

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 1 of 85

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Weber Landscaping Greenhouse Ad](#)
- [4- We the People Column](#)
- [4- Harry Implement Ad](#)
- [5- Subway Ad](#)
- [6- Dairy Queen Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [7- SD News Watch Nearly half of South Dakotans have unfavorable view of Noem, poll shows](#)
- [8- Manhart Ad](#)
- [10- Guthmiller takes third at Groton Invite](#)
- [11- Groton City Council Agenda](#)
- [12- Revised Brown County Commission Agenda](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: State awarded \\$3 million in EPA funds for cleanups at Fort Sisseton, Box Elder, Sioux Falls, Lead](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Q&A: How an anti-vaccine bill motivated a South Dakotan's award-winning response](#)
- [16- SD SearchLight: Prosecution rests in Trump hush money trial, after former fixer Cohen is grilled](#)
- [18- SD SearchLight: U.S. Sen. Katie Britt introduces bill to end a state's Medicaid funding if it blocks IVF](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- News from the Associated Press](#)

Tuesday, May 21

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
Senior Menu: Lemon baked fish, au gratin potatoes, 3 bean salad, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.
High School Region baseball at highest two seeds
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
The Pantry at the Groton Community Center, hours 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Quilting, 9 a.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, May 22

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun, lettuce/tomato/onion, potato salad, fruit, cookie.
High School Region baseball at highest two seeds

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

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



Groton CM&A: Kids' Club, Youth Group and Adult Bible Study begins at 7 pm
United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, May 23

Senior Menu: Cheese tortellini Alfredo with diced chicken, green beans, mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.
State Track Meet at Sioux Falls
Girls Golf Regional at Groton, 10 a.m.
High School Region baseball at highest two seeds
Story Time at Wage Memorial Library, 10 a.m.

Friday, May 24

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, mashed potatoes, sauerkraut, 3 bean salad, chocolate pudding with bananas.
State Track Meet at Sioux Falls
Groton Locke Electric Amateurs at Clark, 8 p.m.

OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton

© 2024 Groton Daily Independent

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 2 of 85

1440

In partnership with smartasset™

is the world's largest seafood chain, serving an estimated 64 million customers annually across more than 550 restaurants in the US and Canada.

The UK's health system wrongfully exposed tens of thousands of patients to HIV and Hepatitis C and engaged in a cover-up, a report found yesterday. The report—the culmination of a six-year independent investigation—fueled victims' calls for compensation.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Sean "Diddy" Combs' music catalog streaming drops 52% amid multiple allegations of sexual assault; Combs apologized over the weekend after 2016 surveillance video surfaced showing him attacking his ex-girlfriend.

Jim Otto, Pro Football Hall of Fame center known as "Mr. Raider," dies at 86. World No. 1 golfer Scottie Scheffler's arraignment set for June 3; Scheffler was arrested and released without bail Friday before playing the second round of the PGA Championship.

NBA Conference Finals begin tonight with Eastern Conference top seed the Boston Celtics taking on the Indiana Pacers (8 pm ET, ESPN); Western Conference Finals begin tomorrow night, with the Minnesota Timberwolves facing the Dallas Mavericks.

Science & Technology

Apple and OpenAI partner to incorporate ChatGPT into upcoming iPhone 16 and iOS18 platforms, reports suggest.

James Webb Space Telescope makes first measurement of the inside of an exoplanet; WASP-107 b, roughly 200 light-years away, has a core 12 times larger than Earth's.

Cockroach genetic study reveals the most common species evolved in Southeast Asia roughly 2,100 years ago before spreading worldwide; bugs likely traveled with humans in two distinct periods around 1,200 and 270 years ago.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (Dow -0.5%, S&P 500 +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.7%); Nasdaq hits record high in intraday trading as Nvidia shares rise 2%. JPMorgan shares drop 4.5% as CEO Jamie Dimon signals upcoming retirement may be sooner than believed.

Ivan Boesky, former Wall Street titan convicted of insider trading, dies at age 87; Boesky is believed to have been the inspiration for "Wall Street" movie character Gordon Gekko, who delivered the famous line "greed is good."

New York attorney general announces \$2B settlement with cryptocurrency lending firm Genesis over claims it defrauded investors; company filed for bankruptcy in the wake of the 2022 FTX collapse.

Politics & World Affairs

Prosecutors rest case in hush money trial against former President Donald Trump; closing arguments expected to begin next week. Key witness Michael Cohen admits to stealing from Trump Organization during tenure.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange wins right to appeal Britain's decision to extradite him to the US to face espionage charges. Legal case has been ongoing for 13 years.

Crews refloat cargo ship that destroyed Baltimore's Key Bridge in March; ship reportedly suffered four power blackouts in the hours leading up to the collision.

Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 3 of 85



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 5 of 85

Segregation had been upheld by the Supreme Court in 1896, in Plessy v. Ferguson, despite the clear language in the Equal Protection Clause of the 14th Amendment that forbade states from making or enforcing laws that denied the equal protection of the laws. The Plessy Court had declared that "separate but equal" facilities for Blacks and whites did not violate the Equal Protection Clause. The practice of segregation was intended to keep Black Americans in a status of inferiority-- philosophically, legally and psychologically.

Segregation violated the essential guarantee of the Declaration of Independence, which President Abraham Lincoln justly regarded as the "sheet anchor of the republic." The central tenet of the Declaration, "that all men are created equal," which Lincoln characterized as an aspiration for legal equality, to be fulfilled when the nation reached a degree of maturity and commitment to equal protection of the laws, could not be squared with the practice of segregation. This philosophical mantra of the nation found expression in the 14th Amendment's trumpet call for legal equality. From a psychological standpoint, segregation was devastating. As Chief Justice Earl Warren wrote for the Court in Brown, segregated schools could not provide equal educational opportunities. The same was true for children in public schools. "To separate them from others of similar age and qualifications solely because of their race generates a feeling of inferiority as to their status in a community that may affect their hearts and minds in a way unlikely ever to be undone."

The drama surrounding the Brown decision had built to a fever pitch on May 17. Inside the Supreme Court, the curtain behind the bench parted at noon, precisely, and the Justices, adhering to a tradition, decades old, followed the Chief Justice and filed to their seats on the high bench which, that day, was the focal point of the nation's attention. Chief Justice Warren recounted years later, "As we Justices

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

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 6 of 85

marched into the courtroom on that day, there was a tenseness that I have not seen equaled before or since." Anticipation of the Court's ruling was marked by those citizens who, days earlier, had begun forming long lines outside the Court, hoping to fill the few seats available to the public. Those in the courtroom knew something important was coming. For one thing, all the Justices' wives were present, which rarely occurs except on historic occasions. For another, Justice Robert H. Jackson was present. The ailing Justice, visited in the hospital that morning by Chief Justice Warren, insisted on attending Court that day, as Warren said, "to demonstrate our solidarity."

Chief Justice Warren read the entire opinion, something the Court reserves for historic decisions with far-reaching implications for the country. When Warren declared, "We conclude unanimously that in the field of public education the doctrine of 'separate but equal' has no place," a surge of emotion swept across the courtroom. Until that moment, neither the press nor the public had any idea that the Court had "unanimously" decided to strike down segregation in public schools. Reporters bolted from their seats and sprinted to the bank of telephones on the wall outside the chambers to inform editors of the Court's historic decision. At 1:20 p.m., on May 17, 1954, American law had changed forever.

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota NewsMedia Association and this newspaper.



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.



Nearly half of South Dakotans have unfavorable view of Noem, poll shows

BY STU WHITNEY

South Dakota News Watch

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – Nearly two-thirds of South Dakotans said Gov. Kristi Noem damaged her credibility in her book rollout, and nearly half said they have an unfavorable view of the second-term Republican, according to a scientific poll of 500 registered voters co-sponsored by South Dakota News Watch.

As for Noem's bid to become former President Donald Trump's vice-presidential nominee in 2024, nearly 60% of South Dakotans said she should not be chosen, including 55% of Republicans. The poll was also sponsored by the Chiesman Center for Democracy at the University of South Dakota.

The governor's favorability based on personal popularity was 39%, down 13 points from a similar poll conducted in October 2020. Nearly half of respondents (48%) said they had an unfavorable opinion of Noem, which is double the number from 2020.

Mason-Dixon Polling and Strategy conducted the statewide survey May 10-13, several days after the governor cut short her book publicity tour and returned to South Dakota. "No Going Back," her second book, was published May 7.

Media coverage focused on revelations in the book about Noem killing an unruly family hunting dog and fabricating a meeting with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.

The controversy, and Noem's response, has sent her political prospects into a spiral not just nationally but in the Mount Rushmore State, said Jon Schaff, a political science professor at Northern State University in Aberdeen.

"These numbers are worse than I expected, quite frankly," said Schaff. "What it tells you is that some of the issues coming out of the book not only damaged her national ambitions, but they put a serious damper on any statewide ambitions she might have had."

Noem did not respond to News Watch interview requests for this story made through Ian Fury, her chief of communications.

'Disappointment, embarrassment'

Poll respondents were selected randomly from a telephone-matched South Dakota voter registration list that included landline and cellphone numbers. Quotas were assigned to reflect voter registration by county. The margin of error is plus or minus 4.5 percentage points.

The poll showed that 52% approve of Noem's job performance as governor, while 46% disapprove. An April analysis of Morning Consult polling data showed Noem with a job-performance approval rating of 59%, with disapproval at 38%.

Noem's overall favorability, which includes a politician's character traits and personality, took a larger hit, especially within her own party. While 81% of Republican respondents approved of Noem's job performance, that number dipped to 58% when respondents were asked if they had a favorable opinion of her.

By comparison, former president Trump had a favorable rating among Republicans of 70%.

"I think those numbers speak to voters' ability to distinguish between the job she's doing as governor and her likability as a person," said Julia Hellwege, an associate political science professor at USD and incoming director of the Chiesman Center.

Perhaps most notable is the fact that criticism and mockery of Noem's book launch have come from all sides of the political and media spectrum, from traditionally left-leaning "Saturday Night Live" to conserva-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 8 of 85

tive Fox News.

"Regardless of what party you belong to, it's not a great look for the state," said Hellwege. "When we're getting Saturday Night Live-type attention in a negative way, there's some disappointment and embarrassment wrapped up in that."

Could fallout impact Senate race?

Noem's book, promoted as being "packed with surprising stories and practical lessons," coincided with her rising national profile and status as one of the front-runners to be chosen as Trump's running mate for his rematch against Biden.

"I will do everything I can to help him win and save this country," Noem said as she endorsed Trump at a South Dakota GOP fundraiser in Rapid City in September 2023.

The 52-year-old Castlewood native was the betting favorite to get the VP nod as recently as January by OddsChecker.com.

Following the book controversies, as of May 17, the same betting site lists her as 49th in the VP race behind fringe political figures such as conservative commentator Candace Owens and University of Colorado football coach Deion Sanders.

If the book fallout prevents her from becoming the VP nominee or getting an administration position if Trump wins, it could also impact Noem's next move in South Dakota politics.

There has been speculation that she could make a run for U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds' seat in 2026. Political experts said the recent controversies and negative media attention could change the dynamic of that race.

"You're only talking two years from now, and it's not like Mike Rounds is in a weak political spot," said Schaff. "She would not be the first politician to find herself in a kind of scandal and rehabilitate herself over time. Such things are possible. But these poll numbers show that she's in a little bigger hole than I would have expected."

Voters: Killing of family dog was wrong

One of the book's most revealing passages involved the killing of a 14-month-old female puppy named Cricket after the dog ruined a pheasant hunt with unruly behavior about 20 years ago.



Logan Manhart

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 9 of 85

Returning from the hunt, wrote Noem, she stopped to talk to a local family and Cricket jumped out of the truck and attacked the family's chickens one at a time, "crunching it to death with one bite, then dropping it to attack another."

"I hated that dog," she wrote in the book. "At that moment, I realized I had to put her down."

Nearly 6 in 10 of statewide poll respondents (58%) said they felt that the shooting of the dog was not justified, compared to 38% who said it was justified. Among female respondents, 65% said the shooting was not justified, compared to 50% of males.

"It's not surprising, perhaps, that women were more critical of the shooting of the family dog, but half of men thought the same thing," said Michael Card, an emeritus professor of political science at the University of South Dakota. "There's a lot of room for the governor to grow in terms of repairing her image."

'You're about to step in it'

Another passage from the book that drew criticism was a reference to meeting the notoriously reclusive North Korean dictator when she served on the House Armed Services Committee in Congress.

Trump met with Kim Jong Un several times as president, significant encounters that would have been highly unlikely for someone in Noem's position. Without any congressional records to back it up, the story was widely disputed, and Noem's staff and publisher, Hachette Book Group, said corrections would be made.

But in an interview on CBS' "Face the Nation" on May 5, the governor didn't offer a clear explanation of how the mistake happened or if she even acknowledged the error.

The News Watch poll asked registered voters: "Does Noem's decision not to answer questions and address some of the issues she raised in her book damage her credibility with you?"

Statewide, 62% said yes, while 34% said no and 4% were undecided. Those saying that Noem's credibility was damaged included 86% of Democrats, 48% of Republicans and 68% of Independents.

The book rollout and ensuing public relations crisis challenged an administration marked by cabinet and staff turnover, including five chiefs of staff. Noem has not named a sixth chief of staff after the June 2023 departure of Mark Miller, her former general counsel.

"People in leadership need to have at least one person who can tell them no and not be afraid they're going to lose their job over it," said Schaff, who was appointed by Noem to the state's Social Studies Content Standards Commission in 2022.

"That typically falls to a chief of staff. If the governor is in a situation where there is nobody around to say, 'You're about to step in it,' then I would say that she's been ill-served."

West River support is strongest

Noem's geographic support within the state remains strongest West River, where 59% of respondents said they approve of her job performance, compared to Sioux Falls Metro (54%). East River South and East River North were both at 46%.

The governor's overall favorability was 43% West River, the highest of the four regions.

Regarding shooting the family dog, 43% of West River respondents said the killing was justified, compared to 31% in the Sioux Falls area, which includes Minnehaha and Lincoln counties in the poll groupings.

Noem carried Pennington County (mostly Rapid City) with 61% of the vote in her 2022 re-election over Democratic challenger Jamie Smith, compared to 53% in Minnehaha County (mostly Sioux Falls).

Women, younger voters more critical

As seen in past polls, Noem's support among male voters is stronger than with females. While 61% of male respondents approved of her job performance, that number was 44% for women.

However, both men (30%) and women (29%) surveyed were against the South Dakota governor being named Trump's running mate. Both men (61%) and women (63%) also said that Noem's reluctance to address some of the issues raised in her book damaged her credibility with them.

Male respondents said the shooting of the dog was not justified by a margin of 50% to 46%, compared to a margin of 65% to 38% for women.

Younger registered voters had the lowest evaluation of the governor in most categories, including job performance (34%) and overall favorability (26%).

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 10 of 85

Job performance approval of Noem from the youngest group was dramatically lower than respondents ages 35-49 (54%), 50-64 (61%) and 65-plus (51%).

Younger voters were also more critical of Noem's puppy anecdote, with 71% of respondents ages 18-34 saying it was not justified, compared to 51% for ages 50-64 and 52% for ages 65-plus.

Mason-Dixon has a rating of 2.6 (3.0 is maximum) from FiveThirtyEight and ranks 30th out of 277 pollsters analyzed by the statistical site.

'She has a lot of work to do'

Republicans are still heavily in support of Noem's job performance, with 81.4% saying they approve, compared to 10.9% of Democrats and 32.8% of Independents.

But only 31.2% of GOP respondents said they think Trump should select Noem as VP nominee, which is less than Democrats (33.6%) who think so. Independents were 22.7%.

On the question of credibility following Noem's book tour and evasive answers, 86% of Democrats surveyed said that she had damaged her credibility, compared to 68% of Independents and 48% of Republicans.

Schaff stressed that nearly half of GOP respondents viewing Noem's credibility as damaged is a serious setback in her home state, where she has served as a state legislator, congressional representative and governor, and has never lost an election.

"That tells me that even within the state party, her base has eroded," said Schaff. "I still think she's a talented politician, and people have come back from similar things before, but it's clear that she has a lot of work to do."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact Stu Whitney at stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org

Guthmiller takes third at Groton Invite

Twenty-five high school golfers representing six schools took to the Olive Grove Golf Course for the Groton Invitational held Monday. Aberdeen Roncalli won the team title with 356 points followed by Groton Area with 383, Sioux Valley with 427 and Milbank with 455. Sisseton and Flandreau had incomplete teams. Claire Crawford of Aberdeen Roncalli won the individual competition with a 79 score. Groton Area's Carly Guthmiller took third with an 86, Carlee Johnson was sixth with a 91, Claire Schuelke was 11th with a 101, Carly Gilbert was 13th with a 105. Mia Crank was 14th with a 107 and Halee Harder was 23rd with a 128.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 11 of 85

Groton City Council Meeting Agenda

May 21, 2024 – 7:00pm
City Hall – 120 N Main Street

(IF YOU WOULD LIKE TO CALL IN TO THIS MEETING, PLEASE MAKE PRIOR ARRANGEMENTS TO DO SO BY
CALLING CITY HALL 605-397-8422)

1. Approval of Agenda
2. Public Comments - pursuant to SDCL 1-25-1
(Public Comments will offer the opportunity for anyone not listed on the agenda to speak to the council. Speaking time will be limited to 3 minutes. No action will be taken on questions or items not on the agenda.)
3. Presentation of Life Saved Award to Emma Schinkel – American Red Cross
4. Code Enforcement Discussion
5. Approval of Special Event Liquor License – Groton Amateur Baseball
6. First Reading of Ordinance No. 776 – Sewer Rates
7. Update 2024 Advisory Committees
8. April Finance Report
9. Updated Rubble Site Fees
10. Soccer Complex Lease Agreement and Maintenance Discussion
11. Minutes
12. Bills
13. Executive session personnel & legal 1-25-2 (1) & (3)
14. Adjournment

Broton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 12 of 85

**BROWN COUNTY
BROWN COUNTY COMMISSION AGENDA
REGULAR MEETING TUESDAY**

May 21, 2024 8:45 A.M.

COMMISSIONER'S CHAMBERS, COURTHOUSE ANNEX - 25 MARKET STREET, ABERDEEN SD

1. Call To Order - Pledge of Allegiance
2. Approval of Agenda
3. Opportunity of Public Comment
4. Public Hearing for Temporary Special Event Alcohol License for Aberdeen Area Chamber of Commerce
5. Approve & Authorize Chairman to sign Landfill Scale Project Payment #1
6. Judy Dosch, Building Superintendent
 - a. Discuss Purchase of Courtroom Compressors
7. Consent Calendar
 - a. Approval of General Meeting Minutes of May 14, 2024
 - b. Claims/Payroll
 - c. HR Report
 - d. Lease Agreements
 - e. Authorize Advertising Public Hearing for Temporary Special Event Alcohol License
 - f. Surplus Sheriff's Office Vehicle
 - g. Claim Assignments
 - h. April Auditors Report of Accounts
 - i. Transfer of Vehicle from Sheriff's Office to Assessor's Office
8. Other Business
 - a. Rededication of the Freedom Shrine (approximately at 9:15am)
9. Executive Session (if requested per SDCL 1-25-2)
10. Adjourn

Brown County Commission Meeting

Please join my meeting from your computer, tablet, or smartphone.

<https://meet.goto.com/BrCoCommission>

You can also dial in using your phone. United States: [+1 \(872\) 240-3311](tel:+18722403311)

Access Code: 601-168-909 #

Get the app now and be ready when your first meeting starts: <https://meet.goto.com/install>

Public comment provides an opportunity for the public to address the county commission but may not exceed 3 minutes.

Public comment will be limited to 10 minutes (or at the discretion of the board).

Public comment will be accepted virtually when the virtual attendance option is available.

Official Recordings of Commission Meetings along with the Minutes can be found at

<https://www.brown.sd.us/node/454>



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

State awarded \$3 million in EPA funds for cleanups at Fort Sisseton, Box Elder, Sioux Falls, Lead

BY: JOHN HULT - MAY 20, 2024 5:24 PM

Sioux Falls, Fort Sisseton Historic State Park, Box Elder and the Sanford Underground Research Facility in Lead will benefit from \$3 million in cleanup funds awarded Monday by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency.

The money comes from the EPA's Brownfields program, which offers grants to state and local partners for the assessment and recovery of contaminated sites around the country. President Biden's Infrastructure Reinvestment and Recovery Act boosted the program's funding by 400%, according to a news release from the EPA.

The South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources will use its \$2 million share of the grant funding for cleanup at:

Falls Park, quarry lake and the Sioux Empire Fairgrounds in Sioux Falls.

Fort Sisseton Historic State Park in the northeast corner of the state.

Villa Ranchaero in Box Elder.

For Falls Park, the needs are tied to contamination from former landfills. The work will involve environmental assessments, dredging and soil sampling, as well as water quality testing and testing for per- and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS, or "forever chemicals") at Falls Park and quarry lake. At the fairgrounds, the money will pay to test for methane, PFAS and other risks to the Big Sioux River.

At Fort Sisseton, the money will enable the construction of a new visitor center, the news release said, which involves environmental testing and asbestos and lead paint studies in historic buildings. The Villa Ranchaero site, 4 acres near Ellsworth Air Force Base, will see environmental assessments for safety, as the area is now home to several retail shops.

The South Dakota Science and Technology Authority manages the research facility in Lead, which is the deepest underground science lab in the U.S.

Its \$1 million share of the money will be used to clean up properties contaminated by asbestos and assess environmental concerns related to hydrocarbons, Polychlorinated Biphenyls (PCBs), volatile organic compounds, lead-based paint and metals such as lead, mercury and arsenic.

Redevelopment plans include a new main entrance to the facility and returning to "safe use of contaminated spaces" on the grounds, the press release said. The lab is located on the site of the former Homestake Gold Mine.

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.

Q&A: How an anti-vaccine bill motivated a South Dakotan's award-winning response

BY: SETH TUPPER - MAY 20, 2024 6:00 AM

Dr. Allie Alvine went to Pierre in 2020 with a concern and came home with a mission.

At the state Capitol, she testified against a bill that would have repealed the immunization requirements that apply to most school children.

"I saw the anti-vaxxers there, and they were a large group," she said.

Lawmakers rejected the bill, but Alvine, of Sioux Falls, feared the anti-vaccine movement was growing.

"I had to get more involved," she said. "I had to create a presence at our state Capitol in Pierre to counter their presence, to be the pro-vaccine voice."

Last year, she founded South Dakota Families for Vaccines, a state-level arm of the national Science and Families Engaged (SAFE) Communities Coalition.

As director of the state-level group, Alvine's work includes talking to legislators and the public about the importance of vaccines, updating supporters about relevant legislation, and publishing local-level vaccination data and voter guides.

Those and other efforts earned Alvine the Excellence in Immunization Advocacy Award at the National Conference for Immunization Coalitions and Partnerships last month in Philadelphia. Another South Dakotan, Andrea Polkinghorn, received the Excellence in Immunization Collaboration Award for her work as president of Immunize South Dakota.

The two groups work together in the state. While South Dakota Families for Vaccines works at the grassroots level to influence policy, Immunize South Dakota works at the "grass tops" to raise immunization rates, Alvine said.

Alvine brings medical knowledge to her job: She went to medical school in Kansas and completed a psychiatry residency through the University of South Dakota Sanford School of Medicine. She now uses her medical education exclusively for advocacy.

Following are portions of South Dakota Searchlight's recent interview with Alvine, edited for length and clarity.

Before your current work, you started the South Dakota chapter of the Arthritis Foundation in response to your son's juvenile rheumatoid arthritis diagnosis. What role did vaccine advocacy play in that work?

Juvenile rheumatoid arthritis is an autoimmune disease where your body attacks its joints, and it's very painful and destroys joints. So the goal is to treat the disease and save the joints as much as possible, but the medications decrease your immune system.

So part of what I did in the Arthritis Foundation was promote vaccinations, because that population has a lot of patients on immune-compromising medications, and it makes you much more vulnerable to all diseases, and these people depend on their communities being vaccinated — creating a community of immunity to protect them from these awful diseases, and especially the vaccine-preventable diseases. So that kind of started my journey in vaccine advocacy.

Did you get exposed to the anti-vaccine movement at that time?

I knew some people were hesitant — and that's absolutely OK to be hesitant and to ask questions, and to talk to your doctor or experts or our organization about vaccines. But back then I was not aware of the anti-vaccine movement as much. I knew they were out there, but they were kind of not on my radar back then.

They came on my radar while I was a member, through the Arthritis Foundation, of Immunize South Dakota. And they asked me to testify in 2020 on the bill that was brought forth in the state House of Representatives that would have gotten rid of school vaccinations, which would be horribly detrimental and dangerous and a disaster for our state. So I agreed to go testify as an M.D. and as a parent of an immunocompromised child.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 15 of 85

Two weeks after your testimony to the Legislature in 2020, South Dakota had its first confirmed case of COVID-19. How did the pandemic influence your thinking about vaccine advocacy?

During the pandemic, I was thinking, OK, we all went through such a hard time with masks, social distancing, schooling our children at home, work changes and isolation. It was really hard. I thought — and a lot of vaccine advocates thought — that with the rolling out of the vaccine, which was the only thing that was going to get us out of the pandemic and make life normal again, that maybe the anti-vaccine sentiment would die down.

But that was exactly opposite of what happened. The vaccine hesitancy increased, and the sharing of misinformation about the COVID vaccine, and people got more vaccine hesitant, and their feelings about the COVID vaccine started trickling down to childhood vaccines, and we're seeing our rates drop across the country.

So what had happened was the SAFE Communities Coalition started in 2020 to counter the spread of vaccine misinformation and support pro-vaccine legislation. Immunize South Dakota talked with SAFE Communities, and they approached me to take on this role as director of South Dakota Families for Vaccines, and SAFE now has 11 states covered.

It's truly a group effort. I work together with all the other directors in other states, and SAFE supports our work. And I also work a lot with other organizations and partners in our state and nationally.

On your website, you report that 93% of South Dakota kindergartners had all their recommended vaccines last school year (although vaccines are required, families can claim exemptions for religious and health reasons). How would you characterize the current atmosphere around vaccines in our state?

People say, "Well, 93%, that's huge." The problem is that very small drops in rates have big effects on vaccine-preventable diseases. So where we want to be is 95%, and that has dropped. We were there, but that has dropped since 2020 to 93%, and that's all because vaccine misinformation is shared so rampantly.

Social media and the internet are great, but information is shared so fast, and a lot of people don't know what's a good source for medical information. TikTok is not a good source for this information. And people share things on Facebook and even websites, and they look professional and they look scientific, but you need to look at resources for the "studies" that they did, and who paid for it, and how many were in the study, and whether it's been reproduced. It's hard for people to figure out what's good information, and a lot of the stuff that the anti-vaxxers are posting is really scary.

How do you explain the popularity and growth of the anti-vaccine message?

We always say now that vaccines are a victim of their own success. Older people in our communities can tell you about multiple family members that died of measles, and they remember polio and people living in iron lungs and dying, and multiple other vaccine-preventable diseases that have just ravaged people's lives, but we don't see that anymore because of vaccines.

And so some people think that those diseases are just gone, and they're not. If we get below 95%, measles is the first one that rears its head, because it's so contagious. And we're seeing that in areas of the country that have lower vaccine rates. It's expected. And if you drop any lower, other horrible diseases will start rearing their heads. And unlike what a lot of anti-vax people say, these diseases are not benign. You're much safer to get the vaccine as opposed to getting any of these diseases.

How do you equip people to defend the safety and effectiveness of vaccines like you do?

We have lots of trainings. We have ways people can get involved and learn about how to do it. But the main goal is to keep the door open to conversation, and to be calm and not argumentative, because people just go into their corners when you argue. And to listen to their concerns. Ask them, what have you heard? What are you worried about? Then ask if you can give them the information that you have about vaccines.

That's kind of the gist, because arguing doesn't do anything. And just reiterate that it's fine to have questions. And then just talk about how vaccines have such a long history. The first smallpox vaccine was

over 200 years ago. We have decades and decades of research that have proven that vaccines are well studied and extremely safe.

How important is it to have people with medical expertise like you working in the vaccine advocacy realm? We need to have people in our health care communities stand up, now more than ever. It's so important to use their voice in this way, and a lot of people do. We have a lot of other medical professionals that do, but we need more — nurses, all medical professionals. We work with a lot of pharmacists, too. Public health experts are in the mix, too. It takes a group effort.

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.

Prosecution rests in Trump hush money trial, after former fixer Cohen is grilled

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 20, 2024 6:07 PM

NEW YORK — New York state prosecutors rested their case against Donald Trump Monday after four days of testimony from their key witness, Trump's former fixer Michael Cohen, who says the former president was well aware of a hush money cover-up. The defense paints Cohen as a liar.

The Manhattan criminal trial, the first ever for a former president, now in its sixth week, was poised to reach closing arguments as early as Tuesday. But New York Justice Juan Merchan indicated Monday that proceedings would stretch beyond Memorial Day.

Trump attorney Todd Blanche, in a lengthy, and at times slow and disjointed cross-examination Monday, continued wringing Cohen for proof that would convince jurors the former fixer cannot be trusted.

Cohen's earlier testimony that Trump reimbursed him for paying a porn star to stay quiet before the 2016 presidential election is at the crux of the prosecution's case.

Trump is charged with falsifying 11 invoices, 11 checks, and 12 ledger entries as routine legal expenses rather than reimbursement of the hush money, amounting to 34 felony counts.

Trump denies any wrongdoing and maintains he never had a sexual relationship with adult film actress and director Stormy Daniels. She testified otherwise in excruciating and awkward detail in early May.

Monday's proceedings were beset with objections and technology issues, and wrapped with tense testimony from the defense's second witness, Robert Costello, Cohen's legal counsel, who promised backdoor communication to Trump after Cohen was under the FBI's thumb in 2018.

The day ended with a long shot, but expected, request from the defense to throw the case out. Merchan dismissed the court, saying he'd issue his ruling Tuesday. The defense is likely to rest its case then as well.

