

Groton Daily Independent

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Tuesday, June 25

Senior Menu: Baked pork chop, au gratin potatoes, vegetable capri blend, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

- Junior Legion hosts Hamlin, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- Legion at Webster 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U12 W/R at Columbia, 7 p.m., 1 7 inning game.
- U10 W/R at Claremont, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U8 R hosts Claremont 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U8 B at Columbia 6 p.m. (2)
- SB U18 hosts Claremont, 6 p.m. (1)
- T-Ball G at Columbia 5 p.m.
- Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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

Life is like a Camera..

Focus on what's important,
Capture good times,
Develop from negatives, and
if things dont work out..
Take another shot!



The Pantry at Community Center, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.
Olive Grove Ladies League, 6 p.m.
Olive Grove Bridge, Noon
Rumble in the Jungle at the Arena

Wednesday, June 26

Senior Menu: Swiss steak, mashed potatoes and gravy, peas and carrots, apricots, whole wheat bread.

- U12 R/B hosts. Britton, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- U10 B/R hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m. (2)
- SB at Claremont (U8 at 5 p.m. (1), U10 Gld at 6 p.m. (1), U12 at 7 p.m. (1))
- Olive Grove Men's League
- Youth Golf Lessons at Olive Grove
- Groton CM&A: Family Fun Night, 7 p.m.

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1440

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Russia's Dagestan Attack

The death toll in Sunday's gun and arson attacks across Russia's southern Dagestan region has risen to at least 20 people. As of this writing, it remains unclear who carried out the coordinated attacks, though Russian officials have alluded to Islamic militants and outside forces.

On Sunday night, gunmen targeted two churches, two synagogues, and a police post across the ethnically diverse Dagestan region in Russia's North Caucasus, near Chechnya. The attacks took place simultaneously across the city of Derbent and the regional capital of Makhachkala, in some cases involving Molotov cocktails and arson. An Orthodox priest, at least 15 law enforcement officials, and several civilians were killed, while at least 46 others were injured. At least five gunmen were killed.

The mass shooting comes after a March attack claimed by ISIS-K killed 145 people at a concert hall in Moscow. That attack was Russia's deadliest in over 20 years.

Panthers Hoist Trophy

The Florida Panthers won their first Stanley Cup last night, defeating the Edmonton Oilers 2 to 1 in Game 7 of the NHL Finals. The Panthers' victory comes a year after their last shot at the Cup ended thanks to the Vegas Golden Knights and nearly 30 years since their first finals appearance in 1996.

The Panthers' Sam Reinhart and Carter Verhaeghe each scored a goal, with Sergei Bobrovsky making 23 saves. The Oilers' Connor McDavid won the Conn Smythe Trophy as the playoff's most valuable player, becoming the first player from a losing team to receive the honor since the Anaheim Ducks' Jean-Sébastien Giguère in 2003. The Oilers had hoped to become the second team in NHL history since the Toronto Maple Leafs in 1942 to overcome a 3-0 deficit in the series and win the Cup.

The Stanley Cup is now back in Florida for the third time in five seasons—the Tampa Bay Lightning won in 2020 and 2021.

EU Targets Apple

European Union regulators have charged Apple with violating its Digital Markets Act by preventing developers using its App Store from directing users to cheaper alternatives. The charge is the first under the new digital competition law, which took effect earlier this year. Apple faces potential fines of up to 10% of its global revenue; Apple's total revenue amounted to \$383B in 2023.

Under the DMA, which aims to prevent tech giants from monopolizing digital markets, developers must be allowed to inform customers about cheaper purchase options. However, EU regulators accused Apple of not allowing communication that promotes alternative offers on its App Store. Additionally, the European Commission is investigating if Apple's Core Technology Fee—which charges developers \$0.54 per installation after the first million—breaches the DMA. Apple said it has made changes in recent months to comply with the act.

The news follows a similar antitrust lawsuit against Apple from the US Justice Department. A final EU compliance decision is expected by March 2025.

Editor's note: In yesterday's subject line, we referenced "Starship" as being stuck at the International Space Station. Starship is SpaceX's heavy lift launch vehicle. We meant to write "Starliner," which is Boeing's spacecraft currently docked at the ISS. Thanks to readers for flagging the error!

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

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Tennessee tops Texas A&M 6-5 in decisive Game 3 to win their first men's College World Series title. "Freaky Friday 2" confirmed for 2025 theatrical release, will feature Jamie Lee Curtis and Lindsay Lohan reprising their original roles.

Three major record labels sue AI music startups, citing copyright infringement.

Tamayo Perry, professional surfer and "Pirates of the Caribbean" actor, dies at 49 following shark attack in Hawaii.

Princess Anne, the sister of King Charles III, hospitalized after suffering concussion from an undisclosed weekend incident.

Science & Technology

Thirteen-year-old British patient becomes first to receive deep brain stimulation implant to address treatment-resistant epilepsy; early results show an 80% reduction in daytime seizures.

Archaeologists uncover 33 ancient tombs in the Egyptian city of Aswan, with some remains showing signs of disease or bone disorders.

Study demonstrates at least 15 types of perfluoroalkyl substances—also known as forever chemicals—can be absorbed through the skin at levels high enough to cause meaningful exposure.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.3%, Dow +0.7%, Nasdaq -1.1%) ahead of fresh batch of economic data this week; Nvidia shares close down nearly 7%.

Chipotle Mexican Grill to execute planned 50-for-1 stock split today, its first stock split since going public in 2006.

Chinese fast fashion retailer Shein—last valued at \$66B—files for initial public offering in London.

Car dealerships across the US and Canada continue to experience disruptions in operations after last week's back-to-back cyberattacks on CDK Global software used by auto retail sales industry.

Politics & World Affairs

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange to plead guilty to violating the Espionage Act in a US court in the Northern Mariana Islands local time Wednesday; Assange to be released to Australia, his country of citizenship.

US Supreme Court agrees to hear challenge to Tennessee law banning gender-affirming care for minors.

At least 22 workers killed at a South Korean battery manufacturing plant after lithium batteries explode; cause of blaze under investigation.

North Korea resumes sending balloons likely carrying trash toward South Korea; North Korea has reportedly dropped over 1,000 such balloons into the region since May.

Cargo ship Dali and remaining crew head to Port of Virginia, leaving Port of Baltimore for first time since the 900-foot ship crashed into the Francis Scott Key Bridge in March; US Coast Guard to oversee its voyage.

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**Gov. Noem Provides
Supply Shortage Relief
for Flooding Recovery**

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem signed Executive Order 2024-05 granting an hours-of-service waiver for certain products being transported through South Dakota.

The 14-day order declares a state of emergency and exempts delivery of needed supplies in support of flood relief efforts from federal motor carrier regulations regarding drivers' hours of service.

Although hours of service have been temporarily suspended for commercial deliveries, companies may not require or allow fatigued drivers to make deliveries. All other road safety and vehicle compliance regulations still apply.

The executive order expires at midnight on July 8, 2024.

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Rumble in the Jungle



Ryder Johnson makes this shot in the Lennox game. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

The first of two days of the Rumble in the Jungle was held Monday at the Groton Area Arena. In talking with Groton Area Head Basketball Coach Brian Dolan, he said he had talked with the Dakota Valley coach at the state tournament last year about creating this event. Unfortunately, due to flooding and the closing of the interstate, Dakota Valley was unable to make it to the event. So Groton Area put together a junior varsity team to fill in for Dakota Valley.

Each game featured two 20-minute halves with two minutes between halves and five minutes between games. For the day, Ryder Johnson made 18 of 20 free throws.

Rapid City Christian defeated Groton Area in the first game, 61-60, in overtime. There were 18 lead changes and the game was tied six times. Ryder Johnson led Groton Area with 14 points followed by Easton Weber with nine, Carson Zak had eight, Becker Bosma (coming from Aberdeen Christian) with seven, Gage Sippel six, Keegen Tracy and Turner Thompson each had five, Kason Keough had four and Blake Pauli added two points. Weber made three three-pointers, Johnson and Zak each made two three-pointers, and making one each were Tracy, Bosma and Thompson.

In the other game, Viborg-Hurley defeated Mobridge-Pollock, 60-51.

In the second round game, Aberdeen Christian defeated Groton Area JV, 37-25. Carson Zak had seven points, Easton Weber six, Jace Johnson and Jayden Schwan each had four, Asher Johnson two and Ethan Kroll one. Making three-pointers were Weber with two and Zak with one.

In the other game, Dawson-Boyd defeated Lennox in overtime, 61-59.

Groton Area won the third game with a 56-55 win over Viborg-Hurley. Ryder Johnson had 22 points, Becker Bosma 12, Keegen Tracy nine, Carson Zak and Gage Sippel each had four points, Teylor Diegel had three and Blake Pauli had two points.

In the other game, Rapid City Christian defeated Mobridge-Pollock, 56-42.

In the fourth round, Groton Area JV defeated Dawson-Boyd, 41-37. Easton Weber had 11 points, Asher Johnson and Carson Zak each had 10, Jace Johnson seven, Jayden Schwan two and Logan Warrington one. Making three-pointers were Johnson with three and Tracy with one.

In the other game, Aberdeen Christian defeated Lennox in overtime, 53-48.

Groton Area junior varsity played right after the fourth round, against Mobridge-Pollock. This was the biggest margin of victory of the day as Groton Area won, 58-30. Easton Weber had 16 points, Jace Johnson 12, Asher Johnson 10, Carson Zak and Logan Warrington each had five, Jayden Schwan four Major Dolan three and Wyatt Wambach two. Making three-pointers were Weber with four, Jace Johnson with two and Zak, Dolan and Warrington with one each.

In the other game, Viborg-Hurley defeated Aberdeen Christian, 56-46.

In the final round of the day, Lennox edged Groton Area, 54-53. There were 12 lead changes and the game was tied eight times. Ryder Johnson had 17 points, Keegen Tracy 12, Gage Sippel eight, Kason Keough and Becker Bosma with seven each and Blake Pauli two. Keough made two three-pointers while Tracy and Bosma each had one.

Dawson-Boyd defeated Rapid City Christian in the other game.

All of the Groton games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by the Groton Chiropractic Clinic. The games are archived under 2023-24 School Year, Other Events, Rumble in the Jungle, Monday's Games.

Flooding Closes Additional South Dakota Lake and State Parks

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) today announced the closure of an additional waterbody, McCook Lake, in southeast South Dakota due to flooding.

McCook Lake has been added to Governor Noem's previous "no boating declaration," which is now in effect on the waters of:

Lake Alvin in Lincoln County,
Lake Henry in Bon Homme County,
Marindahl Lake in Yankton County,
Menno Lake in Hutchinson County,
Swan Lake in Turner County,
Wall Lake in Minnehaha County,
Lake Vermillion in McCook County,
McCook Lake in McCook County, South Dakota.

Per the declaration, GFP Secretary Kevin Robling has been appointed as the Governor's designee in order for him to add to, delete, or modify boating restrictions for any bodies of water similarly affected in South Dakota.

No-Wake Zone Added to Lake Campbell

In addition to the above closed waterbodies, a no-wake zone has been added to Lake Campbell in Brookings County.

The no-wake zone was enacted as the water levels are currently over the ordinary high-water mark and there is floating debris across the waterbody. The no-wake zone will protect public health, safety, and private property.

State Park Closures and Updates

GFP park staff are currently working to maintain as much access to South Dakota State Parks as possible. Beaver Creek Recreation Area is currently closed, as the county road to access the park is closed in both directions. The area will reopen once the road is able to be reopened.

The visitor center at Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve is currently closed due to no power or water. Park staff are currently assessing forecast models and preparing for potential additional flooding.

Lake Herman State Park currently has standing water over the lower campground area. Park staff are working to notify incoming campers regarding their reservations. A small amount of water is currently over the entrance road, and visitors are encouraged to exercise caution when in the park.

Additional parks in southeast South Dakota also have some level of flooding occurring over trails and/or secondary roads. Visitors are encouraged to contact their local park office for any questions they may have regarding access to their favorite park.

The Outdoor Campus Sioux Falls will also be closed Monday, June 24 as Sertoma Park is currently closed to the public.

Individuals are encouraged to stay up to date on all updates by following the GFP Facebook page, as well as their local park Facebook pages.

Hutchinson County Two Vehicle Double Fatality Crash

What: Two vehicle double fatality crash
Where: Junction of US 18 and US 81, eight miles south of Freeman, SD
When: 2:15p.m. Monday, June 24, 2024

Driver 1: Male, 51 years old, fatal injuries
Vehicle 1: 2002 Chevrolet Pickup
Seatbelt Use: No
Passenger 1: Male, 11 years old, fatal injuries
Seatbelt Use: No

Driver 2: Male, 27 years old, no injuries
Vehicle 2: 2005 Peterbilt Semi
Seatbelt Use: No

Hutchinson County, S.D.- Two people suffered fatal injuries in a two-vehicle crash eight miles south of Freeman, SD this afternoon.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2002 Chevrolet pickup was traveling northbound on US Highway 81 at the junction of US highway 18. At the same time, a 2005 Peterbilt tractor/trailer was traveling southbound at the same intersection.

The driver of the pickup failed to yield as he turned west onto US 18 and both vehicles collided in the intersection, coming to rest in the southwest ditch of the junction. The driver and passenger in the pickup were not wearing seatbelts and both were fatally injured in the crash. The driver of the semi also was not wearing his seatbelt and was not injured.

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

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

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The Life of Carson James Bentz

Carson James Bentz, infant son of Thomas and Ashley (Dragt) Bentz was born into Heaven on June 21, 2024 at Sanford Medical Center in Aberdeen.

Services will be held at 2:00 p.m., Wednesday, June 26th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Rev. Michael Lassley will officiate.

Cherishing his memory are his parents, Thomas Henry and Ashley Ninette (Dragt) Bentz, siblings, Jaclyn Rudebusch, Beau Bentz, Madilynn and MeKalynn Bentz, maternal grandparents, James & Tamara Dargt of South Shore, paternal grandparents, Jacob & Joan Bentz of Aberdeen, maternal great-grandparents, Loyd and Harleth Crook of Groton, uncles, Bryan (Danielle) Dragt of Stockholm, James Dragt, Jr. of White, and an aunt, Taylor (Jace) Canaan of Pierre.

Preceding him in death were his great-grandparents.



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Gov. Noem Hosts Tribal Public Safety Crisis Summit

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, Governor Kristi Noem hosted the first-ever Tribal Public Safety Crisis Summit at the Governor’s Residence in Pierre. She was joined by Congressman Dusty Johnson, Attorney General Marty Jackley, and leaders and law enforcement officials at the state, tribal, federal, and local levels.

“We have dangerous drugs and violent crime taking place in parts of South Dakota – we can fix it if we have honest conversations and work together. That’s what happened today,” said Governor Kristi Noem. “Because of the conversations and the relationships that were built at this Summit, we will continue to make meaningful progress towards making South Dakota safer.”

The conversation covered a wide-range of issues tied to public safety on South Dakota’s Native American reservations, including:

Continuing the success of the first-of-its-kind special law enforcement training for tribal law enforcement that began this summer;

The best path forward for mutual aid agreements and cross-deputization;

Federal funding issues for tribal law enforcement, tribal prosecutors, tribal judges, and other related issues; and,

Ways to lead more successful changes moving forward.

The group discussed statistical data on crime in Indian Country.

Groton Jr Teeners 14U Firing On All Cylinders Against Watertown White Sox 14U

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr Teeners 14U easily dispatched Watertown White Sox 14U on Monday, 15-0.

Groton Jr Teeners 14U got on the board in the bottom of the first inning after Jordan Schwan singled, scoring one run, an error scored one run, Ethan Kroll singled, scoring two runs, and an error scored two runs.

A fielder's choice by Schwan, a walk by Braeden Flihs, and a fielder's choice by Kroll helped Groton Jr Teeners 14U extend their early lead in the second.

Groton Jr Teeners 14U scored five runs on four hits in the bottom of the third inning. Alex Abeln singled, scoring one run, TC Schuster drew a walk, scoring one run, Schwan singled, scoring one run, an error scored one run, and Flihs singled, scoring one run.

John Bisbee earned the win for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. The starting pitcher surrendered three hits and zero runs over three innings, striking out two and walking none. Levi Brownlee took the loss for Watertown White Sox 14U. The starting pitcher went two and one-third innings, giving up 13 runs (six earned) on five hits, striking out three and walking six.

Schwan went 2-for-3 at the plate to lead Groton Jr Teeners 14U in hits. Kroll and Schwan each drove in three runs for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. Ryder Schelle led Groton Jr Teeners 14U with two walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating seven walks for the game. Schuster and Schwan each stole multiple bases for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. Groton Jr Teeners 14U ran wild on the base paths, piling up six stolen bases for the game. Groton Jr Teeners 14U didn't commit a single error in the field. Abeln had the most chances in the field with three.

Grant Mayo, Case Hulscher, and Konrad Frankfurth each collected one hit for Watertown White Sox 14U.

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Groton Jr Teeners 14U Defeat Watertown White Sox 14U In High-Scoring Affair

By GameChanger Media

There were runs aplenty on Monday, as Groton Jr Teeners 14U took down Watertown White Sox 14U 14-11. Groton Jr Teeners 14U collected eight hits, while Watertown White Sox 14U had three.

Groton Jr Teeners 14U came back to win despite trailing 8-0 in the first.

Watertown White Sox 14U got on the board in the top of the first inning after Gabe Larson singled, Dray Dahlgren walked, Konrad Frankfurth walked, Max Larson walked, Watertown White Sox 14U scored on a wild pitch, Case Hulscher hit into a fielder's choice, Dustin Garvey walked, and Leo Dunn was struck by a pitch, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr Teeners 14U flipped the game on its head in the bottom of the first, scoring 12 runs on five hits to take a 12-8 lead. The biggest blow in the inning was a single by Shaydon Wood after a 6-pitch at-bat that drove in three.

Groton Jr Teeners 14U added to their early lead in the bottom of the third inning after Groton Jr Teeners 14U scored on a wild pitch, and Watertown White Sox 14U committed an error, each scoring one run.

Xavior Ellenbecker earned the win for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. The reliever surrendered zero hits and three runs (two earned) over one and one-third innings, striking out one and walking five. Hulscher took the loss for Watertown White Sox 14U. They went three innings, giving up five runs (four earned) on six hits, striking out two and walking two. Wood started on the bump for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. The righty allowed one hit and eight runs (five earned) over two-thirds of an inning, striking out two and walking seven. Ryder Schelle collected the save.

Wood seized on their opportunities, leading Groton Jr Teeners 14U with two runs batted in from the number eight spot in the lineup. The pitcher went 1-for-2 on the day. Number seven hitter, Kason Oswald, showed the depth of Groton Jr Teeners 14U's lineup, by leading them with two hits in two at bats. Jordan Schwan and Ellenbecker each stole multiple bases for Groton Jr Teeners 14U. Groton Jr Teeners 14U had a strong eye at the plate, piling up six walks for the game. Groton Jr Teeners 14U stole 12 bases in the game.

Larson led Watertown White Sox 14U with two hits in two at bats. Hulscher, Larson, Dunn, Frankfurth, and Garvey each drove in one run for Watertown White Sox 14U. Watertown White Sox 14U had patience at the plate, collecting 12 walks for the game. Dahlgren and Larson led the team with two walks each. Hulscher and Garvey each stole multiple bases for Watertown White Sox 14U. Watertown White Sox 14U turned one double play in the game.

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American Legion Annual Convention

The 105th Annual Convention of The American Legion Department of South Dakota was held last weekend in Pierre SD. In attendance from the Groton Post 39 was Bruce Babcock, Post 39 Commander, Aaron Grant, Post 39 Vice-commander, Jan Siebel, outgoing District 4 Auxiliary President, and Karen Grant, Groton Auxiliary.



Legion Convention L-R Bruce Babcock, Post 39 Commander, Ted Kimball, new District 4 Commander, Bob Thomason, out going District 4 Commander, and Aaron Grant, new District 4 Vice-commander. (Courtesy Photo Bruce Babcock)



L-R Jan Siebel and Bruce Babcock, both from Groton, pose during the Legion Convention break. (Courtesy Photo Bruce Babcock)



Aaron Grant (center) gets sworn in as the new Department of South Dakota District 4 Vice-commander. Aaron is a member of Groton Post 39. (Courtesy Photo Bruce Babcock)



South Dakota No. 1 state in nation for hemp production

By Greg Goede
South Dakota News Watch

WAKONDA, S.D. – South Dakota recently became the No. 1 producer of hemp fibers in the nation after being the third-to-last state to make it legal just three years ago.

“We’re the highest production and the highest in yield-per-acre, both of those,” said Bill Brehmer, board member of the South Dakota Industrial Hemp Association (SDIHA). “We are going to try to hold that for next year. This will be our first year to dominate that category.”

One of the people helping to do that is John Peterson, treasurer for SDIHA and a hemp farmer near Wakonda, about 50 miles southwest of Sioux Falls. He started Dakota Hemp LLC in 2021 when hemp was legalized, and it was the second farm in the state to grow the crop.

Peterson, a fifth generation farmer, planted 40 acres of hemp the first year and has since expanded to 450 acres in the 2024 season.

He got started in hemp production after attending a meeting of people who already were growing the crop.

“Once hemp farming became legal with the 2018 Farm Bill, it came across my radar again as a reality and I saw the stories of farmers around the country growing CBD hemp but not much for the fiber or grain yet,” Peterson said. “I received a random postcard in the mail announcing an industrial hemp grower’s meeting in Hudson, S.D., in early spring of 2021. There were about eight farmers and 12 presenters.”

That was the start of Dakota Hemp.

“I remember calling one of the presenters on my way home from the meeting to further discuss grain and fiber hemp and get more information, as I really saw that being the better option for my farm. I decided to grow 40 acres of hemp on our farm in 2021, a dual purpose variety grown for the grain and fiber,” Peterson said.

After Peterson saw the results of that first crop, he added hemp into his rotation of corn and soybeans. The farm is now in its fourth year of planting hemp and plans to expand.

“I realized mid-season (in 2021) that this crop is going to thrive here in S.D. and fits very well into a crop rotation on a large-scale across the state,” he said. “I planted 130 acres of industrial hemp on my farm in 2022, nine varieties, including some of the first fiber variety trials in the Midwest, which did surprisingly well in the drought.”

The farm also plants 1,000 to 2,000 CBD plants for hemp products it produces, which include hemp oils, gels and creams.



A Dakota Hemp LLC harvest of its hemp crop near Wakonda, S.D. South Dakota recently became the leading producer of the crop in the United States.

(Photo: John Peterson / Dakota Hemp LLC).



Dakota Hemp crop in 2023 near Wakonda, S.D. (Photo: John Peterson / Dakota Hemp)

Hemp legalized in US in 2018 and SD in 2021

Production of hemp became legal in the United State under the 2018 Farm Bill, which allowed the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA) to start making rules and regulations for commercial hemp production starting in 2019 under the Agriculture Improvement Act.

South Dakota passed a bill through the Legislature to legalize the production of the crop, but Gov. Kristi Noem vetoed it, making it one of three states to outlaw the crop despite federal legalization. After the law was changed and improved in early 2020, the South Dakota Industrial Hemp Program began in 2021.

Since the legalization, the state has grown to more than 3,000 acres of hemp production, with around 40 farm across the state, and plans to continue growing in farms and acreage.

Hemp grows well in SD and helps other crops

South Dakota hemp growers bring in varieties of the plant from other countries, such as France and China, to grow the crop since it was illegal to grow in the U.S. between the 1930s and 2018.

"Well-developed hemp genetics of Canada and Europe work well in our latitude," said Ken Meyer, board president of SDIHA. "Hemp is a photo sensitive plant. The long daylight hours that we experience in the summer are beneficial to growing

hemp. Our lower summer temperatures compared to Southern climate zones are a big help. And we have enough average rainfall but not too much, which can cause — especially in warmer climates — more issues with bugs or diseases."

Farmers who started hemp production, like Peterson, found the crop production in South Dakota had better results than neighboring states because of the soil and weather.

"We can really grow almost double the crop," he said.

Growing hemp in fields also has a positive impact on the soil and how other crops grow. Peterson said there's a clear difference in the organic matter that can be seen after planting a hemp crop.

"You do have good organic matter you're putting back in the soil," Peterson said. "Plus we're giving our microbes a new food source. They have never eaten these hemp roots before. ... That really activates good numbers on our soil."

Materials South Dakota hemp is used for

Farmers grow three different varieties of hemp in South Dakota: CBD, fibers, and grain and seed. South Dakota reached No. 1 for grain and seed acres in 2022 and now reached No. 1 for fibers this year.

"We ended up getting enough farmers to plant over 2,500 acres into industrial hemp and launch S.D. to the No. 2 hemp-producing state in the U.S. in 2022, in just our second year of growing," Peterson said.

CBD

CBD is a chemical found in hemp plants that can be used for different products. Some popular products CBD is used for:

- Tinctures, or liquid, extracted from the plant, like oil, used as herbal medicine
- Pills
- Capsules
- Food and beverages
- Creams and lotions
- Fibers

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Grain and seed

The grain and seed is harvested from the top part of the hemp plant. Grain and seed is used for things such as:

- Fabrics
- Biofuel
- Food and oil

Fibers

Fibers are harvested from the stalk of the hemp plant. Hemp fiber make products that include:

- Animal bedding
- Textiles
- Paper
- Hempcrete

Top products from South Dakota

The hemp grown in South Dakota is used around the country for different materials, most of it for animal bedding and building materials like hempcrete.

Hemp animal bedding is made from the stalk of the hemp plant, also called the hurd. The compostable and absorbent material can hold 4 times its weight in moisture and clumps together when wet.

"The absorbency of the hurd is higher than most any other (material) out there. (People) like this because it quickly absorbs any moisture that is created," Brehmer said.

Hempcrete is a bio-composite building material that is created by mixing and coating particles of hemp hurd that hardens into a natural material commonly used for insulation of walls, floors, roofs or windows.

"The hempcrete is the insulator and it is very mold resistant and termite resistant, allows the walls to breathe. So if any moisture gets in there, it dries up. That's why they're mold resistant," Brehmer said.

The plant-based building material is slowly becoming more popular around the nation, and the industry will have to expand to keep up with the demand, he said.

"Eventually this is going to be what we will see in the future, is more and more homes could be built with hempcrete. Once we get it down to where it's a fast process, (the demand) can go up quickly," Brehmer said.

SD hemp industry's value and plan to stay on top

The total value of South Dakota's 2023 hemp crop was more than \$23 million, Brehmer said.

Nationally, hemp was nearly a \$24 billion market in 2023, according to numbers documented by the USDA. That is expected to continue to climb in the coming years, reaching \$30 billion by 2030, USDA said.

"2024 will kind of be a big year in developing and on the processing side," Brehmer said.

As hemp becomes a more popular product, more farms across the United States have started to pop up, making it more of a challenge for South Dakota to stay No. 1 for production.

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

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That's Life by Tony Bender: What a country

Writer's Note: A July 4 memory from 2009.

Dylan stopped blowing up things on his X-Box long enough for him to join me for the ride to Ashley on Independence Day so we could watch people blow things up. As I waited in the car for Mr. No Sense of Urgency, I glanced around in the fading light.

After years of living here, we finally have that expanded garage and the house has crisp white siding and red shingles. I swear the trees have grown four feet this summer alone. Flowers are in bloom, including a water lily in one of the gurgling ponds alive with darting goldfish.

Dylan and I talked about these things as we drove—the bounty of America and how an average American family like us could live on a five-acre plot surrounded by corn and soybeans—our little slice of the American pie.

"In Europe, everyone is so crowded," Dylan said. It's true. We have so much elbow room here, almost an embarrassment of space.

We often talk a lot about the human condition in our family, about the way things are and the way things ought to be, but I wanted to make sure that on this night we talked about the abundance of good things. I wanted to make sure we stopped for a moment to realize how lucky we are to live in the United States of America.

As we approached Ashley in the dusk, we could see rockets decorating the night sky from one end to the other. Boats docked at Lake Hoskins, a jewel of a lake we are so fortunate to have near our home.

Someone said on the radio last week that what happened in 1776 was a miracle, and it was. The assemblage of so many great men in one place at one time will never be duplicated again. There is an immense amount of wisdom and foresight in the Declaration of Independence, the Constitution and the Bill of Rights.

The great test of our time is can we reconcile that vision with modern circumstance? Our leaders have wavered and sought and end run around certain amendments from time to time, warrantless wiretaps and expansion of eminent domain for commercial purposes among them.

We found a spot to park at the baseball diamond. Dylan scampered off with friends while I leaned the seat back and opened the sunroof for a perfect view. As I watched the spectacular bursts, I thought about, how across the country, the scene was being replicated in small towns and big cities.

We need these days of national celebration to bring us together and remind us that even if we have a long way to go, we have come a long way.

As the sparks from the final volley faded, car horns honked in applause. Dylan emerged from the darkness. "Man, that was awesome!" He told me how he and his friend Jacob had watched sprawled out on the cool grass.

My mind flashed back to my own youth, to those days at the ballpark in Frederick, SD, which is where we watched our fireworks displays. I remembered the way it all reflected in the river behind us. I could almost feel again the sunburn I always seemed to have on July 4.

As the years go by, my pride in my country grows. It's contradictory. I know I complain more these days about what is wrong, but it makes me appreciate what is right more, too.

We waited for the other cars to clear out before we headed home—a rare traffic jam for these parts. Some folks remained behind to light off the last of their arsenal. I could see the silent explosions in my rear view mirror. Dylan was upbeat and we talked about how some people get to watch these Independence Day celebrations from airplanes, and wouldn't that be neat.

"I'd like to do that someday," he said, "Fly all across the county watching the fireworks." I imagine he will. It's something that could only happen in America.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Homes and roads in McCook Lake area ravaged by flooding **Authorities say Big Sioux River rose to record level faster than anticipated; residents criticize response**

BY: SETH TUPPER AND MAKENZIE HUBER - JUNE 24, 2024 12:54 PM

Homes were ruined, roads were washed out, sinkholes opened up, a railroad bridge was destroyed, and rescuers worked through Sunday night into Monday morning to save people from rising floodwaters in the McCook Lake area of southeastern South Dakota.

"It looks like the Grand Canyon here, and it's just pouring in. What a disaster," said McCook Lake Association President Dirk Lohry while kayaking the lake and surveying the damage Monday morning. He waded through trash and navigated currents that he said rivaled the Missouri River.

