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Friday, July 19

Senior Menu: Ham salad on bun, cauliflower/pea/ carrots, salad, fresh fruit, cookie.

Jr. Legion hosts Britton, 5:30 p.m. (DH)

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



Saturday, July 20

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.

Sunday, July 21

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

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

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

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

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

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

1440

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Trump Accepts Nomination

Former President Donald Trump formally accepted the Republican nomination for president yesterday. The public address capped the four-day Republican National Convention and marked Trump's first public speech since Saturday's assassination attempt.

Trump began his speech by recounting the assassination attempt and sharing a tribute to victim Corey Comperatore. He also criticized investigations against him, touted his administration's achievements, and criticized the Biden administration, including on immigration, foreign policy, and trade.

The speech comes as pressure mounts from Democrats for President Joe Biden to exit the race over concerns surrounding his mental fitness and electability. Sources close to Biden yesterday suggested he could drop out as early as this weekend. Trump's campaign manager yesterday characterized the Democratic pressure campaign as a "coup."

Recent polls suggest Trump is ahead of Biden nationally and in seven swing states.

Navy Exoneration

The US Navy announced it has exonerated 256 Black sailors wrongfully convicted after the 1944 Port Chicago explosion, which killed 320 people and injured over 400, mostly Black sailors. The disaster occurred when two ships exploded while loading ammunition for troops serving in World War II.

Following the explosion, white officers received leave while Black sailors were ordered to resume the dangerous work. Of 258 sailors who initially refused, 208 faced summary court-martial for disobeying orders despite returning to work and 50 were charged with mutiny. The exoneration, announced on the explosion's 80th anniversary Wednesday, comes after a Navy review found significant legal errors in the trials, including improper group prosecution and inadequate legal counsel. Two sailors had already been previously cleared.

The incident, which led to the largest mutiny trial in US naval history, exposed racial discrimination in the military and contributed to the Navy's decision to desegregate its forces in 1946.

Jupiter's Shrinking Spot

Jupiter's Great Red Spot is regularly shrinking, likely due to a decrease in the size of smaller storms sustaining it, according to a new study. By conducting computer simulations on the system, researchers determined such smaller storms have likely prolonged the diminishing vortex's longevity.

The reddish windstorm has been observed swirling in Jupiter's southern hemisphere for over a century. It is the solar system's largest individual weather pattern, roughly 30% larger in diameter than Earth and reaching 300 miles deep into the gas giant's atmosphere (Earth's hurricanes are 10 miles tall on average). Known as an anticyclone, the storm rotates counterclockwise around a center of high atmospheric pressure, with wind speeds of over 300 mph. Some observers estimate the spot could disappear within 20 years.

The study sheds light on the behavior of so-called "heat domes" common in the western US, a similar type of anticyclone or "block storm" artificially sustained by smaller systems.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Bob Newhart, Grammy- and Emmy-winning comedy and TV sitcom icon, dies at 94.
Lou Dobbs, political commentator and longtime cable news host, dies at 78.
The 2024 Tour de France wraps up Sunday in Nice, France; see latest standings with three stages left.
The 2024 Kennedy Center Honors to recognize the Grateful Dead, Francis Ford Coppola, Bonnie Raitt, jazz musician Arturo Sandoval, and New York City's Apollo Theater with artistic lifetime achievement awards.

Science & Technology

OpenAI debuts GPT-4o Mini, a smaller, less expensive version of its flagship large language model; critics of an earlier version said the cost to run GPT-4o priced out small developers.
NASA cancels \$450M robotic mission to explore the moon's south pole, citing cost overruns; materials developed to date may be repurposed for future efforts.
Researchers discover the early formation of a 61-million-year-old microcontinent in the Arctic Ocean's Davis Strait; feature emerged during the separation of Greenland from Canada.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close lower (S&P 500 -0.8%, Dow -1.3%, Nasdaq -0.7%) as investors rotate out of AI-focused tech stocks and into smaller cap stocks.
Darden Restaurants, parent of Olive Garden, to buy Tex-Mex chain operator Chuy's Holdings for \$605M in cash deal.
Ford invests \$3B to expand Super Duty truck production, including at Canadian plant previously designated for electric vehicles.
Amazon Prime Day hauls record \$14.2B in US online sales, up 11% from 2023.
Netflix beats Q2 earnings projections, raises 2024 revenue forecast; adds 8 million subscribers in Q2, pushing global audience to 277 million.

Politics & World Affairs

US federal appeals court temporarily blocks Biden administration from carrying out its "SAVE" student debt relief plan, which offers reduced monthly payments to borrowers.
Biden administration announces it will cancel \$1.2B in federal student loans for 35,000 public workers.
> US Justice Department alleges employees of Southwest Key, the largest housing provider of unaccompanied migrant children, engaged in sexual abuse and harassment of children since at least 2015.
> Ursula von der Leyen wins second term as president of the European Commission after securing 401 votes from members of parliament; she will remain in the role until 2029.

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**50th Wedding Celebration
Honoring Neal & Wynella Abeln
Saturday, July 20, 2024
Food & Visiting 6 pm – 8 pm
Barn Dance 8 pm – 11 pm
AT: Tim & Lacey Grabow's
15689 456th Ave
South Shore, SD 57263
FUN FOR ALL
No gifts please**

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I was a packed house at the popular annual Groton American Legion Auxiliary Salad Buffet and Desert Bar! (Photo Courtesy Bruce Babcock)



Auxiliary member Deb McKiver serves at the buffet as Samantha Oswald (left) ponders the many choices. (Photo Courtesy Bruce Babcock)

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Groton American Legion Auxiliary members pose after a successful Salad Buffet Luncheon. Back row L-R Samantha Oswald, Deb McKiver, Meri Erickson, Wendy Cooper, Bonnie Cooper. Front row L-R Grace Oswald, Jan Seibel, Anna Oswald Hailey Pray and Tami Zimney. (Photo

Courtesy Bruce Babcock)

GFP Seeking Comments on Three Draft Action Plans

Pierre, S.D.- South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) is seeking comments on three draft action plans.

Wildlife Action Plan Revision

The South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan was last updated in 2015 and is revised every 10 years. This strategic planning document is designed to address the needs of South Dakota's important habitats and representative plant and animal species. An approved Wildlife Action Plan maintains South Dakota's eligibility for a federal funding match source called State Wildlife Grants.

Wildlife action plans focus on "species of greatest conservation need" but also address broader wildlife issues that can impact species and habitats. GFP has revised the state list of species of greatest conservation need and welcomes feedback on the draft list. The list includes rare species, but also species for which South Dakota constitutes an important part of the species' range or represents a unique or declining habitat.

To learn more about the South Dakota Wildlife Action Plan and the current revision process, visit gfp.sd.gov/wildlife-action-plan/. The draft species list can be found at the Wildlife Action Plan website and the management plan revisions site at gfp.sd.gov/management-plans/.

Feedback on the draft species list for the Wildlife Action Plan Revision 2025 will be accepted through August 20, 2024. Comments may be emailed to swapcomments@state.sd.us. Comments must include your full name and city of residence and be received by the deadline.

Mountain Lion Action Plan

The draft Mountain Lion Action plan, 2024-2028, is a document that will be used by GFP to guide mountain lion management in South Dakota through identified management objectives and measurable strategies to meet those management objectives. All individuals interested in mountain lion management in South Dakota may provide suggestions and comments on the action plan by August 16, 2024.

Pronghorn Antelope Action Plan

The draft Pronghorn Antelope Action plan, 2024-2028, is a document that will be used by GFP to guide pronghorn antelope management in South Dakota through identified management objectives and measurable strategies to meet those management objectives. All individuals interested in pronghorn antelope management in South Dakota may provide suggestions and comments on the action plan by August 14, 2024.

All three management plans can be found online at gfp.sd.gov/management-plans.

Written comments on the plan can be sent to 523 E. Capitol Ave., Pierre, S.D. 57501, or submitted at gfp.sd.gov/forms/positions/. Comments must be received by the respective deadline and include your full name and city of residence.

Youth Participation Holds Strong for Nest Predator Bounty Program

Pierre, S.D.-The South Dakota Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) conducted the sixth year of the Nest Predator Bounty Program as part of Gov. Noem's Second Century Initiative and continues to see excellent youth participation and excitement in the program.

The 2024 program saw youth under the age of 18 compose 46% of the total 2,237 participants, which matched the previous highest level of youth participation set in 2023. A total of 50,141 eligible tails were submitted throughout the program's duration.

"It's so great to see youth participation rates remain strong throughout the sixth year of the program," said Kevin Robling, GFP Department Secretary. "To see youth as nearly half of our participants is very exciting for the future of trapping and hunting."

Additionally in 2024, GFP distributed 710 free live traps to youth participants who had not previously received one. This brings the total to 1,724 live traps distributed to youth participants since 2023.

"In addition to receiving their free live trap, all participating youth were also entered into the Youth Trap Giveaway in honor of Benton Howe," explained Robling. "Each week one winner received a raccoon trapping starter kit, trapping handbook, a knife, and a write-up remembering Benton Howe's love for the outdoors."

The 2024 program opened for South Dakota youth under the age of 18 on March 1. The program then opened to all South Dakota residents on April 1. The cap of 50,000 tails was reached on June 25.



South Dakota's mosquito war

BY MARIIA NOVOSELIA

South Dakota News Watch

A South Dakota county with the second-highest national rate of lethal West Nile virus in humans shares a border with a county that has never reported a single case.

Between 1999 and 2023, Dewey County recorded 13.74 neuroinvasive cases per 100,000 people, just behind King County in Texas, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Neuroinvasive refers to those more serious cases that can affect the brain and can be deadly.

Ziebach County, which borders the western boundary of Dewey County in north-central South Dakota, shows zero neuroinvasive West Nile virus cases, according to the CDC. The Cheyenne River Indian Reservation covers most of both counties.

"That's wild," Randolph Runs After, environmental health specialist at Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, said after learning about the Dewey County ranking. "We actually haven't had that many cases in the last few years."

The data aren't wrong but needs explaining.

"The medical facility for both counties is in Eagle Butte, Dewey County, and they are the ones who report to the health department," said Michael Claymore, director of the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Prairie Management Program.

Population numbers also impact incidence rates, Tia Kafka, marketing and outreach director at the South Dakota Department of Health, said in an email. The fewer residents live in a county, the more impact a single West Nile virus cases will have, she said.

"Historically, Brown County has been the hotspot for West Nile virus activity in South Dakota, with the most cumulative West Nile virus cases reported," Kafka said.

Brown County, whose county seat is Aberdeen, recorded more than 340 West Nile virus cases between 1999 and 2023, which ranks it 24th among other counties in the United States, the CDC said. Within South Dakota, Brown County is followed by Pennington County, with more than 220 West Nile virus cases during that time, and Minnehaha County, with almost 200 incidents.

The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services defines a high incidence rate as one that is greater than 1.1 per 100,000 people. Analysis of the CDC's historic data within this framework showed that 61 out of 66 South Dakota counties – which amounts to 92% – have a high incidence of West Nile virus cases in humans.

When bitten by a West Nile virus-carrying mosquito, most people will not show any symptoms, said Erin Staples, M.D., medical epidemiologist with CDC's Division of Vector-Borne Diseases. Some will develop West Nile fever, but even fewer will get a neuroinvasive West Nile virus disease, which affects the brain or the space around it. Non-neuroinvasive cases are generally less serious.

Virus reached SD in 2002, has been declining

Runs After remembers the first years of West Nile virus in South Dakota when "you could find dead birds here and there."

The first reported case was in 2002 in a crow in Aberdeen, according to a Rapid City Journal story from July 2002.

West Nile virus first appeared in the United States in New York City in 1999 and reached the West Coast by 2004, Staples said. She added that a lot of people got infected at the time because "there was no immunity in anybody."

Since 2002, the South Dakota Department of Health has recorded more than 2,800 human cases, 53

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of which were fatal.

In 2003, Virgil Christensen, an 89-year-old man from Wakonda in Clay County, became the first South Dakotan to die from West Nile, according to the Vermillion Plain Talk.

Both South Dakota and the United States observed a peak in the number of West Nile cases that year. The state Department of Health recorded 1,039 occurrences.

This year, the South Dakota Department of Health has already recorded the first West Nile virus case of 2024.

The department's West Nile Virus Surveillance tool shows that this non-neuroinvasive case of West Nile virus disease was found in a resident of Beadle County who is at least 64 years old.

The CDC's surveillance tool shows that neighboring North Dakota and Nebraska have already recorded one and four cases, respectively.

Weather and human activity increase mosquito numbers

As of July 17, the South Dakota Department of Health predicted 48 West Nile virus cases for 2024 in the state.

Kafka said the state health department uses a model, updated weekly, that considers factors like historical human West Nile virus case data, environmental data, and current year mosquito pool testing data.

Historically, late July and August tend to accumulate the highest number of West Nile virus cases across the United States.

South Dakota experiences the same trend because of "several interrelated factors," Kafka said.

Mosquitoes that can transmit West Nile virus reach their highest population numbers during the warm summer. In addition, heavy rains create puddles and stagnant bodies of water, which are favorable conditions for mosquitoes.

"Warmer temperatures not only support mosquito breeding but also accelerate the development of the virus within mosquitoes, enhancing the risk of transmission to humans," Kafka said.

People also like to spend more time outdoors during the summer, camping, hiking, and participating in evening gatherings, which increases their chances of encounters with mosquitoes, she said.

Mosquitoes are 'the main culprit'

Staples, of the CDC, said West Nile virus is usually transmitted through a mosquito bite.

When bitten by a West Nile virus-carrying mosquito, some people will not exhibit any symptoms at all, she said. One in 5 will develop a febrile illness, which may involve getting a fever, a rash, a headache, muscle pain or joint pain. This is also referred to as West Nile fever.

Some people will go on to develop a West Nile neuroinvasive disease. This can lead to encephalitis, which is inflammation of the brain, or meningitis, which is inflammation of the tissues around the brain and spinal cord, Staples said.

"Mosquitoes are often referred to as the deadliest animal in the world, as they cause more death and disease than any other animal on the planet," Staples said.

Birds also contribute to the spread of West Nile virus. Once infected, they can develop enough virus to pass it on to a non-infected mosquito, which is why they are sometimes called "amplifying hosts," she said.

Humans do not have the same capabilities, although they can spread the virus to one another through blood transfusion, Staples said.

Several vaccines have gone through the early stages of clinical development but are currently stuck at the part called efficacy trial, she said.

"You need to be able to say, 'Where is there West Nile? I'm gonna start vaccinating people and look to make sure that the vaccine is very effective and can prevent infection,' Staples said. "Unfortunately, we haven't been able to necessarily predict where West Nile is going to occur. That's really the sporadic and unpredictable nature of West Nile virus."

CDC and state fund mosquito control

The South Dakota Department of Health received almost \$1.5 million in 2023 for the department's West Nile virus media campaign and laboratory testing of mosquito pools through the CDC's Epidemiology and

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Laboratory Capacity Program.

This year, the state Department of Health allocated \$500,000 in grant funds to distribute among cities, counties and tribes for mosquito control in amounts ranging from \$500 to \$20,000. Kafka said that 166 applicants received money based on the population and history of human cases.

The Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe Prairie Management Program received \$9,325 as part of the grant.

Claymore said the Prairie Management Program tries to eradicate mosquitoes in several different ways. He said the team monitors traps and tests captured mosquitoes to see if any of them carry viruses.

The program also conducts larva sightings, which involve putting chemicals in standing water to kill mosquitoes before they get a chance to develop into adults.

Workers also spray the ground, fog the trees and disperse microscopic droplets of a chemical compound mixed with oil through aerial fogging.

Claymore said the program uses all of the Department of Health grant money to buy just enough chemicals to last a season.

"I tell people to just watch the news and see where the mosquitoes are at, and they are moving towards us," Claymore said. "Now it's really important to be more vigilant with your personal protection."

Mosquitoes in Sioux Falls 'as bad as ever'

The city of Sioux Falls, Aberdeen and Pennington County, received \$20,000 each.

Dominic Miller, environmental health manager for the Sioux Falls Department of Health, said in an email the city's mosquito control program was created the same year the city recorded its first West Nile virus case, 2003. Now that over 20 years have passed, the number of mosquitoes in 2024 is "as bad as (the city has) ever seen it," he said.

The city of Sioux Falls is divided into 18 spraying zones, and each zone has at least one mosquito trap. Every morning during weekdays, the mosquito control team checks all traps to count and test captured mosquitoes.

This summer, one of the traps collected 6,300 mosquitoes overnight, Miller said.

The mosquito control team uses the number of trapped mosquitoes to determine what zones to spray and aims to eradicate all kinds of mosquitoes, not just those that may carry West Nile virus, he said.

Ways to prevent infection

Kafka said homeowners can minimize the risk of being bitten by installing or repairing window and door screens to keep mosquitoes outside of homes.

The state Department of Health also encourages people to reduce the risk of being bitten by mosquitoes and contracting West Nile virus by joining "the S.W.A.T. team:"

- Spray: When outdoors, apply mosquito repellents that contain compounds like DEET, picaridin, 2-undecanone, para-menthane-diol, IR3535 or oil of lemon eucalyptus.
- Water: Remove standing water from old tires, buckets and other containers that can give mosquitoes a place to breed; regularly change the water in bird baths and pet dishes, and stay away from areas near standing water.

- Arms: Wear pants and long-sleeved shirts to cover exposed skin.

- Time: Limit time outdoors at dawn and from dusk until midnight when mosquitoes are most active

Susan Hoover, M.D., an infectious disease physician at Sanford Health, said that since there is no treatment for West Nile virus, it's paramount to take those precautions.

If a person is bitten and exhibits such symptoms as fever, vomiting, diarrhea, headache or body aches and suspects they may have West Nile virus infection, they should contact their health care provider, she said.

Department of Health Reports Measles Case in South Dakota

PIERRE, SD – The Department of Health is reporting a case of measles in a South Dakota resident. An adult Pennington County resident developed a measles infection after traveling internationally. They visited Monument Health in Rapid City and tested positive for measles.

“Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and spreads through the air when an infected individual coughs or sneezes,” said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist. “Individuals who have not been fully immunized with two doses of measles vaccine have an increased risk of infection if they have contact with an infected person.”

The time periods and locations where other community members may have been exposed to the case are the Black Hills Urgent Care on 741 Mountain View Rd. from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. MT on July 9, 2024, and the Monument Health Rapid City Emergency Department waiting room from 5 p.m. to 12 a.m. MT on July 12, 2024.

Measles symptoms appear in two stages. In the first stage, the individual may have a runny nose, cough, and a slight fever. The eyes may become reddened and sensitive to light while the fever consistently rises each day. The second stage begins on the third to seventh day and consists of a temperature of 103-105°F, and a red blotchy rash lasting four to seven days. The rash usually begins on the face and then spreads over the entire body. Koplik spots (little white spots with a red background) may also appear on the gums and inside of the cheeks.

Maintaining the highest level of immunization against measles is the best preventive measure, especially if individuals are planning to travel internationally. Measles vaccine (MMR) is typically given at 12-15 months of age. The second dose of MMR is given at 4-6 years of age. The vaccine is highly effective, and two MMR shots usually produce lifelong immunity. If you are planning to travel internationally with children, MMR vaccines can be given to children starting at six months of age. People born before 1957 are likely to have been infected naturally and are presumed to be protected against measles.

Learn more about measles on the Department of Health website.

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.

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!



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Groton

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- 🏋️ 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

We the People

The South Dakota Humanities Council is making available a weekly column -- "We the People" -- that focuses on the U.S. Constitution. It is written by David Adler, who is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality, and civic education.



By David Adler

Presidential Assassinations Can Destroy Democracy

The use of force, including assassination and other forms of lethal political violence, as a means of altering governmental regimes and political systems—tyrannicide, regicide and revolution-- was part of the warp and woof of ancient politics and a central concern to the Framers of the Constitution. America, after all, was founded on revolution. Delegates to the Constitutional Convention, therefore, sought to create a republic sufficiently responsive to the will of the people to facilitate peaceful political reforms, which would eliminate the perceived need to resort to violence, the dark side of politics, to make changes.

John Adams, a child of the Enlightenment and with Thomas Jefferson and Benjamin Franklin, part of the Holy Trinity of the founding era, spoke for his generation when he declared, "tyranny begins when frequent elections end." Thus, the Framers provided for frequent elections at regular intervals, which empowered voters to create plans and campaigns to usher in peaceful change when they thought it was required. Franklin explained to the Constitutional Convention that the power to impeach an errant president was necessary; otherwise, "there would be no recourse but to assassination." Jefferson asserted that government officials should be "bound by the chains of the Constitution," precisely because those who wielded power were eyed suspiciously. James Madison, Father of the Constitution, wrote eloquently in *The Federalist Papers* of the various ways that checks and balances would restrain officials and encourage adherence to the will of the people. The Framers' assertions, moreover, that a president would be amenable to the judicial process and the provisions of the criminal justice system, aimed to alleviate the fear that they had created an embryonic monarchy, which would have placed the president above the law.

In sum, those who founded our nation and wrote the Constitution, keenly aware of the destructive capacity of violence as a weapon for undermining and, indeed, destroying democracy, sought at every turn to signal to American citizens that the system they designed had rendered obsolete the need to use force to make political and policy changes. And yet, after nearly 250 years of constitutional governance, in the wake of a Civil War, the unforgivable treatment of Native Americans and Black Americans, an insurrection on January 6, 2021, not to mention the fact that of the 22 men who have served in the White House from 1900-2024, eight have been the victims of assault, we bear witness to the perpetuation of violence as a weapon of political change.

Political violence is the scourge of democracy, a system grounded on the consent of the governed, propelled by reasoned discussion and debate undergirded by truths, facts and evidence. Violence, including assassination, undermines the democratic predicate of compromise and peaceful transitions of power, based on the premise that half a loaf is better than none. Democracy requires acceptance of electoral results, without which the country descends into a deep spiral of chaos and interminable violence. As of this writing, we don't have an explanation of the motives of the shooter who attempted to assassinate former President Donald Trump, whether politically inspired or the work of someone who had been bullied throughout life and sought recognition, but the outrageous act may well affect the outcome of the 2024 presidential race. Previous assaults on presidents and presidential candidates have left a big footprint on America's electoral history.

President Richard M. Nixon acknowledged that he could not have defeated Robert F. Kennedy in the 1968 presidential election. American history changed because Kennedy was assassinated. If John Wilkes Booth had not murdered President Abraham Lincoln, our Poet President likely could have facilitated the recovery of the nation torn apart by the Civil War, through a forgiving spirit and genuine enforcement of the Reconstruction Acts, rather than their disregard by his successor, Andrew Johnson.

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In a nation, deeply polarized by political differences, it is imperative for citizens to reject violence as a justifiable means to an end. Such assertions represent a complete rejection of democratic principles and values, and certainly are not the hallmark of a patriot. At this juncture in American politics, political leaders bear the responsibility to tone down their rhetoric, abandon reckless and false claims that may inspire violence and, above all, they absolutely must declare, publicly, their own opposition to the use of force. Responsible leadership requires it.

David Adler is president of The Alturas Institute, a non-profit organization created to promote the Constitution, gender equality and civic education. This column is made possible with the support of the South Dakota Humanities Council, South Dakota NewsMedia Association and this newspaper.

Queen of Hearts

Week number 19 of the Queen of Hearts was held Thursday night. Ticket sales for the week were \$2,855. The jackpot at \$30,697. The name of Faye Hoines was drawn. She picked card number 6 which was the King of Spades. She won the consolation prize of 10 percent of the ticket sales - \$285.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Trump describes assassination attempt in speech accepting GOP presidential nomination

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT AND ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 19, 2024 12:57 AM

MILWAUKEE — Donald Trump in an unusual speech accepting the GOP presidential nomination Thursday at the fourth and final night of the Republican National Convention gave a detailed account about the attempt on his life last weekend when a gunman shot at him during a campaign rally in Pennsylvania.

"I will tell you exactly what happened. And you'll never hear it from me a second time because it's actually too painful to tell," Trump said in his first public remarks about the shooting that killed one rally goer and injured two others. The gunman was killed by law enforcement at the scene.

Turning his head to look at a chart, which was later displayed on multiple screens inside the Fiserv Forum, is what saved his life, Trump said.

"I heard a loud whizzing sound and felt something hit me really, really hard on my right ear," Trump recalled. "I said to myself, 'Wow, what was that? It can only be a bullet.' I moved my hand to my right ear, brought it down, and my hand was covered with blood."

Trump said he knew immediately that he was "under attack" and praised the Secret Service agents for rushing on stage to shield him with their own bodies, calling them "great people" who took "great risk," to applause from the crowd.

He thanked the supporters in attendance last weekend for not panicking and stampeding, which can cause injuries and deaths during a mass shooting.

Trump in his 90-minute remarks appeared to seriously reflect on how close he came to being killed at one point, commenting that he wasn't sure he was meant to survive the attack.

"I'm not supposed to be here tonight," Trump said, before the crowd began chanting, "Yes, you are!"

"I stand before you in this arena only by the grace of Almighty God," he added.

Republicans' bestowal of the nomination on Trump at the finale of their convention is significant in that he becomes the first convicted felon to accept a major political party's presidential nod. Trump still faces charges in multiple criminal cases after one of the cases was dropped earlier this week.

Divine intervention seen

Trump's comments about being saved by God followed days of politicians from throughout the country claiming the bullet only grazing his ear was an act of divine intervention.

Pastor Lorenzo Sewell, from Detroit, said earlier in the night that people "can't deny the power of God" in Trump's life.

"You can't deny that God protected him, you cannot deny that it was a millimeter miracle that was able to save this man's life," Sewell said. "Could it be that Jesus Christ preserved him for such a time as this?"

"Could it be that the King of Glory, the Lord God, strong and mighty, the God who is mighty in battle, protected Donald Trump, because he wants to use him for such a time as this?" Sewell added.

Tucker Carlson, former Fox News television personality and conservative pundit, said that "a lot of people" are wondering what's going on following the shooting on Saturday.

"Something bigger is going on here. I think people who don't even believe in God are starting to think, 'Well, maybe there's something to this,'" Carlson said. "And I'm starting to think it's going to be okay, actually."

Trump wore a white bandage on his right ear concealing the wound he received last Saturday before Secret Service agents rushed to shield him from bullets.

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Trump spoke about Corey Comperatore, a former fire chief attending the rally with his family, who was killed in the shooting as well as the two people who were injured.

Trump called Comperatore a "highly respected" fire chief before walking over to his fire jacket and helmet, which had been placed on the stage, and kissing the helmet in a solemn moment.

Trump said he spoke with Comperatore's wife as well as the two injured people earlier in the day, who were doing "very well" in recovering from their injuries. The convention then observed a moment of silence for Comperatore.

GOP seeks unity as Democrats debate Biden's fate

The Republican National Convention and Trump's acceptance speech provided a prime opportunity for the GOP to show unity as Democrats increasingly questioned whether President Joe Biden should formally become their nominee in the weeks ahead.

Trump repeatedly criticized Democrats' policies and said they were a threat to the country's future, though he only mentioned Biden once, saying the damage the current president could inflict on the country is "unthinkable."

"If you took the 10 worst presidents in the history of the United States... and added them up, they will not have done the damage that Biden has done," Trump said.

Voters, he said, must "rescue our nation from failed and even incompetent leadership" by voting for him and Republicans during November's election.

"This will be the most important election in the history of our country," Trump said.

'The stakes have never been higher,' Biden campaign says

Biden-Harris Campaign Chair Jen O'Malley Dillon released a written statement rebuking Trump's speech, saying he "rambled on for well over an hour."

"He failed to mention how he had inflicted pain and cruelty on the women of America by overturning Roe v Wade. He failed to mention his plan to take over the civil service and to pardon the January 6th insurrectionists," Dillon wrote.

Biden, on the other hand, is "running for an America where we defend democracy, not diminish it," she wrote.

"The stakes have never been higher," Dillon wrote. "The choice has never been more clear. President Biden is more determined than ever to defeat Donald Trump and his Project 2025 agenda in November."

DNC Chair Jaime Harrison said in a written statement that in "Trump's Republican Party, there's only space for unquestioning loyalists who will put him above our democracy, above our freedoms, and above working families."

"Over the past four days, we've seen speakers endorse a far-right, dangerous vision that would see Americans' basic liberties stripped away and replace the rule of law with the rule of Trump," Harrison wrote. "No amount of desperate spin can change how unpopular and out of touch their disastrous plans are for the American people."

No stain left by Jan. 6

Trump's speech solidified a significant turnaround for the former president, who earned rebukes from many of the party's leaders following the Jan. 6 attack on the U.S. Capitol.

The events of that day, which led to the deaths of police officers and ended the country's centuries-long peaceful transition of power, would traditionally have been viewed as a black spot by the party that lauds itself as supporting "law and order" as well as the country's founding principles.

Instead, Trump has succeeded in convincing his supporters that the people convicted for violent acts should be pardoned as "political prisoners" and the several court cases against him are about his politics and not his actions.

Top Trump campaign official Chris LaCivita refused to say earlier Thursday during an event near the RNC

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whether Trump would continue to campaign on the promise to pardon Jan. 6 defendants, or “hostages” as he has described them numerous times.

Trump said Thursday night that nothing would prevent him from becoming president following November’s election.

“Our resolve is unbroken and our purpose is unchanged — to deliver a government that serves the American people better than ever before,” Trump said.

“Nothing will stop me to this vision, because our vision is righteous and our cause is pure,” Trump added. “No matter what obstacle comes our way, we will not break, we will not bend, we will not back down and I will never stop fighting for you.”

Trump’s loss of the popular vote and the Electoral College four years ago led him to make false claims about election fraud, which never bore fruit. Judges threw out numerous court challenges.

Trump faces federal felony charges that he conspired to create false slates of electors in seven states and attempted to obstruct the certification of the 2020 presidential election results.

That, however, hasn’t stopped Trump from repeating the claim and making it a hallmark of his third run for the Oval Office.

Trump reiterated many of those incorrect claims during his speech to applause and cheers from the crowd gathered inside Fiserv Forum.

“They used COVID to cheat,” he said.

Trump: ‘We must not criminalize dissent’

Despite his incessant encouragement of rally chants during the 2016 campaign to lock up former Democratic opponent Hillary Clinton, and a willingness to explore jailing his rivals if he wins in November, Trump said “we must not criminalize dissent or demonize political disagreement.”

In addition to the federal 2020 election subversion charges, Trump faces racketeering charges in Georgia, sentencing over a guilty verdict in New York, and federal charges over allegedly stealing and hiding classified government documents after leaving the Oval Office.

Federal District Judge Aileen Cannon on Monday dropped the classified documents case on the grounds that the government illegally appointed a special counsel to prosecute it. The Department of Justice has since appealed.

The former president reminded the crowd of the “major ruling that was handed down from a highly respected federal judge.”

“If the Democrats want to unify our country, they should drop these partisan witch hunts,” Trump said.

‘Stop wars with a telephone call’

Trump said the “planet is teetering on the edge of World War Three” and he will “end every single international crisis that the current administration has created.”

Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 “would have never happened if I was president,” he said, repeating the same claim about the Oct. 7 attack by Hamas on Israel.

“I tell you this, we want our hostages back and they better be back,” Trump said later in the speech about Israeli-American hostages still in Hamas captivity.

Trump praised Victor Orbán — the Hungarian prime minister known for his authoritarian streak — which the crowd cheered. He also touted his friendship with North Korean dictator Kim Jong Un.

He said the press criticized him for his congeniality with Kim, but “it’s nice to get along with someone who has a lot of nuclear weapons,” Trump said.

“I could stop wars with a telephone call,” Trump said, but immediately followed with a promise to “build an Iron Dome missile defense system to ensure that no enemy can strike our homeland.”

Trump’s ‘only crime’ is ‘loving America’

Speakers rallying the crowd before Trump’s appearance on Thursday exalted his golf game and busi-

ness management style, and defended the former president, who they say supports them through long-established ties.

"To me, he is my friend," Trump's attorney Alina Habba said tearfully.

"Sham indictments and baseless allegations will not deter us, because the only crime President Trump has committed is loving America," she said.

Trump's 2020 election subversion case has sat in a holding pattern for months while he appealed his claim of presidential immunity to the U.S. Supreme Court. The justices returned the case to the trial court after issuing a 6-3 majority opinion in early July that grants broad immunity for former presidents' official acts.

Trump was convicted of 34 felonies in New York state court for falsifying business records related to a hush money payment by his personal lawyer to a porn star ahead of the 2016 election.

However, the New York judge handling the case has delayed Trump's sentencing while his lawyers challenge the case, arguing the Supreme Court's immunity ruling opens questions about what evidence against a former sitting president can be admitted to court.

Pompeo says no Putin in Ukraine under Trump

Mike Pompeo, Trump's former CIA director and secretary of State, blamed Russian President Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine and deaths of its civilians on "weakness" of the Biden administration.

