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Friday, July 26

Senior Menu: Bratwurst on bun, sauerkraut, 3-bean salad, whole wheat bread.
Ferne Open Golf Tourney, 9 a.m., Olive Grove Golf Course
State Teener Tournament at Garretson Legion Regions at Clark

Saturday, July 27

Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Celebration in the Park, 1 p.m. to 9:30 p.m.
State Softball Tournament in Watertown (U10B, U12)
State Teener Tournament at Garretson Legion Regions at Clark
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

Paul's Cell/Text: 605-397-7460

Water Restrictions Now In Effect



Water restrictions have been put in place for the City of Groton. Odd number houses may water on odd number days between 6 p.m. and 11 a.m. Even number houses may water on even number days between 6 p.m. and 11 a.m.

Absolutely no watering from 11 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Thank you for your cooperation!

Sunday, July 28

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship 9 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m.; and at Zion, 11 a.m.
United Methodist: Worship: Conde at 8:30 a.m.; Groton at 10:30 a.m.; Coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.
State Teener Tournament at Garretson

Monday, July 29

Senior Menu: Baked fish, oven roasted potatoes pea-cheese salad, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
Pantry Open, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m., Groton Community Center

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1440

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

Olympics Opening Ceremony

The 2024 Paris Olympics opening ceremony takes place today, 100 years since France last hosted in 1924. For the first time in Summer Games history, athletes will travel in boats along the Seine River instead of parading in an arena.

The Games will include 329 medal events across 35 venues, with 10,500 athletes from 206 countries competing in events ranging from basketball and fencing to the new event of breakdancing. The US will field nearly 600 athletes. The Games are expected to cost roughly \$9B, with 96% coming from the private sector.

Two of the most-watched US events, swimming and gymnastics, kick off this weekend. The Games run through Aug. 11, followed by the Paralympics from Aug. 28 to Sept. 8.

Quantum Leap in Chicago

The country's first utility-scale quantum computer is slated to be built on the site of a former steel mill in Chicago's South Side, Mayor Brandon Johnson said yesterday. The computer is part of a broader \$9B quantum research campus projected to potentially bring \$20B in investment and 175,000 jobs over the coming decades.

Quantum computers can surpass even the most powerful supercomputers available today, improving encryption and expediting development of new drugs. Silicon Valley startup PsiQuantum's facility will use photons—particles of light—to perform calculations, an approach not yet commercially proven. This comes in contrast to techniques relying on ultracold atoms or superconducting circuits used in existing quantum computers by Google, IBM, and others.

The 300,000-square-foot facility will become the anchor tenant of the proposed Illinois Quantum and Microelectronics Park, a new vision for the abandoned steel mill there. The project, one of the earliest public-private partnerships for quantum computing in the US, will see roughly \$500M in public investment from federal, state, and city budgets.

Economy Beats Expectations

The US economy grew at an annualized rate of 2.8% in the second quarter of 2024, according to preliminary data yesterday. The figure beat analysts' expectations of 2.1% and comes as inflation continues to cool.

The announcement sparked hopes the economy was on track for a soft landing, in which inflation is curbed without triggering a recession. The US gross domestic product was double the 1.4% growth rate in the first quarter. It also came as consumer prices last quarter grew at 2.6%—above the Federal Reserve's target inflation rate of 2% but down from 3.4% in the first quarter. Household spending drove over two-thirds of GDP growth; Americans save about 3.8% of their monthly paychecks today, down from 7% prepandemic.

The news reinforced expectations the Federal Reserve will keep interest rates steady at next week's meeting but may cut rates in September. The country's total yearly GDP is roughly \$28.6T.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

"Inside Out 2" hauls in \$1.46B at global box office, surpassing "Frozen 2" as the highest-grossing animated film.

"Deadpool & Wolverine" expected to have biggest opening weekend ever for an R-rated film.

US women's national soccer team kicks off Olympics group stage with 3-0 victory over Zambia.

San Diego Comic-Con kicks off; see full convention schedule.

Screen Actors Guild calls for strike with video game companies over use of AI.

Science & Technology

NASA provides update on Boeing Starliner currently stuck at the International Space Station due to issues with helium leaks and thruster control; no return date for pair of astronauts aboard the ISS.

OpenAI announces pilot of SearchGPT, an AI-powered search engine meant to compete with Google and Perplexity; launch will be initially limited to 10,000 users.

Butterflies can use static electricity to pull pollen grains from flowers more than half an inch away, increasing the effectiveness of the pollinators as they fly.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow +0.2%, Nasdaq -0.9%) as tech sell-off continues and investors assess US economic growth report.

Cold storage giant Lineage raises \$4.4B in largest initial public offering of 2024.

Southwest Airlines to end open seating for first time in 53-year history, will also offer pricier seats with extra legroom; Southwest shares close up 5.5% on the news.

California Supreme Court upholds ballot measure classifying gig workers like Uber, Lyft, and DoorDash drivers as contractors.

Supermarket chains Kroger, Albertsons pause \$25B merger amid federal and state legal challenges.

Meta reportedly to face antitrust fine from European Commission over its bundling of Facebook and ad service Marketplace.

Politics & World Affairs

President Joe Biden meets with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the White House to discuss the war in Gaza and potential cease-fire deal; trip marks Netanyahu's first White House visit since 2020.

The US indicts North Korean hacker accused of stealing military secrets and targeting US hospitals, NASA, and military bases in cyberattack.

California Gov. Gavin Newsom (D) issues executive order to clear homeless encampments in the state.

Man arrested for allegedly starting California's largest fire of the year, which has burned over 70,000 acres of land.

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West Nile Virus Update -SD

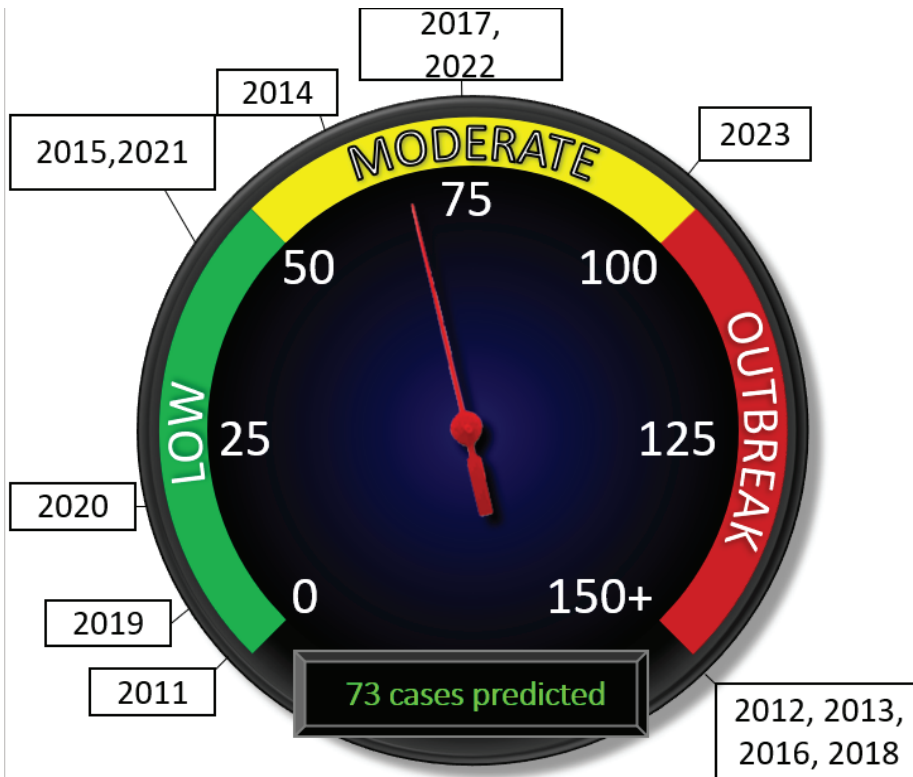
SD WNV (as of July 24):

2 human cases (Beadle, Kingsbury)

7 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Davison, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha)

US WNV (as of July 23): 45 cases (AR, AZ, IN, KS, MD, MN, MS, NC, ND, NE, NV, OK, PA, SD, TN, TX)

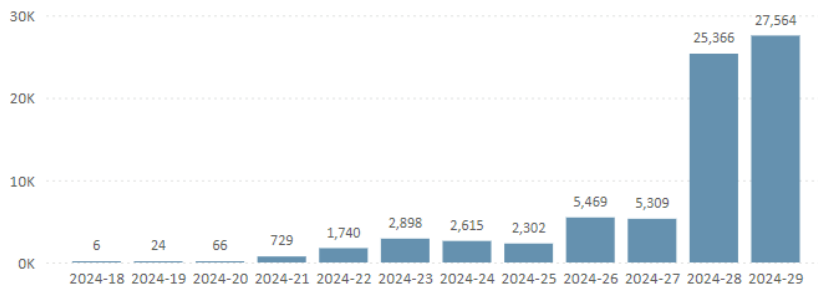
WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2024, South Dakota (as of July 24)



Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2024, South Dakota, Week Ending July 20, 2024 (MMWR Week 29)

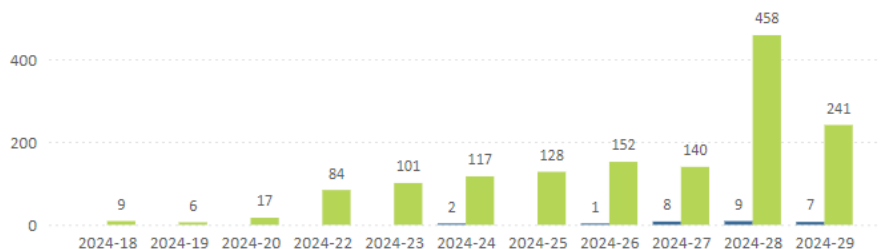
Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 70
 Total mosquito pools tested: 1,480
 % positivity: 1.82%

Culex Mosquitos Collected by Week



Number of mosquito pools tested by week and status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Sign Up for Prairie Dog Control Programs Enrollment Ends August 15

Pierre, S.D.- The South Dakota Departments of Game, Fish and Parks (GFP) and Agriculture and Natural Resources (DANR) want to remind South Dakota landowners to register for assistance with prairie dog encroachment. The deadline for enrollment is August 15.

The state's prairie dog control program is cooperatively operated by GFP and DANR. GFP manages encroachment issues for prairie dogs that move from public lands to adjacent private lands, while DANR manages requests for service between private landowners.

GFP will control prairie dogs that have encroached onto private land from adjacent public land, with a few exclusions. Landowners who have encroachment problems on their property from adjacent public land must be within one mile of the public land and have at least ten acres of actual prairie dog colonies to be eligible for assistance. Eligibility will be verified for every control request through GPS mapping, whether it is a new or recurring request.

Landowners must register at prairiedogcontrol.sd.gov before August 15 to request assistance with unwanted prairie dogs. Landowners with questions about the program can contact GFP at 605.394.6788. Once eligibility is verified in the fall (Aug-Oct), GFP staff or a department representative will begin control measures on the private land. Timing can vary depending on several factors such as weather and location, thus control may not take place immediately following eligibility verification.

Landowners who are experiencing encroachment from adjoining private land should contact DANR at 605.773.3796.

The South Dakota Prairie Dog Management Plan is available online at gfp.sd.gov/management-plans.

GROTON AREA SCHOOL DISTRICT #06-6

School Board Meeting

July 29, 2024 – 7:00 PM – GHS Conference Room

AGENDA:

1. Call to Order with members present. Approve agenda as proposed or amended.

POTENTIAL CONFLICTS DISCLOSURE PURSUANT SDCL 23-3

OLD/CONTINUING BUSINESS:

1. Open Forum for Public Participation...in accordance with Board Policy & Guidelines.

NEW BUSINESS:

1. Board Goal Setting Work Session – Discussion Only

ADJOURN



Referred pipeline law puts company's permit quest in limbo

By **STU WHITNEY**

South Dakota News Watch

An Iowa company seeking regulatory approval to run a carbon dioxide pipeline through South Dakota and four other states said a delay in its plan to re-apply for a permit has nothing to do with a November vote on the project.

After Summit Carbon Solutions gained approval from the Iowa Utilities Board in June, chief executive officer Lee Blank said that "the momentum will continue as we prepare to file our South Dakota permit application in early July."

That did not happen.

And the South Dakota Public Utilities Commission has not received a timetable on when the application might come, which is common so staff can prepare for public meetings.

A spokesperson for Summit Carbon Solutions told News Watch that the delay is not tied to a citizen-led referral of Senate Bill 201, passed during the 2024 session as part of a legislative package known as the "Landowner Bill of Rights."

Sponsors of the law trumpeted a series of landowner protections for potential pipeline negotiations. Opponents said the legislation paved the way for PUC approval of the pipeline by usurping the regulatory authority of counties.

Sabrina Zenor, Summit Carbon's director of corporate communications, told News Watch that the law being referred to voters is not impacting the company's permit application.

"We are committed to working with landowners to have a successful pipeline route in South Dakota, and we will file that application soon," she said.

Giving voters say in pipeline policy

The timing of the application and the fact voters will have a direct say in pipeline policy highlights the emergence of carbon capture, ethanol advancement and "landowner rights" as political flashpoints in South Dakota and neighboring states.

Summit Carbon Solutions is pushing for a \$5.5 billion, 2,500-mile pipeline that would carry liquified carbon dioxide gas from more than 50 ethanol plants in Iowa, Minnesota, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota to be stored deep underground in North Dakota.

The pipeline would address federal environmental standards for tax credits and is seen as crucial for a potential aviation fuel market for the Midwest-based ethanol industry, which buys roughly one-third of the nation's corn crop.

A group called the South Dakota Property Rights and Local Control Alliance gathered enough valid signatures to place Referred Law 21 on the Nov. 5 ballot, giving voters a chance to either keep or kill Senate Bill 201.



A sign urging landowners to stand together against eminent domain and carbon pipelines appears July 20, 2024, along Highway 11 in Lincoln County south of Sioux Falls, S.D. The issue has gained prominence in South Dakota as Summit Carbon Solutions seeks a permit for a network of carbon capture pipelines. (Photo: Stu

Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

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POET Biofuels, whose ethanol plant in Chancellor, S.D., is shown here, announced a partnership with Summit Carbon Solutions in January to incorporate POET's 12 facilities in Iowa and five facilities in South Dakota into the Summit pipeline project. (Photo: Bart

Pfankuch, South Dakota News Watch)

The law, signed March 7 by Gov. Kristi Noem, mandated payments from carbon pipeline companies at the county level per linear foot. It also codified minimum depth requirements, liability on pipeline operators for damages and disclosures of pipelines' plume models, which analyze how carbon dioxide might spread in case of a rupture.

In February 2020, a 24-inch carbon pipeline ruptured in Satartia, Mississippi, causing a "green gas" with a "rotten egg smell" to be emitted. No residents or responders died, but about 300 people were evacuated and nearly four dozen people were treated at local hospitals.

"I think everybody in this state firmly believes that if this pipeline is coming, we want protections in place, and we want real annual benefits to counties and landowners," said Republican House Majority Leader Will Mortenson, who co-sponsored the legislation.

"If this pipeline comes, I understand that it would be good for ethanol, but that's not enough. We need to make sure this is a good thing for every single farmer from the beginning of the route to the end of the route.

And that's what Referred Law 21 does."

Law's potential impact on eminent domain

Jim Eschenbaum, who chairs the property rights group, contends that Referred Law 21 sets the stage for land to be accessed involuntarily through "eminent domain," though the law does not address that issue.

Eminent domain involves taking private property for public use while requiring just compensation.

Eschenbaum's reasoning is that terms set forth in the law between pipeline companies and landowners make it easier for the three-member PUC as a state entity to supersede county zoning ordinances and setbacks, or for a judge to conclude that such action is within PUC authority.

"It will affect eminent domain if it goes into the court system," said Eschenbaum, a semi-retired farmer from Miller, South Dakota, who serves on the Hand County Commission.

"It will be looked at as if negotiations have already been taken care of, which will help them to use eminent domain. In my opinion, legislators overstepped their bounds in negotiating monetary terms on people's private property."

Blank, Summit's CEO, has said that the goal is to obtain 100% of the land it needs in South Dakota through voluntary easements, paying landowners in return. The company said it was at about 80% during its permit application hearing last year.

The alternative to voluntary easements is where things get sticky. The process involves using eminent domain to get a court order to force landowners to allow access to the property in return for just compensation.

'Activists sort of latched on to it'

Eschenbaum said that even though he personally opposes the pipeline, he won't block Summit Carbon's efforts as a county commissioner if the company only uses voluntary easements to obtain land needed for the project.

"I think this pipeline is a bunch of foolishness," he told News Watch.

"I think the hysteria around climate change is a bunch of foolishness. But if they negotiate their way through freely and without the use of eminent domain, then my job as a county commissioner is to step out of the way and let this pipeline go through. But I will dig in my heels for that last very last landowner

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that doesn't want this on their property."

Eminent domain shifted the pipeline discussion into the realm of landowner rights, presenting a stark contrast between limited-government populism and pro-business pragmatism within the South Dakota Republican Party.

The libertarian Freedom Caucus and groups such as Dakota First PAC wielded the pipeline controversy as political leverage in the June 4 GOP primary. Of the 38 Republican legislative incumbents who ran to keep the same position, 11 were defeated, foiled in many cases by the property rights debate and their voting record on SB 201.

"I think the activists sort of latched on to it and formed an opinion before they read the bill," Mortenson said of the anti-pipeline rhetoric and outreach surrounding what is now known as Referred Law 21.

Summit faces same legal landscape

The Secretary of State's office announced July 10 that 31,432 of the signatures submitted by Eschenbaum's group were deemed valid and that Referred Law 21 would appear on the ballot. A "yes" vote will allow SB 201 to become law, while a "no" vote will reject it.

Even if voters approve it, the legislation won't take effect until July 1, 2025. That means any Summit Carbon PUC application in the meantime will occur under the same legal landscape in which its bid was denied on the advice of a staff attorney in September 2023.

"We're not waiting on any parameters," PUC Commissioner Chris Nelson told News Watch. "The law today is what the law is. If any company applies for any permit, whether it's a carbon pipeline or a wind farm, we will process that based on the law that is on the books, just like we always do."

Mortenson denied that SB 201 was an attempt to shift the balance in favor of the PUC being able to approve the permit the next time around. He noted that the commission – consisting of elected Republicans Nelson, Gary Hanson and Kristie Fiegen – holds the regulatory approval authority in either case.

Fiegen, who is up for re-election in November, recused herself from Summit Carbon's initial application process because the pipeline would cross some of her family's land. She was replaced by state Treasurer Josh Haeder.

"Right now the PUC is the entity that calls balls and strikes on which county ordinances have to be followed as part of the linear project siting," Mortenson told News Watch. "That's the same as the bill that we passed."

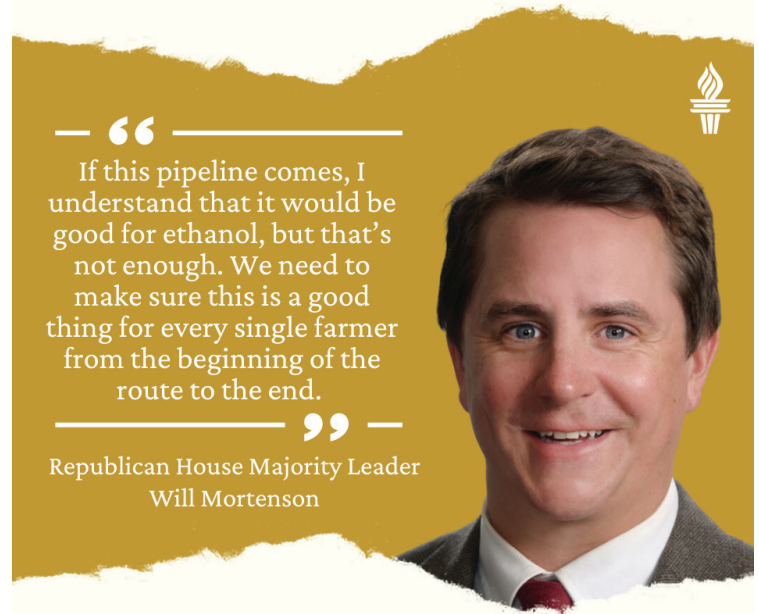
Eschenbaum countered by saying that Summit Carbon has put off applying for the permit now that the new provisions are in limbo. He said it's instructive to observe who was supportive of the "Landowner Bill of Rights" and who opposed it.

"I feel like the legislators just stuck a title on there to make it smell all rosy and pretty," said Eschenbaum. "I don't think it's intended to be for the landowners in any way, shape or form. Why did the landowners go to Pierre and fight against it? Why did Summit Carbon go to Pierre and fight for it?"

Pipeline permit process 'fully consuming'

The South Dakota PUC voted 3-0 to deny Summit Carbon's application in 2023 based on a staff attorney's assessment that the project couldn't proceed without overriding county setbacks and violating state law in the process.

Setbacks are minimum separation distances between the pipeline and structures, property boundaries or specific land uses. Distances set forth in Brown, McPherson, Minnehaha and Spink counties were





A sign protesting the potential use of eminent domain to access land for carbon pipelines appears July 20, 2024, in Lincoln County south of Sioux Falls, S.D. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)

deemed unresolvable.

"You've made crystal clear in your pre-filed testimony that various county ordinances make this an impossible project at this time," Haeder told company representatives at the hearing.

Commissioner Nelson made a motion to postpone the hearing but was overruled, putting Summit in the position of having to re-file its application if it wants the project approved.

Nelson told News Watch that he was surprised by the amount of time and resources occupied by applications from Summit Carbon and Navigator CO2 Ventures. Navigator's application was also denied last fall and the company has since scrapped plans for its pipeline project.

"Last year those applications were fully consuming for PUC staff and commissioners," said Nelson, a former secretary of state who has served on the PUC since 2011.

"We had 418 intervenors (on the Summit docket), which I believe is a record number and shows the level of interest in folks wanting to be involved. I would

anticipate that if another application is filed, it will be fully consuming again for the 12-month time period that statute gives us to process the application."

'Guess what? I'm not a dictator'

The pipeline issue presents a quandary for South Dakota politicians who see the economic advantages of ethanol but don't want to be viewed as supporting government encroachment of private property against the will of citizens.

Adding to the political quagmire is the fact that carbon pipelines are the result of climate-conscious guidelines to reduce global warming, an approach that runs counter to conservative South Dakota Republican doctrine.

Noem has found herself at the center of the storm, with libertarian groups challenging her to do more to support landowners and push back against Summit Carbon, which was a platinum sponsor of her 2023 inauguration events.

The governor addressed the issue in March during a town hall in Mitchell, South Dakota, distancing herself from the "Landowner Bill of Rights" legislative process and suggesting that action in Pierre amounted to public support of the bills.

"There's been a lot of signs and advertising around the state saying, 'The Governor has to do something,'" Noem said in the Mitchell High School library.

"Well, guess what? I'm not a dictator. I don't have a role in this process at all as governor. What happens during the session is that these legislators are sent to represent their districts and to debate and take in facts and then give me a bill that I look at to see if it's constitutional or not. It was signed into law because the people voted for it and they voted overwhelmingly based on the hearings and the committees that we had."

'The biggest red herring with this'

Regardless of what happens with the Referred Law 21 vote in November, the pipeline issue and landowner rights are certain to carry over into the 2025 legislative session beginning in January.

Eschenbaum said he has spoken to Republican lawmakers who ran on the issue in the primary and intend to bring legislation that is "not anti-pipeline but true landowner rights legislation that will address

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eminent domain.”

That’s familiar ground for Mortenson, who helped craft a bill during the 2023 session that would have restricted the use of eminent domain for carbon pipelines because CO2 in that context doesn’t qualify as a commodity.

The bill passed through a House committee before being shot down in the Senate.

In 2024, gauging similar resistance in the Senate, Mortenson worked with Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree to push through a package of bills – the Landowner Bill of Rights – that addressed compensation for surveying and siting, easement standards, leak liability protections and drain tile repair.

SB 201 was part of that package and is now being referred to voters, setting the stage for what comes next for state legislators on the pipeline issue.

“The vote is going to be critically important because it will let us know what the people think on this topic,” said Mortenson. “And I think that the legislature’s pretty duty-bound to honor the will of the voters.”

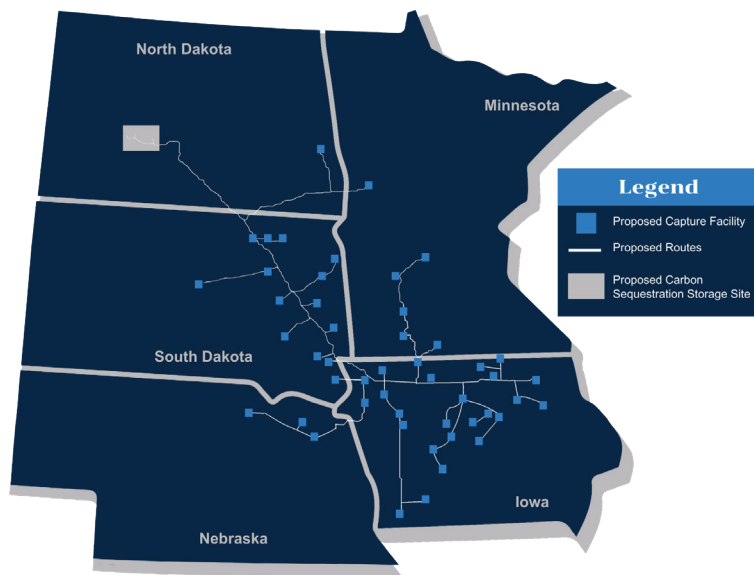
Still, the process is a source of frustration for legislative leaders because the central complaint of the opposition – the use of eminent domain to access land for carbon pipelines – is not specifically addressed in the law.

“I think (Eschenbaum’s group) did this because they don’t like eminent domain, and this has absolutely no impact on eminent domain – up, down, or sideways,” Mortenson said. “That’s the biggest red herring I see with this.”

The Associated Press contributed to this story, which was produced by South Dakota News Watch, a nonpartisan, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they’re published. Contact Stu Whitney at stu.whitney@sdnewswatch.org.



South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem speaks March 13, 2024, at a town hall meeting at the high school in Mitchell, S.D. She distanced herself from the “Landowner Bill of Rights” legislative process and suggesting that action in Pierre amounted to public support of the bills. (Photo: Stu Whitney / South Dakota News Watch)



This map shows the route of the carbon dioxide pipeline proposed by Summit Carbon Solutions

(Image: Courtesy Summit Carbon Solutions)

Brand New Program at

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Downtown Groton

Call/Text Paul: 605-397-7460
Call/Text Tina: 605-397-7285



\$20 Monthly Membership

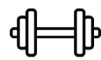
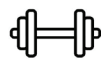
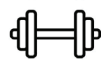
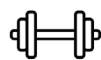
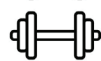
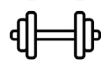
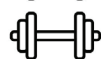
- ☞ for people 60 years of age and older
- ☞ for those who need equipment for physical therapy!



Downtown
Groton

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

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

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The most confusing card games in South Dakota

Cribbage is the most confusing card game in South Dakota, with 373 average monthly Google searches for how to play

Poker and Blackjack are second and third, with 263 and 233 monthly searches, respectively

Poker, Blackjack and Go Fish are the top three most confusing card games across the country

Card games are a great pastime for players of all ages; however, some are known for being particularly confusing, with complicated rules and intricate strategies that can leave even the most seasoned players puzzled.

New research has revealed which card games South Dakota finds most confusing, with Cribbage taking the top spot.

Multiplayer card game site World of Card Games analyzed the average number of monthly Google searches for terms related to different card games such as 'how to play Blackjack' and 'Baccarat rules explained' to determine which ones South Dakota finds most confusing.

Top 5 most confusing card games in South Dakota		
Rank	Card Game	Avg. Monthly Search Volume
1	Cribbage	373
2	Poker	263
3	Blackjack	233
4	Go Fish	202
5	Solitaire	190

#1. Cribbage

Cribbage has an average monthly search volume of 373. It is a classic two-player card game where the goal is to score points by forming specific card combinations. Each player starts with six cards and selects two cards to form the "crib," which the dealer scores. Players take turns playing one card at a time, trying to create pairs, runs, and combinations that total 15. Points are tallied using a cribbage board with pegs, and the first player to reach 121 points wins the game.

#2. Poker

Poker has a monthly search volume of 263. In this classic game, players aim to either have the best hand, or make the other players believe they do. Each player is dealt a hand of five private cards. Players look at their cards and participate in a round of betting. After the first round, players can choose to discard some or all of their cards and draw new ones to replace them. Another round of betting follows, and then players reveal their hands. The player with the highest-ranking hand wins the pot.

#3. Blackjack

Terms related to how to play the game Blackjack have a monthly search volume of 233. The goal of this game is to have a hand value closest to 21 without going over. Each player is dealt two cards, and the dealer also gets two cards, with one card face up. Players can choose to pick up another card or keep their current hand. If a player's hand exceeds 21, they lose. The player with a hand value closest to 21 without going over, wins.

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#4. Go Fish

Next is Go Fish, with a monthly search volume of 202. The goal of this game is to collect sets of four matching cards, for example, all four queens. Players start with a hand of cards, and the rest form a draw pile. Players take turns asking a specific opponent for a card they need to complete a set. If the opponent has the card, they must give it to the asking player, who can then ask for another card. If the opponent doesn't have the card, they say, "Go Fish," and the player must draw a card from the pile. This continues until all sets are completed, and the player with the most sets wins.