The lake is a 273-acre, horseshoe-shaped body of water ringed by homes around its northern shore. It's just west of Interstate 29, while the Big Sioux River is just east of the interstate and the Missouri River is a short distance to the south.

As of Monday morning, the water on McCook Lake was still rising and was already 10 feet above normal levels, Lohry estimated. While dozens of homes were flooded near the lake, several more were under threat as the water continued to rise.

The state, North Sioux City and private contractors built a levee Sunday evening across the interstate at Exit 4 in an effort to tie it in with other protective structures and reduce impacts to North Sioux City from the Big Sioux, which is swollen from three days of rain last week.

Gov. Kristi Noem, speaking at a Monday morning press conference in North Sioux City, said the Big Sioux



A June 24, 2024, view of a home destroyed by flooding the previous night at McCook Lake in southeast South Dakota. (Courtesy of Dirk Lohry)

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rose higher and faster than authorities anticipated Sunday as they were mobilizing the effort.

The river crested at a record 44.98 feet overnight, according to a gauge in North Sioux City, surpassing that segment's old record from 2014 by 7.28 feet. Noem said the crest was 2 feet higher and came 17 hours sooner than an earlier forecast.

"We expected that we had overnight to build a levee," Noem said, adding, "and then within an hour that had changed dramatically. We had to build that levee within a few hours."

The state Department of Transportation closed a portion of Interstate 29 at 6 p.m. Sunday to build the levee. Noem said workers used sandbags as the water rose but soon switched to truckloads of clay offered by a local resident.

Noem said a levee was built in the same location during a 2014 flood, and water never reached it. This time it did, and Noem said the levee "did divert water."

State and local authorities did not immediately have a count on the number of homes destroyed at McCook Lake. Union County Emergency Management Director Jason Westcott said rescuers conducted two sweeps of McCook Lake and would do a third, and he was "feeling pretty comfortable that almost everybody is out of that area."

Westcott said work was underway Monday morning to open a donation site in North Sioux City, to open a shelter for displaced residents, and to draft a debris management plan for the cleanup. He encouraged people to check Union County Emergency Management's Facebook page for updated information.

"We're also asking everyone — this includes residents — to stay out of the flooded areas," Westcott said. "A lot of these flooded areas are very dangerous at this time."

The flooding resulted from 10 to 15 inches of rain that fell from Thursday to Saturday in the hardest-hit area of southeast South Dakota, northwest Iowa and southwest Minnesota, with totals exceeding 17 inches in some locations. Twenty-one of South Dakota's 66 counties experienced flooding, and the National Weather Service reported Monday that June 20-21 was the wettest two-day period ever recorded in Sioux Falls (6.49 inches) and Mitchell (7.7 inches).

Noem said Sunday that at least one person had died as a result of the flooding, but she declined to provide further details on the death. The state Department of Public Safety separately reported that an 87-year-old man died Saturday near Harrisburg when he accidentally backed a utility terrain vehicle over a washed-out road section. The department confirmed Monday that the 87-year-old man's death was the one Noem was referencing.

The heavy rainfall filled rivers and creeks that run south and east to the Missouri River in the southeast corner of the state, putting McCook Lake, North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes in the crosshairs of the collected floodwater. Authorities issued a voluntary evacuation order for the Dakota Dunes area Sunday.

The road in front of Morgan Speichinger's McCook Lake home was washed away overnight. Her family's house is flooded. Some of her neighbors' homes are almost entirely submerged, and another is split in half.

Speichinger evacuated with her husband, two toddlers and dogs before the water reached her home, alerting neighbors to evacuate as well.

"There was nobody telling people that water was in our backyards," Speichinger said. "Within 30 minutes of us seeing the water and leaving, there was water in our basement."

Beyond the damage at McCook Lake, Westcott, the local emergency manager, said some damage in other areas was prevented.

"What occurred yesterday was a result of a mitigation effort," Westcott said Monday morning. "Mitigation is designed to lessen the effects of flooding in our area, and also lessen the effects on critical infrastructure. If we did not take the mitigation effects that we took yesterday, much of North Sioux City would be under water."

But that diverted water went straight into McCook Lake and into Speichinger's backyard, she said. Her house was delisted from the flood zone a few years ago after officials reviewed and updated a flood map, so she doesn't have flood insurance. She's worried that the actions of Gov. Kristi Noem and other authorities — or lack thereof — have cost her family their home and that they won't find an acceptable replacement.

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"I'm pretty mad at Kristi, because she makes it sound like they did a great thing, but in reality it hurt a huge part of our community," Speichinger said. "They said they had this plan set in place since at least the previous flood. I'm angry that they saved the Dunes and the business district but not us."

Lohry said that his association attempted to have city officials review the diversion plan in 2014, but lamented that they didn't "push hard enough" and that their concerns "fell on deaf ears." Officials should review the plan now, he said.

Scott Vetos' lakeside house hadn't flooded yet Monday morning, but his pontoon and lift were on the other side of the lake. While the state did build a levee, it wasn't fast enough to help McCook Lake residents, he said.

"This was intentional. This is basically a triage thing," Vetos said. "To us, living on the lake, we're not happy about the 'Let's flood McCook Lake and save Sioux City' move."

Lohry estimates that once the water stops flowing into McCook Lake, the water level will drop about an inch per day. He said it'll take months for the lake's residents to return to normal.

Beyond the damage around McCook Lake, Noem said Monday that a BNSF Railway bridge on the Big Sioux River had been destroyed by the flooding.

Noem encouraged everyone affected by floods to document their damages and share the information with their insurance provider and local emergency manager. She said that information will help the state prepare its application for aid to the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson attended the Monday press briefing and said he and the state's two U.S. senators will press hard for federal support.

"Having seen some of the damage, having a sense of how high these waters are, I would be surprised if there will not be a robust federal assistance when we talk about recovery," Johnson said.

Some Missouri River tributaries — including the James and Vermillion rivers — were still rising Monday, with crests not expected until later this week. State Geologist Tim Cowman said the varying pace of crests on those rivers should help prevent further damage in the McCook Lake, North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes area.

"It will take a while for that water to get down here," Cowman said. "Our feeling is that the Big Sioux will obviously be past its crest and will have dropped enough that we'll be seeing drops in the Missouri by the time those pulses from the James and the Vermillion get here. So I don't anticipate that the Missouri River later in this week would get any higher than it is today, and actually would be lower than it is today."

Noem welcomed those projections but cautioned against complacency.

"As you can tell, clearly, things change quickly."

The state Department of Transportation, meanwhile, said the I-29 closure was extended Monday morning between exits 2 and 26. A lengthy detour has been established with maps available on sd511.org.

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

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

For both sides, abortion policy two years after Dobbs decision hinges on November

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JUNE 24, 2024 4:33 PM

WASHINGTON — Exactly two years after the U.S. Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion, the battles rage among both advocates and lawmakers over the future of reproductive rights at the state and federal levels.

Anti-abortion groups that have achieved considerable success in deep-red parts of the country are working to sway voters away from approving ballot questions in more than a dozen states this November that

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could bolster protections for abortion. Several will be decided in states that will have an outsized role in determining control of Congress and the White House.

Abortion opponents are also preparing a game plan to implement if former President Donald Trump regains the Oval Office, a prospect that could lead to sweeping executive actions on abortion access as well as at least one more conservative Supreme Court justice.

Reproductive rights organizations are honing in on the numerous ballot questions as a crucial way to remove decisions from the hands of lawmakers, especially in purple or conservative-leaning states.

Abortion rights supporters are also trying to shore up support for Democrats in key races for the U.S. House and Senate as well as hoping to keep President Joe Biden in office for another four years.

\$100 million to be spent by abortion rights advocates

Both sides plan to spend millions to win over voters.

The Center for Reproductive Rights, National Women's Law Center, American Civil Liberties Union and several other organizations announced Monday they're putting at least \$100 million toward building "a long-term federal strategy to codify the right to abortion, including lobbying efforts, grassroots organizing, public education, and comprehensive communication strategies to mobilize support and enact change."

"Anti-abortion lawmakers have already banned or severely restricted abortion in 21 states with devastating consequences, and they won't stop until they can force a nationwide ban on abortion and push care out of reach entirely, even in states that have protected abortion access," they wrote.

Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America and PAC Women Speak Out announced they would dedicate \$92 million to make contact with at least 10 million voters in the swing states of Arizona, Georgia, Montana, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan and Ohio.

SBA President Marjorie Dannenfelser wrote in a statement released Monday that there "is still much work ahead to ensure that every mother and child is supported and protected."

"Meanwhile we are just one election cycle away from having every gain for life ripped away," Dannenfelser wrote. "Joe Biden and the Democrats are hell-bent on banning protections for unborn children, spreading fear and lies, and forcing all-trimester abortion any time for any reason — even when babies can feel pain — as national law."

Democrats have tried repeatedly to enact protections for abortion access, contraception and in vitro fertilization in Congress — both when they had unified control of government following the fall of Roe in 2022 in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization*, and during divided government.

None of Democrats' bills have garnered the support needed to move past the Senate's 60-vote legislative filibuster.

In addition to calling on Congress to restore the protections that existed under Roe, the Biden administration is attempting to defend abortion and other reproductive rights through executive actions as well as in front of the Supreme Court.

Abortion pill, emergency care

Earlier this year, Solicitor General Elizabeth Prelogar argued two cases on abortion access.

The first case, brought by four anti-abortion medical organizations and four anti-abortion doctors, addressed access to mifepristone, one of two pharmaceuticals used in medication abortions.

The justices unanimously ruled earlier this month that the groups didn't have standing to bring the case in the first place, though they didn't address any other aspects of the case.

The second case, yet undecided, has to do with when doctors can provide abortions as emergency medical care under the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act or EMTALA.

Assistant to the President and Director of the Gender Policy Council Jennifer Klein said on a call with reporters Monday that there's not much the Biden administration will be able to do if the justices side with Idaho in the case.

"If the court rejects our current interpretation, our options on emergency medical care are likely to be

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limited," Klein said.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra in July 2022, shortly after the Dobbs ruling came out, released a letter saying that EMTALA protected health care providers who use abortion as stabilizing care.

The letter stated that "if a physician believes that a pregnant patient presenting at an emergency department, including certain labor and delivery departments, is experiencing an emergency medical condition as defined by EMTALA, and that abortion is the stabilizing treatment necessary to resolve that condition, the physician must provide that treatment."

"And when a state law prohibits abortion and does not include an exception for the life and health of the pregnant person — or draws the exception more narrowly than EMTALA's emergency medical condition definition — that state law is preempted," Becerra wrote.

The Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services recently established a new portal that is supposed to make it easier for people to file complaints under EMTALA if they're denied an emergency abortion.

Comstock Act repeal

Klein also said on the call the White House will likely support a bill introduced last week in Congress to repeal sections of the Comstock Act, an 1873 anti-obscenity law, that could be used to bar the mailing of medication abortion during a future GOP administration.

"We support all actions by Democrats in Congress to protect reproductive freedom, including this one," Klein said, after noting the interagency process for determining whether the Biden administration will support the bill was still ongoing.

The legislation, however, is unlikely to pass in a Congress with a Republican-controlled House and a Democratic majority in the Senate. And divided government appears likely to continue during the next four years, regardless of which presidential candidate wins in November.

Ballot questions in states

Outside of court cases and executive actions, ballot referendums are shaping up to be the more fruitful battleground for those supportive of abortion access, though anti-abortion groups are hoping to make some headway this fall.

Advocates in Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Florida, Iowa, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, Pennsylvania and South Dakota have either secured questions for the November ballot or are in the process of doing so, according to the health news publication KFF.

Residents in California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Vermont and Ohio have all previously decided to bolster or add protection for abortion access in the two years since the Supreme Court ruling was released.

Polling from the Pew Research Center conducted earlier this year shows that 63% of Americans support abortion access being legal in all or most cases, while 36% say it should be illegal in most or all cases.

The polling shows that Democrats and Republicans hold views in both directions, with 41% of Republicans and 85% of Democrats saying it should be legal in most or all cases, while 57% of Republicans and 14% of Democrats say it should be illegal in most or all cases.

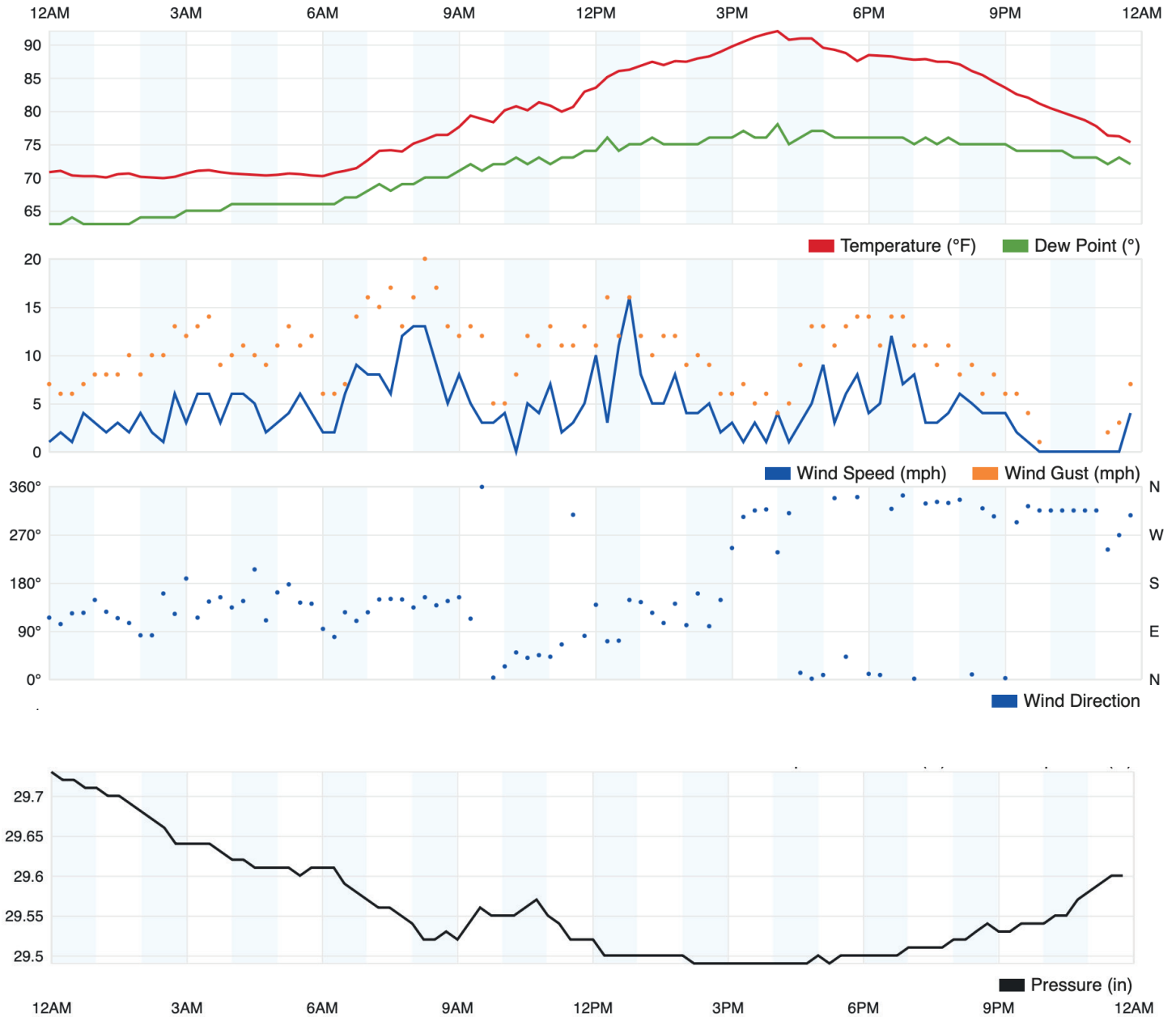
The issue, as well as Biden and Trump's records on abortion, are likely to be a central part of the first presidential debate on Thursday, just three days after the two-year anniversary of the Dobbs ruling.

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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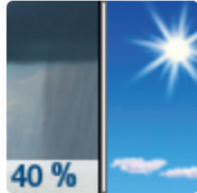
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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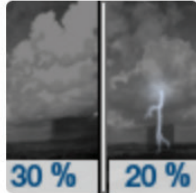
Today



High: 89 °F

Chance Showers then Sunny

Tonight



Low: 58 °F

Chance Showers then Slight Chance T-storms

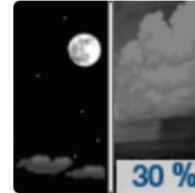
Wednesday



High: 80 °F

Sunny

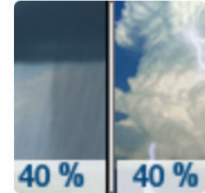
Wednesday Night



Low: 58 °F

Mostly Clear then Chance Showers

Thursday



High: 80 °F

Chance Showers then Chance T-storms and Breezy



Low Chances For Moisture Today/Tonight

June 25, 2024
4:16 AM

Better Chances For Latter Half Of The Week

Key Messages

- Multiple systems moving across the region next several days
- Generally speaking - low risk for severe weather
 - Isolated severe storms today/tonight
- Look for a steady 'cooldown'
 - Hottest temperatures today (highs in the mid/upper 80s)
 - Near-normal Wed-Friday (highs around 80)
 - Much cooler for the weekend

Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

	6/25 Tue				6/26 Wed				6/27 Thu				6/28 Fri																
	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm								
Aberdeen	25	5	5	10	20	20	5	5	0	0	0	0	5	5	30	30	45	45	30	30	50	50	70	70	15	15	10	10	10
Britton	20	5	5	10	25	25	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	40	40	35	35	50	50	75	75	25	25	15	15	10
Brookings	20	15	5	5	5	15	20	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	20	20	50	50	45	45	40	40	60	60	25	25	15	15	10
Chamberlain	15	5	5	5	15	10	5	5	0	0	5	5	15	15	55	55	50	50	20	20	30	30	15	15	5	5	0	0	15
Clark	35	10	5	5	10	25	15	10	0	0	0	0	5	5	25	25	55	55	40	40	50	50	65	65	20	20	15	15	10
Eagle Butte	25	5	10	20	20	10	0	0	0	0	5	5	30	30	60	60	35	35	20	20	50	50	25	25	10	10	5	5	20
Ellendale	15	5	0	20	20	20	10	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	25	25	40	40	35	35	55	55	75	75	20	20	15	15	10
Eureka	15	5	5	20	25	20	5	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	45	45	45	45	20	20	65	65	75	75	15	15	10	10	15
Gettysburg	25	5	5	10	20	15	5	0	5	5	0	0	15	15	60	60	50	50	20	20	55	55	45	45	15	15	5	5	15
Huron	25	15	5	5	5	10	10	5	0	0	0	0	5	5	35	35	55	55	35	35	50	50	50	50	10	10	10	10	10
Kennebec	20	10	5	10	15	10	5	5	5	5	0	0	20	20	60	60	45	45	15	15	30	30	15	15	5	5	5	5	20
McIntosh	5	5	15	20	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	30	30	55	55	40	40	30	30	75	75	40	40	15	15	15	15	20
Milbank	15	5	5	5	5	25	20	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	40	40	45	45	40	40	70	70	35	35	20	20	10
Miller	30	10	5	10	10	15	10	5	5	5	0	0	10	10	50	50	60	60	25	25	50	50	35	35	10	10	5	5	15
Mobridge	10	5	10	20	20	10	5	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	50	50	35	35	15	15	65	65	45	45	10	10	5	5	20
Murdo	25	10	10	15	15	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	25	25	65	65	35	35	15	15	30	30	15	15	5	5	5	5	25
Pierre	25	10	10	10	15	10	5	5	0	0	5	5	15	15	60	60	35	35	15	15	35	35	25	25	5	5	5	5	15
Redfield	35	10	5	5	10	20	15	10	0	0	0	0	5	5	40	40	55	55	30	30	55	55	60	60	15	15	10	10	10
Sisseton	10	5	5	5	20	25	15	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	10	10	35	35	40	40	45	45	75	75	30	30	15	15	10
Watertown	30	10	5	10	5	25	20	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	15	15	50	50	45	45	45	45	65	65	25	25	20	20	10
Webster	20	10	5	5	15	25	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	20	20	50	50	45	45	45	45	75	75	25	25	15	15	10
Wheaton	0	5	0	5	20	20	15	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	25	25	35	35	40	40	75	75	35	35	20	20	15



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

For the rest of the week, look for off and on chances for moisture, with the best chances coming later in the week. Severe weather threats should be conditional/marginal and widespread severe weather looks unlikely

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Severe Weather Threat Overview

June 25, 2024

4:36 AM

Today/Tonight

Timing/Location

Look for a rather random coverage of storms that could occasionally become severe throughout the day today and even into the overnight hours.

Primary Threats for the **Dark Green** areas

Tornado Potential

Very Low Low Medium High

Max Hail Size

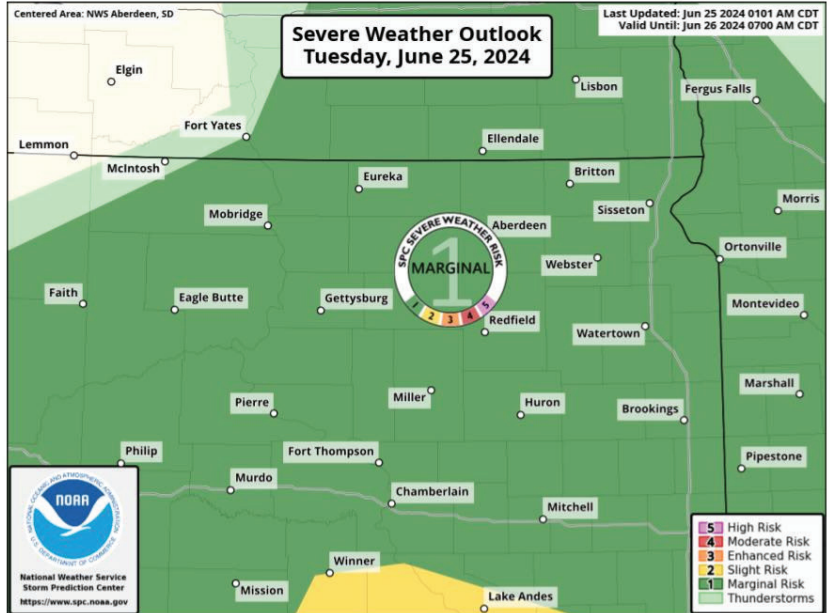
Dimes **Quarters** Golfball Baseball

Max Wind Speed

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

Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low Low Medium High



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

While organized severe weather is not expected, we still cant rule out an isolated severe storm or two today/tonight. Hail to 1" and wind gusts up around 60mph are probably the most we would see

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 92 °F at 4:02 PM

Low Temp: 70 °F at 2:24 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 8:14 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1936

Record Low: 41 in 2017

Average High: 83

Average Low: 58

Average Precip in June.: 3.10

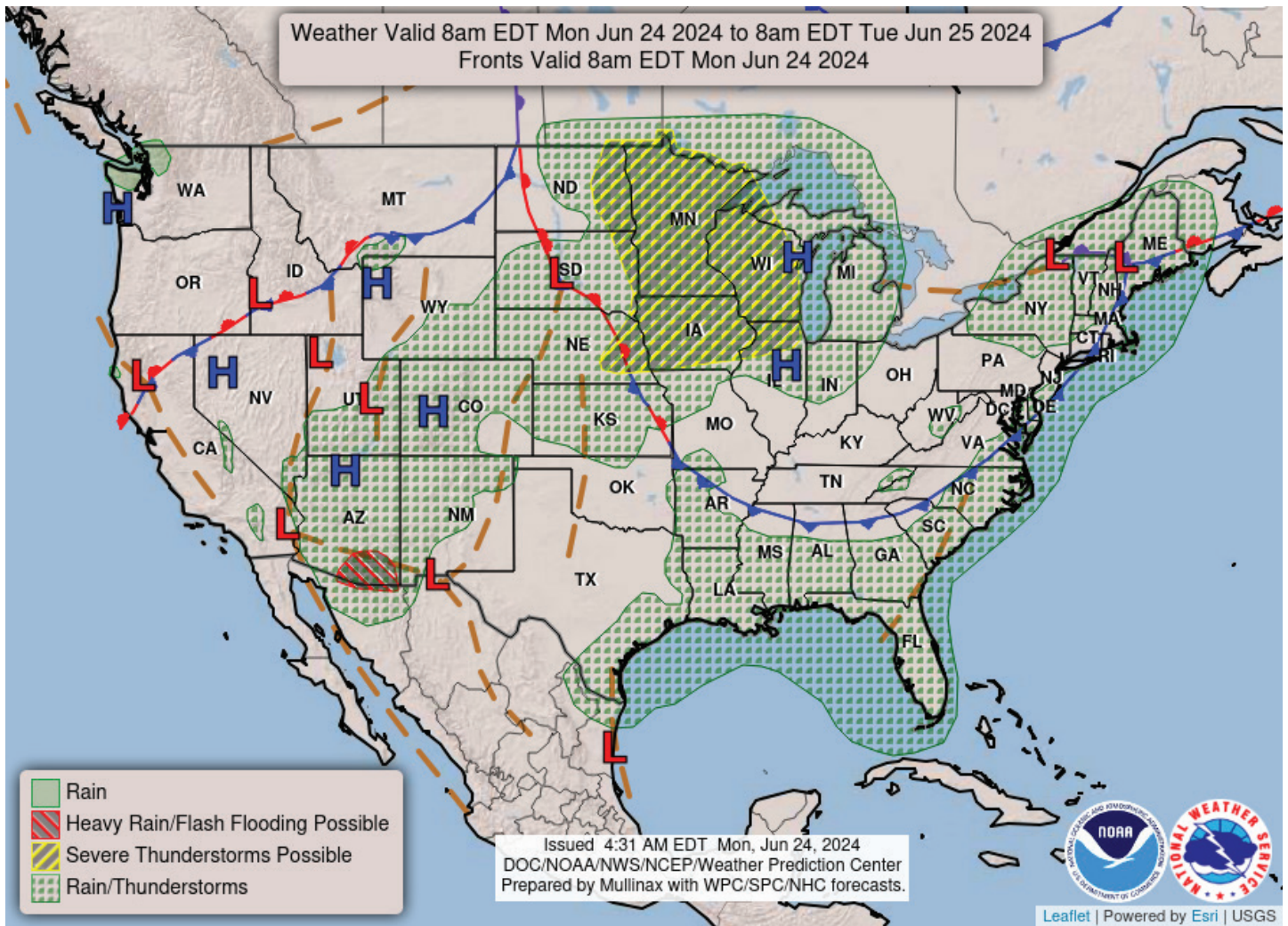
Precip to date in June: 2.73

Average Precip to date: 10.35

Precip Year to Date: 9.80

Sunset Tonight: 9:26:55 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:43:58 am



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Today in Weather History

June 25, 1914: An estimated F2 tornado moved east from 6 miles southeast of Isabel in Dewey County. Three small homes and two barns were destroyed. Twelve tons of hay was said to have vanished.

June 25, 1969: On the northeast side of Groton, an F2 to near F3 tornado destroyed a large grain elevator and uprooted huge trees. Four people were hospitalized. Estimated property damage was a quarter million dollars. Also, locally heavy rains caused flash flooding in Sully and Hughes Counties. A bridge near Harrold was washed out. Some rainfall amounts include; 5.34 inches at 23N of Highmore; 4.24 at 2N of Onaka; 4.14 at 12SSW of Harrold; 3.90 at 1NW of Faulkton; and 3.73 inches at Ipswich. Unofficial reports of 6 inches fell in and around Harrold.

1749 - A general fast was called on account of drought in Massachusetts. It was the year of the famous dry spring in which fields and villages burned. (David Ludlum)

1925 - The mercury hit 101 degrees at Portland, OR, their earliest 100 degree reading of record. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1953 - The temperature at Anchorage soared to 86 degrees, their hottest reading of record. (The Weather Channel)

1957: Hurricane Audrey moved northward, slowly strengthening until the 26th. At that time, a strong upper-level trough led to its acceleration and the hurricane deepened rapidly on its final approach to the Texas/Louisiana border. Audrey became the strongest hurricane on record for June upon landfall, as it reached category four strength. Its acceleration was unanticipated, and despite hurricane warnings in place, 418 people perished in the storm, mainly across southwest Louisiana.

1967: Three, F3 tornadoes crossed the Netherlands on this day. The first tornado touched down at 4:17 PM in Oostmalle. This storm destroyed the church and the center of the village. More than half of the 900 homes in the community were damaged with 135 completely gone. The second tornado touched down near Ulicoten and tracked northward through woodlands area. This storm killed two people at a camping site near Chaam, Netherlands. The third tornado destroyed 50 houses in Tricht, killing five and injuring 32 others.

1987 - Afternoon highs of 97 degrees at Miami, FL, 107 degrees at Medford, OR, and 111 degrees at Redding CA were new records for the date. It was the third of six straight days of record heat for Miami. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 70 mph at Austin, and gusts to 75 mph at Tulsa OK. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Fifty-two cities in the central and eastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Highs of 100 degrees at Erie, PA, and 104 degrees at Cleveland OH established all-time records for those two locations. Highs of 101 degrees at Flint, MI, 105 degrees at Chicago, IL, and 106 degrees at Fort Wayne, IN, equalled all-time records. Thunderstorms in Idaho produced wind gusts to 100 mph west of Bliss and north of Crouch, injuring 29 persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Tropical depression Allison, the remnants of what was earlier Cosme (a hurricane over the Pacific Ocean which dissipated as it crossed northern Mexico), began to spread heavy rain into southeast Texas and southwest Louisiana. (The National Weather Summary)

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

ALWAYS ROOM FOR MORE

Whenever I hear the word "gain," I think it is related to "weight," especially my weight. There are very few mornings that I do not step on the scale to get my "daily report" on what I ate yesterday. Most nutritionists do not recommend such a program. But, my hope to see the arrow pointing downward remains steadfast.

A gain or increase can be good or bad, exciting or depressing, encouraging or discouraging, depending on what the gain refers to. If we depend on the stock market, a gain can be a good thing. But, if we see a gain in our debt, it can be disturbing. Our gains or losses, for the most part, are usually in the physical or material realm.

Solomon speaks of a particular type of "gain" - of being able to achieve some "things" that will last as long as we live. These "gains," these valuable lessons are available and offered to us in Proverbs. Our "attaining" more of God's wisdom, or "life gains" is very important for all Christians because we are constantly challenged to "grow" throughout Scripture, and Proverbs provides this path for us if we want to grow.

