

Groton Daily Independent

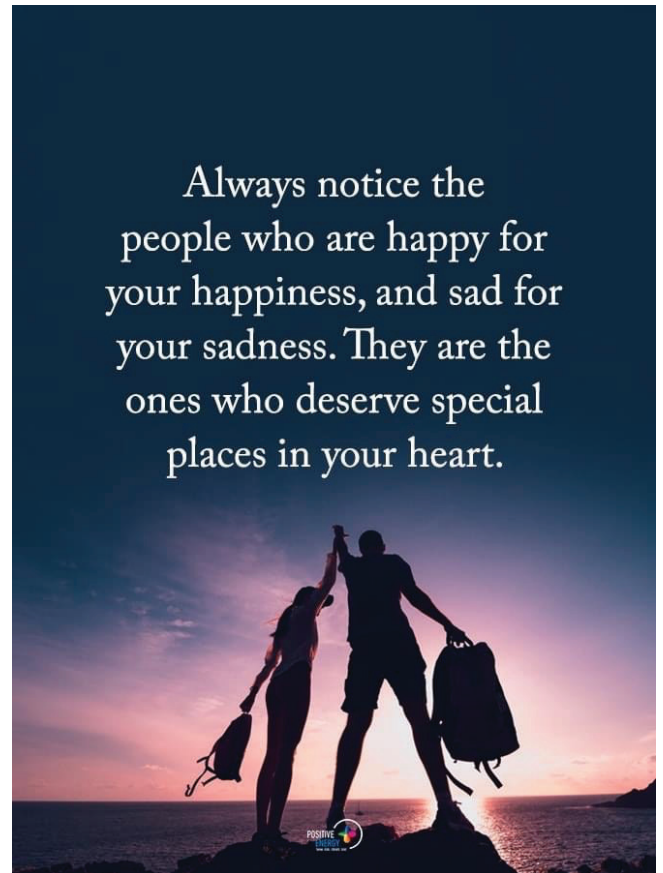
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Thursday, June 27

Senior Menu: Cheeseburger quinoa casserole, cheesy breadstick, steamed Brussel sprouts, fruit.
Junior Legion at Bryant, 5:30 p.m. (2)
Junior Teeners hosts Aberdeen Smitty's, 5 p.m.
Cancelled: U12 B/W hosts Aberdeen 12, 5:30 p.m. (2)
SB at Britton (U10 Blk at 6 p.m. (2), U12 at 6 p.m. (2))
SB U14 hosts Oakes, 6 p.m. (1)
Wage Memorial Library Story Time, 10 a.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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Always notice the people who are happy for your happiness, and sad for your sadness. They are the ones who deserve special places in your heart.

Friday June 28

Senior Menu: Spanish rice with hamburger, green beans, vanilla pudding with mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.
Legion hosts Milbank, 5:30 p.m. (2)
T-Ball B hosts Claremont, 6 p.m.

Saturday, June 29

Junior Legion vs. Platte/Geddes at Britton, 9 a.m. (1)
U10 All - Groton Tourney
SB U10 Gld and Blk at Watertown Tournament
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.
Moose Golf Outing at Olive Grove 10 a.m.

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1440

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Gershkovich Trial Begins

The trial of American journalist Evan Gershkovich began yesterday in Yekaterinburg, Russia, over charges he spied on Russian defense contractors for the US. The 32-year-old Wall Street Journal reporter has been jailed since March 2023 in what the US deems is a wrongful detention. It's the first such Russian imprisonment of a foreign correspondent on espionage charges since the Soviet era.

Espionage trials in Russia are closed to the public, with lawyers prevented from commenting publicly on the case and witness testimony rarely publicized. Gershkovich appeared with his head shaved in a glass enclosure in the courtroom prior to the closed two-hour hearing. His lawyers report Gershkovich—who denies the allegations—has kept busy reading Russian classics and playing chess by mail. If convicted, Gershkovich faces up to 20 years in prison—though officials have signaled openness to a prisoner swap.

American Paul Whelan and dual US-Russian citizen Alsu Kurmasheva are among those also wrongfully detained in the country. Gershkovich's next hearing is slated for Aug. 13.

Presidential Debate Tonight

President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump are scheduled to debate tonight at 9 pm ET on CNN.

Tonight marks the first general election debate of 2024, one of two such planned debates, with the second (hosted by ABC) scheduled for September. Tonight is also the first debate since the 1980s not organized by the nonpartisan Commission on Presidential Debates. Instead, the presumptive Republican and Democratic nominees have coordinated directly with news outlets on the dates and terms, agreeing to forgo opening statements, debate notes, and an audience. There will be a mute button to cut candidates' microphones off after their allotted response time expires.

The debate—hosted by moderators Jake Tapper and Dana Bash—comes as recent polls predict a tight race, with Trump leading by 1%-2% nationally. Trump is currently leading in seven key swing state polls by 1%-5%.

Asteroids Passing by Earth

An asteroid is scheduled to pass an estimated 4 million miles from Earth today, its closest encounter in over 100 years.

Roughly the size of Mount Everest at 1.4 miles wide, asteroid 2011 UL21 was once predicted to have a one in 71 million chance of hitting Earth by the end of the decade—an estimate experts now put at zero. Later this week, a much smaller asteroid, roughly the size of a stadium and discovered days ago, is scheduled to pass within roughly 75% of the distance to the moon. Both rocks—remnants from the early solar system—are expected to be visible using a telescope. A planet-killing asteroid is not expected to threaten Earth for at least the next 1,000 years, though NASA recently conducted an exercise to gauge readiness.

The asteroids come days before Asteroid Day on June 30, timed to commemorate the 1908 Tunguska event in Siberia. An explosion that day was believed to be the largest observed asteroid strike, roughly 1,000 times as powerful as the blast at Hiroshima.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The Atlanta Hawks take France's Zaccharie Risacher with the top pick of the 2024 NBA Draft; Round 2 kicks off this afternoon (4 pm ET, ESPN).

Team USA women's soccer 18-player roster announced for Paris Olympics.

Investigation into "Friends" actor Matthew Perry's death reportedly could result in charges against multiple people involved in supplying Perry with ketamine.

UEFA European Championship Round of 16 set; see latest bracket and schedule.

Copa América group stage continues.

Science & Technology

Daily multivitamin use shows no association with lower risk of death, including from cancer or heart disease, new research finds; study tracked almost 400,000 participants over 20 years.

World's first usable titanium-sapphire laser on a microchip demonstrated; prototype is 10,000 times smaller and 1,000 times cheaper than commercial versions of the powerful research-grade laser.

Scientists capture early moments of butterfly metamorphosis at the microscopic level, shedding light on how the insect's unique scale architecture forms on its wings.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.2%, Dow +0.04%, Nasdaq +0.5%); Nasdaq set for nearly 19% gain in first half of year, led by Nvidia and AI boom.

Amazon tops \$2T market cap for first time as shares hit all-time high.

Federal judge to likely reject \$30B settlement between payment processors Visa, Mastercard, and merchants who say they have overpaid in credit card processing fees—which are often passed down to consumers.

Japanese yen falls to weakest level against the US dollar since 1986; the yen has so far fallen 12% against the dollar this year, with analysts citing the gap between Japanese and foreign interest rates as a reason for the drop.

Politics & World Affairs

US Supreme Court rejects lower court ruling restricting the Biden administration from contacting social media companies to remove misinformation.

The court is also planning to allow Idaho doctors to perform abortions in medical emergencies, per opinion accidentally published early.

Bolivian general Juan José Zúñiga arrested after a failed coup attempt at the presidential palace; Zúñiga claims he was acting at the behest of the president.

Kenyan President William Ruto backs down on plans for tax hike following violent protests earlier this week and police crackdown.

Centrist George Latimer defeats Rep. Jamaal Bowman (D, NY-16) in most expensive primary race in US history; total spend was \$24.8M, almost \$15M from pro-Israel lobbying group AIPAC.

Bradin Althoff Puts On Strong Contact Performance As Groton Post 39 Take The Win Over Clark/Willow Lake Senators **By GameChanger Media**

Bradin Althoff collected three hits in six at bats, as Groton Post 39 defeated Clark/Willow Lake Senators 16-4 on Wednesday. Althoff singled in the third inning, singled in the fourth inning, and singled in the seventh inning.

Groton Post 39 opened the scoring in the second after Conner Mudgett induced Nick Morris to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored.

Groton Post 39 added to their early lead in the top of the third inning after Clark/Willow Lake Senators committed an error, Gavin Englund walked, Karsten Flihs walked, and Morris hit into a fielder's choice, each scoring one run.

Groton Post 39 scored six runs on five hits in the top of the seventh inning. Nick Groeblichhoff was struck by a pitch, driving in a run, an error scored one run, Flihs singled, scoring one run, Jarrett Erdmann grounded out, scoring one run, Dillon Abeln singled, scoring one run, and Colby Dunker doubled, scoring one run.

Korbin Kucker earned the win for Groton Post 39. The righty surrendered two hits and one run over three and two-thirds innings, striking out six and walking none. Conner Mudgett took the loss for Clark/Willow Lake Senators. The starting pitcher went two innings, allowing five runs (four earned) on two hits, striking out one and walking four. Abeln pitched one and one-third innings of shutout ball for Groton Post 39 in relief. The right-handed pitcher gave up zero hits, striking out three and walking none.

Groton Post 39 piled up 10 hits in the game. Abeln collected two hits for Groton Post 39 in four at bats. Flihs paced Groton Post 39 with three walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, accumulating 10 walks for the game.

Conner Mudgett led Clark/Willow Lake Senators with one run batted in. Michael Severson led Clark/Willow Lake Senators with two hits in two at bats. Clark/Willow Lake Senators had patience at the plate, amassing nine walks for the game. Conner Mudgett and Ernesto Garcia led the team with two walks each.

Groton Post 39 play at home on Friday against Post 9 in their next game.

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Doomscrolling: Stop the scroll, protect your mental health

By Alisa Bowman for Mayo Clinic

"I should stop." Have you ever said those words to yourself as you scrolled through one depressing social post after another?

Maybe you planned to do something else — hit the gym, clean the house, spend quality time with your kids or enjoy the outdoors. Instead, you lost the opportunity because you were glued to endless disheartening social media posts and information, a phenomenon popularly known as doomscrolling.

You may wonder: Why is it so difficult to stop doomscrolling once you start? More importantly, what can you do to break free from the negative spiral? Craig N. Sawchuk, Ph.D., L.P., a psychologist with Mayo Clinic, offers some insight.

What is doomscrolling?

"When you think of the word doom, it has an evocative emotional response," Dr. Sawchuk says.

That lines up with the term's origins in 2020.

During the early days of the COVID-19 pandemic, many of us were stuck at home, where we leaned heavily on our phones, computers and television sets to entertain us. However, these devices exposed us to an abundance of negative information about lifestyle restrictions, protests over those restrictions, supply chain issues, empty grocery store shelves, people behaving badly and, of course, the ever-increasing death count.

During these early days, there was a lot of uncertainty, which drove many of us to seek out this information continually. However, no amount of information quelled the uncertainty, keeping us stuck in a never-ending loop of searching, finding negative information and searching for more.

Although the early days of COVID are long behind us, many people still struggle with doomscrolling, and find themselves thumbing through the flood of negative news shared on social media channels about various topics.

Why do people doomscroll?

All behavior and emotions serve a function, says Dr. Sawchuk, and that includes doomscrolling.

Often, doomscrolling starts with a goal of becoming more aware of a situation so you can understand what's happening and prepare yourself for it.

During COVID, for example, you may have initially searched for information to answer questions like:

Where's the best place to find toilet paper?

Should I wipe down my groceries with antiseptic?

Do I need to wear a mask when I walk my dog at the park?

However, with doomscrolling, this search for answers becomes obsessive and unproductive. Rather than helping you to learn useful information, you waste time as you surf from one outrageous story to another, all the while feeling worse about the world, the people in it and your ability to cope.

Doomscrolling is likely motivated by more than curiosity.

According to Dr. Sawchuk, our brains are hardwired to orient us toward novelty and threat. Throughout human existence, this wiring helped keep humans alive. A brain that noticed threats — especially novel threats — was a brain that got you out of harm's way before it was too late.

This protective tendency, however, can backfire when it comes to the internet.

The role of social media platforms and doomscrolling

Before the age of the internet and social media, our natural search for information was typically limited to the length of the evening newscast and the number of sheets of the morning or evening newspaper. Even when the news dominated our television sets — for example, in the days after September 11 — the 24/7 coverage eventually ended, and we returned to our lives.

However, with social media, that's not how things work.

First, unlike our televisions, our phones are mobile, which allows us to search for doom and gloom at all hours of the day or night. Second, social media never ends. New posts pop up constantly — and many

of them are loaded with what the brain craves: novelty and danger. Finally, social media platforms learn from your behavior. If you consume negative content, they'll deliver more and more of it, creating an endless loop.

The effects of doomscrolling on mental and emotional health

According to research completed during the pandemic, the more time people spend consuming negative social media content, the more distressed they feel.

Perhaps you've noticed these mood changes yourself.

You might feel okay when you first pick up your phone. After several minutes of scrolling, however, you feel more anxious, angry, disheartened, disgusted or helpless. Once this negativity arises, it functions like a lens, causing you to pay more attention to stories and posts that justify and accentuate your feelings, says Dr. Sawchuk.

Doomscrolling also may worsen mood in other ways.

Sleep procrastination. If you doomscroll in the evening, you may struggle to stop, consequently staying up long past your bedtime. This loss of sleep can affect your mood the following day.

"Sleep disruption doesn't make us the nicest to be around. We're less tolerant and more impatient the following day," says Dr. Sawchuk.

Worsened social health. Time spent with friends and family tends to be restorative. However, when you doomscroll, you may spend so much time on your phone that there's little left to spend with other humans.

Less exercise. Exercise, sunlight, and nature can all help buffer stress and support mood. However, doomscrolling tends to be a sedentary activity done indoors.

How to stop doomscrolling

To counter your brain's bias to seek out the negative and novel, consider these questions:

Can you do anything about the day's news? In other words, does this information truly help you plan for the future? Or is it merely triggering negativity about a cause or event that you have no power to influence?

How much information do you genuinely need to plan and make decisions? In most situations, some information is likely helpful, allowing you to weigh pros and cons and plan for the future. When most people doomscroll, however, they acquire much more information than they truly need to plan or make decisions, says Dr. Sawchuk. Instead, their information gathering leads to indecision, a sense of helplessness or increased negativity for no beneficial reason.

How is time online affecting you? After you're done scrolling, do you tend to feel better than before you started? Or worse?

What are you missing out on because of your time spent scrolling? How does doomscrolling impact your sleep, relationships, work, mood and physical health?

Once you understand how doomscrolling affects your health and your life, consider adding some limits.

Check in with your mood. Every 5 to 10 minutes, tune out of your social feed and into your mood. Are you feeling better than before you started scrolling? Or worse?

"If you feel worse, pay attention to that," says Dr. Sawchuk.

It doesn't mean you have to stop scrolling right away. You might scroll another five or 10 minutes and do another check-in. If you feel even worse, that's telling you something.

Set a time limit. Based on what you learn from your mood check-ins, decide how much time you will spend online. For example, you might agree to limit your scrolling to 15 to 20 minutes on social media twice daily.

Use a reminder. Apps like ScreenZen and others monitor your scrolling and limit your access to apps after a set period of time. Another strategy is to set a timer to alert you when your allotted time has elapsed.

Replace scrolling with healthy activities. What day-to-day behaviors have you allowed to lapse because of the time you spent scrolling? Would you benefit from more time with friends, outdoors, sleeping or at the gym?

Name Released in Lincoln County Fatal UTV Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: 27225 480th Ave (Lake Alvine/Nine Mile Creek), five miles NE of Harrisburg, SD

When: 2:10 p.m. Saturday, June 22, 2024

Driver 1: Merlyn Duane Rennich, 87-year-old male from Harrisburg, SD, fatal injuries

Vehicle 1: 2013 Kawasaki Mule side x side UTV

Seatbelt/Helmet Use: No

Lincoln County, S.D.- An 87-year-old man died Saturday afternoon in a single vehicle crash five miles northeast of Harrisburg, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Merlyn D. Rennich, the driver of a 2013 Kawasaki Mule, was traveling northbound on 480th Avenue from 273rd Street. The road was closed at the time due to flooding, and the east shoulder of the road had washed away. As Rennich attempted to turn around, he went backwards over the edge of the washout. The UTV began to roll, and Rennich was ejected. He was pronounced deceased at the scene.

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.

South Dakota girls' athletics getting just third administrator ever

By Dana Hess

For the S.D. NewsMedia Association

PIERRE — Girls' high school athletics in South Dakota is getting a new champion.

Jo Auch, assistant executive director of the South Dakota High School Activities Association, is retiring in July after 16 years of serving as the administrator for girls' athletics.

Auch's replacement is former Freeman Public Schools athletic director Kristina Sage who has 35 years of service in Freeman. She has served as the AD there since 2017.

SDHSAA is responsible for state tournaments, the playoffs prior to state tournaments, student-athlete eligibility and the creation of rules and regulations. Auch's portfolio of sports includes competitive cheer, competitive dance, sideline cheer, boys' and girls' tennis, volleyball, boys' and girls' basketball, gymnastics and softball.

Similar backgrounds

Auch grew up in Scotland, South Dakota. She was lucky enough to be a high school freshman in 1974 when Title IX kicked in and opened the door to girls' athletics.

"That was when girls' basketball started in the state of South Dakota," Auch said. "We played nine games our first year, just on kind of a trial basis."

Auch went on to play basketball and softball at the University of South Dakota.

Sage's background is similar. She played basketball and ran track for Montrose High School, where those were the only girls' sports offered when she was in school. She went on to compete in both of those sports at Dakota Wesleyan in Mitchell.

Like Sage, Auch was a coach and AD. Her time at Menno High School lasted 26 years.

On to the association

Auch loved education, but was drawn to work for the association out of her desire for more administrative responsibilities and her association with Ruth Rehn. Rehn was the first administrator for girls' athletics.

"She was the one who got everything started for the state of South Dakota in girls' athletics," Auch said. "It's kind of interesting that there have only been two people in this position."

Working with the association in her capacity as an athletic director was a catalyst for Sage seeking her new job.

"I have a lot of respect for what the association does," Sage said. "In working with them in my job as an AD, I just felt like that was really in my wheelhouse."

Both have seen changes in sports

The biggest change Sage has seen in girls' athletics is the growth in the number of opportunities since the days when she was limited to two sports in Montrose. Through the years, she has also witnessed a change in coaching.



Jo Auch



Kristina Sage

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"There weren't many female coaches when I was a high school athlete," Sage recalled. "Even when I started out teaching and coaching, in the majority of our small schools, the coaches were men."

During Auch's tenure with SDHSAA, new sports have included girls' wrestling, girls' soccer and softball. "Our board has kind of asked us to slow down a little bit," Auch said. "Schools need a chance to go breathe and catch up financially."

To that end, the association has implemented a formal process through which new sports must be suggested by member schools.

Officials, sportsmanship linked

Part of Auch's responsibilities, soon to be inherited by Sage, will be the recruitment and retention of sports officials.

As an AD, Sage was noted for treating officials with respect.

"I thought it was important, the way we treated them when they came here," Sage said. "If there was a new, young official, I always tried to hire those people."

On a statewide basis, Auch has seen the struggle of trying to keep sports officials.

"One of the things we hear over and over again is, we're losing officials because of (poor) sportsmanship," Auch said.

To meet that challenge, the association hopes to recruit more officials through a program called RefReps and getting the administrators at member schools to take a stand against poor sportsmanship, whether it comes from coaches, players or fans.

RefReps is a course in officiating offered in high schools and colleges. Thirty-two students recently took the RefReps course at USD, learning how to be officials for football and volleyball. Auch hopes they sign up to work junior varsity games.

"That's 32 people that we didn't have last year," Auch said. "I'm hoping that's going to continue to move."

Sage described her experience with poor sportsmanship as "pretty discouraging," particularly when dealing with adults.

"You just have to be willing to speak up," Sage said. "It has to come from other fans to say, 'I'm not comfortable with that.' We need to think about how we're treating people."

Auch notes that fans often forget that officials are taking time away from their jobs and their families to give back to a sport they love.

"People need to be reminded that, sitting in the stands, we're still role models," Auch said. "I always say, without officials, it's just recess."

Many benefits of participation

Despite the recent need for an emphasis on sportsmanship, Auch and Sage agree that participation in high school athletics has many benefits.

"I just think it's one of the best parts of being in school for kids," Sage said. "They learn so much just by being a member of a team."

High school activities are full of life lessons, according to Auch. "I think kids that are involved in athletics just turn out to be much better people."

Auch said high school athletes learn about making a commitment while honing their leadership skills.

"There will be mistakes along the way because they're kids," Auch said. "We'll work through those mistakes and move through that so we can become better individuals."

Softball Auch's career highlight

As she tries to predict the future for a job she hasn't started yet, Sage said she hopes for continued growth in participation in girls' athletics. She has seen that growth recently in the state's two-year-old softball program.

"Even in the second year, we had more teams just in our own area," Sage said. "We'll continue to see that growth, which is great."

Auch points the implementation of softball as a sport for girls as the personal highpoint of her 16 years with the association. Softball was in discussions for four years before it was implemented two years ago.

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Since the sport was sanctioned, it has grown from 48 schools to about 60 schools.

"We've talked about it so long and to finally get it two years ago was a real highpoint," Auch said.

Missed event hastened retirement

After years of running playoff tournaments and state athletic events, it was a missed event that convinced Auch it was time for retirement.

When she couldn't attend a Grandparents' Day event at her granddaughter's school in Dickinson, North Dakota, the girl's reaction changed Auch's mind about working for another year. She vowed to be able to make it to the next Grandparents' Day.

"When I'm sitting in the nursing home I'm not going to remember that I worked another year," Auch predicted, "but I am going to know that I missed her event."

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Three South Dakota Lakes Reopen to Boating

PIERRE, S.D. - The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) today announced the reopening of three waterbodies in southeast South Dakota that had been included on Governor Noem's previous "no boating declaration."

Lake Henry in Bon Homme County, Menno Lake in Hutchinson County, and Marindahl Lake in Yankton County have all been removed from the declaration.

These waterbodies are all existing no-wake zones, and boaters utilizing these waterbodies should use caution as there is debris still below the surface.

"These three waterbodies are impoundments, which means they are generally going to drain quicker than a natural lake," said Sam Schelhaas, Law Enforcement Chief. "We want to stress to boaters just because these waterbodies are open they need to still be very careful."

No boating remains in effect on the waters of:

Lake Alvin in Lincoln County,

Swan Lake in Turner County,

Wall Lake in Minnehaha County,

Lake Vermillion in McCook County, and

McCook Lake in Union 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.

South Dakota schools receive \$6.4 million in CTE grants

Groton Area receives \$244,871 Grant

PIERRE, S.D – In a historic move, the South Dakota Department of Education has awarded 36 grants totaling \$6.4 million to school districts to purchase innovative, industry-grade equipment for career and technical education (CTE) programs.

Groton Area will receive a \$244,871 grant. According to Groton Area Superintendent Joe Schwan, he said the money will be used for additional new equipment in the health science department.

“We gave schools a definite challenge to carefully examine their needs and let us know how we could help truly set their CTE programs up for long-term success. Our districts rose to that challenge. I am excited by the opportunities this grant will afford our students, and in turn our communities and businesses throughout the state,” said Secretary of Education Joe Graves.

CTE programs integrate academic knowledge with technical skills, preparing students for careers through hands-on training and industry-aligned curriculum. By emphasizing real-world applications and essential employability skills, CTE equips students with the tools they need for success in both college and the workforce in fields such as agriculture, healthcare, hospitality, engineering, and more.

The scale of this unprecedented, one-time grant opportunity was made possible by funds available to the department through the American Rescue Plan and the federal Perkins grant.

The recipients of the grants are as follows:

Aberdeen Catholic Schools, \$116,848.00;
Aberdeen School District, \$240,085.48;
Baltic School District, \$218,806.31;
Brandon Valley School District, \$221,683.81;
Bridgewater-Emery, \$122,011.14;
Custer School District, \$226,875.35;
Deuel School District, \$50,773.00;
Douglas School District, \$243,744.00;
Eagle Butte School District, \$222,924.72;
Elk Point – Jefferson School District, \$214,151.20;
Faith School District, \$228,987.96;
Faulkton School District, \$218,575.33;
Freeman School District, \$240,194.35;
Groton School District, \$244,871.00;
Hanson School District, \$141,000.00;
Harrisburg School District, \$199,678.72;
Irene-Wakonda School District, \$67,649.73;
Kadoka School District, \$123,347.56;

Lake Preston School District, \$54,220.36;
Madison School District, \$179,829.10;
McIntosh School District, \$106,384.33;
Menno School District, \$208,736.00;
Mobridge-Pollock School District, \$105,624.00;
Oglala Lakota School District, \$206,150.00;
Parkston School District, \$174,075.10;
Rapid City Area Schools, \$248,046.18;
Rosholt School District, \$86,738.36;
Spearfish School District, \$243,080.32;
Stanley County School District, \$245,827.26;
Vermillion School District, \$219,618.01;
Wall School District, \$250,000.00;
Warner School District, \$159,200.00;
Webster Area School District, \$217,695.00;
West Central School District, \$108,615.82;
Wilmot School District, \$136,918.52; and
Wolsey-Wessington School District, \$117,700.81.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Name released in single known fatality from record flooding

BY: JOHN HULT - JUNE 26, 2024 5:13 PM

Authorities have released the name of the person killed in the only known fatality from the flooding that's ravaged southeastern South Dakota over the past week.

Merlyn D. Rennich, 87, was killed Saturday afternoon after driving a 2013 Kawasaki Mule all-terrain vehicle north onto a closed section of 480th Avenue from 273rd Street, about 5 miles northeast of Harrisburg. The east shoulder of the road had washed away in the flooding. According to a news release from the state Department of Public Safety, Rennich went backward over the edge of the washout, the vehicle began to roll, and Rennich was ejected.

He was pronounced dead at the scene. The news release said the the information on the death is preliminary, and the Highway Patrol will continue to investigate the crash.

Lincoln County, where the incident occurred, was among those hardest-hit by the flooding, which saw record or near-record rainfall totals and flood stage cresting from the Big Sioux, James and Vermillion rivers, all of which feed into the Missouri River.

The flooding destroyed part of the McCook Lake community in Union County, where the rivers converge at the South Dakota-Iowa-Nebraska border. The planned diversion of waters to McCook Lake, Gov. Kristi Noem said during a Tuesday press conference, spared the towns of Dakota Dunes and North Sioux City from worse flooding.

Noem said the state planned to "send extra resources" to McCook Lake to prevent people from returning to their homes for their property without permission, because the area is too dangerous from washouts and steep drop-offs.

"We got through this whole situation with one loss of life that happened. We don't want to lose any more," Noem said. "We certainly don't want to lose any people from going into a dangerous area that we knew was dangerous."

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

McCook Lake residents say their homes were sacrificed, and they want a new flood plan

Advance warnings were also inadequate, homeowners allege

BY: SETH TUPPER - JUNE 26, 2024 6:00 AM

State and local authorities knew they were placing McCook Lake in the path of record high floodwaters but failed to adequately warn residents of the danger, according to some people who live in the flood-ravaged community.

Authorities rejected the criticism and said they executed a long-established flood mitigation plan that was simply overwhelmed by record amounts of water. They also defended their communications, saying they gave multiple warnings to residents before the floodwaters arrived.

Both sides now face a long cleanup and questions about the future. Dirk Lohry, president of the McCook Lake Association, said the area needs a new flood mitigation plan.

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"McCook Lake was sacrificed for the benefit of North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes," Lohry said. "We don't really think that's fair."

The crisis began last week when three days of historically heavy rain fell on areas as far as 140 miles north of McCook Lake. A pulse of high water flowed south down the Big Sioux River toward its confluence with the Missouri River. Before the Big Sioux reaches that spot in western Sioux City, Iowa, it flows by McCook Lake, North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes in the southeastern corner of South Dakota.

Long-established plan activated

North Sioux City has had a flood mitigation plan in place for decades, which includes building a temporary levee across Interstate 29 at Exit 4, less than 1,000 feet east of some of the 230 homes that line McCook Lake.

After North Sioux City officials activated the plan Saturday, state and local contractor crews helped build the levee. It ties in with permanent levees that protect North Sioux City and Dakota Dunes, which each have several thousand residents.

The levees are intended to divert floodwaters toward McCook Lake. Overflow from the lake goes south to the Missouri River, because the lake was formerly part of the river. It's an oxbow — a horseshoe-shaped bend that was cut off long ago when the river changed course.

The plan has been implemented before, but never with so much water coming down the Big Sioux River. A gauge at Sioux City showed the river crested early Monday morning at about 45 feet, more than 7 feet higher than the previous record in 2014.

