to arrange a phone interview and naturally told him I'd grown up cheering for him. Brooks said if it was easier, we could talk in person. He'd be at a Crown gas station in suburban Baltimore that weekend — he did promotional work for the company — and invited me down from New York to join him.

For an hour that Saturday, he sat under the blazing sun in a beach chair between the gas pumps, no handlers around him. Signing autographs, shaking hands and telling stories, he didn't give off a single sign of being such a huge, revered star.

The only hint came in the way people approached him, as if they were greeting the Pope. It took all of about 3 seconds for Brooks to even the playing field, making them feel as if they were chatting with their next-door neighbor.

Without a doubt, he was the nicest, kindest ballplayer I ever met.

A few days ago, I was playing pickup softball in Central Park. Standing at third base during batting practice, a guy hit a hot shot at me and I dodged out of the way, not wanting to get zinged.

"You're no Brooks Robinson!" an old-timer playfully shouted.

That's for sure. On and off the field, there was only one Brooks Robinson.

Congress says it wants to avoid a shutdown. But the House and Senate are moving even further apart.

By LISA MASCARO and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Congress is starkly divided over very different paths to preventing a federal shutdown — the Senate charging ahead with a bipartisan package to temporarily fund the government but the House slogging through a longshot effort with no real chance of finishing by Saturday's deadline.

With days remaining before a federal closure, the stakes are rising with no resolution at hand.

A shutdown would furlough millions of federal employees, leave the military without pay, disrupt air travel and cut off vital safety net services, and it would be politically punishing to lawmakers whose job it is to fund government.

President Joe Biden, who earlier this year reached a budget deal with Speaker Kevin McCarthy that became law, believes it's up to the House Republicans to deliver.

"A deal is a deal," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre. "This is for them to fix."

Late Tuesday, the Senate pushed ahead in sweeping bipartisan fashion to break the stalemate, advancing a temporary measure, called a continuing resolution, or CR, to keep government running through Nov. 17. It would maintain funding at current levels with a \$6 billion boost for Ukraine and \$6 billion for U.S. disaster relief, among other provisions.

It's on track for Senate approval later this week but faces long odds in the House.

The Republican McCarthy, pushed by a hard-right flank that rejects the deal he made with Biden and is demanding steep spending cuts, showed no interest in the Senate's bipartisan effort — or the additional money for Ukraine.

"I think their priorities are bad," he said about the Senate effort.

Instead, McCarthy is reviving plans for the House Republicans' own stopgap funding measure that would slash federal spending by 8% for many agencies and attach a hardline border security measure that conservatives are demanding. He's planning a Friday vote, but Biden, Democrats and even some Republicans have said the package is too extreme.

McCarthy is trying to goad Biden into negotiations over the border package, highlighting the record numbers of migrants crossing the Southern border with Mexico, but the speaker has little leverage at this point and the White House has downplayed the prospect of talks.

But first, McCarthy is expected to spend much of this week trying to pass some of the bills needed to fund government agencies — Defense, Homeland Security, Agriculture and State and Foreign Operations.

It's a daunting task ahead. The House Republicans advanced those bills late Tuesday after a days of

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 77 of 78

setbacks and disarray, but it is not at all clear McCarthy has the votes from his hard-right flank to actually pass the four bills this week.

One of the key right-flank holdouts, Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, R-Ga., who is fighting for more cuts and opposes the funds for Ukraine, said she voted against advancing the package because the bills are headed toward defeat anyway.

"I'm trying to save everybody from wasting time," she said.

The 79-page Senate bill would fund the government at current levels and would include the Ukraine and U.S. disaster aid that has been in jeopardy. It also includes an extension of Federal Aviation Administration provisions expiring Saturday.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the Senate bill shows "bipartisanship can triumph over extremism."

Schumer said, "We all know together that a government shutdown will be devastating, devastating to this country."

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell appeared on board with the bipartisan Senate plan, saying, "Government shutdowns are bad news."

The hard-right House Republicans are being egged on by Donald Trump, the front-runner in the 2024 Republican presidential primary, who has urged them to stand firm in the fight or "shut it down."

It is setting up a split-screen later this week as House Republicans hold their first Biden impeachment inquiry hearing probing the business dealings of his son, Hunter Biden. It also comes as former Trump officials are floating their own plans to slash government and the federal workforce if the former president retakes the White House.

McCarthy, who said he spoke to McConnell on Tuesday, brushed off Trump's influence as just a negotiating tactic, even as the far-right members keep torpedoing his plans.

While their numbers are just a handful, the hard-right Republican faction holds sway because the House majority is narrow and McCarthy needs almost every vote from his side for partisan bills without Democratic support.