#5. Solitaire

Next up is Solitaire, with an average of 190 monthly Google searches. In this solo card game, the goal is to move all cards to four foundation piles, sorted by suit from Ace to King. You start by dealing yourself seven piles, each with one more card than the last, and only the top card face-up. The rest of the cards make a draw pile. Your goal is to build up the piles from Ace to King, alternating colors. Move face-up cards between piles to build sequences. If you can't make any more moves, draw cards from the draw pile. The game is won when you've built up all four suits from Ace to King.

A spokesperson from World of Card Games has commented:

"It is fascinating to see which card games people find the most confusing. Each game brings its own unique set of rules and complexities, which can make it difficult to learn new ones.

"Card Games are a great way of bringing people together, whether played casually with family or competitively amongst friends. They encourage communication, teamwork, and friendly competition, making a great pastime for people of all ages.

"Card games can also serve as a great mental workout, as many require focus, patience, and critical thinking. Hopefully, this research will inspire people to try their hand at learning a new game."

This information was provided by <https://worldofcardgames.com/>, multiplayer card game site.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

U.S. House votes to boost support for tribes in bill that would reduce environmental funding

Rep. Dusty Johnson calls the vote 'historic,' acknowledges likely fight over details

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 25, 2024 5:10 PM



From left, U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, and Ihanktonwan Oyate members Perry Little and Justin Song Hawk participate in a meeting about tribal law enforcement on April 3, 2024, in Wagner. (Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

A spending bill passed this week by the U.S. House of Representatives would reduce funding for environmental priorities, but includes a 34% increase in funding for tribal law enforcement.

The legislation passed 210-205 largely along party lines, with all but one House Democrat – Vicente Gonzalez of Texas – voting against it and all but five House Republicans voting for it.

It now moves to the Democrat-controlled Senate, where it faces an uncertain future.

Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota, voted for the measure. Johnson and the other members of South Dakota's congressional delegation have pushed for additional public safety dollars for tribes.

Johnson called the funding in the bill "a historic investment" in tribal public safety.

"It is not everything we need, but it's a big step in moving us in the right direction, and it's something that we've been fighting for for a long time," Johnson said in a social media video posted Wednesday.

Funding boosts for tribes

Tribal law enforcement funding flows through the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Office of Justice Services. The BIA is part of the Interior Department, which also includes the National Park Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Geological Survey and several other agencies.

A Wednesday press release from Johnson's office said the bill includes other "wins for tribal communities" beyond law enforcement.

The legislation would boost total BIA funding by 14.5%, to \$2.81 billion. That total includes a \$746 million allocation for tribal public safety, an increase of 34% from fiscal year 2024, according to the release. Included in that is \$414 million for criminal investigations and police service, a 51% increase, and \$55 million for tribal courts, an 18% increase.

About \$180 million of the public safety funding would flow to Oklahoma, where a recent U.S. Supreme Court decision expanded the footprint of tribal jurisdiction. The rest would be split among the more than 500 other federally recognized tribes.

The bill has \$1.47 billion for the Bureau of Indian Education and \$8.56 billion for the Indian Health Service, increases of 7.5% and 23%, respectively. The bill's total cost is \$72 million lower than the 2024 funding

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level, the release said.

Hurdles remain

The bill serves as a starting point for negotiations. The federal fiscal year ends in September, and talks between the House and Senate will determine spending levels for fiscal year 2025, which begins Oct. 1.

Even that deadline is a squishy one, though. Congress has missed its deadline to pass appropriations bills by Oct. 1 for years, opting instead for continuing resolutions that keep the government funded at existing levels until a final spending package passes. The current spending package didn't pass until March – about six months after the 2024 fiscal year began.

Johnson said he understands that “we're all adults and we're not going to get everything we want,” but argued that the increases for tribes written into the appropriations bill are a win regardless of the timeline or outcome. That's because they represent a consensus on increases for tribal funding from House Republicans that “wouldn't have happened 10 or 20 years ago.”

“This is now the official House position in negotiations with the Senate,” Johnson said.

Democrats with the U.S. Senate Appropriations Committee issued a news release Thursday outlining their own spending bill. The news release points to smaller increases in funding for tribal areas, including a \$17.6 million boost over 2024 levels for tribal public safety. The tribal justice portions of the spending bill would total \$573.2 million, compared to \$746 million in the House bill.

The Senate has yet to vote on its spending bill.

Park funding stripped

The spending cuts in the bill could present a snag during negotiations. Johnson's press release said the tribal funding increase was possible because the bill would implement “significant cuts elsewhere,” including a \$55 million cut to Inflation Reduction Act spending.

Johnson's office later confirmed that the \$55 million noted in the release was a reference to money intended to help upgrade the energy infrastructure, rehabilitate historic buildings and protect habitat at Presidio National Park in California.

Part of the “Presidio Forward” plan outlined on the park's website also references planned upgrades to the park's sidewalks, roadways and public gathering spaces built on “thousands of comments from visitors and underrepresented communities.” That portion of the plan would also see the park's shuttle fleet converted to “a clean electric fleet.”

The national park is in the district of former Speaker Nancy Pelosi, a Democrat. Her communications director did not immediately respond to a message seeking comment.

The bill passed Wednesday night also included amendments that aim to stop the flow of Inflation Reduction Act dollars to projects tied to diversity, equity and inclusion, and environmental justice. The EPA, meanwhile, would see a 20% budget cut.

Those issues were key to GOP support, Johnson said.

“House Republicans are going to be united in our desire to increase public safety in Indian Country and roll back the worst abuses of the Inflation Reduction Act,” Johnson said.

Some Democrats who spoke against the measure criticized GOP efforts to reduce funding for the EPA.

“If we are going to preserve the health of our environment and our economic well-being, we need to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and increase our efforts to respond to and mitigate against harmful climate impacts,” Rep. Chellie Pingree, D-Maine, said on the House floor.

Backdrop of controversy

Funding for tribal law enforcement and public safety on South Dakota's Native American reservations has been a powder keg of controversy in relations between Gov. Kristi Noem and tribal leaders through much of 2024.

It began in January, when Noem delivered a speech on the U.S.-Mexico border. In it, she claimed that

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drug cartels had set up shop on the state's reservations.

Some of Noem's language in the speech drew the ire of tribal leaders, as did her comments in the weeks that followed, in which she suggested that some tribal leaders are "personally benefiting" from cartels.

Leaders in all nine of South Dakota's Native American tribes voted to ban her from their lands in the months after the speech. In addition to her remarks on cartels, the leaders objected to her comments during a town hall in March, when she said children living on tribal lands "don't have any hope."

Even so, tribal leaders have long decried a dearth of federal funding for policing, which is wrapped up in U.S. treaty obligations. Tribes including Oglala, Rosebud and Crow Creek have declared public safety emergencies. Oglala has twice sued the federal government over a lack of police funding.

State officials have tried to help by opening an additional basic law enforcement training course earlier this summer that prioritized tribal recruits. The idea was to make it easier for recruits to receive the 13-week training closer to home than Artesia, New Mexico, the site of the BIA's training facility.

Noem and Attorney General Marty Jackley proposed the idea this spring.

In a Wednesday post on X, formerly Twitter, Noem lauded Johnson for his leadership on tribal police funding. She said she'd reached out to him for help on the issue.

"For months, we have been calling for Washington to take action to address tribal law enforcement shortages. We brought @repdustyjohnson to the table to help," Noem wrote. "Today, he and the House secured what we asked for: a big funding increase for tribal law enforcement."

Johnson shared Noem's post, saying "thank you for your leadership."

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

Protection of kids on social media platforms advances in U.S. Senate

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 25, 2024 5:19 PM

This story mentions suicide. If you or a loved one are experiencing a mental health crisis or thoughts of suicide, please dial 988 or chat with a live counselor at 988lifeline.org.

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Senate advanced online safety legislation Thursday aimed at protecting children from targeted advertising, data harvesting, bullying and sexual exploitation on popular social media platforms.

But the rare bipartisan effort by Senate lawmakers did not escape criticism from advocates who warn the legislative package would curtail free speech online.

The body voted 86-1 on a procedural vote to move ahead with the Kids Online Safety Act and the Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act. Both were rolled into one legislative vehicle. South Dakota's John Thune voted yes, while Mike Rounds was listed as not voting. Both are Republicans.

Republican Sen. Rand Paul of Kentucky was the sole no vote.

Majority Leader Chuck Schumer praised the "ground-breaking step" just before the vote began.



The U.S. Senate voted 86-1 Thursday to move ahead with the Kids Online Safety Act and the Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act. Both were rolled into one legislative vehicle.

(Photo by Mayur Kakade/Getty Images)

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The bill arrived on the chamber floor with the support of nearly 70 co-sponsors, well beyond the 60 votes needed for the procedural vote.

The New York Democrat thanked parents sitting in the Senate gallery to watch the vote — including those who lost children to suicide after cyberbullying — calling them the “true heroes of this effort.”

“We met together, we’ve felt pain together, we’ve cried together. What they have endured is incomprehensible,” Schumer said. “Today the Senate tells these parents: ‘We hear you, we’re taking action.’”

Schumer said the proposal will now be on a “glide path” for final passage next week before the chamber heads into August recess.

Updates from 1990s

The proposal, in part, updates a 1998 law meant to protect children under 13 on the internet.

The Kids Online Safety Act, co-sponsored by Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut and Republican Sen. Marsha Blackburn of Tennessee, would require social media platforms to take “reasonable measures” to mitigate harm when designing products and would also tighten age verification tools.

The bill mandates companies take into consideration “evidence-informed medical information” on mental health disorders including anxiety, depression, eating disorders, substance use disorders, and suicidal behaviors.

The bill would also prohibit hidden “black box algorithms,” as Blumenthal put it, that are used to target content to minors.

If enacted, the Children and Teens’ Online Privacy Protection Act, co-sponsored by Sen. Ed Markey, a Massachusetts Democrat, and Louisiana Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy, would prohibit social media companies from collecting minors’ personal data for the purpose of targeted marketing.

The legislation would require companies to provide a mechanism for removal of children and teens’ personal information from the platforms.

Lawmakers on the Senate Committee on Commerce favorably passed both bills, separately, out of committee in December.

After likely passage next week in the Senate, the legislation will then head to the House, which just began its six-week summer recess.

“I am looking forward to reviewing the details of the legislation that comes out of the Senate,” House Speaker Mike Johnson of Louisiana said in a statement provided by his office. “Parents should have greater control and the necessary tools to protect their kids online. I am committed to working to find consensus in the House.”

The internet ‘not designed with kids in mind’

Sustained support from health advocacy groups and concerned parents bolstered the long process for the bills to finally reach the Senate floor.

The American Academy of Pediatrics issued a series of videos featuring pediatricians explaining why they want to see lawmakers approve the online protections.

“The internet was not designed with kids in mind — and every day, pediatricians see the impacts of social media in their offices. That’s why they are making their voices heard,” according to the academy’s advocacy materials.

The organization has long advocated for safeguarding children and adolescents from addictive social media platforms and targeted digital advertising.

Opposition from ACLU

The legislation faces continued opposition from various advocacy groups across the political spectrum, including the American Civil Liberties Union, which planned to lobby on Capitol Hill with hundreds of teens Thursday against the Kids Online Safety Act.

“At its core, KOSA is an internet censorship bill that would harm the very communities it claims to protect,” Jenna Leventoff, the ACLU’s senior policy counsel, said in a statement Wednesday.

“The First Amendment guarantees everyone, including children, the right to access information free from censorship. We urge lawmakers to protect young people by listening to their concerns and voting no on

the bill that could be used to silence them," Levenoff said.

Paul, the no vote, described the legislation Thursday as "vague," "bizarre" and a "Pandora's box of unintended consequences."

"While proponents of the bill claim that the bill is not designed to regulate content, imposing a duty of care on the internet platforms associated with mental health can only lead to one outcome, the stifling of First Amendment protected speech," Paul said on the Senate floor Thursday specifically about the Kids Online Safety Act.

Paul criticized the legislation's mandate for a Kid Online Safety Council housed within the Federal Trade Commission, dubbing the potential body as "the speech police."

Blumenthal, Blackburn, Markey and Cassidy rebuked Paul on the Senate floor after he delivered his comments and offered an amendment to weaken the legislation.

Cassidy called the bills "bipartisan no-brainers."

Blackburn rebutted Paul, saying the legislation was "years in the making."

"We have worked tirelessly over three years to get this bill in shape," she said.

"Without real and enforceable reforms," Blackburn said, "social media companies will only continue to pay lip service to the issue of protecting children while putting profits over their safety."

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

Six U.S. House Dems join GOP in condemning Harris, Biden administration over border policy

SD Republican Rep. Dusty Johnson votes in favor of resolution

BY: ARIANA FIGUEROA - JULY 25, 2024 12:08 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. House Thursday passed a Republican-led resolution condemning the president and Vice President Kamala Harris, the likely Democratic presidential nominee, for the administration's immigration policies.

Republicans announced they would move forward with the resolution hours after President Joe Biden suspended his reelection campaign and threw his support to Harris to become the new Democratic nominee to face off with former President Donald Trump this November.

The resolution, H.R. 1371, was introduced Wednesday. It passed 220-196 shortly before the House was due to leave for a six-week recess. South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson voted in favor of the resolution.

Six Democrats voted with Republicans: Reps. Yadira D. Caraveo of Colorado, Henry Cuellar of Texas, Don Davis of North Carolina, Jared Golden of Maine, Mary Peltola of Alaska and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington.

Immigration policy at the U.S.-Mexico border has remained a core campaign issue in the presidential elections and a top concern for voters.

Ahead of the vote, the White House Thursday put out a fact sheet pointing out that for the past seven weeks, encounters at the southern border have decreased by more than half, or 55%.

"While the President's action has led to significant results, our nation's immigration system requires Congressional action to provide needed resources and additional authorities," the White House said.

'Border czar' label

Since Harris gained the necessary Democratic delegates to become the party's likely nominee on Monday night, Republicans have criticized her for the Biden administration's immigration policies and labeled her the "Border Czar," inaccurately claiming it's an official title given to her from the White House. It was also a title used in some media reports.

In March 2021, Biden tasked Harris with addressing the root causes of migration, in an effort to stem the flow of undocumented people at the southern border.

Harris was never given the title of "Border Czar," but that title was officially given to Roberta Jacobson,

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A U.S. Senate vote in the wee hours on Saturday, March 23, 2024, wrapped up the government funding process for fiscal year 2024, six months late. (Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

will be the Democratic nominee for president," Thompson said. "This resolution is incredibly petty."

Republicans like Indiana Rep. Rudy Yakym and Florida Rep. Carlos Gimenez again referred to Harris as a "Border Czar" and blamed her for the high number of encounters at the southern border.

Gimenez also criticized Harris for not visiting the southern border frequently. She made one trip to El Paso, Texas, which is a border town, in June 2021, but that was due to her work addressing the root causes of migration leading to the border problems.

Task was narrower, Dems say

Democrats argued that Harris was given a diplomatic role rather than a border security role.

Chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, Democratic Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington, said that Harris was never a "Border Czar."

"She was narrowly tasked with developing agreements that could help bring government and private sector investments to those countries that are sending migrants to the United States, so that those countries could help strengthen the conditions in those countries," she said.

The White House in March said that Harris had secured about \$5 billion in commitments from the private sector to promote economic opportunities in the region and reduce violence in Northern Central America.

The chair of the Congressional Hispanic Caucus, Democratic Rep. Nanette Barragán of California, said that border security is the responsibility of Mayorkas and that Harris was never placed in charge of domestic immigration policy.

"Now they have a desperate resolution to blame Vice President Harris for the border," she said of House Republicans.

Ariana covers the nation's capital for States Newsroom. Her areas of coverage include politics and policy, lobbying, elections and campaign finance.

the former U.S. ambassador to Mexico. Jacobson's role was created for a short stint — Biden's first 100 days in office — before ending in April 2021.

Additionally, U.S.-Mexico border security is tasked to the Department of Homeland Security. Republicans in February impeached DHS Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas over policy disagreements. The Senate dismissed the articles of impeachment in April.

Republicans said Harris and the administration are one and the same. "She owns all of his failed border policies," House Homeland Security Committee Chair Mark Green of Tennessee said during debate Thursday.

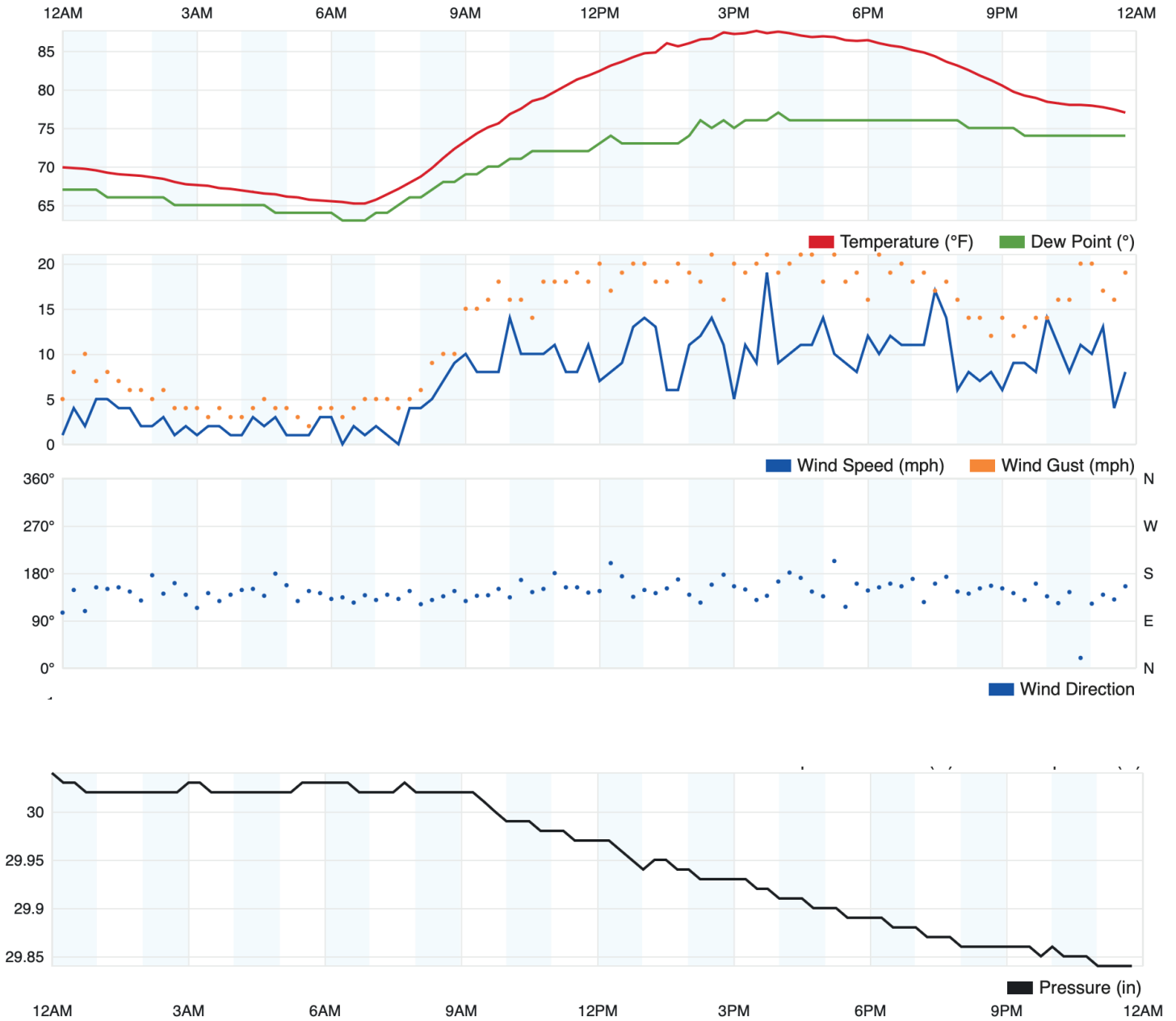
Rep. Bennie Thompson of Mississippi, the top Democrat on the House Homeland Security Committee, said the resolution was "unserious," and "nothing more than a campaign press release."

"This resolution is only before this body because Vice President Kamala Harris

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 96 °F

Hot and
Breezy

Tonight



Low: 71 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



High: 93 °F

Hot

Saturday Night



Low: 70 °F

Chance
T-storms

Sunday



High: 87 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Chance
T-storms

Today

Hights: 91-100°
Lows: 66-72°

Hazy

Saturday

Hights: 91-97°
Lows: 65-71°

Afternoon/evening t-storms,
some may become severe

While some areas of central SD may reach heat indices of 100 degrees, it is not expected to be as widespread as the past few days. Overall, highs are expected to be in the 90s. Hazy skies will continue today, but should see some improvement for Saturday. Afternoon and evening storms are possible Saturday with a possibility of some becoming severe.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 3:21 PM

Low Temp: 65 °F at 6:23 AM

Wind: 24 mph at 1:35 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 59 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 112 in 1931

Record Low: 42 in 1962

Average High: 85

Average Low: 60

Average Precip in July.: 2.68

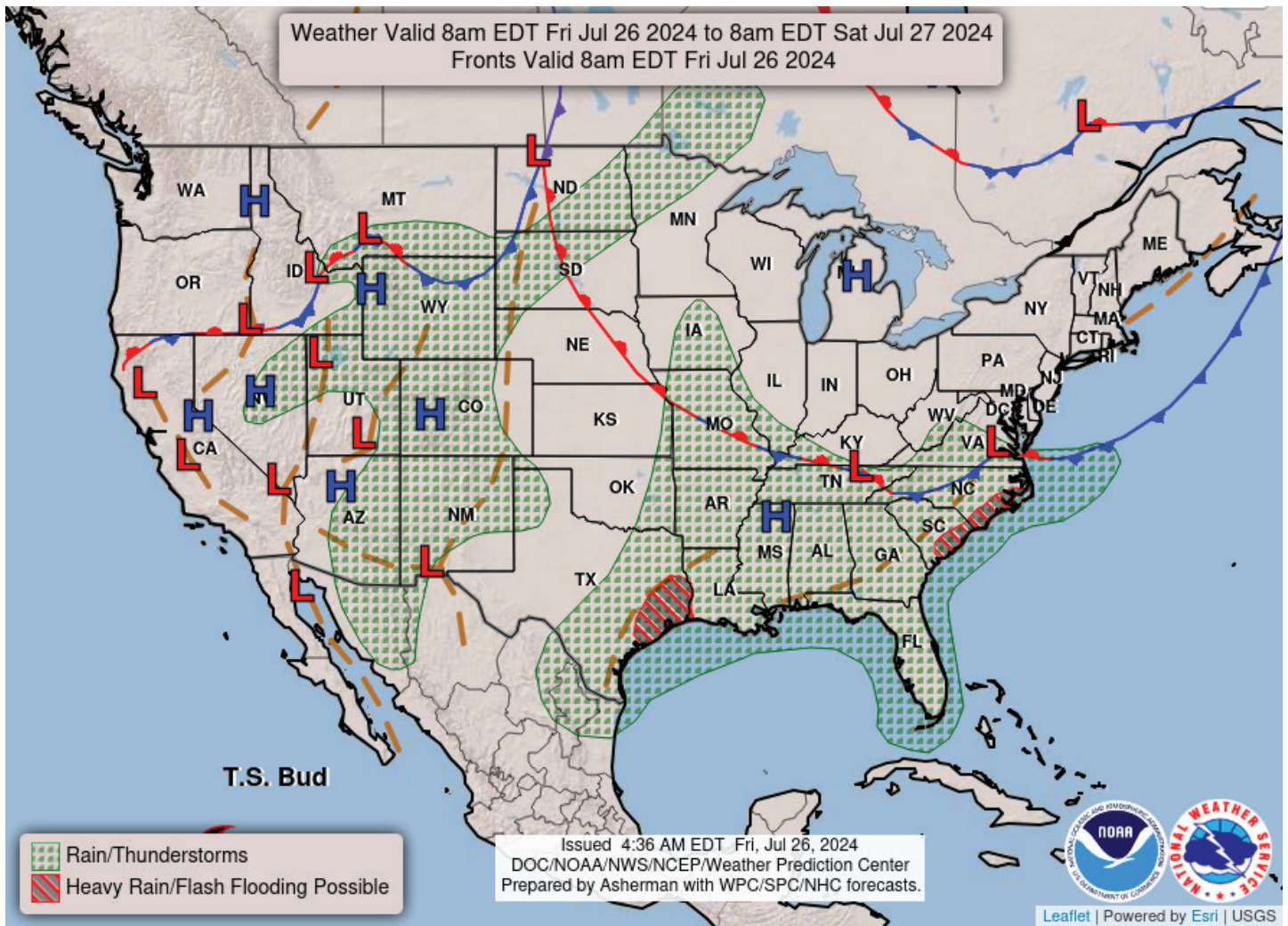
Precip to date in July: 3.56

Average Precip to date: 13.69

Precip Year to Date: 14.51

Sunset Tonight: 9:08:52 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:10:08 am



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Today in Weather History

July 26, 1963: An estimated F2 tornado moved northeast from 4 miles northeast of Raymond. Barns and outbuildings were destroyed on one farm, and the home was unroofed. Asphalt was ripped off a state highway.

1819 - Twin cloudbursts of fifteen inches struck almost simultaneously at Catskill, NY, and Westfield, MA. Flash flooding resulted in enormous erosion. (David Ludlum)

1874: Torrential rainfall brought flash flooding to Pittsburg, Pennsylvania.

1890: During the morning hours, an estimated F3 tornado went through the southern part of Lawrence, Massachusetts. The tornado left 500 people homeless as the tornado destroyed 35 homes and damaged 60 others.

1897: Jewel, Maryland received 14.75 inches of rain in a 24 hour period. This record is currently the oldest, state rainfall record in the United States. All other state rainfall records are in the 1900s and 2000s.

1921: On the summit of Mt. Wellenkuppe, in Switzerland, the temperature reached 100 degrees by 10 am. The summit had an elevation of 12,830 feet and was covered in snow.

1931: A swarm of grasshoppers descends on crops throughout the American heartland, devastating millions of acres. Iowa, Nebraska, and South Dakota, already in the midst of a bad drought, suffered tremendously from this disaster.

1943 - Tishomingo, OK, baked in the heat as the mercury soared to 121 degrees, a state record. (The Weather Channel)

1960 - The temperature at Salt Lake City, UT, hit 107 degrees, an all-time record high for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1979: Tropical Storm Claudette stalled over Alvin, Texas, inundating the town with 45 inches of rain in 42 hours. The total included 43 inches in 24 hours, which is the maximum 24-hour rainfall in American history.

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced hail two inches in diameter in McHenry County, IL, and wind gusts to 70 mph at Auburn, ME. A wind gust of 90 mph was recorded at Blairstown, NJ, before the anemometer broke. The high winds were associated with a small tornado. The record high of 88 degrees at Beckley, WV, was their sixth in a row. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced large hail and damaging winds in the Middle Atlantic Coast Region, and in the south central U.S. Eight cities in the northwestern and north central U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Salem, OR, hit 103 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms produced heavy rain in southeastern Texas, with more than three inches reported at the Widllife Refuge in southwestern Chambers County. Evening thunderstorms produced severe weather in Montana, with wind gusts to 62 mph reported at Helena. Eight cities from Maine to Minnesota reported record high temperatures for the date, including Newark, NJ, with a reading of 99 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



WHAT COUNTS

In the game of baseball victory is determined by runs. It is not determined by strikes or strike outs, hits, double plays, triple plays or the number of innings a game may go. It is only determined by runs.

The player who hits the ball into left field for a single, even stretching it into a double and sliding safely into second is not rewarded with "half-a-run." It is not part of the final score.

How true of life. How true of everything we do. It is not how well we start, how well we continue for awhile, but whether or not we finish what we started.

Paul had a co-worker named Demas. How long he was involved with Paul or whether or not he had any particular skills in church planting is not known. What is known is that he deserted Paul because he loved the things of "this life." He allowed his desire for worldly things and pleasures to surpass his desire for the things of the Lord.

There are two ways we might view the world. One is the way God intended it to be and the way it will be when He returns in His glory. The other way we might look at the world is as Demas did - as it is now with its evil attractions and sinful pleasures.

All of us have the same choices as Demas and Paul: to live for the things of this world or the world to come.

Prayer: Create within us, Lord, the desire to seek first the Kingdom of God and a life of righteousness. May we honor You in all we do and forsake the world. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Demas has deserted me because he loves the things of this life and has gone to Thessalonica. Crescens has gone to Galatia, and Titus has gone to Dalmatia. 2 Timothy 4:10

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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.23.24

3 9 14 26 51 21

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$306,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 16 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.24.24

8 11 31 36 40 6

All Star Bonus: 5x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$5,850,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 31 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.25.24

2 11 33 46 47 8

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 46 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.24.24

2 15 31 32 34

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$47,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 46 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.24.24

4 9 20 47 51 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 2 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 07.24.24

16 42 59 63 68 13

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$131,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 15 Mins 2 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 **AP** Associated Press

US promises \$240 million to improve fish hatcheries, protect tribal rights in Pacific Northwest

By REBECCA BOONE Associated Press

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — The U.S. government will invest \$240 million in salmon and steelhead hatcheries in the Pacific Northwest to boost declining fish populations and support the treaty-protected fishing rights of Native American tribes, officials announced Thursday.