The word used for "wisdom" in this verse also means skillfulness - applying knowledge that comes from God to our lives every day. If we do so, we will "do the right things the right way."

When we go one step further, we come to the fact that it is possible to develop decision-making skills that are God-honoring and enable us to establish life-principals that will bring us success. God's proverbs can guide us through life, help us in our relationships with others, lead to good practices in business, enrich our homes, and bless God and others.

Prayer: Lord, You've left us "no excuses" on how we are to live life if we are Christians. Thanks for the directions on how to live a successful life! Now, give us courage! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Today's Bible Verse: For gaining wisdom and instruction; for understanding words of insight. Proverbs 1:2



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: 06.21.24

3 18 27 40 44 19

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$97,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 23 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.24.24

6 18 22 25 35 1

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$3,765,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 38 Mins 18 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.24.24

20 26 27 29 33 14

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 53 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.22.24

15 20 25 27 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 53 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.24.24

1 31 33 54 60 26

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 22 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

06.24.24

5 6 36 53 69 8

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$95,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 22 Mins 17 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

More rain possible in deluged Midwest as flooding kills 2, causes water to surge around dam

By MARGERY A. BECK, HANNAH FINGERHUT and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

NORTH SIOUX CITY, S.D. (AP) — More storms are possible in parts of the deluged Midwest, where flooding after days of heavy rains has killed at least two people, sent a river surging around a dam and forced evacuations and rescues.

Severe storms were forecast for Tuesday afternoon and evening with large hail, damaging winds and even a brief tornado or two in parts of western Iowa and eastern Nebraska, according to the National Weather Service. Showers and storms are also possible in parts of South Dakota and Minnesota, the agency said.

Flooding in those states has also come during a vast and stubborn heat wave. Some communities hit by flooding were under an excessive heat warning Monday with temperatures approaching 100 degrees Fahrenheit (38 Celsius). Dangerous hot, muggy weather was expected again Tuesday around the Omaha area.

More than 3 million people live in areas touched by flooding, from Omaha, Nebraska, to St. Paul, Minnesota. Storms dumped huge amounts of rain from Thursday through Saturday, with as much as 18 inches (46 centimeters) falling south of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, according to the National Weather Service.

Places that didn't get as much rain had to contend with the extra water moving downstream. Many streams, especially with additional rainfall, may not crest until later this week as the floodwaters slowly drain down a web of rivers to the Missouri and Mississippi. The Missouri will crest at Omaha on Thursday, said Kevin Low, a weather service hydrologist.

On Saturday, an Illinois man died while trying to drive around a barricade in Spencer, Iowa, Sioux City's KTIV-TV reported Monday. The Little Sioux River swept his truck away, the Clay County Sheriff's Office said. Officials recovered his body Monday.

At least one person died in South Dakota, Gov. Kristi Noem said without providing details.

"I've never had to evacuate my house," Hank Howley, a 71-year-old North Sioux City, South Dakota, resident said as she joined others on a levee of the swollen Big Sioux River, where a railroad bridge collapsed a day earlier. She did not have to evacuate in recent days either, but said: "We're on the highest spot in town. But what good is that when the rest of the town is flooded? It makes me nervous."

The bridge connected North Sioux City, South Dakota, with Sioux City, Iowa, and fell into the Big Sioux River around 11 p.m. Sunday, officials said. Images on local media showed a large span of the steel bridge partially underwater as floodwaters rushed over it.

There were no reports of injuries from the collapse. The bridge's owner, BNSF Railway, had stopped operating it as a precaution during the flooding, spokesperson Kendall Sloan said. The railroad said the bridge was used by only a few trains per day and did not expect rerouting to have a significant impact.

The Big Sioux River stabilized Monday morning at around 45 feet, over 7 feet higher than the previous record, Sioux City Fire Marshal Mark Aesoph said.

In North Sioux City, the South Dakota Department of Transportation built a berm Sunday night across Interstate 29 to stem flooding, temporarily blocking the major route. In other areas where the interstate remained open, water crept toward the road. Howley, who has lived there for 33 years, said she has a growing concern over more frequent severe flooding around I-29.

The flooding has damaged roads and bridges, closed or destroyed businesses, required hospitals and nursing homes to evacuate, and left cities without power or safe drinking water, the governors of Iowa and South Dakota said.

"I just keep thinking about all this stuff I've lost and maybe the little things I could recover that we put up high," said Aiden Engelkes in the northwestern Iowa community of Spencer, which imposed curfews during flooding that surpassed a record set in 1953.

Over the weekend, teams from Iowa's natural resources department evacuated families with children and

a person using a wheelchair from flooded homes, director Kayla Lyon told reporters. Gov. Kim Reynolds said the department conducted 250 water rescues on Saturday.

"At one point we had 22 conservation officers doing water rescues, navigating some pretty nasty current," Lyon said.

Outside Mankato, Minnesota, the local sheriff's office said there was a "partial failure" of the western support structure for the Rapidan Dam on the Blue Earth River after the dam became plugged with debris. Flowing water eroded the western bank.

Eric Weller, emergency management director for the Blue Earth County sheriff, said the bank would likely erode more, but he didn't expect the concrete dam itself to fail. The two homes downstream were evacuated.

A 2019 Associated Press investigation into dams across the country found that the Rapidan Dam was in fair condition and there likely would be loss of property if it failed. A pair of 2021 studies said repairs would cost upwards of \$15 million, and removal more than \$80 million.

In Spencer, Engelkes still wasn't able Monday to get back into his apartment on the first floor of a building close to the Des Moines River, nor could he go to work at a flooded chicken hatchery.

He spent more than seven hours Saturday in a friend's fourth-floor apartment, waiting to be rescued by a boat, his Chevy SUV under roiling waters. Rescuers broke a window in a second-floor stairwell, and almost 70 people were taken away by boat in small groups.

Engelkes and his girlfriend left with a bag of clothes, three cats in a carrier, and a kitten his girlfriend carried in her shirt. Their apartment had about 4 feet (1.2 meters) of water. They're now staying with his mother on higher ground.

About 65 miles (105 kilometers) west of Spencer, in Rock Valley, Deb Kempema lost her home decor store, First Impressions, after a river levee broke.

It was "7,000 square feet of very pretty, pretty things. And it's all gone," she told KELO-TV.

President Joe Biden has been briefed by his homeland security team about the Iowa flooding, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency had personnel on the ground there, the White House said.

A potential Trump VP pick backs a controversial CO2 pipeline favored by the Biden White House

By RICHARD LARDNER and JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum is one of Donald Trump's most visible and vocal backers, sprinting around the country to drum up support for the former president's comeback bid while auditioning to be his running mate.

Far from the glare of the campaign trail, however, Burgum is wrestling with a mammoth carbon dioxide pipeline project in his home state. The \$5.5 billion venture has split North Dakota and left him straddling an awkward political divide as Trump and President Joe Biden offer voters starkly different visions about how to deal with climate change.

A Republican little known outside North Dakota, Burgum is a serious contender to be Trump's vice-presidential choice. The two-term governor has stood out in the narrowing field of choices due to his executive experience and business savvy. And Burgum has close ties to deep-pocketed energy industry CEOs whose money Trump wants to help bankroll his third run for the White House.

Burgum is championing the pipeline project, which would gather planet-warming CO2 from ethanol plants across the Midwest and deposit the gas a mile underground. The pipeline aligns with Biden's push to tackle global climate change, a position that could put him at odds with Trump.

In backing the pipeline, Burgum is navigating the tricky issue of land ownership in deep-red North Dakota and the politics of climate change inside the GOP.

While Burgum has outlined plans to make North Dakota carbon neutral by 2030, he's steered clear of describing the pipeline or other carbon capture initiatives as environmentally friendly. Instead, he touts them as a lucrative business opportunity for North Dakota that might ultimately assist the fossil fuel industry.

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"This has nothing to do with climate change," Burgum said in early March on a North Dakota radio program. "This has to do with markets."

The pipelineThe CO2 pipeline, known as the Midwest Carbon Express, is financed by hundreds of investors and will be built by Summit Carbon Solutions of Ames, Iowa. The 2,500-mile pipeline route snakes through Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska and South Dakota before ending in west central North Dakota, where up to 18 million metric tons of CO2 would be entombed each year in underground rock formations.

The North Dakota Industrial Commission, which Burgum chairs, is expected to decide in the coming months whether to approve Summit's application for a permit to store all the CO2 it collects. Regulators in nearby states are also weighing approval of the pipeline.

As part of Biden's investment in combating climate change, companies may receive \$85 from the federal government for every metric ton of CO2 collected from industrial facilities and permanently sequestered. They can also get \$60 for each ton stored and later used to produce more oil, a process that involves injecting carbon dioxide into oilfields to keep them productive.

Summit stands to receive as much as \$1.5 billion annually from the tax credits. The company said it has no plans to use CO2 in oil drilling, which is known as enhanced oil recovery, or EOR. But a carbon dioxide storage permit application drafted by Summit appears to leave open the potential for the CO2 to be used for that purpose.

"Our business model is for 100% sequestration," the company said in an emailed response to questions. "No customers have ever approached us to move their CO2 for EOR."

For several environmental and public interest groups, providing tax credits for more climate-polluting oil is a handout to oil drillers that upends the goal of weaning corporations and consumers off fossil fuels.

"It's just not the right answer," said Brett Hartl, government affairs director at the nonprofit Center for Biological Diversity. "You're incentivizing the extension of the use of fossil fuels for many more years or decades to come."

Burgum's office declined a request to interview the governor for this story. He has hailed his state's underground CO2 storage capacity as a "geologic jackpot." North Dakota, according to Burgum, has the capacity to store 250 billion tons of carbon dioxide underground.

That message has been amplified by North Dakota's mineral resources department, which has estimated CO2 can help extract billions more barrels of oil from the rich Bakken shale formation. The Bakken is a 200,000-square-mile deposit that spans North Dakota, Montana and southern Canada.

Pipeline blowbackIn North Dakota, the blowback to the Summit project has been intense, with Burgum caught in the crossfire.

There are fears a pipeline rupture would unleash a lethal cloud of CO2. In 2020, a pipeline carrying compressed carbon dioxide ruptured in Satartia, Mississippi. At least 45 people required hospital treatment and 200 more had to be evacuated from the area, according to the federal agency that oversees pipeline safety.

Summit said the CO2 line in Mississippi may have contained high amounts of hydrogen sulfide, a toxic gas. Its system will transport nearly pure carbon dioxide, the company said, and any hydrogen sulfide or other elements in the stream "will not be considered impactful."

Landowners also worry their property values will plummet if the pipeline passes under their property. And they're outraged over what they allege are hardball tactics employed by Summit to secure easements for the project.

Burgum has largely avoided the dicey subject of eminent domain. If landowners don't want the pipeline on their property, he's said, the route can be shifted, and someone else can get the "big check."

Julia Stramer, whose family owns cropland in Emmons County and opposes the pipeline, said the amount of money Summit offered her for a 99-year easement was insulting.

"I have informed Gov. Burgum that we have not received an offer of 'the big check,'" she told the North Dakota's Public Service Commission earlier this month.

Stramer scoffed at the safety measures Summit says it is taking, telling the commission the pipeline is to be buried only four feet deep.

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"We bury people deeper than that," Stramer said.

Kurt Swenson and his family own or have an interest in 1,750 acres at or near the proposed CO2 storage site. At a public hearing earlier this month on Summit's storage permit application, Swenson said he had a warning for anyone who attempts to take his land without his consent.

"It seems like everybody wants what isn't theirs," Swenson said. "You're going to end up taking it from my cold, dead hands. And you're going to see how that works out for you."

Summit said it has signed easement deals with landowners along 82% of the pipeline's route in North Dakota and obtained 92% of the lease agreements needed at the storage site. The company added that the project also is supported by state lawmakers and emergency managers.

Concerns over Summit's project in North Dakota's second most populous county, Burleigh, led the county commission to approve an ordinance restricting the pipeline from running too close to residential areas, churches and schools.

"I have not gotten one single contact from anybody that's not affiliated with Summit asking me to support this pipeline," said Brian Bitner, the Burleigh County Commission chairman. "Every contact has asked me to oppose it."

Gaylen Dewing, who has worked as a farmer and rancher near Bismarck for more than 50 years, criticized Burgum for what he sees as the governor's tilt to the left. Burgum's embrace of carbon neutrality has put the governor in cahoots with the "Green New Deal people," he said.

"Although he professes to be a conservative, he is anything but when it comes to environmental issues," Dewing said.

Not a climate warrior When he's out stumping for Trump, Burgum doesn't sound at all like a climate warrior.

Speaking at the North Carolina Republican Party Convention last month, Burgum accused the Biden administration of trying to shut down the oil and gas industries and declared that Trump would reverse the federal rules and mandates that he said are stifling energy companies.

Trump has long criticized federal and state efforts to regulate greenhouse gas emissions and has been backed by the oil and gas industry in his three presidential bids. The former president, who in the past called global warming a "hoax," claims on his campaign website that Biden has surrendered to the "crazed climate crusaders."

Oil and gas interests have already donated nearly \$8 million to Trump's 2024 presidential campaign, according to the political money website Open Secrets.

Burgum, with his close ties to his state's dominant industry, is the type of running mate who could help boost such donations.

If Burgum is not selected to be the GOP's vice-presidential nominee and does not take a job in a second Trump administration, he can always return to North Dakota to finish out his last term, with key decisions looming for the pipeline.

Midwestern flooding collapses a bridge, forces evacuations and kills at least 2

By MARGERY A. BECK, HANNAH FINGERHUT and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

NORTH SIOUX CITY, S.D. (AP) — Flooding in the Midwestern U.S. killed at least two, collapsed a railroad bridge and sent water surging around a dam Monday after days of heavy rains that have forced hundreds of people to evacuate or be rescued from rising waters.

An Illinois man died Saturday while trying to go around a barricade in Spencer, Iowa, Sioux City's KTIV-TV reported Monday.

The Little Sioux River swept his truck away, according to a news release from the Clay County Sheriff's Office provided to the station. Officials found the vehicle in the treeline but weren't able to recover his body until Monday because of dangerous conditions.

At least one person died in South Dakota, Gov. Kristi Noem has said without providing details.

The flooding brought added misery to parts of Iowa, Nebraska, South Dakota and Minnesota during a

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vast and stubborn heat wave. In some communities hit by flooding, the temperature Monday afternoon approached 100 degrees Fahrenheit (37.7 Celsius).

More than 3 million people live in areas touched by flooding, from Omaha, Nebraska, to St. Paul, Minnesota. Storms dumped huge amounts of rain from Thursday through Saturday, with as much as 18 inches (46 centimeters) falling south of Sioux Falls, South Dakota, according to the National Weather Service.

Places that didn't get as much rain had to contend with the extra water moving downstream. More rain is forecast, and many streams may not crest until later this week as the floodwaters slowly drain down a web of rivers to the Missouri and Mississippi. The Missouri will crest at Omaha on Thursday, said Kevin Low, a weather service hydrologist.

Flooding in the Omaha area Monday was causing Amtrak to use buses to transport passengers temporarily, according to an Amtrak spokesperson.

"I've never had to evacuate my house," Hank Howley, a 71-year-old North Sioux City, South Dakota, resident said as she joined others on a levee of the swollen Big Sioux River, where the railroad bridge collapsed a day earlier. She did not have to evacuate in recent days either, but said: "We're on the highest spot in town. But what good is that when the rest of the town is flooded? It makes me nervous."

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In North Sioux City, the South Dakota Department of Transportation built a berm Sunday night across Interstate 29 to stem flooding, temporarily blocking the major route. In other areas where the interstate remained open, water crept toward the road. Howley, who has lived there for 33 years, said she has a growing concern over more frequent severe flooding around I-29.

The flooding has, over the course of days, damaged roads and bridges, shuttered or destroyed businesses, required hospitals and nursing homes to evacuate, and left cities without power or safe drinking water, the governors of Iowa and South Dakota said.

"I just keep thinking about all this stuff I've lost and maybe the little things I could recover that we put up high," said Aiden Engelkes in the northwestern Iowa community of Spencer, which imposed curfews during flooding that surpassed a record set in 1953. "And then I think about where my friends are, because their stuff is also gone."

Over the weekend, teams from Iowa's natural resources department evacuated families with children and a person using a wheelchair from flooded homes, director Kayla Lyon told reporters. Gov. Kim Reynolds said the department conducted 250 water rescues on Saturday.

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In Spencer, Engelkes still wasn't able Monday to get back into his apartment on the first floor of a build-

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ing close to the Des Moines River, nor could he go to work at a flooded chicken hatchery.

He spent more than seven hours Saturday in a friend's fourth-floor apartment, waiting to be rescued by a boat, his 2013 Chevy SUV under roiling waters except for a bit of its antenna. Rescuers broke a window in a second-floor stairwell, and almost 70 people crawled out, volunteers ferrying them away by boat in fours and fives.

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It was "7,000 square feet of very pretty, pretty things. And it's all gone," she told KELO-TV.

While power outages were minimal in the affected states Monday afternoon, according to PowerOutage.us, south of Rock Valley, water surrounded the power substation in Correctionville, causing an outage.

President Joe Biden has been briefed by his homeland security team about the Iowa flooding, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency had personnel on the ground there, the White House said.

CBC Tech Certified as Zscaler Authorized Partner for Delivery Services

BEIJING, CHINA - Media OutReach Newswire - 25 June 2024 - CBC Tech, a next-generation technology service provider, enabling SD-WAN, SASE, and cloud networks in China, is proud to announce that it has been formally certified as a Zscaler's Authorized Partner for Delivery Services, and its first in the Greater China region. This latest achievement strengthens the strategic partnership between CBC Tech and Zscaler, with CBC Tech now offering deployment services covering Zscaler Internet Access TM (ZIATM), Zscaler Private Access TM (ZPATM), Zscaler Digital Experience TM (ZDXTM), along with China Premium Access.

With the increasing threat of cyber breaches, it has become crucial for enterprises to have effective cybersecurity measures in place. CBC Tech assembled a team of skilled Zscaler certified Chinese speaking professionals and will offer deployment and professional services for ZIA, ZPA, ZDX, China Premium Access, etc. as a business capability to enable enterprises to efficiently deploy and operate zero trust technologies, in local Chinese support if required.

Since 2022, CBC Tech has become a Zscaler strategic partner for China, for Zscaler's China Premium Access Service, which delivers a superior user experience for Zscaler's customers in the region. CBC Tech's commitment to excellence is reflected in its suite of networking solutions designed to enable Zscaler's Zero Trust Networking feature, guaranteeing high performance and zero congestion for a seamless and secure user experience.

Shu Yee Hoo, Vice President of CBC Tech stated, "This partnership with Zscaler elevates CBC Tech as a provider of comprehensive security solutions, delivery, and support. We are excited to work closely with Zscaler to bring their industry-leading security-as-a-service platform to enterprises in APAC, especially in the Greater China region, empowering them to achieve their Zero Trust goals."

"Completing the Services Authorized journey shows CBC Tech's commitment to provide their customers with the best possible experience around Zscaler's Zero Trust exchange," said Karl Soderlund, SVP, WW Partners and Alliances, at Zscaler. "The Services Authorized program includes a thorough training track to ensure partners are prepared to provide their customers with the very best in services."

Since its inception, CBC Tech has successfully implemented numerous cybersecurity solutions for organizations across various industries. CBC Tech boasts an extensive technical skillset, with over 200 Zscaler certifications held by sales and technical personnel. The company's team of certified experts goes beyond standard service levels, providing customers with the necessary expertise and support to ensure their cybersecurity needs are met.

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What's causing the devastating flooding in the Midwest?

By MICHAEL PHILLIS Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Hundreds of Iowa residents have needed rescue from record-setting flooding that has swamped parts of the state, covering buildings up to their rooftops, shutting down major roads, and disrupting basic services like electricity and drinking water.

Iowa Gov. Kim Reynolds said water in some areas rose above records from 1993, a flood many in the Midwest remember as the worst of their lives. The floods have hit parts of Iowa, South Dakota, Nebraska and Minnesota.

The water was so powerful that it pulled down a train bridge connecting North Sioux City, South Dakota, with Sioux City, Iowa. On the Blue Earth River in Minnesota, water forced its way around the Rapidan Dam and local officials warned of its possible failure.

The water is expected to be at its highest early this week — in some places it has already passed — and then the crest of the river will move south, eventually into the Missouri and Mississippi rivers.

"Businesses are shuttered, main streets have been impacted. Hospitals, nursing homes and other care facilities were evacuated," Reynolds said at a news conference over the weekend, calling the expected damage "staggering."

It's hot, too, making dangerous conditions worse.

A look at why waters are so high in the Midwest:

What is causing the bad flooding? Torrential rains. The hardest hit areas were south of Sioux Falls, South Dakota. The city's airport received more than 7 inches (17.8 centimeters). More than 11 inches (28 centimeters) fell in Rock Rapids, Iowa, a roughly 45-minute drive to the east.

"It has been just round after round through the month. And then recently, we've had a few big rounds," said Joseph Bauers, a meteorologist with AccuWeather.

Hot air in the Northeast has directed the path of storms through the Midwest, according to Shel Winkley, a weather and climate expert with Climate Central, a nonprofit focused on climate science.

"With that big high-pressure system over the East, that kind of helps steer these and slow these systems down specifically to where we've seen the flooding over the past few days," he said.

And the most recent rounds of heavy rain have fallen on wet ground. When soil is wet, it can't absorb as much new moisture, so more of the rain runs into rivers and streams.

Flooding is a big change for a part of the country that has endured drought in recent years. Rain started to hit the region in late April and early May, according to National Weather Service hydrologist Jeff Zogg.

Then the really heavy storms came Friday and Saturday.

"There were some cases where rainfall was falling at a rate of over 1 inch in 15 minutes, for example," Zogg said. "And that's because there's just so much moisture in the atmosphere that there is a lot of moisture for the thunderstorms to wring out."

The amount of rain was incredible: Across five states, roughly 16 trillion gallons of water fell since last

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Monday, according to Ryan Maue, a private meteorologist and former chief scientist at the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

What is a crest and why do they matter? A crest is the highest level a river reaches before receding, and they are tracked closely by forecasters. It's essential to know when a crest is expected to hit, how bad it will be and how fast it is traveling down river.

Because recent rains dumped extraordinary amounts of water on the region, rivers rose quickly, and crests are expected soon or have already occurred in some places.

Sioux City Fire Marshal Mark Aesoph told reporters that the Big Sioux River stabilized Monday morning at around 45 feet, over 7 feet higher than the previous record.

"It's just been difficult to predict what's going to happen when levels are this high when we have no history with it," he said.

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem said other rivers, the James and Vermillion, are expected to crest Wednesday. The flooding is "more spread out" than expected, which is helping lessen flooding in some inhabited areas. It will "bump up" Missouri River levels, but not as much as anticipated, she said at a news conference Monday.

"The later and the lower crest levels gave us some time that we need to upgrade some levees that we needed to get done," Noem said.

While the heaviest rain has been concentrated in northwestern Iowa, parts of northeastern Iowa will see up to an inch on Monday, said Zogg. The rainfall across northern Iowa will take "several days" to make its way through the state. He said the location of the rain was particularly bad for Iowa because it has to drain through the state's entire river system before exiting.

Since all that water eventually drains into the Missouri and Mississippi rivers, Zogg said, flooding is expected in those big rivers, as well.

And there is the possibility for more rain later this week.

"When it comes to the rainfall and river response, location and timing and the amount" will determine how the river responds and whether floods will get worse, he said.

Is this related to climate change? In the Midwest, flooding isn't new. Nor is heavy rain in June. And linking any particular big rainstorm to climate change is difficult, Winkley said.

But, as greenhouse gases warm the planet, the hotter atmosphere can hold more water. That means big rainstorms can pour down even more water, overwhelming sewer systems and flooding downtowns. Plus, bad floods are growing more common, he said.

"The extremes are becoming more extreme," said Winkley.

More Americans are ending up in Russian jails. Prospects for their release are unclear

By DASHA LITVINOVA and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — One was a journalist on a reporting trip. Another was attending a wedding. Yet another was a dual national returning to visit family.

All are U.S. citizens now behind bars in Russia on various charges.

Arrests of Americans in Russia are increasingly common with relations sinking to Cold War lows. Washington accuses Moscow of using U.S. citizens as bargaining chips, but Russia insists they all broke the law.

While high-profile prisoner exchanges have occurred, the prospects of swaps are unclear.

"It seems that since Moscow itself has cut off most of the communication channels and does not know how to restore them properly without losing face, they are trying to use the hostages. ... At least that's what it looks like," said Boris Bondarev, a former Russian diplomat who quit after Moscow invaded Ukraine in 2022.

Who is known to be in Russian custody? EVAN GERSHKOVICH — The 32-year-old Wall Street Journal reporter faces trial Wednesday on espionage charges that he, his employer and the U.S. government deny. He was detained in March 2023 while reporting in the city of Yekaterinburg and accused of spying. Russia

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alleges Gershkovich was “gathering secret information” at the CIA’s behest about a facility that produces and repairs military equipment. It provided no evidence to support the accusations.

PAUL WHELAN — The 54-year-old corporate security executive from Michigan was arrested in 2018 in Moscow where he was attending a friend’s wedding, convicted two years later of espionage, and sentenced to 16 years in prison. He maintains his innocence, saying the charges were fabricated.

TRAVIS LEAKE — The musician was arrested in 2023 on drug charges. An Instagram page describes him as the singer for the band Lovi Noch (Seize the Night). Court officials have said he is a former paratrooper.

MARC FOGEL — The Moscow teacher was sentenced to 14 years in prison, also on drug charges. The Interfax news agency said Fogel taught at the Anglo-American School in Moscow and had worked at the U.S. Embassy. Interfax cited court officials as saying Fogel has admitted guilt.

GORDON BLACK — The 34-year-old staff sergeant stationed at Fort Cavazos, Texas, was convicted June 19 in Vladivostok of stealing and making threats against his girlfriend, and was sentenced to three years and nine months in prison. He had flown to Russia from his U.S. military post in South Korea without authorization and was arrested in May after she accused him of stealing from her, according to U.S. and Russian authorities.

ROBERT WOODLAND — Woodland, a dual national, is on trial in Moscow on drug- trafficking charges. Russian media reported his name matches a U.S. citizen interviewed in 2020 who said he was born in the Perm region in 1991 and adopted by an American couple at age 2. He said he traveled to Russia to find his mother and eventually met her on a TV show. Woodland was charged with trafficking drugs as part of an organized group — punishable by up to 20 years in prison.

ALSU KURMASHEVA — Kurmasheva, a dual U.S.-Russian national, was arrested in 2023 in her hometown of Kazan. The Prague-based editor for the U.S. government-funded Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty’s Tatar-Bashkir service was visiting her ailing mother. She faces multiple charges, including not self-reporting as a “foreign agent” and spreading false information about the Russian military.

KSENIA KHAVANA — Khavana, 33, was arrested in Yekaterinburg in February on treason charges, accused of collecting money for Ukraine’s military. Independent Russian news outlet Mediazona identified her by her maiden name of Karelina, and said she had U.S. citizenship after marrying an American. She returned to Russia from Los Angeles to visit family. The rights group Pervy Otdel said the charges stem from a \$51 donation to a U.S. charity that helps Ukraine.

DAVID BARNES — An engineer from Texas, Barnes was arrested while visiting his sons in Russia, where their mother had taken them. His supporters say the woman made baseless claims of sexual abuse that already had been discredited by Texas investigators but he was convicted in Russia anyway and sentenced to prison.

What’s the process for negotiations?Gershkovich and Whelan have gotten the most attention, with the State Department designating both as wrongfully detained. The designation is applied to only a small subset of Americans jailed by foreign countries.

Those cases go to a special State Department envoy for hostage affairs, who tries to negotiate their release. They must meet certain criteria, including a determination the arrest came solely because the person is a U.S. national or part of an effort to influence U.S. policy or extract concessions from the government.

The U.S. successfully negotiated swaps in 2022 for WNBA star Brittney Griner and Marine veteran Trevor Reed — both designated as wrongfully detained. Moscow got arms dealer Viktor Bout, who was serving a 25-year sentence, and pilot Konstantin Yaroshenko, serving 20 years for cocaine trafficking.

It’s unclear how many Americans are jailed in Russia or if negotiations are in the works for them.

Kurmasheva’s husband, Pavel Butorin, told The Associated Press after her arrest he hoped the U.S. government would use “every avenue and every means available to it” to win her release, including designating her as wrongfully detained.

Is the West holding anyone Russia wants?In December, the State Department said it had made a significant offer for Gershkovich and Whelan but Russia rejected it.

Officials did not give details, although Russia has been said to be seeking Vadim Krasikov, serving a

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life sentence in Germany in 2021 for the killing of Zelimkhan "Tornike" Khangoshvili, a Georgian citizen of Chechen descent who had fought Russian troops in Chechnya and later claimed asylum in Germany.

President Vladimir Putin, asked about releasing Gershkovich, appeared to refer to Krasikov by pointing to a man imprisoned by a U.S. ally for "liquidating a bandit" who had allegedly killed Russian soldiers in Chechnya.

Beyond that, Russia has stayed silent. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov says such swaps "must be carried out in absolute silence."

Historically, when relations are better, "the exchanges seem to be smoother," said Nina Khrushcheva, a professor of international affairs at the New School in New York and the great-granddaughter of Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

She cited prisoner swaps between the USSR and Chile in the 1970s, as well as those with the U.S. and Germany shortly after Mikhail Gorbachev took office in the 1980s involving dissidents Vladimir Bukovsky and Natan Sharansky.

Ultimately, the decision "is only in Putin's hands," Khrushcheva said.

In Gershkovich's case, an exchange might also involve concessions, possibly related to Ukraine, said Sam Greene of the Center for European Policy Analysis.

"Even if the immediate reason to get people around the (negotiating) table is Evan and a prisoner exchange, that allows them to get right up to the line and to say: 'OK, we've got 98% of the deal, but if you really want to get this done, there's this other thing we'd really like to talk about,'" like sanctions or another Ukraine-related issue, he said.

"The Kremlin is perfectly happy to hold onto Evan as long as it possibly can. And so its incentive is to get as much for him as possible," Greene said.

Top Cats: Panthers win their 1st Stanley Cup, top Oilers 2-1 in Game 7

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

SUNRISE, Fla. (AP) — Aleksander Barkov put his hands at either end of the Stanley Cup and began skating away to start the celebration that the Florida Panthers have wanted forever.

