

# Groton Daily Independent

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## Wednesday, May 22

Senior Menu: Hamburger on bun, lettuce/tomato/onion, potato salad, fruit, cookie.

High School Region baseball at highest two seeds  
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

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

**"Forget the lottery,  
bet on yourself  
instead."**

BRIAN KOSLOW



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.

## Saturday, May 25

State Track Meet at Sioux Falls

Common Cents Community Thrift Store hours 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

**OPEN: Recycling Trailer in Groton**

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

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# 1440

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Kenya will begin to deploy police officers to Haiti to lead a UN-authorized multinational mission to quell gang violence. The officers—some of whom have experience fighting Islamist insurgent groups near Somalia—will constitute 1,000 of the 2,500-person security force that is largely financed by the US.

A 73-year-old man died and at least 71 others were injured amid severe turbulence aboard a Singapore Airlines flight from London to Singapore early Tuesday. The flight was redirected for an emergency landing in Thailand, where dozens were treated for back and head injuries, including six critically.

The Hollywood actors union, SAG-AFTRA, voiced support yesterday for Scarlett Johansson after the actress raised concerns over OpenAI's new artificial intelligence chatbot that features a voice that allegedly sounds similar to her own. OpenAI unveiled its latest model, GPT-4o, last week, allowing users the ability to converse with an AI system; at issue is a persona named "Sky."

## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

NBA Western Conference Finals kick off tonight (8:30 pm ET, TNT) with the Dallas Mavericks taking on the Minnesota Timberwolves. NHL Eastern Conference Finals begin tonight (8 pm ET, ESPN) with the New York Rangers hosting the Florida Panthers.

Pixar lays off 14% of workforce—175 employees—as Disney reduces content output for streaming and prioritizes theatrical releases. Comcast unveils \$15 per month streaming bundle including Peacock, Netflix, and Apple TV+ for Xfinity TV and internet customers.

Los Angeles police are investigating source of ketamine that contributed to "Friends" actor Matthew Perry's death. Fred Roos, Oscar-winning producer and casting director known for work on "The Godfather" trilogy, dies at 89.

## Science & Technology

Volvo debuts self-driving version of its heavy truck, designed for long-haul transport; production-ready vehicle is certified at the fourth level of autonomous safety standards.

European Space Agency plans nuclear-powered Martian rover that uses radioactive americium to stay warm, the first time such technology has been used on a spacecraft.

Paleontologists discover fossil of feathered dinosaur with scaly skin, shedding light on the evolutionary transition from scales to feathers roughly 130 million years ago.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.3%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq +0.2%) with the S&P 500 and Nasdaq reaching new records; Nvidia's stock rises 0.6% in advance of earnings report today.

Energy Department says it will release 1 million barrels of gasoline from a Northeast reserve in 100,000 barrel increments to lower gas prices this summer.

San Francisco-based Scale AI—which specializes in data labeling for large-language models—raises \$1B at a \$13.8B valuation; its AI-powered decision-making tool Donovan is being used by the US Department of Defense.

## Politics & World Affairs

California voters cast ballots in special election to replace outgoing Rep. Kevin McCarthy (R, CA-20); McCarthy resigned after being ousted from speaker role in October, see results. Defense rests in hush money case against former President Donald Trump; Trump opts to not take stand, closing arguments set for next week.

Trial begins in Germany over alleged far-right plot in 2022 to launch a coup; nine people on trial include German aristocrat accused of planning to storm the parliament and arrest lawmakers.

Nigerian army rescues 350 hostages, many of them women and children, from extremist group Boko Haram in northeastern Nigeria.

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## Groton lifeguard receives Red Cross award

Emma Schinkel has been hailed as an extraordinary hero for her swift actions in rescuing a child at the Groton Swimming Pool last year.

Now the lifeguard has the award to prove it.

Representatives from the American Red Cross Eastern South Dakota Chapter and the community pool presented Schinkel with the Red Cross Lifesaving Award during Tuesday evening's Groton City Council meeting.

"Emergencies can happen at any time, from the grocery store to the parking lot, at a family event, at a hot day at a community pool or even at the office or inside your very own home," said Red Cross Chapter Executive Director Patty Brooks. "But regardless of where and when they occur, emergency situations have one thing in common. There's a crowd around of people wondering who and what we should do in that situation. Until, that is, a hero emerges from the crowd.

"What is a hero?" Brooks said. "... The consensus is

A. a person admired for achievements and noble qualities

B. One who shows great courage, and

C. A person who is idolized for outstanding achievements.

"I think saving lives without question fits that definition," she said. "All three of them."

The award stems from an incident on July 13, 2023. Schinkel, one of the lifeguards on duty, was monitoring the lap pool and deep end from the lifeguard chair.

A young boy, swimming with his grandmother, appeared to be do-



**From left: Groton Swimming Pool co-manager Tricia Keith, lifeguard Emma Schinkel, American Red Cross Eastern South Dakota Chapter board member Kim Bowman, Red Cross Chapter Executive Director Patty Brooks and Groton pool co-manager Kami Lipp pose after Schinkel was awarded an American Red Cross Lifesaving Award on Tuesday, May 21.**

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**American Red Cross Eastern South Dakota Chapter Executive Director Patty Brooks, left, and board member Kim Bowman, right, speak before awarding Emma Schinkel with her Lifesaving Award on Tuesday, May 21.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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ing fine, according to past reports. His grandmother went to the other side of the pool with her granddaughter, and, after a bit, the boy called for help. Schinkel leapt into the pool and saved the boy.

Kim Bowman, board member of the Red Cross Eastern South Dakota chapter, asked the council to join her in congratulating Schinkel.

"Emma Schinkel, on behalf of the American Red Cross, I present you with a lifesaving award for professional responders awarded to individuals who step up in an emergency situation and help save or sustain a life," Bowman said. "Emma Schinkel, you exemplify the mission of the Red Cross to prevent and alleviate human suffering in the face of emergencies. And we commend you for your willingness to help other in distress."

Mayor Scott Hanlon thanked Schinkel for her lifeguarding efforts.

"It's good to know we have lifeguards down there keeping an eye on things," he said.

- Elizabeth Varin



**Groton lifeguard Emma Schinkel, center, poses with parents Marjae, left, and Dan Schinkel, right, after receiving her American Red Cross Lifesaving Award on Tuesday, May 21.**

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**American Red Cross Eastern South Dakota Chapter board member Kim Bowman, right, and Executive Director Patty Brooks, back, give lifeguard Emma Schinkel her American Red Cross Lifesaving Award on Tuesday, May 21.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

## Sewer rates increasing, soccer field issues discussed

Sewer utility rates are on the rise.

The City Council approved the first reading of Ordinance No. 776, which would remove the current base rate, add a minimum \$20 charge per month and change the usage charge to \$5 a month for every 1,000 gallons used.

A household using 4,000 gallons per month (an average for Groton) would see a \$13.50 increase in their bill each month, said Finance Officer Douglas Heinrich.

The increase is geared at raising funds for sewer system improvements and maintenance. The increased rate is also required in order to receive some state and federal funding.

"It might be a little tough on everybody, but we're going to have to do this," said Mayor Scott Hanlon.

Another rate will be discussed late this year, Heinrich said. At that point, city officials will have a better idea about how much money would be required for sewer system improvements.

### Soccer field concerns discussed

Representatives from the Groton Soccer Association and Groton Area School District discussed the city's lease agreement at the soccer field near the baseball complex on the west side of town.

"We wanted to talk through not only the agreement, but that area in general," said Becah Fliehs, president of the Groton Soccer Association. "That shed is starting to fall apart. There's exposed nails. The floor is starting to get holes."

The storage building/concession stand needs work, and there are other issues too, she said. Currently there is no main entrance to the soccer complex. And people have to cross the street or even head down to the baseball complex to go to the bathroom.

Some ideas were volleyed around, including bringing out portable toilets or moving the baseball complex concession stand to the soccer fields when a new one is built at the baseball fields.

The fate of the current baseball concession stand has been in discussion for more than a year. One idea was to bring the current building out to the airport.

However, that idea was brought into question.

"I would see this is a bigger cause than the airport," said Councilman Kevin Nehls. "This is for the kids. This is for the program."

Another idea was to partner with the high school's shop class to build a new structure that would work for both the soccer association and school teams.

"We have such nice facilities for our other sports program" Fliehs said. "It would be nice to bring soccer along."



## Now HIRING!

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Soccer association Vice President Whitney Sombke clarified next steps for the soccer fields, including discussion with the Groton Baseball/Softball Foundation.

## Council receives code enforcement updates

The council received an updated on code enforcement efforts undertaken this year.

Groton code enforcer Dennis "Mike" Olson said he's been getting really good compliance after sending notices of code violations to area residents.

Letters were sent starting in March for various issues, including foundation issues, junk on property, house repairs, painting problems, missing windows and more.

Some have already made changes to bring their properties into compliance with city code, Olson said. For those who haven't they will receive a final notice after the date their issue should be fixed. If needed, junk or vehicles will be towed or fences will be repaired at the owner's expense.

Councilman Brian Bahr said "it would be a lot cheaper to get into compliance than otherwise."

A couple of specific issues were discussed, including the fence and lawn at Dollar General and a piece of property some have complained about to the council.

Some code issues will still be taken care of by the city, including lawns that have overgrown. The city currently takes action about two days after the property owner is notified.

- About 300 feet of curb and gutter will soon be replaced. Public Works Coordinator Terry Herron presented a bid he had received for work beside the catholic church. "It needs to be done," he said. The bid came in at \$35,300, though the city budget only includes \$30,000 for that type of work this year. Council members gave the go-ahead for the project, including the extra \$5,300 above the budget amount.

- The City Council approved new rubble site fees. The changes will add a non-residential fee for those



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who do not receive Groton city utility services. All those with semis and side dumps will also be charged \$100 per load regardless of which permit they have.

- The Council approved a special event alcohol license for four days at the Groton Baseball Complex. People will be able to bring their own beer to amateur baseball games on June 9, June 23, July 7 and July 24. Beer will not be allowed if little league or softball games are taking place.

- Elizabeth Varin



# MANHART

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**Primary Election: Vote Now Through June 4th**

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We had another busy week here in the United States Senate. Our biggest event of the week was the release of our bipartisan AI Working Group's roadmap to the future of artificial intelligence. This report is intended to serve as a guide for the Senate as we look to craft public policy on AI in order to incentivize development in the United States.

More on that later. We also had hearings, meetings and votes, including some votes on two South Dakota lawyers who were confirmed as U.S. District Court judges. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:


South Dakotans I met with: South Dakota members of the American College of Physicians; Carl Wynja, Market Leader for U.S. Bank in South Dakota; Jeff Kippley, Vice President of the National Farmers Union from Aberdeen; and leaders from the Sioux Falls Chamber of Commerce.

Other meetings: Members of NORPAC; Lisa Cook, member of the Federal Reserve Board of Governors; Phil Musser, VP of Government Affairs at NextEra Energy; Arthur Mensch, CEO of Mistral AI; and Elizabeth Moore Aubin, U.S. Ambassador to Algeria. I spoke on a panel at the Bloomberg Government's Newsmaker Breakfast about the 2025 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) and my work on the Senate Armed Services Committee. I also attended an event to talk about artificial intelligence with leaders from financial technology companies.


AI White Paper: As many of you may have noticed, over the past year I've had several meetings, panels and discussions focused on artificial intelligence. I also hosted nine AI insight forums with my bipartisan AI working group composed of Majority Leader Chuck Schumer (D-N.Y.) and Senators Martin Heinrich (D-N.M.) and Todd Young (R-Ind.). I am pleased to report that this past week, we released our AI roadmap that summarizes our findings and lays out priorities as we look to the future of AI. You can read more about this, as well as the full 30-page report, [here](#).



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This roadmap to the future of AI sets the stage as we seek to harness its power to bring greater prosperity to the American people while also mitigating potential long-term risks. I look forward to seeing how my colleagues use their subject matter expertise in each committee to address these issues through regular order. We have a real opportunity to shape its future, and we need to embrace this challenge with open arms.

**Appropriations requests:** This past week, I led 11 of my Senate colleagues in requesting funding for tribal law enforcement programs in the FY2025 appropriations bill. Tribes in South Dakota need more resources to adequately address rising crime on reservations. You can read the full text of this request [here](#).

**Votes taken:** 9 – My most notable votes this week were on the confirmations of Eric Schulte and Camela Theeler to serve as U.S. District Court Judges for the District of South Dakota. Judge Schulte was confirmed by the Senate on Wednesday by a vote of 61 to 33. Judge Theeler was confirmed by a vote of 90 to 4 this past Thursday. I gave a floor speech ahead of the vote on Judge Theeler, which you can watch a clip of [here](#).

**Hearings:** I attended four hearings this past week. One was in the Select Committee on Intelligence. I attended a hearing in the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee (SVAC) to talk about rural health care services for veterans. I asked about VA facilities in South Dakota and the Care in the Community program, which you can see a clip of [here](#). I attended a hearing with leaders from the U.S. Navy to talk about spectrum. Last, I attended a Banking committee hearing with FDIC Chair Marty Gruenberg and Fed Vice Chair Michael Barr, where I asked about the Basel III Endgame proposal and asked the FDIC Chair to step down over toxic workplace allegations. Chair Gruenberg has since announced that he will do just that.

**Classified briefings:** I attended one classified briefing this week to talk with my colleagues about the electromagnetic spectrum. Understanding the spectrum is critical in our national defense policy.

**My staff in South Dakota visited:** Aberdeen, Elm Springs, Gettysburg, Pierre, Redfield and Vermillion.

**Steps taken this past week:** 53,747 steps or 26.64 miles

## DANR Reminds Campers Not to Move Firewood – Buy It Where You Burn it!

PIERRE S.D. – With the summer camping season kicking off on Memorial Day weekend, the South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) reminds campers to buy firewood where they burn it to minimize the movement of emerald ash borer (EAB) and other pests.

Ash is a popular firewood in South Dakota. If an ash tree is infested before it was cut, it may still contain EAB insect larvae that could emerge in the summer and infect new trees.

“We all need to work together to slow the spread of emerald ash borer,” said DANR Secretary Hunter Roberts. “Firewood is the most common way emerald ash borer is spread to new locations. Please, don’t move firewood, buy it where you burn it!”

EAB has been found in Minnehaha, Lincoln, and Union counties. To help slow the spread, DANR established a year-round quarantine in those counties, and neighboring Turner County. The quarantine prohibits movement of ash products and all hardwood firewood out of the quarantined counties. DANR also established an external embargo on regulated ash products and untreated firewood entering South Dakota from all states east of South Dakota’s eastern border and any county where EAB is known to exist in other states.



**The City of Groton will be doing adult mosquito control Tonight.**



## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### Flandreau tribe says Noem ban 'is imminent'

**BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 21, 2024 6:36 PM**

The Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe said Tuesday that its president "informed the governor that a ban from our territories is imminent," according to a news release obtained and published by multiple media outlets.

South Dakota Searchlight's messages to tribal officials seeking further comment were not immediately returned. The tribe was the only one of nine in the state that hadn't yet endorsed a ban of Gov. Kristi Noem from its lands.

The banishments began after Noem said during a speech in January that Mexican cartels were operating on Native American reservations. More bans came after Noem said during March town halls in Winner and Mitchell that some tribal leaders are "personally benefitting" from cartels, and that children on reservations "don't have any hope" because "they don't have parents who show up and help them."

The Noem administration has questioned the validity of the Yankton Sioux Tribe ban, because it was adopted by that tribe's Business and Claims Committee. The committee is the highest elected body under the tribe's unique structure, but its action to ban Noem is not considered final and enforceable without a vote of tribal members, which hasn't occurred.

Noem has not adjusted her rhetoric in response to the bans. During a press conference last week, she reiterated allegations of cartel activity on reservations and said, "Banishing me does absolutely nothing to solve this problem. All it does is help those who are perpetuating horrible violence and crimes against the people that are citizens of the state of South Dakota."

Flandreau Santee Sioux tribal members discussed a potential Noem ban Saturday during a meeting that was "contentious at times," according to the tribe's Tuesday news release.

The release said President Anthony "Tony" Reider and Vice President Cyndi Weddell met with Noem on Monday for a conversation that was "respectful and productive."

But the tribe's Executive Council continued deliberations Tuesday, the release said, and agreed that Noem's rhetoric was "ill advised."

"President Reider informed the governor that a ban from our territories is imminent and requested that the Governor refrain from making future blanket statements that offend the tribes within the boundaries of the State of South Dakota, some of which depend on state services for the needs of their people," the press release said.

"It was recommended that the Governor clarify her statements and issue an apology to all tribal nations for the misunderstanding," the release continued. "Until such a time, the Executive Council and the people of the Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe stand with our fellow nations."

## Health care officials call federal 'unfunded mandate' for nursing homes a 'threat'

**Legislators hear testimony at budget committee meeting**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - MAY 21, 2024 5:23 PM**

Health care industry representatives voiced concerns to lawmakers Tuesday in Pierre regarding newly finalized federal staffing standards for nursing homes.

"This is an unfunded mandate being placed on nursing homes," said Tammy Hatting, chief operating officer of the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations.

She called the new requirements a threat to nursing homes nationwide.

"We have to start talking about, 'How do we prepare for this threat?' Because the clock is ticking, the deadlines are out," Hatting said. Her comments came during a hearing conducted at the Capitol by the Legislature's budget committee.

The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services finalized the new rules for Medicare- and Medicaid-certified long-term care facilities in April. The agency said the rules "affirmed its commitment to hold nursing homes accountable for providing safe and high-quality care."

The new rules say nursing homes must complete a facility assessment by Aug. 8.

By May 10, 2026, for urban facilities and May 10, 2027, for rural facilities, there must be enough staff to give each resident 3.48 hours of care daily, and at least one registered nurse on-site 24/7.

By May 10, 2027, for urban facilities and May 10, 2029, for rural facilities, at least 0.55 of the 3.48 hours of daily care per resident must come from a registered nurse and 2.45 hours must come from a certified nurse assistant.

The rules define areas with a population of 10,000 or more as urban. Hatting said her organization is seeking clarity about how areas are defined and is lobbying to raise the population threshold defining an area as urban.

Hatting said the requirement to have a registered nurse on-site 24/7 is the biggest immediate concern. She said the state had 1,232 open registered nurse jobs as of April 24, and 15.1% of registered nurses are expected to retire in the next five years.

Hatting said 18 nursing homes in the state closed from 2015 to 2023, many due to a caregiver shortage.

A new health care industry-led analysis found that 96% of South Dakota's nursing homes don't meet the new rules. They will need to hire 299 more staff members, which will cost about \$19.7 million. Nursing homes might limit new residents, reduce their number of beds or close down, according to the report.

South Dakota Health Care Association Executive Director Mark Deak shared his concerns about the staffing requirements with legislators.

"Where on earth would we find these people?" he said.

Hatting said various congressional bills have been introduced with aims ranging from stopping the rules to providing up to \$400 million per year in grant funding to states for long-term care workers.

Health care industry officials said they're urging South Dakota's congressional delegation to take action, and asking the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to reconsider and roll back some of the rules.

*Joshua Haiar is a reporter based in Sioux Falls. Born and raised in Mitchell, he joined the Navy as a public affairs specialist after high school and then earned a degree from the University of South Dakota. Prior to joining South Dakota Searchlight, Joshua worked for five years as a multimedia specialist and journalist with South Dakota Public Broadcasting.*

## Open primaries measure approved for the ballot

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - MAY 21, 2024 4:27 PM

A petition that would establish open primary elections in South Dakota has enough signatures from registered voters to be placed on the Nov. 5 ballot, according to the South Dakota Secretary of State's Office.

The office made the announcement Tuesday, triggering a 30-day window for challenges to the petition's validity.

It's the third citizen-initiated measure to be validated for the Nov. 5 election, pending potential challenges. Additionally, the Legislature has exercised its authority to place two measures on the ballot, and at least two more measures from citizen groups are either pending validation or still circulating.

The open primaries measure would alter future elections in South Dakota.

Currently, the state has traditional primary elections, in which Democrats and Republicans choose their nominees for the general election.

In an open primary, all candidates for an elected office would run in one primary race, regardless of their party affiliation, and the top two winners would advance. The candidates advancing to the general election could be from different parties or the same party.

The open primaries measure applies to races for governor, the Legislature, U.S. Senate, U.S. House and elected county offices.

Supporters of the measure say the current system disenfranchises some voters, because Republicans only allow members of their own party to vote in Republican primary races. When there's no Democratic or independent candidate for an office, the winner is determined in a Republican primary that excludes Democratic and independent voters.

Opponents of the measure say political parties should be allowed to choose their own nominees.

### Ballot question status update

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Petition still in circulation:

A proposed referendum of a new law regulating carbon dioxide pipelines (the deadline to submit referendum petitions is June 25).

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## Bipartisan border bill likely doomed in approaching U.S. Senate vote

**Thune calls Democratic efforts 'charades and political theater'**

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 21, 2024 8:57 PM**

WASHINGTON — U.S. Senate Democrats are pushing for a second attempt to pass a bipartisan border security bill that failed in February after Republicans walked away from the very deal they helped craft, and it's likely to fail again when the Senate votes on the legislation Thursday.

"So why are we bringing this bill up the second time?" said Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., who was one of three negotiators of the measure. "The answer is simple. Democrats care about border security."

The expected vote comes as immigration has continued to rise as a top concern for voters in the polls and as the presumptive GOP presidential nominee, Donald J. Trump, has centered his reelection campaign on the issue, promising to reinstate his previous policies and carry out mass deportations.

President Joe Biden called Republican leaders in both chambers Monday night to advocate for them to vote for passage of the bill that, among various things, would give Biden the executive authority to close the southern border when it's overwhelmed.

"Mr. President, you caused this problem," Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said he told Biden in their phone call.

McConnell said he pushed for Biden to reinstate Trump-era policies such as the completion of the border wall and the so-called Remain in Mexico policy, which required asylum seekers to stay in Mexico while waiting for their cases.

"The president needs to step up to it, do everything he can do on his own, because legislation obviously is not going to clear this year," McConnell said.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, already said in a statement that should the bill pass the Senate, it's dead on arrival in the House.

**Thune: Democrats trying 'political theater'**

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, said he wanted Senate Republicans on the record for voting on the stand-alone bill. Republicans last year originally said they would only vote for vital aid to Ukraine if a border security bill was attached.

"Do Republicans want to improve the situation on the border, or not?" Schumer said. "Maybe they're happy with the way things are."

Schumer said that Republicans were on board with voting for the border security bill, "until President Trump told them to make a U-turn."

Murphy as well as Kyrsten Sinema, an Arizona independent, and Republican James Lankford of Oklahoma spent months crafting a bipartisan border security bill that would overhaul U.S. immigration law. Senate Republicans walked away from the bill, eventually siding with their House colleagues and Trump.

South Dakota Sen. John Thune, the No. 2 Republican, said Democrats are only holding Thursday's vote to protect vulnerable incumbents up for reelection this November such as Ohio's Sherrod Brown and Montana's Jon Tester.

"Where we are right now, this has become a political liability, a political vulnerability for the Democrats," Thune said, adding "all the charades and political theater the Democrats are trying" are meant to protect incumbents.

The sweeping border security bill would raise the bar for migrants claiming asylum, clarify the White House's parole authority and end the practice of allowing migrants to live in U.S. communities as they await their asylum hearings, among other things.

The Biden administration expressed frustration after Senate Republicans voted to kill the border security deal, frequently blaming Trump and Republicans for walking away.

"Every day between now and November, the American people are going to know that the only reason the border is not secure is Donald Trump and his MAGA Republican friends," Biden said in February.

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

## Trump declines witness stand as testimony in his first trial concludes

**BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - MAY 21, 2024 1:11 PM**

WASHINGTON — The end of the first criminal trial of a former U.S. president is in sight as Donald Trump's defense team rested its case Tuesday in Manhattan, where jurors have heard weeks of testimony from nearly two dozen witnesses about Trump's alleged reimbursement of hush money meant to silence a porn star before the 2016 presidential election.

Trump did not take the stand after his team called just two witnesses.

The former president is accused of 34 felonies for falsifying business records. New York prosecutors allege that Trump covered up reimbursing his former personal lawyer Michael Cohen for paying hush money to porn star Stormy Daniels just before Election Day in 2016 to silence her about a tryst with Trump.

Trump, the presumptive 2024 Republican candidate for president, denies the affair and maintains that he was paying Cohen for routine legal work.

The case will not resume until after the Memorial Day holiday, when closing arguments are expected.

### A back channel to Trump

Trump's defense team's second and final witness, former federal prosecutor and longtime New York-based attorney Robert Costello, stepped down from the witness stand Tuesday morning. His brief but tense appearance began Monday afternoon and included an admonishment from Justice Juan Merchan for "contemptuous" conduct.

Costello testified to meeting a panicked and "suicidal" Cohen in April 2018 after the FBI had raided Cohen's New York City hotel room as part of an investigation of his \$130,000 payment to Daniels just before the 2016 presidential election.

After Merchan sustained a series of objections from the prosecution Monday, Costello exclaimed, "jeez" and "ridiculous" on the mic and at one point rolled his eyes at Merchan. Merchan cleared the courtroom, including the press, to address Costello and Trump's defense team.

Costello's testimony confirmed that he offered a back channel for Cohen to communicate with then-President Trump through Costello's close contact and Trump's former legal counsel Rudy Giuliani as Cohen was under investigation, according to reporters at the courthouse.

New York does not allow recording in the courtroom but provides public transcripts of the proceedings.

During cross examination, prosecutor Susan Hoffinger showed a series of Costello's emails in an attempt to convince jurors that Costello was actively working to assure Trump that Cohen would not turn against him during the federal investigation.

In one email between Costello and his law partner, he asks, "What should I say to this (expletive)? He is playing with the most powerful man on the planet," according to reporters at the courthouse.

Hoffinger also established from Costello during her final series of questions that Cohen never officially retained him for legal help — reinforcing that Costello showed up in Cohen's life only after the FBI raid.

### Trump's multiple indictments

Costello has been publicly critical of the hush money trial against Trump, and of Cohen, as recently as May 15, when he testified before the GOP-led U.S. House Committee on the Judiciary's Subcommittee on the Weaponization of the Federal Government.

There, Costello told lawmakers that the cases brought against Trump during this election year are "politically motivated."

Trump, who faces dozens of criminal charges in four separate cases, was indicted in New York in April 2023.

Three other criminal cases were also brought against Trump in 2023. They all remain on hold.

The former president was indicted by a federal grand jury in Florida in June 2023 on charges related

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to the mishandling of classified information. Federal District Judge Aileen Cannon indefinitely postponed proceedings, making a trial before the November election unlikely.

Trump was indicted by a federal grand jury in Washington, D.C., in August 2023. A four-count indictment accused him of knowingly spreading falsehoods about the 2020 presidential election results and scheming to overturn them. Trump claimed presidential immunity from the criminal charges in October 2023, which both the federal trial and appeals courts denied. Trump is awaiting a decision from the U.S. Supreme Court.

