

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 1 of 96

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Queen of Hearts](#)
- [4- Kosel Bridal Shower Ad](#)
- [5- West Nile Virus Update - South Dakota](#)
- [6- First Human West Nile Virus Case of 2024 Reported in Beadle County](#)
- [7- South Dakota State announces spring 2024 graduation list](#)
- [8- Groton Chamber of Commerce July Meeting](#)
- [10- Groton Post 39 Fall To Lennox On Walk-Off](#)
- [11- New Program at GDI Fitness Center](#)
- [12- SD News Watch: Counties hit with \\$74,000 in plaintiffs' attorney fees for trying to restrict petition circulators](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: State boards approve \\$87 million in bonds, loans and a grant to businesses](#)
- [13- SD SearchLight: Biden at NATO press conference rebuts doubters: 'I'm the best qualified to govern'](#)
- [15- SD SearchLight: U.S. House fails to pass measure to hold attorney general in 'inherent contempt'](#)
- [17- SD SearchLight: GOP plan to reverse final Title IX rule passes U.S. House, but Biden says he'd veto](#)
- [19- Weather Pages](#)
- [24- Daily Devotional](#)
- [25- Subscription Form](#)
- [26- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [27- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [28- News from the Associated Press](#)

Friday, July 12

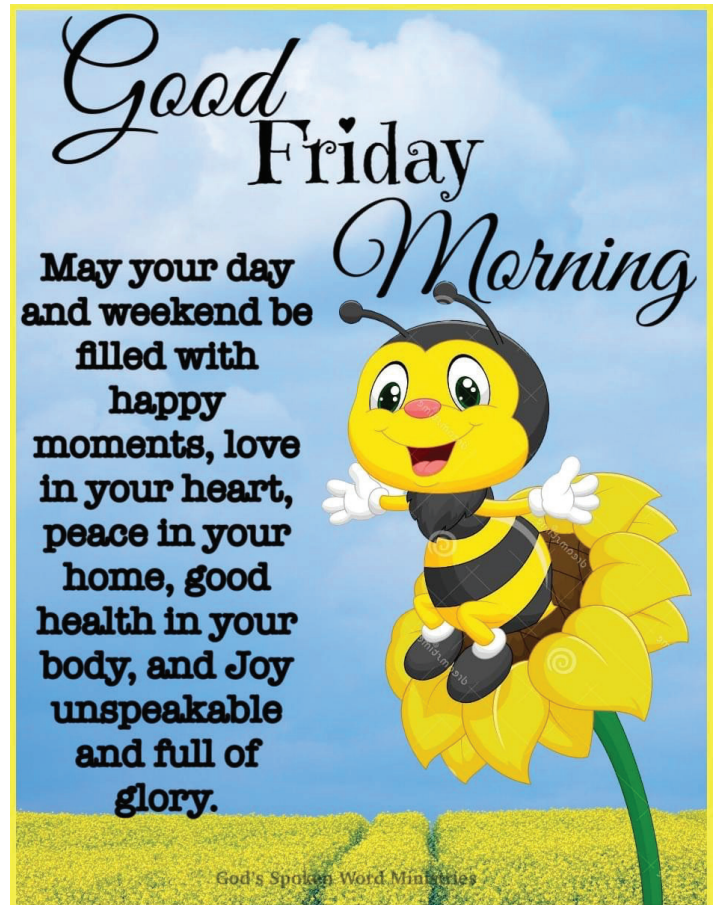
Senior Menu: BBQ gilet on bun, scalloped potatoes, tomato spoon salad, watermelon, cookie.

Saturday, July 13

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

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

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



Sunday, July 14

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and at Zion, 11 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship: 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: Church in Park at 9 a.m. No worship in the church.
Summer Fest/Car Show at City Park, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 2 of 96

1440

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NATO Summit Ends

The 75th Anniversary Summit of NATO came to a close yesterday, with the leaders of 32 countries bolstering support for Ukraine in its ongoing war with Russia.

The conference—hosted by President Joe Biden in Washington, DC—ended with new pledges to Kyiv, including air defense missile systems and fresh aid commitments. France, Germany, Italy, and Poland agreed to develop and host long-range missiles on their soil as a deterrence measure; Germany will also host US missiles beginning in 2026. Leaders meanwhile issued a rare statement condemning China for supplying Russia with commercial components with military uses (see more). Overshadowing the summit was the spotlight on Biden, whose mental fitness has been under intense scrutiny since last month's CNN Presidential Debate. Yesterday's news conference was his first of the year.

Population Peak

The global population is set to peak at 10.3 billion and begin declining by 2084, roughly two decades earlier than estimates from two years ago, according to the United Nations biennial population report.

Analysts attribute the earlier peak to a broad decline in fertility rates, the number of children a woman will birth on average. Worldwide, that figure has dropped from 3.5 to 2.5 in three decades and was closer to seven prior to the Industrial Revolution. Experts say women's empowerment, increased rate of successful births, and rising child rearing costs have contributed to dropping fertility rates.

Demographers theorize developed countries require a fertility rate of 2.1 children per woman to keep the population constant. More than half of all countries have a rate below 2.1, including much of Europe, the US, Japan, China, and Russia.

Demographic shifts have significant effects on resources, public revenues, and income security.

A New Voice

Mayo Clinic this week reported the results of the world's first total larynx transplant on an active cancer patient. Four months after surgery, 59-year-old Marty Kedian has regained his ability to speak, swallow, and breathe independently.

Kedian, diagnosed with a rare form of laryngeal cancer called chondrosarcoma, underwent the complex 21-hour surgery as part of a clinical trial in February. The procedure involved transplanting his cancerous larynx (also known as the voice box) and other organs, including his pharynx, upper trachea, and thyroid. This marks the third documented total larynx transplant in the US and one of only a few documented worldwide. About 12,650 people in the US will be diagnosed with laryngeal cancer this year, or about 0.6% of all new cancer cases.

Separately, Rep. Jennifer Wexton (D, VA-10)—who was diagnosed last year with a rare neurological disorder that affects her ability to speak, hear, and move—debuted a new AI-generated voice, using recordings from before her diagnosis.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Argentina takes on Colombia in Copa América final Sunday (8 pm ET, Fox Sports) ... and Spain and England meet in the UEFA European Championship final Sunday (3 pm ET, Fox)

US men's national team coach Gregg Berhalter fired following team's early exit.

Shelley Duvall, veteran actress best known for her starring role in "The Shining," dies at 75.

Film composer Danny Elfman sued for defamation related to sexual harassment allegations.

Italy's Jasmine Paolini takes on Czechia's Barbora Krejčíková in Wimbledon women's singles finals tomorrow morning (9 am ET, ESPN).

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 3 of 96

Science & Technology

First fossilized chromosome with its 3D structure still intact discovered; sample was recovered from 50,000-year-old frozen woolly mammoth skin.

Air taxi startup Joby Aviation successfully carries out 523-mile test flight using hydrogen fuel; prototype craft covered the distance in about five hours, emits only water vapor.

Engineers train robots to learn and mimic expressive human gestures, including various dance moves, high-fiving, and more.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.9%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -1.9%) following lower-than-expected inflation data.

US consumer price index falls 0.1% month-over-month in June, the first monthly drop since May 2020.

US startups received a total of \$55.6B in venture capital funding in Q2, the highest level in eight quarters, per new data.

World's billionaires gather in Sun Valley, Idaho, for annual weeklong retreat held by investment firm Allen & Co.

Tesla shares close down 8% after reports the company is delaying its planned robotaxi unveiling by two months to October.

Delta Air Lines shares close down 4% after airline reports 29% drop in year-over-year profit in Q2.

Politics & World Affairs

Death toll from historic heat wave in western US this month rises to at least 28 people as more than 60 million remain under heat alerts.

US military to dismantle \$230M floating pier off Gaza's coast—intended to assist in humanitarian aid deliveries to the enclave—after two months of issues, including looting and rough weather.

Kenyan President William Ruto dismisses entire cabinet, excluding his foreign minister, after nationwide protests led to the withdrawal of previously planned tax hikes; it is unclear how long the president can operate without a cabinet.

Queen of Hearts

The 18th week of the Groton Queen of Hearts was conducted Thursday with the weekly sales at \$2,225 and the jackpot at \$28,064. Mark Abeln's name was drawn and he choose card #11 which was the eight of diamonds. He received the consolation prize of 10 percent of the weekly sales of \$222.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 4 of 96



PLEASE JOIN US IN
CELEBRATING

DROP & GO GIFT CARD
BRIDAL SHOWER FOR

*Julianna Kosel
& Isaac Moll*

Box also
at Lori's
Pharmacy!

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.



West Nile Virus Update - South Dakota

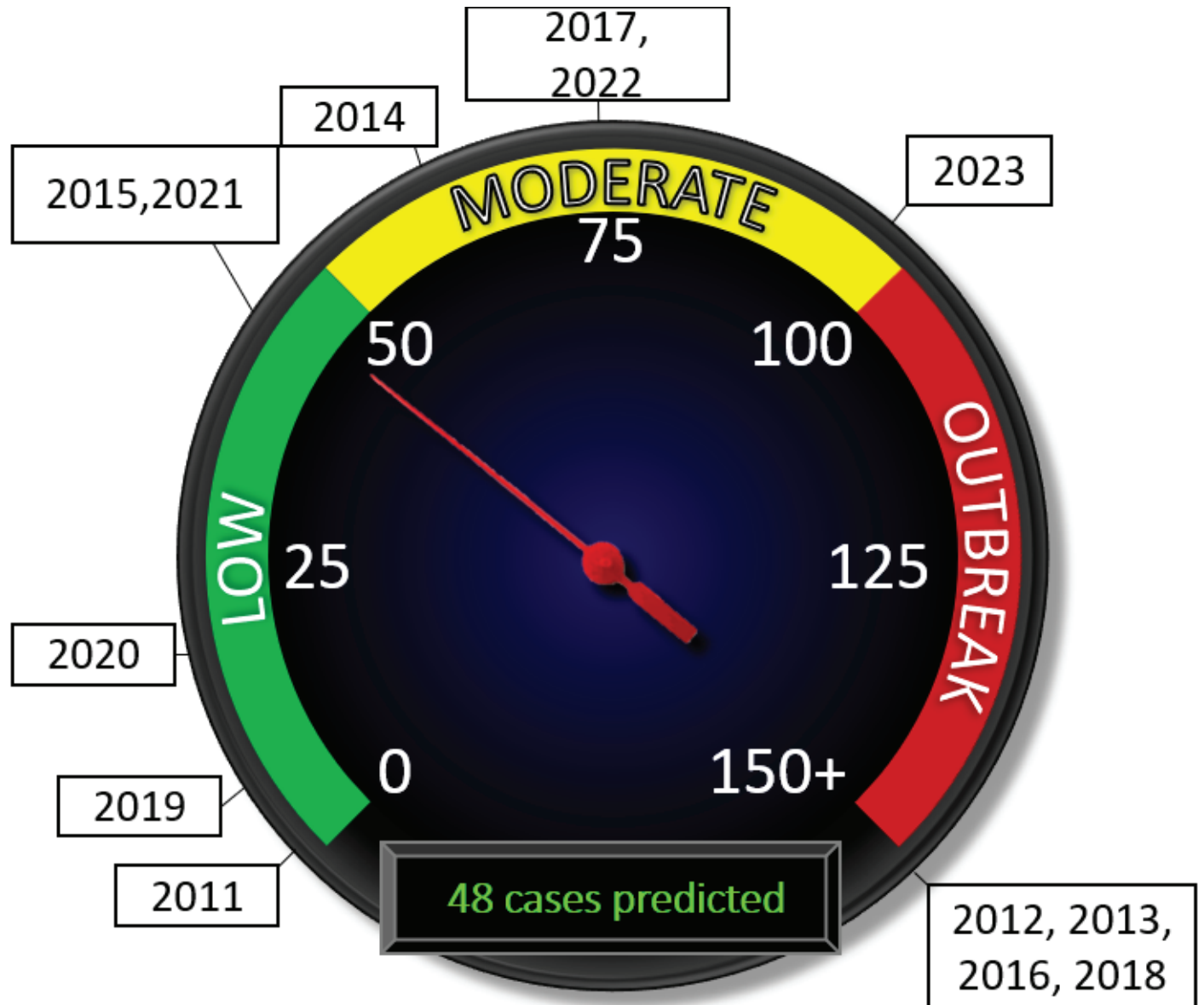
The first human case of West Nile Virus has been reported in Beadle County, South Dakota.

SD WNV (as of July 10):

- 1 human case (Beadle)
- 1 county with positive mosquito pools (Brookings)

US WNV (as of July 9): 15 cases (AR, AZ, KS, MD, MI, MS, ND, NE, SD, TN, TX, TN)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2024, South Dakota (as of July 10):



First Human West Nile Virus Case of 2024 Reported in Beadle County

PIERRE, S.D. – Today, the South Dakota Department of Health confirmed the first human West Nile virus (WNV) case of the 2024 season in a resident of Beadle County. South Dakota has reported more than 2,843 human cases and 53 deaths since WNV was first reported in 2002.

“West Nile virus is an infection most commonly spread through mosquito bites,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist. “The rate of severe infection that includes swelling of the brain and spinal cord with symptoms of stiff neck, confusion, and muscle weakness is highest in South Dakota and other Midwest states. Raising awareness of human cases can ensure residents and visitors alike take action to reduce their risk.”

Individuals and families can reduce their risk by taking the following actions:

Apply mosquito repellents (DEET, picaridin, oil of lemon eucalyptus, 2-undecanone, param-menthane-diol, or IR3535) to clothes and exposed skin. Limit exposure by wearing pants and long sleeves in the evening;

Limit time outdoors from dusk to midnight when mosquitoes are most active. *Culex tarsalis* are the primary carrier of WNV in South Dakota;

Remove standing water that gives mosquitoes a place to breed. Regularly change the water in birdbaths, outside pet dishes, and drain water from other flowerpots and garden containers and stay away from areas near standing water; and

Support local mosquito control efforts.

These precautions are especially important for people at high risk for WNV, including individuals over 50, pregnant women, organ transplant patients, individuals with cancer, diabetes, high blood pressure or kidney disease, and those with a history of alcohol abuse. People with severe or unusual headaches should see their physicians.

“This year, nearly 200 South Dakota cities, counties and tribes will share \$500,000 in grants intended to control mosquitoes and prevent West Nile virus,” added Dr. Clayton.

All applying communities received funding with grants ranging from \$500 to \$20,000. Grant awards were based on the population of the applying jurisdiction and its history of human WNV cases through 2023. This reimbursement grant helps alleviate some of the costs the help control mosquitos that pose a risk of the West Nile virus.

Visit the department’s website for more information about WNV and to learn about which jurisdictions received grant funding. Additionally, the department’s surveillance page includes which counties have reported cases.

At the heart of the Department of Health’s mission is a simple goal: to protect and improve the health of all South Dakotans. The department is entrusted with the vital task of promoting wellness, preventing disease, and ensuring access to quality healthcare for all South Dakotans.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 7 of 96

South Dakota State announces spring 2024 graduation list

BROOKINGS, S.D. (07/11/2024)-- The following students graduated after the spring 2024 semester at South Dakota State University. More than 1,500 students completed all requirements for a degree and/or certificate program.

Overall, students from 35 states and 24 nations graduated following the spring 2024 semester.

More than 70 students received two or more degrees or certificates from a college.

Kaycie Lois Hawkins of Groton, South Dakota, (57445) graduated with a Bachelor of Science in SDSU's Jerome J. Lohr College of Engineering.

Tanae Nicole Lipp of Groton, South Dakota, (57445) graduated Cum Laude with a Bachelor of Science in SDSU's College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

Conner Jeffery Thaler of Groton, South Dakota, (57445) graduated with a Master of Science and two graduate certificates in SDSU's College of Natural Sciences and College of Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences.

About South Dakota State University

Founded in 1881, South Dakota State University is the state's Morrill Act land-grant institution as well as its largest, most comprehensive school of higher education. SDSU confers degrees from seven different colleges representing 230 majors, minors and specializations. The institution also offers 39 master's degree programs, 16 Ph.D. and two professional programs.

The work of the university is carried out on a residential campus in Brookings, at sites in Sioux Falls, Pierre and Rapid City, and through Extension offices and Agricultural Experiment Station research sites across the state. SDSU's research expenditures for the 2023 fiscal year were more than \$74 million.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 8 of 96

Groton Chamber of Commerce

July 3, 2024

12pm City Hall

- Individuals present: Katelyn Nehlich, Topper Tastad, Ashley Bentz, April Abeln, Douglas Heinrich, and Carol Kutter
- Minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Tastad and seconded by Kutter. All members present voted aye.
- Treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$31,796.80. An estimated \$2,100.00 is in the Bucks account. The report was approved by Abeln and seconded by Tastad. All members present voted aye.
- Thank you notes were received from the Bentz family and scholarship recipient, Emily Clark.
- Lisa Dutenhoeffer was the winner of our 605 Day Facebook giveaway.
- More color options will be added to our 2024 shirts and Abeln will ask about profit.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Kutter to use shirt proceeds for Groton banners. All members present voted aye. The quantity is undecided, but order will be placed ASAP so banners can be hung this summer. It was discussed to rotate between the flower and tiger design and hang banners on both Main Street and Hwy 12.
- The POET grant was awarded to the Aberdeen Area Foster Closet as well as the Langford Area Ag Dept/FFA.
- A quote from Aberdeen Awards for tumblers was shared. It was discussed to ask for a quote from Rustic Cuts as well.
- An email motion was given prior by Kutter and seconded by Abeln to advertise in the Olive Grove Monday Night Football books for \$100. All members present voted aye.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to do another Facebook giveaway for a shirt. All members present voted aye. Users will be encouraged to comment with a Main Street bench selfie.
- Motion by Heinrich and seconded by Nehlich to publish a \$300 full inside page ad in the Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament program. All members present voted aye. Foul ball sponsorship was also discussed.
- Motion by Heinrich and seconded by Nehlich to gift \$500 to the Groton Lions Club to sponsor Lizzy Hofer at the 1st Annual Celebration in the Park. All members present voted aye.
- Motion by Abeln and seconded by Kutter to have giveaway baskets at Family Fun Fest and Wine on Nine. All members present voted aye. Baskets will include \$25 Chamber Bucks, a shirt and tumbler.
- The soon-to-be new owners of the Jungle were introduced, and a welcome will be scheduled later.
- Next Meeting: August 7th, 2024, at City Hall at 12:00pm

Upcoming events

- 07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/07/2024 Special Needs Swim at the Pool 4-6pm
- 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 Legion 11am-1pm
- 07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/18/2024 Middle School Moonlight Swim at the Swimming Pool 8:30-10:30pm
- 07/20/2024 Avantara Summer Bash 11am-2pm
- 07/24/2024 Groton Golf Association Fundraiser Lunch at Olive Grove 11:30am-1pm
- 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

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 9 of 96

- 08/02/2024 Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
- 08/04-06/2024 St John's Lutheran Church Vacation Bible School 5:30-8pm
- 08/07/2024 St John's Lutheran Church Vacation Bible School Program 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
- 11/08-10/2024 Front Porch 605 Christmas at the Barn 10am-5pm
- 11/16/2024 Legion Post #39 Turkey Party 6:30pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party 6pm-close

Groton Post 39 Fall To Lennox On Walk-Off

By GameChanger Media

A walk-off left Groton Post 39 on the wrong end of a 5-4 defeat to Lennox on Thursday. The game was tied at four in the bottom of the tenth when Ethan Larsen singled, scoring one run.

Lennox were the first to get on the board in the first when Isaac Bambas singled, scoring one run.

Dillon Abeln singled on the sixth pitch of the at-bat, which helped Groton Post 39 tie the game at one in the top of the fourth.

A single by Conner Eich gave Lennox the lead, 2-1, in the bottom of the fourth.

Groton Post 39 took the lead in the top of the sixth. Ryan Groeblinghoff doubled, scoring two runs, to give Groton Post 39 the advantage, 3-2.

Eich singled, which helped Lennox tie the game at three in the bottom of the sixth.

Groton Post 39 took the lead in the top of the ninth. Carter Simon singled, scoring one run, to give Groton Post 39 the lead, 4-3.

Eich singled, which helped Lennox tie the game at four in the bottom of the ninth.

Abeln led things off on the mound for Groton Post 39. The righty surrendered nine hits and three runs (two earned) over five and two-thirds innings, striking out six and walking two. Braxton Musser stepped on the bump first for Lennox. They allowed 10 hits and three runs over seven and one-third innings, striking out six and walking none.

Groton Post 39 piled up 11 hits in the game. Bradin Althoff, Abeln, and Colby Dunker each collected two hits for Groton Post 39. Groeblinghoff led Groton Post 39 with two runs batted in. They went 1-for-4 on the day. Groton Post 39 turned one double play in the game.

Lennox accumulated 12 hits in the game. Eich, the number seven hitter for Lennox, led the way with three runs batted in. They went 4-for-4 on the day. Jaxon Bittner collected three hits for Lennox in five at bats. Lennox were sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Sawyer Bowers made the most plays with 11.

Next up for Groton Post 39 is a game at LAW Rattlers Legion on Friday.

Brand New Program at

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



\$20 Monthly Membership

- ☞ for people 60 years of age and older
- ☞ for those who need equipment for physical therapy!



Downtown
Groton

24/7 access to the facility ~ Cancel any time

**Staying fit and practicing healthy nutrition
can be linked to benefits, such as:**

- ☞ Reduced levels of stress and anxiety
- ☞ Improved cognitive function
- ☞ Increased energy levels and productivity
- ☞ Controlled blood pressure
- ☞ Better blood flow circulation
- ☞ Strengthened bones and muscles
- ☞ Reduced risk of heart disease and other illnesses

Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Counties hit with \$74,000 in plaintiffs' attorney fees for trying to restrict petition circulators

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 11, 2024 5:14 PM

Two South Dakota counties whose policies violated petition circulators' First Amendment rights to political speech had to fork over a combined \$74,000 in attorney fees and costs for the lawyer representing the group that sued them.

On Wednesday, a federal judge ordered Lawrence County to pay Dakotans for Health's attorney, Jim Leach, \$19,238.90 in fees and costs.

Dakotans for Health prevailed in its lawsuit last year against Lawrence County, where a policy restricted petition circulators at the courthouse in Deadwood to a designated area away from public sidewalks surrounding the complex.

A similar situation and lawsuit occurred in Minnehaha County, resulting in that county agreeing to pay \$54,815.15 for Dakotans for Health's attorney fees and costs after a settlement last fall. South Dakota Searchlight obtained the figure recently after it was not included in public court documents.

Petition circulators for Dakotans for Health were gathering signatures in both counties to put two measures on statewide ballots Nov. 5 — one that would restore abortion rights, and one aimed at eliminating the state sales taxes on groceries. Both petitions have since been submitted and validated with enough signatures to qualify for the election.

In a court order in the Lawrence County case, Judge Roberto Lange wrote that the county's policy "burdened substantially more speech than necessary" to preserve public safety and allow local citizens to conduct county business without disruption.

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

State boards approve \$87 million in bonds, loans and a grant to businesses

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - JULY 11, 2024 7:30 AM

State boards approved two loans, one grant and four bonds Wednesday worth a combined \$87 million.

The Board of Economic Development and Economic Development Finance Authority approved the assistance, which will be administered by the Governor's Office of Economic Development. The office announced the approvals in a news release. The state's help will support private projects totaling \$236 million in costs and creating a projected 119 jobs.

A \$6.75 million Revolving Economic Development Initiative (REDI) loan was awarded to JH Investment in Vermillion. Masaba Inc., a mining, construction and aggregate industries manufacturer, will use the loan to construct a new fabrication facility. Both companies are registered in public corporate documents to Jerad Higman, the CEO of Masaba. The REDI Fund offers low-interest loans to promote economic growth and job creation, covering up to 45% of a project's cost. Projects can include land purchases, site improvements, building costs, or machinery and equipment purchases.

Masaba Inc. was also approved for a Reinvestment Payment Program grant of up to \$315,000. The program offers grants to companies to offset the upfront costs associated with relocating or expanding operations, or upgrading equipment.

An SD Works Loan of \$106,172 was awarded to the Sweat Zone gym in Aberdeen. The loan will be used for building and equipment for the new company. The SD Works program offers loans to businesses for construction, buying equipment, and general expenses.

Four companies were authorized for Livestock Nutrient Management Bonds of up to \$20 million each to construct plants that convert livestock manure into renewable natural gas.

The four companies are:

Brookings Biogas, of Hamlin and Brookings counties.

Lakeside Biogas, of Roberts County.

Five Shots RNG, of Lincoln County.

Moccasin Creek RNG, of Brown County.

The Livestock Nutrient Management Bond program issues tax-exempt bonds to purchasers — typically local banks — who set the repayment terms and interest rates for the company borrowing the money.

Biden at NATO press conference rebuts doubters:

'I'm the best qualified to govern'

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JACOB FISCHLER - JULY 11, 2024 9:03 PM

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden dug in on his 2024 reelection bid Thursday at a solo press conference following the NATO summit in Washington, despite a growing list of rank-and-file Democrats and high-profile supporters urging him to abandon his campaign over suspected health concerns.

The highly anticipated press conference followed weeks of speculation about Biden's ability to hold office and whether he should remain in the 2024 presidential election against former President Donald Trump. His performance, while markedly stronger than his devastating debate performance, still included a notable gaffe and could leave questions open.

In response to the first question, about if Vice President Kamala Harris would be an able candidate against Trump, Biden mixed up their names.

"I wouldn't have picked Vice President Trump to be vice president if I didn't think she was not qualified to be president," he said.

Biden fielded a wide range of questions from reporters from both the U.S. and overseas for just less than an hour. The meeting with the press came exactly two weeks after the June 27 debate, during which Biden stumbled repeatedly, spoke in a hoarse voice and appeared unable to finish some sentences.

Biden and the White House have repeatedly attributed the debate as a "bad night" and pointed to clean results from his last three annual physical examinations.

Asked directly about congressional Democrats' unease about his candidacy, Biden said he had made a final decision to remain in the race, but was working to show doubters he was up to the task and responding to criticism that he could not handle impromptu questioning.

"I'm determined on running," he said. "But I think it's important that I allay fears by seeing — let them see me out there."

Not stepping aside

He added that delegates pledged to him through the Democratic nominating process should be free to vote their conscience, but that no one had a better alternative to his candidacy against Trump, the presumed Republican candidate.

"I believe I'm the best qualified to govern and I think I'm the best qualified to win," Biden said. "But there are other people who could beat Trump, too, but it's awful hard to start from scratch."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 14 of 96

Asked if he would step aside if his polling data showed Harris could beat Trump, Biden said he would not, unless it also showed he could not win.

"No one's saying that," he added in a whisper. "No poll says that."

Harris is seen as the likeliest replacement for Biden if he were to leave the race.

A trickle of congressional Democrats calling for him to leave the race since July 2 turned to a stream this week — with some reports indicating a poor performance Thursday night could give way to a flood.

Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a decades-long friend of Biden's, urged colleagues in an MSNBC interview Wednesday to "let (Biden) deal with this NATO conference, this is a very big deal."

At the time Biden began his Thursday press conference, 14 Democrats in Congress had explicitly called for him to leave the race, with others suggesting it.

Shortly after the press conference concluded, two more, Connecticut's Jim Himes and California's Scott Peters, called on Biden to step aside.

Biden should "make room for a new generation of leaders," Himes, the ranking Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, wrote in a statement posted to X.

Peters' statement was provided to Politico.

Emphasis on foreign policy

Biden, who has rarely held press conferences, consulted a list of reporters and took questions that ranged from his fitness to serve as president to his handling of the Israel-Hamas war.

He lauded his accomplishments in office and said his job performance showed he was still up for the job.

"If I slow down, I can't get the job done, that's a sign that I shouldn't be doing it," he said. "But there's no indication of that yet. None."

Biden — a former chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — appeared more comfortable on foreign policy questions than he was discussing his political future, providing in-depth answers on the Israel-Hamas war, China's growing influence on the world stage and Ukraine's war with Russia.

Trump mocks Biden

While Biden's voice and grasp on the issues appeared stronger than he was at the debate, he still made several speaking mistakes, including the confusion between his vice president and Trump.

Trump mocked the mix-up on his social media platform Truth Social with a post saying "Great job, Joe!"

Later, Biden said Harris was qualified to be president and that is why he picked her as a running mate. His comments were worthy of attention given Harris would likely become the nominee if Biden were to step down.

Biden attacks Trump on NATO

Biden declared the summit a "great success" and underlined the U.S. commitment to the alliance and to Ukraine's war against Russia.

"For those who thought NATO's time had passed, they got a rude awakening when Putin invaded Ukraine. Some of the oldest and deepest fears in Europe roared back to life because once again a murderous madman was on the march. This time, no one cowered in appeasement, especially the United States," Biden said.

Prior to taking questions, he attacked Trump's record of disparaging NATO and its foundational commitment to defend fellow member nations. The former president has threatened to withdraw from NATO and accused allies of shortchanging the organization's defense coffers.

"A strong NATO is essential to American security, and I believe the obligation of Article Five is sacred. And I remind all Americans, Article Five was invoked only once in NATO's long history, and that was to defend America after 9/11," Biden said.

The three-day summit largely centered on Russia's ongoing bombardment and occupation of parts of Ukraine. World leaders promised a path for Ukraine to join the alliance, and the event culminated with

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 15 of 96

the U.S. joining two dozen allies in signing the Ukraine Compact to "(a)ffirm that the security of Ukraine is integral to the security of the Euro-Atlantic region and beyond."

Biden sat down with Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy earlier Thursday to underscore military assistance including "working with our NATO allies to ensure Ukraine is flying F-16s this summer."

Zelenskyy thanked Biden for his "support and personal statement" following Russia's strike on a children's hospital in Kyiv Monday. Biden shook his head and responded the attack was "sick."

Another flub

Between his meeting with Zelenskyy and the press conference, Biden introduced the Ukrainian president at a separate event to sign the compact, but mistakenly called him President Putin — the Russian leader at war with Zelenskyy's country — before correcting himself.

When asked about the blunder, Biden acknowledged that he made the mistake but said that he corrected it immediately.

"I thought it was the most successful conference I've attended in a long time and find me a world leader who didn't think it was," he replied.

Biden did not stumble earlier in the week when he delivered remarks at NATO's 75th anniversary event; rather, his voice remained steady and firm as he opened the ceremony for leaders from the 32 member nations.

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

Jacob covers federal policy as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Based in Oregon, he focuses on Western issues. His coverage areas include climate, energy development, public lands and infrastructure.

U.S. House fails to pass measure to hold attorney general in 'inherent contempt'

SD Republican Dusty Johnson casts vote in favor of resolution

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JULY 11, 2024 11:25 AM

WASHINGTON — In the latest U.S. House Republican attempt to secure audio tapes from the U.S. Justice Department special counsel's interview with President Joe Biden, the U.S. House on Thursday rejected Florida Republican Rep. Anna Paulina Luna's resolution to fine Attorney General Merrick Garland for withholding them.

The measure — which was turned down 204-210 — would have levied a daily fine of \$10,000 against Garland under the House's seldom-used "inherent contempt" power until he complies with a subpoena to release the tapes of the interview between special counsel Robert K. Hur and Biden surrounding his handling of classified documents.

South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson voted in favor of the failed measure.

The resolution is part of a wider effort among Republicans to secure the audio — a drive that's only intensified since Biden's disastrous debate performance two weeks ago.

During floor debate on Wednesday, Luna described the effort as a way to hold Garland accountable to the legislative branch.

"With Attorney General Garland and the Department of Justice refusing to follow the law, we have been left with no choice but to rely on inherent contempt," she said.

Meanwhile, Rep. Jim McGovern, a Massachusetts Democrat, on Wednesday called the measure "stupid," and noted Republican leaders' tepid support for it.

"Republican leadership knows this is a stupid resolution," he said. "Their own members know this is a stupid resolution, but they're beholden to the craziest MAGA members in their conference. So, this is what we get: stupid resolutions on the floor because they're too chicken to stand up to the extremism in

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 16 of 96

their own party.”

The debate was delayed for more than 20 minutes after Virginia Republican Morgan Griffith asked for McGovern’s words to be stricken. After the pause, McGovern conceded to having his words stricken and did not use the word “stupid” for the rest of his remarks.

“I urge a no vote on this – I’ve got to take this word out now – on this resolution,” he said.

The Justice Department declined to comment on Luna’s effort Wednesday.

GOP leadership

Former President Donald J. Trump, the presumptive Republican presidential nominee, took to Truth Social on Wednesday to show his support for Luna’s effort.

“I AGREE with Anna Paulina Luna and the many House Members who think Merrick Garland should be held in INHERENT CONTEMPT for refusing to release the Biden Tapes even though they were subpoenaed!” Trump wrote.

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson expressed some skepticism over Luna’s measure, saying at a Tuesday press conference that “as a former constitutional law litigator, my preference is to follow the legal process, the legal proceedings, that protect the institution.”

Johnson, of Louisiana, said he would rather focus on the civil suit from House Judiciary Committee Republicans, though he said that if the Luna measure came to the floor, he would vote for it.

“I’d rather do it in a way that we’ve done in our present litigation, but we’ll let the chips fall where they may,” Johnson said, adding that “every member has the right to bring a privileged motion like that, and Anna’s very committed to this principle and I am, too. We all are. I think every Republican is.”

Luna’s resolution also signaled a walkback from her earlier effort introduced in May, which called for the House sergeant-at-arms to detain Garland.

Historically, Congress has shied away from the lengthy and burdensome inherent contempt move — which has not been used in either chamber since the 1930s — prompting questions about how the House could actually enforce the fine.

Republicans’ push for tapes

Garland has been hit with several attempts by House Republicans to try to secure the audio tapes.

Last month, House Republicans voted to hold Garland in contempt of Congress after he agreed with Biden’s assertion of executive privilege over the tapes.

Garland also faces a civil lawsuit from the House Judiciary Committee filed last week in the U.S. District Court for the District of Columbia, which seeks to overturn Biden’s assertion of executive privilege.

House Republicans are still pushing for the audio despite the Justice Department offering up a transcript of the interview between Hur and Biden to the House Judiciary Committee and the House Committee on Oversight and Accountability.