"Last week, we saw what it meant — that Children's Hospital bombed, innocents killed — it did not have to be," Pompeo said, referring to the July 8 Russian strike on the medical facility in Kyiv.

World leaders from NATO etched a path for Ukraine to join the alliance at the July summit in Washington, D.C, and pledged more resources for the nation that Russia further invaded in February 2022.

Trump has long criticized NATO, dismissing the post-WWII alliance's core tenet that an attack against one is an attack against all and threatening to withdraw over funding.

In February he told a rally crowd in South Carolina that he would "encourage (Russia) to do whatever the hell they want" to "delinquent" member countries that do not pay 2% of their GDP on defense.

All members agreed to a 2% commitment in 2014, and 23 are on track to meet the target this year, according to the alliance.

On Wednesday night at the RNC, Trump's running mate, Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance, echoed Trump's words and declared "no more free rides for nations that betray the generosity of the American taxpayer."

Lia Chien contributed to this report.

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

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

Tribal representation low at first Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council meeting

State department announces kinship licensing effort, other child welfare initiatives

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 18, 2024 5:34 PM

The newly created Indian Child Welfare Advisory Council held its first meeting Thursday to discuss South Dakota's foster care process and how to improve communication and collaboration between the state and tribal governments.

The Legislature and Gov. Kristi Noem approved legislation earlier this year establishing the advisory council to address the overrepresentation of Native American children in the state's foster care system. A 2023 joint investigation by South Dakota Searchlight and the Argus Leader found that Native American children accounted for nearly 74% of foster children in the system at the end of fiscal year 2023, despite making up 13% of the state's child population.

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However, only two tribal representatives — from the Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate and Lower Brule Sioux Tribe — attended the first meeting. There are nine tribal nations in South Dakota.

Department of Social Services Secretary Matt Althoff told council members he was “sad” there wasn’t full representation by tribal nations. He said feedback about how to improve work between his department and tribes is imperative to “penetrate through barriers” tribal members face regarding child abuse and neglect.

Low attendance due to scheduling conflicts & lack of communication, ICWA offices say

The department resisted the effort to create the advisory council during the legislative session. Sisseton Republican Rep. Tamara St. John, a tribal member who introduced the advisory council bill, said she was disappointed by the low representation at the first meeting, though she attributed it to the “friction” between tribes and the South Dakota government.

Representatives of all nine tribal governments have voted to ban Noem from their reservations because of her claim that tribal leaders are benefiting from drug cartel activity, and because of her statement that Native American children “don’t have any hope” due to economic, educational and cultural struggles on reservations.

“It’s going to take some time to develop a certain level of trust to be able to move forward in a productive way,” St. John said.

Tribal governments have offices that administer the federal Indian Child Welfare Act. Some ICWA directors could not attend the council meeting because of scheduling conflicts. Representatives with the Oglala Sioux Tribe were in San Diego at the Capacity Building Center for Tribes Summer Gathering, and the ICWA director for the Yankton Sioux Tribe was in North Dakota for the state’s annual Indian Child Welfare and Wellness Conference.

Employees with the ICWA offices for Oglala and Yankton Sioux tribes said they were not aware of the advisory council meeting until this week, since state communication about the meeting went through the president or chairman’s office rather than their department.

Heather Patton, an ICWA technician with OST, said she tried attending the meeting virtually but had technical difficulties.

The council is required to meet at least once a year. There is not a set time for its next meeting.

DSS announces new initiatives, including kinship program

Krista Young, director of the Center for Prevention of Child Maltreatment at the University of South Dakota, presented to the council about the organization’s mission and initiatives.

She also talked about the impacts that risk factors (such as poverty) and adverse childhood experiences (such as parental substance abuse or food insecurity) can have on children, and the benefits of strengthening cultural ties for Native American children who experience child abuse and maltreatment.

“We want to treat child maltreatment as a public health priority,” Young said.

Pamela Bennett, the division director of South Dakota Child Protection Services, presented to the advisory council about the South Dakota child welfare process and system, as well as initiatives within the Department of Social Services to improve child welfare in the state.

New initiatives include implementing federally funded Family First Prevention Services and developing materials to approve more Native American foster families in South Dakota. The Family First approach funds prevention services addressing child abuse and neglect at its root, including substance abuse treatment for parents, mental health services and parenting classes. South Dakota is one of the last four states to create a plan, which has yet to be finalized and approved by the federal government.

The department also plans to create a kinship licensing program.

“That’s a really important, attainable goal,” Althoff told council members.

Research shows that when children have to be removed from their homes, prioritizing kinship care (being placed with relatives or close family friends) can improve academic, behavioral and mental health

outcomes, and allow the child to stay within their culture and community, according to Child Trends, a research organization focused on child welfare.

Currently, South Dakota kinship caregivers who accept a child into their home after being removed from their parents don't receive the same amount of resources and support as foster parents, unless they become licensed foster parents themselves. Licensing brings a higher monthly payment to caregivers, helping them cover the cost of the educational, social and medical needs of the children in their care.

That process and training is intensive, time consuming, and potentially unrelated to the kin's situation since they are already familiar with the child. Four percent of South Dakota children in foster care were placed in kinship care between 2021 and 2023, according to data from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.

Of the thousands of instances when Child Protection Services became involved with families during fiscal year 2024, families were able to remain together 28% of the time after implementing a "safety plan," Bennett said.

"What we know is when parents and children can be together and both go through those changes and processes and see that behavior change at the same time, we tend to see better outcomes," Bennett said.

Members of the council serve two-year terms and include representatives appointed by each of the nine tribes within South Dakota, a representative for the Department of Social Services, and a legislative representative from the Senate and House of Representatives.

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

First SD measles case in nine years appears in Rapid City

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - JULY 18, 2024 5:16 PM

The first case of measles in South Dakota in nine years was reported Thursday by the state Department of Health.

Measles is a highly contagious viral disease that can cause health complications, especially in children younger than 5 years old.

The case was found in a Pennington County adult who traveled internationally and tested positive at Monument Health in Rapid City this month. The patient could have exposed people at the Black Hills Urgent Care from 10 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. on July 9 and the Monument Health Rapid City Emergency Department waiting room from 5 p.m. to 12 a.m. on July 12, the Department of Health said.

"Measles is a highly contagious viral disease and spreads through the air when an infected individual coughs or sneezes," said Dr. Joshua Clayton, state epidemiologist, in a news release Thursday. "Individuals who have not been fully immunized with two doses of measles vaccine have an increased risk of infection if they have contact with an infected person."

The measles vaccine is typically given to children between 12 and 15 months old, with the second dose given at 4 to 6 years old. Two measles shots usually produce lifelong immunity, according to the news release.

The last time a measles case was reported in South Dakota was in January 2015, when there was an outbreak of 13 cases in the Mitchell area and one case in an unvaccinated Sioux Falls 10-year-old.

Aside from an unvaccinated child younger than 5 years old contracting measles in Mitchell in December 2014, South Dakota hadn't had a measles case since 1997.

Measles appears in two stages. First, the patient may have a runny nose, cough, slight fever and red-ened eyes sensitive to light. Second, on the third to seventh day, the patient has a temperature of 103-105 degrees Fahrenheit and a red, blotchy rash beginning on their face and spreading across their body. The rash lasts up to a week.

Measles, mumps and rubella (MMR) vaccination rates have been on the decline in the United States for over a decade after the disease was declared eliminated in 2000. More than 160 cases have been reported nationwide so far in 2024, with 53% of cases hospitalized. Over 60% of cases in children younger than 5

years old have been hospitalized so far this year.

South Dakota's MMR vaccination rate among kindergarteners decreased from 96.8% during the 2009-2010 school year to 92.5% during the 2022-2023 school year, according to the Centers for Disease Control. That is below the Office of Disease Prevention and Health Promotion's goal of 95%, which establishes herd immunity.

Children entering school or an early childhood program in South Dakota must have received, or be in the process of receiving, two doses of the MMR vaccine and some other vaccines. Exemptions are available if a licensed physician says it would endanger the child's life or health, or if the child's religious doctrine opposes immunization.

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

Top Trump adviser says 2024 election 'not over' until Inauguration Day

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 18, 2024 5:44 PM

MILWAUKEE — A top Trump campaign official said Thursday that the 2024 presidential race will not be over until Inauguration Day, rather than after Election Day on Nov. 5 — when voters across the nation go to the polls to cast their ballots and a result normally is projected.

The assertion from Chris LaCivita at a Politico event is notable given former President Donald Trump's refusal to accept the results of the 2020 presidential election, which he lost to President Joe Biden, and the ensuing violent attack on the U.S. Capitol by his supporters on Jan. 6, 2021.

It is also significant given that the U.S. Department of Justice alleges after Election Day in 2020, Trump co-conspired with lawyers and election officials in seven states to produce false slates of electors. According to the indictment, those slates were intended to be delivered to Vice President Mike Pence during the routine certification in a joint session of Congress in early January following presidential elections.

"It's not over until he puts his hand on the Bible and takes the oath. It's not over until then. It's not over on Election Day, it's over on Inauguration Day, cause I wouldn't put anything past anybody," LaCivita, Trump's co-campaign manager, told Politico's Jonathan Martin during a lengthy interview open to press and attendees, and livestreamed, at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee.

Trump did not attend Biden's inauguration, and he and many Republican lawmakers continue to repeat false claims that he won.

LaCivita interrupted with his comment when Martin was in the middle of asking about the prospects for Democrats on Election Day.

"It's also possible that Donald Trump can lose," Martin followed up. LaCivita said the campaign will remain focused on the issues.

A few moments later Martin asked LaCivita if he thinks it's politically wise for Trump to continue campaigning on pardoning the Jan. 6 rioters.

"I always find it amazing that you guys are the ones that bring it up," LaCivita said, referring to the press.

"That's not true," Martin replied.

"I've been in a lot of interviews where it's the first question you guys ask," LaCivita said. "What we're talking about right now are the issues that matter, Social Security, protecting Social Security and Medicare, closing the border. I mean we have so much to talk about and that's where our focus is."

"In a perfect Chris LaCivita world (Trump) would never say the words 'Jan. 6 hostages' again," Martin followed up.

LaCivita immediately responded and repeated: "Social Security, Medicaid, closing the border, deportation — yeah I said it — all of those things."

In March, Trump told reporters he was open to cutting Social Security and other entitlement programs as a way to address the national debt.

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Election fraud falsely claimed

Trump repeated false claims of election fraud in the months following the 2020 election and lost numerous court challenges in states that he insisted he won.

The fight erupted in political violence on Jan. 6, when a mob of Trump supporters overran the U.S. Capitol Police with improvised weapons and the goal of stopping Congress from certifying the election results.

The historic criminal indictment of a former sitting U.S. president — handed up from a federal grand jury in August 2023 — charges Trump with conspiracy to defraud the United States and obstructing an official proceeding, among other felony counts.

Trump has successfully delayed the federal election subversion case as he appealed his motion to dismiss based on president criminal immunity all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

The justices on July 1 ruled in a 6-3 decision that former presidents enjoy broad immunity for official acts, and sparked major questions over what type of evidence can be used in any such prosecution.

'How do you utilize' an assassination attempt?

Reaction to the attempted assassination against Trump on Saturday in Butler, Pennsylvania, has evolved over the RNC's first three days. It's gone from initial concerns about political violence to rallying around the event as a symbol of how "Trump Strong" can reshape America, as Donald Trump Jr. said Wednesday night.

Trump supporters wore fake bandages on their ears at the RNC as a political symbol, much like the red "Make America Great Again" hat.

"The energy or the emotion that you feel when something like that happens, how do you utilize it? How do you utilize it to get to where you need to be?" LaCivita said.

"How do you utilize it to win an election or how do you utilize it to bring the country together?" Martin followed up.

"I think it's both," LaCivita said.

The co-campaign manager sidestepped a question about whether Trump will make an effort during his RNC speech to tell supporters not to believe conspiracy theories circulating online that the shooting was a Democratic plot. Martin asked if LaCivita agreed that Trump tamping down accusations against his opposing political party would be "good for the country."

LaCivita said the campaign is planning Trump's speech to be "forward focused."

"I mean look, there are not enough facts, and it's not just up to us to talk about the facts resulting around what happened," LaCivita said as he added to the chorus of criticism of the U.S. Secret Service and calling on its head to resign.

Hours after the shooting Saturday, U.S. Sen. J.D. Vance of Ohio — announced Monday at the RNC as Trump's vice presidential pick — wrote on social media that "today is not just some isolated incident."

"The central premise of the Biden campaign is that President Donald Trump is an authoritarian fascist who must be stopped at all costs. That rhetoric led directly to President Trump's assassination attempt," he wrote.

Project 2025 a 'pain in the ass' for Trump

Of the themes permeating the RNC, the major conservative Project 2025 has dogged Trump's campaign in a way that LaCivita described as "a pain in the ass."

The 922-page document spearheaded by the Heritage Foundation roadmaps a presidential transition and plan to overhaul government administrations, to lobby Congress for national abortion restrictions and restoration of "the American family as the centerpiece of American life and protect our children."

The organization held an all-day policy fest five blocks from the RNC convention hall Monday.

Trump denies any connection to the project, despite former Trump administration officials identifying their previous positions in the project materials. A CNN analysis found that 140 who previously worked for Trump helped on Project 2025.

LaCivita said any claim that Trump is connected to the project is "utter bulls—t."

"They do not speak for the campaign."

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

If a presidential nominee drops out, what happens to states' ballots?

Experts say it's likely the Supreme Court would settle the resulting mess

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - JULY 18, 2024 12:39 PM

This special report was written with contributions from States Newsroom's 39 state news outlets.

WASHINGTON — The Electoral College could help Democrats avoid a complicated situation in the event President Joe Biden withdraws from the race after his name is printed on ballots.

States Newsroom reporters and editors in the network's 39 states explored how a presidential candidate could be replaced on ballots — should the nominee drop out or become unable to continue their campaign following the party conventions.

While there were wildly varying answers, and some states won't even contemplate the possibility, numerous officials pointed to the Electoral College process.

How that process works is often not well understood. When U.S. voters head to the polls the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November, they technically vote for electors, not the candidate.

Those electors then vote for a presidential candidate based on the results of the popular vote in that state, or in certain congressional districts.

The Electoral College is the reason on election night, maps show the race based on 270 electoral votes, not the countdown to one of the candidates winning the popular vote.

The somewhat complicated process made headlines eight years ago when Donald Trump won the Electoral College but not the popular vote and again four years ago when Trump allies sent slates of "fake electors" to Congress in an attempt to push aside the official results.

This year, with Democrats increasingly uneasy about Biden's age and mental state following his debate performance, the system could provide a safety net of sorts in the event Biden withdraws after he becomes the party's official nominee: The electors could potentially vote for someone else, presumably another Democrat.

In Louisiana, for example, Deputy Secretary of State for Communications Joel Watson Jr., said the "nominees for president and vice president are not the candidates who are elected on November 5th, the people running for presidential elector are."

Iowa Secretary of State spokesperson Ashley Hunt noted that how electors vote in December is not governed by the state's election statute, aside from signing a pledge when appointed to those positions by their party.

"All of that of course would be subject to any legal action required by courts to the contrary," Hunt said.

Legal tangle

Election experts warn that it is nearly certain lawsuits would proliferate if a presidential candidate drops out late in the campaign, and the outcome very likely would be in the hands of the courts rather than state election officials.

Emory Law professor Alicia Hughes said during an interview with States Newsroom that such a scenario would be "a complicated mess with an unpredictable outcome that very likely could end up at the steps of a very conservative United States Supreme Court."

With "unequivocal certainty," Hughes said, lawsuits would be filed in both state and federal courts to challenge the process, potentially leading to very different rulings in state, federal district and federal appeals courts.

"What usually happens when you have situations where there are conflicts between state laws and the application of federal law by state courts is the Supreme Court grants cert, and they will take these

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things up as a matter of judicial review," Hughes said.

"And given the importance of dates that we have fixed by our Constitution — with our 20th and 25th Amendments, dealing with the dates of certifications and different things that are required to take place for us to get a president inaugurated on January 20 — it would be expedited," Hughes added.

'Faithless electors'

There have been several calls for overhauling or eliminating the Electoral College in the past couple of decades, especially after President George W. Bush and Trump were elected without winning the popular vote in 2000 and 2016, respectively.

The Electoral College includes 538 possible votes from electors, who are often loyal to their party. Those people then meet in their states in December to vote for a presidential candidate.

Congress will certify the results on Jan. 6, 2025.

But the United States has some history of so-called "faithless electors," who simply don't cast their Electoral College vote for the candidate that voters in their state or congressional district chose.

The nonpartisan Congressional Research Service points out in a report that: "Political parties select elector candidates with the expectation that those electors will support the party's presidential nominee. However, the Constitution and federal law do not address whether electors' votes are bound to particular state-level or party loyalties."

This raises the question of what would happen with electors in the fall of 2024 if Biden has given up on his reelection bid and whether they could shift to an alternate candidate.

Some states have fined electors who cast ballots for a different candidate and the Supreme Court has upheld that practice, but each state differs and some electors could simply accept the fine.

The National Conference of State Legislators writes in a brief on the Electoral College that generally "electors are selected by the political party for their party loyalty, and many are party leaders who are unlikely to vote for anyone other than their party's candidate."

Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Colorado, Connecticut, Delaware, the District of Columbia, Florida, Hawaii, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, Michigan, Minnesota, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Mexico, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Ohio, Oregon, South Carolina, Tennessee, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, Wisconsin and Wyoming all have laws addressing faithless electors, according to NCSL.

'Wild, wild west'

Hughes said in the remaining states there's not "that obligation as an elector."

"So that makes it the wild, wild west," she said. "But then the question becomes what are the repercussions" if electors vote for another candidate.

Even in states with penalties for faithless electors, a conviction would only result in a misdemeanor and the fines don't typically exceed \$2,000, she said.

"So people really don't have a heavy incentive, even in those... states and the District of Columbia to go along with the popular vote of your state," Hughes said.

The U.S. Election Assistance Commission writes in a report on the Electoral College that faithless electors "are rare and have never decided the outcome of an election, but they are worrisome in this time of close electoral margins."

"The other weakness of the Electoral College system is the amount of time it takes to complete the process and the death or resignation of a president-elect," the report states.

The report goes on to note that "(c)onstitutional scholars believe that electors are free to vote for any candidate they wish once they are appointed. However, faithless electors are unlikely because the political parties submit the names of their own electors, and those coveted spots are reserved for party loyalists who are unlikely to defect."

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Confusion seen

Heritage Oversight Project oversight counsel Max Matheu said switching out a party's nominee within 45 days ahead of the election, after military and overseas ballots go out, could create confusion among voters and possibly among the electors as well.

It would also be a different process in each state.

"If Biden wants to withdraw under the DNC rules, that's fine — 33 states defer to DNC rules on substitution and nomination," said Matheu, of the conservative-leaning organization. "It probably would be a nothingburger in those states."

"But there are other states, like Wisconsin, that have mental incapacity issues that have to be essentially asserted to the Secretary of State to say, 'Hey, here's why this candidate is no longer going to be the nominee,'" he said.

That would bring up 25th Amendment issues about Biden continuing to serve as president, he said.

Should Biden withdraw as the candidate after state deadlines have passed and after ballots are printed, Matheu said, there would very likely be lawsuits filed in state and federal courts.

"The reason why this is all kind of a patchwork, and there's a lot of confusion, even among the experts, is that it's 50 different states," Matheu said. "So it's not going to be a clear-cut issue one way or the other."

The possibility of swapping another candidate in for Biden gets much more complicated the closer the country gets to election day, he said.

"I think that's why there's so much interest right now in whether or not he's going to pull out earlier rather than later," Matheu said. "Because it's much easier for him to do it now."

The view from the states

Because presidential elections are administered by the states, there are varying deadlines for when the national parties have to certify their presidential nominee, when that person could withdraw and when electors are chosen.

Here is what election officials throughout the country told States Newsroom about when their deadlines are this year and how their Electoral College process could be affected.

Alabama: The Secretary of State's office wrote in an email that major parties have an Aug. 23 deadline to certify their presidential and vice presidential candidates. Those would be certified by Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen on Aug. 28.

"Under Alabama law, there is no mechanism available for a political party to withdraw or substitute their presidential candidate after they have been certified to the Secretary of State," Laney Rawls, a spokesperson for Allen, wrote.

Alaska: The deadline for political parties to submit names of electors is Sept. 1, with the withdrawal deadline for general election candidates the following day, according to a timeline of the 2024 election.

If a candidate were to drop out after the ballots are printed, the Alaska Division of Elections "would work with (the state) Department of Law to determine our next actions," according to division Operations Manager Michaela Thompson.

Arizona: State law allows the chairman of the state Democratic Party up to 10 days after the July 30 primary election to submit nominations for the slate of presidential electors that will appear on the ballot for the party's nominee.

Were Biden not the party's nominee following the Democratic National Convention, which is set for Aug. 19-22, Democrats would have until Aug. 30 to submit new electors for a new nominee, according to JP Martin, spokesman for Arizona Secretary of State Adrian Fontes.

Any later than that, Fontes said, and the state would be in violation of the Uniformed and Overseas Citizens Absentee Voting Act, or UOCAVA, which governs voting by Americans living outside the country.

Arkansas: Chris Powell, spokesman for Secretary of State John Thurston, wrote in an email that the state does "not have legislation that deals with Presidential candidate withdrawal."

"The political parties will certify their candidates to us after their convention," he said. "Our statewide

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deadline to officially certify all candidates and ballot issues to the counties is August 22nd."

"Each county prints their own ballots, so I'm not sure exactly when they are printed but there are a couple deadlines by which they have to be printed," Powell said. "September 19th is the deadline for a county board of election commissioners to deliver absentee ballots to the county clerk for mailing to all qualified applicants."

Colorado: Every registered voter receives a ballot by mail. Oct. 4 is the last day for general election ballots to be printed this year, and county clerks will begin mailing them Oct. 11.

If the Colorado secretary of state's office receives formal withdrawal paperwork from any candidate after ballots are printed, state law says any votes cast for that candidate "are invalid and shall not be counted," according to Jack Todd, spokesperson for the secretary of state.

Write-in candidates for the general election in Colorado must have filed an affidavit of intent by July 18. Write-in votes for candidates, including for president, who have not filed the affidavit will not be counted.

Florida: Ballots are sent to military and overseas voters by Sept. 21, with vote-by-mail ballots for domestic voters sent between Sept. 26 and Oct. 3, according to a timeline from the Secretary of State.

Georgia: Ballots for the Nov. 5 election must be ready by Sept. 17, which is the first day for local election officials to mail ballots to overseas residents and members of the military.

In the event that a candidate withdraws from an election after ballots have been printed, prominent notices are displayed at polling places. However, a presidential candidate withdrawing presents an unprecedented circumstance, since votes are being cast on behalf of the party's presidential electors instead of the candidates listed on the ticket, according to Georgia Secretary of State spokesman Mike Hassinger.

Substitute nominations are made according to the party's procedures for handling withdrawals, deaths, or disqualifications, Hassinger said.

Idaho: Rob McQuade, assistant chief deputy to the Idaho secretary of state, and Jason Lehosit, deputy secretary of state, stressed that because the Democratic National Committee will have its convention Aug. 19-22, the state would have time to adjust to a new nominee if the Democratic Party nominates someone other than Biden.

The Secretary of State's Office must certify all candidates for the general election ballot by Sept. 6, Lehosit said.

"I'm not going to get too worked up over it because of the timing of the convention," Lehosit said. "The convention is in the middle of August. That's going to be done in plenty of time for (the Democratic Party) to transmit us the names."

"I would say when you're looking at the 50 states, I don't think we're going to be an issue," Lehosit said. "They have their convention Aug. 19 through Aug. 22. If they do change their presidential candidate, I'm sure it's going to be in that window. They're going to notify us who to put on the ballot, and it's not going to be a problem for us."

Indiana: If a candidate certified as part of the Democratic, Republican or Libertarian Party's presidential ticket ceases to be a candidate after ballots are printed, their names will remain on the ballot.

Indiana code says the nominee's successor must be certified in the same manner as the original candidate, but "the ballots must reflect the original nominee's name, and any vote cast in the election for the original nominee shall be considered a vote for the successor."

Matthew R. Kochevar, the Democratic co-general counsel of the Indiana Election Division, said all votes cast for the presidential ticket with the former candidate's name on the ballot will count for the successor candidate.

"That is because while voters are voting on the ticket, in actuality, voters are voting for the slate of electors the party certified to the election division, and by law those electors, if elected to cast Indiana's electoral votes, are pledged to support any successor candidate at the elector meeting."

Iowa: There is not a process for withdrawing a name from the ballot after the applicable withdrawal deadline, according to Ashley Hunt, spokesperson for the Iowa Secretary of State.

For the general election, the deadline is 81 days prior to the election, or on Friday, Aug. 16, for state and

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federal contests. Once the deadline has passed, all certified names will appear on the ballot.

An example in Iowa was the 2018 Democratic primary for governor. Candidate Nate Boulton suspended his campaign two weeks before the primary election. His name still appeared on the ballot and was canvassed.

The vote for president and vice president is actually a vote for the Electoral College electors. If a presidential or vice presidential candidate withdrew or died after the withdrawal deadline, their name would remain on the ballot.

How the electors would vote in December is not governed by Iowa's election statute, aside from signing a pledge when appointed to those positions by their party, Hunt said. "All of that of course would be subject to any legal action required by courts to the contrary."

Kansas: There is no filing deadline in Kansas for presidential and vice presidential candidates, who are selected at party conventions, but the parties must certify a slate of six electors to the Kansas Secretary of State by Sept. 1.

Under Kansas law, as outlined by the Kansas Secretary of State's Office, a candidate can withdraw from the ballot after Sept. 1 only if the candidate dies or suffers a "severe medical hardship" certified by a physician. The candidate's political party must provide a substitute candidate for the ballot, if ballots haven't been printed yet.

Ballots are printed 45 days before the general election — this year, the date is Sept. 15. If a presidential or vice presidential candidate withdraws after voting starts, the electors would choose a substitute.

Candidates for national office can be forcefully removed from the ballot only if they don't meet the eligibility requirements of the U.S. Constitution: a natural born citizen over the age of 35 who has lived in the U.S. for 14 years.

Kentucky: If a presidential nominee were to withdraw from the race, it would be treated like any other candidate withdrawal, said Michon Lindstrom, a spokesperson for the Kentucky secretary of state's office. The candidate would still appear on ballots, but polling places would display signs saying he or she is no longer a candidate.

Kentucky's certification date for the presidential race is Sept. 9, as independent candidates have until Sept. 6 to file for election.

Louisiana: Joel Watson Jr., deputy Secretary of State for communications, noted the "nominees for president and vice president are not the candidates who are elected on November 5th, the people running for presidential elector are."

The qualifying period in the Pelican State ends at 4:30 p.m. Aug. 23, with the candidate withdrawal deadline at the same time Aug. 30.

"However, this is technically the deadline for presidential electors to withdraw, not the presidential nominee." Watson wrote. "If a presidential elector does withdraw, then the law provides that the vacancy is filled by the party's state central committee or by a vote of the remaining electors after the election (if they are elected). Assuming that the presidential nominee listed on the electors' qualifying forms could also withdraw, the deadline would be the same: August 30th."

"But there is a very big caveat to that deadline: the law (R.S. 18:1253(F)) is very clear that if 'the certificate of nomination and notarized affidavit of each candidate for elector are not filed timely with the secretary of state, the secretary of state shall endorse the date and time of receipt upon all documents and shall return them forthwith,'" Watson wrote. "So if a nominee for elector (or nominee for president) withdraws between August 23rd and August 30th, we cannot accept new paperwork with a new nominee."

"So if there will be a change to a presidential nominee for a recognized party, we would need to receive revised certificates of nomination and revised affidavits from the candidates for elector prior to 4:30 p.m. on August 23, 2024," Watson added.

Maine: The election process following a candidate dropping out depends on when they drop out and why, according to Maine law.

Candidates can withdraw or be removed from the ballot up to 70 days before the election, which is Aug. 27 this year. After the deadline has passed, there are "emergency circumstances under Maine election

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law for production of new ballots in the event of a vacancy pursuant to death, injury or incapacitation of a candidate prior to election day," said Shenna Bellows, Maine's Secretary of State.

Under Maine election law, if a candidate on the general election ballot withdraws less than 70 days before the general election and does not meet the criteria for production of an emergency ballot, then notice is distributed to local election officials to post for voters, notifying them that votes for that candidate would not be counted, she said.

Maryland: The certification and display of ballots will be held on Sept. 3, according to a timeline of this year's key election dates. The deadline for a voter to request judicial review for printing errors is the following day.

Printing of ballots is scheduled to begin on Sept. 6 and the state will begin sending mail-in ballots on Sept. 21.

The deadline for the governor "to issue and transmit a certificate of electors" is Dec. 11, just six days before those electors are scheduled to meet.

Michigan: "Presidential candidates are certified to the ballot by the party convention. Following the presidential nominating conventions, presidential candidates are added to the ballot. Convention candidates must be certified to the ballot no later than 60 days before the election so ballots can be delivered to military and overseas civilians 45 days before the election," according to Cheri Hardmon, spokesperson for the Michigan Department of State.

"Once ballots are printed, the Bureau of Elections is limited in its ability to remove a candidate's name, due in part to the logistical complexity involved in preparation and distribution of ballots," Hardmon wrote in a statement. "If a candidate withdraws after this point, the Bureau is committed to providing accurate and timely information to voters and elections officials. The Bureau will continue to follow legal guidelines to ensure transparency and uphold the integrity of Michigan's elections."

Minnesota: Major parties don't have to provide candidates until Aug 26, according to Cassandra Knudson, spokesperson for the Office of Secretary of State.

If there was a change after that, a petition would need to be filed with the Minnesota Supreme Court. The court would provide guidance on how to proceed.

General election ballots will be sent out starting on Sept. 20.

Missouri: The Secretary of State must provide a certified list of candidates to local election officials by Aug. 27. Democrats would need a court order in order to swap out candidates after that date.

Montana: Each major party that received more than 5% of the vote in the previous two general presidential elections submits their nominees for president and vice president. They can be withdrawn from the ballot or changed as soon as 76 days before the election. The ways to change presidential or vice presidential nominations in Montana can happen in one of several ways: Upon the death of either or both of the candidates. If that happens, the party would be responsible for its nomination.

A presidential or vice presidential candidate may withdraw from the election if they send the correct written documentation to the Secretary of State at least 76 days before the general election.

If a presidential or vice presidential candidate withdraws from the election after the 76-day period, then it triggers section 13-12-202, which allows the Secretary of State some discretion in how to correct or update the ballot, including ordering new ballots for the entire state or specifying how the correction will be made.

Nebraska: The state has no process for removing a candidate from the ballot once the ballots are printed. Once the ballot is certified, it is certified, according to Jackie Ourada, a spokeswoman for the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office.

For example, in this year's May 14 Republican presidential primary in Nebraska, Nikki Haley remained on the ballot even though she had dropped out of the race.

Any recognized political party with a spot on the November ballot must certify its presidential and vice presidential candidates to the Nebraska Secretary of State's Office by Sept. 9.

The statewide portion of the ballot is finalized Sept. 13. The process of distributing the first early ballots to deployed military members and Americans abroad starts Sept. 20.

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Counties must have early ballots by mail ready to send out by Sept. 30.

Nevada: Each major political party must provide the names of their candidates for president and vice president to the secretary of state by 5 p.m. on the first business day of September of the year of a presidential election. That's Tuesday, Sept. 3 this year because Sept. 2 is Labor Day.

That is about two-and-a-half weeks before the state's deadline of Sept. 21 for distributing ballots to military and overseas voters. Nevada's deadline is set in regulation.

New Hampshire: Secretary of State Dave Scanlan declined to answer the question about a candidate withdrawing, saying it was a hypothetical.

"This is a hypothetical question that depends on a number of variables. We should wait and see what the results of the national party conventions are before speculating," Scanlan said.

New Jersey: The Secretary of State's office declined to weigh in on what they viewed as a hypothetical question.

But a similar issue arose in 2002 when Sen. Robert Torricelli announced on Sept. 30 that he was withdrawing from that November's general election. The state Democratic Party filed a complaint asking a judge to remove Torricelli's name from the ballot and give the party a chance to select a replacement candidate. Some mail-in ballots — then called absentee ballots — had already been returned when the state Supreme Court heard the case on Oct. 2.

The court ruled in the party's favor, saying election laws should be construed liberally so voters are not denied their franchise. Since it was "administratively feasible" to replace Torricelli's name on the ballot, the court allowed the party to replace him.

A key change in the state's election laws since 2002 would make this type of switch more difficult. In 2002, voters could vote absentee only if they had a valid reason. Since 2009, any voter can vote absentee, and since 2020, mail-in voting has become extremely popular. This means in early October 2024, many more voters will have already voted than had done so in early October 2002.

