

Groton Daily Independent

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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

Saturday, Aug. 3

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Vacation Bible School, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
State Legion Baseball Tournament in Salem
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Groton Daily Independent
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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.

Landslides in India

At least 123 people were killed and hundreds more injured Tuesday after heavy overnight rains caused landslides in India's southwestern state of Kerala. Hundreds of disaster relief workers and military personnel were conducting rescue efforts amid continued downpours, and over 3,000 people had been evacuated to safety.

At least three separate landslides occurred in the early-morning on the slopes of the Western Ghats in the tourist district of Wayanad, where hundreds of tea and cardamom farmers were asleep in their homes. The rains washed out villages, roads, and bridges near the towns of Mundakkai and Chooralmala, making access for rescuers difficult. Prime Minister Narendra Modi announced grants of roughly \$2,400 to victims' families.

Officials determined over 22 inches of rain fell in Wayanad over two days—roughly 10% of the average annual rainfall. Heavy downpours are common during the region's monsoon season from June to September. In 2018, over 400 people were killed in similar floods in the state.

Olympics Redemption

Team USA yesterday clinched its first Olympic gold medal in the women's gymnastics team all-around competition since the 2016 Olympics in Rio de Janeiro.

Simone Biles—who competed in all four events (bars, beam, vault, and floor) after a calf injury—won her eighth Olympic gold medal and broke her own record as the most decorated gymnast in history. Italy and Brazil finished second and third, respectively. Biles, as well as teammate and defending Olympic all-around champion Suni Lee, will return for the individual all-around competition tomorrow.

In the men's swimming 800-meter freestyle, Daniel Wiffen became the first athlete from Northern Ireland to win an Olympic gold medal in 36 years, edging American distance swimmer and two-time Olympian Bobby Finke, who won silver. Today, seven-time Olympic gold medalist Katie Ledecky is looking to secure another gold medal in the 1500-meter freestyle final.

Separately, Team USA men's soccer advanced to the quarterfinals for the first time in 24 years and will face Morocco Friday. Overall, the US became the first country to win 3,000 Olympic medals, following its latest wins from the Paris Olympics.

Meta Settlement

Meta Platforms Inc. has agreed to a \$1.4B settlement with the state of Texas over its use of facial recognition technology, marking the largest privacy-related payment to a single state. The lawsuit, filed in 2022, accused Meta of violating Texas privacy laws by collecting and storing biometric data without proper user consent.

The case centered on Facebook's "Tag Suggestions" feature, which used billions of biometric identifiers contained in uploaded photos and videos on Facebook without customers' consent. The state's biometric privacy law, which allows damages of up to \$25K per violation, prohibits companies from capturing biometric identifiers without informing users and obtaining their consent. The news comes as the state continues to press a separate biometric data lawsuit against Alphabet.

Meta settled a similar \$650M class-action lawsuit in 2021 with Illinois for violating the state's biometric privacy law. Meta stopped using the technology in 2021.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Thirteen novels tapped for prestigious 2024 Booker Prize for fiction longlist, including three from debut novelists.

Francine Pascal, "Sweet Valley High" author, dies at age 92.

The 2024 MLB trade deadline wrapped last night; see complete breakdown of every trade.

"Deadpool & Wolverine" moves past \$500M at the global box office, the highest global opening weekend since 2021.

Science & Technology

California officials create blockchain tokens for all 42 million of the state's registered motor vehicles; owners will be able to access title information from the Avalanche blockchain beginning in 2025.

Scientists engineer disease-causing parasite to deliver therapeutic drugs across the blood-brain barrier; *Toxoplasma gondii* has been shown to cause mice to lose their fear of cats.

Chemists recreate conditions on early Earth, suggest the building blocks for life may have been created by cloud-to-ground lightning.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.5%, Dow +0.5%, Nasdaq -1.3%) as tech stocks fall amid earnings reports.

CrowdStrike shares fall on news Delta Air Lines could sue for damages over the software failure.

Microsoft shares fall in after-hours trading as cloud revenue growth misses estimates.

Tesla recalls 1.8 million vehicles due to possible failure to detect unlatched hood after it opens, increasing risk of crash.

London-based fertility app Flo Health raises \$200M in Series C funding at over \$1B valuation; company bills itself as the first "purely digital" women's health app to reach unicorn status.

Politics & World Affairs

Israel says it killed Fuad Shukr, Hezbollah's top military commander, in a targeted airstrike in Beirut, Lebanon; the strike—reportedly killing at least one other person and wounding 20 others—was in retaliation for Saturday's attack, killing 12 children at a soccer field.

Venezuela protests continue over disputed election results; seven people reportedly killed, close to 750 arrested while election observers cast doubt onto President Nicolás Maduro's claims of victory.

Project 2025 to end policy work, director to step down from the Heritage Foundation amid criticisms from Democrats, former President Donald Trump.

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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.

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August 2024 Groton Community Calendar

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

Saturday, Aug. 3

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Vacation Bible School, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
State Legion Baseball Tournament in Salem
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 3:45-4:15 p.m.; SEAS Mass, 4:30 p.m.

Sunday, Aug. 4

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Pastor at Bethesda, Aberdeen, 2 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.; St. John's voters meeting, 9:45 a.m.; VBS at St. John's, 5:30 p.m.
United Methodist: Worship with communion at Conde, 8:30 a.m., and Groton, 10:30 a.m.; coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
Special Needs Family Fun Night, 4 p.m. to 5:30 p.m., Groton Pool
Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Vacation Bible School, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
State Legion Baseball Tournament in Salem

Monday, Aug. 5

Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, scalloped potatoes, oriental blend vegetables, frosted brownie, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Fall Sports Parent Meeting, 7 p.m., GHS Arena
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Vacation Bible School, 5:30 p.m.
Pantry open, Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
School Supply Drive, Groton Community Center, 4 p.m. to 7 p.m.
Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Vacation Bible School, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
State Legion Baseball Tournament in Salem

Tuesday, Aug. 6

Senior Menu: Roast beef, mashed potatoes with gravy, corn, mandarin orange salad, whole wheat bread.
St. John's Lutheran: Vacation Bible School, 5:30 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m., Vacation Bible School, 5 p.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.
Pantry Open, Groton Community Center, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
Wage Memorial Library meeting, 120 N Main, 6 p.m.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Vacation Bible School, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.
State Legion Baseball Tournament in Salem

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**GROTON
VET CLINIC**



1503 N Broadway, Groton, 605/397-8145

Wednesday, Aug. 7

Senior Menu: Turkey sub sandwich, lettuce and tomato, macaroni salad with peas, broccoli, tropical fruit.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.

St. John's Lutheran: Vacation Bible School program and cookout, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Vacation Bible School, 5 p.m.

Groton Chamber Meeting, 120 N Main, Noon

Groton Christian & Missionary Alliance: Vacation Bible School, 6:15 p.m. to 8:30 p.m.

Thursday, Aug. 8

Senior Menu: Lasagna bake, tossed salad with dressing, melon, cookie, garlic bread.

First day of football practice

Family Fun Fest, 5:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m., Downtown Groton

Groton Lions Club Meeting, 104 N Main, 6 p.m.

Summer Splash at Groton High School, 7:30 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 9

Senior Menu: Chicken pasta salad, peas and carrots, grape juice, cake with strawberries, dinner roll.

Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament in Groton

Saturday, Aug. 10

Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament in Groton
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

Sunday, Aug. 11

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 11 a.m.

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

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

Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament in Groton
High School Moonlight Swim, 8 p.m. to 10 p.m., Pool

Monday, Aug. 12

Senior Menu: Hot pork sandwich, cucumber salad, baked beans, Herbert, fruit.

First day of boys golf practice

Storybook Land Theatre, 1 p.m. to 2:30 p.m., GHS Gym

School Board Meeting, 7 p.m.

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

Pantry open, Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Community Center, 1 p.m.

Blood Drive at the Groton Community Center, 1:15 p.m. to 7 p.m.

Tuesday, Aug. 13

Senior Menu: Chicken cordon bleu hot dish, pears, whole wheat bread.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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

Wednesday, Aug. 14

Senior Menu: Beef stew, buttermilk biscuit, Waldorf salad, cookie.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

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New Construction
Remodeling
Hoop Barns
Shops

Perry Blocker

13379 Sperry Ln, Bath
605/216-2677
prblocker@hotmail.com

Thursday, Aug. 15

Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.

First day of cross country practice

First day of volleyball practice

Emmanuel Lutheran: WELCA "Do Day", 1:30 p.m.

Friday, Aug. 16

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

Saturday, Aug. 17

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

Sunday, Aug. 18

St. John's Lutheran: worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.

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

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

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

Monday, Aug 19

Senior Menu: Beef stroganoff with noodles, green beans, vanilla pudding, mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.

Faculty Inservice, 8 a.m.

Boys golf at Sioux Valley (Volga), 10 a.m.

6th grade welcome walk at GHS, 4 p.m.

Elementary school open house, 4 p.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
Pantry open, Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Community Center, 1 p.m.

Tuesday, Aug. 20

Senior Menu: Lemon chicken breast, au gratin potatoes, 3 bean salad, pineapple/strawberry ambrosia, dinner roll.

Faculty Inservice, 8 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Council meeting, 6 p.m.

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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

City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.

Wednesday, Aug. 21

Senior Menu: Hamburger cabbage roll hot dish, mixed vegetables, muffin, pears.

School Breakfast: Cereal.

School Lunch: Cheese stuffed breadstick with marinara sauce.

First day of school

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship at Rosewood Court, 10 a.m.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Aug. 22

Senior Menu: Chicken fried steak, mashed potatoes with gravy, oriental blend vegetables, baked apples, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg omelet

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, mashed potatoes.

Boys golf at Milbank, 10 a.m.

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JOHN DEERE

Aberdeen
800-843-1865



RDO
EQUIPMENT CO.

Redfield
800-247-4650

Webster
800-658-2252

Friday, Aug. 23

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

School Breakfast: Pancake on a stick.

School Lunch: French bread pizza, green beans.

Saturday, Aug. 24

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

Sunday, Aug. 25

St. John's Lutheran: Worship at St. John's, 9 a.m., and at Zion, 11 a.m.

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship, 9 a.m.

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

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

Monday, Aug. 26

Senior Menu: Chicken Alfredo, broccoli, peaches, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagels.

School Lunch: Corn dogs, baked beans.

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

Pantry open, Groton Community Center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.

Groton Senior Citizens meet at the Community Center, potluck at noon

Tuesday, Aug. 27

Senior Menu: Spaghetti with meat sauce, corn, apple crisp, breadstick.

School Breakfast: Mini pancakes.

School Lunch: Chicken strips, potato wedges.

NEC Boys Golf Meet at Hankinson, N.D. (Tiospa Zina)

United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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

Wednesday, Aug. 28

Senior Menu: Roast turkey, dressing with gravy, 7-layer salad, fruit, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Muffins.

School Lunch: Quesadillas, corn.

United Methodist: Community Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.

Thursday, Aug. 29

Senior Menu: Baked cod, parsley buttered potatoes, creamy coleslaw, tapioca pudding mandarin oranges, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Taco burgers, tri taters.

Volleyball at Hamlin (8th at 4 p.m., 7th/C at 5 p.m., JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow

Friday, Aug. 30

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

No School (Labor Day break)

Football hosts Mobridge-Pollock, 7 p.m.

Basketball Golf Tourney fundraiser at Olive Grove

Saturday, Aug. 31

Volleyball C Team tournament at Matchbox Club in Aberdeen

Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 209 N Main, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

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

Brand New Program at

15 N Main St. - Ste. 101
Downtown Groton

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



\$20 Monthly Membership








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



Downtown
Groton

24/7 access to the facility ~ Cancel any time

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

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

Call/Text Paul at 605-397-7460

Call/Text Tina at 605-397-7285

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First Groton rib cookout sold out in 45 minutes

1,025 rib tickets sold in less than 45 minutes and sold out of the ribs.

Rain storms delayed the kid's area by an hour, but when the sun came out, the area was full. The inflatables were filled the entire time.

Corn Hole tourney was canceled due to the rain.

"It was a great day of fun for all ages! I would say it was a success for the first year and we learned a lot! Next year will be bigger and better." - Suzie Easthouse



Beck Kotzer, owner of BK Custom T's made and donated the banner thanking all the businesses and individuals who contributed to the event.

Jeff Howard of Dakota View Farms purchased all the ribs for the event. 96 racks of St Louis ribs.

The Groton Chamber sponsors Lizzy Hofer Karaoke. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Jeff Howard along with Suzie Easthouse, President of the Groton Lions Club and organizer of the event, prepare to announce the awards to the rib competitors and draw for the first split pot drawing. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



1st place winners: Team "Wilbur's Last Stand" Jon Cutler, Brett Anderson, & Blaine Snyder The team graciously donated their prize money back to the Groton Lions. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



2nd Place: Team "Big PaPa's BBQ" Christian Beatty of Fargo, ND (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Kids area with inflatables were busy all day (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)

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3rd Place: Team "The Rib Ticklers" Zane Ashmore & Adrian Daly. (Courtesy Photo Suzie East-



People's Choice: Team "Kellers Q" Cody Keller. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Cody Keller - Split pot winner of a secondary prize, an oil change from Groton Ford. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Justin Freeland- Split pot winner of a secondary prize, of an oil change from Greg's Repair. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Dunk Tank ran by the Groton Trap Team. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Water balloon fight
Volunteers from Rosewood Court, Toni & Linda helped in the kid's game area handing out prizes. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)

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One of the new owners of the Jungle, Jilian Schaanaman with her staff, Jeramy and Taylor Heupel. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



Lizzy Hoffer who was singing and running the karaoke, drawing out a split top winning ticket with Suzie Easthouse and Topper Tasted. (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)



The night ended with these 2 young ladies singing the last song of the evening, Taylor Flihs and Willow Cowan . (Courtesy Photo Suzie Easthouse)

Big Second Inning Leads Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 Past Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 defeated Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U 12-2 on Tuesday thanks in part to eight runs in the second inning. Jarrett Erdmann singled, scoring two runs, Isaiah Scepaniak induced Nicholas Morris to hit into a fielder's choice, but one run scored, Tristin McGannon singled, scoring two runs, an error scored two runs, and Carter Simon grounded out, scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 got on the board in the bottom of the first inning after Erdmann singled, and Karsten Flihs walked, each scoring one run.