And as he began to hoist hockey's chalice for the first time, he had one thought.

"It's heavy," he said.

A 37-pound trophy wasn't too much for him. A three-game slide wasn't too much for the Panthers. There was no stumble with the Cup, no collapse with the Cup on the line. The Panthers are champions for the first time, after taking about the hardest path possible to the title.

Sam Reinhart and Carter Verhaeghe scored goals, Sergei Bobrovsky made 23 saves and the Panthers beat the Edmonton Oilers 2-1 on Monday night in Game 7 of the Stanley Cup Final. It was the third title-round appearance in Florida's 30-year history; it was swept in 1996 by Colorado and routed 4-1 by Vegas last season. And that loss last year was what this team needed.

"You have to go through it first," forward Matthew Tkachuk said, "to know what it takes to get it done."

This time, they were on the right side of history — after avoiding what would have been a historic collapse. The Panthers won the first three games of the series, then lost the next three and needed a win on Monday to avoid joining the 1942 Detroit Red Wings as the only teams to lose the final after taking a 3-0 lead in the title round.

"It's not what I thought it would be," Panthers coach Paul Maurice said. "It's so much better."

It wasn't easy. Not even close. But it's done.

Barkov handed the Cup to Bobrovsky and the celebration was on. It took until the very end for the Panthers to deny Connor McDavid his first title, and Edmonton what would have been its first Cup since 1990.

"You want to become a true champion and you want to win," said Bobrovsky, a champion for the first time at 35. "But at the end of the day, you don't do it for the Cups. You do it for the love of the game."

McDavid won the Conn Smythe as MVP of the Stanley Cup playoffs. He didn't come out for the trophy. It's not the one he wanted, anyway. The Cup is what they play for, and it was Florida that hoisted it.

"No player in the world wants to win the Stanley Cup more than him," Oilers teammate Leon Draisaitl

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said of McDavid, who had one of the greatest individual postseasons in NHL history with 42 points. "He does everything right, every single day."

But the Panthers did a little more right on Monday. And that's the difference.

"It's not a dream anymore. It's not a dream. It's reality," said Tkachuk, who got traded to Florida two summers ago with this as his goal. "I can't believe it. I can't believe it. ... I can't believe how good these two years have been. So thankful for this group of guys. It's the best place, best guys. It's something really special here with what we have."

Mattias Janmark had the goal for Edmonton and Stuart Skinner stopped 19 shots for the Oilers. The Oilers also couldn't snap Canada's title drought; it's been 1993 and counting since a team based in Canada won the Cup.

Montreal was the last to do so, 30 seasons ago. Since then, there have been seven attempts by teams from Canadian-based cities — Vancouver in 1994 and 2011, Calgary in 2004, the Oilers in 2006, Ottawa in 2007 and the Canadiens in 2021 — to win titles, and all were in vain.

South Florida now has one of everything when it comes to titles from the four major pro sports leagues in the U.S. The Miami Dolphins were champions twice, the then-Florida Marlins were champions twice, the Miami Heat have three titles and now the Panthers have joined the party.

Welcome, Stanley. The Panthers have been waiting. Maurice hoisted the Cup by the bench, closed his eyes tight to control the emotion and let out a yell. General manager Bill Zito didn't bother even trying to not let the yell out. And in the stands, Tkachuk's family — his father, Keith, never won a Cup — reveled in the moment, knowing their surname will soon be on Lord Stanley.

"This is for them," Tkachuk said.

Bobrovsky was as cool as could be, even in the biggest moments. Oilers defenseman Evan Bouchard had a good look from the right circle with about 14 seconds left in the second period; Bobrovsky blocked the shot, and the puck bounced off him and into the air.

No problem. Bobrovsky took his stick and batted the puck away again, more like he was playing morning pickleball at a park than in the biggest game of his life — literally, the last line of defense against the Oilers, and against a piece of history that the Panthers desperately fought to avoid.

Florida led this title series 3-0, then got outscored 18-5 in Games 4, 5 and 6 to waste three chances at winning the Cup. Edmonton was one win away from becoming the second team in NHL history to win the Cup after dropping the first three games; Toronto did it to Detroit in 1942, and no team has pulled off such a comeback since.

Edmonton almost did it. Almost.

"They should have their heads up high," Oilers coach Kris Knoblauch said. "There's lots to be proud of."

The Panthers brought in seven-time Grammy winner Alanis Morissette — she was born in Canada and became a dual U.S. citizen in 2005 — to sing the national anthems. Hardly anybody could hear her; the Oilers fans drowned her out for "O Canada," the Panthers fans did the same for "The Star-Spangled Banner." They had Panthers legend Roberto Luongo bang the ceremonial bass drum after that; he urged fans to "let's go" with an extra word in there that needed to be bleeped a few times.

"We have a great team on our side," said Luongo, whose number was retired by the Panthers and is now part of the team's front office. "And the boys really dug deep."

The pregame was raucous. The stage was set.

And the teams came out absolutely ablaze.

The Panthers got the first goal just 4:27 into the game when Verhaeghe waved his stick at the puck that was fired in from the left side by Evan Rodrigues and got just enough to redirect it past Skinner for a 1-0 lead — the first Florida lead since the end of Game 3.

They waited more than a week to be back on top. They stayed there for just over two minutes.

Janmark got behind the Florida defense and beat Bobrovsky over the right shoulder at 6:44, knotting things right back up and ensuring that this Game 7 of the final — like all 17 of the previous such games — wouldn't end 1-0.

It stayed that way through wild ebbs and flows — the Oilers controlled long stretches, the Panthers would counter, back and forth — until Reinhart scored late in the second to put Florida up 2-1. It capped a crazy sequence, one where Florida defenseman Dmitry Kulikov wound up in the net to help prevent an Edmonton goal seconds before Reinhart beat Skinner. The goal was Reinhart's 67th of the season, extending his Florida single-season record, and it was up to the Panthers to make it hold up.

"The determination," Maurice said, "was clear."

Florida was an NHL-best 44-0-3 entering Monday when leading after two periods this season. An NHL-best 85-2-6 in that situation in the two seasons under coach Maurice, too.

They slammed the door, one last time. And the Cup was their reward.

"This is the best moment of my life so far," veteran Panthers defenseman Aaron Ekblad said. "Nothing tops it."

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange stops in Bangkok on his way to a US court and later freedom

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — A plane carrying Julian Assange landed Tuesday in Bangkok for refueling, as the WikiLeaks founder was on his way to enter a plea deal with the U.S. government that will free him and resolve the legal case that spanned years and continents over the publication of a trove of classified documents.

Chartered flight VJT199 from London's Stansted Airport landed after noon at Bangkok's Don Mueang International Airport, which Assange's wife, Stella, confirmed was carrying her husband.

Airport officials told The Associated Press the plane was scheduled to depart Tuesday evening for Saipan, the capital of the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Western Pacific, where he is to appear in court Wednesday morning local time.

He's expected to plead guilty to an Espionage Act charge of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified national defense information, according to the U.S. Justice Department in a letter filed in court.

Assange is expected to return to his home country of Australia after his plea and sentencing. The hearing is taking place in Saipan because of Assange's opposition to traveling to the continental U.S. and the court's proximity to Australia, prosecutors said.

The guilty plea, which must be approved by a judge, brings an abrupt conclusion to a criminal case of international intrigue and to the U.S. government's yearslong pursuit of a publisher whose hugely popular secret-sharing website made him a cause célèbre among many press freedom advocates who said he acted as a journalist to expose U.S. military wrongdoing. Investigators, in contrast, have repeatedly asserted that his actions broke laws meant to protect sensitive information and put the country's national security at risk.

Stella Assange told the BBC from Australia that it had been "touch and go" over the past 72 hours whether the deal would go ahead but she felt "elated" at the news. A lawyer who married the WikiLeaks founder in prison in 2022, she said details of the agreement would be made public once the judge had signed off on it.

"He will be a free man once it is signed off by a judge," she said, adding that she still didn't think it was real.

She told Britain's PA news agency that the flight was costing Assange \$500,000 and they would start a fundraising campaign to help pay for it.

Kristinn Hrafnsson, editor-in-chief of WikiLeaks, said the deal for Assange came about after the growing involvement of Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese.

"This is the result of a long, long process which has been going on for some time. It has been a tough battle, but the focus now is on Julian being reunited with his family," Hrafnsson told the PA news agency. "The most important thing is that Julian is free and he is finally able to enjoy the big blue sky."

In a statement posted on the social media platform X, WikiLeaks said Assange boarded a plane and departed Monday after leaving the British prison where he has spent the last five years. WikiLeaks ap-

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plauded the announcement of the deal, saying it was grateful for "all who stood by us, fought for us, and remained utterly committed in the fight for his freedom."

Albanese told Parliament that an Australian envoy had flown with Assange from London.

"Regardless of the views that people have about Mr. Assange's activities, the case has dragged on for too long," Albanese said. "There's nothing to be gained by his continued incarceration and we want him brought home to Australia."

The deal ensures that Assange will admit guilt while also sparing him from additional prison time. He had spent years hiding in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London after Swedish authorities sought his arrest on rape allegations before being locked up in the United Kingdom.

Assange is expected to be sentenced to the five years he has already spent in the British prison while fighting extradition to the U.S. to face charges, a process that has played out in a series of hearings in London. Last month, he won the right to appeal an extradition order after his lawyers argued that the U.S. government provided "blatantly inadequate" assurances that he would have the same free speech protections as an American citizen if extradited from Britain.

Assange has been heralded by many around the world as a hero who brought to light military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the files published by WikiLeaks was a video of a 2007 Apache helicopter attack by American forces in Baghdad that killed 11 people, including two Reuters journalists.

But his reputation was also tarnished by rape allegations, which he has denied.

The Justice Department's indictment unsealed in 2019 accused Assange of encouraging and helping U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks published in 2010. Prosecutors had accused Assange of damaging national security by publishing documents that harmed the U.S. and its allies and aided its adversaries.

The case was lambasted by press advocates and Assange supporters. Federal prosecutors defended it as targeting conduct that went way beyond that of a journalist gathering information, amounting to an attempt to solicit, steal and indiscriminately publish classified government documents.

The plea agreement comes months after President Joe Biden said he was considering a request from Australia to drop the U.S. push to prosecute Assange. The White House was not involved in the decision to resolve Assange's case, according to a White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly about the case and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Assange made headlines again in 2016 after his website published Democratic emails that prosecutors say were stolen by Russian intelligence operatives. He was never charged in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation, but the inquiry laid bare in stark detail the role that the hacking operation played in interfering in that year's election on behalf of then-Republican candidate Donald Trump.

During the Obama administration, Justice Department officials mulled charges for Assange but were unsure a case would hold up in court and were concerned it could be hard to justify prosecuting him for acts similar to those of a conventional journalist.

The posture changed in the Trump administration, however, with former Attorney General Jeff Sessions in 2017 calling Assange's arrest a priority.

Assange's family and supporters have said his physical and mental health have suffered during more than a decade of legal battles.

Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012 and was granted political asylum after courts in England ruled he should be extradited to Sweden as part of a rape investigation in the Scandinavian country. He was arrested by British police after Ecuador's government withdrew his asylum status in 2019 and then jailed for skipping bail when he first took shelter inside the embassy.

Although Sweden eventually dropped its sex crimes investigation because so much time had elapsed, Assange had remained in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison during the extradition battle with the U.S.

US surgeon general declares gun violence a public health emergency

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. surgeon general on Tuesday declared gun violence a public health crisis, driven by the fast-growing number of injuries and deaths involving firearms in the country.

The advisory issued by Dr. Vivek Murthy, the nation's top doctor, came as the U.S. grappled with another summer weekend marked by mass shootings that left dozens of people dead or wounded.

"People want to be able to walk through their neighborhoods and be safe," Murthy told The Associated Press in a phone interview. "America should be a place where all of us can go to school, go to work, go to the supermarket, go to our house of worship, without having to worry that that's going to put our life at risk."

To drive down gun deaths, Murthy calls on the U.S. to ban automatic rifles, introduce universal background checks for purchasing guns, regulate the industry, pass laws that would restrict their use in public spaces and penalize people who fail to safely store their weapons.

None of those suggestions can be implemented nationwide without legislation passed by Congress, which typically recoils at gun control measures. Some state legislatures, however, have enacted or may consider some of the surgeon general's proposals.

Murthy said there is "broad agreement" that gun violence is a problem, citing a poll last year that found most Americans worry at least sometimes that a loved one might be injured by a firearm. More than 48,000 Americans died from gun injuries in 2022.

His advisory promises to be controversial and will certainly incense Republican lawmakers, most of whom opposed Murthy's confirmation — twice — to the job over his statements on gun violence.

Murthy has published warnings about troubling health trends in American life, including social media use and loneliness. He's stayed away from issuing a similar advisory about gun violence since his 2014 confirmation as surgeon general was stalled and nearly derailed by the firearm lobby and Republicans who opposed his past statements about firearms.

Murthy ended up promising the Senate that he did "not intend to use my office as surgeon general as a bully pulpit on gun control."

Then-President Donald Trump dismissed Murthy in 2017, but President Joe Biden nominated Murthy again to the position in 2021. At his second confirmation hearing, he told senators that declaring guns a public health crisis would not be his focus during a new term.

But he has faced mounting pressure from some doctors and Democratic advocacy groups to speak out more. A group of four former surgeon generals asked the Biden administration to produce a report on the problem in 2022.

"It is now time for us to take this issue out of the realm of politics and put it in the realm of public health, the way we did with smoking more than a half century ago," Murthy told the AP.

A 1964 report from the surgeon general that raised awareness about the dangers of smoking is largely credited with snubbing out tobacco use and precipitating regulations on the industry.

Children and younger Americans, in particular, are suffering from gun violence, Murthy notes in his advisory called "Firearm Violence: A Public Health Crisis in America." Suicide by gun rates have increased significantly in recent years for Americans under the age of 35. Children in the U.S. are far more likely to die from gun wounds than children in other countries, the research he gathered shows.

In addition to new regulations, Murthy calls for an increase on gun violence research and for the health system — which is likely to be more amenable to his advisory — to promote gun safety education during doctor visits.

Israeli supreme court says ultra-Orthodox men must serve in military

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's Supreme Court on Tuesday ruled unanimously that the military must begin drafting ultra-Orthodox men for military service, a decision that could lead to the collapse of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition as Israel continues to wage war in Gaza.

The court ruled that in the absence of a law that distinguishes between Jewish seminary students and other draftees, Israel's compulsory military service system applies to the ultra-Orthodox like any other citizens.

Under longstanding arrangements, ultra-Orthodox men have been exempt from the draft, which is compulsory for most Jewish men and women. These exemptions have long been a source of anger among the secular public, a divide that has widened during the eight-month-old war, as the military has called up tens of thousands of soldiers and says it needs all the manpower it can get. Over 600 soldiers have been killed.

Politically powerful ultra-Orthodox parties, key partners in Netanyahu's governing coalition, oppose any change in the current system. If the exemptions are ended, they could bolt the coalition, causing the government to collapse and leading to new elections.

During arguments, government lawyers told the court that forcing ultra-Orthodox men to enlist would "tear Israeli society apart."

The court decision comes at a sensitive time, as the war in Gaza drags on into its ninth month and the number of dead soldiers continues to mount.

The court found that the state was carrying out "invalid selective enforcement, which represents a serious violation of the rule of law, and the principle according to which all individuals are equal before the law."

It did not say how many ultra-Orthodox should be drafted.

The court also ruled that state subsidies for seminaries where exempted ultra-Orthodox men study should remain suspended. The court temporarily froze the seminary budgets earlier this year.

In a post on the social media platform X, cabinet minister Yitzhak Goldknopf, who heads one of the ultra-Orthodox parties in the coalition, called the ruling "very unfortunate and disappointing." He did not say whether his party would bolt the government.

"The state of Israel was established in order to be a home for the Jewish people whose Torah is the bedrock of its existence. The Holy Torah will prevail," he wrote.

The ultra-Orthodox see their full-time religious study as their part in protecting the state of Israel. Many fear that greater contact with secular society through the military will distance adherents from strict observance of the faith.

Ultra-Orthodox men attend special seminaries that focus on religious studies, with little attention on secular topics like math, English or science. Critics have said they are ill-prepared to serve in the military or enter the secular work force.

Religious women generally receive blanket exemptions that are not as controversial, in part because women are not expected to serve in combat units.

The ruling now sets the stage for growing friction within the coalition between those who support drafting more ultra-Orthodox and those who oppose the idea. Ultra-Orthodox lawmakers are likely to face intense pressure from religious leaders and their constituents and may have to choose whether remaining in the government is worthwhile for them.

Shuki Friedman, vice-president of the Jewish People Policy Institute, a Jerusalem think tank said the ultra-Orthodox "understand that they don't have a better political alternative, but at same time their public is saying 'why did we vote for you?'"

The exemptions have faced years of legal challenges and a string of court decisions has found the system unjust. But Israeli leaders, under pressure from ultra-Orthodox parties, have repeatedly stalled. It remains unclear whether Netanyahu will be able to do so again.

Netanyahu's coalition is buoyed by two ultra-Orthodox parties who oppose increasing enlistment for their constituents. The long-serving Israeli leader has tried to adhere to the court's rulings while also scrambling to preserve his coalition. But with a slim majority of 64 seats in the 120-member parliament, he's often

beholden to the pet issues of smaller parties.

Netanyahu has been promoting a bill tabled by a previous government in 2022 that sought to address the issue of ultra-Orthodox enlistment.

But critics say that bill was crafted before the war and doesn't do enough to address a pressing manpower shortfall as the army seeks to maintain its forces in the Gaza Strip while also preparing for potential war with the Lebanese Hezbollah group, which has been fighting with Israel since the war in Gaza erupted last October.

With its high birthrate, the ultra-Orthodox community is the fastest-growing segment of the population, at about 4% annually. Each year, roughly 13,000 ultra-Orthodox males reach the conscription age of 18, but less than 10% enlist, according to the Israeli parliament's State Control Committee.

A Chinese lunar probe returns to Earth with the world's first samples from the far side of the moon

BEIJING (AP) — China's Chang'e 6 probe returned on Earth on Tuesday with rock and soil samples from the little-explored far side of the moon in a global first.

The probe landed in northern China on Tuesday afternoon in the Inner Mongolian region.

"I now declare that the Chang'e 6 Lunar Exploration Mission achieved complete success," Zhang Kejian, Director of the China National Space Administration said shortly in a televised news conference after the landing.

Chinese scientists anticipate the returned samples will include 2.5 million-year-old volcanic rock and other material that scientists hope will answer questions about geographic differences on the moon's two sides.

The near side is what is seen from Earth, and the far side faces outer space. The far side is also known to have mountains and impact craters, contrasting with the relatively flat expanses visible on the near side.

While past U.S. and Soviet missions have collected samples from the moon's near side, the Chinese mission was the first that has collected samples from the far side.

The moon program is part of a growing rivalry with the U.S. — still the leader in space exploration — and others, including Japan and India. China has put its own space station in orbit and regularly sends crews there.

China's leader Xi Jinping sent a message of congratulations to the Chang'e team, saying that it was a "landmark achievement in our country's efforts at becoming a space and technological power."

The probe left earth on May 3, and its journey lasted 53 days. The probe has drilled into the core and scooped rocks from the surface.

The samples "are expected to answer one of the most fundamental scientific questions in lunar science research: what geologic activity is responsible for the differences between the two sides?" said Zongyu Yue, a geologist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, in a statement issued in the Innovation Monday, a journal published in partnership with the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

China in recent years has launched multiple successful missions to the moon, collecting samples from the moon's near side with the Chang'e 5 probe previously.

They are also hoping that the probe will return with material that bear traces of meteorite strikes from the moon's past. With the successful reentry of the probe, scientists will begin studying the samples.

Parliament speaker. The Tehran mayor. A heart surgeon. The race is on for Iran's next president

By The Associated Press undefined

Six candidates have been approved by Iran's theocracy to run in Friday's presidential election to replace the late President Ebrahim Raisi, who died in a helicopter crash with several other officials in May.

Among them, Iran's parliament speaker stands out as the most recognizable figure. A little-known politician and heart surgeon is also on the ballot. He is the only reformist while the others are more skewed toward

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hard-liners who back Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei without question and challenge the West. And if previous elections are a guide to Iranian politics, several candidates could drop out in the final days before the vote to coalesce around a unity candidate.

Meanwhile, authorities are not urging the public to vote as vocally as they have in the past, particularly after a parliamentary election earlier in the year that saw the lowest turnout since the country's 1979 Islamic Revolution.

Here's a look at the candidates:

Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi Ghazizadeh Hashemi, 53, served as one of Raisi's vice presidents and as the head of the Foundation of Martyrs and Veterans Affairs. He ran in the 2021 presidential election and received just under 1 million votes, coming in last place. In debates so far, he's urged the country to continue to follow the policies of Raisi and insisted that Iran does not need foreign investment to succeed, despite the widespread economic challenges the nation now faces.

Saeed Jalili The 58-year-old Jalili is a hard-line politician and former senior nuclear negotiator. He ran in Iran's 2013 presidential election and registered in 2021 before withdrawing to support Raisi. Current CIA director Bill Burns, who dealt with Jalili in negotiations in the past, has described him as "stupefyingly opaque" in talks. He got the nickname "The Living Martyr" after losing a leg in the 1980s Iran-Iraq war. He maintains that Iran doesn't need to negotiate over its nuclear program with the West. Though he is seen as maintaining close ties to Khamenei, he's not considered to be a front-runner. His campaign largely has focused on rural voters.

Masoud Pezeshkian A 69-year-old heart surgeon, Pezeshkian is the only reformist candidate among the hard-line figures seeking the presidency. He's said he'd want to renegotiate with the West to try and re-start some version of the 2015 nuclear deal. He's put the need for the deal in economic terms, saying Iran needs to communicate with the world. Iran's former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who served under the relative-moderate President Hassan Rouhani and helped strike the nuclear deal, has backed him. However, analysts believe Pezeshkian would need a heavy turnout to win — which is unlikely, given the current apathy gripping the nation. His campaign has so far focused on the youth vote, women and Iran's ethnic minorities.

Mostafa Pourmohammadi Pourmohammadi, 64, is the only Shiite cleric running in the election. He served as interior minister under hard-line President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and later as justice minister under Rouhani. In 2006, the United States State Department referred to Pourmohammadi as a "notorious human rights violator" for a leading role in the 1988 mass execution of several thousand political prisoners at Tehran's notorious Evin prison. The State Department also linked him to the so-called "chain murders" of activists and others in the 1990s. He's insisted the next president must deal with the world and criticized Iran's arming of Russia in the war in Ukraine — not because of the killing of civilians, but because he felt Tehran wasn't getting enough back from Moscow for its support. His campaign likely is counting on the backing of clerics and traditionalists.

Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf The Iranian parliament speaker, Qalibaf, 62, is the highest-ranking official within the theocracy to be seeking the presidency. Analysts suggest he's the front-runner in the campaign, with Jalili as a second. Qalibaf is a former Tehran mayor with close ties to the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. Many remember that Qalibaf — as a former Guard general — was part of a violent crackdown on Iranian university students in 1999. He also reportedly ordered live gunfire to be used against students in 2003 while serving as the country's police chief. Qalibaf maintains that he, as a strong manager, can save Iran from the crisis, borrowing from recent comments made by Khamenei. Qalibaf has focused on the middle class, as well as promising more cash handouts for the poor.

Alireza Zakani The current mayor of Tehran, Zakani, 58, withdrew from the 2021 presidential election to back Raisi. Zakani has said he believes Iran can neutralize the effects of international sanctions but should pursue a diplomatic solution. He is a hard-liner who has repeatedly criticized reformists and moderates within Iran's political system, wants to see Iran stop using the dollar as a benchmark currency, and has called for Iran to create more value-added products from its oil to boost revenue. He has promised free

health care for women and old people, as well as cash payments to poor people and reviving Iran's currency, the rial. However, he's offered no details on how he plans to accomplish these goals.

Missouri, Kansas judges temporarily halt much of President Biden's student debt forgiveness plan

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Federal judges in Kansas and Missouri on Monday together blocked much of a Biden administration student loan repayment plan that provides a faster path to cancellation and lower monthly payments for millions of borrowers.

The judges' rulings prevent the U.S. Department of Education from helping many of the intended borrowers ease their loan repayment burdens going forward under a rule set to go into effect July 1. The decisions do not cancel assistance already provided to borrowers.

In Kansas, U.S. District Judge Daniel Crabtree ruled in a lawsuit filed by the state's attorney general, Kris Kobach, on behalf of his state and 10 others. In his ruling, Crabtree allowed parts of the program that allow students who borrowed \$12,000 or less to have the rest of their loans forgiven if they make 10 years' worth of payments, instead of the standard 25.

But Crabtree said that the Department of Education won't be allowed to implement parts of the program meant to help students who had larger loans and could have their monthly payments lowered and their required payment period reduced from 25 years to 20 years.

In Missouri, U.S. District Judge John Ross' order applies to different parts of the program than Crabtree's. His order says that the U.S. Department of Education cannot forgive loan balances going forward. He said the department still could lower monthly payments.

Ross issued a ruling in a lawsuit filed by Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey on behalf of his state and six others.

Together, the two rulings, each by a judge appointed by former President Barack Obama, a Democrat, appeared to greatly limit the scope of the Biden administration's efforts to help borrowers after the U.S. Supreme Court last year rejected the Democratic president's first attempt at a forgiveness plan. Both judges said Education Secretary Miguel Cardona exceeded the authority granted by Congress in laws dealing with students loans.

Bailey and Kobach each hailed the decision from their state's judge as a major legal victory against the Biden administration and argue, as many Republicans do, that forgiving some students' loans shifts the cost of repaying them to taxpayers.

"Only Congress has the power of the purse, not the President," Bailey said in a statement. "Today's ruling was a huge win for the rule of law, and for every American who Joe Biden was about to force to pay off someone else's debt."

The White House said it strongly disagrees with the judges' rulings and would continue to defend the program, and use every available tool to give relief to students and borrowers.

In a statement, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the Biden administration "will never stop fighting for students and borrowers — no matter how many roadblocks Republican elected officials and special interests put in our way."

In a statement posted on the social media platform X, leaders of the Student Borrower Protection Center, which advocates for eliminating student debt, called the decisions "partisan lawfare" and "a recipe for chaos across the student loan system."

"Millions of borrowers are now in limbo as they struggle to make sense of their rights under the law and the information being provided by the government and their student loan companies," said the group's executive director, Mike Pierce.

In both lawsuits, the suing states sought to invalidate the entire program, which the Biden administration first made available to borrowers in July 2023, and at least 150,000 have had their loans canceled. But the judges noted that the lawsuits weren't filed until late March in Kansas and early April in Missouri.

"So the court doesn't see how plaintiffs can complain of irreparable harm from them," Crabtree wrote in his opinion.

Both orders are preliminary, meaning the injunctions imposed by the judges would remain in effect through a trial of the separate lawsuits. However, to issue a temporary order each judge had to conclude that the states were likely to prevail in a trial.

Kobach framed the Biden plan as "unconstitutional" and an affront to "blue collar Kansas workers who didn't go to college."

There was some irony in Crabtree's decision: Kansas is no longer a party to the lawsuit Kobach filed. Earlier this month, Crabtree ruled that Kansas and seven other states in the lawsuit — Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska and Utah — couldn't show that they'd been harmed by the new program and dismissed them as plaintiffs.

That left Alaska, South Carolina and Texas, and Crabtree said they could sue because each has a state agency that services student loans.

But Crabtree said that lowering monthly payments and shortening the period of required payments to earn loan forgiveness "overreach any generosity Congress has authorized before."

In the Missouri ruling, Ross said repayment schedules and "are well within the wheelhouse" of the department but the "plain text" of U.S. law doesn't give it authority to forgive loans before 25 years of payments.

Missouri also has an agency that services student loans. The other states in its lawsuit are Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, North Dakota, Ohio and Oklahoma.

A look at Julian Assange and how the long-jailed WikiLeaks founder is now on the verge of freedom

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — News that the U.S. Justice Department has reached a plea deal that will lead to freedom for WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange brings a stunning culmination to a long-running saga of international intrigue that spanned multiple continents. Its central character is a quixotic internet publisher with a profound disdain for government secrets.

A look at Assange, the case and the latest developments:

WHO IS JULIAN ASSANGE?An Australian editor and publisher, he is best known for having founded the anti-secrecy website WikiLeaks, which gained massive attention — and notoriety — for the 2010 release of almost half a million documents relating to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

His activism made him a cause célèbre among press freedom advocates who said his work in exposing U.S. military misconduct in foreign countries made his activities indistinguishable from what traditional journalists are expected to do as part of their jobs.

But those same actions put him in the crosshairs of American prosecutors, who released an indictment in 2019 that accused Assange — holed up at the time in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London — of conspiring with an Army private to illegally obtain and publish sensitive government records.

"Julian Assange is no journalist," John Demers, the then-top Justice Department national security official, said at the time. "No responsible actor, journalist or otherwise, would purposely publish the names of individuals he or she knew to be confidential human sources in war zones, exposing them to the gravest of dangers."

WHAT IS ASSANGE ACCUSED OF?The Trump administration's Justice Department accused Assange of directing former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning in one of the largest compromises of classified information in U.S. history.

The charges relate to WikiLeaks' publication of thousands of leaked military and diplomatic documents, with prosecutors accusing Assange of helping Manning steal classified diplomatic cables that they say endangered national security and of conspiring together to crack a Defense Department password.

Reports from the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq published by Assange included the names of Afghans and Iraqis who provided information to American and coalition forces, prosecutors said, while the diplo-

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matic cables he released exposed journalists, religious leaders, human rights advocates and dissidents in repressive countries.

Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison after being convicted of violating the Espionage Act and other offenses for leaking classified government and military documents to WikiLeaks. President Barack Obama commuted her sentence in 2017, allowing her release after about seven years behind bars.

WHY WASN'T HE ALREADY IN THE CUSTODY OF THE U.S.?Assange has spent the last five years in a British high-security prison, fighting to avoid extradition to the U.S. and winning favorable court rulings that have delayed any transfer across the Atlantic.

He was evicted in April 2019 from the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he had sought refuge seven years earlier amid an investigation by Swedish authorities into claims of sexual misconduct that he has long denied and that was later dropped. The South American nation revoked the political asylum following the charges by the U.S. government.

Despite his arrest and imprisonment by British authorities, extradition efforts by the U.S. had stalled prior to the plea deal.

