

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 1 of 85

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Weber Landscaping Greenhouse Ad](#)
- [4- Social Security Delivers the Most Popular Baby Names in South Dakota for 2023](#)
- [4- Manhart Ad](#)
- [5- American Legion Auxiliary 06/06/24](#)
- [5- Dairy Queen Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [6- Subway Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [6- Region 2B Baseball Schedule](#)
- [7- Girls win six events at Webster Track and Field](#)
- [7- Guthmiller takes fourth at Sisseton golf meet](#)
- [8- SD SearchLight: Abortion-rights measure validated for the ballot, but challenge expected](#)
- [9- SD SearchLight: State board approves \\$3.5 million in loans to businesses](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: Federal bench at full strength in South Dakota following confirmation of Camela Theeler](#)
- [10- SD SearchLight: U.S. House rebukes Biden administration over pause in heavy bomb shipments to Israel](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Advocates press U.S. House to extend radiation exposure fund that includes SD](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Production jumps higher at Black Hills gold mine](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Housing boom in most of the US could ease shortage, but cost is still a problem](#)
- [17- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- Subscription Form](#)
- [23- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [24- News from the Associated Press](#)

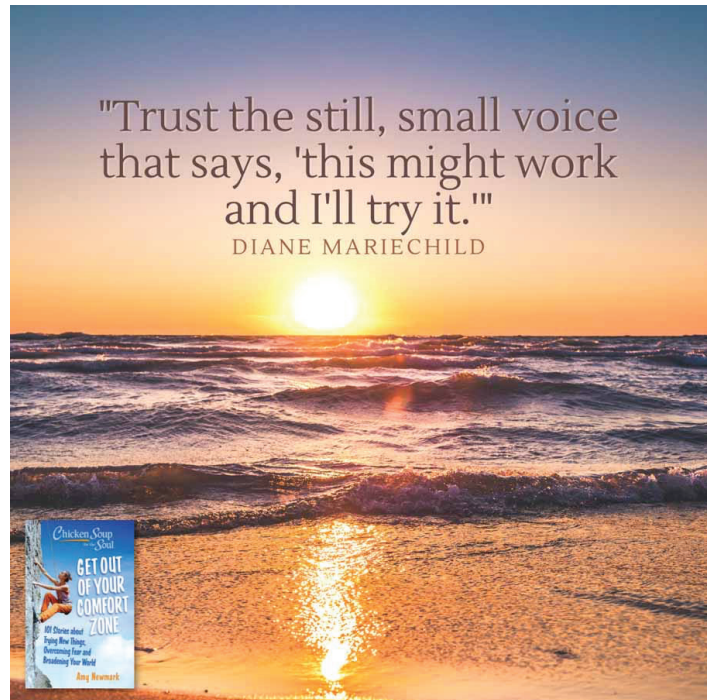
Friday, May 17

Senior Menu: Spanish rice with hamburger, green beans, vanilla pudding with mandarin oranges, whole wheat read.
Region Track at Mobridge.

Saturday, May 18

Common Cents Community Thrift Store hours 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

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



Sunday, May 19

High School Region baseball at highest two seeds
Groton CM&A: Sunday School at 9:15 a.m., Worship Service at 10:30 a.m.

Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m., SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.

First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's 9 a.m. and at Zion, 11 a.m.

United Methodist: Conde worship, 8:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

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

© 2024 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 2 of 85

1440

In partnership with **smartasset**[™]

France declared a 12-day state of emergency in its semiautonomous Pacific territory of New Caledonia yesterday amid violent protests against a voting reform. The unrest has left at least five people dead, including two police officers, and hundreds more injured.

The Justice Department yesterday took steps to reclassify marijuana as a lower-risk drug. Short of decriminalization, the proposal—which now enters a two-month comment period—would expand researchers' access to marijuana and allow cannabis producers to deduct business

expenses on their tax returns.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average briefly surpassed 40,000 points for the first time yesterday on news of strong quarterly earnings from Walmart before ending the day down 0.1%, at 39,869.4 points. Launched in 1896 by journalist Charles Dow—who cofounded The Wall Street Journal—the index tracks the prices of 30 large US companies' stocks.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Kentucky Derby winner Mystik Dan looks to win the second leg of horse racing's Triple Crown at tomorrow's 149th Preakness Stakes (6:50 pm ET, NBC).

Miss Hawaii Savannah Gankiewicz crowned Miss USA 2023, one week after previous titleholder Noelia Voigt resigned citing her mental health. Painting by Leonora Carrington sells at auction for \$28.5M, a record for a UK-born female artist.

Caitlin Clark's professional debut with the Indiana Fever hauls in 2.1 million viewers, the largest ESPN audience ever for a WNBA game. EA Sports "College Football 25" video game to be released July 19 after an 11-year hiatus from the previous edition.

Science & Technology

James Webb Space Telescope captures image of the most distant black hole merger to date; objects combined roughly 740 million years after the birth of the universe. Learn how black holes form and work.

Quantum entanglement demonstrated across miles of fiber optic cable in a city environment, a key step toward a usable quantum internet. Entanglement, termed "spooky action at a distance" by Einstein, explained.

Scientists calculate the energetic cost of pregnancy, finding it takes roughly 50,000 dietary calories over the course of nine months; an estimated 96% goes to support the mother's body.

Business & Markets

Walmart shares rise to all-time high after better-than-expected quarterly earnings and revenue, reports 22% annual growth in e-commerce sales. Online furniture retailer Wayfair to open its first large physical store next week. Shares of Chinese property developers rise on report of China considering a plan for local governments to buy millions of unsold homes; plan is part of efforts to ease China's real-estate debt crisis and slowdown.

Federal Deposit Insurance Corp. Chair Martin Gruenberg faces second day of questioning from lawmakers on Capitol Hill over report alleging sexual harassment and toxic workplace culture at the agency.

Politics & World Affairs

President Joe Biden invokes executive privilege to block release of audio from interview with special counsel Robert Hur in classified documents investigation. House Judiciary Committee votes to advance resolution holding Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt for denying access to the recordings.

US Supreme Court upholds funding structure for Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, which draws funding from the Federal Reserve as opposed to annual congressional appropriations; concludes Congress has wide discretion in how federal agencies are funded. Nadine Menendez, wife of Sen. Bob Menendez (D-NJ), is battling breast cancer, will undergo a mastectomy; the couple face federal bribery charges, with the senator currently on trial and his wife to begin trial in July.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 3 of 85



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 4 of 85

Social Security Delivers the Most Popular Baby Names in South Dakota for 2023

The Social Security Administration today announced the most popular baby names in South Dakota for 2023. Oliver and Ava topped the list.

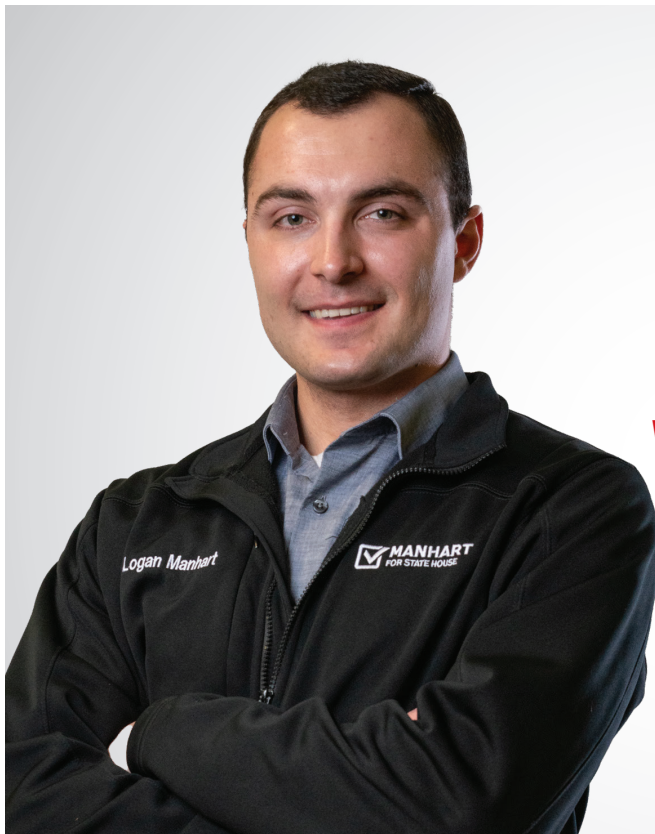
The top five boys' and girls' names for 2023 in South Dakota were:

Boys:

- 1) Oliver
- 2) Henry
- 3) Hudson
- 4) Theodore
- 5) Owen

Girls:

- 1) Ava
- 2) Charlotte
- 3) Nora
- 4) Amelia
- 5) Evelyn



MANHART

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 1

Working to Protect & Promote Traditional American Values

- ✓ Pro Law Enforcement
- ✓ Pro Constitution
- ✓ Pro Family
- ✓ Property Rights



Visit the Campaign Site
ManhartForHouse.com or
facebook.com/ManhartLogan

Paid for by Manhart for State House

Primary Election: Vote Now Through June 4th

American Legion Auxiliary

06/06/24

Called to order at 6:41pm and led by Lori Geidt. Prayer, Pledge of Allegiance and Preamble to the Constitution was said. Last Meeting Follow-up

1. Serving a meal at bingo once a month, we will follow up on this at September's meeting.

New Business

- Teacher appreciation, motion made and passed to send hors d'oeuvre platters to the schools. Jan will take care of this

- Elections: Motion made and passed with unanimous consent to elect President, Tami Zimney, Vice President, Meri Erickson and Treasurer, Lori Giedt, Historian, CoraLea Wolter and Chaplain, Samantha Oswald.

- Thank you letter from High School for the donation made to the post pro party.

- Poppy Day May 24th, Poppies and money canisters will be at local businesses the week of May 20th.

- Salad Luncheon: July 17th from 11:00am-1:00pm with set up on July 16th at 1:00pm.

- We discussed the proposed amendments that will be voted on at the State Convention in June.

- Memorial Day: Wendy will chair. Flags will be placed at the cemetery May 20th at 6:00pm with a rain date of May 21st at 6:00pm, set up at the dining hall on May 22nd after bingo.

- Next meeting will be September 3rd, 2024 at 6:30pm

Please join us for lunch at the Groton Legion Hall following the Memorial Day service at the Groton Cemetery Circle.



Now
HIRING!

Dairy Queen in Groton is hiring! If you're looking for a fun job with lots of variety, look no further! We're looking for energetic, smiling people – we provide free meals, uniforms, competitive wages, fun atmosphere and flexible scheduling. Part-time – day, evening, week-end shifts available. We will work with your schedule. Stop in today and pick up an application.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 6 of 85

SDHSBA

REGION 2B

RD 1 @ MADISON

SINGLE-ELIMINATION

#1 MADISON/CHESTER

#8 ELKTON/LAKE BENTON

#4 W.I.N.

#5 REDFIELD AREA

#2 HOWARD

#7 HAMLIN AREA

#3 GROTON AREA

#6 SIOUX VALLEY/ESTELLINE

RD 2 @ MADISON

STATE QUALIFIERS

RD 2 @ CANOVA

RD 1 @ CANOVA

The Region 2B South Dakota High School Baseball Association will be played in split sites with Groton playing at the Canova field. Groton plays Sioux Valley/Estelline at 2 p.m. on May 19th with the winner playing at 4 p.m. The winner advances to the state tournament May 31 in Sioux Falls.

GROTON

SUBWAY

REOPENING SOON!

Hiring all positions: Manager, Assistant Manager and Sandwich Artists.

Can apply online or email carmbruster_13@hotmail.com with position, dates, times available, and references.

Walk-In Interviews: May 21, 3-5 p.m.

Under new ownership,
Beau and Chelsea Larson



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 7 of 85

Girls win six events at Webster Track and Field

Groton Area's girls team took first in six events at the Webster Invitational Track Meet held Thursday. McKenna Tietz was a double winner in individual events, winning the 200m dash and the 300m hurdles. Taryn Traphagen took first in the 400m dash.

The 400m Relay, 800m Relay and 3200m Relay teams all took first place.

The boys 1600m sprint medley relay team took second. Those taking third were Jayden Schwan in the 800m run and Logan Ringgenberg in the shot put.

Girl's Division

100 Meters: 11. Elizabeth Fliehs, 14.55; 13. Kayla Lehr, 14.62

200 Meters: 1. McKenna Tietz, 28.54; 10. Kayla Lehr, 31.08.

400 Meters: 1. Taryn Traphagen, 1:02.93; 6. Elizabeth Fliehs, 1:11.08.

800 Meters: 2. Ryelle Gilbert, 2:29.62

100m Hurdles: 3. McKenna Tietz, 17.80; 6. Talli Wright, 19.50; 7. Emerlee Jones, 19.80; 10. Hannah Sandness, 20.18

300m Hurdles: 1. McKenna Tietz, 50.25; 5. Emerlee Jones, 52.73; 8. Talli Wright, 54.82; 9. Teagan Hanten, 54.84

4x100 Relay: 1. Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, McKenna Tietz, Rylee Dunker, 53.47.

4x200 Relay: 1. Laila Roberts, Kella Tracy, Jerica Locke, Rylee Dunker, 1:52.04.

4x400 Relay: 2. Elizabeth Fliehs, Ashlynn Warrington, Ryelle Gilbert, Faith Traphagen, 4:31.95.

4x800 Relay: 1. Faith Traphagen, Taryn Traphagen, Ashlynn Warrington, Kella Tracy, 10:11.55.

SMR 1600m: 3. Laila Roberts, Rylee Dunker, Taryn Traphagen, Faith Traphagen, 4:26.19.

Shot Put: 3. Emma Kutter, 32-09.00

Shot Put Varsity - Prelims: 3. Emma Kutter, 32-09.00; 15. Faith Fliehs, 25-11.50; 23. Avery Crank, 23-11.75; 31. Ashley Johnson, 22-10.25; 37. Emma Davies, 16-07.50.

Discus Varsity - Prelims: 12. Emma Kutter, 77-04; 13. Avery Crank, 76-10; 14. Faith Fliehs, 74-07; 27. Ashley Johnson, 61-05; 36. Emma Davies, 42-02.

Javelin: 5. Avery Crank, 80-02

Javelin Varsity - Prelims: 5. Avery Crank, 80-02; 12. Emma Kutter, 66-11; 15. Ashley Johnson, 63-00;

24. Faith Fliehs, 46-05; 26. Emma Davies, 35-11

High Jump: 9. Emerlee Jones, 4-04.00

Long Jump Varsity - Prelims: 12. Teagan Hanten, 13-09.75.

Triple Jump Varsity - Prelims: 11. Emerlee Jones, 28-10.75; 18. Teagan Hanten, 26-08.00

Boy's Division

100 Meters: 9. Lane Tietz, 12.18

200 Meters: 12. Gage Sippel, 25.65

400 Meters: 7. Gage Sippel, 57.26aSR

800 Meters: 3. Jayden Schwan, 2:17.79; 12. Garrett Schultz, 2:36.26

300m Hurdles: 7. Tristin McGannon, 48.34

4x200 Relay: 5. Lane Tietz, Colby Dunker, Blake Pauli, Gage Sippel, 1:44.96.

SMR 1600m: 2. Lane Tietz, Colby Dunker, Keegen Tracy, Blake Pauli, 3:43.71.

Shot Put: 3. Logan Ringgenberg, 45-04.50; 5. Holden Sippel, 43-10.50; 8. Karter Moody, 40-00.00

Shot Put Varsity - Prelims: 3. Logan Ringgenberg, 45-04.50; 5. Holden Sippel, 43-10.50; 8. Karter Moody, 40-00.00; 14. Ashton Holmes, 31-08.75; 22. Drew Thurston, 25-11.00

Discus: 4. Holden Sippel, 118-08; 5. Logan Ringgenberg, 118-00

Discus Varsity - Prelims: 4. Holden Sippel, 118-08; 5. Logan Ringgenberg, 118-00; 11. Ashton Holmes, 83-10; 13. Karter Moody, 79-04; 22. Drew Thurston, 67-06.

Javelin Varsity - Prelims: 12. Ashton Holmes, 82-07; 13. Karter Moody, 82-05; 15. Drew Thurston, 75-07.

Triple Jump Varsity - Prelims: 11. Tristin McGannon, 32-03.50

Guthmiller takes fourth at Sisseton golf meet

The Groton Area girls golf team took third at the Sisseton Invitational held Thursday.

Madison won the team title with 397 points followed by Aberdeen Roncalli with 407, Groton Area with 450 and Milbank with 496.

Carly Guthmiller placed fourth with a 100 score while Carlee Johnson was 11th with a 108, Claire Schuelke was 18th with a 120, Carly Gilbert was 19th with a 122 and Mia Crank was 22nd with a 133.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Abortion-rights measure validated for the ballot, but challenge expected

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - MAY 16, 2024 4:38 PM

A state office said Thursday that a petition seeking to reinstate abortion rights has enough valid signatures to make the Nov. 5 ballot, but opponents have already promised a legal challenge.

Based on a random sample of signatures, the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office estimated that 85% percent of the nearly 55,000 signatures on the petition are from South Dakota registered voters, which means the estimated number of valid signatures is 46,098. The petition needed 35,017 to qualify for the election.

The proposed state constitutional amendment would legalize abortions in the first trimester of pregnancy but allow the state to impose limited regulations in the second trimester and a ban in the third trimester, with exceptions for the life and health of the mother. Abortions are currently banned in the state, except to "preserve the life of the pregnant female."

Opponents have 30 days to challenge the validity of the petition. Leslee Unruh, co-chair of the Life Defense Fund, said earlier this month that the group "can't wait to get to court." The Life Defense Fund is a ballot question committee organized to oppose the ballot measure.

Thursday, Unruh and Life Defense Fund co-chair Rep. John Hansen, R-Dell Rapids, issued a joint statement: "This fight is about saving the lives of countless unborn children in our state. We are grateful to the many dedicated volunteers who have put in countless hours, and we are resolute in our mission to defend unborn babies. We will continue to research these signatures and announce a challenge at the appropriate time."

Opponents of the ballot measure have alleged some petition signers were duped into believing they were signing a petition to repeal the state sales tax on groceries, when they were actually signing the abortion-rights petition. The Dakotans for Health ballot question committee circulated both measures and denies any wrongdoing.

Hansen recently formed the South Dakota Petition Integrity political action committee. People associated with the committee have been calling hundreds of petition signers from the sample list, as part of an effort to gather evidence for a court challenge and tell signers about a new state law passed in March allowing them to withdraw their signature.

Complaints about the calls led to a press release from the Secretary of State's Office earlier this week labeling the calls a "scam," due to callers allegedly giving the impression that they're officially affiliated with the Secretary of State's Office.

Rick Weiland, of Dakotans for Health, said earlier this week that the phone campaign was a sign of "desperation."

"They are desperate to keep abortion off the ballot this fall and let the people decide," Weiland said.

The abortion measure could be one of many on the ballot in November. Two measures already on the ballot were placed there by the Legislature: a proposal to change male-specific officeholder references in the state constitution to neutral language, and a proposal that would allow the state to impose work requirements on some Medicaid expansion enrollees.

Validated but within the 30-day challenge window are the abortion measure and an initiated measure prohibiting state sales taxes on items sold for human consumption, specifically targeting state sales taxes on groceries.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 9 of 85

Validation is pending for citizen-led petitions that would create open primary elections and legalize adult recreational marijuana use.

Meanwhile, a citizen-led group is trying to refer a new pipeline law to the ballot. The Legislature passed the law last winter to implement new protections for landowners affected by a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline, while still allowing a regulatory path forward for the project

Ballot question status update

Measures placed on the Nov. 5 ballot by the Legislature:

An amendment to the state constitution updating references to certain officeholders and people (replacing male-specific pronouns with neutral language).

An amendment to the state constitution authorizing the state to impose work requirements on certain people who are eligible for expanded Medicaid.

Citizen-proposed measures validated for the ballot, pending potential challenges:

An initiated measure prohibiting state sales taxes on items sold for human consumption, specifically targeting state sales taxes on groceries.

An initiated amendment to the state constitution re-establishing abortion rights.

Citizen-proposed measures, pending validation of the required number of petition signatures:

An initiated amendment to the state constitution establishing open primary elections.

An initiated measure legalizing adult recreational use, possession and distribution of marijuana.

Petition still in circulation:

A proposed referendum of a new law regulating carbon dioxide pipelines.

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

State board approves \$3.5 million in loans to businesses

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 16, 2024 3:59 PM

A state government board recently approved three loans to businesses totaling \$3.5 million.

The Board of Economic Development approved the loans, which will be administered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development.

"This financing allows two more local businesses the ability to grow in South Dakota," said Jesse Fonkert, the office's deputy commissioner, in a news release.

The board awarded Dakota Automation Properties LLC, of Watertown, a \$1.97 million Revolving Economic Development and Initiative (REDI) loan and a \$982,519 South Dakota Works loan. The loans will help the business construct a new building to increase capacity. The company designs and installs automated industrial equipment and provides training and support.

The board awarded Borns Group Inc., of Aberdeen, a \$530,000 South Dakota Works loan for working capital. Borns Group is a professional mailing and marketing business.

The South Dakota Works program offers loans to businesses for construction, equipment and general expenses. The loans are typically less than \$1 million with a 3% interest rate. The board has awarded 10 loans totaling \$6.49 million from the program so far this year.

The REDI Fund offers low-interest loans to promote economic growth and job creation, covering up to 45% of a project's cost. Projects can include land purchases, site improvements, building costs, or machinery and equipment purchases. The board has awarded six REDI Fund loans this year totaling \$9.71 million.

Federal bench at full strength in South Dakota following confirmation of Camela Theeler

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 16, 2024 3:47 PM

South Dakota's federal courts once again have a full slate of judges after the U.S. Senate voted 90-4 on Thursday to confirm Camela Theeler's nomination to the federal bench.

The vote came one day after the Senate voted 61-33 to confirm Sioux Falls lawyer and former state bar president Eric Schulte to replace outgoing U.S. District Judge Karen Schreier.

Theeler, who currently serves as a judge in state court, will replace Rapid City-based U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Viken, who retired in October.

Republican Senators Mike Rounds and John Thune took the lead on Theeler and Schulte's nominations last year after nominees proposed to the Biden administration by state Democratic leaders failed to pan out.

Theeler is a Pierre native and former attorney for the Lynn Jackson law firm, as well as a former assistant U.S. attorney for that office's civil division.

Thune and Rounds each spoke in support of Theeler prior to the vote and cast their votes in her favor.

The appointment will relieve pressure on the federal docket in South Dakota. Two judges with senior status, both more than 80 years old, have been assisting the court in managing its caseload.

Carl Tobias, a law professor at the University of Richmond School of Law, told South Dakota Searchlight that Theeler's 90-4 vote tally represents one of the strongest showings for any of the Biden administration's judge nominees in the divided U.S. Senate.

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

U.S. House rebukes Biden administration over pause in heavy bomb shipments to Israel

South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson votes yes

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 16, 2024 5:19 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House passed legislation Thursday rebuking President Joe Biden's decision to withhold some military assistance from Israel amid its ongoing war in Gaza.

The 224-187 vote (including a yes vote from South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson) approved a bill released over the weekend by a handful of Republicans that, in part, "calls on the Biden Administration to allow all previously approved arms transfers to Israel to proceed quickly to ensure that Israel can defend itself and defeat threats from Iran and its proxies, including Hezbollah, Hamas, and the Houthis."

The measure says withheld military assistance "shall be delivered to Israel not later than 15 days after" the bill becomes law and requires the secretaries of Defense and State to obligate all funding for Israel within 30 days of the bill becoming law.

The legislation now goes to the Senate, but it's unlikely that Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, will bring it up for a vote. The White House issued a veto threat for the bill.

"The president has already said he'd veto it, so it's not going anywhere," Schumer said Wednesday.

At a Thursday morning press conference outside the U.S. Capitol, House Speaker Mike Johnson accused Biden of emboldening Iran and "using his authority to defend himself politically."

"Israel needs to finish the job and America needs to help Israel extinguish the flame of terror that is wrought by Hamas. It wasn't that long ago when President Biden called for the elimination of Hamas. But he's not doing that anymore. And now it's clear that Biden and Schumer have turned their back on Israel. They're carrying water for Iran and its proxies," Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 11 of 85

House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, of Oklahoma; Defense Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Ken Calvert, of California; State-Foreign Operations Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Mario Díaz-Balart, of Florida; and Financial Services Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman David Joyce, of Ohio, released the nine-page bill this weekend.

Quiet pause

The legislation comes weeks after the Biden administration quietly paused one shipment of heavy bombs to Israel over concerns that more civilians in Gaza could be killed by U.S.-supplied weapons.

The death toll has reached more than 35,000 in Gaza, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Biden is facing severe opposition from progressives, including high-profile protests on college campuses, over Israel's continued offensive following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

The previously scheduled single shipment that was paused in late April contained 1,800 2,000-pound bombs and 1,700 500-pound bombs, according to a Pentagon update on May 9.

Pentagon spokesman Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters on May 9 that the administration has "not made a final determination on how to proceed with this shipment."

"And as you know, we've provided billions of dollars in security assistance to Israel. We've supported their efforts to defend themselves, most recently (during) Iran's unprecedented attack. So there should be no question that we will continue to stand by Israel when it comes to their defense," Ryder said during a press conference.

The U.S. and allies shot down dozens of drones and missiles launched by Iran at Israel in mid-April, according to the Pentagon.

Israel has been the largest cumulative recipient of financial support from the U.S. since World War II, according to the nonpartisan Congressional Research Service.

Some House Democrats, including Debbie Wasserman Schultz of Florida, expressed concern over the administration's paused shipment, though she voted against the bill Thursday.

"President Biden has been ironclad in his commitment to Israel over the last seven months. His Administration must stay the course and avoid any impression that our support is wavering," Wasserman Schultz said in a statement Friday.

"Targeting remaining Hamas fighters while minimizing harm to civilians will require the best of our combined efforts. I share the President's concern for Palestinian civilians used as human shields and understand the risks posed by a full-scale invasion of Rafah. However, we must remember that Hamas is eager to sacrifice as many Palestinian lives as possible and wants to maximize the civilian toll of this operation as part of their cowardly PR campaign," she continued.

Numerous media reports are citing congressional aides who say the White House is poised to sign off on a \$1 billion arms transfer to Israel.

When asked by reporters Thursday about the reported deal, Johnson criticized it as "window dressing" to provide Biden with "political cover."

White House 'strongly' opposes bill

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Monday during the press briefing that the administration didn't support the legislation.

"We strongly, strongly oppose attempts to constrain the president's ability to deploy U.S. security assistance consistent with U.S. foreign policy and national security objectives," she said.

Jean-Pierre added the Biden administration plans "to spend every last cent appropriated, consistent with legal obligations."

White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan said during the same press briefing the administration had "paused a shipment of 2,000-pound bombs because we do not believe they should be dropped in densely populated cities."

"We still believe it would be a mistake to launch a major military operation into the heart of Rafah that

would put huge numbers of civilians at risk without a clear strategic gain," Sullivan said. "The president was clear that he would not supply certain offensive weapons for such an operation, were it to occur."

Sullivan said the Biden administration was working with the Israeli government "on a better way to ensure the defeat of Hamas everywhere in Gaza, including in Rafah." He also noted that the U.S. is "continuing to send military assistance" to Israel.

The White House released a statement of administration policy on Tuesday further criticizing the legislation and issuing a veto threat.

"The bill is a misguided reaction to a deliberate distortion of the Administration's approach to Israel," it states. "The President has been clear: we will always ensure Israel has what it needs to defend itself."

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

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

Advocates press U.S. House to extend radiation exposure fund that includes SD

South Dakotans have received more than \$6 million from soon-to-expire program

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 16, 2024 5:07 PM

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers and advocates rallied outside the U.S. Capitol Thursday, urging House lawmakers to extend a fund for victims of U.S. nuclear testing that is set to expire in less than a month.

But critics say the program is too expensive and should be winding down, and it's not clear if the House will act before the looming deadline.

New Mexico Democrats Sen. Ben Ray Lujan and Rep. Teresa Leger Fernandez, and Guam's Republican House delegate, James Moylan, among others, called on House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana to bring the legislation to the floor.

"We stand with community members from across the United States, ranging from New Mexico, where they exploded the very first atomic bomb, to Guam to Missouri to Navajo to Utah to Colorado to people in Texas," Fernandez said. "Communities that share a common bond of hardship, of death and of illness that came about because of the nation's program to build and test atomic weapons."

People who worked in South Dakota's uranium mining, milling and transport industry decades ago in Edgemont are among those eligible for compensation from the fund who could benefit from the extension.

As of 2023, people living in South Dakota had submitted 114 claims to the fund since its inception, resulting in 37 denials, 76 awards and one claim that was pending. Total payouts to South Dakotans stood at \$6.56 million.

Legislation to expand and extend the fund already passed the Senate in early March in a bipartisan 69-30 vote. South Dakota's Republican senators split their votes on the measure, with Sen. Mike Rounds voting for it and Sen. John Thune against it. Neither of their offices provided rationale for their votes in response to messages from South Dakota Searchlight. South Dakota Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson's office did not immediately respond to a Searchlight message Thursday inquiring about his position.

Advocates and survivors have long said they were not warned prior to nuclear testing and were forgotten in the following decades as the consequences of nuclear fallout and waste affected their families.

The Radiation Exposure Compensation Fund, often shortened to RECA, was established in 1990 and pays one-time sums to those who developed certain diseases after working on U.S. nuclear tests before 1963, or who lived in counties downwind from test explosion sites between January 1951 and October 1958, and the month of July in 1962, in Arizona, Nevada and Utah.

Uranium industry workers who were employed in 11 states from 1942 to 1971 who subsequently developed qualifying diseases also qualify.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 13 of 85

The U.S. conducted more than 1,000 atomic weapons tests from 1945 to 1992 — the first at the Trinity Test site near Alamogordo, New Mexico, where the U.S. tested the atomic bomb during the Manhattan Project prior to dropping the weapons on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Japan at the end of World War II.

As of June 2022, the Justice Department has approved more than 36,000 RECA claims for more than \$2.3 billion in benefits.

Unless the Radiation Exposure Compensation Fund is extended, claims have to be postmarked by June 10, 2024, according to the Department of Justice.

'Unknowning, unwilling, uncompensated victims'

A small crowd of activists wore "Save RECA" buttons and matching yellow t-shirts bearing the message "We are the unknowing, unwilling, uncompensated victims of the Manhattan Project and Cold War."

A sign on the small lectern read, "Speaker Johnson Pass RECA Before We Die."

Dawn Chapman, co-founder of the St. Louis, Missouri-based Just Moms STL, told the crowd that she and advocates have been in lawmakers' offices pushing for RECA to be taken up on the House floor.

"Speaker Johnson's staff has met as of this morning with two community groups, ours being one of them. We did meet with his office for an hour-and-a-half," she said.

Under the Senate-passed bill, championed by Missouri Republican Sen. Josh Hawley, the fund would extend the program by six years and expand eligibility in several new locations, as well as add qualifying diseases.

As written and if passed, the fund would reach areas including ZIP codes in Alaska, Kentucky, Missouri and Tennessee, where communities were impacted by radioactive waste dumping, uranium processing and other related activities surrounding the testing.

The bill would also expand downwind areas to include Colorado, Idaho, Montana, New Mexico, and Guam and increase the one-time compensation sums to victims or surviving family to \$100,000, up from \$50,000 to \$75,000.

Hawley was not able to attend the press conference due to a last-minute conflict, according to his fellow lawmakers. But in a statement posted to X Thursday, he said, "The good people poisoned by their government's nuclear radiation have been put off long enough – it's time to make this right."

In a statement to States Newsroom, a Johnson spokesperson said Wednesday that "The Speaker understands and appreciates Senator Hawley's position and is working closely with interested members and stakeholders to chart a path forward for the House."

Concerns over cost

Critics say the expansion would just be too costly.