Weeks after the federal election interference indictment, Trump was indicted on state charges in Fulton County, Georgia, for allegedly interfering in the state's 2020 presidential election results. The Georgia case has been mired in pretrial disputes over alleged misconduct by Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis.

## Courtroom conditions

In the dim, tightly secured hallway just feet from the courtroom at the New York County Supreme Court, Trump again criticized the trial Monday and accused prosecutors of wanting to keep him off the campaign trail.

"We're here an hour early today. I was supposed to be making a speech for political purposes. I'm not allowed to have anything to do with politics because I'm sitting in a very freezing cold courtroom for the last four weeks. It's very unfair. They have no case, they have no crime," he said before the news cameras that he's stopped to speak in front of every day during the trial.

Trump told the cameras that outside the courtroom was like "Fort Knox."

He complained that there are "more police than I've ever seen anywhere," and said "there's not a civilian within three blocks of the courthouse."

That statement is false. States Newsroom attended the trial Monday and witnessed the scene outside the courthouse during the morning, mid-afternoon and late afternoon.

Just as dawn broke, people standing in the general-public line vying for the few public seats in the courtroom squabbled over who was in front of whom.

About an hour later, a woman with a bullhorn showed up in the adjacent Collect Pond Park to read the Bible and amplify contemporary Christian music played from her phone. A man paced the park holding a sign that read, "Trump 2 Terrified 2 Testify."

Several people sat outside eating and talking at tables in Collect Pond Park during the 1 p.m. hour, as witnessed by reporters who left the courtroom after Merchan dismissed the jury for lunch.

By late afternoon, a small handful of protesters holding Trump flags and signs shouted that he was innocent.

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

## U.S. Department of Agriculture to fund \$300 million in grants to boost exports

**BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - MAY 21, 2024 9:15 AM**

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Agriculture announced Tuesday \$300 million in funding for more than 60 groups seeking to diversify American agricultural exports.

"USDA is pleased to be able to provide the startup capital to tap into these opportunities," Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said on a call with reporters Monday night previewing the announcement.

In total, 66 organizations will be funded under the new Regional Agricultural Promotion Program, or RAPP. The USDA launched the \$1.4 billion program in October in order to develop new export markets for U.S. food and agricultural products beyond the traditional partnerships with Canada, Mexico, the European Union and China.

"What this program really provides is an opportunity for us not only to expand geographically the opportunities for trade, but also the products that can be made available," Vilsack said. "It's a tremendous

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opportunity for us to diversify in a variety of different ways to grow market opportunity."

The program focuses on tapping U.S. exports into new markets in regions such as South and Southeast Asia, Latin America, the Middle East and Africa.

"When you have the major markets, as we've had, where 60 to 65% of what we export goes into four or five markets, that can create a sense of complacency," Vilsack said.

## 'The riskiest business in the world'

Vilsack said the funding would be an important step in building wealth in rural areas of the United States.

"We want to make sure our foreign-market development programs and agricultural trade in general work for the full spectrum of American agricultural producers, regardless of their size, their location, their product or target market," he said. "By investing in exports, we're investing in the future of American agriculture and rural communities."

Michigan Democratic Sen. Debbie Stabenow, who leads the Senate Committee on Agriculture, joined the call with reporters. She said that USDA investing in exports is crucial to growing American agriculture.

"The bottom line is (to) create new revenue for the folks that have the riskiest business in the world," Stabenow said. "This is a really important way to support them."

## Grant highlights

According to a list provided by the USDA, some of the grant recipients include:

The Hazelnut Marketing Board in Oregon and Washington state will receive \$455,000 to conduct market research and trade missions in several countries in Africa.

The U.S. Dairy Export Council, based in Virginia, will receive \$10 million to expand its presence in Africa by using the funds to study and develop dairy import regulations and regulatory frameworks in those markets.

The U.S. Meat Export Federation based in Colorado will be awarded \$21 million to expand its export efforts to new markets throughout Africa. It will also expand its investment in the convenience-store industry in South Korea, Central America and Colombia.

The Brewers Association in Colorado will be awarded \$2 million to partake in the craft beer scene in Southeast Asia, by participating in the region's premier brewing trade show and festival and bring buyers from that region to top trade shows in the US.

The Cranberry Institute in Massachusetts will receive \$1 million to conduct trade education seminars and other events to identify opportunities in India, Brazil, Colombia and Southeast Asia.

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

## VA reaches 1 million toxic exposure claims granted, including nearly 4,000 in SD

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - MAY 21, 2024 6:00 AM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden is set to announce in New Hampshire on Tuesday that 1 million claims have been granted for benefits under the toxic exposure law that Congress approved less than two years ago, following the military's use of open air burn pits in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The law, approved with broad bipartisan support following years of advocacy by veterans, their families and service organizations, has also led to more than 145,000 people enrolling in health care provided by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

In South Dakota, 5,821 claims have been filed, 3,740 have been granted and there are 518 new VA health care enrollees related to the program.

Secretary of Veterans Affairs Denis McDonough told reporters on a call ahead of the announcement that the law has made "tangible, life-changing differences for" veterans and their survivors.

"That has meant more than \$5.7 billion in earned benefits for veterans as well as access to no-cost VA

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health care across all 50 states and the territories," McDonough said.

White House Domestic Policy Advisor Neera Tanden said during the call that the law, known as the PACT Act, "represents the most significant expansion of benefits and services for toxic-exposed veterans, including veterans exposed to burn pits and certain veterans exposed to radiation and Agent Orange."

"This is truly personal for the president given his experiences as a military parent," Tanden said. Biden's son, Beau, died at 46 years old in 2015 from brain cancer.

The approval rate for benefits under the PACT Act is about 75%, according to a senior administration official.

Biden is set to make the announcement during a trip to Nashua, New Hampshire.

## Burn pit exposure

Congress struggled for years before reaching a compromise on when and how to provide health care and benefits for veterans exposed to open air burn pits during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Hazardous chemicals, medical waste, batteries and other toxic substances were disposed of in those burn pits, typically located on military bases. Service members had no choice but to live and work alongside the smoke, often breathing it in.

The law added 23 illnesses to the list of conditions that the VA presumes are connected to military service, eliminating the arduous and complicated process that many veterans had to undergo to try to get health care and benefits for those diagnoses.

Before the bill became law, veterans often had to prove to the VA that their illnesses were connected to their military service if they wanted to receive benefits or health care for those illnesses.

The U.S. Senate voted 84-14 in June 2022 to send the legislation to the House, where it was delayed for weeks over a dispute about incentivizing health care providers to move to rural or very rural areas.

The bill passed the House following a 342-88 vote in July, after that section was removed from the package. Senators voted 86-11 in August to send the bill to Biden's desk.

The president signed the bill during a ceremony on Aug. 10.

"When they came home, many of the fittest and best warriors that we sent to war were not the same," Biden said during the event. "Headaches, numbness, dizziness, cancer. My son Beau was one of them."

The VA has an interactive dashboard that provides veterans with information about how to apply for health care and benefits under the PACT Act as well as how many claims have been submitted.

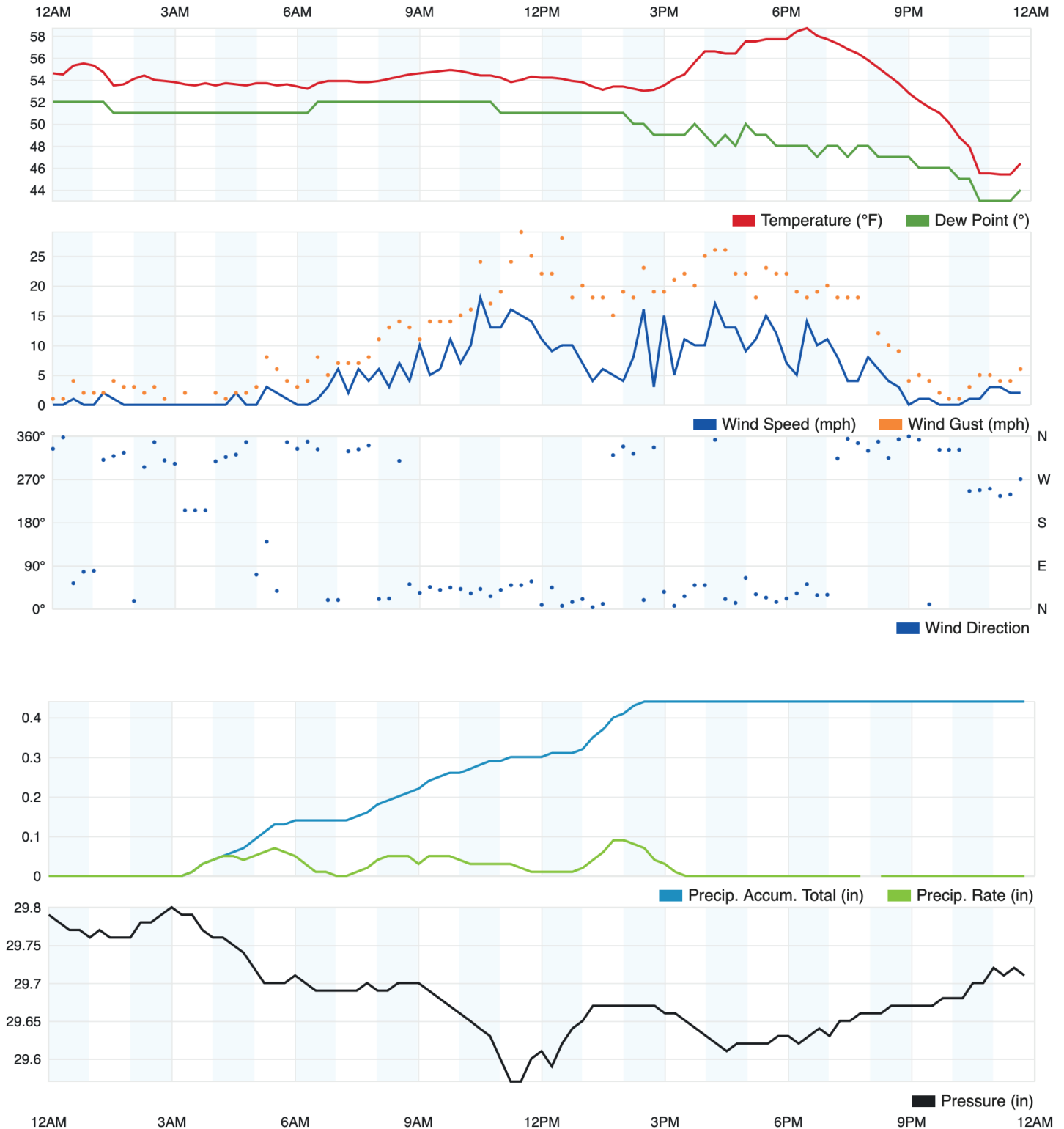
The VA has a calendar of in-person events that can be found online. Veterans or their family members can also call the VA at 800-698-2411 to inquire about PACT Act benefits.

*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.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



**High: 74 °F**

Sunny

Tonight



**Low: 49 °F**

Partly Cloudy

Thursday



**High: 75 °F**

Slight Chance  
Showers then  
Chance  
T-storms and  
Breezy

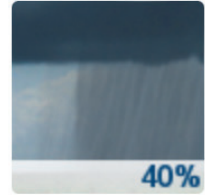
Thursday  
Night



**Low: 45 °F**

Showers and  
Breezy

Friday



**High: 57 °F**

Chance  
Showers and  
Breezy



## Midweek Forecast

May 22, 2024  
4:17 AM



**Today**

*Sunny early with a  
blend of clouds this afternoon*

**Highs: 67-75°**



**Tonight**

*Partly to mostly cloudy  
15% chance of rain late*

**Lows: 47-53°**



**Thursday**

*Chance (30-60%) of  
showers/tstorms in the afternoon  
and evening*

**Highs: 70-80°**



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

Dry for today with a blend of clouds and sun with just slight chances for light rain during the overnight hours (15%). As we head into Thursday as system will bring a chance of showers and thunderstorms (30-60%) Thursday afternoon and evening. Some may be strong to severe.

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## Severe Weather Threat Overview

May 22, 2024  
4:20 AM

Thursday Afternoon Through the Evening

### Timing/Location

Strong to severe storms possible Thursday afternoon into the evening across much of the forecast area

**Primary Threats** for the **Green** areas:

#### Tornado Potential

**Very Low**    Low    Medium    High

#### Max Hail Size

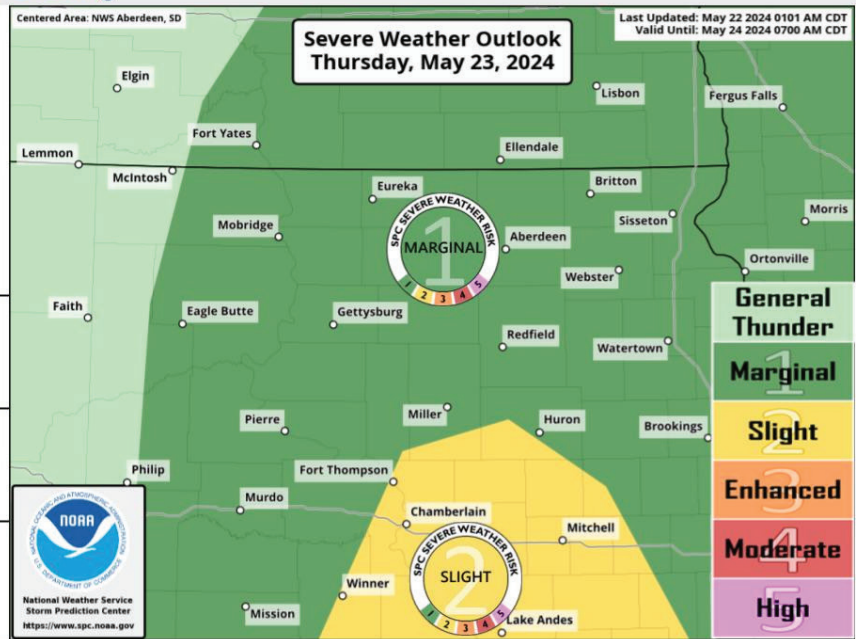
Dimes    **Quarters**    Ping Pong    Golfball

#### Max Wind Speed

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

#### Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

**Very Low**    Low    Medium    High



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

National Weather Service  
Aberdeen, SD

A marginal risk (1/5) for storms to become strong to severe across the forecast area Thursday afternoon into the evening. Main threats include hail of around a quarter inch and wind gusts around 60mph.

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 59 °F at 6:30 PM**

**Low Temp: 45 °F at 11:06 PM**

**Wind: 29 mph at 11:24 AM**

**Precip: : 0.44**

Day length: 15 hours, 14 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 92 in 1928

Record Low: 22 in 1963

Average High: 73

Average Low: 47

Average Precip in May.: 2.42

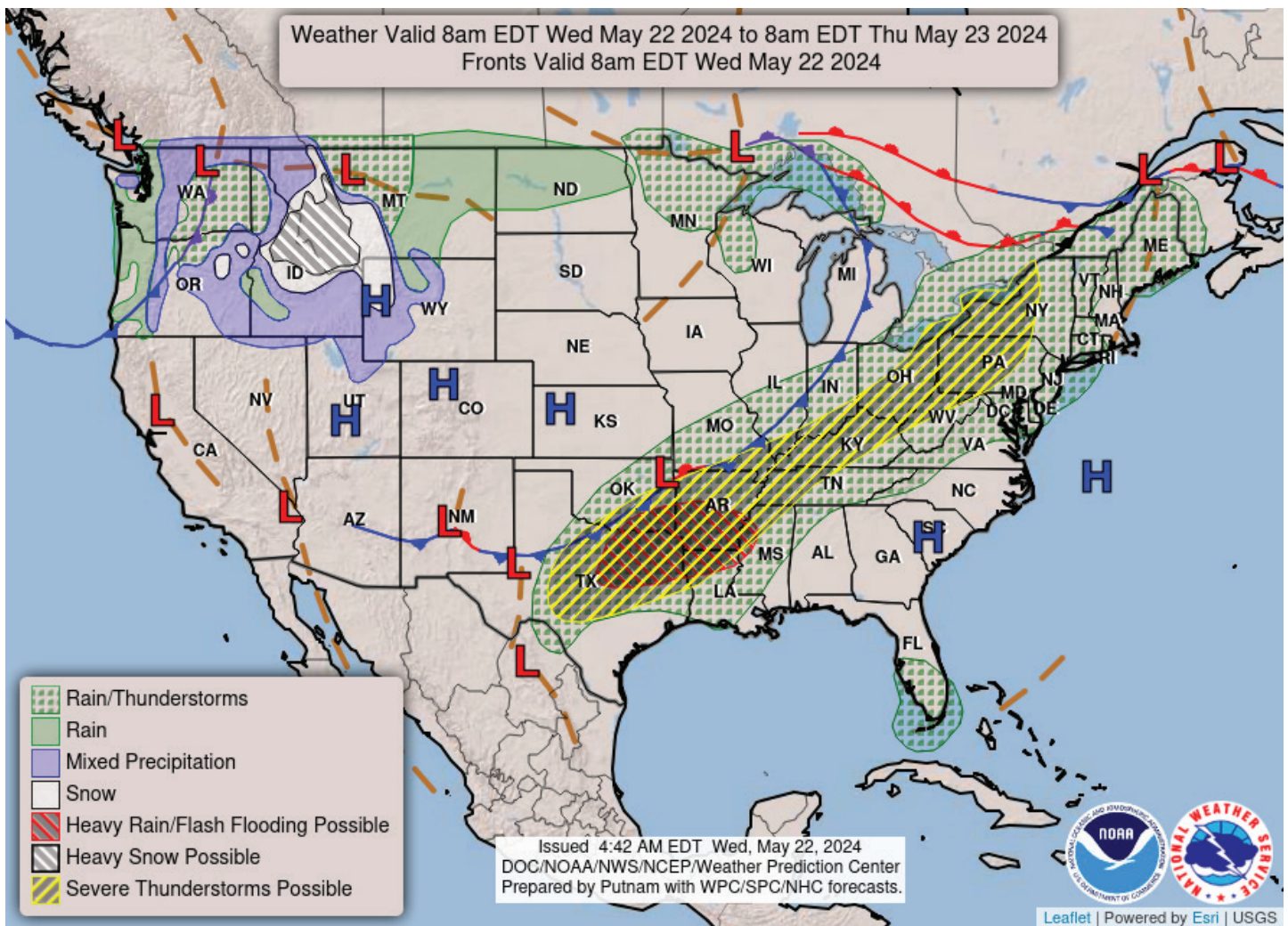
Precip to date in May: 1.71

Average Precip to date: 6.39

Precip Year to Date: 6.25

Sunset Tonight: 9:06:08 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:51:15 am



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## Today in Weather History

May 22, 1963: A late spring freeze impacted many locations reporting lows in the lower 20s. Some low temperatures include: 18 degrees in Andover; 20 degrees in Britton, 4 NW of Gann Valley, Leola and Roscoe; 21 degrees Castlewood, Ipswich, Kennebec, Redfield, 2 NW of Stephen, and 1 west of Summit; 22 degrees in Aberdeen, Eureka, 1 west of Highmore, McLaughlin, and 4 west of Mellette.

May 22, 1993: Nearly stationary thunderstorms dumped five to seven one-half inches of rain and hail within three hours on the southwest side of Sioux Falls causing major urban flooding and a flash flood on an area creek. Water and sewage flooded at least 200 basements as the storm and sewer systems backed up. Water came up to the rooftops of many cars in the Empire Mall area. Power was knocked out at the Empire Mall and to 2600 other customers in southwest Sioux Falls. Rainwater came through the roof of the Empire Mall causing damage to some stores. Hail up to an inch in diameter fell continuously for up to one and one-half hours in parts of southwest Sioux Falls causing considerable damage to hundreds of roofs, trees, and gardens. Thousands of cars received damage from hail or water in Sioux Falls. In the Silver Glen area, a flash flood turned a typically three-foot wide creek to a hundred feet wide in places. At least five houses near this creek had severe damage caused by the rushing waters. The flash flood also tore out a section of a road adjacent to the creek, buckled sidewalks, ripped away 100-year-old trees, and floated a 5500 lb truck down the road.

May 22, 2010: An EF2 tornado in eastern Walworth County crossed into western Edmunds County and intensified into a massive EF4 tornado as it struck several farms in its path. At the first farm, several large cottonwood trees were uprooted along with damage to several trailers. Three-grain bins were also destroyed with debris located several hundred yards to the northeast. The residence suffered some shingle and antenna damage. The tornado then tracked northeast to a second farm where several outbuildings were damaged or destroyed along with widespread tree damage. The primary residence at this location suffered no damage. Several grain cars were also rolled about 100 yards into the trees behind the house. The massive tornado continued to track northeast to a third farm to the north of Bowdle. The main residence suffered major damage to walls with part of the roof structure removed. Widespread tree damage was sustained with many of the trees completely debarked with only the stumps of the largest branches remaining. Two large garages were destroyed with the concrete slab wiped clean. The vehicles in one garage were rolled or tossed from 25 to 100 yards away. It is estimated that one car flew through the air 75 to 100 yards resting in the tree shelter belt to the north of the residence. Several other outbuildings were destroyed. The tornado then toppled six to eight metal power transmission towers as it moved to the north of the farm. One tower was sheared off from the concrete footings and traveled an estimated 400 yards. Ground scouring was visible along the path of these towers. The large tornado continued to track east crossing over State Highway 47 where a state radio tower was toppled. The tornado lifted shortly after that. The highest wind speeds were estimated to be from 166 to 200 mph.

1876: Denver, Colorado was drenched with 6.50 inches of rain in 24 hours, an all-time record for that location.

1911 - The temperature at Lewiston ME soared to 101 degrees. It was the hottest temperature ever recorded in New England during the month of May. (David Ludlum)

1986: A devastating hailstorm hit the Sichuan Province of China. Reports indicate that up to 100 people were killed, 35,000 homes destroyed and entire crops devastated.

1989 - Unseasonably hot weather continued in southern Texas and parts of the southwestern U.S. Seven cities reported record high temperatures for the date, including El Paso TX with a reading of 100 degrees. Presidio TX was the hot spot in the nation with a high of 111 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

2011: On this day, one of the most devastating tornadoes in the nation's history directly killed 158 people and injured over 1,000 in Joplin, Missouri. The Joplin EF5 tornado was the first single tornado to result in over 100 fatalities since the June 8, 1953, Flint, Michigan tornado.

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Daily Devotionals

## Seeds of Hope

### SAVING FAITH - SERVING LOVE

Following a terrible earthquake in Japan, an American reporter decided to do a series of articles on the survivors for his newspaper. As he was traveling from one location to another, he discovered an elderly lady who was selling flashlights and batteries for less than she paid for them. Intrigued, he decided to interview her.

After asking a few introductory questions he asked, "Why are you willing to sell the flashlights and batteries for much less than you paid for them?"

Smiling at him, she replied, "I don't want to profit from their suffering."

What a Christlike attitude!

Suffering is something we all experience. It is part of everyone's life. Sooner or later, today or tomorrow - sickness or sorrow, trial or tragedy will find us and threaten us when we least expect it. No one is immune from the problems or perils of life.

Nor is the Christian immune from responding to those in need. Jesus, in speaking of the final judgment said, "When you refused to help the least of these my brothers and sisters, you were refusing to help me." There are acts of kindness that we can do to help others every day. Jesus expects His followers to give water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, food to the hungry, hospitality to the homeless and visit those in prison. We will have no excuse to offer Him if we do not do as He did.

Prayer: Father, the least and the lost of this world are of great concern to You. May we take Your words to heart, and share whatever You give us with them. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: I was naked, and you gave me clothing. I was sick, and you cared for me. I was in prison, and you visited me. Matthew 25:35-45



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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.21.24

2 5 8 28 69 14

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$453,000,000**

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 35  
DRAW: Mins 43 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 15 Hrs 50 Mins 42  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.21.24

5 13 24 41 48 15

TOP PRIZE:

**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 16 Hrs 5 Mins 42  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 05.18.24

5 7 11 15 28

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

**\$108,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 5 Mins 42  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
05.20.24

5 38 39 41 69 25

TOP PRIZE:

**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 16 Hrs 34 Mins 43  
DRAW: 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 16 Hrs 34 Mins 43  
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

## News from the Associated Press

### **'Top two' primary election measure makes South Dakota's November ballot**

By JACK DURA Associated Press

Voters in Republican-majority South Dakota will decide this fall whether to abandon partisan primaries and make contests open to all candidates regardless of party affiliation. The top two vote-getters in each race would then face off in general elections.

Secretary of State Monae Johnson's office said Tuesday that it has certified the proposed constitutional amendment for the November ballot. The South Dakota Open Primaries group submitted the necessary petition signatures earlier this month.

Other initiatives that will appear on the ballot include measures to protect abortion rights and to repeal the state grocery tax. A measure awaiting validation would legalize recreational marijuana.

The state's candidates in gubernatorial, congressional, legislative and county races currently compete in partisan primaries. If voters approve it, the amendment would have them compete in a unified primary instead.

"Today, almost 150,000 South Dakotans who are independent or unaffiliated voters have almost no say and are shut out of taxpayer-funded primary elections. It's just flat wrong," sponsor Joe Kirby said in a statement on Tuesday.

"That's why we're so excited to be bringing forward this simple reform to make sure all registered voters have a voice in who leads our state. We need to let all voters vote," Kirby said.

Other states such as California, Louisiana and Washington already have their own versions of open primaries. A similar South Dakota measure failed in 2016.

South Dakota's GOP chairman, state Sen. John Wiik, has been opposed, saying he sees "no good coming out of it for the Republican Party."

Democratic Party Executive Director Dan Ahlers has said the party hasn't taken a position, but already allows "no party affiliation" and independent voters to participate in its primary, along with registered Democrats.

South Dakota's registered voters include 304,000 Republicans, 144,000 Democrats and nearly 150,000 others who identify as "no party affiliation" or independent, according to online voter registration tracking.

Republicans control South Dakota's Legislature and hold all statewide elected offices and congressional seats. Democrats haven't won a statewide election since 2008, when voters reelected Sen. Tim Johnson and Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin to their last terms in Congress.

### **Norway, Ireland and Spain say they are recognizing a Palestinian state, deepening Israel's isolation**

By JOSEPH WILSON, MELANIE LIDMAN and JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Norway, Ireland and Spain said on Wednesday they are recognizing a Palestinian state, in a historic but largely symbolic move that deepens Israel's isolation more than seven months into its grinding war against Hamas in Gaza.

The announcements came as the chief prosecutor of the International Criminal Court is seeking arrest warrants for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his defense minister and the International Court of Justice is considering allegations of genocide that Israel has strenuously denied.

Palestinians welcomed the announcements as an affirmation of their decades-long quest for statehood in east Jerusalem, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip — territories Israel seized in the 1967 Mideast war and still controls.

Israel recalled its ambassadors to the three countries and summoned their envoys, accusing the Euro-

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peans of rewarding the militant Hamas group for its Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war.