Kellen Antonsen led things off on the hill for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. They surrendered five hits and two runs over five innings, striking out five and walking one. Scepaniak started the game for Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U. The starting pitcher gave up four hits and nine runs (three earned) over one and one-third innings, striking out two and walking six.

Erdmann provided pop in the middle of the lineup, and led Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 with three runs batted in. The outfielder went 2-for-3 on the day. Flihs paced Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 with three walks. Overall, the team had patience at the plate, piling up 10 walks for the game. Simon and Erdmann each stole multiple bases for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 were sure-handed and didn't commit a single error. Flihs made the most plays with seven.

Scepaniak led Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U with two runs batted in from the number eight spot in the lineup. The right-handed hitter went 1-for-2 on the day. Nate Schuller went 2-for-2 at the plate to lead Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U in hits.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 play at home on Tuesday against Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U in their next game.

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Claremont Post 262 2 - 12 Groton Jr. Legion Post
 Honkers 18U 39

📍 Home 📅 Tuesday July 30, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	R	H	E
CLRM	0	0	0	2	0	2	5	4
GRTN	2	8	0	1	1	12	6	0

BATTING

Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
G Cutler #00 (SS)	2	0	0	0	1	0
C Cutler #99 (C)	3	0	0	0	0	0
K Keough #22 (3B)	3	0	0	0	0	0
R Bruns #16 (CF)	2	1	1	0	0	0
C Glines #10 (1B)	2	0	0	0	0	2
N Schuller #19 (2B)	2	1	2	0	0	0
T Smith #3 (RF)	2	0	1	0	0	0
I Scepaniak #45 (P)	2	0	1	2	0	1
N Cutler #55 (LF)	2	0	0	0	0	2
Totals	20	2	5	2	1	5

TB: N Schuller 2, R Bruns, I Scepaniak, T Smith, **LOB:** 4

PITCHING

Claremont Post 262 Honkers 18U	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
I Scepta... #45	1.1	4	9	3	6	2
C Glines #10	3.0	2	3	1	4	0
Totals	4.1	6	12	4	10	2

L: C Glines, **P-S:** I Scepaniak 72-33, C Glines 57-30, **WP:** I Scepaniak, C Glines, **BF:** I Scepaniak 16, C Glines 18

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (LF)	2	1	0	0	2	1
C Simon #4 (SS)	3	2	1	1	0	0
A Abeln #5 (SS)	1	0	1	1	0	0
J Erdmann #1 (CF)	3	2	2	3	0	0
Jordan... #20 (CF)	1	0	0	0	0	0
G Englund #18 (1B)	2	0	0	0	2	1
N Morris #17 (DH)	3	2	0	1	1	0
K Fliehs #10 (C)	1	1	0	0	3	0
T McGan... #9 (3B)	1	1	1	2	1	0
R Shelle #6 (3B)	2	1	1	1	0	0
G Kroll #8 (RF)	3	1	0	2	0	0
T Schuster #3 (2B)	2	1	0	0	1	0
K Antonsen #7 (P)	0	0	0	0	0	0
Totals	24	12	6	11	10	2

TB: A Abeln, J Erdmann 2, R Shelle, C Simon, T McGannon, **SB:** J Erdmann 2, C Simon 2, N Morris, **LOB:** 7

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
K Antons... #7	5.0	5	2	2	1	5
Totals	5.0	5	2	2	1	5

W: K Antonsen, **P-S:** K Antonsen 60-45, **BF:** K Antonsen 21

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 Survive Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U

By GameChanger Media

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 got out to a 9-run lead in the fifth inning and held on for a 10-9 victory over Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U on Tuesday. Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U closed the gap by scoring on a single, a single, a hit by pitch, a single, and a balk.

Alex Abeln collected three hits in three at bats in the win. Abeln singled in the second inning, singled in the fourth inning, and singled in the fifth inning.

Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U got on the board in the first inning after an error scored one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 captured the lead, 2-1, in the top of the second after Abeln singled, and Tristin McGannon grounded out, each scoring one run.

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 scored six runs on five hits in the top of the fourth inning. Abeln singled, scoring one run, McGannon singled, scoring one run, Lincoln Krause grounded out, scoring one run, Carter Simon singled, scoring one run, an error scored one run, and Nicholas Morris singled, scoring one run.

Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U scored eight runs on seven hits in the bottom of the sixth inning. Carter Stickland singled, scoring two runs, Max Dahlen singled, scoring two runs, LJ Crooks was struck by a pitch, driving in a run, Reggie Lincoln singled, scoring one run, and a wild pitch scored two runs.

Nick Groeblichhoff pitched four and two-thirds innings in relief for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. The reliever allowed five hits and four runs while, striking out four and walking one. Gavin Englund opened the game for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. The right-handed pitcher gave up one hit and one run (zero earned) over one inning, striking out two and walking two. Bradley Hansen stepped on the mound first for Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U. They surrendered nine hits and 10 runs (six earned) over five and two-thirds innings, striking out three and walking four.

Krause, McGannon, and Abeln each drove in two runs for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Morris led Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 with two walks. Overall, the team had a strong eye at the plate, accumulating eight walks for the game. Simon and Abeln each stole multiple bases for Groton Jr. Legion Post 39. Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 ran wild on the base paths, collecting six stolen bases for the game.

Dahlen led Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U with two hits in four at bats. Stickland and Dahlen each drove in two runs for Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U.

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Groton Jr. Legion Post 39 **10 - 9** Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U

📍 Away 📅 Tuesday July 30, 2024

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	R	H	E
GRTN	0	2	0	6	2	0	0	10	9	6
SSST	1	0	0	0	0	8	0	9	9	8

BATTING

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
L Krause #2 (LF)	5	1	0	2	0	1
C Simon #4 (SS)	3	1	1	1	1	0
J Erdmann #1 (CF)	5	1	1	0	0	0
N Morris #17 (C)	3	0	1	1	2	0
N Groebl... #12 (1B)	4	1	1	0	1	1
K Fliehs #10 (DH)	4	2	1	0	1	1
R Shelle #6 (3B)	3	1	0	0	1	1
A Abeln #5 (2B)	3	2	3	2	1	0
T McGan... #9 (RF)	3	1	1	2	1	1
Totals	33	10	9	8	8	5

TB: J Erdmann, A Abeln 3, K Fliehs, C Simon, N Morris, T McGannon, N Groeblinghoff, **HBP:** C Simon, **SB:** J Erdmann, A Abeln 2, C Simon 2, T McGannon, **LOB:** 10

PITCHING

Groton Jr. Legion Post 39	IP	R	ER	BB	SO	HR
G Englu... #18	1.0	1	1	0	2	2
N Groe... #12	4.2	5	4	4	4	0
A Abeln #5	0.1	3	4	4	1	0
J Erdmann #1	1.0	0	0	0	1	3
Totals	7.0	9	9	8	5	0

W: N Groeblinghoff, **P-S:** J Erdmann 25-15, A Abeln 18-10, G Englund 30-18, N Groeblinghoff 63-42, **WP:** A Abeln 2, **HBP:** A Abeln, N Groeblinghoff, **BF:** J Erdmann 5, A Abeln 6, G Englund 7, N Groeblinghoff 21

Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U	AB	R	H	RBI	BB	SO
C Stickland #2 (SS)	4	2	1	2	1	1
B Hansen #1 (P)	4	1	1	0	1	1
M Dahlen #6 (2B)	4	1	2	2	0	1
L Crooks #4 (3B)	3	1	0	0	0	1
R Lincoln #7 (LF)	4	1	1	1	0	0
B Hanson #90 (C)	3	1	1	0	1	0
J Muehler #21 (CF)	3	0	1	0	1	2
R White #20 (1B)	4	1	1	0	0	3
T Monson #12 (RF)	3	1	1	0	1	1
Totals	32	9	9	5	5	10

TB: C Stickland, R White, R Lincoln, B Hansen, J Muehler, M Dahlen 2, B Hanson, T Monson, **HBP:** L Crooks, M Dahlen, **SB:** L Crooks, **LOB:** 9

Sisseton Post 50 Jr Legion 16U	IP	ER	BB	SO	HR
B Hansen #1	5.2	9	10	6	4
B Hans... #90	1.1	0	0	0	4
Totals	7.0	9	10	6	8

L: B Hansen, **P-S:** B Hansen 105-64, B Hanson 38-14, **HBP:** B Hansen, **BF:** B Hansen 33, B Hanson 9

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Jr. Legion State Bound

The Groton Jr. Legion baseball team won the region tournament that was held in Sisseton over the weekend. They will compete in the state tournament that will be played in Groton.

Back row: Coach Aaron Severson, Jarrett Erdmann, Karsten Flihs, Gavin Englund, Tristin McGannon, Carter Simon, Gavin Kroll, Nick Groeblichhoff, Asst. Coach Seth Erickson

Front row: Kellen Antonsen, Nick Morris, Jordan Schwan, T.C. Schuster, Batboy Micah Krause, Alex Abeln, Lincoln Krause, Braeden Flihs, Ryder Schelle (Courtesy Photo Joni Groeblichhoff)

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Hello, Tourism Industry Friends!

I'm having difficulty wrapping my head around the fact that July is almost over. With the summer Olympic Games underway in Paris, the rumble & roar of motorcycles being heard in the distance, and the school year starting in three weeks, this has been the quickest summer in recent memory. We hope you are well and keeping busy giving our visitors an experience unlike any other.

I was fortunate to be in the Black Hills last week and stop at Crazy Horse Memorial and in Custer. I spoke with a couple of visitors from Los Angeles who shared what an incredible time they were having in our state. It's been a challenging summer with road construction, hot temps and smoky skies (as of late), and Americans not traveling in the numbers predicted by many experts this past spring. Despite these obstacles, THANK YOU for hanging in there and for your hard work to give our visitors the best time possible.

Here a few items we want to share with you:

As Shakespeare once wrote, "Parting is such sweet sorrow". We are sad to announce that two team members are leaving our ranks. Jacey Ellsworth, our incredible Agritourism Manager & Industry Outreach Representative, and Mandy Lemmel, our wonderful Welcome Center Manger, will be pursuing new career opportunities. You can read more about their future plans further down in the e-newsletter. We are going to miss these two talented and amazing friends and colleagues and wish them nothing but the very best in the years ahead.

We have 28 partners who are participating in our inaugural Rally Rush outreach to welcome bikers to the 84th Sturgis Motorcycle Rally. We can't wait to see what activities your communities and businesses are undertaking to let our Rally attendees know how much we appreciate them being here.

We are already receiving nominations for the annual tourism awards that are presented at the tourism conference. It's great to see. Be sure and check out all the awards and online nominations forms here. The deadline for nominations is Tuesday, November 26.

And speaking of the tourism conference, we are way ahead of the curve with our planning! Sponsor and exhibitor information will be shared in September, so be on the lookout for these opportunities.

We are currently working on three exciting projects: a new scenic guide print piece, a new inspiration guide (which will also be translated into French, German and Italian) and a complete overhaul of Travel-SouthDakota.com. The scenic guide will be ready by the end of the year, and the inspiration guide and revamped website will debut next spring. We can't wait to share all of these items with you when they are complete.

There is a lot more information about various items in this newsletter, so keep on reading.

Please reach out if we can assist you with anything. Our hope is that as we near the end of summer and head into our shoulder season, our hard work and marketing will inspire visitors to travel to South Dakota this fall. We are doing all we can to make that happen, and we know you are, too. We hope to see you soon!

All our best,

Jim and Team



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Prison officials peppered with questions on price tag for new men's prison

Inmate population growth, uncertain operating expenses among legislator concerns

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 30, 2024 7:51 PM

Lawmakers expressed frustration Tuesday in Pierre over the uncertain price tag for construction and operations of a proposed men's prison in Lincoln County.

Members of the Legislature's Appropriations Committee also had pointed questions for Department of Corrections officials on alternative sites for the project, which has sparked a lawsuit from nearby neighbors and represents the most expensive taxpayer-funded capital project in state history.

"I'm just flabbergasted that we've not yet wrapped our arms around this as a total package," said Rep. John Mills, R-Brookings.

Lawmakers have already dedicated more than \$569 million to the project across the past two legislative sessions, including \$62 million in preparatory spending. The rest sits in an incarceration construction fund.

The guaranteed maximum price for construction is expected in early November, DOC Secretary Kellie Wasko and Finance Director Brittini Skipper testified on Tuesday. That fixed price wouldn't change, Skipper said, even if inflation or other construction costs increase.

Some lawmakers, including Sen. Jim Bolin, R-Canton, struggled to understand how a company could make such a promise.

"If you're talking about an \$800 million project, maybe more, if you make a mistake on that, you can bankrupt your whole company," Bolin said.

Skipper told Bolin the DOC has a construction manager at-risk, JE Dunn and Henry Carlson Construction, who will build three years of projected inflation into the promised price.

"It's in their contract to provide to us a guaranteed maximum price," Skipper said, noting that the DOC has a similar arrangement for a new women's prison under construction in Rapid City.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, was one of several lawmakers to push Wasko and Skipper about the potential ongoing costs associated with the prison once it's complete. Karr and other committee members asked about prison population growth and staffing projections.

"If we're going to make this huge investment, are we going to be able to house everybody?" Karr said.

Wasko said she doesn't trust inmate population projections any further than five years out.

She said too many things can change, including when lawmakers create new felony crimes or toughen penalties. They did that with 2023's "truth in sentencing" bill, which now forces those convicted for violent offenses to serve most or all of their prison terms.

"Our rate of incarceration is not slowing down. It's actually speeding up," Wasko said.