Garland tapped Hur to investigate Biden’s handling of classified documents back in January 2023. Hur, a federal prosecutor during the Trump administration, wrote in the report that Biden “willfully retained and disclosed classified materials after his vice presidency when he was a private citizen.”

However, Hur declined to prosecute the president. He noted that “at trial, Mr. Biden would likely present himself to a jury, as he did during our interview of him, as a sympathetic, well-meaning, elderly man with a poor memory.” The octogenarian fiercely rejected the characterization of his memory.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

GOP plan to reverse final Title IX rule passes U.S. House, but Biden says he'd veto

Party-line vote includes a yes from SD Republican Dusty Johnson

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - JULY 11, 2024 11:03 AM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House on Thursday passed a measure to reverse an Education Department rule seeking to extend federal discrimination protections for LGBTQ students, though President Joe Biden has vowed to veto the legislation should it land on his desk.

House passage of the resolution, 210-205, is part of a barrage of GOP pushback at the state and federal levels to the Biden administration's final rule for Title IX since its April release. For all schools that receive federal funding, the rule protects against discrimination for students based on "sex stereotypes, sexual orientation, gender identity, and sex characteristics."

The party-line roll call included a yes vote from South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson.

Twenty-six states with GOP attorneys general have sued to block the rule — including South Dakota — and courts have temporarily blocked it from going into effect in 14 states on August 1.

The 14 states with temporary blocks are: Alaska, Idaho, Indiana, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, Montana, Ohio, Tennessee, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia and Wyoming.

Illinois GOP Rep. Mary Miller introduced the legislation in early June. A week later, the Republican-controlled House Committee on Education and the Workforce approved it. Miller's resolution seeks to reverse the rule through the Congressional Review Act, a procedural tool Congress can use to overturn certain actions from federal agencies.

In the Senate, Mississippi Republican Cindy Hyde-Smith also introduced legislation in June to try to block the final rule under the same tool. The Senate version has gathered over 30 Republican cosponsors.

Rep. Virginia Foxx — chairwoman of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce and a fierce opponent of the administration's final rule — said during the floor debate Wednesday that she wanted to preserve Title IX, which helped equalize funding for women's sports and education programs beginning in 1972.

"Title IX ushered in a golden era for women's competition and education," the North Carolina Republican said. "There is sanctity in the community and tradition of these memories, these spaces and these opportunities for young girls."

Regardless of whether the attempt to roll back the measure is successful in the Democratic-controlled Senate, Biden's veto threat leaves virtually no possibility it could be adopted this year.

Democrats, LGBTQ advocates in opposition

Democrats and LGBTQ advocates have described the effort to overturn the rule as motivated by misinformation and fear.

"Unfortunately, this resolution has been clouded by misinformation, unfounded fears and with some, just hatred of transgender individuals," said Rep. Bobby Scott, a Virginia Democrat and ranking member of the House Committee on Education and the Workforce, during the debate.

Oregon's Rep. Suzanne Bonamici — ranking member of the House Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and Secondary Education — said the resolution was "another attempt to undercut this administration's efforts to empower survivors and protect all Americans from discrimination."

"If Republicans truly cared about protecting women and children, they would stop this prejudiced rhetoric and take action on bills that would actually protect women from discrimination and harassment and defend women's reproductive health care, make child care more affordable, preserve opportunities in workplaces for all parents, especially women," Bonamici said.

Scott called on the House to "reject these narratives and focus on real issues of safety and equity."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 18 of 96

Final rule blocked in more states

Meanwhile, challenges to the rule are playing out in a handful of federal courts.

Last week, Judge John Broomes of the U.S. District Court for the District of Kansas temporarily blocked the measure from taking effect in the Sunflower State, along with Alaska, Utah and Wyoming.

Broomes also halted the rule from taking effect in “the schools attended by the members of Young America’s Foundation or Female Athletes United, as well as the schools attended by the children of the members of Moms for Liberty,” all groups that sued alongside the four states, per the order.

Under Broomes’ order, the rule is also halted in an Oklahoma public school attended by a minor who is one of the plaintiffs.

In June, U.S. District Judge Terry Doughty of Louisiana issued a temporary injunction barring the final rule from taking effect there, along with Idaho, Mississippi and Montana.

In Kentucky federal court, Chief Judge Danny Reeves temporarily blocked the final rule in the Bluegrass State, plus Tennessee, Ohio, Indiana, West Virginia and Virginia. Reeves rejected the department’s request for a partial stay of the injunction while its appeal plays out, per a Wednesday court filing.

The Education Department has confirmed it is appealing the other two rulings but did not have an update Wednesday on whether it is filing a notice of appeal on the most recent ruling in the Kansas federal court.

The spokesperson reiterated earlier this week that the agency has “asked the trial courts to allow the bulk of the final rule to take effect in these states as scheduled, on August 1, while the appeals are pending.”

LGBTQ advocacy groups push back on GOP effort

Allen Morris, policy director for the advocacy group National LGBTQ Task Force, said the vote was part of a pattern of anti-LGBTQ policy measures.

“When you look at the rise in hatred and the rise in violence and the rise of young LGBTQ individuals not having the support that they need, where suicide rates are high, it is disappointing to see our opposition go against us with such a high level of intention,” he said.

Morris told States Newsroom that “a lot of what is happening with this extremism is not founded in truth.”

“It is founded in ways to spew hate and to spew fear. It is a lot of fear mongering, and it’s anything to make people feel like their backs are up against the wall, or as if they don’t have the power,” he said.

Echoing a previous statement, a spokesperson for the Department of Education said it “does not comment on pending legislation” and emphasized that all schools receiving federal funding are obligated to comply with the new regulations as a condition of receiving those funds.

The department has yet to finalize a separate rule establishing new criteria for transgender athletes.

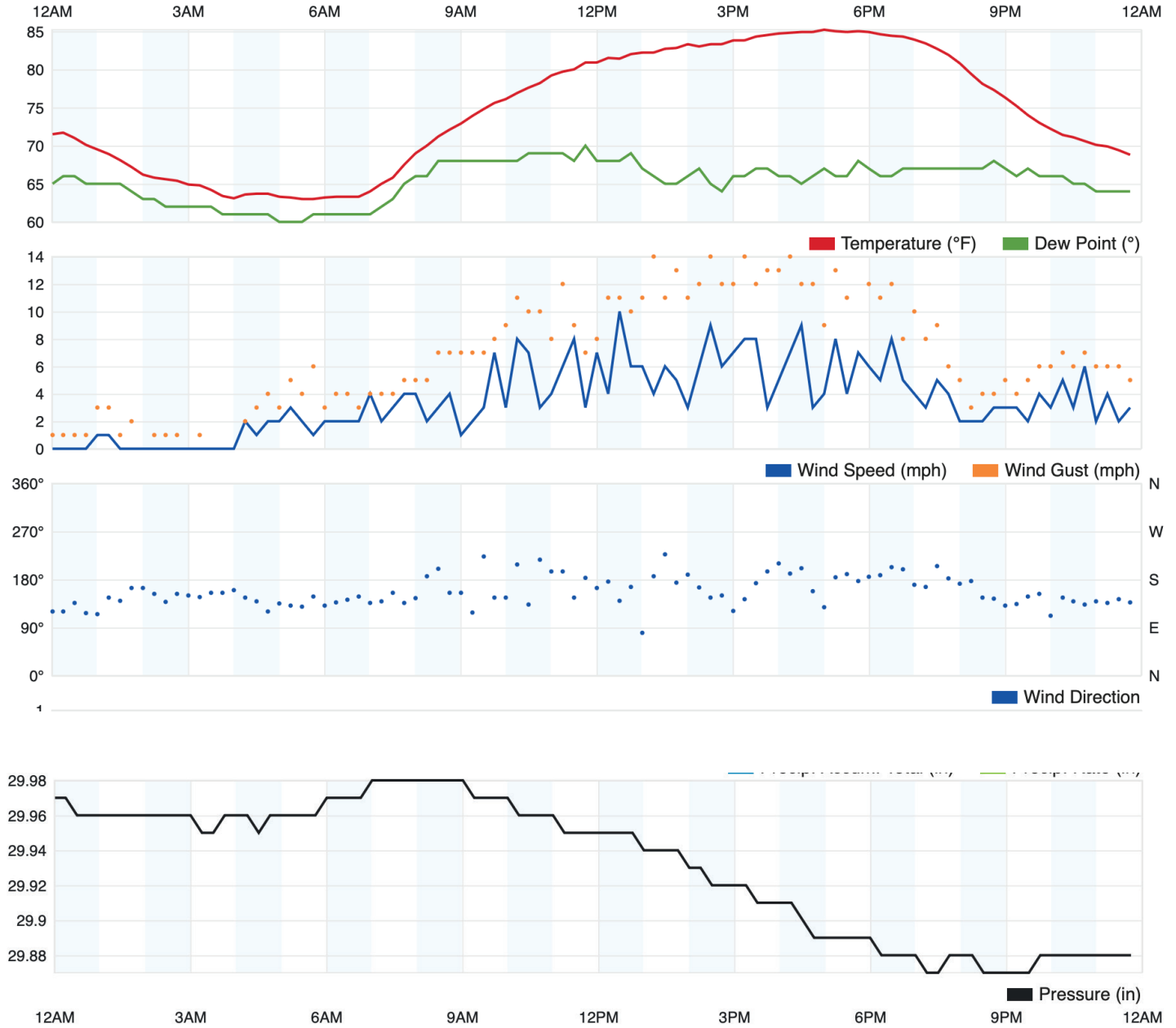
— *The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.*

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom’s Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 19 of 96

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 20 of 96

Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 92 °F

Hot



Low: 69 °F

Mostly Clear



High: 97 °F

Hot



Low: 67 °F

Chance
T-storms



High: 92 °F

Hot

Today



Highs: 83-99°F
Lows: 65-71°F

Isolated nighttime t-storms

HOT AND HUMID CONDITIONS AHEAD

Saturday



Highs: 91-101°F
Lows: 64-71°F

FEELS LIKE: 92-102°F
Slight risk of severe storms

Sunday



Highs: 85-100°F
Lows: 64-70°F

FEELS LIKE: 90-102°F
Isolated nighttime t-storms

**MOST
HUMID**

Monday

Highs: 80-90°F
Lows: 57-64°F



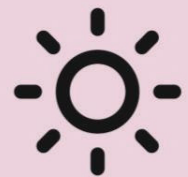
Isolated nighttime t-storms

Tuesday

Highs: 73-83°F
Lows: 54-61°F



Cloudy in south
central SD



Sunny in
northern SD



Hot and humid days are here, starting today, and continuing Saturday and Sunday. Keep on the look out for signs of heat illness and make sure to take frequent water breaks if spending time outdoors.

Broton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 21 of 96

Staying Safe in the Heat

- ☀️ Limit outdoor activities
- ☀️ Drink plenty of water
- ☀️ Wear light clothing
- ☀️ Wear sunscreen
- ☀️ Work outdoors early or very late in the day

NOAA logo and thermometer icon
weather.gov/safety/heat

Keep these tips in mind when spending time outdoors over the next several days. For more safety tips and tricks, visit weather.gov/safety/heat

Severe Thunderstorm Threat Today And Saturday July 12, 2024 4:41 AM

Key Messages

- A few thunderstorms are possible today and tomorrow along frontal boundaries across the region
- Monitor the weather and have a plan if severe weather strikes your area

Severe Thunderstorm Coverage



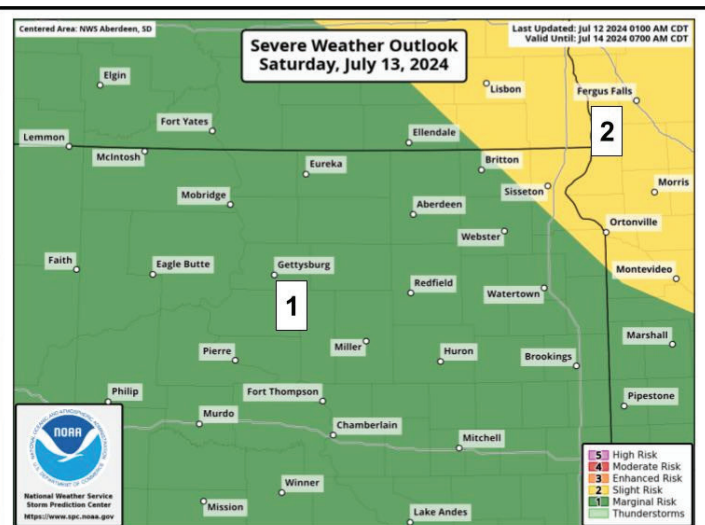
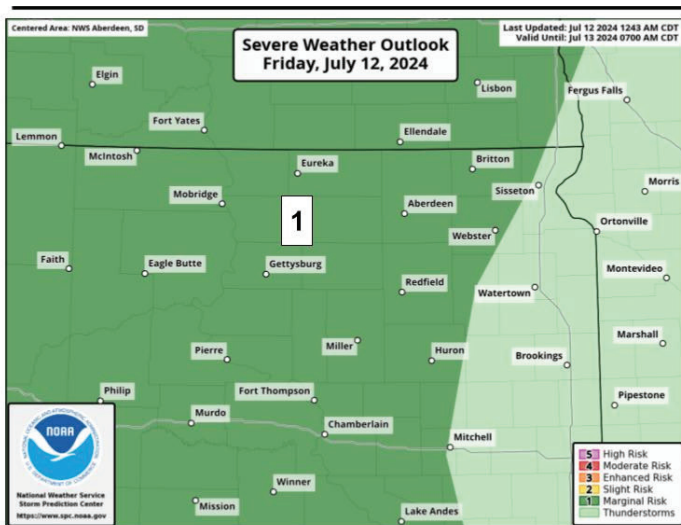
Main Threats:



Quarter size hail or larger



Wind 60-70+ mph



This evening and Saturday evening will contain a low probability chance for thunderstorm development. If storms can get going, they could grow to become strong to severe.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 22 of 96

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:55 PM

Low Temp: 63 °F at 3:57 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 1:10 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 26 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 107 in 1936

Record Low: 40 in 1941

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 1.37

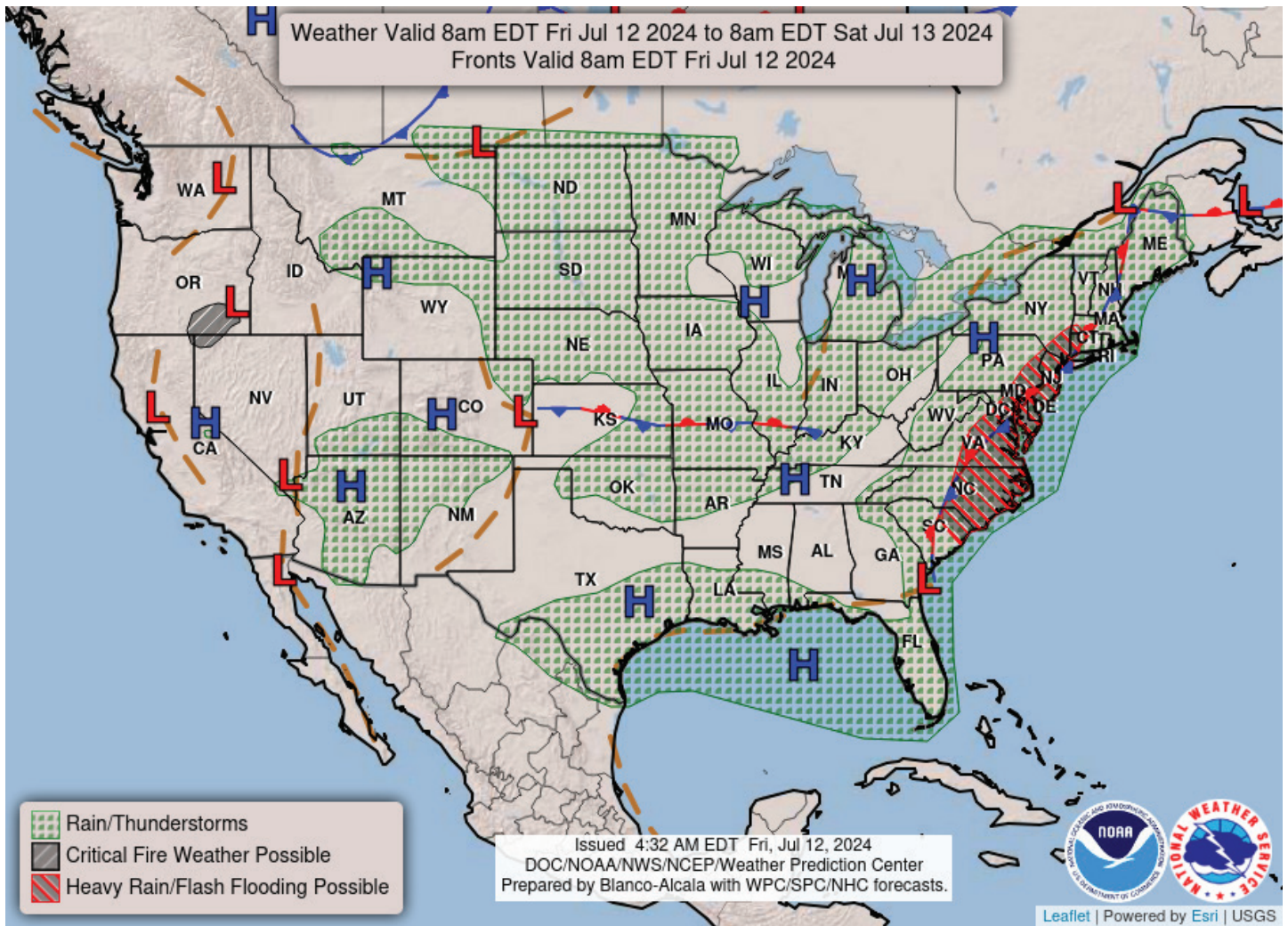
Precip to date in July: 3.56

Average Precip to date: 12.38

Precip Year to Date: 14.51

Sunset Tonight: 9:21:31 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 5:55:41 am



Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 23 of 96

Today in Weather History

July 12, 1993: A thunderstorm dumped up to four inches of rain in 30 minutes, 25 miles west of Pierre. This storm washed hay into big blocks up to five feet high. The heavy rains also caused water to spill over an irrigation dam. Another severe thunderstorm occurred over Dewey County and produced strong winds, damaging hail, and flooding rains which destroyed crops and hay fields. The storm knocked out windows and screens in the Lantry area. Runoff from the storm rushed through the streets of Eagle Butte causing water damage to homes and businesses. Water was reported flowing four to five feet deep through a cafe. High winds also tipped over a house trailer.

July 12, 2004: Hail up to the size of softballs fell in and around Onaka, in Faulk County, damaging vehicles, farm equipment, and homes. Lightning struck a house in Britton starting a fire in the attic, which resulted in significant damage to the home. High winds along with hail up to the size of baseballs caused some structural, vehicle, crop, and tree damage in and around Astoria and Toronto in Duel County.

1951 - The Kaw River flood occurred. The month of June that year was the wettest of record for the state of Kansas, and during the four days preceding the flood much of eastern Kansas and western Missouri received more than ten inches of rain. Flooding in the Midwest claimed 41 lives, left 200 thousand persons homeless, and caused a billion dollars property damage. Kansas City was hardest hit. The central industrial district sustained 870 million dollars property damage. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1980 - Lightning struck a large broiler house in Branford, FL, and the ensuing fire broiled 11,000 nearly ready broilers. Firemen were able to save a few thousand chickens, however. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Cool air invaded the High Plains Region. Eight cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Sheridan, WY, with a reading of 37 degrees. Thunderstorms developing along the cold front in the central U.S. produced 6.5 inches of rain at Fort Dodge, IA, and 2.5 inches in one hour at St. Joseph MO. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Dakotas, including baseball size hail at Aberdeen, SD, and softball size hail near Fullerton, ND. Thunderstorms produced heavy rain in Arkansas and northeastern Texas, with 6.59 inches reported at Mesquite, TX, in just an hour and fifteen minutes. Garland, TX, reported water up to the tops of cars following a torrential downpour. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms over eastern Kansas deluged McFarland with more than six inches of rain. Afternoon thunderstorms in Wyoming produced up to eighteen inches of dime size hail near Rock Springs, along with torrential rains, and a three foot high wall of mud and water swept into the town causing more than 1.5 million dollars damage. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in Oklahoma and Arkansas, deluging Dardanelle, AR, with 3.50 inches of rain in less than twenty minutes. About seventy cows were killed when lightning struck a tree in Jones County, TX. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1995: An intense heat wave affected much of the Midwest for a 4-day period beginning on this day. The worst effects of the heat were noted in the Chicago metropolitan area, where 583 people died from the heat. Temperatures across the region reached as high as 104 degrees, overnight lows on falling to the upper 70s to low 80s. Dew point temperatures in the upper 70s to low 80s created heat indexes peaking at 125 degrees. Electricity and water usage reached record levels, causing periodic outages.

1996: Hurricane Bertha makes landfall near Wrightsville Beach, NC with maximum winds of 105 mph, but the storm surge dealt the most devastation. The U.S. Virgin Islands, along with North Carolina, were declared federal disaster areas. Surveys indicate that Bertha damaged almost 2,500 homes on St. Thomas and St. John. For many, it was the second hit in the ten months since Hurricane Marilyn devastated the same area. The primary effects in North Carolina were to the coastal counties and included storm surge flooding and beach erosion, roof damage, piers washed away, fallen trees and damage to crops. Over 5,000 homes were damaged, mostly from storm surge. Storm total rainfall amounts ranged from 5 to 8 inches along a coastal strip from South Carolina to Maine. Overall, as many as 12 deaths resulted with 8 in the U.S. and territories.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

I CAN'T HANDLE MUCH MORE!

Walter had recently been elected chairman of the deacons in his church. His pastor thought it would be beneficial to the church if the congregation knew him.

After introducing him, Rev. Simpson asked him to make a few remarks. He thought for a moment and then began by saying, "I am so grateful for the way God has blessed me. My business has grown tremendously in the last few years. It has provided me with enough money to purchase a new home with a lovely swimming pool. And I am planning on taking my family to Europe this summer. I am so blessed I can't handle much more. I don't know what more God could give me!"

"I do," replied an older and much wiser deacon sitting in the front row. "A good dose of humility."

Often when sharing God's blessings, people speak with arrogance rather than appreciation or sound greedy rather than grateful. We must always be mindful of God's mercy and without His loving kindness realize that we would be no one or have nothing. What we have, we have because of His grace - beginning with our salvation.

Every breath, every heartbeat, every thought, every step we take or arm we lift or sight we see - and every sound we hear is a gift from Him. Whatever we have, we have because of His love, mercy and grace.

Prayer: Lord, we only fool ourselves when we think we have earned what we have. Help us to be mindful that without You, we are no one and would have nothing. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: No, O people, the LORD has told you what is good, and this is what he requires of you: to do what is right, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God. Micah 6:8



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

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 25 of 96

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Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 26 of 96



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.09.24

21 26 54 60 64 3

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$203,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 59 Mins 37
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.10.24

6 21 25 42 51 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$4,980,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 36 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.11.24

3 4 9 17 37 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 29 Mins 37
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.10.24

7 18 21 34 35

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$32,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.10.24

16 17 33 56 66 18

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 58
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.10.24

7 11 12 27 46 26

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$54,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 58
DRAW: Mins 37 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 27 of 96

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
- 11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party & Tour of Homes with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close

Arizona abortion initiative backers sue to remove 'unborn human being' from voter pamphlet language

PHOENIX (AP) — Backers of a November abortion rights ballot initiative have sued a GOP-led legislative committee that seeks to include proposed language for the voter pamphlet referring to a fetus as an "unborn human being."

Arizona for Abortion Access filed a lawsuit in Maricopa County Superior Court on Wednesday, asking that a judge refuse to allow the language favored by a Republican-dominated legislative group for the initiative summary. The summary will appear on a pamphlet voters can use to decide how to cast their ballots.

Abortion rights is a central issue in Democratic campaigns in this year's elections. Variations of Arizona's ballot initiative, which will ask voters if abortion rights should be enshrined in the state constitution, have been proposed in six other states: Nebraska, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Nevada and South Dakota. New York also has a measure that advocates say would protect abortion access.

The Arizona abortion rights group says the pamphlet summary should simply use the word "fetus," and argues that "unborn human being" is a politically charged phrase aimed at provoking opposition to the measure.

"Arizona voters have a right to clear, accurate and impartial information from the state before they are asked to vote on ballot initiatives," the group said in a statement. "The decision of the Arizona Legislative Council fails to abide by that responsibility by rejecting the request to use the neutral, medical term 'fetus' in place of 'unborn human being' in the 2024 General Election Publicity Pamphlet."

The proposed constitutional amendment would allow abortions in Arizona until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions to save the woman'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.

Arizona currently has a 15-week abortion ban.

Opponents of the proposed Arizona amendment say it could lead to unlimited and unregulated abortions in the state.

Leisa Brug, manager of the opposition It Goes Too Far campaign, argued for the term "unborn human being."

"It shouldn't read like an advertisement for the amendment, it should provide voters with a clear understanding of what current law states and what the amendment would do if passed," Brug said in a statement.

Organizers in Arizona earlier this month said they had submitted 823,685 signatures, far more than the 383,923 required from registered voters. County election officials have until Aug. 22 to verify whether enough of the signatures are valid and provide results to the Arizona secretary of state's office.

Referendum set for South Dakota voters on controversial carbon dioxide pipeline law

By JACK DURA Associated Press

After years spent trying to gain regulatory approval for a proposed carbon dioxide pipeline intended to snake through the Midwest, the effort could be complicated even further if South Dakota voters reject a law passed by the Legislature that pipeline opponents say is an attempt to squelch local control and speed approval of the pipeline.

State officials this week validated the referendum for the Nov. 5 general election, enabling voters to decide whether to reject a package of regulations approved by the Legislature earlier this year. Pipeline opponents argue the regulations would strip county officials of the ability to pass stringent rules that can all but ban such pipelines, while legislative leaders say they intended to add requirements to help land-owners even as they limited the role of county governments.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 29 of 96

The law takes away authority from local governments and consolidates it with the three-member state Public Utilities Commission, said Jim Eschenbaum, chairman of the South Dakota Property Rights and Local Control Alliance, formed by landowners and local officials to oppose the project.

"I honestly believe a majority of South Dakotans think this pipeline is foolishness. I'm one of them," he said. "I think it's just of bunch of hooey and a big taxpayer boondoggle."

Iowa-based Summit Carbon Solutions has proposed the \$5.5 billion, 2,500-mile (4023.4 kilometers) pipeline network that would carry planet-warming emissions from more than 50 ethanol plants in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota to be sent deep underground in North Dakota.

Summit has faced opposition and setbacks throughout the Midwest. But North Dakota regulators are reconsidering an earlier denial of a permit, and last month the Iowa Utilities Commission gave conditional approval to Summit. Last year, South Dakota regulators denied Summit's application for a permit, but company officials have said they will file another application this summer.

The pipeline is seen as crucial for a potential future aviation fuel market for the Midwest-based ethanol industry, which buys roughly one-third of the nation's corn crop. In opposing the pipeline, some landowners question the forced use of their property and raise the danger of ruptures that could release hazardous CO2 gas. They also are critical of lucrative federal tax credits for carbon capture projects.

House Majority Leader Will Mortenson said he believes the pipeline will ultimately be built whether the regulations are in place or not, so he helped introduce the new law because it adds new requirements, such as minimum depth requirements for the pipeline, liability on pipeline operators for damages and disclosures of pipelines' plume models. The law also allows counties to impose a surcharge of \$1 per linear foot on CO2 pipelines whose companies claim federal tax credits.

"If this gets shot down, that pipeline's going to get built with no landowner protections and no plume study released and with(out) a whole bunch of the other benefits that we fought real hard to get included," Mortenson said.

Mortenson, an attorney, said he sees the benefit for the ethanol industry, but also understands farmers' and ranchers' concerns and sees the need for the regulations in the law.

While supporters have called the law a "landowners bill of rights," Republican state Rep. Karla Lems opposed the legislation, calling it "the pipeline bill of rights." She said the law sets the stage for other companies like Summit and future solar and wind projects to roll through, unhindered by local concerns.

Lems' family has land that was in the paths of Summit's proposed pipeline and another pipeline project that was canceled last year.

Asked for comment, Summit spokeswoman Sabrina Ahmed Zenor called the law "pro farmer, pro ethanol and pro business. It protects landowners and provides property tax relief."

South Dakota corrections officials investigate disturbance that left 6 inmates injured

SPRINGFIELD, S.D. (AP) — South Dakota corrections officials say they are investigating a pair of incidents at the state prison in Springfield that left six inmates injured.

Department of Corrections spokesman Michael Winder said in a statement that fighting began Tuesday night at the Mike Durfee State Prison, followed by another incident Wednesday morning. The six inmates suffered non-life-threatening injuries, he said.

Winder also said some prison staff suffered minor injuries while restoring order, but there were no assaults on personnel or damage to property. He said any evidence of criminal activity would be forwarded to the Division of Criminal Investigation.

Shouting through fencing and open windows, inmates at the converted college campus on Wednesday expressed their frustrations to reporters from the Sioux Falls Argus Leader and KELO-TV. They said they had been locked down and weren't allowed to make phone calls to their families since the fighting broke out. Their complaints included gang activity, understaffing and the lack of air conditioning in their cells.

In March, at least one correctional officer was injured in a disturbance at the State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls, resulting in felony charges against 11 inmates.

European Union says X's blue checks are deceptive, transparency falls short under social media law

LONDON (AP) — The European Union said Friday that blue checkmarks from Elon Musk's X are deceptive and that the online platform falls short on transparency and accountability requirements, the first charges against a tech company since the bloc's new social media regulations took effect.

The European Commission outlined the preliminary findings from its investigation into X, formerly known as Twitter, under the 27-nation bloc's Digital Services Act.

The rulebook, also known as the DSA, is a sweeping set of regulations that requires platforms to take more responsibility for protecting users and cleaning up their sites, under threat of hefty fines.

Regulators took aim at X's blue checks, saying they constitute "dark patterns" that are not in line with industry best practice and can be used by malicious actors to deceive users.

After Musk bought the site in 2022, it started issuing the verification marks to anyone who paid \$8 per month for one. Before Musk's acquisition, they mirrored verification badges common on social media and were largely reserved for celebrities, politicians and other influential accounts.

An email request for comment to X resulted in an automated response that said "Busy now, please check back later." Its main spokesman reportedly left the company in June.

"Back in the day, BlueChecks used to mean trustworthy sources of information," European Commissioner Thierry Breton said in a statement. "Now with X, our preliminary view is that they deceive users and infringe the DSA."

The commission also charged X with failing to comply with requirements on ad transparency. Under the DSA platforms must publish a database of all digital advertisements that they've carried, with details including who paid for them and the intended audience.

But X's ad database has "design features and access barriers" that make it "unfit for its transparency purpose," the commission said.

The company also falls short when it comes to giving researchers access to public data, as required by the DSA, the commission said.

Vermonters pummeled by floods exactly 1 year apart begin another cleanup

By LISA RATHKE Associated Press

PLAINFIELD, Vt. (AP) — Owen Bradley has been listening to the flow of the Great Brook outside his historic brick house in Vermont for nearly 40 years. But the sound changed this week as raging waters inched closer, building to a torrent that tore through the back of the building, tearing off the decks, and ravaged a nearby apartment building.

"First it was little noises, cracking wood. Eventually it was just monstrous, like a dragon growling. It was just very otherworldly," he said, describing the crescendo as the cleanup began on Thursday.

Remnants of Hurricane Beryl dumped heavy rain on Vermont, destroying and damaging homes, knocking out bridges, cutting off towns and retraumatizing a state where some people are still awaiting assistance from the last catastrophic floods that hit a year ago to the day.

More than 100 people were rescued by swift-water teams during the worst of the deluge and at least two people died, officials said.

Dylan Kempton, 33, was riding an all-terrain vehicle late Wednesday when he was swept away by floodwaters in Peacham, Vermont State Police said in a statement. His body was recovered Thursday morning.

John Rice, 73, died when he drove his vehicle through a flooded street Thursday morning in Lyndonville, police Chief Jack Harris said. The floodwater current swept the vehicle off the road and into a hayfield that was submerged under 10 feet (3 meters) of water.

Rice had ignored bystanders' warnings to turn around, Lt. Charles Winn of the Vermont State Police said. Rice's body was recovered several hours later after floodwaters receded.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 31 of 96

Stunned residents emerged Thursday to begin the cleanup even as some rivers crested and intermittent rainfall continued. The heaviest damage was in a series of small towns along a hilly corridor on the Winooski River, connected mostly by U.S. Route 2. Parts of that artery were closed, along with dozens of other roads. Shelters opened in several communities.

The storm dropped more than 6 inches (15 centimeters) of rain on parts of Vermont, and the heaviest rainfall was in the same areas devastated a year ago. Receding floodwaters left damage and lots of mud.

"It's not lost on any of us the irony of the flood falling on the one-year anniversary to the day when many towns were hit last year," Gov. Phil Scott said Thursday. "But we're ready, our response and tools are only stronger as a result of last year, and we will get through this."

In Plainfield, a concrete bridge that collapsed and tumbled downstream was likely responsible for ripping off part of an apartment building with five units, said Michael Billingsley, the town's emergency management director.

The occupant of another home was pulled through a window to safety moments before it was swept downstream, and a mobile home floated away with four pets belonging to a family that narrowly escaped, he said.

Hilary Conant said she had to hastily flee her apartment, just as she did a year earlier.

"The water was coming up, so I knew it was time to leave with my dog. It's very retraumatizing," she said. A neighbor offered a camper to temporarily house her before she and her dog Casper moved to a dorm room offered by a local college.

Beryl, blamed for at least nine U.S. deaths and 11 in the Caribbean, made landfall nearly 2,000 miles (3,220 kilometers) away in Texas on Monday as a Category 1 hurricane that left millions in the Houston area without power. Then it traveled across the interior U.S. as a post-tropical cyclone that brought flooding and some tornadoes from the Great Lakes to northern New England and Canada.

The storm spawned six tornadoes that hit western New York on Wednesday, damaging homes and barns and uprooting trees, the National Weather Service said. Flash flooding also closed roads in several northern New Hampshire communities, including Monroe, Dalton, Lancaster and Littleton, where officials said 20 people were temporarily stranded at a Walmart and crews made water rescues.

