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Service Notice: Richard Sanderson

Services for Richard Sanderson, 93, of Conde will be 11:00 a.m., Wednesday, October 4th at the United Methodist Church, Conde. The Rev. Rob Moorlach will officiate. Inurnment will follow in the Conde City Cemetery under the direction of Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton.

Visitation will be held for one hour prior to services at the church.

Richard passed away September 27, 2023 at Wilmot Care Center.

www.paetznick-garness.com

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

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

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The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

province, according to Reuters. The suicide bomb occurred during a rally celebrating the birthday of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad.

Meteorologists said that Tropical Storm Philippe and Tropical Storm Rina, which are both moving over the Atlantic Ocean, could potentially merge into a larger storm. It is yet to be determined if either will make landfall in the U.S.

Proud Boys member Christopher Worrell, who went missing just before he was set to be sentenced for his role in the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol, has been arrested by the FBI.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken has urged India to cooperate with a Canadian investigation into the death of Sikh separatist Hardeep Singh Nijjar. The probe has frayed tensions between Ottawa and New Delhi.

Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban said that "very difficult questions" would need to be answered before the European Union could begin membership talks with Ukraine. Bloc members are due to decide in December whether to allow Kyiv to begin accession negotiations.

The Detroit Lions defeated the Green Bay Packers 34-20 at Lambeau Field on Thursday night, placing the 3-1 Lions at the top of the NFC North.

The Ryder Cup, the biennial men's golf tournament between U.S. and European teams, began today at the Marco Simone Golf and Country Club in Italy.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Deputy Defense Minister Yunus-Bek Yevkurov and former Wagner commander Andrey Troshev to discuss "social guarantees" for anyone who had fought to "defend the fatherland," according to a statement from the Kremlin..

What to Watch in the Day Ahead

Donald Trump and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis will be keynote speakers at the California GOP Fall 2023 Convention in Anaheim.

U.S. prosecutors face a deadline to obtain a return of an indictment by a grand jury President Joe Biden's son, Hunter, in his tax case under the Speedy Trial Act. Hunter was indicted earlier this month for allegedly purchasing a firearm while using illegal drugs.

The 2023 Ryder Cup matches begin at Marco Simone Golf and Country Club in Guidonia Montecelio, northeast of Rome, Italy. The 44th edition will run through Oct 1. The U.S. currently holds the cup following their 19-9 victory over Europe in 2021..

Talking Points

"There's something dangerous happening in America now. There's an extremist movement that does not share the basic beliefs of our democracy: The MAGA movement. There's no question that today's Republican Party is driven and intimidated by MAGA Republican extremists. Their extreme agenda, if carried out, would fundamentally alter the institutions of American democracy as we know it." President Joe Biden during a speech Thursday in Arizona.

"We're happy WGA came to an agreement, but one size doesn't fit all. We look forward to resuming talks with the AMPTP," SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher told CNN ahead of negotiation talks after the Writers Guild of America (WGA) strike officially came to an end.

An appeals court denied Donald Trump's request to delay trial in the civil lawsuit filed against him by New York Attorney General Letitia James, days after a judge ruled he had committed fraud for years.

Netflix and Hulu are down in some locations after reportedly being hacked by a group called Anonymous Sudan, who are protesting LGBTQ+ content on the streaming platforms. The group claimed it brought Netflix down for 30 minutes.

At least 52 people were killed and dozens more injured in an explosion outside a mosque in Pakistan's Balochistan

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**SOUTH DAKOTA
NEWS WATCH**

Inform. Enlighten. Illuminate.

South Dakota road hunting laws the most lax in the Great Plains

By Abbey Stegenga
South Dakota News Watch

MIDLAND, S.D. — No neighboring state is as liberal as South Dakota when it comes to traveling with loaded guns and hunting on, along or over roads.

Despite accidents in which hunters have been killed or wounded, it remains legal for a hunter to drive with a loaded, uncased firearm along almost any highway or road except an interstate.

The hunter can pull over, exit the vehicle and then fire at pheasants, waterfowl or other small game from the pavement or the ditch – even at a bird flying across the travel lanes.

Hunters cannot fire within 660 feet of any church, school, occupied dwelling or livestock.

With few exceptions – special permits granted to handicapped hunters or people trying to kill predators such as coyotes — hunters are not allowed to shoot from the vehicle.

Even though driving with a loaded gun while on the hunt is legal, some law enforcement officers and hunter safety teachers say it is dangerous.

“It’s kind of been a strong issue with me, that it may be legal but it’s not smart,” said Ron Kolbeck of Salem, who has taught state HuntSAFE programs for more than 20 years. “I try to address what is the safest way and not just what’s legal.”

Numerous hunters have been injured in South Dakota while road hunting or while carrying a loaded gun in a vehicle, according to state records.

From 2003 to 2013, 29 vehicle-related incidents leading to four deaths were reported. From 2015 to 2018, officials documented 10 incidents involving road hunting or gun transport.

In addition to a couple close calls where family members had guns discharged in a vehicle, a co-worker of Kolbeck’s lost her husband to a hunting accident in South Dakota in 2008 when a loaded gun went off in a vehicle, killing him.



In South Dakota, it is legal to hunt small game from roads in South Dakota. (Photo: Shutterstock)

Road hunting a South Dakota tradition

Laws allowing hunting in the rights-of-way, or the land under and alongside a highway or road, are part of a longstanding hunting tradition in South Dakota.

The main target of so-called road hunting in South Dakota is the state’s famous pheasant population.

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The birds drew nearly 128,000 hunters in 2022, about 58% from other states. Hunters harvested more than 1.1 million birds during the pheasant hunting season that started in mid-October and ended Jan. 31.

Many hunters view road hunting as safe if done properly and see it as a way for people who don't have access to private land to hunt in areas where target animals congregate.

Road hunting also makes hunting much easier because it doesn't require a bird dog, a large hunting party or long walks through a field. Game animals can be readily seen and pursued.

"There are people who have no place to hunt, and that's where they are going to hunt, and we're totally fine with it," said Rory Ehlers, operator of the Dakota Prairie Hunting reserve near Midland.

"Sometimes when you're an individual, it's hard to walk 100 acres by yourself, or they could be older, so road hunting is the only option they have."



While it is legal in South Dakota to shoot pheasants or other small game on, along or even across paved and gravel roads and rights-of-way, like this section of land in Stanley County, most hunter safety teachers and law enforcement officers recommend against it. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News

Watch)

Not all hunters supportive of laws

But road hunting is unpopular among some members of the state's pheasant preserve hunting industry. At a Game, Fish & Parks Department listening session in 2018, some preserve owners complained that road hunters routinely break safety rules and laws and put their guests in danger by exiting vehicles in a state of "pheasant fever."

"We've had several near-misses and one of our guests was shot in the head by road hunters," one session attendee wrote. "We have also witnessed road hunters shooting out of windows."

Animals must be in the right-of-way or flying over it before they can legally be hunted from the roads and ditches. Hunters are allowed to retrieve birds that are shot and fall onto private property as long as they do not bring their gun during the retrieval.

But Ehlers and others say road hunters under the influence of adrenaline sometimes "push the laws to the limit" in order to take a bird.

"When the only place a person can find a bird is next to a preserve, it leads to a lot of hunting illegally because they are not road hunting 'the right way,'" one GFP session attendee commented. "When the preserve owner confronts the road hunter, it either leads to a chase or a confrontation because all hunters feel it is their right to road hunt and very few know the laws."

Statistics illustrate the dangers of road hunting

Hunting carries inherent risks that, according to hunter safety teachers, can be minimized through a combination of following all laws, using common sense and engaging in practices that limit exposure to harm.

Each year, several South Dakota hunters are injured or killed while in the field, according to Patrick Klotzbach, who has worked as a HuntSAFE Coordinator for the GFP.

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“There are people who have no place to hunt, and that’s where they are going to hunt, and we’re totally fine with it.”

Rory Ehlers, operator of the Dakota Prairie Hunting reserve

From 1988 to 2018, the state recorded 920 hunting incidents involving injury or death. During that period, 34 deaths mostly from firearm incidents occurred, though heart attacks and drownings while hunting are also included in that number.

The vast majority of injuries occur during pheasant hunts when hunters are struck by pellets from shotgun shells fired by others in their party who swing the gun to follow a flying bird or who shoot unknowingly into other hunters ahead of them in a field.

But road hunting factors into many of the incidents:

- A hunter was shot while driving from one hunting spot to another with a loaded gun in Gregory County in October 2015.
- A passenger with his arm out the window of a passing truck was struck by pellets from a road hunter firing from a ditch in Hanson County in November 2016.
- A hunter shot himself in the foot while exiting a vehicle to shoot at a pheasant in a ditch in Hutchinson County in December 2016.
- And a man shot himself with a rifle while entering his truck in Lyman County in November 2017.

Klotzbach said he and other hunter safety trainers stress that guns should be unloaded around or in the vehicle even if it is legal.

“I always stress safety, even if it’s not against the law,” he said. “Usually it’s carelessness, or buck fever or pheasant fever becomes a factor.”

In South Dakota, a road hunter who puts another person in danger or fear of serious physical harm is guilty of a Class 1 misdemeanor, which carries a maximum penalty of a \$1,000 fine.

South Dakota laws most permissive of road hunting

The laws in states surrounding South Dakota differ widely, though no other state allows both loaded guns in vehicles and road hunting in the right-of-way.

Of neighboring states, North Dakota hunting laws are the closest to those in South Dakota.

Road hunting is legal on public rights-of-ways in North Dakota, though most roadside ditches and fields are privately owned in the state. It is the hunter’s responsibility to know whether land is private. A gun can be uncased in vehicles in North Dakota but cannot have a bullet in the chamber.

In Iowa, shooting a rifle on or over public highways is illegal. Guns must be unloaded and cased in a vehicle, except as permitted by law.

In Nebraska, shotguns must be unloaded but can be uncased in a vehicle, while rifles can be loaded and uncased. Hunting from the road or in rights-of-ways is illegal in the Cornhusker State.

In Minnesota, it is legal to road hunt for small game on public roads, but guns must be unloaded at all times in a vehicle, though they can be uncased.

Montana does not prohibit hunters from carrying weapons in their vehicles, according to the Montana Department of Justice. However, it is illegal to hunt on, from or across any public roadway unless the individual has a certified disability and a permit to hunt from a vehicle.

Mike Lee, who spent a decade as a game warden in the field, said that the law against road hunting

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doesn't always stop the practice. He recalled a mishap a few years ago when a hunter pulled over to shoot at a grouse and shot out the window of an oncoming semi.

"This is one of our more common violations in Montana," he said. "There's definitely public safety concerns with people hunting off a public roadway."

Road hunting can be dangerous even when done legally

The danger in driving with a loaded, uncased firearm is that there is almost no safe way to ensure the muzzle of the gun is pointed in a safe direction, one of the most basic tenets of any hunting safety course, Kolbeck said.

The risk in hunting from the roadway, shoulders or ditches is that hunters must not only ensure the safety of themselves and others in their hunting party but also drivers of vehicles or motorcycles that are passing by on the road, said Andy Alban, who has worked as a law enforcement administrator for the South Dakota GFP.

"You could shoot across the road, but I don't typically personally do that," Alban said. "Obviously, there's another safety concern in play there since you've got to be aware of oncoming traffic."

The vexing part of road hunting is that even when done legally, it can be dangerous to the hunter and unsuspecting people nearby, said Dave Olsen, owner of Pheasant Phun hunting preserve near the Beadle County town of Hitchcock.

Olsen said he has sometimes guided a group of clients on a hunt when a road hunter has pulled up nearby and shot without looking out for hunters in his party.

"Somebody who is completely law-abiding, a bird flies out toward my hunting party and he shoots," Olsen said. "A lot of people lose all common sense over a 6-pound bird."

Olsen said he supports road hunting as a practice but would like to see the 660-foot safety zone expanded to include roads along hunting preserves.

Barely surviving a road-hunting accident

A case of buck fever and disregard for basic safety rules nearly cost Lon Reidburn of Clark his legs – and his life.

Reidburn was road hunting with a neighbor on Nov. 22, 1982, when they saw some deer and pulled over to get a shot.

As his friend moved across the front seat past the steering while holding his loaded rifle, it went off and the bullet struck Reidburn, who was standing outside the truck. The bullet shattered both his femurs and left him unable to move and bleeding profusely.

Soon after, Reidburn and his wife were told by doctors at a hospital in Watertown to "expect the worst" and that he was likely to lose his right leg. After a flight to Sioux Falls, a doctor saved both his legs, but Reidburn spent a year at home, out of work and needing constant care during recovery.

'That's not hunting, it's just destroying'

Reidburn rarely hunts now, and never for deer. He has become an advocate for stricter gun transport and road hunting laws in South Dakota and was featured in a video in 2014 as part of the state GFP safety promotional effort called "Get Outta the Truck."



Road hunters can target pheasants in areas along and on roadways. (Photo provided by the state of South Dakota)

“Driving up and down the road 50 mph and slamming on the brakes and jumping out to shoot something. That’s not hunting, it’s just destroying.”

Lon Reidburn, who was shot while road hunting.
He is now an advocate for stricter laws.



Reidburn, who had to give up his career as a carpenter in favor of selling insurance after the accident, said he is greeted with empathy when he meets with lawmakers but has yet to see a legislator make a formal proposal to stiffen hunting safety laws.

With a mix of anger over lax laws, disappointment in himself for hunting so carelessly, and sadness over the year he lost and frequent leg pain he endures, Reidburn continues to call for action against carrying loaded guns in vehicles and hunting from state roadways.

“Why would you carry something loaded in your vehicle? What does it teach the kids when you do that?”

Reidburn asked.

Reidburn said he still sees hunters take needless risks. He recalls seeing a road hunter jump from a truck to shoot at a pheasant as his unattended vehicle drove itself into a ditch.

“Driving up and down the road 50 mph and slamming on the brakes and jumping out to shoot something. That’s not hunting, it’s just destroying,” Reidburn said. “It’s just wrong, wrong. There’s just so many things that can go wrong there, why would you want to do that? They should put a stop to it now.”

— This article was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a non-profit journalism organization located online at sdnewswatch.org.

ABOUT

ABBIEY STEGENGA

Abbey Stegenga joined South Dakota News Watch as a 2023 summer intern through the Scripps-Howard Fund. She studies journalism, English and Spanish at Augustana University in Sioux Falls.



DANR Announces More Than \$19 Million for Statewide Environmental Projects

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) announced the Board of Water and Natural Resources has approved \$19,043,650 in grants and loans for drinking water, wastewater, and storm water, projects in South Dakota.

The \$19,043,650 total includes \$64,362 in grants and \$18,979,288 in low-interest loans including \$3,683,938 in principal forgiveness to be administered by the Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources.

"I am pleased to announce this financial assistance is available," said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. "Safe and reliable water and wastewater infrastructure helps protect our environment and strengthen communities for our kids and grandkids."

Funds were awarded from DANR's Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Program, Clean Water State Revolving Fund Program, and the Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program to the following:

Bowdle received an additional \$405,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to make wastewater system improvements. The project includes rehabilitating the sanitary sewer main to the wastewater ponds, installation of new PVC piping, a new lift station, manhole replacement, and upgrades to the wastewater treatment ponds. The city previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Brookings- Deuel Rural Water System received an additional \$1,600,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan to install 22 miles of 12-inch water main to meet the growing demands of rural customers including livestock and dairy operations; reduce the amount of water loss due to existing glued-joint pipe; and to interconnect the system's two primary water sources. In addition, six miles of 6-inch watermain will be installed to the Lake Cochrane service area to improve low pressures around the lake during periods of peak water use. The system previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The terms of the loan are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Claremont received a \$505,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$306,000 in principle forgiveness to replace a portion of their storm sewer water lines and make improvements to their lift station. The terms of the loan are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Clark Rural Water Systems received a \$610,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$485,000 in principle forgiveness for water system improvements for the Town of Raymond. Upon completion, the town will turn over the water system to Clark Rural Water System to operate, maintain, and provide potable water to the town's residents. The project will replace water mains and service lines, install water meters and pits, complete street repairs, and other necessary improvements as required. The terms of the loan are 2.75 percent for 30 years.

Garretson received a \$2,593,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to replace sanitary and storm sewer. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Garretson also received \$2,394,000 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,264,000 in principle forgiveness for to replace aging watermain that has exceeded its useful life. The loan terms are 3 percent for 30 years.

Hartford received an additional \$5,750,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan to construct a wastewater treatment facility to treat residential and industrial waste from Hartford and the surrounding area. The project will also upgrade Hartford's gravity collection system and install a new lift station and force

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main to the new facility. The city previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Medicine Mountain Scout Ranch received a \$73,000 Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program loan to increase water supply to meet permitted capacity. The project will furnish and install perforated HDPE pipe to provide an infiltration gallery. The terms of the loan are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

Weston Height Homeowners Association received \$899,288 Drinking Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$393,938 in principle forgiveness and received a \$64,362 Drinking Water SRF Construction grant. The project will include construction of a new water storage tank and installation of distribution system pipe to connect the new tank to the rest of the water system. The system previously received a funding package in April 2022 for this project. The loan terms are 2.125 percent for 30 years.

Whitewood received a \$4,150,000 Clean Water State Revolving Fund loan with \$1,235,000 in principle forgiveness to install a lift station and to construct an oxidation ditch to improve wastewater treatment capabilities and meet permitted discharge limits. The loan terms are 3.25 percent for 30 years.

The Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program, funded in part by revenues from the Petroleum Release Compensation Tank Inspection fee and the sale of lotto tickets, provides grants and loans for water, wastewater, and watershed projects. The Legislature annually appropriates dedicated water and waste funding for the Consolidated Water Facilities Construction Program through the Governor's Omnibus Water Funding Bill.

The State of South Dakota and the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency fund the Clean Water and Drinking Water State Revolving Fund Programs, which provide low-interest loans for wastewater, storm water, water conservation, nonpoint source projects, and public drinking water system projects. The programs are funded through a combination of federal appropriations, loan repayments, and bonds.

The board approved the funding at yesterday's meeting in Pierre.

GDILIVE.COM

Groton Area
Tigers

Friday Sept. 29, 2023
at Webster



Football game sponsored by Bary Keith at Harr Motors, BK Custom Ts & More, Bierman Farm Service, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Full Circle Ag, Greg's Repair, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Krueger Brothers, Locke Electric and Rix Farms/R&M Farms

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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

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Groton Community Transit

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

Dear Groton family,

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

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

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

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

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

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

Sincerely,

Dam Hansen & Eugenia Strom

Groton Transit

Steve Smith, Sherry Koehler, Topper Tostad, Dick Kolker



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

With two days until shutdown, Thune and GOP leaders eye border security package

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - SEPTEMBER 28, 2023 5:50 PM

WASHINGTON — Republican U.S. senators huddled behind closed doors Thursday, attempting to draft an amendment to the short-term government funding bill that would increase spending on border security and make policy changes.

The provision could help nudge U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy to put the broadly bipartisan measure up for a vote in that chamber, though the California Republican has remained noncommittal.

Congress has just two days before the new fiscal year begins Oct. 1, adding a sense of urgency to negotiations in both chambers of Congress. If a short-term spending bill is not law by then, the federal government would begin a partial shutdown.

Senate approval of the stopgap spending bill that would keep the government running through Nov. 17 is far from a guarantee. Without the consent of all 100 senators, the chamber cannot vote on final passage of the bill before the Saturday midnight deadline.

Senate Appropriations Chair Patty Murray, a Washington state Democrat, said she was open to having discussions on additional disaster relief funding and border security, though she stressed the stopgap spending bill is only meant to keep the government open while Congress works out agreement on the full-year spending bills.

"I know there are colleagues concerned about doing more on border security — something I am willing to continue to discuss," Murray said. "But time is of absolute essence here and a shutdown would mean the folks who are working at our Southern border would be forced to work without paychecks."

Thune: 'A lot of potential options' on border package

Senate Minority Whip John Thune, a South Dakota Republican, said he and others were discussing how to get border security provisions onto the stopgap spending bill, though he noted there are "a lot of potential options out there."

Thune said Senate GOP leaders were unlikely to try to remove \$6.1 billion in military and humanitarian aid for Ukraine from the short-term spending bill.

"We're going to have a more fulsome debate on what to do about Ukraine down the road," Thune said. "And we have a lot of ... national security hawks, who care deeply about the message that that sends."



Sen. John Thune, R-South Dakota, talks to members of the media as he leaves the Senate Chambers at the U.S. Capitol on Sept. 28, 2023, in Washington, D.C. (Kevin Dietsch/Getty Images)

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Kentucky Republican Sen. Rand Paul, wrote on X later Thursday that he would allow fast approval of the stopgap spending bill if the Ukraine funding was removed.

"To avoid a government shutdown, I will consent to an expedited vote on a clean CR without Ukraine aid on it," Paul wrote. "If leadership insists on funding another country's government at the expense of our own government, all blame rests with their intransigence."

South Carolina Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham said a handful of Republican senators are discussing both a spending boost and policy changes for the border security amendment.

"We're trying to come up with a border package that will, you know, move the ball forward in terms of securing the border and trying to find some bipartisan support for it," Graham said. "I think that's going to be necessary to get the House on board."

The group meeting Thursday included Republican Sens. Katie Britt of Alabama, Susan Collins of Maine, John Cornyn of Texas, Graham, Thom Tillis of North Carolina and Thune.

Collins, the top Republican on the spending panel, said it "is imperative that we avert a government shutdown."

"There's nothing good that comes from that," Collins said.

Britt said the group of Republican senators is "working diligently to make something happen."

"We're working on a number of options," she said. "We want to give ourselves the best path possible to keep the government open and shut down the border."

Votes in the House continue

House Republicans, who have yet to reach consensus on a short-term government funding bill of their own, were set to vote on some of the dozen full-year spending bills late Thursday night.

Those bills, written below the spending levels McCarthy agreed to in the debt limit deal, have no chance of passing the Democratically controlled Senate or getting President Joe Biden's support.

The House's full-year spending bills are also filled with conservative policy provisions that Democrats have repeatedly rebuked.

House Republicans released a short-term government funding proposal earlier this month, though GOP leaders haven't secured the votes needed to approve the bill. Discussions about how to fund the government in the short term were ongoing Thursday, though without significant progress.

McCarthy said earlier this week the House would probably vote on a stopgap spending bill Friday, but such a vote hasn't been scheduled.

House Freedom Caucus demands answers

More than 25 members of the House Freedom Caucus sent McCarthy a letter calling on him to answer six questions about funding the government, a signal they aren't yet convinced they should support a short-term spending bill.

"No Member of Congress can or should be expected to consider supporting a stop-gap funding measure without answers to these reasonable questions," they wrote. "We remain ready to continue working in good faith with our colleagues across the Republican Conference to advance appropriations; likewise, we expect you to take every step necessary to pass these bills — starting with the four bills now under consideration to fund approximately two-thirds of the federal government."

The letter was signed by Republican Reps. Scott Perry of Pennsylvania; Barry Moore of Alabama; Paul Gosar of Arizona; Lauren Boebert of Colorado; Byron Donalds, Anna Paulina Luna and Bill Posey of Florida; Andrew Clyde of Georgia; Mary Miller of Illinois; Clay Higgins of Louisiana; Andy Harris of Maryland; Eric Burlison of Missouri; Dan Bishop of North Carolina; Warren Davidson of Ohio; Josh Brecheen of Oklahoma; Jeff Duncan and Ralph Norman of South Carolina; Diana Harshbarger and Andy Ogles of Tennessee; Michael Cloud, Troy Nehls, Chip Roy, Keith Self and Randy Weber of Texas; Bob Good of Virginia; Alexander Mooney of West Virginia; and Tom Tiffany of Wisconsin

Perry, who chairs the House Freedom Caucus, declined to answer questions about the letter while heading to the House floor for votes Thursday afternoon.

Idaho Republican Rep. Mike Simpson, a senior appropriator, said he didn't know if GOP leaders were

working on a deal on a short-term spending bill, but he said members should vote on all dozen of the annual government funding bills.

Arkansas Republican Rep. Steve Womack, a senior appropriator, said House GOP lawmakers need to be "on record as being for something that prevents a shutdown," though he admitted party leaders have a difficult task ahead given certain personalities.

"I'm also very empathetic with leadership right now because they are trying to do the near impossible when you think about it, and that is appease people who may be ... unappeasable," Womack said.

Womack, however, said he wasn't happy GOP leaders used a procedural vote on a rule to pull Ukraine aid out of the Defense spending bill and move it into a stand-alone measure. The decisions came after House lawmakers voted overwhelmingly to reject an amendment that would have removed the funding from the Defense funding bill.

The decision, he said, was intended to secure the votes to pass the Defense spending measure, but it likely violated a long-held House Republican belief that provisions must be supported by a majority of GOP lawmakers to advance on the floor.

"It's just another movement of the goal posts," Womack said. "I know that's a trite saying now because we say it every day, but it's just one more example of how the conditions under which we are making decisions continue to evolve."

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.

COMMENTARY

How two dead South Dakotans continue to feed the world

SETH TUPPER

There are politicians who spend their entire careers pursuing power and fame, and there are others who set aside those ambitions long enough to make a lasting difference.

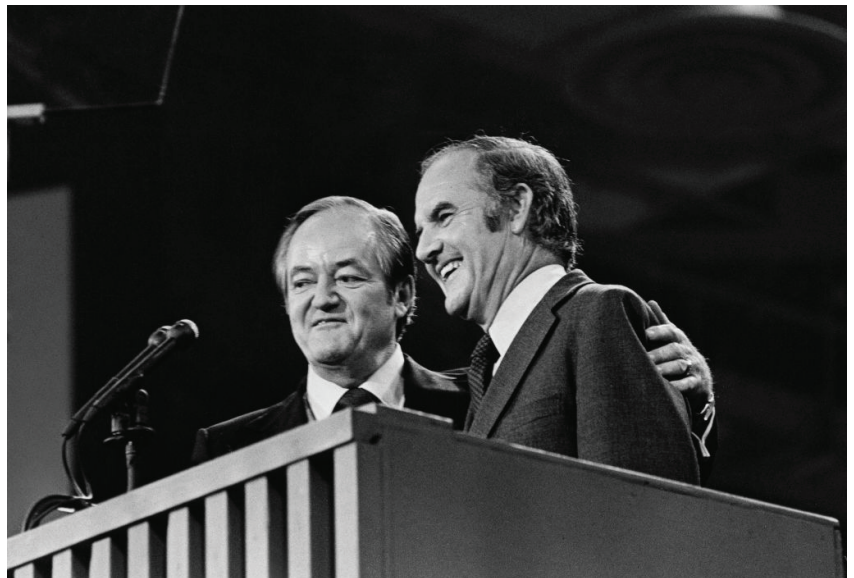
A reminder of that truism arrived recently in the form of a news release from the U.S. Department of Agriculture.

The release said the department is awarding a combined \$455 million of funding through two international food initiatives: Food for Progress, and the McGovern-Dole International Food for Education and Child Nutrition Program.

Yes, the latter program is named in part for that McGovern — George, the late congressman, senator and 1972 Democratic presidential nominee from South Dakota who devoted much of his career to addressing world hunger.

School meals for millions

When Congress and then-President George W. Bush authorized the creation of the McGovern-Dole program in 2002, they named it for McGovern and former Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kansas. They were both out of office by then but were chosen as the program's namesakes because of their long-time advocacy for programs addressing global childhood hunger.



South Dakota natives Hubert Humphrey, left, and George McGovern at the Democratic National Convention on July 13, 1972, at Miami Beach Convention Center in Florida. (Pictorial Parade/Archive Photos/Getty Images)

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The recent news release from the Ag Department said the McGovern-Dole program will award \$230 million to projects in the 2024 fiscal year, which will maintain the program's status as the largest donor to global school feeding programs. The project sites include Cameroon, Haiti, Mozambique, Nepal, Nicaragua, Sri Lanka and Togo.

Since its creation, the McGovern-Dole program has provided 5.5 billion school meals to 31 million children in 48 countries.

McGovern, who like Dole was a World War II veteran, was justifiably proud of the program and had a simple way of summarizing the benefits of feeding school kids. He said peace requires education, and "you can't educate a child who is hungry." He reasoned that feeding school kids around the world would not only help them learn, but could also motivate their parents to send them to school in the first place.

Food for Peace and Progress

The McGovern-Dole program and many other international food assistance efforts have their roots in the Food for Peace Act of 1954. A leading proponent of that legislation was another South Dakotan, Hubert Humphrey, who by then had moved to Minnesota, launched a long political career, and become a Democratic U.S. senator.

Humphrey thought U.S. agricultural surpluses held the potential to reduce conflict around the world, by feeding hungry people in poor countries.