Even so, she said, the 1,500-bed proposal would offer the agency breathing room, as it's designed to be a maximum-security facility capable of managing overflow from other areas of the system. The prison would take on most of the inmates now housed at the penitentiary in Sioux Falls.

Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, said he understands that projections can change, but also said it's important for appropriators to have a better sense of what they're committing to.

"This could be a pretty considerable ongoing cost, and I do think at some point during the next session, we're going to need a ballpark of what that might be," Venhuizen said.

Skipper said the previous ballpark estimates anticipated 130 more employees and approximately \$15 million in ongoing funding.

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Sen. Red Dawn Foster, D-Pine Ridge, wanted to know if the DOC had consulted with the state's Supreme Court, Unified Judicial System or Attorney General's Office to drill down on what to expect in terms of offender population growth.

Wasko said the DOC hadn't reached out to those agencies to talk about projections.

Steve Haugaard, a Republican former lawmaker and one-time primary candidate for governor, seized upon that point during his testimony, which he offered via video feed later in the afternoon.

Haugaard argued that lawmakers were spending too much money on prisons without clear goals for managing corrections and criminal justice as a whole. Haugaard argued that "the building is going to control the overall policy," and said policy guidance ought to come first.

Upon hearing that the DOC hadn't consulted with the courts or attorney general, he said, "I just wonder what are we doing?" Haugaard said.

"We don't have a corrections policy that's firmly in place," Haugaard said. "And from what I can see from those stats from the past 40-plus years, we didn't respond to the ever-increasing spike in incarceration rates."

Wasko said, as she has in the past, that South Dakota stands out from many other states for harsh penalties. But she also said that as a member of the executive branch, her responsibility is to manage an offender population, not to influence its size.

"There's a judicial branch, the legislative branch, and I'm the executive branch, and there's reasons for that," Wasko said. "I would not be responsible for anything on the front end of incarceration."

Wasko got backing on that point from Rep. Rep. Linda Duba, D-Sioux Falls, said the courts, prosecutors and lawmakers need to be proactive in criminal justice policy. She said the new facility is needed to make space for treatment and rehabilitation programs.

During another line of questioning, Karr asked about recent heavy rains and the possibility of flooding. He wanted to know if the proposed prison site is in a flood plain.

Haugaard also keyed in on flooding potential, as did Kyah Broders, one of the Lincoln County residents suing the DOC over its site selection process.

The area did see several road closures during the heavy rains, she said Tuesday.

"Adding sewage ponds and tons of concrete will only compound this issue in the future," she said.

Skipper said the site is not in a flood plain. She showed the committee a photo of the land shortly after the historic June rainfall that wreaked havoc on communities in southeast South Dakota.

"You can see from those photos that there was minimal water damage to the site, without any soil being moved or anything being done," Skipper said.

In response to an email about the rainfall, DOC spokesman Michael Winder sent the photos shown to the lawmakers and wrote that the project's civil engineer "will prepare the design for watershed from the property that would include any stormwater runoff."

Bolin asked what might happen if Broders and her fellow prison site opponents succeed in forcing the state to apply for a county zoning permit and the county refuses to grant one.

"We do not have a valid or developed plan B if that ruling does not come through for us," Wasko said.

Bolin, who is not returning to Pierre for the next legislative session, closed out the prison site update portion of Tuesday's meeting by returning to the influence harsh penalties have on prison populations.

Bills meant to get tough on crime and "lock them up and throw away the key" have appeared in nearly all of his 16 years in Pierre, Bolin said.

For future lawmakers, he said, "If you really believe that, you've also got to be prepared to pay the bill."

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.

Impact of grocery tax ballot measure could range from \$134M to \$646M, legislators told

Estimates depend on 'human consumption' interpretation

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - JULY 30, 2024 7:19 PM

A new analysis of the Nov. 5 ballot measure aiming to eliminate state sales taxes on groceries projects state revenue losses ranging from \$134 million to \$646 million annually.

On Tuesday in Pierre, the Legislative Research Council presented the analysis to lawmakers on the state budget committee. Council employees provide research, analysis and administrative support to legislators.

Backers of the citizen-initiated ballot measure only aim to prohibit state sales taxes on groceries, but the measure references items sold for "human consumption." The wide range of potential revenue losses depends on how "human consumption" is interpreted.

"This is why words matter," said Jeff Mehlhaff, the council's chief fiscal analyst.

A narrow interpretation limits the measure's impact to groceries. A broader interpretation includes many goods and services used by people, based on definitions and interpretations of "consume" and "consumption." Utilities, toiletries and car repairs are some examples cited by the council as goods and services technically "consumed" by humans.

The narrow definition would reduce state revenues by an estimated \$133.6 million. The broader interpretation would result in an estimated revenue loss of up to \$646.2 million. The state's total annual budget is \$7.3 billion.

A coalition formed to oppose the ballot measure says that in addition to affecting state sales taxes, the measure would affect city sales taxes, due to a state law that says cities cannot tax anything the state doesn't tax. Yet the actual language of the measure says "municipalities may continue to impose such taxes."

When asked about that, Mehlhaff said, "I'm just leaving that where it is because it says municipalities may continue to impose such taxes."

Rep. Tony Venhuizen, R-Sioux Falls, said voter passage of the measure could precipitate the worst budget cuts since the 10% across-the-board reductions during the 2011 legislative session.

"If the people vote for this, they need to know that when we come during January, we are not going to be doing increases for anything," he said. "We're going to make significant budget cuts."

Retailers such as Walmart, Sam's Club and Dollar General, which classify a significant portion of their sales as groceries and consumables, could see a substantial portion of their sales untaxed under the new measure, according to the analysis. It estimates that 59% to 81% of sales at those retailers could be affected.

The analysis says the Legislature would need to clarify the definition of "human consumption" to determine the measure's full fiscal impact, should the measure pass.

Proponent says LRC recommended language

Rick Weiland runs Dakotans for Health, the group behind the ballot measure. He said the measure initially said "anything sold for eating or drinking by humans," but was changed to "anything sold for human consumption" because the Legislative Research Council recommended it.

A 2022 letter to Weiland from the council suggested the initial wording was "overly vague, inviting various interpretations in determining its meaning." The council recommended using terms like ingestion, chewing or consumed.

"These terms seem to be more precise than 'eating and drinking,' as they may better capture the various elements of food and beverage consumption," the council wrote to Weiland.

Following this advice, Weiland said, his team revised the language to "anything sold for human consumption, except alcoholic beverages and prepared food."

Attorney General Marty Jackley has since stated that "human consumption" is not defined by state law, and its common definition encompasses more than just food and drinks.

Weiland's attorney sought clarification from Jackley in a February 2023 letter and email, but said he received no response.

Mehlhoff told budget committee members that the language used in the final draft is not the council's recommendation, pointing to another line in the 2022 letter that offered a possible rewrite: "The retail sale of any food or food ingredient for any purpose is exempt from any tax imposed by law."

Mehlhoff said if the measure passes, lawmakers could attempt to amend or repeal it before its effective date on July 1, 2025.

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.

Dozens of children from tribes in South Dakota died at boarding schools, report says

BY: SETH TUPPER - JULY 30, 2024 6:14 PM

A new report on federally supported boarding schools for Native American children says at least 33 of the students who died while attending them — and likely more — were from tribes in South Dakota.

The report also says six known burial sites have been linked to boarding schools in the state.

Each of the 33 deaths was traced to one of the nine tribes in South Dakota: the Cheyenne River, Crow Creek, Flandreau, Lower Brule, Oglala, Rosebud, Sisseton Wahpeton, Standing Rock and Yankton Sioux.

An additional 28 deaths are listed only as "Sioux," meaning they could also have been from tribes in the state.

The report lists 32 boarding school locations in South Dakota, including three with known burial sites, either marked or unmarked: the former Crow Creek Agency Boarding School in Fort Thompson (one marked burial site); the former Rapid City Indian School in Rapid City (one marked site and one unmarked); and the Red Cloud Indian School, which is still operating in Pine Ridge as a nonprofit Lakota and Jesuit Catholic school under the name Mahpiya Luta (two marked sites and one unmarked).

The numbers are in the second and final volume of the Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative's investigative report, released Tuesday. Department of Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, a member of the Pueblo and Laguna tribes in New Mexico, launched the initiative in 2021. The department published the first volume in 2022.

"I am immensely proud of the hundreds of Interior employees — many of them Indigenous — who gave of their time and themselves to ensure that this investigation was thoroughly completed to provide an accurate and honest picture," Haaland said Tuesday in a news release.

From the 1800s through the 1960s, federal assimilation policies resulted in the removal of thousands of Native American children from their homes to be educated in boarding schools. Those policies resulted in numerous instances of abuse and generational damage to Native families, culture and languages.

The second volume of the report updates a national list, profiles and maps of boarding schools to include 417 institutions in 37 states or former territories.

At least 973 American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children died while attending federally operated or supported schools, the report says. Some of those children's remains are in 74 known burial sites at 65 boarding school locations.

The report estimates the U.S. government spent the inflation-adjusted equivalent of at least \$23.3 billion between 1871 and 1969 in support of the boarding school system.

Eight recommendations are listed in the report to "support a path to healing the nation":

Issuing a formal acknowledgment and apology from the U.S. government.

Investing — "on a scale that is, at a minimum, commensurate with the investments made in the federal Indian boarding school system" — in programs for individual and community healing, family preservation

and reunification, violence prevention, Indian education, and revitalizing Native languages.

Establishing a national memorial for tribes, individuals and families affected by the boarding school system.

Identifying and repatriating remains of children and funerary objects that were never returned from boarding schools.

Returning former federal Indian boarding school sites to tribes.

Telling the story of federal Indian boarding schools to the American people and global community.

Researching the present-day health and economic impacts of the boarding school system.

Advancing international relationships with other countries that have histories of boarding schools or other assimilationist policies.

Seth is editor-in-chief of South Dakota Searchlight. He was previously a supervising senior producer for South Dakota Public Broadcasting and a newspaper journalist in Rapid City and Mitchell.

Career prosecutors, magistrate judge appointed to circuit bench in Sioux Falls area

BY: JOHN HULT - JULY 30, 2024 5:10 PM

Gov. Kristi Noem has appointed two prosecutors and a serving magistrate judge to the circuit court bench in the Sioux Falls area.

Noem announced the appointments to the Second Judicial Circuit in a Tuesday news release. The Second Circuit encompasses Minnehaha and Lincoln counties, making it one of the smallest geographically but the largest in terms of caseloads.

The circuit added two new judge positions during the 2024 legislative session. South Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice Steven Jensen said in his 2024 State of the Judiciary message that the positions are necessary to address the circuit's swelling docket.

The circuit now has 14 circuit judges, who handle felony cases and most civil cases, and five magistrate judges, who manage misdemeanor caseloads and small claims.

Noem's appointments fill those new positions, as well as the position recently vacated by Camela Theeler, who is now a federal judge for the U.S. District Court of South Dakota.

The new judges are:

Mandi Mowery, a New Underwood native and Baylor University School of Law graduate and 17-year veteran of the Minnehaha County State's Attorney's Office. Mowery leads a felony prosecution team for the office.

Jeff Clapper, a University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law graduate and 22-year prosecutor with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Sioux Falls. Clapper led prosecutions for sex trafficking and child sexual abuse for 15 years.

Eric Johnson, a Vermillion native and University of Nebraska-Lincoln Law School graduate who worked alongside Mowery as a prosecutor prior to his appointment as magistrate judge in 2016. He ran unsuccessfully for a circuit judgeship in the 2022 general election.

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.

In rare bipartisan vote, U.S. Senate passes package aimed at protecting kids online

South Dakota's Thune and Rounds cast yes votes

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - JULY 30, 2024 4:51 PM

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

WASHINGTON — Legislation aimed at protecting children online sailed through the U.S. Senate Tuesday, marking what could be the first update since the late 1990s for companies who interact with minors on the internet.

Senators approved the package of two bills in a 91-3 vote (including yes votes from South Dakota Republicans John Thune and Mike Rounds). It was a rare bipartisan landslide in the tightly divided body, despite loud and fervent opposition from civil liberties and LGBTQ organizations that say the measures would hand the government power to subjectively censor content.

The three no votes were cast by Mike Lee of Utah, Rand Paul of Kentucky and Ron Wyden of Oregon. If passed by the House, the legislative package would require producers of platforms popular among children and teens to follow new rules governing advertising, algorithms and collection of personal data.

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., has expressed interest in "working to find consensus in the House." President Joe Biden released a statement Tuesday calling the Senate vote a "crucial bipartisan step forward" and said the bill dovetails with measures he advocated for in his first State of the Union Address.

"There is undeniable evidence that social media and other online platforms contribute to our youth mental health crisis. Today our children are subjected to a wild west online and our current laws and regulations are insufficient to prevent this. It is past time to act," Biden said, adding that tech companies need to be "accountable for the national experiment they are running on our children for profit."

Families asked for federal help

The package contains two bills moving together: the Children and Teens Online Privacy Protection Act, which is mainly targeted at regulating the collection of personal data, and the Kids Online Safety Act, a bill that has been a lightning rod of criticism from outside groups.

A bipartisan group of senators points to years of hearings and meetings with tragedy-struck families — including those whose children struggled with eating disorders and died by suicide — as the motivation behind the proposals.

Sen. Marsha Blackburn, of Tennessee, one of the Kids Online Safety Act's original sponsors, said the legislation is a "safety by design bill, a duty of care bill that gives kids and parents a toolbox so that they can protect themselves."

"A message that we're sending to big tech: kids are not your product, kids are not your profit source, and we are going to protect them in the virtual space," Blackburn, a Republican, said at a press conference following the vote.

Blackburn co-led the bill dubbed the Kids Online Safety Act with Democratic Sen. Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut.

Sen. Ed Markey, who championed the last protections passed by Congress in late 1990s, said "back in 1998 only birds tweeted, a gram was a measurement of weight, and so we need to update the law."