"The results of that are absolutely devastating," Lohry said Monday.

Gov. Kristi Noem said during a Tuesday press conference in Yankton that at least "a couple dozen homes" were destroyed at McCook Lake.

"We have whole homes that have fallen into the lake," Noem said. "We've got hundred-foot drop-offs from washouts, we've got live power lines laying across the roads, we've got boats stuck in trees, we've got trees that are half-falling over."

Rescuers worked through Sunday night helping people escape. Authorities said Monday morning they had swept the community twice and found nobody trapped.

Adequacy of communications debated

Before the flood arrived, Noem led a press conference Sunday afternoon in North Sioux City with federal, state and local officials to talk about their mitigation and response plans.

They said McCook Lake could be affected, but nobody at the press conference issued an urgent verbal warning about the safety of lake residents. Dakota Dunes issued a voluntary evacuation order, but no such order was issued at that time for McCook Lake.

Noem fielded a question Sunday afternoon about how McCook Lake residents should prepare.

"What I would say to them is that, yes, they should be protecting their personal property on McCook Lake," she said at the time, "because we do anticipate that they will take in water. That's what we're preparing for. If we don't, then that's wonderful that they don't have an impact, but they could see water flowing into McCook Lake."

Noem was working with rapidly changing forecast data for the Big Sioux River that was outdated by the time she announced it. She said during the press conference that the Big Sioux at Sioux City was projected to crest by 1 p.m. Monday at 42.2 feet. The actual crest was earlier and higher, at 10:30 p.m. Sunday and again at 3:30 a.m. Monday when the river reached 44.98 feet.

Jason Westcott, Union County's emergency management director, said Tuesday in an interview with South Dakota Searchlight that he issued warnings throughout the weekend about potential flooding, both to social media and local media outlets.

"The belief was that the mitigation was going to work effectively," he said.

When the situation grew unexpectedly dire Sunday evening due to the river rising higher and faster than anticipated, Westcott said he sent warnings to cell phones at McCook Lake and dispatched emergency responders to go door-to-door.

His office also posted an all-caps, bolded message to Facebook at 8:35 Sunday night:

**EVACUATION NOTICE NORTH SIOUX CITY / MCCOOK LAKE AREA
RESIDENT'S ON NORTH SHORE FROM EXIT 4 TO DAKOTA VALLEY
HIGH SCHOOL – PLEASE EVACUATE!**

Northshore Drive, which leads to the high school, was the area of McCook Lake most affected by flooding. By the time of the Facebook post, the Big Sioux was within inches of its crest.

Tyler Wood drove away from his McCook Lake home in "grille high" water with almost no time to spare. "If it would have been two to three minutes later," he said, "we wouldn't have been able to get out of the street."

Wood said he did not receive an alert on his phone. He said the closest thing he received to an urgent warning was a neighbor encouraging him to move belongings out of his basement about two hours before the deluge arrived.

"Any communication would have been beneficial instead of less than two hours prior to knowing that our house would maybe be a loss," Wood said. "I know it's hard to deliver on that, but finding out from neighbors in this situation just isn't the best way to find out."

Planning for the future

Monday morning at another press conference in North Sioux City, Noem defended the use of the temporary levee.

"I know that because of the levee system that is the emergency plan that's followed by North Sioux City — and it was planned and followed successfully — that the industrial park and all of North Sioux City was saved from traumatic damage," Noem said. "But we did see some at McCook Lake, and we saw houses that were significantly impacted."

Westcott made similar comments at the Monday press conference.

"What occurred yesterday was a result of a mitigation effort," he said. "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 efforts that we took yesterday, much of North Sioux City would be under water."

Some McCook Lake residents are now at odds with authorities about access to homes and belongings. Noem and Westcott said Tuesday that much of the McCook Lake area is not safe, and it currently lacks power, gas and sewer service. Extra police have been brought in to keep people out, and Westcott said local authorities will work individually with McCook Lake residents to view their destroyed home or access their partially destroyed home.

Lohry, the lake association president, gives authorities some grace for their handling of an unprecedented situation. He's not sure anything could have lessened the destruction at McCook Lake, given the unique circumstances.

"There was so much water, it overwhelmed everything," he said.

But not every future flood will be as severe as this one, and Lohry wants changes to the flood mitigation plan. He suggests a ditch or canal to divert floodwaters from the Big Sioux around McCook Lake to nearby Mud Lake, which is not lined by houses, so the water could overflow there and drain through the state's Adams Homestead and Nature Preserve down to the Missouri River.

"It requires some thought, but considering the expense of what we've gone through right here, I think the plan needs to be revised," Lohry said. "I think there's a more economical and safer way to do it."

South Dakota Searchlight's Makenzie Huber contributed to this report.

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.

Delayed Supreme Court ruling makes Trump trial on 2020 charges unlikely before election

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JUNE 26, 2024 3:18 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Supreme Court has yet to rule on whether presidents enjoy total criminal immunity, delaying one of the most consequential legal decisions in U.S. history and likely closing the door on former President Donald Trump facing his federal election interference trial before November.

Trump, the presumed Republican presidential nominee who is entangled in several criminal cases, already faces a July sentencing for a New York state conviction on 34 felonies for falsifying business records ahead of the 2016 election.

Supreme Court justices heard oral arguments in the immunity case on the last day of their term, April 25, and have held the case in their hands since late February.

Opinions are scheduled to be released on Thursday and Friday, but the court does not disclose which ones in advance. Trump is set to debate President Joe Biden on Thursday night at CNN studios in Atlanta, with the campaign for the presidency in full swing.

The question before the court is whether U.S. presidents are immune from criminal prosecution for any official acts taken while in the Oval Office.

Trump pressed the matter to the Supreme Court after a lower court in January denied his claim that he should not face federal charges that allege he schemed to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss by knowingly spreading falsehoods, conspiring to create false slates of electors in several states and egging on supporters who violently attacked the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021.

U.S. Department of Justice special counsel Jack Smith urged the Supreme Court in December to leapfrog the appellate court level and expedite a ruling on presidential immunity. At the time, Trump's trial for the election subversion charges had still been set for March 4. The justices declined Smith's request.

'De facto' immunity

Critics of the Supreme Court accuse the bench's conservative justices, including three Trump appointees, of purposely delaying the ruling to keep Trump out of the courtroom before November's election.

"By preventing (a) trial before the election, they have de facto provided him with immunity, regardless of what the substance of the decision may eventually hand down," Michael Podhorzer, president of the Defending Democracy Project, told States Newsroom Wednesday.

The anti-Trump advocacy organization has been closely monitoring the former president's legal cases.

Podhorzer blamed the justices for not taking up the case in December.

"Then they waited as long as they possibly could to now rule on it, and they created this crisis. They are basically putting their thumb on the scale in this election," he said.

Defining 'official acts'

The justices appeared skeptical in April as Trump attorney D. John Sauer argued a broad definition for what constitutes a president's "official acts."

Under his view nearly everything done during a presidential term would count as an official act, including Trump's efforts to interfere with Congress' certification of the 2020 presidential election results.

In jaw-dropping moments throughout Trump's appeal, Sauer argued before Supreme Court justices and a lower appellate panel that presidents could order the assassination of a political rival without facing legal accountability — that is, if he or she is not first impeached by the U.S. House and convicted by the Senate.

Trump and supporters of the presidential immunity argument contend that allowing criminal prosecution of former presidents will open a "Pandora's box" of political targeting by opponents.

They also accuse Smith of political interference for bringing charges against Trump as he eyed a second term. Smith announced the four-count indictment in early August 2023.

Meanwhile opponents of such immunity, including several who served in previous Republican administrations, warn of "terrifying possibilities" should a president be free from the threat of criminal liability.

Several conservative justices hinted that the case should be returned to the lower courts, where a clear

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line between official acts and private conduct can be drawn.

That could eat up additional weeks or months, further diminishing any slight possibility that Trump's election interference trial would happen prior to the November election.

Podhorzer said a further delay sets up a "showdown between the ordinary function of the criminal justice system, which would have Trump go on trial, (and) the normal operation of our presidential elections in which there would be no encumbrance on Trump's ability to campaign."

All proceedings at the lower court level have been put on hold until the Supreme Court issues its decision.

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

65th Anniversary

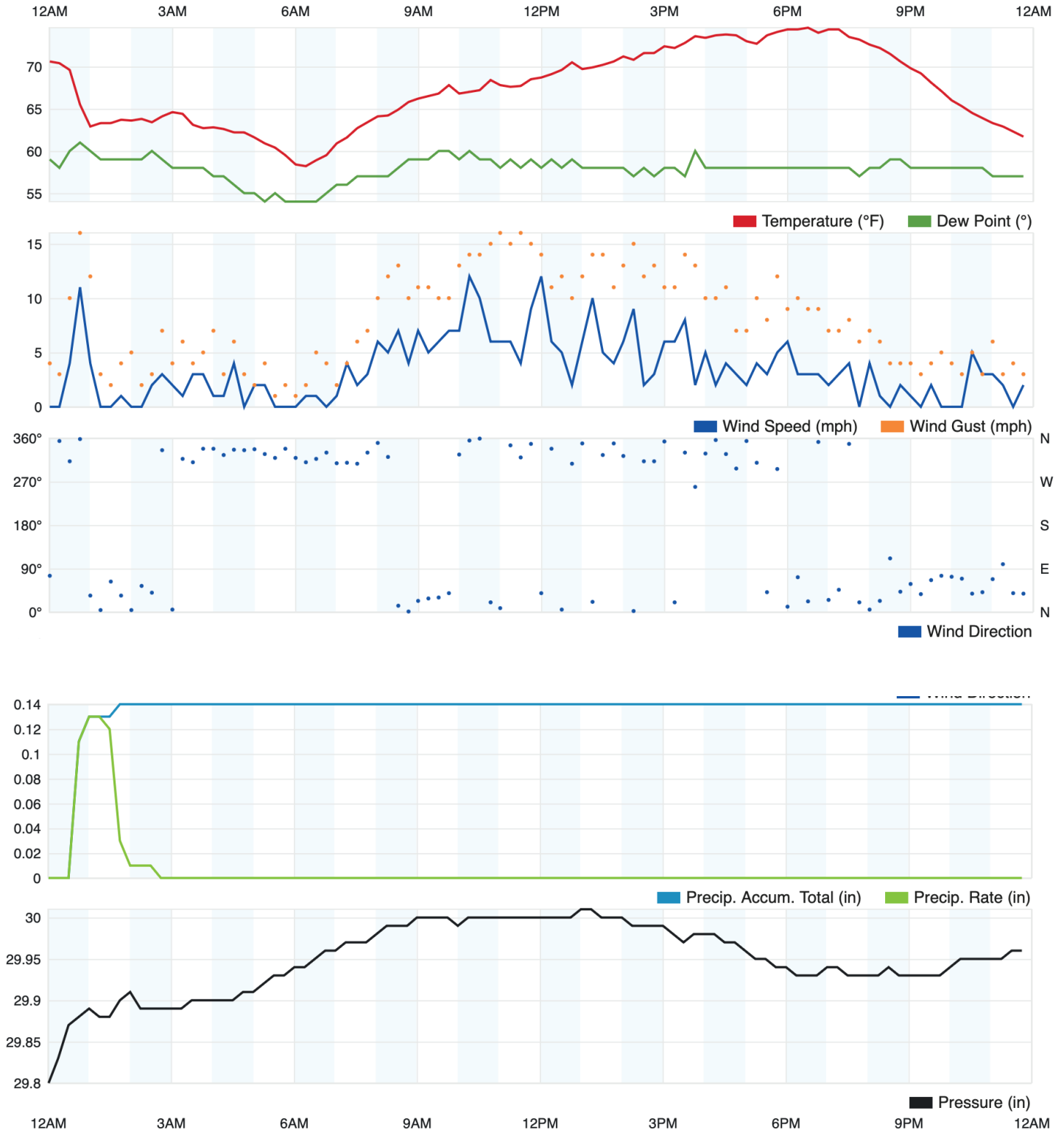


Don and Nancy Hein will celebrate their 65th Wedding Anniversary on July 3, 2024. Greetings may be sent to 918 Arbor Lane #46, Aberdeen SD 57401.

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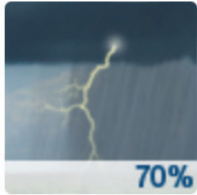
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Thursday



High: 76 °F

T-storms
Likely and
Breezy

Thursday
Night



Low: 65 °F

T-storms
Likely and
Breezy

Friday



High: 83 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms

Friday Night



Low: 56 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 71 °F

Mostly Sunny

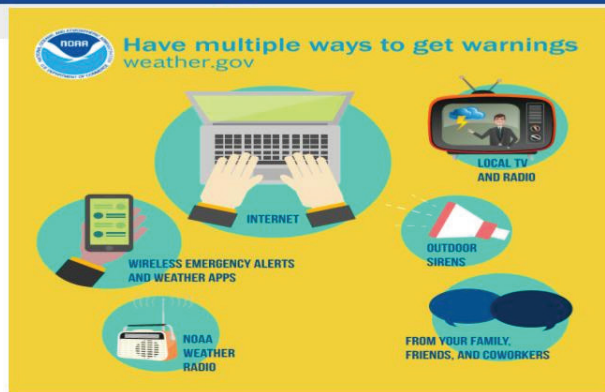


Severe Weather Key Messages

June 27, 2024
4:27 AM

Key Messages

- Atmosphere is primed for severe thunderstorms (supercells) Western & Central Dakotas
- All severe weather threats (hail, winds & tornadoes are all possible)
- Still some uncertainty with respect to coverage & timing. There is also a strong CAP in place.



What You Can Do Now...

When storms near your location, make sure you have a plan in place!

- How will you receive hazardous weather alerts?
- Is there a safe shelter nearby?
- Are there alternate routes to take if a storm blocks your path?



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

We continue to monitor for the potential for severe weather later this afternoon and evening, mainly west river into central South Dakota. Here are the key points.

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Severe Weather Threat Overview

June 27, 2024

4:31 AM

Late This Afternoon/Evening And Through The Overnight Hours

Hazards (primarily in Orange/Yellow area)

Hail (Tennisball) and Damaging Winds (70-80 mph). We cannot rule out a tornado in this setup.

Timing/Location

Storms develop along a front in the western Dakotas in the afternoon Thursday - moving east into the Missouri valley in the evening/overnight.

Tornado Potential

Very Low **Low** Medium High

Max Hail Size

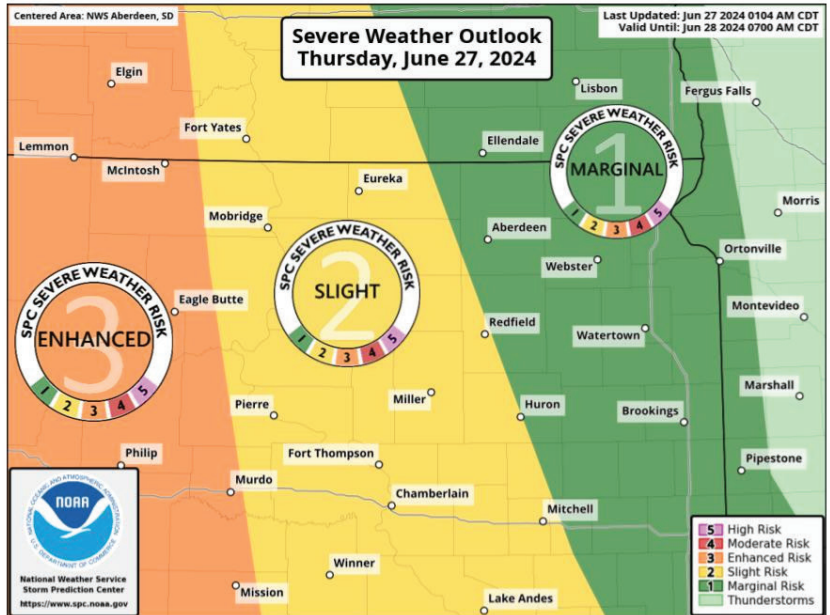
Quarters Golfball **Tennisball** Baseball

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

The severe weather threats and risk areas. Again, the main focus is west river into the Missouri valley. There are lower risks of severe weather as the system progresses east overnight.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 75 °F at 6:09 PM

Low Temp: 58 °F at 6:06 AM

Wind: 20 mph at 11:16 AM

Precip: : 0.14

Day length: 15 hours, 42 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1936

Record Low: 42 in 2017

Average High: 83

Average Low: 58

Average Precip in June.: 3.37

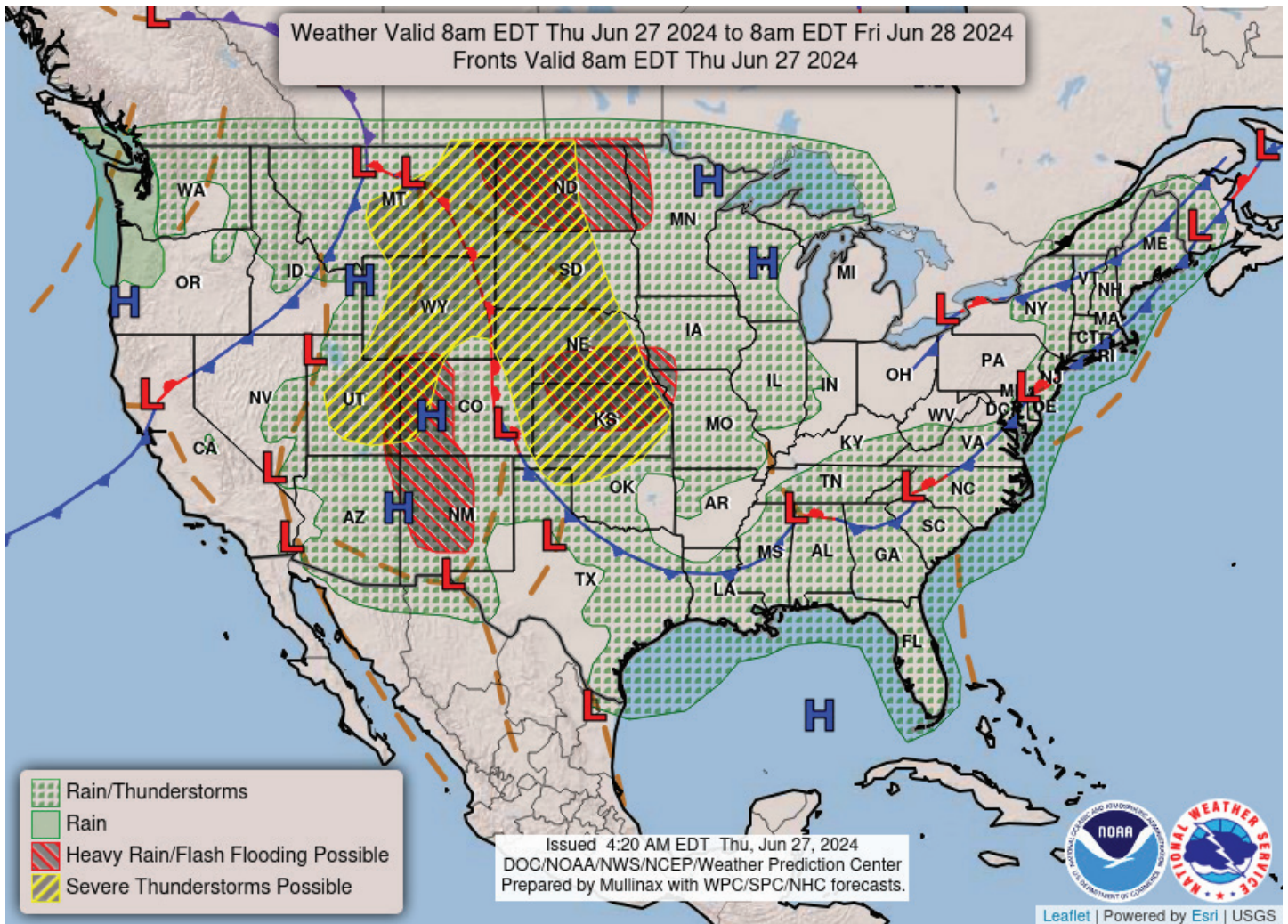
Precip to date in June: 2.87

Average Precip to date: 10.62

Precip Year to Date: 9.94

Sunset Tonight: 9:26:53 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:44:54 am



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Today in Weather History

June 27, 1894: Three people were injured as a tornado destroyed a home 5 miles north of Houghton in Brown County. Lumber on a wagon was scattered for over a mile. This tornado was estimated to be an F2. Also, a second F2 tornado formed south of Aberdeen and moved northeast and went near Randolph, to beyond Bath. Several barns and two homes were destroyed along the narrow path. Three other small funnels were seen to touch down. Another tornado with estimated F2 strength moved ENE from northeast of St. Lawrence to Bonilla and Hitchcock. At least one home was destroyed. One person was killed in the destruction of her home, north of Wessington. An estimated F2 tornado hit 2 miles south of Henry. At least two small houses were blown away. There was another possible tornado 12 miles north of Henry. Numerous tornadoes continued into Minnesota.

June 27, 1928: A long-lived estimated F2 tornado moved southeast from 7 miles west of Faulkton, passing north and east of Orient. Buildings were damaged on nine farms. One home near Orient was riddled with timbers from a nearby grain elevator. This tornado was estimated to travel a distance of 40 miles.

1901 - There was a rain of fish from the sky at Tiller's Ferry. Hundreds of fish were swimming between cotton rows after a heavy shower. (David Ludlum)

1915 - The temperature at Fort Yukon AK soared to 100 degrees to establish a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1957 - Hurricane Audrey smashed ashore at Cameron, LA, drowning 390 persons in the storm tide, and causing 150 million dollars damage in Texas, Louisiana and Mississippi. Audrey left only a brick courthouse and a cement-block icehouse standing at Cameron, and when the waters settled in the town of Crede, only four buildings remained. The powerful winds of Audrey tossed a fishing boat weighing 78 tons onto an off-shore drilling platform. Winds along the coast gusted to 105 mph, and oil rigs off the Louisiana coast reported wind gusts to 180 mph. A storm surge greater than twelve feet inundated the Louisiana coast as much as 25 miles inland. It was the deadliest June hurricane of record for the U.S. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Thunderstorms moving out of Nebraska produced severe weather in north central Kansas after midnight. Thunderstorm winds gusting to 100 mph damaged more than fifty camping trailers at the state park campground at Lake Waconda injuring sixteen persons. Thunderstorm winds gusted to 80 mph at Beloit and Sylvan Grove. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - The afternoon high of 107 degrees at Bismarck, ND, was a record for the month of June, and Pensacola, FL, equalled their June record with a reading of 101 degrees. Temperatures in the Great Lakes Region and the Ohio Valley dipped into the 40s. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather from the Ohio Valley to western New England. Thunderstorm spawned six tornadoes, and there were 98 reports of large hail and damaging winds. Tropical Storm Allison spawned six tornadoes in Louisiana, injuring two persons at Hackberry. Fort Polk LA was drenched with 10.09 inches of rain in 36 hours, and 12.87 inches was reported at the Gorum Fire Tower in northern Louisiana. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: The Madison County Flood on June 27, 1995, was the worst flash floods Virginia had seen since the remnants of Camille dropped up to 30 inches of rain one night in Nelson County in August 1969. The Nelson County flood ranked as one of the nation's worst flash floods of this century and resulted in the deaths of 117 people. The Madison County flood killed one person.

2011: Polar temperatures and unusual snowfall chill several cities in Brazil's southern states. Four cities in Santa Catarina state are blanketed in snow. The town of Urubici reported a temperature of 23.9 degrees Fahrenheit with a wind chill of 16.6 degrees below zero. In Florianopolis, the capital of Santa Catarina and a renowned sea resort, thermometers registered 21.2 degrees.

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Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE NEED TO BE KIND

Miss Wilson went to the post office nearly every day to buy a stamp or two. Often the line was long, and it appeared that she had difficulty standing quietly waiting her turn at the counter.

A stranger who had seen her on many occasions asked, "Why don't you just buy several books of stamps at one time? It would be so much easier and quicker, and you wouldn't have to come here and stand so long."

"Oh my," she said, "the clerks are so kind to me. They always smile at me and ask me how I am doing and how I feel."

Kindness does two things at the same time: It makes us feel good and others feel good. And it rarely costs us anything even though it usually makes others feel important.

Kindness, like love, has its source in God. We read in Titus that "When the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of His mercy."

When we actually begin to understand the fullness of God's kindness to us personally, we will no doubt see others in a different light. We certainly do not deserve God's kindness - yet He has been more than kind to us. He held nothing back in giving His Son to be our Savior. Showing kindness to others demonstrates His love.

Prayer: Acts of kindness, Father, present endless opportunities for us to show others that we care for them just as You do. Help us to represent You always. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: But - When God our Savior revealed his kindness and love, he saved us, not because of the righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He washed away our sins, giving us a new birth and new life through the Holy Spirit. Titus 3:4-5



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.25.24

3 16 27 47 62 8

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$116,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 27
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.26.24

11 12 27 38 48 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$3,930,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 42
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.26.24

5 12 36 39 40 6

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 57 Mins 24
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.26.24

6 12 21 28 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 57
DRAW: Mins 23 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.26.24

4 19 27 37 56 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 26
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
06.26.24

4 9 36 47 56 7

Power Play: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$113,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 26
DRAW: Mins 24 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

News from the Associated Press

Family that lost home to flooded river vows to keep store open as floodwaters devastate Midwest

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A family that watched their home collapse into a flooded river near an at risk Minnesota dam is vowing to reopen their nearby store to sell its homemade pie and burgers as soon as it's safe to do so.

The Rapidan Dam Store remained standing Wednesday, but after the house where its owners, Jenny Barnes and brother David Hruska, grew up toppled into the Blue Earth River near Mankato the day before, they aren't entirely sure what's next.

"We don't know what will happen," a post on the store's Facebook page said Wednesday night, adding that it's been a hard experience. "The Dam Store has not sold its last burger or sold its last slice of pie."

That home's disappearance into the river and the hundreds of flood-damaged or destroyed homes elsewhere in the upper Midwest are among the first property casualties of extreme weather gripping the region as floodwaters move south.

A swath through Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota has been under siege from flooding because of torrential rains since last week, while also suffering through a stifling heat wave. Up to 18 inches (46 centimeters) of rain have fallen in some areas, pushing some rivers to record levels. Hundreds of people have been rescued and at least two people have died after driving in flooded areas.

In Iowa, more towns were bracing for floodwaters. The west fork of the Des Moines River was expected to crest at nearly 17 feet (5.1 meters) in Humboldt overnight into Thursday. About 200 homes and 60 businesses in Humboldt could be affected, officials said.

In the coming days, Nebraska and northwestern Missouri are expected to start to see the downstream effects of the flooding. Many streams and rivers may not crest until later this week. The Missouri River will crest at Omaha on Thursday, said Kevin Low, a National Weather Service hydrologist.

Some of the most stunning images have been of the floodwaters surging around the Minnesota dam.

Jessica Keech and her 11-year-old son watched part of the house near the dam fall into the river Tuesday night. They had often visited the area to see the dam and enjoy the pie from the Dam Store.

"It just kind of sucked it into the water. Just literally disappeared," said Keech, of nearby New Ulm.

Blue Earth County officials said Wednesday that the river had cut more widely and deeply into the bank, and they were concerned about the integrity of a nearby bridge over the river. After the flooding subsides, the county must decide whether to make repairs to the dam or possibly remove it — with both options costing millions of dollars.

President Joe Biden spoke by phone with Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz to discuss the impacts to the Rapidan dam and the Federal Emergency Management Agency had arrived in Minnesota, White House officials said.

Preliminary information from the National Weather Service shows the recent flooding brought record-high river levels at more than a dozen locations in South Dakota and Iowa, surpassing previous crests by an average of about 3.5 feet (1 meter).

In southeastern South Dakota, residents of Canton were cleaning up after getting 18 to 20 inches (46 to 51 centimeters) of rain in just 36 hours last week. A creek beside the 20 acres (8 hectares) owned by Lori Lems and her husband flooded the playground they'd built in their backyard for their grandchildren.

Lems, a 62-year-old former convenience store and wedding venue owner, said she's lived in the town of 3,200 people all her life and never saw rain as intense as last week's.

"We felt that we were in a hurricane-type of rain," she said. "It was just unbelievable."

Farther south, in North Sioux City, South Dakota, flooding collapsed utility poles and trees, and some homes were washed off their foundations. There was no water, sewer, gas or electrical service in that area, Union County Emergency Management said Tuesday in a Facebook post.

In the Sioux City, Iowa, area, water spilled over the Big Sioux River levee, damaging hundreds of homes, officials estimated. And the local wastewater treatment plant has been so overwhelmed by the floodwaters that officials say they're having to dump about a million gallons (3.8 million liters) of untreated sewage per day into the Missouri River.