In a 1959 speech, he described the approach as "a constructive American foreign policy designed to build a stable and enduring peace through the conquests of poverty, disease and suffering."

John F. Kennedy expanded Food for Peace when he became president in 1961, and he appointed McGovern as the program's director. McGovern was in political limbo at the time, having given up his U.S. House seat for an unsuccessful Senate campaign in 1960 (he ran again in 1962, won, and served in the Senate through 1980).

The modern Food for Progress program, a descendant of Food for Peace, will award \$225 million to projects in the 2024 fiscal year, according to the recent announcement from the Ag Department.

Food for Progress donates agricultural commodities to countries in need, and the commodities are sold on the local market. The proceeds are used to support agricultural, economic or infrastructure development programs.

Ambition and moral imperatives

The Ag Department cited the example of Burundi to illustrate how the McGovern-Dole program and Food for Progress work in tandem to promote peace and prosperity around the globe.

With the new funding, the McGovern-Dole program will provide the African nation — by some measures the poorest country in the world — with 6,000 metric tons of U.S. ag commodities and 2,000 metric tons of locally produced commodities for daily school meals to feed 80,000 children.

Funding through Food for Progress will help the Burundi Better Coffee Initiative with its goal to train and equip 60,000 households for work in the country's high-potential, underdeveloped coffee-farming industry.

That's the kind of work that's still happening 45 years after Humphrey's death, 11 years after McGovern's, and two years after Dole's.

All three men had personal ambition, as each of their ill-fated presidential campaigns showed. But they balanced that with a moral imperative to make the world a better place. And in large part due to their efforts, millions of less fortunate people around the world are better fed.

That's quite a legacy, and one that modern politicians would do well to emulate.

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

Noem invites California-based gun manufacturers to SD to escape new taxes

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - SEPTEMBER 28, 2023 3:12 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem is inviting California-based gun manufacturers to move their operations to South Dakota in response to California's new tax on guns and ammunition.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom signed nearly two dozen gun control measures into law on Tuesday, including a ban on carrying firearms in most public places and an 11% state tax on gun and ammunition sales, making California the first to impose a state tax of that kind on top of the existing 11% federal tax.

Revenue from the federal tax goes toward wildlife conservation and hunter education programs. Revenue from the new state tax will pay for school security improvements and gun violence prevention programs. The new tax goes into effect next July and is expected to be challenged in court.

According to the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, there were nearly 75 active firearm manufacturing facilities in California in 2021, the most recent year of available data. There were 20 firearm manufacturing facilities in South Dakota.

Gun manufacturers say they wonder if California's laws and regulations are meant to push them out, according to The Mercury News in San Jose.

"Recently, I'll be honest with you, we felt like this business in California has an expiration date," said Rifle Supply owner John Koukios.

Noem echoed that sentiment.

"Why would anyone want to live in a state where your Second Amendment rights are infringed?" she said in a news release.

She said the first bill she signed into law as governor guaranteed constitutional carry for South Dakotans — the right to carry a firearm without a permit. For those who still want a concealed carry permit (which is valid in some other states that require one), South Dakota was the first state to do away with the fees. Noem also celebrated the state's "Stand Your Ground" laws, which protect the right to claim self-defense in a shooting but have also had unintended consequences, according to some prosecutors.

Noem added that South Dakota's firearms industry has an economic impact of over \$400 million, referencing the success of gun accessory manufacturers Silencer Central, based in Sioux Falls, and Cole-TAC, based in the Black Hills.

Noem did not mention that South Dakota has a higher firearm mortality rate than California. In 2021, the most recent year of available data from the Centers for Disease Control, South Dakota had a firearm mortality rate of 14.3 out of 100,000 residents — or 128 deaths. California's firearm death rate was 9 per 100,000 residents — 3,576 deaths.

Of the 240 violent deaths in South Dakota in 2020, nearly half were caused by firearms, according to the 2020 state Department of Health violent death report (the most recent report available). Of the 180 suicides that year — which accounted for 75% of the total violent deaths — nearly half were caused by firearms. Two gun control bills failed during the 2023 legislative session.



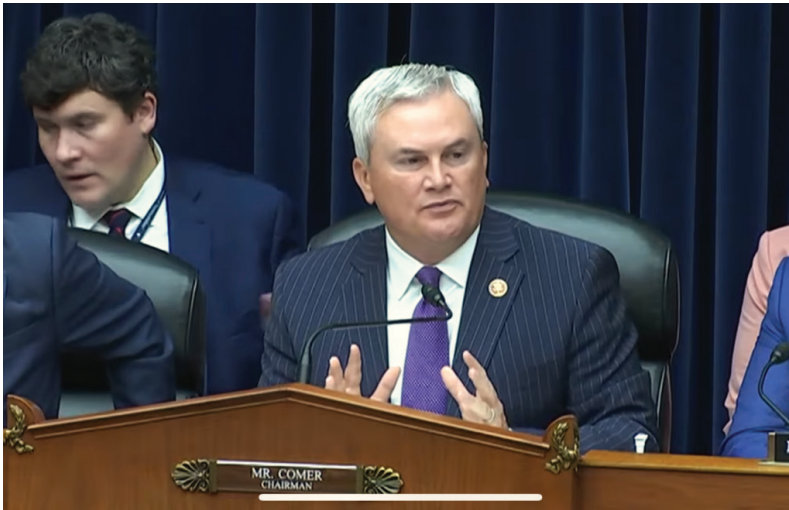
(Getty Images)

Newsom acknowledged that many of the gun control laws he signed on Tuesday might not survive legal challenges based on the U.S. Supreme Court's recent interpretations of the Second Amendment.

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

GOP witnesses at Biden impeachment hearing see insufficient evidence of wrongdoing so far

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - SEPTEMBER 28, 2023 5:37 PM



During the first U.S. House impeachment inquiry hearing, House Oversight and Accountability Chair James Comer of Kentucky alleged that Republicans will show evidence of how President Joe Biden "abused his public office for his family's financial gain." (Screenshot from committee webcast)

investigations from GOP lawmakers for the past year not yet revealed any evidence linking the president, but that the hearing was a distraction from the looming government shutdown on Saturday at midnight.

The top Democrat on the committee, Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, pulled up a countdown clock of the government shutdown on a laptop.

"If the Republicans had a smoking gun, or even a dripping water pistol, they would be presenting it today, but they've got nothing on Joe Biden," Raskin said.

The White House also slammed the hearing as a political stunt.

"Today, House Republicans wasted hours peddling debunked lies, even as their own witnesses admitted there is no evidence that merits this baseless stunt," White House spokesperson for oversight & investigations Sharon Yang said in a statement. "This flop was a failed effort to distract from their own chaos and inability to govern that is careening the country towards an unnecessary government shutdown that will hurt American families."

The U.S. Senate is on track to clear a short-term government funding bill in the days ahead. But it's unclear if it can happen before the deadline to avert a shutdown, or if House GOP leaders will put the bill up for a vote in that chamber.

WASHINGTON — With two days before a partial government shutdown, House Republicans held their first impeachment inquiry hearing Thursday over unproven allegations that President Joe Biden benefited from his son's business dealings overseas.

Witnesses tapped by Republicans for the House Oversight and Accountability Committee hearing acknowledged that there was no evidence showing that the president profited from his son Hunter Biden's business dealings when he was vice president in the Obama administration.

The chair of the committee, Republican Rep. James Comer of Kentucky, has spent the last nine months holding various hearings about Hunter Biden, but those investigations haven't revealed any direct link or that Biden made any financial gains.

Comer said that the committee will continue to "follow the money and the evidence to provide accountability."

Democrats argued that not only have the

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GOP witnesses

The Republican witnesses did not provide direct information of any wrongdoing by the president, but Republicans repeatedly asked them if the allegations that Biden used his official position to enrich his family were enough for an impeachment investigation.

Those witnesses were Jonathan Turley, a conservative legal expert, Bruce Dubinsky, a forensic accountant, and Eileen O'Connor, a former Department of Justice tax attorney.

Turley said that while he supported an impeachment inquiry, he did not believe there was enough evidence for articles of impeachment. He said Republicans would need more evidence for that.

"I do not believe that the evidence currently meets the standard of a high crime and misdemeanor needed for an article of impeachment," he said in his opening statement.

Dubinsky also said in his testimony that there was no clear evidence that the president is linked to "any improper or illicit activities."

"In my opinion, more information needs to be gathered and assessed before I would make such an assessment," he said.

There was one witness from Democrats, Michael Gerhardt, an impeachment expert and law school professor at the University of North Carolina.

He boiled down the impeachment inquiry to an analogy: "Hunter Biden is arrested for speeding in a car owned by his father, and the police go after the father," he said. "I don't think that's how the law should work. I don't think that's how impeachment should work."

Special Counsel David Weiss indicted Hunter Biden in connection with a gun purchase in 2018 in which he lied about his drug use.

Before the hearing, Republicans released bank records that had wire transfers from a Chinese businessman to Hunter Biden in 2019, and the address on the wire transfer form listed the president's home address.

Raskin asked Gerhardt if Republicans had enough evidence for the basis of an impeachment inquiry.

"If that's what exists for a basis of this inquiry, it is not sufficient," Gerhardt said.

Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York asked all four witnesses if they could provide first-hand witness accounts of any wrongdoing. All witnesses said no.

Democratic Rep. Maxwell Frost of Florida made similar remarks, and said that none of the Republican witnesses had provided answers.

"Let's pull back the curtain on what's really going on," Frost said. "There's no evidence of crime, only desperation and political pressure."

Democratic Rep. Jared Moskowitz of Florida called the hearing a disaster, and said even the Republican-picked witnesses concluded that there was no evidence.

"Boy, that is awkward," he said. "When you sling mud, you gotta have mud."

Accusations fly

Republicans argued that Hunter Biden used his family name as a brand to gain access to influential people.

GOP Reps. Mike Turner of Ohio and Glenn Grothman of Wisconsin accused Hunter Biden of "influence peddling."

Turley told lawmakers that the big question when it comes to Hunter Biden's business dealings is, "Did the president know?"

"The only way you'll be able to get that is to follow this evidence," Turley said.

Republican Ways and Means Chair Rep. Jason Smith of Missouri, who is not on the committee but gave a brief statement, also accused the Justice Department of protecting "the Biden family brand."

Comer said based on the witnesses' testimony, the next step for the committee is to request bank records. At the close of the hearing, Comer said he plans on issuing subpoenas for bank records of Hunter Biden, the president's brother James Biden, and "their affiliated companies."

"This committee, under my leadership, does not launch investigations based on predetermined conclusions," Comer said. "This is how an investigation is supposed to work."

Raskin said that the whole "hearing has been dominated by the word 'if.'"

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"You don't impeach a president over hypotheticals," he said.

No formal vote

Democrats such as Reps. Katie Porter of California and Raskin also criticized the fact that the House has not held a formal vote to begin an impeachment process.

Earlier this month, GOP House Speaker Kevin McCarthy announced that Comer, with assistance from House Judiciary Committee Chair Jim Jordan of Ohio and Smith, would lead the impeachment inquiry.

The inquiry allows for McCarthy to skirt a floor vote, as it's unclear if he has 218 votes for the House to launch a formal probe. The announcement comes as a far-right group of Republicans have pushed for an impeachment investigation and have threatened McCarthy's position as speaker.

Gerhardt said that one of the guardrails of the impeachment process is that a majority of the House is on board.

"(McCarthy's) members are demanding an impeachment, but through months and months of investigating our president have not revealed yet any evidence that he himself has committed crimes, but Speaker McCarthy wants to keep his job, so he is set on delivering an impeachment inquiry whether or not there is any evidence," Porter said.

Shutdown concerns

Democratic Reps. Summer Lee of Pennsylvania and Rashida Tlaib of Michigan raised concerns that the committee was focusing its energy on the impeachment inquiry rather than the looming government shutdown.

Lee called it a "sham" hearing.

"I care about the 7 million babies, children, mothers across this country who after Sunday will lose access to food and formula — over 10,000 in my district alone," she said.

Tlaib said that thousands in her district will be harmed if a government shutdown happens.

"Republicans are literally just putting aside and saying no, we're gonna do this instead," she said. "We're gonna go and bring the campaigning, the ugliest toxicity that our families don't need right now into this chamber instead of doing what we need to do, which is making sure we have a functional government that provides for our families," she said.

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

Congress takes aim at state animal welfare laws

15 states have rules requiring freedom of movement, cage-free design and minimum floor space for livestock

BY: KEVIN HARDY - SEPTEMBER 28, 2023 2:23 PM

Earlier this year, Oregon Democrats pushed through state legislation that allows local governments to require setbacks between neighbors and factory farming operations. The law prohibits farms from drawing unlimited amounts of free groundwater and requires farmers to apply for a permit before applying manure to their fields.

It's the kind of state regulation at risk if farm-state Republicans succeed in passing the EATS Act, which stands for Ending Agricultural Trade Suppression, when Congress renews the federal farm bill.

The EATS Act targets state-specific regulations on livestock production — particularly California's Proposition 12, which requires farms to meet specific standards providing animals freedom of movement, cage-free design and minimum floor space. Crucially, California's voter initiative also bars retailers from selling meats raised in other states that don't meet California's standards — viewed as a major imposition by agriculture interests across the country. After court delays, the Proposition 12 rules will be fully implemented as of Jan. 1, 2024.

The EATS Act would likely spell the end to California's Proposition 12 rules. But its broad language also would allow companies and individuals to challenge a range of laws regulating agriculture. An analysis by Harvard researchers estimates the provision could void more than 1,000 state and local laws and regula-

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tions concerning public health and safety.

"I think it's galloping in the wrong direction and exacerbates the really destructive imbalance between corporate power and local power," said Oregon Democratic state Sen. Jeff Golden, who sponsored the farm measure in his state.

"The environments, culture and values across the country vary dramatically," Golden said. "The relative value different communities put on the environment and so-called free enterprise vary dramatically. So, a rigid, standard regulatory structure makes no sense to me."

At least 15 states have passed laws regulating animal confinement, according to the Animal Legal Defense Fund. Many of those laws target the care of calves used for veal, hens for eggs and pigs for pork.

Chris Green, executive director of the fund, said farmers would ideally be subject to national standards, but the nation is simply too divided. Green researched the EATS Act in his previous role directing the animal law and policy program at Harvard University. He said it would create a race to the bottom by sanctioning industry challenges to state standards they don't like.

"I don't think the answer is that if you can't get a national standard, the standard has to be zero," he said. "And that's basically what the EATS Act is saying."

But backers of the EATS Act say farmers in their states shouldn't be beholden to the rules of lawmakers or voters in other states. Congress is still debating its reauthorization of the five-year farm bill, which expires Sept. 30. The legislation, expected to cost \$1.5 trillion over 10 years, funds crop, conservation and nutrition programs.

U.S. Sen Roger Marshall, a Kansas Republican, said American farmers already face protectionist policies from other countries that limit access to new markets.

"The last thing we need is a big state like California imposing its will on ag-heavy states like Kansas with regulations that will also restrict our ability to trade among the states," Marshall said in a news release introducing the EATS Act. "If California wants to regulate agriculture in its own state, that's fine, but California's rules should not apply to Kansas, whose legislatures never approved of these regulations."

Marshall's office did not respond to a request for comment. South Dakota's Rep. Dusty Johnson and Sen. John Thune, both Republicans, are among the cosponsors of the House and Senate version of the EATS Act, respectively.

The National Pork Producers Council, an industry group, did not agree to an interview for this story. But the association provided a two-page memo outlining its support for the EATS Act. The organization says California's livestock rules are not based on science, were crafted by those with "a limited understanding of pork production," and could cause market volatility and rising prices.

Animal advocates, small farmers and environmentalists view the EATS Act as a desperate attempt by the pork industry to override the will of voters and legislators across the country — and to reverse a recent loss at the U.S. Supreme Court. In May, the court in a 5-4 decision rejected a challenge from the National Pork Producers Council and upheld California's rules.

Writing for the majority, Justice Neil Gorsuch said businesses selling across state lines frequently face



A pig looks out of its pen at a hog feeding operation near Tribune, Kan. (Charlie Riedel/The Associated Press)

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various state laws and regulations. "While the Constitution addresses many weighty issues, the type of pork chops California merchants may sell is not on that list," he wrote.

The implications of the four-page EATS Act go well beyond meat production, threatening environmental protections and state laws on zoonotic diseases and invasive species, according to Patty Lovera, policy adviser for the Campaign for Family Farms and the Environment, a coalition of progressive groups fighting factory farming.

Lovera said the bill would clear the way for incessant attacks on state and local regulations. "It's not a coincidence that there's a maneuver being attempted to stick it on a must-pass bill, because it is so controversial," she said.

'Out of a horror film'

Trish Cook and her husband raise more than 30,000 pigs per year on their Iowa farm. Like most other large-scale farmers, she keeps sows in small confinements where staff can closely monitor their food intake and prevent them from fighting.

Cook, who is president of the Iowa Pork Producers Association, said it would cost her \$2 million to \$3 million to reconfigure animal housing and comply with California's livestock rules. Iowa, the nation's largest pig producer, grows about a third of the nation's pork supply.

"What the state ballot initiatives are doing is creating a patchwork of rules state by state that make it really challenging as someone who's trying to raise a delicious, nutritious product to be fed to people across the country and across the world," she said.

Lee Schulz, an agricultural economist at Iowa State University, said laws like California's create an unfunded mandate: Producers who want to meet specific state standards must invest mightily but can't expect higher prices in return. And such rules inject uncertainty into an already shaky pork marketplace, which is facing higher input costs but lower pork prices.

"You're adding higher costs to an industry that was already contracting," Schulz said. He added that while consumers may say they want crate-free pork, they're not necessarily willing to pay more for it.

Still, big producers including Hormel, Smithfield and Tyson have publicly said they intend to comply with the California law, Reuters reported.

Animal welfare advocates note that animals raised indoors can display unnatural behaviors and can live their whole lives without seeing blue skies.

Advocates have focused on sow farms, where female pigs are bred. Mother pigs can spend their entire pregnancy inside gestation crates, cages so small the pig can't even turn around. After giving birth, many are confined in farrowing crates, similar cages that allow the piglets to nurse but don't allow the sow to move around.

"The way the industry raises pigs in particular and how they treat mother sows is absolutely horrible," said Alex Cragun, director of government affairs at Mercy For Animals, a nonprofit fighting animal cruelty in farming. "It's atrocious. It's something out of a horror film."

The organization last month released a report on its undercover investigation at a Nebraska pork farm. Mercy For Animals said it witnessed pigs lying in their own waste, sick pigs that went untreated, sows giving birth directly into piles of feces and animal feed infested with maggots.

While he said he would like consumers to leave pork off their plates altogether, Cragun said efforts like Proposition 12 in California go a long way in improving conditions for livestock.

"This is their full existence. Something like the ability to turn around or the ability to lay down is a small piece of some sense of control. It doesn't completely change all these things, but it is one component, and it is an absolutely critical step towards a more just and stable food system."

Evolving practices

Niman Ranch is a network of more than 700 family farmers and ranchers committed to sustainable and humane production of cattle and pork. Chris Oliviero, the general manager of Niman Ranch, said other producers have sacrificed humane treatment in their yearslong quest to realize efficiency.

"If it's such a humane system, I would argue that the industry would be front and center showcasing

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every single day what this system looks like," Oliviero said. But "there's nobody out there who is putting cameras in these operations saying, 'Look at how great this is' for the animals that are in their care."

For nearly 20 years, Pennsylvania-based Clemens Food Group has been moving away from gestation crates to give pigs more space. That's made it much easier for the company to comply with new state standards. But company president Brad Clemens said the move was "a values-based decision." When given the choice, he said, sows choose open space over confinement.

"Knowing that the technology is out there to give the sows space, why wouldn't we do that?" he said.

The family-owned company is the nation's fifth-largest pork processor. Clemens is vocally opposed to the EATS Act — or any legislation like it. Aside from treating animals better, Clemens said, there's a business case for change: Customers care more than ever about the sourcing, impact and treatment of their food.

"We've had more customer inquiries on sow housing in the last five years than we did the last 50 years before that. Customers are smarter than they've ever been," he said. "They desire more transparency than they ever did before. These are informed buyers who care about how animals are kept and will make buying decisions based on how animals are kept."

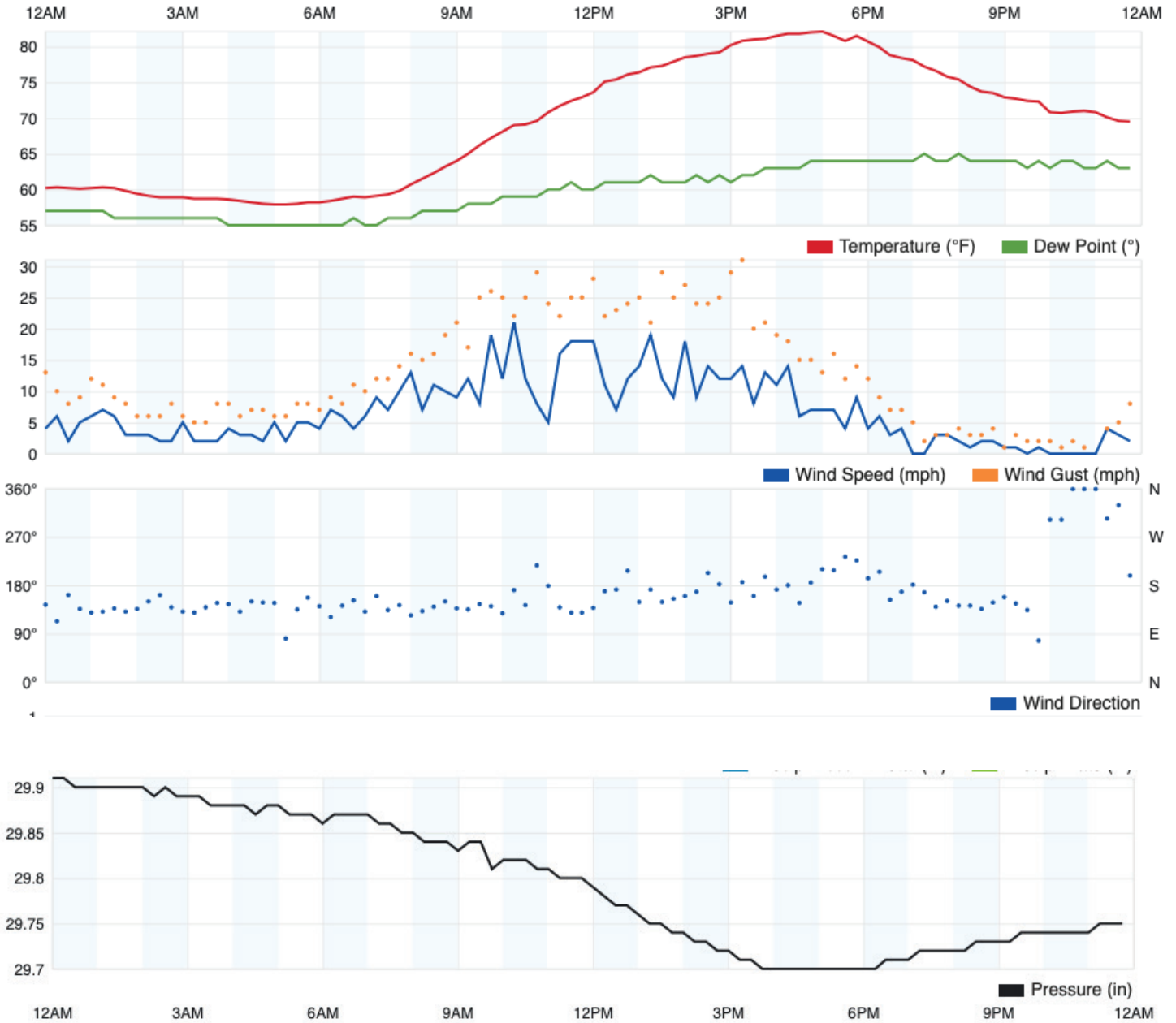
— *South Dakota Searchlight's staff contributed to this report.*

Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Fri Sep 29	Sat Sep 30	Sun Oct 1	Mon Oct 2	Tue Oct 3	Wed Oct 4	Thu Oct 5
72°F	77°F	85°F	80°F	71°F	64°F	60°F
54°F	66°F	65°F	59°F	50°F	45°F	45°F
N	NE	SSE	S	SSE	NNW	W
12 MPH	12 MPH	24 MPH	21 MPH	16 MPH	16 MPH	17 MPH
60%				50%	40%	

Severe Weather Threat Overview September 29, 2023 3:08 AM

Early This Morning Through Early Evening

Timing/Location

Storms west-river will trek northeast through the course of the morning, continuing across the state through the day, and eventually departing far northeast SD/western Minnesota early this evening.

Primary Threats for the **Green** areas
Tornado Potential

Very Low Low Medium High

Max Hail Size

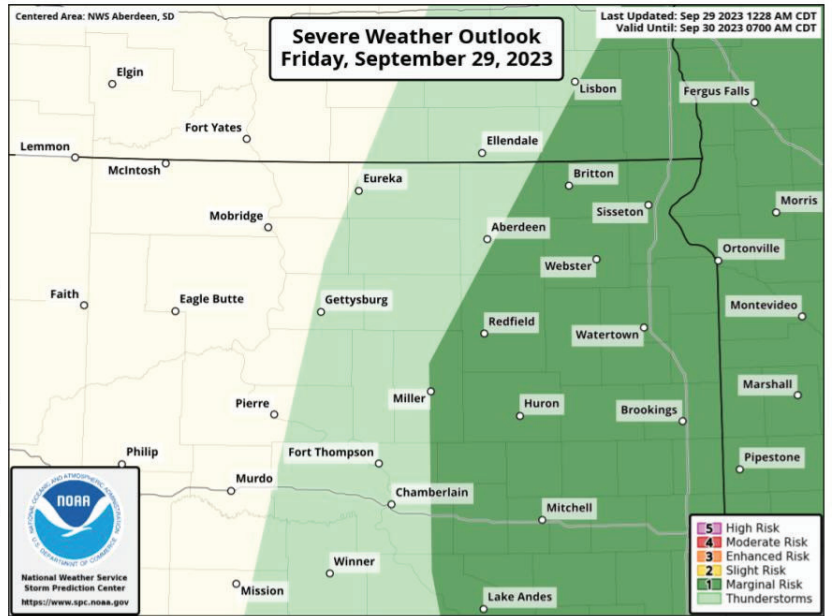
Dimes **Quarters** Golfball Baseball

Max Wind Speed

< 60 mph 60-70 mph 70-80 mph > 80mph

Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low Low Medium High



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Tracking the potential for strong to severe storms from southwest to northeast across the state today. Not looking at widespread severe weather, though some of the stronger storms could produced up to quarter sized hail and wind gusts upwards of 60mph.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 82 °F at 4:49 PM

Low Temp: 58 °F at 5:03 AM

Wind: 31 mph at 3:13 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 95 in 1897

Record Low: 11 in 1939

Average High: 69

Average Low: 41

Average Precip in Sept.: 1.92

Precip to date in Sept.: 2.79

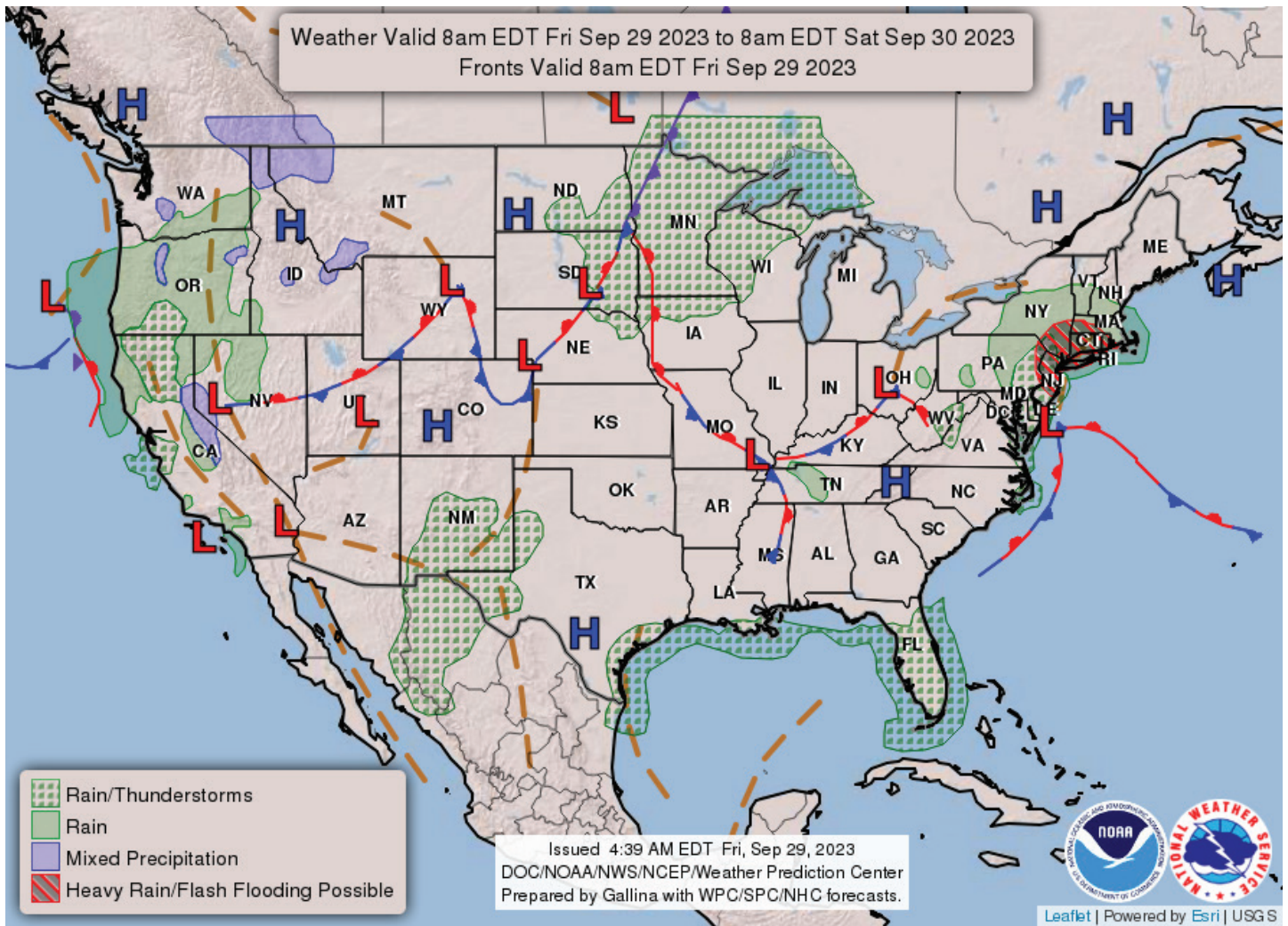
Average Precip to date: 18.26

Precip Year to Date: 21.38

Sunset Tonight: 7:18:41 PM

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:27:57 AM

Day length: 11 hours, 51 minutes



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Today in Weather History

September 29, 1982: An early snowfall in the Black Hills resulted in the breakage of tree branches and caused power outages in parts of Lead and Nevada Gulch.

