

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 1 of 88

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- Harry Implement Ad](#)
- [2- Deer Camp Available for First-Time Youth Deer Hunters](#)
- [3- Julianna Kosel Gift Card Bridal Shower Ad](#)
- [4- SNAP application assistance coming to Groton](#)
- [5- Wait, what? You're struggling to lose weight?](#)
- [7 tips to consider](#)
- [7- Wright's quick thinking rescues boy at Groton Pool](#)
- [8- Obit: Marion Jensen](#)
- [9- Service Notice: Marlene Coon](#)
- [10- Bethesda Lutheran Church Ad](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: Farmer's fight against wetland designation gets boost from U.S. Supreme Court's Chevron ruling](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Ruling that dilutes regulatory power could ripple through farm and ranch country for years](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Fourth human case of bird flu diagnosed in Colorado dairy farm worker](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: Feds prepare for bird flu jump to people with vaccines, tests](#)
- [17- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- Subscription Form](#)
- [23- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [24- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

Thursday, July 4

Cancelled: Firecracker Couples Golf Tournament, Olive Grove Golf Course, 10 a.m.

CLOSED: Groton Swimming Pool

Friday, July 5

Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tri-tators, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.

Saturday, July 6

Common Cents Community Thrift Store is closed.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.



Sunday, July 7

Special Needs Swim, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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

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

United Methodist: Worship with communion: Conde at 8:30 a.m.; Groton at 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.

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

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

Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.

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Deer Camp Available for First-Time Youth Deer Hunters

PIERRE, S.D. – Four first-time deer hunters will have the opportunity to participate in a managed youth deer hunt and camp on Dec. 20-22 at Brown's Lodge and Hunting Ranch in Gettysburg, S.D.

Missouri River Corridor Youth Hunt in partnership with the South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is hosting a free event that is open to first-time youth deer hunters between the ages of 10 and 15. Participants must be accompanied by a parent or guardian.

Participants will learn how to select the best ammunition and firearm for deer hunting, improve shooting and firearm safety, sight in a firearm, field dress, and properly care for meat. The youth hunters will be provided meals, snacks, lodging, deer licenses, guns, ammunition, safety equipment, transportation to and from hunting, binoculars, and assistance with field processing.

"This youth hunt was created for kids who don't have – or have never had – the opportunity to hunt," said Potter County Conservation Officer Kendyll DeRouchey. "We want to teach the kids about firearm safety and ethical hunting while giving them the opportunity to harvest their first deer. It'll be a unique experience they'll remember forever."

Each hunter will be paired with a knowledgeable and experienced guide. Participation is limited to four hunters. Applicants will be selected based on application responses. Successful applicants are required to attend a pre-hunt orientation meeting on the evening of Dec. 20. Hunting will take place on Gettysburg-area land on Dec. 21-22.

For more information and to apply for this opportunity, contact Kendyll DeRouchey at 605.730.1568 or MRCYouth-Hunt@outlook.com. Application deadline is Aug. 15.

*Actual retail prices are set by dealer and may vary. Taxes are additional and vary by location. Freight and PDI charges may be additional and vary by dealer. Models subject to limited availability. Images may not reflect dealer inventory and/or unit specifications. † As rated by Kohler, all power levels are stated in gross horsepower at 3600 RPM per SAE J1940 as rated by engine manufacturer. †† As required by Kawasaki, horsepower tested in accordance with SAE J1995 and rated in accordance with SAE J2723 and certified by SAE International. **See operator's manual for warranty details and information. Certain restrictions apply. Kohler® is a registered trademark of Kohler Co. Kawasaki® is a registered trademark of KAWASAKI JUKOKYO KABUSHIKI KAISHA.
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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 3 of 88

PLEASE JOIN US IN
CELEBRATING

**DROP & GO GIFT CARD
BRIDAL SHOWER FOR**

*Julianna Kosel
& Isaac Mell*

Julianna is the daughter of Tina & the one & only "Paper Paul" Kosel
The wedding will take place in Florida on July 30th.

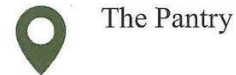
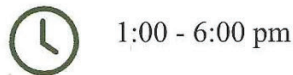
**GROTON SWIMMING POOL
DROP OFF TIMES ARE: 1-8:30 M-TH
1-8 FRI-SUN**

FROM: JUNE 27TH TO JULY 14TH

*The couple is also registered on Amazon if you prefer to send them a gift.

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- Gross monthly earned and unearned income.
- Out-of-pocket medical expenses totaling over \$35/month (**Only for those age 60+ and disabled households**).
- Amount of childcare Expenses.

Household Size	Max Gross Monthly Income
1	\$1580
2	\$2137
3	\$2694
4	\$3250
5	\$3807
6	\$4364
EACH ADDITIONAL MEMBER +\$557	



*This institution is an equal opportunity provider.

Wait, what? You're struggling to lose weight? 7 tips to consider

April 2, 2024

By Hannah Hakes, P.A.-C., M.S.



Press

By the time women turn 40, most either have tried to lose weight or are currently trying to lose weight. There is an excess of diet information out there that can lead to confusion and frustration. Despite the latest diet trends, the truth is, there is no magic formula. Each person is different, and therefore must figure out what works best for them. Although your friend or sister may have had excellent results on a particular diet, that does not mean you will see the same results. Still, there are actions we can all take that support improved weight loss and weight maintenance.

1. Consume less energy than you burn

The No. 1 most important factor for any weight-loss program, regardless of diet type, is creating an energy deficit, aka calorie deficit. The amount of energy consumed must be less than the amount of energy burned to lose weight. There are online calculators you can use to calculate your total daily energy expenditure (TDEE), such as TDEE Calculator. This gives you an idea of how many calories you need to consume to maintain your weight at your current activity level. You can create a calorie deficit by subtracting from this number. Typically, eating 500 calories less each day should result in about a 1-pound weight loss each week, but results can vary.

2. Track your factors

Regular self-monitoring is strongly associated with improved weight-loss outcomes. This includes regularly tracking food and caloric intake, physical activity, and body weight. Although this can be done with pen and paper, technology has made it easier to track with apps like MyFitnessPal and Lose It, which have large food databases. Programs like WW (formerly Weight Watchers) and Noom rely on tracking because regular tracking creates awareness of dietary and activity habits, which promotes positive lifestyle changes, goal setting and accountability.

3. Move more, sit less

Physical activity is an important component of weight loss and weight maintenance. According to the Department of Health and Human Services, adults should get at least 150 minutes of moderate aerobic activity or 75 minutes of vigorous aerobic activity a week. Luckily, these can be broken into segments that are more feasible for our schedules and still provide similar benefits. For example, breaking up a 30-minute workout into 10- to 15-minute intervals spaced 2 to 3 times throughout the day may be easier and more effective for some individuals. Try to incorporate muscle strengthening activities, such as resistance or weight training, two or more days a week. This increases lean muscle mass, which increases metabolism. High-intensity interval training (HIIT) — alternating short intervals of high-intensity exercise with lower intensity exercise or recovery periods — also has been associated with increasing metabolic burn, decreasing fat mass and promoting weight loss.

4. Take fiber to the next level

A high fiber intake has many benefits, including lowering blood pressure and cholesterol levels, but did you know it also enhances weight loss and helps you feel fuller faster? Women should consume 25 to 30 grams of fiber daily. It's likely you're not getting enough daily fiber, as most women in the United States only get about half this amount. Increase your fiber intake by avoiding or minimizing ultraprocessed foods and added sugars and increasing your consumption of vegetables and fruits, whole grains, and legumes.

5. Take breaks from eating

Time-restricted feeding, one form of intermittent fasting, consists of consuming your total daily calories within an 8- to 10-hour window or less. There have been a few small studies showing that restricting the eating window results in a reduction in daily caloric intake and can lead to modest weight loss and significant reduction in body fat percentage. Study participants also said they experienced improvements in sleep, less bedtime hunger and increased energy. Some individuals may find this easier to follow than chronic calorie restriction, which requires regular tracking and measuring. It's important to maintain healthy food choices, as the overall calorie load still matters.

6. Eat at home

Eating out at restaurants has become a regular occasion for many Americans, increasing steadily over the past several decades. Unfortunately, this does not bode well for our waistlines, as calorically dense foods and oversized portions easily lead to weight gain and make efforts for weight loss and weight maintenance more difficult. The new Mayo Clinic Press book *Cook Smart, Eat Well* offers a wealth of quick and easy recipes and meal prep tips for at-home cooking.

Although cooking and eating at home is usually a healthier option, there are some good restaurant tips to support your weight management goals:

Order one or two small plates or appetizers instead of an entree or split an entree with a friend or significant other.

Avoid extra calories from added sauces and dressings and ask for these items on the side for dipping instead.

Order foods baked, grilled or broiled instead of fried.

Opt for healthier sides such as a salad or veggie instead of fries or other starches.

Beware of the bread basket!

Check out the [CalorieKing](#) website which contains a database of fast food and restaurant chains and food and beverage items with calorie and nutritional content.

7. Frontload your calories

Lastly, there is an important old saying that goes, "Eat breakfast like a king, lunch like a prince and dinner like a pauper." Try eating a higher portion of your total daily calories earlier in the day and a significantly smaller portion of your daily calories for dinner. This has been associated with improved weight loss and decreased fat mass.

Wright's quick thinking rescues boy at Groton Pool

What began as a typical day at the Groton Pool transformed into a heroic display of skill and quick thinking, a reminder of the vital role lifeguards play in keeping the community safe.

It was a busy and warm in the afternoon on Tuesday, June 25. Three lifeguards surrounded the pool. One was watching the deep end. One was guarding the shallow end. And another, Talli Wright, was posted near the water slide.

Wright, in her second year of lifeguarding, was keeping watch and noticed a boy around six years old near the rope north of the slide. The water was up to his chin, but he was staying by the rope and wasn't doing anything he should have, she said.

His aunt came over and told him he needed to go more toward the shallower

side, "and I don't know if he was not listening or trying to get to the wall or whatever, but he happened to go a little deeper, and I think he kind of freaked out a bit," Wright said. "I think he should have still been able to touch, but he was kind of bobbing and, like, doggy paddling, saying, 'I need help.'"

Wright sprung into action, blowing her whistle to notify the other lifeguards and jumping in.

"The whole time he was over there, I kind of kept a close eye on him, and I should have told him to go back over," she said. "As soon as I saw him kind of bobbing up and down, I remember I stood up, and I was like, 'This is real.'"

"As soon as he said, 'I need help,' ... honestly, I kind of forgot. Like I don't even remember blowing my whistle," she added. "I remember being in the water, bringing him to the side. Otherwise, I kind of blacked out almost."

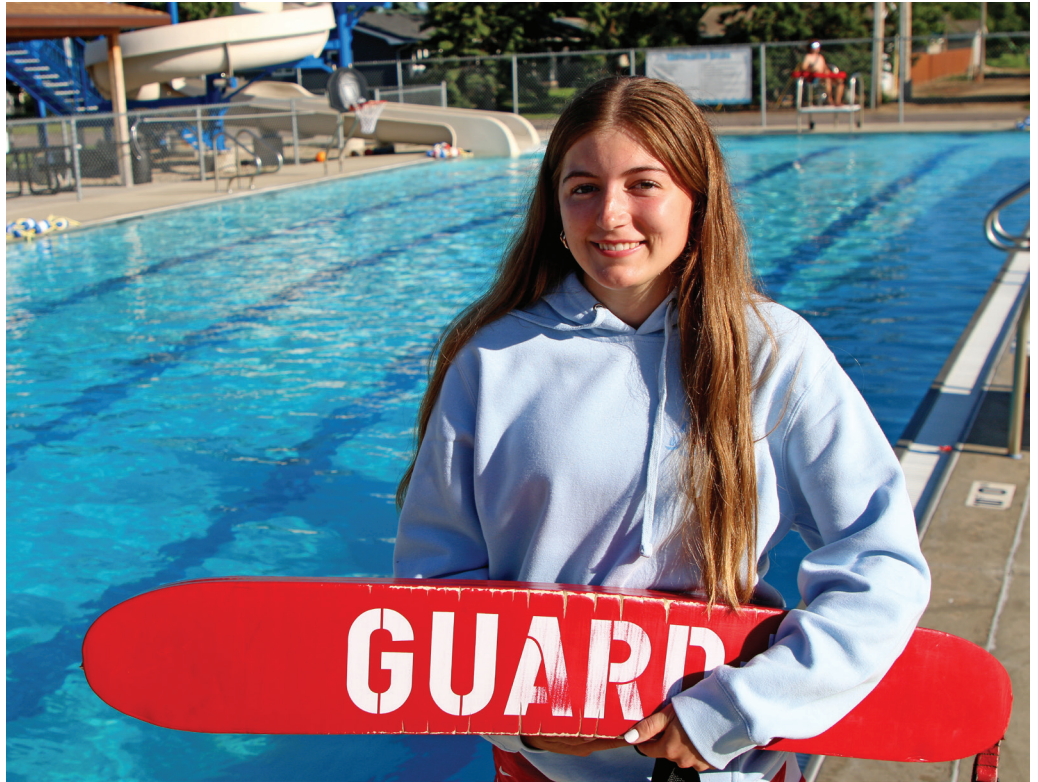
"I was definitely scared," Wright said. "Definitely nervous."

Wright remembers her heart beating "a million miles an hour, and I was kind of just, like, in disbelief, almost like, it didn't feel like what happened just happened," she said. "I was freaked out to say the least."

Wright, who is entering her junior year at Groton High School in the fall, recommends those at the pool know their limits.

"If you're not a strong swimmer, don't go where you know you shouldn't be," she said. "And always listen to the lifeguards. ...I would definitely say, know your limits on where you are."

In the blink of an eye, a Tuesday afternoon at the pool turned harrowing. And without the constant training and quick-thinking lifeguards, it could have ended up worse than it did.



Groton Swimming Pool lifeguard Talli Wright stands next to the deep end of the community pool on Tuesday, July 2, one week after a harrowing experience. (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

The Life of Marion Jensen



Memorial Services for Marion Howard Jensen, 104, of Conde, will be 10:30am on Saturday, July 20th, at the Conde United Methodist Church. Rev. Rob Moorlach will officiate. The family will have an Inurnment at a later date. Visitation will be held at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton, SD, on Friday, July 19th, from 5-7 pm with a prayer service starting at 7pm.

Marion (MH) was born on May 10, 1920, (the day after Mother's Day), northeast of Conde on the Jensen family farm, to Carl and Esther (Callsen) Jensen. He passed away June 18, 2024, (two days after Father's Day) at Prairie Heights Rehabilitation Healthcare in Aberdeen.

In his 104 years on this Earth, MH lived a full life. Especially in his later years, he enjoyed the re-telling of many adventures and experiences he encountered. In the spirit of his love of reminiscing and storytelling, below is a condensed story of MH's 104 years, one month and one day. Highlights of a life well lived.

He and his brother, Conrad (one year younger), were inseparable pranksters while they were growing up during the 1920s. They gained a neighborhood katzenjammer reputation for mischievousness like the 1920s

Katzenjammer Kids comic strip. In 1926, MH lost his birthday money when the Conde bank crashed. The following year, at age 7, he was entrusted to drive a team of horses with a wagon load of wheat from the family farm five miles to the Verdon elevator and return all by himself. By the time he was 10 years old he was driving his dad's 15-30 International tractor on steel wheels.

During the Dirty 30's, he walked or rode his pony to the Jensen Country School and struggled to find his way home on several occasions, due to the dust storms. In his Sophomore year, he began attending Conde High School, graduating in 1938. His employment and education during his teenage years included a summer delivering grasshopper poison to the local Conde farmers. That winter, he attended the National Youth Administration (NYA) Camp at Sand Lake. The next year, he attended auto body school in Fargo, ND, then trained to become a welder at Northern Normal and Industrial College (NSU), Aberdeen. He returned to the family homestead where he farmed with his father until his father's death in 1944 when MH was only 24. He then farmed with his brother, Conrad, for 2 years, at their Uncle Ray Callsen's farm east of Crandall.

MH was united in marriage with Betty Jean Hoops on June 30, 1946, at St. Paul Lutheran Church, Ferney. After a winter in Arizona, they moved their little farmhouse to East Broadway, Conde in 1948. Continuing to farm in the summers and doing odd jobs in the winters, he started his plumbing, heating and electrical business, Farm and Home Repair, in Conde. He continued to farm and operate Farm and Home Repair until his retirement in 1982.

MH was a member of the United Methodist Church in Conde, where, for decades, he served as a usher for Sunday services and funerals. His plumbing, heating and electrical skills were a valuable help to the church during an extensive remodeling of the old church structure in the early 1950's. He provided those same contracting skills for the current building when it was constructed in 1973-4.

He was passionate about the civic development of Conde, a community the Jensen family had a presence in dating back to 1889. He was a member of the Conde Civic Development Association for many years, as well as the Conde Volunteer Fire Department, Conde Masonic Lodge and Eastern Star. He was a founder of the Andover James Valley Threshing Association (2006 Honored Couple). Additionally, MH was a Conde School District Board Member, Conde City Council Member and Conde Farmers Elevator Board Member. The City of Conde employed him to operate and maintain the Conde

Water and Sewer system.

He enjoyed many years of hunting and fishing, including decades of annual treks to the Black Hills, hunting deer with several Conde community leaders and friends, as well as fall pheasant hunting. Together, MH and Betty loved to travel and did so all over North America. Favorite destinations were visits to his sister, Elaine, in Canada, his uncle, Herb, in Louisiana, and an extended trip to Alaska with their friends, Carl and Alice Hanson and Jim and Arlene Peterson.

At age 62, he retired and began his favorite pastime, restoring old tractors, which then turned in to attending auction sales. He also collected Edison cylinder and platter phonographs and many other interesting finds. He sold his tractor collection at auction (2002), and later held an additional auction sale at the Masonic Temple in Conde (which he owned at the time), selling many of his auction finds, as well as the Temple. In June, 2023, MH sold his remaining 11 buildings on 5 properties and their contents, in Conde, which were filled with treasures from his many years of picking.

In his later years, he enjoyed his weekly lunches and marathon Bridge games at the Conde Senior Center, which he generally referred to as the "senile center." His last visit was only about a month ago.

After his wife, Betty, passed away April of 2016, he continued to live in the red family house on East Broadway until January 2022, when, at age 101, he moved into a senior apartment at Derian Living in Aberdeen.

MH instilled a strong work ethic in his children, encouraging them to receive training beyond high school at a profession of their choice; however, "not plumbing". All four children graduated from post-secondary schools. None went into plumbing.

Celebrating his life are his sister, Louise (Delmar) Maeschen of Mitchell, SD; his children: Douglas (Marie) Jensen, Aberdeen, SD; Vicki Sullivan, Alexandria, VA; Randy Jensen, Sioux Falls, SD; and Steve (Mari) Jensen, Young America, MN. Eight grandchildren and 16 great-grandchildren: Kara Jensen (David) Zitnick, Maxfield and Julian, Eagan, MN; Karla Jensen, Hazel and Ruby, Littleton, CO; Carl (Kimberly) Jensen, Emma & Noah, Norman, OK; Ashley Sullivan-Freeman (Jon Freeman), Evelyn, Alexandria, VA; Benjamin Sullivan, Arlington, VA; Lyzzy (Wilbur) Cruz, Rosemari, Imogin, Adeline, Santiago, Washington, DC; Sarah (Jason) Hokkanen, Emily, Kyle, Kevin, New Hope, MN; and Cassie (Alex) MacDonald, Olivia, Colin, Young America, MN.

Preceding him in death are his parents, Carl and Esther, his wife, Betty, brother, Conrad, sister, Elaine Houghton and great granddaughter, Theodora Freeman.

The family requests memorials be made for the Conde Methodist Cemetery, %Plains Commerce Bank, PO Box 179, Conde, SD 57434.

Marlene Deloris Schuelke Ahern Coon



A Celebration of Life for Marlene Ahern Coon. 88, will be 2:00 p.m., Tuesday, July 9th at Paetznick-Garness Funeral Chapel, Groton. Rev. Craig Grams will officiate. Inurnment will follow in Union Cemetery, Groton.

Marlene passed away Saturday, March 16, 2024 at Alive Hospice in Nashville, TN.

A Walk of Faith

"For we walk by faith, not by sight"

II Corinthians 5:7



Ladies' Luncheon

Bethesda Lutheran Church, Bristol

Wednesday, July 10, 2024

By Bethesda Women of the ELCA

Silent Auction opens at 10:30

Speaker: Jeff Peterson, author of "It's Just Walking"
and a graduate of Bristol High School

Luncheon at Noon—Door Prizes

\$15.00 advance tickets please, call:

Kay Espeland 605-492-3507

Jane Goehring 605-290-1420

Or contact any WELCA member





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Farmer's fight against wetland designation gets boost from U.S. Supreme Court's Chevron ruling

Decision on federal agency authority gives new life to 13-year-old legal dispute

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 3, 2024 6:37 PM

A Fulton-area farmer will have a chance to argue that a federally designated wetland on his property is actually regular farm ground thanks to a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision.

The case will be one of the first in the nation to be re-examined as a result of *Loper Bright Enterprises vs. Raimondo*.

The ruling overturned what was known as the Chevron rule, which required courts to defer to federal agencies in their interpretation of ambiguous federal laws and the rules written to enforce them.

The decision could have far-reaching implications for the right of citizens or companies to challenge agency authority and conclusions in court. Many in the farm and ranch community see particularly pointed impacts in South Dakota, as agricultural operations are heavily influenced by federal rules on crop insurance, conservation payments or wetland determinations.

Arlen Foster first attempted to challenge federal authority in 2011.

The Hanson County farmer sued the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) over its determination that an area of his property was a wetland.

Farmers can't use drain tile or ditches to make federally designated wetlands more easily farmable without losing access to USDA supports like crop insurance. Wetlands created through human-led development — in other words, land that wasn't wet until something was done to nearby land to alter drainage patterns — can be drained without losing access to USDA programs.

The NRCS first determined that 0.8 acres on Foster's property are a wetland in 2004. In 2008, Foster asked for a review, and NRCS again ruled it a wetland in 2011.

At his initial hearing with an administrative law judge, Foster argued that the "puddle" on his property only shows up in very wet years, and only because his father planted a belt of trees to prevent erosion in 1936. It's the trees and not nature, he argues, that created what NRCS calls a wetland.

"At the time it was developed, the tree belt was a conservation measure encouraged by the then-recently established Soil Conservation Service, which is the Defendant agency now titled the Natural Resources Conservation Service," Foster's lawyers would later write in a complaint against the NRCS.

The puddle only appears briefly, Foster argues, and as a direct result of the tree belt's capture of snow and slowdown of other moisture. In half the years, the disputed spot and the area around it don't drain quickly enough for planting, taking about two acres on the 44-acre field out of production. That's why he wants to drain it.

In 2011, an administrative law judge said Foster hadn't presented proof that the ephemeral wetlands were created by the tree planting and not natural.

Foster hired experts and attempted to get a new determination in 2017 and 2020, hoping to add new information from his experts. But the NRCS declined to review its determination, citing a rule it had written on eligibility for a new determination.

That's when the conservative-leaning Pacific Legal Foundation took up Foster's cause. He filed a lawsuit and made it to the Eighth Circuit Court of Appeals, which deferred to NRCS under the Chevron rule.

"He was just trying to get them to look at the evidence, because the first time they told him there wasn't

any," said Jeffrey McCoy, the lawyer with the Pacific Legal Foundation who represents Foster.

After the Loper Bright decision's release, the Supreme Court listed Foster's case as one that would need a new hearing before the appeals court. It's one of at least nine cases that will reopen as a result of the decision. Foster had filed for a writ of certiorari at the Eighth Circuit, asking for a review of his case in light of the then-pending Loper Bright decision.

McCoy told South Dakota Searchlight that the court could finally decide if Foster is owed a chance at a new wetlands determination.

"It doesn't necessarily mean he's going to get his way," McCoy said.

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.

Ruling that dilutes regulatory power could ripple through farm and ranch country for years

Farmers, some farm groups have frequently clashed with USDA, EPA and others

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 3, 2024 6:36 PM

A recent ruling from the U.S. Supreme Court limiting the deference to regulators in courtroom disputes is likely to have widespread implications for farmers and ranchers in South Dakota.

The 6-3 decision in Loper Bright Enterprises vs. Raimondo overturned a 40-year precedent known as the Chevron doctrine. That doctrine directed courts to defer to federal agency expertise when the laws an agency is enforcing are ambiguous.

In practice, the doctrine created a high bar for individuals or companies who sought to challenge rules enacted by agencies like the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA), Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Department of Labor and others.

The case stemmed from a dispute over who ought to pay for the on-vessel monitoring required under a rule from the National Marine Fisheries Service. The rule sought to force commercial fishing operations to pay the person doing the monitoring; a group of commercial fishermen sued.

Chief Justice John Roberts wrote that the Chevron doctrine was misguided in its deference to agencies over courts.

"Congress expects courts to handle technical statutory questions," he wrote.

The ruling will be of particular interest to farmers, said South Dakota Farm Bureau President Scott VanderWal. Farmers frequently clash with federal agencies over rules that impact their land and operations.

"It's going to give people better standing to challenge these agencies when they don't agree with what they're doing," VanderWal said.

The case has already led to the reopening of a federal dispute over a wetlands determination between Hanson County farmer Arlen Foster and the USDA's Natural Resource Conservation Service.

Foster had asked the Supreme Court to review the case as Loper Bright was under discussion, and Foster's was among the cases sent back for review as a result.

A statement from South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley issued after the ruling's release praised the justices.

"For years, federal agencies and bureaucrats went too far in wielding authority over the states and citizens as Congress sat by and did nothing," said Jackley. "It is time to give that authority back to the courts, the states and our citizens."

Other officials and organizations decried the ruling as a step backward for public health, safety and welfare. In a dissent, Justice Elena Kagan said the decision struck a blow against "judicial humility" in favor of "judicial hubris" by establishing a standard that expects judges to second-guess the federal subject matter experts who spend years crafting rules based on the authority delegated to them by Congress.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 13 of 88

Connecticut Attorney General William Tong told CT Mirror that the ruling touches “all aspects of life ... everything that we touch and use in our lives that needs to be safe.”

He cited examples such as the Food and Drug Administration’s rules around the ingredients in baby food, the Federal Aviation Administration’s regulation of safety on airplanes and the EPA’s limitations on toxic chemicals known as PFAS.

Broader implications for South Dakota

The Loper Bright ruling is significant for agricultural areas, according to Jeffrey McCoy of the Pacific Legal Foundation. The foundation took up Foster’s case after 2020.

The Chevron rule meant that agencies would often rewrite or reinterpret regulatory policy based on which political party occupied the White House, McCoy said.

“One thing that overturning Chevron’s going to do is that there will be more consistency in regulations,” McCoy said.

McCoy anticipates an uptick in lawsuits over federal regulations as a result of the decision, but he also expects that farmers will feel less whiplash every four to eight years from the agencies that regulate them.

The Waters of the U.S. (WOTUS) rule from the EPA has been a particular concern for South Dakota farmers. It’s meant to protect ephemeral wetlands important to wildlife and the wider environment, but farm groups have called it overreach.

The rulemaking process began under former EPA Director Gina McCarthy, who served in the Obama administration. The Trump administration overturned the rule; the Biden administration moved to bring it back, though legal challenges have altered its scope.

The South Dakota Farmers Union and South Dakota Farm Bureau often find themselves on opposite sides of agriculture issues, but Farmers Union President Doug Sombke and VanderWal both had issues with WOTUS.

“That truly was an overreach by Gina McCarthy,” Sombke said.

That said, Sombke is concerned about the broader implications of Loper Bright. Specifically, he’s concerned about how it might play out in the context of Citizens United, a Supreme Court case that gave corporations the legal rights of individuals.

Fighting a federal regulation in court can be an expensive proposition, and Sombke suspects corporate interests and lobbyists will have far more success knocking down or reshaping regulations than workaday farmers.

“We are so influenced by our government, and our agencies are so influenced by lobbyists anymore,” Sombke said. “The question is, ‘How far do we want this to go?’”

That’s a point echoed by Jillian Linster, policy director for the nonprofit Center for Rural Affairs.

The center has long worked to connect rural Americans to the local arms of regulatory agencies to make sure they have a voice in rulemaking, she said. That’s because farmers rely so heavily on government programs to guard against the ravages of mother nature or to block off cropland for conservation without fear of financial insolvency.

“For us, it’s been really important to maintain those conversations,” Linster said.

A case like Arlen Foster’s – where the NRCS declined to give him another chance to make his case that a patch of his farm ground is not a wetland – or the Loper Bright case might seem egregious to the general public, Linster said. But the decision would grant the same right to challenge rules to large corporations and special interest groups that might seek to challenge rules the public – or even farmers, in the case of some conservation easement programs – might support.

The widespread impact of federal rulemaking, Linster said, can be obscured by individual disputes.

“People do tend to get caught up in the cases that they know about and think less about the broader implications.”

Rulemaking remains

Regulations do not creep up on the public, however, according to Michael B. Thompson, a law professor at the University of Sioux Falls.

Thompson said it's important to keep in mind that administrative rulemaking will remain an open and lengthy process that involves gathering public input and making adjustments to initial proposals.

One of the biggest changes, he expects, will take the form of longer timelines for regulations in situations where rules are challenged in court.

"If we're going to be in federal court arguing about a rule interpretation, federal courts move really, really slowly," Thompson said.

Todd Wilkinson, a lawyer, rancher and immediate past president of the National Cattlemen's Beef Association, agreed with that assessment. But he also reiterated the difficulties ranchers have had with regulatory whiplash.

In the past, he said, the rulemaking process seemed to pay little more than lip service to the concerns of those affected by any given rule. Wilkinson attributes that to politics.

"Depending on what the administration is, they'd be using the rulemaking process to build that administration's record," Wilkinson said.

Rulemakers might need to pay more attention to public comments in light of a decision that strengthens the right to challenge regulations, said Thompson.

"On the front end, an agency is going to be really careful in their drafting so they don't leave so many ambiguities that a court would have the opportunity to fill in," Thompson said.

Wilkinson would prefer that Congress pass laws that don't leave so much open to interpretation.

"Making Congress actually do their job and legislate and understand what they're passing, rather than giving all of this authority to a bunch of bureaucrats, to me, is a good thing," he said.

Linster, with the Center for Rural Affairs, has a more favorable view of those working for federal agencies, particularly the local representatives who interact with stakeholders.

She's concerned that agencies may be gun shy about using their authority to regulate for fear of lawsuits, and that a slowdown to the rulemaking process to address issues on individual farms or for specific interest groups could be detrimental to those who don't oppose the rules or might benefit from them.

But, she said, the only thing certain about Loper Bright is that its implications will play out for years to come.

"It's clear that overturning the Chevron doctrine is going to have a major impact on farm and ranch country," she said. "No one knows exactly what it's going to be."