A U.K. judge in 2021 rejected the U.S. extradition request in 2021 on the grounds that Assange was likely to kill himself if held under harsh U.S. prison conditions. Higher courts overturned that decision after getting assurances from the U.S. about his treatment. The British government signed an extradition order in June 2022.

Then, last month, two High Court judges ruled that Assange can mount a new appeal based on arguments about whether he will receive free-speech protections or be at a disadvantage because he is not a U.S. citizen. The date of the hearing has yet to be determined.

WHAT WILL THE DEAL REQUIRE?Assange will have to plead guilty to a felony charge under the Espionage Act of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified information relating to the national defense of the United States, according to a Justice Department letter filed in federal court.

Rather than face the prospect of prison time in the U.S., he is expected to return to Australia after his plea and sentencing. Those proceedings are scheduled for Wednesday morning, local time in Saipan, the largest island in the Mariana Islands.

The hearing is taking place there because of Assange's opposition to traveling to the continental U.S. and the court's proximity to Australia.

On Monday evening, he left a British prison ahead of a court hearing expected to result in his release.

IS THIS CASE CONNECTED TO THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION?It's not, but beyond his interactions with Manning, Assange is well-known for the role WikiLeaks played in the 2016 presidential election, when it released a massive tranche of Democratic emails that federal prosecutors say were stolen by Russian intelligence operatives.

The goal, officials have said, was to harm the electoral effort of Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton and boost her Republican challenger Donald Trump, who famously said during the campaign: "WikiLeaks, I love WikiLeaks."

Assange was not charged as part of special counsel Robert Mueller's investigation into ties between the Trump campaign and Russia. But the investigation nonetheless painted an unflattering role of WikiLeaks in advancing what prosecutors say was a brazen campaign of Russian election interference.

Assange denied in a Fox News interview that aired in January 2017 that Russians were the source of the hacked emails, though those denials are challenged by a 2018 indictment by Mueller of 12 Russian military intelligence officers.

This week's televised debate is crucial for Biden and Trump — and for CNN as well

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Joe Biden and Donald Trump won't be alone at Thursday's debate. Moderators Dana Bash and Jake Tapper of CNN will be on camera, too, and there's a lot on the line for their network as it fights for relevance in a changing media environment.

CNN has hosted dozens of town halls and political forums through the years, but never a general election presidential debate, let alone one so early in a campaign. No network has.

"This is a huge moment for CNN," said former CNN Washington bureau chief Frank Sesno, now a media and public affairs professor at George Washington University. "CNN has to reassert itself. It has to show that it led a revolution in news before and can do it again."

As a television network, CNN is struggling at a time many consumers are cutting off cable and most news outlets wonder if the campaign will ignite consumer interest.

Those that remain have expressed a clear preference for opinion programming. Fox News Channel has averaged 2.14 million viewers in prime time this month, with MSNBC at 1.22 million and CNN at 525,000, according to the Nielsen company. That's down 17% from last June for CNN.

CNN's chairman and CEO, Mark Thompson, has been with the company for less than a year and has spoken more about the internet than television as an opportunity for growth. Yet it means something that both campaigns chose CNN for the first debate. A well-run, illuminating event can open some eyes and remind people of CNN's legacy as the first all-news television network. If it goes off the rails, that's a stain that could take years to wash away.

"This is a hugely consequential moment in this campaign," said David Chalian, CNN's vice president and political director. "It's the earliest presidential debate ever. It's obviously a huge privilege and a huge responsibility for CNN to host it."

Looking hard for more viewersIt's possible — even likely — that CNN won't even have the biggest American audience on Thursday.

Choosing public service over pure profit, CNN offered to let other networks carry the debate feed; ABC, CBS, NBC, Fox News Channel, MSNBC, PBS and C-SPAN will all do so. The other networks also have the right to sell their own ad time during the two commercial breaks.

The networks had to agree to CNN's rules — they must keep CNN's insignia onscreen and can't interrupt with their own commentators while the debate airs. Internationally, only CNN is carrying it.

The event, in an Atlanta studio, won't have a live audience. That was important to the Biden campaign but also to CNN. The network's town hall with Trump in 2023 was panned in large part because of the presence of Trump partisans.

CNN will also control a mute button, to turn a candidate's microphone off when his opponent is talking. That's also reactive; Biden and many viewers were frustrated by Trump's frequent interruptions during the first of two debates between them in 2020.

When he conducted an unscientific poll among listeners to his SiriusXM radio show, Michael Smerconish said that 90% were in favor of the "mute" button. But Smerconish, who also hosts a weekend show on CNN, counts himself among the 10% who don't like the idea.

"You run the risk that the debate will become an antiseptic experience," missing some good give-and-take, Smerconish said in an interview with The Associated Press.

Stay tuned, though. Chalian, who would not say who would be in control of the mute button, said an opponent's voice may still be picked up if he pipes up. It just won't be the dominant voice.

The network will not attempt to fact-check the candidates in real time, he said.

"Obviously, if there is some egregious fact that needs to be checked or the record needs to be made clear, Jake and Dana can do that," he said. "But that's not their role. They are not here to participate in this debate. They are here to facilitate a debate between Trump and Biden."

Will CNN offer a fair forum?Well before the debate, Trump and his supporters have been putting for-

ward the notion that because of CNN's presence, it won't be a fair fight. At a campaign rally where he denounced "fake Tapper," Trump said that he would be debating three people instead of one — even though his campaign agreed in advance to the rules and moderators.

On CNN Monday, the network's Kasie Hunt cut off an interview with Trump press aide Karoline Leavitt after she repeatedly attacked the moderators.

"Our side has zero expectations that this is going to be a fair debate," said Tim Graham, director of media analysis at the conservative Media Research Center. "When you watch Tapper and Bash anchor, you get the distinct impression that you're not going to get a fair debate."

What Graham will be watching for: How many times will the moderators interrupt Trump and how many times do they stop Biden?

To a large extent, the attitude speaks to how CNN is boxed in commercially. Egged on by Trump, many of his supporters perceive CNN as biased against them, not as a network that follows the facts. And if you oppose Trump and want to see your view reflected, MSNBC is a more satisfying destination.

"Our job is simply to make sure that we are best prepared to facilitate and moderate the debate between the candidates," Chalian said. "That is our focus. I really try not to pay too much attention to the pre-spin or post-spin. I'm really focused on the debate itself."

Days before the event, a keep-your-head-down-and-work attitude seems to be how he's dealing with a pressure-filled event that could choke you if you let it.

"Let's be clear," he said. "The stakes are highest for Donald Trump and Joe Biden. They're the participants in this debate."

Shot in 1.6 seconds: Video raises questions about how trooper avoided charges in Black man's death

By RUSS BYNUM and JIM MUSTIAN Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — Julian Lewis didn't pull over for the Georgia State Patrol cruiser flashing its blue lights behind him on a rural highway. He still didn't stop after pointing a hand out the window and turning onto a darkened dirt road as the trooper sounded his siren.

Five minutes into a pursuit that began over a broken taillight, the 60-year-old Black man was dead — shot in the forehead by the white trooper who fired a single bullet mere seconds after forcing Lewis to crash into a ditch. Trooper Jake Thompson insisted he pulled the trigger as Lewis revved the engine of his Nissan Sentra and jerked his steering wheel as if trying to mow him down.

"I had to shoot this man," Thompson can be heard telling a supervisor on video recorded by his dash-mounted camera at the shooting scene in rural Screven County, midway between Savannah and Augusta. "And I'm just scared."

But new investigative details obtained by The Associated Press and the never-before-released dashcam video of the August 2020 shooting have raised fresh questions about how the trooper avoided prosecution with nothing more than a signed promise never to work in law enforcement again. Use-of-force experts who reviewed the footage for AP said the shooting appeared to be unjustified.

An investigative file obtained by AP offers the most detailed account yet of the case, including documents that spell out why the Georgia Bureau of Investigation concluded the 27-year-old trooper's version of events did not match the evidence. For instance, an inspection of Lewis' car indicated the crash had disconnected the vehicle's battery and rendered it immobile.

Footage of the pursuit has never been made public. It was first obtained by the authors of a new book about race and economic inequality titled "Fifteen Cents on the Dollar: How Americans Made the Black-White Wealth Gap." Louise Story and Ebony Reed shared the video with AP, which verified its authenticity and obtained additional documents under Georgia's open-records law.

The footage does not include visuals of the actual shooting, which happened outside the camera's view. But it shows the crucial final moments in which Thompson uses a police maneuver to send Lewis' car spinning into a ditch. Then the trooper's cruiser stops parallel to Lewis' vehicle and Thompson's voice barks,

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"Hey, get your hands up!" The gunshot rings out before he can finish the warning.

The documents show Thompson fired just 1.6 seconds after his cruiser stopped.

"This guy just came out shooting" and did not give Lewis "remotely sufficient time to respond" to his order, said Andrew Scott, a former Boca Raton, Florida, police chief who wrote a dissertation about police chases.

"This goes beyond a stupid mistake," added Charles "Joe" Key, a former Baltimore police lieutenant and use-of-force expert who has consulted on thousands of such cases.

Key also took issue with the maneuver to disable Lewis' vehicle, saying that, too, was unwarranted. And he deemed Thompson's claim that he fired because of the revving engine "total garbage."

"I'm not in favor of people running from the police," Key said. "But it doesn't put him in the category of people deserving to be shot by the police."

Thompson was fired and arrested on a murder charge a week after the Aug. 7, 2020, shooting, which came amid a summer of protests in the wake of the police killings of George Floyd and other Black people. The trooper was denied bail and spent more than 100 days in jail.

But in the end, Thompson walked free without a trial. A state grand jury in 2021 declined to bring an indictment. The district attorney overseeing the case closed it last fall, when federal prosecutors also ruled out civil rights charges.

At the same time, the U.S. Justice Department quietly entered into a non-prosecution agreement with Thompson forbidding him from ever working in law enforcement again – a highly unusual deal that brought little solace to Lewis' family.

"It's inadequate," said Lewis' son, Brook Bacon. "I thought the shortcomings that occurred at the state level would be more thoroughly examined at the federal level, but that's apparently not the case."

The state of Georgia in 2022 paid Lewis' family a \$4.8 million settlement to avoid a lawsuit.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for Georgia's Southern District, which reached the non-prosecution deal with Thompson, declined to discuss it except to say the Justice Department communicated with the Lewis family "consistent with the law and DOJ policy."

District Attorney Daphne Totten did not respond to requests for comment. Neither Thompson nor his attorney, Keith Barber, would discuss the case.

Because Georgia law doesn't require troopers to use body cameras, the dashcam footage is the only video of the shooting.

"It's a heartbreaking case and sheds light on the complexities and difficulties Black families face when intersecting with the justice system," said Reed, a former AP journalist and one of the authors who first obtained the footage.

Lewis worked odd jobs as a carpenter and handyman. He helped put a new roof and siding on a local church, relatives said, and repaired plumbing and electrical wiring in people's homes. He would often charge friends and family only for materials.

"He was just a good, kind-hearted person," said Tonia Moore, one of Lewis' sisters. "Everybody has flaws."

Lewis also struggled with drugs and alcohol. He served prison time for cocaine possession and multiple DUI violations. After the shooting, blood tests found alcohol, cocaine and methamphetamine in his system.

Thompson, who policed Georgia highways for six years before the shooting, was described in a performance evaluation as "hard working and aggressive." He led his post in DUI arrests, according to his personnel file, and preferred working nights to improve his chances of catching intoxicated drivers.

Days after the shooting, Thompson told GBI investigators he used the tactical maneuver to end the chase – which he estimated reached top speeds of 65 mph (105 kph) — out of concern that the pursuit was approaching a more populated area. He acted right after Lewis' car rolled without stopping through an intersection with a stop sign.

Thompson said that after getting out of his cruiser beside Lewis' car in the ditch, he heard the Nissan's engine "revving up at a high rate of speed."

"It appeared to me that the violator was trying to use his vehicle to injure me," Thompson said in an audio recording of the GBI interview obtained by the AP. He said he fired "in fear for my life and safety."

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On the dashcam footage, a brief noise resembling a revving engine can be heard just before Thompson shouts his warning and fires. Less than two minutes later, the trooper can be heard saying: "Jesus Christ! He almost ran over me."

According to the GBI case file, Thompson fired facing the open driver's side window of Lewis' car less than 10 feet (3 meters) away.

Agents at the scene found Lewis' front tires pointing away from the trooper's cruiser. They also determined Lewis' car had no power after the Nissan struck the ditch. Raising the hood, they discovered the battery had tipped onto its side after its mounting broke. One of the battery cables had been pulled loose, and the engine's air filter housing had come partially open.

Investigators later performed a field test on Lewis' car in which they connected the battery and started the engine. When an agent disconnected one of the cables from the battery, the car's engine immediately stopped. Likewise, opening the air filter cover caused the engine to die.

Because grand jury proceedings are generally secret, it's unknown why the panel declined to indict Thompson in June 2021. Georgia affords law enforcement officers the chance to defend themselves before a grand jury, a privilege not given to any other defendants.

Totten, the district attorney, decided not to try again, saying in a Sept. 28 letter to the GBI that "there has been no new evidence developed in this case."

For Bacon, Lewis' son, the lack of charges is an open wound. He worries no one will remember what happened given the passage of almost four years — and the number of others killed by police under questionable circumstances.

"It's hard for anybody to even reach back that far, especially if they didn't hear about it initially," he said. "But these issues haven't gone away."

How memorable debate moments are made: on the fly, rehearsed — and sometimes without a word uttered

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — It could be a well-rehearsed zinger or an offhand, too-loud sigh.

Notable moments from past presidential debates demonstrate how the candidates' words and body language can make them look especially relatable or hopelessly out-of-touch. They also can showcase candidates at the top of their policy game or suggest they're out to sea.

Will past be prologue when President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump debate in Atlanta on Thursday?

"Debates, being live television events, without a script, without any way of knowing how they are going to evolve — anything can happen," said Alan Schroeder, author of "Presidential Debates: 50 years of High-Risk TV."

Here's a look at some standout high moments, low moments and curveballs from presidential debates past.

That Old Age Question (Again) When everyone knows a sensitive question is coming yet you make the answer sound spontaneous, you're having a good debate. Republican President Ronald Reagan landed a line for the ages in the second presidential debate of 1984 after an underwhelming opening matchup.

Reagan was 73 and seeking a second term in his race against Democratic challenger Walter Mondale, then 56. In the first debate, Reagan struggled to remember facts and occasionally looked befuddled.

One of his top advisers, Nevada Sen. Paul Laxalt, suggested afterward that aides "filled his head with so many facts and figures that he lost his spontaneity."

So Reagan's team took a more hands-off approach toward his second faceoff with Mondale. And, when Reagan got a question about his mental and physical stamina that he had to know was coming, he was ready enough to make the response feel unplanned.

"You already are the oldest president in history," moderator Henry Trewhitt said before asking whether Reagan might not be able to handle a challenge like the Cuban missile crisis.

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"Not at all," Reagan responded in defense of his crisis management smarts. He smoothly continued, "I want you to know that, also, I will not make age an issue of this campaign. I am not going to exploit, for political purposes, my opponent's youth and inexperience."

Then, capitalizing on years of Hollywood-honed comedic training, the president took a sip of water, giving the audience and even Mondale, who himself cracked up, more time to laugh. Finally, he grinned and left little doubt that he'd rehearsed a response, adding, "It was Seneca, or it was Cicero, I don't know which, that said, 'If it was not for the elders correcting the mistakes of the young, there would be no state.'"

Years later, Mondale said that while TV viewers saw him laughing, "I think, if you come in close, you'll see some tears coming down, because I knew he had gotten me there. That was really the end of my campaign that night."

Reagan thereby proved that even at his age, a candidate could get better over time. And with this year's race pitting 81-year-old Biden against 78-year-old Trump, 73 doesn't seem so old anymore.

Reagan is also remembered for using a light touch to neutralize criticisms from Democratic President Jimmy Carter in a 1980 debate.

When Carter accused him of wanting to cut Medicare, Reagan scolded, "There you go again." The line worked so well he turned it into something of a trademark rejoinder going forward.

Gaffes GaloreIn 1976, Republican President Gerald Ford had a notable moment during his second debate against Carter — and not in a good way. The president declared that there is "no Soviet domination of Eastern Europe and there never will be under a Ford administration."

With Moscow controlling much of that part of the world, moderator Max Frankel responded, "I'm sorry, wha..?" and asked if he'd understood correctly. Ford stood by his answer, then spent days on the campaign trail trying to explain it away. He lost that November.

"The closer the election, the more zingers and important debate lines can matter," said Aaron Kall, director of the debate program at the University of Michigan. "Not just on who won, or who lost, but how does it affect fundraising, how does it impact the media cycle in coming days and weeks."

Not all slips of the lip have a devastating impact.

Then-Sen. Barack Obama, in a 2008 Democratic presidential primary debate, dismissively told Hillary Clinton, "You're likable enough, Hillary." That haughty answer drew a backlash but Obama recovered.

The same couldn't be said for the short-lived 2012 Republican White House bid of then-Texas Gov. Rick Perry. Despite repeated attempts and excruciatingly long pauses, Perry could not remember the third of the three federal agencies he'd promised to shutter if elected.

Finally, he sheepishly muttered, "Oops."

The Energy Department is what slipped his mind.

Getting PersonalAnother damaging moment opened the second presidential debate in 1988, when CNN anchor Bernard Shaw pressed Democrat Michael Dukakis, the governor of Massachusetts, about his opposition to capital punishment with a question that evoked the candidate's wife.

"If Kitty Dukakis were raped and murdered, would you favor an irrevocable death penalty for the killer?" Shaw asked. Dukakis showed little emotion as he responded, "I don't see any evidence that it's a deterrent."

Dukakis later said he wished he'd said that his wife "is the most precious thing, she and my family, that I have in this world."

That year's vice presidential debate featured one of the best-remembered, pre-planned one-liners.

When Dan Quayle, the Republican vice presidential nominee and Indiana senator, compared himself to John F. Kennedy while debating Texas Sen. Lloyd Bentsen, the Democrat was ready. He'd studied Quayle's campaigning and seen him invoke Kennedy in the past.

"Senator, I served with Jack Kennedy. I knew Jack Kennedy," Bentsen began slowly and deliberately, drawing out the moment. "Jack Kennedy was a friend of mine. Senator, you're no Jack Kennedy."

The audience erupted in applause and laughter. Quayle was left to stare straight ahead.

Blunders Without WordsQuayle and George H.W. Bush still easily won the 1988 election. But they lost in 1992 after then-President Bush was caught on camera looking at his watch while Democrat Bill Clinton

talked to an audience member during a town hall debate. Some thought it made Bush look bored and aloof.

In another instance of a nonverbal debate miscue, then-Democratic Vice President Al Gore was criticized for a subpar opening 2000 debate performance with Republican George W. Bush in which he repeatedly and very audibly sighed.

During their second, town hall-style debate, Gore moved so close to Bush while the Republican answered one question that Bush finally looked over and offered a confident nod, drawing laughter from the audience.

A similar moment occurred in 2016, as Hillary Clinton faced the audience to answer questions during her second debate with Trump. The Republican candidate moved in close behind her, narrowed his eyes and glowered.

Clinton offered no visible reaction then, but later wrote of the incident, "He was literally breathing down my neck. My skin crawled."

Biden-Trump Redux Thursday's faceoff will be the first time a current president debates a former.

Historically, incumbents sometimes struggle during opening debates. They're used to being surrounded by White House advisers who offer little pushback. In 2012, then-President Obama's seemingly detached first debate performance against Mitt Romney allowed the Republican to gain momentum.

Romney, though, had an awkward moment during the second debate.

Answering a question about gender pay equity, the former Massachusetts governor talked about going to women's groups to get help finding qualified female applicants for top state posts.

"They brought us whole binders full of women," he declared. Obama turned that into an attack line at subsequent rallies, gleefully saying, "We don't have to collect a bunch of binders to find qualified, talented, driven young women."

If Biden's debate skills are rusty this time, his opponent's might be as well. Trump skipped all the GOP primary debates this time, meaning he's not done one since squaring off with Biden twice in 2020.

Trump interrupted so frequently when they first debated four years ago that Biden eventually cried out, "Will you shut up, man?" — a visceral moment if there ever was one. Trump is remembered that night for instructing members of the far-right Proud Boys group from the stage to "stand back and stand by." Some members of the extremist group took it as a sign of encouragement.

The second Biden-Trump debate of 2020 saw producers cut the mics to discourage interrupting, making it less chaotic. It featured Biden wistfully declaring, "I am anxious to have this race. I'm anxious to see this take place."

It did. And now it's happening again.

Missouri, Kansas judges temporarily halt much of President Biden's student debt forgiveness plan

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — Federal judges in Kansas and Missouri on Monday together blocked much of a Biden administration student loan repayment plan that provides a faster path to cancellation and lower monthly payments for millions of borrowers.

The judges' rulings prevent the U.S. Department of Education from helping many of the intended borrowers ease their loan repayment burdens going forward under a rule set to go into effect July 1. The decisions do not cancel assistance already provided to borrowers.

In Kansas, U.S. District Judge Daniel Crabtree ruled in a lawsuit filed by the state's attorney general, Kris Kobach, on behalf of his state and 10 others. In his ruling, Crabtree allowed parts of the program that allow students who borrowed \$12,000 or less to have the rest of their loans forgiven if they make 10 years' worth of payments, instead of the standard 25.

But Crabtree said that the Department of Education won't be allowed to implement parts of the program meant to help students who had larger loans and could have their monthly payments lowered and their required payment period reduced from 25 years to 20 years.

In Missouri, U.S. District Judge John Ross' order applies to different parts of the program than Crabtree's.

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His order says that the U.S. Department of Education cannot forgive loan balances going forward. He said the department still could lower monthly payments.

Ross issued a ruling in a lawsuit filed by Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey on behalf of his state and six others.

Together, the two rulings, each by a judge appointed by former President Barack Obama, a Democrat, appeared to greatly limit the scope of the Biden administration's efforts to help borrowers after the U.S. Supreme Court last year rejected the Democratic president's first attempt at a forgiveness plan. Both judges said Education Secretary Miguel Cardona exceeded the authority granted by Congress in laws dealing with students loans.

Bailey and Kobach each hailed the decision from their state's judge as a major legal victory against the Biden administration and argue, as many Republicans do, that forgiving some students' loans shifts the cost of repaying them to taxpayers.

"Only Congress has the power of the purse, not the President," Bailey said in a statement. "Today's ruling was a huge win for the rule of law, and for every American who Joe Biden was about to force to pay off someone else's debt."

The White House said it strongly disagrees with the judges' rulings and would continue to defend the program, and use every available tool to give relief to students and borrowers.

In a statement, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the Biden administration "will never stop fighting for students and borrowers — no matter how many roadblocks Republican elected officials and special interests put in our way."

In a statement posted on the social media platform X, leaders of the Student Borrower Protection Center, which advocates for eliminating student debt, called the decisions "partisan lawfare" and "a recipe for chaos across the student loan system."

"Millions of borrowers are now in limbo as they struggle to make sense of their rights under the law and the information being provided by the government and their student loan companies," said the group's executive director, Mike Pierce.

In both lawsuits, the suing states sought to invalidate the entire program, which the Biden administration first made available to borrowers in July 2023, and at least 150,000 have had their loans canceled. But the judges noted that the lawsuits weren't filed until late March in Kansas and early April in Missouri.

"So the court doesn't see how plaintiffs can complain of irreparable harm from them," Crabtree wrote in his opinion.

Both orders are preliminary, meaning the injunctions imposed by the judges would remain in effect through a trial of the separate lawsuits. However, to issue a temporary order each judge had to conclude that the states were likely to prevail in a trial.

Kobach framed the Biden plan as "unconstitutional" and an affront to "blue collar Kansas workers who didn't go to college."

There was some irony in Crabtree's decision: Kansas is no longer a party to the lawsuit Kobach filed. Earlier this month, Crabtree ruled that Kansas and seven other states in the lawsuit — Alabama, Idaho, Iowa, Louisiana, Montana, Nebraska and Utah — couldn't show that they'd been harmed by the new program and dismissed them as plaintiffs.

That left Alaska, South Carolina and Texas, and Crabtree said they could sue because each has a state agency that services student loans.

But Crabtree said that lowering monthly payments and shortening the period of required payments to earn loan forgiveness "overreach any generosity Congress has authorized before."

In the Missouri ruling, Ross said repayment schedules and "are well within the wheelhouse" of the department but the "plain text" of U.S. law doesn't give it authority to forgive loans before 25 years of payments.

Missouri also has an agency that services student loans. The other states in its lawsuit are Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, North Dakota, Ohio and Oklahoma.

Lawsuit challenges new Louisiana law requiring classrooms to display the Ten Commandments

By SARA CLINE and KEVIN MCGILL Associated Press

BATON ROUGE, La. (AP) — Civil liberties groups filed a lawsuit Monday to block Louisiana's new law that requires the Ten Commandments to be displayed in every public school classroom, a measure they contend is unconstitutional.

Plaintiffs in the suit include parents of Louisiana public school children with various religious backgrounds, who are represented by attorneys with the American Civil Liberties Union Foundation, Americans United for Separation of Church and State, the Freedom From Religion Foundation and the New York City law firm Simpson, Thacher & Bartlett.

"This display sends a message to my children and other students that people of some religious dominations are superior to others," said the Rev. Jeff Simms, a Presbyterian pastor who is a plaintiff in the suit and father of three children in Louisiana public schools. "This is religious favoritism."

Under the legislation signed into law by Republican Gov. Jeff Landry last week, all public K-12 classrooms and state-funded universities will be required to display a poster-sized version of the Ten Commandments in "large, easily readable font" next year.

Opponents argue that the law is a violation of separation of church and state and that the display will isolate students, especially those who are not Christian. Proponents say the measure is not solely religious, but that it has historical significance. In the language of the law, the Ten Commandments are "foundational documents of our state and national government."

Plaintiff Joshua Herlands has two young children in New Orleans public schools who, like their father, are Jewish. There are multiple versions of the Ten Commandments, and Herlands said the specific version mandated for classroom walls does not align with the version from his faith. He worries the display will send a troubling message to his kids and others that "they may be lesser in the eyes of the government."

"Politicians have absolutely no business forcing their religious beliefs on my kids or any kids, or attempting to indoctrinate them with what they think is the right version of a particular piece of religious text," Herlands said.

The lawsuit filed Monday seeks a court declaration that the new law, referred to in the lawsuit as HB 71, violates First Amendment clauses forbidding government establishment of religion and guaranteeing religious liberty. It also seeks an order prohibiting the posting of the Ten Commandments in public school classrooms.

"The state's main interest in passing H.B. 71 was to impose religious beliefs on public-school children, regardless of the harm to students and families," the lawsuit says. "The law's primary sponsor and author, Representative Dodie Horton, proclaimed during debate over the bill that it 'seeks to have a display of God's law in the classroom for children to see what He says is right and what He says is wrong.'"

Defendants include state Superintendent of Education Cade Brumley, members of the state education board and some local school boards.

Landry and Louisiana Attorney General Elizabeth Murrill support the new law, and Murrill has said she is looking forward to defending it. She issued a statement saying she couldn't comment directly on the lawsuit because she had not yet seen it.

"It seems the ACLU only selectively cares about the First Amendment — it doesn't care when the Biden administration censors speech or arrests pro-life protesters, but apparently it will fight to prevent posters that discuss our own legal history," Murrill said in the emailed statement.

The Ten Commandments have long been at the center of lawsuits across the nation.

In 1980, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that a similar Kentucky law violated the establishment clause of the U.S. Constitution, which says Congress can "make no law respecting an establishment of religion." The high court found that the law had no secular purpose but rather served a plainly religious purpose.

In a more recent ruling, the Supreme Court held in 2005 that such displays in a pair of Kentucky courthouses violated the Constitution. At the same time, the court upheld a Ten Commandments marker on

the grounds of the Texas state Capitol in Austin. Those were 5-4 decisions, but the court's makeup has changed, with a 6-3 conservative majority now.

Although some people think this case may rise to the level of the U.S. Supreme Court and test the conservative members, lawyers for the plaintiffs say that they think this is a clear-cut case

"We think this is already covered by clear Supreme Court precedent," said Patrick Elliott, the legal director for the Freedom From Religion Foundation. "We think under current law that we will prevail and it would not be necessary for the Supreme Court to review it."

Other states, including Texas, Oklahoma and Utah, have attempted to pass requirements that the schools display the Ten Commandments. However, with threats of legal battles, none has the mandate in place except for Louisiana.

The posters in Louisiana, which will be paired with a four-paragraph "context statement" describing how the Ten Commandments "were a prominent part of public education for almost three centuries," must be in place in classrooms by the start of 2025.

The controversial law comes during a new era of conservative leadership in Louisiana under Landry, who replaced two-term Democratic Gov. John Bel Edwards in January. The GOP holds a supermajority in the Legislature, and Republicans hold every statewide elected position, paving the way for lawmakers to push through a conservative agenda.

The case was allotted to U.S. District Judge John deGravelles, nominated to the federal bench by former President Barack Obama.

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange will plead guilty in deal with US that will allow him to walk free

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange will plead guilty to a felony charge in a deal with the U.S. Justice Department that will allow him to walk free and resolve a long-running legal saga that spanned multiple continents and centered on the publication of a trove of classified documents.

Assange left a British prison on Monday and will appear later this week in the U.S. federal court in the Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Western Pacific. He's expected to plead guilty to an Espionage Act charge of conspiring to unlawfully obtain and disseminate classified national defense information, the Justice Department said in a letter filed in court.

The guilty plea, which must be approved by a judge, brings an abrupt conclusion to a criminal case of international intrigue and to the U.S. government's years-long pursuit of a publisher whose hugely popular secret-sharing website made him a cause célèbre among many press freedom advocates who said he acted as a journalist to expose U.S. military wrongdoing. Investigators, by contrast, have repeatedly asserted that his actions broke laws meant to protect sensitive information and put the country's national security at risk.

He is expected to return to his home country of Australia after his plea and sentencing, which is scheduled for Wednesday morning, local time in Saipan, the largest island in the Northern Mariana Islands. The hearing is taking place there because of Assange's opposition to traveling to the continental U.S. and the court's proximity to Australia, prosecutors said.

Attorneys for Assange didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on Monday.

In a statement posted on X, WikiLeaks said Assange boarded a plane and departed the United Kingdom on Monday after leaving the British prison, where he has spent the last five years. WikiLeaks applauded the announcement of the deal, saying it was grateful for "all who stood by us, fought for us, and remained utterly committed in the fight for his freedom."