Numerous roads were closed because of the flooding, including Interstates 29 and 680 in Iowa near the Nebraska line.

What happened to Minnesota's Rapidan Dam? Here's what to know about its flooding and partial failure

By MICHAEL GOLDBERG and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — The visuals were stunning: Water from the Blue Earth River surged around a southern Minnesota dam, carrying a shipping container with it as it toppled utility poles, wrecked a substation and washed away part of a riverbank. A home on the edge of the eroded slope collapsed into the river.

Earlier this week, authorities said the Rapidan Dam near Mankato faced an "imminent threat" of collapse but later said an abutment had partially failed. The river swelled after an onslaught of rain pummeled the Midwest for days.

On Wednesday, the dam was still intact and there were no mass evacuations. Authorities said the partial failure of the abutment was caused by the recent bout of heavy rain, but a past assessment of the dam revealed it was already at risk. Here are some things to know.

What happened? Early Monday morning, emergency management workers gave notice that water was surging over the dam. As water flows peaked, debris plugged parts of the structure and the west abutment of the dam partially failed. Conditions around the dam spun a current that was too vicious for workers to cross safely to clear the detritus.

The rush of water destroyed a power station and caused outages for about 600 households, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz said. Water levels peaked Monday at 34,800 cubic feet per second — the normal flow is 500 cubic feet per second. Those figures make this flood the second largest in the dam's history and the equivalent of once-a-century flooding.

The levels had begun to lower by Tuesday, county officials said.

Water continued flowing around and eroding the west side of the dam Tuesday, officials said. But as overall water levels decreased, they said the prospect of a total collapse was unlikely.

What was the condition of the dam? Construction of the Rapidan Dam was finished in 1910 and is described by the county as a hollow concrete dam, founded on sandstone bedrock in a steep, U-shaped valley. The dam is approximately 475 feet (145 meters) long and 87 feet (27 meters) high.

It was built to generate electricity, but flooding damaged it enough in 1965 that it didn't provide power for nearly 20 years, according to an engineering report. That report, prepared by a Minneapolis firm in 2021, said emergency repairs were required in 2002 because of "extensive undermining" of its foundation. Four more rounds of repairs followed through 2018. Flood damage in 2019 and 2020 stopped the generation of power again.

In 2019, the dam experienced what was one of its highest floods on record. Severe weather from that flood and other rainfall since have caused significant damage to the dam's structure and usability, according to Blue Earth County, which said the dam was in a "state of disrepair."

Further damage occurred, and an April 2023 assessment conducted by the National Inventory of Dams found Rapidan to be in poor condition.

Officials have not said whether the issues identified in past assessments led to the partial failure.

"The structural integrity of the dam has been in question for a long time," Walz said. "The removal of the dam has been a question that's been up there."

What are the dangers to surrounding areas? Areas downstream of the dam have no permanent inhabited structures, reducing the risk of fatalities and property damage, county officials said. But officials closed a park downstream that attracts hikers and fishermen.

The reservoir upstream of the dam provides power generation storage and recreation. But it is full of sediment, making boat access difficult, the county said. Because the reservoir is full, sediment is now pushed downstream of the dam.

Blue Earth County Public Works Director Ryan Thilges said there is more than a century's worth of sediment upstream of the dam. Severe environmental damage could occur if that sediment were to break loose and seep into the river, he said.

What would it cost to repair the dam? The 2021 engineering report put the cost of repairing the dam at \$15.2 million — in addition to more than \$6 million that the county had spent since 2002.

But a county report the following year raised questions about the idea. It said that even if the dam's ability to generate electricity were restored, the county still would likely lose money — an average of almost \$107,000 annually for each of the following 40 years.

And the 2021 engineering report said that after 40 years, the county still would face the same issue — whether to remove the dam. It said repairs would require three years of planning and a year of construction.

Could the county remove the dam? A separate 2021 study by the same engineering firm suggested that removing the dam would have benefits. It called the potential move "an outstanding opportunity to re-establish a free-flowing river" while turning the former lake into 360 acres of parkland.

The actual removal of the dam would cost \$10 million, but the project would come with a lot of other costs, such as stabilizing riverbanks, preventing erosion and replacing a county road bridge over the dam — increasing the potential costs to \$82 million.

What's more, the report said, it could require five years of planning and another five years of work afterward. The report said the Minnesota Legislature might be required to authorize bonds to pay for it.

The work would require the county to install a temporary dam upstream and divert the river around the Rapidan Dam so crews could work on dry ground and bring in equipment.

"Sometimes it's explosives. Sometimes it's less dramatic — it's a backhoe coming and hacking away at it," said Amy Souers Kober, spokesperson and a vice president for the conservation group American Rivers, which monitors dam safety issues.

Tribes honor the birth of a rare white buffalo calf in Yellowstone and reveal its name: Wakan Gli

By AMY BETH HANSON and MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

WEST YELLOWSTONE, Mont. (AP) — In a gathering near a picturesque lake outside Yellowstone National Park, hundreds of people cheered Wednesday as a Native American leader spoke the name revealed on a painted hide for a rare white buffalo that was born in the park earlier this month: Wakan Gli, which means "Return Sacred" in Lakota.

The moment marked the highlight of a Native American religious ceremony to commemorate the calf's birth that also featured dancing, drumming, singing and the retelling of how a mysterious woman brought a message of reassurance during hard times.

Earlier this month, the white buffalo calf was born in Yellowstone National Park's vast and lush Lamar Valley, where huge, lumbering bison graze by the hundreds in scenes reminiscent of the old American West.

To the several tribes who revere American bison — they call them "buffalo" — the calf's appearance was both the fulfillment of sacred prophesy and a message to take better care of the Earth.

"It's up to each and every one of you to make it happen for the future of our children. We must come together and bring that good energy back," Chief Arvol Looking Horse said at the ceremonies a few miles west of Yellowstone, in far southern Montana.

Looking Horse is spiritual leader of the Lakota, Dakota and the Nakota Oyate in South Dakota and the 19th keeper of the sacred White Buffalo Calf Woman Pipe and Bundle. He describes the white buffalo calf's appearance as both a blessing and a warning about the natural environment.

About 500 people — including representatives of the Colville Tribes in Washington, Lakota and Sioux in the Dakotas, Northern Arapaho in Wyoming, and Shoshone-Bannock in Idaho — attended the ceremo-

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nies at the headquarters of Buffalo Field Campaign between Hebgen Lake and the southern reach of the Madison Range. The conservation group works with tribes to protect and honor wild buffalo.

At most, only a handful of people got a look at the calf soon after its birth June 4. Fewer still got photos to prove its existence. The calf has not been seen since.

Each passing week without a sighting adds to suspicions the calf has fallen victim to predators, river currents, illness or any number of hazards for young buffalo. Regardless, it was an auspicious sign with deep roots in Lakota legend and spiritual belief.

Some 2,000 years ago — when nothing was good, food was running out and bison were disappearing — White Buffalo Calf Woman appeared and presented a bowl pipe and a bundle to a tribal member and said the pipe could be used to bring buffalo to the area for food.

As she left, she turned into a white buffalo calf. She promised to return one day, when times are hard again, as a white buffalo calf with black nose, black eyes and black hooves.

“This is a very momentous time in our history when this white buffalo calf with black nose, black eyes, black hooves is born,” Looking Horse said.

White calves are unusual but not unheard of on buffalo ranches, a result of interbreeding between buffalo and cattle. White bison in nature are another level of rare, with none known in Yellowstone — the continent’s largest wild reserve of the animals — in recent memory, if ever.

This calf came after a severe winter in 2023 drove thousands of Yellowstone buffalo to lower elevations. More than 1,500 were killed, sent to slaughter or transferred to tribes seeking to reclaim stewardship over an animal their ancestors lived alongside for millennia.

Jordan Creech, who guides in Yellowstone and Grand Teton national parks, was one of a few people who captured images of the white buffalo calf.

Creech was guiding a photography tour when he spotted a cow buffalo about to give birth near the Lamar River. The buffalo disappeared over a hill and the group continued to a place where grizzly bears had been spotted, Creech said.

They returned later and saw the cow with its calf, Creech said. It was clear the calf had just been born, he said, calling it amazing timing.

“And I noted to my guests that it was oddly white, but I didn’t announce that it was a white bison, because, you know, why would I just assume that I just witnessed the very first white bison birth in recorded history in Yellowstone?” he said.

Yellowstone park officials have no record of a white bison being born in the park previously. Park officials have been unable to confirm this month’s birth.

Erin Braaten, who also captured images of the white calf, looked for it in the days after its birth but couldn’t find it.

“The thing is, we all know that it was born and it’s like a miracle to us,” Looking Horse said.

Swollen river claims house next to Minnesota dam as flooding and extreme weather grip the Midwest

By HANNAH FINGERHUT and DAVE COLLINS Associated Press

DES MOINES, Iowa (AP) — A house that was teetering on the edge of an eroding riverbank near a Minnesota dam collapsed into the river in the latest jarring example of extreme weather gripping the upper Midwest.

Video shows the white frame house falling into the flood-swollen Blue Earth River near Mankato on Tuesday night. The Rapidan Dam’s west abutment failed Monday, sending the river around the dam and eroding the bank where the home sat. The family had evacuated before the collapse.

“It’s been a very scary and hard situation,” Jenny Barnes, whose family owned the house and has run the nearby Dam Store for decades, told KARE-TV on Tuesday before the house fell into the river. She also was worried about the store.

“That’s our life, as well. That’s our business; that’s our livelihood. It’s everything to us,” Barnes said.

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"There's no stopping it. It's going to go where it wants to go. It's going to take what it wants to take."

Jessica Keech and her 11-year-old son watched part of the house fall into the river Tuesday night. They had often visited the area to see the dam and enjoy homemade pie from the Dam Store.

"It just kind of sucked it into the water. Just literally disappeared," said Keech, of nearby New Ulm. "You didn't see it go down the river at all. You didn't see pieces of it anywhere."

Blue Earth County officials said Wednesday that there were dramatic changes around the dam overnight, with the river cutting more widely and deeply into the bank, and they are concerned about the integrity of a nearby bridge over the river. After the flooding subsides, the county will be faced with deciding whether to make repairs to the dam or possibly remove it — with both options costing millions of dollars.

County Administrator Robert Meyer said the debris that went into the river since Monday included not only the home and its fence but also a power company substation, power poles, a propane tank, county playground equipment, a satellite toilet, a dumpster, a steel shipping container used for storage and "many, many trees."

"There's not any attempt to salvage anything," Meyer said during a news conference at the dam.

President Joe Biden spoke by phone with Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz to discuss the impacts to the Rapidan dam and the Federal Emergency Management Agency is already on the ground, White House officials said.

A swath through Nebraska, Iowa, South Dakota and Minnesota has been under siege from flooding because of torrential rains since last week, while also suffering through a scorching heat wave. Up to 18 inches (46 centimeters) of rain have fallen in some areas, pushing some rivers to record levels. Hundreds of people were rescued, homes were damaged and at least two people died after driving in flooded areas.

Tornado warnings, flash flooding and large hail Tuesday night added insult to injury for some Midwesterners. The National Weather Service said several tornadoes were reported in Iowa and Nebraska. The service was assessing damage to some buildings, crops and trees to confirm whether tornadoes touched down. No major injuries were reported.

The weather service also extended flood warnings for multiple rivers in the region. On Tuesday, floodwaters breached levees in Iowa, creating dangerous conditions that prompted evacuations.

Preliminary information from the weather service shows the recent flooding brought record-high river levels at more than a dozen locations in South Dakota and Iowa, surpassing previous crests by an average of about 3.5 feet (0.5 meters).

In southeastern South Dakota, residents of Canton were cleaning up after getting 18 to 20 inches (46 to 51 centimeters) of rain in just 36 hours last week. A creek beside the 20 acres (8 hectares) owned by Lori Lems and her husband flooded the playground they'd built in their backyard for their grandchildren.

Lems, a 62-year-old former convenience store and wedding venue owner, said she's lived in the town of 3,200 people all her life and never saw rain as intense as last week's.

"We felt that we were in a hurricane-type of rain," she said. "It was just unbelievable."

Farther south, in North Sioux City, South Dakota, flooding collapsed utility poles and trees, and some homes were washed off their foundations. There was no water, sewer, gas or electrical service in that area, Union County Emergency Management said Tuesday in a Facebook post.

In the Sioux City, Iowa, area, water spilled over the Big Sioux River levee, damaging hundreds of homes, officials estimated. And the local wastewater treatment plant has been so overwhelmed by the floodwaters that officials say they're having to dump about a million gallons (3.8 million liters) of untreated sewage per day into the Missouri River.

Numerous roads were closed because of the flooding, including Interstates 29 and 680 in Iowa near the Nebraska line.

To the east in Iowa, towns were bracing for floodwaters. The west fork of the Des Moines River was expected to crest at nearly 17 feet (5 meters) in Humboldt overnight into Thursday. About 200 homes and 60 businesses in Humboldt could be affected, and about 68,000 sandbags have been deployed, officials said.

In the coming days, southeastern Nebraska and northwestern Missouri are expected to start to see the downstream effects of devastating flooding in South Dakota, Minnesota and Iowa. Many streams and riv-

ers may not crest until later this week. The Missouri will crest at Omaha on Thursday, said Kevin Low, a weather service hydrologist.

Few have flood insurance to help recover from devastating Midwest storms

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press

SOUTH SIOUX CITY, Neb. (AP) — Rick Satterwhite's house backs up to the Missouri River, but flood insurance hadn't really seemed necessary — until this week, when he had to pump water out of his basement after a round of destructive storms.

It's not the first time he's had to dry out his basement from floodwater, but bad storms are getting more frequent, he said. Satterwhite watched with dread Monday as the river came within 2 feet (61 centimeters) of his backdoor in Dakota City, Nebraska, after torrential rain produced record-setting Midwestern floods, destroying hundreds of properties.

"I talked to our agent today," Satterwhite said. "We're going to get flood insurance now."

Satterwhite is hardly alone. As the Midwest begins to recover, many won't have flood insurance, which must be purchased separately from homeowners insurance. Federal data shows that across the flooded states of Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota, the government has only issued about 26,500 flood insurance policies combined.

Lack of insurance can burden homeowners with out-of-pocket repair costs and place more need on nonprofits and the government, said Emily Rogan, senior program officer at United Policyholders, an insurance consumers group.

In Iowa, for example, consulting firm Milliman estimates that in 22 of the counties covered by the governor's disaster proclamations, less than 1% of single-family homes have flood insurance from the government, which issues the vast majority of policies.

Many think flooding won't happen to them and is hardly worth the cost of another bill, according to Tom O'Meara, CEO of Independent Insurance Agents of Iowa. Iowa property insurance rates have skyrocketed in recent years after a series of expensive weather disasters, he said. Avoidance of flood insurance comes as climate change increases flood risk, creating conditions that produce wetter rainstorms.

And this past week's storms also badly flooded smaller rivers that don't frequently overflow, catching people off guard.

"I don't think people have a personal experience with floods like this very often," said Nathan Young, associate director of the Iowa Flood Center.

In 2022, the average annual price of federal flood insurance was \$935. Federally-backed mortgages and many banks require flood insurance in high risk zones identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but those maps don't consider flooding from all sources, like rain. FEMA's recently-updated pricing reflects more factors, and the agency says these prices — not flood maps — are the best indicator of risk.

In Iowa, hundreds are being helped at American Red Cross shelters. Workers ask people about their loved ones and basic needs. Then they help victims assess the damage and what can be done. This is when some people first realize they needed to buy a separate flood insurance policy, said Charles Blake, disaster services senior executive with the American Red Cross. People who do have policies are so thankful, he said.

"It gives you a leg up," Blake said.

Others like Ben Thomas consciously avoid flood insurance and assume risk themselves. For nearly two days, Thomas pumped water out of his basement on the north side of the Little Sioux River in Spencer, Iowa, moving between his house, his parents' riverfront property across the street and other neighbors.

"I don't believe that insurance is the answer to life's problems," he said. "I would say we made a very well informed decision, but in this case, we got burned."

While he doesn't regret his decision not to buy an expensive policy, he acknowledged residents might feel differently on the south side of the river, where some homes are unlivable with water on the main floor.

The National Flood Insurance Program covers up to \$250,000 for a building and offers policies to protect contents worth as much as \$100,000. That's not always enough to replace an entire destroyed house, and even though the private market is small, it provides policies that can fill the gap.

There is some help available for the uninsured. The federal government's disaster declaration for parts of the flooded area allows it to issue grants and low interest loans to help with temporary housing, some home repairs and essentials like cleaning supplies and baby formula.

"We can still help," said John Mills, a FEMA response team spokesperson, but flood insurance provides much more money.

FEMA's new pricing method increased rates for about three quarters of policy holders, but others saw decreases for the first time. Selling more policies is a struggle nationwide; slightly fewer people are buying them this year.

One problem is that FEMA is prohibited from discounting premiums for low-income residents, according to Rob Moore, director of flooding solutions at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"Only Congress can fix that," he said.

And when rebuilding starts, that's the easiest time to mitigate the risk of the next flood, said Chad Berginnis, executive director of the Association of State Floodplain Managers.

"Instead of rebuilding the same way you did immediately, stop, think about what you can do to protect yourself," Berginnis said. "Nobody wants to elevate their house or do flood proofing projects on a sunny day."

How the Biden-Trump debate could change the trajectory of the 2024 campaign

By ZEKE MILLER, MICHELLE L. PRICE, WILL WEISSERT, BILL BARROW and DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — President Joe Biden and his Republican rival, Donald Trump, will meet for a debate on Thursday that offers an unparalleled opportunity for both candidates to try to reshape the political narrative.

Biden, the Democratic incumbent, gets the chance to reassure voters that, at 81, he's capable of guiding the U.S. through a range of challenges. The 78-year-old Trump, meanwhile, could use the moment to try to move past his felony conviction in New York and convince an audience of tens of millions that he's temperamentally suited to return to the Oval Office.

Biden and Trump enter the night facing fierce headwinds, including a public weary of the tumult of partisan politics. Both candidates are disliked by majorities of Americans, according to polling, and offer sharply different visions on virtually every core issue. Trump has promised sweeping plans to remake the U.S. government if he returns to the White House and Biden argues that his opponent would pose an existential threat to the nation's democracy.

With just over four months until Election Day, their performances have the rare potential to alter the trajectory of the race. Every word and gesture will be parsed not just for what both men say but how they interact with each other and how they hold up under pressure.

"Debates tend not to change voters' perception in ways that change their vote: They ordinarily reinforce, not persuade," said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, the director of the Annenberg Public Policy Center at the University of Pennsylvania and an expert on presidential communications. "What makes this debate different is that you have in essence two incumbents about whom voters have very well-formed views. But that doesn't mean that those perceptions are right or match what voters will see on stage."

The debate marks a series of firsts Trump and Biden haven't been on the same stage or even spoken since their last debate weeks before the 2020 presidential election. Trump skipped Biden's inauguration after leading an unprecedented and unsuccessful effort to overturn his loss to Biden that culminated in the Jan. 6 Capitol insurrection by his supporters.

Thursday's broadcast on CNN will be the earliest general election debate in history. It's the first-ever televised general election presidential debate hosted by a single news outlet after both campaigns ditched

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the bipartisan Commission on Presidential Debates, which had organized every matchup since 1988.

Under the network's rules, independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr. did not qualify.

Aiming to avoid a repeat of their chaotic 2020 matchups, Biden insisted — and Trump agreed — to hold the debate without an audience and to allow the network to mute the candidates' microphones when it is not their turn to speak. There will be two commercial breaks, another departure from modern practice. The candidates have agreed not to consult staff or others while the cameras are off.

The timing follows moves by both candidates to respond to nationwide trends toward early voting by shifting forward the political calendar. It remains to be seen whether the advanced schedule will dampen the effects of any missteps or crystallize them in the public's mind.

"You have two men that have not debated in four years," said Phillippe Reines, a Democratic political consultant who helped former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton prepare for debates with Trump in 2016.

Biden and Trump, he said, "don't like each other, haven't seen each other, (are) pretty rusty heading into the biggest night of their lives. That about sums up what's at stake on Thursday."

Both sides recognize the stakes. The debate falls days after the second anniversary of the Supreme Court's overturning of *Roe v. Wade*, ending a federally guaranteed right to abortion and pushing reproductive rights into the center of politics ever since.

The faceoff also occurs just after the Biden White House took executive action to restrict asylum claims at the U.S.-Mexico border in an effort to lower the number of migrants entering the country. Trump has made illegal immigration a centerpiece of his campaign.

The wars in Ukraine and Gaza loom over the race, as do the candidates' sharply differing views about America's role in the world and its alliances. Differences on inflation, tax policy and government investment to build infrastructure and fight climate change will provide further contrasts.

Also in the political background: The Supreme Court is on the brink of announcing its decision on whether Trump is legally immune for his alleged role in the Jan. 6 insurrection. That's weeks after Trump was convicted in New York of taking part in a hush money scheme that prosecutors alleged was intended to unlawfully influence the 2016 election.

Biden spent the week leading up to the debate secluded at Camp David with senior White House and campaign aides as well as a coterie of longtime advisers and allies. A mock stage was built at the compound to simulate the studio where the debate will be held, and Biden's personal attorney, Bob Bauer, was reprising his role as Trump in practice sessions.

Aides say the work reflects Biden's understanding that he can't afford a flat showing. They insist the sometimes stodgy orator would rise to the occasion.

Trump, meanwhile, has continued his more unstructured debate prep with two days of meetings at his Florida estate, phoning allies and supporters, and road-testing attacks in social media postings and in interviews with conservative-leaning outlets.

Trump and his aides have spent months chronicling what they argue are signs of Biden's diminished stamina. In recent days, they've started to predict Biden will be stronger on Thursday, aiming to raise expectations for the incumbent.

The candidates have Georgia on their mind. Atlanta, the debate's host city, offers symbolic and practical meaning for the campaign, but each side believes that what happens there will resonate far and wide.

In 2020, Biden secured Georgia's 16 electoral votes with a margin of less than 12,000 votes out of 5 million cast. Trump pushed the state's Republican leadership to overturn his victory based on false theories of voter fraud, memorably being caught on tape saying he wanted to "find 11,780 votes." He now faces state racketeering charges.

Both campaigns held a flurry of events in Atlanta leading into the debate, including competing events at Black-owned local businesses. Trump called in Friday to a gathering at Rocky's Barbershop in the Buckhead community to talk about his matchup with Biden and question whether CNN moderators Jake Tapper and Dana Bash would treat him fairly.

Heading out of the debate, both Biden and Trump will travel to states they hope to swing their way this fall. Trump is heading to Virginia, a onetime battleground that has shifted toward Democrats in recent years.

Biden is set to jet off to North Carolina, where he is expected to hold the largest-yet rally of his campaign in a state Trump narrowly carried in 2020.

China calls on scientists of all nations to study lunar samples, but notes obstacle with the US

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

BANGKOK (AP) — China's space officials said Thursday they welcomed scientists from around the world to apply to study the lunar rock samples that the Chang'e 6 probe brought back to Earth in a historic mission, but noted there were limits to that cooperation, specifically with the United States.

Officials said at a televised news conference in Beijing meant to introduce the mission's achievements that any cooperation with the U.S. would be hinged on removing an American law that bans direct bilateral cooperation with NASA.

"The source of the obstacle in US-China aerospace cooperation is still in the Wolf Amendment," said Bian Zhigang, vice chair of the China National Space Administration. "If the U.S. truly wants to hope to began regular aerospace cooperation, I think they should take the appropriate measures to remove the obstacle."

The Wolf Amendment was enacted in 2011 and prevents direct U.S.-Chinese bilateral cooperation except in cases where the FBI can certify that there is no national security risk to sharing information with the Chinese side in the course of work.

Still, China could cooperate with scientists of other countries. It worked with the European Space Agency, France, Italy and Pakistan in the Chang'e 6 mission.

"China welcomes scientists from all countries to apply according to the processes and share in the benefits," said Liu Yunfeng, director of the international cooperation office of the China National Space Administration.

Meanwhile, little information about the global first achieved Tuesday was announced. Chinese officials declined to reveal how many samples they actually gathered or any preliminary findings.

"I'm afraid this matter will not be revealed until tomorrow, so I hope everyone can wait patiently for another day," Chang'e 6 chief designer Hu Hao said at the news conference.

On Monday, Chinese scientists said that they 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 mission had aimed to gather two kilograms (more than four pounds) of material.

The near side of the moon 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 and is much more difficult to reach.

The probe's journey to the far side of the moon was historic in that it was the first time a probe had successfully taken off and brought back samples from the far side directly. Previous samples thought to be from the far side of the moon are from meteorites found on Earth.

The probe had landed in the moon's South Pole-Aitken Basin, an impact crater created more than 4 billion years ago. The samples scientists are expecting will likely come from different layers of the basin, which will bear traces of the different geological events across its long chronology, such as when the moon was younger and had an active inside that could produce volcanic rock.

Officials did announce some future plans, with a planned Chang'e 7 probe to explore resources on the moon's South Pole. Further down the line, they have planned Tianwen-3 for around 2030 to carry out a Mars sample return mission and a Tianwen-4 Jupiter exploration mission.

Analysis: No matter who wins Iran's presidential election, much may hinge on the 'Great Satan' US

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — In the waning moments of Iran's final televised presidential debate, one of the top candidates to replace the late hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi invoked the name of the one person who perhaps has done more than anyone to change the trajectory of the Islamic Republic's relationship with the wider world in recent years.

The next president could be "forced to either sell Iran to Trump or spark a dangerous tension in the country" if economic problems aren't solved, warned Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, Iran's parliament speaker and a candidate in Friday's election.

President Donald Trump's decision in 2018 to unilaterally withdraw America from the Iran nuclear deal saw crushing sanctions reimposed and largely cut Tehran out of the world's economy. That worsened the political climate within Iran, already beset by mass protests over economic problems and women's rights. An escalating series of attacks on land and at sea followed, while Tehran also began enriching uranium at near weapons-grade levels.

Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel and Israel's subsequent war on the militants in the Gaza Strip only added jet fuel to a fire now threatening to burn nearly every corner of the wider Middle East. Iran's support of an array of militias, including Hamas, Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels, and its unprecedented direct attack on Israel during the war, has made it a direct belligerent in the conflict.

What happens in both the war and with Iran's future may hinge directly on the U.S., denounced by the Grand Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the "Great Satan" in the 1979 Islamic Revolution and still cursed at major events like a speech this week by the 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Despite the vitriol, the U.S. has come up again and again in the campaign. Khamenei warned this week against supporting candidates who "think that all ways to progress pass through America," a thinly veiled criticism of the only reformist running in the race, Masoud Pezeshkian, who has fully embraced a return to the 2015 nuclear deal.

Among the six initial presidential contenders — two of whom had dropped out by Thursday — Trump has repeatedly emerged as a theme. One of them, former hard-line candidate Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, contended that if Trump wins the U.S. presidential election "we can negotiate with Trump and impose our demands on him."

That wasn't an opinion shared by Shiite cleric Mostafa Pourmohammadi, who warned Iran should take part in talks now with the U.S. before a second possible Trump presidency. However, his campaign also printed a side-by-side poster showing the cleric and Trump in profile, declaring: "I am the one who can stand against Trump!"

Hard-line candidate Saeed Jalili also mocked his competitors as being "scared" of Trump, vowing to fight him.

For his part, Trump has brought up Iran while campaigning in recent days. Speaking to the "All In" podcast, Trump repeated that he had wanted to "make a fair deal with Iran" — while also trying to claim Iran's theocratic government that long has called for Israel's destruction would somehow have made a diplomatic recognition deal with Israel like the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain did during his presidency.

"A child could have made a deal with them — and Biden did nothing," Trump asserted.

Interestingly, President Joe Biden's name hasn't been mentioned during the Iranian election debates. Before Raisi's death in a May helicopter crash, the U.S. under Biden had several rounds of indirect talks with Iranian officials.

While broadly criticizing Iran, particularly in the wake of the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini and the women's rights protests that followed, the Biden administration has opened the door to Iran accessing some frozen assets abroad. That includes a deal that saw a prisoner swap between the countries in September, less than a month before the Israel-Hamas war began.

Then there's Iran's oil sales. While technically sanctioned, Iran recently reported selling 2.5 million bar-

rels a day — with the lion's share likely going to China, possibly at a discount. Former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who struck the nuclear deal under the relatively moderate President Hassan Rouhani and now supports the reformist candidate Pezeshkian, directly attributed those sales to the Biden administration's policies.

"That the crude sales have gone up was not a work by our friends, but when Biden came power they had a policy to loosen the bolt of sanctions," said Zarif, obliquely referring to hard-liners. "Let Trump come and find out what our friends will do."