1927 - An outbreak of tornadoes from Oklahoma to Indiana caused 81 deaths and 25 million dollars damage. A tornado (possibly two tornadoes) cut an eight-mile long path across Saint Louis MO, to Granite City IL, killing 79 persons. The damage path at times was a mile and a quarter in width. The storm followed a similar path to tornadoes which struck in 1871, 1896, and 1959. (The Weather Channel)

1959 - A storm produced 28 inches of snow at Colorado Springs, CO. (David Ludlum)

1983 - Heavy rains began in central and eastern Arizona which culminated in the worst flood in the history of the state. Eight to ten inch rains across the area caused severe flooding in southeastern Arizona which resulted in thirteen deaths and 178 million dollars damage. President Reagan declared eight counties of Arizona to be disaster areas. (The Weather Channel)

1986 - A week of violent weather began in Oklahoma which culminated in one of the worst flooding events in the history of the state. On the first day of the week early morning thunderstorms caused more than a million dollars damage in south Oklahoma City. Thunderstorms produced 4 to 7 inches of rain from Hobart to Ponca City, and another round of thunderstorms that evening produced 7 to 10 inches of rain in north central and northeastern sections of Oklahoma. (Storm Data)

1987 - A slow moving cold front produced rain from the Great Lakes Region to the Central Gulf Coast Region. A late afternoon thunderstorm produced wind gusts to 62 mph at Buffalo NY. Warm weather continued in the western U.S. In Oregon, the afternoon high of 96 degrees at Medford was a record for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - High pressure brought freezing temperatures to parts of Vermont and New York State. Burlington VT dipped to 30 degrees, and Binghamton NY reported a record low of 34 degrees. The high pressure system also brought cold weather to the Central Rocky Mountain Region. Alamosa CO reported a record low of 18 degrees, and Gunnison CO was the cold spot in the nation with a morning low of just five degrees above zero. (National Weather Summary)

1989 - Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date, as readings soared into the 80s and low 90s in the Northern Plateau and Northern Plains Region. Record highs included 91 degrees at Boise ID, and 92 degrees at Sheridan WY. The high of 100 degrees at Tucson AZ marked their 51st record high of the year, and their 92nd day of 100 degree weather. (National Weather Summary)

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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

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2023 Community Events

- 01/29/2023 Groton Robotics Pancake Feed, 10am-1pm, Community Center
- 01/29/2023 85th Carnival of Silver Skates 2pm & 6:30pm (Last Sunday of January)
- 01/31/2023-02/03/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Drop Off 6-9pm, Community Center
- 02/04/2023-02/05/2023 Lion's Club Prom & Formal Dress Consignment Sale 1-5pm, Community Center
- 02/25/2023 Littles and Me, Art Making 10-11:30am, Wage Memorial Library
- 03/25/2023 Spring Vendor Fair, 10am-3pm, Community Center
- 04/01/2023 Dueling Duo Baseball/Softball Fundraiser at the Legion Post #39 6-11:30pm
- 04/06/2023 Groton Career Development Event
- 04/08/2023 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt 10am Sharp at the City Park (Saturday a week before Easter)
- 04/22/2023 Firemen's Spring Social at the Fire Station 7pm-12:30am (Same Saturday as GHS Prom)
- 04/23/2023 Princess Prom 4:30-8pm (Sunday after GHS Prom)
- 05/06/2023 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm (1st Saturday in May)
- 05/29/2023 Legion Post #39 Memorial Day Services (Memorial Day)
- 06/16/2023 SDSU Alumni and Friends Golf Tournament
- 06/17/2023 Groton Triathlon
- 07/04/2023 Couples Firecracker Golf Tournament
- 07/09/2023 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm (Sunday Mid-July)
- 07/26/2023 GGA Burger Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 08/04/2023 Wine on Nine 6pm
- 08/10/2023 Family Fun Fest, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m.
- 08/11/2023 GHS Basketball Golf Tournament
- 09/08/2023 Family Fun Fest 3:30-5:30pm
- 09/09/2023 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/09-10/2023 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/10/2023 Couples Sunflower Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 09/10/2023 Emmanuel Lutheran Church Sunday School Rally 9:00am
- 09/10/2023 7th Annual Doggie Day at the Swimming Pool 4-6pm
- 09/15/2023 Homecoming Parade
- 10/13/2023 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/14/2023 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/31/2023 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2023 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/02/2023 Tour of Homes, Live & Silent Auctions at Olive Grove Golf Course 4pm-close
- 12/09/2023 Santa Claus Day at Professional Management Services 9-11am

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.26.23

15 30 35 42 60 16

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$267,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 26 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 DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.28.23

16 19 25 30 47 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.27.23

21 23 30 31 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 52 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

09.27.23

10 25 51 52 63 1

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 26 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 DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 26 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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News from the Associated Press

Thursday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP FOOTBALL

Crow Creek Tribal School 52, Marty Indian 0
Lower Brule 63, Flandreau Indian 0
Standing Rock, N.D. 52, St. Francis Indian 22
Todd County 72, Red Cloud 20

PREP VOLLEYBALL

Aberdeen Central def. Brandon Valley, 25-22, 21-25, 22-25, 25-15, 15-13
Aberdeen Roncalli def. Clark/Willow Lake, 27-25, 25-12, 25-20
Baltic def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-11, 25-13, 25-11
Bennett County def. Hot Springs, 25-23, 21-25, 26-24, 9-25, 20-18
Bon Homme def. Menno, 23-25, 25-23, 25-20, 20-25, 15-8
Burke def. Boyd County, Neb., 25-14, 25-15, 25-9
Canton def. Tea Area, 15-25, 25-18, 25-16, 25-21
Centerville def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-23, 25-14, 25-25
Chester def. Beresford, 25-13, 25-12, 25-5
Colman-Egan def. Castlewood, 25-18, 29-27, 25-23
Custer def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-17, 25-14, 25-10
Dell Rapids def. Lennox, 25-16, 25-15, 25-16
Deubrook def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 27-25, 25-6, 25-19
Deuel def. Great Plains Lutheran, 25-18, 12-25, 25-22, 25-19
Douglas def. Sturgis Brown, 22-25, 25-8, 25-13, 25-6
Dupree def. Bison, 25-21, 25-9, 25-21
Elkton-Lake Benton def. Arlington, 23-25, 25-16, 25-13, 25-13
Estelline/Hendricks def. DeSmet, 25-18, 25-14, 25-13
Ethan def. Freeman, 25-14, 19-25, 25-16, 25-20
Faith def. Harding County, 25-23, 25-17, 25-17
Faulkton def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-18, 25-16, 21-25, 25-12
Flandreau def. Sioux Valley, 20-25, 25-22, 25-21, 15-25, 15-11
Florence/Henry def. Tri-State, N.D., 25-14, 25-20, 25-13
Garretson def. Parker, 25-16, 25-9, 25-11
Gregory def. Chamberlain, 25-7, 25-17, 25-11
Hamlin def. Redfield, 25-22, 27-25, 26-24
Harrisburg def. Sioux Falls Jefferson, 25-17, 16-25, 25-21, 22-25, 15-12
Ipswich def. Potter County, 25-23, 25-20, 15-25, 25-17
James Valley Christian def. Sanborn Central/Woonsocket, 25-17, 25-21, 25-21
Kadoka Area def. Jones County, 25-20, 25-11, 25-9
Kimball/White Lake def. Hanson, 25-23, 15-25, 21-25, 25-18, 15-13
Langford def. Waubay/Summit, 25-21, 18-25, 28-30, 25-16, 15-12
Milbank def. Britton-Hecla, 25-18, 25-16, 25-10
Philip def. Sully Buttes, 25-22, 26-24, 25-23

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Platte-Geddes def. Lyman, 25-15, 25-7, 25-11
Sioux Falls Christian def. Elk Point-Jefferson, 25-7, 25-21, 25-19
Sioux Falls Lincoln def. Huron, 23-25, 25-20, 25-19, 25-18
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Freeman Academy/Marion, 25-18, 25-18, 25-9
St. Thomas More def. Red Cloud, 25-16, 25-22, 25-19
Tri-Valley def. McCook Central/Montrose, 25-23, 22-25, 25-21, 19-25, 15-8
Wall def. Newell, 29-27, 25-19, 25-16
Warner def. Herreid/Selby Area, 25-12, 25-14, 25-9
Watertown def. Pierre T F Riggs High School, 25-22, 25-19, 25-20
Wessington Springs def. Bridgewater-Emery, 25-16, 23-25, 25-17, 25-12, 15-10
Ponca Triangular=
Dakota Valley def. Pierce, Neb., 25-15, 17-25, 25-18, 25-23
Dakota Valley def. Ponca, Neb., 25-12, 25-20, 25-18

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

Gov. Burgum and North Dakota Republicans are rushing to fix a major budget bill struck down by court

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — Funding for major parts of North Dakota's government is in jeopardy after the state Supreme Court ruled Thursday that the Republican-controlled Legislature stuffed a key budget bill full of too many different subjects, violating the state Constitution.

That means lawmakers will be coming back to Bismarck to redo the massive bill — likely pulling Republican Gov. Doug Burgum, a long-shot presidential candidate, off the campaign trail. Burgum said Thursday he's arranging meetings with legislative leaders for how to best respond.

Attorney General Drew Wrigley called the court's ruling "seismic in its impact."

The justices decided the budget bill was "was unconstitutionally enacted and is void" because it goes against a provision limiting bills to just one subject. The justices couldn't determine which parts of the bill were primary and which were secondary, Justice Daniel Crothers wrote. He said it also wasn't clear if the bill would've passed in its current form without all the different sections, which meant the court had to toss it out in its entirety.

The budget bill for the state's Office of Management and Budget traditionally contains many subjects that get hammered out in the legislative session's last days. In the bill were salary raises for state employees, policy changes for the state's \$9 billion oil tax savings, and numerous transfers from state government funds.

Long used as a "cleanup bill" for corrections and minor policy adjustments, this April it was the vehicle for major policy decisions, Democratic state Rep. Corey Mock said Thursday.

"Generally speaking, this was the Legislature taking it too far," said Mock, who voted against the bill's final version.

Republican House Majority Leader Mike Lefor disagreed, saying the bill wasn't significantly different from how the Legislature has utilized it in past sessions, such as for fixing errors. A decision for how to proceed won't come until next week at the earliest, he said. It's unclear how long a session might last.

Burgum in a statement acknowledged the court's decision will require a special session of the Legislature. That could take Burgum, who appeared in the second Republican debate on Wednesday, back home to focus on the legislation.

Chief Justice Jon Jensen wrote that invalidating the bill has "far-reaching consequences," which is why he favors a 30-day stay on the ruling. That would give the Legislature breathing room to respond.

Wrigley, the Republican attorney general, said he's working with lawmakers to file motions with the court to allow time for the Legislature to deal with the bill.

The Legislature could reconvene using the five days remaining from its 80-day constitutional limit to meet every two years to pass new laws. The governor could also call a special session.

The state's highest court was asked to rule on the budget bill because of a lawsuit brought by the board overseeing North Dakota's government retirement plans. The bill included a change that increased lawmakers' membership on the board from two to four, a move the board sought to void. The board argued it's unconstitutional for state lawmakers to sit on the panel.

The bill's final version was negotiated by top lawmakers from both the House and Senate, including Republican majority leaders and the chairs of the budget writing committees. It was the last bill passed this year, ending the four-month-long session just before 3 a.m. on a weekend.

Blast at rally celebrating birthday of Islam's prophet kills 52 people in southwestern Pakistan

By ABDUL SATTAR Associated Press

QUETTA, Pakistan (AP) — A powerful bomb exploded near a mosque at a rally celebrating the birthday of Islam's Prophet Muhammad in southwestern Pakistan on Friday, killing at least 35 people and injuring nearly 70 others, police and a government official said.

The bombing occurred in Mastung, a district in Baluchistan province, where hundreds of people had gathered for a procession to celebrate the birth anniversary of the prophet. Muslims hold rallies and distribute free meals to people on the occasion, which is known as Mawlid an-Nabi.

Those injured in the blast were taken to nearby hospitals and some were in critical condition, government administrator Atta Ullah said. Abdul Rasheed, the District Health Officer in Mastung, said 30 bodies were taken to one hospital and 22 others were counted at a second hospital.

A senior police officer, Mohammad Nawaz, was among the dead, Ullah said. Officers were investigating to determine whether the bombing was a suicide attack, he added.

Friday's bombing came days after authorities asked police to remain on maximum alert, saying militants could target rallies making the birthday of Islam's prophet.

Pakistan's President Arif Alvi condemned the attack and asked authorities to provide all possible assistance to the wounded and the victims' families.

In a statement, caretaker Interior Minister Sarfraz Bugti denounced the bombing and expressed sorrow and grief over the loss of lives. He said it was a "heinous act" to target people in the Mawlid an-Nabi procession.

The government had declared a national holiday for the birth anniversary of Prophet Muhammad, and President Alvi and caretaker Prime Minister Anwaarul-haq-Kakar in separate messages had called for unity and for people to adhere to the teachings of Islam's prophet.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for Friday's bombing, but Pakistani Taliban quickly distanced themselves from it. The Pakistani Taliban, known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, or TTP, is a separate group but a close ally of the Afghan Taliban, which seized power in neighboring Afghanistan in August 2021 as U.S. and NATO troops were in the final stages of their pullout from the country after 20 years of war.

The Islamic State group has claimed previous deadly attacks in Baluchistan and elsewhere.

Also Friday, the military said two soldiers were killed in a shootout with Pakistani Taliban after insurgents tried to sneak into southwestern district of Zhob in Baluchistan province. Three militants were killed in the exchange, a military statement said.

The gas-rich southwestern Baluchistan province at the border of Afghanistan and Iran has been the site of a low-level insurgency by Baluch nationalists for more than two decades. Baluch nationalists initially wanted a share of provincial resources, but they later launched an insurgency calling for independence.

The fall of an enclave in Azerbaijan stuns the Armenian diaspora, extinguishing a dream

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The swift fall of the Armenian-majority enclave of Nagorno-Karabakh to Azerbaijani troops and the exodus of much of its population has stunned the large Armenian diaspora around the world. Traumatized by a widely acknowledged genocide a century ago, they fear the erasure of what they consider a central and beloved part of their historic homeland.

The separatist ethnic Armenian government in Nagorno-Karabakh on Thursday announced that it was dissolving and that the unrecognized republic will cease to exist by year's end — a seeming death knell for its 30-year de facto independence.

Azerbaijan, which routed the region's Armenian forces in a lightning offensive last week, has pledged to respect the rights of the territory's Armenian community. Tens of thousands of people — more than 70% of the region's population — had fled to Armenia by Friday morning, and the influx continues, according to Armenian officials.

Many in Armenia and the diaspora fear a centuries-long community in the territory they call Artsakh will disappear.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has termed it "a direct act of an ethnic cleansing." Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry strongly rejected the accusation, saying the departures are a "personal and individual decision and has nothing to do with forced relocation."

Armenians abroad also accuse European countries, Russia and the United States — and the government of Armenia itself — of failing to protect the population during months of a blockade of the territory by Azerbaijan's military and a swift offensive last week that defeated separatist forces.

Armenians say the loss is a historic blow. Outside the modern country of Armenia itself, the mountainous land was one of the only surviving parts of a heartland that centuries ago stretched across what is now eastern Turkey, into the Caucasus region and western Iran.

Many in the diaspora had pinned dreams on it gaining independence or being joined to Armenia.

Nagorno-Karabakh was "a page of hope in Armenian history," said Narod Seroujian, a Lebanese-Armenian university instructor in Beirut.

"It showed us that there is hope to gain back a land that is rightfully ours. ... For the diaspora, Nagorno-Karabakh was already part of Armenia."

Hundreds of Lebanese Armenians on Thursday protested outside the Azerbaijani Embassy in Beirut. They waved flags of Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh and burned pictures of the Azerbaijani and Turkish presidents. Riot police lobbed tear gas when they threw firecrackers at the embassy.

Ethnic Armenians have communities around Europe and the Middle East and in the United States. Lebanon is home to one of the largest, with an estimated 120,000 of Armenian origin, 4% of the population.

Most are descendants of those who fled the 1915 campaign by Ottoman Turks in which some 1.5 million Armenians died in massacres, deportations and forced marches. The atrocities, which emptied many ethnic Armenian areas in eastern Turkey, are widely viewed by historians as genocide. Turkey rejects the description of genocide, saying the toll has been inflated and that those killed were victims of civil war and unrest during World War I.

In Bourj Hammoud, the main Armenian district in Beirut, memories are still raw, with anti-Turkey graffiti common. The red-blue-and-orange Armenian flag flies from many buildings.

"This is the last migration for Armenians," said Harout Bshidikian, 55, sitting in front of an Armenian flag in a Bourj Hamoud cafe. "There is no other place left for us to migrate from."

Azerbaijan says it is reuniting its territory, pointing out that even Armenia's prime minister recognized that Nagorno-Karabakh is part of Azerbaijan. Though its population has been predominantly ethnic Armenian Christians, Turkish Muslim Azeris also have communities and cultural ties to the territory, particularly the city of Shusha, famed as a cradle of Azerbaijani poetry.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh came under control of ethnic Armenian

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forces backed by the Armenian military in separatist fighting that ended in 1994. Azerbaijan took parts of the area in a 2020 war. Now after this month's defeat, separatist authorities surrendered their weapons and are holding talks with Azerbaijan on reintegration of the territory into Azerbaijan.

Thomas de Waal, a senior fellow at the Carnegie Europe think tank, said Nagorno-Karabakh had become "a kind of new cause" for an Armenian diaspora whose forebearers had suffered the genocide.

"It was a kind of new Armenian state, new Armenian land being born, which they projected lots of hopes on. Very unrealistic hopes, I would say," he added, noting it encouraged Karabakh Armenians to hold out against Azerbaijan despite the lack of international recognition for their separatist government.

Armenians see the territory as a cradle of their culture, with monasteries dating back more than a millennium.

"Artsakh or Nagorno-Karabakh has been a land for Armenians for hundreds of years," said Lebanese legislator Hagop Pakradounian, head of Lebanon's largest Armenian group, the Armenian Revolutionary Federation. "The people of Artsakh are being subjected to a new genocide, the first genocide in the 21st century."

The fall of Nagorno-Karabakh is not just a reminder of the genocide, "it's reliving it," said Diran Guilligian, a Madrid-based activist who holds Armenian, Lebanese and French citizenship.

He said his grandmother used to tell him stories of how she fled in 1915. The genocide "is actually not a thing of the past. It's not a thing that is a century old. It's actually still the case," he said.

Seroujian, the instructor in Beirut, said her great-grandparents were genocide survivors, and that stories of the atrocities and dispersal were talked about at home, school and in the community as she grew up, as was the cause of Nagorno-Karabakh.

She visited the territory several times, most recently in 2017. "We've grown with these ideas, whether they were romantic or not, of the country. We've grown to love it even when we didn't see it," she said. "I never thought about it as something separate" from Armenia the country.

A diaspora group called Europeans for Artsakh plans a rally in Brussels next week in front of European Union buildings to denounce what they say are human rights abuses by Azerbaijan and to call for EU sanctions on Azerbaijani officials. The rally is timed ahead of an Oct. 5 summit of European leaders in Spain, where the Armenian prime minister and Azerbaijani president are scheduled to hold talks mediated by the French president, German chancellor and European Council president.

In the United States, the Armenian community in the Los Angeles area — one of the world's largest — has staged protests to draw attention to the situation. On Sept. 19, they used a trailer truck to block a freeway for several hours, causing major traffic jams.

Kim Kardashian, perhaps the most well known Armenian-American today, went on social media to urge President Joe Biden "to Stop Another Armenian Genocide."

Several groups are collecting money for Karabakh Armenians fleeing their home. But Seroujian said many feel helpless.

"There are moments where personally, the family, or among friends we just feel hopeless," she said. "And when we talk to each other we sort of lose our minds."

More than 70% of Nagorno-Karabakh's population flees as separatist government says it will dissolve

By AVET DEMOURIAN Associated Press

YEREVAN, Armenia (AP) — More than 70% of Nagorno-Karabakh's original population has fled to Armenia as the region's separatist government said it will dissolve itself and the unrecognized republic inside Azerbaijan will cease to exist by year's end after a three-decade bid for independence.

By Friday morning 84,770 people had left Nagorno-Karabakh, according to Armenian officials, continuing a mass exodus from the region of ethnic Armenians that began Sunday. The region's population was around 120,000 before the exodus began.

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The moves came after Azerbaijan carried out a lightning offensive last week to reclaim full control over the breakaway region and demanded that Armenian troops in Nagorno-Karabakh disarm and the separatist government disband.

A decree signed by the region's separatist President Samvel Shakhramanyan cited a Sept. 20 agreement to end the fighting under which Azerbaijan will allow the "free, voluntary and unhindered movement" of Nagorno-Karabakh residents to Armenia.

Some of those who fled the regional capital of Stepanakert said they had no hope for the future.

"I left Stepanakert having a slight hope that maybe something will change and I will come back soon, and these hopes are ruined after reading about the dissolution of our government," 21-year-old student Ani Abaghyan told The Associated Press.

"I don't want to live with the Azerbaijanis," said Narine Karamyan, 50. "Maybe there are some people who will return to their homes. I don't want that. I want to live as an Armenian."

During the three decades of conflict in the region, Azerbaijan and separatists inside Nagorno-Karabakh, alongside allies in Armenia, have accused the other of targeted attacks, massacres and other atrocities, leaving people on both sides deeply suspicious and fearful.

While Azerbaijan has pledged to respect the rights of ethnic Armenians in the region, most are now fleeing as they do not believe the Azerbaijani authorities will treat them fairly and humanely or guarantee them their language, religion and culture.

After six years of separatist fighting ended in 1994 following the collapse of the Soviet Union, Nagorno-Karabakh came under the control of ethnic Armenian forces, backed by Armenia. Then, during a six-week war in 2020, Azerbaijan took back parts of the region in the south Caucasus Mountains along with surrounding territory that Armenian forces had claimed earlier. Nagorno-Karabakh was internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan's sovereign territory.

Armine Ghazaryan, who crossed into Armenia from Nagorno-Karabakh with her four young children, told AP it was the second time she had been displaced from her home, saying she had previously sheltered with her children in her neighbors' basement during the war in 2020.

"At least we live in peace here. At least we stay in Armenia," she said upon arriving in the Armenian town of Goris.

In December, Azerbaijan blockaded the only road connecting Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenia, alleging the Armenian government was using it for illicit weapons shipments to the region's separatist forces.

Armenia alleged the closure denied basic food and fuel supplies to Nagorno-Karabakh. Azerbaijan rejected the accusation, arguing that the region could receive supplies through the Azerbaijani city of Aghdam — a solution long resisted by Nagorno-Karabakh authorities, who called it a strategy for Azerbaijan to gain control of the region.

On Monday night, a fuel reservoir exploded at a gas station where people lined up for gas to fill their cars to flee to Armenia. At least 68 people were killed and nearly 300 injured, with over 100 others still considered missing after the blast, which exacerbated fuel shortages that were already dire after the blockade.

On Thursday, Azerbaijani authorities charged Ruben Vardanyan, the former head of Nagorno-Karabakh's separatist government, with financing terrorism, creating illegal armed formations and illegally crossing a state border. A day earlier, he was detained by Azerbaijani border guards as he was trying to leave Nagorno-Karabakh for Armenia along with tens of thousands of others.

Vardanyan, a billionaire who made his fortune in Russia, was placed in pretrial detention for at least four months and faces up to 14 years in prison. His arrest appeared to indicate Azerbaijan's intent to quickly enforce its grip on the region.

Another top separatist figure, Nagorno-Karabakh's former foreign minister and now presidential adviser David Babayan, said Thursday he will surrender to Azerbaijani authorities who ordered him to face a probe in Baku.

As employers face labor shortages, Biden administration rolls out playbook for training workers

By JOSH BOAK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Friday is expected to release a playbook on best practices for training workers as the low 3.8% unemployment rate and years of underinvestment have left manufacturers, construction firms and other employers with unfilled jobs.

Worker shortages have been a frustration for some employers, who upped their investments in new factories and construction projects after President Joe Biden signed into law funding for infrastructure, computer chips and a shift toward renewable energy sources. Finding employees to replace retirees also has become a challenge.

As part of the 2021 pandemic rescue package, state and local governments have committed \$11 billion to worker training. The money must be spent by the end of 2026 and the administration is trying to ensure the investments pay off as promised.

"This is a chance to make a once-in-a-generation investment in the skills and well-being of workers in your communities — an investment that will reap benefits well beyond pandemic recovery," Treasury Department official Veronica Soto says in draft remarks obtained by The Associated Press.

The eight-page playbook being issued in conjunction with the remarks details possible models that the administration believes state and local governments can follow.

The document encourages them to use registered apprenticeship programs, which have seen enrollment more than double over the past decade to 607,509 active apprentices, according to the Labor Department. Starting salaries for those who complete the programs average \$80,000.

Harris County, Texas, committed \$10.9 million to place 1,000 of its low-income residents into union apprenticeships and technology training programs, having put a focus on opportunities for women, people of color and those without a four-year college degree. The state of Maine plans to double its total number of apprenticeships with \$11 billion.

Funding also has gone to community colleges, with Oklahoma budgeting \$80 million to expand its nursing education programs. Connecticut is using \$19.5 million to improve the mentorship and coaching given to community college students, a program that has increased students' grades and kept more of them enrolled.

Money also is going to supportive services for child care and transportation, which are two of the big reasons why people are unable to complete training or stay on the job. Iowa is making \$26.6 million available to help employers make child care available, while Phoenix's airport is offering child care scholarships to workers.

David Montgomery runs wild as Lions beat Packers 34-20 to take early command of NFC North

By STEVE MEGARGEE AP Sports Writer

GREEN BAY, Wis. (AP) — David Montgomery never beat the Green Bay Packers during his four seasons with the Chicago Bears.