"WikiLeaks published groundbreaking stories of government corruption and human rights abuses, holding the powerful accountable for their actions. As editor-in-chief, Julian paid severely for these principles, and for the people's right to know," WikiLeaks said.

The deal ensures that Assange will admit guilt while also sparing him from any additional prison time.

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He had spent years hiding out in the Ecuadorian embassy in London after Swedish authorities sought his arrest on rape allegations before being locked up in the United Kingdom.

Assange is expected to be sentenced to the five years he has already spent in the high-security British prison while fighting to avoid extradition to the U.S. to face charges, a process that has played out in a series of hearings in London. Last month, he won the right to appeal an extradition order after his lawyers argued that the U.S. government provided "blatantly inadequate" assurances that he would have the same free speech protections as an American citizen if extradited from Britain.

Assange has been heralded by many around the world as a hero who brought to light military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. Among the files published by WikiLeaks was a video of a 2007 Apache helicopter attack by American forces in Baghdad that killed 11 people, including two Reuters journalists.

But his reputation was also tarnished by rape allegations, which he has denied.

The Justice Department's indictment unsealed in 2019 accused Assange of encouraging and helping U.S. Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning steal diplomatic cables and military files that WikiLeaks published in 2010. Prosecutors had accused Assange of damaging national security by publishing documents that harmed the U.S. and its allies and aided its adversaries.

Prosecutors said in a charging document filed in connection with the plea agreement that Assange conspired with Manning to receive and obtain documents, notes and other writings related to the national defense and to "willfully communicate" those records. The document takes care to note that Assange was "not a United States citizen, did not possess a U.S. security clearance, and did not have authorization to possess, access, or control documents, writings, or notes relating to the national defense of the United States, including classified information."

The case was lambasted by press advocates and Assange supporters. Federal prosecutors defended it as targeting conduct that went way beyond that of a journalist gathering information, amounting to an attempt to solicit, steal and indiscriminately publish classified government documents. It was brought even though the Obama administration Justice Department had passed on prosecuting him years earlier.

The plea agreement comes months after President Joe Biden said he was considering a request from Australia to drop the U.S. push to prosecute Assange. The White House was not involved in the decision to resolve Assange's case, according to a White House official who was not authorized to speak publicly about the case and spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity.

Manning was sentenced to 35 years in prison after being convicted of violating the Espionage Act and other offenses for leaking classified government and military documents to WikiLeaks. President Barack Obama commuted her sentence in 2017, allowing her release after about seven years behind bars.

Assange made headlines in 2016 after his website published Democratic emails that prosecutors say were stolen by Russian intelligence operatives. He was never charged in special counsel Robert Mueller's Russia investigation, but the inquiry laid bare in stark detail the role that the hacking operation played in interfering in that year's election on behalf of then-Republican candidate Donald Trump.

Justice Department officials mulled charges for Assange following the documents' 2010 publication, but were unsure a case would hold up in court and were concerned it could be hard to justify prosecuting him for acts similar to those of a conventional journalist.

The posture changed in the Trump administration, however, with former Attorney General Jeff Sessions in 2017 calling Assange's arrest a priority.

Assange's family and supporters have said his physical and mental health have suffered during more than a decade of legal battles, which includes seven years spent inside the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

Assange took refuge in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London in 2012 and was granted political asylum after courts in England ruled he should be extradited to Sweden as part of a rape investigation in the Scandinavian country. He was arrested by British police after Ecuador's government withdrew his asylum status in 2019 and then jailed for skipping bail when he first took shelter inside the embassy.

Although Sweden eventually dropped its sex crimes investigation because so much time had elapsed, Assange has remained in London's high-security Belmarsh Prison during the extradition battle with the U.S.

Mass shootings across the US mark the first weekend of summer

By JOHN SEEWER and SHARON JOHNSON Associated Press

The first weekend of summer brought a tragic yet familiar pattern for American cities wracked by gun violence as mass shootings left dozens dead or wounded at a party in Alabama, an entertainment district in Ohio and a grocery store in Arkansas.

It was the second straight weekend that saw an outbreak of mass shootings across the U.S., prompting mayors in places marred by the violence to plead for help.

In Michigan, a deputy was fatally shot while pursuing a suspected stolen vehicle in what the county sheriff described as an ambush. A Philadelphia police officer was critically wounded Saturday after pulling over a car with four people.

Police in Montgomery, Alabama, said hundreds of rounds were fired at a crowded party early Sunday, leaving nine people wounded. Interim Police Chief John Hall said investigators recovered more than 350 different spent shell casings.

"This senseless violence just has to stop," said Montgomery Mayor Steven Reed, who called it a blessing that no one died while also asking for help in keeping guns out of the hands of criminals.

One reason for so many shootings with multiple victims is the increased use of modified guns that can spray hundreds of shots, said Jillian Snider, a lecturer at John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York.

"That's why you're seeing more victims that are not even involved in the initial confrontation," she said.

Gunfire broke out early Sunday on the main street of a popular restaurant and entertainment district near downtown Columbus, Ohio.

Ten people were injured, one in critical condition, leading the city's mayor to call for more action from state and federal governments to keep guns off the streets and for parents to watch their children. Mayor Andrew Ginther said the gun violence "is outrageous, it's unacceptable, and it must stop."

FBI statistics show overall violent crime in the U.S. has dropped after a pandemic-era spike but it might not feel that way to most people in the wake of these recent shootings, said University of Miami criminologist Alex Piquero.

Summertime always brings a rise in violence because school is out, there are more social gatherings and warmer temperatures can cause tempers to flare, he said. "That creates that kind of opportune structure for violence to occur," Piquero said.

Several of the shootings this past weekend happened at large parties. Police in Dayton, Ohio, said a 22-year-old woman was killed and six people were injured early Monday, after a drive-by shooting at a vacant house where a big crowd had gathered.

Six people were wounded early Sunday at a park in Rochester, New York, after police said at least one person started shooting into a crowd. Elsewhere early Sunday, one man was killed and five others were wounded early in a downtown St. Louis shooting that police believe began when a fight broke out between several women and men stepped in with firearms.

The weekend of mass shootings began Friday in the small city of Fordyce, Arkansas, where four people were killed and another 11 injured — including the alleged gunman. The gunfire sent shoppers and store employees ducking for cover. Among those killed was a 23-year-old new mom.

Is Trump shielded from criminal charges as an ex-president? A nation awaits word from Supreme Court

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — In the coming days, the Supreme Court will confront a perfect storm mostly of its own making: a trio of decisions stemming directly from the Jan. 6, 2021 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Within days of each other, if not hours, the justices are expected to rule on whether Donald Trump has immunity from criminal charges over his efforts to overturn his 2020 election defeat and whether Trump supporters who stormed the Capitol can be prosecuted for obstructing an official proceeding.

The court also will decide whether former Trump adviser Steve Bannon can stay out of prison while

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he appeals his contempt of Congress conviction for defying a subpoena from the House committee that investigated the Capitol attack.

These cases are among the dozen or so major disputes dealing with abortion, homelessness, the power of federal regulators, the opioid epidemic and social media platforms that the justices have left to decide as the traditional end of their term's work nears.

Taken together, the three cases connected to the Republican former president could feed narratives about the court and its conservative supermajority, which includes three justices appointed by Trump and two other justices, Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas, who have rejected calls to step away from the Jan. 6 cases because of questions about their impartiality.

From the perspective of Trump and his allies, the outcomes could provide more fodder for their claims that the Justice Department has treated the Capitol riot defendants unfairly. The riots resulted in more than 1,400 criminal cases in which 200 people have been convicted and more than 850 pleaded guilty to crimes. The outcomes of the cases could give them more reasons to decry the prosecutions.

The court's handling of the immunity issue already has provoked criticism, both that the justices took up the issue at all — particularly given a unanimous federal appeals court ruling that rejected Trump's claim — and more recently that they haven't yet decided it.

Even if the court limits Trump's immunity, or rejects his claims altogether, allowing his trial on election interference to go forward in Washington means "it is unlikely a verdict will be delivered before the election," University of Michigan law professor Leah Litman wrote in *The New York Times*.

While the court has moved more quickly than usual in taking up the immunity case, it has acted far more speedily in other epic cases involving presidential power, including in the Watergate tapes case. Nearly 50 years ago, the court ruled 8-0 a mere 16 days after hearing arguments that Richard Nixon had to turn over recordings of Oval Office conversations, rejecting his claim of executive privilege.

In March, it took the justices less than a month after arguments to rule unanimously that the Constitution's post-Civil War "insurrection clause" couldn't be used by states to kick Trump off the presidential ballot.

The three cases related to Trump's effort to undo his election loss in 2020 highlight how often he has appeared in the court's work this year, though now he is doing so as the Republican Party's presumptive nominee for president. Trump also was a factor in two social media cases and even a trademark dispute over the phrase "Trump too small."

The court almost always finishes its work by the end of June, but that won't happen this year.

The court will issue decisions Wednesday, Thursday and Friday, then return next week to deal with whatever is left. Among the other cases left to decide:

— Can doctors provide abortions in medical emergencies in states that banned abortion after the court overturned *Roe v. Wade*? In a case out of Idaho, the Biden administration says abortions must be allowed in emergencies where a woman's health is at serious risk, while the state argues it is enough that its strict abortion ban contains an exception to save a woman's life.

— The most significant Supreme Court case in decades on homelessness centers on whether people can be banned from sleeping outdoors when shelter space is lacking. A San Francisco-based appeals court ruled such bans amount to cruel and unusual punishment. Leaders from California and across the West say the ruling makes it harder for them to regulate homeless encampments encroaching on sidewalks and other public places.

— The justices could overturn a 40-year-old decision that has been cited thousands of times in federal court cases and used to uphold regulations on the environment, public health, workplace safety and consumer protections. The decision colloquially known as *Chevron* calls on judges to defer to federal regulators when the words of a statute are not crystal clear. The decision has long been targeted by conservative and business interests who say *Chevron* robs judges of their authority and gives too much power to regulators.

— Three cases remain unresolved at the intersection of social media and government. Two cases involve social media laws in Texas and Florida that would limit how Facebook, TikTok, X, YouTube and other social media platforms regulate content posted by their users. In the third case, Republican-led states are suing

the Biden administration over how far the federal government can go to counter controversial social media posts on topics including COVID-19 and election security.

— The Supreme Court controls the fate of a nationwide settlement with OxyContin maker Purdue Pharma that would allocate billions of dollars to combat the opioid epidemic, but also provide a legal shield for members of the Sackler family who own the company. The settlement has been on hold since last summer after the Supreme Court agreed to weigh in.

— Republican-led, energy-producing states and the steel industry want the court to put the Environmental Protection Agency's air pollution-fighting "good neighbor" plan on hold while legal challenges continue. The plan aims to protect downwind states that receive unwanted air pollution from other states.

— Another important regulatory case could strip the Securities and Exchange Commission of a major tool in fighting securities fraud and have far-reaching effects on other regulatory agencies. The court is being asked to rule that people facing civil fraud complaints have the right to a jury trial in federal court.

Car dealerships in North America revert to pens and paper after cyberattacks on software provider

By WYATTE GRANTHAM-PHILIPS AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Car dealerships in North America are still wrestling with major disruptions that started last week with cyberattacks on a company whose software is used widely in the auto retail sales sector.

CDK Global, a company that provides software for thousands of auto dealers in the U.S. and Canada, was hit by back-to-back cyberattacks Wednesday. That led to an outage that has continued to impact operations.

For prospective car buyers, that's meant delays at dealerships or vehicle orders written up by hand. There's no immediate end in sight, but CDK says it expects the restoration process to take "several days" to complete.

On Monday, Group 1 Automotive Inc., a \$4 billion automotive retailer, said it is using "alternative processes" to sell cars to its customers. Lithia Motors and AutoNation, two other dealership chains, also disclosed that they implemented workarounds to keep their operations going.

Here is what you need to know.

What is CDK Global? CDK Global is a major player in the auto sales industry. The company, based just outside of Chicago in Hoffman Estates, Illinois, provides software technology to dealers that helps with day-to-day operations — like facilitating vehicle sales, financing, insurance and repairs.

CDK serves more than 15,000 retail locations across North America, according to the company.

What happened last week? CDK experienced back-to-back cyberattacks on Wednesday. The company shut down all of its systems after the first attack out of an abundance of caution, according to spokesperson Lisa Finney, and then shut down most systems again following the second.

"We have begun the restoration process," Finney said in an update over the weekend — noting that the company had launched an investigation into the "cyber incident" with third-party experts and notified law enforcement.

"Based on the information we have at this time, we anticipate that the process will take several days to complete, and in the interim we are continuing to actively engage with our customers and provide them with alternate ways to conduct business," she added.

In messages to its customers, the company has also warned of "bad actors" posing as members or affiliates of CDK to try to obtain system access by contacting customers. It urged them to be cautious of any attempted phishing.

The incident bore all the hallmarks of a ransomware attack, in which targets are asked to pay a ransom to access encrypted files. But CDK declined to comment directly — neither confirming or denying if it had received a ransom demand.

"When you see an attack of this kind, it almost always ends up being a ransomware attack," Cliff Stein-

hauer, director of information security and engagement at the National Cybersecurity Alliance. "We see it time and time again unfortunately, (particularly in) the last couple of years. No industry and no organization or software company is immune."

Are impacted dealerships still selling cars? Several major auto companies — including Stellantis, Ford and BMW — confirmed to The Associated Press last week that the CDK outage had impacted some of their dealers, but that sales operations continue.

In light of the ongoing situation, a spokesperson for Stellantis said Friday that many dealerships had switched to manual processes to serve customers. That includes writing up orders by hand.

A Ford spokesperson added that the outage may cause "some delays and inconveniences at some dealers and for some customers." However, many Ford and Lincoln customers are still getting sales and service support through alternative routes being used at dealerships.

"The people who've been around longer — you know, guys who have maybe a little salt in their hair like me — we remember how to do it before the computers," said John Crane of Hawk Auto Group, a Westmont, Illinois-based dealership operator that uses CDK. "It's just a few more steps and a little bit more time."

Although impacted Hawk Auto dealerships are still able to serve customers by "going back to the basics," Crane added that those working in administration are still "pulling out our hair." He notes that there are now stacks of paper awaiting processing — in place of orders that went through automatically on a computer overnight.

Group 1 Automotive Inc. said Monday that the incident has disrupted its business applications and processes in its U.S. operations that rely on CDK's dealers' systems. The company said that it took measures to protect and isolate its systems from CDK's platform.

In regulatory filings, Lithia Motors and AutoNation disclosed that last week's incident at CDK had disrupted their operations as well.

Lithia said it activated cyber incident response procedures, which included "severing business service connections between the company's systems and CDK's." AutoNation said it also took steps to protect its systems and data, adding that all of its locations remain open "albeit with lower productivity," as many are served manually or through alternative processes.

HOW CAN I PROTECT MYSELF? With many details of the cyberattacks still unclear, customer privacy is also at top of mind — especially with little known about what information may have been compromised this week.

If you've bought a car from a dealership that's used CDK software, cybersecurity security experts stress that it's important to assume your data may have been breached. That could potentially include "pretty sensitive information," Steinhauer noted, like your social security number, employment history, income and current or former addresses.

Those impacted should monitor their credit — or even freeze their credit as an added layer of defense — and consider signing up for identify theft monitor insurance. You'll also want to be wary of any phishing attempts. It's best to make sure you have reliable contact information for a company by visiting their official website, for example, as scammers sometimes try to take advantage of news about data breaches to gain your trust through look-alike emails or phone calls.

Those are some best practices to keep in mind whether you're a victim of CDK's data breach or not, Steinhauer said. "Unfortunately, in this day and age, our data is a valuable target — and you have to make sure that you're taking steps to protect it," he said.

Prosecutor in classified documents case clashes with judge over request to restrict Trump's speech

By ERIC TUCKER and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

FORT PIERCE, Fla. (AP) — A federal prosecutor in the classified documents case of Donald Trump clashed with the judge Monday as he faced skeptical questioning over a request to bar the former president from making threatening comments about law enforcement agents involved in the investigation.

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Special counsel Jack Smith's team is seeking to make as a condition of Trump's freedom pending trial a prohibition on remarks that could endanger FBI agents participating in the case. Prosecutors say those restrictions are necessary after Trump falsely claimed last month that the FBI was prepared to kill him when it searched his Florida estate, Mar-a-Lago, for classified documents two years ago.

But prosecutor David Harbach, a member of Smith's team, encountered immediate pushback from U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, a Trump appointee whose handling of the case has generated intense scrutiny and has contributed to delays that make a trial before the November presidential election a virtual impossibility.

The judge questioned Harbach about how she could fashion an order that did not run afoul of Trump's free speech rights, whether FBI agents were sufficiently protected if their names were withheld from court documents and how prosecutors could prove a direct link between Trump's comments and any resulting harm to the public.

"I'm trying to make sure that whatever condition is contemplated is consistent with the First Amendment," she said, later adding that there needs to be a connection "between the alleged dangerous comments and the risk" to public safety.

At one point, as Harbach tried despite frequent interruptions from Cannon to rattle off the multiple rationales that he said existed for speech restrictions on Trump, the visibly exasperated prosecutor noted acidly that "I've got one reason out so far."

The comment drew a rebuke from Cannon, who said, "Mr. Harbach, I don't appreciate your tone." She said that if he could not behave in a more professional manner, one of his colleagues could take over instead.

Harbach went on to complete his arguments and later apologized to the judge, saying he hadn't meant to be unprofessional.

Defense lawyer Todd Blanche disputed the idea that Trump's comments posed an imminent threat to anyone in law enforcement and contended that prosecutors' request would have a chilling effect. Trump is the presumptive Republican presidential nominee and is set to debate President Joe Biden on Thursday.

Trump was not required to be present for the hearing and was not in attendance.

Trump's often-incendiary rhetoric has carried legal consequences in other cases.

The New York judge presiding over Trump's hush money trial, in which he was convicted of 34 felony counts last month, fined him a total of \$10,000 for violating a gag order that barred him from verbal attacks on witnesses and jurors. And a federal judge in Washington handling his election subversion case imposed a gag order last year that an appeals court later largely upheld but also narrowed.

It was not immediately clear when Cannon might rule. The arguments were part of a three-day hearing that began Friday to deal with several of the many unresolved legal issues that have piled up in a case that has been snarled by delays and a plodding pace. Cannon indefinitely postponed the trial last month and no new date has been set.

Trump faces dozens of felony charges accusing him of illegally hoarding top-secret records at Mar-a-Lago and obstructing the FBI's efforts to get them back. Given the breadth of evidence that prosecutors have put forward, many legal experts have regarded the case as the most straightforward of the four prosecutions against Trump, who has pleaded not guilty. But Cannon has been slow to rule on numerous motions and has proved willing to entertain defense requests that prosecutors say are meritless.

Smith's team objected last month after Trump publicly claimed that the FBI was prepared to kill him while executing a court-authorized search warrant of Mar-a-Lago on Aug. 8, 2022. Trump was referencing boilerplate language from FBI policy that prohibits the use of deadly force during the execution of search warrants except when the officer conducting the search has a reasonable belief that the "subject of such force poses an imminent danger of death or serious physical injury to the officer or to another person."

Trump falsely claimed in a fundraising email that the Biden administration was "locked & loaded ready to take me out & put my family in danger."

Prosecutors argued that such comments are part of a pattern of Trump speech that animates his base against law enforcement, citing as examples an attempted attack on an FBI office in Ohio three days after

the Mar-a-Lago search and the more recent arrest of a Trump supporter accused of threatening an FBI agent who investigated Biden's son, Hunter.

"In our view, they are significant, they are dangerous," Harbach said of the comments. "They present an imminent and foreseeable risk to the FBI agents in the case."

But Trump's lawyers say prosecutors failed to show that his comments have endangered any FBI official who participated in the Mar-a-Lago search. They said Trump was commenting more generally on his belief that he is the victim of political persecution rather than about any one individual.

"It's an attack on the decision made by his political rival to authorize a search by agents authorized to carry guns," said Blanche, one of Trump's attorneys.

The Justice Department has said Biden has had no involvement in the investigation.

Netanyahu says he won't agree to a deal that ends the war in Gaza, testing the latest truce proposal

By TIA GOLDENBERG and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — The viability of a U.S.-backed proposal to wind down the 8-month-long war in Gaza has been cast into doubt after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he would only be willing to agree to a "partial" cease-fire deal that would not end the war, comments that sparked an uproar from families of hostages held by Hamas.

In an interview broadcast late Sunday on Israeli Channel 14, a conservative, pro-Netanyahu station, the Israeli leader said he was "prepared to make a partial deal — this is no secret — that will return to us some of the people," referring to the roughly 120 hostages still held in the Gaza Strip. "But we are committed to continuing the war after a pause, in order to complete the goal of eliminating Hamas. I'm not willing to give up on that."

Netanyahu's comments did not deviate dramatically from what he has said previously about his terms for a deal. But they come at a sensitive time, as Israel and Hamas appear to be moving further apart over the latest cease-fire proposal, and they could represent another setback for mediators trying to end the war.

Netanyahu's comments stood in sharp contrast to the outlines of the deal detailed late last month by U.S. President Joe Biden, who framed the plan as an Israeli one and which some in Israel refer to as "Netanyahu's deal." His remarks could further strain Israel's ties to the U.S., its top ally, which launched a major diplomatic push for the latest cease-fire proposal.

The three-phased plan would bring about the release of the remaining hostages in exchange for hundreds of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. But disputes and mistrust persist between Israel and Hamas over how the deal plays out.

Hamas has insisted it will not release the remaining hostages unless there's a permanent cease-fire and a full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. When Biden announced the latest proposal, he said it included both.

But Netanyahu says Israel is still committed to destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities, and ensuring it can never again carry out an Oct. 7-style assault. A full withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, where Hamas' top leadership and much of its forces are still intact, would almost certainly leave the group in control of the territory and able to rearm.

In the interview, Netanyahu said the current phase of fighting is ending, setting the stage for Israel to send more troops to its northern border to confront the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, in what could open up a new war front. But he said that didn't mean the war in Gaza was over.

On Monday, Minister of Defense Yoav Gallant discussed tensions on the border with Lebanon during his trip to Washington with Amos Hochstein, a senior adviser to Biden. He echoed Netanyahu's comments that the war in Gaza is transitioning to a new phase, which could impact other conflicts, including with Hezbollah.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken told Gallant that it was critical to avoid escalating the conflict in the Middle East and find a resolution that "allows both Israeli and Lebanese families to return to their homes."

Israel is close to dismantling the Hamas military brigades in the southern city of Rafah, and maintains

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"full control" over the Philadelphi Corridor, a strategic buffer zone along Gaza's border with Egypt, Israel's military chief Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi said. Israel says the corridor is awash with tunnels that Hamas uses to smuggle weapons and other goods. Halevi said Israel's control over the buffer zone will bring an end to that.

During the initial six-week phase of the proposed cease-fire, the sides are supposed to negotiate an agreement on the second phase, which Biden said would include the release of all remaining living hostages including male soldiers and Israel's full withdrawal from Gaza. The temporary cease-fire would become permanent.

Hamas appears concerned that Israel will resume the war once its most vulnerable hostages are returned. And even if it doesn't, Israel could make demands in that stage of negotiations that were not part of the initial deal and are unacceptable to Hamas — and then resume the war when Hamas refuses them.

Netanyahu's remarks reinforced that concern. After they were aired, Hamas said they represented "unmistakable confirmation of his rejection" of the U.S.-supported deal, which also received the backing of the United Nations' Security Council.

In a statement late Sunday after Netanyahu's lengthy TV interview, the Palestinian militant group said his position was "in contrast" to what the U.S. administration said Israel had approved. The group said its insistence that any deal should include a permanent cease-fire and the withdrawal of all Israeli forces from the Gaza Strip "was an inevitable necessity to block Netanyahu's attempts of evasion, deception, and perpetuation of aggression and the war of extermination against our people."

Netanyahu shot back and in a statement from his office said Hamas opposed a deal. He said Israel would not withdraw from Gaza until all 120 hostages are returned.

Hamas welcomed the broad outline of the U.S. plan but proposed what it said were "amendments." During a visit to the region earlier this month, Blinken said some of Hamas' demands were "workable" and some were not, without elaborating.

Netanyahu and Hamas both have incentives to keep the devastating war going despite the catastrophic toll it has had on civilians in Gaza and the mounting anger in Israel that the hostages have not been returned and Hamas is not defeated.

The families of hostages have grown increasingly impatient with Netanyahu, seeing his apparent reluctance to move ahead on a deal as tainted by political considerations. A group representing the families condemned Netanyahu's remarks, which it viewed as an Israeli rejection of the latest cease-fire proposal.

"This is an abandonment of the 120 hostages and a violation of the state's moral duty toward its citizens," it said, noting that it held Netanyahu responsible for returning all the captives.

Earlier Sunday, Netanyahu repeated his claim that a "dramatic drop" in arms shipments from the U.S. was hindering the war effort. U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said Monday that he doesn't understand Netanyahu's comments and that Biden has delayed only one shipment of heavy bombs over concerns about heavy civilian casualties.

"There are other weapons that we continue to provide Israel as we have done going back years and years, because we are committed to Israel's security," Miller told reporters in Washington. "There has been no change in that."

In its Oct. 7 cross-border assault, Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and took 250 people captive, including women, children and older people. Dozens were freed in a temporary cease-fire deal in late November and of the 120 remaining hostages, Israel says about a third are dead.

Israel's retaliatory war has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-ruled territory. It has sparked a humanitarian crisis and displaced most of the territory's 2.3 million population.

Trump has spent months painting Biden as incompetent. Now he's changing his tone before the debate

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — After months of casting President Joe Biden as a shell of a man incapable of putting two sentences together, Donald Trump has changed his tune days before their first debate.

"I assume he's going to be somebody that will be a worthy debater," the former president and presumptive Republican nominee said in an appearance on "The All-In" podcast last week.

"I don't want to underestimate him," he added.

The changed rhetoric marks a dramatic shift from how Trump typically describes the man he will face in a rematch this November. At his rallies and in speeches, Trump typically casts the Democratic incumbent as a "low-IQ individual" who is "the worst, most incompetent, and most corrupt president" in the nation's history, and often imitates Biden appearing lost on stage.

The effort to adjust expectations ahead of Thursday's matchup in Atlanta comes amid concerns from some in his party that Trump has set the bar so low for Biden that he is sure to exceed it. And it underscores the stakes for both men in a race that has appeared largely static for months.

Millions are expected to tune in Thursday, offering a rare opportunity for both sides to try to gain momentum in a contest that will likely be decided by a small fraction of voters in a handful of battleground states.

Trump — who has never admitted he lost fairly to Biden in 2020 and continues to spread false and unproven theories about election fraud — may also be setting up a series of excuses in case he is outperformed by Biden.

"Maybe I'm better off losing the debate," Trump quipped in an interview with Real America's Voice earlier this month. "I'll make sure he stays. I'll lose the debate on purpose, maybe I'll do something like that."

It's not just Trump who has been talking up Biden. On Sunday, North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, one of Trump's chief surrogates and a top vice presidential contender, pointed to the president's experience on the debate stage.

"This guy has got the ability," he said on CNN's "State of the Union." "We have seen him in the State of the Union this year, that, when he needs to, he can step up."

At the same time, Trump and his campaign have ramped up their attacks on the debate's moderators, insisting the former president won't be given a fair shake by CNN, which will be hosting the debate. Both campaigns accepted CNN's invitation after deciding to sidestep the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates, which had hosted debates for decades.

"I'll be debating three people instead of one half of a person," Trump said at a rally in Racine, Wisconsin, last week.

On Monday, one of the network's hosts, Kasie Hunt, cut off Trump spokesperson Karoline Leavitt and ended their segment after Leavitt attacked Jake Tapper, the anchor who will moderate along with Dana Bash, accusing him of being biased against Trump.

The episode "shows that exactly what we're saying is true, that CNN is not a friendly Trump network, and it won't be friendly to him on Thursday night," Leavitt said after the incident on FOX Radio's "FOX Across America."

CNN, in a statement, called Tapper and Bash "well-respected veteran journalists" with "extensive experience moderating major political debates."

"There are no two people better equipped to co-moderate a substantial and fact-based discussion and we look forward to the debate on June 27 in Atlanta," the network said in a statement.

During "The All-In" podcast interview, Trump repeatedly pointed to Biden's vice presidential debate against Paul Ryan in 2012, then-GOP nominee Mitt Romney's running mate.

"Well, all I can say is this: I watched him with Paul Ryan, and he destroyed Paul Ryan," said Trump. "So I'm not underestimating him. I'm not underestimating him. It is what it is. We'll see what happens."

Complimenting Biden at Ryan's expense also allows Trump to insult the former House speaker, who was

an often uneasy ally when Trump was in the White House and has since spoken out repeatedly against the former president.

Trump has not completely abandoned his insults of Biden.

At a Saturday gathering of evangelical Christians in Washington, he again went after Biden in deeply personal terms, questioning his intellect. He's even suggested that Biden would be drugged at the debate, an outlandish attack he also made without evidence during this year's State of the Union address.

"I say he'll come out all jacked up, right? All jacked up," Trump told a rally crowd Saturday in Philadelphia.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung, meanwhile, accused the media of helping to lower Biden's expectations "so low he gets a participation trophy simply for standing upright for 90 minutes" and questioned if "Biden can speak for himself without the overt participation and interference of two CNN moderators."

Biden's campaign responded by accusing Trump of trying to "distract us from the reality of Thursday night — before a general election audience for the first time, Trump will have to answer for ripping away Americans' freedoms, promising his billionaire donors tax cuts at the expense of the middle class, and threatening our very democracy with promises to rule as a dictator if he wins and violence if he loses," said spokesperson Ammar Moussa.

Music record labels sue AI song-generators Suno and Udio for copyright infringement

BOSTON (AP) — Big record companies are suing artificial intelligence song-generators Suno and Udio for copyright infringement, alleging that the AI music startups are exploiting the recorded works of artists from Chuck Berry to Mariah Carey.

The Recording Industry Association of America announced the lawsuits Monday brought by labels including Sony Music Entertainment, Universal Music Group and Warner Records.

One case was filed in federal court in Boston against Suno AI, and the other in New York against Uncharted Labs, the developer of Udio AI.

Suno AI CEO Mikey Shulman said in an emailed statement that the technology is "designed to generate completely new outputs, not to memorize and regurgitate pre-existing content" and doesn't allow users to reference specific artists.