Netanyahu's government, which is opposed to Palestinian statehood, says the conflict can only be resolved through direct negotiations, which last collapsed over 15 years ago.

As if to underline the point, Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir paid a provocative visit Wednesday to a flashpoint holy site in Jerusalem sacred to Jews and Muslims in a move that could escalate tensions across the region.

Ben-Gvir said the visit was a response to the move by the three European countries. "We will not even allow a statement about a Palestinian state," he said. The Al-Aqsa mosque compound is the third holiest site in Islam, and the hilltop on which it stands is the holiest site for Jews, who refer to it as the Temple Mount.

With their formal recognition, planned for May 28, the three countries will join some 140 — more than two-thirds of the United Nations — that have recognized the state of Palestine over the years. The United States and Britain, among others, have backed the idea of an independent Palestinian state alongside Israel but say it should come as part of a negotiated settlement.

The announcements from Europe came in a swift cascade. Norway, which helped broker the Oslo accords that kicked off the peace process in the 1990s, was the first to announce its decision, with Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre saying "there cannot be peace in the Middle East if there is no recognition."

Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris called it an "historic and important day for Ireland and for Palestine," saying the announcements had been coordinated and that other countries might join "in the weeks ahead."

The international community has long viewed the creation of a Palestinian state alongside Israel as the only realistic way to resolve the conflict, and in past weeks several European Union countries have indicated they plan to recognize a Palestinian state to further those efforts.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, who announced his country's decision before parliament, has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern countries to garner support for recognition, as well as for a possible cease-fire in Gaza.

"This recognition is not against anyone, it is not against the Israeli people," Sánchez said. "It is an act in favor of peace, justice and moral consistency." He said it was clear that Netanyahu "does not have a project for peace," while acknowledging that "the fight against the terrorist group Hamas is legitimate."

Israel's government harshly condemned the decision taken by the three countries. Foreign Minister Israel Katz recalled Israel's ambassadors and summoned the three countries' envoys in Israel. He said they would watch grisly video footage of the Oct. 7 attack.

"History will remember that Spain, Norway, and Ireland decided to award a gold medal to Hamas murderers and rapists," he said. He also said the announcement would undermine talks aimed at a cease-fire and hostage release in Gaza that came to a standstill earlier this month.

President Mahmoud Abbas, the leader of the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, welcomed the moves toward recognition, saying they would contribute to efforts to bring about a two-state solution.

Hamas also welcomed the decisions and called on other nations to "recognize our legitimate rights and support the struggle of our people for liberation and independence, and ending the Zionist occupation of our land."

Hamas, which Western countries and Israel view as a terrorist group, does not recognize Israel's existence but has indicated it might agree to a state on the 1967 lines, at least on an interim basis.

The announcements are unlikely to have any impact on the ground. Israel annexed east Jerusalem and considers it part of its capital, and in the occupied West Bank it has build scores of Jewish settlements that are now home to over 500,000 Israelis. The settlers have Israeli citizenship, while the 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule.

In Gaza, the war is still raging, and Netanyahu has said Israel will maintain open-ended security control of the territory even after any defeat of Hamas.

Hugh Lovatt, a senior policy fellow at the European Council on Foreign Relations, said "recognition is a tangible step towards a viable political track leading to Palestinian self-determination."

But in order for it to have an impact, he said, it must come with “tangible steps to counter Israel’s annexation and settlement of Palestinian territory – such as banning settlement products and financial services.”

## The Latest | Spain, Ireland and Norway make a coordinated move to recognize a Palestinian state

By The Associated Press undefined

Norway, Ireland and Spain recognized a Palestinian state in a historic move Wednesday.

Several European Union countries indicated in recent weeks that they plan to make the recognition, arguing a two-state solution is essential for lasting peace in the region. Some 140 countries have already recognized a Palestinian state — more than two-thirds of United Nations members — but none of the major Western powers have done so. The move could put more pressure continental heavyweights France and Germany to reconsider their position.

Israel and the United States were already dealing with fallout after chief prosecutor of the world’s top war crimes court requested arrest warrants for leaders of both Israel and Hamas. Among the prosecutor’s allegations against Israel was using “starvation as a method of warfare.” Israeli and U.S. leaders harshly condemned the accusations.

The humanitarian crisis in Gaza has escalated over the past two weeks since Israel launched an incursion into Rafah that closed a vital border crossing, vowing to root out Hamas fighters. The fighting sent hundreds of thousands of Palestinians fleeing out of Rafah, many of whom were displaced earlier in the Israel-Hamas war.

Israel launched its war in Gaza 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 been killed 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:

- Norway, Ireland and Spain recognize a Palestinian state in a historic move.

- The United Nations halts all food distribution in Rafah after running out of supplies in the southern Gaza city.

- Two debunked accounts of sexual violence on Oct. 7 fueled a global dispute over Israel-Hamas war.

- Israel tries to contain the fallout after some allies support ICC prosecutor’s request for warrants.

- Israel says it will return video equipment seized from the AP.

- Iran’s supreme leader presides over funeral for president and others killed in a helicopter crash.

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

Here’s the latest:

### SLOVENIA LAUDS COUNTRIES’ RECOGNITION OF A PALESTINIAN STATE

LJUBLJANA, Slovenia — Slovenia on Wednesday hailed the recognition of an independent Palestinian state by Norway, Spain and Ireland, but stopped short of immediately following suit.

Earlier in the year, Slovenia’s government launched a recognition procedure for a Palestinian state, but the small European Union nation has said the formal step will take place when it could best contribute to a lasting peace in the Middle East.

“The Slovenian government was the first of the group of countries that signed a special declaration ... to start the process of recognizing Palestine, in which we expressed expectations — not conditions — for both sides,” Prime Minister Robert Golob said in a statement. He added that “Palestinians need more than just a symbolic gesture of recognition.”

“We would like to help to reform and empower the Palestinian Authority, which will represent its population in both the West Bank and Gaza and lead it to a two-state solution, which is seen by almost the entire world as the solution to lasting peace,” said Golob.

In Slovenia, lawmakers must give the final approval for the recognition of a state.

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**SOME PALESTINIANS ARE SURVIVING ON AS LITTLE AS 2 CUPS OF WATER PER DAY, AID GROUPS SAY**  
JERUSALEM — Aid groups say damage to water infrastructure and fuel shortages in southern Gaza have left some Palestinians surviving on as little as a half-liter (2 cups) of water per day. That has to cover drinking, washing and cooking, and is only 3% of the 15 liters per day that the World Health Organization says is needed for basic survival.

The International Rescue Committee and Medical Aid for Palestinians, which both operate in Gaza, say water-borne diseases have surged, in part because of the effect of water shortages on hygiene and sanitation. Kiryn Lanning, who leads the IRC's work in Gaza, says staff visited a shelter where 10,000 people only received 4,000 liters of water per day. Another shelter, housing 8,000 people, had only 12 latrines, forcing over 600 people to share a single one.

Melanie Ward, the CEO of Medical Aid for Palestinians, said she had seen "literal lakes of human waste" next to tents in Rafah. Doctors with the group say diarrhea and skin diseases are on the rise, and that children have died from dehydration and starvation.

Israel's incursion into Rafah earlier in May has caused around 900,000 Palestinians to flee the southern city, with many seeking refuge in squalid tent camps with no plumbing and few services. It has also severely restricted the ability to provide aid in the south. Israel seized control of the Rafah border crossing at the start of its incursion, forcing it to close. That was the main entry point for fuel, which is needed to power water infrastructure, hospitals and other infrastructure.

The United Nations suspended food distribution in Rafah on Tuesday, citing lack of supplies and security threats. Some 400,000 people are still believed to be in the city.

## **TURKEY WELCOMES EUROPEAN COUNTRIES' RECOGNITION OF A PALESTINIAN STATE**

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey welcomed Spain, Ireland and Norway's decision to recognize a Palestinian state, calling it an important step toward the restoration of the "usurped rights of the Palestinians."

The Turkish Foreign Ministry also said the move would help "Palestine gain the status it deserves in the international community." Turkey would continue with efforts to press more states to recognize Palestine, the ministry said.

## **IRELAND RECOGNIZES A PALESTINIAN STATE IN COORDINATED MOVE WITH SPAIN AND NORWAY**

LONDON — Ireland has recognized a Palestinian state, Prime Minister Simon Harris said Wednesday.

Harris called the move, coordinated with Spain and Norway, "an historic and important day for Ireland and for Palestine."

He said the move was intended to help move the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to resolution through a two-state solution. The Irish decision will formally take effect on May 28, the government said.

## **SPAIN ANNOUNCES IT WILL RECOGNIZE A PALESTINIAN STATE**

BARCELONA, Spain — Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez says that his country will recognize a Palestinian state on May 28.

Sánchez, Spain's Socialist leader since 2018, made the expected announcement to the nation's Parliament on Wednesday.

Sánchez has spent months touring European and Middle Eastern countries to garner support for the recognition of a Palestinian state, as well as a possible cease-fire in Gaza. He has said several times that he was committed to the move.

Earlier in May, Spain's Foreign Minister José Albares said he had informed U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken of his government's intention of recognizing a Palestinian state.

## **NORWAY FORMALLY RECOGNIZES A PALESTINIAN STATE**

Norwegian Prime Minister Jonas Gahr Støre said Wednesday that the country would formally recognize a Palestinian state, saying, "There cannot be peace in the Middle East if there is no recognition."

Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has welcomed Norway's recognition of a Palestinian state and called on other countries to follow. In a statement carried by the official WAFA news agency, he said Norway's decision, announced Wednesday, will enshrine "the Palestinian people's right to self-determination" and support efforts to bring about a two-state solution with Israel.

Gahr Støre said the Scandinavian country will recognize a Palestinian state as of May 28. Norway is not a member of the European Union but mirrors its moves, and has been an ardent supporter of a two-state solution between Israel and Palestinians.

## Tornado kills multiple people in Iowa as powerful storms again tear through Midwest

By HANNAH FINGERHUT, SCOTT McFETRIDGE and MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press  
GREENFIELD, Iowa (AP) — Multiple people were killed when a tornado tore through Greenfield and left a wide swath of obliterated homes, crumpled cars and splintered trees, while outside the small Iowa town, massive wind turbines were buckled and twisted to the ground by the howling winds.

After devastating the town of 2,000 residents on Tuesday, the storms moved eastward to pummel parts of Illinois and Wisconsin, knocking out power to more than 130,000 customers in the two states.

Greenfield's hospital was among the buildings that were damaged in the town, which meant that at least a dozen people who were hurt had to be taken to facilities elsewhere, according to Iowa State Patrol Sgt. Alex Dinkla.

"Sadly we can confirm that there have been fatalities," Dinkla said at a news conference Tuesday night, without specifying how many. "We're still counting at this time."

He said he thought they had accounted for all of the town's residents but that searches would continue if anyone was reported missing. The Adair County Health System said in a Facebook post Tuesday night that it had set up a triage center at the Greenfield high school and that people who need medical attention should go there.

The tornado destroyed much of Greenfield, which is located about 55 miles (90 kilometers) southwest of Des Moines, during a day that saw multiple tornadoes, giant hail and heavy rain in several states.

Authorities announced a mandatory curfew for the town and said they would only allow residents to enter Greenfield until Wednesday morning. They also ordered media representatives to leave the city Tuesday night.

In the aftermath of the storm, mounds of broken wood from homes, branches, car parts and other debris littered lots where homes once stood. Some trees still standing were stripped of their limbs and leaves. Residents helped each other salvage furniture and other belongings that were strewn in every direction.

Rogue Paxton said he sheltered in the basement of his home when the storm moved through. He told WOI-TV he thought the house was lost but said his family got lucky.

"But everyone else is not so much, like my brother Cody, his house just got wiped," Paxton said. "Then you see all these people out here helping each other. ... Everything's going to be fine because we have each other, but it's just going to be really, really rough. It is a mess."

Multiple tornadoes were reported throughout the state, and one also apparently took down several 250-foot (76-meter) wind turbines in southwest Iowa. Some of the turbines caught fire, sending plumes of smoke into the air. Wind farms are built to withstand tornadoes, hurricanes and other powerful winds.

Greenfield bills itself on its website as a "friendly wave as you walk" type of place with tree-lined streets — before the storm — and as the "perfect place to grow."

Mary Long, the owner of Long's Market in downtown Greenfield, said she rode out the storm at her business in the community's historic town square, which largely escaped damage. Long said there appeared to be widespread damage on the east and south sides of town.

"I could hear this roaring, like the proverbial freight train, and then it was just done," she said.

Camille Blair said the Greenfield Chamber of Commerce office where she works closed around 2 p.m. ahead of the storm.

"I can see from my house it kind of went in a straight line down the road," she said of the tornado.

Gov. Kim Reynolds said she planned to visit Greenfield on Wednesday morning.

"It was just a few weeks ago that tornadoes hit several other Iowa communities, and it's hard to be-

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lieve that it's happened again," she said in a statement. "Iowans are strong and resilient, and we will get through this together."

Iowa had braced for severe weather after the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center gave most of the state a high chance of seeing severe thunderstorms with the potential for strong tornadoes. The storms and tornado warnings moved into Wisconsin on Tuesday evening and night.

Earlier in the day, residents to the west in Omaha, Nebraska, awoke to sirens blaring and widespread power outages as torrential rain, high winds and large hail pummeled the area. The deluge flooded basements and submerged cars. Television station KETV showed firefighters rescuing people from vehicles.

In Illinois, dust storms led authorities to shut down stretches of two interstates due to low visibility.

The storms followed days of extreme weather that have ravaged much of the middle section of the country. Strong winds, large hail and tornadoes swept parts of Oklahoma and Kansas late Sunday, damaging homes and injuring two in Oklahoma.

Another round of storms Monday night raked Colorado and western Nebraska and saw the city of Yuma, Colorado, blanketed in hail the size of baseballs and golf balls, turning streets into rivers of water and ice.

In Texas, deadly storms hit the Houston area last week, killing at least eight people. Those storms Thursday knocked out power to hundreds of thousands for days, leaving many in the dark and without air conditioning during hot and humid weather. Hurricane-force winds reduced businesses and other structures to debris and shattered glass in downtown skyscrapers.

Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service, said the system is expected to turn south Wednesday, bringing more severe weather to parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and southern Missouri.

## **Spain, Ireland and Norway will recognize a Palestinian state on May 28. Why does that matter?**

By The Associated Press undefined

Spain, Ireland and Norway said Wednesday that they would recognize a Palestinian state on May 28, a step toward a long-held Palestinian aspiration that came amid international outrage over the civilian death toll and humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip following Israel's offensive.

The almost simultaneous decisions by two European Union countries, and Norway, may generate momentum for the recognition of a Palestinian state by other EU countries and could spur further steps at the United Nations, deepening Israel's isolation. Malta and Slovenia, which also belong to the 27-nation European Union, may follow suit.

Some 140 of 190 represented in the U.N. countries have already recognized a Palestinian state.

Here's a look at how and why the new European announcements could be important:

### **WHY DOES IT MATTER?**

The 1948 U.N. decision that created Israel envisaged a neighboring Palestinian state, but some 70 years later control of the Palestinian territories remains divided and bids for U.N. membership have been denied.

The United States, Britain and other Western countries have backed the idea of an independent Palestinian state existing alongside Israel as a solution to the Middle East's most intractable conflict, but they insist Palestinian statehood should come as part of a negotiated settlement. There have been no substantive negotiations since 2009.

Though the EU countries and Norway won't be recognizing an existing state, just the possibility of one, the symbolism helps enhance the Palestinians' international standing and heaps more pressure on Israel to open negotiations on ending the war.

Also, the move lends additional prominence to the Middle East issue ahead of June 6-9 elections to the European Parliament, when some 370 million people are eligible to vote and a steep rise of the extreme right is on the cards.

### **WHY NOW?**

Diplomatic pressure on Israel has grown as the battle with Hamas stretches into its eighth month. The U.N. General Assembly voted by a significant margin on May 11 to grant new "rights and privileges" to

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Palestine in a sign of growing international support for a vote on full voting membership. The Palestine Authority currently has observer status.

The leaders of Spain, Ireland, Malta and Slovenia said in March they were considering recognizing a Palestinian state as "a positive contribution" toward ending the war.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez said Wednesday, "This recognition is not against anyone, it is not against the Israeli people," he said. "It is an act in favor of peace, justice and moral consistency."

## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF RECOGNITION?

While dozens of countries have recognized Palestine, none of the major Western powers has done so, and it is unclear how much of a difference the move by the three countries might make.

Even so, their recognition would mark a significant accomplishment for the Palestinians, who believe it confers international legitimacy on their struggle.

Little would likely change on the ground in the short term. Peace talks are stalled, and Israel's hardline government has dug its heels in against Palestinian statehood.

## WHAT IS ISRAEL'S RESPONSE?

Israel reacted rapidly Wednesday by recalling its ambassadors to Ireland, Norway and Spain.

The Israeli government slams talk of Palestinian independence as a "reward" for the Hamas Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that killed 1,200 people and led to the abduction of over 250 others. It rejects any move to legitimize the Palestinians internationally.

Steps like the ones by the three European countries Wednesday will harden the Palestinian position and undermine the negotiating process, Israel says, insisting that all issues should be solved through negotiations.

Israel often responds to foreign countries' decisions deemed as going against its interests by summoning those countries' ambassadors and also punishing the Palestinians through measures such as freezing tax transfers to the cash-strapped Palestinian Authority.

## WHO RECOGNIZES PALESTINE AS A STATE?

Some 140 countries have already recognized Palestine, more than two-thirds of the United Nations' membership.

Some major powers have indicated their stance may be evolving amid the outcry over the consequences of Israel's offensive in Gaza, which has killed more than 35,000 Palestinians according to Gaza's Health Ministry. The ministry does not distinguish between noncombatants and fighters in its count.

British Foreign Secretary David Cameron said no recognition of Palestine could come while Hamas remains in Gaza, but that it could happen while Israeli negotiations with Palestinian leaders were in progress.

French President Emmanuel Macron said in February it's not "taboo" for France to recognize a Palestinian state.

## Biden administration canceling student loans for another 160,000 borrowers

By COLLIN BINKLEY AP Education Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is canceling student loans for another 160,000 borrowers through a combination of existing programs.

The Education Department announced the latest round of cancellation on Wednesday, saying it will erase \$7.7 billion in federal student loans. With the latest action, the administration said it has canceled \$167 billion in student debt for nearly 5 million Americans through several programs.

"From day one of my administration, I promised to fight to ensure higher education is a ticket to the middle class, not a barrier to opportunity," President Joe Biden said in a statement. "I will never stop working to cancel student debt — no matter how many times Republican-elected officials try to stop us."

The latest relief will go to borrowers in three categories who hit certain milestones that make them eligible for cancellation. It will go to 54,000 borrowers who are enrolled in Biden's new income-driven repayment plan, along with 39,000 enrolled in earlier income-driven plans, and about 67,000 who are eligible through

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the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

Biden's new payment plan, known as the SAVE Plan, offers a faster path to forgiveness than earlier versions. More people are now becoming eligible for loan cancellation as they hit 10 years of payments, a new finish line that's a decade sooner than what borrowers faced in the past.

The cancellation is moving forward even as Biden's SAVE Plan faces legal challenges from Republican-led states. A group of 11 states led by Kansas sued to block the plan in March, followed by seven more led by Missouri in April. In two federal lawsuits, the states say Biden needed to go through Congress for his overhaul of federal repayment plans.

A separate action by the Biden administration aimed to correct previous mistakes that delayed cancellation for some borrowers enrolled in other repayment plans and through Public Service Loan Forgiveness, which forgives loans for people who make 10 years of payments while working in public service jobs.

The Biden administration has been announcing new batches of forgiveness each month as more people qualify under those three categories.

According to the Education Department, 1 in 10 federal student loan borrowers has now been approved for some form of loan relief.

"One out of every 10 federal student loan borrowers approved for debt relief means one out of every 10 borrowers now has financial breathing room and a burden lifted," Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said in a statement.

The Biden administration has continued canceling loans through existing avenues while it also pushes for a new, one-time cancellation that would provide relief to more than 30 million borrowers in five categories.

Biden's new plan aims to help borrowers with large sums of unpaid interest, those with older loans, those who attended low-value college programs, and those who face other hardships preventing them from repaying student loans. It would also cancel loans for people who are eligible through other programs but haven't applied.

The proposal is going through a lengthy rulemaking process, but the administration said it will accelerate certain provisions, with plans to start waiving unpaid interest for millions of borrowers starting this fall.

Conservative opponents have threatened to challenge that plan too, calling it an unfair bonus for wealthy college graduates at the expense of taxpayers who didn't attend college or already repaid their loans.

The Supreme Court rejected Biden's earlier attempt at one-time cancellation, saying it overstepped the president's authority. The new plan is being made with a different legal justification.

## Iran's supreme leader presides over funeral for president and others killed in helicopter crash

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Iran's supreme leader presided over a funeral Wednesday for the country's late president, foreign minister and others killed in a helicopter crash, as tens of thousands later followed a procession of their caskets through the capital, Tehran.

Ayatollah Ali Khamenei held the service at Tehran University, the caskets of the dead draped in Iranian flags with their pictures on them. On the late President Ebrahim Raisi's coffin sat a black turban — signifying him as a direct descendent of Islam's Prophet Muhammad.

"Oh Allah, we didn't see anything but good from him," Khamenei said in the standard prayer for the dead in Arabic, the language of Islam's holy book, the Quran. He soon left and the crowd inside rushed to the front, reaching out to touch the coffins. Iran's acting president, Mohammad Mokhber, stood nearby and openly wept during the service.

People then carried the coffins out on their shoulders, with chants outside of "Death to America!" They loaded them onto a semitruck trailer for a procession through downtown Tehran to Azadi, or "Freedom," Square, where Raisi gave speeches in the past. People threw scarves and other items up for attendants on the truck to touch to the coffins for a blessing.

In attendance were top leaders of Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, one of the country's major

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power centers. Also on hand was Ismail Haniyeh of Hamas, the militant group that Iran has armed and supported during the ongoing Israel-Hamas war raging in the Gaza Strip. Before the funeral, Haniyeh spoke and an emcee led the crowd in the chant: "Death to Israel!"

"I come in the name of the Palestinian people, in the name of the resistance factions of Gaza ... to express our condolences," Haniyeh told those gathered.

He also recounted meeting Raisi in Tehran during Ramadan, the holy Muslim fasting month, and heard the president say the Palestinian issue remains the key one of the Muslim world.

The Muslim world "must fulfil their obligations to the Palestinians to liberate their land," Haniyeh said, recounting Raisi's words. He also described Raisi calling the Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war, which saw 1,200 people killed and 250 others taken hostage, an "earthquake in the heart of the Zionist entity." The war since has seen 35,000 Palestinians killed in the Gaza Strip and hundreds of others in the West Bank in Israeli operations.

Also expected to attend services in Tehran were Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and a delegation from the Taliban of Afghanistan, including their Foreign Minister Amir Khan Mutaqqi. Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani also flew in for the ceremony, along with Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Even Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry traveled to Tehran, despite diplomatic relations between the countries being severed after the 1979 revolution. Egypt and Iran have recently discussed reestablishing ties.

But notably, none of Iran's living past presidents — other than Khamenei — could be seen in state television footage of the prayers. They include reformist Mohammad Khatami, hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and relative moderate Hassan Rouhani — all individuals who maintain some political cachet within Iran's tightly controlled political system.

Authorities offered no explanation for their absence from the event, which comes weeks ahead of a planned June 28 presidential election. As of now, there's no clear favorite for the position among Iran's political elite — particularly no one who is a Shiite cleric, like Raisi.

Iran's theocracy declared five days of mourning over Sunday's crash, encouraging people to attend the public mourning sessions. Typically, government employees and schoolchildren attend such events en masse, while others take part out of patriotism, curiosity or to witness historic events.

For Iran's Shiite theocracy, mass demonstrations have been crucial to demonstrating the legitimacy of their leadership since millions thronged the streets of Tehran to welcome Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution, and also attended his funeral 10 years later.

An estimated 1 million turned out in 2020 for processions for the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was slain in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad. In that ceremony, Khamenei openly wept over Soleimani's casket alongside Raisi. On Wednesday, Khamenei appeared composed, though he later hugged family members of the dead on his way out.

Whether Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others draw the same crowd remains in question, particularly as Raisi died in a helicopter crash, won his office in the lowest-turnout presidential election in the country's history and presided over sweeping crackdowns on all dissent.

Prosecutors already have warned people over showing any public signs of celebrating his death and a heavy security force presence has been seen on the streets of Tehran since the crash.

Raisi, 63, had been discussed as a possible successor for Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Khamenei. 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.

Meanwhile, an Iranian official offered a new accounting of Sunday's crash, further fueling the theory bad weather led to it. Gholamhossein Esmaili, who traveled in one of the two other helicopters in Raisi's entourage, told state TV that weather had been fine when the aircraft took off. But Raisi's helicopter disappeared into heavy clouds and the others couldn't reach the aircraft by radio, forcing them to land at

a nearby copper mine.

Neither Amirabdollahian or a bodyguard on board responded to calls, but Tabriz Friday prayer leader Mohammad Ali Ale-Hashem somehow answered two mobile phone calls, Esmaili said. It wasn't clear why Iran then couldn't track the phone's signal.

"When we found the location of the accident, the conditions of the bodies indicated that Ayatollah Raisi and other companions had died instantly but Ale-Hashem ... (died) after several hours," he said.

## Russian attacks on Ukraine power grid touch Kyiv with blackouts ahead of peak demand

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Sustained Russian attacks on Ukraine's power grid in recent weeks have forced leaders of the war-ravaged country to institute nationwide rolling blackouts. Without adequate air defenses to counter assaults and allow for repairs, though, the shortages could still worsen as need spikes in late summer and the bitter-cold winter.

The Russian airstrikes targeting the grid since March have meant blackouts have even returned to the capital, Kyiv, which hadn't experienced them since the first year of the war. Among the strikes were an April barrage that damaged Kyiv's largest thermal power plant and a massive attack on May 8 that targeted power generation and transmission facilities in several regions.

In all, half of Ukraine's energy system was damaged, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said.

Entire apartment blocks in the capital went dark. The city's military administration said at least 10% of consumers were disconnected.

For many, it is a taste of what might be in store if Ukraine doesn't find other electricity sources before winter.

Before dawn Wednesday, a Russian drone attack on Sumy plunged the northern Ukraine city into darkness. Some power was restored to the city of around a quarter-million people in the morning as crews rushed to repair the damage, local authorities said.

With no end in sight to the attacks on the power grid and without a way to adequately defend against them, there are no quick fixes to the electricity shortages, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko explained. Ukraine is appealing to Western allies for more air defense systems and spare parts to fix its Soviet-era plants.

"With each attack we lose additional power generation, so it just goes minus, minus, minus," Halushchenko said Tuesday while standing outside a coal-fired plant in central Ukraine that was destroyed in an April 11 attack. Any efforts to repair the plant would be futile until the military can defend it from another attack.