An earlier iteration of the expansion, which received 61 votes in the Senate, was attached to last year's massive annual defense authorization bill, but eventually lawmakers stripped it from the package.

According to an analysis by the watchdog group Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, the cost of the expansion was slated to reach \$150 billion.

Hawley cut the cost in his revised legislation that garnered bipartisan Senate support in March. The new price tag went down to an estimated cost of \$50 to \$60 billion over 10 years after Hawley removed some qualifying diseases, cut the scope of medical benefits and shortened the extension from 19 years to six years, according to the CRFB.

Still, critics worry that the funds will be designated automatic mandatory spending, meaning funding couldn't be adjusted from year to year by lawmakers like discretionary spending.

"Compensation may very well be warranted for individuals harmed by the government's nuclear activities, but the substantial deficit impact of the legislation is concerning and unnecessary," the Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget wrote in March. The organization also pointed out that the cost is not offset by other federal spending cuts.

"There is no reason why this well-known, long-term problem should not be addressed with careful consideration for both policy design and offsetting revenue increases or spending reductions," the organiza-

tion's statement continued.

South Dakota Searchlight's Seth Tupper contributed to this report.

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

Production jumps higher at Black Hills gold mine

BY: SETH TUPPER - MAY 16, 2024 2:54 PM

Gold production was up and silver production was way up last year at South Dakota's only active large-scale gold mine, according to new numbers reviewed Thursday by a state board.

Chicago-based Coeur Mining owns the Wharf Mine, near Terry Peak and the city of Lead in the northern Black Hills. Gold production at the mine increased by 17% to 93,502 ounces last year, and silver production increased by 481% to 267,786 ounces.

Matt Zietlow is Coeur's environmental manager at Wharf. He told South Dakota Searchlight there was no intentional reason for the silver production spike.

"It's really just random," he said. "It's the metallurgy of the ore."

Silver is a "nice co-product" of gold, he added, but "you can actually get too much of a good thing where the silver can outcompete the gold sometimes."

The increased gold production helped the mine generate \$82 million in annual free cash flow, defined by the company as cash from operating activities minus capital expenditures. It was the mine's highest-ever amount in that category, according to Coeur's annual report. The company's sales of minerals mined at Wharf totaled \$189.5 million in 2023.

The mine began operations in 1982 and has produced more than 3 million total ounces of gold. It has disturbed about 1,300 acres, including 11 new acres last year. About 350 acres have been fully or partially restored to a natural-looking state, in a process known as reclamation.

Wharf is an open-pit mine that uses the heap-leach method of mineral extraction. Ore is crushed, piled on giant pads and treated with a cyanide solution to leach out the precious metals.

Coeur stripped away 9.4 million tons of earth last year at Wharf to uncover 4.9 million tons of ore, yielding the combined 361,288 ounces of gold and silver.

The mine paid \$6.3 million in gold severance taxes to the state last year, employed 245 people and had a payroll of \$32 million. It gave \$212,000 to local community groups, schools, athletic programs and charities.

Zietlow presented the figures Thursday during an annual report to the state's Board of Minerals and Environment.

"A good, solid, safe year for us overall at Wharf," Zietlow told the board. "Very proud of that."

Coeur operates additional mines in Nevada, Alaska and Mexico.

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

Housing boom in most of the US could ease shortage, but cost is still a problem

South Dakota among states with highest percent increase in new units

BY: TIM HENDERSON - MAY 16, 2024 9:08 AM

The United States has added almost 5 million housing units since 2020, most heavily in the South and most of them single-family homes, making a housing shortage look conquerable in much of the nation.

Still, even more homes need to be built — especially single-family homes, experts say — and continuing high interest rates are hurting potential homebuyers.

Almost half of the housing increase from April 2020 to July 2023 came in six states: Texas, Florida, California, North Carolina, Georgia and Tennessee, according to a Stateline analysis of U.S. Census Bureau estimates to be released Thursday. That mirrors America's post-pandemic moving patterns to plentiful suburban housing in Texas and Florida, also California's persistent push for more apartments in resistant areas across the state.

Housing experts caution that the supply has still not caught up with demand even after another good year for home construction in 2023. Last year produced the most housing units since 2007. "One Good Year Does Not Solve America's Housing Shortage" was the title of a Moody's Analytics report in January, which found single-family homes in particular remain in short supply.

Moody's estimated a shortfall of about 1.2 million single-family homes and 800,000 other units, noting that home sales had slowed since reaching all-time-high prices in 2022 as interest rates climbed and made purchases even more unaffordable.

The National Association of Realtors, in a February report, offered a higher housing shortage estimate of about 2.5 million units, mostly single-family homes.

Most of the new housing units in recent years have been single-family homes, according to a separate U.S. Census Bureau construction survey through the end of 2023. Production of new single-family homes reached more than 1 million annually in 2022 and 2023 for the first time since the housing bubble burst in 2007, according to the survey.

Apartment construction is also at historic levels, with 438,500 units built last year, the highest level since 1987. The number of apartments under construction at the end of the year, about 981,000, was an all-time high since the survey began in 1969.

New housing should continue to arrive at a strong pace for several years because so much construction has already started, said Daniel McCue, a senior research associate at Harvard University's Joint Center for Housing Studies.

"New construction can really only slow overheated rental rates, but it's really hard-pressed to bring down rents or make things more affordable for people at the bottom," McCue said. "Our focus is not on the overall shortage of housing units, but on the specific shortage of affordable and available homes for low- and moderate-income people."

The housing unit data released Thursday, which tracks changes through the middle of 2023, shows continued increases across the country, with about 1.6 million new units annually for the past two years.

Increases were concentrated in the West and South, with half the 4.8 million new units since 2020 in a handful of states: Texas (about 806,000), Florida (586,500), California (371,000), North Carolina (270,500), Georgia (200,000) and Tennessee (164,000).

Percentage increases were highest in fast-growing Western states: Utah (up 9% since 2020), Idaho (up 8%) and Texas (up 7%). Five states had 6% growth in housing units: South Carolina, South Dakota, Florida, Colorado and North Carolina.

Arizona, Georgia and Nevada — all of which are key swing states in this year's presidential election — were not far behind, with 5% growth in housing units.

The housing shortage has become a major political talking point, even as states scramble to get more units built and people housed.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 16 of 85

Even with Utah's nation-leading growth in housing units for the decade, for example, Republican Gov. Spencer Cox called high housing prices "the single largest threat to our future prosperity" in his State of the State address this year.

"Housing attainability is a crisis in Utah and every state in this country," Cox said, announcing a plan to build 35,000 small "starter" single-family homes in the next five years.

The Federal National Mortgage Association, known as Fannie Mae, reported last year that the typical homebuyer paid 35% of their income in mortgage payments in October, the highest since at least 2000.

A Utah-based think tank, the Kem C. Gardner Policy Institute at the University of Utah, in a report last year said the pandemic years brought a boom-and bust-cycle to the state's housing construction. New permits increased 26% in 2021, only to drop 21% the next year as interest rates climbed. The new U.S. Census Bureau figures show new units in the state peaking at 38,500 in 2022 and falling back to about 30,000 in 2023.

All states saw some housing growth, according to the Stateline analysis and census data, but it was slowest in some states affected by poverty or low population growth. There was only a 1% increase in housing units since 2020 in Rhode Island, Illinois, West Virginia, Connecticut, Alaska and New Jersey.

Alaska Republican Gov. Mike Dunleavy also mentioned housing affordability as one of the biggest challenges facing the state this year in his State of the State address. Dunleavy proposed a state-funded down payment assistance program for first-time homebuyers, and lumber grading changes designed to make homebuilding materials more affordable.

New Jersey Democratic Gov. Phil Murphy mentioned in his State of the State address the state's low housing stock at a time when tens of thousands of New Yorkers are seeking suburban housing there.

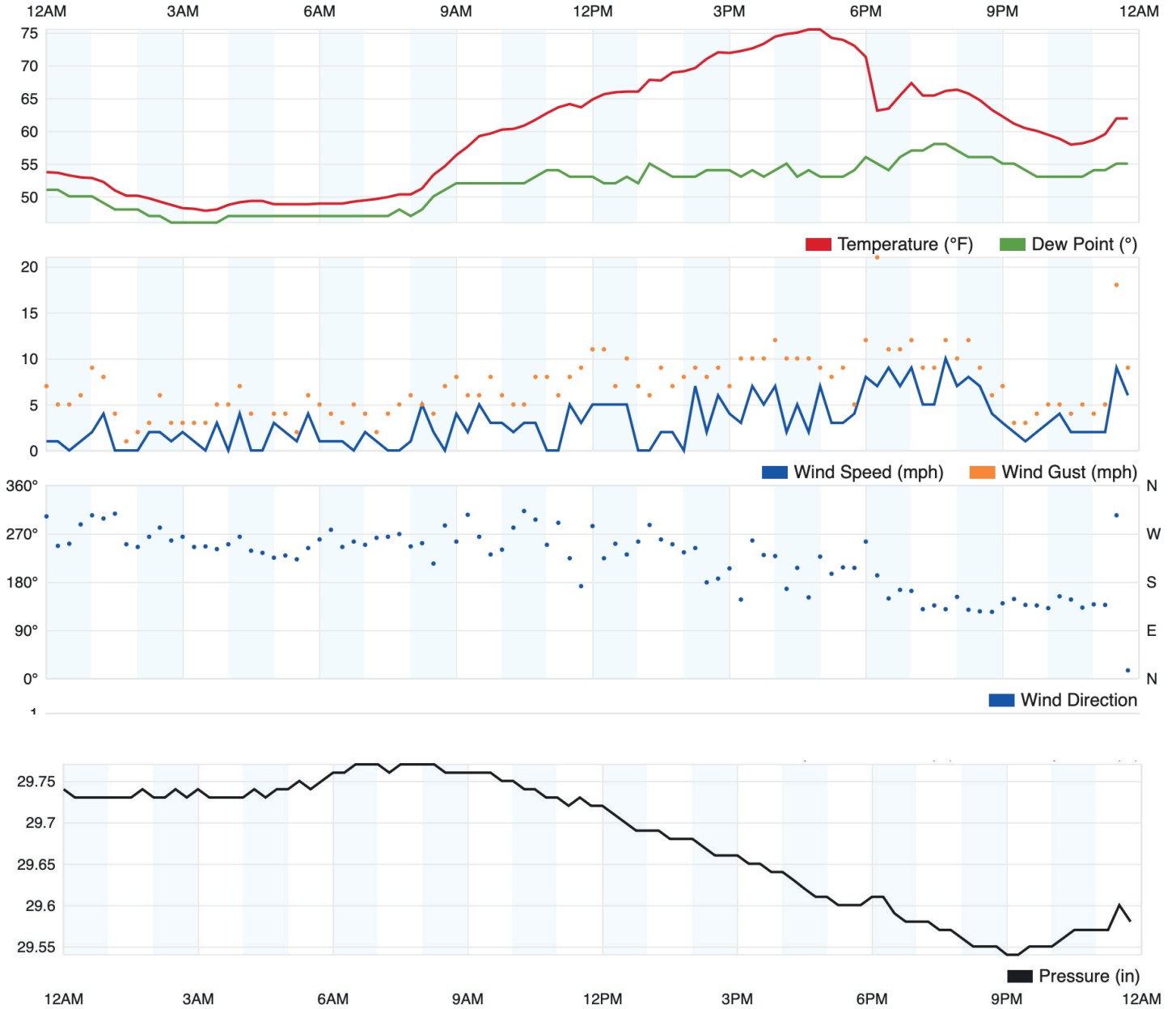
"If our population grows while our housing stock remains steady, homeownership will be a luxury reserved only for those at the top. That is untenable," Murphy said.

Tim Henderson covers demographics for Stateline. He has been a reporter at the Miami Herald, the Cincinnati Enquirer and The Journal News in suburban New York. Henderson became fascinated with census data in the early 1990s, when AOL offered the first computerized reports. Since then he has broken stories about population trends in South Florida, including a housing affordability analysis included in the 2007 Pulitzer-winning series "House of Lies" for the Miami Herald, and a prize-winning analysis of public pension irregularities for The Journal News. He has been a member and trainer for the National Institute for Computer-Assisted Reporting since its inception 20 years ago, specializing in online data access and visualization along with demographics.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 17 of 85

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 18 of 85

Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 86 °F

Sunny



40%

Low: 54 °F

Chance
T-storms



High: 72 °F

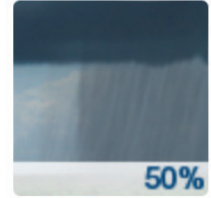
Sunny and
Breezy



20%

Low: 47 °F

Clear then
Slight Chance
Showers



50%

High: 76 °F

Chance
Showers

Severe Weather Threat Overview

Friday Afternoon and Evening

May 17, 2024
3:36 AM

Timing/Location

Fast moving storms with **high wind** potential are possible for mainly western/north-central SD and most of ND this afternoon & evening.

Primary Threats for the **YELLOW** areas

Tornado Potential

Very Low Low Medium High

Max Hail Size

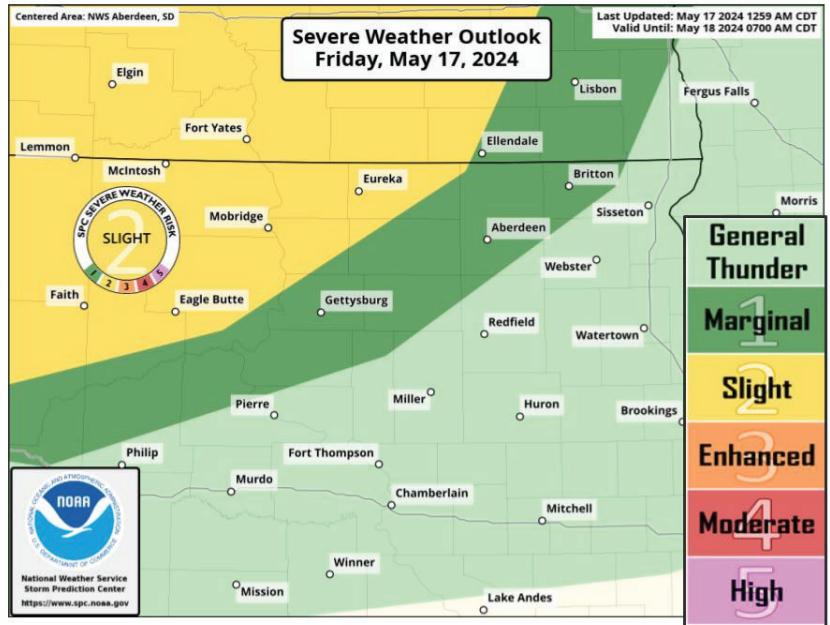
Dimes **Quarters** Golfball Baseball

Max Wind Speed

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

Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low Low Medium High



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Fast moving thunderstorms are expected for western and north central South Dakota and portions of North Dakota this afternoon and evening before storms weaken as they continue east. The main threat with storms will be high winds

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 19 of 85

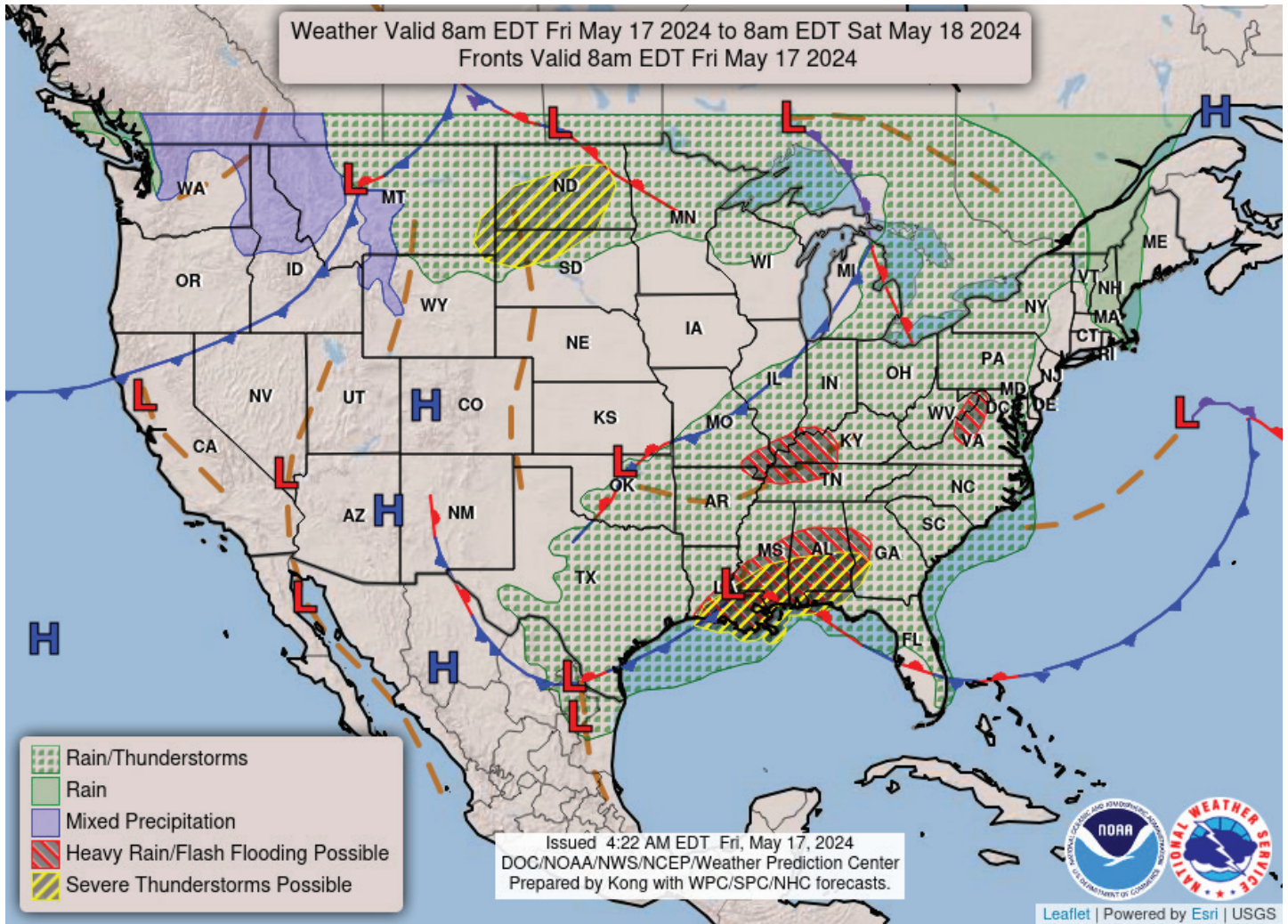
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 76 °F at 4:50 PM
Low Temp: 48 °F at 3:29 AM
Wind: 21 mph at 6:09 PM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 03 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 103 in 1934
Record Low: 27 in 1925
Average High: 71
Average Low: 45
Average Precip in May.: 1.88
Precip to date in May: 0.91
Average Precip to date: 5.85
Precip Year to Date: 5.44
Sunset Tonight: 9:00:37 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:55:59 am



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 20 of 85

Today in Weather History

May 17, 1902: An estimated F3 Tornado moved northeast from 6 miles southwest of Mina to south of Westport, a distance of about 25 miles. A four-year-old girl was killed in one of two farmhouses blown apart in Edmunds County. Three more homes were damaged in Brown County. There were probably two if not three separate tornadoes involved.

May 17, 1937: A complex of tornadoes and downbursts skipped southeast from near Roslyn and Greenville. This storm also caused \$50,000 in damage in downtown Waubay and damaged farm property to about 4 miles west of Gray, Minnesota. About 20 barns were destroyed. Sheep and horses were killed. These events traveled a distance of about 70 miles. The strongest tornado was estimated at F2 strength.

May 17, 1996: An F1 tornado touched down 20 miles southeast of Wilmot or 5 miles northwest of Ortonville, Minnesota at Schmidts Landing on Big Stone Lake. The roof was ripped off of a house, and a garage wall was blown off its foundation. Three RV's were demolished, and a trailer was overturned and destroyed. This tornado moved into Big Stone County and intensified. An F3 tornado crossed Big Stone Lake from Roberts County, South Dakota destroying on a cabin at the Meadowbrook Resort. It also blew the roof off another cabin, and the third cabin was demolished when a tree fell onto it. Several boats on Big Stone Lake were overturned. Approximately 150 buildings sustained damage or were destroyed as the tornado moved northeast across Big Stone County. Southwest of Clinton, a pontoon boat, and a camper were destroyed. East of Clinton, a farm lost all buildings with severe damage to their home. Estimated property damage was listed at \$1.5 million.

A wind gust of 90 mph blew two garage roofs off, destroyed an antenna, blew large trees down, and also a grain dryer was blown down near Dumont, Minnesota.

1883 - A three day flood in the Black Hills of western South Dakota resulted in a million dollars damage at Rapid City. (David Ludlum)

1896: An estimated F5 tornado tracked 100 miles through northeastern Kansas and extreme southeastern Nebraska. Seneca, Oneida, Sabetha, and Reserve, Kansas sustained severe damage. While passing through Reserve, the tornado was 2 miles wide. 25 people were killed, and 200 were injured. The cost was estimated at \$400,000.

1979 - A reading of 12 degrees at Mauna Kea Observatory established an all-time record low for the state of Hawaii. (The Weather Channel)

1983 - A golfer playing the Fox Meadows Course in Memphis TN was struck by a bolt of lightning that went through his neck, down his spine, came out a pocket containing his keys, and went into a nearby tree. Miraculously, he survived! (The Weather Channel)

1987 - A summer-like weather pattern continued, with warm temperatures and scattered thunderstorms across much of the nation. A cold front in the north central U.S. produced a sharp contrast in the weather across the state of Minnesota during the afternoon. At the same time Duluth was 50 degrees with rain and fog, Mankato was 95 degrees with sunny skies. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds over the Carolinas during the afternoon and evening. A "thunderstorm of a lifetime" in northern Spartanburg County, SC, produced hail for forty-five minutes, leaving some places knee-deep in hail. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms ravaged the south central U.S. with severe weather for the third day in a row. Thunderstorms spawned another nineteen tornadoes, for a total of fifty tornadoes in three days. A strong (F-2) tornado injured 14 persons and caused two million dollars damage at Apple Springs TX. Baseball size hail was reported at Matador TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather in New York State during the late morning and afternoon. A tornado injured one person at Warren, and wind gusts to 80 mph were reported at Owego. Evening thunderstorms over southwest Texas produced wind gusts to 80 mph at Marfa, along with golf ball size hail which accumulated to a depth of ten inches. Late night thunderstorms over southwest Texas produced up to seven inches of rain in western Crockett County. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 21 of 85

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

NOT SOMETHING, SOMEONE!

A visitor recently said to me, "There's something different about you. You have something I don't have. I lack something in my life that you have in your life. It's very obvious to me. What is it?"

"Oh," I replied, "it's not something. It's Someone. It's the Lord!"

John, the Apostle, put it this way: "Life itself was in Him, and this life gives light to everyone. This light shines through the darkness, and the darkness can never extinguish it."

There is in this magnificent truth the Light we need in and for our lives: The darkness of sin can never extinguish the Light that comes from God through Jesus Christ. In this Light we can see ourselves as we really are: sinners in need of a Savior and the salvation that only He can provide. When we come to Jesus, the true Light, and follow Him, we can walk confidently in His strength and power, seeing things as they really are. We will be able to avoid falling into temptation and sin since His Light will shine on our paths. We will then walk in ways that are pleasing to Him. When we follow this Light we can be assured of knowing that our lives are pleasing to Him and we can count on His presence and power.

With God's Son, Jesus, as our Savior, we will become "someone" who is different. Our lives will reveal His wonder and glory and we will shine as His "lights."

Prayer: Lord, You truly are the Light of the world and will, if we allow You, give us "the" light that will guide us and guard us and bring us safely into Your presence. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: In him was life, and that life was the light of all mankind. The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it. John 1:4-5



We all need the encouragement, comfort, and peace that comes through God's grace. Our daily devotionals, known as Seeds of Hope, have been a means through which thousands of people have experienced this grace. Each devotional comes from God's Word and we pray this good "seed" finds good soil in your heart. Our aim is that the Seeds of Hope will be a great source of daily encouragement to you and that God will use them to draw you near to Him

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 22 of 85

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

Subscription Form

All prices listed include 6.5% Sales Tax

- Black & White \$48.99/year
- Colored \$79.88/year
- Colored \$42.60/6 months
- E-Weekly* \$31.95/year

* The E-Weekly is a PDF file emailed to you each week. It does not grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

E-mail _____

Phone Number _____

Mail Completed Form to:

Groton Independent

P.O. Box 34

Groton, SD 57445-0034

or scan and email to paperpaul@grotonsd.net

Groton Daily Independent

www.397news.com

Subscription Form

This option will grant you access to the GDI/Video Archives.

- 1 Month \$15.98
- 3 Months..... \$26.63
- 6 Months..... \$31.95
- 9 Months..... \$42.60
- 12 Months..... \$53.25

Name: _____

Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 23 of 85



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.14.24

13 19 43 62 64 6

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$393,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 32 Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.15.24

17 25 27 47 51 10

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,450,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 15 Hrs 47 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.16.24

12 19 34 39 45 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 2 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.15.24

6 20 29 33 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$101,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 2 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.15.24

8 9 29 57 65 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.15.24

19 42 45 55 69 6

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$77,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 56 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

French police fatally shoot a man suspected of setting fire to a synagogue

By JEFFREY SCHAEFFER and JOHN LEICESTER Associated Press

ROUEN, France (AP) — French police shot and killed a man armed with a knife and a metal bar who is suspected of having set fire to a synagogue in the Normandy city of Rouen early on Friday, the latest apparent act in a storm of antisemitism roiling France amid the Israel-Hamas war.

Officers were alerted early Friday morning that smoke was rising from the synagogue and came face to face with the man when they got there, the national police information service said. It said the man surged toward officers with a knife and a metal bar. An officer opened fire and fatally wounded the man, police said. Police said they had not yet identified the man.

Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin posted on the social media site X that the armed individual was “clearly wanting to set fire to the city’s synagogue.”

He congratulated officers for “their reactivity and their courage.”

Tensions and anger have grown in France over the Israel-Hamas war. Antisemitic acts have surged in the country, which has the largest Jewish and Muslim populations in western Europe.

Rouen Mayor Nicolas Mayer-Rossignol said the man is thought to have climbed onto a trash container and thrown “a sort of Molotov cocktail” inside the synagogue, starting a fire and causing “significant damage.”

“When the Jewish community is attacked, it’s an attack on the national community, an attack on France, an attack on all French citizens,” he said.

“It’s a fright for the whole nation,” he added.

Frédéric Desguerre, a regional police union official, told broadcaster BFM-TV that the man hurled the metal bar he was carrying at the officers and pulled out a long kitchen knife from one of his sleeves.

“He moved toward them with a determined air, quite violent,” he said.

Desguerre, of the Unité police union, said the officer fired five shots after warning the man to stop moving.

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal said this month that the sharp spike in antisemitic acts in France that followed the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel has continued into this year.

Authorities registered 366 antisemitic acts in the first three months of 2024, a 300% increase over the same period last year, Attal said. More than 1,200 antisemitic acts were reported in the last three months of 2023 — which was three times more than in the whole of 2022, he said.

“We are witnessing an explosion of hatred,” he said.

Israel tells UN top court South Africa makes ‘mockery’ of genocide charge

By MOLLY QUELL Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — A protester shouting “liars” briefly interrupted a hearing at the United Nations’ top court on Friday as Israel was defending its military operation in Gaza.

The session at the International Court of Justice was paused for less than a minute while security guards escorted a woman from the public gallery. The court in The Hague in the Netherlands was holding a third round of hearings on emergency measures requested by South Africa, which wants the court to order a cease-fire in Gaza.

Israel told the court on Friday that South Africa’s case “makes a mockery of the heinous charge of genocide.”

“Armed conflict is not a synonym of genocide,” Israel’s deputy attorney general Gilad Noam told a panel of 15 international judges.

South Africa told the court on Thursday that the situation in the beleaguered enclave has reached “a new and horrific stage” and urged judges to order a halt to Israeli military operations.

Defending Israel’s conduct in Gaza, lawyer Tamar Kaplan-Tourgeman said it had allowed in fuel and medication. “Israel takes extraordinary measures in order to minimize the harm to civilians in Gaza,” she said.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 25 of 85

Israel's delegation was noticeably smaller than during previous hearings. According to Noam, a number of their lawyers were not available on such short notice. The country was informed on Monday that hearings would be held on Thursday and Friday. This "significantly impacted" their preparations, Noam said.

Outside of the Peace Palace, a small group of protesters gathered to demand the release of the estimated 100 hostages still held by Hamas.

South Africa has submitted four requests for the ICJ to investigate Israel. The court has already found that there is a "real and imminent risk" to the Palestinian people in Gaza by Israel's military operations.

According to the latest request, the country says Israel's military incursion in Rafah threatens the "very survival of Palestinians in Gaza." In January, judges ordered Israel to do all it can to prevent death, destruction and any acts of genocide in Gaza, but the panel stopped short of ordering an end to the military offensive.

ICJ judges have broad powers to order a cease-fire and other measures, though the court doesn't have its own enforcement apparatus. A 2022 order by the court demanding that Russia halt its full-scale invasion of Ukraine has so far gone unheeded.

Most of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced since fighting began.

The war began with a Hamas attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7 in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages. More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, Gaza's Health Ministry says, without distinguishing between civilians and combatants in its count.

South Africa initiated proceedings in December 2023 and sees the legal campaign as rooted in issues central to its identity. Its governing party, the African National Congress, has long compared Israel's policies in Gaza and the occupied West Bank to its own history under the apartheid regime of white minority rule, which restricted most Blacks to "homelands." Apartheid ended in 1994.

Severe storms kill at least 4 in Houston, knock out power in Texas and Louisiana

By DAVID J. PHILLIP, LISA BAUMANN and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — Fast-moving thunderstorms pummeled southeastern Texas for the second time this month, killing at least four people, blowing out windows in high-rise buildings, downing trees and knocking out power to more than 900,000 homes and businesses in the Houston area.

Officials urged residents to keep off roads following Thursday's storms, as many were impassable and traffic lights were out. The storm system moved through swiftly, but flood watches and warnings remained Friday for Houston and areas to the east.

Houston Mayor John Whitmire said four people died during the severe weather. At least two of the deaths were caused by falling trees and another happened when a crane blew over in strong winds, officials said.

Houston's streets were flooded and trees and power lines were down across the region. Whitmire said wind speeds reached 100 mph (160 kph) "with some twisters." Whitmire said the powerful gusts were reminiscent of 2008's Hurricane Ike, which pounded the city.

"Stay at home tonight. Do not go to work tomorrow, unless you're an essential worker. Stay home, take care of your children," Whitmire said in a Thursday evening briefing. "Our first responders will be working around the clock."

Gulf Coast states could experience scattered, severe thunderstorms with tornadoes, large hail and damaging winds. Heavy to excessive rainfall is possible for eastern Louisiana into central Alabama on Friday, the National Weather Service said.

In Houston, hundreds of windows were shattered at downtown hotels and office buildings, with glass littering the streets below, and the state was sending Department of Public Safety officers to secure the area.

"Downtown is a mess," Whitmire said, adding that there was a backlog of 911 calls first responders were working through.

The ferocious storms also moved into neighboring Louisiana and left more than 215,000 customers without power. More than 100,000 Entergy Louisiana customers in the New Orleans area lost power, NOLA.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 26 of 85

com reported.

The weather service forecast office for New Orleans and Baton Rouge issued a flash flood warning through Saturday.

At Minute Maid Park, home of the Houston Astros, the retractable roof was closed due to the storm. But the wind was so powerful it still blew rain into the stadium. Puddles formed on the outfield warning track, but the game against the Oakland Athletics still was played.

The Houston Independent School District canceled classes Friday for some 400,000 students at all its 274 campuses.