New Mexico: Biden's name won't be printed on New Mexicans ballots for the general election if he withdraws from the race before Aug. 27.

State law gives candidates 70 days before the general election date to submit a form with the Secretary of State that takes them out of competing in an election. Sept. 21 is the final day for local county clerks to print ballots, so technically, he has until then to get off ballots statewide, according to New Mexico Secretary of State spokesperson Alex Curtas.

North Carolina: Board of Elections lawyer Paul Cox told States Newsroom that if a presidential candidate dies, resigns, or is disqualified after the ballots have been printed and the absentee voting period has begun, then state law requires that the "candidate whose name appears on the official ballots shall not require that the ballots be reprinted."

"If the vacancy occurs before the absentee voting period begins, the responsible county board of elections, or State Board of Elections if the contests spans more than one county, may determine whether it is practical to have the ballots reprinted with the name of the replacement nominee as authorized by G.S. 163-114," state law says. "If the ballots are not reprinted, a vote cast for the candidate whose name is printed on the ballot shall be counted as a vote for the replacement nominee."

North Dakota: If a candidate withdraws after ballots have been printed, new ballots are not printed, said Deputy Secretary of State Sandy McMerty. The deadline for ballot information to be submitted to the state is Sept. 3. Candidates can withdraw until 4 p.m. on Sept. 5.

If the top vote-getter has withdrawn or is deceased at the time of the election, the top vote-getter is declared the winner and the position is treated like a vacancy, McMerty said.

With the presidential office, the state would have no authority to fill that vacancy, she said.

Ohio: State officials are juggling timelines this year because the Democratic National Convention happens after an existing deadline for certifying candidates. The new cut off is Sept. 1.

If a presidential candidate backs out or dies after that, election officials would be in uncharted territory. On social media, Secretary of State Frank LaRose wrote "unless there were some sort of court ruling" the

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party would not be able to change the name on the ballot. But they'd likely follow procedures for other nominees dropping out late.

Namely, signs would be posted at polling locations and an insert would be included in absentee ballots. Because in the presidential race voters cast their ballot for a slate of electors, votes cast for the nominee who withdrew or died would go to that party's slate of electors if the party's candidate won the state.

Oklahoma: Any presidential candidate that drops out of the race after the state prints its ballots will still have their name appear on Election Day, according to Misha Mohr, spokesperson for the Oklahoma State Election Board.

The Democratic and Republican political parties have until Aug. 21 to certify who they want named as their candidates for president and vice president. The state is also required to send military and overseas voters their ballots at least 45 days before the election.

"One other thing I might add — I think it's often forgotten that voters are actually electing the 'presidential electors' of their choice during the General Election — not the presidential candidate," Mohr said.

Oregon: Election officials need to have ballots for November printed by Sept. 21 to get them to military members and residents overseas. If a presidential candidate were to drop out before Sept. 4, their name would not be on the Oregon ballot. Instead, elections officials would print the name of the nominated candidate on the ballot.

If that candidate were to withdraw after Sept. 4, their name would be on the Oregon ballot unless otherwise instructed by a court, according to Laura Kerns, spokeswoman for the Oregon Secretary of State's Office.

If a candidate is elected, they would then have to resign, Kerns said.

Pennsylvania: Department of State spokesperson Amy Gulli said the agency "is not commenting on such hypothetical situations at this time."

But here's the situation: At least 70 days before the election, the Secretary of the Commonwealth is to provide to the counties the names of all known candidates, as known to exist at that time. This year, that date is Aug. 27. The secretary certifies the candidates for the November election as soon as possible after the deadline to submit substituted nominations.

Pennsylvania law requires that mail ballots must be printed and mailed to registered voters who have requested them no later than Oct. 22, 2024.

Rhode Island: Federal law requires states to send overseas and military voters their ballots at least 45 days before the election, so those must be finalized more than a month before Election Day, according to Faith Chybowski, director of communications for the Rhode Island Department of State.

"Once those ballots are printed and sent to military and overseas voters, we would be unable to change the ballot," Chybowski wrote.

South Carolina: If a candidate drops out after the deadline for printing ballots — mid-September in this case — then the candidate's name will remain on the ballot, and signs are posted at polling places to try to educate voters on what's happened. But in the highly unusual scenario of a presidential candidate for a major party withdrawing before the general election, state election officials will likely give some leeway to the normal deadline.

By law, ballots must be sent to military and overseas voters 45 days prior to the election. For November, that date is Sept. 21. Because ballots take some time to assemble, the official withdrawal deadline is 5 p.m., 53 days prior to the election — so, a week earlier. A candidate who drops out after that deadline will remain on the ballot.

South Carolina Election Commission spokesman John Michael Catalano said the agency would likely stretch that deadline to update a presidential candidate — but not long. There would need to still be enough time to update the ballots before they must be shipped to overseas voters.

In normal circumstances, when a candidate withdraws after the 53-day deadline, the Election Commission tries to educate voters with signs and information on its website. For the Republican presidential primary, for example, the commission put up posters showing which candidates had dropped from the

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race but remained on the ballot.

South Dakota: The executive director of the South Dakota Democratic Party, Dan Ahlers, told States Newsroom he's "not aware of any provision that allows for the replacement of a presidential candidate once the ballot is printed."

South Dakota's deadline for general election ballots to be printed and in the possession of county auditors is Sept. 18.

Tennessee: Political parties have a Sept. 3 deadline to let elections officials know who they've selected as their nominee for president and vice president, according to Doug Kufner, communications director for Tennessee Secretary of State Tre Hargett.

"So if Biden drops out before September 3, the ballot can be changed," Kufner said.

Utah: State election officials said it's unclear what the process would be if a presidential nominee were to drop out of the race after ballots are printed.

In Utah, parties are required to submit their candidates for president and vice president by Aug. 31 at 5 p.m. The deadline for write-in candidates is the Tuesday after Labor Day, and shortly after that date ballots are printed, according to the Utah lieutenant governor's office.

As of this week, "we have not received an official certification from the Democratic Party yet naming their nominee," Carlos Artiles Fortun, a communications specialist for the Utah lieutenant governor's office, told States Newsroom.

When pressed on what the process would be in Utah if a presidential nominee drops out after ballots are printed, Fortun said, "This is something that would be unprecedented" and "we don't have a comment on it right now."

Virginia: If a presidential nominee drops out after ballots are printed, they can file paperwork with the state elections office formally withdrawing and then the state would post a notice at all polling places that the candidate has withdrawn. Sept. 6 is the deadline for parties to swap out their nominee; early voting starts in Virginia Sept. 20. More details here on Virginia's process.

Washington: "The Secretary of State will certify the candidates and measures for the General Election on August 23. Immediately thereafter, counties will begin the process of printing their ballots to ensure timely delivery to military and overseas voters," according to Jessica Hice, spokesperson for the Washington secretary of state's office.

"Washington state's deadlines require a certification no later than August 20, 2024. State law allows for substitutions for vice president up until August 22. The Secretary of State will certify the candidates and measures for the General Election on August 23 and would be the last day that any change wouldn't impact the printing process," Hice wrote in an email to States Newsroom.

"Any change, presumably by court order, after August 23rd could impact the on-time delivery of military and overseas ballot and voting materials (Voters Pamphlet) that are required to be sent no later than 45 days prior to any Federal Election," Hice added.

West Virginia: State law says that "county ballot commissioners in all 55 counties in West Virginia have the authority to determine that the ballot contains an 'error' that 'is of sufficient magnitude to confuse or mislead the voters,' if a presidential candidate drops out of the race after ballots are printed," according to Donald M. Kersey, III, chief of staff and chief deputy secretary of state.

In that case, the ballot commissioners can order that corrections are to be made by either placing stickers on paper ballots or reprinting ballots and reprogramming voting machines, both depending on practical timing.

Wisconsin: Under state law, political parties have until 5 p.m. on Sept. 3 to certify the name of their presidential nominee. Once formally nominated, a candidate can only be removed from the ballot due to death.

Contributions from: Alabama Reflector senior reporter Ralph Chapoco, Alaska Beacon Editor Andrew Kitchenman, Arizona Mirror Editor Jim Small, Arkansas Advocate Editor Sonny Albarado, Colorado Newline Editor Quentin Young, Georgia Recorder reporter Stanley Dunlap, Idaho Capital Sun Editor Christina Lords, Indiana

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

Former state employee accused of stealing \$1.8 million from Child Protection Services

Attorney general says theft occurred from 2010 to 2023

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 18, 2024 11:35 AM

An Iowa woman who formerly worked for the South Dakota Department of Social Services is accused of stealing an estimated \$1.8 million from the department's Division of Child Protection Services over the course of 13 years.

Lonna Carroll, 68, of Algona, Iowa, is charged with two felony counts of aggravated grand theft. She was arrested Wednesday in Iowa and is awaiting extradition to South Dakota. Her bond has been set at \$50,000.

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley announced the charges on Thursday at a press conference in Sioux Falls. He said the investigation began in February of this year "when the Department of Social Services Child Protection saw an irregularity in some of the financial transactions."

"The Governor's Office and the governor specifically cooperated and informed us immediately," Jackley said.

He said the stolen money was intended for foster care and other child protection service-related matters.

Allegations explained

According to Jackley, Carroll made requests for financial assistance on behalf of children and was also "positioning" herself to give supervisory approval of the requests. After a request went through further approvals in the Department of Social Services and the state Auditor's Office, Carroll "intercepted" the check, Jackley said. She allegedly deposited the checks in an account for the child's benefit, but then withdrew the money and put it in her personal account.

Court documents filed so far in the case reveal no further details.

Jackley said the theft occurred from 2010 to 2023. State employee records show Carroll made \$21.09 an hour when she retired in March 2023.

A reporter at the press conference asked about Carroll's use of the stolen money. Jackley said investigators in theft cases typically examine motives, such as potential gambling addictions or other habits.

"And what I can say at this time is my understanding is there will not be a strong likelihood of recovery for restitution," Jackley said.

The state Division of Criminal Investigation and Department of Legislative Audit led the investigation.

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An initial court appearance for Carroll has not yet been scheduled in Hughes County court in Pierre. The maximum sentence for the first count is 25 years in prison and a \$50,000 fine. The maximum sentence for the second count is 15 years in prison and a \$30,000 fine.

Jackley declined to answer questions about how the allegations reflect on state government.

"The question of whether or not it's good government or not and proper oversight, that's not criminal," he said. "Those are questions for the persons in charge of that agency and the South Dakota Legislature."

Department official, legislators react

The Department of Social Services said employees discovered suspicious financial activity, reported it, and staff have cooperated with the investigation.

"DSS utilizes both internal and external audits, reconciliations, and internal controls to safeguard public funds — additional safeguards have already been implemented, and we continue working to identify further prevention and detection methods," Department Secretary Matt Althoff said in an emailed statement. "As this is an ongoing criminal case, DSS cannot comment further."

State Sen. David Wheeler, R-Huron, a member of the Legislature's Government Operations and Audit Committee, said the matter deserves attention from lawmakers.

"A theft of public funds of this magnitude raises serious questions about the internal controls that were in place," Wheeler told South Dakota Searchlight. "It will be important for the Legislature to review what happened and ensure that appropriate protections are in place."

Another member of the committee, Sen. Tim Reed, R-Brookings, pledged to ask fellow members to "move forward with an investigation during our July 31st meeting."

"GOAC should investigate how this happened, learn what changes have been implemented to avoid reoccurrence, and review internal audits procedures," Reed said.

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.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 Secure Win Against Clark Area Jr Legion 17U

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 were victorious against Clark Area Jr Legion 17U 8-5 on Thursday.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 opened the scoring in the first after Nicholas Morris hit a sacrifice fly, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 added to their early lead in the bottom of the second inning after Gavin Kroll walked, and Clark Area Jr Legion 17U committed an error, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 added one run in the third after Kroll walked.

Clark Area Jr Legion 17U tied the game up in the top of the fourth thanks to two doubles. Clark Area Jr Legion 17U tied the game at four on a double by Logan Labrie.

In the bottom of the fourth, Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 broke up the tie when an error scored one run. Then a double by Jarrett Erdmann followed to extend the lead to 8-4.

Morris earned the win for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. They gave up eight hits and five runs (four earned) over five innings, striking out four and walking two. Max Bratland led things off on the bump for Clark Area Jr Legion 17U. The starting pitcher allowed one hit and three runs (two earned) over one and two-thirds innings, striking out one and walking four.

Erdmann drove the middle of the lineup, leading Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 with three runs batted in. The outfielder went 1-for-3 on the day. Carter Simon, Erdmann, Gavin Englund, and Morris each collected one hit for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 had a strong eye at the plate, tallying 11 walks for the game. Kroll, Lincoln Krause, Simon, and Nick Groeblichhoff led the team with two walks each.

Cooper Pommer, Ernesto Garcia, Ky Vandersnick, Jakob Steen, Josh Kannegieter, Watson Grantham, Logan Labrie, and Deegan Moes each collected one hit for Clark Area Jr Legion 17U. Cooper Pommer, Will Hovde, Ernesto Garcia, and Logan Labrie each drove in one run for Clark Area Jr Legion 17U.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 play at home on Friday against Britton U16 Lumberjacks in their next game.

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Groton Post 39 Walk-Off In Nail-Biter Against Clark/Willow Lake Senators

By GameChanger Media

It came down to the wire on Thursday, as Groton Post 39 grabbed the victory in walk-off fashion, 10-9, over Clark/Willow Lake Senators. Groton Post 39 were down 9-8 in the bottom of the seventh inning when Colby Dunker singled, scoring two runs.

Brevin Fliehs drove in four runners in the win. The left-handed hitter went 2-5 on the day.

Clark/Willow Lake Senators got on the board in the first inning after Michael Severson grounded out, scoring one run.

A single by Collin Gaikowski extended the Clark/Willow Lake Senators lead to 3-0 in the top of the second inning.

Clark/Willow Lake Senators added three runs in the third. Will Hovde doubled on a full count, making the score 6-0.

Groton Post 39 tied the game in the bottom of the fifth thanks to a double by Fliehs, a double by Bradin Althoff, and a fielder's choice by Korbin Kucker.

In the bottom of the sixth, Groton Post 39 broke up the tie when Dillon Abeln drew a walk, scoring one run. Then a single by Althoff followed to extend the lead to 8-6.

Clark/Willow Lake Senators jumped into the lead in the top of the seventh when Jakob Steen singled, scoring one run, and an error scored two runs.

Ryan Groeblichhoff earned the win for Groton Post 39. The reliever surrendered two hits and three runs (zero earned) over one inning, striking out two and walking none. Teylor Diegel stepped on the hill first for Groton Post 39. The starting pitcher gave up six hits and six runs (three earned) over five innings, striking out three and walking five. Tyson Huber started on the mound for Clark/Willow Lake Senators. The righty gave up one hit and one run (zero earned) over four innings, striking out four and walking three. Nick Morris threw one inning of shutout ball for Groton Post 39 in relief. The reliever gave up one hit, striking out none and walking none.

Althoff, Fliehs, and Diegel each collected two hits for Groton Post 39. Abeln paced Groton Post 39 with three walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, amassing eight walks for the game. Diegel stole two bases.

Will Hovde led Clark/Willow Lake Senators with three runs batted in from the number seven spot in the lineup. They went 1-for-3 on the day. Jakob Steen, Will Hovde, Conner Mudgett, Waylan Olson, Cooper Pommer, Jack Helkenn, Collin Gaikowski, Michael Severson, and Ky Vandersnick each collected one hit for Clark/Willow Lake Senators.

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Clark Area Jr Legion 17U **5 - 8** Groton Jr. Legion Post 39

📍 Home 📅 Thursday July 18, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
CLRK	0	0	2	2	1	5	8	2
GRTN	1	2	1	4	X	8	4	2

BATTING

Clark Area Jr Legion	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
Cooper P... #1 (3B)	3	0	1	1	0	1
Watson... #00 (1B)	3	1	1	0	0	0
Jakob St... #21 (SS)	2	0	1	0	1	0
Josh Kan... #2 (2B)	3	0	1	0	0	0
Ky Vande... #55 (C)	3	1	1	0	0	2
Will Hov... #10 (CF)	2	0	0	1	1	0
Ernesto... #39 (LF)	3	2	1	1	0	0
Logan L... #14 (SS)	2	0	1	1	0	1
Deegan... #9 (RF)	2	1	1	0	0	0
Totals	23	5	8	4	2	4

Groton Jr. Legion Post	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (LF)	1	1	0	0	2	1
C Simon #4 (SS)	1	2	1	0	2	0
G Englund #18 (C)	1	1	1	0	1	0
R Shelle #6 (C)	2	0	0	0	0	1
N Morris #17 (P)	2	2	1	1	0	0
J Erdmann #0 (CF)	3	0	1	3	0	1
N Groebl... #12 (1B)	1	0	0	0	2	0
Jordan S... #11 (RF)	1	0	0	0	1	1
K Fliehs #10 (2B)	1	1	0	0	1	1
A Abeln #23	1	0	0	0	0	0
T Schus... #3 (2B)	0	0	0	0	0	0
G Kroll #8 (RF)	0	1	0	1	2	0
T McGa... #22 (3B)	2	0	0	0	0	1
Totals	16	8	4	5	11	6

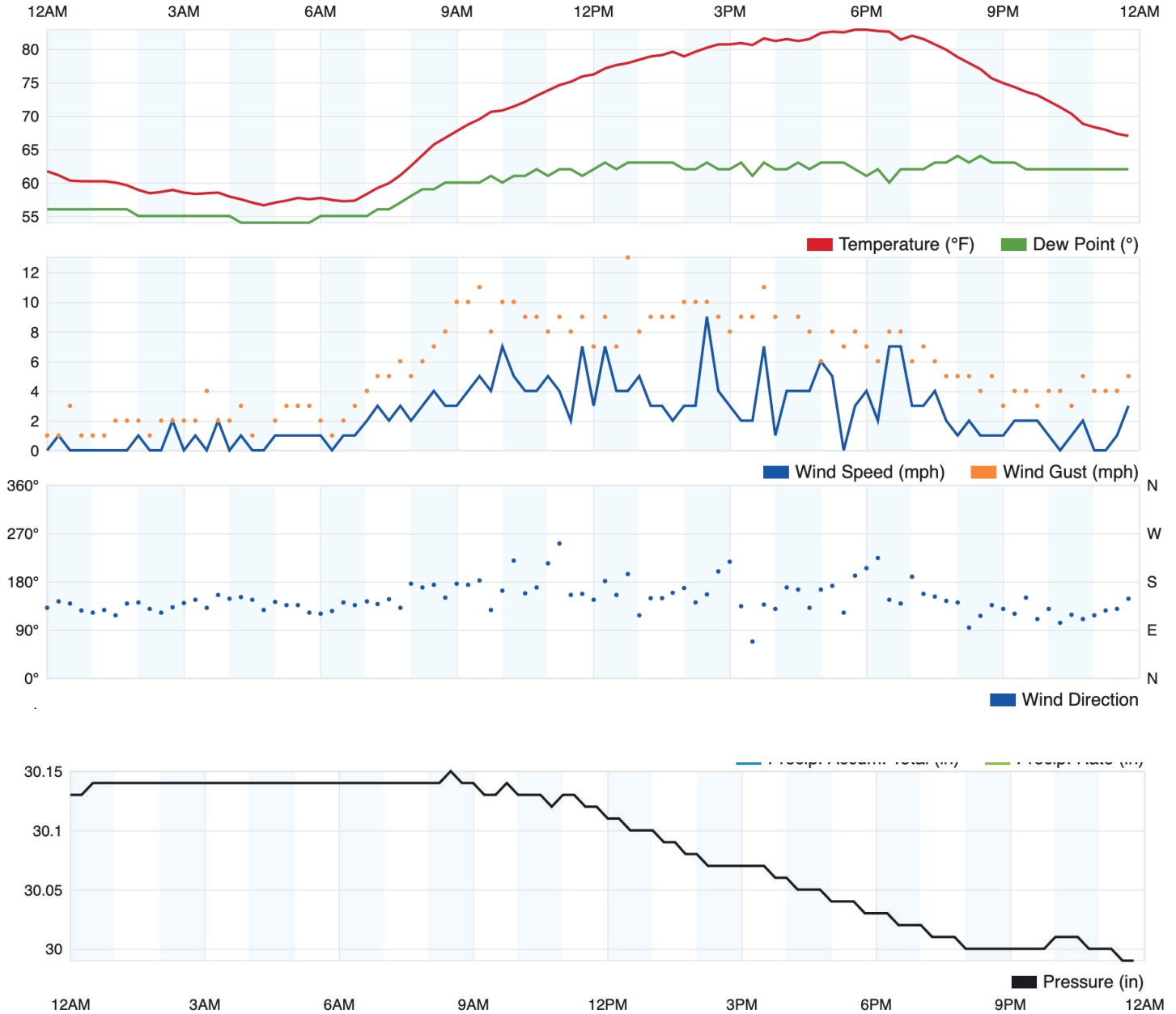
2B: Logan Labrie, Ernesto Garcia, **TB:** Deegan Moes, Watson Grantham, Ky Vandersnick, Logan Labrie 2, Ernesto Garcia 2, Jakob Steen, Cooper Pommer, Josh Kannegieter, **CS:** Watson Grantham, **SB:** Deegan Moes, Ky Vandersnick, Ernesto Garcia, **LOB:** 5

2B: J Erdmann, G Englund, **TB:** J Erdmann 2, C Simon, G Englund 2, N Morris, **SF:** N Morris, **CS:** Jordan Schwan, **HBP:** Jordan Schwan, **SB:** T McGannon, N Groeblinghoff, Jordan Schwan, L Krause, **LOB:** 9

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Broton Daily Independent

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Today

Tonight

Saturday

Saturday Night

Sunday



High: 86 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms



Low: 62 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Partly Cloudy



High: 86 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Slight
Chance
T-storms



Low: 63 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms



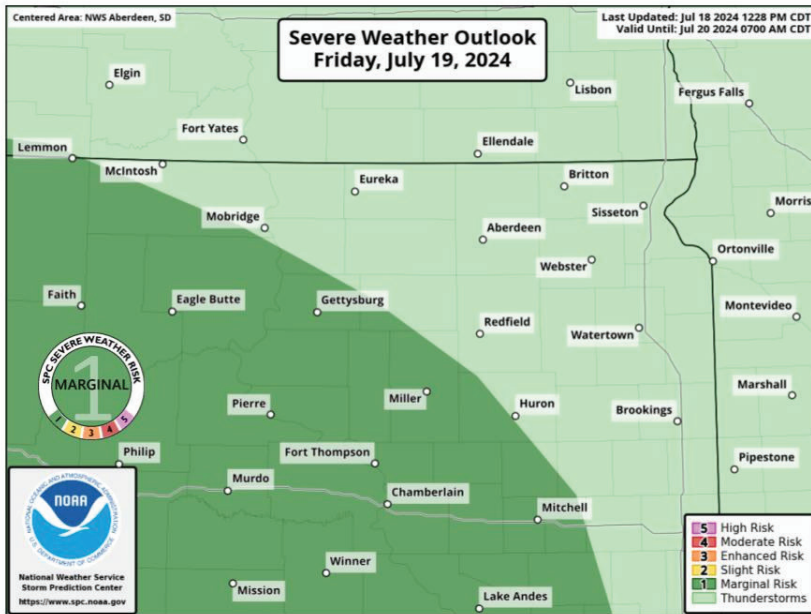
High: 83 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Chance
T-storms



Chances for Severe Storms on Friday

July 18, 2024
3:18 PM



Timing/Location

- Strong to severe storms possible moving northwest to southeast
- Strongest storms expected over central South Dakota (dark green marginal risk area)
- Starting in the morning and persisting through the afternoon

Primary Threats

- Damaging winds: gusts up to 60 mph
- Hail: up to the size of quarters

There is a chance for severe storms to occur tomorrow. Storms will start in the morning and continue into the afternoon with the strongest storms occurring in central SD, in the marginal risk (level 1 of 5). The main threats are for damaging winds, with gusts up to 60 mph, and hail up to the size of quarters.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 83 °F at 5:54 PM

Low Temp: 57 °F at 4:46 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 12:39 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 15 hours, 16 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1932

Record Low: 42 in 1900

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.09

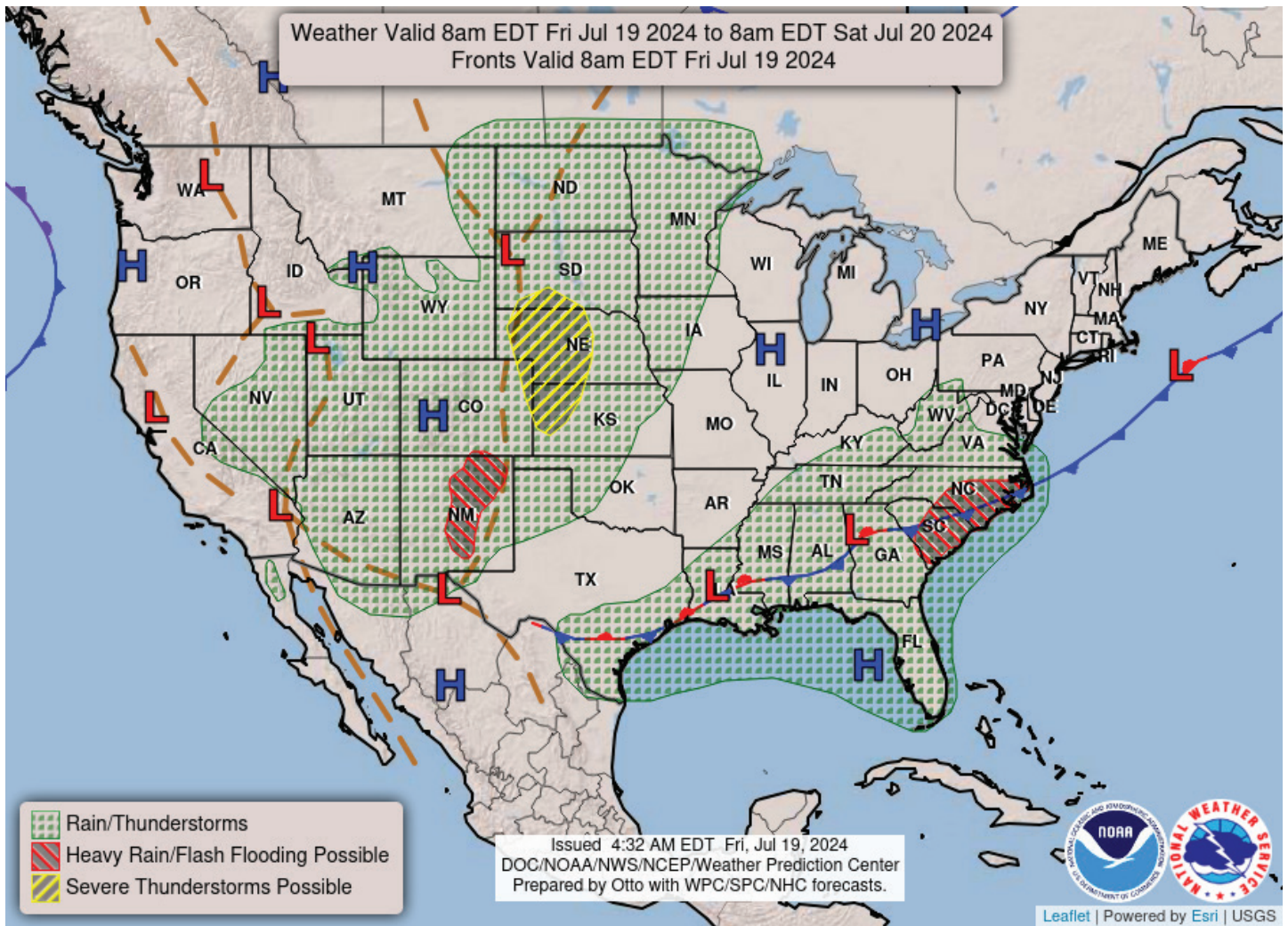
Precip to date in July: 3.56

Average Precip to date: 13.10

Precip Year to Date: 14.51

Sunset Tonight: 9:16:56 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:01:30 am



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Today in Weather History

July 19, 1933: An F2 tornado moved ESE from west of Tulare to 3 miles ENE of Hitchcock. About ten farms had damage, and several barns were destroyed.

July 19, 2010: Severe storms produced a wide swath of hail and high winds from northern Butte County, through southern Meade, eastern Pennington, Jackson, and Bennett Counties. Millions of dollars in crop damage was reported, along with some damage to homes and automobiles.

1886: The 1886 Atlanta Hurricane season was a very active year with ten hurricanes, seven of which struck the United States. During the evening hours of July 18th, a category 1 storm made landfall near Homosassa Springs, Florida. Damage was slight as the area was thinly inhabited. The hurricane weakened to tropical storm status south of Gainesville and emerged on the eastern side of Florida, south of Jacksonville during the morning hours of the 19th. This was the fourth hurricane to make landfall in the United States.

1960 - Cow Creek and Greenland Ranch in Death Valley, CA, reported morning lows of 102 degrees. The afternoon high at Greenland Ranch was 124 degrees, and the high at Cow Creek that afternoon was 126 degrees. The coolest low for the entire month for both locations was 82 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1974 - A severe thunderstorm with winds to 80 mph and up to two inches of rain washed out four to five foot deep sections of roadway in Lake Havasu City, AZ. Three persons in a station wagon died as it was carried 3000 feet down a wash by a ten foot wall of water. (The Weather Channel)

1977 - Thunderstorms produced torrential rains over parts of southwestern Pennsylvania. Some places receive more than twelve inches in a seven hour period. The heavy rains cause flash flooding along streams resulting in widespread severe damage. The cloudburst floods Johnstown with up to ten feet of water resulting in 76 deaths, countless injuries, and 424 million dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Fifteen cities in the western and the southeastern U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Winnemucca, NV, with a reading of 33 degrees. Flagstaff AZ reported a record low of 34 degrees. Afternoon and evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in New York State and New Jersey. High winds and hail two inches in diameter injured two persons and caused considerable damage to crops in the Pine Island area of central New York State. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms in Nebraska produced more than five inches of rain at Red Cloud, including two inches in fifteen minutes. Torrid temperatures continued over California, with record highs of 115 degrees at Red Bluff and 116 degrees at Redding. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Early morning thunderstorms in the Lower Mississippi Valley produced 5.50 inches of rain south of Alexander, AR, in just ninety minutes, and flash flooding which resulted claimed the life of one woman. Thunderstorms in Indiana produced 4.95 inches of rain in twelve hours east of Muncie. Eight cities in the southwestern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Las Vegas, NV, with a reading of 115 degrees, and Phoenix, AZ, with a high of 116 degrees. The low that night at Phoenix of 93 degrees was the warmest of record for that location. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2005 - A severe heat wave gripped the region during early to mid-July. Las Vegas, NV tied their all-time record high temperature of 117 degrees, equalling the old record set on July 24, 1942.

2006 - The first of two severe thunderstorms hits the St. Louis area, causing the largest power outage in the city's history with over 570,000 people losing electricity.

2006: A derecho impacted a sellout crowd of almost 44,000 St. Louis Cardinals fans, packed into the new Busch Stadium. Winds of about 80 mph whirled around the St. Louis area, sending the fans running for shelter. The winds knocked out power and broke windows out of the press box. Nearly two minutes after the winds began at 100 mph, they stopped, and it started to rain. In all, about 30 people were injured at the stadium.

Daily Devotionals

Seeds of Hope

THE KING ON HIS CROSS

Pilate said to them, "What then shall I do with Jesus who is called Christ?"

They all said to him, "Let Him be crucified!"

Then the governor said, "Why, what evil has He done?"

But they cried out all the more saying, "Let Him be crucified!"

When Pilate saw he could not prevail...he took water and washed his hands before the multitude saying, "I am innocent of the blood of this Person. You see to it."

And all the people answered and said, "His blood be on us and on our children."

Then he released Barabbas to them; and when he had scourged Jesus, he delivered Him to be crucified.

Then the soldiers of the governor took Jesus...twisted a crown of thorns and put it on His head...mocked Him...spit upon Him...struck Him on the head...and led Him away to be crucified. Then they put a sign over His head: THIS IS JESUS THE KING OF THE JEWS. In the end the soldiers said: Truly this was the Son of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, let these Words bring to our hearts an understanding of the cost of our salvation. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Pilate saw that he wasn't getting anywhere and that a riot was developing. So he sent for a bowl of water and washed his hands before the crowd, saying, "I am innocent of this man's blood. The responsibility is yours!" Matthew 27



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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.16.24

5 35 42 58 66 22

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$251,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 14 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.17.24

6 9 15 44 49 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$5,370,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 29 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.18.24

9 22 25 35 45 10

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 44 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.17.24

16 20 21 24 25

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$41,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 44 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.17.24

3 24 49 56 60 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 13 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.17.24

24 27 32 47 66 26

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$91,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 13 Mins 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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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
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

News from the Associated Press

Internet outage latest | Airlines, businesses hit by global technology disruption

By The Associated Press undefined

An internet outage affecting Microsoft is disrupting flights, banks, media outlets and companies across the world, with problems continuing hours after the technology company said it was gradually fixing an issue affecting access to Microsoft 365 apps and services.