Now with a different NFC North team, Montgomery made the most of his new situation and helped the Detroit Lions take early command of the division with a 34-20 victory at Lambeau Field on Thursday night.

"It just felt real different coming in with the group of guys that I'm with," said Montgomery, who rushed for 121 yards and three touchdowns. "I'm blessed to come out here with these guys and get the 'dub.' That's big for me. I can tell my son that I beat the Packers, so I'm excited to say that and excited to be a part of this team."

Montgomery carried the ball 32 times after sitting out the Lions' victory over the Atlanta Falcons on Sunday with a thigh bruise. He became the first Lion to rush for three touchdowns at Green Bay and the first Detroit player to top 100 yards rushing with three TDs since James Stewart in 2000.

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"He was balling," Lions receiver Amon-Ra St. Brown said. "We can count on him whenever. Give him the ball, he's going to make something happen."

The Lions (3-1) beat the Packers (2-2) for a fourth straight time, a streak that also includes the final game of last season, when Detroit denied Green Bay a playoff spot in Aaron Rodgers' last game with the Packers.

Detroit has built on the momentum from that season-ending victory by getting off to a fast start this year that now includes road victories over the Packers and the reigning Super Bowl champion Kansas City Chiefs.

"Send us anywhere, line us up against anyone and we feel like we can go in there and beat them," said Lions quarterback Jared Goff, who went 19 of 28 for 210 yards with a touchdown and an interception. "That's a good feeling to have."

Rodgers' replacement, Jordan Love, threw for a touchdown and ran for another as he tried to rally the Packers in the second half. He finished 23 of 36 for 246 yards and had two passes intercepted by Jerry Jacobs.

Detroit led 27-3 at halftime and had outgained Green Bay 284 yards to 21 as the half ended with boos from the crowd. It was the Lions' highest-scoring first half against the Packers in the series' 188-game history.

The Packers had staged an improbable rally earlier in the week, trailing New Orleans 17-0 on Sunday before scoring 18 points in the final 11 minutes for a one-point victory.

Green Bay faced a halftime deficit of at least 17 points in back-to-back weeks for the first time in franchise history. This time, it was too much to overcome.

"I think just offensively as a whole we've just got to start faster," Love said. "We don't start fast and we kind of get behind and it's hard running the ball. We get put in situations where you've got to throw the ball. So I think we've just got to start faster."

Love got the Packers within 10 points. His 1-yard touchdown pass to Christian Watson capped a season-long 86-yard drive to open the second half.

Jayden Reed ended the third quarter with a 44-yard catch that set up Love's 9-yard touchdown run with 14:52 left in the game to make it 27-17.

Detroit responded with a 14-play, 75-yard drive, capped by Montgomery's 1-yard touchdown run on fourth-and-goal, that took nearly nine minutes off the clock and put the game away.

The Lions were prepared to settle for a 30-yard field goal that would have kept it as a two-score game, but they got a first down when Green Bay's Quay Walker received an unsportsmanlike conduct penalty for running forward and leaping across the line in an attempt to block the kick.

"I was just in the moment, but I've got to be aware," Walker said. "That's on me."

Considering the way the game started, it was surprising it was still competitive in the fourth quarter.

Rudy Ford intercepted Goff on the third play from scrimmage to set up a field goal. Detroit then scored 24 points on its next four drives to delight the sizeable contingent of Lions fans who decorated the Lambeau Field stands in Honolulu blue.

Goff's 24-yard touchdown pass to a wide-open St. Brown put the Lions ahead for good. Montgomery scored on runs of 3 and 2 yards, while Riley Patterson kicked field goals of 33 and 37 yards.

The second quarter was nearly halfway over and the Lions already led 24-3 when the Packers finally got their initial first down thanks to a Detroit penalty. The Packers didn't get a first down on their own merits until 7 seconds remained before halftime.

INJURY REPORT

Lions: S Brian Branch injured his ankle in the third quarter, later returned to the game and then went down again. CB Chase Lucas left with an illness in the first half.

Packers: TE Luke Musgrave sustained a concussion in the first half. CB Jaire Alexander (back) and LG Elgton Jenkins (knee) were out for a second straight game, and LT David Bakhtiari (knee) missed a third straight game. Bakhtiari was placed on injured reserve earlier Thursday, meaning he must miss at least the next three games.

UP NEXT

Lions: Host Carolina on Sunday, Oct. 8.

Packers: At Las Vegas on Monday, Oct. 9.

Michigan judge to decide whether Oxford High School shooter gets life in prison or chance at parole

By COREY WILLIAMS and ED WHITE Associated Press

PONTIAC, Mich. (AP) — A teenager who killed four students at Michigan's Oxford High School will learn Friday whether he will spend his life in prison or get a chance for parole in the decades ahead.

Judge Kwame Rowe will announce his decision over video conference, weeks after hearing from experts who clashed over Ethan Crumbley's mental health and witnesses who described the tragic day in 2021 in sharp detail.

First-degree murder carries an automatic life sentence for adults in Michigan. But the shooter was 15 at the time, and the judge has the option of choosing a shorter term that would mean an eventual opportunity for freedom.

The actual sentence won't be formally imposed in Oakland County court until Dec. 8, a day when survivors and families can tell the judge about how the shooting affected their lives.

"Even if the defendant changes, and he finds some peace and some meaning in his life beyond torturing and killing, does not mean that he ever gets the right to live free among us," prosecutor Karen McDonald said while arguing for a life sentence on Aug. 18.

The shooter pleaded guilty to murder, terrorism and other crimes. The teen and his parents met with school staff on the day of the shooting after a teacher noticed violent drawings. But no one checked his backpack for a gun and he was allowed to stay.

The shooter's lawyers had argued that he was in a devastating spiral by fall 2021 after being deeply neglected by his parents, who bought a gun and took him to a shooting range to try it. A psychologist, Colin King, described him as a "feral child."

Defense attorney Paulette Michel Loftin said Crumbley deserved an opportunity for parole some day after his "sick brain" is fixed through counseling and rehabilitation.

Dr. Lisa Anacker, a psychiatrist who evaluated the shooter at a state psychiatric hospital, said he was not mentally ill at the time of the shooting, at least under strict standards in Michigan law.

There is no dispute that the shooter kept a journal and wrote about his desire to watch students suffer and the likelihood that he would spend his life in prison. He made a video with his phone on the eve of shooting, declaring what he would do the next day.

"I'm sorry the families have to go through this," he said.

He killed Madisyn Baldwin, Tate Myre, Hana St. Juliana and Justin Shilling Oxford High, about 40 miles (60 kilometers) north of Detroit. Six students and a teacher were also wounded.

James and Jennifer Crumbley are separately charged with involuntary manslaughter. They are accused of making a gun accessible at home and ignoring their son's mental health.

As China censors homegrown feminism, a feminist scholar from Japan is on its bestseller lists

By KANIS LEUNG Associated Press

HONG KONG (AP) — In the last few years, China's government has promoted increasingly conservative social values, encouraging women to focus on raising children. It has cracked down on civil society movements and made laws to drive out foreign influence.

So a 75-year-old Japanese feminist scholar who's not married and does not have children is an unlikely celebrity on the country's tightly censored internet.

But Chizuko Ueno, a professor emeritus at the University of Tokyo, is a phenomenon. She leapt to fame in China in 2019 with a speech that criticized social expectations for women to act cute and the pressure they face to hide their success.

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Ueno's popularity reflects a surge in interest in women's rights, said Leta Hong Fincher, a research associate at the Weatherhead East Asian Institute who has written about gender discrimination and feminism in China.

About a decade ago, China had a rambunctious feminist movement that staged protests like occupying a men's restroom to demand more toilets for women, or marching in wedding dresses spattered with fake blood to draw attention to domestic violence. But that movement has been silenced as President Xi Jinping's administration has tightened controls on civil society and promoted conservative family values in a bid to boost childbirths.

Ueno declined multiple requests to be interviewed for this story.

In mainland China, Ueno's books sold more than half a million copies in the first half of 2023, according to sales tracker Beijing OpenBook, and 26 were available in Chinese bookstores as of September. They cover topics ranging from "misogyny" in Japanese society to feminist approaches to elder care issues in an aging society.

"Starting From the Limit," a collection of letters between Ueno and Suzumi Suzuki, a writer who used to act in Japanese porn, topped the 2022 Books of the Year list on the popular Chinese review platform Douban.

Fans said Ueno's openness about choosing not to marry or have children makes her a role model.

Edith Cao, a writer who spoke on the condition of being identified by her English nickname due to fear of government retaliation, said seeing an East Asian woman succeed without a family helped her decide not to marry. Yang Xiao, a graduate student, said Ueno's example helped assuage her anxieties about being single and inspired her to start booking holidays alone to build confidence.

Relationships are a divisive issue even among Ueno's Chinese fans. Earlier this year, fans attacked a Chinese video blogger who asked Ueno if she hadn't married because "she'd been hurt by men," saying the blogger had reinforced traditional assumptions. That started a series of online conversations about marriage and feminism that lasted for months, with related hashtags drawing some 580 million views on the Twitter-like social media platform Weibo.

Ueno doesn't write about China, and that's probably one key reason her books have escaped censorship, said Hong Fincher.

Feminist ideas are not banned in China, but authorities view all activism with suspicion.

Police regularly summon owners of bookstores and cafes and pressure them to cancel feminism-themed events, several organizers and founders told The Associated Press. Online, posts that refer to the #MeToo movement are deleted, and nationalist bloggers attack feminists with a public presence as foreign agents.

Chinese journalist and activist Huang Xueqin, who helped spark China's first high-profile #MeToo case, was tried last week for allegedly inciting subversion of state power. According to a copy of the indictment published by supporters of Huang, she was accused of publishing "seditious" articles and facilitating training activities on "non-violent movements."

Protest and campaigning are no longer possible, said Lü Pin, a Chinese feminist activist based in the U.S., meaning feminism is confined to individual action and small groups. The Ueno boom, she said, has helped keep feminist ideas in the "lawful" mainstream.

Megan Ji, a 30-year-old financial analyst, said it wasn't until she read one of Ueno's books that she began taking an interest in the ideas of feminists.

That helped her confront her boss when he began caressing her back at an after-work karaoke party with colleagues and potential business partners. She works in a competitive industry in which fitting in at after-work parties is widely considered vital to her job, and another woman hadn't said anything when a drunken manager placed his arm over her shoulder.

But when her boss began badgering her to sing, she shouted: "Do you respect me? Who do you take me for?" Her colleagues were shocked, but Ji's boss apologized, both on the spot and again the next day. Ji said she didn't suffer retaliation, and no awkward parties have happened in the office since then.

The AP could not independently verify Ji's account, and she requested to be identified by her English name to avoid repercussions from her company.

Guo Qingyuan, a 35-year-old copywriter, said that reading Ueno led him to question how he saw women. He stopped talking about women's looks with his buddies, he said, and sought out children's books for his daughter that didn't promote stereotypical gender roles.

Cao, the writer who also offers support to victims of domestic violence, said there are problems that reading feminist books won't solve.

Two years after China first added "sexual harassment" as a cause of lawsuits in 2019, the Yuanzhong Family and Community Development Service Center, a Beijing-based nonprofit group, found that only 24 cases using the law were recorded in a nationwide database. The researchers identified 12 other cases related to sexual harassment that were filed using other laws.

Ueno-inspired feminism is unlikely to bring direct pressure to change laws. It's a lot tamer than earlier waves of activism, although it may be more widespread.

But "even if her words can't bring policy change," Cao said, they "have further stoked an underlying force."

Democratic rising stars rally around Biden's reelection. They're also eyeing 2028 bids of their own

By STEVE PEOPLES and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Pennsylvania's Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro is set to address presidential primary voters in New Hampshire on Saturday.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer is working to strengthen Democratic parties across the Midwest. And California Gov. Gavin Newsom was the Biden campaign's surrogate during the second Republican presidential debate this week — and he's agreed to a one-on-one debate against a top GOP presidential contender.

As Biden faces concerns, including from voters in his own party, about his prospects in a grueling reelection campaign, a new generation of high-profile Democrats are fanning out for the 80-year-old president. Those close to the ambitious Democrats insist they are focused squarely on the 2024 campaign when Biden may face a tough rematch against Donald Trump. But in building their national profiles, they're also positioning themselves for what could be a contentious 2028 primary — and giving the party something of an insurance policy in case they are suddenly needed next year.

"We've got a lot of talent in our party, and that talent is unified behind the reelection of President Joe Biden," Shapiro said in an interview. "And I'm excited for the next couple of years, and for the future of our party. I think we're in a strong position."

Biden announced his reelection bid in April and his allies insist that only an unforeseen physical challenge could force him from the race. He's taking all the usual steps to support a growing reelection effort, including adding staff to his Wilmington, Delaware-based campaign that now employs about 50 people. The campaign is also launching a spree of advertising with the Democratic National Committee. The push includes a months-long, \$25 million digital and television blitz focused on issues ranging from the administration's economic policies to efforts to protect abortion rights. The pieces are airing in battleground states such as Arizona, Georgia and Pennsylvania.

The administration has a record they're eager to run on, including signing into law major investments in health care, climate change, pandemic relief and the economy. Inflation is ticking down, while the unemployment rate and economic growth remain strong. The GOP's efforts to roll back abortion rights have repelled many voters, even in Republican-leaning states. And he's issuing increasingly dire warnings about the implications of a Trump win for American democracy, delivering a passionate speech on the issue on Thursday in Arizona.

"We should all remember, democracies don't have to die at the end of a rifle," Biden said. "They can die when people are silent, when they fail to stand up or condemn threats to democracy, when people are willing to give away that which is most precious to them because they feel frustrated, disillusioned, tired, alienated."

For now, such efforts haven't lifted Biden's weak approval ratings or neutralized the political fallout from an evolving criminal case against his son. And it's done little to address what may be the president's most

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potent vulnerability: his age. Set to turn 81 in November, he would be 86 at the end of a second term. About three-quarters of Americans — 77% — said Biden is too old to be effective for another four years, according to a poll released last month from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research. That view was held by 89% of Republicans and, notably, 69% of Democrats.

Rep. Ro Khanna, D-Calif. is a progressive leader who has already spoken to New Hampshire's presidential primary voters three times this year. In an interview, he warned Democrats against promoting a message of "triumphalism" in 2024 by simply touting Biden's accomplishments.

"The American dream has slipped away for too many Americans. The working class has been shafted and there's still a lot of anger out there," Khanna said. "We're trying to turn the ship, but it's gonna require bolder and more focused action to help the working class."

The conversation among Democrats is blunter in private. On the sidelines of a recent meeting of the National Governors Association in New Hampshire, several senior Democratic aides were overheard by a reporter discussing the type of candidate who could stand in for Biden if needed.

And at least one major political group aligned with Democrats is in the process of formulating a contingency plan in the unlikely event that Biden is not on the ballot, according to a top official with that group who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss internal planning. The group is also developing options for the possibility that Trump, the overwhelming front-runner in the GOP primary, is not the Republican nominee.

The Biden reelection campaign said any group questioning the president being on the 2024 ballot isn't aligned with anyone of consequence in the Democratic Party.

"I don't have any indication — it doesn't mean that it doesn't exist — that the White House is thinking about not running," said veteran Democratic strategist James Carville. "Having said that, every poll is worse."

The chatter is fueled by a lack of confidence among some donors and party officials in Vice President Kamala Harris as a Biden successor. She has struggled with weak ratings of her own.

In New Hampshire, Democratic officials still angry that Biden moved South Carolina ahead of the state on the party's 2024 presidential primary calendar have been increasingly willing to welcome would-be alternatives to the state.

Former state House Speaker Steve Shurtleff, a longtime Biden ally, is openly encouraging the president to back out of the 2024 campaign. The Democratic Party "absolutely" needs to have a contingency, Shurtleff said, adding that he and other Democrats want more options beyond Harris.

"Something's got to be done. It can't be just that we'll anoint the vice president if the president has to step down or something happens," Shurtleff said. "I'm still hoping that (Biden) will say, 'I won't run after all.'"

Biden has long cast himself as uniquely positioned to defeat Trump. Democrats united behind him in the 2020 campaign largely for that reason. But after years in which the party struggled to identify and elevate future leaders, Democrats now have one of their deepest benches in recent memory thanks largely to a wave of high-profile governors finding success in last fall's midterm elections.

Shapiro, 50, who stepped into the Pennsylvania governor's office just eight months ago, will serve as the keynote speaker at the New Hampshire Democratic Party's annual convention on Saturday. It'll be his first time in the state for any political reason since 2015. He said he's eager to promote the pragmatic "GSD" attitude — short for "get stuff done" — that guides his leadership in the key presidential swing state.

"Right now, there's a cynicism that's gripped our politics. And much of that cynicism is due to people not feeling progress, not seeing I should say deliverables for them that make their lives better," Shapiro said in an interview. "We're taking a different approach in Pennsylvania."

Asked about Biden, he said he was "proud" to support the president in 2024.

"I'll do the work that's asked of me to help him win reelection," Shapiro said.

In California, the term-limited Newsom was the Biden campaign's chief spokesman at Wednesday's GOP presidential primary debate. He was given time on each of the national television networks to respond to the Republican message and held court with dozens of reporters in the post-debate spin room.

In an interview, Newsom acknowledged the strength of his party's rising class of presidential prospects.

"The bench, it's next level, I mean, you're gonna have, I don't know, three debate stages in the next

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presidential election. I mean, I don't know how the heck they're gonna figure that out," he said.

The California governor also said "there's no question" Biden would be the party's nominee in 2024.

"Let's just stop naval gazing about this. Let's go. As Democrats, let's enthusiastically go," Newsom said of rallying behind Biden. "The real show is around the corner and its time for us to show up now and stop these conversations, these internal circular conversations about where we are situationally, and make the case."

Yet Newsom, who leaves office at the end of 2026, is stoking questions about his own presidential aspirations by agreeing to debate Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who is a prominent Republican presidential candidate. Newsom said the debate, to be hosted by Fox News' Sean Hannity, has been confirmed for November.

They have not yet set a location, but have agreed that the event wouldn't take place in a key presidential primary state like Iowa or New Hampshire, Newsom said.

Biden has successfully fended off serious Democratic rivals in part by keeping potential challengers close by. He's assembled a national advisory board including Newsom, Shapiro, Khanna, Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker, Massachusetts Sen. Elizabeth Warren and Maryland Gov. Wes Moore. Whitmer is serving as one of the Biden's national campaign co-chairs. The campaign says that, while the goal is to further Biden's reelection, it is also helping the president realize his promise of being a "bridge" to a future generation of Democrats.

Many of the party's rising stars are building on their personal, political, fundraising and organizing networks to promote the president, said Carla Frank, director of the national advisory board and surrogate operations. She said members "are going to speak to different communities in different ways, and be able to put their unique voices to various issues."

"We have an opportunity to work with these leaders, integrate them into our broad campaign structure and build a strong party with them," said Frank, who is also a former White House deputy political director. "But, in return, they are uplifting our message, which is the broad party message, rather than just trying to get them in line."

Whitmer launched a political action committee, the Fight Like Hell PAC, in June to help Democrats across the country while expanding her national footprint. That same month, an aide shared an article on social media entitled, "Why Gretchen Whitmer Has What It Takes for a White House Run."

In October, she'll headline a major fundraising dinner for the Minnesota Democratic Party.

Whitmer spokesperson Bobby Leddy said the PAC would release its first series of endorsements in the coming weeks as she works to raise money for the Biden campaign and help "shore up the base in the Midwest."

"The governor laid out a pretty good blueprint for how you should engage with voters in the Midwest in the last election," Leddy said, noting that Whitmer made Biden's accomplishments "front and center" in her winning reelection campaign.

Pritzker, Illinois' Democratic governor, is making moves as well.

Having just begun his second term, Pritzker is scheduled to headline an upcoming fundraiser for Wisconsin Democrats. His team says he'll also continue to seek out opportunities to boost candidates that defend abortion rights and causes across the country as he stumps for Biden.

Pritzker is uniquely positioned to maintain a high profile for the party in 2024 as a leader of the state that will host the Democratic National Convention next summer. And while he is presumed to be running for a third term in 2026, Pritzker stoked speculation about his presidential ambitions by campaigning in New Hampshire last summer on behalf of local Democrats.

In New Hampshire, which traditionally hosts one of the nation's opening presidential primary contests, Shurtleff said he's looking forward to getting to know the new generation of Democratic leaders.

"There are a lot of good qualified people — governors, possibly members of Congress — who could possibly run," he said. "I don't look at Joe Biden being a strong candidate. ... There's a lot of negatives here. And that's what people are thinking."

Traveling with Milley: A reporter recalls how America's top soldier was most at home with his troops

By TARA COPP Associated Press

STE MERE EGLISE, France (AP) — The soldier had target fixation. He had three beers in hand, a full day of leave and a group of young women waiting. But a crowd of Army uniforms also gathered for this French village's D-Day celebrations stood in the way.

The soldier navigated another step and realized he was pushing his beers right into the uniform of Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

"Palomino, what are you doing?" Milley said, reading the captain's name tag.

Palomino's eyes went wide.

"Whoaaa!" he said, backing away from the big guy.

"Whoaaa!" Milley said right back, grinning and taking a step toward him.

While the captain may have been surprised to find Milley mixing it up with soldiers, it didn't surprise me. For those of us who have covered him, there's the Milley who has been defined by the deeply controversial moments of his chairmanship under former President Donald Trump, who branded him a traitor. And then there's Milley with the troops, mischievous and at home.

"Here, I'm going to give you a coin!" Milley said, continuing his approach toward the 173rd Combat Airborne Brigade captain, dropping his chairman's coin into his beer to the laughter of a herd of troops.

Once soldiers get a coin as high-ranking as Milley's, any time they are at a bar and are challenged to show what coin they carry, well, they win and the other soldier buys the drinks. So it's a valuable coin to have.

I was a few steps behind, on assignment for The Associated Press, but this was becoming no ordinary reporting trip. It was Milley's last pilgrimage to Normandy as a soldier before his term ends Saturday. And along the way, he would make my late great-uncle, who is buried at Normandy, part of his journey.

It began on that sunny, beer-soaked day in Sainte-Mere-Eglise — on the square famous for the American paratrooper whose parachute got caught on the church steeple as thousands of young men spilled out of planes and into the darkness on June 6, 1944.

"For me, it's deeply meaningful. It's spiritual, actually," Milley told me. His father was a Marine who fought at Iwo Jima, his mother served as a nurse. And Milley had served in both divisions whose battles here on D-Day made Normandy sacred ground.

Hundreds of soldiers from the 82nd and 101st Airborne divisions packed the town's bars and streets. During this weeklong party, Sainte-Mere-Eglise embraces the young men and women who now wear the patches of the units that liberated them.

Everywhere on the square Milley went, curious onlookers followed. During Trump's presidency, Milley had become one of the most recognizable chairmen in recent history, and one of the most controversial. He drew fire from critics who argued he should never have become so high-profile, and he enraged Trump for opposing some of the president's plans.

But among the troops, he was their Milley.

"It was pretty incredible meeting him. He's been a huge influence," said Sgt. Muniz, a 4th Infantry Division sniper team leader, after crossing Milley's path and getting coined.

"There you go — it says General Milley, Commanding Officer 1-506th Infantry, BCT 101st, 39th Chief of Staff of the Army and 20th Chairman," he said, slapping the shoulder of another 101st Airborne Division soldier, Staff Sgt. Wolfe, who'd draped the Screaming Eagles flag across his back to secure the chairman's autograph.

Like Capt. Palomino, the sergeants blended into the crowd before I got their first names.

"What are you reading?" Milley said as he moved among the group, slipping a coin into the hand of another young sergeant. "You've got to read Clausewitz and Sun-Tzu, 'Art of War' and 'On War.' If you read those you don't have to read any other books. And the Bible, that's it," he said, with a roar of laughter.

A few days before, I'd shown Milley a photograph. My grandfather and his brother were standing in

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uniform in an English field just weeks before Operation Overlord.

Terry "Salty" Harris would die days after jumping into Normandy, but he was already immortalized by HBO's "Band of Brothers." I'd brought the photograph and my grandfather's wings thinking there might be an opportunity to slip away and leave both on Terry's white cross grave at the Normandy American Cemetery.

Once I told Milley about them, he latched on.

"I commanded the 506th!" he said, talking about the 101st Airborne Division's 506th Infantry Regiment. Terry had been in the 506th's Easy Company; Milley had commanded the unit in Korea.

With Milley, a carefully planned itinerary is always just an opening salvo; it never survives his first conversation. Add in the chairman's love of history, the sea swell of active-duty soldiers and line of WWII veterans in wheelchairs who embody the last living memory of the fighting, it's a bit of a miracle Milley is not still there deep among the troops and veterans, coining every one of them.

But now he had Terry in mind, too.

"We've got to get to Carentan," Milley said, nudging his staff to find a way to make it happen.

Carentan is a village about 10 miles (16 kilometers) from Sainte-Mere-Eglise. It's also where Terry died.

On the nights that followed June 6, 1944, paratroopers who had not been picked off by German guns gave their all while regrouping on the ground. The road to Carentan is known as "Purple Heart Lane."

We would go to Carentan, but only after more hours of meeting soldiers; then visiting two orders of nuns, where Milley told stories of his own Catholic upbringing; then a street vendor, where Milley took over the grill and cooked sausages for his wife, Hollyanne Milley, and his staff. Then we headed to Carentan.

"This right here, the turf we are on, is the beginning of the liberation of France, and the beginning of the liberation of Western Europe," Milley said. "We should never forget why they fought here."

Over the next few days, the schedule slipped away. As the flyovers and speeches began on June 6 at the Normandy American Cemetery, honoring the past was slipping behind news demands of the present. The gravesite was for another trip, being there was enough.

It was not enough for Milley. Even after the speeches and the demands for more interviews before the TV cameras, including ours, the chairman got target fixated, too.

"Did you get to see the grave?" he asked me as our AP video crew took his microphone off.

"No, there just wasn't time," I said. Already the interview we'd just finished meant I needed to get to work.

Within a minute Milley had his advance guys briskly walking the rows of white crosses. He knew that seeing the grave mattered. I had the gravesite coordinates stored on my cellphone and his advance team members were quick scouts. I hurried with them, reporter's notebook still in hand.

Maybe it was the background sounds of the cemetery, Omaha Beach just off to the side, the wind. Maybe it was the stress that minutes were moving and a headline was not. But Terry's story was one I knew deeply and held close. A family member who'd been killed was right there, and I gave in to the present and began to weep.

Hollyanne Milley put her arm around my shoulder, and she and the chairman and I bowed our heads, and prayed over Terry's white cross.

And then Milley coined him.

McCarthy rejects Senate spending bill while scrambling for a House plan that averts a shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING and STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A government shutdown appeared all but inevitable as House Speaker Kevin McCarthy dug in Thursday, vowing he will not take up Senate legislation designed to keep the federal government fully running despite House Republicans' struggle to unite around an alternative.

Congress is at an impasse just days before a disruptive federal shutdown that would halt paychecks for many of the federal government's roughly 2 million employees, as well as 2 million active-duty military troops and reservists, furlough many of those workers and curtail government services.

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But the House and Senate are pursuing different paths to avert those consequences even though time is running out before government funding expires after midnight on Saturday.

"I still got time. I've got time to do other things," McCarthy told reporters Thursday evening at the Capitol, adding, "At the end of the day, we'll get it all done."

The Senate is working toward passage of a bipartisan measure that would fund the government until Nov. 17 as longer-term negotiations continue, while also providing \$6 billion for Ukraine and \$6 billion for U.S. disaster relief.

The House, meanwhile, took up four of the dozen annual spending bills that fund federal agencies. Republicans were heartened as they passed three bills that would fund the Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security and State Department, though the fourth bill to fund federal agriculture programs failed.

In one sign of deepening resistance to assisting Ukraine, more than half the House Republicans voted against providing Ukraine \$300 million in military aid, though the money was approved on a bipartisan 311-117 vote.

The House's movement on the appropriations legislation won't keep the government from shutting down, but leadership hoped the progress would cajole enough Republicans to support a House-crafted continuing resolution that temporarily funds the government and boosts security at the U.S. border with Mexico.

It's a long shot, but McCarthy predicted a deal.

Lawmakers, already weary from days of late-night negotiating, showed signs of strain at McCarthy's closed-door meeting with Republicans Thursday morning. It was marked by a tense exchange between the speaker and Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla., according to those in the room.

Gaetz, who has taunted McCarthy for weeks with threats to oust him from his post, confronted the speaker about conservative online influencers being paid to post negative things about him. McCarthy shot back that he wouldn't waste his time on something like that, Gaetz told reporters as he exited the meeting.

McCarthy's allies left the meeting fuming about Gaetz's tactics.