Flights were briefly grounded at Houston's two major airports. Sustained winds topping 60 mph (96 kph) were recorded at Bush Intercontinental Airport.

About 900,000 customers were without electricity in and around Harris County, which contains Houston, according to poweroutage.us. The county is home to more than 4.7 million people.

The problems extended to the city's suburbs, with emergency officials in neighboring Montgomery County describing the damage to transmission lines as "catastrophic" and warning that power could be impacted for several days.

Heavy storms slammed the Houston area during the first week of May, leading to numerous high-water rescues, including some from the rooftops of flooded homes.

US military says first aid shipment has been driven across a newly built US pier into the Gaza Strip

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Trucks carrying badly needed aid for the Gaza Strip rolled across a newly built U.S. pier and into the besieged enclave for the first time Friday as Israeli restrictions on border crossings and heavy fighting hindered the delivery of food and other supplies.

The shipment is the first in an operation that American military officials anticipate could scale up to 150 truckloads a day, all while Israel presses in on the southern city of Rafah in its 7-month offensive against Hamas.

But the U.S. and aid groups warn that the floating pier project is not a substitute for land deliveries that could bring in all the food, water and fuel needed in Gaza. Before the war, more than 500 truckloads entered the territory on an average day.

The operation's success also remains tenuous because of the risk of militant attack, logistical hurdles and a growing shortage of fuel for the trucks to run due to the Israeli blockade of Gaza since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. Militants killed 1,200 people and took 250 others hostage in that assault on southern Israel. The Israeli offensive since has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians in Gaza, local health officials say, while hundreds more have been killed in the West Bank.

Aid agencies say they are running out of food in southern Gaza and fuel is dwindling, while the U.S. Agency for International Development and the World Food Program say famine has already taken hold in Gaza's north.

Troops finished installing the floating pier on Thursday, and the U.S. military's Central Command said the first aid crossed into Gaza at 9 a.m. Friday. It said no American troops went ashore in the operation.

"This is an ongoing, multinational effort to deliver additional aid to Palestinian civilians in Gaza via a maritime corridor that is entirely humanitarian in nature, and will involve aid commodities donated by a number of countries and humanitarian organizations," the command said.

The Pentagon said no backups were expected in the distribution process, which is being coordinated by the United Nations.

The U.N., however, said fuel deliveries brought through land routes have all but stopped and this will make it extremely difficult to bring the aid to Gaza's people.

"We desperately need fuel," U.N. deputy spokesperson Farhan Haq said. "It doesn't matter how the aid comes, whether it's by sea or whether by land, without fuel, aid won't get to the people."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 27 of 85

Pentagon spokesperson Sabrina Singh said the issue of fuel deliveries comes up in all U.S. conversations with the Israelis. She also said the plan is to begin slowly with the sea route and ramp up the truck deliveries over time as they work the kinks out of the system.

Israel fears Hamas will use fuel in the war, but it asserts it places no limits on the entry of humanitarian aid and blames the U.N. for delays in distributing goods entering Gaza. Under pressure from the U.S., Israel has opened a pair of crossings to deliver aid into the territory's hard-hit north in recent weeks.

It has said that a series of Hamas attacks on the main crossing, Kerem Shalom, have disrupted the flow of goods. The U.N. says fighting, Israeli fire and chaotic security conditions have hindered delivery. There have also been violent protests by Israelis that disrupted aid shipments.

Israel recently seized the key Rafah border crossing in its push against Hamas around that city on the Egyptian border, raising fears about civilians' safety while also cutting off the main entry for aid into the Gaza Strip.

U.S. President Joe Biden ordered the pier project, expected to cost \$320 million. The boatloads of aid will be deposited at a port facility built by the Israelis just southwest of Gaza City and then distributed by aid groups.

U.S. officials said the initial shipment totaled as much as 500 tons of aid. The U.S. has closely coordinated with Israel on how to protect the ships and personnel working on the beach.

But there are still questions about the safety of aid workers who distribute the food, said Sonali Korde, assistant to the administrator of USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, which is helping with logistics.

"There is a very insecure operating environment," and aid groups are still struggling to get clearance for their planned movements in Gaza, Korde said.

That concern was highlighted last month when Israeli strike killed seven relief workers from World Central Kitchen whose trip had been coordinated with Israeli officials. The group had also brought aid in by sea.

Pentagon officials have made it clear that security conditions will be monitored closely and could prompt a shutdown of the maritime route, even if just temporarily. Navy Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, a deputy commander at the U.S. military's Central Command, told reporters Thursday that "we are confident in the ability of this security arrangement to protect those involved."

Already, the site has been targeted by mortar fire during its construction, and Hamas has threatened to target any foreign forces who "occupy" the Gaza Strip.

Biden has made it clear that there will be no U.S. forces on the ground in Gaza, so third-country contractors will drive the trucks onto the shore.

Israeli forces are in charge of security on shore, but there are also two U.S. Navy warships nearby that can protect U.S. troops and others.

The aid for the sea route is collected and inspected in Cyprus, then loaded onto ships and taken about 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the large floating pier off the Gaza coast. There, the pallets are transferred onto the trucks that then drive onto the Army boats, which will shuttle the trucks from the pier to a floating causeway anchored to the beach. Once the trucks drop off the aid, they return to the boats.

North Korea test-fires suspected missiles a day after US and South Korea conduct a fighter jet drill

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — North Korea fired suspected short-range ballistic missiles off its east coast on Friday, South Korea's military said, a day after South Korea and the U.S. flew powerful fighter jets in a joint drill that the North views as a major security threat.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the weapons launched from the North's east coast Wonsan region traveled about 300 kilometers (185 miles) before landing in the waters between the Korean Peninsula and Japan. Japan's Chief Cabinet Secretary Yoshimasa Hayashi said a North Korean missile landed outside Japan's exclusive economic zone.

South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff statement called the launches "a clear provocation" that threatens

peace on the Korean Peninsula. It said South Korea will maintain a firm readiness to repel potential aggressions by North Korea in conjunctions with the military alliance with the United States.

North Korea has extended its run of weapons testing in recent months as part of its efforts to enlarge and modernize its arsenal while diplomacy with the United States and South Korea remains stalled. Last week, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un supervised the test firing of a new multiple rocket launch system, according to the North's state media.

North Korea says it has been forced to boost its nuclear and missile programs to deal with U.S.-led hostilities. North Korea cites expanded U.S.-South Korean military training, which it calls an invasion rehearsal. Many foreign experts say North Korea uses its rivals' military drills as a pretext for building a larger weapons arsenal in the belief that it would boost its leverage in future diplomacy with the U.S.

On Thursday, two South Korean F-35As and two U.S. F-22 Raptors were mobilized for a combined aerial exercise over the central region of South Korea. North Korea is extremely sensitive to the deployment of sophisticated U.S. aircraft. It was reportedly the first deployment of a U.S. F-22 to South Korea in seven months.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said Friday the re-deployment of the U.S. F-22s for joint training with South Korea is "another clear proof of the hostile nature of the U.S." which seeks "a showdown of force" with North Korea. KCNA accuses "the military gangsters" of South Korea of intensifying tensions to keep pace with "their master's confrontation scheme" against the North.

It warned the F-22s flyovers "will only precipitate the advent of a situation that the U.S. does not want to see." But it didn't elaborate what steps North Korea would take.

Also Friday, Kim's sister and senior official Kim Yo Jong said North Korea's recent weapons tests were part of the country's five-year arms buildup plan launched in 2021. She said the recently tested weapons are designed to attack Seoul, the South Korean capital, and denied outside speculation that the tests were meant to display weapons that North Korea plans to export to Russia.

"We don't conceal the fact that such weapons will be used to prevent Seoul from inventing any idle thinking," Kim Yo Jong said in a statement carried by KCNA.

Massive Ukrainian drone attack on Crimea causes power cutoffs in Sevastopol

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A massive Ukrainian drone attack on Crimea early Friday caused power cutoffs in the city of Sevastopol and set a refinery ablaze in southern Russia, Russian authorities said.

The drone raids marked Kyiv's attempt to strike back during Moscow's offensive in northeastern Ukraine, which has added to the pressure on outnumbered and outgunned Ukrainian forces who are waiting for delayed deliveries of crucial weapons and ammunition from Western partners.

Ukraine has not commented on the attack or claimed responsibility for it.

The Russian Defense Ministry said air defenses downed 51 Ukrainian drones over Crimea, another 44 over the Krasnodar region and six over the Belgorod region. It said Russian warplanes and patrol boats also destroyed six sea drones in the Black Sea.

Mikhail Razvozhayev, the governor of Sevastopol, which is the main base for Russia's Black Sea Fleet, said the drone attack damaged the city's power plant. He said it could take a day to fully restore energy supplies and warned residents that power would be cut to parts of the city.

"Communal services are doing their best to restore the power system as quickly as possible," he said in a statement.

Razvozhayev also announced that schools in the city would be closed temporarily.

Earlier Ukrainian attacks damaged aircraft and a fuel storage facility at Belbek air base near Sevastopol, according to satellite images released by Maxar Technologies.

In the Krasnodar region, the authorities said a drone attack early Friday caused a fire at an oil refinery in Tuapse which was later contained. There were no casualties.

Ukraine has repeatedly targeted refineries and other energy facilities deep inside Russia, causing significant damage.

Ukrainian drones also attacked Novorossiysk, a major Black Sea port. The Krasnodar region's governor, Veniamin Kondratyev, said fragments of downed drones caused several fires but there were no casualties.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said a Ukrainian drone struck a vehicle, killing a woman and her 4-year-old child. Another attack set a fuel tank ablaze at a gas station in the region, he said.

Meanwhile, Ukrainian troops were fighting to halt Russian advances in the northeastern Kharkiv region that began late last week.

The town of Vovchansk, located just 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the Russian border, has been a hot spot in the fighting in recent days. Ukrainian authorities have evacuated some 8,000 civilians from the town. The Russian army's usual tactic is to reduce towns and villages to ruins with aerial strikes before its units move in.

Russia has also been testing defenses at other points along the roughly 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line snaking from north to south through eastern Ukraine. That line has barely changed over the past 18 months in what became a war of attrition. Recent Russian attacks have come in the eastern Donetsk region, as well as the Chernihiv and Sumy regions in the north and in the southern Zaporizhzhia region. The apparent aim is to stretch depleted Ukrainian resources and exploit weaknesses.

Michael Cohen pressed on his crimes and lies as defense attacks key Trump hush money trial witness

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JENNIFER PELTZ, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's lawyers accused the star prosecution witness in his hush money trial of lying to jurors, portraying Trump fixer-turned-foe Michael Cohen on Thursday as a serial fabulist who is bent on seeing the presumptive Republican presidential nominee behind bars.

As Trump looked on, defense attorney Todd Blanche pressed Cohen for hours with questions that focused as much on his misdeeds as on the case's specific allegations and tried to sow doubt in jurors' minds about Cohen's crucial testimony implicating the former president.

Blanche's voice rose as he interrogated Cohen with phone records and text messages over Cohen's claim that he spoke by phone to Trump about the hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels that is at the heart of the case, days before wiring her lawyer \$130,000.

Blanche said that was a lie, confronting Cohen with texts indicating that what was on his mind, at least initially, during the phone call were harassing calls he was getting from an apparent 14-year-old prankster. Cohen said he believed he also spoke to Trump about the Daniels deal.

"We are not asking for your belief. This jury does not want to hear what you think happened," Blanche said, his voice growing even louder, prompting an objection from the prosecutor.

The heated moment was the crescendo of defense cross-examination over two days designed to portray Cohen — a onetime Trump loyalist who has become one of his biggest foes — as a media-obsessed opportunist who turned on the former president after he was denied a White House job.

Whether the defense is successful in undermining Cohen's testimony could determine Trump's fate in the case. Over the course of the trial's fourth week of testimony, Cohen described for jurors meetings and conversations he said he had with Trump about the alleged scheme to stifle stories about sex that threatened to torpedo Trump's 2016 campaign.

Prosecutors have tried to blunt the defense attacks on their star witness by getting him to acknowledge at the outset his past crimes, including a guilty plea for lying to Congress about work he did on a Trump real estate deal in Russia.

But the cross-examination underscored the risk of prosecutors' reliance on Cohen, who was peppered repeatedly with questions about his criminal history and past lies. Cohen also testified that he lied under oath when he pleaded guilty to federal charges, including tax fraud, in 2018.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 30 of 85

"It was a lie? Correct?" Blanche asked Cohen about whether he lied to the late U.S. District Judge William H. Pauley III at a court hearing about not feeling pressured into pleading guilty.

"Correct," Cohen said.

The defense also attacked Cohen's motivations and elicited testimony designed to support the defense's argument that the Daniels deal was essentially a shakedown of Trump, rather than a plot to keep voters in the dark. Cohen acknowledged telling a former prosecutor that he felt Daniels and her lawyer were extorting Trump in seeking the \$130,000 payment to keep quiet about her claim of a 2006 sexual encounter with Trump.

"Yes, I recall making a statement like that ... that they were extorting Mr. Trump," Cohen told jurors.

He's by far prosecutors' most important witness, placing Trump directly at the center of the alleged scheme to silence women who claimed to have had sexual encounters with Trump. Trump denies the women's claims. Cohen told jurors that Trump promised to reimburse him for the money he fronted and was constantly updated about behind-the-scenes efforts to bury potentially detrimental stories.

Cohen also matters because the reimbursements he received form the basis of 34 felony counts charging Trump with falsifying business records. Prosecutors say the reimbursements were logged, falsely, as legal expenses to conceal the payments' true purpose.

Trump, who insists the prosecution is an effort to damage his campaign to reclaim the White House, says the payments to Cohen were properly categorized as legal expenses because Cohen was a lawyer. The defense has suggested that he was trying to protect his family, not his campaign, by squelching what he says were false, scurrilous claims.

"The crime is that they're doing this case," Trump told reporters Thursday before entering the courtroom, flanked by a group of congressional allies that included Rep. Matt Gaetz, R-Fla.; Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo.; and Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., the chairman of the hard-right House Freedom Caucus.

The hard-right Republican lawmakers stood outside the courthouse and railed against a "kangaroo court" and the case, amplifying the former president's attacks on the judicial system as they were heckled but also cheered by the crowd. The former president has been joined at the courthouse in recent days by a slew of conservative supporters, including some considered potential vice presidential picks and others angling for future administration roles.

Among those at the courthouse Thursday were Republican members of the House Oversight Committee, which delayed a hearing on an effort to hold Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt of Congress so the lawmakers could appear alongside Trump in Manhattan.

Blanche confronted Cohen with profane social media posts, a podcast and books he wrote about the former president, getting Cohen to acknowledge that he has made millions of dollars off slamming Trump. In one clip played in court Thursday, Cohen could be heard using an expletive and saying he truly hopes "that this man ends up in prison."

"It won't bring back the year that I lost or the damage done to my family. But revenge is a dish best served cold," Cohen was heard saying. "You better believe that I want this man to go down."

Cohen acknowledged he has continued to attack Trump, even during the trial.

In one social media post cited by the defense attorney, Cohen called Trump an alliterative and explicit nickname, as well as an "orange-crusted ignoramus." Asked if he used the phrase, Cohen responded: "Sounds correct."

Cohen — prosecutors' final witness, at least for now — is expected to return to the witness stand Monday. The trial will take Friday off so Trump can attend the high school graduation of his youngest son, Barron.

Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg's office has said it will rest its case once Cohen is done on the stand, though it could have an opportunity to call rebuttal witnesses if Trump's lawyers put on witnesses of their own.

The defense isn't obligated to call any witnesses, and it's unclear whether the attorneys will do so. Trump's lawyers have said they may call Bradley A. Smith, a Republican who was appointed by former President Bill Clinton to the Federal Election Commission, to refute the prosecution's contention that the

hush money payments amounted to campaign-finance violations. Defense lawyers said they have not decided whether Trump will testify.

Brazil picked by FIFA to get soccer's 2027 Women's World Cup, a first for South America

By LERPONG AMSA-NGIAM Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — Brazil will host the 2027 Women's World Cup after a vote of FIFA's full membership chose the South American bid over a joint proposal from Belgium, Netherlands and Germany.

The FIFA Congress on Friday voted 119-78 for Brazil in the reduced field of two candidates to host the 2027 tournament after a joint bid by the United States and Mexico was pulled late last month, and South Africa withdrew its candidacy in November.

It will be the first time the global women's tournament, first played in 1991, is staged in South America.

Brazil was strongly favored to win since October when FIFA brokered deals for the men's World Cups of 2030 and 2034. It left South American neighbors Argentina, Paraguay and Uruguay getting just one game each of the 104 in the 2030 tournament that will be mostly co-hosted by Spain, Portugal and Morocco.

A key point for FIFA was clearing the way for its close ally Saudi Arabia to get the 2034 World Cup uncontested in a fast-track process. South American soccer body CONMEBOL's agreement to take a small part of the 2030 tournament removed it from the subsequent bidding.

The US-Mexico decision to opt out and focus on bidding for the 2031 World Cup — that decision is due next year — was another indicator of Brazil's expected win.

The Brazilian bid team hugged and celebrated on the podium after the result was announced, and described it as a victory for women's soccer, for their country and for South America.

"We are a South American country that achieved the victory for women's soccer," Brazil's soccer federation president Ednaldo Rodrigues said before reflecting on recent flooding that has devastated parts of the country. "After the things that impact all Brazilians — a catastrophe due to the climate change — our achievement today, the first Women's World Cup in South America, will help strengthen us."

It was the first time that all of FIFA's member associations had the opportunity to weigh in on the host of the women's tournament. Previously, it was decided by the FIFA Council, the governing body's decision-making committee.

There were 207 of the 211 members eligible to vote in the electronic ballot which gave three options: Brazil, BNG or abstain.

Brazil was even more favored to win the contest after ranking higher in an evaluation report by a FIFA-appointed panel.

The next World Cup votes, to endorse the 2030 and 2034 hosts, will be on Dec. 11 in an online congress held remotely.

Putin focuses on trade and cultural exchanges in Harbin, China, after reaffirming ties with Xi

By HUIZHONG WU and EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin focused on trade and cultural exchanges Friday during his state visit to China that started with bonhomie in Beijing and a meeting with Chinese leader Xi Jinping that deepened their "no limits" partnership as both countries face rising tensions with the West.

Putin praised China at a China-Russia Expo in the northeastern city of Harbin, hailing the growth in bilateral trade. He will also meet with students at Harbin Institute of Technology later Friday. Harbin, capital of China's Heilongjiang province, was once home to many Russian expatriates and retains some of those historical ties in its architecture, such as the central Saint Sophia Cathedral, a former Russian Orthodox church.

Though Putin's visit is more symbolic and is short on concrete proposals, the two countries nonetheless

are sending a clear message.

"At this moment, they're reminding the West that they can be defiant when they want to," said Joseph Torigian, a research fellow at Stanford University's Hoover Institute.

At the exhibition in Harbin, Putin emphasized the importance of Russia-China cooperation in jointly developing new technologies.

"Relying on traditions of friendship and cooperation, we can look into the future with confidence," he said. "The Russian-Chinese partnership helps our countries' economic growth, ensures energy security, helps develop production and create new jobs."

Putin started the second day of his visit to China on Friday by laying flowers at a monument to fallen Soviet soldiers in Harbin who had fought for China against the Japanese during the second Sino-Japanese war, when Japan occupied parts of China.

At their summit on Thursday, Putin thanked Xi for China's proposals for ending the war in Ukraine, while Xi said China hopes for the early return of Europe to peace and stability and will continue to play a constructive role toward this. Their joint statement described their world view and expounded on criticism of U.S. military alliances in Asia and the Pacific.

The meeting was yet another affirmation of the friendly "no limits" relationship China and Russia signed in 2022, just before Moscow invaded Ukraine.

Putin has become isolated globally for his invasion of Ukraine. China has a tense relationship with the U.S., which has labeled it a competitor, and faces pressure for continuing to supply key components to Russia needed for weapons production.

Talks of peacefully resolving the Ukraine crisis featured frequently in Thursday's remarks, though Russia just last week opened a new front in the Ukraine war by launching attacks at its northeastern border area. The war is at a critical point for Ukraine, which had faced delays in getting weapons from the U.S.

China offered a broad plan for peace last year that was rejected by both Ukraine and the West for failing to call for Russia to leave occupied parts of Ukraine.

In a smaller meeting Thursday night at Zhongnanhai, the Chinese leaders' residential compound, Putin thanked Xi for his peace plan and said he welcomed China continuing to play a constructive role in a political solution to the problem, according to China's official Xinhua News Agency. They also attended events to celebrate 75 years of bilateral relations.

Since Russia invaded Ukraine, Russia has increasingly depended on China as Western sanctions have taken a bite. Trade between the two countries increased to \$240 billion last year, as China helped its neighbor defray the worst of Western sanctions.

European leaders have pressed China to ask Russia to end its invasion in Ukraine, to little avail. Experts say China and Russia's relationship with each other offer strategic benefits, particularly at a time when both have tensions with Europe and the U.S.

"Even if China compromises on a range of issues, including cutting back support on Russia, it's unlikely that the U.S. or the West will drastically change their attitude to China as a competitor," said Hoo Tiang Boon, who researches Chinese foreign policy at Singapore's Nanyang Technological University. "They see very little incentive for compromise."

Xi and Putin have a longstanding agreement to visit each other's countries once a year, and Xi was welcomed at the Kremlin last year.

Hezbollah introduces new weapons and tactics against Israel as war in Gaza drags on

BY BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The Lebanese militant group Hezbollah this week struck a military post in northern Israel using a drone that fired two missiles. The attack wounded three soldiers, one of them seriously, according to the Israeli military.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 33 of 85

Hezbollah has regularly fired missiles across the border with Israel over the past seven months, but the one on Thursday appears to have been the first successful missile airstrike it has launched from within Israeli airspace.

The group has stepped up its attacks on Israel in recent weeks, particularly since the Israeli incursion into the southern city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip. It has struck deeper inside Israel and introduced new and more advanced weaponry.

"This is a method of sending messages on the ground to the Israeli enemy, meaning that this is part of what we have, and if needed we can strike more," said Lebanese political analyst Faisal Abdul-Sater who closely follows Hezbollah.

While the cross-border exchanges of fire have been ongoing since early October, "complex attacks" by Hezbollah began a few days after Iran's unprecedented drone and missile barrage attack on Israel in mid-April.

In the past two weeks, Hezbollah has escalated further in response to the Israeli incursion into the city of southern Rafah in the Gaza Strip, a Lebanese official familiar with the group's operations said. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to detail military information to the media.

The Thursday afternoon attack by a drone carrying missiles came just days after Hezbollah launched three anti-tank guided missiles at an Israeli military post that controlled a surveillance balloon flying over the border. They released camera footage afterward to show they had hit their mark. Hours later, the Israeli military confirmed that the spy balloon had been shot down over Lebanon.

The night before, Hezbollah had carried out its deepest attack in Israel to date using explosive drones to strike at a base in Ilaniya near the city of Tiberias about 35 kilometers (22 miles) from the Lebanon border. The Israeli military said the attack did not hurt anyone.

Abdul-Sater, the analyst, said the Iran-led coalition known as the axis of resistance, which includes the Palestinian militant group Hamas, has warned that if Israeli troops launch a full-scale invasion of Rafah in an attempt to go after Hamas, other fronts will also escalate.

Yemen's Iran-backed Houthi rebels claimed Wednesday that they attacked a U.S. destroyer while Iran-backed militants in Iraq have said they fired a series of drones toward Israel in recent weeks after having gone relatively quiet since February.

Hezbollah's use of more advanced weaponry, including drones capable of firing missiles, explosive drones and the small type of guided missile known as Almas, or Diamond, that was used to attack the base controlling the balloon has raised alarms within the Israeli military.

"Hezbollah has been escalating the situation in the north," said military spokesman Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani. "They've been firing more and more."

In adapting its attacks, Hezbollah has also managed to reduce the numbers of fighters lost compared with the early weeks of the conflict.

The group has lost more than 250 fighters so far, compared with 15 Israeli troops since fighting broke out along the Lebanon-Israel border a day after the Israel-Hamas war started on Oct. 7.

According to a count by The Associated Press, Hezbollah lost 47 fighters in October and 35 in November, compared with 20 in April and 12 so far this month.

The official familiar with the group's operations said Hezbollah had reduced the numbers of fighters along the border areas to bring down the numbers of casualties. While Hezbollah continues to fire Russian-made anti-tank Kornet missiles from areas close to the border, it has also shifted to firing drones and other types of rockets with heavy war heads — including Almas as well as Falaq and Burkan rockets — from areas several kilometers (miles) from the border.

Over the weekend, Hezbollah said it had launched a new rocket with a heavy warhead named Jihad Mughniyeh after a senior operative who was killed in an Israeli airstrike on southern Syria in 2015.

Eva J. Koulouriotis, a political analyst specialized in the Middle East and jihadi groups wrote on the social media platform X that Hezbollah's recent escalation likely has several goals, including raising the ceiling of the group's demands in any future negotiations for a border deal, as well as raising military pressure on Israel's military in light of the preparations for the battle in Rafah.

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant vowed in a speech last week that "we will stand, we will achieve our goals, we will hit Hamas, we will destroy Hezbollah, and we will bring security."

On Monday, Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah reiterated in a speech that there will be no end to the fighting along the Lebanon-Israel border until Israel's military operations in the Gaza Strip come to an end.

"The main goal of Lebanon's front is to contribute to the pressure on the enemy to end the war on Gaza," Nasrallah said.

His comments were a blow to attempts by foreign dignitaries, including U.S. and French officials, who have visited Beirut to try to put an end to the violence that has displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border.

A day after Nasrallah spoke, Canada's Foreign Minister Mélanie Joly visited Beirut and told Lebanon's private LBC TV station that she was pushing for a cease-fire.

"We need the people living in the south of Lebanon to be able to go back to their homes," she said. "We need to make sure that the Israelis living in the northern part of Israel are able to get back to their homes also."

Hezbollah's deputy leader Naim Kassim warned Israel in a speech over the weekend against opening an all-out war.

"You have tried in the past and you were defeated and if you try again you will be defeated," said Kassim, referring to the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah 34-day war that ended in a draw.

For the children of Gaza, war means no school — and no indication when formal learning might return

By WAFAA SHURAF and SAM MEDNICK Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza (AP) — Atef Al-Buhaisi, 6, once dreamed of a career building houses. Now, all he craves is to return to school.

In Israel's war with Hamas, Atef's home has been bombed, his teacher killed and his school in Nuseirat turned into a refuge for displaced people. He lives in a cramped tent with his family in Deir al-Balah in central Gaza, where he sleeps clinging to his grandmother and fears walking alone even during the day.

Since the war erupted Oct. 7, all of Gaza's schools have closed — leaving hundreds of thousands of students like Atef without formal schooling or a safe place to spend their days. Aid groups are scrambling to keep children off the streets and their minds focused on something other than the war, as heavy fighting continues across the enclave and has expanded into the southern city of Rafah and intensified in the north.

"What we've lost most is the future of our children and their education," said Irada Ismael, Atef's grandmother. "Houses and walls are rebuilt, money can be earned again ... but how do I compensate for (his) education?"

Gaza faces a humanitarian crisis, with the head of the U.N.'s World Food Program determining a "full-blown famine" is already underway in the north. More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the war, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between civilians and combatants in its figures. About 80% of Gaza's population has been driven from homes. Much of Gaza is damaged or destroyed, including nearly 90% of school buildings, according to aid group estimates.

Children are among the most severely affected, with the U.N. estimating some 19,000 children have been orphaned and nearly a third under the age of 2 face acute malnutrition. In emergencies, education takes a back seat to safety, health and sanitation, say education experts, but the consequences are lasting.

"The immediate focus during conflict isn't on education, but the disruption has an incredibly long-term effect," said Sonia Ben Jaafar, of the Abdulla Al Ghurair Foundation, a philanthropic organization focused on education in the Arab world. "The cost at this point is immeasurable."

Before the war, Gaza was home to more than 625,000 students and some 20,000 teachers in its highly literate population, according to the U.N. In other conflicts, aid groups can create safe spaces for children in neighboring countries — for example, Poland for shelter and schooling during the war in Ukraine.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 35 of 85

That's not possible in Gaza, a densely populated enclave locked between the sea, Israel and Egypt. Since Oct 7, Palestinians from Gaza haven't been allowed to cross into Israel. Egypt has let a small number of Palestinians leave.

"They're unable to flee, and they remain in an area that continues to be battered," said Tess Ingram, of UNICEF. "It's very hard to provide them with certain services, such as mental health and psychosocial support or consistent education and learning."

Aid groups hope classes will resume by September. But even if a cease-fire is brokered, much of Gaza must be cleared of mines, and rebuilding schools could take years.

In the interim, aid groups are providing recreational activities — games, drawing, drama, art — not for a curriculum-based education but to keep children engaged and in a routine, in an effort for normalcy. Even then, advocates say, attention often turns to the war — Atef's grandmother sees him draw pictures only of tents, planes and missiles.

Finding free space is among the biggest challenges. Some volunteers use the outdoors, make do inside tents where people live, or find a room in homes still standing.

It took volunteer teachers more than two months to clear one room in a school in Deir al-Balah to give ad hoc classes to children. Getting simple supplies such as soccer balls and stationery into Gaza can also take months, groups report.

"Having safe spaces for children to gather to play and learn is an important step," Ingram said, but "ultimately the children of Gaza must be able to return to learning curriculum from teachers in classrooms, with education materials and all the other support schooling provides."

This month, UNICEF had planned to erect at least 50 tents for some 6,000 children from preschool to grade 12 for play-based numbers and literacy learning in Rafah. But UNICEF says those plans could be disrupted by Israel's operation there.

Lack of schooling can take a psychological toll — it disrupts daily life and, compounded with conflict, makes children more prone to anxiety and nervousness, said Jesus Miguel Perez Cazorla, a mental health expert with the International Committee of the Red Cross.

Children in conflicts are also at increased risk of forced labor, sexual violence, trafficking and recruitment by gangs and armed groups, experts warn.

"Not only are children vulnerable to recruitment by Hamas and other militant groups, but living amid ongoing violence and constantly losing family members makes children psychologically primed to want to take action against the groups they consider responsible," said Samantha Nutt of War Child USA, which supports children and families in war zones.

Palestinians say they've seen more children take to Gaza's streets since the war, trying to earn money for their families.

"The streets are full of children selling very simple things, such as chocolate, canned goods," said Lama Nidal Alzaanin, 18, who was in her last year of high school and looking forward to university when the war broke out. "There is nothing for them to do."

Some parents try to find small ways to teach their children, scrounging for notebooks and pens and insisting they learn something as small as a new word each day. But many find the kids are too distracted, with the world around them at war.

Sabreen al-Khatib, a mother whose family was displaced to Deir al-Balah from Gaza City, said it's particularly hard for the many who've seen relatives die.

"When you speak in front of children," al-Khatib said, "what do you think he is thinking? Will he think about education? Or about himself, how will he die?"

On Oct. 7, 14-year-old Layan Nidal Alzaanin — Lama's younger sister — was on her way to her middle school in Beit Hanoun when missiles flew overhead, she said. She fled with her family to Rafah, where they lived crowded in a tent. Since Israel ordered evacuations there, she fled to Deir al-Balah.

"It is a disaster," she said. "My dreams have been shattered. There is no future for me without school."

PEN America, facing criticism over its response to the Mideast war, gathers for annual gala

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Like a political convention held amidst an intra-party rift, Thursday night's PEN America gala was a call for unity, dialogue and a renewed sense of mission at a time when PEN's priorities have been called into question.

"Our assembly is disassembling," PEN America CEO Suzanne Nossel acknowledged Thursday night. "People of good intention and staunch conviction are wracked by a wrenching conflict. We are haunted by destruction, death and suffering that has caused some to question PEN America's words, deeds and purpose."