Airlines in the United States, Europe, Australia and India were reporting problems, with some flights grounded. Retail outlets, banks, railway companies and hospitals in several parts of the world were also affected in what appeared to be an unprecedented internet disruption.

Here's the Latest:

Airlines across the world report disruptions to flights

Airlines across the world, from Thailand to Australia, India, the United States and several European countries, reported disruptions to check-in systems and other issues that caused flight delays.

With athletes and spectators from around the world heading to France for the Paris Olympics, the Paris airport authority says its computer systems "are not impacted" by the global outage, but several airlines and airports elsewhere are.

As a result, "this situation has an impact on the operations of airlines at Paris-Charles de Gaulle and Paris-Orly airports: delays in check-in, delays and temporary suspension of some flights. Our teams are mobilized to orient and assist passengers," the airport authority said in a statement.

In the U.S., the FAA said the airlines United, American, Delta and Allegiant had all been grounded.

Thailand's Suvarnabhumi Airport, a gateway to one of the world's most visited cities, reported that some airlines were forced to check in passengers manually due to outages to their systems, while in the country's second largest airport of Don Mueang, Air Asia was also checking passengers in manually. Director of Tourism of Thailand, the country's tourism authority, told state broadcaster Thai PBS the issue was with Navitaire, an e-commerce platform for air travel, and up to six airports had been affected.

In Germany, flights at Berlin-Brandenburg Airport were halted for several hours from Friday morning due to check-in problems, while some flights were cancelled. An airport spokeswoman said flights resumed after 10 a.m.. Issues were also reported in the busy European hubs of Amsterdam, Zurich and Rome.

Baltic container hub in Poland suspends business

WARSAW — Baltic Hub, a major container hub in the Baltic port of Gdansk, Poland, says it is battling problems resulting from the global system outage. Their entry gates are temporarily closed and they have suspended business, the Baltic Hub said in a statement.

British broadcaster back on air

LONDON — Britain's Sky News was broadcasting again after the outage knocked it off the air during the morning. The news anchor referred to printed notes as Sky News got back on the air. The broadcaster was able to deliver news online, on its app and website during the broadcast outage.

Milan's stock exchange index information restored

ROME — Borsa Italiana, the company that manages Milan's stock exchange, said the "correct disclosure of the index FTSE MIB has been restored." Earlier Friday, the company had said that the index had not been updated, without providing additional information.

Israel's Cyber Directorate attributes outage to cybersecurity platform CrowdStrike

JERUSALEM — Israel's Cyber Directorate said on Friday that it was among those affected by the global outages, attributing them to a problem with the cybersecurity platform CrowdStrike. The outage also hit the country's post offices and hospitals, according to the ministries of communication and health.

A recording playing on CrowdStrike's customer service line said, "CrowdStrike is aware of the reports of crashes on Microsoft ports related to the Falcon sensor." It attributed the problems to one of its products used to block online attacks. It said callers should monitor its customer support portal.

Russia seeks 18-year sentence for US reporter on trial for spying in highly politicized legal system

By KIRILL ZARUBIN Associated Press

YEKATERINBURG, Russia (AP) — Russian prosecutors sought a prison sentence of 18 years on Friday for Wall Street Journal reporter Evan Gershkovich, who is on trial on espionage charges that his employer and the U.S. have denounced as fabricated.

Gershkovich, 32, was arrested March 29, 2023, while on a reporting trip to the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg. Authorities claimed, without offering any evidence, that he was gathering secret information for the U.S. He pleaded not guilty, according to the court, and The Wall Street Journal and the U.S. government have called the trial a sham.

Gershkovich appeared in court for a second straight day Friday as the closed-door proceedings in Russia's highly politicized legal system picked up speed. A verdict is expected later in the day, according to court officials.

Unlike previous sessions in which reporters were allowed to see Gershkovich briefly before sessions began, there was no access to the courtroom this week and he was not seen, with no explanation given. Espionage and treason cases are typically shrouded in secrecy.

Court officials said the prosecutors requested an 18-year sentence in a high-security prison during closing arguments. Russian courts convict more than 99% of defendants, and prosecutors can appeal sentences that they regard as too lenient. They even can appeal acquittals.

"Evan's wrongful detention has been an outrage since his unjust arrest 477 days ago, and it must end now," the Journal said Thursday in a statement. "Even as Russia orchestrates its shameful sham trial, we continue to do everything we can to push for Evan's immediate release and to state unequivocally: Evan was doing his job as a journalist, and journalism is not a crime. Bring him home now."

The U.S. State Department has declared Gershkovich "wrongfully detained," committing the government to assertively seek his release.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday at the United Nations that Moscow and Washington's "special services" are discussing an exchange involving Gershkovich. Russia has previously signaled the possibility of a swap, but it says a verdict would have to come first. Even after a verdict, any such deal could take months or years.

State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel on Thursday declined to discuss negotiations about a possible exchange, but said: "We have been clear from the get-go that Evan did nothing wrong and should not have been detained. To date, Russia has provided no evidence of a crime and has failed to justify Evan's continued detention."

Gershkovich's trial began June 26 in Yekaterinburg after he spent about 15 months in in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo Prison.

The Russian Prosecutor General's office said last month the journalist is accused of "gathering secret information" on orders from the CIA about Uralvagonzavod, a plant about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Yekaterinburg that produces and repairs tanks and other military equipment.

Lavrov on Wednesday reaffirmed the Kremlin claim that the government has "irrefutable evidence" against Gershkovich, although neither he nor any other Russian official has ever disclosed it.

Gershkovich's employer and U.S. officials have dismissed the charges as phony.

"Evan has never been employed by the United States government. Evan is not a spy. Journalism is not a crime. And Evan should never have been detained in the first place," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said last month.

Russia's interpretation of what constitutes high crimes like espionage and treason is broad, with authorities often going after people who share publicly available information with foreigners and accusing them of divulging state secrets.

Earlier this month, U.N. human rights experts said Russia violated international law by jailing Gershkovich and should release him "immediately."

Arrests of Americans are increasingly common in Russia, with nine U.S. citizens known to be detained there as tensions between the two countries have escalated over fighting in Ukraine.

U.S. Ambassador to the U.N., Linda Thomas-Greenfield accused Moscow of treating "human beings as bargaining chips." She singled out Gershkovich and ex-Marine Paul Whelan, 53, a corporate security director from Michigan, who is serving a 16-year sentence after being convicted on spying charges that he and the U.S. denied.

Bangladesh security forces fire bullets and sound grenades as protests escalate

By AL EMRUN GARJON, JULHAS ALAM and KRUTIKA PATHI Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Police and security officials fired bullets and tear gas at protesters in Bangladesh on Friday, as internet and mobile services were cut off after days of deadly clashes over the allocation of government jobs.

The protests, which began weeks ago but escalated sharply on Monday, represent the biggest challenge to Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina since she was won a fourth consecutive term in a January election that was boycotted by the main opposition parties.

The fresh clashes follow the bloodiest day of the protests to date, with local media reporting 22 people killed as protesting students attempted to impose a "complete shutdown" on the country.

The chaos has highlighted cracks in Bangladesh's governance and economy and the frustration of young graduates who face a lack of good jobs.

An Associated Press reporter saw border guard officials fire at a crowd of more than 1,000 protesters who had gathered outside the head office of state-run Bangladesh Television, which was attacked and set on fire by protesters the previous day.

The border guards shot at the right crowd with rifles and sound grenades, while police officers fired tear gas and rubber bullets. Bullets littered the streets, which were also marked by smears of blood.

A news producer and reporter at Bangladesh Television on Thursday told the Associated Press that protesters had broken through the main gate and set fire to vehicles and the reception area. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

"I escaped by leaping over the wall but some of my colleagues got stuck inside. The attackers entered the building and set furniture on fire," the producer said by phone.

At least 22 people were killed on Thursday, a local TV station reported, following six deaths earlier this week. Authorities could not be reached to immediately confirm figures for the deaths.

On Friday morning, internet services and mobile data appeared to be down in the capital, Dhaka, and social media platforms like Facebook and WhatsApp were not loading.

A statement from the country's Telecommunication Regulatory Commission said they were unable to ensure service after their data center was attacked Thursday by demonstrators, who set fire to some equipment. The Associated Press has not been able to independently verify this.

Student protesters said they will extend their calls to impose a shutdown on Friday as well, and urged mosques across the country to hold funeral prayers for those who have been killed.

The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971 against Pakistan.

They argue the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, and they want it replaced with a merit-based system.

But Hasina has defended the quota system, saying that veterans deserve the highest respect for their contributions in the war regardless of their political affiliation.

The Bangladeshi leader is credited for bringing stable growth to Bangladesh, but rising inflation — thanks in part to the global upheaval sparked by the war in Ukraine — has triggered labor unrest and dissatisfaction with the government.

Even though job opportunities have grown in some parts of the private sector, many people prefer gov-

ernment jobs because they are seen as more stable and lucrative. But there aren't enough to go around — each year, some 400,000 graduates compete for around 3,000 jobs in the civil service exam.

"What is unfolding in Bangladesh is deeply unsettling for a generation that only asked for a fair opportunity in public service recruitment. That a peaceful protest against a state policy would slip into the peak of lawlessness shows the government's lack of farsightedness and inefficient policy governance," said Saad Hammadi, policy and advocacy manager at the Canada-based Balsillie School of International Affairs who has advocated for freedom of speech in the country.

"The internet shutdown makes matters worse. Local news sites are inaccessible, and people in the country are left incommunicado with the rest of the world all in the pretext of conducting sweeping operations by the state that have often resulted in serious human rights violations," he added in an email.

Bangladesh has previously shut down internet services in areas affected by protests, using it as a measure to suppress dissent by opposition parties, according to Access Now, an internet watchdog.

CIVICUS, a nonprofit that tracks civic freedoms around the world, last year downgraded Bangladesh to "closed," the worst rating that it could assign, along with China and Venezuela, following a crackdown on the country's opposition members and supporters ahead of its national election.

The main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party has backed the protesting students and is expected to hold demonstrations to show their support. Hasina's party has accused them of stoking the violence, raiding the BNP's headquarters and arresting activists from the party's student wing earlier this week.

The Awami League and the BNP have often accused each other of fueling political chaos and violence, most recently ahead of the country's national election, which was marred by a crackdown on several opposition figures while Hasina's government accused the party of attempting to disrupt the vote.

Hasina's government had earlier halted the job quotas following mass student protests in 2018, but last month, Bangladesh's High Court nullified that decision and reinstated the quotas after relatives of the 1971 veterans filed petitions, triggering the latest demonstrations.

The Supreme Court has suspended that ruling pending an appeal hearing, and said in a statement it will take up the issue on Sunday.

On Wednesday, Hasina urged protesters in a televised address to "wait with patience" for the court verdict. "I believe our students will get justice from the apex court. They will not be disappointed."

Yemen's Houthi rebels claim drone strike that kills 1 person, injures at least 10 in Tel Aviv

By MELANIE LIDMAN and SAM METZ Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Yemen's Houthi rebels claimed responsibility for a drone strike early Friday that hit part of central Tel Aviv near the U.S. Embassy, killing one person and injuring 10.

The aerial strike rumbled through the streets causing shards of shrapnel to rain down and spreading shards of glass over a large radius. The Houthis have launched drones and missiles toward Israel throughout the Israel-Hamas war, in solidarity with the Palestinian people and against Israel. But until Friday, all were intercepted by either Israel or Western allies with forces stationed in the region.

Yahya Sare'e, the Houthis' spokesperson, said in a statement published on the social media platform X that the strike was made in retaliation for the war and had hit one of many of the group's targets.

The Houthis claimed their newest drones can bypass Israel's aerial defense systems. However, an Israeli military official on Friday said the explosive-laden drone had been identified on Thursday and attributed the hit to "human error." The military's assessment of aerial threats has not changed because, the military said, Israel's adversaries have attempted such strikes for months.

"It was a terror attack that was targeted to kill civilians in Israel," the official said of the strike, the first to threaten Tel Aviv in months.

Local police said the blast sounded at around 3:10 a.m., reverberating to nearby cities and physically injuring at least 10 people. Tel Aviv District Commander Peretz Amar said officers could not locate the point of contact, suggesting the explosion occurred in the air, however Israel's military said they had not

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determined whether the drone — or pieces of it — had struck buildings.

It blew out windows of a number of buildings and damaged cars in the neighborhood near the coastline. People thronged to the area as police helicopters hovered overhead.

Many of the roughly 60,000 Israelis evacuated from their homes earlier in the war have found housing in the area. For many, it reaffirmed feelings of disillusionment with how the military has handled the war over the past nine months.

Yossi Nevi, a retired evacuee from Kiryat Shmona living in a nearby hotel in Tel Aviv said the blast shook him awake to watch the aftermath from his balcony and decreased his faith in the army's management of the war. He said many expected such a strike to come from the north, which the military said had not been the case.

Hearing it was a human error, Nevi said, made him lose "all trust in the army, not that I had much after the past nine months."

Eldad Namdar, who owns a camera store next to the intersection where the drone exploded, said some of his items had fallen but there was no major damage. While he hopes the war ends soon, he also wants it to be concluded in a way that secures his future.

"I don't want this to happen again in six months, I want them to finish this situation until the end," he said.

The Houthi strike hit hours after Israel's military confirmed one of its airstrikes had killed a Hezbollah commander and other militants in southern Lebanon. Israel has so far not made attacks on the Houthis, allowing its allies instead to take the lead as it focuses its efforts on the war in Gaza and ongoing fighting with Lebanon's Hezbollah militant group.

The Houthis have routinely claimed responsibility for hitting targets in the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden. They maintain that their attacks target ships linked to Israel, the United States or the United Kingdom however many have little or no connection to the war. Friday's drone strike on Tel Aviv could resurface fears about the war in Gaza between Israel and Hamas expanding into a regionwide conflagration as international mediators continue to push for a cease-fire. The three-phase deal under discussion would halt fighting and free about 120 hostages held by the militant group in Gaza.

Such fears run counter to renewed hopes that Israel signaling its operation underway in Rafah nearing its finish could foster an environment more conducive to negotiations. The country remains divided over striking a deal, with some wanting the government to take the necessary steps to free the hostages and others, including far-right national security minister Itamar Ben-Gvir disavowing the idea. On Thursday, Ben-Gvir visited Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site to pray for the return of Israeli hostages, he said, "without a reckless deal, without surrendering."

Israel possesses a multilayered aerial defense system, capable of intercepting threats ranging from long-range ballistic missiles to drones and short-range missiles. These systems have intercepted thousands of projectiles throughout the war. But officials warn they are not 100% effective, and the systems appear to have struggled against small and hard-to-detect attack drones. A military official said the system had identified the weapon but due to human error, was not set to alarm in case of attack.

Like Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis are backed by Israel's arch enemy, Iran. Israel for the most part also has avoided a direct confrontation with Iran throughout the war. Iran launched hundreds of drones and missiles at Israel during a single incident in April in response to Israel's alleged assassination of a pair of Iranian generals in Syria at the time.

The war in Gaza, which was sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, has killed more than 38,600 people, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. The war has created a humanitarian catastrophe in the coastal Palestinian territory, displaced most of its 2.3 million population and triggered widespread hunger.

Hamas' October attack killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took about 250 hostage. About 120 remain in captivity, with about a third of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli authorities.

The top UN court is delivering an advisory opinion on Israel's policies in occupied territories

By MIKE CORDER Associated Press

THE HAGUE, Netherlands (AP) — The top United Nations court is delivering a nonbinding advisory opinion Friday on the legality of Israel's 57-year occupation of lands sought for a Palestinian state, a ruling that could have more effect on international opinion than it will on Israeli policies.

Friday's hearing comes against the backdrop of Israel's devastating 10-month military assault on Gaza, which was triggered by the Hamas-led attacks in southern Israel. In a separate case, the International Court of Justice is considering a South African claim that Israel's campaign in Gaza amounts to genocide, a claim that Israel vehemently denies.

Israel captured the West Bank, east Jerusalem and Gaza Strip in the 1967 Mideast war. The Palestinians seek all three areas for an independent state.

Israel considers the West Bank to be disputed territory, whose future should be decided in negotiations. It has annexed east Jerusalem in a move that is not internationally recognized, while it withdrew from Gaza in 2005 but maintained a blockade of the territory after Hamas took power in 2007. The international community generally considers all three areas to be occupied territory.

At hearings in February, then-Palestinian Foreign Minister Riad Malki accused Israel of apartheid and urged the United Nations' top court to declare that Israel's occupation of lands sought by the Palestinians is illegal and must end immediately and unconditionally for any hope for a two-state future to survive.

Israel, which normally considers the United Nations and international tribunals as unfair and biased, did not send a legal team to the hearings, but submitted written comments, saying that the questions put to the court are prejudiced and "fail to recognize Israel's right and duty to protect its citizens," address Israeli security concerns or acknowledge Israel-Palestinian agreements to negotiate issues, including "the permanent status of the territory, security arrangements, settlements, and borders."

The Palestinians presented arguments in February along with 49 other nations and three international organizations.

Erwin van Veen, a senior research fellow at the Clingendael think tank in The Hague, said that if the court rules that Israel's policies in the West Bank and east Jerusalem breach international law, that is unlikely to change Israeli policies but it would "isolate Israel further internationally, at least from a legal point of view."

He said such a ruling would "worsen the case for occupation. It removes any kind of legal, political, philosophical underpinning of the Israeli expansion project."

It would also strengthen the hand of "those who seek to advocate against it" — such as the grassroots Palestinian-led movement advocating boycotts, divestment and sanctions against Israel.

He said it also could increase the number of countries that recognize the state of Palestine, in particular in the Western world, following the recent example of Spain and Norway and Ireland."

It is not the first time the ICJ has been asked to give its legal opinion on Israeli policies. Two decades ago, the court ruled that Israel's West Bank separation barrier was "contrary to international law." Israel boycotted those proceedings, saying they were politically motivated.

Israel says the barrier is a security measure. Palestinians say the structure amounts to a massive land grab because it frequently dips into the West Bank.

The U.N. General Assembly voted by a wide margin in December 2022 to ask the world court for the advisory opinion. Israel vehemently opposed the request that was promoted by the Palestinians. Fifty countries abstained from voting.

Israel has built well over 100 settlements, according to the anti-settlement monitoring group Peace Now. The West Bank settler population has grown by more than 15% in the past five years to more than 500,000 Israelis, according to a pro-settler group.

Israel also has annexed east Jerusalem and considers the entire city to be its capital. An additional 200,000 Israelis live in settlements built in east Jerusalem that Israel considers to be neighborhoods of its capital. Palestinian residents of the city face systematic discrimination, making it difficult for them to build

new homes or expand existing ones.

The international community considers all settlements to be illegal or obstacles to peace since they are built on lands sought by the Palestinians for their state.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's hard-line government is dominated by settlers and their political supporters. Netanyahu has given his finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, a former settler leader, unprecedented authority over settlement policy. Smotrich has used this position to cement Israel's control over the West Bank by pushing forward plans to build more settlement homes and to legalize outposts.

Authorities recently approved the appropriation of 12.7 square kilometers (nearly 5 square miles) of land in the Jordan Valley, a strategic piece of land deep inside the West Bank, according to a copy of the order obtained by The Associated Press. Data from Peace Now, the tracking group, indicate it was the largest single appropriation approved since the 1993 Oslo accords at the start of the peace process.

Some GOP voters welcome Trump's somewhat softened tone at Republican National Convention

By GENE JOHNSON, JAKE OFFENHARTZ and RIO YAMAT Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — For those conservative voters long turned off by former President Donald Trump's rhetoric, his somewhat softened tone in accepting the Republican nomination Thursday night was a welcome relief.

"He's much improved," said Dave Struthers, a 57-year-old farmer from Collins, Iowa, after watching the beginning of Trump's speech in the basement of his farmhouse. "It's more of a conversation with the American people, rather than yelling at them."

Trump, who has a long history of divisive commentary, has said shoplifters should be immediately shot, suggested the United States' top general be executed as a traitor and mocked Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi's husband, who was beaten with a hammer by a far-right conspiracy theorist.

But on Thursday night in Milwaukee, he sported a white bandage over his right ear, which was pierced by a bullet from a would-be assassin just days earlier, and spoke in a quieter, more relaxed tone for at least the first part of the speech. He described his experience of the shooting and called for an end to discord, division and demonization in national politics.

Nevertheless, many of his talking points remained familiar and his rhetoric grew more ascerbic as the 93-minute speech wore on. He claimed that Democrats are destroying America, derided the prosecutions against him as a partisan witch hunt, warned of an "invasion" at the U.S.-Mexico border and insisted, without evidence, that murder rates in Central and South American countries were down because they were sending their killers to the U.S.

The more muted delivery at the outset was enough to get Trump a second look from Erich Hazen, a 32-year-old art teacher in Milwaukee, who described himself as a longtime Democrat who supports abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. He said he's now considering a vote for Trump in November — surprising even himself.

"I feel like he's calmed things down a bit more," Hazen said. "Now that he's a little more reserved, it's making me feel more comfortable."

"I'm normally not undecided, so this is a little bit strange for me," he added. "But what I've seen from the other side hasn't been impressive at all. He's at least making coherent sentences."

Jennifer Ryan Garnica, 52, who owns a store that sells Trump merchandise in Seal Beach, California, said she noticed an uptick in traffic in her store during the speech and thought people found it inspiring. She said the attempt on Trump's life was an emotional experience for her and a change in tone was desperately needed.

"Our country has become so divided that we wish ill will on each other," Garnica said.

Struthers, a Republican who raises pigs and grows soybean and corn, supported Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis during the caucuses. He said that while he appreciated some of Trump's policies as president, his trade war with China hurt agriculture — including soybean sales, as that country is an important customer.

The speech didn't win over everyone, however.

"I don't think he sounds any different than he did before the assassination attempt," said John Frank, a 25-year-old designer in Milwaukee and self-described libertarian.

Frank said he does not plan to vote in November but nonetheless met up with a friend to watch the speech because "we didn't want to miss something big happening in Milwaukee."

Inside the secure zone around the convention, attendees packed a pub called Drink Wisconsinably and sang along to "Proud to Be an American" as they watched Trump take center stage on the television screens around the bar.

All week, Max Bradshaw, the bar's general manager, said he's noticed a softened tone in Trump and other party leaders after the attempted assassination. Bradshaw declined to give his own view of Trump and said there's a diversity of political beliefs among his staff, "but this whole week everybody's been neutral."

"It seems like we're all coming a little bit more together, so regardless of what's happening politically, I still feel more togetherness right now," he said. "I'm very happy about that."

Outside the pub Liam Stanton, 29, said he feels increasingly out of place in America's two-party system, calling both parties "pathetic." He described himself as a Bernie Sanders supporter who in previous presidential elections has voted for both Republicans and, once, a Democrat.

Despite agreeing with the Democratic Party's "pro-immigrant views," Stanton said he plans to vote for Trump. He sees President Joe Biden as "incoherent" and out-of-touch.

Still, Stanton wasn't impressed by Trump's speech and said he only attended the convention because a friend had free guest passes.

"I was hoping he would be spicier, to be honest with you," Stanton said.

Biden's campaign faces critical moment, as Democrats encourage him to consider exiting 2024 race

By LISA MASCARO, ZEKE MILLER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Critical days ahead, President Joe Biden is facing the stark reality that many Democrats at the highest levels want him to consider how stepping aside from the 2024 election to make way for a new nominee atop the ticket could be the party's best chance of preventing widespread losses in November.

Isolated as he battles a COVID infection at his beach house in Delaware, Biden's already small circle of confidants before his debate fumbling has downsized further. The president, who has insisted he can beat Republican Donald Trump, is with family and relying on a few longtime aides as he weighs whether to bow to the mounting pressure to drop out.

The Biden For President campaign is calling an all-staff meeting Friday. At the same time, the Democratic National Committee's rulemaking arm expects to meet Friday, pressing ahead with plans for a virtual roll call before Aug. 7 to nominate the presidential pick, ahead of the party's convention later in the month in Chicago.

"President Biden deserves the respect to have important family conversations with members of the caucus and colleagues in the House and Senate and Democratic leadership and not be battling leaks and press statements," Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, Biden's closest friend in Congress and his campaign co-chair, told The Associated Press.

It's a pivotal few days for the president and his party: Trump has wrapped up an enthusiastic Republican National Convention in Milwaukee. And Democrats, racing time, are considering the extraordinary possibility of Biden stepping aside for a new presidential nominee before their own convention.

Amid the turmoil, a majority of Democrats think Vice President Kamala Harris would make a good president herself.

A new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about 6 in 10 Democrats believe Harris would do a good job in the top slot. About 2 in 10 Democrats don't believe she would, and another 2 in 10 say they don't know enough to say.

Democrats at the highest levels have been making a critical push for Biden to rethink his election bid,

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with former President Barack Obama expressing concerns to allies and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi privately telling Biden the party could lose the ability to seize control of the House if he doesn't step away from the 2024 race.

Late Thursday, Montana Sen. Jon Tester became the second Democrat in the chamber — and now among nearly two dozen in Congress — calling on him to bow out, saying, "Biden should not seek reelection to another term."

Campaign officials said Biden was even more committed to staying in the race even as the calls for him to go mounted. And senior West Wing aides have had no internal discussions or conversations with the president about Biden dropping out.

But there is also time to reconsider. Biden has been told the campaign is having trouble raising money, and key Democrats see an opportunity as he is away from the campaign for a few days to encourage his exit. Among his Cabinet, some are resigned to the likelihood of him losing in November.

The reporting in this story is based in part on information from almost a dozen people who insisted on anonymity to discuss sensitive private deliberations. The Washington Post first reported on Obama's involvement.

Biden, 81, tested positive for COVID-19 while traveling in Las Vegas earlier this week and is experiencing "mild symptoms" including "general malaise" from the infection, the White House said.

The president himself, in a radio interview taped just before he tested positive, dismissed the idea it was too late for him to recover politically, telling Univision's Luis Sandoval that many people don't focus on the November election until September.

"All the talk about who's leading and where and how, is kind of, you know — everything so far between Trump and me has been basically even," he said in an excerpt of the interview released Thursday.

But in Congress, Democratic lawmakers have begun having private conversations about lining up behind Harris as an alternative. One lawmaker said Biden's own advisers are unable to reach a unanimous recommendation about what he should do. More in Congress are considering joining the others who have called for Biden to drop out. Some prefer an open process for choosing a new presidential nominee.

"It's clear the issue won't go away," said Vermont Sen. Peter Welch, the other Senate Democrat who has publicly said Biden should exit the race. Welch said the current state of party angst — with lawmakers panicking and donors revolting — was "not sustainable."

However, influential Democrats including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries are sending signals of strong concern.

To be sure, many want Biden to stay in the race. But among Democrats nationwide, nearly two-thirds say Biden should step aside and let his party nominate a different candidate, according to an AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll. That sharply undercuts Biden's post-debate claim that "average Democrats" are still with him.

Obama's dilemma: Balancing Democrats' worry about Biden and maintaining influence with president

By AAMER MADHANI, WILL WEISSERT and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Barack Obama has a delicate balance to strike: how to weigh the mounting opposition to President Joe Biden continuing his campaign with his loyalty to his former running mate.

In recent days, Obama has taken calls from congressional leaders, Democratic governors and key donors in which he has shared their unease about the prospect of Biden's campaign following his calamitous June 27 debate performance against his predecessor, Donald Trump.

But even as Obama has listened to Democrats' concerns, he has insisted that the decision to remain in the race is only for Biden to make, according to several people familiar with the matter who requested anonymity to discuss the private conversations.

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Obama finds himself forging through the most delicate political moment for Democrats since former President Bill Clinton's impeachment, with much higher stakes. It's a moment that requires Obama to balance his role as a party elder and an honest broker for Democrats seeking advice while avoiding being seen as betraying his former vice president.

"President Obama has to and wants to play the role of statesman, above the political fray that former presidents have traditionally played," said Matt Bennett, who served as an aide to Vice President Al Gore and is now an executive vice president at the Democratic-leaning group Third Way. "He also wants to remain a credible sounding board for President Biden. If he takes a public position, that ends it."

Obama's relationship with Biden started as a marriage of political convenience when he picked the veteran Delaware senator in 2008 to be his vice president. When they served in the Senate, the two were not close.

It was a selection made in part to quiet concerns about Obama's relative inexperience and make white Democrats more comfortable with casting their ballots for the Black politician with less than four years in the Senate. The pragmatic relationship eventually evolved into a true partnership and friendship.

Julian Castro, who served as Housing and Urban Development secretary under Obama, said he wasn't privy to the private talks Obama has had about Biden, but called it crucial for "respected, trusted elders within the party" to speak clearly to Biden about the headwinds Democrats will face if he stays in the race.

"Whether it's President Obama, former President Clinton, Secretary Clinton, I think their most important role, at this point, is helping to ensure that we have a successful November," said Castro, who sought the Democratic presidential nomination against Biden in 2020 and has recently called on him to end his current candidacy.

Obama's concerns have surfaced as former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi presented polling to Biden that she argued shows he likely can't defeat Trump, while influential Democrats, including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, have also sent signals of concern about Biden's political viability.

Meanwhile, among Democrats nationwide, nearly two-thirds say Biden should step aside and let his party nominate a different candidate, according to an AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll published this week. That sharply undercuts Biden's post-debate claim that "average Democrats" are still with him even if some "big names" are turning on him.

Biden is relying on longtime aides as he weighs whether to bow to pressure to step aside. He remains publicly insistent that he is the Democrat in the best position to beat Trump.

Campaign officials said Biden was even more committed to staying in the race as the calls for him to go mounted. But there was also time for Biden to reconsider - a brief opening seemingly being exploited by party leaders trying to plot his exit.

Obama has been taking more calls than he's been making on the matter and sees protecting Biden and his legacy as his top concern, according to the people familiar with his thinking, and largely has remained publicly silent about Biden's political tailspin.

In the calls with allies, the former president has been protective of Biden and does not believe taking a stronger stance — publicly or even privately — would be productive, according to people familiar with the matter.

The former president is also mindful of lingering tension in Biden's political circle over some in Obama's senior staff urging Biden when he was vice president to sit out the 2016 presidential race.

In his memoir "Promise Me, Dad," Biden wrote about having lunch in 2015 with Obama just months after his son Beau died of cancer in which they discussed the possibility of a 2016 run.

Obama, Biden recalled, asked if he was going to enter the race. Biden said that he told Obama he was not ready to make up his mind, but if he decided to jump into the race he would do it in time to be viable.

"The president was not encouraging," Biden wrote.

Obama also urged Biden as he was pondering the 2016 race to sit down with David Plouffe, an architect of Obama's winning 2008 campaign. Plouffe made it clear to Biden that he would face an uphill climb against Vermont Sen. Bernie Sanders and that election's eventual Democratic nominee, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton.

Since last month's disastrous debate performance, more than 20 Democratic lawmakers have called on Biden to exit. He's also faced stinging criticism from prominent alumni of the Obama White House, including a group of senior aides that host the popular Pod Save America podcast and former Obama senior adviser and CNN analyst David Axelrod.

"There have always been two Joe Bidens. The empathetic, decent, big-hearted leader, forged in loss and grief, finding the good in his friends and opponents, in love with America, arms wide and open with space for everyone," Jon Lovett, a former Obama speechwriter and Pod Save America co-host, wrote on the social media site X last week. "And there's the blowhard with a chip on his shoulder, stubborn, something to prove, his fellow senators rolling their eyes as the finger wags harder and the stories get longer. Statesman and politician, hero and fool."

In an interview with BET this week, Biden insisted that he still has plenty of time to right his campaign. On Thursday, the campaign stated that Biden was committed to his reelection bid and would be the Democratic nominee.

Obama's concerns are surfacing at a moment when many Democrats believe that time is running out to get Biden out of the race with the Democratic National Convention just weeks away.

But Biden and Obama as they try to find their way through this moment seem flummoxed by the weight of legacy and tradition, said Edward Frantz, a presidential historian at the University of Indianapolis.

Obama, Frantz said, has shown himself a traditionalist in his nearly eight years out of office — largely maintaining the post-presidency tradition of his predecessors who have sought to avoid wading deeply into politics.

Biden, meanwhile, seems deeply aware that history often hasn't judged one-term presidencies kindly, Frantz said.

"Both Biden and Obama have legacy on their minds, and they have to juggle that along with duty to party and country," Frantz said. "To step away knowingly and willingly? Few have done so."