The Massachusetts Democrat joined Republican Sen. Bill Cassidy of Louisiana in co-sponsoring the Children and Teens' Online Privacy Protection Act.

Markey likened addictive social media products to those of the tobacco industry in previous decades, and cited public health warnings attributing increasing childhood mental health issues to the platforms.

"So we have to give the tools to parents and to teenagers and children to be able to protect themselves, and that would be my message to my colleagues in the House. We cannot avoid this historic moment," Markey said at the press conference.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer praised the legislation's passage in the Senate and said the

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parents of affected teens are “the reason we succeeded today.”

“I’ve heard the terrible stories: children, teenagers, perfectly normal, then some algorithm captures them online by accident, and they end up committing suicide shortly thereafter,” the New York Democrat said in a statement. “You imagine being a parent and living with that.”

New rules for platforms

The original two bills, rolled into one legislative vehicle, respectively outline “duty of care” rules requiring platform creators to consider broad mental health categories when designing and operating their products as well as a prohibition of the use of personal data for targeted marketing.

The legislation would also mandate that platforms create an “easy-to-understand privacy dashboard” detailing how a minor’s personal information is collected, used and protected.

Other measures would include a prohibition on hidden algorithms, mechanisms for minors or parents to remove data, parental controls to restrict financial transactions and annual public reports from the platforms on “reasonably foreseeable” harms to children and teens and efforts underway to prevent them.

Enforcement

The new policies, if enacted, would be enforced by the Federal Trade Commission and any civil actions would be prosecuted by states in U.S. district court with advance notice to the FTC.

The legislation defines the online platforms as public-facing websites, social media applications, video games, messaging applications or video streaming services that are “used, or reasonably likely to be used, by a minor.”

Snap, the company behind the popular platform Snapchat, issued a statement specifically praising the Senate’s passage of the Kids Online Safety Act.

“The safety and well-being of young people on Snapchat is a top priority,” a Snap spokesperson said in a statement provided to States Newsroom. “That’s why Snap has been a long-time supporter of the Kids Online Safety Act. We applaud Senators Blackburn, Blumenthal and the roughly 70 other co-sponsors of this critical legislation for their leadership and commitment to the privacy and safety of young people.”

Opponents see ‘dangerous’ measure

A coalition of organizations advocating for First Amendment rights, privacy and the interests of LGBTQ minors urged the House to vote no on the legislation, criticizing it as “blatantly unconstitutional.”

Evan Greer, director of the tech policy group Fight For the Future, also lambasted the bill as “dangerous and misguided” and “wildly broad.”

The coalition largely takes issue with the Kids Online Safety Act’s “duty of care” provision that requires companies to “prevent and mitigate” harms associated with anxiety, depression, eating disorders, substance use disorders and suicidal behaviors.

During a joint virtual press conference hosted by the groups during the Senate vote, Greer described the provision as “a blank check for censorship of any piece of content that an administration could claim is harmful to kids.”

“What that means in practice, is that for example, a Trump administration FTC would get to dictate what types of content platforms can recommend or even show to younger users,” Greer said, referring to Republican presidential nominee and former President Donald Trump.

Jenna Leventoff, senior policy counsel at the American Civil Liberties Union, said the Kids Online Safety Act is “nothing more than a thinly veiled effort to censor information that some consider objectionable”

“If enacted, KOSA could lead to information about health care, gender, identity, politics and more being removed from social media. And kids note that censorship will make them less and not more safe,” Leventoff said. “As one student recently told me, they don’t get sex education in school, and if information about sex is removed from the internet because platforms fear liability for hosting it, how else can they learn about sex?”

Teens in opposition

The ACLU brought roughly 300 teens to Capitol Hill Thursday to lobby against the legislation. Dara Adkinson, of the organization TransOhio, said the legislation is “truly terrifying.”

Adkinson questioned whether state and federal authorities could argue that content about climate change or the nation's history of slavery causes anxiety and should therefore be regulated.

Regarding content about transgender youth, Adkinson said: "We know there (are) people out there that would like us to not exist and having the lack of visibility of the kinds of resources found on the internet is the first step for many of these folks."

Greer said the coalition is concerned about the role of "big tech" in society. Advocates would support a "heavily modified" version of the Kids Online Safety Act that focuses on regulating business practices, including targeted advertising or videos that automatically play and encourage continuous, addictive scrolling habits.

Greer said their organization is neutral on the legislation targeted at protecting children's privacy, but that they would like to see comprehensive legislation that protects minors and adults alike.

"Censorship and privacy do not go together, and these should not be moving together," Greer said.

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

15 GOP-led states, including SD, support Trump's appeal of \$355M in NY court fines

BY: JESSICA HOLDMAN, SC DAILY GAZETTE - JULY 30, 2024 12:30 PM

South Carolina Attorney General Alan Wilson is heading up a coalition of 15 GOP-led states — including South Dakota — supporting former President Donald Trump in his appeal of court fines ordered in a New York real estate case against him.

New York state court Judge Arthur Engoron in February ordered Trump to pay \$355 million, plus interest, in a civil trial finding his company and executives, including his two eldest sons, conspired to deceive banks and insurers by inflating his wealth on financial statements. The judge also barred Trump from serving as an executive at any New York company, including the Trump Organization, for three years and imposed a two-year ban on Eric Trump and Donald Trump Jr.

Trump appealed the fine to New York's intermediate appellate court.

Wilson's office authored a court brief supporting the appeal, which 14 other states joined.

"Our brief isn't about Donald Trump, it's about upholding the rule of law and the Constitution," Wilson said in a statement after Friday's filing.

Other states in the coalition are Alabama, Alaska, Florida, Iowa, Louisiana, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, Utah, and West Virginia.

The attorneys general argue the fine is excessive, violating the Eighth Amendment and a similar clause in the Fourteenth Amendment prohibiting states from imposing a "grossly excessive" punishment.

Residents of South Carolina and other states that joined the brief conduct business in New York, primarily New York City, wrote Joseph Spate, assistant deputy solicitor general in Wilson's office.

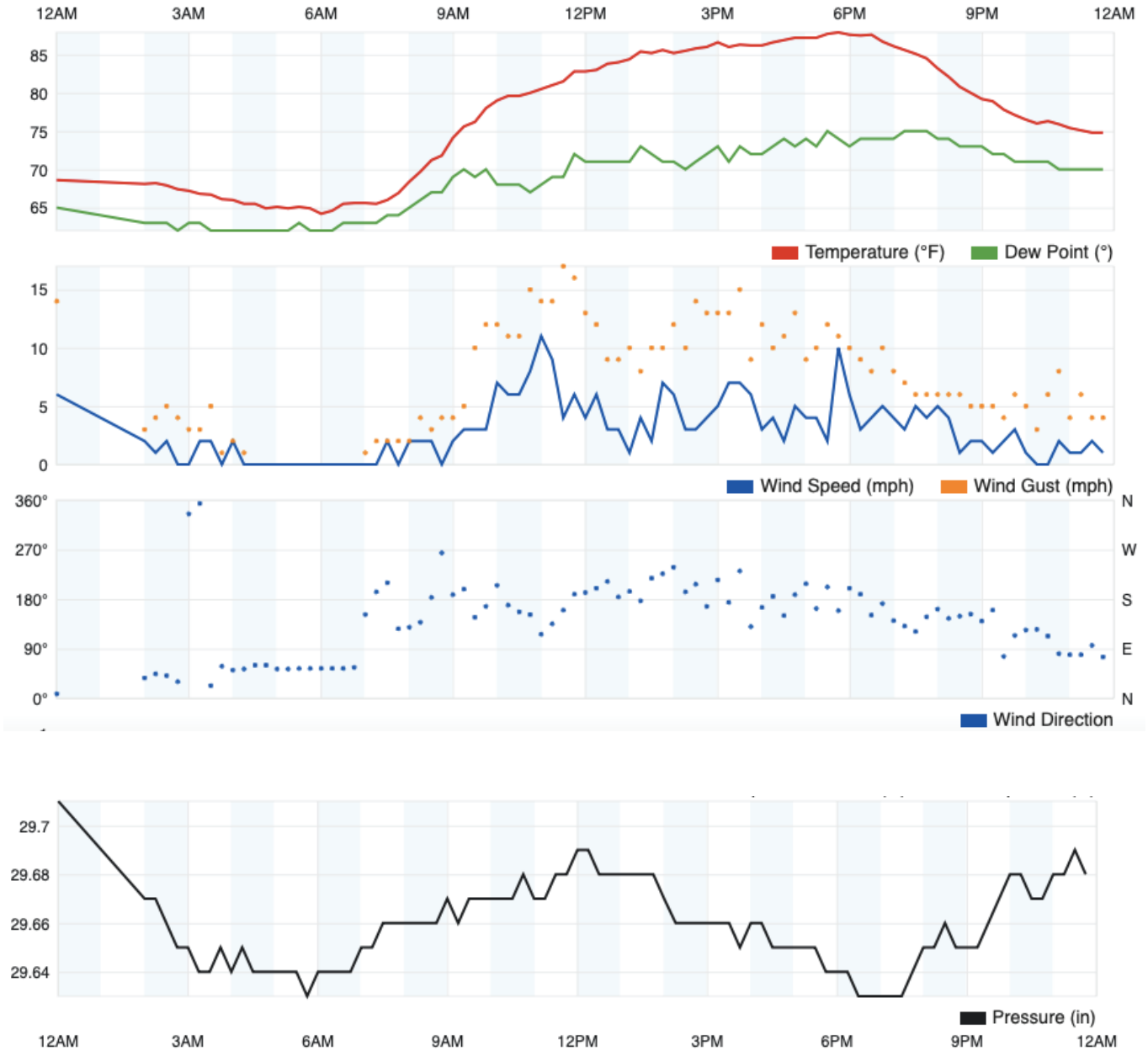
"And they need confidence that their customary business dealings in New York will not subject them to devastating fines," he wrote, arguing that fear of heavy financial penalties will drive companies away from doing business in New York.

Jessica Holdman writes about the economy, workforce and higher education. Before joining the SC Daily Gazette, she was a business reporter for The Post and Courier.

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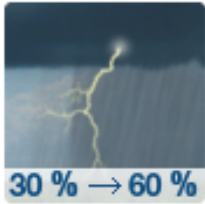
Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



30 % → 60 %

High: 85 °F

Chance
T-storms and
Areas Fog
then Heavy
Rain

Tonight



30 %

Low: 64 °F

Chance
T-storms and
Patchy Fog
then Patchy
Fog

Thursday



High: 89 °F

Patchy Fog
then Sunny

Thursday
Night



Low: 63 °F

Clear

Friday



High: 92 °F

Hot



Severe Weather Threat

July 31, 2024
3:58 AM

This Afternoon and Evening

Location/Timing

Storms continue today, becoming severe this afternoon into the evening.

Primary Threats for the **Yellow** areas.

Some hailstones could exceed 2 inches in diameter

Tornado Potential

Very Low **Low** Medium High

Max Hail Size

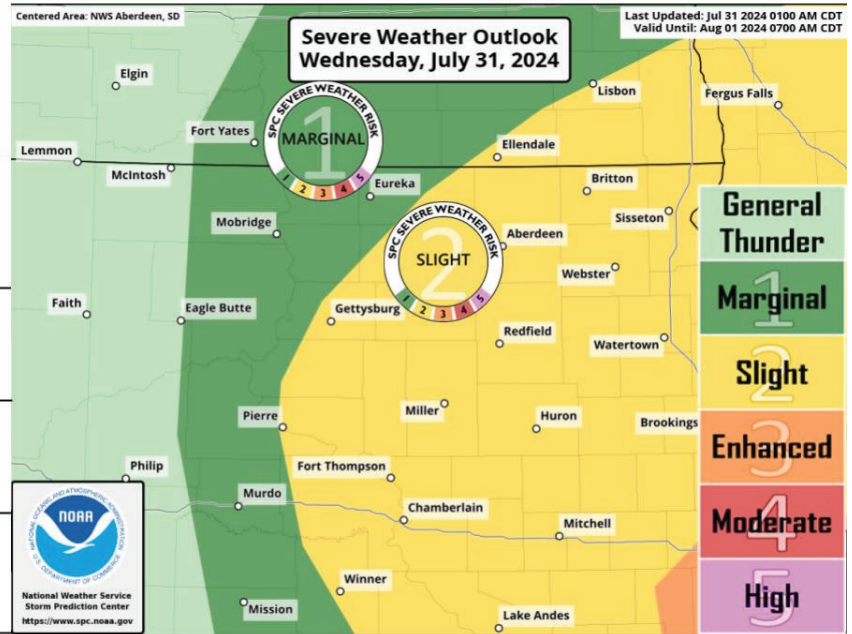
Dimes **Quarters** **Golfball** Baseball

Max Wind Speed

< 60 mph **60-70 mph** 70-80 mph > 80mph

Heavy Rain/Flooding Potential

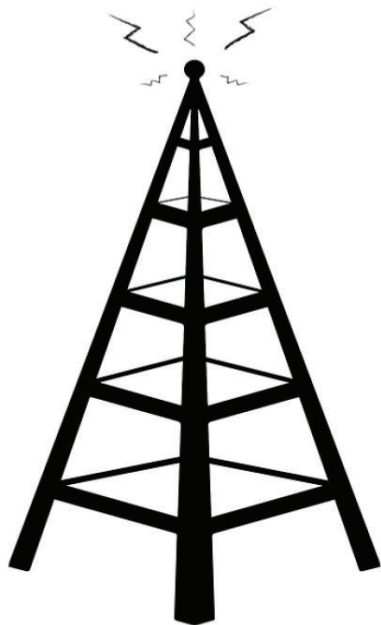
Very Low **Low** Medium High



National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
U.S. Department of Commerce

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

Storms will continue to move through the region today, with some becoming severe this afternoon and evening. The main threats will be large hail (diameters in excess of 2 inch possible) and 60+ mph wind gusts. A tornado or two cannot be ruled out. Make sure to stay weather aware and have multiple ways to receive warnings.