The departments of Commerce and the Interior said there will be an initial \$54 million for hatchery maintenance and modernization made available to 27 tribes in the region, which includes Oregon, Washington, Idaho and Alaska.

The hatcheries “produce the salmon that tribes need to live,” said Jennifer Quan, the regional administrator for NOAA Fisheries West Coast Region. “We are talking about food for the tribes and supporting their culture and their spirituality.”

Some of the facilities are on the brink of failure, Quan said, with a backlog of deferred maintenance that has a cost estimated at more than \$1 billion.

“For instance, the roof of the Makah Tribe’s Stony Creek facility is literally a tarp. The Lummi Nation Skookum Hatchery is the only hatchery that raises spring Chinook salmon native to the recovery of our Puget Sound Chinook Salmon,” and it is falling down, Quan said.

Lisa Wilson, secretary of the Lummi Indian Business Council, said salmon are as important as the air they breathe, their health and their way of life. She thanked everyone involved in securing “this historic funding.”

“Hatchery fish are Treaty fish and play a vital role in the survival of our natural-origin populations while also providing salmon for our subsistence and ceremonies,” she said in a statement. “If it weren’t for the hatcheries and the Tribes, nobody would be fishing.”

The Columbia River Basin was once the world’s greatest salmon-producing river system, with at least 16 stocks of salmon and steelhead. Today, four are extinct and seven are listed under the Endangered Species Act. Salmon are a key part of the ecosystem, and another endangered Northwest species, a population of killer whales, depend on Chinook salmon for food.

Salmon are born in rivers and migrate long distances downstream to the ocean, where they spend most of their adult lives. They then make the difficult trip back upstream to their birthplace to spawn and die.

Columbia Basin dams have played a major part in devastating the wild fish runs, cutting off access to upstream habitat, slowing the water and sometimes allowing it to warm to temperatures that are fatal for fish.

For decades, state, federal and tribal governments have tried to supplement declining fish populations by building hatcheries to breed and hatch salmon that are later released into the wild. But multiple studies have shown that hatchery programs frequently have negative impacts on wild fish, in part by reducing genetic diversity and by increasing competition for food.

Quan acknowledged the hatcheries “come with risks” but said they can be managed to produce additional fish for harvest and even to help restore populations while minimizing risks to wild fish.

“Hatcheries have been around for a long time, and we’ve seen the damage that they can do,” Quan said.

Still the programs have gone through a course correction in recent years, following genetic management plans and the principles established by scientific review groups, she said. “We are in a different place now.”

It will take habitat restoration, improved water quality, adjustments to harvest and other steps if salmon are going to recover, but so far society has not been willing to make the needed changes for that to happen, she said. Add in the impacts of climate change, and the calculus of bad and good hatchery impacts changes further.

“We need to start having a conversation about hatcheries and how they are going to be an important adaptation tool for us moving forward,” Quan said.

Greg Ruggeron, a salmon research scientist with Natural Resources Consultants Inc. in Seattle, said the key is to determine how to better harvest hatchery salmon from rivers without harming the wild salmon that are making the same trek to spawning grounds. Robust harvests of hatchery fish will help ensure that the federal government is meeting its treaty obligations to the tribes, while reducing competition for wild fish, Ruggeron said.

"A big purpose of the hatcheries in the Pacific Northwest is to provide for harvest — especially harvest for the tribes — so there is a big opportunity if we can figure out how to harvest without harming wild salmon," Ruggeron said.

Every hatchery in the Columbia River basin was built to mitigate the effects of the hydropower dams built in the region, said Becky Johnson, the production division director for the Nez Perce Tribe's Department of Fisheries Resource Management.

Most were built in the 1960s, 1970s or earlier, she said.

"I'm super excited about this opportunity. Tribal and non-tribal people benefit from them — more salmon coming back to the basin means more salmon for everyone," Johnson said. "It's critical that we have fish and that the tribal people have food. Tribal members will tell you they're fighting hard to continue to hang on to fish, and they're never going to stop that fight."

Days before a Biden rule against anti-LGBTQ+ bias takes effect, judges are narrowing its reach

By JOHN HANNA Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — New federal court rulings are narrowing the Biden administration's enforcement of a rule for protecting LGBTQ+ students from discrimination and allowing critics to limit it even further school by school.

A federal judge in Missouri blocked enforcement of the rule in six additional states, bringing the total to 21. The decision Wednesday from Senior U.S. District Judge Rodney Sipple, an appointee of President Bill Clinton, applies in Arkansas, Iowa, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota and South Dakota. It comes just a week before the rule is to take effect.

Sipple's ruling followed one last week by U.S. District Judge John Broomes in Kansas, who blocked enforcement in that state, Alaska, Utah and Wyoming but also in individual schools and colleges across the U.S. with students or parents who are members of three groups opposing the rule. Broomes, an appointee of President Donald Trump, gave one group, Moms for Liberty, an extra week — until Friday — to submit its list of affected schools and said it could include ones for members who joined the group after his initial July 2 order.

Republican officials seeking to roll back transgender rights hailed Sipple's ruling as a victory for cisgendered girls and women, having framed the issue as protecting their privacy and safety in bathrooms and locker rooms. They've also argued the rule is a ruse to allow transgender females to play on girls' and women's sports teams, but Sipple said it would not apply to athletics.

"Yet again a federal court has stopped the Biden-Harris administration from going around Congress to implement a ridiculous, nonsensical, and illegal election-year move," Arkansas Attorney General Tim Griffith said in a statement. "And it comes just in time before the start of the new school year."

Moms for Liberty had told Broomes in a court filing earlier this month that its members have students in tens of thousands of schools across the U.S., many in Democratic-led states supporting the rule. Also, judges in Alabama and Oklahoma have yet to rule in lawsuits filed by those states and Florida, Georgia and South Carolina.

The three groups involved in the Kansas lawsuit already have submitted lists of about 1,100 schools and colleges in the U.S. affected by Broomes' order. An AP analysis shows that 69% are outside the 21 states where enforcement already is blocked.

The Department of Education did not immediately respond Thursday to an email seeking comment about the latest rulings, but it has stood by the rule, which takes effect Aug. 1. LGBTQ+ youth, their parents,

health care providers and others say restrictions on transgender youth harm their mental health and make often-marginalized students even more vulnerable.

The Biden administration has asked federal appeals courts in Cincinnati, Denver and New Orleans to overturn judges' orders. On Monday, it asked the U.S. Supreme Court to narrow orders applying in 10 states. It wants to enforce a provision declaring that bias against transgender students violates the 1972 Title IX civil rights law barring sex discrimination in education, without affecting bathroom access or use of students' preferred pronouns.

The various federal judges' rulings block the rule at least through the trials of the states' lawsuits, but they have concluded the states are likely to show that the Department of Education exceeded the authority granted by Title IX. Sipple and Broomes also said the rule likely violates the free speech rights of staff, student and staff who don't recognize transgender students' gender identities.

"The Court also considers the fact that the regulations currently in effect have essentially 'been unchanged for approximately 50 years. Therefore, it would be of relatively little harm to others to maintain the status quo,'" Sipple wrote in his decision, quoting Broomes' July 2 decision.

In the Kansas case, Moms for Liberty had asked Broomes to apply his July 2 order to any county where a group member lived — greatly expanding its reach, including across most major U.S. cities. Broomes declined, but he also rejected the Department of Education's argument that Moms for Liberty couldn't add to the list of affected schools through people who joined after July 2.

Moms for Liberty said it was encouraging people to join online — and modified its website — so the schools of new members' children can fall under Broomes' order.

For Ukrainian athletes, joy mixes with sorrow at the Paris Olympics

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — For Ukrainian competitors in Paris for the Olympics, joy goes hand in hand with sorrow. Athletes are striving to enjoy the dream of competing at one of the world's most prestigious sports events while carrying the burden of the war back home.

"When we read news, we feel very upset," said Polina Buhrova, a 20-year-old badminton player at her first Games. "But it's also our power and our possibility to show how strong we are that we are here, that we are going to fight until the end."

The living accommodations for athletes from around the world are adorned with flags and slogans at the Olympic village. The Ukrainian house features children's drawings with messages like: "The resilient do not give up and strive for victory" and "Glory to the Ukrainian Armed Forces." These drawings, a tradition to support Ukrainian soldiers on the frontline, have extended to cheering for their athletes.

"It warms my heart," said fencer Olga Kharlan, smiling at the drawings. She added, "We want to finish this season successfully because we are doing it for our country."

Kharlan had a unique route to the Paris Games. She was drawn against Russian fencer Anna Smirnova at last year's world championships. Smirnova protested after Kharlan refused to shake her hand, and the Ukrainian was disqualified. The International Olympic Committee awarded Kharlan a spot in Paris anyway.

The fencer said preparing for the Games this year was challenging — not just the grueling routine typical for an Olympic athlete but because she had to train abroad due to Russia's war and had not seen her family in a long time.

But she is determined, saying her showing goes far beyond any sports arena.

"We fight and perform for those who, unfortunately, cannot come here because they were killed by Russia," she said. "This is dedicated to them and to all our defenders."

This year, Ukraine will be represented by the smallest number of athletes in its history of participation in the Summer Games, with 140 competitors in 26 sports. The most are in athletics, at 25, while there's just the one — Buhrova — in badminton. The war deeply and negatively affected Ukraine's sports industry.

The International Olympic Committee barred Russians and Belarusians from team sports in Paris, and those who pass a two-step vetting procedure can compete individually as neutrals. They must not have

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publicly supported Russia's invasion of Ukraine or be affiliated with military or state security agencies.

In Ukraine, Buhrova said that the war undermined the importance of sports and accessibility for many and that she knows many athletes who stopped practicing after Russia's invasion.

"When you try to choose between life and the sport, you choose life first," she said. "If government have the choice, it's understandable they choose to save our lives first, and then support the sport."

Buhrova, originally from the eastern city of Kharkiv that has been under heavy Russian bombardment for the third year, said she had to evacuate abroad to keep training. The trauma of the war still affects her deeply: She said that even after leaving Ukraine, loud noises often remind her of the bombings back home.

Despite these challenges, she is excited and determined.

"I'm really happy I have the opportunity to show my performance, my best," she said. "I will try to make my country proud."

Anastasiya Kozhenkova, a Ukrainian rower who won a gold medal with her team at the 2012 Summer Olympics, said it is a significant achievement for Ukraine to even be represented amid the war.

"In the winter, there were many explosions, and it was very frightening because despite the training, you didn't know if you would make it to the Olympic Games or not," she said.

Kozhenkova said Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy addressed the team online Wednesday, wishing them success and noting that their participation would help the nation take a break from the harsh reality of the war.

She said she hopes for fewer power cuts and no major attacks so that Ukrainians back home can enjoy the competitions.

"This will be a small relief for our people," she said. "Maybe if there is electricity and people can cheer, they will experience (positive) emotions."

Arson attacks paralyze French high-speed rail network hours before start of Olympics

By THOMAS ADAMSON and JEFFREY SCHAEFFER Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — France's high-speed rail network was hit Friday with widespread and "criminal" acts of vandalism including arson attacks, paralyzing travel to Paris from across the rest of France and Europe only hours before the grand opening ceremony of the Olympics.

French officials described the attacks as "criminal actions" and said they were investigating whether they were linked to the Olympic Games. The disruptions as the world's eye was turning to Paris were expected to affect a quarter of a million people on Friday and endure through the weekend, and possibly longer, officials said.

French Prime Minister Gabriel Attal wrote on the social media platform X that France's intelligence services have been mobilized to find the perpetrators.

Attal characterized them as "acts of sabotage," which were "prepared and coordinated."

There were no known reports of injuries.

Transport Minister Patrice Vergriete described people fleeing from the scene of fires and the discovery of incendiary devices. "Everything indicates that these are criminal fires," he said.

The incidents paralyzed several high-speed lines linking Paris to the rest of France and to neighboring countries, Vergriete said, speaking on BFM television, Vergriete.

The French national rail company SNCF said that areas affecting rail track intersections were intentionally targeted by the arsonists in the overnight attacks to double the impact.

"For one fire, two destinations were hit," the company's CEO, Jean-Pierre Farandou.

It was "a premeditated, calculated, coordinated attack" that indicates "a desire to seriously harm" the French people, Farandou said.

The attack occurred against a backdrop of global tensions and heightened security measures as the city prepared for the 2024 Olympic Games. Many travelers were planning to converge on the capital for the opening ceremony, and many vacationers were also in transit.

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As Paris authorities geared up for a spectacular parade on and along the Seine River, three fires were reported near the tracks on the high-speed lines of Atlantique, Nord and Est. The disruptions particularly affected Paris' major Montparnasse station, where the station's hall was full of travelers.

The Paris police prefecture "concentrated its personnel in Parisian train stations" after the "massive attack" that paralyzed the TGV high-speed network, Laurent Nuñez, the Paris police chief, told France Info television.

Many passengers at the Gare du Nord, one of Europe's busiest train stations, were looking for answers and solutions on Friday morning. All eyes were on the central message boards as most services to northern France, Belgium and the United Kingdom were delayed.

"It's a hell of a way to start the Olympics," said Sarah Moseley, 42, as she learned that her train to London was an hour late.

"They should have more information for tourists, especially if it's a malicious attack," said Corey Grainger, a 37-year-old Australian sales manager on his way to London, as he rested on his two suitcases in the middle of the station.

Government officials denounced the acts, though they said there was no immediate sign of a direct link to the Olympics. National police said authorities were investigating the incidents. French media reported a major fire on a busy western route.

Sports Minister Amélie Oudéa-Castera said authorities were working to "evaluate the impact on travelers, athletes, and ensure the transport of all delegations to the competition sites" for the Olympics. Speaking on BFM television, she added, "Playing against the Games is playing against France, against your own camp, against your country." She did not identify who was behind the vandalism.

Passengers at St. Pancras station in London were warned to expect delays of around an hour to their Eurostar journeys. Announcements in the departure hall at the international terminus informed travelers heading to Paris that there was a problem with overhead power supplies.

SNCF said it did not know when traffic would resume and feared that disruptions would continue "at least all weekend." SNCF teams "were already on site to carry out diagnostics and begin repairs," but the "situation should last at least all weekend while the repairs are carried out," the operator said. SNCF advised "all passengers to postpone their journey and not to go to the station," specifying in its press release that all tickets were exchangeable and refundable.

Valerie Pecresse, president of the regional council of the greater Paris region, speaking from Montparnasse station, said "250,000 travelers will be affected today on all these lines." Substitution plans were underway, but Pecresse advised travelers "not to go to stations."

The troubles comes ahead of an opening ceremony has been planned for later Friday in which 7,000 Olympic athletes are due to sail down the Seine past iconic Parisian monuments such as Notre-Dame Cathedral, the Louvre Museum, and the Musee d'Orsay.

Lightning and a burning car pushed into a gully are blamed for wildfires scorching the West

By JOHN ANTCZAK and HOLLY RAMER Associated Press

A burning car pushed into a gully sparked California's largest wildfire of the year, authorities said Thursday as they announced the arrest of a suspect. Meanwhile other blazes scorched the Pacific Northwest.

Flames from the fire the man is accused of starting exploded into what is now the Park Fire, which has burned more than 195 square miles (505 square km) near the city of Chico. Evacuations were ordered in Butte and Tehama counties, with the blaze only 3% contained by Thursday evening.

California authorities did not immediately name the man they arrested.

Also in California near the Nevada line, about 1,000 people remained displaced from their homes Thursday after evacuations were ordered Monday night when lightning sparked the Gold Complex fires that have burned more than 4 square miles (10 square km) of brush and timber in the Plumas National Forest about

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50 miles (80 km) northwest of Reno, Forest Service spokeswoman Adrienne Freeman said.

There have been no reports of structure damage, deaths or serious injuries at the Gold Complex of fires southwest of Portola near the Nevada line. But they still had zero containment Thursday.

"We've made some really good progress on the fires," Forest Service operations section chief Tom Brown said Thursday afternoon. "But it's hot, it's dry and it's very windy ... With the wind and the heat, we don't have great containment on all these lines."

Tim Fike, Forest Service incident commander at the Gold Complex, said gusty winds were plaguing crews at the Park Fire as well, causing new spot fires up to a mile beyond the main fire lines.

"That's been a big, big problem on the Park Fire right now," Fike said.

As evacuations continued in California, some Oregon residents were cleared to return home after a thunderstorm dropped welcome rain but also potentially dangerous lightning on the biggest active blaze in the United States. More than two dozen new fires started in Montana on Wednesday and early Thursday, and another fast-moving blaze forced thousands to abandon a town in Canada.

In eastern Oregon, evacuation orders were lifted for the city of Huntington, population 500, after a severe thunderstorm late Wednesday brought some rain and cooler temperatures to the nearly 630 square miles (1,630 square kilometers) burned by the Durkee Fire — the nation's biggest — and another nearby blaze.

President Joe Biden called Oregon Gov. Tina Kotek on Thursday night and offered his support to ensure the state has everything it needs to fight the fires, the White House said.

Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash called the rain a "godsend," and the Oregon State Fire Marshal said firefighters were set to "seize the opportunity" of better conditions to push back the fire on the Oregon-Idaho border. It remained unpredictable and was just 20% contained, according to the government website InciWeb.

Lightning strikes started 15 new fires overnight in Idaho, the U.S. Forest Service told Boise's KBOI-TV, but several had already been extinguished by Thursday afternoon. More than 2,800 cloud-to-ground lightning strikes were detected across southeast Oregon and Idaho on Wednesday alone, the National Weather Service in Boise said.

Overall, nearly 1,562 square miles (4,045 square kilometers) have burned so far this summer in the Pacific Northwest. Oregon alone has 34 large fires, almost all of them in the central or eastern part of the state.

Climate change is increasing the frequency of wildfires sparked by lightning across the Pacific Northwest and western Canada as the region endures recording-breaking heat, with many triple-digit days and bone-dry conditions. Idaho Power has for the first time instituted a pre-emptive power outage, shutting off electricity to thousands of customers to prevent new fire starts and other power grid issues from wires downed by the high winds, the utility said.

In northern California, fire personnel were focusing on evacuations and defending structures while using bulldozers to build containment lines ahead of the Park Fire. No deaths or damage to structures had been reported, CAL FIRE/ Butte County Fire Department said.

A fire in southern California was much smaller, but moving fast and threatening homes.

Evacuation orders were in effect Wednesday night in San Diego County after a wildfire began to spread fast near the border with Riverside County. Fire officials said the Grove Fire was heading southeast through steep and challenging terrain. The fire grew to 1.4 square miles (3.6 square kilometers) overnight and was 10% contained by Thursday afternoon.

In Montana, a fire warning was in effect in the central part of the state because of high temperatures, low humidity and strong winds. An extreme heat warning east of the storm front meant temperatures could soar up to 108 degrees Fahrenheit (42 degrees Celsius). After hurricane-force winds toppled trees, downed power lines and damaged gas lines in the Missoula area, authorities urged people to stay out of rivers because they might be electrified.

In the Canadian Rockies' Jasper National Park, a fast-moving wildfire this week hit the park's namesake town, forcing thousands to flee and causing significant damage in the World Heritage Site. That blaze, like those in the Western United States, led to some air quality alerts or advisories as skies filled with smoke and haze.

Barack and Michelle Obama endorse Kamala Harris, giving her expected but crucial support

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Former President Barack Obama and former first lady Michelle Obama have endorsed Kamala Harris in her White House bid, giving the vice president the expected but still crucial backing of the nation's two most popular Democrats.

The endorsement, announced Friday morning in a video showing Harris accepting a joint phone call from the former first couple, comes as Harris continues to build momentum as the party's likely nominee after President Joe Biden's decision to end his reelection bid and endorse his second-in-command against Republican nominee and former President Donald Trump.

It also highlights the friendship and potentially historic link between the nation's first Black president and the first woman, first Black woman and first person of Asian descent to serve as vice president, who is now vying to break those same barriers at the presidential rank.

"We called to say Michelle and I couldn't be prouder to endorse you and do everything we can to get you through this election and into the Oval Office," the former president told Harris, who is shown taking the call as she walks backstage at an event, trailed by a Secret Service agent.

Said Michelle Obama, "I can't have this phone call without saying to my girl, Kamala, I am proud of you. "This is going to be historic," she added.

Harris, who has known the Obamas since before his election in 2008, thanked them for their friendship and said she looks forward to "getting there, being on the road" with them in the three-month blitz before Election Day on Nov. 5.

"We're gonna have some fun with this too, aren't we?" Harris said.

The Obamas are perhaps the last major party figures to endorse Harris formally — a reflection of the former president's desire to remain, at least publicly, a party elder operating above the fray. The Obamas remain prodigious fundraising draws and popular surrogates at large campaign events for Democratic candidates.

According to an Associated Press survey, Harris already has secured the public support of a majority of delegates to the Democratic National Convention, which begins Aug. 19 in Chicago. The Democratic National Committee expects to hold a virtual nominating vote that would, by Aug. 7, make Harris and a yet-to-be-named running mate the official Democratic ticket.

Biden endorsed Harris within an hour of announcing his decision last Sunday to end his campaign amid widespread concern about the 81-year-old president's ability to defeat Trump. Former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, House Democratic Leader Hakeem Jeffries, House Minority Whip Jim Clyburn, former President Bill Clinton and former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton followed in the days after.

The Obamas, however, trod carefully as Harris secured the delegate commitments, made the rounds among core Democratic constituencies and raised more than \$120 million. The public caution tracks how the former president handled the weeks between Biden's debate debacle against Trump and the president's eventual decision to end his campaign: Obama was a certain presence in the party's maneuvers but he operated quietly.

Barack Obama's initial statement after Biden's announcement did not mention Harris. Instead, he spoke generically about coming up with a nominee to succeed Biden: "I have extraordinary confidence that the leaders of our party will be able to create a process from which an outstanding nominee emerges," the former president wrote.

Both Obamas campaigned separately for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Biden in 2020, including large rallies on the closing weekends before Election Day. They delivered key speeches at the Democrats' convention in 2020, a virtual event because of the coronavirus pandemic. The former president's speech was especially notable because he unveiled a full-throated attack on Trump as a threat to democracy, an argument that endures as part of Harris' campaign.

How to watch the 2024 Olympics opening ceremony

By The Associated Press undefined

The opening ceremony for the Paris Olympics is set for Friday.

Instead of a traditional march into a stadium, about 6,800 athletes will parade on more than 90 boats on the Seine River for 6 kilometers (3.7 miles). This will start the ceremony, not mark the end of it, another break from tradition.

What time does the opening ceremony start?

The ceremony starts at 1:30 p.m. EDT/7:30 p.m. CEST and is expected to last more than three hours.

Where is the opening ceremony being held?

The parade starts at the Austerlitz Bridge beside the Jardin des Plantes and follows the course of the Seine from east to west. It makes its way around two islands in the center of the city before passing under several bridges and gateways. Athletes aboard the boats will get glimpses of several Olympic venues including La Concorde Urban Park (3X3 basketball, breaking, BMX freestyle cycling, skateboarding), Invalides (archery, athletics — marathon finish, road cycling — time trial start) and the Grand Palais (fencing, taekwondo). The parade ends at the Iena Bridge, which links the Eiffel Tower on the left bank of the Seine to the Trocadéro district on the right bank. The ceremony's finale is at the Trocadéro. There, among other ceremonial procedures, French President Emmanuel Macron will deliver opening remarks.

How can I watch the opening ceremony?

The ceremony will air on NBC and stream on Peacock and NBC Olympic platforms — NBCOlympics.com, NBC.com, NBC app, NBC Olympics app.

A preview will air on NBC at noon EDT, with live coverage beginning at 1:30 p.m. and an enhanced prime-time encore at 7:30 p.m.

About 220,000 invited and security-screened spectators are expected to fill the upper tiers of the Seine's banks, and an additional 104,000 paying spectators will watch from the lower riverside and around the Trocadéro plaza.

Those in Paris who could not get tickets will be able to watch the ceremony on 80 giant screens set up throughout the city.

Will the train sabotage impact the opening?

A major disruption of train traffic plunged Paris into uncertainty only hours before the scheduled start of the ceremony.

There were no immediate indication that what a government official was calling a series of "criminal fires" near the tracks would impact the start.

Who is performing at the opening ceremony?

In addition to the athletes who will participate in the parade, 3,000 dancers, artists and other athletes will be featured in the opening and closing ceremonies. Most of the entertainment acts remain under wraps. NBC News reported that Celine Dion and Lady Gaga have arrived in Paris amid speculation that one or both of the pop singers will perform at the opening ceremony.

What happens if it rains at the opening ceremony?

Light showers hit Paris on Friday morning with more forecasted for about the time the ceremony starts. It means there's a good chance onlookers and athletes will get wet since there is no roof over the Seine. If it rains, the ceremony is expected to go on as planned.

Netanyahu will meet Trump at Mar-a-Lago, mending a years-long rift

By ELLEN KNICKMEYER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As president, Donald Trump went well beyond his predecessors in fulfilling Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's top wishes from the United States. Yet by the time Trump left the White House, relations between the two had broken down after Netanyahu rapidly congratulated Joe Biden on his 2020 presidential victory.

On Friday, the two men will meet face-to-face for the first time in nearly four years in a test of whether

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the relationship can be mended. Both have an interest in getting past their differences.

For Trump, now the Republican presidential nominee, the meeting could cast him as an ally and statesman, as well as sharpen efforts by Republicans to portray themselves as the party most loyal to Israel.

That's as divisions among Americans over U.S. support for Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza open cracks in what has been decades of strong bipartisan backing for Israel, the biggest recipient of U.S. aid.

For Netanyahu, who was in the United States to address Congress and meet with Biden, repairing relations with Trump is imperative given the prospect that he may once again become president of the United States, Israel's main arms supplier and protector.

For both men, Friday's meeting at Mar-a-Lago will highlight for their home audiences their depiction of themselves as strong leaders who have gotten big things done on the world stage, and can again.

One political gamble for Netanyahu is whether he could get more of the terms he wants in any deal on a Gaza cease-fire and hostage release, and in his much hoped-for closing of a normalization deal with Saudi Arabia, if he waits out the Biden administration in hopes that Trump wins.

"Benjamin Netanyahu has spent much of his career in the last two decades in tethering himself to the Republican Party," said Aaron David Miller, a former U.S. diplomat for Arab-Israeli negotiations, now a senior fellow at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

For the next six months, that means "mending ties with an irascible, angry president," Miller said, meaning Trump.

Trump broke off with Netanyahu in early 2021. That was after the Israeli prime minister became one of the first world leaders to congratulate Biden for his presidential election victory, disregarding Trump's false claim he had won.

"Bibi could have stayed quiet," Trump said in an interview with an Israel newspaper back then. "He made a terrible mistake."

Netanyahu and Trump last met at a September 2020 White House signing ceremony for the signature diplomatic achievement of both men's political careers. It was an accord brokered by the Trump administration in which the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain agreed to establish normal diplomatic relations with Israel.

For Israel, it amounted to the two countries formally recognizing it for the first time. It was a major step in what Israel hopes will be an easing of tensions and a broadening of economic ties with its Arab neighbors.

In public postings and statements after his break with Netanyahu, Trump portrayed himself as having stuck his neck out for Israel as president, and Netanyahu paying him back with disloyalty.

He also has criticized Netanyahu on other points, faulting him as "not prepared" for the Oct. 7 Hamas attacks that started the war in Gaza, for example.

In his high-profile speech to Congress on Wednesday, Netanyahu gave recognition to Biden, who has kept up military and diplomatic support for Israel's offensive in Gaza despite opposition from within his Democratic Party.

But Netanyahu poured praise on Trump, calling the regional accords Trump helped broker historic and thanking him "for all the things he did for Israel."

Netanyahu listed actions by the Trump administration long-sought by Israeli governments — the U.S. officially saying Israel had sovereignty over the Golan Heights, captured from Syria during a 1967 war; a tougher U.S. policy toward Iran; and Trump declaring Jerusalem the capital of Israel, breaking with long-standing U.S. policy that Jerusalem's status should be decided in Israeli-Palestinian negotiations.

"I appreciated that," Trump told "Fox & Friends" on Thursday, referring to Netanyahu's praise.

He didn't quiet his criticism, however, of Israel's conduct of the war, which has killed more than 39,000 Palestinians.

"I want him to finish up and get it done quickly. You gotta get it done quickly, because they are getting decimated with his publicity," Trump said in Thursday's interview.

"Israel is not very good at public relations, I'll tell you that," he added.

Wounded in a strike that killed her family, a 2-year-old joins Gaza's ranks of thousands of orphans

By WAFAA SHURAFI Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — The 2-year-old toddler lay on a foil blanket, her face covered with salve for her burns and her little body riddled with scars from shrapnel. She squirmed, her breath heaving, as doctors examined her and the tube in her chest.

Siwar Abdel-Hadi is now an orphan. She's the lone survivor of an Israeli strike that hit their family home in central Gaza, killing her parents, her two sisters and her brother, along with a brother of her mother.

"The whole family was gathered around a table for lunch" when the missile struck Tuesday in the Bureij refugee camp, said Nour Abdel-Hadi, one of Siwar's paternal aunts. She spoke at nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah, where the overwhelmed staff rushed around her dealing with influxes of wounded.