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.

Fourth human case of bird flu diagnosed in Colorado dairy farm worker

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JULY 3, 2024 3:48 PM

WASHINGTON — Public health officials have diagnosed a Colorado farm worker with the country's fourth human case of highly pathogenic avian influenza, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention and the state's department of health reported Wednesday.

The Colorado case, the state's first this year related to spread from dairy cattle to humans, was reported after an adult man working on a farm in the northeast region of the state experienced conjunctivitis or pink eye.

The unidentified man, who has since recovered, was being monitored by public health officials after dairy

cattle on the farm he worked on tested positive for H5N1, or bird flu.

Dr. Rachel Herlihy, an epidemiologist with the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, wrote in a statement announcing the diagnosis that the "risk to most people remains low."

"Avian flu viruses are currently spreading among animals, but they are not adapted to spread from person to person," Herlihy wrote in the statement. "Right now, the most important thing to know is that people who have regular exposure to infected animals are at increased risk of infection and should take precautions when they have contact with sick animals."

Nationwide, the U.S. Department of Agriculture has reported bird flu in 139 dairy herds throughout a dozen states, including Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, New Mexico, North Carolina, Ohio, South Dakota, Texas and Wyoming.

In Colorado, there have been 27 dairy herds where at least one cow has tested positive for H5N1 since the outbreak began, according to data from the USDA.

The other three human cases reported this year include two dairy farm workers in Michigan and one in Texas. Two of the cases were pink eye, while one of the Michigan patients experienced mild respiratory symptoms.

The Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment wrote in its announcement Wednesday that 2022 was the last time a person within the state was diagnosed with bird flu. That time it was the result of infected poultry.

Bird flu continues to spread in the country's poultry flocks as well, though that industry has had much more time to adjust and get its workers used to wearing personal protective equipment than dairy farmers have.

More than 97 million poultry throughout 48 states have tested positive for H5N1 since this outbreak began in January 2022, according to reports from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Unlike dairy cows, which generally recover from bird flu, poultry flocks are culled after a diagnosis, making response and recovery to H5N1 vastly different.

The USDA began a voluntary pilot program for dairy farmers in late June that gives them the option to have their herd's bulk milk tanks tested. The program is designed to make it easier for farmers to transport their cows across state lines.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced Tuesday that it would direct \$176 million to Moderna to develop a vaccine that would inoculate people against the virus.

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

Feds prepare for bird flu jump to people with vaccines, tests

BY: JARED STRONG, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - JULY 3, 2024 6:00 AM

Federal health officials have commissioned Moderna to develop a vaccine to protect people from an avian influenza that has been circulating in dairy cattle in recent months.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services officials said Tuesday the agency would devote about \$176 million to the effort, with the hope that final clinical trials might commence next year.

That schedule could be accelerated if "we're starting to get extraordinarily concerned about additional human cases, severity of human cases, human-to-human transmission," said Dawn O'Connell, the department's assistant secretary for preparedness and response.

It's unclear whether that will happen.

Highly pathogenic avian influenza has been widespread in wild birds in the past two years, has been sporadically devastating for U.S. poultry flocks, and has this year been infecting cows at an alarming pace and spreading to different states.

Four infections of people who worked closely with infected poultry and cattle have been documented in that time: one poultry worker in 2022 and three dairy workers this year.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 16 of 88

All of those infections resulted in minor symptoms, and the people recovered. However, the latest infected person showed signs of respiratory illness.

The fear is that a mutation in the virus might better enable it to infect human respiratory tissue and easily spread person to person, which could ignite a human pandemic. Key to preventing that is keeping the virus out of people, where it can commingle with other viruses and share bits of genetic material.

Dairy precautions

Research has shown that the virus likely transmitted from wild birds to Texas dairy cattle as early as December. It spread undercover for months until two veterinarians identified it as the culprit in sick cows in late March.

Since then the virus has been found in cattle in at least 137 dairy herds in 12 states.

It is believed to have spread between states via the transportation of sick cows. From there, the virus has likely been carried between herds by people and their equipment.

Within the individual dairies, the virus can transmit between cows by contaminating equipment that is used for milking the animals. Lab tests have shown that the virus primarily dwells within cows' mammary glands and that the amount of the virus in their milk is considerable.

It's not yet clear how to feasibly prevent the spread of the virus within herds, said Eric Deeble, acting senior advisor for H5N1 response for the department. H5N1 is the flu subtype that is currently circulating in birds and cattle.

"There are a variety of USDA and other researchers that are currently working on that problem," he said in a Tuesday call with reporters.

Deeble said a vaccine for cattle could be effective at halting the virus but that one wouldn't be available soon.

Meantime, federal officials have monitored nearly 800 workers at infected dairy herds for illness and have tested more than 50 of them for bird flu. They have advised dairies to shield their workers with masks and other protective clothing and offered to pay for it.

Antiviral drugs might also be used to prevent infections among workers, said Dr. Nirav Shah, principal deputy director of the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But that will likely require voluntary participation from those workers.

"If H5 is not perceived as a pressing threat among farm workers — and I'm not speculating as to whether it is or not — but if that is the case, then uptake may not be robust," he said.

More testing capacity

Shah said there are sufficient numbers of avian flu tests for people in the public health system — about 750,000 — and that another 1.2 million might be available in the next several months.

Further, the CDC has worked with more than a dozen companies since last year to help them develop tests that could be produced and deployed if the virus becomes readily transmissible between people.

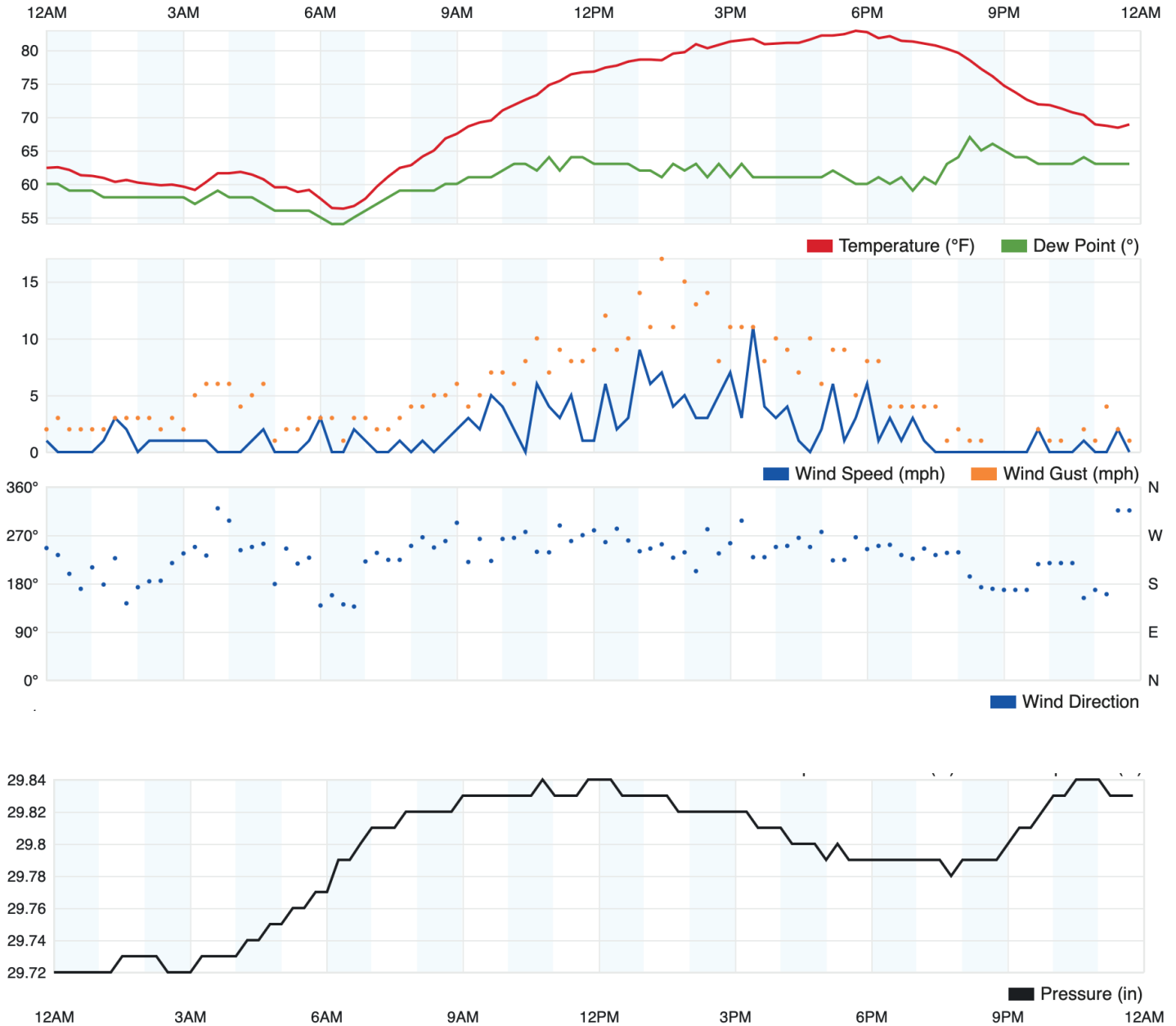
"We need to stay prepared for the possibility of an expansion of the H5N1 outbreak in humans," Shah said.

Jared Strong is the senior reporter for the Iowa Capital Dispatch. He has written about Iowans and the important issues that affect them for more than 15 years, previously for the Carroll Times Herald and the Des Moines Register. His investigative work exposing police misconduct has notched several state and national awards. He is a longtime trustee of the Iowa Freedom of Information Council, which fights for open records and open government. He is a lifelong Iowan and has lived mostly in rural western parts of the state.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 17 of 88

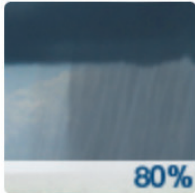
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 18 of 88

Independence
Day



High: 71 °F

Showers

Thursday
Night



Low: 58 °F

Chance
T-storms

Friday



High: 78 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Slight
Chance
T-storms

Friday Night



Low: 57 °F

Partly Cloudy
then Slight
Chance
T-storms

Saturday



High: 80 °F

Chance
T-storms

Morning

Temps: upper 50s
to low 60s

Chance of rain:
60-80%

More likely over
eastern SD/west
central MN

Afternoon

Temps: mid 60s to
mid 70s

Chance of rain:
50-70%

Rain expected
across entire area

Evening

Temps: low to mid
60s

Chance of rain:
30-40%

More likely over
eastern SD/west
central MN

A few weak thunderstorms are possible



Cool and wet conditions are expected today with highs in the mid 60s to mid 70s. While showers will produce most of the rain, a few weak thunderstorms are possible throughout the day. Due to the slow moving nature of the showers, there will be brief periods of heavy rain.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 19 of 88

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 83 °F at 5:07 PM

Low Temp: 56 °F at 6:22 AM

Wind: 17 mph at 1:24 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 105 in 1988

Record Low: 40 in 1967

Average High: 84

Average Low: 59

Average Precip in June.: 0.47

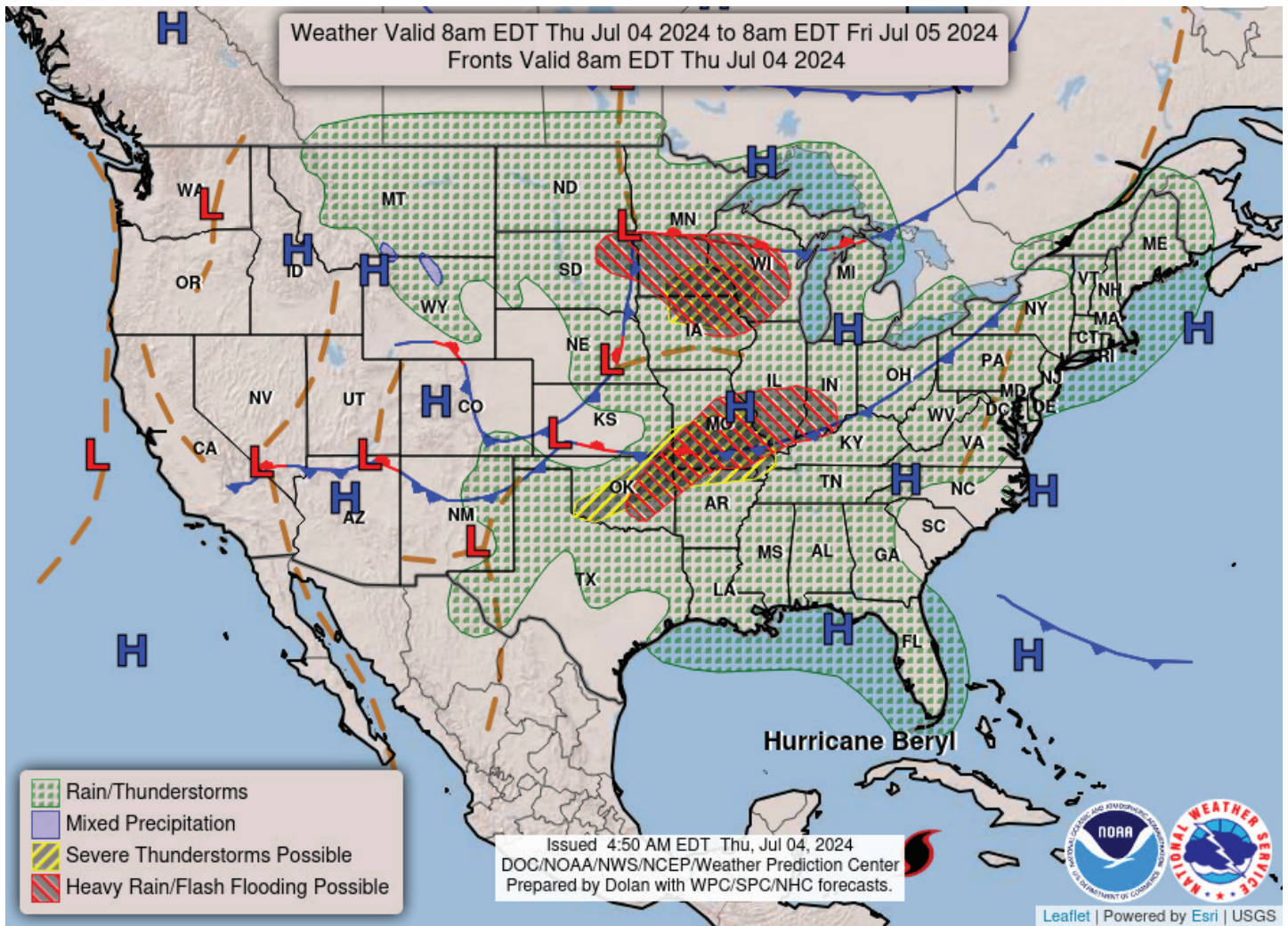
Precip to date in July: 0.83

Average Precip to date: 11.48

Precip Year to Date: 11.88

Sunset Tonight: 9:25:30 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:49:10 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 20 of 88

Today in Weather History

July 4, 1936: Several record highs were seen on this day, including; 113 degrees 4NW of Gann Valley; 111 in Murdo; 107 in Castlewood; 106 in Clark and Highmore; 105 near Onida; 104 in Faulkton and Miller; 103 degrees 6SE of McIntosh; 101 in Pollock.

July 4, 1988: Several record highs were set on this day, including; 103 degrees in Ipswich and Britton; 102 in Webster; 101 in Summit and Artichoke Lake, MN; 99 in Leola; 98 degrees in Clear Lake and Waubay.

1776: Thomas Jefferson purchased a thermometer from a local merchant before signing the Declaration of Independence. According to his weather memorandum book, at 1 PM it was cloudy and 76 degrees.

1911 - The northeastern U.S. experienced sweltering 100 degree heat. The temperature soared to 105 degrees at Vernon, VT, and North Bridgton ME, and to 106 degrees at Nashua NH, to establish all-time records for those three states. Afternoon highs of 104 at Boston, MA, 104 at Albany, NY, and 103 at Portland, ME, were all-time records for those three cities. (The Weather Channel)

1956 - A world record for the most rain in one minute was set at Unionville, MD, with a downpour of 1.23 inches. (The Weather Channel) (The National Severe Storms Forecast Center)

1987 - Thunderstorms around the country provided extra fireworks for Independence Day. Thunderstorms produced wind gusts to 82 mph at Clearwater, KS, eight inches of rain in four hours at Menno SD, and three inches of rain in just fifteen minutes at Austin, KY. Morning thunderstorms drenched Oneonta AL with 8.6 inches of rain, their greatest 24 hour total in thirty years of records. The heavy rain caused mudslides and serious flooding, claiming two lives. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced heavy rain over the Central Gulf Coast Region for the second day in a row. Monroe, LA, was deluged with 3.75 inches in two hours. Aberdeen and Rapid City, SD, reported record high temperatures for the date, with readings of 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Independence Day was hot as a firecracker across parts of the country. Nineteen cities, mostly in the north central U.S., reported record high temperatures for the date, including Williston ND with a reading of 107 degrees. In the southwestern U.S., highs of 93 at Alamosa, CO, 114 at Tucson, AZ, and 118 at Phoenix, AZ, equalled all-time records for those locations. (The National Weather Summary)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 21 of 88

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

CAREFUL: GOD AT WORK

One morning a man, seeking direction in his life, was going through his mail. He had prayed earnestly for direction from God, but it never seemed to come. On this day, however, things changed.

Tucked away in the pile of mail he was sorting through was a magazine that was addressed to his neighbor. He looked at the cover and saw an article entitled, "The Needs of the Congo." His curiosity got the best of him so he opened the magazine and read the article. It touched his heart deeply.

For days he prayed about its contents and the opportunities and challenges it represented. Finally, one day he declared, "My search is over." He went to the Congo, lost himself in his work and became a great medical missionary and author. Ultimately he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his work.

Albert Schweitzer was a theologian, philosopher, organist, and physician. But one day he became a medical missionary where he lost himself in God's will doing God's work among the lost and dying.

Was it an accident that the mailman put the magazine in the wrong mailbox? Of course not. He too was doing God's work. Although some may consider it an "accident" it was actually "an act of God" to get his attention.

Prayer: How marvelous are the different ways, Lord, You use to get our attention to do Your will. Help us to be alert to see and hear what You have for us to do. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And we know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Romans 8:28



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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 22 of 88

The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 23 of 88



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.02.24

4 8 19 31 45 11

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$162,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.03.24

6 7 37 46 49 10

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$4,440,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.03.24

10 11 23 35 42 16

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 44 Mins 35
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.03.24

4 7 14 25 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$26,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 44
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.03.24

19 22 38 55 61 23

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.03.24

2 26 33 55 57 22

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 24 of 88

Upcoming Groton Events

- 07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center
- 07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day
- 07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm
- 07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church
- 07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
- 07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm
- 08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center
- 08/02/2024 Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
- 08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm
- 08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament
- 08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm
- 09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party & Tour of Homes with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close

News from the Associated Press

Police fatally shoot suspect allegedly holding hostages at South Dakota gas station

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota police say a deputy fatally shot an armed suspect Wednesday who allegedly was holding several employees hostage at a Sioux Falls gas station.

A Sioux Falls police officer was by the gas station early Wednesday when someone began firing at the officer, who fired back, Sioux Falls Police Chief Jon Thum told the Argus Leader. Police received an emergency call about the shooting at roughly the same time.

Backup arrived, Thum said, and a Minnehaha County Sheriff's deputy and SWAT officer used a sniper rifle to shoot the suspect.

Law enforcement found a hostage hiding in a bathroom and another who had been near the suspect, Thum said. Another hostage had already fled.

No law enforcement or hostages were injured, according to Thum and South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley.

Medics then checked on the suspect, who was pronounced dead at the scene, Thum said.

Calls by The Associated Press to the gas station Wednesday were not answered.

The South Dakota attorney general's Division of Criminal Investigation is reviewing the shooting and is expected to release a report in roughly a month.

Thum did not provide details on the suspect's identity and did not say whether the deputy involved in the shooting has been suspended. An Associated Press voicemail left with the Minnehaha County sheriff was not immediately returned Wednesday.

High school journalism removed from Opportunity Scholarship

By GRETA GOEDE/South Dakota News Watch South Dakota News Watch

High school journalism courses no longer count toward South Dakota's general merit-based scholarship, though schools can seek a waiver, and teachers in the state haven't been told why.

"There was never any knowledge of this being an issue, and the school district didn't know about it either, as far as I know," said Katie Kroeze, journalism teacher and adviser for the school newspaper at Sioux Falls Lincoln High School. "So we weren't even given the option to voice our opinions before it was passed."

The South Dakota Board of Regents (SDBOR), which governs the state's six public universities, provides up to \$7,500 over four years for students who attend an eligible institution through the South Dakota Opportunity Scholarship.

Eligibility is based on curriculum requirements and ACT scores. As of fall 2023, 3,515 students in South Dakota were receiving the scholarship, said Nathan Lukkes, executive director for the SDBOR.

Regents: Journalism not included because of content standards

The South Dakota Department of Education (SDDOE) and the SDBOR work together to identify which courses apply toward the scholarship requirements, said Lukkes.

"They look at the content standards of the course to determine what qualifies and what doesn't," he said.

In the past, journalism was included in the English unit but was removed because of how the course varied from school district to school district, and the courses didn't have the content standards and couldn't be "holistically" verified, Lukkes said.

"(In) some instances, journalism was an extracurricular activity versus an actual course," he said. "So there really weren't content standards from a course curriculum standpoint to align or compare it to."

Journalism programs were given no warning

Before the decision was made, high school journalism teachers and program heads were given no information about this happening, Kroeze said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 26 of 88

Her department thought the decision was based on the rigor of the program, but the SDBOR never reached out to them or looked at their curriculum, she said.

"We were never given the option to back up what the rigor is of our journalism program," she said. "I was never (sought) out to ask, 'What does my curriculum look like?' or, 'How rigorous is it?'"

Impact on high school, college journalism

Taking journalism out as an elective option for the Opportunity Scholarship might impact the number of students that take the course, Kroeze said.

"It may lower the numbers for the courses. I am lucky I'm at a larger school that has a very strong journalism program, where it might not be as impacted as maybe a smaller school district that (is) already struggling getting kids to take newspaper or yearbook," she said.

Some students will sign up for journalism just for the credit and become interested in it after taking the course and consider it as a possible career path. But this decision will lower the chances of that happening, Kroeze said

"Journalism is very important in our state to ensure that we have good journalists, good programs that are preparing them to be good journalists and having those opportunities for those kids that are interested in that career path," she said.

Journalism courses may still be accepted

Schools can apply to get their journalism courses accepted as a qualifying course for the Opportunity Scholarship by applying for a waiver through the SDBOR.

"If a school district does, in fact, have a journalism course that meets the English content standards, they can apply for a waiver and then get the course counted towards one of the one of the English blocks. Otherwise it would default to an elective," Lukkes said.

The school district needs to contact the Department of Education to get the course approved, as it must be an actual high school course and not an extracurricular activity. This would fall under the same guidelines as oral interpretation, Shuree Mortenson, director of communication for SDBOR, said in an email.

The district must be granted a substitution for the required high school unit offerings waiver by the DOE to be eligible for a writing credit, she said.

But this may not be as easy as it seems.

Kroeze said she has looked for the forms on the Board of Regents website but had little success.

"It's very difficult to find what forms need to be filled out, or they're very, very detailed and take a lot of time," she said.

Lincoln High School's plan going forward

Kroeze plans to contact the SDBOR to get the school's journalism program back to counting toward the Opportunity Scholarship.

"The best decision here is probably just to go directly to the Board of Regents and then just reaching out to journalism professors in the state schools of South Dakota and seeing if there's anything they can do to help," she said.

Kroeze said journalism is a great option for an English elective and should still be included in the English block because it includes all different areas of the curriculum.

"There's the writing element: they're brainstorming, they're developing a story, they're editing the story, they're revising it over and over and over. And then not only is it written, it's also published for people to see," she said.

Students also learn interviewing and research skills during the journalism courses and learn about different issues that are going on in their community, Kroeze said.

"All of those things are incorporated into the standards that we have in South Dakota English standards and writing standards. And so it really is disappointing to me that journalism isn't seen as a course that could live up to those standards of being an English (unit)," she said.

This story was originally published by South Dakota News Watch and distributed through a partnership with The Associated Press.

The Latest | The UK goes to the polls in a national election with results expected early Friday

By The Associated Press undefined

Voters in the U.K. are casting their ballots in a national election to choose the 650 lawmakers who will sit in Parliament for the next five years. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak surprised his own party on May 22 when he called the election, which could have taken place as late as January 2025.

After 14 years in power under five different prime ministers, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservatives are widely expected to lose to the main opposition party, the left-of-center Labour Party led by Keir Starmer. Sunak's party has struggled to reassure voters on issues including the rising cost of living and a crisis in the National Health Service.

Polls opened at 7 a.m. and will close at 10 p.m. on Thursday night. Even before in-person voting began, hundreds of thousands of people had cast their ballot by postal vote.

An exit poll commissioned by the main U.K. broadcasters will be published as soon as the polls close, giving an indication of the likely result.

Counting will begin immediately but most of the results will only be announced in the early hours of Friday. Here's the latest:

Lib Dem leader Ed Davey, who urged voters to take 'a leap of faith,' votes in his suburban London district. Liberal Democrat leader Ed Davey voted Thursday in an election that could see his left-of-center party gain a larger share of seats in Parliament.

Davey's Lib Dems have been trying to make inroads in areas of southern England where Conservatives are vulnerable as their party has plunged in popularity after 14 years in power.

Davey's stunt-filled campaign has been a publicity bonanza. He has tumbled off a paddleboard into a lake, braved roller coaster rides and bungee jumped, urging voters to take "a leap of faith."

The party had 15 of the 650 seats in the House of Commons when Parliament was dissolved in May.

The party has vowed to improve Britain's ailing health and social care systems, including introducing free nursing care at home. It wants to lower voting age to 16 and rejoin the European Union's single market. Davey has championed the cause of hold water companies accountable for dumping sewage in rivers.

Davey, first elected to Parliament in 1997, greeted members of the news media as he arrived with his wife, Emily, to vote at a Methodist church in Surbiton, a suburb in southwest London.

"It's a beautiful day," he said as he left the polls. "I hope lots of people come out to vote."

UK communities locked in tight contests as traditional party loyalties come second

Communities all over the United Kingdom such as Henley-on-Thames are locked in tight contests in which traditional party loyalties come second to more immediate concerns about the economy, crumbling infrastructure and the National Health Service.

Though it has traditionally been a Conservative Party stronghold, the area known for its famous regatta may change its stripes. The Conservatives, which took power during the depths of the global financial crisis, have been beset by sluggish growth, declining public services and a series of scandals, making them easy targets for critics on the left and right.

"This is a blue (Conservative) town, always has been," said Sam Wilkinson, a restaurant manager. "My generation won't necessarily vote blue, not necessarily, but at the same time who else do you vote for? It's really tricky. I'm just kind of looking out for my kids really, hopefully more money into education and the arts."

Residents steadily streamed to the polling station, including Patricia Mulcahy, who is retired.

"The younger generation are far more interested in change," she said. "So, I think whatever happens in Henley, in the country, there will be a big shift. But whoever gets in, they've got a heck of a job ahead of them. It's not going to be easy."

Labour's ex-leader Corbyn casts vote as an independent candidate

Former Labour leader Jeremy Corbyn, who is running for reelection as an independent, posted a photo of himself voting Thursday in his North London district.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 28 of 88

Corbyn, a socialist who has won his seat for Labour at every general election since 1983, was suspended from the party and barred from running by Labour after his leadership faced antisemitism allegations.

He became deeply unpopular after Labour in 2019 suffered its worst defeat since 1935.

Keir Starmer was chosen as leader to replace Corbyn and he has rebuilt it and moved it closer to the center. Pollsters and politicians expect Labour to win the largest number of seats.

Corbyn posted a photo of himself on the social media platform X with his right thumb up, saying: "Just voted for the independent candidate in Islington North. I heard he's alright."

Labour's Keir Starmer, favored to win power, votes in London

Labour Party leader Keir Starmer voted Thursday in an election that is widely expected to return his party to power for the first time in 14 years and make him prime minister.

Starmer, who has warned his supporters not to take the election for granted despite polls and politicians predicting a landslide, voted in his London neighborhood.

Pollsters have given Labour a double-digit lead since before the campaign began six weeks ago.

Starmer has spent his time criss-crossing Britain and urging voters to vote for change.

He has pledged to revive a sluggish economy, invest in the nation's crumbling infrastructure and repair the broken National Health Service, which his center-left party founded in 1945.

Scottish National Party leader, fighting Labour wave, casts his vote

Scottish National Party leader John Swinney has voted as his party fights to hold off a wave of support from the rival Labour Party.

Swinney, who became the SNP's third leader in just over a year in May, has tried to bring stability to a party in turmoil.

Scotland's long-serving First Minister Nicola Sturgeon abruptly stepped down last year during a campaign finance investigation that eventually led to criminal charges against her husband, who was the party's chief executive.

Swinney joined the party at 15 years old, and previously led the party from 2000 to 2004.

Swinney has said that if his party wins a majority of seats in Scotland he will try to open Scottish independence negotiations with the London-based U.K. government. He wants to rejoin the European Union and the European single market.

Swinney walked to the polls in Burrelton Village Hall, Perthshire, with his 13-year-old son Matthew.

Sunak votes in his Northern constituency

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak cast his ballot Thursday in a national election that will determine if he remains in office.

Sunak, who tried to bring stability to a Conservative Party in chaos when he was picked as leader in October 2022, spent the past six weeks trying to persuade voters across the U.K. to give his party another term after 14 years in power.

Pollsters and politicians widely expect the Labour Party to win for the first time since 2005.

Sunak's campaign got off to a soggy start when he called the snap election in a downpour outside 10 Downing Street in May.

He had been expected to wait until the fall, when expected improvements in the economy would give him a better chance.

Sunak voted shortly after polls opened in his constituency in Yorkshire in northern England.

Polls open in vote that could end Tories' 14 years in power

British voters are picking a new government on Thursday after polls opened at 7 a.m. for a parliamentary election that is widely expected to bring the opposition Labour Party to power.

Against a backdrop of economic malaise, mounting distrust of government institutions and a fraying social fabric, a fractious electorate is delivering its verdict on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party, which has been in power since 2010.

The center-left Labour Party, led by Keir Starmer, has had a steady and significant lead in opinion polls for months, but Labour leaders have warned against taking the election result for granted, worried their

supporters will stay home.

Sunak, for his part, has tried to rally his supporters, saying on Sunday that he still thought the Conservatives could win and defending his record on the economy.

With Taylor Swift heading to Germany, one city has taken her name — at least for a few weeks

BERLIN (AP) — The Swifties are about to take over the German city formerly known as Gelsenkirchen, where American superstar Taylor Swift is set to give three Eras Tour concerts later this month.