With his majority splintering, McCarthy is scrambling to come up with a plan for preventing a shutdown and win Republican support. The speaker told Republicans he would reveal a Republican stopgap plan, known as a continuing resolution or CR, on Friday, according to those in the room, while also trying to force Senate Democrats into giving some concessions.

But with time running out, many GOP lawmakers were either withholding support for a temporary measure until they had a chance to see it. Others are considering joining Democrats, without McCarthy's support, to bring forward a bill that would prevent a shutdown.

With his ability to align his conference in doubt, McCarthy has little standing to negotiate with Senate Democrats. He has also attempted to draw President Joe Biden into negotiations, but the White House, so far, has shown no interest.

Biden sought to apply more pressure on McCarthy, urging him to compromise with Democrats even though that could threaten his job.

"I think that the speaker is making a choice between his speakership and American interests," Biden said.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said Congress and the White House had already worked out top-line spending levels for next year with an agreement this summer that allowed the government to continue borrowing to pay its bills. But McCarthy was deviating from that deal and courting a shutdown by catering to Republicans who say it didn't do enough to cut spending, he said.

"By focusing on the views of the radical few instead of the many, Speaker McCarthy has made a shutdown far more likely," Schumer said.

McCarthy insisted in a CNBC interview that the House will have its say. "Will I accept and surrender to what the Senate decides? The answer is no, we're our own body."

But later at the Capitol, he openly complained about the difficulty he is having herding Republican lawmakers.

"Members say they only want to vote for individual bills, but they hold me up all summer and won't let me bring individual bills up. Then they say they won't vote for a stopgap measure that keeps government

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open," McCarthy told reporters.

"So I don't know, where do you go in that scenario?"

The speaker also hinted he has a backup plan but gave no indication he was ready to work with Democrats to pass something in the House.

Meanwhile, the White House, as well as the Department of Homeland Security, notified staff on Thursday to prepare for a shutdown, according to emails obtained by The Associated Press. Employees who are furloughed would have four hours on Monday to prepare their offices for the shutdown.

The White House plans to keep on all commissioned officers. That includes chief of staff Jeff Zients, press secretary Karine Jean Pierre, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and other senior-level personnel, by declaring them "excepted" during a shutdown, according to the White House email.

Military troops and federal workers, including law enforcement officers, air traffic controllers and Transportation Security Administration officers, will also report to work because they are essential to protecting life and property. They would miss paychecks if the shutdown lasts beyond Oct. 13, the next scheduled payday, though they are slated to receive backpay once any shutdown ends.

Social Security payments for seniors, Medicare and Medicaid payments to health care providers, and disability payments to veterans will continue, as much of the government will continue to function. But there will be critical services that do stop. For example, the U.S. Treasury says that, with two-thirds of IRS employees potentially furloughed, taxpayer phone calls to the agency will go unanswered and 363 Taxpayer Assistance Centers across the country will close.

Many Republicans have voiced fears they would be blamed for a shutdown — including in the Senate, where many GOP members are aligned with Democrats on a temporary bill.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell said he agrees with many of the goals of the House Republicans, but he warned a shutdown will not achieve any of them.

"Instead of producing any meaningful policy outcomes, it would actually take the important progress being made on a number of key issues and drag it backward," McConnell said.

Nevertheless, Senate Republicans huddled for much of the day to cobble together a plan that could win support to boost funding for border security. McCarthy's House allies were also hoping the threat of a shutdown could help conservatives with their push to limit federal spending and combat illegal immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border.

"Anytime you have a stopgap situation like this, you have an opportunity to leverage," said Rep. Garret Graves, R-La. "This is another opportunity. America does not want an open Southern border. The polls are crystal clear. It's having a profound impact on us."

Brazil's President Lula set to undergo hip replacement surgery

By DIANE JEANTET Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva is scheduled to undergo hip replacement surgery Friday, a procedure likely to put a temporary halt to his frequent international trips but otherwise not disrupt his activities.

The 77-year-old leader should spend a few days in the Hospital Sirio-Libanês in the capital, Brasília, before heading back to the presidential palace early next week, said Andrea Cordeiro of the president's press office.

"The impact of Lula's surgery will probably be small and should not affect the decision-making process or negotiations in a significant way," said Paulo Calmon, a political science professor at the University of Brasília.

"It is very likely that Lula, even in recovery, will continue to influence main decisions and will certainly demand to be informed of everything that is happening," Calmon added.

Hip replacement surgery is a common procedure, which usually takes one to two hours, according to the American Academy of Orthopedic Surgeons. Recovery varies from patient to patient, but most can resume light, day-to-day activities within three to six weeks.

Many patients initially use a cane, crutches or a walker until balance and strength improve, to avoid falls that could jeopardize the surgery's success, says the orthopedic organization. The Brazilian newspaper O Globo said Thursday that Lula would use a walker. His press office could not confirm that information.

Lula is the oldest president in Brazil's history. During the election campaign last year, he often joked that despite being over 70, "I have the energy of a 30-year-old and the lust of a 20-year-old."

Having served two previous presidential terms, in 2003-2010, Lula said during the campaign that if he won he had no intention of running for a fourth four-year term. But in July, he said that U.S. President Joe Biden's re-election campaign was an "encouragement" for him to run again in 2026.

Lula has been busy since taking office Jan. 1 from the man he defeated in the October 2022 runoff election, far-right President Jair Bolsonaro. After vowing to "bring Brazil back" onto the world stage, Lula has traveled to 21 countries, including United States, China, France, India, Argentina and Angola.

"He tried to include all these crucial trips before the surgery," said Oliver Stuenkel, an associate professor of international relations at the Getulio Vargas Foundation, a university in Sao Paulo. "Now he can't continue to travel like that."

This week the president wore a mask to public events, following medical directives to lessen the risk of contracting a respiratory illness before his operation.

Slovakia election pits a pro-Russia former prime minister against a liberal pro-West newcomer

BRATISLAVA, Slovakia (AP) — Slovakia holds an early parliamentary election on Saturday that pits populist former Prime Minister Robert Fico, who campaigned on a clear pro-Russia and anti-American message, against a liberal pro-West newcomer.

Fico and his leftist Smer, or Direction, party vowed to reverse Slovakia's military support for neighboring Ukraine in Russia's war, if his attempt to return to power is successful.

Slovakia's vote is a key test that could put the country on a new course away from Kyiv and towards Moscow, threatening to break a fragile unity in the European Union and NATO.

Fico's main challenger is the relatively new liberal pro-West Progressive Slovakia. The winner of the vote traditionally gets the first chance to create a government.

A total of 150 seats in the Parliament are up for grab in the vote.

SNAP BALLOT

The populist Ordinary People party won the 2020 election with an anti-corruption ticket, and party leader Igor Matovič struck a deal to govern with the pro-business Freedom and Solidarity party, the conservative For People party, and another populist group, We Are Family.

The coalition collapsed in December after losing a parliamentary no-confidence vote, the latest step in a long-term political crisis caused by bickering among the coalition partners over a number of issues, including the state's response to the coronavirus pandemic and how to tackle soaring inflation driven by high energy prices amid Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine.

The government lost a parliamentary majority after Freedom and Solidarity withdrew from it in September 2022 last year and requested the no-confidence vote.

The coalition was a staunch supporter of Ukraine, donating arms to the Ukrainian army while opening its border with neighboring Ukraine to refugees fleeing the war with Russia.

The country is currently headed by a caretaker government.

FICO TURNS EASTWARD

Fico, 59, opposes EU sanctions on Russia, questions whether Ukraine can force out the invading Russian troops and wants to block Ukraine from joining NATO.

He proposes that instead of sending arms to Kyiv, the EU and the U.S. should use their influence to force Russia and Ukraine to strike a compromise peace deal.

His return to power could lead Slovakia to abandon its democratic course in other ways, following the path of Hungary under Prime Minister Viktor Orbán and to a lesser extent of Poland under the Law and

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Justice party.

He has a clear source for his inspiration.

"War always comes from the West," Fico said at a rally. "And freedom and peace always come from the East."

Fico repeats Russian President Vladimir Putin's unsupported claim that the Ukrainian government runs a Nazi state from which ethnic Russians in the country's east needed protection. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is Jewish and has lost relatives in the Holocaust.

Known for foul-mouthed tirades against journalists, Fico campaigned against immigration and LGBTQ+ rights and threatened to dismiss investigators from the National Criminal Agency and the special prosecutor who deals with the most serious crimes and corruption.

After Smer lost the 2020 vote, the four-party coalition made fighting corruption a key focus. Dozens of senior officials, police officers, judges, prosecutors, politicians and business people, many linked to Smer, have been convicted of corruption and other crimes. Fico himself faced criminal charges last year for creating a criminal group and misuse of power.

Fico led Slovakia from 2006 to 2010 and again from 2012 to 2018.

WESTERN-MINDED CHALLENGER

Progressive Slovakia sees the country's future firmly in the EU and NATO.

The party vowed to continue Slovakia's support for Ukraine and is a rare example among the major parties in the conservative Roman-Catholic stronghold that is in favor of LGBTQ+ rights.

Popular among the young people, the party won the 2019 European Parliament election in Slovakia in coalition with the Together party after gaining more than 20% of the vote. But it narrowly failed to win parliamentary seats in the 2020 ballot.

The party is led by Michal Simecka, a European Parliament vice president. Liberal President Zuzana Caputova was deputy head of the party before running for president. After trailing Smer in second place, some of the latest polls show that Progressive Slovakia's support is surging and fighting neck and neck with Smer for the lead.

WHAT'S AHEAD

No party is expected to win a governing majority and a coalition government will need to be formed.

Fico said he hopes to join forces with Hlas, or the Voice, which is expected to finish in third place. It's led by Peter Pellegrini, Fico's former deputy at Smer.

Pellegrini replaced Fico as prime minister after he was forced to resign by the major anti-government street protests following the 2018 slayings of journalist Jan Kuciak and his fiancée.

The two parted ways after the 2020 election loss.

Two other anti-West forces remain in hand for Fico's possible coalition.

The Republic is a far-right group that might finish fourth, according to some polls. It is led by former members of the openly neo-Nazi People's Party Our Slovakia whose members use Nazi salutes and want Slovakia out of the EU and NATO. Its possible participation in the government would send shockwaves through Europe.

The ultranationalist Slovak National Party is the other one.

Four other political groups and parties might surpass a 5% threshold necessary to win parliamentary seats. Their results will be key to determine the chances of Smer, or Progressive Slovakia, to form a ruling coalition.

The far right has been feuding with McCarthy for weeks. Here's how it's spiraling into a shutdown.

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — With little time left to prevent a government shutdown, the House is in a familiar position: effectively paralyzed as conservatives feud with Speaker Kevin McCarthy over matters large and small.

McCarthy has pushed the Republican conference to embrace a short-term funding plan that would also include a sweeping Republican proposal for the southern border. But a small group of hardline conservatives has defied the speaker in a quest to get rid of stopgap funding plans, known as continuing resolutions, even if opposing them means forcing a government shutdown.

It's left McCarthy at an impasse. He will likely be left with the political damage of a shutdown unless he turns to Democrats for help in passing a bipartisan bill. But working with Democrats would give hard-right Republicans reason to remove him as speaker.

Here's what to know about the House Republicans' conflict and where it may be headed:

WHAT ARE THEY FIGHTING OVER?

At its core, the conflict is over how far to the right House Republicans should push legislation — and what level of compromise, if any, is acceptable.

Pragmatic-minded Republicans acknowledge they hold just one chamber of Congress and must negotiate legislation with a Democratic president and the Democratic-held Senate. But some conservatives, organized around the House Freedom Caucus — as well as the score of Republicans who opposed McCarthy's bid to become speaker — have taken combative stands as they try to disrupt business as usual in Washington.

They are determined to not only slash spending levels but remake the U.S. government, which they view with growing enmity and criticize as "woke and weaponized." Some conservatives have downplayed the effects of a government shutdown and even contend that it would have benefits.

"The Biden regulatory agenda comes to a grinding halt with a government shutdown," Russell Vought, an influential strategist among the right-wing lawmakers, posted on social media this week.

In the current clash over funding the government, the debate has centered on whether Congress should use stopgap funding legislation to keep government offices running and paychecks for federal employees flowing beyond Sept. 30, when the government's fiscal year expires.

WHAT IS MCCARTHY DOING?

McCarthy is urging his fellow House Republicans to avoid the political pain of causing a shutdown as he tries to protect his narrow House majority. But because Republicans had such a slim majority to begin with, even a handful of holdouts can demand concessions or prevent the party from moving forward on legislation.

In his eight months as speaker, McCarthy has at times surprised Washington with his ability to maneuver with his fragile majority. But now that he is facing a government shutdown, he is caught between commitments he made during the two major crises Congress faced this year: the fight over choosing a House speaker and negotiations to suspend the nation's debt limit.

McCarthy had to win support from almost every House Republican in his grueling bid to become speaker in January. To do so, he made a range of concessions, including an agreement to cut government spending to certain levels and pass each of the 12 annual appropriations bills individually.

Then in June, as he negotiated with President Joe Biden to suspend the nation's debt limit, McCarthy agreed to hold the government's annual discretionary funding to \$1.59 trillion. That deal passed the House, in part due to support from Democrats.

"He's made promises to part of the conference with the deal that he cut with President Biden on certain numbers," said Republican Rep. Ken Buck, who is part of the House Freedom Caucus. "Then he's made promises to get elected speaker to a different part of the conference. And those two numbers are pretty far apart."

McCarthy's allies have insisted the speaker has kept his word and is still fighting for the spending levels

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he promised Republicans in January.

WHO ARE THE OTHER KEY PLAYERS?

Rep. Matt Gaetz, a bombastic conservative and close ally to former President Donald Trump, has emerged as the chief foil to McCarthy. The Florida Republican rallied GOP lawmakers to resist McCarthy's bid to become speaker in January and is now openly threatening a bid to remove him from the office.

At a closed-door GOP meeting on Thursday, Gaetz confronted McCarthy and asked whether he was involved in a campaign of conservative internet influencers posting negative things about him. The speaker retorted that he would not waste time on something like that, according to Gaetz.

Gaetz's tactics prompted profanity-laced derision from Rep. French Hill, a close McCarthy ally.

McCarthy has tried to call Gaetz's bluff and dared him to move on his threats. But for now, Gaetz is mostly focused on rallying Republicans, such as Reps. Andy Ogles of Tennessee, Anna Paulina Luna of Florida and Eli Crane of Arizona, to stand firm in opposing any temporary funding bill.

As House Republicans scrambled to find a path forward this week, Rep. Matt Rosendale, a Republican fiscal hardliner, blasted GOP leadership for failing to bring up spending bills for House votes long before the end of the fiscal year.

"This is an incredible failure on the part of leadership by not starting this process back in June, July, when we would have had ample time to get through it all," he said.

McCarthy has pointed the finger back at Gaetz and the conservatives, saying work on the appropriations bills was delayed all summer and into the fall due to their demands.

"When they stop the bills from coming up, and if he votes against a continuing resolution, it's my fault? That's interesting," McCarthy said.

In the background, Trump has also urged the hardline conservatives to hold out for sweeping concessions even if a shutdown is needed.

Biden, meanwhile, has avoided the fight in Congress besides repeatedly blaming House Republicans for the dysfunction. He has called on McCarthy to enforce the spending levels agreed to in the debt limit deal.

McCarthy has tried to drag Biden into the debate, calling on him to meet with Republicans to discuss the border security proposals that the speaker wants to attach to the temporary funding legislation.

HOW WILL THE STANDOFF END?

A government shutdown is almost inevitable at this point. But the duration of the shutdown, as well as the future of McCarthy's speakership, is impossible to predict.

For now, McCarthy is still searching for support from his own party, hoping he can leverage his thin majority to force negotiations with Democrats. But the Senate is working on a temporary, bipartisan funding plan that is likely to pass in the coming days, adding more pressure on McCarthy to work with Democrats to avert a shutdown.

If McCarthy works with Democrats, Gaetz has promised he'll try to oust McCarthy by filing a so-called "motion to vacate the chair." Procedural votes could be offered to halt the motion, or it could trigger a House floor vote on whether McCarthy should remain speaker.

Some House Democrats have signaled a willingness to help McCarthy remain speaker if conservatives try to oust him, though they'll likely want something in return.

If McCarthy refuses to support a bipartisan plan, some moderate House Republicans are considering joining with Democrats to force a vote on such a bill.

Either development would be extraordinary in modern politics and could send the House into even more turmoil.

A man is shot and wounded as tempers flare in New Mexico over the statue of a Spanish conquistador

By MORGAN LEE Associated Press

ESPANOLA, N.M. (AP) — Chaos erupted Thursday as a gunshot rang out during a protest in northern New Mexico where officials had planned to install a statue of Spanish conquistador Juan de Oñate, an event that county officials had already postponed anticipating that tempers would flare.

One man was struck by the gunfire and rushed to the hospital as Rio Arriba County sheriff's officials took the suspected shooter, 23-year-old Ryan Martinez, into custody. Authorities said they were not currently seeking any other suspects in connection with the shooting.

Oñate has been a controversial figure in New Mexico's history for generations, with activists targeting the statue and other likenesses of the Spaniard for his oppressive and sometimes brutal treatment of Native Americans during his country's conquest of what is now the Southwestern United States. Some Hispanics have pointed to the statue as a symbol of their heritage.

Although the county had postponed the installation of the statue the previous day because of public safety concerns, people still turned out.

Protesters arrived Tuesday and pitched tents. They placed offerings on and around the empty pedestal to Oñate: pottery, corn stalks, votive candles, a basket of vegetables. Banners read, "not today Oñate," and "celebrate resistance not conquistadores."

The man who would later draw and fire a gun used profanity in arguments with protesters and was told by law enforcement officers to leave. Video captured by onlookers showed the man jumping a short wall and heading toward the crowd as others grabbed him.

One person yelled, "Hey, hey, hey. Let him go!" as he broke free and jumped back over the wall. That's when he pulled a gun from his waistband and fired a single shot before running off. Screaming ensued.

One person could be heard saying, "Help me! Help me!" and "I can't breathe."

The shooting occurred just outside the doors of county offices, which include sheriff offices. More than 20 law enforcement vehicles responded, crowding an Española city roadway that overlooks the Upper Rio Grande Valley.

The wounded man, whose name was not immediately released by authorities, was shot in the upper torso and was being treated at a local hospital, authorities said.

Authorities said a motive for the shooting was unclear.

"Once again, the saddest part about this is we have another incident of gun violence," county Sheriff Billy Merrifield said at a brief news conference.

Merrifield said he expressed concerns about safety issues to county commissioners about reinstalling the statue in Española outside the county building. He said he was grateful to commissioners who decided against putting up the statue.

He declined to take any questions, saying New Mexico State Police were handling the crime scene and the investigation.

State police didn't immediately respond to emails or phone calls Thursday night from The Associated Press seeking any information about the condition of the victim or any charges that had been filed or were pending in connection with the shooting. A dispatcher who wasn't authorized to release any information said additional details were expected to be released later Thursday night or Friday.

Jennifer Marley, of San Ildefonso Pueblo, an organizer for the Native American rights group The Red Nation, said the shooting took place within view of the county sheriff's department building but without any officers on site to intervene.

"It was awful. This was a peaceful call to action. We were there to celebrate the fact that the statue was not going up," she said.

She described Oñate's legacy as one of genocidal violence. "It's really ironic, I was basically saying that this violence is ongoing ... even when we are being peaceful and prayerful. The shooting began while I was speaking."

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The shooting happened on the day the New Mexico Department of Health released a report on gunshot victims treated at New Mexico's hospitals. Gov. Michelle Lujan Grisham commissioned the report earlier this month, alongside issuing a public health order that temporarily suspended gun rights in the Albuquerque area over recent gun violence.

A federal judge blocked aspects of it while a flurry of lawsuits alleging violations of constitutional rights played out.

According to the report, there was a 16% increase in patients admitted to intensive care units for firearm injuries between 2019 and 2022. Gunshot victims transferred from emergency departments to operating rooms increased by 61% over the same time frame.

The report also noted that deaths from firearm injuries between 2017 and 2021 increased among Hispanics, non-Hispanic Native Americans and non-Hispanic Black populations.

Tony Ortega, a 78-year-old retired technician who worked at Los Alamos National Laboratory, said he was glad to hear the county planned to put the Oñate statue back on public display as a symbol of local Hispanic pride. But he said he knew it would cause trouble.

"I knew this was going to be a problem. Native Americans don't want it," Ortega said. "They think Oñate was a bad person more or less."

Oñate, who arrived in present-day New Mexico in 1598, is celebrated as a cultural father figure in communities along the Upper Rio Grande that trace their ancestry to Spanish settlers. But he is also reviled for his brutality.

To Native Americans, Oñate is known for having ordered the right feet cut off of 24 captive tribal warriors after his soldiers stormed the Acoma Pueblo's mesa-top "sky city." That attack was precipitated by the killing of Oñate's nephew.

In 1998, someone sawed the right foot off the statue of Oñate near Española, where it had been on display until it was taken down in 2020 amid a national movement for racial justice that sought to topple countless monuments.

A likeness of Oñate among a caravan of Spanish colonists set in bronze outside an Albuquerque city museum also drew protests in 2020 that resulted in it being taken down.

Rio Arriba County Commission Chairman Alex Naranjo, a Democratic former magistrate judge and school board member, said he is still committed to returning the statue to public display. He said the bronze likeness and companion cultural center in the nearby community of Alcalde was commissioned at a cost of more than \$1 million in county, state and federal funding, in a project championed by his uncle Emilio Naranjo as a state senator and public figures including former Gov. Bill Richardson.

He blamed Thursday's confrontations on "disrespectful" protesters from beyond the Española Valley, though many protesters Thursday cited local Native American ties.

"To me it's a matter of principle," said Naranjo, who traces his ancestry to Spanish settlers who arrived in the late-1500s. "I don't question anybody who disagrees with me as long as they do it in a respectful, cordial way."

New California law raises minimum wage for fast food workers to \$20 per hour, among nation's highest

By ADAM BEAM Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — A new law in California will raise the minimum wage for fast food workers to \$20 per hour next year, an acknowledgment from the state's Democratic leaders that most of the often overlooked workforce are the primary earners for their low-income households.

When it takes effect on April 1, fast food workers in California will have the highest guaranteed base salary in the industry. The state's minimum wage for all other workers — \$15.50 per hour — is already among the highest in the United States.

Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom signed the law Thursday amid a throng of cheering workers and labor leaders at an event in Los Angeles. Newsom dismissed the popular view that fast food jobs are meant for

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teenagers to have their first experience in the workforce.

"That's a romanticized version of a world that doesn't exist," Newsom said. "We have the opportunity to reward that contribution, reward that sacrifice and stabilize an industry."

Newsom's signature reflects the power and influence of labor unions in the nation's most populous state, which have worked to organize fast food workers in an attempt to improve their wages and working conditions.

It also settles — for now, at least — a fight between labor and business groups over how to regulate the industry. In exchange for higher pay, labor unions have dropped their attempt to make fast food corporations liable for the misdeeds of their independent franchise operators in California, an action that could have upended the business model on which the industry is based. The industry, meanwhile, has agreed to pull a referendum related to worker wages off the 2024 ballot.

"That was a tectonic plate that had to be moved," Newsom said, referring to what he said were the more than 100 hours of negotiations it took to reach an agreement on the bills in the final weeks of the state legislative session.

Mary Kay Henry, president of the Service Employees International Union International, said the law capped 10 years of work — including 450 strikes across the state in the past two years.

The moment was almost too much for Anneisha Williams, who held back tears as she spoke during a news conference just before Newsom signed the bill. Williams, a mother of six — seven if you count her beloved dog — works at a Jack in the Box restaurant in Inglewood.

"They've been with me on the picket line, and they've been marching with me as well," Williams said of her children. "This is for them."

Newsom signing the law could win back some favor with organized labor, who sharply criticized him last week for vetoing a separate bill aimed at protecting the jobs of truck drivers amid the rise of self-driving technology. Unions have played a big part in Newsom's political rise in California, offering a reliable source of campaign cash.

Newsom's appearance in Los Angeles comes a day after Republican presidential candidates — but not Donald Trump — appeared at the Ronald Reagan Presidential Library in Simi Valley for their second televised debate. Newsom, while denying any interest in a White House run, has positioned himself as a foil to GOP contenders and has traveled the country to criticize conservative positions on abortion and gun rights. His actions on hundreds of bills before him may be viewed through the lens of his future political ambitions.

The new minimum wage for fast food workers will apply to restaurants with at least 60 locations nationwide, with an exception for restaurants that make and sell their own bread, like Panera Bread.

Right now, California's fast food workers earn an average of \$16.60 per hour, or just over \$34,000 per year, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. That's below the California Poverty Measure for a family of four, a statistic calculated by the Public Policy Institute of California and the Stanford Center on Poverty and Equality that accounts for housing costs and publicly-funded benefits.

The new \$20 minimum wage is just a starting point. The law creates a Fast Food Council that has the power to increase that wage each year through 2029 by 3.5% or the change in averages for the U.S. Consumer Price Index for urban wage earners and clerical workers, whichever is lower.

Now, the focus will shift to another group of low-wage California workers waiting for their own minimum wage increase. Lawmakers passed a separate bill earlier this month that would gradually raise the minimum wage for health care workers to \$25 per hour over the next decade. That raise wouldn't apply to doctors and nurses, but to most everyone else who works at hospitals, dialysis clinics or other health care facilities.

But unlike the fast food wage increase — which Newsom helped negotiate — the governor has not said if he would sign the raise for health care workers. The issue is complicated by the state's Medicaid program, which is the main source of revenue for many hospitals. The Newsom administration has estimated the wage increase would cost the state billions of dollars in increased payments to health care providers.

Labor unions that support the wage increase point to a study from the University of California-Berkeley Labor Center that said the state's costs would be offset by a reduction in the number of people relying

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on publicly funded assistance programs.

Analysis: It looks like it'll take all 162 games to decide MLB's postseason races

By DAVID BRANDT AP Baseball Writer

PHOENIX (AP) — It might take all 162 games to decide the playoff races in both the National League and American League.

The epicenter of the wild-card chase this weekend is in Arizona at Chase Field. Thanks to some fortuitous interleague scheduling, the AL's Houston Astros face the NL's Arizona Diamondbacks in a three-game set crucial to races in both leagues.

Defending champion Houston is fighting for a berth after a September swoon. The Diamondbacks — who have played better lately after their own second-half slide — are trying to make the postseason for the first time since 2017.

"We know it's right in front of us," Arizona manager Torey Lovullo said after his team beat the White Sox on Wednesday. "We control our own destiny in this particular situation."

Here's a look at some of the other series this weekend that will decide the postseason field:

Rangers at Mariners: This is a big four-game set that actually began Thursday night, with both teams fighting for position in the AL West and the AL wild-card race. The Rangers have played well over the past 1 1/2 weeks, opening a 2 1/2-game division lead. Texas probably is fine with a win or two in the series while Seattle might need to sweep.

Rays at Blue Jays: The Rays have already secured their berth and are locked into their playoff spot after the Orioles won the AL East on Thursday. The Blue Jays are fighting for an AL wild-card spot and winning at least two of three against Tampa Bay would go a long way toward securing that goal.

Cubs at Brewers: The Cubs just finished a tough series against Atlanta and have lost nine times in September in games in which they led. The Brewers have won the NL Central.

Marlins at Pirates: The Marlins have been playing roughly .500 ball for the better part of a month. They'll need a big weekend against the Pirates — possibly a sweep — to have a chance at making the postseason.

Reds at Cardinals: The surprising Reds have been sliding some in recent weeks. They'll likely need a sweep over the Cardinals to have much of a shot at sneaking into the postseason.

AWARDS RACES

The most intrigue still surrounds the NL Cy Young Award race, which has a handful of solid candidates in San Diego's Blake Snell, Chicago's Justin Steele, Arizona's Zac Gallen and Atlanta's Spencer Strider.

Strider's got a shot in his final start to become the majors only 20-game winner. Steele and Gallen will have one more chance to impress in the middle of the NL wild-card race.

Ronald Acuña Jr. recently created the 40-homer, 70-stolen base club after the Braves star became the first player to reach both those marks in the same season. With apologies to teammate Matt Olson and Dodgers standouts Mookie Betts and Freddie Freeman, he's still the favorite for the National League MVP.

Yankees star Gerrit Cole pitched a two-hit shutout against Toronto, clinching the AL ERA title and strengthening his Cy Young case.

MIGGY FAREWELL

Miguel Cabrera hit his 511th homer on Wednesday.