"Should we repair (power stations) just for them (Russians) to renew strikes while we are unable to defend ourselves?" the minister asked.

German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock's joined him on the plant visit, underscoring Ukraine's desperation to close the power gap as quickly as possible.

The first major test of the grid will come in July and August, when consumption due to summer heat can mirror levels in the sub-freezing winter months, the minister said.

By mid-May, Kyiv's residents began to feel the consequences of Russia's attacks. A cold snap drove up consumption, forcing Ukrenergo, the main transmission system operator, to introduce controlled blackouts throughout the country. Ukraine can't generate enough power to cover evening peaks, and the shortage is greater than the country's ability to import electricity from Poland, Slovakia and Romania.

The April 11 attack on the plant destroyed generators, transformers and turbines — every necessary part to generate electricity, said Yevhen Harkavyi, the technical director of Centerenergo, which operates the plant.

Five missiles hit the facility that day, and workers were still clearing away rubble on Tuesday as snow-like tufts of poplar cotton fell through a hole in the roof.

The plan for winter is to restore power generation as much as possible, said Harkavyi. How that will

happen isn't clear, he conceded: "The situation is already too difficult."

Ukraine is hoping to acquire parts from long-decommissioned German plants. Harkavyi said Ukrainian teams recently went to Germany to evaluate the equipment, which was taken offline because it doesn't meet European Union environmental standards. It remains to be seen how willing European allies will be to invest in Ukraine's coal-fueled energy sector given their own greener goals.

The teams are still evaluating how to get the equipment back to Ukraine, he said.

"This is the first question," he said. "The second question is what Ukraine is crying about: We need active protection with air defense systems, and we hope that Mrs. Minister (Baerbock) has seen the scale of destruction and will do everything possible to call for help from the whole world."

## How 2 debunked accounts of sexual violence on Oct. 7 fueled a global dispute over Israel-Hamas war

By TIA GOLDENBERG and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Chaim Otmazgin had tended to dozens of shot, burned or mutilated bodies before he reached the home that would put him at the center of a global clash.

Working in a kibbutz that was ravaged by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack, Otmazgin — a volunteer commander with ZAKA, an Israeli search and rescue organization — saw the body of a teenager, shot dead and separated from her family in a different room. Her pants had been pulled down below her waist. He thought that was evidence of sexual violence.

He alerted journalists to what he'd seen. He tearfully recounted the details in a nationally televised appearance in the Israeli Parliament. In the frantic hours, days and weeks that followed the Hamas attack, his testimony ricocheted across the world.

But it turns out that what Otmazgin thought had occurred in the home at the kibbutz hadn't happened.

Beyond the numerous and well-documented atrocities committed by Hamas militants on Oct. 7, some accounts from that day, like Otmazgin's, proved untrue.

"It's not that I invented a story," Otmazgin told The Associated Press in an interview, detailing the origins of his initial explosive claim — one of two by ZAKA volunteers about sexual violence that turned out to be unfounded.

"I couldn't think of any other option" other than the teen having been sexually assaulted, he said. "At the end, it turned out to be different, so I corrected myself."

But it was too late.

The United Nations and other organizations have presented credible evidence that Hamas militants committed sexual assault during their rampage. The prosecutor for the International Criminal Court, Karim Khan, said Monday he had reason to believe that three key Hamas leaders bore responsibility for "rape and other acts of sexual violence as crimes against humanity."

Though the number of assaults is unclear, photo and video from the attack's aftermath have shown bodies with legs splayed, clothes torn and blood near their genitals.

However, debunked accounts like Otmazgin's have encouraged skepticism and fueled a highly charged debate about the scope of what occurred on Oct. 7 — one that is still playing out on social media and in college campus protests.

Some allege the accounts of sexual assault were purposely concocted. ZAKA officials and others dispute that. Regardless, AP's examination of ZAKA's handling of the now debunked stories shows how information can be clouded and distorted in the chaos of the conflict.

As some of the first people on the scene, ZAKA volunteers offered testimony of what they saw that day. Those words have helped journalists, Israeli lawmakers and U.N. investigators paint a picture of what occurred during Hamas' attack. (ZAKA, a volunteer-based group, does not do forensic work. The organization has been a fixture at Israeli disaster sites and scenes of attacks since it was founded in 1995. Its specific

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job is to collect bodies in keeping with Jewish law.)

Still, it took ZAKA months to acknowledge the accounts were wrong, allowing them to proliferate. And the fallout from the debunked accounts shows how the topic of sexual violence has been used to further political agendas.

Israel points to sexual violence on Oct. 7 to highlight what it says is Hamas' savagery and to justify its wartime goal of neutralizing any repeated threat coming from Gaza. It has accused the international community of ignoring or playing down evidence of sexual violence claims, alleging anti-Israel bias. It says any untrue stories were an anomaly in the face of the many documented atrocities.

In turn, some of Israel's critics have seized on the ZAKA accounts, along with others shown to be untrue, to allege that the Israeli government has distorted the facts to prosecute a war — one in which more than 35,000 Palestinians have been killed, many of them women and children, according to Gaza health officials.

A U.N. fact-finding team found "reasonable grounds" to believe that some of those who stormed southern Israel on Oct. 7 had committed sexual violence, including rape and gang rape. But the U.N. investigators also said that in the absence of forensic evidence and survivor testimony, it would be impossible to determine the scope of such violence. Hamas has denied its forces committed sexual violence.

## BODY BAGS AND ROCKET FIRE

Israel was caught off guard by the ferocity of the Oct. 7 assault, the deadliest in the nation's history. About 1,200 people were killed and 250 taken hostage. It took days for the military to clear the area of militants.

There were hundreds of bodies scattered across southern Israel, bearing various signs of abuse: burns, bullet holes, signs of mutilation, marks indicating bodies were bound. ZAKA volunteers weren't used to dealing with so many bodies.

"You get dizzy at some point," said Moti Bukjin, ZAKA's spokesperson. "Some of the bodies are burned. Some are mutilated. Some of the bodies are decapitated. Every house has a story."

Standard protocols for dealing with attacks, which Israel encountered frequently on a far smaller scale in the early 2000s, collapsed. There was confusion over who was dead and who was taken captive, especially in the hard-hit communal farming villages and in the aftermath of the outdoor Nova music festival.

Authorities were concerned that remaining militants might snatch more bodies. ZAKA says it was instructed to gather the dead as swiftly as possible and send them for identification and quick burial, according to Jewish custom. ZAKA said it sent some 800 volunteers to southern Israel, arriving at the music festival late on Oct. 7 and entering the kibbutzim two days later, according to Otmazgin.

For the first three days, many hardly slept at all. Accompanied by military escorts, volunteers went house to house, wrapping the bodies in white plastic bags on which they wrote the person's gender, the house number where they were found and any other identifying details. Then they'd say the Jewish mourning prayer and load them into a truck, according to Tomer Peretz, who volunteered for the first time with ZAKA in the days following the attack.

As first responders worked, rocket fire from Gaza boomed overhead. Volunteers paused and crouched when air raid sirens blared. They used anything they could find to move bodies — even shopping carts. "We worked a minute and a half per body, from the moment we touch it to the moment it is on the truck," said Otmazgin, commander of special units with ZAKA.

Peretz, a U.S.-based artist, said the volunteers weren't there to do forensic work; he thought the soldiers who cleared the houses of explosives beforehand were handling that process. But the Israeli military told the AP that the army did not do any forensic work in the wake of Oct. 7.

Bukjin said police forensics teams were mostly focused on the southern cities of Sderot and Ofakim. Otmazgin said forensics workers were present in the kibbutzim but spread thin and could not follow standard — and painstaking — protocols because of the scale of the attack. He said forensics teams in the area mostly instructed ZAKA on how to help identify the bodies.

That means that bodies which might have shown signs of sexual assault could have eluded examination. Instead, they were loaded into body bags, sent to a facility to be identified and dispatched for quick burial.

"People seem to have expected that the aftermath of the attack would be like a movie, that immediately

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the police would come, that everything would be very sterile and very clean. People who don't live in a war zone do not understand the horrific chaos that took place that day," said Orit Sulitzeanu, the executive director of The Association of Rape Crisis Centers in Israel.

The group has spent months gathering evidence of sexual violence that occurred that day, sifting through many accounts emerging from the chaotic early days just after the attack. "Some of those stories that turned out not to be true were not lies," she said. They were, she said, "mistakes."

## FIRST ACCOUNT: PANTS PULLED DOWN

Otmazgin said he was the origin of one of two debunked stories by ZAKA volunteers about sexual assault.

He said he entered a home in Kibbutz Be'eri, one of the hardest-hit communities, where nearly a tenth of the population of roughly 1,000 was killed, and found the body of a teenage girl separated from two of her relatives. Her pants, he said, were pulled down. He assumed that meant she had been sexually assaulted.

"They slaughtered her. They shot her in the head and her pants are pulled down to here. I put that out there. Have someone give me a different interpretation," he said then, showing an AP reporter a photo he took of the scene, which he had altered by pulling up the teenager's pants.

Today, he maintains that he never said outright that the girl whose body he saw had been sexually assaulted. But his telling strongly suggested that was the case. Otmazgin says he told journalists and lawmakers details of what he'd seen and asked if they might have some other interpretation.

Nearly three months later, ZAKA found out his interpretation was wrong. After cross-checking with military contacts, ZAKA found that a group of soldiers had dragged the girl's body across the room to make sure it wasn't booby-trapped. During the procedure, her pants had come down.

Otmazgin said it took time to learn the truth because the soldiers who moved the body had been deployed to Gaza for weeks and were not reachable. He said he recognized that such accounts can cause damage, but he believes he rectified it by correcting his account months later.

A military spokesperson said he had no way of knowing what had happened to every body in the assault's immediate aftermath. He spoke on condition of anonymity in line with military regulations.

Another account with details similar to Otmazgin's but attributed to an anonymous combat medic has also come under scrutiny after emerging in international media, including in a story by the AP. But the medic did not disclose where he saw the scene.

The military would not make the medic available for further interviews, so it was not possible to reconcile the two accounts or verify the medic's.

## SECOND ACCOUNT: EVERYTHING WAS CHARRED

Yossi Landau, a longtime ZAKA volunteer, was also working in Be'eri when he entered a home that would produce the second debunked story. Landau would recount to global media what he thought he saw: a pregnant woman lying on the floor, her fetus still attached to the umbilical cord wrenched from her body.

Otmazgin was overseeing the other ZAKA workers when he said Landau frantically called him and others into the home. But Otmazgin did not see what Landau described. Instead, he saw the body of a heavy-set woman and an unidentifiable hunk attached to an electric cable. Everything was charred.

Otmazgin said he told Landau that his interpretation was wrong — this wasn't a pregnant woman. Still, Landau believed his version, went on to tell the story to journalists and was cited in outlets around the world. Landau, along with other first responders, also told journalists he had seen beheaded children and babies. No convincing evidence had been publicized to back up that claim, and it was debunked by Haaretz and other major media outlets.

Bukjin said it took some time for ZAKA to understand that the story was not true, then asked Landau to stop telling it. Otmazgin also told Landau to stop telling the story, but that wasn't until about three months after the attack when ZAKA was wrapping up its work in the field. The United Nations said Landau's claim was unfounded.

Otmazgin said it has been difficult to rein Landau in, both because he vehemently believes in his version and because there is no way to stop journalists from engaging with him directly. Both Otmazgin and Bukjin attributed Landau's continued belief in the false account to him having been deeply traumatized by

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what he saw in the aftermath of Oct. 7.

AP journalists attempted to reach Landau multiple times. While he answered initial inquiries, he was ultimately unreachable.

## 'WE'RE NOT FORENSICS WORKERS'

Almost immediately after Oct. 7, Israel began allowing groups of journalists to visit the ravaged kibbutzim. On the trips, journalists found ZAKA volunteers onsite to be some of the most accessible sources of information and some shared what they thought they saw, even though, as Bukjin notes, "we are not forensics workers."

"They pretend to know, sometimes very naively, what happened to the bodies they are dealing with," said Gideon Aran, a sociologist at Jerusalem's Hebrew University who wrote a recent book on the organization.

Bukjin said that the group's usual media protocols faltered and that volunteers, who he said typically were vetted by him before being interviewed, were speaking to journalists directly. "The information is wild, is not controlled right," said Peretz, the first-time volunteer. He said he took photos and video of what he saw even though he was told not to and was interviewed repeatedly about what he witnessed.

Other first responders also offered accounts — of babies beheaded, or hung from a clothesline, or killed together in a nursery, or placed in an oven — which were later debunked by Israeli reporters.

ZAKA is a private civilian body made up of 3,000 mostly Orthodox Jewish volunteer workers. Beyond its work in Israel, the group has also sent teams to international incidents, including the 2011 earthquake and tsunami in Japan and the 2002 attacks in Mombasa, Kenya. As part of its role to ensure burial according to Jewish law, its volunteers scour crime scenes for remains in order to bury each body as completely as possible.

Aran, the sociologist, said Oct. 7 was unlike anything the organization had previously witnessed. ZAKA's main experience with victim identification before Oct. 7 was limited to distinguishing militant attackers from their victims, not determining who was a victim of sexual assault, Aran said.

## DEBUNKED ACCOUNTS VS. THE EVIDENCE

After untrue accounts of sexual assault filtered into international media, the process of debunking them appeared, at times, to take center stage in the global dispute over the facts of Oct. 7. On social media, accounts with hundreds of thousands of followers question the very occurrence of sexual violence.

The loud debate belies a growing body of evidence supporting the claim that sexual assault took place that day, even as its scope remains difficult to ascertain.

The U.N. team investigating sexual violence said it saw "credible circumstantial information which may be indicative of some forms of sexual violence, including genital mutilation, sexualized torture or cruel, inhuman and degrading treatment."

That included photos and videos showing a minimum of 20 corpses with clothes that had been torn, revealing private body parts, and 10 bodies with indications of bound wrists and or tied legs. No digital materials showed sexual violence in real time, the report said.

The investigators described the accounts that originated with Otmazgin and Landau to be "unfounded." Regarding Otmazgin's original account, they said the "crime scene had been altered by a bomb squad and the bodies moved, explaining the separation of the body of the girl from the rest of her family."

Otmazgin said he publicly corrected himself after discovering what had transpired, including to the U.N. investigators he met. He showed the investigators — and later an AP reporter — photos and video, including one of a deceased woman who had a blood-speckled, flesh-colored bulb in her genital area, as well as several bodies of women with blood near their genitals and another who appeared to have small sharp objects protruding from her upper thigh and above her genitals.

More evidence is emerging as time goes by. A released hostage has described facing sexual violence in captivity in an account to The New York Times, and a man at the music festival said he heard a woman screaming she was being raped.

On Monday, releasing arrest warrants for top Hamas and Israeli officials, ICC Chief Prosecutor Karim Khan said that "there are reasonable grounds to believe that hostages taken from Israel have been kept

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in inhumane conditions, and that some have been subject to sexual violence, including rape, while being held in captivity.”

The U.N. report shines a light on the issues that have contributed to the skepticism over sexual violence. It said there was “limited crime scene processing” and that some evidence of sexual assault may have been lost due to “the interventions of some inadequately trained volunteer first responders.” It also said global scrutiny of the accounts emerging from Oct. 7 may have deterred survivors from coming forward.

## PULLING FOCUS FROM THE VICTIMS

In the fraught global discourse surrounding Oct. 7 and the war it sparked, sexual violence has been a particular point of tension.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, as well as prominent figures such as former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and top technology executive Sheryl Sandberg, have called out what they saw as global indifference toward Israeli women who were sexually assaulted in the attack.

Some critics of Israel’s war, meanwhile, have raised questions about the weight of the evidence, using debunked testimonies, including from ZAKA volunteers, to do so. The site oct7factcheck.com, which says its aim is to combat “atrocities propaganda” that could “justify military or political actions,” has repeatedly challenged investigations in mainstream media about sexual violence.

The site, which is run by a loose coalition of tech industry employees supporting Palestinian rights, says it has not yet reached a conclusion on the occurrence of gender-based violence. It has alleged that ZAKA members are “behind many of the Oct. 7 fabrications.” The site has also highlighted other debunked accounts, including about a baby found in an oven and a hostage giving birth in captivity.

Tariq Kenney-Shawa, a U.S. policy fellow at Al-Shabaka, a Palestinian think tank, said a long history of what he calls Israeli disinformation and propaganda has fueled global skepticism over the claims. The debunked ZAKA stories, he said, contributed to the sense that Israel exaggerated accounts of atrocities committed by Hamas to dehumanize Palestinians as its military continues its deadly offensive.

“Skepticism of all claims made by the Israeli military, a military that is being investigated for genocide at The Hague, are not only justified but should be encouraged,” he said. “That’s why Palestinians, and much of the international community, are asking for thorough scrutiny.”

Dahlia Scheindlin, a commentator on Israeli affairs, said those downplaying the atrocities committed by Hamas have seized on the debunked ZAKA accounts as “ammunition” to show that Israel fabricates or that Oct. 7 wasn’t so bad, rather than examining all the available evidence to build a more comprehensive picture of what happened.

At the same time, any false accounts, even if produced without malice, lead to further polarization and pulls the focus away from victims, she argues. “Every bit of misinformation, disinformation — good faith or bad faith, mistakes or lies — is extremely destructive.”

## From London to Los Angeles, many Iranians overseas cheer, and fear, after president’s death

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Among Iranian communities from London to Los Angeles, few tears are being shed over the death of President Ebrahim Raisi, killed in a weekend helicopter crash.

But there are not always loud cheers, either.

While some hope the demise of a powerful figure in Iran’s authoritarian Islamic government may bring change, others fear it could result in more repression.

“It’s a better world without him,” said Maryam Namazie, a U.K.-based women’s rights campaigner. “He is one of the pillars of the Islamic regime of Iran. He has been there since its inception.”

But, she added: “Raisi, however much of a pillar he was, is expendable. There are many others to take his place.”

Inside Iran, authorities are keeping a tight lid on reaction to the crash that killed Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and six others. The government declared five days of mourning, encouraging

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people into the streets in displays of public grief and support. Prosecutors have warned Iranians against any public celebrations, and a heavy security force presence has been on the streets of Tehran.

Outside Iran, some expatriates felt bold enough to dance in the street. Nazenin Ansari, editor of Kayhan London, a news website for Iranians abroad that is critical of the country's theocracy, said that within hours of news of Raisi's death, Iranians gathered in cities across Europe and beyond to celebrate.

The Iranian diaspora is large, including those who fled soon after the 1979 Islamic Revolution and later waves who left because of continued repression or economic woes. More than half a million Iranians live in the U.S. — many in California — and there are large communities in European cities, including London, Paris and Stockholm.

Dissidents have shared social media videos showing dozens of Iranians dancing and cheering in the streets of Toronto and Cologne, Germany, Ansari said.

"I understand their anger, I understand why they are celebrating," she said. "For me, I wish this guy stayed alive so he can be taken to an international court, to look in the eyes of his victims and reply to them. I'm sorry he won't be able to stand in a court of law and take responsibility for his actions."

Raisi, 63, was reviled by opponents, and sanctioned by the U.S., for his role in mass executions of political prisoners at the end of Iran's long war with Iraq in the 1980s.

Many also hold Raisi responsible for the death of Mahsa Amini, who died in police custody in September 2022 after being detained for allegedly violating Iran's mandatory headscarf law.

Amini's death sparked mass protests against the country's ruling theocracy, and a security crackdown that saw more than 500 people killed and over 22,000 detained. A U.N. fact-finding mission found Iranian authorities responsible for the "physical violence" that led to Amini's death.

"Each member of this regime that goes is a victory for us," said Guilda Torabi, spokesperson for the Homa association, an Iranian support group in France. "It's a step forward, a little victory for the Iranian people. It's one step to vanquishing the regime. We are getting closer to the objective, which gives us hope."

Raisi had long been considered a potential successor for Iran's supreme leader, 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in whose hands power ultimately rests, and his death could complicate that process.

Still, short-term instability appears unlikely. First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber has been appointed caretaker president, and a presidential election was called for June 28.

Even thousands of miles from Iran, some expatriates were unwilling to relax their reticence. Iranian critics of the government have been attacked overseas — including Pouria Zeraati, a newscaster with Farsi-language TV channel Iran International, who was stabbed in the leg near his London home in March.

The channel has been demonized for years by Iran's government, as well as other foreign-language Farsi broadcasters and their journalists. Television in Iran is entirely state-controlled and run by hard-liners, often airing coerced confessions of prisoners.

In the Los Angeles area nicknamed "Tehrangeles" — home to Persian cafes, ice cream parlors, grocery stores and rug shops — a husband and wife eating at the Pink Orchid bakery said that while they cheered the president's death, they were not optimistic it would bring major changes.

"Everyone knows someone worse is going to come," said the wife, who grew up in Iran and left when she was 21.

The couple refused to give their names for fear of retaliation against family and friends who remain in Iran, as well as concerns about their own safety.

Poone, who only gave her first name for fear of retaliation against her family in Iran, said Raisi's death provided a measure of justice. She said the late president "had a lot of blood on his hands."

Others saw reason for hope.

As news of the crash circulated in Iran on Sunday night, anti-government chants could be heard in some areas of Tehran. Namazie said many Iranians shared dark jokes and social media memes.

Aliasghar Ramezanpoor, executive news director at Iran International, said many Iranians were contacting the station to express happiness at Raisi's death.

Ramezanpoor said the Islamic Republic's authorities would likely be shaken by the realization that many Iranians saw the president's death as cause for celebration.

"People are talking about the crash as a kind of sign of hope," he said. "Everyone sees how losing a president (caused) national celebration — which sends a powerful message to everyone in the government."

Namazie said political instability might bring more brutality as the government moved to repress dissent. But even so, "any infighting opens up the space for people to be able to push back the regime, to weaken it."

"It opens up the space for protest," she said. "That's what we need — from below, not any kind of regime change from above, not foreign intervention. People themselves will be able to challenge this regime and bring it to an end."

## **Sites with radioactive material more vulnerable as climate change increases wildfire, flood risks**

By TAMMY WEBBER Associated Press

As Texas wildfires burned toward the nation's primary nuclear weapons facility, workers hurried to ensure nothing flammable was around buildings and storage areas.

When the fires showed no sign of slowing, Pantex Plant officials urgently called on local contractors, who arrived within minutes with bulldozers to dig trenches and enlarge fire breaks for the sprawling complex where nuclear weapons are assembled and disassembled and dangerous plutonium pits — hollow spheres that trigger nuclear warheads and bombs — are stored.

"The winds can pick up really (quickly) here and can move really fast," said Jason Armstrong, the federal field office manager at Pantex, outside Amarillo, who was awake 40 hours straight monitoring the risks. Workers were sent home and the plant shut down when smoke began blanketing the site.

Those fires in February — including the largest in Texas history — didn't reach Pantex, though flames came within 3 miles (5 kilometers). And Armstrong says it's highly unlikely that plutonium pits, stored in fire-resistant drums and shelters, would have been affected by wildfire.

But the size and speed of the grassland fires, and Pantex's urgent response, underscore how much is at stake as climate change stokes extreme heat and drought, longer fire seasons with larger, more intense blazes and supercharged rainstorms that can lead to catastrophic flooding. The Texas fire season often starts in February, but farther west it has yet to ramp up, and is usually worst in summer and fall.

Dozens of active and idle laboratories and manufacturing and military facilities across the nation that use, store or are contaminated with radioactive material are increasingly vulnerable to extreme weather. Many also perform critical energy and defense research and manufacturing that could be disrupted or crippled by fires, floods and other disasters.

There's the 40-square-mile Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico, where a 2000 wildfire burned to within a half mile (0.8 kilometers) of a radioactive waste site. The heavily polluted Santa Susana Field Laboratory in Southern California, where a 2018 wildfire burned 80% of the site, narrowly missing an area contaminated by a 1959 partial nuclear meltdown. And the plutonium-contaminated Hanford nuclear site in Washington, where the U.S. manufactured atomic bombs.

"I think we're still early in recognizing climate change and ... how to deal with these extreme weather events," said Paul Walker, program director at the environmental organization Green Cross International and a former staff member of the House Armed Services Committee. "I think it's too early to assume that we've got all the worst-case scenarios resolved ... (because) what might have been safe 25 years ago probably is no longer safe."

That realization has begun to change how the government addresses threats at some of the nation's most sensitive sites.

The Department of Energy in 2022 required its existing sites to assess climate change risks to "mission-critical functions and operations," including waste storage, and to develop plans to address them. It cited wildfires at Los Alamos and Lawrence Livermore national laboratories and a 2021 deep freeze that damaged "critical facilities" at Pantex.

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Yet the agency does not specifically consider future climate risks when issuing permits or licenses for new sites or projects, or in environmental assessments that are reviewed every five years though rarely updated. Instead, it only considers how sites themselves might affect climate change — a paradox critics call short-sighted and potentially dangerous.

Likewise, the Nuclear Regulatory Commission considers only historical climate data rather than future projections in licensing decisions and oversight of nuclear power plants, according to a General Accounting Office study in April that recommended the NRC “fully consider potential climate change effects.” The GAO found that 60 of 75 U.S. plants were in areas with high flood hazard and 16 were in areas with high wildfire potential.

“We’re acting like ... (what’s) happening now is what we can expect to happen in 50 years,” said Caroline Reiser, a climate and energy attorney at the Natural Resources Defense Council. “The reality of what our climate is doing has shifted dramatically, and we need to shift our planning ... before we experience more and more of the extreme weather events.”

The National Nuclear Security Administration’s environmental safety and health division, which oversees active DOE sites, will conduct an internal review and convene a work group to develop “crucial” methodologies to address climate risks in permitting, licensing and site-wide assessments, John Weckerle, the division’s director of environmental regulatory affairs, told The Associated Press.

The agency said last year that climate change could “jeopardize the NNSA mission and pose a threat to national security.”

“We all know the climate is changing. Everybody’s thinking about, what effect are we having on the climate?” Weckerle said. “Now we need to flip that on its head and say, ‘OK ... but what do we think is going to happen as a result of climate on a particular site?’”

Assessments before and after projects are built are critical to protecting infrastructure and waste materials, said Dylan Spaulding, a senior scientist at the Union of Concerned Scientists.

“We know that climate change makes it likely that these events will happen with increased frequency, and that brings the likelihood for unprecedented consequences,” Spaulding said. Sites “can be better protected if you are anticipating these problems ahead of time.”

One of the most dangerous radioactive materials is plutonium, said Edwin Lyman, director of nuclear power safety at the Union of Concerned Scientists. It can cause cancer, is most dangerous when inhaled, and just a few hundred grams dispersed widely could pose a significant hazard, he said.

Experts say risks vary by site. Most plutonium and other radioactive material is contained in concrete and steel structures or underground storage designed to withstand fire. And many sites are on large tracts in remote areas where risk to the public from a radiation release would be minimal.

Even so, potential threats have arisen.

In 2000, a wildfire burned one-third of the 580-square-mile (1,502-square-kilometer) Hanford site, which produced plutonium for the U.S. atomic weapons program and is considered the nation’s most radioactive place.