Israel's campaign of bombardment and offensives in Gaza has left thousands of orphans. Cases like Siwar's have become so common, doctors created an acronym for it: WCNSF, "wounded child, no surviving family." The United Nations estimated in February that some 17,000 children in the territory are now unaccompanied, and the number is likely to have grown since.

The Israeli military rarely comments on individual strikes. It says it targets Hamas fighters and infrastructure and blames the militants for civilian deaths because they work in residential areas and among the population. On the day of the strike that killed Siwar's family, the military said it hit dozens of targets across the Gaza Strip, including military structures, observation posts and individual militants.

Israel says it is determined to destroy Hamas after the militants' Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. Its campaign has killed more than 39,100 people, according to the Gaza Health Ministry. Of those, women and children make up around half the dead whom the ministry has firmly identified, and an unknown proportion of the nearly 10,000 it has yet to identify. Doctors often say children make up a large proportion of the wounded that come streaming into hospitals.

At the Kamal Adwan Hospital in northern Gaza, another orphaned child was recovering from her wounds.

Three-month-old Asma Ajour's family was fleeing their neighborhood in Gaza City after the Israeli military issued evacuation orders and moved in against Hamas militants it said were operating there.

As the family fled July 8, Israeli shelling hit the street, killing Asma's mother and father and two sisters, 3 and 5 years old, said Asma's grandmother, Basema Qwedat. Asma lay in the street in her dead mother's arms for 12 hours, until her grandfather — who was searching for them — heard her cries and found her, Qwedat said, rocking the infant in a child's seat at the hospital.

Two of Qwedat's sons were killed by strikes earlier in the war, and now she has lost her daughter, Asma's mother. They don't know yet who will take in Asma, but Qwedat said her daughter had told her, "If something happens to me, take care of my child."

At Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, Siwar's extended family was similarly trying to figure out how to take her in. Her grandparents are still alive, but are sick and may not be able to raise her, Nour Abdel-Hadi said. Otherwise, one of her aunts will take her, but they are struggling with their own children during the shortages of food and supplies in the war.

The Abdel-Hadis were a close-knit, loving family, relatives said. The parents, Hisham Abdel-Hadi and Hedaia Yasin, made sure their kids got high grades. As the youngest, Siwar was showered in toys, they said. They had fled their home three times during the war to escape frequent bombardment in central Gaza, but each time returned, most recently in May.

Israel "didn't leave anything for Siwar, no father, mother or siblings. Even her toys and bed are gone," Nour Abdel-Hadi said, sobbing.

Doctors said they were treating Siwar for second-degree burns on her face, shrapnel wounds and collapsed lungs.

"God give us the capability to raise her," said another aunt, Amal Abdel-Hadi. "May she live a dignified life, to play among children. May she not keep enduring what she's already experienced, all the bombing and missiles and deprivation."

Harris will carry Biden's economic record into the election. She hopes to turn it into an asset

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — A key question is looming for Vice President Kamala Harris as she edges closer to gaining the Democratic presidential nomination: Can she turn the Biden-Harris economic record into a political advantage in a way that President Joe Biden failed to do?

In some ways, her task would seem straightforward: The administration oversaw a vigorous rebound from the pandemic recession, one that shrank the U.S. unemployment rate to a half-century low of 3.4% in early 2023 — far below the painful 6.4% rate when Biden and Harris took office in 2021. The rate stayed below 4% for more than two years, the longest such stretch since the 1960s.

Boosted by the administration's \$1.9 trillion stimulus package, robust economic growth sent demand for workers soaring, forcing employers to jack up wages. Paychecks rose particularly fast for lower-paid workers, thereby narrowing income inequality.

Soon, though, clogged supply chains caused parts shortages, as demand for furniture, cars, and other goods, juiced by the administration's stimulus, soared. Russia's invasion of Ukraine escalated gas and food prices. In June 2022, inflation reached a four-decade high.

The spike in prices was so severe that it offset most of the wage growth that workers had enjoyed. And it soured Americans on the economy. Consumer sentiment plunged in late 2021 and has barely recovered even as inflation has plummeted from 9.1% in 2022 to 3%.

A wide gap has opened up between the public's dim view of the economy and the generally positive data on jobs, falling inflation and economic growth. Chris Jackson, head of polling at Ipsos Public Affairs, said he blames the cumulative jump in average prices over the past three years — roughly 20%, only partly offset by higher paychecks — and a general unease about the country's direction.

"People are, generally speaking, doing OK," Jackson said. "They have their jobs, they're getting paid, they've seen pay raises — all those sort of things. And yet they don't feel like their dollars go as far. They feel like the country is not going in a good direction, just in general."

Former President Donald Trump is campaigning hard on the higher cost of living, having mentioned inflation 14 times in his speech last week at the Republican National Convention. His running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, has attacked Biden over the surge in housing costs, which has diminished the hopes of many would-be home buyers.

Speaking this week in Indianapolis, Harris highlighted her support for "affordable health care" and "affordable child care." She also charged that Trump would eliminate the Biden administration's price cap on insulin, which the White House often cites as an example of its efforts to reduce high drug costs.

Even though inflation — the rate of price increases — has sharply slowed over the past two years, Americans remain unhappy that average prices are much higher than they were just a few years ago. Grocery prices are up 21% since Biden and Harris took office. Average apartment rents have climbed about 23%, to \$1,411 a month, according to Apartment List.

And to fight inflation, the Federal Reserve, led by Chair Jerome Powell, raised its key interest rate at the fastest pace in four decades. Borrowing costs soared as a result. The average 30-year fixed mortgage rate has more than doubled, from a low of about 2.7% during the pandemic to about 6.8% last week.

The combined increase in prices and inflation has been particularly jarring for many families because it followed nearly a decade of little-to-no inflation and ultra-low interest rates. America's households grew used to prices barely rising. From 2015 until the pandemic, for example, U.S. food prices were basically flat. When high inflation eventually did strike, it both bruised Americans' finances and darkened their economic outlook.

Still, many leading policymakers see the Fed's sharp boost in interest rates, and the subsequent fall in inflation, as an economic success story. When the Fed began aggressively raising rates, making consumer and business loans much costlier, the widespread fear was that the United States would soon tumble into

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a recession. In August 2022, Powell issued a high-profile warning that the Fed's inflation fight would "bring some pain to households and businesses."

Instead, inflation has fallen without a sharp rise in unemployment, which is at a still-low 4.1%. And Fed officials have indicated that they're increasingly confident that inflation is declining steadily toward their 2% target.

Christopher Waller, an influential member of the Fed's governing board, celebrated that progress in remarks last week.

"We've never really seen this in terms of a severe policy tightening," Waller said, referring to the Fed's rate hikes. "The economy just kind of held its ground. And inflation came down a lot. This has been an amazing recovery from what happened in '21 and '22."

Yet many everyday Americans aren't sharing in the enthusiasm as they grapple with still-high costs. New car prices, for example, jumped 24% in the three years after the pandemic, to an average of \$48,000. They have largely leveled off in the past year, according to government data. But on Thursday, General Motors said that customers paid an average of nearly \$50,000 for one of its new cars in the April to June quarter.

Perhaps most painfully, housing affordability has worsened. Both prices and mortgage rates are much higher than they were three years ago. The monthly payment for a newly purchased median-priced home has jumped nearly one-third in that time, to more than \$3,000, according to Harvard's Joint Center for Housing Studies. Would-be homebuyers need to earn at least \$100,000 to afford the median-priced home in nearly half of all metro areas, the center has found.

Abigail Wozniak, director of the Opportunity and Growth Institute at the Federal Reserve Bank of Minneapolis, said the burden of such major purchases becomes harder to manage when overall prices spike.

"It's difficult to change your consumption" of cars and homes "in little amounts quickly," Wozniak said. "You're forced to think about this big budget choice of, should I give up a car and substitute into transit? That's a huge adjustment. And adjustments are painful."

Then there are groceries. A pound of ground beef has jumped \$1.05 since Biden's inauguration, to a national average of \$5.36 a pound, according to government data. Though egg prices are far below the peak they reached during a bout of avian flu in late 2022, at \$2.72 a dozen they're still 85% more expensive than they were three years ago. A pound of chicken has surged 25% to \$2.01 since January 2021.

Economists at the Biden administration have calculated, though, that average wages have risen enough to make up for the higher costs. As of June, average hourly pay was 23% higher than it was four years earlier — larger than the 21% jump in average prices. As a result, the White House economists calculated, it now takes about 3.6 hours of work for a typical employee to buy a week's worth of groceries, about the same as it did before the pandemic.

Economists say this is how it's supposed to work: After an inflationary burst, prices won't fall back to their previous levels. Such sustained price drops typically occur only during recessions. In a healthy economy, wages eventually rise enough for consumers to afford the higher costs.

By some measures, lower-income workers have fared particularly well, a result of the difficulty employers faced after the pandemic in filling many in-person jobs. Wages for restaurant and hotel workers soared nearly 15% in the spring of 2022 from a year earlier — much faster than the inflation rate.

Yet overall household income hasn't grown as fast as hourly pay. That can happen if fewer people in a household work or if their hours are cut.

Economists at Motio Research have calculated that since Biden was inaugurated in January 2021, inflation-adjusted median household incomes have risen just 1.6% to \$79,000. (The median represents a midpoint and filters out extremely high or low numbers that can skew averages.)

"So if half of the population, at least, see their income stagnating for four years, you can understand why inflation is being identified as a huge problem here," said Matias Scaglione, a co-founder of Motio.

Agreement with Russia is 'deal with the devil,' adviser to Ukrainian president says

By ANDREW MELDRUM and SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Signing an agreement with Russia to stop the war with Ukraine would amount to signing a deal with the devil, a top adviser to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said, as pressure mounts on the country to seek an end to more than two years of fighting.

A deal would only buy time for Russian President Vladimir Putin to strengthen his army and usher in another, potentially more violent chapter in the war, Mykhailo Podolyak told The Associated Press in an interview Thursday.

"If you want to sign a deal with the devil, who will then drag you to hell, well, go for it. This is what Russia is," Podolyak said when asked about the prospects for a peace deal for Kyiv, whose forces are locked in a bloody war of attrition with Moscow's troops in eastern Ukraine.

"If you sign anything today with Russia, that will not lose the war and will not be legally responsible for mass crimes, this will mean that you have signed yourself a ticket to continue the war on a different scale, with other protagonists, with a different number of killed and tortured people," he said.

It is a view held across Zelenskyy's camp and reflected broadly among Ukrainians. But it also increasingly comes up against the current of Western pressure, as Kyiv continues to face difficult front-line conditions against Moscow's larger, better equipped army, as well as uncertainty over the level of future political support from Ukraine's closest ally, the U.S.

War fatigue also appears to be eroding the morale of Ukrainians, who have struggled with constant bombardment, electricity outages and the loss of loved ones. A poll by the Kyiv International Institute for Sociology found that the number of Ukrainians opposed to territorial concessions to Russia in exchange for peace has continued to fall. It was 55% in July, compared with 74% in December.

Even Zelenskyy hinted at a willingness to negotiate with Russia for the first time since the 2022 full-scale invasion, suggesting Moscow should send a delegation to the next global peace summit, which is expected in November.

But Podolyak insisted that an agreement now would only delay greater violence.

"Yes, it can be a freeze of the conflict for a certain time. But this means that the Russian Federation will work on its mistakes and update its own army," he said. "An aggressor country did not come to the territory of Ukraine to sign a peace agreement. That's nonsense!"

A lasting peace that works for Ukraine would ensure a steady erosion of Russian military might encompassed by the "three tools" often reiterated by Zelenskyy: increased military support, effective economic sanctions and diplomatic pressure to isolate Russia.

As he spoke, Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba was in China, one of Russia's closest allies, on a mission to forge closer ties. Podolyak said the goal was to provide explanations for Ukraine's positions and for why China should play a more "active intensive function in ending the war on the terms of international law."

Few countries are watching the twists and turns of the U.S. presidential election more intently than Ukraine. But Zelenskyy is confident that his government has established good relations with both sides in the U.S. election, Podolyak said.

"Ukraine has fine relations ... with both the Republican Party and the Democratic Party," he explained. "It's not a matter of personal relationships, only on the candidate-leader level. This is a question of the institutional relations between the parties of the United States and the parties and institutions of Ukraine."

Some leading Republican politicians, including GOP nominee Donald Trump's running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, have voiced support for withdrawing vital American military support to Ukraine, and Trump is often portrayed as favoring Russian leader Vladimir Putin.

Zelenskyy, however, took Trump's nomination as an opportunity and had a phone call with him shortly after the Republican national convention. Podolyak asserted that the phone call between the two was positive.

As for the Democratic Party, Podolyak said he has "great sympathy" for the President Joe Biden's administration despite what he said was its slow decision-making regarding Ukraine.

"But they made all the decisions that Ukraine needed, one way or another: arms supplies to Ukraine; additional permits for strikes on the border territories of the Russian Federation; global diplomatic and informational support of Ukraine, and so on."

Whichever party emerges victorious from the November election, Podolyak asserted that Ukraine will continue to have strong relations with the U.S.

"Regardless of who will be the head of the White House, I don't see a scenario where it is possible to stop aid to Ukraine," he said.

US arrests 2 leaders of Mexico's Sinaloa cartel: 'El Mayo' Zambada and son of 'El Chapo'

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER, MARÍA VERZA and CHRISTOPHER SHERMAN Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Ismael "El Mayo" Zambada, a longtime leader of Mexico's Sinaloa cartel, and Joaquín Guzmán López, a son of another infamous cartel leader, were arrested by U.S. authorities in Texas on Thursday, the U.S. Justice Department said.

A leader of the powerful Sinaloa cartel for decades alongside Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán, Zambada is one of the most notorious drug traffickers in the world and known for running the cartel's smuggling operations while keeping a lower profile.

A Mexican federal official told The Associated Press that Zambada and Guzmán López arrived in the United States on a private plane and turned themselves in to authorities. The official spoke on the condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the matter.

The U.S. government had offered a reward of up to \$15 million for information leading to the capture of Zambada, who eluded authorities for decades.

Zambada and Guzmán López oversaw the trafficking of "tens of thousands of pounds of drugs into the United States, along with related violence," FBI Director Christopher Wray said, adding that now they will "face justice in the United States."

"Fentanyl is the deadliest drug threat our country has ever faced, and the Justice Department will not rest until every single cartel leader, member, and associate responsible for poisoning our communities is held accountable," Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement.

Mexican authorities didn't immediately comment on the arrests.

U.S. officials have been seeking Zambada's capture for years, and he has been charged in a number of U.S. cases. He was charged in February in the Eastern District of New York with conspiring to manufacture and distribute the synthetic opioid. Prosecutors said he was continuing to lead the Sinaloa cartel, "one of the most violent and powerful drug trafficking organizations in the world."

Zambada, one of the longest-surviving capos in Mexico, was considered the cartel's strategist, more involved in day-to-day operations than his flashier and better-known boss, "El Chapo" Guzmán, who was sentenced to life in prison in the U.S. in 2019 and is the father of Guzmán López.

Zambada is an old-fashioned capo in an era of younger kingpins known for their flamboyant lifestyles of club-hopping and brutal tactics of beheading, dismembering and even skinning their rivals. While Zambada has fought those who challenged him, he is known for concentrating on the business side of trafficking and avoiding gruesome cartel violence that would draw attention.

In an April 2010 interview with the Mexican magazine *Proceso*, he acknowledged that he lived in constant fear of going to prison and would contemplate suicide rather than be captured.

"I'm terrified of being incarcerated," Zambada said. "I'd like to think that, yes, I would kill myself."

The interview was surprising for a kingpin known for keeping his head down, but he gave strict instructions on where and when the encounter would take place, and the article gave no hint of his whereabouts.

Zambada reputedly won the loyalty of locals in his home state of Sinaloa and neighboring Durango through his largess, sponsoring local farmers and distributing money and beer in his birthplace of El Alamo.

Although little is known about Zambada's early life, he is believed to have gotten his start as an enforcer

in the 1970s.

By the early 1990s, he was a major player in the Juarez cartel, transporting tons of cocaine and marijuana. Zambada started gaining the trust of Colombian traffickers, allegiances that helped him come out on top in the cartel world of ever-shifting alliances. Eventually he became so powerful that he broke off from the Juarez cartel, but still managed to keep strong ties with the gang and avoided a turf war. He also developed a partnership with "El Chapo" Guzman that would take him to the top of the Sinaloa Cartel.

Zambada's detention follows some important arrests of other Sinaloa cartel figures, including one of his sons and another son of "El Chapo" Guzmán, Ovidio Guzmán López. Zambada's son pleaded guilty in U.S. federal court in San Diego in 2021 to being a leader in the Sinaloa cartel.

In recent years, Guzman's sons have led a faction of the cartel known as the little Chapos, or "Chapitos" that has been identified as a main exporter of fentanyl to the U.S. market.

They were seen as more violent and flamboyant than Zambada. Their security chief was arrested by Mexican authorities in November.

Ovidio Guzmán López was arrested and extradited to the U.S. last year. He pleaded not guilty to drug trafficking charges in Chicago in September.

Mike Vigil, former head of international operations for the DEA, said Zambada's arrest is important but unlikely to have much impact on the flow of drugs to the U.S. Joaquín Guzmán López was the least influential of the four sons who made up the Chapitos, Vigil said.

"This is a great blow for the rule of law, but is it going to have an impact on the cartel? I don't think so," Vigil said.

"It's not going to have a dent on the drug trade because somebody from within the cartel is going to replace him," Vigil said.

Venezuelan voters face crucial choice:

Reelect Maduro or give opposition a chance after 25 years

By REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The future of Venezuela is on the line. Voters will decide Sunday whether to reelect President Nicolas Maduro, whose 11 years in office have been beset by crisis, or allow the opposition a chance to deliver on a promise to undo the ruling party's policies that caused economic collapse and forced millions to emigrate.

Historically fractured opposition parties have coalesced behind a single candidate, giving the United Socialist Party of Venezuela its most serious electoral challenge in a presidential election in decades.

Maduro is being challenged by former diplomat Edmundo González Urrutia, who represents the resurgent opposition, and eight other candidates. Supporters of Maduro and Gonzalez marked the end of the official campaign season Thursday with massive demonstrations in the capital, Caracas.

Maduro and his allies have traditionally fended off challenges by barring rivals from elections and painting them as out-of-touch elitists in league with foreign powers. But this time, the ruling party is allowing the Unitary Platform, the coalition of the main opposition parties, to participate in the election.

A deal that allowed the opposition coalition to participate in the election won Maduro some relief from crippling economic sanctions imposed by the United States. But that respite was short-lived. President Joe Biden's administration reimposed the sanctions, citing mounting government repression of real and perceived adversaries, including blocking the candidacy of opposition powerhouse María Corina Machado.

Here's what to know about Venezuela's upcoming presidential election.

Who is the opposition candidate?

The most talked-about name in the race is not on the ballot: María Corina Machado. The former lawmaker emerged as an opposition star in 2023, filling the void left when a previous generation of opposition leaders fled into exile. Her principled attacks on government corruption and mismanagement rallied millions of Venezuelans to vote for her in the opposition's October primary.

But Maduro's government declared the primary illegal and opened criminal investigations against some

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of its organizers. Since then, it has issued warrants for several of Machado's supporters and arrested some members of her staff, and the country's top court affirmed a decision to keep her off the ballot.

Yet, she kept on campaigning, holding rallies nationwide and turning the ban on her candidacy into a symbol of the loss of rights and humiliations that many voters have felt for over a decade.

She has thrown her support behind Edmundo González Urrutia, a former ambassador who has never held public office, helping a fractious opposition unify.

They are campaigning together on the promise of economic reform that will lure back the millions of Venezuelans who have migrated since Maduro became president in 2013.

González began his diplomatic career as an aide to Venezuela's ambassador in the U.S. in the late 1970s. He was posted to Belgium and El Salvador, and served as Caracas' ambassador to Algeria. His last post was as ambassador to Argentina during Hugo Chávez's presidency, which began in 1999.

More recently, González worked as an international relations consultant and wrote a historical work on Venezuela during World War II.

Why is the current president having trouble?

Maduro's popularity has dwindled due to an economic crisis caused by a drop in oil prices, corruption and government mismanagement.

Maduro can still bank on a cadre of die-hard believers, known as Chavistas, including millions of public employees and others whose businesses or employment depend on the state. But the ability of his party to use access to social programs to make people vote has diminished as the economy has frayed.

He is the heir to Hugo Chávez, a popular socialist who expanded Venezuela's welfare state while locking horns with the United States.

Sick with cancer, Chávez handpicked Maduro to act as interim president upon his death. He took on the role in March 2013, and the following month, he narrowly won the presidential election triggered by his mentor's death.

Maduro was reelected in 2018, in a contest that was widely considered a sham. His government banned Venezuela's most popular opposition parties and politicians from participating and, lacking a level playing field, the opposition urged voters to boycott the election.

That authoritarian tilt was part of the rationale the U.S. used to impose economic sanctions that crippled the country's crucial oil industry.

Who will vote?

More than 21 million Venezuelans are registered to vote, but the exodus of over 7.7 million people due to the prolonged crisis — including about 4 million voters — is expected to reduce the number of potential voters to about 17 million.

Voting is not mandatory and is done on electronic machines.

Venezuelan law allows people to vote abroad, but only about 69,000 voters met the criteria to cast ballots at embassies or consulates during this election. Costly and time-consuming government prerequisites to register, lack of information and a mandatory proof of legal residency in a host country kept many migrants from registering to vote.

Venezuelans in the U.S. face an insurmountable obstacle: Consulates, where citizens abroad would typically cast their ballots, are closed because Caracas and Washington severed diplomatic relations after Maduro's 2018 reelection.

Under what conditions is the election taking place?

A more free and fair presidential election seemed like a possibility last year, when Maduro's government agreed to work with the U.S.-backed Unitary Platform coalition to improve electoral conditions in October 2023. An accord on election conditions earned Maduro's government broad relief from U.S. economic sanctions on its state-run oil, gas and mining sectors.

But days later, authorities said the opposition's primary was against the law and began issuing warrants and arresting human rights defenders, journalists and opposition members.

A U.N.-backed panel investigating human rights violations in Venezuela has reported that the government has increased repression of critics and opponents ahead of the election, subjecting targets to detention,

surveillance, threats, defamatory campaigns and arbitrary criminal proceedings.

The government has also used its control of media outlets, the country's fuel supply, electric network and other infrastructure to limit the reach of the Machado-González campaign.

The mounting actions taken against the opposition prompted the Biden administration earlier this year to end the sanctions relief it granted in October. ____

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What's in a name?

GOP vice presidential nominee JD Vance has had many of them

By JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

COLUMBUS, Ohio (AP) — When it comes to Republican vice presidential nominee JD Vance's name, it's complicated.

The senator from Ohio introduced himself to the world in 2016 when he published his bestselling memoir, "Hillbilly Elegy," under the name J.D. Vance — "like jay-dot-dee-dot," he wrote, short for James David. In the book, he explained that this was not the first iteration of his name. Nor would it be the last.

Over the course of his 39 years, Vance's first, middle and last names have all been altered in one way or another. As Vance is being introduced to voters across the country as Donald Trump's new running mate, his name has been the source of both curiosity and questions — including why he no longer uses periods in "JD."

He was born James Donald Bowman in Middletown, Ohio, on Aug. 2, 1984, his middle and last names the same as his biological father, Donald Bowman. His parents split up "around the time I started walking," he writes. When he was about 6, his mother, Beverly, married for the third time. He was adopted by his new stepfather, Robert Hamel, and his mother renamed him James David Hamel.

When his mother erased Donald Bowman from her and her son's life, the adoption process also erased the name James Donald Bowman from the public record. The only birth certificate for Vance on file at Ohio's vital statistics office reads James David Hamel, according to information provided by the state.

Beverly kept the boy's initials the same, since he now went universally by "J.D.," Vance explains in the book. He didn't buy his mother's story that he was now named for his uncle David, though. "Any old D name would have done, so long as it wasn't Donald," he wrote.

Vance spent more than two decades as James David "J.D." Hamel. It's the name by which he graduated from Middletown High School, served in Iraq as a U.S. Marine (officially, Cpl. James D. Hamel), earned a political science degree at The Ohio State University and blogged his ruminations as a 26-year-old student at Yale Law School. Those facts are borne out in documentation provided by those entities upon request, or otherwise publicly available, and were confirmed by campaign spokesperson Taylor Van Kirk.

But the situation gnawed at him, particularly after his mother and adoptive father divorced.

"I shared a name with no one I really cared about (which bothered me already), and with Bob gone, explaining why my name was J.D. Hamel would require a few additional awkward moments," he writes in "Hillbilly Elegy." "Yeah, my legal father's last name is Hamel. You haven't met him because I don't see him. No, I don't know why I don't see him. Of all the things that I hated about my childhood, nothing compared to the revolving door of father figures."

So he decided to change his name again, to Vance — the last name of his beloved "Mamaw," the grandmother who raised him.

It didn't happen on his wedding day in 2014, as the book implies, but in April 2013, as he was about to graduate from Yale, Van Kirk said. It felt right to take the name of the woman who raised him before dying in 2005, as he was putting the struggles of his early life behind him and launching into this new phase.

"Throughout his tumultuous childhood, Mamaw — or Bonnie Blanton Vance — raised JD and was always his north star," Van Kirk said in a statement. "It only felt right to him to take Vance as his last name."

Claiming the Vance name also served to tie JD more clearly to what he writes was "hillbilly royalty" on his grandfather's side not long before he would release a book opining on hillbilly culture. A distant cousin

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to his "Papaw," also named James Vance, married into the McCoy-hating Hatfield family, and committed a murder that "kicked off one of the most famous family feuds in American history," Vance wrote in his book.

Vance achieved a clean slate of sorts with his new name, just as he was entering his career as a lawyer and author. Besides being the name on his book, it's the name he used to register for the bar, to marry, to enter the world of venture capital in the Silicon Valley and as he became a father.

But there was one more name alteration to come.

When Vance jumped into politics in July 2021, he had removed the periods from "JD." He'd often used this shorthand over his lifetime.

Asked by The Associated Press at the time if this was a formal change, or merely stylistic, his campaign said it was how Vance preferred to be referred to in print. He has maintained the usage as a U.S. senator, referring to himself as JD Vance on his official Senate website, in press releases and in certain campaign and business filings.

The nominee's legal name today is James David Vance. The AP, whose industry-standard stylebook advises to generally call people by the name they prefer, honors his request to go by JD with no periods.

Harris tries to thread the needle on Gaza after meeting with Netanyahu

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris, the likely Democratic nominee for president, is attempting to bridge divides within the party over the war in Gaza, emphasizing Israel's right to defend itself while also focusing on alleviating Palestinian suffering.

She delivered remarks after meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday that reflected a delicate balancing act on one of the country's most divisive political issues. Some Democrats have been critical of President Joe Biden's steadfast support for Israel despite the increasing death toll among Palestinians, and Harris is trying to unite her party for the election battle with Republican candidate Donald Trump.

"We cannot look away in the face of these tragedies," she said. "We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering. And I will not be silent."

Harris did not deviate from the administration's approach to the conflict, including grueling negotiations aimed at ending the fighting, releasing hostages held by Hamas and eventually rebuilding Gaza. She also said nothing about military assistance for Israel, which some Democrats want to cut.

Instead, she tried to refocus the conversation around mitigating the calamity in Gaza, and she used language intended to nudge Americans toward an elusive middle ground.

"The war in Gaza is not a binary issue," she said. "But too often, the conversation is binary when the reality is anything but."

In addition, Harris made a more explicit appeal to voters who have been frustrated by the ceaseless bloodshed, which began when Hamas attacked Israel on Oct. 7.

"To everyone who has been calling for a cease-fire, and to everyone who yearns for peace, I see you, and I hear you," she said.

Harris' meeting with Netanyahu was private, and she described it as "frank and constructive." She also emphasized her longtime support for Israel, which includes raising money to plant trees in the country when she was a young girl.

Jewish Americans traditionally lean Democratic, but Republicans have tried to make inroads. Trump claimed this week that Harris "is totally against the Jewish people" because she didn't attend Netanyahu's address to a joint meeting of Congress. The vice president was traveling in Indiana during the speech.

Harris is married to a Jewish man, Doug Emhoff, who has played an outspoken role in the administration's efforts to combat antisemitism.

Netanyahu did not speak publicly after his meeting with Harris. His trip was scheduled before Biden dropped his reelection bid, but the meeting with Harris was watched closely for clues to her views on Israel.

"She is in a tricky situation and walking a tightrope where she's still the vice president and the president really is the one who leads on the foreign policy agenda," said Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud, a

Democrat whose city is home to one of the largest Arab American communities in the nation. "But as the candidate, the presumptive nominee, she has to now create the space to differentiate in order for her to chart a new course."

Protesters gathered outside Union Station on the day of Netanyahu's speech, ripping down American flags and spray painting " Hamas is coming."

Harris sharply criticized those actions, saying there were "despicable acts by unpatriotic protesters and dangerous hate-fueled rhetoric."

"I support the right to peacefully protest, but let's be clear: Antisemitism, hate and violence of any kind have no place in our nation," she said in a statement.

As vice president, Harris has tried to show little daylight between herself and Biden. But David Rothkopf, a foreign policy writer who has met with her, said there's been "a noticeable difference in tone, particularly in regards to concern for the plight of innocent Palestinians."

The difference was on display in Selma, Alabama, in March, when Harris commemorated the anniversary of the Bloody Sunday march for voting rights in 1965.