The 40-year-old is putting the finishing touches on a stellar career that includes two MVP awards, A Triple Crown, four batting titles, 12 All-Star appearances and a 2003 World Series title. There was a 13-year stretch from 2004-6 when he was one of the most feared hitters in baseball.

FRANCONA'S FINALE?

All signs point to this being Cleveland manager Terry Francona's final season in the dugout.

The 64-year-old has been slowed by major health issues in recent years, but if this is it, there's little doubt the personable, popular Francona has left a lasting imprint as a manager and one of the game's most beloved figures.

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He won World Series titles with the Boston in 2004 and 2007 before guiding the Guardians over the past 11 years, which have included nine winning seasons.

EYES ON THE BALL

MLB has enjoyed a big boost in attendance this season, averaging roughly 29,000 fans per game going into the final weekend.

That's much better than 26,843 fans per game from 2022 and 18,901 in 2021 — which were both affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. No fans were allowed in parks during the 2020 regular season.

But that doesn't explain all of this year's jump. The sport is poised to draw its most fans since 2017, when the average was just shy of 30,000. One popular hypothesis: The newly-introduced pitch clock has made the sport much more watchable, shaving more than 20 minutes off of games.

Utah and Arizona will pay to keep national parks open if federal government shutdown occurs

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Arizona and Utah will keep iconic national parks in those states open if a shutdown of the federal government threatens access to Arizona's orange-striped Grand Canyon and the sheer red cliffs of Utah's Zion Valley.

Most importantly for state budgets, visitors can keep spending their money near the parks.

A cutoff could come Sunday. The economic impact of the national parks is so important that Arizona's Democratic governor and Utah's Republican governor have decided to invest state funds in keeping Grand Canyon, Zion, Arches, Bryce Canyon, Capitol Reef and Canyonlands national parks open.

For Arizona Gov. Katie Hobbs and Utah Gov. Spencer Cox, it's a simple question of economics.

The nonprofit National Parks Conservation Association says that every \$1 invested in the National Park Service annually supports more than \$15 in economic activity.

The association says that every day of a shutdown could mean national parks collectively losing nearly 1 million visitors, and gateway communities losing as much as \$70 million.

Hobbs and Cox say their states will pay to keep those parks operating on a basic level, cushioning tourism-dependent communities.

"We expect to be reimbursed, just as federal employees receive back pay during a shutdown, and we have communicated this to the Department of Interior," Cox said this week.

Hobbs has said Arizona Lottery funds would help keep the Grand Canyon park open.

Utah paid about \$7,500 daily during the last part of December 2018 to keep Zion, Bryce Canyon and Arches running during a shutdown back then. The nonprofit Zion Forever Project committed \$16,000 to pay a skeleton crew and keep bathrooms and the visitor center open at Zion, which continued drawing several thousand visitors daily.

The National Parks Conservation Association noted that keeping parks open during a shutdown without sufficient staff and other resources can be disastrous.

"We witnessed unnecessary and avoidable damage, including overflowing trash and human waste, vandalism, looting and illegal use of off-road vehicles," the organization said about some sites during the 2018-2019 shutdown.

Conditions at Joshua Tree National Park in California were described as especially bad, with overflowing trash and portable toilets and unsupervised visitors driving off road and toppling incalculable numbers of the distinctive plants.

Sen. John Barrasso, a Republican representing Wyoming, on Thursday urged Interior Secretary Deb Haaland to keep the parks open with previously collected fees. The decision by Trump administration officials to use such fees to keep some parks open five years ago has been lambasted as illegal by the Government Accountability Office, the congressional watchdog.

The Interior Department and the National Park Service it oversees have not released a contingency plan for a probable shutdown.

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"As secretary of the Interior, it is your responsibility to provide opportunities for people to access our parks in a way that ensures visitor health and safety, as well as providing the same opportunity for future generations," wrote Barrasso, ranking member of the Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Arizona paid about \$64,000 a week during the shutdown that stretched 35 days from late 2018 to early 2019 to cover restroom cleaning, trash removal and snow plowing at the Grand Canyon park. People with permits to hike in the backcountry or raft on the Colorado River could still go, but no new permits were issued during that period.

National park employees who were not furloughed had to work without pay, their lost wages repaid after a budget resolution was reached.

Those expected to work in another potential shutdown include members of Grand Canyon National Park's emergency services, which has teams trained in medical services, search and rescue and firefighting to protect not only visitors but about 2,500 park workers, concession employees and others who live on park property.

Joëlle Baird, the park's public affairs specialist, said Arizona state funding "kept most everything business as usual" during the shutdown five years ago. She said hotels and restaurants remained open.

John Garder, senior director of Budget & Appropriations for the nonprofit National Parks Conservation Association, said funding the parks is a federal responsibility that states shouldn't have to assume.

"We understand states' interest in opening our parks when the government shuts down as they are proven economic engines, generating more than \$50.3 billion and supporting more than 378,400 jobs annually," Garder said. "But ultimately, it is Congress' responsibility to keep them funded and open."

The association said the shutdown could affect more than 400 sites in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and U.S. territories such as Puerto Rico, Guam and American Samoa.

In South Dakota, Gov. Kristi Noem was reviewing a shutdown's possible impact on national parks, including Mount Rushmore, which Noem spokesperson Ian Fury called "the heart of South Dakota's tourism industry."

Colorado Gov. Jared Polis issued an executive order Thursday directing the state's Department of Natural Resources to develop a plan for continued operations and resource protection of Colorado's national parks. Rocky Mountain and the state's other three national parks contributed \$804 million to the local economy last year.

In Washington state, home to Mount Rainier and Olympic national parks, Gov. Jay Inslee has no plans to provide more funding or staff to national parks if there's a shutdown. Inslee's staff said much of governor's discretionary spending was needed this year for cleanup and recovery after wildfires in Spokane County.

Montana Gov. Greg Gianforte's office didn't say if the state would spend money to keep Glacier or Yellowstone national parks open. But his staff said the Republican governor's budget team is working with state agencies "to prepare for a possible shutdown in the event Congress can't get its act together."

Most of Yellowstone is in Wyoming, but three of the five entrances are in Montana.

Wyoming Gov. Mark Gordon is awaiting more information from Interior and White House officials to better understand the state's options, spokesperson Michael Pearlman said.

Pearlman said the Republican governor was also in contact with officials at Grand Teton and Yellowstone national parks, recognizing that closures "could have significant economic repercussions to Wyoming families that live and work in our gateway communities."

Democratic California Gov. Gavin Newsom's administration said this week it doesn't plan to keep national parks open if the federal government shuts down, saying they are not within state jurisdiction and the state has had to make difficult budgetary decisions this year.

Ringo Starr on 'Rewind Forward,' writing country music, the AI-assisted final Beatles track and more

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — There are rock stars, and then there is Ringo Starr — drummer for the Beatles, award-winning soloist, photographer, narrator, actor, activist. To call him prolific would almost shortchange his accomplishments. But it also feels right.

"Rewind Forward," out October 13, is his fourth extended play release in three years.

"I've loved EPs since they first came out in the '60s," he says of the format. "And then I heard the kids are making EPs and thought, 'That's good!'"

The title is a classic "Ringoism," as John Lennon used to refer to his malapropisms, an unusual phrase ripped from the same mind that came up with "A Hard Day's Night" and "Tomorrow Never Knows."

Assigning profundity to it came later. "I think it means that, you know, you're sitting still for a while. You rewind and you find out 'I was a much better person then,' or 'this was working for me better then,' he says. You don't have to ever live in the past, but just check it occasionally."

"Of course, I'm making all this up," he jokes.

Starr got a little help from his friends on the four track EP, a collection of life-affirming songs co-penned by Starr's engineer frequent co-writer Bruce Sugar, Steve Lukather of the All Starr Band, Toto's Joe Williams, Benmont Tench and Mike Campbell of Tom Petty's Heartbreakers, and many more.

"Feeling the Sunlight" was written by Beatle Paul McCartney, who Starr says he "FaceTimes twice a month" and hangs out with whenever he is in London, or McCartney is in LA.

"When he sent the track, he'd actually done the drums, so we had to take them off," he says, laughing.

If there is a thematic throughline to "Rewind Forward," or any of Starr's solo work, it's a kind of unrelenting optimism — that even in the most troubling circumstances, peace and love will see you through.

It's that spirit that has kept him moving forward. He's currently embarked on a fall tour, which began September 17th in Ontario, California, and ends next month in Thackerville, Oklahoma. It's a feat for a veteran performer when so many bands are embarking on farewell tours.

"A lot of people have said 'That's the last gig!' And I say it after every tour and our children and my wife are fed up with me. 'Oh, you said that last time,'" he jokes. And yet, he continues to hit the road because he simply loves it: "I get everything I need."

More short collections are on the horizon, too. ("Right now, I'm EP crazy," he says.) The next one is founded in country music. While attending a poetry reading by Olivia Harrison, late Beatle George Harrison's widow, Starr ran into "T-Bone" Burnett. They decided to work together. Starr thought he'd get a pop number, but Burnett instead sent him a country song. "He actually opened the door," he says. "So, I thought, 'Why don't we do that, too? A country one.'"

Recently, Starr collaborated with McCartney on Dolly Parton's cover of the Beatles' "Let It Be." ("It's good to be a part of it," he says, adding that it required no convincing. "I'm easy.")

In June, news broke that a final Beatles recording would soon become available, created using artificial intelligence technology to extricate John Lennon's voice from a piano demo — the same method used to separate the Beatles' voices from background sounds during the making of director Peter Jackson's 2021 documentary series, "The Beatles: Get Back."

There was some confusion — and potentially fear — around the use of AI. "The rumors were that we just made it up," he says of Lennon's contributions to the forthcoming track. "Like we would do that anyway."

"This is the last track, ever, that you'll get the four Beatles on the track. John, Paul, George, and Ringo," he says.

When asked when it will be released, he says, "It should've been out already."

And if it's the Beatles you're hungry for, there's always their immense discography to dive into. Or all eight hours of "Get Back," which its ineffable access the biggest band in history, and its most intimate moments: like the scene that shows Starr beginning to write "Octopus's Garden," and Harrison coming in to assist.

Harrison had left the band; Starr was in Sardinia on Peter Sellers' yacht when the captain told him oc-

topuses have gardens — they collect stones and shiny objects. He had his guitar — “I play three chords, that’s about it,” he says — and starting writing.

In his view, the documentary allows viewers to see exactly what came next — and the magic of being a Beatle.

“It was a great time of my life. Being a Beatle was great,” he says. “I had three brothers, I’m an only child, and that’s life.”

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

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, LISA MASCARO and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans launched a formal impeachment hearing Thursday against President Joe Biden, promising to “provide accountability” as they probe the family finances and lucrative business dealings of his son Hunter and make their case to the public, colleagues and a skeptical Senate.

The chairmen of the Oversight, Judiciary, and Ways and Means committees used the opening hearing to review the constitutional and legal questions involved with impeachment. They are trying to show what they say are links to Biden’s son Hunter’s overseas businesses, though key witnesses said they do not yet see hard evidence of impeachable offenses.

Rep. James Comer, R-Ky, the Oversight chairman, said the lawmakers have “a mountain of evidence” that will show that the elder Biden “abused his public office for his family’s financial gain.”

Hours after the hearing wrapped, Comer issued subpoenas for additional banking records from the personal and business accounts of Hunter Biden and the president’s brother, James Biden. He said the panel will continue to “follow the money and the evidence to provide accountability.”

It’s a high-stakes opening act for Republicans, taking place just before a potential federal government shutdown, as they begin a process that can lead to the ultimate penalty for a president, dismissal from office for what the Constitution describes as “high crimes and misdemeanors.”

The White House pushed back with statements throughout the hearing saying nothing can distract from the Republicans’ inability to govern as the shutdown loomed. Spokesperson Sharon Yang called the hearing a “baseless stunt” and said, “President Biden will always stay focused on the priorities of the American people — not these political games.”

The more than six-hour hearing came as House Republicans face scattered resistance to an impeachment inquiry from their own ranks and deep reluctance in the Senate from Republicans who worry about political ramifications and say Biden’s conviction and removal from office are unlikely.

As the hearing began, Democrats displayed a screen showing the days, hours and minutes left until the government shuts down as Congress struggles to fund the government before Saturday’s deadline.

“We’re 62 hours away from shutting down the government of the United States of America and Republicans are launching an impeachment drive, based on a long debunked and discredited lie,” said Rep. Jamie Raskin, the top Democrat on the Oversight panel.

Raskin questioned the legitimacy of the hearing since the House has not voted to formally launch the impeachment inquiry. He said Republicans are rehashing five-year-old allegations raised by Donald Trump, who is Biden’s chief rival in 2024, during the former president’s 2019 impeachment over Ukraine.

“They don’t have a shred of evidence against President Biden for an impeachable offense,” he said.

The hearing Thursday did not feature witnesses with information about the Bidens or Hunter Biden’s business. Instead, the panel heard from outside experts in tax law, criminal investigations and constitutional legal theory.

A top Republican-called witness, Jonathan Turley, a George Washington University law professor who is an expert in impeachment issues, said he believed the House had passed the threshold for an inquiry but the current evidence was not enough for charges.

“I do not believe that the current evidence would support articles of impeachment,” Turley said.

Democrats, who decry the investigation as a political ploy aimed at hurting Biden and helping Trump as

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he runs again for president, brought in Michael Gerhardt, a law professor who has also appeared as an expert in previous impeachment proceedings.

In detailing the reasons Republicans say they have to impeach Biden, Gerhardt concluded: "If that's what exists, as a basis for this inquiry, it is not sufficient. I say that with all respect."

Still, questions remain as Republicans dig into the Biden family finances and the overseas business dealings of Hunter Biden, who has acknowledged being a drug user during much of the time under scrutiny. The president's brother, James, was also involved in some work with Hunter.

Republicans have been investigating Hunter Biden for years, since his father was vice president. And while there have 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.

One former business partner of Hunter Biden has told House investigators the son was selling the "illusion of access" to his father.

Turley told the lawmakers the question remains, "Was the president involved?"

In the run-up to the hearing, Republicans unveiled 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 say 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 because it was the address on Hunter Biden's 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.

House Republicans are also looking into the Justice Department investigation into 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 that they faced retaliation when they pushed back.

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

"The Biden Justice Department protected the Biden family brand," said Rep. Jason Smith, a Missouri Republican and Ways and Means chairman.

What Smith did not mention was that the discussions occurred during the Trump Justice Department and were likely in keeping with the agency's practice of avoiding overt investigative steps concerning political candidates in the immediate run-up to an election.

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.

"They tried to put together this sweetheart deal," said Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, the Judiciary chairman.

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 and disrupt services for millions of Americans.

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy announced the impeachment inquiry this month, egged on by Trump and with mounting pressure from his right flank to take action against Biden or risk being ousted from his leadership job.

Trump is the only president to be twice impeached, first over accusations he pressured Ukraine to dig up dirt on Biden and later over accusations that he incited the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol. He was acquitted in both cases by the Senate.

The hearing Thursday is expected to be the first of many as House Republicans explore whether or not they will pursue articles of impeachment against the president.

It's unclear if McCarthy has support from his slim Republican majority to impeach Biden. If Biden was impeached, the charges would then be sent to the Senate for a trial.

Many questions but few answers in congressional hearing on Maui's wildfire and electric provider

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

Lawmakers probing the cause of last month's deadly Maui wildfire did not get many answers during Thursday's congressional hearing on the role the electrical grid played in the disaster.

The president of Hawaiian Electric, Shelee Kimura, said she didn't know specific details about when the power stopped flowing through downed power lines in Lahaina or when the decision was made to trigger a procedure designed to ensure broken lines were not re-energized. But she said she would get that information to the committee later. Hawaiian Electric is Maui's sole electricity provider.

The fire in the historic town of Lahaina killed at least 97 people and destroyed more than 2,000 buildings, mostly homes. It first erupted at 6:30 a.m. when strong winds appeared to cause a Hawaiian Electric power line to fall, igniting dry brush and grass near a large subdivision. The fire was initially declared contained, but it flared up again around 3 p.m. and spread through the town.

The Associated Press reported Wednesday that aerial and satellite imagery shows the gully where the fire reignited that afternoon has long been choked with plants 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 (three meters) high, and a resident who lives next to the gully said it had not been mowed in the 20 years he's lived there.

Asked about the issue Thursday during the U.S. House Energy and Commerce subcommittee hearing, Kimura reiterated Hawaiian Electric's position that it is only responsible for trimming trees that are high enough to contact electric lines.

"Our vegetation management is around our lines. It is not a stated right to take care of the grass under our lines on private property," Kimura said, adding that it is an issue that the state should consider in the aftermath of the fire.

Lawmakers questioned Kimura and other 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.

There is still much to sort out about the fire, Rep. Morgan Griffith, R-Virginia, said at the hearing's start. Among questions that need to be answered are how the fires spread and what efforts to reduce fire risk have been made in recent years.

"It is extremely important that we ... ask the hard questions," he said.

Those testifying at the hearing were Kimura, Hawaii Public Utilities Commission Chair Leodoloff Asuncion Jr. and Hawaii Chief Energy Officer Mark Glick.

Asked to address whether the electrical grid in Lahaina was safe and properly maintained, Kimura told the committee that 2,000 of the company's wooden power poles had not been tested for possible termites, rot or other problems since 2013. The other 29,000 poles on the island had been assessed under Hawaiian Electric's "test and treat" program, she said.

Kimura said she didn't know exactly where those 2,000 remaining untested poles were located. But at least one near where the fire started was tested and treated in 2022, she said.

The factors that led to the fire are complex and involve several organizations, Kimura said.

"There's a system here that was in play for all of these conditions to happen all at one time that resulted in the devastation in Lahaina," she said.

Both Kimura and Asuncion addressed the possibility of burying power lines to reduce wildfire risk, especially in high-wind conditions. About 50% of Hawaii's power lines are now underground, Kimura said. However, Asuncion said burying can be cost-prohibitive and has a big impact on rate-payers.

"I get that," Rep. Michael Burgess, R-Texas, responded. "But sometimes the cost of doing nothing gets to be prohibitive too."

Andrea Pekelo, one of eight fire victims who attended the hearing, said afterward that she appreciated the "pointed questions" asked by the lawmakers but she was frustrated by the responses and hopes the committee keeps pushing for answers.

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"There was a lot of non-answers and deflection, and a lot of 'I don't know' or 'I have to check with people within my company,'" she said.

Pekelo and others were trapped in their subdivision by flames and gridlocked traffic and escaped only after a neighbor used a grinder to dismantle a fence and another used a hose to spray cars as they drove through the fence and the flames beyond.

"I really hope to get real facts about what these people in positions of power knew the day of the fire," she said.

Downed power lines hindered some residents' efforts to flee Lahaina during the fires, and several survivors told The Associated Press that they were turned away from exit routes by closed roads, utility crews and police who were trying to keep people from driving over potentially live wires.

Some of the fire victims submitted written testimony for the hearing.

Kathleen Hennricks wrote that her family spent 10 days searching for her 57-year-old sister Rebecca Ann Rans, only to learn that she had died in the arms of her longtime partner, Doug Gleoge, just a few blocks from their home.

"The biggest tragedy is that my sister's death and the losses to our family were completely preventable," Hennricks wrote. "My sister's death was unnecessary, but please do not let it be meaningless. Steps must be taken now to prevent yet another fire on Maui."

The FBI agents who informed her of Rans' death said the only items that remained of her sister were a bracelet with the word "Kuuipo," which means "sweetheart" in Hawaiian, and one burnt slipper.

Gleoge's son and daughter, Jon Gleoge and Andrea Wheeler, also submitted testimony, saying details of their father and Rans' attempt to flee the fire "remain shrouded in uncertainty."

"Perhaps the most excruciating aspect of this ordeal has been the condition of our dad's remains," the two wrote. "The fire's ferocity left his body unrecognizable, rendering viewing impossible. The weight of this reality is one that we both continue to grapple with daily."

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

The letter asked about the sequence of events on the day of the fire, efforts to mitigate risks posed by the electrical grid, the investigation and other matters.

Kimura acknowledged Hawaiian Electric's downed lines caused the initial fire but said the lines had been de-energized for more than six hours when it 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 — and emphasized that its cause has not been determined.

Whether the lines were fully de-energized might still be in question. At least one Lahaina resident told AP their power came back on around 2 p.m., and Maui Police Chief John Pelletier has said his officers were trying to keep people from driving over live power lines later that afternoon as they fled.

Rep. Frank Pallone, a Democrat from New Jersey, warned that if Congress does not act before a looming federal government shutdown, residents could be left without the financial assistance needed to cope with the crisis. Scores of people were have lost homes and jobs.

A "reckless government shutdown, which we know is imminent," would dramatically slow Maui's recovery effort, Pallone said.

Trump won't try to move Georgia case to federal court after judge rejected similar bid by Meadows

By KATE BRUMBACK and JEFF AMY Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Former President Donald Trump will not seek to get his Georgia election interference case transferred to federal court, his attorneys said in a filing Thursday, three weeks after a judge rejected a similar attempt by the former president's White House chief of staff.

The notice filed in federal court in Atlanta follows a Sept. 8 decision from U.S. District Judge Steve Jones that chief of staff Mark Meadows "has not met even the 'quite low' threshold" to move his case to federal court, saying the actions outlined in the indictment were not taken as part of Meadows' role as a federal official. Meadows is appealing that ruling.

Trump has pleaded not guilty to the charges, including an alleged violation of Georgia's anti-racketeering law, over his efforts to overturn the results of the 2020 election. He was indicted last month along with Meadows and 17 others.

The notice, filed in state court in Atlanta by Trump's defense attorney, expressed confidence in how Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee will handle the trial, but may have also reflected the difficulties that other defendants have had in trying to move their cases to federal court.

"President Trump now notifies the court that he will NOT be seeking to remove his case to federal court," the notice states. "This decision is based on his well-founded confidence that this honorable court intends to fully and completely protect his constitutional right to a fair trial and guarantee him due process of law throughout the prosecution of his case in the Superior Court of Fulton County, Georgia."

If Trump had gotten his case moved to federal court, he could have tried to get the charges dismissed altogether on the grounds that federal officials have immunity from prosecution over actions taken as part of their official job duties.

Trump, though, is still making arguments in the state court case that he can't be prosecuted because of his federal position. On Thursday, his lawyer filed a motion saying in part that Trump is immune from state prosecution for all the acts he took while president, and that Georgia's prosecution violates the supremacy clause of the U.S. Constitution, which says federal law overrides state law.

A venue change also could have broadened the jury pool beyond overwhelmingly Democratic Fulton County and meant that a trial that would not be photographed or televised, as cameras are not allowed inside federal courtrooms. A venue change would not have meant that Trump — if he's reelected in 2024 — or another president would have been able to issue a pardon because any conviction would still happen under state law.

Several other defendants — three fake electors and former U.S. Justice Department official Jeffrey Clark — are also seeking to move their cases to federal court. Jones has not yet ruled on those cases.

Meadows testified as part of his bid to remove his case, although the others did not. Trump would not have been required to testify at his own hearing, but removal might have been difficult to win if he didn't take the stand. That would have given prosecutors a chance to question him under cross-examination, and anything he said could have been used in an eventual trial.

Meadows had asked for the charges to be dismissed, saying the Constitution made him immune from prosecution for actions taken in his official duties as White House chief of staff.

The judge ruled that the actions at the heart of prosecutors' charges against Meadows were taken on behalf of the Trump campaign "with an ultimate goal of affecting state election activities and procedures."

Trump, who is facing three other criminal cases, has so far been unsuccessful in seeking to have a state case in New York, alleging falsified business records in connection with a hush money payment to a porn actor, transferred to federal court. He asked a federal appeals court to reverse a judge's opinion keeping the case in state court.

What to know and what's next for Travis King, the American soldier who ran into North Korea

By JAKE BLEIBERG Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — An American soldier who sprinted into North Korea and was held there for two months before being returned to the U.S. is set to undergo medical testing and extensive questioning about his time in the isolated country before potentially facing charges under the military justice system.

Pvt. Travis King ran across the heavily fortified border from South Korea in July and became the first American detained in North Korea in nearly five years.

Pyongyang abruptly announced Wednesday that it would expel King, and he was flown to an Air Force base in Texas on Thursday.

Here's what we know about King, his mysterious entry into North Korea and what's happened in similar cases.

WHO IS HE, AND WHAT HAPPENED?

King, 23, joined the Army in January 2021 and was in South Korea as a cavalry scout with the 1st Armored Division, according to military officials.

On July 10 he was released from a South Korean prison after serving nearly two months on assault charges. He was set to be sent to Fort Bliss, Texas, where he could have faced potential additional disciplinary actions and discharge.

Officials said King was taken to the airport and escorted as far as customs. But instead of getting on the plane, he left and later joined a civilian tour of the Korean border village of Panmunjom. He bolted across the border, which is lined with guards and often crowded with tourists, in the afternoon.

North Korea's state news agency said King, who is Black, had said he entered the country because he "harbored ill feelings against inhuman mistreatment and racial discrimination within the U.S. Army."

U.S. officials have cast doubt on the authenticity of those statements, and King's mother, Claudine Gates of Racine, Wisconsin, told The Associated Press she never heard him express such views.

It remains unclear why King crossed the border and why Pyongyang — which has tense relations with Washington over its nuclear program, its support for Russia's war in Ukraine and other issues — agreed to release him.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT?

The coming weeks are likely to hold a battery of medical and psychological examinations as well as intelligence debriefings about his time in North Korea, a country few Americans enter.

King arrived early Thursday at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio and was taken to Brooke Army Medical Center, according to the Pentagon. Along with the testing and questioning, he will also get a chance to see family.

King's movements will likely be controlled while commanders learn what they can from him and decide what to do next, said Rachel VanLandingham, a national security law expert and professor at Southwestern Law School in Los Angeles. She said the probable next steps are formal charges under the military justice system, but they could take months.

"Based on their track record, I think they're going to court-martial him," said VanLandingham, a retired Air Force lieutenant colonel, adding that the evidence against King appears "overwhelming" but he could also be discharged without charges.

King was declared AWOL but not considered a deserter. Punishment for going AWOL or desertion vary based on a number of factors that are complicated by King's two-month absence and ultimate handover by North Korea.

The fact that he spent weeks in the secretive country would be unlikely to give him any leverage with the U.S. military over his punishment, said Gary Solis, a former Marine Corps prosecutor and military judge.

"I don't think that he would have been allowed to have seen anything of strategic or even tactical value that he might use as a bargaining chip," Solis said. "I think he's out of luck."

WHAT HAS HAPPENED BEFORE IN SIMILAR CASES?

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The last active-duty soldier returned to the U.S. by an adversary was Bowe Bergdahl, VanLandingham said. Bergdahl was 23 when he left his Army post in Afghanistan in 2009, was abducted by the Taliban and was held captive and tortured for nearly five years. He later said he left to report what he saw as poor leadership within his unit.

Several U.S. servicemembers were wounded while searching for Bergdahl. After his return in a prisoner swap, he was charged in military court with desertion and misbehavior before the enemy. Bergdahl pleaded guilty to both charges in 2017, but a judge vacated his conviction this year.

VanLandingham said that while the two cases are not identical, the fact that the Army pursued a court-martial against Bergdahl suggests it will against King as well.

Officials said King was released in good health, unlike Otto Warmbier, another American recently held in North Korea.

Warmbier, a 22-year-old University of Virginia student, was seized by North Korean authorities from a tour group in January 2016, convicted of trying to steal a propaganda poster and sentenced to 15 years of hard labor.

He spent 17 months in captivity before he was released and flown home in a coma, dying shortly afterward in June 2017.

While not providing a clear reason for Warmbier's brain damage, North Korea denied accusations by Warmbier's family that he was tortured.

Biden offers dire warnings about Trump, accuses mainstream GOP of 'deafening' silence

By SEUNG MIN KIM, JONATHAN J. COOPER and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

TEMPE, Arizona (AP) — President Joe Biden issued one of his most dire warnings yet that Donald Trump and his allies are a menace to American democracy, declaring Thursday that the former president is more interested in personal power than upholding the nation's core values and suggesting even mainstream Republicans are complicit.

"The silence is deafening," he said.

During a speech in Arizona celebrating a library to be built honoring his friend and fierce Trump critic, the late Republican Sen. John McCain, Biden repeated one of his key campaign themes, branding the "Make America Great Again" movement as an existential threat to the U.S. political system. He's reviving that idea ahead of next year's presidential race after it buoyed Democrats during last fall's midterm election, laying out the threat in especially stark terms: "There's something dangerous happening in America right now."