Air monitoring detected plutonium in nearby populated areas at levels higher than background, but only for one day and at levels not considered hazardous, according to a Washington State Department of Health report.

The agency said the plutonium likely was from surface soil blown by the wind during and after the fire, though site officials said radioactive waste is buried several feet deep or stored in concrete structures.

Because the Hanford site is fire-prone — with 130 wildfires between 2012 and 2023 — officials say they’re diligent about cutting fire breaks and removing flammable vegetation.

The 2018 Woolsey Fire in California was another wakeup call.

About 150,000 people live within 5 miles (8 kilometers) of the Santa Susana Field Laboratory, a former nuclear power research and rocket-engine testing site.

The fire burned within several hundred feet of contaminated buildings and soil, and about 600 feet (183 meters) from where a nuclear reactor core partially melted down 65 years ago.

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The state's Department of Toxic Substances Control said sampling by multiple agencies found no off-site radiation or other hazardous material attributable to the fire. But another study, using hundreds of samples collected by volunteers, found radioactive microparticles in ash just outside of the lab boundary and at three sites farther away that researchers say were from the fire.

The state ordered demolition of 18 buildings, citing "imminent and substantial endangerment to people and the environment because unanticipated and increasingly likely fires could result in the release of radioactive and hazardous substances."

It also ordered cleanup of old burn pits contaminated with radioactive materials. Though the area was covered with permeable tarps and did not burn in 2018, the state feared it could be damaged by "far more severe" wildfire, high winds or flooding.

"It's like these places we think, it'll never happen," said Melissa Bumstead, founder and co-director of Parents Against Santa Susana Field Laboratory. "But ... things are changing very quickly."

Jay Coghlan, executive director of Nuclear Watch New Mexico, said he and others successfully urged federal nuclear security officials to include a wildfire plan in a 1999 final environmental impact statement for the Los Alamos National Laboratory.

The next year, the 48,000-acre (19,000-hectare) Cerro Grande Fire burned 7,500 acres (3,035 hectares) at the laboratory, including structures, and came within a half-mile (0.8 kilometers) of an area with more than 24,000 above-ground containers of mostly plutonium-contaminated waste.

The plan's hypothetical fire "eerily matched the real fire," Coghlan said, adding that it "could have been catastrophic," if containers had been compromised and plutonium become airborne. But the lab had cut fire breaks around the area — and since then, most containers have been shipped to a permanent storage site in southern New Mexico.

Remaining radioactive material — including from the World War II Manhattan Project — now is underground with barriers to prevent leaching, or in containers stored under fire-retardant fabric-and-steel domes with paved floors until it can be processed for disposal.

The amount of radioactive material in each container is kept low to prevent a significant release if it were compromised, said Nichole Lundgard, engineering and nuclear safety program manager at DOE contractor N3B.

The lab also emphasizes fire preparedness, including thinning forests to reduce the intensity of future fires, said Rich Nieto, manager of the site's wildland fire program.

"What used to be a three-month (fire) season, sometimes will be a six-month season," he said.

Wildfires aren't the only climate-related risk. Flooding from increasingly intense rainstorms can wash away sediment — especially in areas that have burned. Floods and extreme cold also can affect operations and have forced the shutdown of several DOE sites in recent years.

The Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in Northern California was evacuated during a 2020 wildfire, and last year the lab was forced to shut down for three weeks because of heavy flooding.

The 2000 fire at Los Alamos was followed by heavy rainstorms that washed away sediment with plutonium and other radioactive material.

In 2010, Pantex was inundated with 10 inches (25 centimeters) of rain that forced the plant to shut down, affecting operations for almost a month. The plutonium storage area flooded and corrosion later was found on some containers that's since "been addressed," said Armstrong, the field office manager.

In 2017, storms flooded facilities that processed nuclear material and led to power outages that affected a fire alarm control panel.

Then in 2021, Pantex was shut down for a week because of extreme cold that officials said led to "freeze-related failures" at 10 nuclear facilities and other plants. That included failure of a sprinkler head in a radiation safety storage area's fire suppression system.

Pantex has since adopted freeze-protection measures and a cold weather response plan. And Armstrong says there have been upgrades, including to its fire protection and electrical systems and installation of backup generators.

Other DOE sites also are investing in infrastructure, the nuclear security agency's Weckerle said, because what once was considered safe now may be vulnerable.

"We live in a time of increased risk," he said. "That's just the heart of it (and) ... a lot of that does have to do with climate change."

## California lawmaker Vince Fong wins special election to finish ousted House Speaker McCarthy's term

By MICHAEL R. BLOOD AP Political Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Vince Fong, a California State Assembly member backed by former President Donald Trump, won a special election Tuesday to complete the remainder of the term of deposed former U.S. House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, which runs through January.

A McCarthy protege who also had the former speaker's endorsement, Fong defeated fellow Republican and Tulare County Sheriff Mike Boudreaux in the 20th Congressional District, in the state's Central Valley farm belt.

Because of Trump's involvement, the race will be watched as a possible proxy vote on the former president's clout as he heads toward an all-but-certain matchup against President Joe Biden in November.

"With the campaign over, the real work now begins," Fong said in a statement, adding that he will focus on border security, supporting small business and investing in water storage critical to the region's agriculture.

It wasn't immediately clear when Fong will be sworn in — that decision falls to current House Speaker Mike Johnson.

Turnout appeared to be light for the unusual May election, for which mail-in voting began last month.

Trump endorsed Fong in February, calling him "a true Republican." Boudreaux's supporters include Richard Grenell, a former acting director of national intelligence in the Trump administration, and Republican state Sen. Shannon Grove of Bakersfield, Fong's home turf.

Republicans occupy only 11 of the state's 52 U.S. House seats. With the district once held by McCarthy remaining in GOP hands, it will give Republicans 12 seats in the state delegation and boost the party's fragile edge in Congress by a single vote.

There are 217 Republicans in the House, 213 Democrats and five vacancies, including McCarthy's former seat.

The special election only covers the time remaining in McCarthy's term. Fong and Boudreaux will reprise their contest again in November for a full two-year term in the district, though the winner of the special election will gain the advantage of incumbency.

In a statement Boudreaux said he congratulated Fong in a phone call, thanked volunteers and donors for their support and signaled that he already was gearing up for November.

"California faces a crime crisis unlike any other in its history. That's why I will be stepping up the fight for a safer Valley and safer California," Boudreaux said.

Some voters might be confused, since Fong and Boudreaux already have appeared on two House ballots this year — the March 5 statewide primary for the full House term, and the March 19 primary in the special election to fill out McCarthy's term.

The two conservative Republicans and Trump supporters occupy much of the same policy terrain. Boudreaux has spotlighted his decades of law-and-order experience and promised to harden the nation's porous border. Fong also promised to "end the chaos" at the border with Mexico while prioritizing water and energy needs in the farm belt.

Fong, a onetime McCarthy aide, entered the contest with advantages beyond the endorsements from Trump and McCarthy.

He carried 42% of the vote in the March primary, with Boudreaux getting nearly 26% and the remainder divided among other candidates. Fong hails from the most populous part of the district, Kern County, and he outraised the sheriff by about 3 to 1 in campaign funds, according to federal records through the end

of March.

McCarthy's dramatic fall in the House — he is the only speaker in history to be voted out of the job — left behind a messy race to succeed him that exposed rivalries within his own party. He has worked behind the scenes to promote Fong's candidacy — a political action committee linked to McCarthy steered over \$700,000 into the 20th District contest to boost Fong's campaign.

McCarthy resigned last year after being ousted as speaker.

## Judge in Trump classified documents case to hear more arguments on dismissing charges

By TERRY SPENCER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — Prosecutors and defense lawyers in the classified documents case against former President Donald Trump are due in court Wednesday for the first time since the judge indefinitely postponed the trial earlier this month.

The case, one of four criminal prosecutions against Trump, had been set for trial on May 20 but U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon cited numerous issues she has yet to resolve as a basis for canceling the trial date.

On Wednesday, Cannon was scheduled to hear arguments on a Trump request to dismiss the indictment on grounds that it fails to clearly articulate a crime and instead amounts to "a personal and political attack against President Trump" with a "litany of uncharged grievances both for public and media consumption."

Prosecutors on special counsel Jack Smith's team, which brought the case, will argue against that request. Trump is not expected to be present for the hearing.

The motion is one of several that Trump's lawyers have filed to dismiss the case, some of which have already been denied.

Also scheduled for Wednesday are arguments by a Trump co-defendant, his valet Walt Nauta, to dismiss charges.

The arguments come one day after a newly unsealed motion reveals that defense lawyers are seeking to exclude evidence from the boxes of records that FBI agents seized during a search of Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate nearly two years ago.

The defense lawyers asserted in the motion that the August 2022 search was unconstitutional and "illegal" and the FBI affidavit filed in justification of it was tainted by misrepresentations.

Smith's team rejected each of those accusations and defended the investigative approach as "measured" and "graduated." They said the search warrant was obtained after investigators collected surveillance video showing what they said was a concerted effort to conceal the boxes of classified documents inside the property.

"The warrant was supported by a detailed affidavit that established probable cause and did not omit any material information. And the warrant provided ample guidance to the FBI agents who conducted the search. Trump identifies no plausible basis to suppress the fruits of that search," prosecutors wrote.

The defense motion was filed in February but was made public on Tuesday, along with hundreds of pages of documents from the investigation that were filed to the case docket in Florida.

Those include a previously sealed opinion last year from the then-chief judge of the federal court in Washington, which said that Trump's lawyers, months after the FBI search of Mar-a-Lago, had turned over four additional documents with classification markings that were found in Trump's bedroom.

That March 2023 opinion from U.S. District Judge Beryl Howell directed a former lead lawyer for Trump in the case to abide by a grand jury subpoena and to turn over materials to investigators, rejecting defense arguments that their cooperation was prohibited by attorney-client privilege and concluding that prosecutors had made a "prima facie" showing that Trump had committed a crime.

Trump has pleaded not guilty and denied any wrongdoing.

## Asian American, Pacific Islander Latinos in the US see exponential growth, new analysis says

By TERRY TANG Associated Press

The number of people of both Latino and Asian American or Pacific Islander heritage has more than doubled in the last 20 years yet it remains an often ignored demographic, researchers at UCLA said Wednesday.

The UCLA Latino Policy and Politics Institute analyzed Census Bureau data within the last two decades. This included the 2000 census count as well as American Community Survey 5-year estimates on population characteristics from 2010 and 2022. Their analysis indicates people in the United States who identify as Latino and Asian American or Pacific Islander, or "AAPI Latinos," rose from 350,000 to 886,000 in that period.

"We looked at people who identify themselves as Latino, who are of Latino ethnicity and then among all these people, we looked at when they fill out the race question, which race did they specify," said Jie Zong, a senior research analyst. "If they specify they are of (an) Asian race, we considered these individuals AAPI and Latinos."

This shows mixed-race Asians and Latinos are a more typical occurrence now, said Kevin Kandamby, a graduate student in Chicano/a and Central American Studies and a member of the research team. Part of the reasoning in pursuing this was because this population remains understudied.

"This is still a very niche topic. I'm happy to see that there's more and more people now understanding that this community is growing," said Kandamby, who is Mexican and Sri Lankan.

Asian or Pacific Islander Latinos primarily tended to be either Asian immigrants from Latin America or American-born citizens with both Latino and Asian American or Pacific Islander parents, the analysis found.

The population's trajectory has roots in a lengthy history of Latino and Asian or Pacific Islander citizens interacting while meeting a labor demand in the U.S., according to Kandamby. There are records of Chinese immigrants, targeted by the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, settling in towns on both sides of the U.S.-Mexico border and Punjabi and Mexican farmworkers intermarrying in California's Imperial Valley in the early 1900s.

In fact, grouped by state, a third of Asian Latino Americans reside in California, the data brief states. Texas and Hawaii are the next highest.

That doesn't surprise Hawaii Democratic state Rep. Sonny Ganaden, whose father is Filipino and mother is Mexican. The 43-year-old self-described "Mexipino" got constant ribbing growing up in Orange County, California, that he wasn't truly Latino or Asian. In 2018, he lost his first bid for the Statehouse but came away with an invaluable and "decolonizing" experience. Residents in his district, which includes the heavily Filipino Kalihi neighborhood, embraced him.

"I was feeling like I was out of place in the American experience and then I ran for office. Then I felt so like both accepted and accepting," Ganaden said. "It's like a community chose me and I chose a community and that was it."

Having two cultures resulting in the irony of feeling less visible is a common thread. Olivia Yuen, 29, and a middle school art teacher and well-known artist in Phoenix, has a Chinese father and a Mexican mother. When it came to which culture was more dominant in her household, it was more of a draw.

"It definitely felt like ... I wasn't Mexican enough to be considered Mexican or wasn't Chinese enough to be considered Chinese," Yuen said. "And because my parents had raised me with a pretty Western approach, honestly, I felt like growing up, I identified mostly as American."

She was either questioned about her ethnic makeup or treated as fully Asian. This led to her leaning into her Chinese side more.

"Now I acknowledge and both identify myself from both sides of my heritage," Yuen said.

Growing up in the military city of Killeen, Texas, Isabella Chavez, 23, and the daughter of a Korean mother and Mexican father, felt lucky enough to be in a mixed community where friends helped her find her identity. Having divorced parents and being raised by her Korean grandmother had her surrounded by

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Korean culture. Chavez spent childhood going only to Korean churches, dry cleaners and grocery stores. "I mostly say that I grew up as, like, an Asian American, even though I don't look Asian, by any means," Chavez said. "Being a mixed kid a lot of the time like I found myself questioning like, well, I don't look Asian. So is it right to identify as Asian American?"

It wasn't until she was older that Chavez realized she did not have to pick one or the other. Living in San Antonio — with the vibrancy and pride of the Latino community — has made it easier for to connect to her Mexican heritage, she said.

There were plenty of great things about growing up Asian and Latino for Ganaden. It meant a lot of relatives on both sides including an abuela and a lola. And having Filipino or Mexican food on the table led to tasty mash-ups like "day-old adobo in a tortilla."

"My favorite way to have adobo is with a side of rice and beans. So it's kind of funny to me that there are like a variety of new food movements or like some random New York Times article about like, 'Check out this new fusion.' I'm like... 'Were you in my house?'" said Ganaden, chuckling.

Other trends the data analysis found were "AAPI Latinos" placed higher than Latinos overall but lower than all Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders in educational attainment and homeownership. About a third, or 33%, of AAPI Latinos have a bachelor's degree or higher. In comparison, 55% of Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders and 19% of Latinos are at the same level.

The UCLA analysis also states the current Latino-Asian or Pacific Islander population skews pretty young. Nearly half are age 18 or younger.

Kandamby hopes to delve beyond the data and bring more attention to the Asian or Pacific Islander and Latino identity. He also wants to show how life experience can vary within this population.

"We have very distinctly different communities and understandings and identities, but we still warrant the need to be included into the conversations, to know that we have specific needs that may be different from others," Kandamby said.

## Russia is waging a shadow war on the West that needs a collective response, Estonian leader says

By EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Perched on the open ramp at the rear of a British Chinook helicopter, Estonian Prime Minister Kaja Kallas flew home from the annual Spring Storm military exercises, pleased to see NATO allies cooperating. But she later said that other types of warfare were on her mind.

Her nation, which borders Russia, has seen a rise in sabotage, electronic warfare and spying — all blamed on Moscow.

As the war in Ukraine turns in Russia's favor, defenses are being bolstered in the front-line nations of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, as well as in Finland and Poland.

Kallas says Russia is carrying out a "shadow war" against the West.

Lithuanian President Gitanas Nausėda urged vigilance, saying Tuesday he had information that "acts of sabotage can happen again."

Polish Prime Minister Donald Tusk said at least nine people were recently arrested on suspicion of beatings and arson, allegedly directed by Russia's secret services, and described them as Ukrainian, Belarusian and Polish nationals, some "from the criminal world."

Not everyone sees the attacks as interconnected, Kallas told The Associated Press, despite NATO's assertion this month that Moscow is intensifying its campaign against the alliance from the Baltics to Britain. Russia dismissed that allegation.

Because many Russian intelligence operatives already are sanctioned, Western officials and experts say the Kremlin is shifting tactics, hiring others for hybrid operations — nonmilitary strategies including cyberattacks, election interference and disinformation, and attacks on foes of President Vladimir Putin.

With crucial elections in the West, officials say they believe the tempo of such activities will only increase, and some want tougher countermeasures.

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Kallas cited a warning from an intelligence agency to a European country that one of its warehouses was targeted by Russian military intelligence. When a fire occurred at the warehouse two weeks later, officials in the country suggested that "we don't know it is the Russians," she said. Kallas did not identify the country.

The West must have a "serious discussion of a coordinated approach," she said. "How far do we let them go on our soil?"

Estonia has taken the challenge of finding Russian agents of influence "very seriously" since regaining independence from the USSR in 1991, rebuilding its security services from scratch, U.S. Ambassador George Kent told AP.

This year in Estonia, a university professor was arrested on charges of spying for Moscow, 13 people were arrested over attacks allegedly organized by Russian military intelligence operating under diplomatic cover, and flights between Finland and the city of Tartu were disrupted by Russian jamming of GPS signals.

In October, a Baltic Sea gas pipeline and telecoms cables were damaged after a Chinese ship dragged its anchor for over 115 miles (185 kilometers) in an incident that is still under investigation. That ship was later seen in a Russian port.

Britain expelled Russia's defense attache in May after two British men were accused of working with Russian intelligence services to set fire to a London warehouse. In April, two German-Russian nationals were arrested and accused of trying to attack military sites in southern Germany.

"What I would like to see is the recognition that these are not isolated events," Kallas told AP. "Second, that we share information about this amongst ourselves. Third, make it as public as we can."

Estonia has a reputation for aggressively pursuing espionage activity and publicizing it, consistently seizing more Russian agents per capita in the country of 1.3 million than other European nations.

It is "not very plausible" that there's such a large pool of agents in Estonia that makes them easier to catch, said Kusti Salm, permanent secretary at Estonia's Defense Ministry, in an interview with AP, implying that other countries could work harder at it.

Former Estonian President Toomas Hendrik Ilves, in office from 2006-16, told AP that some nations don't act because they hope to do business with Russia again.

"People are afraid of decisive action, and the absence of decisive action basically tempts bad actors to keep pushing their luck," added Ilves, who dealt with a major cyber attack blamed on Russia in 2007.

Russian officials, he said, "will push their luck until something bad happens, but they won't pay the consequence. We will."

That could lead to unintended deaths and injuries, Estonian officials and security experts say, citing a trend of Russia is outsourcing attacks to locals, sometimes recruited relatively cheaply on video gaming platforms and social media. That makes it harder to identify connections between attacks or to trace them back to Russia.

Bulgarian investigative journalist Christo Grozev, who exposed Russian intelligence involvement in poisoning former spy Sergei Skripal in 2018 in Britain and the late opposition leader Alexei Navalny in 2020, was a victim of such outsourcing.

A former Austrian intelligence officer was arrested in March for supplying Grozev's address to Russian intelligence, which allegedly hired burglars to break into the journalist's apartment in 2022 to steal a laptop connected to the Navalny investigation. Grozev had to move from Vienna last year after authorities said they couldn't guarantee his security.

Grozev said his son was in his room playing computer games when the 2022 break-in occurred, adding: "Imagine if he had walked out."

He and other journalists discovered links between an attack on a Russian opposition figure in Argentina last year and a Polish organized crime cell. When the information was passed to Polish authorities, they found a connection between the Argentina attack and one on Russian opposition figure Leonid Volkov in Lithuania in March. Lithuania's security service said that attack was probably Russian-organized.

Grozev said nations need to enforce intelligence sharing between their own security services and police

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and prosecutors and create a "proactive international working task force" to combat foreign influence operations.

Although Russia has been blamed for attacks in Europe for decades, Estonian officials and security experts indicated there's no collective mechanism for dealing with them, and suggested the EU do more.

Kallas says Russia uses spies in the guise of diplomats "all the time," and senior Estonian officials support a Czech initiative limiting visas for Russian envoys to the country where they are posted.

That would make it harder for them to travel in the EU, where IDs aren't needed at the border. It also could reduce the possibility of one nation expelling spies, only to see them return to another and continue working under diplomatic cover.

Estonia also is pushing for separate sanctions within the EU to counter hybrid threats. Although many Russian intelligence agents already are sanctioned, these could dissuade some "intermediaries" -- local organized crime figures, disillusioned youth and potential spies and collaborators -- from working for Moscow, said Jonatan Vsevirov, secretary general of Estonia's Foreign Ministry.

While some countries feel such exposure could cause instability and erode trust, Grozev called it an important deterrent.

Russian intelligence agents running operations abroad are "extremely averse" to incidents where they are named and shamed, Grozev said. Such individuals can be denied promotion, and proxies will realize they cannot be guaranteed immunity, he said.

The threat of sanctions and reduced opportunities for travel and study abroad can also help discourage younger Russians from joining security services.

Russia seeks "to sow fear" and break Western support for Kyiv, Kallas said.

Vsevirov said Putin wants to use every tool available, including the shadowy attacks, to "undermine our unity, collapse our policy and destroy the collective West, as we know it, as a functioning body."

## What's in a name? A Trump embraces ex-president's approach in helping lead Republican Party

By MARTHA MENDOZA and JULIET LINDERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The direction of the Republican National Committee is clear from the last name of its new second-in-command: Trump.

"My No. 1 goal is making sure that Donald Trump is the 47th president," said RNC co-chair Lara Trump in an interview with The Associated Press.

It's one more step in solidifying Trump's hold over the Republican Party. The daughter-in-law of the former president has wasted no time in rebranding the typically staid committee in Trump's image, embracing her own version of his pugilistic politics and brash management style in ways that affirm his sway over the Republican establishment.

The RNC has fired dozens of longtime staffers and sought alliances with election deniers, conspiracy theorists and alt-right advocates the party had previously kept at arm's length. Lara Trump, who is married to Trump's third child, Eric, has been an outspoken defender of the former president and has not hesitated to blast his foes, promising four years of "scorched earth" political retribution if he wins the election. And she's led a steep increase in fundraising, a particularly acute need for Trump's election bid because his political fundraising operations have spent tens of millions of dollars in legal fees to defend him in criminal and civil cases.

Trump supporters say Lara Trump is breathing new life into the party, and say her charisma and dogged work ethic make her an ideal choice to serve as its champion.

But her installation has raised concerns among some Republicans who say the RNC is being run in ways that could harm its mandate to help all its candidates up and down the ballot. By prioritizing the presidential campaign, they said, the RNC might not be able to dedicate the necessary resources to assist other office seekers.

"It kind of suggests an expectation of complete, unabashed and, perhaps, a blind loyalty to the candi-

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date," said Marc Racicot, a former RNC chair who served as Montana's governor for eight years.

Conceding that she is confronting a "big, big learning curve," Lara Trump told the AP she has the background to succeed, having worked on both of Trump's previous presidential campaigns.

"You'd be hard pressed to find someone who has had as much political experience as I have in any campaign right now, and that's kind of unique to be able to say," she said.

She is also aware that, as a Trump, she makes a particularly tempting political target.

"Certainly," she said, "I am in the crosshairs for a lot of people given this position."

## THE NEW RNC

Lara Trump became co-chair in March, culminating efforts by Trump and his allies to shake up the RNC, the party's governing body.

Trump and other members of his "Make America Great Again" movement had grown disenchanted with the RNC's leadership, blaming the organization for the party's lackluster performances in 2018, 2020 and 2022. They were also concerned about the RNC's financial position.

They succeeded in replacing its chair of eight years, Ronna McDaniel, with Michael Whatley, a fervent Trump supporter and leader of North Carolina's GOP. Lara Trump, a fellow North Carolinian, was tapped to be Whatley's No. 2. The chair runs the party's day-to-day operations. The co-chair, meanwhile, generally focuses on raising money and boosting morale.

As they took the reins, Lara Trump and Whatley promised to enact sweeping changes. And they did: They merged the GOP and the Trump campaign into a single operation.

Brian Hughes, a spokesman for the Trump campaign, told the AP the strategy was essential to ensuring Republican victories in November.

"By joining the two organizations together, we are all rolling in the same direction to get President Trump elected, as well as to increase the majority of the House and the Senate," he said.

Lara Trump said party and campaign staff are "all part of organizing the ground game, working on day-to-day operations."

She appears to have already helped turn around the committee's anemic fundraising operation. Republicans say she is a sought-after speaker on the fundraising circuit and has helped excite donors.

Whatley, the RNC's chair, told the AP that Lara Trump was among the party's "most important assets."

"My friend Lara has the ability to raise money, inspire our grassroots and deliver our message extremely effectively," he said.

The RNC brought in \$76 million in April and \$65.6 million in March — up from just \$10.6 million in February. The increase also reflects changes in donation limits after Trump, in March, became the party's presumptive nominee. The DNC, by comparison, raised far less in April, \$51 million, down from \$72 million in March.

The RNC's ability to pump money into the election could prove critical to Trump's chances because he needs money. The former president is facing dozens of federal and state criminal charges over his alleged efforts to overturn the 2020 election and retention of classified documents. He is currently on trial in New York, accused of making hush money payments to bury allegations of extramarital affairs. His political action committee, Save America, presidential campaign and other fundraising organizations have spent at least \$76.7 million on legal fees over the last two years.

The donation button on the RNC webpage automatically redirects to Trump's campaign site, where 90% of every donation goes to his reelection efforts and the remaining 10% goes to other committee business.

The RNC is "a very big fundraising arm," said Seth Masket, a political science professor at the University of Denver. "He's trying to get donors to help cover his legal fees, pay for his lawyers, pay for some of the fines he owes."

The Trump campaign says money donated to the RNC will not be directed toward Trump's legal defense.

## CONCERNS ABOUT STRATEGY

Party insiders and former RNC staffers, including those swept out in recent months, say the committee is lagging in building a county-by-county operation that helps turn out the vote. Former staffers said they worry the RNC is focusing too much on Trump's race, putting down-ballot candidates in a tough spot.

Lara Trump brushed off such critiques, saying the restructuring will ensure the RNC is supporting can-

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didates in state and local races.

"It would be very silly of me to assume that only having the presidency would be able to achieve the goals of the Republican Party," she said. "Obviously, that requires majorities in Congress, and that's our goal."

To help bolster turnout, she is embracing conservative groups that espouse fringe beliefs.

She speaks highly of Scott Presler, an election denier who chaired the group Gays For Trump and who described the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection as "the largest civil rights protest in American history." Lara Trump calls him a "grassroots hero," and said in March that she hoped to hire him to help run the RNC's "legal ballot harvesting" initiative, but later said the RNC would partner with his group, Early Vote Action, instead.

Another organization she said she wants to collaborate with is led by Charlie Kirk, a right-wing student organizer who leads Turning Point USA. Kirk has questioned whether Black pilots are qualified to fly and derided gymnast Simone Biles after she withdrew from the 2020 Olympics. His group has raised roughly a quarter-billion dollars since 2016 — enriching Kirk — but has generally struggled to help Republicans win elections.

