

Groton Daily Independent

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Tuesday, July 30

Senior Menu: Tater tot hot dish, carrots, peaches, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

Pantry Open, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m., Groton Community Center

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



Wednesday, July 31

Senior Menu: Ham, au gratin potatoes, creamed cabbage, tropical fruit, whole wheat bread.

Groton CM&A: Family Fun Night, 7 p.m.

Thursday, Aug. 1

Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazzini, green beans, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 2

Senior Menu: Taco salad, Mexican rice with beans, breadstick, cherry fluff.

State Legion Baseball Tournament in Salem

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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.

England Stabbing Attack

A stabbing attack in northern England killed two children and injured 11 people yesterday, most of them children. The attack—which is not being investigated as an act of terrorism—was believed to be carried out by a 17-year-old male.

The stabbing took place at a Taylor Swift-themed dance class for kids aged six to 11 in Southport, a small seaside town near Liverpool. The suspect reportedly entered the studio premises armed with a knife and began targeting the children. Police say two adults were among those critically injured, believed to have been hurt while trying to protect the kids. Police are investigating a motive.

The deadliest attack on children took place in 1996, when a 43-year-old gunman killed 16 kindergartners and their teacher at a school in Dunblane, Scotland. That attack led to a 1997 ban on almost all private gun ownership in the UK.

Park Fire Rages On

The Park Fire continues to burn across Northern California, becoming the sixth-largest wildfire in the state's history and the largest active blaze in the US. The fire has burned 373,357 acres and is 14% contained as of this writing. Authorities have confirmed over 100 buildings have been destroyed, with no reported fatalities.

The rapid spread of the fire, which was deliberately started last week, has been attributed to abundant dry vegetation and an exceptionally hot summer, with temperatures in the area averaging 12 degrees above normal. While slightly cooler temperatures this week have moderated the fire's intensity, temperatures are forecast to reach above 100 degrees by the end of this week.

Smoke is affecting air quality across multiple states and is expected to reach as far as the Dakotas and Nebraska. The state has seen 4,574 fires this year, burning 726,667 acres—a 2,744% increase from the same period last year.

Proposed SCOTUS Reforms

President Joe Biden yesterday proposed a set of changes to the US Supreme Court, including creating an enforceable code of conduct and setting term limits for justices—a departure from the current lifetime tenure. Capping each justice's term to 18 years could reduce the chances of a single president shaping the country's highest court, according to Biden.

The outgoing president also proposed an amendment to the US Constitution that would overturn the Supreme Court's recent decision giving former President Donald Trump some immunity from criminal prosecution for actions taken while in office. Two-thirds of the House and Senate must propose constitutional amendments, which three-quarters of state legislatures must then ratify. The proposal is unlikely to be enacted.

Separately, former White House Chief of Staff Mark Meadows asked the Supreme Court yesterday to intervene in his criminal election interference case in Fulton County, Georgia. Meadows cited the court's Trump immunity ruling as part of his request.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

US men's gymnastics team wins bronze in team all-around competition, their first medal in 16 years.
Martin Phillipps, lead singer of New Zealand rock band The Chills, dies at age 61.
Sinéad O'Connor's 2023 death revealed to have been caused by pulmonary disease and asthma.
Longtime BBC presenter Huw Edwards charged with three counts of "making indecent images of children".

Science & Technology

US health regulators approve blood test to diagnose colon cancer, the second-highest cause of cancer-related deaths in the US; test detects DNA released by tumors in the bloodstream.
Apple to include features powered by its Apple Intelligence AI platform in upcoming iOS 18 update and future products; beta versions for developer testing released yesterday.
Paleontologists discover new species of tyrannosaurus relative; 69-million-year-old fossil fills a gap in the evolutionary record as the creatures grew smaller and more bird-like.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (Dow -0.1%, S&P 500 +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.1%) as analysts await key Federal Reserve meeting this week.
McDonald's reports first drop in global sales in 13 quarters, falling short of analysts' expectations of 0.5% growth.
Oil futures fall 2% on signs Israel will try to avoid a broader conflict in the Middle East; signals come after Israel and Lebanon-based Hezbollah traded missile strikes over the weekend.

Politics & World Affairs

US national debt tops \$35T for first time; current spending projections have total debt passing \$56T by 2034.
Former President Donald Trump to be interviewed as part of FBI probe into attempted assassination at Pennsylvania rally.
Law enforcement textshow shooter was spotted as a potentially suspicious person 90 minutes before attack.
Officials in West Texas declare state of emergency after area experiences more than 100 earthquakes over the past week; cause of seismic activity is suspected to be from oil and gas extractions.

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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!

Special Needs Family Fun Night

4 AUGUST | **4PM-5:30PM**
Groton Swimming Pool.

For all children and adults with special needs, with their families and/or caregivers.

Sensory friendly time.
No radio or water features.

No Charge
Concessions Available

8TH ANNUAL DOGGIE DAY!



Sunday, September 8th 4-6pm
Groton Swimming Pool \$5/dog
Dogs must be accompanied by an adult.

Names Released in Union County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 2, within North Sioux City, SD limits

When: 1:47 p.m., Friday, July 26, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2013 Lexus Rx 350

Driver 1: David Solomon Jones, 57-year-old male from Sioux Falls, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Vehicle 2: 2020 Ford Escape

Driver2: William Richard Chicoine, 69-year-old male from Elk Point, SD, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Use: Yes

Union County, S.D.- One man died and another was injured in a two vehicle crash on Interstate 29 in North Sioux City, SD, Friday afternoon.

Preliminary crash information indicates William R. Chicoine, the driver of a 2020 Ford Escape was traveling northbound on Interstate 29, slowed by congested traffic entering a construction zone. The driver of a 2013 Lexus, David S. Jones, was traveling the same direction at highway speeds, collided with the rear of the Escape, causing it to enter the median and roll over. The Lexus went across the southbound lane and collided with a fence in the west ditch where it came to rest.

Both drivers were transported to a Sioux City hospital where Chicoine passed away from his injuries. Jones suffered serious, non-life-threatening injuries.

The South Dakota Highway Patrol is investigating the crash. All information released so far is only preliminary.

The Highway Patrol is an agency of the South Dakota Department of Public Safety.

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2024 South Dakota American Legion State Class "B" Sr. Baseball Tournament

Friday - August 2, 2024

Saturday - August 3, 2024

Sunday - August 4, 2024

Monday - August 5, 2024

Tuesday - August 6, 2024

South Dakota American Legion
State Class "B" Sr. Baseball Tournament
Cubs Field, Salem, SD
August 2 - August 6, 2024



Lake Norden/Badger Post 260
Region 5 Champion

GAME 1
10:00 AM

Elk Point-Jefferson Post 134
Region 3 Champion

Winner Game 1

GAME 7
4:00 PM

Parkston Post 194
Region 4 Champion

GAME 3
5:00 PM

Winner Game 3

Platte/Geddes Post 115
Region 7 Champion

Big Stone City Post 229
Region 1 Champion

GAME 2
30 Minutes after Game 1

Winner Game 2

Dell Rapids Post 65
Region 2 Champion

GAME 8
30 Minutes after Game 7

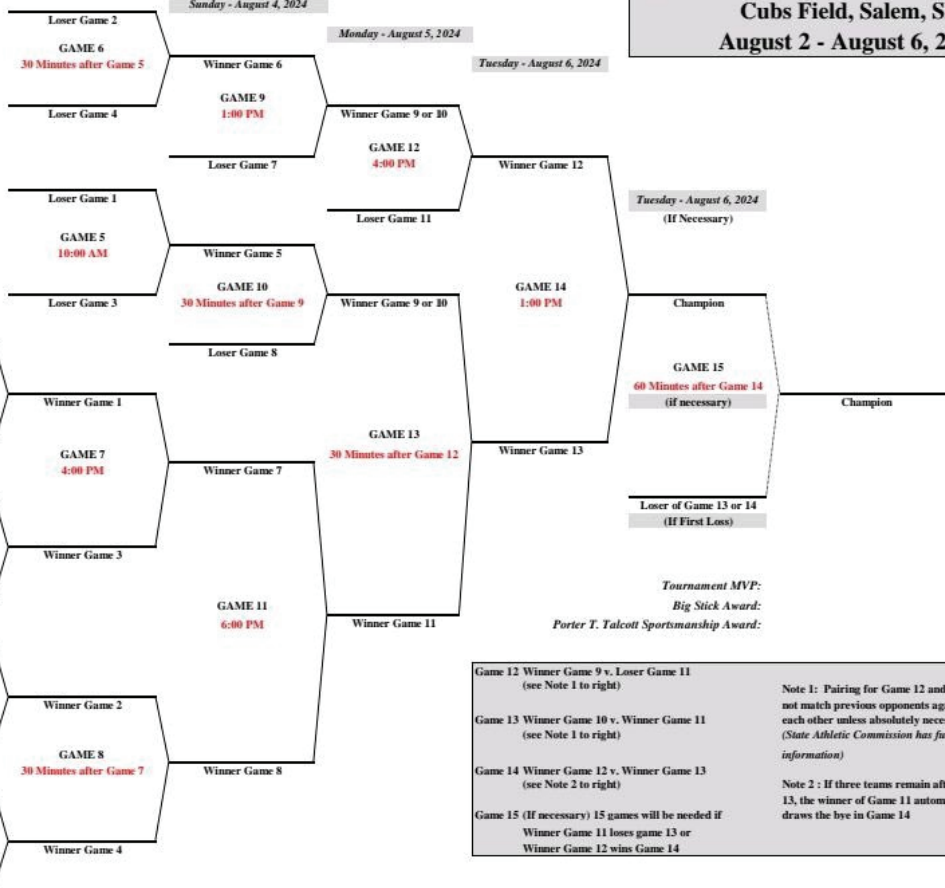
Winner Game 8

Groton Post 39
Region 6 Champion

GAME 4
30 Minutes after Game 3

Winner Game 4

Salem/Montrose/Canova Post 140
Host



Tuesday - August 6, 2024
(If Necessary)

Champion

GAME 15
60 Minutes after Game 14
(if necessary)

Champion

Loser of Game 13 or 14
(If First Loss)

Tournament MVP:

Big Stick Award:

Porter T. Talcott Sportsmanship Award:

Game 12 Winner Game 9 v. Loser Game 11
(see Note 1 to right)

Game 13 Winner Game 10 v. Winner Game 11
(see Note 1 to right)

Game 14 Winner Game 12 v. Winner Game 13
(see Note 2 to right)

Game 15 (If necessary) 15 games will be needed if
Winner Game 11 loses game 13 or
Winner Game 12 wins Game 14

Note 1: Pairing for Game 12 and 13 will
not match previous opponents against
each other unless absolutely necessary.
(State Athletic Commission has further
information)

Note 2: If three teams remain after Game
13, the winner of Game 14 automatically
draws the bye in Game 14

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 Defeat Clark Area Jr Legion 17U

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 beat Clark Area Jr Legion 17U 6-3 in regional competition held Monday in Sis-seton.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 were the first to get on the board in the first when Nicholas Morris singled, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 added two runs in the second after Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 scored on a wild pitch.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 added to their early lead in the top of the third inning after Karsten Fliehs walked, Kellen Antonsen walked, and Tristin McGannon grounded out, each scoring one run.

Morris stepped on the bump first for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. The starting pitcher allowed eight hits and three runs (two earned) over seven innings, striking out three and walking none. Will Hovde led things off on the bump for Clark Area Jr Legion 17U. The starting pitcher surrendered three hits and six runs over two innings, striking out three and walking six.

Lincoln Krause and Morris each collected two hits for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Fliehs, McGannon, Antonsen, and Morris each drove in one run for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 had a strong eye at the plate, collecting 10 walks for the game. Carter Simon and Antonsen led the team with two free passes each.

Michael Severson and Jakob Steen were a force together in the lineup, as they each collected two hits for Clark Area Jr Legion 17U while hitting back-to-back. Max Bratland, Ky Vandersnick, and Jakob Steen each drove in one run for Clark Area Jr Legion 17U. Clark Area Jr Legion 17U were sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Watson Grantham made the most plays with six.

Next up for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 is a game at Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U on Tuesday.

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Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 **6 - 3** Clark Area Jr Legion 17U

📍 Away 📅 Monday July 29, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	1	2	3	0	0	0	0	6	5	4
CLRK	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	3	8	0

BATTING

Groton Jr. Legion Post	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (LF)	3	2	2	0	1	0
C Simon #4 (SS)	1	0	0	0	2	0
G Englund #18 (3B)	4	0	0	0	0	2
J Erdmann #1 (CF)	2	1	1	0	1	0
N Morris #17 (P)	3	1	2	1	1	0
N Groebl... #12 (1B)	3	1	0	0	1	1
K Flieds #10 (C)	3	0	0	1	1	0
K Antonsen #7 (2B)	2	1	0	1	2	0
T McGan... #9 (RF)	2	0	0	1	1	1
Totals	23	6	5	4	10	4

2B: J Erdmann, **TB:** L Krause 2, J Erdmann 2, N Morris 2, **CS:** L Krause, **HBP:** J Erdmann, C Simon, **LOB:** 8

PITCHING

Groton Jr. Legion Post	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
N Morris #17	7.0	8	3	2	0	3
Totals	7.0	8	3	2	0	3

W: N Morris, **P-S:** N Morris 96-64, **HBP:** N Morris 2, **BF:** N Morris 33

Clark Area Jr Legion 17U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
Cooper P... #1 (3B)	4	0	0	0	0	0
Watson G... #00 (C)	4	1	1	0	0	1
Jakob St... #21 (SS)	4	0	2	1	0	0
Michael... #13 (RF)	4	0	2	0	0	1
Logan Labrie #14	0	0	0	0	0	0
Ky Vand... #55 (DH)	4	1	1	1	0	0
Josh Kan... #2 (1B)	3	0	0	0	0	1
Damian... #61 (CF)	3	0	1	0	0	0
Max Brat... #12 (2B)	3	0	1	1	0	0
Ernesto... #39 (LF)	2	1	0	0	0	0
Totals	31	3	8	3	0	3

2B: Jakob Steen, Michael Severson 2, **TB:** Ky Vandernick, Max Bratland, Jakob Steen 3, Damian Severson, Watson Grantham, Michael Severson 4, **HBP:** Ernesto Garcia, Josh Kannegieter, **SB:** Ky Vandernick, **LOB:** 9

Clark Area Jr Legion 17U	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
Will Ho... #10	2.0	3	6	6	3	0
Max Br... #12	5.0	2	0	0	4	1
Totals	7.0	5	6	6	10	4

L: Max Bratland, **P-S:** Max Bratland 66-31, Will Hovde 65-32, **WP:** Will Hovde 2, **HBP:** Max Bratland, Will Hovde, **BF:** Max Bratland 19, Will Hovde 16

Brand New Program at

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

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



\$20 Monthly Membership








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



Downtown
Groton

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

-  Reduced levels of stress and anxiety
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-  Controlled blood pressure
-  Better blood flow circulation
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How a small SD college became a national cyber powerhouse

Bart Pfankuch

South Dakota News Watch

MADISON, S.D. – A seed planted by South Dakota legislative and higher education leaders four decades ago has blossomed into one of the nation's top high-tech universities located in a small city in the rural midsection of the state.

The story of how Dakota State University rose to become a powerhouse in cyber technology academics, job creation and research is one of ingenuity, strong leadership and a bit of fortuitous timing.

Those factors have combined to build DSU into a university that has received well over \$140 million in public and private donations over the past decade. The university has developed numerous working partnerships with government and private industry, and it's expanding its campus with a massive research and development facility in Sioux Falls. Soon, DSU could become a leader in research into the world's next major technology breakthrough in quantum computers.



The \$18 million, 40,000-square-foot MadLabs research facility, shown on the Dakota State University campus in Madison, S.D., on March 22, 2024, is a hub for cyber research. (Photo; Bart

Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

And it all began at a time when the future of the entire university itself was in question.

In 1984, the South Dakota Board of Regents, under pressure to cut its budget, closed its Springfield campus and the state turned it into a women's prison. The late Gov. Bill Janklow that spring also signed a law that changed DSU's mission to focus on technology in all academic programs, a hopeful effort called, "A Brand New Day."

The decision to reinvent a teacher's college founded in 1881 into a technology-focused university in a somewhat isolated rural city of 6,000 people may, in retrospect, seem like a risky move.

But as told by current DSU President Jose-Marie Griffiths, the new focus on tech dovetailed with the decision by financial giant Citibank to move its credit card operation to Sioux Falls, an hour drive from Madison.

"Citibank was in need of mainframe programmers. And as a result of that, somebody came up with the idea that, well, we could turn this college that's fumbling a little bit into a computer school with software development and engineering," Griffiths told News Watch. "That way, we could supply the needed programmers to the Sioux Falls workforce for Citibank and ultimately for others, and I guess the advantage of proximity was in favor of Madison."

Initially, mission shift not universally supported

DSU business and information systems professor Lynette Molstad Gorder was teaching at the university 40 years ago when the shift to a high-tech campus began. In a video recorded by DSU, Molstad Border recalled that there was initial hesitancy on campus about the mission change.

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The Beacom Institute of Technology, shown on March 22, 2024, is in the heart of the DSU campus in Madison, S.D., and is at the heart of the university's cyber training efforts. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

"The first thing that goes through your mind is apprehension," she said. "How it's going to affect you personally and how it's going to affect faculty and the curriculum we had set up."

Molstad Gorder, who was teaching typing and office and records management at the time, said acceptance of the shift to technology slowly washed over the DSU campus.

"Later on we looked upon it as a welcome opportunity," she said. "It was kind of hazy (at first) and then all of a sudden, it just clicked."

Suddenly, computers replaced pens, pencils and typewriters in classrooms. And later, the need to delve more deeply into computer science, and eventually cyber security, became a greater focus at DSU, she said.

"Somehow we had to protect this whole digital infrastructure," she said. "With our faculty and staff we were able to move into the whole cyber security realm of

problems and issues and teach our students. And we've had great success."

Molstad Gorder said she sees a continued bright future for DSU.

"When you look at 40 years ago in 1984 what we were using to accomplish the tasks and what we have today, it's absolutely amazing," she said. "Everything seems to be going faster and faster (and) it takes a lot of power and leadership to keep abreast of all the changes that are happening."

Starting with computer science

In 1984, while still known as Dakota State College, a name used until 1989, the initial jump into technology came with the creation of a bachelor's degree in computer science using a curriculum from IBM. That foundation in teaching computer science and software development – and in forming an industry partnership – laid the groundwork for what was to come, Griffiths said.

With a mix of private and public funding, the university was able to slowly but consistently expand its facilities and academic offerings, she said.

In the early 2000s, a further step forward came when DSU began to focus on cyber security.

"We were actually quite late in the game to get into cyber security," Griffiths said. "But DSU decided to get into that game and did so with a vengeance."

A milestone achievement, and a significant source of mission confirmation, came 20 years later, in 2004, when the National Security Agency named DSU a Center of Academic Excellence in computer security, one of the first. It is now one of just 10 in the nation to hold three center of excellence designations from NSA.

Now, another 20 years later, that gradual growth has exploded into almost constant expansion of academic offerings, research opportunities, industry and government partnerships and construction of new facilities to accommodate it all.

Enrollment has risen steadily, from 867 in 1985 to 1,801 in 2000 and to 3,509 in 2023. The number of female students enrolled in technology programs has jumped about 300% in recent years, according to DSU data.

DSU now offers 44 degrees, including seven master's degrees and four doctoral programs. Upon gradu-

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ation, 99.7% of students in 2022 got jobs or went further in their educational journey, the university said.

Shift toward research

When Griffiths arrived on campus, DSU had a strong academic reputation but was not known for its research. In her time at the helm, she has pushed to obtain funding and the infrastructure necessary to conduct research and develop doctoral programs to involve students and faculty in the work.

In 2017, the research and development efforts took a major step forward with the launch of the Madison Cyber Labs, or Mad-Labs, facility on campus. A sparkling, glass-encased \$18 million research building is at the heart of what overall was a \$40 million program to expand research into groundbreaking fields of cyber security, digital forensics, machine learning and artificial intelligence, among others.

The state pitched in \$10 million in Future Fund money to add to a \$30 million donation from Premier Bankcard CEO Miles Beacom and wife Lisa, along with Denny Sanford, owner of the Sioux Falls-based First Premier Bank and Premier Bankcard.

Up next for DSU is an expansion into Sioux Falls, where thanks to roughly \$100 million in combined public and private funds, DSU will build an off-campus Applied Research Lab on the city's northwest side.

That funding package included another \$60 million donation from Sanford and \$30 million in state funding to build the research facility and to launch the Governor's Cyber Academy on the DSU campus. The academy will include a dual credit program for high school students in South Dakota. The city of Sioux Falls is contributing \$10 million to get the applied lab up and running.

As reported earlier by News Watch, DSU's next big venture will be to lead a multi-campus effort to expand research in South Dakota into quantum computers, which are far faster and more capable than any of the largest, most complex supercomputers already in use.

The 2024 state Legislature approved \$3 million in spending to pay for faculty and other resources to help DSU and other colleges take a leading role into understanding quantum computers and developing a path forward for their use.

"Obviously, there's a sense of excitement around innovation because it doesn't just happen everywhere," said Griffiths, 72, who told News Watch her job as DSU president will be her last before retirement. "There's a shared vision around the culture of innovation here, and we're all excited about that. It means you create an environment where people can try things out, and if they fail, it's not the end of the world."

Opportunities for graduates abound

People within and outside the university said DSU has a strong reputation in the high-tech industry as a pipeline for employers seeking well-prepared students.

Alexis Kulm of Sioux Falls said she had several employment options upon graduation from DSU in December 2022 with a degree in cyber operations, which she describes as "kind of cool, right?"

Kulm, 23, had a flair for math and science while at Washington High School in Sioux Falls and attended



Devin Christensen, left, a junior at Dakota State University, attended the DakotaCon event on March 22, 2024 in Madison, S.D. Christensen, who hails from North Sioux City, S.D., is studying cyber intelligence and hopes to land a job with the FBI, CIA or National Security Agency upon graduation. (Photo: Bart

Pfankuch / South Dakota News Watch)

HKS A D
DSU ARL LAB INTERIORS REVIEW
FEBRUARY 2024



A rendering of DSU's Applied Research Lab (ARL) under construction in Sioux Falls, S.D. (Source: Dakota State University)

a pair of technology summer camps at DSU prior to graduation. She liked the small-town feel, the professors and administrators she met and saw great opportunity in the university's growing range of cyber education options.

"That's one thing I really liked, that it doesn't limit your opportunities," she said. "You get a strong real-world education in your classes."

Kulm took classes in web and network design, computer programming and malware analysis, which she said all helped prepare her for the cyber workplace. As a native of South Dakota, and with

close family ties, Kulm took a job at Sanford Health in Sioux Falls, where she joked she received a "not bad" employment and benefit package that allows her to live comfortably.

Sanford Health and DSU announced a partnership in November 2020 to create a CyberHealth innovation hub that will increase employment opportunities for DSU graduates while expanding the health care provider's ability to innovate and create economic development across its footprint.

In her work on the Sanford Health cybersecurity team, Kulm works at the secure operations center, helping keep computer systems and information safe from errors or outside cyber attacks.

Kulm said her fellow DSU graduates took cyber positions in Hawaii and Washington, D.C., and she feels well positioned for her own professional future.

"What I heard a lot during the interview process was, 'Oh, you're from DSU, I know about them,'" she said. "It's a small school, but it's very well known."

A rising national reputation

The growing influence of DSU in the cyber security realm was highlighted when the university attracted Jen Easterly, director of the federal Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, as the keynote speaker at its DakotaCon event in March.

Easterly said the agency's mission is "to lead the national effort to understand and manage and reduce the risk to the cyber and physical infrastructure that Americans rely on every hour of every day, for water, for power, for finance, for transportation, for communication, for health care, and the networks and data that power our daily lives."

She said that prior to her visit to Madison, she had been hearing increasing discussion on the national level about the growth and innovation taking place at DSU.

"The ideas generated at forums like this are just further proof that it doesn't matter the size of the university. It's really about the power of innovation and the focus on collaboration and the cutting edge of emerging technology that really makes this place something truly miraculous," Easterly said.

She specifically praised the ability of Griffiths to establish meaningful partnerships across the cyber

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world and urged future graduates to consider working in cyber security in either the private or public sectors.

"I look at this (DSU) community as really being at the forefront of being able to keep our nation safe against very real cyber threats," Easterly said. "I've been excited to make this trip for a while because I've been impressed by DSU's efforts to actively inspire the next generation of cyber leaders to join alongside public servants and the private sector that are looking to keep our country safe and secure."

Job creation in Madison and beyond

The cutting-edge academic programs at DSU have created a pipeline of new, well-trained employees for a wide range of companies across the country, including in its home city of Madison.

After graduating from DSU with a master's degree in 2006, Jon

Waldman and fellow graduate Chad Knutson started an information security company that got in on the ground floor of what has become a massive industry in the U.S. and across the world.

"We started as a handful of college kids with a garage-band mentality," Waldman, a self-described "technology nerd," told News Watch in an interview during DakotaCon at DSU in March.

The fledgling information security business began as Secure Banking Solutions, helping banks keep critical information safe and preventing internal systems from being hacked.

Over the past 20 years, the firm – now named SBS CyberSecurity and headquartered in Madison – has grown to include 90 employees with clients in 49 states that include the nation's largest turkey farm and the Graceland Mansion tourist attraction.

Waldman, 43, said he saw great value as a student in the small class sizes and close faculty relationships he developed at DSU, which continue at the university today. He also credits DSU with providing students with educational and job opportunities they might not get at a university that lacks the industry and government partnerships DSU has secured.

"DSU might be smaller in size, but what they do for their students is so powerful, both in terms of the training and the relationships that are built here, among the students, among faculty and among industry partners," Waldman said. "They've been on the forefront of what the cyber industry really needs for the last 25 years or more."

Waldman retains close ties with DSU, serving on a cybersecurity industry advisory board at the university and by continuing to hire DSU graduates, of whom there are now 25 working at SBS. His company in June donated \$300,000 to DSU to offer scholarships and to support the growing CybHER program that seeks to boost female participation in the cyber industry.



Dakota State University in Madison, S.D., shown on March 22, 2024, has benefited from large infusions of money since it became a national hub for education of students in the technology and cyber security fields. (Photo: Bart Pfankuch / South Dakota

News Watch)

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"We're very proud to have big DSU connections and be part of that pipeline," he said.

Waldman said DSU has "a commitment to innovation" that allows for a nimble approach to creation of academic tracks and degrees that allow DSU graduates to remain at the forefront of the constantly and rapidly evolving cyber technology and security industry.

A new degree focused on artificial intelligence and its applications is a good example of how DSU reacts quickly to changes in the industry and in society as a whole, he said.

"DSU is building new programs that apply to the kids of yesterday, today and tomorrow," Waldman said. "So that's part of what makes DSU really special."

This story 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 Bart Pfankuch at bart.pfankuch@sdnewswatch.org.



— “ —

Obviously, there's a sense of excitement around innovation, because it doesn't just happen everywhere. ...

There's a shared vision around the culture of innovation here, and we're all excited about that.

— ” —

Dakota State University president
José-Marie Griffiths



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Weekly Round[s] Up By Senator Mike Rounds

July 22-28, 2024

Welcome back to another edition of the Weekly Round[s] Up. Along with meeting with constituents and casting votes, the main event of the week was an address from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. He made the trip to the United States to thank our country for the continued support of our ally Israel. I also introduced three pieces of bipartisan legislation with my colleagues. More on all of those below. Here's my Weekly Round[s] Up:

South Dakotans I met with: Leaders from Missouri River Energy Services; the South Dakota Agri-Business Association's class of 2024 Future Ag Leaders; South Dakota members of the Renewable Fuels Association; and South Dakota's delegates to Boys and Girls Nation. I was also able to meet virtually with the South Dakota FFA state officers and Community Support Providers of South Dakota.