Several officials said they believed the storms in back-to-back years reflected climate change.

A study prepared directly after Hurricane Ian made landfall in 2022 climate change added at least 10% more rain to the powerful storm, compared to a storm with no human-caused climate change.

"Climate change is real," Scott, a Republican, said Thursday. "I think we all need to come to grips with that regardless of your political persuasion and deal with it, because we need to build back stronger, safer and smarter."

Even though Vermont is not a coastal state, it has been pummeled before by tropical weather systems. Tropical Storm Irene dumped 11 inches (28 centimeters) of rain on parts of Vermont in 24 hours in 2011. The storm killed six in the state, washed homes off their foundations and damaged or destroyed more than 200 bridges and 500 miles (804 kilometers) of highway.

In May, Vermont became the first state to enact a law requiring fossil fuel companies to pay a share of the damage caused by extreme weather fanned by climate change.

Scott allowed the bill to become law without his signature, saying he was concerned about the costs and outcome of the small state taking on "Big Oil." But he said he understands something has to be done to address the toll of climate change.

In Plainfield, Bradley's relatives removed debris and mud from the yard and wet furniture and silt from the porch while neighbors pumped out the basement.

Bradley believes climate change played a role.

"This is what climate change looks like to the day we had a flood one year ago. The same day, a year apart. And I don't know if you could make that up," he said.

2 buses carrying more than 50 people were swept into a river by a landslide in Nepal

By BINAJ GURUBCHARYA Associated Press

KATHMANDU, Nepal (AP) — A landslide swept two passenger buses carrying more than 50 people into a swollen river in central Nepal early Friday, while continuous rain and more landslides were making rescue efforts difficult.

Three survivors apparently swam to safety, but rescuers by late morning had not found any trace of the buses, which likely were submerged and swept downstream in the Trishuli River. Nepal's rivers generally are fast-flowing due to the mountainous terrain. Heavy monsoon downpours in the past few days have swollen the waterways and turned their waters murky brown, making it even more difficult to see the wreckage.

Home Minister Rabi Lamichhane told parliament 51 passengers were missing and more than 500 rescue personnel have been assigned to the search operation.

Elsewhere in the country, 17 people have died and three more people were injured due to landslides in different districts in the past 24 hours, he said.

The buses were on the key highway connecting the capital to southern parts of Nepal when they were swept away around 3 a.m. near Simaltal, about 120 kilometers (75 miles) west of Kathmandu.

More landslides blocked routes to the area in several places, government administrator Khima Nanada Bhusal said. Additional rescuers and security forces were sent to help with the rescue efforts. Police and army personnel were searching using rubber rafts. Divers with scuba gear were also dispatched, according to the Chitwan district police.

The three survivors were being treated in the hospital, Bhusal said, adding that they reportedly jumped out of the bus and swam to the banks, where locals found them and took them to a nearby hospital.

A third bus was hit by another landslide on Friday morning a short distance away on the same highway. Bhusal said the driver was killed but it was not clear if there were any other casualties.

Nepal's Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal said he was saddened by the news and expressed concern over recent flooding and landslides. He added that several government agencies were searching for the missing, in a post on the social media platform X.

On Thursday night, a landslide buried a hut and killed a family of seven near the resort town of Pokhara. The family were asleep when the landslide crushed their hut and damaged three more houses nearby.

Monsoon season brings heavy rains to Nepal from June to September, often triggering landslides in the mountainous Himalayan country.

Meanwhile, the government has also imposed a ban on passengers buses travelling at night in the areas where weather warnings have been issued, according to the Home Ministry.

These Picassos prompted a gender war at an Australian gallery. Now the curator says she painted them

By CHARLOTTE GRAHAM-McLAY Associated Press

WELLINGTON, New Zealand (AP) — They were billed as artworks by Pablo Picasso, paintings so valuable that an Australian art museum's decision to display them in an exhibition restricted to women visitors provoked a gender discrimination lawsuit. The paintings again prompted international headlines when the gallery re-hung them in a women's restroom to sidestep a legal ruling that said men could not be barred from viewing them.

But the artworks at the center of the uproar were not really by Picasso or the other famed artists billed as their creators, it emerged this week when the curator of the women-only exhibition admitted she had painted them herself.

Kirsha Kaechele wrote on the blog of Tasmania's Museum of Old and New Art (MONA) on Wednesday that she was revealing herself as the works' creator after receiving questions from a reporter and the Picasso Administration in France about their authenticity.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 33 of 96

But they had been displayed for more than three years before their provenance was questioned, she said, even though she had accidentally hung one of the fake paintings upside down.

"I imagined that a Picasso scholar, or maybe just a Picasso fan, or maybe just someone who googles things, would visit the Ladies Lounge and see that the painting was upside down and expose me on social media," Kaechele wrote. But no one did.

The saga began when Kaechele created a women-only area at MONA in 2020 for visitors to "revel in the pure company of women" and as a statement on their exclusion from male-dominated spaces throughout history.

The so-called Ladies Lounge offered high tea, massages and champagne served by male butlers, and was open to anyone who identified as a woman. Outlandish and absurd title cards were displayed alongside the fake paintings, antiquities and jewelry that was "quite obviously new and in some cases plastic," she added.

The lounge had to display "the most important artworks in the world," Kaechele wrote this week, in order for men "to feel as excluded as possible."

It worked. MONA — famous in Australia for its strange and subversive exhibitions and events — was ordered by the Tasmanian Civil and Administrative Tribunal in March to stop refusing men entry to the Ladies Lounge after a complaint from a male gallery patron who was upset at being barred from the space during a 2023 visit.

"The participation by visitors in the process of being permitted or refused entry is part of the artwork itself," tribunal Deputy President Richard Grueber wrote in his decision, which found the exhibition was discriminatory.

Grueber ruled that the man had suffered a disadvantage, in part because the artworks in the Ladies Lounge were so valuable. Kaechele had described them to the hearing as "a carefully curated selection of paintings by the world's leading artists, including two paintings that spectacularly demonstrate Picasso's genius."

The tribunal ordered MONA to cease refusing men entry. In his ruling, Grueber also lambasted a group of women who had attended in support of Kaechele wearing matching business attire and had silently crossed and uncrossed their legs in unison throughout the hearing. One woman "was pointedly reading feminist texts," he wrote, and the group left the tribunal "in a slow march led by Ms Kaechele to the sounds of a Robert Palmer song."

Their conduct was "inappropriate, discourteous and disrespectful, and at worst contemptuous and contemptuous," Grueber added.

Rather than admit men to the exhibit, Kaechele -- who is married to the gallery's owner, David Walsh -- installed a working toilet in the space, turning it into a women's restroom in order to exploit a legal loophole to allow the refusal of men to continue.

International news outlets covered the development in May, apparently without questioning that a gallery would hang Picasso paintings in a public restroom. However, the Guardian reported Wednesday that it had asked Kaechele about the authenticity of the work, prompting her confession.

A spokesperson for MONA told The Associated Press that the gallery would not supply more detail about the letter Kaechele said she had received from the Picasso Administration. When the AP asked MONA to confirm that the statements in Kaechele's blog post, titled "Art is Not Truth: Pablo Picasso," were accurate, the spokesperson, Sara Gates-Matthews, said the post was "truthfully Kirsha's admission."

The Picasso Administration, which manages the late Spanish artist's estate, did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

"I'm flattered that people believed my great-grandmother summered with Picasso at her Swiss chateau where he and my grandmother were lovers when she threw a plate at him for indiscretions (of a kind) that bounced off his head and resulted in the crack you see inching through the gold ceramic plate in the Ladies Lounge," Kaechele wrote this week, referring to the title card on one painting.

"The real plate would have killed him — it was made of solid gold. Well, it would have dented his forehead because the real plate is actually a coin."

Biden pushes on 'blue wall' sprint with Michigan trip as he continues to make the case for candidacy

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI, ZEKE MILLER and SEUNG MIN KIM The Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four years ago, candidate Joe Biden stood before supporters at a Detroit high school, flanked by Kamala Harris and other rising Democratic stars, and called himself a bridge to the next generation of leaders.

Biden, now a president seeking reelection, returns to the city Friday with many in his party now pleading for him to fulfill that very promise and step aside. But Biden remains defiant that he'll remain in the race despite a disastrous debate performance that triggered a wave of calls for him to end his candidacy.

During a news conference on Thursday, when asked why he no longer considered himself a "bridge" to the next generation of leaders, Biden responded that "what changed was the gravity of the situation I inherited in terms of the economy, foreign policy, and domestic division."

"We've never been here before," Biden continued. "And that's the other reason why I didn't, you say, hand off to another generation. I gotta finish the job."

In the two weeks since his debate debacle, Biden and his team have been on a relentless sprint to persuade fretting lawmakers, nervous donors and a skeptical electorate that at the age of 81, he is still capable of being president. But a spate of travel to battleground states, interviews with journalists and a rare solo news conference have done little to tamp down the angst within the party about Biden's candidacy and his prospects against Donald Trump in November.

So far, one Democratic senator and 16 House Democrats have publicly called on Biden to step aside, with the latest statements — from Connecticut Rep. Jim Himes, California Rep. Scott Peters and Illinois Rep. Eric Sorensen — coming as the president's highly anticipated news conference ended Thursday night. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., has indicated Biden still has a decision to make on whether to run, even though the president has made it clear he remains in the race.

Meanwhile, his reelection campaign has indirectly acknowledged that Biden's route to the White House is narrowing, saying the so-called "blue wall" of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania is now the "clearer pathway" to victory even as other battleground states like Arizona and Nevada are not out of reach.

That strategy is reflected in how Biden is redoubling his efforts in the Midwestern states, hitting Detroit nearly one week after he campaigned in Madison, Wisconsin; Philadelphia; and Harrisburg, Pennsylvania. Rallying enthusiasm in Detroit and among its sizable Black population could prove decisive for Biden's chances of winning Michigan, which Biden reclaimed in 2020 after Donald Trump won it in four years prior by just over 10,000 votes.

But at a critical juncture when Biden needs to consolidate support, key Democratic leaders in the state will notably be absent at Friday's event, where Biden plans to speak about the "Project 2025" agenda, a massive proposed overhaul of the federal government drafted by longtime allies and former officials in the Trump administration.

Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer, who is co-chair of Biden's campaign, will be out of the state. Sen. Gary Peters, a steadfast supporter of Biden, and Rep. Elissa Slotkin, who is vying for Michigan's open Senate seat, will also be absent from the event. United Auto Workers President Shawn Fain, whom Biden actively courted during last year's strikes and who met with him and other union leaders Wednesday, is traveling for a conference.

Meanwhile, Rep. Hillary Scholten, who is seeking reelection in a battleground district in western Michigan, joined a growing list of national Democrats who have called on Biden to step aside for another candidate.

"With the challenges facing our country in 2025 and beyond, it is essential that we have the strongest possible candidate leading the top of the ticket — not just to win, but to govern," Scholten said in a statement Thursday.

But in a swing state that he won by close to 3 percentage points in 2020, Biden continues to command support. Michigan Rep. Debbie Dingell, Rep. Haley Stevens, Rep. Shri Thanedar and AFL-CIO President Liz Shuler will all attend the Detroit event, which marks Biden's fourth trip to the state this year. Also planning

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 35 of 96

on attending is Academy Award-winning actress Octavia Spencer. And over a dozen Detroit-area state lawmakers signed onto a joint letter Thursday "to express our unwavering support for President Joe Biden."

"As the Detroit Caucus, we are committed to mobilizing our communities, raising awareness, and advocating for policies that benefit Black Michiganders," the state lawmakers wrote in the letter. "We encourage all our members and allies to join us in supporting President Biden and Vice President Harris."

In his return to Michigan, Biden aims to reignite the energy felt in March 2020 when appearing at Detroit's Renaissance High School. During that appearance, Biden had locked hands with Harris, Whitmer and New Jersey Sen. Cory Booker.

"I view myself as a bridge, not as anything else," Biden said. "There's an entire generation of leaders you saw stand behind me. They are the future of this country."

In 2016, Trump won Michigan by a thin margin attributed in part to reduced turnout in predominantly Black areas like Detroit's Wayne County, where Hillary Clinton received far fewer votes than Barack Obama did in previous elections.

Biden reclaimed much of that support four years ago, when he defeated Trump in Michigan by a 154,000-vote margin, but he has work to do. Detroit, which holds a population that is nearly 78% Black, saw a 12% turnout in the Feb. 27 primary, almost half that of the 23% total turnout in the state.

Key parts of Biden's coalition in Michigan are also upset with him over Israel's offensive following Hamas' Oct. 7 attack. Michigan holds the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the nation, contributing to over 100,000 people voting "Uncommitted" in Michigan's Democratic primary in February.

Time is frozen in the empty bedrooms of Israelis kidnapped by Hamas

By ODED BALILTY and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

KIBBUTZ NIR OZ, Israel (AP) — The empty bedrooms of Israelis kidnapped by Hamas on Oct. 7 remain frozen in time.

Nine months into their captivity in Gaza, some hostages' bedrooms still show signs of that day's violence and struggle: blood-stained floors, bullet-riddled walls, scorched and toppled furniture.

Others' exude tranquility and routine: their beds are left unmade and their belongings — trophies, stuffed animals, framed photos — remain untouched at the behest of shell-shocked families as a testimony to their absence.

Hamas militants killed roughly 1,200 people in Israel on Oct. 7, and kidnapped around 250 — many taken from their bedrooms. Since then, the Israeli army has killed over 38,000 Palestinians while fighting Hamas in Gaza, according to local health officials who do not distinguish between civilians and militants in their count.

Around 120 hostages remain in Gaza, though Israel believes at least 40 of them are dead. During a November cease-fire, 105 hostages were released. A few hostages have been rescued alive, and the Israeli military has recovered the bodies of others during military operations.

For many of those kidnapped from Kibbutz Nir Oz, their bedrooms or entire homes were destroyed. All that remains of the charred bedroom of David Cunio and Sharon Alony Cunio are the curled springs of their mattress, lying in a pile of soot.

"This was a place of joy until Oct. 7, of joy, of the gift of togetherness, of giving, of love. Now, it's not just a war zone, but a place of massacre," said Jonathan Dekel-Chen, as he leaned against the door frame of the destroyed bedroom of his son, Sagui.

Dekel-Chen wonders how his family — now living with other members of Kibbutz Nir Oz in temporary housing an hour away — will ever regain their sense of security. Sagui's wife, Avital, was seven months pregnant on Oct. 7 and survived the attack with her two daughters by hiding for hours in the family's safe room. She gave birth to a third daughter during Sagui's captivity.

In a suburb of Tel Aviv, plastic sheeting covers the furniture in the empty home of Or and Einav Levy. Or was kidnapped and Einav was killed when militants attacked the Nova music festival in southern Israel. Their three-year-old son, Almog, now lives with his grandparents.

The family of Naama Levy, 20, a soldier kidnapped from an army base near Gaza, has kept most everything intact in her bedroom. But they've also filled her bedroom with photo collages and presents that people have made for Naama when she returns.

Amit Levy, Naama's 21-year-old brother, said he sometimes sleeps in his sister's room when he's feeling especially low. "It helps me feel her, to be in her room and her pictures around me, I'm not sad because I'm always thinking that she'll come home soon."

In the bedroom of Omer Shem-Tov, 21, who was kidnapped with some 40 others from a music festival, the light never goes off. His mother, Shelly Shem-Tov, put a piece of tape over the light switch on Oct. 8 with instructions that nobody should touch or clean up the room until he comes home and does it himself.

Omer's room is strewn with mementos, including a Torah scroll, that have been blessed by rabbis.

"I get strength from that room," said Shem-Tov, who is active in pressuring the Israeli government to bring her son — and all of the hostages — home.

"This bedroom has energy," said Shem-Tov, who prays in it every morning and evening and has long talks with her other children as they lay sprawled on Omer's bed. "I feel that he can feel me when I'm in there."

Two weeks that imperiled Biden's presidency left him on probation in the court of Democratic opinion

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden's tribulations were previewed in Hollywood days before he got on the debate stage.

At a fundraiser organized by George Clooney and packed with luminaries including former President Barack Obama, Biden was a listless figure, perhaps merely jet-lagged after flying straight from Italy but clearly not the man they knew.

Oh brother, where art thou? Clooney wondered.

It was a flashing-light moment for the actor, producer and prodigious Democratic donor and for others in the crowd. Then came the debate debacle, which set off 50 shades of panic among Democrats and pitted Biden loyalists against those now convinced a successor should take the party into November.

Two weeks after debate night, more than 15 Democratic lawmakers have gone out on a limb and called publicly for a president they've long supported to step aside. Many more kept their newfound alarm about Biden semi-private. Mega-donors froze in the moment, wondering if they were plowing fortunes into a lost cause.

The bleeding of support continued past Biden's NATO news conference Thursday night. Immediately afterward, Connecticut Rep. Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House intelligence committee, posted on X that Biden should step aside. Several others did as well.

From Michael Moore to James Carville to Rob Reiner, voices from the intelligentsia and liberal Hollywood pitched in over the past two weeks to tell the president he should go. He said hell no.

It's been an excruciating reckoning for all in the family, and it's not over.

Lawmakers were furious that the White House kept Biden in such a bubble for so long that Americans could be blindsided by how bad he was on the stage with Trump. Biden's camp was furious at the public show of disloyalty by those who want him replaced on the ticket and the relentless focus on Biden's every word and step.

Most stayed with Biden over those two weeks as dissent alternately flared, faded and sparked anew, like tamped-down embers in a dry forest. Democrats on both sides of the Biden divide were left fearing the prospects of a Donald Trump win.

"I think we could lose the whole thing and it's staggering to me," Democratic Sen. Michael Bennet of Colorado told CNN, speaking for many others as well as himself. He meant the presidency, the Senate and the House, in what he worries may be a Trump landslide.

How did Democrats get here? Some boiling points and turning points along the way:

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 37 of 96

June 27

With the calendar rushing toward the Democratic convention in August, the debate in Atlanta upended Democratic officials, lawmakers and voters. Biden was befogged from the first words he uttered, or muttered. Voters had long felt Biden, now 81, was too old to be effective but they had never seen him like this. More than 51 million people watched it.

Biden hadn't been on his game for some time before June 27. He appeared pale and his movements were slow after the Group of Seven summit in Italy nearly two weeks earlier.

After the long flight from Europe, Biden was unable to turn it on for his 30-minute onstage conversation with late-night talk show host Jimmy Kimmel and Obama at the June 15 fundraiser. It's not often a popular former president and the brightest Hollywood stars join to rally behind a candidate, and donors and other Democrats hoped the event would get Biden's motor running. He was conspicuously lackluster.

"It is devastating to say so," Clooney wrote in *The New York Times* this week, but the event convinced him that Biden, a man he loves, should go: "He was the same man we all witnessed at the debate."

The White House, in the first of its shifting explanations for Biden's troubling demeanor, said he was sick with a cold or the like when going into the debate. (The White House initially said Biden did not see a doctor, then said he had. Its explanation for Biden's frailty evolved to jet lag.)

The debate left even some of Biden's aides questioning privately whether his campaign could be salvaged. Some longtime Biden supporters called immediately for him to step aside. But the prevailing view in the party was that he should stay for now and prove himself fit for the campaign, and fast.

He was, essentially, placed on probation in the court of Democratic opinion. At his NATO news conference, he acknowledged he has fears to try to put to rest. "I've got to finish this job," he said. "I've got to finish this job."

He was not gaffe-free at the NATO summit. In a pair of passing name jumbles, he referred to the Ukrainian president as Putin and his own vice president as Trump. But he displayed a wide-ranging and detailed command of policy that had been lacking in the debate.

The 'bedwetting brigade'

The morning after the debate, the illness cited by Biden's people seemed to have disappeared. He was spirited in scripted remarks at a North Carolina rally, but many Democrats weren't shaking off what they had seen the night before.

After watching the debate, "I had to take a few more antidepressants than usual," cracked Rep. Ritchie Torres of New York.

The most prominent Democrats talked up the past — Biden's accomplishments — and the strength of the team supporting the president. Democratic leaders said people should focus instead on the lies Trump told. But it never goes very far when elites tell people what they should be talking about.

In an early sign of trouble, one Democratic senator did not presume that Biden would hang in for the election. "It's his decision what he wants to do going forward," Rhode Island Sen. Jack Reed told WPRI-TV.

That weekend, the Biden campaign emailed supporters about a "flash poll" purporting to show that Biden was best positioned among potential replacements to defeat Trump. Actually, like other public polls, it showed no clear advantage for Biden over other possible candidates. Other public polling released in the immediate aftermath of the debate found that most watchers thought Trump outperformed Biden, although neither candidate's favorability ratings shifted meaningfully.

In the email, deputy campaign manager Rob Flaherty branded the Biden doubters the "bedwetting brigade." More sheets were about to be soiled.

The 'freak-out'

On the Sunday news shows, Pennsylvania Sen. John Fetterman stepped up to offer a defense of the president. He, too, had epically flopped in a debate.

Five months after a stroke, Fetterman was hopelessly muddled against his sprightly Republican opponent, Mehmet Oz. As with Biden, Fetterman's people wondered why the candidate, on a long road to recovery, had ever agreed to go on that stage just days before the 2022 midterms.

"Same kind of a freak-out," he said. "And I smoked Oz by five points."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 38 of 96

With no chance of recovering from being 81 to 85 in the next four years, Biden saw the cracks in his support widen, but, crucially, Democrats as a whole did not rush to judgment.

Old as he may be, Biden has had time on his side in this late-in-the-game crisis. With each tick of the clock, it becomes harder for Democrats who want him out to replace him.

But on July 2, former Speaker Nancy Pelosi lent credence to the doubts about Biden, saying she was hearing mixed opinions on whether he should stay. "I think it's a legitimate question to say, is this an episode or is this a condition?" she said on MSNBC.

The first cracks

Within hours, Rep. Lloyd Doggett of Texas became the first lawmaker to say Biden should go. "I am hopeful that he will make the painful and difficult decision to withdraw," he said.

For days, Democrats had been imploring Biden to get out more, call more lawmakers and put himself in unscripted situations to show what he can do. "Come on, pick up the phone," said Rep. Nanette Barragan of California, chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus and a Biden supporter.

Biden's dilemma was clear. The more he was encouraged to do in public, the more he increased the chances of making a mistake. Still, he agreed to sit down for questions with ABC's George Stephanopoulos later that week.

But first, as scattered defections were picking up, Biden spoke in person and remotely in a closed session with Democratic governors. Maryland Gov. Wes Moore, firmly behind Biden, called it a "bitch session" by unnerved governors.

In large measure, governors came away sounding supportive of Biden or at least quiet about discontent, and reported that he seemed on top of things.

Yet the session played into public perceptions of Biden as stretched thin, as he acknowledged he needs to get more sleep and limit evening events so he can go to bed earlier. The president joked that his health was fine and it was his brain that was the problem. The crack fell flat.

Panic 2.0

In 22 minutes with Stephanopoulos on July 5, Biden avoided another debacle like his debate — a matchup that had been proposed by his campaign and accepted by Trump's. But the ABC interview left few Democrats reassured.

Biden's ill-timed pauses, meandering moments and garbled words made some even more alarmed than they were before, because now the debate could not be written off as just one bad night. The ground shifted.

An architect of Obama's two presidential election victories, David Axelrod, said it was all too much. Biden, he said, is "dangerously out-of-touch with the concerns people have about his capacities moving forward and his standing in this race."

Rob Reiner, the Hollywood director, Democratic Party donor and "Meathead" of long-ago "All in the Family" fame, posted an expletive on X with his opinion that "It's time for Joe Biden to step down."

Michael Moore, the Oscar-winning documentary filmmaker who forecast Trump's 2016 victory when most others on the left (and the right and the center) figured he would lose, appealed to Biden to not "let your enablers hound you into doing what your body is begging you not to do."

Among governors, those who have been floated as presidential prospects voiced firm support for Biden, surely in part to avoid being seen as pretenders to the throne. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan and Gavin Newsom of California left no daylight between the president and themselves.

In Kentucky, Gov. Andy Beshear told a news conference Thursday, "I support him as long as he is our nominee" but the Biden campaign needs to set "an aggressive campaign schedule" and provide "the information on his health that I think people have been asking for."

For all that, the debate among Democrats over what to do in the aftermath of June 27 has been most pronounced in Congress, where Biden made career-long friendships in his decades as a senator. It's the place where Biden, as president, has scored improbable wins for some of the top items on his agenda.

In inconclusive Capitol Hill meetings this week, more Democrats spoke up for Biden than against him, even

as many suggested the private feelings were moving swiftly away from the president. The Congressional Black Caucus offered unqualified support and other groups circled the wagons, too. The list of Democratic House members who called for him to get out of the race grew, but the floodgates didn't open.

On Monday, Biden sent a forceful open letter to congressional Democrats declaring: "Any weakening of resolve or lack of clarity about the task ahead only helps Trump and hurts us. It's time to come together, move forward as a unified party, and defeat Donald Trump."

Gone Fishing

Alaska Rep. Mary Peltola was off fishing. She'd stepped back from the fray and headed home to spend the week packing fish into freezers for the winter, her summer ritual. "There's nothing quite like being out on the water," she posted on X on Monday with photos of her wharf-side.

With Biden's allies stepping up pressure, the ground appeared to shift again, this time in his favor. One of those who had urged him to quit, Rep. Jerry Nadler of New York, walked that back. There was a lull in defections. But only for a blink of time.

On Wednesday, Pelosi again weighed in. Her words were exquisitely measured but instantly taken as a setback for Biden. On MSNBC's "Morning Joe," she dodged when asked if he should run for president again, instead saying it's his decision to make.

Days earlier, Biden had vowed only the "Lord Almighty" would make him quit. Pelosi did not take that yes as his answer.

In short order, Sen. Peter Welch of Vermont became the first senator to call openly for Biden to quit the campaign. This, after several others had held back from such an announcement while leaving no doubt in their public comments that the president had become a liability in their minds.

Sen. Patty Murray of Washington was among them. "We need to see a much more forceful and energetic candidate on the campaign trail in the very near future in order for him to convince voters he is up to the job," she said Monday. "President Biden must seriously consider the best way to preserve his incredible legacy and secure it for the future."

Virginia Sen. Mark Warner, who took steps early on to bring colleagues together to assess the damage from the debate, said Biden needed to burst out of his protective bubble and "hear directly from a broader group of voices."

Rep. Earl Blumenauer, the longest serving Democrat in Oregon's House delegation, became the ninth House Democrat to ask Biden to step aside, followed Thursday by more.

The naysayers, though a distinct minority, aren't outliers. Rather they are a mix of senior Democrats and some newer members who won closely watched races in swing districts and feel especially vulnerable now. They have given voice to many more who have said, whether publicly or privately, that Biden puts Democrats on a path to defeat.

Among the veterans, Rep. Adam Schiff of California, while stopping short of urging Biden to quit the campaign, said people are rightfully asking whether the president has the vigor to defeat Trump.

"There's only one reason it is close," he said of the 2024 race. "And that's the president's age."

He added, "Everything is riding on this."

Republicans are gathering in Milwaukee to nominate Donald Trump again. Here's what to expect

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

For all the usual stagecraft, the Republican National Convention that opens Monday is different from Donald Trump's previous nominating affairs.

In 2016 and 2020, Trump was the underdog heading into fall and faced criticism from within his own party. This year, he will accept the Republican nomination with his party in lockstep behind him and Democrats in turmoil over President Joe Biden's viability.

There will be the usual convention tasks throughout the four-day affair. Delegates, almost 2,400 of them, must approve a platform and formally designate the presidential ticket: Trump and his yet-to-be-named

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 40 of 96

running mate. They'll hear from both national candidates and a slew of others rallying support for Trump and taking aim at Democrats.

The GOP expects a triumphant moment.

"The political environment is not only great for Donald Trump, but it's really great for Republicans running for Senate, governor, House seats, all the way down," said Henry Barbour, an influential Republican National Committee member who has sometimes criticized Trump in the past.

Here's are some questions going into the convention.

Are there any dissenters left in the 'Trump National Committee'?

Trump has buried his opponents and taken over the party. Voters get fundraising mail with "Trump National Committee" stamped above the RNC's Capitol Hill address. Trump's closest primary rival, Nikki Haley, will not see the convention stage. Instead, delegates will hear from, among others, Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis, who ended his presidential campaign after the Iowa caucuses and immediately endorsed Trump.

"I don't think there's any comparison to his previous campaigns," said former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, a Trump ally.

Most importantly, Trump is on offense against Biden and confident enough that his campaign promised in a convention preview that "President Donald J. Trump will usher in a new golden age for America."

Whom will Trump pick as vice president?

Ever the showman, Trump has strung out his choice of running mate. The most commonly mentioned candidates are North Dakota Gov. Doug Burgum, Florida Sen. Marco Rubio and Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance. Trump has mused that he'd love to withhold his pick until the convention begins — but he admits that idea frustrates his aides who want to preview the rollout. All three men, along with other contenders Trump has considered, are expected to address delegates at some point.

Will Trump reach for the middle or for his base?

Conventions are mostly about firing up core supporters. But they draw large television and online audiences that include the broader electorate. Trump's campaign has outlined daily messaging aimed at both audiences, with themes that riff on Trump's red-hat motto: "Make America Great Again."

Monday's theme is economics: "Make America Wealthy Once Again." Trump has outlined an agenda of sweeping tariffs and ramped-up production of oil and gas, even though it already hit a record under Biden. He argues that his plans to deport millions of immigrants in the U.S. illegally will bring down inflation, which has fallen from higher levels earlier in Biden's presidency.

Tuesday, it's immigration and crime: "Make America Safe Once Again." Trump and Republicans believe the border debate is among their strongest issues. They have arranged speeches for the family members of slain people in which immigrants in the U.S. illegally face criminal charges, as part of Trump's broader attempts to blame crime on border policies.

Wednesday is national security day: "Make America Strong Once Again." Delegates and the viewing audience can expect to hear arguments that Biden is a "weak" and "failed" commander in chief and head of state. This is the day, typically, that vice presidential nominees address the convention.

Thursday will culminate with Trump himself: "Make America Great Once Again."

Will Trump focus on Biden and the future or on election lies?

The takeaway for most observers, regardless of all the careful planning and choreography, will be what Trump himself says in his acceptance address. In 2016 in Cleveland, Trump offered a dark indictment of American life and insisted, "I alone can fix it." The populist, nationalistic pitch enraptured his backers but did not necessarily help him expand his appeal.

Republicans across the party want Trump to take advantage of Biden's struggles by explaining his ideas for a second presidency. That means sidestepping his most incendiary, racist rhetoric. And, yes, it would mean not repeating his lies that the 2020 election was fraudulent or spend time complaining about the criminal prosecutions against him.

"He needs to avoid the politics of division," said Barbour.

Of course, that would also mean Trump taking a decidedly un-Trump approach.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 41 of 96

Will the party go along Trump's wishes on abortion?

If there is any notable dissent on the floor, it may come over the platform provision stating that abortion policy should be left to state governments. That's what Trump wants two years after the conservative U.S. Supreme Court majority he helped cement overturned the precedent establishing a federal right to abortion services.

Anti-abortion activists — and Trump's former vice president, Mike Pence — want Republicans to call for federal restrictions on abortion. There's no question that Trump controls the votes to ratify the proposed platform. A public fight would play into Democrats' contention that the GOP wants to effectively ban abortion access nationwide — part of their wider argument that a second Trump administration would be extreme on many policy matters.

Will the protesters outside matter?

Protest groups won't be permitted inside the security zone established around the convention arena by the Secret Service. But they'll get as close as they can and attract at least some media attention.

Principles First, which describes itself as a nationwide grassroots movement of pro-democracy, anti-Trump conservatives, is holding a rally Wednesday. Speakers include former Republican Party Chairman Michael Steele.

The Democratic National Committee is holding events in Milwaukee as well, promising daily news conferences, counterprogramming and voter outreach in the Democratic-dominated city. Democrats intend to highlight Biden's accomplishments on the economy and juxtapose the president's advocacy for democracy and international alliances with Trump's criticism of NATO, praise of authoritarian leaders and quips about being a dictator on "day one."

Democratic-aligned groups, including United We Dream Action, the Service Employees International Union and America's Voice, are going even further, with bilingual mobile billboards around the RNC site urging voters to reject "Trump's fascist agenda."

The NATO summit was about Ukraine and Biden. Here are some key things to know

By MATTHEW LEE AP Diplomatic Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — NATO leaders met this week to celebrate the alliance's 75th anniversary under the cloud of deep political uncertainty in its most powerful member — the United States.

But even as questions swirled about President Joe Biden's future and the implications of a possible return to the White House by NATO skeptic Donald Trump, the 32 allies put a brave face on their strength and unity going forward, particularly in relation to Ukraine.

Over three days in Washington, Ukraine, Russia, the threat posed by an increasingly aggressive China and NATO's future dominated the formal summit discussions, although all eyes were on Biden.

He hoped to use the summit as a symbol of his strength as leader of the free world as he struggles to salvage his reelection campaign. Biden is facing growing calls to withdraw after a poor debate performance against Trump last month.

Here are key takeaways from the summit:

Biden gets some slack

Biden stunned the audience at a meeting of the NATO-Ukraine Council on Thursday by referring to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as Russian President Vladimir Putin before quickly correcting himself.

At his news conference later at the conclusion of the summit, he mistakenly called Vice President Kamala Harris Vice President Trump.

NATO leaders paid great deference to Biden by either ignoring or sidestepping questions about his comportment, appearance and grasp of the issues. They praised his leadership and the achievements that NATO has made during his tenure in the White House, including rallying the allies to oppose Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine and the addition of Finland and Sweden as members.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 42 of 96

French President Emmanuel Macron and new British Prime Minister Keir Starmer were asked repeatedly about the gaffe but declined to answer directly.

"We can all have a slip of the tongue," Macron said. "It's happened to me. I'm sure it will happen to me again tomorrow, and I'd ask you to be just as kind to me."

Macron said he had a long discussion with Biden during Wednesday's dinner with NATO leaders and heard his discussions in meetings during the summit. He described Biden as "very much on top of things."

"He knows the issues, and around the table, he is amongst those who has the greatest depth of knowledge on these international issues," Macron said.