During her speech, Harris said that "given the immense scale of suffering in Gaza, there must be an immediate ceasefire."

The audience broke out in applause. A few sentences later, Harris emphasized that it was up to Hamas to accept the deal that had been offered. But her demand for a cease-fire still resonated in ways that Biden's comments had not.

An AP-NORC poll conducted in June found that about 6 in 10 Democrats disapproved of the way Biden is handling the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians. Roughly the same number said Israel's military response in Gaza had gone too far.

Israeli analysts said they doubted that Harris would present a dramatic shift in policies toward their country.

Chuck Freilich, a former Israeli deputy national security adviser and senior fellow at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank, said Harris was from a generation of American politicians who felt they could both support Israel and publicly criticize its policies.

"The question is as president, what would she do?" Freilich said. "I think she would put considerably more pressure on Israel on the Palestinian issue overall."

Venezuela's presidential candidates conclude their campaigns ahead of Sunday's election

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela's government and opposition closed the official presidential campaign season Thursday with demonstrations that drew thousands of people to the streets of the capital.

The events three days before the highly anticipated election on Sunday encapsulated the massive disparities between the top contenders, including their resources.

President Nicolás Maduro, who is seeking a third term, appeared before supporters on a massive stage set up on one of the city's main roads and rallied attendees with musical intermissions and dances throughout his speech. He told the crowd, part of it transported to Caracas on state-owned buses, his opponents are promoters of violence and described himself as a man of peace.

"Who of the 10 candidates guarantees peace and stability?" Maduro asked the crowd. Yet it was he who in recent days spoke of a possible post-election "bloodbath."

Meanwhile, former diplomat Edmundo González Urrutia, who is representing the Unitary Platform coalition, and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado gathered far fewer supporters. González and Machado moved through the city standing atop a platform affixed to a truck until they reached a middle-class district of the capital.

Lack of funding and government repression against Machado and any service provider who may volunteer or enter a contract with the campaign has affected their ability to set up proper stages, including Thursday when their sound system was not powerful enough to allow all supporters to listen.

State television transmitted live the entirety of Maduro's rally and ignored the opposition's event.

Sunday's election is giving the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela its toughest electoral test in decades.

Maduro is as unpopular as ever among many voters, who blame him for the complex crisis that has affected them for more than 11 years. At the same time, after years of boycotting elections and party divisions, the main opposition parties have come together to support a single candidate, González.

Secret DEA files show agents joked about rape in a WhatsApp chat. Then one of them was accused of it

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — In a WhatsApp chat that quickly devolved into depravity, a group of U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents boasted about their "world debauchery tour" of "boozing and whoring" on the government's dime. They swapped lurid images of their latest sexual conquests. And at one point they even joked about "forcible anal rape."

Within months of that jaw-dropping exchange, an agent in the group chat was accused of that very crime.

The 2018 arrest of George Zoumberos for allegedly forcing anal sex on a 23-year-old woman in a Madrid hotel room set off alarms at the highest levels of the DEA, beginning with a middle-of-the-night phone call from a supervisor to the agency's headquarters outside Washington. But U.S. officials never even spoke with the woman and made only cursory efforts to investigate.

The DEA has refused for years to discuss its handling of the arrest, instead telling The Associated Press in response to its questions that "the alleged misconduct in this case is egregious and unacceptable and does not reflect the high standards expected of all DEA personnel."

The details of the case and the graphic group chat are outlined in a trove of thousands of secret law enforcement documents obtained by the AP that offer a never-before-seen window into a culture of corruption among federal narcotics agents who parlayed the DEA's shadowy money laundering operations into a worldwide pursuit of binge drinking and illicit sex.

Zoumberos, married and 38 at the time, maintained the interaction was consensual and, after a jailhouse visit from U.S. Embassy officials, was released and flew home within hours of his arrest. A Spanish judge later dismissed the case, ruling only that the allegations were not "duly justified." The agent eventually returned to duty with a DEA letter of reprimand chiding him for "poor judgment."

"I told him very clearly that I didn't want to have sex," the woman recently told AP, which does not typically identify those who say they are victims of sexual assault.

The woman, speaking about her allegations for the first time, says her anguish led to severe panic attacks that forced her to drop out of college, and to this day she's haunted by fears her attacker will return.

"I'm very afraid," she said, her voice trembling over the phone. "He could try to find me or take revenge."

'A very fun game'

Many of the documents AP obtained focus on ongoing investigations following the scandalous 2020 arrest of José Irizarry, an agent in the group chat considered the ringleader of the debauchery and perhaps the most corrupt agent in the DEA's 50-year history.

But despite his conviction and repeated claims that dozens of others were involved in his scheme to skim millions from money laundering seizures to bankroll a junket of partying and sex, no criminal charges have been filed against any other DEA agents, supervisors or prosecutors allegedly tied to the corruption. The U.S. Justice Department did not respond to questions asking why. More than a dozen, however, have been quietly disciplined or ousted from their jobs.

Irizarry, serving a 12-year federal prison term for laundering money for the very Colombian drug cartels he was sworn to police, has maintained to AP in recent interviews that he was not a rogue agent and accountability is long overdue for the many others who joined him in a wild ride that mocked the DEA's mission.

"You can't win an unwinnable war," Irizarry said before reporting to prison. "The drug war is a game. ...

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It was a very fun game that we were playing.”

That game revolved around the DEA’s undercover money laundering operations, including one codenamed White Wash that was led by the agents in the group chat. It was shut down in 2017 before a blistering internal audit found agents’ globetrotting through the bars, strip clubs and hotels of Paris, Madrid, and the Caribbean was “unacceptable” and rife with corruption.

“The agents would set up one meeting in the city of their choice but in reality were just going on vacation,” reads an FBI investigative report in the files obtained by AP. Other records detailed how agents frequented the red-light district of Amsterdam for prostitutes and recorded “no enforcement operations” whatsoever during a weeklong trip to Norway, a country with one of the lowest crime rates in the world.

In the end, the DEA audit found the five-year operation could claim credit for just five convictions while agents shelled out \$900,000 on travel, and \$26,000 on meals as they partied around the world tapping a \$1.9 million government fund of lawful money laundering proceeds they referred to as their “debauchery piggy bank.”

“It was all bulls---” Irizarry told the FBI, adding that White Wash was compromised from its first day by reports falsified to justify the next party spree. “It was all a novel.”

An unending, degenerate party

The WhatsApp chat, recovered during the FBI’s criminal investigation of DEA misconduct, included five DEA agents identified by AP, one of whom remains with the agency today, and hundreds of exchanges from 2017. Irizarry was the only agent willing to discuss the chat with AP.

The chat backed up many of his allegations that portrayed life in the DEA as an unending, degenerate party. Agents planned DEA travel around binge-drinking and sex with no fear their encrypted messages would ever be read by anyone else. And rather than reporting Irizarry’s misconduct, agents pressed him for X-rated images of his exploits.

“José you’re just smashing ass,” one agent wrote of Irizarry in February 2017, a month into a new U.S. presidential administration. “Nothing wrong with that under Trump. ... Your good.”

Before one jaunt, an agent wrote colleagues he was “hoping you’ve organized some welcome p---y for me tomorrow when I land.”

“Tough life this war on drugs,” an agent quipped in one message.

Added another: “Think of how different our experience on the job is than most.”

Federal authorities’ extraction of the deleted chat does not identify the author of every message, but AP identified the senders through context, federal law enforcement records and interviews. AP is only identifying two of the agents who have been accused of crimes: Irizarry and Zoumberos.

Irizarry told federal authorities in 2020 that he had direct knowledge of 15 DEA agents soliciting prostitutes. He attributed the most damning exchanges in the group chat to Zoumberos, the agent briefly jailed on suspicion of sexual assault in Spain.

“Irizarry stated Zoumberos talked about forcing anal sex on hookers,” a Homeland Security Investigations report states.

References to anal sex were so common in the group chat that agents coined a term for it – pancaking – and often accompanied such mentions with an emoji of a stack of pancakes.

“I’m coming old school to pancake a few Colombia chicks,” Zoumberos texted before one 2017 trip.

There were frequent mentions of prostitutes and at least two references to assaulting them and leaving it to an informant to “clean up” the mess.

They also joked about creating a “hooker app” in which agents would sneak prostitutes past everything from a hotel front desk to DEA internal affairs while trying to avoid federal prison.

“These are some expensive bitches,” one agent wrote in an exchange that included the sharing of a prostitute’s phone number. “She’s telling me \$1,000 for the night.”

Ben Greenberg, a former U.S. attorney in Miami who reviewed the messages at AP’s request, called them “beyond inappropriate.”

“In the context of such serious criminal allegations, the chats look like evidence of a crime and not just

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grotesque banter," he said. "U.S. law enforcement has an obligation to fully investigate this case and to hold anyone involved in criminal activity accountable regardless of their position."

The lewd texts came even as the DEA was making public promises to clean up its act following a highly publicized scandal in which agents participated in "sex parties" with prostitutes hired by Colombian cartels. That prompted the suspension of several agents and the 2015 retirement of then-DEA Administrator Michele Leonhart.

Misconduct in the 4,100-agent DEA has hardly been isolated. AP has tallied at least 16 agents over the past decade brought up on federal charges ranging from child pornography and drug trafficking to leaking intelligence to defense attorneys and selling firearms to cartel associates, revealing gaping holes in the agency's supervision.

After Administrator Anne Milgram took the reins of the DEA in 2021, the agency placed new controls on how funds can be used in money laundering stings, and warned agents they can now be fired for a first offense of misconduct if serious enough, a departure from prior administrations.

"The DEA has made significant advancements in oversight measures, disciplinary processes and accountability of personnel," the agency said in a statement to AP, adding it will "remain vigilant in our pursuit for excellence and integrity and will take decisive action should serious misconduct occur."

Quiet casualties

The FBI and a federal grand jury in Tampa have been investigating DEA misconduct in money laundering probes for years, following a roadmap sketched out by Irizarry.

Recently, an informant who traveled the world partying with the agents – and was with Zoumberos when he met his accuser at the Madrid bar – was arrested in Colombia on a U.S. warrant for failing to pay taxes on more than \$3.8 million in snitch money.

But so far, Irizarry is the only government employee to be charged. The internal records obtained by AP show the DEA disciplined or ousted at least a dozen other agents for either participating in the bacchanalia or failing to sound the alarms about it.

Among the quiet casualties was the head of the St. Louis division who retired amid allegations that he rented a New York apartment for his paramour with DEA funds. Another who quit was a veteran supervisor of the jet-setting agents who lied to the FBI about soliciting prostitutes, according to a law enforcement official who wasn't authorized to discuss the investigation.

The DEA records also contain new details about one agent, Danielle Dreyer, who was fired last year for what the Justice Department called "outlandish behavior" during a rooftop party in 2017 in Cartagena, Colombia, attended by a half-dozen DEA agents and then-federal prosecutor Marisa Darden. An internal DEA investigation found Dreyer used ecstasy and that her antics in a hot tub included squirting breast milk on colleagues, fondling Darden's breasts and grinding on her supervisor's lap.

After leaving the Justice Department, Darden was confirmed by the Senate in 2022 to be the first Black woman U.S. attorney in northern Ohio. She abruptly withdrew before taking the position, however, telling AP through an attorney that she did so for personal reasons.

Law enforcement records obtained by AP show Darden had been interviewed by the Justice Department's Office of Inspector General just days before she pulled out. Neither Darden nor her attorney responded to requests for comment.

'I didn't want him to do this to others'

The overseas rape accusation turned out to be the beginning of the end for Zoumberos, who more than a year after his rape arrest resigned from the DEA after invoking his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination in refusing to testify to the federal grand jury in Tampa.

Irizarry long considered Zoumberos a brother but in his interviews with investigators accused his former partner of a list of crimes, including that he used DEA snitch money to buy a personal boat.

"Zoumberos could do whatever he wanted and would not get caught because he was in charge of the AGEO," Irizarry told the FBI, using the acronym for the money laundering probes, Attorney General Exempt Operations.

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Zoumberos' attorney, Raymond Mansolillo, has called Irizarry a serial liar and previously told AP that federal authorities were "looking to find a crime to fit this case as opposed to a crime that actually took place."

On the night of the alleged sexual assault in Spain in April 2018, Zoumberos and a partner ate dinner with an informant at an Irish pub in Madrid, according to DEA records, and Zoumberos told authorities the woman later approached him at the bar.

The woman told AP that, over drinks, Zoumberos showed her smartphone photos of him fishing and playing with his dogs.

"He seemed like a good person," she recalled.

The conversation was pleasant, she said, and she lost track of time. With the subway closed, Zoumberos made what seemed like a gentlemanly offer.

"He told me, 'Don't worry, you can sleep in my hotel room. We'll watch a movie and in the morning you can catch the metro,'" she told AP. "Honestly, I was a student and I didn't have 60 euros to pay for a taxi home."

Around 1:30 a.m., the two walked a few blocks to Zoumberos' government-paid hotel. The woman said she told Zoumberos she could not have sex because she was having her period. Zoumberos told the DEA that she agreed to consensual sex and was "never upset."

About 3 a.m., the woman said, police and an ambulance arrived and found her bruised around the wrists and Zoumberos very drunk. She told AP she locked herself in the bathroom before fleeing the hotel through the fire exit in a state of utter shock.

A few hours later, the DEA chief in Spain placed an urgent telephone call to the agency's command center outside Washington. Records show nearly three dozen DEA officials were eventually notified of Zoumberos' arrest, including then-acting administrator Robert W. Patterson.

Within hours, the U.S. Embassy in Madrid dispatched a small delegation to visit Zoumberos in jail. What happened next is unclear. The U.S. State Department didn't respond to repeated requests for comment and would not release any records related to its response. The DEA also denied Freedom of Information Act requests for records of Zoumberos' arrest, citing the former agent's privacy.

A day after his arrest, Zoumberos was released without bail with only an order to stay away from his accuser and he quickly caught an American Airlines flight home to Tampa. There's no record of why the judge didn't seize his passport.

Six weeks later, the case was dismissed at prosecutors' request. Judge Enrique De la Hoz Garcia determined the allegations were not "duly justified" but didn't elaborate, according to Spanish court records. He and prosecutors did not respond to emails seeking further comment.

Back in Tampa, the DEA opened an internal investigation and suspended Zoumberos from normal duties. But within a few months, his firearm and top-secret clearance were returned and Zoumberos resumed his job with a letter reprimanding him for showing "poor judgment."

"As a DEA Special Agent, you are held to a higher standard of personal conduct and must take responsibility for your actions," read the letter, which under DEA policy was to be removed automatically from the file after two years.

Zoumberos, who now lives in North Carolina, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Internal records and interviews show the DEA never spoke with the woman or attempted to reconstruct what happened the night of the alleged rape. The records indicate the ranking DEA official in Spain did not even have the accuser's contact information and make no mention of any inquiries with Spanish authorities to obtain it.

The records also don't mention any efforts to secure surveillance footage from the hotel or the results of medical examinations that the woman says would have corroborated her account.

"We dropped the ball," a law enforcement official familiar with the matter told AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to discuss internal investigations.

About a year ago, the woman said she was approached by Spanish police asking if she would be willing to speak to the FBI as part of its broader probe of misconduct in the DEA.

At first, she said yes.

"I didn't want him to do this to others," she said.

But her willingness to speak out eventually gave way to fear of the powerful man she was confronting.

"I don't want to reopen this," she said. "I want to forget it."

Harris tells Netanyahu 'it is time' to end the war in Gaza and bring the hostages home

By AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris on Thursday said she urged Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to reach a cease-fire deal soon with Hamas so that dozens of hostages held by the militants in Gaza since Oct. 7 can return home.

Harris said she had a "frank and constructive" conversation with Netanyahu in which she affirmed Israel's right to defend itself but also expressed deep concern about the high death toll in Gaza over nine months of war and the "dire" humanitarian situation there.

With all eyes on the likely Democratic presidential nominee, Harris largely reiterated President Joe Biden's longstanding message that it's time to find an endgame to the brutal war in Gaza, where more than 39,000 Palestinians have died. Yet she offered a more forceful tone about the urgency of the moment just one day after Netanyahu gave a fiery speech to Congress in which he defended the war, vowed "total victory" against Hamas and made relatively scant mention of cease-fire negotiations.

"There has been hopeful movement in the talks to secure an agreement on this deal," Harris told reporters shortly after meeting with Netanyahu. "And as I just told Prime Minister Netanyahu, it is time to get this deal done."

Netanyahu met separately earlier in the day with Biden, who has also been calling on Israel and Hamas to come to an agreement on a U.S.-backed, three-phase deal to bring home remaining hostages and establish an extended cease-fire.

The White House said in a statement that Biden discussed with Netanyahu "the need to close the remaining gaps, finalize the deal as soon as possible, bring the hostages home, and reach a durable end to the war in Gaza." Biden and Netanyahu also discussed improving the flow of aid into Gaza as well as the ongoing threat posed by Iranian-backed militant groups, including Hamas, Hezbollah and the Houthis.

Harris said after her meeting with Netanyahu that Israel's war in Gaza is more complicated than simply being supportive of one side or the other.

"Too often, the conversation is binary when the reality is anything but," Harris said.

Harris also condemned Hamas' brutality. White House national security spokesperson John Kirby reiterated the administration position that the militant group that killed some 1,200 on Oct. 7 and kidnapped 250 people from Israel ultimately holds responsibility for the suffering in Gaza and must come to terms with Israel.

Kirby added that gaps between the two sides can be closed "but there are issues that need to be resolved that will require some leadership, some compromise."

With Harris' forceful comments, the administration also appeared to be stepping up pressure on the Israelis to not let the moment pass to get a deal done.

"What has happened in Gaza over the past nine months is devastating. The images of dead children and desperate, hungry people fleeing for safety, sometimes displaced for the second, third or fourth time," Harris said. "We cannot look away in the face of these tragedies. We cannot allow ourselves to become numb to the suffering. And I will not be silent."

Thousands protested Netanyahu's visit in Washington, and Harris condemned those who were violent or used rhetoric that praised Hamas.

Netanyahu, last at the White House when former President Donald Trump was in office, is headed to Florida on Friday to meet with the Republican presidential nominee.

Ahead of the Harris-Netanyahu meeting Thursday, Trump said at a rally in North Carolina the vice president was "totally against the Jewish people."

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Harris has long spoken of her strong support for Israel. The first overseas trip of her Senate career in early 2017 was to Israel, and one of her first acts in office was to introduce a resolution opposing a U.N. Security Council resolution condemning Israel.

She's also spoken of her personal ties to Israel, including memories of raising money as a child to plant trees in Israel and installing a mezuzah near the front door of the vice president's residence in Washington — her husband is Jewish. She also has connections to pro-Israel groups including the conservative American Israel Public Affairs Committee and the liberal J Street.

For Harris, the meeting with Netanyahu was an opportunity to demonstrate that she has the mettle to serve as commander in chief. She's being scrutinized by those on the political left who say Biden hasn't done enough to force Netanyahu to end the war and by Republicans looking to brand her as insufficient in her support for Israel.

Harris' last one-on-one engagement with Netanyahu was in March 2021, but she's taken part in more than 20 calls between Biden and Netanyahu.

The conservative Likud Party leader Netanyahu and centrist Democrat Biden have had ups-and-downs over the years. Netanyahu, in what will likely be his last White House meeting with Biden, reflected on the roughly 40 years they've known each other and thanked the president for his service.

"From a proud Jewish Zionist to a proud Irish American Zionist, I want to thank you for 50 years of public service and 50 years of support for the state of Israel," Netanyahu told Biden.

A U.S.-backed proposal to release remaining hostages in Gaza over three phases is something that would be a legacy-affirming achievement for Biden, who abandoned his reelection bid and endorsed Harris. It could also be a boon for Harris in her bid to succeed him.

Following their talks, Biden and Netanyahu met with the families of American hostages.

Jonathan Dekel-Chen, the father of hostage Sagui Dekel-Chen, said the families received an "ironclad commitment" from Biden and Netanyahu to get the hostages home. He said he was more hopeful than at anytime since Hamas released more than 100 hostages during a temporary cease-fire in November.

"There is more reason today than in any time since the last round of hostage releases that something can happen," he said.

Netanyahu is trying to navigate his own delicate political moment. He faces pressure from the families of hostages demanding a cease-fire agreement to bring their loved ones home and from far-right members of his governing coalition who demand he resist any deal that could keep Israeli forces from eliminating Hamas.

In his speech to a joint session of Congress on Wednesday, Netanyahu offered a robust defense of Israel's conduct during the war and lashed out against accusations by the International Criminal Court of Israeli war crimes. He made the case that Israel, in its fight against Iran-backed Hamas, was effectively keeping "Americans boots off the ground while protecting our shared interests in the Middle East."

"Remember this: Our enemies are your enemies," Netanyahu said. "Our fight, it's your fight. And our victory will be your victory."

Netanyahu also derided protesters who massed near the U.S. Capitol on Wednesday, calling them Iran's "useful idiots."

Harris on Thursday said she was outraged that some protesters tagged areas near the U.S. Capitol with pro-Hamas graffiti, expressed support for the militants and burned a U.S. flag at Union Station.

"Pro-Hamas graffiti and rhetoric is abhorrent and we must not tolerate it in our nation," Harris said in a statement. "I condemn the burning of the American flag. That flag is a symbol of our highest ideals as a nation and represents the promise of America. It should never be desecrated in that way."

Protesters massed near the White House on Thursday chanted, "Arrest Netanyahu," and brought an effigy of the prime minister with blood on its hands and wearing an orange jumpsuit. A small number of counterprotesters wore Israeli flags around their shoulders.

Martin Indyk, former US diplomat and author who devoted career to Middle East peace, dies at 73

By SUSAN HAIGH Associated Press

NORWICH, Conn. (AP) — Veteran diplomat Martin S. Indyk, an author and leader at prominent U.S. think tanks who devoted years to finding a path toward peace in the Middle East, died Thursday. He was 73.

His wife, Gahl Hodges Burt, confirmed in a phone call that he died from complications of esophageal cancer at the couple's home in New Fairfield, Connecticut.

The Council on Foreign Relations, where Indyk had been a distinguished fellow in U.S. and Middle East diplomacy since 2018, called him a "rare, trusted voice within an otherwise polarized debate on U.S. policy toward the Middle East."

A native of Australia, Indyk served as U.S. ambassador to Israel from 1995 to 1997 and from 2000 to 2001. He was special envoy for the Israeli-Palestinian negotiations during former President Barack Obama's administration, from 2013 to 2014.

When he resigned in 2014 to join The Brookings Institution think tank in Washington, it had symbolized the latest failed effort by the U.S. to forge an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal. He continued as Obama's special adviser on Mideast peace issues.

"Ambassador Indyk has invested decades of his extraordinary career to the mission of helping Israelis and Palestinians achieve a lasting peace. It's the cause of Martin's career, and I'm grateful for the wisdom and insight he's brought to our collective efforts," then-Secretary of State John Kerry said at the time, in a statement.

In a May 22 social media post on X, amid the continuing war in Gaza, Indyk urged Israelis to "wake up," warning them their government "is leading you into greater isolation and ruin" after a proposed peace deal was rejected. Indyk also called out Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in June on X, accusing him of playing "the martyr in a crisis he manufactured," after Netanyahu accused the U.S. of withholding weapons that Israel needed.

"Israel is at war on four fronts: with Hamas in Gaza; with Houthis in Yemen; with Hezbollah in Lebanon; and with Iran overseeing the operations," Indyk wrote on June 19. "What does Netanyahu do? Attack the United States based on a lie that he made up! The Speaker and Leader should withdraw his invitation to address Congress until he recants and apologizes."

Indyk also served as special assistant to former President Bill Clinton and senior director for Near East and South Asian affairs at the National Security Council from 1993 to 1995. He served as assistant secretary of state for Near Eastern affairs in the U.S. Department of State from 1997 to 2000.

Besides serving at Brookings and the Council on Foreign Relations, Indyk worked at the Center for Middle East Policy and was the founding executive director of The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. Indyk's successor at the Washington Institute called him "a true American success story."

"A native of Australia, he came to Washington to have an impact on the making of American Middle East Policy and that he surely did - as pioneering scholar, insightful analyst and remarkably effective policy entrepreneur," Robert Satloff said. "He was a visionary who not only founded an organization based on the idea that wise public policy is rooted in sound research, he embodied it."

Indyk wrote or co-wrote multiple books, including "Innocent Abroad: An Intimate Account of American Peace Diplomacy in the Middle East" and "Master of the Game: Henry Kissinger and the Art of Middle East Diplomacy," which was published in 2021.

Harris says she's ready to debate Trump and accuses him of 'backpedaling' from Sept. 10 faceoff

By JOSH BOAK and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris told reporters on Thursday that she's "ready to debate Donald Trump."

She accused him of "backpedaling" away from a previous agreement for a debate hosted by ABC News on Sept. 10.

"I think the voters deserve to see the split screen that exists in this race on the debate stage," she said after landing at Joint Base Andrews following a trip to Indiana and Texas.

The Sept. 10 debate was one of two debates that President Joe Biden and Trump had agreed on. The first one was hosted by CNN on June 27, but Biden has since dropped out of the race and endorsed Harris as his successor.

Trump has said he would prefer to shift the debate to Fox News, but he would be willing to face off with Harris more than once.

Harris did not respond to a question about having Fox News host a debate.

Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said in a statement late Thursday that debate arrangements "cannot be finalized until Democrats formally decide on their nominee."

"Democrats very well could still change their minds," Cheung said.

Alex Conant, a Republican consultant, said the debate could be "decisive." "It's the only time voters really tune in," he said.

This year's campaign has already shown the potential power of a debate. Biden's disastrous performance on June 27 revived concerns that he was too old for a second term. His support within the Democratic Party crumbled, and he ended his reelection bid on Sunday.

Video game performers will go on strike over artificial intelligence concerns

By SARAH PARVINI AP Technology Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollywood's video game performers announced they would go on strike Thursday, throwing part of the entertainment industry into another work stoppage after talks for a new contract with major game studios broke down over artificial intelligence protections.

The strike — the second for video game voice actors and motion capture performers under the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists — will begin at 12:01 a.m. Friday. The move comes after nearly two years of negotiations with gaming giants, including divisions of Activision, Warner Bros. and Walt Disney Co., over a new interactive media agreement.

SAG-AFTRA negotiators say gains have been made over wages and job safety in the video game contract, but that the two sides remained split over the regulation of generative AI. A spokesperson for the video game producers, Audrey Cooling, said the studios offered AI protections, but SAG-AFTRA's negotiating committee said that the studios' definition of who constitutes a "performer" is key to understanding the issue of who would be protected.

"The industry has told us point blank that they do not necessarily consider everyone who is rendering movement performance to be a performer that is covered by the collective bargaining agreement," SAG-AFTRA Chief Contracts Officer Ray Rodriguez said at a news conference Thursday afternoon. He said some physical performances are being treated as "data."

Without guardrails, game companies could train AI to replicate an actor's voice, or create a digital replica of their likeness without consent or fair compensation, the union said.

"We strike as a matter of last resort. We have given this process absolutely as much time as we responsibly can," Rodriguez told reporters. "We have exhausted the other possibilities, and that is why we're doing it now."

Cooling said the companies' offer "extends meaningful AI protections."

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"We are disappointed the union has chosen to walk away when we are so close to a deal, and we remain prepared to resume negotiations," she said.

Andi Norris, an actor and member of the union's negotiating committee, said that those who do stunt work or creature performances would still be at risk under the game companies' offer.

"The performers who bring their body of work to these games create a whole variety of characters, and all of that work must be covered. Their proposal would carve out anything that doesn't look and sound identical to me as I sit here, when, in truth, on any given week I am a zombie, I am a soldier, I am a zombie soldier," Norris said. "We cannot and will not accept that a stunt or movement performer giving a full performance on stage next to a voice actor isn't a performer."

The global video game industry generates well over \$100 billion dollars in profit annually, according to game market forecaster Newzoo. The people who design and bring those games to life are the driving force behind that success, SAG-AFTRA said.

Members voted overwhelmingly last year to give leadership the authority to strike. Concerns about how movie studios will use AI helped fuel last year's film and television strikes by the union, which lasted four months.

The last interactive contract, which expired in November 2022, did not provide protections around AI but secured a bonus compensation structure for voice actors and performance capture artists after an 11-month strike that began in October 2016. That work stoppage marked the first major labor action from SAG-AFTRA following the merger of Hollywood's two largest actors unions in 2012.

The video game agreement covers more than 2,500 "off-camera (voiceover) performers, on-camera (motion capture, stunt) performers, stunt coordinators, singers, dancers, puppeteers, and background performers," according to the union.

Amid the tense interactive negotiations, SAG-AFTRA created a separate contract in February that covered independent and lower-budget video game projects. The tiered-budget independent interactive media agreement contains some of the protections on AI that video game industry titans have rejected. Games signed to an interim interactive media agreement, tiered-budget independent interactive agreement or interim interactive localization agreement are not part of the strike, the union said.

Kamala Harris: A Baptist with a Jewish husband and a faith that traces back to MLK and Gandhi

By DARREN SANDS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Black clergy who know Vice President Kamala Harris, now the frontrunner for the Democratic presidential nomination, marvel at the fusion of traditions and teachings that have molded her religious faith and social justice values.

A Baptist married to a Jewish man, she's inspired by the work of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., and influenced by the religious traditions of her mother's native India as well as the Black Church.

