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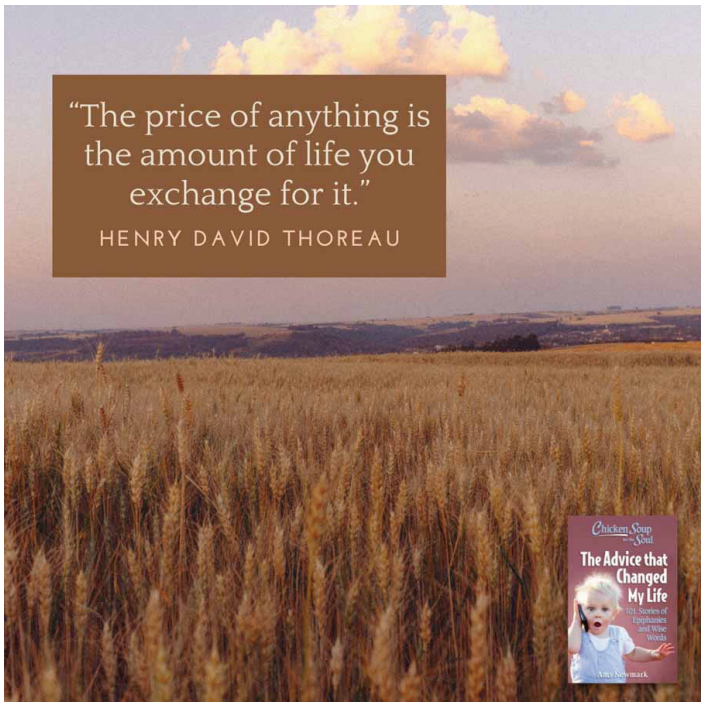

Groton Daily Independent
PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445
Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

OPEN: **Recycling Trailer in Groton**

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

The Bulletin by Newsweek

World in Brief

Bolivia has become the first Latin American country to cut diplomatic ties with Israel, calling Israel's military actions in the Gaza Strip "aggressive and disproportionate."

Public schools in Portland, Oregon, will be closed today as teachers strike amid contract negotiations. Portland Public Schools district serves more than 49,000 students.

The Texas Rangers are one win away from a first-ever World Series title after beating the Arizona Diamondbacks 11-7 to take a 3-1 lead.

The U.S. infant mortality rate increased for the first time in 20 years in 2022, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, rising 3% last year.

North Korea is set to close as many as a dozen embassies—around 25% of Pyongyang's missions worldwide—as the country's economy struggles under heavy sanctions.

Pakistan has started to arrest Afghans within its borders after a Nov. 1 deadline for around 1.7 million undocumented Afghan migrants to leave the country expired.

Tyler Christopher, an actor known for his roles on General Hospital and Days of Our Lives, has died at the age of 50.

A former Delta Air Lines pilot has been indicted after threatening to shoot the captain of a flight if the plane was diverted due to a passenger medical emergency.

In the ongoing war in Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, and other NATO nations close to Russia and Belarus are bolstering defense and their "deterrence posture on the Eastern flank," including protection for the contentious Suwałki Gap, Vilnius' defense minister, Arvydas Anušauskas, told Newsweek.

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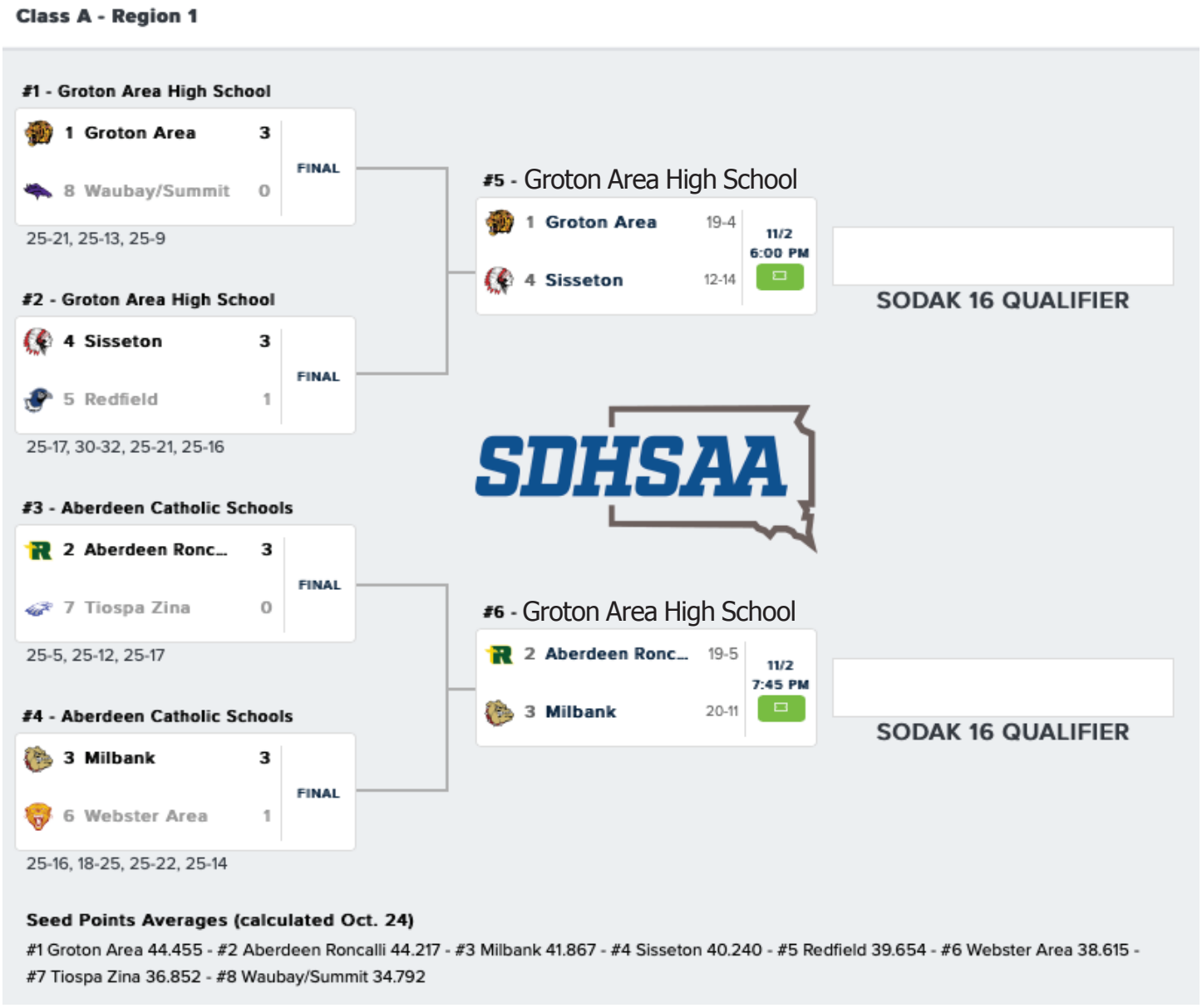
Region 1A Volleyball Bracket



Seed Points Averages (calculated Oct. 24)

#1 Groton Area 44.455 - #2 Aberdeen Roncalli 44.217 - #3 Milbank 41.867 - #4 Sisseton 40.240 - #5 Redfield 39.654 - #6 Webster Area 38.615 - #7 Tiospa Zina 36.852 - #8 Waubay/Summit 34.792

Region 1A Volleyball

Groton Area beats Waubay-Summit

Groton Area advanced to the next round of the Region 1A Volleyball Tournament with a 3-0 win over Waubay/Summit. The match was played Tuesday night in Groton.

Game scores were 25-21, 25-13 and 25-9.

The three seniors led the Tigers and all three had double figures. Anna Fjeldheim was 13 of 17 in attacks with 10 kills and also had double-double with 10 digs and she a solo block. Sydney Leicht was 16 of 19 in attacks with 10 kills, she was 12 of 12 in serving with three ace serves and had an assisted block. Leight also scored the game winning point in all three sets with two ace serves and a kill. Carly Guthmiller had 10 digs, was 19 of 21 in serving with six ace serves.

Others adding to the Tiger win were Chesney Weber with 15 of 18 in attacks with five kills and had two ace serves. Elizabeth Fliehs, who now has over 2,000 career assists and hold the school record, had 21 assists on the night and she was 13 of 14 in serving with five ace serves and she had one kill. Rylee Dunker had four kills and one solo and one assisted block. Jaedyn Penning was one kill and one assist. Laila Roberts had five digs.

Groton Area will play Sisseton on Thursday at 6 p.m. in Groton.

Sisseton runs away with fourth set for the win

Sisseton and Redfield battled in four sets before the Redmen pulled out a fourth set win. Sisseton won the first set, 25-17. That set was tied eight times before the Redmen puled away for the win. The second set went extra points with Redfield getting the 32-30 win. Down the stretch, the set was tied seven times. Sisseton won the third set, 25-21, with that set tied seven times. The Redmen jumped out to an 8-1 lead in the fourth set and went on for the 25-16 win. Katie Rozell led Redfield with 19 kills, three ace serves and a block. Others scoring for Redfield were Charlie Jungwirth with eight kills and three aces erves, Hayden Gall, Kinley mith and Cecilia Suchor each having six kills, Chole Zens had two kills and two ace serves and Jersey Morrison and Layla Hardie each had an ace serve.

Chloe Langager led the Redmen with 20 kills, two ace serves and a block. Adding to the Sisseton tally were Emmalee Nielsen with eight kills, a block and an ace serve, Krista Langager had five kills and six blocks, Ruby Rice had seven kills and two ace serves, Rylie Huff had three blocks and a kill, Jourdes Chanku had two kills and Tara Nelson had two aces serves and a kill.

Both matches were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, with Justin Hanson and Ryan Tracy providing the commentary. Broadcast sponsors were Avantara of Groton, Bary Keith at Harr Motors, Bierman Farm Services, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction , Dacotah Bank, Full Circle AG, Groton American Legion Post #39, Groton Chiropractic Clinic, Groton Dairy Queen, Groton Ford, Ken's Food Fair, Lori's Pharmacy, Love to Travel with Becah Fliehs, Milbrandt Enterprises Inc., MJ's Sinclair, Professional Management Services, S & S Lumber & Hardware Hank, Spanier Harvesting & Trucking, The Meathouse, Weismantel Agency.

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Earlier this season, Groton Area Junior, Liz Fliehs, broke the Groton career assist record of 1,672 assists held by Kaylin Kucker set in 2019. During tonight's region game she surpassed 2,000 career assists! (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Ellizabeth Fliehs
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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Anna Fjeldheim
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Sydney Leicht
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Faith Traphagen
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

Carly Guthmiller
(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)

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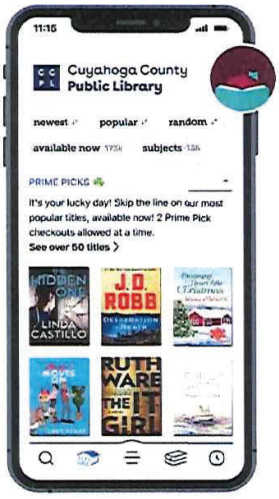
Groton Wage Memorial Library

120 N Main St – Groton, SD – (605) 397-8422

Open Monday-Friday 8am-5pm

- Library Cards are FREE to ALL Groton Area Residents!
- Offer a variety of books, magazines, audiobooks and DVDs!
- Offer printing, copying, faxing and scanning services!
- Computer Lab, laptops and tablets available for public use!
- Now offering e-books and audiobooks with the FREE OverDrive/Libby App!

Discover new reads on Libby, the free app from your local library that allows you to borrow ebooks, audiobooks & more on your phone or tablet.



Why you'll love Libby:

- Quick and easy setup! Just follow the prompts to start reading
- A unified bookshelf for all your loans and holds
- Unlimited custom tags to categorize books however you'd like
- Push notifications so you never miss a thing, including available holds
- Easily find the next book in a series
- Preferences to only see the content you like
- More ways to listen on the go with Apple CarPlay and Android Auto

With the classic OverDrive app being discontinued soon, it's time to read on Libby. The award-winning Libby app by OverDrive offers a fresh, easy-to-use design with access to the same great titles from your library.

Visit overdrive.com/libby to get started with Libby today!

App Store Google Play

Summer Storytime EVERY Thursday in the Summer June-August!

'1,000 Books Before Kindergarten Program' is NOW available!

FREE UPCOMING EVENTS: *MUST PREREGISTER BY CALLING LIBRARY*

Saturday, October 28th 3pm-5pm: Halloween Movie Event: Featuring Hocus Pocus 2!

Saturday, December 9th 11am-1pm: Christmas Movie Event (TBA). Jungle Pizza will be served!

Conde National League

October 30, 2023 Team Standings: Cubs 20, Giants 18½, Braves 16, Tigers 15, Mets 14½, Pirates 12
Men's High Games: Austin Schuelke 213, Ryan Bethke 212, Russ Bethke 211, 203
Men's High Series: Russ Bethke 594, Austin Scheulke 545, Ryan Bethke 506
Women's High Games: Suzi Easthouse 222, Nancy Radke 200, Sam Bahr 163
Women's High Series: Suzi Easthouse 575, Nancy Radke 415, Vickie Kramp 424

Frosty is Back!!!

Please check the Groton Independent for daily clues as to who the Groton Area Mystery Frosty is. The unveiling of Frosty will take place at the Groton Area Snow Queen and Talent Contest on Sunday, November 26th at 4:00pm.

2023 Frosty Clues

I....

1.) Grew up on a farm

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PLEASE JOIN US FOR

St Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church

Fall Dinner

NOVEMBER 5TH, 5PM TO 7PM

TOSSED SALAD, LASAGNA, GARLIC BREAD,
ICE CREAM SUNDAE BAR

FREE WILL OFFERING

BINGO, BINGO, BINGO!

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Names Released in Custer County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: US Hwy 16A, Mile Marker 33, 10 miles east of Custer
When: 5:01 p.m., Wednesday, October 25, 2023

Driver 1: Connor Owens, 16, Hermosa, SD, Minor injuries
Vehicle 1: 2003 Ford Escape

Driver 2: Ronald Shaw, 66, Custer, SD, Fatal injuries
Vehicle 2: 1973 Porsche 911
Passenger in Vehicle 2: Jill Shaw, 64, Custer, SD, Minor injuries

Custer County, S.D.- A Custer, SD man has been identified as the person who died Wednesday evening (October 25) in a two vehicle crash 10 miles east of Custer.

Preliminary crash information indicates a 2003 Ford Escape was traveling eastbound on US Hwy 16A near mile marker 33. The Ford was negotiating a left curve, slid on the slick road, and entered the oncoming lane. A 1973 Porsche 911 was traveling westbound at the same time and location. The front of the Ford struck the driver's side of the Porsche.

The Ford spun around and came to rest on the highway. The Porsche entered the ditch and came to rest against a tree.

The driver of the 2003 Ford Escape, Connor Owens, age 16, of Hermosa, SD sustained minor injuries.
He was wearing a seatbelt.

The driver of the 1973 Porsche 911, Ronald Shaw, age 66, of Custer, SD sustained fatal injuries and was pronounced deceased at the scene.
He was wearing a seatbelt.

The passenger of the Porsche, Jill Shaw, age 64, of Custer, SD sustained minor injuries.
She was wearing a seatbelt.

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

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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Groton Post No. 39 American Legion

Annual Turkey Party

Saturday, Nov. 11, 2023

Starting at 6:30 p.m.

Groton Legion Post Home, 10 N. Main.

Turkey, Ham and Bacon
to be given away

FREE ADMISSION

DOOR PRIZE!

Lunch served by Auxiliary

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Jaromir and Jana Simunek scarily greeted trick or treaters at their house on Halloween night! The Simunek's are new to Groton and have enjoyed volunteering and being a part of the community. (Photos courtesy April Abeln)

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The Groton Christian & Missionary Church basement was full of trick or treaters, games, candy, hot dogs and beverages as the church sponsored a fun-filled Hallelujah Night on October 31st. S'mores were also served outside around a campfire. (Photos courtesy April Abeln)

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A few vehicles were set up to hand out candy and hot dogs in the Groton United Methodist Church parking lot for Trunk or Treat on Halloween night. (Photos courtesy April Abeln)

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Downtown Trick & Treat

Over 18 businesses participated in Groton's Downtown Trick or Treat event on Halloween night! Pictured here are some of the participants. Photos by April Abeln.

Base Kamp Lodge

KB Law DBA Kolker Law Office

Johnson Agency

Karma Salon & Boutique

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Dacotah Bank

City Hall/Wage Memorial Library

Groton Community Transit

J. Simon Photography

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Common Cents Community Thrift Store

Bahr Spray Foam

Fruit Fusion

Professional Management Services

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James Valley Telecommunications

Midwest Masonry

Jungle Lanes & Lounge

Allied Climate Professionals

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Bierman Farm Service

Groton Vet Clinic

Groton American Legion Post #39

Farmers Union Insurance

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Some of the trick and treaters at Basekamp Lodge. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

Taylor Swift look alike aka Emery Blackwood poises with her friend. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

Krystina McCollum poises with her daughter Scarlet. (Photo by Bruce Babcock)

The Skeleton hunters greet passerby's on Main St outside of Base Kamp Lodge during last nights Groton "Trick or Treat on Main St." A total of 20 businesses participated this year in this popular and growing event.

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Here is Excerpt #4 from 1942. Hope you enjoy. - Lee Raines

1942 – War Year One

January 1942 – Diary - January 1 did the usual work. Made two batches of cookies and a batch of soap. Stormed and snowed. Very cold. January 2 very cold. January 3 22 below. January 4 cold 30 below. Listened to the radio in the evening. January 6 very cold. Could not get the car started. January 7 30 below. Ben Miller pulled our car with his truck. Ralph and I went to town in the PM. I got a pair of cotton stockings, seamless nylon stockings $.59. Beth babysat for Miller's, got $.35. Don got a pair of mittens $.39. January 8 Don babysat for David Kohler got $.50. Had a flat tire on way home. January 10 Beth went to Brookings with the debate kids. Don went to town to buy groceries. January 12 Beth didn't go to school. I did a big washing. Swell day. Hung them out. Didn't dry very well Didn't iron anything. January 15 kids didn't have any exams, so they didn't have to go to school. Beth, Ralph, and I went to the show $.10 "The Perfect Snob". Don stayed home to study. January 16 Don took the car to school. Took chemistry and shorthand tests. Ralph sold 32 lambs in Sioux Falls. $358/$.12 per pound. January 18 took a bath. Ralph helped me wash a few clothes. January 19 Ralph went out to sell seed corn. January 20 Don went to the basketball game in Egan in the evening. January 22 swell day. Did the usual work. Ralph and I went to town. Went to Dr. May and got two teeth filled. Got some new linoleum for the bedroom. Fixed my green dress in the PM. Went to the dance at the Masonic Temple in the evening. January 23 kids went to basketball game. Beth skipped school and went to Coleman to the dance. January 25 kids went skating in the evening. January 26 Ralph is 42 years old. January 28 sewed carpet rugs. January 30 kids went to a basketball game and President's Ball in the evening.

January GI 8 – People in the city of Groton and the whole community as well, greeted the coming of 1942 with the decorum that befits citizens of a nation at war. The revelry that seems to be a necessary evil in larger centers of population was conspicuous by its absence. In more than one home the thoughts of the family turned to the boys who are in service and whose vacant places cast a damper on the happiness there perhaps had known in other days. Still other families felt less like merrymaking because of the prospect of one or more of their circle departing for army and navy service. All in all the New Year's eve had something of solemnity in it that made frivolity seem decidedly out of place. Yet, there was little of lament over the tragic turn of events that brought war in the last weeks of 1941. In common with millions of other Americans, Groton folk appear to take it all in stride with a firm resolution to see the conflict through. The eve of the new year, of course, wasn't spent quite as sedately by everyone in the community. Here and there small groups congregated to stir up a bit of merriment that simulated, after a fashion, the revels that echoed over the airwaves from distant cities of the nation. There was, for instance, a gay party at the golf club house, where a goodly number of people whiled away the closing hours of the old year and the opening hours of the new with dancing, as well as in libations of various kinds, traditional with new year's parties. Persons in attendance described the event as most enjoyable. In contrast to the Christmas holiday, there was a light coat of snow and zero weather, cold enough to make motors a bit refractory and afflicted with severe coughing spells while warming up. But there was no high wind and no blizzard conditions. By and large, it was a reasonably happy new year's event and new year's day.

Due to war restrictions on weather reports over the radio, KABR, at Aberdeen has indicated it will be unable to broadcast "no school" announcements on days when the weather is too severe for scholars to venture out. At least until further instructions are received, Supt. H.W. Iverson announced Monday, that a long blast of the fire siren at 7:45 am will indicate there will be no school sessions in the forenoon. A long blast of siren at 11:00 am will mean no school session in the afternoon. Absence of signals from the siren will mean that school sessions will be held.

January 16 – Grandpa Jim Fry, 102-year-old civil war veteran from Claremont, even though he can't get in the Army, isn't going to sit idly by while there's some defending to do. Mr. Fry became one of the first to sign up for civilian defense. "I'm ready to do anything" Grandpa said, "especially if there's goin' to be any fightin involved". At the time the war started two years ago, last September Grandpa Fry made the remark that "Hitler is a damned fool and ought to be killed". He added that he'd just as soon go to war, as "my eyes are good, I can see a man a mile away, and I can shoot just as good as I ever could".

Local merchants have been apprised that in the near future the familiar Kraft paper bag, used so lavishly in wrapping purchases in grocery stores, may not be available for general use. Materials going into various kinds of paper are being used in making ammunition and further the tremendous needs of the government for forwarding its supplies are requiring greater and greater amounts of paper and paper cartons. Merchants here are therefore asking their customers not to expect to have many articles of food, already adequately wrapped, to be wrapped. The reason: Paper bags will advance in price shortly to double their pre-war levels and the strong Kraft bags may become extinct very soon. Even more serious is the burlap bag situation. Burlap bags are at the present moment rationed out, for instance to coffee roasters. A government purchase of 50 million burlap bags may make them unavailable for general use. So, if you have a supply of burlap bags, take good care of them. They are valuable.

February GI 26 – More than a half hundred young men, whose homes are in the Groton community are now serving in the armed services of the nation. Being far inland this section has provided more men for the army, but quite a few have chosen to serve on the fighting ships and the navy air ships. The honor roll, now on display in the city auditor's office here contains 57 names to date. The roll was compiled by City Auditor Earl A. Mueller from the best information available. If any omissions have been made, parents or next of kin of the service men should report the names to the auditor's office here.

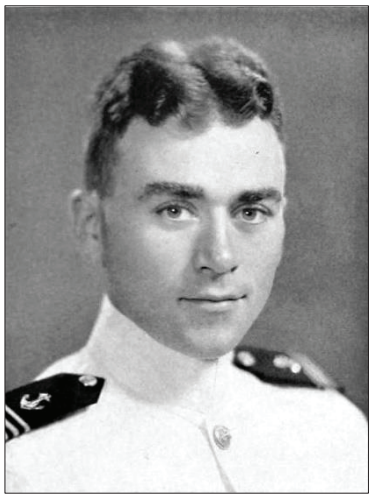
Army Air Corps – Terrance Abeln, Gordon Baldry, Maurice Cook, Emil Dobberpuhl, Erwin Dobberpuhl, Donald Falk, Bud Lackness and Orville Tosch.

Army – Robert Barthle, Lloyd Blair, Donald Bowles, Edward Boulian, Kenneth Bunsness, Donald Cook, Robert Cook, Donald Craig, Robert Dombrowe, Ronald Ellsbury, Jason Feller, Mark Falknor, James Gilchrist, Ernest Hasemann, Marvin Holcomb, Donald Ives, Harold T. Johnson, Ralph Karnopp, Fred Larson, Borden Meyer, DeWayne Peterson, Stanley Peterson, Joseph Pethtel, Wayne P. Quiggle, Chas. Rasmussen, Jr., Ronald Rosenberg, Donald Simonson, George Sperry, Reuben Stange, and Robert Van De Brake.

Navy - Donald Dombrowe, Floyd J. Erdmann, Ed Falk, Delton Feller, John R. Hart, Robert N. Hart, Robert Harnois, Roy Haug, John Hoy, Kenneth Karnopp, Gareth Nereim, Ronald Sieh, Orville Simonson, Kenneth Swearingen, and Fred Thede.

Nurse – Hildegard Barthle and Clara Ruden.

Coast Guard – Milton Henderson.



Captain Byron Kirk

February 28 – Twenty-nine naval academy seniors, including three football players, have been selected for appointment to the U.S. Marine Corps upon their graduation in June. Upon graduation, the group will be commissioned second lieutenants in the marine corps and will be given advanced training before going on active duty. Included are Byron A. Kirk, Andover and Robert D. Karl, Aberdeen. **Byron A. Kirk, Captain, U.S. Marines, born August 6, 1919, was declared dead after missing in the Philippines on November 2, 1943. He fought at Bouganville, in the Solomon Islands. He was assigned to C Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marines in August 1942. In September 1942 he arrived in American Samoa and in March 1943 was promoted to 1st Lieutenant. In May 1943 he arrived in Auckland, New Zealand. August 1, 1943, he was assigned to Guadalcanal and on October 3, 1943, was killed in action during the landing operations at Blue Beach, Bouganville. In 1947, Byron's mother requested as much information as possible that would relate to her son's death. The Marines reached out to various members of his company and Mrs. Kirk via the Marines received numerous letters. The best description of his death was provided by James E. Hendry, Warrant Officer, USMC. "Lieutenant KIRK and Lieutenant SHELTON were standing back of the ramp of the boat, ready to lead the men ashore when the Japanese fired a shell direct into the ramp. Lieutenant KIRK and Lieutenant SHELTON being the nearest to the ramp took the full impact of the shell, and they with twelve enlisted men were knocked backwards into the boat. The Coxswain was a casualty, so a sergeant got the boat turned around and started back to the ship where medical attention could be administered to the wounded. However, because of a Japanese air raid the ships had to move out. The sergeant and another slightly wounded man put life jackets on all the men, as the landing craft began to sink. All of the wounded were picked up later. However, all of the survivors reported that both Lieutenant KIRK and Lieutenant SHELTON were killed instantly." Another letter dated June 25, 1947, from James Henry provided the following: "I knew the late Lieutenant Kirk from September 1942, until the time of his missing in action 1 November 1943. He was an outstanding officer and one of my close friends and we lived together for over a year. On the night of October 31, 1943, we attended services together aboard the ship. We had only a Protestant Chaplain aboard the ship, (Chaplain Jones), and after his service, some of the men asked Byron to say the Rosary, which he did for the Catholic men. We knew that early the next morning we would be making**

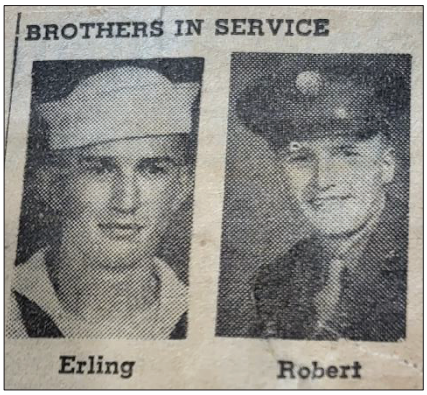
our first landing on enemy soil, so we talked about plans and several things until late that night. Byron was in good spirits and I've known of no one who was more confident and as unafraid of the task ahead. Early the next morning (1 Nov 43) we embarked aboard the landing craft for the run to the beach. Our boats were together in the wave, some seventy-five yards apart and I waved at Byron as we shoved off for the beach." Byron Kirk remained on the Marine roll for one year from the date he went missing. On November 3, 1944, his parents received a telegram from the Marine Corps. It said "An official declaration of presumptive death has been made in the case of your son First Lieutenant Byron A. Kirk USMC. Please accept my heartfelt sympathy. Letter follows."

On February 19, 1946, he was promoted to Captain (posthumously). He is commemorated on a monument at Fort William McKinley, Manila, the Philippines and buried in Mount Calvary Cemetery in Cedar Rapids, IA. In 1947 he was awarded the Victory Medal World War II, the Purple Heart and the Asiatic-Pacific Campaign Medal. His term of service was from June 10, 1942, until November 1, 1945.

The war, of course, had a great impact on South Dakota schools. According to the state census, total population dropped from 642,961 in 1940 to 589,802 in 1945; corresponding high school enrollment declined from 37,424 in 1940-1941 to 29,005 in 1945-1946, while the number of elementary pupils decreased from 96,022 to 84,826 during the same period. The biggest problem, however, was a teacher shortage with rural schools being especially hard hit. To alleviate the problem, the state legislature relaxed certification requirements, permitting high school graduates to teach in some cases if they took summer school courses and passed an examination. An effort was made to lure retired teachers back into the classroom, and salary levels were increased. The average pay for elementary teachers rose from $719 in 1942 to $1,308 in 1946; in high schools, the average went from $1,316 to $2,493 during the same years. Colleges were also seriously affected. The number of male students dropped precipitously in all schools, private and public. For instance, enrollment of civilians at State College went from about 1,500 in 1940-1941 to 395 in 1944-1945, while the School of Mines and Technology slipped from 427 students in the fall of 1942 to 48 during the spring of 1945. The State University noted a similar fall-off, particularly in the School of Law, where enrollees dropped from 55 to two. Women assumed leadership roles on the campuses, and athletic programs were severely curtailed. Filling some of the voids were literally thousands of service people assigned to South Dakota institutions of higher learning under the Army Student Training Program, the Navy V-12 Program, and various other war-related educational activities, including a glider training school at Northern State Teachers College. Dormitories were converted to barracks, courses were accelerated, romances blossomed, and for the duration, the state's colleges adapted to the demands of the national emergency.

Lyle Podoll from Aberdeen, South Dakota, arranged for me to meet with his uncle, Erling "Punch" Podoll at their family heritage center, near Columbia SD in July 2023. Punch is in his mid-90's and was a Navy ensign during World War II and was commissioned through the V-12 program while attending State College in Brookings. The V-12 Navy College Training Program was designed to supplement the force of commissioned officers in the United States Navy during World War II. Between July 1, 1943, and June 30, 1946, more than 125,000 participants were enrolled in 131 colleges and universities in the United States. Numerous participants attended classes and lectures at their respective colleges

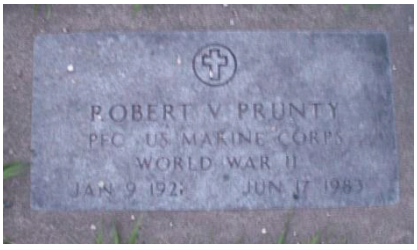
and earned completion degrees for their studies. Some even returned from their naval obligations to earn a degree from the college where they were previously stationed. The V-12 program's goal was to produce officers, not unlike the Army Specialized Training Program (ASTP), which sought to turn out more than 200,000 technically trained personnel in such fields as engineering, foreign languages, and medicine. Navy officer candidates were required to complete the V-7 United States Naval Reserve Midshipmen's School program. It was a short course of eight months. The first month was spent at Indoctrination School, a "boot camp" for officer candidates that had Marine Corps drill instructors. Pre-Midshipman's School was a preparatory four-month course teaching military skills like seamanship, navigation, ordinance, and how to behave like an officer. Midshipmen's School itself taught academic skills and was three months long. Graduates were commissioned as ensigns in the U.S. Naval Reserve and the majority entered into active duty with the U.S. fleet. Unlike the ASTP, the Navy predominately chose small, private colleges for V-12 detachments. Of the 131 institutions selected for line units, approximately 100 could be considered "small" and eighty-eight were private institutions. Eleven were associated with the Roman Catholic Church, Land grant and state flagship universities accounted for only eighteen of the 131 detachments. After the V-12 program got underway on July 1, 1943, public and private college enrollment increased by 100,000 participants, helping reverse the sharp wartime downward trend. These colleges/universities were broken down into: Midshipmen Schools (V-7 Program); Line Units; Medical Units; Dental Units; and Theological Units. Included in this of colleges/universities were North Dakota State School of Science, University of Minnesota/Minnesota Medical School, University of South Dakota and State College of South Dakota, Creighton University College of Medicine/College of Dentistry, and University of Nebraska College of Medicine. Notable graduates of this program, in addition to Punch, were George Allen, football coach; Howard Baker, U.S. Senator from Tennessee; Johnny Carson, television personality; Jackie Cooper, actor; Elroy Hirsche, LA Rams football great; Robert F. Kennedy, U.S. Attorney General; Melvin Laird, Secretary of Defense; Jack Lemmon, actor; Paul Newman, actor; Pierre Salinger, newsman; Eugene Sledge, author; and Zig Ziglar, author, to name just a few.



Before I get any further let me introduce Erling "Punch" Podoll. He is a 1942 graduate of Columbia High School in northeast South Dakota. He had two brothers – Robert who was killed in action in Italy in 1944 while serving in the U.S. Army and Vernon who served in the U.S. Army and was part of the Army of Occupation of Japan. After graduation from high school, Punch – by the way Punch has no idea how he got the nickname Punch. All of the Podoll son's had nicknames, just no one is quite sure where they came from. Punch entered Northern State Teachers' College in Aberdeen, SD, a short drive up the road from home after he graduated from high school. At registration time, he was required to pay $28 for the first semester college costs and he described the scene: "I didn't have $28 so had to borrow it." Punch had the same problem at the registration of the second semester and third semester. He had no money and was running out of people to borrow the $28 from. He heard about the V-12 program at State College in Brookings and figured at least he wouldn't have to borrow the registration fees and they promised him clothes, food, a place to stay, etc. Sounded like a good idea. He was a little concerned that his father, Ferdinand J. Podoll and mother, Anna Claire Elsie Podoll would think that he shouldn't leave home, join the Navy, etc. Too far from home. After a

conversation with his father, who explained that he (Ferdinand) had left home (Germany) as a young boy, travelled to SD by himself, left his family, friends, etc. and rode a horse to meet his future bride in SD, joining the U.S. Navy didn't seem like too big of deal. So, Punch joined the program.

June 1942 – Diary – June 1 sheared sheep in the AM. 33 of them got 11 ¾ pounds per sheep. Pooled it for $.30. June 2 Ralph and Don fixed fence. June 3 went to town with Ralph when he took the wool. Got my hair fixed. Kids took car and went to the show. June 4 scrubbed the brooder house on my hands and knees. Scrubbed the walk. June 6 our 20th wedding anniversary. Went to church. Went to the second show "Kings Row". June 9 scrubbed walls behind the separator. Made a cake with syrup. Rained. June 10 cleaned the house. Went to town. Helped Ann (sister) with the sugar rationing all day. Got a new hoe. Ralph got done plowing corn for the first time. June 12, we went to town to see the boys go. So cold we couldn't enjoy. June 13 went to town in the evening. Did a lot of shopping. Ralph mowed alfalfa. June 15 washed – had trouble. Don and I wrung them out by hand. Don got a letter from Northwestern. We went to town so that he could get his military physical. Passed. Got two bank drafts for $25.00. June 16 put our alfalfa in the barn. Got Don's clothes ready. June 17 Ann and I took Don to Sioux Falls. Don went to Chicago at 9:20. Got to Chicago at 8:55. We got home at 4:30. June 18 did the usual work. Worked in the garden in the evening. Ralph mowed clover. Beth worked for Virginia in the AM. June 19 Beth went to town and got a permanent. Washed my hair at the laundry and got a wet wave. Beth and I cleaned the whole house in the evening. Took a bath. June 20 Don came home. In Sioux Falls, Beth got slacks $5.00; shoes $2.29; Ralph tan pants $8.00; shorts $2.25; hat $1.50; and I got shoes $2.29. June 21 put out tomato plants. June 22 Don and I washed on the board – had a big load. Beth worked for Alice. June 23-24 Ralph helped Madison hay all day. June 26 got 400 leghorn chickens. 3 ½ weeks old. Made cookies and Ralph plowed corn. June 27 terrible dirt storm in the PM. Ralph plowed corn. June 29 Don ate a good breakfast and Dr. Miller took his tonsils out about 10:00. Don didn't feel very well. June 30 Don stayed in bed most of the day. Beth is 16 today. She got $.50 and a handkerchief.



July 3 – Robert Vincent Prunty, Westport, South Dakota, entered the U.S. Marine Corps on July 3. He received an honorable discharge on October 6, 1945. His military specialties included: Mortar Crewman 607. At his discharge his monthly pay was $56.00. He was discharged from Farragut, Idaho to Minneapolis, Minnesota and received his final pay (including travel expenses) of $199.28. He was discharged as a private first class. According to his discharge records, he was a veteran of the Guadalcanal battle from January 4 to February 10, 1943; Tarawa, from November 20 through November 28, 1943; Saipan from June 16 to July 9, 1944; and Tinian Marianas from July 25, to August 1, 1944. He was wounded in action on August 2, 1944, during action on Tinian.

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Robert Prunty

Articles in the Aberdeen daily paper reported the following relative to Prunty – ON SAIPAN – Mrs. F.L. Prunty of Ordway received word from her son, PFC Robert Prunty, that his battalion was the first one to land on Saipan, and that he is all right. He wrote "it was rough over here, but I am one of the most fortunate fellows and didn't get a scratch". PFC Prunty is a veteran of Guadalcanal, the Gilbert islands, and was one of the first to land on Tarawa. He has been overseas since October 1942. FORMER ABERDOMAN GETS PURPLE HEART – Marine PFC Robert V. Prunty, 23, who was wounded in action during the fighting for Saipan and Tinian in the Marianas has been awarded the Purple Heart, according to word received here. The son of Mr. and Mrs. Felix Prunty of Ordway, PFC Prunty serviced at Guadalcanal, Tarawa and the Gilbert islands before landing at Saipan. PFC Prunty was employed in Aberdeen before entering the service and played in Aberdeen city league baseball. PFC ROBERT PRUNTY, stationed on Tarawa in the Gilbert islands, writing to his parents, Mr. and Mrs. F.L. Prunty of Ordway. "We have been pretty busy lately as you have probably seen by the papers. I mean, had plenty of action the past week and I am perfectly safe and sound so don't worry about me. I am now stationed on Tarawa in the Gilbert group. We just got through traveling every island so there isn't a Jap left. I suppose you know by now that this was the toughest fight the marines ever had. Wish to God some of those defense workers and strikers could see what I have been through in the past week or so. Sure isn't nice. We passed through quite a lot of native villages, and they are quite a sight to see. They are real friendly and quite civilized. The weather is really swell here. Here is a scoop for you to let you know the South Dakota fellows are coming out fine in this war. A marine from Lemmon who left Aberdeen with me has been recommended for the marine bravery medal for getting more than 15 Japs last week. His name is Amden". (PFC Prunty has seen action on Guadalcanal and has been stationed in New Zealand). The last article – A party honoring PFC Rob Prunty, USMC, and Eugene Prunty of the merchant marine, will be at Westport Friday. The affair was originally planned for Ordway but the community hall there is flooded. Robert Prunty was born January 9, 1921, in Ordway, SD. He died on June 17, 1983, and is buried in the Riverside Memorial Park in Aberdeen, SD. He married Lorraine L. Silvernail and from that marriage came sons – Vincent, Damian, and Brian and a daughter – Kathann.

Marvin L. McNickle retired from the U.S. Air Force as a lieutenant general (3 stars) after serving in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. He was born on January 30, 1914, and died on August 19, 2007, and is buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. His twin brother, Melvin, retired from the U.S. Air Force as a major general (2 stars). He also served in World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. He is also buried in Arlington National Cemetery in Washington, D.C. He died in Oklahoma City on July 9, 1986. Each had a very long list of awards including Distinguished Service Medals, Purple Hearts, Legions of Merit and many oak leaf clusters. I am not aware of any other veterans, from our area, who served as long, achieved such rank, or were awarded the extent of medals, as these two brothers.

Milton H. Jensen, U.S. Army, Tec 5/Sergeant, entered the service August 7, 1942, and was discharged October 23, 1945. He served in North Africa, Sicily, and Northern Italy in the Quartermaster Corps. In 1962, Jensen returned to South Dakota from the West Coast and was a resident of Stratford.