Met with South Dakotans from: Beresford, Brandon, Britton, Brookings, Groton, Harrisburg, Ipswich, Lake Norden, Miller, Mitchell, Onida, Pierre, Rapid City, Spearfish, Twin Brooks, Viborg and Wallace.

Other meetings: Sammons Financial Group; and Jack Clark, co-founder of Anthropic AI. I also attended our weekly Senate Prayer Breakfast.

I spent part of last Monday at Fort Eisenhower in Augusta, Georgia to visit Army Cyber Command. I was joined by the Army's Principal Cyber Advisor, Dr. Michael Sulmeyer, who has been nominated to be the nation's first Assistant Secretary of Defense for Cyber Policy, and Lieutenant General Maria Barrett, the Commander of Army Cyber Command. We discussed operations and training, along with the ongoing partnership between Dakota State University and Army Cyber.

Netanyahu address: This past week, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to both the Senate and the House in a joint session of Congress. PM Netanyahu reaffirmed the need for U.S. support for Israel as they continue to defend their nation against Hamas in the wake of the October 7 terrorist attacks. It's critical to Israel's success that America continues to stand with their nation, our strongest democratic ally in the Middle East. I spoke with Keloland after the address, which you can view a clip of here.

Votes taken: 5 – these were all on nominations to positions within the Federal Labor Relations Authority, the United States Tax Court and the Department of State.

Legislation introduced: This past week, I introduced three pieces of bipartisan legislation. Senator Richard Blumenthal (D-Conn.) and I introduced the BRAIN Act, legislation that would strengthen research and treatment development for brain cancers. As many of you know, the fight against cancer is personal for me. When my late wife Jean was courageously battling cancer a few years ago, we were already seeing encouraging progress in the development of new treatments for many cancers. I firmly believe we are years, not decades, away from seeing cures to many of the most deadly cancers. The BRAIN Act will allow us to continue capitalizing on the progress we have made so far by implementing programs and funding that will advance research and treatments for brain tumors. You can read more about this legislation here.

I also introduced legislation with Senator Gary Peters (D-Mich.) that requires the Federal Emergency Management Agency to accept requests from tribal governments to receive a Fire Management Assistance Grant Declaration. You can read more about this bill here.

Last, I introduced the Federal Cyber Workforce Training Act. This bill would help advance the development of the federal government's cyber workforce. You can read more about it here.

Classified briefings: I had one classified briefing on Ukraine with the Senate Armed Services Committee.

My staff in South Dakota visited: Aberdeen, Chamberlain, Deadwood, Leola, McIntosh, Mission, Murdo, Rapid City, Rosebud, Summerset and Timber Lake.

Steps taken this past week: 53,018 steps or 25.99 miles



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Wealth of controversies, outbreaks of violence spark questions on prison oversight

Corrections Commission members say group is neutered; legislative audit committee focuses on department metrics

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 29, 2024 5:55 PM

In the past year, the state Department of Corrections has dealt with two bouts of violence behind prison walls, been sued over its site selection for a proposed men's prison in Lincoln County and drawn the ire of inmates and family members for shutting down text messaging on inmates' electronic tablets.

That's in addition to long-simmering controversies over low staffing, high turnover and overcrowding, the latter of which has been among the most prominent points used by the agency to make its case for new facilities.

The state's Corrections Commission has yet to meaningfully address any of those issues.

The group hasn't met to address the security concerns raised by two skirmishes earlier this month at Mike Durfee State Prison in Springfield and two nights of unrest at the South Dakota State Penitentiary in March.

Comments from DOC officials and the commission's own members suggest that those conversations may never happen.

Members: Corrections Commission has lost its way

The compounding DOC controversies concern Mark Anderson, the labor representative on the state Corrections Commission. Anderson is one of the commission's longest-serving members. He recalls a time when commissioners had far more involvement in discussions on prison problems.

Anderson and another longtime member, David McGirr, had begun to question the commission's value long before the DOC experienced its second round of prison violence in a handful of months.

"I've been on the Corrections Commission for more than a decade, and we've only ever had maybe two votes that weren't a call to order or a vote to adjourn," McGirr said. "I think they should either abolish the Corrections Commission or give it some teeth."

Anderson pinned the blame on the 2017 death of Sen. Craig Tieszen of Rapid City, the commission's longtime chair. Commissioners formerly heard legislative updates, reviewed security issues and delved into trends, but that's changed, Anderson said.

"It's just gone basically in the toilet," Anderson said. "Nothing goes on."

In the days following the violence in Springfield, Rosebud Democratic Rep. and commission member Eric Emery said he expected to have "a little bit more input on operations of the prisons."

"But that has not been the case at all," Emery said. "I think my name is just on a list for the commission, and that's about it. I really know nothing more about the prisons than the general public does."

DOC: Commission only looks at prison industries

The frustration over a shift in focus has come alongside an apparent shift in the DOC's views on the commission's role.

The commission is empowered under state law to "assist the Department of Corrections in examining criminal justice issues and developing initiatives to address problems in corrections and the criminal justice system."

That language appears on the DOC website, as well as on the body's page on the state's boards and commissions website.

The commission is required by law to meet twice a year, in meetings called by the DOC secretary. The

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law also requires the DOC to get approval from the board to expend prison industry funding for any purpose beyond normal operations.

The group hasn't met since October, when members were informed of the DOC's plans to take over prison commissary operations. The commissary is the "store" from which inmates can buy things like snacks, hygiene products and other general items. Inmates would learn how to manage inventories and fill orders, the commission was told.

Secretary Kellie Wasko called a meeting in May, but there weren't enough members available for a quorum. The meeting was canceled. A September meeting was added to the board's website at some point within the past week.

The DOC and at least one of the commission's members told South Dakota Searchlight that the body "does not get involved in the day-to-day operations of the DOC."

Circuit Judge and commissioner Christina Klinger used that language in response to an email asking if the commission would take up questions of security. The judge said the commission typically looks at the finances and operations of Pheasantland Industries, the umbrella term for a range of prison shops where inmates make license plates and road signs, in addition to other tasks.

DOC spokesman Michael Winder sent an unsolicited reply to South Dakota Searchlight a few days later, in the same email thread, that led with the words "we were told you had questions about the Corrections Commission." It then repeated the language used in Klinger's email on the commission's role and its typical agenda items.

It wasn't the first time the DOC suggested a narrow scope of authority for commissioners. During a legislative Appropriations Committee meeting in May, DOC Finance Director Brittini Skipper told lawmakers the commission didn't discuss the site of the proposed men's prison, which is set to be the most expensive taxpayer-funded capital project in state history.

The location of that prison, in southern Lincoln County between Harrisburg and Canton, provoked a lawsuit from neighboring homeowners who say the state should seek approval from the county planning commission. The lawsuit is ongoing.

Skipper and Wasko fielded a host of questions on prison location during that meeting. There were questions about alternative sites, the site selection process, the water and sewer capacity, emergency services contracts and the price tag.

Rep. Ernie Otten, R-Tea, is a member of both the Corrections Commission and the Appropriations Committee.

He asked Skipper in May if the commission he serves on would've had a say in site selection.

"They have oversight only over Pheasantland Industries," Otten said. "Is that correct?"

Skipper replied "yeah" and noted that the law requires the group to vote on the use of funds.

Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, will soon fill a legislative seat on the commission vacated by Sen. Mike Diedrich, who is not seeking reelection.

Duhamel said she'd accepted the position with the understanding that the group's role was restricted to prison industries, but she added, "I'm guessing we can still ask questions and get info."

Duhamel said the problems at the state penitentiary in March and at Mike Durfee this month underscore "the need to move quickly with the construction of new facilities."

Narrowed scope unexplained

The law that placed the commission in state statute – it initially operated as an executive body in Gov. George Mickelson's administration – has not changed since the 1990s.

The commission's bylaws, online at the DOC website, make no mention of restrictions on the scope of its members' inquiries.

McGirr struggles to understand why the commission's task has changed, particularly given that the board's website still cites its more expansive purpose.

"Either the website is totally wrong, or what we've been told repeatedly by prison officials is totally wrong," McGirr said.

It wasn't always that way.

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News articles from South Dakota sources archived at newspapers.com show that the commission formerly asked questions following security lapses.

In 2011, two inmates murdered an officer named Robert "R.J." Johnson during an escape attempt. Johnson was alone at his post when he was attacked.

That same year, an inmate was released from prison in Sioux Falls after spending several months in solitary confinement. The mentally ill man would later tell police he'd spent that first night under a bridge praying to Satan. The next morning, he broke into a woman's house and slashed her throat in her bed.

Members of the commission were given reports on the incidents and had opportunities to question DOC officials in the aftermath.

The commission also had a voice in questions about prison construction. In the late 1980s, for example, its members toured a facility in Utah to get ideas on how to improve the state's facilities. In 1990, the commission toured Lake Byron, near Huron, to evaluate its potential as a site for a future prison.

In 1991, the year lawmakers wrote the commission into state law, the commission produced a 71-page report outlining the prison system's facility needs. It recommended new facilities and an expansion of community-based supervision for offenders within five years.

Audit committee also has oversight

Senate Majority Leader Casey Crabtree, R-Madison, said the commission isn't the only avenue for oversight. He pointed to the Government Operations and Audit Committee as another avenue.

The audit committee oversees all state departments, which are required to produce reports, set benchmarks and report on their progress. For corrections, state law directs the committee "to review any findings of abuse or neglect in a juvenile corrections facility, to make a continuing study of the operation of the state's correctional system, and to make a detailed report to the Senate and House of Representatives."

But Crabtree said the DOC is "better suited" to address safety concerns, and the Legislature is focused on budgetary matters.

"I think these issues that have been raised highlight the importance of funding updated prison systems which a majority of the legislature has partnered with Gov. Noem on over the last few years and should continue to do so until it's completed," Crabtree said in an emailed statement.

The Appropriations Committee is expected to hear Tuesday about prison construction plans and the Governor's House construction program at the prison in Springfield, but its agenda lists no other DOC topics.

The Government Operations and Audit Committee, meanwhile, will hear reports Wednesday from the DOC on abuse and neglect in private placement facilities and DOC performance measures.

That DOC performance report, filed in advance of the committee meeting, addresses staff shortages, turnover, inmate completion rates for substance use dependency treatment and touches on prison construction milestones and offender reentry.

There are no slides in the presentation that directly address security.

Otten, the audit committee's chair, did not return multiple phone calls across several weeks seeking comment. The vice chair, Republican Sen. Dean Wink, R-Howes, also did not return calls.

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.

Security questions after prison unrest met with silence by officials

Corrections spokesman refers to brief, weeks-old statement in response to questions

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 29, 2024 5:54 PM

It's been nearly three weeks since an outbreak of violence in Springfield on a former university campus now used as a medium-security prison.

The state Department of Corrections has yet to address any questions on the incident. The agency has declined to tell the public how and why the fights began, the number of inmates involved, the methods used to quell the violence and any punishments or security protocol updates in the aftermath.

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It's the last piece that most concerns the people who live in the former college dormitories of Mike Durfee State Prison.

On the day after the July 9-10 fighting began, inmates yelled at reporters from their cell windows, saying they felt unsafe. The DOC said six inmates suffered non-life threatening injuries, but the inmates said that number was deflated by at least half.

Multiple inmates told South Dakota Searchlight that the cell doors at the medium-security Springfield prison are still more like the dorm room doors they used to be than modern prison cells. Doors can be locked from the inside, they say, making it possible for attackers to be locked inside rooms with victims. Inmates have also claimed that understaffing left officers unable to do much but let inmates tussle early on in the fighting.

Inmates and a representative with the state employees' lobbying group say more high- or formerly high-security inmates from the penitentiary in Sioux Falls have been transferred to Springfield in recent months.

Inmate Winston Brakeall said the recent fighting included inmates beating other inmates with pool balls and cues, pop machines knocked over to block entryways, bloodied floors and scarred faces.

"There's one guy down the hall, his face just looks like road rash," Brakeall said over the phone. "He just got pummeled."

His biggest concern was about the alleged transfer of inmates from Sioux Falls to Springfield. Brakeall has been imprisoned at Durfee for nearly 20 years, and says he can't recall anything as severe as what happened earlier this month.

He attributes much of it to the transfers. Durfee used to be a place where inmates came "after they could show they had their s— together," Brakeall said.

"Now it's just another wing of The Hill," he said, referring to the South Dakota State Penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

Eric Ollila of the South Dakota State Employees' Organization said he's heard stories of higher-security inmates being transferred to Durfee over the past few months, in addition to ongoing concerns about staffing and officer security.

A 2022 report commissioned by the state to assess the corrections system's security and facility needs did not mention transfers but did note some problems in Springfield, some of which were tied to its layout as a college campus, as well as staffing and security protocols.

At the time of the review, the report said, inmates would be patted down after work, but not again after walking across the campus to their housing units.

Durfee was among the corrections facilities dinged for "inefficient facility layouts" that "present security challenges."

Michael Winder, in response to an email asking about a series of claims by inmates at Springfield – the second email to ask those questions – said "the claims that you cite are inaccurate."

"I would encourage you to refer to the information that DOC has previously provided on the offender fights," he wrote.

Information that is security sensitive or tied to an ongoing investigation, he wrote, will not be released.

Last week, the agency declined to release information requested by Searchlight under the state's open records law on the number of inmates at Springfield who'd been classified as high security within six months of their transfer to the medium-security facility.

Ian Fury, spokesman for Gov. Kristi Noem, has yet to reply to questions on the incident.

Earlier incidents of unrest broke out on two nights in March at the penitentiary in Sioux Falls. Court documents filed by Attorney General Marty Jackley's office in criminal cases against 11 inmates offer some details on how those events played out.

The DOC has released little on how the agency has moved to address any underlying security issues that may have contributed to the incidents, for either the Sioux Falls or Springfield facilities.

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.

South Dakota medical marijuana businesses are facing a \$3,690 fee increase

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 29, 2024 4:47 PM

Medical marijuana businesses in South Dakota will soon face a nearly 70% increase in their annual state registration fees, rising from \$5,310 to \$9,000.

"For a business-friendly state, this is not a business-friendly approach," said Deb Peters, president of the Cannabis Industry Association of South Dakota.

The Department of Health oversees the state's medical marijuana program. The fee was set at \$5,000, with annual adjustments for inflation, when the program began in 2021 after voters legalized medical marijuana in 2020.

During the 2024 legislative session that ended in March, the department proposed raising the fee, and legislators obliged.

"The current establishment certification fee does not provide the revenue necessary for the program implementation and administration," said the Department of Health's Lynne Valenti, who testified to lawmakers.

Governor Kristi Noem signed the bill on March 14. The law took effect July 1 and requires the Department of Health to complete rulemaking that will raise the fee to \$9,000 — an increase of \$3,690 — by Sept. 30. The rule affects cultivation, manufacturing, testing and dispensaries.

Peters said the fee increase will hurt customers by causing dispensaries to raise prices, and she said it could hurt the entire medical cannabis industry.

"This increase is so substantial that some small businesses will be forced to close as the cost of products and the cost to patients is not sustainable," she said. "Access to licensed establishments providing medicine will become even more difficult to find."

Kittrick Jeffries owns Puffy's Dispensary in Rapid City and Sturgis. He said the state should use medical marijuana sales tax revenue to help support the program, rather than raise his cost of doing business.

"There are other options," he said.

There are 78 medical marijuana dispensaries, 21 manufacturing sites, 40 cultivation sites and three testing facilities in South Dakota. As of July 19, the state's medical cannabis website said there were 286 practitioners and 13,257 patient cards.

A Nov. 5 ballot measure would legalize recreational marijuana. Matthew Schweich, who is a leader in that effort, was also behind the effort to legalize medical marijuana.

"This is a reason to pass recreational," Schweich said. "Those taxes would not only cover the recreational market, but medical as well."

The state Department of Health did not respond to a request for comment. The department held a public hearing Monday regarding the rule change. The deadline for public comment on the fee increase is Aug. 8, and the legislative rules committee will consider the change on Aug. 20.

For the 2022 fiscal year, the Department of Health reported collecting \$1.07 million in registration fees from medical cannabis businesses. Collections dropped to \$520,080 in the 2023 fiscal year. The \$9,000 fee is expected to generate \$846,000 during the remainder of the fiscal year after it takes effect, and then \$1.2 million during the next fiscal year.

How to submit a comment on the fee increase

Email DOHAdminRules@state.sd.us or mcquestions@state.sd.us.

Mail comments to 600 E. Capitol Avenue, Pierre, SD 57501.

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

Biden urges term limits for U.S. Supreme Court justices, new ethics rules

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 29, 2024 12:08 PM

WASHINGTON — Before he leaves the Oval Office in January, President Joe Biden wants to see Congress take up a constitutional amendment restoring criminal liability for U.S. presidents in response to the recent Supreme Court decision granting the chief executive broad immunity.

Biden announced the "Not Above the Law Amendment" Monday along with endorsing other changes for the nation's highest bench, potentially setting the tone and focus for the Democrat's final months in office after he exited the 2024 race in favor of Vice President Kamala Harris.

The proposal, released by the White House without text and detailed by Biden in a Washington Post op-ed, comes as public trust in the high court flags after recent ethics scandals and the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* that bucked popular opinion on abortion.

Biden is urging Congress to pass 18-year term limits for justices, with a president appointing a new justice every two years, and to approve enforceable conduct and ethics rules that would require disclosure of gifts, bar public political activity and ensure recusal from cases where a justice or their spouse has a financial or political stake.

Biden's plan to "restore faith" in the nation's highest court will likely hit a roadblock in the Republican-led U.S. House and in the Senate, where Democrats hold a slim edge and any reforms could struggle to gain the necessary 60 votes. A constitutional amendment would also require passage in three-fourths of the states.

U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson called Biden's proposal "dead on arrival."

Writing in the Washington Post op-ed, Biden said a lack of legal repercussions for former President Donald Trump's role in the violent Jan. 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, intended to stop the peaceful transfer of power from one elected administration to another, is "only the beginning."

"The only limits will be those that are self-imposed by the person occupying the Oval Office," he wrote.

He also referenced recent behavior from the court uncovered by ProPublica's investigative journalists — including gifts and luxury travel given to the justices from political donors — as cause for alarm.

"What is happening now is not normal, and it undermines the public's confidence in the court's decisions, including those impacting personal freedoms. We now stand in a breach," Biden wrote.

Biden is expected to speak on his plan Monday afternoon when he commemorates the 60th anniversary of the Civil Rights Act at the Lyndon B. Johnson Library in Texas.

Public Citizen, a group that advocates for changes at the Supreme Court, issued a statement Monday praising Biden's proposal.

"The dramatic drop in public confidence in the Supreme Court both undercuts the Court's legitimacy and endangers the legitimacy of the judicial branch as a whole," wrote Lisa Gilbert, the organization's co-president. "It is also critical that we undo the damage caused by the overreaching SCOTUS decision in the presidential immunity case and ensure that no person — including the president — is above the law."

Johnson panned Biden's announcement as a "radical overhaul" and "logical conclusion to the Biden-Harris Administration and Congressional Democrats' ongoing efforts to delegitimize the Supreme Court."

"It is telling that Democrats want to change the system that has guided our nation since its founding simply because they disagree with some of the Court's recent decisions," the Louisiana Republican said in a statement Monday.

But various acts of Congress have changed the court since the nation's founding, including the number of seats on the bench, which have ranged from five to 10. The number of seats on the court was fixed at nine shortly after the Civil War, according to the court's historical information that details the changes. In 1925, an act granted the justices the power to decide whether to hear a case, also known as *certiorari*.

The Republican National Committee issued a statement accusing Biden's plan of being "Kamala's scheme to pack the Supreme Court with far-left, radical judges who will render decisions based on politics, not the

law — and insulate her dangerously liberal policy positions from scrutiny if she's elected."

Democrats decry the court

Efforts to pass an enforceable code of conduct at the Supreme Court are already underway among Democratic lawmakers.

Reps. Jamie Raskin of Maryland, the top Democrat on the GOP-led House Committee on Oversight and Accountability, and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez of New York, another Democratic committee member, introduced legislation last month that would prohibit justices from receiving gifts valued over \$50, according to their offices.

The two lawmakers hosted a roundtable in early June excoriating the court after Chief Justice John Roberts refused to take action when the New York Times revealed that an upside-down U.S. flag — a sign of protest — flew outside Justice Samuel Alito's Virginia home shortly after the Jan. 6 riot.

House progressives unsuccessfully urged Alito to recuse himself from two cases related to Jan. 6, including Trump's appeal for immunity from federal election subversion charges.

A Supreme Court ethics bill sponsored by Rhode Island's Democratic Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse advanced out of the Senate Committee on the Judiciary along party lines a year ago but has not received a floor vote.

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

Iowa's six-week abortion ban is now in effect

Many patients were unaware of the law change, Planned Parenthood staff say

BY: ROBIN OPSAHL, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - JULY 29, 2024 8:59 AM

Many patients seeking abortion care in Iowa in the past few weeks were unaware that the state has banned most abortions beginning Monday, Planned Parenthood staff said.

More than six years after the Legislature first attempted to pass the law, abortion became illegal in Iowa, with narrow exceptions, at 8 a.m. Monday.

Kristina Remus, a Planned Parenthood patient services associate, said Friday that many people she is working with are unaware that Iowa's abortion law was changing.

"To say the last few weeks have been hard is an understatement," Remus said. "People are confused and seeking clarification. And a lot of patients are unaware that there is a law banning abortion at about six weeks before many people know that they're pregnant set to take effect so soon on Monday. We are having extremely difficult conversations in my department with patients."

The Iowa law bans abortions after cardiac activity is detectable in an embryo, something that can occur as early as six weeks of gestation. There are some exceptions to the ban, including for rape, incest and to save the life of the mother.

The so-called "fetal heartbeat" law was blocked from enforcement shortly after it was passed in July 2023. It was signed by Gov. Kim Reynolds in a special session after the Iowa Supreme Court ruled to uphold an injunction on a similar 2018 law. But in this June, the state Supreme Court ruled that a district court judge should lift the injunction on the 2023 measure, in addition to setting a lower legal standard for testing the constitutionality of Iowa abortion laws.

Dr. Sarah Traxler, chief medical officer for Planned Parenthood North Central States, said the law will have major negative impacts on health care in Iowa — especially maternal and reproductive health care, areas of care that the state already faces care shortages.

"We now live in a reality where politicians have control over Iowans' bodies and futures," Traxler said. "Its impact will be widespread and generational. We are tired, of course, but we are not defeated. Instead, we stand strong with Iowans in this moment."

Following the district judge's announcement of the law taking effect Monday, Reynolds said in a statement that "our work will continue to strengthen a culture of life in Iowa," in supporting expectant parents, encouraging adoption and ensuring legal access to in vitro fertilization treatments. She also celebrated the six-week abortion ban becoming enforceable after many years of being enjoined in the legal system.

"Today is a victory for life," Reynolds said. "There is nothing more sacred and no cause more worthy than protecting innocent unborn lives."

Remus said that in the week before enforcement of the law began, Planned Parenthood locations were "overbooking our schedules" in Iowa facilities trying to get patients access to legal abortion care.

"But I would say 30% of the people I talked to on the phone told me that, 'Well, I can't get off work this week, you know, I'm already scheduled for work this week, and I can't find day care, I can't get off work — I have it for next week,'" she said. "So unfortunately, those people, I was able to connect them with a navigator, and they will have to go out of state, because they are already above the (gestational age) of six weeks. So I would say we were able to get in maybe 50 percent of the people that were scheduled for next week, but the rest of them, the fact is that it was too late of notice for them to rearrange their schedules to be able to come sooner."

Here's what to know about the law, and how abortion care providers plan to assist Iowans seeking the medical procedure beginning Monday.

What changes are being made to abortion law in Iowa?

Before Monday, abortions were legal up to 20 weeks of pregnancy in Iowa. With the injunction lifting, abortion will be illegal when embryonic cardiac activity can be detected. Cardiac activity can become detectable as early as six weeks of gestation.

There are multiple exceptions to the law:

In cases of rape resulting in pregnancy, if reported within 45 days to law enforcement or a public health agency or doctor. In cases of incest, if reported within 140 days to law enforcement or a public health agency or doctor. When an abortion is necessary to save the life of the pregnant person.

Planned Parenthood advocates say the standards for medical providers to determine when an abortion is necessary to prevent the death of a patient are unclear. Lawsuits against in other states with abortion bans, including similar exceptions to save the life of the mother, have called for clarification on this exception. Five women filed a lawsuit in Texas in 2023 saying they were denied abortion despite having medical problems that endangered their lives during pregnancy. The Texas Supreme Court rejected the lawsuit in May.

Abortions can still legally be provided in Iowa before cardiac activity is detectable. Planned Parenthood staff said they plan to continue to provide abortions in Iowa in adherence with the law.

What abortion care looks like in Iowa, starting Monday

If a pregnant Iowan goes to a health care facility seeking an abortion, they are required to have two appointments — with a 24-hour waiting period before an abortion can be performed — in addition to having an ultrasound performed. The health care provider must also assess whether embryonic cardiac activity is detectable.

If there is no observable cardiac activity, the patient can legally access an abortion in Iowa.

If cardiac activity is detected, an abortion cannot be performed in Iowa — outside of the law's exemptions for rape, incest when reported in specified timeframes, and when an abortion is required to save the life of the patient.

Alex Sharp, senior health care manager at Planned Parenthood North Central States, said if a person seeking an abortion comes to one of the organization's Iowa clinics and cardiac activity is found, they will "have that conversation with the patient" about Iowa restrictions on the procedure, and connect them with a patient navigator for assistance seeking care in other states where they can legally have an abortion performed.

Remus, on the Planned Parenthood patient services team, said navigators will then help the person setting up an appointment in a nearby state where abortion is legal.

Navigators will also assist patients in seeing if they have access to financial aid — through programs like the Planned Parenthood Justice Fund, or outside sources like the Iowa Abortion Access Fund — to see if they qualify for funding to help cover the cost of the procedure, as well as associated expenses like transportation and lodging.

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Planned Parenthood has expanded patient capacity at health centers in Omaha, Nebraska, and Mankato, Minnesota in recent months as the organization prepared for abortion law to change in Iowa.

Will there be future legal challenges to Iowa's abortion law?

Peter Im, staff attorney at Planned Parenthood Federation of America, said earlier in July that reproductive health care advocates are "exploring all of our options right now" for challenging Iowa's law restricting abortion. That includes a potential challenge to the Iowa Board of Medicine rules on the law, Im said.

However, the 4-3 Iowa Supreme Court decision sets a high standard for finding state abortion laws unconstitutional. The Supreme Court majority ruled that the "rational basis" test will be used to assess Iowa abortion laws constitutionality. This means that if the state has a legitimate reason to enact a law restricting abortion, the measure can stand.

"Employing that test here, we conclude that the fetal heartbeat statute is rationally related to the state's legitimate interest in protecting unborn life," Justice Matthew McDermott wrote in the June majority opinion.

Sally Frank, a law professor at Drake University, said in June there may be "applied challenges" to the law, similar to the Texas lawsuit, in the future. These challenges could be made by women who have their life endangered and families of people who died due to the law, as medical professionals may not be willing to perform an abortion when necessary because of a lack of clarity on what qualifies a "medical emergency" that would make the procedure legal, she said.

Will there be further restrictions on abortion in Iowa?