The literary and human rights organization has faced ongoing criticism over its response to the Israel-Hamas war, with hundreds of writers alleging that PEN showed limited concern over the suffering of Gaza residents and the deaths of Palestinian writers and journalists. PEN has already canceled its spring awards ceremony after dozens of nominees withdrew and its World Voices festival after hundreds signed an open letter saying they wouldn't participate.

Some had wondered if the gala would take place, but the event is the organization's major annual fundraiser, with more than \$2 million coming in from Thursday's event, and key donors remained. All five major New York publishers — Penguin Random House, Simon & Schuster, HarperCollins, Hachette Book Group and Macmillan — were listed as sponsors, along with organizations ranging from Bloomberg and Barnes & Noble to the National Basketball Association and the David Geffen Foundation.

"There was zero discussion about us not attending," Simon & Schuster CEO Jonathan Karp told The Associated Press on Thursday.

Many attendees had to clear three checkpoints before entering the American Museum of Natural History; if dissenters were inside, they were not speaking out. Nossel received a standing ovation, and she was among several speakers who emphasized common PEN goals such as opposing book bans and the imprisonment of writers, including Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich in Russia. PEN President Jennifer Finney Boylan stated that PEN America was "determined to amplify the voices of all writers at risk — from Israel to Ukraine, from Palestine to Russia, from Florida to Texas."

Seth Meyers, the evening's host, joked about the "super chill and laid back" moment for PEN. One honoree, Paul Simon, consoled with words and music. Simon, this year's winner of PEN's Literary Service Award, brought an acoustic guitar to the stage, and performed a gentle, even fragile version of his 1973 classic about a generation's strife and exhaustion, "American Tune."

"There are songs that can inhabit two eras and speak truth to both," he said, adding that the "mood today is uncomfortably similar to those days."

Wall Street Journal publisher Almar Latour was presented the Business Visionary Honoree Award and dedicated much of his speech to Gershkovich, saying he was being held in Russia simply for doing his job and noting the hundreds of other journalists in similar peril worldwide. "The grim reality is that there are scores of Evans everywhere," he said.

Authors at the gala included Candace Bushnell, Jay McInerney and Andrew Solomon, a former PEN president who joined Salman Rushdie, Jennifer Egan and other onetime PEN officials in publishing a letter in April urging "writers to keep faith in the community that we have built together so that PEN America can continue to evolve in ways that serve and elevate the writers as a vital force within society."

Around 650 were in attendance, roughly 100 less than 2023, according to PEN. Some who came acknowledged ambivalence.

"I won't say it didn't occur to me about whether I should go," said novelist Dinaw Mengestu, a PEN vice president who has been highly critical of the organization. "But I feel it's important that we can continue to move forward and try and learn and change."

Protests against PEN have continued, and writers have publicly clashed. On Thursday night, around 20 protestors stood in front of the museum, calling out names of Palestinian civilians killed and chanting

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 37 of 85

"Shame!" as gala attendees arrived. Earlier this month, Author-journalist and PEN board member George Packer condemned what he called the "authoritarian spirit" of PEN critics, alleging in *The Atlantic* they were pressuring others not to back the organization. Mengestu responded on Instagram by alleging that Packer's essay "perverts and distorts the legitimate and necessary criticisms against PEN" and trivializes the Gaza war.

Last week more than a dozen writers who withdrew from PEN events held a benefit reading at a church in downtown Manhattan, with proceeds going to We Are Not Numbers, a youth-led Palestinian non-profit in Gaza that advocates for human rights. When the opening speaker, Nancy Kricorian, referred to the PEN cancellations, audience members shouted and clapped. Another speaker, writer-translator and "World Voices" co-founder Esther Allen, criticized PEN for continuing with the fundraising gala while calling off the awards and World Voices.

"The priorities could not be clearer," she said.

Two honors Thursday night were dedicated to those under siege in the U.S. and abroad.

PEN's Freedom to Write Award, for imprisoned dissidents, was given to journalist Pham Doan Trang of Vietnam. Accepting on her behalf, her friend Quynh-Vi Tran praised Trang as a "symbol of bravery and perseverance, inspiring countless young people to envision and strive for a Vietnam where freedom and human rights are upheld."

PEN's Courage Award was presented to Georgia election workers Ruby Freeman and her daughter, "Shaye" Moss, both of whom faced violent threats after President Donald Trump falsely accused them of manipulating ballots for the 2020 election.

"I still struggle with fear. It has a way of just rearing its head and interrupting my life. I would love for it to stop, but what I want most is for people to understand the truth that has been buried beneath so many lies," Moss said.

"But here tonight, with all of you, I'm filled with hope again."

The latest hot spot for illegal border crossings is San Diego. But routes change quickly

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

JACUMBA HOT SPRINGS, Calif. (AP) — On many nights, hundreds of migrants squeeze through poles in a border wall or climb over on metal ladders. They gather in a buffer zone between two walls with views of the night lights of Tijuana, Mexico, waiting hours for Border Patrol agents while volunteers deliver hot coffee, instant ramen and bandages for busted knees and swollen ankles.

About an hour drive east, where the moon offers the only light, up to hundreds more navigate a boulder-strewn desert looking for always-shifting areas where migrants congregate. Groups of just a few to dozens walk dirt trails and paved roads searching for agents.

The scenes are a daily reminder that San Diego became the busiest corridor for illegal crossings in April, according to U.S. figures, the fifth region to hold that distinction in two years in a sign of how quickly migration routes are changing.

Routes were remarkably stable a short time ago. San Diego was the busiest Border Patrol sector for decades until more enforcement pushed migrants to the desert area near Tucson, Arizona, which became the top spot by 1998. The Rio Grande Valley in South Texas saw the most activity from 2013 to June 2022 as Central Americans became a greater presence.

Migrants were arrested nearly 128,900 times on the Mexican border in April, U.S. Customs and Border Protection said Wednesday, down 6.3% from March and barely half of a record-high 250,000 in December. While still historically high, April bucked a typical spring increase.

The drop is largely due to heightened Mexican enforcement, which includes blocking migrants from boarding freight trains, according to U.S. officials. Texas Gov. Greg Abbott touts his multibillion-dollar border crackdown, while others highlight violence in the Mexican state of Tamaulipas as a deterrent on

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 38 of 85

the path to the Rio Grande Valley.

Mexico pledged it won't allow more than 4,000 illegal crossings a day to the U.S., Alicia Bárcena, Mexico's foreign relations secretary, told reporters Tuesday. The U.S. Border Patrol arrested more than 10,000 on some days in December.

Despite the overall decline, arrests in the San Diego sector reached 37,370 in April, up 10.6% from March to replace Tucson as the busiest of nine sectors bordering Mexico. Troy Miller, CBP's acting commissioner, said more enforcement, including with other countries, led to overall declines from March, while acknowledging "continually shifting migration patterns."

Many migrants say San Diego is the easiest and least dangerous place to cross. They constantly check their phones for messages, social media posts and voice calls that help them plan their route and crossing.

"One hears many things on the way," Oscar Palacios, 42, said one April morning after being driven by an agent to wait in a dirt patch where more than 100 migrants shivered near campfires. After Mexican immigration agents returned him three times to southern Mexico, the Ecuadorian man said, he gave someone he didn't know \$500 for a document that allowed him to fly to Tijuana. He then paid a smuggler to guide him to California.

San Diego's draw lies in part because Tijuana is the largest city on the Mexican side of the border, U.S. officials say. People of nearly 100 nationalities have arrived at Tijuana's airport this year, including 12,000 each from Colombia and Cuba, about 6,000 each from Haiti and Venezuela and thousands more from Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, China and Mauritania.

"It's the prevalence of social media," said Paul Beeson, whose 33-year Border Patrol career included stints as chief agent in the San Diego, Tucson and Yuma, Arizona, sectors. "There's a lot more information out there about getting across. Air transportation has picked up and people are able to move around."

Migration in San Diego presents a challenge because people come from a wider variety of countries — including India, Georgia, Egypt, Jamaica and Vietnam — where deportation flights can be costly and difficult to arrange, U.S. officials say. Mexicans, who are deported nearby over land, and Guatemalans and Hondurans, whose governments have long accepted frequent deportation flights, are a smaller presence there than elsewhere on the border.

The Border Patrol has been busing and flying some migrants from San Diego to other border cities for processing, a role reversal from even last year, when migrants were sent to San Diego to deal with overflow.

Migrants wait hours for agents to pick them up for processing instead of dayslong delays that were common when makeshift camps started popping up in the San Diego area about a year ago. Last month a federal judge said children in the camps were subject to custody standards guaranteeing their health and safety.

One night last week, about 70 people gathered between two walls near an upscale outlet mall. Two Honduran women were no longer able to walk after being injured while scaling the border wall; one accepted a Border Patrol ride to the hospital.

"Almost every night we have injuries from people jumping," said Clint Carney, 58, who volunteers many nights answering migrants' questions and serving snacks.

Near Jacumba Hot Springs, a town of less than 1,000 people, about a dozen people from Latin American countries arrived at a fork in a dirt road around 10 p.m. About 100 Chinese migrants came just before sunrise, many neatly dressed and playfully taking pictures on their phones.

Some of the Latin Americans grumbled quietly when the Chinese lined up ahead of them as Border Patrol vehicles arrived. Previously agents issued colored wristbands that were used to keep track of how long people had been waiting and who was next in line, but that practice was stopped in December.

Such staging areas have popped up in remote areas after migrants cross the border where mountainous terrain has prevented barrier construction. Mexican authorities' increased presence in some areas pushed traffic elsewhere in the sparsely populated desert, creating new camps. One new site is a short distance from a gun club, without tents, bathrooms or other services.

San Diego shelters have been unable to house everyone who is released by the Border Patrol with notices to appear in immigration court. San Diego County Supervisor Jim Desmond said more than 143,000

migrants have been released on the streets since Sept. 13, citing Border Patrol data.

From a bus and trolley station where agents leave migrants, it is a short ride to the airport, where they can charge phones and use restrooms before boarding flights to destinations elsewhere in the U.S.

Funeral set for Roger Fortson, the Black US Air Force member killed in his home by Florida deputy

By JEFF MARTIN and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

STONECREST, Ga. (AP) — A funeral will be held Friday for a Black U.S. Air Force senior airman who was shot and killed in his Florida home by a sheriff's deputy, a day after the decorated military member's mother vowed during an emotional news conference to get justice for her son.

Roger Fortson's service is scheduled to be held at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in the Atlanta suburb of Stonecrest. He grew up in the area before joining the Air Force. The 23-year-old was a senior airman who served in overseas combat zones and was stationed at Hurlburt Field in the Florida Panhandle when he was shot to death by the deputy responding to a domestic violence call.

During a news conference Thursday, a lawyer for Fortson's family highlighted police radio and body camera footage that he said shows the deputy went to the wrong apartment.

The airman's mother, Meka Fortson, spoke glowingly about how her son was always on a positive path and had never been in trouble or shown signs of violence.

"Roger was light. There was not a stain on his name. He will not be put to rest in darkness because he was light," she said during the news conference.

She also had a message for Okaloosa County Sheriff Eric Aden: "You're going to give me justice whether you want to, Sheriff Aden, or not," she said.

The deputy, whose name has not been released, shot Fortson six times on May 3 within moments of Fortson responding to the deputy's knocking and opening the door of his apartment while holding a handgun pointed at the ground.

Sheriff's officials say the deputy acted in self-defense while responding to a call about a possible domestic disturbance in progress at the apartment complex.

The Fortson family and their attorney, Ben Crump, argue the shooting was completely unjustified, saying Roger Fortson was home alone at the time FaceTiming with his girlfriend and that the deputy had gone to the wrong unit.

A steady stream of mourners attended a wake for Fortson on Thursday, including some who didn't know the family. Among them was Conseulla Childs, of nearby Lithonia, who said she hates seeing people so young lose their lives.

"I can only imagine getting that call to say that you have to bury your child and give your child a homegoing before your time," she said. "So it's just heartbreaking to ever get that kind of news, so I just wanted to come and pay my respects."

Charles Dorsey, of nearby Decatur, arrived in a hat emblazoned "U.S. AIR FORCE VIETNAM VET."

"I was looking at the news and saw what happened ... and he reminded me of when I was in the Air Force. As a matter of fact, he had the same rank I had when I was in the Air Force," Dorsey said. "I wanted to put on my Air Force cap and show my respects for the family."

Police radio traffic played at the news conference Thursday bolsters the family's contention that the deputy may have gone to the wrong apartment. In the recording, a dispatcher said all they know about the location of the disturbance was "fourth-party information."

"Uh, don't have any further other than a male and female," the dispatcher told officers. "It's all fourth-party information from the front desk at the leasing office."

Crump also highlighted two portions of the deputy's bodycam video in which the deputy asked a woman who was leading him around the complex, "Which door?" The woman responded, "Um... I'm not sure." Seconds later, she told the deputy that she heard a disturbance two weeks before that, but "I wasn't sure where it came from."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 40 of 85

The bodycam video shows the deputy arriving at a Fort Walton Beach apartment building and speaking to a woman outside who described hearing an argument. The deputy then went up an elevator and walked down an outdoor hallway.

The video shows the deputy banging on the door and stepping aside, seemingly out of view of the door. Twice he shouted: "Sheriff's office! Open the door!"

Fortson, who legally owned a firearm, opened the door while holding a handgun pointed toward the floor. The deputy shouted, "Step back!" and then shot Fortson six times. Only afterward did he shout, "Drop the gun! Drop the gun!" The deputy then called paramedics on his radio.

Fortson was talking to his girlfriend on FaceTime and grabbed his gun because he heard someone outside his apartment, Crump said. The deputy then burst into the apartment, he said, citing the account of the girlfriend, who has not yet been identified.

The Florida Department of Law Enforcement is investigating and the deputy has been placed on administrative leave. Two weeks after the shooting, the sheriff has yet to release an incident report, any 911 records or the officer's identity, despite requests for the information under Florida's open records act.

The case is among many around the country in which Black people have been shot in their homes by law enforcement personnel.

Crump, a notable civil rights attorney, said the family will not let the case be forgotten or hidden away. "We have to call them to account. If we don't do it, they won't do anything," he said.

A shrine of sorts has sprung up outside Fortson's apartment, where people have left combat boots, bouquets of flowers and an American flag, among other things.

Fortson was stationed at Hurlburt Field near Fort Walton Beach, Florida. He was a gunner aboard the AC-130J and earned an Air Medal with combat device, which is typically awarded after 20 flights in a combat zone or for conspicuous valor or achievement on a single mission.

He was assigned to the 4th Special Operations Squadron as a special missions aviator, where one of his roles was to load the gunship's 30mm and 105mm cannons.

UAW's push to unionize factories in South faces latest test in vote at 2 Mercedes plants in Alabama

By TOM KRISHER and KIM CHANDLER Associated Press

DETROIT (AP) — The United Auto Workers union faces the latest test of its ambitious plan to unionize auto plants in the historically nonunion South when a vote ends Friday at two Mercedes-Benz factories near Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

The voting at the two Mercedes factories — one an assembly plant, the other a battery-making facility — comes a month after the UAW scored a breakthrough victory at Volkswagen's assembly factory in Chattanooga, Tennessee. In that election, VW workers voted overwhelmingly to join the UAW, drawn by the prospect of substantially higher wages and other benefits.

The UAW had little success before then recruiting at nonunion auto plants in the South, where workers have been much less drawn to organized labor than in the traditional union strongholds of Michigan and other industrial Midwest states.

A victory at the Mercedes plants would represent a huge plum for the union, which has long struggled to overcome the enticements that Southern states have bestowed on foreign automakers, including tax breaks, lower labor costs and a nonunion workforce.

Some Southern governors have warned voting for union membership could, over time, cost workers their jobs because of the higher costs that the auto companies would have to bear.

Yet the UAW is operating from a stronger position than in the past. Besides its victory in Chattanooga, it achieved generous new contracts last fall after striking against Detroit Big 3 automakers: General Motors, Stellantis and Ford. Workers there gained 33% pay raises in contracts that will expire in 2028.

Top-scale production workers at GM, who now earn about \$36 an hour, will make nearly \$43 an hour by the end of their contract, plus annual profit-sharing checks. Mercedes has increased top production worker

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 41 of 85

pay to \$34 an hour, a move that some workers say was intended to fend off the UAW.

Shortly after workers ratified the Detroit contract, UAW President Shawn Fain announced a drive to organize about 150,000 workers at more than a dozen nonunion plants, mostly run by foreign-based automakers with plants in Southern states. In addition, Tesla's U.S. factories, which are nonunion, are in the UAW's sights.

About 5,200 workers at the Mercedes plants are eligible to vote on the UAW, the union's first election there. Balloting is being run by the National Labor Relations Board.

The union may have a tougher time in Alabama than it did in Tennessee, where the UAW had narrowly lost two previous votes and was familiar with workers at the factory. The UAW has accused Mercedes of using management and anti-union consultants to try to intimidate workers.

In a statement Thursday, Mercedes denied interfering with or retaliating against workers who are pursuing union representation. The company has said it looks forward to all workers having a chance to cast a secret ballot "as well as having access to the information necessary to make an informed choice" on unionization.

If the union wins, it will be a huge momentum booster for the UAW as it seeks to organize more factories, said Marick Masters, a professor emeritus at Wayne State University's business school who has long studied the union.

"The other companies should be on notice," Masters said, "that the UAW will soon be knocking at their door more loudly than they have even in the recent past."

If the Mercedes workers reject the union, Masters expects the UAW leadership to explore legal options. This could include arguing to the National Labor Relations Board that Mercedes' actions made it impossible for union representation to receive a fair election.

Though a loss would be a setback for the UAW, Masters suggested it would not deal a fatal blow to its membership drive. The union would have to analyze why it couldn't garner more than 50% of the vote, given its statement that a "supermajority" of workers signed cards authorizing an election, Masters said. The UAW wouldn't say what percentage or how many workers signed up.

A UAW loss, he said, could lead workers at other nonunion plants to wonder why Mercedes employees voted against the union. But Masters said he doesn't think an election loss would slow down the union.

"I would expect them to intensify their efforts, to try to be more thoughtful and see what went wrong," he said.

If the UAW eventually manages to organize nonunion plants at Hyundai, Kia, Nissan, Toyota and Honda with contracts similar to those it won in Detroit, more automakers would have to bear the same labor costs. That potentially could lead the automakers to raise vehicle prices.

Some workers at Mercedes say the company treated them poorly until the UAW's organizing drive began, then offered pay raises, eliminated a lower tier of pay for new hires and even replaced the plant CEO.

Other Mercedes workers have said they prefer to see how the company treats them without the bureaucracy of a union.

Mexico's cartel violence haunts civilians in the lead-up to June elections

By MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

HUITZILAC, Mexico (AP) — Tailed by trucks of heavily armed soldiers, four caskets floated on a sea of hundreds of mourners. Neighbors peered nervously from their homes as the crowd pushed past shuttered businesses, empty streets and political campaign posters plastering the small Mexican town of Huitzilac.

Days earlier, armed men in two cars sprayed a nearby shop with bullets, claiming the lives of eight men who locals say were sipping beers after a soccer match. Now, fear paints the day-to-day lives of residents who say the town is trapped unwillingly in the middle of a firefight between warring mafias.

As Mexico's expanding slate of criminal groups see June 2 elections as an opportunity to seize power, they have picked off more than a hundred hopefuls for local office and warred for turf, terrorizing local communities like Huitzilac.

"The violence is always there, but there's never been so many killings as there are today. One day they

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 42 of 85

kill two people, and the next they kill another," said 42-year-old mother Anahi, who withheld her full name out of fear for her safety on Tuesday. "When my phone rings, I'm terrified that it'll be the school saying something has happened to my kids."

Cartel violence is nothing new to Mexico, but bloodshed in the Latin American nation has spiked in the run-up to the elections, with April marking the most lethal month this year, government data shows.

But candidates are not the only ones at risk. Even before the election it was clear that outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador had done little more than stabilize Mexico's high level of violence, despite pledges to ease cartel warfare.

Despite disbanding a corrupt Federal Police and replacing it with a 130,000-strong National Guard, focusing on social ills driving cartel recruitment, and declining to pursue cartel leaders in many cases, killings in April reached nearly the same historic high as when López Obrador first took office in 2018.

Cartels have expanded control in much of the country and raked in money — not just from drugs but from legal industries and migrant smuggling. They've also fought with more sophisticated tools like bomb-dropping drones and improvised explosive devices.

So far, those vying to be Mexico's next president have only offered proposals that amount to more of the same.

"Criminal violence has become much more difficult to resolve today than six years ago. ... You can't expect a quick fix to the situation, it's too deeply ingrained," said Falko Ernst, a senior Mexico analyst for International Crisis Group. "It is going to be even harder to unwind now" than it was when López Obrador took power.

Saturday's mass shooting in Huitzilac came after waves of other attacks, according to local media and residents. In recent weeks alone, local media reported that three people were slain on the highway running out of town, three more were shot outside a restaurant in a neighboring municipality, and in the nearby tourist city of Cuernavaca, hit men reportedly killed a patient in a private hospital.

Josué Meza Cuevas, Huitzilac's municipal secretary general, said it was not clear what provoked the bloodshed, but many in the town attribute it to a turf war between the Familia Michoacana, La Unión de Morelos and other cartels, which has made the state of Morelos one of Mexico's most violent.

Huitzilac fell eerily silent as businesses shuttered and few dared to venture into the streets Tuesday. Schools canceled classes "until further notice" amid requests from fearful parents.

Anahi, a longtime resident of the town, and her teenage children were among many families that hunkered down in their homes, too scared to wander out in the streets.

While Cuevas said "nothing like this has ever happened," Anahi said she has long felt death breathing down her neck.

Located little more than an hour from the hipster bars and backpacker hostels in Mexico City, Huitzilac made a name as a town just outside the law's reach.

For years, it's been at the center of a tug-of-war between a rotating set of cartels and gangs, making headlines in 2012 when police inexplicably pumped a U.S. Embassy vehicle with 152 bullets. When Anahi's car, her only means of work, was stolen from her garage last year, she said she didn't dare report it because "they might do something to me."

But Anahi said she's never been as scared as she has been since local and presidential elections began to heat up in October.

"We're going to ask at the school meeting that they do classes remotely until the elections are over so our kids aren't in danger," she said. "What would happen if there's a shootout and our kids are there?"

On Monday night, Anahi heard gunshots echo from town and saw armed men moving outside her window. Days before that, her son's friend who once played at their house, was shot dead. Before that, her daughter's friend received death threats on her phone.

Such bursts of violence are common in the lead-up to elections, especially in local races. At least 125 candidates have been killed throughout the country this year, according to the electoral violence tracker Data Civica, while even more have been threatened, attacked and kidnapped.

That goes "hand-in-hand" with cartels warring for territory and attempts to terrorize communities into

submission, said Ernst, the analyst.

"Elections are a high-stakes game for criminal groups," he said. "You see upticks in violence as these groups are trying to position themselves to have a more stable negotiating position in the lead up to elections."

In Huitzilac, armed National Guard soldiers shifted nervously on Tuesday as they guarded the side of the road. One soldier said their units have faced a number of attacks since the bloodshed that took place last weekend. An armored vehicle drove past the small neighborhood bar where the eight men were killed, the facade dented by bullets, with candles and flowers laying on the ground below.

Marchers cried and prayed as they carried caskets through town, but dozens approached by The Associated Press fell silent and cast their eyes to the ground when asked how they felt.

"This is happening to innocent people now. And if you speak, they kill you," said one middle-aged man in a cowboy hat sitting outside a funeral for four of the dead.

López Obrador's political ally and front-runner Claudia Sheinbaum faces off against opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez in the June 2 election and the winner will inherit a puzzle more complex than the governments before them, said Victoria Dittmar, a researcher at Insight Crime, a non-governmental organization tracking organized crime. She noted that increases in forced disappearances and extortion by cartels were particularly worrying.

"They're going to have to dismantle these criminal organizations ... but they're more resilient and flexible, with more revenue streams," Dittmar said.

Meanwhile, voters like Anahi living under the chokehold of those mafias feel disillusioned. Anahi said she voted for López Obrador in 2018 because she hoped the leader would usher in a new era of economic prosperity and reduce violence in areas like hers.

"With the violence, I don't know why my government, my president, don't come down with a heavier hand against these people," she said, as she and her children sat trapped in their home. "I feel disappointed. I expected more."

Trump will campaign in Minnesota after attending his son Barron's graduation

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

ST. PAUL, Minn. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump will head to Minnesota on a day off from his hush money trial for a Republican fundraiser Friday night in a traditionally Democratic state that he boasts he can carry in November.

Trump will headline the state GOP's annual Lincoln Reagan dinner, which coincides with the party's state convention, after attending his son Barron's high school graduation in Florida.

Trump will use part of the day granted by the trial judge for the graduation to campaign in Minnesota, a state he argues he can win in the November rematch with President Joe Biden. No Republican presidential candidate has won Minnesota since Richard Nixon in 1972, but Trump came close to flipping the state in 2016, when he fell 1.5 percentage points short of Hillary Clinton.

Trump returned to Minnesota several times in 2020, when Biden beat him by more than 7 points.

"I think this is something Trump wants to do. He believes this is a state he can win. We believe that's the case as well," David Hann, the chairman of the Republican Party of Minnesota, said in an interview.

Democratic U.S. Sen. Tina Smith of Minnesota, a Biden ally, said the Trump campaign is "grasping at straws" if it thinks he can win the state.

"The Biden campaign is going to work hard for every vote," Smith said in an interview. "We're going to engage with voters all over the state. But I think Minnesota voters are going to choose President Biden."

Trump will appear at Friday's dinner after going to see Barron Trump's graduation from the private Oxbridge Academy in West Palm Beach, Florida. The former president had long complained Judge Juan M. Merchan would not let him attend the graduation before Merchan agreed not to hold court Friday.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 44 of 85

Hann is co-hosting Friday's dinner along with Trump's state campaign chair, House Majority Whip Tom Emmer, who represents a central Minnesota district. Hann said Emmer was instrumental in bringing the former president to Minnesota.

The dinner coincides with the party's state convention. Tickets started at \$500, ranging up to \$100,000 for a VIP table for 10 with three photo opportunities with Trump. Hann declined to say how much money he expects it will raise, but he anticipates a full house of around 1,400 people.

All the money from the dinner tickets will go to the state party, Hann said, though he added that some money from photo opportunities may go to the Trump campaign.

Experts are split on whether Minnesota really will be competitive this time, given its history and the strong Democratic Party ground game in the state. But Hann said there's "great dissatisfaction with President Biden" in the state, noting that nearly 19% of Democratic voters in its Super Tuesday primary marked their ballots for "uncommitted." That was at least partly due to a protest-vote movement over Biden's handling of the Israel-Hamas war that has spread to several states.

In an interview aired Wednesday by KSTP-TV of Minneapolis-St. Paul, Trump said his speech would focus on economic issues. And he repeated a false claim he made in March to KNSI Radio of St. Cloud that he thought he actually won Minnesota in 2020, even though there's no evidence that there were any serious irregularities in the state.

"We think we have a really good shot at Minnesota," Trump told KSTP. "We have great friendships up there. We've done a lot for industry. We've done a lot for everything in Minnesota. Worked hard on Minnesota. Tom Emmer is very much involved."

Taiwan is selling more to the US than China in major shift away from Beijing

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Whether it's tapioca balls or computer chips, Taiwan is stretching toward the United States and away from China — the world's No. 2 economy that threatens to take the democratically ruled island by force if necessary.

That has translated to the world's biggest maker of computer chips — which power everything from medical equipment to cellphones — announcing bigger investments in the U.S. last month after a boost from the Biden administration. Soon afterward, a Taiwanese semiconductor company said it was ending its two-decade-long run in mainland China amid a global race to gain the edge in the high-tech industry.

These changes at a time of an intensifying China-U.S. rivalry reflect Taiwan's efforts to reduce its reliance on Beijing and insulate itself from Chinese pressure while forging closer economic and trade ties with the United States, its strongest ally. The shift also is taking place as China's economic growth has been weak and global businesses are looking to diversify following supply chain disruptions during the pandemic.

In a stark illustration of the shift, the U.S. displaced mainland China as the top destination for Taiwan's exports in the first quarter of the year for the first time since the start of 2016, when comparable data became available. The island exported \$24.6 billion worth of goods to the U.S. in the first three months, compared with \$22.4 billion to mainland China, according to Taiwan's official data.

Meanwhile, the island's investments in mainland China have fallen to the lowest level in more than 20 years, dropping nearly 40% to \$3 billion last year from a year earlier, according to Taiwan's Ministry of Economic Affairs. Yet, Taiwan's investments in the U.S. surged ninefold to \$9.6 billion in 2023.

Washington and Taipei signed a trade agreement last year, and they're now negotiating the next phase. U.S. lawmakers also have introduced a bill to end double taxes for Taiwanese businesses and workers in the U.S.

"Everything is motivated by ... a desire to build Taiwan's deterrent capability and their resilience, all in support of maintaining the status quo and deterring China from being tempted to take ... action against Taiwan," Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Kritenbrink said.

The world's biggest computer chip maker, TSMC, announced last month that it would expand its U.S.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 45 of 85

investments to \$65 billion. That came after the Biden administration pledged up to \$6.6 billion in incentives that would put the company's facilities in Arizona on track to produce about one-fifth of the world's most advanced chips by 2030.

Apart from its U.S. investments, TSMC is putting money into Japan, a staunch U.S. supporter in the region. Foxconn, a Taiwanese conglomerate known for being Apple's main contractor, is building manufacturing capacity in India, while Pegatron, another Taiwan business that makes parts of iPhones and computers, is investing in Vietnam.

King Yuan Electronics Corp., a Taiwanese company specializing in semiconductor testing and packaging, said last month that it would sell off its \$670 million stake in a venture in the eastern Chinese city of Suzhou. KYEC cited geopolitics, the U.S. export ban on advanced chips to China and Beijing's policy of seeking self-sufficiency in the technology.

"The ecological environment of semiconductor manufacturing in China has changed, and the market competition has become increasingly severe," KYEC said in a statement.

Exports of semiconductors, electronic components and computer equipment from Taiwan to the U.S. more than tripled from 2018 to reach nearly \$37 billion last year. It's not just tech: The island more than tripled exports of tapioca and its substitute, key ingredients in boba milk tea, to the U.S. between 2018 and 2023 and is shipping more fruits, tree nuts and farmed fish.

The recent trade data reflect "the strategy from both Taiwan and the U.S. to reorient that trade in an effort to de-risk from China," said Hung Tran, a nonresident senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Geo-Economics Center.

The share of Taiwan's exports to mainland China and Hong Kong fell from about 44% in 2020 to less than one-third in the first quarter of 2024. That was "a very big movement," Tran said. "And I think that the share (of exports to mainland China and Hong Kong) will probably continue to decline."

Since the 1990s, Beijing has tried to balance its claim over the island with favorable economic and trade policies, aiming to foster closer ties that could make it harder for Taiwan to break away.

When the independent-leaning Democratic Progressive Party gained power in Taiwan in 2016, the new government put forward a policy to distance the island from the mainland and boost economic ties with other countries in the region, especially in Southeast Asia. Unhappy Beijing turned to its economic leverage to try to bring Taiwan to heel.

It has restricted travel by mainland tourists to the island and suspended imports of Taiwanese seafood, fruits and snacks. In 2021, China banned Taiwan-grown pineapples over biosecurity concerns, devastating Taiwanese farmers whose exported fruit nearly all went to the mainland.

Ralph Cossa, president emeritus of the Honolulu-based foreign policy research institute Pacific Forum, said Beijing's actions have helped push the island away.

Chinese President "Xi Jinping is tactically clever but strategically foolish in many of the decisions he has made; his loyalty tests on Taiwan businessmen and other heavy-handed business practices and decisions have been a major contributor to the success of Taiwan's" policy to distance itself from China, he said.

And that policy will continue with Lai Ching-te, the island's new president, Cossa said.

70 years after Brown v. Board, America is both more diverse — and more segregated

By SHARON LURYE Associated Press

On May 17, 1954, the Supreme Court laid out a new precedent: Separate but equal has no place in American schools.