Starmer, who made his debut on the international stage at the summit, ducked multiple questions about the gaffe, instead praising Biden for his leadership and his preparation in putting an event together to secure solid outcomes for Ukraine.

"I want to look at the substance of what's been achieved over these two days," he said.

Trump looms over the summit

A potential Trump presidency has raised concerns in some European capitals. Trump has repeatedly questioned NATO's relevance, has suggested he might withdraw from the alliance or short of that has threatened not to defend allies who do not meet the 2% defense spending commitments.

Biden said at his news conference that he's the "best qualified person" to ensure that the 32-member transatlantic alliance remains strong and that Ukraine does not fall to Putin.

"Foreign policy has never been his strong point and he seems to have an affinity to people who are authoritarian," Biden said of Trump. "That worries Europe, that worries Poland, and nobody, including the people of Poland, think if (Putin) wins in Ukraine, he's going to stop in Ukraine."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said he's not concerned about the U.S. commitment to the alliance if Trump is returned to the White House, because it has bipartisan support in Congress and a record number of allies are hitting their goals for military spending.

Trump was asked this week on Fox News Radio whether he wants the U.S. to exit NATO. He answered, "No, I want them to pay their bills."

Zelenskyy, meanwhile, gave a speech to friendly Republicans, including Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, on the sidelines of the summit, saying he hopes the U.S. never leaves NATO.

"I hope that if the people of America will elect President Trump, I hope that his policy with Ukraine will not change," Zelenskyy said in a question-and-answer session with Fox News host Bret Baier after his speech.

Ukraine brings in aid

Although they stopped short of offering Ukraine an invitation to join, the allies affirmed that Ukraine is on an "irreversible path" to NATO membership and pledged to maintain a baseline of roughly \$43 billion in annual support to Kyiv as it defends itself from Russia's invasion and attempts to deter future aggression.

There were new pledges of air defense support, including Patriot missile systems and F-16 fighter jets, as well as promises that individual security deals being signed by NATO members with Ukraine constitute a "bridge to NATO." As part of that bridge, NATO agreed to start up a new program to provide reliable military aid and training to Ukraine and help it get ready to join the alliance.

"Ukraine's future is in NATO," the allies said in their joint communique Wednesday.

Zelenskyy embraced the support of allies who have provided substantial new military aid and a path to joining NATO, but he emphatically pushed for the help to arrive faster and for restrictions to be lifted on the use of U.S. weapons to attack military targets inside Russia.

"If we want to win, if we want to prevail, if we want to save our country and to defend it, we need to lift all the limitations," Zelenskyy said alongside Stoltenberg in the final hours of a summit that saw Ukraine receive fresh commitments of weapons to firm up its defense against Russia.

Harsh words for China

NATO leaders have been concerned about China and its increasing aggressiveness for some time. But in a first, they adopted significantly stronger language calling out Beijing for its support of Russia in its war against Ukraine.

The communique labeled China a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war effort, saying Chinese investments

and exports of dual-use items are rebuilding Russia's defense industrial sector. That is helping Russia overcome Western sanctions to ramp up the production of weapons for use in Ukraine.

China has opposed NATO's reach into the Indo-Pacific region, saying it hurts Beijing's interests and disrupts peace and stability in the region, said Lin Jian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman.

The four Indo-Pacific countries attending the summit — Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia — issued a joint statement to "strongly condemn the illicit military cooperation" between Russia and North Korea, showing how the military alliance and its Pacific partners are forging closer ties to counter what they see as shared security threats.

"We must work even more closely together to preserve peace and protect the rules-based international order," Stoltenberg said when meeting officials of the four Pacific partners. "Our security is not regional. It is global."

Why Nicolás Maduro appears 13 times on the ballot for Venezuela's presidential election

By JORGE RUEDA Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — His smile is confident, his hair well-combed and his eyes are squinting slightly: The first candidate you'll likely see on the ballot in Venezuela's upcoming presidential election is Nicolás Maduro, the incumbent seeking reelection.

Unlike some of his nine challengers, Maduro shows up not once or twice, but a whopping 13 times on the ballot — and he's certain to catch the voters' attention.

Each time, it's for one of the several political groups he is representing in the highly anticipated July 28 presidential election. Maduro takes up the entire first of the ballot's four rows while the rest of the candidates' photos are sprinkled here and there, including that of former diplomat Edmundo González Urrutia, the only contender with real chances of denying the president a third term.

Still, the sheer number of Maduro's images appearing on the ballot belies the seriousness of the moment.

Venezuela faces its toughest electoral test in decades. The outcome could give Maduro another six years in power or end the self-described socialist's policies that once successfully boosted anti-poverty programs but whose sustained mismanagement later pushed the country into an ongoing economic crisis.

Venezuela's electoral rules allow for candidates' pictures to appear on the ballots — the electronic ones within Venezuela and printed for those voting abroad — as many times as the number of parties that support them. This year's ballot has 38 pictures, each with every candidate's name and party underneath.

Seasoned Venezuelan voters are also used to seeing many candidates on the touchscreens used in the South American country's elections.

But for some, that many photos could be confusing.

"I get dizzy when I see Maduro so many times on that card, but I know that the danger is in the candidates who do not represent us," said Sonia Guevara, a 38-year-old office worker, referring to some opposition candidates who are seen close to the government.

Such an example is the case of Luis Martínez, the candidate from "Acción Democrática" — Democratic Action party or AD for short — a traditional opposition group whose leadership was suspended months ago by the Maduro-loyal top court.

Martínez decided not to support González, the contender of the opposition's Unitary Platform coalition.

"This is confusing. I have had to explain to my mother many times that the AD on the card is not the AD she always votes for," Guevara said. "My mom is 71 years old, and I tell her not to vote for AD this time."

González is featured three times on the ballot. Martínez, who is considered a government ally, shows up six times.

The number of eligible voters ahead of this month's election is estimated to be around 17 million. Another 4 million Venezuelans living abroad are registered to vote, but only about 69,000 met the government-set requirements to cast ballots overseas. Costly and time-consuming government prerequisites to register, lack of information and a mandatory proof of legal residency in a host country kept many migrants from

signing up to vote.

Francisco Maldonado, a 50-year-old merchant in Caracas, is ready to vote.

"At this point, I think we all know who we are going to vote for, but more than ever we have to be careful, the same care we have when we use an ATM," Maldonado said. "We cannot make a mistake when marking."

Venezuela's exact population is unclear as the last census in the South American country was conducted in 2011. At the time, it concluded there were 27.2 million people — but since the country's political, economic and social crisis over the last decade, more than 7.7 million have left.

Laura Dib, Venezuela Program Director at WOLA, a Washington-based nongovernmental organization focused on human rights in the Americas, said that even if it's common that a candidate's face is repeated on the ballot, being 13 times on it, makes Maduro "visually the easiest to identify."

Considering that the opposition faction supporting González has no access to official media in Venezuela, Dib said "the opposition has a harder time educating voters on how to vote."

She also noted there are other confusing matters — some parties are using the same colors on the ballot as those supporting Maduro. And one candidate from an opposition faction was allowed to use the same color as the main opposition candidate group.

That, Dib said, "also creates confusion and it violates the rules of the CNE," she said, referring to the acronym in Spanish for the national electoral council.

Additionally, the electoral law allows parties to substitute candidates 10 days before election day, although that change may not be reflected on the ballots, which have already been programmed on the electronic machines or printed for the vote abroad.

If people vote for a candidate who has been replaced, Dib said, "those votes casted will be null."

Key takeaways from Biden's news conference: Insistence on staying in the race and flubbed names

By JOSH BOAK and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Joe Biden faced a test Thursday that he had avoided so far this year — a solo news conference with questions from the White House press corps.

The news conference was meant to reassure a disheartened group of Democratic lawmakers, allies and persuadable voters in this year's election that Biden still has the strength and stamina to be president. Biden has tried to defend his feeble and tongue-tied performance in the June 27 debate against Republican Donald Trump as an outlier rather than evidence that at 81 he lacks the vigor and commanding presence that the public expects from the commander in chief.

He made at least two notable flubs, referring at an event beforehand to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy as "President Putin" and then calling Kamala Harris "Vice President Trump" when asked about her by a reporter. But he also gave detailed responses about his work to preserve NATO and his plans for a second term. And he insisted he's not leaving the race even as a growing number of Democratic lawmakers ask him to step aside.

Here are some highlights from the press conference:

He bungled key names — and remained defiant

Perhaps Biden's biggest slip-up in the press conference came early on when he referred to Vice President Kamala Harris as "Vice President Trump," in saying he picked her because he believed she could beat Trump.

Even before the news conference, Biden had bungled an important name at the NATO summit and instantly lowered expectations for his performance.

"Ladies and gentlemen, President Putin," Biden said as he was introducing Ukrainian President President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, who is most definitely not Russian President Vladimir Putin. The gaffe immediately prompted gasps, as Biden caught himself and said to Zelenskyy: "President Putin? You're going to beat President Putin."

But he was defiant when a reporter brought up his reference to "Vice President Trump" and noted the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 45 of 96

presumptive Republican nominee's campaign was already promoting the slip-up. "Listen to him," he said, before walking off the stage.

One House Democrat, Rep. Jim Himes of Connecticut, issued a statement minutes later calling on the president to withdraw.

He insisted, 'I've got to finish this job'

It's a delicate dance between the president and vice president, with many Democrats openly pining for Harris to replace Biden on the ticket. Biden didn't acknowledge that tension, but only brought Harris up in response to pointed questions about whether he believed she had the capability to replace him.

"I wouldn't have picked her unless I thought she was qualified to be president," Biden said, citing Harris' resume from prosecutor to the U.S. Senate.

But in response to a later question he acknowledged he'd moved on from his 2020 campaign promise to be a "bridge" to a new generation of Democrats. "What changed was the gravity of the situation I inherited," he said, without a word about his vice president.

Repeatedly, he said, "I've got to finish this job."

The press conference ended with Biden being asked directly whether he'd step down for Harris if he saw polling showing she had a better chance of beating Trump. "No, unless they come back and said there's no way you can win," Biden responded. Then he added, in a stage whisper, "No poll's saying that."

He argued he's delivered results over rhetoric

Biden tried to make the case that what he's doing matters more than how he talks about it.

He praised the just finished NATO summit as elevating America's standing. "Have you ever seen a more successful conference?" Biden said to a group of reporters who often only got to see the conference during prepared remarks.

He drilled down on how inflation has eased from its 2022 peak as he reeled off stats such as the creation of 800,000 manufacturing jobs under his watch, saying that world leaders would want to trade their own economies for what United States has. He also said he would cap how much rent could grow for tenants of landlords who are part of a tax-credit program for low-income housing.

It's the same pitch Biden has made in stump speeches without necessarily doing much to move his own popularity. His team believes it will sink in if repeated constantly.

He brought up his work on NATO

Biden kicked off the press conference by talking at length about NATO and its value to the United States — one of his strongest political issues against Trump, who has been openly skeptical of the alliance and once suggested he'd encourage Russia to attack NATO members whom he considered delinquent.

Biden tied himself to an American tradition stretching "from Truman to Reagan to me" of defending NATO. "Every American must ask herself or himself, is the world safer with NATO?" he asked.

Later, to assure a European journalist asking about governments on that continent worrying Trump could win, Biden launched into a detailed recounting of how he helped shepherd Finland into the alliance. After that, he went into detail about how to push back against China for supporting Russia during its war against Ukraine and contended he will continue to be able to deal with Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

Overall, Biden spoke forcefully and fluently about foreign policy, one of his favorite subjects. But the news conference's focus wasn't really foreign policy, it was reassuring Democrats and the world that Biden is still able to be president and beat Trump.

That shows how even Biden's strengths are being overshadowed by questions about his capabilities.

When possible, he went back to the stump speech

Every politician has a stock set of lines. And whenever Biden could, he went back to his favorite talking points. It was a way to answer the question without necessarily needing to say anything spontaneous or new.

He went after trickle-down economics, borrowing a line about his father never benefiting much from tax cuts aimed at the wealthy ("I don't remember much trickling down to his kitchen table"). He hailed Delaware for leading the country in corporations. He said he's the "most pro-union labor president in history." He explained his decision to run for a second term with a variation on his "finish the job" catchphrase. He

went into his standard spiel about computer chips.

With no time limit on his answers like he faced at the debate, Biden went on for several minutes at a time telling stories about his interactions with foreign leaders and making the case for his reelection.

He answered questions in detail — unlike at the debate

There were few fireworks in Biden's answers -- with the highly anticipated event at times coming across as more of a think tank lecture than an effort to grab voters' attention. He went into granular detail on geopolitics and rattled off numbers — asking at one moment, though, to not be held to the precise figure.

While it didn't erase the stumbles and blank stares from the debate, it showed that he could engage with reporters' questions on a range of issues without losing focus.

There was still regular coughing and throat clearing. And at times he lowered his voice to a hoarse whisper that evoked the rasp of his voice on debate night.

Overall, his presentation was a reminder that people are focused on him now with an almost clinical eye toward possible slip-ups and mistakes, the kind of pressure that is unlikely to go away for as long as Biden insists he'll stay in the race.

More than 6 in 10 U.S. adults support protecting access to IVF, AP-NORC poll finds

By COLLEEN LONG and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Relatively few Americans fully endorse the idea that a fertilized egg should have the same rights as a pregnant woman. But a significant share say it describes their views at least somewhat well, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

The new survey comes as questions grow around reproductive health access in the continued fallout from the decision by the Supreme Court to end federal abortion protections. The poll found that a solid majority of Americans oppose a federal abortion ban as a rising number support access to abortions for any reason.

But anti-abortion advocates are increasingly pushing for broader measures that would give rights and protections to embryos and fetuses, which could have massive implications for fertility treatments and other areas of health care.

The poll suggests that when it comes to more nuanced questions about issues like in vitro fertilization, or IVF — which may be affected by the restrictive climate in some states, even though they were not previously considered as part of "abortion" — there is general support for reproductive health protections. But the poll also shows some uncertainty, as Americans are faced with situations that would not have arisen before *Roe v. Wade* was overturned.

According to the poll, about 6 in 10 U.S. adults support protecting access to IVF, a type of fertility treatment where eggs are combined with sperm outside the body in a lab to form an embryo. Views on banning the destruction of embryos created through IVF are less developed, with 4 in 10 adults expressing a neutral opinion.

"I believe that it's a woman's right to determine what she wants to do with her pregnancy, and she should be cared for. There should be no question about that," said John Evangelista, 73. "And IVF, I mean, for years, it's saved a lot of people grief — because they want to have a child. Why would you want to limit this for people?"

Earlier this year, Alabama's largest hospital paused in vitro fertilization treatments, following a court ruling that said frozen embryos are the legal equivalent of children. Not long after, the governor signed legislation shielding doctors from potential legal liability in order to restart procedures in the state.

But the political damage was done. Democrats routinely cite IVF concerns as part of a larger problem where women in some states are getting worse medical care since the fall of *Roe*. They link delayed IVF care to cases in states with abortion restrictions, where women must wait until they are very sick in order to get care. Democrats say these issues show how GOP efforts to overturn *Roe* have profoundly affected all facets of reproductive care.

On the other hand, protections for IVF are supported by Americans across the political spectrum: About three-quarters of Democrats and 56% of Republicans favor preserving access to IVF, while about 4 in 10 independents are in favor and just under half, 46%, neither favor nor oppose protecting access. For some, their views have been shaped by personal experience with the procedure.

"I'm about to go through IVF right now, and you're trying to get as many embryos as you can so you can have more chances at having one live birth, or more than that, if you're lucky," said Alexa Voloschenko, 30. "I just don't want people to be having more trouble to access IVF; it's already hard enough."

But the poll found that about 3 in 10 Americans say that the statement "human life begins at conception, so a fertilized egg is a person with the same rights as a pregnant woman" describes their views on abortion law and policy extremely or very well, while an additional 18% say it describes their views somewhat well. About half say the statement describes their views "not very well" or "not well at all."

This view is in tension with some aspects of IVF care — in particular, fertility treatments where eggs are fertilized and develop into embryos in a lab. Sometimes, embryos are accidentally damaged or destroyed, and unused embryos may be discarded.

Republicans are about twice as likely as Democrats or independents to say that the statement about fertilized eggs having the same rights as a pregnant woman describes their views extremely or very well. About 4 in 10 Republicans say that compared with about 2 in 10 Democrats and independents.

And views are less clear overall on a more specific aspect of policy related to IVF — making it illegal to destroy embryos created during the process. One-quarter of U.S. adults somewhat or strongly favor banning the destruction of embryos created through IVF, while 4 in 10 have a neutral view and about one-third somewhat or strongly oppose it.

"Human life begins at a heartbeat," said Steven Otey, 73, a Republican who doesn't believe created embryos should be destroyed. "Embryos ... can become babies, we shouldn't be destroying them."

About 3 in 10 Republicans and roughly one-quarter of Democrats favor banning the destruction of embryos created through IVF. Four in 10 Republicans — and nearly 6 in 10 independents — have a neutral view.

Lead detective in Alec Baldwin case to testify, convicted armorer may be called in 'Rust' trial

By MORGAN LEE and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — The lead detective in the shooting of cinematographer Halyna Hutchins on the set of the film "Rust" is likely to be on the stand for most of Friday at Alec Baldwin's involuntary manslaughter trial in New Mexico, as prosecutors try to cast the movie star as a reckless cavalier with a gun in his hand and the defense seeks to portray him as a working actor just doing his job.

Cpl. Alexandria Hancock of the Santa Fe County Sheriff's Office didn't become the chief investigator until two weeks after the October 2021 shooting, but she conducted the first interviews of Baldwin, "Rust" armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed and assistant director David Halls, the three people criminally charged in the case.

Hancock was on the stand briefly at the end of the day Thursday and will continue her direct examination by the prosecution Friday before undergoing what's likely to be a long cross-examination by the defense as they look to poke holes in an investigation they have suggested unfairly focused on Baldwin.

Before Hancock took the stand, Italian gunmaker Alessandro Pietta testified Thursday about quality control in the manufacturing process for the gun eventually acquired by an Albuquerque-based gun and ammunition supplier to "Rust" and handled by Baldwin in the fatal shooting. It was shipped in 2017, and Pietta last examined the gun in 2018 through a sales and distribution company.

The provenance of the gun, and its use for several years in trade shows, is under the microscope as defense attorneys raise concerns that the gun might have been modified or might otherwise discharge under some circumstances without a trigger pull.

Baldwin has claimed the gun fired accidentally after he followed instructions to point it toward Hutchins,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 48 of 96

who was behind the camera. Unaware that it was loaded with a live round, he said he pulled back the hammer — not the trigger — and it fired.

Both Pietta and a sales distributor who handled the gun as recently as September 2021 testified that the revolver was in good working order and had not been modified.

Pietta testified that the hammer on the gun will only drop with a trigger pull.

“If you want to release the hammer you have to pull the trigger,” he told the courtroom.

But Pietta also noted that standard practice is to only load the gun -- a remake of a 19th century revolver -- with five rounds, and not six, to ensure the firing pin does not rest on a live round. Gun experts including an FBI forensic expert acknowledge that the revolver can discharge if pressure is applied to the hammer while resting on a live round.

Before Hancock returns to the stand, Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer will consider striking testimony from Thursday about a “good Samaritan” who walked into a sheriff’s station with what he told authorities was the supply of ammunition that the bullet that killed Hutchins came from, after the conviction early this year of Gutierrez-Reed for involuntary manslaughter.

The issue came up during defense questioning of sheriff’s crime scene technician Marissa Poppell. Baldwin lawyer Alex Spiro suggested with his questions that Poppell and other authorities had been overly cozy with the film’s firearms supplier Seth Kenney and had insufficiently investigated whether he was responsible for the fatal ammunition reaching the set.

Spiro asked Poppell whether the “good Samaritan” had brought the ammunition into the sheriff’s department, and she said he had and she had written a report on it, denying that she had “buried it” to keep it from the defense.

Spiro asked whether the man “told you you all had been duped by Seth Kenney.” Poppell said she had no recollection of that.

The prosecution reacted with contempt for the suggestion that the man’s claims were legitimate.

Special prosecutor Kari Morrissey established in her questioning that the source of the ammunition was Troy Teske, a friend of Gutierrez-Reed’s father with motivations to redirect the blame, and despite similarities the bullets were not the same size as the live rounds found on the “Rust” set, including the one that killed Hutchins.

Morrissey sought to further defend Kenney’s role in her questioning of Hancock.

“Did you ever discover any evidence throughout your entire investigation that Seth Kenney supplied live rounds to the set of ‘Rust?’” Morrissey asked. Hancock said no.

Kenney has not been charged with any wrongdoing. An email sent to his attorney seeking comment was not immediately returned.

Gutierrez-Reed’s attorney said they have been informed prosecutors will try to call her to testify.

The lawyer, Jason Bowles, told The Associated Press in an email that Gutierrez-Reed will assert her Fifth Amendment rights against self-incrimination if she is called because she has an appeal of her conviction pending.

The judge declined to grant a pretrial request from prosecutors to give Gutierrez-Reed immunity for her testimony.

She is serving an 18-month sentence, the same penalty Baldwin faces if he’s convicted.

The Latest | Israel will send cease-fire negotiators to Cairo for more talks, Netanyahu says

By The Associated Press undefined

Israel will send a delegation to Cairo for further talks with mediators on a proposed deal with Hamas for a cease-fire and hostage release, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s office said Thursday.

Israel has been pressing ahead with a fresh offensive across the north, south and center of the Gaza Strip in recent days, which could be aimed at increasing pressure on Gaza’s Hamas militant group during cease-fire negotiations.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 49 of 96

Palestinians returned to breathtaking scenes of destruction in the Gaza City district of Shijaiyah after Israeli troops withdrew following a two-week offensive there. Civil defense workers said that so far they had found the bodies of 60 people in the rubble.

Israel launched the war in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Since then, Israeli ground offensives and bombardments have killed more than 38,300 people in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. It does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people are crammed into squalid tent camps in central and southern Gaza. Israeli restrictions, fighting and the breakdown of law and order have limited humanitarian aid efforts, causing widespread hunger and sparking fears of famine. The top United Nations court has ordered Israel to take steps to protect Palestinians as it examines genocide allegations against Israeli leaders. Israel denies the charge.

Currently:

- Israeli army acknowledges Oct. 7 failures, including slow response times and disorganization.
- 'We have nothing': Palestinians return to utter destruction in Gaza City after Israeli withdrawal.
- The U.S. says the end of its pier for Gaza aid is coming soon.
- A boy in Gaza was killed by an Israeli airstrike. His father held him and wouldn't let go.
- Head of US aid agency says Israel has pledged to improve safety for humanitarian workers in Gaza.
- Yemen's Houthi rebels fired an Iranian missile at ship, debris analyzed by US shows.
- Follow AP's coverage of the war in Gaza at <https://apnews.com/hub/israel-hamas-war>.

Here's the latest:

President Biden acknowledges disappointments, missteps and frustrations with Israel's hard-right government

WASHINGTON -- President Joe Biden acknowledged disappointments, missteps and frustrations with Israel's hard-right government Thursday, but pointed to increased hopes now of a cease-fire to end the Israel-Hamas war devastating the lives of Gaza's people.

Biden looked back over the course of his efforts in Israel's war against Hamas during a much-watched press conference at the site of the just ended NATO summit.

He called Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's government the most conservative Israeli administration he had experienced, and said he had urged Israeli leaders not to follow the example that the U.S. set against al-Qaida and other extremist militant groups. "Don't think that's what you should be doing, doubling-down," he recounted telling them.

He said he had been "disappointed" his order for the U.S. military to build a pier to bring aid by sea to Gaza, along with some other efforts, "have not succeeded as well."

But Biden said Israel and Hamas had now both agreed to the broad terms of a deal to pause fighting and free hostages, and said that made prospects brighter now. Mediators were helping work on gaps in agreement, he said.

Head of US aid agency says Israel has pledged to improve safety for humanitarian workers in Gaza

ASHDOD, Israel — The head of the U.S. agency overseeing American humanitarian assistance worldwide says Israel has agreed to use an improved system across the Gaza Strip to ensure humanitarian workers and aid can more safely move around.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Samantha Power, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said that Israel has also taken new steps to increase the flow of aid through its port of Ashdod, just north of Gaza. The move could give donors a new option for delivering aid as the U.S. shuts its troubled maritime pier off Gaza's coast.

"We have not seen the kind of humanitarian system to this point that has allowed humanitarians to move efficiently and safely to the degree that we need," Power said. "This week and through this visit, we have secured an agreement."

"My whole career has been working in and around conflict areas," said Power, a former war correspon-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 50 of 96

dent and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. "I have never seen a more difficult conflict environment for humanitarians to work in."

Humanitarian workers have complained throughout the war that the system by which the Israeli military assures safe passage to aid has been a failure. Power said a system by which the U.N. and Israeli military communicate more closely will be extended across Gaza.

A main hospital reopens in northern Gaza, days after patients were evacuated ahead of Israeli ground operation

GAZA CITY, Gaza Strip — One of the main hospitals in Gaza City partially resumed operations on Thursday, days after evacuating its patients and staff in the face of an Israeli military assault in the area.

Al-Ahli Hospital was vacated on Monday after the Israeli military issued evacuation orders for central and eastern parts of Gaza City ahead of an offensive. Staff rushed patients to the Indonesian Hospital in another part of northern Gaza.

The Episcopal Church in the Middle East, which operates Al-Ahli, said the hospital was "compelled to close by the Israeli army" after the evacuation orders and a wave of nearby drone strikes on Sunday.

The military later said it told hospitals and other medical facilities in Gaza City they did not need to evacuate. But hospitals in Gaza have often shut down and moved patients at any sign of possible Israeli military action, fearing a repeat of destructive raids that troops have launched on multiple hospitals.

On Thursday, staff reopened the emergency ward and were admitting new patients, though the rest of the facility was still not functioning.

Mohammed al-Sheikh, a nurse in the emergency department, said the hospital was resuming primary care "because the danger still exists, and the area is still under fire and under bombing, and injuries are still arriving," referring to Israel's continued military offensive in Gaza City.

With Al-Ahli's reopening, 14 of Gaza's 36 hospitals are partially functioning, according to U.N. figures, while the rest have been shut down because of damage to facilities, lack of fuel, supplies or staff or because of nearby fighting.

US says the end of its pier for Gaza aid is coming soon

WASHINGTON — Battling rough seas around Gaza, the U.S. now is considering abandoning efforts to reinstall the pier that has been used to get badly needed humanitarian aid to starving Palestinians, two U.S. officials said Thursday.

The initial plan earlier this week had been to reinstall the pier for a few days to move the final pallets of aid onto the shore and then permanently remove it, but rough seas have prevented the reinstallation.

The White House and the Defense Department both said the pier will cease operations "soon" but would not specify timing. Other U.S. officials said the Pentagon and U.S. Central Command were actively discussing an early end to pier operations because weather and some maintenance problems make it far less desirable to reconnect it for just a short time.

The officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss internal deliberations, said there is no final decision yet and that if the weather calms for a bit, there is a slim chance they could reattach it for a short time.

Across Washington, officials were signaling the end of what has been a mission fraught with weather and security problems, but which also has brought more than 19.4 million pounds (8.6 million kilograms) of aid to starving Palestinians in Gaza.

"Look, I see any result that produces more food, more humanitarian goods, getting to the people of Gaza as a success," White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan told reporters Thursday. "It is additive. It is something additional that otherwise we would not have gotten there when it got there. And that is a good thing."

Some aid still remains offshore and in Cyprus, but officials said they are looking at alternative plans to take the aid to the Israeli port at Ashdod. The port has been eyed as a likely replacement option for the movement of supplies from Cyprus to Gaza.

The continuing weather problems have forced the military to temporarily remove the pier three times

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 51 of 96

since it was installed in May. And the project has also been hampered by security threats that prompted aid agencies to halt distribution of the food and other supplies into Gaza.

The aid groups have said that while any amount of food for Gaza is welcome, many have criticized the project as a costly distraction, saying the U.S. should concentrate on pressuring Israel to allow more aid through land borders, which have long been considered the most productive option.

The U.N. suspended all World Food Program deliveries from the pier after a June 8 Israeli military raid that saved four Israeli hostages but killed hundreds of Palestinians, citing concerns that troops used an area near there for flying out the rescued hostages by helicopter.

Israeli assault on Gaza City leaves behind scenes of complete destruction

SHIJAIYAH, Gaza Strip — Palestinians returned to breathtaking scenes of destruction in the Gaza City district of Shijaiyah after Israeli troops withdrew, ending a two-week offensive there. Civil defense workers said that so far they had found the bodies of 60 people in the rubble.

Families who had fled the assault ventured back into Shijaiyah to see the condition of their homes or salvage whatever they could.

Nearly every building was flattened to rubble for block after block, leaving giant piles of concrete and twisted rebar. Here and there, a few stories of gutted concrete frames still stood. People on bicycles or carts made their ways down dirt paths where the streets had been bulldozed away.

Sharif Abu Shanab found his four-story family building collapsed. "I can't enter it. I can't take anything out of it, not even a can of tuna. We have nothing, no food or drink," he said.

Since fleeing the district, his family sleeps in the streets, he said. "Where do we go and to whom? ... We have no home or anything," he said in despair. "There's only one solution, hit us with a nuclear bomb and relieve us of this life."

The Israeli military has invaded Shijaiyah several times in the 9-month-old war to battle Hamas militants. Its latest assault began in late June, when it said it was pursuing militants who had regrouped in the district. The assault sent some 80,000 people fleeing Shijaiyah, most into nearby areas, and it is not known how many people remained in the district during the fighting.

The Israeli military said in a statement Wednesday evening that its operations in Shijaiyah had ended. It said its troops had killed dozens of militants and destroyed eight tunnels in the area. Those claims could not be independently confirmed.

Gaza's Civil Defense organization said that during Israel's offensive, its emergency crews had largely been unable to respond to calls for help from residents in destroyed buildings. After the Israeli withdrawal, its crews entered and recovered 60 bodies, it said, adding that the search was ongoing. More bodies were believed buried under rubble, but the organization has little heavy equipment to clear debris.

Israel's Netanyahu heckled with chants of "shame" during military graduation ceremony

JERUSALEM -- Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday was interrupted by hecklers during a military graduation ceremony in southern Israel when he vowed to continue the war against Hamas "until victory."

"There are some who ask how long the campaign will last, and I answer in two words: Until victory. Until victory, even if it takes time" he said.

As he spoke, a small crowd began to chant: "Shame."

Netanyahu has said he will press ahead with the nine-month offensive until Hamas is destroyed and all the hostages it is holding come home. Large parts of the Israeli public want Netanyahu to reach a cease-fire deal to free the hostages, even if the other goals aren't met.

During the same military ceremony, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said a broad government investigation is needed into the nation's leaders, including Netanyahu.

"We require a probe at the national level, a probe that will clarify the facts, allow the drawing of conclusions and lead to the assimilation of correct lessons," he said. "It needs to check me, minister of defense. It needs to check the prime minister."

Israeli military releases the results of its first investigation into failures during Oct. 7 attack

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 52 of 96

The Israeli military released on Thursday the results of its first investigation into failures during the deadly Hamas attack on Oct. 7 that triggered the nine-month war in Gaza.

The military said Israeli hostages held in a home that was struck by tank fire on Oct. 7 were likely killed by Hamas militants, not Israeli shelling.

While the army appeared to clear itself in the tank strike — one of the most high-profile episodes of Oct. 7 — it acknowledged a string of errors that day in its core mission of protecting the country's citizens, including slow response times and disorganization during the standoff at Kibbutz Be'eri.

"The fighting in the area in the first hours was characterized by a lack of command and control and a lack of coordination and order between the various forces," the report said. "This caused a number of incidents in which security forces gathered at the entrance to the kibbutz and did not engage in immediate combat."

Be'eri was the scene of one of the most high-profile incidents of Oct. 7 — a standoff in which militants held a group of hostages inside a home. Survivors said that during the standoff a tank fired at the home, raising concerns that the 13 hostages inside were killed by friendly fire.

In its investigation, the army said the kibbutz was overrun by about 340 Hamas fighters and that militants killed most of the hostages, though it was unclear how it reached that conclusion, and the report called for additional tests.

The Israeli army has come under heavy criticism from Palestinians and human rights groups, who say its investigations rarely result in punishment.

Kibbutz residents gave the report a mixed reception, expressing anger over the army's failures that day but also appreciation that it was taking responsibility.

The surprise cross-border raid killed some 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took 250 others hostage, in the deadliest attack in Israel's 76-year history.

The army has launched multiple investigations into the failures of Oct. 7, and the head of military intelligence has resigned. Several other commanders have apologized and taken responsibility for their failures. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected repeated calls for an official state investigation, saying the country is focused on its war against Hamas.

US imposes new sanctions on extremist Israeli settlers

WASHINGTON — The Biden administration is imposing new sanctions on extremist Israeli settlers who it accuses of undermining peace and stability in the occupied West Bank by encouraging or participating in violence against Palestinian civilians.

The departments of State and Treasury announced Thursday they were targeting three Israeli individuals and five groups with which they are affiliated for involvement in violence or threats of violence targeting civilians, seizure of property or other actions that threaten security in the West Bank.

"The United States remains deeply concerned about extremist violence and instability in the West Bank, which undermines Israel's own security," State Department spokesman Matthew Miller said in a statement. "We strongly encourage the Government of Israel to take immediate steps to hold these individuals and entities accountable. In the absence of such steps, we will continue to impose our own accountability measures."

The sanctions freeze any assets held by those targeted in U.S. jurisdictions and block Americans from doing business with them.

The targets of Thursday's sanctions are Isachar Manne, Reut Ben Haim, Aviad Shlomo Sarid, three settlement outposts, Manne Farm, Meitarim Farm, Hamahoch Farm, Neriya's Farm; and Lehava, an umbrella group for settlers.

In an escalation over past months, West Bank settlers have carried out more than 1,000 attacks on Palestinians, causing deaths, damaging property and in some cases prompting Palestinians to flee villages.

Israel has built well over 100 settlements scattered across the West Bank. Settlers also have built scores of tiny unauthorized outposts that are tolerated or even encouraged by the government. Some are later legalized.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 53 of 96

Israel will send cease-fire negotiators to Cairo for more talks, Netanyahu's office says

JERUSALEM — Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's office says Israel will send a delegation to Cairo for further talks with mediators on a proposed deal with Hamas for a cease-fire and hostage release.