Trump urges unity after assassination attempt while proposing sweeping populist agenda in RNC finale

By STEVE PEOPLES, JONATHAN J. COOPER and JILL COLVIN Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — Donald Trump, somber and bandaged, accepted the GOP presidential nomination on Thursday at the Republican National Convention in a speech that described in detail the assassination attempt that could have ended his life just five days earlier before laying out a sweeping populist agenda, particularly on immigration.

The 78-year-old former president, known best for his bombast and aggressive rhetoric, began his acceptance speech with a softer and deeply personal message that drew directly from his brush with death. Moment by moment, the crowd listening in silence, Trump described standing onstage in Butler, Pennsylvania, with his head turned to look at a chart on display when he felt something hit his ear. He raised his hand to his head and saw immediately that it was covered in blood.

"If I had not moved my head at that very last instant, the assassin's bullet would have perfectly hit its mark," Trump said. "And I would not be here tonight. We would not be together."

Trump's address, the longest convention speech in modern history at just under 93 minutes, marked the climax and conclusion of a massive four-day Republican pep rally that drew thousands of conservative activists and elected officials to swing-state Wisconsin as voters weigh an election that currently features two deeply unpopular candidates. Sensing political opportunity in the wake of his near-death experience, the often bombastic Republican leader embraced a new tone he hopes will help generate even more momentum in an election that appears to be shifting in his favor.

"The discord and division in our society must be healed. We must heal it quickly. As Americans, we are bound together by a single fate and a shared destiny. We rise together. Or we fall apart," Trump said, wearing a large white bandage on his right ear, as he has all week, to cover a wound he sustained in the

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Saturday shooting. "I am running to be president for all of America, not half of America, because there is no victory in winning for half of America."

While he spoke in a gentler tone than at his usual rallies, Trump also outlined an agenda led by what he promises would be the largest deportation operation in U.S. history. He repeatedly accused people crossing the U.S.-Mexico border illegally of staging an "invasion." Additionally, he teased new tariffs on trade and an "America first" foreign policy.

Trump also falsely suggested Democrats had cheated during the 2020 election he lost — despite a raft of federal and state investigations proving there was no systemic fraud — and suggested "we must not criminalize dissent or demonize political disagreement," even as he has long called for prosecutions of his opponents.

He did not mention abortion rights, an issue that has bedeviled Republicans ever since the U.S. Supreme Court struck down a federally guaranteed right to abortion two years ago. Trump nominated three of the six justices who overturned *Roe v. Wade*. Trump at his rallies often takes credit for *Roe* being overturned and argues states should have the right to institute their own abortion laws.

Nor did he mention the insurrection at the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, in which Trump supporters tried to stop the certification of his loss to Democrat Joe Biden. Trump has long referred to the people jailed for the riot as "hostages."

Indeed, Trump barely mentioned Biden, often referring only to the "current administration."

"It was Donald Trump who destroyed our economy, ripped away rights, and failed middle class families," said Jen O'Malley Dillon, the Biden campaign chair, in a statement after the speech. "Now he pursues the presidency with an even more extreme vision for where he wants to take this country."

The RNC ends at an uncertain moment in the race

With less than four months to go in the contest, major changes in the race are possible, if not likely.

Trump's appearance came as Biden, the 81-year-old Democratic incumbent, clings to his party's presumptive nomination in the face of unrelenting pressure from key congressional allies, donors and even former President Barack Obama, who fear he may be unable to win reelection after his disastrous debate.

Long pressed by allies to campaign more vigorously, Biden is instead in isolation at his beach home in Delaware after having been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Hours before the balloons were scheduled to rain down on Trump and his family inside the convention hall, Biden deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks appeared nearby in Milwaukee and insisted over and over that Biden would not step aside.

"I do not want to be rude, but I don't know how many more times I can answer that," Fulks told reporters. "There are no plans being made to replace Biden on the ballot."

Strength on the program

Thursday's RNC program seemed designed to project strength and masculinity in an implicit rebuke of Biden.

Ultimate Fighting Championship President Dana White called Trump "a real American bad ass." Kid Rock performed a song with the chorus, "Fight, fight!," echoing the word Trump mouthed on stage in Pennsylvania as Secret Service agents surrounded him. And wrestling icon Hulk Hogan described the former president as "an American hero."

Hogan drew a raucous response when, standing on the main stage, he ripped off his shirt to reveal a red "Make America Great Again" shirt.

"As an entertainer, I try to stay out of politics," Hogan said as he briefly broke character. "I can no longer stay silent."

Like many speakers during the convention, former Fox News host Tucker Carlson suggested that recent events were divinely inspired and that he wondered "if something bigger is going on."

"I think it changed him," Carlson said of the shooting, praising Trump for not lashing out in anger afterward.

"He did his best to bring the country together," Carlson added. "This is the most responsible, unifying behavior from a leader I've ever seen."

Former first lady Melania Trump and Ivanka Trump, the president's elder daughter and former senior

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adviser, joined Trump in the convention hall ahead of his speech, making their first appearances there. Neither woman spoke.

At nearly 93 minutes, the former president's speech eclipsed the 74 minutes for which he spoke eight years ago, according to the American Presidency Project at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

Republicans leave their convention united

The convention has showcased a Republican Party reshaped by Trump since he shocked the GOP establishment and won over the party's grassroots on his way to the party's 2016 nomination. Rivals Trump has vanquished — including Sens. Ted Cruz of Texas and Marco Rubio of Florida, former U.N. Ambassador Nikki Haley and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis — put aside their past criticisms and gave him their unqualified support.

Even his vice presidential pick, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Trump's choice to carry his movement into the next generation, was once a fierce critic who suggested in a private message since made public that Trump could be "America's Hitler."

Security was a major focus in Milwaukee in the wake of Trump's near-assassination. But after nearly four full days, there were no serious incidents inside the convention hall or the large security perimeter that surrounded it.

The Secret Service, backed by hundreds of law enforcement officers from across the nation, had a large and visible presence. And during Trump's appearances each night, he was surrounded by a wall of protective agents wherever he went.

Meanwhile, Trump and his campaign have not released information about his injury or the treatment he received. The former president on Thursday described his story of surviving the attack — and vowed he would not talk about it again.

"I'm not supposed to be here tonight," Trump told the packed convention hall. The crowd of thousands, which was listening in silence, shouted back, "Yes, you are."

Mounting home demolitions and settler attacks plunge a Palestinian village into crisis

By JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

UMM AL-KHAIR, West Bank (AP) — First came the Israeli military bulldozers, which tore down a quarter of the homes in the West Bank Bedouin village of Umm al-Khair. Then came the settler attacks.

In the aftermath, dozens of people were left homeless and without consistent access to water and electricity. Several were injured from pepper spray and sticks, and the village's water pipe was cut — all, they said, as Israeli soldiers looked on.

"Where shall I go?" said Yasser Hathaleen, sitting near the rubble of his family's homes, exposed to the blazing heat of summer with little to protect him. "To whom do I complain? I want a law to protect me. Where are the people of law?"

Bedouin communities in the West Bank face a double threat of rampant, unpunished Israeli settler violence and a frenzy of state-backed demolitions. Together, the two are pushing a growing number of Bedouin from their land and making any eventual independent Palestinian state a more distant reality, rights groups say.

The threats have intensified since the start of the war in Gaza, as settler violence surges across the West Bank — even as Israel faces growing international pressure to clamp down. Settler advocates hold key Israeli Cabinet positions that grant them important say over the West Bank, giving settlers greater control over their destiny in the territory.

Residents describe the escalating attacks

Settler violence and demolitions are nothing new in Umm Al-Khair, founded in the 1950s by traditionally nomadic people known as Bedouin, who settled there just after being uprooted from the Negev desert during the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation.

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Two decades later, Umm Al-Khair fell under Israeli security control when Israel captured the West Bank. Though Palestinians seek the area as the heart of a future independent state, Israel has established a rash of settlements across the territory, viewed by the international community as illegal and an obstacle to peace.

Settler attacks, residents say, began in the 1980s, after Israel built the settlement of Carmel just meters away from Umm Al-Khair. Today, Carmel's large houses and lush gardens sit across a barbed-wire fence from the village, whose pipes are not connected to the Israeli water network and whose homes of corrugated tin bake in the summer sun.

Settler attacks were sporadic but not debilitating, residents said, until settlers established an unauthorized outpost, called "Roots Farm," on a nearby hilltop.

"Since then, this farm, their only goal is to target the community, to violate the people's lives and to attack and insult people on a daily basis," said 21-year-old Tariq Hathaleen, an English teacher in Umm Al-Khair. Most villagers bear the last name Hathaleen, all descendants of the village founder.

On July 1, in a particularly brutal recent attack described by residents and activists, settlers injured about 10 people in the village with sticks and pepper spray that made people's eyes water.

"There were so many women on the ground, lying on the earth, struggling to breathe," said Basel Adra, a Palestinian activist who was in Umm Al-Khair that day.

Videos taken by Palestinians in the village and sent to The Associated Press showed a man residents identified as the leader of the outpost clutching a rifle as he strides past Israeli soldiers into the village.

The military told AP the forces were there "to maintain the security of all residents of the area, and to act to prevent terrorism and activities that endanger the citizens of the State of Israel."

In another video, taken July 3 by an Umm Al-Khair resident, young settlers are seen tampering with the village's water pipes as soldiers look on. The military said soldiers helped repair the pipe soon after.

But residents said the pipe was damaged by settlers again days later, showing AP video of a settler near the freshly damaged pipe. When sent the video, the military told AP the pipe was damaged by erosion, not settlers.

To Tariq Hathaleen, the settlers and the state are working toward the same goal: expelling his community from their lands. Umm Al-Khair residents say they have lived there since they were expelled from the Negev during what's referred to as the "Nakba" — Arabic for catastrophe — when roughly 700,000 Palestinians fled or were driven out of what today is Israel.

The residents showed AP handwritten contracts appearing to show land sales from neighboring Palestinian towns to the founder of the village, Tariq's grandfather, during the period when Jordan controlled the West Bank.

COGAT, the Israeli military body coordinating humanitarian aid efforts, did not respond to a request for comment on land ownership in the area.

"There's no legal pretext for soldiers to remove us from our land. So what the settlers do is they make our life the most hard life, so we eventually leave on our own," said Tariq Hathaleen.

Outposts and settlements are growing

As some settlers expand their network of unauthorized farming outposts atop West Bank hilltops — which rights groups say are the primary drivers of violence and displacement in the territory — others in Israel's far-right government turbocharge settlement in the territory. In the last month alone, Israel's government has legalized five formerly unauthorized settlements and made the largest land grab in the West Bank in three decades, declaring a wide swath of the territory state land.

Since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, the U.N. says settler violence across the West Bank has displaced 1,260 Palestinians, including 600 children, from their homes in Bedouin villages such as Umm Al-Khair.

The U.N. documented 1,000 settler attacks in the West Bank in the nine months since the start of the Israel-Hamas war, averaging four attacks a day. That's double the daily average during the same period last year, according to AIDA, a coalition of nonprofits and other groups working in the territory. The violence has killed 10 people in total, including two children, and has injured 234 people, the group says.

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With the rapid and easy establishment of farming outposts, rights groups say, settlers can expand their control of the territory through violence, effectively pushing the prospect of a contiguous Palestinian state further from reach.

Outposts are now "one of the primary methods employed by Israel to take over areas in the West Bank and to expel Palestinian communities," said a July report from Israeli rights group B'Tselem.

The crisis in the West Bank has reached such heights that Maj. Gen. Yehuda Fox, the outgoing Israeli general overseeing the territory, used his farewell speech July 8 to denounce settler violence.

"Under the auspices of the war, and the desire for revenge, it sowed chaos and fear in Palestinian residents who did not pose any threat," he said. He accused settler leaders of not doing enough to halt the violence.

Legality of structures is disputed

Naomi Kahn, head of the international division at settler organization Regavim, describes Umm Al-Khair as an "illegal squatters camp" on land that belongs to Israel.

Following the recent round of demolitions, the Israeli military told AP that the structures were illegal and that their construction had been carried out "in complete violation of the law."

Palestinians have long said that securing Israeli permission to build in the West Bank is nearly impossible.

"They knock down our homes, and then we rebuild," shepherd Bilal Hathaleen said. "They come to knock them down again, so we will rebuild. We are not going anywhere."

Rebranding Trump, former president recalls shooting details but avoids policy details: RNC Takeaways

By BILL BARROW and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — The Republican National Convention celebrated former President Donald Trump not just as a party leader but a living martyr who survived a would-be assassin's bullet and is ready to work for everyday Americans after a sweeping victory in November.

The portrayals of unity, including in Trump's first speech since he was injured in the assassination attempt last Saturday, sought to erase the image of a man whose presidency often swirled in chaos and infighting and ended with a violent insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. Democrats have repeatedly wielded images of that day to try to thwart his return and have spotlighted his recurring use of inflammatory and hardline rhetoric.

Inside the Milwaukee arena, he was "an American folk hero" and "strong commander in chief," alive because of a "miracle." To the left, he remains a threat to democracy, with authoritarian designs.

There's plenty of campaigning left between now and the election, so the effectiveness of the competing messages remains to be seen. But it's been a striking four days for a Republican Party that over three presidential elections has been reshaped by Trump's personality and his politics.

Here are some takeaways from the closing stanza of the GOP gathering in Wisconsin.

Trump promises to serve 'all of America' (But ...)

Trump, who has not won the popular vote in two tries, opened with the sweeping tone common to inaugural addresses.

"The discord and division in our society must be healed. As Americans, we are bound together by a single fate and a shared destiny," he said. "I am running to be president for all of America, not half of America, because there is no victory in winning for half of America."

It was a sharp departure from his first convention acceptance in Cleveland eight years ago, when he painted a dark portrait of American life and declared, "I alone can fix it."

It seemed at first that Trump was trying to embody a less partisan, less caustic version of himself — still a giant personality, but one that uses his stature for the country's benefit. Yet as quickly as he called for an end of the "demonization of political enemies," he turned the issue exclusively toward Democrats. He reprised his accusations that his criminal conviction and other prosecutions were because of the weaponization of the justice system. And he answered the critique that he is upending democracy by insisting, "I

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am the one saving democracy.”

Republicans in the convention hall embraced the idea. But it was aimed at what’s almost certainly a more circumspect crowd: swing voters and sporadic voters, those people Republicans will need in order to have the kind of sweeping victory they talked about in Milwaukee.

Trump tried to humanize his image by telling of assassination attempt

The former president spoke in vivid detail of his experience being injured and nearly killed on Saturday. “You will never hear it from me a second time because it’s actually too painful,” he said before recalling at length a “beautiful day” that took a fateful turn. He recalled “a loud whizzing sound” and realized his ear was injured. He praised Secret Service agents, avoiding any mention of the criticism the agency is taking in Washington.

“I felt serene,” he said.

“I stand before you in this arena only by the grace of Almighty God,” Trump continued, echoing the same idea of divine intervention that flowed freely from the stage during the convention. “I’m not supposed to be here tonight,” he said, with delegates responding with a chant of “Yes you are! Yes you are!”

On stage was the uniform of the retired fire chief, Corey Comperatore, who was killed behind Trump. It was powerful stagecraft and storytelling. When Trump returns to his post-convention rally circuit, it will be notable to watch whether the former president sticks to his claim that he will not talk again about the assassination attempt that shocked the nation.

The brand man rebranded — with limits

Trump, the name and the man, has been ubiquitous for decades. Americans and the world recognized those gold letters, T-R-U-M-P, and watched him say, “You’re fired!” on his hit show “The Apprentice” long before Trump first ran for president. He took over the GOP and won the presidency in 2016 as the unapologetically bombastic political outsider.

The convention program sought to frame the former president as a softer, more compassionate man who helps people individually and is determined to help Americans across the country. Alina Habba, a Trump attorney, talked of “his character, his kindness, his commitment to saving this great country.” Personal friend Steve Witkoff described Trump as a lover of music, “a man who in the darkest hours shows up, listens and always acts.”

Between speeches Thursday, videos of Trump filled the arena with another tone. Democrats, a stern-looking Trump said, “are destroying our country. ... They do cheat. And, frankly, it’s the only thing they do well. ... Swamp them — they can’t cheat.”

Leading up to his speech, Trump called on a number of figures from the world of professional fighting, including retired wrestler Hulk Hogan and Linda McMahon, the former president and CEO of World Wrestling Entertainment, Inc. She made perhaps the most overt attempt to straddle the competing messages: “Donald Trump is not only a fighter, ladies and gentleman,” she said. “He is a good man.”

It perhaps added up to a confusing message.

Certainly, you can square images of an aggressive politician and a compassionate man who loves music, his friends, his family and even Americans he does not know.

But there’s a difference in selling Trump as someone who leverages his determination on behalf of those “everyday Americans” and one who uses hyperbolic attacks on whole classes of Americans and still fights over a presidential election that he lost. Voters who believe Trump’s false assertions about 2020 and relish his broadsides are already in his corner. He’s trying to grow his coalition, or at least he needs to if Republicans want to have the kind of November sweep they’ve talked about in Milwaukee.

Short on details of another term

Trump made sweeping promises to end inflation and secure the border. He said “Republicans have a plan” to bring down energy prices “very, very rapidly.” He didn’t say what it is.

He said he’d “drill, baby, drill” and “reduce your taxes.” He suggested falsely that Democrats want to raise taxes “by four times” what they are now.

The most specific he got was promising to roll back Biden administration efforts to combat climate change, direct all infrastructure spending to “roads and bridges,” and impose steep tariffs.

GOP leaders said ahead of the convention that Trump should lay out a clear vision of what a second presidency would look like. If he did that, it was only in the broadest strokes, mostly using crowd-pleasing talking points.

Trump barely mentioned Biden or Harris

Many Republican speakers this week made a point not just to blast President Joe Biden but also Vice President Kamala Harris. It's an obvious move to position the party for the possibility that the 81-year-old Biden ends his campaign and Democrats turn to his second-in-command.

Trump himself barely acknowledged the Democratic incumbents. "I'm only going to say it one time," he said, after mentioning Biden by name. At another point, he said merely "this person."

That approach could be because of how much Democrats are in flux, leaving Trump unsure of who he will actually face in the fall. It could just as easily reflect how confident Trump is that he will win. Perhaps he believes he does not need to take on Biden any longer at all.

Majority of Democrats think Kamala Harris would make a good president, AP-NORC poll shows

By SEUNG MIN KIM and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As President Joe Biden faces a growing drumbeat of pressure to drop his reelection bid, a majority of Democrats think his vice president would make a good president herself.

A new poll from the AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research found that about 6 in 10 Democrats believe Kamala Harris would do a good job in the top slot. About 2 in 10 Democrats don't believe she would, and another 2 in 10 say they don't know enough to say.

Since Biden's debate debacle on June 27, many Democrats have privately and even openly looked to Harris to step in and succeed Biden as the party's presidential nominee, believing she has a better chance against GOP nominee Donald Trump. For her part, Harris has remained completely loyal to Biden, being one of his toughest defenders in the aftermath of the disastrous debate performance.

Oakley Graham, a Democrat in Greenwood, Missouri, said while he is "pretty happy" with Biden's accomplishments in office, he felt that he would be more excited to support Harris at the top of the ticket and that it was "about time" a woman becomes president.

"I know he's got unfinished business," Graham, 30, said of Biden. "But it would be nice to see a person of color, a woman, somebody younger to step up and to lead that charge. I would hope that that would inspire a younger generation to be more engaged."

Black adults — a key contingent of the Democrats' coalition and a group that remains relatively more favorable to Biden than others — are more likely than Americans overall to say that Harris would do well.

As for Americans more broadly, they are more skeptical of how Harris would perform in the Oval Office. Only about 3 in 10 U.S. adults overall say Harris would do well as president. About half say Harris would not do a good job in the role, and 2 in 10 say they don't know enough to say.

Harris' favorability rating is similar to Biden's, but the share of Americans who have an unfavorable opinion of her is somewhat lower. The poll showed that about 4 in 10 U.S. adults have a favorable opinion of Harris, while about half have an unfavorable opinion. There are more Americans with a negative view of Biden: approximately 6 in 10. About 1 in 10 Americans say they don't know enough to have an opinion of Harris, whereas nearly everyone has an opinion on Biden.

About three-quarters of Democrats have a positive view of Harris, which is in line with how Democrats view Biden. Seven in 10 have a favorable view of him.

Shannon Bailey, a Democrat who lives in Tampa, praised Biden's accomplishments as president — particularly with his infrastructure law and efforts to tame inflation — and said he'll be "remembered fondly." But she had a more favorable view of Harris than she does the incumbent president because, in Bailey's view, the vice president appears more "capable of handling the taxing nature of the job."

"It's not just the physical stamina part, but also the cognitive reasoning part right now," said Bailey, 34. "It's important to be able to concisely and persuasively get the message across that is the Democratic

platform right now.”

Bailey said the Democratic Party needs Harris and a running mate “who can really motivate people to go out to the polls” — a task that she’s skeptical Biden can do as effectively.

Harris’s position as the administration’s lead messenger on abortion also has endeared her to many Democrats.

“I think she would be a very strong advocate for abortion, has been and would continue to be,” said Thomas Mattman, a Democrat from Chico, California. “The Republicans have gone with white men as their ticket, and both of them have said some pretty specific things about being opposed to abortion so I think that would be a very strong argument.”

Mattman, 59, said he believes Biden will not be able to defeat Republican nominee Donald Trump — a prospect that leaves Mattman “very distraught.” Harris would be a much more effective candidate because Biden is unable to “put pressure” on his opponent and exploit his weaknesses, Mattman said.

Harris is more popular among Black Americans than she is among white or Hispanic adults. She is more disliked by men than she is by women.

Other prominent Democrats who have been floated as potential replacements are less known than Harris is. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults don’t have an opinion of California Gov. Gavin Newsom, and half are unfamiliar with Michigan Gov. Gretchen Whitmer. Newsom is seen, overall, slightly more negatively than positively. Americans are divided about evenly on Whitmer: 24% have a favorable view and 22% have an unfavorable view.

More Democrats see Harris rather than Newsom or Whitmer as someone who would make a good president, though that’s partly because they’re relative unknowns. About one-third of Democrats say Newsom would make a good president, and half don’t know enough to say. About one-quarter of Democrats say Whitmer would do well, and about two-thirds don’t know enough to say.

Trump’s running mate, Senator JD Vance of Ohio, is unknown to most Americans. In the AP-NORC poll, which was conducted before Trump made Vance his vice presidential choice, 6 in 10 Americans don’t know enough about him to form an opinion. About 2 in 10 U.S. adults have a favorable view of Vance, and about 2 in 10 view him negatively. Among Republicans, 61% don’t know enough to have an opinion of Vance. About one-quarter have a positive view of him, and roughly 1 in 10 have a negative view.

Leader of Belarus marks 30 years in power after crushing all dissent and cozying up to Moscow

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — For three decades, European leaders have come and gone by the dozens, but Alexander Lukashenko remains in absolute control of Belarus.

His longevity is due to a mixture of harshly silencing all dissent, reverting to Soviet-style economic controls and methods, and cozying up to Russia, even as he sometimes flirted with the West.

Lukashenko, 69, was dubbed “Europe’s last dictator” early in his tenure, and he has lived up to that nickname.

On Saturday, he marks 30 years in power — one of the world’s longest-serving and most ruthless leaders.

As head of the country sandwiched between Russia, Ukraine and NATO members Poland, Lithuania and Latvia, Lukashenko was elected to his sixth term in office in 2020, in balloting widely seen at home and abroad as rigged.

Months of mass protests that followed were harshly suppressed in a violent crackdown that sent tens of thousands to jail amid allegations of beatings and torture. Many political opponents remain imprisoned or have fled the nation of 9.5 million.

But the strongman shrugged off Western sanctions and isolation that followed, and now he says he will run for a seventh five-year term next year.

Lukashenko owes his political longevity to a mixture of guile, brutality and staunch political and economic support from his main ally, Russia.

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Most recently, in 2022 he allowed Moscow to use Belarusian territory to invade Ukraine and later agreed to host some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons.

"Lukashenko has turned Belarus into a fragment of the USSR, dangerous not only for its own citizens but also threatening its Western neighbors with nuclear weapons," said independent political analyst Valery Karbalevich.

He describes the Belarusian leader as "one of the most experienced post-Soviet politicians, who has learned to play on both on the Kremlin's mood and the fears of his own people."

When the former state farm director was first elected in July 1994 just 2½ years after Belarus gained independence following the USSR's collapse, he pledged to fight corruption and boost living standards that had plunged amid chaotic free-market reforms.

An admirer of the Soviet Union, Lukashenko pushed soon after his election for a referendum that abandoned the country's new red-and-white national flag in favor of one similar to what Belarus had used as a Soviet republic.

He also quickly bolstered ties with Russia and pushed for forming a new union state in the apparent hope of becoming its head after a full merger — an ambition dashed by the 2000 election of Vladimir Putin to succeed the ailing Boris Yeltsin as Russian president.

Under Lukashenko, Belarus' top security agency retained its fearsome Soviet-era name of the KGB. It also has been the only country in Europe to keep capital punishment, with executions carried out with a shot to the back of the head.

In 1999 and 2000, four prominent Lukashenko critics disappeared, and an investigation by the Council of Europe concluded they were kidnapped and killed by death squads linked to senior Belarusian officials. Belarusian authorities stonewalled European demands to track down and prosecute the suspected culprits.

"Lukashenko never bothered with his reputation," said Anatoly Lebedko, leader of the now-outlawed United Civil Party of Belarus. "He relished in calling himself a dictator and bragged about being a pariah even when he was publicly accused of political killings and other crimes."

Lukashenko initiated constitutional changes that put parliament under his control, removed term limits and extended his power in elections that the West didn't recognize as free or fair. Protests following the votes were quickly broken up by police and organizers were jailed.

His Soviet-style centralized economy depended heavily on Russian subsidies.

"Instead of helping Belarus, cheap Russian oil and gas have become its curse, allowing Lukashenko to receive windfall profits from exporting oil products to Europe and freeze the situation in Belarus," said Alexander Milinkevich, who challenged him in a 2006 election. "Opposition calls for reforms and movement toward the European Union literally drowned in the flood of Russian money."

But even while relying on Moscow, Lukashenko repeatedly clashed with the Kremlin, accusing it of trying to strong-arm Belarus into surrendering control of its most prized economic assets and eventually abandoning its independence.

While maneuvering for more subsidies from Russia, he often tried to appease the West by occasionally easing repressions. Before the 2020 election, the U.S. and EU lifted some sanctions as Belarus freed political prisoners.

The balancing act ended after the vote that sparked the largest protests ever seen in Belarus. In the subsequent crackdown, over 35,000 people were arrested, thousands were beaten in police custody, and hundreds of independent media outlets and nongovernmental organizations were closed and outlawed.

While Putin had been annoyed by Lukashenko's past maneuvers, he saw the protests as a major threat to Moscow's influence over its ally and moved quickly to shore up the Belarusian leader who came under Western sanctions.

Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya, who challenged Lukashenko in that election and then fled the country to lead the opposition from exile, said the vote marked a watershed as it became clear that he had "lost support of the majority of the Belarusians."

"Lukashenko has survived primarily thanks to Russia, which offered him information, financial and even military support at the peak of the protests," she told The Associated Press. "The Kremlin's intervention

prevented a split in the Belarusian elites. Now Lukashenko is paying back that support with the country's sovereignty."

Belarus' leading human rights group Viasna counts about 1,400 political prisoners in the country, including group founder and Nobel Peace Prize laureate Ales Bialiatski, who has been held incommunicado like other opposition figures.

"Lukashenko has created a harsh personalist political regime in the center of Europe with thousands of political prisoners where civic institutions don't function and time has turned back," said Bialiatski's wife, Natalia Pinchuk. "Torturous conditions in which Ales has been held are emblematic for thousands of Belarusian prisoners and Lukashenko's path in politics."

In one of the most vivid episodes of the crackdown, a commercial jet carrying a dissident journalist from Greece to Lithuania was forced to land in Minsk in May 2021 when it briefly crossed into Belarusian airspace in what the West condemned as air piracy. The journalist, Raman Pratasevich, was convicted of organizing protests and sentenced to eight years in prison. He later was pardoned and became a Lukashenko supporter.

The Belarusian leader is sometimes blustery and mercurial. He once praised Adolf Hitler for "raising Germany from ruins."

Lukashenko shrugged off the COVID-19 pandemic as "psychosis" and advised people to "kill the virus with vodka," go to saunas and work in the fields because "tractors will cure everybody!"

Amid the 2020 crackdown, Lukashenko declared that "sometimes we shouldn't care about the laws and just take tough steps to stop some scum."

He kept his youngest son, 19-year-old Nikolai, at his side at official events, fueling speculation that he could be nurturing him as a successor.

Lukashenko maintained a tough-guy image by playing hockey, skiing and doing other sports. After contracting COVID-19, he said he recovered quickly, thanks to physical activity.

But he's become visibly less energetic in recent years amid rumors of health problems that he denied with his usual bravado.

"I'm not going to die," he said last year. "You will have to tolerate me for quite a long time to go."

Thousands gather at banquet hall to celebrate life of former fire chief killed at Trump rally

By MICHAEL SISAK, MARYCLAIRE DALE and JOSEPH FREDERICK Associated Press

FREEDPORT, Pa. (AP) — Thousands of mourners filed into a Pennsylvania banquet hall Thursday to remember the former fire chief who was fatally shot during the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump, who sent a note of condolence hailing him as a hero.

The crowd paying respects to Corey Comperatore and his family appeared to be a mix of friends, neighbors and strangers who wanted to show appreciation for the man who officials said spent his final moments shielding his wife and daughter from gunfire at the campaign rally.

Fire trucks and police vehicles filled the parking lot outside the building. Sharpshooters were positioned on top of the event hall and on nearby buildings as dozens of people waited in line to enter. Among the mourners were firefighters in dress uniforms.

Comperatore, 50, worked as a project and tooling engineer, was an Army reservist and spent many years as a volunteer firefighter after serving as chief, according to his obituary.

Trump sustained an ear injury but was not seriously hurt and has been participating this week in the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee.

Trump honored Comperatore during his speech Thursday night accepting the party's presidential nomination, displaying his firefighting gear on the convention stage, kissing his helmet and heralding the ex-chief as "an unbelievable person."

Trump said a fund for Comperatore's family and the two men wounded in the attack — David Dutch,

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57, and James Copenhaver, 74 — has raised more than \$6 million.

Comperatore's visitation Thursday saw a line of hundreds of people at a time stretching through Laube Hall, a space with white brick walls, white linens, white curtains and exposed wooden beams that's normally used for weddings and other celebratory occasions.

Guests walked past a large, framed photo of Comperatore holding a fish, while a slideshow of photos from his life was projected on a screen — his wedding, a recent 50th birthday party, time with his daughters, firefighting, fishing on a lake and palling around with his beloved Dobermans.

The gathering, northeast of Pittsburgh in the rural community where Comperatore grew up, included firefighters from other nearby communities and people involved in local and state Republican politics.

Rich Tallis, a Penn Hills volunteer firefighter who attended the visitation, did not know Comperatore personally but felt a need to honor his memory.

"Any first responder, it's a brotherhood — police, EMS fire, military. We're technically all one," he said. "When one goes, we all go."

Tables inside the hall were lined with flowers — some sent by fire departments in New York and West Virginia, an auto racing circuit and the mayor of a nearby community. Others came from people in faraway places such as Connecticut, Florida and Texas who knew of Comperatore only because of his death.

The messages on the cards accompanying the arrangements praised his selflessness and dedication to his family. One said his name would be "written in the history books."

Mourners took turns pausing in front of Comperatore's open casket, which was adorned with flower arrangements and ribbons with words such as "dad" and "husband."

In a corner was a framed copy of a note to Comperatore's wife signed by Trump and former first lady Melania Trump. "Corey will forever be remembered as a True American Hero," they wrote.

Retired New York City Fire Department Lt. Joe Torrillo said outside the visitation that he came because Comperatore was a firefighter who lost his life the same way he lived his life — like a hero.

"And, you know, a lot of people maybe wouldn't or couldn't have done what he did," Torrillo said.

Jon Ruffley, who lives outside Pittsburgh and attended part of the Trump rally Saturday, went to the visitation with his wife and young child. He said he hoped his presence sent a supportive message to the family that "we stick together as Americans regardless of, you know, what someone's political affiliations are."

"I think it's really important that we raise our kids in a way where we can see that political violence is unacceptable, that we stand for having important discourses about things in, in our society," he said.

A box truck parked on a route to the banquet hall displayed video screens showing slides, including a photograph of Trump raising his fist after Saturday's shooting. It had the slogan "never surrender" and a message expressing prayers for Trump and Comperatore.

The visitation, which was broken into a pair of two-hour blocks, was the second of two public events memorializing and celebrating Comperatore's life. Hundreds of people gathered Wednesday at a vigil for him at an auto racing track.