Shulman said his Cambridge, Massachusetts-based startup tried to explain this to labels "but instead of entertaining a good faith discussion, they've reverted to their old lawyer-led playbook."

Udio didn't immediately respond to requests for comment.

RIAA Chairman and CEO Mitch Glazier said in a written statement that the music industry is already collaborating with responsible AI developers but said that "unlicensed services like Suno and Udio that claim it's 'fair' to copy an artist's life's work and exploit it for their own profit without consent or pay set back the promise of genuinely innovative AI for us all."

AI has been a heated topic of conversation in the music industry, with debates ranging from the creative possibilities of the new technology to concerns around its legality. In March, Tennessee became the first U.S. state to pass legislation to protect songwriters, performers and other music industry professionals against the potential dangers of artificial intelligence. Supporters said the goal is to ensure that AI tools cannot replicate an artist's voice without their consent.

The following month, over 200 artists signed an open letter submitted by the Artist Rights Alliance non-profit calling on artificial intelligence tech companies, developers, platforms, digital music services and platforms to stop using AI to infringe upon and devalue the rights of human artists.

Planned Parenthood says it will spend \$40 million on abortion rights ahead of November's election

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Planned Parenthood will spend \$40 million ahead of November's elections to bolster President Joe Biden and leading congressional Democrats, betting that voters angry at Republican-led efforts to further restrict access to abortion can be the difference in key races around the country.

The political and advocacy arms of the nation's leading reproductive health-care provider and abortion rights advocacy organization shared the announcement with The Associated Press before its wider release Monday.

The group will initially target eight states: Arizona, Georgia, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, where Biden is seeking to defend 2020 victories, as well as North Carolina, which the Democratic president's campaign hopes to flip after Republican Donald Trump won it four years ago, and Montana, New Hampshire and New York, which have races that could help determine control of the Senate and House.

The push will try to reach voters with volunteer and paid canvassing programs, phone banking and digital, TV, and mail advertising.

"Abortion will be the message of this election, and it will be how we energize voters," said Jenny Lawson, executive director of Planned Parenthood Votes. "It will be what enables us to win."

The spending plan is not an election cycle record for the group. It spent \$45 million ahead of Biden defeating Trump in 2020 and \$50 million before the 2022 midterms.

Planned Parenthood's advocacy arms focused on pouring money into contests where access to abortion was on the ballot after the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade*, the landmark 1973 case that created a constitutional right to have an abortion, a decision handed down two years ago Monday.

"We continue to see the devastation that comes when anti-abortion politicians have power," Lawson said of the years since. "It's just gotten worse."

Abortion continues to be one of the nation's most important political issues, but dynamics around it have changed since the Supreme Court ruling. After the ruling, most Republican-controlled states imposed new abortion restrictions, including some bans at every stage of pregnancy.

Meanwhile, voters in seven states — California, Michigan and Vermont, as well as usually reliably Republican Kansas, Kentucky, Montana and Ohio — sided with abortion-rights supporters on ballot measures.

In November, voters in several other states, including battleground Arizona and Nevada, will have abortion referendums on the ballot, as will Florida, a onetime presidential bellwether that has gotten increasingly Republican in recent cycles but where Biden's campaign is hoping turnout for the abortion ballot initiative can make things closer.

SBA Pro-Life America, one of the country's most prominent groups opposed to abortion rights, announced in February that it plans to spend \$92 million targeting voters in eight battleground states: Arizona, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Wisconsin, Michigan, Ohio, Montana and Georgia.

In addition to national efforts, local Planned Parenthood advocacy and political organizations in California, Florida, Michigan, Minnesota, Nevada, North Carolina and Ohio are planning advocacy campaigns ahead of November.

Planned Parenthood advocacy efforts also will focus on some down-ballot races, like aiding Democrats seeking a supermajority in the Nevada statehouse, or opposing two state supreme court justices up for reelection in Arizona after they voted to allow officials to enforce an 1864 law criminalizing nearly all abortions, which the state legislature has since voted to repeal.

"We can't just vote for ballot initiatives," said Lindsey Harmon, executive director for Nevada Advocates for Planned Parenthood Affiliates PAC. "We also have to support the infrastructure that makes abortion access possible."

What is Hezbollah, the Iranian-backed group that could go to all-out war against Israel?

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB The Associated Press
BEIRUT (AP) — After more than eight months of low-scale conflict, Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah are threatening all-out war.

The United States and the international community are lobbying for calm and hopeful for a diplomatic solution. They have not been successful so far and time for a political settlement could be expiring.

Should war break out, Israel would face a much more formidable foe in Lebanon than it faced in Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah warned Israel last week that his group has new weapons and capabilities, and it has published surveillance drone footage taken deep inside northern Israel that showed the port of Haifa and other sites far from the Lebanon-Israel border.

A look at how Hezbollah became what many call the strongest non-state force in the region.

What is Hezbollah? Founded in 1982 during Lebanon's civil war, Hezbollah's initial objective was ending Israel's occupation of southern Lebanon. It achieved that in 2000.

Shiite Muslim Hezbollah is part of a collection of Iranian-backed factions and governments known as the Axis of Resistance. It was the first group that Iran backed and used as a way to export its brand of political Islamism.

In its early days the group attacked U.S. targets, causing Washington to designate it a terrorist organization.

"Iran's support has helped Hezbollah consolidate its position as Lebanon's most powerful political actor as well as the most-equipped military actor supported by Iran in the whole of the Middle East," said Lina Khatib, the director of the SOAS Middle East Institute in London.

Hezbollah fighters ambushed an Israeli patrol in 2006 and took two Israeli soldiers hostage. Hezbollah and Israel fought a monthlong war that ended in a draw but Israeli bombardment wreaked widespread destruction in southern Lebanon.

Israel's objective was eliminating Hezbollah but the Lebanese group came out stronger and became a key military and political power on Israel's northern border.

Domestic opponents have criticized Hezbollah for maintaining its arsenal and for coming to dominate the government. Hezbollah's reputation also suffered when it briefly seized a section of Beirut in May 2008 after the Lebanese government took measures against its private telecommunications network.

Hezbollah's military capabilities have also surged, and it has played a key role in the Syrian civil war, keeping President Bashar al-Assad in power. And it has helped train Iran-backed militias in Syria and Iraq, as well as Yemen's Houthi rebels.

What are Hezbollah's military capabilities? Throughout its latest conflict with Israel, Hezbollah has gradually introduced new weapons to its arsenal, especially after Israel began its ground invasion of the southern city of Rafah in Gaza in early May.

While Hezbollah initially began launching Cornet anti-tank missiles and salvos of Katyusha rockets, it later started using rockets with heavy warheads, and eventually introduced explosive drones and surface-to-air missiles for the first time. Nasrallah said the drones are locally manufactured, with many at their disposal.

The group notably released the two videos of footage from drones over Haifa and other sites in northern Israel, showing critical civilian and military infrastructure in a move intended to showcase new access and capabilities and deter Israeli attack.

In a televised address last week, Nasrallah said that the group will continue resorting to this tactic.

"We now have new weapons. But I won't say what they are," he said. "When the decision is made, they will be seen on the front lines."

How does Hezbollah compare to other Iranian-backed groups? Hezbollah is the Arab world's most significant paramilitary force with a robust internal structure as well as a sizeable arsenal. Israel sees it as its most direct threat, and estimates that it has an arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, including precision-guided missiles.

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In recent years, Hezbollah sent forces to Syria to help fellow Iranian ally President Bashar Assad against armed opposition groups. It also supported the growth of Iranian-backed militias in Iraq, Yemen and Syria.

Khatib of the SOAS Middle East Institute in London likened Hezbollah to a "big brother" of fledgling Iranian-backed groups that "do not enjoy the same level of infrastructure or discipline."

Hezbollah is bound to Iran by doctrine. However, its relationship with Hamas, an offshoot of the Sunni Muslim Brotherhood movement, is based on pragmatism.

In recent years, some Hamas officials, including its former second-in-command, Saleh al-Aroui, have since moved to Lebanon, where they have Hezbollah's protection and a presence across Lebanon's multiple Palestinian refugee camps. Aroui was killed in an Israeli drone strike in a southern Beirut suburb in January.

Who Is Hassan Nasrallah? Born in 1960 into a poor Shiite family in the Beirut suburb of Bourj Hammoud and later displaced to south Lebanon, Nasrallah studied theology and joined the Amal movement, a Shiite political and paramilitary organization, before becoming one of Hezbollah's founders.

He became Hezbollah's leader in 1992 after his predecessor was killed in an Israeli strike.

Idolized by many for presiding over Israel's withdrawal from the south and leading the 2006 war, his image appears on billboards and on gadgets in souvenir shops in Lebanon, Syria and other countries across the Arab world. But he also faces opposition among Lebanese who accuse him of tying their country's fate to Iran.

Nasrallah is also considered to be pragmatic, able to make political compromises.

He has lived in hiding for years, fearing Israeli assassination, and delivers his speeches from undisclosed locations.

A WHO official says the US-built pier in Gaza not sufficient in delivering aid to Palestinians

By AHMED HATEM and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

CAIRO (AP) — The reconnected U.S.-built pier off the coast of the Gaza Strip cannot supply Palestinians with anywhere near the level of aid they need, the head of the World Health Organization's Eastern Mediterranean region said Monday.

Dr. Hanan Balkhy made the remarks after the U.S. military began delivering aid through the floating pier again, after it was removed a second time because of rough seas.

"The pier has supported a little bit, but it's not to the scale that is needed by any stretch of the imagination," Balkhy told The Associated Press in an interview. "So we need to emphasize on the land routes to ensure the amount and the quantity and the efficiency."

The organization says that since Israel launched its ground operation into Rafah, aid delivery had declined by 67%, with over 50 WHO trucks stuck on the Egyptian side of the crossing into the southern city. Meanwhile, just three trucks were allowed into Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing.

Israel says it has allowed hundreds of truckloads of aid through the crossing, but says the U.N. has failed to pick it up. The U.N. says it is too dangerous for trucks to move through the area due to rampant lawlessness, despite Israeli pledges to carve out a safe corridor.

Israel's war against Hamas, now in its ninth month, continues to face growing international criticism over widespread destruction in Gaza and a huge toll in civilian lives.

Aid groups have regularly criticized the plan to deliver aid to Gaza by sea as ineffective and a distraction that has taken pressure off Israel to open land border crossings that can deliver aid in larger numbers.

The Israeli military's ground offensives and bombardments, following Hamas' surprise attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, have killed over 37,600 people and wounded over 86,000 others, according to Gaza's Health Ministry. Some 1.3 million people displaced from the southern city of Rafah, over half the strip's population, now shelter in tents and cramped apartments in central Gaza.

And despite some increased aid into northern Gaza, experts say the enclave is at "high risk" of famine. Overcrowded hospitals struggle to keep the lights on due to lack of fuel and there are medicine shortages, while also sheltering many displaced Palestinians.

Delivering aid through two key Gaza land border crossings has been especially difficult after Israeli troops seized the strategic Rafah crossing with Egypt in May. WHO has also struggled to evacuate some 10,000 patients in Gaza who it says urgently need treatment abroad.

WHO says its last dispatch of aid that reached Gaza was a rare delivery into the north to the Kamal Adwan and Al Awda hospitals.

"Almost everything is being prohibited, and some of the needed commodities are being delivered, but as I mentioned not at the scale that is needed for the people of Gaza," Balkhy said.

She warned that the dire condition of hospitals as well as poor living conditions and "significant malnutrition," is ripe for the spread of infectious diseases.

"We're talking about larger numbers of children, and patients with scabies, diarrhea, lice, rashes of unknown causes," she said. "Every time there's a lack of hygiene, infectious diseases caused by pathogens start to flourish."

Endangered House candidates grapple with how closely to run with Biden and Trump

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As Democratic Rep. Mary Peltola readies for a tough reelection contest in Alaska, she's talking fish. For Rep. Mike Levin, who is trying to keep his California district blue, the big topic is sand. And as Republican Rep. Mike Garcia campaigns in another competitive California district, he's criticizing a state-levied gas tax.

As these incumbents and others vie for reelection in the few dozen districts that are likely to determine control of the House this fall, they are leaning into local issues. It's a time-honored political strategy, but it's also an attempt to change the subject as candidates wrestle with how to talk about the two men at the top of the ticket this year — President Joe Biden and Donald Trump.

Both presumptive presidential nominees remain popular with their party's core voters, yet have struggled to secure the broad approval that helps their party win down ballot, leaving many of their candidates to essentially fend for themselves.

"I am so angry and frustrated with Joe Biden right now," said Peltola, citing disagreements with Biden's policies on liquefied natural gas and the border.

In 2022, she flipped Alaska's lone House seat to Democrats for the first time in nearly 50 years. But to keep it blue this year, she will have to overcome headwinds at the top of the ticket. Trump carried Alaska by 10 percentage points over Biden in 2020, and is nearly certain to carry the state again.

For Peltola, the answer to Trump's popularity in Alaska is a cause that was central to her 2022 campaign: reducing the number of fish that are caught by accident through bottom trawling.

"Salmon and halibut and crab and herring really, really unite Alaskans," she said. "That is our identity."

Peltola is not alone in her approach. With attention in Congress shifting to campaigns in recent weeks, at times dozens of Democrats have broken with Biden on policy matters, especially thorny issues like illegal immigration and conditions on aid to Israel.

The dynamic was on full display earlier this month when Biden announced an order to clamp asylum claims at the border. While Biden's ceremonial signing of the proclamation in the East Room of the White House came during a busy day on Capitol Hill, only eight congressional lawmakers -- Democrats mostly from border states like Texas, Arizona and California -- showed up.

With Biden and Trump locked in a tight election battle and Democrats defending a difficult map to keep control of the Senate, many Democrats view the House majority as a crucial firestop in the event of a Trump presidency.

To win, Democrats are focusing on peeling away independent and Republican voters, a tacit acknowledgment that winning control of Congress will likely require many of the party's candidates to outperform Biden.

"We want them to stand up and talk about what positions they think, what policies we should move, and they may have some disagreements with the administration in some cases, some cases not," Rep. Suzan

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DelBene, the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, said last month. "Whatever that may be, they are speaking up for their communities."

As the country grapples with a moment of dissatisfaction with the choices for president, political strategists also see growing potential for split-ticket voting, especially among independent-minded voters.

"Voters may decide they are going to vote for Trump but they know how unstable he can be, so they will vote for a Democrat to check him," said former Rep. Steve Israel, who chaired the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee and now directs the Cornell University Institute of Politics and Global Affairs.

Meanwhile, House Republican leaders have tied themselves closely to Trump. They enthusiastically welcomed him to Capitol Hill this month and both House Speaker Mike Johnson and Rep. Richard Hudson, the chair of the Republican National Campaign Committee, traveled to Florida for meetings at Trump's Mar-a-Lago club.

"We're committed to working very closely with him," Hudson said at a news conference.

During Trump's visit with House members, he offered to hold telephone rallies for the lawmakers.

Several Republicans — surely aware of Trump's propensity for calling out those who voice dissent — said they would potentially welcome Trump's help, even in districts that Biden won in 2020.

Garcia, the California Republican whose district Biden won by more than 12 percentage points, called Trump's town hall proposal "a gracious offer."

"We appreciate all the help we can get," he said.

As a former U.S. Navy officer, Garcia looks to appeal to a large number of service members, veterans and what he calls "JFK Democrats" who are socially liberal but conservative on economic and national security issues.

Some other Republicans, such as Rep. Mike Lawler, R-N.Y., were ambivalent about taking the former president up on the telephone rally offer. But he still said that contrasting Trump's record in the White House with Biden's accomplishments would give him an advantage in a district that Biden won in 2020.

"The focus for me is on the direction of the country," Lawler said. "I think what you're seeing across the country is that people are less focused on personality and more focused on the substance of the issues."

Recent elections give Republican candidates some reason for caution. Trump has been mostly a drag on his party when it comes to Congress. When Trump ran for reelection in 2020, Democrats took the Senate and held on to their House majority. In 2022, as Trump's presence loomed large, Republicans fell well short of expectations while winning the House. Meanwhile, their campaign for the Senate majority crashed and burned, doomed in key states by candidates that Trump had helped to elevate.

Republicans are hoping that Biden's record, rather than what they see as Trump's, will be decisive for voters.

"Four years have gone by, it could be more of a referendum on Biden," said Sarah Chamberlain, president of Republican Main Street Partnership, which bolsters the GOP House members running in battleground districts.

But some swing state Democrats see Biden's rematch against Trump as a potential political asset. In 2022, Biden made a late-hour visit to help Levin in California and he went on to win by five points. Levin thinks he still has an advantage at the top of the ticket.

"I think my constituents have strong feelings about President Biden, but they also had strong feelings about former President Trump," Levin said. "I will always take a decent, accomplished President Biden who truly cares about people over a narcissistic, chaotic Trump who only cares about himself."

Levin is also emphasizing one of Biden and Democrats' key legislative accomplishments by developing an interactive map that shows the district projects that have been funded by the infrastructure law of 2021. He talks often about a local project that replenishes the sand on a beach to protect a coastal rail line.

"I hear more about that sand than you would know," he said.

With another setback for cease-fire talks, worries of full-scale war for Israel and Lebanon escalate

BY ABBY SEWELL AND MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — The prospect of a full-scale war between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group terrifies people on both sides of the border, but some see it as an inevitable fallout from Israel's ongoing war against Hamas in Gaza, particularly as cease-fire negotiations have faltered.

Such a war could be the most destructive either side has ever experienced.

Israel and Hezbollah each have lessons from their last war, in 2006, a monthlong conflict that ended in a draw. They've also had nearly nine months to prepare for another war, even as the United States tries to prevent a widening of the conflict that could spark a confrontation with Iran and endanger U.S. forces in the region.

Here's a look at each side's preparedness, how war might unfold and what's being done to prevent it.

What happened in 2006? The 2006 war, six years after Israeli forces that had occupied southern Lebanon withdrew, erupted after Hezbollah captured two Israeli soldiers and killed several others in a cross-border raid.

Israel launched a full-scale air and ground offensive and imposed a blockade that aimed to free the hostages and destroy Hezbollah's military capabilities — a mission that ultimately failed.

Israeli bombing leveled large swaths of south Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. Hezbollah fired thousands of unguided rockets into northern Israel communities.

The conflict killed some 1,200 Lebanese, mostly civilians, and 160 Israelis, mostly soldiers.

A United Nations resolution ending the war called for withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon and a demilitarized zone on Lebanon's side of the border.

Despite the deployment of U.N. peacekeepers, Hezbollah continues to operate in the border area, while Lebanon says Israel regularly violates its airspace and continues to occupy pockets of Lebanese land.

How probable is war? An Israel-Hezbollah war could be "a catastrophe that goes far beyond the border, and frankly, beyond imagination," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres warned last week, amid rising rhetoric and fears of a conflict.

Iran-backed Hezbollah initially seemed caught off-guard by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel, a regional ally, but began firing rockets into northern Israel the following day. Since then, Hezbollah and Israel have exchanged near-daily cross-border strikes, escalating gradually. Israel also carried out targeted killings of Hezbollah and Hamas figures in Lebanon.

More than 450 people, mostly fighters with Hezbollah and allied groups but also more than 80 civilians and noncombatants, have been killed on Lebanon's side, and 16 soldiers and 11 civilians on Israel's.

Tens of thousands have been displaced on both sides. There are no immediate prospects for their return.

Last week, the Israeli army said it has "approved and validated" plans for an offensive in Lebanon, although the decision to launch such an operation would have to come from the country's political leadership.

Hezbollah has released surveillance drone videos showing sites in Israel with the words "Whoever thinks of war against us will regret it." And the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, has warned of a fight "without limits" if Israel does.

Hezbollah says it won't agree to a cease-fire on the Israel-Lebanon border before there's one in Gaza, a prospect that looks increasingly unlikely.

How prepared are they? Both Hezbollah and the Israeli military have expanded capabilities since 2006 — yet both countries are also more fragile.

In Lebanon, more than four years of economic crisis have crippled public institutions, including its army and electrical grid, and eroded its health system. The country hosts more than 1 million Syrian refugees.

Lebanon adopted an emergency plan for a war scenario in late October. It projected the forcible displacement of 1 million Lebanese for 45 days.

More than 95,000 Lebanese are displaced from the border area now, according to the International Organization for Migration. The government has said it will compensate those who lost their homes, but it's

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unclear where the money will come from.

Hezbollah has provided modest stipends to many of the displaced, but the response has largely fallen to cash-strapped municipalities.

Local and international nongovernmental organizations and religious charities have picked up some of the slack, but their resources are also strained.

Some have stockpiled supplies such as backup fuel and medical equipment in anticipation of blockades and shortages should war break out.

Israel is feeling economic and social strain from the war in Gaza, which is expected to cost over \$50 billion, or about 10 percent of national economic activity through the end of 2024, according to the Bank of Israel. Costs would rise sharply if there's war with Lebanon.

Israel has evacuated 60,000 residents from towns nearest the border, where there's no warning time for rocket launches because of the proximity of Hezbollah squads.

In a war with Hezbollah, there would be no point in additional evacuations since the militia's rockets and missiles can reach all of Israel.

How would war play out? A full-scale war would likely spread to multiple fronts, escalating the involvement of Iranian proxies in Syria, Iraq and Yemen — and perhaps draw in Iran itself.

It could also drag the U.S., Israel's closest ally, deeper into the conflict.

Hezbollah has 150,000 to 200,000 rockets and missiles of various ranges, said Orna Mizrahi of the Israeli think tank Institute for National Security Studies. This arsenal is at least five times larger than that of Hamas and far more accurate, she said.

The militia's guided projectiles could reach water, electricity or communications facilities, and densely populated residential areas.

In Lebanon, airstrikes would likely wreak havoc on infrastructure and potentially kill thousands. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has threatened to "turn Beirut into Gaza," where Israel's air and ground incursion has caused widespread destruction and killed more than 37,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Israel is far more protected, with several air defense systems, including the Iron Dome, which intercepts rockets with a roughly 90% success rate. But it can get overwhelmed if a mass barrage of rockets is fired.

Some 40% of Israel's population live in newer homes with private safe rooms fortified with blast protection to withstand rocket attacks. Israel also has a network of bomb shelters, but a 2020 government report says about one-third of Israelis lack easy access to them.

Lebanon has no such network, and shelters would be of little use against massive "bunker buster" bombs Israel has dropped in some parts of Gaza. The U.S. has halted some shipments of those bombs since May out of concern over civilian casualties.

Hezbollah has limited air defenses, while those of the Lebanese army are outdated and insufficient because of budget shortfalls.

The Lebanese army has remained on the sidelines since Oct. 7. In 2006, it entered fighting in a limited capacity, but it's unclear how it would react in the event of a new Israel-Hezbollah war.

Russian region of Dagestan holds a day of mourning after attacks kill 20 people, officials say

MOSCOW (AP) — Russia's southern region of Dagestan held the first of three days of mourning Monday following an attack by Islamic militants who authorities say killed 20 people, mostly police, and attacked Christian and Jewish houses of worship in assaults in two cities.

Sunday's violence in Dagestan's regional capital of Makhachkala and nearby Derbent was the latest that officials blamed on Islamic extremists in the predominantly Muslim region in the North Caucasus. It was also the deadliest in Russia since March, when gunmen opened fire at a concert in suburban Moscow, killing 145 people.

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An affiliate of the Islamic State group in Afghanistan had claimed responsibility for March's raid and quickly praised the attack in Dagestan, saying it was conducted by "brothers in the Caucasus who showed that they are still strong."

The Washington-based Institute for the Study of War argued that the Islamic State group's North Caucasus branch, Vilayat Kavkaz, likely was behind the attack, describing it as "complex and coordinated."

Dagestan Gov. Sergei Melikov blamed members of Islamic " sleeper cells " directed from abroad, but didn't give any other details. He said in a video statement that the assailants aimed at " sowing panic and fear, " and attempted to link the attack to Moscow's military action in Ukraine — but also provided no evidence.

President Vladimir Putin had sought to blame the March attack on Ukraine, again without evidence and despite the claim of responsibility by the Islamic State affiliate. Kyiv has vehemently denied any involvement.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Putin has received reports on Sunday's attacks and efforts to help the victims.

The Investigative Committee, the country's top state criminal investigation agency, said all five attackers were killed. Of the 20 people killed, at least 15 were police.

Medical authorities in Dagestan said at least 46 people were injured. Of those, at least 13 were police, with four officers hospitalized in grave condition.

Among the dead was the Rev. Nikolai Kotelnikov, a 66-year-old Russian Orthodox priest at a church in Derbent. The attackers slit his throat before setting fire to the church, according to Shamil Khadulayev, deputy head of a local public oversight body. The attack came as the Orthodox faithful celebrated Pentecost, also known as Trinity Sunday.

Melikov, the Dagestan governor, said Sunday that also among the dead were a Russian Orthodox believer and 18 Muslims.

The Kele-Numaz synagogue in Derbent also was set ablaze.

Shortly after the attacks in Derbent, militants fired at a police post in Makhachkala and attacked a Russian Orthodox Church and a synagogue there before being killed by special forces.

Russian news reports said the attackers included the two sons and a nephew of Magomed Omarov, the head of the Dagestan regional branch of the pro-Kremlin United Russia party. Omarov was detained by police for interrogation, and United Russia quickly dismissed him from its ranks. Melikov later said Omarov had been removed from his post, Russian state news agencies reported.

In the early 2000s, Dagestan saw near-daily attacks on police and other authorities that was blamed on militant extremists. After the emergence of the Islamic State group, many residents of the region joined it in Syria and Iraq.

The violence in Dagestan has abated in recent years, but in a sign that extremist sentiments still run high in the region, mobs rioted at an airport there in October, targeting a flight from Israel. More than 20 people were hurt — none of them Israelis — when hundreds of men, some carrying banners with antisemitic slogans, rushed onto the tarmac, chased passengers and threw stones at police.

The airport rampage challenged the Kremlin's narrative that ethnic and religious groups coexist in harmony in Russia.

After March's Moscow concert hall attack, Russia's top security agency reported that it had broken up what it called a " terrorist cell " in southern Russia and arrested four of its members who had provided weapons and cash to suspected attackers in Moscow.

Harold Chambers, political and security analyst specializing in the North Caucasus, noted the authorities' response to Sunday's attack " was significantly more than we have seen in the past, but still lacking, particularly with response time. "

" They were definitely caught off guard by this attack, " he said. " What we're seeing here is still this disconnect between Russian counterterrorism capability and what the terrorists capability is inside of Russia. "

Dagestan, in southern Russia, has a history of violence. Why does it keep happening?

By KATIE MARIE DAVIES Associated Press

Over the years, Russia's southern republic of Dagestan, located in the North Caucasus region, has been beset by extremist violence. This weekend, there was more bloodshed.

Officials say five gunmen in the regional capital of Makhachkala and the city of Derbent opened fire at Orthodox churches and two synagogues, as well as a police post, killing at least 20 people before being slain by authorities.

The large-scale and coordinated assault raises difficult questions for the Russian authorities about continued security lapses, especially after an attack claimed by an affiliate of the Islamic State group at a Moscow-area concert hall in March killed 145 people.

A look at the volatile region:

Where is Dagestan? Dagestan, which sits in the North Caucasus between Chechnya and the Caspian Sea, is known as one of Russia's most diverse — but volatile — regions.

There are more than 30 recognized ethnic groups and 13 local languages granted special status alongside Russian.

The region has seen its population boom in recent years, reaching 3.2 million in 2024.

About 95% of the population identifies as Muslim, according to Russian government statistics, but the region also has long-standing Christian and Jewish communities. The Jewish community dates to the 5th century.

A history of violence It has been blighted by violence since the early 2000s, when militant insurgents taking part in separatist wars in neighboring Chechnya were pushed into the region as a result of pressure from Russian security forces and iron-fisted Chechen leader Ramzan Kadyrov.

Bombings, attacks on police and kidnappings — all blamed on extremists — were commonplace in the region more than a decade ago,

The bloodshed eased as tougher security measures were imposed before the 2014 Winter Olympics in Sochi, and thousands of militants were believed to have left for Syria and Iraq to fight alongside Islamic State extremists there.

The COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine also has kept violence down, said Harold Chambers, a political and security analyst specializing in the North Caucasus.

But the region remains restive.

Activists in Russia say ethnic minorities are serving in Ukraine in disproportionate numbers, and videos circulated in October 2022 of protests in Dagestan over complaints that its population was providing more recruits than elsewhere.

In a sign that extremist sentiments still run high, mobs rioted at Makhachkala's airport in October, targeting a flight from Israel. Hundreds of men, some carrying banners with antisemitic slogans, rushed onto the tarmac, chasing passengers and throwing stones at police. More than 20 people were hurt — none of them Israelis.

What happened this weekend? The attacks took place Sunday night in the city of Derbent and the regional capital of Makhachkala. A group of armed men attacked a synagogue and an Orthodox church in Derbent, the Interior Ministry said.

The Russian Jewish Congress said the attackers opened fire and set the building ablaze using Molotov cocktails less than an hour before evening prayers. Many of the victims were private security guards and police who had provided extra security for worshippers after the Makhachkala airport incident involving the flight from Israel.

At the church, attackers slit the throat of the Rev. Nikolai Kotelnikov, a 66-year-old Russian Orthodox priest, before setting the church ablaze, according to Shamil Khadulayev, deputy head of a local public oversight body. The attack came on the day the Orthodox faithful celebrated Pentecost, also known as Trinity Sunday.

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Almost simultaneously, reports appeared about an attack on a church, synagogue and a traffic police post in Makhachkala, some 120 kilometers (about 75 miles) to the north.

Russia's Anti-Terrorist Committee said at least five gunmen were killed.

Why is this happening now? Chambers says several factors contribute to the unrest in Dagestan, including sympathizers to the Ukrainian cause and Russia's "continuous, tightening repression — particularly in the wake of the large-scale anti-mobilization protests in September of 2022,"

He also says a "long-term trend of youth radicalization contributed to what we saw in Makhachkala and Derbent."

So far, no group has claimed responsibility for the attacks.

Telegram channels associated with the Islamic State affiliate group that carried out the Moscow concert hall massacre praised Sunday's attack by "our brothers from the Caucasus," but did not mention its own involvement.

Dagestan Gov. Sergei Melikov blamed Islamic "sleeper cells" directed from abroad, but didn't give any other details. He said in a video statement that the assailants aimed at "sowing panic and fear," and attempted to link the attack to Moscow's military action in Ukraine — but also provided no evidence.