While wider talks in Vienna with world powers to restart the nuclear deal collapsed, Biden may be trying to replicate a strategy from when he was vice president under Barack Obama — quietly working indirectly with the Iranians toward a deal that later can be brought to the table.

But much of whatever U.S. policy the Biden administration planned for the Middle East — including a possible Saudi security deal that could see Riyadh diplomatically recognize Israel — has been upended by the Israel-Hamas war.

Meanwhile, the real wildcard for Iran comes Nov. 5 when the U.S. holds its presidential election. Biden's re-election likely would see a continuation of the carrot-stick approach wielded so far during his term. If Trump is re-elected, it could portend more discussions about a deal while also carrying risks. Trump in 2020 launched a drone strike killing Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani while still insisting he wanted a deal with Tehran.

A war between Israel and Lebanon — or the Houthis potentially getting a missile strike on an American warship amid their campaign — also could drastically upend calculations in both Tehran and Washington.

For now though, Iran and the U.S. remain intertwined in tension, much like the nations have for decades.

Two candidates drop out of Iran presidential election, due to take place Friday amid voter apathy

By JON GAMBRELL and NASSER KARIMI Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Two candidates in Iran's presidential election withdrew from the race as the country prepared Thursday for the upcoming vote, an effort by hard-liners to coalesce around a unity candidate in the polls to replace the late President Ebrahim Raisi.

Amirhossein Ghazizadeh Hashemi, 53, dropped his candidacy and urged other candidates to do the same "so that the front of the revolution will be strengthened," the state-run IRNA news agency reported late Wednesday night.

Ghazizadeh Hashemi 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 some 1 million votes, coming in last place.

On Thursday, Tehran Mayor Alireza Zakani also withdrew, as he did previously in the 2021 election in which Raisi was voted into office.

Zakani said he withdrew to "block the formation of a third administration" of former President Hassan Rouhani, a reference to reformist candidate Masoud Pezeshkian. Pezeshkian is running with the support of former Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who under Rouhani reached the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

Such withdrawals are common in the final hours of an Iranian presidential election, particularly in the last 24 hours before the vote is held when campaigns enter a mandatory quiet period without rallies. Voters go to the polls Friday.

The two withdrawals leave four other candidates still in the race. Analysts broadly see the race as a three-way contest.

Two hard-liners, former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili and parliamentary speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, are fighting over the same bloc, experts say. Then there's Pezeshkian, a cardiac surgeon who has sought to associate himself with Rouhani and other reformist figures like former President Mohammad

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Khatami and those who led the 2009 Green Movement protest.

Iran's theocracy under Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei has maintained its stance of not approving women or anyone urging radical change to the country's government for the ballot. However, Khamenei in recent days has called for a "maximum" turnout in the vote, while also issuing a veiling warning to Pezeshkian and his allies about relying on the United States.

Widespread public apathy has descended in the Iranian capital over the election, coming after a May helicopter crash that killed Raisi.

After the promise nearly a decade ago of Tehran's nuclear deal opening up Iran to the rest of the world, Iranians broadly face crushing economic conditions and a far more uncertain Middle East that already has seen the Islamic Republic directly attack Israel for the first time. Iran also now enriches uranium at nearly weapons-grade levels and has enough of it to produce several nuclear weapons if it chooses.

The limited options in the election, as well as widespread discontent over Iran's ongoing crackdown on women over the mandatory headscarf, has some saying they won't vote.

"I did not watch any of the debates since I have no plan to vote," said Fatemeh Jazayeri, a 27-year-old unemployed woman with a master's degree. "I voted for Rouhani seven years ago, but he failed to deliver his promises for a better economy. Any promise by any candidates will remain on paper only."

Worshippers in Tehran at Friday prayers in recent weeks, typically more conservative than others in the city, appeared more willing to vote.

Maohmoud Seyedi, a 46-year-old shopkeeper, said he and his wife, alongside two young daughters, will vote,

"My wife and I have decided to vote for Qalibaf since he knows how to solve problems of the country because years of experience but my daughters are thinking about Jalili, too," he said. "By the way, voting is a duty for us."

Parivash Emami, 49, another at prayers, said she hoped his vote could help Iran overcome its problems.

"Qalibaf knows details of problems, the rest are either critics or promise to solve problems without offering any program," Emami said.

Prospect of low-priced Chinese EVs reaching US from Mexico poses threat to automakers

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — It's a scenario that terrifies America's auto industry.

Chinese carmakers set up shop in Mexico to exploit North American trade rules. Once in place, they send ultra-low-priced electric vehicles streaming into the United States.

As the Chinese EVs go on sale across the country, America's homegrown EVs — costing an average of \$55,000, roughly double the price of their Chinese counterparts — struggle to compete. Factories close. Workers lose jobs across America's industrial heartland.

Ultimately, it would all become a painful replay of how government-subsidized Chinese competition devastated American industries from steel to solar equipment over the past quarter-century. This time, it would be electric vehicles, which America's automakers envision as the core of their business in the coming decades.

Low-priced Chinese EVs pose a potentially "extinction-level event" for America's auto industry, the Alliance for American Manufacturing has warned.

Especially worrisome: The 2020 U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement would potentially let Chinese cars assembled in Mexico enter the United States duty-free or at a nominal 2.5% tariff rate. Either way, China could sell its EVs well below typical U.S. prices.

To defuse the threat, the U.S. has options. Customs officials could rule that Chinese EVs don't qualify for the low-duty or duty-free benefits of being made in Mexico. U.S. policymakers could also pressure Mexico to keep Chinese vehicles out of that country. Or they could bar Chinese EVs from the U.S. on the grounds that they would threaten America's national security.

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The threat from Beijing is emerging just as U.S. automakers face slowing EV sales. High prices and a shortage of charging stations are keeping many American consumers away.

Cheap Chinese EVs might help by pushing down prices, accelerating sales and encouraging investment in charging stations. "It would be cheaper just to let the Chinese cars come in, forget all the tariffs and subsidies, let the market figure it out," said Christine McDaniel, a senior research fellow at George Mason University's Mercatus Center. "Yes, it would be disruptive. But EVs would get on the road in the U.S. a lot faster."

At stake is who stands to dominate the manufacture and sale of zero-emissions electric vehicles.

China has so far taken a daunting lead. It accounted for nearly 62% of the 10.4 million battery-powered EVs produced worldwide last year. The United States made 1 million — less than 10% of the total, according to GlobalData.

Chinese automakers have made remarkable strides holding down costs. China's BYD last year introduced a small EV called the Seagull that sells for just \$12,000 in China (\$21,000 for a version sold in four Latin American countries). The Seagull's lightweight design allows it to go farther per charge on a smaller battery. BYD has said it's considering building a factory in Mexico — but only for the Mexican market.

Critics note that BYD and other Chinese EV makers have achieved their cost efficiencies thanks to heavy subsidies from the Beijing government. The Chinese government spent more than \$130 billion on EVs and other green vehicles from 2009 through 2021, according to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Last month, President Joe Biden raised the tariff on Chinese EVs, from the 27.5% established during Donald Trump's presidency to 102.5%. It's meant to price even the bargain-priced BYD Seagull out of the U.S. market. (The European Union says it plans to impose provisional tariffs of up to 38.1% on Chinese EVs for four months starting in July.)

The U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement, though, potentially lets vehicles assembled by Chinese firms in Mexico enter the U.S. at a much lower tariff or none at all. If made-in-Mexico cars met the USMCA's requirements, they could enter the United States duty-free. At least 75% of a car and its parts would have to come from North America. And at least 40% of it must originate in places where workers earn at least \$16 an hour.

Still, for a Chinese EV maker like BYD, qualifying for duty-free treatment under the USMCA would be difficult. "Even North American automakers have a challenging time reaching those thresholds," said Daniel Ujczko of the Thompson Hine law firm.

But there's an easier way Chinese EV makers could use Mexico to try to dodge Biden's killer 102.5% import tax: They would have to pay only 2.5% — the tax imposed on most cars imported to the United States — if they could show that assembling their EVs in Mexico involved a "substantial transformation" that essentially transformed them from Chinese into Mexican cars.

U.S. officials could reject the notion that a substantial transformation occurred during the assembly process. But the U.S. would struggle to prevail if that decision were challenged in the U.S. Court of International Trade, "given the substantial changes that typically take place in automotive assembly factories," David Gantz, a fellow at Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, has written.

The "most effective and quickest" way to keep Chinese EVs out of the United States, Gantz argues, would be to block them on national security grounds. Today's EVs, after all, are loaded with cameras, sensors and other technological gizmos that could collect images from the cars' surroundings and sensitive personal information from EV drivers. And China isn't merely an economic competitor. It's a geopolitical adversary — and potentially a military one, too.

"U.S. fears regarding possible use of connected vehicles to spy on military installations or powerplants are not irrational," Gantz wrote. In February, Biden ordered his Commerce Department to investigate the technology in Chinese "smart cars," a potential prelude to blocking Chinese EVs on national security grounds.

Stella Assange thanks Australian lawmakers for WikiLeaks founder's freedom

By ROD MCGUIRK Associated Press

MELBOURNE, Australia (AP) — Stella Assange thanked the spectrum of lawmakers who campaigned for her husband, WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange, to be freed during her visit Thursday to Australia's Parliament House, where political leaders differed over how welcome the convicted felon was in his homeland.

"Julian is overjoyed and so grateful to the Australian people, to the members of Parliament and to the government and also the opposition who came together to voice the need for his release," Stella Assange said.

Assange has made no public comment since he arrived in Australia on Wednesday after pleading guilty to obtaining and publishing U.S. military secrets in a deal with U.S. Justice Department prosecutors that ended his 14-year legal battle for freedom.

The Bring Julian Assange Home Parliamentary Group began with a few federal lawmakers in 2019 and expanded to 47 — one of five of the total in Canberra — as a consensus grew that the prosecution over WikiLeaks' release of almost half a million documents relating to the U.S. wars in Iraq and Afghanistan in 2010 had taken too long.

His lawyers now want to swing that public and political support behind a campaign to have Assange's conviction pardoned.

"President (Joe) Biden or any subsequent president absolutely can and, in my mind, should issue a pardon to Julian Assange," lawyer Barry Pollack said.

But while Australian lawmakers largely agreed that the time had come for Assange to be brought home, they disagreed on whether he deserved the same level of support as Australians recently released from arbitrary detention in China, Iran and Myanmar thanks to government intervention.

Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has been credited with the diplomatic coup that enabled Assange to be released from a London prison to travel to Northern Mariana Islands, a U.S. commonwealth in the Western Pacific where he pleaded guilty to a single charge under the Espionage Act.

With credit given for the five years Assange had spent in Belmarsh Prison fighting extradition, he was allowed to return to Australia without serving any more jail time.

Opposition lawmakers argue Albanese risked damaging relations with the United States, Australia's most important security partner, by telephoning Assange moments after the former computer hacker had landed in Canberra.

"It's not necessary nor appropriate for Anthony Albanese to welcome home Julian Assange on the same day he's admitted to espionage acts," opposition spokesperson on foreign affairs Simon Birmingham said. But Stella Assange argued her husband should never have been charged.

"He was pleading guilty to committing journalism. This case criminalizes journalism, journalistic activity, standard journalist activity of news gathering and publishing," she said.

Assange was accused of receiving and publishing war logs and diplomatic cables that included details of U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. His activities drew an outpouring of support from press freedom advocates, who heralded his role in bringing to light military conduct that might otherwise have been concealed from view and warned of a chilling effect on journalists. 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.

Assange has been celebrated by supporters as a transparency crusader but lambasted by national security hawks who insist that his conduct put lives at risks and strayed far beyond the bounds of traditional journalism duties.

Questioned at a news conference after Assange's return, Albanese declined to say whether he considered him a journalist who had been wrongly pursued by U.S. authorities.

"I think that there will continue to be different views about Julian Assange and his activity," Albanese said.

"My role as prime minister has been to firmly say that whatever the views that people have, there was no purpose to be served by this ongoing incarceration," Albanese added.

Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong distanced the government from the Assange campaign for the crime to be pardoned.

"That is a matter for Mr. Assange and his legal team and the decision on that is a matter for the United States," Wong said.

"What we are pleased about is that he is home. We did think his incarceration had dragged on," she added.

Stella Assange, a South Africa-born lawyer who married her husband in prison in 2022, has given few clues to his future career.

"He plans to swim in the ocean every day. He plans to sleep in a real bed. He plans to taste real food and he plans to enjoy his freedom," she said.

"Julian is the most principled man I know and he will always defend human rights and speak out against injustice and he can choose how he does that, because he is a free man," she added.

Maui officials highlight steps toward rebuilding as 1-year mark of deadly wildfire approaches

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press

LAHAINA, Hawaii (AP) — Nearly a year after wind-whipped flames raced through Kim Ball's Hawaii community, the empty lot where his house once stood is a symbol of some of the progress being made toward rebuilding after the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than century destroyed thousands of homes and killed 102 people in Lahaina.

"Welcome to the neighborhood," Ball said Wednesday as he greeted a van full of Hawaii reporters invited by Maui County officials to tour certain fire-ravaged sites.

The gravel covering lots on his street in Lahaina indicate which properties have been cleared of debris and toxic ash in the months since the Aug. 8, 2023, blaze. On the lots along Komo Mai Street, there are pockets of green poking up through still visible charred vegetation.

Speaking over the noise from heavy equipment working across the street, Ball described how he was able to get a building permit quickly, partly because his home was only about 5 years old and his contractor still had the plans.

Ball wants to rebuild the same house from those plans.

"We may change the color of the paint," he said.

Nearby on Malanai Street, some walls were already up on Gene Milne's property. His is the first to start construction because his previous home was not yet fully completed and had open permits.

When he evacuated, he was living in an accessory dwelling, known locally as an "ohana unit," borrowing the Hawaiian word for family. The main home was about 70% done.

"I was in complete denial that the fire would ever get to my home," he recalled. "Sure enough, when I came back a couple days later it was gone."

It's "extremely healing," he said, to be on the site and see the walls go up for what will be the new ohana unit. Using insurance money to rebuild, he's "looking forward to that day where I can have a cocktail on the lanai, enjoy Maui — home."

The construction underway at Milne's property is "a milestone for us," said Maui Mayor Richard Bissen. "I think the rest of the community can use this as sort of a jumping off point, and say, 'If they can do it, we can do it, too.'"

Even though it's been nearly a year, rebuilding Lahaina will be long and complicated. It's unclear when people displaced by the fire will be able to move back and whether they'll be able to afford to do so. The county has approved 23 residential building permits so far and 70 are under review, officials said.

"We're not focused on the speed — we're focused on the safety," Bissen said.

Other stops of the tour included work underway at a former outlet mall that had been a popular shop-

ping destination for both tourists and locals, and a beloved, giant 151-year-old banyan tree, now drastically greener with new growth thanks to the preservation efforts of arborists.

They cared for the sprawling tree with alfalfa and other nutrients — “mainly just water,” said Tim Griffith, an arborist who is helping care for the tree along Lahaina’s historic Front Street. “Trees are ... going to heal themselves, especially when they’re stressed.”

Bolivian general arrested after apparent failed coup attempt as government faces new crisis

By PAOLA FLORES and MEGAN JANETSKY Associated Press

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — Led by a top general vowing to “restore democracy,” armored vehicles rammed the doors of Bolivia’s government palace Wednesday in what the president called a coup attempt, then quickly retreated — the latest crisis in the South American country facing a political battle and an economic crisis.

Within hours, the nation of 12 million people saw a rapidly moving scenario in which the troops seemed to take control of the government of President Luis Arce. He vowed to stand firm and named a new army commander, who immediately ordered the troops to stand down.

Soon the soldiers pulled back, along with a line of military vehicles, ending the rebellion after just three hours. Hundreds of Arce’s supporters then rushed the square outside the palace, waving Bolivian flags, singing the national anthem and cheering.

The soldiers’ retreat was followed by the arrest of army chief Gen. Juan José Zúñiga, after the attorney general opened an investigation.

Government Minister Eduardo del Castillo said that in addition to Zúñiga, former navy Vice Adm. Juan Arnez Salvador was taken into custody.

“What was this group’s goal? The goal was to overturn the democratically elected authority,” del Castillo told journalists in announcing the arrests.

Late Wednesday, Defense Minister Edmundo Novillo said “everything is now under control.” Surrounded by the new military chiefs appointed by Arce, Novillo said that Bolivia lived a “failed coup.”

The apparent coup attempt came as the country has faced months of tensions and political fights between Arce and his one-time ally, former leftist president Evo Morales, over control of the ruling party. It also came amid a severe economic crisis.

The clashes have paralyzed the government’s efforts to deal with the economic crisis. For example, Morales’ allies in Congress have consistently thwarted Arce’s attempts to take on debt to relieve some of the pressure.

Zúñiga referenced that paralysis during the rebellion, telling reporters the military was tired of the fighting and was seeking “to restore democracy.”

“We are listening to the cry of the people because for many years an elite has taken control of the country,” he said, adding that politicians are “destroying the country: look at what situation we are in, what crisis they have left us in.”

“The armed forces intend to restore the democracy, to make it a true democracy,” he said.

The rapidly unfolding crisis began in the early afternoon as the streets of La Paz started filling with soldiers. Arce tweeted that the troops deployment was irregular and soon he and other political figures warned of an attempted coup.

Still, the apparent attempt to depose the sitting president seemed to lack any meaningful support, and even Arce’s rivals closed ranks to defend democracy and repudiate the uprising.

In a twist, Zúñiga claimed in comments to journalists before his arrest that Arce himself told the general to storm the palace in a political move. “The president told me: ‘The situation is very screwed up, very critical. It is necessary to prepare something to raise my popularity,’” Zúñiga quoted the Bolivian leader as saying.

Zúñiga said he asked Arce if he should “take out the armored vehicles?” and Arce replied, “Take them out.”

Justice Minister Iván Lima denied Zúñiga’s claims, saying the general was lying and trying to justify his

actions for which he said he will face justice.

Prosecutors will seek the maximum sentence of 15 to 20 years in prison for Zúñiga, Lima said via the social media platform X, "for having attacked democracy and the Constitution."

The spectacle shocked Bolivians, no stranger to political unrest; in 2019 Morales was ousted as president following an earlier political crisis.

As the crisis unfolded Wednesday, Arce confronted Zúñiga in the palace hallway, as shown on video on Bolivian television. "I am your captain, and I order you to withdraw your soldiers, and I will not allow this insubordination," Arce said.

Surrounded by ministers, he added: "Here we are, firm in Casa Grande, to confront any coup attempt. We need the Bolivian people to organize."

Less than an hour later, Arce announced new heads of the army, navy and air force amid the roar of supporters, and thanked the country's police and regional allies for standing by him. Arce said the troops who rose against him were "staining the uniform" of the military.

"I order all that are mobilized to return to their units," said the newly named army chief José Wilson Sánchez. "No one wants the images we're seeing in the streets."

Shortly after, the armored vehicles roared out of the plaza, tailed by hundreds of military fighters as police in riot gear set up blockades outside the government palace.

The incident was met with a wave of outrage by other regional leaders, including the Organization of American States, Chilean President Gabriel Boric, the leader of Honduras, and former Bolivian leaders.

Gustavo Flores-Macias, a professor of government and public policy focusing on Latin America at Cornell University, said it's important that world leaders and organizations keep up their condemnation of the coup attempt as developments unfold.

"If we allow the interruption of the constitutional order to take place in Bolivia, it could serve a demonstration effect," Flores-Macias said from New York in an interview with The Associated Press. "It could send a signal that if this is OK to happen in Bolivia, it could happen elsewhere."

Bolivia has seen intensifying protests in recent months over the economy's precipitous decline from one of the continent's fastest-growing two decades ago to one of its most crisis-stricken.

Arce and Morales have been battling for the future of Bolivia's splintering Movement for Socialism, known by its Spanish acronym MAS, ahead of elections in 2025.

Following Wednesday's chaos, reports on local media showed Bolivians stocking up on food and other essentials in supermarkets, concerned about what will come next.

But addressing supporters outside the presidential palace, the country's vice president, David Choquehuanca, vowed: "Never again will the Bolivian people permit coup attempts."

Back to Woodstock, with Wi-Fi: Women return after 55 years to glamp and relive the famous festival

By MICHAEL HILL Associated Press

BETHEL, N.Y. (AP) — Beverly "Cookie" Grant hitchhiked to the Woodstock music festival in 1969 without a ticket and slept on straw. Ellen Shelburne arrived in a VW microbus and pitched a pup tent.

Fifty-five years later, the two longtime friends finally got back to the garden, but this time in high style.

The women, now 76, were recently treated to a two-bedroom glamping tent at the upstate New York site equipped with comfy beds, a shower, a coffee maker and Wi-Fi. No mud from drenching rains this time. They sat in pavilion seats to watch shows by Woodstock veterans John Fogerty and Roger Daltrey.

"We're like hippie queens!" Grant joked over breakfast during the trip earlier this month.

The Bethel Woods Center for the Arts, the not-for-profit organization that runs the site, rolled out the tie-dyed carpet for Grant and Shelburne to promote its new glamping facilities and to delve deeper into Shelburne's trove of photos from the generation-defining festival held Aug. 15-18, 1969.

The once-trampled hillside by the main stage is now a manicured green space near a Woodstock-and-'60s-themed museum and the concert pavilion. But the return visit still bought back a flood of memories.

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Shelburne was able to retrace the steps she took as a 21-year-old college student in the photos taken by her then-boyfriend, and future husband, David Shelburne.

"I'm looking at this person in the photograph, who is me, but a person just starting out in life at that age. And now I'm looking back at sort of bookends of my life," Ellen Shelburne said. "All these decades later, I'm back at Woodstock and it just brings it all up in such a positive way."

Grant and Shelburne did not know each other in August 1969 and they attended the concert separately.

Shelburne came from Columbus, Ohio, with David Shelburne, his best friend and another woman. They purchased tickets, got there early and bought ponchos at a local store after rain was forecast. She slept in a pup tent.

"I was never cold, wet, hungry, muddy, dirty, uncomfortable or miserable," she said. "It was the total opposite."

Grant went to Woodstock on a lark.

A long-haired surfer she knew named Ray came up to her and a friend on a beach in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, and said, "There's this music festival happening in New York. You want to hitchhike up there with me?" Grant's friend dropped out along the way, but she and the surfer made it to the town of Bethel. The last driver dropped them off at the edge of the epic traffic jam outside the festival and gave them a blanket.

Grant walked the last several miles to Woodstock barefoot.

Both women were wowed by Jimi Hendrix, The Who and other musical acts, but also by the good vibes from the 400,000 or more people who converged on Max Yasgur's dairy farm some 80 miles (130 kilometers) northwest of New York City.

"If we needed food, someone gave us food. Someone gave us water. We needed nothing," Grant said.

The two women met months later in Columbus, where they each ran shops adjacent to Ohio State University with the men they went to Woodstock with. And they each married their concert companions, though Grant got a divorce several years later.

David and Ellen Shelburne ran a film and video production company together until he died four years ago. Grant moved to Florida and eventually became a chef on mega-yachts before starting her own business providing crews for those big boats.

Each woman kept a spark of the Woodstock spirit. Shelburne said she's "stuck in the '60s and proud of it." They got the bug to return to the festival site last year after providing oral histories in Columbus to curators for the Museum at Bethel Woods.

Just like in 1969, the women were provided what they needed during their recent long weekend of peace, love and nostalgia — though this time it was a "Luxury 2 Bedroom Safari Tent" with a front deck and the shower in a bathroom. And when it rained this time, they were able to stay dry in the museum.

On a sunny Saturday, Bethel Woods senior curator Neal Hitch drove the women around in a golf cart to explore the spots where David Shelburne shot his festival photos. Unlike others who focused their cameras on the stage, he documented festivalgoers camping, swimming, selling goods, relaxing and having fun. Hitch noted that David Shelburne's images also are valuable because they are in sequence, meaning they tell a story.

At one stop, Shelburne stood by a tree line as she held a photo of a field full of campers. She was standing on the spot where her late husband took the photograph and was looking at the same field, minus the campers, 55 years later. Visibly moved, she said "oh" a few times and let out a deep breath before exclaiming, "Wow!"

It broke her heart that her husband is not in the photographs, but she felt his presence that weekend.

The women ranged across the festival site over several days, from the stage area to the woods where vendors had set up stalls. Despite the changes — the luxury tents, the fences, the museum — the women said they recognized the same mellow, friendly vibes here that they experienced as 21-year-olds.

And they were thrilled to immerse themselves in it again decades later.

"It's very wonderful to see that it's in history forever," Grant said, "and we're a part of that."

Biden's asylum halt is falling hardest on Mexicans and other nationalities Mexico will take

By ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press

NOGALES, Mexico (AP) — Ana Ruiz was dismayed seeing migrants from some countries released in the United States with orders to appear in immigration court while she and other Mexicans were deported on a one-hour bus ride to the nearest border crossing.

"They're giving priority to other countries," Ruiz, 35, after a tearful phone call to family in Mexico's southern state of Chiapas at the San Juan Bosco migrant shelter. The shelter's director says it is receiving about 100 deportees a day, more than double what it saw before President Joe Biden issued an executive order that suspends asylum processing at the U.S.-Mexico border when arrests for illegal crossings reach 2,500 a day.

The asylum halt, which took effect June 5 and has led to a 40% decline in arrests for illegal crossings, applies to all nationalities. But it falls hardest on those most susceptible to deportation — specifically, Mexicans and others Mexico agrees to take (Cubans, Haitians, Nicaraguans, Venezuelans). Lack of money for charter flights, sour diplomatic ties and other operational challenges make it more difficult to deport people to many countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and South America.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the U.S. is working with countries around the world to accept more of their deported citizens, citing challenges from diplomatic relations to speed producing travel documents.

"The reality is that it is easier to remove individuals to certain countries than other countries," he said in an interview Wednesday in Tucson, Arizona. "We do remove individuals to Senegal, we do remove individuals to Colombia, we do remove individuals to India. It can be more difficult."

Mexicans accounted for 38% of border arrests in May, down from 85% in 2011 but still the highest nationality by far. The Border Patrol's Tucson sector has been the busiest corridor for illegal crossings for much of the last year. Last month, nearly three of every four arrests there were of Mexicans, helping explain why the asylum ban has had more impact in Arizona. U.S. authorities say the seven-day average of daily arrests in the Tucson sector fell below 600 this week from just under 1,200 on June 2.

Border agents in Arizona have been severely tested since late 2022 by nationalities that are difficult to deport — first from Cuba and later Mauritania, Guinea and Senegal. Many cross near Lukeville, about a four-hour bus ride to a major processing center in Tucson.

Many Mexicans cross illegally much closer to Tucson in Nogales, Arizona, some by climbing over a wall with ladders made from material at a seatbelt plant on the Mexican side to try to disappear into homes and businesses within seconds. Others turn themselves in to border agents to claim asylum, entering through gaps in the wall that are being filled in. On Tuesday, a group of 49 predominantly Mexican migrants were waiting for agents.

Some are taken to the Border Patrol station in Nogales, where they can be held for six days if they express fear of being deported under the asylum halt and seek similar forms of protection that would allow them to remain but that have a much higher bar, such as the U.N. Convention Against Torture.

Most are taken to a cluster of giant white tents near Tucson International Airport, which opened in April 2021 for unaccompanied children. It now has space for 1,000 people, including single adults and families, who sleep on foam mattresses or raised beds.

On Tuesday, about a dozen people who said they feared deportation sat on benches in a cavernous room to hear instructions on the screening interview, which includes a four-hour window to call attorneys or others to prepare. They were then directed to one of 16 soundproof phone booths.

The Tucson processing center didn't even conduct screenings before Biden's asylum halt. That resulted in more migrants being released with orders to appear in U.S. immigration court, a practice that has plummeted in recent weeks. The screenings by asylum officers take about 90 minutes by phone.

Many migrants who fail interviews are deported to Nogales, a sprawling city in the Mexican state of Sonora, and end up at San Juan Bosco, where a giant fan in a former chapel offers relief from blistering

summer heat.

Francisco Loureiro, who runs the shelter in a hardscrabble hillside neighborhood, said word has gotten out among Mexicans that they will be deported if they surrender to agents to seek asylum and that more will try to avoid being captured. He said one deported migrant accepted a smuggler's offer outside the shelter Tuesday to try to sneak across undetected.

Ruiz said she did not get a chance to explain to an asylum officer that she feared returning to Mexico due to cartel violence. "They were very direct, yes-or-no questions. You couldn't explain why you were afraid," she said.

Mayorkas said complaints about the screening predate Biden's June order.

"I have confidence in our agents and officers that they are abiding by the guidelines, that our guidelines are strong, and we have the expertise to individuals who manifest fear," he said.

Anahi Sandoval, 30, said she tried to avoid capture after crossing the border in Nogales and was abandoned by her smuggler in the desert. She said she fled Chiapas after she and her husband, who owned a doors and windows business, refused to be extorted by gangs; her husband was killed and she left her daughter with a relative.