U.S., Egyptian and Qatari mediators are making a new push to seal the agreement, as Hamas and Israel have come the closest yet to narrowing the gaps between them after months of negotiations.

But obstacles still remain. Hamas agreed to relent on its key demand that Israel commit to ending the war as part of any agreement. But it still wants mediators to guarantee that talks will go on until a permanent cease-fire is reached, in return for a full release of hostages held by Hamas.

Netanyahu, meanwhile, says he won't sign any deal that would force Israel to stop its military campaign in Gaza before Hamas is eliminated.

Netanyahu's office said Israel's negotiating team returned from meeting with mediators in the Qatari capital Doha, without giving details on the results of the talks. The team was heading Thursday evening to Cairo for continuing discussions, it said.

US announces \$100 million additional aid for Palestinians

JERUSALEM — The United States announced Thursday that it is providing \$100 million dollars in additional aid for Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

A statement from USAID said the funding would assist the United Nations' World Food Program. It also said that through the funding, it would provide "logistics support for the safe and efficient delivery of life-saving humanitarian aid across Gaza," without elaborating. Aid agencies have complained that goods are not reaching people in Gaza because of the dangerous security situation and growing lawlessness that is complicating aid delivery.

A statement from the U.S. aid agency said the additional funding brings U.S. contributions to the Palestinians since the war began to more than \$774 million.

The war in Gaza, sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7 cross-border raid, has triggered a humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza that has led to widespread hunger.

A boy in Gaza was killed by an Israeli airstrike. His father held him and wouldn't let go

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — He wouldn't let go. Nael Al-Baghdadi held his 12-year-old son, Omar, and held him tight. But it was already too late. Omar, who was playing outside near his home, had been killed Tuesday in the Gaza Strip by an Israeli airstrike.

In the photo made by Associated Press photographer Abdel Kareem Hana after the strike, al-Baghdadi's eyes are shut. He holds his son, whose small body rests limply in his arms. His right hand and right shirt sleeve are streaked with blood. Grief is etched upon the father's face, but more than that there is an expression of deep love for the child he has just lost. So much love that he insisted on holding Omar, uninterrupted, until the child could be shepherded hours later to his grave.

Omar and his three friends were playing soccer in the street near their house in the Bureij refugee camp around noon Tuesday, under a blistering sun, when the Israeli airstrike hit and sent the street into a swirl of dust, blood and chaos. Al-Baghdadi was already in nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah with his injured brother. His cousin ran toward the wreckage, found Omar and took him to an ambulance.

From there, he called the father and broke the news: His son had been killed; be ready to receive him. According to al-Baghdadi, he met the ambulance when it rolled into the hospital, picked up his son's body and carried it to the morgue, weeping all the way.

He refused to put his son on the ground inside the morgue, holding him gently until he was shrouded and the funeral prayer was performed before a quick burial.

One image, one moment — a child lost, a father's grief, an excruciating goodbye.

Yemen's Houthi rebels fired an Iranian missile at Norwegian-flagged ship, debris analyzed by US shows

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — Yemen's Houthi rebels likely fired an Iranian-made anti-ship cruise missile at a Norwegian-flagged tanker in the Red Sea in December, an assault that now provides a public, evidence-based link between the ongoing rebel campaign against shipping and Tehran.

A report by the U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency released Wednesday linked the attack on the Strinda,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 54 of 96

which set the vessel ablaze, to Tehran, the Houthis' main backer in Yemen's nearly decadelong war.

The findings correspond with those of a Norway-based insurers group that also examined debris found on the Strinda. It comes as the Houthis continue their monthslong campaign of attacks over the Israel-Hamas war targeting ships in the Red Sea corridor, disrupting the \$1 trillion flow of goods passing through it annually.

Houthi attacks on ships have rapidly escalated since November, as the group says it aims to pressure Israel and the international community to halt the war against Hamas in Gaza.

Very little aid is getting to Palestinians due to lawlessness and combat in Gaza, UN says

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations is stressing that very little aid is getting to Palestinians from the Kerem Shalom border crossing because of lawlessness, ongoing fighting, and the lack of effective coordination with Israeli forces in Gaza.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric was responding Wednesday to the head of the Israeli military body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs who told reporters at Kerem Shalom earlier that the United Nations needs to step up its ability to receive and distribute aid in Gaza.

Col. Elad Goren, head of the body known as COGAT, said it has facilitated the entry of more than 40,000 trucks to Gaza but the U.N. has only received and distributed aid from 26,000. He called for the U.N. to increase trucks, manpower and warehouses.

Dujarric said the U.N. is trying its best to get to people in need, especially in central and southern Gaza, but "you have utter lawlessness, plus you have continuing conflict."

Some U.N. and private sector trucks are trying to pick up aid from Kerem Shalom, "often at great cost, because they are being either looted or attacked by criminal elements," he said, adding that "we've had convoys also being fired on by Israeli forces."

As a result, very little is getting through, Dujarric said.

"We're discussing with various parties, but the facts on the ground remain the facts on the ground, unfortunately," the U.N. spokesman said.

"Unless there is a cease-fire which allows for full and unfettered humanitarian access, which will see the release of the hostages, will see an end to the fighting, every day is a challenge to get aid and to deliver it," Dujarric said.

US sends hundreds of bombs to Israel after pausing shipment over concerns about civilian casualties in Gaza, officials say

WASHINGTON — The U.S. has agreed to send Israel hundreds of 500-pound bombs from a shipment that the Biden administration withheld because of concerns about Israeli operations in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, according to three U.S. officials.

U.S. President Joe Biden announced in May that he would not supply offensive weapons that Israel could use to launch an all-out assault on Rafah over concern for the well-being of hundreds of thousands of civilians sheltering there.

The White House announced at the time that they were holding up a shipment of 1,800 of the larger 2,000-pound (900-kilogram) bombs and 1,700 of the relatively smaller 500-pound (225-kilogram) bombs because of the president's concerns.

The officials, who were not authorized to comment on the matter and spoke on the condition of anonymity, said the Biden administration had been more concerned about the use of the larger bombs and recently agreed to fulfill Israel's request for the 500-pound bombs in the shipment.

The U.S. is continuing to hold up the 2,000-pound bombs, the officials said. One of the officials said the U.S. remains concerned about how these bombs could be used in Gaza.

One of the officials said the shipment of the 500-pound bombs is still being processed and the bombs have not yet arrived in Israel.

Israel says it has nearly defeated Hamas forces in Rafah after two months of fighting there. Before Israeli troops invaded, the city had sheltered most of Gaza's more than 2 million people. Today it is a dust-covered ghost town.

Associated Press writers Aamer Madhani and Lolita C. Baldor contributed.

United Nations says Israel's operations in Gaza City will fuel mass suffering for Palestinians

UNITED NATIONS – The United Nations is warning that Israel's order for Palestinians to leave Gaza City will fuel mass suffering and is insisting that civilians must be protected and their needs must be met whether they flee or stay.

U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told reporters Wednesday that this warning from the U.N. humanitarian office means that all parties involved in the conflict in Gaza must respect international humanitarian law at all times. Protection of civilians and the infrastructure for their survival are key requirements of the law.

"The level of fighting and destruction that we are seeing in recent days, as the cease-fire talks are ongoing, is truly shocking," Dujarric said.

He said Muhannad Hadi, the U.N. humanitarian coordinator for the Palestinian territories, briefed Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on Wednesday about his visit into the Gaza Strip a day earlier and the dire situation there.

"He saw firsthand the consequences of the breakdown in public order and safety as he entered and exited Gaza through the Kerem Shalom crossing," Dujarric said.

"He saw groups of men with sticks waiting for trucks to leave the Kerem Shalom crossing into Gaza," the U.N. spokesman said. "All the trucks that he passed were badly damaged, with broken windshields, mirrors and hoods."

Hadi also saw bags of fortified flour from the U.N. World Food Program and the U.N. agency helping Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, scattered on the side of the road coming out of the crossing, Dujarric said.

In Khan Younis, Hadi reported that the southern city "has largely been reduced to sand and rubble," the spokesman said. "Every building that he saw had been damaged in some way, shape or form."

Hadi also met with women's groups at a U.N. guesthouse who told him about harrowing conditions at sites for displaced Palestinians, he said.

"Many women have cut off their hair due to lice and difficulties in accessing the necessary hygiene products such as shampoo, and because of the lack of privacy at sites for displaced people," Dujarric said.

He said "others voiced despair over their inability to provide for their families, in particular for relatives living with disabilities and those who are sick and cannot get treatment," and for having to send their children to bed without eating and drinking.

"One woman said that living with many different families in the same room meant that she wasn't removing her hijab for days and that she couldn't brush her hair or change clothes without being watched," Dujarric said. "Others told him that overcrowding, despair and the breakdown in public order and safety is leading to an increase in sexual and gender-based violence."

USAID leader will meet with Israeli officials about security of aid workers in Gaza

TEL AVIV, Israel — A United States official says the head of the agency overseeing American foreign humanitarian and development aid will visit Israel on Thursday to address security concerns around aid workers and aid distribution in Gaza.

U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Samantha Power will meet with Israeli officials to discuss improving communication and coordination to protect humanitarian workers in the ongoing Gaza war. She was last in the region in March, when she visited Israel, Jordan, and the Israeli-occupied West Bank.

The United Nations chief has said "total lawlessness" and chaos in Gaza prevents the distribution of desperately needed humanitarian aid in the enclave. Humanitarian conditions are dire as many families are displaced multiple times. According to the U.N., more than 200 aid workers have been killed in Gaza since the war began.

Ahead of Power's visit, the Israeli military asserted that the U.N. must step up its ability to receive and distribute aid in Gaza. "Even if we will bring 1,000 trucks today, there's nowhere to put it on the Palestinian side, that's the main problem," said Col. Elad Goren, the head of the civilian department at the Israeli

defense body in charge of Palestinian civilian affairs, during a press conference.

USAID has said thousands of tons of food, medicine and other aid are piled up uncollected on a beach near the U.S.-built pier because of the lawlessness on the ground.

Israeli army acknowledges Oct. 7 failures, including slow response and disorganization

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — The Israeli military on Thursday acknowledged a string of errors in its response to the deadly Hamas attacks last Oct. 7, including slow response times and disorganization, as it released the results of its first investigation into failures during the assault that triggered the war in Gaza.

The report focused on the border community of Be'eri, where over 100 people were killed and more than 30 others taken hostage by Hamas. It was among the hardest-hit communities in the early morning attack, and it was the scene of one of the highest-profile confrontations of Oct. 7 — a standoff in which militants held a group of hostages inside a home.

"The army failed in its mission to protect the residents of Kibbutz Be'eri," the military's chief spokesman, Rear Adm. Daniel Hagari, said in a televised address. "It is painful and difficult for me to say that."

During the standoff, a tank fired at the home, raising concerns that the 13 hostages inside were killed by friendly fire. The military concluded that they were likely killed by Hamas militants, not Israeli shelling, though it was unclear how it reached that conclusion, and the report called for additional tests. The army said the kibbutz was overrun by about 340 Hamas fighters.

Investigators "determined that, based on the information reviewed and to the best of their understanding, no civilians inside the building were harmed by tank shell fire," the report said, though it said two Israeli civilians were hit by shrapnel outside the building. One of those civilians died, according to the man's wife.

It also said commanders on the scene made "professional and responsible decisions" in ordering the tank strike. It said there had been a joint decision by various commanders after hearing gunshots within the house and militants saying they planned to kill the hostages and commit suicide.

"The team determined that most of the hostages were likely murdered by the terrorists," the report said.

The report also pointed to delays of several hours in the arrival of military forces and said forces waited outside the kibbutz into the afternoon as residents were being killed, not understanding the severity of the situation.

"This situation is extremely grave and cannot occur," it said.

The report praised "the bravery of the Be'eri residents and the members of the kibbutz's civilian rapid response team," saying it was "crucial in stabilizing the defensive line during the first hours of combat."

The Israeli army has come under heavy criticism from Palestinians and human rights groups, who say its investigations rarely result in punishment.

Kibbutz residents gave the report a mixed reception, expressing anger over the army's failures that day but also appreciation that it took responsibility.

Meir Zarbiv, a resident whose brother and sister were both killed on Oct. 7, called the report a "deception" by the army. "I don't believe the report, and I don't believe anything about it," he said.

He said he still cannot understand the delays in arriving and entering the kibbutz. "I just don't believe what happened here. I have no explanation," he said. "Where was the army?"

In a statement, the community called the investigation "thorough" and said it helped them understand the complexity of the fighting that day.

"We see great importance in the army accepting the blame and responsibility for its complete failure to protect us and in asking for forgiveness for abandoning us for many hours during an attack of unmatched evil," it said.

The kibbutz also called for an official state commission of inquiry into the broader failures of Oct. 7 "so the unimaginable loss we experienced will never again be experienced by any other citizen."

The surprise cross-border raid killed some 1,200 people, most of them civilians, and took 250 others

hostage, in the deadliest attack in Israel's 76-year history. The attack, in which several thousand militants stormed across the border without resistance, revealed grave shortcomings in the army's readiness, its intelligence assessments and policies set by political leaders toward Gaza.

An Israeli offensive launched in response to the attack has killed over 38,000 Palestinians, according to local health authorities, displaced over 80% of the territory's people and triggered a humanitarian disaster in Gaza. Israel is now facing war crimes and genocide allegations in international courts.

The army has launched multiple investigations into the failures of Oct. 7, and the head of military intelligence has resigned. Several other commanders have apologized and taken responsibility for their failures.

But Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has rejected repeated calls for an official state investigation, even as the war enters its 10th month.

Netanyahu has said an investigation cannot be conducted while the country is focused on its war against Hamas and says all questions will be answered at the appropriate time. But critics accuse the Israeli leader of dragging his feet to avoid what will almost certainly be harsh criticism of his policies and leadership.

At a military ceremony Thursday, Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said the time has come to launch a state commission of inquiry to look into the country's leadership. "It needs to check me, the minister of defense. It needs to check the prime minister."

In the face of fierce international criticism, Netanyahu has vowed to continue the war until destroying Hamas' military and governing capabilities and the roughly 120 hostages remaining in Gaza return home. Tens of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets in weekly protests calling on Netanyahu to reach an immediate cease-fire, saying time is running out to bring the hostages home safely.

International mediators have launched renewed efforts to broker a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas.

Netanyahu announced Thursday that he would send a team of negotiators to Cairo to continue cease-fire talks, but he reiterated his stance that he will not halt the war until Israel achieves its war objectives.

He was interrupted by hecklers at the same military ceremony when he vowed to continue the war "until victory, even if it takes time."

As he spoke, a small crowd began to chant "shame."

Head of US aid agency says Israel has pledged to improve safety for humanitarian workers in Gaza

By LEO CORREA and AMI BENTOV Associated Press

ASHDOD, Israel (AP) — The head of the U.S. agency overseeing American humanitarian assistance worldwide on Thursday said she has received Israeli pledges to allow aid workers to move more quickly and safely throughout the war-battered Gaza Strip.

In an interview with The Associated Press, Samantha Power, administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development, said that Israel has also taken new steps to increase the flow of aid through its port of Ashdod, just north of Gaza. The move could give donors a new option for delivering aid as the U.S. shuts its troubled maritime pier off Gaza's coast.

Nine months into the war in Gaza, the announcement marked a small victory for international efforts to increase aid deliveries to the territory's desperate civilians.

The Israeli offensive launched in response to Hamas' Oct. 7 attack has plunged Gaza into a humanitarian crisis. Over 80% of the territory's 2.3 million people have been displaced, with most now living in squalid tent camps. International experts say hundreds of thousands of people are on the brink of famine.

"We have not seen the kind of humanitarian system to this point that has allowed humanitarians to move efficiently and safely to the degree that we need," Power said. "This week and through this visit, we have secured an agreement."

"My whole career has been working in and around conflict areas," said Power, a former war correspondent and U.S. ambassador to the United Nations. "I have never seen a more difficult conflict environment for humanitarians to work in."

The U.N. says that since May, the amount of aid reaching it to distribute in Gaza has fallen to some of the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 58 of 96

lowest levels of the war. Israel says it places no limits on the entry of aid into Gaza. But tons of supplies have piled up on the Gaza side of Israeli-controlled border crossings because the U.N. says it is unable to collect them for distribution.

Israel blames the bottleneck on U.N. logistical failures. But U.N. and other aid officials deny that, saying that permit requirements from the military limit access to the site and that Israeli military operations against Hamas make it too dangerous to move around. Also, criminal gangs inside Gaza have looted aid trucks, adding another challenge for aid workers.

Power said her talks with the Israelis focused heavily on improving the system by which humanitarian groups and the military coordinate safe passage.

Throughout the war, humanitarian groups have complained the system was not working. In one instance early this year, the Israeli military struck an aid convoy of World Central Kitchen, killing seven workers from the international charity. Israel called the incident a tragedy and punished five officers.

Power said that for deliveries by the pier, a system was set up where the Israeli and U.S. militaries and the U.N. could communicate more closely and immediately over the location of humanitarian workers.

She said the Israeli government had now agreed to extend that system across Gaza.

"Having a system lined up where those aid workers can convey their coordinates, their movements to the (Israeli army), and know that they are going to be safe in making those deliveries, that has not been an assurance that they have had throughout this conflict," she said.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military or COGAT, the military body in charge of coordinating aid into Gaza. Power said it would take time to implement the changes, but that the U.S. is pushing for improvements "not a month from now, but a week from now."

Power spoke after touring the Ashdod port, which sits about 30 kilometers (20 miles) from Gaza.

She said Israel is increasing its scanning capacity at the port to inspect goods bound for Gaza, which can then be delivered by truck through nearby Israeli crossings. As the U.S. prepares to shut down the temporary maritime pier, she said she expected Ashdod to play a bigger role in aid deliveries.

"I think there will be a maritime part of the humanitarian solution over time that will get bigger and bigger," she said. "It will probably flow through this port."

During the visit, Power also announced that the U.S. pledged \$100 million in new assistance to the Palestinians. USAID said the money would assist the U.N.'s World Food Program and help deliver "lifesaving humanitarian aid across Gaza." Altogether, the U.S. has donated \$774 million to the Palestinians since the war began last October.

Power said the only way to dramatically improve conditions in Gaza would be through a cease-fire.

She blamed Hamas for holding up a deal, and urged the militant group to accept the latest proposals being floated by international mediators.

"Hamas must accept the terms of the cease-fire, and then we will be in a position to flood the zone with humanitarian support on a scale that is just not possible when you have fighting," she said.

Biden's challenge: Will he ever satisfy the media's appetite for questions about his ability?

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Toward the end of his closely watched news conference Thursday night on the sidelines of the NATO summit, President Joe Biden was talking about being examined by doctors for his mental acuity. Suddenly, a little frustration slipped through.

"No matter what I did," he said, "no one's going to be satisfied."

That's the challenge Biden faced during his meeting with American and international reporters, two weeks after a poor debate performance ignited calls for him to step aside and let another candidate take up the Democratic campaign against former president Donald Trump.

Biden was animated at times, particularly during an opening statement when he spoke about the importance of the NATO alliance and delivered a defense of his presidency on issues of the economy and the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 59 of 96

border with Mexico. He relished an opportunity to talk about the nation's relations with China and where that might go.

But on the very first question put to him, he also rewarded viewers, opponents and journalists who were looking for gaffes: He referred to Vice President Kamala Harris as Donald Trump. He rambled at times, dropping in stray facts inexplicably, and came across as tired, particularly as the hour drifted past 8 p.m. Eastern. His voice was gravelly and, at times, tentative.

Ultimately, the news conference was an ink-blot test for people who were watching him, NBC News' Hallie Jackson said at the end. Supporters were likely encouraged by his grasp of issues, she said, "but if you think he should step off the ticket, this probably didn't change your mind."

Pressed by journalists and appearing determined

Biden appeared determined and gave no indication that he doubted his ability to be the best candidate to take on Trump in the November general election.

Yet the news conference indicated how difficult it will be for him to change the subject. The first five questions, taken together, formed a volley on the same topic: his ability to perform in the office. Even reporters who brought up other topics — Ukraine, China, NATO — usually mixed in questions about his fitness to serve moving forward.

Even after Biden had called an end to the news conference, NBC's Peter Alexander asked a question about his flub with Harris' name and how Trump was already using it as ammunition against him..

The news conference had been widely anticipated throughout the week, leaving pundits to repeatedly emphasize the stakes. Tension between journalists and the Biden team has been running high, an outgrowth of the president giving relatively few news conferences and interviews compared to his predecessors. Little of that hostility was evident at the news conference, but the questions he faced were still pointed.

Have you spent time thinking about what an election loss would mean for his legacy? Is Vice President Harris ready to serve as president? How can you say you'd be able to handle the rigors of the job in two or three years? How can you reassure Americans that there won't be more bad nights like the debate? Are you open to taking more cognitive tests?

ABC's George Stephanopoulos bored in on the same issues during their prime-time interview last week, and NBC's Lester Holt is likely to do the same with their interview scheduled for Monday.

Assessments across the media spectrum

Some of the immediate pundit reaction on live newscasts was as expected: MSNBC's Joy Reid suggested gaffes like mixing up a name aren't likely to hurt Biden, because they're what people who know him have come to expect. On Fox, Republican Sen. Lindsey Graham said, "it was hard to watch. It was a car wreck."

"How much is it gonna take?" Fox News' Jesse Watters said. "Is this guy that pain-tolerant that he can withstand this type of beating from now until the convention?"

Yet Fox's Martha MacCallum said, "I think he was able to get out there and do fairly well given how low the bar has become."

David Axelrod, a former aide to President Barack Obama who has angered some on the Biden team with candid assessments of the campaign as a commentator on CNN, said he didn't think the news conference was likely to change too many minds.

"The issue really isn't about his record or history," Axelrod said. "It's about his ability to move forward. And when he was asked those questions, he really didn't have a great answer for what people should expect in the future."

The debate had been over for mere minutes — on some networks, just seconds — before pundits and reporters began talking about how that discussion will continue.

Western envoys criticize South Sudan security bill that could allow warrantless detentions

By DENG MACHOL Associated Press

JUBA, South Sudan (AP) — The U.S. and other western governments criticized a controversial security bill in South Sudan that would allow the government to detain people without warrants, saying it would undermine open political and civic space ahead of the country's elections.

The security bill, which passed parliament July 3, has threatened the collapse of ongoing peace talks and prompted fears of arbitrary arrests ahead of the country's first-ever elections on Dec. 22. President Salva Kiir has 30 days to approve or veto the law.

Nine western envoys, including representatives of the U.S. and Britain, said Wednesday that the signing of the bill would "constitute a significant step away from the opening of political and civic space, which is a prerequisite for genuine and peaceful elections to take place."

The diplomats said South Sudanese should have the right to participate freely in political and civic expression without fear of arbitrary arrest or intimidation by security personnel.

In a statement issued Wednesday, U.S. State Department spokesperson Mathew Miller Wednesday said that the transitional government in South Sudan must act with urgency to create an environment in which the people can express their views openly and without fear.

"Enactment of this law would further degrade political and civic space in South Sudan," the statement read.

The law has also proved to be a sticking point in talks between the government and opposition groups that were not part of a 2018 peace agreement that ended the five-year civil war in which nearly 400,000 people died.

U.N. Commission on Human Rights in South Sudan chair Yasmin Sooka said the security bill should be returned to legislators to "work on amendments that align with the government's commitment to scrap this institution's arrest powers, which are systematically abused and unlawful."

The Commission has reported human rights violations by South Sudanese security agencies that include illegal detentions during which victims have been tortured, with many having died in detention.

"As South Sudan prepares for its first elections since independence, the citizenry must be able to exercise their civil and political rights without fear of retribution," said commission member Barney Afako.

In February, South Sudan acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which includes protection from arbitrary arrest and detentions, and requires that anyone arrested or detained be brought promptly before a judge.

But the country, which is Eastern Africa's youngest nation, has a fragile judiciary.

Commissioner Carlos Castresana Fernández said the "courts lack independence, are chronically under-resourced, and thus unable to protect citizens against arbitrary detentions."

Thousands mark 1995 Srebrenica genocide which is denied by Serbs, fueling ethnic tensions in Bosnia

By ELDAR EMRIC Associated Press

SREBRENICA, Bosnia-Herzegovina (AP) — Thousands of people from Bosnia and abroad gathered in Srebrenica on Thursday for the annual ritual of commemorating the 1995 genocide which Serb officials continue to deny, fueling ethnic tensions and deep divisions within the war-ravaged state.

Twenty-nine years after they were murdered in Europe's only acknowledged genocide since the Holocaust, the bodies of 13 men and one teenage boy were laid to rest Thursday at a vast and ever-expanding memorial cemetery just outside Srebrenica, in eastern Bosnia. They join more than 6,600 massacre victims already reburied there.

Ajla Efendic buried two of her uncles on Thursday.

"Two older men who were not carrying weapons, two men who were defenseless," she said. "My

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 61 of 96

grandfather, a pensioner, who did not pose any danger to anyone was also killed. His body was found in a mass grave."

More than 8,000 Bosniak Muslims were estimated to have been killed in the shooting spree by the Bosnian Serb army and police over several days in July 1995.

Relatives of the victims can bury only partial remains of their loved ones as they are typically found scattered over several different mass graves, sometimes miles (kilometers) apart.

The Srebrenica killings were the bloody crescendo of Bosnia's 1992-95 war, which came after the breakup of Yugoslavia unleashed nationalist passions and territorial ambitions that set Bosnian Serbs against the country's two other main ethnic populations — Croats and Bosniaks, who are mostly Muslim.

The commemoration Thursday came only weeks after the United Nations General Assembly voted to designate July 11 annually as an international day of reflection and commemoration of the 1995 Srebrenica genocide. Serbia and Bosnian Serbs strongly opposed its adoption, wrongly claiming it portrays all Serbs as "genocidal people."

Serb leaders insist the massacre is not genocide, but a "terrible crime." They have also downplayed the number of those killed.

"The genocide in Srebrenica did not happen, and if it did, there would be no need to constantly impose this topic," Bosnian Serb separatist President Milorad Dodik has repeatedly said.

President of the Board of Directors of the Srebrenica Memorial Center, Hamdija Fejzic, said that the genocide denial must stop.

"For a full 29 years, the policy of covering up and denying the genocide was carried out by those forces who designed and planned the genocide, and who for years provided shelter to those suspected and accused of the most serious war crimes," he told the gathering on Thursday.

In an op-ed piece in Bosnian media, European Union High Representative Josep Borrell said "Srebrenica remains a deep scar in the history of Europe."

"The failure to prevent this genocide is a burden we continue to bear," he wrote. "Both the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia and the International Court of Justice have indisputably determined that this crime is genocide."

"We promised that we would never forget -- neither the victims, nor the lasting pain of their families and loved ones," he added. "Their memory drives us to work every day to ensure that history does not repeat itself, in a world where peace seems increasingly fragile."

On July 11, 1995, Bosnian Serbs overran a U.N.-protected safe area in Srebrenica. They separated more than 8,000 Bosniak men and boys from their wives, mothers and sisters and slaughtered them. Those who tried to escape were chased through the woods and over the mountains around the ill-fated town.

The perpetrators then dumped their victims' bodies into hastily made mass graves, which they later dug up with bulldozers, scattering the remains among other burial sites to hide the evidence of their war crimes.

The Bosnian Serb wartime political leader Radovan Karadzic and his military commander Ratko Mladic were both convicted of genocide in Srebrenica by a special U.N. war crimes tribunal in The Hague. In all, the tribunal and courts in the Balkans have sentenced close to 50 Bosnian Serb wartime officials to more than 700 years in prison for the Srebrenica killings.

However, most Serbian and Bosnian Serb officials still celebrate Karadzic and Mladic as national heroes. They continue to downplay or even deny the Srebrenica killings and offend the massacre victims and survivors.

Biden says during news conference he's going to 'complete the job' despite calls to bow out

By ZEKE MILLER, SEUNG MIN KIM, LISA MASCARO and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden used his closely watched news conference Thursday to deliver a forceful defense of his foreign and domestic policies and batted away questions about his ability to serve another four years, declaring: "I'm not in this for my legacy. I'm in this to complete the job."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 62 of 96

Early on, he made one notable flub when he bobbled a reference to Vice President Kamala Harris. But for an hour, he largely held his own under intense questioning, eschewing any suggestion that he was in decline, no longer capable of leading the nation and too old to serve another term.

It was unclear whether the performance was enough to change the dynamic that has set in: A growing number of Democratic lawmakers, donors and celebrities are calling on him to step aside — not to mention the majority of voters expressing doubts that he is up to the job — and Biden is digging in, insisting he's staying in the race and will win come November. And the longer the infighting continues, the less the Democrats are presenting a united front against Republican Donald Trump.

"If I slow down and I can't get the job done, that's a sign that I shouldn't be doing it," Biden said. "But there's no indication of that yet — none."

Yet even as he wrapped his news conference, the 81-year-old leader was confronting calls to step aside. In a statement released shortly after he walked offstage, Connecticut Rep. Jim Himes, the top Democrat on the House Intelligence Committee, said Biden should end his candidacy, considering his "remarkable legacy in American history." Fifteen other House Democrats have called on him to make way for a new candidate.

Vintage Biden during the news conference

Biden said he was willing to take another neurological assessment before the election, but only if his doctors recommended it. His last exam was in January and the results of it were released in February.

In his first exchange with reporters, Biden was asked about losing support among many of his fellow Democrats and unionists, and was asked about Vice President Kamala Harris. Biden was at first defiant, saying the "UAW endorsed me, but go ahead," meaning the United Auto Workers. But then he mixed up Harris and Trump, saying, "I wouldn't have picked Vice President Trump to be vice president if she wasn't qualified."

Trump weighed in live on Biden's news conference with a post on his social media network of a video clip of the president saying "Vice President Trump."

Trump added sarcastically, "Great job, Joe!"

Most of news conference was vintage Biden: He gave long answers on foreign policy and told well-worn anecdotes. He used teleprompters for his opening remarks on NATO, which ran about eight minutes. Then the teleprompters lowered and he took a wide range of questions from 10 journalists about his mental acuity, foreign and domestic policy and — mostly — the future of his campaign.

"I believe I'm the best qualified to govern and I think I'm the best qualified to win," Biden said, adding that he will stay in the race until his staff says there's no way he can win.

"No one's saying that," he said. "No poll says that."

Biden has explained away his June 27 debate performance as a bad night following a grueling month of international travel. Since then, he's been out in public more, talking with voters and answering reporters' questions. He even looks considerably less pale than he did two weeks ago.

"I'm determined on running but I think it's important that I allay fears — let them see me out there," Biden said.

But his campaign on Thursday acknowledged he is behind, and a growing number of the president's aides in the White House and the campaign privately harbor doubts that he can turn things around.

But they're taking their cues from Biden, expressing that he is in 100% unless and until he isn't, and there appears to be no organized internal effort to persuade the president to step aside. His allies were aware heading into the week that there would be more calls for him to step down, and they were prepared for it. But they felt like he met the moment Thursday, and demonstrated to lawmakers and the public he could do the job even though he's not known as a polished speaker.

The news conference extended into prime-time television coverage, and the major TV networks broke into programming for it, meaning millions of Americans were likely to have seen it.

Campaign acknowledges president is behind but sees path to win

Earlier, Biden's campaign laid out what it sees as its path to keeping the White House in a new memo,

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 63 of 96

saying that winning the "blue wall" states of Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan is the "clearest pathway" to victory.

The memo sought to brush back "hypothetical polling of alternative nominees" as unreliable and said such surveys "do not take into account the negative media environment that any Democratic nominee will encounter."

Meanwhile, the campaign has been quietly surveying voters on Harris to determine how she's viewed among the electorate, according to two people with knowledge of the campaign who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to talk about internal matters.

The people said the polling was not necessarily to show that she could be the nominee in Biden's place, but rather to better understand how she's viewed. The research came after Trump stepped up his attacks against Harris following the debate, according to another person familiar with the effort. The survey was first reported by The New York Times.

The other major flub of the day

His other major flub of the day came before the press conference, while announcing a compact that would bring together NATO countries to support Ukraine. Biden referred to the nation's leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy as "President Putin" to audible gasps in the room. He quickly returned to the microphone: "President Putin — he's going to beat President Putin ... President Zelenskyy," Biden said.

Then he said, "I'm so focused on beating Putin," in an effort to explain the gaffe.

"I'm better," Zelenskyy replied. "You're a hell of a lot better," Biden said back.

Biden campaign meets with senators

In an effort to bring together anxious lawmakers with Biden's team, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer organized a meeting to discuss concerns and the path forward, but some senators grouched they would prefer to hear from the president himself. In the Senate, only Peter Welch of Vermont has so far called for Biden to step out of the race.

The 90-minute conversation with the president's team, which one person said included no new data, polling or game plan on how Biden would beat Trump, did not appear to change senators' minds. The person was granted anonymity to discuss the closed door session.

The meeting was frank, angry at times and also somewhat painful, since many in the room know and love Biden, said one senator who requested anonymity to discuss the private briefing. Senators confronted the advisers over Biden's performance at the debate and the effect on Senate races this year.

One Democrat, Sen. Chris Murphy of Connecticut, said afterward: "My belief is that the president can win, but he's got to be able to go out and answer voters' concerns. He's got to be able to talk to voters directly over the next few day."

At the same time, influential senators are standing strongly with Biden, leaving the party at an impasse.

Sen. Bernie Sanders, the Vermont independent, told the AP he thinks Biden "is going to win this election. I think he has a chance to win it big."

Sanders said he has been publicly critical of the campaign, and said Biden needs to talk more about the future and his plans for the country. "As we come closer to Election Day, the choices are very clear," he said.

World population is projected to grow from 8.2 billion to a peak of 10.3 billion in 2080s, UN says

By EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — The world's population is expected to grow by more than 2 billion people in the next decades and peak in the 2080s at around 10.3 billion, a major shift from a decade ago, a new report by the United Nations said Thursday.

The report — released on World Population Day — says the global population is then expected to decline to around 10.2 billion by the end of the century.

John Wilmoth, head of the U.N. Population Division which prepared the report, said the probability that the world's population will peak within the current century is quite high — about 80%.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 64 of 96

"This is a major change compared to the United Nations projections from a decade earlier when the estimated probability the global population would reach a maximum, and thus the growth would come to an end during the 21st century, was around 30%," he said.