The speaker has given the holdouts many of their demands, but it still has not been enough as they press for more — including gutting funding for Ukraine, which Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told Washington last week is vital to winning the war against Russia.

The hard-line Republicans want McCarthy to drop the deal he made with Biden and stick to earlier promises for spending cuts he made to them in January to win their votes for the speaker's gavel, citing the nation's rising debt load.

Republican Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida, a key Trump ally leading the right flank, said on Fox News Channel that a shutdown is not optimal but "it's better than continuing on the current path that we are to America's financial ruin."

Gaetz, who has also threatened to call a vote to oust McCarthy from his job, wants Congress to do what it rarely does anymore: debate and approve each of the 12 annual bills needed to fund the various departments of government — typically a process that takes weeks, if not months.

Even if the House is able to complete its work this week on some of those bills, which is highly uncertain, they would still need to be merged with similar legislation from the Senate, another lengthy process.

Today in History: September 28, Alexander Fleming discovers penicillin

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 28, the 271st day of 2022. There are 94 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 28, 1928, Scottish medical researcher Alexander Fleming discovered penicillin, the first effective

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, Sept. 28, 2023 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 096 ~ 78 of 78

tive antibiotic.

On this date:

In 1781, American forces in the Revolutionary War, backed by a French fleet, began their successful siege of Yorktown, Virginia.

In 1841, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow completed his poem "Excelsior."

In 1850, flogging was abolished as a form of punishment in the U.S. Navy.

In 1920, eight members of the Chicago White Sox were indicted for allegedly throwing the 1919 World Series against the Cincinnati Reds. (All were acquitted at trial, but all eight were banned from the game for life.)

In 1924, three U.S. Army planes landed in Seattle, having completed the first round-the-world trip by air in 175 days.

In 1939, during World War II, Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union signed a treaty calling for the partitioning of Poland, which the two countries had invaded.

In 1958, voters in the African country of Guinea overwhelmingly favored independence from France.

In 1962, a federal appeals court found Mississippi Gov. Ross Barnett in civil contempt for blocking the admission of James Meredith, a Black student, to the University of Mississippi.

In 1995, Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and PLO chairman Yasser Arafat signed an accord at the White House ending Israel's military occupation of West Bank cities and laying the foundation for a Palestinian state.

In 2000, capping a 12-year battle, the government approved use of the abortion pill RU-486.

In 2018, reversing course, President Donald Trump agreed to the demands of Democrats for a deeper FBI investigation of Supreme Court nominee Brett Kavanaugh.

In 2019, voters in Afghanistan went to the polls to elect a president for the fourth time since a U.S.-led coalition ousted the Taliban regime in 2001; the vote was marred by violence, Taliban threats and widespread allegations of mismanagement.

In 2020, the worldwide death toll from the coronavirus pandemic topped 1 million, according to a count by Johns Hopkins University.

In 2021, testifying before the Senate Armed Services Committee, Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called the 20-year war in Afghanistan a "strategic failure," and said he had favored keeping several thousand troops in the country to prevent a collapse of the U.S.-backed government and a rapid takeover by the Taliban.

In 2022, Hurricane Ian barreled ashore in southwestern Florida as a massive Category 4 storm. About 2.5 million people were ordered to evacuate before the storm hit the coast with maximum sustained winds of 150 mph (241 kph).

Today's Birthdays: Actor Brigitte Bardot is 89. Actor Joel Higgins is 80. Singer Helen Shapiro is 77. Actor Vernee Watson is 74. Movie writer-director-actor John Sayles is 73. Rock musician George Lynch is 69. Zydeco singer-musician C.J. Chenier (sheh-NEER') is 66. Actor Steve Hytner is 64. Actor-comedian Janeane Garofalo (juh-NEEN' guh-RAH'-fuh-loh) is 59. Country singer Matt King is 57. Actor Mira Sorvino is 56. TV personality/singer Moon Zappa is 56. Actor-model Carre Otis is 55. Actor Naomi Watts is 55. Country singer Karen Fairchild (Little Big Town) is 54. Singer/songwriter A.J. Croce is 52. Country singer Mandy Barnett is 48. Rapper Young Jeezy is 46. World Golf Hall of Famer Se Ri Pak is 46. Actor Peter Cambor is 45. Writer-producer-director-actor Bam Margera is 44. Actor Melissa Claire Egan is 42. Actor Jerrika Hinton is 42. Neo-soul musician Luke Mossman (Nathaniel Rateliff & the Night Sweats) is 42. Pop-rock singer St. Vincent is 41. Comedian/actor Phoebe Robinson is 39. Rock musician Daniel Platzman (Imagine Dragons) is 37. Actor Hilary Duff is 36. Actor Keir Gilchrist is 31.