"The Colombians get a pass but not the Mexicans," said Sandoval, who failed her screening interview. "It makes me angry."

Araceli Martinez, 32, said she fears returning home with her 14-year-old daughter to a physically abusive husband but no one asked her and she didn't know that she had to ask until she was on a bus to Mexico. Previously, Border Patrol agents had to ask migrants if they feared returning home. Under new rules, migrants must ask unprompted or express obvious signs of distress, such as crying.

Martinez was eager to spread a message to others: "People come thinking there is asylum, but there isn't."

In the searing heat of the Gaza summer, Palestinians are surrounded by sewage and garbage

By WAFAA SHURAFI and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza (AP) — Children in sandals trudge through water contaminated with sewage and scale growing mounds of garbage in Gaza's crowded tent camps for displaced families. People relieve themselves in burlap-covered pits, with nowhere nearby to wash their hands.

In the stifling summer heat, Palestinians say the odor and filth surrounding them is just another inescapable reality of war — like pangs of hunger or sounds of bombing.

The territory's ability to dispose of garbage, treat sewage and deliver clean water has been virtually decimated by eight brutal months of war between Israel and Hamas. This has made grim living conditions worse and raised health risks for hundreds of thousands of people deprived of adequate shelter, food and medicine, aid groups say.

Hepatitis A cases are on the rise, and doctors fear that as warmer weather arrives, an outbreak of cholera is increasingly likely without dramatic changes to living conditions. The U.N., aid groups and local officials are scrambling to build latrines, repair water lines and bring desalination plants back online.

COGAT, the Israeli military body coordinating humanitarian aid efforts, said it's engaging in efforts to improve the "hygiene situation." But relief can't come soon enough.

"Flies are in our food," said Adel Dalloul, a 21-year-old whose family settled in a beach tent camp near the central Gaza city of Nuseirat. They wound up there after fleeing the southern city of Rafah, where they landed after leaving their northern Gaza home. "If you try to sleep, flies, insects and cockroaches are all over you."

Over a million Palestinians had been living in hastily assembled tent camps in Rafah before Israel invaded in May. Since fleeing Rafah, many have taken shelter in even more crowded and unsanitary areas across southern and central Gaza that doctors describe as breeding grounds for disease — especially as temperatures regularly reach 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 degrees Celsius).

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"The stench in Gaza is enough to make you kind of immediately nauseous," said Sam Rose, a director at the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees.

Conditions are exacting an emotional toll, too.

Anwar al-Hurkali, who lives with his family in a tent camp in the central Gazan city of Deir al-Balah, said he can't sleep for fear of scorpions and rodents. He doesn't let his children leave their tent, he said, worrying they'll get sick from pollution and mosquitoes.

"We cannot stand the smell of sewage," he said. "It is killing us."

Basic services breakdownThe U.N. estimates nearly 70% of Gaza's water and sanitation plants have been destroyed or damaged by Israel's heavy bombardment. That includes all five of the territory's wastewater treatment facilities, plus water desalination plants, sewage pumping stations, wells and reservoirs.

The employees who once managed municipal water and waste systems have been displaced, and some killed, officials say. This month, an Israeli strike in Gaza City killed five government employees repairing water wells, the city said.

Despite staffing shortages and damaged equipment, some desalination plants and sewage pumps are working, but they're hampered by lack of fuel, aid workers say.

A U.N. assessment of two Deir al-Balah tent camps found in early June that people's daily water consumption — including drinking, washing and cooking — averaged under 2 liters (about 67 ounces), far lower than the recommended 15 liters a day.

COGAT said it's coordinating with the UN to repair sewage facilities and Gaza's water system. Israel has opened three water lines "pumping millions of liters daily" into Gaza, it said.

But people often wait hours in line to collect potable water from delivery trucks, hauling back to their families whatever they can carry. The scarcity means families often wash with dirty water.

This week, Dalloul said, he lined up for water from a vendor. "We discovered that it was salty, polluted, and full of germs. We found worms in the water. I had been drinking from it," he said. "I had gastrointestinal problems and diarrhea, and my stomach hurts until this moment."

The World Health Organization declared an outbreak of Hepatitis A that, as of early June, had led to 81,700 reported cases of jaundice — a common symptom. The disease spreads primarily when uninfected people consume water or food contaminated with fecal matter.

Because wastewater treatment plants have shut down, untreated sewage is seeping into the ground or being pumped into the Mediterranean Sea, where tides move north toward Israel.

"If there are bad water conditions and polluted groundwater in Gaza, then this is an issue for Israel," said Rose, of the U.N. agency for Palestinian refugees. "It has in the past prompted actions by Israel to try and ameliorate the situation."

COGAT said it's working on "improving waste management processes" and examining proposals to establish new dumps and allow more garbage trucks into Gaza.

Where can garbage go?Standing barefoot on a street in the Nuseirat refugee camp, 62-year-old Abu Shadi Afana compared the pile of garbage next to him to a "waterfall." He said trucks continue to dump rubbish even though families live in tents nearby.

"There is no one to provide us with a tent, food, or drink, and on top of all of this, we live in garbage?" Afana said. Trash attracts bugs he's never seen before in Gaza — small insects that stick to his skin. When he lies down, he said, he feels like they're "eating his face."

There are few other places for the garbage to go. When Israel's military took control of a 1-kilometer (0.6-mile) buffer zone along its border with Gaza, two main landfills east of the cities of Khan Younis and Gaza City became off-limits.

In their absence, informal landfills have developed. Displaced Palestinians running out of areas to shelter say they've had little choice but to pitch tents near trash piles.

Satellite images from Planet Labs analyzed by The Associated Press show that an informal landfill in Khan Younis that sprung up after Oct. 7 appears to have doubled in length since January. Since the Rafah evacuation, a tent city has sprung up around the landfill, with Palestinians living between piles of garbage.

Cholera fears Doctors in Gaza fear cholera may be on the horizon.

"The crowded conditions, the lack of water, the heat, the poor sanitation — these are the preconditions of cholera," said Joanne Perry, a doctor working in southern Gaza with Doctors Without Borders.

Most patients have illnesses or infections caused by poor sanitation, she said. Scabies, gastrointestinal illnesses and rashes are common. Over 485,000 diarrhea cases have been reported since the war's start, WHO says.

"When we go to the hospital to ask for medicine for diarrhea, they tell us it is not available, and I go to buy it outside the hospital," al-Hurkali said. "But where do I get the money?"

COGAT says it's coordinating delivery of vaccines and medical supplies and is in daily contact with Gaza health officials. COGAT is "unaware of any authentic, verified report of unusual illnesses other than viral illnesses," it said.

With efforts stalled to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, Dalloul says he's lost hope that help is on the way.

"I am 21 years old. I am supposed to start my life," he said. "Now I just live in front of the garbage."

Robert F. Kennedy Jr. didn't make the debate stage. He faces hurdles to stay relevant

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr., won't be with his better-known rivals, President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, when they debate Thursday in Atlanta.

And aside from a livestreamed response to the debate, he also has nothing on his public schedule for the coming weeks. Nor does his running mate, philanthropist Nicole Shanahan.

After a busy spring hopscotching the country for a mix of political rallies, fundraisers and nontraditional campaign events, Kennedy appears to be taking a breather.

Kennedy's absence from the debate stage and the campaign trail carries risk for his insurgent quest to shake up the Republican and Democratic dominance of the U.S. political system. He lacks the money for a firehose of television commercials, and he must spend much of the money he does have to secure ballot access. Public appearances are a low-cost way to fire up supporters and drive media coverage he needs to stay relevant.

Kennedy himself says he can't win unless voters know he's running and believe he can defeat Biden and Trump. That problem will become increasingly acute as the debate, followed by the major party conventions in July and August, push more voters to tune into the race.

Still, Kennedy has maintained a steady stream of social media posts and he continues to sit for interviews, most recently with talk show host Dr. Phil.

"Mr. Kennedy has a full schedule for July with many public events, mostly on the East Coast and including one big rally," said Stefanie Spear, a Kennedy campaign spokesperson. "We will start announcing the events next week."

For Thursday's debate on CNN, the network invited candidates who showed strength in four reliable polls and ballot access in enough states to win the presidency. Kennedy fell short on both requirements.

He's cried foul about the rules, accusing CNN of colluding with Biden and Trump in a complaint to the Federal Election Commission and threatening to sue.

Sujat Desai, a 20-year-old student from Pleasanton, California who supports Kennedy, said Kennedy's absence from the debate is a major hurdle for him to overcome.

"I don't think there's any way to get awareness if you're not on the debate stage," Desai said. "I think it's a pretty lethal blow not to be in this debate, and it would be detrimental not to be in the next."

Still, Desai said he won't be dissuaded from voting for Kennedy even if he appears to be a longshot come November.

"I think this is probably the strongest I've seen an independent candidate in a while, so I'll give him that," Desai said. "I think he's definitely doing well. His policies are strong enough to win, I just don't know if

there's awareness."

Kennedy plans to respond in real time to the same questions posed to Biden and Trump in a livestream. Independent and third-party candidates like Kennedy face supremely long odds, but Kennedy's campaign has spooked partisans on both sides who fear he will tip the election against them. Biden supporters worry his famous Democratic name and his history of environmental advocacy will sway voters from the left. Trump supporters worry his idiosyncratic views, particularly his questioning of the scientific consensus that vaccines are safe and effective, will appeal to people who might otherwise vote for Trump.

Christy Jones, 54, a holistic health and mindfulness coach from Glendora, California, worries people won't know Kennedy is running without him standing next to Biden and Trump at the debate. But she said he's still all over her social media feeds and she's confident he's making himself visible.

"I do feel like he could still win if people choose to be courageous," she said. "If all the people that actually want change voted for him he would be in. People are asking for change."

Until recently, Kennedy's website promoted a variety of events weeks or more in advance, including public rallies and private fundraisers. He held comedy nights with prominent comedians in Michigan and Tennessee.

But since he went to the June 15 premiere of a film on combatting addiction, Kennedy has been dark, though he continues to promote in-person and virtual organizing events for his supporters.

FACT FOCUS: Here's a look at the false claims you might hear during tonight's presidential debate

By The Associated Press undefined

To hear former President Donald Trump tell it, the U.S. has fallen apart under President Joe Biden: the economy is failing, countries are emptying their prisons and mental institutions across the southern border and crime has skyrocketed.

Biden, on the other hand, has claimed he confronted an inflation rate of 9% and \$5 gas prices when he took office, and boasts about his administration's job creation without telling the full story.

There's no comparing the volume of false and misleading claims Trump has deployed throughout his campaigns and presidency with Biden, who tends to lean more on exaggerations and embellishments rather than outright lies. But as the two men prepare to debate Thursday night, here's a look at the facts around false and misleading claims frequently made by the two candidates.

Economy Trump and his team like to claim his presidency gave the U.S. its "greatest economy in history." That's not accurate.

First of all, the pandemic triggered a massive recession during his presidency. The government borrowed \$3.1 trillion in 2020 to stabilize the economy. Trump had the ignominy of leaving the White House with fewer jobs than when he entered.

But Trump's team likes to argue that only his pre-pandemic economic record should be judged. So, how does that compare?

— Economic growth averaged 2.67% during Trump's first three years. That's pretty solid. But it's nowhere near the 4% averaged during Bill Clinton's two terms from 1993 to 2001, according to the Bureau of Economic Analysis. In fact, growth has been stronger so far under Biden than under Trump.

Now, Trump did have the unemployment rate get as low as 3.5% before the pandemic. But again, the labor force participation rate for people 25 to 54 — the core of the U.S. working population — was higher under Clinton. The participation rate has also been higher under Biden than Trump.

Trump also likes to talk about how low inflation was under him. Gasoline fell as low as \$1.77 a gallon. But, of course, that price dip happened during pandemic lockdowns when few people were driving. The low prices were due to a global health crisis, not Trump's policies.

Similarly, average 30-year mortgage rates dipped to 2.65% during the pandemic. Those low rates were a byproduct of Federal Reserve efforts to prop up a weak economy, rather than the sign of strength that Trump now suggests it was.

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— Biden has misrepresented the economy at times, including falsely claiming that gas prices were \$5 when he took office. The average price was around \$2.39 a gallon the week Biden was inaugurated in January 2021, according to data from the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The president also has said in a few instances that he inherited high inflation. In May interviews, he said the inflation rate was 9% when he took office in January 2021. It was 1.4% at that point and increased steadily during the first 17 months of his presidency, reaching a peak of 9.1% in June 2022. But since then it has fallen and May data showed it at 3.3%.

His standard message has been that prices fell from their 2022 peaks without the mass layoffs and recession that many economists had predicted.

Biden correctly noted that inflation was a global phenomenon as the world economy reopened after the pandemic. He can claim that the U.S. economy is faring better than its peers. The World Bank recently estimated the U.S. economy would grow 2.6% this year, way better than the 0.7% for the 20 countries on the euro currency or 0.7% for Japan.

Yet Biden has at times boasted about his economic achievements without providing the full context. He has said his administration created a record 15 million jobs in its first three years. While data supports that, it's partly because Biden inherited a pandemic economy. After staggering job losses early in the pandemic, the job recovery began under Trump, and continued under Biden when he took office.

ImmigrationA mass influx of migrants coming into the U.S. illegally across the southern border has led to a number of false and misleading claims by Trump. For example, he regularly claims other countries are emptying their prisons and mental institutions to send to the U.S. There is no evidence to support that.

Trump has also argued the influx of immigrants is causing a crime surge in the U.S., although statistics actually show violent crime is on the way down.

There have been recent high-profile and heinous crimes allegedly committed by people in the country illegally. But FBI statistics do not separate out crimes by the immigration status of the assailant, nor is there any evidence of a spike in crime perpetrated by migrants, either along the U.S.-Mexico border or in cities seeing the greatest influx of migrants, like New York. Studies have found that people living in the country illegally are less likely than native-born Americans to have been arrested for violent, drug and property crimes.

The number of foreigners on the terrorist watch list has increased, but federal immigration authorities say they "are very uncommon" and a small fraction of the total number of migrants who cross the border. From October 2022 to September 2023, the U.S. Border Patrol reported seeing 169 people from the list, compared with 98 the previous year. Since October 2023, the Border Patrol has reported 80 encounters.

CrimeTrump falsely claims that crime has skyrocketed since he left office in 2021, particularly in Democratic-led big cities that he says are overrun with violence and bloodshed.

In reality, as Biden has accurately pointed out, violent crime is close to its lowest point in 50 years after a spike in 2020. That year, Trump's last in office, was marred by the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest after a Minneapolis police officer murdered George Floyd.

The FBI's annual crime report for 2022, the last year for which yearly data is available, showed violent crime across the U.S. dropping to about the same level as before the pandemic — a rate of 380.7 violent crimes per 100,000 people compared to 380.8 per 100,000 people in 2019. Since 1972, only 2014 had a lower violent crime rate.

A quarterly FBI crime report released June 11 showed the downward trend continuing, with sharp drops in violent crime in January-March compared with the same period in 2023. According to the report, overall violent crime was down 15%, with murder and rape both down 26%, robbery down 18% and 13% fewer aggravated assaults.

Experts noted, however, that while violent crime almost certainly dropped in the first quarter, the report is preliminary, subject to revision, and is likely overstating the size of the drops.

While violent crime has trended lower, property crime has spiked — though that too may be ebbing. The 2022 report showed a 7.1% jump in property crime, such as vehicle thefts, while the quarterly report

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counted a 15% drop compared to the first three months of 2023.

Trump, meanwhile, contends the FBI's statistics are skewed and don't tell the real story. In his June 15 speech, Trump falsely claimed the statistics "no longer include data from 30% of the country including the biggest and most violent cities."

While it's true that some law enforcement agencies didn't provide data to the FBI, a change in collection methods helped close the gap. The FBI said the 2022 report is based on data from 83.3% of all agencies covering 93.5% of the population. By contrast, the 2021 report contained data from 62.7% of agencies, representing 64.8% of Americans. For agencies that didn't provide data, the FBI estimates the numbers based on comparably sized cities.

During his criminal trial in New York in April and May, Trump falsely claimed on social media that violent crime was "running rampant and totally out of control" in the city and said Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg had let violent crime "flourish at levels never seen before."

In reality, crime in New York is nowhere near the levels seen in the early 1990s, when the city averaged more than 2,000 murders a year. Last year, according to the NYPD, there were 391 murders. This year, the city is on pace for less than 350. Shootings have dropped 41.4% since 2021, though some crimes, like reports of rape, robbery and felony assault have trended higher.

Elections Trump's lie that he was the real winner of the 2020 election has permeated the Republican Party and its agenda over the past four years – and the former president has shown no interest in reversing that in his current campaign.

Trump has continued using the disproven claim as fuel to motivate his supporters and sow doubt in the upcoming election results, insisting without evidence that anything but a landslide victory in 2024 would be a sign of Democrats rigging the vote.

"The radical left Democrats rigged the presidential election in 2020, and we're not going to let them rig the presidential election in 2024," he said at a recent campaign rally in Wisconsin.

Biden beat Trump in 2020 with 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232 and won the popular vote by more than 7 million ballots. Legal challenges to the election were heard and roundly rejected in dozens of state and federal courts, including by judges whom Trump appointed.

And despite Trump's allegations of foul play, members of his own administration and election administrators in his own party have maintained that election safeguards were effective and there was no evidence of widespread fraud. An exhaustive AP investigation in 2021 found fewer than 475 instances of confirmed voter fraud across six battleground states — nowhere near the magnitude required to sway the outcome of the race.

Trump and his allies have made the specter of mass numbers of noncitizens voting in the presidential election their latest rallying cry. That's also not based in fact.

It's a felony for non-U.S. citizens to vote in presidential elections — one that states have mechanisms to catch. Election administration experts say the number of noncitizens illegally voting in federal elections is extremely small, and audits of voter rolls in several states confirm that.

The world Foreign affairs are likely to loom large in the debate as both Trump and Biden look to tout their leadership while criticizing the other's handling of world affairs. Likely topics include the wars in Ukraine and Gaza, conflicts with China, Russia and Iran, as well as the strength of U.S. alliances — complicated subjects that have long been the topic of misleading, debunked and exaggerated claims.

Trump has repeatedly misled about his own administration's support for Ukraine in the years ahead of Russia's 2022 invasion. Trump has said that his administration gave Ukraine the \$400 million that Congress had approved ahead of schedule — even though he actually held up the funding in an effort to pressure Ukraine to announce an investigation of Democrats. That incident led to Trump's first impeachment by the U.S. House.

He has also falsely accused his predecessors of ignoring Ukraine's pleas for military aid. "The Obama-Biden administration only sent them meals and blankets," he said two years ago.

Trump has repeated a debunked story that Ukraine sought to intervene in the 2016 U.S. election by

hacking into Democratic Party servers and then framing Russia for the attack. Authorities have said the evidence shows that Russia was behind the attack, and that suggestions that Ukraine did it are playing into the Kremlin's hands.

"Fictions," Trump's former special assistant on the National Security Council, Fiona Hill, told members of Congress when asked about Trump's assertions. "I would ask that you please not promote politically driven falsehoods that so clearly advance Russian interests."

Biden, for his part, has misleadingly taken credit for an international group including the U.S., Australia, Japan and India known as the Quad. Last year, Biden claimed he convinced the countries to form the organization to maintain stability in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. But the group was actually formed in the early 2000s, and revived in 2017 under Trump.

7 in 10 Americans think Supreme Court justices put ideology over impartiality: AP-NORC poll

By THOMAS BEAUMONT and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A solid majority of Americans say Supreme Court justices are more likely to be guided by their own ideology rather than serving as neutral arbiters of government authority, a new poll finds, as the high court is poised to rule on major cases involving former President Donald Trump and other divisive issues.

The survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that 7 in 10 Americans think the high court's justices are more influenced by ideology, while only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults think the justices are more likely to provide an independent check on other branches of government by being fair and impartial.

The poll reflects the continued erosion of confidence in the Supreme Court, which enjoyed broader trust as recently as a decade ago. It underscores the challenge faced by the nine justices — six appointed by Republican presidents and three by Democrats — of being seen as something other than just another element of Washington's hyper-partisanship.

The justices are expected to decide soon whether Trump is immune from criminal charges over his efforts to overturn his 2020 reelection defeat, but the poll suggests that many Americans are already uneasy about the justices' ability to rule impartially.

"It's very political. There's no question about that," said Jeff Weddell, a 67-year-old automotive technology sales representative from Macomb County, in presidential swing-state Michigan.

"The court's decision-making is so polluted," said Weddell, a political independent who plans to vote for Trump in November. "No matter what they say on President Trump's immunity, this will be politically motivated."

Confidence in the Supreme Court remains low. The poll of 1,088 adults found that 4 in 10 U.S. adults say they have hardly any confidence in the people running the Supreme Court, in line with an AP-NORC poll from October. As recently as early 2022, before the high-profile ruling that overturned the constitutional right to abortion, an AP-NORC poll found that only around one-quarter of Americans lacked confidence in the justices.

And although the Supreme Court's conservative majority has handed down some historic victories for Republican policy priorities over the past few years, rank-and-file Republicans aren't giving the justices a ringing endorsement.

It's been two years since the court's ruling on abortion rights. Justices Neil Gorsuch, Brett Kavanaugh and Amy Coney Barrett — Trump nominees confirmed by a Republican Senate — were part of the majority that overturned the near-50-year abortion-rights precedent established in *Roe v. Wade*.

This year's term, with a dozen cases still undecided, has already seen some major rulings. Earlier in June, the Supreme Court unanimously preserved access to the pharmaceutical drug mifepristone, a medication used in nearly two-thirds of all abortions in the U.S. last year. The same week, the court struck down a Trump-era gun restriction, a ban on rapid-fire gun accessories known as bump stocks, a win for gun-rights

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advocates.

Only about half of Republicans have a great deal or a moderate amount of confidence in the court's handling of important issues, including gun policy, abortion, elections and voting, and presidential power and immunity, according to the new poll.

"I don't have a lot of faith in the Supreme Court. And that's unfortunate because that's the final say-so, the final check and balance on our three-branch government," said Matt Rogers, a 37-year-old Republican from Knoxville, Tennessee.

Other Republicans share that mistrust, although the court's current makeup is more conservative than any court in modern history. They are also split on whether the justices are more driven by personal ideology or impartiality, with about half of Republicans saying the justices are more likely to shape the law to fit their own ideology, and another half saying they are likelier to be an independent check on their co-equal branches.

"I think they are getting influenced and pressured by a lot of people and a lot of entities on the left," said Rogers, a health and wellness trainer who plans to vote for Trump a third time this year. "Let's be honest. It's anything to crucify Trump."

Some Republicans have less confidence in the court's handling of specific issues than others. The poll found, for instance, that about 6 in 10 Republican women have little to no confidence in the court's handling of presidential power and immunity, compared to 45% of Republican men.

Janette Majors, a Republican from Ridgefield, Washington, says it's only natural for a justice to reflect the ideology of the president who nominated them.

But episodes outside the Supreme Court chambers have made her less confident in the people running the court.

"What you hear about Clarence Thomas, taking trips paid for by rich people, makes me think there are some individuals there that don't sound like I should trust them," Majors said, referring unprompted to reports that Thomas has for years received undisclosed expensive gifts, including travel, from GOP megadonor Harlan Crow.

Democrats and independents are even more skeptical of the court's neutrality, according to the poll.

About 8 in 10 Democrats — and about 7 in 10 independents — say the justices are more likely to shape the law to fit their own ideology. A similar share has little or no confidence at all in the court's handling of abortion, gun policy and presidential power and immunity.

Michigan Democrat Andie Near noticed that the court seemed to become a political tool in 2016, when then-Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell refused to allow hearings on Democratic President Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland.

McConnell quickly allowed hearings after Trump nominated Gorsuch within 10 days of taking office in 2017.

"I had thought the court, though maybe skewing left or right, was serving the whole body of the country," the 42-year-old museum registrar from Holland, Michigan, said. "That's when it brought to high relief that the Supreme Court is being used to skew the political environment we live in, and it's only gotten worse."

The Latest | Bolivian official says general wanted to take power, navy vice admiral also arrested

LA PAZ, Bolivia (AP) — An apparent failed coup attempt erupted Wednesday in Bolivia, where armored vehicles rammed into the doors of the government palace and President Luis Arce said the country stood firm against attacks on democracy.

Arce confronted the general commander of the army — Juan José Zúñiga, who appeared to be leading the rebellion — in the palace hallway, saying, "I am your captain, and I order you to withdraw your soldiers, and I will not allow this insubordination."

Bolivian television showed two tanks and a number of men in military uniform outside the building, but troops and armored vehicles later began to pull back. Supporters of Arce flooded into the plaza outside soon afterward, waving Bolivian flags.

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Arce said the day has been "atypical in the life of country that wants democracy." He decried what he called "an attempted coup by troops who are staining the uniform, who are attacking our constitution."

Arce also replaced the heads of the armed forces, with Zúñiga and navy Vice Adm. Juan Arnez Salvador being arrested later.

Tensions have been brewing for months, with protesters streaming into the capital amid a severe economic crisis as two political titans battle for control of the ruling party.

Here's the latest:

Bolivian official: Army general "wanted to take power"; navy vice admiral also arrested
A high-ranking Bolivian official says the army general arrested in Wednesday's apparent failed coup attempt was out to seize power and a second top officer was also arrested over the uprising.

Government Minister Eduardo del Castillo said in the evening that in addition to Juan José Zúñiga, former navy Vice Adm. Juan Arnez Salvador was taken into custody. Both men were dismissed by President Luis Arce and replaced after the uprising began.

Del Castillo accused Zúñiga of attempting a coup with political motivations.

"What was this group's goal? The goal was to overturn the democratically elected authority," del Castillo said in an appearance before journalists in which the two men were presented.

"Gen. Zúñiga wanted to take power," he added.

Del Castillo also said two people were injured and taken to the hospital: One who was hit in the leg by a shotgun pellet, and another for whom details were not released.

High-ranking Bolivian official denies arrested general's claims that president asked for uprising
Bolivia's justice minister has denied an army general's claims of being asked by the president to storm the government palace.

Iván Lima said Juan José Zúñiga, who was arrested earlier Wednesday after the apparent coup attempt fizzled, was lying and trying to justify his own actions, for which he will face justice.

Lima also said via the social platform X that prosecutors will seek the maximum sentence of 15 to 20 years in prison for Zúñiga, "for having attacked democracy and the Constitution."

Shortly before he was arrested, Zúñiga told reporters: "The president told me: 'The situation is very screwed up, very critical. It is necessary to prepare something to raise my popularity.'"

Zúñiga said he asked President Luis Arce if he should "take out the armored vehicles?" and Arce replied, "Take them out." _____

Army general apparently behind failed coup claims president asked him to storm government palace
The army general apparently behind a failed coup attempt has claimed that the president asked him to storm the government palace in a political move.

Shortly before he was arrested Wednesday, Juan José Zúñiga told reporters: "The president told me: 'The situation is very screwed up, very critical. It is necessary to prepare something to raise my popularity.'"

Zúñiga said he asked President Luis Arce if he should "take out the armored vehicles?" and Arce replied, "Take them out." _____

Arce has not commented on Zúñiga's claim. The Associated Press has asked the Ministry of the Presidency, but there has been no immediate reply.

Zúñiga was replaced by Arce earlier in the day, along with other heads of the armed forces, while the rebellion was still underway. It was not immediately clear what the charges against Zúñiga were. _____

Army general apparently behind the failed coup attempt has been arrested
Bolivian authorities say the army general apparently behind the failed coup attempt has been arrested after the attorney general opened an investigation against him.

Juan José Zúñiga was previously replaced by President Luis Arce, along with other heads of the armed forces, while the rebellion was still underway. It was not immediately clear what the charges against Zúñiga were.

Before entering the government palace earlier Wednesday, Zúñiga told journalists in the plaza outside:

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"Surely soon there will be a new Cabinet of ministers; our country, our state cannot go on like this." Zúñiga said that "for now" he recognized Arce as commander in chief.

Zúñiga did not explicitly say whether he was leading a coup, but in the palace, with bangs echoing behind him, he said the army was trying to "restore democracy and free our political prisoners."

President Arce thanks the Bolivian people, and VP says country will not allow more coups
Bolivian President Luis Arce has addressed supporters who gathered in Plaza Murillo, outside the governmental palace, after Wednesday's apparent failed coup attempt.

"Many thanks to the Bolivian people. ... Long live democracy," Arce said.

People then began singing the South American country's national anthem.

Vice President David Choquehuanca told the crowd, "Never again will the Bolivian people allow coups d'état."

Chile, EU among foreign governments condemning apparent failed coup attempt
Chile is among foreign governments that are condemning what appeared to be a failed coup attempt in neighboring Bolivia.