The message of Brown v. Board of Education was clear. But 70 years later, the impact of the decision is still up for debate. Have Americans truly ended segregation in fact, not just in law?

The answer is complicated. U.S. schools in recent decades have grown far more diverse and, by some measures, more segregated, according to an Associated Press analysis.

On one hand, the number of Black and white students who go to school almost exclusively with students

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 46 of 85

of the same race is at an all-time low.

On the other hand, huge shares of students of color still go to schools with almost no white students. Hispanic segregation is worse now than in the 1960s. The nation's largest school districts, in particular, have seen a surge in segregation since the 1990s, according to research from Stanford University's Educational Opportunity Project.

The history of school desegregation efforts, from *Brown v. Board* to today, shows how far the U.S. has come – and how far it has to go.

1954-1964: THE SOUTH DRAGS ITS FEET

The *Brown v. Board* decision declared white and Black students could not be forced to attend separate schools, even if those schools were allegedly equal in quality.

A few states such as Kansas and Delaware made some effort to comply with the order. But leaders in the Deep South immediately declared what U.S. Sen. Harry Byrd of Virginia called "massive resistance" to integration.

In all, segregation levels changed little over the next decade, despite the bravery of Black students like the Little Rock Nine in 1957 and 6-year-old Ruby Bridges in New Orleans in 1960, who faced violent, racist mobs when they tried to desegregate their local schools.

1964-1986: DESEGREGATION GETS SERIOUS

By the mid-1960s, the federal courts lost patience with the South. They started to mete out desegregation orders with teeth, requiring busing if necessary. Supreme Court Justice William J. Brennan Jr. declared segregation must be ripped out "root and branch."

At the same time, civil rights legislation of the 1960s reshaped schools in far-reaching ways. The Civil Rights Act of 1964 banned discrimination in education; the Voting Rights Act gave Black voters more power to choose school boards; and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act offered schools federal cash if they desegregated. Meanwhile, the Immigration and Nationality Act opened the country to more immigrants from Asia, Africa and Latin America, leading to far more diverse schools.

From there, segregation decreased quickly. Almost every Black student in the South went to school only with people of color in 1963; only one-fourth of Black students did in 1968.

But desegregation came with a price: Thousands of qualified Black teachers were laid off, even though they were often more credentialed and qualified than white teachers.

"Integration has never been equitable," said Ivory Toldson, a professor at Howard University.

Courts also began pushing desegregation in other parts of the country. Denver was one of the first cities outside the South called out for segregation in a 1973 Supreme Court case. Places like San Francisco and Cleveland were subject to desegregation orders, and riots broke out in 1974 over busing orders in Boston.

The momentum was short-lived. In 1974, the Supreme Court in *Milliken v. Bradley* struck down a desegregation plan that involved multiple school districts in and around Detroit. That meant metropolitan areas, with rare exceptions, could not be forced to bus students across school district lines.

The era saw massive white flight from urban school districts, in places where busing was required and where it was not. Los Angeles, Chicago and New York City collectively lost over half a million white public school students from 1968 to 1980. In just twelve years, the number of white students fell 71% in New Orleans, 78% in Detroit and 86% in Atlanta.

Still, federal court orders had succeeded in reducing Black segregation to its lowest level ever by 1986.

After that, progress began to stall.

1986-TODAY: DIVERSITY GROWS, DESEGREGATION LOSES STEAM

The courts gradually began to focus less on achieving racially balanced schools and more on other ways to promote desegregation, such as magnet schools. It became easier for school districts to argue they had made enough progress to be released from desegregation orders, and most of them were lifted by the early 2000s. A few hundred are still active today, but usually unenforced; school district leaders often don't know they're still under desegregation orders.

The segregation of Black students changed little after the 1980s. As Latino immigration soared, so did the segregation of Latino students.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 47 of 85

The effects of isolation are particularly pernicious for students who come from an immigrant background, said Patricia Gándara, co-director of UCLA's Civil Rights Project. These families are less likely to speak English or know the unspoken rules of the American education system, like how to apply for college.

More court cases chipped away at policy tools to address desegregation, turning toward the conservative idea that setting targets by race is itself a form of racial discrimination.

Nevertheless, classrooms became more diverse, reflecting the country's changing demographics. A historic milestone came in 2014, when for the first time the majority of U.S. students were children of color.

Students of color may be more exposed to each other, but they're still often in separate schools from white students. Around 4 out of 10 Black and Hispanic students go to schools made up almost entirely of other students of color.

Racial imbalance is particularly acute in the nation's 100 largest districts, according to researchers from Stanford's Educational Opportunity Project. Using segregation scores of 0 to 100, they found Black-white segregation grew over 40% from 1991 to 2019, from 21 to 30 points, while Hispanic-white segregation grew from 15 to 24.

That's both because the government moved away from desegregation orders in the 1990s and because parents took advantage of the school choice movement in the 2000s.

Even before school choice, racial isolation was extreme in many large urban school districts. This is one of the reasons that many states with large cities outside the South, such as Illinois, Michigan, New York and California, have been among the most segregated in America since at least the 1980s.

This segregation matters, because concentration in high-poverty, racially segregated schools is strongly correlated with poorer outcomes for students.

"Segregation is at the core of an awful lot of the problems that we have," Gándara said. "No matter how much money you throw at it, if you're going to cluster poor kids and kids without family resources to support them in school, you're going to continue to have these uneven outcomes."

GOP advances Garland contempt charges after White House exerts executive privilege over Biden audio

By FARNOUSH AMIRI, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Two House committees moved ahead Thursday with contempt charges against Attorney General Merrick Garland for refusing to turn over audio from President Joe Biden's interview with a special counsel, advancing the matter after the White House's decision to block the release of the recording earlier in the day.

In back-to-back hearings that nearly spilled into early Friday, the House Judiciary and Oversight and Accountability committees voted along party lines to advance an effort to hold Garland in contempt of Congress for not turning over the records. But the timing of any action by the full House, and the willingness of the U.S. attorney's office to act on the referral, remained uncertain.

"The department has a legal obligation to turn over the requested materials pursuant to the subpoena," Rep. Jim Jordan, the GOP chairman of the Judiciary Committee, said during the hearing. "Attorney General Garland's willful refusal to comply with our subpoena constitutes contempt of Congress."

The rapid sequence of events Thursday further inflamed tensions between House Republicans and the Justice Department, setting the stage for another round of bitter fighting between the two branches of government that seemed nearly certain to spill over into court.

If House Republicans' efforts against Garland are successful, he will become the third attorney general to be held in contempt of Congress. The White House slammed Republicans in a letter earlier Thursday, dismissing their efforts to obtain the audio as purely political.

"The absence of a legitimate need for the audio recordings lays bare your likely goal — to chop them up, distort them, and use them for partisan political purposes," White House counsel Ed Siskel wrote in a scathing letter to House Republicans ahead of scheduled votes by the two House committees to refer Garland to the Justice Department for the contempt charges.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 48 of 85

"Demanding such sensitive and constitutionally-protected law enforcement materials from the Executive Branch because you want to manipulate them for potential political gain is inappropriate," Siskel added.

Garland separately advised Biden in a letter made public Thursday that the audio falls within the scope of executive privilege, which protects a president's ability to obtain candid counsel from his advisers without fear of immediate public disclosure and to protect confidential communications relating to official responsibilities.

The attorney general told reporters that the Justice Department has gone to extraordinary lengths to provide information to the committees about special counsel Robert Hur's investigation, including a transcript of Biden's interview with Hur. But, Garland said, releasing the audio could jeopardize future sensitive and high-profile investigations. Officials have suggested handing over the tape could make future witnesses concerned about cooperating with investigators.

"There have been a series of unprecedented and frankly unfounded attacks on the Justice Department," Garland said. "This request, this effort to use contempt as a method of obtaining our sensitive law enforcement files is just most recent."

The Justice Department warned Congress that a contempt effort would create "unnecessary and unwarranted conflict," with Assistant Attorney General Carlos Uriarte saying, "It is the longstanding position of the executive branch held by administrations of both parties that an official who asserts the president's claim of executive privilege cannot be held in contempt of Congress."

Siskel's letter to lawmakers comes after the uproar from Biden's aides and allies over Hur's comments about Biden's age and mental acuity, and it highlights concerns in a difficult election year over how potentially embarrassing moments from the lengthy interview could be exacerbated by the release, or selective release, of the audio.

Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson slammed the White House's move, accusing Biden of suppressing the tape because he's afraid to have voters hear it during an election year.

"The American people will not be able to hear why prosecutors felt the President of the United States was, in Special Counsel Robert Hur's own words, an 'elderly man with a poor memory,' and thus shouldn't be charged," Johnson said during a press conference on the House steps.

House Democrats defended Biden's rationale during the back-to-back hearings on Thursday, citing the massive trove of documents and witnesses who have been made available to Republicans as part of their more than yearlong probe into Biden and his family.

Rep. Jerry Nadler, the top Democrat on the Judiciary Committee, said on Thursday that Republicans want to make it seem like they've uncovered wrongdoing by the Justice Department.

"In reality, the Attorney General and DOJ have been fully responsive to this committee in every way that might be material to their long dead impeachment inquiry," the New York lawmaker said. "Sometimes, they have been too responsive, in my opinion, given the obvious bad faith of the MAGA majority."

The contempt effort is seen by Democrats as a last-ditch effort to keep Republicans' impeachment inquiry into Biden alive, despite a series of setbacks in recent months and flailing support for articles of impeachment within the GOP conference.

A transcript of the Hur interview showed Biden struggling to recall some dates and occasionally confusing some details — something longtime aides say he's done for years in both public and private — but otherwise showing deep recall in other areas. Biden and his aides are particularly sensitive to questions about his age. At 81, he's the oldest-ever president, and he's seeking another four-year term.

Hur, a former senior official in the Trump administration Justice Department, was appointed as a special counsel in January 2023 following the discovery of classified documents in multiple locations tied to Biden.

Hur's report said many of the documents recovered at the Penn Biden Center in Washington, in parts of Biden's Delaware home, and in his Senate papers at the University of Delaware were retained by "mistake."

However, investigators did find evidence of willful retention and disclosure related to a subset of records found in Biden's Wilmington, Delaware, house, including in a garage, an office and a basement den.

The files pertain to a troop surge in Afghanistan during the Obama administration that Biden had vigor-

ously opposed. Biden kept records that documented his position, including a classified letter to Obama during the 2009 Thanksgiving holiday. Some of that information was shared with a ghostwriter with whom he published memoirs in 2007 and 2017.

Kim's sister denies North Korea has supplied weapons to Russia

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — The influential sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un again denied Friday that her country has exported any weapons to Russia, as she labeled outside speculation on North Korea-Russian arms dealings as “the most absurd paradox.”

The U.S., South Korea and others have steadfastly accused North Korea of supplying artillery, missiles and other conventional weapons to Russia for its war in Ukraine in return for advanced military technologies and economic aid. Both North Korea and Russia have repeatedly dismissed that.

Foreign experts believe North Korea's recent series of artillery and short-range missile tests were meant to examine or advertise the weapons it was planning to sell to Russia.

Kim Yo Jong called outside assessments on the North Korean-Russian dealings “the most absurd paradox which is not worth making any evaluation or interpretation.”

“We have no intention to export our military technical capabilities to any country or open them to the public,” she said in a statement carried by state media.

She said North Korea's recent weapons tests were purely performed as parts of the country's five-year arms buildup plan launched in 2021. She added that the recently tested weapons are designed to attack Seoul, the South Korean capital.

“We don't conceal the fact that such weapons will be used to prevent Seoul from inventing any idle thinking,” Kim Yo Jong said.

South Korea's Unification Ministry responded later Friday that it is fully ready to repel military threats by North Korea in step with its military alliance with the U.S. Deputy ministry spokesperson Kim Inae also said that “illegal” arms dealings between North Korea and Russia must be stopped immediately.

Any weapons trade with North Korea would be a violation of multiple U.N. Security Council resolutions that Russia, a permanent U.N. Security Council member, previously endorsed.

In March, South Korean Defense Minister Shin Wonsik said North Korea had shipped about 7,000 containers filled with munitions and other military equipment to Russia since last year. In return, Shin said that North Korea had received more than 9,000 Russian containers likely filled with aid.

In January, U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said North Korea-supplied missiles had been fired on Ukraine. At the time, Ukraine officials also said an investigation of the debris of a missile found in its northeastern Kharkiv region showed the weapon likely was from North Korea.

In May, the White House also said Russia was shipping refined petroleum to North Korea at levels that exceed U.N. Security Council limits.

The deepening North Korean-Russia ties come as both countries are locked in separate confrontations with the United States — North Korea over its advancing nuclear program and Russia over its protracted war in Ukraine.

Since 2022, North Korea has conducted a provocative run of missiles tests, prompting the U.S. to expand its military drills with South Korea and Japan. Foreign experts say North Korea likely thinks an enlarged weapons arsenal would boost its leverage in future diplomacy with the United States.

Justice Alito's home flew flag upside down after Trump's 'Stop the Steal' claims, report says

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — An upside-down American flag, a symbol associated with former President Donald Trump's false claims of election fraud, was displayed outside the home of Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito in January 2021, The New York Times reported Thursday.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 50 of 85

A photo obtained and published by the newspaper shows the flag flying on Jan. 17, 2021, days after Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021. Dozens of the rioters were carrying similarly inverted flags and chanting slogans like "Stop the Steal."

The report could raise concerns about Alito's impartiality as the court considers two major cases related to the attack, including charges faced by the rioters and whether Trump has immunity from prosecution on election interference charges.

It comes as another conservative justice, Clarence Thomas, has ignored calls to recuse himself from cases related to the 2020 election over his wife, Ginni Thomas', support for Trump and as public trust in the Supreme Court is at its lowest point in at least 50 years. Judicial experts said the flag clearly violates ethics rules set to avoid even the appearance of bias.

At the time the flag was flying, the court was still considering whether to take up cases over the 2020 election. It ultimately rejected them over dissent from three conservative justices, including Alito, who was appointed by Republican President George W. Bush. He wrote that the court's consideration of the cases would have no impact on the 2020 election but "would provide invaluable guidance for future elections."

Alito, for his part, acknowledged the presence of the flag at his home in Alexandria, Virginia, but said it was placed there by his wife.

"I had no involvement whatsoever in the flying of the flag," Alito said in an emailed statement to the newspaper. "It was briefly placed by Mrs. Alito in response to a neighbor's use of objectionable and personally insulting language on yard signs."

Martha-Ann Alito had been in a dispute with another family in the neighborhood over an anti-Trump sign on their lawn, and neighbors also interpreted the flag as a political statement, the Times reported. It isn't clear how long the flag was flying.

Judicial ethics codes focus on the need for judges to be independent, avoiding political statements or opinions on matters they could be called on to decide. The Supreme Court had long gone without its own code of ethics, but adopted one in November 2023 in the face of sustained criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices. The code lacks a means of enforcement, however.

Amanda Frost, a law professor at the University of Virginia, told the newspaper that flying the flag upside down is "the equivalent of putting a 'Stop the Steal' sign in your yard, which is a problem if you're deciding election-related cases."

Even if it was placed by his spouse or someone else living in the home, "he shouldn't have it in his yard as his message to the world," she said.

The Supreme Court has warned its own employees about public displays indicating partisan leanings, the newspaper reported. The court did not respond to questions about whether those rules apply to justices.

The U.S. Flag Code states that the American flag is not to be flown upside down "except as a signal of dire distress in instance of extreme danger to life or property." It has been used as a protest symbol on both the left and the right on a range of issues over the decades. It took off as a symbol of Trump's "Stop the Steal" campaign as he spread false claims that the election he lost to President Joe Biden had been stolen.

House votes to require delivery of bombs to Israel in GOP-led rebuke of Biden policies

By STEPHEN GROVES and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House delivered a rebuke to President Joe Biden Thursday for pausing a shipment of bombs to Israel, passing legislation that seeks to force the weapons transfer as Republicans worked to highlight Democratic divisions over the Israel-Hamas war.

Seeking to discourage Israel from its offensive on the crowded southern Gaza city of Rafah, the Biden administration this month put on hold a weapons shipment of 3,500 bombs — some as large as 2,000 pounds — that are capable of killing hundreds in populated areas. Republicans were outraged, accusing Biden of abandoning the closest U.S. ally in the Middle East.

Debate over the bill, rushed to the House floor by GOP leadership this week, showed Washington's deeply

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 51 of 85

fractured outlook on the Israel-Hamas war. The White House and Democratic leadership scrambled to rally support from a House caucus that ranges from moderates frustrated that the president would allow any daylight between the U.S. and Israel to progressives outraged that he is still sending any weapons at all.

The bill passed comfortably 224-187 as 16 Democrats joined with most Republicans to vote in favor. Three Republicans voted against it.

On the right, Republicans said the president had no business chiding Israel for how it uses the U.S.-manufactured weapons that are instrumental in its war against Hamas. They have not been satisfied with the Biden administration moving forward this week on a new \$1 billion sale to Israel of tank ammunition, tactical vehicles and mortar rounds.

"We're beyond frustrated," Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell said. "I don't think we should tell the Israelis how to conduct their military campaign, period."

The House bill condemns Biden for initiating the pause on the bomb shipment and would withhold funding for the State Department, Department of Defense and the National Security Council until the delivery is made.

The White House has said Biden would veto the bill if it passes Congress, and the Democratic-led Senate seems certain to reject it.

"It's not going anywhere," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said earlier this week.

Republicans were undeterred. Appearing on the Capitol steps ahead of voting Thursday morning, House Republican leaders argued that passage of the bill in the House would build pressure on Schumer and Biden.

"It is President Biden and Senator Schumer himself who are standing in the way of getting Israel the resources it desperately needs to defend itself," Speaker Mike Johnson said.

Biden placed the hold on the transfer of the bombs this month over concerns the weapons could inflict massive casualties in Rafah and to deter Israel from the attack.

Over 30,000 Palestinians in Gaza have been killed as Israel tries to eliminate Hamas in retaliation for its Oct. 7 attack that killed 1,200 people in Israel and took about 250 more captive. Hundreds of thousands of people could be at risk of death if Israel attacks Rafah, the United Nations humanitarian aid agency has warned, because so many have fled there for safety.

The heavy toll of the Israeli campaign has prompted intense protests on the left, including on university campuses nationwide and some aimed directly at Biden. In a rare scene on the Capitol steps Thursday, a group of about two dozen House aides gathered just as lawmakers were entering the chamber to vote and displayed a banner that read, "Your staff demands you save Rafah."

At the same time, a group of moderate Democrats in Congress have expressed almost unconditional support for Israel. Roughly two dozen House Democrats last week signed onto a letter to the Biden administration saying they were "deeply concerned about the message" sent by pausing the bomb shipment.

Eager to tamp down the number from Biden's own party who would side with Republicans on the vote, national security adviser Jake Sullivan and deputy national security adviser Jon Finer got on the phone this week with Democratic lawmakers who could possibly defect.

Among their arguments, according to an administration official with knowledge of their conversations and granted anonymity to discuss them, was that the legislation would constrain the president's foreign policy powers, particularly his ability to adjust security aid as needed. Sullivan and Finer also noted in these discussions that what Biden did — pausing aid in order to influence Israel's actions — was similar to President Ronald Reagan's decision in 1982 to halt military aid to Israel amid its invasion of Lebanon.

National Security Council spokeswoman Adrienne Watson said the legislation was intended to "score political points, not help Israel."

"President Biden will take a back seat to no one on his support for Israel and will ensure that Israel has everything it needs to defeat Hamas," she said. "President Biden is also strongly on the record for the protection of innocent civilians. Most Americans agree on both these points, Israel has a right and obligation to protect themselves, but they must do so while avoiding civilian casualties."

House Democratic leadership also worked hard to convince rank-and-file lawmakers to vote against the bill.

"The legislation on the floor today is not a serious effort to strengthen the special relationship between

the United States and Israel," said House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries.

He added that he supported the effort to "decisively" defeat Hamas while also advocating for a goal of "Israel living in safety and security side by side with a demilitarized Palestinian state that allows for dignity and self-determination amongst the Palestinian people."

With the general election campaign coming into focus, the speaker has mostly turned to advancing partisan bills, including legislation on immigration, local policing and antisemitism, that are intended to force Democrats into taking difficult votes.

"It's being done to score cheap political points," said Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz, a Florida Democrat who signed onto the letter criticizing the pause, but voted against the bill. She added that it would potentially defund U.S. national security programs.

As an alternative, Rep. Michael McCaul, the Republican chair of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, introduced a separate bill Thursday with some bipartisan backing that would require the president to notify Congress before holding the delivery of defensive weapons to Israel and allow Congress to override the hold.

Still, the 16 Democrats who voted for the bill showed a willingness to buck the president. The group consisted of both lawmakers vying for reelection in swing districts and those who are staunch supporters of Israel.

"The administration has been wavering so I'm going to vote for the bill when it comes to the floor," Rep. Ritchie Torres, a New York Democrat, said ahead of the vote.

Another Democrat who voted for the bill, Rep. Jared Moskowitz of Florida, said this week he also considered the messages being sent to the Jewish community in the United States.

"My community right now is worried," he said. "Things don't happen in a vacuum."

Historically, the U.S. has sent enormous amounts of weaponry to Israel, and it has only accelerated those shipments after the Oct. 7 attack. But some progressives are pushing for an end to that relationship as they argue that Israel's campaign into Gaza amounts to genocide — a characterization that the Biden administration has rejected.

"My fear is that our government and us as citizens, as taxpayers, we are going to be complicit in genocide," said Rep. Ilhan Omar, a Minnesota Democrat. "And that goes against everything we value as a nation."

House Republicans ditch their day jobs to stand with Trump, while legislating languishes

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

Leaving Washington behind, prominent far-right House Republicans who have repeatedly thrown this Congress into chaos showed up Thursday at Donald Trump's hush money trial to do what they do best.

They stood outside Trump Tower filming their support for the indicted former president. They filed into the Manhattan courthouse "standing back and standing by," as Rep. Matt Gaetz put it — invoking Trump's call to the extremist Proud Boys. They were admonished to put down their cell phones.

And the House Republicans commandeered the spotlight — much like House Speaker Mike Johnson did earlier in the week — to rant against what they called the "kangaroo court" and the "political persecution" of Trump, as their day jobs waited for their return.

"President Trump is not going anywhere," said Rep. Lauren Boebert, R-Colo., as hecklers interrupted.

"And we are not going anywhere either. We are here to stand with him."

The split-screen scene between New York and D.C. provided one of the more vivid examples yet of how Republicans have tossed aside the de rigueur tasks of governing in favor of the engineered spectacle of grievance, performance and outrage that powers Trump-era American politics.

As much of Congress stalled out yet again, unable to legislate through the country's challenges, the Republicans chose to spend the day going viral.

The excursion was all the more remarkable because it comes as House Republicans were focused Thursday on moving to hold Attorney General Merrick Garland in contempt of Congress — part of a broader

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 53 of 85

campaign attack on President Joe Biden.

The House's Oversight and Judiciary Committee Republicans are demanding the Justice Department turn over evidence in the classified documents case against Biden, including an audio interview that is potentially embarrassing to the president as he stumbles through some answers. The Judiciary panel soldiered on Thursday, while the Oversight committee punted its hearing to evening, once lawmakers return.

Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, perhaps the most outspoken of Trump's allies who joined him in New York when he was first charged in the case, lambasted her GOP colleagues for dashing to Manhattan when she said they should be back in Washington doing congressional business.

"I'm here doing my job," Greene said on the eve of the trip.

Greene particularly criticized Johnson, the speaker she tried to oust, for "running up" to New York when she is pushing him toward her next big project, dismantling Special Counsel Jack Smith's office and its federal indictments against Trump, including for trying to overturn the 2020 election in the run-up to the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol attack.

It all unfolds as Congress is on record as being among the most unproductive in recent times, with few legislative accomplishments or bills passed into law.

Republicans swept to House majority control in 2023, but became quickly consumed by infighting as traditional conservatives were pushed aside by Trump's national populist Make America Great Again movement. They ousted their own leader, then-Speaker Kevin McCarthy, derailed priority bills and left Johnson forced to rely on help from Democrats to stay in power, an unheard of scenario.

"The extreme MAGA Republicans have brought nothing but chaos, dysfunction and extremism to the Congress from the very beginning," said Rep. Hakeem Jeffries of New York, the Democratic leader. "And they cannot point to a single thing that they've been able to do on their own to deliver real results, to solve problems for hardworking American taxpayers."

"Get a job," the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee posted on social media.

Outside the courthouse, the dozen or so Republican lawmakers didn't dress the same, as others did with matching dark suits and Trump-styled red ties earlier in the week, but still formed a unified front for Trump.

"We're watching the persecution of a patriot," said Rep. Diana Harshbarger, R-Tenn. "What a price to be a patriot President Trump has paid."

Gaetz called it the "Mr. Potato Head doll of crimes" where the prosecutors had to "stick together a bunch of things" to make a case.

While some like Gaetz are among Trump's biggest backers in Congress, others are working quickly to burnish their credentials with the MAGA movement that now defines the Republican Party for their own political survival.

The chairman of the House Freedom Caucus, Rep. Bob Good, R-Va., had been late to endorse Trump, and now faces a difficult primary next month. His Trump-aligned challenger, Republican John McGuire, was able to ride with Good and the other lawmakers in Trump's motorcade to the courthouse.

"We're here to have his back," Good said of Trump. "We're here to defend him and to tell the truth about this travesty of justice, this political persecution, this election interference, this rigging of elections."

Rep. Ralph Norman, R-S.C., who had been a supporter of his home state presidential contender Nikki Haley, derided the "kangaroo court" prosecuting Trump.

Arizona Rep. Eli Crane said Democrats are prosecuting Trump because "they can't beat him" at the ballot box in November.

Crane said he and other Republicans are fighting to "Make America Great Again," which after the afternoon of heckling, drew a round of cheers.

By day's end, they were back at the Capitol, several of them recounting their visit in a series of late-evening floor speeches, all caught on the cameras, before they finished up for the night, and closed out the House.

Lawyer for family of slain US Air Force airman says video and calls show deputy went to wrong home

By JEFF MARTIN and CURT ANDERSON Associated Press

STONECREST, Ga. (AP) — A lawyer for the family of Roger Fortson said Thursday that police radio traffic and the body camera footage of the Florida sheriff's deputy who killed the Black U.S. Air Force airman reinforce their assertion that the deputy was directed to the wrong apartment while responding to a domestic disturbance call that day.

In police radio traffic that lawyer Ben Crump played at a news conference surrounded by Fortson's family, a dispatcher said all they knew about the disturbance was "fourth-party information."

"Uh, don't have any further other than a male and female," the dispatcher told officers. "It's all fourth-party information from the front desk at the leasing office."

Crump also highlighted two portions of the bodycam video in which the deputy asked the woman leading him around the complex, "Which door?" The woman responded, "Um... I'm not sure." Seconds later, the woman told the officer that she heard a disturbance two weeks ago, but "I wasn't sure where it came from."

Fortson, 23, was shot May 3 by an Okaloosa County sheriff's deputy in the doorway of his apartment. Sheriff's officials say the deputy acted in self-defense while responding to a call of a disturbance in progress at the apartment complex.

Crump and Fortson's family contend that the deputy went to the wrong apartment and the shooting was unjustified. At a May 9 news conference, Okaloosa County Sheriff Eric Aden disputed allegations that the deputy went to the wrong unit, saying he's aware of comments that "falsely state our deputy entered the wrong apartment."

Nearly two weeks after the shooting, the sheriff has yet to release an incident report, any 911 records or the officer's identity, despite requests for the information under Florida's open records act. The Florida Department of Law Enforcement is investigating and the deputy involved has been placed on administrative leave.

At the news conference, Fortson's mother, Meka Fortson, said she doesn't remember her son even killing a spider, and that he didn't deserve to be killed.

"I'll walk through the fires" to get justice, she said.

Her message to the Sheriff Aden: "You're going to give me justice whether you want to, Sheriff Aden, or not," she said.

A shrine of sorts has sprung up outside Fortson's apartment, where people have left combat boots, bouquets of flowers and an American flag, among other things.

The news conference was held at the New Birth Missionary Baptist Church in the Atlanta suburb of Stonecrest. It would be followed by a wake in nearby Decatur. Fortson's funeral will be held at New Birth on Friday.

Bodycam video of the confrontation shows the deputy arriving at a Fort Walton Beach apartment building and speaking to a woman outside who described hearing an argument. The deputy then went up an elevator and walked down an outdoor hallway.

The video shows the deputy banging on the door and stepping aside, seemingly out of view of the door. Twice he shouted: "Sheriff's office! Open the door!"

Fortson, who legally owned a firearm, opened the door and could be seen holding a handgun pointed toward the floor. The deputy shouted, "Step back!" and then shot Fortson six times. Only afterward did he shout, "Drop the gun! Drop the gun!"

The deputy then called paramedics on his radio. The case is among many around the country in which Black people have been shot in their homes by law enforcement personnel.

Crump said earlier that Fortson was talking to his girlfriend on FaceTime and that he grabbed his gun because he heard someone outside his apartment. He said the deputy burst into the apartment, citing the account of the girlfriend, whose name hasn't been released.

In a clip from the FaceTime video captured by Fortson's cellphone, the airman can be heard groaning

and saying, "I can't breathe." A deputy can be heard yelling back at him, "Stop moving!" The phone is pointed at the ceiling and does not show what is going on in the apartment.

Fortson, a senior airman, was stationed at Hurlburt Field near Fort Walton Beach, Florida. He was a gunner aboard the AC-130J and earned an Air Medal with combat device, which is typically awarded after 20 flights in a combat zone or for conspicuous valor or achievement on a single mission.

Fortson was assigned to the 4th Special Operations Squadron as a special missions aviator, where one of his roles was to load the gunship's 30mm and 105mm cannons.

His family has said he doted on his 10-year-old sister and was determined to provide a better life for her and his mother, hoping eventually to buy her a house.

US Coast Guard says Texas barge collision may have spilled up to 2,000 gallons of oil

By LEKAN OYEKANMI and VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

GALVESTON, Texas (AP) — Early estimates indicate up to 2,000 gallons of oil may have spilled into surrounding waters when a barge carrying fuel broke free from a tugboat and slammed into a bridge near Galveston, Texas, the U.S. Coast Guard said Thursday.

The barge crashed into a pillar supporting the Pelican Island Causeway span on Wednesday. The impact caused the bridge to partially collapse and cut off the only road connecting Galveston to Pelican Island, the Coast Guard said.

Video shows splotches of oil had spilled from the barge into Galveston Bay. Jeff Davis of the Texas General Land Office said during a news conference Thursday that early cleanup efforts have not identified any impacted wildlife.

The barge has the capacity to hold 30,000 barrels, but was holding 23,000 barrels — approximately 966,000 gallons — when it struck the bridge, Rick Freed, the vice president of barge operator Martin Marine, said at the news conference. Freed said the only tank that was compromised in the crash was holding approximately 160,000 gallons, which is the "complete risk."

"We're pretty confident there was much less oil introduced to the water than we initially estimated," Coast Guard Capt. Keith Donohue said.

"We've recovered over 605 gallons of oily water mixture from the environment, as well as an additional 5,640 gallons of oil product from the top of the barge that did not go into the water," Donohue said.

The Coast Guard said earlier that it had deployed a boom, or barrier, to contain the spill, which forced the closure of about 6.5 miles (10.5 kilometers) of the waterway.

A tugboat lost control of the 321-foot barge "due to a break in the coupling" that had connected the two vessels, the Coast Guard said.

"Weather was not a factor, at all, during the coupling issue," Freed said. When pressed for more details on how the two vessels became disconnected, he said: "It's under investigation right now, and I really can't disclose anything further until the investigation is through."

On Thursday, the barge remained beside the bridge, weighed in place by debris including rail lines that fell onto it after the crash.