Closing arguments are expected after the holiday.

On a 'journey'

Blanche began the day grilling Cohen on his previous business dealings, income and the money he's made since breaking ties with the former president.

Cohen testified that he's made millions of dollars on his books "Disloyal" and "Revenge," and his podcast "Mea Culpa," all of which sharply criticize the man from whom he used to seek praise, as he testified days earlier.

Prompted by Blanche, Cohen confirmed he's mulling over a third book, has a television show in the works titled "The Fixer" and is considering a run for Congress because he has "the best name recognition" out there.

When Blanche suggested Cohen's name recognition hinges on Trump, Cohen disagreed.

"I wouldn't characterize it that way. My name recognition is because of the journey I've been on," Cohen said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 17 of 85

"Well the journey you've been on ... has included daily attacks on Trump," Blanche responded.

Through the course of Blanche's questioning, Cohen again acknowledged his previous crimes and also fessed up to stealing \$30,000 from the Trump Organization when Trump lagged on paying a tech company to rig a CNBC poll of famous businessmen.

Minutes later, Blanche asked, "Do you have a financial interest in this case?"

"Yes, sir," Cohen responded.

When Blanche pressed about whether a guilty verdict is Cohen's preferred outcome, Cohen responded, "The answer is no. It's better if he's not (guilty) for me because it gives me more to talk about in the future."

Prosecutor Susan Hoffinger conducted her redirect at a tidy and speedy clip, leading Cohen through each of Blanche's doubting lines of questioning to reaffirm for the jury Cohen's testimony that Trump's hand was behind the hush money reimbursements.

"They've asked you a lot of questions about how you've made money and (your) podcast... Putting aside financial matters, how has telling the truth affected your life?" Hoffinger asked.

"My entire life has been turned upside down as a direct result," Cohen responded.

Before the prosecution rested its case, the defense lobbed a lengthy objection to a still frame of a C-SPAN video depicting Trump with his bodyguard Keith Schiller just before 8 p.m. on Oct. 24, 2016. The parties eventually agreed to admit it.

Evidence that Trump and Schiller were together that night looms large for Cohen's claim that he spoke to both of them on the phone about paying off Daniels.

Trump's support inside the courtroom

A steady flow of high-profile Republican supporters has shown up for the GOP's presumed 2024 presidential nominee.

Monday's supporters included Trump ally and attorney Alan Dershowitz; legal adviser Boris Epshteyn, who himself is indicted in Arizona for trying to subvert the 2020 presidential election results; and Chuck Zito, an actor and one of the founders of New York City's Hells Angels chapter in the 1980s.

Several Republican lawmakers, including vice presidential hopefuls, have flocked to Manhattan for the trial.

North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Sen. J.D. Vance of Ohio and former GOP primary hopeful Vivek Ramaswamy attended May 13. Sens. Rick Scott of Florida and Tommy Tuberville of Alabama also made appearances last week, alongside Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird.

House Speaker Mike Johnson delivered remarks outside the courthouse May 14, slamming the "sham trial" and accusing New York prosecutors of only wanting to keep the former president off the campaign trail.

The Louisiana Republican cast Trump as a victim of a "travesty of justice."

Nearly a dozen far-right Republican House members showed up Thursday, led by Rep. Matt Gaetz of Florida. Accompanying Gaetz were other right-wing House Freedom Caucus members: fellow Floridian Reps. Anna Paulina Luna and Mike Waltz; Eli Crane and Andy Biggs of Arizona; Lauren Boebert of Colorado; Ralph Norman of South Carolina; Diana Harshbarger and Andy Ogles of Tennessee; Mike Cloud of Texas; and caucus Chair Bob Good of Virginia.

Speaking on the sidewalk outside the courthouse, Gaetz described the charges as the "Mr. Potatohead doll of crimes," accusing the prosecution of combining things "that did not belong together."

Reps. Byron Donalds and Cory Mills of Florida attended earlier in the week.

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

U.S. Sen. Katie Britt introduces bill to end a state's Medicaid funding if it blocks IVF

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 20, 2024 2:03 PM

WASHINGTON — Two Republican U.S. senators have teamed up to try to prevent states from banning in vitro fertilization, months after the Alabama state Supreme Court upended access to the procedure by ruling fertilized embryos were children under state law.

Sens. Katie Britt of Alabama and Ted Cruz of Texas introduced a three-page bill on Monday that would cut off a state's Medicaid funding if that state were to bar in vitro fertilization.

"As a mom, I know firsthand that there is no greater blessing than our children, and IVF helps families across our nation experience the joyous miracle of life, grow, and thrive," Britt wrote in a statement. "This commonsense piece of legislation affirms both life and liberty — family and freedom, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to enact it into law."

Cruz wrote that "IVF has given miraculous hope to millions of Americans, and it has given families across the country the gift of children."

The bill comes months after the Alabama state Supreme Court ruled that fertilized embryos that were frozen or hadn't been implanted constituted children under an 1872 law.

State lawmakers approved and Gov. Kay Ivey signed legislation afterward to provide civil and criminal protections to the state's IVF clinics so that they might resume their work. Questions, however, remain and at least one of the state's IVF clinics has closed.

Democrats in Congress have introduced their own bills to provide nationwide protections for IVF, though two of those bills have been blocked from quickly passing the Senate by GOP lawmakers.

Republican Sen. Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi in late February prevented Illinois Democratic Sen. Tammy Duckworth from receiving unanimous consent to pass a bill that would have protected IVF nationwide.

That bill would have blocked limitations on "assisted reproductive technology services" that are "more burdensome than limitations or requirements imposed on medically comparable procedures, do not significantly advance reproductive health or the safety of such services and unduly restrict access to such services."

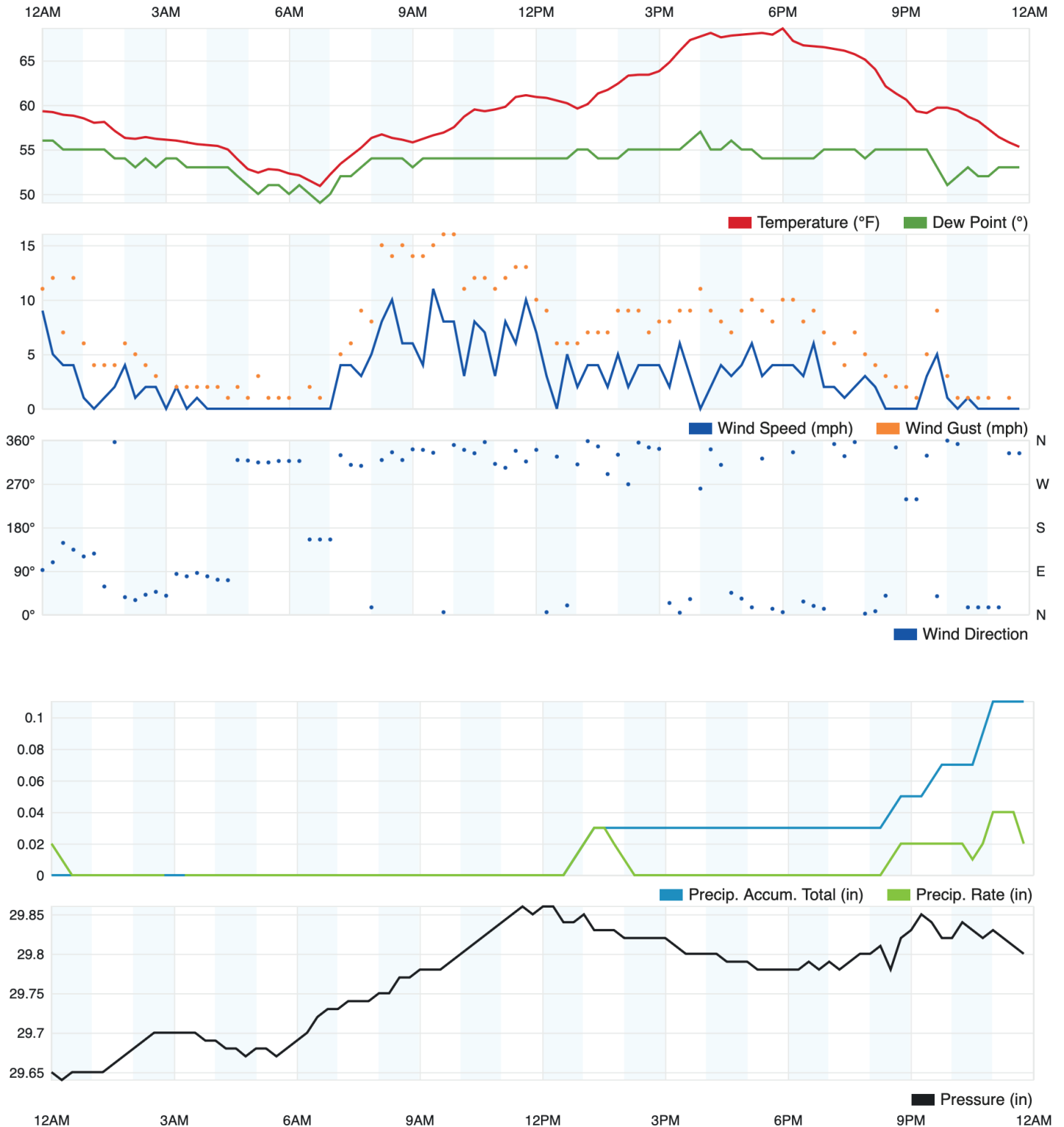
Oklahoma Republican Sen. James Lankford in March blocked Washington state Democratic Sen. Patty Murray from quickly passing a bill that would have expanded access to in vitro fertilization for military service members and veterans.

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

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 19 of 85

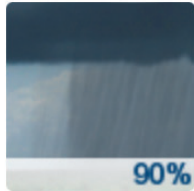
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 20 of 85

Tuesday



High: 56 °F

Showers and Breezy

Tuesday Night



Low: 44 °F

Chance Showers and Breezy then Partly Cloudy

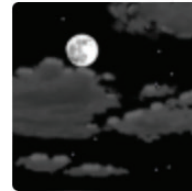
Wednesday



High: 70 °F

Sunny

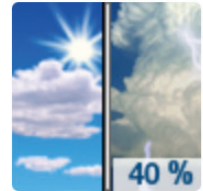
Wednesday Night



Low: 45 °F

Partly Cloudy

Thursday



High: 71 °F

Mostly Sunny then Chance T-storms



Windy Today Through This Evening

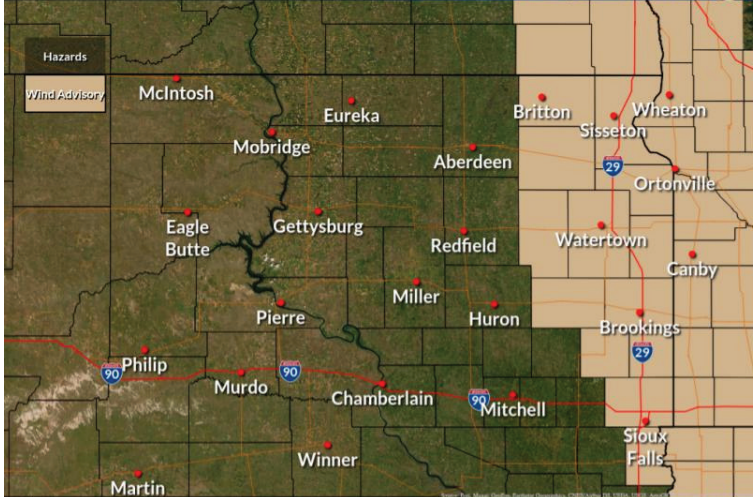
May 21, 2024
4:07 AM

Wind Advisory

11:00 AM-11:00 PM

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD

Issued May 21, 2024 2:57 AM CDT



Increasing northerly winds today. The highest gusts of 35-50 mph will occur along and east of the James River Valley



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

Maximum Wind Gust Forecast (mph)

	5/21 Tue						5/22 Wed			
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	Maximum
Aberdeen	24	32	36	37	35	24	20	20	20	37
Britton	26	35	43	46	45	36	26	22	22	46
Brookings	30	33	37	49	49	39	28	23	23	49
Chamberlain	29	36	33	29	22	14	14	16	15	36
Clark	30	37	41	45	43	35	24	21	21	45
Eagle Butte	22	29	32	32	30	20	16	16	17	32
Ellendale	24	31	37	38	37	29	23	22	21	38
Eureka	21	25	28	28	26	21	17	16	17	28
Gettysburg	21	26	28	28	25	18	15	17	17	28
Huron	32	38	39	43	36	23	17	18	18	43
Kennebec	28	32	33	35	30	18	17	18	17	35
McIntosh	18	24	32	32	31	23	17	15	17	32
Milbank	24	33	43	51	49	41	35	31	26	51
Miller	26	33	33	33	30	20	18	20	20	33
Mobridge	17	23	25	26	25	17	15	15	15	26
Murdo	26	31	33	35	28	18	20	20	20	35
Pierre	22	26	29	29	25	16	14	13	13	29
Redfield	25	35	37	37	33	22	17	18	17	37
Sisseton	24	33	44	49	49	41	35	31	29	49
Watertown	30	37	43	48	48	39	30	26	23	48
Webster	30	37	45	49	48	39	30	25	24	49
Wheaton	23	31	39	44	45	39	35	31	28	45

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

The system moving through today will increase winds out of the north with gusts ranging from 35 to 50 mph, with the highest wind gusts along and east of the James River Valley. A Wind Advisory has been issued for this area through tonight.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 21 of 85



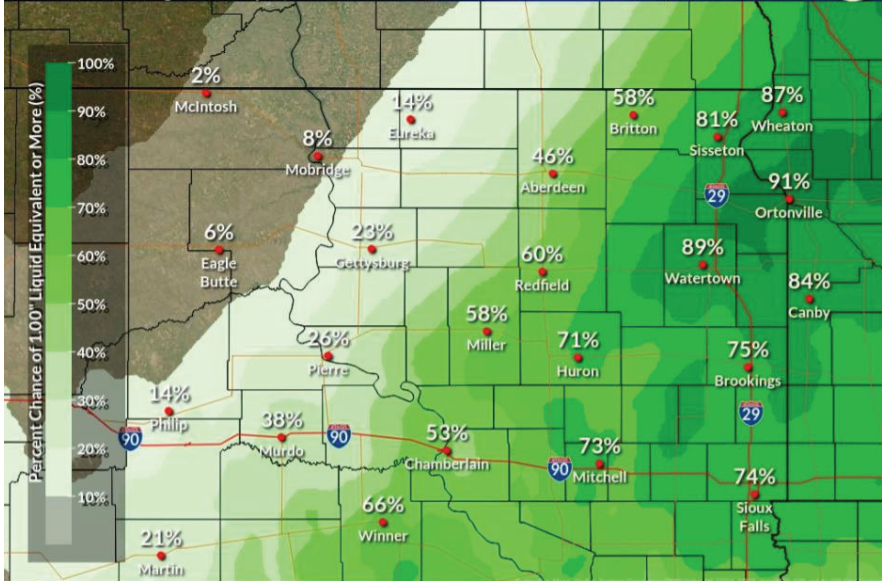
Moisture Timing Today Through The Evening

May 21, 2024
4:11 AM

Percent Chance of 1.00" of Rain or More

For the 24 hours ending on Wed May 22, 2024 at 1:00AM CDT

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued May 21, 2024 2:53 AM CDT



Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

	5/21 Tue							5/22 Wed
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	Maximum
Aberdeen	75	80	85	75	35	10	5	84
Britton	75	85	90	85	55	35	10	89
Brookings	95	100	60	65	40	10	0	98
Chamberlain	95	80	75	40	10	0	0	96
Clark	100	100	90	90	40	10	10	100
Eagle Butte	40	35	30	20	15	10	10	42
Ellendale	50	60	65	65	35	15	5	67
Eureka	35	40	35	25	15	10	5	39
Gettysburg	65	65	55	25	15	5	5	65
Huron	100	95	90	90	20	0	0	100
Kennebec	85	80	80	35	15	10	10	86
McIntosh	15	15	15	20	15	10	5	20
Milbank	100	100	90	75	60	45	15	100
Miller	95	95	90	60	15	5	5	96
Mobridge	35	35	25	20	15	5	5	35
Murdo	85	75	65	30	15	15	15	85
Pierre	75	65	65	25	15	10	5	77
Redfield	95	95	90	80	25	5	5	97
Sisseton	95	100	95	85	75	55	20	99
Watertown	100	100	90	80	50	25	10	100
Webster	100	100	95	85	55	30	10	98
Wheaton	95	100	95	90	85	75	20	98



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



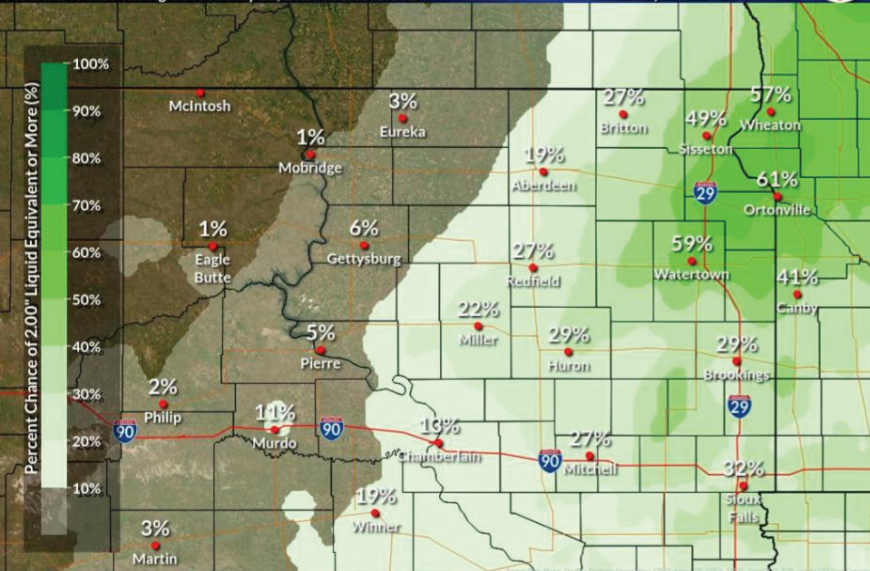
Probability of 2 Inches of Rain or More

May 21, 2024
4:17 AM

Percent Chance of 2.00" of Rain or More

For the 24 hours ending on Wed May 22, 2024 at 1:00AM CDT

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued May 21, 2024 2:54 AM CDT



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

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

- Greatest area that could see **2+ inches of rain**:
 - Roberts to Grant Counties and eastward into west central MN.



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 22 of 85

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 69 °F at 5:56 PM

Low Temp: 51 °F at 6:39 AM

Wind: 16 mph at 8:47 AM

Precip: : 0.11 through midnight

Day length: 15 hours, 12 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 94 in 1925

Record Low: 25 in 1895

Average High: 72

Average Low: 47

Average Precip in May.: 2.31

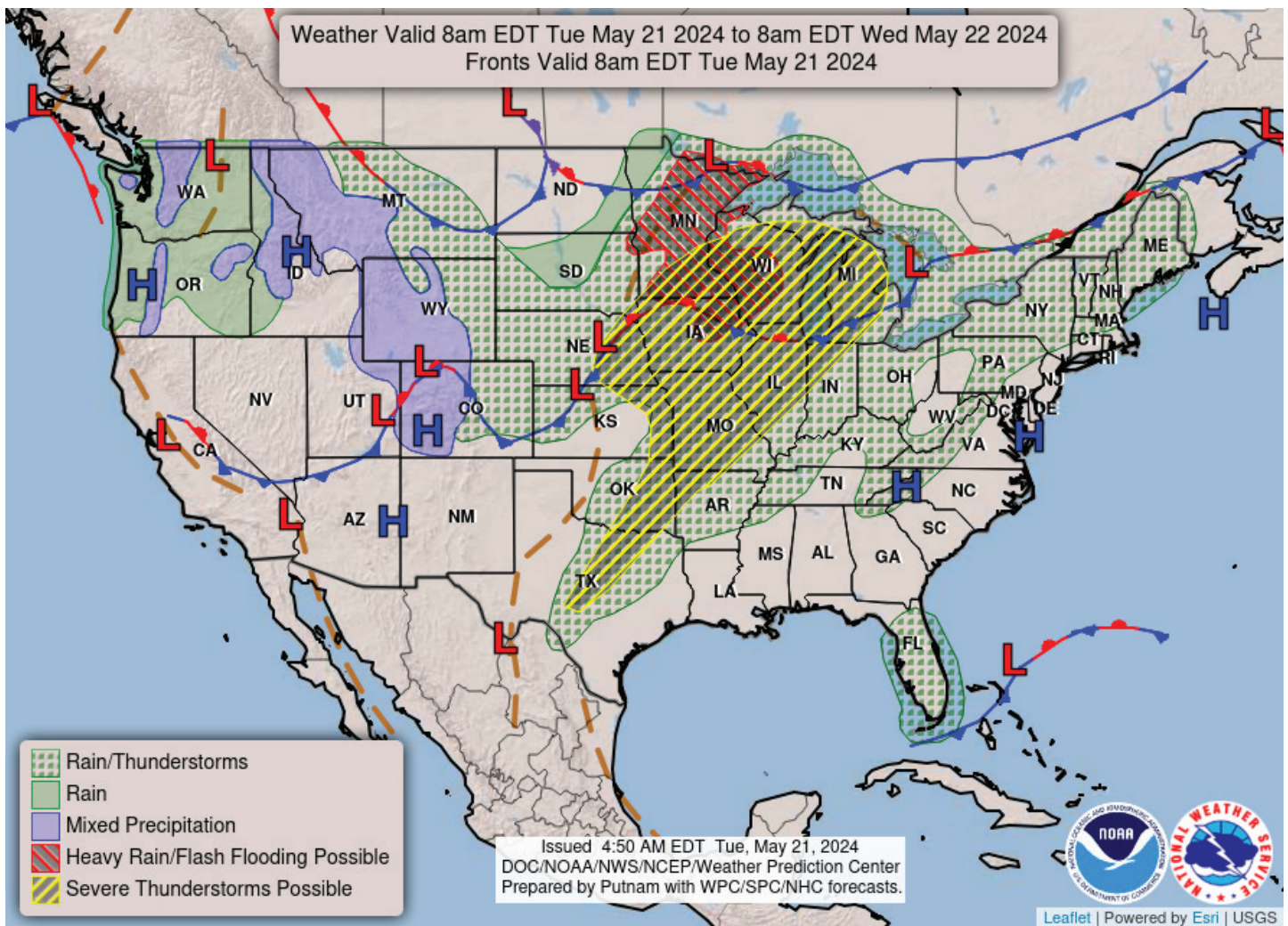
Precip to date in May: 1.27

Average Precip to date: 6.28

Precip Year to Date: 5.81

Sunset Tonight: 9:05:04 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:52:08 am



Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 23 of 85

Today in Weather History

May 21, 1977: Observers south of Clear Lake saw five tornadoes. One was five miles south of town moving northeast. Another was four miles south and one mile west of Clear Lake. Both destroyed trees and some small buildings. Three other tornadoes were sighted about two miles south of town. These touched down only momentarily with no damage occurring.

Two tornadoes were seen in southern Codrington County. One was seen at Grover, and the other was five miles south of Watertown. No damage was reported.

A tornado was on the ground in the vicinity of Revillo. A few barns and some outbuilding were damaged.

May 21, 1992: A severe thunderstorm moved over Northwestern Edmunds County causing high winds and penny size hail. In Bowdle, there was considerable wind damage. Tree limbs more than five inches in diameter were broken off and fell on a car. Other tree branches went through the roof of a home. Two pickup trucks were rolled on their side. Three miles ENE of Bowdle a garage was moved 20 feet off its foundation and was stopped by a large tractor.

1881: Clara Barton and a circle of close friends found the American Red Cross.

1860 - A swarm of tornadoes occurred in the Ohio Valley. Tornadoes struck the cities of Louisville, KY, Cincinnati, OH, Chillicothe, OH, and Marietta, OH, causing a million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1895 - The temperature at Norwalk, OH, dipped to 19 degrees to set a state record for the month of May. (The Weather Channel)

1896 - The mercury soared to 124 degrees at Salton, CA, to establish a U.S. record for May. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1949: A violent tornado crossed the Mississippi River from the St. Louis area into Wood River, then to Roxanna. This tornado damaged or destroyed 300 homes in these two towns, killing five people. Four people died in a destroyed restaurant in Palestine, Illinois; one body was recovered from a tree. A tornado causing estimated F4 damage killed five people and injured 55 in St. Louis and St. Charles counties in Missouri and Madison County in Illinois. This tornado was part of an outbreak that produced four different tornadoes and was responsible for five deaths and 57 injuries.

1980 - The temperature at Williston ND reached 102 degrees to set a record for May, and the next day the mercury hit 106 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Severe thunderstorms, developing along a sharp cold front crossing the central U.S., produced 60 mph winds and golf ball size hail at Sedalia, MO, and drenched Hagerstown, IN, with six inches of rain in one hour. Temperatures soared into the 90s ahead of the cold front. Paducah, KY, hit 94 degrees for the second day in a row. Light snow blanketed Montana, with three inches reported at Butte. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Severe thunderstorms swept across southern Louisiana during the morning hours spawning six tornadoes, and producing wind gusts to 88 mph at Jennings. Thunderstorms also produced five inches of rain in two hours at Lake Charles, causing local flooding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms moving southeastward across the Central Plains Region into Oklahoma and Arkansas produced severe weather through the day and night. Thunderstorms spawned just four tornadoes, but there were 243 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Baseball size hail was reported at Augusta, KS, and thunderstorm winds gusted to 98 mph at Johnson, KS. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1990 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather across the southeastern U.S. for the second day in a row. Severe thunderstorms spawned five tornadoes, including one which injured a person at Richmond KY. There were eighty-seven reports of large hail or damaging winds, with hail three inches in diameter reported at Austin TX. Thunderstorms produced up to five inches of rain in Macon County GA, and heavy rains left nearly eight feet of water over roads near Stepstone KY. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2001: Golfers participating in a golf tournament at the Majestic Golf Course in Hartland, Michigan received an urgent message on the G.P.S. on their carts. The message, relayed from the clubhouse, was that a tornado was bearing down on the course. Most of the golfers made it to safety in the clubhouse, although some had to take shelter on the course. Only one golfer suffered a minor injury. The F2 tornado damaged 70 cars in the parking lot along with numerous golf carts and a pontoon boat.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 24 of 85

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

"PASS IT ON"

Jascha Heifetz had a brilliant career as one of the world's greatest violinists. From his earliest concert at the age of nineteen and throughout his career as a violinist, his performances demonstrated his mastery of the violin. He never ceased to command respect, and this brought him the highest esteem of those who heard him play.

When his concert career ended, he was invited to become a professor of music at UCLA. Shortly after he accepted this position, a reporter conducting an interview with him asked, "Why did you change careers?"

He answered, "Violin playing is a perishable art. It must be passed on as a personal skill; otherwise, it will be lost."

Christian living is not a perishable art. It is a way of living that reflects "the way, the truth and the life" of Jesus Christ. And though it is not perishable, it must be passed on or the message of the Gospel will be lost, and people will not come to know Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord.

When we become Christians, God gives us a new vocation - not an avocation. An avocation is what we do to entertain ourselves to escape the trying demands of life.

The word vocation comes from the Latin word vocatio - a calling.

When we become new creations in Christ, we are called to a new profession: to pass on the Good News.

Prayer: Lord, may we realize, recognize, respect and accept our new calling in Christ and be faithful witnesses to always pass on Your salvation to others. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Jesus called out to them, "Come, follow me, and I will show you how to fish for people! Matthew 4:19



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

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 25 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





WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.17.24

8 17 40 60 70 3

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$421,000,000

NEXT 17 Hrs 10 Mins 52
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.20.24

13 15 24 26 27 3

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$2,550,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 25
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.20.24

12 15 19 20 47 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 40 Mins 53
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.18.24

5 7 11 15 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$108,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 40
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.20.24

5 38 39 41 69 25

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 9
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

05.20.24

1 7 48 64 68 5

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$100,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 9
DRAW: Mins 52 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Hometown of Laura Ingalls Wilder set for a growth spurt

By BART PFANKUCH, South Dakota News Watch undefined

DE SMET, S.D. (AP) — A rural South Dakota county known mainly as the former home of beloved author Laura Ingalls Wilder is on the precipice of rapid growth as two record-setting agricultural processing plants are proposed for the area.

If the planned projects — the state's largest individual dairy farm with up to 25,000 cows and a nearly \$1 billion biofuels plant — both come to fruition, Kingsbury County in east-central South Dakota could see a sudden surge in its population, economy and tax base.

So far, local officials and the state of South Dakota are rolling out the welcome mat for the two projects. They see an opportunity to create hundreds of jobs that would attract new residents, new spin-off businesses and new amenities to the rural county of fewer than 6,000 people over 832 square miles.

Joe Jensen, zoning director for Kingsbury County, said the two agriculture plants and a large hog farrowing facility that recently began operation in the area could bring economic opportunity to Kingsbury County and the cities of Lake Preston, Arlington and De Smet, the county seat.

"It will be a huge shot in the arm for our county," Jensen said.

State records show that the proposed \$190 million dairy, planned for a site 10 miles southwest of De Smet near the tiny town of Manchester, would create about 100 new full-time jobs.

The proposed Gevo Net-Zero 1 biofuels plant, eyed for a site two miles east of Lake Preston, would create 1,500 construction jobs and 460 permanent positions, including 90 in Lake Preston, along with generating up to \$250 million in annual economic activity, according to the company's website. Project leaders said it would be the largest single development project in South Dakota history.

Jensen said he expects that if both projects become operational, the county would see a jump of at least \$500 million and up to \$1 billion in its tax base, which could lead to development of new schools, better roads and overall improved infrastructure.

The new dairy could also drive growth in ancillary agricultural businesses, including trucking, feed grinding, and the growing and bailing of corn and alfalfa, Jensen said. Gevo, meanwhile, could bring new high-tech jobs and a stronger connection to cutting-edge agricultural research at South Dakota State University in nearby Brookings, he said.