President Gabriel Boric told reporters that he "immediately" contacted his Bolivian counterpart to offer his "solidarity."

"We condemn this coup attempt. We call for institutions to function, for the constitution and the laws to be respected," he added. "We hope that no one is injured and that the legitimate government of President Luis Arce remains in place and can continue with the mandate that the Bolivian people have voted for."

Boric said the matter would be raised Thursday before the Organization of American States.

EU President Ursula von der Leyen also expressed the European bloc's strong support for constitutional order and the rule of law in Bolivia.

Troops and armored vehicles begin to pull back; president decries those who "are staining the uniform"
Troops and armored vehicles have begun to pull back from Bolivia's government palace.

Supporters of President Luis Arce flooded into the plaza outside and waved Bolivian flags soon afterward. Arce said the day has been "atypical in the life of country that wants democracy."

He decried what he called "an attempted coup by troops who are staining the uniform, who are attacking our constitution."

Arce praised those troops who obey the constitution and "wear their uniform with pride."

"We deplore the attitudes of bad troops who regrettably repeat history by trying to carry out a coup when the Bolivian people have always been a democratic people," he added.

Bolivia president replaces heads of the armed forces; new army commander orders troops back to barracks
Bolivian President Luis Arce has announced new heads of the army, navy and air force. That includes the position of the army general commander, Juan José Zúñiga, who appears to be leading the rebellion.

New army chief José Wilson Sánchez is ordering all mobilized troops to return to their barracks. "No one wants the images we're seeing in the streets," he said.

Arce said that those who rose up against him were "staining the uniform." He vowed that democracy would be respected.

Police with riot gear have put up fences around the government palace and the plaza outside.

Video from the streets showed armored vehicles driving away from the palace, followed by troops and journalists.

Bolivian labor union condemns what it calls an attempted coup
The leadership of Bolivia's largest labor union has condemned what it calls an attempted coup d'état and declared an indefinite strike of social and labor organizations in La Paz in defense of the government.

President to Army commander: "I order you to withdraw"; army commander says he is out to "restore democracy" Bolivian President Luis Arce has told the army general commander, who appeared to be leading the rebellion: "I am your captain, and I order you to withdraw your soldiers, and I will not allow this insubordination."

Before entering the government palace, Juan José Zúñiga told journalists in the plaza outside that "Surely soon there will be a new Cabinet of ministers; our country, our state cannot go on like this." Zúñiga said that "for now" he recognizes Arce as commander in chief.

Zúñiga did not explicitly say whether he is leading a coup, but in the palace, with bangs echoing behind him, he said the army was trying to "restore democracy and free our political prisoners." _____

Armored vehicles ram the doors of the palace, and president confronts army commander Armored vehicles rammed into the doors of Bolivia's government palace Wednesday as President Luis Arce said the country faced an attempted coup, insisted he stands firm and urged people to mobilize.

In a video of Arce surrounded by ministers in the palace, he said: "The country is facing an attempted coup d'état. Here we are, firm in Casa Grande, to confront any coup attempt. We need the Bolivian people to organize."

Arce confronted the general commander of the Army, Juan José Zúñiga, in the palace hallway, as shown on video on Bolivian television. "I am your captain, and I order you to withdraw your soldiers, and I will not allow this insubordination," Arce said.

Kenya's president says he won't sign the finance bill that led protesters to storm the parliament

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Kenya's president said Wednesday he won't sign into law a finance bill proposing new taxes that prompted thousands of protesters to storm the parliament the previous day, leaving several people killed as police opened fire. It was the biggest assault on Kenya's government in decades.

The government wanted to raise funds to pay off debt, but Kenyans said the bill would have caused more economic pain as millions struggle to get by. Tuesday's chaos led authorities to deploy the military, and Kenyan President William Ruto called protesters' actions "treasonous."

He now says the proposed bill caused "widespread dissatisfaction" and that he has listened and "conceded." It's a major setback for Ruto, who came to power vowing to help Kenyans cope with rising costs but has seen much of the country — led by its youth — unite in opposition to his latest attempted reforms.

"It is necessary for us to have a conversation as a nation on how ... do we manage the affairs of the country together," he said.

Kenyans faced the lingering smell of tear gas and military in the streets on Wednesday morning, a day after the protesters' act of defiance that Ruto had called an "existential" threat. Parliament, city hall and the supreme court were cordoned off.

At least 22 people were killed, the Kenya National Human Rights Commission said, and police were accused of some shooting deaths. Chairperson Roseline Odede said 50 people were arrested.

Ruto acknowledged there were deaths, without elaborating, called it an "unfortunate situation" and offered condolences. He also said about 200 people had been wounded in the chaos. Part of the parliament building burned and clashes occurred in several communities beyond the capital, Nairobi.

Kenya has seen protests in the past, but activists and others warned the stakes were now more dangerous — Ruto on Tuesday vowed to quash unrest "at whatever cost," even as more protests were called at the State House on Thursday.

"We are dealing with a new phenomenon and a group of people that is not predictable," said Herman Manyora, an analyst and professor at the University of Nairobi. "We don't know whether these people will fear the army."

The demonstrations showed Kenyans bridged tribal and other divisions to keep the finance bill from becoming law. It would have raised taxes and fees on a range of items and services, from egg imports

to bank transfers.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby urged the Kenyan government to exercise "restraint so that no further Kenyans are put in harm's way while exercising their right to peaceful public assembly."

There were no reports of violence Wednesday, but there was fear. Civil society groups have reported abductions of people involved in recent protests and expect more to come. Kenya's High Court ordered police to release all those arrested in the protests. Ruto said those allegedly abducted had been released or processed in court.

Later Wednesday, the High Court, acting on a challenge from Kenyan lawyers, ordered the military be pulled back from the streets. It was not immediately clear if the government would do so.

The mother of a killed teenager, Edith Wanjiku, told reporters at a morgue that the police who shot her son should be charged with murder because her 19-year-old was unarmed. "He had just completed school and was peacefully protesting," she said.

Many young people who helped vote Ruto into power in 2022, supporting his promises of economic relief, now oppose the pain of reforms. Inequality among Kenyans has sharpened along with long-held frustrations over state corruption. The booming young population is also frustrated by the lavish lifestyles of politicians, including the president.

"How did we get here?" Kenya's vice president, Rigathi Gachagua, asked Wednesday in nationally broadcast comments after the president's turnabout, openly wondering how the government had become so unpopular in just two years. "We were the darling of the Kenyan people."

The bill was not as important as people's lives, said one Nairobi businessman, Gideon Hamisi. "Many young people lost their lives yesterday. I am a young man, and I feel deeply pained by what transpired."

Opposition leader Raila Odinga called for dialogue. "Kenya cannot afford to kill its children just because the children are asking for food, jobs and a listening ear."

The president's concession was "self preservation" by a leader worried about his reputation, opposition lawmaker Edwin Sifuna wrote on X.

The events are a sharp turn for Ruto, who has been embraced by the United States as a welcome, stable partner in Africa while frustration grows elsewhere on the continent with the U.S. and some other Western powers.

In May, Ruto went to Washington in the first state visit by an African leader in 16 years. On Tuesday, as the protests erupted, the U.S. designated Kenya as its first major non-NATO ally in sub-Saharan Africa, a largely symbolic act but one highlighting their security partnership. Also Tuesday, hundreds of Kenyan police deployed to lead a multinational force against gangs in Haiti, an initiative that brought thanks from President Joe Biden.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had been expected to speak with Ruto on Wednesday about the Haiti deployment, a call planned prior to Tuesday's violence.

The Vatican stands trial in London as a British financier seeks to clear his name in a property deal

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ROME (AP) — The Vatican went on trial in a London court Wednesday, as a British financier sought to recover from the harm he said he suffered to his reputation as a result of a Vatican investigation into its 350 million euro (around \$375 million) investment in a London property.

It is believed to be the first time the Holy See has been forced to stand trial in a foreign court.

A Vatican tribunal has already convicted Raffaele Mincione of an embezzlement-related charge, and sentenced him to more than five years in prison, for his role in the London deal. But Mincione, who remains free pending an appeal, lodged a counter civil claim against the Holy See's secretariat of state at London's High Court, insisting he acted in good faith.

On Wednesday, he asked the court to approve a series of declarations asserting that he indeed acted in good faith in his dealings with the secretariat of state, that the Holy See knowingly and lawfully entered

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into the transactions in question and have no grounds to make any claims against Mincione as a result.

"I am delighted that these proceedings in England are finally underway," Mincione said in a statement. "I look forward to these issues being examined by an independent and internationally-respected judicial system."

The Holy See had tried unsuccessfully to quash Mincione's claim and in pleadings Wednesday urged the court to refuse to agree to the declarations Mincione is seeking. It said they were unnecessary since a Vatican court has already convicted Mincione and others for crimes related to the transactions.

The trial is expected to last a few weeks and feature the in-person testimony of a high-ranking Vatican official, Archbishop Edgar Pena Parra, the No. 3 in the secretariat of state.

While several lawsuits in the U.S. have sought to hold the Vatican liable for clergy sexual abuse, they have always failed since the Holy See was able to claim it enjoyed immunity as a sovereign state. But the British court allowed Mincione's case to proceed because it involved a commercial transaction, which is not typically covered by sovereign immunity claims.

The case concerns the Vatican's decision in 2013-2014 to invest an initial 200 million in a Mincione fund to acquire 45% of the London property, a former Harrod's warehouse that it hoped to develop into luxury apartments to then reap rental income as a long-term return on its investment.

By 2018, the Vatican's secretariat of state decided to exit the fund, unhappy with its performance, but wanted to retain its ownership of the property. Another London-based broker, Gianluigi Torzi, helped negotiate a 40 million euro payout to Mincione.

Vatican prosecutors alleged that Torzi and Mincione, who had had previous business dealings, were working together from the start and conspired to defraud the Holy See of millions of euros.

They alleged that Mincione, whose fund had purchased the Harrod's warehouse at auction in 2012 for 129.5 million pounds (around US\$165 million) plus 8 million pounds in costs, had inflated the property's value to 230 million pounds when it came time for the Vatican to invest in it. The prosecutors accused Torzi of then extorting the Vatican for another 15 million euros to cede control of the building, after the Vatican realized it still didn't own it.

Those transactions were at the heart of the Vatican trial, which ended in December with several convictions among nine of the 10 defendants, including Mincione and Torzi. The tribunal's written explanation of the verdict hasn't been published, but both prosecutors and the defendants have announced appeals.

Mincione has insisted he acted in good faith throughout his dealings with the Vatican and rejected the Vatican's accusations of fraud and embezzlement. He has taken his case to the United Nations human rights office to highlight some of the incongruities of the Vatican trial, which have also been flagged as problematic by other defense lawyers and outside Italian legal experts.

In the British civil case, he is seeking to have the court rule that he acted in good faith, arguing that such a ruling is necessary since he and his businesses have suffered reputational harm as a result of the Vatican's highly-publicized trial.

In an 84-page filing, the Holy See's lawyers argued that Mincione certainly did not act in good faith, alleging that he misled the Vatican by inflating the value of the property and participated in an "unlawful conspiracy" to defraud it.

If Mincione and his firms "cannot show that they did in fact act in good faith at all material times in the lead-up to the transaction, the entire house of cards upon which the claim is founded falls down," the Vatican's lawyers argued.

A separate British court has previously cast doubts about the Vatican prosecutors' allegations in the London deal. In 2021, Judge Tony Baumgartner of Southwark Crown Court reversed another judge's decision to seize the British-based bank accounts of Torzi.

Baumgartner accused the Vatican prosecutors of making "appalling" misrepresentations and omissions to the court in seeking to freeze Torzi's assets, and concluded that they hadn't provided sufficient evidence to make their case against him.

Nevada judge denies release of ex-gang leader ahead of trial in 1996 killing of Tupac Shakur

By KEN RITTER and SCOTT SONNER Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — An ailing former Los Angeles-area gang leader has been denied release from a Las Vegas jail ahead of his trial in the 1996 killing of music legend Tupac Shakur, despite a bid by a hip-hop music figure to underwrite his \$750,000 bond.

A Nevada judge rejected house arrest with electronic monitoring for Duane “Keffe D” Davis, 61, saying she wasn’t satisfied with assurances that Davis and his would-be benefactor — Cash “Wack 100” Jones — weren’t planning to reap profits from the sale of Davis’ life story.

A Nevada law prohibits convicted killers from profiting from their crime.

Clark County District Court Judge Carli Kierny said in her ruling issued Wednesday that a review of Jones’ financial records also did little to address her concerns that Jones might be a “front” or “middleman” for the true bond poster.

Davis has sought to be released since shortly after his arrest last September made him the only person ever charged with a crime in the killing, which has drawn intense interest and speculation for 27 years.

Prosecutors allege the gunfire in Las Vegas that killed Shakur stemmed from competition between East Coast members of a Bloods gang sect and West Coast groups of a Crips sect, including Davis, for dominance in a musical genre known at the time as “gangsta rap.”

Davis has pleaded not guilty to first-degree murder. His trial is scheduled for Nov. 4. If convicted, he could spend the rest of his life in prison.

After a 45-minute hearing Tuesday, Kierny said she was left with more questions than answers after Davis’ legal team tried to demonstrate the source of the funds.

Prosecutors have argued that Davis intends to benefit from retelling his story about the killing of Shakur and played a recording of a jailhouse phone call in which Jones describes to Davis a plan to produce “30 to 40 episodes” of a show based on his life story.

“It is an illegal benefit, profiting from this crime,” prosecutor Binu Palal told the judge. Palal didn’t respond to an email seeking comment Wednesday on the judge’s decision.

Jones, a music record executive who has managed hip-hop artists including Johnathan “Blueface” Porter and Jayceon “The Game” Taylor, offered sworn testimony Tuesday by video from an unspecified place in California.

He said he paid 15% of the bail amount, or \$112,500, as “a gift” from his business accounts to secure Davis’ release.

Davis’ attorney, Carl Arnold, didn’t respond to emails or phone calls left at his office Wednesday seeking comment. A spokesperson for Arnold didn’t immediately have comment when reached by email.

The judge said in Wednesday’s 2-page order she wasn’t convinced the bail money was not being paid “out of profits from Mr. Davis discussing the killing of the victim in this case.”

While Jones testified he was bonding out Davis because Davis was fighting cancer and “had been a pillar of the community,” previous interviews “suggested another motive,” Kierney wrote.

She said Jones indicated there were “stipulations” on the bond and “that Mr. Davis would be signing a contract regarding the rights to his life story, ostensibly including the shooting of Mr. Shakur.” She said that was supported by a recorded phone call at the jail when Jones “insisted that a contract be signed before the bond premium was paid.”

WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange returns to Australia a free man after US legal battle ends

By RICK RYCROFT and ROD McGUIRK Associated Press

CANBERRA, Australia (AP) — WikiLeaks founder Julian Assange returned to his homeland Australia aboard a charter jet and raised a celebratory clenched fist as his supporters cheered Wednesday after he pleaded guilty to obtaining and publishing U.S. military secrets in a deal with Justice Department prosecutors that concludes a drawn-out legal saga.

Assange told Prime Minister Anthony Albanese in a phone call from the capital Canberra's airport tarmac that Australian government intervention in the U.S. prosecution had saved his life, Assange lawyer Jennifer Robinson said.

Assange embraced his wife Stella Assange and father John Shipton who were waiting on the tarmac, but avoided media at a news conference less than two hours after he landed.

"Julian wanted me to sincerely thank everyone. He wanted to be here. But you have to understand what he's been through. He needs time. He needs to recuperate and this is a process." Stella Assange told reporters.

Assange was accused of receiving and publishing hundreds of thousands of war logs and diplomatic cables that included details of U.S. military wrongdoing in Iraq and Afghanistan. His activities drew an outpouring of support from press freedom advocates, who heralded his role in bringing to light military conduct that might otherwise have been concealed from view and warned of a chilling effect on journalists. 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.

The case came to a surprise end in a most unusual setting with Assange, 52, entering his plea in a U.S. district court in Saipan, the capital of the Northern Mariana Islands. The American commonwealth in the Pacific is relatively close to Assange's native Australia and accommodated his desire to avoid entering the continental United States.

Albanese said Assange told him during their phone call he was looking forward to playing with his sons, conceived while the father was in self-exile in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London for seven years.

"He described it as a surreal and happy moment, his landing here in our national capital, Canberra," Albanese told reporters in Parliament House. "I had a very warm discussion with him this evening. He was very generous in his praise of the Australian government's efforts."

Robinson said she became "very emotional" when she overheard Assange's conversation with the prime minister.

"Julian thanked him and the team and told the prime minister that he had saved his life. And I don't think that that's an exaggeration," Robinson said.

Assange's British court hearings in which he fought extradition to the United States had heard evidence of his failing health and potential risk for self-harm in the U.S. penal system.

Assange was accompanied on the flights by Australian Ambassador to the United States Kevin Rudd and High Commissioner to the United Kingdom Stephen Smith, both of whom played key roles in negotiating his freedom with London and Washington.

The flights were paid for by the "Assange team," Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles said, adding his government played a role in facilitating the transport.

Albanese told Parliament that Assange's freedom, after he spent five years in a British prison fighting extradition to the U.S., was the result of his government's "careful, patient and determined work."

It is unclear where Assange will go from Canberra and what his future plans are. His South African-born lawyer wife and mother of his two children, Stella Assange, has been in Australia for days awaiting his release.

Another of Julian Assange's lawyers, Barry Pollack, expected his client would continue vocal campaigning.

"WikiLeaks's work will continue and Mr. Assange, I have no doubt, will be a continuing force for freedom of speech and transparency in government," Pollack said.

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Assange's father John Shipton said ahead of his son's arrival that he hoped that his first-born child was coming home to the "great beauty of ordinary life."

"He will be able to spend quality time with his wife, Stella, and his two children, be able to walk up and down the beach and feel the sand through his toes in winter, that lovely chill," Shipton said.

The plea deal required Assange to admit guilt to a single felony count but also permitted him to return to Australia without any time in an American prison. The judge sentenced him to the five years he'd already spent behind bars in the U.K. fighting extradition to the U.S. on an Espionage Act indictment that could have carried a lengthy prison sentence in the event of a conviction. He was holed up for seven years before that in the Ecuadorian Embassy in London.

The conclusion enables both sides to claim a degree of satisfaction.

The Justice Department, facing a defendant who had already served substantial jail time, was able to resolve — without trial — a case that raised thorny legal issues and that might never have reached a jury at all given the plodding pace of the extradition process. Assange, for his part, signaled a begrudging contentment with the resolution, saying in court that though he believed the Espionage Act contradicted the First Amendment, he accepted the consequences of soliciting classified information from sources for publication.

The plea deal, disclosed Monday night in a sparsely detailed Justice Department letter, represents the latest — and presumably final — chapter in a court fight involving the eccentric Australian computer expert who has been celebrated by supporters as a transparency crusader but lambasted by national security hawks who insist that his conduct put lives at risks and strayed far beyond the bounds of traditional journalism duties.

Prosecutors alleged that Assange teamed with former Army intelligence analyst Chelsea Manning to obtain the records, including by conspiring to crack a Defense Department computer password, and published them without regard to American national security. Names of human sources who provided information to U.S. forces in Iraq and Afghanistan were among the details exposed, prosecutors have said.

The indictment was unsealed in 2019, but Assange's legal woes long predated the criminal case and continued well past it.

Weeks after the release of the largest document cache in 2010, a Swedish prosecutor issued an arrest warrant for Assange based on one woman's allegation of rape and another's allegation of molestation. Assange has long maintained his innocence, and the investigation was later dropped.

He presented himself in 2012 to the Ecuadorian Embassy in London, where he claimed asylum on the grounds of political persecution, and spent the following seven years in self-exile there, welcoming a parade of celebrity visitors and making periodic appearances from the building's balcony to address supporters.

In 2019, his hosts revoked his asylum, allowing British police to arrest him. He remained locked up for the last five years while the Justice Department sought to extradite him, in a process that encountered skepticism from British judges who worried about how Assange would be treated by the U.S.

Ultimately, though, the resolution sparing Assange prison time in the U.S. contradicts years of ominous warnings by Assange and his supporters that the American criminal justice system would expose him to unduly harsh treatment, including potentially the death penalty — something prosecutors never sought.

No human remains are found as search crews comb rubble from New Mexico wildfires

By SUSAN MONTTOYA BRYAN Associated Press

No human remains have been found after search and rescue crews combed through 1,300 damaged and destroyed structures in a New Mexico mountain community hit hard by a pair of wildfires.

Authorities made the announcement Wednesday evening during a public meeting, easing the concerns of many who had been working to whittle down a list of people who were unaccounted for in the wake of evacuations that came with little warning.

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The teams — with the help of specially trained dogs — spent the last few days going property to property, coming up with nothing but debris in areas where whole neighborhoods were reduced to ash and charred vehicles lined driveways or were buried under twisted metal carports.

Ruidoso Mayor Lynn Crawford also confirmed that there were now zero names left on the list of those who had been unaccounted for following the evacuations. Early on, authorities confirmed two fire-related deaths.

The mayor and other officials talked about work being done to ensure the drinking water system and electrical services can be restored at homes that were spared. Utility officials said miles of lines will have to be replaced and there are estimates that more than 1,300 power poles need to be replaced.

“It’s going to be a long effort and this is just the beginning,” Crawford told the audience, promising that officials were working to help businesses reopen so that Ruidoso’s economic engine could start humming again.

The community has about 8,000 permanent residents but that population can easily triple in the summer when tourists are looking to escape to the Sacramento Mountains or visit the Ruidoso Downs Race Track to watch the horses run.

The track, its owners and members of the horse racing industry have created a special fund aimed at raising money to help with recovery efforts throughout the community, while donations have been pouring in from around New Mexico.

Firefighters reported Wednesday evening that the threat from flames was all but quenched with the help of rain over recent days. Fire managers were using drones to identify any remaining heat within the interior of the fires.

Brad Johnson, a member of the incident command team overseeing firefighting efforts, described it as a mission to “seek and destroy” all of those hot spots.

Forecasters said storms that have popped up so far have not tracked directly over vulnerable areas. Still, they warned that if the showers expected over the next two days cross impacted areas, flash flooding will become a serious concern.

The New Mexico fires are among others burning in the western U.S., and the latest maps from the National Interagency Fire Center show above normal chances for significant wildland fire potential across a large swath of New Mexico, throughout Hawaii and in parts of other western states heading into July and through August.

Former Honduran president sentenced to 45 years for helping traffickers get tons of cocaine into US

By LARRY NEUMEISTER Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — A defiant former Honduran President Juan Orlando Hernández was sentenced in New York Wednesday to 45 years in prison for teaming up with some bribe-paying drug traffickers for over a decade to ensure over 400 tons of cocaine made it to the United States.

Judge P. Kevin Castel sentenced Hernández to 45 years in a U.S. prison and fined him \$8 million, saying that the penalty should serve as a warning to “well educated, well dressed” individuals who gain power and think their status insulates them from justice when they do wrong.

A jury convicted him in March in Manhattan federal court after a two-week trial, which was closely followed in his home country.

“I am innocent,” Hernández said through an interpreter at his sentencing. “I was wrongly and unjustly accused.”

In a lengthy extemporaneous statement interrupted several times by the judge who repeatedly reminded him that this was not a time to relitigate the trial, Hernández portrayed himself as a hero of the anti-drug trafficking movement who teamed up with American authorities under three U.S. presidential administrations to reduce drug imports.

But the judge said trial evidence proved the opposite and that Hernández employed “considerable acting

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skills" to make it seem that he was an anti-drug trafficking crusader while he deployed his nation's police and military, when necessary, to protect the drug trade.

Castel called Hernández a "two-faced politician hungry for power" who protected a select group of traffickers.

As the sentence was announced, the bespectacled Hernández in a dull green prison uniform stood next to his lawyer in front of two U.S. marshals. After shaking hands with his lawyer and turning to nod toward the packed spectator section, Hernández hobbled out of court with the help of a cane and a brace on one foot.

Prosecutors had sought a sentence of life in prison, plus 30 years, the same as the recommendation from the court's probation officers.

Hernández, 55, served two terms as the leader of the Central American nation of roughly 10 million people. He was arrested at his home in Tegucigalpa, the Honduran capital, three months after leaving office in 2022 and was extradited to the U.S. in April of that year.

U.S. prosecutors say Hernández worked with drug traffickers as long ago as 2004, taking millions of dollars in bribes as he rose from rural congressman to president of the National Congress and then to the country's highest office.

Hernández acknowledged in trial testimony that drug money was paid to virtually all political parties in Honduras, but he denied accepting bribes himself.

Hernández insisted in his lengthy statement Wednesday that his trial was unjust because he was not allowed to include evidence that would have caused the jury to find him not guilty. He said he was being persecuted by politicians and drug traffickers.

"It's as if I had been thrown into a deep river with my hands bound," he said.

In Honduras Wednesday, U.S. Ambassador Laura Dogu called the sentencing an important step in combating the social consequences of drug trafficking.

"Here in Honduras and in the United States, we cannot forget that the actions of Juan Orlando have made the people suffer," Dogu said.

Luis Romero, a Honduran criminal lawyer and analyst, said the sentence was a surprise to many people in Honduras who believed he would receive a life sentence.

At a news conference in Honduras, Hernández's wife, Ana García, said her husband was innocent and called the sentencing a "judicial lynching." García — who is planning to run for president next year — said she looked forward to her husband's appeal.

"Today is only a chapter in a series of injustices," she said.

Trial witnesses included traffickers who admitted responsibility for dozens of murders and said Hernández was an enthusiastic protector of some of the world's most powerful cocaine dealers, including notorious Mexican drug lord Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, who is serving a life prison term in the U.S.

During his remarks, the judge noted that Guzman had given a \$1 million bribe in 2013 directly to Hernández's brother, Juan Antonio "Tony" Hernández, a former Honduran congressman who was sentenced to life in a U.S. prison in 2021 in New York for his own conviction on drug charges.

Hernández shook his head when he heard Assistant U.S. Attorney Jacob Gutwillig tell the judge that he chose to "commit evil."

"No one, not even the former president of a country, is above the law," Gutwillig said.

Hernández was sentenced in a federal courthouse less than two blocks from where former U.S. President Donald Trump is scheduled to be sentenced July 11 following his conviction on charges of falsifying business records.

As he announced the sentence, Castel spoke at length about the ways Hernández had received a fair trial and described much of the key evidence that emerged at trial to prove guilt.

Castel described the number of killings linked to the drug trade during Hernández's political career as "staggering," saying one drug trafficking witness admitted at the trial that he aided 56 killings and another said he was involved in 78 murders before he began cooperating with U.S. authorities.

He noted that Hernández only helped the drug traffickers who aided his political ambitions, and not all

the time.

"No, he was too smart for that," Castel said. The judge said Hernández aided traffickers whenever he could.

"His No. 1 goal was his own political survival," Castel said.

Most Americans plan to watch the Biden-Trump debate, and many see high stakes, an AP-NORC poll finds

By JONATHAN J. COOPER and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Most U.S. adults plan to watch some element of Thursday's presidential debate and many think the event will be important for the campaigns of both President Joe Biden and former President Donald Trump, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

Both men remain broadly unpopular as they prepare to face off for the first time since 2020, although Trump, the presumptive Republican nominee, maintains a modest enthusiasm advantage with his base compared to Biden, the Democratic incumbent.

About 6 in 10 U.S. adults say they are "extremely" or "very" likely to watch the debate live or in clips, or read about or listen to commentary about the performance of the candidates in the news or social media.

The poll suggests tens of millions of Americans are likely to see or hear about at least part of Thursday's debate despite how unusually early it comes in the campaign season. Both Biden and Trump supporters view the debate as a major test for their candidate — or just a spectacle not to miss.

"I think it's super important," said Victoria Perdomo, a 44-year-old stay-at-home mom and a Trump supporter in Coral Springs, Florida. "It shows America what you're going to see for the next four years."

Nic Greene, a libertarian who is a registered independent, said he'll likely vote for Trump as the "least worst candidate." He doesn't think debates do much to help voters make decisions, but he's expecting to be entertained and plans to listen to post-debate analysis on podcasts.

"I think the majority of people have their minds made up with or without these debates," he said. "It's a circus."

Both sides see the debate as important. About half, 47%, of Americans say the debate is "extremely" or "very" important for the success of Biden's campaign and about 4 in 10 say it's highly important for Trump's campaign. About 3 in 10 Americans say it is at least "very" important for both campaigns.

Most Democrats, 55%, think the upcoming debate is extremely or very important for the success of the Biden campaign. About half of Republicans, 51%, say the same thing about the importance of the debate for the Trump campaign. Only about one-third of independents say the debate, taking place at a CNN studio in Atlanta, is highly important for either campaign.