In honor of the singer, the city has renamed itself “Swiftkirchen” — at least temporarily — to welcome the tens of thousands of fans who are expected to come for her shows on July 17, 18 and 19, German news agency dpa reported.

A yellow city sign with the new name — which translates roughly to “Swift’s Church” — was unveiled Tuesday by Swift fan Aleshane Westhoff, who suggested the name to the city’s mayor and started a petition a few weeks ago. Mayor Karin Welge thanked the teenager for her “great idea” in a letter accepting the proposal.

The Swiftie sign has been emblazoned with a pink portrait of the pop icon and is located in the city center. Several more signs “at highly frequented locations in Gelsenkirchen” will be put up in the coming days, city spokesman Markus Schwardtmann told dpa.

One of the poorest cities in Germany, Gelsenkirchen is a former coal mining town that’s never recovered from the decline of its main industry. The Ruhr city is known for its soccer team, and a massive stadium that occasionally attracts international entertainers like Swift.

And there’s more to come in Germany’s Swiftie town.

The U.S. singer will also receive her own stone on the Gelsenkirchen Walk of Fame, alongside local notables like soccer coach Rudi Assauer and writer Ilse Kibgis, and during her concerts, the city will host open-air parties with karaoke performances. A “Taylor Swift streetcar” is already up and running, dpa reported.

Further fan attractions are being planned but kept secret for the time being. “There will be lots of big and small surprises so that the Swifties have plenty to discover in Gelsenkirchen,” Schwardtmann said.

Swift’s concerts in Gelsenkirchen are sold out and will take place at the Veltins-Arena on Schalke stadium, which has space for up to 70,000 Swifties. Further Eras Tour shows are planned for Hamburg and Munich.

Israel weighs Hamas’ latest response to Gaza cease-fire proposal as diplomatic efforts are revived

By TIA GOLDENBERG and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel’s Cabinet was set to convene Thursday to discuss Hamas’ latest response to a U.S.-backed proposal for a phased cease-fire in Gaza, as diplomatic efforts aimed at ending the nine-month war stirred back to life after a weeklong hiatus.

Fighting, meanwhile, intensified between Israel and Lebanon’s Hezbollah, with the militant group saying it fired more than 200 rockets and exploding drones into northern Israel to avenge the killing of a senior commander in an Israeli airstrike the day before.

The relatively low-level conflict has literally set the border ablaze and raised fears of a potentially even more devastating war in the Middle East. Hezbollah has said it will halt its attacks if there is a cease-fire between Hamas — a fellow Iran-backed ally — and Israel.

The United States has rallied world support behind a plan that would see the release of all of the scores of hostages still held by the militant group in return for a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. But until now, neither side appears to have fully embraced it.

Hamas suggested “amendments” to the proposal last month, some of which the U.S. said were unworkable, without providing specifics. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed that the original proposal was an Israeli one, but has raised doubts over whether it would end the war — a key

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 30 of 88

Hamas demand.

Hamas confirmed Wednesday that it had sent another response to Egypt and Qatar, which are mediating the talks, without providing details. A U.S. official said the Biden administration was examining the response, calling it constructive but saying more work needed to be done. The official, who wasn't authorized to comment publicly, spoke on condition of anonymity.

An Israeli official said Netanyahu would convene a Cabinet meeting Thursday to discuss the latest developments surrounding the negotiations. The official, who wasn't authorized to discuss the meeting with media, spoke on condition of anonymity. Israel would likely hold additional consultations before making a final decision on any amended proposal.

As cease-fire talks appeared to be gaining new steam, the Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said the death toll in the war had climbed past 38,000.

Hamas political official Bassem Naim said that the group has neither accepted nor rejected the American proposal, and has "responded with some ideas to bridge the gap" between the two sides, without elaborating. Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' top political leader, has shared suggestions with Egyptian, Qatari and Turkish officials, the group said in a statement late Wednesday.

U.S. officials have said the latest proposal has new language that was proposed to Egypt and Qatar on Saturday and addresses indirect negotiations that are set to commence during the first phase of the three-phase deal that U.S. President Joe Biden laid out in a May 31 speech.

The first phase calls for a "full and complete cease-fire," a withdrawal of Israeli forces from all densely populated areas of Gaza and the release of a number of hostages, including women, older people and the wounded, in exchange for the release of hundreds of Palestinian prisoners.

The proposal called for the parties to negotiate the terms of the second phase during the 42 days of phase one. Under the current proposal, Hamas could release all of the remaining men, both civilians and soldiers, during the second phase. In return, Israel could free an agreed-upon number of Palestinian prisoners and detainees. The releases wouldn't occur until "sustainable calm" takes effect and all Israeli troops withdraw from Gaza. The third phase would see the return of the remains of hostages.

The transition from the first to the second phase has appeared to be the main sticking point.

Hamas is concerned that Israel will restart the war after the first phase, perhaps after making unrealistic demands in the talks. Israeli officials have expressed concern that Hamas will do the same, drawing out the talks and the initial cease-fire indefinitely without releasing the remaining captives.

In a lengthy television interview last month, Netanyahu said that he was prepared to make a "partial deal," but was committed to continuing the war "after a pause" in order to annihilate Hamas. Later, speaking before Israel's parliament, he said Israel remains committed to the deal outlined by Biden.

The war began when Hamas-led militants launched a surprise attack on Oct. 7 into southern Israel, attacking multiple army bases and farming communities and killing around 1,200 people, mostly civilians. They abducted another 250 people, more than 100 of whom were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November. Militants are still holding around 80 hostages and the remains of 40 others.

Israel launched a major offensive in response to the Oct. 7 attack that has killed more than 38,000, according to health officials in Gaza, who don't say how many were civilians or militants. The war has caused vast destruction across the territory, displaced most of its population of 2.3 million — often multiple times — caused widespread hunger and raised fears of famine.

Chehayeb reported from Beirut. Associated Press writers Abby Sewell in Beirut and Aamer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

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

Palestinian death toll from Israel-Hamas war surges past 38,000, Gaza Health Ministry says

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The Health Ministry in Hamas-run Gaza said Thursday that the Palestinian death toll from nearly nine months of war has surged past 38,000.

The ministry said that in the last 24 hours, the bodies of 58 people had been brought to hospitals, bringing the overall death toll to 38,011.

It said more than 87,000 people have been wounded in the fighting.

The ministry does not distinguish between fighters and noncombatants in its count, but many of the dead are said to be women and children.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

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Fighting, meanwhile, has intensified between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, with the militant group saying it fired more than 200 rockets and exploding drones into northern Israel to avenge the killing of a senior commander in an Israeli airstrike the day before.

The relatively low-level conflict has literally set the border ablaze, and raised fears of a potentially even more devastating war in the Middle East. Hezbollah has said it will halt its attacks if there is a cease-fire between Hamas — a fellow Iran-backed ally — and Israel.

The United States has rallied world support behind a plan that would see the release of all of the scores of hostages still held by the militant group in return for a lasting truce and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza. But until now, neither side appears to have fully embraced it.

Hamas suggested "amendments" last month, some of which the U.S. said were unworkable, without providing specifics. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has confirmed that the original proposal was an Israeli one, but has raised doubts over whether it would end the war — a key Hamas demand.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 32 of 88

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Kareem Chehayeb reported from Beirut. Aamer Madhani contributed to this report from Washington.

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

Labour is hopeful and Conservatives morose as voters deliver their verdict on UK's election day

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — British voters are picking a new government Thursday in a parliamentary election that is widely expected to bring the Labour Party to power against a gloomy backdrop of economic malaise, mounting distrust in institutions and a fraying social fabric.

A jaded electorate is delivering its verdict on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's Conservative Party, which has been in power since 2010. Polls opened at 40,000 polling stations in a vast variety of locales including church halls, a laundromat and a crematorium.

Hundreds of communities are locked in tight contests in which traditional party loyalties come second to more immediate concerns about the economy, crumbling infrastructure and the National Health Service.

In Henley-on-Thames, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) west of London, voters like Patricia Mulcahy, who is retired, sensed the nation was looking for something different. The community, which normally votes Conservative, may change its stripes this time.

"The younger generation are far more interested in change," Mulcahy said. "So, I think whatever happens in Henley, in the country, there will be a big shift. But whoever gets in, they've got a heck of a job ahead of them. It's not going to be easy."

Sunak made the short journey from his home to vote at Kirby Sigston Village Hall in his Richmond constituency. He arrived with his wife, Akshata Murty, and walked hand-in-hand into the village hall, which is surrounded by rolling fields.

The center-left Labour Party led by Keir Starmer has had a steady and significant lead in opinion polls for months, but its leaders have warned against taking the election result for granted, worried their supporters will stay home.

"Change. Today, you can vote for it," he wrote Thursday on the X social media platform.

A couple of hours after posting that message, Starmer walked hand-in-hand with his wife, Victoria, into a polling place in the Kentish Town section of London to cast his vote. He left through a back door out of sight of a crowd of residents and journalists who had gathered.

The Conservatives have acknowledged that Labour appears headed for victory and urged voters not to hand the party a "supermajority."

In the final days of campaigning Sunak insisted "the outcome of this election is not a foregone conclusion."

But in a message to voters on Wednesday, Sunak said that "if the polls are to be believed, the country could wake up tomorrow to a Labour supermajority ready to wield their unchecked power." He urged voters to back the Conservatives to limit Labour's power.

Labour has not set pulses racing with its pledges to get the sluggish economy growing, invest in infrastructure and make Britain a "clean energy superpower."

But nothing has really gone wrong in its campaign, either. The party has won the support of large chunks of the business community and endorsements from traditionally conservative newspapers, including the Rupert Murdoch-owned Sun tabloid.

The Sun said in an editorial that "by dragging his party back to the center ground of British politics for the first time since Tony Blair was in No. 10 (Downing St.), Sir Keir has won the right to take charge," using the formal title for Starmer, who was knighted.

Former Labour candidate Douglas Beattie, author of the book "How Labour Wins (and Why it Loses)," said Starmer's "quiet stability probably chimes with the mood of the country right now."

The Conservatives, meanwhile, have been plagued by gaffes. The campaign got off to an inauspicious start when rain drenched Sunak as he made the announcement outside 10 Downing St. Then, Sunak went home early from commemorations in France marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion.

Several Conservatives close to Sunak are being investigated over suspicions they used inside information to place bets on the date of the election before it was announced.

It has all made it harder for Sunak to shake off the taint of political chaos and mismanagement that's gathered around the Conservatives since then-Prime Minister Boris Johnson and his staff held lockdown-breaching parties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Johnson's successor, Liz Truss, rocked the economy with a package of drastic tax cuts and lasted just 49 days in office. There is widespread dissatisfaction over a host of issues, from a creaking public health care system to crumbling infrastructure.

But for many voters, the lack of trust applies not just to Conservatives, but to politicians in general. Veteran rouser of the right, Nigel Farage, has leaped into that breach and grabbed attention with his anti-immigration rhetoric.

The centrist Liberal Democrats and environmentalist Green Party also want to sweep up disaffected voters. "I don't know who's for me as a working person," said Michelle Bird, a port worker in Southampton on England's south coast who was undecided about whether to vote Labour or Conservative. "I don't know whether it's the devil you know or the devil you don't."

Ukraine's army retreats from positions as Russia gets closer to seizing strategically important town

By HANNA ARHIROVA undefined

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — A spokesperson for Ukraine's military said its army has retreated from a neighborhood in the outskirts of Chasiv Yar, a strategically important town in the eastern Donetsk region which has been reduced to rubble under a months-long Russian assault.

Chasiv Yar lies a short distance west Bakhmut, which was captured by Russia last year after a bitter 10-month battle. For months, Russian forces have focused on capturing Chasiv Yar, a town which occupies a strategic, elevated location. Its fall would put nearby cities in jeopardy, compromise critical Ukrainian supply routes and bring Russia closer to its stated aim of seizing the entire Donetsk region.

The Ukrainian army retreated from a northeastern neighborhood in the town of Nazar Voloshyn, the spokesman for the Khortytsia ground forces formation, told The Associated Press in a written message Thursday.

Ukraine's defensive positions in the town were "destroyed," he said, adding that there was a threat of serious casualties if troops remained in the area and that Russia did not leave "a single intact building."

Months of relentless Russian artillery strikes have devastated Chasiv Yar, with homes and municipal of-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 34 of 88

fices charred, and a town that once had a population of 12,000 has been left deserted.

The intensity of Russian strikes on Ukraine's defensive line in the area of Chasiv Yar has increased over the last month, Voloshyn said.

In the past week alone, Voloshyn said Russia has carried out nearly 1,300 strikes, fired nearly 130 glide bombs and made 44 ground assaults.

Other Russian attacks in recent weeks have focused on capturing nearby settlements that would allow them to advance to Kramatorsk and Sloviansk, the biggest cities in the Ukrainian-controlled part of the Donetsk region.

Ukrainian commanders in the area say their resources remain stretched, largely due to a months-long gap in military assistance from the United States which threw Ukraine's military onto the defensive.

In June, members of the artillery brigade in Chasiv Yar reported that supplies of American ammunition had started to arrive.

Elsewhere in Ukraine, the governor of the northern Chernihiv region, Viacheslav Chaus, said Russia launched 22 drones over Ukraine last night. One hit an infrastructure facility in the northern Chernihiv region, leaving nearly 6,000 customers without electricity, he said, adding that the rest were shot down.

Russia is continually targeting Ukraine's badly-damaged energy infrastructure, resulting in hours of rolling blackouts across the country. Ukrainian officials have warned that the situation may worsen as winter approaches.

Hurricane Beryl roars toward Mexico after leaving destruction in Jamaica and eastern Caribbean

By MARTÍN SILVA and FERNANDO LLANO Associated Press

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, Mexico (AP) — Hurricane Beryl ripped off roofs in Jamaica, jumbled fishing boats in Barbados and damaged or destroyed 95% of homes on a pair of islands in St. Vincent and the Grenadines before rumbling toward the Cayman Islands and taking aim at Mexico's Caribbean coast after leaving at least seven dead in its wake.

What had been the earliest storm to develop into a Category 5 hurricane in the Atlantic, weakened slightly but remained a major hurricane. Its eye was forecast to pass just south of the Cayman Islands overnight.

Mexico's popular Caribbean coast prepared shelters, evacuated some small outlying coastal communities and even moved sea turtle eggs off beaches threatened by storm surge, but in nightlife hotspots like Playa del Carmen and Tulum tourists still took one more night on the town.

Mexico's Navy patrolled areas like Tulum telling tourists in Spanish and English to prepare for the storm's arrival.

Early Thursday morning, the storm's center was about 500 miles (800 kilometers) east-southeast of Tulum, Mexico. It had maximum sustained winds of 125 mph (205 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 21 mph (32 kph). Beryl was forecast to make landfall in a sparsely populated area of lagoons and mangroves south of Tulum in the early hours of Friday, probably as a Category 2 storm. Then it was expected to cross the Yucatan Peninsula and restrengthen over the warm Gulf of Mexico to make a second strike on Mexico's northeast coast near the Texas border.

The storm had already shown its destructive potential across a long swath of the southeastern Caribbean.

Beryl's eye wall brushed by Jamaica's southern coast Wednesday afternoon knocking out power and ripping roofs off homes. Prime Minister Andrew Holness said Jamaica had not seen the "worst of what could possibly happen."

"We can do as much as we can do, as humanly possible, and we leave the rest in the hands of God," Holness said.

Several roadways in Jamaica's interior settlements were impacted by fallen trees and utility poles, while some communities in the northern section were without electricity, according to the government's Information Service.

The worst perhaps came earlier in Beryl's trajectory when it smacked two small islands of the Lesser

Antilles.

Michelle Forbes, the St. Vincent and Grenadines director of the National Emergency Management Organization, said that about 95% of homes in Mayreau and Union Island have been damaged by Hurricane Beryl.

Three people were reported killed in Grenada and Carriacou and another in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, officials said. Three other deaths were reported in northern Venezuela, where four people were missing, officials said.

One fatality in Grenada occurred after a tree fell on a house, Kerryne James, the environment minister, told The Associated Press.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves has promised to rebuild the archipelago. In Cancun Wednesday afternoon, Donna McNaughton, a 43-year-old cardiac physiologist from Scotland, was taking the approaching storm in stride.

Her flight home wasn't leaving until Monday, so she planned to follow her hotel's advice to wait it out. "We're not too scared of. It'll die down," she said. "And we're used to wind and rain in Scotland anyway."

Associated Press journalists John Myers Jr. and Renloy Trail in Kingston, Jamaica, Mark Stevenson and María Verza in Mexico City, Coral Murphy Marcos in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Lucanus Ollivierre in Kingstown, St. Vincent and Grenadines contributed to this report.

Fires have become the most visible sign of the conflict heating up on the Lebanon-Israel border

By ABBY SEWELL and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

CHEBAA, Lebanon (AP) — With cease-fire talks faltering in Gaza and no clear offramp for the conflict on the Lebanon-Israel border, the daily exchanges of strikes between Hezbollah and Israeli forces have sparked fires that are tearing through forests and farmland on both sides of the frontline.

The blazes — exacerbated by supply shortages and security concerns — have consumed thousands of hectares of land in southern Lebanon and northern Israel, becoming one of the most visible signs of the escalating conflict.

There is an increasingly real possibility of a full-scale war — one that would have catastrophic consequences for people on both sides of the border. Some fear the fires sparked by a larger conflict would also cause irreversible damage to the land.

Charred remains in Lebanon

In Israel, images of fires sparked by Hezbollah's rockets have driven public outrage and spurred Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, to declare last month that it is "time for all of Lebanon to burn."

Much of it was already burning.

Fires in Lebanon began in late April — earlier than the usual fire season — and have torn through the largely rural areas along the border.

The Sunni town of Chebaa, tucked in the mountains on Lebanon's southeastern edge, has little Hezbollah presence, and the town hasn't been targeted as frequently as other border villages. But the sounds of shelling still boom regularly, and in the mountains above it, formerly oak-lined ridges are charred and bare.

In a cherry orchard on the outskirts of town, clumps of fruit hang among browned leaves after a fire sparked by an Israeli strike tore through. Firefighters and local men — some using their shirts to beat out flames — stopped the blaze from reaching houses and U.N. peacekeeper center nearby.

"Grass will come back next year, but the trees are gone," said Moussa Saab, whose family owns the orchard. "We'll have to get saplings and plant them, and you need five or seven years before you can start harvesting."

Saab refuses to leave with his wife and 8-year-old daughter. They can't afford to live elsewhere, and they fear not being able to return, as happened to his parents when they left the disputed Chebaa Farms

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 36 of 88

area — captured from Syria by Israel in 1967 and claimed by Lebanon.

Burn scars in Israel

The slopes of Mount Meron, Israel's second-highest mountain and home to an air base, were long covered in native oak trees, a dense grove providing shelter to wild pigs, gazelles, and rare species of flowers and fauna.

Now the green slopes are interrupted by three new burn scars — the largest a few hundred square meters — remnants of a Hezbollah explosive drone shot down a few weeks ago. Park rangers worry that devastation has just begun.

"The damage this year is worse a dozen times over this year," said Shai Koren, of the northern district for Israel's Nature and Parks Authority.

Looking over the slopes of Meron, Koren said he doesn't expect this forest to survive the summer: "You can take a before and after picture."

Numbers and weapons

Since the war began, the Israeli military has tracked 5,450 launches toward northern Israel. According to Israeli think tank the Alma Research and Education Center, most early launches were short-range anti-tank missiles, but Hezbollah's drone usage has increased.

In Lebanon, officials and human rights groups accuse Israel of firing white phosphorus incendiary shells at residential areas, in addition to regular artillery shelling and airstrikes.

The Israeli military says it uses white phosphorus only as a smokescreen, not to target populated areas. But even in open areas, the shells can spark fast-spreading fires.

The border clashes began Oct. 8, a day after the Hamas-led incursion into southern Israel that killed around 1,200 people and sparked the war in Gaza. There, more than 37,000 have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry.

Hezbollah began launching rockets into northern Israel to open what it calls a "support front" for Hamas, to pull Israeli forces away from Gaza.

Israel responded, and attacks spread across the border region. In northern Israel, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed. In Lebanon, more than 450 people — mostly fighters, but also 80-plus civilians and noncombatants — have been killed.

Exchanges have intensified since early May, when Israel launched its incursion into the southern Gaza city of Rafah. That coincided with the beginning of the hot, dry wildfire season.

Since May, Hezbollah strikes have resulted in 8,700 hectares (about 21,500 acres) burned in northern Israel, according to Israel's Nature and Parks Authority.

Eli Mor, of Israel's Fire and Rescue, said drones, which are much more accurate than rockets, often "come one after another, the first one with a camera and the second one will shoot."

"Every launch is a real threat," Mor added.

In southern Lebanon, about 4,000 hectares (10,000 acres) have burned due to Israeli strikes, said George Mitri, of the Land and Natural Resources program at the University of Balamand. In the two years before, he said, Lebanon's total area burned annually was 500 to 600 hectares (1,200 to 1,500 acres).

Fire response

Security concerns hamper the response to a fire's first crucial hours. Firefighting planes are largely grounded over fears they'll be shot down. On the ground, firefighters often can't move without army escorts.

"If we lose half an hour or an hour, it might take us an extra day or two days to get the fire under control," said Mohammad Saadeh, head of the Chebaa civil defense station. The station responded to 27 fires in three weeks last month — nearly as many as a normal year.

On the border's other side, Moran Arinovsky used to be a chef and is now deputy commander of the emergency squad at Kibbutz Manara. With about 10 others, he's fought more than 20 fires in the past two months.

Mor, of Israel's Fire and Rescue, said firefighters often must triage.

"Sometimes we have to give up on open areas that are not endangering people or towns," Mor said.

The border areas are largely depopulated. Israel's government evacuated a 4-kilometer strip early in the

war, leaving only soldiers and emergency personnel. In Lebanon, there's no formal evacuation order, but large swathes have become virtually uninhabitable.

Some 95,000 people in Lebanon and 60,000 people in Israel have been displaced for nine months.

Kibbutz Sde Nehemia didn't evacuate, and Efrat Eldan Schechter said some days she watches helplessly as plumes of smoke grow closer to home.

"There's a psychological impact, the knowledge and feeling that we're alone," she said, because firefighters can't access certain areas.

Israel's cowboys, who graze beef cattle in the Golan Heights, often band together to fight blazes when firefighters cannot arrive quickly.

Schechter noted that news footage of flames tearing across hillsides has focused more attention on the conflict in her backyard, instead of solely on the Gaza war. "Only when the fires started, only then we are in the headlines in Israel," she said.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that as fighting in Gaza winds down, Israel will send more troops to its northern border. That could open a new front and raise the risk of more destructive fires.

Koren says natural wildfires are a normal part of the forest's lifecycle and can promote ecodiversity, but not the fires from the conflict. "The moment the fires happen over and over, that's what creates the damage," he said.

Lidman reported from northern Israel.

The questions about Biden's age and fitness are reminiscent of another campaign: Reagan's in 1984

By LAURIE KELLMAN Associated Press

The age question for presidential candidates is more than four decades old. President Ronald Reagan answered it with a pledge to resign if he became impaired, and later with a clever joke that reset his campaign from a stumbling debate performance to a 49-state landslide and a second term.

"I will not make age an issue of this campaign," Reagan said to the question he knew was coming in perhaps the most famous mic-drop moment in campaign history. "I am not going to exploit for political purposes my opponent's youth and inexperience."

The audience roared, even Democratic Vice President Walter Mondale laughed — and Reagan's reelection was back on track.

Today, Democratic President Joe Biden, 81, is struggling for such a redemptive moment after a disastrous debate performance against Republican former president Donald Trump, 77. Those 90 minutes last week set off alarms among Democrats hoping Biden would keep Trump from returning to the White House — and heightened concern among voters long skeptical of how either elderly man would govern a complex nation of more than 330 million people for four more years.

More than two dozen people who have spent time with the president privately described him as often sharp and focused. But he also has moments, particularly later in the evening, when his thoughts seem jumbled and he trails off mid-sentence or seems confused, they said. Sometimes he doesn't grasp the finer points of policy details. He occasionally forgets people's names, stares blankly and moves slowly around the room, they said.

Biden has vowed to stay in the race, despite signs of eroding support on Capitol Hill.

"I am running ... no one's pushing me out," Biden said on a call Wednesday with staffers from his reelection campaign. "I'm not leaving. I'm in this race to the end and we're going to win."

But the question facing him is far more intimate, according to one expert who covered Reagan's health during his presidency.

"The most important debate of the campaign is the one taking place right now in Joe Biden's head between the part of mind telling him he's the chosen one, and the more self-aware part," said Rich Jaro-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 38 of 88

slavsky of the University of California Berkeley, formerly of the Wall Street Journal.

A nation ever more accustomed to dealing with aging

At its heart, the question — how old is too old to be president? — is about competence. And Americans have never had wider personal experience with the effects of aging than they do today.

A surge of retiring baby boomers means that millions more Americans know when they see someone declining. For many, this widespread experience made Biden's halting performance during Thursday's debate a familiar reality check.

Trump seemed more vigorous, even though he lied about or misstated a long list of facts. When he challenged Biden to a cognitive test, Trump flubbed the name of the doctor who had administered his.

"Is this an episode, or is this a condition?" Rep. Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., 84, wondered on MSNBC, reflecting the question dominating Democratic circles this week. "It's legitimate — of both candidates."

Reagan faced the same questions even before he was elected as the oldest president to that point. In 1980, at 69, he pledged to resign if he sensed serious cognitive decline while in office.

"If I were president and had any feeling at all that my capabilities had been reduced before a second term came, I would walk away," he told the New York Times on June 10, 1980. "By the same token, I would step down also."

That didn't happen. Reagan served two full terms, leaving office in 1989. He announced in 1994 that he had been diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease. He died in 2004.

Neither Trump nor Biden has made a similar pledge, and their campaigns did not respond to requests for comment Wednesday.

For Reagan, the age issue faded in his first term as any health questions focused on his recovery from a nearly fatal assassination attempt in 1981. He seemed headed for an easy reelection. And debates seemed natural settings for the smooth-talking former Hollywood actor. But his performance in the first showdown with Mondale in the 1984 campaign brought the age issue roaring back.

The president, then 73, rambled and hesitated. He seemed to lose his train of thought at one point, and appeared tired at others. No one had seen him perform publicly in such a way, recalled Jaroslovsky, who co-authored a story headlined: "New Question in Race: Is Oldest U.S. President Now Showing His Age?"

Important differences between 1984 and 2024

Reagan's age — really, his fitness for a second term — was now indelibly part of the 1984 race, a striking parallel to what is happening in 2024 in the aftermath of Biden's shaky debate performance. But there are key differences.

Reagan was leading going into the first debate, while Biden and Trump were virtually tied. Onstage, "Biden was terrible out of the gate," said Jaroslovsky, the founder of the Online News Association.

Then, as now, Jaroslovsky said, the embattled president's supporters provided vigorous spin.

Reagan's operation said he had been tired. There was sniping about the staff overpreparing him, Jaroslovsky said. Biden's team cited fatigue from two overseas trips that had exhausted even younger staffers. It was a bad night, they said. Blame flew at the president's aides. Democrats on Capitol Hill griped that Biden's performance had damaged their chances at the polls. And press critics asserted that reporters had failed to hold the president and his staff to account.

By Tuesday, pressure was building on Biden to withdraw from the race and open a difficult process for Democrats to nominate someone else. The crisis rippled across the Democratic Party just over six weeks before its convention in Chicago. It's not clear that Biden and Trump will debate a second time.

Reagan's moment in 1984 came during the second debate at the 33 minute-mark, when The (Baltimore) Sun's Henry Trewhitt said: "You already are the oldest president in history, and some of your staff say you were tired after your most recent encounter with Mr. Mondale." Here, Reagan squared his feet and suppressed a smile. He was ready.

Trewhitt noted that President John F. Kennedy (the youngest American elected president) got hardly any sleep during the Cuban Missile Crisis: "Is there any doubt in your mind that you would be able to function in such circumstances?"

"Not at all, Mr. Trewhitt," Reagan said. Later, he declared, "I am in charge."

Russian-linked cybercampaigns put a bull's-eye on France. Their focus? The Olympics and elections

By LORI HINNANT Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Photos of blood-red hands on a Holocaust memorial. Caskets at the Eiffel Tower. A fake French military recruitment drive calling for soldiers in Ukraine, and major French news sites improbably registered in an obscure Pacific territory, population 15,000.

All are part of disinformation campaigns orchestrated out of Russia and targeting France, according to French officials and cybersecurity experts in Europe and the United States. France's legislative elections and the Paris Olympics sent them into overdrive.

More than a dozen reports issued in the past year point to an intensifying effort from Russia to undermine France, particularly the upcoming Games, and President Emmanuel Macron, who is one of Ukraine's most vocal supporters in Europe.

This story, supported by the Pulitzer Center for Crisis Reporting, is part of an Associated Press series covering threats to democracy in Europe.

The Russian campaigns sowing anti-French disinformation began online early last summer but first became tangible in October 2023 when more than 1,000 bots linked to Russia relayed photos of graffitied Stars of David in Paris and its suburbs.

A French intelligence report said the Russian intelligence agency FSB ordered the tagging, as well as subsequent vandalism of a memorial to those who helped rescue Jews from the Holocaust.

Photos from each event were amplified on social media by fake accounts linked to the Russian disinformation site RRN, according to cybersecurity experts. Russia denies any such campaigns. The French intelligence report says RRN is part of a larger operation orchestrated by Sergei Kiriyenko, a ranking Kremlin official.

"You have to see this as an ecosystem," said a French military official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to reveal information about the Russian effort. "It's a hybrid strategy."

The tags and the vandalism had no direct link to Russia's war in Ukraine, but they provoked a strong reaction from the French political class, with denunciations in the legislature and public debate. Antisemitic attacks are on the rise in France, and the war in Gaza has proven divisive.

The Stars of David could be interpreted either as support for Israel or as opposition. The effect was to sow division and unease. French Jews in particular have found themselves unwittingly thrust into the political fray despite, at just 500,000 people, making up a small proportion of the French population.

In March, just after Macron discussed the possibility of mobilizing the French military in Ukraine, a fake recruitment drive went up for the French army in Ukraine, spawning a series of posts in Russian- and French-language Telegram channels that got picked up in Russian and Belarusian media, according to a separate French government report seen by The Associated Press. On June 1, caskets appeared outside the Eiffel Tower, bearing the inscription "French soldiers in Ukraine."

The larger disinformation efforts show little traction in France, but the Russian audience may have been the real target, officials said, by showing that Russia's war in Ukraine is, as Putin has said, really a war with the West.