"It will bring a lot of opportunity, especially for a county of only around 5,000 or 6,000 people," Jensen said. "The main streets in our small towns have struggled a little bit, so this will help a lot in bringing in more people and money, and it will be a big benefit to those small towns."

Opposition to the huge dairy, which received unanimous county commission approval in December, has so far been limited to concerns over water usage and whether local roads are able to handle increased truck traffic, according to county records reviewed by News Watch.

The addition of new workers has also brought to light the need to develop more housing in the county, an issue many communities in South Dakota struggle with, though the dairy operation is expected to provide on-site housing for some workers.

Jensen said there is widespread local support for the projects, and he hasn't heard any concerns that they could somehow negatively affect the existing tourism industry, largely centered on Ingalls Wilder, who grew up and lived in De Smet.

Nicknamed the "Little Town on the Prairie," De Smet offers covered wagon rides, building tours, a discovery center and an annual pageant dedicated to the memory of the author of "Little House on the Prairie" and other notable books.

"Absolutely, it will look and feel differently here," Jensen said. "But the population is extremely sparse where these projects will be located, so you can still go visit Laura Ingalls all you want and you won't see or smell any of it."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 28 of 85

The South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development has provided major financing help to the two projects through its Livestock Nutrient Management Bond program, state records show.

In May 2023, the South Dakota Economic Development Finance Authority within GOED approved a \$187 million bond to Gevo Net-Zero 1 for waste management at its proposed plant. That project, according to the company, would process locally grown corn into jet fuel on a 240-acre swath of farmland north of U.S. 14 a couple miles east of Lake Preston in central Kingsbury County.

In April, the same board approved a \$55 million bond to Minnesota-based agricultural firm Riverview LLP. The production agriculture company would use the bond funds to build infrastructure needed to handle animal wastes at the proposed dairy that would be built on the site of an existing cattle feedlot south of U.S. 14 about 10 miles west of De Smet.

GOED said in a release that the dairy would house 15,000 to 20,000 cows, but public records filed in Kingsbury County show that the dairy could be home to 25,000 milking cows. That would make it the largest single dairy operation in the state, Jensen said.

According to GOED documents obtained by News Watch through an open records request, the animal waste management bonding for the dairy will finance land acquisition costs and construction of concrete containment lagoons, manure disposal equipment and settling ponds.

The agricultural growth in Kingsbury County is being driven, officials said, by its location in the heart of the South Dakota corn belt, where corn prices are low. The county also has a flat east-west highway that connects to Interstate 29, and the county is in close proximity to cheese plants in Brookings, Lake Norden and Milbank that have undergone expansion.

Gov. Kristi Noem said in a news release that providing financial aid to the dairy is part of a strategy using agriculture as the center of efforts to enhance overall economic development.

"South Dakota's economy is thriving thanks to continued growth for the ag industry and for our small businesses," she said.

Officials with Riverview LLP, the company in Morris, Minnesota, that recently was in talks to buy land from Noem's brothers for a separate South Dakota dairy project, did not respond to numerous phone messages left by News Watch.

Gevo, based in Englewood, Colorado, has raised some uncertainty about whether the Lake Preston facility is viable. And despite a formal groundbreaking ceremony at the site in 2022, no construction has begun.

Officials with Gevo did not return an email from News Watch seeking comment. But recent reports have indicated that officials with the biofuels plant want construction of a carbon-dioxide pipeline through eastern South Dakota before building. Gevo officials also said recently, however, that the project could be buoyed by new biofuels tax credits being offered by the federal government.

Kingsbury County, and De Smet in particular, are prime locations for new industry in part because the area has long taken a progressive, welcoming approach to new businesses and new residents, said Jamie Lancaster, economic development director for the De Smet Development Corp.

Lancaster noted that city leaders have a history of encouraging development of light industry and new businesses, including creation of an industrial park in the 1960s, before it was common in small towns. That park has led to job creation by a wide range of businesses that include a window and door manufacturer, a seed company, a sign firm, a medical device manufacturer and a company that makes plastic parts used to build casino gaming machines used around the world.

Residents of De Smet also looked to the future in 2022 when they handily voted to approve bonding for a \$9 million elementary school now under construction.

Lancaster, who moved to De Smet from California, said he has noticed the community embracing the arrival of workers at the local industrial park, including some Hispanic immigrants. U.S. Census data show that 3.3% of Kingsbury County's population consisted of Hispanic or Latino residents in 2023.

Lancaster said the local grocery store, Maynard's Food Center, has added more spicy foods lately, including fresh Mexican chorizo sausage and a partial aisle dedicated to other staple Hispanic foods. The school system has also expanded its ability to teach students who speak English as a second language, he said.

"Here, when somebody moves in, they're your neighbor and you welcome them," he said.

Lancaster said the region is also well equipped to handle the health care needs of new and existing residents, with an Avera Health hospital and a Horizon Health Care clinic that includes dental services, both located in De Smet.

While investments of more than \$1 billion into the regional economy will surely ripple through the county, residents and Kingsbury County government leaders aren't expecting explosive or immediate growth, Lancaster said.

"It is a once-in-a-generation opportunity, but at the same time, we're trying not to get ahead of ourselves," he said. "We're taking things as they come to a certain degree because what sets us apart really comes down to the quality of life for the people who are going to work in the businesses."

Looking to the future, Lancaster said he expects that some parts of De Smet and Kingsbury County will surely look different. But he predicts that even if both the dairy and biofuels plant are developed, they won't overwhelm the community or reduce the rural charm that attracted him and his family to De Smet after an Ingalls Wilder vacation.

"Things will be somewhat different and everything changes with time, but I don't see it being drastically different, other than maybe more restaurants and more of the businesses that come along with more people," Lancaster said. "Other than that, I don't see a drastic change, and of course, Laura (Ingalls Wilder) will always be a big part of our community."

The Latest | France and Belgium support request for arrest warrants of Israel and Hamas leaders

By The Associated Press undefined

France and Belgium released statements supporting the world's top war crimes court and its chief prosecutor's request for arrest warrants for leaders of Israel and Hamas, after Israel and the United States both harshly condemned the effort.

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and three Hamas leaders — Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. While Netanyahu and Gallant do not face imminent arrest, the announcement Monday was a symbolic blow that deepened Israel's isolation over the war in Gaza.

Israeli forces raided a militant stronghold Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing at least seven and wounding several, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. The raid into Jenin is part of months of surging violence in the Palestinian territory.

Israel launched its offensive after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed about 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250.

At least 35,000 Palestinians have died in the war, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish between combatants and civilians. Around 80% of the population of 2.3 million Palestinians has been displaced within the territory, often multiple times.

Currently:

- Iran's president and foreign minister die in a helicopter crash.
- ICC prosecutor seeks arrest warrant for Israeli and Hamas leaders, including Netanyahu.
- These photos show Palestinians' quick exodus from Rafah after Israel issued evacuation orders.
- Israeli forces kill at least seven Palestinians in a West Bank raid.

Follow AP's coverage of the war in Gaza at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Here's the latest:

ISRAEL'S GALLANT SLAMS ICC PROSECUTOR'S REQUEST FOR ARREST WARRANTS

JERUSALEM — Israel's defense minister on Tuesday slammed the international court prosecutor's request for arrest warrants against himself and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as well as Hamas leaders.

Yoav Gallant said prosecutor Karim Khan created a parallel between the militant group and Israel, calling that "despicable and disgusting." He noted that Israel is not party to the International Criminal Court and

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 30 of 85

does not recognize its authority, and stressed that Israel has a right to defend itself.

"Prosecutor Karim Khan's attempt to deny the state of Israel the right to defend herself and ensure the release of the hostages held in Gaza, must be rejected explicitly," he said.

Khan accused Netanyahu, Gallant, and three Hamas leaders — Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of warcrimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. While Netanyahu and Gallant do not face imminent arrest, the announcement Monday was a symbolic blow that deepened Israel's isolation over the war in Gaza.

ISRAELI FORCES KILL 7 IN A RAID ON A WEST BANK MILITANT STRONGHOLD, PALESTINIAN HEALTH MINISTRY SAYS

JERUSALEM — Israeli forces raided a militant stronghold Tuesday in the occupied West Bank, killing at least seven and wounding several, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry.

The Israeli military said it struck militants during an operation into the city. In addition to the seven fatalities, the Palestinian Health Ministry said nine people were injured. Among those killed was Dr. Ossayed Kamal Jabareen, the surgery specialist at Jenin Governmental Hospital who was killed on his way to his work, according to Dr. Wissam Abu Baker, the hospital's director.

The raid was ongoing and the casualty numbers could rise.

The raid into Jenin is part of months of surging violence in the Palestinian territory. Nearly 500 Palestinians have been killed by Israeli fire in the West Bank since the start of the war in Gaza, part of an Israeli crackdown on militancy in the territory. Attacks by Palestinians against Israelis have also increased.

Saraya al-Quds, the military arm of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement, said its fighters battled Israeli forces raiding Jenin.

Israel has arrested more than 3,000 Palestinians since the start of the war.

FRANCE AND BELGIUM SUPPORT WAR CRIMES COURT'S REQUEST FOR ARREST WARRANTS

France and Belgium each released statements supporting the world's top war crimes court and its chief prosecutor's request for arrest warrants for leaders of Israel and Hamas.

International Criminal Court top prosecutor Karim Khan accused Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, and three Hamas leaders — Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel. While Netanyahu and Gallant do not face imminent arrest, the announcement Monday was a symbolic blow that deepened Israel's isolation over the war in Gaza.

"France supports the International Criminal Court, its independence, and the fight against impunity in all situations," its Foreign Ministry said in a statement late Monday, around the same time Belgium Minister of Foreign Affairs Hadja Lahbib posted on X, "Crimes committed in Gaza must be prosecuted at the highest level, regardless of the perpetrators," along with a statement.

Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders condemned the move as disgraceful and antisemitic. United States President Joe Biden also lambasted the prosecutor and supported Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas.

SRI LANKA DECLARES NATIONAL DAY OF MOURNING FOR IRANIAN PRESIDENT

COLOMBO, Sri Lanka — The Sri Lankan government declared Tuesday a national mourning day for the death of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. The government also ordered all state institutions to hoist the national flag at half-staff.

Raisi visited Sri Lanka in April to inaugurate a long-delayed hydropower and irrigation project. The project, valued at \$514 million, was started in 2010. It was scheduled for completion in 2015 but was delayed by the sanctions, technical issues and the COVID-19 pandemic.

Raisi was the first Iranian leader to visit Sri Lanka since then-President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad visited in 2008.

Germany's foreign minister visits Kyiv as Ukraine battles to hold off a Russian offensive

By SAMYA KULLAB and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Germany's foreign minister arrived in Kyiv on Tuesday in the latest public display of support for Ukraine by its Western partners, although deliveries of promised weapons and ammunition from NATO countries like Germany have been slow and have left Ukraine vulnerable to a recent Russian push along parts of the front line.

Annalena Baerbock renewed Berlin's calls for partners to send more air defense systems, as Russia pounds Ukraine with missiles, glide bombs and rockets. Germany is the second-biggest supplier of military aid to Ukraine after the United States.

Ukraine's depleted troops are trying to hold off a fierce Russian offensive along the eastern border in one of the most critical phases of the war, which is stretching into its third year.

Germany recently pledged a third U.S.-made Patriot battery for Ukraine, but Kyiv officials say they are still facing an alarming shortfall of air defenses against the Russian onslaught.

The Kremlin's forces have used their advantage in the skies to debilitate Ukraine's power grid, hoping to sap Ukrainian morale and disrupt its defense industry.

Baerbock, accompanied by Ukrainian Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko, toured a thermal power plant in central Ukraine that was heavily damaged on April 11. In the plant's scorched interior, workers of Centrenergo, a state company that operates the plant, were still scooping up rubble several weeks after it was hit.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said the Kremlin's forces are still focusing their efforts on the eastern Donetsk province and northeastern Kharkiv region, where explosive-laden Russian glide bombs are wreaking destruction on military and civilian areas.

"This brings us back again and again to the need for air defense — for additional defense systems that could significantly mitigate the difficulties for our warriors and the threat to our cities and communities," Zelenskyy said late Monday on social media.

Zelenskyy claimed Ukraine's forces are still in control of the contested areas, though Russia says it has captured a series of border villages.

It was not possible to independently verify either side's battlefield claims.

Baerbock had planned to visit Kharkiv on Tuesday but the trip had to be called off for security reasons, German news agency dpa reported. Almost 11,000 people have been evacuated from Kharkiv border areas since Russia launched its offensive actions there on May 10.

A Russian overnight drone attack hit transport infrastructure in Kharkiv city, the regional capital, damaging over 25 trucks, buses, and other vehicles, regional Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said Tuesday. Seven people were injured, he said.

Ukraine's general staff said the frequency of Russian attacks in Kharkiv slowed on Monday, though fighting continued.

Russian troops are also conducting reconnaissance and sabotage raids in Ukraine's northern Sumy and Chernihiv regions, shelling border settlements and laying more minefields, according to Dmytro Lykhovii, Ukraine's general staff spokesman. The front line is some 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) long.

Baerbock was due to meet with Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba in Kyiv. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has been resisting appeals from Ukrainian officials to provide Taurus missiles, which are equipped with stealth technology and have a range of up to 500 kilometers (300 miles).

The German- and Swedish-made missiles would be able to reach targets deep in Russia from Ukrainian soil. But Berlin has balked at that prospect, saying that sending the missiles would bring a risk of it becoming directly involved in the war.

The restriction on not allowing Ukraine to fire at Russia has denied Kyiv the ability to strike at Russian troops and equipment massing for attacks on the other side of the border, a Washington-based think tank said.

"These U.S. and Western policies are severely compromising Ukraine's ability to defend itself against current Russian offensive operations in northern Kharkiv (region) or any area along the international border where Russian forces may choose to conduct offensive operations in the future," the Institute for the Study of War said in an assessment late Monday.

Baerbock said in a statement that Ukraine's prospective membership of the European Union is "the necessary geopolitical consequence of Russia's illegal war of aggression."

Ukraine has made "impressive progress" and must not let up in reforms to the judicial system, in fighting corruption and on media freedom, she said.

Germany will host a reconstruction conference for Ukraine next month. Rebuilding the country is predicted to cost hundreds of billions of dollars.

Over 1 million claims related to toxic exposure granted under new veterans law, Biden will announce

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden, intent on selling his legislative accomplishments this election year, will travel to New Hampshire on Tuesday to detail the impact of a law that helps veterans get key benefits as a result of burn pit or other toxic exposure during their service.

In raw numbers, more than 1 million claims have been granted to veterans since Biden signed the so-called PACT Act into law in August 2022, the administration said Tuesday. That amounts to about 888,000 veterans and survivors in all 50 states who have been able to receive disability benefits under the law.

That totals about \$5.7 billion in benefits given to veterans and their survivors, according to the administration.

"The president, I think, has believed now for too long, too many veterans who got sick serving and fighting for our country had to fight the VA for their care, too," Veterans Affairs Secretary Denis McDonough told reporters on Monday.

The PACT Act is relatively lower profile compared to the president's other legislative accomplishments — such as a bipartisan infrastructure law and a sweeping tax, climate and health care package — but it is one that is deeply personal for Biden.

He has blamed burn pits for the brain cancer that killed his son Beau, who served in Iraq, and vowed repeatedly that he would get the PACT Act into law. Burn pits are where chemicals, tires, plastics, medical equipment and human waste were disposed of on military bases and were used in Iraq and Afghanistan.

But before the PACT Act became law, the Department of Veterans Affairs denied 70% of disability claims that involved burn pit exposure. Now, the law requires the VA to assume that certain respiratory illnesses and cancers were related to burn pit or other toxic exposure without the veterans having to prove the link.

Defense witness who angered judge in Trump's hush money trial will return to the stand

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ, JENNIFER PELTZ and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A defense witness in Donald Trump's hush money case whom the judge threatened to remove from the trial over his behavior will return to the stand Tuesday as the trial nears its end.

Trump's lawyers are hoping Robert Costello's testimony will help undermine the credibility of a key prosecution witness, Trump fixer-turned-foe Michael Cohen.

But Costello angered Judge Juan Merchan on Monday by making comments under his breath, rolling his eyes and calling the whole exercise "ridiculous," prompting the judge to briefly kick reporters out of the courtroom to admonish him.

The judge told Costello, a former federal prosecutor, he was being "contemptuous," adding, "If you try to stare me down one more time, I will remove you from the stand," according to a court transcript.

Costello didn't immediately respond to a request for comment Monday from The Associated Press.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 33 of 85

The chaotic scene unfolded after prosecutors rested their case accusing Trump of falsifying business records as part of a scheme to bury stories that he feared could hurt his 2016 campaign. The case is in the final stretch, with closing arguments expected the Tuesday after Memorial Day.

The charges stem from internal Trump Organization records where payments to Cohen were marked as legal expenses. Prosecutors say they were really reimbursements for a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels to keep her from going public before the 2016 election with claims of a sexual encounter with Trump. Trump says nothing sexual happened between them.

Trump has said he did nothing illegal and has slammed the case as an effort to hinder his 2024 bid to reclaim the White House. Trump called the judge a "tyrant" in remarks to reporters while leaving the courthouse Monday and called the trial a "disaster" for the country.

After jurors left for the day Monday, defense attorneys pressed the judge to throw out the charges before jurors even begin deliberating, arguing prosecutors have failed to prove their case. The defense has suggested that Trump was trying to protect his family, not his campaign, by squelching what he says were false, scurrilous claims.

Defense attorney Todd Blanche argued that there was nothing illegal about soliciting a tabloid's help to run positive stories about Trump, run negative stories about his opponents and identify potentially damaging stories before they were published. No one involved "had any criminal intent," Blanche said.

"How is keeping a false story from the voters criminal?" Blanche asked.

Prosecutor Matthew Colangelo shot back that "the trial evidence overwhelmingly supports each element" of the alleged offenses, and the case should proceed to the jury.

The judge didn't immediately rule on the defense's request. Such long-shot requests are often made in criminal cases but are rarely granted.

The defense called Costello because of his role as an antagonist to Cohen since their professional relationship splintered in spectacular fashion. Costello had offered to represent Cohen soon after the lawyer's hotel room, office and home were raided and as Cohen faced a decision about whether to remain defiant in the face of a criminal investigation or to cooperate with authorities in hopes of securing more lenient treatment.

Costello in the years since has repeatedly maligned Cohen's credibility and was even a witness before last year's grand jury that indicted Trump, offering testimony designed to undermine Cohen's account. In a Fox News Channel interview last week, Costello accused Cohen of lying to the jury and using the case to "monetize" himself.

Costello contradicted Cohen's testimony describing Trump as intimately involved in all aspects of the hush money scheme. Costello told jurors Monday that Cohen told him Trump "knew nothing" about the hush money payment to Daniels.

"Michael Cohen said numerous times that President Trump knew nothing about those payments, that he did this on his own, and he repeated that numerous times," Costello testified.

Cohen, however, testified earlier Monday that he has "no doubt" that Trump gave him a final sign-off to make the payments to Daniels. In total, he said he spoke with Trump more than 20 times about the matter in October 2016.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove told the judge that the defense does not plan to call any other witnesses after Costello, though they may still call campaign-finance expert Bradley A. Smith for limited testimony. They have not said definitively that Trump won't testify, but that's the clearest indication yet that he will waive his right to take the stand in his own defense.

Tuesday's primaries include presidential races and the prosecutor in Trump's Georgia election case

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

The presidential primaries that Joe Biden and Donald Trump have already clinched will move closer to their end Tuesday.

Voters in two states, Kentucky and Oregon, will get their chance to weigh in, symbolic decisions that provide a few more delegates to the national conventions and a gut check on where the Democratic and Republican bases stand toward their standard-bearers.

Even after they secured the nominations and their rivals dropped out, Biden and Trump have continued facing dissent from within their own parties. Biden has faced protest votes over his handling of the Israel-Hamas war while Trump is still seeing thousands of people voting for long-vanquished rival Nikki Haley.

After Tuesday, eight presidential nominating contests will remain: Democrats in Idaho, the District of Columbia, Guam and the Virgin Islands, and both parties in Montana, New Jersey, New Mexico and South Dakota.

Voters in Kentucky, Oregon, Georgia and Idaho will also hold state primaries Tuesday to choose nominees for the U.S. House and other contests. And in California's Central Valley, voters will select a Republican to replace former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy. Republicans Vince Fong and Mike Boudreaux face off in the special runoff election to finish McCarthy's term, and will have a rematch in November for the next full two-year term.

In Georgia, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who is leading the prosecution of Trump in a 2020 election interference case, faces challenger Christian Wise Smith in the Democratic primary. Smith is an attorney and author who ran against Willis four years ago.

The judge in the case is also up for reelection. Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee faces Robert Patillo, an attorney and radio host, in the nonpartisan race. McAfee is a former prosecutor who was appointed by Republican Gov. Brian Kemp in 2022.

Oregon's 5th Congressional District is home to one of the top Democratic primaries in the country, pitting Jamie McLeod-Skinner, a progressive candidate who ousted a moderate Democratic incumbent two years ago, against Janelle Bynum, a state lawmaker who some top Democrats believe is a stronger candidate. The winner faces first-term Republican Rep. Lori Chavez-DeRemer in the general election, a race both parties are emphasizing.

In the Portland-based 3rd Congressional District, Democrats will pick a nominee to replace retiring Rep. Earl Blumenauer in a safe Democratic seat. The candidates include Susheela Jayapal, the sister of progressive champion U.S. Rep. Pramila Jayapal. Susheela Jayapal faces two other well-funded Democratic challengers, state Rep. Maxine Dexter and Gresham City Councilor Eddy Morales.

Australia and New Zealand begin evacuating nationals from unrest in New Caledonia

By KEIRAN SMITH Associated Press

NEWCASTLE, Australia (AP) — Australia and New Zealand sent airplanes to New Caledonia on Tuesday to begin bringing home stranded citizens from the violence-wracked French South Pacific territory.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong said Australia had received clearance from French authorities for two flights to evacuate citizens from the archipelago, where indigenous people have long sought independence from France.

Hours later, a Royal Australian Air Force C-130 Hercules touched down in Noumea, the capital. The plane can carry 124 passengers, according to the Defense Department.

"We continue to work on further flights," Wong wrote on the social media platform X on Tuesday.

The Department of Foreign Affairs said 300 Australians were in New Caledonia. It did not immediately confirm whether the Australian-organized flights would also evacuate other stranded foreign nationals,

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 35 of 85

believed to number in the thousands.

New Zealand's government also announced that it had sent a plane to New Caledonia to begin evacuating about 50 of its citizens.

"New Zealanders in New Caledonia have faced a challenging few days — and bringing them home has been an urgent priority for the government," Foreign Affairs Minister Winston Peters said. "In cooperation with France and Australia, we are working on subsequent flights in coming days."

Noumea's international airport remains closed to commercial flights. Its reopening will be reassessed on Thursday.

At least six people have died and hundreds more have been injured since violence erupted last week in New Caledonia following controversial electoral reforms passed in Paris.

About 270 suspected rioters have been arrested as of Tuesday, and a 6 p.m.-6 a.m. curfew is in effect for the archipelago of about 270,000 people, which is a popular tourist destination with its idyllic beaches and climate.

France has sent in over a thousand security personnel, with hundreds more due to arrive Tuesday, to try to quell the unrest and restore control.

Armed clashes, looting, arson and other violence turned parts of Noumea into no-go zones. Columns of smoke billowed into the sky, hulks of burned cars littered roads, businesses and shops were ransacked and buildings became smoking ruins.

There have been decades of tensions between indigenous Kanaks who are seeking independence and descendants of colonizers who want to remain part of France.

The unrest erupted May 13 as the French legislature in Paris debated amending the French Constitution to make changes to New Caledonia voter lists. The National Assembly in Paris approved a bill that would, among other changes, allow residents who have lived in New Caledonia for 10 years to cast ballots in provincial elections.

Opponents fear the measure will benefit pro-France politicians in New Caledonia and further marginalize Kanaks who once suffered from strict segregation policies and widespread discrimination.

Israeli forces kill at least 7 Palestinians in a West Bank raid

By MAJDI MOHAMMED Associated Press

JENIN REFUGEE CAMP, West Bank (AP) — Israeli forces raided a militant stronghold in the occupied West Bank on Tuesday, killing at least seven Palestinians, including a doctor, according to local authorities, in some of the deadliest violence in the territory since the war in the Gaza Strip erupted seven months ago.

The military said its forces struck militants during the operation, which took place in the Jenin refugee camp adjacent to the city of Jenin in the northern West Bank, both of which have long been a bastion of armed struggle against Israel. The Palestinian Health Ministry said at least seven Palestinians were killed and another nine wounded. Their identities were not immediately known.

The Palestinian Islamic Jihad militant group said its fighters battled the Israeli forces.

However, according to Wissam Abu Baker, the director of Jenin Governmental Hospital, the medical center's surgery specialist Ossayed Kamal Jabareen was among the dead. He was killed on his way to work, Abu Baker said.

Jenin and the refugee camp, seen as a hotbed of militancy, have been frequent targets of Israeli raids, long before Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza broke out following the militant group's deadly attack on Israel on Oct. 7.

Since the start of the war, nearly 500 Palestinians have been killed in the West Bank fighting, many of them militants, as well as others throwing stones or explosives at troops. Others not involved in the confrontations have also been killed.

Violence between Jewish West Bank settlers and Palestinians has also increased.

Israel says it is cracking down on soaring militancy in the territory, pointing to a spike in attacks by

Palestinians on Israelis. It has arrested more than 3,000 Palestinians since the start of the war in Gaza.

Israel captured the West Bank in the 1967 Mideast war, along with east Jerusalem, which it later annexed, and the Gaza Strip, which it withdrew troops and settlers from in 2005. The Palestinians seek those territories as part of their future independent state, hopes for which have been dimmed since the war in Gaza erupted.

World leaders plan new agreement on AI at virtual summit co-hosted by South Korea, UK

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — World leaders are expected to adopt a new agreement on artificial intelligence when they gather virtually Tuesday to discuss AI's potential risks but also ways to promote its benefits and innovation.

The AI Seoul Summit is a follow-up to November's inaugural AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in the United Kingdom, where participating countries agreed to work together to contain the potentially "catastrophic" risks posed by galloping advances in AI.

The two-day meeting -- co-hosted by the South Korean and U.K. governments -- also comes as major tech companies like Meta, OpenAI and Google roll out the latest versions of their AI models.

On Tuesday evening, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak are to meet other world leaders, industry leaders and heads of international organizations for a virtual conference. The online summit will be followed by an in-person meeting of digital ministers, experts and others on Wednesday, according to organizers.

"It is just six months since world leaders met at Bletchley, but even in this short space of time, the landscape of AI has changed dramatically," Yoon and Sunak said in a joint article published in South Korea's JoongAng Ilbo newspaper and the U.K.'s online inews site on Monday. "The pace of change will only continue to accelerate, so our work must accelerate too."

While the U.K. meeting centered on AI safety issues, the agenda for this week's gathering was expanded to also include "innovation and inclusivity," Wang Yun-jong, a deputy director of national security in South Korea, told reporters Monday.

Wang said participants will subsequently "discuss not only the risks posed by AI but also its positive aspects and how it can contribute to humanity in a balanced manner."

The AI agreement will include the outcomes of discussions on safety, innovation and inclusivity, according to Park Sang-wook, senior presidential adviser for science and technology for President Yoon.

The leaders of the Group of Seven wealthy democracies -- the U.S., Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan and Britain -- were invited to the virtual summit, along with leaders of Australia and Singapore and representatives from the U.N., the EU, OpenAI, Google, Meta, Amazon and Samsung, according to South Korea's presidential office.

China doesn't plan to participate in the virtual summit though it will send a representative to Wednesday's in-person meeting, the South Korean presidential office said. China took part in the U.K. summit.

In their article, Yoon and Sunak said they plan to ask companies to do more to show how they assess and respond to risks within their organizations.

"We know that, as with any new technology, AI brings new risks, including deliberate misuse from those who mean to do us harm," they said. "However, with new models being released almost every week, we are still learning where these risks may emerge, and the best ways to manage them proportionately."

The Seoul meeting has been billed as a mini virtual summit, serving as an interim meeting until a full-fledged in-person edition that France has pledged to hold.

Governments around the world have been scrambling to formulate regulations for AI even as the technology makes rapid advances and is poised to transform many aspects of daily life, from education and the workplace to copyrights and privacy. There are concerns that advances in AI could take away jobs, trick people and spread disinformation.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 37 of 85

Developers of the most powerful AI systems are also banding together to set their own shared approach to setting AI safety standards. Facebook parent company Meta Platforms and Amazon announced Monday they're joining the Frontier Model Forum, a group founded last year by Anthropic, Google, Microsoft and OpenAI.

In March, the U.N. General Assembly approved its first resolution on the safe use of AI systems. Earlier in May, the U.S. and China held their first high-level talks on artificial intelligence in Geneva to discuss how to address the risks of the fast-evolving technology and set shared standards to manage it.

Climbing limits are being set on Mount Fuji to fight crowds and littering

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Those who want to climb one of the most popular trails on Japan's iconic Mount Fuji will have to book a slot and pay a fee as crowds, littering and climbers who try to rush too fast to the summit cause safety and conservation concerns at the picturesque stratovolcano.

The new rules for the climbing season, starting July 1 to Sept. 10, apply for those hiking the Yoshida Trail on the Yamanashi side of the 3,776 meter- (nearly 12,300 feet-) high mountain that was designated a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site in 2013.

Only 4,000 climbers will be allowed to enter the trail per day for a hiking fee of 2,000 yen (about \$18). Of those slots, 3,000 will be available for online booking and the remaining 1,000 can be booked in person on the day of the climb, Yamanashi prefecture said in a statement via the Foreign Press Center of Japan on Monday. Hikers also have an option of donating an additional 1,000 yen (about \$9) for conservation.