The bridge, which provides the only road access between Galveston and Pelican Island, remained closed to incoming traffic, but vehicles leaving Pelican Island and pedestrians in both directions were able to cross.

Texas A&M University at Galveston, which has a campus on Pelican Island, urged staff and faculty to leave and said it was closing the campus, although essential personnel would remain.

"Given the rapidly changing conditions and uncertainty regarding the outage of the Pelican Island Bridge, the Galveston Campus administration will be relocating all Texas A&M Pelican Island residents," through at least Sunday, it said in a statement late Wednesday.

Fewer than 200 people related to the school were on the island when the barge hit the bridge. Spokesperson Shantelle Patterson-Swanson said the university would provide transportation and cover the housing

costs of those who choose to leave, but underlined that the school has not issued a mandatory evacuation.

Aside from the environmental impact of the oil spill, the region is unlikely to see large economic disruption as a result of the accident, said Maria Burns, a maritime transportation expert at the University of Houston.

The affected area is miles from the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, which sees frequent barge traffic, and the Houston Ship Channel, a large shipping channel for ocean-going vessels.

The accident came weeks after a cargo ship crashed into a support column of the Francis Key Bridge in Baltimore on March 26, killing six construction workers.

What to know about how much the aid from a US pier project will help Gaza

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A U.S.-built pier is in place to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza by sea, but no one will know if the new route will work until a steady stream of deliveries begins reaching starving Palestinians.

The trucks that will roll off the pier project installed Thursday will face intensified fighting, Hamas threats to target any foreign forces and uncertainty about whether the Israeli military will ensure that aid convoys have access and safety from attack by Israeli forces.

Even if the sea route performs as hoped, U.S, U.N. and aid officials caution, it will bring in a fraction of the aid that's needed to the embattled enclave.

Here's a look at what's ahead for aid arriving by sea:

WILL THE SEA ROUTE END THE CRISIS IN GAZA?

No, not even if everything with the sea route works perfectly, American and international officials say.

U.S. military officials hope to start with about 90 truckloads of aid a day through the sea route, growing quickly to about 150 trucks a day.

Samantha Power, head of the U.S. Agency for International Development, and other aid officials have consistently said Gaza needs deliveries of more than 500 truckloads a day — the prewar average — to help a population struggling without adequate food or clean water during seven months of war between Israel and Hamas.

Israel has hindered deliveries of food, fuel and other supplies through land crossings since Hamas' deadly attack on Israel launched the conflict in October. The restrictions on border crossings and fighting have brought on a growing humanitarian catastrophe for civilians.

International experts say all 2.3 million of Gaza's people are experiencing acute levels of food insecurity, 1.1 million of them at "catastrophic" levels. Power and U.N. World Food Program Director Cindy McCain say north Gaza is in famine.

At that stage, saving the lives of children and others most affected requires steady treatment in clinical settings, making a cease-fire critical, USAID officials say.

At full operation, international officials have said, aid from the sea route is expected to reach a half-million people. That's just over one-fifth of the population.

WHAT ARE THE CHALLENGES FOR THE SEA ROUTE NOW?

The U.S. plan is for the U.N. to take charge of the aid once it's brought in. The U.N. World Food Program will then turn it over to aid groups for delivery.

U.N. officials have expressed concern about preserving their neutrality despite the involvement in the sea route by the Israeli military — one of the combatants in the conflict — and say they are negotiating that.

There are still questions on how aid groups will safely operate in Gaza to distribute food to those who need it most, said Sonali Korde, assistant to the administrator for USAID's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, which is helping with logistics.

U.S. and international organizations including the U.S. government's USAID and the Oxfam, Save the Children and International Rescue Committee nonprofits say Israeli officials haven't meaningfully improved protections of aid workers since the military's April 1 attack that killed seven aid workers with the World

Central Kitchen organization.

Talks with the Israeli military “need to get to a place where humanitarian aid workers feel safe and secure and able to operate safely. And I don’t think we’re there yet,” Korde told reporters Thursday.

Meanwhile, fighting is surging in Gaza. It isn’t threatening the new shoreline aid distribution area, Pentagon officials say, but they have made it clear that security conditions could prompt a shutdown of the maritime route, even just temporarily.

The U.S. and Israel have developed a security plan for humanitarian groups coming to a “marshaling yard” next to the pier to pick up the aid, said U.S. Vice Admiral Brad Cooper, deputy commander of the U.S. military’s Central Command. USAID Response Director Dan Dieckhaus said aid groups would follow their own security procedures in distributing the supplies.

Meanwhile, Israeli forces have moved into the border crossing in the southern city of Rafah as part of their offensive, preventing aid from moving through, including fuel.

U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said that without fuel, delivery of all aid in Gaza can’t happen.

WHAT’S NEEDED?

U.S. President Joe Biden’s administration, the U.N. and aid groups have pressed Israel to allow more aid through land crossings, saying that’s the only way to ease the suffering of Gaza’s civilians. They’ve also urged Israel’s military to actively coordinate with aid groups to stop Israeli attacks on humanitarian workers.

“Getting aid to people in need into and across Gaza cannot and should not depend on a floating dock far from where needs are most acute,” U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq told reporters Thursday.

“To stave off the horrors of famine, we must use the fastest and most obvious route to reach the people of Gaza — and for that, we need access by land now,” Haq said.

U.S. officials agree that the pier is only a partial solution at best, and say they are pressing Israel for more.

WHAT DOES ISRAEL SAY?

Israel says it places no limits on the entry of humanitarian aid and blames the U.N. for delays in distributing goods entering Gaza. The U.N. says ongoing fighting, Israeli fire and chaotic security conditions have hindered delivery.

Under pressure from the U.S., Israel has in recent weeks opened a pair of crossings to deliver aid into hard-hit northern Gaza. It said a series of Hamas attacks on the main crossing, Kerem Shalom, have disrupted the flow of goods.

They shared a name — but not a future. How two kids fought to escape poverty in Baltimore

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — Growing up in the streets of east Baltimore surrounded by poverty and gun violence, two kids named Antonio became fast friends. Both called “Tone,” they were similarly charismatic and ambitious, dreaming of the day they would finally leave behind the struggles that defined their childhoods.

One has. The other never will.

Antonio Lee was shot and killed last summer. In the weeks that followed, his friend Antonio Moore warned their peers about the consequences of retaliation, trying to prevent more needless bloodshed and stolen futures in a city that consistently ranks among the nation’s most violent.

“This s--- will keep going for the next 20 years, or it’ll stop,” Moore said at Lee’s funeral service in August. “Y’all gotta make a choice.”

Moore, 24, is a successful real estate investor and entrepreneur. He founded a consulting company that helps brands and nonprofits connect with urban youth. His accomplishments serve as a reminder of what’s possible.

Moore said Lee was committed to forging a similar path; he just didn’t have enough time to see it through.

How was Moore able to break the negative cycles of his youth while Lee fell victim to them?

It’s a question with no simple answers, but their disparate fates highlight the sometimes insurmountable challenges facing young Black men from Baltimore’s poorest neighborhoods and similar communities

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 58 of 85

across the country. They live in a world where rampant gun violence often draws an arbitrary line between life and death, where the fight for survival is constant and trauma is passed down through generations.

And the hurdles don't stop there: underperforming schools, limited job opportunities, inadequate public transportation, inaccessible health care, housing insecurity and an embattled criminal justice system that disproportionately locks up people of color. Guns and drugs are readily available. Hope is hard to come by.

Beating the odds is possible, but it requires an extraordinary combination of hard work and good luck. Above all, it requires time.

On the afternoon of his death, Lee was washing windshields at a busy northeast Baltimore intersection when gunfire broke out. His loved ones believe he was killed over a dispute between rival groups from different sections of east Baltimore. No arrests have been made in the case.

Lee died about four months before his 20th birthday. A second victim survived his injuries.

Stories like this are painfully common in Baltimore even as the city's homicide rate overall trends downward.

Lee's life unfolded in forgotten communities suffering from decades of population loss and unchecked drug activity. He attended Baltimore's underfunded public schools. Money was tight at home.

He came from a loving family, but his childhood was punctuated by tragedy. A brother was shot to death in North Carolina and a sister died from brain cancer. As the youngest child, Lee clung to his mother and surviving sister for support.

Several of his close friends were killed as teenagers, including a Baltimore high school football player whose death rocked the city two years ago when he was gunned down in his school's parking lot less than an hour before a scheduled home game.

Lee mourned them all, and he was acutely aware of the danger he faced simply operating in his environment, according to friends and family. That's one reason he was fighting to get out.

Statistically, he was fighting a losing battle. Black children grow up in some of the country's poorest households. Compared to their white counterparts, research shows they're significantly less likely to achieve upward economic mobility: About three-quarters of Black children born in the lowest income bracket will remain there for the rest of their lives. They're also about five times more likely to die in gunfire.

Lee talked about moving to Atlanta or maybe Florida, somewhere he would feel safer. He just needed to save up enough money to make it happen.

He was constantly brainstorming potential business opportunities — everything from music production and real estate investment to trash collection.

He started working at McDonald's and considered taking culinary classes. He loved to cook and bake. His funeral program listed some of his favorite dishes: pasta, chicken wings, banana pudding.

Lee was enrolled in one of Baltimore's flagship anti-violence programs through the nonprofit Roca, which provides mentoring, job training, GED classes and other services. He was meeting with his mentor regularly; they last spoke just hours before the shooting while Lee was brushing his teeth. Despite having a mouthful of toothpaste, he answered the phone with his signature greeting, an enthusiastic "Hey baby!"

Wherever he went, Lee would show up well-dressed and smiling, usually sporting a spotless pair of Air Jordan 5s, his favorite sneaker. As an aspiring rapper, he kept his finger on the pulse of music and fashion trends.

"A lot of these kids, their souls are like vacant buildings," said Terry "Uncle T" Williams, who founded a youth mentorship program in east Baltimore after his son was killed. "Antonio was really ambitious. He had a big heart. He stood out like a sore thumb for this reason."

Lee's optimism was contagious. He was curious and open-minded. He wanted to make his community proud.

"He was just so young," said Brandon Taylor, a Baltimore attorney who represented Lee. "I feel like Mr. Lee was a damn baby."

At the same time, he was forced to grow up fast, especially after his older brother was killed in 2019. Lee was grappling with a question facing many of Taylor's clients: Was it worth carrying a gun for protection

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 59 of 85

despite the risk of getting stopped by police?

"But fighting and violence, that's not what Mr. Lee was all about," Taylor said. "So when I heard about him dying, that kind of crushed this whole firm."

Just weeks before his death, Lee met with Taylor about a recent arrest for fleeing police and traffic violations. Taylor shook his head, recalling how Lee sped home and climbed through a window instead of complying with the traffic stop.

After the shooting, loved ones were similarly left wondering what was going through Lee's mind when he decided to wash windshields in northeast Baltimore, an area he normally avoided because of ongoing neighborhood beef. He was squeegeeing with a friend that afternoon.

Baltimore's squeegee workers have long been a fixture at some of the city's busiest intersections. Mostly young Black men from east and west Baltimore, they're typically desperate for cash. But their numbers have been dwindling since a 2022 initiative from the mayor's office sought to discourage the practice and banned panhandling in certain locations.

Lee must have needed supplemental income and decided to take a chance, loved ones said. It was a mistake he couldn't afford to make.

While Lee's death added to already devastating statistics, Moore is living proof of what happens when the pendulum swings the other way.

Moore grew up in the same forgotten neighborhood and struggling school system. He basically stopped going to class junior year, but he still graduated from high school thanks to a grade-changing scheme that was later detailed in a state inspector general's report and led to districtwide policy changes.

As a teen, he spent most days gambling and selling weed, occasionally dodging gunfire. He was making decent money in the streets. And despite the near constant threat of getting shot or arrested, it was a familiar environment, a known quantity, a source of instant gratification.

But ultimately, the risks seemed to outweigh the rewards. Moore tried to envision a positive future for himself and started hanging around people who seemed like good role models.

He got a job at Chipotle, where he learned how to operate in a corporate setting and talk to customers. One day, he struck up a conversation with a man who worked in Baltimore's wholesale real estate market.

"Hit me up when you're ready to make real money," Moore remembers the man telling him. So he did.

Moore quit Chipotle after about a year. By then, he was supporting himself as a property wholesaler, coordinating deals between buyers and sellers. It was a lucrative trade that required no professional license or college degree. Moore said his most important asset was his knowledge of Baltimore's neighborhoods, crime trends, local politics and other factors that could inform investment decisions. The city's glut of vacant rowhouses provided ample opportunities.

Meanwhile, Moore also began developing relationships with advocates and business leaders focused on improving conditions for teens and young adults living in poverty.

Moore said those interactions made him realize the value of his perspective — not in spite of where he came from, but because of it. He launched a consulting firm in 2021.

As a marketing consultant, he advises businesses and nonprofits on how to connect with a Gen Z audience. His current client list includes YouTube and the national anti-violence organization Everytown for Gun Safety.

Last year, Moore organized a collaboration between Everytown and three local Baltimore streetwear designers. During a recent visit to his childhood neighborhood, he caught up with old friends and handed out shirts emblazoned with the organization's message: "STOP GUN VIOLENCE"

Moore was able to make it out of the streets, but he can't escape the social media posts perpetuating Baltimore's intractable cycles of youth violence. Some nights, he lies awake wondering how to stop them, grappling with complex questions that criminologists, public health experts and politicians have repeatedly failed to answer.

"It's so easy to self-sabotage yourself in the city. It's easy to stunt your own growth because that's what the environment breeds," he said. "You have to see a future and want it more — really want it."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 60 of 85

It was an uphill battle as Moore pushed himself to embrace the unknown. Aside from a few lucky breaks, he attributes his success to an inquisitive mind, strong social skills, discipline and drive. Those qualities may have served him well, but they're not particularly unique.

"The thing is, there are so many more kids like me," he said.

One of them was Lee, who considered Moore a role model of sorts. The pair developed a close friendship based on shared experiences and similar goals. In between watching sports, listening to music and going shopping, they talked about Lee's future: how he dreamed of finding a lucrative career and buying his mom a house. Moore offered advice and support. He thought Lee was next in line for success.

Moore was visiting Chicago when he heard about the shooting. He rushed back to Baltimore, unable to shake the feeling that somehow he'd failed his little brother.

"I'm so mad he got killed because kids younger than him would have been influenced and inspired by him, too," Moore said. "It possibly could have helped change a whole generation."

A week after Lee's death, family members organized an evening vigil in the heart of east Baltimore. Against a backdrop of abandoned brick rowhouses, they constructed a makeshift memorial with photographs from his childhood. They decorated nearby stoops with bunches of blue balloons and spelled "TONE" with cardboard letters fastened to a boarded-up window.

The crowd grew to around 100 people, filling the sidewalks and spilling into the street as Baltimore police officers watched from a distance. Mourners sipped from liquor bottles and lit candles while hip-hop music blasted in the background. They laughed and cried together, carrying out a series of rituals that have become all too familiar in Baltimore's most underserved communities.

Moore walked to a corner store and bought candy for some of the younger kids. He visited with a friend who had recently come home from jail. He hugged Lee's mom while she sobbed for several minutes.

Instead of inspiring others, Lee's story had become a cautionary tale.

"Right now, this city is known for its pain," said John Young, a local pastor who mentored Lee and officiated his funeral service. "The future leaders of this world are being eliminated."

During the funeral, Young asked how many people in attendance had experienced similar tragedies before. Dozens raised their hands.

He used the moment to send a clear message to Lee's peers, other young men on the brink of adulthood, caught somewhere between forgiveness and revenge, ambition and resignation.

"I want y'all to make a decision. Think about Tone and how you're gonna remember him," Young said. "How many of y'all don't want to look in a casket and see yourself in it? Aren't you tired of watching other people's mothers cry?"

"Tone wanted to change and he had the courage to admit it. ... Now it's your turn to do something for him — live."

Moore, for his part, tries to live by example.

He remains immersed in the community that raised him, even when it feels like he's straddling two worlds. He understands both sides of the equation, the challenges and the possibilities.

"Where we come from, we're so lost, we're not thinking our life matters," he said. "But there's a place for us out there. We don't have to stay outcasts just because we were born into this."

His insight comes from personal experience, but to many other young people growing up under similar circumstances, his accomplishments seem like an impossible pipe dream. Moore searches desperately for the words that will finally make them realize their untapped potential.

In a world where the future is anything but guaranteed, how do you inspire hope?

It's a piece of advice he gave Lee countless times: "You are valuable," he tells anyone who will listen. "You really gotta stay alive long enough to catch on."

Texas governor pardons ex-Army sergeant convicted of killing Black Lives Matter protester

By JIM VERTUNO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Texas Gov. Greg Abbott issued a full pardon Thursday for a former U.S. Army sergeant convicted of murder for fatally shooting an armed demonstrator in 2020 during nationwide protests against police violence and racial injustice.

Abbott announced the pardon shortly after the Texas Board of Pardons and Paroles announced a unanimous recommendation that Daniel Perry be pardoned and have his firearms rights restored.

Perry had been in state prison on a 25-year sentence since his 2023 conviction in the killing of Garrett Foster, and was released shortly after the pardon, a prison spokeswoman said.

Perry, who is white, was working as a ride-share driver when his car approached a demonstration in Austin. Prosecutors said he could have driven away from the confrontation with Foster, a white Air Force veteran who witnesses said never raised his gun.

A jury convicted Perry of murder, but Abbott called it a case of self-defense.

"Texas has one of the strongest 'Stand Your Ground' laws of self-defense that cannot be nullified by a jury or a progressive district attorney," Abbott said.

A Republican in his third term, Abbott has typically issued pardons only for minor offenses, and he notably avoided a posthumous pardon recommendation for George Floyd for a 2004 drug arrest in Houston. It was Floyd's killing by a white police officer in Minneapolis in 2020 that set off national demonstrations.

Abbott ordered the board to review Perry's case shortly after the trial, and said he would sign a pardon if recommended. Under Texas law, the governor cannot issue a pardon without a recommendation from the board, which the governor appoints.

Travis County District Attorney Jose Garza blasted the pardon as a "mockery of our legal system."

"The board and the governor have put their politics over justice," Garza said. "They should be ashamed of themselves. Their actions are contrary to the law and demonstrate that there are two classes of people in this state where some lives matter and some lives do not."

Abbott's demand for a review of Perry's case followed pressure from former Fox News star Tucker Carlson, who on national television had urged the governor to intervene after the sergeant was convicted at trial in April 2023. Perry was sentenced after prosecutors used his social media history and text messages to portray him as a racist who may commit violence again.

The sergeant's defense attorneys argued that Foster did raise the rifle and that Perry had no choice but to shoot. Perry did not take the witness stand and jurors deliberated for two days before finding him guilty.

Perry acted in self-defense when confronted by an angry crowd and a person with an assault rifle, Perry attorney Clint Broden said after the pardon.

"The events of this case have always been tragic and, unfortunately, Garrett Foster lost his life," Broden said. "Mr. Perry and his family thank the Board of Pardons and Parole for its careful review of the case and are grateful that the State of Texas has strong laws to allow its citizens to protect themselves."

Foster's girlfriend, Whitney Mitchell, was with Foster when he was killed. She called the pardon an act of "lawlessness."

"With this pardon the governor has desecrated the life of a murdered Texan and U.S. Air Force veteran and impugned that jury's just verdict. He has declared that Texans who hold political views that are different from his and different from those in power can be killed in this state with impunity," Mitchell said.

The shooting set off fierce debate in 2020 amid the demonstrations sparked by Floyd's death, and Perry's conviction three years later prompted outrage from prominent conservatives.

Before sentencing in the case, Carlson aired a broadcast calling the shooting an act of self-defense and criticizing Abbott for not coming on his show. The next day, Abbott said he believed Perry should not be punished and told Texas' parole board to expedite a review of the conviction.

After the verdict but before Perry was sentenced, the court unsealed dozens of pages of text messages and social media posts that showed he had hostile views toward Black Lives Matter protests. In a com-

ment on Facebook a month before the shooting, Perry wrote, "It is official I am a racist because I do not agree with people acting like animals at the zoo."

Perry served in the Army for more than a decade. At trial, a forensic psychologist testified that he believed Perry has post-traumatic stress disorder from his deployment to Afghanistan and from being bullied as a child. At the time of the shooting, Perry was stationed at Fort Cavazos, then Fort Hood, about 70 miles (110 kilometers) north of Austin.

Aid for Gaza will soon flow from pier project just finished by US military, Pentagon says

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Pentagon said Thursday that humanitarian aid will soon begin flowing onto the Gaza shore through the new pier that was anchored to the beach and will begin reaching those in need almost immediately.

Sabrina Singh, Pentagon spokeswoman, told reporters that the U.S. believes there will be no backups in the distribution of the aid, which is being coordinated by the United Nations.

The U.N., however, said fuel imports have all but stopped and this will make it extremely difficult to deliver the aid to Gaza's people, all 2.3 million of whom are in acute need of food and other supplies after seven months of intense fighting between Israel and Hamas.

"We desperately need fuel," U.N. deputy spokesman Farhan Haq said. "It doesn't matter how the aid comes, whether it's by sea or whether by land, without fuel, aid won't get to the people."

Singh said the issue of fuel deliveries comes up in all conversations with the Israelis.

The U.S. military finished installing a floating pier off the Gaza Strip early Thursday, and officials were making final checks before trucks begin driving onto the shore to deliver pallets of aid.

The pier project, expected to cost \$320 million, was ordered more than two months ago by U.S. President Joe Biden to help starving Palestinians as Israeli restrictions on border crossings and heavy fighting hinder food and other supplies from making it into Gaza.

Fraught with logistical, weather and security challenges, the pier project is not considered a substitute for far cheaper deliveries by land that aid agencies say are much more sustainable.

The boatloads of aid will be deposited at a port facility built by the Israelis just southwest of Gaza City and then distributed by aid groups.

U.S. officials said Thursday as much as 500 tons of food will begin arriving on the Gaza shore within days and that the U.S. has closely coordinated with Israel on how to protect the ships and personnel working on the beach.

But there are still questions on how aid groups will safely operate in Gaza to distribute food to those who need it most, said Sonali Korde, assistant to the administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development's Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance, which is helping with logistics.

"There is a very insecure operating environment" and aid groups are still struggling to get clearance for their planned movements in Gaza, Korde said. Those talks with the Israeli military "need to get to a place where humanitarian aid workers feel safe and secure and able to operate safely. And I don't think we're there yet."

Fighting between Israeli troops and Palestinian militants on the outskirts of the southern city of Rafah as well as Israel restarting combat operations in parts of northern Gaza have displaced some 700,000 people, U.N. officials say. Israel recently seized the key Rafah border crossing in its push against Hamas.

Pentagon officials say the fighting isn't threatening the new shoreline aid distribution area, but they have made it clear that security conditions will be monitored closely and could prompt a shutdown of the maritime route, even just temporarily.

Already, the site has been targeted by mortar fire during its construction, and Hamas has threatened to target any foreign forces who "occupy" the Gaza Strip.

The "protection of U.S. forces participating is a top priority. And as such, in the last several weeks, the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 63 of 85

United States and Israel have developed an integrated security plan to protect all the personnel," said Navy Vice Adm. Brad Cooper, a deputy commander at the U.S. military's Central Command. "We are confident in the ability of this security arrangement to protect those involved."

Central Command stressed that none of its forces entered the Gaza Strip to secure the pier and would not during its operations. It said trucks with aid would move ashore in the coming days and "the United Nations will receive the aid and coordinate its distribution into Gaza."

The World Food Program will be the U.N. agency handling the aid, officials said.

Israeli forces will be in charge of security on shore, but there are also two U.S. Navy warships nearby, the USS Arleigh Burke and the USS Paul Ignatius. Both are destroyers equipped with a wide range of weapons and capabilities to protect American troops offshore and allies on the beach.

Israeli military spokesman Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani confirmed that the pier had been attached and that Israeli engineering units had flattened ground around the area and surfaced roads for trucks.

"We have been working for months on full cooperation with (the U.S. military) on this project, facilitating it, supporting it in any way possible," Shoshani said. "It's a top priority in our operation."

The U.N., U.S. and international aid groups say Israel is allowing only a fraction of the normal pre-war deliveries of food and other supplies into Gaza since Hamas' attacks on Israel launched the war in October. Aid agencies say they are running out of food in southern Gaza and fuel is dwindling, while USAID and the World Food Program say famine has taken hold in Gaza's north.

Israel says it places no limits on the entry of humanitarian aid and blames the U.N. for delays in distributing goods entering Gaza. The U.N. says fighting, Israeli fire and chaotic security conditions have hindered delivery. Under pressure from the U.S., Israel has in recent weeks opened a pair of crossings to deliver aid into hard-hit northern Gaza and said that a series of Hamas attacks on the main crossing, Kerem Shalom, have disrupted the flow of goods.

The first cargo ship loaded with food left Cyprus last week and the cargo was transferred to a U.S. military ship, the Roy P. Benavidez, off the coast of Gaza.

Military leaders have said the deliveries of aid will begin slowly to ensure the system works. They will start with about 90 truckloads of aid a day through the sea route, and that number will quickly grow to about 150 a day. Aid agencies say that isn't enough and must be just one part of a broader Israeli effort to open land corridors.

Because land crossings could bring in all the needed aid if Israeli officials allowed it, the U.S.-built pier-and-sea route "is a solution for a problem that doesn't exist," said Scott Paul, an associate director of the Oxfam humanitarian organization.

Under the new sea route, humanitarian aid is dropped off in Cyprus where it will undergo inspection and security checks at Larnaca port. It is then loaded onto ships and taken about 200 miles (320 kilometers) to the large floating pier built by the U.S. military off the Gaza coast.

There, the pallets are transferred onto trucks, driven onto smaller Army boats and then shuttled several miles (kilometers) to the causeway anchored to the beach. The trucks, which are being driven by personnel from another country, will go down the causeway into a secure area on land where they will drop off the aid and immediately turn around and return to the boats.

Aid groups will collect the supplies for distribution.

Justice Department formally moves to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug in historic shift

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Justice Department on Thursday formally moved to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug, a historic shift in generations of U.S. drug policy.

A proposed rule sent to the federal register recognizes the medical uses of cannabis and acknowledges it has less potential for abuse than some of the nation's most dangerous drugs. The plan approved by Attorney General Merrick Garland would not legalize marijuana outright for recreational use.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 64 of 85

The Drug Enforcement Administration will next take public comment on the proposal in a potentially lengthy process. If approved, the rule would move marijuana away from its current classification as a Schedule I drug, alongside heroin and LSD. Pot would instead be a Schedule III substance, alongside ketamine and some anabolic steroids.

The move comes after a recommendation from the federal Health and Human Services Department, which launched a review of the drug's status at the urging of President Joe Biden in 2022.

Biden also has moved to pardon thousands of people convicted federally of simple possession of marijuana and has called on governors and local leaders to take similar steps to erase convictions.

"This is monumental," Biden said in a video statement, calling it an important move toward reversing longstanding inequities. "Far too many lives have been upended because of a failed approach to marijuana, and I'm committed to righting those wrongs. You have my word on it."

The election year announcement could help Biden, a Democrat, boost flagging support, particularly among younger voters.

The notice kicks off a 60-day comment period followed by a possible review from an administrative judge, which could be a drawn-out process.

Biden and a growing number of lawmakers from both major political parties have been pushing for the DEA decision as marijuana has become increasingly decriminalized and accepted, particularly by younger people. Some argue that rescheduling doesn't go far enough and marijuana should instead be treated the way alcohol is.

Democratic Senate Majority Leader Sen. Chuck Schumer of New York applauded the change and called for additional steps toward legalization.

The U.S. Cannabis Council, a trade group, said the switch would "signal a tectonic shift away from the failed policies of the last 50 years."

The Justice Department said that available data reviewed by HHS shows that while marijuana "is associated with a high prevalence of abuse," that potential is more in line with other Schedule III substances, according to the proposed rule.

The HHS recommendations are binding until the draft rule is submitted, and Garland agreed with it for the purposes of starting the process.

Still, the DEA has not yet formed its own determination as to where marijuana should be scheduled, and it expects to learn more during the rulemaking process, the document states.

Some critics argue the DEA shouldn't change course on marijuana, saying rescheduling isn't necessary and could lead to harmful side effects.

Dr. Kevin Sabet, a former White House drug policy adviser now with the group Smart Approaches to Marijuana, said there isn't enough data to support moving pot to Schedule III. "As we've maintained throughout this process, it's become undeniable that politics, not science, is driving this decision and has been since the very beginning," Sabet said.

The immediate effect of rescheduling on the nation's criminal justice system is expected to be muted. Federal prosecutions for simple possession have been fairly rare in recent years.

Schedule III drugs are still controlled substances and subject to rules and regulations, and people who traffic in them without permission could still face federal criminal prosecution.

Federal drug policy has lagged behind many states in recent years, with 38 states having already legalized medical marijuana and 24 legalizing its recreational use. That's helped fuel fast growth in the marijuana industry, with an estimated worth of nearly \$30 billion.

Easing federal regulations could reduce the tax burden that can be 70% or more for marijuana businesses, according to industry groups. It also could make it easier to research marijuana, since it's very difficult to conduct authorized clinical studies on Schedule I substances.

US prisoners are being assigned dangerous jobs. But what happens if they are hurt or killed?

By MARGIE MASON and ROBIN McDOWELL Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Blas Sanchez was nearing the end of a 20-year stretch in an Arizona prison when he was leased out to work at Hickman's Family Farms, which sells eggs that have ended up in the supply chains of huge companies like McDonald's, Target and Albertsons. While assigned to a machine that churns chicken droppings into compost, his right leg got pulled into a chute with a large spiraling augur.

"I could hear 'crunch, crunch, crunch, crunch,'" Sanchez said. "I couldn't feel anything, but I could hear the crunch."

He recalled frantically clawing through mounds of manure to tie a tourniquet around his bleeding limb. He then waited for what felt like hours while rescuers struggled to free him so he could be airlifted to a hospital. His leg was amputated below the knee.

Nationwide, hundreds of thousands of prisoners are put to work every year, some of whom are seriously injured or killed after being given dangerous jobs with little or no training, The Associated Press found. They include prisoners fighting wildfires, operating heavy machinery or working on industrial-sized farms and meat-processing plants tied to the supply chains of leading brands. These men and women are part of a labor system that — often by design — largely denies them basic rights and protections guaranteed to other American workers.

The findings are part of a broader two-year AP investigation that linked some of the world's largest and best-known companies — from Cargill and Walmart to Burger King — to prisoners who can be paid pennies an hour or nothing at all.

Prison labor began during slavery and exploded as incarceration rates soared, disproportionately affecting people of color. As laws have steadily changed to make it easier for private companies to tap into the swelling captive workforce, it has grown into a multibillion-dollar industry that operates with little oversight.

Laws in some states spell it out clearly: Prisoners aren't classified as employees, whether they're working inside correctional facilities or for outside businesses through prison contracts or work-release programs. That can exclude them from workers' compensation benefits, along with state and federal laws that set minimum standards for health and safety on the job.

It's almost impossible to know how many incarcerated workers are hurt or killed each year, partly because they often don't report injuries, fearing retaliation or losing privileges like contact with their families. Privacy laws add to the challenges of obtaining specific data. In California, for instance, more than 700 work-related injuries were recorded between 2018 and 2022 in the state's prison industries program, but the documents provided to the AP were heavily redacted.

At Hickman's Family Farms, logs obtained by the AP from Arizona's corrections department listed about 250 prison worker injuries during the same time frame. Most were minor, but some serious cases ranged from deep cuts and sliced-off fingertips to smashed hands.

"They end up being mangled in ways that will affect them for the rest of their lives," said Joel Robbins, a lawyer who has represented several prisoners hired by Hickman's. "If you're going to come out with a good resume, you should come out with two hands and two legs and eyes to work."