A private funeral is scheduled for Friday. Trump is not going to the funeral because of Secret Service concerns, according to a source familiar who was not authorized to speak publicly.

A statement issued Thursday by Comperatore's family described him as a "beloved father and husband, and a friend to so many throughout the Butler region."

"Our family is finding comfort and peace through the heartfelt messages of encouragement from people around the world, through the support of our church and community, and most of all through the strength of God," the statement said.

Dan Ritter, who gave a eulogy at Wednesday's vigil, said he bought Comperatore's childhood home in 1993, sparking a friendship that grew with their shared values of family, Christian faith and politics.

"Corey loved his family and was always spending time with them," Ritter said. "This past Saturday was supposed to be one of those days for him. He did what a good father would do. He protected those he loved. He's a true hero for us all."

Comperatore's pastor, Jonathan Fehl of Cabot Methodist Church in Cabot, said the family "has been

humbled by the way this community has rallied around them” and by the support they have received from people around the world.

The vigil concluded with people in the crowd lighting candles and raising cellphones, glow sticks and lighters as Comperatore’s favorite song — “I Can Only Imagine,” by Christian rock band MercyMe — played.

Two other people were wounded at the rally: David Dutch, 57, of New Kensington, and James Copenhaver, 74, of Moon Township. As of Wednesday night, both had been upgraded to serious but stable condition, according to a spokesperson with Allegheny Health Network.

Joseph Feldman, an attorney for Copenhaver, said Wednesday that he had spoken with his client by phone. “He seems to be in good spirits, but he also understands the gravity of the situation,” Feldman said. “And he’s deeply saddened about what has occurred, and he’s deeply sympathetic” to the other victims and their families.

Feldman said Copenhaver suffered “life-altering injuries,” declining to go into detail. He said Copenhaver’s priority is to “keep up with the medical treatment he’s receiving and hopefully be released at some point.”

In a statement, Dutch’s family thanked the “greater western Pennsylvania community and countless others across the country and world” for the incredible outpouring of prayers and well wishes.

Illinois deputy charged with murder shot woman in face after ordering her to move pot of water

By MELISSA PEREZ WINDER, JOHN O’CONNOR and ED WHITE Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — An Illinois sheriff’s deputy charged with murder in the death of a Black woman shot her in the face during a tense moment over a pot of water in her home and then discouraged his partner from trying to save her, authorities said Thursday.

The details were in a court document filed in support of keeping fired Sangamon County Deputy Sean Grayson in custody without bond. County Circuit Judge Ryan M. Cadagin agreed, denying Grayson pretrial release at a hearing Thursday in Springfield.

In a courtroom guarded by a dozen sheriff’s deputies with three more patrolling the hall, Cadagin described the actions the former deputy is accused of as “such a departure from the expectations of a civil society.”

Sonya Massey, 36, was killed at her home in Illinois’ capital city, about 200 miles (322 kilometers) south of Chicago, after deputies responded to her 911 call about a possible prowler early on July 6.

Prosecutors alleged that after Grayson allowed Massey to move a pot of water heating on the stove and she set it on a counter, Grayson then “aggressively yelled” at Massey over the pot and pulled his 9 mm pistol. Massey then put her hands in the air, declared “I’m sorry” and ducked for cover before being shot in the face. Grayson also discouraged the other deputy from getting his medical kit, prosecutors said.

“The other deputy still rendered aid and stayed with Ms. Massey until medical help arrived,” First Assistant State’s Attorney Mary Rodgers wrote. Grayson “at no time attempted to render aid to Ms. Massey.”

The 30-year-old Grayson, who is white, was indicted on charges of first-degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm and official misconduct. He pleaded not guilty in his first court appearance Thursday.

More than 30 of Massey’s family members and their supporters filled the seats of the courtroom Thursday, several of whom declined to comment afterward.

No one argued with the state’s contention that body camera footage of the incident upheld the first requirement in ordering Grayson detained — that there is a strong presumption that the actions alleged in the indictment occurred. Authorities said they plan to release the body camera footage publicly Monday.

“At no point did this defendant show anything but callousness to human life,” Rodgers said.

Defense attorney Dan Fultz argued for Grayson’s release, contending the state’s arguments fell short on other arguments. Fultz said Grayson is not a threat to the community because was compliant and turned himself in within a half-hour after his arrest warrant was issued.

He said the Army veteran owns a home in Riverton, a community just east of Springfield, with his fiancée, whom he plans to marry this fall. His detention would pose a burden on the county, he said, because of Stage 3 colon cancer diagnosed last fall that requires special medical treatment.

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Fultz asked for Grayson's release on condition that weapons be removed from his home, that he undergo a mental health evaluation and be put on around-the-clock electronic monitoring.

Cadagin decreed that Massey, weighing about 110 pounds (50 kilograms), posed no threat to the 6-foot-3 (190-centimeter), 228-pound (103-kilogram) Grayson, who was armed and accompanied by another deputy, and after shooting her refused to render aid.

Sheriff Jack Campbell said Wednesday that Grayson was fired because it is evident that the deputy "did not act as trained or in accordance with our standards. ... With our badge we accept enormous responsibility, and if that responsibility is abused, there should be consequences."

Ben Crump, an attorney for Massey's family, said the charges were a "step toward justice for Sonya's loved ones, especially her children, who have endured unimaginable pain and suffering since they were notified of this tragedy."

As many as 200 people gathered Wednesday at the Springfield NAACP building to express support for Massey and her family.

"I am enraged that another innocent Black woman had her life taken from her at the hands of a police officer," Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker said after the indictment.

Grayson is due back in court Aug. 26. He has been with the Sangamon County Sheriff's Department about 18 months, Fultz said, after serving as an officer with several other police agencies in central Illinois for about seven years before that.

Biden is isolated at home as Obama, Pelosi and other Democrats push for him to reconsider 2024 race

By LISA MASCARO, ZEKE MILLER, MICHAEL BALSAMO and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Democrats at the highest levels are making a critical push for President Joe Biden to rethink his election bid, with former President Barack Obama expressing concerns to allies and Speaker Emerita Nancy Pelosi privately telling Biden the party could lose the ability to seize control of the House if he doesn't step away from the 2024 race.

Biden's orbit, already small before his debate fumbling, has grown even smaller in recent days. Isolated as he battles a COVID infection at home in Delaware, the president is relying on a few longtime aides as he weighs whether to bow to the mounting pressure to drop out.

Late Thursday, Montana Sen. Jon Tester became the second Democrat in the chamber — and now among nearly two dozen in Congress — calling on him to bow out, saying, "Biden should not seek reelection to another term."

The Biden For President campaign is calling an all-staff meeting for Friday. It's heading into a critical weekend for the party as Republican Donald Trump wraps up a heady Republican National Convention in Milwaukee and Democrats, racing time, consider the extraordinary possibility of Biden stepping aside for a new presidential nominee before their own convention next month in Chicago.

As anxiety and information swirled, Biden's closest friend in Congress and his campaign co-chair, Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware, told The Associated Press, "President Biden deserves the respect to have important family conversations with members of the caucus and colleagues in the House and Senate and Democratic leadership and not be battling leaks and press statements."

The reporting in this story is based in part on information from almost a dozen people who insisted on anonymity to discuss sensitive private deliberations. The Washington Post first reported on Obama's involvement.

Campaign officials said Biden was even more committed to staying in the race even as the calls for him to go mounted. And senior West Wing aides have had no internal discussions or conversations with the president about Biden dropping out. On Friday, the Democratic National Committee's rulemaking arm expects to meet to discuss plans for the virtual roll call nominating the president in early August, ahead of the party's convention later that month.

But there is also time to reconsider. Biden has been told the campaign is having trouble raising money,

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and key Democrats see an opportunity as he is away from the campaign for a few days to encourage his exit. Among his Cabinet, some are resigned to the likelihood of him losing in November.

Biden, 81, tested positive for COVID-19 while traveling in Las Vegas earlier this week and is experiencing "mild symptoms" including "general malaise" from the infection, the White House said.

The president himself, in a radio interview taped just before he tested positive, dismissed the idea it was too late for him to recover politically, telling Univision's Luis Sandoval that many people don't focus on the November election until September.

"All the talk about who's leading and where and how, is kind of, you know — everything so far between Trump and me has been basically even," he said in an excerpt of the interview released Thursday.

But in Congress, Democratic lawmakers have begun having private conversations about lining up behind Vice President Kamala Harris as an alternative. One lawmaker said Biden's own advisers are unable to reach a unanimous recommendation about what he should do. More in Congress are considering joining the others who have called for Biden to drop out.

"It's clear the issue won't go away," said Vermont Sen. Peter Welch, the other Senate Democrat who has publicly said Biden should exit the race. Welch said the current state of party angst — with lawmakers panicking and donors revolting — was "not sustainable."

Obama has conveyed to allies that Biden needs to consider the viability of his campaign but has also made clear that the decision is one Biden needs to make. The former president has taken calls in recent days from members of congressional leadership, Democratic governors and key donors to discuss their concerns about his former vice president.

Biden said Monday he hadn't spoken to Obama in a couple of weeks.

Pelosi also presented polling to Biden that she argued shows he likely can't defeat Republican Trump — though the former speaker countered Thursday in a sharp statement that the "feeding frenzy" from anonymous sources "misrepresents any conversations" she may have had with the president.

Pressed about reports that Biden might be softening to the idea of leaving the race, his deputy campaign manager Quentin Fulks said Thursday, "He is not wavering on anything."

However, influential Democrats including Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer and House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries are sending signals of strong concern.

Using mountains of data showing Biden's standing could seriously damage the ranks of Democrats in Congress, frank conversations in public and private and now the president's own few days of isolation, many Democrats see an opportunity to encourage a reassessment.

Over the past week, Schumer and Jeffries, both of New York, have spoken privately to the president, candidly laying out the concerns of Democrats on Capitol Hill. Control of the House and Senate is at stake, and leaders are keenly aware that a Republican sweep in November could launch Trump's agenda for years to come.

Separately, the chair of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, Rep. Suzan DelBene of Washington, spoke with the president last week and aired the concerns of front-line Democrats seeking election to the House.

Major political donors, particularly in Pelosi's California, have been putting heavy pressure on the president's campaign and members of Congress, according to one Democratic strategist. Schumer has told donors and others to bring their concerns directly to the White House.

And Rep. Jamie Raskin of Maryland used a baseball metaphor to suggest in a recent letter to Biden, "There is no shame in taking a well-deserved bow to the overflowing appreciation of the crowd."

To be sure, many want Biden to stay in the race. And the Democratic National Committee is pushing ahead with plans for a virtual vote to formally make Biden its nominee in the first week of August, ahead of the Democratic National Convention, which begins Aug. 19.

Rep. James Clyburn, a senior Democrat and key Biden ally, wrapped up several days of campaigning for Biden in Nevada and said: "Joe Biden has the knowledge. He's demonstrated that time and time again." He warned against those who he said "have an agenda."

But among Democrats nationwide, nearly two-thirds say Biden should step aside and let his party nominate a different candidate, according to an AP-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research poll. That sharply undercuts Biden's post-debate claim that "average Democrats" are still with him.

The Biden campaign pointed to what it called "extensive support" for his reelection from legislators in key swing states as well as from the Congressional Black and Hispanic caucuses.

Other Democrats in Congress have shown less support, including when Biden's top aides visited Democratic senators last week in a private lunch. When Sen. John Fetterman of Pennsylvania asked for a show of hands on who was with the president, only his own and a couple others including top Biden ally Coons went up, according to one of the people granted anonymity to discuss the matter.

Federal appeals court blocks remainder of Biden's student debt relief plan

By ANNIE MA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A federal appeals court blocked the implementation of the Biden administration's student debt relief plan, which would have lowered monthly payments for millions of borrowers.

In a ruling Thursday, the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals granted a motion for an administrative stay filed by a group of Republican-led states seeking to invalidate the administration's entire student loan forgiveness program. The court's order prohibits the administration from implementing the parts of the SAVE plan that were not already blocked by lower court rulings.

The ruling comes the same day that the Biden administration announced another round of student loan forgiveness, this time totaling \$1.2 billion in forgiveness for roughly 35,000 borrowers who are eligible for the Public Service Loan Forgiveness program.

The PSLF program, which provides relief for teachers, nurses, firefighters and other public servants who make 120 qualifying monthly payments, was originally passed in 2007. But for years, borrowers ran into strict rules and servicer errors that prevented them from having their debt cancelled. The Biden administration adjusted some of the program's rules and retroactively gave many borrowers credits towards their required payments.

Borrowers who are enrolled in the SAVE plan, which was the subject of Thursday's ruling, will be placed into interest-free forbearance while the case works its way through the legal system, Education Secretary Miguel Cardona said Thursday.

"Today's ruling from the 8th Circuit blocking President Biden's SAVE plan could have devastating consequences for millions of student loan borrowers crushed by unaffordable monthly payments if it remains in effect," Cardona said in a statement. "It's shameful that politically motivated lawsuits waged by Republican elected officials are once again standing in the way of lower payments for millions of borrowers."

Two separate legal challenges to Biden's SAVE plan have worked their way through the courts. In June, federal judges in Kansas and Missouri issued separate rulings that blocked much of the administration's plan to provide a faster path towards loan cancellation and reduce monthly income-based repayment from 10% to 5% of a borrower's discretionary income. Those injunctions did not affect debt that had already been forgiven.

The 10th Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling that allowed the department to proceed with the lowered monthly payments. Thursday's order from the 8th circuit blocks all aspects of the SAVE plan.

The Education Department said it was reviewing the ruling. "Our Administration will continue to aggressively defend the SAVE Plan — which has been helping over 8 million borrowers access lower monthly payments, including 4.5 million borrowers who have had a zero dollar payment each month," the administration said. "And, we won't stop fighting against Republican elected officials' efforts to raise costs on millions of their own constituents' student loan payments."

Largest housing provider for migrant children engaged in pervasive sexual abuse, US says

By PAUL J. WEBER and VALERIE GONZALEZ Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — Employees of the largest housing provider for unaccompanied migrant children in the U.S. repeatedly sexually abused and harassed children in their care for at least eight years, the Justice Department said Thursday, alleging a shocking litany of offenses that took place as the company amassed billions of dollars in government contracts.

Southwest Key Programs Inc. employees, including supervisors, raped, touched or solicited sex and nude images of children beginning in 2015 and possibly earlier, the Justice Department said in a lawsuit filed this week. At least two employees have been indicted on criminal charges related to the allegations since 2020.

It was not immediately clear how many children are currently in Southwest Key's vast network of shelters across three states, which have room for more than 6,300 children. A Justice Department spokesperson declined to comment beyond the lawsuit announcement when asked whether the department recommended that children be removed from the shelters or that the nonprofit's contracts be terminated.

"In some cases, Southwest Key employees threatened children to maintain their silence," the lawsuit states. "In harassing these children, these Southwest Key employees exploited the children's vulnerabilities, language barriers, and distance from family and loved ones."

In a statement, Southwest Key said it was reviewing the complaint and disputed the portrayal of its care for children.

The nonprofit organization is the largest provider of housing for unaccompanied migrant children, operating under grants from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It has 29 child migrant shelters — 17 in Texas, 10 in Arizona and two in California. The company's largest shelter in Brownsville, Texas, is at a converted Walmart with a capacity for 1,200.

The provider has been a major but somewhat low-profile player in the government's response to the arrival of hundreds of thousands of migrant children traveling alone in recent years and during the separation of thousands of families in 2017 and 2018 under President Donald Trump's administration. The government awarded the provider more than \$3 billion in contracts from 2015 to 2023.

The Border Patrol must transfer custody of unaccompanied children within 72 hours of arrest to Health and Human Services, which releases most to parents or close relatives after short stays at Southwest Key or shelters operated by other contracted providers.

Health and Human Services reported 6,228 children at all of its facilities on June 17, according to the most recent data on its website, which does not break numbers down by shelter or provider. The department declined to say how many children are currently in Southwest Key's care or if the agency continues to assign children to its facilities.

The lawsuit, filed Wednesday in Austin, where Southwest Key is based, provides extensive details, saying authorities received more than 100 reports of sexual abuse or harassment at the provider's shelters since 2015.

Among the lawsuit's allegations: An employee "repeatedly sexually abused" three girls ages 5, 8 and 11 at the Casa Franklin shelter in El Paso, Texas. The 8-year-old told investigators that the worker "repeatedly entered their bedrooms in the middle of the night to touch their 'private area,' and he threatened to kill their families if they disclosed the abuse."

The lawsuit also alleges that an employee of the provider's shelter in Tucson, Arizona, took an 11-year-old boy to a hotel and paid him to perform sexual acts for several days in 2020.

Children were threatened with violence against themselves or family if they reported abuse, according to the lawsuit. It added that testimony from the victims revealed staff in some instances knew about the ongoing abuse and failed to report it or concealed it.

Health and Human Services Secretary Xavier Becerra said Thursday that the complaint "raises serious pattern or practice concerns" about Southwest Key. "HHS has a zero-tolerance policy for all forms of sexual abuse, sexual harassment, inappropriate sexual behavior, and discrimination," he said in a statement.

Southwest spokesperson Anais Biera Miracle said Thursday that the provider is still reviewing the complaint, which she said "does not present the accurate picture of the care and commitment our employees provide to the youth and children."

Texas, like Florida, revoked the licenses of facilities that house migrant children in 2021 in response to an extraordinary influx of people across its border from Mexico, creating what some critics said was an oversight void.

The lawsuit comes less than three weeks after a federal judge granted the Justice Department's request to lift special court oversight of HHS' care of unaccompanied migrant children. President Joe Biden's administration argued that new federal safeguards rendered special oversight unnecessary 27 years after it began.

Special court oversight remains in place at the Department of Homeland Security, which includes the Border Patrol.

Leecia Welch, an attorney for unaccompanied children in the case for court oversight, said the allegations against Southwest Key are "absolutely disgusting" and blamed Texas' revocation of licenses for "a powder keg waiting to explode."

"While I applaud the efforts to right the grievous wrongs these children have experienced, I hope the federal government will also take some responsibility for the role it played," said Welch, deputy legal director of Children's Rights.

Neha Desai, another attorney involved in court oversight, called the allegations "profoundly disturbing and shocking."

"I hope that the government takes the most aggressive measures possible to ensure that children currently placed at Southwest Key facilities are not in harm's way," said Desai, senior director for immigration at the National Center for Youth Law.

The Associated Press left email messages Thursday with the offices of Texas Gov. Greg Abbott and Attorney General Ken Paxton. The attorneys general of Arizona and California declined to comment on the litigation.

Southwest grew as unaccompanied children began crossing the border in large numbers in 2014, overwhelming U.S. authorities.

The company has found itself in the middle of controversies over immigration and has steadfastly maintained that its mission was to provide quality care for children. It names its facilities "casas," Spanish for home.

"A typical day for children in a Southwest Key Casa includes breakfast, school, lunch, dinner, homework, snacks, and bedtime," the Justice Department said in its complaint.

Comedian Bob Newhart, deadpan master of sitcoms and telephone monologues, dies at 94

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Bob Newhart, the deadpan accountant-turned-comedian who became one of the most popular TV stars of his time after striking gold with a classic comedy album, has died at 94.

Jerry Digney, Newhart's publicist, says the actor died Thursday in Los Angeles after a series of short illnesses.

Newhart, best remembered now as the star of two hit television shows of the 1970s and 1980s that bore his name, launched his career as a standup comic in the late 1950s. He gained nationwide fame when his routine was captured on vinyl in 1960 as "The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart," which went on to win a Grammy Award as album of the year.

While other comedians of the time, including Lenny Bruce, Mort Sahl, Alan King, and Mike Nichols and Elaine May, frequently got laughs with their aggressive attacks on modern mores, Newhart was an anomaly. His outlook was modern, but he rarely raised his voice above a hesitant, almost stammering delivery. His only prop was a telephone, used to pretend to hold a conversation with someone on the other end of the line.

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In one memorable skit, he portrayed a Madison Avenue image-maker urging Abraham Lincoln to quit tinkering with the Gettysburg Address and stick with his speechwriters' draft.

"You changed four score and seven to 87?" Newhart asks in disbelief. "Abe, that's meant to be a grabber ... It's sort of like Mark Antony saying, 'Friends, Romans, countrymen, I've got something I wanna tell you.'"

Another favorite was "Merchandising the Wright Brothers," in which he tried to persuade the aviation pioneers to start an airline, although he acknowledged the distance of their maiden flight could limit them.

"Well, see, that's going to hurt our time to the Coast if we've got to land every 105 feet."

Newhart was initially wary of signing on to a weekly TV series, fearing it would overexpose his material. Nevertheless, he accepted an attractive offer from NBC, and "The Bob Newhart Show" premiered on Oct. 11, 1961. Despite Emmy and Peabody awards, the half-hour variety show was canceled after one season, a source for jokes by Newhart for decades after.

He waited 10 years before undertaking another "Bob Newhart Show" in 1972. This one was a situation comedy with Newhart playing a Chicago psychologist living in a penthouse with his schoolteacher wife, Suzanne Pleshette. Their neighbors and his patients, notably Bill Daily as an airline navigator, were a wacky, neurotic bunch who provided an ideal counterpoint to Newhart's deadpan commentary.

The series, one of the most acclaimed of the 1970s, ran through 1978.

Four years later, the comedian launched another show, simply called "Newhart." This time he was a successful New York writer who decides to reopen a long-closed Vermont inn. Again Newhart was the calm, reasonable man surrounded by a group of eccentric locals. Again the show was a huge hit, lasting eight seasons on CBS.

It bowed out in memorable style in 1990 with Newhart — in his old Chicago psychologist character — waking up in bed with Pleshette, cringing as he tells her about the strange dream he had: "I was an innkeeper in this crazy little town in Vermont. ... The handyman kept missing the point of things, and then there were these three woodsmen, but only one of them talked!"

The stunt parodied a "Dallas" episode where a key character was killed off, then revived when the death was revealed to have been in a dream.

Two later series were comparative duds: "Bob," in 1992-93, and "George & Leo," 1997-98. Though nominated several times, his only Emmy came for a guest role on "The Big Bang Theory." "I guess they think I'm not acting. That it's just Bob being Bob," he sighed about not winning television's highest honor during his heyday.

Over the years, Newhart also appeared in several movies, usually in comedic roles. Among them: "Catch 22," "In and Out," "Legally Blonde 2" and "Elf," as the diminutive dad of adopted full-size son Will Ferrell. More recent work included "Horrible Bosses" and the TV series "The Librarians" and the "The Big Bang Theory" spin-off "Young Sheldon."

Newhart married Virginia Quinn, known to friends as Ginny, in 1964, and remained with her until her death in 2023. They had four children: Robert, Timothy, Jennifer and Courtney. Newhart was a frequent guest of Johnny Carson's and liked to tease the thrice-divorced "Tonight" host that at least some comedians enjoyed long-term marriages. He was especially close with fellow comedian and family man Don Rickles, whose raucous insult humor clashed memorably with Newhart's droll understatement.

"We're apples and oranges. I'm a Jew, he's a Catholic. He's low-key, I'm a yeller," Rickles told Variety in 2012. A decade later, Judd Apatow would pay tribute to their friendship in the short documentary "Bob and Don: A Love Story."

A master of the gently sarcastic remark, Newhart got into comedy after he became bored with his \$5-an-hour accounting job in Chicago. To pass the time, he and a friend, Ed Gallagher, began making funny phone calls to each other. Eventually, they decided to record them as comedy routines and sell them to radio stations.

Their efforts failed, but the records came to the attention of Warner Bros., which signed Newhart to a record contract and booked him into a Houston club in February 1960.

"A terrified 30-year-old man walked out on the stage and played his first nightclub," he recalled in 2003.

Six of his routines were recorded during his two-week date, and the album, "The Button-Down Mind of

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Bob Newhart," was released on April Fools' Day 1960. It sold 750,000 copies and was followed by "The Button-Down Mind Strikes Back!" At one point the albums ranked No. 1 and 2 on the sales charts. The New York Times in 1960 said he was "the first comedian in history to come to prominence through a recording."

In addition to winning Grammy's album of the year for his debut, Newhart won as best new artist of 1960, and the sequel "The Button-Down Mind Strikes Back!" won as best comedy spoken word album.

Newhart was booked for several appearances on "The Ed Sullivan Show" and at nightclubs, concert halls and college campuses across the country. He hated the clubs, however, because of the heckling drunks they attracted.

"Every time I have to step out of a scene and put one of those birds in his place, it kills the routine," he said in 1960.

In 2004, he received another Emmy nomination, this time as guest actor in a drama series, for a role in "E.R." Another honor came his way in 2007, when the Library of Congress announced it had added "The Button-Down Mind of Bob Newhart" to its registry of historically significant sound recordings.

Newhart made the bestseller lists in 2006 with his memoir, "I Shouldn't Even Be Doing This!" He was nominated for another Grammy for best spoken word album (a category that includes audio books) for his reading of the book.

"I've always likened what I do to the man who is convinced that he is the last sane man on Earth ... the Paul Revere of psychotics running through the town and yelling 'This is crazy.' But no one pays attention to him," Newhart wrote.

Born George Robert Newhart in Chicago to a German-Irish family, he was called Bob to avoid confusion with his father, who was also named George.

At St. Ignatius High School and Loyola University in Chicago, he amused fellow students with imitations of James Cagney, Humphrey Bogart, Jimmy Durante and other stars. After receiving a degree in commerce, Newhart served two years in the Army. Returning to Chicago after his military service, he entered law school at Loyola, but flunked out. He eventually landed a job as an accountant for the state unemployment department. Bored with the work, he spent his free hours acting at a stock company in suburban Oak Park, an experience that led to the phone bits.

"I wasn't part of some comic cabal," Newhart wrote in his memoir. "Mike (Nichols) and Elaine (May), Shelley (Berman), Lenny Bruce, Johnny Winters, Mort Sahl — we didn't all get together and say, 'Let's change comedy and slow it down.' It was just our way of finding humor. The college kids would hear mother-in-law jokes and say, 'What the hell is a mother-in-law?' What we did reflected our lives and related to theirs."

Newhart continued appearing on television occasionally after his fourth sitcom ended and vowed in 2003 that he would work as long as he could.

"It's been so much, 43 years of my life; (to quit) would be like something was missing," he said.

Paris police are sealing off the Seine River ahead of the Olympics opening ceremony

By JOHN LEICESTER and TOM NOUVIAN Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — A special kind of iron curtain came down across central Paris on Thursday, with the beginning of an Olympic anti-terrorism perimeter along the banks of the River Seine sealing off a kilometers-long (miles-long) area to Parisians and tourists who hadn't applied in advance for a pass.

The words on many lips were "QR code," the pass that grants access beyond snaking metal barriers that delineate the security zone set up to protect the Olympic Games' opening ceremony on July 26.

"I didn't know it started today," said Emmanuelle Witt, a 35-year-old communications freelancer who was stopped by police near the Alma bridge while biking across town. She desperately went on her phone to fill out the online form to get her QR code, unaware that the vetting process could take several days.

Those with the precious code — either on their phones or printed out on pieces of paper — passed smoothly past police checkpoints at gaps in the barriers taller than most people.

Those without got mostly turned away — with no amount of grumbling and cajoling making officers budge.

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"That's too much, that's over the top, that whole thing is a pain," grumbled Nassim Bennamou, a delivery man who was denied access to the street leading to Notre Dame Cathedral on his scooter.

"Even the GPS is confused, I have no idea how I'm going to work today," he added.

While authorities announced the code system last year and have been meeting with local residents for months to explain the restrictions, not everyone was aware. Officers patiently explained to visitors without the pass how to reach iconic Paris monuments without going through the restricted zone.

"We had no idea we needed a QR code," said Takao Sakamoto, 55, who was denied access to the Eiffel Tower near the Bir Hakeim Metro station. Visiting from Japan with his wife, he took a photo of the tower from a distance, behind fences and police cars. "That will do," Sakamoto remarked with despair.

On the other hand, visitors who were lucky enough to come across officers who leniently let them pass without QR codes and others who'd equipped themselves with them were treated to the sight of near-empty riverside boulevards that, in normal times, heave with traffic.

"There's no one around!" sang a happy cyclist on a street he had largely to himself. With police seemingly everywhere, another man walking past a riverside café with fewer than usual customers loudly quipped: "You can leave your money and cell phones on the tables, there's definitely no thieves!"

"It's surreal, it really feels like we're the only ones here," said Sarah Bartnicka from Canada. Enjoying a morning jog with a friend, the 29-year-old took a selfie with a police officer on the deserted Iéna bridge to capture the moment.

Paris has repeatedly suffered deadly extremist attacks, most notably in 2015. Up to 45,000 police and gendarmes as well as 10,000 soldiers are being deployed for Olympic security.

"I understand why they're doing this," said Carla Money, a 64-year-old American who managed to pass the barriers with her family.

Some business owners inside the security zone grumbled that sharply reduced foot-fall would hurt their bottom line.

"They've locked me up like a prisoner," said Raymond Pignol. His restaurant, L'Auberge Café, near the Pont Neuf that spans the Seine, is just inside the metal fencing.

The perimeter went into effect early Thursday morning and will last through the ceremony. As an exception, Paris has decided to hold the opening of its first Games in a century on the river rather than in a stadium, like previous host cities. Most of the river security measures will be lifted after the show.

Officers were under instructions to be polite and patient as employees on their way to work and others dealt with the perimeter and the passes for the first time. But Paris police chief Laurent Nunez said that after the initial 24 hours of being accommodating, officers would apply the rules much more firmly, with no more looking the other way for those without QR codes.

Daniel Brown makes late birdies for a 1-shot lead over Shane Lowry in wind-challenged British Open

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

TROON, Scotland (AP) — The wind caught just about everyone off guard Thursday in the British Open. It came from the opposite direction off the Irish Sea, accompanied by occasional rain, and made Royal Troon a tougher test than anyone was expecting.

Turns out that wasn't even the biggest surprise.

Daniel Brown made his major championship debut a memorable one. He birdied two of the last three holes for a 6-under 65, giving him a one-shot lead over Shane Lowry with just enough spectators left in the Scottish twilight to celebrate his amazing day.

It was getting too dark to take a photo of his name atop the leaderboard, and that doesn't interest the 29-year-old from England, anyway.

"I'm going to try and keep my feet on the ground a bit and take on the job again tomorrow," Brown said.

A one-time winner on the European tour, he arrived at Royal Troon having failed to make the cut in seven straight tournaments dating to March until a couple of good events. One was the final qualifying

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to earn a spot in his first major, the other at the Scottish Open when he made the cut and finished 61st. But this day was all about the wind — yes, it was fierce, but it was different. Instead of players trying to make a score on the downwind front nine and keep it together on the way back, it was tough from start to finish.

Rory McIlroy certainly found that to be the case. He shot 78 with a pair of double bogeys. Ditto for U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau, who went out in 42 on his way to a 76. Every major is tough on 48-year-old Tiger Woods, who had a 79 for his highest start in a major since an 80 in the 2015 U.S. Open at Chambers Bay.

Lowry motored along, putting as well as he has all year, soaking up the warm applause all while reminding himself it was only a good start and three more rounds were ahead of him. But he sure knew what to expect.

"Fortunately enough, I came here two weeks ago and I played this wind on the second day that I played here. I saw the golf course in every wind possible I could see it," Lowry said. "Yeah, I guess that was a good thing to do, and it's out there paying off a little bit today."

Justin Thomas is off to another great start for the second straight week in Scotland, even if his score doesn't look that way. He had a 68 — he shot 62 last week in the Scottish Open — and feels as though he played better because the misses are more severely punished at Troon.

The group at 69 included PGA champion Xander Schauffele and Justin Rose, who also played bogey-free with greater appreciation of this Open because he had to endure 36-hole final qualifying just to get in.

Throw in the occasional rain, and Masters champion Scottie Scheffler found it plenty difficult after battling his way to a 70.

"I don't know if confusing is the right word, just challenging, especially when you get the rain involved," Scheffler said. "When you get a wet ball into the wind, it's amazing how short it goes. I think it was No. 2 today, I had 165 to the pin off a slight upslope, and I hit a hold 5-iron, which for me usually goes about 205. It went probably 155 at the most. And I striped it."

Lowry, the Open champion at Royal Portrush five years ago, hit his stride around the turn. He birdied the seventh from about 10 feet and hit wedge to 10 feet at the par-3 eighth, the famed "Postage Stamp" that caused so much damage for a 123-yard hole.

He also made two big pars, including a 25-foot putt on the 10th, before holing a 20-foot birdie putt on the 11th to reach 4 under. Lowry ended his round with a wedge to 5 feet for his 66.

The applause kept getting louder, and Lowry kept reminding himself it was only Thursday.