Iowa Democrats and reproductive health care advocates have said Iowa Republicans — who control both chambers of the Legislature, in addition to holding the governorship — may pursue further restrictions on abortion in future legislative sessions following the state Supreme Court ruling. Frank said she expects Iowa to pass measures restricting travel or assistance for out-of-state abortions similar to those passed by conservatives in other states, like an Idaho law that criminalized the act of assisting a pregnant minor seeking an abortion in another state.

While top Iowa Republican leaders have not commented on future abortion legislation, other conservative figures have said they are aiming for further restrictions. Chuck Hurley, vice president of the conservative Christian organization the Family Leader and lobbyist at the Iowa Legislature, told the crowd at the Family Leadership Summit earlier in July that "we aren't done" on the issue of abortion in Iowa.

"Fourteen states now protect babies from the moment of conception, and Iowa should be the 15th," Hurley said.

Robin Opsahl is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering the state Legislature and politics. Robin has experience covering government, elections and more at media organizations including Roll Call, the Sacramento Bee and the Wausau Daily Herald, in addition to working on multimedia projects, newsletters and visualizations. They were a political reporter for the Des Moines Register covering the Iowa caucuses leading up to the 2020 presidential election, assisting with the Register's Iowa Poll, and reporting on Iowa's 4th District elections.

Bowhunters are volunteering to improve pronghorn survival in western South Dakota

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 29, 2024 6:00 AM

Bowhunters in western South Dakota are volunteering to replace sheep fences with a pronghorn-friendly alternative, aiming to improve the survival of the world's second-fastest land mammal.

Pronghorns, often called antelope, are native to North America and thrive in the American West, including the area west of the Missouri River in South Dakota. The animals reach speeds of 60 mph, making them well-suited to the region's open, semi-arid plains.

However, pronghorns prefer to crawl under rather than leap over fences, and parts of western South Dakota are fenced for sheep with wire-grid fencing that is difficult to go under.

Some of the land that was once used for sheep now serves other uses, such as cattle ranching, but the sheep fencing remains.

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So, in June, South Dakota Bowhunters Association members began working alongside landowners to remove existing fencing and replace it with pronghorn-friendly fencing.

"This state is home to tens of thousands of hunters, and every year we take and take," said association member and volunteer Rob Mahaffey, of Rapid City. "Let's also give back."

The team has conducted three outings, helping landowners remove and replace about 4 miles of fencing, with another 6 miles lined up. The association said it's just the start, and more volunteers are needed.

"We've seen firsthand how these fences can hurt pronghorn," Mahaffey said. "They get hung up in the fence while trying to evade a predator, or they're unable to get to safety during a blizzard."

The new fencing meets the requirements set by state wildlife officials for a public program paying landowners up to \$2,000 for wildlife-friendly fencing projects. Since 2019, the department said the program has incentivized 145 miles worth of wildlife-friendly fence installation, primarily to keep livestock from grazing or overgrazing certain areas.

The Department of Game, Fish & Parks declined South Dakota Searchlight's request to interview one of the department's biologists for this story but encouraged interested landowners to visit their local habitat biologist to learn more about the program. GF&P Communications Manager Nick Harrington said in an email that the department wants to thank the bowhunters association "for their efforts in assisting and promoting this conservation practice."

The state's pronghorn-friendly fence specifications consist of a maximum top wire height of 42 inches, a second strand of wire at 30 inches, a third wire at 24 inches, and the bottom must be a smooth wire (the others can be barbed wire) set at 18 inches above the ground. The fencing also has to remain in place for at least 10 years.

The GF&P aims for a pre-hunting season pronghorn population of 58,000 to 79,000. The 2024 pre-season estimate is about 35,000.

To improve numbers, Bowhunters Association President Justin Broughton said replacing fences will not be enough. He wants the state to put limits on the currently unlimited licenses for all resident pronghorn bowhunters and nonresident bowhunters who hunt exclusively on private land.

"There is no control when you have unlimited licenses," he said. "We have a situation where the population is half the objective, yet we have unlimited licenses. Think about that."

South Dakota hunters killed 1,788 pronghorns with rifles and 606 with bows in 2023. Other factors impacting the pronghorn population include the amount and quality of habitat, weather, disease and predation.

Pronghorns' range extends from southern Canada through the western United States and into northern Mexico. In the early 1800s, their numbers were estimated to be 30 million. By the early 20th century, overhunting and habitat loss reduced their numbers to about 13,000.

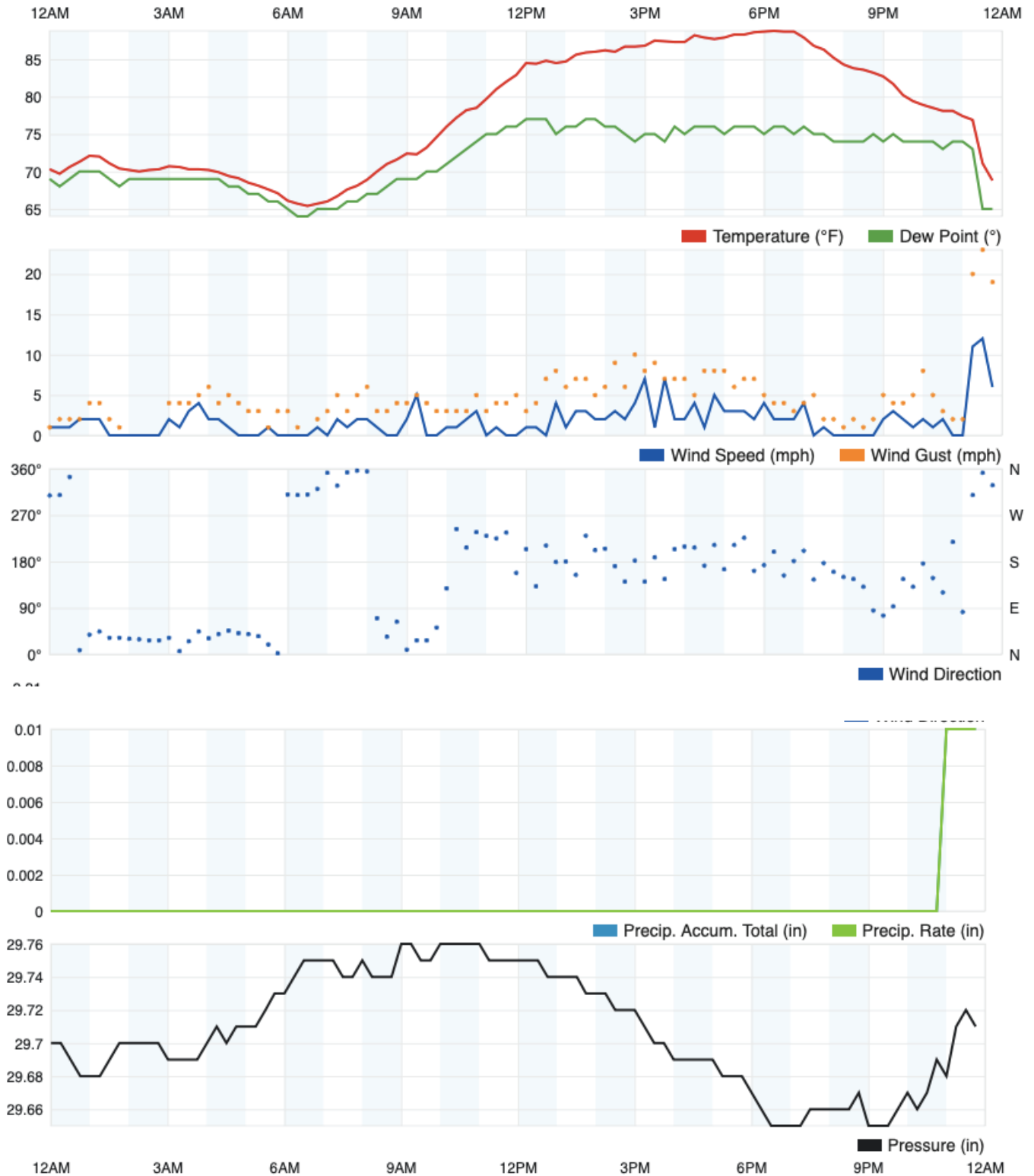
Conservation efforts have increased and sustained their population between 500,000 and 1 million since the mid-20th century. Wildlife advocates say the current population is about 500,000.

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

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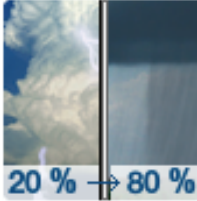
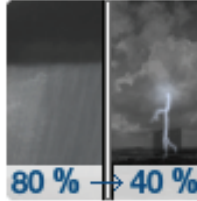

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today	Tonight	Wednesday	Wednesday Night	Thursday	
					
High: 90 °F	Low: 69 °F	High: 87 °F	Low: 65 °F	High: 87 °F	
Patchy Fog then Mostly Sunny	Partly Cloudy then Patchy Fog	Slight Chance T-storms and Patchy Fog	Showers then Chance T-storms	Sunny	

Tuesday Severe Weather Threat

Afternoon and Evening Hours

July 30, 2024 3:52 AM

Location/Timing
Storms are expected to develop over central South Dakota between 5-7 PM CDT and track east through the evening.

Primary Threats for the **Yellow** areas

Tornado Potential

Very Low	Low	Medium	High
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Max Hail Size

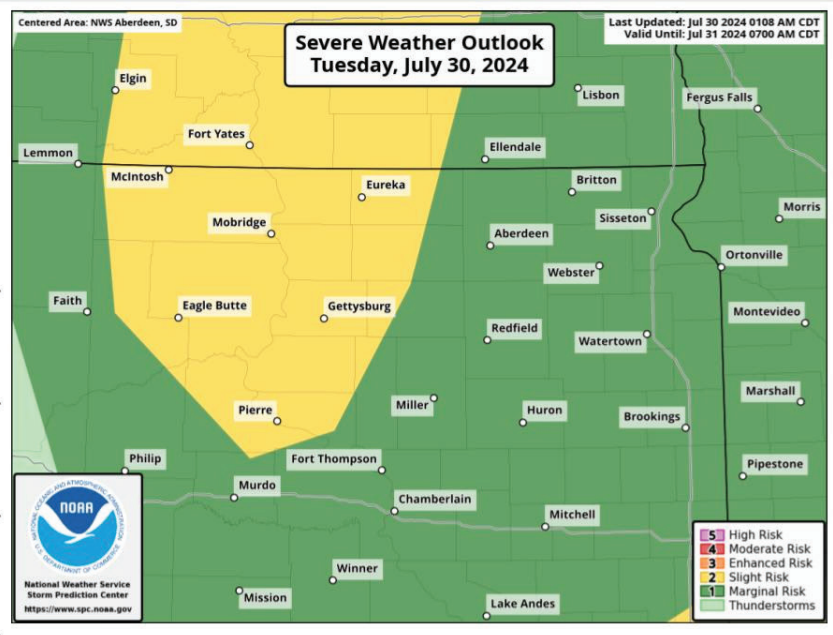
Dimes	Quarters	Golfball	Baseball
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Max Wind Speed

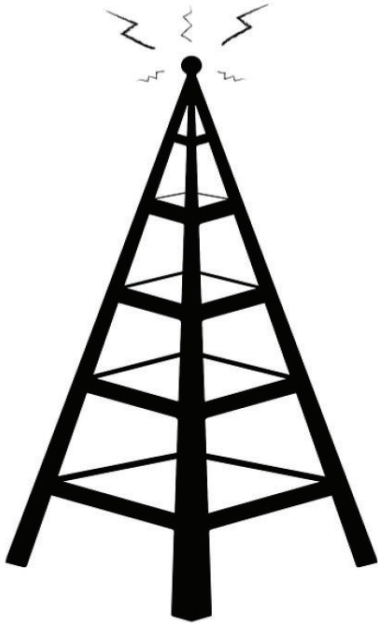
< 60 mph	60-70 mph	70-80 mph	> 80mph
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Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

Very Low	Low	Medium	High
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Storms are expected to develop in western SD between 5 and 7 PM CDT and move into central SD later this evening. The strongest storms may produce hail to the size of quarters and 60-70 mph winds.



NOAA Weather Radio Maintenance

What & Where

The **NOAA Weather Radio located in Bath, SD**, that covers portions of McPherson, Edmunds, Faulk, Brown, Spink, Marshall, Day, and Clark Counties.

When

Until Further Notice

Backup Locations

Additional transmitters that cover portions of this area remain available: **Lowry** (162.500 MHz), **Wessington** (162.550 MHz), **South Shore** (162.425 MHz).



<https://www.weather.gov/nwr/Maps>



7/27/2024 3:30pm: The NOAA Weather Radio in Bath, SD has stopped transmitting audio. Our technicians are troubleshooting the issue, but we don't have an estimated time that it will return to service.

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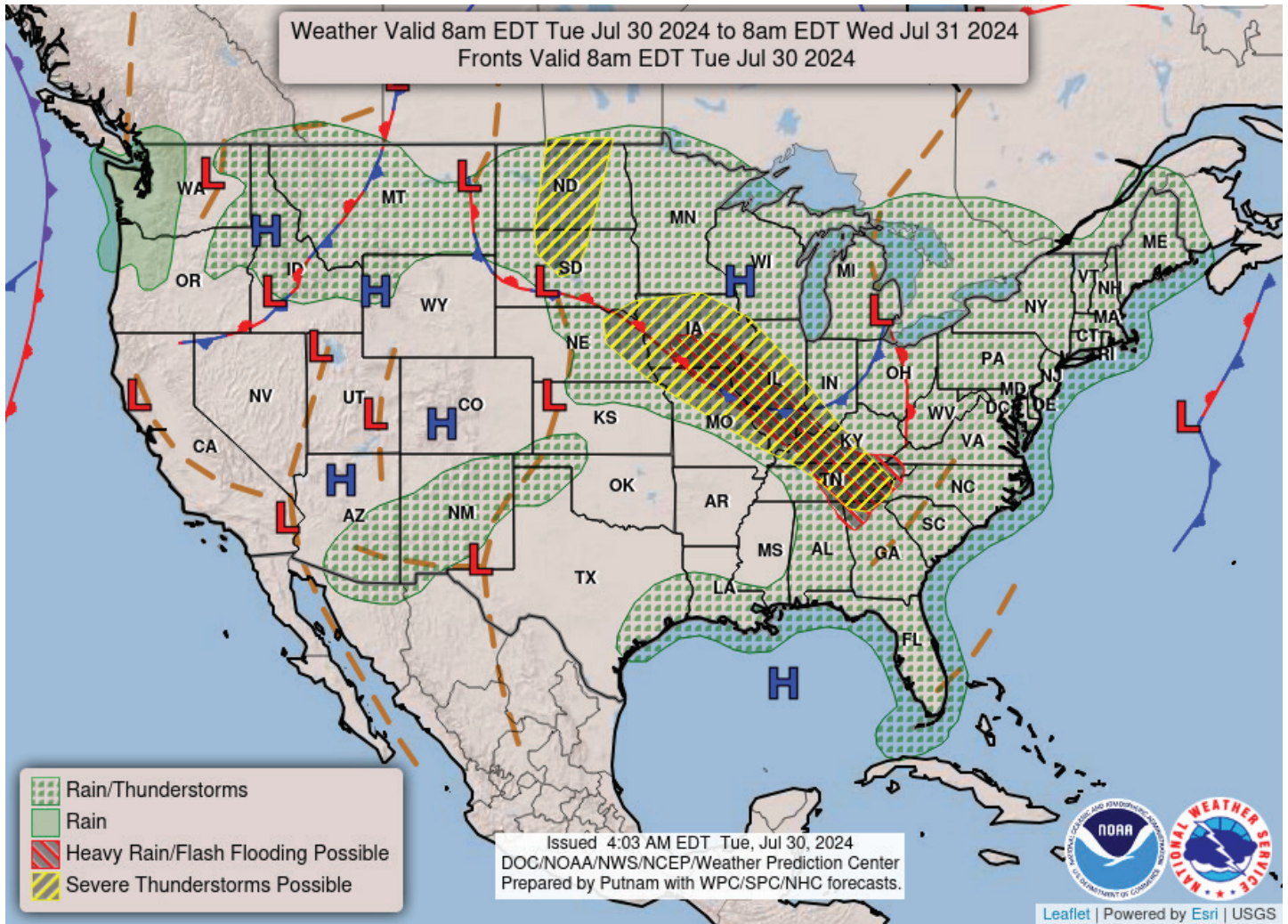
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 89 °F at 6:16 PM
Low Temp: 65 °F at 6:31 AM
Wind: 23 mph at 11:27 PM
Precip: : 0.01

Day length: 14 hours, 50 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 2006
Record Low: 39 in 1971
Average High: 85
Average Low: 60
Average Precip in July.: 3.01
Precip to date in July: 3.78
Average Precip to date: 14.02
Precip Year to Date: 14.73
Sunset Tonight: 9:04:05 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:14:42 am



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Today in Weather History

July 30, 1981: Operation Skywarn organized by the National Weather Service in Bismarck four years ago had a perfect opportunity to put the training into operation on this day. A spotter 20 miles west of Bismarck identified a rotating wall cloud 10 minutes before a tornado touchdown. The strong tornado was rated as having F3 strength, leaving behind an 18-mile long path of destruction. The force of the storm drove a stick between a tire and rim. A 6-inch steel beam was twisted and found near the high tension tower which had been toppled.

July 30, 2001: Strong winds of 81 mph blew much of the roof off of the bowling alley in Mobridge. Some flying debris also damaged a trailer home. Many trees were snapped in two or uprooted, and many power lines were downed. High winds brought down tree branches and also knocked the power out for several hours in Pollock.

July 30, 2010: Very heavy rains of 5 to 10 inches caused the Rosehill Dam to break in the early morning hours in southeast Hand County. Flash flooding began around 1 am CDT with two campers being swept up around 130 am CDT. The two campers clung to a tree until they could be rescued about 6 am CDT. They were both injured with one camper being treated for hypothermia and other airlifted to Sioux Falls for broken ribs and head trauma. The dam broke at 330 am CDT with the spillway breaking at 420 am CDT. There was between a 100 to the 150-foot hole left by the dam break. The flash flooding continued downstream on Sand Creek causing damage to area farms, filling basements, and flooding many roads.

1949 - The state record for Connecticut was established when the town of Greenville registered an afternoon high of 102 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1965 - The temperature at Portland, OR, reached 107 degrees to equal their all-time record high. (The Weather Channel)

1970: Hurricane Celia was born in the northwest of the Caribbean Sea on this day. The hurricane would be one of the worst ever to hit Texas and would reach Texas late on August 3. The storm reached its peak as it made landfall near Corpus Christi, Texas, as a strong Category 3 hurricane. Hurricane Celia is currently the last major hurricane to make landfall on the middle Texas Coast until Hurricane Harvey in 2017.

1979 - A forty-minute hailstorm bombed Fort Collins, CO, with baseball to softball size hail. Two thousand homes and 2500 automobiles were damaged, and about 25 persons were injured, mainly when hit on the head by the huge stones. A three month old baby died later of injuries. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Afternoon highs of 105 degrees at Aberdeen SD, 102 degrees at Bismarck, ND, and 102 degrees at Pueblo, CO, were records for the date. Pueblo, CO, reported just .09 inch of rain for the first thirty days of the month. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - A dozen cities in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Downtown Baltimore, MD, hit 103 degrees, marking a record eight days of 100 degree heat for the month, and ten for the year. The high of 101 degrees at Billings, MT, marked a record seventeen days of 100 degree heat for the year. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the northeast, with nearly fifty reports of large hail or damaging winds in Pennsylvania and New York State. A tree fell on a car at Erie, PA, injuring four persons. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Morning thunderstorms over central Missouri deluged Columbia with 5.98 inches of rain causing flash flooding. Daytime thunderstorms in Kentucky drenched Paducah with 1.73 inches of rain in less than half an hour. Evening thunderstorms in the north central U.S. produced wind gusts to 78 mph east of Moccasin, MT. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



WILLING AND ABLE

Little Anne was anxious for her birthday to arrive. It was to be a day of celebration filled with presents and a party with her best friends.

One morning before school she asked, "Mom, when's my birthday? How long before it's here? You know, how much time do I have to start being good 'cause you know it's hard for me to be good."

How true of all of us!

If we truly want to be good and do good, however, we need to listen to the advice of Paul: "For God is working in you, giving you the power to do what pleases Him."

To do good we must first be willing to do good. For the Christian doing good is being Christ-like. For some of us it takes a while. We know that our goal is to have an attitude like Christ and act as He did. But what do we do until that happens? Many of us have had that as a goal for years and still have not achieved the results we want: to think and act like Jesus.

Look at it this way: If we are willing, God will enable us to do what He would have us to do. We can read the Gospel message and see what Jesus did and then go into His world and do whatever He did to honor His Father. Willingness always precedes ability. And ability comes from imitation, practice and application.

Prayer: Lord, sometimes we really try to complicate things to get out of doing them. Truth is, if we want to do good we can do good for You promised to help us. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him. Philippians 2:13

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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- Colored.....\$42.60/6 months
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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.26.24

2 14 33 58 65 3

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$331,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 48 Mins
DRAW: 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.29.24

1 26 44 51 52 4

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$6,150,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 3
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.29.24

18 28 30 32 33 11

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 18 Mins 39
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.27.24

3 5 8 11 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$51,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 18
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.29.24

20 21 36 54 63 21

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 47
DRAW: Mins 39 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

07.29.24

11 27 30 33 44 16

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$154,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 47
DRAW: Mins 39 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
- CANCELLED:** 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

Taylor Swift says she is 'in shock' after 2 children died in an attack on a UK dance class

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Police were questioning a suspect and working Tuesday to understand what motivated a 17-year-old boy to attack children at a Taylor Swift-themed dance and yoga class, leaving two dead and six in critical condition.

A total of nine children and two adults were hurt in the rampage in Southport in northwest England. Both adults and six of the children were in critical condition in local hospitals.

Swift said she was "completely in shock" and still taking in "the horror" of the event.

"These were just little kids at a dance class," she wrote on Instagram. "I am at a complete loss for how to ever convey my sympathies to these families."

A 17-year-old boy was arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder.

Local people left flowers and stuffed animals in tribute at a police cordon on the street lined with brick houses in the seaside resort near Liverpool — nicknamed "sunny Southport" — whose beach and pier attract vacationers from across northwest England.

Witnesses described scenes "from a horror movie" as bloodied children ran from the attack just before noon on Monday. The suspect was arrested soon after on suspicion of murder and attempted murder. Police said he was born in Cardiff, Wales and had lived for years in a village about 3 miles (5 kilometers) from Southport. He has not yet been charged.

Police said detectives are not treating Monday's attack as terror-related and they are not looking for any other suspects.

"We believe the adults who were injured were bravely trying to protect the children who were being attacked," Merseyside Police Chief Constable Serena Kennedy said.

It is the latest shocking attack in a country where a recent rise in knife crime has stoked anxieties and led to calls for the government to do more to clamp down on bladed weapons.

Witnesses described hearing screams and seeing children covered in blood emerging from the Hart Space, a community center that hosts everything from pregnancy workshops and meditation sessions to women's boot camps.

The attack happened during a Taylor Swift-themed yoga and dance workshop for children aged about 6 to 11.

"They were in the road, running from the nursery," said Bare Varathan, who owns a shop nearby. "They had been stabbed, here, here, here, everywhere," he said, indicating the neck, back and chest.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer called the attack "horrendous and deeply shocking." King Charles III sent his "condolences, prayers and deepest sympathies" to those affected by the "utterly horrific incident."

Prince William and his wife Catherine said that "as parents, we cannot begin to imagine what the families, friends and loved ones of those killed and injured in Southport today are going through."

Colin Parry, who owns a nearby auto body shop, told The Guardian that the suspect arrived by taxi.

"He came down our driveway in a taxi and didn't pay for the taxi, so I confronted him at that point," Parry was quoted as saying. "He was quite aggressive, he said, 'What are you gonna do about it?'"

Parry said most of the victims appeared to be young girls.

"The mothers are coming here now and screaming," Parry said. "It is like a scene from a horror movie. ... It's like something from America, not like sunny Southport."

Britain's worst attack on children occurred in 1996, when 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton shot 16 kindergarteners and their teacher dead in a school gymnasium in Dunblane, Scotland. The U.K. subsequently banned the private ownership of almost all handguns.

Mass shootings and killings with firearms are rare in Britain, where knives were used in about 40% of homicides in the year to March 2023.

Concerns over water quality in Paris' Seine River postpone men's Olympic triathlon

By PAT GRAHAM and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — Concerns about water quality in the Seine River led Paris Olympics organizers to postpone the men's triathlon Tuesday, with officials hoping the swimming portion of the race will be able to go forward in the long-polluted waterway in the coming days following an expensive cleanup effort.

Organizers said they will try to hold the men's triathlon Wednesday instead. The women's competition also is scheduled that day, but both will only go forward if water tests show acceptable levels of E. coli and other bacteria in the river. Friday is also planned as a backup date.

However, storms or rain are forecast Tuesday night through Thursday, which could complicate efforts to reschedule the events because rain generally causes bacteria levels in the Seine to rise.

Paris experienced a downpour during the Olympic opening ceremony Friday, with rain persisting into Saturday. The swimming portion of training events meant to let the triathletes familiarize themselves with the course was canceled on both Sunday and Monday because of concerns over water quality.

The delays come after Olympic organizers and city officials had expressed confidence in recent days that bacteria levels would improve as skies cleared and temperatures warmed this week, but that apparently wasn't sufficient to ensure the athletes' safety. Tuesday's high in Paris of 35 degrees Celsius (95 Fahrenheit) offers some hope of the heat wave killing off some of the bacteria.

Paris spent 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) to improve the water quality in the Seine so the swimming portion of the triathlon and the marathon swimming event next week could be held in the famed river that runs through the city center. But bacteria levels have remained in flux.

The decision to postpone the men's triathlon followed a meeting early Tuesday that included the sport's governing body, World Triathlon, its medical team, the International Olympic Committee and city officials.

"Despite the improvement on the water quality levels in the last hours, the readings at some points of the swim course are still above the acceptable limits," organizers said, stressing that their "priority is the health of the athletes."

Paris Deputy Mayor Pierre Rabadan said "the trend is improving" but "we are still not below the necessary threshold."

To hold the two competitions on the Seine on Wednesday "seems to us to be the best option," he said. However, he did not rule out further delays "if there is an issue tomorrow after the results of the analysis."

Daily water quality tests measure levels of fecal bacteria known as E. coli, with a safe limit of 900 colony-forming units per 100 milliliters determined by European rules. Monitoring group Eau de Paris releases data each Friday, but it is updated only through the previous Tuesday.

Aurelie Merle, the Paris 2024 director of sports, said one of four test sites was below the threshold for E. coli Tuesday morning. Two other sites were just above the limit and one was more elevated, she said, citing a range of 980 to 1,553.

High levels of E. coli in water can indicate contamination from sewage. Most strains are harmless and some live in the intestines of healthy people and animals. But others can be dangerous. Even a mouthful of contaminated water can lead to diarrhea, and the germ can cause illnesses such as infections in the urinary tract or in the intestines.

Efforts to make the river suitable for swimming cost 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion). They included the construction of a giant basin to capture excess rainwater and keep wastewater from flowing into the river, renovating sewer infrastructure and upgrading wastewater treatment plants.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo very publicly took a swim in the river two weeks ago, along with Paris 2024 chief Tony Estanguet, and the top government official for the Paris region, Marc Guillaume, along with swimmers from local swimming clubs. Data released last week show that E. coli levels at the Bras Marie were at 985 units per 100 milliliters that day, slightly above the established threshold.

The men's triathlon is now scheduled to start at 10:45 a.m. Wednesday, which may make heat more of a factor as the event may be finishing at the hottest part of the day. The women's race is set to go forward

at 8 a.m. as originally planned.