Bucknell University mathematics professor Tom Cassidy told AP that newly published research in the journal *Demography* that he co-authored also calculates that population is likely to peak before the end of the century.

According to the World Population Prospects 2024 report, the earlier-than-anticipated population peak is due to several factors, including lower fertility levels in some of the world's largest countries, especially China, whose population is projected to drop dramatically from 1.4 billion in 2024 to 633 million in 2100.

Globally, women are having an average of one fewer child than they did in 1990, the report said, and in more than half of all countries and territories, the average number of live births per woman is below 2.1. That's the level needed for a country's population to maintain its size without migration.

Nearly 20% of the world — including China, Italy, South Korea and Spain — have "ultra-low" fertility, with women having fewer than 1.4 live births, the report said. In China, the current number is just around one birth per woman, Wilmoth said.

U.N. Assistant Secretary-General for Economic Development Navid Hanif told a press conference launching the report that the expectation the world's population in 2100 will be lower than anticipated "represents a major shift compared to a decade ago, with important policy implications for the sustainability of our planet."

According to the report, in 2024 population has already peaked in 63 countries and territories, including China, Germany, Japan and Russia. In this group, the total population is projected to decline by 14% over the next 30 years.

In another 48 countries and territories — including Brazil, Iran, Turkey and Vietnam — the population is projected to peak between 2025 and 2054, the report said.

For the remaining 126 countries and territories, including the United States, India, Indonesia, Nigeria and Pakistan, the population is expected to increase through 2054, "and, potentially, to peak in the second half of the century or later."

For nine of those countries — including Angola, Central African Republic, Congo, Nigeria and Somalia — the U.N. is projecting very rapid growth, with their populations doubling between 2024 and 2054.

While these differences are striking, Wilmoth said, "it's important to understand that all populations are following a similar path."

"The differences stem from countries being at different stages of the demographic transition towards longer lives and smaller families," he said.

Wilmoth cited additional key findings in the report: Following the COVID-19 pandemic global life expectancy is rising again. By 2080, people aged 65 and older will outnumber children under 18 years of age. In some countries, immigration will be "the main driver of future growth." And gender equality and women's empowerment can help counter population growth.

The world's population has grown dramatically in the last 75 years, from an estimated 2.6 billion in 1950 to 8 billion in November 2022. Since then, it has increased by roughly 2.5% to 8.2 billion.

Kathleen Mogelgaard, president and CEO of the Washington-based Population Institute, said Thursday's new estimates underscore "an increasing demographic divide around the world."

While it identified more than 100 countries and territories whose populations have already peaked or will do so in the next 30 years, she said, it shows even more where population will keep growing, many of them among the world's poorest nations.

The U.N.'s Hanif said rapid population growth is likely to magnify the scale of investments and efforts required to eradicate poverty and hunger, ensure universal health care and education in countries facing severe economic, social and environmental challenges.

Conversely, he said, countries where fertility is low that face rapid population declines may require innovative policies to deal with labor market, social protection, and national security ramifications.

Looking ahead, the report compares the world's 10 most populous countries today with their projection

of the 10 most populous countries in 2100.

India tops both lists followed by China, though with a much smaller population at the turn of the century. The United States is in third place today but is replaced by Pakistan in 2100 and drops to sixth place -- behind Nigeria in fourth and Congo in fifth.

Right behind the U.S. in 2100 are Ethiopia, Indonesia, Tanzania and Bangladesh. Brazil, which is the seventh most populous country today drops to 12th place at the end of the century.

Wilmoth said nobody knows what the world will be like when the world population peaks in the 2080s and the population is likely to be just one part of it, "but not necessarily the largest or the determining part." "What really matters is our behaviors and the choices we make," Wilmoth said.

Trump lawyers press judge to overturn hush money conviction after Supreme Court immunity ruling

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump's lawyers are imploring a New York judge to overturn his hush money conviction and dismiss the case, arguing his historic trial was "tainted" by evidence that shouldn't have been allowed because of the Supreme Court's recent presidential immunity ruling.

In a court filing made public Thursday, the former president's lawyers expanded on their view that Manhattan prosecutors had rashly and wrongly hurried to try Trump while the high court was still considering his immunity claims.

"Rather than wait for the Supreme Court's guidance, the prosecutors scoffed with hubris at President Trump's immunity motions and insisted on rushing to trial," Trump lawyers Todd Blanche and Emil Bove wrote. They urged Judge Juan M. Merchan "to address these injustices," saying he was "duty-bound to do so in light of the Supreme Court's decision."

Trump became the first ex-president convicted of a crime when a jury found him guilty in May of falsifying records to cover up a potential sex scandal.

Trump's lawyers urged Merchan to toss out not only the jury's verdict but the indictment, which would prevent prosecutors from retrying the case.

Merchan has said he'll rule on the defense's requests on Sept. 6 and will sentence Trump on Sept. 18, "if such is still necessary."

The Manhattan district attorney's office has until July 24 to respond to the defense filing and declined comment Thursday.

The Supreme Court's July 1 immunity decision gave broad protections to presidents and insulated them from prosecution for official acts. It also restricted prosecutors from citing any official acts as evidence in trying to prove a president's unofficial actions violated the law.

The Supreme Court did not define what constitutes an official act, leaving that to lower courts.

Hours after the opinion's release, Trump's lawyers wrote a letter asking Merchan to set aside the verdict and to delay Trump's sentencing, which had been scheduled for Thursday.

Trump's trial began April 15. The Supreme Court heard arguments in the immunity case 10 days later.

Trump was convicted on 34 felony counts of falsifying business records arising from what prosecutors said was an attempt to cover up a \$130,000 hush money payment to porn actor Stormy Daniels just before the 2016 presidential election.

Daniels claims she had a sexual encounter with Trump in 2006. Trump denies it, saying at his June 27 debate with President Joe Biden, "I didn't have sex with a porn star."

He has vowed to appeal the conviction but would not be able to do so until he is sentenced.

Prosecutors said the Daniels payment was part of a broader scheme to buy the silence of people who might have gone public during the campaign with embarrassing stories alleging Trump had extramarital sex.

Trump denied any wrongdoing and said all the stories were false.

Trump's former lawyer Michael Cohen paid Daniels and was later reimbursed by Trump. Prosecutors said Cohen — with Trump's knowledge — disguised the reimbursements by submitting monthly invoices

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 66 of 96

for retainer payments as Trump's personal lawyer. Trump's company logged the payments to Cohen as legal expenses.

Trump's lawyers argue that jurors shouldn't have been allowed to hear about matters including his conversations with then-White House Communications Director Hope Hicks, nor testimony from another aide about his work practices.

Blanche and Bove also pointed to prosecutors' use of Trump's 2018 financial disclosure report, which he was required as president to file for public disclosure. A footnote on the form mentioned that Trump reimbursed Cohen in 2017 for unspecified expenses the year before.

The defense wrote that prosecutors tried "to assign a criminal motive" to some actions Trump took while in office — by arguing, for example, that some of his 2018 tweets were part of a "pressure campaign" to keep Cohen from turning on him.

The Supreme Court's decision "forecloses inquiry into those motives," the defense argued.

Jurors were shown multiple 2018 Trump tweets about Cohen, which prosecutors portrayed as efforts to pressure Cohen not to cooperate with authorities and then punish him when he did.

In Thursday's filing, Trump's lawyers countered that the tweets were "communications with the American people regarding matters of public concern bearing on President Trump's credibility as the commander-in-chief."

The question of what jurors are entitled to hear about a president's conduct divided even the conservative members of the Supreme Court responsible for the majority opinion.

Justice Amy Coney Barrett, in a separate concurrence, wrote that the Constitution does not require juries to be blinded "to the circumstances surrounding conduct for which Presidents can be held liable" and suggested that it would needlessly "hamstring" a prosecutor's case to exclude from trial "any mention of the official act" in question.

Trump's lawyers had previously invoked presidential immunity in a failed bid last year to get the hush money case moved from state court to federal court.

U.S. District Judge Alvin Hellerstein rejected Trump's claim that allegations in the hush money indictment involved official duties, writing in July 2023, "The evidence overwhelmingly suggests that the matter was a purely a personal item of the president — a cover-up of an embarrassing event."

Later, Trump's lawyers sought to delay the hush money trial until the Supreme Court ruled on his immunity claim. Merchan denied the request, declaring it untimely because it came well after a deadline for pretrial motions.

Trump's lawyers never raised presidential immunity as a defense in the hush money trial, but they tried unsuccessfully to prevent prosecutors from showing the jury evidence from his time in office.

The ongoing immunity fight and ensuing sentencing delay have spared Trump the damage of a potential prison sentence, probation, fine or other punishments just days before he is to accept the Republican nomination for president at the party's convention next week in Milwaukee.

The postponement avoided the potential split screen of Trump being sentenced while Democrats continued to debate President Joe Biden's viability as a reelection candidate after his dismal debate performance last month.

Falsifying business records is punishable by up to four years behind bars. Other potential sentences include probation, a fine or a conditional discharge that would require Trump to stay out of trouble to avoid additional punishment.

If Trump were to be sentenced to jail or prison, he could be allowed to remain free while he appeals. Because it is a state case, Trump would not be able to pardon himself if he were to be elected president again. Presidential pardons apply only to federal crimes.

Zelenskyy says to win the war, US needs to lift limits on striking military targets inside Russia

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Thursday embraced the support of allies who have provided substantial new military aid and a path to joining NATO, even as he emphatically pushed for the help to arrive faster and for restrictions to be lifted on the use of U.S. weapons to attack military targets inside Russia.

"If we want to win, if we want to prevail, if we want to save our country and to defend it, we need to lift all the limitations," Zelenskyy said alongside NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg in the final hours of a summit that saw Ukraine receive fresh commitments of weapons and other support to firm up its defense against Russia.

The summit unfolded against the backdrop of a tumultuous American political cycle, with mounting angst among Democrats about President Joe Biden's ability to serve another four years following a shocking debate flop two weeks ago that threw the future of his presidency into doubt.

An untimely verbal flub Thursday evening did little to soothe concerns, when Biden at an event for the unveiling of an agreement called the Ukraine Compact mistakenly introduced Zelenskyy as Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Some in the room gasped at Biden's gaffe, which the U.S. president quickly sought to clean up by saying, "President Putin? You're going to beat President Putin," Biden said to Zelenskyy. "I'm so focused on beating Putin, we got to worry about it."

New British Prime Minister Keir Starmer and French President Emmanuel Macron declined to criticize Biden. Macron said "we can all have a slip of the tongue" and said Biden, with whom he spoke during Wednesday's dinner, "is very much on top of things." And Starmer declined at least five times to answer directly about Biden's gaffe, instead praising him for his leadership and his preparation in putting the event together and securing solid outcomes for Ukraine.

All eyes were on Biden as he closed out the summit of 32 NATO leaders in Washington with a news conference.

Asked about Zelenskyy's appeal for greater freedom in targeting Russian forces, Biden showed no sign of easing the U.S. limits, saying he was following the advice of his defense and intelligence officials.

"If he had the capacity to strike Moscow, strike the Kremlin, would that make sense?" Biden said of Zelenskyy. He later added, "We're making it on a day-to-day basis ... how far they should go in" to Russian territory.

Ukraine has been the primary focus for European and North American leaders at the summit of the 75-year-old military alliance, with Biden earlier in the day announcing a new military aid package and pledging to Zelenskyy: "We will stay with you, period."

Though Zelenskyy offered public thanks for the package and a promise by NATO leaders that Ukraine is now on an "irreversible path" to membership in the military alliance, he also sounded an alarm: Ukraine cannot win the war with Russia, now in its third year, unless the U.S. ends limits on the use of its weapons to attack military targets in Russia.

The Biden administration permits Ukraine to fire weapons into Russian territory only for the purpose of hitting back against Russian forces that are attacking or preparing to attack them, concerned that the broader use of American-made weaponry could provoke Russia to widen the war.

Zelenskyy has been pressing for greater latitude so that U.S. weapons could be used to hit critical military bases and installations deeper in Russian territory.

The calls to drop the restrictions have grown in recent months, in the wake of Russian military gains during months in which political battles in the U.S. delayed vital military support for Ukraine.

Stoltenberg and Macron have championed Ukraine's efforts to win more leeway in how it can use U.S.-provided arms. If we tell Ukrainians "you do not have the right to reach the point from which the missiles are fired, we are in fact telling them that we are delivering weapons to you, but you cannot defend

yourself," Macron said in May.

At a one-on-one meeting with Zelenskyy, Biden touted the aid package as his eighth since taking office, with this latest one consisting of \$225 million of support, including an additional Patriot missile system to bolster Ukraine's air defenses against a deadly onslaught of Russian airstrikes.

The Patriot air defense system, the second the U.S. has provided to Ukraine, is one of several announced this week at the NATO summit and is part of a swell of pledges to get weapons to Ukraine to help it fend off Russian attacks, including one of the deadliest of the war this week that hit a children's hospital in Kyiv.

The devastating missile attack on the eve of the summit celebrating NATO's 75th anniversary underscored that Putin may not be ready to make peace for some time.

In a comment on NATO allies declaring that Ukraine is on an "irreversible" path to membership, Dmitry Medvedev, deputy head of Russia's Security Council, which is chaired by Putin, said Moscow should do everything to "make this irreversible path of Ukraine to NATO lead to the disappearance of either Ukraine or NATO, or better both."

While promising that Ukraine will one day be a member of the alliance, NATO leaders have said it can only join after the war with Russia and when the allies agree it has met all conditions.

In addition to the offers of more military support, NATO launched a new program to underwrite deliveries of military equipment and coordinate training for Ukraine's beleaguered armed forces. NATO members also committed to keep up current levels of military aid — about 40 billion euros (\$43.5 billion) annually — for at least a year.

The summit has also been shadowed by concerns about growing Chinese and North Korean support for Russia's invasion.

The flurry of final events at the NATO summit come a day after NATO labeled China a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war against Ukraine. China in turn accused NATO of seeking security at the expense of others and it has warned the Western military alliance not to bring the same "chaos" to Asia.

US would keep more hydropower under agreement with Canada on treaty governing Columbia River

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — The U.S. and Canada said Thursday they have agreed to update a six-decade-old treaty that governs the use of one of North America's largest rivers, the Columbia, with provisions that officials said would provide for effective flood control, irrigation, and hydropower generation and sharing between the countries.

The "agreement in principle," reached after six years of talks, provides a framework for updating the Columbia River Treaty. It calls for the U.S. to keep more of the power generated by its dams while improving cooperation between the Bonneville Power Administration, which markets power from dams in the northwestern U.S., and Canadian utilities, to help avoid blackouts.

The U.S. would pay Canada for reservoir capacity to hold back water during flood seasons, protecting downstream communities, at a rate that would begin at \$37.6 million per year and increase with inflation. And the agreement would provide Canada with more flexibility in using the water stored in its reservoirs.

"After 60 years, the Treaty needs updating to reflect our changing climate and the changing needs of the communities that depend on this vital waterway," U.S. President Joe Biden said in a written statement Thursday.

But environmental groups lamented the deal as a missed opportunity to provide more water for imperiled salmon and steelhead runs that have been decimated by dam operations in the Columbia River basin over the past century. While the original treaty ratified in 1964 was designed to cover flood control and hydropower generation, conservationists and Indigenous tribes have long argued that it should be updated to include river health and salmon restoration as a third principle.

"Our community is frustrated and disappointed today," said Joseph Bogaard, of the nonprofit Save Our Wild Salmon. "The treaty needs to be a tool to address challenges for these fish. There are benefits and

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 69 of 96

certainty for the power sector and for flood risk management, while salmon basically get status quo treatment.”

The Biden administration earlier this year brokered a \$1 billion plan to boost salmon runs in the Northwest.

The Columbia River begins in Canada but flows mostly in the U.S. on its 1243-mile (2000.41 kilometer) journey to the Pacific Ocean. It forms most of the border between Washington state and Oregon. Its tributaries account for 40% of U.S. hydropower, irrigate \$8 billion in agriculture products, and move 42 million tons of commercial cargo annually, officials noted Thursday.

The Columbia River Treaty came together after a 1948 flood washed away the Oregon community of Vanport, leaving more than 18,000 people homeless.

It provided for the construction of one dam in Montana, which flooded land in Canada, and three in British Columbia, completed between 1968 and 1973, that together more than doubled the amount of reservoir storage in the basin, providing benefits for both flood prevention and hydropower. The British Columbia dams also flooded tribal lands and retained much spring runoff that would otherwise be available for migrating salmon.

The treaty provided for what came to be known as the “Canadian Entitlement,” under which Canada receives \$250 million to \$350 million a year worth of electrical power in exchange for storing water in huge reservoirs that can be released to boost U.S. hydropower generation. The cost is higher than anticipated by the United States when the treaty was signed, and it increased prices for U.S. customers, lawmakers in the Pacific Northwest long complained.

Under the agreement announced Thursday, the U.S. will immediately reduce by 37 percent the amount of Columbia Basin hydropower it delivers to Canada, with further cuts amounting to 50 percent by 2033. BPA administrator John Hairston said Thursday that will save the agency about \$70 million next year and about \$1.2 billion over the next two decades.

“These new terms will go a long way toward helping meet the growing demand for energy in the region and avoid building unnecessary fossil fuel-based generation,” Hairston told reporters during a briefing Thursday.

U.S. Sens. Maria Cantwell, D-Washington, and Jim Risch, R-Idaho, who have pushed for updates to the treaty, called the agreement a positive step, but said they would need to review the details. Government negotiators will finalize details before the treaty is submitted to the U.S. Senate for ratification.

Indigenous tribes have long wanted the Columbia to flow more like a natural river, instead of a series of reservoirs with slow-moving water that often heat up to temperatures that kill migrating salmon.

U.S. and Canadian officials said the agreement would establish a tribal-led body that will provide recommendations on how treaty operations can better support ecosystem needs and tribal and indigenous cultural values.

In a written statement, Chief Keith Crow, of the Syilx Okanagan Nation in British Columbia, said the agreement gave him hope that one day his grandchildren might harvest salmon in the upper Columbia River region.

“We still have lots of work to do with Canada and B.C. to start addressing the past and ongoing impacts to our lands, waters and people,” Crow said.

Canada has been providing up to 1 million acre-feet of water a year to help juvenile salmon on their migration to the Pacific, with up to an additional half-million acre-feet in dry years, subject to negotiation between the countries, Bogaard, of Save Our Wild Salmon, said.

Researchers insist that the fish need 3 million to 5 million acre-feet per year released by Canada, but the agreement announced Thursday would reinforce the current amount, with the minor improvement that in dry years Canada would automatically provide the extra half-million acre-feet if available, he said.

“Salmon have suffered tremendous losses through the industrialization of the Columbia Basin’s rivers, in part, as a result of this Treaty,” Neil Brandt, executive director of WaterWatch of Oregon, said in a written statement. “A modernized Treaty must do better for salmon.”

Alec Baldwin's lawyer grills crime scene tech over search for live ammo at his shooting trial

By MORGAN LEE and ANDREW DALTON Associated Press

SANTA FE, N.M. (AP) — Alec Baldwin's defense attorney questioned a crime scene technician over what he suggested were shoddy and subpar searches for the live ammunition that ended up in the actor's revolver and killed cinematographer Halyna Hutchins.

On the second day of Baldwin's New Mexico involuntary manslaughter trial, Judge Mary Marlowe Sommer sided with the prosecution on Thursday in letting in key statements from the actor that demonstrate his knowledge of guns and the impact of blanks.

Earlier, Alex Spiro grilled Santa Fe County sheriff's technician Marissa Poppell in particular over search warrants served on a prop truck a week after the death of Hutchins on the set of the movie "Rust," and on a prop warehouse more than a month after her shooting.

The questions eventually led to Spiro asking Poppell whether police and prosecutors "were just trying to get this over with so that prosecutors could focus on Alec Baldwin?"

"No," she answered.

In assertions that would be hotly disputed and dismissed by the prosecution, defense questioning mostly centered on the searches of Seth Kenney's warehouse and a prop truck where his guns were kept in a safe. He is an Albuquerque-based ammunition and weapons supplier to "Rust," who forged a cooperative relationship with investigators in the immediate aftermath of the fatal shooting.

Spiro suggested that relationship may have been too close.

"There was a witness there who assisted in the search," Spiro said when asking about the warrant served on the truck. "A man named Seth Kenney. And not only did he assist, he actually was the one that opened the safe."

"Yes, he had the combination to it," Poppell said.

Spiro asked, "Why did law enforcement wait a week to go to the prop truck?"

"The search warrant needed to be written," Poppell replied. "I'm not sure why the time difference exactly."

Spiro responded that a search warrant for the church building set where the shooting took place was obtained in a day.

"If you can do a search warrant in one day for one thing why does it take seven days for something else?"

Spiro asked Poppell, who found a half-dozen live rounds on the set, if she was surprised to find none in the truck.

"Not necessarily," she said.

"You're finding these live rounds all over the set, right?" Spiro asked. Poppell replied yes.

"You go a week later to the prop truck, which has all the ammunition right?" Spiro asked. "And there's not a single live round there, right?"

Poppell replied "yes" to both.

"Let me ask you something," the attorney said eventually. "At any point did you become suspicious of Seth Kenney?"

Poppell answered, "No."

Kenney has not been charged with any wrongdoing. An email sent to his attorney seeking comment was not immediately returned.

Special prosecutor Kari Morrissey in her redirect questioning of Poppell sought to render irrelevant the defendant's approach by asking whether Alec Baldwin was charged with involuntary manslaughter because he brought live rounds onto the set or loaded them into his gun. Poppell answered "no" to both.

Poppell agreed there was evidence that Hannah Gutierrez-Reed — the film's armorer who has already been convicted of involuntary manslaughter in the shooting — had brought the ammunition, which she said was given to her by her father.

Morrissey's defense of Kenney's role extended into her questioning of the case's lead detective, sheriff's Cpl. Alexandria Hancock, who testified briefly at the end of the day and will likely be on the stand for

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 71 of 96

much of Friday.

"Did you ever discover any evidence throughout your entire investigation that Seth Kenney supplied live rounds to the set of 'Rust?'" Morrissey asked. Hancock said no.

The prosecution was especially contemptuous of defense questions to Poppell about bullets brought into the sheriff's department after the Gutierrez-Reed trial earlier this year by a good Samaritan who said the ammunition was the source of the round that killed Hutchins and that Kenney had duped authorities.

Spiro said that Poppell had "buried" this evidence and it had not been shared with the defense in either Baldwin's case or that of Gutierrez-Reed.

Morrissey established in her questioning that the source of the ammunition was Troy Teske, a friend of Gutierrez-Reed's father, and despite similarities was not the same size as the live rounds found on the "Rust" set, including the one that killed Hutchins.

"The ammunition that the good Samaritan Mr. Teske, close friend of Hannah Gutierrez's dad, brought to you after her conviction do you still have it?"

Poppell replied yes.

"You could bring it in here and show it to the jury and they could see for themselves that it does not match the live ammunition from the set of 'Rust?'"

Yes, the technician answered.

Spiro got Poppell to testify that it could be very difficult to tell the difference between dummy rounds made to appear as onscreen ammunition that were used on the set, and the live rounds that turned the set fatal.

It was an attempt to push back against the key assertion of prosecutors' case: that Baldwin recklessly flouted gun safety.

Hutchins' death and the wounding of director Joel Souza nearly three years ago sent shock waves through the film industry. The fatal shooting led to the felony involuntary manslaughter charge against Baldwin, the 66-year-old star of "30 Rock" and frequent host of "Saturday Night Live," that could result in up to 18 months in prison.

His wife Hilaria Baldwin, younger brother Stephen Baldwin and older sister Elizabeth Keuchler sat behind him in the gallery for each of the first two days.

Faced with threats from Russia and its Asian supporters, NATO and Indo-Pacific partners get closer

By DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Four Indo-Pacific countries attending the NATO summit issued a joint statement Thursday to "strongly condemn the illicit military cooperation" between Russia and North Korea, showing how the military alliance and its Pacific partners are forging closer ties to counter what they see as shared security threats.

For the third year in a row, leaders or their deputies from Japan, South Korea, New Zealand and Australia — which are not NATO members — attended the high-level meeting of the 75-year-old military alliance of European and North American countries. In Washington, they launched cooperative projects on Ukraine, disinformation, cybersecurity and artificial intelligence.

"We will address our shared security challenges, including Russia's war against Ukraine, China's support for Russia's war economy and the growing alignment of authoritarian powers," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said when meeting officials of the four Pacific partners. "We must work even more closely together to preserve peace and protect the rules-based international order."

"Our security is not regional. It is global," he said.

The White House said it welcomed the attendance of the four Indo-Pacific countries at the NATO meeting because the threats and challenges among the regions are interconnected.

In an interview with the South Korean news agency Yonhap, Deputy Secretary of State Kurt Campbell said Washington wants to "institutionalize" the grouping of the four countries as Washington refocuses

its attention in the region.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol told fellow leaders that solidarity among like-minded countries has become more important than ever when facing interlinked challenges such as the war in Ukraine and provocations from Pyongyang.

He said South Korea welcomed an airworthiness certification from NATO for Korean aircraft, which he said would ensure "mutual military compatibility."

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said he would promote a foundation for a "long, lasting collaboration" between NATO and its Indo-Pacific partners.

Kishida told reporters that Japan and NATO would "reinforce" procedures for sharing highly sensitive intelligence and that Japan would conduct a joint exercise with NATO in the Euro-Atlantic region, according to Japanese broadcaster NHK.

New Zealand signed a partnership program with NATO, though details were not immediately known. Stoltenberg wrote on the social platform X that it would take the cooperation between New Zealand and the transatlantic alliance to "unprecedented levels."

The Australian government announced its largest single military assistance package, worth nearly \$250 million Australian dollars (\$167 million U.S.), for Ukraine.

"The delivery of highly capable air defense capabilities and air-to-ground precision munitions represents Australia's largest single support package for Ukraine, and will make an enormous contribution to its efforts to end the conflict on its terms," said Australian Deputy Prime Minister Richard Marles, who met Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy along with other leaders from the Indo-Pacific region.

China, which NATO on Wednesday called out as a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war efforts, has opposed NATO's reach into the Indo-Pacific region. It harms China's interests and disrupts peace and stability in the region, said Lin Jian, a Chinese foreign ministry spokesman.

"Don't bring instability to the Asia-Pacific after it has done so to Europe," he said Thursday.

But it is Russia's invasion of Ukraine, North Korea's growing alliance with Russia, and China's role as the main supplier of dual-use technology to Russia that are driving the cooperation between the 32 NATO member countries and the four Indo-Pacific nations, said Kenneth Weinstein, the Japan chair at the Washington-based think tank Hudson Institute.

The growing partnerships, he said, are "key to bolstering deterrence."

He was orphaned in the Holocaust and never met any family.

Now he has cousins, thanks to DNA tests

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

NORTH CHARLESTON, S.C. (AP) — Shalom Korai never knew his real name or his birthday. He was saved from the streets of a burning Warsaw neighborhood while he was a toddler during World War II, when the rest of his family was killed by Nazis in Poland.

He grew up and lived in Israel with no idea of his past. He never knew a hug from someone who shared his blood or his DNA — until Wednesday, when Korai walked off an airplane in South Carolina and into the arms of Ann Meddin Hellman. Her grandfather was the brother of Korai's grandfather, making them second cousins.

It's a story that would have been impossible without modern DNA science and without a genetic test that Korai was given by a psychologist who studies children orphaned in the Holocaust.

Hellman's ancestors came to the U.S. while Korai's family stayed behind in Poland to run a family business. They would decades later be among the 6 million Jewish men, women and children systematically killed by the Germans in World War II.

"I feel like I've given somebody a new life. He's become my child. I have to protect him and take care of him," Hellman said, although she is a few years younger than Korai, who is about 83.

She beamed and gave Korai another hug as they waited for his luggage so they could start several days

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 73 of 96

of parties with dozens of other relatives at Hellman's Charleston home.

Korai, who speaks mostly Hebrew, couldn't stop smiling even if he didn't quite understand the hubbub of camera crews and Southern hospitality swirling around him. He and Hellman spoke often since the DNA breakthrough, first in letters and later on video calls several times a week.

As Hellman waited at the end of the jetway, she nervously spoke to her brother and sister. "I can't wait to get my arms around him," she said.

What is known of Korai's story started with him alone. He was on a street in a burning Jewish ghetto in Warsaw in 1943 when a policeman scooped him up and took him to a convent. Nuns baptized him and started to raise him as a gentile with several other orphaned children.

Lena K uchler-Silberman, a Jewish woman who was part of the resistance against the Nazis, heard of the children. She saved around 100 Jewish children, sometimes taking them in as she found them abandoned or alone or sometimes negotiating or paying to take them out of non-Jewish orphanages.

Korai was taken to a Jewish boarding school in Poland, then to France and eventually to Israel in 1949. He spent 35 years working on semi-trucks. Korai had three children and eight grandchildren. And he put out of his mind that he would never know his actual birthday, the name given to him at birth, how his father and mother met or what his grandfathers did for a living.

"You can't start searching for something you know nothing about," Korai said in Hebrew to the website for MyHeritage, the company whose DNA testing helped find his relatives.

MyHeritage offered Korai and other Holocaust orphans DNA testing in the summer of 2023. A few months later Hellman got a ping from a DNA sample she had given during her extensive research of her family tree. It was an unknown second cousin.

The name and other information was unfamiliar. On a hunch, she asked another cousin to test her DNA. It matched too. Hellman reached out to MyHeritage and requested a photo and other information. She remembers gasping when she saw Korai. He looked just like her brother.

"The picture gave it away," Hellman said.

The connection instantly fell into place. Hellman knew a branch of her family connected to her great uncle was killed during the Holocaust. Now she knew there was a survivor.

Hellman wasn't looking for anyone in particular when she took her DNA test, but sometimes wonderful surprises happen, said Daniel Horowitz, an expert genealogist at MyHeritage.

"All this family that he was always praying for came to him just like that," Horowitz said.

Some mysteries remain, thanks to the Nazi annihilation of people and many records of their existence. Hellman knows the name of Korai's aunt. "But I haven't been able to find his parents' names. That upsets me the most," she said.

Hellman has learned much about her cousin. He's shy and quiet. As Korai got off the plane Wednesday along with his travel companion and translator, Arie Bauer, he jokingly asked if he could stand behind Bauer. His friend told him to hug his family.

"It's slowly dawning on him. He's getting used to, little by little, a brand new family he didn't know about," Bauer said.

It wasn't just Hellman at the airport. More than a dozen other relatives — Hellman's brother and sister, her husband and sons, a niece, sister-in-law and cousins were there to celebrate. Dozens more were gathered at Hellman's house for more parties and gatherings.

Korai smiled as each of his relatives hugged him. In quieter moments when they talked among themselves, he looked them over.

"He'll get to see himself in them in a way he has never gotten to see himself before," Hellman said. "And we get to give a family to someone who never thought one existed."

Mother of the 'miracle baby' found crawling by a highway faces a murder charge in older son's death

LAKE CHARLES, La. (AP) — Three days after a 4-year-old boy's body was pulled from a southwest Louisiana lake, and two days after the child's 1-year-old brother was rescued while crawling beside an interstate highway, Louisiana authorities announced a murder charge against the children's mother.

Aaliyah Jack, 25 was arrested earlier this week in Mississippi on a Louisiana charge of failure to report a missing child. On Thursday, the Calcasieu Parish Sheriff's Office added charges including cruelty to a juvenile and second-degree murder. She remained in custody in Mississippi after her arrest in the city of Meridian.

It was unclear when she would be extradited. She did not appear in online booking records, and there was no information available on whether she had an attorney who could comment on her behalf. A Louisiana judge set bond at \$9.1 million, according to the sheriff's news release.

"Although we have upgraded charges on Jack, our detectives still have a lot of work to do," Calcasieu Sheriff Gary "Stitch" Guillory said in a news release. "The investigation will continue while we wait for the autopsy results of the victim."

Authorities have not stated a suspected cause of death for the 4-year-old.

Guillory said at a Tuesday news conference that the baby was covered with insect bites but otherwise appeared in good condition. Guillory called the boy a "miracle baby," having been spotted crawling in a ditch beside Interstate 10 after two days alone in sometimes stormy weather.

Authorities had recovered the dead child's body Monday after getting a report of a body in a lake behind a Louisiana welcome center. An investigation led police to search for Jack, who was arrested in Meridian while the search continued for her missing baby. Workers were preparing to search the water behind the welcome center Tuesday morning when a 911 call came in from a truck driver who spotted the baby, Guillory said.

'We have nothing': Palestinians return to utter destruction in Gaza City after Israeli withdrawal

SHIJAIYAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinians returned to breathtaking scenes of destruction in the Gaza City district of Shijaiyah after Israeli troops withdrew, ending a two-week offensive there. Civil defense workers said Thursday that so far, they had found the bodies of 60 people in the rubble.

Families who fled the assault ventured back into Shijaiyah to see the condition of their homes or salvage whatever they could.

Nearly every building was flattened to rubble for block after block, leaving giant piles of concrete and twisted rebar. Here and there, grey gutted concrete frames still stood a few stories high. The ever-present buzzing sound of Israeli military drones hung in the hot summer air as people on bicycles or horse-drawn carts made their way over dirt paths where the streets had apparently been bulldozed away.

Sharif Abu Shanab found his family's four-story building collapsed. "I can't enter it. I can't take anything out of it, not even a can of tuna. We have nothing, no food or drink," he said.

Since fleeing the district, his family sleeps in the streets, he said. "Where do we go and to whom? ... We have no home or anything," he said in despair. "There's only one solution, hit us with a nuclear bomb and relieve us of this life."

The Israeli military has invaded Shijaiyah several times in the nine-month war against Hamas militants in Gaza. Its latest assault began in late June, when it said it was pursuing militants who had regrouped in the district. The assault sent some 80,000 people fleeing Shijaiyah, most into nearby areas, and it is not known how many people remained in the district during the fighting.

The Israeli military said in a statement Wednesday evening that its operations in Shijaiyah had ended. It said its troops had killed dozens of militants and destroyed eight tunnels in the area. Those claims could not be independently confirmed.