"We should all remember, democracies don't have to die at the end of a rifle," Biden said. "They can die when people are silent, when they fail to stand up or condemn threats to democracy, when people are willing to give away that which is most precious to them because they feel frustrated, disillusioned, tired, alienated."

The 2024 election is still more than a year away, yet Biden's focus reflects Trump's status as the undisputed frontrunner for his party's nomination despite facing four indictments, two of them related to his attempts to overturn Biden's 2020 victory.

The president's speech was his fourth in a series of addresses on what he sees as challenges to democracy, a topic that is a touchstone for him as he tries to remain in office in the face of low approval ratings and widespread concern from voters about his age, 80.

He used this line of political attack frequently ahead of last year's midterms, when Democrats gained a Senate seat and only narrowly lost the House to the GOP. But shifting the narrative in Washington could be especially tricky given that Biden is facing mounting pressure on Capitol Hill, where House Republicans held the first hearing in their impeachment inquiry and where the prospect of a government shutdown looms — a prospect Trump has actively egged on.

On the first anniversary of Jan. 6, 2021, when a mob of Trump supporters staged an insurrection, Biden

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visited the Capitol and accused Trump of continuing to hold a "dagger" at democracy's throat. He closed out the summer that year in the shadow of Philadelphia's Independence Hall, decrying Trumpism as a menace to democratic institutions.

And in November, as voters were casting midterm ballots, Biden again sounded a clarion call to protect democratic institutions.

Advisers see the president's continued focus on democracy as both good policy and 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.

"Our task, our sacred task of our time, is to make sure that they change not for the worst but for the better, that democracy survives and thrives, not be smashed by a movement more interested in power than a principle," Biden said Thursday. "It's up to us, the American people."

Like previous speeches the latest location was chosen for effect. It was near Arizona State University, which houses the McCain Institute, named after the late senator, the 2008 Republican presidential nominee who spent his public life denouncing autocrats around the globe.

Biden said that "there is no question that today's Republican Party is driven and intimidated by MAGA extremists." He pointed to Trump's recent suggestion that Gen. Mark Milley, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff who is stepping down from his post on Friday, should be executed for allegedly treasonous betrayal of him.

"Although I don't believe even a majority of Republicans think that, the silence is deafening," Biden added. He also noted that Trump has previously questioned those who serve in the U.S. military calling "service members suckers and losers. Was John a sucker?" Biden asked, referring to McCain, who survived long imprisonment in Vietnam.

Then he got even more personal adding, "Was my son, Beau — who lived next to a burn pit for a year and came home and died — was he a sucker for volunteering to serve his country?"

The late senator's wife, Cindy McCain, said the library, which is still to be built, grew out of bipartisan support from Biden, Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs and her predecessor, Republican Gov. Doug Ducey. She called it "a fitting legacy for my husband" and recalled how the Bidens introduced her to her future husband decades ago.

"I am so grateful for that," Cindy McCain said, her voice cracking.

Later Thursday, the Treasury Department announced \$83 million in federal funds to help construct the 83,000-square-foot library near Papago Park.

Republicans competing with Trump for their party's 2024 presidential nomination have largely avoided challenging his election falsehoods, and Biden said Thursday that voters can't let them get away with it.

"Democracy is not a partisan issue," he said. "It's An American issue."

After the speech, Biden spoke at an Arizona fundraiser for his reelection campaign. The attendees included Brittney Griner, the basketball star who was arrested last year at the airport in Moscow on drug-related charges and detained for nearly 10 months.

A number of 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 midterm races in every presidential battleground state.

Still, 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 Republican dominance. Biden's victory made the state a hotbed of efforts to overturn or cast doubt on the results, and some GOP candidates continue to deny basic facts on elections.

That's help reinforce other claims from Democrats about GOP extremism on other, separate issues, said Republican officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to candidly describe the party's election shortcomings last year. Though Trump-animated forces in the party dominate public attention, many Republican voters were concerned about other issues such as the economy and the border and did not want to focus on an election result that was two years old.

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Republican state lawmakers used their subpoena power to obtain 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 and spurred an exodus of election workers.

In the midterms, voters up and down the ballot rejected Republican candidates who repeatedly denied the results of the 2020 election. But Kari Lake, the GOP gubernatorial candidate, has never conceded her loss to Hobbs and plans to launch a bid for the U.S. Senate. Last year, Republican Senate candidate Blake Masters and Mark Finchem, who ran for secretary of state, also repeated fraudulent election claims in their campaigns.

Sen. Mark Kelly, D-Ariz., who defeated Masters, said the importance of defending democracy resonates not only 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.

Arizona Rep. Ruben Gallego, who is seeking the Democratic nomination in next year's Senate race, said a democracy-focused message 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."

Menendez tells Senate colleagues he won't resign, remains defiant amid bribery charges

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — New Jersey Sen. Robert Menendez remained defiant in the face of federal bribery charges on Thursday, telling a room full of his Senate Democratic colleagues that he has no plans to resign.

Speaking behind closed doors at the Capitol, Menendez echoed his previous public statements in response to last week's indictment, according to a person who attended the private luncheon and requested anonymity to discuss it. Menendez has repeatedly denied wrongdoing and pledged that he will beat the charges that he worked to secretly advance Egyptian interests and pressured prosecutors to help his friends.

More than half of Democratic senators have said Menendez should step down. But none of them asked questions after he spoke and vowed to remain in office, according to several senators leaving the meeting.

But Menendez's remarks also appeared to win him no new allies, further isolating the New Jersey senator as his colleagues and Democratic leaders have wrestled over how to respond to the indictment alleging that he traded off his Senate position to enrich himself with cash, gold bars and a luxury car.

"My mind is not changed," said Sen. Michael Bennet, D-Colo., who has called on Menendez to step down. He declined to give any additional details about the meeting.

"I don't think there's anything happy about his situation," said Rhode Island Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse.

"He was pretty clear" that he's not resigning, said Maryland Sen. Ben Cardin, who is taking over for Menendez as chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee. Menendez was forced to step down after he was indicted due to caucus rules.

Menendez, who pleaded not guilty to the charges on Wednesday, did not tell his colleagues whether he will run for re-election next year. At least one Democrat, New Jersey Rep. Andy Kim, has already jumped into the primary, and the head of Senate Democrats' campaign arm, Michigan Sen. Gary Peters, has called on Menendez to resign — signaling that he may not receive campaign assistance traditionally available to incumbents.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., hinted at the uncertainty of Menendez's political future when he announced on Wednesday that Menendez would speak at Thursday's meeting. "We'll see what happens after that," Schumer said.

But Schumer, who has not called on Menendez to resign, would not comment as he left the meeting. Menendez also declined to elaborate. "They heard my message," he said of his colleagues. He reiterated he will not step aside.

The New Jersey senator is accused along with his wife, Nadine, in an indictment released Friday of using his position to aid the authoritarian government of Egypt and to pressure federal prosecutors to drop a case against a friend, among other allegations of corruption. The three-count indictment says they were paid gold bars, a luxury car and cash by three New Jersey businessmen as bribes in exchange for multiple corrupt acts.

Menendez, who was released on a \$100,000 bond Wednesday, has said 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 the DNA of one of the businessmen who are charged as his co-conspirators, the indictment said. It was also marked with the real estate developer's return address, according to prosecutors.

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.

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.

Menendez was similarly defiant as he fought those charges. But that time most of his colleagues stood by him — including fellow New Jersey Democratic Sen. Cory Booker, who was a character witness in his trial. On Tuesday, Booker called for his longtime colleague to step down, saying the new indictment includes "shocking allegations of corruption and specific, disturbing details of wrongdoing."

Booker would not comment on Menendez's remarks after Thursday's caucus lunch.

West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin was one of the few senators who did comment after the meeting, telling reporters that he would still give Menendez the benefit of the doubt.

"The rule of law is for all of us," Manchin said. "He is going to vigorously defend himself."

What to know as fall vaccinations against COVID, flu and RSV get underway

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Updated COVID-19 vaccines may be getting a little easier for adults to find but they're still frustratingly scarce for young children. Health officials said Thursday the kid shots have started shipping — and reminded most everyone to get a fall flu shot too.

About 2 million Americans have gotten the new COVID-19 shot in the two weeks since its approval despite early barriers from insurance companies and other glitches, according to the Department of Health and Human Services.

For the first time, the U.S. has vaccines to fight a trio of viruses that cause fall and winter misery. But health officials worry that shot fatigue and hassles in getting them will leave too many people needlessly unprotected.

"We need to use them," Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, said Thursday. "Right now is the right time."

A flu vaccination and that updated COVID-19 shot are urged for just about everyone, starting with babies as young as 6 months.

Also this year, a vaccine against another scary virus called RSV is recommended for people 60 and older and for certain pregnant women. And for babies, a vaccinelike medicine to guard against that respiratory

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syncytial virus is expected to arrive next month.

"These vaccines may not be perfect in being able to prevent absolutely every infection with these illnesses, but they turn a wild infection into a milder one," said Dr. William Schaffner of Vanderbilt University and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases.

Some things to know:

WHY DO I NEED ANOTHER COVID-19 SHOT?

This year's vaccine is updated to protect against newer versions of the constantly evolving coronavirus. Already there's been a late summer jump in infections, hospitalizations and deaths. And so far the new vaccine recipe appears to be a good match to the variants currently circulating.

Protection against COVID-19, whether from vaccination or from an earlier infection, wanes over time — and most Americans haven't had a vaccine dose in about a year. Everyone 5 and older will need just one shot this fall even if they've never had a prior vaccination, while younger children may need additional doses depending on their vaccination and infection history.

HOW HARD IS IT TO FIND COVID-19 SHOTS?

The rollout's start has been messy. This time the government isn't buying and distributing shots for free. Now drugstores, doctors' offices and other providers had to place their own orders, and sometimes canceled appointments if supplies didn't arrive in time. Some people had to wait for their insurance companies to update the billing codes needed to cover them or risk paying out of pocket.

Manufacturers Pfizer and Moderna have shipped millions of doses, and say there's plenty of supply — and in recent days, more appointments have started opening, at least for people 12 and older. In a Wednesday meeting, insurance companies told HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra they've largely resolved the paperwork issues blocking some patients' vaccinations.

The shots are supposed to be provided free in-network to the insured. For the uninsured or underinsured, CDC has opened what it's calling a "bridge" program to provide free shots at certain sites.

WHY CAN'T PARENTS FIND COVID-19 SHOTS FOR YOUNGER KIDS?

Adult doses got shipped first, CDC's Cohen said. Doses for the under-12 set have begun shipping, and "the supply is filling out," she said.

Drugstore chain CVS said its doses for ages 5 and older began arriving last week, although supplies vary by location, while its MinuteClinic locations anticipate opening appointments for tots as young as 18 months in the coming days.

As for pediatricians, they've had to guess how many doses to buy up-front while waiting to learn how much insurance companies would reimburse them for each shot, said Dr. Jesse Hackell of the American Academy of Pediatrics. He said early parent demand is heartening but that pediatricians expect to spend lots of time this fall explaining to hesitant families how important COVID-19 vaccination is even for healthy children.

In Redmond, Washington, Ania Mitros got herself, her husband and her 13-year-old vaccinated pretty easily but despite calls to multiple pharmacies and clinics can't find anyone to tell her when shots for her 8- and 11-year-old will be available. "There need to be clear expectations," she said.

WHAT ABOUT FLU VACCINE?

Fewer Americans got a flu vaccine last year than before the coronavirus pandemic — a discouraging gap that CDC hopes to reverse.

People need a flu vaccine every fall because influenza also mutates each year. Like with COVID-19, flu is most dangerous to older adults, the very young and people with weak immune systems, lung, heart or other chronic health problems, or who are pregnant.

There are multiple kinds of flu vaccines, including a nasal spray version for certain younger people. More important, three kinds are specifically recommended for seniors because they do a better job revving up an older adult's immune system.

CAN I GET A FLU SHOT AND COVID-19 SHOT AT THE SAME TIME?

Yes, although one in each arm might be more comfortable.

WHO NEEDS THE NEW RSV VACCINE?

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RSV is a cold-like nuisance for most people, and not as well-known as the flu. But RSV packs hospitals every winter and kills several hundred tots and thousands of seniors. The CDC says already, RSV cases are rising in the Southeast.

RSV vaccines from GSK and Pfizer are approved for adults 60 and older.

Drugstores have adequate supplies but some seniors are reporting hurdles such as requirements to get a prescription. That's because the CDC recommended that seniors talk with their doctors about the new vaccine. Cohen said it was meant just for education about a virus that people may not know much about.

"We want folks to ... get access to the vaccine as quickly as possible," she said.

WHAT ABOUT BABIES AND RSV?

The FDA also has approved Pfizer's RSV vaccine to be given late in pregnancy so moms-to-be pass virus-fighting antibodies to their fetuses, offering some protection at birth. The CDC is recommending that pregnancy vaccinations be offered between September and January, when RSV tends to be most common.

There's no vaccine for children but babies whose mothers didn't get vaccinated in pregnancy may get an injection of lab-made antibodies to guard against RSV. Called Beyfortus, the one-dose shot from Sanofi and AstraZeneca is different than a vaccine, which teaches the body to make its own infection-fighting antibodies, but is similarly protective. Cohen said it should be available in October.

A key US government surveillance tool should face new limits, a divided privacy oversight board says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal spy agencies should be required to get court approval before reviewing the communications of U.S. citizens collected through a secretive foreign surveillance program, a sharply divided privacy oversight board recommended on Thursday.

The recommendation came in a report from a three-member Democratic majority of the Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board, an independent agency within the executive branch, and was made despite the opposition of Biden administration officials who warn that such a requirement could snarl fast-moving terrorism and espionage investigations and weaken national security as a result.

The report comes as a White House push to secure the reauthorization of the program known as Section 702 of the Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Act is encountering major bipartisan opposition in Congress and during a spate of revelations that FBI employees have periodically mishandled access to a repository of intelligence gathered under the law, violations that have spurred outrage from civil liberties advocates.

Section 702 permits allow spy agencies without a warrant to collect swaths of emails and other communications from foreigners located abroad, even when those foreigners are in touch with people in the United States.

Officials in President Joe Biden's administration have said the program is essential for disrupting foreign terror attacks, espionage operations from Russia and China and cyberattacks against critical infrastructure. But many Democratic and Republican lawmakers say they won't vote to renew Section 702 when it expires at the end of the year without major changes targeting how the FBI uses foreign surveillance data to investigate Americans.

The privacy board recommended that the program be renewed despite being divided about what reforms were needed.

The opposition to reauthorization has united unusual bedfellows, bringing together civil liberties-minded Democrats who have long supported limits on government surveillance powers with Republicans still angry over what they see as abuses during the investigation into ties between Russia and Donald Trump's 2016 presidential campaign.

A central point of contention is analysts' use of the foreign intelligence database to search for information about people, businesses or phone numbers located in the U.S. Those queries are permissible if there's reason to believe they will retrieve foreign intelligence information. The FBI can also search the database if it believes it will turn up evidence of a crime, though a court order is required to review the results of

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those queries.

A succession of unsealed court opinions in recent months have revealed FBI violations in how those queries have been done, including improper searches of Section 702 databases for information related to the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol and the 2020 protests following the police killing of George Floyd. FBI officials say significant safeguards have since been imposed.

In a recommendation Thursday that critics say would impose a significant hurdle and mark a dramatic break from the status quo, three members of the board said executive branch agencies, with limited exceptions, should have to get permission from the secretive Foreign Intelligence Surveillance Court to read the results of their database queries on U.S. citizens.

"The scale of U.S. person queries, the number of compliance issues surrounding U.S. person queries, and the failure of current law and procedures to protect U.S. persons compels the Board to recommend a new approach," the report said.

Underscoring the blurred political lines of the debate, the two Republican members of the board joined the White House in objecting to the proposal as unduly burdensome. Those two members refused to sign on to the report issued by their colleagues and instead issued their own document lambasting some of the conclusions.

"Eliminating U.S. person queries, or making it bureaucratically infeasible to conduct them — as the Majority recommends — would effectively destroy the crucial portion of the program that enables the U.S. government to prevent, among other things, terrorist attacks on our soil," they wrote.

Separately, the White House said that seeking a judge's permission to read through intelligence that's already been lawfully collected was legally unnecessary and would interminably slow national security investigations that require fast action.

"That is operationally unworkable and would blind us to information already in our holdings that, often, must be acted upon in time-sensitive ways in order to prevent lethal plotting on U.S. soil, the recruitment of spies by hostile actors, the hacking of U.S. companies, and more," a National Security Council spokesperson said in a statement.

"We urge Congress to continue to work with us on alternative reforms that can strengthen Section 702 this reauthorization cycle without causing the type of detrimental effects to U.S. national security that this recommendation would generate," the statement added.

Speaking Thursday at a luncheon at the National Press Club, Gen. Paul Nakasone, the director of the National Security Agency, said the U.S. must balance national security needs with civil liberties and privacy.

"It can't be out of balance," he said. "That's my concern and just being able to balance that equation. And that's something we always work towards."

Jamil Jaffer, founder and executive director of the National Security Institute at George Mason University's law school and a senior Justice Department official at the time the law was created, was more pointed. He said in a statement that the position of the board's majority would create a "wall" between law enforcement and intelligence and "represent a drastic break from the consistent view of all four presidents to have served" since the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

The Privacy and Civil Liberties Oversight Board was formed in 2007 following a recommendation from the Sept. 11 commission, intended as a way to create checks and balances on the government's expanding spy powers. The five members are nominated by the president and receive Senate approval.

Inside scientists' mission to save America's wine industry from climate change

By ANDREW SELSKY Associated Press

ALPINE, Ore. (AP) — The U.S. West Coast produces over 90% of America's wine, but the region is also prone to wildfires — a combustible combination that spelled disaster for the industry in 2020 and one that scientists are scrambling to neutralize.

Sample a good wine and you might get notes of oak or red fruit. But sip on wine made from grapes

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that were penetrated by smoke, and it could taste like someone dumped the contents of an ashtray into your glass.

Wine experts from three West Coast universities are working together to meet the threat, including developing spray coatings to protect grapes, pinpointing the elusive compounds that create that nasty ashy taste, and deploying smoke sensors to vineyards to better understand smoke behavior.

The U.S. government is funding their research with millions of dollars. Wineries are also taking steps to protect their product and brand.

The risk to America's premier wine-making regions — where wildfires caused billions of dollars in losses in 2020 — is growing, with climate change deepening drought and overgrown forests becoming tinderboxes. According to the U.S. Department of Agriculture, grapes are the highest-value crop in the United States, with 1 million acres (405,000 hectares) of grape-bearing land, 96% of it on the West Coast.

Winemakers around the world are already adapting to climate change, including by moving their vineyards to cooler zones and planting varieties that do better in drought and heat. Wildfires pose an additional and more immediate risk being tackled by scientists from Oregon State University, Washington State University and the University of California, Davis.

"What's at stake is the ability to continue to make wine in areas where smoke exposures might be more common," said Tom Collins, a wine scientist at Washington State University.

Researcher Cole Cerrato recently stood in Oregon State University's vineyard, nestled below forested hills near the village of Alpine, as he turned on a fan to push smoke from a Weber grill through a dryer vent hose. The smoke emerged onto a row of grapes enclosed in a quasi greenhouse made of taped-together plastic sheets.

Previously, grapes exposed to smoke in the MacGyvered setup were made into wine by Elizabeth Tomasino, an associate professor leading Oregon State's efforts, and her researchers.

They found sulfur-containing compounds, thiophenols, in the smoke-impacted wine and determined they contributed to the ashy flavor, along with "volatile phenols," which Australian researchers identified as factors more than a decade ago. Bush fires have long impacted Australia's wine industry. Up in Washington state, Collins confirmed that the sulfur compounds were found in the wine that had been exposed to smoke in the Oregon vineyard but weren't in samples that had no smoke exposure.

The scientists want to find out how thiophenols, which aren't detectable in wildfire smoke, appear in smoke-impacted wine, and learn how to eliminate them.

"There's still a lot of very interesting chemistry and very interesting research, to start looking more into these new compounds," Cerrato said. "We just don't have the answers yet."

Wine made with tainted grapes can be so awful that it can't be marketed. If it does go on shelves, a winemaker's reputation could be ruined — a risk that few are willing to take.

When record wildfires in 2020 blanketed the West Coast in brown smoke, some California wineries refused to accept grapes unless they had been tested. But most growers couldn't find places to analyze their grapes because the laboratories were overwhelmed.

The damage to the industry in California alone was \$3.7 billion, according to an analysis that Jon Moramarco of the consulting firm bw166 conducted for industry groups. The losses stemmed mostly from wineries having to forego future wine sales.

"But really what drove it was, you know, a lot of the impact was in Napa (Valley), an area of some of the highest priced grapes, highest priced wines in the U.S.," Moramarco said, adding that if a ton of cabernet sauvignon grapes is ruined, "you lose probably 720 bottles of wine. If it is worth \$100 a bottle, it adds up very quickly."

Between 165,000 to 325,000 tons of California wine grapes were left to wither on the vine in 2020 due to actual or perceived wildfire smoke exposure, said Natalie Collins, president of the California Association of Winegrape Growers.

She said she hasn't heard of any growers quitting the business due to wildfire impacts, but that: "Many of our members are having an extremely difficult time securing insurance due to the fire risk in their region, and if they are able to secure insurance, the rate is astronomically high."

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Some winemakers are trying techniques to reduce smoke impact, such as passing the wine through a membrane or treating it with carbon, but that can also rob a wine of its appealing nuances. Blending impacted grapes with other grapes is another option. Limiting skin contact by making rosé wine instead of red can lower the concentration of smoke flavor compounds.

Collins, over at Washington State University, has been experimenting with spraying fine-powdered kaolin or bentonite, which are clays, mixed with water onto wine grapes so it absorbs materials that are in smoke. The substance would then be washed off before harvest. Oregon State University is developing a spray-on coating.

Meanwhile, dozens of smoke sensors have been installed in vineyards in the three states, financed in part by a \$7.65 million USDA grant.

"The instruments will be used to measure for smoke marker compounds," said Anita Oberholster, leader of UC Davis' efforts. She said such measurements are essential to develop mitigation strategies and determine smoke exposure risk.

Greg Jones, who runs his family's Abacela winery in southern Oregon's Umpqua Valley and is a director of the Oregon Wine Board, applauds the scientists' efforts.

"This research has really gone a long way to help us try to find: are there ways in which we can take fruit from the vineyard and quickly find out if it has the potential compounds that would lead to smoke-impacted wine," Jones said.

Collins predicts success.

"I think it's increasingly clear that we're not likely to find a magic bullet," he said. "But we will find a set of strategies."

The American soldier who bolted into North Korea 2 months ago has returned to the US

By ERIC GAY, MATTHEW LEE and LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

SAN ANTONIO (AP) — The American soldier who sprinted into North Korea across the heavily fortified border between the Koreas more than two months ago was whisked to a Texas Army base Thursday for medical checks and interviews after his return to the U.S., according to the Pentagon.

North Korea abruptly announced a day earlier that it would expel Pvt. Travis King. His return was organized with the help of ally Sweden and rival China, according to the White House.

While officials have said King, 23, 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 isolated country in 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 was declared AWOL from the Army, but not considered a deserter. Punishment for going AWOL can vary, and it depends in part on whether the service member voluntarily returned or was apprehended. King's two-month absence and ultimate handover by the North Koreans makes that more complicated.

King arrived in the early hours of Thursday at Lackland Air Force Base in San Antonio and was taken to Brooke Army Medical Center, according to the Pentagon. He will undergo an array of medical and psychological assessments and debriefings, and he will also get a chance to meet with family.

Video aired by a Texas news station showed King walking off a plane. 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.

At the Pentagon on Thursday, spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said King will be going through the reintegration process "for the immediate future." She said the length of time often depends on the person involved.

"He'll be going through medical screenings, medical evaluations, and then he'll be meeting with professionals to assess his emotional and mental health well being and he'll be meeting with counselors," she

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said. "This is something that you can't really put a timetable on."

Many questions remain about King's case, including why he fled in the first place and 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.

The White House has not addressed North Korean state media reports that King fled because of his dismay about racial discrimination and inequality in the military and U.S. society.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency reported that King made such complaints but verifying that is impossible.

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 heading to the U.S.

His detention was relatively short by North Korean standards.

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

North Korea has often been accused of using American detainees as bargaining chips, and there had also been speculation that the North would try to maximize the propaganda value of a U.S. soldier.

But analysts say King's legal troubles could have limited his propaganda value, and Biden administration officials insisted they provided no concessions to North Korea to secure his release.

Why this week's mass exodus from embattled Nagorno-Karabakh reflects decades of animosity

By JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — The exodus of ethnic Armenians this week from the region known as Nagorno-Karabakh has been a vivid and shocking tableau of fear and misery. Roads are jammed with cars lumbering with heavy loads, waiting for hours in traffic jams. People sit amid mounds of hastily packed luggage.

As of Thursday, more than 78,300 people had left the breakaway region for Armenia. That's a huge number — more than half of the population of the region that is located entirely within Azerbaijan.

Still, it's not the largest displacement of civilians in three decades of conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan following the 1991 collapse of the Soviet Union.

After ethnic Armenian forces secured control of Nagorno-Karabakh and surrounding territories in 1994, refugee organizations estimated that some 900,000 people had fled to Azerbaijan and 300,000 to Armenia.

When war broke out again in 2020 and Azerbaijan seized more territory, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees said 90,000 had gone to Armenia and 40,000 to Azerbaijan.

Those figures underline the fierce animosity between the two countries, and they raise questions about the region's future.

WHAT IS THE REGION?

Nagorno-Karabakh, with a population of about 120,000, is a mountainous, ethnic Armenian region inside Azerbaijan in the southern Caucasus Mountains.

When both Azerbaijan and Armenia were part of the Soviet Union, the region was designated as an autonomous republic, but as Moscow's central control of far-flung regions deteriorated, a movement arose in Nagorno-Karabakh for incorporation into Armenia.

Tensions burst into violence in 1988 when more than 30 — some say as many as 200 — ethnic Armenians were killed in a pogrom in the Azerbaijani city of Sumgait. Armenians fled, as did many ethnic Azeris who lived in Armenia. When a full-scale war broke out, the numbers soared. That first war lasted until 1994.

Azerbaijan regained control of parts of Nagorno-Karabakh and large swaths of adjacent territory held by Armenians in a six-week war in 2020, driving out tens of thousands of Armenians that the government in Baku declared to have settled illegally.

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WHAT HAPPENED IN RECENT DAYS?

Last week, Azerbaijan launched a blitz that forced the capitulation of Nagorno-Karabakh's separatist forces and government. On Thursday, the separatist authorities agreed to disband by the end of this year.

The events put the region's ethnic Armenians on the move out of the territory.

Nagorno-Karabakh and the territory around it have deep cultural and religious significance for Christian Armenians and predominantly Muslim Azeris, and each group denounces the other for alleged efforts to destroy or desecrate monuments and relics.

Armenians were deeply angered by recent video that purportedly showed an Azerbaijani soldier firing at a monastery in the region. Azeris have seethed with resentment at Armenians' wholesale pillaging of the once-sizable city of Aghdam and the use of its mosque as a cattle barn.

WHY HAVE THE SEPARATISTS QUICKLY GIVEN UP?

A Russian peacekeeping force of about 2,000 was deployed to Nagorno-Karabakh under an armistice that ended the 2020 war. But its inaction in the latest Azerbaijani offensive probably was a key factor in the separatists' quick decision to give in.

In December, Azerbaijan began blocking the only road leading from Nagorno-Karabakh to Armenia.

Armenians bitterly criticized the peacekeepers for failing to follow their mandate to keep the road open. The blockade caused severe food and medicine shortages in Nagorno-Karabakh. International organizations and governments called repeatedly for Baku to lift the blockade.

Russia, which is fighting a war in Ukraine, seems to be unable or unwilling to take action to keep the road open. That appears to have persuaded the separatists that they would get no support when Azerbaijan launched its blitz.

Nagorno-Karabakh's forces were small and poorly supplied in comparison with those of Azerbaijan, thanks to the country's surging oil revenues and support from Turkey.

WHAT WILL THE FUTURE HOLD?

Under last week's cease-fire, Azerbaijan will "reintegrate" Nagorno-Karabakh, but the terms for that are unclear. Baku repeatedly has promised that the rights of ethnic Armenians will be observed if they stay in the region as Azerbaijani citizens.

That promise appears to have reassured almost no one. Although Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said last week that he saw no immediate need for Armenians to leave, on Thursday he said he expected that none would be left in Nagorno-Karabakh within a few days.

Ethnic Armenians in the region do not trust Azerbaijan to treat them fairly and humanely or grant them their language, religion and culture.