Other swimming events planned in the Seine are the triathlon mixed relay on Aug. 5 and the women's and men's marathon swimming events on Aug. 8 and Aug. 9.

US boosts alliance with the Philippines with \$500 million funding and pact amid concern over China

By JIM GOMEZ and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — Washington's top diplomat and defense chief announced \$500 million in military funding Tuesday to boost Philippine defenses and progress on a proposed military intelligence-sharing pact as both allies renewed their concerns over China's continuing aggressive actions in the region.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with President Ferdinand Marcos Jr., who has fortified Manila's decades-old treaty alliance with Washington as hostilities between Philippine and Chinese forces flared since last year in the disputed South China Sea.

Marcos hailed "very open" communication lines between Washington and Manila, adding that the two countries' treaty alliance and key issues in the South China Sea and the Indo-Pacific region "are continuously examined and reexamined so we are agile in terms of our responses."

Marcos has underscored the need for a U.S. military presence for Asian stability and peace.

After meeting their Philippine counterparts later, Blinken and Austin announced the \$500 million military funding to help in an ongoing modernization of the Philippine military and coast guard and boost security collaboration amid shared concerns over China's assertive actions.

"Both of us share concerns and many other countries in the region share concerns, as well, about some of the actions that the People's Republic of China has taken, escalatory actions in the South China Sea, the East China Sea," including "coercive methods," Blinken said in a joint news conference.

He renewed a warning that the U.S. would help defend the Philippines if Filipino forces, ships and aircraft come under attack in the Pacific, including in the South China Sea.

The U.S. officials also offered condolences over the dozens of deaths wrought by typhoon-worsened monsoon rains in recent weeks and announced an additional \$1 million in aid for the victims and to help devastated communities recover.

The visit came the week after the Philippines and reached a temporary arrangement to prevent clashes around the Philippine-occupied Second Thomas Shoal like the violent faceoff between their forces on June 17.

Philippine forces transported food and other supplies and a fresh batch of navy personnel Saturday to Manila's territorial outpost at the shoal without a confrontation were reported for the first time since last year.

But the Philippines would continue strengthening its territorial defense with the assistance of the U.S. and other friendly military powers and build new security alliances, Philippine Ambassador to the U.S. Jose Manuel Romualdez said.

"The non-confrontational resupply and rotation is purely temporary. The People's Republic of China will not stop and we are determined just as well," Romualdez told The Associated Press.

The \$500 million in U.S. military financing would include funding for reinforcing the Philippine navy's capability. About \$125 million would be used for constructions and other improvements in parts of Philippine military bases to be occupied by U.S. forces under the 2014 Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement, Romualdez said.

With strong support in Congress, U.S. military funding may double next year "depending on our capacity to absorb it," Romualdez said.

Progress in negotiations on a proposed military intelligence-sharing pact, the General Security of Military Information Agreement was announced by Austin, who said that the accord may be signed later this year.

The agreement, similar to ones Washington has forged with other allied countries, would allow the U.S. to provide high-level intelligence, more sophisticated weapons, including missile systems, and access to

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satellite and drone surveillance systems to the Philippines with an assurance that such intelligence and details about sophisticated weapons would be closely kept secret in a highly secured manner to prevent leaks, two Philippine officials told the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because of a lack of authority to discuss the issue publicly.

Philippine efforts to obtain sophisticated weapons from the U.S. military in the past have been hampered by the lack of such an intelligence deal.

In his meeting with Blinken and Austin, Marcos alluded to the intense political divisions in the U.S. ahead of the presidential elections this year.

"I'm a bit surprised considering how interesting your political situation has become back in the States, but I'm glad that you found the time to come and visit with us," Marcos said.

Meanwhile, Romualdez said that U.S. support to the Philippines would "absolutely" not change regardless of who becomes America's next president. Numerous countries have expressed concerns about the implications of former President Donald Trump returning to the White House in January after President Joe Biden withdrew and threw his support to Vice President Kamala Harris.

"Both Republicans and Democrats are in full agreement for the Philippines," he said, adding that both sides have given assurances of continued support to Manila.

Marcos approved last year an expansion of the U.S. military presence in four more Philippine military camps under the 2014 defense agreement, and the largest war drills between Filipino and U.S. forces have been staged under his administration, drawing opposition and alarm from China, which said that increased deployments of American forces would endanger regional peace and security.

The Philippines has responded that it has the right to move to safeguard its territorial interests and national security.

Secret Service, FBI officials to testify about Trump assassination attempt in latest hearing

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Senate lawmakers are expected Tuesday to grill the acting director of the Secret Service about law enforcement lapses in the hours before the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump in the latest in a series of congressional hearings dedicated to the shooting.

Ronald Rowe became acting director of the agency last week after his predecessor, Kimberly Cheatle, resigned in the aftermath of a House hearing in which she was berated by lawmakers from both parties and failed to answer specific questions about the communication failures preceding the July 13 shooting.

Rowe will be joined by FBI Deputy Director Paul Abbate at a joint hearing of the Senate committees on the Judiciary and Homeland Security.

The hearing comes one day after the FBI released new details about its investigation into the shooting, revealing that the gunman, 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks, had looked online for information about mass shootings, power plants, improvised explosive devices and the May assassination attempt of the Slovakian prime minister.

The FBI also said that Trump has agreed to be interviewed by agents as a crime victim; the bureau said last week that the former president had been struck in the ear by a bullet or fragment of one. Trump said Monday evening that he expected that interview to take place on Thursday.

But the bulk of the questions Tuesday are expected to be directed at Rowe as lawmakers demand answers about how Crooks was able to get so close to Trump. Investigators believe Crooks fired eight shots in Trump's direction from an AR-style rifle after scaling the roof of a building of some 135 meters (147 yards) from where Trump was speaking in Butler, Pennsylvania.

One rallygoer was killed and two others were injured. Crooks was shot dead by a Secret Service countersniper.

At her hearing last week, Cheatle said the Secret Service had "failed" in its mission to protect Trump. She called the attempt on Trump's life the Secret Service's "most significant operational failure" in decades.

and vowed to "move heaven and earth" to get to the bottom of what went wrong and make sure there's no repeat of it.

Cheatle acknowledged that the Secret Service was told about a suspicious person two to five times before the shooting at the rally. She also revealed that the roof from which Crooks opened fire had been identified as a potential vulnerability days before the rally.

Cheatle said she apologized to Trump in a phone call after the assassination attempt.

In a Monday night interview on Fox News, Trump defended the Secret Service agents who protected him from the shooting but said someone should have been on the roof with Crooks and that there should have been better communication with local police.

"They didn't speak to each other," he said.

He praised the sniper who killed Crooks with what he said was an amazing shot but noted: "It would have been good if it was nine seconds sooner."

California man defends his home as wildfires push devastation and spread smoke across US West

By EUGENE GARCIA and JAIMIE DING Associated Press

COHASSET, Calif. (AP) — In the small forest community of Cohasset, Ron Ward watched as flames hundreds of feet high from California's deadly Park Fire approached his family ranch.

He had lost insurance coverage on it just a month earlier as companies increasingly drop California homeowners due to the growing risk of wildfires in the state, in part due to hotter weather and arid conditions caused by climate change. So he and his son Ethan went to work installing a fire protection system involving a water line to a pond and sprinklers. The system's pump was delivered right when the fire started.

The flames reached within 70 feet (21. meters) of his house. Then they stopped.

"It hit our sprinklers and kind of died down and then went around our property and missed, missed all of our structures," Ward said. His 100-year-old ranch was saved.

Cohasset exhibited charred remnants of the devastation Sunday, a scene that Ward described as a "moonscape." Mailboxes and vehicles were covered with pink fire retardant dropped by aircraft. The husks of a washer and dryer set were surrounded by burned debris and a blackened motorcycle was propped upright, balancing on rims after its tires apparently melted away.

Firefighters made progress and were helped by improving weather over the weekend in the battle against wildfires covering massive areas in the western United States, but further evacuations have been necessary as thousands of personnel tackle the flames.

Ward, who stayed behind with a few friends, had to be the one to call his bookkeeper and neighbors to tell them their homes were gone.

"They haven't even been able to get back to look at their homes," he said, tearing up as he recounted last week's experience to The Associated Press in an interview Monday.

The Park Fire, the largest wildfire in California this year and the sixth largest in the state's recorded history, was one of more than 100 large active wildfires burning in the U.S. on Monday. The man arrested on suspicion of starting the blaze in Northern California by pushing a burning car into a gully made his first appearance in court Monday and was charged with felony arson of an inhabited structure or property.

Ronnie Dean Stout was arrested at his home in Chico a day after the fire started. Prosecutors said Stout has a previous criminal record and would face life in prison if convicted.

There was no reply to an email to the district attorney asking whether Stout had legal representation or someone who could comment on his behalf. Butte County District Attorney Michael Ramsey told reporters after the hearing that Stout says the incident was an accident, The Sacramento Bee reported.

The Park Fire scorched more than 575 square miles (1,489 square kilometers), an area greater than the city of Los Angeles, as of Monday, according to CAL Fire. It has destroyed more than 100 structures and is threatening 4,200 more.

Firefighters reached 12% of containment after being aided by cooler temperatures and more humidity over the weekend and it remained at that figure Monday.

Evacuation orders were in effect Monday on 25 wildfires, according to the National Interagency Fire Center. More than 27,000 wildland firefighters and support personnel are assigned to wildfires that have burned more than 3,200 square miles (8,288 square kilometers) nationwide, the center said.

Some blazes were sparked by the weather, with climate change increasing the frequency of lightning strikes as the western U.S. endures blistering heat and bone-dry conditions.

Ward said that even though he and his friends "survived the onslaught," he remains vigilant, waking up at 5 a.m. and patrolling the area for fires until nightfall in his all-terrain vehicle.

"We're just cruising around and putting out fires," he said.

The National Weather Service issued "red flag" warnings Monday for wide swaths of Idaho, Montana, Utah and Wyoming, in addition to parts of California, meaning dry fuels and stronger winds were increasing the fire danger. Air quality alerts were also issued for Monday in the northwestern U.S. and western Canada.

More than 4,800 firefighters were battling the fire Monday, aided by numerous helicopters and air tankers.

The Park Fire has drawn comparisons to the 2018 Camp Fire that tore through Paradise, killing 85 people and torching 11,000 homes.

In Southern California, about 2,000 people were ordered to evacuate because of a fire sweeping through the Sequoia National Forest. The wind-driven blaze ate up more than 60 square miles (155 square kilometers) in four days, Andrew Freeborn of the Kern County Fire Department said.

U.S. Fire Administrator Dr. Lori Moore-Merrell said one-third of U.S. residents live in an area where human activities and wildland vegetation intersect, creating a higher potential for wildfires, according to a statement.

"We question living here for sure," Ward said of his ranch in Cohasset. But generations have remained since his wife's great grandfather settled there in 1905, and he isn't the one to leave, he said.

"There's a lot of history here," Ward said. "So we live on this ranch and we're committed to this ranch and preserving the ranch."

Income gap between Black and white US residents shrank between Gen Xers and millennials, study says

By MIKE SCHNEIDER Associated Press

The income gap between white and Black young adults was narrower for millennials than for Generation X, according to a new study that also found the chasm between white people born to wealthy and poor parents widened between the generations.

By age 27, Black Americans born in 1978 to poor parents ended up earning almost \$13,000 a year less than white Americans born to poor parents. That gap had narrowed to about \$9,500 for those born in 1992, according to the study released last week by researchers at Harvard University and the U.S. Census Bureau.

The shrinking gap between races was due to greater income mobility for poor Black children and drops in mobility for low-income white children, said the study, which showed little change in earnings outcomes for other race and ethnicity groups during this time period.

A key factor was the employment rates of the communities that people lived in as children. Mobility improved for Black individuals where employment rates for Black parents increased. In communities where parental employment rates declined, mobility dropped for white individuals, the study said.

"Outcomes improve ... for children who grow up in communities with increasing parental employment rates, with larger effects for children who move to such communities at younger ages," said researchers, who used census figures and data from income tax returns to track the changes.

In contrast, the class gap widened for white people between the generations — Gen Xers born from 1965 to 1980 and millennials born from 1981 to 1996.

White Americans born to poor parents in 1978 earned about \$10,300 less than than white Americans

born to wealthy parents. For those born in 1992, that class gap increased to about \$13,200 because of declining mobility for people born into low-income households and increasing mobility for those born into high-income households, the study said.

There was little change in the class gap between Black Americans born into both low-income and high-income households since they experienced similar improvements in earnings.

This shrinking gap between the races, and growing class gap among white people, also was documented in educational attainment, standardized test scores, marriage rates and mortality, the researchers said.

There also were regional differences.

Black people from low-income families saw the greatest economic mobility in the southeast and industrial Midwest. Economic mobility declined the most for white people from low-income families in the Great Plains and parts of the coasts.

The researchers suggested that policymakers could encourage mobility by investing in schools or youth mentorship programs when a community is hit with economic shocks such as a plant closure and by increasing connections between different racial and economic groups by changing zoning restrictions or school district boundaries.

"Importantly, social communities are shaped not just by where people live but by race and class within neighborhoods," the researchers said. "One approach to increasing opportunity is therefore to increase connections between communities."

How two Syrians in Rome are using hummus to aid war refugees and help migrants integrate

By LEILA EL ZABRI Associated Press

A pair of Syrians have created a community that provides support to migrants and vulnerable people in Rome, by sharing the flavors of a homeland torn by civil war.

Founded in 2018 as a "humanitarian catering service," HummusTown was originally aimed at raising funds for families and friends in Syria.

It has since grown into a successful small business that has shifted from sending remittances to helping new migrants integrate in Italy, all the while gaining a steady following on Rome's gastronomic scene.

As the Syrian war continued to rage, Shaza Saker, a long-time U.N. employee living in Rome, and Joumana Farho, who was working as her cook, wanted to find a way to help people at home. Farho, 48, brought her "divine" cooking, while Saker, 49, networked.

"I told her: 'Let's start inviting people over for dinner ... and whatever we make out of these dinners we'll just send to Syria,'" Saker said. "My house had become a bit of, you know, a restaurant, a home restaurant. But it was fun. We felt useful."

The non-profit that started with 45,000 euros (\$48,670) raised through crowdfunding now employs 13 full-time and 10 part-time staff at its kitchen kiosk near Rome's train station and a small bistro, with plans to open a restaurant.

The expanded group now also organizes cooking classes, cultural events and summer aperitifs, as well as catering for events in the Italian capital.

Each month, they donate food to the homeless and last year they raised 40,000 euros for victims of the earthquakes that struck Syria on Feb. 6, 2023 with the loss of thousands of lives.

As more refugees arrived in Rome, the two shifted their focus to providing Syrian asylum-seekers with work and a support network, eventually expanding their mission to all vulnerable people, including Italians.

They include Mayyada al-Amrani, a Palestinian woman who fled Gaza with her eldest daughter, who is getting treatment for cancer. She spends her days rolling traditional spiced rice into grape leaves, working alongside four other cooks of Syrian and Palestinian origin. While she is able to earn money to help support herself and her daughter in Italy, she worries about her five other children back in Gaza, the youngest not yet 9 months old.

"They are surviving," she said. "They struggle and suffer mostly from (lack of) water."

Fadi Salem, now HummusTown's manager, is a Syrian refugee from Damascus who arrived in Rome in 2022 after living in Lebanon for seven years. Salem discovered the humanitarian catering service through Rome's Syrian community and said it gradually became a family for him.

"I found integration through HummusTown instead of finding it through the migration centers," he said. "Because from my position here I speak with many Italian and foreign clients, so I practice my Italian, English and Arabic every day," he noted.

Lice, scabies, rashes plague Palestinian children as skin disease runs rampant in Gaza's tent camps

By WAFAA SHURAFI and MOHAMMED JAHJOUH Associated Press

KHAN YOUNIS, Gaza Strip (AP) — A steady stream of miserable children and worried parents flowed into the dermatology office at Nasser Hospital in central Gaza.

A toddler with a blue hair bow sobbed as her mother showed how the red and white spots covering her face have spread to her neck and chest. Another woman lifted her little boy's clothes to reveal the rashes on his back, butt, thighs and stomach. On his wrists, he had open sores from scratching. A father stood his daughter on the desk so the doctor could examine the lesions on her calves.

Skin diseases are running rampant in Gaza, health officials say. The cause, they say, is the appalling conditions in overcrowded tent camps housing hundreds of thousands of Palestinians driven from their homes, along with the summer heat and the collapse of sanitation that has left pools of open sewage amid 10 months of Israel's bombardment and offensives in the territory.

Doctors are wrestling with more than 103,000 cases of lice and scabies and 65,000 cases of skin rashes, according to the World Health Organization. In Gaza's population of some 2.3 million, more than 1 million cases of acute respiratory infections have been recorded since the war began, along with more than half a million of acute diarrhea and more than 100,000 cases of jaundice, according to the United Nations Development Program.

Cleanliness is impossible in the ramshackle tents, basically wood frames hung with blankets or plastic sheets, crammed side by side over wide stretches, Palestinians say.

"There's no shampoo, no soap," said Munira al-Nahhal, living in a tent in the dunes outside the southern city of Khan Younis. "The water is dirty. Everything is sand and insects and garbage."

Her family's tent was crammed with her grandchildren, many of whom had rashes. One little boy stood scratching the red patches on his belly. "One child gets it, and it spreads to all of them," al-Nahhal said.

Palestinians in the camp said clean water was almost impossible to get. Some wash their children in salt water from the nearby Mediterranean. People have to wear the same clothes day after day until they're able to wash them, then they wear them again immediately. Flies are everywhere. Children play in garbage-strewn sand.

"First it was spots on her face. Then it spread to her stomach and arms, all over her forehead. And it hurts. It itches. And there's no treatment. Or if there is we can't afford it," said Shaima Marshoud, sitting next to her little daughter in a cinder block structure they'd settled in among the tents.

More than 1.8 million of Gaza's 2.3 million people have been driven from their homes, often moving multiple times over the past months to get away from Israeli ground assaults or bombardment. The vast majority are now crowded into a 50-square-kilometer (20-square-mile) area of dunes and fields on the coast with almost no sewage system and little water.

The distribution of humanitarian supplies, including soap, shampoo and medicines, has slowed to a trickle, U.N. officials say, because Israeli military operations and general lawlessness in Gaza make it too dangerous for relief trucks to move.

Israel launched its campaign vowing to destroy Hamas after its Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel, in which some 1,200 people were killed and 350 abducted. Israel's assault has killed more than 39,000 people, according to Gaza health authorities.

"The solid waste management system has collapsed," said Chitose Noguchi, the deputy special repre-

sentative of the U.N. Development Program's Programme of Assistance to the Palestinian People.

In a report released Tuesday, the UNDP said Gaza's two pre-war landfills were unreachable amid the fighting and it had set up 10 temporary sites. But Noguchi said there were more than 140 informal dumping sites that have cropped up. Some of them are giant pools of human waste and garbage.

"People are having tents and living next to dumping sites, which is really, really critical situation in terms of the health crisis," Noguchi said.

Nassim Basala, a dermatologist at Nasser Hospital, said they get 300 to 500 people a day coming in with skin diseases. After the most recent Israeli evacuation orders, more people have crowded into agricultural fields outside the city of Khan Younis, where insects are rife in the summer.

Scabies and lice are at epidemic proportions, he said, but other fungal, bacterial and viral infections and parasites are also running wild.

With the flood of patients, even simple cases can be dangerous.

For example, Basala said, impetigo is a simple bacterial infection treatable with creams. But sometimes by the time the patient gets to a doctor, "the bacteria have spread and affected the kidneys," he said. "We've had cases of kidney failure" as a result. Scratched rashes get infected in the pervasive dirt.

He said creams and ointments were in short supply at the hospital.

Children are the most affected. But adults suffer as well. At the hospital's dermatology office, one man untied his dirt-covered shoes to show the painful looking sores on the tops of his feet and ankles where his rash had rubbed open. A woman held up her hands, chapped raw and red.

Mohammed al-Rayan, several of whose children in a tent outside Khan Younis, have rashes or spots, said he has taken them to doctors.

"They give us creams, but it's no use when you don't have anything to wash with," he said. "You put a cream and it gets better but then the next day it's back the same."

Parents are left struggling to comfort children with painful conditions that won't go away.

Manar al-Hessi's toddler cried as she spread cream on her forehead and chest, covered in scabs, sores and spots.

"It's horrible," al-Hessi said. "There are always flies on her face. She goes in the toilet or the garbage, and it gets in her hands. The filth is huge."

Venezuelan opposition says it has proof its candidate defeated President Maduro in disputed election

By JOSHUA GOODMAN and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — As thousands of people demonstrated across Venezuela, opposition candidate Edmundo González announced Monday that his campaign has the proof it needs to show he won the country's disputed election in which electoral authorities named President Nicolás Maduro the victor.

González and opposition leader Maria Corina Machado told reporters they have obtained more than 70% of tally sheets from Sunday's election, and they show González with more than double Maduro's votes. Both called on people, some of whom protested in the hours after Maduro was declared winner, to remain calm and invited them to gather peacefully at 11 a.m. Tuesday to celebrate the results.

"I speak to you with the calmness of the truth," González said as dozens of supporters cheered outside campaign headquarters in the capital, Caracas. "We have in our hands the tally sheets that demonstrate our categorical and mathematically irreversible victory."

Their announcement came after the National Electoral Council, which is loyal to Maduro's ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela, officially declared him the winner, handing him his third six-year term.

In the capital, the protests were mostly peaceful, but when dozens of riot gear-clad national police officers blocked the caravan, a brawl broke. Police used tear gas to disperse the protesters, some of whom threw stones and other objects at officers who had stationed themselves on a main avenue of an upper-class district.

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A man fired a gun as the protesters moved through the city's financial district. No one suffered a gunshot wound.

The demonstrations followed an election that was among the most peaceful in recent memory, reflecting hopes that Venezuela could avoid bloodshed and end 25 years of single-party rule. The winner was to take control of an economy recovering from collapse and a population desperate for change.

"We have never been moved by hatred. On the contrary, we have always been victims of the powerful," Maduro said in a nationally televised ceremony. "An attempt is being made to impose a coup d'état in Venezuela again of a fascist and counterrevolutionary nature."

"We already know this movie, and this time, there will be no kind of weakness," he added, saying that Venezuela's "law will be respected."

Machado told reporters tally sheets show Maduro and Gonzalez received more than 2.7 million and roughly 6.2 million votes respectively.

"A free people is one that is respected, and we are going to fight for our freedom," Gonzalez said. "Dear friends, I understand your indignation, but our response from the democratic sectors is of calmness and firmness."

Venezuelans vote using electronic machines, which record votes and provide every voter a paper receipt that shows the candidate of their choice. Voters are supposed to deposit their receipt at ballot boxes before exiting the polls.

After polls close, each machine prints a tally sheet showing the candidates' names and the votes they received.

But the ruling party wields tight control over the voting system, both through a loyal five-member electoral council and a network of longtime local party coordinators who get near unrestricted access to voting centers. Those coordinators, some of whom are responsible for handing out government benefits including subsidized food, have blocked representatives of opposition parties from entering voting centers as allowed by law to witness the voting process, vote counting and, crucially, to obtain a copy of the machines' final tally sheet.

Electoral authorities had not yet released the tally sheets for each of the 30,000 voting machines as of Monday evening. The electoral body's website was down, and it remained unclear when the tallies would be available. The lack of tallies prompted an independent group of electoral observers and the European Union to publicly urge the entity to release them.

In the capital's impoverished Petare neighborhood, people started walking and shouting against Maduro, and some masked young people tore down campaign posters of him hung on lampposts. Heavily armed security forces were standing just a few blocks away from the protest.

"He has to go. One way or another," said María Arráez, a 27-year-old hairdresser, as she joined in the demonstration.

As the crowd marched through a different neighborhood, it was cheered on by retirees and office workers who banged on pots and recorded the protest in a show of support. There were some shouts of "freedom" and expletives directed at Maduro.

Several foreign governments, including the U.S. and the EU, held off recognizing the election results.

After failing to oust Maduro during three rounds of demonstrations since 2014, the opposition put its faith in the ballot box.

The country sits atop the world's largest oil reserves and once boasted Latin America's most advanced economy. But after Maduro took the helm, it tumbled into a free fall marked by plummeting oil prices, widespread shortages of basic goods and hyperinflation of 130,000%.

U.S. oil sanctions sought to force Maduro from power after his 2018 reelection, which dozens of countries condemned as illegitimate. But the sanctions only accelerated the exodus of some 7.7 million Venezuelans who have fled their crisis-stricken nation.

Voters lined up as early as Saturday evening to cast ballots, boosting the opposition's hopes it was about to break Maduro's grip on power. The electoral council's results came as a shock to many who had celebrated, online and outside a few voting centers, what they believed was a landslide victory for González.

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Gabriel Boric, the leftist leader of Chile, called the results “difficult to believe,” while U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken said Washington had “serious concerns” that the announced tally did not reflect the actual votes or the will of the people.

In response to criticism from other governments, Maduro’s foreign affairs ministry announced it would recall its diplomatic personnel from seven countries in the Americas, including Panama, Argentina and Chile. Foreign Minister Yvan Gil asked the governments of those countries to do the same with their personnel in Venezuela.

He did not explain what would happen to the staff of Machado’s, including her campaign manager, who have sheltered for months in the Argentinian embassy in Caracas after authorities issued arrest warrants against them.

González was the unlikeliest of opposition standard bearers. The 74-year-old was unknown until he was tapped in April as a last-minute stand-in for opposition powerhouse Machado, who was blocked by the Maduro-controlled supreme court from running for any office for 15 years.

Authorities set Sunday’s election to coincide with what would have been the 70th birthday of former President Hugo Chávez, the revered leftist firebrand who died of cancer in 2013, leaving his Bolivarian revolution in the hands of Maduro. But Maduro and his United Socialist Party of Venezuela, which controls all branches of government, are more unpopular than ever among many voters who blame his policies for crushingly low wages that spurred hunger, crippled the oil industry and separated families due to migration.

The president’s pitch this election was one of economic security, which he tried to sell with stories of entrepreneurship and references to a stable currency exchange and lower inflation rates. The International Monetary Fund forecasts the economy will grow 4% this year — one of the fastest in Latin America — after shrinking 71% from 2012 to 2020.

But most Venezuelans have not seen any improvement in their quality of life. Many earn under \$200 a month, which means families struggle to afford essential items. Some work second and third jobs. A basket of food staples to feed a family of four for a month costs an estimated \$385.

The opposition managed to line up behind a single candidate after years of intraparty divisions and election boycotts that torpedoed their ambitions to topple the ruling party.

A former lawmaker, Machado swept the opposition’s October primary with over 90% of the vote. After she was blocked from joining the presidential race, she chose a college professor as her substitute on the ballot, but the National Electoral Council also barred her from registering. That’s when González, a political newcomer, was chosen.

González and Machado focused much of their campaigning on Venezuela’s vast hinterland, where the kind of economic activity seen in Caracas in recent years never materialized. They promised a government that would create sufficient jobs to attract Venezuelans living abroad to return home and reunite with their families.

How did the strike on a Golan Heights soccer field happen?

Here’s what we know

By JULIA FRANKEL and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press
JERUSALEM (AP) — Two days after a rocket slammed into a soccer pitch in the Israel-controlled Golan Heights, killing 12 children, many questions remain about the attack on the Druze town of Majdal Shams.

Israel accused Hezbollah in Lebanon of deliberately targeting civilians, while Hezbollah quickly issued a rare denial of any responsibility for the attack.