"No prior political candidate has inspired grassroots supporters to start their own groups and initiatives like Donald J. Trump and it's why we have seen great expansion in the Republican Party," Lara Trump said, adding the RNC would work with groups run by Presler, Kirk and others "in whatever way we legally can."

## MAIL-IN BALLOTS

She is also hoping to encourage Republicans to adopt an election tactic that Trump and many of his allies view with suspicion: mail-in voting. The former president has long criticized the voting method as being rife with fraud — an unfounded assertion. Sizable contingents of voters rely on this method, and Lara Trump sees value in making it as easy as possible for Trump supporters to cast their ballots.

She said she supported a nationwide policy of not counting any ballots after Election Day but declined to go into specifics, adding it wasn't her area of "expertise."

That strategy is illegal. States set their own election laws, and most rely on postmarks to determine if a vote was cast in time. That's because it can take days — even weeks — for ballots cast on or before Election Day to arrive in the mail.

Stephen Richer, a Republican who runs elections in Maricopa County, Arizona, said under state law every legal ballot must be counted. He also said Lara Trump's policy would have hurt Trump in 2020: He had an edge over Biden in ballots that arrived after Election Day.

"That's not the law as we understand it and as it has been practiced for many, many, many, many elections in Arizona," he said.

Lara Trump is no stranger to controversy over counting ballots. In 2020, as the results of the presidential election rolled in, the Trump campaign fired off frantic fundraising missives to supporters, claiming they were the victims of fraud and the election was being stolen.

In one email, Lara Trump told supporters the campaign will just "keep fighting."

Two months later, Lara Trump was onstage with the then-president and his family at the Jan. 6 rally that preceded the Capitol riot.

Richer said voter fraud and voter suppression are at an all-time low, and questioned the motivations for the Trumps' insistence that the vote count had been rigged.

"Which is worse, a person who really believes some of these things or the person who knows it's all nonsensical and goes along with it anyways?" he said. "I'm not sure."

## ON THE TALK SHOW CIRCUIT

Lara Trump is not the first presidential relative to be tapped to help lead the RNC. Maureen Reagan, daughter of then-President Ronald Reagan, was named co-chair in 1987 amid nepotism concerns.

But unlike Maureen Reagan, who kept her head down and spent her time attending party meetings and staying out of the headlines, Lara Trump has embraced her more public role. A communications major at North Carolina State University, she had dreamed of becoming a sportscaster, and dabbled in modeling before working as a producer on a TV news show.

She married Eric Trump in 2014 at Mar-a-Lago, the former president's estate and club in Florida.

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Lara Trump has focused on reaching Trump voters through appearances on Fox News, smaller conservative outlets and podcasts, including her own. Such appearances have not always gone smoothly and some of her starkest rhetoric — while appealing to Trump supporters — could alienate moderate Republicans whose votes will count in November.

She was recently lambasted on social media and by a late-night comic for a gaffe during an appearance on Newsmax, a conservative cable channel, in which she asserted the RNC had filed lawsuits in “81 states.”

The RNC co-chair was also roasted after releasing a cover of Tom Petty’s “I Won’t Back Down,” and Democrats in March used artificial intelligence to create a parody track after she released an original song, “Anything is Possible.”

“Oh Lara, Lara,” the AI voice croons, “what have you done, the party’s fallin’ down, it’s no longer fun.”  
SCORCHED EARTH

Lara Trump is painting a startling picture of what a second Trump term might look like.

At a conservative conference last month, she said Trump would punish his political enemies if he retakes the White House. It will be, she said, “four years of scorched earth,” referencing the wartime strategy of destroying everything that could help an enemy, including food and water.

Such stark language has been known to backfire, said John J. Pitney, a professor of American politics at Claremont McKenna College.

“It fires up the Trumpist base, but it doesn’t sound so good to that sliver of moderate voters that Trump is going to need,” he said.

Supporters described Lara Trump as loyal, a staunch conservative committed to her family. A mother of two, a fitness buff and a fierce advocate for rescue dogs.

“I’m a kind-hearted person,” she said. “I continue to maintain values with which I was raised.”

But online, on television and on her podcast she sometimes uses aggressive and incendiary language, including describing political foes as “deranged” and “lunatics.”

When asked about her tone, Lara Trump laughed.

“Obviously some of it is a bit of showmanship for sure,” she said. “I have a fun time.”

## Barbie will make dolls to honor Venus Williams and other star athletes

EL SEGUNDO, Calif. (AP) — Barbie dolls will honor tennis champion Venus Williams and eight other athletes as part of a project announced by Mattel on Wednesday.

The others being depicted as dolls are gymnasts Rebeca Andrade and Alexa Moreno, soccer players Mary Fowler and Christine Sinclair, boxer Estelle Mossely, swimmer Federica Pellegrini, paratriathlete Susana Rodriguez and track and field sprinter Ewa Swoboda.

“Throughout my career, I’ve always been driven by the idea of shattering glass ceilings and staying true to myself, and Barbie’s mission couldn’t resonate more deeply with that ethos,” said Williams, who has won seven Grand Slam singles titles.

The brand wanted to note “the impact of sports in fostering self-confidence, ambition, and empowerment among the next generation,” Mattel’s Krista Berger said.

## Tornado devastates Iowa town, killing multiple people as powerful storms rip through Midwest

By HANNAH FINGERHUT, SCOTT McFETRIDGE and MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press

GREENFIELD, Iowa (AP) — Multiple people died Tuesday and at least a dozen were injured when a powerful tornado tore through a small Iowa town, carving a bleak landscape of destroyed homes and businesses, shredded trees, smashed cars, and widely strewn debris.

The tornado destroyed much of Greenfield, a town of about 2,000 around 55 miles (88.5 kilometers) southwest of Des Moines, during a day that saw multiple tornadoes, giant hail and heavy rain in several

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states.

"We do have confirmed fatalities," Iowa State Patrol Sgt. Alex Dinkla said at a news conference Tuesday night. He said authorities were still determining the total number but thought they had accounted for all of the town's residents.

Dinkla said there were at least a dozen injuries amid widespread devastation in Greenfield, including at the community's small hospital. Patients there had to be transferred to other facilities in nearby cities.

The Adair County Health System said in a Facebook post Tuesday night that it had set up a triage center at the Greenfield high school and that people who need medical attention should go there.

Authorities said they would only allow residents to enter Greenfield until Wednesday morning and ordered media representatives to leave the city Tuesday night.

In the aftermath of the storm, parts of Greenfield appeared devastated. Mounds of broken wood, branches, car parts and other debris littered lots where homes once stood. Cars lay busted and bent while damaged houses sat skewed against the gray and overcast sky. Trees stood — barely — bereft of branches or leaves. Residents helped each other salvage furniture and other belongings from mounds of debris or from homes barely left standing.

Rogue Paxton said he sheltered in the basement of his home when the storm moved through. He told WOI-TV he thought the house was lost but said his family got lucky.

"But everyone else is not so much, like my brother Cody, his house just got wiped," Paxton said. "Then you see all these people out here helping each other. ... Everything's going to be fine because we have each other, but it's just going to be really, really rough. It is a mess."

Multiple tornadoes were reported throughout the state, and one also apparently took down several 250-foot (76-meter) wind turbines in southwest Iowa. Some of the turbines caught fire, sending plumes of smoke into the air and continued to smolder hours later.

Wind farms are built to withstand tornadoes, hurricanes and other powerful winds. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, turbines are designed to shut off when winds exceed certain thresholds, typically around 55 mph (88.5 kph). They also lock and feather their blades, and turn into the wind, to minimize the strain.

The town bills itself as "the friendly wave as you walk" type of place with tree-lined streets — before the storm — and "the crack of the fireworks or twinkle of the lights" on special holidays. Also touting itself as the "perfect place to grow," Greenfield prides itself on being a town where business owners know your name and neighbors help neighbors, according to its visitors page.

Mary Long, the owner of Long's Market in downtown Greenfield, said she rode out the storm at her business in the community's historic town square, which largely escaped damage. Long said there appeared to be widespread damage on the east and south sides of town.

"I could hear this roaring, like the proverbial freight train, and then it was just done," she said.

Camille Blair said the Greenfield Chamber of Commerce office where she works closed around 2 p.m. ahead of the storm. She emerged from her home to describe widespread damage and scattered debris.

"There's a pretty significant roof damage to several houses that I know will need whole new roofs," she said. "And I can see from my house it kind of went in a straight line down the road."

In far southwestern Iowa, video posted to social media showed a tornado just northwest of Red Oak. Further east and north, the National Weather Service issued multiple tornado warnings for areas near the towns of Griswold, Corning, Fontanelle and Guthrie Center, among others.

Iowa was already braced for severe weather after the National Weather Service's Storm Prediction Center gave most of the state a high chance of seeing severe thunderstorms with the potential for strong tornadoes. Des Moines public schools ended classes two hours early and canceled all evening activities ahead of the storms.

The storms and tornado warnings moved into Wisconsin Tuesday evening and night, including a warning for the state's capital city of Madison.

Earlier in the day, residents to the west in Omaha, Nebraska, awoke to weather sirens blaring and

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widespread power outages as torrential rain, high winds and large hail pummeled the area. The deluge flooded basements and submerged cars. Television station KETV showed firefighters arriving to rescue people from vehicles.

In Illinois, dust storms forced authorities to shut down stretches of two interstates due to low visibility. Winds gusts of between 35 mph (56 kph) and 45 mph (74 kph) hit the McLean area, according to National Weather Service meteorologist Chuck Schaffer.

"There is no visibility at times," state police posted on the social media platform X.

The storms followed days of extreme weather that have ravaged much of the middle section of the country. Strong winds, large hail and tornadoes swept parts of Oklahoma and Kansas late Sunday, damaging homes and injuring two in Oklahoma.

Another round of storms Monday night raked Colorado and western Nebraska and saw the city of Yuma, Colorado, blanketed in hail the size of baseballs and golf balls, turning streets into rivers of water and ice. Front-end loaders were used to move half-foot (15.24-centimeter) deep hail Tuesday.

Last week, deadly storms hit the Houston area in Texas, killing at least eight people. Those storms Thursday knocked out power to hundreds of thousands for days, leaving those Texans in the dark and without air conditioning during hot and humid weather. The total of deaths was raised Tuesday from seven to include a man who died from carbon monoxide poisoning while running a generator after his power went out. Hurricane-force winds reduced businesses and other structures to debris and shattered glass in downtown skyscrapers.

Tuesday's storms were expected to bring much of the same high winds, heavy rain and large hail to Minnesota and part of northern Missouri, said Bob Oravec, lead forecaster with the National Weather Service.

He said the system is expected to turn south on Wednesday, bringing more severe weather to parts of Texas, Oklahoma, Arkansas and southern Missouri.

## **Biden, Trump win Kentucky, Oregon primaries as presidential nominating season nears its end**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

President Joe Biden and his Republican rival, Donald Trump, piled up more delegates Tuesday as both presumptive nominees won primaries in Kentucky and Oregon.

The symbolic decisions 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 as the presidential nominating season nears its end.

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.

That trend continued Tuesday in Kentucky with about 18% of the Democratic vote going to "uncommitted" with roughly 80% of the vote counted. In the GOP race, Haley was winning about 6%.

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 also held state primaries Tuesday to choose nominees for the U.S. House and other contests.

In Georgia, Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis, who is leading the prosecution of Trump in a 2020 election interference case, defeated challenger Christian Wise Smith in the Democratic primary. The judge in the case, Scott McAfee, also won his election.

In Oregon's Multnomah County, home to Portland, the progressive district attorney who took office during the social justice movement of 2020 is being challenged by a candidate vowing to be tough on crime.

## Israel's block of AP transmission shows how ambiguity in law could restrict war coverage

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Israel's shutdown and seizure of an Associated Press video camera that provided a live glimpse into Gaza alarmed many journalists, who worried Tuesday about wider implications for coverage of a war largely fought out of the world's sight to begin with.

After widespread condemnation, including a call by the Biden administration for Israel to back off, authorities returned the AP's equipment late Tuesday. Israel had justified its move by saying the agency violated a new media law that bans Al Jazeera, since the Qatari satellite channel is one of thousands of customers that receive live AP video.

By early Wednesday, the AP's live video of Gaza was back up in Israel.

The camera confiscated earlier, located in the southern Israeli town of Sderot, was not the only one the AP operated in Israel or Gaza — the company would not say how many it uses regularly — nor is the AP the only news organization to do so. Agence France-Presse confirmed it has frequently used such cameras in Israel and also sells its images to Al Jazeera.

"Israel's move to restrict AP's work today is extremely concerning and a clear attack on press freedom," said Phil Chetwynd, AFP's global news director.

News organizations expressed worry about the potential ambiguity in how Israel's law could be enforced. What, they asked, prevents Israel from shutting down the news cooperative's operations in the country altogether?

"It also could allow Israel to block media coverage of virtually any news event on vague security grounds," Israel's Foreign Press Association said in a statement.

### OTHERS ARE LIKELY WATCHING ISRAEL'S ACTIONS

Israel also denies foreign journalists entry into Gaza to cover a war that began following Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks inside the Jewish state, and has been criticized for not doing enough to protect Palestinian journalists and civilians.

The country "seems to be grasping at anything that hurts Al Jazeera," said Thomas Kent, former president and CEO of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty and an international consultant on media ethics. Its latest step damages a reputable news organization at a time the country would seem to want independent news coverage, Kent said.

A democracy acting in this way also sends a disturbing signal to authoritarian countries, he said. "You have to look at the larger picture," said Kent, also a former standards editor and international correspondent at the AP. "They're giving fuel to other countries that would love to seize equipment and shut down transmissions."

The move against the AP set off a debate within Israel. Yair Lapid, opposition leader to the Netanyahu government, called it an "act of madness." Communications Minister Shlomo Karhi, who accused the AP of violating the country's law, said it clearly states that any device used to deliver content to Al Jazeera could be seized.

"We will continue to act decisively against anyone who tries to harm our soldiers and the security of the state, even if you don't like it," Karhi responded to Lapid on X.

The AP's camera in Sderot was operated 24 hours a day and was also attended by staff members. A staffer can be used to move or focus the camera to cover news that may be happening, and also to avoid capturing military moves. The AP says it complies with military censorship rules that prohibit the broadcast of troop movements that could endanger soldiers.

### STATIONARY CAMERAS ARE COMMON

News organizations frequently place cameras that can operate remotely at various places around the globe, either in an area where news is happening or simply to provide a view of a city skyline.

These shots have many uses — providing a backdrop for a television station reporting on developments, or as a livestream feature on a website. Earlier in the Gaza war, footage from such cameras helped news

organizations conduct forensic investigations into who was responsible for a military strike on a Palestinian hospital.

The AP is the biggest supplier of live video news coverage to newsrooms across the world, said AP Vice President Paul Haven, the agency's head of news gathering.

"Our live video provides a window of what's happening around the world on any given day, allowing audiences to see events for themselves as they unfold," Haven said.

The Committee to Protect Journalists said it was "deeply disturbed" by Israel's actions on Tuesday. Carlos Martinez de la Serna, CPJ program director, said the country should allow all international media outlets, including Al Jazeera, to operate freely in the country.

While Israel's return of the equipment is a positive development, the underlying issue has not disappeared.

"We remain concerned about the Israeli government's use of the foreign broadcaster law and the ability of independent journalists to operate freely in Israel," said AP spokeswoman Lauren Easton.

## **Mourners begin days of funerals for Iran's president and others killed in helicopter crash**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Mourners in black began gathering Tuesday for days of funerals and processions for Iran's late president, foreign minister and others killed in a helicopter crash, a government-led series of ceremonies aimed at both honoring the dead and projecting strength in an unsettled Middle East.

For Iran's Shiite theocracy, mass demonstrations have been crucial since millions thronged the streets of Tehran to welcome Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini in 1979 during the Islamic Revolution, and also attended his funeral 10 years later. An estimated 1 million turned out in 2020 for processions for the late Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani, who was slain in a U.S. drone strike in Baghdad.

Whether President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and others draw the same crowd remains in question, particularly as Raisi died in a helicopter crash, won his office in the lowest-turnout presidential election in the country's history and presided over sweeping crackdowns on all dissent. Prosecutors already have warned people over showing any public signs of celebrating his death and a heavy security force presence has been seen on the streets of Tehran since the crash.

But Raisi, 63, had been discussed as a possible successor for Iran's supreme leader, the 85-year-old Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. His death now throws that selection into question, particularly as there is no heir-apparent cleric for the presidency ahead of planned June 28 elections.

"Raisi's death comes at a moment when the Islamist regime is consolidated," wrote Alex Vatanka, an Iran expert at the Middle East Institute. "In short, there will be no power vacuum in Tehran; nonetheless, post-Khamenei Iran suddenly looks far less predictable than it did just a few days ago."

A procession Tuesday morning led by a semitruck carrying the caskets of the dead slowly moved through the narrow streets of downtown Tabriz, the closest major city near the site of the crash Sunday. Thousands in black slowly walked beside the coffins, some throwing flowers up to them as an emcee wept through a loudspeaker for men he described as martyrs. On Wednesday, a funeral presided over by Khamenei will turn into a procession as well.

The caskets later arrived in Tehran to an honor guard at the airport and then went onward to the holy Shiite seminary city of Qom. There, a semitruck surrounded by soldiers in fatigues at one point was swarmed by a crowd of mourners. Some beat their chests and wailed. The truck later picked up speed while others stood alongside the road, watching.

The bodies will return to Tehran on Tuesday night for services Wednesday.

It remains unclear what international presence that funeral will draw, as Raisi faced U.S. sanctions for his part in mass executions in 1988 and for abuses targeting protesters and dissidents while leading the country's judiciary. Iran under Raisi also shipped bomb-carrying drones to Russia to be used in its war on Ukraine.

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"I don't feel comfortable sending condolences while Iran is sending drones that are used against civilians in Ukraine," wrote Lithuanian Foreign Minister Gabrielius Landsbergis on the social platform X.

United Kingdom Security Minister Tom Tugendhat echoed that in his own message on X: "President Raisi's regime has murdered thousands at home, and targeted people here in Britain and across Europe. I will not mourn him."

On Thursday, Raisi's hometown of Birjand will see a procession, followed by a funeral and burial at the Imam Reza shrine in the holy city of Mashhad, the only imam of the Shiite's faith buried in Iran.

That shrine has long been a center for pilgrims and sees millions visit each year. Over the centuries, its grounds have served as the final burial site for heroes in Persian history. It's an incredibly high, rare honor in the faith. Iranian President Mohammad-Ali Rajai, the only other president to die in office when he was killed in a 1981 bombing, was buried in Tehran.

Iran's theocracy declared five days of mourning, encouraging people to attend the public mourning sessions. Typically, government employees and schoolchildren attend such events en masse, while others take part out of patriotism, curiosity or to witness historic events.

Across Iran, its rural population often more closely embraces the Shiite faith and the government. However, Tehran has long held a far different view of Raisi and his government's policies as mass protests have roiled the capital 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. Meanwhile, Iran's rial currency has cratered after the collapse of Iran's nuclear deal with world powers, destroying people's savings and pensions.

On Sunday night, as news of the helicopter crash circulated, some offered anti-government chants in the night. Fireworks could be seen in some parts of the capital, though Sunday also marked a remembrance for Imam Reza, which can see them set off as well. Critical messages and dark jokes over the crash also circulated online.

Iran's top prosecutor has already issued an order demanding cases be filed against those "publishing false content, lies and insults" against Raisi and others killed in the crash, according to the semiofficial ISNA news agency.

No cause has yet been offered by Iran's government for the crash, which took place in a foggy mountain range in a decades-old helicopter. Iranian presidents including hard-liner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Abolhasan Banisadr both survived their own helicopter crashes while in office.

Iran's military, not its civil aviation authority, will investigate and later offer a report, authorities say. Iran's civil air crash investigators faced widespread international criticism over their reports on the downing of a Ukrainian passenger plane by an air defense battery in 2020 after Soleimani's killing.

Meanwhile Tuesday, Iran's new Assembly of Experts opened its first session after an election that decided the new assembly, a panel of which both Raisi and the late Tabriz Friday leader Mohammad Ali Ale-Heshem were members. A flower-ringed portrait sat on the seat Raisi would have occupied at the meeting of the 88-member panel, which is tasked with selecting the country's next supreme leader. Acting President Mohammad Mokhber also attended.

## Proposed \$2.8 billion settlement clears second step of NCAA approval with no change to finance plan

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

A potential multibillion-dollar settlement of an antitrust lawsuit cleared the second of a three-step NCAA approval process Tuesday, with no change to a payment structure that would have the 27 college conferences not named in the suit cover the majority of a \$1.6 billion portion of the damages.

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The Division I Board of Directors voted to move forward on a proposed \$2.77 billion settlement of House vs. NCAA, according to two people who had been briefed on the vote. They said the vote was not unanimous, but it was unclear exactly how the 24 member-board voted.

The people spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the NCAA was not revealing its internal discussions related to the settlement. The NCAA Board of Governors still must sign off on the deal for final approval. It is scheduled to meet later this week.

The D-I board's finance committee recommended on Monday to stick with the original finance plan for the settlement, which has drawn the ire of non-power conference leaders who believe their leagues will bear a disproportionate financial burden.

The NCAA, Big Ten, Big 12, Atlantic Coast Conference, Pac-12 and Southeastern Conference are defendants in the House case, a class-action lawsuit that seeks back pay for college athletes who were denied name, image and likeness compensation dating to 2016. The NCAA lifted its ban on athletes earning money for sponsorship and endorsement deals in 2021.

The Big 12 became the first conference to approve the settlement Tuesday, with their board of university presidents and chancellors voting unanimously in favor, another person with direct knowledge of the decision told The Associated Press. The person spoke on condition of anonymity because the conferences were not making any public statements about the settlement for now.

Later Tuesday, the ACC presidents also voted to approve the settlement, according to a person with knowledge of their vote who spoke on condition of anonymity.

The Big Ten, SEC and Pac-12 presidents were scheduled to vote on whether to approve the settlement deal later this week.

Moving forward, it will be the Big Ten, Big 12, ACC and SEC making the largest investment as the settlement includes a proposed revenue-sharing system that asks their schools to commit upwards of \$20 million per year to be paid directly to athletes. The overall commitment is expected to be about \$300 million per school over 10 years.

The NCAA office is set to cover \$2.77 billion in damages over 10 years through a reduction of operating expenses, insurance and reserve funds. Withheld distributions to its 352 Division I member schools would cover the rest. The NCAA distributes more than \$700 million per year to its 1,100 member schools in three divisions, the vast majority to Division I.

The approved finance plan for the settlement calls for the NCAA to cover 41% of the \$2.77 billion in damages, with the Power Five conferences accounting for 24% and the other five major college football conferences — the so-called Group of Five — covering 10%.

The conferences that compete in the second tier of Division I football, the Championship Subdivision, would cover 14% of the overall settlement and the non-football D-I conferences would be on the hook for 12%.

The conference commissioners from leagues that do not compete at the highest tier of Division I football, the Bowl Subdivision, have taken issue with the \$1.6 billion in withheld distribution portion of the settlement.

The 27 conferences not named in the lawsuit are expected to cover 60% of withheld distributions, with the other 40% coming from power conferences that are currently comprised of 69 schools.

The commissioners of the 22 non-FBS conferences sent a memo to NCAA leadership, proposing the finance structure be flipped so power conference withheld distributions cover 60% of the \$1.6 billion.

Big Sky Commissioner Tom Wistrill said earlier Tuesday the non-FBS conferences were holding out hope for reconsideration.

"We're fighting uphill," he said.

The Big Sky is one of the most successful conferences in the Championship Subdivision, with schools such as Montana, Montana State, Eastern Washington, Idaho State and Weber State.

"We believe over 95% of the damages are going to go to (Power Five) football and basketball players. For non-A5 conferences to pay for that is disproportionate. We're asking for a more proportionate structure because our student-athletes are not going to see the money," Wistrill said,

Plaintiffs' lawyers have given the NCAA and conferences until Thursday to respond to the settlement

proposal, with parties on both sides sounding hopeful that it will be approved.

The conferences not named in the lawsuit did not find out about details of the proposed settlement until two weeks ago through media reports, Wistrick said. He said they are hoping the settlement can be approved with an opportunity for the NCAA financing plan to be readdressed, but the prospects of that diminished even further with the full board's approval Tuesday night.

Wistrick said the formula for withheld distributions the NCAA is using, which is based on the percentage a conference received of overall NCAA distributions between 2016-2024, is projected to cost the Big Sky around \$3 million per year over 10 years.

He said while power conferences will have a larger total distribution withheld on a per school basis, that revenue is a much smaller part of athletic department budgets that typically soar past \$100 million annually. It also does not take into account the huge influx of revenue those schools are about to receive from the expanded College Football Playoff.

Big Sky school athletic budgets run about \$20 million annually.

"The money is flowing to their student-athletes while disproportionately (the settlement) is penalizing our institutions," Wistrick said.

## **Resigned to a fate of constant displacement, India's river islanders return home in between floods**

By ANUPAM NATH Associated Press

MORIGAON, India (AP) — Yaad Ali is dreading the rainy season's arrival this year.

The 56-year-old farmer from northeastern India's Assam state lives with his wife and son on Sandahkhaiti island on India's Brahmaputra River. The island, like two thousand others on the river, floods with increasing ferocity and unpredictability as human-caused climate change makes rain heavier and more erratic in the region.

The family move away with every flood, and move back to their house every dry season. Ali said politicians in the region have made promises to provide relief for them, including during the current election, but little has changed for his family. For now, they contend with being displaced for large parts of the year.

"We need some sort of a permanent solution," Ali said. "In the last few years, it's only a short time after we recover from flood damages that we have to be ready to face another flood."

A permanent piece of land in a safer region of the state can be the only solution to their troubles, he said. And while local governments have talked about it, only a few river islanders have been offered land rights in the state.

When The Associated Press met Ali and his family last year, they were relocating because of incessant rain that had flooded their island home. Now, during the dry season, Ali and his family cultivate red chile peppers, corn and a few other vegetables in their small farm on the island.

Like most other islanders, farming is their livelihood: An estimated 240,000 people in the Morigaon district of the state — where some of the river islands, known as Chars, are located — are dependent on fishing and selling produce like rice, jute and vegetables from their small farms.

When it rains, the family stays as long as they can, living in knee-deep water inside their small hut, sometimes for days. Cooking, eating and sleeping, even as the river water rises. But sometimes the water engulfs their home, forcing them to flee with their belongings.

"We leave everything and try to find some higher ground or shift to the nearest relief camp," Monuwara Begum, Ali's wife, said last year. The relief camps are unhygienic and there's never enough space or food, Ali said, and "sometimes we get only rice and salt for days."

But when it's dry, the family has temporary respite. They move back to their homes, tend to their farms, and are able to make a living selling the produce they harvest.

India, and Assam state in particular, is seen as one of the world's most vulnerable regions to climate change because of more intense rain and floods, according to a 2021 report by the Council on Energy,

Environment and Water, a New Delhi-based climate think tank.