September 18 – Allen G. Wilson, Hot Springs, has been appointed cadet colonel, commanding the cadet officers of the State University regiment of reserve officers training corps (ROTC) by order of LTC Joseph Church, professor of military science and tactics. Included named cadets who were promoted to second lieutenant and will be assigned to companies was Robert N. Williams, Groton. Other high-ranking officers named included Jay Swisher, Vermillion, captain, commanding company C. **Jay Swisher was a first lieutenant in the U.S. Army when discharged in 1946. Served with the 27th Infantry of the 9th Armored Division, European Theater, Battle of the Bulge, Battle at Remagen to capture the Ludendorff Bridge over the Rein into Germany, and the Ardennes. Purple heart recipient and awarded the Bronze Star. Served from 1943 through 1946 with the final rank of first lieutenant. He entered OCS out of State University as a corporal. His son, Bill indicated that his father did not speak of the war often, but he did tell Bill that he had only six ration candy bars for ten days. He was wounded when his jeep was hit by German shelling. Swisher woke up on the operating table in inches of his own blood. Received shell fragments in his back and back side. He recuperated from his wounds in England. Jay was a member of the South Dakota State Legislature for two years, starting in 1967, and was South Dakota Secretary of Agriculture from 1988 to 1995. He died in 2008. He married Mary Clark Swisher, a 1941 graduate of Groton High School. His brother Clark Swisher was discharged from the U.S. Army as a major and would go on to become a long-serving head coach of the Northern State Teachers College sports program. At one time, the college's football stadium was named after him. Both Jay and Clark were high school and college football players. Jay, at only 145 pounds, started as the center on the State University football team prior to the war. Clark was a quarterback and was a high school football coach prior to enlisting in the U.S. Army during WWII.**

A flaming army bomber carried seven fliers to death on a pasture 15 miles southwest of here **(Ottawa, Ohio)** Saturday. The plane was from Bear Field, Fort Wayne, Ind., the fifth service command said. One of the victims was Pvt. O.R. Colestock of Hecla, So. Dakota. Sheriff Arnold Potts of Putnam county said he was informed by witnesses that the ship circled the area several minutes, then suddenly burst into flames and plunged to the group. It struck on the farm of James Thomas and hurtled 400 yards before stopping on the farm of Leonard Klausing. Bodies were scattered throughout the wreckage. **O. R. Colestock of Hecla was born on January 8, 1918, and was killed on September 26, 1942. He was a private in the U.S. Army Air Corps and entered the service on June 16, 1941. He was buried in the Hecla cemetery.**

November GI 3 – A former Stratford boy played a heroic role once again as he piloted a burning bomber in the Solomon Islands area to a forced landing to save the crew of the craft after the pilot was killed and the co-pilot mortally wounded by Jap fighters. He was Col. Laverne (Blondy) Saunders. The Colonel,

West Point graduate, who chose air corps service, makes occasional trips with his bombers, was back on the job the next day or so with his forehead bandaged and a cut on his hand, suffered when he landed the big bomber in the water at 95 miles an hour. The Colonel told the story of the terrific trip, recounting how the co-pilot was first wounded in the leg and went back to get a first aid kit and while he was doing that a bullet pierced the pilot's heart, killing him instantly and at the same time the co-pilot received a stomach wound which proved fatal. Taking control of the plane after lifting the dead body of the pilot away from the cock-pit (sic), Col. Saunders radioed other planes in the formation he was dropping out as about 20 Jap zeros had come at the flight head-on. With the cock-pit (sic) all shot up, two motors out and the left wing on fire, he headed for some overcast and finally came out of it about 500 feet above the water. He knew, he said, that he would have to set the craft down and proceded (sic) to do so near a little island in enemy territory. There was a terrific bump as the plane hit the water – which gave the Colonel the cut he is nursing on his head. The crew crawled out of the craft before it sank and paddled ashore to the little island where friendly natives helped build shelters for the wrecked airmen. The dead pilot went down with the plane, but the co-pilot was taken aboard the life raft. He died before the group reached land. The next day a navy plane flew to the island and rescued the fliers.

November 19 – Charles Edward Fuller, U.S. Navy, Seaman First Class, from Groton, was killed in action November 19, 1942. He entered the service July 14, 1942, and is buried in the Groton cemetery.

November 22 – Gale H. Thorne, Corporal, U.S. Army, member of the 31st Infantry Regiment, died of dysentery while a POW at the Cabanatuan POW camp on Nueva Ecija Province, Philippines. Gale Thorne's next of kin was his grandmother, M.E. Thorne of Andover, SD. In February 1950, his grandmother was notified by the U.S. Army's Memorial Division that the American Graves Registration Service had disinterred all remains from the Cabanatuan Prisoner of War Cemetery and removed them to the American Graves Registration Service Mausoleum, Manila, Philippines Island in an effort to establish and/or verify identification. These remains were subjected to exhaustive investigations, including processing by anthropologists and medical, dental and laboratory technicians in the Central Identification Laboratory at Manila. Even after these investigations it was impossible to identify any of the recovered remains as those of her grandson. The Department of the Army was forced to conclude that the remains of Gale were not recoverable. Thorne's body was part of a group burial which included Alex Martin, Bruce Penny, James Efishoff, Ernest Ulrich, Robert Pierce, Howard Hasselkus, and David Crouse. One (James Efishoff) was a U.S. Marine and the others were U.S. Army.

Gale Thorne entered the U.S. Army February 3, 1940, and was declared missing in action May 7, 1942. He died after approximately seven months of captivity, November 22, 1942. On November 21, 1943, Thorne's grandmother wrote a letter to the Army. I am including it as it was written. "I am writing my first letter to the War Dept concerning the death of my Grandson Corporal Gale H. Thorne XC-3.272.213. First I want to thank all who were concerned in any way of trying to comfort me in any way for it was a hard blow & hard to bear. he being like one of my own. Now in one of the letters I received it stated his personal belongings would be sent to me now did he have anything he certainly had an identification tag which I would like to have and when he was home he had a very nice wrist

watch. If he still had it I would like to have it as he has a Sister who I want to have it. he has been reported dead since July 9th so it seems these things should of had time to have been gotten especially his tag. some of my folks cant believe he is gone especially his Sis & if I could get his tag then would be no getting around it and then around the first of the year I plan to have a Memorial for him and it might be necessary to have this please see to this and inform me at an early date. Yours truly, Mrs. M.E. Thorne, Andover, SD" The Army responded to Mrs. Thorne in January and September 1944 that it would be improbable that any personal property could be recovered because of "the fact our military stations there were occupied by the enemy". I think that her letters written to the Army were handwritten and then someone typed them. Both were included in the file of information held by the military.

December GI 17 – Mr. and Mrs. Eric Ness of Langford received the sad news of the death of their son, Adrian, 27, in action on a south Pacific fighting front. The news came from the Adjutant Generals office in Washington. Adrian Ness was a native of Pierpont having been born while his parents resided there. He was inducted into the army at Ft. Snelling, Minn., in March 1941 and received his training at Camp Roberts, Calif., and other points on the coast, going overseas with the 159th infantry of the 40th division. The soldier who paid the supreme sacrifice, last wrote to his parents from Caledonia last September. It is believed that he was killed in action there. A memorial service was held for him at the Langford Lutheran church last Sunday afternoon, the Rev. C. E. Shaleen delivering the memorial sermon. **Adrian Ness, PFC, U.S. Army, served with the 164th Infantry of the 14th Division when he was killed in action. He was killed during the Guadalcanal campaign. He was born on March 12, 1915.**

December 25 – Blake F. Gardiner, Private, Co I 126th Infantry is killed in action on Soputa-Sanananda trail, three miles north of Soputa, New Guinea. Gardiner was from Houghton and was survived by his mother Esther Gardiner and his brother Rodney Gardiner from Ludden ND. He was interred in the U.S. Cemetery-Soputa #2, New Guinea. Grave number 11, row one with a cross marker. He was reburied in 1943 and again March 29, 1945, in U.S. Armed Forces Cemetery, Finschhaufen #2, New Guinea. As set forth in a letter from the Army, Quartermaster Corps, "the Finschhaufen cemetery is located on the east coast of Huon Peninsula, approximately two hundred miles north of Port Moresby, New Guinea. It is under the constant care and supervision of United States military personnel." His personal effects consisted of one social security card, one registration card, one pay book, and insignia and pin. He also had $7.43 in his possession. These were mailed to Mrs. Esther Gardiner in July 1943. In July 1947, Mrs. Gardiner requested that the U.S. Army permanently intern Private Gardiner in Plot A, Row 11, Grave 126, Cross Headstone, of the Fort McKinley, U.S. Military Cemetery, Manila, Philippine Islands.

Stratford – Just south of Groton, my hometown, was a very small town – Stratford. I found the history of their American Legion Post 207. Some interesting information of World War II participation included:

- Seven families had three sons who served in World War II at the same time: Bunsness; Joseph, Kenneth, and Mark. Carmine; Darrel, Duane and Lee. Dayton; Dale, Earl, and Robert. Erdmann; Lynn, Richard and John (Jack) Holcomb. Floan; George, Melvin, and Raymond. Misslitz; Curtis, Donald, and Vernon. Schlichting; Delbert, Lloyd, and Orville.
- Sergeant Lynn Erdmann was awarded the Silver Star for rescuing a buddy from a mine field.
- BG Laverne G. Saunders was awarded the Navy Cross for his activity in the Southwest Pacific. This award was not normally awarded to Army Personnel.
- Ervin G. Wood was a prisoner of war in Germany in World War II.
- Three area residents were killed in action during World War II. All were pilots. Albert Svarstad, Navy Pilot; Harvey Swenson, B-29 bomber pilot; Ervin Westby, B-24 bomber pilot. William Edgar Stange was found dead at the Brooklyn Navy Pier, cause of death unknown.
- Stratford Draft Board – led by C.L. Pardun.
- Stratford High School Graduates who served in World War II: Rudolf Bartz, Joseph Bunsness, Gordon Schlick, Vernon Gerharter, Melvin Schley, Clifford Moulton, Harvey Erickson, Raymond Floan, Gail Brimmerman, Mathew Rawlings, Kenneth Olson, Erin Wood, Kermit Schley, Vernon Misslitz, Jack Stewart, Donald Misslitz, Dale Dayton, Earl (Dick) McNeil, Clarence Erickson, Knolen Face, Thomas E. Saunders, Raymond Schley, Robert Rock, and Marvin Schley.

Other Area Veterans of World War II: Kenneth Bunsness, Marcus Bunsness, Eugene Cramp, Earl Dayton, Robert Dayton, Dale Dunker, Wallace Dunker, Dick Erdman, Lynn Erdman, George Floan, Melvin Floan, Lloyd Larson, Curtis Misslitz, Dale Moulton, Verl Radke, Ralph Peterson, Clarence Robinson, Maurice Samuelson, Laverne G. Saunders, Melvin A. Schley, Orville Schlichting, and Floyd Stoltenberg.

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT
https://southdakotasearchlight.com

Law school dean to lawmakers: More students admitted, bar exam scores best neighboring states

BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 31, 2023 4:43 PM

The University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law saw its largest incoming class in over a decade this fall, according to a report prepared for lawmakers by Dean Neil Fulton.

The 88 students in the class of 2026 is a reflection of the school's "investment in admissions personnel and resources," Fulton wrote in his letter to the South Dakota Legislature's Joint Appropriations Committee.

The letter also says that exam passage rates stood at 88% for the graduating class of 2022 based on "ultimate bar passage," meaning passage within two years of graduation. The first-time passage rate was 72% for July 2023's USD Law graduating class, the letter says.

The National Conference of Bar Examiners puts the total South Dakota examinee passage rate – which would include out-of-state graduates seeking admission to the South Dakota Bar – at 75%.

Fulton wrote that the first-time passage rate for USD Law was higher than that of graduates in North Dakota, Nebraska, Wisconsin and Wyoming.

Ninety-six percent of 2023 USD Law grads found jobs in the legal field, with 68% working in South Dakota.

On Tuesday, Fulton told South Dakota Searchlight that the letter's figures signal a solid foundation for the school.

The first-time passage rate for USD Law students dipped slightly this spring, which the dean attributes to learning disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic for the 2023 graduating class.

"Our bar passage and placement numbers and trend remain strong," Fulton said.

The six-page report to appropriators is meant to outline the school's goals and successes in advance of the budget hearings that take place near the beginning of each legislative session. The "letter of intent" has been filed each fall since 2018, the year lawmakers added $300,000 in ongoing annual funding to "improve sustainability" at the Vermillion-based institution.

Bar passage rates had dropped significantly at that point, but have crept up since the implementation of adjustments to the scoring system, which also took place in 2018. Since then, examiners in South Dakota have been able to award points from a high essay score to boost a test-taker's multiple choice score.

The 2023 letter of intent comes after two consecutive years of debate in the Legislature on bills that would have struck the bar exam requirement for USD Law grads and offered alternative paths to bar membership. Critics argue that changes to the bar exam scoring system put in place in 2014 continue to have a negative impact on passage rates, particularly for people of color.

South Dakota Supreme Court Justice Steven Jensen was among the officials to spearhead the creation of a bar exam study committee tasked with recommending possible alternatives – a move that led the 2023 bill's sponsor to shelve the proposal.

The work of that group was highlighted in Fulton's letter, as well. The group "appears on track to recommend a pilot program for a limited number of applicants to obtain (bar) admission through supervised practice and an assessment of a portfolio of their work."

"This option will likely be limited to applicants entering public service or rural practice in an effort to draw more lawyers to high need areas," Fulton wrote.

The committee is expected to release its full report and recommendations to the state Supreme Court prior to the start of the 2023 session.

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COMMENTARY

Tough to evaluate other penitentiary location options without transparency

JOE KIRBY

South Dakota is finally moving forward on the long overdue replacement of its men's penitentiary near downtown Sioux Falls. It announced a new site and a timeline for the move. However, the process for selecting a replacement site has raised questions and concerns from the public.

Downtown Sioux Falls has changed

In recent decades, downtown Sioux Falls has grown into a popular place to live, work and play. Inevitably, some features of historical downtown no longer seem appropriate there. Downtown would be better off today if we no longer had a slaughterhouse, penitentiary and railroad switching yard nearby. We usually don't bring up those legacy features of our city center when we brag about it.

When the decision was made in the mid- to late-19th century to create a university in Dakota Territory, community promoter Richard Pettigrew wished it could be in Sioux Falls. But as a political realist, he recognized that it would be located near the then population center in the southeast corner of the territory. So, he worked on getting Sioux Falls the next best alternative.

He wanted the penitentiary in Sioux Falls to provide stable jobs in the community. It worked. But over a century later, the facility has aged and the need for a new location has been evident for a long time.

Why surprise the public?

Earlier this year, the state announced it would build a new penitentiary on farmland it owns in Lincoln County. The announcement apparently surprised the public, especially those owning property in the area of the site, as well as public officials.

If I had been advising the state on its site selection process, I would have recommended a transparent and open-minded approach. The state could have announced its intention to replace the penitentiary, publicly shared the criteria for evaluating potential sites, and invited proposals from communities across the state.

Instead, the state made its pick with no advance notice, and so far, minimal information has been released. Both the site and the process used to pick it have raised concerns. Many neighbors, including local officials, have expressed an interest in learning more. And now some legislators have started asking questions.

Other options

There may be communities along the Interstate 29 corridor or within an hour of Sioux Falls on I-90 that would enthusiastically welcome the facility, just as Sioux Falls and Richard Pettigrew did decades ago. It offers the prospect of stable government jobs for the next century, which is a potentially enticing opportunity for areas dealing with stagnant or declining populations.

The state has picked a nice piece of farmland it owns in Lincoln County. It is a valuable state asset, characterized by its high-quality agricultural potential and its future prospects as a development site within the metro Sioux Falls area. Given the lack of information and the hardships this location might impose on neighbors, it is only natural that questions have been raised about whether there might be more suitable locations.

Selling the Lincoln County land could potentially generate significant revenue, possibly helping offset some of the costs of constructing the new facility. And while we're at it, selling the old facility might also help defray costs of the new prison. The state has indicated it plans to keep the old building, but that may not be in the best interests of the state or the community.

Maybe there is a less valuable and less controversial location available. Or maybe this Lincoln County site is the best one available. It's hard to know without more transparency.

This commentary is adapted with permission from a SiouxFallsJoe.com blog post.

Joe Kirby, of Sioux Falls, formerly led Western Surety Company and worked as an accountant and lawyer. He helped lead a successful effort to modernize Sioux Falls city government in the 1990s and continues to advocate for government reform.

Thune and Rounds vote against Biden pick for ambassador to Israel

BY: JACOB FISCHLER - OCTOBER 31, 2023 5:32 PM

The U.S. Senate voted, 53-43, Tuesday to confirm Jacob J. Lew as ambassador to Israel amid a recent escalation in the U.S. ally's war with the militant group Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Senators of both parties agreed the need to confirm an ambassador to Israel gained urgency after Hamas' surprise attack on Oct. 7 that killed at least 1,400 in Israel.

But almost all Republicans voted against President Joe Biden's nominee Tuesday, with many citing Lew's record dealing with Iran while he headed the Treasury Department during the Obama administration.

Two Republicans, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Lindsey Graham of South Carolina, joined all Democrats and independents to vote in favor. All 43 no votes (including South Dakota's John Thune and Mike Rounds) came from Republicans, who raised objections over Lew's role in the Iran nuclear deal. Four senators, Roger Marshall of Kansas, Tom Tillis of North Carolina, Mike Lee of Utah and Tim Scott of South Carolina, were absent for the vote.

In floor remarks Tuesday morning, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer noted the importance of having a representative in Israel as Congress considers a major aid package.

"With everything happening in Israel right now, confirming Jack Lew at this moment will be one of the most important and consequential nomination votes the Senate has taken in a long time," the New York Democrat said. "The need to confirm Mr. Lew is plain and irrefutable: Israel is in crisis, America needs to stand with her, and a most urgent and obvious step would be to ensure that we have an ambassador in place."

At his Oct. 18 confirmation hearing, Republicans on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee registered their objections to Lew's role in the 2015 international agreement that lifted some economic sanctions on Iran in return for the country allowing restrictions on its nuclear program.

Iran is a major funder of Hamas and Hezbollah, another militant group neighboring Israel.

"Secretary Lew, I have reservations on your appointment as America's ambassador to Israel," the panel's ranking Republican, Jim Risch of Idaho, told Lew at the hearing.

"Not only will you need to support Israel as it responds to these attacks, but also as it contends with the enduring and indeed, existential, Iranian threat, which I think is an underlying and foundational issue here. I have reservations about your ability to do that."

The committee advanced Lew's nomination last week on a 12-9 vote.

On the Senate floor Tuesday, Thune cited the Iran agreement as a reason to oppose Lew.

"Mr. Lew played a key role in developing and carrying out the Obama administration's misguided nuclear deal," Thune said, "And his nomination does not exactly send the message to Iran that the Biden administration will be cracking down on Iranian warmongering."

National Security Council spokesman John Kirby Tuesday called Lew "more than qualified" and said he would assist in both Israel's war effort and the push to provide humanitarian aid.

Former Ambassador Thomas Nides left the position in July.

Ground strike

After weeks of airstrikes, Israel began a ground offensive into northern Gaza over the weekend, according to a statement from the country's military.

Humanitarian aid continues to flow into Gaza, though there are complications around the deliveries, particularly fuel, Kirby said at the White House press briefing Tuesday.

In the last 24 hours, 66 trucks delivered supplies into the territory, with "dozens more" expected Tuesday, Kirby said.

The delivery of aid did not necessarily mean Gaza residents could leave Gaza, Kirby said. He blamed the inability of civilians to escape the territory on Hamas, who he said had established obstacles for people seeking to leave.

"Just because the gate swings one way doesn't mean it's going to swing the other way," Kirby said. "Obviously, we want it to. Right now the aid is getting in — not enough, but it is getting in. But right now

we can see we just are not able to get people out."

Kirby said delivery of fuel to Gaza was critical, with existing stocks "dang near down to zero" and no fuel yet delivered. Fuel is needed to power water desalination plants, he added.

Kirby responded to concerns that Hamas could steal incoming fuel, saying that the group had not touched any of the humanitarian aid that had arrived thus far.

"It's a legitimate concern, no question about that," he said. "Our argument is it's also a legitimate need of the innocent civilians in Gaza who are suffering right now in desperate need of continued medical care and fresh water to drink."

Biden was scheduled to speak Tuesday afternoon with King Abdullah II of Jordan to discuss cooperating with Arab partners to provide humanitarian aid.

Aid package

Also Tuesday, the Senate Appropriations Committee, led by Washington Democratic Sen. Patty Murray, held a hearing to review an aid package that would include military and humanitarian assistance for Israel and Gaza. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin testified to the panel Tuesday in support of the administration's request for funding.

The White House has requested more than $100 billion for Israel, Ukraine, and U.S.-Mexico border security.

The U.S. can pay for aid packages to Israel, Ukraine and Taiwan, Kirby said Tuesday.

But U.S. House Republicans are split on further funding for Ukraine and introduced a bill Monday to send aid only to Israel. Administration officials and Democrats in Congress have dismissed the legislation.

"We've been very clear… how deeply concerning this House Republican bill is and how it doesn't meet our national security needs," Kirby said. "As commander in chief, the president is never going to do anything that doesn't meet our national security needs."

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

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

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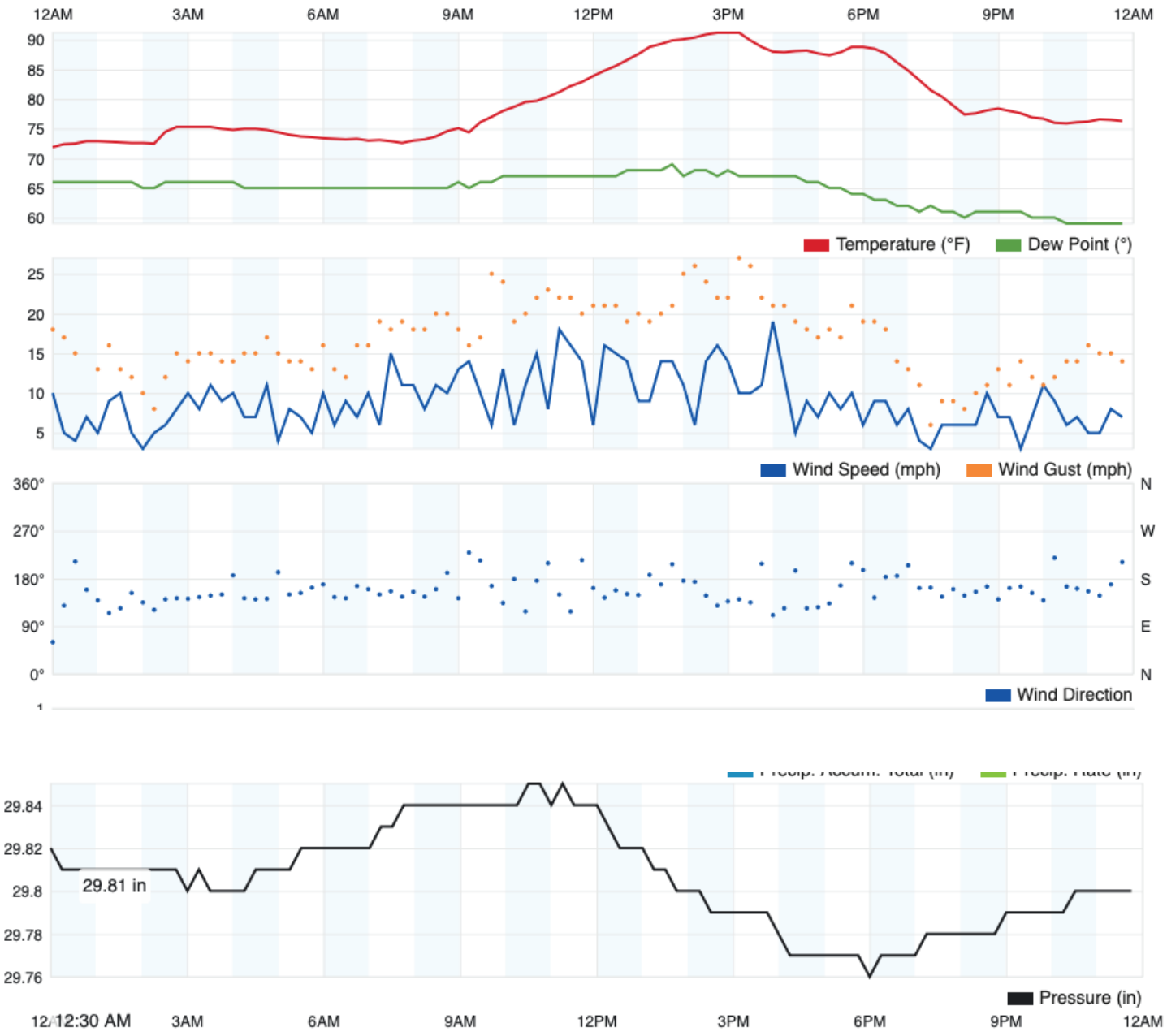
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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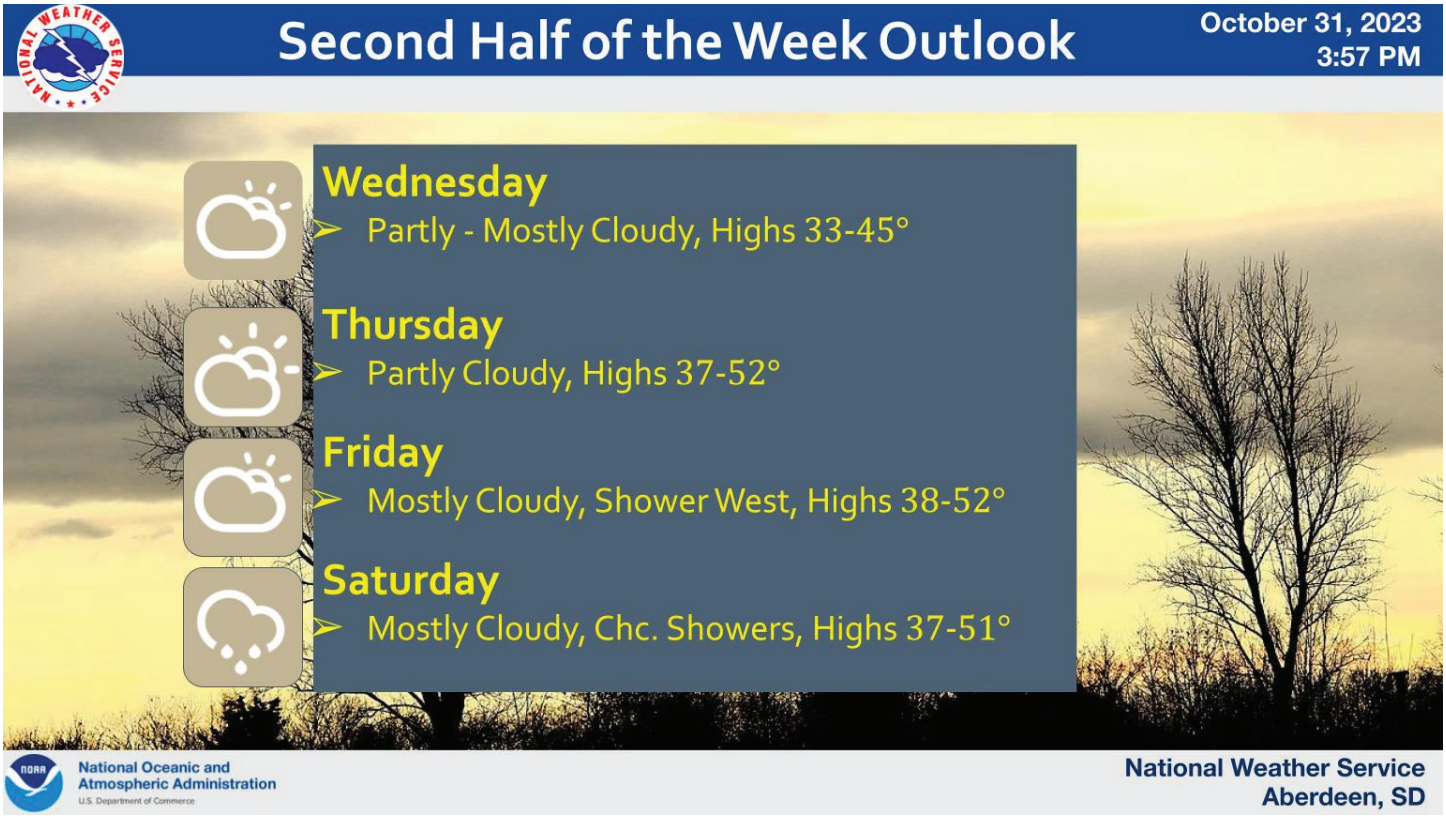
Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	Mon	Tue
Nov 1	Nov 2	Nov 3	Nov 4	Nov 5	Nov 6	Nov 7
39°F	43°F	40°F	42°F	42°F	36°F	34°F
19°F	26°F	25°F	28°F	28°F	24°F	28°F
SSW	SSW	NW	NNE	NE	NNE	ESE
12 MPH	10 MPH	9 MPH	11 MPH	11 MPH	12 MPH	11 MPH
			20%	20%	40%	20%



Mainly dry conditions and partly to mostly cloudy skies will be the general rule through the end of the week. Temperatures will modify some by the end of the week. The next best chance for precip will arrive this weekend.

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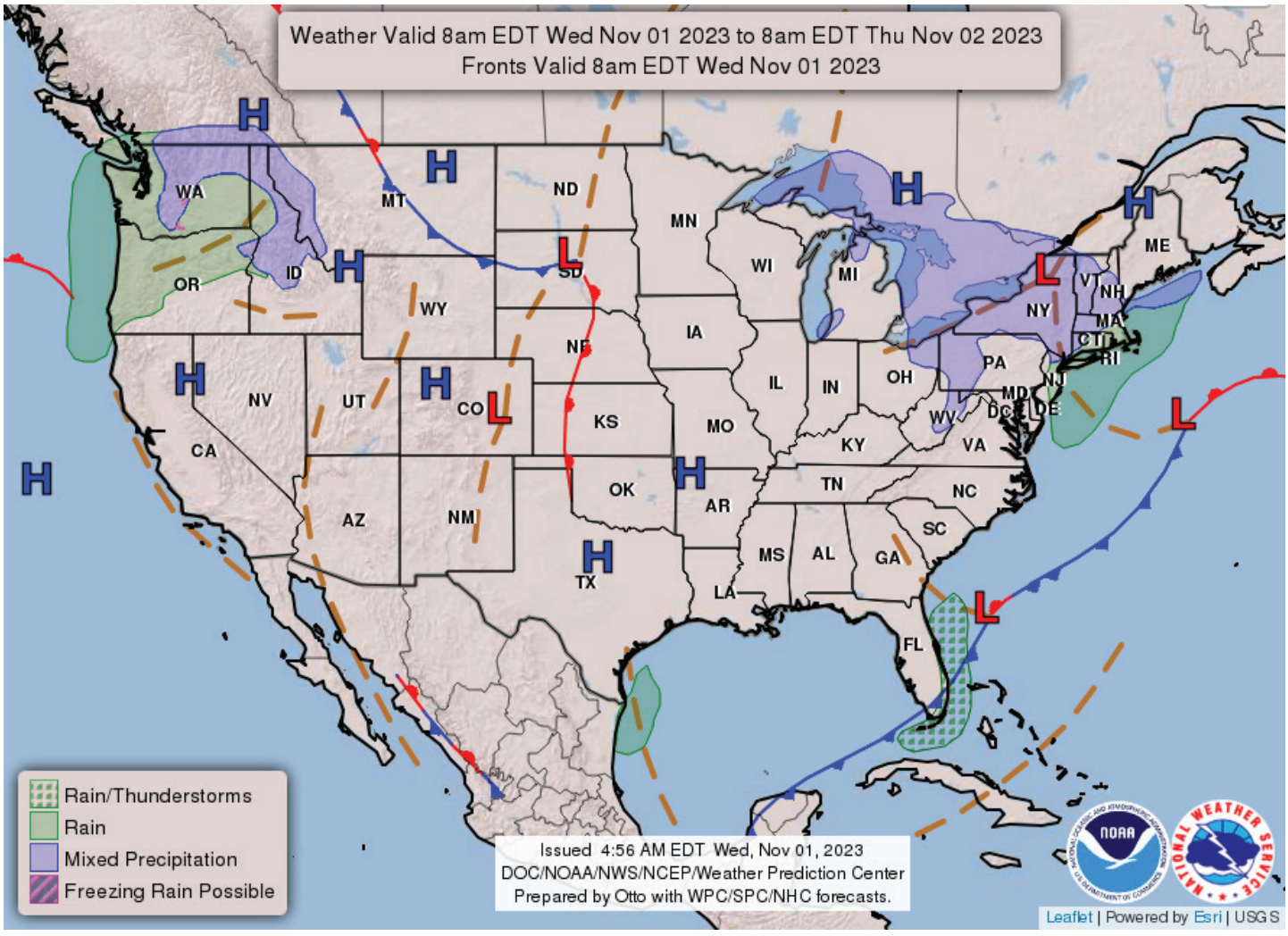
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 30 °F at 4:43 PM
Low Temp: 16 °F at 6:21 AM
Wind: 26 mph at 12:03 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 10 hours, 11 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 75 in 2022
Record Low: -3 in 1935
Average High: 50
Average Low: 26
Average Precip in Nov..: 0.03
Precip to date in Nov.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 20.50
Precip Year to Date: 22.98
Sunset Tonight: 6:21:39 PM
Sunrise Tomorrow: 8:11:40 AM



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Today in Weather History

November 1st, 1999: High winds of 30 to 50 mph with gusts to around 55 mph caused some tree and building damage throughout Big Stone and Traverse counties. On Highway 10 west of Browns Valley, the high winds blew a semi-tractor trailer full of 12,000 pounds of meat off the road and into a ditch. High winds from 30 to 50 mph, gusting to near 65 mph, also caused building and tree damage throughout central, north-central, and northeast South Dakota. In Eureka, the high winds blew down a large part of the ballpark fence. In Mellette, a 250-foot diameter grain bin under construction also received some damage from the winds.

November 1st, 2000: A rare and unusual tornado event occurred as five tornadoes hit south-central North Dakota, causing property damage and injuries. The majority of the damage and injuries occurred in the Bismarck area. Forty-two homes suffered minor to moderate damage. The tornadoes were rated F0 and F1, packing winds up to 90 mph. Another unusual phenomenon, these tornadoes traveled from east to west due to close proximity to a low-pressure system. Simultaneously, as these tornadoes were occurring, snow began to fall in the far western area of North Dakota. As a result, winter storm watches and warnings were posted across northwest and central North Dakota that afternoon. Before this, the last recorded tornado in the state was October 11th, 1979, in Sargent County in southeast North Dakota.

1755: A magnitude 8.7 earthquake devastated Lisbon, Portugal, on this day, killing as many as 50,000 people. The epicenter was located 120 miles west-southwest of Cape St. Vincent. In addition, many individuals who sought safety on the Tagus River were killed by an estimated 20-foot tall tsunami that struck 40 minutes after the earthquake.

1848: When Joseph Henry came to the Smithsonian, one of his priorities was to set up a meteorological program. In 1847, while outlining his plan for the new institution, Henry called for "a system of extended meteorological observations for solving American storms." On November 1st, 1848, Joseph Henry and Navy meteorologist James Espy wrote a letter urging anyone interested in becoming a weather observer to signify their willingness to do so. By 1849, he had budgeted $1,000 for the Smithsonian meteorological project and established a network of some 150 volunteer weather observers. A decade later, the project had more than 600 volunteer observers, including people in Canada, Mexico, Latin America, and the Caribbean. Its cost in 1860 was $4,400, or thirty percent of the Smithsonian's research and publication budget.

1861: A tropical storm raced across Florida, becoming a hurricane off the coast of South Carolina. The storm-battered a Union fleet of ships attacking the Carolina ports.

1870: United States Army Signal Corps observers at 24 sites around the country simultaneously made weather reports and transmitted them to Washington, where a national weather map would be drawn. These simultaneous reports also started the process of sending out weather reports by telegraph to metropolitan newspapers. This would be the beginning of our present-day National Weather Service.

1966 - Santa Anna winds fanned fires, and brought record November heat to parts of coastal California. November records included 86 degrees at San Francisco, 97 degrees at San Diego, and 101 degrees at the International airport in Los Angeles. Fires claimed the lives of at least sixteen firefighters. (The Weather Channel)

1968 - A tornado touched down west of Winslow, AZ, but did little damage in an uninhabited area. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Early morning thunderstorms in central Arizona produced hail an inch in diameter at Williams and Gila Bend, and drenched Payson with 1.86 inches of rain. Hannagan Meadows AZ, meanwhile, was blanketed with three inches of snow. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across the Ohio Valley. Afternoon highs of 76 degrees at Beckley WV, 77 degrees at Bluefield WV, and 83 degrees at Lexington KY were records for the month of November. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Low pressure brought gales and locally heavy rain to the northeastern U.S. The rainfall total of 1.46 inches at Newark NJ was a record for the date. New York City was soaked with more than two inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2014: Up to 6 inches of snow fell in Gilbert, South Carolina.

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WORDS OF WISDOM

Thomas Edison is recognized as being one of the greatest inventors who ever lived. He is credited with over 1,200 inventions, including the light bulb and the first "talking machine"- now what we call movies. He was the founder of General Electric and greatly influenced the quality of life for everyone.

Edison was one who was known to be very conscious of the value of time. On one occasion the person introducing him as a featured speaker at a large gathering did not know when to end his remarks. He spoke endlessly of his creative genius, his ability to see things others did not see, and the great future for his "talking machine."

When he finally stopped talking, Edison stood up and said, "Thank you for your kind words. But I must correct you. God invented the "first talking machine." I only invented the first one that can be shut off."

"Let your conversation be gracious and effective," said Paul, "so that you will have the right answer for everyone." A wise warning for Christians who want to witness the grace of God in a way that will draw others to Christ.

Christians are ineffective if we act offensive and arrogant. We must always be gracious and humble if we want others to hear and accept God's message of salvation and hope.