Climbers can book their slots via the Mount Fuji Climbing website, which is jointly run by the Environment Ministry and the mountain's two home prefectures, Yamanashi and Shizuoka.

Mount Fuji is divided into 10 stations, and there are four "5th stations" halfway up the mountain from where the Yoshida, Fujinomiya, Subashiri, and Gotemba trails start to the top.

Under the new system, climbers must choose between a day hike or an overnight stay at the several available huts along the trail. The day of their climb, they are given a QR code to be scanned at the 5th station. Those who have not booked an overnight hut will be sent back down and not allowed to climb between 4 p.m. and 3 a.m., mainly to stop "bullet climbing," or rushing to the summit without adequate rest, which authorities are worried puts lives at risk.

A symbol of Japan, the mountain called "Fujisan" used to be a place of pilgrimage. Today, it especially attracts hikers who climb to the summit to see the sunrise. But the tons of trash that's left behind, including plastic bottles, food and even clothes, have become a major concern.

In a statement, Yamanashi Gov. Kotaro Nagasaki thanked people for their understanding and cooperation in helping conserve Mount Fuji.

Shizuoka prefecture, southwest of Mount Fuji, where climbers can also access the mountain, has sought a voluntary 1,000-yen (\$6.40) fee per climber since 2014 and is considering additional ways to balance tourism and environmental protection.

The number of Mount Fuji climbers during the season in 2023 totaled 221,322, according to the Environment Ministry. That is close to the pre-pandemic level and officials expect more visitors this year.

Just a few weeks ago, a town in Shizuoka began setting up a huge black screen on a sidewalk to block a view of Mount Fuji because tourists were crowding into the area to take photos with the mountain as a backdrop to a convenience store, a social media phenomenon known as "Mount Fuji Lawson" that has disrupted business, traffic and local life.

Overtourism has also become a growing issue at other popular tourist destinations such as Kyoto and Kamakura as foreign visitors have flocked to Japan in droves since the coronavirus pandemic restrictions were lifted, in part due to the weaker yen.

Last year, Japan had more than 25 million visitors, and the figures in 2024 are expected to surpass nearly 32 million, a record from 2019, according to the Japan National Tourism Organization.

Former Arizona GOP chair Kelli Ward and others set to be arraigned in fake elector case

PHOENIX (AP) — Former Arizona Republican Party chair Kelli Ward and at least 11 other people are set to be arraigned in a Phoenix courtroom on conspiracy, forgery and fraud charges stemming from their roles in an effort to overturn Donald Trump's 2020 election loss in Arizona to Joe Biden.

Former New York Mayor Rudy Giuliani also is scheduled to be arraigned Tuesday, though it's unclear whether he'll seek a postponement. Arizona authorities tried unsuccessfully over several weeks to serve Giuliani notice of the indictment against him. Giuliani was finally served Friday night as he was walking to a car after his 80th birthday celebration.

Arizona authorities unveiled the felony charges last month against Republicans who submitted a document to Congress falsely declaring Trump, a Republican, had won Arizona. The defendants include five lawyers connected to the former president and two former Trump aides. Biden, a Democrat, won Arizona by more than 10,000 votes.

The indictment alleges Ward, a former state senator who led the GOP in Arizona from 2019 until early 2023, organized the fake electors and urged then-Vice President Mike Pence to declare them to be the state's true electors. It says Ward failed to withdraw her vote as a fake elector even though no legal challenges changed the outcome of the presidential race in Arizona.

Last week, attorney John Eastman, who devised a strategy to try to persuade Congress not to certify the election, was the first defendant in the case to be arraigned, pleading not guilty to the charges.

Trump himself was not charged in the Arizona case but was referred to as an unindicted co-conspirator. Arizona is the fourth state where allies of the former president have been charged with using false or unproven claims about voter fraud related to the election.

The 11 people who claimed to be Arizona's Republican electors met in Phoenix on Dec. 14, 2020, to sign a certificate saying they were "duly elected and qualified" electors and asserting that Trump carried the state. A one-minute video of the signing ceremony was posted on social media by the Arizona Republican Party at the time. The document was later sent to Congress and the National Archives, where it was ignored.

Of eight lawsuits that unsuccessfully challenged Biden's victory in the state, one was filed by the 11 fake Arizona electors, who had asked a federal judge to decertify the results and block the state from sending its results to the Electoral College. In dismissing the case, the judge concluded the Republicans had "failed to provide the court with factual support for their extraordinary claims." Days after that lawsuit was dismissed, the 11 participated in the certificate signing.

Those set to be arraigned Tuesday are Ward; Tyler Bowyer, an executive of the conservative youth organization Turning Point USA; state Sen. Anthony Kern; Greg Safsten, a former executive director of the Arizona Republican Party; Robert Montgomery, a former chairman of the Cochise County Republican Committee; Samuel Moorhead, a Republican precinct committee member in Gila County; Nancy Cottle, who in 2020 was the first vice president of the Arizona Federation of Republican Women; Loraine Pellegrino, past president of the Ahwatukee Republican Women; Michael Ward, an osteopathic physician who is married to Ward; attorneys Jenna Ellis and Christina Bobb; and Michael Roman, who was Trump's 2020 director of Election Day operations.

Arraignments are scheduled for June 6 for state Sen. Jake Hoffman; on June 7 for former Trump chief of staff Mark Meadows; and on June 18 for Trump attorney Boris Epshteyn and for James Lamon, another Republican who claimed Trump carried the state.

More companies offer on-site child care. Parents love the convenience, but is it a long-term fix?

By JACKIE VALLEY of The Christian Science Monitor undefined

LAS VEGAS (AP) — They operate in places like an airport, a resort, and a distribution center, tucked away from the public eye but close enough for easy access. They often emit laughter — and the sound

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 39 of 85

of tumbling blocks, bouncing balls, and meandering tricycles.

They're child care centers based at workplaces. And in the fraught American child care landscape, they are popping up more frequently.

Skyrocketing child care costs and staffing shortages have complicated arrangements for working parents. Some have left jobs after struggling to find quality care. Employers, in turn, view their entry into the child care realm as both a competitive advantage and a workplace morale booster.

"In the absence of government intervention and investment, a lot of businesses have been stepping up to make sure that their employees can access affordable child care," says Samantha Melvin, an assistant research professor at the Erikson Institute, an independent graduate school for early childhood education.

This series on how the child care crisis affects working parents — with a focus on solutions — is produced by the Education Reporting Collaborative, a coalition of eight newsrooms, including The Hechinger Report, AL.com, The Associated Press, The Christian Science Monitor, The Dallas Morning News, Idaho Education News, The Post & Courier, and The Seattle Times.

Parents benefiting from child care at their work sites praise its convenience and affordability.

Frances Ortiz, who works in accounting at The Venetian Resort Las Vegas, can't imagine a better option. She says her 3-year-old daughter has gained independence and language skills — with mom not far away — at the property's on-site child care center for employees.

"She runs in here," Ortiz says. "She grabs my badge. She has to open the door for herself."

In September, the Pittsburgh International Airport added an on-site child care. The center serves children of Allegheny County Airport Authority employees as well as those of select airport workers, such as food and beverage workers, ground handlers, and wheelchair attendants.

Airport officials say the idea stemmed from wanting to bring more women and people of color into the aviation workforce. Plus, the airport sits 17 miles (27 kilometers) outside of downtown Pittsburgh, making child care logistics challenging for employees. So far, it's operating at about half capacity.

"It's certainly an important proof point to our team that we mean it when we say that we're invested in them and in what they need," says Christina Cassotis, CEO of the Allegheny County Airport Authority, which operates the airport.

Child care costs can eclipse rent or mortgages, if parents can access care in the first place. Many find themselves on waitlists.

Experts caution against an overreliance on businesses filling the void. Philip Fisher, director of the Stanford Center on Early Childhood, says doing so could undercut efforts to recognize child care as a public good.

"There's a lot of well-intentioned people who are thinking this is a really good idea, and for those who would benefit from it, it could be," he says. "Again, there are lots of downsides even in the short term."

One of those potential pitfalls, he says, is instability if a parent suddenly loses their job and then has to find new child care and a new job.

The assistance offered by public and private employers runs the gamut. Some run their own centers. Others outsource the operations and management.

The financial arrangements also differ. Many companies and organizations don't disclose the exact discounts offered to employees.

Walmart, for instance, recently opened an on-site child care center at its massive Bentonville, Arkansas, campus. The Little Squiggles Children's Enrichment Center charges a monthly rate of \$1,117 to \$1,258, based on the child's age, which company officials tell the Monitor in an email is "at market rate or below regional levels for comparable care."

Another method gaining steam: employers providing subsidies for families to use toward child care options within their own communities.

KinderCare, a large child care operator with locations nationally, partners with more than 600 businesses and organizations to provide employee-sponsored child care, up from 400 in 2019, says Dan Figurski, presi-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 40 of 85

dent of KinderCare for Employers and Champions. Those employers represent the technology, medical, banking, academic, and public service industries, among others.

In Nevada, The Venetian Resort's child care center, run by KinderCare, sits in a back-of-house hallway steps away from the Las Vegas Boulevard.

All employees can enroll their children, as long as space allows, at a cost that's generally 35% to 40% lower than KinderCare's normal rate, says Matt Krystofiak, the Venetian's chief human resources officer. The company also offers subsidies for employees who want to enroll their children in an off-site KinderCare closer to their homes.

"We're doing this because this is what our team members want," Krystofiak says. "This is what our team members need."

Some businesses view investments in child care as a reflection of their company culture.

Patagonia's foray into child care began in 1983 when some of the company's original employees started having children. As the clothing retailer grew, so did its child care footprint. Nowadays, it operates three child care centers — two in southern California and one in Reno, Nevada — serving roughly 200 children.

The company charges employees in each location what leaders describe as an "average market rate." Subsidies are available based on household income, says Sheryl Shushan, Patagonia's director of global family services. The child care teachers are employed by Patagonia, so they receive corporate benefits as well.

At the outdoor classroom at Patagonia's distribution center in Reno, children spend hours digging in sand, riding bikes, playing with water, or climbing natural and human-made objects. Patagonia leaders say the benefits on their end are stronger employee retention, a can-do spirit in the workplace, and a greater sense of community.

For Alyssa Oldham, a classroom manager in Reno, the job and child care benefit meant rethinking her family size. She and her husband originally envisioned being a one-child family, given child care costs.

Now she comes to work with her 4-year-old son and 1-year-old daughter.

"Working here, I was like, 'We could have another child,'" she says.

Indian voters dissect Modi's politics while traversing the country by train

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

ABOARD THE THIRUKKURAL EXPRESS, India (AP) — The 1,800-mile (2,900-kilometer) journey south from New Delhi to Kanyakumari is one of the longest train rides in India, passing through cities, villages, scrub forests and deep ravines.

The 22-car Thirukkural Express is a microcosm of India, carrying passengers from different castes and religions and with wide-ranging ambitions and grievances — from migrants crammed into sweltering no-frills cars to well-heeled families luxuriating in air-conditioned sleeper cabins, and everyone in between.

Passengers can also be divided by their politics, a topic that is top of mind with a consequential election underway. The ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is likely to win and reappoint Prime Minister Narendra Modi — the leader for the past decade — for another five years.

India's economy has grown rapidly under Modi, but the strong-arm tactics he has deployed to push his Hindu-nationalist agenda has sharpened religious divisions in the country of 1.4 billion people — roughly 200 million of whom are Muslim — and raised fears of a slide from secular democracy toward religious autocracy.

The Associated Press recently made the 48-hour train journey to interview Indian voters about the election, whose results will be announced on June 4. Below are some highlights:

THE GENERAL CLASS

Many passengers who bought the cheapest tickets available are domestic migrants. Sitting on steel benches, standing in doorways, or lying on the floor, they traveled between the thriving capital and vil-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 41 of 85

lages in the countryside, or to other cities, in search of work.

Pardeep Kumar, a bespectacled man who runs a food stall in New Delhi, said the ruling Modi government isn't doing enough for the poor.

Like millions of Indians scraping by in the informal economy, Kumar has felt the sting of rising food prices. He appreciates the 5 kilograms (11 pounds) of free grains he receives every month from the government, part of a program to alleviate poverty and help large numbers of unemployed. But he would prefer the government focus more on improving education, and providing better health care.

"We don't want free food," said Kumar, who traveled with his family to their village in the northern state of Uttar Pradesh. With better education, he said, "we can then earn on our own and feed our families."

Kumar is rooting for the opposition party, the Indian National Congress, which he knows faces an uphill battle against the ruling BJP.

"For ten years all (the BJP) did was talk about Hindus and Muslims, temples and mosques," Kumar said. "And if you raise your voice against this, you'll be arrested."

A few berths down, Rishipal Chaudhary, wiry and goateed, disagreed.

Chaudhary, a locomotive driver traveling to the southern city of Madurai for work, believes Modi has improved the country. For example, he said, crime against women is down, and schools are being given better teachers and facilities, changes that have benefitted his daughter.

"I love him from the beginning," Chaudhary said, an opinion shared by many passengers crowded around him.

THE SLEEPER CLASS

As the train cruised through the heartland of India, passing through Agra, a city famous for the 17th century Taj Mahal mausoleum, a man moved through the aisles, shouting: "Tea! Tea! Get your tea!"

A notch up from basic service, the more comfortable — and only slightly less affordable — sleeper cars were filled with passengers sitting in its lower berths. Some were perched on top of the foldable bunks. They discussed politics to pass the time.

"The times have changed. Ten, twenty years ago we were one, but now we have been divided," Haji Abdul Subhan said, his flowing beard buried in the newspaper he was reading.

Subhan, a 74-year-old former railway employee who is Muslim, was traveling to the city of Bhopal.

Many Muslims have experienced discomfort since Modi took office, and Subhan enumerated some of the indignities carried out by the government: razing the homes and shops of Muslim activists as a form of punishment; banning Islamic schools in some states; and restricting the volume of loudspeakers at mosques.

"There is an effort to create problems for us. We can't even speak freely," he said.

His voice is cut short by Santosh Kumar Aggarwal, a man in a cotton vest who sat cross-legged on the upper berth and listened to Subhan's concerns.

"He is talking the language of Pakistan," said Aggarwal, taking a swipe at Muslims, who make up 14% of the population. The stinging suggestion: If you're unhappy with the government, move to Muslim-majority Pakistan.

A Hindu, Aggarwal has been voting for the BJP for decades. Under Modi, he said, India is reaching new heights.

What about Subhan's concerns?

"You see, (Muslims) might be facing problems," Aggarwal said. "We don't have any problems at all."

And the razing of Muslim properties?

"They (Muslims) grabbed public land under previous governments. That's why they are crying now," he said.

THE AIR-CONDITIONED CLASS

As the train chugged south, the terrain was greener, the farms bigger. The homes of the affluent stood out as the landscape rushed by.

On board for a few hours more, the highest-paying passengers pulled freshly starched white bedding from brown paper bags delivered to their berths.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 42 of 85

Nikunj Garg, a medical officer, is worried about rising unemployment and trouble in the education system. She believes the quality of life should be improved for all Indians. "It is the small things that matter the most," she said.

A berth ahead, Samodhra Meena questioned the government's supposedly female-friendly policies, such as access to clean drinking water and cooking gas, that are a hallmark of Modi administration, saying they didn't benefit her family. "I want a change in the government," she said.

In the same carriage was Mahadev Prasad. Along with his family, Prasad was going to Madurai, one of the most ancient cities in India known for its Hindu temples. He carried with him holy water from the Ganges River as an offering for one of the temples.

Prasad is confident Modi is coming back to power for a rare third term. He hailed the government's decision to revoke the semi-autonomy of Kashmir, a Muslim-majority region. And he supports Modi's increased spending on infrastructure and the decision to build a Hindu temple on top of a razed mosque.

Has his life as a businessman improved?

"All the industries have slowed down. Some are even getting closed in my area," he said. Yet, for Prasad, Modi has achieved something important.

He draws on a widely accepted theory among Modi supporters to make his pitch: "In the past, Indians didn't get much respect while travelling abroad. But now we are being respected."

Vinoth Kumar, who was seated next to Prasad, didn't seem quite impressed.

Kumar, a 32-year-old telecom engineer from the southern Indian city of Tiruchirappalli, is scathing of the Modi government. He said divisions based on language, ethnicity and religion are rising because of Modi's Hindu-first agenda.

Kumar predicts that if Modi wins another term "the country will not be secular."

At the end of another day, the clamor in the train gave way to quiet whispers. More passengers disembarked before the train made its final stop at Kanyakumari's sprawling beaches that were getting crowded with hundreds of men and women stepping into the water's edge.

They looked to the east, hands pressed together, as the sun rose from the horizon.

Election deniers moving closer to GOP mainstream, report shows, as Trump allies fill Congress

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the hours after the attack on the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, Ohio's then-Republican senator, Rob Portman, voted to accept President Joe Biden's win over the defeated former president, Donald Trump, despite Trump's false allegations that Biden only won because of fraud.

But as Trump charges toward his rematch with Biden in 2024, Portman has been replaced by Sen. J.D. Vance, a potential vice presidential pick who has echoed Trump's false claims of fraud and said he'll accept the results this fall only "if it's a free and fair election."

South Carolina Sen. Tim Scott and Florida Sen. Marco Rubio, other possible VP picks, also declined to object to Biden's victory over Trump, but have been less committal this year. Rubio said recently if "things are wrong" with November's election, Republicans won't stand by and accept the outcome.

And the new speaker of the House, Mike Johnson, helped organize Trump's failed legal challenge to Biden's win. He demurred when asked if he believed the 2020 election was legitimate during an event with other Trump allies about the upcoming election.

As Trump makes a comeback bid to return to power, Republicans in Congress have become even more likely to cast doubts on Biden's victory or deny it was legitimate, a political turnaround that allows his false claims of fraud to linger and lays the groundwork to potentially challenge the results in 2024.

A new report released Tuesday by States United Action, a group that targets election deniers, said nearly one-third of the lawmakers in Congress supported in some way Trump's bid to overturn the 2020 results or otherwise cast doubt on the reliability of elections. Several more are hoping to join them, running for election this year to the House and Senate.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 43 of 85

"The public should have a real healthy dose of concern about the real risk of having people in power who've shown they're not willing to respect the will of the people," said Lizzie Ullmer of States United Action.

The issue is particularly stark for Congress given its constitutional role as the final arbiter of the validity of a presidential election. It counts the results from the Electoral College, as it set out to do on Jan. 6, 2021, a date now etched in history because of the violent assault on the U.S. Capitol by a pro-Trump mob.

In its report, States United found that in Congress, 170 representatives and senators out of 535 lawmakers overall can be categorized as election deniers. Heading into the fall elections, two new Senate candidates and 17 new House candidates already are on the ballot this fall seeking to join them.

It's not just Congress that has been seeded with people who supported trying to overturn Trump's 2020 loss, but the highest ranks of the Republican Party.

"This is deeply alarming," said Wendy Weiser, the vice president for democracy programs at the Brennan Center for Justice at New York University. "A democracy can only function if the participants commit to accepting the results of popular elections. That is it. That's the entire political system."

The former president picked Michael Whatley, who has echoed Trump's election lies, to become co-chairman of the Republican National Committee, with his daughter-in-law, Lara Trump. Christina Bobb, who was recently indicted for her alleged involvement in a scheme to recruit fake electors in Arizona, has been named the RNC's head of "election integrity."

Under Trump's direction, the RNC is making the elections process its top priority, bringing in the new personnel and adding resources, said Danielle Alvarez, an adviser to both the Trump campaign and the party committee.

"Biden is in the White House, that's true," Alvarez said, "but there were issues in the election."

To be clear, there was no widespread fraud in the 2020 election that cost Trump reelection. Recounts, audits and reviews in the battleground states where he contested his loss all affirmed Biden's victory, and courts rejected dozens of lawsuits filed by Trump and his allies.

States United's report details how successful election deniers have been in bolstering their congressional ranks. It examines the results of congressional party primaries in the 10 states that have held them this year and found that in each state, at least one election denier has made it to the general election for a House or Senate seat.

The report defines election deniers as people who falsely claimed Trump won in 2020, spread misinformation about that election or took steps to overturn it, or refused to concede a separate race. It finds that at least 67 will be on the ballot in the House in November, including 50 incumbents. Three will be running for the Senate — one of whom, Republican Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, is an incumbent.

There have been high-profile losses among election deniers, as well. Last week in West Virginia, Republican Rep. Carol Miller, who also voted against accepting Biden's victory, successfully fended off a primary challenge from Derrick Evans, who was convicted of a felony civil disorder charge after storming the Capitol on Jan. 6. Numerous election deniers in 2022 lost bids for swing state offices such as governor or secretary of state that would have given them direct power over voting in 2024.

Still, the movement has grown by dominating Republican primaries. In the race for the nomination to challenge Democratic Sen. Sherrod Brown in Ohio, businessman Bernie Moreno, who has previously said Trump was "right" to call 2020 "stolen," won his primary. In Indiana, Republican Sen. Mike Braun voted to certify Biden's win, but he will step down this year to run for governor and is poised to be replaced by Rep. Jim Banks, a prominent election denier who easily won the GOP primary in that state.

The report classifies neither Rubio or Scott as election deniers, but skepticism about the trustworthiness of voting has become an organizing GOP principle, particularly for the Republican-controlled House of Representatives.

Before becoming the House speaker, Johnson recruited colleagues to support a lawsuit, which ultimately failed, filed by Trump's allies to overturn his 2020 loss.

More recently Johnson met with Trump at the former president's Mar-a-Lago resort to shore up his own political support amid a far-right rebellion seeking to oust him as speaker. He emerged promising House

legislation that would be designed to stop immigrants in the country illegally from voting.

During a press conference on the Capitol steps to announce the bill, the speaker acknowledged it's hard to prove that certain immigrants are wrongfully casting ballots. Election experts say it is extremely rare for immigrants who are ineligible to vote to break federal law to do so.

While Congress passed legislation putting in safeguards to better protect against interference after the Capitol attack, it's lawmakers who will ultimately be asked to accept the 2024 results from their states.

Vance stood by his recent remarks. And Rubio said he expects there will be lawsuits in jurisdictions where the final tallies are close, as sometimes happens.

"When people ask me, 'Are you going to accept the outcome?' I think what some people are arguing is if there's things wrong with this election, we're going to point it out," Rubio said in a short interview.

Iran's president and foreign minister die in helicopter crash at moment of high tensions in Mideast

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and the country's foreign minister were found dead Monday hours after their helicopter crashed in fog, leaving the Islamic Republic without two key leaders as extraordinary tensions grip the wider Middle East.

Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who has the final say in the Shiite theocracy, quickly named a little-known vice president as caretaker and insisted the government was in control, but the deaths marked yet another blow to a country beset by pressures at home and abroad.

Iran has offered no cause for the crash nor suggested sabotage brought down the helicopter, which fell in mountainous terrain in a sudden, intense fog.

In Tehran, Iran's capital, businesses were open and children attended school Monday. However, there was a noticeable presence of both uniformed and plainclothes security forces.

Later in the day, hundreds of mourners crowded into downtown Vali-e-Asr square holding posters of Raisi and waving Palestinian flags. Some men clutched prayer beads and were visibly crying. Women wearing black chadors gathered together holding photos of the dead leader.

"We were shocked that we lost such a character, a character that made Iran proud, and humiliated the enemies," said Mohammad Beheshti, 36.

The crash comes as the Israel-Hamas war roils the region. Iran-backed Hamas led the attack that started the conflict, and Hezbollah, also supported by Tehran, has fired rockets at Israel. Last month, Iran launched its own unprecedented drone-and-missile attack on Israel.

A hard-liner who formerly led the country's judiciary, Raisi, 63, was viewed as a protege of Khamenei. During his tenure, relations continued to deteriorate with the West as Iran enriched uranium closer than ever to weapons-grade levels and supplied bomb-carrying drones to Russia for its war in Ukraine.

His government has also faced years of mass protests over the ailing economy and women's rights.

The crash killed all eight people aboard a Bell 212 helicopter that Iran purchased in the early 2000s, according to the state-run IRNA news agency. Among the dead were Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, the governor of Iran's East Azerbaijan province, a senior cleric from Tabriz, a Revolutionary Guard official and three crew members, IRNA said.

Iran has flown Bell helicopters extensively since the shah's era. But aircraft in Iran face a shortage of parts because of Western sanctions, and often fly without safety checks. Against that backdrop, former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif sought to blame the United States for the crash.

"One of the main culprits of yesterday's tragedy is the United States, which ... embargoed the sale of aircraft and aviation parts to Iran and does not allow the people of Iran to enjoy good aviation facilities," Zarif told The Associated Press.

Ali Vaez, Iran project director with the International Crisis Group, said that while U.S. sanctions have deprived Iran of the ability to renew and repair its fleet for decades, "one can't overlook human error and the weather's role in this particular accident."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 45 of 85

Richard Aboulafia, an aerospace analyst and consultant, said Iran likely is tapping the black market for parts, but questioned whether Iran has the maintenance skills to keep older helicopters flying safely.

"Black-market parts and whatever local maintenance capabilities they've got — that's not a good combination," he said.

There are 15 Bell 212 helicopters with an average age of 35 years currently registered in Iran that could be in active use or in storage, according to aviation data firm Cirium.

State TV gave no immediate cause for the crash in Iran's East Azerbaijan province. Footage released by IRNA showed the crash site, across a steep valley in a green mountain range.

U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said the U.S. continues to monitor the situation surrounding the "very unfortunate helicopter crash" but has no insight into the cause. "I don't necessarily see any broader regional security impacts at this point in time," he said.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Raisi's death is not expected to have any substantive impact on difficult U.S.-Iran relations, or Iran's support of Hamas, Hezbollah and the Yemen-based Houthi rebels.

"We have to assume that the supreme leader is the one who makes these decisions and the supreme leader, as he did in the last so-called election, made sure to stack the deck with only candidates that met his mandates," Kirby said.

He called the accusation that U.S. sanctions contributed to the crash "baseless," adding: "Every country, no matter who they are has a responsibility, their own responsibility to ensure the safety and reliability of its equipment."

For now, Khamenei has named the first vice president, Mohammad Mokhber, as caretaker, in line with the constitution. The election for a successor is to be held on June 28, IRNA said. Raisi's funeral will take place Thursday in Mashhad, the city where he was born, with other funerals to be held on Tuesday, state TV said.

It said Ali Bagheri Kani, a nuclear negotiator for Iran, will serve as the country's acting foreign minister.

Condolences poured in from allies after Iran confirmed there were no survivors. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said in a post on the social media platform X that his country "stands with Iran in this time of sorrow." Russian President Vladimir Putin, in a statement released by the Kremlin, described Raisi "as a true friend of Russia."

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, China's Xi Jinping and Syrian President Bashar Assad also offered condolences. Azerbaijan's president, Ilham Aliyev, said he and his government were "deeply shocked." Raisi was returning Sunday from Iran's border with Azerbaijan, where he had inaugurated a dam with Aliyev, when the crash happened.

The death also stunned Iranians, and Khamenei declared five days of public mourning. But many have been ground down by the collapse of the country's rial currency and worries about regional conflicts spinning out of control with Israel or Pakistan, which Iran exchanged fire with this year.

"He tried to carry out his duties well, but I don't think he was as successful as he should have been," said Mahrooz Mohammadi Zadeh, 53, a resident of Tehran.

Khamenei stressed the business of Iran's government would continue no matter what — but Raisi's death raised the specter of what will happen after the 85-year-old supreme leader either resigns or dies. The final say in all matters of state rests with his office and only two men have held the position since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Raisi had been discussed as a contender. The only other person suggested was Khamenei's 55-year-old son, Mojtaba. However, concerns have been raised over the position going to a family member, particularly after the revolution overthrew the hereditary Pahlavi monarchy of the shah.

An emergency meeting of Iran's Cabinet issued a statement pledging it would follow Raisi's path and that "with the help of God and the people, there will be no problem with management of the country."

Raisi won Iran's 2021 presidential election, in a vote that saw the lowest turnout in the Islamic Republic's history. He was sanctioned by the U.S. in part over his involvement in the execution of thousands of political prisoners in 1988 at the end of the bloody Iran-Iraq war.

Mass protests in the country have raged for years. The most recent involved the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, a woman detained over her allegedly loose headscarf, or hijab. The monthslong security crackdown that followed the demonstrations killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained.

In March, a United Nations investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death.

Raisi is the second Iranian president to die in office. In 1981, a bomb blast killed President Mohammad Ali Rajai in the chaotic days after the country's Islamic Revolution.

War crimes prosecutor seeks arrest of Israeli and Hamas leaders, including Netanyahu

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The chief prosecutor of the world's top war crimes court sought arrest warrants Monday for leaders of Israel and Hamas, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, over actions taken during their seven-month war.

While Netanyahu and his defense minister, Yoav Gallant, do not face imminent arrest, the announcement by the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor was a symbolic blow that deepened Israel's isolation over the war in Gaza.

The court's prosecutor, Karim Khan, accused Netanyahu, Gallant, and three Hamas leaders — Yehya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders condemned the move as disgraceful and antisemitic. U.S. President Joe Biden also lambasted the prosecutor and supported Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas.

A panel of three judges will decide whether to issue the arrest warrants and allow a case to proceed. The judges typically take two months to make such decisions.

Israel is not a member of the court, so even if the arrest warrants are issued, Netanyahu and Gallant do not face any immediate risk of prosecution. But the threat of arrest could make it difficult for the Israeli leaders to travel abroad.

Netanyahu called the prosecutor's accusations against him a "disgrace," and an attack on the Israeli military and all of Israel. He vowed to press ahead with Israel's war against Hamas.

Biden said the effort to arrest Netanyahu and Gallant over the war in Gaza was "outrageous," adding "whatever this prosecutor might imply, there is no equivalence — none — between Israel and Hamas."

Hamas also denounced the ICC prosecutor's actions, saying the request to arrest its leaders "equates the victim with the executioner."

Netanyahu has come under heavy pressure at home to end the war. Thousands of Israelis have joined weekly demonstrations calling on the government to reach a deal to bring home Israeli hostages in Hamas captivity, fearing that time is running out.