Like many families on the Chars, Ali and his family are unable to afford to permanently relocate, and have reconciled themselves to their fate of moving back and forth to their home.

"Nobody cares about our problems," said Ali. "All the political parties promise to solve the flood problems but after the election, nobody cares about it."

"We have to manage here somehow," he said.

## **Defrocked in 2004 for same-sex relationship, a faithful Methodist is reinstated as pastor**

By DAVID CRARY AP National Writer

Twenty years ago, Beth Stroud was defrocked as a United Methodist Church pastor after telling her Philadelphia congregation that she was in a committed same-sex relationship. On Tuesday night, less than three weeks after the UMC repealed its anti-LGBTQ bans, she was reinstated.

In a closed meeting of clergy from the UMC's Eastern Pennsylvania region, Stroud exceeded the two-thirds vote requirement to be readmitted as a full member and pastor in the UMC.

Bishop John Schol of Eastern Pennsylvania welcomed the outcome, stating, "I'm grateful that the church has opened up to LGBTQ persons."

Stroud was brought into the meeting room after the vote, overcome with emotion.

I was completely disoriented," she told The Associated Press via email. "For what felt like several minutes I couldn't tell where the front of the room was, where I was, where I needed to go. Everyone was clapping and then they started singing. The bishop asked me quietly if I wanted to say anything and I said I couldn't."

She was handed the red stole that designates a fully ordained member of the clergy, and joined her colleagues in a procession into a worship service.

Earlier this month, delegates at a major UMC conference in Charlotte, North Carolina, struck down long-standing anti-LGBTQ policies and created a path for clergy ousted because of them to seek reinstatement.

Stroud — even while recalling how her 2004 ouster disrupted her life — chose that path, though some other past targets of UMC discipline chose otherwise.

At 54, Stroud doesn't plan a return to full-time ministry — at least not immediately. Now completing a three-year stint teaching writing at Princeton University, she is excited to be starting a new job this summer as assistant professor of Christian history at the Methodist Theological School in Ohio — one of 13 seminaries run by the UMC.

Yet even with the new teaching job, Stroud wanted to regain the options available to an ordained minister as she looks for a congregation to join near the Delaware, Ohio, campus.

When Stroud finally made her decision, she knew it was the right one. But the decision did not come easily as she followed the UMC's deliberations on the anti-LGBTQ policies.

"The first thing I felt was just anger — thinking about the life I could have had," she told the AP at the time. "I loved being a pastor. I was good at it. With 20 more years of experience, I could have been very good — helped a lot of people and been very fulfilled."

Instead of pastoring, she spent several years in graduate schools, while earning modest income in temporary, non-tenured academic jobs. There were challenges, including a bout with cancer and divorce from her wife, although they proceeded to co-parent their daughter, who was born in 2005.

Had she not been defrocked, Stroud said, "My whole life would have been different."

The process that led to Stroud's ouster began in April 2003, when she told her congregation, the First United Methodist Church of Germantown, about her same-sex relationship. The church — where Stroud had been a pastor for four years — set up a legal fund to assist with her defense and hired her as a lay minister after she was defrocked.

The UMC says it has no overall figures of how many clergy were defrocked for defying anti-LGBTQ bans or how many reinstatements might occur.

## UN halts all food distribution in Rafah after running out of supplies in the southern Gaza city

By SAMY MAGDY, LEE KEATH and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The United Nations suspended food distribution in the southern Gaza city of Rafah on Tuesday due to a lack of supplies and an untenable security situation caused by Israel's expanding military operation. The U.N. warned that humanitarian operations across the territory were nearing collapse.

A senior United States official said Israel has addressed many of the Biden administration's concerns about a full-scale ground invasion of Rafah aimed at rooting out Hamas fighters there. U.S. President Joe Biden had previously opposed a total military assault on a city filled with displaced civilians if plans did not prioritize the safety of innocent Palestinians. The U.S. official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

The official said the administration stopped short of greenlighting the Israeli invasion plan, but said Israeli officials' changes to the planning suggested they were taking the American administration's concerns seriously.

Over the past two weeks, hundreds of thousands of people have fled Rafah in a chaotic exodus, seeking shelter in new tent camps or crowding into areas already devastated by previous Israeli offensives. Some 400,000 people are believed to still be in Rafah after around 900,000 rushed to escape, according to COGAT, the Israeli military office in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs.

Getting aid to displaced civilians has been hampered by closed and chaotic land crossings, as well as problems plaguing the U.S. military's new floating pier meant to provide an alternative sea route for aid into Gaza. Over the weekend, hungry Palestinians took aid from a U.N. vehicle convoy coming from the pier, and the U.N. said since then it had been unable to receive trucks there.

Pentagon press secretary Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder told reporters in Washington that for the past few days, forward movement of aid from the pier was paused but it resumed Tuesday. There was no confirmation from the U.N.

The U.N.'s World Food Program said it was running out of food for central Gaza, where hundreds of thousands of people are now living.

"Humanitarian operations in Gaza are near collapse," said Abeer Etefa, a WFP spokesperson. If food and other supplies don't resume entering Gaza "in massive quantities, famine-like conditions will spread," she said.

The warning came as Israel seeks to contain the international fallout from a request at the world's top war crimes court for arrest warrants targeting both Israeli and Hamas leaders. The move garnered support from three European countries, including Israel's key ally France.

"Use of starvation as a method of warfare" was among the accusations against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant by the chief prosecutor at the International Criminal Court — charges they and other Israeli officials angrily deny. The prosecutor accused three Hamas leaders of war crimes over killings of civilians in the group's Oct. 7 attack.

The U.N. says some 1.1 million people in Gaza — nearly half the population — face catastrophic levels of hunger and that the territory is on the brink of famine. Throughout the war, Rafah has been filled with scenes of hungry children holding out pots and plastic containers at makeshift soup kitchens, with many families reduced to eating only one meal a day.

The humanitarian crisis deepened after Israeli forces pushed into Rafah on May 6. Tanks and troops seized the vital Rafah crossing into Egypt, and it's been closed ever since. After May 10, only about three dozen trucks made it into Gaza via the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel because fighting made it dangerous for aid workers to reach it, the U.N. says.

Israel insists it puts no restriction on the number of trucks entering Gaza. COGAT said 450 trucks entered Tuesday from its side to Kerem Shalom and a small crossing in northern Gaza. It said more than 650 trucks are waiting on the Gaza side of Kerem Shalom to be retrieved, blaming "lack of logistical capabilities and

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manpower gaps" among aid groups.

For months, the U.N. has warned that an Israeli assault on Rafah could wreck the effort to get food, medicine and other supplies to Palestinians across Gaza.

Asked about the ramifications of suspending aid, U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric said simply: "People don't eat."

Etefa said the WFP was still passing out hot meals and "limited distributions" of reduced food packages in central Gaza, but "food parcel stocks will run out within days," she said.

The U.S. touted the \$320 million pier project as a route for accelerated deliveries. The first 10 trucks rolled off a ship onto the pier on Friday and were taken to a WFP warehouse. However, a second convoy on Saturday was met by Palestinian crowds who removed all the food from 11 trucks, and only five truckloads made it to the warehouse, Etefa said.

No further deliveries came from the pier Sunday or Monday, Etefa said.

"The responsibility of ensuring aid reaches those in need does not end at the crossings and other points of entry into Gaza — it extends throughout Gaza itself," she said.

At the same time, battles have escalated in northern Gaza as Israeli troops conduct operations against Hamas fighters, who the military says regrouped in areas already captured in offensives months ago.

One of the main hospitals still operating in the north, Kamal Adwan, was forced to evacuate after it was "targeted" by Israeli troops, the Gaza Health Ministry said. Around 150 staff and dozens of patients fled the facility, including intensive care patients and infants in incubators "under fire from shelling," it said. The Israeli military did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

The nearby Awda hospital has been surrounded by troops the past three days, and an artillery shell hit its fifth floor, the hospital administration said Tuesday. A day earlier, the international medical aid group Doctors Without Borders said Awda had run out of drinking water.

The war between began on Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants crossed into Israel and killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took 250 hostage. ICC prosecutor Karim Khan accused Hamas leaders Yahya Sinwar, Mohammed Deif and Ismail Haniyeh of crimes against humanity, including extermination, murder and sexual violence.

Israel responded to the Oct. 7 with an offensive that has laid waste to Gaza and killed more than 35,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between noncombatants and fighters in its count.

Monday's call by Khan for arrest warrants deepens Israel's global isolation at a time when it is facing growing criticism from even its closest allies over the war. France, Belgium, and Slovenia each said they backed Khan's decision.

Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz headed to France on Tuesday in response, urging it to "declare loud and clear" that the request for warrants against Netanyahu and Gallant "is unacceptable to you and to the French government."

His meetings there could set the tone for how countries navigate the warrants — if they are eventually issued — and whether they could pose a threat to Israeli leaders. A panel of three ICC 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 still has the support of its top ally, the United States, as well as other Western countries that spoke out against the decision. But if the warrants are issued, they could complicate international travel for Netanyahu and his defense minister, even if they do not face any immediate risk of prosecution because Israel itself is not a member of the court.

## Police break up pro-Palestinian camp at the University of Michigan

By MIKE HOUSEHOLDER and ED WHITE Associated Press

ANN ARBOR, Mich. (AP) — Police broke up a pro-Palestinian encampment at the University of Michigan before dawn Tuesday, citing a threat to public safety and coming less than a week after demonstrators

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stepped up pressure by placing fake body bags on the lawn of a school official.

Officers wearing helmets with face shields cleared approximately 50 people from the Diag, known for decades as a site for campus protests. Video posted online showed police using what appeared to be an irritant to spray people, who were forced to retreat.

"UM is not a campground," Sarah Hubbard, chair of the university's governing board, said on the social platform X.

At least four people were arrested, which caused protesters to shift to the Washtenaw County jail where they marched outside in support of their allies.

"We will not stop, we will not rest," a coalition of pro-Palestinian student groups said on social media.

The campus encampment was set up on April 22, near the end of the school year and just before families began arriving for spring commencement. Posters taunting President Santa Ono and other officials were also displayed.

After the camp was cleared, nearby buildings including the undergraduate and graduate libraries were closed and police turned away students who showed up to study.

Ono said in a statement that the encampment had become a threat to safety, with overloaded power sources and open flames. Organizers, he added, had refused to comply with requests to make changes following an inspection by a fire marshal.

"The disregard for safety directives was only the latest in a series of troubling events centered on an encampment that has always violated the rules that govern the Diag — especially the rules that ensure the space is available to everyone," Ono said.

Protesters have demanded that the school's endowment stop investing in companies with ties to Israel. But the university insists it has no direct investments and less than \$15 million placed with funds that might include companies in Israel. That's less than 0.1% of the total endowment.

"There's nothing to talk about. That issue is settled," Hubbard said last week.

A group of 30 protesters showed up at her house on May 15 and placed stuffed, red-stained sheets on her lawn to resemble body bags. They banged a drum and chanted slogans over a bullhorn.

People wearing face coverings also posted demands at the doors of other board members.

"This conduct is where our failure to address antisemitism leads literally — literally — to the front door of my home," board member Mark Bernstein, a Detroit-area lawyer, said at a Regents meeting last Thursday. "Who's next? When and where will this end? As a Jew, I know the answer to these questions because our experience is full of tragedies that we are at grave risk of repeating. Enough is enough."

Students and others have set up tent encampments on campuses around the country to press colleges to cut financial ties with Israel. Tensions over the war have been high on campuses since the fall, but demonstrations spread quickly following an April 18 police crackdown on an encampment at Columbia University. Arrests at campuses have surpassed the 3,000 mark nationwide.

An encampment of pro-Palestinian protesters at Philadelphia's Drexel University persisted Tuesday despite an earlier threat by the school's president to have it cleared.

University administrators tried to open a line of communication to the protesters but were rebuffed, Drexel President John Fry said in a statement Tuesday. He said city and campus police planned to monitor a rally at the encampment scheduled for Tuesday night.

Lecture classes will remain virtual for a third day Wednesday because of the encampment, and some events will have to be rescheduled, Fry said.

"Many of you have expressed your frustration over our decision to scale back in-person classes and activities. I understand and share your frustration. But please rest assured that we are doing everything we can to return our campus safely to normal operations," he said.

## UN food agency warns that the new US sea route for Gaza aid may fail unless conditions improve

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.N. World Food Program said Tuesday the new U.S. \$320 million pier project for delivering aid to Gaza may fail unless Israel starts ensuring the conditions the humanitarian groups need to operate safely. The operation was halted for at least two days after crowds looted aid trucks coming from the port and one Palestinian man was killed.

Deliveries were stopped Sunday and Monday after the majority of the trucks in an aid convoy Saturday were stripped of all their goods on the way to a warehouse in central Gaza, the WFP said. The first aid transported by sea had entered the besieged enclave on Friday.

The Pentagon said movement of aid from the secured area at the port resumed Tuesday, but the U.N. said it was not aware of any deliveries on Tuesday.

The U.N. food agency is now reevaluating logistics and security measures and looking for alternate routes within Gaza, said spokesperson Abeer Etefa. The WFP is working with the U.S. Agency for International Development to coordinate the deliveries.

Only five of the 16 aid trucks that left the secured area on Saturday arrived at the intended warehouse with their cargo intact, another WFP spokesperson, Steve Taravella, told The Associated Press. He said the other 11 trucks were waylaid by what became a crowd of people and arrived without their cargo.

"Without sufficient supplies entering Gaza, these issues will continue to surface. Community acceptance and trust that this is not a one-off event are essential for this operation's success," Taravella said in an email. "We have raised this issue with the relevant parties and reiterated our request for alternative roads to facilitate aid delivery. Unless we receive the necessary clearance and coordination to use additional routes, this operation may not be successful."

The WFP also said Tuesday it has suspended food distribution in the southern Gaza city of Rafah due to a lack of supplies and insecurity.

President Joe Biden ordered the U.S. military's construction of the floating pier for deliveries of food and other vital supplies. Israeli restrictions on shipments through land borders and overall fighting have put all 2.3 million residents of Gaza in a severe food crisis since the Israel-Hamas war began in October, and U.S. and U.N. officials say famine has taken hold in the north of Gaza.

Authorities have offered limited details of what transpired with Saturday's aid convoy. However, Associated Press video shows Israeli armored vehicles on a beach road, then aid trucks moving down the road. Civilians watching from the roadside gradually start to clamber on top of the aid trucks, throwing aid down to people below. Numbers of people then appear to overrun the aid trucks and their goods.

At one point, people are shown carting a motionless man with a chest wound through the crowd. A local morgue later confirmed to the AP the man had been killed by a rifle shot. At another point, shots crackled, and some of the men in the crowd are shown apparently ducking behind aid boxes for cover.

It was not clear who fired the shots. The Israeli military is responsible for security for the aid when it reaches the shore. Once it leaves the secure area at the port, aid groups follow their own security protocols.

Asked about the shooting, the Israeli army told the AP, using the acronym for the Israel Defense Forces: "The IDF is currently focused on eliminating the threat from the terrorist organization Hamas."

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters Tuesday that the aid convoys do not travel with armed security. He said the best security comes from engagement with various community groups and humanitarian partners so people understand that there will be a constant flow of aid. "That is not possible in an active combat zone," Dujarric said.

The Pentagon press secretary, Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, said that as of Tuesday 569 metric tons of aid has been delivered to the secured area at the Gaza port. Some of it remains there, however, because distribution agencies are working to find alternative routes to warehouses in Gaza.

Asked if any aid from the pier had yet reached Gaza residents in need, Ryder said, "I do not believe so." He said aid had resumed moving Tuesday from the secured area into Gaza, after what had been a

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two-day halt following Saturday's disruption. He gave no immediate details.

Etefa, the WFP spokesperson in Cairo, said she knew of no deliveries from the shore on Tuesday, however.

Biden announced the U.S. mission to open a new sea route for humanitarian goods during his State of the Union address in March, as pressure built on the administration over civilian deaths in Gaza.

The war began in October after a Hamas-led attack killed about 1,200 people in Israel. Israeli airstrikes and fighting have killed more than 35,000 Palestinians since then, Gaza health officials say.

Many international humanitarian organizations were critical of the U.S. project, saying that while any aid was welcome, surging food through the land crossings was the only way to curb the growing starvation. Jeremy Konyndyk, a former USAID official now leading the Refugees International humanitarian organization, called the pier operation "humanitarian theater" and said it was being done for political effect.

The U.N. says some 1.1 million people in Gaza — nearly half the population — face catastrophic levels of hunger and that the territory is on the brink of famine. The crisis in humanitarian supplies has spiraled in the two weeks since Israel began an incursion into Rafah on May 6, vowing to root out Hamas fighters. Troops seized the Rafah crossing into Egypt, which has been closed since.

Since May 10, only about three dozen trucks have made it into Gaza via the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing from Israel because fighting makes it difficult for aid workers to reach it, the U.N. says.

Taravella said little aid or fuel — needed to run aid delivery trucks — is currently reaching any part of Gaza, and stocks of both are almost exhausted.

"The bottom line is that humanitarian operations in Gaza are near collapse," he wrote.

## Ex-NYC Mayor Rudy Giuliani pleads not guilty to felony charges in Arizona election interference case

By JACQUES BILLEAUD Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Former New York City Mayor Rudy Giuliani pleaded not guilty Tuesday to nine felony charges stemming from his role in an effort to overturn Donald Trump's 2020 election loss in Arizona to Joe Biden.

Ten others, including former Arizona Republican Party Chair Kelli Ward, also pleaded not guilty to conspiracy, forgery and fraud charges related to the case. Giuliani appeared remotely for the arraignment that was held in a Phoenix courtroom. His and Ward's trials are scheduled for Oct. 17, about three weeks before the U.S. election.

The indictment alleged Giuliani spread false claims of election fraud in Arizona after the 2020 election and presided over a downtown Phoenix gathering where he claimed officials made no effort to determine the accuracy of presidential election results.

It also accused him of pressuring Maricopa County officials and state legislators to change the outcome of Arizona's results and encouraging Republican electors in the state to vote for Trump in mid-December 2020.

During his remote appearance, Giuliani said he did not have an attorney, and that he felt capable of handling the arraignment himself.

Giuliani said he received a summons but did not have a copy of the indictment. He said he is familiar with the charges, though, by reading about them.

Arizona authorities tried unsuccessfully over several weeks to serve Giuliani notice of the indictment against him. He was finally served Friday night as he was walking to a car after his 80th birthday celebration in Florida.

On Tuesday, prosecutors requested a \$10,000 cash bond after outlining efforts by Arizona authorities since April 23 and the difficulties they faced. The judge instead required Giuliani to post a secured appearance bond of \$10,000 as well as appear in Arizona within the next 30 days for booking procedures. A cash bond would have meant Giuliani would have to pay the court \$10,000, while a secured appearance instead lets him offer up a security worth \$10,000 to post bond. "He has shown no intent to comply with the legal process in Arizona," prosecutor Nicholas Klingerman said in asking for the bond.

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Investigators weren't allowed to go up to Giuliani's New York residence, a doorman at the building refused to accept the documents and voicemails left for Giuliani weren't returned, Klingerman said.

The prosecutor said before the notice was delivered, Giuliani mentioned the Arizona case on a podcast, telling listeners he found it hilarious that Arizona investigators were having difficulty finding him. "This is perfect evidence that if they're so incompetent (that) they can't find me, they also can't count votes correctly," he said, according to Klingerman.

Giuliani responded that he hadn't been hiding from Arizona authorities, saying he has strict rules about who can walk up to his residence given he's been the target of death threats and doesn't have security personnel. He also called the indictment political.

"I do consider the indictment to be a complete embarrassment to the American legal system," Giuliani said. Moments later Court Commissioner Shellie Smith, who was presiding over the hearing, tried to interrupt Giuliani but he kept talking.

After Tuesday's arraignments, Giuliani spokesperson Ted Goodman said the former New York City mayor looks forward to being vindicated.

"These charges are essentially a cut and paste version of what they're attempting to use to interfere with the 2024 Election and to take down President Trump and anyone willing to take on the permanent Washington political class," Goodman said.

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.

The other people who pleaded not guilty Tuesday included 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; and attorney Christina Bobb.

Two other defendants — attorney Jenna Ellis and Michael Roman, who was Trump's 2020 director of Election Day operations — were scheduled to be arraigned on Tuesday, but ultimately didn't appear at the hearing. Their lawyers had requested postponements. It's unclear from the court record whether the judge had ruled on that request.

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.

## Trump's lawyers rested their case after calling just 2 witnesses. Experts say that's not unusual

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's legal team rested its case Tuesday in his hush money trial after calling just two witnesses and opting not to have the former president take the stand in his own defense.

But despite what Hollywood courtroom dramas might suggest, that isn't all that unusual, according to criminal defense lawyers and former prosecutors.

The reason is simple: Prosecutors need to prove their case, while the defense only has to show there's reasonable doubt their client committed a crime. And defense lawyers don't necessarily need to call different witnesses to knock holes in a prosecutor's case.

"The burden is on the prosecution, and it's a high burden," said Sarah Krissoff, a white-collar defense lawyer and former federal prosecutor in New York.

Trump has been charged with falsifying records at his company in order to disguise the true nature of payments made in 2017 to one of his lawyers, Michael Cohen. Prosecutors say the money was for Cohen's work suppressing negative stories about his boss during the 2016 presidential campaign, including one about an alleged sexual encounter with a porn actor, Stormy Daniels. Trump, who denies Daniels' account, has said the company properly classified them as legal expenses.

Most of the work of defense lawyers, Krissoff and other experts said, happens during cross-examination of the prosecution's witnesses, when they can challenge their testimony and credibility.

"The defense narrative comes through during cross-examination, then they will tie it all together during the closing statement," she explained.

It isn't unusual for defense lawyers to call just a few witnesses of their own, or none at all.

A lot of the defense team's work happens before the trial begins, and involves trying to make sure incriminating evidence isn't admitted into the trial and is never seen or heard by the jury, Krissoff added.

"What you see in a courtroom is really only a sliver of the work they're doing," she said.

And while Trump has for weeks dangled the prospect of testifying, legal experts say that was never likely to happen.

"There was no guarantee that if Trump testified that he would stay on point and not go completely off script in ways that would be, at best, not helpful to the defense and, at worst, harmful to them," said Richard Serafini, a criminal defense attorney in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and former prosecutor with the U.S. Justice Department.

Krissoff agreed, adding that having a defendant testify can also open the door for other evidence and information to be introduced in trial that could be harmful.

"They've done the calculus and decided that they've made enough inroads," she explained, referring to Trump's lawyers. "They feel they've done the damage to the prosecution's case and they're going to be able to stand up next week and argue that there isn't enough to convict the former president."

If anything, legal experts said, it was surprising that Trump's lawyers called any witnesses.

The defense's main witness was attorney Robert Costello, who testified Monday and Tuesday about conversations he had with Cohen in 2018, after the FBI raided Cohen's home and office. Costello testified that Cohen told him at the time that Trump knew nothing about \$130,000 in hush money paid to Daniels.

"I'm not sure that Costello moved the needle in favor of Trump," said Mark Bederow, a New York criminal defense lawyer and former prosecutor in the Manhattan district attorney's office. But he and other legal experts said Trump's lawyers rightly zeroed in on Cohen's credibility.

Cohen testified that Trump knew all about the scheme to pay off Daniels. But under cross-examination, he also admitted stealing thousands of dollars from Trump's company and lying during congressional testimony. Cohen also claimed he was innocent of crimes, including tax evasion and bank fraud, despite having pleaded guilty to those crimes in 2018. Cohen said his guilty pleas were, themselves, lies.

"His lack of credibility is just shocking, in terms of his personal bias, his financial motives, his lying and stealing from the company that he was working with, his dishonesty and tape recording his own client,"

Bederow said.

One potential witness who never wound up taking the stand was Allen Weisselberg, the former chief financial officer of the Trump Organization. According to the testimony of some witnesses, Weisselberg had knowledge of the payments made to Cohen.

But Weisselberg was sentenced last month to five months in jail for lying under oath during his testimony in the civil fraud lawsuit brought against Trump by New York's attorney general.

"The problem was neither side could really call him," Krissoff said. "He's in custody for lying in a courtroom in the recent past. It was impossible for him to be a credible witness."

Closing arguments in the trial are expected May 28.

## **Trump hush money trial enters new phase after defense rests without testimony from former president**

By MICHAEL R. SISAK, JAKE OFFENHARTZ, JILL COLVIN and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's hush money trial moved into a new phase Tuesday, drawing closer to the moment when the jury will begin deciding his fate after testimony concluded without the former president taking the stand in his own defense.

"Your honor, the defense rests," Trump lawyer Todd Blanche told the judge. Trump's team ended with a former federal prosecutor who was called to attack the credibility of the prosecution's key witness, one of two people summoned to the stand by the defense. The Manhattan district attorney's office called 20 witnesses over 15 days of testimony before resting its case Monday.

The jury was sent home for a week, until May 28, when closing arguments are expected, but the attorneys returned to the courtroom to discuss how the judge will instruct jurors before deliberations, a sort of road map meant to help them apply the law to the evidence and testimony. The two sides haggled over word choices, legal phrases and how to describe various campaign-related issues.

Trump, the first former American president to be tried criminally, did not answer questions about why he did not testify.

Trump had previously said he wanted to take the witness stand in his own defense, but there was no requirement or even expectation that he do so. Defendants routinely decline to testify. His attorneys, instead of mounting an effort to demonstrate Trump's innocence to jurors, focused on attacking the credibility of the prosecution witnesses. That's a routine defense strategy; the burden of proof in a criminal case lies with the prosecution. The defense doesn't have to prove a thing.

Yet even as Trump denounces the trial as a politically motivated travesty of justice, he has been working to turn the proceedings into an offshoot of his presidential campaign. He's capitalized on the trial as a fundraising pitch, used his time in front of the cameras to criticize President Joe Biden and showcased a parade of his own political supporters.

Prosecutors have accused the presumptive Republican presidential nominee of a scheme to scoop up and bury negative stories in an illegal effort to influence the 2016 presidential election. Trump has pleaded not guilty to falsifying business records to conceal the alleged scheme and denied any wrongdoing. It's the first of Trump's four criminal cases to go to trial, and quite possibly the only one before the 2024 presidential election.

"They have no case," Trump said outside court. "There's no crime."

He also again attacked the prosecutor, despite repeated warnings from Judge Juan M. Merchan not to violate a gag order that bars him from publicly commenting on witnesses, prosecutors, court staff or the judge's family.

Jurors have been given a lesson on the underbelly of the tabloid business world, where Trump allies at the National Enquirer launched a plan to keep seamy, sometimes outrageous stories about Trump out of the public eye by paying tens of thousands of dollars to "catch and kill" them. They watched as a porn actress, Stormy Daniels, recounted in discomfiting detail an alleged sexual encounter with Trump in a hotel room. Trump says nothing sexual happened between them.