With Israel vowing retaliation for the highest civilian death toll in Israel-held territory since Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack, diplomats rushed to prevent an escalation that could spiral into an all-out war after months of exchanges between Israel and Hezbollah over the border.

Weapons experts told The Associated Press that evidence appears to point to a rocket from Lebanon hitting the field. But they raised the possibility that the hit on civilians was an accident.

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Here's what we know and what remains unclear about the attack.

The strike

The strike left a crater about 2 meters (yards) wide, breaking through the carpet of artificial grass where the children were playing. Around it were scattered burned-out bicycles and scooters, some electric with their batteries melted. Walls of a nearby tent and shelter were pockmarked from shrapnel.

The Israeli military's Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi said an Iranian-made Falaq rocket with a 53-kilogram (117-pound) warhead belonging to Hezbollah was used in the attack that landed in the town of over 11,000 inhabitants.

Israel released images of rocket fragments it said the military found, with visible lettering that matched pictures of Falaq rockets also provided by the military. The AP was unable to verify that the fragments were found on-site. No ordinance debris was visible when AP reporters visited Monday.

The Israeli military was investigating why the rocket wasn't intercepted by its renowned missile defense system called Iron Dome.

While Iron Dome's radar detected the launch, it did not release an interceptor missile to knock down the rocket, an Israeli military official told AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The military said the flight time may have been too brief. Hezbollah has experimented during the war with launching rockets from a shorter distance. The rocket was fired from just north of the Lebanese town of Chebaa, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Majdal Shams, it said.

The Iron Dome alert set off sirens at 6:18 p.m. Majdal Shams' local council reported the rocket landed less than a minute later, leaving no chance for the children to run to shelters.

"At very short distance, you don't have enough time to operate the Iron Dome," said Yehoshua Kalisky, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies, a Tel Aviv think tank. Rockets fired from within 5 kilometers (3 miles) that take 2-3 seconds to reach their destination are nearly impossible to intercept, he said.

As a result, the interception rate along the northern border is considerably lower than in central Israel, where Iron Dome batteries have more time, he said.

Hezbollah's denial

Hezbollah, Lebanon's most powerful military and political force, was quick to say it was not behind the attack, a rare denial from a group that normally claims every attack launched.

What Hezbollah would gain from attacking a Druze community is unclear. Many Druze in the Golan see themselves as citizens of Syria, Hezbollah's ally. A strike on them could hurt the militant group's standing — including with Druze in Lebanon — when it's trying to keep support in the war.

An overt intentional strike on civilians would also be a dramatic escalation in Hezbollah's near daily exchanges with Israel. The group's officials have said they don't aim to expand the war and will halt their strikes when a cease-fire is reached in Gaza.

In the thousands of rockets it has fired since October, Hezbollah has insisted it targets military and intelligence installations. Still, Hezbollah rockets have hit civilian areas. Before Saturday's bloodshed, strikes had killed 13 civilians and 22 soldiers in Israel. In Lebanon, Israel's attacks have killed more than 500 people, including 90 civilians.

Just before news of Saturday's deadly attack emerged, Hezbollah claimed at least two strikes, using Katyusha rockets and the larger Falaq-1, targeting a military base on Mount Hermon, about 3 kilometers (2 miles) north of Majdal Shams.

Hezbollah-allied TV stations and news outlets were also quick to deny the group was behind the attack, questioning whether Israel was looking for an excuse to widen its war against Lebanon and the militant group amid the most serious push yet to reach a cease-fire in Gaza.

Was it an error?

Experts say the fragmentation and impact patterns are consistent with a rocket attack.

"The evidence that we can see from the ground, from impact site, is much more consistent with that of a rocket artillery of the type and size of the Falaq," said Richard Weir, crisis and weapons researcher with

Human Rights Watch.

The 53-kilogram (117-pound) warhead would explode on impact with a deadly high explosive load, causing irregular fragmentation.

Weir said the damage didn't appear consistent with the scenario of a hit by an air defense missile that malfunctioned. Such missiles send regular-shaped fragments in every direction, and there was no sign of such fragmentation.

The shape of the crater and the direction a fence was blown down indicate the rocket came from the north, said Chris Cobb-Smith, a weapons analyst.

He said that without independent verification of the munition's remnants it is impossible to say who is to blame.

Weir said a Hezbollah rocket aimed at the military position on Mount Hermon may have overshot its target, landing in Majdal Shams. He said any number of mistakes could have taken place, including a mechanical fault or human error in estimating the distance.

"These kinds of things happen even with the best trained forces, he said. "So it is possible that, given that this is an unguided piece of rocket, that this was a mistake."

The Druze stance

After Israel claimed Hezbollah was responsible for the blast, many Druze leaders in Lebanon, Syria and Israel spoke out against what they called an attempt to drive a wedge within the close-knit community over the strike. Followers of the Druze faith, which began as an offshoot of Shiite Islam, are divided between the three countries.

Some 300 Majdal Shams residents protested a visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday, shouting that he was exploiting the bloodshed for political gain.

Only 20% of residents in Majdal Shams, part of the Golan Heights annexed by Israel in 1981, have accepted Israeli citizenship. Many still consider themselves citizens of Syria.

"For sure, it was not targeting Majdal Shams. There are many Israeli military bases around the town. I expect this threat was heading their way," said Nabeeh Abu Saleh, a medic from the town who rushed to the scene Saturday.

Nothing prepared Abu Saleh, who has 25 years of experience as a medic, for what he saw. Some body parts were found 100 meters (yards) from the explosion. One of his nephews was killed, another injured.

The military said Iron Dome sirens have gone off in Majdal Shams 30 times during the conflict. A few months ago, a rocket landed short of the town, Abu Saleh said.

"We buried our children. We don't want retaliation," he said. "We have families in Lebanon, in Syria, and we have brothers here in Israel."

Surviving Rwanda: God, remembrance and reconciliation on the genocide's 30th anniversary

By MARÍA TERESA HERNÁNDEZ Associated Press

Thirty years ago, while he was hiding from the machetes that killed his father, two of his brothers and an estimated 800,000 other people during the genocide against Rwanda's Tutsi minority, Pascal Kanyemera made a deal with God.

"Please, if I survive one more week, I will give you 100 Rwandan francs."

God listened, so the 16-year-old prayed again. Then again. And again, until the killings stopped in July 1994.

"By the end of the genocide, I owed God 400 Rwandan francs," said Kanyemera, now 46, from his home in Ottawa, the capital of Canada. "That shows you how I always put my life and my survival in his hands."

His grandmother, uncles and cousins were also among the thousands of Tutsi killed by extremist Hutus in massacres that lasted over 100 days.

The genocide was ignited on April 6, 1994, when a plane carrying President Juvénal Habyarimana, a

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member of the Hutu majority, was shot down as it prepared to land in Rwanda's capital, Kigali. The Tutsi were blamed for downing the plane and killing the president. Enraged, gangs of Hutu extremists began killing Tutsi, backed by the army and police.

Kanyemera was hiding at a local school when his family was slaughtered on April 9. He learned about their deaths by late May, when he reunited with his mother and sisters at a refugee camp that was controlled by the French.

Other Tutsi witnessed the killings firsthand and barely survived to tell the tale.

In her book "Chosen to Die: Destined to Live," Frida Umuhiza recounts how her mother was beheaded before her eyes. She gazed at her grandfather begging his assassins — Bible in hand — to let her family pray together one last time. She shuddered when the Hutu extremists coaxed her into choosing the weapon she would be killed with.

"Please, don't kill me with anything else," said Umuhiza, who was terrified of machetes and opted for a club.

Soon after, the 14-year-old felt a smack in the back of her head and all went dark. When she woke up, her heels were sliced open and her body covered in dirt inside the ditch where her relatives lay dead. She remained numb for hours, until one of her Hutu neighbors took pity on her and dug her out to a life of sorrow, orphanhood and anger.

"Sometimes, when people hear about what happened to us, they don't believe it," Kanyemera said. "Some men killed their kids, their own kids. Out of hate."

Healing, he said, is a long process. But many survivors hold on to faith to bring back peace into their lives.

Umuhiza details in her book how becoming a Christian allowed her to forgive. Another survivor, Immaculée Ilibagiza, has written about hiding for 91 days in the tiny bathroom of a pastor's house. Now a U.S.-based author, motivational speaker and devout Catholic, Ilibagiza often recounts how reciting the rosary drew out the pain and rage inside her.

Kanyemera — the current president of the Humura Association, which supports genocide survivors — has always attributed his survival to God.

Hutu militias patrolled the school where he was hiding, looking for the Tutsi who lived in the surrounding area, but he was never caught. And though the Hutu planned to kill the surviving Tutsi in the refugee camp he was heading to, French troops took over before Kanyemera arrived, so he survived.

As painful as it is, many survivors remain committed to remembrance. They visit schools to share their stories with younger generations. They write books. They speak to journalists, willing to reopen their wounds year after year, hoping that no genocide is ever committed again.

"Someone said that whoever forgets the past is condemned to relive it," said Tarcisse Ruhamyandekwe, who lost a brother, uncles and aunts in 1994. "Our people, our families, were killed in unusual circumstances, so it is a way of giving them back the dignity they did not have."

During the genocide, Hutu extremists engaged in extreme brutality. Killings were often preceded by beatings, torture and mutilation. Militias sang "Kill them all!" before reaching the homes of the families they would exterminate. An estimated 100,000 to 250,000 women were brutally raped, many of whom later needed reconstructive surgery or HIV/AIDS treatment.

"Rwanda was full of bodies," said Ruhamyandekwe, who also lives in Ottawa. "Imagine you go back as a survivor and in your house you only find the bodies of your brothers and sisters."

He, like Kanyemera, moved far from Rwanda to be safe. His first stop was Congo, where his parents sent him in 1985, fearing that the violence against Tutsi would escalate.

Survivors like them have emphasized that the genocide arose from longstanding Hutu-Tutsi animosity.

"I remember that, when I was 7 or 8, I used to see my dad taken by the military to jail," Ruhamyandekwe said. "I remember thinking he was lucky because he came back. Other people did not; they were killed in jail."

Discrimination, he said, was inflicted on the Tutsi from a very young age. Schools required teachers to keep a detailed registration of students. It was common for them to enter the classrooms and say: "All

the Tutsi, stand up.”

“We carried our IDs to show our race and we could not escape,” Ruhamyandekwe said. “That’s why during the genocide it was very simple to ask: ‘Where is your ID?’ And get the Tutsi killed.”

His father was not a victim of the Hutu, but when he died later in the 1990s — probably of a heart attack — Ruhamyandekwe was unable to bury him. “Taking that risk, going back to Rwanda, was probably going to get me killed,” he said.

He has no pictures or material possessions from his life in Rwanda, but his memories of the country of a thousand hills remain intact.

A few years ago, he took his children there.

Nothing is left of the house where his parents — both teachers — raised him comfortably and lovingly, except for marks in the ground. And there, with his hands moving through the air, he “drew” his childhood home for his kids.

“I showed them where my room was. My brother’s, my sister’s,” Ruhamyandekwe said. “I told them: ‘That’s the house where I grew up, but everything was destroyed.’”

Sharing his feelings has not been easy. Rwandans, he said, are not open with emotion, even within their own families. Crying or confiding in someone is discouraged from an early age. For him, though, writing has been like therapy. And there has been his faith.

“In my book I write about what I call ‘God’s invisible hand,’” Ruhamyandekwe said. “Some people say it’s luck, but I say it was God guiding me through all the stuff I went through.”

By writing, he has not only expressed himself, but tried to spread awareness about his people’s history.

“We cannot forget our loved ones,” Ruhamyandekwe said. “If reconciliation has to happen, as it is happening, we have to remember that and teach what happened to the next generation.”

“Someone said that there’s something stronger than death: It’s the presence of the dead in the memory of the living.”

Putin often cites Russia’s ‘nuclear doctrine’ governing the use of atomic weapons. But what is it?

By The Associated Press undefined

Since Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, President Vladimir Putin and other Kremlin voices have frequently threatened the West with its nuclear arsenal.

On Day 1 of the war, Putin said “whoever tries to impede us, let alone create threats for our country and its people, must know that the Russian response will be immediate and lead to consequences you have never seen in history.”

Over nearly 2 1/2 years of fighting, the West has given Ukraine billions of dollars of advanced weapons, some of which have struck Russian soil. And while there have been more Kremlin threats — and even the deployment of battlefield nuclear weapons in Belarus, just over the border from Ukraine — so far it has remained only a blunt message.

What could finally trigger a nuclear response?

Asked that in June by international news agencies, Putin pointed to Russia’s so-called nuclear doctrine.

“Look what is written there,” he said at the St. Petersburg session. “If somebody’s actions threaten our sovereignty and territorial integrity, we consider it possible to use all means at our disposal.”

Now Russian hawks are urging him to change the doctrine to lower the threshold for using nuclear weapons, and Putin says the document could be modified to take into account the evolving global situation.

What is Russia’s nuclear doctrine?

Formally known as the “Basic Principles of State Policy on Nuclear Deterrence,” it was signed by Putin in 2020 and outlines when Russia could dip into its atomic arsenal, the world’s largest.

It describes nuclear weapons as “a means of deterrence,” noting that their use is an “extreme and compelled measure.” It declares that Russia “takes all necessary efforts to reduce the nuclear threat and prevent aggravation of interstate relations that could trigger military conflicts, including nuclear ones.”

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The document states that “nuclear deterrence is aimed to provide comprehension by a potential adversary of the inevitability of retaliation in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation and/or its allies.”

What does it say will trigger using nuclear weapons?

Russia could use them, the doctrine says, “in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy.”

It says nuclear weapons could be used under the following specific situations:

— If reliable information is received about the launch of ballistic missiles targeting the territory of Russia or its allies.

— If nuclear weapons or other weapons of mass destruction are used against Russia or its allies.

— If an enemy attack with conventional weapons threatens Russia’s existence.

— If there are attacks on critically important Russian government or military facilities that could undermine the country’s retaliatory nuclear strike capability.

Has any attack so far come close to crossing this threshold?

As Russia attacked parts of northeastern Ukraine near the city of Kharkiv, Washington has allowed Kyiv to use longer-range U.S.-supplied weapons for strikes in Russian territory in the border region. But these attacks have been limited in scope and would not seem to pose an existential threat that would fall under the nuclear doctrine.

However, the hawks in Moscow have pointed to a series of Ukrainian attacks on Russian air bases that host long-range nuclear capable bombers earlier in the conflict, as well as recent raids on early warning radars.

They say these circumstances would seem to warrant the use of nuclear weapons as laid out in the doctrine.

Russian officials haven’t commented on the attacks on the more sensitive targets. The early warning radars are designed to spot the launch of U.S. missiles to allow Russia to launch its own nuclear-tipped missiles before they are destroyed.

James Acton, co-director of the nuclear policy program at the Carnegie Endowment, said in a recent commentary that Ukrainian attacks on the early warning radars could prompt the Kremlin to think Washington had encouraged such strikes to try to weaken Russia’s nuclear deterrent.

“If Moscow believes that Washington could conduct a successful preemptive attack on its nuclear forces, its trigger finger could get very itchy, raising the risk that Russia might launch a large-scale nuclear attack based on a false or misinterpreted warning,” Acton said.

What changes in the doctrine are under discussion?

The Kremlin’s nuclear threats have been dialed down recently amid Moscow’s battlefield successes in Ukraine. However, there also have been calls in Russia for changing the nuclear doctrine, and Putin said it could be modified, depending on global events.

Hawks have called repeatedly for sharpening it, arguing the current document is too weak and vague. They say the doctrine hasn’t deterred the West from increasing aid to Ukraine and gives the impression that Moscow won’t ever resort to nuclear weapons.

Foreign affairs expert Dmitri Trenin, of the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, a state-funded Moscow think tank, suggests revising it to declare that Russia could strike first with nuclear weapons when “the core national interests are at stake,” like in Ukraine.

“The acute task in the third year of military confrontation is to prevent NATO’s deeper engagement in it,” Trenin wrote recently. “If we don’t do it, the inertia of persistent escalation by the West will lead to a direct clash between Russian and NATO militaries, which is fraught with a global nuclear war.”

At the international forum in St. Petersburg, Sergei Karaganov, a foreign policy expert who advises the Kremlin, also urged Putin to amend the doctrine to lower the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons.

“I hope it will be changed soon to give you the formal right to respond to any strikes on our territory with a nuclear strike,” he told the Russian leader. “I hope that such a provision will be added to our doctrine to help cool our adversaries.”

Karaganov likened the West to Sodom and Gomorrah, the biblical cities destroyed by God with a rain of fire for their wickedness. "Let's remember that rain and try to make humankind come to its senses," he said.

Putin responded cautiously, saying that he currently sees no threats that would warrant nuclear weapons use, but he also held the door open to revising the policy.

"This doctrine is a living instrument, we are carefully watching what's going on in the world around us, and we don't exclude making changes in the doctrine," he said.

The need to modify the document, he said, was driven by concerns about the West pondering the possible deployment of low-yield nuclear weapons. Putin didn't give specifics, but his comments could refer to U.S. discussions on deploying low-power submarine-launched nuclear missiles.

Proponents say such weapons are needed to counter Russian threats, while critics argue they could lower the threshold for the U.S. using nuclear weapons and increase the risk of war.

"Nuclear devices of extremely low power are being developed, and we are aware of the ideas circulating in expert circles in the West that such strike assets could be used, and there is nothing particularly horrible about it," Putin said. "We are obliged to take notice of that, and we are taking notice."

Democrats had feared Georgia was a lost cause with Biden running. Harris will campaign there Tuesday

By WILL WEISSERT and BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Little more than a week ago, Georgia appeared to be slipping out of the Democrats' reach: President Joe Biden's campaign pledged to concentrate more on holding the Midwestern "blue wall" states and indicated they might be willing to forsake "Sun Belt" battlegrounds.

But now that Biden has bowed out of the race and Vice President Kamala Harris is the likely nominee, Democrats say they have new hope for the state. They're betting that a fresh burst of energy and a surge in fundraising has helped make Georgia — the state that delivered Biden his narrowest victory margin in 2020 — a toss-up again.

Harris is planning to make a show of political force with a rally in Atlanta on Tuesday night that will feature a performance by hip hop star Megan Thee Stallion, the latest example of just how much the race against Republican Donald Trump has shifted since Biden abandoned his reelection bid. She will be appearing in the same city where Biden's dismal performance in a debate against Trump on June 27 sparked a Democratic revolt that ultimately ended his campaign.

Harris is hoping a large rally will help affirm her campaign's momentum. Her campaign argues that Harris' appeal with young people, working-age women and non-white voters have scrambled the dynamics in Georgia and other states that are demographically similar, from North Carolina to Nevada and Arizona.

"The energy is infectious," said Georgia Democratic Chairwoman Nikema Williams, a congresswoman from Atlanta. "My phone has been blowing up. People want to be part of this movement."

In a strategy memo released after the president left the race, Harris campaign chair Jen O'Malley Dillon, who held the same role for Biden, reaffirmed the importance of winning Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, a trio of industrial states that have formed the traditional Democratic blue wall.

But she also argued that the vice president's place atop the ticket "opens up additional persuadable voters" and described them as "disproportionately Black, Latino and under 30" in places like Georgia.

Republicans, who still control Georgia's state government, counter that Biden's lagging popularity and concern over higher consumer prices and immigration will transfer to Harris in the historically conservative state.

But they concede that the landscape suddenly looks much closer to 2020 — when Biden won by about 0.25 percentage points — than when Trump was riding high after the Republican National Convention and surviving an assassination attempt.

"Trump was going to win Georgia. It was over," said Republican consultant Brian Robinson. "The Democrats have a chance here for a reset."

Robinson said Harris still has plenty of liabilities, including the progressive positions she took in her failed

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2020 primary campaign and her various rhetorical stumbles. But he said Harris so far in this campaign has been "in command," and if that continues "we have a new ballgame and she will be competitive in Georgia."

Trump campaign spokesperson Karoline Leavitt did not give similar ground. She dismissed Harris as "just as weak, failed and incompetent as Joe Biden" and said the vice president would have to explain her support of Biden administration policies that "hurt working families in Georgia over the past four years."

The Harris campaign and Georgia Democratic officials have 24 offices across the state, including two added last weekend in metro Atlanta. Trump and the Republican National Committee opened their first Georgia offices only recently.

Democrats are betting that a combination of high turnout among traditional, core Democratic constituencies, as well as a strong showing in the suburbs and small pickups elsewhere can be enough for Harris to carry Georgia. That approach was on display at the weekend office openings.

On Saturday, the venue was East Point, a majority Black municipality and Democratic stronghold south of Atlanta. Congressional Progressive Caucus Chair Pramila Jayapal, D-Wash., was the featured guest, telling a crowd of mostly Black women that they were the key to victory — "the people who are really going to save the country."

A day later, it was Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, among several contenders Harris is considering for her running mate, campaigning in Forsyth County. The area is historically very conservative, though Democrats have narrowed the GOP margins in recent cycles.

"Every county matters," Beshear said, holding out his ability to win two governor's races in Kentucky despite Trump's domination of the state in presidential elections.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, a Republican, said in a recent interview that the best GOP campaigns can win comfortably in Georgia but bad efforts — combined with strong Democratic campaigns — lose.

Democrats recently have held wide advantages in the core of metro Atlanta, where Jayapal spoke. The party also performed well in Columbus and Savannah, as well as some rural, majority-Black counties. But Republicans dominated in other rural areas and small towns and cities — where Trump has held multiple rallies in recent years.

The fast-growing, diversifying Atlanta suburbs and exurbs, like those where Beshear campaigned on Sunday, offer the most opportunity for swings, especially from GOP-leaning moderates disenchanted with Trump.

For Harris, that means depending on voters as varied as Michael Sleister, a white suburbanite, and Allen Smith, a Black man who lives not far from downtown Atlanta.

Sleister, who considers himself an independent, has lived in Forsyth County for 35 years. "I've voted Republican many times in my life," he said, but not since the GOP took a rightward turn during President Barack Obama's administration.

"Now I see the Republican Party as representing a direct threat to my grandchildren," he said, adding that he sees Trump "as just a horrible person."

Smith is a 41-year-old Atlanta native who has become a first-time campaign volunteer since Harris became the likely nominee.

"I was driving when I heard the news about President Biden endorsing her, and I started pounding my fist — I decided right then I would do whatever I could to help her get elected," Smith said.

Harris and Democrats keep calling Trump and Vance 'weird.' Here's why

By MEG KINNARD Associated Press

Vice President Kamala Harris and her Democratic allies are emphasizing a new line of criticism against Republicans — branding Donald Trump and his running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, as "weird."

Democrats are applying the label with gusto in interviews and online, notably to Vance's comments on abortion and his previous suggestion that political leaders who didn't have biological children "don't really have a direct stake" in the country.

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The “weird” message appears to have given Democrats a narrative advantage that it rarely had when President Joe Biden was still running for reelection. Trump’s campaign, which so often shapes political discussions with the former president’s pronouncements, has spent days trying to flip the script by highlighting things about Democrats it says are weird.

“I don’t know who came up with the message, but I salute them,” said David Karpf, a strategic communication professor at George Washington University.

Karpf said labeling Republican comments as “weird” is the sort of concise take that resonates quickly with Harris supporters. Plus, Karpf noted, “it frustrates opponents, leading them to further amplify it through off-balance responses.”

“So far, at least, Trump-Vance has been incapable of finding an effective response,” Karpf said.

Harris and her allies have used the label frequently

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat who is on Harris’ short list for vice president, called Trump and Vance “just weird” last week in an MSNBC interview, which the Democratic Governors Association — of which Walz is chair — amplified in a post on X. Walz reiterated the characterization Sunday on CNN, referencing Trump’s repeated mentions of the fictional serial killer Hannibal Lecter from the film “Silence of the Lambs” in stump speeches.

Responding to Trump’s Thursday appearance on Fox News, the Harris campaign — in a news release with the subject line “Statement on a 78-Year-Old Criminal’s Fox News Appearance” — included “Trump is old and quite weird?” in a bulleted list of takeaways.

A day later, multiple news releases from the Harris campaign described her opponents similarly, declaring simply that “JD Vance is weird” in part due to his stances on abortion, and Harris’ campaign spokesperson saying that Vance had “spent all week making headlines for his out-of-touch, weird ideas.”

Two of Harris’ allies, Sens. Brian Schatz of Hawaii and Chris Murphy of Connecticut, on Friday posted a video on X calling Vance’s past comments about limiting the political power of childless Americans “a super weird idea.”

And then, at her first fundraiser since becoming the Democrats’ likely White House nominee, Harris used the characterization herself, calling out some of Trump’s “wild lies about my record and some of what he and his running mate are saying, it is just plain weird.”

“I mean that’s the box you put that in, right?” she added.

Many of Democrats’ comments appear to be allusions to a 2021 interview with Vance in which he slammed some prominent Democrats without biological children — including Harris — as “childless cat ladies” with “no direct stake” in America.

But Harris’ own characterization of Trump as “weird” may date back even further. In his 2021 book, political reporter Edward-Isaac Dove wrote that Harris reportedly gathered with aides in 2018 to prepare for her own presidential bid.

As staff aimed to prepare her for how she’d react if, during a debate, Trump stood over her as he did Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton in 2016, Harris reportedly quipped, “I’d turn around and say, ‘Why are you being so weird? What’s wrong with you?’”

Trump’s campaign has tried to flip the script

On Sunday, Trump spokesman Steven Cheung posted video of Walz calling Trump and Vance “weird” as he stumped for Harris and said the likely Democratic nominee and her backers were themselves out of line for “trying to gaslight everyone into thinking the shooting was staged,” a reference to the assassination attempt at Trump’s rally in Pennsylvania.

More broadly, some of Trump’s allies have angled to turn the conversation back to Harris and what they portray as her failed policy ideas.

Donald Trump Jr., the former president’s oldest son, took to X on Monday to ask, “You know what’s really weird? Soft on crime politicians like Kamala allowing illegal aliens out of prison so they can violently assault Americans.”

On Saturday, Vance reposted an X video Trump Jr. shared in which Harris talked about “climate anxiety, which is fear of the future and the unknown of whether it makes sense for you to even think about hav-

ing children.”

“It’s almost like these people don’t want young people starting families or something,” Vance wrote. “Really weird stuff.”

Democrats are co-opting Republican attack lines to support Harris

Republicans have long shared clips of Harris’ laugh and some of her jokes or stories to try to make the vice president seem weird — notably an anecdote she told last year about her mother scolding her, “You think you just fell out of a coconut tree?”

The “coconut tree” story has itself become a Democratic in-joke in the days since Harris took over the campaign. Many of her supporters have embraced coconut emojis in their online accounts.

Calling Republicans “weird” may be a way to take Republicans’ previous tactics and make them their own, said Matt Sienkiewicz, a communication professor at Boston College.

University at Buffalo political communication professor Jacob Neiheisel compared the “weird” message to Arizona Sen. John McCain’s 2008 attempt to portray Barack Obama as a celebrity with no real accomplishments.

“At a functional level, I think that this might be part of a concerted attempt to mitigate some of the longstanding efforts on the right to paint Harris in a similar way,” Neiheisel said.

Biden proposed enforceable ethics code and term limits for Supreme Court. How might they work?

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden on Monday proposed major changes for the U.S. Supreme Court: an enforceable code of ethics, term limits for justices and a constitutional amendment that would limit the justices’ recent decision on presidential immunity.

There’s almost no chance of the proposal passing a closely divided Congress with Election Day looming, but the ideas could still spark conversation with public confidence in the court hitting an all-time low amid ethical revelations about some justices. It also comes against the backdrop of a contentious presidential election and growing Democratic outrage about recent decisions from the conservative-majority court.