Gaza's Civil Defense organization said that during Israel's offensive, its emergency crews had largely been unable to respond to calls for help from residents in destroyed buildings. After the Israeli pullout, its crews entered and recovered 60 bodies, it said, adding that the search was ongoing. More bodies were believed buried under rubble, but the organization has little heavy equipment to clear debris.

The United Nations estimated earlier this week that about 300,000 Palestinians were still in northern Gaza, after much of the population left earlier in the war. Most of Gaza's 2.3 million people are now experiencing widespread hunger while crammed into squalid tent camps.

Israel launched the war in Gaza after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack in which militants stormed into southern Israel, killed some 1,200 people — mostly civilians — and abducted about 250. Since then, Israeli ground offensives and bombardments have killed more than 38,300 people in Gaza, according to the territory's Health Ministry. It does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count.

The top United Nations court has ordered Israel to take steps to protect Palestinians as it examines genocide allegations against Israeli leaders. Israel denies the charge.

US sanctions a Venezuela gang for spreading criminal activity across Latin America

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — The Biden administration on Thursday sanctioned a Venezuelan gang allegedly behind a spree of kidnappings, extortion and other violent crimes tied to migrants that have spread across Latin America and the United States.

The U.S. also offered a \$12 million reward for the arrest of three leaders of Tren de Aragua, which now joins the MS-13 gang from El Salvador and the Mafia-styled Camorra from Italy on a list of transnational criminal organizations banned from doing business in the U.S.

"Tren de Aragua poses a deadly criminal threat across the region," the U.S. Treasury Department said in a statement, adding that it often preys on vulnerable populations such as migrant women and girls for sex trafficking.

"When victims seek to escape this exploitation, Tren de Aragua members often kill them and publicize their deaths as a threat to others," the statement added.

The Tren de Aragua traces its origins to more than a decade ago, to an infamously lawless prison in the central state of Aragua where a number of hardened criminals were held. But it has expanded in recent years as millions of desperate Venezuelans fled President Nicolás Maduro's rule and migrated to other parts of Latin America or the U.S.

Authorities in countries such as Colombia, Peru and Ecuador — with large populations of Venezuelan migrants — have accused the group of being behind a spree of violent crimes in a region that has long had some of the highest murder rates in the world.

Initially its focus was exploiting Venezuelan migrants through loan sharking, human trafficking and the smuggling of contraband goods to and from Venezuela.

But as the Venezuelan diaspora has settled more permanently abroad, it has joined — and sometimes clashed — with homegrown criminal syndicates engaged in drug trafficking, extortion of local businesses and murders for hire.

Among the groups the Treasury Department said the gang has teamed up with is Primeiro Comando da Capital, a notorious organized crime group out of Brazil that has also been sanctioned by the U.S.

Earlier this year, prosecutors in Chile blamed the gang, whose name means "train" in Spanish, for the killing of a Venezuelan army official who had sought refuge in that country after partaking in a failed plot to overthrow Maduro.

"The Tren de Aragua is not a vertically integrated criminal structure, but rather a federation of different gangs," said Jeremy McDermott, the Colombia-based co-director of InSight Crime, which this month published a report on the gang's expansion.

"It has now become a franchise name for Venezuelan criminal structures operating in the region, with weakening coherence now that its home prison base is no more," McDermott said,

The group is led by Hector Guerrero, who was jailed years ago for killing a police officer, according to InSight Crime. Guerrero, better known by his alias El Nino, or Spanish for the "boy," later escaped and then was recaptured in 2013, returning to the prison in Aragua where the criminal enterprise was then headquartered.

He fled prison again more recently, as Venezuelan authorities tried to reassert control over its prison population.

His current whereabouts are unknown but the U.S. State Department, which has offered up to \$12 million for his arrest and that of two other gang leaders, said it believes Guerrero and Giovanni San Vicente, another target of the U.S. bounty, are believed to be living in Colombia.

Sen. Marco Rubio, a Florida Republican who co-chairs the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, has warned that if left unchecked, the Tren de Aragua could also start terrorizing American cities.

Among the nearly 1 million Venezuelan migrants that have crossed into the U.S. in recent years are suspected gang members tied to police shootings, human trafficking and other crimes although there's no evidence that the gang has set up an organizational structure in the U.S., McDermott said.

"Now we are seeing evidence that they have made it into the United States. Every single day, we're seeing reports from Chicago, South Florida, and New York that these gang members are here," Rubio said at a Senate hearing in April.

The White House, in a statement on Thursday said the Department of Homeland Security has implemented enhanced screening to vet and better identify known or suspected gang members, including Tren de Aragua members.

Maduro's government has accused opponents of exaggerating the reach of Tren de Aragua to tarnish its reputation and said that authorities dismantled the group last year when security forces retook control of the prison that had served as its hub of illicit activity.

Hours after the U.S. sanctioned the gang, the government announced that a brother of the gang's leader, who was arrested in Barcelona earlier this year, arrived home pursuant to a Venezuelan extradition request to Spain.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab said that Gerso Guerrero, who was arrested earlier this year in Barcelona, faces up to 30 years in prison — the maximum in Venezuela — on multiple criminal charges including extortion, money laundering, weapons trafficking and terrorism.

Marathon Oil reaches \$241 million settlement with EPA for environmental violations in North Dakota

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

The federal government announced a \$241.5 million settlement with Marathon Oil on Thursday for alleged air quality violations at the company's oil and gas operations on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota.

The Environmental Protection Agency and Department of Justice said the settlement requires Marathon to reduce climate- and health-harming emissions from those facilities and will result in over 2.3 millions tons worth of pollution reduction.

"This historic settlement — the largest ever civil penalty for violations of the Clean Air Act at stationary sources — will ensure cleaner air for the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation and other communities in North Dakota, while holding Marathon accountable for its illegal pollution," said Attorney General Merrick Garland.

Marathon officials did not immediately respond to a request for comment. Houston-based Marathon operates 169 well pads in North Dakota, where the company extracts oil and natural gas. A proposed consent decree for implementing the settlement says the company does not admit any liability over the allegations, but that the two sides agree it will avoid litigation and serve the public interest.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 77 of 96

A spokesperson for the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation based at the Fort Berthold Reservation did not immediately respond to a request for comment either.

While Marathon is the country's 22nd-largest oil producer based on 2022 data, the federal agencies said, it's also the seventh-largest emitter of greenhouse gas emissions in the oil and gas industry. Much of its emissions come from flaring, the industry practice of burning waste gases, including methane, which the EPA says is 25 times more potent of a contributor to climate change than carbon dioxide. While flaring burns off methane and other pollutants, it's not completely efficient, so significant quantities still get released into the atmosphere, which the agencies said can have health impacts on nearby communities.

The settlement is part of an EPA climate change enforcement initiative that focuses in part on reducing methane emissions from oil and gas production and from landfills.

It calls for Marathon to eliminate the equivalent of over 2.25 million tons of carbon-dioxide emissions over the next five years, which the agencies said was tantamount to taking 487,000 cars off the road for one year, and will also eliminate nearly 110,000 tons of volatile organic compound emissions, which contribute to asthma and other respiratory diseases.

"This settlement is a major win for the health and future of our Tribal communities, including people and families who are often overburdened by pollution," said KC Becker, the EPA's regional administrator. "As a result of the agreement, Marathon has and will continue to take comprehensive measures to come into compliance and reduce harmful emissions across hundreds of production sources. These investments will improve air quality and reduce respiratory illnesses across the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation and western North Dakota."

The agencies said the case is the first of its kind against an oil and gas producer for "violations of major source emissions permitting requirements under the Clean Air Act's Prevention of Significant Deterioration program." They also said the \$64.5 million civil penalty Marathon must pay is the largest-ever penalty imposed for "stationary source violations," which include facilities such as oil and gas tank systems.

The settlement is the largest of 12 similar efforts by the Biden administration to target emissions from the oil and gas industry, with a penalty that's more than double the 11 previous settlements combined, according to David Uhlmann, EPA assistant administrator for the Office of Enforcement and Compliance Assurance.

Marathon also agreed to invest \$177 million in extensive compliance measures, much of it by the end of the year, that the agencies said will "significantly reduce" harmful emissions from 169 existing facilities on state land and on the reservation, as well as at new facilities built in North Dakota.

The settlement is part of a complaint and proposed consent decree officially filed Thursday in federal court in North Dakota. The complaint alleges that Clean Air Act violations at nearly 90 Marathon facilities resulted in thousands of tons of illegal pollution. And it alleges that Marathon submitted artificially low estimates of its emissions to avoid permitting requirements.

The consent decree is subject to a 30-day public comment period, but the settlement was welcomed by environmental watchdogs.

"It's encouraging to see EPA holding Marathon accountable for flagrant violations of the Clean Air Act," Jen Duggan, executive director of the Environmental Integrity Project, said in a statement. "Failing to obtain permits for dozens of oil and gas operations, and releasing thousands of tons of illegal air pollution as a result, is irresponsible and endangers air quality, public health and the global climate. These penalties, along with requirements to reduce pollution, should send a warning signal to other oil companies that don't follow the rules."

In May, ConocoPhillips said it was buying Marathon Oil in an all-stock deal valued at about \$17.1 billion. The deal, worth \$22.5 billion when including \$5.4 billion in debt, comes as energy prices have surged and big oil companies have reaped huge profits. The acquisition was expected to close by the end of the year.

In its latest financial report, Marathon said it earned \$297 million in the three-month period that ended March 31, posting revenue of \$1.55 billion.

Thursday's settlement did not appear to rattle investors. Marathon's stock closed up 1.6% Thursday. It has risen about 18% so far this year.

Two 80-something journalists tried ChatGPT. Then, they sued to protect the 'written word'

By MATT O'BRIEN AP Technology Writer

GRAFTON, Mass. (AP) — When two octogenarian buddies named Nick discovered that ChatGPT might be stealing and repurposing a lifetime of their work, they tapped a son-in-law to sue the companies behind the artificial intelligence chatbot.

Veteran journalists Nicholas Gage, 84, and Nicholas Basbanes, 81, who live near each other in the same Massachusetts town, each devoted decades to reporting, writing and book authorship.

Gage poured his tragic family story and search for the truth about his mother's death into a bestselling memoir that led John Malkovich to play him in the 1985 film "Eleni." Basbanes transitioned his skills as a daily newspaper reporter into writing widely-read books about literary culture.

Basbanes was the first of the duo to try fiddling with AI chatbots, finding them impressive but prone to falsehoods and lack of attribution. The friends commiserated and filed their lawsuit earlier this year, seeking to represent a class of writers whose copyrighted work they allege "has been systematically pilfered by" OpenAI and its business partner Microsoft.

"It's highway robbery," Gage said in an interview in his office next to the 18th-century farmhouse where he lives in central Massachusetts.

"It is," added Basbanes, as the two men perused Gage's book-filled shelves. "We worked too hard on these tomes."

Now their lawsuit is subsumed into a broader case seeking class-action status led by household names like John Grisham, Jodi Picoult and "Game of Thrones" novelist George R. R. Martin; and proceeding under the same New York federal judge who's hearing similar copyright claims from media outlets such as The New York Times, Chicago Tribune and Mother Jones.

What links all the cases is the claim that OpenAI — with help from Microsoft's money and computing power — ingested huge troves of human writings to "train" AI chatbots to produce human-like passages of text, without getting permission or compensating the people who wrote the original works.

"If they can get it for nothing, why pay for it?" Gage said. "But it's grossly unfair and very harmful to the written word."

OpenAI and Microsoft didn't return requests for comment this week but have been fighting the allegations in court and in public. So have other AI companies confronting legal challenges not just from writers but visual artists, music labels and other creators who allege that generative AI profits have been built on misappropriation.

The chief executive of Microsoft's AI division, Mustafa Suleyman, defended AI industry practices at last month's Aspen Ideas Festival, voicing the theory that training AI systems on content that's already on the open internet is protected by the "fair use" doctrine of U.S. copyright laws.

"The social contract of that content since the '90s has been that it is fair use," Suleyman said. "Anyone can copy it, recreate with it, reproduce with it. That has been freeware, if you like."

Suleyman said it was more of a "gray area" in situations where some news organizations and others explicitly said they didn't want tech companies "scraping" content off their websites. "I think that's going to work its way through the courts," he said.

The cases are still in the discovery stage and scheduled to drag into 2025. In the meantime, some who believe their professions are threatened by AI business practices have tried to secure private deals to get technology companies to pay a fee to license their archives. Others are fighting back.

"Somebody had to go out and interview real people in the real world and conduct real research by poring over documents and then synthesizing those documents and coming up with a way to render them in clear and simple prose," said Frank Pine, executive editor of MediaNews Group, publisher of dozens of newspapers including the Denver Post, Orange County Register and St. Paul Pioneer Press. Several of the chain's newspapers sued OpenAI in April.

"All of that is real work, and it's work that AI cannot do," Pine said. "An AI app is never going to leave

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 79 of 96

the office and go downtown where there's a fire and cover that fire."

Deemed too similar to lawsuits filed late last year, the Massachusetts duo's January complaint has been folded into a consolidated case brought by other nonfiction writers as well as fiction writers represented by the Authors Guild. That means Gage and Basbanes won't likely be witnesses in any upcoming trial in Manhattan's federal court. But in the twilight of their careers, they thought it important to take a stand for the future of their craft.

Gage fled Greece as a 9-year-old, haunted by his mother's 1948 killing by firing squad during the country's civil war. He joined his father in Worcester, Massachusetts, not far from where he lives today. And with a teacher's nudge, he pursued writing and built a reputation as a determined investigative reporter digging into organized crime and political corruption for The New York Times and other newspapers.

Basbanes, as a Greek American journalist, had heard of and admired the elder "hotshot reporter" when he got a surprise telephone call at his desk at Worcester's Evening Gazette in the early 1970s. The voice asked for Mr. Basbanes, using the Greek way of pronouncing the name.

"You were like a talent scout," Basbanes said. "We established a friendship. I mean, I've known him longer than I know my wife, and we've been married 49 years."

Basbanes hasn't mined his own story like Gage has, but he says it can sometimes take days to craft a great paragraph and confirm all of the facts in it. It took him years of research and travel to archives and auction houses to write his 1995 book "A Gentle Madness" about the art of book collection from ancient Egypt through modern times.

"I love that 'A Gentle Madness' is in 1,400 libraries or so," Basbanes said. "This is what a writer strives for -- to be read. But you also write to earn, to put food on the table, to support your family, to make a living. And as long as that's your intellectual property, you deserve to be compensated fairly for your efforts."

Gage took a great professional risk when he quit his job at the Times and went into \$160,000 debt to find out who was responsible for his mother's death.

"I tracked down everyone who was in the village when my mother was killed," he said. "And they had been scattered all over Eastern Europe. So it cost a lot of money and a lot of time. I had no assurance that I would get that money back. But when you commit yourself to something as important as my mother's story was, the risks are tremendous, the effort is tremendous."

In other words, ChatGPT couldn't do that. But what worries Gage is that ChatGPT could make it harder for others to do that.

"Publications are going to die. Newspapers are going to die. Young people with talent are not going to go into writing," Gage said. "I'm 84 years old. I don't know if this is going to be settled while I'm still around. But it's important that a solution be found."

The GOP platform calls for 'universal school choice.'

What would that mean for students?

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — National Republicans are poised to support "universal school choice" as part of the policy platform they adopt at next week's convention in Milwaukee, a goal supporters see as the culmination of decades advocating for parents' autonomy to pick their children's schools. To opponents, it's a thinly veiled blueprint for gutting public education.

The term can mean different things to different people — from erasing school boundaries, to open enrollment, to being able to curate your child's individual curriculum, to parental control over K-12 course content.

But education experts across the political spectrum interpret the GOP platform's wording as favoring the type of approach adopted in states like West Virginia and Ohio, which make available taxpayer-funded vouchers, or scholarships, that can follow a child regardless of income to any public or private school.

"In our way of thinking, this is kind of your money, your children and your choice for where they want to go to school," said Lisa B. Nelson, CEO of the American Legislative Exchange Council, which launched an Education Freedom Alliance in January to fight for just that. About a dozen states now have such pro-

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 80 of 96

grams, and proposals are in play in another 16, according to the alliance.

Nelson said this is the first time the GOP platform has gone beyond merely supporting school choice to calling for it as a universal option. It remains unclear how that would come to pass, given the platform also calls for shuttering the U.S. Department of Education, founded in 1979, and sending education policy-making "back to the States, where it belongs."

Republican Donald Trump's presidential campaign didn't immediately respond to a request for comment on the platform.

"Republicans believe families should be empowered to choose the best Education for their children," the platform says.

James Singer, a spokesperson for President Joe Biden's re-election campaign, said eliminating the department — which oversees Head Start, administers college financial aid programs, conducts education research and enforces civil rights laws — "isn't just bad policy, it would rip vital support away from our most vulnerable children, leaving them less likely to graduate from high school or attend college."

Chad Aldis, vice president for Ohio policy at the conservative Thomas B. Fordham Institute, said declaring universal school choice as a policy goal and carrying it out are two very different things.

"I think empowering families with high-quality options is the right approach, but the details on how much funding is available, whether there are income constraints, those are the types of questions that would have to be answered," he said.

State programs have faced a host of legal and practical questions as they've expanded voucher programs. The scholarships were once available only to low-income students in academically struggling districts, but they've evolved into catch-all offerings applicable to public, private, religious and charter schools. Opponents argue the expansive programs take money away from public schools that serve most of the country's students and benefit higher-income families choosing to attend expensive private or religious schools.

The Hope Scholarship Program in West Virginia survived a constitutional challenge in 2022, but the number of school districts signing onto a lawsuit against Ohio's EdChoice has ballooned since the voucher program became universal last summer.

This year's Republican plank also calls for treating "Homeschooling Families equally," which could take universality to yet another level.

Kim Anderson, executive director of the National Education Association, the nation's largest teachers union, said Republicans' plan would "throw chaos into the lives of American families" without addressing what parents tell her members are their two highest priorities: the availability of mental health services and school safety.

"Public education has been a common good in this country since its inception, and to eliminate public education puts our democracy and our economy and the fabric of a diverse, inclusive society at risk," she said.

Other policy priorities include: stripping federal funds from any school that engages in "inappropriate political indoctrination," guaranteeing that students can pray and read the Bible in school, "hardening" schools' disciplinary standards as a way of curbing violence, eliminating teacher tenure and adopting merit pay, and rejecting efforts to nationalize civics education.

Randi Weingarten, president of the American Federation of Teachers, decried the entire GOP education platform, saying it sets up "a defunding mechanism and a mechanism to give a tax break to the wealthy."

"My question to them is, what are they afraid of?" she said. "Why are they afraid of critical thinking? Why are they afraid of freedom to learn and freedom to teach? Why are they afraid of honest history? Why are they afraid of diversity?"

ALEC's Nelson said supporters of choice believe vigorous competition makes all schools better.

And calls for broadening school choice are not coming exclusively from Republicans. In Louisiana, six Democrats voted in favor of a universal school choice bill in April.

"As I watch children in poverty, trapped in failing schools, who can hardly read, I'd be damned if I will continue to defend the status quo," Democratic Rep. Jason Hughes, who represents New Orleans, opined on the floor before casting his vote.

Democrats also have voted in favor of expanded school choice in Nebraska and Pennsylvania. In Georgia, state Rep. Mesha Mainor left the party last year in part because of a differences over school vouchers.

Shelley Duvall, star of 'The Shining' and 'Nashville,' dies at 75

By JAKE COYLE AP Film Writer

Shelley Duvall, the intrepid, Texas-born movie star whose wide-eyed, winsome presence was a mainstay in the films of Robert Altman and who co-starred in Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining," has died. She was 75.

Duvall died Thursday in her sleep at home in Blanco, Texas, her longtime partner, Dan Gilroy, announced. The cause was complications from diabetes, said her friend, the publicist Gary Springer.

"My dear, sweet, wonderful life, partner, and friend left us last night," Gilroy said in a statement. "Too much suffering lately, now she's free. Fly away beautiful Shelley."

Duvall was attending junior college in Texas when Altman's crew members, preparing to film "Brewster McCloud," encountered her at a Houston party in 1970. They introduced the 20-year-old to the director, who cast her in "Brewster McCloud" and made her his protege.

Duvall would go on to appear in Altman films including "Thieves Like Us," "Nashville," "Popeye," "Three Women" and "McCabe & Mrs. Miller."

"He offers me damn good roles," Duvall told The New York Times in 1977. "None of them have been alike. He has a great confidence in me, and a trust and respect for me, and he doesn't put any restrictions on me or intimidate me, and I love him. I remember the first advice he ever gave me: 'Don't take yourself seriously.'"

Duvall, gaunt and gawky, was no conventional Hollywood starlet. But she had a beguilingly frank manner and exuded a singular naturalism. The film critic Pauline Kael called her the "female Buster Keaton."

At her peak, Duvall was a regular star in some of the defining movies of the 1970s. In "The Shining" (1980), she played Wendy Torrance, who watches in horror as her husband, Jack (Jack Nicholson), goes crazy while their family is isolated in the Overlook Hotel. It was Duvall's screaming face that made up half of the film's most iconic image, along with Jack's axe coming through the door.

Kubrick, a famous perfectionist, was notoriously hard on Duvall in making "The Shining." His methods of pushing her through countless takes in the most anguished scenes took a toll on the actor. One scene was reportedly performed in 127 takes. The entire shoot took 13 months. Duvall, in a 1981 interview with People magazine, said she was crying "12 hours a day for weeks on end" during the film's production.

"I will never give that much again," said Duvall. "If you want to get into pain and call it art, go ahead, but not with me."

Duvall disappeared from movies almost as quickly as she arrived in them. By the 1990s, she began retiring from acting and retreated from public life.

"How would you feel if people were really nice, and then, suddenly, on a dime, they turn on you?" Duvall told the Times earlier this year. "You would never believe it unless it happens to you. That's why you get hurt, because you can't really believe it's true."

Duvall, the oldest of four, was born in Fort Worth, Texas, on July 7, 1949. Her father, Robert, was a cattle auctioneer before working in law and her mother, Bobbie, was a real estate agent.

Duvall married the artist Bernard Sampson in 1970. They divorced four years later. Duvall was in a long-term relationship with the musician Paul Simon in the late '70s after meeting during the making of Woody Allen's "Annie Hall." (Duvall played the rock critic who keeps declaring things "transplendent.") She also dated Ringo Starr. During the making of the 1990 Disney Channel movie "Mother Goose Rock 'n' Roll," Duvall met the musician Dan Gilroy, of the group Breakfast Club, with whom she remained until her death.

Duvall's run in the 1970s was remarkably versatile. In the rugged Western "McCabe & Mrs. Miller" (1971), she played the mail-order bride Ida. She was a groupie in "Nashville" (1975) and Olive Oyl, opposite Robin Williams, in "Popeye" (1980). In "3 Women," co-starring Sissy Spacek and Janice Rule, Duvall played Millie Lammoreaux, a Palm Springs health spa worker, and won best actress at the Cannes Film Festival.

In the 1980s, Duvall produced and hosted a number of children's TV series, among them "Faerie Tale Theatre," "Tall Tales & Legends" and "Shelley Duvall's Bedtime Stories."

Duvall moved back to Texas in the mid-1990s. Around 2002, after making the comedy "Manna from Heaven," she retreated from Hollywood completely. Her whereabouts became a favorite topic of internet

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 82 of 96

sluths. A favorite but incorrect theory was that it was residual trauma from the grueling shoot for "The Shining." Another was that the damage to her home after the 1994 Northridge earthquake was the last straw.

To those living in Texas Hill Country, where Duvall lived for some 30 years, she was neither in "hiding" nor a recluse. But her circumstances were a mystery to both the media and many of her old Hollywood friends. That changed in 2016, when producers for the "Dr. Phil" show tracked her down and aired a controversial hourlong interview with her in which she spoke about her mental health issues. "I'm very sick. I need help," Duvall said on the program, which was widely criticized for being exploitative.

"I found out the kind of person he is the hard way," Duvall told The Hollywood Reporter in 2021.

THR journalist Seth Abramovitch wrote at the time that he went on a pilgrimage to find her because "it didn't feel right for McGraw's insensitive sideshow to be the final word on her legacy."

Duvall attempted to restart her career, dipping her toe in with the indie horror "The Forest Hills" that filmed in 2022 and premiered quietly in early 2023.

"Acting again — it's so much fun," Duvall told People at the time. "It enriches your life."

Oil tanker held by Iran for over a year heads reaches international waters, tracking data shows

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An oil tanker held by Iran for over a year after being seized amid tensions between Tehran and the United States reached international waters on Thursday, tracking data showed.

The Marshall Islands-flagged tanker Advantage Sweet traveled through the Strait of Hormuz, where it was seized in April 2023 by Iran's navy while carrying \$50 million worth of oil from Kuwait for Chevron Corp. The strait is the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of the world's oil passes.

Tracking data analyzed by The Associated Press showed the Advantage Sweet had been unloaded while in Iranian custody and that the vessel listed as its destination Khor Fakkan in the United Arab Emirates, which has been the first port of call for other ships leaving Iranian detention.

Iran did not acknowledge the ship's departure. It came after an Iranian court earlier on Thursday ordered the U.S. government to pay more than \$6.7 billion in compensation over a Swedish company stopping its supply of special dressings and bandages for those afflicted by a rare skin disorder after Washington imposed sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Iran's government initially said it seized the Advantage Sweet because it hit another vessel, something not supported by any evidence. Then Iranian officials linked the Advantage Sweet's seizure to the court case decided Thursday.

The developments follow the recent election of the reformist President-elect Masoud Pezeshkian, who has vowed to improve relations with the West.

A report by the state-run IRNA news agency described the \$6.7 billion order as being filed on behalf of 300 plaintiffs, including family members of victims and those physically and emotionally damaged. IRNA said about 20 patients died after the Swedish company's decision.

Epidermolysis bullosa is a rare genetic condition that causes blisters all over the body and eyes. It can be incredibly painful and kill those afflicted. The young who suffer from the disease are known as "butterfly children" as their skin can appear as fragile as a butterfly's wing.

The order comes as U.S. judges have issued rulings that call for billions of dollars to be paid by Iran over attacks linked to Tehran, as well as those detained by Iran and used as pawns in negotiations between the countries — something Iran has responded to with competing lawsuits accusing the U.S. of involvement in a 2017 Islamic State group attack.

The United Nations' highest court also last year rejected Tehran's legal bid to free up some \$2 billion in Iranian Central Bank assets, frozen by U.S. authorities.

In 2018, then-President Donald Trump unilaterally withdrew the U.S. from Iran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers, apparently sparking the Swedish company to withdraw from the Iranian market. Iran now says it locally produces the bandages.

Chevron, based in San Ramon, California, has maintained that the Advantage Sweet was "seized under false pretenses." It since has written off the cargo as a loss.

The withdrawal from the deal effectively ended an accord in which Tehran drastically limited its enrichment of uranium in exchange for the lifting of economic sanctions. It also sparked years of attacks and tensions on land and at sea.

The U.S. Navy has blamed Iran for a series of limpet mine attacks on vessels that damaged tankers in 2019, as well as for a fatal drone attack on an Israeli-linked oil tanker that killed two European crew members in 2021.

Tehran denies carrying out the attacks, but a wider shadow war between Iran and the West has played out in the region's volatile waters. Iranian tanker seizures have been a part of it since 2019. The last major seizure came when Iran took two Greek tankers in May 2022 and held them until November of that year.

Since then, the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels of Yemen have launched a series of attacks targeting vessels in the Red Sea corridor over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip. A new report from the U.S. military says the Houthis likely fired an Iranian-made anti-ship cruise missile at a Norwegian-flagged tanker in the Red Sea in December, an assault that now provides a public, evidence-based link between the ongoing rebel campaign against shipping and Tehran.

House rejects GOP effort to fine Attorney General Garland for refusal to turn over Biden audio

By FARNOUSH AMIRI and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The House on Thursday rejected a GOP effort to fine Attorney General Merrick Garland \$10,000 a day until he turns over audio of President Joe Biden's interview in his classified documents case as a handful of Republicans resisted taking an aggressive step against a sitting Cabinet official.

Even if the resolution, titled inherent contempt, had passed, it was unclear how the fine would be enforced as the dispute over the tape of Biden's interview with special counsel Robert Hur is now playing out in court.

The House voted 204-210, with four Republicans joining all Democrats, to halt a Republican resolution that would have imposed the fine, effectively rebuffing the latest effort by GOP lawmakers to assert its enforcement powers — weeks after Biden asserted executive privilege to block the release of the recording.

House Republican leaders were caught off guard by the failed vote, telling The Associated Press that they expected the effort to pass but that, regardless, they would continue using other tools to obtain the audio recording.

"We expected it to pass, but we've been very aggressive on enforcing the subpoena against Merrick Garland and seeking to hold him accountable," Speaker Mike Johnson said after the vote. "We are using every tool in the arsenal to ensure that he follows the law and that we can complete our constitutional responsibility."

A spokesperson for Garland said the attorney general was leading a cross-border crime forum and was unavailable for comment.

Rep. Anna Paulina Luna, R-Fla., the resolution's lead sponsors, said during debate Wednesday that "No one is above the law."

"This is not a decision that we have reached lightly, but the actions of the attorney general cannot be ignored," Luna said.

The House earlier this year made Garland the third attorney general in U.S. history to be held in contempt of Congress. But the Justice Department said Garland would not be prosecuted, citing the agency's "longstanding position and uniform practice" to not prosecute officials who don't comply with subpoenas

because of a president's claim of executive privilege.

Democrats blasted the GOP effort as another political stunt. Rep. Jim McGovern, D-Mass., said that the resolution is unjustified in the case of Garland because he has complied with subpoena.

"Their frustration is that they can't get their hands on an audio recording that they think they could turn into an RNC attack ad," McGovern said in reference to the Republican National Committee. "When you start making a mockery of things like inherent contempt you diminish this institution."

Garland himself has defended the Justice Department, saying officials have gone to extraordinary lengths to provide information to the committees about Hur's classified documents investigation, including a transcript of Biden's interview. However, Garland has said releasing the audio could jeopardize future sensitive investigations because witnesses might be less likely to cooperate if they know their interviews might become public.

House Republicans sued Garland earlier this month in an attempt to force the release of the recording.

Republicans have accused Biden of suppressing the recording because he's afraid to have voters hear it during an election year. The White House and Democratic lawmakers, meanwhile, have slammed Republicans' motives for pursuing contempt and dismissed their efforts to obtain the audio as purely political.

The congressional inquiry began with the release of Hur's report in February, which found evidence that Biden willfully retained and shared highly classified information when he was a private citizen. Yet the special counsel concluded that criminal charges were not warranted.

Republicans, incensed by Hur's decision, issued a subpoena for audio of his interviews with Biden during the spring. But the Justice Department turned over only some of the records, leaving out audio of the interview with the president.

Beyond the bitingly critical assessment of Biden's handling of sensitive government records, Hur offered unflattering characterizations of the Democratic president's memory in his report, sparking fresh questions about his competency and age that cut at voters' most deep-seated concerns about the 81-year-old seeking a second term.

Biden's press conference will be a key test for him. But he's no master of the big rhetorical moment

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden has a fresh opportunity Thursday to try to prove to the American public that he's capable of serving another four years after his shocking debate flop threw the future of his presidency into doubt. But Biden is not known as a master of the big rhetorical moment and his recent cleanup efforts have proved inadequate.

Biden, 81, will close out the NATO summit in Washington — an event meant to showcase his leadership on the world stage — with a rare solo press conference. His stamina and effectiveness are under the microscope like never before and he's struggling to quell the Democratic Party's panic about his chances this November.

By many metrics, from job growth and major legislation to the expanded transatlantic alliance, Biden can point to successes during his tenure in office. But where he has sometimes failed — spectacularly, in the case of the debate — is at a defining part of the role that isn't in the official job description: delivering inspiring oratory that commands the attention and respect of the nation.

Biden has tried to step up his performance since the debate but his follow-up interview on ABC last week was disappointing. Nothing he's tried seems to be stopping the bleeding, with more lawmakers calling for him to bow out in the face of concerns that he could hand the White House back to Republican former President Donald Trump.

Americans tend to regard their leaders less for what they do than how they make them feel, and Biden's debate disaster has shaken his party to its core.

"The debate was a reminder that you can have as many policies as you want, but what the public sees

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 85 of 96

and hears might matter more," said Julian Zelizer, a Princeton presidential historian.

Rhetoric is intertwined with the modern presidency, from Franklin D. Roosevelt's "The only thing we have to fear is fear itself" to Ronald Reagan's "Mr. Gorbachev, tear down this wall!"

It can inspire in the wake of tragedy, like George W. Bush's bullhorn speech on the smoky rubble at ground zero after the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks and help a war- and recession-weary country recover its sense of self, like Barack Obama's "Yes we can!" Even Donald Trump's "Make America Great Again" cry echoed the temperament of the agitated nation.

"People saw Trump as a reflection of a more turbulent, chaotic and angry country," Zelizer said. "Voters may see Biden's frailty as a symbol of weakness or its own kind of instability."

Biden can give a good speech — his State of the Union address earlier this year helped quiet doubters about his viability as a candidate. But his strength as a president and politician has been how his humanity in intimate settings resonated with voters, and the power of his personal narrative and down-to-earth roots.

Yet those moments, in private or before small crowds, even if amplified on social media as Biden's team hopes, are certain to reach fewer people than the tens of millions who watched his bout with Trump.

Despite a drumbeat of calls from some in his party to step aside, Biden has dug in, insisting he's the best Democrat to defeat Trump, whose candidacy he's called an existential threat to democracy.

His press conference will be closely watched for his ability to think on his feet, to demonstrate dynamism and to articulate both that he is still capable of doing the job and of winning it once more. To date, Biden has held the fewest news conferences, 37, since Ronald Reagan, who had held 25 at the same point in his presidency, according to research by Martha Kumar, a Towson University presidential scholar.

Even before the debate, Biden's victories as president have often come despite his inability to sell them to a skeptical public. Heading into his face-off with Trump he has historically low job approval ratings for an American leader. And he's been unable to overcome voters' pessimism over the direction of the country and a majority of voters in his own party had already believed him too old to effectively lead.

The debate, rather than helping Biden reset the race against Trump, confirmed voters' preestablished fears about him, said Allison Prash, a professor of rhetoric who researches presidential communications at the University of Wisconsin, Madison.