Prayer: We pray, Father, that the "grace of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ" will always be obvious in our speech and conduct as we represent You to others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Live wisely among those who are not believers and make the most of every opportunity. Let your conversation be gracious and attractive so that you will have the right response for everyone. Colossians 4:5-6

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 Triathalon
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
11/05/2023 St. Elizabeth Ann Seton Catholic Church Fall Dinner, 5 p.m. to 7 p.m.
11/11/2023 Groton American Legion Annual Turkey Party 6:30 pm.
11/23/2023 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
11/26/2023 Snow Queen Contest, 4 p.m.
12/02/2023 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:
10.31.23

14 35 37 55 70 **15**

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$181,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 43 Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.30.23

11 28 43 49 50 **4**

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$3,470,000

NEXT DRAW: 15 Hrs 58 Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.31.23

28 31 33 40 47 **16**

TOP PRIZE:
$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 13 Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.28.23

2 10 12 21 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$37,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 13 Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.30.23

1 4 8 11 66 **10**

TOP PRIZE:
$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.30.23

19 22 34 66 69 **5**

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
$152,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 42 Mins 4 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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News from the Associated Press

Tuesday's Scores

The Associated Press
PREP VOLLEYBALL=
Sioux Falls Jefferson def. Pierre T F Riggs High School, 25-20, 25-14, 25-12
Sioux Falls Roosevelt def. Aberdeen Central, 25-23, 25-17, 25-23
SDHSAA Playoffs=
Class A=
Region 1=
Quarterfinal=
Aberdeen Roncalli def. Tiospa Zina Tribal, 25-5, 25-12, 25-7
Groton Area def. Waubay/Summit, 25-21, 25-13, 25-9
Milbank def. Webster, 25-16, 18-25, 25-22, 25-14
Sisseton def. Redfield, 25-17, 30-32, 25-21, 25-16
Region 2=
Quarterfinal=
Elkton-Lake Benton def. Great Plains Lutheran, 28-26, 25-18, 25-21
Estelline-Hendricks def. Sioux Valley, 25-12, 25-20, 18-25, 25-23
Flandreau def. Florence-Henry, 25-22, 24-26, 23-25, 25-22, 15-5
Hamlin def. Clark-Willow Lake, 27-25, 25-27, 25-16, 26-24
Region 3=
Quarterfinal=
Baltic def. Garretson, 25-20, 25-20, 25-22
Dell Rapids def. McCook Central-Montrose, 25-13, 25-13, 25-6
Madison def. Tri-Valley, 25-14, 25-11, 25-20
Sioux Falls Christian def. West Central, 25-12, 25-10, 25-6
Region 4=
Quarterfinal=
Canton def. Beresford, 25-13, 25-11, 25-20
Dakota Valley def. Parker, 25-18, 25-7, 25-7
Elk Point-Jefferson def. Vermillion, 25-18, 25-13, 25-21
Lennox def. Tea Area, 25-14, 25-16, 21-25, 25-22
Region 5=
Quarterfinal=
Mt. Vernon/Plankinton def. Bon Homme, 25-15, 26-24, 25-23
Parkston def. Kimball/White Lake, 20-25, 21-25, 25-18, 25-21, 15-10
Platte-Geddes def. Hanson, 25-23, 25-14, 25-17
Wagner def. Sanborn Central-Woonsocket, 25-13, 25-8, 25-20
Region 6=
Quarterfinal=
Miller def. McLaughlin, 25-9, 25-3, 25-10
Mobridge-Pollock def. Crow Creek Tribal School, 25-0, 25-0, 25-0
North Central Co-Op def. Dupree, 25-20, 15-25, 19-25, 25-19, 15-13
Stanley County def. Cheyenne-Eagle Butte, 25-11, 25-13, 25-15
Class B=
Region 1=
Leola-Frederick High School def. Aberdeen Christian, 25-15, 29-31, 25-15, 24-26, 19-17

Quarterfinal=
Hitchcock-Tulare def. Langford, 25-12, 25-12, 25-22
Northwestern def. Britton-Hecla, 25-9, 25-10, 25-17
Warner def. Wilmot, 25-5, 25-11, 25-9
Region 2=
Quarterfinal=
Arlington def. Deubrook, 25-27, 25-21, 25-21, 25-23
Castlewood def. Oldham-Ramona/Rutland, 25-9, 25-14, 25-14
Iroquois-Lake Preston def. James Valley Christian, 25-16, 25-21, 25-20
Wolsey-Wessington def. DeSmet, 25-8, 25-8, 25-20
Region 3=
Quarterfinal=
Chester def. Howard, 25-7, 25-18, 25-4
Colman-Egan def. Dell Rapids St. Mary, 25-13, 29-27, 25-9
Ethan def. Canistota, 27-25, 21-25, 25-23, 25-12
Sioux Falls Lutheran def. Bridgewater-Emery, 19-25, 26-24, 25-22, 24-26, 18-16
Region 4=
Quarterfinal=
Alcester-Hudson def. Irene-Wakonda, 25-13, 25-15, 25-15
Centerville def. Menno, 12-25, 25-22, 25-20, 25-23
Gayville-Volin High School def. Viborg-Hurley, 25-22, 25-13, 25-12
Scotland def. Freeman, 25-23, 8-25, 25-15, 22-25, 15-8
Region 5=
Quarterfinal=
Avon def. Corsica/Stickney, 25-21, 25-20, 25-10
Burke def. Colome, 25-2, 25-18, 25-13
Gregory def. Andes Central-Dakota Christian, 25-19, 25-16, 22-25, 25-22
Tripp-Delmont/Armour def. Wessington Springs, 25-17, 25-13, 19-25, 26-24
Region 6=
Quarterfinal=
Faulkton def. Sunshine Bible Academy, 25-8, 25-3, 25-9
Highmore-Harrold def. Lyman, 22-25, 25-20, 25-23, 25-16
Region 7=
Quarterfinal=
Crazy Horse def. Philip, 25-17, 26-24, 13-25, 18-25, 16-14
Kadoka Area def. Jones County, 25-15, 25-7, 25-15
Wall def. New Underwood, 25-13, 22-25, 25-15, 25-15
White River def. Edgemont, 25-17, 26-24, 13-25, 18-25, 16-14
Region 8=
Quarterfinal=
Lemmon High School def. McIntosh, 28-26, 25-12, 25-13
Newell def. Timber Lake, 20-25, 25-11, 25-17, 25-18
Semifinal=
Faith def. Bison, 25-13, 25-6, 25-12
Harding County def. Wakpala, 25-6, 25-10, 25-9

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

Gaza's communications cut again for hours, as dozens of foreigners and wounded prepare to exit

By NAJIB JOBAIN and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

RAFAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Gaza was plunged into another communications blackout Wednesday, with internet and phone service cut for several hours as Israeli troops battled Hamas militants. Meanwhile, dozens of foreign passport holders crowded into a border crossing ahead of what could be the first such departure from the besieged Palestinian enclave.

Communications began to be restored later in the day, but aid agencies warned that such blackouts severely disrupt their work in an already dire situation. Daily airstrikes have displaced more than half of the population and basic supplies are running low. On Tuesday, an Israeli barrage leveled apartment buildings in a refugee camp near Gaza City, killing an unknown number of people.

No one has been allowed to leave Gaza, except for four hostages released by Hamas, since Israel declared a total siege in the wake of the militants' bloody Oct. 7 rampage into southern Israel. Disagreements among Egypt, Israel and Hamas have prevented any exit, even as hundreds have gathered at the Rafah crossing, the only one currently operating, at different times in recent weeks.

The Palestinian crossing authority said more than 400 foreign passport holders would be permitted to leave Gaza for Egypt on Wednesday, as would a small number of wounded people. Egypt has said it will not accept an influx of Palestinian refugees because of fears Israel will not allow them to return to Gaza after the war.

Dozens of people could be seen entering the Rafah crossing, while ambulances drove in from the other direction. Egypt's Health Ministry said more than 80 wounded Palestinians would be brought in for treatment, and a field hospital has been set up in an Egyptian town near the crossing.

But as a few hundred prepared to leave, the rest of of Gaza's 2.3 million people found themselves cut off from the world — and each other — once again.

The Palestinian telecoms company Paltel said internet and mobile phone services were gradually being restored in Gaza following a "complete disruption" that was also reported by internet-access advocacy group NetBlocks.org. It was the second time residents were largely cut off after communications went down over the weekend, as Israeli troops pushed into Gaza in larger numbers.

The International Committee of the Red Cross said communication blackouts disrupt the work of first responders and make it harder for civilians to seek safety. "Even the potentially life-saving act of calling an ambulance becomes impossible," said Jessica Moussan, an ICRC spokesperson.

More than 8,500 Palestinians have been killed in the war, mostly women and minors, and more than 21,000 people have been wounded, the Gaza Health Ministry said Tuesday, without providing a breakdown between civilians and fighters. The figure is without precedent in decades of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Over 1,400 people have died on the Israeli side, mainly civilians killed during Hamas' initial attack, also an unprecedented figure. Palestinian militants also abducted around 240 people during their incursion and have continued firing rockets into Israel.

The Israeli military confirmed Wednesday that nine soldiers have been killed in fighting in northern Gaza, bringing the total of military casualties since the start of the ground operation to 11.

On Tuesday, rescuers frantically dug through the rubble of apartment buildings leveled in Israeli airstrikes on the Jabaliya refugee camp near Gaza City, pulling out men, women and children. The director of a nearby hospital where casualties were taken, Dr. Atef Al-Kahlot, said hundreds of people were wounded or killed, but the exact toll was not yet known.

Israel said the strike, which targeted senior Hamas military leader Ibrahim Biari, destroyed a militant command center and an underground tunnel network, and killed dozens of other fighters. Military spokesman Jonathan Conricus said Biari had also been a key planner of the Oct. 7 attack, and that the apartment buildings collapsed only because the underground Hamas complex had been destroyed.

Neither side's account could be independently confirmed.

The strike underlined the anticipated surge in casualties on both sides as Israeli troops advance toward

the outskirts of Gaza City and its dense residential neighborhoods. Israeli officials say Hamas' military infrastructure, including hundreds of kilometers (miles) of underground tunnels, is concentrated in the city, which was home to some 650,000 people before the war.

Israel has been vague about its operations in Gaza, but residents and spokesmen for militant groups say troops appear to be trying to take control of the two main north-south roads.

An estimated 800,000 Palestinians have fled south from Gaza City and other northern areas following Israeli orders to evacuate, but hundreds of thousands remain in the north, including many who left and later returned because Israel is also carrying out airstrikes in the south.

Gaza has been sealed off since the start of the war, causing shortages of food, water, medicine and fuel. Israel has allowed international aid groups to send more than 200 trucks carrying food and medicine to enter from Egypt over the past 10 days, but aid workers say it's not nearly enough.

Israel has barred fuel imports, leading to a blackout in the territory that relies heavily on generators for electricity. Hospitals have warned that their own generators may soon shut down, putting patients on life support at risk. Israel says it won't allow fuel to enter because Hamas would confiscate it to use for military purposes.

Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' ability to govern Gaza or threaten it, while also saying it does not plan to reoccupy the territory, from which it withdrew soldiers and settlers in 2005. But it has said little about who would govern Gaza afterwards.

In congressional testimony on Tuesday, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken suggested that "at some point, what would make the most sense is for an effective and revitalized Palestinian Authority to have governance and ultimately security responsibility for Gaza."

Hamas drove the authority's forces out of Gaza in a week of heavy fighting in 2007, leaving it with limited control over parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank. Palestinian support for the President Mahmoud Abbas has plunged since then, with many Palestinians dismissing the PA as little more than Israel's police force because it helps suppress Hamas and other militant groups.

The war has meanwhile threatened to ignite more fighting on other fronts. Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group have traded fire daily along the border, and Israel and the U.S. have struck targets in Syria linked to Iran, which supports Hamas, Hezbollah and other armed groups in the region.

Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, an military spokesman, said Israeli forces "intercepted a threat" overnight south of the southernmost city of Eilat that did not pose any risk to Israelis and did not enter Israeli airspace, without elaborating. A day earlier, the military said it shot down what appeared to be a drone near Eilat and intercepted a missile over the Red Sea. Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen claimed the attacks.

Live updates | Foreign passport holders enter Rafah crossing

By The Associated Press undefined

Dozens of people entered the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt on Wednesday. It appeared to be the first time foreign passport holders have been allowed to leave the besieged territory since the start of the Israel-Hamas war more than three weeks ago.

Communications and internet services were gradually being restored after the second major cut in five days, according to Paltel, the main service provider. Humanitarian aid agencies have warned that such blackouts severely disrupt their work in an already dire situation in Gaza.

The Palestinian death toll in the Israel-Hamas war has reached 8,525, according to the Hamas-run Health Ministry in Gaza. In the occupied West Bank, more than 122 Palestinians have been killed in violence and Israeli raids.

More than 1,400 people in Israel have been killed, most of them civilians slain in the initial Oct. 7 Hamas rampage that started the fighting. In addition, around 240 hostages were taken from Israel into Gaza by the militant group. One of the captives, a female Israeli soldier, was rescued in a special forces operation.

Currently:

1. 5 hostages of Hamas are free, offering some hope to families of more than 200 still captive.

2. Yemen's Houthi rebels claim attacks on Israel, drawing their main sponsor Iran closer to Hamas war.
3. Bolivia severs diplomatic ties with Israel as Chile and Colombia recall their ambassadors.
4. Amnesty International says Israeli forces wounded Lebanese civilians with white phosphorus.
5. Biden's Cabinet secretaries will push Congress to send aid to Israel and Ukraine.
6. Find more of AP's coverage at https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war.

Here's what is happening in the latest Israel-Hamas war:

MEDIA WATCHDOG GROUP SAYS 34 JOURNALISTS HAVE BEEN KILLED

CAIRO — The group Reporters Without Borders says 34 journalists have been killed in the war between Israel and Hamas militants, accusing both sides of committing possible war crimes.

In a statement Wednesday, the media watchdog called on the International Criminal Court to investigate the killings.

"The scale, seriousness and recurring nature of international crimes targeting journalists, particularly in Gaza, calls for a priority investigation by the ICC prosecutor," said Christophe Deloire, head of the group.

It said it filed a complaint with the ICC's prosecutor regarding eight Palestinian journalists it said were killed in Israel's bombardment of civilian areas in Gaza, and an Israeli journalist killed during Hamas' bloody Oct. 7 attack in southern Israel, which ignited the war.

It said the complaint cited "the deliberate, total or partial, destruction of the premises of more than 50 media outlets in Gaza" since the war began.

It's the third such complaint to be filed by the group since 2018 alleging war crimes against Palestinian journalists in Gaza. Israel says it makes every effort to avoid killing civilians and accuses Hamas of putting them at risk by operating in residential areas.

COMMUNICATIONS BEING GRADUALLY RESTORED IN GAZA

CAIRO — Communications were gradually being restored in parts of Gaza, hours after the besieged territory suffered its second major blackout in five days, according to Paltel, the main service provider.

Paltel said in an announcement on social media that fixed line and cellular services and the internet were beginning to return in various areas across Gaza.

Associated Press journalists in Gaza confirmed the restoration.

Connectivity was previously cut from late Friday to early Sunday, coinciding with the entry of large numbers of ground troops into Gaza in what Israel at the time described as a new stage in the war.

Humanitarian aid agencies have warned that such blackouts severely disrupt their work in an already dire situation in Gaza.

The aid group Doctors Without Borders said Wednesday's blackout hampered its activities. Guillemette Thomas, medical coordinator for the group, also known as Médecins Sans Frontières, said the blackout made it "impossible to coordinate" its activities. She said it had been unable to reach its team in Gaza hospitals since Tuesday evening.

IRANIAN LEADER CALLS FOR MUSLIM NATIONS TO STOP EXPORTING FOOD AND OIL TO ISRAEL

TEHRAN, Iran — Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on Wednesday called on Muslim nations to stop exporting food and oil to Israel over its airstrikes and military offensive in the Gaza Strip.

Khamenei made the comments to students in Tehran. He had earlier praised Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

"What the Islamic governments should insist is an immediate halt to the crimes (the Israelis) are committing in Gaza. The bombardments should immediately stop," Khamenei said, according to state media. "They should block the flow of oil and food to the Zionist regime. Islamic governments shouldn't have economic cooperation with the Zionist regime."

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian earlier suggested an oil embargo on Israel, though there has been no sign that energy flows to the country have been affected.

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Associated Press writer Nasser Karimi contributed.

DOZENS OF PEOPLE ENTER THE RAFAH CROSSING FROM GAZA TO EGYPT

RAFAH, Gaza — Dozens of people could be seen entering the Rafah crossing from Gaza to Egypt on Wednesday. It appeared to be the first time foreign passport holders have been allowed to leave the besieged territory since the start of the war.

Hundreds have gathered at the crossing at different times in recent weeks, but have not been allowed out due to disagreements among Egypt, Israel and Hamas. No one has been allowed to leave Gaza, except for four hostages released by Hamas. Another captive was rescued by Israeli forces earlier this week.

Egyptian state-run media reported that more than 80 wounded Palestinians would be brought from Gaza to Egypt on Wednesday for medical treatment. Ambulances were seen entering the Rafah crossing from the Egyptian side, and a field hospital has been set up in the nearby town of Sheikh Zuweid.

The Palestinian crossing authority said more than 400 foreign passport holders would be permitted to leave Gaza on Wednesday. Egypt has said it will not accept an influx of Palestinian refugees because of fears Israel will not allow them to return to Gaza after the war.

PAKISTAN URGES ACTION AFTER ISRAELI AIRSTRIKES ON A REFUGEE CAMP

ISLAMABAD — Pakistan's interim Prime Minister Anwaar-ul-Haq Kakar on Wednesday denounced the latest Israeli airstrikes on a refugee camp near Gaza City, urging the international community to play its role in ending such strikes.

"Yesterday's air raid on Jabalia camp, where hundreds of lives were lost, including women and children, was a stark reminder of ongoing Israeli brutalities and war crimes in Gaza," Kakar said in a statement.

He said that "such reprehensible acts can never be condoned or forgotten. The world must act now to end this carnage."

THREE ARAB STATES DENOUNCE ISRAEL'S AIRSTRIKES ON A REFUGEE CAMP

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Three Arab states have strongly criticized Israel's airstrikes on a refugee camp near Gaza City as its war on Hamas rages.

Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates each issued statements denouncing the strikes on the Jabaliya camp. The exact number of casualties was not immediately clear in the strikes, though one doctor said hundreds were killed and wounded.

Qatar, which as been mediating talks with Hamas over the more than 200 hostages it holds from its Oct. 7 attack on Israel, described the strike as "a new massacre against the defenseless Palestinian people, especially women and children." The country warned that "the expansion of Israeli attacks in (the) Gaza Strip … is a dangerous escalation in the course of confrontations, which would undermine mediation and de-escalation efforts."

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Associated Press writer Jon Gambrell contributed.

U.S. SECRETARY OF STATE TO TRAVEL TO ISRAEL ON FRIDAY

WASHINGTON — United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced plans to travel to Israel on Friday to consult with Israeli officials about their ongoing war on Hamas.

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said Tuesday that Blinken would visit Israel "and then will make other stops in the region." He did not identify the other planned stops.

Blinken made an urgent trip to the Middle East earlier in October, visiting Israel, Jordan, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates.

Biden's Minnesota trip serves as a show of political force against primary challenger Dean Phillips

By WILL WEISSERT and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden is headed to Minnesota to visit a family-run farm south of Minneapolis and hold a fundraiser featuring many of the state's top Democrats, aimed to demonstrate political clout on the home turf of his new 2024 primary challenger, Rep. Dean Phillips.

The president plans to announce more than $5 billion in spending on adapting agriculture to climate change, expanding high-speed internet access, improving local infrastructure, and more. The money comes

from infrastructure and inflation reduction laws approved earlier in Biden's term.

"The president is very cognizant of the fact that equity needs to be at the center of what we do and all that we do," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said. He described the announcement as "an exciting opportunity to celebrate the importance of rural America."

Biden's reelection campaign said the president's trip to Minnesota was planned before Phillips announced his candidacy. The congressman is the only elected official from the president's party to campaign against Biden for the White House.

Phillips is a moderate, 54-year-old congressman from the largely well-to-do, comfortably Democratic Minneapolis suburbs. He has been saying since last year that Biden shouldn't be seeking reelection and should instead step aside to make way for a new generation. He points to polls showing voters — even many Democrats — concerned about the 80-year-old president's age and electability against Donald Trump, the former president and Republican front-runner.

Biden's trip, coming so soon after Phillips' announcement, will be an opportunity for the president to try to snuff out any potential support for his nascent primary challenger. Invited guests to Biden's fundraiser include past donors to Phillips' congressional campaigns, as well as Minnesota Democratic Gov. Tim Walz.

Phillips' campaign will feel "almost like a cold glass of water being thrown in his face," said Ken Martin, chair of Minnesota Democrats and a Democratic National Committee vice chair.

Martin is a friend of Phillips and recruited him to run for his House seat. But if Phillips believes that people are clamoring for alternatives to Biden, Martin said, "he may be alone in that thinking amongst Democratic Party leaders."

"There really does not seem to be as much of an opening here, as much as he might want, or think there is, or should be," he said.

Walz has been even more full-throated in his defense of Biden, releasing a fundraising email Friday on Biden's behalf before Phillips even formally got into the race titled "Minnesotans Love Joe Biden."

"I have to say this about Minnesota: it's a great state, full of great people. And sometimes they do crazy things," Walz wrote, such as making "political side shows for themselves."

An AP-NORC poll released in August found that the top words associated with Biden were "old" and "confused." Nearly 70% of Democrats and 77% of U.S. adults said they thought Biden was too old to be effective for four more years.

Another Minnesota Democrat, Rep. Angie Craig, joined Phillips in suggesting Biden shouldn't seek reelection prior to last year's midterms, but now says she supports the president. Dutch Creek Farms, which Biden visits Wednesday, is in Craig's district.

Prominent Black Democrats, meanwhile, have slammed Phillips for focusing his early campaign on New Hampshire, which is overwhelmingly white, in defiance of the new, Biden-championed 2024 Democratic primary calendar that has South Carolina going first. The move is meant to better empower Black and minority voters — but Biden also did far better as a 2020 Democratic primary candidate in South Carolina, which he won handily, than New Hampshire, where he finished fifth.

"Any serious Democratic candidate would understand that Black voters are the backbone of the Democratic Party," said Mississippi Democratic Rep. Bennie Thompson. He said Phillips' White House run is "disrespectful to the voters of color."

New Hampshire's primary, which officials are planning to hold in January ahead of South Carolina's on Feb. 3, is unsanctioned by the Democratic National Committee. Biden won't appear on its ballot but every New Hampshire state senator and other party leaders are leading a write-in campaign on the president's behalf.

"I welcome President Biden back to Minnesota, where Everyone's Invited!," Phillips said in a statement about Biden's trip, referencing his campaign slogan. "I'm grateful that the president chose to make a last-minute trip to our great state to discuss the urgent issues affecting everyday Americans."

He added that he "won't be able to welcome the president, as I'll be hosting my first town hall in New Hampshire — which is celebrating its 103rd anniversary of hosting America's first in the nation presidential

primary."

Biden's campaign put out a statement as Phillips announced his bid last week, saying it was "hard at work mobilizing the winning coalition that President Biden can uniquely bring together." That's after ignoring previous primary challenges from self-help author Marianne Williamson and Robert Kennedy Jr., an anti-vaccine activist who eventually switched from running as a Democrat to an independent.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre wouldn't comment on Biden hitting Phillips' home state beyond telling reporters that "this president loves Minnesota."

Minnesota hasn't backed a Republican for president since Richard Nixon in 1972. Trump narrowly lost the state to Hillary Clinton in 2016 and talked before the 2020 election of flipping the state before ultimately failing to do so. Democratic pollster Cornell Belcher said Biden will need to shore up Minnesota support for 2024, likening it to a swing state the president has visited more than any other, Pennsylvania.

"It is not a diehard, reliable blue state," Belcher said. He noted Minnesota is part of the midwestern blue wall that includes Michigan and Wisconsin, and Biden "does not stand a chance if that blue wall does not stand."

"We've seen that blue wall, in past elections, be shaky," Belcher said.

Pennsylvania Rep. Chrissy Houlahan, who worked with Phillips as a member of the centrist House Problem Solvers Caucus and other legislative endeavors, said she has "an enormous amount of respect for Dean" but "I feel as though his likely platform would be very similar to the platform that he has voted for largely, which is President Biden's agenda and legislative accomplishments."

"I don't see a real differentiation," Houlahan said. She also called Phillips a "distraction" at a time when Democrats should be backing Biden "in a unified manner to allow him, and us, to complete work that we've all started together."

UK summit aims to tackle thorny issues around cutting-edge AI risks

By KELVIN CHAN and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

BLETCHLEY PARK, England (AP) — Digital officials, tech company bosses and researchers are converging Wednesday at a former codebreaking spy base near London to discuss and better understand the extreme risks posed by cutting-edge artificial intelligence.

The two-day summit focuses on so-called frontier AI — the latest and most powerful systems that take the technology right up to its limits, but could come with as-yet-unknown dangers. They're underpinned by foundation models, which power chatbots like OpenAI's ChatGPT and Google's Bard and are trained on vast pools of information scraped from the internet.

Some 100 people from 28 countries are expected to attend Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's two-day AI Safety Summit, though the British government has refused to disclose the guest list.

The event is a labor of love for Sunak, a tech-loving former banker who wants the U.K. to be a hub for computing innovation and has framed the summit as the start of a global conversation about the safe development of AI. But Vice President Kamala Harris is due to steal the focus on Wednesday with a separate speech in London setting out the U.S. administration's more hands-on approach.

She's due to attend the summit on Thursday alongside government officials from more than two dozen countries including Canada, France, Germany, India, Japan, Saudi Arabia — and China, invited over the protests of some members of Sunak's governing Conservative Party.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk is also scheduled to discuss AI with Sunak in a livestreamed conversation on Thursday night. The tech billionaire was among those who signed a statement earlier this year raising the alarm about the perils that AI poses to humanity.

European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, United Nations Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and executives from U.S. artificial intelligence companies such as Anthropic and influential computer scientists like Yoshua Bengio, one of the "godfathers" of AI, are also expected.

The meeting is being held at Bletchley Park, a former top secret base for World War II codebreakers

that's seen as a birthplace of modern computing.

One of Sunak's major goals is to get delegates to agree on a first-ever communique about the nature of AI risks. He said the technology brings new opportunities but warns about frontier AI's threat to humanity, because it could be used to create biological weapons or be exploited by terrorists to sow fear and destruction.

Only governments, not companies, can keep people safe from AI's dangers, Sunak said last week. However, in the same speech, he also urged against rushing to regulate AI technology, saying it needs to be fully understood first.

In contrast, Harris will stress the need to address the here and now, including "societal harms that are already happening such as bias, discrimination and the proliferation of misinformation."

Harris plans to stress that the Biden administration is "committed to hold companies accountable, on behalf of the people, in a way that does not stifle innovation," including through legislation.

"As history has shown in the absence of regulation and strong government oversight, some technology companies choose to prioritize profit over: Tthe wellbeing of their customers; the security of our communities; and the stability of our democracies," she plans to say.

She'll point to President Biden's executive order this week, setting out AI safeguards, as evidence the U.S. is leading by example in developing rules for artificial intelligence that work in the public interest. Among measures she will announce is an AI Safety Institute, run through the Department of Commerce, to help set the rules for "safe and trusted AI."

Harris also will encourage other countries to sign up to a U.S.-backed pledge to stick to "responsible and ethical" use of AI for military aims.

A White House official gave details of Harris's speech, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss her remarks in advance.

China keeps up military pressure on Taiwan, sending 43 planes and 7 ships near self-governing island

By CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan said Wednesday that China sent 43 military aircraft and seven ships near the self-ruled island, the latest sign that Beijing plans no let-up in its campaign of harassment, threats and intimidation.

Taiwan's Defense Ministry said the figure was current for the 24 hours up to 6:00 a.m. Wednesday and that 37 of the aircraft had crossed the median line in the Taiwan Strait, which China no longer recognizes as an informal divider between the sides.

It said Taiwan had monitored the situation, scrambled jet fighters, dispatched ships and activated land-based missile systems, all standard responses to Chinese military activities, which include crossing into Taiwan's air defense identification zone but not into its actual airspace.

Such Chinese maneuvers have become frequent and aggressive since then- U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taiwan in August 2022. China suspended military communication with the U.S. to show its displeasure over her trip to Taiwan, which Beijing considers part of its territory to be brought under under its control by force if necessary.

China's military maneuvers are seen as intended to break down Taiwanese morale, exhausting its pilots and other personnel and wearing down its equipment. Despite that, the present status of de-facto independence remains widely popular among the island's voters and the defense budget has been increased to purchase new equipment from the U.S., its chief ally, and to produce some items locally, including submarines.

At an international defense forum in Beijing on Monday, China's second-ranking military official Gen. Zhang Youxia reiterated threats by the Chinese government to retaliate against moves toward establishing Taiwan's formal independence, saying that "no matter who tries to split Taiwan from China in any form,

China and the Chinese military will never allow that to happen."

Zhang, who is also vice chairman of the Central Military Commission, which oversees the world's largest standing military, opened the three-day event in the absence of former Defense Minister Gen. Li Shangfu, who would have normally hosted the event.

Li was removed from his position last week after a two-month absence from public view. The government has not provided any reason for his removal.

The Beijing event, attended by military representatives from dozens of countries, was an occasion for China to project regional leadership and boost military cooperation. That comes despite frictions with the U.S., with Japan over an uninhabited East China Sea island group, with its Southeast Asian neighbors over China's claim to virtually the entire South China and with India along their disputed border.

But in a sign that Washington and Beijing were considering a possible resumption of military dialogue, the U.S. was represented at the forum by a delegation led by Cynthia Carras, the Defense Department's leading official on China. As of Wednesday, it appeared she had departed without holding any formal meetings with Chinese officials or speaking to the media.

White House will develop an anti-Islamophobia strategy but faces skepticism from Muslim Americans

By AAMER MADHANI, SEUNG MIN KIM and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's administration is preparing to announce that it will develop a national strategy to combat Islamophobia, according to people briefed on the matter, as it faces skepticism from many in the Muslim American community for its staunch support of Israel's military assault on Hamas in Gaza.

The White House announcement had originally been expected to come last week when Biden held a meeting with Muslim leaders, but was delayed, three people said. Two of them said the delay was due in part to concerns from the Muslim American community that the administration lacked credibility on the issue given its robust support for Israel's military, whose strikes against Hamas militants have also killed thousands of civilians in Gaza. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to publicly discuss the White House plans.

The launch of the anti-Islamophobia strategy has been anticipated for months, after the administration in May released a national strategy to combat antisemitism that also made passing reference to countering hatred against Muslims. The formal strategy is expected to take many months to formalize, following a similar process as the plan to counter antisemitism involving various government agencies.

Incidences of anti-Jewish and anti-Muslim hate have skyrocketed in the U.S. and abroad since the surprise Oct. 7 attack by Hamas militants on Israel that killed over 1,400 and saw hundreds taken hostage, and Israel's response in Gaza, where it has pledged to use force to "destroy" Hamas. One of the most prominent attacks was the killing of 6-year-old Wadea Al-Fayoume and the wounding of his mother in an attack prosecutors allege was driven by Islamophobia.

"This horrific act of hate has no place in America and stands against our fundamental values: freedom from fear for how we pray, what we believe, and who we are," Biden said in the aftermath of the attack.

There had been widespread agreement among the Muslim American community on the need for a national strategy to counter Islamophobia, according to a fourth person familiar with the matter, who added that the Israel-Hamas war has made the timing of the White House announcement more complicated. The person, who was also not authorized to speak publicly, said the Biden administration wants to keep the two issues separate, while some prominent Muslim American groups see them as interrelated.

Biden administration officials, during a meeting with a small group of faith leaders last week, indicated that things were "in the works" for an anti-Islamophobia strategy, said Rami Nashashibi, the founder of the Inner City Muslim Action Network in Chicago and a participant in the meeting. The officials indicated that they would be meeting with additional stakeholders from the community in coming days and weeks.

Nashashibi said he believed such an effort would be "dead on arrival" with the Muslim community until

the president and administration officials forcefully condemn members of the far-right government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who have openly called for the eradication of Palestinians from Gaza and until the administration more aggressively calls out hate crimes targeting Muslims and Arab Americans.

He and other leaders also want the president to apologize, or at least publicly clarify, his recent comments in which he said he had "no confidence" in the Palestinian death count from Israel's retaliatory strikes, because the data comes from the Hamas-run Health Ministry.

The United Nations and other international institutions and experts, as well as Palestinian authorities in the West Bank — rivals of Hamas — say the Gaza ministry has long made a good-faith effort to account for the dead under the most difficult conditions. In previous wars, the ministry's counts have held up to U.N. scrutiny, independent investigations and even Israel's tallies.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said Tuesday the Biden administration is "not taking the Ministry of Health at face value" but acknowledged that have been "many thousands of civilian deaths in Gaza" in the conflict.

Nashashibi also said that the White House strategy could land flat at a moment when many in the community feel that advocacy for Palestinian self-determination is being unfairly lumped in with those espousing antisemitism and backing of extremists.

"That conflating is in great part contributing to an atmosphere where we could see even more deadly results and more targeting," he said. Nashashibi added, "The White House does not have the credibility to roll out an Islamophobia strategy at this moment without publicly addressing the points we explicitly raised with the president during our meeting."

Israeli airstrikes crush apartments in Gaza refugee camp, as ground troops battle Hamas militants

By NAJIB JOBAIN, JACK JEFFREY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — A barrage of Israeli airstrikes leveled apartment buildings in a refugee camp near Gaza City on Tuesday, with rescuers clawing through the destruction to pull men, women and children from the rubble. Israel said the strike, which targeted a senior Hamas military leader, destroyed a militant command center and an underground tunnel network.

The toll from the attack in the Jabaliya camp was not immediately known. The director of the nearby hospital where casualties were taken, Dr. Atef Al-Kahlot, said hundreds of people were wounded or killed, but he did not provide exact figures.

The Israeli military said dozens of militants were killed, including a key Hamas commander for northern Gaza.

Israel aggressively defended the attack, with military spokesman Jonathan Conricus saying the targeted commander had also been a key planner of the bloody Oct. 7 rampage that started the war, and that the apartment buildings collapsed only because the vast underground Hamas complex had been destroyed.

Neither side's account could be independently confirmed.

Early Wednesday, the Palestinian telecoms company Paltel reported a "complete disruption" of internet and mobile phone services in Gaza, marking the second time in five days that Gaza residents were largely cut off from the world.

Communications were previously cut off late Friday until early Sunday, coinciding with the entry of large numbers of ground troops into Gaza as Israel said it was beginning a new stage in the war. Attempts to reach Gaza residents by phone were unsuccessful early Wednesday.

Humanitarian aid agencies have warned that such blackouts severely disrupt their work in an already dire situation in Gaza.

Several hundred thousand Palestinians remain in northern Gaza in the path of the ground assault. They have crowded into homes or are packed by the thousands into hospitals that are already overwhelmed with patients and running low on supplies.

The strike in Jabaliya underlined the anticipated surge in casualties on both sides as Israeli troops battling Hamas militants advance deeper into the northern Gaza Strip toward dense, residential neighborhoods. Israel has vowed to crush Hamas' ability to govern Gaza or threaten Israel following the Oct. 7 assault, which ignited the war. Hamas, an Islamic militant group, openly calls for the destruction of Israel.

Meanwhile, the Israeli military confirmed Wednesday that nine more soldiers were killed in fighting in northern Gaza, bringing the total of military casualties since the start of the ground operation to 11.

In the Jabaliya refugee camp, a densely built-up area of small streets on Gaza City's outskirts, dozens of rescuers searched for survivors amid a series of obliterated buildings and others that had partially collapsed.

Young men carried the limp forms of two children from the upper floors of the crumbling frame of one damaged apartment building, while helping down another child and woman. It was unclear whether the children were alive or dead. Gray dust, apparently left by pulverized concrete, seemed to coat nearly everything.

The Israeli military said it carried out a wide-scale strike in Jabaliya on Hamas infrastructure "that had taken over civilian buildings."

Brig. Gen. Daniel Hagari said an underground Hamas installation beneath a targeted building collapsed, toppling other nearby buildings. Conricus later said the main strike had hit between buildings.

"We don't intend for the ground to collapse," he told reporters. "But the issue is that Hamas built their tunnels there and that they're running their operations from there."

He said the commander killed in the strike, Ibrahim Biari, played an important role in the Oct. 7 attack and had been involved in anti-Israeli attacks going back decades.

Also on Tuesday, the Israeli military said ground troops took control of a Hamas military stronghold in west Jabaliya, killing 50 militants.

Hamas spokesman Hazem Qassem denied the military's claim, saying it was trying to justify "its heinous crime" against civilians.

Hagari repeated calls for civilians to evacuate northern Gaza to the south. The military says it targets Hamas fighters and infrastructure and that the militants endanger civilians by operating among them. The military has also repeatedly emphasized it will strike Hamas wherever it finds it.

Some 800,000 Palestinians have reportedly fled to the south, but many have not, in part because they say nowhere is safe as Israeli airstrikes in the south have continued to cause civilian deaths. The window to flee may be closing, as Israeli forces reached Gaza's main north-south highway this week.

More than 8,500 Palestinians have been killed in the war, mostly women and minors, the Gaza Health Ministry said Tuesday, without providing a breakdown between civilians and fighters. The figure is without precedent in decades of Israeli-Palestinian violence.

Over 1,400 people have died on the Israeli side, mainly civilians killed during Hamas' initial attack, also an unprecedented figure. Palestinian militants also abducted around 240 people during their incursion and have continued firing rockets into Israel.

A day after Israel's first successful rescue of a Hamas captive, the spokesman of the militant group's armed wing said they plan to release some non-Israeli hostages in coming days. Hamas has previously released four hostages, and has said it would let the others go in return for thousands of Palestinian prisoners held by Israel, which has dismissed the offer.

More than half of Gaza's 2.3 million Palestinians have fled their homes, with hundreds of thousands sheltering in packed U.N.-run schools-turned-shelters or at hospitals.

The war has also threatened to ignite fighting on other fronts. Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group have traded fire daily along the border, and Israel and the U.S. have struck targets in Syria linked to Iran, which supports Hamas, Hezbollah and other armed groups in the region.

Some 200,000 people have been evacuated from Israeli towns near Gaza and the northern border with Lebanon.

The military said it shot down what appeared to be a drone near the southernmost city of Eilat and intercepted a missile over the Red Sea on Tuesday, neither of which entered Israeli airspace.

Iranian-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen later claimed they fired ballistic missiles and drones at Israel,

saying it was their third such operation and threatening more. Earlier this month, a U.S. Navy destroyer in the Red Sea intercepted missiles and drones launched toward Israel by the Houthis, who control much of northern Yemen.

In the occupied West Bank, where Israeli-Palestinian violence has also surged, the army demolished the family home of Saleh al-Arouri, a senior Hamas official exiled over a decade ago. An official in the village of Aroura said the home had been vacant for 15 years.

Israeli forces reportedly have advanced north and east of Gaza City. South of the city, Israeli troops were also trying to cut off the territory's main highway and the parallel road along the Mediterranean coast, according to Dawood Shehab, a spokesperson for Islamic Jihad, a smaller militant group allied with Hamas.

Zaki Abdel-Hay, a Palestinian living a few minutes' walk from the road south of Gaza City, said people are afraid to use it. "People are very scared. The Israeli tanks are still close," he said over the phone, adding that "constant artillery fire" could be heard near the road.

The Israeli military said it struck some 300 militant targets over the past day, including compounds inside tunnels, and that troops had engaged in several battles with militants armed with antitank missiles and machine guns.

Gaza's humanitarian crisis continued to worsen.

The World Health Organization said two hospitals were damaged and an ambulance destroyed in Gaza over the last two days. It said all 13 hospitals operating in the north have received Israeli evacuation orders in recent days. Medics have refused such orders, saying it would be a death sentence for patients on life support.

Gaza City's Shifa Hospital, the largest in the territory, is on the verge of running out of fuel, the Health Ministry said.

There has been no central electricity in Gaza for weeks, and Israel has barred the entry of fuel needed to power generators for hospitals and homes, saying it wants to prevent it from falling into Hamas' hands.

It has allowed a limited amount of food, water, medicine and other supplies to enter from Egypt, though far less than what is needed, relief groups say. A convoy of 59 aid trucks entered through the Rafah Crossing with Egypt on Tuesday — the largest yet — bringing the total that have entered since Oct. 22 to 216, according to Wael Abu Omar, Hamas' spokesperson for the crossing.

The U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees, known as UNRWA, says 64 of its staff have been killed since the start of the war.

Belarusians who fled repression face new hurdles as they try to rebuild their lives abroad

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Andrei, a 29-year-old computer programmer who fled to Germany from Belarus two years ago amid a harsh crackdown on political dissent, is facing a serious dilemma.

His Belarusian passport has expired, along with his German residence permit. But Belarus has stopped renewing passports at its embassies abroad under a new decree by authoritarian leader Alexander Lukashenko.

"I have a terrible choice to make: become an illegal immigrant in Germany, or return to Belarus, where I will probably be arrested," said Andrei, who asked to be identified only by his first name because he fears for his safety.

Authorities in Minsk, he told The Associated Press, "managed to turn the life of Belarusians into hell even here."

An estimated 500,000 Belarusians fled to the West after Lukashenko was declared the winner of the 2020 election, which was widely seen as fraudulent. Many of them face having no valid documents after the Sept. 4 decree halted passport renewals.

Human Rights Watch has condemned what it called the "draconian" decision, labeling it retaliation against

the regime's "critics-in-exile" by putting them at risk of "politically motivated prosecution if they have to return to Belarus to process their documents."

Lithuania and Poland, which host the largest number of Belarusians, are trying a temporary fix by issuing them a one-year "foreigner's passport" that verifies their identity and gives them the right to travel. At least 24 such documents have been issued by Lithuania's Migration Department.

Poland's Foreign Ministry said it expects "further repression" in Belarus and wants to put the issue on the European Union's agenda, but it's unclear when that will happen.

Anitta Hipper, a spokesperson for home affairs for the European Commission, said those who can't get a passport from their country of origin should seek support from the one where they reside. She added the EC welcomed Lithuania's temporary solution and said it was monitoring the overall situation.

Germany, where Andrei lives, deals with immigrants' cases individually.

Germany's Interior Ministry said if a foreign national's passport has expired, authorities can examine if it's "reasonable" for the person to get a new passport from their home country or whether Germany can issue replacement papers. The person must state why getting a new passport from their country would not be a reasonable expectation and must have residence status in Germany to get replacement papers.

Andrei needs an immediate solution because he's lost his job and can't get a new one without a residence permit. To apply for refugee status, his lawyers say he needs documents from Belarus to prove he was persecuted in the country, where he said he was arrested and beaten during the 2020 protests.

"This is the authorities' revenge against all Belarusians who fought for democracy and opposed Lukashenko's policies," he said, noting his brother was sentenced to seven years in jail.

Analysts believe Lukashenko wants to neutralize a significant part of the opposition in the country of 9.5 million ahead of parliamentary elections in 2024 and a presidential election in 2025.

"The authorities are making it clear they do not want opposition citizens in any form and are doing everything to prevent them from participating in the elections," said independent Belarusian analyst Valery Karbalevich.

Lukashenko, he added, wants to avoid another uprising like in 2020, when months of anti-government protests saw more than 35,000 people detained, with many saying they were tortured. About 1,500 people remain imprisoned on politically motivated charges, including Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski.