"For some reason I felt like the crowd were getting very excited out there," he said. "It was late in the afternoon — a few pints of Tennent's were had out there ... and it felt more like the weekend. I just kept on telling myself there's a lot more to do and there's a few days left, so I just kind of stayed in my lane and hit some good shots, and I was pretty happy with how I handled myself."

Thomas played earlier in the day and was at 4 under through 11. He just had to work hard to keep a good score on his card.

His tee shot landed in a bush on the tough 12th hole that required a penalty drop, and he missed a 4-foot putt and made double bogey. His next drive took a wild hop into grass so deep his caddie called out to the gallery, "Last call. Anyone see the other ball to the right?" They eventually found it, but it led to bogey.

"A little bit of a hiccup in the beginning of the back nine but stayed patient and kept plugging," Thomas said.

Indeed, Thomas managed to keep it together. He avoided another bogey with a 12-foot par putt, and finished with a 6-iron to 8 feet for birdie on the 17th and a birdie on the 18th that showed how much the wind was helping — 4-iron off the tee, wedge into 25 feet on the 458-yard closing hole.

Justin Leonard, a winner at Royal Troon in 1997, returned for the first time since 2016 and was given the honor of the opening tee shot with the shiny claret jug positioned nearby on a podium. He had an 80, one of 12 rounds of 80 or higher.

McIlroy broke 80, but not by much.

He was hopeful of one last chance this year to end his drought in the majors that dates 10 years. Now

McIlroy only wants to make it to the weekend. He took two to get of a bunker on the Postage Stamp, and then sent his drive on the 11th over the railroad tracks and out-of-bounds. He couldn't solve the wind.

"You play your practice rounds, and you try to come up with a strategy that you think is going to get you around the golf course. Then when the wind is like that other options present themselves, and you start to second-guess yourself a little bit," McIlroy said.

"The conditions were tough on that back nine, and I just didn't do a good enough job."

FACT FOCUS: Heritage Foundation leader wrong to say most political violence is committed by the left

By DAVID KLEPPER and FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The leader of a conservative think tank on Thursday misrepresented partisan differences in political violence in the United States, wrongly suggesting that people associated with left-wing causes commit more violence than those on the right.

HERITAGE FOUNDATION PRESIDENT KEVIN ROBERTS: "Most political violence in the last 25 years has been initiated by the left."

THE FACTS: Roberts' remarks came in response to questions about comments earlier this month in which he said the country was in the midst of "the second American Revolution, which will remain bloodless if the left allows it to be."

He told reporters Thursday that he considers himself a historian of the American Revolution and that his comments about a second revolution were a reference to "ambitious policy plans" that Republicans have should former President Donald Trump win the 2024 election. Roberts' organization has proposed a sweeping overhaul of the federal government known as Project 2025.

Roberts said his comments about political violence were meant to be seen in the historical context.

A deeper look at the available evidence, however, shows that right-wing groups have committed more acts of political violence in recent U.S. history.

Two years ago a team of researchers from four universities examined court records and other data relating to 3,500 extremists active in the U.S. between 1948 and 2022. The individuals were split into three groups — left wing, right wing and relating to Islamic extremism. While some in the database had committed violent acts, others had raised money for extremist groups, volunteered or spoken out in favor of them.

Right-wing extremists were just as likely to commit violent acts as those motivated by Islamic extremism, the researchers found. Left-wing extremists were a distant third.

Gary LaFree, a University of Maryland professor and one of the co-authors of the research, said violent acts by left-wing groups have been diminishing for decades following violence by radical groups like the Weather Underground, a far-left militant organization founded in 1969.

In recent years, violence by right-wing groups has far outpaced violence by left-wing groups, said LaFree, the founding director of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, which studies extremism and political violence.

"There are very few left-wing cases these days," LaFree said.

Increasingly, he said, many of those responsible for political violence espouse "muddled ideologies" combining a rejection of authority with conservative views, for instance, or supposed anarchists who say they also support authoritarianism. "Or they don't have a strong ideological commitment at all," LaFree added.

Questions about political violence and its place in American democracy are getting renewed attention following Saturday's attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump, a Republican. Some Trump supporters, including Trump running mate JD Vance, have blamed Democratic rhetoric for the shooting.

The attempt on Trump's life, however, is just the latest in several cases of violence committed against elected officials over more than a decade.

Democratic U.S. Rep. Gabby Giffords, who was gravely wounded in a 2011 shooting outside an Arizona

grocery store, had been threatened and windows of her congressional offices in Tucson knocked out after she voted in favor of President Barack Obama's healthcare reform. Although a motive for the shooting was never determined.

Republican U.S. Rep. Steve Scalise, now House majority leader, was shot in 2017 while practicing for a charity baseball game. His assailant was described as having grievances against President Donald Trump and the GOP. Democratic Gov. Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan was the target of a foiled kidnapping plot uncovered in 2020.

In 2022, a man broke into the San Francisco home of then-U.S. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi and bludgeoned her husband, fracturing his skull. Last year, a man with a history of mental illness went to the Fairfax, Virginia, district office of Democratic U.S. Rep. Gerry Connolly, looking to kill him with a baseball bat. Connolly wasn't there, so the man attacked two staffers.

The largest single act of political violence in recent years is the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, when a mob of Trump supporters fought with police, vandalized the Capitol and sought to block the certification of Joe Biden's presidential win.

Trump's own incendiary words and his baseless lies about the 2020 election were blamed for encouraging the Jan. 6 attack, as well as other violent acts by supporters. Trump also mocked the hammer attack on Paul Pelosi, 80.

Years of surveys have consistently shown that Americans from both political parties strongly oppose political violence, according to Sean Westwood, a Dartmouth College political scientist who directs the Polarization Research Lab.

People typically overstate the violent intentions of those with different ideologies, too, Westwood said, with one party believing the other is far more willing to commit violence to further their political agenda. That's one reason why it's so important for leaders from both parties to come together to call for unity and peaceful discourse, Westwood said.

"Americans hate violence," Westwood said. "Even the most polarized don't support partisan violence."

Missouri high court clears the way for a woman's release after 43 years in prison

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

CHILLICOTHE, Mo. (AP) — The Missouri Supreme Court has cleared the way for the release of a Missouri woman whose murder conviction was overturned after she served 43 years in prison, but she still remained in custody as of Thursday evening.

A circuit court judge ruled last month that Sandra Hemme's attorneys showed evidence of her "actual innocence," and an appeals court ruled she should be freed while her case is reviewed.

But Hemme's immediate freedom has been complicated by lengthy sentences she received for crimes she committed while behind bars — a total of 12 years, which were piled on top of the life sentence she received for her murder conviction.

Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey took his fight to keep her locked up to the state's highest court, but her attorneys argued that keeping her incarcerated any longer would be a "draconian outcome."

Her release appeared imminent after the Missouri Supreme Court refused to undo lower court rulings that allowed her to be released on her own recognizance and placed in the custody of her sister and brother-in-law in the Missouri town of Higginsville.

No details have been released on when Hemme will be freed. One of her attorneys, Sean O'Brien, filed a motion Thursday asking that a judge "hold an emergency status conference at the earliest possible time" and order Hemme's release.

Hemme's lawyers, in an emailed statement to The Associated Press, said her family "is eager and ready to reunite with her, and the Department of Corrections should respect and promptly" release her.

Hemme, now 64, had been serving a life sentence at a prison northeast of Kansas City after she was

twice convicted of murder in the death of library worker Patricia Jeschke.

She's been the longest-held wrongly incarcerated woman known in the U.S., according to her legal team at the Innocence Project.

"This Court finds that the totality of the evidence supports a finding of actual innocence," Circuit Court Judge Ryan Horsman concluded after an extensive review.

Horsman noted that Hemme was heavily sedated and in a "malleable mental state" when investigators repeatedly questioned her in a psychiatric hospital. Her attorneys described her ultimate confession as "often monosyllabic responses to leading questions." Other than this confession, no evidence linked her to the crime, her trial prosecutor said.

The St. Joseph Police Department, meanwhile, ignored evidence pointing to Michael Holman — a fellow officer, who died in 2015 — and the prosecution wasn't told about FBI results that could have cleared her, so it was never disclosed before her trials, the judge found.

"This Court finds that the evidence shows that Ms. Hemme's statements to police are so unreliable and that the evidence pointing to Michael Holman as the perpetrator of the crime so objective and probative that no reasonable juror would find Ms. Hemme guilty," Horsman concluded in his 118-page ruling. "She is the victim of a manifest injustice."

Rally shooter had photos of Trump, Biden and other US officials on his phone, AP sources say

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The 20-year-old Pennsylvania man who tried to assassinate Donald Trump had photos on his phone of the former Republican president, President Joe Biden and other officials, including Attorney General Merrick Garland and FBI Director Chris Wray, according to two people familiar with the matter.

Investigators searching Thomas Matthew Crooks' devices have also found that the shooter looked up the dates for the Democratic National Convention as well as Trump's appearances, according to the people who spoke to The Associated Press on the condition of anonymity to discuss details of the ongoing probe.

The FBI has been searching for clues into what drove Crooks to open fire at Saturday's campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, in an attempt to assassinate the GOP presidential nominee. The FBI has said they are investigating the shooting as a potential act of domestic terrorism but have yet to find a clear ideological motive. The FBI gained access to Crooks' cellphone, scoured his computer, home and car, and interviewed more than 100 people so far.

Crooks killed one rallygoer and seriously wounded two others. Trump suffered an ear injury but was not seriously hurt, appearing just days later at the Republican National Convention in Milwaukee with a bandage over the wound.

The shooter had also searched for information about major depressive disorder, according to three people familiar with the investigation. But investigators have not yet determined whether he was actually diagnosed with the disorder, one of the people said. Studies have shown that the vast majority of people with mental illnesses are not violent, and experts say most people who are violent do not have mental illnesses.

On a conference call with reporters Sunday, Kevin Rojek, the special agent in charge of the Pittsburgh field office, said: "We have no indication of any mental health issues."

Crooks used an AR-style rifle, which authorities said was purchased legally by his father. Investigators also found he brought multiple loaded magazines. He also bought 50 rounds on the day of the shooting. Authorities found a bulletproof vest in his car and another rudimentary explosive device at his home. Over the past few months he had received several packages there, including some that had potentially hazardous material.

The shooting raised serious questions about why law enforcement was unable to stop the man from getting on a roof and opening fire. Multiple investigations into the security failures are underway, including a Department of Homeland Security inspector general's probe into the Secret Service's handling of security.

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The Republican chairman of the House Oversight and Accountability Committee issued a subpoena Wednesday to Secret Service Director Kimberly Cheatle for her to appear before the committee on Monday. Republicans have been calling for Cheatle to resign in the wake of the shooting, though she has said she has no intention to do so.

Local law enforcement had noticed Crooks pacing around the edges of a rally, shouldering a big backpack and peering into the lens of a rangefinder toward the rooftops behind the stage where the president later stood, officials have told the AP.

An image of Crooks was circulated by officers stationed outside the security perimeter. Witnesses later saw him climbing up the side of a squat manufacturing building that was within 135 meters (157 yards) from the stage. He then set up his AR-style rifle and lay on the rooftop, a detonator in his pocket to set off crude explosive devices that were stashed in his car parked nearby.

Butler Township Manager Tom Knights said in a statement to The Associated Press on Thursday that officers were searching for a suspicious person around the time Trump arrived. Officers didn't find him around the building, so a Butler Township officer attempted to gain access to the roof by being hoisted up by another officer, Knights said. The officer spotted a person on the roof, and that person pointed a rifle at the officer, Knights said.

"The officer was in a defenseless position, and there was no way he could engage the actor while holding onto the roof edge," Knights said. The officer fell to the ground and Butler Township officers "immediately communicated the individual's location and that he was in possession of a weapon," Knights said.

Moments later, Crooks started firing, sending panicked spectators ducking for cover as Secret Service agents shielded Trump and pulled him from the stage. Two counter-sniper teams were stationed on buildings behind Trump, and the team further away from Crooks fired once, killing him.

FDA OKs best-selling e-cigarette Vuse Alto, but only in tobacco flavor

By MATTHEW PERRONE AP Health Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Federal health officials on Thursday authorized sales of the best-selling e-cigarette in the U.S., Vuse Alto, allowing manufacturer Reynolds American to keep the vaping brand on the market for years to come.

The Food and Drug Administration decision only applies to several tobacco-flavored versions of the reusable product, which takes cartridges filled with liquid nicotine. The FDA previously rejected Reynolds' application for its more popular menthol flavor, but the company is challenging that decision in court.

Last month, the FDA granted competitor Njoy the first authorization for a menthol-flavored e-cigarette. The vaping brand, which is not a big seller, is controlled by tobacco giant Altria, which also sells Marlboro cigarettes.

Thursday's announcement is not an approval or endorsement, and the FDA reiterated that people who do not smoke should not use Vuse or any other e-cigarettes. The FDA determination indicates that smokers who switch completely to Vuse can reduce their exposure to deadly carcinogens and other chemicals found in traditional tobacco.

"All tobacco products are harmful and potentially addictive," the FDA said in a statement. "Those who do not use tobacco products, especially young people, should not start."

Like other tobacco companies, Reynolds makes most of its income from traditional cigarettes, including Camels and Newport.

Vuse made up 40% of U.S. vaping sales in the past year, according to retail data from Nielsen. Most company sales are for menthol products, which remain available under a court order while Reynolds challenges the FDA's negative ruling.

Juul Labs is now a distant second in the e-cigarettes market, accounting for less than a quarter of retail sales. The company was forced to drastically cut back its marketing and promotions following legal settlements with states, local governments and families that blamed the brand's small, discreet e-cigarettes for hooking children on nicotine.

The FDA is wrapping up a sweeping regulatory review intended to clean up the multibillion-dollar vaping industry after years of delays.

Some brands like Vuse have been sold in the U.S. for years, awaiting FDA action on their scientific applications. The market also includes thousands of fruit- and candy-flavored products from China that are technically illegal but widely available in convenience stores and vape shops.

The FDA faced a self-imposed court deadline last month to wrap up its yearslong review of major vaping brands. Currently, Juul's products remain under federal review, although FDA recently rescinded a 2022 order that would have forced the products off the market. That action never took effect because FDA regulators agreed to place it on hold following a legal challenge by Juul.

The agency has rejected more than 26 million applications for products it received from vaping companies hoping to stay on the market. Only a handful of products from major manufacturers have been authorized to help smokers

To win FDA authorization, companies generally must show that their e-cigarettes provide an overall health benefit for smokers, without significantly appealing to kids.

For Catholic pilgrims, all roads lead to Indy for an old-style devotion in modern stadium setting

By PETER SMITH Associated Press

Like the star of an arena tour, a spotlight illuminated the glittering, golden vessel carried by a Catholic bishop. Inside, it held a round communion host, which Catholics believe is the full presence of Jesus in the appearance of bread.

The bishop placed it on an altar at the center of Lucas Oil Stadium in Indianapolis on Wednesday evening. It was the culmination of more than two years of preparations and two months of four cross-country pilgrimages destined for the Midwestern city and the first National Eucharistic Congress in more than 80 years. Thousands of Catholics converged for the start of a five-day gathering focused on devotion to the Eucharist and the core Catholic doctrine that it is not merely a symbol but is the reality of Jesus among them.

The congress reflects bishops' attempt to revive traditional devotions that have waned in recent generations, even as some have questioned how this movement was forged. There has been debate involving politics as well as disputed research over whether most Catholics actually believe the doctrine.

The stadium remained quiet for a half hour of devotional adoration, followed by prayers, multiple speakers and an extended session led by a worship band in front of a stage set and lighting that simulated the look of gothic stained-glass windows. The music ranged from the solemn hymn "Holy God, We Praise Thy Name" to contemporary, electronic-infused music that more resembled that of an evangelical megachurch than of a Mass songbook.

Bishop Andrew Cozzens, who brought in the Eucharist, read a gospel passage in which Jesus calls himself the bread of life.

"We want every Catholic to realize that you are alive in the Eucharist and to encounter your love," said Cozzens, of the Diocese of Cookston, Minnesota, in an extended prayer.

Attendees expressed enthusiasm.

"It's a beautiful thing to see so many families, religious (order members), priests, the whole church here represented," said Sister Teresa Christine DesGeorges, one of several members of the Carmelite Sisters of the Most Sacred Heart of Los Angeles who traveled from California. "There was something about being in that room with so many thousands of people for the same reason that reignites the faith."

There were nine National Eucharistic Congresses between 1895 and 1941, an era when Catholics also gathered by the tens of thousands in stadiums and parades in their home cities for rosary prayers, Eucharistic adoration and other traditional devotions. Such events displayed the growing numbers and clout of the Catholic population, then largely defined by their urban neighborhoods and parishes made up of European immigrant families.

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By the 1950s, mass devotional gatherings had declined, and liturgical reforms of the 1960s put emphasis on other areas, such as preaching, lay involvement and congregational singing.

Many churches retained such practices on smaller scales, but this event coincides with a push by some to revive many older traditions, including the Latin Mass.

A 2021 document from U.S. bishops, "The Mystery of the Eucharist in the Life of the Church," arose amid debate over whether bishops should withhold Communion from Catholic politicians like President Joe Biden or Rep. Nancy Pelosi, Democrats who supported abortion rights. Following cautionary signals from the Vatican, the document ultimately avoided that direct question, though it called on Catholics to examine whether they align with church teachings.

Some bishops also said the Eucharistic doctrine needed a fresh emphasis, citing a 2019 survey that found most church members didn't believe it.

But some researchers have questioned the phrasing of that survey.

A follow-up poll in 2022 — by the Georgetown University-affiliated Center for Applied Research in the Apostolate — used multiple phrasings and found that 64% of Catholics expressed belief in Jesus' presence in the Eucharist in at least one response, as did virtually all who attended Mass weekly.

Among the main speakers Wednesday was Pope Francis' diplomatic representative to the U.S., Cardinal Christophe Pierre. While many traditionalist Catholics have been disenchanted with Pope Francis, such as with his outreach toward LGBTQ+ people, Francis has endorsed the Eucharistic revival and personally blessed the custom-made monstrance used to display the Communion host at the congress.

Pierre underscored themes of the Francis papacy, including "synodality" — church-wide dialogue — and bridging cultural divides.

"Our encounter with Christ's real presence in the sacrament opens us to an encounter with him in the rest of our lives," he said. "Not only is he present in our family, friends, communities, but he is also present in our encounters with people from whom we would otherwise consider ourselves divided. This might include people from a different economic class or race. People who challenge our way of thinking, people whose perspective is informed by experiences that differ greatly from our own."

Another speaker, Sister Bethany Madonna of the Sisters of Life, spoke of how Eucharistic adoration is integral to the group's work with pregnant women considering abortion.

The five-day event includes stadium gatherings, breakout sessions, Masses, rosary prayers and more. In keeping with the traditionalist tenor, there are displays of saints' relics and of a replica of the Shroud of Turin, which some believe is Jesus' burial cloth.

The event included greetings in English and Spanish, reflecting the large Hispanic presence amid the diverse crowd

Logistical delays led to long registration lines Wednesday, but the stadium gradually filled to roughly 70 percent of capacity.

Tim Glemkowski, chief executive officer of the congress, said he anticipates 50,000 attendees over the course of the congress. "We did a lot of things over the past couple of years to make it affordable," he said, including some discounted tickets as well as free admission for young children.

Event organizers have studiously emphasized that it's not political and wasn't timed to coincide with the Republican National Convention.

But the event comes during a conservative Catholic moment in U.S. politics. Even as the Eucharistic gathering was underway, Ohio Sen. J.D. Vance, a Catholic convert, accepted the GOP nomination as the vice presidential running mate of Donald Trump. And some U.S. Catholics are voicing their belief that God spared Trump's life in Pennsylvania on July 13, associating the assassination attempt with an apparition of the Virgin Mary that same date in 1917 in Fatima, Portugal.

Catholic voters are far from monolithic and are often seen as a crucial swing voters, though traditionalist Catholics are often supportive of conservative candidates and policies such as opposition to abortion.

Glemkowski said he's aware of the current events, but "everyone who's here and everyone watching at home is clear, what this is about is the church unified and encountering Jesus in the Eucharist. As long as we stay focused on that, people will see this is not a political movement but a movement of grace."

Trump's convention notably downplays Jan. 6 and his lies about election fraud

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

MILWAUKEE (AP) — As the Republican National Committee moves into its final day Thursday, the loudest applause for a speaker not named Trump so far has been for a previously little-known economist who served as a trade adviser to the former Republican president.

Peter Navarro came to the convention stage straight from Florida on Wednesday, the day he was released from a four-month federal prison sentence for defying a subpoena from the House Jan. 6 Committee.

Navarro was one of Trump's advisers who urged Trump to pressure then-Vice President Mike Pence to reject electoral college votes for Joe Biden on Jan. 6, 2021 in a last-minute bid to stay in office. Pence's refusal to act unlawfully helped spur Trump's defiant speech on the ellipse the morning of Jan. 6, and the violent attack on the U.S. Capitol by the president's supporters.

"Now here's the most important thing I'm going to tell you," Navarro said to the crowd as he complained of "lawfare jackals" pursuing him for his defiance of Congress. "You may think this'll never happen to you. Uh-uh, they're already coming for you."

Navarro's appearance was the rare mention of what have become a staple of Trump's campaign but not his convention — the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol and Trump's lies about widespread voting fraud costing him the 2020 election.

On the campaign trail, Trump's message has been unmistakable.

Last year, Trump called Jan. 6 a "beautiful day" and repeatedly calls the hundreds of people convicted of federal crimes for Jan. 6, including attacks on police officers, "hostages" whom he has pledged to pardon if elected to a second term. Trump's rallies sometimes feature the song "Justice For All," recorded by a group of men imprisoned after convictions for the attack who call themselves the J6 Prison Choir. Trump's embrace of the song pushed it to the top of Billboard's digital song sales chart.

Trump's senior campaign advisor Chris LaCivita was asked in an interview at the RNC Thursday with Politico about whether Trump will continue talking about pardoning the Jan. 6 rioters.

LaCivita wouldn't directly answer the question but said "What we're talking about right now are the issues that matter," listing off Social Security, Medicare and closing the border.

The former president still continues to claim that fraud cost him the 2020 election even though his own attorney general, recounts and investigations found no evidence of that. Courts rejected dozens of lawsuits from Trump and his allies challenging Biden's win. And a comprehensive AP review found fewer than 475 cases of fraud in key battleground states, nowhere near enough to tip the outcome of the contest.

In 2022, Biden and Democrats campaigned on the GOP's embrace of Trump's election lies and found electoral success, winning control of the U.S. Senate while defeating election deniers in key state races. Biden has made the Jan. 6 attack the centerpiece of his own reelection campaign, arguing Trump is a danger to democracy.

Election denial, meanwhile, has become a central issue for the Republican Party. Trump has remade the party apparatus, installing his daughter-in-law Lara Trump as co-chair with Michael Whatley, a North Carolina Republican who has repeated Trump's election lies.

The party has filed a wave of election lawsuits around the country and hired as its election integrity director Christina Bobb, a controversial former conservative journalist who has been indicted by Arizona's Democratic Attorney General for her role in assembling a slate of electors contending that Trump, not Biden, won the state in 2020. Republicans have also positioned themselves to try to block certification of November's election.

The Republican convention's program has been revised on the fly after Saturday's assassination attempt on Trump. Speakers have sought a more unifying tone. Trump's aides contend the former president is now the only candidate who can bring the country together.

Still, Trump's allegations and moments between convention speakers have been occasionally punctuated by a video of Trump vowing to require only voting on Election Day rather than the mail balloting he

blames for his defeat.

"Keep your eyes open, because these people want to cheat, and they do cheat, and it's the only thing they do well," Trump says in the video.

Tony Fabrizio, Trump's pollster, said at an event outside the convention hall that the campaign isn't worried about Democrats' message about Jan. 6 and democracy. "If it was going to work it would have worked already," Fabrizio said.

Republican speakers have picked up one new wrinkle on election conspiracy theories, contending that illegal immigrants who entered the country over the past four years will flood the polls in November.

It's illegal for noncitizens to vote in federal elections and reviews of voter rolls in states like Georgia and North Carolina have found only a few dozen to zero noncitizens have registered to vote, nowhere near enough to make a difference in statewide races.

But Republicans argue that it's conceivable there could be a sudden rise on illegal noncitizen votes and complain Democrats won't vote for their bill to require proof of citizenship to register to vote. Critics say that, given the lack of evidence that noncitizens are voting in significant numbers, adding additional requirements will only make it harder for actual U.S. citizens who can't lay their hands on a birth certificate to vote.

"Biden and Harris want illegals to vote now that they've opened up the border," House Majority Leader Steve Scalise said onstage at the convention.

But that's remained an occasional punchline rather than the focus of a speech. Navarro's appearance, on the other hand, was a full-throated attack on the federal justice system.

Navarro, who led the Office of Trade and Manufacturing Policy, contended he couldn't testify before the Jan. 6 committee because it would violate executive privilege, a claim that was rejected by the courts. In doing so, he became the first Trump official convicted of a crime in connection to the Jan. 6 attack.

"The Jan. 6 committee demanded that I betray Donald Trump to save my own skin," Navarro said. "I refused."

He named the federal judge, a Barack Obama appointee, who ultimately sent him to prison and contended it was political, without mentioning that the only other person to similarly refuse to testify in the Jan. 6 inquiry, former Trump adviser Steve Bannon, was similarly sent to prison by a Trump-appointed judge.

"They did not break me and they will never break Donald Trump," said Navarro before being joined on the stage by a woman he identified as his fiancée, to wild cheers. He spoke for more than 10 minutes — longer than several members of Congress or former House Speaker Newt Gingrich, who preceded him.

On the floor, delegates were thrilled. Brian McAuliffe, a Texas financial planner, wore a giant button with a red line through a banana that read "Don't Banana My Republic." He said he has an acquaintance who the federal government prosecuted for Jan. 6 even though McAuliffe says the man didn't enter the building — and he had to plead guilty to a lesser charge rather than fight a felony count in court because he didn't have the money to defend himself.

"It's not what they're doing to Trump, it's what they're doing to everyone else," McAuliffe said.

He was glad, though, that allegations of election fraud were kept to a minimum. McAuliffe helps certify elections in Hays County, Texas, between Austin and San Antonio, and has surveyed non-voters to understand why they don't cast a ballot. Fear of fraud is the top reason, he said,

"Talking too much about fraud," he said, "just turns people off."

Israel's Netanyahu makes surprise Gaza visit as far-right politician tours flashpoint Jerusalem site

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu made a surprise visit to troops in southern Gaza on Thursday, saying it was essential that Israel keep control of a strip of territory along the territory's border with Egypt, just days before he was set to give a speech to the U.S. Congress.

In his comments at Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah, Netanyahu sounded a tone of triumph in the

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campaign against Hamas — and underscored the differences that still remain in monthslong attempts to reach a cease-fire.

A U.S.-backed outline for a deal calls for an eventual full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in return for a full release of hostages by Hamas, something a continued Israeli grip on the Rafah border crossing and nearby border strip would appear to contradict.

Netanyahu's visit to Rafah was announced hours after Israel's far-right national security minister, Itamar Ben-Gvir, visited Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site. Ben Gvir's move also could disrupt the talks over a cease-fire in the 9-month-old Israel-Hamas war.

Ben-Gvir, an ultranationalist settler leader, said he went up to the flashpoint site to pray for the return of Israeli hostages "but without a reckless deal, without surrendering." Israeli negotiators landed in Cairo on Wednesday to keep working on the talks.

Tensions over the compound have fueled past rounds of violence. The Palestinian Foreign Ministry condemned Ben-Gvir's visit as a "provocative intrusion" that endangered the fragile status quo regarding the Jerusalem compound, which is revered by Jews as the Temple Mount and by Muslims as Haram al-Sharif, a holy site and important national symbol.

The two leaders' visits came hours after Israel's parliament overwhelmingly passed a resolution rejecting the establishment of a Palestinian state. The vote, in an overnight session that lasted into Thursday morning, was largely symbolic and meant to send a message ahead of Netanyahu's trip to the United States.

Netanyahu's office announced his visit to Rafah once the prime minister had exited the war-torn Palestinian territory. Israeli forces invaded Rafah in early May, forcing most of the 2 million Palestinians sheltering there to flee. Rafah, once a crucial entry point for humanitarian aid, is now a dusty ghost town full of bullet-riddled apartment buildings with blasted-out walls and shattered windows. Very few civilians remain, even as the ground operation continues.

Netanyahu toured the Rafah crossing with Egypt and from a viewpoint saw the Philadelphi corridor, a narrow strip running the length of the Gaza side of the border with Egypt. The Israeli military seized control of both early in the Rafah assault, and it says that since then troops have uncovered Hamas smuggling tunnels into Egypt.

Netanyahu said his talks with troops and commanders had made him "stronger in the understanding that our control of the Philadelphi corridor and of the Rafah crossing are essential going forward," his office said in a statement.

Israeli leaders have signaled that the Rafah operation is close to finished — a step that is expected to lead to a new, lower-intensity phase of the war and could possibly improve conditions for a cease-fire. Israel has previously said Rafah was Hamas' last major stronghold in Gaza.

But differences still remain in the talks over the three-phase deal, which starts with a halt in fighting and a partial hostage release. The outline says the deal is to lead to an end to the war and complete Israeli withdrawal — a top Hamas demand for a full hostage release. But it also says the two sides must negotiate the terms for that during the initial cease-fire phase. Hamas wants stronger guarantees, while Israel has suggested it will demand Hamas be removed from power in those negotiations.

In his comments in Rafah, Netanyahu also said Israel demands "a maximum number of hostages" to be released in the first phase. That's likely to fuel Hamas' suspicions he aims to get out as many hostages as possible and then resume fighting.

Overnight Israeli strikes Thursday in central Gaza killed at least 11 people, according to the Hamas-run Civil Defense organization and hospitals. At least two children and two women were killed in air strikes on a house and a car.

In recent weeks, Israel has stepped up strikes in central Gaza, where many Palestinians have fled to escape fighting in other parts of the beleaguered territory. Israel's military said it targeted a senior commander from the militant Palestinian group Islamic Jihad's naval forces in Gaza City, and another Islamic Jihad commander responsible for launches in the city of Shijaiyah.

Ben-Gvir said Thursday while standing in front of the iconic golden Dome of the Rock in the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound that he "is praying and working hard" to ensure that Netanyahu will not give in to in-

ternational pressure and will continue with the military campaign in Gaza. Ben-Gvir has frequently visited the site during times of conflict, drawing condemnation. He last visited the site in May to protest countries unilaterally recognizing Palestinian statehood.

As security minister, Ben-Gvir oversees the country's police force. As a key coalition partner, Ben-Gvir also has the power to rob Netanyahu of his parliamentary majority and try to force early elections.

Ben-Gvir has used his influence to push forward pet projects and encourage Netanyahu to press ahead with the war in Gaza in the face of widespread calls to reach a cease-fire deal that would bring home hostages.

He has been convicted eight times for offenses that include racism and supporting a terrorist organization. As a teen, his views were so extreme that the army banned him from compulsory military service.

On Friday, the U.N.'s International Court of Justice is expected to issue an advisory opinion on the legality of Israel's 57-year occupation of the Palestinian territories, an ongoing legal case not connected to the current Israel-Hamas war.

Israel also said it killed a senior commander affiliated with Hamas and other militant groups in Lebanon. In a statement, Sunni al-Jamaa al-Islamiya, or the Islamic Group, identified him as Mohammad Hamed Jabbara and said he was killed in a strike in the western Bekaa area in Lebanon not far from the Syrian border. The Israeli military described Jabbara as a Hamas operative in Lebanon who helped coordinate Islamic Group attacks targeting northern Israel.

The war in Gaza, which was sparked by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, has killed more than 38,600 people, according to the territory's Health Ministry, which does not distinguish between combatants and civilians in its count. The war has created a humanitarian catastrophe in the coastal Palestinian territory, displaced most of its 2.3 million population and triggered widespread hunger.

Hamas' October attack killed 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and militants took about 250 hostage. About 120 remain in captivity, with about a third of them believed to be dead, according to Israeli authorities.

Closing arguments in espionage trial of Wall Street Journal reporter will be Friday, court says

By KIRILL ZARUBIN and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

YEKATERINBURG, Russia (AP) — Closing arguments in the espionage trial of U.S. journalist Evan Gershkovich will be held Friday, a court said, as the proceedings in Russia's highly politicized legal system picked up speed in a case that has seen the reporter held behind bars for over a year.

Gershkovich attended a trial session for a second day behind closed doors on Thursday, the court said. The Wall Street Journal reporter faces charges that he, his employer and the U.S. government vehemently deny.

Unlike previous sessions in which reporters were allowed to see Gershkovich briefly before the proceedings began, there was no access to the courtroom and he was not seen, with no explanation given. Espionage and treason cases are typically shrouded in secrecy.