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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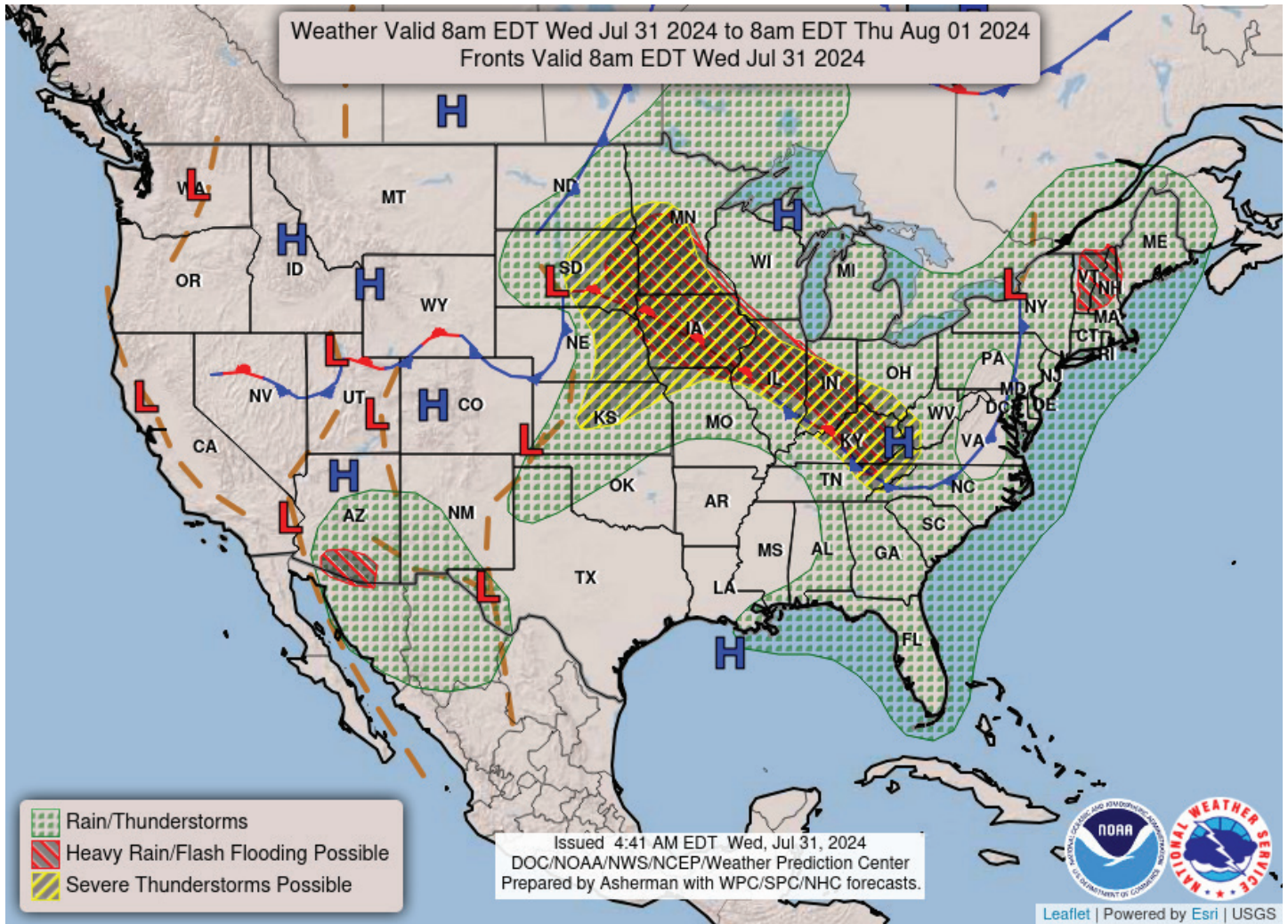
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 88 °F at 5:26 PM
Low Temp: 64 °F at 6:07 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 11:27 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 48 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 106 in 1987
Record Low: 42 in 1903
Average High: 85
Average Low: 60
Average Precip in July.: 3.09
Precip to date in July: 3.78
Average Precip to date: 14.10
Precip Year to Date: 14.73
Sunset Tonight: 9:02:49 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:15:52 am



Today in Weather History

July 31, 1966: A deadly, estimated F3 tornado moved southeast, passing south of Ashley, North Dakota, destroying buildings on five farms with near F4 damage to one farm house. Another tornado with F2 strength occurred north of Long Lake where two adults were killed, and three children were injured as a car was thrown 500 feet from Highway 101. A second estimated F2 tornado moved ENE just south of Aberdeen. A trailer was demolished, killing a man and injuring his wife. Seven airplanes were also had damage. Property damage was estimated at a quarter million dollars. An estimated 90 mph wind gust was also reported northeast of Aberdeen.

July 31, 2008: In the early morning hours of the 31st, a line of storms originating in North Dakota began to expand and surge southeast into northeast South Dakota. As the storms moved southeast, they started to tap into warmer, more humid air and rapidly evolve into a line of severe thunderstorms. Widespread damage occurred in a broad swath extending from Long Lake in McPherson County all the way into eastern Grant County and southern Big Stone County in Minnesota. The most extensive damage was found along and near US Highway 12 from Aberdeen to Milbank. Several observing stations in the path of this system measured wind speeds ranging from 70 mph to over 115 mph. Estimated wind speeds from damage surveys indicated even stronger winds with peak speeds of 120 mph.

Over fifty communities in northeast South Dakota and the surrounding rural areas received minor to major tree, and structural damage as straight-line winds from 70 to 120 mph raced across the area. Webster and Waubay received the most extensive damage from the storms. Thousands of trees were snapped or uprooted, hundreds of grain bins were damaged or destroyed, hundreds of homes, businesses, and outbuildings were damaged or destroyed along with many power poles and miles of power lines downed. Many mobile homes, campers, and boats were damaged or destroyed along with many road and business signs.

Fallen trees also damaged countless homes, vehicles, and campers. Thousands of acres of crops were also damaged or destroyed by the winds and hail. The most significant crop damage occurred in the Roslyn, Grenville, Eden, and Pickerel Lake areas in Marshall and Day counties. Many acres of corn were blown down and not able to come back. The large hail combined with the strong winds also broke out many windows in homes and vehicles along with damaging the siding on houses. Thousands of people were left without power for up to several days. Large hay bales were moved up to 700 yards by the high winds. A semi was overturned on Highway 12 near Webster, injuring the driver. Near Milbank on Highway 12, two other semis were blown off the road resulting in injuries to both drivers. A State Forestry Specialist said it was one of the worst tree damage events he has ever seen in the Webster area. A fifty-eight-year-old man died two miles north of Waubay during the cleanup after the storms when he was pinned between a backhoe and a tree.

1715: Spanish treasure ships, returning from the New World to Spain, encountered a hurricane during the early morning hours on this day. Eleven of the twelve ships were lost near present-day Vero Beach, Florida.

1949: Lightning struck a baseball field at Baker, Florida during a game. The shortstop and third baseman were killed instantly.

1987: The second deadliest tornado in Canadian history occurred in Edmonton, Alberta. An F4 tornado killed 27 people, injured over 300, and caused a quarter of a billion dollars in damage. [Click HERE](#) for more information.

1997: South Pole, Antarctica recorded their coldest July ever. The average temperature of -86.8 degrees broke the previous record of -83.6 degrees set in July 1965.



WILLPOWER OR WILTPOWER?

Little Debbie looked at her mom with sadness in her eyes. "Please, Mom, may I have one more cookie?"

"Sweetheart," replied her mom, "you've already had three."

"I know, Mom," she whined, "but they are so good. Just one more? Please?"

"All right," agreed her mom, "one more and that's all!"

"Thanks, Mom!" exclaimed Little Debbie. "You sure don't have much willpower. You gave in without even thinking."

Giving in to temptation is easy if we do not call on the Lord when we face the slippery slope of life. The easy way out, however, is rarely the best way out. When we give in without counting the cost we are usually giving up something of value.

Paul reminds us that we all face the same type of temptations. In fact, he says, that "they are no different from what others experience." Why is it, then, that some Christians have better "survival rates" than others?

It's because of our focus. If we depend on ourselves for the strength to overcome the "evil one" we will surely lose the battle. But if we look to and call upon the Lord, the battle becomes His and victory is assured.

Prayer: Lord, before we are tempted and tried may we fill our minds with Your Word, open our hearts to Your Spirit and depend completely on You for our survival. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today The temptations in your life are no different from what others experience. And God is faithful. He will not allow the temptation to be more than you can stand. When you are tempted, he will show you a way out so that you can endure. 1 Corinthians 10:13

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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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.30.24

19 23 30 33 50 25

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$358,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 46 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 15 Hrs 44 Mins
DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.30.24

19 22 34 41 45 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 59 Mins
DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.27.24

3 5 8 11 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$51,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 59 Mins
DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
07.29.24

20 21 36 54 63 21

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 16 Hrs 28 Mins
DRAW: 46 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 16 Hrs 28 Mins
DRAW: 46 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

Olympic triathletes swim in Seine River after days of concerns about water quality

By KATE BRUMBACK and PAT GRAHAM Associated Press

PARIS (AP) — After days of water-quality concerns caused by heavy rains last week put the swimming portion of the Olympic triathlons in doubt, the women dove into the Seine River on Wednesday under gray skies that lingered following an early-morning drizzle, followed by the men a few hours later.

The athletes began near the Pont Alexandre III, a bridge that spans the famed Paris waterway. The steady rain tapered off just as the athletes splashed into the water. Some dunked their swim goggles in the Seine before putting them on and heading into the river with the Eiffel Tower in the background.

The decision to go ahead with the swim for the triathlon competitions was a big deal for the city, Olympics organizers and the athletes. Officials undertook an ambitious plan, including 1.4 billion euros (\$1.5 billion) in infrastructure improvements, to clean up the long-polluted Seine and have been steadfast in their insistence that the swimming portion of the triathlon and the marathon swimming events next week could safely be held in the river.

The organizers said early Wednesday the latest tests of the water showed compliance with quality standards. That came after days of uncertainty following heavy rains on Friday and Saturday.

"The problem is always worse when there's a heavy rainfall, because it kind of overwhelms the pipes and you also get all the runoff from the street. All that lands in the Seine," explained Dr. Nicole Iovine, an infectious diseases specialist at the University of Florida. "They've done a lot to try to improve the quality of the water. But the truth is you're at the mercy of Mother Nature."

As they swam, the triathletes stayed close to the barges and boats that line the banks of the river. Spectators watched and cheered from the stands set up along the side and from the bridges spanning the waterway.

After swimming two laps in the Seine, a 1.5-kilometer course, the athletes emerged from the water and ran up a set of stairs to jump on their bikes for a ride through the rain-soaked streets of Paris, including the iconic Champs-Elysees.

During the women's race, the biking portion saw numerous crashes and wipeouts along wet roads, but skies were blue by the time the triathletes began the final leg of the race, a 10-kilometer run.

France's Cassandre Beaugrand won gold in the women's event, while Switzerland's Julie Derron took silver and Great Britain's Beth Potter got the bronze medal.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo, who took a much publicized dip in the Seine two weeks ago to ease fears about water quality, celebrated Beaugrand's victory.

"The incredible Cassandre Beaugrand has made history!" she said in a statement. "How emotional to see her swimming in the Seine, thank you for making us so proud."

Elevated levels of bacteria in the river pushed the men's race originally planned for Tuesday to Wednesday, when the women's competition had been scheduled. The women began their race at 8 a.m., while the men started at 10:45 a.m. Test events meant to allow the athletes to familiarize themselves with the course had already been canceled for the same reason on Sunday and Monday.

The water quality in the Seine is directly affected by rainfall that can lead to wastewater runoff flowing into the river. Heavy rains fell during Friday's Olympic opening ceremony, and rain continued for most of the day Saturday.

Every day since Sunday, even as organizers announced cancellations or postponements, they continued to express confidence that the swims in the Seine would go forward as planned the next day. For several days they did not publicly release the data on levels of E. coli and other bacteria that contributed to their decisions.

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.

Daily water quality tests measure levels of the fecal bacteria *E. coli*. World Triathlon's water safety guidelines and a 2006 European Union directive give a range of *E. coli* levels from "excellent" to "sufficient." Anything beyond 900 colony-forming units per 100 milliliters is not considered safe or "sufficient." But experts stressed that these numbers are simply guidelines used to assess risk.

Plus, Aurélie Merle, the Paris 2024 director of sports, told reporters Tuesday that water samples are taken 21 and a half hours before decisions are made about the swim. That leaves uncertainty about their accuracy the day of the race.

Merle said Tuesday that testing results showed "we're very close to the threshold of triathlon." She noted that one of four test sites along the triathlon course was below the threshold for *E. coli*. Two other sites were just above the limit and one was more elevated, she said, citing a range of 980 to 1,553.

"We know the sun and the heat have a very strong impact on the quality of the water," she said, hoping that a heat wave that hit most of France on Tuesday would help improve water quality.

Organizers have said the marathon swimming races, scheduled for Aug. 8 and 9, could be relocated, if needed, to the Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Stadium in the greater Paris region, which already hosts rowing and canoeing competitions and can accommodate up to 15,000 spectators.

Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas leader on Israel's hit list since Oct. 7, is killed in an airstrike at 62

By BASSEM MROUE Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas' supreme leader in exile who landed on Israel's hit list after the militant group staged its surprise Oct. 7 attacks, was killed in an airstrike in the Iranian capital early Wednesday. He was 62.

Hamas said Haniyeh was killed at his residence in Tehran in an Israeli airstrike after he attended the swearing-in ceremony of Iran's new president. Israel has not commented on the accusation.

Haniyeh's death makes him the latest Hamas official to be killed by Israel since the Hamas-led Oct. 7 attacks, when militants killed 1,200 people and took about 250 hostages. The devastating Israel-Hamas war the attacks set off has become the deadliest and longest in the Arab-Israeli conflict. More than 39,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to health officials in Gaza.