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And they sat intently in the jury box as Trump's former-lawyer-turned-foe Michel Cohen placed Trump in the middle of the scheme to buy Daniels' story to keep it from going public in the waning weeks before the 2016 presidential election. During that time, Republicans were wringing their hands in distress over the potential political fallout from the infamous "Access Hollywood" tape, where Trump bragged about grabbing women sexually without asking permission.

But the crux of the prosecution's case centers not on the spectacle but on business transactions, including internal Trump Organization records in which payments to Cohen were labeled legal expenses. Prosecutors argued that those payments were really reimbursements to Cohen, doled out in chunks, for a \$130,000 payment he made on Trump's behalf to keep Daniels quiet.

Trump has been charged with 34 counts of falsifying business records. The offense is in the lowest tier of felony charges in New York state, and it is punishable by up to four years in prison, though there is no guarantee that a conviction would result in prison time.

Trump's son Donald Trump Jr. defended his father's decision not to testify.

"There'd be absolutely no reason, no justification to do that whatsoever. Everyone sees it for the sham that it is," the younger Trump said as he left a news conference with supporters of the former president outside the courthouse.

The judge has yet to rule on a defense request to throw out the charges, before jurors even begin deliberating, based on the argument that prosecutors have failed to prove their case. Such long-shot requests are often made in criminal cases but are rarely granted.

The final witness was Robert Costello, a former federal prosecutor, who was first called Monday afternoon and who angered the judge by rolling his eyes and talking under his breath. The judge cleared the courtroom and threatened to remove Costello if he didn't show more respect.

Tuesday's testimony was absent the same kind of drama as Trump's lawyers sought to use Costello to undermine Cohen's credibility. The two had a professional relationship that 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 bristled as he insisted to prosecutors that he did not feel animosity toward Cohen and did not try to intimidate him. "Ridiculous. No," he said to the latter.

But Costello 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.

Prosecutors sought to show that Costello was part of a pressure campaign to manipulate and arm-twist Cohen in order to keep him in Trump's corner once he came under federal investigation. Prosecutor Susan Hoffinger asked Costello about a 2018 email in which he assured Cohen that he was "loved" by Trump's camp, "they are in our corner" and "you have friends in high places."

Asked who those "friends in high places" were, Costello said he was talking about Trump, then the president.

Trump lawyer Emil Bove tried to undo that portrayal.

"Did you ever pressure Michael Cohen to do anything?" Bove asked.

"No," Costello replied.

After the defense rested, the judge dismissed the jurors and looked ahead to closing arguments — the last time the jury will hear from either side. Deliberations could begin as early as next Wednesday, giving the panel their first chance to talk about the case. Until then, they're barred from discussing it.

"I'll see you in a week," Merchan told the jury.

## Former Trump adviser and ambassadors met with Netanyahu as Gaza war strains US-Israel ties

By ZEKE MILLER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former national security adviser Robert O'Brien on Tuesday said he and two U.S. ambassadors who served in the Trump administration met with Israel Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials from the country.

John Rakolta, who served under Trump as ambassador to the United Arab Emirates, and Ed McMullen, who served as ambassador to Switzerland, participated in the meeting. Reuters reported first on the meeting.

Former President Donald Trump is the presumptive 2024 GOP presidential nominee challenging President Joe Biden's reelection. O'Brien notified the Biden administration of the trip, as it is routine for former senior officials.

The meeting happened as the United States-Israel relations hit a low point over Biden's decision to hold up the delivery of heavy bombs. He has warned other provisions may be suspended as well if Israel takes on a widescale operation in the southern Gaza city of Rafah.

On Monday, however, both countries strongly condemned an effort by the International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor to seek arrest warrants for Israeli officials in connection with the Gaza war. Biden said the U.S. would stand with Israel.

The Gaza war has been a challenge for both leaders, whose political futures are at risk.

Trump has criticized Biden, accusing him of abandoning a key ally. And Biden also faces pro-Palestinian protests in campuses.

Netanyahu vowed to destroy Hamas after the Oct. 7 rampage in southern Israel in which 1,200 people were killed and some 250 were taken hostage. His critics have blamed him for the failures of Oct. 7 and have accused him of prolonging the war for his political survival.

The Trump administration advisers also met with Israel's opposition leader Yair Lapid and other officials.

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Gomez Licon reported from Miami.

## Over 1 million claims related to toxic exposure granted under new veterans law, Biden announces

By SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

NASHUA, N.H. (AP) — President Joe Biden, aiming to highlight his legislative accomplishments this election year, traveled to New Hampshire on Tuesday to discuss how he's helped military veterans get benefits as a result of burn pit or other toxic exposure during their service.

"We can never fully thank you for all the sacrifices you've made," Biden said to the veterans and their families gathered at a YMCA. "In America, we leave no veteran behind. That's our motto."

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. PACT stands for "Promise to Address Comprehensive Toxics."

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 has 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.

Before the 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 veterans having to prove the link.

Before Biden's planned remarks, he went to a Veterans of Foreign Wars post in Merrimack, New Hampshire. The president met there with Lisa Clark, an Air Force veteran who is receiving benefits through the PACT Act because her late husband, Senior Master Sergeant Carl Clark, was exposed to the chemical herbicide Agent Orange during the Vietnam War.

Sen. Jon Tester, D-Montana, marked the milestone by praising the veterans who advocated for the law.

"For far too long, our nation failed to honor its promises to our veterans exposed to toxins in military conflicts across the globe—until we fought like hell alongside veterans to finally get the PACT Act signed into law," Tester, chairman of the Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee, said.

## **Driver of pickup that collided with farmworker bus in Florida, killing 8, is arrested on DUI charges**

By MIKE SCHNEIDER and TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

OCALA, Fla. (AP) — The Florida Highway Patrol has arrested the driver of a pickup truck that crashed into a farmworker bus early Tuesday, killing eight, on charges of driving under the influence-manslaughter.

Bryan Maclean Howard, 41, faces eight counts of DUI-Manslaughter, the FHP said in a statement. No further details were released, including what substance allegedly left Howard impaired.

Troopers said he was driving the 2001 Ford Ranger when it crossed into the center line on State Road 40, a straight but somewhat hilly two-lane road that passes through horse farms. The truck sideswiped the bus, causing it to veer off the road at about 6:40 a.m. It crashed through a fence and into a tree before overturning. In addition to the eight killed, at least 40 were injured.

It was not immediately known if Howard has an attorney, and no phone numbers for family members could be found. According to state records, Howard has previous arrests for driving with a suspended license, leaving the scene of an accident and marijuana possession.

The accident happened in Marion County, about 80 miles (130 kilometers) north of Orlando. The workers had been headed to Cannon Farms in Dunnellon, which has been harvesting watermelons. The bus ended up on its side, with its windows smashed and its emergency rear door and top hatch open. The truck came to a stop at the side of the road, with its air bag blown and extensive damage to the driver's side.

Federal statistics show that vehicle crashes were the leading cause of job-related deaths among farmworkers in 2022, the latest year available. They accounted for 81 of 171 fatalities. It was not immediately known if the bus had seat belts.

Authorities in several states have been pushing for greater regulations for the safety of farmworkers, who are overwhelmingly migrants. It is unknown if all the workers on the bus were migrants. The Mexican consulate in Orlando said it was making help available to any of the workers who are from its country.

The Labor Department announced new seat belt requirements for employer vehicles used for farmworkers on temporary visas, among other worker protections that take effect June 28. The Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association called the seat belt requirement "impractical."

State law requires seat belts for farmworker transport using smaller vehicles, weighing less than 10,000 pounds.

"We will be closed today out of respect to the losses and injuries endured early this morning in the accident that took place to the Olvera Trucking Harvesting Corp.," Cannon Farms announced on its Facebook page. "Please pray with us for the families and the loved ones involved in this tragic accident. We appreciate your understanding at this difficult time."

Cannon Farms describes itself as a family-owned operation that has farmed its land for more than 100 years. The company now focuses on peanuts and watermelons, which it sends to grocery stores across

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the U.S. and Canada. It is about 8 miles (13 kilometers) from the crash site.

No one answered the phone at Olvera Trucking on Tuesday afternoon. The company recently advertised for a temporary driver who would bus workers to watermelon fields and then operate harvesting equipment. The pay was \$14.77 an hour.

A Labor Department document shows Olvera recently applied for 43 H-2A workers to harvest watermelons at Cannon Farms this month. The company again offered a base rate of \$14.77 an hour, with promises of housing and transportation to and from the fields.

The H-2A program allows U.S. employers or agents who meet certain regulatory requirements to bring foreign nationals into the country to fill temporary agricultural jobs. Florida farms employ more H-2A workers than any other state, about 50,000 a year, according to the Florida Fruit & Vegetable Association.

Guatemala's government initially said some of its citizens were involved in the crash but retracted that Tuesday night, saying a report on an accident from the consulate in Chicago had been confused with the Florida crash. Goldin López de Bonilla, spokesperson for the Foreign Affairs Ministry, said the Central American nation was still waiting to hear whether any of its citizens were involved in the Florida crash.

Alicia Bárcena, Mexico's foreign relations secretary, said via the social media platform X, "I am sorry to report that a tragic automotive accident happened in Florida with Mexican agricultural workers involved."

The Mexican Consulate in Orlando was on the scene, she said, to provide support.

Andres Sequera, a director of mission and ministry for AdventHealth hospitals, told reporters that the injured workers who could be visited by chaplains "were in good spirits for what they have been through."

"We were able to provide support, presence, prayer when it was asked of us," he said.

A GoFundMe campaign organized by the Farmworker Association of Florida to support accident victims and their families had raised about \$5,000 of a \$50,000 goal by Tuesday evening.

"Farmworkers tend to be forgotten, but it's important not to forget farmworkers, especially during such difficult times," the post said.

Two groups that advocate for farmworkers issued statements calling for stricter laws to protect them from harm.

"It is too easy to dismiss this as just another accident," said Asia Clermont, Florida director for the League of United Latin American Citizens. "Florida must take every possible step to protect its essential workers, who are human beings and the backbone of the state's economy."

Ty Joplin of the Coalition of Immokalee Workers said transportation laws for farmworkers are often unenforced.

"While accidents will happen, protecting workers while transporting them with mandatory and enforceable safety provisions, like seat belts and safety inspections, can reduce injuries and deaths," he said.

## AI companies make fresh safety promise at Seoul summit, nations agree to align work on risks

By HYUNG-JIN KIM and KELVIN CHAN Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Leading artificial intelligence companies made a fresh pledge at a mini-summit Tuesday to develop AI safely, while world leaders agreed to build a network of publicly backed safety institutes to advance research and testing of the technology.

Google, Meta and OpenAI were among the companies that made voluntary safety commitments at the AI Seoul Summit, including pulling the plug on their cutting-edge systems if they can't rein in the most extreme risks.

The two-day meeting is a follow-up to November's AI Safety Summit at Bletchley Park in the United Kingdom, and comes amid a flurry of efforts by governments and global bodies to design guardrails for the technology amid fears about the potential risk it poses both to everyday life and to humanity.

Leaders from 10 countries and the European Union will "forge a common understanding of AI safety and align their work on AI research," the British government, which co-hosted the event, said in a statement.

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The network of safety institutes will include those already set up by the U.K., U.S., Japan and Singapore since the Bletchley meeting, it said.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres told the opening session that seven months after the Bletchley meeting, "We are seeing life-changing technological advances and life-threatening new risks — from dis-information to mass surveillance to the prospect of lethal autonomous weapons."

The U.N. chief said in a video address that there needs to be universal guardrails and regular dialogue on AI. "We cannot sleepwalk into a dystopian future where the power of AI is controlled by a few people — or worse, by algorithms beyond human understanding," he said.

The 16 AI companies that signed up for the safety commitments also include Amazon, Microsoft, Samsung, IBM, xAI, France's Mistral AI, China's Zhipu.ai, and G42 of the United Arab Emirates. They vowed to ensure the safety of their most advanced AI models with promises of accountable governance and public transparency.

It's not the first time that AI companies have made lofty-sounding but non-binding safety commitments. Amazon, Google, Meta and Microsoft were among a group that signed up last year to voluntary safeguards brokered by the White House to ensure their products are safe before releasing them.

The Seoul meeting comes as some of those companies roll out the latest versions of their AI models.

The safety pledge includes publishing frameworks setting out how the companies will measure the risks of their models. In extreme cases where risks are severe and "intolerable," AI companies will have to hit the kill switch and stop developing or deploying their models and systems if they can't mitigate the risks.

Since the U.K. meeting last year, the AI industry has "increasingly focused on the most pressing concerns, including mis- and dis- information, data security, bias and keeping humans in the loop," said Aiden Gomez CEO of Cohere, one of the AI companies that signed the pact. "It is essential that we continue to consider all possible risks, while prioritizing our efforts on those most likely to create problems if not properly addressed."

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 eliminate jobs, spread disinformation or be used to create new bioweapons.

This week's meeting is just one of a slew of efforts on AI governance. The U.N. General Assembly has approved its first resolution on the safe use of AI systems, while the U.S. and China recently held their first high-level talks on AI and the European Union's world-first AI Act is set to take effect later this year.

## 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. JD 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

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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 tracks 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.

"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 Ulmer 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 13 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 trustworthi-

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ness 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.

## Trump or Biden? Either way, US seems poised to preserve heavy tariffs on imports

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — As president, Donald Trump imposed a 25% tariff on foreign steel, which hurt Clips & Clamps Industries, a Michigan auto supplier — raising its materials prices, making it harder to compete with overseas rivals and costing it several contracts.

Jeff Aznavorian, the company president, thought he might enjoy some relief once Joe Biden entered the White House. Instead, Biden largely preserved Trump's tariffs — on steel, aluminum and a mass of goods from China.

"It was a little surprising that an ideologically different administration would keep the policies so intact," Aznavorian said, recalling how a previous Democratic president, Bill Clinton, had fought for freer trade. "That's just so different from a 2024 Biden administration."

Trump and Biden agree on essentially nothing, from taxes and climate change to immigration and regulation. Yet on trade policy, the two presumptive presidential nominees have embraced surprisingly similar approaches. Which means that whether Biden or Trump wins the presidency, the United States seems poised to maintain a protectionist trade policy — a policy that experts say could feed inflation pressures.

Last week, in fact, Biden announced some new tariffs, on Chinese electric vehicles, advanced batteries, solar cells and other products, that he said would keep Beijing from flooding the United States with cheap imports.

The protectionist tilt of the two presidential contenders reflects the widespread view that opening the nation to more imports — especially from China — wiped out American manufacturing jobs and shuttered factories. It's an especially potent political topic in the Midwestern industrial states that will likely decide who wins the White House.

"If you look at the election, it's obvious," said William Reinsch, a former trade official now at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "Where are the deciding states? Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin — right there, you can see that trade is going to have an outsize role."

In their own ways, the two candidates have ditched a U.S. commitment to relatively frictionless trade — low barriers and scant government interference — that were a bedrock of American policy for decades after World War II. The idea was that free trade would hold down costs and aid consumers and businesses across the world.

In recent years, though, the perception grew that while free trade benefited households and companies,

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it hurt workers, with American jobs falling victim to cheaper foreign labor.

"The once nearly unanimous Washington consensus on free trade is dead," Robert Lighthizer, who was Trump's lead trade negotiator, crowed in his 2023 book, "No Trade Is Free."

Yet like free trade, trade protectionism carries its own economic price. It can raise costs for households and businesses just as the nation is struggling to fully tame inflation. It tends to prop up inefficient companies. It spurs retaliation from other nations against American exporters. And it typically sours relations with allies and adversaries alike.

Trump, who brazenly labeled himself "Tariff Man," tried to pummel America's trading partners with import taxes, vowing to shrink America's trade deficits, especially with China.

He did pressure Mexico and Canada into rewriting a North American trade deal that Trump insisted had destroyed U.S. manufacturing jobs. He also persuaded China to agree to buy more American farm goods. But his efforts didn't revive the manufacturing base — factory jobs make up a smaller share of U.S. employment than they did before his presidency — or shrink America's trade deficits.

Trump has vowed more of the same in a second term. He's threatening to impose a 10% tariff on all imports — and a 60% tax on Chinese goods.

"I call it a ring around the country," Trump said in an interview with Time magazine.

Mark Zandi, chief economist at Moody's Analytics, warns that the consequences would be damaging. Trump's tariff plans, Zandi said, "would spark higher inflation, reduce GDP and jobs and increase unemployment, all else equal."

A year after the import taxes were imposed, Zandi estimates, average consumer prices would be 0.7 percentage points higher than they would otherwise be. A report out Monday, from Kimberly Clausing and Mary Lovely of the Peterson Institute for International Economics, estimates that for families in the middle of the U.S. income distribution, Trump's tariff proposals would amount to a tax of at least \$1,700 a year.

For his part, Biden favors subsidizing such key industries as chipmaking and EV manufacturing to give them a competitive edge. It's a stance that reflects worry that China's rising military and technological might imperils America's national security. As last week's announcement showed, Biden isn't averse to new tariffs, either. His top trade negotiator, Katherine Tai, has opened an investigation into Chinese trade practices in the shipbuilding industry, likely a prelude to imposing further sanctions on Beijing.

"The laissez-faire economic model of trade wasn't working for the United States," said Elizabeth Baltzan, a senior adviser to Tai. "We want to correct for that. The measures you take in order to get a fairer (economy) may involve measures that could be labeled protectionist. But I think you have to ask what you're protecting" — notably working-class communities.

Dani Rodrik, a Harvard economist who was an early critic of the globalization of the 1990s and 2000s, views Biden trade policies more favorably than he does Trump's approach.

"Trump's was knee-jerk and incoherent; there is little evidence that his trade restrictions on China did any good to workers or the middle class in the U.S.," Rodrik said.

By contrast, he said, "Biden's approach is strategic and based on rebuilding U.S. manufacturing capacity and investing in the green transition, so fundamentally strengthening the U.S. economy rather than crass protectionism."

Either way, a consensus formed in recent years that U.S. trade policy had to change. Moving factories to low-wage countries like Mexico and China in the 1990s and early 2000s, critics say, fattened corporate profits and enriched executives and investors but devastated American factory towns that couldn't compete with cheap imports.

David Autor, a leading economist at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, and two colleagues concluded in a 2016 paper that from 1999 to 2011, cheap Chinese imports wiped out 2.4 million American jobs.

More recently, China's rise as America's No. 1 geopolitical rival has created a bipartisan effort to reduce America's reliance on Beijing for supplies of everything from pharmaceuticals to "rare earth" minerals for electric cars and cellphones.

Though this sea change in policy may have started with Trump, discontent with free trade and with an increasingly combative China had been building for years. One of Trump's first presidential acts was to

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dump a free trade agreement the Obama administration had negotiated with 11 Pacific Rim countries.

Then Trump really got going. He imposed taxes on foreign washing machines and solar panels. Next, he labeled steel and aluminum imports a threat to national security and hit them with tariffs.

Finally, he started perhaps the biggest trade war since the 1930s: He hammered \$360 billion of Chinese products with tariffs for Beijing's efforts to surpass U.S. technological supremacy through illicit tactics, including cybertheft. China lashed back with retaliatory taxes of its own: It targeted American farmers, in particular, to try to hurt Trump's constituency in rural America.

Did Trump's tariff war achieve anything?

A study by Autor and colleagues at the University of Zurich, Harvard and the World Bank concluded that Trump's import taxes failed in their goal to return jobs to the American heartland. The tariffs, the study found, "neither raised nor lowered U.S. employment" where they were supposed to protect jobs.

Worse, the retaliatory taxes imposed by China and other nations on U.S. goods had "negative employment impacts," especially for farmers. These were only partly offset by billions in government aid that Trump bestowed on farmers to cushion their pain.

The Trump tariffs also damaged companies that relied on supplies that were affected by the tariffs. In Plymouth, Michigan, Clips & Clamps doesn't even use much imported steel. Yet it was still hurt by the tariffs because they allowed American steel producers to raise their prices.

"Our raw material prices here in the United States tend to be 20% higher than Europe and Mexico and 40% to 60% higher than China," Aznavorian said. His overseas rivals, he said, enjoy "significantly cheaper" costs.

If Trump's trade war fizzled as policy, though, it succeeded as politics. Autor's study found that support for Trump and Republicans running for Congress rose in the areas most exposed to the import tariffs — the industrial Midwest and manufacturing-heavy Southern states like North Carolina and Tennessee.

After entering office, Biden retained many of Trump's trade policies and made no effort to revive Obama's old Pacific Rim trade pact. He kept Trump's steel and aluminum tariffs, while letting some trading partners avoid it until they reached a quota. He also retained China tariffs. Biden even turned up the heat on Beijing by restricting its access to advanced computer chips and the equipment to make them.

"Trade and national security have been combined into one thing," Reinsch said. "This is the first time we've had an adversary that posed both an economic and a security challenge. The Soviet Union was a security challenge, but it was never an economic threat. Japan was an economic threat in the '80s, but it was never a security threat; they were an ally. China is both, and it's been complicated trying to figure out how to deal with that."

Biden's China policies are "grounded in national security," said Peterson's Lovely. "That makes it harder to critique because national security is always this black box that only those with the highest security clearance get to see."

The Biden administration has rankled some U.S. allies by offering subsidies to encourage U.S. companies to manufacture goods in America. Under Biden's 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, for instance, auto buyers can receive a \$7,500 tax credit for purchasing an electric vehicle. But the credit applies only to EVs assembled in North America. And the full credit goes only to EVs in which at least 60% of battery parts are made in North America and 50% of the "critical minerals" used in the vehicle — like cobalt, copper and lithium — come from the United States or a country with which the U.S. has a free trade deal.

"It's important that the United States develop its own clean energy sector, in collaboration with its allies and partners, thereby not becoming dependent on Chinese technologies," said Wendy Cutler, a former U.S. trade negotiator who is vice president of the Asia Society Policy Institute. "When trade is increasingly being weaponized, it's important that the U.S. does not become overly dependent on China for strategic products."

Biden's initiatives — including incentives to produce green technology and computer chips in the United States — have spurred what looks like a surge of investment in manufacturing. Karen Dynan of the Peterson Institute has reported that investment in U.S. factories surged at an 80% annual rate in the January-March period compared with the final three months of 2023, helping fuel the economy's unexpectedly

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strong performance.

The United States seems unlikely to reverse its tilt toward protectionism anytime soon. China, struggling to revive its own economy, is trying to export its way out of trouble, threatening to overwhelm world markets with cheap EVs and other products.

As for Aznavorian, he hopes the U.S. mends trade relations with its allies.

"We need friendly trade partners in order to compete against China," he said.

Yet when it comes to China and other U.S. adversaries, Aznavorian said, he's convinced that protectionist trade policies are "definitely here to stay."

## Today in History: May 22 Lyndon B. Johnson outlines 'Great Society'

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Wednesday, May 22, the 143rd day of 2024. There are 223 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On May 22, 1964, President Lyndon B. Johnson, speaking at the University of Michigan, outlined the goals of his "Great Society," saying that it "rests on abundance and liberty for all" and "demands an end to poverty and racial injustice."

On this date:

In 1939, the foreign ministers of Germany and Italy, Joachim von Ribbentrop and Galeazzo Ciano, signed a "Pact of Steel" committing the two countries to a military alliance.

In 1960, an earthquake of magnitude 9.5, the strongest ever measured, struck southern Chile, claiming some 1,655 lives.

In 1962, Continental Airlines Flight 11, en route from Chicago to Kansas City, Missouri, crashed after a bomb apparently brought on board by a passenger exploded, killing all 45 occupants of the Boeing 707.

In 1967, a fire at the L'Innovation department store in Brussels killed 322 people. Poet and playwright Langston Hughes died in New York at age 65.

In 1968, the nuclear-powered submarine USS Scorpion, with 99 men aboard, sank in the Atlantic Ocean. (The remains of the sub were later found on the ocean floor 400 miles southwest of the Azores.)

In 1969, the lunar module of Apollo 10, with Thomas P. Stafford and Eugene Cernan aboard, flew to within nine miles of the moon's surface in a dress rehearsal for the first lunar landing.

In 1985, U.S. sailor Michael L. Walker was arrested aboard the aircraft carrier Nimitz, two days after his father, John A. Walker Jr., was apprehended; both were later convicted of spying for the Soviet Union. (Michael Walker served 15 years in prison and was released in 2000. John Walker Jr. died in prison in 2014.)

In 1992, after a reign lasting nearly 30 years, Johnny Carson hosted NBC's "Tonight Show" for the final time. (Jay Leno took over as host three days later.)

In 2006, The Department of Veterans Affairs said personal data, including Social Security numbers of 26.5 million U.S. veterans, was stolen from a VA employee after he took the information home without authorization.

In 2011, a tornado devastated Joplin, Missouri, with winds up to 250 mph, claiming at least 159 lives and destroying about 8,000 homes and businesses.

In 2012, the Falcon 9, built by billionaire businessman Elon Musk, sped toward the International Space Station with a load of groceries and other supplies, marking the first time a commercial spacecraft had been sent to the orbiting outpost.

In 2017, a suicide bomber set off an improvised explosive device that killed 22 people at the end of an Ariana Grande concert in Manchester, England.

In 2020, "Full House" star Lori Loughlin and her fashion designer husband, Mossimo Giannulli, pleaded guilty to paying half a million dollars into the University of Southern California as part of a college admissions

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bribery scheme. (Loughlin would spend two months behind bars; Giannulli began a five-month sentence in November 2020 and was released to home confinement in April 2021.)

In 2018, novelist Philip Roth, whose books included "Portnoy's Complaint" and the Pulitzer Prize-winning "American Pastoral," died in New York at the age of 85.

In 2022, Kate McKinnon and Pete Davidson departed from "Saturday Night Live," leaving the sketch institution without arguably its two most famous names after its 47th season finale

Today's Birthdays: Actor-director Richard Benjamin is 86. Actor Frank Converse is 86. Actor Barbara Parkins is 82. Retired MLB All-Star pitcher Tommy John is 81. Songwriter Bernie Taupin is 74. Actor-producer Al Corley is 69. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, R-Alaska, is 67. Singer Morrissey is 65. Actor Ann Cusack is 63. Country musician Dana Williams (Diamond Rio) is 63. Rock musician Jesse Valenzuela is 62. Actor Mark Christopher Lawrence is 60. R&B singer Johnny Gill (New Edition) is 58. Rock musician Dan Roberts (Crash Test Dummies) is 57. Actor Brooke Smith is 57. Actor Michael Kelly is 55. Model Naomi Campbell is 54. Actor Anna Belknap is 52. Actor Alison Eastwood is 52. Singer Donell Jones is 51. Actor Sean Gunn is 50. Actor A.J. Langer is 50. Actor Ginnifer Goodwin is 46. R&B singer Vivian Green is 45. Actor Maggie Q is 45. Olympic gold medal speed skater Apolo Anton Ohno is 42. Actor Molly Ephraim (TV: "Last Man Standing") is 38. Tennis player Novak Djokovic is 37. Actor Anna Baryshnikov (TV: "Superior Donuts") is 32. Actor Camren Bicondova is 25.