Gershkovich, 32, was arrested March 29, 2023, while on a reporting trip. Authorities claimed, without offering any evidence, that he was gathering secret information for the U.S. The American-born son of immigrants from the USSR, Gershkovich is the first Western journalist arrested on espionage charges in post-Soviet Russia.

"Evan's wrongful detention has been an outrage since his unjust arrest 477 days ago, and it must end now," the Journal said Thursday in a statement. "Even as Russia orchestrates its shameful sham trial, we continue to do everything we can to push for Evan's immediate release and to state unequivocally: Evan was doing his job as a journalist, and journalism is not a crime. Bring him home now."

The U.S. State Department has declared Gershkovich "wrongfully detained," committing the government to assertively seek his release.

Gershkovich faces up to 20 years in prison if found guilty, which is almost a certainty. Russian courts convict more than 99% of defendants, and prosecutors can appeal sentences that they regard as too

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lenient. They even can appeal acquittals.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said Wednesday at the United Nations that Moscow and Washington's "special services" are discussing an exchange involving Gershkovich. Russia has previously signaled the possibility of a swap, but it says a verdict would have to come first.

He also repeated statements from Kremlin officials that there was "irrefutable evidence" against Gershkovich, although neither he nor any other Russian official has ever disclosed it.

State Department deputy spokesman Vedant Patel on Thursday declined to discuss negotiations about a possible exchange, but said, "We have been clear from the get-go that Evan did nothing wrong and should not have been detained. To date, Russia has provided no evidence of a crime and has failed to justify Evan's continued detention."

On Tuesday, the top U.S. envoy at the U.N. told Lavrov that Russian President Vladimir Putin should release Gershkovich and other Americans detained in the country, accusing Moscow of treating "human beings as bargaining chips."

U.S. Ambassador Linda Thomas-Greenfield singled out Gershkovich and ex-Marine Paul Whelan, 53, a corporate security director from Michigan, who was detained in Moscow in 2018, convicted of espionage in 2020 and serving a 16-year sentence. Both he and the U.S. the charge is baseless.

"We will not rest until Paul and Evan come home, and Russia has ceased this barbaric practice of holding human pawns once and for all," Thomas-Greenfield said. "And that's a promise."

Gershkovich's trial began June 26 in the Ural Mountains city of Yekaterinburg after he spent about 15 months in in Moscow's notorious Lefortovo Prison.

At the trial's first day, the court said it was adjourning until mid-August. But Gershkovich's lawyers asked for the second hearing to be held earlier, Russian state news agency RIA Novosti and independent news site Mediazona reported Tuesday, citing court officials.

The Russian Prosecutor General's office said last month the journalist is accused of "gathering secret information" on orders from the CIA about Uralvagonzavod, a plant about 150 kilometers (90 miles) north of Yekaterinburg that produces and repairs tanks and other military equipment.

Gershkovich's employer and U.S. officials have dismissed those charges as fabricated and denounced the trial as illegitimate and a sham.

"Evan has never been employed by the United States government. Evan is not a spy. Journalism is not a crime. And Evan should never have been detained in the first place," White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said last month.

Earlier this month, U.N. human rights experts said Russia violated international law by jailing Gershkovich and should release him "immediately."

The Working Group on Arbitrary Detention, made up of independent experts convened by the U.N.'s top human rights body, said there was a "striking lack of any factual or legal substantiation" for spying charges leveled against Gershkovich. It said his U.S. nationality has been a factor in his detention, and as a result the case against him was discriminatory.

In addition, Russia's interpretation of what constitutes high crimes like espionage and treason is broad, with authorities often going after people who share publicly available information with foreigners and accusing them of divulging state secrets.

Arrests of Americans are increasingly common in Russia, with nine U.S. citizens known to be detained there as tensions between the two countries have escalated over fighting in Ukraine.

On Thursday, Michael Travis Leake, a musician who has lived in Russia for more than a decade, was sentenced by a Moscow court to 13 years in prison for drug trafficking.

19 more die in Bangladesh clashes as student protesters try to impose a 'complete shutdown'

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — Police and government supporters clashed Thursday with student activists trying to shut down transportation across Bangladesh as part of dayslong protests over the allocation of government jobs, and media reports said 19 people died in the violence.

The new casualties Thursday would bring the overall toll to 25 dead since Monday when violence erupted at the prestigious Dhaka University in the capital. Violence pitting protesters against pro-government student groups and police soon spread to other cities. Six people had been reported killed on Tuesday, and hundreds more have been injured.

Authorities did not immediately confirm figures for the deaths.

The protesters are demanding an end to a quota system that reserves up to 30% of government jobs for relatives of veterans who fought in Bangladesh's war of independence in 1971.

They argue the system is discriminatory and benefits supporters of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina, whose Awami League party led the independence movement, and they want it replaced with a merit-based system. Hasina's party has accused opposition parties of stoking the violence.

The leading Dhaka-based newspaper Prothom Alo, which has a strong network of reporters across the country, said that by late Thursday night, they received reports of 19 deaths in Dhaka and elsewhere in the day's raging violence. The country's leading English-language Daily Star also reported 19 deaths on Thursday.

Prothom Alo said at least six people died in Dhaka's Uttara area alone in the latest clashes pitting the protesters against security officials and ruling party activists. Thirteen others including a Dhaka-based journalist of an online portal died in other parts of the capital and elsewhere.

Protesters attacked the head office of state-run Bangladesh Television, breaking through a main gate and setting vehicles and the reception area on fire, a news producer and a reporter told The Associated Press by phone. They spoke on condition of anonymity for fear of reprisals.

"I escaped by leaping over the wall but some of my colleagues got stuck inside. The attackers entered the building and set furniture on fire," the producer said by phone.

He said the station continued broadcasting, though some Dhaka residents said they were receiving no signal from the broadcaster.

Meanwhile, the country was experiencing a near-total shutdown of internet services, Alp Toker, director of the London-based internet monitor NetBlocks, said on X.

The violence has continued despite a pending court decision on the legality of quota system. Hasina and Law Minister Anisul Huq urged protesters to await that decision, with Hasina saying she believes the protesters won't be disappointed by the court verdict. Huq said on Thursday that he would be willing to sit with protesters to discuss their demands.

Following the first deaths in this week's violence on Tuesday, the government asked universities across the country to close in hopes of quelling the student unrest, and police raided the main opposition party's headquarters.

Protesters responded Wednesday evening by saying they would enforce a "complete shutdown" of transportation across the country apart from emergency services on Thursday. The opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party said that it would join those efforts.

Clashes continued Thursday as protesters tried to enforce the shutdown. In Dhaka's Uttara neighborhood, police chased hundreds of protesters after they blocked a road and chanted. In other locations, police fired tear gas and charged with batons to disperse protesters, who threw stones in response.

Police said protesters vandalized police cars and set fire to a traffic police box. Scores of people, including police officers, were injured in the violence, the Dhaka Metropolitan Police said.

Protesters also blocked some major highways across the country, and local broadcasters reported violence in other cities including Chattogram and Khulna.

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Traffic was thin on Dhaka's usually clogged streets, while many malls closed. Offices and banks opened, but transportation was limited. Police set up checkpoints at the entrances to Dhaka University.

Salma Rahman, an official at a financial institution in Dhaka, said that she left her car at home and caught a ride on a motorcycle. "Our office has alerted us to stay safe on the streets, as there is fear that violence could happen during the shutdown."

Hasina's government had earlier halted the job quotas following mass student protests in 2018. But last month, Bangladesh's High Court nullified that decision and reinstated the quotas after relatives of the 1971 veterans filed petitions, triggering the latest demonstrations.

The Supreme Court then suspended the High Court's ruling and said it would rule on the quotes by Aug. 7. The government has also appealed the High Court decision in the wake of the protests, according to the attorney general's office.

Huq said the government was seeking an early hearing.

"I have already asked the attorney general to appeal in the Supreme Court on Sunday seeking early hearing," he told reporters. Friday and Saturday form the weekend in Bangladesh. The court opens on Sunday.

Hasina urged protesters in a televised address Wednesday evening to "wait with patience" for the court verdict. "I believe our students will get justice from the apex court. They will not be disappointed."

While job opportunities have expanded in Bangladesh's private sector, many people prefer government jobs because they are stable and well-paid. Each year, around 400,000 graduates compete for 3,000 jobs in the civil service exam.

Hasina said there would be a judicial investigation into Tuesday's deaths and vowed that those responsible would be brought to justice.

"Some precious lives have been lost unnecessarily," she said. "I condemn every killing."

U.N. Human Rights chief Volker Türk posted on X that all acts of violence and deadly use of force must be investigated and the perpetrators held accountable. Türk said freedom of expression and peaceful assembly are fundamental human rights.

Bangladesh's ruling party blamed the BNP for the chaos, and Dhaka police raided the party's headquarters late Tuesday. Detective Chief Harun-or-Rashid said police arrested seven members of the party's student wing, and said detectives found 100 crude bombs, 500 wooden and bamboo sticks, and five to six bottles of gasoline in the raid.

Ruhul Kabir Rizvi, a senior BNP leader, said the raid was a government attempt to divert attention from the protests.

McIlroy, DeChambeau stumble badly out of the gates at British Open

By DOUG FERGUSON AP Golf Writer

TROON, Scotland (AP) — So much for the British Open being one last stand for Rory McIlroy in the majors this year. His best hope now is getting beyond one more day.

And he has company from U.S. Open champion Bryson DeChambeau.

The protagonists from Pinehurst No. 2 were no match for a wind that came out of the opposite direction at Royal Troon and caused both of them more problems than they wanted Thursday.

McIlroy took two shots to get out of a deep bunker right of the "Postage Stamp," the famous nickname of the 123-yard eighth hole. Three holes later, he hammered driver that sailed over the railroad tracks and out-of-bounds.

It added to a 7-over 78, his worst start to major in five years.

"The conditions were tough on that back nine, and I just didn't do a good enough job," he said.

DeChambeau wasn't much better. He couldn't buy a par putt early on, even missing from 3 feet on the par-5 fourth. He tried to hit 7-iron out of the thick grass and moved it only a few feet, leading to a double bogey on the par-5 seventh.

He wound up with a 76 and was headed to the range to figure out his equipment and why his golf ball didn't leave the club the way he expected.

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"It was a weird day," he said.

They were part of the morning wave and the star attraction coming off a U.S. Open that neither is likely to forget. McIlroy had a two-shot lead on the back nine and still in control of his fate until missing a 30-inch par putt on the 16th hole, and then a par putt from just inside 4 feet on the 18th hole that extended his decade-long drought in the majors.

DeChambeau captured his second U.S. Open by getting up-and-down from 55 yards away in a bunker. The finish was so hard for McIlroy that he bolted from Pinehurst No. 2 without speaking or sticking around to congratulate DeChambeau.

McIlroy played last week in the Scottish Open and tied for fourth, and was optimistic about his form going into the final major of the year. But he and everyone else was thrown off their plans when the wind came from an opposite direction.

It was into their faces on the shorter front nine — where good scores are to be had — and helping from the left on the longer back nine, which isn't easy in any conditions.

"I was actually surprised how difficult I felt like the back nine played. I thought we were going to get it a little bit easier than we did," McIlroy said. "The course was playing tough. The conditions are very difficult in a wind that we haven't seen so far this week."

McIlroy said he had a strategy based on the wind from the practice rounds.

"But then when you get a wind you haven't played in, it starts to present different options and you start to think about maybe hitting a few clubs that you haven't hit in practice," he said. "Just one of those days where I just didn't adapt well enough to the conditions."

The round didn't end well. McIlroy chose to hit driver off the 18th and found a pot bunker to the left that left him no choice but to blast out sideways. He hit wedge to about 8 feet and missed one last putt, making one last bogey, leaving a that much more work ahead.

"I have to do a better job in those conditions, and I need to go out there and play better and try to shoot something under par and at least be here for the weekend, if not try to put myself up the leaderboard a bit more more and feel like I have half a chance," he said.

McIlroy was 10 shots out of the lead when he finished, hopeful it wouldn't be more.

DeChambeau was more of a slow bleed, going out in 42 and not registering a hole under par until he reached the par-5 16th. That was the one happy spot of the day. He easily reached the green on the 565-yard hole and made a 55-foot eagle putt.

"I'm just proud of the way I persevered today," DeChambeau said. "Shoot, man, I could have thrown in the towel after nine and could have been like, 'I'm going home.' But no, I've got a chance tomorrow. I'm excited for the challenge.

"If I have some putts go in and hit some shots the way I know how to and figure out this equipment stuff, I'll be good."

Newly arrived migrants encounter hazards of food delivery on the streets of NYC: robbers

By ROMMEL H OJEDA, AMBAR REYES, APRIL XU and CEDAR ATTANASIO Documented, Associated Press NEW YORK CITY (AP) — Brad Song thought he was about to get his e-bike stolen a second time in a less than a month after delivering an order for Chinese food app Fantuan Delivery. Seven strangers surrounded the Chinese immigrant and knocked him off the scooter. He was rescued when a nearby motorist revved his engine, scaring the assailants.

His brakes were damaged and a phone used for navigation had its screen shattered, but, while the February attack in New York rattled Song, his bike and body emerged intact.

Asylum-seekers have gravitated to working food delivery in New York and other major cities, drawn by an abundance of customers and ease of getting started. But the job carries hazards, particularly thieves who target food delivery bikes. Newly arrived asylum-seekers have been easy targets. Some work without

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legal permission, which can make them fearful of seeking help in an emergency.

Dissatisfied with the police response, many delivery drivers have banded together.

Juan Solano, who migrated from the Mexican state of Guerrero in 2017, founded E l Diario de los Delivery Boys en la Gran Manzana, a group of delivery workers who help retrieve stolen e-bikes, often with the help of monitoring devices. Launched during the pandemic, the group has more than 50,000 followers on Facebook and a WhatsApp channel to alert delivery workers of robberies in real time.

Solano, 35, started working in food delivery during the pandemic with his nephew, Sergio, who had his e-bike stolen twice.

Thieves appear to target isolated areas near bridges that connect Manhattan to other boroughs, especially those with lighter police presence. They prey especially on those traveling alone.

A WhatsApp group, called Alert Willis, is dedicated to workers who ride the Willis Avenue Bridge connecting Manhattan to the Bronx.

Sergio Solano said he waited for other workers before crossing the Willis Avenue Bridge recently. After crossing, they turned back after learning on their phones that someone else was being robbed while traveling alone.

"The robber had some type of weapon, but we decided to confront him anyway," Solano said. Outnumbered, the person fled without the bike.

New York migrant shelters have dozens, even hundreds, of scooters parked outside. The city estimates there are 65,000 food delivery workers — almost certainly an undercount — an unknown percentage of them newly-arrived asylum-seekers. A \$1,000 investment for a bike is the main requirement.

Asylum-seekers must apply for a work permit, prompting many to work under the names of people who can legally work. Heisen Mao, a delivery worker and labor organizer, says drivers without work authorization typically pay an account owner between \$400 and \$500 a month, or about 20% of their revenue.

DoorDash spokesman Eli Scheinholtz said company safeguards against fraudulent accounts include requiring periodic selfies to verify identity. The company said bike thefts are "extremely rare." Uber spokesman Josh Gold said in a statement that it has similar anti-fraud measures. Fantuan says it verifies the identity of each of its drivers in person and alerts couriers of high-crime areas.

The New York Police Department reported 11,157 thefts of bikes valued at \$1,000 or more from 2018 through 2023, with sharp increases to a peak of nearly 3,000 in 2020, when supply-chain problems created huge demand. The thefts are concentrated in certain areas, with lower Manhattan the most prevalent.

Consequences can be deadly. In 2021, Francisco Villalba, 29, was fatally shot in the chest after refusing to give up his bike while taking a break at a playground. He had just finished a DoorDash delivery in East Harlem. His assailant was sentenced to 41 years in prison.

Tiburcio Castillo, 37, was fatally attacked on the Willis Bridge while riding his e-bike back home from a food delivery shift in 2022. After an extensive search, his family found him at Lincoln Hospital in the Bronx, in a coma, where he died. No one has been arrested.

Police insist they have been vigilant against theft.

"The NYPD will answer all calls for service and investigate all crimes reported regardless of immigration status," the agency said in a statement.

The rise in asylum-seeking food delivery workers reflects a seismic shift in migration at the U.S. border from predominantly Mexican men trying to elude capture to single adults, families and unaccompanied children from dozens of countries around the world who surrender to Border Patrol agents.

The Border Patrol released about 1.6 million migrants with notices to appear in immigration court from January 2022 through April 2024 and about 600,000 under presidential powers known as "parole." Since late 2022, the Biden administration granted entry to another 1 million migrants through new or expanded legal pathways using parole authority at land crossings or airports to stay up to two years and immediately obtain work authorization.

New York began seeing a large increase in the spring of 2022, fueled partly by Texas Gov. Greg Abbott sending busloads of people at his state's expense. The city currently estimates it is currently home to

about 195,000 newly arrived migrants.

Song, 30, arrived in New York last July amid a major increase in Chinese citizens coming to the United States on a relatively new and perilous route that has become increasingly popular with the help of social media. They start by flying to the Ecuadorian capital of Quito. Chinese people are the fourth-largest nationality, after Venezuelans, Ecuadorians and Haitians, crossing the Darien Gap, according to Panamanian government data.

Chinese asylum-seekers say they are seeking to escape an increasingly repressive political climate and bleak economic prospects.

Song had his first e-bike stolen off the sidewalk during his lunch break. The second assault, ending in a near miss in East Flushing, Queens, came only a month later.

"I shudder to think what might have happened if they had brandished a knife or a gun," Song said.

Song eventually purchased a car to make deliveries.

Gustavo, an asylum seeker from Venezuela, living at the former Roosevelt Hotel, a city-run shelter, switched to a moped after his electric bike was stolen 15 days after he started delivering food. He reported it to police, to no avail.

"I knew where it was," said Gustavo, who declined to give his last name. "But if I went there, I would have beaten the thief up and then I would have been screwed because he would be the victim."

Fidel Luna, who has delivered food for a restaurant in upper Manhattan since he arrived in New York from Mexico in 2020, tracked his stolen e-bike to a building in January and immediately notified police. He said his repeated inquiries to police have elicited no response.

Police declined to comment on his case.

Luna, 29, borrowed his brother's bike to keep working. He kept track of his original bike and planned to intercept if the moment was right.

"I would like the police to help but I cannot wait, I need to get my bike back."

Paris Olympic competition nears total gender parity.

Take a look at the athlete gender breakdown

By GRAHAM DUNBAR AP Sports Writer

GENEVA (AP) — The founder of the modern Olympics and former IOC president, Pierre de Coubertin, once said women competing in the Games would be "impractical, uninteresting, unaesthetic and improper."

Over a century later, the 2024 Paris Olympic Games are targeting gender parity in the same city where women made their Olympic debut in 1900.

The IOC set a goal of a 50-50 split among the more than 11,000 men and women, including backups, registered to compete from July 26 to Aug. 11. However, the latest numbers from the IOC suggest organizers might fall just short of that target.

Slightly more medal events for men than women

There is still a slight edge toward men among the 329 medal events at the Paris Olympics. The IOC has said there are 157 men's events, 152 women's events and 20 mixed-gender events.

Of the 32 sports, 28 are "fully gender equal," the IOC said, including the new event of breaking to music. Rhythmic gymnastics is still for women only but men are allowed to compete in artistic swimming.

Mixed-gender team events were strongly pushed. In Tokyo three years ago, vivid images were created by debuts for 4x400 meters mixed relay on the track and 4x100 mixed medley relay in swimming.

"There is nothing more equal than a male and female competing as one team on the same field of play towards the same sports performance," the IOC's sports director, Kit McConnell, has said.

How many athletes entered to compete in Paris?

One week before the opening ceremony, the official IOC database for the Paris Olympics showed 11,215 athletes, including backups, registered to compete: 5,712 in men's events and 5,503 in women's events or a 51-49% split.

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In track and field, which has qualifying standards the athletes much reach, there were 50 more registered for the men's events than women's: 1,091-1,041. In swimming, the difference was 464-393.

In soccer, with 16 teams in the men's tournament and just 12 in the women's, the athlete tally was 351-264. The wrestling entry has 193 men and 96 women, with a men-only category in Greco-Roman.

In equestrian, where men and women compete in the same events, entries were 154-96.

No men were registered in artistic swimming or rhythmic gymnastics, which have a total of 200 women. There's no men's category in rhythmic gymnastics.

Which teams have more athletes in women's events?

As the biggest team at the Paris Olympics, the United States has the most competitors in women's events with 338, or 53% of its 638-strong delegation, according to the IOC's games database this week.

The 38 fewer men is partly because the U.S. qualified a squad of 19 in women's field hockey but didn't qualify in the men's competition, and registered nine women in artistic swimming.

France, with invitations to compete in every team event, had 293 female athletes registered. Australia had 276, China 259 and Germany 239.

Other teams, albeit with many fewer athletes, have more women on their squads.

Guam, a U.S. island territory east of the Philippines, led the way with 87.5% women — seven in its team of eight athletes, according to the IOC database. Guam's seven women are in six different sports. Nicaragua is set to arrive with 86% women — six of its seven athletes — and Sierra Leone with 80%.

Kosovo's strength in women's judo — four of its total team of nine athletes — lifts its percentage of women to 77%. North Korea, Laos and Vietnam each has 75% female athletes on their teams.

Which teams have the fewest women?

Six of the 205 official Olympic teams had no elite-level female athlete registered to compete: Belize, Guinea-Bissau, Iraq, Liechtenstein, Nauru and Somalia.

Qatar, which wants to host the 2036 Olympics, has just one woman in its 14-athlete team or 7%. Half the Qatari team represents men's track and field, including the defending champion in high jump Mutaz Essa Barshim.

Mali and South Sudan are at 7%. Mali will send 22 male soccer players and South Sudan 12 athletes in men's basketball.

El Salvador has one woman among eight athletes (12.5%).

Two nonbinary athletes competing

The registered entries to women's events in Paris include two athletes who identify as nonbinary and transgender.

Nikki Hiltz won the 1,500 meters event at the U.S. track and field trials last month and will make their Olympic debut at Stade de France.

Quinn won Olympic gold with the Canadian soccer team in Tokyo three years ago and returns to help defend the title.

When did women first compete in Olympics?

Paris hosted the first female athletes at the 1900 Olympics — in the second modern Games — with 22 of the 997 athletes in competition, or 2.2% of the total. The modern Olympics began in 1896 in Athens.

Women competed in tennis and golf, plus team events of sailing, croquet and equestrian in Paris.

Charlotte Cooper of Britain was the first female individual gold medalist in tennis singles.

Gender parity over the decades

Just 4.4% of the athletes were women when Paris again hosted the Olympics exactly 100 years ago. In 1924, the "Chariots of Fire" Olympics, there were 135 women competing among 3,089 athletes, according to the IOC's research.

The number rose to 9.5% at the 1932 Los Angeles Olympics, dropped to 8.4% in Berlin four years later, and got back to 9.5% when the Summer Games were held in London in 1948.

The rise included a bump to 20.7% female athletes in Montreal in 1976 and got close to 23% when the Games returned to Los Angeles in 1984. That's when rhythmic gymnastics and artistic swimming, then

called synchronized, made their debuts.

The IOC put pressure on Olympic teams that traditionally sent only men to compete. Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Brunei included women for the first time at the 2012 London Olympics. That's where 44.2% of the athletes competed in women's events at the Olympics. The number rose to 45% in Rio 2016 and reached 48% at the Tokyo Games, where teams were encouraged to select a man and a woman to be flag-bearers at the opening ceremony.

How did we get here?

The IOC formally committed to "foster gender quality" as part of a package of wide-ranging reforms pushed in December 2014 by the recently-elected president Thomas Bach.

The IOC's sports department worked with the sports' governing bodies to remove some men's medal events and add more for women. The federations have since achieved more equity on the field of play for female athletes than for women in their own offices.

A 2020 review of the 31 sports governing bodies at the Tokyo Olympics found only one achieved 40% women on its board and 18 had female representation of 25% or less.

'One screen, two movies': Conflicting conspiracy theories emerge from the Trump rally shooting

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A former president is wounded in a shooting, the gunman quickly neutralized, and all of it is caught on camera. But for those who don't believe their eyes, that's just the start of the story.

For some supporters of Donald Trump, the failure of the Secret Service to prevent the attempted assassination of the Republican former president points to a conspiracy orchestrated by Democratic President Joe Biden. For some of Trump's critics, however, the details of the shooting don't add up. They wonder if Trump staged the whole thing.

Two dueling conspiracy theories are taking root online following Trump's attempted assassination, one for each end of America's polarized political spectrum. In this split-screen republic, Americans are increasingly choosing their own reality, at the expense of a shared understanding of the facts.

"One screen, two movies," is how Ron Bassilian describes the online reaction to Saturday's shooting at a Pennsylvania rally. Bassilian is a prolific user of social media and has used X to broadcast his conjecture about the shooting. "People have their beliefs, and they're going to come up with theories that fit their beliefs."

Bassilian is one of many Republicans now questioning how the shooter, Thomas Matthew Crooks, was able to climb to the roof of a building providing a clear shot at Trump and whether law enforcement looked the other way to allow the attempt. Bassilian acknowledged that he doesn't have proof to back up his conjecture. But the Culver City, California, resident said many people will be distrustful of explanations until an independent review of the facts is completed.

"It seems highly suspicious," Bassilian said of the attack on Trump and the law enforcement response. "Something was going on that was more than a slip-up."

Authorities have released no information about Crooks' possible motive, though they have said they believe he acted alone. But a lack of details from law enforcement and mounting questions about the Secret Service's performance have led online sleuths to speculate — often in ways that reveal their own ideological leanings.

Some of the claims about the shooting have already been debunked. Despite claims that the Secret Service refused to give Trump extra security before the rally, the agency says it actually increased staffing. A post from someone claiming to be a law enforcement sniper at the rally — who said they were ordered not to fire on the shooter — was discredited after it turned out no sharpshooter by his name was working on Saturday. And a photo that supposedly showed an uninjured Trump after the rally turned out to be a picture from 2022.

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Humans have an inherent drive to share information and conjecture following big events like disasters, political assassinations or seemingly inexplicable events — a process experts call “collective sensemaking.” Often, experts say, we look for information that makes us feel safe or in control of uncertainty. Trump’s attempted assassination is only the most recent example on a list that also includes the JFK assassination, the moon landing, the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, the Sandy Hook school shooting, COVID-19 and the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.

Many of the claims about the Trump assassination attempt emerged first on fringe social media platforms like 4chan before migrating to larger sites like X or TikTok, where they were seen by far more people.

“Rumoring under these conditions is a normal thing that humans do,” said Kate Starbird, a University of Washington professor who studies misinformation and how people use the internet following crises. Attempts to put the shooting in a political context began within minutes of the shooting, Starbird said: “People tried almost from the beginning to frame the event in a way that benefits their political goals.”

Many of those rumors may contain exaggerations, missing context or outright falsehoods that generate conspiracy theories. The misleading information is then amplified by online trolls, politicians, internet influencers and online merchants trying to hawk merchandise tied to the assassination attempt. With few guardrails in place to combat bad information online, such claims can quickly spread, impacting the election in 2024 and potentially persisting for years to come.

The flood of false or misleading information about the shooting will only make it harder for voters to find trustworthy information ahead of the 2024 election, according to Imran Ahmed, the CEO and founder of the Center for Countering Digital Hate, a nonprofit that tracks online misinformation and hate speech. Ahmed blames social media platforms for not enforcing basic content moderation policies and for making the spread of misinformation and hate speech into a lucrative business model.

Social media platforms have recently pulled back from content moderation efforts designed to prevent the spread of misinformation. While some sites like Facebook and Instagram still prohibit information that could interfere with the operations of an election, others like X rely on other users to correct falsehoods.

Ahmed’s group analyzed 100 posts about the shooting that were recommended to users on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, and found that many contained conspiracy theories. Only about 1 in 20 false posts had been flagged for inaccuracies or missing context using X’s “community note” feature to add needed information. In two days, the posts had been seen more than 215 million times. Some of the viral posts also contained hate speech, such as those suggesting Saturday’s shooting was a plot by Jewish people.

“The algorithms take the most outlandish content and amplify it exponentially until the entire digital world is flooded with conspiracism, disinformation and hate,” Ahmed said. As a result, he said, “People seem to feel that they can only fight lies with more lies.”

Russian state media and some pro-Kremlin influencers are already seizing on the shooting with content blaming Democrats for what happened or questioning authorities’ explanations, based on recent posts from users with ties to Russia.

“Almost makes you think they let it happen and then got rid of the guy because dead men tell no tales,” wrote John Mark Dougan, a former Florida sheriff’s deputy turned online influencer who now writes pro-Kremlin content.

Russia, as well as China and Iran, have used social media disinformation in the past in efforts to undermine Americans’ trust in government and democracy and increase polarization ahead of elections. The goal is to exploit the understandable confusion, anger and concern that many Americans feel following the attempted assassination. Federal officials say they expect Russia and other adversaries to expand their disinformation campaigns targeting the U.S. as November nears.

Conspiracy theories have played an outsize role in recent American politics, and much of the attention has focused on right-leaning theories like QAnon, a movement that claims without evidence that Democrats are involved in a global ring of Satanic, child molesting cannibals. But the onslaught of misinformation and conspiracy theories following the attempted assassination show conspiracy theories know no party.

“They target the left and right, and the same goes for homegrown domestic sources of misinformation,” said David Salvo, a senior fellow and managing director of the Alliance for Securing Democracy, a

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Washington-based group that tracks foreign disinformation. He has this advice for anyone interested in finding reliable, trustworthy information about the shooting: "Check your sources, and check the agenda behind those sources."

Today in History: July 19, the Seneca Falls Convention

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 19, the 201st day of 2024. There are 165 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 19, 1848, the first "Convention to discuss the social, civil and religious condition and rights of Woman" convened at the Wesleyan Chapel in Seneca Falls, N.Y.

Also on this date:

In 1812, during the War of 1812, the First Battle of Sackets Harbor in Lake Ontario resulted in an American victory as U.S. naval forces repelled a British attack.

In 1969, Apollo 11 and its astronauts, Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins, went into orbit around the moon.

In 1975, the Apollo and Soyuz space capsules that were linked in orbit for two days separated.

In 1979, the Nicaraguan capital of Managua fell to Sandinista guerrillas, two days after President Anastasio Somoza fled the country.

In 1980, the Moscow Summer Olympics began, minus dozens of nations that were boycotting the games because of Soviet military intervention in Afghanistan.

In 1989, 111 people were killed when United Air Lines Flight 232, a DC-10 which sustained the uncontained failure of its tail engine and the loss of hydraulic systems, crashed while making an emergency landing at Sioux City, Iowa; 185 other people survived.

In 1990, baseball's all-time hits leader, Pete Rose, was sentenced in Cincinnati to five months in prison for tax evasion.

In 1993, President Bill Clinton announced a policy allowing gays to serve in the military under a compromise dubbed "don't ask, don't tell, don't pursue."

In 2006, prosecutors reported that Chicago police beat, kicked, shocked or otherwise tortured scores of Black suspects from the 1970s to the early 1990s to try to extract confessions from them.

In 2005, President George W. Bush announced his choice of federal appeals court judge John G. Roberts Jr. to replace Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor. (Roberts ended up succeeding Chief Justice William H. Rehnquist, who died in Sept. 2005; Samuel Alito followed O'Connor.)

In 2013, in a rare and public reflection on race, President Barack Obama called on the nation to do some soul searching over the death of Trayvon Martin and the acquittal of his shooter, George Zimmerman, saying the slain black teenager "could have been me 35 years ago."

In 2018, a duck boat packed with tourists capsized and sank in high winds on a lake in the tourist town of Branson, Missouri, killing 17 people.

In 2021, Paul Allard Hodgkins, a Florida man who breached the U.S. Senate chamber on Jan. 6 carrying a Trump campaign flag, received an eight-month prison term; it was the first resolution for a felony case in the January 6th U.S. Capitol insurrection.

In 2022, Britain shattered its record for the highest temperature ever registered amid a heat wave that seared swaths of Europe.

Today's Birthdays: Civil rights activist and educator Rachel Robinson, widow of baseball's Jackie Robinson, is 102. Singer Vikki Carr is 84. Blues singer-musician Little Freddie King is 84. Singer-musician Alan Gorrie (Average White Band) is 78. International Tennis Hall of Famer Ilie Nastase is 78. Rock musician Brian May (Queen) is 77. Rock musician Bernie Leadon is 77. Movie director Abel Ferrara is 73. Movie director Atom Egoyan is 64. Actor Campbell Scott is 63. Actor Anthony Edwards is 62. Ukrainian politician and former boxing champion Vitali Klitschko is 53. Actor Benedict Cumberbatch is 48. TV chef Marcela Valladolid is 46. Actor Trai Byers (TV: "Empire") is 41. Actor Kaitlin Doubleday (TV: "Empire," "Nashville") is 39.