While Hamas' Gaza leader Yahya Sinwar is believed to have been the mastermind of the attacks, Haniyeh, seen as a more moderate force in Hamas, lauded them as a humiliating blow to Israel's aura of invincibility.

"The Al-Aqsa flood was an earthquake that struck the heart of the Zionist entity and has made major changes at the world level," Haniyeh said in a speech in Iran during the funeral of late Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi in May.

"We will continue the resistance against this enemy until we liberate our land, all our land," Haniyeh said.

Hours after the Oct. 7 attacks, Haniyeh appeared in a video released by Hamas leading prayers with other top Hamas officials. They thanked God for the success of the attack, which blasted through Israel's vaunted defenses and resulted in the deadliest assault in Israel's history.

Michael Milshtein, a Hamas expert at Tel Aviv University, said Haniyeh had a commanding role in the group's foreign policy and diplomacy, but was less involved in military affairs.

"He was responsible for propaganda, for diplomatic relations, but he was not very powerful," said Milshtein, a former military intelligence officer. "From time to time, Sinwar even laughed and joked: 'He's the more moderate, sophisticated leader, but he doesn't understand anything about warfare.'"

Still, Israel pledged to target all of Hamas' leaders following the attacks and has gradually worked to fulfill that promise.

Haniyeh was also under the eye of the International Criminal Court, whose chief prosecutor sought arrest warrants against him and two other Hamas leaders, Sinwar and Mohammed Deif, for war crimes and

crimes against humanity. Similar requests were issued for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Defense Minister Yoav Gallant.

Haniyeh lived in self-imposed exile in Qatar since 2019 and the threats against him did not prevent him from traveling. He visited Turkey and Iran throughout the war. From Doha, he was involved in negotiations meant to bring about a cease-fire and free the hostages.

His role in Hamas' leadership also cost him his closest relatives. In April, an Israeli airstrike in Gaza killed three of Haniyeh's sons, after which he accused Israel of acting in "the spirit of revenge and murder."

Hamas said four of the leader's grandchildren were also killed as well as his sister in a separate strike last month.

Haniyeh, who was born in Gaza's urban Shati refugee camp, joined Hamas when it was founded in 1987. He served as an aid to Ahmad Yassin, the group's founder, and rose throughout the years until he became its top political leader, replacing Khaled Mashaal in 2017.

Haniyeh was deeply religious and studied Arabic literature at university. He was known for delivering lengthy speeches using flowery language to his supporters while serving as prime minister in Gaza.

Hani Masri, a veteran Palestinian analyst who met Haniyeh several times, said the late leader's personality was a natural fit for the head of the group's political bureau in Doha. He described him as having been sociable and well spoken.

Haniyeh, like thousands of other Palestinians, was detained by Israeli authorities in 1989 for being a member of Hamas and spent three years in jail before he was deported to Lebanon in 1992 with a group of top Hamas officials and founders. He later returned to the Gaza Strip following the 1993 interim peace accords, which were signed between Israel and the Palestine Liberation Organization.

Haniyeh assumed the position of prime minister in the Palestinian government after Hamas won legislative elections in 2006. He presided over the gravest crisis in the Palestinian leadership in its history, which continues until today.

Hamas violently overran Gaza in 2007, routing forces loyal to Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah faction and installing itself as ruler of the tiny coastal enclave, with Haniyeh as prime minister.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh is killed in Iran by an alleged Israeli strike, threatening escalation

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh was killed by a predawn airstrike in the Iranian capital Wednesday, Iran and the militant group said, blaming Israel for a shock assassination that risks escalating the conflict even as the U.S. and other nations were scrambling to prevent an all-out regional war. Iran's supreme leader vowed revenge against Israel.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has pledged to kill Haniyeh and other Hamas leaders over the group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel in which the Palestinian militant group killed 1,200 people and took some 250 others hostage. The strike came just after Haniyeh had attended the inauguration of Iran's new president in Tehran — and only hours after Israel targeted a top commander in Iran's ally Hezbollah in the Lebanese capital Beirut.

The dramatic assassination of Hamas's top political leader threatened to reverberate throughout the region's intertwined conflicts. Most explosively, the strike in Tehran could push Iran and Israel into direct conflict if Iran retaliates.

"We consider his revenge as our duty," Iranian supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said in a statement on his official website. He said Israel had "prepared a harsh punishment for itself" by killing "a dear guest in our home."

Bitter regional rivals, Israel and Iran risked plunging into war earlier this year when Israel hit Iran's embassy in Damascus in April. Iran retaliated and Israel countered in an unprecedented exchange of strikes on each other's soil, but international efforts succeeded in containing that cycle before it spun out of control.

Haniyeh's killing could also prompt Hamas to pull out of negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage release

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deal in the 10-month-old war in Gaza, which U.S. mediators had said were making progress.

And it could enflame already heightening tensions between Israel and Hezbollah — which international diplomats were trying to contain after a weekend rocket attack that killed 12 young people in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights.

Tuesday evening, Israel carried out a rare strike in the Lebanese capital that it said killed a top Hezbollah commander allegedly behind the rocket strike. Hezbollah, which denied any role in the Golan strike, said Wednesday that it was still searching for the body of Fouad Shukur in the rubble of the building that was hit in a Beirut suburb, killing two women and two children, according to the Lebanese Health Ministry.

There was no immediate reaction from the White House to the killing of Haniyeh.

Asked by reporters in Manila about the Tehran strike, U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin said he had no “additional information to provide.” But he expressed hope for a diplomatic solution on the Israeli-Lebanon border.

“I don’t think that war is inevitable,” he said. “I maintain that. I think there’s always room and opportunity for diplomacy, and I’d like to see parties pursue those opportunities.”

But international diplomats trying to defuse tensions were alarmed. One Western diplomat, whose country has worked to prevent an Israeli-Hezbollah escalation, said the double strikes in Beirut and Tehran have “almost killed” hopes for a Gaza cease-fire and could push the Middle East into a “devastating regional war.” The diplomat spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the sensitive situation.

An Israeli military spokesman declined to comment. Israel often doesn’t comment on assassinations carried out by its Mossad intelligence agency or strikes on other countries.

Iranian media showed videos of Haniyeh and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian hugging after Pezeshkian’s inauguration ceremony Tuesday. Hours later, the strike hit a residence Haniyeh uses in Tehran, killing him, Hamas said in a statement.

It also quoted a past speech by Haniyeh in which he said the Palestinian cause has “costs” and “we are ready for these costs: martyrdom for the sake of Palestine, and for the sake of God Almighty, and for the sake of the dignity of this nation.”

Pezeshkian vowed his country would “defend its territory” and make the attackers “regret their cowardly action.” An influential Iranian parliamentary committee on national security and foreign policy was to hold an emergency meeting on the strike later Wednesday.

Hamas’ military wing said in a statement that Haniyeh’s assassination “takes the battle to new dimensions and will have major repercussions on the entire region.” It said Israel “made a miscalculation by expanding the circle of aggression.”

Speaking to the AP, a Hamas spokesman Sami Abu Zuhri said the loss of Haniyeh won’t impact the group, saying it had emerged stronger after past crises and assassinations of its leaders.

Haniyeh left the Gaza Strip in 2019 and had lived in exile in Qatar. The top Hamas leader in Gaza is Yehya Sinwar, who masterminded the Oct. 7 attack.

In the West Bank, the internationally backed Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas condemned Haniyeh’s killing, calling it a “cowardly act and dangerous development.” Political factions in the occupied territory called for strikes in protest at the killing.

In April, an Israeli airstrike in Gaza killed three of Haniyeh’s sons and four of his grandchildren.

Meanwhile, Iraq’s Popular Mobilization Forces, a coalition of Iranian-backed militias, said that a strike Tuesday night on a base southwest of Baghdad killed four members of the Kataib Hezbollah militia.

The group accused the United States of being behind the strike. Kataib Hezbollah, along with some of the other militias, has in recent months carried out attacks against bases housing U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria in retaliation for Washington’s support for Israel in the war in Gaza. U.S. officials did not immediately comment.

Israel is suspected of running a yearslong assassination campaign targeting Iranian nuclear scientists and others associated with its atomic program. In 2020, a top Iranian military nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, was killed by a remote-controlled machine gun while traveling in a car outside Tehran.

In Israel's war against Hamas since the October attack, more than 39,360 Palestinians have been killed and more than 90,900 wounded, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, whose count does not differentiate between civilians and combatants.

How Hungary's Orbán uses control of the media to escape scrutiny and keep the public in the dark

By JUSTIN SPIKE Associated Press

BUDAPEST, Hungary (AP) — In the months leading up to elections for the European Parliament, Hungarians were warned that casting a ballot against Prime Minister Viktor Orbán would be a vote for all-out war.

The right-wing Fidesz party cast the June 9 election as an existential struggle, one that could preserve peace in Europe if Orbán won — or fuel widespread instability if he didn't. To sell that bold claim, Orbán used a sprawling pro-government media empire that's dominated the country's political discourse for more than a decade.

The tactic worked, as it has since Orbán returned to power in 2010, and his party came first in the elections — though not by the margins it was used to. An upstart party, led by a former Fidesz insider, attracted disaffected voters and took 29% of the vote to Fidesz's 44%.

"Everything has fallen apart in Hungary. The state essentially does not function, there's only propaganda and lies," said Péter Magyar, the leader of that new party who has emerged in recent months as perhaps the most formidable challenge yet to Orbán's rule.

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

Magyar's Respect and Freedom (TISZA) party campaigned on promises to root out deep-seated corruption in the government. He has also been outspoken about what he sees as the damage Orbán's "propaganda factory" has done to Hungary's democracy.

"It might be very difficult to imagine from America or Western Europe what the propaganda and the state machinery is like here," Magyar said in an interview before elections with The Associated Press. "This parallel reality is like the Truman Show. People believe that it's reality."

Since 2010, Orbán's government has promoted hostility to migrants and LGBTQ+ rights, distrust of the European Union, and a belief that Hungarian-American financier George Soros — who is Jewish and one of Orbán's enduring foes — is engaged in secret plots to destabilize Hungary, a classic antisemitic trope.

Such messaging has delivered Orbán's party four consecutive two-thirds majorities in parliament and, most recently, the most Hungarian delegates in the EU legislature.

But according to Péter Krekó, an analyst and head of the Political Capital think tank in Budapest, Orbán has created "an almost Orwellian environment" where the government weaponizes control of a majority of news outlets to limit Hungarians' decisions.

"Hungary has become a quite successful informational autocracy, or spin dictatorship," Krekó said.

The restriction of Hungary's free press directly affects informed democratic participation. Opposition politicians have long complained that they only get five minutes of air time every four years on public television, the legal minimum, to present their platforms before elections.

In contrast, public television and radio channels consistently echo talking points communicated both by Fidesz and a network of think tanks and pollsters that receive funding from the government and the party. Their analysts routinely appear in affiliated media to bolster government narratives, while independent commentators rarely, if ever, appear.

During the campaign in May, Hungary's electoral commission issued a warning to the public broadcaster for repeatedly airing Fidesz campaign videos during news segments, a violation of impartiality rules. The broadcaster carried on regardless.

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Magyar, who won a seat in the European Parliament, credits his new party's success partly to its ability to sidestep Orbán's dominance by meeting directly with voters and developing a large following on social media.

But in largely rural Hungary, even those with a strong online presence struggle to compete with Fidesz's control of traditional outlets.

According to press watchdog Reporters Without Borders, Orbán has used media buyouts by government-connected "oligarchs" to build "a true media empire subject to his party's orders." The group estimates that such buyouts have given Orbán's party control of some 80% of Hungary's media market resources. In 2021, it put Orbán on its list of media "predators," the first EU leader to earn the distinction.

The title didn't come out of nowhere: in 2016, Hungary's oldest daily newspaper was suddenly shuttered after being bought by a businessman with links to Orbán. In 2018, nearly 500 pro-government outlets were simultaneously donated by their owners to a foundation headed by Orbán loyalists, creating a sprawling right-wing media conglomerate. And in 2020, nearly the entire staff of Hungary's largest online news portal, Index, resigned en masse after its lead editor was fired under political pressure.

A network of independent journalists and online outlets that continue to function in Hungary struggles to remain competitive, said Gábor Polyák, head of the Media and Communication Department at Eötvös Loránd University in Budapest.

The government is the largest advertiser in Hungary, he said. A study by watchdog Mérték Media Monitor showed up to 90% of state advertising revenue is awarded to pro-Fidesz media outlets, keeping them afloat.

The government's efforts to control media have moved beyond television, radio and newspapers, shifting into social media posts that are boosted by paid advertisements.

Hungary spent the most in the entire 27-member EU — nearly \$4.8 million — on political ads on platforms owned by Facebook's parent company, Meta, in a 30-day period in May and June, outspending Germany, which has more than eight times the population, according to a recent report based on publicly available data compiled by Political Capital, Mérték Media Monitor and fact-checking site Lakmusz.

The vast majority of that spending came from Fidesz or its proxies, the report found.

One major spender is Megafon, a self-declared training center for aspiring conservative influencers. In the same 30-day period, the group spent \$800,000 on boosting its pro-government content on Meta platforms, more than what was spent in total by 16 EU countries in the same period.

With government narratives so pervasive across mediums, a level of political polarization has emerged that can reach deep into the private lives of Hungarians. In recent years, the views of Andrea Simon, a 55-year-old entrepreneur from a suburb of Budapest, and her husband Attila Kohári began to drift apart — fed, according to Simon, by Kohári's steady diet of pro-government media.

"He listened to these radio stations where they pushed those simple talking points, it completely changed his personality," Simon said. "I felt sometimes he'd been kidnapped, and his brain was replaced with a Fidesz brain."

In December, after 33 years of marriage, they agreed to divorce.

"I said to him several times, 'You have to choose: me or Fidesz,'" she said. "He said Fidesz."