Here’s a look at how the ideas, how they might work, and the possible stumbling blocks:

How would justices’ terms be limited?

Limiting how long justices serve on the nation’s highest court has broad support among Americans, polling indicates.

A poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research in July 2022 found 67% of Americans support a proposal to set a specific number of years that justices serve instead of life terms, including 82% of Democrats and 57% of Republicans.

Biden’s proposal would limit justices to 18-year terms, a system that he says would make nominations more predictable, less arbitrary, and reduce the chances that a single president could shape the court for generations to come.

There’s a big problem: The Constitution gives all federal judges lifetime tenure, unless they resign, retire or are removed.

There are ideas about how to impose term limits without an amendment — but if such a law passed and were challenged in court the justices could end up ruling on it and it’s unclear how they’d come down, said Charles Geyh, a law professor at Indiana University and expert in judicial ethics.

How would a code of ethics be enforced?

The Supreme Court didn’t have a formal code of ethics until last year, when the justices adopted one in the face of sustained criticism over undisclosed trips and gifts from wealthy benefactors to some justices, like Clarence Thomas.

It still lacks a means of enforcement — something Biden says is “common sense.” Members of Congress, for example, generally can’t accept gifts worth more than \$50.

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Anyone can file complaints against other federal judges, who are subject to censure and reprimand. Justice Elena Kagan voiced support for adding an enforcement mechanism to the Supreme Court ethical code in a public appearance last week.

Still, making the high court's ethical code enforceable raises thorny questions about how it might be enforced, and by whom.

Lower courts say their discipline process isn't intended to directly police their code of ethics, maintaining the code is too broadly phrased for violations to directly translate into discipline, Geyh said.

That ethical code is overseen by the Judicial Conference, which is headed up by Chief Justice John Roberts. He "might be reluctant to use whatever power the conference has against his colleagues," Stephen Gillers, a legal ethics expert at NYU School of Law, said in an email.

What about presidential immunity?

Biden is also calling for a constitutional amendment limiting the Supreme Court's recent decision giving former president Donald Trump — and all other presidents — broad immunity from criminal prosecution.

The amendment would "make clear that there is no immunity for crimes a former president committed while in office," Biden wrote in an opinion piece in the Washington Post. "We are a nation of laws — not of kings or dictators."

It wouldn't be the first time - the Constitution has been amended about five times to in US history to overturn a Supreme Court decision, Geyh said.

But constitutional amendments have even higher hurdles than new laws. The proposal must get support from two-thirds of both the House and Senate and then be ratified by three-quarters of state legislatures.

No new amendments have passed in more than 30 years. Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson has called Biden's proposal a "dangerous gambit" that would be "dead on arrival in the House."

Biden has resisted other calls to reform the Supreme Court

A former chairman of the Senate Judiciary Committee, Biden has long resisted calls to reform the Supreme Court.

In 2021, he fulfilled a campaign promise by convening a commission to study potential changes to the court. It was not charged with making recommendations and cautioned that excessive change could potentially erode democracy.

The latest proposals come years later, and amid growing outrage among Democrats about high court opinions that overturned landmark decisions on abortion rights and federal regulatory powers. There's also a hotly contested presidential election against Trump underway.

Even if Biden's ideas aren't likely to pass, they could draw voter attention. Vice president Kamala Harris, who Biden endorsed for president after dropping out of the race, backed the proposal.

It's being blasted, though, by conservatives like activist Leonard Leo, who said in a statement: "It's about Democrats destroying a court they don't agree with."

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Focused on legacy, Biden calls out Trump and says how civil rights led him into politics

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

AUSTIN, Texas (AP) — No longer on the campaign trail, President Joe Biden on Monday delivered a speech at the LBJ Presidential Library designed to help cement his legacy.

Slightly more than a week after dropping out of this year's election, Biden marked the 60th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act by speaking out for the rule of law and democratic principles. All the while, he warned about the threat he sees if Republican Donald Trump returns to the White House.

"No one is above the law," Biden said.

Biden followed his denunciations of Trump with a mix of nostalgia for his early days in politics during the era of Martin Luther King Jr., John F. Kennedy and Lyndon Baines Johnson.

It's a story he's told before, about how he became a public defender and was cornered by Delaware leaders to run for the U.S. Senate. But it's taken on a new resonance as he stares down the final six months of his political career.

"Because I got engaged like a lot of you do ... you get engaged and you want to change things," he said.

The setting carried a special resonance. Biden spoke at the library dedicated to Johnson, the last president who, like him, opted against seeking reelection.

Biden also used his speech to call for changes to the Supreme Court that include term limits and an enforceable ethics code for justices, as well as a constitutional amendment that would limit presidential immunity. But his proposal is unlikely to clear a Republican House, leaving Biden to take a symbolic stand to the causes to which he had devoted his time in public office.

The Texas visit has taken on very different symbolism in the two weeks it took to reschedule it after Biden had to cancel because he got COVID-19.

The speech, originally set for July 15, was once seen by the White House as an opportunity for Biden to try to make a case for salvaging his sinking presidential campaign — delivered in the home district of Rep. Lloyd Doggett, the 15-term congressman who was the first Democratic lawmaker to publicly call for Biden to step aside.

Two weeks later, the political landscape has been reshaped. Biden is out of the race. Vice President Kamala Harris is the likely Democratic nominee. And the president is focused not on his next four years, but on the legacy of his single term and the future of democracy.

Doggett was among the group of lawmakers, civil rights advocates and others who greeted Biden after the president landed Monday in Austin. Biden and the Texas congressman shook hands and spoke briefly.

Biden called Harris in his speech an "incredible partner" who will "continue to be an inspiring leader."

No American incumbent president has dropped out of the race as late in the process as did Biden. Johnson announced he would not seek reelection in March of 1968, at the height of the Vietnam War.

Biden has drawn a lot of comparisons to Johnson of late. Both men spoke to the nation from the Oval Office to lay out their decisions. Both faced pressure from within their own party to step aside, and both were ultimately praised for doing so.

But their reasons were very different. Johnson stepped away in the heat of the war and spoke at length about his need to focus on the conflict. Biden, 81, had every intention of running for reelection until his shaky June 27 debate performance ignited fears within his own party about his age and mental acuity, and whether he could beat Trump.

Biden has called Trump a serious threat to democracy, particularly after the ex-president's efforts in 2020 to overturn the results of the election he lost and his continued lies about that loss. The president framed

his decision to bow out of the race as motivated by the need to unite his party to protect democracy.

"I've decided the best way forward is to pass the torch to a new generation. That's the best way to unite our nation," Biden said in his Oval Office address. "Nothing, nothing can come in the way of saving our democracy. And that includes personal ambition."

During his presidency, Biden has often put equity and civil rights at the forefront, including with his choice for vice president. Harris is the first woman, Black person and person of South Asian descent to have the job. She could also become the first woman elected to the presidency.

Biden's administration has worked to combat racial discrimination in the real estate market, he pardoned thousands of people convicted on federal marijuana charges that have disproportionately affected people of color and provided federal funding to reconnect city neighborhoods that were racially segregated or divided by road projects, and also invested billions in historically Black colleges and universities.

His efforts, he has said, are meant to push the country forward — and to guard against efforts to undermine the landmark legislation signed by Johnson in 1964, one of the most significant civil rights achievements in U.S. history.

The law made it illegal to discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, sex, or national origin. It was designed to end discrimination in school, work and public facilities, and barred unequal application of voter registration requirements.

Johnson signed the act five hours after Congress approved it, saying the nation was in a "time of testing" that "we must not fail." He added: "Let us close the springs of racial poison. Let us pray for wise and understanding hearts. Let us lay aside irrelevant differences and make our nation whole."

Biden has said he is "determined to get as much done" as he can in his final six months in office, including signing major legislation expanding voting rights and a federal police bill named for George Floyd.

"I'll keep defending our personal freedoms and our civil rights, from the right to vote to the right to choose," Biden said from the Oval Office. "I'll keep calling out hate and extremism, make it clear there is no place, no place in America for political violence or any violence ever, period."

Later Monday, Biden traveled to Houston to pay his respects to the late Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee, who died July 19 at age 74.

NC Gov. Cooper opted out of Harris VP vetting, in part over worry about GOP lieutenant: AP sources

By ZEKE MILLER and SEUNG MIN KIM Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper opted not to be a candidate in Vice President Kamala Harris' running mate search in part due to concerns that his Republican lieutenant governor would try to assume control if he left the state to campaign as part of the Democratic ticket, according to three people familiar with the matter.

Cooper confirmed in a statement Monday night that he would not be a candidate to be Harris' vice president, saying he was "honored" to be considered but "this just wasn't the right time for North Carolina and for me to potentially be on a national ticket." The governor, 67, withdrew from contention well before Harris' vetting process began and never submitted the requisite material, according to two of the people. All three spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive search process.

Harris' search is ongoing and her teams of lawyers and political aides are still reviewing information on a narrowing list of potential candidates.

Harris' team was initially said to looking at about a dozen potential contenders, but the field has narrowed and now Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro and Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly are seen as among the front-runners, according to the people.

Cooper, the former chairman of the Democratic Governors Association, has been close to Harris since they were both state attorneys general. His potential selection was seen as a possible asset in shifting North Carolina — the Democrats' only significant opportunity to expand on their 2020 map — into Harris' hands.

Under the state constitution, North Carolina Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, who is the GOP's nominee to re-

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place the term-limited Cooper, becomes acting governor and can assume the Democrat's powers when he travels out of state.

Cooper, according to two of the people, has expressed concern about what Robinson might do if he were to leave the state extensively for campaign travel. Cooper's legal team, as well as some outside experts, do not believe Robinson would actually assume the powers that accompany being governor, such as issuing executive orders. But the governor was concerned enough, one of the people familiar with the matter said, that Robinson would try to take action that could prompt litigation and spur distractions in North Carolina, one of the most critical political states nationwide both for the presidency and in its gubernatorial race.

Robinson is an ardent social conservative, who once called abortion "child sacrifice." In various church pulpits, Robinson has asserted men as the rightful leaders in church and society. He once mused that leaders of the original birth control movement in the U.S. were "witches, all of 'em." He has discussed LGBTQ people with words like "filth" and "maggots."

In the weeks before President Joe Biden withdrew from the race, Cooper appeared with Harris at campaign events in Greensboro and Fayetteville. He had deflected questions about the vetting process.

"I trust her to make the right decision," he told reporters in North Carolina recently.

Cooper, who leaves his job as governor in January, had already been widely regarded as a potential Cabinet member in a future Democratic administration because of his party loyalty and his ability to achieve policy victories on health care and energy in a state with a GOP-dominated legislature bent on weakening him.

North Carolina has consistently voted for the Republican ticket in presidential races for more than four decades, with the exception of supporting Democrats Barack Obama and Biden in 2008.

Cooper has never lost a race for state office dating back to the 1980s, including six statewide general elections since 2000. He has benefited from a booming state economy that has moved from traditional textiles and tobacco to biotech and clean energy and for which he and GOP lawmakers grudgingly share credit. He also routinely portrays himself as a fighter for public education and abortion rights.

Many of his legislative efforts have been thwarted by a General Assembly with veto-proof Republican majorities that rolled back some of his powers before he even took office.

The New York Times first reported that Cooper had withdrawn himself from the process, but did not detail the timing of his decision or his rationale. The Harris campaign declined to comment.

Donald Trump says he 'probably' will debate Kamala Harris but 'can also make a case for not'

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump on Monday seemed to back away from his earlier commitment to debate Vice President Kamala Harris, questioning the value of a meetup and saying he "probably" will debate but he "can also make a case for not doing it."

Trump, in an interview with Fox News Channel that aired Monday night, was pressed several times about committing to debating Harris before giving a squishier answer than he had in recent days.

The Republican former president had been eager to debate President Joe Biden when he was the Democratic nominee after months of suggesting that Biden was not mentally up for the matchup — or the presidency. But after Biden dropped out of the race and Harris became poised to be the Democratic presidential candidate, Trump has been questioning the terms of the original debate he agreed to with Biden. He has suggested the Sept. 10 debate on ABC News should be moved to a different network, calling ABC "fake news."

Last week, in a phone call with reporters, Trump was asked if he'd commit to debating Harris at least once. He responded: "Oh yes, absolutely. I'd want to," and said there was an obligation to debate.

In the interview Monday, host Laura Ingraham repeatedly pressed Trump on whether he would commit to a debate.

"I want to do a debate. But I also can say this. Everybody knows who I am. And now people know who she is," Trump said.

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Trump eventually said, "The answer is yes, I'll probably end up debating."

He went on for a minute, saying any debates need to be held before early voting starts in states, and then added, "The answer is yes, but I can also make a case for not doing it."

Trump has skipped debates before, including all the 2024 Republican presidential primary debates. He initially didn't participate after suggesting the timing was too early and then questioning the venue of another before eventually making it clear he would not participate in any of those debates.

The Republican candidate also sought in the interview Monday to clarify comments he made last week at a conservative event in which he told an audience of Christians that they "won't have to vote anymore" after he's elected.

He urged Christians, who he claims don't vote in high numbers, to vote "just this time," and said, "You won't have to do it anymore."

In four years, he said: "It'll be fixed, it'll be fine. You won't have to vote anymore, my beautiful Christians," he said.

He added moments later: "In four years, you don't have to vote again. We'll have it fixed so good, you're not gonna have to vote."

The comments drew alarm from Democrats and others who noted Trump's pattern of using authoritarian language, his earlier comments that he would only be a dictator on "day one" and his behavior after losing the 2020 presidential election, in which he refused to accept the results and sought to overturn them.

His campaign and supporters offered various explanations for Trump's comments, and Ingraham prodded him to explain what he meant.

"They don't vote and I'm explaining that to 'em. 'You never vote.' This time, vote. I'll straighten out the country. You won't have to vote anymore. I won't need your vote," Trump said.

Ingraham asked if he meant Christians won't need to vote for him because he will only have four years in office.

Trump started his answer by speaking about voting rates of Christians and gun owners, and Ingraham interrupted to ask him again.

"Don't worry about the future. Vote, on, you have to vote on November 5th. After that, you don't have to worry about voting anymore. I don't care because we're going to fix up, the country will be fixed and we won't even need your vote anymore because frankly, we will have such love. If you don't want to vote anymore, that's okay," Trump said.

Trump made similar comments last month at another Christian-focused event, in which he lamented the voting rates of Christians and implored them to participate in the election.

"In four years, you don't have to vote, OK? In four years, don't vote. I don't care," he said.

Trump agrees to be interviewed as part of an investigation into his assassination attempt, FBI says

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump has agreed to be interviewed by the FBI as part of an investigation into his attempted assassination in Pennsylvania earlier this month, a special agent said on Monday in disclosing how the gunman prior to the shooting had researched mass attacks and explosive devices.

The expected interview with the 2024 Republican presidential nominee is part of the FBI's standard protocol to speak with victims during the course of its criminal investigations. The FBI said on Friday that Trump was struck in the ear by a bullet or a fragment of one during the July 13 assassination attempt at a campaign rally in Butler, Pennsylvania.

"We want to get his perspective on what he observed," said Kevin Rojek, the special agent in charge of the FBI's Pittsburgh field office. "It is a standard victim interview like we would do for any other victim of crime, under any other circumstance."

Trump said in a Fox News interview that aired Monday night that he expected the FBI interview to take

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place Thursday.

Through more than 450 interviews, the FBI has fleshed out a portrait of the gunman, Thomas Matthew Crooks, that reveals him to be a "highly intelligent" but reclusive 20-year-old whose primary social circle was his family and who maintained few friends and acquaintances throughout his life, Rojek said. Even in online gaming platforms that Crooks visited, his interactions with peers appeared to have been minimal, the FBI said.

His parents have been "extremely cooperative," with the investigation, Rojek said. They have said they had no advance knowledge of the shooting.

The FBI has not uncovered a motive as to why he chose to target Trump, but investigators believe the shooting was the result of extensive planning, including the purchase under an alias in recent months of chemical precursors that investigators believe were used to create the explosive devices found in his car and his home, and the deployment of a drone about 200 yards (180 meters) from the rally site in the hours before the event.

The day before the shooting, the FBI says, Crooks visited a local shooting range and practiced with the gun that would be used in the attack.

After the shooting, authorities found two explosive devices in Crooks' car and a third in his room at home. The devices recovered from the car, consisting of ammunition boxes filled with explosive material with wires, receivers and ignition devices, were capable of exploding but did not because the receivers were in the "off" position, Rojek said. How much damage they could have done is unclear.

The FBI has said that Crooks in the lead-up to the shooting had shown an online interest in prominent public figures, searching online for information about individuals including President Joe Biden. In addition, Rojek said, Crooks looked up information about mass shootings, improvised explosive devices, power plants and the attempted assassination in May of Slovakia's populist Prime Minister Robert Fico.

FBI Director Christopher Wray told Congress last week that on July 6, the day Crooks registered to attend the Trump rally, he googled: "How far away was Oswald from Kennedy?" That's a reference to Lee Harvey Oswald, the shooter who killed President John F. Kennedy from a sniper's perch in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963.

New details, meanwhile, were emerging about law enforcement security lapses and missed communications that preceded the shooting.

Sen. Chuck Grassley, an Iowa Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, released text messages from members of the Beaver County Emergency Services Unit that showed how local officers had communicated with each other about a suspicious-behaving man who turned out to be Crooks lurking around more than an hour before the shooting.

One text just before 4:30 p.m. describes a man "sitting to the direct right on a picnic table about 50 yards from the exit."

In another text at 5:38 p.m., an officer tells other counter-snipers: "Kid learning around building we are in. AGR I believe it is. I did see him with a range finder looking towards stage. FYI. If you wanna notify SS snipers to look out. I lost sight of him." Photographs of Crooks circulated among the group.

AGR is a reference to a complex of buildings that form AGR International Inc, a supplier of automation equipment for the glass and plastic packaging industry. Crooks scaled the roof of one of the buildings of the compound and is believed to have fired eight shots at the rally stage with an AR-style rifle that was purchased legally by his father years earlier.

The shots were fired at 6:12 p.m., according to a Beaver County after-action report.

Trump said he was "shot with a bullet that pierced the upper part of my right ear," and he appeared in the days later with a bandage on the ear. One rallygoer, Corey Comperatore, was killed, and two others were injured. Crooks was shot dead by a Secret Service counter-sniper.

In an interview with ABC News, a Beaver County officer who sounded the alarm said that after sending a text alerting others to Crooks, "I assumed that there would be somebody coming out to speak with this individual or find out what's going on."

Another officer told ABC News that the group was supposed to get a face-to-face briefing with the Secret Service counter-snipers but that that never happened.

An email to the Secret Service seeking comment was not immediately returned Monday.

With DUI-related ejection from Army, deputy who killed Massey should have raised flags, experts say

By JOHN O'CONNOR and LOLITA BALDOR Associated Press

SPRINGFIELD, Ill. (AP) — The Illinois sheriff's deputy charged in the shooting death of Sonya Massey was kicked out of the Army for the first of two drunken driving convictions in which he had a weapon in his car, authorities said, but that didn't stop multiple law enforcement agencies from giving him a badge.

Before his policing career began with six jobs in four years — the first three of which were part time — 30-year-old Sean Grayson was convicted twice within a year of driving under the influence, which cost him his hitch in the military.

The convictions plus his previous employment record should have raised serious questions when the Sangamon County Sheriff's Department hired him in May 2023, law enforcement experts say.

Grayson, who has since been fired, is charged with first-degree murder, aggravated battery with a firearm and official misconduct in the death of Massey, a 36-year-old Black woman who had called 911 about a suspected prowler at her home in Springfield, 200 miles (320 kilometers) southwest of Chicago. Grayson, who is white, has pleaded not guilty.

"Six jobs in four years should have raised a red flag. And you would ask why he wasn't hired full time in any of those (part-time) jobs," said Chuck Wexler, executive director of the Police Executive Research Forum, a Washington, D.C.-based think tank. "Combined with a track record of DUIs, it would be enough to do further examination as to whether or not he would be a good fit."

Grayson, who enlisted in the Army in 2014, was charged with DUI in Macoupin County, just south of Sangamon County, after traffic stops on Aug. 10, 2015, and again on July 26, 2016.

The first DUI led to his discharge from the military in February 2016 for "serious misconduct," according to a U.S. official who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss personnel information, adding that Grayson had an unregistered gun in his vehicle.

Macoupin County State's Attorney Jordan Garrison confirmed that police found a gun in the center console, but Grayson did not face a weapons charge because he was a resident of Fort Riley, Kansas. Kansas has an open-carry firearms law.

Grayson received a general discharge under honorable conditions — rather than an honorable discharge — because he was charged by a civilian law enforcement agency and his military service otherwise was good.

His attorney, Daniel Fultz, declined to comment Monday.

A misdemeanor DUI charge doesn't by law preclude someone from serving in law enforcement, said Sean Smoot, chairman of the Illinois Law Enforcement Training and Standards Board, but a hiring agency can certainly consider it.

"Some police departments would not have hired someone with one DUI," Smoot said. "I am shocked an agency would hire someone with two DUIs, but multiple agencies apparently did."

Massey's father, James Wilburn, has demanded the resignation of Sangamon County Sheriff Jack Campbell. "He does not intend to step down," Campbell spokesman Jeff Wilhite said.

A statement from Campbell's office indicated that the county merit commission and state law enforcement board recommended Grayson's certification as an officer despite the DUIs, and he passed a drug test, criminal background check, psychological evaluation and 16-week academy course.

Before he came to Springfield, Grayson worked for a year as a deputy sheriff in Logan County, just to the northeast. According to a report obtained under a public records request, he was told he needed more training, including "high-stress decision-making classes," in November 2022 after he failed to follow an order to halt a high-speed pursuit, reaching speeds of 110 mph (177 kph) before colliding with a deer.

When he applied at Logan, an employment report from Auburn, south of Springfield, where he had worked previously, showed that while Grayson was always early for work, eager for training, receptive to criticism and had not faced disciplinary action, he struggled with report writing, was "not great with evidence — left items laying around office" and was "a bragger."

The Logan County records also include complaints of misconduct from two people Grayson arrested, including one in which a woman who admitted having drugs in a body cavity claimed Grayson gave her a glove and told her to remove the contraband in front of him and another male officer. She later was taken to a hospital to have it removed and claimed Grayson burst through the curtain during the procedure. He denied both complaints and resigned from Logan County before the investigation was complete.

In the body camera video from the night of the shooting, Grayson and another officer find no evidence of a prowler and wait several minutes for Massey to answer, during which time Grayson makes a comment that she's dead inside and calls impatiently for her.

Massey, who had suffered mental health issues, appears confused and says, "Don't hurt me." Grayson responds at times in a condescending or impatient manner.

"His conduct before, during and after suggests that this guy was a loose cannon, and that's being polite," said Kalfani Ture, a former police officer, now assistant professor of criminal justice at Widener University in Chester, Pennsylvania, and an instructor in the New York Police Department's academy.

Inside Massey's home, video shows Grayson directing that a pan of water be removed from a flame on the stove. Massey appears to set it near the sink. The two joke about Grayson moving away from her "hot, steaming water" and Massey inexplicably says, "I rebuke you in the name of Jesus."

That prompts Grayson to pull his gun. Massey apologizes and ducks behind a counter, but when Grayson yells at her to drop the pot, she appears to pick it up again. Grayson fires three times, striking her in the face, and makes no immediate effort to provide medical aid because "That's a headshot."

"That's not characteristic of an officer. That is characteristic of someone who has a depraved indifference to human life," Ture said. "And this incident is not an aberration. Someone like this is pretty consistent in their display of this type of profile."

Ture said Massey probably picked the pan up again because she was confused by the shouted orders. He moved too quickly to lethal force — he had other options, including using a stun gun, chemical spray or easily overpowering the diminutive woman, Ture said.

Pulling his weapon escalated the incident, Wexler said.

"He should have slowed things down, communicate, have a plan B and know where the door is to get out of the house, not put himself in a position where he had no alternative but to use deadly force by standing still, pulling out his gun and barking orders," Wexler said.

The U.S. men's gymnastics team ended a lengthy Olympic medal drought. They hope the NCAA notices

By WILL GRAVES AP National Writer

PARIS (AP) — Before they stood with their arms wrapped around each other in a brotherhood forever etched into U.S. Olympic lore, Brody Malone, Frederick Richard, Asher Hong, Paul Juda and Stephen Nedoroscik were collegians.

Yes, the dreams the members of the U.S. men's gymnastics team had fostered since childhood began in small gyms scattered across the country. But they became tangible at Stanford, Michigan and Penn State.

So when it was time for those dreams to become fully, vividly realized inside a raucous Bercy Arena on Monday night, they leaned on the experiences they gained during all those meets in all those sometimes sparsely filled gyms that taught them about pressure and teamwork and belief.

Yes, the bronze medal the Americans so emphatically earned ended a 16-year drought on the sport's biggest stage.

Yet it was also a message to athletic directors at the dozen schools that still have Division I gymnastics — and to be honest, to the ones that don't, too — that the sport is worth saving.

"If you want to keep seeing USA Gymnastics and Team USA on a gymnastics podium, at least on the men's side, you're going to have to give us more opportunities to compete in college," said Juda, who is in graduate school at Michigan.

Opportunities that are in danger of vanishing quickly thanks to a rapidly evolving college sports land-

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scape. It's a reality the five men who stood on the podium with their arms around each other are only too aware of.

Richard, a rising junior at Michigan, has made it his life's mission to bring more people to a side of the sport that — at least in the U.S. anyway — has long plugged along anonymously.

And while he's carved out a rapidly expanding niche on social media, Richard is savvy enough to understand the one thing guaranteed to attract people to men's gymnastics isn't a viral video, but hardware like the medal he kept grabbing in the giddy aftermath.

"My goal even here was to make a statement that the U.S. is getting stronger and stronger and we're only (going up)," Richard said. "And I think we did that today. I think a lot of young boys watching are inspired by us."

That's the way it was for Richard as a kid in the Boston suburbs. There were pictures on the wall at the gym of the medal-winning 2004 and 2008 U.S. men's Olympic teams. Richard would stare at the pictures and wonder how those teams put all the pieces together.

"It looks like they all came together on the same day and just did like these perfect routines," Richard said. "And you're like, how is that possible?"

Richard found out firsthand.

The Americans didn't record a major fall during any of their 18 routines in the final and finished closer to second-place China than fourth-place Britain. They leaned into the energy from a vocal contingent of U.S. fans that offered a hint of what it might look like in Los Angeles four years from now.

Mostly, however, they leaned on each other and their experiences to shake off an iffy qualifying session on Saturday in which they finished a sloppy fifth.

"We just told each other we were gonna treat it like an NCAA championships because we've all been there," Malone said. "And it's high pressure competing for a team. And it's no different this competition. I mean yeah, this one's a little bit different, a little bit bigger. But same concept."

With perhaps a much more impactful result.

Nedoroscik is 26. Malone is 24. Juda is 23. Hong and Richard are 20. There is a feeling of real momentum within the U.S. men's program for the first time in a while. Yet to keep it going, the pipeline behind them needs to keep churning.

There was a sense in the 2010s that the U.S. had grown stale in part because those at the core group at the top grew a little too comfortable due in part to a lack of competition from those trying to catch them.

Sam Mikulak went to three Olympics with teams that had considerable talent. He never came home with a medal, though on Monday night he was chatting with Nedoroscik as he prepared for his pommel horse set that served as the exclamation point.

While they talked, Mikulak told Nedoroscik to stay calm, that 80 percent of his best would be good enough. To soak in a moment Mikulak dreamed of but never quite grasped.

And when Nedoroscik gracefully swooped from one end of the horse to the other, his hands working dutifully in tandem on an event that has given the Americans fits for years, the bronze that felt in some ways like gold was won.