In recent days, the two other members of his war Cabinet, Gallant and Benny Gantz, have threatened to resign if Netanyahu does not spell out a clear postwar vision for Gaza.

But on Monday, Netanyahu received wall-to-wall support as politicians across the spectrum condemned the ICC prosecutor's move. They included Israel's president, Isaac Herzog, and his two main political rivals, Gantz and opposition leader Yair Lapid.

It is unclear what effect Khan's move will have on Netanyahu's public standing. The possibility of an arrest warrant against Netanyahu could give him a boost as Israelis rally behind the flag. But his opponents could also blame him for bringing a diplomatic catastrophe on the country.

Yuval Shany, an expert on international law at Hebrew University and the Israel Democracy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank, said it was far more certain that Netanyahu's already troubled international standing could be further weakened.

"This is going to make Netanyahu an outcast, and his ability to move around the world will be seriously

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 47 of 85

compromised," said Shany. Even if the ICC does not issue the arrest warrant, other countries may now be more reluctant to provide support and assistance, he said.

Hamas is already considered an international terrorist group by the West. Both Sinwar and Deif are believed to be hiding in Gaza. But Haniyeh, the supreme leader of the Islamic militant group, is based in Qatar and frequently travels across the region. Qatar, like Israel, is not a member of the ICC.

The latest war between Israel and Hamas began on Oct. 7, when militants from Gaza crossed into Israel and killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 others hostage.

Since then, Israel has waged a brutal campaign to dismantle Hamas in Gaza. More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting, at least half of them women and children, according to the latest estimates by Gaza health officials.

The war has triggered a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, displacing roughly 80% of the population and leaving hundreds of thousands of people on the brink of starvation, according to U.N. officials.

Speaking of the Israeli actions, Khan said "the effects of the use of starvation as a method of warfare, together with other attacks and collective punishment against the civilian population of Gaza are acute, visible and widely known."

The United Nations and other aid agencies have repeatedly accused Israel of hindering aid deliveries throughout the war. Israel denies this, saying there are no restrictions on aid entering Gaza and accusing the U.N. of failing to distribute aid.

Of the Hamas actions on Oct. 7, Khan, who visited the region in December, said that he saw for himself "the devastating scenes of these attacks and the profound impact of the unconscionable crimes."

In their rampage, Hamas militants gunned down scores of revelers at a dance party and killed entire families as they huddled in their homes. "These acts demand accountability," Khan said.

International human rights lawyer Amal Clooney served on a five-member expert panel that advised Khan. She said the panel had agreed unanimously that there are "reasonable grounds" to believe that both the Hamas and Israeli leaders had committed war crimes, according to a statement.

South Africa, which has been leading a genocide case against Israel at the U.N. world court, welcomed Khan's announcement seeking the arrest of Israeli and Hamas leaders. "The law must be applied equally to all in order to uphold the international rule of law," the office of President Cyril Ramaphosa said.

The ICC was established in 2002 as the permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the world's most heinous atrocities — war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression.

The U.N. General Assembly endorsed the ICC, but the court is independent.

Dozens of countries don't accept the court's jurisdiction over war crimes, genocide and other crimes. They include Israel, the United States, Russia and China.

The ICC accepted "The State of Palestine" as a member in 2015, a year after the Palestinians accepted the court's jurisdiction.

In 2020, then U.S. President Donald Trump authorized economic and travel sanctions on the ICC prosecutor and another senior prosecutor. The ICC staff were looking into U.S. and allies' troops for possible war crimes in Afghanistan. Biden lifted the sanctions in 2021.

Last year, the court issued a warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin on charges of responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine. Russia responded by issuing its own arrest warrants for Khan and ICC judges.

What's next for Iran's government after death of its president in helicopter crash?

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The death of Iran's president is unlikely to lead to any immediate changes in Iran's ruling system or to its overarching policies, which are decided by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

But Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash Sunday, was seen as a prime candidate to succeed

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 48 of 85

the 85-year-old supreme leader, and his death makes it more likely that the job could eventually go to Khamenei's son.

A hereditary succession would pose a potential crisis of legitimacy for the Islamic Republic, which was established as an alternative to monarchy but which many Iranians already see as a corrupt and dictatorial regime.

Here's a look at what comes next.

HOW DOES IRAN'S GOVERNMENT WORK?

Iran holds regular elections for president and parliament with universal suffrage.

But the supreme leader has final say on all major policies, serves as commander-in-chief of the armed forces and controls the powerful Revolutionary Guard.

The supreme leader also appoints half of the 12-member Guardian Council, a clerical body that vets candidates for president, parliament and the Assembly of Experts, an elected body of jurists in charge of choosing the supreme leader.

In theory, the clerics oversee the republic to ensure it complies with Islamic law. In practice, the supreme leader carefully manages the ruling system to balance competing interests, advance his own priorities and ensure that no one challenges the Islamic Republic or his role atop it.

Raisi, a hard-liner who was seen as a protege of Khamenei, was elected president in 2021 after the Guardian Council blocked any other well-known candidate from running against him, and turnout was the lowest in the history of the Islamic Republic. He succeeded Hassan Rouhani, a relative moderate who had served as president for the past eight years and defeated Raisi in 2017.

After Raisi's death, in accordance with Iran's constitution, Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, a relative unknown, became caretaker president, with elections mandated within 50 days. That vote will likely be carefully managed to produce a president who maintains the status quo.

That means Iran will continue to impose some degree of Islamic rule and crack down on dissent. It will enrich uranium, support armed groups across the Middle East and view the West with deep suspicion.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR SUCCESSION?

Presidents come and go, some more moderate than others, but each operates under the structure of the ruling system.

If any major change occurs in Iran, it is likely to come after the passing of Khamenei, when a new supreme leader will be chosen for only the second time since the 1979 Islamic Revolution. Khamenei succeeded the founder of the Islamic Republic, Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, in 1989.

The next supreme leader will be chosen by the 88-seat Assembly of Experts, who are elected every eight years from candidates vetted by the Guardian Council. In the most recent election, in March, Rouhani was barred from running, while Raisi won a seat.

Any discussion of the succession, or machinations related to it, occur far from the public eye, making it hard to know who may be in the running. But the two people seen by analysts as most likely to succeed Khamenei were Raisi and the supreme leader's own son, Mojtaba, 55, a Shiite cleric who has never held government office.

WHAT HAPPENS IF THE SUPREME LEADER'S SON SUCCEEDS HIM?

Leaders of the Islamic Republic going back to the 1979 revolution have portrayed their system as superior, not only to the democracies of a decadent West, but to the military dictatorships and monarchies that prevail across the Middle East.

The transfer of power from the supreme leader to his son could spark anger, not only among Iranians who are already critical of clerical rule, but supporters of the system who might see it as un-Islamic.

Western sanctions linked to the nuclear program have devastated Iran's economy. And the enforcement of Islamic rule, which grew more severe under Raisi, has further alienated women and young people.

The Islamic Republic has faced several waves of popular protests in recent years, most recently after the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, who had been arrested for allegedly not covering her hair in public. More than 500 people were killed and over 22,000 were detained in a violent crackdown.

Raisi's death may make the transition to a new supreme leader trickier, and it could spark more unrest.

Haiti's main airport reopens nearly 3 months after gang violence forced it closed

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) — Haiti's main international airport reopened Monday for the first time in nearly three months after relentless gang violence forced authorities to close it.

The reopening of the Toussaint-Louverture airport in the capital of Port-au-Prince is expected to help ease a critical shortage of medications and other basic supplies. The country's main seaport remains paralyzed. Gangs control 80% of the capital.

U.S.-based airlines are not expected to start using the airport until late May or early June.

The first commercial passenger flight since March left for Miami nearly two hours behind schedule, with sweating passengers complaining about the lack of air conditioning until takeoff. Although the flight was organized by local carrier Sunrise Airways, it contracted Florida-based charter airline World Atlantic, which distributed paper towels to drenched passengers.

As the plane hurtled down the runway and took off, one passenger said in a soft voice, "Yes. Yes."

Before Monday, the sole airport operating in Haiti was located in the north coastal city of Cap-Haitien. It was out of reach for many seeking to flee the country, with roads leading from Port-au-Prince controlled by gangs that have opened fire on cars and buses passing through.

The U.S. government had evacuated hundreds of citizens by helicopter out of a hilly neighborhood in Port-au-Prince, as did nonprofit organizations, as gangs laid siege to parts of the capital.

The attacks began on Feb. 29, with gunmen seizing control of police stations, opening fire on the Port-au-Prince airport and storming Haiti's two biggest prisons, freeing more than 4,000 inmates.

Gangs since then have directed their attacks on previously peaceful communities, leaving thousands homeless.

More than 2,500 people have been killed or injured in Haiti from January to March, a more than 50% increase compared to the same period last year, according to the United Nations.

At the Couronne Bar near the sole airport gate operating on Monday, 43-year-old manager Klav-Dja Raphael welcomed her first clients. But her smile belied her fear.

"We are scared because they can still attack us here," she said. "We must come in. It's our job, but we're afraid." She recalled how bullets ricocheted through the airport the day it was attacked.

While the airport provided workers at that bar a month's wages, she was left unemployed for the rest of the time, relying on friends and family. She is anxious to join her 13-year-old son who lives in Florida with his father.

Other workers, including those at immigration, were all smiles, content to be finally back at work. "That was a long vacation!" one immigration agent said.

Dozens of people lined up hours before the flight.

"I'm very happy, but it hurts that I'm leaving my husband and my son," said Darling Antoine as her eyes began to water.

She received a visa allowing her to live in the U.S., but the rest of her family is still waiting. They applied because gangs kept encroaching on their neighborhood. "There are heavy gunshots every day," she said. "Sometimes we have to hide under the bed."

Jean Doovenskey, a 31-year-old accountant, left unemployed by the violence, said he was notified in early April that he was authorized to live in the U.S. He will live with his aunt in Florida but hopes to return to Haiti one day and live. "I believe in a new Haiti," he said.

The attack on the airport also left former Prime Minister Ariel Henry locked out of Haiti since he was on an official trip to Kenya. He has since resigned, and a transitional presidential council is seeking a new prime minister. It is also tasked with selecting a new Cabinet and organizing general elections.

In recent weeks, U.S. military planes have landed at the Port-au-Prince airport with supplies as well as

civilian contractors to help Haiti prepare for the arrival of foreign forces expected to help quell the gang violence.

On Sunday, Kenya's foreign affairs principal secretary, Korir Sing'oei, said a plan to deploy police officers from the East African country was in final stages.

"I can tell you for sure that deployment will happen in the next few days, few weeks," he said.

In March, Kenya and Haiti signed agreements to try to salvage a plan for the country to deploy 1,000 police officers to the troubled Caribbean nation. Other countries expected to back up Kenyan forces include the Bahamas, Barbados, Benin, Chad and Bangladesh. It wasn't immediately clear when those would arrive.

Judge in Trump's hush money trial threatened to remove witness from court for behavior on stand

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

NEW YORK (AP) — The judge in Donald Trump's hush money trial cleared the courtroom of reporters Monday and then threatened to remove the defense's witness from the trial altogether because of his behavior on the stand, which included making comments under his breath and rolling his eyes, a court transcript showed.

Judge Juan M. Merchan told Robert Costello, a former federal prosecutor, that his conduct during testimony was contemptuous. Costello aggravated Merchan repeatedly in part by continuing to speak after objections were sustained — a signal to witnesses to stop talking. At one point, Costello remarked "jeez" when he was cut off by an objection. He also called the whole exercise "ridiculous."

The exchange came toward the end of a heated day that included the prosecution's star witness admitting to stealing tens of thousands of dollars from Trump's company. Trump's lawyers also pressed Merchan to dismiss the case after prosecutors concluded their presentation of evidence. The judge didn't immediately rule on that request.

But the most tense moments happened with Costello on the witness stand. Merchan first sent the jury out of the courtroom to discuss proper decorum. He chided Costello for remarking "jeez" when he was cut off by a sustained objection and, at another point, "strike it." Merchan told him: "I'm the only one that can strike testimony in the courtroom. Do you understand that?"

"And then if you don't like my ruling, you don't give me side eye and you don't roll your eyes."

Merchan was about to bring the jury back in when he asked Costello, "Are you staring me down right now?" and then kicked out the press to further admonish him.

"I'm putting you on notice that your conduct is contemptuous," Merchan said, according to the transcript of the conversation that occurred when the press was out of the room. "If you try to stare me down one more time, I will remove you from the stand."

Costello didn't return a message seeking comment Monday night.

When Merchan brought the press back in, Costello's testimony continued and it will resume Tuesday. The defense is using him in an effort to attack the credibility of Trump attorney-turned-adversary, Michael Cohen.

After jurors left for the day, defense attorney Todd Blanche told the judge that prosecutors failed to prove their case and that it should be thrown out immediately. Blanche beseeched the judge to "not let this case go to the jury relying on Mr. Cohen's testimony."

The judge appeared unmoved by the argument, asking the defense attorney whether he believed that "as a matter of law, this person's so not worthy of belief that it shouldn't even be considered by the jury?"

"You said his lies are irrefutable," the judge replied. "But you think he's going to fool 12 New Yorkers into believing this lie?"

Cohen was the last witness — at least for now — for prosecutors, who are trying to prove that Trump sought to bury unflattering stories about himself and then falsified internal business records to cover it up as part of a scheme to illegally influence the 2016 presidential election. The defense has painted Cohen

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 51 of 85

as a media-obsessed liar who is on a revenge mission aimed at taking down Trump.

The defense called Costello because of his role as a Cohen antagonist and critic in the years since their professional relationship splintered in spectacular fashion.

Costello had offered to represent Cohen soon after the lawyer's hotel room, office and home were raided and as Cohen faced a decision about whether to remain defiant in the face of a criminal investigation or to cooperate with authorities in hopes of securing more lenient treatment.

Costello testified that Cohen told him Trump "knew nothing" about the \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels that's at the center of the case.

"Michael Cohen said numerous times that President Trump knew nothing about those payments, that he did this on his own, and he repeated that numerous times," Costello told jurors.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove told the judge that the defense does not plan to call any other witnesses after Costello, though they may still call campaign-finance expert Bradley A. Smith for limited testimony. They have not said definitively that Trump won't testify, but that's the clearest indication yet that he will waive his right to take the stand in his own defense.

Back on the witness stand for a fourth day, Cohen told jurors earlier Monday that he stole from the Trump Organization after his 2016 holiday bonus was slashed to \$50,000 from the \$150,000 he usually received.

Cohen claimed to have paid \$50,000 to a technology firm for its work artificially boosting Trump's standing in a CNBC online poll about famous businessmen. Cohen said he gave the firm only \$20,000 in cash in a brown paper bag, but he sought reimbursement from Trump for the full amount, pocketing the difference.

Cohen said he never paid the Trump Organization back. Cohen has never been charged with stealing from Trump's company.

Cohen is a key witness but also a complicated one. He admitted on the witness stand to a number of past lies, many of which he claims were meant to protect Trump. Cohen also served prison time after pleading guilty to various federal charges, including lying to Congress and a bank and engaging in campaign-finance violations related to the hush money scheme.

But when pushed by Blanche, Cohen stood by his recollection of conversations with Trump about the hush money payment to Daniels. Cohen testified that he spoke with Trump more than 20 times about the matter in October 2016.

"No doubt in your mind?" Blanche asked about whether Cohen specifically recalled having conversations with Trump about the Daniels matter. No doubt, Cohen said.

After more than four weeks of testimony, jurors could begin deliberating as soon as next week to decide whether Trump is guilty of 34 felony counts of falsifying business records in the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president.

The charges stem from internal Trump Organization records where payments to Cohen were marked as legal expenses. Prosecutors say they were really reimbursements for the payment to Daniels to keep her from going public before the 2016 election with claims of a sexual encounter with Trump. Trump says nothing sexual happened between them.

Trump has pleaded not guilty. His lawyers say there was nothing criminal about the Daniels deal or the way Cohen was paid.

"There's no crime," Trump told reporters after arriving at the courthouse Monday. "We paid a legal expense. You know what it's marked down as? A legal expense."

Prosecutors will have an opportunity to call rebuttal witnesses once Trump's witnesses are done. The judge, citing scheduling issues, said he expects closing arguments to happen May 28, the Tuesday after Memorial Day.

Scarlett Johansson says a ChatGPT voice is 'eerily similar' to hers and OpenAI is halting its use

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — OpenAI on Monday said it plans to halt the use of one of its ChatGPT voices that “Her” actor Scarlett Johansson says sounds “eerily similar” to her own.

In a post on the social media platform X, OpenAI said it is “working to pause” Sky — the name of one of five voices that ChatGPT users can choose to speak with. The company said it had “heard questions” about how it selects the lifelike audio options available for its flagship artificial intelligence chatbot, particularly Sky, and wanted to address them.

Among those raising questions was Johansson, who famously voiced a fictional, and at the time futuristic, AI assistant in the 2013 film “Her.”

Johansson issued a statement saying that OpenAI CEO Sam Altman had approached her in September asking her if she would lend her voice to the system, saying he felt it would be “comforting to people” not at ease with the technology. She said she declined the offer.

“When I heard the released demo, I was shocked, angered and in disbelief that Mr. Altman would pursue a voice that sounded so eerily similar to mine that my closest friends and news outlets could not tell the difference,” Johansson said.

She said OpenAI “reluctantly” agreed to take down the Sky voice after she hired lawyers who wrote Altman letters asking about the process by which the company came up with the voice.

OpenAI had moved to debunk the internet’s theories about Johansson in a blog post accompanying its earlier announcement aimed at detailing how ChatGPT’s voices were chosen. The company wrote that it believed AI voices “should not deliberately mimic a celebrity’s distinctive voice” and that the voice of Sky belongs to a “different professional actress.” But it added that it could not share the name of that professional for privacy reasons.

In a statement sent to The Associated Press following Johansson’s response late Monday, Altman said that OpenAI cast the voice actor behind Sky “before any outreach” to Johansson.

“The voice of Sky is not Scarlett Johansson’s, and it was never intended to resemble hers,” Altman said. “Out of respect for Ms. Johansson, we have paused using Sky’s voice in our products. We are sorry to Ms. Johansson that we didn’t communicate better.”

San Francisco-based OpenAI first rolled out voice capabilities for ChatGPT, which included the five different voices, in September, allowing users to engage in back-to-forth conversation with the AI assistant. “Voice Mode” was originally just available to paid subscribers, but in November, OpenAI announced that the feature would become free for all users with the mobile app.

And ChatGPT’s interactions are becoming more and more sophisticated. Last week, OpenAI said the latest update to its generative AI model can mimic human cadences in its verbal responses and can even try to detect people’s moods.

OpenAI says the newest model, dubbed GPT-4o, works faster than previous versions and can reason across text, audio and video in real time. In a demonstration during OpenAI’s May 13 announcement, the AI bot chatted in real time, adding emotion — specifically “more drama” — to its voice as requested. It also took a stab at extrapolating a person’s emotional state by looking at a selfie video of their face, aided in language translations, step-by-step math problems and more.

GPT-4o, short for “omni,” isn’t widely available yet. It will progressively make its way to select users in the coming weeks and months. The model’s text and image capabilities have already begun rolling out, and is set to reach even some of those that use ChatGPT’s free tier — but the new voice mode will just be available for paid subscribers of ChatGPT Plus.

While most have yet to get their hands on these newly announced features, the capabilities have conjured up even more comparisons to the Spike Jonze’s dystopian romance “Her,” which follows an introverted man (Joaquin Phoenix) who falls in love with an AI-operating system (Johansson), leading to many complications.

Altman appeared to tap into this, too — simply posting the word “her” on the social media platform X

the day of GPT-4o's unveiling.

Many reacting to the model's demos last week also found some of the interactions struck a strangely flirtatious tone. In one video posted by OpenAI, a female-voiced ChatGPT compliments a company employee on "rocking an OpenAI hoodie," for example, and in another the chatbot says "oh stop it, you're making me blush" after being told that it's amazing.

That's sparked some conversation on the gendered ways critics say tech companies have long used to develop and engage voice assistants — dating back far before the latest wave of generative AI advanced the capabilities of AI chatbots. In 2019, the United Nations' culture and science organization pointed to "hardwired subservience" built into default female-voiced assistants (like Apple's Siri to Amazon's Alexa), even when confronted with sexist insults and harassment.

"This is clearly programmed to feed dudes' egos," The Daily Show senior correspondent Desi Lydic said of GPT-4o in a segment last week. "You can really tell that a man built this tech."

Corn, millet and ... rooftop solar? Farm family's newest crop shows China's solar ascendancy

By HUIZHONG WU and HAN GUAN NG Associated Press

JINAN, China (AP) — Shi Mei and her husband earn a decent enough living by growing corn and millet on their small farm in eastern China's Shandong province. In 2021, they diversified by investing in solar energy — signing a contract to mount some 40 panels on their roof to feed energy to the grid.

Now, the couple get paid for every watt of electricity they generate, harvesting the equivalent of \$10,000 per year that Shi can track through an app on her phone.

"When the sun comes out, you make money," Shi said.

The Shi family is on the leading edge of a solar boom in China, which has long dominated global solar manufacturing but didn't always install a lot of it at home. That's changing as the government focuses on the urgency of cutting its worst-in-the-world greenhouse gas emissions at the same time it grows its green economy. China wants one-fifth of its power to come from renewables by 2025, and it's offered a wide range of subsidies to local governments and businesses.

The push — in both industrial solar and in rooftop installations like Shi's — is working so well that the grid now has more power than it can handle. Shi was fortunate to get in early; some cities across Shandong province, including her village, are halting new rooftop solar installations.

Analysts and solar companies say the future remains bright if China can quickly adapt to the oversupply. Companies and utilities are scrambling to build battery capacity to store all the power being generated. They'd like to see more flexible energy pricing that could shape demand to better match supply. And they'd like technology that makes it easier to start and stop coal power so it's not always the clean energy of solar power that gets "curtailed" — in industry jargon — when the grid can't take any more supply.

"China has the great potential and opportunity to make its power sector achieve its carbon peak by 2025," said Grace Gao, a Climate and Energy senior campaigner at Greenpeace in China. "I am looking forward to seeing Shandong truly become a leader in renewable energy and showcase its best practices to the rest of China."

SOLAR POWERHOUSE

As with many infrastructure projects in China, it is installing solar at breakneck speed and scale. China added 216 gigawatts of solar in 2023, a little over half in large solar farms, according to the country's National Energy Administration. China's total is more than half of what the entire world added last year, according to research from the consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

A gigawatt of solar is enough to supply the energy needs of about 320,000 Chinese households for a year, Gao said.

Shandong province added about 14 gigawatts of solar in 2023, and the province now has the ability to produce more power than it can use at certain times during the day. It's the leading province for renewable energy capacity, but that also means it's the first to encounter the difficulties of rapid growth.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 54 of 85

"Other provinces will also meet these problems, because there will be more and more solar energy," said Peng Peng, the secretary general of China New Energy Investment and Financing Alliance, an industry group.

BOOM YEARS

After China announced subsidies for both rooftop and industrial solar in 2014, Shandong, with an advanced manufacturing industry, was a good candidate to take the early lead in solar development compared to less populous provinces like Qinghai or Inner Mongolia.

Wang Xingyong installs and maintains rooftop solar panels for clients ranging from villagers to factories, and said his business has doubled every year since 2016.

"In the beginning, maybe we'd just do a project for one client, a farmer, and it'd be worth ten thousand yuan, fifty thousand," he said. "Later, we'd do a couple hundred thousand, millions, for just one project."

The business model varies, but many companies like Wang's solicit villagers and factories for the chance to use their roofs. Villagers buy the systems and get payouts from selling the electricity to the grid. Wang gets paid to build and maintain the solar setups for factories that use the electricity they generate.

Wang said the concept was a hard sell at first, with few people believing the government would pay them for generating electricity. Wang said he slowly won people over, starting with his family and friends, putting forward the money for the equipment himself, and then moving on to other villages with the results.

While pitching, few talk about big concepts like the country's target to ensure carbon emissions peak at 2030. It comes down to cash in people's pockets. Shi, the farmer, said her neighbors installed solar panels on their roofs after seeing her investment do well.

"Compared to just putting your money in a savings account, the rate of return is higher," she said. Thanks to her contract from 2021, she's still earning money even though the village has stopped allowing new installations.

A second model allows families to basically get paid rent to allow solar to be installed on their roof — as much as 3,000 yuan (\$414) a month, said Liu Wenping, an investor in solar companies. They might also get a free air conditioner or refrigerator as an extra incentive, and get a small percentage from the electricity sold, though not as much as people who buy the solar equipment.

SOLUTIONS IN PROGRESS

Chinese battery companies, EV manufacturers and utilities are all racing to develop more advanced batteries to store the electricity from solar panels. Batteries are getting cheaper, but still affect the overall model's profitability. The Shandong provincial government is running a pilot program in Dezhou with lithium iron phosphate batteries that can store power during peak production and feed it to the province's grid later as needed.

Other fixes include moving to what's called spot market pricing, with the price fluctuating in an open market. China currently uses prices set by regulators for its electricity, updated after intensive research. Without pricing flexibility, China can't incentivize customers to shift some use to non-peak times by lowering prices during those times.

But just last year, regulators in Shandong introduced trough pricing, with prices slashed sharply to encourage people to use electricity right when it was being generated abundantly but use was very low — in this case, the lunch period when factories typically all break at the same time. Factories responded by shifting some of their use to get some of the cheaper power.

Solar analysts say they expect China to eventually move towards completely market-driven pricing with the grid.

Meanwhile, China is intent on improving its grid. The National Development and Reform Council, which oversees economic policy and implementation, in February called on provinces to focus on increasing flexibility to the grid. It included a call to retrofit old coal plants with new technology so they can power up and down much more quickly. The council also wants a "smart" grid that can quickly decide the best time to distribute the power being generated.

"Every country in the world that is installing a lot of renewables and then facing the challenges that arise from all this variable intermittent generation, is searching for smart ways, intelligent AI-enabled or at

least model-backed approaches to distributing this power and using it in the most efficient and effective way," said David Fishman, a senior manager at the Lantau Group consultancy who tracks China's energy industry. "Certainly that's where China is heading."

There's no sign of a pause in China's solar buildout. Companies are flocking to other provinces in the south that aren't as far along as Shandong.

And in Shandong, Wang, the solar installer, is optimistic about his prospects despite the halt in new projects, because he still has industrial clients. He's already planning to invest in upgrading transformers. And he's intrigued by a trend driven by China's electric car explosion, with the installation of all-in-one stations that combine solar generation, battery storage and electric vehicle charging.

"I trust the future will be better and better," he said.

Top US drug agency a notable holdout in Biden's push to loosen federal marijuana restrictions

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

In an isolated part of the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration headquarters known as the 12th-floor "bubble," chief Anne Milgram made an unusual request of top deputies summoned in March for what she called the "Marijuana Meeting": Nobody could take notes.

Over the next half hour, she broke the news that the Biden administration would soon be issuing a long-awaited order reclassifying pot as a less-dangerous drug, a major hurdle toward federal legalization that DEA has long resisted. And Milgram went on to reveal another twist, according to two people familiar with the private meeting who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity, that the process normally steered by the DEA had been taken over by the U.S. Justice Department and the action would not be signed by her but by Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Milgram didn't give aides a reason for the unprecedented omission and neither she nor the DEA has explained since. But it unfolded this past week exactly as laid out in that meeting two months ago, with the most significant drug policy change in 50 years launched without the support of the nation's premier narcotics agency.

"DEA has not yet made a determination as to its views of the appropriate schedule for marijuana," reads a sentence tucked 13 pages into Garland's 92-page order last Thursday outlining the Biden administration proposal to shift pot from its current Schedule I alongside heroin and LSD to the less tightly regulated Schedule III with such drugs as ketamine and some anabolic steroids.

Internal records accompanying the order indicate the DEA sent a memo to the Justice Department in late January seeking additional scientific input to determine whether marijuana has an accepted medical use, a key requirement for reclassification. But those concerns were overruled by Justice Department attorneys, who deemed the DEA's criteria "impermissibly narrow."

Several current and former DEA officials told the AP they believe politics may be at play, contending the Justice Department is moving forward with the marijuana reclassification because President Joe Biden wants to use the issue to woo voters in his re-election campaign and wasn't willing to give the DEA time for more studies that likely would have dragged beyond Election Day.

Those officials also noted that while the Controlled Substances Act grants the attorney general responsibility for regulating the sale of dangerous drugs, federal law still delegates the authority to classify drugs to the DEA administrator.

"It's crystal clear to me that the Justice Department hijacked the rescheduling process, placing politics above public safety," said Derek Maltz, a retired agent who once headed the DEA's Special Operations Division. "If there's scientific evidence to support this decision, then so be it. But you've got to let the scientists evaluate it."

Former DEA Administrator Tim Shea said the striking absence of Milgram's sign-off suggests she was backing "the DEA professionals."

"If she had supported it she would have signed it and sent it in," said Shea, who served in the Trump

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 56 of 85

administration. "DEA was opposed to this and the politics entered and overruled them. It's demoralizing. Everybody from the agents in the streets to the leadership in DEA knows the dangers this brings."

The White House did not respond to a request for comment but Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre previously said Biden was committed to fulfilling a 2020 campaign promise. "He said no person, no American who possesses marijuana should go to jail. It is affecting communities across the country, including communities of color."

Justice Department attorneys defended Garland's decision to proceed without Milgram's backing, saying in a separate memo that the action was prompted by "sharply different views" between DEA and the Department of Health and Human Services. The HHS last year recommended reclassifying marijuana, deeming it less risky to public health than cocaine, heroin and oxycodone, and effective in treating anorexia, pain and other ailments.

HHS concluded in part that "although abuse of marijuana produces clear evidence of a risk to public health, that risk is relatively lower than" that posed by other drugs.

The DEA balked at those findings and Garland's order cites at least 10 times when the drug agency requested additional information before blessing HHS' medical findings. It did not respond to AP questions seeking further comment.