"She's had the best of two worlds," says her longtime pastor, the Rev. Amos Brown, who leads Third Baptist Church in San Francisco.

In interviews, religious leaders and theologians told The Associated Press that Harris' candidacy has special symbolic significance following President Joe Biden's departure from election campaign. Not only because she would be the nation's first female president, but she's a Black American with South Asian roots and her two cultures are intrinsically linked.

The clergy and scholars noted that the concept of nonviolent resistance, a critical strategy in the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, gained influence under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi in India, who was an inspiration for many decades to America's Black preachers and civil rights leaders. Gandhi was a Hindu who preached Hindu-Muslim unity.

"It may be through the Negroes that the unadulterated message of nonviolence will be delivered to the world," Gandhi said in 1935 to a visiting delegation led by prominent Black U.S. theologian Howard Thurman.

Those shared cultural links can be found in Harris' family history, too. Her maternal grandmother was a

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community organizer, and her grandfather P.V. Gopalan, was a civil servant who joined the resistance to win India's independence from Britain.

Harris' mother, Shyamala Gopalan, even met King as a graduate student at the University of California at Berkeley, where she participated in civil rights demonstrations.

"She was conscious of history, conscious of struggle, conscious of inequities. She was born with a sense of justice imprinted on her soul," Harris wrote of her mother in her 2019 book "The Truths We Hold."

The Black Church tradition also influenced Harris.

"The vice president has a strong Christian faith that she's talked about a lot," said Jamal Simmons, a pastor's son and Harris' former communications director. As a Democratic strategist, he has helped candidates make inroads with faith communities.

"She was raised in a Christian church, and attended Christian churches throughout her life, and I think that still influences her, her worldview and her ethical commitments," he said.

The Rev. Freddie D. Haynes III, a pastor in Dallas, first met Harris at Third Baptist in San Francisco, sparking their more than 30-year friendship.

Haynes – whose family has close ties to Third Baptist – was guest preaching at the time while visiting his mother. Harris, then the Alameda County district attorney, had just joined the congregation.

"She has always understood that Jesus and justice go together. So, it's not hard to see why she chose a church that has that kind of justice DNA," said Haynes, whose grandfather shaped Third Baptist's social justice identity as its pastor. Then his father carried it on during his short time in the pulpit.

Through the years, Haynes and Harris connected over their shared faith. Haynes said she admired his ability to blend Black Christian theology in the pulpit with the cadence and rhythm of hip-hop. It was Harris's commitment to serving the most vulnerable that impressed him.

"Her spirituality has been informed by a sense of justice for those who are othered, disadvantaged, and treated as second-class citizens," said Haynes, who leads Friendship-West Baptist Church in Dallas.

As a student at Howard University in Washington, D.C., Harris was immersed in a cultural environment influenced by deep faith. The fellowship and service she learned at her alma mater is key to understanding the spirituality driving her sense of purpose, said Matthew Watley, pastor of nearby Kingdom Fellowship AME, one of the fastest growing churches in America.

Watley said Howard's commitment to service through religious passion and academic prowess never leaves its students. Several of Harris' friends, including a line sister in the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc., worship at Kingdom Fellowship, where Harris has attended twice in recent years.

Joshua DuBois, former head of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, said because of the influence of Eastern and Western cultural and religious traditions, Harris exudes a kind of ecumenism that makes her candidacy appealing to an array of religious voters.

"I think that presidents are grounded in their faith and inspired by their faith in numerous ways. It's the wellspring that they draw from," said DuBois, who worked under former President Barack Obama's administration. "When you know the world is going mad how do you connect to something larger than yourself?"

"I also think faith can help you with prioritization," he added. "Often times you can only focus on one thing as president and you face the question: Who needs you the most? I think that is certainly how Jesus walked. That's how Gandhi walked."

Black women, including clergy and activists who have not stopped organizing and praying since the COVID-19 pandemic, are quickly embracing Harris.

The Rev. Traci Blackmon, who joined 4,000 Black clergy on a recent pro-Harris call, said the outpouring of support for her is connected to the anticipated ugliness and opposition she is bound to face in her sprint against former President Donald Trump.

"She should be president because she's equipped, prepared and the best candidate for the job," said Blackmon, a St. Louis-based United Church of Christ minister, who spoke to the AP as Harris gathered delegate support.

The call was organized by the Black Church PAC, co-founded by the Rev. Michael McBride, a longtime

Harris supporter and pastor of The Way Christian Center in Berkeley. McBride told the AP that he was still in the pulpit on Sunday when Biden withdrew his candidacy. After the benediction, McBride said, one of the church mothers stood up, shared that news, and asked, in effect, "What do we do now?"

McBride and many other Black pastors who have been calling for an end to the Israel-Hamas war will be looking to Harris for leadership that would bring about peace. Brown, her own pastor, was among the Black clergy who visited the White House in recent months to appeal to the Biden administration.

"To me it's a matter of peace and justice," Brown said.

On Sunday, after Harris was endorsed by Biden, she sought out Brown with an evening phone call, about an hour before the AP reached him at his home in San Francisco.

"I'm calling my pastor," Harris said in her typical greeting, referring to the man that staffers in her office are instructed to get to know during their first week on the job.

She wanted her pastor to pray, and pray Brown did, that Harris "would be the quintessential instrument to bring healing, hope and wholeness" to the United States of America.

Fast-moving wildfire in the Canadian Rockies ravages the picturesque resort town of Jasper

GRANDE PRAIRIE, Alberta (AP) — A fast-moving wildfire in the Canadian Rockies that had prompted 25,000 people to flee roared into the near-deserted town of Jasper overnight with flames higher than treetops, devastating up to half of its structures, officials said Thursday.

There were no immediate reports of injuries, following a mass evacuation of the picturesque resort and a neighboring national park earlier in the week, but Jasper Mayor Richard Ireland said in a letter on the town's website that the wildfire "ravaged our beloved community."

"The destruction and loss that many of you are facing and feeling is beyond description and comprehension, my deepest sympathies go out to each of you," he said.

Danielle Smith, the premier of Alberta province, said from 30% to 50% of the town's structures are potentially damaged or destroyed, saying "that's going to be a significant rebuild and significant displacement."

Smith teared up talking about the beauty of Jasper, noting that many families from the province regularly visit. A postcard-perfect mountain town, Jasper is famous for hiking, skiing, kayaking and biking. It is also home to dozens of species such as elk, mountain goats, cougars, lynx, black bears and grizzly bears.

"We share the sense of loss with all who live in town," Smith said at a news conference in Edmonton, Alberta, while pledging her government's support for the community to rebuild.

Parks Canada officials later said all critical infrastructure was protected including the hospital, schools and the wastewater treatment plant. They said the most significant structural damage is concentrated on the west side of town. Some bridges around town and throughout the park were damaged.

Jasper and the neighboring Jasper National Park had been menaced by fires from both the north and south, and the town's 5,000 full-time residents — along with 20,000 visitors -- fled on short notice late Monday and Tuesday when the fires flared up.

One of the fires raced into the southern edge of the community Wednesday evening as firefighters tried to limit the damage.

Alberta Public Safety Minister Mike Ellis said a wind gust moved the wildfire about 5 kilometers (about 3 miles) in probably less than 30 minutes toward the town with a wall of fire that he estimated was 100 meters high.

"People need to picture what those wildfire folks were experiencing at that time. Any firefighter will tell you there is little to nothing you can do when a wall of fire like that is coming at you," Ellis said. "Nobody anticipated the fire to come so fast, so large."

Pierre Martel, director of fire management at Parks Canada, said lightning, winds and drought made the fire grow rapidly on Monday and that flames were above the treetops when it entered the town Wednesday.

"It's just a monster at that point. There are no tools we have in our tool box to deal with that at that point. You get out of the way, you retreat," he said.

Parks Canada said in a post on X that there had been “no reported injuries,” adding that “Approximately 25,000 people were safely evacuated from the town of Jasper and Jasper National Park. All residents, visitors and responders are safe.”

Annelies Lager, who has owned and lived in the Austrian Haven B&B for 30 years, said she’s waiting to hear if it’s been destroyed but isn’t optimistic because all the houses nearby are gone. She said she fled with her 13 cats and dog.

“I have no clue where I go now. Heaven or hell. It was my life. You can imagine how much work it was,” she said. “I’m think I’m in shock.”

She said relatives including her daughter and son-in-law had their homes destroyed. “It was the heat that dried everything out. And now the town is gone,” she said.

Lager was sheltering with a kind stranger in Valemount, British Columbia, but said she eventually will need to find new homes for her family members and “for my critters.”

“I’m a very tough women. Whatever happens I start again even though I’m 82 years old,” she said.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said his administration has approved Alberta’s request for federal assistance, including military resources.

Jasper National Park is considered a national treasure. The United Nations designated the parks that make up the Canadian Rockies, including Jasper, a World Heritage Site in 1984 for its striking mountain landscape.

Alberta has been baking under scorching temperatures that have already forced another 7,500 people out of remote communities. About 176 wildfires were burning across the province, including 54 that are burning out of control.

Alberta Forestry and Parks Minister Todd Loewen said many of the fires are caused by lightning, and Alberta Wildfire spokesperson Christie Tucker said firefighters expect winds will raise the danger.

Tucker said hundreds firefighters from Australia, Mexico, New Zealand and South Africa are arriving to help fight the wildfires throughout the province.

A record number of wildfires in 2023 forced more than 235,000 people across Canada to evacuate and sent thick smoke into parts of the U.S., leading to hazy skies and health advisories in multiple U.S. cities.

Newsom orders California state agencies to start clearing homeless encampments

By TRẦN NGUYỄN Associated Press

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom ordered state agencies Thursday to start removing homeless encampments on state land in his boldest action yet following a Supreme Court ruling allowing cities to enforce bans on sleeping outside in public spaces.

This executive order directs state agencies “to move urgently to address dangerous encampments while supporting and assisting the individuals living in them.” It also provides guidance for cities and counties to do the same, which applies pressure on them, though they are not legally bound to the order.

California is home to roughly one-third of the nation’s population of homeless people, a problem that has dogged Newsom since he took office. There are thousands of tents and makeshift shelters across the state that line freeways, and fill parking lots and public parks.

Under Newsom’s direction, state agencies — including state parks and the department of transportation — would be required to prioritize clearing encampments that pose safety risks, such as those along waterways. Officials should give “reasonable” advance notice to homeless people, offer to connect them to local services and help store their belongings for at least 60 days. Local cities and counties are urged to adopt similar protocols.

Last month the U.S. Supreme Court overturned a lower court ruling that said governments could not force people to leave encampments if there weren’t any shelter beds available. The case was the most significant on the problem to come before the high court in decades. Cities across the country have been wrestling with the politically complicated task of how to deal with a rising number of people without a

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permanent place to live and public frustration over related health and safety issues.

Newsom's administration wrote in support of cities' arguments that previous rulings, including one that barred San Francisco from clearing encampments, have prevented the state from solving a critical problem.

"There are simply no more excuses. It's time for everyone to do their part," Newsom said in a statement Thursday.

Newsom's decision garnered praise from some local elected officials and business groups, who said they were left with no options to address homeless encampments before the Supreme Court's ruling. San Francisco Mayor London Breed recently said the city will start an "aggressive" campaign to clear encampments across the city in August. Her office noted that the governor's order does not affect the city's operations.

"I applaud Governor Newsom's emphasis on urgency," Kathryn Barger, a member of the Los Angeles County Board of Supervisors said in a statement. "He rightfully points out that local government remains at the helm of homeless encampment removals. Cities have an obligation to develop housing and shelter solutions in tandem with support services provided by County government."

Even Republican lawmakers, who have repeatedly blasted Newsom over his handling of the crisis, are rallying behind the order Thursday.

"It's about damn time! Letting people live and die on the streets or in our parks is unsafe and unsanitary," Senate Minority Leader Brian Jones said in a statement. He added, "I am cautiously optimistic that the governor has finally taken note of the urgency of this problem, albeit many years later than needed."

Homeless people and advocates say the sweeps are cruel and a waste of taxpayer money. They say the answer is more housing, not crackdowns.

"You get your highway off-ramp clean for a moment only," Democratic Assemblymember Alex Lee said on social media. "Without meaningful services and housing, all sweeps do is making a prominent inequality less visible."

While Newsom cannot order local authorities to act, his administration can apply pressure by withholding money for counties and cities. In 2022, he threatened to withhold \$1 billion in homelessness spending from local governments over the lack of progress.

Newsom touted that his administration has spent roughly \$24 billion cleaning up streets and housing people but acknowledged the persistent issue. Newsom's administration has also come under fire recently after a state audit found that the state didn't consistently track whether the huge amount of public money spent on this actually improved the situation.

Earlier this year, Newsom threw all of his political weight behind a ballot measure to allow the state to borrow nearly \$6.4 billion to build 4,350 housing units, which passed with a razor-thin margin.

The order comes as Republicans have stepped up their criticisms of Vice President Kamala Harris — a former California district attorney, attorney general and senator who just launched her presidential campaign. Harris entered the race over the weekend after President Joe Biden's announced that he would not seek reelection.

Newsom himself has presidential ambitions, though he's said he wouldn't run against Harris or Biden. He has long been a top Biden campaign surrogate.

The timing of the executive order is "curious" given recent developments in the 2024 presidential race, California political analyst Brian Sobel said. He doubts though that Newsom's move would have much impact on Harris' campaign.

"Harris' problem isn't in California, because California is a done deal," he said. "Where she needs to do well on issues like this are in swing states."

Rather, the order is a logical step for Newsom, who called himself the state's "homeless czar," said Wesley Hussey, a political science professor at California State University, Sacramento.

"I don't think it's being motivated by the presidential race as much as it's definitely something that Newsom cared a lot about," Hussey said. "If you're going to put it in a political context of the election, this isn't going to magically fix the problem."

Prosecutors urge judge not to toss out Trump's hush money conviction, pushing back on immunity claim

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Prosecutors are urging a judge to uphold Donald Trump's historic hush money conviction, arguing in court papers made public Thursday that the verdict should stand despite the Supreme Court's recent ruling on presidential immunity.

The Manhattan district attorney's office said in a court filing that the high court's opinion "has no bearing" on the hush money case because it involves unofficial acts for which the former president is not immune.

"This case involved evidence of defendant's personal conduct, not his official acts," prosecutors wrote in a 66-page filing. They contend there is "no basis for disturbing the jury's verdict."

The Republican presidential nominee is trying to get the verdict — and even the indictment — tossed out because of the Supreme Court's July 1 decision. The ruling curbs prosecutions of ex-presidents for official acts and restricts prosecutors from pointing to official acts as evidence that a commander in chief's unofficial actions were illegal.

Trump's lawyers have argued that prosecutors rushed to trial instead of waiting for the Supreme Court's presidential immunity decision, and that the trial was "tainted" by evidence that should not have been allowed under the high court's ruling, such as testimony from some Trump White House staffers and tweets he sent while president in 2018.

Prosecutors countered that the Supreme Court ruling doesn't apply to the evidence in question, and that regardless, it's "only a sliver of the mountains of testimony and documentary proof" that the jury considered before reaching its verdict May 30.

In a letter Thursday to trial Judge Juan M. Merchan, Trump lawyer Todd Blanche said the prosecution filing contains "several legal and factual misrepresentations," and asked for permission to file a 30-page response next week.

The Supreme Court ruled about a month after the jury found Trump guilty of falsifying business records to conceal a deal to pay off porn actor Stormy Daniels shortly before the 2016 election. At the time, she was considering going public with a story of a sexual encounter with Trump a decade earlier.

He denies her claim, maintains he did nothing wrong and says the case is politically motivated. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is a Democrat.

Trump was a private citizen — campaigning for president, but neither elected nor sworn in — when Cohen paid Daniels. But Trump was president when Cohen was reimbursed, and Cohen testified that they discussed the repayment arrangement in the Oval Office.

Prosecutors say the reimbursements to Cohen were misleadingly logged as legal expenses in Trump's company records.

Merchan is due to rule Sept. 6 on Trump's request to overturn the verdict and dismiss the indictment. Trump's sentencing is set for Sept. 18, if the verdict stands.

The sentencing, which carries the potential for anything from probation to up to four years in prison, was initially set for mid-July. But within hours of the Supreme Court's ruling, Trump's lawyers persuaded Merchan to delay it.

The Supreme Court did not define what constitutes an official act, leaving that matter to lower courts. Indeed, even the conservative justices responsible for the majority opinion differed about what is proper for jurors to hear about a president's conduct.

In a separate concurring opinion, Justice Amy Coney Barrett wrote that the Constitution does not require juries to be blinded "to the circumstances surrounding conduct for which presidents can be held liable" and suggested that it would needlessly "hamstring" a prosecutor's case to prohibit any mention of an official act in question.

Before the Supreme Court ruling, Trump's lawyers brought up presidential immunity in a failed bid last year to get the hush money case moved from state court to federal court. In rejecting the move, U.S. District Judge Alvin Hellerstein wrote that "hush money paid to an adult film star is not related to a presi-

dent's official acts."

Later, Trump's lawyers beseeched Merchan to hold off the hush money trial until the Supreme Court ruled on his immunity claim, which arose from a separate prosecution — the Washington, D.C., federal criminal case pertaining to Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 presidential election loss. But Merchan ruled that they raised the issue too late because it came well after a deadline for such pretrial requests.

Trump's lawyers never raised presidential immunity as a defense in the hush money trial, but they tried unsuccessfully to prevent prosecutors from showing the jury evidence from his time in office. As the trial got underway in April, Merchan balked at the idea that prosecutors be prohibited from showing jurors tweets that Trump had voluntarily sent out to millions of followers.

Trump's lawyers argue that presidential immunity should have ruled out some testimony from former White House communications director Hope Hicks and another aide, as well as documents including his 2018 financial disclosure.

Prosecutors countered that the aides' testimony — including Hicks' account of conversations with Trump about news coverage — concerned Trump's personal matters or described his work practices so generally that immunity doesn't apply. The financial disclosure form fell within allowances for using public records, they argued.

As for Trump's tweets, his lawyers contend they were official acts: a president's communications to Americans about something pertinent to his credibility as their leader.

Prosecutors maintained otherwise in the new filing.

"Defendant's tweets conveying his personal opinion about his private attorney do not bear any conceivable relationship to any official duty of the presidency," they wrote.

House Republicans vote to rebuke Kamala Harris over administration's handling of border policy

By STEPHEN GROVES Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans are moving quickly to emphasize Vice President Kamala Harris' role in the Biden administration's handling of the U.S. border with Mexico, passing a resolution Thursday that condemns her performance in the job.

The resolution, which is purely symbolic, echoes an attack line that Republican Donald Trump has taken against Harris since she rose to become the likely Democratic presidential nominee. All House Republicans and six Democrats in tough reelection races voted for the resolution.

President Joe Biden tasked Harris early in his administration with addressing the root causes of migration. Border crossings eventually became a major political liability for Biden when they reached historic levels. Since June, when Biden announced significant restrictions on asylum applications at the border, arrests for illegal crossings have fallen.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said migrant encounters between U.S. ports of entry have dropped more than 55% and are now lower on average than they were at the end of Trump's term.

It remains to be seen whether the border will become a political liability for Harris as it was for Biden. But Republicans say Harris did not do enough to clamp down on illegal immigration in a role they characterized as "border czar."

"The result of her inaction has been record high illegal crossings, overwhelmed communities, and an evisceration of the rule of law," said House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La.

Trump, if elected president, has pledged deport millions of people and has made anti-immigration rhetoric a central focus of his campaign.

The House vote showed some early signs of cracks in the confidence that Democrats have so far bestowed on Harris.

The six Democrats who voted for the resolution — Reps. Yadira Caraveo of Colorado, Henry Cuellar of Texas, Don Davis of North Carolina, Jared Golden of Maine, Mary Peltola of Alaska and Marie Gluesenkamp Perez of Washington state — were all members from battleground districts and had previously been critical

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of Biden on the border. The measure called for "elected officials who understand the gravity of the crisis at the border and who will execute the policies to fix the border crisis."

"This isn't about any one person — it's about our border not being secure and fentanyl destroying Alaska communities," Peltola said in a statement.

Caraveo endorsed Harris this week, but the congresswoman emphasized her own independence in a statement after the vote, saying she was sent to Washington to be "an independent voice who will stand up to party leaders when they're wrong."

As vice president, Harris was tasked with overseeing diplomatic efforts to deal with issues spurring migration in the Northern Triangle countries of El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, as well as pressing them to strengthen enforcement on their own borders. The Biden administration wanted to develop and put in place a long-term strategy that gets at the root causes of migration from those countries.

Most House Democrats tried to defend how Harris has handled the job.

Democratic leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York said the resolution was "fake and fraudulent" and that Harris was never appointed "border czar," as the measure stated.

Rep. Pramila Jayapal of Washington state, who is the chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, said Harris "was narrowly tasked with developing agreements that could help bring government and private sector investments to those countries that are sending migrants to the United States."

Jayapal said Harris successfully recruited "billions" of dollars in investments for Mexico, Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras.

Democrats also repeatedly pointed out that Republicans rejected a border and immigration deal that the White House negotiated with Senate GOP leadership earlier this year.

Democratic Rep. Tom Suozzi of New York, who won a special election this year on a campaign that focused on border security, said Harris has some potential strengths on the issue. He said Harris' relationship with Mexico's president-elect, Claudia Sheinbaum, and Harris' past as a prosecutor could prove to be assets when it comes to the border.

"I think now she has to emphasize the fact that she recognizes that the southern border is a problem," Suozzi said.

Video game actors are going on strike. Here's why

SARAH PARVINI AP Technology Writer

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Hollywood's video game performers voted to go on strike Thursday after negotiations with game industry giants that began nearly two years ago came to a halt over artificial intelligence protections.

Leaders of the Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists have billed the issues behind the labor dispute — and AI in particular — as an existential crisis for performers. Game voice actors and motion capture artists' likenesses, they say, could be replicated by AI and used without their consent and without fair compensation.

The union says the unregulated use of AI poses "an equal or even greater threat" to performers in the video game industry than it does in film and television because the capacity to cheaply and easily create convincing digital replicas of performers' voices is widely available.

"We're not going to consent to a contract that allows companies to abuse AI to the detriment of our members. Enough is enough. When these companies get serious about offering an agreement our members can live — and work — with, we will be here, ready to negotiate," SAG-AFTRA President Fran Drescher said in a statement Wednesday. "

Here are five things to know about the strike, which starts at 12:01 a.m. Friday:

Who is covered under the contract?

The agreement covers more than 2,500 "off-camera voiceover performers, on-camera (motion capture, stunt) performers, stunt coordinators, singers, dancers, puppeteers, and background performers," according to SAG-AFTRA.

Which game companies are involved?

The union had been negotiating with an industry bargaining group consisting of signatory video game companies, including divisions of Activision and Electronic Arts. Those companies are Activision Productions; Blindlight; Disney Character Voices; Electronic Arts; Productions Inc.; Formosa Interactive; Insomniac Games; Take 2 Productions; VoiceWorks Productions; and WB Games.

The game companies have said that they were negotiating in good faith and had reached tentative agreements "on the vast majority of proposals."

Not the first time video game actors have gone on strike

Wednesday's labor action marks the second time SAG-AFTRA's video game performers have gone on strike. Their first work stoppage, in October 2016, began after more than one year of negotiations failed. The union and video game companies reached a tentative deal 11 months later, in September 2017. At the time, the strike — which helped secure a bonus compensation structure for voice actors and performance capture artists — was the longest in the union's history, following the merger of Hollywood's two largest actors unions in 2012.

What are performers asking for?

SAG-AFTRA has said that some of the key issues include securing wages that keep up with inflation, protections around "exploitative uses" of artificial intelligence and safety precautions that account for the strain of physical performances as well as vocal stress. Union negotiators told The Associated Press that they had made gains in bargaining over wages and job safety, but that the game studios refused to "provide an equal level of protection from the dangers of AI for all our members."

The signatory companies refused to extend AI protections to on-camera performers, the union said.

"They're saying we'll protect voiceover performers, but we won't protect anybody else," Duncan Crabtree-Ireland, SAG-AFTRA's executive director, said in an interview last month. "The bottom line is if you have performers working for you, helping create the content that's in your game, whether it's voice content, whether it's stunt work, whether it's motion work...all of those performers deserve to have their right to have informed consent and fair compensation for the use of their image, their likeness or voice, their performance. It's that simple."

AI is the sticking point

Although the unchecked use of artificial intelligence has been a sticking point in talks, voice actors and members of the union negotiating committee have said they are not anti-AI. The performers are worried, however, that unchecked use of AI could provide game makers with a means to displace them — by training an AI to replicate an actor's voice, or to create a digital replica of their likeness without consent.

Some also argue that AI could also strip less experienced actors of the chance to land smaller background roles, such as non-player characters, where they typically cut their teeth before landing larger roles. The unchecked use of AI, performers say, could also lead to ethical issues if their voices or likenesses are used to create content that they do not morally agree with.

SAG-AFTRA created a separate contract in February that covered indie and lower-budget video game projects. The tiered-budget independent interactive media agreement contains some of the protections on AI that video game industry bargaining group rejected.

The union also announced a side deal with AI voice company Replica Studios in January that enables major studios to work with unionized actors to create and license a digital replica of their voice. It also sets terms that allow performers to opt out of having their voices used in perpetuity.

Argentina coach slams chaotic 'scandal' at Olympic soccer match vs Morocco

By JAMES ROBSON AP Soccer Writer

The head of Argentina's soccer federation said the chaotic ending to its Olympic soccer match against Morocco on Wednesday "makes no sense," and coach Javier Mascherano called the scene "a scandal."

The opening match of the men's soccer tournament was suspended for nearly two hours during added

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time after Morocco fans invaded the field and threw bottles in protest of a late goal by Argentina. The goal was later overturned by the video assistant referee, and Argentina lost 2-1.

"What happened on the field was a scandal. This isn't a neighborhood tournament, these are the Olympic Games," Mascherano said.

Paris organizers said they were trying to "understand the causes and identify appropriate actions" after the match in Saint-Etienne. Argentina's soccer federation said it issued a formal protest Wednesday to world governing body FIFA and would do "what is necessary" to guarantee the safety of players.

"Having to wait almost two hours in the dressing room, after Morocco fans entering the pitch, the violence that the Argentina delegation suffered, our players having to warm up again and continue to play a match that should have been suspended by the main referee, is really something that makes no sense and that goes against the competition rules," Argentina Football Association president Claudio Tapia said.

The Argentina team also said its training base was robbed before the game, with a watch belonging to midfielder Thiago Almada among the items taken.

Meanwhile, Argentine President Javier Milei arrived Thursday in Paris, his office said, and is expected to meet French President Emmanuel Macron after tensions escalated between their countries over the Argentine soccer team's derogatory post-match chants about French players at Copa America.

Morocco fans rushed the field to protest Cristian Medina's goal in the 16th minute of added time at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard, which appeared to tie the game at 2. Bottles also were thrown from the crowd and, in frenzied scenes, security tackled fans on the field.

"Some of the fans thought it was the end of the match and decided to invade the pitch," Thomas Colomb, the deputy director of security for Paris organizers, said Thursday. "The atmosphere was festive. At no time was there any security risk for players or spectators. Within minutes of the final whistle, a security bubble formed around the athletes."

There were images of Argentina players flinching when what appeared to be a flare was thrown onto the field.

"I can understand why this might have been worrying for Argentine athletes," said Bruno Le Ray, the organizing committee's security director. "Stade Geoffroy-Guichard is known for having no barriers between the stands and the pitch. To our knowledge, no firecrackers were fired at any time. It's definitely an incident, but not in the security sense."

Morocco defender Achraf Hakimi wrote on X: "I deplore the attitude of certain supporters during the match, which tarnished the image of our loyal fans. Such behavior has no place in football."

In the confusion, it was believed the final whistle had been blown when players headed to the locker room and fans were told to leave the stadium. FIFA's official website declared the final score 2-2.

But it later emerged that the game had been suspended with just minutes of play remaining and that Medina's goal was being reviewed.

The players re-emerged to warm up in an empty stadium after about two hours and referee Glenn Nyberg confirmed he was reviewing video of the goal on the touchline monitor. He then confirmed it would be overturned for offside.

Morocco held on for the win as the teams played out the final three minutes.

"The game was suspended because of security. At no moment did they talk to us about any revision (of the play)," Mascherano said.

"Obviously it's confusing, but we have to move forward. It's already happened, it's over. We have to focus on the two games (remaining). Save up the anger and let it all out in the coming games."

Two-time gold medalist Argentina was one of the pretournament favorites and was aiming for more hardware after winning the World Cup in 2022 and back-to-back Copa Americas.

On Saturday, Morocco is scheduled to face Ukraine at Stade Geoffroy-Guichard.

"We'll make sure we reinforce security by adding barriers or private security," Le Ray said.

Flavor Flav is soaking up his 1st Olympic experience cheering on the US water polo teams

By JAY COHEN AP Sports Writer

PARIS (AP) — Flavor Flav stopped for hugs, handshakes and high-fives as he made his way around the Team USA House at the Paris Games on Thursday.

He never stopped smiling.

"This is quite an experience for me right now, you know, because the only time I've ever seen the Olympics was on TV," Flav said. "You know what I'm saying? But I always wanted to see what it felt like being there. So now I got the opportunity to be here. It's the best."