Standing there in the aftermath, Mikulak couldn't help but speculate about what might lie ahead.

"I think the guys are going to be hungry for more," he said. "And hopefully this spurs men's gymnastics in the US like never before."

2 children dead and 11 people injured in stabbing rampage at a dance class in England, police say

By BRIAN MELLEY and JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Bloodied children ran screaming from a dance and yoga class "like a scene from a horror movie" to escape a teenager's savage knife attack that killed two children and wounded 11 other people Monday in northwest England, police and witnesses said.

A 17-year-old boy was arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder in the stabbing in South-

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port, a seaside town near Liverpool, Merseyside Police said. The motive was not clear, but police said detectives were not treating the attack as terror-related.

Nine children were wounded — six of them in critical condition — in the latest headline-grabbing attack amid a recent rise in knife crime that has stoked anxieties and led to calls for the government to do more to clamp down on bladed weapons.

Two wounded adults who tried to shield the pupils were in critical condition, police said.

"We believe the adults who were injured were bravely trying to protect the children who were being attacked," Merseyside Police Chief Constable Serena Kennedy said.

The Taylor Swift-themed workshop was held on the first week of school vacation for children aged about 6 to 11. The two-hour session was led by two women — a yoga instructor and a dance instructor — according to an online listing.

Witnesses described hearing blood-curdling screams and seeing children covered in blood emerging from the business that hosts everything from pregnancy workshops and meditation sessions to women's bootcamps.

"They were in the road, running from the nursery," said Bare Varathan, who owns a shop nearby. "They had been stabbed, here, here, here, everywhere," indicating the neck, back and chest.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer called the attack "horrendous and deeply shocking." King Charles III sent his "condolences, prayers and deepest sympathies" for those affected by the "utterly horrific incident."

Police were called shortly before noon to a street where several small businesses are located behind rows of brick houses in the city of about 100,000.

The first officers who arrived were shocked to find so many casualties from the "ferocious attack," most of them children with serious injuries, Kennedy said.

Colin Parry, an auto body shop owner, said most of the stabbing victims appeared to be young girls.

"The mothers are coming here now and screaming," Parry said. "It is like a scene from a horror movie. ... It's like something from America, not like sunny Southport."

The suspect, who has not been identified, lived in a village about 5 miles (8 kilometers) from the site of the attack, police said. He was originally from Cardiff, Wales.

Ryan Carney, who lives with his mother in the street, said his mother saw emergency workers carrying children "covered in red, covered in blood. She said she could see the stab wounds in the backs of the children."

"All this stuff never really happens around here," he said. "You hear of it, stabbings and stuff like that in major cities, your Manchesters, your Londons. This is sunny Southport. That's what people call it. The sun's out. It's a lovely place to be."

Britain's worst attack on children occurred in 1996, when 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton shot 16 kindergarten pupils and their teacher dead in a school gymnasium in Dunblane, Scotland. The U.K. subsequently banned the private ownership of almost all handguns.

Mass shootings and killings with firearms are rare in Britain, where knives were used in about 40% of homicides in the year to March 2023.

Netanyahu vows retaliation against Hezbollah after weekend strike as US warns against escalation

By LEO CORREA and ALON BERNSTEIN Associated Press

MAJDAL SHAMS, Golan Heights (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday vowed heavy retaliation against Hezbollah amid furious diplomatic efforts to prevent a spiral into regional war following a weekend rocket strike that killed 12 children in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

Israel has blamed Hezbollah for Saturday evening's rocket from Lebanon that slammed into a soccer field where the children were playing in the mainly Druze town of Majdal Shams. In an unusual move, Hezbollah denied any role in the strike.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken spoke with Israeli President Isaac Herzog on Monday, empha-

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sizing the "importance of preventing escalation" and discussing efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to months of conflict.

Israel and the Iranian-backed Lebanese Hezbollah have exchanged fire almost daily over the border since the war in Gaza erupted in October. Each side has seemed intent on avoiding an escalation that would bring their full firepower against each other. But the exchanges have mounted, and the latest strike threatened reprisals and counter-reprisals that could spiral into full-fledged war.

Early Monday, Israeli strikes hit a motorcycle in Lebanon near the border, killing two people and wounding three others, Lebanese state media said. The strikes, mirroring the pace of the daily cross-border fire, did not appear to be Israel's retaliation for Saturday's attack.

Thousands of mourners laid to rest on Monday the 12th victim of the strike. The body of 11-year-old Guevara Ibrahim was carried through the streets of Majdal Shams in a procession of black-clad mourners.

Netanyahu spoke as he visited the soccer field in Majdal Shams and met with leaders of the Druze community.

"These children are our children, they are the children of all of us," he said as officials laid a wreath on the field. "The state of Israel will not and cannot overlook this. Our response will come, and it will be severe," he said, adding that the rocket was fired by Hezbollah.

Nearby, around 300 friends, supporters and relatives of the slain children protested against Netanyahu's visit, shouting that he was exploiting the bloodshed for political gain and calling for an end to the violence. Some held up pictures of the children, saying they wanted no more deaths.

After Netanyahu left, some rushed onto the soccer field and tore down the wreath. Weeping relatives held up toys left by the children on the field.

The Druze of the Golan Heights have long had a fraught relationship with Israel since it captured the territory from Syria in the 1967 war and later annexed it. Some Druze have Israeli citizenship, and ties with Israeli society have grown over the years. But many still have sympathies for Syria and have rejected Israeli annexation.

Earlier in the day, Defense Minister Yoav Gallant also visited the town, saying Hezbollah will "pay a price" for the attack. He did not elaborate, saying only, "We will let actions speak for themselves."

Israel's military says Hezbollah fired an Iranian-made Falaq rocket with a 53-kilogram (117-pound) warhead. Hezbollah has started moving precision-guided missiles for use if needed, an official with a Lebanese group told The Associated Press, without elaborating on where they are being moved.

The official said Hezbollah's stance has not changed and it does not want a full-blown war with Israel, but if war breaks out it will fight without limits. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military activities.

Israel and Hezbollah have been trading fire since Oct. 8, a day after Hamas militants stormed into southern Israel. Hezbollah has said it is showing its support for the Palestinian group.

More than 500 people, including 90 civilians, have been killed in Lebanon, as have 22 soldiers and 25 civilians on the Israeli side. Tens of thousands have evacuated their homes on both sides of the border.

The U.S. and France for months have pushed for a negotiated agreement between Hezbollah and Israel to quieten the border and allow the return of residents.

The White House National Security Council said it was speaking with Israeli and Lebanese counterparts and working on a diplomatic solution to "end all attacks once and for all" in the border area.

Amos Hochstein, a senior adviser to U.S. President Joe Biden who frequently handles delicate negotiations in Lebanon, has been making a flurry of calls trying to contain the situation, a Lebanese diplomat said, speaking on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to talk to the press on the issue.

An outright war between Israel and Hezbollah could bring intense destruction. Hezbollah has far superior firepower than Hamas, with an arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, including precision-guided missiles, according to Israeli estimates.

The last time they went to war, in 2006, Israel inflicted massive damage in Lebanon with a bombing campaign in retaliation for a cross-border Hezbollah attack. The death and destruction were so great,

Hezbollah has been under intense pressure from the Lebanese ever since not to trigger a repeated war with Israel.

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati spoke to British Foreign Secretary David Lammy. "We both agreed that widening of conflict in the region is in nobody's interest," Lammy said in a post on the social media site X.

Storms bring flash flooding to Dollywood amusement park in Tennessee

PIGEON FORGE, Tenn. (AP) — Strong thunderstorms brought flash flooding to Dolly Parton's Dollywood in east Tennessee.

Park workers and the Pigeon Forge police and fire departments directed guests to safety on Sunday afternoon, and one minor injury was reported, park officials said in a statement. The amusement park said it was supporting guests whose vehicles were affected and cleanup crews were deployed. The park was opening at noon Monday and the park's Splash Country, which wasn't affected, opened at its regular time.

A road collapse closed McCarter Hollow Road at the entrance to Dollywood on Sunday night, according to the Pigeon Forge Police Department.

JeMiale McKinney of Knoxville and his wife and two daughters are season pass holders and headed to the park Sunday. Sometimes, when there is a threat of bad weather, that is the best time to go because many people will leave and once the weather clears, you get shorter ride times, McKinney said.

However, it was pouring buckets and within 10 minutes the entrance was blocked. People could see that it wouldn't be worth it to drive through the water that was thigh-deep in some places, McKinney said.

"We got trapped in the parking lot faster than we thought," he said. They were stuck there for two hours until a crew broke down a fence so people could get out.

"I was surprised about how calm people were," he said.

Nearly 5 inches of rain fell in the area in about an hour, Dollywood spokesperson Wes Ramey said in an email.

"While the volume of rain was difficult for both the park's and the city's infrastructure to manage, the fact we have only one minor injury illustrates how well our hosts handled the situation and how well our guests followed their directions," Ramey said.

The park will evaluate the response to determine whether any changes are needed, he said.

Ukrainian troops say Russia has driven them out of 2 more eastern Donetsk villages

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russian forces have overrun two front-line villages in Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region, a Ukrainian army sergeant said Monday, after relentless assaults that are part of a Kremlin summer push to overwhelm battlefield defenses there.

Separately, attacks in Russia's Kursk region by the Security Service of Ukraine, also known as the SBU, struck a number of substations causing power outages, according to a statement from the General Staff of Ukraine. The claim of responsibility came after Russia said it thwarted a nighttime Ukrainian drone attack.

"They pressed non-stop" to capture Vovche and Prohres, the chief sergeant of Ukraine's 47th Separate Mechanized Brigade, Oleh Chaus, told Radio Svaboda. "They sent in a large number of troops, which had not previously been used."

Russia's Defense Ministry claimed in recent days that it had taken control of the villages, but the Ukrainian General Staff made no official comment.

The villages lie about 30 kilometers (20 miles) northwest of Avdiivka, a Donetsk city that the Russian army seized in February after a long battle. That victory was the Kremlin's last major triumph in the war

that is now in its third year.

Russia's onslaught, fueled by its heavy advantage in soldiers and weaponry, has repeatedly forced the Ukrainians to pull back from defensive positions to avoid being captured or killed.

Oleksandr Shyrshyn, the 47th brigade's deputy battalion commander, confirmed to local media that the villages had been taken. He blamed poor training of troops, low abilities of officers, motivation and inadequate weapons for the setbacks.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy late Sunday described the situation in the Donetsk region as "extremely challenging."

Russia's strategy of attritional warfare, with powerful glide bombs smashing Ukrainian defenses before infantry move in, has brought incremental gains for the Kremlin as it seeks another big breakthrough.

Ukraine is significantly outgunned by Russia's bigger army on the roughly 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line.

Russian troops are also intensifying their weeklong drive to breach Ukrainian defenses around Pokrovsk, a town of around 60,000 people before the war, the Ukrainian General Staff said Monday.

Russia launched 52 attacks there over the previous 24 hours — almost twice the daily number in recent weeks, it said.

Meanwhile, Russian air defenses thwarted a nighttime barrage of 39 Ukrainian drones over five of the country's regions, Russian authorities said Monday. Ukraine claimed its forces carried out strikes in the Kursk region.

Russia's air defense were active and explosions were reported near at least four substations, the statement from Ukraine's General Staff said. After the attack, power outages were reported in the Ponyrovsky, Solntsevsky and Kursky districts of Kursk region, according to the statement.

The attacks were carried out by the Security Service of Ukraine's Special Operations Center, as well as other components of the Defense Forces.

"These facilities, among other things, ensure the functioning of the Russian railway, which transports weapons and military equipment to support its occupation army," the statement said.

Russia's Defense Ministry said the drones were "intercepted and destroyed" in regions bordering Ukraine as well as in the Leningrad region roughly 700 kilometers (430 miles) north of the Ukrainian border. A power plant, a bridge and a power line were damaged by drone debris, it said.

Ukraine has employed high technology in its campaign of increasingly ambitious drone strikes deep inside Russia that target critical infrastructure in an attempt to make the war more costly for Moscow and hinder its war machine.

Israel-Hamas war latest: US cautions Israel over escalation with Hezbollah after weekend attack

By The Associated Press undefined

The United States on Monday cautioned Israel about escalation with the Iranian-backed Hezbollah as Israel weighs its response to a rocket attack from Lebanon over the weekend that killed 12 youths in the Israel-controlled Golan Heights.

The attack increased concerns about a wider regional conflict, even as Hezbollah in a rare move denied having a role. Cross-border fighting between Israel and Hezbollah has occurred almost daily since the war with Hamas in Gaza began in October. On Monday, Israeli strikes killed two people on a motorcycle and injured three others in southern Lebanon, Lebanon's state-run news agency said. Israeli military officials said they struck Hezbollah operatives and infrastructure.

An official with a Lebanese group told The Associated Press that Hezbollah has started moving precision-guided missiles but doesn't want a full-blown war with Israel. Hezbollah has far superior firepower than Hamas, and analysts have said that igniting a war in Israel's north while it's engaged in Gaza would overburden the military.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu visited the site of the rocket attack on Monday, saying that

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"our response will come, and it will be severe." But some residents of the Druze village protested by tossing his wreath aside and saying the tragedy shouldn't be used for political purposes.

Here's the latest:

U.S. defense leaders speak with their Israeli counterparts after rocket strike

WASHINGTON — The top two U.S. defense leaders spoke with their Israeli counterparts, working to de-escalate tensions in the region in the wake of the Majdal Shams attack, the Defense Department said Monday.

Gen. CQ Brown, Jr., spoke Sunday with Chief of the Israeli General Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi, said Navy Capt. Jereal Dorsey, spokesman for the Joint Staff. Dorsey said the U.S. "is actively striving to mitigate tensions."

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin spoke with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, offering condolences for the attack. Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh said they discussed efforts to finalize the hostage deal and ceasefire, and "continued efforts toward a diplomatic solution in the north that stops all attacks and allows citizens on both sides of the Israel-Lebanon border to return home safely."

Syrian citizen killed by Israeli drone strike in Lebanon, news outlet says

A Syrian civilian was killed in an Israeli drone strike in south Lebanon Monday, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported.

The 25-year-old man was with another man in a car that happened to be passing by when the strike hit a motorcycle in the area of Kfar Raman, the NNA said. It was not clear who the intended target was.

Around 500 people have been killed in Lebanon over nearly 10 months of low-level clashes between Israeli forces and the militant group Hezbollah. Most of them were fighters, but around 90 civilians have also been killed. In Israel, 22 soldiers and 24 civilians have been killed, including 12 children and teens killed over the weekend in a rocket strike in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

Israel has accused Hezbollah of carrying out the strike, while the Lebanese militant group has issued a rare denial of responsibility. Israeli officials have vowed to retaliate in Lebanon, kicking off a flurry of diplomatic efforts to limit the escalation.

U.S. urges restraint as Israel considers how to respond to rocket strike

WASHINGTON — The White House says that Israel has every right to respond to a recent strike on the Golan Heights, but is urging restraint amid boiling tensions on the Israeli-Lebanon border.

"There's no reason, in our view, that this has to lead to some dramatic escalation," White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Monday. "There's still time and space for diplomacy."

Kirby added that senior administration officials have been in close contact with Israeli officials since Saturday's strike in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights killed 12 children and teens. Israel and the United States have blamed Hezbollah for the rocket attack. Hezbollah has denied having a role in the attack.

Kirby reiterated the White House position that Hezbollah is to blame for ratcheting up tensions along the Blue Line and said that Israel would speak for itself on how it would respond.

"It's Hezbollah that started firing on Israel way back in October, and I think we need to keep that in mind," Kirby said. "But nobody wants a broader war, and I'm confident that we'll be able to avoid such an outcome."

White House declines to comment on reports of Israel hardening its demands

WASHINGTON — White House national security spokesman John Kirby on Monday declined to comment on the reports of Israel hardening its demands. He said that the U.S. administration still that an agreement remains "close" to being achieved.

"There are teams at work right now trying to close these gaps, and I think it's important that we give them the time and the space to do that in a way that, that doesn't make it harder," Kirby told reporters. "So again, we believe the gaps can be narrowed. We believe the details can be hashed out."

Some airlines cancel or delay flights to Beirut amid Israel-Hezbollah tensions

NEW YORK — A small number of flights to and from Beirut's international airport have been canceled this week as tensions between Israel and Hezbollah escalate and carriers cite security risks.

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Due to "current developments in the Middle East," the Lufthansa Group said three of its airlines — Lufthansa, Swiss and Eurowings — decided to suspend flights "up to and including" Aug. 5. Air France said it had suspended flights between Paris and Beirut for Monday and Tuesday.

In a statement, Air France said it is monitoring the situation and that "the safety of its customers and crews is its number one priority."

Other airlines have reported delays. Lebanon's Middle East Airlines said five flights have been delayed to arrive Tuesday morning due to "technical reasons related to the distribution of insurance risks."

Western diplomat says Israel is expected to keep retaliation against Hezbollah within limits

BEIRUT — A Western diplomat whose country is involved in diplomatic efforts to prevent a major escalation in the fighting between Hezbollah and Israel says he anticipates Israel will keep its retaliation within boundaries that would not lead to an all-out war, similar to the exchange of strikes between Iran and Israel earlier this year after Israel struck an Iranian consular building in Syria.

"It's clear that they (Israel) want to take a stance but without leading to a generalized conflict," the diplomat said. "It's sure that there will be a retaliation. It will be symbolic. It may be spectacular, but it will not be a reason for both parties to engage in a general escalation." He spoke on condition of anonymity because he wasn't authorized to speak publicly.

Israel is weighing its response after a weekend rocket attack in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights killed 12 children and teens. Israel blamed Hezbollah, which in a rare move denied having a role.

— Abby Sewell

Israeli military detains soldiers after allegations of abuse at center

The Israeli military says it is holding nine soldiers for questioning following allegations of "substantial abuse" of a detainee at a shadowy facility where Israel has held Palestinian prisoners throughout the war in Gaza.

The military said its top legal official had launched a probe. An investigation by The Associated Press and reports by rights groups have exposed abysmal conditions at the Sde Teiman facility, the country's largest detention center.

The military has generally denied ill-treatment of detainees. Following the accusations, Israel has said it is transferring the bulk of Palestinian detainees out of Sde Teiman and upgrading it. The detentions of soldiers prompted an outcry among members of Israel's far-right government, who condemned the investigation as an affront to their service.

Israel has detained thousands of Palestinians since the Hamas attack on Oct. 7, according to official figures, though hundreds were released after the military determined they were not affiliated with the militant group. Israeli human rights groups say the majority of detainees have passed through Sde Teiman.

Blinken urges against escalation in Israel-Hezbollah conflict in call with Herzog

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has spoken with Israeli President Isaac Herzog to urge that Israel and Hezbollah step back from escalating their conflict.

Israeli leaders are weighing a response to the weekend rocket attack that killed 12 young people in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. Israel blamed Iran-backed Hezbollah, which denied responsibility.

The U.S. and France for months have pushed a negotiated agreement between Hezbollah and Israel to keep the Israeli-Hamas war in Gaza from spinning into a larger and more dangerous regional conflict.

The State Department says Blinken in the call with Herzog on Monday "emphasized the importance of preventing escalation of the conflict and discussed efforts to reach a diplomatic solution to allow citizens on both sides of the border between Israel and Lebanon to return home."

Blinken also underscored the United States' commitment to Israel's defense against Iranian-allied armed groups.

Residents of village where children were killed protest Netanyahu's visit

Some residents of the Golan Heights village where a rocket killed 12 youths over the weekend have protested the visit by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other officials expressing condolences.

Netanyahu is weighing Israel's response to the attack it blames on Hezbollah, which in a rare move has denied having a role. The prime minister laid a wreath, expressed his shock and said the local Druze com-

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munity has paid a heavy price. He met with representatives of victims' families.

But after Netanyahu left the area of the soccer field where the rocket hit, some people ran there, threw away the wreath and protested the political use of the tragedy. Relatives and friends of the dead cried over photos of the children and teens that had been placed there. They said they want the war to end.

Israel and Hezbollah have exchanged cross-border fire since Oct. 8, a day after the Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza. The weekend attack in Majdal Shams again raised concerns about a wider regional war.

Israeli defense minister says Hezbollah will 'pay a price' for weekend attack

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant has told the families of some of the 12 children and teens killed in a weekend rocket strike that Hezbollah will "pay a price" for the attack. The Iranian-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon has denied carrying it out.

The rocket struck a soccer field in the Druze town of Majdal Shams in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. It was the deadliest attack against civilians in Israel or in Israeli-controlled territory since Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

During his visit, Gallant told families that "we will let actions speak for themselves." Israel has been weighing how to respond to the strike, which increased fears that Israel and Hezbollah would move toward all-out war. The foes have exchanged cross-border fire since Oct. 8, a day after the Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza.

Hezbollah starts moving missiles amid Israel threat, an official says

BEIRUT — Lebanon's militant Hezbollah group has started moving precision-guided missiles as Israel threatens to launch an attack on Lebanon following the weekend strike that killed 12 children in the Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

An official with a Lebanese group told The Associated Press that Hezbollah's stance has not changed and that the Iran-backed group does not want a full-blown war with Israel, but if war breaks out it will fight without limits.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive military activities, said Hezbollah since Sunday has started moving some of its "smart precision-guided missiles" to use if needed.

Since the war in Gaza began in October, Hezbollah has fired thousands of rockets and scores of explosive drones into Israel. Israel estimates that Hezbollah has an arsenal of 150,000 rockets and missiles, including precision-guided missiles.

— Bassem Mroue in Beirut

Flurry of diplomatic activity in Lebanon ahead of expected Israeli retaliation for deadly strike

BEIRUT — Monday saw a flurry of diplomatic activity in Lebanon ahead of anticipated Israeli retaliation to a strike that killed 12 children and teenagers in a town in the Israel-controlled Golan Heights.

Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati has held "intensive diplomatic contacts after the recent Israeli threats against Lebanon," including a call with British Foreign Secretary David Lammy, who "renewed the call on all parties to exercise restraint to prevent escalation," Mikati's office said in a statement.

Lammy posted on social media site X that he had called Mikati "to express my concern at escalating tension and welcomed the Government of Lebanon's statement urging for cessation of all violence."

"We both agreed that widening of conflict in the region is in nobody's interest," he said.

Also on Monday, Hezbollah's head of foreign relations, Ammar Moussawi, met with Lebanese Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib, according to a Lebanese diplomat and a Hezbollah official who spoke on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to comment publicly on the matter.

The diplomatic official said there had also been a flurry of calls by Amos Hochstein, a senior advisor to U.S. President Joe Biden who frequently handles delicate negotiations in Lebanon, attempting to ensure that the Israeli retaliation and Hezbollah's response would not spiral into an all-out war.

Israel has accused Hezbollah of firing the rocket that hit a soccer field in the town of Majdal Shams over the weekend. Hezbollah denied responsibility, a rare move by the militant group.

—Abby Sewell

12th victim of rocket strike in Israeli-controlled Golan Heights laid to rest

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MAJDAL SHAMS, Golan Heights — Thousands of mourners laid to rest on Monday the 12th victim of a rocket strike from Lebanon that hit a soccer field in Israeli-controlled territory, an attack that risked pushing the region toward all-out war.

The body of 11-year-old Guevara Ibrahim was carried through the streets of the Druze town of Majdal Shams in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights in a procession of people clad in black. Pictures of the smiling boy were hoisted up as his body, shrouded in white, was moved through the streets.

Ibrahim was one of 12 children and teens between the ages of 10 to 16 who were killed when a rocket struck a soccer field. It was the deadliest attack on Israel or Israeli-controlled territory since Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks.

The strike's other victims were buried on Sunday but Ibrahim's body was not immediately identified and he was initially considered missing, Israeli media reported.

Israel blamed Hezbollah for Saturday's strike, but in an unusual move the Iran-backed Lebanese militant group denied involvement.

Israel is expected to retaliate and the region is bracing for the possibility of an escalation in the fighting.

Israel and Hezbollah have been exchanging cross-border fire since Oct. 8, a day after Hamas attacked southern Israel, which sparked the war in Gaza.

Officials from Egypt and Hamas say cease-fire negotiations still face hurdles

CAIRO — Officials from Egypt and Hamas said Monday that mediators negotiating a Gaza cease-fire deal were still working to iron out sticking points.

The officials, who have direct knowledge of the negotiations, said the contentious points include Israeli demands to maintain a presence in a strip of land on the Gaza-Egypt border known as the Philadelphi corridor, as well as along a highway separating Gaza's south and north.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

They said Israel refuses to leave the area between Egypt and Gaza during the cease-fire. They said Israel has linked its forces' departure from the border corridor to installing underground sensors and an underground wall to monitor any future efforts by Hamas to build tunnels or smuggle weapons. Officials in Israel did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Israel says Hamas uses tunnels that pass under the corridor to smuggle weapons, although Egypt denies the allegation and says it destroyed many in an earlier crackdown.

Israel's military seized control of the Philadelphi corridor in early May along with the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza when it began its invasion of Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah.

The Egyptian official said no agreement has been reached on the corridor and the reopening of Rafah, adding that direct negotiations between Egypt and Israel were continuing to find a compromise.

The Hamas official, meanwhile, rejected Israel's demands, including its desire to maintain Israeli troops along the highway halving Gaza, which is meant to vet Palestinians returning to their homes in northern Gaza and weed out any militants.

The Hamas official said the group will hand its written response to Qatar and Egypt within the coming days.

Both officials said Hamas still wants "written guarantees" from mediators that negotiations will continue during the first phase of the cease-fire to establish a permanent truce.

CIA director William Burns, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani and Egypt's head of intelligence Abbas Kamel met Sunday with Mossad chief David Barnea in Rome to discuss Israel's latest demands.

—Samy Magdy

Israel weighs response to Hezbollah after a rocket from Lebanon kills 12 youths on a soccer field

TEL AVIV, Israel — The Middle East is bracing for a potential flare-up in violence after Israeli authorities said a rocket from Lebanon struck a soccer field in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights, killing 12 children and teens in what the military called the deadliest attack on civilians since Oct. 7.

Saturday's strike raised fears of a broader regional war between Israel and Hezbollah, which in a rare

move denied it was responsible.

The White House National Security Council said it was speaking with Israeli and Lebanese counterparts and working on a diplomatic solution to "end all attacks once and for all" in the border area between Israel and Lebanon.

The Israeli military said it struck a number of targets inside Lebanon overnight into Sunday, though their intensity was similar to months of cross-border fighting between Israel and the Iranian-backed Hezbollah. Hezbollah said it also carried out strikes. There were no immediate reports of casualties.

Edna O'Brien, Irish literary giant who wrote 'The Country Girls,' dies at 93

By HILLEL ITALIE AP National Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Edna O'Brien, Ireland's literary pride and outlaw who scandalized her native land with her debut novel "The Country Girls" before gaining international acclaim as a storyteller and iconoclast that found her welcomed everywhere from Dublin to the White House, has died. She was 93.

O'Brien died Saturday after a long illness, according to a statement by her publisher Faber and the literary agency PFD.

"A defiant and courageous spirit, Edna constantly strove to break new artistic ground, to write truthfully, from a place of deep feeling," Faber said in a statement. "The vitality of her prose was a mirror of her zest for life: she was the very best company, kind, generous, mischievous, brave."

O'Brien published more than 20 books, most of them novels and story collections, and would know fully what she called the "extremities of joy and sorrow, love, crossed love and unrequited love, success and failure, fame and slaughter." Few so concretely and poetically challenged Ireland's taboos on religion, sex and gender. Few wrote so fiercely, so sensually about loneliness, rebellion, desire and persecution. A world traveler in mind and body, O'Brien was as likely to imagine the longings of an Irish nun as to take in a man's "boyish smile" in the midst of a "ponderous London club."