"The president is a symbol," she said, adding that Americans often look to the president as a mirror to reflect on their hopes and their fears.

"You could argue that when you see a president that appears infirm, has difficulty doing some basic tasks of the presidency, you have questions about the state of the nation," she said.

She contrasted his recent halting public comments with his message from the campaign four years ago.

"In 2020 he was promising to demonstrate confidence in the face of chaos. He was saying, 'I'm this steady force,'" Prash said. "If that's how you branded yourself and you do the opposite thing in this debate, that's exactly why this was so jarring for the public."

Biden aides and allies responded to the debate with a series of public pronouncements defending Biden's mental state and fitness for the job, notably focused on the big decisions of the Oval Office, rather than his ability to articulate them to the masses.

"I have not seen any reason whatsoever to question or doubt his lucidity, his grasp of context, his probing nature, and the degree to which he is completely in charge of facts and figures," White House National Security spokesman John Kirby said Monday.

Brett McGurk, the White House coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa and a veteran of four administrations, said he has never been concerned about Biden's decision-making.

Speaking of Biden, he told The Associated Press: "I have never seen a president who is not prepared, who is not deliberate, who is not asking rigorous questions of those in the room or of a foreign leader," adding that Biden "makes decisions sometimes which are often difficult decisions, and then actually follows up."

While Biden and his team have made a concerted effort since the debate to increase his public visibility — which had been limited by aides worried about Biden's penchant for gaffes or missteps — he has proven to be uneven and at times underwhelming.

Campaigning in Pennsylvania on Sunday, Biden delivered remarks for less than 10 minutes at a Phila-

delphia church and a Harrisburg rally, but spent three times as long taking selfies and hugging kids — the sort of feel-good content that has always bolstered his political fortunes.

A call-in interview with MSNBC's "Morning Joe" showcased Biden's defiance and distaste of party "elites" as he pledged to stay in the race. In his opening remarks at the NATO summit, Biden was forceful in defense of the alliance.

"The more he gets out there to campaign with voters, the starker the contrast and easier the choice will be for these voters: between Joe Biden, a decent man fighting for the middle class and an unhinged billionaire like Trump who wants to terminate the ACA and turn our country into a dictatorship," said campaign spokesman Kevin Munoz, referring in part to the Affordable Care Act.

But asked in the ABC News interview about how he would feel if his candidacy handed the White House back to Trump, he offered a mangled and less-than-inspiring response: "I'll feel as long as I gave it my all and I did the good as job as I know I can do, that's what this is about."

Chileans confront a homelessness crisis, a first for one of South America's richest countries

By NAYARA BATSCHE Associated Press

SANTIAGO, Chile (AP) — The presidential residence of Gabriel Boric, the leftist millennial leader of Chile elected three years ago in the wake of public unrest over income inequality, shares a street in downtown Santiago with an overwhelmed homeless shelter.

The sight of cardboard boxes and blankets strewn across sidewalks in Boric's bohemian neighborhood serves as a sharp reminder of his struggle to fulfill his promise to give Chileans "a better life."

A pandemic-induced recession combined with a housing crunch and a major immigration influx have expanded Chile's homeless population like never before. Over the last four years, the rate of homelessness in one of South America's richest economies has jumped more than 30%, transforming the streets of a country that prides itself on its prosperity.

"The resources allocated to combat homelessness have been reduced, and the homeless population has increased," said Rosario Carvajal, a city councilor in the capital, Santiago.

Even in the "barrios altos" — the well-heeled areas that presidents before Boric called home — destitute families have increasingly turned benches into beds and trees into toilets. In the beachside tourist hub of Viña del Mar, huddles of improvised tents have overshadowed the trendy art scene.

Chile said it has registered 21,126 homeless people this year, compared to 15,435 in 2020. Government figures rely on single-night snapshots by municipalities. Social workers put the real count around 40,000.

Last month, the government announced that, for the first time, it would include the homeless in its national census. Aid workers say that a better number, however flawed, will better reflect the scope of the problem and the country's progress — or lack thereof — toward fixing it.

"This should force the government to implement more effective social policies," said Andrés Millar, from Chilean charity Hogar de Cristo.

The sheer visibility of so many homeless people in Chile — a country considered far wealthier and more stable than its neighbors — has pushed the problem up on the agenda. "There is a lot of pressure from the neighbors to recover the public spaces," said Carvajal.

Chilean police, reviled by the left for their harsh handling of the mass 2019 protests, have taken to tearing down encampments, joining municipal workers in routinely removing rough sleepers from parks and plazas.

"Police come and take everything, my tent, my blankets, my HIV medication," said 43-year-old Paris López who sleeps outside in downtown Santiago. She stays up all night, she said, fearing violence from police as much as assaults from criminal gangs that have recently gained a foothold in Chile.

"It's dangerous," Victoria Azevedo, a homeless mother of two, said of life on the streets in Santiago — particularly amid a crime wave that has driven Chile's homicide rate up 50% since 2018. "If you are a woman and have children, it's worse."

In recent years, Chile has seen a demographic shift in its homeless population. Although there won't

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 87 of 96

be an official breakdown until the census comes out next year, experts say that the country's affordable housing crunch has pushed more women and children onto the streets.

"Entire families have lost their resources to pay rent," said Ximena Torres, another advocate from Hogar de Cristo.

Pandemic lockdowns wreaked hardship on Chile's economy while it was struggling to recover from the 2019 mass protests that cost the country at least \$3 billion, Chile's national insurance organization estimated.

Lavish pandemic aid — including a measure allowing Chileans to withdraw their pensions early — stoked inflation. The unemployment rate doubled to a record-breaking 13% from 2019 to 2020, making it difficult for many to pay rent. The central bank raised interest rates, lenders hiked the cost of loans and a housing crisis was born.

Housing prices jumped 70% over the last decade, said economist Gonzalo Durán from SOL Foundation, a Chilean think tank.

"I'm extremely broken inside," said Moka Valdés, bursting into tears as she tried to describe the shock of having landed on the street last November after losing her job.

Migration on the rise

Many families bouncing between Chile's tent camps are undocumented migrants lured to the country by its reputation as South America's most successful economy.

Government data shows that nearly 1.6 million of Chile's 19 million inhabitants are registered migrants, up from 1.3 million in 2018. The number of undocumented migrants has also soared, from 16,000 in 2020 to a staggering 53,875 two years later, according to the Observatory of Responsible Migration, a Chilean watchdog.

As the economy has slumped and public backlash against migrants intensified, Chile tightened visa requirements for Venezuelans — the largest group of recent arrivals. And last year President Boric deployed armed forces to the northern border with Peru, a key migration pass, to check migrants' documents and arrest smugglers.

After fleeing Venezuela and finding life as a migrant intolerable in Colombia and then Ecuador, 34-year-old Karen Salazar dreamed of Chile. Via foot and pick-up truck, Salazar, her husband and their two small children braved freezing cold mountains, rough desert terrain and predatory smugglers, lured by Chile's reputation as a rare upwardly mobile nation in the region.

They didn't find what they hoped for. At first, they lived in a flimsy tent encampment in northern Chile. Then they moved to Santiago, where they slept outside in a public park.

"We know why we're in this situation, but to see the children like this is heart-breaking," Salazar said from the shelter on Boric's street, where she queues for free meals.

As the crisis mounts, aid groups have intensified their pressure on the government. There are fewer than 200 homeless shelters nationwide, barely enough to accommodate 13% of Chile's current homeless population, said local advocate Rodrigo Ibarra Montero.

Upon taking office in March 2022, Boric vowed to build 260,000 new government-sponsored houses during his four-year term. Given the scale of the problem, many fear that will not be enough.

But the president hopes it will.

"We are making steady progress," he insisted in a recent speech inaugurating a new public housing development in Santiago. "You should judge us by the end of our term."

Demand for rare elements used in clean energy could help clean up abandoned coal mines in Appalachia

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

MOUNT STORM, W.Va. (AP) — Down a long gravel road, tucked into the hills in West Virginia, is a low-slung building where researchers are extracting essential elements from an old coal mine that they hope will strengthen the nation's energy future.

They aren't mining the coal that powered the steel mills and locomotives that helped industrialize America

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 88 of 96

— and that is blamed for contributing to global warming.

Rather, researchers are finding that groundwater pouring out of this and other abandoned coal mines contains the rare earth elements and other valuable metals that are vital to making everything from electric vehicle motors to rechargeable batteries to fighter jets smaller, lighter or more powerful.

The pilot project run by West Virginia University is now part of an intensifying worldwide race to develop a secure supply of the valuable metals and, with more federal funding, it could grow to a commercial scale enterprise.

“The ultimate irony is that the stuff that has created climate change is now a solution, if we’re smart about it,” said John Quigley, a senior fellow at the Kleinman Center for Energy Policy at the University of Pennsylvania.

The technology that has been piloted at this facility in West Virginia could also pioneer a way to clean up vast amounts of coal mine drainage that poisons waterways across Appalachia.

The project is one of the leading efforts by the federal government as it injects more money than ever into recovering rare earth elements to expand renewable energies and fight climate change by reducing planet-warming greenhouse gas emissions.

For the U.S., which like the rest of the West is beholden to a Chinese-controlled supply of these valuable metals, the pursuit of rare earth elements is also a national security priority.

Those involved, meanwhile, hope their efforts can bring jobs in clean energy to dying coal towns and clean up entrenched coal pollution that has hung around for decades.

In Pennsylvania alone, drainage from coal piles and abandoned mines has turned waterways red from iron ore and turquoise from aluminum, killing life in more than 5,000 miles (8,000 km) of streams. Federal statistics also show about 470 square miles (about 1,200 square km) of abandoned and unreclaimed coal mine lands host more than 200 million tons of coal waste.

The metals that chemists are working to extract from mine drainage here are lightweight, powerfully magnetized and have superior fluorescent and conductive properties.

One aim of the Department of Energy is to fund research that proves to private companies that the concepts are commercially viable and profitable enough for them to invest their own money.

Hundreds of millions of dollars from President Joe Biden’s 2021 infrastructure law is accelerating the effort.

Department officials hope that by the middle of the 2030s this infusion will have spawned full-fledged commercial enterprises.

The two most advanced projects funded by the department are the one in West Virginia treating mine drainage and another processing coal dug up by lignite mining in North Dakota.

The first could be an important source of a number of critical metals, such as yttrium, neodymium and gadolinium, used in catalysts and magnets. The latter could be a major source of germanium and gallium, used in semiconductors, LEDs, electrical transmission components, solar panels and electric vehicle motors.

Researchers at each site are designing a commercial-scale operation, based on their pilot projects, in hopes of landing a massive federal grant to build it out.

The alternative would be to develop new mines, disturb more land, get permits, hire workers, build roads and connect power supplies, tasks that take years.

“With acid mine drainage, that’s already done for you,” said Paul Ziemkiewicz, director of the Water Research Institute at West Virginia University.

Ziemkiewicz began the mine drainage project almost a decade ago, helped by federal subsidies. He had envisioned it as a way to treat runoff, recover critical minerals and raise money for more mine cleanups in West Virginia.

But the Biden administration’s ambitious funding for clean energy and a domestic supply of critical minerals broadened that goal.

At the facility, drainage from a one-time coal mine — now closed and covered by a grassy slope — emerges from two pipes, and dumps about 800 gallons per minute into a retention pond.

From there the water is routed through massive indoor pools and a series of large tanks that, with the

help of lime to lower the acidity, separate out most of the silicate, iron and aluminum. That produces a pale powdery concentrate that is about 95% rare earth oxides, plus water clean enough to return to a nearby creek.

The Department of Energy is funding research on coal wastes in various states.

"There are literally billions of tons of coal ash and coal waste lying around, across the country. And so if we can go back in and remine those, there's decades worth of materials there," said Grant Bromhal, the acting director of the Department of Energy's Division of Minerals Sustainability.

Not only coal, but old copper and phosphate mines also hold potential, Bromhal said.

The country won't be able to recover metals from all of them right away, but technologies the department is helping develop can satisfy a substantial part of demand in the next 20 to 30 years, Bromhal said.

"So if we get into the tens of percents or 50%, I think that's in the realm of possibility," he said.

Other solutions to obtain more of these metals are retrieving them from discarded devices and shifting sourcing to friendly nations and away from geopolitical rivals or unstable countries, analysts say. For now, there is only a handful of critical or rare earth mineral mines in the United States, although many more are being proposed.

One final subsidy will be required from the federal government: buy the reclaimed metals at a price that guarantees a commercially viable operation, Ziemkiewicz said.

That way China can't simply buy up the product or use its market dominance to drive down prices and scare away private investors, he said.

Quigley, a former environmental protection secretary of Pennsylvania and a one-time small-city mayor in coal country, hopes to see a facility like Ziemkiewicz's come to the Jeddo mine tunnel system in north-eastern Pennsylvania.

The Jeddo has defied decades of efforts to treat its flow, which drains a vast network of abandoned underground mines.

It is a massive source of pollution in the Chesapeake Bay watershed, producing an estimated 30,000 to 40,000 gallons per minute.

Bringing the Little Nescopeck Creek back to life could put people to work cleaning up the stream and creating recreational opportunities from a newly revived waterway, Quigley said.

"This could mean a lot to coal communities, to a lot of people in the coal region," Quigley said. "And to the country."

They fled from their home countries.

Now, they'll compete in Paris for the Refugee Olympic Team

By MEGAN JANETSKY, RENATA BRITO, KIRSTEN GRIESHABER and DANIELLA MATAR Associated Press

They compete under the same flag but speak different languages and come from different parts of the world. After fleeing war and persecution at home, 36 athletes from 11 countries will compete in the Paris Games as part of the Refugee Olympic Team.

The team was created for the Rio Olympics in 2016 as a symbol of hope and to call attention to the plight of refugees worldwide.

In Paris, the refugee athletes will take the stage at a time of record global migration, with hundreds of millions of people — many of them displaced from their homes — working to reinvent themselves just as these athletes have.

The record migration comes alongside a rise in far-right populism across much of the world, with officials and parties in many countries promising to clamp down on immigration and asylum.

At the Games, athletes will compete in a host country where the anti-immigration far-right party saw a surge of voter support in parliamentary elections, but was beaten back by a coalition of the French left and failed to win a majority.

The refugee athletes will compete in 12 sports, but for many, their journey to Paris is already a victory

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 90 of 96

in itself.

Fernando Dayán Jorge, Cuban, canoeing

Fernando Dayán Jorge spent his childhood flying past rickety fishing boats and colonial houses in the bay next to his home in Cienfuegos, Cuba.

Since he began practicing there with his father when he was 11, he said it feels as if he's lived a thousand lifetimes.

The 25-year-old canoeist was a two-time Olympian for Cuba's national team in Rio de Janeiro and Tokyo. Then, a gold medalist. A deserter of the Cuban team. A migrant. A maintenance worker. And a refugee.

Now, he continues to rocket along on his narrow red-and-white canoe, this time flying past suburban homes in the canals winding through Cape Coral, Florida.

Kneeling on his boat, his oar slices through the air as his coach chants "very good work, very good work" from a boat next to him.

Jorge's eyes are fixed ahead, throwing all his force into his third Olympics.

"After having written off the 2024 Paris Olympics, it's a massive opportunity," he said. "There are so many Cubans that come to this country and lose this dream of competing once again, simply because they don't know how to get back to this place."

Jorge was at the top of his career, having won gold in Tokyo for the 1,000-meter canoe sprint, when he took a daunting step in March 2021. While training in Mexico, Jorge defected, joining a growing number of Cuban athletes in deserting their country amid an ongoing migratory flight.

Some hope to make more money than they can in the communist-run island. Others, like Jorge, say they left because of political differences over how the government treats citizens and athletes.

He left behind his home and crossed into the United States via the Rio Grande, in hopes of a better — if uncertain — life.

Arriving to Florida was, in some ways, like starting from scratch. Granted refugee status in the U.S., Jorge said he would wake up hours before sunrise to train, then work eight hours in a maintenance gig to pay his bills.

He said he watched friends forced to give up everything after migrating, but he fought to continue as a professional athlete.

"I had a hard time getting out of bed every day and keeping my head on straight," he said. "I had no support whatsoever."

Becoming one of the first Cubans to compete on the Refugee Olympic Team changed everything for him, he said. Still, he is among those who've struggled to cover the costs of competing internationally. He opened a GoFundMe page in June to help pay his way to the Games.

Cuba has protested the inclusion of Jorge and Cuban weightlifter Ramiro Mora on the team, saying they should not be considered refugees.

Today, Jorge's life in Cuba and his future in Florida seem to blend together in his home. His red, blue and white Cuba jersey sits framed over his doorway, while medals from competitions in the U.S. hang over a statue of the Olympic emblem.

"To the refugees and athletes who've been through the same thing, I want to tell them to not give up," he said. "No matter how dark the days become, the sun is always going to rise."

Manizha Talash, Afghan, breaking

Manizha Talash does not fear the Taliban.

"I'm here because I want to reach my dream. Not because I'm scared," she declared from Spain, where she was granted asylum.

On the outskirts of Madrid, the 21-year-old is training hard for the Games, which for the first time will include breaking, or, as it's popularly known, breakdancing. Talash prances and swivels on her hands and feet to the beat of hip-hop, swooshing her black and red hair around before striking a pose signaling the end of her performance.

Just months ago, she was working in a hair salon in the town of Huesca. Talash was among hundreds of

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 91 of 96

Afghans brought to Spain aboard military planes following the return of the Taliban to power in August 2021.

Talash first came across breaking at age 17. She saw a social media video of a man spinning on his head and was skeptical — it must have been fake, generated by AI, she thought. But the images were real, and she said she soon became obsessed with the sport, scrolling through video after video on her phone.

"I wanted to do it, I wanted to learn it," she said.

She found a club in Kabul where a dancer from the videos trained and knocked at the door. "There were 55 boys, and I was the only girl," she said. "I told myself, why can't a girl do this?"

Breaking in some ways freed her from the problems facing young women in Afghanistan. But it wasn't long before Talash was noticed — international news outlets published stories about the young Afghan woman defying cultural and religious norms. That was enough to become a target.

"The Taliban don't like it when a girl dances," she said, even though breaking is more than that — it's a sport.

Her club began receiving threats, Talash said, and one day, when a bomb hit very close, local police asked them to shut down over the dangers.

She trained behind closed doors in her home until the Taliban's return to power. Despite initial promises that women's rights wouldn't be curtailed, women have since been barred from studying and face several restrictions on employment, travel and health.

"Now, girls can't do anything," Talash said.

She's had little time to train while adapting to a foreign country, and at some points, competing in the Games seemed unfathomable.

"But when my friend told me I could join the refugee team, I was so happy," Talash said. "I can now fly."

Mohammad Amin Alsalami, Syrian, athletics

When Mohammad Amin Alsalami arrived in Berlin in October 2015, he was cold, lonely and homesick.

The Syrian refugee had left behind his war-torn hometown of Aleppo, fled to Turkey, crossed the Mediterranean on a rubber boat to Greece, and trekked by foot to Germany. Like millions of other migrants, he was in search of a place where he could build a future without bombs and violence.

Almost a decade later, Alsalami, 29, has been granted asylum, learned German and made new friends. And he's living his dream of becoming a world-class athlete.

He learned just months ago that he got the green light to participate in the Paris Games.

"That moment was so wow," he said. "I get to go to the Olympics. I cried so much. It was really cool."

Alsalami discovered his passion for athletics during physical education in school at age 15. A teacher noticed his talent for long jump and pushed him to participate in local and national competitions in Syria. But when civil war erupted, he could no longer practice. His family — he's the youngest of nine siblings and comes from a family of tailors — was displaced several times within Syria, then fled to Turkey. Alsalami decided to continue on to Europe on his own.

He credits his passion for athletics with getting him through the initial hardships in his new country.

During the first weeks in Berlin, he looked up different stadiums and gyms on Google maps so he could start practicing long jump again. He remembers walking through the first snow to finally discover one of the city's big indoor gymnasiums.

"All the other Berlin track and field athletes were training in this hall," he said. "When I came in and saw how full and how warm it was inside ... it was almost like paradise for me."

On that first day, a man watched him jump, approached him and asked something in German.

"I didn't understand anything, not in English either," Alsalami said. "And then I said 'Hey, I'm Syrian' on my cellphone, and he said 'I'm your trainer from now on.'"

He stayed with that first coach for five years, then moved on to a different one — and said he's eternally grateful to both for their support.

Despite his excitement for the Games, Alsalami admits he's a bit sad that he can't represent his home country.

"Syria is home, I miss it every day," he said. "In the end, that's my country, that's where I come from."

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 92 of 96

Iman Mahdavi, Iranian, wrestling

Iman Mahdavi smiles and dishes up Iranian food that he's cooked himself at his Milan home.

"If my mum could see me now," he said with a laugh. "She wouldn't believe it."

Mahdavi hasn't seen his mother since October 2020, when the Iranian wrestler fled his home country over fears for his life.

With only the clothes he was wearing, Mahdavi made a harrowing journey by foot from Iran to Turkey, then flew to Italy and applied for asylum.

"I didn't even really know where I was flying to," said Mahdavi, 29. "Luckily for me, it was Italy."

Once he was granted asylum, one of Mahdavi's first aims was to continue wrestling. His father, once a wrestler himself, had instilled in his son a passion. Mahdavi became a seven-time national junior champion and won more than 50 medals.

Through a friend he connected with on Instagram, Mahdavi was introduced to a gym on the outskirts of Milan.

"As soon as we had him in the gym, in his first training sessions, we immediately saw that he was an extraordinary athlete, that he was a very, very high-level wrestler," said Giuseppe Gammarota, president of Lotta Club Seggiano. "We immediately started preparing him for competitions."

The gym has become like family to him — so much so that he calls his coach, Marco Moroni, "Papi."

Mahdavi said his real father died of a heart attack several years ago after being mistakenly told his son died in a car crash.

It was Moroni who helped Mahdavi find a job, as a nightclub bouncer.

Mahdavi admits the schedule can be tough: He works from 11 p.m. to 5 a.m., goes home to sleep, then trains every day. But he has a focus that drives him.

"The Olympics is a dream for any athlete who does any sport," he said. "I hope to come back from the Olympics with the best colored medal I can get. And I will also be thinking about the next Olympics, hoping I'm still in form."

NATO agrees to take on coordination of some Ukraine security support. How that will work

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — NATO has agreed to launch a new program to provide reliable military aid and training to Ukraine and help it get ready to join the alliance.

The plan will supplement, but not replace, the two-year-old Ukraine Defense Contact Group, which was created by U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin after Russia launched its February 2022 invasion into Ukraine. That group, with more than 50 nations from Europe and around the world, coordinates the delivery of much-needed weapons and training to Ukraine.

But the failure of the U.S. Congress to fund any weapons for months due to partisan gridlock late last year and early this year, as well as similar lags in European Union funds, underscored how vulnerable that effort was to the vagaries of politics.

And the delays allowed Russian troops to gain the advantage on the battlefield, and led to widespread complaints from Ukraine's forces about lack of equipment and weapons.

Some officials have described the new NATO organization as a way to "Trump-proof" alliance support for Ukraine in case former President Donald Trump wins the November election. But that may be a reach.

Here's what is planned and what it will and won't do:

Ukraine Defense Contact Group

Over the past two years, the U.S.-created group has evolved into a more sophisticated and organized effort that so far has pumped more than \$100 billion in weapons, equipment and training into Ukraine.

The U.S. alone has sent more than \$53.6 billion in security aid, including about \$25 billion in presidential drawdown authority, under which weapons are taken from Pentagon stocks and sent quickly to Ukraine. The U.S. has provided more than \$27 billion in longer-term funding for weapons contracts through the

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 93 of 96

Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative.

The rest of the NATO members and other international partners have provided about \$50 billion in weapons and security assistance, according to the Kiel Institute for the World Economy, an independent research organization based in Germany.

An international coordination center was set up at Lucius D. Clay Kaserne, the U.S. Army base in Wiesbaden, Germany, to identify Ukraine's needs, and to locate equipment, weapons and spare parts in other countries that could fill those requirements. That group may eventually be absorbed into the new NATO organization.

And the contact group set up eight so-called capability coalitions headed by various countries to concentrate on specific military requirements: such as fighter aircraft, tanks, artillery, naval assets, air defense, de-mining, cyber and drones. Those are expected to continue.

The new NATO plan

Under the plan endorsed by NATO heads of state on Wednesday, the alliance will take on a broader role to coordinate training and equipment donations.

The effort will be based at the U.S. Army Garrison Wiesbaden in Germany and is expected to be led by a U.S. three-star general. There will be about 700 staff members, including some who will work at logistics nodes in eastern allied nations.

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the new program would put support for Ukraine on a "firmer footing for years to come" but would avoid making the alliance a party to the war between Russia and Ukraine.

And NATO also is pledging to provide at least €40 billion (\$43.3 billion) within the next year, and "to provide sustainable levels of security assistance for Ukraine to prevail," while taking into account budgets and other agreements.

The new coordination effort is dubbed the NSATU — NATO Security Assistance and Training for Ukraine — and it will oversee three main areas:

1. the development of Ukraine's armed forces and their training at allied facilities
2. the planning and coordination of allied and partner contributions and their delivery via logistics nodes in countries such as Poland, Romania and Slovakia
3. the repair and maintenance of equipment

A way to help Ukraine join NATO

A critical component of the new NSATU is that it will help facilitate Ukraine's effort to become a member of NATO.

Membership in the alliance requires that nations meet a litany of political, economic and security criteria. For example, Ukraine's military forces will have to meet certain standards of conduct and training, and their weapons and equipment have to be interoperable with those of other allied nations.

The NSATU will help ensure that as time goes on the weapons and training for Ukraine fit what would be required for NATO membership.

In announcing the effort earlier this year, Stoltenberg said it would help to organize training for Ukrainian military personnel in NATO member countries, coordinate and plan donations of the equipment that Kyiv needs, and manage the transfer and repair of that military equipment.

But is it Trump-proof?

Likely not.

A key incentive for the broader NATO organization, according to some officials, is the worry that Trump could regain the presidency and scale back support for the alliance as well as help to Ukraine.

Earlier this year, Trump reiterated his threat that he will not defend NATO members that don't meet defense spending targets. And he set off alarms in Europe by suggesting he would tell Russia to attack NATO allies he considered delinquent.

And the gap in U.S. funding for Ukraine this year was the result of opposition from Republican allies of Trump in Congress who blocked the aid package for months.

While moving some assistance for Ukraine under the NATO umbrella provides greater consistency, any

change in U.S. administrations could trigger shifts in U.S. policy. And that could include limits on spending to support Ukraine or any other diplomatic or military operations.

Participation in the Ukraine contact group, for example, could be upended, as well as any other Pentagon program.

A boy in Gaza was killed by an Israeli airstrike. His father held him and wouldn't let go

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — He wouldn't let go.

Nael Al-Baghdadi held his 12-year-old son, Omar, and held him tight. But it was already too late. Omar, who was playing outside near his home, had been killed Tuesday in the Gaza Strip by an Israeli airstrike.

In the photo made by Associated Press photographer Abdel Kareem Hana after the strike, al-Baghdadi's eyes are shut. He holds his son, whose small body rests limply in his arms. His right hand and right shirt sleeve are streaked with blood. Grief is etched upon the father's face, but more than that there is an expression of deep love for the child he has just lost. So much love that he insisted on holding Omar, uninterrupted, until the child could be shepherded hours later to his grave.

Omar and his three friends were playing soccer in the street near their house in the Bureij refugee camp around noon Tuesday, under a blistering sun, when the Israeli airstrike hit and sent the street into a swirl of dust, blood and chaos. Al-Baghdadi was already in nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah with his injured brother. His cousin ran toward the wreckage, found Omar and took him to an ambulance.

From there, he called the father and broke the news: His son had been killed; be ready to receive him. According to al-Baghdadi, he met the ambulance when it rolled into the hospital, picked up his son's body and carried it to the morgue, weeping all the way.

He refused to put his son on the ground inside the morgue, holding him gently until he was shrouded and the funeral prayer was performed before a quick burial.

One image, one moment — a child lost, a father's grief, an excruciating goodbye.

China tells NATO not to create chaos in Asia and rejects label of 'enabler' of Russia's Ukraine war

By KEN MORITSUGU Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — China accused NATO on Thursday of seeking security at the expense of others and told the alliance not to bring the same "chaos" to Asia, a reflection of its determination to oppose strengthening ties between NATO members and Asian nations such as Japan, South Korea and the Philippines.

The statement by a Foreign Ministry spokesperson came a day after NATO labeled China a "decisive enabler" of Russia's war against Ukraine.

"NATO hyping up China's responsibility on the Ukraine issue is unreasonable and has sinister motives," spokesperson Lin Jian said at a daily briefing. He maintained that China has a fair and objective stance on the Ukraine issue.

China has broken with the United States and its European allies over the war in Ukraine, refusing to condemn Russia's invasion or even to refer to it as an act of aggression in deference to Moscow. Its trade with Russia has grown since the invasion, at least partially offsetting the impact of Western sanctions.

NATO, in a statement issued at a summit in Washington, said China has become an enabler of the war through its "no-limits partnership" with Russia and its large-scale support for Russia's defense industrial base.

Lin said China's trade with Russia is legitimate and reasonable and based on World Trade Organization rules.

He said NATO's "so-called security" comes at the cost of the security of other countries. China has backed Russia's contention that NATO expansion posed a threat to Russia, whose attack on Ukraine has only strengthened the alliance, leading to Sweden and Finland becoming formal members.

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 95 of 96

China has expressed concern about NATO's budding relationships with countries in the Indo-Pacific region. Australia, New Zealand, Japan and South Korea sent their leaders or deputies to the NATO summit this week.

"China urges NATO to ... stop interfering in China's internal politics and smearing China's image and not create chaos in the Asia-Pacific after creating turmoil in Europe," Lin said.

Chinese troops are in Belarus this week for joint drills near the border with Poland, a NATO member. The exercises are the first with Belarus, an ally of Russia, with which it shares a single-party system under President Alexander Lukashenko, whose regime cracked down brutally on 2020 mass protests against his rule.

Lin described the joint training as a normal military operation that is not directed at any particular country.

China is a key player in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes a strong military element involving Russia and several Central Asian nations, India and, most recently, Belarus.

That is seen as creating a bulwark against Western influence in the region, but also tensions over rising Chinese influence in what Russia considers its political backyard made up of former parts of the Soviet Union, which included Belarus.

Earlier this month, Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping attended a meeting of leaders or top officials from the 10 SCO countries in Kazakhstan at which Putin reiterated his demand that Ukraine withdraw its troops from parts of the country occupied by Russia. Ukraine has firmly rejected that, along with a Chinese peace proposal that makes no mention of the return of Ukrainian territory to the government in Kyiv.

China and Russia have closely aligned their foreign policies to oppose the West, even as Russia grows increasingly reliant on China as a purchaser of its oil and gas that make up the bulk of its foreign trade.

Today in History: July 12, Disco Demolition Night

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 12, the 194th day of 2024. There are 172 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 12, as an angry reaction to the popularity of disco music, the Chicago White Sox held the "Disco Demolition Night" promotion, in which a crate of disco records was blown up on the field between games of a double-header; the ensuing riot and damage to the field caused the White Sox to forfeit the second game.

Also on this date:

In 1543, England's King Henry VIII married his sixth and final wife, Catherine Parr.

In 1812, United States forces led by Gen. William Hull entered Canada during the War of 1812 against Britain. (However, Hull retreated shortly thereafter to Detroit.)

In 1862, during the Civil War, President Abraham Lincoln signed a bill authorizing the Army Medal of Honor.

In 1909, the House of Representatives joined the Senate in passing the 16th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, allowing for a federal income tax, and submitted it to the states. (It was declared ratified in February 1913.)

In 1962, the Rolling Stones played their first show, at the Marquee Club in London.

In 1967, rioting erupted in Newark, New Jersey, over the police beating of a Black taxi driver; 26 people were killed in the five days of violence that followed.

In 1984, Democratic presidential candidate Walter F. Mondale announced his choice of U.S. Rep. Geraldine A. Ferraro of New York to be his running-mate; Ferraro was the first woman to run for vice president on a major-party ticket.

In 1991, Japanese professor Hitoshi Igarashi, who had translated Salman Rushdie's "The Satanic Verses," was found stabbed to death, nine days after the novel's Italian translator was attacked in Milan.

In 1994, President Bill Clinton, visiting Germany, went to the eastern sector of Berlin, the first U.S. president to do so since Harry Truman.

In 2003, the USS Ronald Reagan, the first carrier named for a living president, was commissioned in

Groton Daily Independent

Friday, July 12, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 017 ~ 96 of 96

Norfolk, Virginia.

In 2012, a scathing report by former FBI Director Louis Freeh said the late Joe Paterno and other top Penn State officials had buried child sexual abuse allegations against Jerry Sandusky more than a decade earlier to avoid bad publicity.

In 2022, Twitter sued Elon Musk to force him to complete the \$44 billion acquisition of the social media company after Musk said he was backing off his agreement to buy the company. (He would eventually become Twitter's owner three months later.)

Today's Birthdays: Writer Delia Ephron is 80. Fitness guru Richard Simmons is 76. Singer Walter Egan is 76. Writer-producer Brian Grazer is 73. Actor Cheryl Ladd is 73. Gospel singer Ricky McKinnie (The Blind Boys of Alabama) is 72. Gospel singer Sandi Patty is 68. Actor Mel Harris is 68. Boxing champion Julio Cesar Chavez is 62. Rock singer Robin Wilson (Gin Blossoms) is 59. Actor Lisa Nicole Carson is 55. Olympic gold medal figure skater Kristi Yamaguchi is 53. CBS newsman Jeff Glor is 49. Actor Anna Friel is 48. R&B singer Tracie Spencer is 48. US Senator Kyrsten Sinema is 48. Actor Topher Grace is 46. Actor Michelle Rodriguez is 46. Country singer-musician Kimberly Perry (The Band Perry) is 41. Actor Natalie Martinez is 40. Actor Ta'Rhonda Jones is 36. Golfer Inbee Park is 36. Actor Rachel Brosnahan is 34. Olympic gold medal gymnast Jordyn Wieber is 29. Nobel Peace Prize laureate Malala Yousafzai is 27. NBA guard Shai Gilgeous-Alexander is 26. Soccer player Vinicius Junior is 24.