Flav, a founding member of the hip-hop group Public Enemy, is in Paris as part of his duties as the official hype man for USA Water Polo — a partnership that came together after he connected with U.S. captain Maggie Steffens on Instagram in May.

The 65-year-old Flav is embracing his new responsibilities with his usual brand of seemingly boundless enthusiasm.

"I'm so ready, man. ... I'm so hype right now about this sport," said Flav, wearing a custom USA Water Polo clock around his neck. "I wish I was playing it. I'm hyping myself up right now to ask them to let me on the team."

The road to Flav's Olympic debut began when Steffens posted on Instagram about her experiences with the U.S. women's program, which has won an unprecedented three straight gold medals going into Paris.

While paying tribute to her teammates and expressing her love for her grueling sport, Steffens also highlighted the constant financial struggle for most Olympic athletes. Flav's manager brought the issue to his attention, and he promised his assistance in a comment on Steffens' post.

"As a girl dad and supporter of all women's sports - imma personally sponsor you my girl,,, whatever you need. And imma sponsor the whole team," Flav wrote.

That exchange turned into a unique sponsorship deal between Flav — whose legal name is William Jonathan Drayton Jr. — and USA Water Polo. Flav made an undisclosed financial contribution to the women's program as part of the five-year agreement, and he also agreed to collaborate on social media to help bring attention to the small sport.

He is planning to attend the Olympic openers for the U.S. women and men. The women face Greece on Saturday, and the men play Italy on Sunday.

Flav, who was inducted into the Rock and Roll Hall of Fame with Public Enemy in 2013, prepped for his Paris experience by attending two women's games, even joining the TV broadcast. He also jumped into the pool with the women's team.

"I tried it. I got to try it to see what it feels like," Flav told the AP. "And boy, I was in the water with the girls for like seven minutes. And I was treading water for seven minutes. And I'm not going to lie. But that was like the hardest seven minutes in my life."

Flav said he "got lucky" and connected on two goals against Ashleigh Johnson — widely considered the best goaltender in the world — though he felt as if she might have let him score.

The significance of the moment was not lost on Johnson, the first black woman to play water polo for the U.S. Olympic team.

"We saw the video come out (on social media). ... It was so cool to see it," Johnson said. "But I read through the comments and I see people asking questions about water polo and people of color wanting to start playing. And that's a different community than I've seen talk about our sport in the way they were talking about it than I have like this whole time I've been on this team."

That is something Flav hopes to see more of as he continues to cheer on the U.S. teams.

"When it comes down to water polo ... it's not really about people of color. It's about people that love to play it," he said. "Water polo is for all races, all colors of people."

Biden signs bill strengthening oversight of crisis-plagued US Bureau of Prisons after AP reporting

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden signed into law on Thursday a bill strengthening oversight of the crisis-plagued federal Bureau of Prisons after reporting by The Associated Press exposed systemic corruption, failures and abuse in the federal prison system.

The Federal Prison Oversight Act, which passed the Senate on July 10 and the House in May, establishes an independent ombudsman to field and investigate complaints in the wake of sexual assaults and other criminal misconduct by staff, chronic understaffing, escapes and high-profile deaths.

It also requires that the Justice Department's inspector general conduct risk-based inspections of all 122 federal prison facilities, provide recommendations to address deficiencies and assign each facility a risk score. Higher-risk facilities would then receive more frequent inspections.

Bureau of Prisons Director Colette Peters lauded the bill as she testifying before Congress this week. But, she told the House Judiciary Subcommittee on Crime and Federal Government Surveillance that the agency will need tens of millions of dollars in additional funding "to effectively respond to the additional oversight and make that meaningful, long-lasting change."

Sen. Jon Ossoff, D-Ga., introduced the oversight bill in 2022 while leading an investigation of the Bureau of Prisons as chair of the Senate Homeland Security Committee's subcommittee on investigations.

Ossoff and the bill's two other sponsors, Judiciary Committee Chair Sen. Dick Durbin, D-Ill., and Sens. Mike Braun, R-Ind., launched the Senate Bipartisan Prison Policy Working Group in February 2022 amid turmoil at the Bureau of Prisons, much of it uncovered by AP reporting. Reps. Kelly Armstrong, R-N.D., and Lucy McBath, D-Ga., backed the House version of the bill.

"The human rights crisis behind bars in the United States is a stain on America's conscience," Ossoff said in a statement thanking the bill's other sponsors. "The United States Congress will no longer tolerate the ongoing and widespread abuse of those who are in Federal Bureau of Prisons' custody."

Under the legislation, an independent federal prison ombudsman would collect complaints via a secure hotline and online form and then investigate and report to the attorney general and Congress dangerous conditions affecting the health, safety, welfare and rights of inmates and staff.

Along with inspecting prison facilities, the legislation requires the Justice Department's inspector general to report any findings and recommendations to Congress and the public. The Bureau of Prisons would then need to respond with a corrective action plan within 60 days.

Last year, Inspector General Michael Horowitz launched an unannounced inspection program of federal prison facilities that identified critical shortcomings, including staff shortages in health and education programs, crumbling infrastructure, and moldy and rotten food being served to inmates.

The oversight bill "recognizes the importance of our inspection program," Horowitz said. "We look forward to working with Congress to expand its impact."

Peters said the bill "really enhances" what the inspector general has been doing, while also enabling the agency to collect data and spot problems more quickly.

"We'll be seeing more announced visits — more unannounced visits from the inspector general," Peters told the House subcommittee. "And then I think the ombudsman position is very powerful as well, for it to have a place where individuals can bring forward complaints and somebody is there to ensure that those complaints are asked and answered."

Biden signed a separate Ossoff bill into law in December 2022 requiring the Bureau of Prisons to fix broken surveillance cameras and install new ones.

An ongoing Associated Press investigation has uncovered deep, previously unreported flaws within the Bureau of Prisons, the Justice Department's largest law enforcement agency with more than 30,000 employees, 158,000 inmates and an annual budget of about \$8 billion.

AP reporting has revealed dozens of escapes, chronic violence, deaths and severe staffing shortages that have hampered responses to emergencies, including inmate assaults and suicides.

In April, the Bureau of Prisons said it was closing its women's prison in Dublin, California, known as the "rape club," giving up on attempts to reform the facility after an AP investigation exposed rampant staff-on-inmate sexual abuse.

Last year, two high-profile prisoners were attacked and another killed himself in federal prisons.

Former Minneapolis police officer Derek Chauvin was stabbed 22 times by a fellow prisoner last November at the Federal Correctional Institution in Tucson, Arizona. The assailant said he targeted Chauvin because of his notoriety for killing George Floyd, federal prosecutors said.

Disgraced former sports doctor Larry Nassar was stabbed in July 2023 at a federal penitentiary in Florida, and "Unabomber" Ted Kaczynski killed himself at a federal medical center in June 2023.

A neurological disorder stole her voice.

Jennifer Wexton takes it back on the House floor.

By DAN MERICA Associated Press

When Jennifer Wexton rose Thursday to speak on the House floor, something she has done countless times before, the congresswoman used a voice she thought was gone forever.

After a rare neurological disorder robbed her of her ability to speak clearly, Wexton has been given her voice back with the help of a powerful artificial intelligence program, allowing the Virginia Democrat to make a clone of her speaking voice using old recordings of speeches and appearances she made as a congresswoman. She used that program to deliver what is believed to be the first speech on the House floor ever given via a voice cloned by artificial intelligence.

"It was a special moment that I never imagined could happen. I cried happy tears when I first heard it," Wexton told The Associated Press in the first interview she's participated in since attaining her new voice.

Standing at a lectern on the floor, Wexton rose to commemorate Disability Pride Month, a time each July that aims to commemorate the Americans with Disabilities Act, the landmark 1990s civil rights law aimed at protecting Americans with disabilities. But her speech was also a symbol of her strength in the face of a debilitating disease.

"I used to be one of those people who hated the sound of my voice," she remarked from the floor. "When my ads came on TV, I would cringe and change the channel. But you truly don't know what you've got til it's gone, because hearing the new AI of my old voice for the first time was music to my ears. It was the most beautiful thing I had ever heard."

Wexton's voice now plays out of her iPad, propped up using a rainbow-colored floral case. During the interview at her dining room table in Leesburg, Virginia, the congresswoman typed out her thoughts, used a stylus to move the text around, hit play and then the AI program put that text into Wexton's voice. It's a lengthy process, so the AP provided Wexton with a few questions ahead of the interview to give the congresswoman time to type her answers.

Wexton was diagnosed with progressive supranuclear palsy in 2023, an aggressive neurological disorder that impacts many aspects of life, including speech. Sitting across from a credenza filled with photos marking the high points of her personal life - weddings, family trips, her children - the congresswoman called the diagnosis "cruel" for someone whose "entire professional life has been built around using my voice," from Virginia prosecutor to state Senator to member of Congress.

"A politician who can't do public speaking will be a former politician before too long. But this AI voice model has given me a new opportunity to have my voice heard and it reminds listeners that I am still me," Wexton told the AP.

The congresswoman, whose runaway win in 2018 signaled the success Democrats would have that year, initially announced a Parkinson's diagnosis in April 2023, striking an upbeat tone by telling supporters they were "welcome to empathize" with her, but not to "feel sorry for me." Her tone in September 2023 was vastly different: She described her PSP diagnosis as "Parkinson's on steroids" and said she would not seek reelection in 2024.

"This new diagnosis is a tough one. There is no 'getting better' with PSP. I'll continue treatment options

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to manage my symptoms, but they don't work as well with my condition as they do for Parkinson's," she said at the time.

The diagnosis has changed Wexton's personal and professional life. The congresswoman doesn't look like she once did. Her posture slumped, her movements less precise, her natural voice muted - all impacts of the disease. As it became more difficult for Wexton to use her voice, she turned to a traditional text-to-speech app that many people with speech disorders often use. The voice sounded more like a robot than a human, but Wexton used it to conduct interviews and give speeches.

"This is not a situation I would have chosen to find myself in," she said from the House floor. "I never thought that at my age and otherwise good health, something like PSP could, in the space of just over a year, rob me of my ability to speak, run or dance, and force me to stop doing the job that I love."

ElevenLabs, a start-up with one of the most widely used AI-powered voice cloning models, saw Wexton speak using the older technology. They contacted her office several weeks ago and Wexton's aides provided the company with several recordings, mostly speeches she had given as a member of Congress.

"Our technology gives individuals who have lost their voice the ability to speak as they once did, with the emotion and passion they feel, and we hoped to help the Congresswoman do just that," said Dustin Blank, Head of Partnerships at the company.

Wexton told AP she first used the cloned voice to speak with President Joe Biden in the Oval Office earlier this month when he signed the National Plan to End Parkinson's Act, a bill that Wexton called the "most consequential action we have taken in decades to combat Parkinson's and related diseases, like my PSP." A few days later, Wexton publicly debuted her cloned voice in a video, leading to an outpouring of support and thrusting the congresswoman into a debate over AI.

This is "not the way I thought I would be leaving Congress," she said. "I didn't anticipate being at the forefront of a debate over the future of AI."

Using AI-powered cloning to give Wexton her voice back is one of the positive applications of this technology. However, voice cloning has also been used nefariously, like defrauding people and pushing fake political messaging. The most notable of these instances was when an AI-generated robocall impersonating President Joe Biden urged voters ahead of the New Hampshire primary not to vote. The call was quickly reported and resulted in serious consequences for those behind it, but the incident raised serious questions about the future of this technology and the companies behind it.

Wexton, whose district is home to scores of data centers that power AI, harbors those questions, too. After she debuted her voice clone, Wexton jokingly texted a few friends the same message: "AI isn't entirely evil, just mostly."

Hany Farid, a professor and digital forensics expert at the University of California, Berkeley, said Wexton's example is the exception to the numerous nefarious uses for voice cloning technology.

"I found it really moving... and I am all for this application," he said. "But I just want to emphasize, just because there are these really beautiful stories... doesn't mean we should just ignore the pretty nasty things with these technologies."

One way to ensure the technology is being used for good, said Farid, is "better checks and balances" to ensure "people aren't doing nefarious things with your products." That includes content credentials that say how the audio was developed, storage of all audio created using the technology and know-your-customer rules that require voice cloning companies to know who is using their technology.

Wexton agrees more guardrails are needed. Her team of advisers has taken precautions to make sure her likeness is protected, from limiting access to the voice to only three people and tightening security on the program.

"It is humanizing and it is empowering. It can also be dangerous," she said. "I still believe that the dangerous potential of AI technology must be better understood and steps must be taken to prevent abuses of the technology like deepfakes from proliferating and part of that falls on lawmakers like us in Congress," she later added.

In 2019, Wexton won bipartisan approval for an amendment directing the National Science Foundation to research public awareness around deepfake videos generated by AI.

Wexton also said the technology isn't perfect. Because the audio used came from speeches and public events, it isn't great for regular conversation, often making everything sound "like some big proclamation." Her two college-aged sons, she said, don't like it for that reason and, she quipped, she doesn't use it to "ask my husband to please pass me the ketchup," displaying a sense of humor that she is known for on Capitol Hill.

"At the end of the day, it will never be me. But it is more me than I ever could have hoped I could hear again and for that, I am so grateful and excited," she said. "I plan to make the most of it."

For doctors like Jori Fleisher, the Director of Rush CurePSP Center of Care, that sentiment is why this kind of technology could be life-altering for those diagnosed with the rare neurological disorder.

Too often PSP patients lose their voices and have to rely on traditional speech-to-text programs to communicate, Fleisher said. But those programs use robotic voices that often sound nothing like the patients. Fleisher notes that people with "neurological diseases are already stigmatized," so speaking with a voice that sounds like a computer "perpetuates the stigma" and often leads them to withdraw from relationships and "worsens the social isolation that can be such a huge part of these conditions."

"To know of and already deeply respect Representative Wexton and then hear her speak so beautifully in her own voice, using her own words through this technology, it is giving me goosebumps now," she said, growing emotional. "It's so empowering."

The key, Fleisher added, is making this technology available to more people by encouraging patients in the early stages of PSP and other neurological disorders to "bank enough sounds from your own voice that it could be used later" and for insurance companies to cover this kind of treatment. Wexton said she tried to do this late last year through an Apple program, but her voice was already too impacted by the disease for their AI to use.

Wexton's new voice particularly helps in more emotional moments when hearing sentiment in her speech is significantly more powerful than a more robotic sound. When asked how Barbara Comstock, the Republican congresswoman Wexton has grown close to since defeating her in 2018, had helped support her since Wexton revealed her diagnosis, the Democrat grew emotional and said, "She has been so gracious."

"I was just thrilled for her," Comstock said, recalling when she first heard Wexton's AI voice. "Just great to hear she is getting her literal voice out there for others to see the power of the technology. ... I am getting teary thinking about it again."

After defeating Comstock in 2018, Wexton's future in Virginia politics was bright, with many in the state speculating she could seek higher office. Her diagnosis has taken that future away — her political career will end next year — but it has given Wexton a new resolve.

"I want to be a voice, even an AI voice, for Americans facing accessibility challenges and other disabilities because too often people only see us for that disability," Wexton said. "I hope that by continuing to do my job to the best of my ability, whether that means using a walker or a wheelchair to get to the House floor to vote or delivering my speeches through an AI-recreated version of my voice, that it can help show I am just as much me on the inside that I have always been."

Patty Mills has played his best ball for Australia. He's back to take on a stacked Olympic field

By KYLE HIGHTOWER AP Sports Writer

MARCQ-EN-BAROEUL, France (AP) — Patty Mills kept putting up shots after Australia finished a two-hour practice at a training facility not far from where it will open the Paris Olympics basketball tournament Saturday against Spain.

"OK, I'm good," Mills said after watching one last corner 3-pointer fall through the net.

Mills knows the value that comes with putting in a little extra time. At 35 years old and entering his fourth Olympics, he is one of the most decorated players in Australian men's basketball team history, having helped it capture its lone Olympic medal in 2021 when it won bronze in Tokyo.

Now he's back for likely his final Games, poised to steer his home country through what he acknowledged

is one of the toughest groups -- and overall fields -- in Olympic history.

"When you look down the line at the caliber of players that the countries are putting together, I'd probably say so, yes," Mills said Thursday.

The Paris Games is the realization of former NBA commissioner David Stern's dream to globalize the NBA. Of the 30 teams in the U.S. league, 27 will have players on the 12 teams competing in France over the next three weeks.

Australia has nine current or former NBA players, the third most of any team in this summer's field behind Canada (10) and the U.S. (12).

Mills, a former champion with the San Antonio Spurs who most recently played with Miami, is a free agent. He is joined by Josh Giddey (Chicago), Dyson Daniels (Atlanta), Josh Green (Charlotte), Joe Ingles (Minnesota), Dante Exum (Dallas), Jock Landale (Houston), Duop Reath (Portland) and Matthew Dellavedova (now playing in Australia).

They will be trying to make it out of Group A's so-called "group of death" featuring Canada (led by Shai Gilgeous-Alexander and Jamal Murray), Greece (with first-time Olympian Giannis Antetokounmpo) and Spain (currently second in the FIBA world rankings).

Australian coach Brian Goorjian, 71, has watched how much parity has grown in international play, first as a player and then as a coach with China and Japan, followed by multiple stints with Australia.

"This in my mind is the deepest competition that I've ever been affiliated with or around," Goorjian said.

But Goorjian's team has a not-so-secret weapon in Mills, who has played some of the best basketball of his career on the international stage. His averages of 20.7 points and 3.8 assists dwarf his NBA career average of 8.8 points and 2.2 assists.

"If I could put my thumb on it, I'll let you know. I'm still trying to figure that out," Mills said. "All I can say is that I take a lot of pride and passion playing for my country and being able to represent Australia the right way in what I believe and show the strength. ... I think it becomes more that just basketball when you put these colors on."

Australia won six of its eight exhibition games leading up to the Olympics. The others were a tie against Japan and a narrow loss to the U.S. that featured a furious comeback by the Aussies. The wins included handing Olympic gold medal contender Serbia its first loss this summer.

That and his team's overall preparation have given Mills the only barometer he needs to think Australia will again still be around when the tournament shifts back to Paris for the knockout stage.

"It's how connected we are collectively as a group," Mills said. "I think that the team that we put together, the pieces of the puzzle to be able to put a hell of a team together. We get along together both on and off the court and that's hard to do in a short period of time."

2 years after Ukrainian POW deaths, survivors and leaked UN analysis point to Russia as the culprit

By SUSIE BLANN and HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The former prisoners of war still puzzle over the strange events leading up to the night now seared into their memories, when an explosion ripped through the Russian-controlled Olenivka prison barracks and killed so many comrades two years ago.

Among the survivors: Kyrylo Masalitin, whose months in captivity and long beard age him beyond his 30 years. Arsen Dmytryk, the informal commander of the group of POWs that was shifted without explanation to a room newly stocked with bare bunks. And Mykyta Shastun, who recalled guards laughing as the building burned, acting not at all like men under enemy attack.

"Before my eyes, there were guys who were dying, who were being revived, but it was all in vain," said Masalitin, who is back on the front line and treated as a father-figure by the men he commands.

The Associated Press interviewed over a dozen people with direct knowledge of details of the attack, including survivors, investigators and families of the dead and missing. All described evidence they believe points directly to Russia as the culprit. The AP also obtained an internal United Nations analysis that found

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the same.

Despite the conclusion of the internal analysis that found Russia planned and executed the attack, the U.N. stopped short of accusing Russia in public statements.

Of 193 Ukrainians in the barracks, less than two dozen made it back home. More than 50 died on the night of July 28, 2022. Around 120 are missing and believed detained somewhere in Russia. Russia accused Ukraine of striking its own men with U.S.-supplied missiles.

There are no active international investigations into the attack and a Ukrainian inquiry is one of tens of thousands of war crimes for investigators there, raising wider questions about whether those who committed crimes in occupied areas can ever face justice.

The U.N. has rejected Russia's claims that Ukrainian government HIMARS targeted the men, as do the victims who returned in prisoner exchanges, like Masalitin. When the former POWs have time to reflect – rare since many have returned to the fight – they say too many things don't add up.

In the days following the Olenivka deaths, U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres launched an independent mission to investigate. Russia refused to guarantee the mission's safety and its members never traveled either to occupied territory in the eastern Donetsk region or to Ukrainian-held territory. It dissolved five months later.

But when survivors began to return to Ukraine in exchanges, a U.N. field team that had been in-country since 2014 sought them out.

That team analyzed 70 open-source images, 20 statements by Russian officials along with 16 survivor interviews from Russian television. They conducted in-depth interviews with 55 freed POWs who were in the barracks or elsewhere in Olenivka during the attack. Their conclusion: Russia planned and executed the attack.

The 100-page analysis circulated at the highest levels of the U.N. but was never intended to be published in full. Some of the evidence was incorporated piecemeal into broader U.N. reports on the war, including one that said the missile traveled from east to west. The Russian Federation controls the territory east of where the prisoners were kept. The UN never publicly blamed Russia.

Names on a list

The lists of names the Russians drew up in late July 2022 had no explanation, no context. All the men listed were from the Azov unit who became national heroes after holding out for months against an overwhelmingly larger Russian force in the city of Mariupol. The prisoners were told to be ready. No one knew why.

On the morning of July 27, 2022, the group was rounded up and led to an industrial section of the colony, away from the other five POW barracks. They were taken to a cinder-block building with a tin-plate roof and 100 bunks, no mattresses and a hastily dug pit toilet, multiple survivors told AP.

"Everything in the barracks was prepared very quickly," said Arsen Dmytryk, who outranked the others and became the informal leader. The barbed wire was cheap and flimsy, and there were machine tools inside, indicating that the building was recently a workshop.

The prison director visited to tell them that their old barracks were under renovation, although plenty of other prisoners had remained. Ukrainians who have been since released said there was no renovation.

That first day, the guards dug trenches for themselves, said Shastun. Ukraine's Security Service told AP that their analysis confirmed the presence of the unusual new trenches.

On July 28, the colony management ordered the guard post moved further away, and for the first time the barrack guards "wore bullet-proof vests and helmets which they had not done before and unlike other colony personnel who rarely wore them," according to a section of the internal U.N. analysis later incorporated into public reports.

On the night of July 28 around 10:30 p.m., Dmytryk completed his checks, cut the lights, climbed into the top bunk and fell asleep at once. An explosion woke him perhaps 45 minutes later, followed by the sound of a Grad missile launcher. But he'd heard that before and drifted back to sleep.

Ukrainian POWs elsewhere in the colony told the U.N. investigators that the Grad fire muffled sounds of the bigger explosions.

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Dmytryk's memories then turn apocalyptic. His body burned with shrapnel wounds. Fire raged. Men screamed in pain. And he climbed down from his bunk, he checked the pulse of the man below him. He was already dead. He and other witnesses told AP they ran outside through broken walls to beg the guards to send help for the injured.

"They fired into the air, saying 'stay away from the gates, don't come closer,'" Dmytryk recalled.

If Dmytryk's memories are a narrative of horror, Shastun's are more like disjointed film scenes. He recalled the guards just stood there laughing, tossing rags and flashlights at the panicked Ukrainians.

It took hours before POW medics were sent from the other barracks to help, around the same time as Russian forces brought in trucks and told survivors to load them with the most severely wounded.

"We carried them on stretchers, lifted them into the car, unloaded them and then ran back to get the other wounded," Shastun said. One person died in a comrade's arms. It was mid-morning when they finished, and the trucks were piled with bloody men.

Dmytryk was among them, his face caked in dried blood. He said men in another truck died before they made it to the hospital in Donetsk. The U.N. said in its public report of March 2023 that slow medical care worsened the death toll.

"They transported us like cattle, not stopping, speeding over bumps and taking sharp turns," he said.

Also among the wounded was Serhii Aliksieievych, whose wife Mariia last caught sight of him in his hospital bed in a video circulating on Russian media, slowly answering questions as he recovered from his injuries.

Back at Olenivka, Shastun was one of approximately 70 survivors with lesser injuries who were taken to two 5x5 meter (yard) cells as the last of the trucks drove away, to be isolated from the rest of the prison colony. There were wooden pallets for sleeping and a single toilet in each.

The internal U.N. analysis said their isolation was intended to prevent survivors speaking to others in the colony about what happened that night because some prisoners had access to mobile phones and had direct contact with Ukraine. It also left them unaware of the debate raging outside.

According to the analysis, other Ukrainian prisoners were then sent to the bombed barracks and ordered to remove debris and the remaining bodies. Two hours later, that group was sent into a nearby hangar, and some saw men in camouflage bringing boxes of ammunition to the blast site and setting HIMARS fragments on a blue bench nearby.

Russian officials soon arrived, accompanied by Russian journalists whose images of twisted, charred bunk beds, HIMARS fragments and bodies laid out in the sun spread across the world.

The Ukrainians in the nearby hangar said after everyone was gone, the men in camouflage returned everything to the boxes and left.

As the clock ticked down to a U.N. Security Council meeting later that day, Russia and Ukraine blamed each other.

Russia opened an investigation and said Kyiv did it to silence soldiers from confessing to their "crimes" and used their recently acquired American-made HIMARS rockets. Ukraine denied the charge and said Russia was framing Ukraine to discredit the country before its allies.

The international community didn't know who to believe. That's when the U.N. secretary general announced it would conduct its own investigation, but negotiations to access the site were long and ultimately fruitless. Guterres' special mission was disbanded on Jan. 5, 2023, having never traveled to Ukraine.

"The members of the mission were of the view that it would be indispensable for them to be able to access all the relevant sites, materials and victims in order to fulfil its task and establish the facts of the incident," U.N. spokesman Stephane Dujarric told AP. Without that, the mission "was not in a position to provide any conclusions."

But the separate Human Rights Monitoring Mission in Ukraine, which had been based in the country since Russia's first invasion of Ukraine in 2014, didn't wait. The team combed through testimonies on Russian television from 16 survivors taken to the hospital, examined public images from the site and analyzed 20 statements made by Russian officials who visited the prison.

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The mission informally shared an abridged version of its preliminary analysis with the U.N.'s newly formed Olenivka probe. Then on Sept. 22, a surprise prisoner swap gave the Human Rights Monitoring Mission its first chance to speak to witnesses and survivors. But from the date of the explosion, it would take eight months for any of that material to emerge publicly, and then only in pieces.

Dujarric did not respond to questions about the internal analysis.

In July 2023, U.N. Human Rights chief Volker Turk publicly stated what the internal report had first said nearly a year before — that HIMARS were not responsible. Three months later, the U.N. devoted a section to Olenivka in its annual report on the human rights situation in Ukraine. Again, cribbing from the internal analysis, the report noted that HIMARS were not responsible, that the fragments shown by Russian officials were not “in situ,” the scene had been contaminated and physical evidence disturbed.

The report concluded that the damage “appeared consistent with a projected ordnance having travelled with an east-to-west trajectory.” It failed to note that Russia controlled the eastern territory.

Fading hopes for justice

A Ukrainian investigation is ongoing, according to Taras Semkiv of the Ukrainian prosecutor general's war crimes unit. The challenge is to identify the weapon used, in hopes that could lead to who ordered the attack. Semkiv said it's been narrowed to three possibilities — artillery, planted explosives, or a grenade launcher.

The Olenivka director is named as a suspect in “conspiracy for the ill-treatment of POWs” but the investigation leaves open the probability that more people were involved. At the war crimes unit headquarters of the Ukraine Security Service, known as the SBU, meters-long charts line the walls, illustrating the hierarchy of Russian officials responsible for various sections of the front line.

Semkiv said no international investigators have requested information from the General Prosecutor's Office since the deaths at Olenivka, including the disbanded U.N. fact-finding mission. He said initial optimism about the mission faded as soon as it became clear that they would not investigate at all if there was no access to the prison.

“Technology is advancing rapidly, and there are ways to assess the situation without the direct presence of an investigator or prosecutor at the scene,” he said.

Relatives of those missing from the bombed barracks say they're now alone in their search for answers.

First there was hope “that the world would not turn its back on us,” said Mariia Aliksieievych, the wife of the soldier seen recovering in the Donetsk hospital video. Her letters to her husband are shots in the dark — she hands them to the Red Cross, but as far as she knows there's never been access to the prisoners. She said Ukraine's government gives them no help or news about whether the men could be included in any future exchanges and has ignored requests for a day of remembrance for the Olenivka victims.

Her fading hopes for an international investigation have been replaced by determination.

She and other relatives want the International Criminal Court to take up the case, but she's realistic enough to know that's a distant possibility.

Her goal in the meantime: “To save the lives of our defenders, to bring them home. Because in Russian captivity, death is not an isolated case.”

Takeaways from AP's investigation into DEA corruption, agent accused of rape

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — Thousands of secret law enforcement documents obtained by The Associated Press offer a never-before-seen window into a culture of corruption among U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration agents who parlayed the agency's shadowy money laundering operations into a worldwide pursuit of binge drinking and illicit sex.

Among the documents is a recovered WhatsApp chat, in which a group of agents bragged about what they called a “world debauchery tour” on the government's dime, exchanged lurid images of their latest

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sexual conquests and even joked at one point about “forcible anal rape.”

That exchange seemed even darker months later when one of the agents in the chat was accused of that very crime in Spain.

The newly obtained documents show the 2018 arrest of George Zoumberos on charges accusing him of forcing anal sex on a 23-year-old woman in a Madrid hotel room set off alarms at the highest levels of the DEA. The case finally ended with the charges dismissed and the agent given a letter of reprimand.

Here are some of the key findings of the AP investigation.