The AP requested comment from the companies it identified as having connections to prison labor. Most did not respond, but Cargill -- the largest private company in the U.S. with \$177 billion in revenue last year -- said it was continuing to work "to ensure there is no prison labor in our extended supplier network." Others said they were looking for ways to take action without disrupting crucial supply chains.

Prisoners across the country can be sentenced to hard labor, forced to work and punished if they refuse, including being sent to solitary confinement. They cannot protest against poor conditions, and it's usually difficult for them to sue.

Most jobs are inside prisons, where inmates typically earn a few cents an hour doing things like laundry and mopping floors. The limited outside positions often pay minimum wage, but some states deduct up to 60% off the top.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 66 of 85

In Arizona, jobs at Hickman's are voluntary and often sought after, not just for the money, but also because employment and affordable housing are offered upon release.

During a daylong guided tour of the company's egg-packaging operations and housing units, two brothers who run the family business stressed to an AP reporter that safety and training are top priorities. Several current and formerly incarcerated workers there praised the company, which markets eggs with brand names like Land O' Lakes, Eggland's Best and Hickman's, and have been sold everywhere from Safeway to Kroger.

"We work on a farm with machinery and live animals, so it is important to follow the instructions," said Ramona Sullins, who has been employed by Hickman's for more than eight years before and after her release from prison. "I have heard and seen of people being hurt, but when they were hurt, they weren't following the guidelines."

AP reporters spoke with more than 100 current and former prisoners across the country – along with family members of workers who were killed – about various prison labor jobs. Roughly a quarter of them related stories involving injuries or deaths, from severe burns and traumatic head wounds to severed body parts. Reporters also talked to lawyers, researchers and experts, and combed through thousands of documents, including the rare lawsuits that manage to wind their way through the court system.

While many of the jobs are hidden, others are in plain view, like prisoners along busy highways doing road maintenance. In Alabama alone, at least three men have died since 2015, when 21-year-old Braxton Moon was hit by a tractor-trailer that swerved off the interstate. The others were killed while picking up trash.

In many states, laws mandate that prisoners be deployed during emergencies and disasters for jobs like hazardous material cleanup or working on the frontlines of hurricanes while residents evacuate. They're also sent to fight fires, filling vital worker shortage gaps, including in some rural communities in Georgia where incarcerated firefighters are paid nothing as the sole responders for everything from car wrecks to medical emergencies.

California currently has about 1,250 prisoners trained to fight fires and has used them since the 1940s. It pays its "Angels in Orange" \$2.90 to \$5.12 a day, plus an extra \$1 an hour when they work during emergencies.

When a brush fire broke out in 2016, Shawna Lynn Jones and her crew were sent to the wealthy Malibu beach community near California's rugged Pacific Coast Highway, which was built by prisoners a century ago. The 22-year-old, who had just six weeks left on her sentence for a nonviolent crime, died after a boulder fell 100 feet from a hillside onto her head – one of 10 incarcerated firefighters killed in the state since 1989.

Unlike many places, California does offer workers' compensation to prisoners, which Jones' mother, Diana Baez, said covered hospital expenses and the funeral.

Baez said her daughter loved being a firefighter and was treated as a fallen hero, but noted that even though she was on life support and never regained consciousness, "When I walked behind the curtain, she was still handcuffed to that damn gurney."

The California corrections department said prisoners must pass a physical skills test to participate in the program, which "encourages incarcerated people to commit to positive change and self-improvement." But inmates in some places across the country find it can be extremely difficult to transfer their firefighting skills to outside jobs upon their release due to their criminal records.

In most states, public institutions are not liable for incarcerated workers' injuries or deaths. But in a case last year, the American Civil Liberties Union represented a Nevada crew sent to mop up a wildfire hotspot. It resulted in a \$340,000 settlement that was split eight ways, as well as assurances of better training and equipment going forward.

Rebecca Leavitt said when she and her all-woman team arrived at the site with only classroom training, they did a "hot foot dance" on smoldering embers as their boss yelled "Get back in there!" One crew member's burned-up boots were duct-taped back together, she said, while others cried out in pain as their socks melted to their feet during nine hours on the ground that paid about \$1 an hour.

Two days later, Leavitt said the women finally were taken to an outside hospital, where doctors carved

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 67 of 85

dead skin off the bottoms of their feet, which had sustained second-degree burns. Because they were prisoners, they were denied pain medicine.

"They treated us like we were animals or something," said Leavitt, adding that the women were afraid to disobey orders in the field or report their injuries for fear they could be sent to a higher-security facility. "The only reason why any of us had to tell them was because we couldn't walk."

Officials at Nevada's Department of Corrections did not respond to requests for comment.

Chris Peterson, the ACLU lawyer who brought the women's lawsuit, said Nevada's Legislature has passed laws making it harder for injured prisoners to receive compensation. He noted that the state Supreme Court ruled five years ago that an injured firefighter could receive the equivalent of only about 50 cents a day in workers' compensation based on how much he earned in prison, instead of the set minimum wage.

"At the end of the day," Peterson said, "the idea is that if I get my finger lopped off, if I am an incarcerated person working as a firefighter, I am entitled to less relief than if I am a firefighter that's not incarcerated."

"HELP ME! HELP ME!"

A loophole in the 13th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution passed after the Civil War makes forced labor legal, abolishing slavery except "as punishment for a crime." Efforts are underway to challenge that language at the federal level, and nearly 20 states are working to bring the issue before voters.

Today, about 2 million people are locked up in the U.S. – more than almost any country in the world – a number that began spiking in the 1980s when tough-on-crime laws were passed. More than 800,000 prisoners have some kind of job, from serving food inside facilities to working outside for private companies, including work-release assignments everywhere from KFC to Tyson Foods poultry plants. They're also employed at state and municipal agencies, and at colleges and nonprofit organizations.

Few critics believe all prison jobs should be eliminated, but they say work should be voluntary and prisoners should be fairly paid and treated humanely. Correctional officials and others running work programs across the country respond that they place a heavy emphasis on training and that injuries are taken seriously. Many prisoners see work as a welcome break from boredom and violence inside their facilities and, in some places, it can help shave time off sentences.

In many states, prisoners are denied everything from disability benefits to protections guaranteed by the federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration or state agencies that ensure safe conditions for laborers. In Arizona, for instance, the state occupational safety division doesn't have the authority to pursue cases involving inmate deaths or injuries.

Strikes by prisoners seeking more rights are rare and have been quickly quashed. And the U.S. Supreme Court has ruled that inmates cannot join or form unions. They also can't call an ambulance or demand to be taken to a hospital, even if they suffer a life-threatening injury on the job.

The barriers for those who decide to sue can be nearly insurmountable, including finding a lawyer willing to take the case. That's especially true after the federal Prison Litigation Reform Act was passed almost three decades ago to stem a flood of lawsuits that accompanied booming prison populations.

Kandy Fuelling learned that all too well after being gravely injured in 2015 while assigned to work at a Colorado sawmill. She said her lawyer never met with her face-to-face and her suit was dismissed after a court ruled she could not sue state entities, leaving her with zero compensation.

Fuelling, who said she received only a few hours of training at the Pueblo mill, was feeding a conveyor belt used to make pallets when a board got stuck. She said she asked another prisoner if the machinery was turned off, but was told by her manager to "hurry up" and dislodge the jam. She crawled under the equipment and tugged at a piece of splintered lumber. Suddenly, the blade jolted back to life and spiraled toward her head.

"That saw went all the way through my hard hat. ... I'm screaming 'Help me! Help me!' but no one can hear me because everything is running," Fuelling said. "All I remember is thinking, 'Oh my God, I think I just cut my head off.'"

With no first aid kit available, fellow prisoners stuck sanitary pads on her gushing wound and ushered her into a van. But instead of being driven to a nearby emergency room, she was taken to the prison for evaluation. The 5-inch gash, which pierced her skull, eventually was sewn up at an outside hospital.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 68 of 85

Despite being dizzy and confused, she said she was put back to work soon after in the prison's laundry room and received almost no treatment for months, even when her wound oozed green pus. She said she had privileges stripped and eventually was diagnosed with MRSA, an antibiotic-resistant infection. She still suffers short-term memory loss and severe headaches, she said.

The Colorado Department of Corrections had no comment when asked about prisoner training and medical treatment for those injured on the job.

While prisoners have access to low-cost care in correctional facilities nationwide, a typical co-pay of \$2 to \$5 per visit can be unaffordable for those earning next to nothing. Many inmates say it's not worth it because the care they receive is often so poor.

Class-action lawsuits have been filed in several states – including Illinois, Idaho, Delaware and Mississippi – alleging everything from needless pain and suffering to deliberate medical neglect and lack of treatment for diseases like hepatitis C.

Some prisoners' conditions worsened even after getting care for their injuries.

In Georgia, a prison kitchen worker's leg was amputated after he fell on a wet floor, causing a small cut above his ankle. He was susceptible to infection as a diabetic, but doctors in the infirmary did not stop the wound from festering, according to a lawsuit that was handwritten and filed by the prisoner. It was an unusual case where the state settled – for \$550,000 – which kept the prison medical director from going to trial.

Noah Moore, who lost a finger while working at Hickman's egg farm in Arizona, had a second finger later amputated due to what he said was poor follow-up treatment in prison after surgery at a hospital. That's in a state where a federal judge ruled two years ago that the prison medical care was unconstitutional and "plainly, grossly inadequate."

"I think the healing hurt worse than the actual accident," Moore said.

The Arizona corrections department would not comment on injuries that occurred during a previous administration, but said prisoners have access to all necessary medical care. The department also stressed the importance of workplace safety training.

Prisons and jails can struggle to find doctors willing to accept jobs, which means they sometimes hire physicians who have been disciplined for misconduct.

A doctor in Louisiana, Randy Lavespere, served two years in prison after buying \$8,000 worth of methamphetamine in a Home Depot parking lot in 2006 with intent to distribute. After his release, his medical license was reinstated with restrictions that banned him from practicing in most settings. Still, he was hired by the Louisiana State Penitentiary, the country's largest maximum-security prison. His license has since been fully reinstated, and he now oversees health care for the entire corrections department.

Over the years, physicians who have worked at Louisiana prisons have had their medical licenses restricted or suspended following offenses ranging from sexual misconduct and possessing child pornography to self-prescribing addictive drugs, according to the state Board of Medical Examiners.

Lavespere could not be reached for comment, but corrections department spokesman Ken Pastorick said all prison doctors are licensed and that the board does not allow physicians to return to work unless they are "deemed competent and have the ability to practice medicine with skill and safety."

NO REMEDY FOR HARM

Across the country, it's not uncommon for the relatives of prisoners who died on the job to struggle with determining who's liable. When workers' compensation is offered, the amount awarded is typically determined by the size of the worker's paycheck and usually closes the door on future wrongful death suits.

The few cases that make their way to court can result in meager settlements compared to what the survivors of civilian workers might receive, in part because those behind bars are seen as having little or no future earning potential.

Matthew Baraniak was on work release in 2019 when he was killed at a Pennsylvania heavy machinery service center while operating a scissor lift. He was using a high-heat torch on a garbage truck that was rigged precariously with chains when its weight shifted, causing Baraniak to hit his head and lose control

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 69 of 85

of the burning torch. His body was engulfed in flames.

Ashley Snyder, the mother of Baraniak's daughter, accepted a workers' comp offer made to benefit their then 3-year-old child, paying about \$700 a month until the girl reaches college age. Family members said their claim against the county running the work-release program was dismissed, and their lawyer told them the best they could hope for was a small settlement from the service center.

"There are no rules," Holly Murphy, Baraniak's twin sister, said of the long and confusing process. "It's just a gray area with no line there that says what's acceptable, what the laws are."

Michael Duff, a law professor at Saint Louis University and an expert on labor law, said some people think, "Well, too bad, don't be a prisoner." But an entire class of society is being denied civil rights, Duff said, noting that each state has its own system that could be changed to offer prisoners more protections if there's political will.

"We've got this category of human beings that can be wrongfully harmed and yet left with no remedy for their harm," he said.

Laws sometimes are amended to create even more legal hurdles for those seeking relief.

That's what happened in Arizona. In 2021, a Hickman's Family Farms lawyer unsuccessfully tried to get the corrections department to amend its contract to take responsibility for prisoner injuries or deaths, according to emails obtained by the AP. The next year, a newly formed nonprofit organization lobbied for a bill that was later signed into law, blocking prisoners from introducing their medical costs into lawsuits and potentially limiting settlement payouts.

Billy Hickman, one of the siblings who runs the egg company, was listed as a director of the nonprofit. He told the AP that the farm has hired more than 10,000 incarcerated workers over nearly three decades. Because they aren't eligible for protections like workers' comp, he said the company tried to limit its exposure to lawsuits partially driven by what he described as zealous attorneys.

"We're a family business," he said, "so we take it very seriously that people are safe and secure."

At the height of the pandemic – when all other outside prison jobs were shut down – Crystal Allen and about 140 other female prisoners were sent to work at Hickman's, bunking together in a large company warehouse. The egg farm is Arizona Correctional Industries' biggest customer, bringing in nearly \$35 million in revenue in the past six fiscal years.

Allen was earning less than \$3 an hour after deductions, including 30% for room and board. She knew it would take time, but hoped to bank a few thousand dollars before her release.

One day, she noticed chicken feeders operating on a belt system weren't working properly, so she switched the setting to manual and used her hand to smooth the feed into place.

"All of a sudden, the cart just takes off with my thumb," said Allen, adding she had to use her sock to wrap up her left hand, which was left disfigured. "It's bleeding really, really bad."

She sued before the new state law took effect and settled with the company last year for an undisclosed amount. In legal filings, Hickman's denied any wrongdoing.

THE PAIN LIVES ON

When a 2021 tornado flattened a Kentucky factory that made candles for Bath & Body Works and other major companies, Marco Sanchez risked his life to pull fellow employees from the debris. Eight people were killed, including the correctional officer overseeing Sanchez and other prisoners on a work-release program.

Sanchez fractured ribs and broke his foot and, after being treated at a hospital, was taken to the Christian County Jail. According to an ongoing civil rights lawsuit filed last year, he was sent to solitary confinement there and beaten by guards frustrated by his repeated requests for medical attention, which he said went unmet.

"They were retaliating against me," said Sanchez, who was homeless when he talked to the AP. "They were telling me, 'It should have been you ... instead of one of ours.'"

Christian County Jail officials would not comment, citing the pending litigation. But attorney Mac Johns, who is representing the correctional officers, disputed Sanchez's characterization of the care and treatment he received while incarcerated, without elaborating.

A few months after the tornado, Sanchez was portrayed on national television as a hero and given a key to the city, but he questions why he was treated differently than the civilian workers he was employed alongside.

He noted that they got ongoing medical attention and support from their family members at a difficult time. "I didn't get that," he said, adding that strong winds and sirens still leave him cowering.

The man who lost his leg while working at the composting chute in Arizona said he, too, continues to struggle, even though nearly a decade has passed since the accident.

Blas Sanchez settled for an undisclosed amount with Hickman's, which denied liability in court documents. He now runs a motel in Winslow along historic U.S. Route 66 and said he's still often in agony – either from his prosthetic or shooting pains from the nerves at the end of his severed limb.

And then there's the mental anguish. Sometimes, he wonders if continuing to live is worth it.

"I wanted to end it because it's so tiring and it hurts. And if it wasn't for these guys, I probably would," he said, motioning to his step-grandchildren playing around him. "End it. Finished. Done. Buried."

Slovak authorities charge 'lone wolf' with assassination attempt on the prime minister

By BELA SZANDELSZKY, PETR DAVID JOSEK and PHILIPP JENNE Associated Press

BANSKA BYSTRICA, Slovakia (AP) — Slovak authorities charged a man Thursday with attempting to assassinate Prime Minister Robert Fico, saying he acted alone in a politically motivated attack that left the longtime leader in serious but stable condition.

Fico's pro-Russia views have contributed to deep divisions in the small European country that borders Ukraine, and the shooting attack Wednesday shocked the nation and reverberated across the continent weeks ahead of elections for the European Parliament.

While President-elect Peter Pellegrini and President Zuzana Caputova urged people to dial back the sharp rhetoric that has characterized the country's political debate, some Fico allies took aim at Slovakia's media for contributing to the polarization.

Interior Minister Matus Sutaj Estok asked journalists to "reflect" on how they had covered Fico's policies. He referred to the suspect — who was charged with premeditated murder — as a "lone wolf" who did not belong to any political groups, though he said the attack itself was politically motivated.

"I can confirm that this person is not a member of any right-wing or left-wing radicalized party," Estok said.

Fico, 59, was in serious but stable condition a day after being shot multiple times, a hospital official said. Pellegrini said he spoke to Fico and that his condition "remains very serious."

Fico has long been a divisive figure in Slovakia and beyond. His return to power last year on a pro-Russian, anti-American message led to even greater worries among fellow European Union and NATO members that he would abandon his country's pro-Western course — particularly on Ukraine.

At the start of Russia's invasion, Slovakia was one of Ukraine's staunchest supporters. Fico halted arms deliveries to Ukraine when he returned to power, his fourth time serving as prime minister.

Fico's government has also made efforts to overhaul public broadcasting — a move critics said would result in the government's full control of public television and radio. That, coupled with his plans to amend the penal code to eliminate a special anti-graft prosecutor, have led opponents to worry that Fico will lead Slovakia down a more autocratic path.

Thousands of demonstrators have repeatedly rallied in the capital and around the country of 5.4 million to protest his policies.

Slovak police have provided little information on the identity of the suspect. But unconfirmed media reports suggested he was a 71-year-old retiree who was known as an amateur poet, and may have previously worked as a security guard at a mall in the country's southwest.

At a news conference on Thursday following a meeting of Slovakia's Security Council, government ministers gave more details about the man, while still not naming him.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 71 of 85

Estok said the suspect cited his dissatisfaction with several of Fico's policies as motivation for the attack. The minister said presidential elections in the spring prompted the assault, and that the suspect had attended a recent anti-government protest.

"I can confirm to you that the reason it was a politically motivated, attempted premeditated murder is as the suspect himself said: the media information that he had at his disposal," he said. "I think each of you can reflect on the way you presented it."

At the same news conference, Deputy Prime Minister Robert Kalinak also blamed the media for tensions in the country.

The tenor of those remarks stood in contrast to a news conference earlier in the day when the country's outgoing and next presidents — political rivals — appeared together in an appeal for Slovaks to overcome their increasingly tense political differences.

"Let us step out of the vicious circle of hatred and mutual accusations," said Caputova, the outgoing president and a rival of Fico's.

Pellegrini, the president-elect, called on political parties to suspend or scale back their campaigns for European elections, which will be held June 6-9.

"If there is anything that the people of Slovakia urgently need today, it is at least basic agreement and unity among the Slovak political representation. And if not consensus, then please, at least civilized ways of discussing among each other," Pellegrini said.

Fico said last month on Facebook that he believed rising tensions in the country could lead to the murder of politicians, and he blamed the media for fueling tensions.

Grigorij Meseznikov, a political scientist who heads the Institute for Public Affairs think tank in Bratislava, said he disagreed that media played any role in inciting violence against Fico. "We have very good and independent media in Slovakia," he said. "The media is doing its job."

Before Fico returned to power last year, many of his political and business associates were the focus of police investigations, and dozens have been charged.

His plan to overhaul of the penal system would eliminate the office of the special prosecutor that deals with organized crime, corruption and extremism.

Zuzana Eliasova, a resident of the capital, Bratislava, said the attack on Fico was a "shock" to the nation and an attack on democracy.

"I believe that a lot of people or even the whole society will look into their conscience, because the polarization here has been huge among all different parts of society," she said.

Doctors performed a five-hour operation on Fico, who was initially reported to be in life-threatening condition, according to director of the F.D. Roosevelt Hospital in Banska Bystrica, Miriam Lapunikova. He is being treated in an intensive care unit.

Five shots were fired as Fico was greeting supporters at an event Wednesday in the former coal mining town of Handlova, nearly 140 kilometers (85 miles) northeast of the capital, government officials said.

Fico returned to power in Slovakia last year after having previously served three terms as prime minister. He and his Smer party have most often been described as left-populist, though he has also been compared to politicians on the right like the nationalist prime minister of neighboring Hungary, Viktor Orbán.

Condemnation of the attack came from both Fico's allies and adversaries abroad. On Wednesday, Russian President Vladimir Putin sent a message to President Caputova, expressing his support and wishing the prime minister a fast and full recovery.

"This atrocious crime cannot be justified," Putin said in the message released by the Kremlin. "I know Robert Fico as a courageous and strong-willed person. I truly hope these personal qualities will help him overcome this harsh situation."

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy also denounced the violence against a neighboring country's head of government.

"Every effort should be made to ensure that violence does not become the norm in any country, form or sphere," he said.

Supreme Court sides with the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau, spurning a conservative attack

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Thursday rejected a conservative-led attack that could have undermined the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau.

The justices ruled 7-2 that the way the CFPB is funded does not violate the Constitution, reversing a lower court and drawing praises from consumers. Justice Clarence Thomas wrote the majority opinion, splitting with his frequent allies, Justices Samuel Alito and Neil Gorsuch, who dissented.

The CFPB was created after the 2008 financial crisis to regulate mortgages, car loans and other consumer finance. The case was brought by payday lenders who object to a bureau rule that limits their ability to withdraw funds directly from borrowers' bank accounts. It's among several major challenges to federal regulatory agencies on the docket this term for a court that has for more than a decade been open to limits on their operations.

The CFPB, the brainchild of Democratic Sen. Elizabeth Warren of Massachusetts, has long been opposed by Republicans and their financial backers. The bureau says it has returned \$19 billion to consumers since its creation.

Outside the Supreme Court following the decision, Warren said, "The Supreme Court followed the law, and the CFPB is here to stay."

President Joe Biden, a fellow Democrat who has taken steps to strengthen the bureau, called the ruling "an unmistakable win for American consumers."

Unlike most federal agencies, the consumer bureau does not rely on the annual budget process in Congress. Instead, it is funded directly by the Federal Reserve, with a current annual limit of around \$600 million.

The federal appeals court in New Orleans, in a novel ruling, held that the funding violated the Constitution's appropriations clause because it improperly shields the CFPB from congressional supervision.

Thomas reached back to the earliest days of the Constitution in his majority opinion to note that "the Bureau's funding mechanism fits comfortably with the First Congress' appropriations practice."

In dissent, Alito wrote, "The Court upholds a novel statutory scheme under which the powerful Consumer Financial Protection Bureau (CFPB) may bankroll its own agenda without any congressional control or oversight."

The CFPB case was argued more than seven months ago, during the first week of the court's term. Lopsided decisions like Thursday's 7-2 vote typically don't take so long, but Alito's dissent was longer than the majority opinion, and two other justices, Elena Kagan and Ketanji Brown Jackson, wrote separate opinions even though they both were part of the majority.

Consumer groups cheered the decision, as did a bureau spokesman.

"For years, lawbreaking companies and Wall Street lobbyists have been scheming to defund essential consumer protection enforcement," bureau spokesman Sam Gilford said in a statement. "The Supreme Court has rejected their radical theory that would have devastated the American financial markets. The Court repudiated the arguments of the payday loan lobby and made it clear that the CFPB is here to stay."

Jesse Van Tol, president and CEO of the National Community Reinvestment Coalition, said the decision upholding the consumer bureau's funding structure would have positive effects across the U.S. economy.

"It's always nice to see the courts get something right — especially in this tawdry circumstance where payday loan predators sought to wriggle out of basic oversight using absurd distortions of law and fact," Van Tol said in a statement.

While the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and some other business interests backed the payday lenders, mortgage bankers and other sectors regulated by the CFPB cautioned the court to avoid a broad ruling that could unsettle the markets.

In 2020, the court decided another CFPB case, ruling that Congress had improperly insulated the head of the bureau from removal. The justices said the director could be replaced by the president at will but allowed the bureau to continue to operate.

Shaken by the Fico assassination attempt, the EU wonders if June elections can be free of violence

By RAF CASERT Associated Press

BRUSSELS (AP) — In an increasingly vitriolic political climate, the last thing needed in the runup to the June European Union elections was an assassination attempt on one of the bloc's most controversial figures.

As Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico lay recovering from Wednesday's attack, the sheer violence of five shots targeted at a politician merely for doing his job immediately had a whole continent worried ahead of the June 6-9 polls.

Across the 27-nation EU, the political landscape is becoming increasingly polarized, with no holds barred between mainstream parties on the one hand and the bellicose populists and extremists on the other.

"It is shocking to see that someone can become the victim of his political ideas. Three weeks ahead of the elections, that is extremely alarming," said Prime Minister Alexander De Croo of Belgium, which holds the EU presidency.

"Let's make it an intense campaign when it comes to words, but not beyond that," De Croo told the regional broadcaster VRT. Underscoring the seriousness of the issue, De Croo filed a police complaint Thursday against a broadcaster at a local event who called, apparently in jest, for the prime minister "to be shot."

Such incidents are no laughing matter. In Germany last week, a prominent Berlin politician was violently assaulted and suffered injuries to her head and neck. A week earlier, a candidate from the party of Chancellor Olaf Scholz was beaten up while campaigning for next month's election for the European Parliament and had to undergo surgery.

The politics of compromise laid the foundations for Europe's famed welfare society, but in recent years, aggressive discourse and unbridled partisanship have been on the rise.

"There was dialogue and with political plodding, solutions emerged. But now, all too often, that doesn't work anymore," said Prof. Hendrik Vos of Ghent University.

Slovakia is a case in point. Fico's mastery of confrontational politics brought him back from the political wilderness and helped secure him a third term in office.

Fico campaigned on a pro-Russian, anti-American platform, a foreign policy liberated from its EU links, a tougher stance on migration and opposition to LGBTQ+ rights.

After he returned to power last year, he immediately set about dismantling the office of the anti-corruption prosecutor and bringing the public broadcaster, RTVS, under tighter government control. However, concerns in the EU about democratic backsliding and the rule of law have now been overtaken by events on the ground.

"Fico's politics may be a threat to democracy, but this kind of violence in European politics is a much bigger threat," political scientist Tom Theuns, of Leiden University, told The Associated Press.

"In this period of polarization at European level, we see that the quality of democratic discourse has gone backward and politicians are increasingly depicted as enemies, both by other politicians and by the general public," Theuns said. "Such discourse to increasingly see each other as 'enemies' legitimizes violence in the eyes of those who could possibly use it."

As Fico lay in hospital, outgoing President Zuzana Caputova, one of his staunchest opponents, pleaded to "step out of the vicious circle of hatred and mutual accusations." Caputova acknowledged that "the tense atmosphere of hatred was our collective work."

Even Fico himself was predicting that the blaze would rage out of control: on April 10, he posted on Facebook that he would expect a slaying of a leading politician and blamed the media, long a target of his ire.

In 2018, he stepped down amid mass street protests after an investigative journalist who had been reporting on tax-related crimes implicating some in Fico's party, was murdered, along with his fiancée.

It is too early to say what impact, if any, the attack on Fico would have on the EU elections, since they are highly compartmentalized in 27 separate polls in the member states.

In Slovakia, though, the effect is likely to be felt, predicted Juraj Majcin, analyst at the European Policy

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 74 of 85

Center think tank in Brussels.

The attack "certainly won't help the less extreme parties," he said, adding that the "chances are that the people will be more motivated to go and vote for people like Fico."

Even if Fico and his Smer party do well in the elections, their influence in the European Parliament is limited: his tiny parliamentary fraction has even been suspended by the socialist group. Fico himself wields more influence at the summits of EU leaders, where often he can threaten to veto items of business that displease him.

Rather, the Slovak leader is part of a much larger continental shift toward populist parties of the left and right, a move away from the center ground and the often messy compromises of the once-dominant big-tent parties such as the Christian Democrats and Socialists.

Fico is the latest in a surprisingly long list of political victims in postwar Europe. For all their non-confrontational politics of the postwar years, leaders have fallen victims to extremists before. Perhaps most infamously, Swedish Prime Minister Olaf Palme was murdered in 1986, and foreign minister Anna Lindh was also in office when killed in 2003.

German stalwart Wolfgang Schaeuble, a key figure in the reunification of Germany and the EU financial crisis a decade ago, survived an assassination attempt in 1990 but was left permanently disabled. A similar fate befell about a half dozen politicians, former and active, in the EU.

And even when nothing serious happens, the threat alone can have a massive impact.

On Thursday, anti-Islam firebrand Geert Wilders became the power behind the throne in a new Dutch government that is throwing overboard compromise politics to set up the most radical rightwing coalition since the war.

Wilders has always thrived on confrontation that some equaled to hate speech. And he has never toned down the strident nature of his campaigning. He has had the highest level of security protection for two decades, since a jihadist website distributed a video calling for his beheading. Following the threat, he was temporarily moved to a safe house.

Wilders now travels in an armored car, surrounded by security personnel. The Dutch security services purchased a home and converted it into a permanent safe house.

The danger is far from abstract: in 2002, maverick Dutch politician Pim Fortuyn, a precursor of today's far right, was murdered by an animal rights activist.

During a court hearing last year over death threats made against him by Pakistani cricketer Khalid Latif, Wilders said of the measures "You never get used to all that. You learn to deal with it, but you never get used to it."

A Palestinian converted to Judaism. An Israeli soldier saw him as a threat and opened fire

By JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — At first, it seemed like the kind of shooting that has become all too common in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. A Palestinian aroused suspicions and an Israeli soldier killed him.

But then the deceased was identified as David Ben-Avraham, a Palestinian who had made the almost unheard-of decision to convert from Islam to Judaism years earlier.

His unusual journey had taken him across some of the deepest fault lines in the Middle East and led to some unlikely friendships. Most Palestinians saw him as an eccentric outcast, while many Israelis treated him as an unwelcome convert to a religion that doesn't proselytize.

But in his final moments, he was once again viewed as a Palestinian who was in the wrong place, at a time of widespread anger and suspicion.

A DIVIDED CITY

He was born Sameh Zeitoun in Hebron, home to some 200,000 Palestinians as well as hundreds of Jewish settlers who live in enclaves guarded by Israeli troops. Tensions have run high for decades, often

Hebron Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 75 of 85

spilling over into violence.

Rights groups have long accused Hebron's settlers of harassing Palestinian residents, and Palestinians have committed a number of stabbing and shooting attacks against Israelis over the years.

At its most extreme, the bitter neighbors live just a few meters apart. In some narrow alleys of Hebron's Old City, metal netting protects Palestinian shoppers from objects thrown by settlers living on the upper floors.

Zeitoun first made contact with Jewish settlers over a decade ago, asking for help converting to Judaism, according to Noam Arnon, a Jewish settler in Hebron who went on to befriend him.

He said Zeitoun was inspired by family stories about his grandfather protecting Jews when riots erupted in 1929, when the Holy Land was under British colonial rule. Palestinians killed dozens of Jewish residents in the city.

"He went further, not only to live as a good neighbor but to join the Jewish community," Arnon recounted.

A RARE CONVERSION

Conversion to other faiths is deeply frowned upon in Islam. In much of the Muslim world, those who do so are cast out of their communities, sometimes violently. Judaism, unlike Islam and Christianity, has no tradition of proselytization.

Such a conversion is even more fraught in Israel and the Palestinian territories, where religion and nationality usually overlap in a decades-old conflict. Judaism is the faith of most of the soldiers who patrol the territory and the settlers whom Palestinians see as hostile colonizers.

Arnon said most of the settlers from Hebron's tight-knit community refused to accept Ben-Avraham. Only Arnon and a few others interacted with him, helping with his conversion application papers.

Religious conversions are rare but legal in areas administered by the semi-autonomous Palestinian Authority. Most are undertaken by Palestinian Christians converting to Islam for marriage.

In Israel, converting to Judaism requires an application to the government-run Conversion Authority. Ben-Avraham submitted two requests in 2018 but did not meet the requirements, according to a government official who was not authorized to speak with media and spoke on condition of anonymity.

With that pathway closed, Ben Avraham turned to Israel's insular ultra-Orthodox community and eventually made his conversion official in 2020, according to documents published online.