Lukashenko has not commented publicly on the passport decree.

Oleg Gaidukevich, deputy head of the parliament's Commission for International Affairs, said "only extremists are afraid to return to Belarus." The decree "deals a final blow to the fifth column within the country," he added.

"Those who escaped have long been working for other countries -- for Poland, Lithuania, the United States — so get passports from these countries and stay there," he told Belarusian state television.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who challenged Lukashenko in the election and has since become the leader-in-exile of the opposition, said no Belarusians should return home under these circumstances.

"Not a single document in the world is worth human freedom," said Tsikhanouskaya, whose activist husband Siarhei Tsikhanouski is serving a 19 1/2-year sentence for organizing protests.

She said the opposition has developed a "Passport of New Belarus," which can serve as confirmation of citizenship and could be used as a travel document for Belarusians abroad.

"We are taking lessons from the Baltic countries, which issued passports in exile during the Soviet occupation," she told the European Parliament. "Very soon we will go to governments in the European Union with a request to recognize our new passports."

Valery Kavaleuski, the foreign affairs representative of Tsikhanouskaya's government in exile — the United Transitional Cabinet of Belarus — said at least 62,000 Belarusians "are in dire need of a new passport."

Although no country recognizes the government in exile, Kavaleuski said dozens of them have expressed interest in the idea for the new passport. He would not identify them,

Each EU country must decide whether to recognize it, he said. adding it would "show solidarity with Belarusians" and "be a response to policies taken by Minsk."

"This will become not only a symbol, but also a practical tool that will unite the huge community of Belarusians around the world," Kavaleuski said.

One Belarusian couple who were arrested for several days in the protests but later moved to Poland and got relocation visas now need a passport for their daughter, Katya, who was born in Warsaw this year. Their appointment at the Belarusian Embassy was canceled.

"It's hard to believe, but the Belarusian authorities have deprived not only me of a future but also my child," said Nina, 27, who also asked that her last name not be revealed for fear of retaliation. "We will be forced to get a passport from a foreign country, because I will definitely not go back to Belarus."

Independent experts appointed by the U.N. Human Rights Commission urged Minsk to annul the Sept. 4 decree, since it will further restrict "the rights of Belarusians who are unable to return to their homeland, including the right to register births and grant citizenship to children born abroad."

The experts said in a report that the decree was part of "a deliberate policy to punish exiled Belarusians, including human rights activists, journalists and opposition figures, for their alleged political disloyalty." They also urged countries not to deport people to Belarus if their passports are expired.

Aleh Osipau, a 33-year-old artist who was accused of extremism in Belarus for participating in the protests, lost his passport and refugee application after fleeing to the eastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv. In 2022, a Russian missile destroyed the building where the documents were kept, and he's been living in Ukraine for over a year without any papers.

"Without a doubt, for people in a hopeless situation, the 'Passport of New Belarus' and its global recognition will come as real salvation and hope," Osipau told AP.

"The world enthusiastically watched the courage of Belarusians in 2020, but now the world's help is urgently needed for those who ended up in a difficult situation after challenging the dictatorship," he said.

Donald Trump's sons Don Jr. and Eric set to testify at fraud trial that threatens family's empire

By MICHAEL R. SISAK Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — When Donald Trump became president in 2017, he handed day-to-day management of his real estate empire to his eldest sons, Donald Jr. and Eric.

Now, as the Trumps fight to keep the family business intact, the brothers are set to testify in the New York civil fraud case that threatens their Trump Organization's future.

Donald Trump Jr. is expected to testify Wednesday and Eric Trump on Thursday, kicking off a blockbuster stretch as the trial in New York Attorney General Letitia James' lawsuit enters its second month.

James, a Democrat, alleges that Donald Trump, his company and top executives, including Eric and Donald Trump Jr., conspired to exaggerate his wealth by billions of dollars on financial statements that were given to banks, insurers and others to secure loans and make deals.

Donald Trump — the former president, family patriarch and 2024 Republican front-runner — is slated to testify Monday, followed by his eldest daughter, ex-Trump Organization executive and White House adviser Ivanka Trump, on Nov. 8. State lawyers are expected to rest their case after that, giving Trump's lawyers a chance to call their own witnesses.

Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump are both executive vice presidents at the Trump Organization and defendants in James' lawsuit. Eric has oversight over the company's operations while Donald Trump Jr. has been involved in running the company's property development. He and longtime company finance chief Allen Weisselberg were also trustees of the revocable trust Trump set up to hold the company's assets when he became president.

Before the trial, Judge Arthur Engoron ruled that Trump's financial statements were fraudulent. He ordered that a court-appointed receiver seize control of some of his companies — potentially stripping him and his family of such marquee properties as Trump Tower — though an appeals court has halted enforcement for now.

Like their father, both brothers have denied wrongdoing.

Eric Trump has spent several days at the trial, often on the days his dad has been there. He's commented sporadically, mostly on social media. On Oct. 5, he posted a video montage to Truth Social of James criticizing his father. With it, he wrote: "this is the corruption my father and our family is fighting! The system is weaponized, broken and disgusting!"

Donald Trump Jr. hasn't been to court, but since testimony began Oct. 2, he's repeatedly denounced the case and Engoron as a "kangaroo court." State law doesn't allow for juries in this type of lawsuit, so Engoron will decide the case.

"It doesn't matter what the rules are, it doesn't matter what the Constitution says, it doesn't matter what general practices and business would be," Donald Trump Jr. said Monday on Newsmax. "It doesn't matter. They have a narrative, they have an end goal, and they'll do whatever it takes to get there."

Building to Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump's testimony, state lawyers have asked other witnesses about their role leading the Trump Organization and their involvement, over the years, in valuing their father's properties and preparing his financial statements. Their names have also appeared on various emails and documents entered into evidence.

David McArdle, an appraiser at commercial real estate firm Cushman & Wakefield, testified that Eric Trump had substantial input on valuing planned-but-never-built townhomes at a Trump-owned golf course in the New York City suburbs. McArdle said Eric Trump arrived at a "more lofty value" than him for the project but that going with the scion's higher number wouldn't have been credible.

Donald Trump Jr. and Eric Trump have already been heard from at the trial, albeit in snippets of prior testimony. During opening statements on Oct. 2, state lawyers showed about a minute each from sworn depositions the brothers gave in the case.

In his July 2022 clip, Donald Trump Jr. testified about his scant knowledge of the accounting standards known as Generally Accepted Accounting Principles — which state lawyers say were used at times and disregarded at others in preparing Donald Trump's financial statements.

Trump Jr., who's never been an accountant, said he couldn't recall having to use the GAAP standards in his work. He got a laugh out of a state lawyer when he said he'd learned about them "probably in Accounting 101 at Wharton" but didn't remember much other than that they were "generally accepted."

In his March 2023 deposition, Eric Trump testified, "I don't think I've had any involvement in the Statement of Financial Condition, to the best of my knowledge." He appeared to minimize his role as a top company executive, testifying that he tried to remain "siloed into the things I care and are passionate about" while sharing management responsibilities with his brother.

"I'm a construction, concrete and on-the-ground operations guy," Eric Trump said, according to a deposition transcript posted on the case docket.

Questioned at another point about decision-making earlier in his career, Eric Trump said: "I pour concrete. I operate properties. I don't focus on appraisals between a law firm and Cushman. This is just not what I do in my day-to-day responsibilities."

Donald Trump attended the trial's first three days in early October and showed up again for four days in the past two weeks, but his campaign schedule suggests it's unlikely he'll return to see his sons testify.

In his past appearances, Trump groused to TV cameras outside court, calling the case a "sham," a "scam," and "a continuation of the single greatest witch hunt of all time." He also angered the judge twice, incurring $15,000 in fines for violating a limited gag order with comments about a member of the court staff.

The Day of the Dead in Mexico is a celebration for the 5 senses

By MARÍA VERZA and FERNANDA PESCE Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — The Day of the Dead in Mexico smells like cempasuchil flowers and copal incense. It has a sweet taste. Sounds and colors abound. There are photos, candles and music all over. The hands of artisans prepare the altars to honor their ancestors.

Although it is an intangible tradition, borne down from pre-Hispanic cultures, Day of the Dead is also a celebration for all the senses —even if one of them is failing you. Gerardo Ramírez, who over the years

become almost blind, sums it all up in one line: "You honor people, you connect with the past."

THE SMELL THAT GUIDES YOU FROM THE UNDERWORLD

Together, two smells show dead souls the way out of the underworld: cempasúchil — a type of marigold whose name means "flower of 20 petals in Náhuatl language" — and a tree resin called copal burned at altars.

The native species of cempasúchil smells so strong you can almost hear it, said Verenice Arenazas, a young woman who traded her HR job for her family's traditional flower field. "As soon as you move it, it tells you 'here I am, look at me'" she said.

Her family this year produced 17,000 cempasúchil plants in Xochimilco, Mexico City's famed canal-crossed southern borough. Arenazas' family grows two types of cempasúchil: those grown by selecting seeds from the most potent-smelling flowers and those that are genetically modified. Both are nearly sold out, she said with a smile.

Arenazas says the flowers smell like the "sweet, fresh, honest work" of the farmers like her who dedicate unending days caring for the flowers. They also smell of "Mexican pride," she said.

FOOD FOR THE DEAD

On the traditional altars honoring the dead, food is a symbol of Mother Earth. Even the sweetest bread, flavored with orange blossom, has grizzly origins. According to researchers at the Mexican School of Gastronomy, the dough was prepared by mixing honey and human blood as an offering to the gods.

Other historians believe that Spanish colonizers, frightened by human sacrifices in Mexico, created a bread, dipped in sugar and painted it red, to symbolize a heart.

Today there is a special place on altars for the dead person's favorite food and drink. "The offering loses flavor," explained Ramírez, "because the dead actually come back; what they eat is the essence."

Ramírez explained the communion between the living and the dead recalling an anecdote that marked him when he was a child. When his uncle died, the family placed his body on the dining table until the coffin arrived. Then they all sat down to eat there.

THE CREATIVE HANDS PREPARING THE ALTAR

Preparing an altar is a great pleasure to many Mexicans. "To feel the softness of the flowers, where you put the food, all the textures," said Ramírez. "It's an explosion of sensations."

Altars welcome all sorts of handicrafts, from papier-mache skeletons to alebrijes (imaginary animal figures), but"papel picado" - very thin sheets of colored paper cut-outs - is essential. There are places where "papel picado" is still made with hammer and chisel, as in the workshop of Yuriria Torres, located south of Mexico City.

"It's like sculpting" a work of art, says Torres, who still does the whole process by hand, eschewing stencils or laser cutters.

Some people connect Torres' art to the sheets of amate tree bark used by pre-Hispanic communities as paper, though the Indigenous precursor was not dyed. Others say the careful cuttings originated in China, and were brought to Mexico by the Spaniards.

Either way, researchers agree that it symbolizes the union between life and death. Perhaps for that reason, the scenes that Torres represents are skulls or skeletons dancing or eating.

MUSIC OVER THE TOMBS

While some older Mexicans remember hearing only the murmur of prayers characterizing the Day of the Dead, today mariachi music can be heard over the decorated tombs of many cemeteries.

José García, a 60-year-old shoe shiner from San Antonio Pueblo Nuevo, a township 90 miles (140 kilometers) west of Mexico City, said people with money would bring a group of musicians to the cemetery to toast with their departed loved ones and listen to their favorite songs.

But, he adds, one doesn't have to have money to enjoy the music. Some people just bring "their recordings or their horns," he said.

PHOTOS OF THE DEPARTED

Day of the Dead is one of Mexico's great visual spectacles — and a celebration of cultural syncretism.

All the while, its fundamental purpose is to remember those who have died so their souls don't disappear forever.

Photos of the departed loved ones take the most important spot on the altar. Colors fill everything. The bright orange of the cempasúchil, the black of the underworld, the purple of the Catholic faith, red for warriors and white for children.

Remembrance is not only individual, but collective.

Some more political altars in the country's main public university, the National Autonomous University of Mexico, remembered murdered students and the Palestinian dead in the Israel-Hamas war. Elsewhere remembrance is institutional, like the offering in the capital's Zócalo in honor of the revolutionary Pancho Villa on the centenary of his death.

Beyond the visual spectacle, the important thing is to "get into" the offering, to connect with the past and go beyond the senses, insists Ramírez. "It's not something they explain to you," he says. "From the moment you are born and experience the celebration, it's in your DNA."

House Speaker Mike Johnson was once the dean of a Christian law school. It never opened its doors

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Before House Speaker Mike Johnson was elected to public office, he was the dean of a small Baptist law school that didn't exist.

The establishment of the Judge Paul Pressler School of Law was supposed to be a capstone achievement for Louisiana College, which administrators boasted would "unashamedly embrace" a "biblical worldview." Instead, it collapsed roughly a decade ago without enrolling students or opening its doors amid infighting by officials, accusations of financial impropriety and difficulty obtaining accreditation, which frightened away would-be donors.

There is no indication that Johnson engaged in wrongdoing while employed by the private college, now known as Louisiana Christian University. But as a virtually unknown player in Washington, the episode offers insight into how Johnson navigated leadership challenges that echo the chaos, feuding and hard-right politics that have come to define the Republican House majority he now leads.

The chapter is just the latest to surface since the four-term congressman's improbable election as speaker last week following the ouster of former Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a reminder of his longstanding ties to the Christian right, which is now a dominant force in GOP politics.

It's also a milestone that he does not typically mention when discussing a pre-Congress resume that includes work as litigator for conservative Christian groups that fiercely opposed gay rights and abortion, as well as his brief tenure as a Louisiana lawmaker who pushed legislation that sanctioned discrimination for religious reasons.

Johnson's office declined to make him available for an interview and did not offer comment for this story.

"The law school deal was really an anomaly," said Gene Mills, a longtime friend of Johnson's. "It was a great idea. But due to issues that were out of Mike's hands that came unraveled."

J. Michael Johnson Esq., as he was then known professionally, was hired in 2010 to be the "inaugural dean" of the Judge Paul Pressler School of Law, named for a Southern Baptist Convention luminary who was instrumental in the faith group's turn to the political right in the 1980s. The board of trustees who brought Johnson onboard included Tony Perkins, a longtime mentor who is now the president of the Family Research Council in Washington, a powerhouse Christian lobbying organization that the Southern Poverty Law Center classifies as an anti-gay "hate group."

In early public remarks, Johnson predicted a bright future for the school, and college officials hoped it would someday rival the law school at Liberty University, the evangelical institution founded by the Rev. Jerry Falwell.

"From a pure feasibility standpoint," Johnson said, "I'm not sure how this can fail." According to the Daily Town Talk, a newspaper in Alexandria, Louisiana, he added that it looked "like the perfect storm for our

law school."

Reality soon intruded.

For several years before Johnson's arrival, the college had been in a state of turmoil following a board takeover by conservatives who felt the school had become too liberal. They implemented policies that restricted academic freedoms, including the potential firing of instructors whose curriculum touched upon sexual morality or teachings contradictory to the Bible.

The school's president and other faculty resigned, and the college was placed on probation by an accreditation agency.

But a shale oil boom in the area also brought a wave of prosperity from newly enriched donors. And school officials, led by president Joe Aguillard, had grand ambitions beyond just the law school, which included opening a medical school, a film school and making a movie adaptation of the 1960s pastoral comedy TV show "Green Acres."

Bringing Johnson into the school's leadership helped further those ambitions. As dean of the proposed law school, Johnson embarked on a major fundraising campaign and described a big-dollar event in Houston with former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee, then-Louisiana Gov. Bobby Jindal and Pressler, according to an account Johnson wrote in a 2011 alumni magazine.

But he struggled to draw an adequate amount of cash while drama percolated behind the scenes. That culminated in a flurry of lawsuits, including a whistleblower claim by a school vice president, who accused Aguillard of misappropriating money and lying to the board, according to court records.

A law firm brought in to conduct an investigation later concluded in a 2013 report that Aguillard had inappropriately diverted funds to a school the institution hoped to build in Africa, as well as for personal expenses.

Aguillard declined to comment on Tuesday, citing health reasons.

Meanwhile, the historic former federal courthouse in Shreveport that was selected as the law school's campus required at least $20 million in renovations. The environment turned untenable after the school was denied accreditation to issue juris doctorate degrees and major donors backed away from their financial pledges.

"Mike worked diligently to assemble a very elite faculty and curriculum," said Gilbert Little, who was involved in the effort. But "fundraising for a small private college is very, very difficult."

Johnson resigned in the fall of 2012 and went back to litigating for Christian causes. He also started a new pro-bono firm, Freedom Guard, which Perkins served as a director, business filings show.

Five years later, Pressler, the school's namesake, was sued in a civil case that has since grown to include allegations of abuse by multiple men who say he sexually assaulted them, some when they were children. The matter, which is still pending in court, helped spark a broader reckoning by the Southern Baptist Convention over its handling of claims of sexual abuse.

Little said the school was named after Pressler because he had a close relationship with the institution's leaders. Johnson didn't stray entirely from the school. He represented the college for six more years in a case challenging a mandate in then-President Barack Obama's health care law that required employers to provide workers access to birth control, court records show.

It was the type of case that has defined his legal career.

The 51-year-old Johnson was born in Shreveport, Louisiana, the eldest of four children in what he has described as a "traditional Christian household." Tragedy struck when Johnson was 12.

His father, Pat, a Shreveport firefighter and hazardous materials specialist, was critically injured when ammonia gas leaking inside a cold storage facility exploded during an emergency repair — leaving him permanently disabled, while killing his partner.

"None of our lives would ever be the same again," his son wrote years later in a commentary piece published in the Shreveport Times.

Johnson and his wife, Kelly, married in 1999, entering into a covenant marriage, which both have touted for the difficulty it poses to obtaining a divorce, and the couple served as a public face of an effort by evangelical conservatives to promote such marriages. In 2005, Kelly Johnson told ABC News that she

viewed anything less as "marriage-light."

Johnson has said he was the first in his family to graduate college, enrolling at Louisiana State University, where he earned a law degree in 1998. He also worked on the 1996 Senate campaign of Louis "Woody" Jenkins, where he had an early brush with a contested election.

Jenkins, a conservative state lawmaker, narrowly lost to Democrat Mary Landrieu amid allegations of voter fraud, including ballots cast by dead people and voters who were paid. A subsequent investigation by the Senate's then-Republican majority found no evidence "to prove that fraud or irregularities affected the outcome of the election."

But in the wake of Trump's 2020 election loss, which Johnson played a leading role in disputing, the congressman offered a differing view of the decades-old contest while describing himself as a young law student "carrying around everyone's briefcases."

"Even though we had all the evidence all wrapped up," Johnson, told Louisiana radio host Moon Griffon in 2020, the Senate "put it in a closet and never looked at it again."

Even though Jenkins lost, Johnson drew notice from conservative activists who worked on the campaign.

Among them was Perkins, the founder of the Louisiana Family Forum, who has long promoted an existential clash between pious Christians and decadent liberals. He did not respond to a request for comment.

Mills, a longtime Perkins confidant who now leads the Louisiana Family Forum, called Johnson's ascension to House speaker "a wonderful day in America," adding, "if you don't believe God is at work in the midst of this, then you aren't paying attention."

Of his initial interactions with Johnson, Mills said, "he just glowed."

"The reality is Mike added value everywhere he went. And that was evident from the early days," Mills said.

Soon Johnson was representing the group and others during his roughly decade-long tenure as an attorney for the Alliance Defense Fund, a nonprofit legal organization still in its infancy, which presented itself as a bulwark for traditional family values.

The group is no longer an upstart. Now known as the Alliance Defending Freedom, or ADF, the organization raised over $100 million in 2022 and conceived the legal strategy that led to the Supreme Court last year overturning the constitutional right to an abortion, among other conservative wins it helped secure from the high court.

Much of Johnson's early work for ADF was far more prosaic. In court and before public boards, he represented conservatives on issues related to the exercise of faith in schools and alcohol regulations, as well as zoning disputes over casinos and strip clubs.

But Johnson's vehement opposition to the burgeoning gay rights movement in the mid-2000s soon garnered greater attention.

In 2004, Johnson and the ADF filed suit, seeking to overturn a New Orleans law that allowed same-sex partners of city workers to receive health benefits, which a judge rejected.

He also wrote a semi-regular guest column in the Shreveport Times, where his defenses of "religious liberty" included stridently anti-gay rhetoric, including a prediction that same-sex marriage would be a "dark harbinger of chaos and sexual anarchy that could doom even the strongest republic."

"If we change marriage for this tiny, modern minority, we will have to do it for every deviant group. Polygamists, polyamorists, pedophiles and others will be next in line to claim equal protection," he wrote in a July 2004 column, as previously reported by CNN. "There will be no legal basis to deny a bisexual the right to marry a partner of each sex, or a person to marry his pet."

Another column lamented the Supreme Court's decision in 2004 to overturn a Texas law that outlawed same-sex intimacy, which Johnson referred to as "deviate sexual intercourse."

His advocacy did not occur in a political vacuum. Then-President George W. Bush's reelection campaign was looking to energize turnout among social conservatives, tapping allies across the U.S. to place referendums opposing gay marriage on the ballot in hopes of doing so. It's a role Johnson leaned into.

In 2004, he represented the Louisiana Family Forum in opposing a case filed by gay rights supporters

who sought to block a voter-approved state constitutional amendment that prohibited "civil unions" — a legal precursor to same-sex marriage — and codified marriage as between one man and one woman.

The amendment was overwhelmingly approved in an unusual and low-turnout election, held weeks before the 2004 presidential contest, in which it was the only issue on the ballot. The election was marred by the late delivery of voting machines to the Democratic stronghold of Orleans Parish.

In a legal brief, Johnson chided gay rights supporters for challenging the outcome in court.

"Discontent with an election's results does not entitle one to have it overturned," he wrote. Nearly two decades later, Johnson, then in Trump's corner, would effectively argue the opposite.

Johnson's harsh rhetoric in the early 2000s surrounding the issue of gay rights contrasts starkly with the amiable image he cultivated following his election to public office, which is punctuated with appeals for "a respectful, diverse society where citizens from all viewpoints can peacefully coexist."

Yet his arguments often obscure a far more striking reality.

The Marriage and Conscience Act, which he sponsored as a freshman state representative in 2015, would have effectively blocked Louisiana from punishing business owners and workers who discriminated against gay couples, so long as it was for religious reasons — similar to arguments invoked during the Civil Rights era against interracial marriage. The bill was rejected by lawmakers in both parties.

The following year, critics charged that his "Pastor Protection Act," which was focused on gay marriage, would also create a legal defense for clergy who opposed interracial marriage. Johnson, who has an adopted Black son, acknowledged the point but argued it wasn't a big deal because opposition to interracial marriage was an issue of the past — unlike gay marriage.

"Maybe there are some people out there who do that. But it's not a big current issue, I think we would agree, at least in the courts and the court of public opinion," Johnson said during a 2016 committee hearing.

The bill was rejected by lawmakers in both parties. Johnson was elected to Congress the next fall, drawing his short tenure as a lawmaker in Baton Rouge to a close.

Lamar White Jr., a progressive who wrote a widely read Louisiana political blog, said his interactions with Johnson were always pleasant, even if he "disagreed with everything he stood for."

"His climb to the top is not surprising considering his personal charm, his charisma and intellect, which were disarming," said White. "That obscured the end goal and what he was really up to."

Natalee Holloway's confessed killer returns to Peru to serve out sentence in another murder

LIMA, Peru (AP) — A Dutchman who recently confessed to killing American high school student Natalee Holloway in 2005 in Aruba was returned to Peru on Tuesday to serve the remainder of his prison sentence for murdering a Peruvian woman.

Joran van der Sloot arrived in Lima in the custody of law enforcement. The South American country's government agreed in June to temporarily extradite him to the U.S. to face trial on extortion and wire fraud charges.

Van der Sloot was long the chief suspect in Holloway's disappearance in Aruba, though authorities in the Dutch Caribbean island never prosecuted him. Then in an interview with his attorney conducted in the U.S. after his extradition, he admitted to beating the young woman to death on a beach after she refused his advances. He said he dumped her body into the sea.

Van der Sloot, 36, was charged in the U.S. for seeking a quarter of a million dollars to tell Holloway's family the location of her remains. A plea deal in exchange for a 20-year sentence required him to provide all the information he knew about Holloway's disappearance, allow her parents to hear in real time his discussion with law enforcement and take a polygraph test.

Video shared on social media by Peru's National Police shows van der Sloot, hands and feet shackled, walking on the tarmac flanked by two Interpol agents, each grabbing one of his arms. He wore a pink short-sleeved shirt, jeans, tennis shoes and a bulletproof vest that identified him as an Interpol detainee.

The video also showed him doing paperwork at the airport, where he also underwent a health exam.

Col. Aldo Avila, head of Interpol in Peru, said van der Sloot would be taken to a prison in the northern Lima, the capital.

About two hours after van der Sloot's arrival, three police patrol cars and three police motorcycles left the airport escorting a black vehicle with tinted windows.

His sentence for extortion will run concurrently with prison time he is serving for murder in Peru, where he pleaded guilty in 2012 to killing 21-year-old Stephany Flores, a business student from a prominent Peruvian family. She was killed in 2010 five years to the day after Holloway's disappearance.

Van der Sloot has been transferred among Peruvian prisons while serving his 28-year sentence in response to reports that he enjoyed privileges such as television, internet access and a cellphone and accusations that he threatened to kill a warden. Before he was extradited to the U.S., he was housed in a prison in a remote area of the Andes, called Challapalca, at 4,600 meters (about 15,090 feet) above sea level.

Holloway went missing during a high school graduation trip. She was last seen May 30, 2005, leaving a bar with van der Sloot. A judge eventually declared her dead, but her body was never found.

The Holloway family has long sought answers about her disappearance, and van der Sloot has given shifting accounts over the years. At one point, he said Holloway was buried in gravel under the foundation of a house but later admitted that was untrue.

Five years after the killing, an FBI sting recorded the extortion attempt in which van der Sloot asked Beth Holloway to pay him $250,000 so he would tell her where to find her daughter's body. He agreed to accept $25,000 to disclose the location and asked for the other $225,000 once the remains were recovered.

Before he could be arrested in the extortion case, van der Sloot slipped away by moving from Aruba to Peru.

After his recent confession to killing Holloway became public, prosecutors in Aruba asked the U.S. Justice Department for documents to determine if any measures will be taken against van der Sloot.

Bolivia severs diplomatic ties with Israel as Chile and Colombia recall their ambassadors

By PAOLA FLORES and DANIEL POLITI Associated Press

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — Bolivia's government severed diplomatic relations with Israel on Tuesday, accusing it of carrying out "crimes against humanity" in Gaza, and Chile and Colombia recalled their ambassadors to Israel as they criticized the Israeli military offensive against Hamas militants.

Bolivian officials cited the number of Palestinian casualties in Gaza that have resulted from the latest Israel-Hamas war, but made no mention of the Hamas attack on Israel at the start of the conflict.

"Bolivia decided to break diplomatic relations with the state of Israel in repudiation and condemnation of the aggressive and disproportionate Israeli military offensive taking place in the Gaza Strip," Freddy Mamani, Bolivia's deputy foreign minister, said at a news conference.

Chile decided to recall its ambassador "in the face of the unacceptable violations of international humanitarian law committed by Israel in the Gaza Strip," the South American country's Foreign Ministry said in a statement.

Colombia's president, Gustavo Petro, also announced he was recallinghis country's ambassador to Israel.

"If Israel does not stop the massacre of the Palestinian people, we cannot remain there," Petro wrote on X, formerly Twitter.

Bolivia, Chile and Colombia all have leftist governments.

María Nela Prada, Bolivia's minister of the presidency who is acting foreign minister, accused Israel of "committing crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip against the Palestinian people."

She went on to call on Israel to "cease attacks in the Gaza Strip that have already resulted in thousands of civilian casualties and the forced displacement of Palestinians."

Chile also called for "an immediate end to hostilities." It condemned Israel's operations, saying they "constitute collective punishment against the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza."

Like Bolivia, Chile made no mention of the Hamas attack on Israel.

Bolivia also said that it "rejects the Israeli hostile treatment of international actors providing humanitarian aid in the Gaza Strip," Prada said, adding that Bolivia will send aid to the Gaza Strip, although she did not detail what that could entail.

Neither Prada nor Mamani mentioned the Hamas attack on Israel, continuing with a pattern for the Bolivian government that never condemned the Oct. 7 assault in which more than 1,400 people were killed in Israel.

On Oct. 7, Bolivia's Foreign Ministry said only that it had "deep concern over the violent events that occurred in the Gaza Strip between Israel and Palestine." On Oct. 18, the Foreign Ministry condemend Israeli attacks and emphasized "our solidarity and unwavering support for the Palestinian people."

The Gaza Health Ministry says more than 8,500 Palestinians have been killed in the war.

The government of this Andean nation of 12 million, now led by leftist President Luis Arce, has long been critical of Israel, and it previously severed diplomatic ties in 2009 over fighting involving Gaza. Diplomatic relations were reestablished in 2020.

Arce expressed his solidarity with the Palestinian people following a Monday meeting with Palestinian Ambassador to Bolivia Mahmoud Elalwani.

"We cannot remain silent and continue to allow the suffering of the Palestinian people, especially of the children, who have the right to live in peace. We condemn the war crimes being committed in Gaza," Arce wrote on social media following the meeting.

Bolivia's influential former president, Evo Morales, who was once allied with Arce but has turned against him, celebrated the government's decision to break off relations, although said it did not go far enough.

"Bolivia must declare the state of Israel as a terrorist state and file a complaint with the International Criminal Court," Morales wrote on social media.

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim attacks on Israel, drawing their main sponsor Iran closer to Hamas war

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels for the first time Tuesday claimed missile and drone attacks targeting Israel, drawing their main sponsor Iran closer into the ongoing Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and further raising the risks of a regional conflict erupting.

The Houthis had been suspected of an attack earlier this month targeting Israel by sending missiles and drones over the crucial shipping lane of the Red Sea, an assault that saw the U.S. Navy shoot down the projectiles.

This time on Tuesday, however, Israel said its own fighter jets and its new Arrow missile defense system shot down two salvos of incoming fire hours apart as it approached the country's key Red Sea shipping port of Eilat.

The Houthis, who have held Yemen's capital, Sanaa, since 2014 as part of that country's ruinous war, claimed three attacks on Israel in a later military statement, without elaborating on the timeframe of the operations and whether Tuesday's salvos represented one or two attacks.

Beyond the attack that saw the U.S. shoot down missiles, there had been a mysterious explosion Thursday that hit the Egyptian resort town of Taba, near the border with Israel. The blast, which Egyptian authorities have not explained, wounded six people.

"Our armed forces launched a large batch of ballistic missiles and a large number of drones at various targets of the Israeli enemy," Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree said in a televised statement. "The Yemeni Armed Forces confirm that this operation is the third operation in support of our oppressed brothers in Palestine and confirm that we will continue to carry out more qualitative strikes with missiles and drones until the Israeli aggression stops."

For Israel, Tuesday's attack marked an incredibly rare reported in-combat use of the Arrow missile defense system, which intercepts long-range ballistic missiles with a warhead designed to destroy targets while they are in space, according to the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

"All aerial threats were intercepted outside of Israeli territory," the Israeli military said. "No infiltrations were identified into Israeli territory."

However, the missile fire sparked a rare air raid siren alarm to go off in Eilat, some 250 kilometers (155 miles) south of Jerusalem, sending people fleeing into shelters.

Saree did not identify the specific weapons used in the attack. However, the use of the arrow suggests it was a ballistic missile. The Houthis have a variant of its Burkan ballistic missile, modeled after a type of an Iranian missile, believed to be able to reach over 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) to strike near Eilat.

The incoming fire comes as the troop-and-aircraft-carrying USS Bataan and other elements of its strike group are likely in the Red Sea now, along with other U.S. vessels.

Air Force Brig. Gen. Pat Ryder, the Pentagon's press secretary, acknowledged the Houthi fire targeting Israel, suggesting the rebels had missiles able to reach some 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles).

"This is something we will continue to monitor," Ryder said. "We want to prevent a broader regional conflict."

Saudi Arabia also did not respond to questions. The kingdom saw four of its soldiers killed in its southern Jazan province in recent days in fighting with the Houthis, according to a report Tuesday by Bloomberg citing anonymous sources. That's even as Saudi Arabia has tried for months to reach a peace deal with the Houthis after a yearslong deadlock war against them.

The Houthis' declaration further drew Iran into the conflict. Tehran has long sponsored both the Houthis and Hamas, as well as the Lebanese Shiite militia group Hezbollah, which continues to trade deadly cross-border fire with the Israelis. U.S. troops also have been targeted in drone attacks on bases in Iraq and Syria claimed by Iranian-allied militia groups since the war started.

The Houthis follow the Shiite Zaydi faith, a branch of Shiite Islam that is almost exclusively found in Yemen. The rebels' slogan has long been: "God is the greatest; death to America; death to Israel; curse the Jews; victory to Islam."

But "now they have the hard power to back it," said Thomas Juneau, a professor at the University of Ottawa who has studied Yemen for years.

"It was just a matter of time before they would be able to do this," Juneau said, noting the rebels' steadily advancing missile program that came with Iranian assistance. "The fact that there's another front directly to the south raises the risk that Israel (air defenses) can be overwhelmed and then it can be that much more worrying" if Hezbollah, Hamas and others launch massive missile barrages.

Iran has long denied arming the Houthis even as it has been transferring rifles, rocket-propelled grenades, missiles and other weaponry to the Yemeni militia using sea routes. Independent experts, Western nations and United Nations experts have traced components seized aboard other detained vessels back to Iran.

The reason for that likely is a U.N. arms embargo that has prohibited weapons transfers to the Houthis since 2014.

There also has been at least one attack that the Houthis claimed where suspicion later fell fully on Iran. In 2019, cruise missiles and drones successfully penetrated Saudi Arabia and struck the heart of its oil industry in Abqaiq. That attack temporarily halved the kingdom's production and spiked global energy prices by the biggest percentage since the 1991 Gulf War.

While the Houthis claimed the Abqaiq attack, the U.S., Saudi Arabia and analysts blamed Iran. U.N. experts similarly said it was "unlikely" the Houthis carried out the assault, though Tehran denied being involved.

Iran's mission to the U.N. warned in a statement to The Associated Press that allied militias like the Houthis could expand their operations against Israel.

"The warnings from Iran regarding the initial days of the Gaza civilian casualties highlighted a concern: if these atrocities were not halted, they could incite public outrage and exhaust the patience of the resistance movements," the Iranian mission said. "These concerns can be averted and the responsibility lies squarely in the hands of the American administration to halt the transgressions perpetuated by the Israeli regime."

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Children return to school and trick-or-treat as Maine community starts to heal from mass shooting

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — Children were back in school in Lewiston and on the streets dressed as dinosaurs and princesses for Halloween, after a chaotic week that saw the deadliest mass shooting in Maine's history and a massive search for the suspect as people sheltered indoors.

Hundreds of students returned to Lewiston High School, petting therapy dogs and signing a large banner that read "Lewiston Strong." Days earlier the campus had been transformed into a law enforcement command post, with helicopters utilizing athletic fields and 300 vehicles filling the parking lot.

"Today's going to be hard," Superintendent Jake Langlais said. "But I think there's strength in gathering, in unity, in getting back together."

Jayden Sands, a 15-year-old sophomore, said one of his football coaches lost four friends. One of his best friends also lost a friend, and his mom's friend was shot four times but survived.

Sands is glad to be back at school though safety was in the back of his mind.

"A lot of people are shocked and scared," he said. "I'm just happy to be here. You know, another day to live. Hopefully it gets better."

On Wednesday night, a U.S. Army reservist and firearms instructor from Bowdoin fatally shot 18 people at a bowling alley and a bar. A massive search followed on land and water for 40-year-old Robert Card. Authorities issued a shelter-in-place order for residents before Card was found dead Friday.

Nearly a week later, parents and children were searching for candy in their favorite costumes, many thronging a long-running event put on by Peter Geiger, whose Lewiston-based business publishes the Farmers' Almanac. Each year hundreds visit to get king-size candy bars — as long as they know the "secret" password — which this Halloween was "Lewiston Strong."

And again, the streets were filled with assorted ghosts, monsters, Disney princesses and blow-up dinosaurs, a Halloween almost like any other.

"I hurt as much as anyone else. For all of us there's a loss," Geiger said. "But I'm not going to let somebody undo a fun night for kids and families."

Michelle Russell, assistant principal at McMahon Elementary School, who was with her granddaughter, dressed as a witch, said it was important to go trick-or-treating.

"We're trying to get back to normal, if we can do that. We're taking it slow," she said.

Logan Phelps, of Greene, said Halloween was a distraction from a tough week, including some difficult discussions he and wife Rebecca had with the kids.

Luna, 5, and Juniper, 3, were both dressed as Wonder Woman, and their 20-month-old brother, Allister, as a Triceratops.

"At the end of the day, you've got to keep going, and you've got to keep living your life," Phelps said.

Heather Hunter, a city administrator in Lewiston, said she was heartened to see steps toward normalcy but acknowledged the community has a long way to go.

"It's similar to COVID. We're adjusting to a new normal," she said.

Back at Lewiston High School, senior Calista Karas said students have much to process. Sheltering at home was frightening, Karas said. And on the day of the shootings, she couldn't immediately reach her mother, who was at work.

"I just couldn't believe something like this would happen here — to us," Karas said.

When she walked through the school doors Tuesday, she felt her stomach drop somewhat. "It was a weird experience to walk though school and see … life going on," she said.

Langlais, the superintendent, said staff and students will take it one day at a time, understanding that some will need more support than others.

"Having helicopters with search lights and infrared sensors over your homes and apartments is pretty uncomfortable," he said. "So we're recognizing that everybody had some level of impact."

In Washington, D.C., independent Sen. Angus King and Republican Sen. Susan Collins took to the Senate

floor Tuesday night to remember the dead.

"A week ago, there was a tear in the fabric of our community," King said.

"We're going to have a lot of time around here to talk about policy and what to do about this problem and what our policies can and should be," he said. "But tonight, my colleague and I simply want to remember the people that lost their lives."

Collins, standing next to a placard with photos of the victims, talked about how the 18 died because of "a senseless act."

"No words can diminish the pain, shock and understandable anger felt by the families who lost loved ones. Nevertheless, it is my hope they will find solace and strength knowing they are in the hearts of so many," she said.

Each of the victims' names were read aloud — half by each senator.

Bodycam video shows police saving residents from Maui wildfire, keeping people out of burn zone

By AUDREY McAVOY, REBECCA BOONE, GENE JOHNSON and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — An officer sprinted from house to house in the historic town of Lahaina, Hawaii, alerting people to the approaching inferno. Another coughed and swore as he drove through thick smoke past burning buildings with people he rescued crammed in the back seat. With no ambulance available, one officer offered to bring a severely burned man to a hospital.

While police frantically tried to save people from what would be the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century, they also faced another challenge: keeping people from heading back toward the flames, newly released video from body cameras shows.

"No more waiting! Too much people have died already!" one frustrated officer shouted at a line of stopped cars. "Turn around and get out of Lahaina! Stop being stubborn and get out of Lahaina now!"

The roughly 20 hours of video depict the actions of Maui police officers on Aug. 8, when strong winds from a hurricane passing far to the south drove flames that quickly leveled Lahaina and killed at least 99 people. Authorities initially released 16 minutes of clips during a news conference Monday, before providing the rest to The Associated Press in response to a public records request.

The video helps provide a fuller picture of how the disaster unfolded and officers' efforts to react. Earlier this month Maui County provided AP with 911 call recordings in response to an open records request.

It includes chaotic footage of officers north and south of town trying to block people — residents desperate to learn the fates of their homes or relatives, or tourists just looking for a place to sleep — from entering the burning area.

A man on a motorcycle tried to skirt police cars blocking the road into town. Stuck in traffic, a dozen people got out to ask what they should do or if they could abandon their vehicles and walk into town. "Absolutely not," an officer responded.

One officer sat in a patrol vehicle and watched as his own home burned.

At another point, late at night, two officers decided that one of them should go back to the police station to gather additional ammunition — not because the bullets might be dangerous in a fire, as the station has thick concrete walls, but because they feared what the coming days might bring.

"I don't know if we're going to be dealing with civil unrest," one said.

Another clip showed an officer's arrival at the Coffee Bean and Tea Leaf shop at a supermarket on Front Street, an area that was devastated by the fire. He found 15 people inside.

"Come out! Come out!" he shouted. "Come with me!"

Some got in their own cars, while others climbed into the back of his patrol vehicle. Saying "Get in, uncle!" — a term of respect in Hawaii — he shoved one last person inside before driving off toward refuge at the Lahaina Civic Center.