The Justice Department didn't comment on internal differences but in a statement said that the proposal was "consistent with the scientific and medical determinations of HHS." The department added it was legally required to follow HHS's scientific and medical findings that marijuana should be reclassified, at least until the start of the rulemaking process.

The dissonance within the federal government underscores the continuing debate over the risks posed by cannabis, even as 38 states have legalized medical marijuana and 24 have legalized its recreational use. All the while, more voters — 70% of adults, according to a Gallup poll last fall — support legalization, the highest level yet recorded by the polling firm.

"The argument that marijuana is as dangerous as fentanyl, cocaine and meth is laughable," said Matthew C. Zorn, a Houston-based attorney who writes a newsletter on cannabis regulation. "The DEA isn't where most Americans are. They're standing on the wrong side of history."

But even HHS' National Institute on Drug Abuse has come out with statements in apparent conflict with HHS' recommendation to reclassify pot, saying the potency of marijuana has been steadily increasing over the years, resulting in higher numbers of emergency room visits to treat a wide range of physical and mental effects, from breathing problems and mental impairment to hallucinations and paranoia.

"Whether smoking or otherwise consuming marijuana has therapeutic benefits that outweigh its health risks is still an open question that science has not resolved," Nora Volkow, a neuroscientist who leads NIDA, is currently quoted as saying on the institute's website. A NIDA spokesperson said rescheduling would facilitate research more into the drug.

The NIDA last performed a medical evaluation of marijuana in 2015 — a year before the Obama administration's DEA rejected a similar request to reschedule the drug.

This time, after Biden ordered a review of the drug's status in 2022, HHS adopted new criteria to reach its rescheduling conclusion, taking into account the states that have already legalized medical marijuana.

The rescheduling move, first reported by the AP last month, faces a potentially lengthy process. The DEA, which must show "significant deference" to HHS' medical determinations, according to Justice Department attorneys, will now take public comment on the rescheduling plan before a review by an administrative judge and the publishing of a final rule. Federal prosecutions involving marijuana are already exceedingly rare but a Schedule III classification would still make pot a controlled substance subject to rules and regulations.

For her part, Milgram has said little about her stance on marijuana and was not asked about it during her confirmation. When she took the helm of the agency in 2021, she privately told colleagues she considered the legalization debate a distraction from the far more serious fentanyl crisis, according to one of the people who spoke to the AP.

Milgram is known for a progressive, data-driven approach to law enforcement dating to her days as the Democratic attorney general of New Jersey. When the state's governor, a close ally, signed a bill in 2010

making the state the 14th to make marijuana legal for medical purposes, she said only that the legislation was "workable."

This past week, she was similarly opaque in a three-sentence announcement to DEA employees obtained by the AP.

"As required," she wrote, "the DEA will post this notice and all attachments on our website."

US says cyberattacks against water supplies are rising, and utilities need to do more to stop them

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Cyberattacks against water utilities across the country are becoming more frequent and more severe, the Environmental Protection Agency warned Monday as it issued an enforcement alert urging water systems to take immediate actions to protect the nation's drinking water.

About 70% of utilities inspected by federal officials over the last year violated standards meant to prevent breaches or other intrusions, the agency said. Officials urged even small water systems to improve protections against hacks. Recent cyberattacks by groups affiliated with Russia and Iran have targeted smaller communities.

Some water systems are falling short in basic ways, the alert said, including failure to change default passwords or cut off system access to former employees. Because water utilities often rely on computer software to operate treatment plants and distribution systems, protecting information technology and process controls is crucial, the EPA said. Possible impacts of cyberattacks include interruptions to water treatment and storage; damage to pumps and valves; and alteration of chemical levels to hazardous amounts, the agency said.

"In many cases, systems are not doing what they are supposed to be doing, which is to have completed a risk assessment of their vulnerabilities that includes cybersecurity and to make sure that plan is available and informing the way they do business," said EPA Deputy Administrator Janet McCabe.

Attempts by private groups or individuals to get into a water provider's network and take down or deface websites aren't new. More recently, however, attackers haven't just gone after websites, they've targeted utilities' operations instead.

Recent attacks are not just by private entities. Some recent hacks of water utilities are linked to geopolitical rivals, and could lead to the disruption of the supply of safe water to homes and businesses.

McCabe named China, Russia and Iran as the countries that are "actively seeking the capability to disable U.S. critical infrastructure, including water and wastewater."

Late last year, an Iranian-linked group called "Cyber Av3ngers" targeted multiple organizations including a small Pennsylvania town's water provider, forcing it to switch from a remote pump to manual operations. They were going after an Israeli-made device used by the utility in the wake of Israel's war against Hamas.

Earlier this year, a Russian-linked "hactivist" tried to disrupt operations at several Texas utilities.

A cyber group linked to China and known as Volt Typhoon has compromised information technology of multiple critical infrastructure systems, including drinking water, in the United States and its territories, U.S. officials said. Cybersecurity experts believe the China-aligned group is positioning itself for potential cyberattacks in the event of armed conflict or rising geopolitical tensions.

"By working behind the scenes with these hactivist groups, now these (nation states) have plausible deniability and they can let these groups carry out destructive attacks. And that to me is a game-changer," said Dawn Cappelli, a cybersecurity expert with the industrial cybersecurity firm Dragos Inc.

The world's cyberpowers are believed to have been infiltrating rivals' critical infrastructure for years planting malware that could be triggered to disrupt basic services.

The enforcement alert is meant to emphasize the seriousness of cyberthreats and inform utilities the EPA will continue its inspections and pursue civil or criminal penalties if they find serious problems.

"We want to make sure that we get the word out to people that 'Hey, we are finding a lot of problems here,'" McCabe said.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 58 of 85

EPA did not say how many cyber incidents have occurred in recent years, and the number of attacks known to be successful so far is few. The agency has issued nearly 100 enforcement actions since 2020 regarding risk assessments and emergency response, but said that's a small snapshot of the threats water systems face.

Preventing attacks against water providers is part of the Biden administration's broader effort to combat threats against critical infrastructure. In February, President Joe Biden signed an executive order to protect U.S. ports. Health care systems have been attacked. The White House has pushed electric utilities to increase their defenses, too. EPA Administrator Michael Regan and White House National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan have asked states to come up with a plan to combat cyberattacks on drinking water systems.

"Drinking water and wastewater systems are an attractive target for cyberattacks because they are a lifeline critical infrastructure sector but often lack the resources and technical capacity to adopt rigorous cybersecurity practices," Regan and Sullivan wrote in a March 18 letter to all 50 U.S. governors.

Some of the fixes are straightforward, McCabe said. Water providers, for example, shouldn't use default passwords. They need to develop a risk assessment plan that addresses cybersecurity and set up backup systems. The EPA says they will train water utilities that need help for free. Larger utilities usually have more resources and the expertise to defend against attacks.

"In an ideal world ... we would like everybody to have a baseline level of cybersecurity and be able to confirm that they have that," said Alan Roberson, executive director of the Association of State Drinking Water Administrators. "But that's a long ways away."

Some barriers are foundational. The water sector is highly fragmented. There are roughly 50,000 community water providers, most of which serve small towns. Modest staffing and anemic budgets in many places make it hard enough to maintain the basics — providing clean water and keeping up with the latest regulations.

"Certainly, cybersecurity is part of that, but that's never been their primary expertise. So, now you're asking a water utility to develop this whole new sort of department" to handle cyberthreats, said Amy Hardberger, a water expert at Texas Tech University.

The EPA has faced setbacks. States periodically review the performance of water providers. In March 2023, the EPA instructed states to add cybersecurity evaluations to those reviews. If they found problems, the state was supposed to force improvements.

But Missouri, Arkansas and Iowa, joined by the American Water Works Association and another water industry group, challenged the instructions in court on the grounds that EPA didn't have the authority under the Safe Drinking Water Act. After a court setback, the EPA withdrew its requirements but urged states to take voluntary actions anyway.

The Safe Drinking Water Act requires certain water providers to develop plans for some threats and certify they've done so. But its power is limited.

"There's just no authority for (cybersecurity) in the law," Roberson said.

Kevin Morley, manager of federal relations with the American Water Works Association, said some water utilities have components that are connected to the internet — a common, but significant vulnerability. Overhauling those systems can be a significant and costly job. And without substantial federal funding, water systems struggle to find resources.

The industry group has published guidance for utilities and advocates for establishing a new organization of cybersecurity and water experts that would develop new policies and enforce them, in partnership with the EPA.

"Let's bring everybody along in a reasonable manner," Morley said, adding that small and large utilities have different needs and resources.

Israeli and Hamas leaders join list of people accused by leading war crimes court

By MELANIE LIDMAN and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — By accusing the heads of Israel and Hamas of war crimes, the International Criminal Court's top prosecutor placed them among world leaders infamous for heinous acts against humanity.

The chief prosecutor, Karim Khan, announced arrest warrants Monday against two Israeli leaders — including Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu — and three Hamas leaders.

The prosecutor focused on actions taken by Hamas on Oct. 7 when militants stormed southern Israel, killing around 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages, and on Israel's military response in Gaza, which has killed roughly 35,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza health ministry.

Netanyahu condemned the decision Monday, calling it "a complete distortion of reality."

"I reject with disgust the Hague prosecutor's comparison between democratic Israel and the mass murderers of Hamas," Netanyahu said.

In a statement, Hamas accused the prosecutor of trying to "equate the victim with the executioner." It said it has the right to resist Israeli occupation, including "armed resistance."

The ICC is the permanent court of last resort, established in 2002 to prosecute individuals for war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression. Several countries don't accept the court's jurisdiction, including Israel, the United States, China and Russia.

Here's a closer look at the accusations against Israeli and Hamas leaders, and some of the leaders around the world who have also been served arrest warrants from the ICC:

THE HAMAS LEADERS

The Hamas officials — Ismail Haniyeh, Yahya Sinwar and Mohammed Deif — are accused of planning and instigating eight war crimes and crimes against humanity, among them extermination, murder, taking hostages, rape and torture.

"The crimes against humanity charged were part of a widespread and systematic attack against the civilian population of Israel by Hamas," the decision released today by the ICC stated.

"There are reasonable grounds to believe that hostages taken from Israel have been kept in inhumane conditions, and that some have been subject to sexual violence, including rape, while being held in captivity."

Hamas rejected the accusations.

Sinwar and Deif are believed to be hiding in Gaza. Haniyeh, the supreme leader of Hamas, is based in Qatar.

THE ISRAELI LEADERS

Netanyahu and Israeli defense minister Yoav Gallant are accused of seven war crimes and crimes against humanity, including extermination and murder. They are also accused of starvation of civilians as a method of warfare, intentionally directing acts against a civilian population, persecution, and willfully causing great suffering.

The U.N. says a "full-blown famine" is occurring in northern Gaza, as the territory faces a near-complete cutoff from aid supplies. Israel has been accused of heavily restricting the flow of aid into the territory, an allegation it denies.

Netanyahu and Gallant do not face any immediate risk of prosecution. Israel is not a member of the court, but the threat of arrest could make it difficult for the Israeli leaders to travel abroad.

OTHER ARREST WARRANTS

The ICC has issued arrest warrants for other leaders over the past roughly two decades since the court was established.

In March of last year, Russian President Vladimir Putin was accused of the abduction of children from Ukraine to Russia. He was charged along with Maria Alekseyevna Lvova-Belova, the Russian Commissioner for Children's Rights.

The chances of Putin facing trial at the ICC are highly unlikely because Moscow does not recognize the court's jurisdiction or extradite its nationals. Russia responded by issuing its own arrest warrants for Khan,

the court's prosecutor, and other ICC judges.

One of Africa's most notorious warlords, Joseph Kony, was issued an arrest warrant from the ICC in 2005. As the leader of the Lord's Resistance Army in northern Uganda, he faces 12 counts of crimes against humanity including murder, sexual enslavement and rape, and 21 counts of war crimes.

Despite an internationally-backed manhunt and a \$5 million reward, Kony has evaded capture and remains at large. The ICC is expected to begin the court's first in absentia hearing in October.

Sudan's former President Omar al-Bashir is wanted by the ICC over accusations related to the conflict in Darfur. Al-Bashir was served with arrest warrants in 2009 and 2010 accusing him of five counts of crimes against humanity and three counts of genocide.

He remains at large, after spending some time in a prison in Khartoum from 2019 to 2023. Earlier this year, the ICC said there had been "progress" in the case against al-Bashir.

Longtime Libyan dictator Moammar Gadhafi was charged with two counts of crimes against humanity for his brutal crackdown during the Arab Spring in 2011. The ICC issued an arrest warrant for Gadhafi in June 2011, but closed the case in November 2011, after his death.

Seif al-Islam Gadhafi, the dictator's son, was charged along with two others in 2011 and remains at large.

University of California academic workers strike to stand up for pro-Palestinian protesters

By JANIE HAR Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) — Graduate students at the University of California, Santa Cruz walked off their jobs and went on strike Monday, the first campus to do so as part of a systemwide protest against a public university they say has violated the speech rights of pro-Palestinian advocates.

United Auto Workers Local 4811 represents 48,000 graduate students who work as teaching assistants, tutors, researchers and other academic employees on the 10-campus UC system. Organizers said the campuses will not strike all at once, opting instead for rolling strikes, to protest the arrests and forcible ejection by police of union members who participated in demonstrations calling for an end to the war in Gaza.

Rebecca Gross, a UC Santa Cruz graduate student in literature and union leader, said at least 1,500 people were on strike Monday and had no plans to return to work until the union reaches a deal with the university. Students and researchers are not teaching, grading or working in their labs, and they are withholding data, she said.

"Police were unleashed and given the go-ahead to arrest protesters," at the Los Angeles, San Diego and Irvine campuses, she said.

University officials say the strike is unlawful and in violation of the union's contract, which prohibits work stoppages. Both sides have filed unfair labor practice complaints with the California Public Employment Relations Board.

The union is demanding amnesty for all academic employees, students and faculty who face disciplinary action or arrest due to the protests. It's also seeking divestment from UC's investments in weapons makers, contractors and companies aiding Israel in its war against Hamas, among other issues.

Tobias Higbie, a labor historian and director of the Institute for Research on Labor and Employment at UCLA, said it is not unusual for unions to flex their muscle over broad workplace issues that are not narrowly tied to wages and benefits.

"They're not everyday events, and maybe not even every year events," he said. "But they're not unheard of."

The union's action may be surprising to some, but so was what happened at UCLA earlier this month, Higbie said. On May 1, police in riot gear ordered the dispersal of more than a thousand people gathered on campus to support Palestine, and warned that those who refused to leave would face arrest.

The night before, police had waited to intervene as counter-protesters attacked the pro-Palestinian encampment, causing injuries. California Gov. Gavin Newsom denounced the delay.

Scott Hernandez-Jason, an assistant vice chancellor with UC Santa Cruz, said afternoon classes are being conducted remotely Monday.

"Our primary goal is to minimize the disruptive impact, especially given the many educational and research challenges that have affected students and researchers in recent years," he said in an email. "Academic and operational continuity is essential to the University of California's education and research mission and a core responsibility to our students."

Judge blocks Biden administration from enforcing new gun sales background check rule in Texas

By ACACIA CORONADO Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — A federal judge has blocked the Biden administration from enforcing a new rule in Texas that would require firearms dealers to run background checks on buyers at gun shows or other places outside brick-and-mortar stores.

The decision by U.S. District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk, an appointee of former President Donald Trump, came before the rule had been set to take effect Monday. The order also prevents the federal government from enforcing the rule against several gun-rights groups, including Gun Owners of America. It does not apply to Louisiana, Mississippi and Utah, which were also part of the lawsuit.

"Plaintiffs understandably fear that these presumptions will trigger civil or criminal penalties for conduct deemed lawful just yesterday," Kacsmaryk said in his ruling.

The federal Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives declined to comment. The Justice Department didn't immediately respond to a request for comment.

Twenty-six Republican attorneys general filed lawsuits in federal court in Arkansas, Florida and Texas aiming to block enforcement of the rule earlier this month. The plaintiffs argued that the rule violates the Second Amendment of the U.S. Constitution and that President Joe Biden, a Democrat, doesn't have the authority to implement it.

The new requirement is the Biden administration's latest effort to curtail gun violence and aims to close a loophole that has allowed unlicensed dealers to sell tens of thousands of guns every year without checking that the potential buyer is not legally prohibited from having a firearm.

Kacsmaryk wrote that the rule sets presumptions about when a person intends to make a profit and whether a seller is "engaged in the business." He said this is "highly problematic" for multiple reasons, including that it forces the firearm seller to prove innocence rather than the government to prove guilt.

"This ruling is a compelling rebuke of their tyrannical and unconstitutional actions that purposely misinterpreted federal law to ensure their preferred policy outcome," Gun Owners of America senior vice president Erich Pratt said in a statement Monday.

Biden administration officials proposed the rule in August and it garnered more than 380,000 public comments. It follows the nation's most sweeping gun violence prevention bill in decades, which Biden signed in 2022 after lawmakers reached a bipartisan agreement in the wake of the Uvalde Elementary School shooting that killed 19 children and two teachers two years ago this week.

The rule implements a change in the 2022 law that expanded the definition of those who are "engaged in the business" of selling firearms, are required to become licensed by the ATF, and therefore must run background checks.

"This is going to keep guns out of the hands of domestic abusers and felons," Biden said in a statement last month. "And my administration is going to continue to do everything we possibly can to save lives. Congress needs to finish the job and pass universal background checks legislation now."

Kacsmaryk is the sole district court judge in Amarillo — a city in the Texas panhandle — ensuring that all cases filed there land in front of him. Since taking the bench, he has ruled against the Biden administration on several other issues, including immigration and LGBTQ protections.

The White House says FDIC chairman to step down following report on agency's toxic workplace culture

By KEN SWEET AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The White House said Monday that the chairman of the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation will step down, a departure that follows the release earlier this month of a damning report about the agency's toxic workplace culture.

The White House said Martin Gruenberg will step down once a successor is appointed and that President Joe Biden will name a replacement "soon." The announcement came after the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee earlier Monday called for Gruenberg's removal.

Biden expects the FDIC "to reflect the values of decency and integrity and to protect the rights and dignity of all employees," Deputy Press Secretary Sam Michel said in a statement.

The FDIC is one of several U.S. banking system regulators. The Great Depression-era agency is best known for running the nation's deposit insurance program, which insures Americans' deposits up to \$250,000 in case their bank fails.

Before Monday, no Democrats had called for Gruenberg's ouster, although several came very close to doing so. But Sen. Sherrod Brown, the top Democrat on the Senate Banking Committee and who is facing a tough reelection campaign, issued a statement Monday calling for Gruenberg to step down, saying his leadership at the FDIC could no longer be trusted.

Gruenberg was grilled for two days last week on Capitol Hill in hearings largely focused on the FDIC's workplace culture and the failures disclosed in the report prepared by an outside law firm.

"After chairing last week's hearing, reviewing the independent report, and receiving further outreach from FDIC employees to the Banking and Housing Committee, I am left with one conclusion: there must be fundamental changes at the FDIC," Brown said in a statement.

Republicans have been calling for Gruenberg's ouster for some time and criticized the White House for not calling for his immediate departure.

Gruenberg has held positions in various levels of leadership at the FDIC for nearly 20 years, and this was his second full term as FDIC chair. His long tenure at the agency made him largely responsible for the agency's toxic work environment, according to the independent report outlining the problems at the agency.

The report released Tuesday by law firm Cleary Gottlieb Steen & Hamilton cites incidents of stalking, harassment, homophobia and other violations of employment regulations, based on more than 500 complaints from employees.

Complaints included a woman who said she was stalked by a coworker and continually harassed even after complaining about his behavior; a field office supervisor referring to gay men as "little girls;" and a female field examiner who described receiving a picture of an FDIC senior examiner's private parts.

US pediatricians reverse decades-old advice against HIV-positive mothers breastfeeding

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

People with HIV can breastfeed their babies, as long as they are taking medications that effectively suppress the virus that causes AIDS, a top U.S. pediatricians' group said Monday in a sharp policy change.

The new report from the American Academy of Pediatrics reverses recommendations it had in place since the start of the HIV epidemic in the 1980s.

It recognizes that routinely prescribed drugs can reduce the risk of transmitting HIV via breast milk to less than 1%, said Dr. Lisa Abuogi, a pediatric HIV expert at the University of Colorado and lead author of the report.

"The medications are so good now and the benefits for mom and baby are so important that we are at a point where it is important to engage in shared decision-making," Abuogi said.

The drugs, known as antiretroviral therapy, don't eliminate all risk of transmitting HIV through breast

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 63 of 85

milk. Avoiding breastfeeding is the only certain way to prevent spreading the virus, Abuogi said.

In addition, parents must breastfeed exclusively for the babies' first six months because research shows that switching between breast milk and formula can disrupt an infant's gut in ways that increase the risk of HIV infection.

About 5,000 people who have HIV give birth in the U.S. each year. Nearly all take drugs to suppress the virus to very low levels, Abuogi said, though viral levels can rebound if they don't stay on them.

Before the medications became widely available starting a decade ago, about 30% of HIV infections transmitted from moms to babies occurred during breastfeeding, said Dr. Lynne Mofenson, an adviser to the Elizabeth Glaser Pediatric AIDS Foundation. In the early 1990s, about 2,000 infections occurred in U.S. infants each year. Today, it's fewer than 30.

The AAP policy comes more than a year after the National Institutes of Health and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention reversed longstanding recommendations against breastfeeding by people with HIV. That guidance said people who have consistent viral suppression should be counseled on their options. It also emphasizes that health care providers shouldn't alert child protective services agencies if a parent with HIV seeks to breastfeed.

The goal is listening to patients "and not blaming or shaming them," said Dr. Lynn Yee, a Northwestern University professor of obstetrics and gynecology who helped draft the NIH guidance.

Breastfeeding provides ideal nutrition for babies and protects them against illnesses and conditions such as obesity and Type 2 diabetes, research shows. Nursing also reduces the mother's risk of breast and ovarian cancer, diabetes and high blood pressure.

The World Health Organization has recommended since 2010 that women with HIV in developing countries breastfeed their infants and have access to antiretroviral therapy. The guidance weighed the risk of infants acquiring HIV through breastfeeding and the risk of babies dying from malnutrition, diarrhea and pneumonia in places where safe replacements for breast milk aren't available.

In developed nations, however, experts had recommended against breastfeeding because the wide availability of safe water, formula and human donor milk could eliminate the risk of HIV transmission, Yee said.

That frustrated people with HIV who were flatly refused the option of nursing.

Ci Ci Covin, 36, of Philadelphia, said she was diagnosed with HIV at age 20 and not permitted to breastfeed her first child, Zion, now 13.

"I couldn't understand how come my sister that lives in a place like Kenya, who looks just like me with the same color brown skin, was given the option to breastfeed and how my option was starkly no," she said.

Not being able to nurse her son sent Covin into a spiral of postpartum depression, she said. When she became pregnant with her now 2-year-old daughter, Zuri, her health care team helped her successfully breastfeed for seven months. Covin took her prescriptions as directed and also gave the baby drugs to prevent infection.

"Breast milk has everything in it that my baby would need," Covin said. "That's a beautiful thing."

Abuogi said the AAP report provides crucial guidance for pediatricians, nurses and lactation specialists who work directly with children and families.

Some providers were already helping people treated for HIV to nurse their babies, despite the earlier recommendations. The new guidance should expand the practice, hopefully quickly, Abuogi said.

"This is a unique situation because it's not just doctors and providers who are changing," Abuogi said. "Our patients are pushing this as well."

What is the ICC and why it is considering arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The International Criminal Court could soon issue arrest warrants for Israeli and Hamas leaders, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, more than seven months into the war between the two sides, based on a request by the court's chief prosecutor.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 64 of 85

Karim Khan said that he believes Netanyahu, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and three Hamas leaders — Yehia Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — are responsible for war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

The ICC was established in 2002 as the permanent court of last resort to prosecute individuals responsible for the world's most heinous atrocities — war crimes, crimes against humanity, genocide and the crime of aggression.

The Rome Statute creating the ICC was adopted in 1998 and took effect when it got 60 ratifications on July 1, 2002. The U.N. General Assembly endorsed the ICC, but the court is independent.

Without a police force, the ICC relies on member states to arrest suspects, which has proven to be a major obstacle to prosecutions.

Netanyahu said last month that Israel "will never accept any attempt by the ICC to undermine its inherent right of self-defense." He said that while the ICC won't affect Israel's actions, it would "set a dangerous precedent."

WHAT IS THE ICC?

The ICC's 124 member states have signed on to the Rome Statute. Dozens of countries didn't sign and don't accept the court's jurisdiction over war crimes, genocide and other crimes. They include Israel, the United States, Russia and China.

The ICC becomes involved when nations are unable or unwilling to prosecute crimes on their territory. Israel argues that it has a functioning court system, and disputes over a nation's ability or willingness to prosecute have fueled past disputes between the court and individual countries.

In 2020, then U.S. President Donald Trump authorized economic and travel sanctions on the ICC prosecutor and another senior prosecution office staffer. The ICC staff were looking into U.S. and allies' troops and intelligence officials for possible war crimes in Afghanistan.

U.S. President Joe Biden, whose administration has provided crucial military and political support for the Gaza offensive, lifted the sanctions in 2021.

The ICC has 17 ongoing investigations, issued a total of 42 arrest warrants and taken 21 suspects into custody. Its judges have convicted 10 suspects and acquitted four.

In its early years, the court was criticized for focusing on crimes in Africa, but now it has investigations in Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America.

WHAT IS THE ICC'S RELATIONSHIP TO ISRAEL AND PALESTINIAN TERRITORIES?

The U.N. General Assembly raised the Palestinians' status in 2012 from a U.N. observer to a nonmember observer state. That opened the door for the Palestinian territories to join international organizations, including the ICC.

The ICC accepted "The State of Palestine" as a member in 2015, a year after the Palestinians accepted the court's jurisdiction.

The court's chief prosecutor at the time announced in 2021 that she was opening an investigation into possible crimes on Palestinian territory. Israel often levies accusations of bias at U.N. and international bodies, and Netanyahu condemned the decision as hypocritical and antisemitic.

Khan, the current ICC prosecutor, visited Ramallah and Israel in December, meeting Palestinian officials and families of Israelis killed or taken hostage by Hamas militants in the Oct. 7 attack that sparked the Israel-Hamas war.

Khan called Hamas' actions "some of the most serious international crimes that shock the conscience of humanity, crimes which the ICC was established to address," and called for the immediate and unconditional release of all hostages.

Khan said "international humanitarian law must still apply" in the Israel-Hamas war and "the Israeli military knows the law that must be applied." After the visit, Khan said that an ICC investigation into possible crimes by Hamas militants and Israeli forces "is a priority for my office."

WHO ELSE HAS THE ICC CHARGED?

Last year, the court issued a warrant for Russian President Vladimir Putin on charges of responsibility for the abductions of children from Ukraine. Russia responded by issuing its own arrest warrants for Khan

and ICC judges.

Other high-profile leaders charged by the court include ousted Sudanese strongman Omar al-Bashir on allegations including genocide in his country's Darfur region. Former Libyan leader Moammar Gadhafi was captured and killed by rebels shortly after the ICC issued a warrant for his arrest on charges linked to the brutal suppression of anti-government protests in 2011.

Pentagon vows to keep weapons moving to Ukraine as Kyiv faces a renewed assault by Russia

By LOLITA C. BALDOR and TARA COPP Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin committed Monday to keeping U.S. weapons moving to Ukraine as Kyiv faces one of its toughest moments against a renewed assault by Russia.

Austin and as many as 50 defense leaders from Europe and around the world met Monday to coordinate more military aid to Ukraine as it tries to hold off a Russian offensive in the northeast while launching its own massive assault on the Russia-occupied Crimean Peninsula.

"We're meeting in a moment of challenge," Austin said, noting that Russia's new onslaught on Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, showed why the commitment was vital. Austin vowed to keep U.S. weapons moving "week after week."

Austin told reporters the group spent a lot of time talking about Ukraine's critical need for air defense systems, which he said are helping stave off the Russian attacks.

"We'll continue to push to ensure that Ukraine owns its skies and can defend its citizens and its civilian infrastructure far from the front lines," he said after the meeting ended.

Speaking alongside Austin, Gen. CQ Brown, chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, said that while there are no plans now to put U.S. trainers back into Ukraine to work with Ukrainian forces, the U.S. could do that after the war.

"Once this conflict is over and we're in a better place, then I would suspect we would be able to bring trainers back in," he said.

The U.S. announced no new aid packages Monday, even as Ukrainian forces continue to complain that weapons are just trickling into the country after being stalled for months due to congressional gridlock over funding. Pentagon officials have said that weapons pre-positioned in Europe began moving into Ukraine soon after the aid funding was approved in late April.

It's unclear how much of that has reached some of the front lines, where Russian troops have intensified their assault.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said on Friday during a visit to China that Moscow's offensive in the northeastern Kharkiv region aims to create a buffer zone but there are no plans to capture the city.

Ukrainian troops have been fighting to halt Russian advances in the Kharkiv region, while also increasing their offensive attacks in Crimea, including on military infrastructure on the Black Sea coast and in the Russian-occupied city of Sevastopol.

Ukraine has struggled to get enough troops to the front lines, as the war drags on into its third year and fighting takes its toll. In an effort to increase troop numbers, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy signed two laws, allowing prisoners to join the army and increasing fines for draft dodgers fivefold. The controversial mobilization law goes into effect on Saturday.

In the four weeks since President Joe Biden signed the \$95 billion foreign aid package, which included about \$61 billion for Ukraine, the U.S. has sent \$1.4 billion in weapons pulled from Pentagon stockpiles and announced it was providing \$6 billion in funding through the Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative. USAI pays for longer-term contracts with the defense industry and means that the weapons could take many months or years to arrive.

In recent packages the U.S. has agreed to send High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) and rockets for them, as well as munitions for Patriot and National Advanced Surface-to-Air Missile Systems, artillery, anti-aircraft and anti-tank munitions, and an array of armored vehicles, such as Bradley and Mine

Resistant Ambush Protected vehicles.