Arthur Morris, a 40-year-old operations manager at a major financial firm, is an undecided voter open to Biden, Trump or a third-party option such as independent candidate Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. He, along with a significant share of Americans, has doubts about the mental capabilities of the aging candidates, and sees Biden's debate performance as an important test.

"I need Biden to demonstrate to me that he's cogent enough to be able to hold this office and execute to the level that we need him to," Morris said.

Trump, meanwhile, needs to show he can be trusted after the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol in which Trump supporters disrupted the certification of his 2020 loss to Biden and Trump's recent conviction in a hush money scheme, said Morris, of Lewiston, Ohio.

About 4 in 10 say they are likely to watch or listen to some or all of the debate live, while a similar share say they will watch or listen to clips later. Another 4 in 10, roughly, expect to consume commentary about the debate and candidate performance in the news or on social media. Republicans and Democrats are more likely than independents to be following debate coverage in some capacity.

Voters are still unhappy about their options. Biden and Trump are each entering the debate with low favorability ratings. About 6 in 10 U.S. adults say they have a very or somewhat unfavorable view of Biden,

and a similar number have a negative view of Trump.

Most Americans, 56%, say they are "very" or "somewhat" dissatisfied with Biden being the Democratic Party's likely nominee for president, and a similar majority are dissatisfied with Trump as the likely GOP nominee. The poll indicates that Republicans continue to be more satisfied with a re-nomination of Trump than Democrats are with an anticipated Biden re-nomination. Six in 10 Republicans are satisfied with Trump as a nominee; just 42% of Democrats say that about Biden.

About 3 in 10 U.S. adults are dissatisfied with both Trump and Biden as their party's likely nominees – with independents and Democrats being more likely than Republicans to be dissatisfied with both.

Republicans and Democrats are more likely to have a negative view of the opposing party's candidate than they are to have a positive view of their own.

About 9 in 10 Republicans have an unfavorable view of Biden, and about 9 in 10 Democrats have a negative view of Trump. By comparison, roughly 7 in 10 Democrats have a favorable view of Biden, and about 7 in 10 Republicans have a positive view of Trump.

About 4 in 10 U.S. adults approve of how Biden is handling his job as president, in line with where that number has stood for the past two years. Biden's approval rating among U.S. adults on handling the economy is similar, as is his handling of abortion policy. Only 3 in 10 approve of his approach to immigration.

"I do believe there has been some progress under Biden, but I believe it's Congress who is the one stalling on any of the policies that Biden wants to proceed with," said Jane Quan-Bell, 70, a school librarian from Chico, California, and a Democrat.

The conflict between the Israelis and Palestinians is an especially vulnerable spot for Biden. With only 26% of U.S. adults approving of his handling of the issue, it's well below his overall approval rating. Nearly 6 in 10 Democrats disapprove of his approach.

Baby cousin with cancer inspires girls to sew hospital gowns for sick kids across U.S. and Africa

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

FREEHOLD, N.J. (AP) — Fighting brain cancer, little Giada Demma was lying in her pediatric hospital bed, her tiny body virtually swimming in a drab green hospital gown.

Her cousin Giuliana Demma remembers looking at the 1-year-old and thinking how sad the scene was: a small child awash in an ugly gown several sizes too big for her.

"I thought to myself, 'Why does she have to wear this? Why can't she wear something nicer?'" Giuliana said.

Inspired by that moment, Giuliana Demma, 13, and her 11-year-old sister Audrina have sewn and donated more than 1,800 brightly colored, playfully patterned gowns to hospitalized children in 36 states. They've even sent them to Uganda, with three other African nations set to get them in the fall.

"I wanted to do something to help kids like (Giada) and give them hospital gowns that have nice patterns, that are colorful, that they can feel comfortable in while they're going through a rough time," Giuliana said.

Their family hired a seamstress to make a custom Disney princess gown for little Giada, who was hospitalized in 2017 and is doing well now. But as Giuliana grew over the next four or five years, she developed an interest in sewing, and remembered how lost her little cousin looked in a drab, ill-fitting gown years earlier.

Once Giuliana learned to sew, her cousin was no longer hospitalized. But she started making cheerful gowns for other sick kids. Her first creations were gowns with flamingos and Paris-themed patterns for a child with cancer that her aunt knew.

No child is ever charged for one of her gowns, which are paid for by donations of money and material. The Starbucks Foundation gave the project a \$3,000 grant this year. A hospital linen company, ImageFIRST in Clifton, New Jersey, cleans all the garments for free before they are sent to hospitals, and a women's group at a nearby housing development and a church youth group help out with about 40 volunteers cutting fabric for the girls.

Giuliana gets help from her sister, who also loves sewing. Audrina will pitch in when Giuliana has home-

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work to do, heading to the basement of their home in Freehold, New Jersey, not far from the Jersey Shore, that has been taken over by the sewing operation.

Audrina's specialty is sewing small pillows for young patients. They are sent with boxes of markers so that the recipients can color them as they like while they're in the hospital.

Audrina made 100 pillows as part of an effort to earn her Girl Scout Bronze award, packaged them and sent them off to hospitals. She makes seasonally themed pillows for St. Patrick's Day, Valentine's Day and other special times; last winter she made 100 snowman pillows.

They are often part of packages the girls create that include rubber duckies and other toys, and a local pediatric cancer charity, LIV Like a Unicorn, includes them in boxes they send to children battling cancer. The Minnesota charity Children's Surgery International took 60 of the gowns to hospitals in Uganda in February with more headed to Gambia, Liberia and Ethiopia in the fall.

Some of the recipients write back to thank the girls for the gowns and pillows.

"I like seeing the smiles on the kids' faces, even though they're going through such a hard time," said Audrina, who wants to be a veterinarian.

The girls have recently begun sewing zippers into brightly colored T-shirts to accommodate infusion ports for chemotherapy or other drugs that could allow young patients not to have to wear a gown at all while hospitalized.

Samantha DiSimone's son Vito was hospitalized in January in New York for a heart valve ailment at 9 months old. Hospital staff brought in a sealed package with a gown Giuliana made from material with a pattern from the "Cars" movie.

He broke out in a big smile when they unpackaged the garment.

"I was so emotional," Samantha DiSimone said. "You're in a hospital praying that your child will make it through the surgery, and to see him in the gown with a big smile on his face is an amazing thing."

Soft-spoken yet entirely at ease recounting her efforts, Giuliana has the poise and maturity of someone beyond her years, though she just graduated from middle school. She wants to be a cancer surgeon, and said she loves hearing from recipients of the gowns.

"I'm really happy I can help make a difference for them during this tough time," she said. "I want them to feel confident and know that they're an inspiration, they're loved and they're strong and they're brave. They can wear these gowns and have something to cheer them up."

Melissa Demma, Giada's mother, said the drive by her child's young cousins to make and give away gowns "blows me away and touches me each and every day."

"They're young girls and this is what they choose to do, spending their time helping others," she said. "If everyone could be like this, our world would be a better place. It makes me feel better for the future and what this world could be."

Border arrests fall more than 40% after Biden's halt to asylum processing, Homeland Security says

By ELLIOT SPAGAT and REBECCA SANTANA Associated Press

TUCSON, Arizona (AP) — Arrests for illegal border crossings have dropped more than 40% during the three weeks that asylum processing has been suspended, the Homeland Security Department said Wednesday.

The announcement comes just one day before President Joe Biden is set to debate former President and presumptive Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump in what is expected to be a crucial moment in the election campaign.

Biden is considered especially vulnerable with voters when it comes to immigration. Trump has hammered him repeatedly on border security by painting a picture of the border as out of control and migrants as a threat to the nation's security and economy.

Biden has both sought to crack down on new arrivals at the border and to offer new immigration pathways.

The restrictions he announced at the beginning of June cut off asylum access when arrivals at the border reached a certain number, infuriating immigration advocates who say the policy differs little from what

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Trump attempted. Then a few weeks later Biden announced a new program aimed at undocumented spouses of American citizens who had been in the country for a decade or more that could ultimately provide them a pathway to citizenship.

The figures announced Wednesday by the Department of Homeland Security show that the Border Patrol's average daily arrests over a seven-day period have fallen below 2,400, down more than 40% from before Biden's proclamation took effect June 5. That's still above the 1,500 mark needed to resume asylum processing, but Homeland Security says it marks the lowest number since Jan. 17, 2021, just before Biden took office.

Last week, Customs and Border Protection said in its monthly release of statistics that border arrests had fallen 25% since Biden's order took effect, indicating they have decreased much more since then.

The monthly data releases are a closely watched metric of border security and how many people are coming to the southern border of the U.S. The numbers reached a record high last December before falling roughly in half in January and staying in that range throughout the spring. A large part of that decrease was believed to be due to Mexican enforcement on its side of the border.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas visited the Tucson, Arizona, sector Wednesday. That sector has been the busiest corridor for illegal crossings during much of the last year. U.S. authorities say the seven-day daily average of arrests in the sector was just under 600 on Tuesday, down from just under 1,200 on June 2.

Mayorkas declared the new rule limiting asylum a success during his visit.

"These actions are changing the calculus for those considering crossing the border," the secretary told reporters.

Under the asylum suspension, which takes effect when daily arrests are above 2,500, anyone who expresses fear or an intention to seek asylum is screened by a U.S. asylum officer but at a higher standard than currently used. If they pass the screening, they can pursue more limited forms of humanitarian protection than asylum, including the U.N. Convention Against Torture.

Immigration advocates have sued to stop the restrictions.

What is the federal law at the center of the Supreme Court's latest abortion case?

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Supreme Court appears ready to rule that hospitals in Idaho may provide medically necessary abortions to stabilize patients at least for now, despite the state's strict abortion law, according to a copy of the opinion that was briefly posted on Wednesday to the court's website and obtained by Bloomberg News.

The document suggests that a 6-3 ruling from the court will reinstate a lower court's order to allow Idaho emergency rooms to provide abortions that save a woman's health as the broader legal case plays out.

The Justice Department had sued Idaho over its abortion law, which allows a woman to get an abortion only when her life — not her health — is at risk. Idaho doctors say they were unable to provide the stabilizing treatment the federal law requires and that is typically standard of care, prompting them to airlift at least a half-dozen pregnant patients to other states since Idaho's law took effect in January.

But attorneys for Idaho have said their state law allows for women in dire circumstances to get an abortion and is not in conflict with the federal law.

The federal law, called the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, or EMTALA, requires doctors to stabilize or treat any patient who shows up at an emergency room.

Here's a look at the history of EMTALA, what rights it provides patients and how a Supreme Court ruling might change that.

What protections does EMTALA provide patients at an ER? The law requires emergency rooms to offer a medical exam if you turn up at their facility. The law applies to nearly all emergency rooms — any that accept Medicare funding.

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Those emergency rooms are required to stabilize patients if they do have a medical emergency before discharging or transferring them. And if the ER doesn't have the resources or staff to properly treat that patient, staff members are required to arrange a medical transfer to another hospital, after they've confirmed the facility can accept the patient.

So, for example, if a pregnant woman shows up at an emergency room concerned that she is in labor but there is not an OB-GYN on staff who could deliver her baby, hospital staff cannot simply direct the woman to go elsewhere.

Why was this law created? Look to Chicago in the early 1980s.

Doctors at the city's public hospital were confronting a huge problem: Thousands of patients, many of them Black or Latino, were arriving in very bad condition — and they were sent there by private hospitals in the city that refused to treat them. Some were gunshot victims who hadn't been stabilized. Most of them did not have health insurance.

Chicago wasn't alone. Doctors working in public hospitals around the country reported similar issues. Media reports, including one of a pregnant woman who delivered a stillborn baby after being turned away by two hospitals because she didn't have insurance, intensified public pressure on politicians to act.

Congress drafted legislation with Republican Sen. David Durenberger of Minnesota saying at the time, "Americans, rich or poor, deserve access to quality health care. This question of access should be the government's responsibility at the federal, state, and local levels."

Then-President Ronald Reagan, a Republican, signed the bill into law in 1986.

What happens if a hospital turns away a patient? The hospital is investigated by the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services. If they find the hospital violated a patient's right to care, they can lose their Medicare funding, a vital source of revenue needed for most hospitals to keep their doors open.

Usually, however, the federal government issues fines when a hospital violates EMTALA. They can add up to hundreds of thousands of dollars.

Why did the Supreme Court look at the law? Since the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion, President Joe Biden, a Democrat, has repeatedly reminded hospitals that his administration considers an abortion part of the stabilizing care that EMTALA requires facilities to provide.

The Biden administration argues that Idaho's law prevents ER doctors from offering an abortion if a woman needs one in a medical emergency.

But Idaho's attorney general has pointed out that EMTALA also requires hospitals to consider the health of the "unborn child" in its treatment, too. Attorneys for Idaho have also said that there's no conflict between the state and federal law since Idaho allows doctors to perform an abortion if the woman's life is at stake.

What are the advocates saying? Anti-abortion advocates argue that state laws banning abortion can coexist with the federal law that requires hospitals to stabilize pregnant patients in an emergency.

The prominent anti-abortion group Susan B. Anthony Pro-Life America has called the lawsuit in Idaho a "PR stunt."

"The EMTALA case is based on the false premise that pregnant women cannot receive emergency care under pro-life laws," said Kelsey Pritchard, the group's state public affairs director after the case was heard earlier this year. "It is a clear fact that pregnant women can receive miscarriage care, ectopic pregnancy care and treatment in a medical emergency in all 50 states."

But many doctors say it's not as clear cut as anti-abortion advocates claim.

In rare cases, a woman may risk sepsis, hemorrhaging or reproductive organ loss if a troubled pregnancy is not terminated. But Idaho's state law forces a doctor to wait until the patient is close enough to death to end a pregnancy, doctors argue.

Doctors risk a minimum two-year imprisonment for providing an abortion if the woman's life is not at risk.

"There's nothing worse than feeling as a physician that you know what the patient needs and you can't get it for them," Dr. Jessica Kroll, the president of the Idaho American College of Emergency Physicians told reporters during a press conference early this month.

Pennsylvania bishop Sean Rowe elected new leader of Episcopal Church. He's the youngest since 1789

By PETER SMITH and DAVID CRARY Associated Press

Sean Rowe, a 49-year-old bishop from western Pennsylvania, on Wednesday became the youngest person ever elected as leader of the Episcopal Church.

He immediately issued a sobering call for the church, which has faced division and chronic membership loss, to confront an "existential crisis" that he compared with the steel industry collapse in his native Rust Belt.

Rowe, who leads two small dioceses along Lake Erie, will succeed Bishop Michael Curry, the first African American to hold the position, when Curry's nine-year term ends on Nov. 1. The presiding bishop serves as the denomination's chief pastor, president and CEO.

Rowe was elected on the first ballot in the House of Bishops, which convened behind closed doors Wednesday in the Episcopal cathedral in Louisville. Rowe received 89 votes, the required majority, with other votes widely dispersed among the other four candidates.

The House of Deputies, consisting of clergy and lay people, confirmed his election with 95% of the vote, followed by strong applause.

The only presiding bishop to take the post at a younger age than Rowe was the first one, William White, who was 41 when he served briefly in 1789 when there was no leadership election.

Rowe was 32 in May 2007, when he was elected bishop of the Diocese of Northwestern Pennsylvania, based in Erie. For almost 12 years, he was the youngest bishop in the Episcopal Church.

In 2019, he also began overseeing the Diocese of Western New York, based in Buffalo. The adjacent dioceses, with less than 10,000 members between them, have been collaborating on ministries in recent years.

He said that sort of collaboration is just one example of how the church needs to adapt to new realities.

"It's not too strong to say that we're facing an existential crisis," Rowe told the House of Deputies after his election. "It's not because our church is dying, or because we've lost the belief in the salvation of God in Jesus Christ, but because the world around us has changed and continues to change. It changes all the time. And God is calling us ever more deeply into the unknown."

The Episcopal Church is an offshoot of the Church of England in the United States and has been the spiritual home of many of the American founding fathers and U.S. presidents.

But as with other mainline Protestant denominations, membership in the Episcopal Church has been declining for decades. After peaking at 3.4 million in 1959, it had fallen to 1.9 million when Curry was elected leader in 2015 and dipped to under 1.6 million in 2022. Average Sunday church attendance for Episcopalians nationwide was 614,241 in 2015; by 2022 it had dropped to 372,952.

Rowe compared the church's challenges to the collapse of the steel industry, which had employed his grandparents, when he was growing up in Pennsylvania.

"I've been around to see things that I love go away," he said. "I watched everything that I had known evaporate."

He cited tensions within the denomination, without giving specifics, and called on members to be more gracious and forgiving toward each other. He called on them to turn their "anger at injustice instead of turning it inward on each other."

Still, he offered reassurance by quoting the late Catholic monk and author Thomas Merton — a favorite son of the convention's host state of Kentucky — about proceeding in faith despite uncertainty.

"You do not need to know precisely what is happening" to embrace challenges "with courage, faith, and hope," he said.

On a practical level, Rowe called for the church to avoid top-heavy structures and steer more of its funds and resources toward local and diocesan ministries.

Born in Sharon, Pennsylvania, Rowe graduated from nearby Grove City College in 1997 with a bachelor's degree in history.

He graduated from Virginia Theological Seminary in 2000, before returning to western Pennsylvania. The bishop is known for his research and work on organizational learning and adaptive performance in the church. He earned a doctorate in organizational learning and leadership at Gannon University in Erie in 2014.

After the election, Curry praised his successor in a news conference. He credited Rowe with both "a vision and a sense of the mechanics that will help us get there."

Curry, in opening remarks to the General Convention on Sunday, urged delegates to remain optimistic. "This Episcopal Church is stronger, more durable and has a future that God has decreed and that God has figured out," he said. "Don't you worry about this church. Don't you weep and don't you moan. Just roll up your sleeves and let's get to work. That's our future."

Throughout his ministry, Curry has been an outspoken leader on a range of challenging issues, including racial reconciliation, climate change, immigration policy, and LGBTQ+ equality. Among his favored causes: establishing ecumenical summer day camps for children, creating networks of day care providers, and encouraging large investments in urban neighborhoods.

In 2018, he became a global star with a stirring sermon at the widely televised royal wedding of Britain's Prince Harry and Meghan Markle.

Curry, 71, has battled a variety of health problems since May 2023, when he was hospitalized for treatment of internal bleeding and an irregular heartbeat. In March, doctors successfully surgically inserted a pacemaker as part of ongoing treatment.

Few have flood insurance to help recover from devastating Midwest storms

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and MARGERY A. BECK Associated Press

SOUTH SIOUX CITY, Neb. (AP) — Rick Satterwhite's house backs up to the Missouri River, but flood insurance hadn't really seemed necessary — until this week, when he had to pump water out of his basement after a round of destructive storms.

It's not the first time he's had to dry out his basement from floodwater, but bad storms are getting more frequent, he said. Satterwhite watched with dread Monday as the river came within 2 feet (61 centimeters) of his backdoor in Dakota City, Nebraska, after torrential rain produced record-setting Midwestern floods, destroying hundreds of properties.

"I talked to our agent today," Satterwhite said. "We're going to get flood insurance now."

Satterwhite is hardly alone. As the Midwest begins to recover, many won't have flood insurance, which must be purchased separately from homeowners insurance. Federal data shows that across the flooded states of Nebraska, South Dakota, Iowa and Minnesota, the government has only issued about 26,500 flood insurance policies combined.

Lack of insurance can burden homeowners with out-of-pocket repair costs and place more need on nonprofits and the government, said Emily Rogan, senior program officer at United Policyholders, an insurance consumers group.

In Iowa, for example, consulting firm Milliman estimates that in 22 of the counties covered by the governor's disaster proclamations, less than 1% of single-family homes have flood insurance from the government, which issues the vast majority of policies.

Many think flooding won't happen to them and is hardly worth the cost of another bill, according to Tom O'Meara, CEO of Independent Insurance Agents of Iowa. Iowa property insurance rates have skyrocketed in recent years after a series of expensive weather disasters, he said. Avoidance of flood insurance comes as climate change increases flood risk, creating conditions that produce wetter rainstorms.

And this past week's storms also badly flooded smaller rivers that don't frequently overflow, catching people off guard.

"I don't think people have a personal experience with floods like this very often," said Nathan Young, associate director of the Iowa Flood Center.

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In 2022, the average annual price of federal flood insurance was \$935. Federally-backed mortgages and many banks require flood insurance in high risk zones identified by the Federal Emergency Management Agency, but those maps don't consider flooding from all sources, like rain. FEMA's recently-updated pricing reflects more factors, and the agency says these prices – not flood maps – are the best indicator of risk.

In Iowa, hundreds are being helped at American Red Cross shelters. Workers ask people about their loved ones and basic needs. Then they help victims assess the damage and what can be done. This is when some people first realize they needed to buy a separate flood insurance policy, said Charles Blake, disaster services senior executive with the American Red Cross. People who do have policies are so thankful, he said.

"It gives you a leg up," Blake said.

Others like Ben Thomas consciously avoid flood insurance and assume risk themselves. For nearly two days, Thomas pumped water out of his basement on the north side of the Little Sioux River in Spencer, Iowa, moving between his house, his parents' riverfront property across the street and other neighbors.

"I don't believe that insurance is the answer to life's problems," he said. "I would say we made a very well informed decision, but in this case, we got burned."

While he doesn't regret his decision not to buy an expensive policy, he acknowledged residents might feel differently on the south side of the river, where some homes are unlivable with water on the main floor.

The National Flood Insurance Program covers up to \$250,000 for a building and offers policies to protect contents worth as much as \$100,000. That's not always enough to replace an entire destroyed house, and even though the private market is small, it provides policies that can fill the gap.

There is some help available for the uninsured. The federal government's disaster declaration for parts of the flooded area allows it to issue grants and low interest loans to help with temporary housing, some home repairs and essentials like cleaning supplies and baby formula.

"We can still help," said John Mills, a FEMA response team spokesperson, but flood insurance provides much more money.

FEMA's new pricing method increased rates for about three quarters of policy holders, but others saw decreases for the first time. Selling more policies is a struggle nationwide; slightly fewer people are buying them this year.

One problem is that FEMA is prohibited from discounting premiums for low-income residents, according to Rob Moore, director of flooding solutions at the Natural Resources Defense Council.

"Only Congress can fix that," he said.

And when rebuilding starts, that's the easiest time to mitigate the risk of the next flood, said Chad Berginnis, executive director of the Association of State Floodplain Managers.

"Instead of rebuilding the same way you did immediately, stop, think about what you can do to protect yourself," Berginnis said. "Nobody wants to elevate their house or do flood proofing projects on a sunny day."

A US journalist goes on trial in Russia on espionage charges that he and his employer deny

By KIRILL ZARUBIN and JIM HEINTZ Associated Press

YEKATERINBURG, Russia (AP) — Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich went on trial behind closed doors in Yekaterinburg on Wednesday, 15 months after his arrest in the Russian city on espionage charges that he, his employer and the U.S. government vehemently deny.

The 32-year-old journalist appeared in the court in a glass defendants' cage, his head shaved and wearing a black-and-blue plaid shirt. A yellow padlock latched the cage.

Authorities arrested Gershkovich on March 29, 2023, while on a reporting trip to Yekaterinburg, in the Ural Mountains, and claimed without offering any evidence that he was gathering secret information for the U.S.

Russia has signaled the possibility of a prisoner swap involving Gershkovich, but it says a verdict — which could take months — would have to come first. Even after a verdict, it still could take months or years.

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Journalists were allowed into the courtroom for a few minutes Wednesday before the proceedings were closed. Also briefly permitted in court were two consular officers from the U.S. Embassy in Moscow, according to the embassy. The White House said the officials were not able to speak with Gershkovich.

The hearing ended after about two hours, and the next one was scheduled for Aug. 13, court officials said. "Today our colleague Evan Gershkovich faced the Russian regime's shameful and illegitimate proceedings against him," said Almar Latour, Dow Jones CEO and publisher of the Journal, and Emma Tucker, its top editor.

"It's jarring to see him in yet another courtroom for a sham trial held in secret and based on fabricated accusations," the statement said. "While we are told he's doing well given the circumstances, Evan's wrongful detention continues to be a devastating assault on his freedom and his work and an unfathomable attack on the free press."

They noted he has already spent 455 days behind bars.

A top White House spokesman called the proceedings "nothing more than a sham trial."

"Evan has never been employed by the United States government. Evan is not a spy. Journalism is not a crime. And Evan should never have been detained in the first place," White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Wednesday. "Russia has failed to justify Evan's continued detention. He, like fellow American Paul Whelan, is simply being used as a bargaining chip."

The American-born son of immigrants from the USSR, Gershkovich is the first Western journalist arrested on espionage charges in post-Soviet Russia. The State Department has declared him "wrongfully detained," thereby committing the government to assertively seek his release.

The Journal has worked to keep the case in the public eye and it has become an issue in the months leading up to the U.S. presidential election.

After his arrest, Gershkovich was held in Moscow's notoriously dismal Lefortovo Prison. He has appeared healthy during court hearings in which his appeals for release have been rejected.

"Evan has displayed remarkable resilience and strength in the face of this grim situation," U.S. Ambassador Lynne Tracy said on the first anniversary of his arrest.

Gershkovich faces up to 20 years in prison if the court finds him guilty, which is almost certain. Russian courts convict more than 99% of the defendants who come before them, and prosecutors can appeal sentences that they regard as too lenient, and they even can appeal acquittals.

In addition, Russia's interpretation of what constitutes high crimes like espionage and treason is broad, with authorities often going after people who share publicly available information with foreigners and accusing them of divulging state secrets.

Paul Whelan, an American corporate security executive, was arrested in Moscow for espionage in 2018 and is serving a 16-year sentence.

Gershkovich's arrest came about a year after President Vladimir Putin pushed through laws that chilled journalists, criminalizing criticism of what the Kremlin calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine and statements seen as discrediting the military. Foreign journalists largely left after the laws' passage; many trickled back in subsequent months, but there were concerns about whether Russian authorities would act against them.

After he was detained, fears rose that Russia was targeting Americans as animosity between Moscow and Washington grew. Last year, Alsu Kurmasheva, a reporter with dual American-Russian citizenship for the U.S. government-funded Radio Liberty/Radio Free Europe, was arrested for alleged violation of the law requiring "foreign agents" to register.

Another dual national, Los Angeles resident Ksenia Karelina, is on trial, also in Yekaterinburg, on treason charges for allegedly raising money for a Ukrainian organization that supplied arms and ammunition to Kyiv. Several Western reporters have been forced to leave after Gershkovich's arrest because Russia refused to renew their visas.

With Gershkovich's trial being closed, few details of his case may become public. But the Russian Prosecutor General's office said this month that he is accused of "gathering secret information" on orders

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from the CIA about Uralvagonzavod, a plant about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Yekaterinburg that produces and repairs tanks and other military equipment.

Not only is Uralvagonzavod strategically sensitive, it's also been a nest of vehement pro-Putin sentiment where an inquisitive American could offend and alarm. In 2011, a plant manager, Igor Kholmanskikh, attracted national attention on Putin's annual call-in program by denouncing mass protests in Moscow. Putin later appointed him as his regional envoy and as a member of the National Security Council.

Asked about the trial Wednesday during a conference call with reporters, Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov refrained from comment, saying only "it's necessary to wait for the verdict."

A verdict in Gershkovich's case could be months away, because Russian trials often adjourn for weeks. The post-verdict prospects are mixed.

Although Russia-U.S. relations are troubled because of the conflict in Ukraine, the Kremlin and Washington did work out swaps in 2022 that freed WNBA star Brittney Griner, who was serving a 9 1/2-year sentence for cannabis possession. That exchange freed the highest-value Russian prisoner in the United States, arms dealer Viktor Bout.

The countries also traded Marine veteran Trevor Reed, serving nine years in Russia for assaulting a police officer, for Russian pilot, Konstantin Yaroshenko, who had been serving a 20-year prison sentence for conspiring to smuggle cocaine.

The U.S. may not hold another strong card like Bout to swap. Putin has alluded to interest in freeing Vadim Krasikov, a Russian imprisoned in Germany for assassinating a Chechen rebel leader in Berlin, but Germany's willingness to aid in a Russia-U.S. dispute is uncertain.

The Biden administration would also be sensitive to appearing to be giving away too much after substantial criticism for trading Bout, widely called "the Merchant of Death," for a sports figure.

But Biden may feel an incentive to secure Gershkovich's release because of boasts by former President Donald Trump, who is his main challenger in this year's election, that he can easily get the journalist freed. Putin "will do that for me, but not for anyone else," Trump claimed in May.

The Kremlin, however, says it has not been in touch with Trump, and Peskov has previously bristled at the attention given to a possible exchange, saying "these contacts must be carried out in total secrecy."

He reaffirmed that Wednesday, adding: "It can only be repeated that this issue likes silence."