Another officer found a badly burned man at a shopping center and put him in the back seat of his patrol car. "I'll just take you straight to the hospital. That sound good?" the officer asked.

"Yeah," the man responded.

The videos also show officers checking in with each other about their own families. Some responders discussed a coworker who worried that his son, a firefighter, had a medical emergency during the response.

People who made it to safety have recounted running into barricades and roads that were blocked by flames and downed utility poles. One video showed an officer tying a tow strap to a metal gate blocking a dirt road escape route, while residents used a saw to cut it open so cars could get through.

At times officers appeared flummoxed by traffic backups at dramatic moments. One patrol vehicle pulled through thick smoke, past a burning vehicle and onto Lahainaluna Road, only to encounter a long line of stopped cars.

"We have got to get all these cars down Lahainaluna Road. The fire is right next to the cars. We can't see," one of the two officers in the car told dispatchers, later repeatedly wondering aloud, "Why are these cars not moving?"

The videos also reflect confusion among residents about where they were supposed to go, even after most of the damage had been done.

One man, a resident of an apartment building downtown, spoke with an officer in a parking lot where his truck had run out of gas. The officer suggested he stay put because he'd be safe there, but the man had no food and asked if he could walk to town or to the shelter at the civic center.

"It's dangerous man," the officer said. "There's power lines everywhere, poles, debris. It's not safe in there."

"I don't even know where to go from here," the man responded.

During Monday's news conference, Maui Police Chief John Pelletier said his department faced a deadline to release the footage in response to an open records request and wanted to provide some context for what people would see before it came out.

The cause of the fire is still under investigation. It may have been sparked by downed power lines that ignited dry, invasive grasses. An AP investigation found the answer may lie in an overgrown gully beneath Hawaiian Electric Co. power lines and something that harbored smoldering embers from an initial fire that burned in the morning and then rekindled in high winds that afternoon.

After warning residents to evacuate during the morning fires, one clip showed, an officer regrouped with colleagues minutes later and expressed concern that they could reignite and spread in the wind.

"The thing is, could start smoldering again," he said, pointing toward an area of blackened ground. "Like, you see this kind of stuff right over here? I don't want it — the wind gonna kick up, hop right over."

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Lauer reported from Philadelphia, Johnson from Seattle and Boone from Boise, Idaho. Associated Press reporters Trisha Ahmed in Minneapolis; Christopher L. Keller in Albuquerque, New Mexico; Becky Bohrer in Juneau, Alaska; Sara Cline in Baton Rouge, Louisiana; Hannah Fingerhut in Des Moines, Iowa; Valerie Gonzalez in McAllen, Texas; John Hanna in Topeka, Kansas; Jennifer Sinco Kelleher in Honolulu; and James Pollard in Columbia, South Carolina, contributed to this report. Ahmed and Pollard are corps members for the Associated Press/Report for America Statehouse News Initiative. Report for America is a nonprofit national service program that places journalists in local newsrooms to report on undercovered issues.

Maine mass shooter's troubling behavior raised concerns for months, documents show

By HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

Authorities publicly identified Robert Card as a person of interest about four hours after he shot and killed 18 people and wounded 13 others during attacks last week at a bowling alley and bar in Lewiston, Maine. But Card, who was found dead two days after his rampage, had been well known to law enforcement for months. Here's a look at some of the interactions he had with sheriff's deputies, his family and members of his Army Reserve unit, as gleaned from statements made by authorities and documents they released:

MAY:

On May 3, Card's 18-year-old son and ex-wife told a school resource officer in Topsham, about 15 miles (25 kilometers) southeast of Lewiston, that they were growing concerned about his deteriorating mental health.

A Sagadahoc County sheriff's deputy met with the son and ex-wife that day and the son said that around last January, his father started claiming that people around him were saying derogatory things about him. He said his father had become angry and paranoid, and described an incident several weeks earlier in which he accused the son of saying things about him behind his back.

Card's ex-wife told the deputy that Card had recently picked up 10-15 guns from his brother's home, and she was worried about their son spending time with him.

A sheriff's deputy spoke to a sergeant from Card's Army Reserve unit, who assured him that he and others would "figure out options to get Robert help."

JULY:

Card and other members of the Army Reserve's 3rd Battalion, 304th Infantry Unit were in New York for training on July 15 when he accused several of them of calling him a pedophile, shoved one of them and locked himself in his motel room. The next morning, he told another soldier that he wanted people to stop talking about him.

"I told him no one was talking about him and everyone here was his friend. Card told me to leave him alone and tried to slam the door in my face," the soldier later told Maine authorities, according to documents released by the sheriff's office.

New York State Police responded and took Card to a hospital at the U.S. Military Academy in West Point for an evaluation.

"During the four hours I was with Card, he never spoke, just stared through me without blinking," an unidentified soldier in the unit wrote in a letter to the Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Office.

Card spent 14 days at the Four Winds Psychiatric Hospital in Katonah, New York, which is a few miles (kilometers) from West Point.

AUGUST:

Card returned home on Aug. 3, according to the Army. At that time, the Army directed that while on duty, he shouldn't be allowed to have a weapon, handle ammunition or participate in live-fire activity. It also declared him to be non-deployable.

On Aug. 5, Card went to Coastal Defense Firearms in Auburn, next to Lewiston, to pick up a gun suppressor, or silencer, that he had ordered online, according to the shop's owner, Rick LaChapelle.

LaChapelle said to that point, federal authorities had approved the sale of the device, which is used to quiet gunshots. But he said the shop halted the sale after Card filled out a form and answered "yes" to the question: "Have you ever been adjudicated as a mental defective OR have you ever been committed to a mental institution?"

Card was polite when notified of the denial, mentioned something about the military and said he would "come right back" after consulting his lawyer, LaChapelle said.

SEPTEMBER:

On Sept. 15, a deputy was sent to visit Card's home in Bowdoin, about 10 miles (16 kilometers) southeast of Lewiston, for a wellness check. Card's unit requested it after a soldier said he was afraid Card was "going to snap and commit a mass shooting" because he was hearing voices again, according to documents released by the Sagadahoc County Sheriff's Office. The deputy went to Card's trailer but couldn't find him.

The sheriff's office then sent out a statewide alert seeking help locating Card. It included a warning that he was known to be "armed and dangerous" and that officers should use extreme caution.

The same deputy and another one returned to Card's trailer on Sept. 16. Card's car was there and the deputy said he could hear him moving around the trailer, but no one answered the door, according to the deputy's report.

The report included a letter written by an unidentified member of Card's Reserve unit who described the July incidents as well as getting a call the "night before last" from another soldier about Card. The timing isn't clear, but according to the letter, the soldier said he and Card were returning from a casino

when Card punched him and said he planned to shoot up places, including an Army Reserve drill center in Saco, Maine.

"He also said I was the reason he can't buy guns anymore because of the commitment," the soldier wrote.

A deputy reached out to the Reserve unit commander, who assured him the Army was trying to get treatment for Card. The commander also said he thought "it best to let Card have time to himself for a bit."

On Sept. 17, the deputy reached out to Card's brother, who said he had put Card's firearms in a gun safe at the family farm and would work with their father to move the guns elsewhere and make sure Card couldn't get other guns.

Card didn't report to weekend Army reserve training activities in September or October, telling his unit that he had work conflicts and was unable to attend, the Army said.

OCTOBER 2023:

On Oct. 18, the sheriff's office canceled its statewide alert seeking help locating Card.

One week later, shortly before 7 p.m. on Oct. 25, authorities began receiving 911 calls about a gunman at the Just-In-Time Recreation bowling alley in Lewiston. Four local police officers who were in plain clothes at a nearby gun range arrived at the shooting scene a minute and a half after the first 911 call, but the gunman had already left. Other Lewiston officers arrived at the scene within four minutes of the first call.

Twelve minutes after the first 911 call and as the first state troopers began arriving at the bowling alley, authorities began getting calls about a gunman at Schemengees Bar and Grille about 4 miles away. Officers arrived at the bar five minutes later, but again, the attacker had already left.

Seven people were killed at the bowling, eight were killed at the bar and three others died at the hospital, authorities said.

Video surveillance footage from the bar showed a white male armed with a rifle getting out of a car and entering the building, according to Maine State Police documents released Tuesday. Another portion showed a man "walk through the bar while seeking out and shooting at patrons."

Authorities released a photo of Card an hour after the shootings and his family members were the first to identify him. Residents were urged to stay inside with their doors locked while hundreds of officers searched for the gunman.

Later on the night of the attack, Card's car was found near a boat launch in Lisbon, about 8 miles (13 kilometers) from Lewiston. During a massive search over the next two days, authorities focused on property his family owns in Bowdoin.

Card was found dead of an apparent self-inflicted gunshot Friday night at a recycling center where he used to work.

Largest Christian university in US faces record fine after federal probe into alleged deception

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The country's largest Christian university is being fined $37.7 million by the federal government amid accusations that it misled students about the cost of its graduate programs.

Grand Canyon University, which has more than 100,000 students, mostly in online programs, faces the largest fine of its kind ever issued by the U.S. Education Department. The university dismissed the allegations as "lies and deceptive statements."

"Grand Canyon University categorically denies every accusation in the Department of Education's statement and will take all measures necessary to defend itself from these false accusations," the school said in a five-page statement.

An Education Department investigation found that Grand Canyon lied to more than 7,500 current and former students about the cost of its doctoral programs.

As far back as 2017, the university told students its doctoral programs would cost between $40,000 and $49,000. The department found that less than 2% of graduates completed programs within the range, with 78% paying an additional $10,000 to $12,000.

The additional cost often came from "continuation courses" that were needed to finish dissertation requirements, the department said.

"GCU's lies harmed students, broke their trust and led to unexpectedly high levels of student debt," said Richard Cordray, chief operating officer for Federal Student Aid, an office in the Education Department. "Today, we are holding GCU accountable for its actions, protecting students and taxpayers, and upholding the integrity of the federal student aid programs."

The Biden administration is issuing the fine amid a broader push for accountability among U.S. universities. The Education Department recently finalized a new regulation that could cut federal funding to for-profit college programs that leave graduated unable to repay loans, and the agency plans to give students and families more information about outcomes from all colleges.

Grand Canyon has 20 days to appeal the fine. The department is also adding new conditions the school must meet to continue receiving federal money.

The school will be barred from making "substantial misrepresentations" about the cost of doctoral programs, and if it tell students about the cost of doctoral programs, it must use the average cost paid by graduates.

It also has to report any other investigations or lawsuits, and it must also send a notice to current doctoral students telling them how to submit a complaint to the Education Department.

For the past four years, Grand Canyon has disbursed more federal student aid than any other U.S. institution, the department said.

Earlier this month, Grand Canyon issued a statement saying federal agencies were unfairly targeting the school with "frivolous accusations" in retaliation for an ongoing lawsuit the university filed against the Education Department in 2021.

Grand Canyon sued after the agency rejected the school's request to be classified as a nonprofit college. It became a for-profit college in 2004 after investors saved it from financial collapse. It applied to become a nonprofit again in 2018 but the Trump administration blocked the move, saying the college remained too close to its previous parent company.

It's considered a nonprofit by its accreditor and the Internal Revenue Service.

Responding to the fine, Grand Canyon said its cost disclosures have been upheld in court during a separate lawsuit, and by the school's accreditor. It said the fine is part of a "disturbing pattern" by the Education Department, adding that the agency declined a request to address the issue through a federal mediator.

"This speaks volumes about their agenda-driven motivation to bring harm to the university and the coordinated efforts being taken against GCU," the school said.

The university enrolls roughly 20,000 students at its campus in Phoenix, but most of its overall enrollment comes from students who take online classes from outside Arizona. It enrolled 80,000 students in online programs as of 2021, with a roughly even split between undergrad and graduate programs.

The fine was applauded by groups that advocate for student loan borrowers.

"When colleges lie to students, it costs them time and money they'll never get back," said Aaron Ament, president of the group Student Defense. "We're glad to see the Department of Education take action to prevent graduate schools from misleading students about the costs of their programs, and we hope they will continue to crack down on these types of predatory schemes."

Expert says Trump could have defended Capitol on Jan. 6 as disqualification case enters new phase

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Then-President Donald Trump could have mobilized the National Guard and other federal agencies to protect the U.S. Capitol once violence broke out on Jan. 6, 2021, a law professor testified Tuesday as a case to bar the former president from the 2024 ballot moved into a new phase.

William Banks, a Syracuse University law professor and expert in national security law, said that once the attack on the Capitol began, Trump had options he did not use.

"He should respond to his constitutional responsibilities to protect the security of the United States when there's an assault on our democratic process," Banks said of Trump.

Banks was testifying as a witness for a group of Colorado voters who want to bar Trump from the ballot for allegedly violating his oath to uphold the Constitution in his attempt to overturn his 2020 election loss. They cite a rarely used clause in the 14th Amendment, adopted just after the Civil War, that prohibits those who "engaged in insurrection" against the Constitution from holding higher office.

The Colorado case and another before the Minnesota Supreme Court on Thursday are the two most advanced of dozens of challenges to Trump around the country. On Tuesday, his campaign filed a lawsuit in Michigan to stop a related case there. One of the cases is likely to end up at the U.S. Supreme Court, which has never ruled on the insurrection clause.

Trump's attorneys have said the lawsuits are anti-democratic efforts to deny voters the opportunity to choose who leads the country. They've also said they will show in court that Trump took the threat of violence seriously on Jan. 6.

On Tuesday, Geoffrey Blue, one of Trump's Colorado attorneys, noted that a Department of Defense timeline shows that Trump previously had asked Gen. Mark Milley, then-head of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, if the military was prepared for protests that he himself had called against Congress' Jan 6 certification of President Joe Biden's win. Milley said yes, according to the timeline.

Trump gave a fiery speech on the Ellipse before the assault, urging his supporters to march to the Capitol to protest the fictitious election fraud he claimed had stopped him from winning a second term. Attacks on the Capitol began earlier and intensified significantly after Trump wrapped up his speech.

Banks acknowledged he did not know what conversations were occurring in the White House that afternoon. Testimony to the House committee that investigated the attack shows that some aides were aghast that Trump wasn't taking action, but the former president's lawyers called the committee's report a partisan document that was distrusted by Republicans.

The committee's final report details Trump's inaction as rioters stormed the Capitol, calling it "a dereliction of duty," and suggested that Congress consider barring him from holding office in the future.

Earlier Tuesday, an expert in right-wing extremism testified about how violent groups interpreted Trump's calls for a "wild" protest on Jan. 6. And on Monday, the trial's opening day, police officers who defended the Capitol that day testified about the assault.

The case is expected to get to the constitutional issues that make it significant on Wednesday, when a law professor is scheduled to testify about whether Section Three of the 14th Amendment applies to the president, even though that office is not specifically mentioned in the text.

Trump's attorneys and some critics of the litigation contend the provision also needs congressional legislation to be used.

Maryland man who received second pig heart transplant dies, hospital says

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The second person to receive a transplanted heart from a pig has died, nearly six weeks after the highly experimental surgery, his Maryland doctors announced Tuesday.

Lawrence Faucette, 58, was dying from heart failure and ineligible for a traditional heart transplant when he received the genetically modified pig heart on Sept. 20.

According to the University of Maryland School of Medicine, the heart had seemed healthy for the first month but began showing signs of rejection in recent days. Faucette died Monday.

In a statement released by the hospital, Faucette's wife, Ann, said her husband "knew his time with us was short and this was his last chance to do for others. He never imagined he would survive as long as he did."

The Maryland team last year performed the world's first transplant of a heart from a genetically altered pig into another dying man. David Bennett survived two months before that heart failed, for reasons that aren't completely clear although signs of a pig virus later were found inside the organ. Lessons from that

first experiment led to changes, including better virus testing, before the second attempt.

"Mr. Faucette's last wish was for us to make the most of what we have learned from our experience," Dr. Bartley Griffith, the surgeon who led the transplant at the University of Maryland Medical Center, said in a statement.

Attempts at animal-to-human organ transplants — called xenotransplants — have failed for decades, as people's immune systems immediately destroyed the foreign tissue. Now scientists are trying again using pigs genetically modified to make their organs more humanlike.

Faucette, a Navy veteran and father of two from Frederick, Maryland, had been turned down for a traditional heart transplant because of other health problems when he came to the Maryland hospital, out of options and expressing a wish to spend a little more time with his family.

In mid-October, the hospital said Faucette had been able to stand and released video showing him working hard in physical therapy to regain the strength needed to attempt walking.

Cardiac xenotransplant chief Dr. Muhammad Mohiuddin said the team will analyze what happened with the heart as they continue studying pig organs.

Many scientists hope xenotransplants one day could compensate for the huge shortage of human organ donations. More than 100,000 people are on the nation's list for a transplant, most awaiting kidneys, and thousands will die waiting.

A handful of scientific teams have tested pig kidneys and hearts in monkeys and in donated human bodies, hoping to learn enough for the Food and Drug Administration to allow formal xenotransplant studies.

The FBI director warns about threats to Americans from those inspired by the Hamas attack on Israel

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

FBI Director Christopher Wray warned on Tuesday that Hamas' rampage inside Israel could inspire violence in the U.S., telling lawmakers that multiple foreign extremist groups have called for attacks against Americans and the West in recent weeks.

"We assess that the actions of Hamas and its allies will serve as an inspiration the likes of which we haven't seen since ISIS launched its so-called caliphate years ago," Wray said, using an acronym for the Islamic State group.

In his testimony before the Senate Homeland Security Committee, Wray gave his most detailed and ominous assessment of potential threats to the U.S. since the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israeli soldiers and civilians.

His reference to the Islamic State, a reminder of when the FBI scrambled to disrupt hastily developed plots of violence by people inspired by the group's ascendancy, underscores the bureau's concerns that the current Middle East conflict could create a similarly dangerous dynamic.

Though the FBI isn't currently tracking an "organized threat" inside the United States, law enforcement is concerned about the potential of attacks by individuals or small groups, as occurred during the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq a decade ago.

The bureau has already seen an increase in attacks on overseas military bases and expects cyberattacks targeting American infrastructure to get worse as the conflict expands, he said.

"It is a time to be concerned. We are in a dangerous period," Wray said. "We shouldn't stop going out, but we should be vigilant."

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas, meanwhile, said his agency has responded to an increase in threats against Jewish, Muslim, and Arab American communities in the U.S. since the Oct. 7 attack.

"Hate directed at Jewish students, communities and institutions add to a preexisting increase in the level of antisemitism in the United States and around the world," he said.

Democratic Sen. Maggie Hassan said Jewish leaders in her state of New Hampshire say congregants

are scared to go to synagogue, and Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida has heard similar fears from people in his state.

"I know our Jewish families all across my state and all across the country are pretty scared to death right now," Scott said.

Wray cited sobering statistics in his response, saying that Jewish people make up 2.4% of the U.S. population but are the targets of about 60% of religious-based hate crimes. "That should be jarring to everyone," he said.

The FBI has also opened a hate-crime investigation in the death of a 6-year-old Muslim boy who police say was stabbed to death by his landlord in an attack that also seriously wounded his mother, Wray said. Police and relatives have said the victims were singled out because of their faith and as a response to the war between Israel and Hamas.

Missouri appeals court rules against ballot summary language that described 'dangerous' abortions

By SUMMER BALLENTINE Associated Press

COLUMBIA, Mo. (AP) — A Missouri appeals court ruled Tuesday against Republican-written summaries of abortion-rights ballot measures that described several proposed amendments as allowing "dangerous and unregulated abortions until live birth."

A three-judge panel of the Western District Court of Appeals found the summaries written by Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft, who is running for governor in 2024, are politically partisan.

Ballot summaries are used on Missouri ballots to help voters understand sometimes lengthy and complex constitutional amendments and policy changes.

Ashcroft's original description of the amendments, which could go on the ballot in 2024 if supporters gather enough voter signatures, would have asked voters whether they want to "allow for dangerous, unregulated, and unrestricted abortions, from conception to live birth, without requiring a medical license or potentially being subject to medical malpractice."

But the appeals-court panel wrote that allowing unrestricted abortion "during all nine months of pregnancy is not a probable effect of initiatives."

The judges largely upheld summaries that were rewritten by a lower court judge to be more impartial.

The summaries approved by the appeals court would tell voters the amendments would "establish a right to make decisions about reproductive health care, including abortion and contraceptives" and "remove Missouri's ban on abortion."

Ashcroft said he plans to appeal the ruling.

"We stand by our language and believe it fairly and accurately reflects the scope and magnitude of each petition," Ashcroft said in a statement.

Abortion-rights proponents lauded the Tuesday ruling.

"Today, the courts upheld Missourians' constitutional right to direct democracy over the self-serving attacks of politicians desperately seeking to climb the political ladder," the ACLU of Missouri said in a statement. It called the decision "a complete rebuke of the combined efforts from the Attorney General and Secretary of State to interfere and deny Missourian's their right to initiative process."

Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey's office is defending Ashcroft's summary language in court.

"Missourians deserve meaningful access to abortion and the ability to fully participate in the democratic process," Emily Wales, the president and CEO of the Planned Parenthood's Great Plains affiliate, said in a statement. "The court rightfully struck down language that is misleading and stigmatizing."

Missouri is among several states, including Ohio, where abortion opponents are fighting efforts to ensure or restore access to the procedure following the fall of Roe v. Wade last year.

A measure to ensure abortion access is on the November ballot in Ohio after withstanding legal challenges from opponents. That state's voters in August rejected a measure that would have required at

least 60% of the vote to amend the state constitution, an approach supported by abortion opponents that would have made it harder to adopt the November ballot question.

Measures to protect access already have spots in the 2024 votes in Maryland and New York. Legislative efforts or petition drives are underway in a variety of states. There are efforts to protect or expand access in Arizona, Florida, Nevada and South Dakota; and to restrict it in Iowa, Nebraska and Pennsylvania. Drives are on for both kinds of measures in Colorado.

Voters in every state with an abortion-related ballot measure since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022, effectively making abortion access a state-by-state question, have favored the side supported by abortion rights supporters.

An Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll earlier this year found that most voters -- including those in states with bans on access at all stages of pregnancy -- want abortion to be legal early in pregnancy. Most voters also favored some limits.

Jacob Lew, former treasury secretary to Obama, confirmed as US ambassador to Israel

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate has confirmed Jacob Lew as ambassador to Israel, filling the key diplomatic post as the country is fighting a war with Hamas.

Lew, a treasury secretary under President Barack Obama, was confirmed 53-43.

He has promised to stand side by side with Israel's leaders as they respond to the militant group's surprise attack on Oct. 7, telling senators in his confirmation hearing in mid-October that "at this moment, there is no greater mission than to be asked to strengthen the ties between the United States and the state of Israel."

President Joe Biden nominated Lew, who goes by Jack, last month to fill the post left vacant when Tom Nides left as ambassador in July. Democrats say Lew's wealth of government experience — he also was chief of staff to Obama and White House budget director under Obama and President Bill Clinton — makes him the right person to fill the post at a a critical moment in the two countries' relationship.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said after Lew's confirmation that the administration is eager for him "to get on the ground and start leading our efforts to support Israel and their fight against Hamas, but also to help us integrate and continue to lead the effort to get humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza."

Republicans criticized Lew for his role in the Obama White House when it negotiated the Iran nuclear agreement in 2015, among other foreign policy moves. The deal with Iran — the chief sponsor of Hamas — was later scuttled by former President Donald Trump.

"This is the wrong person at the wrong time in the wrong place," said Idaho Sen. Jim Risch, the top Republican on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, just before the vote. "The last thing we need is somebody who is very contrary to our view about how Iran should be handled."

Senate Foreign Relations Committee Chairman Ben Cardin, D-Md., said that Lew has won praise from Israeli leaders and has the gravitas to "stand shoulder to shoulder with Israel" as the United States partners with the country.

"There's to me no question about his qualifications, no question about his presence being welcomed by our Israeli friends, no question about his knowledge and commitment to these issues," Cardin said. "We could not have a more qualified individual to represent America as our ambassador to Israel."

At the hearing, Lew defended his work in the Obama White House and called Iran an "evil, malign government."

"I want to be clear — Iran is a threat to regional stability and to Israel's existence," Lew said.

He also expressed sympathy for the civilians on both sides who have been injured or killed in the fighting. It must end, Lew said, "but it has to end with Israel's security being guaranteed."

Lew, who is Jewish, said at the hearing that he cannot remember a time in his life "when Israel's struggle

for security was not at the forefront of my mind."

U.S. military and diplomatic leaders urge a divided Congress to send aid to both Israel and Ukraine

By MARY CLARE JALONICK Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's top military and diplomatic leaders urged an increasingly divided Congress on Tuesday to send immediate aid to Israel and Ukraine, arguing at a Senate hearing that broad support for the assistance would signal U.S. strength to adversaries worldwide.

The testimony from Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin and Secretary of State Antony Blinken to the Senate Appropriations Committee came as the administration's massive $105 billion emergency aid request for conflicts in the two countries encountered roadblocks.

While there is bipartisan support in the Democratic-led Senate for aid to both Ukraine and Israel, the request faces deep problems in the Republican-led House. New Speaker Mike Johnson has proposed focusing on Israel alone, and slashing money for the Internal Revenue Service to pay for it.

As the congressional divisions deepen, Blinken and Austin warned that the consequences of failing to help Ukraine in its war with Russia and Israel as it strikes back against Hamas would be dire. Inaction, they said, would threaten the security of the U.S. and the rest of the world.

"We now stand at a moment where many are again making the bet that the United States is too divided or distracted at home to stay the course," Blinken said. "That is what is at stake."

Austin said that if the United States fails to lead, "the cost and the threats to the United States will only grow. We must not give our friends, our rivals, or our foes any reason to doubt America's resolve."

President Joe Biden has requested $14.3 billion for Israel, $61.4 billion to support Ukraine, $9.1 billion for humanitarian efforts in Gaza and elsewhere and $7.4 billion for the Indo-Pacific, where the U.S. is focused on countering China's influence. Some of the Ukraine funding would go toward replenishing domestic stockpiles of weapons that have already been provided.

The White House has also requested around $14 billion to protect the U.S. border. That money would be used to boost the number of border agents, install new inspection machines to detect fentanyl and to increase staffing for processing asylum cases.

But the House is trying to set aside much of Biden's request for now to focus on a roughly $14.5 billion package for Israel. That plan faced immediate resistance among Senate Democrats — and put pressure on the Senate Republicans who support the Ukraine aid but are conscious of growing concerns about it within their party.

Speaking on the Senate floor, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said the House proposal "is clearly designed to divide Congress on a partisan basis, not unite us." He said he hopes Johnson realizes he made a "grave mistake" and reverses course.

The two Cabinet secretaries argued that the aid should be tied together because the conflicts are interconnected. Blinken said that assisting Ukraine and Israel will strengthen the U.S. position against Iran, which is the biggest financial backer of Hamas.

"Since we cut off Russia's traditional means of supplying its military, it has turned more and more to Iran for assistance," Blinken said. "In return, Moscow has supplied Iran with increasingly advanced military technology, which poses a threat to Israel's security. Allowing Russia to prevail with Iran's support will embolden both Moscow and Tehran."

Austin said the money would help Israel and Ukraine defend themselves against aggression — and also replenish U.S. stockpiles.

"In both Israel and Ukraine, democracies are fighting ruthless foes bent on their annihilation," Austin said. "We will not let Hamas or Putin win. Today's battles against aggression and terrorism will define global security for years to come."

Senate Appropriations Chairwoman Patty Murray, D-Wash., said at the start of the hearing that she and

the panel's top Republican, Maine Sen. Susan Collins, were drafting "strong bipartisan legislation" that would include aid for both countries.

"Make no mistake, we need to address all of these priorities as part of one package — because the reality is these issues are all connected, and they are all urgent," Murray said.

Blinken and Austin were repeatedly interrupted by dozens of protesters in the room who called for Israel to end its bombardment of the Gaza Strip, and the hearing was suspended as the demonstrators were escorted out. "Cease-fire now!" they yelled. "Save the children of Gaza!"

After the protesters were removed, Blinken said he heard "the passions expressed in this room and outside this room." He said that the U.S. is committed to protecting civilian life, "but all of us know the imperative of standing up with our allies and partners when their security, when their democracies, are threatened."

Some Republicans have expressed concerns that the humanitarian aid could end up in the wrong hands. Tennessee Sen. Bill Hagerty asked Blinken to guarantee that "not one dime" of taxpayer money will go to Hamas and terrorist activities.

Blinken said that the U.S. has an ability to track the aid. "The overwhelming majority of assistance so far is getting to people who need it, and we need more," he said. "The needs are desperate."

Despite growing questions about the Ukraine aid within the Republican conference, Senate GOP Leader Mitch McConnell has forcefully advocated tying the aid for Ukraine and Israel together. He hosted Oksana Markarova, the Ukrainian ambassador to the United States, at an event in Kentucky on Monday and told the audience, "this is a moment for swift and decisive action."

Senate Republicans who support the Ukraine aid are uncertain of the path forward. Sen. John Thune of South Dakota, the No. 2 Senate Republican, said there are a significant number of Republicans "who believe that these are all vital national security interests and priorities of the United States." At the same time, trying to pass all of them together is complicated, he said.

Republican Sen. Joni Ernst of Iowa said she wants to see Ukraine aid passed, and "I don't care how it happens." She said she is open to the IRS cuts that Republicans proposed for the Israel funding in the House.

Senate Republicans who have opposed additional Ukraine aid threw support behind the House approach. "We have a Republican majority in the House, we need to follow the speaker," said Florida Sen. Rick Scott.

Missouri Sen. Josh Hawley said he wanted to see the U.S. focus on the Pacific and Asia rather than Ukraine, arguing that China posed a long-term threat. "We can do more in Ukraine or we can do what we need to do in the Pacific," he said.

Further complicating the package, a group of Senate Republicans have been negotiating border security measures that would go beyond Biden's request, an attempt to help control the influx of migrants.

Maine Sen. Susan Collins, the top Republican on the Appropriations panel, supports tying the aid to the two countries together. But added border security is needed as well, she said. "This real threat to our homeland must also be addressed," Collins said.

The House could pass its Israel aid package by the end of the week. In an interview on Fox News on Tuesday, Johnson said he hopes "most if not all" of the Democrats join Republicans in voting for it. He said he would call Schumer to discuss it.

"This is a matter of good versus evil," Johnson said.

Blinken made a quick trip to Johnson's office after his Senate testimony — an effort to push a combined aid package to the new speaker, according to State Department spokesman Matthew Miller.

The secretary would only say as he left that it "was a very good meeting. I appreciate the opportunity."

More than 40% of Ukrainians need humanitarian help under horrendous war conditions, UN says

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Russian strikes are inflicting unimaginable suffering on the people of Ukraine and more than 40% of them need humanitarian assistance, a senior U.N. official told the U.N. Security

Council on Tuesday.

Ramesh Rajasingham, director of coordination in the U.N. humanitarian office, said thousands of civilians have been killed in strikes on homes, schools, fields and markets since Russia's invasion in February 20022. The U.N. human rights office has formally verified 9,900 civilians killed, but he said "the actual number is certainly higher."

Ukrainian civilians are suffering "horrendous humanitarian consequences" and "unimaginable levels of suffering" from the Russian strikes, Rajasingham said. About 18 million Ukrainians — more than 40% of the population — need some form of humanitarian assistance, and as winter approaches "needs will be magnified," he said.

Rajasingham said significant damage and destruction of critical infrastructure continues to severely impact civilian access to electricity, heating, water and telecommunications, "a particular concern as winter fast approaches," which will put the elderly, disabled and displaced most at risk.

The Russian military methodically targeted Ukraine's power stations and other critical infrastructure with missile and drone strikes during the last winter season, resulting in frequent power outages.

To prepare for the freezing temperatures this winter, the U.N. official said, the humanitarian community is helping people carrying out household repairs and ensuring that water and heating systems are functional.

"The aim is to ensure that every civilian has access to somewhere both safe and warm during the winter ahead," Rajasingham said.

Ukrainians must also deal with diminished health care, he said.

Since the invasion, the U.N. World Health Organization has verified over 1,300 attacks on health care – more than 55% of all attacks worldwide during the same period, he said. And 111 health care workers and patients have been killed, with 13 health facilities impacted by attacks just since the beginning of September.

As the war continues, it has become more dangerous for humanitarian organizations to operate, with the number of aid workers killed more than tripling from four in 2022 to 14 so far in 2023, Rajasingham said.

Despite the risks, more than 500 humanitarian organizations – the majority of them local -- reached nine million people with aid in the first nine months of 2023, thanks to more than $2 billion contributed by donors to the U.N.'s $3.9 billion appeal for this year, he said. But over 40% of the appeal is still unfunded.

U.S. Deputy Ambassador Robert Wood told the council Russian attacks reduced Ukraine's power generating capacity to roughly half its pre-war capacity, according to a U.N. estimate in June. And between October 2022 and March 2023, many civilians spent roughly 35 days without power.

He said Russian attacks on critical infrastructure have already resumed, "risking critical services and exacerbating the humanitarian crisis."

Wood pointed to a single day in September when Russia launched 44 missiles at energy facilities in six regions, and a Ukrainian government report that from Oct. 11-12, Russia launched artillery, missiles and drones against the Kherson region "an estimated 100 times."

From mid-July, when Russia pulled out of the initiative enabling Ukraine to ship critically needed wheat and other foodstuffs from Black Sea ports, until mid-October, Russian attacks destroyed nearly 300,000 tons of Ukrainian grain, he said.

"We call on the international community to continue providing essential humanitarian support to Ukraine, including supporting Ukraine's efforts to restore its energy grid," Wood said.

Russia's U.N. Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia claimed it is Ukrainian missiles – not Russian airstrikes – that hit "civilian objects." And he accused the Kyiv government of making up "lies about Russia" and blaming Moscow for "high profile tragedies" in Ukraine in order to elicit Western support for more military assistance.

While Western diplomats speak out about casualties and destruction in Ukraine, Nebenzia added, they never mention anything about casualties and destruction in the eastern Donbas region, which Russia illegally annexed in October 2022.

Ukraine's U.N. Ambassador Sergiy Kyslytsya expressed gratitude to the U.N. and donors for assisting the government in preparing for winter.

He said Russia shows no intention of abandoning the "terrorist" practice of targeting civilian infrastruc-

ture, saying that "makes it imperative to obtain additional air defense systems to safeguard these critical facilities during the winter."

Amnesty International says Israeli forces wounded Lebanese civilians with white phosphorus

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The human rights group Amnesty International said Tuesday that civilians in southern Lebanon were injured this month when Israeli forces hit a border village with shells containing white phosphorus, a controversial incendiary munition.

The organization said it verified three other instances of Israel's military dropping white phosphorus on Lebanese border areas in the past month, but Amnesty said it did not document any harm to civilians in those cases.

Human rights advocates say the use of white phosphorus is illegal under international law when the white-hot chemical substance is fired into populated areas. It can set buildings on fire and burn human flesh down to the bone. Survivors are at risk of infections and organ or respiratory failure, even if their burns are small.

After an Oct. 16 Israeli strike in the town of Duhaira, houses and cars caught fire and nine civilians were rushed to the hospital with breathing problems from the fumes, Amnesty said. The group said it had verified photos that showed white phosphorus shells lined up next to Israeli artillery near the tense Lebanon-Israel border.

The organization described the incident as an "indiscriminate attack" that harmed civilians and should be "investigated as a war crime."

A paramedic shared photos with the The Associated Press of first responders in oxygen masks and helping an elderly man, his face covered with a shirt, out of a burning house and into an ambulance.

"This is the first time we've seen white phosphorus used on areas with civilians in such large amounts," Ali Noureddine, a paramedic who was among the responding emergency workers, said. "Even our guys needed oxygen masks after saving them."

The Amnesty report is the latest in a series of allegations by human rights groups that Israeli forces have dropped shells containing white phosphorus on densely populated residential areas in Gaza and Lebanon during the ongoing Israel-Hamas war.

Israel maintains it uses the incendiaries only as a smokescreen and not to target civilians.

The Israeli military said in a statement to the AP earlier this month that the main type of smokescreen shells it uses "do not contain white phosphorous." But it did not rule out its use in some situations. The military did not immediately respond to inquiries about Tuesday's Amnesty statement.

The rights group said it also verified cases of white phosphorus shelling on the border town of Aita al Shaab and over open land close to the village of al-Mari. It said the shelling caused wildfires. The United Nations' peacekeeping mission in Lebanon, UNIFI, was called in to help with firefighting efforts as local firefighters couldn't go near the front lines, a spokesperson for the mission told the AP.

Amnesty and Human Rights Watch have also reported an alleged case of white phosphorus shelling in a populated area of the Gaza Strip during the current Israel-Hamas war but have not verified civilian injuries from it.

Doctors working in hospitals in the besieged Palestinian territory told the AP they saw patients with burn wounds they thought were caused by white phosphorus but they did not have the capacity to test for it.

In 2013, the Israeli military said it would stop using white phosphorus in populated areas in Gaza, except in narrow circumstances that it did not reveal publicly. The decision came in response to an Israeli High Court of Justice petition about use of the munitions.

The military disclosed the two exceptions only to the court, and did not mark an official change in policy.

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Has Israel invaded Gaza? The military has been vague, even if its objectives are clear

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

Over the past five days, Israeli ground troops have pushed deeper and deeper into Gaza in their war against Hamas, launched in response to a bloody Oct. 7 cross-border raid by the Islamic militant group.

A growing array of units, including naval, air and ground forces, have joined the effort. The army says it has killed scores of militants and damaged Hamas' strategic tunnel network. Soldiers have taken over abandoned Palestinian homes to stake out positions.

Yet even as the operation expands each day, the army refuses to call it an invasion.

Its vague choice of words is more than an issue of semantics. It appears to be a deliberate strategy aimed at keeping its enemy off balance and preserving its options as a lengthy war unfolds.

Here is a closer look at what Israel is doing inside Gaza.

IS IT AN INVASION?

In the classic sense of the word, an Israeli invasion appears to be underway.

Ground forces have moved into enemy territory and operated continuously since last Friday. While the army has given few specifics about the operations, it has acknowledged that tanks, artillery, infantry, bulldozers and special forces have taken part, all backed by aerial support.

The army has been vague about the location or size of its forces. But its announcements indicate that thousands of troops have joined the effort, with those numbers seeming to grow by the day.

The Palestinians have used far stronger language, referring to Israel's ongoing bombing with terms like "massacre" and "genocide." The ongoing offensive has killed over 8,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in Hamas-ruled Gaza, and reduced thousands of buildings to rubble.

WHAT DOES THE ARMY CALL IT?

The army refuses to say it has invaded Gaza, referring to its activities as "raids" and "operations."

This reflects what is a fluid situation, as the number of troops fluctuates and, for the time being at least, Israel avoids trying to overwhelm Hamas with an overpowering number of ground troops.

These tactics appear to be aimed at confusing Hamas and leaving options for further action open. Still, Israel has made clear it will maintain a presence inside Gaza for a long time to come.

Over the weekend, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that operation had moved into a new phase.

"We have reached a new stage in the war," Gallant said. "The ground in Gaza is shaking. The operation will continue until a new order."

While visiting troops on Tuesday, Gallant added: "We are deploying forces on a large scale in the depths of Gaza."

WHAT IS THE PLAN?

Israel has set two objectives: the return of all hostages and the destruction of Hamas, a militant group armed with thousands of fighters, rockets, bombs, anti-tank missiles and significant public support.

Israel's chief military spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, routinely refers to a methodical plan to achieve these goals, even if he does not call it an invasion. "Our offensive operations will continue and intensify according to plan," he said Tuesday.

Amir Avivi, a retired general and former deputy commander of the military's Gaza division, says the vague terminology is intentional. "They don't want the enemy to know what they are doing," he said.

But Avivi, who now heads the Israel Defense and Security Forum, a group of hawkish former military commanders, said it is clear what will be needed to achieve the objectives.

"There is only one way to do this. They will have to conquer the whole Gaza Strip and spend months and months and months dismantling all the capabilities," he said. "What does it matter what the army is saying?"

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The Supreme Court wrestles with social media cases that have echoes of Donald Trump

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court wrestled Tuesday with whether public officials can block critics from commenting on their social media accounts, an issue that first arose in a case involving former President Donald Trump.

The justices heard arguments in two cases involving lawsuits filed by people who were blocked after leaving critical comments on social media accounts belonging to school board members in southern California and a city manager in Port Huron, Michigan, northeast of Detroit.

The cases force the court to deal with the competing free speech rights of public officials and their constituents, and all in a rapidly evolving virtual world.

"More and more of our democracy operates on social media," Justice Elena Kagan said during three hours of arguments.