The U.S. is also providing additional coastal and riverine patrol boats, trailers, demolition munitions, high-speed anti-radiation missiles, protective gear, spare parts and other weapons and equipment.

The State Department has also approved a proposed emergency sale of HIMARS to Ukraine for an estimated \$30 million. State said Ukraine has asked to buy three of the rocket systems, which would be funded by the government of Germany.

The U.S. has now provided about \$50.6 billion in military assistance to Ukraine since Russia invaded in February 2022.

Tugboats escort ship that caused deadly Baltimore bridge collapse back to port

By LEA SKENE Associated Press

BALTIMORE (AP) — The recovery from the deadly Baltimore bridge collapse reached a significant milestone Monday as tugboats escorted the ill-fated container ship Dali back to port, its damaged bow still covered with smashed shipping containers, fallen steel trusses and mangled concrete.

Nearly two months have passed since the Dali lost power and crashed into one of the bridge's supporting columns, killing six construction workers and halting most maritime traffic through the Port of Baltimore.

Refloated at high tide Monday morning, the vessel slowly moved away from the site of the March 26 disaster, guided by five tugboats. The extensive damage to its bow included a massive, gaping hole above the waterline on its starboard side.

Removing the hulking ship opened a new void in Baltimore's altered skyline, which lost an iconic landmark and a symbol of the city's proud maritime history. Crews have already cleared thousands of tons of mangled steel that jutted up from the water's surface after the collapse.

The bodies of the six victims have been recovered from the underwater wreckage — all Latino immigrants who came to the U.S. for job opportunities. They were filling potholes on an overnight shift when the bridge was destroyed.

Officials said the Dali would move at about 1 mph on the roughly 2.5-mile (4-kilometer) trip back to port, a fraction of its speed when it lost power and brought down the bridge. It will spend several weeks getting temporary repairs at the same marine terminal it occupied before beginning its disastrous voyage, then move to a shipyard in Norfolk, Virginia for extensive repairs.

To refloat the Dali, crews released anchors and pumped out more than 1 million gallons of water that had kept the ship grounded and stable. Crews conducted a controlled demolition on May 13 to break down the largest remaining span of the collapsed bridge, which was draped across the Dali's bow. Dive teams then confirmed the path was clear.

The FBI has launched a criminal investigation into the circumstances leading up to the crash.

The Dali experienced two electrical blackouts about 10 hours before leaving the Port of Baltimore on its way to Sri Lanka. The crew later made changes to the ship's electrical configuration, switching to a transformer and breaker system that had previously been out of use for several months, according to the National Transportation Safety Board's preliminary report.

Two more blackouts left the Dali without propulsion, drifting off course just as it was approaching the Key Bridge. By then, two tugboats that had guided the Dali out of port had peeled off — normal protocol, according to the report — but when the power went out, the tugs were too far away to help avert disaster.

The ship's 21 crew members, most of whom are from India, haven't been allowed off the vessel since the collapse. The Dali is managed by Synergy Marine Group and owned by Grace Ocean Private Ltd., both of Singapore.

Darrell Wilson, a spokesperson for Synergy, said Monday that the crew has been busy maintaining the ship and assisting investigators. But now that the Dali is docked, he said company officials are working to secure shore leave for them. The process is somewhat more complicated than usual because their visas have expired.

Wilson said two more crew members recently joined the original 21 to spread out the workload and give them a break.

"Ultimately, we want to get them home to see their families," he said, though that timeline is unclear.

William Marks, a spokesperson for the crew, said they will remain on board "for the foreseeable future."

Port Director Jonathan Daniels said Monday that the channel is now 400 feet (122 meters) wide and 50 feet (15-meter) deep, and will be cleared to its full 700-foot (213-meter) width within two weeks.

Gov. Wes Moore praised the cleanup and recovery for "achieving in a matter of weeks what many thought would take months." He said Maryland will continue working to clear the channel, support the people affected and rebuild the Francis Scott Key Bridge.

Amal Clooney is one of the legal experts who recommended war crimes charges in Israel-Hamas war

By The Associated Press undefined

Amal Clooney is one of the legal experts who recommended that the chief prosecutor of the world's top war crimes court seek arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and leaders of the militant Hamas group.

The human rights lawyer and wife of actor George Clooney wrote of her participation in a letter posted Monday on the website of the couple's Clooney Foundation for Justice. She said she and other experts in international law unanimously agreed to recommend that International Criminal Court chief prosecutor Karim Khan seek the warrants.

Khan announced his intention to do so on Monday, saying that actions taken by both Israeli leaders and Hamas in the seven-month war in Gaza amounted to war crimes.

"I served on this Panel because I believe in the rule of law and the need to protect civilian lives," Clooney wrote. "The law that protects civilians in war was developed more than 100 years ago and it applies in every country in the world regardless of the reasons for a conflict."

The panel comprised experts in international humanitarian law and international criminal law, and two of its members are former judges at criminal tribunals in The Hague, where the ICC is based, Clooney wrote. She added that their decision was unanimous. The panel also published an op-ed about its recommendation in the Financial Times on Monday.

A panel of three judges at the ICC will decide whether to issue the arrest warrants and allow a case to proceed. The judges typically take two months to make such decisions.

In his announcement Monday, Khan accused Netanyahu, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant and three Hamas leaders — Yehia Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh — of war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders condemned the move as disgraceful and antisemitic. U.S. President Joe Biden also lambasted the prosecutor and supported Israel's right to defend itself against Hamas.

Israel is not a member of the court, so even if the arrest warrants are issued, Netanyahu and Gallant do not face any immediate risk of prosecution. But the threat of arrest could make it difficult for the Israeli leaders to travel abroad. Hamas is already considered an international terrorist group by the West.

The latest war between Israel and Hamas began on Oct. 7, when militants from Gaza crossed into Israel and killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 others hostage.

Since then, Israel has waged a brutal campaign to dismantle Hamas in Gaza. More than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed in the fighting, at least half of them women and children, according to the latest estimates by Gaza health officials, who do not distinguish between civilians and Hamas militants.

The war has triggered a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, displacing roughly 80% of the population and leaving hundreds of thousands of people on the brink of starvation, according to U.N. officials.

NYC mayor defends police response after videos show officers punching pro-Palestinian protesters

NEW YORK (AP) — New York City Mayor Eric Adams defended the police department's response to a pro-Palestinian street demonstration in Brooklyn over the weekend, calling video of officers repeatedly punching men lying prone on the ground an "isolated incident."

"Look at that entire incident," Adams said on the "Mornings on 1" program on the local cable news channel NY1. He complained that protesters who marched through Brooklyn's Bay Ridge section on Saturday had blocked traffic, spit at officers and, in one instance, climbed on top of a moving city bus. "I take my hat off to the Police Department, how they handled an unruly group of people."

"People want to take that one isolated incident that we're investigating. They need to look at the totality of what happened in that bedroom community," Adams added.

Footage shot by bystanders and independent journalists shows police officers intercepting a march in the street, shoving participants toward the sidewalk, and then grabbing some people in the crowd and dragging them down to the asphalt. Officers can be seen repeatedly punching at least three protesters, in separate incidents, as they lay pinned on the ground.

A video shot by videographer Peter Hambrecht and posted on X shows an officer in a white shirt punching a protester while holding his throat. Hambrecht said the arrests took place after police told the crowd to disperse.

"They were aware they might get arrested, but many times people use that to justify the beating which is obviously ridiculous," Hambrecht told The Associated Press in a text message.

Independent journalist Katie Smith separately recorded video of an officer unleashing a volley of punches on a man pinned to the ground, hitting him at least five times with a closed fist.

At least 41 people were arrested, police said.

The NYPD later released its own video showing misbehavior by protesters, including people throwing empty water bottles at officers, splashing them with liquids and lighting flares and smoke bombs. It also showed one protester sitting on the roof of a moving transit bus waving a Palestinian flag.

"We will not accept the narrative that persons arrested were victims, nor are we going to allow illegal behavior," NYPD Deputy Commissioner Kaz Daughtry said in a statement on X.

The NYPD agreed to change the way it handles public protests last summer after it had to pay out at least \$35 million to settle claims of police misconduct during the large protests against racial injustice after the 2020 murder of George Floyd.

The legal settlement required the department to reduce the number of officers it sent to most protests. It also required police to allow most demonstrations to take place on public streets, even if they temporarily block traffic, as long as they are nonviolent and don't involve a threat of major property damage. Police can still step in under the settlement to redirect protest marches to prevent them from blocking access to bridges and tunnels, or places like hospitals and police precincts. But the written agreement says "the fact that some individuals in a crowd have engaged in unlawful conduct does not by itself provide grounds" to end demonstrations and order a crowd to disperse.

The City Council member who represents Bay Ridge, Justin Brannan, said the demonstration broken up by police was one held annually in the neighborhood to protest the displacement of Palestinian people following the establishment of Israel in 1948.

"Bay Ridge is home to the largest Palestinian community in NYC," Brannan wrote on X. "There has been a Nakba Day demonstration here every year for the past decade without incident. I saw no evidence of actions by protestors today that warranted such an aggressive response from NYPD."

New York Civil Liberties Union Executive Director Donna Lieberman criticized the arrests and called them an escalation of police tactics against demonstrators.

"The aggressive escalation by the NYPD's Strategic Response Group yesterday in Bay Ridge was a violation of New Yorkers' right to speak out and risks chilling political expression," Lieberman said, naming the NYPD unit that is often called to protests.

Nikki Haley faces a murky path forward and a key decision on whether or not to endorse Trump

By STEVE PEOPLES, MEG KINNARD and THOMAS BEAUMONT Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — Nikki Haley is perhaps the highest-profile Republican in the nation who has refused to fall in line and endorse Donald Trump's presidential bid.

It's unclear how long that might last.

Some allies believe she may be forced to endorse him before the November election to avoid permanently alienating the Republican Party base. Some even suspect that Haley will re-emerge on Trump's short list of vice presidential contenders in the coming months, despite Trump's recent statement to the contrary.

But if Haley submits to Trump, as so many of his GOP critics have done, she also risks destroying her own coalition of independents, moderates and anti-Trump Republicans, who are still showing up to support her in low-profile primary contests from deep-red Indiana to deep-blue Maryland. On Tuesday, she gets another chance to demonstrate her sustained strength in Kentucky's presidential primary contest, which comes more than two months after she suspended her campaign.

Haley's decision on Trump in the coming months will be closely watched not just by her supporters, but by allies of Trump and President Joe Biden. What she decides to do — and whether her coalition follows — could have a profound impact on this year's general election and her future as a top-tier Republican whose brand appeals to many people outside her party.

"Nikki Haley could be the person that unites us," said Thalia Floras, a 62-year-old retail manager from Nashua, New Hampshire, who was a lifelong Democrat before casting a ballot for Haley in her state's January primary.

But Floras also has a warning: "Nikki Haley has a good place with me now. But if she goes with Trump, I'm done."

Those close to Haley, a 52-year-old former governor and U.N. ambassador, say it's unclear what she'll do.

HALEY VOTERS UP FOR GRABS, BUT ONLY BIDEN TRYING

Haley and Trump haven't spoken in months. That includes the period after she bowed out of the GOP primary campaign in early March, according to a person with direct knowledge of Haley's private conversations who was not authorized to speak about them publicly.

And while some Republicans who supported Haley will certainly drift back to Trump organically, the Biden campaign is working to win over her supporters, whom they view as true swing voters.

Biden's team is quietly organizing a Republicans for Biden group, which will eventually include dedicated staff and focus on the hundreds of thousands of Haley voters in each battleground state, according to people familiar with the plans but not authorized to discuss them publicly.

The Democratic president hasn't kept his intentions a secret.

Biden issued a statement thanking Haley for her courage to challenge Trump just minutes after she bowed out of the primary race in March.

"Donald Trump made it clear he doesn't want Nikki Haley's supporters. I want to be clear: There is a place for them in my campaign," Biden said at the time.

Trump, meanwhile, said in late January that Haley donors would be permanently banned from his "Make America Great Again" camp. While he has refrained from attacking her since she left the race, Trump hasn't offered public statements of goodwill either as he has for other vanquished rivals like Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis.

As part of Biden's sustained outreach to Haley's coalition, his campaign released a digital ad late last month highlighting Trump's often-personal attacks against Haley, including his primary nickname of her as "birdbrain" and suggestion that "she's not presidential timber."

Asked about Trump's lack of outreach to Haley and her supporters, senior adviser Jason Miller avoided any mention of her and instead cast doubt on the strength of Biden's coalition of Black Americans, Latinos and young voters.

"The reality is the Republican Party is united behind President Trump while the Democrat Party has shat-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 70 of 85

tered to pieces because of Joe Biden's disastrous policies on issues like inflation and the border," Miller said. Few expect Haley to endorse the Democratic president outright. Such a decision would make it difficult, if not impossible, for her to win a future GOP presidential primary if she decides to run again.

Instead, Biden's allies are hopeful that Haley, among other high-profile Republican Trump critics, may either stay silent or offer an endorsement focusing on the stakes of the election for democracy rather than direct praise for Biden.

If and when Biden's team does secure high-profile Republican supporters, it's likely to wait several more weeks to unveil them to help maximize their impact when voters are paying closing attention to the November election.

A PRO-BIDEN REPUBLICAN SPEAKS

Former Georgia Lt. Gov. Geoff Duncan, a Republican who had backed Haley in the GOP primary, formally endorsed Biden earlier in the month. In an interview, he said he made the decision before talking to Biden's campaign, although Biden personally called to thank him after Duncan announced his decision.

Duncan didn't rule out playing a prominent role in the Republicans for Biden group or even speaking at the Democratic National Convention this summer, just as former Ohio Gov. John Kasich did four years ago.

Duncan hopes Haley doesn't ultimately endorse Trump as so many of Trump's high-profile Republican critics have done.

"I feel like that would be a short-term sugar high to just gain favor inside the Republican Party," Duncan said of a potential Haley endorsement of Trump. "She has the right to do what she wants to do. Obviously everybody's playing the political calculus. But at some point, where do we draw the line?"

The list of high-profile Republicans willing to stand up to Trump in 2024 is extraordinarily small.

Even those who described Trump as a dangerous threat to democracy, like New Hampshire Gov. Chris Sununu, have ultimately endorsed him. Sununu, who was among Haley's top national surrogates during the campaign, declined repeated requests to comment on her political future. And DeSantis, once Trump's chief primary rival and another early 2028 prospect, now plans to raise money for Trump's general election campaign.

HALEY STEPS BACK INTO PUBLIC SPOTLIGHT

Haley has only just begun to emerge from a period of post-campaign seclusion, where she took time to reconnect with family, especially her husband, a military serviceman who recently returned from a nearly yearlong tour overseas.

She plans to deliver a speech on foreign policy later this week — her first public address since ending her 2024 campaign — at the Hudson Institute, a Washington-based conservative think tank where she's agreed to serve as the Walter P. Stern Chair.

And last week, Haley huddled with dozens of donors and allies behind closed doors in South Carolina, where she thanked her coalition, while largely ignoring Trump. She did not encourage attendees to support his campaign.

Simone Levinson, a Haley bundler who attended the private gathering, said there remains an appetite among Republicans for a next-generation figure who can communicate well and build consensus.

"There is a very strong indication that she has struck a chord that is still continuing to resonate with millions of Americans," said Levinson, who is based in Florida.

HER COALITION SENDS A MESSAGE

Indeed, without any formal organization, advertising or even private encouragement, the Haley voters continue to show up in low-profile presidential primaries, which will run through the end of June even though Trump is the only candidate still in the running.

Haley earned more than 21% of the vote in Maryland's presidential primary last week. That's after hitting similar marks the week before in Indiana and Arizona just weeks after leaving the race.

"She's articulate and intelligent, which are things that Trump isn't," said retired school psychologist Kathy Showen, an independent voter from Cross Lanes, West Virginia, who cast a primary ballot for Haley last week.

Meanwhile, in New Hampshire, Floras said she'll begrudgingly vote for Biden this fall because she can't

stomach Trump. But she's hopeful that Haley will run again in 2028.

Her feelings might change, however, if Haley gives in and endorses Trump before the fall election. "It would really disappoint me if she doesn't stand up to him," Floras said. "That would do her in."

WikiLeaks founder Assange wins right to appeal against an extradition order to the US

By BRIAN MELLEY and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange can appeal an extradition order to the United States on espionage charges, a London court ruled Monday — a decision likely to further drag out an already long legal saga.

High Court judges Victoria Sharp and Jeremy Johnson ruled for Assange after his lawyers argued that the U.S. government provided "blatantly inadequate" assurances that he would have the same free speech protections as an American citizen if extradited from Britain.

Assange, 52, has been indicted on 17 espionage charges and one charge of computer misuse over his website's publication of a trove of classified U.S. documents almost 15 years ago.

Hundreds of supporters cheered and applauded outside court as news of the ruling reached them from inside the Royal Courts of Justice.

Assange's wife, Stella, said the U.S. had tried to put "lipstick on a pig — but the judges did not buy it." She said the U.S. should "read the situation" and drop the case.

"As a family we are relieved but how long can this go on?" she said. "This case is shameful and it is taking an enormous toll on Julian."

The Australian computer expert has spent the last five years in a British high-security prison after taking refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for seven years. Assange was not in court to hear the ruling because of health reasons, his lawyer said.

American prosecutors allege that Assange encouraged and helped U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks published.

Assange's lawyers have argued he was a journalist who exposed U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Sending him to the U.S., they said, would expose him to a politically motivated prosecution and risk a "flagrant denial of justice."

The U.S. government says Assange's actions went way beyond those of a journalist gathering information, amounting to an attempt to solicit, steal and indiscriminately publish classified government documents.

The brief ruling from the bench followed arguments over Assange's claim that by releasing the confidential documents he was essentially a publisher and due the free press protections guaranteed by the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution.

The hearing was a follow-up to a provisional ruling in March that said he could take his case to the Court of Appeal unless the U.S. guaranteed he would not face the death penalty if extradited and would have the same free speech protections as a U.S. citizen.

The U.S. provided those assurances but Assange's lawyers only accepted that he would not face the prospect of capital punishment.

They said the assurance that Assange could "raise and seek to rely upon" the First Amendment fell short of the protections he deserved. Further, they argued that the prosecutor refused to say he would not challenge Assange's right to use such a defense.

"The real issue is whether an adequate assurance has been provided to remove the real risk identified by the court," Fitzgerald said. "It is submitted that no adequate assurance has been made."

Attorney James Lewis, representing the U.S., said Assange would be "entitled to the full panoply of due process trial rights" but said some of his conduct was "simply unprotected" by the First Amendment.

"No one, neither U.S. citizens nor foreign citizens, are entitled to rely on the First Amendment in relation to publication of illegally obtained national defense information giving the names of innocent sources, to

their grave and imminent risk of harm," Lewis said.

The court ruled that Assange could appeal on two grounds, both of which were related to the free press issue.

The judges said if he was deprived of a First Amendment defense then his extradition could be incompatible with the European Convention on Human Rights, which also provides free speech and media protections. Secondly, if he can't rely on the First Amendment because he's not a U.S. citizen then he could be treated unfairly because of his nationality.

Assange's lawyers say he could face up to 175 years in prison if convicted, though American authorities have said any sentence would likely be much shorter.

Assange's family and supporters say his physical and mental health have suffered during more than a decade of legal battles, which includes seven years spent inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London from 2012 until 2019. He has spent the past five years in a British high-security prison.

Commuters emerging from a Tube stop near the courthouse couldn't miss a large sign bearing Assange's photo and the words, "Publishing is not a crime. War crimes are."

Scores of supporters gathered outside the neo-Gothic Royal Courts of Justice chanting "Free Julian Assange" and "Press freedom, Assange freedom." Some held white flags aimed at President Joe Biden, exhorting: "Let him go Joe."

Biden said last month that he was considering a request from Australia to drop the case and let Assange return to his home country.

Officials provided no other details but Assange's wife said it was "a good sign" and Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese said the comment was encouraging.

Assange's U.S. lawyer, Barry Pollack, said the ruling was "a significant milestone" in the long-running case. "I hope that the United States will take a hard look at this decision and maybe reconsider whether they should be pursuing this fundamentally flawed prosecution," he said.

Ex-South African leader Zuma, now a ruling party critic, is disqualified from next week's election

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — Former South African President Jacob Zuma was disqualified Monday from running for a Parliament seat in next week's national election because of a previous criminal conviction. The decision by the country's highest court is certain to raise political tensions ahead of a pivotal vote in Africa's most advanced economy, as Zuma leads a new political party challenging former allies.

The Constitutional Court said a section of the constitution disqualifying people from standing for Parliament if they've been sentenced to more than 12 months in prison without the option of a fine does apply to the 82-year-old former leader. Zuma was sentenced to 15 months in prison in 2021 by the court for contempt for refusing to testify at a judicial inquiry into government corruption.

Zuma cannot serve as a lawmaker until five years after that sentence is completed, the court said in a ruling nine days ahead of the May 29 election.

Zuma once led South Africa's ruling African National Congress party but was forced out as its leader in 2017 and resigned as president in 2018 under a cloud of corruption allegations.

He returned to politics late last year with a new party and renewed his fierce criticism of the ANC and current President Cyril Ramaphosa, who replaced him as both party leader and president.

Zuma's new party said in a statement that "this unsurprising decision, while disappointing, has not disheartened us." The party criticized the court and the panel of judges that issued the ruling.

Next week's election could be South Africa's most important in 30 years, with the beleaguered ANC facing the biggest challenge to its long rule since the end of the apartheid system of white minority rule in 1994.

The ANC is struggling to hold onto its parliamentary majority, and the election might force it into a national coalition government. That would be the country's biggest political shift since apartheid was dismantled

with the first all-race elections.

The court ruling doesn't prevent Zuma's party, called uMkhonto weSizwe (Spear of the Nation), or the MK Party, from contesting the election.

Zuma appears on the party's election posters and is the face of its campaign. South Africa's independent electoral commission that governs elections said Zuma's image could remain on the party's election regalia, but his name would be removed from its list of proposed candidates.

South Africans don't vote directly for their president, but rather for parties. Those parties get seats in Parliament according to their share of the vote. The president is elected by lawmakers, meaning the party that holds the majority chooses the president. That has always been the ANC since 1994, but if it receives less than 50% of the vote this time, it will need a coalition to form a government and reelect Ramaphosa for a second and final term.

Zuma's MK Party could erode more of the ANC's vote and make it harder for the ruling party to retain its majority.

Zuma still enjoys significant support, and the court's ruling increases the political temperature after some MK Party officials had suggested they would reject any decision stopping Zuma from being a candidate.

Ramaphosa told Radio 702 he didn't think the decision would cause unrest but added: "Should there be any threat of violence, our security forces are ready."

South Africa has had credible, peaceful elections since it became a democracy in 1994.

Zuma was initially disqualified from running for Parliament by the electoral commission. He successfully challenged that decision at the Electoral Court. Monday's ruling overturned that and confirmed his disqualification.

Zuma was South Africa's leader for nearly a decade from 2009-2018, but stepped down under internal pressure from the ANC as allegations emerged of widespread government graft. He was later called to testify at a judge-led inquiry into those graft allegations, but refused. That led to his sentence for contempt.

That sentence reinforced Zuma's lingering influence in parts of South Africa when it sparked a week of looting and rioting in two provinces that led to the deaths of more than 350 people, some of the country's worst violence since the last days of apartheid. Zuma was released on medical parole after serving two months of the 15-month sentence.

Zuma has also been charged with corruption in a separate case that deals with allegations against him from a time before he was president. He is expected to go on trial next April on those charges and has pleaded not guilty.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, a hard-line diplomat, dies in a helicopter crash

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Hossein Amirabdollahian, Iran's foreign minister and a hard-liner close to the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard who confronted the West while also overseeing indirect talks with the U.S. over the country's nuclear program, died in the helicopter crash that also killed the country's president, state media reported Monday. He was 60.

Amirabdollahian represented the hard-line shift in Iran after the collapse of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers after then President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the United States from the accord. Amirabdollahian served under President Ebrahim Raisi, a protege of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and followed their policies.

However, Amirabdollahian also was involved in efforts to reach a detente with regional rival Saudi Arabia in 2023, a move eclipsed months later by tensions that arose over the Israel-Hamas war. But he remained close to Iran's Revolutionary Guard, once praising the late Gen. Qassem Soleimani, slain in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad in 2020.

"You should thank the Islamic Republic and Qassem Soleimani, because Soleimani has contributed to

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 74 of 85

world peace and security," Amirabdollahian once said. "If there was no Islamic Republic, your metro stations and gathering centers in Brussels, London and Paris would not be safe."

Amirabdollahian served in the Foreign Ministry under Ali Akbar Salehi in 2011 through 2013. He then returned for several years under Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who was a key player in the nuclear deal reached under the administration of the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani.

But Zarif and Amirabdollahian had a falling out, likely over internal differences in Iran's foreign policy. Zarif offered him the ambassadorship to Oman, a strategically important post given the sultanate has been a long serving interlocutor between Iran and the West. But Amirabdollahian refused.

He became foreign minister under Raisi with his election in 2021. He backed the Iranian government position, even as mass protests swept the country in 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who had been detained earlier over allegedly not wearing a hijab, or headscarf, to the liking of authorities. The monthslong security crackdown that followed the demonstrations killed more than 500 people and saw more than 22,000 detained.

In March, a U.N. investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death.

During the Israel-Hamas war, Amirabdollahian met with foreign officials and the leader of Hamas. He also threatened retaliation against Israel and praised an April attack on Israel. He also oversaw Iran's response to a brief exchange of airstrikes with Iran's nuclear-armed neighbor Pakistan and worked on diplomacy with the Taliban in Afghanistan, with whom Iran had tense relations.

Amirabdollahian is survived by his wife and two children.

Jim Otto, 'Mr. Raider' and Pro Football Hall of Famer, dies at 86

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Jim Otto, the Hall of Fame center known as "Mr. Raider" for his durability through a litany of injuries, has died, the team confirmed Sunday night. He was 86.

The cause of death was not immediately known.

"The Original Raider," the club said in a statement posted on the social platform X. "The personification of consistency, Jim's influence on the American Football League and professional football as a whole cannot be overstated. His leadership and tenacity were a hallmark of the dominant Raider teams of the 1960s and 70s."

Otto remained involved with the Raiders even after they moved to Las Vegas in 2020. He was among several players from the club's past who were in the locker room following the Raiders' 27-14 season-ending victory over the Denver Broncos in January.

Las Vegas Raiders defensive end Maxx Crosby posted on X that Otto was an "absolute legend & incredible person."

Otto joined the Raiders for their inaugural season in the American Football League in 1960 and was a fixture on the team for the next 15 years.

He never missed a game because of injuries, competing in 210 consecutive regular-season games and 308 straight total contests despite undergoing nine operations on his knees during his playing career. His right leg was amputated in 2007.

"He's a warrior," former Raiders quarterback Rich Gannon once said. "When you think of the old-time, tough Raider, you think of Jim Otto."

Otto was elected to the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 1980 and is considered one of the AFL's all-time greats.

"Jim Otto personified the aura and mystique of the Raiders," Hall of Fame President Jim Porter said in a statement. "He was 'The Original Raider,' leading a new franchise from its inception into its first run of glory years from the late 1960s into the 1970s. His legendary reliability — with 210 consecutive starts in the AFL and NFL — and the accolades he acquired serve as a testament to his dedication to the organization and the game."

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 75 of 85

Otto was believed to have undergone more than 50 operations, most because of football-related injuries. Those dealt with multiple joint replacements, arthritis, and debilitating back and neck problems. His right leg was amputated in 2007.

Otto also had prostate cancer and two major infections after his career.

"I can take any type of surgery in the world except for when it comes to something that's internal," he said. "When it's cosmetic, fixing your nose, fixing your knee, fixing your elbows or whatever, that's nothing."

Wearing his famous No. 00 jersey — a play on his name, "Aught-oh" — Otto played in nine AFL All-Star games and the first three AFC-NFC Pro Bowls before being inducted into the Hall of Fame in his first year on the ballot.

"Throughout my career, I worked hard to continue to stay a level above everyone else," Otto once said. "Every day I walked on to the field, I was the best center. That's the way I wanted to be. I continued to play at that level with those expectations."

Otto was a key as the Raiders became one of the best organizations in professional football. The team won seven division titles in his final eight seasons and lost the Super Bowl to Green Bay following the 1967 season.

He played his final seasons with fellow Hall of Famers offensive linemen Gene Upshaw and Art Shell. Those Raiders physically dominated their opponents.

"There was some intimidation," he said. "Teams didn't like to come to Oakland because of the fans and the football team."

The Raiders also developed a reputation for partying as hard as they hit. Legend has it that players would show up just in time for bed check at 11 p.m., then head back out the door.

"No matter what happened the night before, they were all at practice the next morning," Otto said.

Born Jan. 5, 1938, in Wausau, Wisconsin, Otto grew up in poverty, even living for a while in a chicken coop with his family. He left to play college football at the University of Miami, where he starred at center and linebacker.

He went undrafted by the NFL in 1959, before signing with the Raiders of the new AFL the next year. He was one of only 20 players to play in the AFL for its entire 10 years.

Otto most recently served as the team's director of special projects. He organized reunions for former players and events for fans in the luxury boxes, and made public appearances for the team.

He also played a key role in negotiating the team's move back to Oakland from Los Angeles before the 1995 season. The Raiders left the Bay Area for Las Vegas in 2020.

Otto is survived by his wife Sally, his son Jim Jr. and daughter-in-law Leah, and his 14 grandchildren — Alice, Sarah, Amy, Amanda, Josiah, Hannah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Jennifer, Avery, Noah, Aiden, Roman and Ellie.

Taiwan's new President Lai in his inauguration speech urges China to stop its military intimidation

By SIMINA MISTREANU and CHRISTOPHER BODEEN Associated Press

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — Taiwan's new president, Lai Ching-te, said in his inauguration speech Monday that he wants peace with China and urged it to stop its military threats and intimidation of the self-governed island that Beijing claims as its own territory.