President Vladimir Putin had sought to blame the Crocus City Hall attack in March attack on Ukraine, again without evidence and despite the claim of responsibility by the Islamic State affiliate. Kyiv has vehemently denied any involvement.

How did authorities respond? Dagestan's violent history means the area has a heavy security presence, said Mark Youngman, the founder of Threatologist, which analyzes Eurasian security risks and specializes in the North Caucasus. Nonetheless, the response was slow, with different state agencies giving conflicting accounts as events unfolded.

"If you're looking at it from a security perspective, you should have concerns because you have a high number of security service casualties," Youngman said, noting Russian authorities reported at least 15 security service personnel among the dead.

"I think you would look at the official response and say there are concerns about the security services' ability to protect themselves, let alone others," he said.

The Russian state news agency Tass cited law enforcement sources as saying that one Dagestani official was detained over his sons' alleged involvement in the assault.

Concerns remain that Russia's broad security apparatus has not learned the lessons from the Moscow Crocus City Hall concert attack.

Authorities "were caught off guard" by Sunday's attack, Chambers said.

He believes a disconnect remains between Russian counterterrorism and the capability of assailants operating domestically.

There has been no evidence that Russia's "counterterrorism strategy more broadly will change in the wake of the Crocus City Hall attack," Chambers said.

"The solution is still deportation and repression. This has been the Russian counterterrorism strategy for decades, and it has still allowed for such attacks as today," he said.

Experts say Gaza is at 'high risk' of famine despite increased aid to the north

By SAM MEDNICK and MOHAMMAD JAHJOUH Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — An influx of aid appears to have eased a hunger crisis in northern Gaza for now, but the entire territory remains at "high risk" of famine after Israel's offensive in Rafah caused displacement and the disruption of aid operations in the south, a draft report said Monday.

The report by the leading international authority on the severity of hunger crises said nearly everyone in Gaza is struggling to get enough food and that more than 495,000 people, or greater than a fifth of the population of 2.3 million, are expected to experience the highest level of starvation in the coming months.

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That's despite months of U.S. pressure on Israel to do more to facilitate aid efforts, the installation of a \$230 million U.S.-built pier that has been beset by problems and repeated airdrops by multiple countries that aid agencies say are insufficient to meet vital needs.

Israel invaded Gaza after Hamas' attack on Oct. 7, in which Palestinian militants killed around 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted about 250. The war has killed more than 37,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which doesn't say how many were civilians or fighters.

Israel imposed a complete siege on the territory at the start of the war and has only gradually eased it under pressure from Washington. The war has destroyed most of Gaza's capacity to produce its own food.

The latest findings come from the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification, or IPC, an initiative first set up in 2004 during the famine in Somalia that now includes more than a dozen U.N. agencies, aid groups, governments and other bodies. The Associated Press obtained a draft of its latest report, the final version of which is set to be released Tuesday.

In its last report, in March, the IPC said that famine was "imminent" in northern Gaza, which has suffered widespread destruction and which Israeli troops have surrounded and largely isolated since the earliest days of the ground invasion. That report said that around a third of Gaza's population was experiencing stage 5 hunger — the highest level of starvation.

In April, after Israeli strikes killed seven aid workers and sparked international outrage, Israel promised to ramp up aid, and it later opened additional land crossings in the north. The IPC said the amount of food deliveries to the north "sharply increased."

But in early May, Israel launched ground operations in the southernmost city of Rafah, leading to the closure of the Rafah crossing with Egypt and repeated disruptions to the nearby Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel. The air and ground operations also displaced more than a million people, most of whom had already fled their homes earlier in the war. Many are now crammed into squalid tent camps where they are at heightened risk of disease outbreaks, which the IPC said could exacerbate the hunger crisis.

"The humanitarian space in the Gaza Strip continues to shrink and the ability to safely deliver assistance to populations is dwindling," the draft report said. "The recent trajectory is negative and highly unstable. Should this continue, the improvements seen in April could be rapidly reversed."

Children, especially those with underlying medical conditions, are particularly vulnerable.

Manal Nayef, from Rafah, has made multiple visits to the hospital since her son Karam was born underweight nearly three months ago. During a visit earlier this month, he lay with an IV drip in his hand, his lips seeking a breast but only sucking air.

"As a mother, I was not well-nourished," his mother said. "And it is getting worse because he needs a special formula, and it is not available. He looks smaller than other children."

A separate group of experts warned earlier this month that it's possible that famine is already underway in northern Gaza. The Famine Early Warning Systems Network, or FEWS NET, said the ongoing war and restrictions on humanitarian access impeded the data collection to prove it.

Stage 5 hunger is equivalent to famine, but the IPC only declares an entire area to be in famine when 20% of households have an extreme lack of food, 30% of children suffer from acute malnutrition and at least two adults or four children per 10,000 people die daily.

Israel says it allows hundreds of trucks to enter through multiple crossings on a near-daily basis and blames U.N. agencies for not distributing it, saying containers are stacking up at Kerem Shalom, Gaza's main cargo terminal.

U.N. agencies and aid groups say they often can't access Kerem Shalom because of fighting in the area and that Israeli restrictions, difficulties coordinating with the army and the collapse of law and order greatly hinder their work. They say it's impossible to address the crisis without a complete cease-fire.

The United States has rallied international support behind a proposal that would lead to the release of the remaining hostages and a permanent cease-fire, but neither Israel nor Hamas have fully embraced it.

Jeremy Konyndyk, president of Refugees International and a former official with the U.S. Agency for International Development, said the IPC report shows that even with massive U.S. and international pres-

sure on Israel leading to larger volumes of aid, the situation remained dire.

"All that was achieved was ramping back an imminent famine to a high risk of famine," he said. "And what that says is that there is still not unfettered aid access, unfettered aid delivery, as required by international law."

He added that if aid flows are disrupted again, as they have been during the ongoing Rafah operation, "all that progress, modest and insufficient as it is, will be lost again."

The Texas Rangers are frustrating LGBTQ+ advocates as the only MLB team without a Pride Night

By SCHUYLER DIXON AP Sports Writer

ARLINGTON, Texas (AP) — Rafael McDonnell sometimes gets to address the staff of his beloved Texas Rangers on issues of diversity and inclusion through his role with the Resource Center, one of the leading LGBTQ+ organizations in the Dallas area.

For several years, the Rangers have been the only Major League Baseball team without a Pride Night. When questioned about it, Texas has cited its work with the Resource Center, among other organizations.

As Pride Month — the June celebration of LGBTQ+ culture and rights — comes and goes again without the Rangers participating, McDonnell tried to explain the connection between his group and the team he has loved and watched for the better part of 50 years.

"It's a complicated relationship," McDonnell said. "As someone who grew up watching the Rangers, as someone who has gone to games since the 1970s, some of my biggest and best memories are going to games at the old Arlington Stadium with my late grandfather and listening to games on the radio in his backyard.

"It pains me that this remains an issue (after) all these years."

Painful enough, McDonnell said, that he considered not attending the parade with his boyfriend when the Rangers celebrated their first World Series championship last fall. Ultimately, he decided to go.

McDonnell, the communications and advocacy manager for the Resource Center, says the Rangers invited his group to help them develop a policy of inclusion about five years ago.

The team has sent employees to volunteer for programs in an organization that grew out of the AIDS crisis in the 1980s and advocates for marriage equality and transgender rights.

While he has continuing conversations with members of the Rangers staff, McDonnell says he doesn't recall any since the five-game victory over the Arizona Diamondbacks in last year's Fall Classic.

"For a long time, I've thought that it might be somebody very high up in the organization who is opposed to this for some reason that is not clearly articulated," McDonnell said. "To say that the Rangers aren't doing anything for the community, well, they have. But the hill that they are choosing to stake themselves out on is no Pride Night."

Several years ago, MLB diversity officer Billy Bean, who came out as gay after a six-year playing career, said he believed a Pride Night eventually would come to Globe Life Field, the Rangers' retractable roof home that will host next month's All-Star Game. MLB did not have comment when asked last week about the Rangers' Pride Night status.

McDonnell and DeeJay Johannessen — chief executive of the HELP Center, an LGBTQ+ organization based in Tarrant County, where the Rangers play — also say they believe the Rangers some day will join the rest of MLB with a Pride Night.

At the same time, McDonnell and Johannessen say the catalyst for change might have to be new ownership. Johannessen said he hasn't requested to speak with majority owner Ray C. Davis to discuss Pride.

"I have not because, quite honestly, that's just not going to happen," Johannessen said. "I'd love to meet with Mr. Davis and talk about why it's important. But I don't think that's on his priority list right now."

Through a spokesman, the Rangers declined a request by The Associated Press to interview Davis.

The team issued a statement similar to one from a year ago, listing various organizations they have

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sponsored and steps they have taken internally to “create a welcoming, inclusive, and supportive environment for fans and employees.”

“Our longstanding commitment remains the same: To make everyone feel welcome and included in Rangers baseball — in our ballpark, at every game, and in all we do — for both our fans and our employees,” the team said. “We deliver on that promise across our many programs to have a positive impact across our entire community.”

The Rangers’ stance doesn’t keep Misty Lockhart, who lives near the ballpark, from attending about 35 games a year. Also a big Dallas Stars fan, she was at the NHL team’s Pride Night in March at the American Airlines Center in downtown Dallas.

Lockhart was wearing a No. 91 Tyler Seguin Pride jersey that had been worn during warmups in a previous year and was signed by the Stars forward. The Stars logo on the front was in rainbow colors.

While she doesn’t believe the Rangers risk losing fans over their stance on Pride, Lockhart would prefer the Rangers complete the MLB picture on something that is believed to have started with the Chicago Cubs in 2001.

“I think if it were something where MLB said, ‘We’re not participating in this,’ but the MLB does participate in it. And the Rangers have chosen not to,” Lockhart said. “I think that’s where I take the bigger issue, is they have actively chosen not to participate in it.”

Lockhart says she doesn’t see Pride Night as a political issue, but acknowledges there would be more pressure on the Rangers if they had a downtown stadium in the heart of Dallas County, where the majority of elected officials are Democrats. Tarrant County, home to Arlington and Fort Worth, is generally more conservative.

Will Davis — a Rangers fan from Marble Falls, about 200 miles southwest of the stadium in Central Texas — does see it as a political issue. He attended a recent game with his son’s youth baseball team.

“I think it’s a private organization. And if they don’t want to have it, I don’t think they should be forced to have it,” Davis said. “In something like this, this is a way for people to go as a state. We don’t want the political stuff shoved down our throats one way or the other, left or right. We’re coming out here to have a good time with friends or family and let it be.”

The Rangers celebrate Mexican heritage during a game in June and also have nights throughout the season dedicated to other ethnic groups along with Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, first responders, teachers and the military. The team recognizes universities from around the Dallas-Fort Worth area and the state.

Those celebrations make the absence more glaring, Johannessen said.

“I think that the issue here is not whether they are losing every game or whether they are World Series champions,” he said. “It’s a matter of whether or not having a Pride Night is something that the ownership of the Rangers is supportive of.”

“There may be deeply held beliefs of why they don’t want to do that,” Johannessen said. “And, we’re very respectful of that, but also have to advocate for our community. Because it’s kind of an embarrassment to the city of Arlington that their team is the only one that doesn’t have a Pride Night.”

The Rangers raised eyebrows when the slogan on the home page of their website changed to “Straight Up Texas” from “Run it Back” sometime around June 1. The team has used the “Straight Up Texas” slogan in previous years, and said the change had nothing to do with Pride Month.

Still, the attention the change received on social media illustrated the scrutiny the Rangers have invited as the only MLB team without a Pride Night.

“The Texas Rangers have reached out to us about working with us and providing services and volunteers,” said Johannessen, whose organization has provided health services among other things in the LGBTQ+ community for 30 years. “That actually hasn’t happened yet. When they asked what they could do, the first thing I said was, ‘Let’s talk about a Pride Night.’”

Conservative-backed group is creating a list of federal workers it suspects could resist Trump plans

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — From his home office in small-town Kentucky, a seasoned political operative is quietly investigating scores of federal employees suspected of being hostile to the policies of Republican Donald Trump, a highly unusual and potentially chilling effort that dovetails with broader conservative preparations for a new White House.

Tom Jones and his American Accountability Foundation are digging into the backgrounds, social media posts and commentary of key high-ranking government employees, starting with the Department of Homeland Security. They're relying in part on tips from his network of conservative contacts, including workers. In a move that alarms some, they're preparing to publish the findings online.

With a \$100,000 grant from the Heritage Foundation, the goal is to post 100 names of government workers to a website this summer to show a potential new administration who might be standing in the way of a second-term Trump agenda — and ripe for scrutiny, reclassifications, reassignments or firings.

"We need to understand who these people are and what they do," said Jones, a former Capitol Hill aide to Republican senators.

The concept of compiling and publicizing a list of government employees shows the lengths Trump's allies are willing to go to ensure nothing or no one will block his plans in a potential second term. Jones' Project Sovereignty 2025 comes as Heritage's Project 2025 lays the groundwork, with policies, proposals and personnel ready for a possible new White House.

The effort, focused on top career government officials who aren't appointees within the political structure, has stunned democracy experts and shocked the civil service community in what they compare with the red scare of McCarthyism.

Jacqueline Simon, policy director at the American Federation of Government Employees, said the language being used — the Heritage Foundation's announcement praised the group for ferreting out "anti-American bad actors" — is "shocking."

Civil servants are often ex-military personnel and are required to take an oath to the Constitution to work for the federal government, not a loyalty test to a president, she and others said.

"It just seems as though their goal is to try to menace federal employees and sow fear," said Simon, whose union backs President Joe Biden, a Democrat, for reelection.

As Trump, who has been convicted of felony charges in a hush money case and is under a four-count federal indictment accusing him of working to overturn his 2020 election loss, faces a likely rematch with Biden this fall, far-right conservatives have vowed to take a wrecking ball to what they call the deep-state bureaucracy.

The Trump campaign has said outside groups don't speak for the ex-president, who alone sets his policy priorities.

Conservatives view the federal workforce as overstepping its role to become a power center that can drive or thwart a president's agenda. Particularly during the Trump administration, government officials came under attack from the White House and Republicans on Capitol Hill, as his own Cabinet often raised objections to some of his more singular or even unlawful proposals.

While Jones' group won't necessarily be recommending whether to fire or reassign the federal workers it lists, the work aligns with Heritage's far-reaching Project 2025 blueprint for a conservative administration.

Heritage's Project 2025 proposes reviving the Trump Schedule F policy that would try to reclassify tens of thousands of federal workers as political appointees, which could enable mass dismissals — although a Biden administration rule seeks to make that more difficult. The Heritage project is working to recruit and train a new generation to travel to Washington to fill government jobs.

In announcing the \$100,000 Innovation Award last month, Heritage said it'd support American Accountability Foundation's "investigative researchers, in-depth reports, and educational efforts to alert Congress, a conservative administration, and the American people to the presence of anti-American bad actors bur-

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rowed into the administrative state and ensure appropriate action is taken.”

Heritage President Kevin Roberts said the “weaponization of the federal government” has been possible only because of the “deep state of entrenched Leftist bureaucrats.” He said he was proud to support the work of American Accountability Foundation workers “in their fight to hold our government accountable and drain it of bad actors.”

The federal government employs about 2.2 million people, including those in the Washington, D.C., area and workers who the unions say many Americans know as friends or neighbors in communities across the country.

About 4,000 positions in the government are considered political appointees who routinely change from one presidential administration to the next, but most are career professionals — from landscapers at Veterans Administration cemeteries to economists at the Bureau of Labor Statistics.

The public list-making conjures for some the era of Joseph McCarthy, the senator who conducted grueling hearings into suspected communist sympathizers during the Cold War. The hearings were orchestrated by a top staffer, Roy Cohn, who became a confidant of a younger Trump.

Skye Perryman, CEO of the advocacy group Democracy Forward, said it’s deeply disturbing and reminiscent of “the darker parts of American history.”

Publicly naming government workers is an “intimidation tactic to try to chill the work of these civil servants,” she said, and part of a broader “retribution agenda” underway this election.

“They’re seeking to undermine our democracy,” she said. “They’re seeking to undermine the way that our government works for people.”

Jones, from his desk overlooking rickhouses storing barrels in the Bourbon Capitol of Bardstown, scoffed at comparisons to McCarthyism as “nonsense.”

He’s a former staffer to then-Sen. Jim DeMint, the South Carolina conservative Republican who later led Heritage and now helms the Conservative Policy Institute, where American Accountability Foundation has a mailing address. Jones also worked for Sen. Ron Johnson, R-Wisconsin, and provided opposition research for Texas GOP Sen. Ted Cruz’s 2016 presidential bid.

With six researchers, Jones’ team operates remotely across the country, poring over the information about federal workers within Homeland Security, the State Department and other agencies that deal with immigration and border issues.

Their focus is on the highest ranks of the civil servants — GS-13, GS-14 and GS-15 employees and those in senior executive positions who could put up roadblocks to Trump’s plans for tighter borders and more deportations.

“I think it’s important to the next administration to understand who those people are,” Jones said.

He dismissed the risks that could be involved in publicly posting the names, salary information and other details of federal workers who have some level of privacy or the idea his group’s work could put employees’ livelihoods in jeopardy.

“You don’t get to make policy and then say, ‘Hey, don’t scrutinize me,’” he said.

He acknowledges some of the work is often a “gut check” or “instinct” about which federal employees would be suspected of trying to block a conservative agenda.

“We’re looking at, ‘Are there wrong people on the bus right now that are, you know, openly hostile to efforts to secure the southern border?’” he said.

His own group came under scrutiny as it first probed Biden nominees.

Biden had repealed Trump’s Schedule F executive order in January 2021, but a Government Accountability Office report in 2022 found that agencies believed it could be reinstated by a future administration.

Since then, the Biden administration issued a rule that would make it harder to fire workers. A new administration could direct the Office of Personnel Management to undo the regulation, but the process would take time and be open to legal challenges.

Supreme Court will take up state bans on gender-affirming care for minors

By MARK SHERMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court on Monday jumped into the fight over transgender rights, agreeing to hear an appeal from the Biden administration seeking to block state bans on gender-affirming care.

The justices' action comes as Republican-led states have enacted a variety of restrictions on health care for transgender people, school sports participation, bathroom usage and drag shows. The administration and Democratic-led states have extended protections for transgender people, including a new federal regulation that seeks to protect transgender students.

The case before the high court involves a law in Tennessee that restricts puberty blockers and hormone therapy for transgender minors. The federal appeals court in Cincinnati allowed laws in Tennessee and Kentucky to take effect after they had been blocked by lower courts. (The high court did not act on a separate appeal from Kentucky.)

"Without this Court's prompt intervention, transgender youth and their families will remain in limbo, uncertain of whether and where they can access needed medical care," lawyers for the transgender teens in Tennessee told the justices.

Actor Elliot Page, the Oscar-nominated star of "Juno," "Inception" and "The Umbrella Academy," was among 57 transgender people who joined a legal filing in support of Supreme Court review.

Arguments will take place in the fall.

Last month, South Carolina became the 25th state to adopt a law restricting or banning gender-affirming medical care for transgender minors, even though such treatments have been available in the United States for more than a decade and are endorsed by major medical associations.

Most of the state restrictions face lawsuits. The justices had previously allowed Idaho to generally enforce its restrictions, after they had been blocked by lower courts.

At least 24 states have laws barring transgender women and girls from competing in certain women's or girls' sports competitions. At least 11 states have adopted laws barring transgender girls and women from girls' and women's bathrooms at public schools, and in some cases other government facilities.

The nation's highest court has only rarely taken up transgender issues. In 2020, the justices ruled that a landmark civil rights law protects gay, lesbian and transgender people from discrimination in employment.

In 2016, the court had agreed to take up the case of a transgender student, backed by the Obama administration, who was barred from using the boys' bathroom in his Virginia high school. But the court dropped the case after a directive advising schools to allow students to use the bathroom of their chosen gender, not biological birth, was scrapped in the early months of the Trump administration. The directive had been a key part of an appeals court ruling in favor of the student, Gavin Grimm.

In 2021, the justices declined to get involved in Grimm's case after the appeals court again ruled in his favor. At the time, Justices Samuel Alito and Clarence Thomas noted they would have taken up the school board's appeal.

Summer camps are for getting kids outdoors, but more frequent heat waves force changes

By MELINA WALLING Associated Press

OREGONIA, Ohio (AP) — At the end of their weeklong sleepaway camp, a hush falls over the boisterous kids at YMCA's Camp Kern as they prepare for a treasured annual tradition: after songs and skits around a bonfire, they write down their favorite memories on slips of paper. Most years, they toss them into the flames, and the ash that rises and then falls over their heads is meant to symbolize the joy they shared.

But this year, it was too hot for a bonfire.

Even as the sun went down, on a day when the high hit 92 degrees Fahrenheit (33 Celsius) with oppressive humidity, kids wiped sweat from their foreheads, flocked to water coolers to refill bottles and fanned

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themselves to try to get a breeze going. At the end of the night, they burned their memory notes in a small bucket.

It's just one way American summer camps have had to adapt as climate change fuels extreme heat events that can start earlier in the season and keep heat lingering well into the night. Camp administrators, counselors and experts say such camps are a great way for kids to develop social skills, learn outside of the classroom and connect with nature. But running them is getting harder and more expensive as camps look for ways to better provide access to water and cooling and better prepare staff to take care of young people.

"Extreme heat is serious. We have to really focus on carefully and thoughtfully planning the program to adapt to these situations," said Tom Rosenberg, president and CEO of the American Camp Association, a nonprofit that provides research and resources to improve camps. He said the ACA has had climate change on its radar for many years as an issue that affects camp programming.

In 2011, for example, a dozen Girl Scouts were treated for heat-related illnesses at a camp in Connecticut. In 2015, two children were hospitalized with heat exhaustion in a Florida summer camp. And a 15-year-old Boy Scout died in Texas in 2017 after collapsing from heatstroke during a group hike while pursuing a camping merit badge.

The U.S. has over 20,000 unique camp operations that serve 26 million campers, according to a study funded by the ACA and conducted in partnership with the University of Michigan's Economic Growth Institute.

It's all the more important for camps to be on their guard because children are more vulnerable to heat than adults, said Grace Robiou, director of the Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Children's Health Protection. "General good health includes being outside," she said, but children's growing bodies can warm faster than adult bodies do. They're also not as self-aware, and often need an adult to tell them to stay hydrated and cool.

"If you're overheating, you can guarantee that the kids you are watching or playing with or supervising are getting overheated as well," said Dr. Alison Tothy, a pediatric emergency medicine physician at the University of Chicago's children's hospital who spends her summers working as a camp doctor in upstate New York. "It's just something that we've now put on our list of reasons why someone might be sick. And I don't think that we were doing that as much, even a few years ago."

The physical activities kids do at camp can involve a lot of exertion. After climbing an obstacle course or a rock wall, some of the kids at Camp Kern said they were ready to go inside — even Alex Reiff, 12, who thought it was the best thing he did that week. "When you climb, you feel like you're getting active," he said, then added, "I was sweating."

Seeking reprieve, Reiff and his bunkmates have been cranking the air conditioning in their cabin when they're inside, something kids at other camps in more rustic accommodations across the U.S. don't have the option of doing. Many kids at Camp Kern have taken to carrying around handmade paper, folding fabric or electric fans. Some campers simply poured water on their heads. And nearly all eagerly rushed forward at the offer of brightly colored popsicles on a day reporters visited.

Todd Brinkman, the executive director of Camp Kern, said their strategy has generally been to add breaks and indoor sessions, incorporate as many water-based activities as they can and give kids choices. In the past the camp had set pool hours, but they've added more lifeguards and swim instructors to keep the pool open all day. They've also enhanced some of the water features aimed at smaller children. But water can't solve all heat problems. Rosenberg said a national lifeguard shortage and the rising cost of insurance in the face of extreme weather have made it more expensive to provide water activities at camps. And Robiou said poor air quality and extreme heat are often linked, worsening problems like childhood asthma, and being in the pool or a lake doesn't change that.

Just being near water doesn't necessarily negate the heat. Kids at Camp Kern who went on a raft trip said it was one of the hottest experiences they had that week.

"We just, like, sat in the sun in a big canoe, basically," said Madelynn Medve, 11.

The young adults who help staff the camp aren't immune to the blistering temperatures either. Lizzy

Johnson, 24, is now a counselor at Camp Kern after going there as a camper growing up. When she looks back, social bonds and fun activities are the memories she treasures. However, she's also watched and participated in the camp's evolution, helping organizers trade outdoor experiences like cookouts for indoor or water-based ones like arts and crafts or pool parties.

"I definitely don't remember any of the heat, I remember all the things that we did," she said of her own childhood at camp. "But I never remember being this uncomfortable."

A fire at a lithium battery factory in South Korea kills 22 mostly Chinese migrant workers

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — A fire likely sparked by exploding lithium batteries swept through a manufacturing factory near South Korea's capital on Monday, killing 22 mostly Chinese migrant workers and injuring eight, officials said.

The fire began after batteries exploded while workers were examining and packaging them on the second floor of the factory in Hwaseong city, just south of Seoul, at around 10:30 a.m., fire officials said, citing a witness. They said they would investigate the cause of the blaze.

The dead included 18 Chinese, two South Koreans and one Laotian, local fire official Kim Jin-young told a televised briefing. He said the nationality of one of the dead couldn't be immediately verified.

In the past few decades, many people from China, including ethnic Koreans, have migrated to South Korea to seek jobs. Like other foreign migrants from Southeast Asian nations, they often end up in factories or in physically demanding and low-paying jobs shunned by more affluent South Koreans.

Kim said that one factory worker remained out of contact and rescuers continued to search the site. He said that two of the eight injured were in serious condition.

The fire started at one of the factory buildings owned by a battery manufacturer, Aricell. He said that authorities would investigate whether fire extinguishing systems were at the site and if they worked.

Rechargeable lithium-ion batteries are ubiquitous in consumer goods from laptops to cellphones. They can overheat if damaged, defective or packaged improperly, leading to fires and explosions and making them a hazard for shipment aboard aircraft.

The video of the incident showed the factory's second floor being engulfed with blaze, about 15 seconds after a small amount of white smoke was seen billowing from a battery, senior fire official Jo Seon-ho told a briefing later Monday.

Jo, citing the footage, said workers at the site mobilized fire extinguishers but failed to put out the blaze. They later rushed to an area where there was no exit before they likely inhaled toxic smoke and lost their consciousness, he said. The dead foreign workers were daily laborers so they were not likely familiar with the building's internal structure, he added.

Fire officials said a total of 102 people were working at the factory at the time of the fire.

President Yoon Suk Yeol, wearing a safety helmet and a mask, visited the site with other officials. He expressed condolences to the dead people and ordered officials to put in place measures to effectively deal with battery-related fires, according to Yoon's office.

Prime Minister Han Duck-soo, the country's No. 2 official, and Interior and Safety Minister Lee Sang-min also came to the site. Han asked officials to provide government assistance for funeral services and support programs for victims' relatives, according to his office.

Monday's blaze is one of the deadliest in South Korea in recent years.

In 2020, a fire at a warehouse being built in Icheon City, south of Seoul, killed 38 construction workers. In 2018, 46 people died after a fire ripped through a small hospital with no sprinkler systems in the southern city of Miryang. In 2008, 40 workers, 12 of them ethnic Koreans with Chinese nationality, died after a fire and accompanying explosions tore through a refrigerated warehouse in Icheon city.

South Korea has struggled for decades to improve safety standards and change widespread attitudes that regard safety as subservient to economic progress and convenience.

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Today in History: June 25, Korean War begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, June 25, the 177th day of 2024. There are 189 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History: On June 25, 1950, war broke out in Korea as forces from the communist North invaded the South.

Also on this date:

In 1938, the Fair Labor Standards Act of 1938 was enacted.

In 1942, Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower was designated Commanding General of the European Theater of Operations during World War II. Some 1,000 British Royal Air Force bombers raided Bremen, Germany.

In 1947, "The Diary of a Young Girl," the personal journal of Anne Frank, a German-born Jewish girl hiding with her family from the Nazis in Amsterdam during World War II, was first published.

In 1962, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that recitation of a state-sponsored prayer in New York State public schools was unconstitutional.

In 1973, former White House Counsel John W. Dean began testifying before the Senate Watergate Committee, implicating top administration officials, including President Richard Nixon as well as himself, in the Watergate scandal and cover-up.

In 1990, the U.S. Supreme Court, in its first "right-to-die" decision, ruled that family members could be barred from ending the lives of persistently comatose relatives who had not made their wishes known conclusively.

In 1993, Kim Campbell was sworn in as Canada's 19th prime minister, the first woman to hold the post.

In 1996, a truck bomb killed 19 Americans and injured hundreds at a U.S. military housing complex in Saudi Arabia.

In 2009, death claimed Michael Jackson, the "King of Pop," in Los Angeles at age 50 and actor Farrah Fawcett in Santa Monica, California, at age 62.

In 2013, President Barack Obama declared the debate over climate change and its causes obsolete as he announced at Georgetown University a wide-ranging plan to tackle pollution and prepare communities for global warming.

In 2015, the U.S. Supreme Court upheld nationwide tax subsidies under President Barack Obama's health care overhaul in a 6-3 ruling that preserved health insurance for millions of Americans.

In 2016, Pope Francis visited Armenia, where he recognized the Ottoman-era slaughter of Armenians as a genocide, prompting a harsh rebuttal from Turkey.

In 2021, former Minneapolis police Officer Derek Chauvin was sentenced to 22 1/2 years in prison for the murder of George Floyd, whose dying gasps under Chauvin's knee led to the biggest outcry against racial injustice in the U.S. in generations.

Today's Birthdays: Actor June Lockhart is 99. Civil rights activist James Meredith is 91. R&B singer Eddie Floyd ("Knock on Wood") is 87. Actor Barbara Montgomery is 85. Singer Carly Simon is 81. Actor-comedian Jimmie Walker is 77. Rock musician Tim Finn is 72. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor is 70. Actor-writer-director Ricky Gervais (jer-VAYZ') is 63. Author Yann Martel ("Life of Pi") is 61. Actor Erica Gimpel is 60. Basketball Hall of Famer Dikembe Mutombo (dih-KEHM'-bay moo-TAHM'-boh) is 58. Actor Angela Kinsey ("The Office") is 53. Actor Linda Cardellini is 49. Actor Busy Philipps is 45.