What does the WhatsApp chat show?

The yearlong group chat, recovered by federal authorities, included five DEA agents identified by AP. Among them was José Irizarry, a notoriously corrupt agent and ringleader of the debauchery now serving a 12-year federal prison sentence.

The chat portrays life in the DEA as an unending, degenerate party. Agents planned DEA travel around binge-drinking and sex with no fear their encrypted messages would ever be read by anyone else.

“Tough life this war on drugs,” an agent quipped in one message.

Before one jaunt, an agent wrote colleagues he was “hoping you’ve organized some welcome p---y for me tomorrow when I land.”

References to anal sex were so common in the group chat that agents coined a term for it – pancaking – and often accompanied such mentions with an emoji of a stack of pancakes.

There were frequent mentions of prostitutes and at least two references to assaulting them and leaving it to an informant to “clean up” the mess.

What happened in the rape case?

On the night of the alleged sexual assault in Madrid in April 2018, Zoumberos told authorities the woman approached him at a bar and they eventually went back to his hotel.

Zoumberos, married and 38 at the time, maintained the interaction was consensual and told the DEA that the woman was “never upset.”

The woman gave a completely different account in her first public remarks about the case. “I told him very clearly that I didn’t want to have sex,” she told AP, which does not typically identify those who say they are victims of sexual assault.

She said she told Zoumberos she could not have sex because she was having her period. Around 3 a.m., the woman said, police and an ambulance arrived and found her bruised around the wrists and Zoumberos drunk. She told AP she locked herself in the bathroom before fleeing the hotel through the fire exit in a state of shock.

Zoumberos was briefly jailed in Madrid but released within hours following a jailhouse visit from U.S. Embassy officials. A Spanish judge later dismissed the case, ruling only that the allegations were not “duly justified.” The agent eventually returned to duty with a DEA letter of reprimand chiding him for “poor judgment.”

Internal records and interviews show the DEA never spoke with the woman or attempted to reconstruct what happened the night of the alleged rape.

“We dropped the ball,” a law enforcement official familiar with the matter told AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because he wasn’t authorized to discuss internal investigations.

Zoumberos, who now lives in North Carolina, did not respond to repeated requests for comment.

Have any agents faced accountability?

The DEA has refused for years to discuss its handling of the arrest. It did not answer detailed questions from AP about the case but said in a statement that “the alleged misconduct in this case is egregious and unacceptable and does not reflect the high standards expected of all DEA personnel.”

Ben Greenberg, a former U.S. attorney in Miami who reviewed the messages at AP’s request, called them “beyond inappropriate.”

“In the context of such serious criminal allegations,” he said, “the chats look like evidence of a crime and not just grotesque banter.”

The FBI and a federal grand jury in Tampa have been investigating DEA misconduct in money laundering probes for years, following a roadmap sketched out by Irizarry, who pleaded guilty to corruption counts in 2020. But so far, Irizarry is the only government employee to face criminal charges.

Of the agents in the group chat, only one remains with the DEA today. Three others were among at least a dozen agents disciplined or ousted for either participating in the bacchanalia or failing to sound the alarms about it.

More than a year after his rape arrest, Zoumberos resigned from the DEA after invoking his Fifth Amendment protection against self-incrimination in refusing to testify to the grand jury.

After Administrator Anne Milgram took the reins of the DEA in 2021, the agency placed new controls on how funds can be used in money laundering stings, and warned agents they can now be fired for a first offense of misconduct if serious enough, a departure from prior administrations.

Trump turns his full focus on Harris at his first rally since Biden's exit from the 2024 race

By MEG KINNARD and ADRIANA GOMEZ LICON Associated Press

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — Donald Trump unleashed a barrage of attack lines Wednesday against his likely new opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris, whom he called his "new victim to defeat" and accused of deceiving the public about President Joe Biden's ability to run for a second term.

The rally in Charlotte, North Carolina marked his first public campaign event since Biden dropped out of the 2024 matchup and Harris became the Democrats' likely nominee. The rally concluded minutes before Biden addressed the nation to explain he dropped his reelection bid to "pass the torch" to Harris, who is 22 years younger than him.

"So now we have a new victim to defeat: Lyin' Kamala Harris," Trump said, labeling her "the most incompetent and far-left vice president in American history."

Trump called her a "radical left lunatic" and said she was "crazy" for her positions on abortion and immigration. He repeatedly mispronounced the first name of the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent likely to lead a major party's presidential ticket.

Trump's speech signaled the next stage for the campaign may be especially brutal and personal, even as some GOP leaders warned Republican allies not to use overtly racist and sexist attacks against Harris.

Trump has ramped up his criticism of the vice president since Biden's abrupt departure, calling Harris "the same as Biden but much more radical."

He blamed her for what he portrays as the Biden administration's failures, particularly security along the U.S.-Mexico border. On Wednesday, the speakers who appeared on stage before the Republican nominee attacked Harris' record on the border, highlighting she was tasked with leading a White House effort to tackle migration issues. Harris' name was met with boos several times during the speeches.

"She was assigned that, she was given that task, and she failed," said Brandon Judd, former president of the National Border Patrol Council, the union that represents agents.

Trump also accused Harris of being just as responsible for Biden's policies at the U.S.-Mexico border, which saw illegal crossing arrests reach record highs at the end of 2023 and repeated his pledge to conduct mass deportations with the help of local police.

"Kamala's deadly destruction of America's borders is completely and totally disqualifying. She shouldn't be allowed to run for president with what she's done," Trump told supporters.

Harris, meanwhile, spent Wednesday in Indiana, telling members of the historically Black sorority Zeta Phi Beta that "we are not playing around" and asked for their help in electing her president in November, an election she characterized as "a choice between two different visions for our nation, one focused on the future, the other focused on the past."

Harris' campaign released a statement after Trump's speech describing it as "unhinged, weird and rambling."

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"Unity is over for Donald Trump," said campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa, referring to unity pledges made during the Republican National Convention.

Harris is expected to make abortion a key part of her campaign, looking to present herself to voters as someone who will fight against abortion restrictions. Earlier this week, she said she "trusts women to make decisions about their own bodies."

Trump has hedged on plans for an expected debate with Harris, first saying that he wanted Fox News, not ABC, to host the matchup he had originally scheduled for September with Biden. On Tuesday, Trump appeared to tweak that message again, saying on a call with reporters that he'd like to debate Harris "more than once" but not committing to appearing at the debate currently on the books and saying he'd only agreed to debate Biden twice, not Harris.

Quietly, Republicans have spoken about how subbing Harris in for Biden nullifies a portion of their party's argument in favor of Trump's vitality and vigor.

At 81, Biden would have been the oldest presidential nominee heading into a general election. Now, the 78-year-old Trump occupies that slot. Harris, 59, has launched a campaign that at least in some corners appears to be stoking interest among the younger voters who could be key in deciding an anticipated close general election.

Trump's stop in North Carolina shows he's concerned about keeping the state in his column this November, even as his team reaches for wins in traditionally Democratic-leaning states like Minnesota, which Trump is set to visit on Saturday.

North Carolina is a state Trump carried in both his previous campaigns but by less than 1.5 percentage points over Biden in 2020, the closest margin of any state Trump won. Trump stumped heavily in North Carolina even as the COVID-19 pandemic wore on, while Biden largely kept off the physical campaign trail and did not personally visit the state in the last 16 days of the election.

This year, Trump had planned to hold his first rally since the start of his hush money trial in Fayetteville, but that event was called off due to inclement weather. Trump called in from his private plane instead.

Democrats also have been working to win North Carolina, where the party's most recent presidential win was Barack Obama's 2008 victory, despite recent GOP dominance.

Biden held a campaign event in Raleigh the day after his disastrous June debate with Trump. While he was much more forceful in that appearance than he was on the debate stage, it did not help much to quell the growing concern from members of his party about his ability to win the White House again.

Trump's Charlotte event was his second campaign rally since a July 13 assassination attempt at a Pennsylvania rally. Days later, Trump accepted the GOP presidential nomination and gave a speech at the Republican National Convention, where his ear — injured in the shooting — was bandaged.

The Charlotte rally, like one held Saturday in Grand Rapids, Michigan, was held in an indoor arena. Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung said it's "to be determined" if the campaign will no longer hold outdoor rallies due to security concerns.

Forced to emigrate, Venezuelans living abroad hope for change — and to eventually return home

By ASTRID SUÁREZ, NAYARA BATSCHE, TERESA MEDRANO and GISELA SALOMON Associated Press
The prolonged economic and political instability in Venezuela has forced millions of Venezuelans to leave over the past decade, quashing many of their dreams and leaving many wondering if they'll ever return to what was once South America's most prosperous country.

The refugee agency UNHCR estimates that more than 7.7 million Venezuelans have left since 2014, the largest exodus in Latin America's recent history, with most settling in the Americas, from neighboring Colombia and Brazil to Argentina and Canada.

On Sunday, Venezuelans will vote in a highly anticipated presidential election that, for the first time in years, poses an electoral challenge for President Nicolás Maduro, who is seeking a third term. His top

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challenger is former diplomat Edmundo González, the candidate from the main faction of the opposition. Here are the voices of some Venezuelans living abroad. Some have carved out new lives; some hope to return — someday.

COLOMBIA

Most Venezuelans who have left in the past decade have settled in Colombia, where the government has set up a program to grant them legal residency status and incorporate them into the formal economy.

María Auxiliadora Añez, 60, left her home in the once-thriving oil hub of Maracaibo in 2020 to visit her son, who was already living in Colombia's capital, Bogota. Her Mexican food business had been struggling, and she had seen neighbors and friends migrate amid a constant lack of services and frequent blackouts.

Añez decided to stay in Colombia, where she and her husband manage a Venezuelan food truck.

She said she didn't register to vote on Sunday because she found it difficult, but she thinks Venezuela needs more than an election to turn around. "It is not just about changing the president," she said. "We need quality of life, access to basic and essential services such as water and electricity".

Ana Isabel Gómez, 51, decided to emigrate in 2014 after feeling her safety and that of her family were at risk.

Gómez lived in the northwestern city of Barquisimeto, where she helped provide humanitarian aid to people during a period of protests against Maduro, who had been elected in 2013 after the death of former leader Hugo Chávez.

"My oldest son, for the third time, told me: 'Mom, get me out,' because they were murdering teenagers ... at that moment, above being a woman, I was a mother," she said.

Gómez, her then-partner and her two children, ages 3 and 13 at the time, took a flight to Bogota, where she eventually settled down and now runs a wellness center and a nonprofit organization that sends medications to Venezuela.

She says she's optimistic about the future of Venezuela, and would like to return someday.

CHILE

Emilia Lizbeth Angulo, a 51-year-old lawyer, left the northwestern city of Merida in 2018 after being harassed by pro-government officials. It was the year Maduro was reelected in an election that saw major opposition parties and candidates banned from participating.

Angulo was working in human resources at a hospital when she was asked to join pro-government demonstrations and refused. Then came the retaliation. The hospital stopped giving her heart medication that her mother needed. Eventually, her position was eliminated.

Angulo said leaving Venezuela at first sank her into depression. She and a friend left for Colombia, where she spent six months selling coffee and arepas before moving to Chile, where she settled down and works as an administrative assistant.

"Yes, I really want to return, but I'm waiting for the right moment to do so," she said.

Liseth Díaz, a 46-year-old systems engineer, started thinking of migrating in 2015. "One day, leaving the movie theater with my daughters in the car, we found ourselves in the middle of a shooting," she remembers.

Díaz and her family closed their contracting business and in December 2017 she, her husband and three daughters traveled from the central Venezuelan city of Guacara to Chile. After 14 days crossing through Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, they reached Santiago, the capital, where she now works in the fiber optic industry.

They haven't returned to Venezuela, and Díaz doesn't think they will any time soon — at least not while what she calls the Maduro "dictatorship" remains in power.

She won't vote Sunday because she wasn't able to get a required passport despite various efforts.

SPAIN

In 2016, as he struggled to get by amid hyperinflation and widespread shortage, José Alberto Morán got mugged a couple of times.

Morán, who was studying and working in Caracas, decided to emigrate to Spain. He moved to Valencia,

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becoming the first member of his family to leave. Later, one brother moved to the Dominican Republic and another to Colombia.

His parents and other siblings remain in Venezuela, where he sends them money.

"What we do is help to support them all," said Morán, 29, who works as a tile salesman in Madrid.

He won't vote in Sunday's election due to the "many hurdles" to register, but said he doesn't expect major changes. Morán said he wouldn't go back permanently unless his country can offer him "security and stability," something he doesn't expect in the short term.

Jacobo Alonso Sequeiros left Venezuela in 2012, when Chávez was still president. Hoping for a better future, he headed for Europe, traveling first to the U.K. before finding a job as a computer engineer in Spain.

Born in Caracas, he grew up in Ciudad Guayana, in the southern state of Bolívar. He left behind his parents and sister, but after his mother's death in 2016, his sister moved to Spain with him.

Like many other Venezuelans living abroad, Sequeiros won't vote in Sunday's election, because he found the process to register too bureaucratic. But he has hope that "there can be a great change on July 28."

Sequeiros, who now lives in Galicia, doesn't see himself returning permanently. "Return to stay? No," he said. "First, there would have to be circumstances, such as a job offer or economic stability for me to decide to leave everything I have achieved over the years in Spain and start my life again in Venezuela."

UNITED STATES

Yuly Macedo, a 47-year-old lawyer who cleans houses in Miami, said that she has always opposed the government of Maduro. In April 2016, she took a plane with her husband and her then 10-year-old son to Miami, where she requested political asylum and has lived ever since.

Before leaving, Macedo worked for more than six years in different positions in the municipal office in Cagua, about 100 miles (60 kilometers) southwest of Caracas.

She said she was forced to attend pro-Maduro demonstrations and to recruit people to vote for him. She was warned not to talk about corruption and irregularities that she saw while working in the local government or else risk losing her job. She recalled receiving death threats and even being followed around.

It was "constant harassment and threats," she said.

She was fired in 2014, but the threats continued, she said. At some point she thought: "I can't continue with this fear," and she finally left, leaving behind her parents and two brothers.

Venezuelans who like Macedo have no way of voting while in the United States because their country's embassy and consulates have been closed for years. But she hopes that this time there will be a change. "Hope and expectations will never be lost," she said.

Returning, however, is not in her plans — even if the opposition triumphs.

"I can't go back to Venezuela, I feel very afraid, very afraid," she added, explaining that those who threatened her still live there.

Mayra José Marchán arrived in South Florida with her husband and her two daughters almost a decade ago, but she has been helping to mobilize opposition voters back in Venezuela.

Marchán is looking for donors to help pay for transporting voters in Venezuela on election day, to buy food and drinks for voting center representatives, and even to pay phone bills of activists campaigning for the opposition.

"My slogan is: 'If I can't vote, I can help,'" said Marchán, a 52-year-old economist.

Marchán, a former university professor, said she was not affiliated with any political party, but she took part in anti-government demonstrations. She said she was threatened and that members of the military followed her in Araure, her hometown about 340 kilometers (210 miles) southwest of Caracas.

Marchán, her husband and her two daughters entered the U.S. with tourist visas and shortly after requested political asylum. They now have a company that dehydrates Venezuelan sweet chili.

She is confident that the Venezuelan opposition will come out "en masse" to vote Sunday. And although she fears Maduro's government will do whatever it can to stay in power, she has hope.

"I dream of a different Venezuela; I work for a different nation, we have to keep working to make it happen," she said.

Typhoon Gaemi hits China's coast after leaving 25 dead in Taiwan and the Philippines

TAIPEI, Taiwan (AP) — A strong typhoon made landfall on China's southeastern coast on Thursday evening after sweeping across the nearby island of Taiwan, where it caused landslides and flooding in low-lying areas and left three dead.

Typhoon Gaemi had swept up the western Pacific, intensifying seasonal rains earlier in the week in the Philippines, where the death toll climbed to 22.

Offices and schools in Taiwan were closed for a second day on Thursday and people were urged to stay home and away from the coastline.

Two people were killed on Wednesday before the storm made landfall around midnight, and a 78-year-old man died after his home was hit by a mudslide on Thursday afternoon, Taiwan's Central News Agency said. Another 380 people were reported injured.

A third death on Wednesday — a driver pinned under an overturned excavator — was initially attributed to the typhoon but later was determined not to be linked, the news agency said.

The island is regularly hit by typhoons and has boosted its warning systems, but its topography, high population density and high-tech economy make it difficult to avoid losses when such storms hit. The capital, Taipei, was unusually quiet, with light rain and occasionally gusting winds.

The storm prompted the cancellation of air force drills this week off Taiwan's east coast.

In China's coastal Fujian province, flights, trains and ferry services were canceled, and more than 240,000 residents were evacuated as the typhoon approached, the official Xinhua News Agency said.

The storm is expected to weaken but still bring heavy rains to inland areas over the next three days, including the capital, Beijing.

In the Philippines, the death toll rose due to drownings and landslides. At least three people were missing, according to police.

Gaemi, called Carina in the Philippines, did not make landfall in that archipelago but enhanced its seasonal monsoon rains.

The Philippine coast guard reported that an oil tanker, MT Terra Nova, loaded with about 1.4 million liters (370,000 gallons) of industrial fuel oil sank off Limay town in Bataan province early Thursday and rescuers saved 15 of 16 crew members.

It was not immediately clear if the sinking was related to the bad weather and rough seas but Transport Secretary Jaime Bautista said coast guard personnel could not immediately reach the area to contain a possible oil spill because of the rough sea conditions.

Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. has ordered authorities to speed up efforts to deliver food and other aid to isolated rural villages.

"People there may not have eaten for days," Marcos said in a televised emergency meeting.

In the densely populated region around the Philippine capital, government work and school classes were suspended after rains flooded many areas.

US economic growth increased last quarter to a healthy 2.8% annual rate

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The nation's economy accelerated last quarter at a strong 2.8% annual pace, with consumers and businesses helping drive growth despite the pressure of continually high interest rates.

Thursday's report from the Commerce Department said the gross domestic product — the economy's total output of goods and services — picked up in the April-June quarter after growing at a 1.4% pace in the January-March period. Economists had expected a weaker 1.9% annual pace of growth.

The GDP report also showed that inflation continues to ease, while still remaining above the Federal Reserve's 2% target. The central bank's favored inflation gauge rose at a 2.6% annual rate last quarter,

down from 3.4% in the first quarter of the year. Excluding volatile food and energy prices, so-called core PCE inflation increased at a 2.9% pace. That was down from 3.7% from January through March.

The latest figures should reinforce confidence that the U.S. economy is on the verge of achieving a rare "soft landing," whereby high interest rates, engineered by the Fed, tame inflation without tipping the economy into a recession.

Helping boost last quarter's expansion was consumer spending, the heart of the U.S. economy. It rose at a 2.3% annual rate in the April-June quarter, up from a 1.5% pace in the January-March period. Spending on goods, such as cars and appliances, increased at a 2.5% rate after falling at a 2.3% pace in the first three months of the year.

Business investment was up last quarter, led by a 11.6% annual increase in equipment investment. Growth also picked up because businesses increased their inventories. On the other hand, a surge in imports, which are subtracted from GDP, shaved about 0.9 percentage point from the April-June growth.

Fed officials have made clear that with inflation edging toward their 2% target level, they're prepared to start cutting interest rates soon, something they're widely expected to do in September.

"The Fed will be reassured" by Thursday's GDP report, said Bill Adams, chief economist at Comerica Bank. "With inflation trending lower ... the Fed thinks that it's getting close to the time to cut interest rates."

Rate reductions by the Fed would, over time, reduce consumers' borrowing costs for things like mortgages, auto loans and credit cards.

The state of the economy has seized Americans' attention as the presidential campaign has intensified. Though inflation has slowed sharply, to 3% from 9.1% in 2022, prices remain well above their pre-pandemic levels.

This year's economic slowdown reflects, in large part, the much higher borrowing rates for home and auto loans, credit cards and many business loans resulting from the Fed's aggressive series of interest rate hikes.

The Fed's rate hikes — 11 of them in 2022 and 2023 — were a response to the flare-up in inflation that began in the spring of 2021 as the economy rebounded with unexpected speed from the COVID-19 recession, causing severe supply shortages. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 made things worse by inflating prices for the energy and grains the world depends on. Prices spiked across the country and the world.

Economists had long predicted that the higher borrowing costs would tip the United States into recession. Yet the economy kept chugging along. Consumers, whose spending accounts for roughly 70% of GDP, kept buying things, emboldened by a strong job market and savings they had built up during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

The slowdown at the start of this year was caused largely by two factors, each of which can vary sharply from quarter to quarter: A surge in imports and a drop in business inventories. Neither trend revealed much about the economy's underlying health.

Prisoners fight against working in heat on former slave plantation, raising hope for change in South

By MARGIE MASON and ROBIN McDOWELL Associated Press

Beneath the blazing summer sun on a former slave plantation, Lamont Gross and fellow prisoners stooped in long rows, picking vegetables by hand under the watchful eyes of armed guards on horseback. He said breaks were short and infrequent, with nothing to protect workers from the heat.

"I saw guys collapse," Gross said of his days on the so-called farm line at Louisiana's state penitentiary, where men work for pennies an hour or nothing at all and face punishment if they refuse. "There were dudes that got heat stroke. There were dudes with underlying conditions, older or had some sort of disability, but they had to go out there, too."

As daily temperatures hit record highs across much of the South, a federal judge took an unusual step, challenging the treatment of mostly Black incarcerated workers in the fields.

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America's largest maximum-security prison, known as Angola, sits on 18,000 acres. It was once a patchwork of cotton fields where, historians note, even enslaved pregnant women and young children worked from dawn to dusk during the busiest and hottest harvesting months. Prisoners have toiled on the same farm lines since after emancipation often without shade, adequate work breaks or even sunscreen.

In September, several incarcerated workers along with the New Orleans-based advocacy group Voice of the Experienced filed a class-action lawsuit calling for an end to the farm line, and accusing the state of cruel and unusual punishment. But as temperatures soared in May, the men asked the court in an emergency filing to stop work during extreme heat.

U.S. District Judge Brian Jackson issued a temporary restraining order earlier this month. It said correctional officials have shown "deliberate indifference" to the risks of injuries or death of incarcerated workers in sending them to the fields even when they had serious health issues, including some with heart disease, high blood pressure and histories of pre-diabetes or AIDS.

He ordered the state to quickly fix what he called "glaring deficiencies" in its heat-related policies.

Louisiana's corrections department challenged the order, but the 5th Circuit Court of Appeals sided with the judge. Prison officials have already taken some steps to improve conditions, providing inmates with sunscreen and pop-up tents for shade, lawyers for the state said. And when heat alerts are issued, which is common in summer months, they have agreed to provide the men with five-minute breaks every half hour.

Earlier, the state warned that shutting down the farm line once the heat index hits 88 degrees Fahrenheit (31.1 degrees Celsius), as requested by plaintiffs in their emergency filing, would "open the floodgates" to cease work "in any institution across the South."

Several other Southern states also operate sprawling penal farms on former slave plantations. Modern equipment is typically used to tend and harvest row crops that are sometimes sold on the open market and exported, even though the U.S. bans the import of goods made with prison labor overseas. But in some places, like Louisiana's penitentiary, rudimentary tools and prisoners' bare hands are used to harvest fruits and vegetables that feed inmates.

"If we can get similar rulings here in Arkansas, that'll be a blessing," said Kaleem Nazeem, an organizer at that state's grassroots coalition decARcerate. He spent 28 years behind bars and said he was routinely sent to solitary confinement for refusing to join the rows of men forced to pick cotton, scenes he compared to ones from "Roots," Alex Haley's harrowing book, and later miniseries, about slavery.

"The general public doesn't know the history of the land," he said, "because we, as a society, have chosen to become practiced at turning our heads."

As part of a two-year investigation, The Associated Press found some prison farms nationwide have in recent years supplied millions of dollars worth of crops — including soy, corn and wheat — to massive global companies like Tyson Foods, Louis Dreyfus, Consolidated Grain and Barge and Riceland Foods. Agricultural goods produced through prison labor end up in the supply chains of popular brands like Kellogg's Frosted Flakes, Ballpark hot dogs and Pepsi, reporters found.

Though many companies did not respond to questions about their links to prison farms, others, including Cargill and Archer Daniels Midland, have said they were investigating AP's findings and had either cut ties or were considering next steps.

Prison labor is legal in the United States due to a loophole in the 13th Amendment of the U.S. Constitution, which banned slavery, except for people convicted of crimes.

But it's viewed differently elsewhere. A U.N. investigator is expected to submit a report to the body's human rights council in September calling it a form of modern-day slavery.

U.S. correctional officials, meanwhile, tout the benefits of their work programs, saying they reduce recidivism, provide skills that can be used on the outside and keep prisoners from being idle.

The issue of extreme heat has become more concerning in recent years amid the effects of global warming. The Biden administration is proposing heat index restrictions for millions of agricultural workers and others who work outside. Most prisoners, however, would be excluded from that because they are not typically covered by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration, which sets the guidelines.

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Some incarcerated workers say heat is used as a form of punishment, not just in the fields but also inside facilities. Many units across the country lack air conditioning, and some prisoners resort to flooding their cells and lying on the wet floor nearly naked to try to stay cool.

"If it's 103 outside, it may be 107 to -8 inside of your cell," said Christopher Scott, who worked in the fields while imprisoned in Texas. "So, you work me hard for free in this heat, then you bring me back into my cell where I'm subjected for it to be even hotter?"

"A lot of times I saw men have heat strokes, heart attacks, because they just couldn't stand the heat," he said.

The Texas corrections department maintains that no prisoner has died from heat-related illnesses since 2012.

The class-action suit in Louisiana is scheduled to go to court in September.

One plaintiff called the farm line work "backbreaking," saying "we had to squat and pluck grass with our fingers." Others said they had trouble walking or standing in the heat and that drinking water was often dirty. Some said they fainted while working and were then punished for it.

Louisiana's corrections department told the court it follows its "constitutionally appropriate" policy protecting workers from heat-related illnesses while working outside, including monitoring temperatures every two hours and providing regular rest and water breaks when a heat alert is issued.

But the judge wrote that many of the prisoners' grievances had merit, noting that an independent expert found some were taking medications affecting their bodies' ability to regulate temperature. And a review of sick calls by the court confirmed that some men sent to the fields without restrictions had serious health conditions.

The judge also questioned the validity of some claims made by Angola staff, including that workers could "rest whenever they like" and that shutting down the farm line would result in losses of more than \$8 million annually — a figure Jackson challenged. He said that number likely referred to the overall agricultural operations, not just food picked by a small group of prisoners on the farm line.

"The Court does not doubt that inmates sent to the Farm Line work diligently," he wrote, "but this would be a feat of Herculean proportions."

Today in History: July 26

Americans with Disabilities Act signed into law

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Friday, July 26, the 208th day of 2024. There are 158 days left in the year.

Today's Highlight in History:

On July 26, 1990, President George H.W. Bush signed the ADA, prohibiting discrimination based on mental or physical disabilities.

Also on this date:

In 1775, the Continental Congress established a Post Office and appointed Benjamin Franklin its Postmaster-General.

In 1847, the western African country of Liberia, founded by freed American slaves, declared its independence.

In 1863, Sam Houston, former president of the Republic of Texas, died in Huntsville at age 70.

In 1945, Winston Churchill resigned as Britain's prime minister after his Conservatives were soundly defeated by the Labour Party. Clement Attlee succeeded him.

In 1947, President Harry S. Truman signed the National Security Act, which reorganized America's armed forces as the National Military Establishment and created the Central Intelligence Agency.

In 1948, President Truman issued Executive Order 9981, which desegregated the U.S. military.

In 1953, Fidel Castro began his revolt against Fulgencio Batista (fool-HEN'-see-oh bah-TEES'-tah) with an

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unsuccessful attack on an army barracks in eastern Cuba. (Castro ousted Batista in 1959.)

In 1971, Apollo 15 was launched from Cape Kennedy on America's fourth successful manned mission to the moon.

In 2002, the Republican-led House voted to create an enormous Homeland Security Department in the biggest government reorganization in decades.

In 2016, Hillary Clinton became the first woman to be nominated for president by a major political party at the Democratic National Convention in Philadelphia.

In 2018, the last six members of a Japanese doomsday cult who remained on death row were executed for a series of crimes in the 1990s, including a gas attack on Tokyo subways that killed 13 people.

In 2020, a processional with the casket of the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis crossed the Edmund Pettus Bridge in Alabama, where Lewis and other civil rights marchers were beaten 55 years earlier.

Today's Birthdays: Former Australian Prime Minister John Howard is 85. Football Hall of Famer Bob Lilly is 85. Rock and Roll Hall of Famer Darlene Love is 83. Singer Brenton Wood is 83. The Rolling Stones' Mick Jagger is 81. Actor Helen Mirren is 79. Rock musician Roger Taylor (Queen) is 75. Olympic gold medal figure skater Dorothy Hamill is 68. Actor Kevin Spacey is 65. Actor Sandra Bullock is 60. Actor Jeremy Piven is 59. Actor Jason Statham is 57. Actor Olivia Williams is 56. Actor Kate Beckinsale is 51. Former New Zealand Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern is 44. Actor Juliet Rylance is 44. Actor Monica Raymund is 38. Actor Francia Raisa is 36. Actor-singer Taylor Momsen is 31. Actor Elizabeth Gillies is 31. Actor Thomasin McKenzie is 24.