"I hope that China will face the reality of (Taiwan)'s existence, respect the choices of the people of Taiwan, and in good faith, choose dialogue over confrontation," Lai said after being sworn into office.

Lai pledged to "neither yield nor provoke" Beijing and said he sought peace in relations with China. But he emphasized the island democracy is determined to defend itself "in the face of the many threats and attempts at infiltration from China."

Lai's party, the Democratic Progressive Party, doesn't seek independence from China but maintains that Taiwan is already a sovereign nation.

The Chinese office in charge of Taiwan affairs criticized Lai's inauguration speech as promoting "the fal-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 76 of 85

lacy of separatism," inciting confrontation and relying on foreign forces to seek independence.

"We will never tolerate or condone any form of 'Taiwan independence' separatist activities," said Chen Binhua, spokesperson of the Taiwan Affairs Office of China's State Council.

"No matter how the situation on the island changes, no matter who is in power, it cannot change the fact that both sides of the Taiwan Strait belong to one China ... and cannot stop the historical trend of the motherland's eventual reunification," Chen said.

The Chinese Ministry of Commerce on Monday also announced sanctions against Boeing and two other defense companies for arms sales to Taiwan.

Lai, 64, takes over from Tsai Ing-wen, who led Taiwan through eight years of economic and social development despite the COVID-19 pandemic and China's escalating military threats. Beijing views Taiwan as a renegade province and has been upping its threats to annex it by force if necessary.

Lai is seen as inheriting Tsai's progressive policies, including universal health care, backing for higher education and support for minority groups, including making Taiwan the first place in Asia to recognize same-sex marriages.

In his inauguration speech, Lai pledged to bolster Taiwan's social safety net and help the island advance in fields such as artificial intelligence and green energy.

Lai, who was vice president during Tsai's second term, came across as more of a firebrand earlier in his career. In 2017, he described himself as a "pragmatic worker for Taiwan's independence," drawing Beijing's rebuke. He has since softened his stance and now supports maintaining the status quo across the Taiwan Strait and the possibility of talks with Beijing.

Thousands of people gathered in front of the Presidential Office Building in Taipei for the inauguration ceremony. Donning white celebratory hats, they watched the swearing-in on large screens, followed by a military march and colorful performances featuring folk dancers, opera performers and rappers. Military helicopters flew in formation, carrying Taiwan's flag.

Lai accepted congratulations from fellow politicians and delegations from the 12 nations that maintain official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, as well as politicians from the U.S., Japan and various European states.

Lai, also known by his English name William, has vowed to continue his predecessor's push to maintain stability with China while beefing up Taiwan's security through imports of military equipment from close partner the U.S., the expansion of the defense industry with the manufacture of submarines and aircraft, and the reinforcing of regional partnerships with unofficial allies such as the U.S., Japan, South Korea and the Philippines.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken congratulated Lai on his inauguration. "We look forward to working with President Lai and across Taiwan's political spectrum to advance our shared interests and values, deepen our longstanding unofficial relationship, and maintain peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait," Blinken said in a statement from his office.

The U.S. doesn't formally recognize Taiwan as a country but is bound by its own laws to provide the island with the means to defend itself.

Japan's government spokesperson, Yoshimasa Hayashi, said it continues to expect a peaceful settlement of the Taiwan issue through dialogue.

"The peace and stability of the Taiwan Strait is important not only for the security of Japan but the stability of all of the international community," Hayashi said Monday.

Lai's relatively conciliatory tone will come across as reassuring to foreign governments that may have been concerned about his past reputation as a firebrand, said Danny Russell, vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute.

"There is virtually nothing that Lai could have said, short of 'unconditional surrender,' that would satisfy Beijing," he said.

Although Lai signaled he would maintain the overall direction of Tsai's policy regarding Beijing, he struck a more sovereignty-affirming tone in his speech, said Amanda Hsiao, a senior analyst with the International

Crisis Group.

"This likely fits within Beijing's low expectations of Lai, so it won't necessarily change their response," Hsiao said. "China was always going to respond negatively to Lai."

During her tenure, Tsai oversaw a controversial pension and labor reform and extended the military conscription length to one year. She also kickstarted a military modernization drive.

Tsai's leadership during the pandemic split public opinion, with most admiring Taiwan's initial ability to keep the virus largely outside its borders but criticizing the lack of investment in rapid testing as the pandemic progressed.

Wolves reach conference finals brimming with talent and tenacity in quest for first NBA championship

By ARNIE STAPLETON AP Sports Writer

DENVER (AP) — The Minnesota Timberwolves reached the Western Conference finals brimming with talent, trust and tenacity after staging the biggest Game 7 comeback since the NBA began tracking play-by-play data 28 years ago.

The Wolves trailed the Denver Nuggets by 15 points at halftime Sunday night and by 20 points just over a minute into the third quarter.

With the crowd rocking Ball Arena, the Timberwolves didn't flinch. They doubled down on their dogged defense and roared back for the most monumental victory in the franchise's 35-year history.

They did it behind a terrific transition game and an unwavering superstar in Anthony Edwards for a stunning 98-90 victory over the reigning NBA champions.

The Wolves will face the Dallas Mavericks beginning Wednesday night at Target Center.

"The fans have been waiting for this moment, and this team has brought them this moment," said Karl-Anthony Towns, adding that it certainly wasn't lost on him that Sunday marked Minnesota all-time great Kevin Garnett's 48th birthday.

"Shoutout to KG, happy birthday, KG," Towns said. "Here's your present from all of us."

Garnett led Minnesota to its first conference finals 20 years ago. The Wolves lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in six games in 2004 and Garnett never made it back to the postseason before leaving for Boston, where he won an NBA title in 2008.

The Wolves would miss the playoffs 16 times in the next 17 years, making it only in 2018, when they lost in the first round to Houston.

Things began to turn around for the Timberwolves when they drafted Edwards No. 1 overall in 2020. They made it back to the postseason party the following year, losing to Memphis in Round 1.

After hiring head coach Chris Finch off Michael Malone's staff in Denver, the Timberwolves hired away the Nuggets' roster architect Tim Connelly, who built the Wolves explicitly to unseat his former team in Denver.

Connelly's first major move was a bold get of Rudy Gobert that was as risky as it was unconventional — he sent five players and five picks to Utah for the star defender — but going big was no small part of this breakthrough season for the Timberwolves.

"I think when Tim Connelly made that trade, everybody was laughing at him like, 'What is he doing?' But he made a great team," Nuggets center Nikola Jokic said as this series began.

Jokic and the defending NBA champions knew that well before losing their semifinal series in such humbling fashion to a team, like theirs, that was assembled largely at Connelly's direction.

As Jokic noted Sunday night, Connelly's deep, versatile roster can adapt to any style, meet any challenge and, as Sunday night showed, overcome the longest of odds.

The Timberwolves' resolve was hardened a year ago when they lurched into the playoffs with a short-handed team that was quickly dispatched by Denver in five games in Round 1.

Fueled by that disappointment, the Wolves won 56 games this year, produced the league's top defense and led the Western Conference for most of the season before finishing a game behind Oklahoma City

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 78 of 85

and Denver for the No. 3 seed.

The Wolves made sure seeding didn't matter.

After their four-game dispatch of the Phoenix Suns that marked their first playoff sweep in franchise history, the Wolves were unfazed by the Nuggets' 20-5 record in the playoffs over the last two years or by their Western Conference-best 36-8 record at home this season.

The Wolves won three times in four games at Ball Arena. They took Games 1 and 2 in Denver before losing three in a row. Facing elimination, they recovered with a 115-70 demolition of the Nuggets in Game 6, the biggest win over a defending champion in NBA history.

And they followed up that win with an epic Game 7 comeback.

"The series was wild and this game was just a microcosm of the entire series," Finch said.

Towns and Jaden McDaniels each scored 23 points in the clincher. Edwards finished with 16 points, eight rebounds and seven assists with most of his contributions coming in Minnesota's surgical 60-37 second half that knocked out the Nuggets, who got 35 points from Jamal Murray and 34 from Jokic.

Up next are the fifth-seeded Mavericks, who reached their second conference championship in three years. They lost to eventual champion Golden State in five games in 2022, but that was before Luka Dončić had Kyrie Irving as his sidekick.

The Wolves won three of four against Dallas in the regular season, with the Mavs winning the only game in which Dončić and Irving both played. Dallas was without both its stars for both losses in Minnesota.

"Honestly, I think for us we're just so happy for this moment, that we can't even think about the next moment," Towns said.

"I'm thinking about it," Edwards playfully interrupted.

"I will say for us, if we continue to play Timberwolves basketball, it will fix a lot of problems that we may have with that team and what they do best," Towns suggested. "So as long as we play Timberwolves' brand of basketball, I like our chances."

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, supreme leader's protege, dies at 63 in helicopter crash

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line protege of the country's supreme leader who helped oversee the mass executions of thousands in 1988 and later led the country as it enriched uranium near weapons-grade levels, launched a major attack on Israel and experienced mass protests, has died. He was 63.

Raisi's death, along with the foreign minister and other officials in a helicopter crash Sunday in northwestern Iran, came as Iran struggles with internal dissent and its relations with the wider world. A cleric first, Raisi once kissed the Quran, the Islamic holy book, before the United Nations and spoke more like a preacher than a statesman when addressing the world.

Raisi, who lost a presidential election to the relatively moderate incumbent Hassan Rouhani in 2017, came to power four years later in a vote carefully managed by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to clear any major opposition candidate.

His election came at a time when relations between Tehran and Washington were particularly tense following U.S. President Donald Trump's 2018 decision to unilaterally withdraw America from a nuclear deal aimed at limiting Iran's uranium enrichment in exchange for sanctions relief.

While Raisi said he wanted to rejoin the deal with world powers, his new administration instead pushed back against international inspections of nuclear facilities, in part over an alleged sabotage campaign that Tehran blamed on Israel. Talks to restore the accord remained stalled in his government's first months.

"Sanctions are the U.S.' new way of war with the nations of the world," Raisi told the United Nations in September 2021. "The policy of 'maximum oppression' is still on. We want nothing more than what is rightfully ours."

Mass protests swept the country in 2022 after the death of Mahsa Amini, a woman who had been de-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 79 of 85

tained over her allegedly loose headscarf, or hijab. The monthslong security crackdown that followed the demonstrations killed more than 500 people and more than 22,000 others were detained.

In March, a United Nations investigative panel found that Iran was responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death.

Then came the current Israel-Hamas war, in which Iran-backed militants targeted Israel. Tehran launched an extraordinary attack itself on Israel in April that used hundreds of drones, cruise missiles and ballistic missiles. Israel, the U.S. and its allies shot down the incoming fire, but it showed just how intense the yearslong shadow war between Iran and Israel was.

Born in Mashhad on Dec. 14, 1960, Raisi came from a family that traces its lineage to Islam's Prophet Muhammad, as signaled by the black turban he would later wear. His father died when he was 5. He went on to the seminary in the Shiite holy city of Qom and later described himself as an ayatollah, a high-ranking Shiite cleric.

On Monday, state-run media referred to Raisi as being "martyred while serving the nation." Khamenei said Raisi "did not believe in tiredness." Others cited the detente reached last year with Saudi Arabia as a major milestone.

But activists abroad, like the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran, described his presidency as seeing "a stunning escalation of state repression and violence against peaceful dissent in Iran."

"Raisi presided over a country suffocated by a regime that fears its own people," said Hadi Ghaemi, the center's executive director. "He was merely one boot on the necks of the Iranian people; others can easily take his place."

In 1988, at the end of Iran's long war with Iraq, Raisi served on what would become known as "death commissions," which handed down death sentences for political prisoners, militants and others. International rights groups estimate that as many as 5,000 people were executed.

After Iran's then-Supreme Leader Ruhollah Khomeini accepted a U.N.-brokered cease-fire, members of the Iranian opposition group Mujahedeen-e-Khalq, heavily armed by Iraq's Saddam Hussein, stormed across the Iranian border in a surprise attack. Iran ultimately blunted their assault, but the attack set the stage for the sham retrials.

Some who appeared were asked to identify themselves. Those who responded "mujahedeen" were sent to their deaths.

Raisi was defiant when asked at a news conference after his election about the executions.

"I am proud of being a defender of human rights and of people's security and comfort as a prosecutor wherever I was," said Raisi, who also served as Iran's attorney general for a time.

In 2016, Khamenei appointed Raisi to run the Imam Reza charity foundation, which manages a conglomerate of businesses and endowments in Iran. It is one of many bonyads, or charitable foundations, fueled by donations or assets seized after Iran's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

These foundations offer no public accounting of their spending and answer only to Iran's supreme leader. The Imam Reza charity, known as "Astan-e Quds-e Razavi" in Farsi, is believed to be one of the biggest. Analysts estimate its worth at tens of billions of dollars as it owns almost half the land in Mashhad, Iran's second-largest city.

At Raisi's appointment to the foundation, Khamenei called him a "trustworthy person with high-profile experience." That led to analyst speculation that Khamenei could be grooming Raisi as a possible candidate to be Iran's third-ever supreme leader, a Shiite cleric who has final say on all state matters and serves as the country's commander-in-chief.

Though Raisi lost his 2017 campaign, he still garnered nearly 16 million votes. Khamenei installed him as the head of Iran's internationally criticized judiciary, long known for its closed-door trials of human rights activists and those with Western ties. The U.S. Treasury in 2019 sanctioned Raisi "for his administrative oversight over the executions of individuals who were juveniles at the time of their crime and the torture and other cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment or punishment of prisoners in Iran, including amputations."

By 2021, Raisi became the dominant figure in the election after a panel under Khamenei disqualified candidates who posed the greatest challenge to his protege. He swept nearly 62% of the 28.9 million

votes in that election. Millions stayed home and others voided ballots, resulting in the lowest turnout by percentage in the Islamic Republic's history.

Raisi is survived by his wife and two daughters.

Timeline of the Assange legal saga over extradition to the US on espionage charges

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange won a key battle on Monday in his decade-and-a-half-long attempt to avoid extradition to the United States on espionage charges.

Two judges at London's High Court ruled that Assange can appeal against his extradition order.

Assange, 52, faces charges related to his organization's publication of a huge trove of classified documents. He has been in custody in a high-security London prison since 2019, and previously spent seven years in self-exile in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

Here is a look at key events in the long-running legal saga:

- 2006: Assange founds WikiLeaks in Australia. The group begins publishing sensitive or classified documents.

- 2010: In a series of posts, WikiLeaks releases almost half a million documents relating to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

- August 2010: Swedish prosecutors issue an arrest warrant for Assange based on one woman's allegation of rape and another's allegation of molestation. The warrant is withdrawn shortly afterward, with prosecutors citing insufficient evidence for the rape allegation. Assange denies the allegations.

- September 2010: Sweden's director of prosecutions reopens the rape investigation. Assange leaves Sweden for Britain.

- November 2010: Swedish police issue an international arrest warrant for Assange.

- December 2010: Assange surrenders to police in London and is detained pending an extradition hearing. The High Court grants Assange bail.

- February 2011: A district court in Britain rules Assange should be extradited to Sweden.

- June 2012: Assange enters the Ecuadorian Embassy in central London, seeking asylum, after his bids to appeal the extradition ruling fail. Police set up around-the-clock guard to arrest him if he steps outside.

- August 2012: Assange is granted political asylum by Ecuador.

- July 2014: Assange loses his bid to have an arrest warrant issued in Sweden against him canceled. A judge in Stockholm upholds the warrant alleging sexual offenses against two women.

- March 2015: Swedish prosecutors ask to question Assange at the Ecuadorian Embassy.

- August 2015: Swedish prosecutors drop investigations into some allegations against Assange because of the statute of limitations; an investigation into a rape allegation remains active.

- October 2015: Metropolitan Police end their 24-hour guard outside the Ecuadorian Embassy but say they'll arrest Assange if he leaves, ending a three-year police operation estimated to have cost millions.

- February 2016: Assange claims "total vindication" as the U.N. Working Group on Arbitrary Detention finds that he has been unlawfully detained and recommends he be immediately freed and given compensation. Britain calls the finding "frankly ridiculous."

- September 2018: Ecuador's president says his country and Britain are working on a legal solution to allow Assange to leave the embassy.

- October 2018: Assange seeks a court injunction pressing Ecuador to provide him basic rights he said the country agreed to when it first granted him asylum.

- November 2018: A U.S. court filing that appears to inadvertently reveal the existence of a sealed criminal case against Assange is discovered by a researcher. No details are confirmed.

- April 2019: Ecuadorian President Lenin Moreno blames WikiLeaks for recent corruption allegations; Ecuador's government revokes Assange's asylum status. London police haul Assange out of the Ecuador-

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 81 of 85

ian Embassy and arrest him for breaching bail conditions in 2012, as well as on behalf of U.S. authorities.

- May 2019: Assange is sentenced to 50 weeks in prison for jumping bail in 2012.
- May 2019: The U.S. government indicts Assange on 18 charges over WikiLeaks' publication of classified documents. Prosecutors say he conspired with U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to hack into a Pentagon computer and release secret diplomatic cables and military files on the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.
- November 2019: Swedish prosecutor drops rape investigation.
- May 2020: An extradition hearing for Assange is delayed during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- June 2020: The U.S. files a new indictment against Assange that prosecutors say underscores Assange's efforts to procure and release classified information.
- January 2021: A British judge rules Assange cannot be extradited to the U.S. because he is likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions.
- July 2021: The High Court grants the U.S. government permission to appeal the lower court's ruling blocking Assange's extradition.
- December 2021: The High Court rules that U.S. assurances about Assange's detention are enough to guarantee he would be treated humanely.
- March 2022: Britain's Supreme Court refuses to grant Assange permission to appeal against his extradition.
- June 2022: Britain's government orders the extradition of Assange to the United States. Assange appeals.
- May 2023: Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese says Assange should be released and "nothing is served" by his ongoing incarceration.
- June 2023: A High Court judge rules Assange cannot appeal his extradition.
- Feb. 20, 2024: Assange's lawyers launch a final legal bid to stop his extradition at the High Court.
- March 26, 2024: Two High Court judges in London give U.S. authorities three more weeks to submit further assurances, including a guarantee that Assange won't get the death penalty, before deciding whether they will grant him a new appeal against his extradition.
- May 20, 2024: The two High Court judges rule that Assange can mount a new appeal based on arguments about whether he will receive free-speech protections or be at a disadvantage because he is not a U.S. citizen. The date of the hearing has yet to be determined.

Who is Jacob Zuma, the former South African president disqualified from next week's election?

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Former South African President Jacob Zuma was barred Monday from running for Parliament in next week's national election over a previous criminal conviction, the latest twist in his return to politics.

The decision by the country's highest court, the Constitutional Court, may still be appealed. It ruled that Zuma is only eligible to serve as a lawmaker five years after his 2021 sentence for contempt of court was completed.

Zuma is now the leader of a new party, uMkhonto weSizwe Party, and is campaigning against the long-ruling African National Congress he once led.

Analysts say the ANC, which has comfortably held power since Nelson Mandela became the country's first Black president in 1994, might receive less than 50% of votes in next Wednesday's election and lose its parliamentary majority.

That would be the ANC's worst electoral performance since it came into power in South Africa at the end of apartheid.

One reason the ANC is under pressure is Zuma, who stepped down as president in 2018 amid a swirl of

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 82 of 85

corruption allegations and now threatens to draw more support away from the ANC.

Here is what you need to know about the 82-year-old Zuma's contentious return and why he was disqualified from the election:

WHO IS JACOB ZUMA?

Zuma has long been one of South Africa's most recognizable politicians. He was a senior leader in the ANC during the liberation struggle against apartheid. A former ANC intelligence chief, he has repeatedly threatened to reveal some of the party's secrets. While Zuma was not one of Mandela's preferred choices to succeed him, Mandela trusted Zuma to play an influential role in ending deadly political violence that engulfed the KwaZulu-Natal province before the historic 1994 elections. The province has remained a vocal base of support for Zuma ever since, and members of Zuma's Zulu ethnic group make up its majority. Zuma became deputy leader of the ANC in 1997 and was appointed South Africa's deputy president in 1999.

HOW DID HE BECOME PRESIDENT?

Zuma's path to power included legal challenges. In 2006, he was found not guilty of raping the daughter of a comrade at Zuma's home in Johannesburg. A year earlier, he was fired as South Africa's deputy president after his financial advisor was convicted for corruption for soliciting bribes for Zuma during an infamous arms deal. Alleging a political witch hunt, Zuma launched an aggressive political campaign that saw him elected ANC president in 2007. His campaign appealed to widespread discontent with then-President Thabo Mbeki, who was often described as autocratic and aloof. The corruption charges against Zuma were later dropped, amid controversy, and he was elected South Africa's president in 2009. The arms deal case has resurfaced decades later, however, and Zuma is due to go on trial for corruption next year.

HOW DID HE LOSE POWER?

Zuma's presidency was often under fire. His close friends and allies, the Gupta family, were accused of influencing appointments to key cabinet positions in exchange for lucrative business deals. The allegations of corruption in government and state-owned companies eventually led the ANC to force Zuma to resign in 2018. A judicial commission of inquiry uncovered wide-ranging evidence, and Zuma in 2021 was convicted and sentenced to 15 months in jail for refusing to testify at that commission. Zuma remains aggrieved with the ANC and his successor, President Cyril Ramaphosa. But few South Africans expected the break to go so far.

HOW HAS HE REEMERGED?

Zuma shocked the country in December by denouncing the ANC and campaigning against a party that had been at the heart of his political career. His new political party, uMkhonto weSizwe (which means Spear of the Nation), was named after the ANC's military wing, which was disbanded at the end of the struggle against white minority rule. The ANC launched a legal case seeking to stop the new party from using a name and logo that are similar to those of the military wing. The charismatic Zuma continues to crisscross the country, delivering lively speeches, and an image of his face is expected to represent the party on ballots.

WHY WAS HE DISQUALIFIED FROM THE ELECTION?

Zuma was disqualified from standing as a candidate for Parliament because of that previous conviction for contempt of court in 2021. The Constitutional Court said that a section of the constitution disqualifying people from standing for office if they've been sentenced to more than 12 months in prison without the option of a fine does apply to Zuma. It said Zuma is not allowed to run for Parliament for five years from when his sentence was completed. Even if he's not allowed to be a candidate, Zuma's party still threatens to draw support from within the often divided ANC. It may emerge as a significant opposition party and could play a role if the weakening ANC must form coalitions to run the country.

What happened in the UK's infected blood scandal from the 1970s to '90s?

By PAN PYLAS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — The final report of the U.K.'s infected blood inquiry was published on Monday, nearly six years after it began looking into how tens of thousands of people contracted HIV or hepatitis from transfusions of tainted blood and blood products in the 1970s and 1980s.

The scandal is widely seen as the deadliest to afflict Britain's state-run National Health Service since its inception in 1948, with around 3,000 people believed to have died as a result of being infected with HIV and hepatitis.

The report criticized medical practitioners, civil servants and politicians, though many have already died given the passage of time. It's also set to pave the way to a huge compensation bill that the British government will be under pressure to rapidly pay.

Had it not been for the tireless campaigners, many of whom saw loved ones die decades too soon, the scale of the scandal may have remained hidden forever.

"This whole scandal has blanketed my entire life," said Jason Evans, who was 4 when his father died at the age of 31 in 1993 after contracting HIV and hepatitis from an infected blood plasma product.

"My dad knew he was dying and he took many home videos, which I've got and replayed over and over again growing up because that's really all I had," he added.

Evans was instrumental in the decision by then-Prime Minister Theresa May to establish the inquiry in 2017. He said he just "couldn't let it go." His hope is that on Monday, he and countless others, can.

Here is a look at what the scandal was about and what the report's impact may be.

WHAT IS THE INFECTED BLOOD SCANDAL?

In the 1970s and 1980s, thousands of people who needed blood transfusions, for example after childbirth or surgery, became exposed to blood tainted with hepatitis, including an as yet-unknown type of the liver infection that was later named hepatitis C, and HIV.

Those with hemophilia, a condition affecting the blood's ability to clot, became exposed to what was sold as a revolutionary new treatment derived from blood plasma.

In the United Kingdom, the NHS, which treats the vast majority of people, started using the new treatment in the early 1970s. It was called Factor VIII. It was more convenient when compared with an alternative treatment and was dubbed a wonder drug.

Demand soon outstripped domestic sources of supply, so health officials began importing Factor VIII from the United States, where a high proportion of plasma donations came from prisoners and drug users who were paid to donate blood. That dramatically raised the risk of the plasma being contaminated.

Factor VIII was made by mixing plasma from thousands of donations. In this pooling, one infected donor would compromise the whole batch.

The inquiry heard estimates that more than 30,000 people were infected from compromised blood or blood products via transfusions or Factor VIII.

MISSED CHANCES

By the mid-70s, there was evidence hemophiliacs being treated with Factor VIII were more prone to hepatitis. The World Health Organization, which had warned in 1953 of the hepatitis risks associated with the mass pooling of plasma products, urged countries not to import plasma.

AIDS was first recognized in the early 1980s among gay men but soon started appearing among hemophiliacs and those who had received blood transfusions.

Though HIV was not identified as the cause of AIDS until 1983, warnings had been relayed to the U.K. government the year before that the causative agent could be transmitted by blood products. The government argued there was no conclusive proof. Patients were not informed of the risk and continued to use a treatment that put them in mortal danger.

MISTAKES

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 84 of 85

The inquiry said lessons from as early as the 1940s had been ignored.

Campaigners argue that since the 1940s it had been clear that heat killed hepatitis in another plasma product, Albumin. They say authorities could have made Factor VIII safe before it was sold.

Evidence given to the inquiry suggested that authorities' main objection was financial. Non-heated Factor VIII was prescribed by the NHS until late 1985.

Campaigners hope the inquiry's core finding is that Factor VIII concentrates should never have been licensed for use unless heated.

WHY NOW?

In the late 1980s, victims and their families called for compensation on the grounds of medical negligence. Though the government set up a charity to make one-off support payments to those infected with HIV in the early 1990s, it did not admit liability or responsibility and victims were pressured to sign a waiver undertaking not to sue the Department of Health to get the money.

Crucially, the waiver also prevented victims from suing for hepatitis, even though at that stage they only knew about their HIV infection. Years after signing, victims were told they had also been infected with hepatitis, mainly hepatitis C.

There was no further group litigation until Evans, whose mother "crumbled" after his father's death and who was called "AIDS boy" at school, brought a case claiming misfeasance in public office against the Department of Health.

Combined with political and media pressure, May announced the independent inquiry. It was, she said, "an appalling tragedy which should simply never have happened."

COMPENSATION

The government has accepted the case for compensation, with most estimates putting the final bill in the region of 10 billion pounds (\$12.7 billion). In October 2022, authorities made interim payments of 100,000 pounds to each survivor and bereaved partners.

The government is expected to announce different payments for different infections and also address how and when bereaved families can apply for interim payments on behalf of the estates of people who have died.

Today in History: May 21

Clara Barton founds the American Red Cross

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, May 21, the 142nd day of 2024. There are 224 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 21, 1881, Clara Barton founded the American Red Cross.

On this date:

In 1471, King Henry VI of England died in the Tower of London at age 49.

In 1542, Spanish explorer Hernando de Soto died while searching for gold along the Mississippi River.

In 1924, in a case that drew much notoriety, 14-year-old Bobby Franks was murdered in a "thrill killing" carried out by University of Chicago students Nathan Leopold Jr. and Richard Loeb (Bobby's cousin).

In 1927, Charles A. Lindbergh landed his Spirit of St. Louis monoplane near Paris, completing the first solo airplane flight across the Atlantic Ocean in 33 1/2 hours.

In 1932, Amelia Earhart became the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean as she landed in Northern Ireland, about 15 hours after leaving Newfoundland.

In 1941, a German U-boat sank the American merchant steamship SS Robin Moor in the South Atlantic after the ship's passengers and crew were allowed to board lifeboats.

In 1955, Chuck Berry recorded his first single, "Maybellene," for Chess Records in Chicago.

In 1972, Michelangelo's Pieta, on display at the Vatican, was damaged by a hammer-wielding man who shouted he was Jesus Christ.

Groton Daily Independent

Tuesday, May 21, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 330 ~ 85 of 85

In 1979, former San Francisco City Supervisor Dan White was convicted of voluntary manslaughter in the slayings of Mayor George Moscone (mahs-KOH'-nee) and openly gay Supervisor Harvey Milk; outrage over the verdict sparked rioting. (White was sentenced to seven years and eight months in prison; he ended up serving five years and took his own life in 1985.)

In 1991, former Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi was assassinated during national elections by a suicide bomber.

In 2000, death claimed actor Sir John Gielgud at age 96 and author Dame Barbara Cartland at age 98.

In 2017, the Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus received its final standing ovation as it performed its last show, at the Nassau County Coliseum in Uniondale, New York, ending its 146-year existence.

In 2020, President Donald Trump visited a Ford Motor Co. plant outside Detroit that had been repurposed to manufacture ventilators; he did not publicly wear a face mask but said he had worn one while out of public view.

In 2021, thousands of Palestinians rallied after a cease-fire took effect in the latest Gaza war; the 11 days of fighting left more than 250 people dead, the vast majority Palestinians, and brought widespread destruction to the Gaza Strip.

Today's Birthdays: R&B singer Ron Isley (The Isley Brothers) is 83. Musician Bill Champlin is 77. Singer Leo Sayer is 76. Actor Carol Potter is 76. Former Sen. Al Franken, D-Minn., is 73. Actor Mr. T is 72. Music producer Stan Lynch is 69. Actor Judge Reinhold is 67. Actor-director Nick Cassavetes is 65. Actor Lisa Edelstein is 58. Actor Fairuza Balk is 50. Rock singer-musician Mikel Jollett (Airborne Toxic Event) is 50. Rapper Havoc (Mobb Deep) is 50. Rock musician Tony LoGerfo (Lukas Nelson & Promise of the Real) is 41. Actor Sunkrish Bala is 40. Actor David Ajala is 38. Actor Ashlie Brillault is 37. Country singer Cody Johnson is 37. Actor Scott Leavenworth is 34. Actor Sarah Ramos is 33.