Fed up with the UK Conservatives, some voters turn to the anti-immigration Reform party for answers

By SYLVIA HUI Associated Press

CLACTON-ON-SEA, England (AP) — Dorothy Carr is fed up with how things are run in her hometown. It's impossible to get a doctor's appointment through Britain's state-run health care system. Local buses have been canceled. There isn't enough public housing.

Like many others in Clacton-on-Sea — a town on England's southeast coast where many older, white voters used to staunchly support the governing Conservatives — the retiree feels a deep sense of disillusionment with the party. Instead, Carr says she is probably voting for the populist Reform UK party in next week's national election because she agrees with its core message: Record immigration has damaged Britain.

"This country's getting to be a joke, a complete joke," Carr said as she looked out to the sea from Clacton beach. "Nothing's like it used to be. There's just too many people. We can't handle it."

Britain is going to the polls to elect a new House of Commons at a time when public dissatisfaction is running high over a host of issues, from the high cost of living and a stagnating economy to a dysfunctional state health care system and crumbling infrastructure. That disillusionment has given the opposition Labour Party a significant lead in the polls — but it has also given oxygen to Reform and its leader Nigel Farage, who is drawing growing numbers of Conservative voters with his pledge to "take our country back."

Opponents have long accused Farage of fanning racist attitudes toward migrants and condemned what they call his scapegoat rhetoric. They argue that chronic underfunding of schools, hospitals and housing

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under successive governments on both left and right — particularly in poorer areas like Clacton — is the real problem, not migrants.

But many share Carr's views in Clacton, which recorded one of England's highest votes to leave the European Union during the 2016 Brexit referendum, when a key promise of the campaign to exit the bloc was that it would give the U.K. more control over its borders. But immigration figures have gone up, not down, post-Brexit.

That makes Clacton fertile ground for Farage, Britain's most divisive politician and one of the chief architects of Brexit, who is running to represent the town in Parliament. Polls show Farage, who has run for Parliament seven times but never won, has a comfortable lead in the constituency.

"We're getting poorer. Our productivity is going down. Our public services are failing. Britain is broken and the population explosion is the main reason why," Farage told the The Associated Press in an interview at his campaign office in Clacton on Friday.

He has dubbed this "the immigration election."

The latest official figures show that net migration — the number of people moving to the U.K. minus the number of those moving abroad — was 685,000 in 2023, slightly down from a record set in 2022. That's compared to levels of around 200,000 to 300,000 a year pre-pandemic.

The figures have been on an upward trend since the 1990s and climbed sharply in recent years, with a large influx of international workers, students and their dependents making up most of the numbers.

Still, the Migration Observatory at Oxford University says the U.K.'s foreign-born population stood at about 14% in 2022 — on a par with other high-income countries such as the United States and France, and much lower than, say, Australia or Canada.

"Nigel Farage is trying to weaponize the issue of immigration in quite a simple way," said Anand Menon, director of the U.K. In a Changing Europe think tank at King's College London.

Menon said while there is no doubt that high levels of immigration add extra pressure to housing, Farage's supporters ignore the economic benefits that migrants bring to key sectors including academia, technology and health and social care.

"Migration is really important to U.K. economic growth," he said. "In areas like social care, in particular, we are massively reliant on an immigrant workforce to do jobs that British people aren't willing to do. And of course our universities benefit hugely both intellectually and financially from having foreign students who pay a higher fee than domestic students."

But the immigration debate in Britain often focuses on the emotive issue of the much smaller number of people who cross the English Channel in small boats, many fleeing war, famine and human rights abuses to seek asylum. They numbered about 30,000 last year.

Reform wants the U.K. to leave the European Convention on Human Rights so that asylum-seekers can be deported without interventions from rights courts. The party says it wants to freeze all "nonessential immigration" and bar international students from bringing their families with them, in order, it says, to boost wages and protect "British culture and values."

While the party does not have widespread support and is competitive in only a handful of constituencies, its message clearly resonates strongly with some voters. Retired couple Sean and Janet Clancy, who say they had voted Conservative all their lives, won't do so this time because neither the Tories nor Labour are "concentrating on England and Great Britain anymore."

"I think it was a good move for Nigel Farage to come along. It's really shocked the other two parties, hasn't it? We're all for it, really," Janet Clancy said.

Polls suggest immigration is an important issue for about two in five British voters — but it is the No. 1 topic typically for older, male Conservative voters who backed Brexit, according to Keiran Pedley, director of politics at the pollster Ipsos U.K.

"They no longer trust the Conservatives on this. They don't support their record, so they're switching to Reform," Pedley said. "People could dispute the exact scale of Reform support, but (immigration) is definitely dividing the right in this election."

Wary of Farage's growing influence, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak has made cutting immigration and stopping asylum-seekers arriving in small boats a key pledge. Authorities have tightened rules for international students and workers, but Sunak's controversial solution to "stop the boats" — to send some migrants on a one-way trip to Rwanda as a deterrent — has been tied up in a series of legal challenges.

And while the Conservatives have urged voters to reject Farage's inflammatory rhetoric on immigration, critics point out that the Tories, too, have hardened their language and shifted their policies to the right in response to Reform.

During an election TV debate earlier this month, Scottish National Party leader Stephen Flynn drew applause from the audience when he said both the Conservatives — and Labour, to a lesser degree — were chasing Farage in a "race to the bottom on migration."

Natasha Osben, the Green Party candidate in Clacton, disputed the narrative that migrants are the reason local schools, hospitals and public housing are overstretched — noting the town does not have many migrants.

"People here are particularly angry because we've been left behind by the mainstream parties," she said. "Rather than putting their hands up and say, 'OK, we failed,' they've been happy to allow migration to become a scapegoat for all of those issues."

"I completely see how Nigel Farage has been able to opportunistically prey on people's valid frustration at Westminster establishments," she added. "He's come to a place where people are disillusioned, really disenfranchised, and they see him as the answer. But he's not the answer."

Gunfire, lawlessness and gang-like looters are preventing aid distribution in Gaza, an official says

By MENELAOS HADJICOSTIS Associated Press

LARNACA, Cyprus (AP) — Thousands of tons of food, medicines and other aid piled up on a beach in war-torn Gaza is not reaching those in need because of a dire security situation and lawlessness on the ground, a U.S. aid official said Wednesday.

Truck drivers are getting caught in the crossfire or have their cargo seized by marauding "gang-like" groups, said Doug Stropes, with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The sense of desperation gripping ordinary Palestinians is only compounded by the combination of Gaza being an active combat zone and a prevailing "general sense of lawlessness," Stropes told The Associated Press.

The security "that's needed for the humanitarians to work is what's really lacking right now," the USAID official added.

The remarks are the latest amid international criticism over Israel's campaign against Hamas as Gaza faces severe and widespread hunger. The eight-month war has largely cut off the flow of food, medicine and basic goods to Gaza, and people there are now totally dependent on aid.

The war was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in which the militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people and took about 250 hostage. Since then Israel's ground offensives and bombardments have killed more than 37,600 people in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

Over 80% of the territory's 2.3 million people have been displaced. Palestinians in Gaza are heavily reliant on U.N. aid, which has only trickled in after Israel in early May expanded its offensive into Rafah, Gaza's southernmost city, shutting down a major land crossing and slowing deliveries from another one.

Meanwhile, the U.N. food agency has suspended aid delivery from a U.S.-built pier linked to Gaza's coast-line due to security concerns after the Israeli military appeared to use the area in a June 8 hostage rescue.

The World Food Program is currently reviewing the security around the beach area so that deliveries can resume "very soon," Stropes said.

Since June 25, ships have delivered almost 7,000 metric tons (7,716 U.S. tons) of humanitarian assistance

from the Mediterranean island nation of Cyprus to Gaza via the pier — but only 1,000 metric tons (1,102 U.S. tons) have so far reached Palestinians. The rest is being stored on a stretch of beach by the pier, he said.

Scenes of desperate people randomly grabbing what they can off the trucks and the reported “gang-like activity” in which looting has become “more organized and systemic,” are undermining aid efforts, he added.

Still, aid donated by the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates and other European countries, continues to be shipped to Gaza from the Cypriot port of Larnaca to the pier.

On Wednesday, the U.S. navy ship MV Cape Trinity was being loaded with hundreds of pallets of aid carried onboard by trucks that drive through scanners inspected by both Cypriot and Israeli customs officials. U.S. military officials said that no contraband of any sort has so far been identified among the cargo.

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi warned on Wednesday during a visit to Athens that 96% of Gaza residents “are suffering from conditions that can’t be accepted humanitarily,” according to a report by the food analysis agency Integrated Food Security Phase Classification.

In Cyprus, Foreign Minister Constantinos Kombos acknowledged the difficulties of the maritime corridor — a complex “mega-project” from Larnaca, across the Mediterranean Sea to the pier in Gaza, untried before on this scale anywhere else.

“There is no alternative, inaction or inertia in this kind of situation is not an option,” Kombos told reporters.

U.S. Ambassador to Cyprus Julie Fisher said the pier was built because of the urgency of the need to get food and medicine into Gaza.

“Last month alone, the assistance that went through this maritime corridor, we know it reached a million Palestinians in Gaza,” Fisher said after talks with Kombos. “Undoubtedly, it has challenges. We also know that it is making a difference. We know we can do more.”

A signature Biden law aimed to boost renewable energy. It also helped a solar company reap billions

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As he campaigned for the presidency, Joe Biden promised to spend billions of dollars to “save the world” from climate change. One of the largest players in the solar industry was ready.

Officials, board members and major investors in First Solar, the largest domestic maker of solar panels, donated at least \$1.5 million to Biden’s successful 2020 bid for the White House. After he won, the company spent \$2.8 million more lobbying his administration and Congress, records show — an effort that included high-level meetings with top administration officials.

The strategy was a dramatic departure from the Arizona-based company’s posture under then-President Donald Trump, whom corporate officials publicly called out as hostile toward renewable energy. It has also paid massive dividends as First Solar became perhaps the biggest beneficiary from \$1 trillion in environmental spending enacted under the Inflation Reduction Act, which Biden signed into law in 2022 after it cleared Congress solely with Democratic votes.

Since then, First Solar’s stock price has doubled and its profits have soared thanks to new federal subsidies that could be worth up to \$10 billion over a decade. The success has delivered a massive windfall to a small group of Democratic donors who invested heavily in the company.

Ahead of what’s shaping up to be a tight race for the White House this year, Biden and fellow Democrats point to the legislation as an example of investing in alternative energy in ways that’ll help the environment and lift the economy. But First Solar offers an example of how that legislation, shaped by lobbyists and potentially influenced by a flood of campaign cash, can yield mammoth returns to the well-connected.

Angelo Fernández Hernández, a White House spokesperson, didn’t directly address First Solar’s efforts to curry favor with the Biden administration.

“President Biden has led and delivered on the most ambitious climate agenda in history,” Fernández Hernández said in a statement. “The White House regularly engages with industry leaders across all sectors, including clean energy manufacturers and gas and oil producers.”

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In a statement, First Solar CEO Mark Widmar said the new subsidies have helped build the company's domestic footprint. He took a swipe at some of First Solar's rivals with ties to China, which dominates the industry.

"Unlike others who routinely spend substantially more lobbying on behalf of Chinese companies that circumvent US laws and deepen strategic vulnerabilities, our interests lie in a diverse, competitive domestic solar manufacturing base supporting American jobs, economic value, and energy security," Widmar said.

Founded in 1999, First Solar went public in 2006, the year former Vice President Al Gore's movie "An Inconvenient Truth" helped raise consciousness about the threat of climate change. Company officials cultivated a constituency with Democrats during President Barack Obama's administration, which in turn subsidized them through billions of dollars in government-backed loans.

When the Biden administration started writing rules to implement the Democrats' new law, First Solar executives and lobbyists met at least four times in late 2022 and 2023 with administration officials, including John Podesta, who oversaw the measure's environmental provisions.

One of the more intimate gatherings was attended by Podesta, Widmar and Sloan, as well as First Solar's contract lobbyist, Claudia James, a friend of Podesta's who worked for decades at a lobbying firm run by Podesta's brother, records show.

The company will benefit from billions of dollars in lucrative tax credits for domestic clean energy manufacturers — a policy aimed at putting the U.S. on a more competitive footing with green energy giant China. Though intended to reward clean-energy businesses, the credits can be sold on the open market to companies that have little to do with fighting climate change.

Last December, First Solar agreed to sell roughly \$650 million of these credits to a tech company — providing a massive influx of cash, courtesy of the U.S. government.

Investors in the company, including a handful of major Democratic donors, have also benefited as First Solar's share price climbed.

Farhad "Fred" Ebrahimi was added to Forbes billionaires list in 2023 thanks to the skyrocketing value of his roughly 5% stake in First Solar, financial disclosures show. Ebrahimi, along with his wife and family, contributed at least \$1 million to Biden's election effort, according to campaign finance disclosures.

Democrats' investments in alternative energy companies haven't always panned out. The 2011 bankruptcy of Solyndra, which had received \$500 million in government-backed loans, became a rallying cry for Republicans.

It also drew a spotlight to First Solar, whose chairman was called to testify before the GOP-controlled House Oversight Committee, where he was grilled about strong-arm tactics used to secure \$2.4 billion in loans from the Obama administration for projects First Solar was involved in.

In an email turned over to House Republicans, a First Solar executive pressured the Department of Energy for the financing, suggesting that if it weren't approved, a Mesa, Arizona, factory Obama administration officials were eager to tout may not be built.

"A failure to receive DOE and U.S. government agency approvals" could "jeopardize construction" and "frankly, undermine the rationale for a new manufacturing center in Arizona," a former executive wrote to an administration official in 2011.

The loans were granted. The factory, however, was never completed.

First Solar spokesman Reuven Proenca said the decision was driven by a solar industry downturn and the company also shuttered a factory in Germany.

More recently, the company paid \$350 million in 2020 to settle a securities fraud lawsuit. The company denied wrongdoing, and the settlement, approved by the court, included no admission of liability.

Details included in the case file offer a damning portrait. Investors accused company officials of lying about the scope of a major manufacturing defect that caused panels to fail prematurely and eventually cost \$260 million to fix. By downplaying the extent of the problem, company executives were able to preserve First Solar's stock price, court papers say.

Meanwhile, some company officials dumped massive amounts of personally held stock, including \$427

million worth sold by company founder Mark Ahearn, court records state.

Proenca, the First Solar spokesman, said the company settled the case to "focus on driving the business forward."

Saipan, placid island setting for Assange's last battle, is briefly mobbed — and bemused by the fuss

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY and MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

SAIPAN, Northern Mariana Islands (AP) — It was a peculiar setting to the final act in a legal drama that has now spanned the globe: a rural Western Pacific island, where visitors are usually tourists — attracted by laid-back resorts, snorkeling, diving and golf — and the furthestmost reach of the United States.

When Julian Assange stepped from a car Wednesday to enter the Saipan courthouse, from which he would emerge hours later a free man, it was against a backdrop that could have adorned a travel brochure. Palm trees waved gently and verdant hills stood against a bright blue sky.

If the location felt bizarre to Assange, his sudden arrival — along with dozens of reporters from news outlets across the world — was equally startling to the 43,000 residents of the largest island and capital of the Northern Marianas, a territory of the United States. Fueled by tourism, Saipan's economy is struggling to rebound after the coronavirus pandemic and a devastating typhoon in 2018, with a declining number of direct flights to the island vexing the local travel industry.

Near the courthouse where Assange's spectacle unfolded, Hitomi Matagolai, a wedding planner, had come to windsurf off the beach because her business was slow.

"The hearing was not like, talk of the town here and people are not all that interested," she said. "People here have more important things to worry about, like their work, and that's what we talk about."

The so-called "Caribbean of the Western Pacific" has traditionally been a vacation spot for Japanese, Korean and Chinese tourists escaping wintry weather at home, said Mark Rabago, editor of the Saipan Tribune, a weekday newspaper.

"We haven't had this kind of publicity since the Miura case 15 years ago," Rabago said, referring to the case of businessperson Kazuyoshi Miura, who in 2008 was arrested in Saipan in connection with the death of his wife.

More than 15 years on, Assange's case was much different: with the expected outcome known in advance, the world's media converged on Saipan for theater, rather than surprises. But their arrival came unexpectedly for the low-key, rural island.

Accommodation providers, restaurants, law enforcement and tourism officials had "literally less than 24 hours" to prepare for the influx, said Christopher Concepcion, managing director of the Marianas Visitors Authority. Police officers were deployed to the airport and the courthouse as the WikiLeaks founder arrived there and hotels reported a surge in bookings as reporters scrambled to find places to stay.

"We're used to seeing a bunch of tourists from east Asia, but seeing international media descend on the island all at once, if you will, has been an interesting phenomenon," Concepcion said.

The tourism agency recorded a surge in the number of people visiting its website and social media platforms, and the tourism head said he hoped the balmy island setting for Assange's last legal hurdle would prompt interest from international visitors — particularly as the case emphasized the island's relative proximity to Australia.

"In show business, there's no such thing as bad publicity, right?" Concepcion added.

Central to Wednesday's events was a building not frequented by most tourists: the United States District Court for the Northern Mariana Islands, one of Saipan's newest and grandest buildings. Opened in 2020, the 36,000-square-foot (3,300-square-meter) courthouse looms over the downtown landscape. In front, tall, white pillars mark an elegant and imposing forecourt, while windows at the rear of the building show a commanding view of glittering azure sea.

Before the notorious murder extradition case in 2008, the last time Saipan made world news was when the Japanese emperor and empress visited sites of military significance in 2005, said Rabago of the Saipan

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Tribune. Steeped in WWII history, the island was the site of one of war's bloodiest battles in the Pacific, in which more than 50,000 Japanese and American soldiers and local civilians died.

Banzai Cliff became known as Suicide Cliff after the mass suicides of soldiers and civilians jumping off the cliff at the end of the Battle of Saipan in the summer of 1944, when Japan was headed toward World War II defeat. Emperor Akihito, who abdicated in 2019, prayed at the Banzai Cliff in 2005 when he made a rare foreign visit to pay tribute to the war dead.

On Wednesday afternoon, the cliff — a popular tourist site — was host to a group of four South Korean visitors who were outnumbered by workers mowing the grass. One man preparing to depart in his pickup truck said the case was probably the biggest event to happen on Saipan in decades — although he had mixed views on Assange himself.

It might have been the most unusual Wednesday in memory for some, but as Assange's plane took off hours after the hearing — reporters not far behind him — the familiar pace of things returned.

"It's back to normal beach resort life for us on Thursday," Concepcion said.

Still, he hoped the island had not seen its last of the Australian.

"When he has the time, we totally invite him to come back and enjoy a vacation here with his family," Concepcion said hopefully. His promise to Assange? "People tend to mind their own business and there's no paparazzi."

At least not usually.

A signature Biden law aimed to boost renewable energy. It also helped a solar company reap billions

By BRIAN SLODYSKO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As he campaigned for the presidency, Joe Biden promised to spend billions of dollars to "save the world" from climate change. One of the largest players in the solar industry was ready.

Executives, officials and major investors in First Solar, the largest domestic maker of solar panels, donated at least \$2 million to Democrats in 2020, including \$1.5 million to Biden's successful bid for the White House. After he won, the company spent \$2.8 million more lobbying his administration and Congress, records show — an effort that included high-level meetings with top administration officials.

The strategy was a dramatic departure from the Arizona-based company's posture under then-President Donald Trump, whom corporate officials publicly called out as hostile toward renewable energy. It has also paid massive dividends as First Solar became perhaps the biggest beneficiary of an estimated \$1 trillion in environmental spending enacted under the Inflation Reduction Act, a major piece of legislation Biden signed into law in 2022 after it cleared Congress solely with Democratic votes.

Since then, First Solar's stock price has doubled and its profits have soared thanks to new federal subsidies that could be worth as much as \$10 billion over a decade. The success has also delivered a massive windfall to a small group of Democratic donors who invested heavily in the company.

Big returns Ahead of what is shaping up to be a tight race for the White House this year, Biden and his fellow Democrats point to the sprawling legislation as an example of investing in alternative energy in ways that will help the environment and lift the economy. But First Solar offers an example of how the same piece of legislation, shaped by a team of lobbyists and potentially influenced by a flood of campaign cash, can yield mammoth returns for the well-connected.

First Solar's top lobbyist, Samantha Sloan, offered a revealing glimpse of the company's reach after a bill signing celebration.

"Those of us who've worked on this know that none of this would have been possible without the dedication and collaboration of a group of Congressional staffers who worked long hours" to ensure that the law would "deliver as intended," she posted on LinkedIn alongside a photo of herself beaming on the White House South Lawn.

Angelo Fernández Hernández, a White House spokesperson, did not directly address First Solar's efforts to curry favor with the Biden administration.

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"President Biden has led and delivered on the most ambitious climate agenda in history, restoring America's climate leadership at home and abroad," Fernández Hernández said in a statement. "The White House regularly engages with industry leaders across all sectors, including clean energy manufacturers and gas and oil producers."

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When the Biden administration started writing rules to implement the Democrats' new law, First Solar executives and lobbyists met at least four times in late 2022 and 2023 with administration officials, including John Podesta, who oversaw the measure's environmental provisions. One of the more intimate gatherings was attended by Podesta, Widmar and Sloan, as well as First Solar's contract lobbyist, Claudia James, an old friend of Podesta's who worked for decades at a lobbying firm run by Podesta's brother, Tony, records show.

Widmar and Sloan also attended a September 2022 celebration at the White House, according to records and social media posts, with Sloan praising the new law as "one of the most consequential pieces of legislation of our lifetimes."

A consequential lawThe law has been consequential for First Solar.

The company will benefit from billions of dollars in lucrative tax credits for domestic clean energy manufacturers — a policy aimed at putting the U.S. on a more competitive footing with green energy giant China. Though intended to reward clean energy businesses, the credits can also be sold on the open market to companies that have little to do with fighting climate change.

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Lukas T. Walton, an heir to the Walmart fortune, held a 4.9% interest in the company, according to financial disclosures from 2020. Walton donated \$360,000 to Biden's 2020 campaign, as well as \$100,000 to his 2021 inauguration, campaign finance records show.

A breakthroughFor a period, there were real doubts about whether Democrats could reach a consensus and approve the bill, which had stalled in the Senate in late 2021. A breakthrough came the following July when Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York and holdout Sen. Joe Manchin of West Virginia began secret negotiations in hopes of reviving it.

A day after the two lawmakers began meeting, Democratic megadonor Jim Simons, an enthusiastic backer of the party's green energy efforts, gave \$2.5 million to Schumer's super PAC, which spends tens of millions of dollars each election season supporting Senate Democrats.

Renaissance Technologies, a hedge fund founded by Simons, also started buying First Solar shares. The hedge fund purchased 60,000 shares between July, when Schumer was privately negotiating with

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Manchin, and September, when Biden held a celebration after signing the bill, financial filings show. The fund eventually increased its position to 1.5 million shares, which it sold in 2023 after the company's stock price shot up.

Simons, who died in May, was no ordinary donor. His family contributed \$25 million to Democrats in 2022, records show. And in the past, he had said that he helped Schumer craft legislation and called the New York Democrat as "a pretty good friend of mine," according to a 2020 oral history interview with the American Institute of Physics.

A spokesperson for Schumer said the Senate leader did not speak with Simons about the negotiations. "At Sen. Manchin's request no one outside of Sen. Schumer's staff or Sen. Manchin's staff was told about the negotiations," the spokesperson said. A Manchin spokesperson did not respond to a request for comment.

A representative for Renaissance Strategies said the hedge fund uses computer-based trading strategies that "do not involve human stock-picking."

Investments in alternative energy Democrats' investments in alternative energy companies have not always panned out. The 2011 bankruptcy of Solyndra, which had received a \$500 million government-backed loan, became a rallying cry for Republicans.

It also drew a spotlight to First Solar, whose chairman was called to testify before the GOP-controlled House Oversight Committee in 2012, when he was grilled about strong-arm tactics used to secure over \$2 billion in loans from the Obama administration for projects First Solar was involved with.

In an email turned over to House Republicans, a First Solar executive pressured the Department of Energy for the financing, suggesting that otherwise a Mesa, Arizona, factory that Obama administration officials were eager to tout may not be built.

"A failure to receive" approval could "jeopardize construction" and "frankly, undermine the rationale for a new manufacturing center in Arizona," the former executive wrote in 2011.

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More recently, the company paid \$350 million to settle a securities fraud lawsuit — an agreement announced shortly before the case was set to go to trial. The company denied wrongdoing and the settlement in 2020 included no admission of liability.

Details included in the case file offer a damning portrait. Investors accused company officials of lying about the scope of a defect that caused panels to fail prematurely, court records state. It was a decision, investors argued, driven by company executives' desire to preserve First Solar's stock price.

But while First Solar officials downplayed the extent of the problem, some of them dumped personally held stock, according to court records. Mark Ahearn, the company's founder and chairman, alone sold off more than \$427 million in shares before the extent of the defect was made public and the stock tumbled. The ordeal ultimately cost the company \$260 million to fix, court records state.

Proenca, the First Solar spokesman, said the company settled the case to "focus on driving the business forward."

Because First Solar is the biggest U.S.-based solar manufacturer, green energy advocates say Biden faces no other choice than subsidizing the company if he wants to meet his ambitious climate goals while becoming more competitive with China.

"Hopefully they've reformed," said Pat Parenteau, an emeritus professor at Vermont Law School and a senior fellow at the Environmental Law Center. "They may be an imperfect vehicle. But the reality is we desperately need them."

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Today in History: June 27

Hurricane Audrey makes deadly Gulf Coast landfall

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, June 27, the 179th day of 2024. There are 187 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On June 27, 1957, Hurricane Audrey slammed into coastal Louisiana and Texas as a Category 4 storm; the initial official death toll from the storm was placed at 390, although a variety of state, federal and local sources have estimated the number of fatalities at between 400 and 600.

Also on this date:

In 1844, Mormon leader Joseph Smith and his brother, Hyrum, were killed by a mob in Carthage, Illinois.

In 1880, author-lecturer Helen Keller, who lived most of her life without sight or hearing, was born in Tuscumbia, Alabama.

In 1942, the FBI announced the arrests of eight Nazi saboteurs put ashore in Florida and Long Island, New York. (All were tried and sentenced to death; six were executed while two were spared for turning themselves in and cooperating with U.S. authorities.)

In 1944, during World War II, American forces liberated the French port of Cherbourg (SHEHR'-boorg) from the Germans.

In 1950, the U.N. Security Council passed a resolution calling on member nations to help South Korea repel an invasion from the North.

In 1974, President Richard Nixon opened an official visit to the Soviet Union.

In 1991, Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, the first Black jurist to sit on the nation's highest court, announced his retirement.

In 2005, BTK serial killer Dennis Rader pleaded guilty to 10 murders that had spread fear across Wichita, Kansas, beginning in the 1970s.

In 2006, a constitutional amendment to ban desecration of the American flag died in a Senate cliffhanger, falling one vote short of the 67 needed to send it to states for ratification.

In 2011, former Illinois Gov. Rod Blagojevich (blah-GOY'-uh-vich) was convicted by a federal jury in Chicago on a wide range of corruption charges, including the allegation that he'd tried to sell or trade President Barack Obama's U.S. Senate seat. (Blagojevich was later sentenced to 14 years in prison; his sentence was commuted by President Donald Trump in February 2020.)

In 2016, the U.S. Supreme Court issued its strongest defense of abortion rights in a quarter-century, striking down Texas' widely replicated rules that sharply reduced abortion clinics.

In 2018, Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy, whose vote often decided cases on abortion, gay rights and other contentious issues, announced his retirement.

In 2022, the Supreme Court said a high school football coach who sought to kneel and pray on the field after games was protected by the Constitution. Opponents said the decision would open the door to "much more coercive prayer" in public schools.

Today's Birthdays: Former Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt is 86. Singer-musician Bruce Johnston (The Beach Boys) is 82. Fashion designer Norma Kamali is 79. Fashion designer Vera Wang is 75. Actor Julia Duffy is 73. Actor Isabelle Adjani is 69. Country singer Lorrie Morgan is 65. Writer-producer-director J.J. Abrams is 58. Former Sen. Kelly Ayotte (AY'-aht), R-N.H., is 56. Olympic gold and bronze medal figure skater Viktor Petrenko (peh-TREHN'-koh) is 55. Latin singer Draco Rosa is 55. TV personality Jo Frost ("Supernanny") is 54. Actor Tobey Maguire is 49. Reality TV star Khloe Kardashian (kar-DASH'-ee-uhn) is 40. Actor Drake Bell is 38. Actor Sam Claflin is 38. Actor India de Beaufort is 37. Actor Ed Westwick is 37. Actor Matthew Lewis (Harry Potter film series) is 35. Actor Madylin Sweeten ("Everybody Loves Raymond") is 33. Pop singer Lauren Jauregui (Fifth Harmony) is 28. Singer-songwriter H.E.R. is 27. Actor Chandler Riggs ("The Walking Dead") is 25.