Among the broader goals, the French military official said, was a long-term and steady effort to sow social discord, erode faith in the media and democratic governments, undermine NATO, and sap Western support for Ukraine. Denigrating the Olympics, from which most Russian athletes are banned, is a bonus, according to French officials monitoring the increasingly strident posts warning of imminent unrest ahead of the Games.

On June 9, the French far-right National Rally trounced Macron's party in elections for the European Parliament. The party has historically been close to Russia: one of its leading figures, Marine Le Pen, cultivated ties to Putin for many years and supported Russia's illegal annexation of Crimea from Ukraine in 2014. And its leading contender for prime minister, Jordan Bardella, has said he opposes sending long-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 40 of 88

range weapons to Kyiv.

In more than 4,400 posts gathered since mid-November by antibot4navalny, a collective that analyzes Russian bot behavior, those targeting audiences in France and Germany predominated. The number of weekly posts ranged from 100 to 200 except for the week of May 5, when it dropped near zero, the data showed. That week, as it happens, was a holiday in Russia.

Many of the posts redirect either to RRN or to sites that appear identical to major French media, but with the domain – and content – changed. At least two of the more recent mirrored sites are registered in Wallis and Futuna, a French Pacific territory 10 time zones from Paris. A click on the top of the fake page redirects back to the real news sites themselves to give the impression of authenticity. Other posts redirect to original sites controlled by the the campaign itself, dubbed Doppelganger.

The redirects shifted focus for the European elections and continued after Macron called the surprise legislative elections with just three weeks to spare. Three-quarters of posts from the week ahead of the June 30 first-round legislative vote that were directed toward a French audience focused on either criticizing Macron or boosting the National Rally, antibot4navalny found in data shared with The Associated Press.

One post on a fake site purported to be from Le Point, a current affairs magazine, and the French news agency AFP, criticizing Macron.

“Our leaders have no idea how ordinary French people live but are ready to destroy France in the name of aid for Ukraine,” read the headline on June 25.

Another site falsely claimed to be from Macron’s party, offering to pay 100 euros for a vote for him – and linking back to the party’s true website. And still another inadvertently left a generative AI prompt calling for the re-write of an article “taking a conservative stance against the liberal policies of the Macron administration,” according to findings last week from Insikt Group, the threat research division of the cybersecurity consultancy Recorded Future.

“They’re scraping automatically, sending the text to the AI and asking the AI to introduce bias or slants into the article and rewrite it,” said Clément Briens, an analyst for Recorded Future.

Briens said metrics tools embedded within the site are likely intended to prove that the campaigns were money well-spent for “whoever is doing the payouts for these operations.”

The French government cybersecurity watchdog, Viginum, has published multiple reports since June 2023 singling out Russian efforts to sow divisions in France and elsewhere. That was around the time that pro-Kremlin Telegram feeds started promoting “Olympics has Fallen” — a full-length fake Netflix film featuring an AI-generated voice resembling Tom Cruise that criticized the International Olympic Committee, according to the Microsoft Threat Analysis Center.

Microsoft said this campaign, which it dubbed Storm-1679, is fanning fears of violence at the Games and last fall disseminated digitally generated photos referring, among other things, to the attacks on Israeli athletes at the 1972 Olympics.

The latest effort, which started just after the first round of the elections on June 30, merges fears of violence related to both the Olympics and the risk of protests after the decisive second round, antibot4navalny found. Viginum released a new report Tuesday detailing the risks ahead for the Games — not for violence but for disinformation.

“Digital information manipulation campaigns have become a veritable instrument of destabilization of democracies,” Viginum said. “This global event will give untold informational exposure to malevolent foreign actors.” The word Russia appears nowhere.

Baptiste Robert, a French cybersecurity expert who ran unsuccessfully as an unaffiliated centrist in the legislative elections, called on his government – and especially lawmakers – to prepare for the digital threats to come.

“This is a global policy of Russia: They really want to push people into the extremes,” he said before the first-round vote. “It’s working perfectly right now.”

India is likely undercounting heat deaths, affecting its response to increasingly harsh heat waves

By SIBI ARASU Associated Press

BENGALURU, India (AP) — Months of scorching temperatures sometimes over 50 degrees Celsius (122 Fahrenheit) in parts of India this year — its worst heat wave in over a decade — left hundreds dead or ill. But the official number of deaths listed in government reports barely scratches the surface of the true toll and that's affecting future preparations for similar swelters, according to public health experts.

India now has a bit of respite from the intense heat, and a different set of extreme weather problems as monsoon rain lashes the northeast, but for months the extreme heat took a toll on large swaths of the country, particularly in northern India, where government officials reported at least 110 heat-related deaths.

Public health experts say the true number of heat-related deaths is likely in the thousands but because heat is often not listed as a reason on a death certificate many heat deaths don't get counted in official figures. The worry, they say, is that undercounting the deaths means the heat wave problem isn't as prioritized as it should be, and officials are missing out on ways to prepare their residents for the scorching temperatures.

All of India's warmest years on record have been in the last decade. Studies by public health experts found that up to 1,116 people have died every year between 2008 and 2019 due to heat.

Difficulties registering heat deaths

As part of his work in public health, Srinath Reddy, the founder of the Public Health Foundation of India, has advised state governments on how to factor in heat when recording deaths.

He found that as a result of "incomplete reporting, delayed reporting and misclassification of deaths," heat-related deaths are significantly undercounted around the country. Despite national guidelines for recording deaths, many doctors — especially those in overcrowded public hospitals where resources are already strained — don't follow it, he said.

"Most doctors just record the immediate cause of death and attribution to environmental triggers like heat are not recorded," Reddy said. That's because heat deaths can be classified as exertional or non-exertional: Exertional is when a person dies due to direct exposure to high temperatures and non-exertional is when young children, older people or people with pre-existing health conditions become seriously ill or sometimes die from the heat, even if indoors.

"The heatwave is the final straw for the second category of people," said Dileep Mavalankar, former head of the Indian Institute of Public Health in Gandhinagar. "Most people dying during heat waves belong to this category but their deaths are not recorded as connected to the heat."

Mavalankar agreed the official number of heat deaths this year is an undercount. He said there were 40,000 recorded case of heat stroke, but only 110 deaths. "This is just 0.3% of the total number of heat-stroke cases recorded, but usually heat deaths should be 20 to 30% of heatstroke cases," he said.

"We need to be counting deaths better," Mavalankar said. "That is the only way we will know how severe the consequences of extreme heat are."

Planning for future heat

In his former role at the Indian Institute of Public Health in Gandhinagar, Gujarat, Mavalankar was instrumental in developing India's first-ever heat action plan for the city of Ahmedabad in 2013, three years after more than 1,300 people died there during a heat wave.

The heat plan included measures like increasing access to shaded areas for outdoor workers, converting relatively cool public buildings to temporary shelters for people without homes or access to electricity and ensuring hospitals have adequate medical supplies and staff during heat waves.

In the years that followed, Mavalankar and his team studied the impact of the heat plan by counting death tolls in subsequent hot summers. Because of a lack of data on heat deaths specifically, the team looked at deaths from all causes, which spikes during heat waves, and used the number of excess deaths to determine how many deaths were likely caused by heat.

They estimate that the heat action plan had helped reduce the number of fatalities during heat waves

by up to 40%.

Having that data, while imperfect, Mavalankar said, allowed the city to adequately prepare itself for extreme heat, and do more of what worked in the future.

But he said the lack of data elsewhere makes it difficult to replicate the results in Ahmedabad on a national level.

"Not reporting these deaths, sharing data, is like the Indian Meteorological Department not sharing weather data," he said. "We can easily do this across the country but we've not decided that we should do it."

Improving government data

The Indian government collects data on heat-related deaths through the health ministry's National Centre for Disease Control which is then shared with the National Disaster Management Agency. The agency then shares the data as a total nationwide figure for the year, but a state by state breakdown is not publicly available.

The National Crime Records Bureau also collects heat-related death data as part of their accounting of deaths due to "forces of nature" and publishes those figures.

But there are huge discrepancies. In 2020, the last year with publicly available data on heat deaths from both official sources, the crime records bureau recorded 530 deaths from heatstroke, but the disaster agency reported just four heat-related deaths.

The Associated Press contacted India's health ministry spokesperson, the NCDC and the NDMA to comment on the discrepancy but did not receive a response.

Getting better data can answer a whole host of questions about who is most vulnerable and how best to help them, said Bharghav Krishna, a public health expert and a fellow at the Sustainable Futures Collaborative thinktank, "especially with respect to identifying who is dying, where they're dying, what are they doing when they're dying."

Krishna thinks that the data currently collected, while inadequate, can at least provide some insight for policymakers and researchers and force at least some action if its shared with the right people.

But Malavankar said the issues of data collection are more systemic, and that needs to be urgently addressed.

"We have not done a national census since 2011, not having numbers is our national weakness," he said.

Follow Sibi Arasu on X at @sibi123

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Masoud Pezeshkian, a heart surgeon who rose to power in parliament, runs to be Iran's next president

By JON GAMBRELL and AMIR VAHDAT Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — After the 2022 death of Mahsa Amini, Iranian lawmaker Masoud Pezeshkian wrote that it was "unacceptable in the Islamic Republic to arrest a girl for her hijab and then hand over her dead body to her family."

Days later as nationwide protests and a bloody crackdown on all dissent took hold, he warned that those "insulting the supreme leader ... will create nothing except long-lasting anger and hatred in the society."

The stances by Pezeshkian, now a 69-year-old candidate for Iran's next president, highlight the dualities of being a reformist politician within Iran's Shiite theocracy — always pushing for change but never radically challenging the system overseen by Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

After Iran's June 28 presidential election saw the lowest turnout in history, Pezeshkian now must convince a public angered by years of economic pain and bloody crackdowns to go vote in a runoff poll on

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 43 of 88

Friday — even though a majority of them earlier decided not to cast ballots at all.

"We are losing our backing in the society, because of our behavior, high prices, our treatment of girls and because we censor the internet," Pezeshkian said at a televised debate Monday night. "People are discontent with us because of our behavior."

Pezeshkian will face the hard-line former nuclear negotiator Saeed Jalili in Friday's election. Jalili already may hold an edge as another hard-liner knocked out in last week's election, parliament Speaker Mohammad Bagher Qalibaf, urged his supporters to back him.

Pezeshkian has aligned himself with other moderate and reformist figures during his campaign to replace the late President Ebrahim Raisi, a hard-line protégé of Khamenei killed in a helicopter crash in May. His main advocate has been former Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, who reached Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers that saw sanctions lifted in exchange for the atomic program being drastically curtailed.

Iranian rushed into the streets in a carnival-like expression of hope that the deal would finally see their country enter the international community. But in 2018, then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew America from the accord, setting in motion a series of attacks across the wider Middle East. Iran now enriches uranium to near-weapons-grade levels while having a large enough stockpile to build several bombs if it chose.

That, coupled with the bloody crackdown on dissent that followed nationwide protests over Amini's death and the mandatory hijab, have fueled voters' disenchantment. Pezeshkian has offered comments suggesting he wants better relations with the West, a return to the atomic accord and less enforcement of the hijab law.

"The inclusion of the reformist Pezeshkian, who was likely qualified by authorities to boost voter turnout, failed to halt the trend of declining participation," the geopolitical risk firm the Eurasia Group said in an analysis Tuesday. "Regardless of who wins the runoff, it is clear that the majority of Iranians have little faith in the governing system, regard elections to be sham affairs and are unlikely to participate even when an ostensible reformist is on the ballot."

Pezeshkian was born Sept. 29, 1954, in Mahabad in northwestern Iran to an Azeri father and a Kurdish mother. He speaks Azeri and long has focused on the affairs of Iran's vast minority ethnic groups. Like many, he served in the Iran-Iraq war, sending medical teams to the battlefield.

He became a heart surgeon and served as the head of the Tabriz University of Medical Sciences. However, personal tragedy shaped his life after a 1994 car crash killed his wife, Fatemeh Majidi, and a daughter. The doctor never remarried and raised his remaining two sons and a daughter alone.

Pezeshkian entered politics first as the country's deputy health minister and later as the health minister under the administration of reformist President Mohammad Khatami.

Almost immediately, he found himself involved in the struggle between hard-liners and reformists, attending the autopsy of Zahra Kazemi, a freelance photographer who held both Canadian and Iranian citizenship. She was detained while taking pictures at a protest at Tehran's notorious Evin prison, was tortured and died in custody.

In 2006, Pezeshkian was elected as a lawmaker representing Tabriz. He later served as a deputy parliament speaker and backed reformist and moderate causes, though analysts often described him more as an "independent" than allied with the voting blocs. That independent label also has been embraced by Pezeshkian in the campaign.

Yet Pezeshkian at the same time honored Iran's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, on one occasion wearing its uniform to parliament. He repeatedly criticized the United States and praised the Guard for shooting down an American drone in 2019, saying it "delivered a strong punch in the mouth of the Americans and proved to them that our country will not surrender."

In 2011, Pezeshkian registered to run for president, but withdrew his candidacy. In 2021, he found himself and other prominent candidates barred from running by authorities, allowing an easy win for Raisi.

In this campaign, Pezeshkian's advocates have sought to contrast him against the "Taliban" policies of Jalili. His campaign slogan is "For Iran," a possible play on the popular song by the Grammy Awarding-

winning Iranian singer-songwriter Shervin Hajipour called "Baraye," or "For" in English. Hajipour has been sentenced to more than three years in prison over his anthem for the Amini protests.

Yet it remains unclear if he'll get the votes this Friday after the low turnout last week, something the candidate has acknowledged.

"With all the noisy arguments between me and him, only 40% (of eligible voters) voted," Pezeshkian acknowledged at his final televised debate with Jalili on Tuesday. "Sixty percent don't accept us. So people have issues with us."

Vahdat reported from Tehran, Iran.

Ahead of Iran's presidential runoff, a floated rise in gasoline prices may spark new protests

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As Iran's runoff presidential election nears, comments by an official in the campaign of reformist Masoud Pezeshkian raised the possibility of his government increasing government-set gasoline prices — a move that has sparked nationwide protests in the past.

While still tentative, economists long have warned Iran needs to overhaul its system of subsidies, estimated to cost the Islamic Republic tens of billions of dollars a year. In 2019, a similar hike triggered mass demonstrations and a bloody crackdown that grew even more intense after the 2022 protests over the death of Mahsa Amini.

On Saturday, Pezeshkian campaign head Ali Abdolalizadeh told journalists that his possible presidency would see price hikes for fuel and other items handled without any outcry.

"Don't worry, petrol at any ... price, you will see that it would be allowed with calmness and cooperation by the people," Abdolalizadeh said.

Hard-liners immediately accused Pezeshkian of planning to increase fuel prices by a factor of eight. Pezeshkian's camp claimed the price under Saeed Jalili, a former nuclear negotiator Pezeshkian is facing in Friday's election, would be 12 times higher, based on remarks by those close to the hard-liner. That official, Majid Karimi, suggested Iranians should be paying the "world price" at the pump.

People gathered at a Jalili rally carried a sign warning against any price hike, saying: "We do not want petrol at price of 250,000 Rial" a liter. That would be 40 cents a liter, or \$1.55 a gallon.

But no matter who is elected, it is likely Iran will see fuel price hikes.

Iran raised minimum gasoline prices by 50% to 15,000 rials per liter in 2019 — or 12 cents a liter, or about 50 cents a gallon. But with Iran's currency crashing since then, that's now 2 cents a liter, or 9 cents a gallon. After a monthly 60-liter quota, it costs 30,000 rials a liter. That had been nearly 24 cents a liter or 90 cents a gallon then, but now is nearly 5 cents a liter, or 18 cents a gallon. By comparison, an average gallon of regular gas in the U.S. costs \$3.50, according to AAA.

Iran spent \$52 billion on oil subsidies in 2022, according to the Paris-based International Energy Agency, the most of any country in the world. Iran spent 36% of its overall gross domestic product, or \$127 billion, that year on oil, electricity and natural gas subsidies.

Though it costs the Iranian government tens of billions of dollars in subsidies, cheap gasoline is practically considered a birthright in the country, home to the world's fourth-largest crude oil reserves despite decades of economic woes since its 1979 Islamic Revolution. Gasoline there remains among the cheapest in the world, in part to help keep costs low for its underemployed, who often drive taxis to make ends meet.

The 2019 hikes led to demonstrations across some 100 cities and towns across Iran, with gas stations and banks burned down. The crackdown that followed included at least 321 people killed, according to Amnesty International. Thousands were detained.

During the 2022 protests over the death of Amini, after she was arrested for wearing her hijab not to the liking of security forces, over 500 people were killed and 22,000 locked up — part of a pattern of

widening unrest in the Islamic Republic.

On the streets of Tehran, people have grown increasingly anxious about the price of fuel rising. "Do you know what that means? I may buy fuel to set fire to everything," said taxi driver, Rasoul Kashani, 45. "I will not vote at all. Both plan to slaughter ordinary people."

Shahrooz Imani, a 41-year-old mother of three, said she planned to vote for Jalili as she believes he cares more about the poor given Pezeshkian's apparent plan to raise prices.

"This will deprive us of our daily needs — even vegetables and bread — if price of fuel hikes up," she said. A bookseller on Tehran's famed Enghelab — or "Revolution" — Street also worried about the poor.

"We cannot tolerate this again, maybe we need to flee to neighboring countries to work," said Abbas Irani. Mahdi Robati, a business analyst and CEO of an Iranian brokerage firm, warned that Jaili's economic policies and hard-line positions could bring about economic damage on the scale of China's Mao Zedong.

"The output of this thinking is the complete destruction of the rial, the spread of absolute poverty throughout the country, the deprivation of all political and social freedoms, famine and the complete couponization of the economy, and many other nightmarish consequences," he wrote on the social media platform X.

Karimi reported from Tehran, Iran.

Haiti's prime minister says Kenyan police are crucial to controlling gangs, early days are positive

By JADE LOZADA Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Haitian Prime Minister Garry Conille told the U.N. Security Council on Wednesday that recently deployed Kenyan police will be crucial to helping control the country's gangs and moving toward democratic elections — and he called feedback from their initial days in the capital "extremely, extremely positive."

He said his government will focus on addressing gang violence and food insecurity, ensuring free elections through constitutional and political reform, and rebuilding public trust in the police.

On June 25, the initial contingent of 200 Kenyan police arrived in Port-au-Prince. Kenya has pledged 1,000 police to the international police force and Conille said the next contingent will be arriving "very soon." They will later be joined by police from the Bahamas, Bangladesh, Barbados, Benin, Chad and Jamaica in the force that will total 2,500 personnel.

Haiti asked for an international force to combat gangs in 2022, and U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres appealed for months for a country to lead the force before the Kenyans came forward.

The gangs have grown in power since the July 7, 2021, assassination of President Jovenel Moïse and are now estimated to control up to 80% of the capital. The surge in killings, rapes and kidnappings has led to a violent uprising by civilian vigilante groups.

Conille, a former U.N. development specialist, took up his post as prime minister last month after being voted in by a transitional council.

With the help of the international police force, Conille is tasked with stabilizing the country in preparation for democratic elections in February 2026.

"More than ever Haiti must mobilize all the necessary and available resources to make this transition the last one, a transition that could set it on the path toward peace, security and sustainable development," Conille told the council.

He said Haiti intends to "redefine our approaches" to build "strong and effective institutions" by the time the police leave Haiti.

Since its arrival, the Kenyan police contingent has held "operational meetings" with the national police and started "joint operations" for the mission, Kenya's U.N. Ambassador Njambi Kinyungu said.

In February, gangs launched coordinated attacks on government infrastructure, including roads, prisons, and the Port-au-Prince airport, eventually leading Prime Minister Ariel Henry to resign in April.

The violence has resulted in the displacement of 580,000 people, more than half of whom are children,

according to the U.N. children's agency, UNICEF. The World Food Program reports that more than 4 million Haitians face food insecurity.

Conille called the country's history of foreign intervention a "mixed bag" that has included human rights abuses and a "lack of respect for sovereignty and local culture."

"Haiti must escape the spiral of security missions once and for all," the prime minister said.

Conille said the international police force will require "close coordination and constant communication between all the parties involved to ensure the mistakes of the past are not repeated."

U.N. Special Representative for Haiti María Isabel Salvador urged the international community to contribute to the fund financing the police operation.

Kenya's Kinyungu and Foreign Minister Roberto Álvarez Gil of the Dominican Republic, which shares the island of Hispaniola with Haiti, also called for countries that have made pledges to the fund to deposit the money. Álvarez Gil said this should be done "as soon as possible."

The United States pledged \$309 million to the police mission, the largest contribution of any country. Kinyungu said Kenya is "working closely with the United States" to distribute supplies in Haiti, but the U.S. funding has not yet arrived.

At the council meeting, Russian Ambassador Vassily Nebenzia criticized the U.S. for failing to prevent arms smuggling to Haiti's gangs.

"We do not see the current embargo doing anything to prevent the flow of arms from the U.S.," Nebenzia said. "If it wished to do so, Washington could have long tackled this problem."

Earlier, U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield said that the United States is "concerned about the illicit flow of arms into Haiti" and is "actively working to enforce the arms embargo."

Edith M. Lederer contributed to this report from the United Nations.

Americans to celebrate Fourth of July with parades, cookouts — and lots of fireworks

By DAVID SHARP Associated Press

Many Americans weren't letting worries about their pocketbooks keep them from traveling and enjoying fireworks as they celebrate their nation's birth with parades, cookouts and fiery splashes of colors against the evening sky.

Travel records were projected to fall, with people already jamming airports and crowding highways ahead of the Fourth of July to get to their destinations.

Fireworks also were expected to reach an all-time high with an untold number of backyard displays in addition to 16,000 professional shows lighting up the horizon from sea to shining sea, a consumer fireworks industry group said.

"This is how we celebrate. It's the bombs bursting in air. It's the rockets' red glare. That's how people show their pride and patriotism," Julie Heckman of the American Pyrotechnics Association told The Associated Press.

All signs pointed to big celebrations: The Transportation Security Administration reported that a record-breaking nearly 3 million people traveled through airports in a single day last week, and that figure is expected to be broken this week. And AAA projected that 60.6 million people will travel by car during the holiday period.

Part of the boost in travel was attributed to easing inflation, even though Americans remain concerned about the economy.

Plenty of barbecue, desserts, cold drinks and the Stars and Stripes were on tap. But Americans were also celebrating in other ways unique to their communities.

Off the rocky coast in Down East, Maine, some planned to enjoy lobster boat races. Descendants of the signers of the Declaration of Independence were ringing the Liberty Bell 13 times — once for each of the original colonies — in Philadelphia. The California communities of Bolinas and Stinson Beach, north of San

Francisco, were engaging in their annual tug-of-war contest in which losers end up in a lagoon.

And, of course, there's the annual hot dog eating contest on New York's Coney Island.

At least one community was in for a muted observance, however: The Northern California city of Oroville's annual fireworks were canceled as an estimated 26,000 residents remained displaced by the growing Thompson Fire, while hundreds of firefighters toiled under extreme heat to keep flames from reaching more homes.

The July Fourth holiday generally unites Americans in their shared love of country, but the 2024 version comes against a backdrop of deep political polarization and a divisive presidential race.

In Boston, where tens of thousands were expected to enjoy the Boston Pops Fireworks Spectacular, maestro Keith Lockhart said it's inspiring to see people of different political stripes gather on Charles River Esplanade. But he noted that "one would have to have one's head pretty deeply stuck in the sand to not notice the deep divisions in our country."

"It is, indeed, a dangerous time," he wrote in an email before the show. "If, even for one day, we can set aside our differences and embrace our commonalities, this has to be a positive thing."

Biden vows to keep running as signs point to rapidly eroding support for him on Capitol Hill

By SEUNG MIN KIM, WILL WEISSERT and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A defiant President Joe Biden vowed Wednesday to keep running for reelection, rejecting growing pressure from Democrats to withdraw after a disastrous debate performance raised questions about his readiness to keep campaigning, much less win in November.

But increasingly ominous signs were mounting for the president. Two Democratic lawmakers have called on Biden to exit the race while a leading ally publicly suggested how the party might choose someone else. And senior aides said they believed he might only have a matter of days to show he was up to the challenge before anxiety in the party boils over.

"Let me say this as clearly as I possibly can as simply and straightforward as I can: I am running ... no one's pushing me out," Biden said on a call with staffers from his reelection campaign. "I'm not leaving. I'm in this race to the end and we're going to win."

In his private conversations, Biden was focused on efforts to course correct from his rocky debate and on the threat that, in his view, former President Donald Trump poses to the country, as he scoured for feedback on what went wrong last Thursday in Atlanta and took responsibility for his performance.

"We had a direct, open, clear-eyed conversation about the debate, his thoughts on what happened and why it wasn't his best evening or best debate," Sen. Chris Coons, D-Del., who spoke with Biden on Tuesday, said in an interview with the Associated Press. "He wanted advice. He was asking earnestly for input and comment on what he should do to restore confidence and support, and what's the best path forward."

Coons, the president's closest ally on Capitol Hill, said Biden clearly understood the urgency, the difficulty and the importance of the election, as the senator advised that the president do more unscripted, open-ended events to restore confidence in his candidacy. The two also spoke about Biden's schedule and its impact on his political efforts, particularly as he balances that task with critical governing tasks such as the NATO summit in Washington next week.

Biden's efforts to pull multiple levers to salvage his faltering reelection include his impromptu appearance with campaign aides, private conversations with senior lawmakers, a weekend blitz of travel and a network television interview. But he was confronting serious indications that support for him was rapidly eroding on Capitol Hill and among other allies.

Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz., told The New York Times that though he backs Biden as long as he is a candidate, this "is an opportunity to look elsewhere" and what Biden "needs to do is shoulder the responsibility for keeping that seat — and part of that responsibility is to get out of this race."

Senior advisers say they believe the 81-year-old Biden may have mere days to mount a convincing display of his fitness for office before his party's panic over his debate performance and anger about his response

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 48 of 88

boils over, according to two people with knowledge who insisted on anonymity to more freely discuss strategy. The president accepts the urgency of the task — having reviewed the polling and mountains of media coverage — but he is convinced he can do that in the coming days and insistent that he will not step out of the race, they said.

Biden met for more than hour at the White House on Wednesday night, in person and virtually, with more than 20 Democratic governors who afterward described the conversation as “candid” but said they were standing behind Biden despite being concerned about a Trump victory in November.

“The president is our nominee. The president is our party leader,” said Gov. Wes Moore of Maryland. He added that, in the meeting, Biden “was very clear that he’s in this to win.”

Despite such reassuring sentiments, a major Democratic donor, Netflix co-founder Reed Hastings, also called on the president to exit the race, saying, “Biden needs to step aside to allow a vigorous Democratic leader to beat Trump and keep us safe and prosperous.” The statement was first reported by The New York Times.

And all that followed Rep. Jim Clyburn, a longtime Biden friend and confidant, saying he’d back a “mini-primary” in the run-up to the Democratic National Convention next month if Biden were to leave the race. The South Carolina Democrat floated an idea that appeared to be laying the groundwork for alternative choices by delegates during the Democrats’ planned virtual roll call that is scheduled before the more formal party convention set to begin Aug. 19 in Chicago.

On CNN, Clyburn said Vice President Kamala Harris, governors and others could join the competition: “It would be fair to everybody.”

Clyburn, a senior lawmaker who is a former member of his party’s House leadership team, said he has not personally seen the president act as he did on the debate stage last week and called it “concerning.”

And even as other Democratic allies have remained quiet since Thursday’s debate, there is a growing private frustration about the Biden campaign’s response to his disastrous debate performance at a crucial moment in the campaign — particularly in Biden waiting several days to do direct damage control with senior members of his own party.

One Democratic aide said the lacking response has been worse than the debate performance itself, saying lawmakers who support Biden want to see him directly combatting the concerns about his stamina in front of reporters and voters. The aide was granted anonymity to candidly discuss interparty dynamics.

Most Democratic lawmakers are taking a wait-and-see approach with Biden, though, holding out for a better idea of how the situation plays out through new polling and Biden’s scheduled ABC News interview, according to Democratic lawmakers who requested anonymity to speak bluntly about the president.

When Texas Rep. Lloyd Doggett, who called on Biden to leave the race this week, shopped around his move for support from other Democratic lawmakers, he had no takers and eventually issued a statement on his own, according to a person familiar with the effort granted anonymity to discuss it.

But there was also a sense that the waiting period will soon expire if Biden does not step up his outreach to Capitol Hill or prove otherwise that he’s up to the job.

Some suggested Harris was emerging as the favorite to replace Biden if he were to withdraw, although those involved in private discussions acknowledge that Govs. Gavin Newsom of California and Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan remain viable alternatives. But for some insiders, Harris is viewed as the best prospect to quickly unify the party and avoid a messy and divisive convention fight.

Even as pressure around Biden mounted, he and Harris made a surprise appearance on an all-staff reelection campaign call and offered a pep talk. They stressed how important it was to beat Trump, the presumptive nominee, in November and returned to Biden’s previous post-debate vow that when he gets knocked down, he gets up again.

“Just as we beat Donald Trump in 2020, we’re going to beat him again in 2024,” said Biden, who told participants that he would not be dragged out of the race. Harris added: “We will not back down. We will follow our president’s lead. We will fight, and we will win.”

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre was asked during her briefing with reporters whether

Biden would consider stepping down. "Absolutely not," she said.

"I cannot lay out something that would change the president's mind," Jean-Pierre said about Biden continuing to seek a second term.

Still, Democrats are unsatisfied with the explanations of Biden's debate performance, from both White House staff and the president himself. And there is a deeper frustration among some in the party who feel that Biden should have handled questions about his stumbling debate performance much sooner and that he has put them in a difficult position by staying in the race.

The Leadership Now Project, a group of business executives, academics and thought leaders, said in a letter that the "threat of a second Trump term" is great enough that Biden should "pass the torch of this year's presidential nomination to the next generation of highly capable Democrats."

Trump's campaign issued a statement noting that "every Democrat" now calling on the president "to quit was once a supporter of Biden."

Trump had a slight lead over Biden in two polls of voters conducted after last week's debate. One poll, conducted by SSRS for CNN, found that three-quarters of voters — including more than half of Democratic voters — said the party has a better chance of winning the presidency in November with a candidate other than Biden.

About 7 in 10 voters, and 45% of Democrats, said Biden's physical and mental ability is a reason to vote against him, according to the CNN/SSRS poll.

And about 6 in 10 voters, including about one-quarter of Democrats, said reelecting Biden would be a risky choice for the country rather than a safe one, according to a New York Times/Siena College poll. That poll found that Democrats were split on whether Biden should remain the nominee.

Biden campaign pollster Molly Murphy said "today's polling doesn't fundamentally change the course of the race."

In a further effort to boost morale, Biden chief of staff Jeff Zients urged White House aides during an all-staff meeting to tune out the "noise" and focus on the task of governing.