O'Brien was an unknown about to turn 30, living with her husband and two small children outside of London, when "The Country Girls" became one of Ireland's most polarizing works of fiction in memory. Written in just three weeks and published in 1960, for an advance of roughly \$75, "The Country Girls" follows the lives of two young women — Caithleen (Kate) Brady and Bridget (Baba) Brennan journey from a rural convent to the risks and adventures of Dublin. Admirers were as caught up in their defiance and awakening as would-be censors were enraged by such passages as "He opened his braces and let his trousers slip down around the ankles" and "He patted my knees with his other hand. I was excited and warm and violent."

Fame, wanted or otherwise, was O'Brien's ever after. Her novel was praised and purchased in London and New York while back in Ireland it was labeled "filth" by Minister of Justice Charles Haughey and burned publicly in O'Brien's home town of Tuamgraney, County Clare. Detractors also included O'Brien's parents and her husband, the author Ernest Gebler, from whom O'Brien was already becoming estranged.

O'Brien would be recognized well beyond the world of books. The 1980s British band Dexy's Midnight Runners named her alongside Eugene O'Neill, Samuel Beckett and Oscar Wilde among others in the literary tribute "Burn It Down." She dined at the White House with then-first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton and Jack Nicholson and befriended Jacqueline Kennedy, whom she remembered as a "creature of paradoxes. While being private and immured she also had a hunger for intimacy — it was as if the barriers she had put up needed at times to be battered down."

O'Brien's other books included the novels "August Is a Wicked Month," the story of a woman's sexual liberation that was banned in parts of Ireland; "Down By The River," based on a true story about a teenage Irish girl who becomes pregnant after being raped by her father, and autobiographical "The Light of Evening," in which a famous author returns to Ireland to see her ailing mother. Her most recent work, "Girl," a novel about victims of Boko Haram, came out in 2019.

Josephine Edna O'Brien was one of four children raised on a farm where "the relics of riches remained.

It was a life full of contradictions. We had an avenue, but it was full of potholes; there was a gatehouse, but another couple lived there." Her father was a violent alcoholic, her mother a talented letter writer who disapproved of her daughter's profession, quite likely out of jealousy. Lena O'Brien's hold on the author's imagination, the force of her regrets made her a lifelong muse and a near stand-in Ireland itself, "the cupboard with all things in it, the tabernacle with God in it, the lake with the legends in it."

By her early 20s, she was working in a pharmacy in Dublin and reading Tolstoy, Thackeray and O'Connor among others in her spare time. She had dreams of writing since sneaking out to the nearby fields as a child to work on stories, but doubted the relevance of her life until she read a biography of James Joyce and learned that "Portrait Of An Artist As a Young Man" was autobiographical. She began writing fiction that ran in the literary magazine The Bell and found work reviewing manuscripts for the publishing house Hutchinson, where editors were impressed enough by her summaries to commission what became "The Country Girls."

"I cried a lot writing 'The Country Girls,' but scarcely noticed the tears. Anyhow, they were good tears. They touched on feelings that I did not know I had. Before my eyes, infinitely clear, came that former world in which I believed our fields and hollows had some old music slumbering in them, centuries old," she wrote in her memoir.

"The words poured out of me, and the pen above the paper was not moving fast enough, so that I sometimes feared they would be lost forever."

Israeli military detains 9 soldiers over alleged abuse of a detainee at a shadowy military facility

By SAM McNEIL and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

SDE TEIMAN BASE, Israel (AP) — The Israeli military said Monday it was holding nine soldiers for questioning following allegations of "substantial abuse" of a detainee at a shadowy facility where Israel has held Palestinian prisoners throughout the war in Gaza.

The military did not disclose additional details surrounding the alleged abuse, saying only that its top legal official had launched a probe. An investigation by The Associated Press and reports by rights groups have exposed abysmal conditions and abuses at the Sde Teiman facility, the country's largest detention center.

A report by the United Nations agency for Palestinian refugees, UNRWA, earlier this year said that detainees alleged they were subjected to ill-treatment and abuse while in Israeli custody, without specifying the facility.

The military has generally denied ill-treatment of detainees. Following the accusations of harsh treatment that prompted a court case, Israel said it was transferring the bulk of Palestinian detainees out of Sde Teiman and upgrading it.

Israeli media reported that military police officers who arrived at Sde Teiman in southern Israel to detain the soldiers were met with protests and scuffles. Later, dozens of protesters who had come to show support for the soldiers burst through the facility's gate, waving Israeli flags and chanting "shame."

After the military cleared the protesters, several hundred of them broke into the military base where the nine soldiers were taken for questioning. Video showed a swarm of people scuffling, pushing and shoving with soldiers in the base. Some of the protesters were masked and carried guns. Others called through megaphones for the soldiers' immediate release.

Israeli military chief Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi condemned the protesters' break-in at Sde Teiman and said he fully supports the military prosecutors' investigation into the abuse allegation. "It is precisely these investigations that protect our soldiers in Israel and the world and preserve the values" of the military, he said.

Israel has detained thousands of Palestinians since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that sparked the war in Gaza, according to official figures, though hundreds were released after the military determined they were not affiliated with Hamas. Israeli human rights groups say the majority of detainees have at some point passed through Sde Teiman.

The Public Committee Against Torture in Israel said it welcomed the military's investigation but said its

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claims are of systemic abuse at the facility and not just one case.

Israel has long been accused of failing to hold its soldiers accountable for crimes committed against Palestinians. The allegations have intensified during the war in Gaza. Israel says its forces act within military and international law and says it independently investigates any alleged abuses.

The detentions of soldiers prompted an outcry among members of Israel's far-right government, who called the investigation into their conduct an affront to their service.

"Our soldiers are not criminals and this despicable pursuit of our soldiers is unacceptable to me," Yuli Edelstein, a veteran lawmaker from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's Likud party, wrote on the platform X.

The detentions came as international mediators are trying to bring Hamas and Israel to agree to a cease-fire deal that would wind down the war in Gaza and free the remaining 110 hostages held there.

Officials from Egypt and Hamas said Monday that mediators were still working to smooth out sticking points.

The officials, who have direct knowledge of the negotiations, said the contentious points include what they called new Israeli demands to maintain a presence in a strip of land on the Gaza-Egypt border known as the Philadelphi corridor, as well as along a highway running across the breadth of the strip, separating Gaza's south and north.

Israel says it needs to control the highway to stop militants from returning to the north when civilians are eventually allowed back. Currently, troops there prevent any returns of the displaced to the north and monitor those fleeing to the south, arresting any they suspect of militant ties.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity because they weren't authorized to discuss the sensitive talks with the media.

They said Israel refuses to leave the area between Egypt and Gaza during the cease-fire. They said Israel has linked its forces' departure from the border corridor to installing underground sensors and an underground wall to monitor any future efforts by Hamas to build tunnels or smuggle weapons.

Officials in Israel did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

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Israel's military seized control of the Philadelphi corridor in early May along with the Rafah crossing between Egypt and Gaza when it began its invasion of Gaza's southernmost city of Rafah.

The Egyptian official said no agreement has been reached on the corridor and the reopening of Rafah, adding that Egypt and Israel were continuing direct talks on a compromise.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby on Monday declined to comment on the reports of Israel hardening its demands. He said that the U.S. administration still believes an agreement remains "close" to being achieved.

"There are teams at work right now trying to close these gaps," Kirby told reporters. "So again, we believe the gaps can be narrowed."

Hamas denounced the Israeli demands in a statement, saying Netanyahu had "returned to the strategy of procrastination, delay, and evasion from reaching an agreement by setting new conditions and demands."

The Hamas official said the group will hand its written response to mediators from Qatar and Egypt in the coming days.

Netanyahu's office denied making new demands, saying its calls for control over the border and the highway were "in accordance with the original outline" of the peace deal, though the U.S.-backed outline made no mention of them. "The Hamas leadership is preventing a deal" by seeking changes, it said in a statement.

The U.S.-backed plan calls for a three-phase cease-fire starting with a 45-day truce and partial hostage release. During that time, the two sides are to negotiate the second phase, which is supposed to lead to a full hostage release in return for a full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza. Hamas is seeking written guarantees that the cease-fire will continue until those talks reach a deal, while Israeli officials have said they want a time limit on the talks.

CIA director William Burns, Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed Bin Abdul Rahman al-Thani and Egypt's head of intelligence Abbas Kamel met Sunday with Mossad chief David Barnea in Rome to discuss Israel's latest demands.

Vandalism hits communication lines in France, but the Paris Olympics aren't affected

By BARBARA SURK and ANGELA CHARLTON Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — The French government was investigating after multiple telecommunications lines were hit by acts of vandalism Monday, affecting fiber lines and fixed and mobile phone lines as cities around France host events for the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Organizers for the Paris Games say their operations were not affected. France's second largest telecommunications company said it had made repairs in several areas already or workarounds kept the scale of the impact low. Some other providers also got things back up and running later Monday.

The vandalism came after arson attacks hit train networks around France on Friday, hours before the Olympics opening ceremony.

A national investigation has been launched into the attacks on optic cables and "the damage to the telecommunications systems," according to Paris prosecutors. The crimes they're investigating include damaging property with an intent to harm vital national interests and attacking data processing systems by an organized group, which carry 10- to 15-year prison sentences, prosecutors said.

Marina Ferrari, secretary of state in charge of digital affairs, posted on X that damage in several regions overnight Sunday to Monday affected telecommunications operators. She said that led to local impact on access to fiber lines and fixed and mobile telephone lines.

A French police official said there were issues in at least six of the country's administrative departments, which include the region around the Mediterranean city of Marseille, hosting Olympic soccer and sailing competitions.

Paris 2024 organizers said they have been informed of acts of sabotage on fiber optic networks across several French departments but "we can only confirm that there is no impact on our operations."

SFR, France's second-largest telecommunications company, said its long-distance network "was the target of acts of vandalism at five points in five departments between 1 a.m. and 3 a.m."

"Maintenance teams are on site to carry out repair work," SFR said in a statement. It added that the impact of the vandalism acts on its customers was "very low because there are sufficient backups and workarounds."

Up to eight French and international operators, who use SFR's infrastructure, have been affected, the company also said, adding that full service has already been restored by Monday afternoon in several areas.

Telecom operators Bouygues and Free confirmed they were affected. Free later said service had been restored after an "incident effecting multiple networks in 11 departments."

A national investigation also is underway into last week's train sabotage, which disrupted travel for nearly a million passengers in France as well as people in London and in other neighboring countries. Train traffic had largely resumed by Monday.

French media reported that an extreme-left activist was arrested at a rail facility on Sunday in the Seine-Maritime region of western France. But the Paris prosecutor's office said it was unconnected to what happened Friday and that no one has been arrested so far in the national investigation into the arson attacks. ____

Surk reported from Nice. Nicolas Vaux-Montagny contributed from Lyon.

Infants' tongue-tie may be overdiagnosed and needlessly treated, American Academy of Pediatrics says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Tongue-tie—a condition in infants that can affect breastfeeding — may be overdiagnosed in the U.S. and too often treated with unnecessary surgery, a prominent doctors' group said Monday.

The American Academy of Pediatrics is the latest, and largest, medical society to sound an alarm about the increasing use of scissors or lasers to cut away some infants' tongue tissue when breastfeeding is

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difficult.

"It's almost an epidemic," said Dr. Maya Bunik, a Colorado-based co-author of the report.

Experts say there isn't a good count of how many infants each year are being treated for tongue-tie with surgery, though Bunik believes the annual tally may exceed 100,000. Research suggests many of those treatments are not necessary, she added.

The academy's new report encourages pediatricians and other medical professionals to consider non-surgical options to address breastfeeding problems. The report cites a study that suggests less than half of the kids with the characteristics of tongue-tie actually have difficulty breastfeeding.

Ankyloglossia, or "tongue-tie," occurs when an infant is born with a tight or short band of tissue that tethers the bottom of the tongue's tip to the floor of the mouth. The condition can make it hard for the infant to extend and lift their tongue to grasp a nipple and draw milk — which in turn can be painful for the mother.

Doctors say it's critical to get breastfeeding on track in the first three to four weeks, and surveys indicate most parents want to breastfeed, so it's natural that they want a quick solution to a problem, Bunik said.

Ankyloglossia diagnoses have been increasing worldwide, though there is no uniform diagnostic criteria for this condition and no consensus on how to treat it. One common approach is to cut the tissue with scissors, but dentists increasingly are using lasers to vaporize the tissue — some charging \$800 or more.

But the procedures can cause pain and sore mouths, potentially deterring babies from trying to breastfeed, Bunik said.

"The practice (of treating tongue-tie) got to be very common without a lot of good data," said Wisconsin pediatrician Dr. Jennifer Thomas, who also co-authored the report.

The report also recommends lactation experts, pediatricians and surgeons and other medical professionals work with parents to evaluate possible reasons for breastfeeding challenges and make the best treatment decision.

The American Academy of Pediatrics, which has 67,000 members who specialize in treating children, started working on the report in 2015 after some pediatricians began to notice that an increasing number of patients were going to dentists to get treatment for tongue-tie, Thomas said. Pediatricians were finding out after the surgeries.

At least two other medical groups have issued statements about tongue-tie. In 2020, the American Academy of Otolaryngology-Head and Neck Surgery issued a consensus statement in which member physicians said they believe tongue-tie is being overdiagnosed in some places and that there isn't sufficient evidence to support claims that using lasers is superior to other techniques.

A year later, the Academy of Breastfeeding Medicine, an international group, issued a position called for more research into tongue-tie treatment and stressed that decisions "require a high level of clinical skill, judgment, and discernment."

The American Dental Association didn't directly respond to The Associated Press' questions about the new report. It sent a statement saying the organization agrees with a 2022 policy statement by the American Academy of Pediatric Dentistry, which noted not all children with ankyloglossia need surgical intervention and that a team-based approach with other specialists can aid in treatment planning.

Haley Brown saw a lactation consultant two years ago after her son Shiloh, who was born prematurely, had trouble nursing. But as months passed and the situation didn't improve, Brown turned to a Denver dentist she heard about on social media. The dentist diagnosed Shiloh with tongue-tie and also lip-tie, in which the tissue inside the upper lip is too tight. Shiloh underwent a short laser procedure that cost \$750.

Breastfeeding improved immediately. "Things just seemed a little easier for him," said Brown, 33, of Englewood, Colorado.

Brown later had another baby, and another lactation consultant told her that a scissors snip could have been less involved and just as effective. Brown said the laser treatment worked for Shiloh, but added: "I probably should have consulted with my pediatrician before I went straight to the dentist."

Blinken and envoys from Japan, Australia and India work to improve maritime safety in Asia-Pacific

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — Top diplomats from Japan, the U.S., Australia and India meeting Monday in Tokyo compiled a set of measures to reinforce maritime safety and cybersecurity and to support other Asia-Pacific countries in improving their defenses during growing tensions in the regional seas.

After the meeting, Japanese Foreign Minister Yoko Kamikawa, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong and Indian External Affairs Minister Subrahmayam Jaishankar said they were “seriously concerned” about the tensions and expressed “strong opposition” to unilateral changes to the status quo by coercion.

They noted “the militarization of disputed features, and coercive and intimidating maneuvers in the South China Sea” as examples, but carefully avoided identifying China in their joint statement.

Several regional governments dispute China’s sweeping territorial claims over the South China Sea, which has crucial maritime trade routes and potential energy reserves. Beijing also claims self-governing Taiwan as its territory, to be annexed by force if necessary.

At what are known as the Quad talks, the four ministers agreed on a number of initiatives to counter cyberattacks, ensure maritime security and deal with disinformation. They also announced expanded support for other countries, including in Southeast Asia and Pacific islands, to bolster their abilities in those areas as the Quad seeks to expand its partnerships.

The ministers plan to launch a maritime legal dialogue to focus on the international law of the sea. They said they were determined to contribute to maintaining and developing free-and-open maritime order consistent with the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans and to enhance cooperation and coordination on it.

The four countries are expanding their partnership to include the Indian Ocean to enhance maritime domain awareness, Kamikawa said.

Their initiatives included support for installing a secure telecommunications network in Palau and building cybersecurity capacity in the Philippines and India, according to the joint statement. The ministers reaffirmed their commitment to improving the region’s connectivity through the development of resilient infrastructure such as undersea cables.

“We are committed to putting our collective resources, our collective strength to work to benefit people across the region that we share,” Blinken told a joint news conference after the talks. “We continue to work with partners to ensure that freedom of navigation, overflight, the unimpeded flow of lawful maritime commerce that these continue to go forward. They are critical to the region’s security. They’re critical to its ongoing prosperity.”

Citing Russia’s aggression against Ukraine and North Korea’s missile advancement, Kamikawa said: “The international situation is becoming increasingly uncertain.”

Ensuring stability in maritime, cyber and space domains is crucial to achieve regional prosperity, Kamikawa added.

“We Quad nations aim to protect the foundations of prosperity in the Indo-Pacific as we seek to achieve an international community of coexistence and coprosperity,” she said.

China also has territorial disputes with India, though that was not openly discussed at the meeting.

“We have a problem ... it is for the two of us to sort out,” Jaishankar said at a speech in Tokyo later Monday.

Australia’s Wong said the Quad nations were working to achieve “a world in which disputes are managed by rules, by talking, by cooperation, not by force or by power. But most importantly we understand that this does not happen on its own. We have to make this happen.”

The talks came after Japan and the United States held their “2+2” security meeting on Sunday, when they called China “the greatest strategic challenge.” They agreed on further deepening military cooperation by making major upgrades to their command structures and bolstering Japanese production and repair

of U.S.- licensed weapons.

Blinken and Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin were to fly to Manila later Monday to hold similar security talks with the Philippines.

On Monday, Austin and Japanese Defense Minister Minoru Kihara also held separate talks to follow up on the progress of the command upgrade plans, Japan's sale of missiles to the U.S. and other issues around bilateral military cooperation.

Japan has been accelerating its military buildup and efforts to strengthen its arms industry in a major shift from its postwar, self-defense-only principle under the pacifist Constitution.

Japan has largely eased its restrictions on arms exports. In December on those made in Japan under foreign licensing in part to accommodate a U.S. request for shipment of surface-to-air PAC-3 missile interceptors produced in Japan under an American license to replenish U.S. inventories, which have decreased due to its support for Ukraine.

Kihara told reporters Monday that Japan and the U.S. signed a deal on Sunday to sell an undisclosed number of Japanese-made Patriot missiles currently owned by Japan's Self Air Defense Force, in the first case of finished weapons for export being approved by Japan's National Security Council.

Harris quickly pivots to convincing Arab American voters of her leadership

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI Associated Press

DEARBORN, Mich. (AP) — Osama Siblani's phone won't stop ringing.

Just days after President Joe Biden withdrew his bid for reelection and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris for the Democratic presidential nomination, top officials from both major political parties have been asking the publisher of the Dearborn-based Arab American News if Harris can regain the support of the nation's largest Muslim population located in metro Detroit.

His response: "We are in listening mode."

Harris, who is moving to seize the Democratic nomination after Biden stepped down, appears to be pivoting quickly to the task of convincing Arab American voters in Michigan, a state Democrats believe she can't afford to lose in November, that she is a leader they can unite behind.

Community leaders have expressed a willingness to listen, and some have had initial conversations with Harris' team. Many had grown exasperated with Biden after they felt months of outreach had not yielded many results.

"The door is cracked open since Biden has stepped down," said Dearborn Mayor Abdullah Hammoud. "There's an opportunity for the Democratic nominee to coalesce the coalition that ushered in Biden's presidency four years ago. But that responsibility will now fall on the vice president."

Arab American leaders such as Hammoud and Siblani are watching closely for signals that Harris will be more vocal in pressing for a cease-fire. They're excited by her candidacy but want to be sure she will be an advocate for peace and not an unequivocal supporter of Israel.

But Harris will need to walk a fine line not to publicly break with Biden's position on the war in Gaza, where officials in his administration have been working diligently toward a cease-fire, mostly behind the scenes.

The divide within Harris' own party was evident in Washington last week during Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to address Congress. Some Democrats supported the visit, while others protested and refused to attend. Outside the Capitol, pro-Palestinian protesters were met with pepper spray and arrests.

Michigan Rep. Rashida Tlaib, the only Palestinian American in Congress whose district includes Dearborn, held up a sign that read "war criminal" during Netanyahu's remarks.

Harris did not attend.

Some Arab American leaders interpret her absence — she instead attended a campaign event in Indianapolis — as a sign of good faith with them, though they recognize her ongoing responsibilities as vice

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president, including a meeting Thursday with Netanyahu.

Her first test within the community will come when Harris chooses a running mate. One of the names on her short list, Pennsylvania Gov. Josh Shapiro, has been public in his criticism of pro-Palestinian protesters and is Jewish. Some Arab American leaders in Michigan say putting him on the ticket would ramp up their unease about the level of support they could expect from a Harris administration.

"Josh Shapiro was one of the first ones to criticize the students on campus. So it doesn't differentiate Harris very much if she picks him. That just says I'm going to continue the same policies as Biden," said Rima Meroueh, director of the National Network for Arab American Communities.

Arab Americans are betting that their vote holds enough electoral significance in pivotal swing states like Michigan to ensure that officials will listen to them. Michigan has the largest concentration of Arab Americans in the nation, and the state's majority-Muslim cities overwhelmingly supported Biden in 2020. He won Dearborn, for example, by a roughly 3-to-1 margin over former President Donald Trump.

In February, over 100,000 Michigan Democratic primary voters chose "uncommitted," securing two delegates to protest the Biden administration's unequivocal support for Israel's response to the Oct. 7 attacks by Hamas. Nationally, "uncommitted" garnered a total of 36 delegates in the primaries earlier this year.

The groups leading this effort have called for — at a minimum — an embargo on all weapons shipments to Israel and a permanent cease-fire.

"If Harris called for an arms embargo, I would work around the clock every day until the election to get her elected," said Abbas Alawieh, an "uncommitted" Michigan delegate and national leader of the movement. "There's a real opportunity right now to unite the coalition. It's on her to deliver, but we are cautiously optimistic."

Those divisions were on full display Wednesday night when the Michigan Democratic Party brought together over 100 delegates to pitch them on uniting behind Harris. During the meeting, Alawieh, one of three state delegates who did not commit to Harris, was speaking when another delegate interrupted him by unmuting and telling him to "shut up," using an expletive, according to Alawieh.

The call could be a preview of tensions expected to surface again in August, when Democratic leaders, lawmakers, and delegates convene in Chicago for the party's national convention. Mass protests are planned, and the "uncommitted" movement intends to ensure their voices are heard within the United Center, where the convention will be held.

Trump and his campaign, meanwhile, are keenly aware of the turmoil within the Democratic base and are actively seeking the support of Arab American voters. That effort has been complicated by Trump's history of anti-immigrant rhetoric and policy during his one term as president.

A meeting between over a dozen Arab American leaders from across the country and several of Trump's surrogates was convened in Dearborn last week. Among the surrogates was Massad Boulos, a Lebanese-born businessman whose son married Tiffany Trump, the former president's younger daughter, two years ago. Boulos is leveraging his connections to rally support for Trump.

Part of the pitch that Boulos and Bishara Bahbah, chairman of Arab Americans for Trump, made in Dearborn was that Trump has shown an openness to a two-state solution. He posted a letter on social media from Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas and pledged to work for peace in the Middle East.

"The three main points that were noted in the meeting were that Trump needs to state more clearly that he wants an immediate cease-fire in Gaza and that he supports the two-state solution, and that there is no such thing as a Muslim ban," said Bahbah. "This is what the community wants to hear in a clear manner."

Before a July 20 rally in Michigan, Trump also met with Bahbah, who pressed him about a two-state solution. According to Bahbah, Trump responded affirmatively, saying, "100%."

But any apparent political opportunity for Trump may be limited by criticism from many Arab Americans about the former president's ban on immigration from several majority Muslim countries and remarks they felt were insulting.

"I have not heard any individuals saying I'm now rushing to Donald Trump," said Hammoud, Dearborn's Democratic mayor. "I have yet to hear that in any of the conversations I've had. They all know what Donald

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Trump represents.”

Siblani, who organized Wednesday’s meeting with Trump surrogates, has spent months serving as an intermediary between his community and officials from all political parties and foreign dignitaries. Privately, he says, almost all express the need for a permanent cease-fire.

“Everybody wants our votes, but nobody wants to be seen as aligning with us publicly,” Siblani said.

Today in History: July 30, Jenner takes gold in Montreal

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, July 30, the 212th day of 2024. There are 154 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On July 30, 1976, Bruce Jenner, now known as Caitlyn Jenner, set a world record of 8,618 points and won the gold medal in the Olympic decathlon at the Montreal Summer Games.

Also on this date:

In 1619, the first representative assembly in Colonial America convened in Jamestown in the Virginia Colony.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union forces tried to take Petersburg, Virginia, by exploding a gunpowder-laden mine shaft beneath Confederate defense lines; the attack failed.

In 1916, German saboteurs blew up a munitions plant on Black Tom, an island near Jersey City, New Jersey, killing about a dozen people.

In 1930, Uruguay won the first FIFA World Cup, defeating Argentina 4-2.

In 1945, the Portland class heavy cruiser USS Indianapolis, having just delivered components of the atomic bomb to Tinian in the Mariana Islands during World War II, was torpedoed by a Japanese submarine; only 316 out of nearly 1,200 service members survived.

In 1956, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed a measure making “In God We Trust” the national motto, replacing “E Pluribus Unum.”

In 1965, President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Social Security Amendments of 1965, which led to the creation of Medicare and Medicaid.

In 2008, ex-Bosnian Serb leader Radovan Karadzic (RA’-doh-van KA’-ra-jich) was extradited to The Hague to face genocide charges after nearly 13 years on the run. (He was sentenced by a U.N. court in 2019 to life imprisonment after being convicted of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes.)

In 2012, three electric grids in India collapsed in a cascade, cutting power to 620 million people in the world’s biggest blackout.

In 2013, U.S. Army Pfc. Chelsea Manning was acquitted of aiding the enemy — the most serious charge she faced — but was convicted of espionage, theft and other charges at Fort Meade, Maryland, more than three years after she’d spilled secrets to WikiLeaks. (The former intelligence analyst was later sentenced to up to 35 years in prison, but the sentence was commuted by President Barack Obama in his final days in office.)

In 2016, 16 people died when a hot air balloon caught fire and exploded after hitting high-tension power lines before crashing into a pasture near Lockhart, Texas, about 70 miles northeast of San Antonio.

Today’s Birthdays: Former Major League Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig is 90. Blues musician Buddy Guy is 88. Singer Paul Anka is 83. Actor and former California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is 77. Actor Jean Reno is 76. Actor Ken Olin is 70. Actor Delta Burke is 68. Law professor Anita Hill is 68. Singer-songwriter Kate Bush is 66. Film director Richard Linklater is 64. Actor Laurence Fishburne is 63. TV personality Alton Brown is 62. Actor Lisa Kudrow is 61. Basketball Hall of Famer Chris Mullin is 61. Actor Vivica A. Fox is 60. Actor Terry Crews is 56. Actor Simon Baker is 55. Film director Christopher Nolan is 54. Actor Tom Green is 53. Actor Christine Taylor is 53. Actor Hilary Swank is 50. Olympic gold medal beach volleyball player Misty May-Treanor is 47. Actor Jaime Pressly is 47. Alt-country singer-musician Seth Avett (AY’-veht) is 44. Former soccer player Hope Solo is 43. Actor Yvonne Strahovski is 42. Actor Martin Starr is 42. Actor Gina Rodriguez is 40. Actor Nico Tortorella is 35. Actor Joey King is 25.