The cases are part of a term-long focus on the relationship between government and the private digital platforms. Justice Clarence Thomas hinted at coming cases when he described as "the looming elephant in the room" the power of Facebook and other platforms to take down accounts.

Early next year, the court will evaluate Republican-passed laws in Florida and Texas that prohibit large social media companies from taking down posts because of the views they express. The tech companies said the laws violate their First Amendment rights. The laws reflect a view among Republicans that the platforms disproportionately censor conservative viewpoints.

Also on the agenda is a challenge from Missouri and Louisiana to the Biden administration's efforts to combat controversial social media posts on topics including COVID-19 and election security. The states argue that the administration has been unconstitutionally coercing the platforms into cracking down on conservative positions.

Tuesday's cases delving into the common use of social media by public officials are less overtly partisan. But they are similar to a case involving Trump and his decision to block critics from his personal account on Twitter, now known as X. The justices dismissed the case after Trump left office.

The @realdonaldtrump account had more than 88 million followers, but Trump argued that it was his personal property.

"But he seems to be doing, you know, a lot of government on his Twitter account," Kagan said. "I mean, sometimes he was announcing policies. Even when he wasn't, I mean, I don't think a citizen would be able to really understand the Trump presidency, if you will, without any access to all the things that the president said on that account."

Appeals courts in San Francisco and Cincinnati reached conflicting decisions about when personal accounts become official, and it seemed that the justices did not wholly embrace either ruling.

The justices did seem to agree that they should provide a clear legal standard, though where they would come down was unclear.

Justice Brett Kavanaugh, husband of a town manager in the Washington suburbs, said it is "definitely true" that local officials need guidance.

The first case involved two elected members of a California school board, the Poway Unified School District Board of Trustees. The members, Michelle O'Connor-Ratcliff and T.J. Zane, used their personal Facebook and Twitter accounts to communicate with the public. Two parents, Christopher and Kimberly Garnier, left critical comments and replies to posts on the board members' accounts and were blocked. The 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals said the board members had violated the parents' free speech rights by doing so. Zane no longer serves on the school board.

The other case involved James Freed, who was appointed Port Huron 's city manager in 2014. Freed used the Facebook page he first created while in college to communicate with the public, as well as recount the details of daily life.

In 2020, a resident, Kevin Lindke, used the page to comment several times from three Facebook profiles,

including criticism of the city's response to the COVID-19 pandemic. Freed blocked all three accounts and deleted Lindke's comments. Lindke sued, but the 6th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals sided with Freed, noting that his Facebook page talked about his roles as "father, husband, and city manager."

The Biden administration is siding with the officials and urging the court to respect the distinction between officials' private and public lives. In these cases, the government doesn't control or operate the accounts, the Justice Department said.

Several justices seemed dissatisfied with the administration's approach. "To make so much turn on who owns the Facebook page seems quite artificial," Justice Samuel Alito said.

On the other side of the case, the American Civil Liberties Union wrote that the officials in both cases took public, or state action, "when they excluded dissenting constituents from social media profiles that they held out as extension of their public office."

The justices lobbed one hypothetical question after another at the six lawyers who argued before them Tuesday. Justice Amy Coney Barrett stopped herself midway through one offering, after she said one of her law clerks could start posting "the official business of the Barrett chambers" on social media.

"That wouldn't be OK," she said, seeming to speak directly to the law clerks, who often attend Supreme Court arguments.

Decisions in O'Connor-Ratcliff v. Garnier, 22-324, and Lindke v. Freed, 22-611, are expected by early summer.

From inventing the huddle to trying a new helmet, Gallaudet is home to a proud football tradition

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Chuck Goldstein has not used a whistle to coach football in more than a decade. It has become commonplace for him.

Since arriving at Gallaudet University as an assistant in 2009, Goldstein has embraced coaching a team of Deaf and hard-of-hearing players and the adjustments that go with it.

He learned American Sign Language as the primary method of communication. At practice, he started to move to where the sun was in his eyes so players could see him signing, not the other way around. During games, he still worries about opponents being injured because his players can't hear whistles when a play is stopped.

"Those are the challenges we face year to year, but we overcome them," Goldstein said. "We play football."

Gallaudet has been playing football since 1883, when it was known as the National Deaf-Mute College, and invented the huddle just over a decade later. The school added a drum to replace whistles in 1970, and players and coaches carry on the program's rich history by continuing to innovate — most recently a helmet developed with AT&T that allows play calls to show up on a tiny almost transparent screen placed above the quarterback's right eye.

"With the helmet, you waste less time trying to seek information out," offensive lineman John Scarborough said in ASL through an interpreter. "We're basically able to play on par when it comes to the pace of other teams and other players."

The NCAA granted Gallaudet a one-game waiver for the helmet, though Goldstein hopes it gets approved for all players in the future. The development comes as major college football has been rocked by an alleged sign-stealing scandal at Michigan, prompting some to call for the NCAA to lift its ban on radio communication between coaches and players.

"We're still going to play football with or without (the helmet, which) would help definitely level the playing field," Goldstein said. "But for now, we're just going to have to compete with a non-level playing field because that's what it is. It's always been that way for 140 years."

Gallaudet football games, particularly at home on campus in northeast Washington, are unlike any in the world. The anthem is performed in ASL, without the familiar strains of "The Star-Spangled Banner" playing audibly. There is no public address announcer. Some fans cheer, while others applaud in ASL with

their hands.

"It's good to see a football program kind of replicate the Deaf community," said Shelby Bean, a former player who is now an assistant coach. "We're always going to fight. We're always going to play our best. We're always going to give all of our effort into something and just be resilient."

And win games at the Division III level, something Gallaudet has done a lot of over the past decade-plus since Goldstein has taken over. The Bison won their conference and reached reached the playoffs for the first time in 2013 and did the same last season.

Ravaged by injuries this year, Gallaudet won its trial game with the helmet, snapping a four-game skid for the first victory of the season, and followed that up with back-to-back victories.

"We view ourselves as normal people who can do everything except hear," Bean said. "We've kind of adapted how we coach football, how we play football."

One of those adaptations is the drum, a symbol of Gallaudet football that has strategic importance and goes everywhere the team goes. Because deaf and hard-of-hearing players can feel the vibrations created by the drum, it's used during warmups and during the game to signal some special teams calls like being ready for a punt.

After beating Hilbert College at home Oct. 7 with quarterback Brandon Washington wearing the new helmet, players and coaches banged the drum to celebrate. Taking nothing away from the technology that smoothed out the play-calling, Bean said the victory was the result of a good week of preparation and practice.

Washington, who scored a 63-yard touchdown on his first run of the game, couldn't contain his joy of getting Gallaudet back in the win column.

"I'm happy," he said. "It makes me want to cry a little bit because knowing we are a Deaf community, people think that we can't play sports or whatever. And we proved them wrong."

Just as they have for 140 years.

War plunged Israel's agricultural heartlands into crisis, raising fears for its farming future

By JULIA FRANKEL and MOSHE EDRI Associated Press

ASHKELON, Israel (AP) — The soldiers guarding Avi Chivivian's organic vegetable farm in southern Israel must first scour every corner of his fields for militants before they give him the all clear: He has six hours to work.

It's potato planting season for the farms of southern Israel, a region near the Gaza border that the Agriculture Ministry calls the country's "vegetable barn" because it supplies at least a third of Israel's vegetables. But Chivivian — one of the few remaining farmers in the area since the brutal Oct. 7 cross-border attack by Hamas militants — no longer lives by the harvest cycle. He's on the military's timetable.

"If we don't plant potatoes now, there won't be any in the spring," said Chivivian, who lives in the small village of Yated. "If we put our hands up, we will have a food crisis in Israel."

The Israel-Hamas war has plunged Israel's agricultural heartlands, located around the Gaza Strip and in the north near the Lebanese and Syrian borders, into crisis. Israeli airstrikes, ground operations and a siege have also upended all manner of life in Gaza.

Near Gaza, the military has banned all farming within 4 kilometers (2.5 miles) of the border fence and tightly monitors farmers whose lands lie just outside the no-go zone.

In the north, entire communities have been evacuated because of rocket fire from Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group. As foreign laborers flee and farming towns have emptied out, the country has begun importing more vegetables. The few remaining farmers fret for the future of Israeli agriculture.

Chivivian lost his entire harvest in the few days following Oct. 7. He was unable to tend to his 65 acres (25 hectares) as militants rampaged around his community. All of his crops — tomatoes, cucumbers and sweet potatoes — now lie dead in the fields and must be uprooted before he can till the soil anew and start over.

The bulk of the country's leafy greens, tomatoes, cucumbers and bell peppers come from the area, according to the Israel Farmers Association's general-secretary, Uri Dorman. Meanwhile, farms in the north produce 40% of the country's sub-tropical fruit and 70% of its eggs, the Agriculture Ministry said.

Before the war, most of the produce consumed by Israelis was grown in Israel. The increasing reliance on imports threatens the local farms whose products used to stock supermarket shelves. Last week, a ship carrying tomatoes from Turkey docked in Haifa.

Dorman predicted the Israeli agriculture industry could bounce back within two to three years. But he said rising imports could create fears and perceptions "that there are more shortages than there actually are."

"If people act on this fear and begin importing more produce, we will be witnessing the slow death of Israeli agriculture," he said.

For Chivivian, the farm he spent his whole adult life building is now his second priority. First is paying for the home in Jerusalem where his wife and six children have been staying since they evacuated Yated.

His bank account is in overdraft, and most of the foreign workers he employed from Thailand and Rwanda have fled.

"My house is empty, the whole kibbutz is empty. It looks like a tornado tore through the place," Chivivian said. "The government hasn't given us anything. We're alone, trying with all our might to save the food system."

In an attempt to attract foreign workers back to evacuated areas, the Agriculture Ministry has said it will extend their work visas and give them bonuses of about $500 a month. It also plans to build greenhouses to make up for potential shortages, construct hundreds of bomb shelters near farms and support volunteer efforts to fill labor gaps.

Before the war, roughly half of Israel's agricultural workforce was composed of foreign and Palestinian labor. Since the war erupted, Israel has barred Palestinian laborers from the West Bank from reaching their jobs. A fifth of the foreign workforce has fled the country, and many more have left their jobs.

As Israel calls 360,000 reservists up for military service, posts from pickers to truck drivers have been left abandoned, the Agriculture Ministry says.

Volunteer efforts enlisting thousands of people have sprung up across the country to fill the gaps. At the 25-acre (10-hectare) Dafna family orchard near the southern town of Ashkelon, volunteers brave frequent air-raid sirens as they pull ripe pomegranates from trees bursting with pink fruit. Their bounty tumbles into large troughs bound for market. Without their labor, the fruit would rot.

"I'm not afraid to come here to help them," said 21-year-old Ayelet Ben Assayag, who volunteered at the farm on a recent day. "I think it's really important that we will come here, even though it's a war zone."

She said the volunteers were prepared to run toward small shelters or lie on the ground in the event of a siren.

But volunteers can only help so much, said Liad Vaknin, spokesperson for Israel's Dairy Council. With the loss of skilled foreign labor, farming tasks take longer.

"The volunteers are temporarily saving these farms," Vaknin said. "But at the end of the day, they are volunteers. They don't have the same capabilities as the workers. We need to find a more permanent solution."

Volunteers have a harder time accessing the farms closest to the Gaza border, like Marcelo Wasser's dairy, because they need a military escort to enter the area. Wasser runs one of the 16 dairies dotting the border that account for roughly 10% of Israel's milk. Wasser stayed behind in Kibbutz Nirim to tend to his cows, as his family and community members evacuated.

After sheltering with his family for 12 hours in a safe room on Oct. 7, Wasser emerged to find five of his neighbors killed by militants and eight of his cows dead from rocket attacks.

Wasser, who immigrated to Israel from Argentina 30 years ago, continues to head out every day to feed and milk the cows, tending to the injured and dodging rocket fire as he goes.

"I'm scared for my life, not the cows' lives," he said. "I don't know how much longer I can do this."

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Sofia Coppola turns her lens on an American icon: Priscilla Presley

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

In her 25 years of making films, Sofia Coppola has always found the poetry behind the headlines, the banality in the glamour, the soul in the superficial. Her dreamy, lyrical portraits of girl culture and gilded cages have brought her to 18th century Versailles, 1970s suburban Michigan, the 1860s South, noughties Calabasas and modern-day Tokyo, West Hollywood and Manhattan.

In Priscilla Presley's 1985 memoir "Elvis and Me," Coppola saw something that was glamourous and wild, something that would provide an opportunity for beautiful filmmaking in a setting she had yet to explore — the world of 1960s American rock royalty. But even she was a little surprised to find in this wholly unrelatable tale something, well, relatable: A young woman, isolated, figuring out who she is, in the shadow of a powerful man.

"Priscilla," now playing in New York and Los Angeles and expanding nationwide Friday, emerged from a disappointment: Coppola's ambitious adaptation of Edith Wharton's "Custom of the Country" had fallen apart, and a friend encouraged her to dive into something else.

"(Priscilla) wasn't looking to make a movie out of the story," Coppola told The Associated Press in a recent interview. "But she said that because she liked my movies, she would let me do it."

Making a film about — and for — someone who is going to see it was a unique challenge. She wanted to do justice to her subject, while maintaining her creative expression. But the tension worked: "Priscilla" has landed Coppola some of her best reviews since "Lost in Translation," and already won her star, Cailee Spaeny, the best actress award from the Venice Film Festival.

"Priscilla" is a kind of culmination of all her previous experiences, both thematically and practically. Coppola learned some time ago that to have the true creative freedom she craved, she'd have to get creative in other ways, mostly with budgets and timelines. For "Priscilla," she had only 30 days to shoot a story that takes her heroine from Germany to Graceland, with detours in Las Vegas, Los Angeles and Palm Springs, and covers over a decade of an opulent and well-documented life, with many, many costumes.

"It's such a grand moment," Coppola said. "Our budget was pretty small for what we were trying to pull off."

Mostly, Coppola wanted it all to feel "big enough for her story."

This would involve a lot of "creative solutions" with her trusted filmmaking team, including cinematographer Philippe Le Sourd, production designer Tamara Deverell and costume designer Stacey Battat. They shot digitally instead of on film. To save some money on costumes without compromising quality, they enlisted the help of high-profile fashion houses: Chanel made the wedding dress while Valentino handled Elvis's knitwear and suits. They borrowed some walls from a just-wrapped Netflix show on a neighboring stage that Deverell then repurposed for a Vegas suite. They used platforms to cheat the height difference between Spaeny, who is 5'1", and Jacob Elordi, who is 6'5", and get them in frame together. They shot out of order: On some days, Spaeny was teenage Priscilla in the morning and adult, pregnant Priscilla after lunch.

And after many years of filming on location — among them Versailles, the Park Hyatt Tokyo, Bemelmans and the Chateau Marmont — for "Priscilla," Coppola had to build sets and "find Graceland in Toronto." The Graceland living room was even built to scale, though the ceiling was made taller for their Elvis.

"They were really building everything there and it was really fun to be working on a stage, almost like an old Hollywood studio, where the costume department was next to the props and the art department was building the Graceland gates," she said. "It's sort of that movie magic."

The Graceland set became a special place, too. One night, Coppola and her kids snuck into it and had a birthday cake in the dining room for her daughter's 16th birthday. When the production wrapped, the crew had champagne in the living room.

"There was something about making this movie where I just felt so in my element," she said. "It was hard work but I really had so much fun."

She, Le Sourd and her actors also spent a lot of time in Elvis' bedroom, filming in the only place the characters ever really got to be alone. In the book, Presley writes that they would sometimes dabble in

costumed role-play and document it with Polaroids. Though there are endless photographs and video footage of Elvis and Priscilla, those photographs have disappeared, Coppola said.

"I felt so lucky that I was able to ask her questions throughout the process. But with that scene, I had to ask her, like, 'What kind of costumes?'" Coppola said with a smile. "You're trying to get inside, but not pry and still be polite. She kind of hesitated and was like, 'Well, you know, like secretary.'"

Presley's book, nearly 40 years old at this point, reveals things about Elvis that are, at best, unflattering. Everyone knows they met when she was 14 and he was 24. But his controlling and sometimes volatile behavior, dictating exactly what she looked like, what she was allowed to do and whom she was allowed to spend time with, might still come as a surprise to some. Before the film's premiere in Venice, Coppola said she wasn't making "Priscilla" for Elvis fans.

"I didn't mean it to be brazen," she said. "I was just getting pressured to cut out anything negative about him and I was being firm. I was really clear that I wanted to tell her story and that was my priority."

"I really didn't want to make him a villain," she continued. "I know she has so much love for him. And so much of the dark side of him comes from vulnerability and frustrations and to sort of show him as a human was important to me."

The Elvis Presley estate did not participate in "Priscilla" and did not let Coppola use any of his music — though that just opened possibilities. She worked again with Phoenix, her husband Thomas Mars' band, used the Phil Spector-produced Ramones song "Baby I Love You" and, in a big coup, got Dolly Parton's permission to use "I Will Always Love You" for a pivotal moment.

The story also made Coppola think about her own mother, Eleanor Coppola, who was born nine years before Priscilla, and similarly struggled to find an outlet for her creative expression.

"She was expected to be totally content, happy to have a big house and a successful husband, and that should be enough for a woman to be fulfilled," said Coppola, who dedicated the film to her mother.

Though Coppola's films may sometimes release quietly, her fans are passionate. Hers are the films they'll watch over and over in their rooms — rites of passage, as important as any Joan Didion essay or Sylvia Plath poem, that have transcended generations. Spaeny is one of them.

"I came across 'The Virgin Suicides' when I was around 14 or 15 years old, and it was the first time I ever asked myself who was behind the camera," Spaeny said. "She just sort of cracked things open for me on a personal level, seeing young women depicted that were complex and had dark sides and longings and wants and needs."

Coppola has known this anecdotally for a while. But she's been able to observe the phenomenon on a mass scale with the recent release of her book "Sofia Coppola Archive: 1999-2023." And even if this hasn't made getting her films greenlit any easier, she's just more confident now than the person who thought about quitting after "Marie Antoinette."

"I feel so grateful that I get to make exactly what I want to make without any compromises," she said. "With my book coming out and people responding to my work, I feel so lucky to be appreciated. Some people aren't appreciated in their lifetime and when I was starting out, it took a while."

But, throughout, she's always found some people who've connected with her work, even if it was barely released or underappreciated in the moment. And she's loved hearing from young girls who are just discovering her films now.

"It's been really sweet," she said, "To know that my work still resonates. Because I made it for them a long time ago."

Abuse victims say gun surrender laws save lives. Will the Supreme Court agree?

By MARYCLAIRE DALE Legal Affairs Writer

As Janet Paulsen prepared to leave her husband, who had become increasingly volatile over their 15-year marriage, she slipped down to his gun safes one night while he slept to try to change the combination locks.

"There were 74 firearms in my house," said Paulsen, who was stunned by how many guns she found, but could not figure out how to change the codes. "When I went to get my protection order, I brought pictures of all of those firearms with me."

Georgia, where she lives, is not among the 21 states with gun surrender laws that can force people to relinquish their weapons while they are deemed a risk to themselves or others. So Paulsen's husband, whom she accused of threatening and erratic behavior, was only ordered to stay away from her and their 13-year-old twin boys until a court hearing.

That changed a few days later when she said he tried to track them through a phone locator app, a violation of the protection order that prompted a misdemeanor charge, two hours in jail and a court order to confiscate his guns.

As Paulsen and the boys rode out the week at a motel where they had taken refuge while he moved out, deputies removed more than 70 firearms from their home, a modern Craftsman nestled in a lakeside community about 30 miles northwest of Atlanta.

Police, though, left a handgun in a pickup truck parked in the driveway, unsure if the order covered Scott Bland's vehicle, she said.

Five days later, Bland ambushed Paulsen in the garage as she stopped home with groceries. He used the 9 mm semiautomatic pistol to shoot her six times, as she tried to flee, before killing himself.

"It took me five years to get up the courage to divorce him, because I knew I would pay a price. And you know what happened when I did? He shot me," said Paulsen, 53, a former property manager and endurance athlete who was left partially paralyzed in the 2015 shooting.

Her medical care has since cost about $2.5 million, much of it borne by society at large through health insurance payments.

"Every step of the way it seemed like his rights were more important … than mine and my children's," she said, her normally stoic voice breaking.

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Different states, different protections

If Paulsen endured those threats in Seattle today, not only would her husband's cache of weapons be moved to police storage, a judge would hold a hearing within days to grill him about his access to other firearms. Does anyone else in your family have a weapon? Do you have access to guns at work? What happened to the gun listed in your firearms purchase history?

Scores of people seek protection in King County each week from domestic violence, stalking, school threats or other concerning behavior. When guns are present — as they are in about half of the cases in which domestic violence petitions are granted — the threat of injury or death is exponentially higher, and an interagency team can initiate a gun surrender under state law.

It's a less adversarial, non-criminal program that's become a model for other counties. But the effort, and similar ones across the country, could be in jeopardy as the U.S. Supreme Court considers next month whether people can be forced to relinquish their weapons before a conviction.

A federal appeals court, in a Texas case, deemed the practice unconstitutional. The Supreme Court has agreed to review the issue on Nov. 7 — but no one knows if it's to overturn the Fifth Circuit ruling or double down on it.

The Supreme Court seems to have a growing interest in gun rights cases. The conservative 6-3 majority voted last year to overturn New York's longstanding restrictions on concealed weapons. That has led lower courts, sometimes begrudgingly, to overturn more than a dozen state and local gun safety measures. Domestic violence advocates worry that so-called "red flag" laws, which keep guns away from people in crisis, may be next.

Meanwhile, some state courts are loosening firearm bans for other reasons. Gun surrender orders are on hold in at least five counties in Washington after a state appeals court said they violated a man's Fourth Amendment right protecting individuals from improper search and seizures and Fifth Amendment right not to incriminate himself.

That worries advocates who point to new data that show gun seizures could reduce the nation's 2,500 or more annual domestic violence deaths — more than half of which involve guns — by 10% or more. The most dangerous time for victims is when they try to leave a relationship, long before their abuser would be convicted of anything.

"It's very troubling," said Karla Carlisle, managing partner of the Northwest Justice Project, who represents domestic violence victims and has asked the Washington Supreme Court to uphold the state law. "I keep waiting for the worst to happen, which is for somebody to lose their life."

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'Do his gun rights supersede the rights of others?'

One of Carlisle's clients has moved three hours across the state with her children to try to avoid that fate.

"Isabelle," who asked that her real name not be published to protect her and her family, obtained a domestic violence protection order in a rural Washington county in May, but the judge refused to order her estranged husband to surrender his estimated 40 weapons. Her spouse was instead told not to "possess" them. But with no enforcement, Isabelle has no guarantees.

Carlisle is using the case — and its inherent contradiction — to try to challenge the Washington appeals court ruling.

"You have victims just pulling up stakes, because they don't want to be in that situation," said Jordan Ferguson, a retired Spokane police sergeant now with the Spokane Regional Domestic Violence Coalition.

In hours of interviews this summer, Isabelle described a 20-year cycle of toxic behavior that echoed classic patterns of abuse: "Lovebombing," at first. Isolation, before long. "Baby-trapping," after they had three kids in two years. Gaslighting, as she grew afraid. Stalking, when she tried to hold down a postal route.

"You really do fall in love with a lie, and hope becomes an addiction, that that person (you first met) is coming back," she said. "But he made me like a servant."

The fraught behavior intensified after her truck driver husband suffered a head injury on the job in 2016, she said. They had started collecting weapons around 2008, when the country's economic downturn led them to lose their home and business and consider becoming licensed firearms dealers. That never happened, but they nonetheless amassed AK-47s, handguns, rifles and thousands of dollars worth of gun parts.

As his temperament devolved, she said, her husband would brandish a gun in the bedroom during the overnight hours, sometimes scaring her, sometimes threatening her, sometimes vowing to take out the entire family.

Although she didn't know it then, the presence of a gun made it five times more likely that Isabelle would die by her husband's hands, according to Everytown for Gun Safety's analysis of available data. She just prayed he would spare their young boys.

She decided she'd had enough early this year, when he spiraled over her decision to attend the funeral of a sister in Texas she hadn't seen in a decade. She returned home a week later and told him she wanted a divorce. He pleaded to work it out.

Then, in March, her husband pointed a loaded gun at his head and said, "We should all go together," before choosing instead to toss the gun on the bed and choke her, according to her case file. The judge granted the order, but — at odds with state law — did not order a one-year firearms surrender.

"Are his rights to (gun) possession more important than the rights of his wife and children to be safe? Or, not even his wife and children, but people around him?" Isabelle asked. "Do his gun rights supersede the rights of others?"

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Who else is at risk?

Nationwide, more than 20% of the people killed in domestic violence shootings are someone other than the intended victim: children, other relatives, bystanders, police and, of course, perpetrators of a murder-suicide.

Police have long known that domestic calls are dangerous situations for their officers. And research conducted in recent years — in the wake of the nation's troubling epidemic of mass shootings — makes

clear that family violence can be a crucial harbinger of public harm.

Only a small fraction of abusers go on to commit mass shootings. However, more than half of the perpetrators of mass shootings have a history of family or gender violence, including the school shooter at Sandy Hook Elementary, who killed his mother that morning, and the gunman in Uvalde, who sent sexually violent threats to women in his video gaming community. But the greatest risk in mass shootings involving four or more fatalities is not to a worried public, but to gun owners and their families.

"It was a fluke that I came home alone that night. He was waiting on myself, my two boys and my dad," said Paulsen, who had been at her sons' football practice. "This really could have been a much bigger tragedy."

April Ross, a former Fulton County prosecutor who now directs the Georgia Commission on Family Violence, said police officers trying to keep families safe in her state have it tough.

"They just want it to be clear, one way or the other: Can we go in and take the guns or not? But, in Georgia right now, it depends on where you live," Ross said. "So each circuit, and each sheriff, is its own little fiefdom and they set the rules in that county, because there's no state law."

In 2014, Ross herself was shot and paralyzed by her estranged husband, who also shot a male friend in her car before killing himself. She had not sought a protection order because, as a prosecutor, she did not think she had enough evidence until it was too late.

Now a quadriplegic, Ross believes the state's failure to remove guns when granting a protection order harms not only victims, but the perpetrators themselves.

"What's lost in the argument is the value of human life," Ross said. "Both of those men are dead and otherwise might not be, and there was value in their lives as well."

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Intervening, one gun at a time

In Seattle, judges juggle a dizzying array of protection order cases each day, switching their attention from petitioners and respondents on video to those appearing in person in the courtroom. The goal is to intervene before a tragedy by taking guns out of the equation.

Collectively, the hearings offer a sobering peek into the lives of the untold number of Americans who worry about the guns in their own homes.

— A judge speaks to a nervous 30-something woman who appears on video from her car. She's been granted a temporary domestic violence protection order, and her ex- has surrendered an AK-47, but not the SIG Sauer pistol listed in his purchase history. The man doesn't show up for the hearing, so the judge sets a new hearing date three weeks later. In the meantime, the woman worries that he may still have the deadly weapon.

— A young father with a felony record says he doesn't have the assault weapon claimed by an ex-girlfriend, complaining that police who searched his small apartment, including the baby's room, "wouldn't miss a gun like an AK-47." (The judge believes him.)

— A slightly built teen insists he doesn't know the name of the friend who handed him the Glock-like pistol he's seen showing off in a cellphone photo taken at the friend's home. A teen girl had reported it. "I really can't say because I don't want him to get in trouble," says the teenager, sitting by his mother and speaking with a mix of bravado and fear. (He's found not credible, and told to track down the friend's name and address by the next hearing.)

— One of the most troubling cases involves a veteran whose wife is worried for her safety. He had served only a brief stint in the military three decades ago but tells people he is a Special Forces operative. He was arrested for allegedly trying to lure two children from a Costco by warning them about an "emergency situation" nearby. On a separate visit, he said something similar to a woman with an infant in the parking lot. And he had walked into a Bellevue apartment building to visit a cancer-stricken friend with an AR-15 slung over his shoulder. The man's wife says he regularly takes out his weapons while he's drinking to clean them. Yet, the judge — after conceding the open carry at the apartment building was legal, and with the Costco kidnapping charges dismissed — denies the prosecutor's request for an Extreme

Risk Protection Order. The man will keep his weapons.

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'We've got to start somewhere.'

Both Ross and Paulsen have urged the Georgia Legislature to adopt statewide red flag laws to protect vulnerable victims like themselves. With Republicans in power there — and U.S. Rep. Andrew Clyde, a Georgia gun store owner, handing out AR-15 lapel pins to fellow members of Congress — they know the challenge is steep.

"Even as a gunshot victim, I am not someone who says that Second Amendment rights are not important," Ross said.

Yet she believes the American "obsession, the fascination with gun culture" needs to be examined and the data on guns and domestic violence believed.

"The reality is that this problem was not born overnight, and it's not going to be solved overnight. But we've got to start somewhere," said Ross. "States need to start passing consistent laws and enforcing those laws."

Paulsen sometimes keeps a small pistol in the basket of her walker.

"I actually own a firearm now," she said. "So I am not about willy-nilly taking guns away from people. But if you're threatening to kill someone, yeah, you need to surrender that firearm."

Isabelle took half of the family gun collection when she fled, a point of contention in their ongoing divorce. She said it was the only asset they had. She sleeps every night with a gun under her pillow.

"I will not leave without my pistol, even if I'm just taking my kids to school, because I am so afraid he will try to catch me off guard," she said.

Last year, in a rare moment of bipartisanship, Congress enacted the first meaningful slate of gun safety measures it had been able to pass in decades, a $13 billion package that includes funding and incentives for more states to adopt red flag laws. And last month, President Joe Biden announced plans to create an Office of Gun Violence Prevention.

But the Supreme Court could soon upend those plans as it shapes the Second Amendment landscape in a nation with more than 400 million guns in private hands.

"In some ways, I think that the promise of the red flag laws is that ... they're designed to work in a nation awash in guns," said Nick Suplina, senior vice president for law and policy at Everytown for Gun Safety, even if he thinks "it would be better to have a system where we were stopping things on the front end."

April Zeoli, a University of Michigan researcher who studies gun injury prevention, said laws that remove guns during a period of conflict can offer victims a safe window of time to leave. "Do we want to sort of sit back and just watch this (violence) continue to happen? Or do we want to embrace a tool that will allow, in some instances, courts and people to intervene?" Zeoli said.

She acknowledged that the research in her field is just getting started after a 20-year period when it was thwarted — under pressure from the gun industry — by Congress.

That's starting to change amid public outrage over mass shootings including the 2018 massacre at Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida. But there is much more she wants to know about gun violence at home.

"You would think anybody would be able to find out how many restraining orders there are in the United States in a given year, right? But we can't," Zeoli said. "In my own state, Michigan, how many restraining orders are there with firearm restrictions? I don't know. ... Nobody can tell me."

In San Diego, City Attorney Mara Elliott compared removing someone's guns during a time of crisis to taking keys away from a drunk driver, a public health practice the country has come to endorse.

"It would be nice if we could get people to realize that this does not have to be a partisan issue," said Ferguson, the former Spokane police officer. "It's a safety issue."

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The threats escalate quickly

Paulsen, who grew up near Chicago and moved to Georgia for college, met her husband through work.

Their marriage began happily, and he was the primary caretaker after they had the twins. He helped coach the boys' baseball teams as they grew up.

But over the years, he became increasingly unstable. He would stop on the way home with the boys to drink in a nearby cemetery. He got thrown out of a local restaurant. He twice threatened suicide. And he once shot at someone who tried to steal a four-wheeler from their garage — with the same weapon he would later use to shoot Paulsen and take his life.

"It escalated very rapidly when I told him I wanted a divorce," Paulsen said. "He was sexually abusive, he was emotionally abusive, he was unstable. But there had not been any prior (physical) violence. That's another thing people don't understand."

"You don't have to be black-and-blue to be in a domestic violence situation," she said.

The night before she was gunned down, Paulsen was honored for her volunteer work with the Acworth baseball community. (Both sons, Hunter and Fisher, are now college pitchers.) The next morning, still fearing her husband's wrath, she went to court for a concealed carry permit.

"It came in the mail 10 days later, when I was in a coma fighting for my life," Paulsen said. "So that's not the answer, you know?"

In the shadow of loss, a mother's long search for happiness

By MATT SEDENSKY AP National Writer

AJIJIC, Mexico (AP) — There's a look Sandy Phillips came to know each time she arrived somewhere a gunman had made famous. Her road trip through mass shooting sites went on for a decade and always seemed to have a new stop. When she reached it, she'd lock eyes with someone and see the catatonia, as plain as the weight of every leaden step they'd taken since the news that upended their life.

She, too, had inched through days when all the world's laughter went silent and its beauty was lost. In a morning fog, she'd question if it all was a nightmare, and in the black of night, when the grisly visions clawed her awake, she'd lie there wishing it was she who had died. Life became a torturous cycle punctuated by her own sobbing. She was sure she was creeping toward insanity.

Now she found herself in Newtown or Parkland or Uvalde or whatever fresh hell had just been put on the map. She had lessons to share, advice that could only be amassed by someone who'd lived through the same. So, she'd clasp the hands of the mourning and ask about the ones they'd been robbed of and mouth words that could surprise her as much as those who listened.

"You will," she said confidently, "find joy again."

She repeated it more times than she can count. She'd show up at the school or nightclub or church or wherever the latest battle erupted in this new American war, and she'd say them to the parents who put children in tiny caskets and the partners who never got to say goodbye. She knew them to be true even if she had to repeat them to convince herself.

It would be a journey, she told them, to rediscover happiness. A journey she was on, too.

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Here is life before Phillips' daughter was shot: She is sharing her dream house with her dream husband and has just landed her dream job. She goes to cocktail parties. She is fun to be around. Come summer, there are carefree vacations, and at year's end, there are Christmas trees in every room. All the teenage strife that once occupied her San Antonio home has faded. Her son is suddenly a responsible adult. Her daughter has blossomed into a poised and professional woman, on the cusp of college graduation and eager to make a name for herself as a sports reporter.

And here is life after: The dream home is lost to bankruptcy. The dream job is abandoned. She and her dream husband barely want to leave the house, much less fake their way through socializing. Even her best friend of decades has tired of her gloom. There will be no vacation. There will be no Christmas. All of that ended with a middle-of-the-night call on July 20, 2012, that caused her to slide down the wall, screaming the same two words over and over.

"Jessi's dead!" she bellowed. "Jessi's dead!"

Just hours earlier, she'd texted back and forth with her daughter, Jessica Ghawi, the electric 24-year-old who oozed so much enthusiasm, kindness and impulsivity that she reminded her mother of a Labrador puppy. From the time she was a little girl, she was marked by her empathy, befriending the friendless and comforting the crying. She was fiery, she was silly, she was irrepressible. She sailed down a mountain dressed like a banana the first time she skied. She sweet-talked her way to the front of the airport security line when she was late for a flight. Her smile sparkled, her conversation never ended, she stopped traffic in a dress.

And now she was gone.

Details dripped out from inside the Century 16 movie theater in Aurora, Colorado, where Ghawi was among the dozen killed, lives ended by a man with guns he never should have had.

And, for months, Phillips sunk into a paralyzing haze.

"This really happened. This is not a dream. This is my life now," she'd realize when she awoke.

Before, when headlines flashed of Columbine and Virginia Tech and Fort Hood and so many others, she absorbed the horror of it all for just a moment before turning away and returning to her safe and happy life. Something had to be done, she knew, but she left the task to others.

Now, it felt as if her whole identity was challenged. How could she ever again believe the idea that her country was the home of life, liberty and happiness, when her daughter's life and her own happiness had been taken?

She felt her daughter nagging at her, not just to rise from bed day after agonizing day, but to do something more.

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As the first Christmas that Phillips would not celebrate neared, another shooting erupted, this time at Sandy Hook Elementary School in Newtown, Connecticut. An anti-violence group reached out, asking if she might consider visiting Newtown to meet parents of the dead. She said yes and found herself in a room where she saw that familiar expression.

"We looked like that five months ago," she said to her husband Lonnie, who had been in Jessi's life since she was a little girl and saw her as a daughter of his own.

There, they met David Wheeler, who recalled learning of the shooting that claimed Phillips' daughter. "Those poor people," he thought at the time, pausing just for a moment before returning to work. Now, two of those people were before him, and he was living through the same.

Wheeler's 6-year-old son Ben was silly, rambunctious, athletic and funny, and loved being the center of attention. He sang Beatles songs in perfect pitch and shrieked in glee whenever a lighthouse came into view. He was about to get the training wheels off his bike, about to lose his baby teeth, about to start playing soccer, about to be so many things.

Phillips held Wheeler and offered a bevy of advice. She told him to forgive himself even as his mind would trick him into thinking he could have prevented his son's death. She told him to think of himself first and take the time to grieve before jumping into advocacy. She told him he might lose friends and be the target of conspiracy theories. She told him he'd be happy again.

Wheeler was left stunned that anyone who'd been through what Phillips had could stand before him just months later and express any sense of optimism about life.

"Not only do you wonder if you're going to ever be happy or feel happy or find happiness ever again," Wheeler said, "you wonder if it's wrong to do that."

Phillips' very presence gave him hope. And for her, a sense of purpose was found.

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For the first time since Jessi's death, a new life crystallized. Phillips vowed to travel to as many shooting sites as she could.

She'd pin on a button with her daughter's face and set out for whatever makeshift memorial had sprouted up. She'd pass the piles of flowers and stuffed animals and look for the photos of the lost. She felt a kinship with those whose loved ones' lives ended like Jessi's. When she looked into their eyes, she sensed

the hopes and dreams that were snuffed out.

Often, those closest to the dead were hard to find, holing up as she once did to shut the world out. She would make her way through the community, looking for people to make introductions, or reach out directly through Facebook and phone calls.

"You don't know me," Phillips said when she made her way to Rhonda Hart after her daughter was killed at a school shooting in Santa Fe, Texas, "but I know what you're going through."

Hart's 14-year-old daughter, Kimberly Vaughan, was a Girl Scout through and through, who devoured books and was a model of politeness, with an occasional burst of sassiness sneaking through. When she was 3, Hart once nudged her out the door by saying, "Come on, princess." She snapped back: "I'm not a princess, Mommy. I'm a race car."

Kimberly loved her American Sign Language class and dreamed of being an interpreter. The last time she saw her mother, they signed "I love you" to one another.

Now Hart was in her darkest moment. She cried constantly. She couldn't sleep. Her body hurt. Showering and changing her clothes had become optional. Nothing mattered.

On the other end of the phone was a woman who knew precisely how she felt.

"I kind of let my barriers down to talk to her," Hart said. "And we just kind of bonded."

Each place Phillips went, it repeated.

Always, there were vigils by candlelight and politicians with empty promises and first responders who'd seen too much. Always, there were reporters telling the same story that seemed to have been told a hundred times. Always, there was a cascade of grief.

"Every one is the same and every one is different," Phillips said.

Some people Phillips met along the way stayed in touch for years; others dissolved into tears in her arms, never to be heard from again. Some spiraled to suicide. Some of their tragedies were seared into public consciousness; others receded into a jumble of places where something awful happened, but few seemed to remember exactly what.

Along the way, there were diversions. For months, Phillips sat in a Colorado courthouse while her daughter's killer stood trial. She found herself in court again when she sued the seller of the guns used in the theater attack, but a law shielding gun sellers ensured it failed.

On the hook for the gun shop's legal fees, the Phillipses lost their home.

But the journey continued. They made an RV their home and took to the road even more.

Sometimes, at the site of one tragedy, they'd cut their stay short to rush to another. Sometimes months passed between shootings. Always, they returned to the road.

People would ask, "How could you keep doing this?"

They would reply, "How could we not?"

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As she pushed forward, Phillips' hopes soared from time to time that major gun reform could happen. She went to Capitol Hill and the White House and the campaign trail to elevate the cause. There she was, beside a president or a congresswoman. There she was, again and again, not just frustrated but sickened by the country's inability to confront the killings.

At each shooting site, she had nothing more on her agenda than reaching families of the dead and being a source of comfort and advice gleaned from her own experience. Often, though, those she met would reach out later, seeking to advocate for change the way she had.

Droves joined the cause, but the killings only continued and the political divide only widened.

Phillips didn't consider it radical to believe weapons of war had no place on American streets. Her parents gave her a gun for her 10th birthday and she enjoyed bird hunting as a girl. She was a Texan, long aligned with Republican politics. Now, she found their intransigence on guns maddening.

"Innocent people and children are dying," she said, "and people go, 'Oh well, nothing we can do.'"

It became a source of pain for Phillips and those who joined her work.