Biden himself began making personal outreach on his own, speaking privately with senior Democratic lawmakers such as Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer of New York, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Coons and Clyburn.

Associated Press writers Mary Clare Jalonick, Zeke Miller, Colleen Long, Josh Boak and Amelia Thomson-DeVeaux in Washington and Michael Liedtke in San Francisco contributed to this report.

Hurricane Beryl roars by Jamaica after killing at least 7 people in the southeast Caribbean

By JOHN MYERS JR. and RENLOY TRAIL Associated Press

KINGSTON, Jamaica (AP) — Hurricane Beryl was roaring by Jamaica Wednesday, bringing fierce winds and heavy rain after the powerful Category 4 storm earlier killed at least seven people and caused significant damage in the southeast Caribbean.

The U.S. National Hurricane Center said Beryl's eyewall was "brushing the south coast of Jamaica."

Wind-whipped rain pounded the island for hours as residents heeded authorities' call to shelter until the storm had passed. Power was knocked out in much of the capital.

Prime Minister Andrew Holness said on Wednesday afternoon that nearly 500 people were placed in shelters.

By evening, he said that Jamaica has not seen the "worst of what could possibly happen."

"We can do as much as we can do, as humanly possible, and we leave the rest in the hands of God," Holness said.

Several roadways in the country's interior settlements were impacted by fallen trees and utility poles, while some communities in the northern section were without electricity, according to the government's information service.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 50 of 88

Kingston resident Pauline Lynch said that she had stockpiled food and water in anticipation of the storm's arrival. With wind already driving rain, Lynch said, "I have no control over what is coming so I just have to pray that all people of Jamaica is safe and we don't suffer no deaths, no loss."

By midday, winds already howled in the capital, turning the sea into churning whitecaps as Beryl's eye scraped by the island's southern coast.

"We are very concerned about a wide variety of life threatening impacts in Jamaica," including storm surge, high winds and flash flooding, said Jon Porter, chief meteorologist at AccuWeather.

Porter called Beryl "the strongest and most dangerous hurricane threat that Jamaica has faced, probably, in decades."

A hurricane warning was in effect for Jamaica, Grand Cayman, Little Cayman and Cayman Brac, and the coast of the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico from Puerto Costa Maya to Cancun. Beryl was forecast to weaken slightly over the next day or two, but still be at or near major-hurricane strength when it passes near the Cayman Islands on Thursday and into Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula late Thursday or Friday, according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center.

Jamaica was under a state of emergency as the island was declared a disaster zone hours before the impact of Beryl. Holness said that the disaster zone declaration will remain for the next seven days.

An evacuation order was in place for communities across Jamaica that are prone to flooding and landslides. Holness urged Jamaicans to move away from low-lying areas.

Mexico's Caribbean coast, meanwhile was preparing for Beryl.

The head of Mexico's civil defense agency said that Beryl is expected to make a rare double strike on Mexico. Laura Velázquez said the hurricane is expected to make landfall along a relatively unpopulated stretch of the Caribbean coast between Tulum and the inland town of Felipe Carrillo Puerto. Because the coast there is largely made up of lagoons and mangroves, there are few resorts or hotels in the area south of Tulum.

On Wednesday, Mexican government officials moved sea turtle eggs off Cancun beaches in an attempt to protect them from storm surge.

The hurricane is expected to weaken to a tropical storm as it crosses the Yucatan peninsula and reemerge over the weekend at storm strength into the Gulf of Mexico. Velázquez said that Beryl is then expected to hit Mexican territory a second time in the Gulf coast states of Veracruz or Tamaulipas, near the Texas border.

Late Monday, Beryl became the earliest storm to develop into a Category 5 hurricane in the Atlantic and peaked at winds of 165 mph (270 kph) Tuesday before weakening to a still-destructive Category 4. Late Wednesday night, the storm's center was about 560 miles (905 kilometers) east-southeast of Tulum, Mexico. It had maximum sustained winds of 130 mph (215 kph) and was moving west-northwest at 21 mph (32 kph). Hurricane strength winds extended 45 miles from the center.

In Miami, hurricane center director Michael Brennan in an online briefing said people on the island should plan to stay sheltered throughout the day Wednesday with conditions only beginning to improve overnight.

Jamaica's southern coast, where Kingston is located, was expected to bear the brunt of Beryl with coastal water levels rising to 6 or 9 feet (1.8 to 2.7 meters) above normal tide levels in some area.

Heavy rains of 4 to 8 inches, with up to a foot in isolated areas, threatened flash flooding and mudslides on the mountainous island, he said.

As Beryl barreled through the Caribbean Sea, rescue crews in southeastern islands fanned out to determine the extent of the damage the hurricane inflicted on Carriacou, an island in Grenada.

Michelle Forbes, the St. Vincent and Grenadines director of the National Emergency Management Organization, said that about 95% of homes in Mayreau and Union Island have been damaged by Hurricane Beryl.

Three people were reported killed in Grenada and Carriacou and another in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, officials said. Three other deaths were reported in northern Venezuela, where five people are missing, officials said. About 25,000 people in that area also were affected by heavy rainfall from Beryl.

One fatality in Grenada occurred after a tree fell on a house, Kerryne James, the environment minister, told The Associated Press.

Grenada's Prime Minister Dickon Mitchell said Tuesday there was no power, roads are impassable and

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 51 of 88

the possible rise of the death toll "remains a grim reality."

St. Vincent and the Grenadines Prime Minister Ralph Gonsalves has promised to rebuild the archipelago. The last strong hurricane to hit the southeast Caribbean was Hurricane Ivan 20 years ago, which killed dozens of people in Grenada.

Associated Press writers Mark Stevenson in Mexico City, Coral Murphy Marcos in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Lucanus Ollivierre in Kingstown, St. Vincent and Grenadines contributed to this report.

Biden at 81: Often sharp and focused but sometimes confused and forgetful

By COLLEEN LONG, ZEKE MILLER, MICHAEL BALSAMO, AAMER MADHANI and SYLVIE CORBET Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's conduct behind closed doors, in the Oval Office, on Air Force One and in meetings around the world is described in the same dual way by those who regularly see him in action.

He is often sharp and focused. But he also has moments, particularly later in the evening, when his thoughts seem jumbled and he trails off mid-sentence or seems confused. Sometimes he doesn't grasp the finer points of policy details. He occasionally forgets people's names, stares blankly and moves slowly around the room.

Biden's occasional struggles with focus may not be unusual for someone his age. But at 81 years old and seeking another four years in the White House, the moments when he's off his game have taken on a fresh resonance following his disastrous debate performance against Republican Donald Trump. The president appeared pale, gave nonsensical answers, stared blankly and lost his train of thought.

The June 27 faceoff alarmed Democrats and his financial backers, in part, because Biden seemed so much worse than during the almost routine moments when he's less sharp. And that has raised questions about whether he's up for a campaign that's only going to get nastier and whether he can effectively govern for another four years if he wins.

"We understand the concerns. We get it," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said this week. But she insisted Biden has no intention of stepping away from the campaign. "The president is clear-eyed and he is staying in the race."

But there have been other notable signs in recent weeks, from Biden's constrained itinerary during a recent visit to France to his flat demeanor during a big-dollar Hollywood fundraiser with top stars.

This story is based on interviews with two dozen people who have spent time with the president privately, some of whom were granted anonymity to discuss interactions that were not intended to be public.

How he is in private is how he often is in public — uneven

The way Biden acts in private, according to regular observers, often tracks how he comes off publicly. In both settings, he can be commanding one day and halting another.

A day after his debate blunder, Biden's voice at a North Carolina rally was forceful, his eyes alert, his delivery confident. As he spoke, cheers filled the room.

"I give you my word as a Biden. I would not be running again if I didn't believe with all my heart and soul I can do this job," he told supporters. "Because, quite frankly, the stakes are too high."

But sometimes, Biden speaks so softly that it is difficult to make out his words even with a microphone. He'll stop mid-sentence and trail off during speeches. At other times he runs the room, leading the audience, joking and shaking hands with thrilled supporters, in clear command of the moment. His gait is often stiff, but sometimes he jogs.

His State of the Union speech earlier this year was widely seen as a confident and fiery speech that showed he was ready to take on Trump.

Through it all, public concern about Biden's fitness for another four years has been persistent. In an August 2023 poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, fully 77% of U.S. adults said Biden was too old to be effective for four more years. Not only did 89% of Republicans say

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 52 of 88

that, but so did 69% of Democrats.

Missed opportunities to manage the issue

One person who spends time with Biden regularly said there have been visible signs of his aging over the past year that the president's team has failed to fully address. The debate performance accelerated concerns about what was already a slow-moving problem, even if Biden has offered assurances that he can still effectively govern.

Biden's advisers have long been aggressively dismissive of questions about his age. But now they're acknowledging that Biden's slowdown is undeniable. The debate has forced the president to more frontally acknowledge the limitations of his age, when before he largely made light of it. But they've taken only largely cosmetic steps to minimize its prominence in the public eye.

They've reduced his use of a long staircase to board Air Force One in favor of a shorter one, and aides often accompany him when he walks in public to make his stiff gait less noticeable. While his schedule remains busy, aides have built-in recovery stretches — long weekends or extended stays in Delaware at his Wilmington and Rehoboth Beach homes or at Camp David, the presidential retreat in Maryland — to rest up after a grueling period of travel.

Three French officials who helped organize Biden's visit to France earlier this month said their U.S. counterparts' reactions to options offered for a state visit in Paris and D-Day commemorations in Normandy made them think the president's health must be fragile.

They were told the U.S. president needed some time to rest and they felt Biden's entourage was very protective of him.

Biden's public interactions — with journalists especially — have been greatly limited under a mandate led by one of his top advisers, Anita Dunn. Even during major events with Democrats or other supporters, the White House sometimes limits how much time Biden spends with the audience, two people said. At best, it is a protective reflex meant to shield their longtime boss — many at the White House have been with Biden for decades. But it also can look like an effort to hide something.

A shift in strategy to get Biden out there more

That strategy is shifting in the aftermath of the debate flop. After internal discussion within the campaign, the White House on Tuesday announced a public blitz: Biden will sit for an interview Friday with ABC's George Stephanopoulos. The president added a trip to Wisconsin on Friday, and will head to Philadelphia on Sunday. And he will hold a press conference during the NATO summit in Washington next week.

Biden's allies worry that the next inevitable misstep — even if it's not of the magnitude of his debate disaster — will resurrect voter concerns about the president's fitness for office. That no matter how hard he tries, Biden may never be able to fully get past it.

A growing body of misleading online videos isn't helping matters. In one clip, Biden stands very still during a Juneteenth musical performance at the White House, leading to talk he had "frozen." But Philonise Floyd, George Floyd's brother, was standing next to the president for the performance and disputed the tenor of the clip. "Joe was just standing there having fun," he told the AP. Floyd put his arm around Biden during the performance and said the two chatted a bit before the music started and had a great conversation.

One clip, from France, made it seem like he tried to sit down when there wasn't a chair, but there was.

In another widely circulated clip, Biden appears to wander off on a hilltop golf course outside Bari, Italy, during the Group of Seven summit earlier this month, his back turned to leaders who had begun to gather for a group photo.

In reality, he'd turned around to talk to skydivers who had landed behind the leaders, giving them a thumbs up and praising their feats. The entire scene was chaotic, with skydivers landing all around the leaders and hundreds of staff members standing on the other side of a rope.

Grueling foreign trips

Those foreign trips can be grueling, even for the youngest and healthiest of leaders. And Biden did back-to-back trips in quick succession, first to France and then the G7 visit to Italy.

French officials involved in organizing the first trip said his schedule appeared lighter compared with most world leaders' state visits to the country.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 53 of 88

After the G7, where Biden appeared pale and his movements slow, he flew across nine time zones to Los Angeles for a glitzy Hollywood fundraiser. One person who spoke with Biden at the event was struck by how tired the president had seemed during backstage conversations, and grew more concerned when Biden seemed unable to turn it on for his 30-minute onstage conversation with late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel and former President Barack Obama.

The same person said that during a fundraiser in March, the president came off as vibrant and engaging and displayed the kind of charm that the person was accustomed to seeing over years of interactions.

During his debate prep sessions at Camp David, Biden seemed to be doing well — ready to take on Trump. So his actual performance came as a shock even to those who were working with him, two of the people said. At a fundraiser this week, Biden offered up that he had still been recovering from the grueling travel 12 days earlier.

"I wasn't very smart. I decided to travel around the world a couple of times," Biden said. The president added that he "didn't listen to my staff" about travel and joked that he "fell asleep on stage" during the debate.

How Biden is on the job

Many in the White House say the president is in command across both domestic issues and critical foreign policy problems, like the war in Ukraine and the Israel-Hamas conflict.

"I have been with the president a number of times over the last 3 1/2 years on some of the most consequential kind of life, death or peace-type decisions, and also very high-stakes engagements with senior leaders," said Brett McGurk, a senior National Security Council official who coordinates the Middle East and North Africa. McGurk has worked for both Republican and Democratic administrations.

"And what I have seen time and again — repeatedly and consistently — from the first week of the administration until now — is a president who prepares for those engagements, who has very detailed and comprehensive briefs for those engagements, and then does the engagement, and then has very active follow-up."

One senior administration official described tense moments with Biden inside the Situation Room, including one on April 13, where over four intense hours Biden and others worked through reports of an imminent attack by Iran on Israel. Biden gamed out how to respond, and led complicated discussions with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other G7 leaders, working to ensure there was no broader regional conflict.

Domestic policy adviser Neera Tanden said in recent weeks she has been in private meetings with Biden and in larger group settings on major policy issues, including potential citizenship for more migrants, new healthcare data and the FBI's crime statistics. She said the president was engaged, thorough and fully in command of the policies.

"I take him very complicated issues, and he handles them," she said. "He understands how programs are complicated and interconnected, and he can connect things to experiences he's had a long time ago, or experiences they've had a few months ago."

New Jersey Gov. Phil Murphy described a weekend fundraiser that raised millions for Biden. It included a sit-down meal where the president, first lady and governor chatted with supporters and took a round of unscripted questions.

"He weighed in on all of the above, substantively — I'll give you a smattering, universal pre-K, free community college, the Ukraine war, Middle East war, Federal Reserve, general economy, wage growth, job growth."

Unsatisfied with the explanations

Democrats, so far, have been largely unsatisfied with the explanations for Biden's debate performance from White House staff, his campaign and the president himself. And there is a deeper frustration among some who feel like the president should have handled this much sooner, and he has put them in a difficult position by staying in the race.

Biden could decide to drop out of the race, but he can't be removed. So far only two active members

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 54 of 88

of Congress have called for him to step aside, but there is growing anxiety on Capitol Hill about his ability to do the job and many are anxiously awaiting post-debate polling and waiting to see how he handles his Friday interview on ABC.

Another problem for Democrats: With the focus so squarely on Biden, there has been less attention paid to Trump, whose debate performance was riddled with falsehoods about the Jan. 6, 2021, Capitol riot, Democrats' views on abortion rights and his own revisionist comments about his response on a 2017 neo-Nazi rally.

One Democratic ally expressed frustration that Biden's family members have not called on him to step aside for the sake of the top priority: Keeping Trump out of the White House. Instead, they're encouraging him to stay in the race.

Only Biden's doctors can really answer

Really, only Biden's personal physician can answer questions about the president's cognitive fitness — and given the level of public concern, he should do so, said well-known aging researcher S. Jay Olshansky of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

One bad appearance on TV isn't enough to assess anyone's cognitive ability, Olshansky stressed, "even for those of us that study aging for a living." Without more insight, there's no way to know if the jet lag Biden has cited, or other factors, explain the performance, he said.

"I certainly know how it looks, and it did not look good. But can we attribute it to cognitive decline? Look, an hour after he was participating in that debate, and the day after, he looked back to his old self," Olshansky said. "But the fact that we don't know for sure is the problem."

"The only person that's ever examined the president from a medical perspective is his personal physician," he added. "The important message is that we don't know and we haven't heard from his physician. And until those issues are resolved it just seems to be a festering wound."

Biden's physician, Dr. Kevin O'Connor, deemed the president fit for duty after a February checkup that included a neurologic assessment. White House officials at the time said Biden wasn't given a specific cognitive test because O'Connor and the neurologist decided he didn't need one.

"His doctor's a very good one and he doesn't do unnecessary tests," Olshansky said. "So when he made the decision not to do it, that told us a compelling story about what he saw and what he didn't see — which is no evidence of cognitive decline" at that time.

Corbet reported from Paris. Associated Press Writers Seung Min Kim, Mary Clare Jalonick, Josh Boak, Matthew Lee and Luran Neergaard in Washington contributed to this report.

Migrants pause in the Amazon because getting to the US is harder. Most have no idea what lies ahead

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

ASSIS BRASIL, Brazil (AP) — Dozens of migrants sleep in a mosquito-infested six-bedroom wooden shelter in the Brazilian Amazon, their dreams of a better life in the U.S. on hold because of President Joe Biden's halt on asylum.

Johany "Flaca" Rodríguez, 48, was ready to leave behind the struggles of life in Venezuela. She has been waiting in the shelter holding 45 people in Assis Brasil, a city of 7,000 residents bordering Peru, because others told her how difficult the journey to the U.S. has become.

Migrants, police, officials and analysts say Biden's actions have caused a wait-and-see attitude among migrants who are staying in Latin America's biggest economy, at least for now. Like anywhere along migrants' routes toward hoped-for new lives, local communities are finding it hard to meet new populations' needs.

After sleeping on dirty mattresses and in half-torn hammocks, and eating rice, beans and ground beef, Rodríguez decided this month that she and her dog Kiko would spend a few weeks with friends in the southern state of Rio Grande do Sul.

Wearing a headband, leggings and a small backpack, Rodríguez woke early to walk more than 100

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 55 of 88

kilometers (62 miles) for two days to a nearby city of 27,000 residents. There, she hopes to make some money and take a bus to Brazil's south, then reach the U.S. one day.

"I have to stay here until it is safer to go," Rodríguez said. "I am not super happy about staying (in Brazil), but that's what I can do."

Brazil saw waves of migrants passing through to North America in the first part of the year. There were Indians, Bengalis, Senegalese and Nigerians, among others, said Rêmullo Diniz, the coordinator of Gepron, Acre state's police group for border operations,

When Biden said he was going to crack down, many people in those groups began staying in their countries instead of heading to Latin America, Brazilian government officials and independent analysts said. For citizens of South American countries, it's easier. Brazil allows residents of its 10 neighboring nations to stay visa-free for up to two years.

The Biden administration said last week that arrests for illegal crossings from Mexico fell more than 40% since asylum processing was temporarily suspended at the U.S. border with Mexico on June 5. Arrests fell below 2,400 a day for the first time during Biden's presidency.

Acre state offers a snapshot of the attitude among many migrants, and raises the possibility that Acre and other resting spots will become long-term hosts.

The city of Assis Brasil has little to offer to migrants but the wooden shelter where Rodríguez was staying and a school gymnasium where 15 men can sleep. There are two small hotels and a bus stop used by vans crossing into Peru. It has five restaurants scattered along its main road, two grocery shops and an ice cream parlor that has Amazon flavors like local fruits cupuacu and tapereba. Migrants frequently beg for money at the city's only square.

There are three daily flights into state capital Rio Branco, where 21-year-old Jay came from India en route to the U.S. to study engineering. He declined to disclose his hometown and his last name.

Wearing a white cap reading "RIO DE JANEIRO," he said that "it would take too long if I just sat and waited," in India.

"It is a long trip, very risky. But it is my dream to study there and I will accomplish it," he said.

Brazil's westernmost state is a remote enclave in the middle of the rainforest, used by tourists as part of an alternative route to visit Cuzco, once the capital of the Inca empire in Peru.

One of Assis' main attractions for locals is sitting on the benches of its main square Senador Guimard to watch soccer on TV and eat barbecue. The small city's founders came to the Amazon in 1908 to start a rubber plantation that 50 years later became a city. Not much has changed since, despite the BR-317 road that runs by it, the only land connection between Brazil and Peru. When residents of Assis Brasil are bored, and they often are, they go to neighboring Peruvian city of Iñapari to have a drink, generally a pisco sour.

Venezuelan migrant Alexander Guedes Martinez, 27, said he will stay as long as needed to get more cash and maybe in a year go to Houston, where he has family. He came with his 17-year-old partner and their 5-month-old baby.

At the Assis Brasil shelter where they were staying last month, he said that he hopes "to go (back) to Venezuela and get key documents to try to cross in a better fashion."

"I want to be cautious because of my daughter," he said. "Being here helps."

Acre state's patrol has about 40 agents to inspect 2,600 kilometers (1,615 miles) of border with Peru and Bolivia. A main road connects the three countries, but local police say that many migrants also move through the forest, some of them carrying drugs.

Cuban migrant Miguel Hidalgo, 52, tried to get to the U.S. years ago. He left the island to Suriname, then came to Brazil and doesn't plan on leaving any time soon.

"I like Brazil. I have been here for a short time, but people are not prejudiced against me, people are lovely," he said. "I want to live like a human being. I am not asking for any riches. I want to live in tranquility, help my family in Cuba."

Acre Gov. Gladson Camelli said in a statement to the AP that he is worried about a bigger influx of South American migrants coming soon.

"Our government has tried to do its part in the humanitarian support," he said.

Assis Brasil's Mayor Jerry Correia also is bracing for more demand. City hall is feeding about 60 migrants every day and voters are feeling upset in a year of mayoral elections.

"This is all on our back. This is a policy that has to be handled by the federal government," Correia said. "People don't know what happens on our border. We need to be seen."

AP videojournalist Lucas Dumphreys contributed to this report.

Which states could have abortion on the ballot in 2024?

By GEOFF MULVIHILL and KIMBERLEE KRUESI Associated Press

Organizers in Arizona and Nebraska turned in more than enough signatures Wednesday to put abortion-related ballot questions before voters in November's election if a sufficient number of them are deemed valid.

They now bring to five the number of states where election officials are validating signatures on abortion measures.

They're already on the ballot in another five, plus a sixth state where an amendment would bar discrimination based on "pregnancy outcomes."

A campaign in one more state is trying to get enough signatures by Friday to add it to the ballot there, too.

The U.S. Supreme Court removed the nationwide right to abortion with a 2022 ruling, which sparked a national push to have voters decide.

Since the ruling, most Republican-controlled states have new abortion restrictions in effect, including 14 that ban it at every stage of pregnancy. Most Democratic-led states have laws or executive orders to protect access.

Voters in all seven states that have had abortion questions before voters since 2022 — California, Kansas, Kentucky, Michigan, Montana, Ohio and Vermont — have sided with abortion rights supporters.

What is on 2024 ballots?

COLORADO

Colorado's top election official confirmed in May that a measure to enshrine abortion protections into the state constitution, including requirements that Medicaid and private health insurers cover it, made the ballot for the fall election.

Supporters said they gathered over 225,000 signatures, nearly double the requirement of over 124,000 signatures.

Amending the state constitution requires the support of 55% of voters.

Those backing a dueling measure — a law to ban abortion — did not turn in signatures, and the measure will not go before voters.

Abortion is legal at all stages of pregnancy in Colorado.

FLORIDA

The state Supreme Court ruled in April that a ballot measure to legalize abortion until viability could go on the ballot despite a legal challenge from state Attorney General Ashley Moody, who argued that there are differing views on the meaning of "viability" and that some key terms in the proposed measure are not properly defined.

Advocates collected nearly a million signatures to put a state constitutional amendment to legalize abortion until viability on the ballot, surpassing the nearly 892,000 required.

Sixty percent of voters would have to agree for it to take effect.

Abortion is currently illegal in Florida after the first six weeks of pregnancy under a law that took effect May 1.

MARYLAND

Maryland voters also will be asked this year to enshrine the right to abortion in the state's constitution. The state already protects the right to abortion under state law and Democrats outnumber Republicans 2-1. Abortion is allowed in Maryland until viability.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 57 of 88

NEVADA

The Nevada Secretary of State's office announced in June that a ballot question to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution has met all of the requirements to appear in front of voters in November.

Under the amendment, abortion access for the first 24 weeks of pregnancy — or later to protect the health of the pregnant person — would be enshrined. Such access is already ensured under a 1990 law.

To change the constitution, voters would need to approve it in both 2024 and 2026.

SOUTH DAKOTA

South Dakota voters will decide this fall on a measure that would ban any restrictions on abortion in the first trimester of pregnancy. It would allow the state in the second trimester to "regulate the pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation only in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." An abortion ban would be allowed in the third trimester, as long as it included exceptions for the life and health of the woman.

The state's top election official announced May 16 that about 85% of the more than 55,000 signatures submitted in support of the ballot initiative are valid, exceeding the required 35,017 signatures.

Opponents have sued to try to take the initiative off the ballot.

What's on the ballot in New York?

While not explicitly preserving a right to abortion, a reproductive rights question is on the ballot in New York. The measure would bar discrimination based on "pregnancy outcomes" and "reproductive health-care," along with sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, national origin and disability. Abortion is currently allowed in New York until fetal viability.

The question was on the ballot, then removed in May by a judge who found lawmakers missed a procedural step when they put it there. An appeals court reinstated it in June.

Where else could abortion be on the ballot in 2024?

ARIZONA

Abortion rights supporters submitted more than 823,000 signatures on Wednesday to put an abortion access measure before voters in November. That's more than twice as many as required.

Election officials still need to verify signatures, though.

Under the measure, the state would not be able to ban abortion until the fetus is viable, with later abortions allowed to protect a woman's physical or mental health.

Abortion is currently legal for the first 15 weeks of pregnancy in Arizona. An Arizona Supreme Court ruling in April said enforcement could begin soon for a near-total ban that was already on the books. The governor has since signed a bill repealing that law. It is still expected to be in effect for a time, however.

ARKANSAS

Proponents of an amendment to allow abortion in many cases must gather nearly 91,000 signatures by Friday for it to get on the Nov. 5 ballot.

They said on Wednesday that they were about 5,800 short of the requirement with two days left to circulate petitions.

The measure would bar laws banning abortion in the first 20 weeks of gestation and allow abortion later in pregnancy in cases of rape, incest, threats to the woman's health or life, or if the fetus would be unlikely to survive birth. Because it allows abortion to be banned 20 weeks into pregnancy, the proposal does not have the support of Planned Parenthood Great Plains, which includes Arkansas. The state currently bans abortion at all stages of pregnancy, with narrow exceptions.

MISSOURI

Missouri abortion rights advocates turned in more than 380,000 signatures — more than twice the required 171,000 — for a measure asking voters to approve a constitutional amendment to guarantee abortion until viability. Local election officials have until July 30 to verify the signatures, then it's up to the secretary of state to declare whether there were enough.

A group of moderate Republicans have for this year abandoned efforts for an alternate amendment that would have allowed abortion up to 12 weeks, with limited exceptions after that.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 58 of 88

Abortion is currently banned in Missouri at all stages of pregnancy, with limited exceptions.

MONTANA

Abortion rights proponents in Montana have proposed a constitutional amendment that would bar the government from denying the right to abortion before viability or when it's necessary to protect the life or health of the pregnant person.

After a legal battle over the ballot language, the Montana Supreme Court in April wrote its version of the language that would appear on the ballot if enough valid signatures are certified. Sponsors were required to submit about 60,000 by June 21. They turned in nearly twice that many — about 117,000. Counties have until July 19 to verify them, and the secretary of state would have until Aug. 22 to determine whether it goes on the ballot.

Abortion is legal until viability in Montana under a 1999 Montana Supreme Court opinion.

NEBRASKA

Competing abortion measures could be before voters in November after supporters of each said Wednesday they turned in far more signatures than the 123,000 required for ballot access.

One, like those on other states' ballots, would enshrine the right to abortion in the state constitution until viability. Supporters of that said they submitted more than 207,000 signatures.

The other would write into the constitution the current law, which bars abortions after the first 12 weeks of pregnancy, with some exceptions. Its backers said they submitted more than 205,000 signatures.

Organizers for a third effort did not submit petitions: It would have defined embryos as people, thus barring abortion at all stages of pregnancy.

Where did ballot efforts fail to gain traction?

Some efforts that sought to restrict or ban abortion have also failed to reach ballots. In Wisconsin, the House approved a measure asking voters to ban abortion after 14 weeks, but the legislative session ended without a vote from the state Senate.

Likewise, Iowa lawmakers ended their session without approving a measure asking voters to find that there's no constitutional right to abortion. Pennsylvania lawmakers previously pursued a similar amendment, but it's not expected to be added to the ballot this year.

A Louisiana measure to enshrine abortion rights in the state constitution died in committee, one in Maine effectively died when it fell short of receiving the approval of two-thirds of the House and a Minnesota measure was not passed by lawmakers, either.

This story has been updated to correct the number of signatures Arkansas organizers said they still need, and the number of signatures submitted for the Montana proposal.

Life and death in Gaza's 'safe zone' where food is scarce and Israel strikes without warning

By WAFAA SHURAFI Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — An Israeli airstrike slammed into a residential building next to the main medical center in Gaza's southern city of Khan Younis, wounding at least seven people, hospital authorities and witnesses said Wednesday.

Nasser Hospital sits in the western part of the city, which is inside the Israeli-designated humanitarian "safe zone" where Palestinians have been told to go, according to maps provided by Israel's military. The latest Israeli evacuation order affected about 250,000 people earlier this week across wide swathes of Gaza, the United Nations estimated.

As dust from Wednesday's strike billowed through a street near Nasser Hospital, an Associated Press contributor filmed people running in all directions — some rushing toward the destruction and some away. Men carried two young boys, apparently wounded. Later, civil defense first responders and bystanders picked their way across chunks of cement and twisted metal, searching for people who might have been buried.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 59 of 88

Displaced families ordered out of eastern Khan Younis on Monday have struggled to find places to live in overcrowded shelters and open areas in the western parts of the city. Wednesday's airstrike hit an area that also includes a school-turned-shelter for displaced people, many of whom are living in makeshift tents.

"We were sitting in this tent, three people, and we were surprised by the rubble and dust," said one man, Jalal Lafi, who was displaced from the city of Rafah in the south.

"The house was bombed without any warning, hit by two missiles in a row, one after another," he said, looking back over his shoulder at the rubble, his hair and clothes covered in grey soot.

The Israeli military did not immediately comment on the strike.

Andrea De Domenico, the head of the U.N. humanitarian office for the Palestinian territories, said Gaza is "the only place in the world where people cannot find a safe refuge, and can't leave the front line." Even in so-called safe areas there are bombings, he told reporters Wednesday in Jerusalem.

An Israeli airstrike Tuesday killed a prominent Palestinian doctor and eight members of his extended family, just hours after they complied with military orders to evacuate their home and moved to the Israeli-designated safe zone.

Most Palestinians seeking safety are either heading to a coastal area called Muwasi or the nearby city of Deir al-Balah, De Domenico said.