Still, like many Hungarians who hold fast to traditional values in a changing world, Kohári remains a faithful supporter of Orbán and his policies, despite the personal cost.

His love of his country and belief that Orbán has led Hungary in the right direction have him "clearly convinced that my position is the right one," he said. "But it ruined my marriage."

The media divide also has consequences for Hungary's finances, says independent lawmaker Ákos Hadházy, who has uncovered dozens of suspected cases of graft involving EU funds.

Such abuses, he said, go largely unaddressed because the majority of voters are unaware of them.

"Following the Russian model, (the government) controls state media by hand and spends about 50 billion forints (\$135 million) a year on advertisements ... that sustain their own TV networks and websites," he said. "The people that consume those media simply don't hear about these things."

On a recent day in Mezőcsát, a small village on the Hungarian Great Plain, Hadházy inspected the site of an industrial park that was built with 290 million euros (\$310 million) in EU funds. The problem, he said,

is that since the site was completed in 2017, it has never been active, and the money used to build it has disappeared.

Hadházy said that Hungarians “who consciously seek out the real news hear about these cases and don’t understand how it’s possible that there are no consequences when I present such things almost daily.”

He continued: “But it’s not important for the government that nobody hears about them, it’s important that more people hear their lies, and that’s the way it is now. Far more people hear their messages than the facts.”

Rescuers search through mud and debris as deaths rise to 151 in landslides in southern India

By ASHOK SHARMA Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Hundreds of rescue workers searched through mud and debris Wednesday from multiple landslides that have killed at least 151 people in southern India, police said.

The multiple landslides occurred after torrential rains triggered torrents of mud and water that swept through tea estates and villages.

Another 186 people were injured by the landslides that hit hilly areas in Kerala state’s Wayanad district early Tuesday, flattening houses, uprooting trees and destroying bridges, said police officer Aijaz, who uses one name.

P.M Manoj, a spokesman for the state’s top elected official, said that 187 people were unaccounted for. Seventy-seven bodies have been identified so far and mostly handed to their relatives, he added,

More than a dozen bodies were found overnight, Aijaz said, as over 300 rescuers worked to pull out people stuck under mud and debris, but blocked roads and unstable terrain hampered their efforts.

The first landslide occurred at 2 a.m. on Tuesday, followed by another two hours later. Several areas, including Meppadi, Mundakkai and Chooralmala, were isolated, and roads were washed away causing immense damage to homes, said Kerala’s top elected official, Pinarayi Vijayan.

“Efforts to locate missing persons continue with all available resources,” their statement said.

Mundakka is in an area highly prone to disasters. However, the gushing soil, gravel, and rock reached the town of Chooralmala, 6 kilometers (3.7 miles) away.

Manoj said more than 8,300 people have been moved to 82 government-run relief camps. The government is ensuring food delivery and essential items to the relief camps.

Authorities sent vehicles carrying 20,000 liters of drinking water to the disaster area. Temporary hospitals are being set up, the statement said on Tuesday night.

The Press Trust of India news agency said more than 300 houses were destroyed in Mundakkai and Chooralmala areas.

Local media reported that most of the victims were tea estate workers. Television footage showed rescue workers making their way through mud and uprooted trees to reach those who had been stranded. Vehicles swept off the roads were seen stuck in a swollen river. Local TV news channels also aired phone calls from stranded people asking for help.

Authorities mobilized helicopters to help with rescue efforts and the Indian army was roped in to build a temporary bridge.

“We are trying every way to rescue our people,” state Health Minister Veena George said.

In a post on social media platform X, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was “distressed by the landslides in parts of Wayanad,” a hilly district which is part of the Western Ghats mountain range.

“My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones and prayers with those injured,” Modi wrote. He announced compensation of 200,000 rupees (\$2,388) to the victims’ families.

India’s weather department has put Kerala on alert as the state has been lashed by incessant rains. Downpours have disrupted life for many, and authorities closed schools in some parts Tuesday.

Kerala, one of India’s most popular tourist destinations, is prone to heavy rains, flooding and landslides. Nearly 500 people were killed in the state in 2018 in one of the worst floods.

The Indian Meteorological Department said the state has had heavy rainfall over its northern and central regions, with Wayanad district recording up to 28 centimeters (11 inches) of rain on Monday and Tuesday.

"Monsoon patterns are increasingly erratic and the quantum of rainfall that we receive in a short spell of time has increased. As a result, we see frequent instances of landslides and floods along the Western Ghats," said Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

Koll also said authorities must check on rapid construction activities happening over landslide areas.

UN report says Palestinians detained by Israeli authorities since Oct. 7 faced torture, mistreatment

By JAMEY KEATEN Associated Press

GENEVA (AP) — The U.N. human rights office issued a report Wednesday saying Palestinians detained by Israeli authorities since the Oct. 7 attacks faced waterboarding, sleep deprivation, electric shocks, the release of dogs, and other forms of torture and mistreatment.

The report said Israel's prison service held more than 9,400 "security detainees" as of the end of June, and some have been held in secret without access to lawyers or respect for their legal rights.

A summary of the report, based on interviews with former detainees and other sources, decried a "staggering" number of detainees — including men, women, children, journalists and human rights defenders — and said such practices raise concerns about arbitrary detention.

"The testimonies gathered by my office and other entities indicate a range of appalling acts, such as waterboarding and the release of dogs on detainees, amongst other acts, in flagrant violation of international human rights law and international humanitarian law," said U.N. Human Rights Chief Volker Türk in a statement.

Findings in the report, one of the most extensive of its kind, could be used by International Criminal Court prosecutors who are looking into crimes committed in connection with Hamas' Oct. 7 attacks and Israel's blistering ongoing military campaign in Gaza.

In May, the ICC's chief prosecutor sought arrest warrants for leaders of Israel and Hamas, including Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over war crimes and crimes against humanity in the Gaza Strip and Israel.

Authors of the report said its content was shared with the Israeli government. There was no immediate comment from Israeli authorities.

The report also said detainees were taken from Gaza, Israel and the West Bank, and says Israel has not provided information regarding the fate or whereabouts of many, adding that the International Committee of the Red Cross has been denied access to facilities where they are held.

"Detainees said they were held in cage-like facilities, stripped naked for prolonged periods, wearing only diapers. Their testimonies told of prolonged blindfolding, deprivation of food, sleep and water, and being subjected to electric shocks and being burnt with cigarettes," a summary of the report said.

"Some detainees said dogs were released on them, and others said they were subjected to waterboarding, or that their hands were tied and they were suspended from the ceiling," it added. "Some women and men also spoke of sexual and gender-based violence."

The report said the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the Israeli-occupied West Bank, had also "continued to carry out arbitrary detention and torture or other ill-treatment in the West Bank, reportedly principally to suppress criticism and political opposition."

On Wednesday, an Israeli military court extended the detention of eight out of nine soldiers detained over what a defense lawyer said were allegations of sexual abuse of a Palestinian at Sde Teiman — a shadowy facility where Israel has held prisoners from Gaza during the war. The soldiers' detention triggered angry protests by supporters demanding their release.

The war in Gaza erupted after Hamas' surprise attack on southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people that day and taking 250 others hostage. Israel's retaliatory operation has obliterated entire neighborhoods in Gaza and forced some 80% of the population to flee their homes. Over 39,000 Palestinians

have been killed, according to Gaza's Health Ministry which doesn't distinguish between civilians and combatants in its count.

From August, migrants seeking refuge in Italy could be taken to Albania pending asylum decisions

By LLAZAR SEMINI Associated Press

GJADER, Albania (AP) — Migrants rescued at sea while attempting to reach Italy may see themselves transported to Albania beginning next month while their asylum claims are processed, under a controversial deal in which the small Balkan country will host thousands of asylum-seekers on Italy's behalf.

Speaking during a visit to Albania in June, Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni said the two centers designed to shelter the migrants would be ready to host the first 1,000 people by Aug. 1. But with that day at hand, intensive construction is still underway in one of them, casting doubt on whether it will be entirely ready in time. Neither Italy nor Albania has indicated when the first migrants are likely to arrive.

The five-year deal, signed by Meloni and her Albanian counterpart, Edi Rama, last November, provides for the sheltering of up to 3,000 migrants picked up by the Italian coast guard in international waters each month. They will be screened initially on board the ships that have rescued them, before being sent to Albania for additional screening.

The centers will house only adult men, Italy's ambassador to Albania, Fabrizio Bucci, told The Associated Press. People deemed to be vulnerable — women, children, the elderly and those who are ill or victims of torture — will be accommodated in Italy. Families will also not be separated, the ambassador said. Those who are sent to Albania will retain their right under international and European Union law to apply for asylum in Italy and have their claims processed there.

With each claim taking around a month to process, the number of people sent to Albania could reach 36,000 in a year. Italy has agreed to welcome those who are granted asylum. Those whose applications are rejected face deportation directly from Albania, the ambassador said.

Endorsed by European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen as an example of "out-of-box thinking" on tackling the issue of migration into the European Union, the deal has been slammed by human rights groups as setting a dangerous precedent.

"The International Rescue Committee (IRC) highlights the risks associated with the scheme and urges the EU and its member states not to use this dangerous model as a blueprint for their own approaches to asylum and migration," the humanitarian organization said in a July 23 statement. Earlier this year, the IRC had described the deal as "costly, cruel and counterproductive."

It is not the first time a country has sought to outsource the housing of asylum-seekers. New British Prime Minister Keir Starmer has scrapped the former Conservative government's much-criticized plan to send some migrants to Rwanda to process their asylum claims. New Home Secretary Yvette Copper said the cost of 700 million pounds (\$904 million) for the plan was the "most shocking waste of taxpayer money I have ever seen."

The two centers in Albania will cost Italy 670 million euros (\$730 million) over five years. The facilities will be fully run by Italy and both centers are under Italian jurisdiction, while Albanian guards will provide external security.

One of the centers, in the port of Shengjin on Albania's Adriatic coast, has been ready for more than a month. But the other, about 24 kilometers (15 miles) to its east near a former military airport in Gjader, was still far from being finished with just a week to go before its scheduled opening date.

Bucci, the Italian ambassador, said the first delay came due to the crumbling soil at the Gjader camp site, which needed intervention to consolidate it. Also the heat wave in July forced authorities to impose a break during the hottest hours of the day.

"Our main concern is, and will remain, the absolute safety and protection of the workers on the site and, eventually, of the migrants that will be hosted in Gjader," Bucci said.

The Associated Press was not allowed access to the camp, but evidence of intensive construction was clear, with two excavators and a tall crane working furiously, digging to prepare for the installation of a perimeter fence around the roughly 50-acre (20-hectare) site and moving huge pipes.

Container buildings that will provide housing for the camp residents were already installed, but piles of panels and frames to build further housing units lay at the main entrance.

The head of the nearby village of Gjader and local residents said work at the center was far from complete.

Away from the controversy sparked by the deal elsewhere, residents of the low-income village — a source of emigration itself — said they appreciated the center being built in their area. With few local job opportunities, more than two-thirds of Gjader's population has emigrated to other European countries over the past 30 years, and some locals said they felt an affinity with the prospective residents of the migrant center.

"Honoring those in need will make us more in number, despite their race, language or nation," said Bib Lazri, a 70-year-old Gjader resident.

The center is also bringing an economic boom to the impoverished rural area.

"The people have seen their life improved. They are looking to get employed. There is movement and vivacity," said village head Sander Preka. "People are very happy." His own shop, he said, had seen 30% higher turnover in the past month, while some locals have rented their homes to migrant center employees and others have found work at the center.

In Shengjin, a 4,000-square-meter (43,000-square-foot) area contains housing units and offices at the port, surrounded by a five-meter (16-foot) high metal fence topped with barbed wire. A sign reads: "Security Level 1." Journalists were not allowed access.

Meloni and her right-wing allies have long demanded European countries share more of the migration burden. She has held up the Albania agreement as an innovative solution to a problem that has vexed the EU for years.

She became a mother after Islamic State captivity. A decade on, Yazidi community shuns her children

By MARIAM FAM and SALAR SALIM Associated Press

DOHUK, Iraq (AP) — The day they came to take her children, the young mother bundled them up against the cold. She asked her nearly 6-year-old son to take care of his younger sister.

"Don't let anyone hit her," she told the boy. "OK, Mama," she remembers him replying.

Much else was left unsaid.

Then, as the car carried her boy and girl away to a life without her in a children's home in Syria, a country she knew she would soon leave, the woman wept.

Nearly a decade ago, K, the mother, had been a child herself, about 13, when she and her family were captured in Iraq by militants from the Islamic State group. The extremists waged an onslaught that started in August 2014 and ravaged her Yazidi community, a small religious minority.

Many were forced to flee their homes; thousands were killed or abducted, including many women and girls subjected to sexual violence and enslavement.

Ten years on, a traumatized Yazidi community is still convulsed by the legacy of IS's brutal campaign, well after the group's territorial defeat. Nearly 2,600 Yazidis are still considered missing, to the anguish of their families. Former captives grapple with the trauma of what they endured. Many have been weathering life in displacement camps.

Among the most fraught questions is the fate of children like K's — born to women who had been captured and raped by or married to the extremists. The Associated Press is identifying K only by her first initial due to the backlash that mothers in her sensitive situation might face.

While the community has embraced the return of mothers like her, the children's status is more contentious, colliding with long-standing Yazidi beliefs and newer scars. Many Yazidis vehemently reject accepting these children in the community, viewing them as the non-Yazidi offspring of men who inflicted unimaginable

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nable horrors and humiliations.

In her dreams, K would see herself back with her family, but she knew she couldn't have both: her family and children. Then came the moment when she was found in Syria's al-Hol camp housing IS-linked families.

"My family said they won't receive them. The Yazidi community, too, won't receive them," she said of the children.

Though heartbroken by what the militants did to her and others, the children are, to her, simply the babies who came out of her body.

"They're kids; they've committed no sin," she said. "They're a piece of my heart."

Thus, as the 10th anniversary of the IS onslaught approaches, K finds herself reeling.