Marc Orfanos received a call from Phillips within a day of his son Telemachus' killing. The 27-year-old was one of 13 who were fatally shot at the Borderline Bar and Grill in Thousand Oaks, California, and he

felt his cynicism and disgust grow with each shooting that followed. His son was a Navy veteran who was just beginning to recover from the trauma of surviving the shooting a year earlier that killed 60 people at a Las Vegas concert.

The loss Orfanos felt rippled to people he never met. A little boy down the street wrote him a letter saying that when he'd walk his dog at night, he felt safer when he'd see Telemachus outside. A customer at the Infiniti dealership where Telemachus worked told of how she texted back and forth with him about the Dodgers. Childhood teachers showed up, talking of his humor and how he seemed to find something in common with everyone he met.

As so many showered the family in compassion, though, others turned to vitriol.

The day after the shooting, Orfanos' wife Susan gave a seething, voice-breaking TV interview in which she said, "I don't want prayers, I don't want thoughts, I want gun control." It made the family a target and unleashed a torrent of hate. Callers dialed them at home claiming it was all a lie and their son wasn't even dead. Letters blanketed the neighborhood saying the family was embroiled in a conspiracy to take away people's guns. All of it came as the horrifying details of Telemachus' death – on the floor of a bar, bleeding out from five bullet holes – tormented them.

Orfanos couldn't find consolation in his son's death bringing change, because it didn't.

"One doesn't get through it or over it or past it," he said. "It never changes. And the reason it never changes is because there seems to be no concerted and universal effort to stop this."

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Phillips had no idea how far her trip would go or how long it would last. As it stretched on, she lost faith in politicians to do anything, and grew disenchanted with some gun reform groups, too. The only thing she could rely on was more shootings, more ripples of devastating grief.

Brandon Wolf met Phillips after he survived the shooting at Pulse, a gay nightclub in Orlando, Florida, keeping in touch and crossing paths as their advocacy overlapped. Two of his best friends were killed in the attack. The pain remained even as the years passed.

He was plagued with guilt over making it out alive; it took years to feel as if he deserved to be happy again. When joy returned, it was dampened by the absence of two men he considered brothers. He could be guarded and vigilant. He was plagued by PTSD and insomnia.

"It severs your soul in a way that is irreparable," Wolf said. "You learn to find new joy. You learn to navigate the world in a different way. But it changes you forever."

As years passed tending to the grief of others, Phillips felt her own heartbreak evolve.

She had climbed out of the depths of debilitating sadness, broke the habits of eating and drinking too much, returned to putting makeup on her face and found a reason to rise from bed.

One day, she made it through without breaking into tears and when she realized it, she cried. Another, a thought of Jessi sent her into a fit of laughter, which in turn spurred a wave of guilt.

Other scars remained: Her thinking was so disjointed and attentiveness so fractured that she couldn't make it through a book for years. Filling out paperwork in a doctor's office seemed insurmountable. Sleep remained fitful. The sight of a mother and daughter together was piercing.

"I have that hole in my heart," she said. "I'm not complete anymore."

Being on the road and meeting so many others like herself often felt like it helped. She had purpose and helping others brought some solace.

But each tragedy also took its toll. She lost count of the places she'd been. Her phone filled with numbers for people she met, but she could no longer keep all their stories straight.

Isla Vista. Sutherland Springs. Pittsburgh. She'd try to come up with the sorrowful litany of her past decade and her mind would blank. Las Vegas. El Paso. Highland Park. Santa Barbara. Each of them came with blessings but also added to her grief. Virginia Beach. Colorado Springs. Another Aurora. She felt it all building, but pushed on. She was in Buffalo, where a racist took aim at supermarket shoppers, when she had to fly off to Uvalde, where little boys and girls were murdered and uniformed men stood by for a seeming eternity. She was more shaken than she had been in years. The weight of her journey became blatantly clear. The grief swallowed her. And, as quickly as it started 10 years earlier, her trip was over.

To the very end of her journey, Phillips never stopped telling those she met that they would find happiness again. She believed it to her core and needed them to believe it too.

Now, she had decided to put an end to a trip that came to define her.

But when your life is punctuated by the kind of tragedy she endured, it only has two parts. There is before and after.

After never rivals before. Everyone she met along the way affirmed it.

When Wheeler goes on vacation and a lighthouse appears, it's impossible not to think of the lanky, wavy-haired teen with a sly smile that his son might have become before the Newtown gunman ended his life.

When Girl Scout cookie season comes, Hart avoids any place they might appear. The cold snap of a fresh-from-the-freezer Thin Mint, once sold by her daughter, now makes her sick to her stomach.

When Wolf's birthday arrives, it doesn't matter what revelry it brings, there will always be two missing faces. Food doesn't taste as good. Songs don't sound the same. A visit to a nightclub, once carefree, now has him on high alert.

And for Orfanos, the gruesomeness of his son's death at the bar still permeates his thoughts. Life feels like a performance, an effort to fill time with distractions so as not to focus on the void that defines it.

"It's been 1,676 days," he said one day in June. "Maybe the sun has gone up and down 1,676 times, but it's all just one continuous day for us … Every morning you wake up and you put one foot in front of the other and you just make it through."

It turned out Phillips wasn't wrong when she offered confident promises of finding happiness. It was that two things could at once be true.

She had come so far in the space of a decade and yet, in some ways, nothing had changed. For all the therapy sessions, all the personal growth, all the disciplined work to rise from the suffocating depths of sadness, her daughter still was gone. The pace of killings only intensified. Instead of tighter gun laws, some states loosened them.

Exhausted, disgusted and impoverished, the Phillipses came to a radical conclusion: The country they'd pledged their loyalty to and spent their entire lives in had betrayed them.

"We had our daughter taken. We lost everything we had. And we lost our country," Phillips says.

They rented a house an hour south of Guadalajara, Mexico, in the lakeside town of Ajijic. They continue their advocacy, but since Uvalde, haven't returned to the road to visit shooting sites.

She is 73 now. He is 79. They know this is their final chapter. They want it to be a happy one.

The distance has been good. When a shooting happens in the U.S., they don't rush to the TV. They eat at restaurants and don't worry a gunman might intrude. They walk carefree through a street market, where a lone guitarist croons and strawberries are perfectly stacked. When fireworks go off, they have no fear someone is firing a gun. In their yard, clementines and limes grow and plumerias rain from the trees. Fountains spout, hummingbirds and orioles dart and mountains rise in the background. They even have let Christmas return.

"We're surrounded by beauty," Phillips said, "and all in this moment is good."

The next morning, though, the emotion rushed back. They were quietly sipping coffee on the patio when Sandy looked over at Lonnie and saw his eyes had welled with tears.

"I know, baby," she said, and no one had to explain anything more.

Sometimes, Jessi visits in her dreams, usually appearing as a toddler. When Phillips awakes, she'll squeeze her eyes closed and try and coax the vision to return. She begs for more.

"Let me feel her touch me," she says. "Let me feel her hug me. Let me feel her kiss me on the cheek again. Let me hear her laugh again. Let me hear her high heels coming up the walkway."

Let me, she wishes, be happy.

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Cutting-edge AI raises fears about risks to humanity. Are tech and political leaders doing enough?

By KELVIN CHAN AP Business Writer

LONDON (AP) — Chatbots like ChatGPT wowed the world with their ability to write speeches, plan vacations or hold a conversation as good as or arguably even better than humans do, thanks to cutting-edge artificial intelligence systems. Now, frontier AI has become the latest buzzword as concerns grow that the emerging technology has capabilities that could endanger humanity.

Everyone from the British government to top researchers and even major AI companies themselves are raising the alarm about frontier AI's as-yet-unknown dangers and calling for safeguards to protect people from its existential threats.

The debate comes to a head Wednesday, when British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak hosts a two-day summit focused on frontier AI. It's reportedly expected to draw a group of about 100 officials from 28 countries, including U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen and executives from key U.S. artificial intelligence companies including OpenAI, Google's Deepmind and Anthropic.

The venue is Bletchley Park, a former top secret base for World War II codebreakers led by Alan Turing. The historic estate is seen as the birthplace of modern computing because it is where Turing and others famously cracked Nazi Germany's codes using the world's first digital programmable computer.

In a speech last week, Sunak said only governments — not AI companies — can keep people safe from the technology's risks. However, he also noted that the U.K.'s approach "is not to rush to regulate," even as he outlined a host of scary-sounding threats, such as the use of AI to more easily make chemical or biological weapons.

"We need to take this seriously, and we need to start focusing on trying to get ahead of the problem," said Jeff Clune, an associate computer science professor at the University of British Columbia focusing on AI and machine learning.

Clune was among a group of influential researchers who authored a paper last week calling for governments to do more to manage risks from AI. It's the latest in a series of dire warnings from tech moguls like Elon Musk and OpenAI CEO Sam Altman about the rapidly evolving technology and the disparate ways the industry, political leaders and researchers see the path forward when it comes to reining in the risks and regulation.

It's far from certain that AI will wipe out mankind, Clune said, "but it has sufficient risk and chance of occurring. And we need to mobilize society's attention to try to solve it now rather than wait for the worst-case scenario to happen."

One of Sunak's big goals is to find agreement on a communique about the nature of AI risks. He's also unveiling plans for an AI Safety Institute that will evaluate and test new types of the technology and proposing creation of a global expert panel, inspired by the U.N. climate change panel, to understand AI and draw up a "State of AI Science" report.

The summit reflects the British government's eagerness to host international gatherings to show it has not become isolated and can still lead on the world stage after its departure from the European Union three years ago.

The U.K. also wants to stake its claim in a hot-button policy issue where both the U.S. and the 27-nation EU are making moves.

Brussels is putting the final touches on what's poised to be the world's first comprehensive AI regulations, while U.S. President Joe Biden signed a sweeping executive order Monday to guide the development of AI, building on voluntary commitments made by tech companies.

China, which along with the U.S. is one of the two world AI powers, has been invited to the summit, though Sunak couldn't say with "100% certainty" that representatives from Beijing will attend.

The paper signed by Clune and more than 20 other experts, including two dubbed the "godfathers" of AI — Geoffrey Hinton and Yoshua Bengio — called for governments and AI companies to take concrete action, such as by spending a third of their research and development resources on ensuring safe and

ethical use of advanced autonomous AI.

Frontier AI is shorthand for the latest and most powerful systems that go right up to the edge of AI's capabilities. They're based on foundation models, which are algorithms trained on a broad range of information scraped from the internet to provide a general, but not infallible, base of knowledge.

That makes frontier AI systems "dangerous because they're not perfectly knowledgeable," Clune said. "People assume and think that they're tremendously knowledgeable, and that can get you in trouble."

The meeting, though, has faced criticism that it's too preoccupied with far-off dangers.

"The focus of the summit is actually a bit too narrow," said Francine Bennett, interim director of the Ada Lovelace Institute, a policy research group in London focusing on AI.

"We risk just forgetting about the broader set of risk and safety" and the algorithms that are already part of everyday life, she said at a Chatham House panel last week.

Deb Raji, a University of California, Berkeley, researcher who has studied algorithmic bias, pointed to problems with systems already deployed in the U.K., such as police facial recognition systems that had a much higher false detection rate for Black people and an algorithm that botched a high school exam.

The summit is a "missed opportunity" and marginalizes communities and workers that are most affected by AI, more than 100 civil society groups and experts said in an open letter to Sunak.

Skeptics say the U.K. government has set its summit goals too low, given that regulating AI will not be on the agenda, focusing instead on establishing "guardrails."

Sunak's call to not rush into regulation is reminiscent of "the messaging we hear from a lot of the corporate representatives in the U.S.," Raji said. "And so I'm not surprised that it's also making its way into what they might be saying to U.K. officials."

Tech companies shouldn't be involved in drafting regulations because they tend to "underestimate or downplay" the urgency and full range of harms, Raji said. They also aren't so open to supporting proposed laws "that might be necessary but might effectively endanger their bottom line," she said.

DeepMind and OpenAI didn't respond to requests for comment. Anthropic said co-founders Dario Amodei and Jack Clark would be attending.

Microsoft said in a blog post that it looked forward "to the U.K.'s next steps in convening the summit, advancing its efforts on AI safety testing, and supporting greater international collaboration on AI governance."

The government insists it will have the right mix of attendees from government, academia, civil society and business.

The Institute for Public Policy Research, a center-left U.K. think tank, said it would be a "historic mistake" if the tech industry was left to regulate itself without government supervision.

"Regulators and the public are largely in the dark about how AI is being deployed across the economy," said Carsten Jung, the group's senior economist. "But self-regulation didn't work for social media companies, it didn't work for the finance sector, and it won't work for AI."

Cyprus proposes to establish a sea corridor to deliver a stream of vital humanitarian aid to Gaza

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

NICOSIA, Cyprus (AP) — Cyprus is working out with partners in the European Union and the Middle East the logistics to establish a sea corridor to deliver a stream of vital humanitarian aid to Gaza from the island's main port of Limassol once the situation on the ground permits it, authorities said Tuesday.

A senior government official — who spoke on condition of anonymity because he's not authorized to publicly discuss details of the proposal — said Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "wasn't opposed" to the idea pitched by Cypriot President Nikos Christodoulides last week.

Gaza's humanitarian needs have escalated after the Israel-Hamas war erupted following the Palestinian militant group's surprise Oct.7 attacks in Israel which left nearly 1,400 Israelis dead and at least 240 taken

hostage. Israel retaliated with a military operation that has so far left over 8,000 Palestinians dead.

The underlying premise of Cyprus' proposal is to have a constant flow of large quantities of assistance delivered by sea during what the official called "humanitarian pauses" in the fighting to enable aid to reach those in need.

"We want to be ready to start sending aid once a window of opportunity opens," he said.

The official said the proposal has the support of many fellow EU member states including Ireland, Spain, France and the Netherlands, as well as Arab nations such as Egypt, Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman and Jordan. The U.S. government and the Palestinian authority in the West Bank have also been apprised of the proposal.

Christodoulides is scheduled to speak to Netanyahu by phone later Tuesday.

"Everyone recognizes the need for this corridor and that it is feasible," the official said, adding that the need for even larger quantities of aid such as medical supplies, food and clothing will be more pressing as the Israeli offensive against Hamas in Gaza has been stepped up.

According to the official, Israel's paramount concern is to ensure the aid doesn't contain anything that Hamas could weaponize. Israel also wants to make sure the content of containers is vetted before leaving Limassol.

Cyprus is also in contact with the Palestinian authorities to determine which aid is needed the most.

The official said they are ironing out logistical details including the key question of where the ships will dock to offload aid and which international agencies in Gaza will be tasked with distributing it. Another issue is whether the supplies will be shipped by commercial or naval vessels.

The Mediterranean country is open to all suggestions on how to handle aid delivery effectively, whether offloading the supplies either directly in Gaza, or for them to be sent to either Israel or Egypt and then to the enclave.

"Cyprus is offering the geographical location, the infrastructure and the political will for this proposal to proceed," the official said.

Maine mass shooter's family reached out to sheriff 5 months before rampage, sheriff's office says

By DAVID SHARP, ROBERT F. BUKATY, JAKE BLEIBERG and BERNARD CONDON Associated Press

LEWISTON, Maine (AP) — Five months before the deadliest mass shooting in Maine's history, the gunman's family alerted the local sheriff that they were becoming concerned about his deteriorating mental health while he had access to firearms, authorities said Monday.

After the alert, the Sagadohoc County Sheriff's Office reached out to officials of Robert Card's Army Reserve unit, which assured deputies that they would speak to Card and make sure he got medical attention, Sheriff Joel Merry said.

The family's concern about Card's mental health dated back to early this year before the sheriff's office was contacted in May, marking the earliest in a string of interactions that police had with the 40-year-old firearms instructor before he marched into a Lewiston bowling alley and a bar last Wednesday, killing 18 people and wounding 13 others.

After an intensive two-day search that put residents on edge, he was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot.

Card underwent a mental health evaluation last summer after accusing soldiers of calling him a pedophile, shoving one and locking himself in his room during training in New York, officials said. A bulletin sent to police shortly after last week's attack said Card had been committed to a mental health facility for two weeks after "hearing voices and threats to shoot up" a military base.

Documents released from the sheriff on Monday gave the most detailed timeline yet of other warning signs and failed efforts to stop the gunman months before he killed.

On Sept. 15, a sheriff's deputy was sent to visit Card's home for a wellness check at the request of the reserve unit after a soldier said he was afraid Card was "going to snap and commit a mass shooting" be-

cause he was hearing voices again. The deputy went to Card's trailer but could not find him — nor the next day on a return visit. The sheriff's department then sent out a statewide alert for help locating Card with a warning that he was known to be "armed and dangerous" and that officers should use extreme caution.

By this time, Card's reserve unit had grown sufficiently concerned that it had decided to take away his military-issued firearms, the sheriff's office was told. Army spokesperson Lt. Col. Ruth Castro confirmed that account, adding that Card was also declared "non-deployable" and that multiple attempts were made to contact him.

According to the deputy's report after visiting Card's home, he reached out to the reserves' unit commander who assured him the Army was trying to get treatment for Card. The commander also said he thought "it best to let Card have time to himself for a bit."

The deputy then reached out to Card's brother. The brother said he had put Card's firearms in a gun safe in the family farm and would work with their father to move the guns somewhere else and make sure Card couldn't get other firearms.

Authorities recovered a multitude of weapons while searching for Card after the shooting and believe he had legally purchased them, including a Ruger SFAR rifle found in his car, officials said Monday. A Smith & Wesson M&P15 rifle and Smith & Wesson M&P .40-caliber handgun were with his body.

Authorities have not said whether they believe Card planned the Oct. 25 rampage in advance. Nearly three months ago, he tried and failed to acquire a device used to quiet gunshots, a gun shop owner in Auburn said.

Rick LaChapelle, owner of Coastal Defense Firearms, said Card purchased a suppressor, also called a silencer, online and arranged to pick it up at his shop.

Card already had submitted information to the federal government to purchase it, and federal authorities had approved the sale to that point, he said.

When Card filled out the form at LaChapelle's gun shop to pick up the silencer Aug. 5, he answered "yes" to the question: "Have you ever been adjudicated as a mental defective OR have you ever been committed to a mental institution?"

"As soon as he answered that 'yes' we know automatically that this is disqualifying, he's not getting a silencer today," LaChapelle said.

Silencers are more heavily regulated under federal law than most firearms. Federal law requires buyers to apply with the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and be approved. The dealer must do a background check ,too

He said Card was polite when notified of the denial, mentioned something about the military and said he would "come right back" after consulting his lawyer.

Investigators are facing increasing public scrutiny and still searching for a motive for the massacre but have increasingly focused on Card's mental health history.

On Monday, Gov. Janet Mills, a Democrat, held a news conference to provide an update on the response to the shooting. The conference turned contentious quickly when Mills declined to provide information about what the investigation has turned up so far.

Mills said state lawmakers would revisit Maine gun control laws. Proposals for tighter laws have stalled or failed in recent legislative sessions.

"I'm not going to stand here today and tell you I'm proposing X, Y and Z," she said. "I'm here to listen, work with others and get people around the table as promptly as possible."

Card's body was found late Friday in a trailer at a recycling center in Lisbon Falls, but it was unclear when he died.

Residents of Lewiston returned to work Monday, the morning after coming together to mourn those lost in the shootings. More than 1,000 people attended Basilica of Saints Peter & Paul for a vigil in Lewiston.

The deadliest shooting in Maine's history stunned a state of 1.3 million people that has relatively little violent crime and only 29 killings in all of 2022.

The Lewiston shootings were the 36th mass killing in the U.S. this year, according to a database maintained by the AP and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. The database includes every

mass killing since 2006 from all weapons in which four or more people, excluding the offender, were killed within a 24-hour time frame.

'My heart was always just with the sheep.' One Navajo's push to keep tradition vibrant

By MELINA WALLING and JOHN LOCHER Associated Press

GANADO, Ariz. (AP) — Growing up in Ganado, a small town in Navajo Nation in eastern Arizona, Nikyle Begay always wanted to visit their grandmother's sheep.

Begay's parents had grown up raising livestock, and their dad had always wanted to raise sheep and cattle, but it was a hard way to make a living. In a family with seven children, Begay and their younger sisters were the ones who felt drawn to the sheep. And as a kid, Begay, who is non-binary and uses the pronoun they, always felt connected to their grandmother. While she worked, carding and spinning wool outdoors, Begay would play with Hot Wheels cars, carving little roads in the sand and clay.

"You can never say that you're broke, that you're hungry, that you're bored, that you don't know what to do, because you have two hands," Begay remembered their grandmother saying while teaching them to weave.

It was a sentiment passed through the generations, one Begay says their great-grandmother had proven by winning the family's first truck, a 1950's Chevy, in a raffle as part of a local sheep shearing contest. By the time Begay was 13, they had gotten involved in local Future Farmers of America programs and started keeping a flock.

When Begay grew up, they moved to Tempe, outside Phoenix, and worked for an electronics manufacturing company. Then the company shifted its operations, and Begay had the option to move to California or Florida. They were torn about the decision, and felt disconnected and lonely.

So Begay came home. It was quiet out here, not loud like in Tempe, making them feel more grounded. Upon returning, Begay learned that their grandmother had, in a Navajo custom, buried their umbilical cord in a sheep corral in the hopes that they would carry on the tradition and become a shepherd and a weaver.

"My heart was always just with the sheep," they said.

Now 34, Begay has 15 sheep. When it's time for shearing, they tie their hooves into place and cut the wool by hand with a special pair of scissors. The sheep lies down, calm, as Begay pulls up a section and snips deftly with even strokes. If the sheep gets startled, they soothe them with a soft word or touch. Begay knows each sheep by shades of brown or white, by their horns and by their personalities—assertive, quiet and occasionally sassy or mean.

Begay's family used to have around 150 head, but that isn't possible now. A highway fence has been put up, and the grazing limits are lower. Erosion is common, because more than two decades of drought has meant fewer native grasses to hold the land in place when it does rain. The drought means spending more on feed in the winter. And traders no longer place as high a value on Navajo hand-weaving as they once did, because many, though not all, aspects of weaving can be accomplished by machine. In some ways, the art is dying.

Begay is determined to help stop that from happening. In 2020, they started Rainbow Fiber Co-Op, a wool co-op intended to protect ancestral flocks on Navajo Nation and to help other Diné (Navajo) shepherds get fair prices for their wool, especially wool from the Navajo-Churro breed prized by weavers around the world for their range of natural colors and quality of the fibers.

During the pandemic, they started teaching weaving classes on Zoom, which continue to this day each morning. And Begay is vocal about the importance of sheep and the art of weaving. Their Instagram, @navajoshepherd, shares weaving projects, historical and cultural moments of significance, and of course, pictures of the furry friends they've bonded with.

It also provides a window into the cultivating of wool for the purposes of weaving, which is a multi-step craft that requires lots of specialized knowledge. Some of the co-op's wool is processed commercially, but Begay knows how to do every part by hand.

After shearing, Begay uses a long platform made of chicken wire to sift out bits of wool that aren't the right length. They wash the wool by soaking it in water and a bit of dish soap.

Next comes carding — brushing the wool out on a rotating drum to prepare it for making yarn — and sometimes dyeing, a task Begay often takes to California where their best friend has the garage space for it. And finally, there's spinning, which Begay makes look easy — evenly feeding tufts of wool onto a roll that turns with the gentle up-and-down motion of a foot pedal.

Then they weave.

In front of a loom at the dining room table, Begay moves long sticks up and down between the fibers, threads brightly colored strands and uses a weaving comb to lock each line of a project into place. Begay's current double-sided work, which has completely different colors and patterns on each side, requires deep patience — it can take hours to finish even just a small segment. Begay says many Navajo weavers have special ceremonies to cleanse themselves of the frustration and strong emotions that accompany the weaving.

"They say with weaving, you're intertwining yourself with every weft," Begay said.

Like keeping sheep, weaving is an emotionally potent practice for Begay, who describes occasionally having to return from mentally dark places. They sometimes wonder whether keeping the tradition alive even matters in the face of big forces like climate change, drought, and modern development. But Begay also thinks that by raising awareness, combined with simple solutions like adding interested young people to the grazing permits some elders might not be using, there's hope for the future.

And Begay feels the satisfaction of fulfilling their ancestors' prayers. They describe a day in 2020, when many of their family members were sick with COVID-19 and wildfire smoke had painted the morning sky with a choking orange sunrise. It felt apocalyptic. Distraught, Begay set about morning chores and took the sheep out to graze.

One of the sheep seemed to notice their distress and wouldn't leave them alone. As Begay sat on a rock to watch the sun come up, the sheep came right up, face-to-face — and sneezed. Begay was covered in sheep snot, but still felt content.

"You take care of the sheep and they will take care of you," Begay said.

Group seeks to clear names of all accused, convicted or executed for witchcraft in Massachusetts

By STEVE LeBLANC Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — In 1648, Margaret Jones, a midwife, became the first person in Massachusetts — the second in New England — to be executed for witchcraft, decades before the infamous Salem witch trials.

Nearly four centuries later, the state and region are still working to come to grips with the scope of its witch trial legacy.

The latest effort comes from a group dedicated to clearing the names of all those accused, arrested or indicted for witchcraft in Massachusetts, whether or not the accusations ended in hanging.

The Massachusetts Witch-Hunt Justice Project, made up of history buffs and descendants, is hoping to persuade the state to take a fuller reckoning of its early history, according to Josh Hutchinson, the group's leader.

Hundreds of individuals were accused of witchcraft in what would become the Commonwealth of Massachusetts between 1638 and 1693. Most escaped execution.

While much attention has focused on clearing the names of those put to death in Salem, most of those caught up in witch trials throughout the 1600s have largely been ignored, including five women hanged for witchcraft in Boston between 1648 and 1688.

"It's important that we correct the injustices of the past," said Hutchinson, who noted he counts both accusers and victims among his ancestors. "We'd like an apology for all of the accused or indicted or arrested."

For now, the group has been collecting signatures for a petition but hopes to take their case to the

Statehouse.

Among those accused of witchcraft in Boston was Ann Hibbins, sister-in-law to Massachusetts Gov. Richard Bellingham, who was executed in 1656. A character based on Hibbins would later appear in Nathaniel Hawthorne's "The Scarlet Letter," published in 1850.

Another accused Boston witch, known as Goodwife Ann Glover or Goody Glover, was hanged in the city in 1688. A plaque dedicated to her is located on the front of a Catholic church in the city's North End neighborhood, describing her as "the first Catholic martyr in Massachusetts." It's one of the few physical reminders of the city's witch trial history.

The witch justice group helped successfully spearhead a similar effort in Connecticut, home of the first person executed for witchcraft in the American colonies in 1647 -- Alse Young. The last witchcraft trial in Connecticut happened in 1697 and ended with the charges being dismissed.

Connecticut state senators in May voted by 34-1 to absolve 12 women and men convicted of witchcraft — 11 of whom were executed — more than 370 years ago and apologize for the "miscarriage of justice" that occurred over a dark 15-year-period of the state's colonial history.

The resolution, which lists the nine women and two men who were executed and the one woman who was convicted and given a reprieve, passed the House of Representatives by a vote of 121-30. Because it's a resolution, it doesn't require the governor's signature.

For many, the distant events in Boston, Salem and beyond are both fascinating and personal. That includes David Allen Lambert, chief genealogist for the New England Historic Genealogical Society.

Lambert counts his 10th great grandmother — Mary Perkins Bradbury — among the accused who was supposed to be hanged in 1692 in Salem but escaped execution.

"We can't change history but maybe we can send the accused an apology," he said. "It kind of closes the chapter in a way."

Massachusetts has already made efforts to come to terms with its history of witch trials — proceedings that allowed "spectral evidence" in which victims could testify that the accused harmed them in a dream or vision.

That effort began almost immediately when Samuel Sewall, a judge in the 1692-1693 Salem witch trials, issued a public confession in a Boston church five years later, taking "the blame and shame of" the trials and asking for forgiveness.

In 1711, colonial leaders passed a bill clearing the names of some convicted in Salem.

In 1957, the state Legislature issued a kind of apology for Ann Pudeator and others who "were indicted, tried, found guilty, sentenced to death and executed" in 1692 for witchcraft. The resolution declared the Salem trials "shocking, and the result of a wave of popular hysterical fear of the Devil in the community."

In 2001, acting Gov. Jane Swift signed a bill exonerating five women executed during the witch trials in Salem.

In 2017, Salem unveiled a memorial for the victims. The ceremony came 325 years to the day when Sarah Good, Elizabeth Howe, Susannah Martin, Rebecca Nurse and Sarah Wildes were hanged at a site in Salem known as Proctor's Ledge. Nineteen were hanged during the Salem witch trials while a 20th victim was pressed to death.

In 2022, lawmakers exonerated Elizabeth Johnson Jr., clearing her name 329 years after she was convicted of witchcraft in 1693 and sentenced to death at the height of the Salem witch trials. Johnson is believed to be the last accused Salem witch to have her conviction set aside.

Other states have worked to confront similar histories.

In Pownal, Vermont, a town that borders Massachusetts and New York, a dedication ceremony was held last month for a historical marker recognizing the survivor of Vermont's only recorded witch trial. Widow Krieger was said to have escaped drowning in the Hoosic River when tried as a witch in 1785, according to the Legends and Lore marker.

Accusers believed witches floated but Krieger sank and was saved, the marker states.

The Sept. 16 dedication ceremony included a witches' walk, in which people dressed as witches walked

across a bridge to the marker site along the Hoosic River.

"I am sure Widow Krieger would have been quite happy to join our witches' walk today in defiance of those who feel they have the right to accuse someone they feel looks different, acts different or has a personality that they might find odd, of being a witch," said Joyce Held, a member of the Pownal Historical Society, which worked with the Bennington Museum to get the marker.

In a first, MIT trains students to resolve clean energy conflicts

By AMY HARDER, Cipher News undefined

CAMBRIDGE, Mass. (AP) — As the United States injects hundreds of billions of dollars into clean energy through its signature climate law, known as the Inflation Reduction Act, criticism is growing louder about where, how and whether new development should be allowed.

As opposition grows, once-routine regulatory processes are taking several years, if they are completed at all. Some communities are concerned about landscape changes, some property values and others wildlife preservation. Layered on top of these debates is misinformation, which sows doubt and mistrust among developers and communities.

A new class at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology offers a glimpse into a novel way of resolving these types of conflicts.

MIT is offering a first-of-its-kind course that trains students to be mediators in conflicts over clean energy projects. Supervised by a professional mediator, students work directly with developers, local officials and community members. Students get academic credit and hands-on experience addressing real-world dilemmas, while the community and developer get free help resolving conflict.

"Most coverage of clean-energy opposition sloppily reaches for the term NIMBYism," said Larry Susskind, the MIT professor behind the course, during one recent class a reporter visited. He was referring to the common acronym for "not in my backyard" opposition. Ultimately, Susskind said, such framing delegitimatizes affected community members and stokes acrimony.

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EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is a collaboration between Cipher News and The Associated Press.

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Curbing climate change — and extreme weather for future generations — depends squarely on society's ability to rapidly build new clean energy infrastructure despite the messy puzzle of local, state and federal reviews projects must overcome.

Today, the technologies being built are mostly wind and solar farms, storage facilities and powerlines. In the coming decades, new projects will include everything from carbon dioxide pipelines to facilities capturing CO2 directly from the sky to renewable hydrogen production.

There has been debate in Washington D.C. and elsewhere around the country about how to speed up project reviews. Most has focused on streamlining permitting processes, such as limiting the time local officials can spend on reviews and giving state and federal governments power to overrule local authorities. New York and California recently passed such laws and these could become models for the whole country.

But "this risks simply ignoring community concerns instead of finding ways to make the siting process more just in the eyes of those who are protesting," Susskind and research colleagues write in an article set to be published in the January 2024 issue of the scientific journal Cell Reports Sustainability.

In Susskind's class, dubbed the MIT Renewable Energy Clinic, he hopes to create collaboration that may slow down projects initially by incorporating more input but ultimately speed them up by avoiding later-stage conflicts.

In one recent Friday afternoon class, students debated everything from environmental justice concerns to misinformation to oil companies. Ultimately, several students said they will need to put their own opinions aside to assume the role of mediator.

"We must find a way to be fair and create equal conditions for all parties," Leyla Uysal, a design school

student from Harvard University with an urban planning background, said. "It's going to be difficult, but I will educate myself not to take sides."

The students, about two dozen across a range of disciplines, ages and other area schools, recently completed a certification exam. The certification prepares them to begin the real-world part of the class. The projects in this first course are two solar farms proposed by Chicago-based Ranger Power for counties in Michigan, which are already facing opposition.

"We're not starting at the beginning," Susskind said. "We're coming in because they are stalled."

It's not Susskind's first hands-on academic effort. He helped create the first student-led cybersecurity clinic in 2021 to help defend public infrastructure from hacking. It has since expanded to 15 universities and received $20 million from Google this summer.

He hopes to create a similar national consortium of universities serving communities and projects in their respective regions regarding clean energy.

Columbia University is already talking with Susskind. Abraham Silverman directs a new initiative at the university focused on permitting and other non-technical challenges in the clean energy transition, and said he favors processes that focus more on expediting permitting decisions, but that he's "intrigued" by Susskind's approach of more directly engaging communities.

"That is a very Jeffersonian democracy approach on siting and permitting," said Silverman, a former top official at the New Jersey Board of Public Utilities. "It's refreshing to have people like Larry take a look at these kinds of things."

One foundational challenge Susskind faces is potential lack of trust from community members skeptical of outsiders.

"Some students may naively think that coming in as MIT is a good thing, but they may find out soon enough that's a bad thing," said Patrick Field, a senior mediator at the Consensus Building Institute who is supervising the class and recently visited Cambridge.

Undergraduate student Anushree Chaudhuri has a cautionary tale. She faced angry phone calls (or no callbacks at all) while studying projects this summer in California on behalf of research associated with the clinic. Part of the problem, she said, was wording on the webpage forthe clinic that implied preference for development over engagement, which has since been changed, she said.

"For students who are new to this kind of engagement with communities, it can be hard to develop empathy unless you start having conversations," Chaudhuri says. "And it can be hard to have empathy if everyone angrily hangs up on you."

Students are seeking to engage with local company representatives, public regulators and community members in the two Michigan solar projects over the coming weeks, with the goal of making progress by mid-December.

Progress will be measured not by the projects moving forward, but instead by all stakeholders finding more understanding of the other side, Field said: "Did people walk away with emotions turned down and a sense of understanding and respect, even if an agreement doesn't exist?"

On the subject of trust, Sarah Mills, an urban and regional planning professor at the University of Michigan, who is not involved with the clinic, noted the rural-urban divide that exists in many states. Rural residents often trust schools with deeper rural ties more than universities like hers, she said. She is exploring the potential for agricultural extension programs to act as facilitators in renewable energy siting conflicts.

The next iteration of the MIT course, slated for spring, may engage with communities and developers on projects that are not (yet anyway) at loggerheads, according to Susskind.

"We're not going to give up if we fail the first or second time," Susskind said. "It may be a function of the places we choose to work. It may be easier to start with a place that isn't already in a battle."

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Veterans are more likely than most to kill themselves with guns. Families want to keep them safe.

By CLAIRE GALOFARO AP National Writer

FLINT, Texas (AP) — She leaned out of the tent at a small-town summer festival, hoping someone would stop to ask about her tattoos, her T-shirt, the framed pictures of her son on a table in the back of the booth.

Barbie Rohde has made herself a walking billboard for this cause. She feels called to say the words, as much as they sometimes rattle the people who stop at her booth: "veteran suicide."

A man in an Army cap recoiled and walked away. His wife said she was sorry, he suffers from post-traumatic stress disorder and struggles to speak of it.

"I worry for him and for us every day," she said.

Rohde reached underneath her display tables, grabbed a gun lock and wrapped it in a blue bandana, printed with the phone number for the Department of Veterans Affairs crisis line: call 988, press 1.

"Here's some free goodies for you," she said, and tucked it discreetly into the bag with two T-shirts the woman bought.

Rohde runs the most active chapter of a nonprofit called Mission 22, aimed at ending the scourge of military and veteran suicide, which kills thousands every year, at a rate far higher than the general population. Three-quarters of those who take their own lives use guns.

One of them was her 25-year-old son, Army Sgt. Cody Bowman.

For decades, discussions of suicide prevention skirted fraught questions about firearms, experts say, and the Army has not implemented measures that might be controversial. But a growing conviction has taken hold, among researchers, the VA, ordinary people like Rohde: If America wants to get serious about addressing an epidemic of suicide, it must find a way to honor veterans, respect their rights to own a gun, but keep it out of their hands on their darkest days.

Rohde travels to towns all over conservative, gun-loving east Texas. At this festival, the Marine Corps booth down the street was auctioning off an AR-15 to raise money for a children's charity. She passed a toy booth, where a popular item was a plastic version of the rifle. She stopped to visit a friend who hands out free gun locks to anyone who buys his T-shirts, some supporting former President Donald Trump, others that declare: "God. Guns. Coffee."

This is a place where people believe deeply in the Second Amendment, that guns are fundamental to the identity of the nation, that guns protect their families. And Rohde believes that, too — except, sometimes, the tool you thought would protect you might be what destroys you.

She tells her story to anyone who will listen: She had been worried about her son. Most of his left hand had been blown off in a training accident. He told his mom he didn't know if he could continue his military career, and all he'd ever wanted to be was a soldier. He asked for his guns, which she had been holding. She'd hesitated. But they were his, and this is Texas.

Then one day, she got home from work waiting tables. She heard a car, looked out the window and saw men in military dress uniforms heading toward her house.

"Your son Sgt. Cody Bowman died of a self-inflicted gunshot wound," they said. For the rest of the day, Rohde sat on the floor and screamed.

She didn't eat for six days. She decided she wanted to be with her son.

She sat on her couch, crushed up sleeping pills, put them in a Blue Moon and drank it down. She guesses that subconsciously she didn't want to die because she called a friend, who alerted her husband and she woke up in the hospital.

So when people say that if a person doesn't have a gun, they'll find some other way, she disagrees. She tried, and she lived.

Her son didn't get that second chance.

Now her life is consumed with this volunteer work, so that when she visits her son's grave, she can whisper all the things she's done in his name, to spare another mother this agony, to make him proud of her.

"I'm glad I didn't have a gun. Because if I would have had a gun, I believe I'd have finished the job. I need to be here, I still have a lot to do," she said.

"And I wish Cody wouldn't have had a gun."

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Barbie Rohde is a conservative, a devoted fan of Trump. She doesn't like phrases like "gun control" and doesn't believe in mandated gun restrictions. But something more needs to be done, she thinks.

"I truly believe that having such ready access to weapons is a big problem, the easy access for our military who are suffering," she said. "That's not a popular opinion for me to have. And I don't care because that's what I believe."

Others believe this now, too.

The VA invited Joe Bartozzi, the president of the National Shooting Sports Foundation, to speak to health care providers at a conference on suicide in 2020. Bartozzi was nervous. He worried things might devolve into the heated debates he's gotten used to: either guns are bad or guns are great, and there's nothing in between.

But that didn't happen. The doctors really wanted to know about firearms, how to talk to patients without it sounding like a gun grab — and what the industry could do to help.

"It's a big change for us to be talking so directly about firearms," said Matt Miller, who runs the VA's suicide prevention efforts. The data had become too obvious to ignore any longer: the vast majority of people who attempt suicide do not die. A tiny fraction, only about 5% of people attempting suicide, use a gun. But guns are deadly almost every time, and so end up accounting for over half of suicide deaths. For veterans, that jumps to 75%.

Experts say that traumatic experiences at war play a role in veterans having a suicide rate 1.5 times higher than others. Yet even those with no combat history die by suicide at a much higher rate. What they have in common, researchers say, is demographics that are especially vulnerable to suicide: predominately white men with access to and a familiarity with firearms.

The military tasked a panel of researchers with recommending solutions. In February, that committee issued a 115-page report, including gun-safety measures like waiting periods on military property and raising the minimum age for servicemembers to buy guns to 25.

"We're not trying to take people's guns, we're trying to prevent people from killing themselves," said Dr. Craig Bryan, a veteran and Ohio State University psychologist who was on the panel. "I say it's possible to value Second Amendment rights and also be willing to prevent suicide. Those two things can coexist."

But the Defense Department punted on endorsing the gun restrictions, creating another panel to study them instead.

Gun suicides in the United States reached an all-time high last year , Johns Hopkins University found. The debate about guns usually centers on homicides and mass shootings, but suicides account for more than half of American gun deaths. Policy changes — like requiring permits, waiting periods, red flag laws — actually do more to prevent suicide than homicides, researchers say.