The Israeli military said Tuesday it estimates at least 1.8 million Palestinians are now in the humanitarian zone it declared, covering a stretch of about 14 kilometers (8.6 miles) along the Mediterranean. Much of that area is now blanketed with tent camps that lack sanitation and medical facilities with limited access to aid, U.N. and humanitarian groups say. Families live amid mountains of trash and streams of water contaminated by sewage.

It's been "a major challenge" to even bring food to those areas, De Domenico said. Although the U.N. is now able to meet basic needs in northern Gaza, he said it's very difficult getting aid into the south. Israel says it allows aid to enter via the Kerem Shalom crossing with southern Gaza, and blames the U.N. for not doing enough to move the aid.

The U.N. says fighting, Israeli military restrictions and general chaos — including criminal gangs taking aid off trucks in Gaza — make it nearly impossible for aid workers to pick up truckloads of goods that Israel has let in.

The amount of food and other supplies getting into Gaza has plunged since Israel's offensive into Rafah began two months ago, causing widespread hunger and sparking fears of famine.

"It's an unendurable life," said Anwar Salman, a displaced Palestinian. "If they want to kill us, let them do it. Let them drop a nuclear bomb and finish us. We are fed up. We are tired. We are dying every day."

Associated Press writers Edith M. Lederer at the United Nations, Samy Magdy in Cairo, and Drew Calister in New York contributed.

GM will pay \$146 million in penalties because 5.9 million older vehicles emit excess carbon dioxide

By TOM KRISHER and MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — General Motors will pay nearly \$146 million in penalties to the federal government because 5.9 million of its older vehicles do not comply with emissions and fuel economy standards.

The National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said in a statement Wednesday that certain GM vehicles from the 2012 through 2018 model years did not comply with federal fuel economy requirements.

The penalty comes after the Environmental Protection Agency said its testing showed the GM pickup trucks and SUVs emit over 10% more carbon dioxide on average than GM's initial compliance testing claimed.

The EPA says the vehicles will remain on the road and cannot be repaired. The GM vehicles on average consume at least 10% more fuel than the window sticker numbers say, but the company won't be required to reduce the miles per gallon on the stickers, the EPA said.

"Our investigation has achieved accountability and upholds an important program that's reducing air pollution and protecting communities across the country," EPA Administrator Michael Regan said.

GM said in a statement that it complied with all regulations in pollution and mileage certification of its vehicles. The company said it is not admitting to any wrongdoing nor that it failed to comply with the Clean Air Act.

The problem stems from a change in testing procedures that the EPA put in place in 2016, GM spokesman Bill Grotz said.

Owners don't have to take any action because there is no defect in the vehicles, Grotz said.

"We believe this voluntary action is the best course of action to resolve the outstanding issues with the federal government," he said.

The enforcement action involves about 4.6 million full-size pickups and SUVs and about 1.3 million midsize SUVs, the EPA said. The affected models include the Chevy Tahoe, Cadillac Escalade and Chevy Silverado. About 40 variations of GM vehicles are covered.

GM will be forced to give up credits used to ensure that manufacturers' greenhouse gas emissions are below the fleet standard for emissions that applies for that model year, the EPA said. In a quarterly filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission, GM said it expects the total cost to resolve the matter will be \$490 million.

Because GM agreed to address the excess emissions, EPA said it was not necessary to make a formal determination regarding the reasons for the excess pollution.

But David Cooke, senior vehicles analyst for the Union of Concerned Scientists, questioned how GM could not know that pollution exceeded initial test by more than 10% because the problem was so widespread on so many different vehicles. "You don't just make a more than 10% rounding error," he said.

Dan Becker, director of the Safe Climate Transport Campaign for the environmental group Center for Biological Diversity, said the violations by GM "show why automakers can't be trusted to protect our air and health, and why we need strong pollution rules. Supreme Court, take notice!"

In similar pollution cases in the past, automakers have been fined under the Clean Air Act for such violations, and the Justice Department normally gets involved, Cooke said. Hyundai and Kia, for instance, faced Justice Department action in a similar case.

The Justice Department declined to comment, and GM said the settlement resolves all government claims.

Cooke said it's possible that GM owners could sue the company because they are getting lower gas mileage than advertised.

In 2014, Hyundai and Kia entered into a settlement in which they had to pay a \$100 million civil penalty to end a two year investigation into overstated gas mileage on window stickers of 1.2 million vehicles.

The affiliated Korean automakers denied allegations that they violated the law. Hyundai blamed the inflated mileage on honest misinterpretation of the EPA's complex rules governing testing.

In 2015, Volkswagen admitted it intentionally rigged nearly half a million cars to defeat U.S. smog tests.

The German company admitted that it intentionally installed software programmed to "defeat" emissions testing, enabling cars to drive more powerfully on the road while emitting as much as 40 times the legal pollution limit. The scandal cost Volkswagen more than \$30 billion in fines and settlements and saw two U.S. executives sent to prison.

Krisher reported from Detroit.

Abortion measures could be on Arizona and Nebraska ballots after organizers submit signatures

By WALTER BERRY and ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Organizers in Arizona and Nebraska said Wednesday that they turned in far more signatures than required to get ballot measures on abortion rights before voters in November's election.

In Nebraska, there could be two competing questions. One, like the Arizona proposal, would add a right

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 61 of 88

to abortion to the state constitution. The other would enshrine Nebraska's current ban on most abortions after 12 weeks of pregnancy.

In both states, it's now up to election officials to certify the signatures before they're added to ballots.

Democrats have made abortion rights a central message since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 and it is a key part of their efforts in this year's elections. Activists in Arkansas are still pushing to meet Friday's deadline to make the ballot there.

In five other states, the issue already is set to go before voters this year: Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Nevada and South Dakota. New York also has a measure that advocates say would protect abortion access.

Arizona organizers say they submitted 823,685 signatures, far above the 383,923 required from registered voters. County election officials have until Aug. 22 to verify whether enough of the petition signatures are valid and provide results to the Arizona secretary of state's office.

Arizona currently has a 15-week abortion ban. The proposed amendment would allow abortions until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions to save the mother's life or to protect her physical or mental health. It would restrict the state from adopting or enforcing any law that would prohibit access to the procedure.

Opponents say it goes too far and could lead to unlimited and unregulated abortions in Arizona. Supporters say a change in the state's constitution is necessary to ensure that abortion rights cannot be easily erased by a court decision or legislative vote.

Arizona for Abortion Access, a coalition that includes the American Civil Liberties Union of Arizona and Planned Parenthood of Arizona, turned in 300 boxes of signed petitions to the secretary of state's office, where extra security has been added.

"We don't talk about specific threats, but we have been operating under some serious threat profiles — generally speaking — for the last several weeks," Secretary of State Adrian Fontes told reporters. "In an abundance of caution, we just wanted to make sure that the voters' signatures are safe."

Arizona for Abortion Access spokesperson Dawn Penich said it was the most signatures ever submitted for a citizens initiative in state history.

"That was our goal from the get-go," Penich said. "We started collecting signatures in September and October 2023 and saw how passionate people are about this issue."

In April, the Arizona Supreme Court upheld a 1864 abortion ban that permitted abortions only to save the mother's life and provided no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest, but the Republican-controlled Legislature voted for a repeal of the Civil War-era ban, and Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs quickly signed. The 19th century law had been blocked since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that eliminated constitutional protections for abortion.

The current 15-week ban was signed into law in 2022 and includes exceptions in cases of medical emergencies and has restrictions on medication abortion. It also requires an ultrasound before an abortion is done, as well as parental consent for minors.

In Nebraska, officials with Protect Our Rights said they turned in 207,000 signatures in their effort to enshrine abortion rights. Organizers of SBA Pro-Life America's competing petition effort said they submitted more than 205,000 signatures.

The state requires more than 123,000 valid signatures — or 10% of registered voters in the state — to qualify for the ballot. There's also a requirement that signatures come in sufficient numbers from several counties in the largely rural state.

It looks like a third measure won't make the ballot. That one would ban abortion at all stages of pregnancy by deeming embryos as people. An organizer of that effort did not return a call from The Associated Press, and there was no announcement about gathering enough signatures by Wednesday's deadline.

Supporters of an Arkansas proposal to scale back the state's abortion ban face a Friday deadline to submit petitions to qualify for the November ballot. The group behind the measure, Arkansans for Limited Government, said on Facebook and Instagram on Tuesday that it still needed about 5,800 signatures out of the 90,704 required.

The proposed constitutional amendment would prohibit the state from banning abortion within the first

18 weeks of pregnancy. It includes exceptions for rape, incest, fatal fetal anomalies and to protect the mother's life. It would also exempt abortions performed to protect the pregnant woman from a physical disorder, physical illness or physical injury.

Arkansas' current ban exempts abortions only to protect the woman's life in a medical emergency.

Associated Press reporters Margery A. Beck in Omaha, Nebraska; Andrew DeMillo in Little Rock, Arkansas, and Geoff Mulvihill in Cherry Hill, New Jersey, contributed to this report.

This story has been corrected to reflect that the Arizona Supreme Court decision upholding the 1864 abortion ban was in April, not two months ago.

Democrats in Congress are torn between backing Biden for renomination and sounding the alarm

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden's disastrous debate performance is reverberating across the Democratic Party, forcing lawmakers to grapple with a crisis that could upend the presidential election — and their own — and even change the course of American history.

The Democratic president has vowed to stay in the race against Republican Donald Trump despite the halting and uneven debate delivery that threw a spotlight on questions about Biden's age and capacity to be president. But as Democrats make the case that the stakes of the election are momentous — challenging no less than the foundations of American democracy — they're wrestling with what to do about the 81-year-old who's supposed to be leading the charge for their party.

Here's how Democrats are handling the debate aftermath:

Raising alarm

Prominent congressional Democrats have moved in recent days to public concern not just over Biden's performance during the 90-minute debate last week but also the level of transparency his team has shown about his mental fitness. They've tiptoed toward embracing the idea Biden should withdraw.

One Biden ally, Rep. James Clyburn, on CNN Wednesday openly discussed holding a "mini-primary" in the run-up to the Democratic National Convention in mid-August.

After the debate last week, Clyburn had initially urged fellow Democrats to "stay the course" with Biden and "chill out," but by Wednesday his tone had changed.

"I saw what I saw last Thursday night, and it is concerning," said Clyburn, who is 83 years old.

In recent days, comments from Clyburn and other senior Democrats including former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi have provided signposts for a political party in crisis. Still, it was not clear whether their concerns were reaching Biden, who told aides on a Democratic National Committee call that "no one is pushing me out."

Clyburn, a senior South Carolina lawmaker who is a former top party leader in the House, also had a lengthy call with Biden on Wednesday.

Pelosi, in an interview Tuesday on MSNBC, called on both Biden and Trump, who's 78, to face tests for their health and mental acuity even though she also emphasized that Biden is on "top of his game, in terms of knowing the issues and what is at stake."

"I think it is a legitimate question to say is this an episode or is this a condition. So when people ask that question, it's legitimate — of both candidates," said Pelosi, D-Calif., who's 84.

Minutes after Pelosi's comments on Tuesday, Rep. Lloyd Doggett, of Texas, became the first sitting Democrat in Congress to call for Biden to withdraw from the race.

"Recognizing that, unlike Trump, President Biden's first commitment has always been to our country, not himself, I am hopeful that he will make the painful and difficult decision to withdraw. I respectfully call on him to do so," said Doggett, who's 77.

Rep. Raúl Grijalva, D-Ariz., also told The New York Times on Wednesday that Biden had a "responsibil-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 63 of 88

ity" to drop out of the race.

Lawmakers are also concerned Biden's weaknesses could tamp down potential voters' enthusiasm, creating a ripple effect that hurts Democrats as they try to maintain a narrow Senate majority and take back control of the House. Down-ballot Democrats are already confident they can outperform Biden in swing races, but if large numbers of voters reject Biden, it could impact them.

While several vulnerable Democrats have stopped short of calling for Biden to withdraw, they've also cast the situation in stark terms: If Biden continues, Trump will win.

"The truth, I think, is that Biden is going to lose to Trump," Rep. Marie Gluesenkamp Perez, a Washington Democrat, told an ABC-affiliated television station. "I know that's difficult, but I think the damage has been done by that debate."

Backing Biden

With Biden's family urging him to stay in the race, attention has turned to senior Democratic lawmakers who could potentially persuade the president to withdraw his nomination. So far, top Democratic leaders have mostly stood behind Biden in public statements.

"There have not been discussions among senior leadership about anything other than making sure we continue to articulate a compelling vision for the future to the American people related to the issues of importance around the economy," House Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries told reporters Monday in Pittsburgh.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, posted on X after the debate that it showed voters there was a choice between "four more years of progress, or four more years of attacks on our fundamental rights and our democracy."

After days of no direct talk between Biden and congressional leaders, the president late Tuesday and Wednesday held calls with Schumer and Jeffries, as well as Sen. Chris Coons, a Delaware Democrat who's a close ally of the president, according to people briefed on the calls who insisted on anonymity to discuss them.

Many of Biden's allies have chided the news media for being fixated on Biden's mental capacities, arguing that instead the focus should be put on Trump's record of refusing to accept the results of the 2020 election he lost to Biden and repeatedly lying.

Rep. Veronica Escobar, a Texas Democrat who's part of Biden's campaign committee, conceded on Friday the debate wasn't what she hoped for but added, "I think there needs to be a real conversation about the things that Donald Trump said. It is beyond vile."

Feeling it out

The June 27 debate infused a new dynamic into an election contest that had been marked by few surprises. Voters are familiar with Biden and Trump and had previously decided between the two in 2020.

Still, many House Democrats were caught in a state of uncertainty as they faced a barrage of questions on the morning after. The situation has only grown more unpredictable as Democrats contemplate the effects of replacing Biden at the top of the ticket.

Privately, rank-and-file lawmakers have been engaging in calls and conversations amongst themselves as they consider their message to the White House. Many are still holding back public remarks allowing Biden time to make his case in campaign stops and interviews in the days ahead. Many will closely watch his interview with ABC, the first since the debate, later in the week.

But some vulnerable House Democrats are already distancing themselves from the president.

Rep. Jared Golden, a moderate Democrat from Maine, argued the outcome of the election was a foregone conclusion.

"While I don't plan to vote for him, Donald Trump is going to win," Golden said in a Bangor Daily News op-ed. "And I'm OK with that."

Associated Press writers Farnoush Amiri and Lisa Mascaro contributed to this report.

To save spotted owls, US officials plan to kill hundreds of thousands of another owl species

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

To save the imperiled spotted owl from potential extinction, U.S. wildlife officials are embracing a contentious plan to deploy trained shooters into dense West Coast forests to kill almost a half-million barred owls that are crowding out their cousins.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service strategy released Wednesday is meant to prop up declining spotted owl populations in Oregon, Washington state and California. The Associated Press obtained details in advance.

Documents released by the agency show up to about 450,000 barred owls would be shot over three decades after the birds from the eastern U.S. encroached into the West Coast territory of two owls: northern spotted owls and California spotted owls. The smaller spotted owls have been unable to compete with the invaders, which have large broods and need less room to survive than spotted owls.

Past efforts to save spotted owls focused on protecting the forests where they live, sparking bitter fights over logging but also helping slow the birds' decline. The proliferation of barred owls in recent years is undermining that earlier work, officials said.

"Without actively managing barred owls, northern spotted owls will likely go extinct in all or the majority of their range, despite decades of collaborative conservation efforts," said Fish and Wildlife Service Oregon state supervisor Kessina Lee.

The notion of killing one bird species to save another has divided wildlife advocates and conservationists. It's reminiscent of past government efforts to save West Coast salmon by killing sea lions and cormorants that prey on the fish, and to preserve warblers by killing cowbirds that lay eggs in warbler nests.

Some advocates grudgingly accepted the barred owl removal strategy; others said it's reckless diversion from needed forest preservation.

"The Fish and Wildlife Service is turning from protector of wildlife to persecutor of wildlife," said Wayne Pacelle, founder of the advocacy group Animal Wellness Action. He predicted the program would fail because the agency won't be able to keep more barred owls from migrating into areas where others have been killed.

The shootings would likely begin next spring, officials said. Barred owls would be lured using megaphones to broadcast recorded owl calls, then shot with shotguns. Carcasses would be buried on site.

The birds already are being killed by researchers in some spotted owl habitats, with about 4,500 removed since 2009, said Robin Bown, barred owl strategy leader for the Fish and Wildlife Service. Those targeted included barred owls in California's Sierra Nevada region, where the animals have only recently arrived and officials want to stop populations from taking hold.

In other areas where barred owls are more established, officials aim to reduce their numbers but acknowledge shooting owls is unlikely to eliminate them entirely.

Supporters include the American Bird Conservancy and other conservation groups.

Barred owls don't belong in the West, said American Bird Conservancy Vice President Steve Holmer. Killing them is unfortunate, he added, but reducing their numbers could allow them to live alongside spotted owls over the long term.

"As the old forests are allowed to regrow, hopefully coexistence is possible and maybe we don't need to do as much" shooting, Holmer said.

The killings would reduce North American barred owl numbers by less than 1% annually, officials said. That compares with potential extinction for spotted owls, should the problem go unaddressed.

Because barred owls are aggressive hunters, removing them also could help other West Coast species that they've been preying on such as salamanders and crayfish, said Tom Wheeler, director of the Environmental Protection Information Center, a California-based conservation group.

Public hunting of barred owls wouldn't be allowed. The wildlife service would designate government agencies, landowners, American Indian tribes or companies to carry out the killings. Shooters would have to provide documentation of training or experience in owl identification and firearm skills.

The publishing in the coming days of a final environmental study on the proposal will open a 30-day comment period before a final decision is made.

The barred owl plan follows decades of conflict between conservationists and timber companies, which cut down vast areas of older forests where spotted owls reside.

Early efforts to save the birds culminated in logging bans in the 1990s that roiled the timber industry and its political supporters in Congress.

Yet spotted owl populations continued declining after barred owls started showing up on the West Coast several decades ago. Across the region at least half of spotted owls have been lost, with declines of 75% or more in some study areas, said Katherine Fitzgerald, who leads the wildlife service's northern spotted owl recovery program.

Opponents say the mass killing of barred owls would cause severe disruption to forest ecosystems and could lead to other species — including spotted owls — being mistakenly shot. They've also challenged the notion that barred owls don't belong on the West Coast, characterizing their expanding range as a natural ecological phenomenon.

Researchers say barred owls moved westward by one of two routes: across the Great Plains, where trees planted by settlers gave them a foothold in new areas; or via Canada's boreal forests, which have become more hospitable as temperatures rise because of climate change.

Northern spotted owls are federally protected as a threatened species. Federal officials determined in 2020 that their continued decline merited an upgrade to the more critical designation of "endangered." But the Fish and Wildlife Service refused to do so at the time, saying other species took priority.

California spotted owls were proposed for federal protections last year. A decision is pending.

Under former President Donald Trump, government officials stripped habitat protections for spotted owls at the behest of the timber industry. Those were reinstated under President Joe Biden after the Interior Department said political appointees under Trump relied on faulty science to justify their weakening of protections.

LeBron James agrees to a 2-year extension with the Los Angeles Lakers, AP source says

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Basketball Writer

LeBron James is making it official: He's coming back for a record-tying 22nd season in the NBA, one where the league's all-time scoring leader could share the floor with his son Bronny as teammates with the Los Angeles Lakers.

James has agreed to a two-year contract to remain with the Lakers, a person with knowledge of the negotiations said Wednesday. The second year of the deal is at James' option and means he could become a free agent again next summer, said the person, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because the agreement had not been announced publicly.

ESPN reported that the Lakers and James' agent, Klutch Sports CEO Rich Paul, may agree on a salary slightly less than the max that James could have gotten — a move that could keep the team from reaching the second apron and preserve some roster flexibility going forward.

Either way, the expectation is that James will make around \$50 million — give or take a little bit — this coming season, pushing his career on-court earnings to around \$530 million and making him the first player in NBA history to eclipse the \$500 million mark.

It will be James' 22nd season in the NBA, tying Vince Carter for the league record. The Lakers selected Bronny James last week in the second round of the draft, putting them in position to have the first on-court father-son duo in NBA history.

Bronny James already has signed his first NBA contract, the Lakers announced Wednesday. It is a four-year deal, the last of those years at the Lakers' option, worth \$7.9 million — with about \$1.2 million as his rookie year salary.

Getting his latest deal done clears one logistical hurdle for LeBron James: He needed a contract to be

in place before he could take the floor with USA Basketball for the start of its training camp in Las Vegas this weekend, one where the squad will start preparations for the Paris Olympics. James will play in the Olympics for the fourth time, his first since helping the U.S. win gold at the 2012 London Games.

He'll turn 40 in December and averaged 25.7 points, 7.3 rebounds and 8.3 assists last season — as the oldest active player in the league.

Not only is James the all-time leader in points (40,474), but he's fourth in assists (11,009), sixth in games played (1,492) and eighth in both 3-pointers made (2,410) and steals (2,275).

His 20 All-Star selections is a record, as are his 20 appearances on the All-NBA team. He holds the records for being both the youngest player, and oldest player, to make an All-NBA squad.

James became the youngest to make All-NBA when he was voted onto the team for the 2004-05 season. This past season, he became the first player to be age 39 or older in what became an All-NBA campaign.

Kareem Abdul-Jabbar and Tim Duncan were both just a few days from turning 39 when the regular seasons ended in what became their final All-NBA campaigns, Abdul-Jabbar's being 1985-86 and Duncan's being 2014-15. James played in 71 games this past season, the last 42 of those coming after he turned 39.

AP NBA: <https://apnews.com/NBA>

FACT FOCUS: Trump wasn't exonerated by the presidential immunity ruling, even though he says he was

By MELISSA GOLDIN Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump on Tuesday misrepresented in a social media post what the U.S. Supreme Court's Monday ruling on presidential immunity means for his civil and criminal cases.

"TOTAL EXONERATION!" he wrote in the post on his Truth Social platform. "It is clear that the Supreme Court's Brilliantly Written and Historic Decision ENDS all of Crooked Joe Biden's Witch Hunts against me, including the WHITE HOUSE AND DOJ INSPIRED CIVIL HOAXES in New York."

But none of Trump's pending cases have been dismissed as a result of the ruling, nor have the verdicts already reached against him been overturned. The ruling does amount to a major victory for the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, whose legal strategy has focused on delaying court proceedings until after the 2024 election.

Here's a closer look at the facts.

CLAIM: The Supreme Court's ruling that former presidents have broad immunity from prosecution means "total exoneration" for former President Donald Trump.

THE FACTS: Although the historic 6-3 ruling is a win for Trump, he has not been exonerated and his legal troubles are far from over. A delay of his Washington trial on charges of election interference has been indefinitely extended as a result. Also, he still faces charges in two other criminal cases, and the verdicts already reached against him in a criminal and a civil case have not been overturned.

Barbara McQuade, a law professor at the University of Michigan and former U.S. attorney for the state's Eastern District, told The Associated Press that Trump's claim is "inaccurate for a number of reasons."

"The court found immunity from prosecution, not exoneration," she wrote in an email. "The court did not say that Trump's conduct did not amount to criminal behavior. Just that prosecutors are not allowed to prosecute him for it because of the special role of a president and the need to permit him to make 'bold' and 'fearless' decisions without concern for criminal consequences."

McQuade wrote that Trump's case over classified documents found at his Mar-a-Lago estate won't be affected, as it arose from conduct committed after he left the White House. She added that any impact on his New York hush money trial "seems unlikely" since the crimes were committed in a personal capacity.

"In addition, the Court's opinion is solely focused on immunity for criminal conduct," McQuade continued, explaining that it will not protect him from civil liability in his cases regarding defamatory statements about advice columnist E. Jean Carroll or fraudulent business practices conducted at the Trump Organization.

Trump's campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 67 of 88

The Supreme Court's conservative majority said former presidents have absolute immunity from prosecution for official acts that fall within their "exclusive sphere of constitutional authority" and are presumptively entitled to immunity for all official acts. Unofficial, or private, actions are exempt from such immunity.

This means that special counsel Jack Smith cannot proceed with significant allegations in his indictment accusing Trump of plotting to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss, or he must at least defend their use in future proceedings before the trial judge.

The case has not been dismissed. It was instead sent back to U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who must now "carefully analyze" whether other allegations involve official conduct for which the president would be immune from prosecution. The trial was supposed to have begun in March, but has been on hold since December to allow Trump to pursue his Supreme Court appeal.

However, the justices did knock out one aspect of the indictment, finding that Trump is "absolutely immune" from prosecution for alleged conduct involving discussions with the Justice Department.

The opinion also stated that Trump is "at least presumptively immune" from allegations that he tried to pressure Vice President Mike Pence on Jan. 6, 2021, to reject certification of Democrat Joe Biden's electoral vote win. But prosecutors can try to make the case that Trump's pressure on Pence can still be part of the case against him, Chief Justice John Roberts wrote.

It is all but certain that the ruling means Trump will not face trial in Washington ahead of the 2024 election, as the need for further analysis is expected to tie up the case for months with legal wrangling over whether actions in the indictment were official or unofficial, the AP has reported.

Trump is facing charges in two other criminal cases, one over his alleged interference in Georgia's 2020 election and the other over classified documents found at his Mar-a-Lago estate after he left the White House. Trump's lawyers have asserted presidential immunity in both cases, but a ruling on the matter has not been made in either.

The former president was convicted in May of 34 felony counts in his hush money trial in New York. After Monday's ruling, the New York judge who presided over that trial postponed Trump's sentencing until at least September and agreed to weigh the impact of the presidential immunity decision.

Trump was ordered in February to pay a \$454 million penalty as part of a civil fraud lawsuit, for lying about his wealth for years as he built the real estate empire that vaulted him to stardom and the White House. It is still under appeal.

In May 2023, a jury found Trump liable for sexually abusing Carroll in 1996 and for defaming her over the allegations, awarding her \$5 million. Carroll was awarded an additional \$83.3 million in January by a separate jury for Trump's continued social media attacks against her. An appeal of the former decision was rejected in April. The latter case is still being appealed.

Find AP Fact Checks here: <https://apnews.com/APFactCheck>.

Trump, for now, is ceding the spotlight to Biden as the president's campaign reels from bad debate

By JILL COLVIN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump likes to be the one in the spotlight.

But in the days since President Joe Biden's disastrous debate performance, the presumptive Republican nominee has kept a low profile, leaving the focus on the drama engulfing the Democratic Party as he and his campaign revel in a series of legal and political victories heading into the Republican National Convention this month.

Trump's run began last week during the first debate, when Biden delivered a performance so dismal that he has spent the days since fending off calls from alarmed Democrats to step aside to save the party from losses up and down the ballot.

On Monday, the U.S. Supreme Court ruled that former presidents have broad immunity from prosecution, limiting the indictment against Trump for his efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss to Biden. It's

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 68 of 88

all but certain he won't face trial before Election Day.

And on Tuesday, the judge in Trump's New York criminal hush money trial postponed his sentencing to weigh the impact of the Supreme Court decision.

The flood of good news — along with a major fundraising haul that has eliminated what had been Biden's substantial cash advantage — has given Trump and his team cause for celebration as they head into the convention this month. And it has frustrated Biden supporters who would prefer to focus on Trump's sweeping second-term agenda and comments he made during the debate minimizing the Capitol riot and suggesting he might not accept the results of this election, either.

Instead of taking a victory lap, Trump has been lying low. While he sat for several radio interviews over the weekend and has been active on his Truth Social site, he has no public events on his schedule this week.

That's partially a function of the calendar with the Fourth of July on Thursday. But Trump's team, recognizing that Biden's campaign faces intense pressure, is perfectly happy to keep the focus on the incumbent, according to people familiar with the strategy who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the campaign's thinking.

Brendan Buck, a Republican strategist who's not a Trump supporter, credited the ex-president for what he called an "uncharacteristically disciplined" response to the debate and for "letting Biden sort of twist in the wind."

But he said challenges remain for the former president as he seeks a second term.

"Trump still remains an incredibly vulnerable, bad candidate. And that's what makes all of this so much worse," he said of the debate debacle. "I think Donald Trump is still very capable of blowing this."

In a statement, Trump campaign spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said the campaign would "continue to build off the momentum earned by President Trump to grow our movement, raise the money we need to win, and head into the fall poised for a historic victory."

The recent events could also impact the timing of Trump's vice presidential rollout — an announcement certain to garner a flurry of attention and a flood of stories about his chosen candidate's record and past statements.

Campaign officials have repeatedly said Trump will announce his pick when he's ready and still caution that an announcement could come anytime.

But some allies said they think he's now more likely to wait.

"Donald Trump has a hot hand. He's playing his hand perfectly," said Corey Lewandowski, Trump's 2016 campaign manager, who traveled with him to the debate June 27 and is now a senior adviser to the convention. Given the current situation, Lewandowski said, there's "no reason to announce anything and take the media attention away from Joe Biden."

While the election remains months away, Lewandowski argued Trump is in a stronger position now than he was at this point during his previous campaigns.

"All of these things are indications that the campaign is looking to keep their foot on the gas and keep the pressure on the Biden campaign," he said.

In the meantime, aides have been exulting in the Biden campaign's troubles. Steven Cheung, Trump's chief spokesperson, dialed into a Biden campaign media call held Monday to respond to the Supreme Court's ruling and mocked the campaign on social media for letting him join.

On Wednesday, Trump campaign senior advisers Chris LaCivita and Susie Wiles also dug in, issuing a statement declaring the "Total Collapse of the Democrat Party."

"Every Democrat who is calling on Crooked Joe Biden to quit was once a supporter of Biden and his failed policies that lead to extreme inflation, an open border, and chaos at home and abroad," they wrote, accusing Democrats, the media and the "swamp" of having "colluded to hide the truth from the American public — Joe Biden is weak, failed, dishonest, and not fit for the White House."

Biden and his allies, meanwhile, have tried to return the focus to Trump. They've noted that Trump again minimized the violence of the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol during the debate and refused to denounce those who attacked police officers and stormed the building by breaking doors and windows.

Trump also repeatedly declined to state unequivocally that he would accept the results of this November's

election, saying he would do so only "If it's a fair and legal and good election." There is no reason to think it won't be, even as Trump for years has spread false fears about election fraud.

Democrats have also called attention to Trump's mention of migrants entering the U.S. illegally taking "Black jobs" and "Hispanic jobs," arguing Trump was insulting people of color.

And Biden and his allies have warned about the implications of the Supreme Court ruling declaring Trump immune from prosecution for key moments listed in the Jan. 6 indictment. They have cited previous Trump comments that he would be a "dictator" on his first day in office and his threats to prosecute political enemies.

Over the weekend, Trump shared several posts on his Truth Social network reflecting his long-simmering grievances and threats of political retribution. One of the posts suggested former Wyoming Rep. Liz Cheney, a Republican critic, was "guilty of treason" and asked supporters to share it if they wanted "televised military tribunals." Another post featured photos of Biden and other senior Democratic and Republican officials and suggested they should be jailed.