AN ARREST

In the year before his conversion, Ben-Avraham was detained by the Palestinian Authority's intelligence unit in Hebron, according to Arnon and a local Palestinian activist, Issa Amro.

The reason for his arrest was never publicly disclosed, but they believe his conversion and open connections with Israelis attracted unwanted attention.

Palestinians can face arrest or even death if they're seen as collaborating with Israeli authorities. But few would have suspected Ben-Avraham of being an informant because his story was widely known.

Ben-Avraham told the Israeli news site Times of Israel that he was held for two months in solitary confinement and beaten before being released. Around that time, a video emerged showing him holding what appears to be a Quran and pledging his Muslim faith.

Arnon and Amro said his statement was likely made under duress during detention. The PA's prosecution office said it had no information about his case.

After his release, Ben-Avraham moved in with Haim Parag, a Jewish friend who lived in Jerusalem. He returned to Hebron infrequently because of safety concerns and continued his Jewish studies. Parag said the pair regularly prayed together at a nearby synagogue.

"He was like a son to me," he said.

Parag also said he met Ben-Avraham's wife and some of his children, and that several close family members maintained a relationship with him even after his conversion.

The Zeitoun family declined to speak with The Associated Press, fearing reprisal. In the end, Ben-Avraham left little public record of what drove his personal convictions.

A DEADLY SHOOTING

Ben-Avraham was waiting outside a West Bank settlement for an Israeli bus to take him to Parag's apart-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 76 of 85

ment March 19 when he got into an argument in Hebrew with an Israeli soldier.

Across the West Bank, Jewish settlers live apart from Palestinians in guarded settlements where they're subject to different laws. Palestinians are generally barred from entering settlements unless they have work permits.

"Are you Jewish?" the soldier shouts in a video that circulated online and appears to have been shot by his body camera.

"Of course," Ben Avraham answers.

"What's your name?" the soldier says.

"David." he replies.

"David?" the soldier says.

"Ben-Avraham, stupid."

The soldier then orders Ben-Avraham to step away from his bag on the ground and raise his hands in the air, before saying sarcastically, "Jewish."

A second video, apparently taken from a nearby security camera, appears to show two soldiers shooting Ben-Avraham from a close distance as he keels over backward onto the sidewalk.

The army said a small knife was found in Ben Avraham's bag after the shooting. Parag said he gave him the knife for self-defense.

The Israeli army said it's investigating the shooting, but rights groups say soldiers are rarely held accountable in such situations.

Israeli forces have been on high alert as the West Bank has seen a surge of violence linked to the war in Gaza. Nearly 500 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire since the war's start, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Many have been shot dead in armed clashes during military raids, others for throwing stones at troops, and some who were posing no apparent threat.

Palestinians have also carried out several stabbing and other attacks against Israelis.

Arnon said the shooting was a tragic misunderstanding. Parag, Ben-Avraham's friend in Jerusalem, accused the soldiers of racial profiling, saying they saw Ben-Avraham for his background and not his unexpected beliefs.

A FUNERAL

Even in death, Ben-Avraham's identity was contested.

Parag and another Israeli friend asked an Israeli court for the body to be buried at a Jewish cemetery, filing a petition against members of the Zeitoun family who wanted a Muslim funeral. Bezalel Hochman, a lawyer representing the two Israelis, said the Tel Aviv family court ruled in their favor.

After his death caused a public outcry, the Interior Ministry granted him Israeli residency, saying it wanted "to fulfill the will and desire of the deceased to be part of the nation of Israel."

Ben Avraham was buried in April in a Jewish cemetery on the foothills of Mount Gerizim, near the Palestinian city of Nablus, Parag said. The hilltop is sacred for Samaritans — a small, ancient religious minority that straddles the Palestinian-Israeli divide, just like Ben-Avraham.

No one from the Zeitoun family attended the funeral, said Parag, who's designing his friend's gravestone. He said it will read: "David Ben-Avraham Zeitoun Parag. The Holy Jew."

Georgia's leader says a divisive media bill passed by lawmakers is unacceptable and she'll veto it

By SOPHIKO MEGRELIDZE Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — A controversial media bill passed this week by Georgia's parliament is "unacceptable" and will be vetoed, President Salome Zourabichvili said Thursday, reaffirming her opposition to a measure that critics describe as a threat to free speech.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Zourabichvili harshly criticized the ruling Georgian Dream party for pushing the bill that also is widely seen setting back Georgia's aspirations to join the European Union.

The bill, passed Tuesday, requires media, nongovernmental organizations and other nonprofit groups

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 77 of 85

to register as "pursuing the interests of a foreign power" if they receive more than 20% of their funding from abroad. The government says the bill is needed to stem what it deems to be harmful foreign actors trying to destabilize the South Caucasus nation of 3.7 million.

"It's unacceptable because it reflects a turn of the Georgian attitudes towards the civil society, towards the media and towards the recommendations of the European Commission that are not consistent with what is our declared policy of going towards a European integration," Zourabichvili told the AP.

She reaffirmed her intention to veto it because it "goes directly against the spirit or the letter of EU recommendations."

Zourabichvili is increasingly at odds with the Georgian Dream party, which has a majority sufficient to override her veto. She has until May 28 — 14 days after its passage — to act.

She emphasized it's her "duty under the constitution to make everything in my capacity possible to support the European integration and to consolidate it."

Huge crowds of protesters have blocked streets in the capital of Tbilisi and milled angrily outside the parliament building after lawmakers approved the measure 84-30 despite strong criticism from the U.S and the EU.

"The authorities are not doing what the country expects, and the country is reacting because the country wants Europe and wants not to lose the possibility at the end of the year of seeing the opening of these accession negotiations," Zourabichvili said.

The bill is nearly identical to one that the Georgian Dream party was pressured to withdraw last year after street protests. Renewed demonstrations have rocked Georgia for weeks, with demonstrators scuffling with police, who used tear gas and water cannons to disperse them.

The opposition has denounced the bill as "the Russian law" because Moscow uses similar legislation to crack down on independent news media, nonprofits and activists critical of the Kremlin.

European Council President Charles Michel said Tuesday that if Georgians "want to join the EU, they have to respect the fundamental principles of the rule of law and the democratic principles."

Zourabichvili emphasized that after Georgia received the status of a candidate last fall to join the EU, the government should have focused on passing the necessary laws to qualify for the launch of accession talks at the end of the year.

"The parliament should be working day and night to satisfy the recommendations that we have on the table on the justice reform, on the corruption agency's independence and things like that," she told AP. "And instead of that, instead of doing what is expected from us, the parliament is working on a law that was rejected last year that all our partners, European partners, have said that it's not consistent with the European values and the European objectives."

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the U.S. was "deeply troubled" by the legislation, which she said "runs counter to democratic values and would move Georgia further away from the values of the European Union. And let's not forget also NATO." Enacting it "will compel us to fundamentally reassess our relationship with Georgia," she added.

U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Europe and Eurasia Affairs James O'Brien met Tuesday with Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze and told journalists "if the law goes forward out of conformity with EU norms, and there's undermining of democracy here and there's violence against peaceful protesters, then we will see restrictions coming from the United States."

The opposition United National Movement accuses Georgian Dream of trying to drag Georgia into Russia's sphere of influence — allegations it rejects. Georgian Dream was founded by Bidzina Ivanishvili, a former prime minister and billionaire who made his fortune in Russia.

Zourabichvili said it's hard to say whether the bill was the ruling party's initiative or if Moscow had played any role in its passage, but she emphasized that the Kremlin is unhappy with Georgia's pro-Western aspirations.

"It's clear that Moscow is not seeing with lots of appreciation this accelerated pace of Georgia towards the European Union," she said.

Webb telescope uncovers merger of two massive black holes from early universe

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — The Webb Space Telescope has discovered the earliest known merger of black holes.

These two gigantic black holes and their galaxies consolidated just 740 million years after the universe-forming Big Bang. It's the most distant detection ever made of merging black holes, scientists reported Thursday.

One black hole is 50 million times more massive than our sun. The other is thought to be similar in size, but is buried in dense gas, which makes it harder to measure.

Until now, astronomers weren't sure how supermassive black holes got so big.

The latest findings, published in the Monthly Notices of the Royal Astronomical Society, suggest mergers are how black holes can grow so rapidly — "even at cosmic dawn," said lead author Hannah Ubler of the University of Cambridge.

"Massive black holes have been shaping the evolution of galaxies from the very beginning," Ubler said in a statement.

Launched in 2021 as the eventual successor to NASA's Hubble Space Telescope, Webb is the biggest and most powerful observatory ever sent into space. A joint U.S.-European project, the infrared observatory surveys the universe from a location 1 million miles (1.6 million kilometers) from Earth.

Afro-Cuban drums, Muslim prayers, Buddhist mantras: Religious diversity blooms in once-atheist Cuba

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The 1959 Castro-led revolution installed an atheist, Communist government that sought to replace the Catholic Church as the guiding force in the lives of Cubans.

But 65 years later, religion seems omnipresent in Cuba, in dazzling diversity.

The bells toll on Catholic churches and the call to prayer summons Muslims in Havana. Buddhists chant mantras as they gather at a jazz musician's home. Jews savor rice, beans and other Cuban staples for Sabbath dinner. Santeria devotees dance and slap drums in a museum filled with statues, paying homage to their Afro-Cuban deities.

It's also visible in the growing ranks of evangelicals who worship across the island, in the faith of LGBTQ+ Christians who sing at an inclusive church in the seaport of Matanzas, or in the pilgrims who travel to the remote shrine of Cuba's patron saint in the shadow of the Sierra Maestra mountains.

Critics say Cuba still falls short on religious tolerance. The U.S. State Department has designated Cuba a "Country of Particular Concern" for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom.

Cuba's constitution includes provisions for religious freedom and bans religious-based discrimination. But a recent State Department report says provisions in Cuba's penal and administrative codes "contravene these protections." The report says the Cuban Communist Party requires religious groups to be officially registered, "and membership in or association with an unregistered group is a crime."

The report says the Office of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Justice continue to withhold registration to some groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Some academics and religious leaders say more strides toward full religious freedom are needed, such as easing the process to build houses of worship, allowing access to state-owned media to spread faith-based messages, and reestablishing private religious schools. But there's been significant progress; some call it a time of Cuban religious revival.

"I don't know whether the religious revival has occurred in Cuba as a result of the (evangelical) Protestants involvement in the island, or as a result of the frustrations of the Cubans, or the result of a tolerance that the Cuban government seems to show toward religion," said Jaime Suchlicki, former director of the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 79 of 85

University of Miami Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies.

"Maybe a combination of all these factors have really revived religion in the island."

More than 60% of Cuba's 11 million people are baptized Catholic, according to the church. Experts estimate that as many, or more, also follow Afro-Cuban traditions such as Santería that intermingle with Catholicism.

"Cubans are believers, but sometimes they believe in everything," said Monsignor Ramon Suarez, chancellor of Havana's Catholic archdiocese.

Cuba's religious landscape is too diverse to fit easy categorizations, said Maximiliano Trujillo, a Havana University philosophy professor.

"There's a very unique religiosity," he said. "In Cuba, it's not uncommon that someone goes to meet a babalao (Santería high priest) in the morning and can visit a Pentecostal temple in the afternoon, and at night goes to Mass – and doesn't see any type of conflict in its spirituality."

Today, diverse beliefs can be found mixed together on altars in homes, with the Virgin Mary sharing space with a ceramic Buddha and a warrior spirit from the Afro-Cuban faith.

But when Suarez did his military service as a young seminarian, he kept his Bible hidden, fearing it would get confiscated.

"You couldn't say anything about religion," said Suarez.

The Catholic Church took an anti-communist stance shortly before Fidel Castro declared Cuba to be socialist in 1961. The government later accused prominent Catholics of trying to topple Castro. Public religious events were banned after processions transformed into political protests, sometimes turning violent.

Hundreds of foreign priests were expelled. Private schools, including more than 100 Catholic schools, that had operated across Cuba were nationalized.

Many Cuban priests were sent to military-run labor camps in the mid-1960s. The government became officially atheist; religion was not allowed and believers of all faiths were banned from Communist Party membership.

Church-state relations began to warm three decades later when Castro met with evangelical leaders and representatives from the local Jewish community. In 1992, the government dropped its constitutional references to atheism. The first papal visit to the island, Pope John Paul II in 1998, marked a turning point that led to government acceptance of some outdoor religious events and the celebration of Christmas outside churches for the first time in several decades.

Arguably the most popular religion in Cuba is Santería, which fuses Catholicism with Afro-Caribbean traditions.

Santería was born as a form of quiet resistance among Cuba's Black communities. It dates back centuries to when Spanish colonists brought hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans to Cuba, many from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria.

The Spanish tried to force Catholicism on the enslaved, but the Africans who made that transatlantic voyage brought their own religions, camouflaging them by attaching symbols of their orishas – Yoruba deities – to Catholic saints.

Santería long remained on the political margins due to its scattered, nonhierarchical nature and centuries of taboo and racism. In recent years, it has grown in prominence.

Beyond Catholicism and Santería, Cuba has numerous smaller but vibrant faiths. Among them:

JUDAISM

At Cuba's largest synagogue, ancient Jewish traditions and Cubaness often blend. At times, Sabbath dinners at Beth Shalom include Cuban black beans and rice.

Jews are believed to have arrived in Cuba with Christopher Columbus in 1492, but the Cuban community officially began in the early 20th century, said Hella Ezkenazi, vice president of Cuba's Hebrew Community. After WWII, more European Jews arrived.

The community grew to an estimated 15,000 at its peak in the 1950s, but most emigrated to the U.S. after the 1959 revolution when many of their businesses were confiscated. Today, there are about 1,000 Jews living in Cuba.

ISLAM

The only mosque in Havana opened in 2015 and the Muslim community has grown to about 2,500 people nationwide, said Ahmed Aguero, one of the mosque's leaders.

"We're pioneers in spreading the religion here," he said. "Sometimes they have a bad impression of Muslims, they fear that we're bad or even terrorists, until they meet us and they learn about the real practice of our religion."

BUDDHISTS

Twin brothers Yasnel and Yasmel Quintana were raised in an Afro-Cuban family that follows Santeria, but they never practiced that faith. Ten years ago, they joined the local branch of Soka Gakkai, a global Japanese Buddhist organization.

On a recent Sunday, they went to the home of Cuban jazz musician Cesar Lopez and his wife, Japan-born Seiko Ishii, where group members often meet to meditate.

"Buddhism became our first and only religion, where we felt identified and grew spiritually," said Yasmel.

Soka Gakkai is present in more than 190 countries, according to the group. In Cuba, it grew from a few people in 2015 to about 500 today.

Afro-Cuban drums, Muslim prayers, Buddhist mantras: Religious diversity blooms in once-atheist Cuba

By LUIS ANDRES HENAO Associated Press

HAVANA (AP) — The 1959 Castro-led revolution installed an atheist, Communist government that sought to replace the Catholic Church as the guiding force in the lives of Cubans.

But 65 years later, religion seems omnipresent in Cuba, in dazzling diversity.

The bells toll on Catholic churches and the call to prayer summons Muslims in downtown Havana. Buddhists chant mantras as they gather at the home of a jazz musician. Jews savor rice, beans and other Cuban staples for Sabbath dinner. Santeria devotees immerse the senses as they dance and slap drums in a museum filled with statues paying homage to their Afro-Cuban deities and leave offerings to the goddess of the sea.

It's also visible in the growing ranks of evangelicals who worship across the island, in the faith of LGBTQ+ Christians who sing at an inclusive church in the seaport of Matanzas, or in the pilgrims who travel to the remote shrine of Cuba's patron saint in the shadow of the Sierra Maestra mountains to ask for health and prosperity during a wrenching economic crisis.

Critics say Cuba is still falling short on religious tolerance. The U.S. State Department has designated Cuba a "Country of Particular Concern" for having engaged in or tolerated severe violations of religious freedom.

Cuba's constitution includes provisions for religious freedom and bans religious-based discrimination. But a recent State Department report says provisions in Cuba's penal and administrative codes "contravene these protections." The report says the Cuban Communist Party requires religious groups to be officially registered, "and membership in or association with an unregistered group is a crime."

The report says the Office of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Justice continue to withhold registration to some groups, including the Jehovah's Witnesses and The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints.

Cuba's government says the criticism is an excuse for Washington to justify the decades-old economic embargo that dates back to the Cold War.

Some academics and religious leaders say more strides toward full religious freedom are needed, such as easing the process to build houses of worship, allowing access to state-owned media to spread their faith-based messages, and reestablishing private religious schools. But significant progress has been achieved; some call it a time of a Cuban religious revival.

"I don't know whether the religious revival has occurred in Cuba as a result of the (evangelical) Protestants involvement in the island, or as a result of the frustrations of the Cubans, or the result of a tolerance that the Cuban government seems to show toward religion," said Jaime Suchlicki, former director of the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 81 of 85

University of Miami Institute for Cuban and Cuban-American Studies.

"Maybe a combination of all these factors have really revived religion in the island."

More than 60% of Cuba's 11 million people are baptized Catholic, according to the church. But experts estimate that as many, or more, also follow Afro-Cuban traditions such as Santería that intermingle with Catholicism.

"Cubans are believers, but sometimes they believe in everything," said Monsignor Ramon Suarez, chancellor of the archdiocese of Havana and author of "History of the Catholic Church in Cuba."

Cuba's religious landscape is so diverse that it would be wrong to simply say the island is Catholic or Afro-Cuban Santería, said Maximiliano Trujillo, a philosophy professor at Havana University who has written about Cuban religion.

"There's a very unique religiosity," he said. "In Cuba, it's not uncommon that someone goes to meet a babalao (Santería high priest) in the morning and can visit a Pentecostal temple in the afternoon, and at night goes to Mass – and doesn't see any type of conflict in its spirituality."

Today, diverse beliefs can be found mixed together on altars in homes, with the Virgin Mary sharing space with a ceramic Buddha and a warrior spirit from the Afro-Cuban faith.

But when Suarez did his military service as a young seminarian, he kept his Bible hidden, fearing it would get confiscated.

"You couldn't say anything about religion," said Suarez, who today is one of Cuba's highest ranking Catholic leaders.

The Catholic Church — long associated with Cuba's wealthier citizens — took an anti-communist stance shortly before Fidel Castro declared the country to be socialist in 1961. The government later accused prominent Catholics of trying to topple Castro. Public religious events were banned after processions were transformed into political protests, sometimes turning violent.

Hundreds of foreign priests were expelled, and private schools — including more than 100 Catholic schools — that had operated across Cuba were nationalized.

Many Cuban priests were sent to military-run labor camps in the mid-1960s. The government became officially atheist — religion was not allowed and believers of all faiths were banned from membership in the Communist Party.

Church-state relation began to warm three decades later when Castro met with dozens of evangelical leaders and representatives from the local Jewish community. In 1992, the government dropped its constitutional references to atheism. The first papal visit to the island in 1998 marked a turning point that led to government acceptance of some outdoor religious events and the celebration of Christmas outside churches for the first time in more than three decades.

"John Paul II marks the start of the opening — there's a before and after," said Suarez, speaking at the iron gate-guarded Catholic headquarters that stands next to a plaque commemorating the pope's historic visit.

John Paul II was greeted at Havana's airport by Castro, who wore a suit and tie instead of his typical military uniform.

"May Cuba, with all its magnificent potential, open itself up to the world, and may the world open itself up to Cuba," the pope said.

The Catholic Church still wants to eventually be allowed to operate religious schools and broadcast on state-run television and radio. "We have a long way to go," Suarez said.

Arguably the most popular religion in Cuba is Santería, which fuses Catholicism with Afro-Caribbean traditions.

Santería was born as a form of quiet resistance among Cuba's Black communities. It dates back centuries to when Spanish colonists brought hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans to Cuba, many from the Yoruba tribe of Nigeria.

The Spanish tried to force Catholicism on the enslaved, but the Africans who made that transatlantic voyage brought their own religions, camouflaging them by attaching symbols of their orishas — Yoruba deities — to Catholic saints.

"They came in terrible conditions ... but in their hair and their humble clothes, they brought snail shells,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 82 of 85

collars and other parts of the essence of their religion," said Gloria Esperanza Reyes, historian of the Yoruba Association.

For six decades, she has made a monthly offering of flowers and cane syrup to the goddess of the sea after doctors told her that she wouldn't live long because of a heart condition. She recently turned 82.

"It's very important (to preserve) the Yoruba faith because we are also learning more about plants and animals," she said. "It can even save our lives."

Santeria long remained on the political margins due to its scattered, nonhierarchical nature and centuries of taboo and racism. In recent years, it has grown in prominence.

"We, the young ones, we're learning from the elders," said Alena Ferro, a dancer and Yoruba faith devotee who often lights candles and flowers honoring her orishas at a home altar.

These days, music from Santeria drum ceremonies echoes from inside the Yoruba Cultural Association of Cuba into the American Brotherhood Park, known for its large ceiba, a sacred tree in Afro-Cuban religions. On a recent day, young dancers synchronized their moves to the fast batá drumbeat at a rehearsal paying homage to their orishas.

"I have so much faith in my saint," said dancer Susie Stuart Castellanos.

Nearby was a statue of Yemaya, the Yoruba goddess of the sea. She also is venerated in her sky-blue shawl as Our Lady of Regla, a Black Madonna at a Catholic church across the Bay of Havana.

Beyond Catholicism and Santeria, Cuba has numerous smaller but vibrant faiths. Among them:

JUDAISM

At Cuba's largest synagogue, ancient Jewish traditions and Cubanness often blend. At times, Sabbath dinners at Beth Shalom include Cuban black beans and rice — a popular dish known as Moros y Cristianos or Moors and Christians. During Rosh Hashana, Jews worldwide traditionally dip apples in honey to wish each other a sweet new year. Beth Shalom congregants say they use easier to find tropical fruits like guavas and bananas.

Jews are believed to have arrived to Cuba with Christopher Columbus in 1492, but the Cuban community officially began in the early 20th century, said Hella Ezkenazi, vice president of Cuba's Hebrew Community. After WWII, more European Jews arrived.

The community grew to an estimated 15,000 at its peak in the 1950s, but most emigrated to the U.S. after the 1959 revolution when many of their businesses were confiscated. Today, there are about 1,000 Jews living in Cuba.

As the sun set on a recent Friday, about 100 members of Beth Shalom gathered for the Sabbath to pray. Several later joined hands in a Israeli dance infused with Cuban rhythms.

"We show our love for being Jewish, our roots," said Betina Acosta, 24, who is part of the Israeli folk dance group and teaches the congregation's children. "We're Cuban, and we're also Jewish."

ISLAM

The only mosque in Havana opened in 2015 and the Muslim community has grown to about 2,500 people nationwide, said Ahmed Aguero, one of the mosque's leaders. He owns a nearby restaurant where community members often gather.

"We're pioneers in spreading the religion here," he said. "Sometimes they have a bad impression of Muslims, they fear that we're bad or even terrorists, until they meet us and they learn about the real practice of our religion."

Among the mosque's worshippers is Ubakar Bari, who emigrated from the West African nation of Guinea-Bissau. He was grateful to find a welcoming Muslim community that offered him a meal and helped him rent a room.

"It was such a huge surprise," he said. "I never thought I'd find a community like this in Havana."

BUDDHISTS

Twin brothers Yasnel and Yasmel Quintana were raised in an Afro-Cuban family that follows Santeria, but they never practiced that faith. Instead, they were exposed to a subculture of manga comics, animated movies and video games and began to learn Japanese — an example of how one of the world's least connected countries has adapted to global trends. Ten years ago, they joined the local branch of the Soka

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 83 of 85

Gakkai, a global Japanese Buddhist organization.

On a recent Sunday, they went to the home of Cuban jazz musician Cesar Lopez and his wife, Japan-born Seiko Ishii, where group members often meet to meditate.

"Buddhism became our first and only religion, where we felt identified and grew spiritually," said Yasmel.

Soka Gakkai is present in more than 190 countries, according to the group. In Cuba, it grew from a few people in 2015 to about 500 today.

"It's so awesome that this is a religion that comes from a country so far from this island, and you're hearing Cubans singing with us in Japanese," said Ishii, who grew up in Buddhism in Japan.

"There are so many Cubans who grew up without a religion and who have understood our philosophy and Japanese culture," said Ishii, a musical producer. "It transcends race, languages and countries. Like music, religion has no barriers."

All eyes are on Coppola in Cannes. Sound familiar?

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

CANNES, France (AP) — Francis Ford Coppola on Thursday will premiere at the Cannes Film Festival a film on which he has risked everything, one that's arriving clouded by rumors of production turmoil. Sound familiar?

On Thursday, Coppola's self-financed opus "Megalopolis" will make its much-awaited premiere. Other films are debuting in Cannes with more fanfare and hype, but none has quite the curiosity of "Megalopolis," the first film by the 85-year-old filmmaker in 13 years. Coppola put \$120 million of his own money into it.

Forty-five years ago, something very similar played out when Coppola was toiling over the edit for "Apocalypse Now." The movie's infamous Philippines production, which would be documented by Coppola's late wife, Eleanor, was already legend. The originally planned release in December 1977 had come and gone. Coppola had, himself, poured some \$16 million into the \$31 million budget for his Vietnam-set telling of Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness."

"I was terrified. For one thing, I was on the hook for the whole budget personally — that's why I came to own it," Coppola said in 2019. "In addition, in those days interest was over 25, 27%. So it looked as though, especially given the controversy and all the bogus articles being written about a movie that no one knew anything about but were predicting it was 'the heralded mess' of that year, it looked as though I was never going to get out of the jeopardy I was in. I had kids, I was young. I had no family fortune behind me. I was scared stiff."

Gilles Jacob, delegate general of Cannes, traveled to visit Coppola, hoping he could coax him into returning to the festival where the director's "The Conversation" had won the Palme d'Or in 1974. In his book, "Citizen Cannes: The Man Behind the Cannes Film Festival," Jacob recounted finding Coppola in the editing suite "beset by financial woes and struggling with 20 miles of film."

By springtime 1979, Coppola had assembled an edit he screened in Los Angeles — much as he recently did "Megalopolis." When Jacob got wind of the screening, he threw himself into securing it for that year's Cannes.

"Already considered an event even before it had been shown, 'Apocalypse Now' would be the festival's crowning glory," Jacob wrote. He added: "Ultimately I knew it was Cannes' setting — more than a match for his own megalomania — that would convince him to come."

But Coppola wasn't so sure. The film was unfinished, didn't have credits yet and he still was unsure about the ending. But after some back-and-forth and debate about whether "Apocalypse Now" would screen in or out of competition, it was decided: It would screen as a "work in progress" — in competition.

At the premiere in Cannes, Coppola carried his daughter, Sofia, then 8, on his shoulders. The response to the film wasn't immediately overwhelming.

"'Apocalypse Now,' one of the most ballyhooed movies of the decade, got only a polite response at the Cannes Film Festival on Saturday," wrote the Herald Tribune.

At the press conference, Coppola was defensive about the bad press the film received and the attention

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 84 of 85

given to its budget.

"Why is it that I, the first one to make a film about Vietnam, a film about morality, am so criticized when you can spend that much about a gorilla or a little jerk who flies around in the sky?" asked Coppola.

But "Apocalypse Now" would ultimately go down as one of Cannes' most mythologized premieres. The president of the jury that year, French author Françoise Sagan, preferred another entry about war: "The Tin Drum," Volker Schlöndorff's adaptation of the Günter Grass novel. The jury, split between the two, gave the Palme d'Or to both.

"Megalopolis," too, will be premiering in competition on Thursday.

The day after the 1978 Cannes closing ceremony, Jacob recalled running into Coppola at the Carlton Hotel, just as he was leaving.

"A big, black limousine was about to drive off. The back door opened and Francis got out," Jacob wrote. "He came up to me, held out his hand and, as he removed a big cigar from between his teeth, said, 'I only received half a Palme d'Or.'"

Today in History: May 17

Brown v Board of Education ruling strikes down legal segregation

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, May 17, the 138th day of 2024. There are 228 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 17, 1954, a unanimous U.S. Supreme Court handed down its *Brown v. Board of Education of Topeka* decision which held that racially segregated public schools were inherently unequal, and therefore unconstitutional.

On this date:

In 1536, Archbishop of Canterbury Thomas Cranmer declared the marriage of England's King Henry VIII to Anne Boleyn invalid after she failed to produce a male heir; Boleyn, already condemned for high treason, was executed two days later.

In 1940, the Nazis occupied Brussels, Belgium, during World War II.

In 1946, President Harry S. Truman seized control of the nation's railroads, delaying — but not preventing — a threatened strike by engineers and trainmen.

In 1973, a special committee convened by the U.S. Senate began its televised hearings into the Watergate scandal.

In 1980, rioting that claimed 18 lives erupted in Miami's Liberty City after an all-white jury in Tampa acquitted four former Miami police officers of fatally beating Black insurance executive Arthur McDuffie.

In 1987, 37 American sailors were killed when an Iraqi warplane attacked the U.S. Navy frigate *Stark* in the Persian Gulf. (Iraq apologized for the attack, calling it a mistake, and paid more than \$27 million in compensation.)

In 1996, President Bill Clinton signed a measure requiring neighborhood notification when sex offenders move in. ("Megan's Law," as it's known, was named for Megan Kanka, a 7-year-old New Jersey girl who was raped and murdered in 1994.)

In 2004, Massachusetts became the first state to allow same-sex marriages.

In 2010, the Supreme Court ruled 5-4 that young people serving life prison terms should have "a meaningful opportunity to obtain release" provided they didn't kill their victims.

In 2012, Donna Summer, the "Queen of Disco," died at age 63.

In 2013, Jorge Rafael Videla (HOHR'-hay rah-fay-EHL' vih-DAY'-lah), 87, the former dictator who took power in Argentina in a 1976 coup and led a military junta that killed thousands during a "dirty war" against alleged subversives, died in Buenos Aires while serving life in prison for crimes against humanity.

In 2015, a shootout erupted between bikers and police outside a restaurant in Waco, Texas, leaving nine

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, May 17, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 326 ~ 85 of 85

of the bikers dead and 20 people injured.

In 2017, the Justice Department appointed former FBI Director Robert Mueller as a special counsel to oversee a federal investigation into potential coordination between Russia and the 2016 Donald Trump campaign.

In 2020, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo was tested for the coronavirus on live TV as he announced that all people in the state who were experiencing flu-like symptoms were eligible for tests.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Peter Gerety is 84. Singer Taj Mahal is 82. Rock musician Bill Bruford is 75. TV personality Kathleen Sullivan is 71. Boxing Hall of Famer Sugar Ray Leonard is 68. Sports announcer Jim Nantz is 65. Producer Simon Fuller (TV: "American Idol") is 64. Singer Enya is 63. Actor-comedian Craig Ferguson is 62. Rock singer-musician Page McConnell is 61. Actor David Eigenberg is 60. Singer-musician Trent Reznor (Nine Inch Nails) is 59. Actor Paige Turco is 59. Actor Hill Harper is 58. TV personality/interior designer Thom Filicia is 55. Singer Jordan Knight is 54. R&B singer Darnell Van Rensalier (Shai) is 54. U.S. Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo is 53. Actor Sasha Alexander is 51. Rock singer-musician Josh Homme (HAHM'-ee) is 51. Rock singer Andrea Corr (The Corrs) is 50. Actor Sendhil Ramamurthy (SEN'-dul rah-mah-MURTH'-ee) is 50. Actor Rochelle Aytes is 48. Singer/songwriter Kandi Burruss is 48. Actor Kat Foster is 46. Actor Ayda Field is 45. Actor Ginger Gonzaga is 41. Folk-rock singer/songwriter Passenger is 40. Dancer-choreographer Derek Hough is 39. Actor Tahj Mowry is 38. Actor Nikki Reed is 36. Singer Kree Harrison (TV: "American Idol") is 34. Actor Leven Rambin is 34. Actor Samantha Browne-Walters is 33. Actor Justin Martin is 30.