The biggest misconception, Bryan said, is that guns aren't the problem. If someone doesn't have a gun, people assume, they will find another way to end their life.

Suicide is an impulsive act. Research has shown that three-quarters of people move from thought to action within an hour. For 24%, it's less than five minutes.

"And what they reach for is the greatest predictor of whether they will live or die," Bryan said. Intentional overdoses, for example, end in death in 2% of attempts — it is slow, there is time to get help. Suicidal people, given a chance to change their mind, usually do, Bryan said.

When the District of Columbia put barriers on a bridge many jumped from, some scoffed: there was another bridge in eyesight, people would just jump there instead. But they didn't. Bridge suicides dropped to almost nothing. In the United Kingdom, a particular drug became a common way people killed themselves. Lawmakers mandated a change in the packaging, making it more time-consuming to open. Suicides plummeted.

Bryan calls it "strategic inconvenience."

The VA is now working with Bartozzi's gun lobby; they set up suicide prevention booths at gun shows, encourage gun shops and ranges to offer to store firearms in a time of crisis, encourage responsible storage at home — anything Bartozzi said, to "put distance between the thought and the trigger."

That's why Barbie Rohde sneaks gun locks into her customers' bags. A representative from the VA told her that they met a soldier who had decided to end her life and went for her gun. But it was locked. By the time she found the key, the impulse passed. She decided to stay alive, and the military officers did not have to knock on her parents' door to repeat the horrible script Rohde endured.

But in Kingsport, Tennessee, the Fox family heard the car pull into the driveway.

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"Your son, Parker Gordon Fox, was found dead at his home this morning from an apparent self-inflicted gunshot wound," they said.

His mother screamed.

"Not my child! Not my boy! Not my baby!"

When he was a kid, he pretended to be a superhero. He'd tie a blanket around his neck as a cape. He was 4 when his little brother was born, and he greeted them at the car, holding out another cape to put on the baby.

He was tiny for a long time. When he started high school, he wasn't yet 5-feet tall and weighed less than 100 pounds. He was well-loved, and his friends defended him from bullies. His parents, Brenda and David Fox, wonder if that's what drew him to the military: once he grew big and strong, he needed to defend others like he had been defended.

Parker was 19 when he told his parents he wanted to join the Army, in 2014, and his mother tried not to let him see her cry.

As the years went by, he told his parents about military colleagues taking their lives. They asked him if he was OK. And he'd say, "I have bad days, but everyone has bad days." And that sounded like the answer they'd expect.

In 2020, they didn't get to see him much because of COVID restrictions. He was a sniper trainer, based at Fort Moore, formerly Fort Benning, in Georgia, about six hours away.

He got leave in July 2020 and visited for a weekend. People have asked his parents if they now believe he came to say goodbye. But he was talking about his future, leaving the military, going back to college, buying a house. He left Sunday afternoon and his dad texted him a joke about the beer he'd left in the fridge: grapefruit flavored. I wish you would have left better beer behind, his dad said, and Parker responded with laughter.

He was already out drinking with friends, they'd later learn. That night he wrecked his car, with a friend in the passenger seat. No one was hurt, but he was drunk and felt ashamed. He told his friend, "I could have killed you." He went home and kept drinking.

"It's not like a person like him is vulnerable all the time," his dad said. "They're vulnerable during those low, low, low moments."

His roommate found him dead in his bathroom. He was 25.

He left a note.

It started out tidy, then the handwriting grew more frantic.

"I have to do this quick because I have a lot of friends who would stop me."

That's the part that gutted them the most: It had to be fast, or someone would have saved him.

"If he didn't have that gun would he still be with us? Absolutely," his mother said. "I believe that down in my soul. He would have gotten through until the morning and he would have said, 'God, that was a bad night but I'm here today and let's go.'"

A relative called to ask: "What are you telling people?" There was an implication: this was shameful, this should be hidden.

Tell people the truth, they said.

"There was never shame. I'm so proud of my son, of the boy and the man he was. I don't have one ounce of shame in him. I have regret," David Fox said.

Their congressman heard, and called. He said he was sponsoring legislation to address veteran suicide — in community organizations outside of the VA — and asked if he could put their son's name on it. Brenda Fox always loved hearing her son's name. Then it was spoken on the floor of Congress. They've been contacted by organizations who received grant funding — from Alaska, Oklahoma, Wisconsin, Georgia.

The Foxes don't consider themselves political people. But they call on the military and politicians to lead a cultural change in how the country talks about guns, consider reasonable restrictions, train soldiers how to get a gun away from a colleague in crisis.

"Everyone is always shouting: 'You're taking away my guns!' Or, 'We don't need any guns!'" Brenda said. "There aren't any easy solutions, and we know that. But thoughts and prayers aren't cutting it."

Earlier this month, the Army published its first major suicide prevention doctrine, after years of delays. It was criticized for including no clear guidance for how service members should act when someone in their ranks is suffering.

They are hard conversations to have.

Years ago, Jay Zimmerman, a peer specialist with the VA, talked with a struggling friend he'd served with. Zimmerman did the things the VA had trained him to; talk about mental health treatment, use sensitive language.

"But I never once thought to say, 'Hey, what are you doing with your firearm? Where's your pistol right now?'" he said. "And I got the call from his wife later that night that he had killed himself."

He's never not asked that question since then.

Zimmerman is from Appalachian Tennessee, not far from where Fox grew up. Guns are a part of life. Zimmerman used to sleep with two pistols under his pillow. He now encourages the veterans he's counseling to calculate safety and risk in a different way: Sometimes, the immediate threat is an internal one, and having a gun in the bedside table doesn't make you safer; it puts you in danger.

David Fox has spent weeks pining over this problem. He posted on Facebook: Please, if you ever have a suicidal thought, give your gun to a friend. You might think you're OK right now, but that can turn in an instant, like a night of drinking, a car accident.

When he was going through his son's possessions, it was the little things that hurt him the most: flashlights, weedeaters, evidence of building a life.

And there was the gun he'd used to end his. They hated this gun: they didn't want to keep it, they also didn't want it to circulate in the world.

David got a sledgehammer and took it out into the yard.

He smashed it into 20 pieces.

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A young woman walked into Barbie Rohde's booth, and said she felt she was running out of options.

"I'm scared every day, all the time," she said.

The woman's husband is a Marine who lost seven people when his battalion went to war. He doesn't feel worthy of making it home.

He has dozens of guns, she said. Sometimes he sat on the tailgate of his truck, holding one and drinking. More than once, when he'd drink so much he passed out, she called his mom and said: "We have to get these guns out of the house." They gathered them up and locked them in a trailer, and his mother took the key. He got mad at her the first couple times. But then he understood.

He started going to 12-step recovery for alcohol, and they assigned him a sponsor, a person who's experienced his struggle, available all hours of the day. Why, he asked his wife, doesn't the military offer him this, too, since they know soldiers trust their battle buddies?

The stress has worn on her, his wife said. She spent a week in a mental health facility.

"It's hell, it really is," she said.

She took one of Rohde's business card with her cell number listed on it, and she answers every call, any hour of the day.

Rohde discovered the nonprofit Mission 22 shortly after her son's death and now she does almost noth-

ing else. She and her husband, Robert, have put 200,000 miles on their car. They set up at festivals all over Texas to sell T-shirts and caps and keychains to raise money for the charity that offers programs for struggling veterans.

But really, Rohde feels like she's there to be a safety net for anyone who wanders into her path. They've gone so far as to drive five hours to pick up a veteran and take him to rehab. They often hear from wives and mothers who feel helpless, just like Rohde did.

She had asked for help, calling the base where her son was stationed to tell his commanders she was worried he might harm himself, and that he had guns, she said. She didn't think her son would turn over the guns if she asked, but he was a "soldier's soldier," and she believes he would have given them to a fellow officer.

Instead, they told him she'd called, and he was furious at her.

He shot himself in his truck on Fort Sam Houston Army base in San Antonio.

"I have a lot of regret, I have a lot of anger over that," she said. "There needs to be a network, a support system, to say 'you're going through some stuff, let me hang on to your guns.'"

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She watched people walk by her tent and never even glance over. Sometimes she wants to grab and shake them, demand that they be angry about this, to tell them that next, it might be their kid.

"Everyone thinks it couldn't happen to them until it does. I was one of those people," she said.

The nonprofit they volunteer for recently changed its logo. It used to say "United in the War Against Veteran Suicide." Now it's "Veterans Family Community." Rohde hates it.

"They need to say the word: suicide," she said. "That's the hard truth that needs to be out there."

She has tattoos of the nonprofit's logo all over her body, and when people ask her about them, she doesn't hesitate to tell them how her son died, and how he should not have.

She obsessively tracks how much money she raises for the cause. She was disappointed at this festival; they raised less than $1,000 and her goal was twice that. She slumped her shoulders as they packed the unsold T-shirts and hats into their SUV.

Her husband thinks that deep down, it's not really about the money for her — that's just the easiest way to track how much people care, so when she goes to visit Cody soon at the national cemetery, she can whisper to him that his death was not for nothing.

She raised him as a single mom, and married her husband when Cody was a teenager. It was a hard life, they didn't have much money, and her son was always smart and strong, with a big smile. He was analytical, he liked to take things apart and figure out how to put them together again. He followed the rules: he refused to go to a concert once because he heard people would be smoking weed.

He'd declared at 4 years old he would be "an Army guy" and never changed his mind. People ask her now, if she could turn back time, would she try to stop him. She says no. It's what he'd always wanted.

She keeps an unwashed shirt he wore in a plastic bag in her dresser drawer. She tries not to take it out too often because she doesn't want it to lose the smell of him. But when she's having an especially bad day, she'll hold it.

Other than that, a plot at a national cemetery is what she has left.

Her husband drives her there, spends a moment with her, then leaves her alone for however long she needs. Sometimes she stays for hours, sometimes she can't bear more than a few minutes.

The morning after the festival, she fell to her knees in front of his marker. It's etched with a number, 96-314. It's always been easy for her to remember numbers — she can recall her childhood address, friends' phone numbers. But she cannot bring herself to memorize this one.

She pulled weeds around his grave. She told him about the work she'd done for him, that she's proud of him.

"I hope you're proud of me," she said. "We're working really hard to prevent anyone from going to heaven the way you did."

She hugged his marker; she said she was sorry, and kissed the cold stone.

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For parents who've been through shootings, raising kids requires grappling with fears

By ADAM GELLER AP National Writer

LOUISVILLE, Kentucky (AP) — By the time Hollan Holm pulls the family minivan into Chickasaw Park, the buzz rising from a crowd clustered around a large picnic shelter makes clear this afternoon's story-sharing is already underway.

In the thick heat just outside the pavilion, a youth football coach recounts the grief of losing his 19-year-old son, shot dead in the parking lot of a local liquor store in 2012. Under the rafters, a mother of five, infant son balanced on her hip, recalls her 15-year-old cousin, gunned down just across the park last December.

Holm also carries a story of trauma. But it's from his own youth, when it was shattered by gunshots.

"Dad, are you speaking today?" asks his daughter, Sylvia, a sixth grader wearing a T-shirt with a picture of Pakistani activist Malala Yousafzai, shot by a Taliban fighter at 15 for asserting girls' right to an education.

"They've got other folks lined up," says Holm, who a generation ago survived one of the first school mass shootings to shake America's consciousness.

His son, George, 8, groans.

"Yeah," Holm says, rolling his eyes. "You guys want to hear me talk."

They do, actually.

But how can Holm, now 40 and a lawyer for a health care company, make sense for them of what he and classmates in a small Kentucky town endured that long-ago morning?

After a record number of mass killings this year and surging youth deaths by firearms, it can be challenging for any parent to reassure their children and to set aside their own fears.

It can be even harder for those who survived the school shootings of the Columbine era, now that they have children of their own.

"I can't really go into crowds of people and not be concerned about maybe somebody's going to do something with a gun … and I don't want them to have to live like that," Holm says. "I just want them to be kids."

More than 25 years and 200 miles separate the violence shadowing today's protest, in Louisville's predominantly Black West End, from the school shooting that haunts Holm, who is white. But parental apprehension is common ground.

Heading home, his son's voice fills the minivan with a gleeful rendition of "Old MacDonald," when Holm points out the turn to the site of a previous rally. His wife, Kate Dittmeier Holm, notes that it's just before a gas station where a 44-year-old woman was shot to death recently while trying to break up a fight between customers.

"Why are there so many shootings?" Sylvia says, pleading more than asking.

"That," her mother says, gently, "is a complex answer."

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In the United States, every child has the right to an education.

But ever since a horrific pair of school shootings – the 1989 attack on an elementary school in Stockton, California that killed five students and the massacre of 12 teens and a teacher at Colorado's Columbine High School a decade later – the question of how to protect children while upholding gun rights has been bitterly contested.

School administrators have worked to "harden" their campuses, adding metal detectors, active-shooter drills and safety officers and, in some cases, encouraging teachers to carry guns. Yet shootings have continued, spotlighting tensions fueled further by U.S. courts' increasingly expansive reading of the Second Amendment.

In a recent poll by the Pew Research Center, about two-thirds of parents said they are very or somewhat worried that there could be a shooting at their child's school.

For school shooting survivors, the threat can add new anxiety to old trauma, says Frank DeAngelis, who

was Columbine's principal at the time of the massacre and remains in contact with many former students.

"I grabbed my little girl and clenched her to my chest," one mom, a Columbine survivor, told him on the day her own daughter started kindergarten. "Then I put her down and watched her walk through the doors and I said to myself: Is there a chance she'll never come home?"

Columbine, at the time the deadliest school shooting in U.S. history, was a watershed, dominating television news and public discourse. But in the months before, several other school shootings had begun raising alarm.

In late 1997, a junior at a high school in Pearl, Mississippi shot and killed two classmates. A few months later, at a middle school near Jonesboro, Arkansas, a pair of students killed five.

It happened, too, at a school tucked between tobacco fields, a half dozen miles outside Paducah, Kentucky.

In December 1997, a 14-year-old freshman walked into the lobby of Heath High School with a .22 caliber pistol in his backpack and four long guns wrapped in blankets. Before the day's first-period class began, he put plugs in his ears, drew the stolen handgun and started firing on a group of classmates gathered in a morning prayer circle.

Three girls were killed. Nicole Hadley, 14, was a member of the freshman basketball team. Jessica James, 17, played flute in the school band. Kayce Steger, 15, was a member of the school's Law Enforcement Explorers club, with plans to become a police officer. Five other students were injured.

They included Holm, then 14, scarred by a bullet that grazed the left side of his scalp. It was a very cold morning, he recalls, and when the shooting stopped, someone helped him to a spot near the front doors, his hair matted with blood. In the minutes before ambulances arrived, the muscles in his back tensed uncontrollably as icy air rushed over him.

For years afterward, Holm says, he told himself that the surface wound didn't justify brooding. More school shootings and the arrival of fatherhood forced him to consider otherwise.

"The more I talked about it the more I would get those same spasms again," says Holm, whose still boyish face, now framed by a receding hairline, recalls the photo on the front of the Paducah Sun the morning after the shooting. "And I realized there was something I needed to deal with."

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Hollan and Kate met when both were students at Western Kentucky University, working together on the campus newspaper. On their first date, Kate recalls trying to figure out why his attention seemed to be elsewhere, not realizing that it was the fifth anniversary of the shooting at Heath.

"It took me years to figure out why Hollan was quiet and in a bad mood on that day," she says.

Whether or not he wanted to acknowledge the trauma that stemmed from the shooting, though, it remained present.

In restaurants, Hollan made sure to get a chair facing the door, intent on watching for approaching threats. When an unfamiliar man wearing a trench coat and carrying a backpack entered church one Sunday, Hollan tensed up, so alarmed by what the visitor might do that he and Kate had to leave.

The couple had married, graduated from law school together and started a family before he began confronting those feelings in earnest.

In 2017, Sylvia, their first child, started kindergarten. At the dinner table that fall, she announced that her class had learned a new drill. First her teacher locked the classroom door and turned off all the lights. Then she instructed the 5-year-olds to stay very quiet, so the "bad person" wouldn't find them.

"I remember that look on your face – you were just kind of grief stricken," Kate tells Hollan.

"It just kind of broke my heart," he says.

That December survivors marked the 20th anniversary of the shooting at Heath with a new memorial for victims. Watching the ceremony live on local television, Holm says, visions of the attack played back in his head.

"I am not OK," he told himself.

Seven weeks later, a 15-year-old boy opened fire on classmates at western Kentucky's Marshall County High School, about a 30-minute drive from Heath. He killed two students and injured 14.

Memories sparked by the shooting convinced Holm to sit down with a therapist. Later that year, meeting with Marshall County students, he was struck by how much their stories echoed his own and how little changed.

At protests that followed the 2018 shooting at Florida's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that killed 17, he began speaking out for stronger gun laws.

He didn't anticipate the way it would affect his family.

In August 2019, Holm was delivering a speech on the steps of the federal courthouse in Louisville when he spotted his wife and 7-year-old daughter in the crowd. For the first time, Sylvia was hearing her father's story. She looked stricken, her eyes wide with fear.

"She went up to him and she held on tight and the worry on her face, you could see it," Kate says.

Sylvia has only hazy memories of the first time she heard her father's story, but she knows how it made her feel: "I can't even imagine living without Dad."

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More than a dozen years after the most traumatic day of her life, Missy Jenkins Smith was thinking only of celebration.

It was her son's third birthday and she and husband Josh had taken him out to dinner at Chuck E. Cheese. Driving home in the Nissan, fitted to accommodate the disability Missy sustained in the same school shooting that injured Holm, the little boy stayed wide awake.

His parents laughed when he pointed out that his middle name, Brock, was almost the same as the president of the United States. Then, suddenly, the subject of his interest changed.

"Mom, why are you in a wheelchair?" he asked.

"We just looked at each other and it was like we were kind of in shock. How are we going to answer this?" Jenkins Smith recalls. "We knew that day would come, but we never really talked about what we would say."

Of course, she and Josh tell each other now, they should've been prepared. Unlike Holm, Jenkins Smith never had a choice about whether to keep what had happened to her hidden.

Paralyzed from the chest down when one of the shooter's bullets severed her spinal cord, she had been honest with herself and others about the injury and the circumstances. In a way, talking about it was like therapy, she says.

But that was very different from explaining it to a small child. Her child.

"There were people that died," she told her son, Logan. "But Mommy lived, and this is what it did to me."

That seemed to satisfy him, and when Jenkins Smith delivered a speech about her experience five years later, she brought both her sons so they could hear it in full. Still, it remained abstract to them, like a movie or a scary story, she says.

The 2018 shooting at nearby Marshall County High School, which played a role in forcing Holm to confront his trauma, also shook the Jenkins Smith household.

With local airwaves and conversation filled with accounts of the shooting, Logan confided his fears to a teacher. Their fourth-grade classroom had no door and it was right by the entrance to the building, he pointed out. If shooting erupted, he would have to escape through a window.

Missy and Josh tried to reassure him, encouraging him to share his worries rather than hide them. But she, too, was shaken.

Jenkins Smith had long warned educators and students she spoke to that no school was immune from a mass shooting. At the same time, she had told herself that her own community, having endured it once, would be OK.

"That was a scary thing, knowing people that went to Marshall and that I was a parent now," she says. "It could happen again. We're not immune. … Those words were true. It was kind of haunting."

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In the shade of Chickasaw Park's pavilion, the Holms and more than 200 others stand with heads bowed, observing one second of silence for each person shot to death in Louisville so far this year.

Seventy-four ticks of the clock – and it's only June.

"It's not just the boys I worry about, because no kid is safe," says Myia Brown, a mother of five, pointing to a spot across the 61-acre park, not far from a marker noting that Muhammad Ali trained here as a teenager.

In December, it was joined by a small white cross wreathed in silk flowers that mourns Brown's cousin, Ja'Maury Johnson, shot to death near an asphalt lot overlooking the Ohio River. He was 15.

In April, two more people were killed in Chickasaw, including a 17-year-old, and four were injured when someone fired into a crowd.

The violence feels very far from the small-town shooting that scarred Holm and left Jenkins Smith in a wheelchair. All the teens killed or injured in 1997 were white, raised in a county that in some years does not report a single homicide. Most of those shot in Louisville are Black and the toll keeps climbing.

What they share is trauma.

Holm recalls the panic he felt years ago, a few weeks after returning to school, when he mistook the sound of a balloon popping inside a Walmart for gunfire. Even now, sudden, loud noises can bring that feeling back.

The sound of gunshots is not uncommon in some Louisville neighborhoods. But the trauma described by those gathered in the park today is at least as potent.

Krista Gwynn recalls that after her 19-year-old son, Christian, was killed in a drive-by shooting four blocks from home in December 2019, her husband blamed himself for not doing more to protect him.

Just two years later, their older daughter, then also 19, was shot and injured at a park on Louisville's eastside. The 17-year-old friend she was there to meet was killed.

Now the Gwynns have pulled their youngest child, 15-year-old daughter Navada, out of school, home schooling to keep her safe. When she goes out, Gwynn's husband insists on driving her, even to a friend's house six blocks away. He carries a pistol for protection, pointing out that people, not their guns, are responsible for committing violence.

"Who wants to live with the fact that when I take my child to the park I have to watch every person who drives through?" Krista Gwynn says. "I have to listen to every conversation on the other side of the park that turns into an argument, because bullets don't have a name."

Today, at least, the loudest sound in the park are voices demanding change.

"Put down the guns! Save our sons!" the Gwynns and dozens of others chant, as they circle the park's path. Near the back of the procession, Hollan Holm raises his voice louder when the heat starts wearing others down, with Kate and the kids seconding his call.

Before today the Holms and the Gwynns had met only once, the previous afternoon, when Hollan was asked to introduce Krista at a local Moms Demand Action event calling for tighter gun laws. But that was long enough for Gwynn to sense something.

"I feel like we are connected because now we are a group of survivors," she says. "He shook my hand like he knew me."

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Behind the Holms' house, two miles from downtown Louisville, the deck looks over a large trampoline, girdled with a safety net. Kate and Hollan joke that for a pair of attorneys plenty familiar with the legal landmines of injury and liability, it's a strange choice. But it reflects their thinking on parenting, not lawyering.

"There is some risk, but there is also a lot to be gained by letting them out into the world," Kate says.

Some days, though, the world tests that decision.

On a Monday morning in April, Hollan Holm was putting his son and daughter on the school bus when seven or eight police cars sped by, sirens screaming. For a moment he was irritated that they'd blown past the bus stop sign. Then he realized how much the sounds echoed the emergency vehicles that converged on the school years before, when he was shot.

There was good reason. Just after 8:30 that morning, a gunman armed with an AR-15 rifle had walked into the Old National Bank downtown and killed five former co-workers.

During the week that followed, nine more people were shot to death in Louisville, a spasm of violence the city's police department decried as "unconscionable."

The day of the bank shooting, Hollan Holm's fears about his children's safety welled up. But he kept them to himself when he and Kate tried to answer their questions about what had happened.

"I try not to put that parental anxiety on the kids because that's certainly the thing we carry," he says.

That way they can just "be kids," their days filled with theater camp and saxophone practice, graphic novels and Legos. But like kids everywhere, their awareness grows no matter how parents shield them.

Just before school ended last May, Sylvia Holm was looking forward to the fifth grade's field trip to an entertainment arcade. That morning, she and her dad were driving to school when an interview came on the radio with the parents of Maite Rodriguez, one of the 19 children killed in last year's mass shooting at Robb Elementary in Uvalde, Texas. They recalled their 10-year-old's aspiration to one day become a marine biologist.

"Dad didn't really talk during the car ride after he heard that," Sylvia says.

On the bus to the arcade, she started crying, thinking about how close in age the children in Uvalde were to the friends around her. Still, she says, if today's children are going to find ways to stop school shootings when they grow up, it was better to know.

Kate, sitting beside her daughter at a park picnic table, smiles at the 11-year-old's resolve.

"When I was her age I would think, 'Oh, the grownups are going to solve this.' And here's she's telling us, 'We're going to solve the problem,'" Kate says. But the expression on Sylvia's face remains stone serious.

"Because the adults haven't done enough," she says.

Two pastors worry for their congregants' safety. Are more guns the answer or the problem?

By ADAM GELLER AP National Writer

NIAGARA FALLS, N.Y. (AP) — Inside the columned church on the corner, the rich tones of the organ have wrapped congregants in their embrace. The time has come for the Rev. Jimmie Hardaway Jr. to preach the lessons embodied by the Prince of Peace.

If only the world outside Trinity Baptist's stained-glass windows were a more peaceful one. Alas, it is not.

So when Hardaway rises to the pulpit this Sunday morning – weeks after a 24-year-old man was shot to death in the street two blocks from the chapel, and days after a mass shooting claimed six lives at a church-run school in Tennessee – he carries a .380 caliber semiautomatic pistol concealed in the pinstriped folds of his suit.

"I'm really not free if I have to sit here and worry about threats to a congregation," says Hardaway, one of several religious leaders who sued New York officials last fall after lawmakers restricted guns in houses of worship. He notes the similarities between Trinity's worshippers and those at a historic Black church in Charleston S.C., where a mass shooter killed nine people in 2015.

"I'm really not free if I know that there's someone who can do harm and I can't do anything to protect them," says Hardaway, whose city struggles with one of the state's highest rates of violent crime.

The decision Hardaway has made is a distinctly American one. And it spotlights rising friction between the assertion of two very American principles: the right to worship and the right to own guns. With U.S. deaths by gunfire reaching record levels, it is far from an isolated instance of that tension.

At the same hour, about 90 miles away, the Rev. Stephen Cady and his flock at Asbury First United Methodist Church in Rochester, N.Y., are also seeking sanctuary.

And in a country where many faith leaders say their jobs now require them to draw up plans for responding to a mass shooter on their premises, Cady has reached the diametrically opposite conclusion.

His church, in a city where 63 people were killed in shootings last year, presides over a leafy neighborhood of carefully kept homes largely bypassed by the violence. But for a congregation unsettled by the increase in mass shootings and the deaths across town that garner far less attention, the way forward

would only be darkened by adding even more guns, Cady says.

"Let us pause for a moment together … just outside the violence of the week ahead, that we might at least acknowledge the violence of the week we have just left behind," preaches Cady, a father of three. He tells his worshippers of the dread he felt learning that one of those slain in the Tennessee mass shooting was the 9-year-old daughter of that church's pastor.

"Here we stand … outside of the gate, longing for nothing more than to get to that new life on the other side," he says. "Yet hell seems to have found us."

Two men, brothers in Christ but unknown to one another, each determined to exercise their American right to pray without interference.

To one, the right to bear arms – and the proliferation of 400 million guns and thousands of shootings it has enabled – undermines the freedom to worship in peace. To the other, the right to carry a gun is an essential means of protecting fragile religious liberty.

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At the core of American identity is the belief that everyone is endowed with certain rights – to voice their opinions freely, to gather with whoever they choose, to pursue life, liberty and happiness as they see fit.

But as the Supreme Court has adopted an increasingly expansive interpretation of the Second Amendment, the right to guns is casting a shadow over many other freedoms Americans hold dear.

That tension is becoming visceral in some houses of worship because, more and more, they feel like targets.

That was the case in 2012, when a gunman espousing white supremacist views killed six worshippers at the Sikh Temple of Wisconsin, in the town of Oak Creek. And in 2017, when a shooter entered the First Baptist Church in Sutherland Springs, Texas, slaying 25 people, including a pregnant woman. And a year later, when 11 people, including several who had survived the Holocaust, were killed by a gunman who invaded the Tree of Life synagogue in Pittsburgh.

The attacks, and more routine violence, weigh on places of worship that strive to offer refuge from the profanity of everyday life, says David Yamane, a professor of sociology at Wake Forest University whose work has focused on both gun culture and religion. It has left priests, rabbis and others to confront sometimes pained choices between maintaining openness and locking down, he says.

"Any kind of church shooting is a very low odds, but very high stakes event. But to be wrong would just be devastating," Yamane says. "Almost every religious leader you talk to, no matter their background, that's what they're grappling with."

In a survey of 1,000 Protestant pastors, conducted in 2019 by the Southern Baptist Convention's research division, 62 percent said they had developed plans for responding to an active shooter. Nearly half said some in their congregations are now armed to provide security when they gather for prayer.

Ensuring safety in houses of worship most often centers on everyday concerns like medical emergencies and vetting those who care for children. But violent incidents at religious gathering places, tracked by the non-profit Faith Based Security Network, have increased more than twentyfold since 1999, with 60 percent of them involving guns.

Still, for leaders of some houses of worship, the threat can feel remote.

That is not the case at Hardaway's church. In a neighborhood pocked by boarded-up homes, where votive candles and empty liquor bottles are arranged in street-corner memorials to young men killed during robberies and disputes, violence -- much of it carried out with guns -- is not abstract.

"This is not the answer!" the mother of 24-year-old Jaylan McWilson screamed during a sidewalk vigil Hardaway convened for her son, shot dead as he arrived home one evening in late January, within sight of Trinity Baptist. "God gave me a miracle son! And now he's gone in the blink of an eye!"

Hardaway, 62, is the son of another mostly Black neighborhood in nearby Buffalo. Growing up there, he says, the pastor at his childhood church carried a gun for protection.

In 1989, Hardaway also began doing so, leading congregations in the Bronx, California and elsewhere, where neighborhood crime and all-hours calls to minister in sometimes tense family situations left him wary.

One time, when he wasn't carrying a gun, "I had a guy beat his wife in my office and I couldn't do anything. He was too big for me. All I could do was say: 'Stop! Stop!'" he recalls.

In 2015, he was hired to replace the founding pastor at Trinity, about 2 miles (3 kilometers) from Niagara's namesake falls. By then, he says, his worries about safety had faded, largely convincing him to leave his guns at home. Until one horrific night that June.

On that Wednesday evening, a young man walked into a Bible study session at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, S.C. and killed nine people. The victims included the senior pastor, Clementa Pinckney. The shooter was an avowed white supremacist.

"It was like, OK, what if this happens to us?" says Hardaway, whose congregants, like Pinckney's, are nearly all Black, many of them senior citizens. "It could be us."

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A different sort of tension is present in Cady's church. But it, too, is keenly felt.

Well-funded and well-attended, Asbury is a neogothic landmark in a neighborhood not far from downtown, sharing its street with the mansion built for Kodak founder George Eastman. It is roughly 3 miles (5 kilometers) from poorer neighborhoods north and west where most of the city's shootings take place.

The congregation, though, is committed to taking on problems beyond its doorstep. It has converted a home it owns next door into a community outreach center, providing clothing, showers, laundry and other help to people in need, while serving thousands of meals a year.

On Sundays, the 44-year-old Cady applies Christian teachings to problems on the minds of a modern congregation. That has included repeated calls for an end to what he views as Americans' warped worship of guns. The alarming regularity of mass shootings in communal gathering places has only cemented his feeling that guns have no place in a church.

"As a people of faith our adherence is not to the Second Amendment. It's to the Second Commandment, which is 'Love your neighbor as yourself," he says. "And more guns do not help you love your neighbor."

For years, Asbury's efforts to preserve safety while doing ministry have been framed by memories of an incident in the late 1970s, when a man who claimed to be carrying a bomb strode into the sanctuary during worship. The threat was defused, in part, by agreeing to his demand to speak.

It worked then. But the drumbeat of mass shootings and the continued rise in U.S. gun deaths – up 23 percent from 2019 to 2021 to a single-year record of 48,800 lives lost, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention – has pushed church leaders to repeatedly review their approach.

Soon after Cady was hired in 2012, a man set his own home ablaze in a nearby suburb, then opened fire on first responders, killing two and wounding two more. Last year, a little more than an hour's drive away on the east side of Buffalo, a shooter bent on killing Black people targeted shoppers at a supermarket, leaving 10 dead.

For congregants of Asbury, the increasing frequency of shooting attacks on communal spaces has seeded a lingering sense that whether praying or sending their children to school, they need to be looking over their shoulders, Cady says.

After mass shootings at houses of worship, Asbury's security committee has conferred with local police, updated the church's emergency plans and worked to secure the premises. But they have decided against arming guards or others.

The proximity of violence is unsettling enough. In Rochester, 351 people were injured in shootings last year. Of the 63 who died, the closest was just over a mile from Asbury. To carry guns into the church itself risks damaging the spirit of empathy and reflection the congregation exists to foster, Cady says.

"Can you serve God and guns? I don't think you can," he says. "I think you have to make a choice."

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On a wall directly across the street from the Tops supermarket in Buffalo, an enormous mural depicts 10 doves rising to the heavens – one for each of the people killed in last year's mass shooting.

"The tears are real," an inscription reads.

Hardaway knows the place well. He grew up a few blocks away, works as a substitute teacher at a nearby

school and shops at the store from time to time. The morning after the shooting, he drove to the scene, offering to pray with those grieving.

The hatred for Black people represented by the shooting felt like a threat, he knew, adding to worries that drug dealers or users in the neighborhood around his church might see his congregation as a target for robbery.

"The world has changed. There's things that we would not expect to take place in a house of worship that are taking place now," he says. "And I would do what I have to do to protect myself and my loved ones, those around me."

A month after the mass shooting in Buffalo, the Supreme Court struck down a New York law that put limits on the right to carry guns outside the home. The state Legislature, controlled by Democrats, responded to the supermarket attack and the court's decision by passing measures including one restricting guns in locations deemed sensitive, such as schools and churches.

Hardaway, a longtime Democrat, had voted for Kathy Hochul, the governor who signed the bill. But he took issue with a law he felt left him and his congregation vulnerable.

His search for others who agreed led him to an Orthodox Jewish organization in the southern part of the state that believes in the need for guns in synagogues, and then to a pair of gun rights groups.

Last fall he and another pastor joined with the groups to sue officials charged with administering the law. Two other lawsuits, one by 26 pastors together with the conservative New Yorkers for Constitutional Freedoms and another organized by the New York State Jewish Gun Club and filed by men from a pair of synagogues, also sought to overturn the restrictions.

With an appeals court weighing the issue, New York legislators voted in May to amend the law, allowing congregational leaders and those in charge of security to carry guns. But the pastors and gun rights groups are continuing their lawsuit, noting that the law still does not allow ordinary worshippers to be armed.

Concerns for congregational safety were amplified in late August when three young, white men pastors did not recognize visited several Black churches in Buffalo during Sunday worship.

"Please make certain that your security team is aware and vigilant," one pastor wrote in a text message sent to Hardaway and others that included a photo of the men.

Church leaders notified the Buffalo Police Department, whose investigators "have found no evidence of possible wrongdoing" involving the three men, city spokesman Mike DeGeorge said.

Hardaway's stand on guns is supported by some congregants as an unfortunate necessity.

"The world we are in now, you always have to be on guard," says Tameka Felts, a church trustee who also is licensed to carry. She does not bring her gun into church but is reassured knowing the pastor is armed.

"You always have to wonder, 'Who is that person coming into the building?'" she says. "Coming in to church you should not have to feel like that, but you do."

That can be hard to reconcile with the sense of peace that fills Trinity on this Sunday. The light of a crystalline sky streams through the stained glass. Worshippers, some holding children on their laps, lift their voices in song.

Sundays should be reserved for giving praise, says the pastor's wife, Karen Anderson Hardaway, whose voice intertwines with her husband's in the call and response of worship. The decision to carry a concealed weapon is intended to keep it that way.

Still, Anderson Hardaway says she understands how others seeking to preserve sanctuary fervently disagree. In a country where the average day sees more than 130 people killed with a gun, will the right to worship in peace be insulated from violence with one or without one?

"There is no right answer," she says.

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A UN report urges Russia to investigate an attack on a Ukrainian village that killed 59 civilians

By NEBI QENA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — U.N investigators on Tuesday urged Russia to acknowledge responsibility for a missile strike on a Ukrainian village that killed 59 civilians, conduct a transparent investigation into what happened, provide reparations for victims and hold those responsible to account.

The strike on a cafe in the village of Hroza on Oct. 5 was one of the deadliest strikes since the Kremlin's forces launched a full-scale invasion 20 months ago. Whole families perished while attending a wake for a local soldier who died fighting Russian troops. The blast killed 36 women, 22 men and an 8-year-old boy. Numerous bodies were found torn to pieces, and it took nearly a week to identify all the dead.

The U.N. Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine said in a report published Tuesday it "has reasonable grounds to believe" that a Russian Iskander missile — a short-range precision-guided ballistic weapon — probably caused the blast in Hroza.

The extensive damage and weapon debris at the scene led investigators to that conclusion, the report said.

It said that Russia "either failed to undertake all feasible measures to verify that the intended target was a military objective rather than civilians or civilian objects, or deliberately targeted civilians or a civilian object."

Either of those explanations amounts to a violation of international humanitarian law, the report said.

The incident "serves as a stark reminder of the human cost of the war in Ukraine and underscores the necessity of holding perpetrators accountable," Danielle Bell, head of the U.N. mission in Ukraine, said in a statement.

The Kremlin did not directly address the strike in Hroza at the time, but continued to insist that it aims only at legitimate military targets in Ukraine.

Russia's U.N. ambassador, however, told the U.N. Security Council, that "a high-ranking Ukrainian nationalist" and "a lot of neo-Nazi accomplices" were at the wake.

Neither Moscow nor Kyiv officials made any immediate comment on Tuesday's report.

Repeated civilian deaths have weakened Russia's claim that it doesn't target civilians.

Ukraine's presidential office said early Tuesday that one civilian was killed and at least 17 others were injured over the previous 24 hours.

The death was a woman visiting a cemetery and among the injured were five people traveling on a bus, it said.

Today in History: November 1
Clarence Thomas joins the Supreme Court

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, Nov. 1, the 305th day of 2023. There are 60 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On Nov. 1, 1991, Clarence Thomas took his place as the newest justice on the Supreme Court.

On this date:

In 1478, the Spanish Inquisition was established.

In 1512, Michelangelo's just-completed paintings on the ceiling of the Vatican's Sistine Chapel were publicly unveiled by the artist's patron, Pope Julius II.

In 1604, William Shakespeare's tragedy "Othello" was first presented at Whitehall Palace in London.

In 1765, the Stamp Act, passed by the British Parliament, went into effect, prompting stiff resistance from American colonists.

In 1861, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln named Maj. Gen. George B. McClellan General-

in-Chief of the Union armies, succeeding Lt. Gen. Winfield Scott.

In 1870, the United States Weather Bureau made its first meteorological observations.

In 1936, in a speech in Milan, Italy, Benito Mussolini described the alliance between his country and Nazi Germany as an "axis" running between Rome and Berlin.

In 1950, two Puerto Rican nationalists tried to force their way into Blair House in Washington, D.C., in a failed attempt to assassinate President Harry S. Truman. (One of the pair was killed, along with a White House police officer.)

In 1952, the United States exploded the first hydrogen bomb, code-named "Ivy Mike," at Enewetak (en-ih-WEE'-tahk) Atoll in the Marshall Islands.

In 1989, East Germany reopened its border with Czechoslovakia, prompting tens of thousands of refugees to flee to the West.

In 1995, peace talks opened in Dayton, Ohio, with the leaders of Bosnia, Serbia and Croatia present.

In 2007, less than a week after workers ratified a new contract, Chrysler announced 12,000 job cuts, or about 15 percent of its work force.

In 2021, the global death toll from COVID-19 topped 5 million, as tallied by Johns Hopkins University.

In 2022, voters gave former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his far-right allies a victory with a majority in the country's parliament.

Today's Birthdays: World Golf Hall of Famer Gary Player is 88. Country singer Bill Anderson is 86. Actor Robert Foxworth is 82. Country singer-humorist Kinky Friedman is 79. Actor Jeannie Berlin is 74. Music producer David Foster is 74. Actor Belita Moreno is 74. Country singer-songwriter-producer Keith Stegall is 69. Country singer Lyle Lovett is 66. Actor Rachel Ticotin is 65. Apple CEO Tim Cook is 63. Actor Helene Udy is 62. Pop singer-musician Mags Furuholmen (a-ha) 61. Rock singer Anthony Kiedis (Red Hot Chili Peppers) is 61. Rock musician Rick Allen (Def Leppard) is 60. Country singer "Big Kenny" Alphin (Big and Rich) is 60. Singer Sophie B. Hawkins is 59. Rapper Willie D (Geto Boys) is 57. Country musician Dale Wallace (Emerson Drive) is 54. Actor Toni Collette is 51. Actor-talk show host Jenny McCarthy is 51. Actor David Berman is 50. Actor Aishwarya Rai (ash-WAHR'-ee-ah reye) is 50. Rock singer Bo Bice is 48. Actor Matt Jones is 42. Actor Natalia Tena is 39. Actor Penn Badgley is 37. Actor Max Burkholder is 26. Actor-musician Alex Wolff is 26.