"Trump now has the cover he needs to jail and assassinate his opponents, direct the military to overturn a free and fair election, and take cash in bribes for pardons — with full immunity," Biden campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa charged in a statement. "This November, the voters must stop Trump from turning the Oval Office into his throne room."

Trump has a long history of turning what would be devastating, career-ending episodes for anyone else into campaign fuel.

Though he has been indicted four times and was convicted on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records, his criminal trial and conviction appear to have done little to damage his standing in the polls and instead helped him raise millions of dollars.

His campaign announced Tuesday that it had outraised Biden in the year's second quarter, with a reported haul of \$331 million.

In a sign of how Trump's opponents feel about the state of the race, Buck, the Republican strategist, warned the former president could be in trouble if the debate fallout does somehow push Biden out of the race, even though that currently seems unlikely. Trump could then face a fresher face who is potentially more energetic and a better campaigner than Biden.

"This lucky week could turn unlucky," Buck said, "if it means Biden drops out."

In their statement, LaCivita and Wiles pushed back on that thinking even as they insulted Vice President Kamala Harris — a possible Biden successor — calling her the president's "Cackling Copilot."

Trump, they said, "will beat any Democrat on November 5th because he has a proven record and an agenda to Make America Great Again."

Fossils show huge salamanderlike predator with sharp fangs existed before the dinosaurs

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Scientists have revealed fossils of a giant salamanderlike beast with sharp fangs that ruled waters before the first dinosaurs arrived.

The predator, which was larger than a person, likely used its wide, flat head and front teeth to suck in and chomp unsuspecting prey, researchers said. Its skull was about 2 feet (60 centimeters) long.

"It's acting like an aggressive stapler," said Michael Coates, a biologist at the University of Chicago who was not involved with the work.

Fossil remnants of four creatures collected about a decade ago were analyzed, including a partial skull and backbone. The findings on *Gaiaasia jennyae* were published Wednesday in the journal *Nature*. The creature existed some 40 million years before dinosaurs evolved.

Researchers have long examined such ancient predators to uncover the origins of tetrapods: four-legged animals that clambered onto land with fingers instead of fins and evolved to amphibians, birds and mam-

mals including humans.

Most early tetrapod fossils hail from hot, prehistoric coal swamps along the equator in what's now North America and Europe. But these latest remnants, dating back to about 280 million years ago, were found in modern-day Namibia, an area in Africa that was once encrusted with glaciers and ice.

That means tetrapods may have thrived in colder climates earlier than scientists expected, prompting more questions about how and when they took over the Earth.

"The early story of the first tetrapods is much more complex than we thought," said co-author Claudia Marsicano at the University of Buenos Aires, who was part of the research.

The creature's name comes from the Gai-As rock formation in Namibia where the fossils were found and for the late paleontologist Jennifer Clack, who studied how tetrapods evolved.

The Associated Press Health and Science Department receives support from the Howard Hughes Medical Institute's Science and Educational Media Group. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Colorado dairy worker tests positive for bird flu, fourth person linked to outbreak

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

A fourth farm worker has been infected with bird flu in the growing outbreak linked to dairy cows, health officials reported Wednesday.

The worker had direct contact with infected dairy cows on a northeast Colorado farm, state and federal health officials said. The man developed pink eye, or conjunctivitis, received antiviral treatment and has recovered.

Three previous cases of human infection linked to cows have been reported in dairy workers in Texas and Michigan since March. Two of those workers also developed pink eye, while one had mild respiratory symptoms. In 2022, the first U.S. case of bird flu was detected in a Colorado farm worker exposed to infected poultry.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention said the new infection "does not change" the agency's assessment that the risk to the general public remains low. Surveillance systems tracking flu in the U.S. have shown no unusual activity, officials said. However, people with prolonged contact with infected birds or other animals, including livestock, or to their environments, are at higher risk of infection.

The Colorado man was being monitored when he developed symptoms because of his work with dairy cows, according to the CDC. Tests at the state level were inconclusive, but samples sent to CDC tested positive. Full results of genetic analysis of the sample are pending.

As of Wednesday, more than 135 dairy herds in a dozen states had reported infections with the H5N1 virus that originated in poultry, according to the Agriculture Department.

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Blazing hot surfaces are a danger for catastrophic burn injuries in the urban desert Southwest

By ANITA SNOW Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — Ron Falk lost his right leg, had extensive skin grafting on the left one and is still recovering a year after collapsing on the searing asphalt outside a Phoenix convenience store where he stopped for a cold soda during a heat wave.

Now using a wheelchair, the 62-year-old lost his job and his home. He's recovering at a medical respite center for patients with no other place to go; there he gets physical therapy and treatment for a bacterial infection in what remains of his right leg, too swollen to use the prosthesis he'd hoped would help him

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 71 of 88

walk again.

"If you don't get somewhere to cool down, the heat will affect you," said Falk, who lost consciousness due to heatstroke. "Then you won't know what's happening, like in my case."

Sizzling sidewalks and unshaded playgrounds pose risks for surface burns as air temperatures reach new summertime highs in Southwest cities like Phoenix, which just recorded its hottest June on record. The average daytime high was 109.5 degrees Fahrenheit (43 Celsius), without a single 24-hour high below 100 (37.7 C).

Young children, older adults and homeless people are especially at risk for contact burns, which can occur in seconds when skin touches a surface of 180 degrees Fahrenheit (82 C).

Since the beginning of June, 50 people have been hospitalized with such burns, and four have died at Valleywise Health Medical Center in Phoenix, which operates the Southwest's largest burn center, serving patients from Arizona, New Mexico, Utah, Nevada, Southern California and Texas, according to its director, Dr. Kevin Foster. About 80% were injured in metro Phoenix.

Last year, the center admitted 136 patients for surface burns from June through August, up from 85 during the same period in 2022, Foster said. Fourteen died. One out of five was homeless.

"Last year's record heat wave brought an alarming number of patients with life-threatening burns," Foster said of a 31-day period, including all of last July, with temperatures at or above 110 degrees (43 C) during Phoenix's hottest summer ever.

A map released this week by NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Southern California makes clear just how hot surfaces like asphalt and concrete get in metro Phoenix. The data for the visualization of land surface temperatures was collected the afternoon of June 19 by a NASA instrument aboard the International Space Station that measures thermal infrared emissions from the Earth's surface. The yellow, red and purple of hot urban areas on the map contrast with cooler green spaces.

In Las Vegas, which regularly sees summertime highs in the triple digits, 22 people were hospitalized in June alone at the University Medical Center's Lions Burn Care Center, said spokesperson Scott Kerbs. That's nearly half as many as the 46 hospitalized during all three summer months last year.

As in Phoenix, the desert sun punishes Las Vegas for hours every day, frying outdoor surfaces like asphalt, concrete and metal doors on cars and playground equipment like swings and monkey bars.

Surface burn victims often include children injured walking barefoot on broiling concrete or touching hot surfaces, adults who collapsed on a sidewalk while intoxicated, and older people who fell on the pavement due to heatstroke or another medical emergency.

Some don't survive.

Thermal injuries were among the main or contributing causes of last year's 645 heat-related deaths in Maricopa County, which encompasses Phoenix.

One victim was an 82-year-old woman with dementia and heart disease admitted to a suburban Phoenix hospital after being found on the scorching pavement on an August day that hit 106 degrees (41.1 C).

With a body temperature of 105 degrees (40.5 C) the woman was rushed to the hospital with second-degree burns on her back and right side, covering 8% of her body. She died three days later.

Many surface burn patients also suffered potentially fatal heatstroke.

Valleywise hospital's emergency department recently adopted a new protocol for all heatstroke victims, submerging patients in a bag of slushy ice to quickly bring down body temperature.

Recovery for those with skin burns was often lengthy, with patients undergoing multiple skin grafts and other surgeries, followed by months of recovery in skilled nursing or rehabilitation facilities.

Bob Woolley, 71, suffered second- and third-degree burns to his hands, arms, leg and torso after he stumbled onto the broiling backyard rock garden at his Phoenix home, wearing only swim trunks and a tank top.

"The ordeal was extremely painful; it was almost unbearable," said Woolley, who was hospitalized at the Valleywise burn center for several months. He said he considers himself "95% recovered" after extensive skin grafts and physical therapy and has resumed some former activities like swimming and motorcycle

riding.

Some skin-burn victims, both in Phoenix and Las Vegas, were children.

"In many cases, this involves toddlers walking or crawling onto hot surfaces," Kerbs said of those hospitalized at the Las Vegas center.

Foster said about 20% of the hospitalized and outpatient skin-burn victims seen at the Phoenix center are children.

Small children aren't fully aware of the harm a sizzling metal door handle or a scorching sidewalk can cause.

"Because they're playing, they don't pay attention," said urban climatologist Ariane Middel, an assistant professor at Arizona State University who directs the SHaDE Lab, a research team that studies the effects of urban heat.

"They may not even notice that it's hot."

In measuring surface temperatures of playground equipment, the team found that in 100-degree Fahrenheit (37.7 C) weather without shade, a slide can heat up to 160 degrees (71.1 C), but a covering can bring that down to 111 degrees (43.8 C). A rubber ground cover can hit as high as 188 degrees (86.6 C), a handrail can heat up to 120 degrees (48.8 C) and concrete can reach 132 degrees (55.5 C).

Many metro Phoenix parks have covered picnic tables and plastic fabric stretched over play equipment, keeping metal or plastic surfaces up to 30 degrees cooler. But plenty do not, Middel said.

She said cooler wood chips are better underfoot than rubber mats, which were designed to protect kids from head injuries but soak up heat in the broiling sun. Like rubber, artificial turf gets hotter than asphalt.

"We need to think about alternative surface types, because most surfaces we use for our infrastructure are heat sponges," Middel said.

Hot concrete and asphalt also pose burn risks for pets.

Veterinarians recommend dogs wear booties to protect their paws during outdoor walks in summer, or keeping them on cooler grassy areas. Owners are also advised to make sure their pets drink plenty of water and don't get overheated. Phoenix bans dogs from the city's popular hiking trails on days the National Weather Service issues an excessive heat warning.

Recovering at Phoenix's Circle the City, a respite care facility he was sent to after being released from Valleywise's burn unit, Falk said he never imagined the Phoenix heat could cause him to collapse on the broiling asphalt in his shorts and T-shirt.

Because he wasn't carrying identification or a phone, no one knew where he was for months. He has a long road ahead but still hopes to regain part of his old life, working for a concessionaire for entertainment events.

"I kind of went into a downward spiral," Falk acknowledged. "I finally woke up and said, 'Hey, wait, I lost a leg.' But that doesn't mean you're useless."

Israel turbocharges West Bank settlement expansion with largest land grab in decades

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel has approved the largest seizure of land in the occupied West Bank in over three decades, a settlement tracking group said Wednesday, a move that is likely to worsen already soaring tensions linked to the war in Gaza.

Israel's aggressive expansion in the West Bank reflects the settler community's strong influence in the government of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the most religious and nationalist in the country's history. Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich, a settler himself, has turbocharged the policy of expansion, seizing new authorities over settlement development and saying he aims to solidify Israel's hold on the territory and prevent the creation of a Palestinian state.

Authorities recently approved the appropriation of 12.7 square kilometers (nearly 5 square miles) of land

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 73 of 88

in the Jordan Valley, according to a copy of the order obtained by The Associated Press. Data from Peace Now, the tracking group, indicate it was the largest single appropriation approved since the 1993 Oslo accords at the start of the peace process.

Settlement monitors said the land grab connects Israeli settlements along a key corridor bordering Jordan, a move they said undermines the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state.

U.N. spokesperson Stephane Dujarric called it "a step in the wrong direction," adding that "the direction we want to be heading is to find a negotiated two-state solution."

The newly seized land is in an area of the West Bank where, even before the outbreak of the Israel-Hamas war, settler violence was displacing communities of Palestinians. That violence has only surged since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack ignited the war in Gaza. Settlers have carried out more than 1,000 attacks on Palestinians since October in the West Bank, causing deaths and damaging property, according to the U.N.

The land seizure, which was approved late last month but only publicized on Wednesday, comes after the seizure of 8 square kilometers (roughly 3 square miles) of land in the West Bank in March and 2.6 square kilometers (1 square mile) in February.

That makes 2024 by far the peak year for Israeli land seizure in the West Bank, Peace Now said.

By declaring them state lands, the government opens them up to being leased to Israelis and prohibits private Palestinian ownership. This year's land seizures are contiguous, linking two already existing settlements to create a solid block near the border with Jordan. The lands were declared to be closed Israeli military zones before they were declared state land.

The Palestinians view the expansion of settlements in the occupied West Bank as the main barrier to any lasting peace agreement, preventing any possibility of a cohesive state. Most of the international community considers settlements illegal or illegitimate.

Israel captured the West Bank, the Gaza Strip and east Jerusalem in the 1967 Mideast war, territories the Palestinians want for a future state. Israel's current government considers the West Bank to be the historical and religious heartland of the Jewish people and opposes Palestinian statehood.

Israel has built well over 100 settlements across the West Bank, some of which resemble fully developed suburbs or small towns. They are home to over 500,000 Jewish settlers who have Israeli citizenship.

The 3 million Palestinians in the West Bank live under seemingly open-ended Israeli military rule. The Palestinian Authority administers enclaves scattered across the territory, but is barred from operating in 60% of the West Bank, which includes the settlements as well as areas with a population of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians.

Yoni Mizrahi, the head of settlement tracking at Peace Now, described the land grab announced Wednesday as part of a strategy to establish a buffer zone between Jordan and Palestinian lands and choke off the practical possibility of a Palestinian state. The aim, he believes, is to push Palestinians into isolated islands surrounded by Israeli land.

"They definitely see this area as a strategic area, as the first and one of the easiest ways to begin annexation," he said.

Prominent human rights organizations have pointed to Israel's rule over the West Bank in accusing it of the international crime of apartheid, allegations Israel rejects as an attack on its legitimacy.

Smotrich was granted expanded powers over Israel's administration of the occupied territory under Netanyahu's governing coalition. Smotrich laid out his plans for the West Bank at a conference for his ultranationalist Religious Zionism Party last month, a recording of which was obtained by Peace Now. He said he intended to appropriate up to 15 square kilometers (nearly 6 square miles) of land in the West Bank this year.

"We came to settle the land, to build it, and to prevent its division and the establishment of a Palestinian state, God forbid," he said during the conference. He vowed to "change the map dramatically" by claiming more West Bank land than ever before as state land.

He also promised to expand the establishment of farming outposts, which hard-line settlers have used to extend their control of rural areas, and to crack down on Palestinian construction.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 74 of 88

The proliferation of outposts has driven up settler violence in the West Bank since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, rights groups say, leading several Palestinian villages to pick up and leave their land.

Palestinians say the violence is geared toward putting wide swaths of land under Israeli control and pushing the prospect of a Palestinian state further from reach.

The U.S., E.U., UK and Canada have imposed high-level sanctions against violent settlers and settler organizations, but some of those targeted have told The AP that the measures have had little effect.

The declaration published Wednesday was signed under the authority of Hillel Roth, a deputy Smotrich appointed earlier this year to boost settlement expansion and state land declarations in the West Bank, Peace Now said.

The declaration came a day after Peace Now said Israeli authorities were scheduled to approve or advance construction of over 6,000 new settlement homes in the occupied West Bank in the coming days.

COGAT, the Israeli military body in charge of civilian affairs in the West Bank, was not immediately available for comment.

Hamas cited the expansion of West Bank settlements as one of its justifications for the Oct. 7 attack into southern Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostage. Israel has launched a massive offensive in response that has killed over 37,900 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not say how many were fighters.

The war has caused massive devastation across Gaza and displaced most of its 2.3 million people, often multiple times. Israeli restrictions, the ongoing fighting and the breakdown of law and order have curtailed humanitarian aid efforts, causing widespread hunger and sparking fears of famine.

___ Follow AP's war coverage at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>

Why mass shootings and violence increase in the summer

By JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

Violence and mass shootings often surge in the summer months, especially around the Fourth of July, historically one of the deadliest days of the year.

A flurry of shootings around the holiday a year ago left more than a dozen people dead and over 60 wounded. Just two years ago, another mass shooting at a Fourth of July parade left seven people dead near Chicago. The mother of a 10-year-old boy left paralyzed by the attack said Wednesday that her family won't go to this year's parade, which is returning for the first time since the shooting.

"I don't know if we'll ever be able to attend the parade again," said Keely Roberts, who also was wounded.

The Gun Violence Archive, which tracks mass shootings involving four or more people regardless of whether they died, shows June, July, and August have had the highest total number of mass shootings over the past decade. The lowest totals were from December through March.

Independence Day topped the list with 58 mass shootings over the last 10 years — closely followed by July 5, according to the archive.

"It's the gathering, the free time, the drinking," said James Alan Fox, a criminologist and professor at Northeastern University, who oversees a mass killings database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with the university.

In the first half of this year, there were 19 mass killings — 14 of them shootings — with at least four dead in the U.S., according to the database. In 2023, the nation recorded the highest number of mass shootings — 39 — since the tracking began.

Researchers point to a combination of factors that historically have caused the summer months to see an increase in violence and shootings.

School's out for the summer

Mass killings are far more likely to happen at a home and most often the victims are related to the shooter or are a close acquaintance.

When school is out, families are spending more time together, children are often home all day and there's a greater likelihood of more victims when everyone is under one roof, said Jesenia Pizarro, a criminology

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 75 of 88

professor at Arizona State University.

Teenagers also have more idle time on their hands. "It's like the opportunity shifts in the summer," she said.

After two mass shootings hours apart in Dayton, Ohio, left a total of three people dead and eight injured in late June, police said one of the shootings took place at a vacant house where hundreds of teens and young adults had gathered.

"It could have been a lot worse," said Eric Henderson, the city's assistant chief, who pointed out it was the third big party since mid-June where trouble erupted after young people took over a vacant house.

More social events, more drinking

Family reunions, block parties and festivals in the summertime all bring more people together — and create more opportunities for trouble, more so when there's drinking involved.

"It doesn't mean that those kinds of things aren't around in March or in January. They're just around at a lower extent than they are in the summertime," said University of Miami criminologist Alex Piquero. "We do know that just about every summer there's an uptick in violence. So I fully anticipate that happening this summer. I fully anticipate it happening next summer and the summer after that."

The likelihood of being a victim of a mass shooting is still extremely low, but it does mean there's the potential for more victims if something happens at a crowded event.

During the first weekend of this summer, there were several shootings where multiple people were killed or wounded at large gatherings, including in Montgomery, Alabama, where gunfire erupted during an unsanctioned street party with more than 1,000 people. Police said nine people were shot and that investigators found more than 350 spent shell casings.

Tempers rise with hot temps

Several studies have linked warm weather and hotter than normal temperatures with rising tempers — and not just in the summer. They also link the increased temps with more violent crimes, although other factors often come into play.

Former New York City police officer Jillian Snider, now a lecturer at the John Jay College of Criminal Justice, said she saw this firsthand in neighborhoods where a lack of air conditioning pushed people out onto their stoops or into parks on sweltering days.

"It makes people a little angry because there's nowhere to cool down and tensions rise," she said. "You have no escape from that, you're just more upset."

Associated Press journalists Sharon Johnson in Atlanta and Sophia Tareen in Chicago contributed.

In the UK election campaign's final hours, Sunak battles to the end as Labour's Starmer eyes victory

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Rishi Sunak has covered thousands of miles in the past few weeks, but he hasn't outrun the expectation that his time as Britain's prime minister is in its final hours.

United Kingdom voters will cast ballots in a national election Thursday, passing judgment on Sunak's 20 months in office, and on the four Conservative prime ministers before him. They are widely expected to do something they have not done since 2005: Elect a Labour Party government.

During a hectic final two days of campaigning that saw him visit a food distribution warehouse, a supermarket, a farm and more, Sunak insisted "the outcome of this election is not a foregone conclusion."

He said Wednesday that whatever the outcome, he had a "clear conscience."

"As long as I can look myself in the mirror and know that I am working as hard as I can, doing what I believe is right for the country, that is how I get through, and that is what I believe I am doing," Sunak said.

But even a last-minute pep talk at a Conservative rally Tuesday night by former Prime Minister Boris Johnson — who led the party to a thumping election victory in 2019 — did little to lift the party's mood.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 76 of 88

Conservative Cabinet minister Mel Stride said Wednesday it looked like Labour was heading for an "extraordinary landslide."

Labour warned against taking the election result for granted, imploring supporters not to grow complacent about polls that have given the party a solid double-digit lead since before the campaign began. Labour leader Keir Starmer has spent the six-week campaign urging voters to take a chance on his center-left party and vote for change. Most people, including analysts and politicians, expect they will.

Labour has not set pulses racing with its pledges to get the sluggish economy growing, invest in infrastructure and make Britain a "clean energy superpower."

But nothing has really gone wrong, either. The party has won the support of large chunks of the business community and endorsements from traditionally conservative newspapers including the Rupert Murdoch-owned Sunday Times and tabloid The Sun. The Sun said in an editorial Wednesday that "by dragging his party back to the center ground of British politics for the first time since Tony Blair was in No.10, Sir Keir has won the right to take charge."

Former Labour candidate Douglas Beattie, author of the book "How Labour Wins (and Why it Loses)," said Starmer's "quiet stability probably chimes with the mood of the country right now."

"The country is looking for fresh ideas, moving away from a government that's exhausted and divided," Beattie said. "So Labour are pushing at an open door."

The Conservatives, meanwhile, have been plagued by gaffes. The campaign got off to an inauspicious start when rain drenched Sunak as he made the announcement outside 10 Downing St. on May 22. Then on June 6, Sunak went home early from commemorations in France marking the 80th anniversary of the D-Day invasion, missing a ceremony alongside United States President Joe Biden and France's Emmanuel Macron.

Several Conservatives close to Sunak are being investigated by the gambling regulator over suspicions they used inside information to place bets on the date of the election before it was announced.

It has all made it harder for Sunak to shake off the taint of political chaos and mismanagement that's gathered around the Conservatives since Johnson and his staff held lockdown-breaching parties during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Johnson's successor, Liz Truss, rocked the COVID-weakened economy with a package of drastic tax cuts, making a cost-of-living crisis worse, and lasted just 49 days in office. There is widespread dissatisfaction over a host of issues, from a dysfunctional public health care system to crumbling infrastructure.

But for many voters, the lack of trust applies not just to Conservatives, but to politicians in general. Veteran rouser of the right, Nigel Farage, has leaped into that breach with his Reform U.K. party and grabbed headlines, and voters' attention, with his anti-immigration rhetoric.

The centrist Liberal Democrats and environmentalist Green Party also want to sweep up disaffected voters from the bigger parties.

Across the country, voters say they want change but aren't optimistic it will come.

"I don't know who's for me as a working person," said Michelle Bird, a port worker in Southampton on England's south coast who was undecided about whether to vote Labour or Conservative. "I don't know whether it's the devil you know or the devil you don't."

Conner Filsell, a young office worker in the London suburbs, would like a roof of his own.

"I still live at home. I would love to be able to have my own place, but the way things are going it's just not on the cards," he said.

Lise Butler, senior lecturer in modern history at City University of London, said that signs point to this being "a change election in which the Conservatives are punished." But she said that if Starmer wins, "the years to come ... may be challenging."

"He'll probably be facing constant attacks on various grounds from left and right," she said. "So I think that while the outcome of this election is pretty clear, I think all bets are off in terms of what, what Labour's support is going to look like over the next few years."

Starmer has agreed that his biggest challenge is "the mindset in some voters that everything's broken, nothing can be fixed."

"And secondly, a sense of mistrust in politics because of so many promises having been made over the last 14 years which weren't carried through," he told broadcaster ITV on Tuesday. "We have to reach in and turn that around."

Many election experts expect a low turnout, below the 67% recorded in 2019. Yet this election may bring a scale of change Britain has not seen for decades if it delivers a big Labour majority and a diminished Conservative Party.

In Moreton-in-Marsh, a pretty town of honey-colored stone buildings in western England's Cotswold hills, 25-year-old Evie Smith-Lomas relished the chance to eject the area's longstanding Conservative lawmaker.

"This has been a Tory seat forever, for 32 years, longer than I've been alive," she said. "I'm excited at the prospect of someone new. I mean I think 32 years in any job is too long. You surely have run out of ideas by now."

Associated Press video journalist Tian Macleod Ji in Moreton-in-Marsh, England, contributed to this report.

Israeli strike kills another senior Hezbollah commander as diplomats scramble for calm in Lebanon

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — An Israeli strike in southern Lebanon on Wednesday killed a senior Hezbollah commander as tensions between the two sides continue to boil, a Hezbollah official told The Associated Press.

The strike near the southern coastal city of Tyre took place as global diplomatic efforts have intensified in recent weeks to prevent escalating clashes between Hezbollah and the Israeli military from spiraling into an all-out war that could possibly lead to a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran.

A Hezbollah statement identified the killed commander as Mohammad Naameh Nasser, who went by the name "Abu Naameh," his nom de guerre. A Hezbollah official speaking anonymously in line with regulations, said he was head of the group's Aziz Unit, one of three regional divisions in southern Lebanon.

Nasser is the most senior official from the Iran-backed group killed since Taleb Sami Abdullah, who was killed in an airstrike June 11. Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in a speech honoring Abdullah said he played a pivotal role on the front line since clashes began on Oct. 8 leading the Nasr Unit.

Hezbollah said in response to the killing of Nasser, it launched Falaq rockets with heavy warheads targeting the headquarters of the Israeli military's 769th Brigade in Kiryat Shmona, as well as 100 salvos of Katyusha rockets targeting the headquarters of Israel's 210th division and the Kilaa air base in the Israeli-occupied Syrian Golan Heights.

The group also shared footage of Nasser taking part in what they said was an operation at an Israeli military outpost in southern Lebanon in 1999 back when it was under occupation.

In a video circulated by local media, residents rushed toward a charred vehicle with a large plume of smoke. Civil Defense said its first responders transported an unnamed wounded person to a hospital.

The Israeli military acknowledged the attack, saying that Nasser alongside Abdullah are "two of the most significant Hezbollah" militants in southern Lebanon. It said Nasser led attacks from southwestern Lebanon.

Hezbollah launched rockets on northern Israel a day after a Hamas surprise attack on southern Israel in October, leading to limited clashes along the tense border. The attacks have since gradually escalated, with Hezbollah introducing new weapons in their attacks and Israel striking deeper into Lebanon.

The group maintains that it will stop its attacks once there is a cease-fire in the Gaza Strip. Until then, it says it will continue with its attacks to pile pressure on Israel and the international community. Israeli officials have threatened to launch a larger military operation should Hezbollah not stop its attacks.

Hezbollah deputy leader Sheikh Naim Kasseem told The Associated Press in an interview Monday that Israel cannot expect the group's attacks to remain limited should it launch a military operation within Lebanon, even if it aims to keep the conflict below the threshold of all-out war. Allies, including thousands of Iran-backed militiamen in Iraq, have offered to join Hezbollah on the front lines.

Israeli airstrikes on Lebanon since October have killed over 450 people, most of them Hezbollah fighters,

but the dead also include more than 80 civilians and non-combatants. On the Israeli side, 16 soldiers and 11 civilians have been killed since the war in Gaza began. Tens of thousands of people on both sides of the tense frontier have been displaced in the monthslong war.

Senior adviser to U.S. President Joe Biden, Amos Hochstein, who has been shuttling between Lebanon and Israel, is set to meet with French President Emmanuel Macron's Lebanon envoy Jean-Yves Le Drian in Paris on Wednesday as part of his ongoing diplomatic efforts to end the conflict.

French officials had invited Hochstein to the French capital to discuss the latest developments in their ongoing diplomatic scrambles, according to administration officials who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly.

Associated Press writers Abby Sewell in Beirut and Amer Madhani in Washington contributed to this report.

Worsening floods and deterioration pose threats to US dam safety

By MICHAEL PHILLIS and JOHN HANNA Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — Early last week, floodwater in rural Minnesota pushed debris against a more than century-old dam and then carved a path around it, eroding so much of the riverbank that most of a house fell into the river. Several days later, intense rain damaged a dam that holds drinking water for Houston, forcing officials to issue a potential failure warning.

"Something like this could happen, and it has happened, all over the country," said Del Shannon, former president of the U.S. Society on Dams.

There are roughly 90,000 significant dams in the U.S. At least 4,000 are in poor or unsatisfactory condition and could kill people or only harm the environment if they failed, according to data from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. They need inspections, upgrades and even emergency repairs.

It's a difficult problem in part because dams in the U.S. are roughly 60 years old, on average. It requires costly maintenance to keep decades of wear and tear from degrading dams, and resources to fix problems are often scarce, Shannon said.

Blue Earth County owns the Rapidan dam, a 1910 hydroelectric dam in Minnesota that is still standing but was badly damaged last week by the second-worst flood in its history. The dam hasn't been producing power, as previous floods knocked out that small source of revenue. The county of roughly 70,000 people had been considering spending \$15 million on repairs or removing the dam at a cost of \$82 million.

"The dollar amounts we're talking about ... are big amounts for a county our size," said County Administrator Bob Meyer.

A federal inspection in May didn't find major problems at the Rapidan dam, which isn't considered to pose a major threat to people if it fully fails. A federal investigation is now expected. Debris clogged the dam during flooding, forcing the river to divert around it — the damage likely wasn't related to the dam's repair needs, Meyer said.

Dams are designed to withstand a lot of stress, but sometimes a flood will be too much and cause damage, according to Martin McCann Jr., director of the National Performance of Dams Program at Stanford University. Climate change may be making the problem worse in some parts of the country. A warming atmosphere holds more moisture, so bad rainstorms can release more water.

In Texas, officials said flooding damaged the Lake Livingston Dam's spillway about 65 miles (105 kilometers) northeast of Houston. They reassured the public that the dam is not in any immediate danger of failing.

The vast majority of dams are safe, and even when one does fail, deaths are rare. But large dams hold back tremendous amounts of water and energy, so they carry enormous potential for downstream destruction. That's why even rare problems are such a concern for state and federal regulators.

In 2017, for example, heavy rain damaged the spillway at the Oroville Dam in California, forcing nearly 190,000 downstream residents to evacuate. And after storms in 2020, the Edenville Dam in Michigan

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 79 of 88

breached. Water rushed downstream and overwhelmed another dam, causing it to fail, too.

John France is an engineering consultant who led teams that investigated both of those incidents. He said that when many dams were built decades ago, engineers knew less about designing them to withstand floods. And although many were constructed far from populated areas, circumstances changed as cities and towns spread.

"There's this gradual building up of the hazard," France said.

After his teams' investigations, he's seen some improvements. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which licenses hydroelectric dams, added more thorough inspections that review a dam's design and construction to find weaknesses. Some states have looked at incorporating these reviews and France hopes FERC's broader approach will spread to state oversight programs.