Without an international peacekeeping or police force in the region, ethnic violence would be almost certain to flare.

Michael Gambon, veteran actor who played Dumbledore in 'Harry Potter' films, dies at age 82

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Michael Gambon, the Irish-born actor knighted for his illustrious career on the stage and screen and who went on to gain admiration from a new generation of moviegoers with his portrayal of Hogwarts headmaster Albus Dumbledore in six of the eight "Harry Potter" films, has died. He was 82.

The actor died on Wednesday following "a bout of pneumonia," his publicist, Clair Dobbs, said Thursday. "We are devastated to announce the loss of Sir Michael Gambon. Beloved husband and father, Michael died peacefully in hospital with his wife Anne and son Fergus at his bedside," his family said in a statement.

While the Potter role raised Gambon's international profile and found him a huge audience, he had long been celebrated as one of Britain's leading actors. His work spanned TV, theater, film and radio, and over the decades he starred in dozens of movies from "Gosford Park" and "The King's Speech" to the animated family film "Paddington." He recently appeared in the Judy Garland biopic "Judy," released in 2019.

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Gambon was knighted for his contribution to the entertainment industry in 1998.

The role of the much loved Professor Dumbledore was initially played by another Irish-born actor, Richard Harris. When Harris died in 2002, after two of the films in the franchise had been made, Gambon took over and played the part from "Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban" through to "Harry Potter And The Deathly Hallows Part 2."

He once acknowledged not having read any of J. K. Rowling's best-selling books, arguing that it was safer to follow the script rather than be too influenced by the books. That didn't prevent him from embodying the spirit of the powerful wizard who fought against evil to protect his students.

Co-stars often described Gambon as a mischievous, funny man who was self-deprecating about his talent. Actress Helen Mirren fondly remembered his "natural Irish sense of humor — naughty but very, very funny."

Fiona Shaw, who played Petunia Dursley in the "Harry Potter" series, recalled Gambon telling her how central acting was to his life.

"He did once say to me in a car 'I know I go on a lot about this and that, but actually, in the end, there is only acting,'" Shaw told the BBC on Thursday. "I think he was always pretending that he didn't take it seriously, but he took it profoundly seriously."

Irish President Michael D. Higgins paid tribute to Gambon's "exceptional talent," praising him as "one of the finest actors of his generation."

Born in Dublin on Oct. 19, 1940, Gambon was raised in London and originally trained as an engineer, following in the footsteps of his father. He did not have formal drama training, and was said to have started work in the theater as a set builder. He made his theater debut in a production of "Othello" in Dublin.

In 1963 he got his first big break with a minor role in "Hamlet," the National Theatre Company's opening production, under the directorship of the legendary Laurence Olivier.

Gambon soon became a distinguished stage actor and received critical acclaim for his leading performance in "Life of Galileo," directed by John Dexter. He was frequently nominated for awards and won the Laurence Olivier Award 3 times and the Critics' Circle Theatre Awards twice.

A multi-talented actor, Gambon was also the recipient of four coveted British Academy of Film and Television Arts awards for his television work.

He became a household name in Britain after his lead role in the 1986 BBC TV series "The Singing Detective," written by Dennis Potter and considered a classic of British television drama. Gambon won the BAFTA for best actor for the role.

Gambon also won Emmy nominations for more recent television work — as Mr. Woodhouse in a 2010 adaption of Jane Austen's "Emma," and as former U.S. President Lyndon B. Johnson in 2002's "Path to War."

Gambon was versatile as an actor but once told the BBC he preferred to play "villainous characters." He played gangster Eddie Temple in the British crime thriller "Layer Cake" — a review of the film by the New York Times referred to Gambon as "reliably excellent" — and a Satanic crime boss in Peter Greenaway's "The Cook, The Thief, His Wife and Her Lover."

He also had a part as King George V in the 2010 drama film "The King's Speech." In 2015 he returned to the works of J.K. Rowling, taking a leading role in the TV adaptation of her non-Potter book "The Casual Vacancy."

"I absolutely loved working with him," Rowling posted on X, formerly known as Twitter. "The first time I ever laid eyes on him was in 'King Lear', in 1982, and if you'd told me then that brilliant actor would appear in anything I'd written, I'd have thought you were insane."

Gambon retired from the stage in 2015 after struggling to remember his lines in front of an audience due to his advancing age. He once told the Sunday Times Magazine: "It's a horrible thing to admit, but I can't do it. It breaks my heart."

Gambon was always protective when it came to his private life. He married Anne Miller and they had one son, Fergus. He later had two sons with set designer Philippa Hart.

The average long-term US mortgage rate reaches highest point in nearly 23 years, hitting 7.31%

By ALEX VEIGA AP Business Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Home loan borrowing costs climbed again this week, pushing the average long-term U.S. mortgage rate to its highest level in nearly 23 years, another blow to prospective homebuyers facing an increasingly unaffordable housing market.

The average rate on the benchmark 30-year home loan rose to 7.31%, from 7.19% last week, mortgage buyer Freddie Mac said Thursday. A year ago, the rate averaged 6.70%.

Borrowing costs on 15-year fixed-rate mortgages, popular with homeowners refinancing their home loan, also increased. The average rate rose to 6.72% from 6.54% last week. A year ago, it averaged 5.96%, Freddie Mac said.

"The 30-year fixed-rate mortgage has hit the highest level since the year 2000," said Sam Khater, Freddie Mac's chief economist. "However, unlike the turn of the millennium, house prices today are rising alongside mortgage rates, primarily due to low inventory. These headwinds are causing both buyers and sellers to hold out for better circumstances."

High rates can add hundreds of dollars a month in costs for borrowers, limiting how much they can afford in a market already out of reach for many Americans. They also discourage homeowners who locked in rock-bottom rates two years ago from selling. The average rate on a 30-year mortgage is now more than double what it was two years ago, when it was just 3.01%.

The combination of elevated rates and low home inventory has worsened the affordability crunch by keeping home prices near all-time highs even as sales of previously occupied U.S. homes have fallen 21% through the first eight months of this year versus the same stretch in 2022.

This is the third consecutive week that mortgage rates have moved higher. The weekly average rate on a 30-year mortgage has remained above 7% since mid August and is now at the highest level since mid-December 2000, when it averaged 7.42%.

Mortgage rates have been climbing along with the 10-year Treasury yield, which lenders use as a guide to pricing loans. The yield has surged in recent weeks amid worries that the Federal Reserve will keep short-term interest rates higher for longer to fight inflation.

The central bank has already pulled its main interest rate to the highest level since 2001 in hopes of extinguishing high inflation, and it indicated last week it may cut rates by less next year than earlier expected.

The threat of higher rates for longer has pushed Treasury yields to heights unseen in more than a decade. The yield on the 10-year Treasury was at 4.61% in midday trading Wednesday. It was at roughly 3.50% in May and just 0.50% early in the pandemic.

While mortgage rates don't necessarily mirror the Fed's rate increases, they tend to track the yield on the 10-year Treasury note. Investors' expectations for future inflation, global demand for U.S. Treasuries and what the Fed does with interest rates can influence rates on home loans.

Kari Lake, prominent Trump supporter and election denier, will launch US Senate campaign in Arizona

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Republican Kari Lake, a Donald Trump ally who has refused to acknowledge her loss in last year's race for Arizona governor, will soon launch her campaign for the U.S. Senate seat held by independent Kyrsten Sinema, a senior adviser said Thursday.

Lake's entrance in one of next year's top Senate contests likely complicates Republican efforts to nominate candidates with a broader appeal after a disappointing showing for the party in last year's midterms. She will enter the race as the front-runner for the GOP nomination.

Caroline Wren, a senior adviser to Lake, confirmed that she will open her campaign with an Oct. 10 rally. The Wall Street Journal first reported the news.

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A charismatic former television anchor who is well known in the Phoenix market, Lake built an enthusiastic following among Republicans with her unflinching support for Trump and her steadfast promotion of false claims of election fraud.

Lake's star power stretches far beyond Arizona. Lake is seen as a potential running mate for Trump, who is leading polls for the Republican presidential nomination.

The Arizona race is a top target for Republicans looking to regain the Senate, where Democrats hold a 51-49 edge that includes Sinema, who left the Democratic Party in 2022 but still receives her committees assignments from Democrats. The 2024 Senate map heavily favors the GOP, with Democratic-held seats up for grabs in three states that Trump won in 2020.

Courts have repeatedly rejected Lake's lawsuits challenging last year's election results. The litigation has juiced Lake's fundraising but not advanced her false claim to be the "duly elected governor" Arizona, rather than Democrat Katie Hobbs.

Lake joins Pinal County Sheriff Mark Lamb in the Republican Senate primary. Several other Republicans have considered running but have stayed out of the race while Lake considered her plans. They include Blake Masters, Jim Lamon and Karrin Taylor Robson, all businesspeople who lost 2022 races for Senate or governor.

U.S. Rep. Ruben Gallego, an Iraq War veteran and one of the most prominent Latino officials in Arizona, is the only major Democrat in the race.

Sinema is raising money for a potential reelection campaign and is stepping up her public appearances in Arizona, but she has said she's in no hurry to decide whether to seek a second term in the Senate. Her party switch came after she had infuriated many Democrats who saw her as too close to business interests and an impediment to progressive change.

Lake's presence in the race could help Sinema if she chooses to mount an independent campaign for reelection. Lake alienated many establishment Republicans during her campaign for governor, even telling "McCain Republicans" to "get the hell out" of a campaign event, describing the late and beloved Arizona Sen. John McCain a "loser."

To win, Sinema will need to win over a sizable chunk of Republicans and Democrats along with a majority of independents.

Until Trump's presidency, Arizona had been a reliably Republican state since World War II. Republicans still maintain a registration edge over Democrats, but the GOP lost three consecutive Senate races and last year watched Democrats win the top state offices over a slate of Trump-endorsed election deniers, including Lake.

The state is emblematic of the party's struggles to win over suburban voters turned off by Trump. In Lake's loss last year, 11% of voters who identified as Republicans backed Hobbs, including 25% of Republicans who identified as moderate or liberal, according to AP VoteCast, an expansive survey of more than 3,200 voters in Arizona.

Democrats posted surprising success in last year's Senate races despite a tough economic picture and an unpopular Democratic president after voters rejected Trump-backed Republican nominees in battleground states, including Arizona. Republicans in Washington have pledged to take a more active posture in primaries next year, hoping to ensure the party nominates candidates who can win in November.

GOP officials in Washington have taken a wait-and-see approach to the Arizona race, viewing Lake as the odds-on favorite to win the primary but fearing the serious baggage she would carry into a general election.

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 the 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 on Wednesday to participate in a reality show-style game in which 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."

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.

He told the conservative Daily Caller early Thursday that the GOP should cancel future debates "because it is just bad for the Republican Party." The next debate is scheduled for Nov. 8 in Miami.

"There is not going to be a breakout candidate," he said.

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."

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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 accused Trump of not being tough enough on China while he was president. She 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.

US government estimates economy grew last quarter at a 2.1% rate, unchanged from previous projection

By PAUL WISEMAN and CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writers

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. economy grew at a 2.1% annual pace from April through June, extending its sturdy performance in the face of higher interest rates, the government said Thursday, leaving its previous estimate unchanged.

The second-quarter expansion of the nation's gross domestic product — its total output of goods and services — marked a modest deceleration from the economy's 2.2% annual growth from January through March.

Consumer spending, business investment and state and local government outlays drove the second-quarter economic expansion.

The economy and job market have shown surprising resilience even as the Federal Reserve has dramatically raised interest rates to combat inflation, which last year hit a four-decade high. The Fed has raised its benchmark rate 11 times since March 2022, sparking concerns that ever-higher borrowing rates will trigger a recession.

So far, though, inflation has eased without causing much economic pain, raising hopes that the central bank can pull off a so-called soft landing — slowing the economy enough to conquer high inflation without causing a painful recession.

Still, those higher rates have taken a toll. Consumer spending, for example, rose at an annual rate of just 0.8% from April through June, down sharply from the government's previous estimate of 1.7% and the weakest such figure since the first quarter of 2022.

But business investment excluding housing, a closely watched barometer, rose at a 7.4% annual pace, the fastest rate in more than a year. And state and local government spending and investment jumped 4.7%, the biggest such quarterly gain since 2019.

Thursday's report was the government's third and final estimate of economic expansion in the April-June quarter.

Growth is believed to be accelerating in the current July-September quarter, fueled in part by many still-free-spending consumers. Americans, for example, flocked to theaters for the hit summer movies "Barbie" and "Oppenheimer" and splurged on Taylor Swift and Beyonce tickets. Business investment is also thought to have remained solid.

Economists have estimated that the economy expanded at a roughly 3.2% annual rate in the third quarter, which would be the fastest quarterly growth in a year. Even more optimistic estimates have projected that growth from July through September exceeded a 4% annual rate, according to the Federal Reserve Bank of Atlanta.

Even so, the acceleration in growth isn't likely to endure. The economy is expected to weaken in the final three months of the year. Hiring and income growth are slowing. And economists think the savings that many Americans amassed during the pandemic from federal stimulus checks will have evaporated by next quarter.

The economy also faces an array of obstacles that are expected to hobble growth. They include surging oil prices, the resumption of student loan payments, the effects of the United Auto Workers strike, the loss of pandemic-era child care aid and a likely government shutdown beginning this weekend.

The combined effects of those factors will hamper Americans' ability to spend and likely weaken the economy.

"Growth remains positive and is set to accelerate" in the current quarter, said Rubeela Farooqi, chief U.S. economist at High Frequency Economics.

"But the trend going forward, particularly in household spending, will be important. We continue to forecast positive growth going forward but expect the pace to slow quite significantly" in the final three months of the year.

NY Attorney General Letitia James has a long history of fighting Trump and 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 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

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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.

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 Sunday.

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 unable 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 Home-

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land 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 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.

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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.

Miguel Cabrera's career coming to close with Tigers, leaving lasting legacy in MLB and Venezuela

By LARRY LAGE AP Sports Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Miguel Cabrera sat in a gray chair beside his two stalls in the Detroit Tigers' clubhouse early in the final week of his career, sorting through stuff to get shipped.

Major League Baseball's only Triple Crown winner since 1967 stuffed dozens of barely used cleats and a bunch of batting gloves in a cardboard box at his feet. Cabrera then put a slew of balls he had signed, each in a zip lock bag, in a tote.

The bottle of wine, in bubble wrap, that the Oakland Athletics gave him last week along with his personal belongings are being sent to his home in Miami.

Where's he going to put it all?

"I don't know," the 40-year-old Cabrera said with a shrug and a grin.

For Cabrera — and baseball fans — there's a lot to unpack from the career of one of the best hitters ever.

Cabrera's career will end Sunday afternoon against Cleveland at Comerica Park, where a sold-out crowd will include a few thousands fans paying for standing-room only tickets to cheer him on one more time.

The 12-time All-Star leaves the game with an impressive legacy. The popular player has also provided a desperately needed jolt of joy in his native Venezuela during a crisis that has pushed millions into poverty and compelled 7.3 million people to migrate.

Cabrera, who made his major league debut at 20 with the Florida Marlins, has put himself in the conversation with all-time greats at the plate.

"Hitting a baseball is one of the hardest things to do in sports, and he and Albert Pujols are the two best that I've seen do it my 60 years in baseball," Jim Leyland, who managed Cabrera in Detroit, said in a telephone interview this week. "It's on paper, and in the books."

When Cabrera led the majors with a .330 batting average, 44 homers and 139 RBIs in 2012, he was the first to win a Triple Crown since Carl Yastrzemski did it in 1967 with the Boston Red Sox.

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Last year, he joined Hank Aaron and Albert Pujols as the three players in baseball history with 3,000 hits, 500 homers and 600 doubles.

"One of the things that made Miggy really special is the way he could drive the ball to all fields," said Philadelphia Phillies team president Dave Dombrowski, who ran the Marlins when they signed Cabrera as a teenager and later acquired him in a blockbuster trade. "He could hit to right field as if he was a left-handed pull hitter.

"Miggy also had so much grit, playing at times when he was hurt badly, and always had a smile on his face because he loves the game so much."

Cabrera is from the Venezuelan city of Maracay, which is known for producing bullfighters and ballplayers, including Houston Astros star Jose Altuve. He grew up following fellow countrymen Davey Concepcion, Omar Vizquel and Andres Galarraga.

"I wanted to follow them to make it to the big leagues," Cabrera said in an interview with The Associated Press. "I say to people from Venezuela, 'I think our baseball is safe with Ronald Acuña.'"

The 25-year-old Acuña, an Atlanta Braves outfielder, became the first player in major league history on Wednesday night to have 40 homers and 70 stolen bases in the same season.

"There's a lot of Venezuelan baseball players who are doing great things over here and playing well," Acuña said through a translator. "I think we're all doing a good job of just continuing that, but as far as Venezuelan players are concerned, Miguel Cabrera is like a Venezuelan baseball god."

The Marlins gave Cabrera \$1.8 million to sign when he was 16, and after three seasons in the minors, they called him up. He provided a glimpse of what was to come in his major league debut, hitting a walk-off, 11th-inning homer.

Cabrera cleared the fences three times as a rookie in the NL Championship Series and hit an opposite-field homer off Roger Clemens to help Florida win the 2003 World Series.

He was an All-Star in each of his four full seasons in Florida. The financially strapped franchise traded him to the Tigers in December of 2007, and he flourished even more.

He won consecutive AL MVP awards in 2012 and 2013. Cabrera won five of his seven Silver Slugger awards and all four batting titles in Detroit, including becoming the first right-handed batter in either league to win three straight batting titles since Rogers Hornsby did in the early 1920s.

While the Tigers did have success in Cabrera's prime, winning four straight division titles and reaching the 2012 World Series, they never won it all despite having him and some dominant pitching staffs. The 2014 team alone had what turned out to be five Cy Young Award winners in Justin Verlander, Max Scherzer, David Price, Rick Porcello and Robbie Ray.

Cabrera cashed in on his talent, signing a \$152.3 million, eight-year contract in 2008 and a record-setting \$292 million, 10-year contract in 2014.

In between the two deals, Cabrera acknowledged he had a drinking problem and spent three months in an outpatient treatment program following a much-publicized binge during the final weekend of the 2010 season.

Cabrera's wife and children are expected to attend the games for what the team is calling "Miggy Celebration Weekend," at Comerica Park.

Even though his production at the plate declined and he didn't play first base much in recent years as the team struggled during rebuilds, it didn't diminish how popular he is among major leaguers, in the Motor City and back home in Venezuela.

He established the Miguel Cabrera Foundation in 2007, and it funded the renovation of a Little League baseball stadium in Venezuela. He had clinics and competitions for kids in his native country until stopping in 2016 due to the political turmoil.

When a cancer-stricken Vietnam veteran, given three months to live by doctors, told the Tigers' community relations department he wanted to meet his favorite player, Cabrera came through.

Wayne Ochadleus had his white Tigers jersey signed on the back — just above the 24 — by Cabrera before Tuesday night's game against Kansas City and posed for pictures with him.

"This is the best thing to happen in my life," the 72-year-old Ochadelus said.

The Detroit Tigers Foundation has benefitted from Cabrera's charisma and commitment to give back, including having him host a Keeping Kids in the Game event that has raised more than \$3 million to assist children's health and sports initiatives.

"I want people to remember me here in Detroit as not only coming here to play baseball," he told the AP. "I want to be part of the community. It's what I want to do after I retire."

Shelters for migrants are filling up across Germany as attitudes toward the newcomers harden

By KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Dozens of people from around the world lined up on a sunny morning this week in front of a former mental health hospital in Berlin to apply for asylum in Germany.

There were two older women from Moldova. A young man from Somalia sat next to them on a bench. A group of five young Pakistanis chatted loudly, standing behind two pregnant women from Vietnam.

The newcomers are among more than 10,000 migrants who have applied for asylum in the German capital this year, and are coming at a time when Berlin is running out of space to accommodate them.

"The situation is not very good at the moment," Sascha Langenbach, the spokesperson for the state office for refugee affairs in Berlin, said in an interview this week. "This is much more than we expected last year."

The former mental health hospital in Berlin's Reinickendorf neighborhood was turned into the city's registration center for asylum-seekers in 2019 and can house up to 1,000 migrants.

But it's full.

Officials have put an additional 80 beds in a church on the premises. Beyond that, there are another 100 asylum shelters in Berlin, but those are at capacity too.

Berlin's state government says it will open a hangar at the former Tempelhof airport to make space for migrants, put up a big tent at the asylum seekers' registration center, and open a former hardware store and hotels and hostels in the city to provide another 5,500 beds for more migrants the city is expecting will come through the end of the year.

There are also not enough places in kindergartens and schools. In addition to the asylum seekers, Berlin has also taken in another 11,000 Ukrainian refugees this year who fled Russia's war.

The lack of space and money for migrants and Ukrainian refugees isn't unique to Berlin. It's a problem across Germany, where local and state officials have been demanding more funds from the federal government without success.

More than 220,000 people applied for asylum in Germany between January and August — most of them from Syria, Afghanistan, Turkey, Moldova and Georgia. In all of 2022, 240,000 people applied for asylum in Germany.

That's a far cry from the more than 1 million people who arrived in Germany in 2015-16. But Germany has also taken in more than 1 million Ukrainians since the outbreak of the war in 2022. Unlike others who arrive, Ukrainians immediately receive residency status in Germany and the 26 other European Union countries.

While Germans welcomed asylum seekers with flowers, chocolates and toys when they first arrived in 2015, and many opened their homes to house Ukrainians in 2022, the mood toward new arrivals has profoundly changed since then.

"After two years of the (coronavirus) crisis, then the Ukraine war with its increasing prices for basically everything — heating, gas, also food — it's sometimes pretty tough to convince people that they have to share places and capacities with people who just arrived," Langenbach said.

Germany's far-right Alternative for Germany party, or AfD, has been successfully exploiting Germans' hardening attitudes toward migrants. Polling now puts it in second place nationally with around 21%, far above the 10.3% it won during the last federal election in 2021.

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AfD's rise in the polls and the party leaders' relentless anti-migrant rhetoric, including calls to close Germany's borders to prevent migrants from entering, have put pressure on the national and state governments and other mainstream parties to toughen their approach toward migrants.

On Wednesday, Germany's interior minister announced the country would increase border controls along "smuggling routes" with Poland and the Czech Republic to prevent irregular migrants from entering.

In June, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz defended plans to stop migrants from entering the EU altogether until their chances of getting asylum have been reviewed, arguing that the bloc's existing arrangements on sharing the burden of asylum seekers among the different European countries is "completely dysfunctional."

Germany has been taking in more migrants than most other European countries, but other countries such as Turkey and Lebanon, which shelter millions of migrants from Syria, have taken in more refugees as a percentage of their population.

Despite the changing sentiment toward migrants in Germany, those who make it and apply for asylum are generally grateful to be here.

Abdullah al-Shweiti, from Homs, Syria, recently arrived in Berlin and was waiting for the results of his medical checkup at the asylum welcome center. He said he was relieved to be "in a safe place."

The 29-year-old said he had run away from home because his family's house had been bombed in the war and he didn't want to fight in the army. He said he'd paid 3,000 euros (\$3,180) to smugglers who helped him get from Lebanon to Europe. He took the Balkans route, trekking with other young Syrians north via Bulgaria through forests. They traveled on foot, by taxi and by bus until smugglers dropped them off in the German capital.

Mirbeycan Gurhan, a Kurdish man from Bingol in eastern Turkey, said he'd fled suppression by Turkish authorities. He paid 6,000 euros (\$6,360) for smugglers to arrange a flight from Ankara to Belgrade, Serbia, and then a car to Germany.

"I hope I will have a better future here. I hope I can find work," the 24-year-old said with a shy smile as his uncle, who applied for asylum in Berlin four years ago, stood next to him and translated.

Michael Elias, head of the Tamaja company that runs the asylum registration center in Berlin, said the arrival of migrants from all over the world is simply a reflection of the many crises around the globe, such as climate change and wars, and that Germany needs to be prepared for even more people to arrive.

"Yes, a lot of people are coming here, but look at what's going on in the world," Elias said. "We must simply anticipate that we're not an island of the fortunate here, that things will reach us too."

Today in History: September 29

Munich agreement established, aimed at appeasing Hitler

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, Sept. 29, the 272nd day of 2022. There are 93 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Sept. 29, 1938, British, French, German and Italian leaders concluded the Munich Agreement, which was aimed at appeasing Adolf Hitler by allowing Nazi annexation of Czechoslovakia's Sudetenland.

On this date:

In 1789, the U.S. War Department established a regular army with a strength of several hundred men.

In 1829, London's reorganized police force, which became known as Scotland Yard, went on duty.

In 1943, General Dwight D. Eisenhower and Italian Marshal Pietro Badoglio signed an armistice aboard the British ship HMS Nelson off Malta.

In 1962, Canada joined the space age as it launched the Alouette 1 satellite from Vandenberg Air Force Base in California.

In 1965, President Lyndon Johnson signed the National Foundation on the Arts and the Humanities Act of 1965, creating the National Endowment for the Humanities and the National Endowment for the Arts.

In 1978, Pope John Paul I was found dead in his Vatican apartment just over a month after becoming

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head of the Roman Catholic Church.

In 1982, Extra-Strength Tylenol capsules laced with deadly cyanide claimed the first of seven victims in the Chicago area. (To date, the case remains unsolved.)

In 1986, the Soviet Union released Nicholas Daniloff, an American journalist confined on spying charges.

In 1989, actor Zsa Zsa Gabor was convicted of battery for slapping Beverly Hills police officer Paul Kramer after he'd pulled over her Rolls-Royce for expired license plates.

In 2000, Israeli riot police stormed a major Jerusalem shrine and opened fire on stone-throwing Muslim worshippers, killing four Palestinians and wounding 175.

In 2005, John G. Roberts Jr. was sworn in as the nation's 17th chief justice after winning Senate confirmation.

In 2012, Omar Khadr, the last Western detainee held at the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, returned to Canada after a decade in custody.

In 2017, Tom Price resigned as President Donald Trump's secretary of Health and Human Services amid investigations into his use of costly charter flights for official travel at taxpayer expense.

In 2018, Tesla and its CEO, Elon Musk, agreed to pay a total of \$40 million to settle a government lawsuit alleging that Musk had duped investors with misleading statements about a proposed buyout of the company.

In 2020, the first debate between President Donald Trump and Democrat Joe Biden deteriorated into bitter taunts and near chaos, as Trump repeatedly interrupted his opponent with angry and personal jabs and the two men talked over each other.

In 2021, a judge in Los Angeles suspended Britney Spears' father from the conservatorship that had controlled her life and money for 13 years, saying the arrangement reflected a "toxic environment."

In 2022, rescue crews piloted boats and waded through flooded streets Thursday to save thousands of Floridians trapped after Hurricane Ian destroyed homes and businesses and left millions in the dark.

Today's Birthdays: Conductor Richard Bonyngé is 93. Writer-director Robert Benton is 91. Soul-blues-gospel singer Sherman Holmes is 84. NASA administrator and former Sen. Bill Nelson, D-Fla., is 81. Actor Ian McShane is 81. Jazz musician Jean-Luc Ponty is 81. Nobel Peace laureate Lech Walesa (lehk vah-WEN'-sah) is 80. Television-film composer Mike Post is 79. Actor Patricia Hodge is 77. TV personality Bryant Gumbel is 75. Rock singer-musician Mark Farner is 75. Rock singer-musician Mike Pinera is 75. Country singer Alvin Crow is 73. Actor Drake Hogestyn is 70. Olympic gold medal runner Sebastian Coe is 67. Singer Suzzy Roche (The Roches) is 67. Comedian-actor Andrew "Dice" Clay is 66. Rock singer John Payne (Asia) is 65. Actor Roger Bart is 61. Rock musician Les Claypool is 60. Actor Jill Whelan is 57. Actor Ben Miles is 57. Actor Luke Goss is 55. Actor Erika Eleniak is 54. R&B singer Devante Swing (Jodeci) is 54. Country singer Brad Cotter (TV: "Nashville Star") is 53. Actor Emily Lloyd is 53. Actor Natasha Gregson Wagner is 53. Actor Rachel Cronin is 52. Country musician Danick Dupelle (Emerson Drive) is 50. Actor Alexis Cruz is 49. Actor Zachary Levi is 43. Actor Chrissy Metz (TV: "This Is Us") is 43. Actor Kelly McCreary (TV: "Grey's Anatomy") is 42. Rock musician Josh Farro is 36. NBA All-Star Kevin Durant is 35. Actor Doug Brochu is 33. Singer Phillip Phillips is 33. Pop singer Halsey is 29. Actor Clara Mamet is 29.