Most dams are privately owned and there's a huge need for resources — just fixing many of the country's most important dams could cost \$34 billion, according to a report by the Association of State Dam Safety Officials. Minnesota, for example, regulates about 1,000 dams and helps provide some funding, but officials said there's "a difference between demonstrated need and funds available." The Biden administration's infrastructure law provided a rare boost for upgrades. Dam owners are responsible for keeping their dams safe and they can be held liable if something goes wrong.

"We are one step away from holding bake sales to help the dam owners," quipped John Roche, a board member with the Association of State Dam Safety Officials. State officials try to help owners find grants so they can afford improvements. There is help, but there is even more need.

In southeastern Nebraska, the Nemaha Natural Resources District covers eight counties and raises about \$4 million a year from a small property tax. With that money it must maintain about 380 structures — the vast majority of which are dams — including the Wilson Creek Dam 9-C, a roughly 840-foot-long (255-meter-long) earthen structure built in the 1960s for flood control.

"Funding is probably our biggest uphill battle," said the district's general manager, Kyle Hauschild.

After a poor inspection result in 2022, the district rushed to fix a rusty spillway at the Wilson Creek dam. The district keeps a maintenance list and prioritizes older structures, but if the public doesn't see a problem with a dam, it tends to forget about it, Hauschild said.

States have limited power to pressure owners to fix problems. Roche said regulators try to work cooperatively, but if that doesn't work, they can pressure owners by starting more confrontational enforcement proceedings.

"It takes a lot of diligence to keep enforcement actions moving along, as they can often take many years to resolve," Roche said.

In Colorado, officials consider whether a dam is a threat to humans and the severity of its defects. That helps them prioritize scrutiny and funding.

If an owner won't make needed upgrades, officials can wield a "regulatory hammer" and force owners to store less water behind their dams, reducing pressure and ensuring safety. That can kickstart action — less water in a reservoir can hurt the ability of dam owners to supply water to the communities they serve, for example, according to John Hunyadi who oversees dam safety in Colorado.

But in many states, officials can't order the worst owners to remove their dams, France said.

"All the state agencies ought to have that authority," he said, adding that if an owner refuses, the state should be able to do it themselves.

Hanna reported from Topeka, Kansas.

The Associated Press receives support from the Walton Family Foundation for coverage of water and environmental policy. The AP is solely responsible for all content. For all of AP's environmental coverage, visit <https://apnews.com/hub/climate-and-environment>

From 'latte makeup' to 'girl dinners,' TikTok has launched tons of trends. Will its influence last?

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO, HALELUYA HADERO and DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — TikTok and its bite-sized videos arrived in the United States as a global version of the Chinese app Douyin. Less than six years later, the social media platform is deeply woven into the fabric of American consumerism, having shortened the shelf life of trends and revamped how people engage with food and fashion.

The popularity of TikTok coupled with its roots in Beijing led Congress, citing national security concerns, to pass a law that would ban the video-sharing app unless its Chinese parent company sells its stake. Both the company, ByteDance, and TikTok have sued on First Amendment grounds.

But while the platform faces uncertain times, its influence remains undisputed — and for now, arguably unrivaled.

Interest in bright pink blush and brown lipstick soared last year, for example, after the cosmetics were featured in TikTok videos with looks labeled as "cold girl" and "latte" makeup. An abundance of clothing fads with quirky names, from "cottagecore" to "coastal grandma," similarly owe their pervasiveness to TikTok.

Silly video snippets have spun food hacks like "smash burger" tacos - a burger fried with a tortilla on top - and "girl dinners" — shorthand for a snack plate that requires less cooking and cleaning up than a typical evening meal - into cultural currency. And sometimes, into actual dollars for creators and brands.

Plenty of TikTok-spawned crazes last only a week or two before losing steam. Yet even mini trends have challenged businesses to decipher which ones are worth jumping on and stocking up for. A majority of the more than 170 million Americans who use TikTok belong to the under-30 age group coveted by retailers, according to the Pew Research Center. Whether fans of the platform or not, shoppers may have a #tiktokmademebuyit moment without knowing the origin story behind an eye-catching product.

"The impact has been almost immeasurable," Christopher Douglas, a senior manager of strategy at the influencer marketing agency Billion Dollar Boy, said.

What made TikTok such a trendsetter compared to predecessor platforms? Researchers and marketing analysts have often described the platform's personalized recommendation algorithm as the "secret sauce" of TikTok's success. The company has disclosed little about the technology it employs to populate users' "For You" feeds.

Jake Bjorseth, founder of the advertising agency Trndsttrs, which specializes in Generation Z, thinks the app's use of an interest-based algorithm instead of personal contacts to connect like-minded people is what gave TikTok the edge. Predecessors like Instagram, Facebook and Snapchat were known more for peer-to-peer networks.

TikTok also changed the standard for what was considered desirable in social media content. Because the platform was designed to be easy to use, many videos lacked filters, lighting setups or production-level audio. "These minimally planned and produced" recordings made TikTok creators seem more authentic and allowed them to develop more intimate relationships with their followers than earlier breeds of influencers, Bjorseth said.

In the early days of the app, TikTok recruited influencers from rival platforms by paying them to join and post content, according to Brendan Gahan, the CEO of influencer marketing agency Creator Authority. "Video-makers with as few as 1,000 followers still can earn commissions by promoting products in their videos, although those with at least 10,000 followers - and a minimum number of video views - are eligible for programs that pay them based on viewership.

The platform naturally has plenty of critics. Some experts argue that TikTok, like other social media sites, can be addictive and promote hours of endless scrolling, as well as unnecessary spending. Others accuse TikTok of promoting harmful behavior, like young girls engaging in skin care rituals and procedures intended for older women.

Some observers accuse prolific TikTok video-makers of using gimmicks to concoct ersatz trends or re-packaging the looks of an earlier era with attention-grabbing names. Yet for all the detractors who won't

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 81 of 88

mourn TikTok if it goes away, a vocal base of fans hopes it doesn't come to that.

Niki Maragos, a 26-year-old digital marketer from Charlotte, North Carolina, is one. She credits TikTok with transforming her personal style. Before frequenting the platform, she wore clothes from a single genre at a time and followed the same makeup routine.

Now she's into experimenting. To attend a recent music festival, for example, Maragos wore white ruffled bloomers, a black top and cowboy boots — a vintage-inspired look known as "cottagecore" in TikTok speak. She's also tried applying faux freckles — a sun-kissed cosmetics trick that's experiencing a renaissance — and latte-toned makeup.

"TikTok has allowed everybody to be their own fashionista," Maragos said. "I have become free. I am going outside the box."

FASHION AND ACCESSORIES:

Casey Lewis, a trend analyst based in New York who previously worked as an editor at Teen Vogue, said TikTok's clout in the fashion arena first became apparent to her when videos about Birkenstock's Boston clogs overtook her "For You" feed in 2022.

Lewis thought it was odd since her brother, whom she described as a "frat boy" and not a fashionista, wore the cork-soled comfort shoes in college. As the number of TikTok videos exploded, some creators took to advising their followers where they could find the suddenly sold-out clogs.

"I'm not a psychologist, but I'm sure there's some psychology where your brain goes from thinking like, 'How weird? Is that fashion?'" she said. "And then suddenly you're obsessed with it."

Eventually, two other out-of-style shoes, UGG boots and Crocs, also saw their sales rebound after gaining a foothold with young consumers, Lewis said. The pace with which TikTok-shaped trends popped up — many of them tagged with the suffix "core" in a reference to the wearer's style — was so dizzying that Lewis devoted much of her Substack newsletter to them.

In the last year, the hot pink ensembles of "Barbiecore" coexisted with the down-to-earth, deliberately unsexy looks of "dadcore" — think chunky white sneakers, baggy jeans and polo shirts. The oversized cardigans and linen separates of "coastal grandmother," meanwhile, gave rise to "eclectic grandpa" a unisex aesthetic featuring sweater vests, loafers and mismatched prints.

Looks based on the reimagined aesthetics of mob wives and Gilded Age author Edith Wharton also had short-lived moments. While the rotating cast of "cores" may not drive their adherents to buy entire wardrobes, they're "influencing spending in small ways, and that adds up," Lewis said.

"It's easy to dismiss them as simply micro-trends that aren't actually meaningful when it comes to consumer spending," she said. "But often, they actually are more meaningful."

Daniella López White, 21, who graduated from Emerson College in Boston this year and is on a tight budget, said TikTok influencers have helped her with tips on how to find affordable clothes at places like H&M and thrift shops. But the platform also connected López White to plus-size creators who feature fashions for larger-bodied women, which made her more confident in trying out new styles.

"Those TikTok trends really helped me figure out what parts of my body I want to accentuate and feel cute in and still incorporate my sense of style," she said.

After trying the "dark academia" trend, a blend of vintage fashion, tweed blazers and turtleneck sweaters, and "cottagecore," she has moved onto the "office siren" look, which combines corporate clothing with form-fitting pieces like pencil skirts and cinched blazers.

FOOD:

With easy-to-follow cooking videos and clever hacks, TikTok became a go-to spot for home cooks during the COVID-19 pandemic. The platform made humble ingredients a star but in the process earned endorsements from some of the stars of the food world.

"Every day, honestly, I am blown away by the creativity from the FoodTok community," restaurateur and chef Gordon Ramsay said in a TikTok video late last year.

Like the clothing styles of earlier eras, foods that had fallen out of fashion were resurrected via TikTok. U.S. sales of cottage cheese jumped 34% between April 2022 and April 2024 after videos promoting cot-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 82 of 88

tage cheese ice cream, cottage cheese toast and other recipes racked up millions of views.

Ben Sokolsky, the general manager of sales and marketing for Dallas-based dairy company Daisy Brand, said cottage cheese is seeing its highest sustained growth in nearly 50 years. The curdled milk product used to be a "secret sensation," but social media helped expose new customers to the protein-rich, low-carb food, Sokolsky said.

The trend has had real impacts for Daisy Brand, which saw its cottage cheese sales double over the last five years. In April, the company announced a \$626.5 million investment to expand a manufacturing facility in Iowa with at least 106 new jobs.

Some topics that went viral on TikTok even spawned analog equivalents. Last summer, TikToker Olivia Maher posted what she called her "girl dinner" of bread, cheese, pickles and grapes. It was a hit, with more than 1.6 million views. A handful of "girl dinner" cookbooks soon followed.

But the eagerness to try trendy foods had its downside. A 14-year-old in Massachusetts died after trying an extremely spicy tortilla chip popularized in so-called One Chip Challenge videos on TikTok and other social media sites. An autopsy of the boy, who had a congenital heart defect, found that eating a large quantity of chile pepper extract caused his death. Paqui, the maker of the chip, pulled it off the market.

BEAUTY:

TikTok has upended the cosmetics industry by promoting do-it-yourself skin and hair treatments, causing ingredients to get labeled as the next miracle cure or to be avoided, and featuring videos of people gleefully applying or panning the contents of their latest shopping hauls.

Get Ready with Me videos, which first became popular on YouTube, are also everywhere these days in shorter forms mainly due to TikTok. Makeup tutorials also were a fixture on YouTube before TikTok turbo-charged purchases for creating a new look du jour, such as the "glazed donut" skin and "strawberry makeup" popularized by Hailey Bieber.

Influencers on TikTok and elsewhere have made freckles an asset with clips showing how to add faux ones with eyebrow pencils or broccoli florets. The "clean girl" aesthetic, a renamed version of the no-makeup makeup look, prompted both luxury and drugstore brands to rush out their own versions of skin tints and lip oils.

Tiffany Watson, a college student who posts makeup tutorials on TikTok, says the platform has made the beauty space more fun by giving specific looks winsome titles.

"It brings lightheartedness. It's fun to be able to put a cute little name on it, try something new and then see a community of people trying the same thing," said Watson, who currently has more than 31,000 followers on TikTok and has done paid partnerships with brands like Colourpop Cosmetics.

Similar to YouTube, TikTok has helped popularize so-called "dupes" — less expensive alternatives to pricier products — to the benefit of brands such as e.l.f. Beauty, Revolution Beauty and NYX .

"TikTok is one of the highly effective platforms for our community to talk to us — and each other — directly," Kory Marchisotto, the chief marketing officer at cosmetics brand e.l.f. Beauty, said. "They'll directly compare it to more expensive premium products, sometimes as a split-screen with e.l.f. and another brand."

Some veteran users of TikTok have noted the platform is almost too good in its role as both a tastemaker and a shopping search engine. Videos of influencers "decluttering" drawers filled with piles of barely used lipsticks, blushes and eyeshadow palettes are often as popular as the ones of people reviewing the products from their shopping sprees.

On the positive side, its defenders credit TikTok with promoting a more inclusive image of beauty and forcing brands to create products for a wider range of skin tones and hair types. Beauty retailer Sephora, which has more than 1.3 million followers on TikTok, announced last year a partnership to help new brands owned by women of color to expand their presence on the platform.

Though the desire for clicks can encourage creators to follow the same hair and makeup trends, it also has given a diverse group of influencers a larger platform on which to champion or call out brands, Lewis said. She pointed to a recent controversy involving Youthforia, a brand that was criticized by some Black content creators after it released a foundation shade that resembled jet black paint.

"With TikTok, people who otherwise weren't heard were suddenly heard," Lewis said.

Watson, too, says the platform has helped bring more diversity to beauty videos compared to other platforms, where users had to intentionally seek out the type of creators they wanted to follow.

"I see more diversity on TikTok because (with) every video you're swiping, you're seeing somebody new," she said.

AP journalist Beatrice Dupuy contributed to this report.

From 'latte makeup' to 'girl dinners,' TikTok has launched tons of trends. Will its influence last?

By ANNE D'INNOCENZIO, HALELUYA HADERO and DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — TikTok and its bite-sized videos arrived in the United States as a global version of the Chinese app Douyin. Less than six years later, the social media platform is deeply woven into the fabric of American consumerism, having shortened the shelf life of trends and revamped how people engage with food and fashion.

The popularity of TikTok coupled with its roots in Beijing led Congress, citing national security concerns, to pass a law that would ban the video-sharing app unless its Chinese parent company sells its stake. Both the company, ByteDance, and TikTok have sued on First Amendment grounds.

But while the platform faces uncertain times, its influence remains undisputed.

Interest in bright pink blush and brown lipstick soared last year, for example, after the cosmetics were featured in TikTok videos with looks labeled as "cold girl" and "latte" makeup. An abundance of clothing fads with quirky names, from "cottagecore" to "coastal grandma," similarly owe their pervasiveness to TikTok.

Plenty of TikTok-spawned crazes last only a week or two before losing steam. Yet even mini trends have challenged businesses to decipher which ones are worth stocking up for. A majority of the more than 170 million Americans who use TikTok belong to the under-30 age group coveted by retailers, according to the Pew Research Center. Whether fans of the platform or not, shoppers may have a #tiktokmademebuyit moment without knowing the origin story behind an eye-catching product.

What made TikTok such a trendsetter compared to predecessor platforms? Researchers and marketing analysts have often described the platform's personalized recommendation algorithm as the "secret sauce" of TikTok's success. The company has disclosed little about the technology it employs to populate users' "For You" feeds.

Jake Bjorseth, founder of the advertising agency Trndsttrs, which specializes in Generation Z, thinks the app's use of an interest-based algorithm instead of personal contacts to connect like-minded people is what gave TikTok the edge.

TikTok also changed the standard for what was considered desirable in social media content. The beginner-friendly platform featured videos made without filters, lighting setups or production-level audio. TikTok creators could develop more intimate relationships with their followers because they appeared more authentic, Bjorseth said.

The platform has plenty of critics. Some experts argue that TikTok, like other social media sites, can be addictive and promote unnecessary spending. Others accuse TikTok of encouraging harmful behavior, like girls engaging in skin care rituals intended for older women.

Yet for all the detractors who won't mourn TikTok if it goes away, a vocal base of fans hopes it doesn't come to that.

FASHION AND ACCESSORIES:

Casey Lewis, a trend analyst based in New York, said TikTok's clout in the fashion arena first became apparent to her when videos about Birkenstock's Boston clogs overtook her "For You" feed in 2022.

As the number of TikTok videos exploded, creators advised their followers where they could find the suddenly sold-out clogs. Lewis thought it was odd since her brother, whom she described as a "frat boy" and not a fashionista, wore the cork-soled comfort shoes in college.

"I'm not a psychologist, but I'm sure there's some psychology where your brain goes from thinking like,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 84 of 88

'How weird? Is that fashion?' And then suddenly you're obsessed with it," she said.

The pace with which TikTok-shaped trends pop can be dizzying. In the last year, the hot pink ensembles of "Barbiecore" coexisted with the deliberately unsexy looks of "dadcore" — think chunky white sneakers, baggy jeans and polo shirts. The linen-draped "coastal grandma" aesthetic gave way to "eclectic grandpa."

While the rotating cast of "cores" may not drive their adherents to buy entire wardrobes, they're "influencing spending in small ways, and that adds up," Lewis said.

Daniella López White, 21, a recent college graduate on a tight budget, said TikTok influencers provided tips on finding affordable clothes but also connected her to plus-size creators featuring fashions for larger-bodied women, which made her more confident.

"Those TikTok trends really helped me figure out what parts of my body I want to accentuate and feel cute in, and still incorporate my sense of style," she said.

FOOD:

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"Every day, honestly, I am blown away by the creativity from the FoodTok community," restaurateur and chef Gordon Ramsay said in a TikTok video late last year.

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Ben Sokolsky, the general manager of sales and marketing for Dallas-based dairy company Daisy Brand, said cottage cheese is seeing its highest sustained growth in nearly 50 years. The curdled milk product used to be a "secret sensation," but social media helped expose new customers to its benefits, Sokolsky said.

Topics that went viral on TikTok have even spawned analog equivalents. Last summer, TikToker Olivia Maher posted what she called her "girl dinner" of bread, cheese, pickles and grapes. It was a hit, with more than 1.6 million views. A handful of "girl dinner" cookbooks soon followed.

But the eagerness to try trendy foods had a downside. A 14-year-old in Massachusetts died after trying a challenge involving an extremely spicy tortilla chip that appeared on TikTok and other social media sites. An autopsy of the boy, who had a congenital heart defect, found that eating a large quantity of chile pepper extract caused his death. Paqui, the maker of the chip, pulled it off the market.

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Some veteran users of TikTok have noted the platform is almost too good in its role as both a tastemaker and a shopping search engine. A popular category of beauty videos shows influencers "decluttering" drawers filled with piles of barely used lipsticks, blushes and eyeshadow palettes.

Though the desire for clicks can encourage creators to follow the same hair and makeup trends, TikTok's defenders credit the platform with forcing brands to create products for a wider range of skin tones and hair types.

Tiffany Watson, who currently has more than 31,00 followers on TikTok and has done paid partnerships with brands like Colourpop Cosmetics, says the platform has promoted a more inclusive image of beauty compared to other sites.

"I see more diversity on TikTok because (with) every video you're swiping, you're seeing somebody new," she said.

___AP journalist Beatrice Dupuy contributed to this report.

How did a religious gathering in India turn into a deadly stampede?

By BISWAJEET BANERJEE and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

LUCKNOW, India (AP) — More than 120 people died Tuesday in a stampede after a large religious gathering in northern India, one of the deadliest such accidents in recent years.

Authorities are investigating. The stampede among thousands of attendees is believed to have begun as the event, led by a Hindu guru known locally as Bhole Baba, was ending.

What happened?

Authorities believe massive overcrowding, insufficient exits, bad weather and other factors may have contributed to the high death toll.

The event was held in a large tent in a village in Hathras district, located in Uttar Pradesh state, amid sweltering heat and high humidity.

"Initial reports suggest that the closed enclosure of the tent led to suffocation, causing discomfort and panic among attendees," said senior police officer Shalabh Mathur.

Poor planning was another issue. Some 250,000 people turned up for the event, which was permitted for 80,000 and held in a muddy field. It's not clear how many were inside the tent.

As the preacher descended from the stage, officials said, devotees surged forward to touch him, causing chaos as volunteers struggled to intervene.

An initial police report suggests that thousands of people then thronged toward the exits. Many slipped on the muddy ground, falling and being crushed by the crowds.

Witnesses described further chaos as more devotees tried to follow the preacher as he left in his car. His security personnel pushed the crowd back, causing more people to fall, according to officials. Most of the dead were women.

Who is Bhole Baba?

The Hindu guru's name is Suraj Pal, but he goes by Bhole Baba. He is a Dalit, a group at the bottom of India's caste pyramid, and many of his followers are also from lower castes, female and poor.

He was a policeman until the late 1990s, when he quit his job to become a preacher. While not a household name nationally, he enjoys a large following in Uttar Pradesh and nearby states. Now in his 60s, he's known for dressing in all white, often sporting mirrored aviator sunglasses.

Bhole runs two ashrams in Uttar Pradesh and holds weekly religious gatherings, known as satsangs, where he often talks about leading a simple and virtuous life.

The preacher's Sri Jagar Guru Baba organization had spent more than two weeks preparing for this event. Police have launched a search for Bhole and other organizers.

In May 2022, Bhole held a gathering that drew over 50,000 people, but no casualties were reported.

How common are stampedes in India?

Deadly crowd surges are fairly common in India, especially during religious festivals where huge gatherings, sometimes in the millions, are held often in cramped areas with shoddy infrastructure and few safety measures.

There have been a number of stampedes in India over the past two decades. Many religious events are organized without adequate preparations, crowd control measures or even prior permission, said Sanjay Srivastava, a disaster management expert.

"Often such functions are held so regularly that sometimes police don't check whether guidelines are being followed," he said.

The event on Tuesday violated general safety norms, Srivastava added.

"The function was held in a makeshift tent without ensuring multiple exit routes. Typically, there should be eight to 10 well-marked exits opening into open areas," he said.

State official Ashish Kumar said there were insufficient exits in the vast tent. It's not clear how many there were.

One of the last major stampedes occurred in 2013, when pilgrims visiting a temple for a popular Hindu festival in central Madhya Pradesh state trampled each other amid fears that a bridge would collapse. At least 115 were crushed to death or died in the river.

Strike kills family as Israeli evacuation order sparks panicked flight from southern Gaza city

By WAFAA SHURAF, SAMY MAGDY and LEE KEATH Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — An Israeli airstrike killed a prominent Palestinian doctor and eight members of his extended family on Tuesday after they complied with military orders to evacuate their home and moved into an Israeli-designated safe zone.

The Hamdan family — around a dozen people from three generations — fled their home in the middle of the night after the Israeli military ordered an evacuation from the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis.

They found refuge with extended relatives in a building further north, inside an Israeli-declared safe zone. But hours after they arrived, an Israeli airstrike on Tuesday afternoon hit their building in the town of Deir al-Balah, killing nine members of the family and three others.

In all, five children and three women were among the dead, according to hospital records and a relative who survived.

Israel's order on Monday for people to leave the eastern half of Khan Younis — the territory's second-largest city — has triggered the third mass flight of Palestinians in as many months, throwing the population deeper into confusion, chaos and misery as they scramble once again to find safety.

About 250,000 people live in the area covered by the order, according to the United Nations. Many of them had just returned to their homes there after fleeing Israel's invasion of Khan Younis earlier this year — or had just taken refuge there after escaping Israel's offensive in the city of Rafah, further south.

The order also prompted a frantic flight from European General Hospital, Gaza's second-largest hospital, located in the evacuation area. The facility shut down after staffers and more than 200 patients were evacuated overnight and on Tuesday, along with thousands of displaced who had sheltered on the hospital grounds, according to the staff and the International Committee of the Red Cross, which had a medical team there.

Hisham Mhanna, the ICRC spokesperson in Gaza, said some families dragged patients in their hospital beds through the streets for up to 10 kilometers (6 miles) to reach safety. Ambulances moved others elsewhere as staff rushed out valuable equipment, including X-ray and ultrasound machines and endoscopy devices now so scarce, said a nurse, Muhammad Younis.

Hours after ordering the evacuation, the Israeli military said the hospital was not included in that order. But the staff said they feared a repeat of previous Israeli raids on other Gaza hospitals.

"Many hospitals have come to rubble and have been turned into battlefields or graveyards," Mhanna said.

Israel has raided hospitals, saying Hamas uses them for military purposes, a claim Gaza's medical officials deny.

On Tuesday, cars loaded with personal belongings streamed out of eastern Khan Younis, though the number of those fleeing was not immediately known. The new exodus comes on top of the 1 million people who fled Rafah since May, as well as tens of thousands who were displaced the past week from a new Israeli offensive in the Shijaiyah district of northern Gaza.

"We left everything behind," said Munir Hamza, a father of three children who on Monday night fled his home in an eastern district of Khan Younis for the second time. "We are tired of moving and displacement. ... This is unbearable."

Nowhere safe

Up to 15 members of the Hamdan family fled their Khan Younis home and arrived late on Monday at their extended family's building in Deir al-Balah, said Asmaa Salim, a relative who lived in the building.

The building was located inside the extended humanitarian zone that the Israeli military had declared when it began its offensive in Rafah in May, telling Palestinians to evacuate there for safety.

The strike came around 3 p.m. on Tuesday. Associated Press video shows an entire floor of the building gutted. "Almost everyone inside was martyred, only two or three survived," Salim told the AP.

A list of the dead posted at the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital said those killed included the family

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 87 of 88

patriarch, 62-year-old dermatologist Hassan Hamdan, as well as his wife and their adult son and daughter. Four of their grandchildren, aged 3 to 5, and the mother of two of the children were also killed. A man and his 5-year-old son who lived in the building and a man on the street outside were also killed in the strike, which wounded 10 other people, including several children.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to requests for comment on the strike.

Flight from Khan Younis

Monday's evacuation order suggested a new ground assault into Khan Younis could be coming though there was no immediate sign of one. Israeli forces waged a months-long offensive there earlier this year, battling Hamas militants and leaving large swaths of the southern city destroyed or heavily damaged.

Israel has repeatedly moved back into parts of the Gaza Strip it previously invaded to root out militants it said had regrouped — a sign of Hamas' continued capabilities even after nearly nine months of war in Gaza.

Israel's campaign has killed more than 37,900 Palestinians, the majority women and children, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which doesn't distinguish combatants among its count. Israel launched its campaign after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in which militants killed some 1,200 people in southern Israel and took around 250 others hostage.

The Israeli military said Tuesday it estimates that some 1.8 million Palestinians are now in the humanitarian zone it declared, covering a stretch of about 14 kilometers (8.6 miles) along Gaza's Mediterranean coast. Much of that area is now blanketed with tent camps that lack sanitation and medical facilities with limited access to aid, U.N. and humanitarian groups say. Families live amid mountains of trash and streams of water contaminated by sewage.

The amount of food and other supplies getting into Gaza has plunged since the Rafah offensive began. The U.N. says fighting, Israeli military restrictions and general chaos — including looting of trucks by criminal gangs in Gaza — make it near impossible for it to pick up truckloads of goods that Israel has let in. As a result, cargo is stacked up uncollected just inside Gaza at the main Kerem Shalom crossing with Israel, near Rafah.

The Norwegian Refugee Council said last week that it surveyed nearly 1,100 families who fled Rafah and 83% of them reported having no access to food and more than half had no access to safe water.

On Tuesday, more families fleeing Khan Younis were trying to find space in the zone. Um Abdel-Rahman said she and her family of four children — the youngest 3 years old — walked for hours during the night to reach the zone only to find no place to stay.

"There is no room for anyone," she said. "We are waiting and have nothing to do but wait."

Noha al-Bana said she has been displaced four times since fleeing Gaza City in the north early in the war.

"We have been humiliated," she said. "No proper food, no proper water, no proper bathrooms, no proper place for sleep. ... Fear, fear, fear. There is no safety. No safety at home, no safety in the tents."

Magdy and Keath reported from Cairo. Associated Press writer Sarah El Deeb in Beirut contributed to this report.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, July 04, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 009 ~ 88 of 88

Today in History: July 4

Declaration of Independence adopted in Philadelphia

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, July 4, the 186th day of 2024. There are 180 days left in the year. This is Independence Day.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 4, 1776, the Declaration of Independence was adopted by delegates to the Second Continental Congress in Philadelphia.

Also on this date:

In 1802, the United States Military Academy officially opened at West Point, New York.

In 1817, construction of the Erie Canal began in Rome, New York.

In 1826, 50 years to the day after the Declaration of Independence was adopted, former presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson both died.

In 1831, the fifth president of the United States, James Monroe, died in New York City at age 73.

In 1855, the first edition of Walt Whitman's "Leaves of Grass" was published.

In 1863, the Civil War Siege of Vicksburg, Mississippi, ended as a Confederate garrison surrendered to Union forces.

In 1910, in what was billed as "The Fight of the Century," Black world heavyweight boxing champion Jack Johnson defeated white former champ "Gentleman" Jim Jeffries in Reno, Nevada; race riots across the country following the fight killed more than 20 people.

In 1912, the 48-star American flag, recognizing New Mexico and Arizona statehood, was adopted.

In 1939, Lou Gehrig of the New York Yankees delivered his famous farewell speech in which he called himself "the luckiest man on the face of the earth."

In 1946, the United States and the Philippines signed the Treaty of Manila, recognizing Philippine independence from the US.

In 1960, the current 50-star version of the US flag was adopted.

In 1976, America celebrated its bicentennial with daylong festivities; President Gerald R. Ford made stops in Valley Forge, Pennsylvania, Independence Hall in Philadelphia and New York, where more than 200 ships paraded up the Hudson River in Operation Sail.

In 1987, Klaus Barbie, the former Gestapo chief known as the "Butcher of Lyon," was convicted by a French court of crimes against humanity and sentenced to life in prison (he died in September 1991).

In 1995, the space shuttle Atlantis and the Russian space station Mir parted after spending five days in orbit docked together.

In 2012, scientists at the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) in Geneva cheered the apparent end of a decades-long quest for a new subatomic particle called the Higgs boson, or "God particle."

In 2013, the Statue of Liberty reopened on the Fourth of July, eight months after Superstorm Sandy shuttered the national symbol of freedom.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Eva Marie Saint is 100. Tuskegee Airman Harry Stewart Jr. is 100. Queen Sonja of Norway is 87. Actor Carolyn Grimes ("It's a Wonderful Life") is 83. Broadcast journalist Geraldo Rivera is 81. Funk/jazz trombonist Fred Wesley is 81. Vietnam War veteran and peace activist Ron Kovic is 78. Singer John Waite is 72. International Tennis Hall of Famer Pam Shriver is 62. Christian rock singer Michael Sweet (Stryper) is 60. Actor-playwright-screenwriter Tracy Letts is 59. Actor Becki Newton is 46. TV personality Mike "The Situation" Sorrentino is 42. R&B singer Melanie Fiona is 41. Singer and rapper Post Malone is 29. Malia Obama is 26.