Her ordeal is one stark example of the very personal toll IS crimes against Yazidis, which a United Nations team characterized as genocide, continue to exact on many lives.

"A lot of our problems are still pending, like missing people, mass graves, justice, reconciliation, return, everything," said Natia Navrouzov, executive director of Yazda, an NGO supporting the Yazidi community.

"We're facing existential threats, and at the same time we're not equipped because of the trauma, the division and the lack of unity to find any way forward."

For children like K's, the challenges are multifaceted.

Under long-standing beliefs, community members must have two Yazidi parents. Even if the community accepted the children, Iraqi laws would require them to be registered as Muslim, said Hadi Babasheikh, whose now-deceased brother was the Yazidi spiritual leader during IS atrocities. He questioned how a family can raise children whose father may have killed some of its own.

Navrouzov agreed these cases were complex and called for help resolving them: "You don't know how to approach this issue without harming the mother, harming the child, harming the community."

Families who accept these children might be ostracized, she added.

The result: Some missing Yazidi women don't return, staying behind with IS-linked families to avoid being separated from their children, Navrouzov said.

Hussein al Qaidi, director of an office tasked with rescuing kidnapped Yazidis, said many of the missing are believed to be in Syria, especially in al-Hol, and suggested they could be hiding their Yazidi identity for fear of what IS supporters in the camp would do to them.

Hadi Babasheikh said his brother had urged the community to welcome back the once-captured survivors -- a position that was considered relatively progressive given stigma surrounding rape and forced conversions.

But he said it's "impossible" for a mother to stay in the community and in Iraq with children from IS-affiliated fathers and urges the international community to resettle those who want to keep their children.

Some Yazidi mothers, he added, want nothing to do with children from IS-affiliated fathers.

But for those yearning for their children, the options are tormenting.

"On the one hand, I want my family and on the other, I keep thinking about my children," K said.

The familiar pieces of K's previous life faded away during an adolescence and young adulthood spent in an IS-dominated world.

The militants separated her from family members. She had to trade her Kurdish dialect for Arabic. For years, she's lived under a different name.

Gradually, she started praying and fasting without being told to. She became so used to being swathed in the IS-required garb for women — black robes, gloves, a face covering — that, at first, she felt virtually naked when she donned other clothes.

She had been robbed of her childhood.

"They raped us and sold us off and deprived us of our families when we were kids. They've slaughtered our men," she said, her words coming in like rapid fire. "Our lives have been wasted."

She recalled how she told a much older man who raped her that she was "just a child." It didn't matter. "He had a heart of stone."

Her life took sharp turns during her years away from home. She was sold to a man who freed her from

enslavement and, eventually, she said, ended up getting married more than once, including to the men who became her children's fathers. She said she continued enduring the al-Hol camp's hardships rather than identify herself to authorities as a Yazidi, primarily so she could stay with her children.

After she was found, K learned that there's no word about the fate of her parents and one of her sisters. For all her anguish, K's face lights up when she talks about her children; she giggles, becomes more animated.

She recalls how she would hug them before going to sleep; how they would ask for a bedtime story. She talks proudly about raising them well despite everything.

Her reunion with her family and Yazidi community was celebrated and felt good. But she misses her son and daughter. Their absence stings when she tastes foods they like (eggs and instant noodles are their favorites). She believes she can feel them too, asking where she is, why she isn't with them.

She recalls how, after they separated, she would sniff the clothes they left behind and cry.

She dreams of a life with her children — outside of Iraq.

"I am so worn out," she said. "I wonder how we still have any soul left in us."

Harris is calibrating her policy pitch for going to battle with Trump

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris is facing the delicate task of calibrating her policy pitch to American voters, a standard task for any White House hopeful but one that comes with additional challenges this year.

First, Harris is running for president while serving under President Joe Biden, meaning she's linked to anything that happened — or will happen — on his watch. She inherits accomplishments like limiting the cost of insulin but also the administration's struggle to prevent illegal border crossings.

Second, Harris has baggage from her own failed campaign for president before she became Biden's running mate four years ago. During that Democratic primary, she backed an array of progressive proposals that Republicans have highlighted to paint her as "dangerously liberal."

Harris has already disavowed some of her earlier positions, such as a ban on fracking and support for single-payer healthcare. And she's pledging to keep some of Biden's promises, including no tax increases on anyone making less than \$400,000 a year.

That means Harris' path to the White House could depend on her ability to chart a course toward the country's future while being selective about her past. Success will mean keeping Democrats united behind her vision while keeping the focus on Republican candidate Donald Trump's record of undermining abortion rights and his challenges to democratic traditions.

Everything will have to happen at unprecedented speed because Harris was abruptly thrust into the spotlight after Biden decided to drop his reelection bid a little more than a week ago. Her newly designed campaign website doesn't even include a policy section.

"You're building the plane while you're flying it," said Bakari Sellers, a Harris ally who co-chaired her campaign four years ago.

Sellers said Harris should make sure to focus on bread-and-butter issues like medical debt.

"You can see the history she represents. You can hear that in her voice," Sellers said. "But you still have to attract voters who don't know who you are, who don't subscribe to the historic nature of your campaign."

Unsurprisingly, Harris has embraced much of the same platform as Biden. In her stump speeches since jumping into the presidential race, she promotes affordable child care, paid family leave and expanded health care.

On Tuesday in Atlanta, she promised to target price gouging and hidden bank fees. She always emphasizes restoring the nationwide right to abortion, which was eliminated two years ago by the U.S. Supreme Court.

She's also endorsing new proposals announced by Biden since she took over the campaign, including term limits for Supreme Court justices and binding ethics rules. In a statement, Harris said the court faces a "clear crisis of confidence" that needs to be addressed.

Presidential candidates often detail their policy ideas during primaries as they try to differentiate themselves within their party. However, Harris leapfrogged that step this year, and she may face less pressure in the compressed campaign to spell out exactly how new programs will be funded and implemented.

"In this environment, the Democratic candidate needs enough policy to tell people how she's going to bring her fight for the future alive, but not so much that it weighs down the speeches," said Jamal Simmons, a former communications director in the vice president's office.

Kevin Munoz, a spokesperson for Harris, said she would "build on the Biden-Harris Administration's historic agenda" and offer a "stark contrast" to Trump's plans to cut taxes for the wealthy and eliminate the Affordable Care Act.

Harris wants to keep Democrats united as the campaign enters its final few months. So far, intra-party skirmishes have been rare but not eliminated.

Two billionaire donors said that Harris should replace Lina Khan, the chair of the Federal Trade Commission appointed by Biden, if elected because of her aggressive use of antitrust law. In response, liberals rallied to Khan's defense and called on Harris to leave her in place. Harris hasn't commented on the issue.

Adam Green, co-founder of the Progressive Change Campaign Committee, said the White House has built "high trust" with liberal groups that will buoy Harris through the election. He doubted she would dramatically change course from the Biden administration, but expected that "she will have her own unique flavor and point of emphasis."

Green added, "I don't think anybody should be afraid of a gut check."

Some of Harris' shifts may be more about emphasis than outright changes. For example, her recent remarks on the Gaza war did not create any daylight between her and Biden, but Harris placed more emphasis on Palestinian suffering. She also included clearer outreach to Americans who have been demoralized by the conflict.

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

Republicans want to prevent Harris from reinventing herself for the general election, aiming to saddle her with Biden-era controversies and her own campaign from four years ago.

"She was involved in every one of Joe Biden's failures, but we've also seen what her vision is for president," said Mike Berg, communications director for the National Republican Senatorial Committee. "She would make things even worse."

Trump's team and its allies have been sifting through videos where Harris talked about providing healthcare to immigrants who are in the country illegally and decriminalizing border crossings. And they're blaming her for migration challenges that took place before border crossings dropped under Biden's latest policies.

Although Trump is hardly consistent when it comes to policy proposals, Berg said there's more risk to Harris because she's less well-known and public views on her can still be shaped.

"She's going to come off as a liar," he said. "Was she lying then or is she lying now?"

Simmons doubted voters would care about her past positions on issues like the "defund the police" movement, which Harris praised for questioning whether money was being wisely spent on public safety, because she served in an administration that pumped more money into law enforcement.

"Five years ago she said one thing, but two years ago she did something about it, and the crime rate is lower today," he said.

About 8 in 10 Democrats are satisfied with Harris in stark shift after Biden drops out: AP-NORC poll

By SEUNG MIN KIM and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris appears to have energized Democrats in the early days of her candidacy, with the surge in warm feelings extending across multiple groups, including some key Democratic constituencies that had been especially tepid about President Joe Biden, a new poll shows.

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About 8 in 10 Democrats say they would be somewhat or very satisfied if Harris became the Democratic nominee for president, according to the survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research, which was conducted after Biden withdrew from the race.

In a separate AP-NORC poll, taken before Biden dropped out but after his debate against former President Donald Trump, only about 4 in 10 Democrats said they were somewhat or very satisfied that he was the Democratic Party's likely nominee for president.

The rapidly changing views among Democrats in such a short time span underscore how swiftly the party — from rank-and-file voters to elected officials — has coalesced behind Harris as its standard-bearer, motivated by the fresh face at the top of the ticket and newfound confidence in the party's prospects against Trump in November.

Gary Hines, a Democrat from Philadelphia, said he wasn't particularly impressed by Harris' first presidential bid but now, she's shown "she's up to the task, can do the work, has proven that she's running a strong campaign so far and maybe on a bigger level, she's somebody that can beat Donald Trump." All those factors have ignited an enthusiasm in Hines that wasn't there when Biden was still in the race, he said.

"I really want to go out and maybe knock on doors, which I would've never done," said Hines, 68. "It's jazzed me up quite a bit."

Americans are also more likely to say that Harris would make a good president than they were earlier in July, a shift that was primarily driven by Democrats. They still see a tough contest looming, though: A majority of U.S. adults, 56%, say that if Trump and Harris are their parties' nominees for the general election in November, Trump is more likely to win.

Lauren Schulman, a Democrat from Pompano Beach, Florida, said she admires Biden and what he has accomplished during his presidency. But she said with him at the top of the ticket, "I have just been so terrified that we were going to lose."

With Harris, on the other hand, "she's been a bright, shining star," said Schulman, 66, noting that the vice president is "smart and she's younger, and she even comes off younger than she is. That makes such a huge contrast with Trump."

Growing enthusiasm for Harris — especially compared to Biden

About 7 in 10 Black adults and about half of Hispanic adults would be satisfied with Harris as the Democratic nominee — a marked increase from earlier in July, when about half of Black adults and 15% of Hispanic adults felt satisfied with Biden as the Democrats' expected nominee. (The poll did not include enough Asian adults to analyze their responses separately.)

The share of younger adults (those under the age of 45) who say they would be satisfied with Harris as the nominee, at around 4 in 10, is higher than the 17% who said they were satisfied with Biden in July.

Bryan Seigler, a Democrat from Raleigh, North Carolina, praised Harris' "broad appeal" and pointed to a contrast that Democrats weren't able to make before.

"Donald Trump is the old guy now," said Seigler, 36.

The new poll shows that Harris' overall favorability has risen slightly, from 39% at the beginning of the summer — before the debate — to 46% now. Democrats' opinions of Harris have also shifted in a slightly more positive direction. Eight in 10 Democrats have a positive view of Harris, up slightly from around 7 in 10 in early June.

Harris would be a historic candidate — she would be the first woman to win the presidency, as well as the first Black woman, the first South Asian American, and the first Asian American. Around 4 in 10 Americans say that it would be a good thing for the country to elect either a woman or a person of color to be president. Even more — about 6 in 10 when asked about electing a person of color and about half when asked about electing a woman — say it does not matter.

Majorities of Democrats, however, say it would be good for the country to elect a woman or person of color.

Views of Biden's decision

Most Americans, 54%, say they have heard or read a lot about Biden's decision to withdraw from the

2024 presidential race. About three-quarters of Americans approve of his decision to withdraw as the Democratic nominee for president, including most Democrats and Republicans.

For many Democrats, Biden's catastrophic June 27 debate showed that — even if they were largely satisfied with his accomplishments during his time in office — the incumbent president should not be running for a second term because of concerns about how his age was affecting his public performance or his ability to campaign effectively against Trump.

"When I watched the debate, you could just tell his cognitive ability was hardly there," said Julian Castañeda, a Democrat in Pocatello, Idaho. "He had a hard time forming sentences and a lot of his responses, I couldn't even understand what he was saying. At his age right now, it was appropriate for him to stand aside."

Biden's choice to endorse Harris as the Democratic nominee for president is slightly more divisive, with about half of U.S. adults in support, though Democrats overwhelmingly approve. There are similar levels of support for Biden's decision to serve out the rest of his presidential term.

Withdrawing from the race didn't do much to change Americans' views of Biden overall. About 4 in 10 Americans approve of how Biden is handling his job as president. That number is roughly in line with where it has been for the last two years. Biden's favorability ratings are similar to where they were before he dropped out of the race, with about 4 in 10 adults and about three-quarters of Democrats holding a positive view.

Americans see a tough election contest for Harris

Even as the new Harris campaign has reasons for optimism, the vice president faces an opponent who is better known by the country and who has a reputation for a loyal base of support.

Most Americans perceive Trump as having the advantage going into the November election. A majority of U.S. adults say that if Trump and Harris are the candidates, Trump is more likely to win. About 9 in 10 Republicans say Trump is more likely to become president, while only about 7 in 10 Democrats say that about Harris.

Schulman thinks Harris is more likely to win this fall. Still, she added: "Democrats, we're like a real, nervous, paranoid bunch these days."

First interest rate cut in 4 years likely on the horizon as the Federal Reserve meets

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — With the end of their two-year fight against inflation in sight, Federal Reserve officials are likely Wednesday to set the stage for the first cut to their key interest rate in four years, a major shift in policy that could eventually lower borrowing costs for U.S. consumers and businesses.

Inflation has been falling steadily closer to the Fed's 2% target for the past several months. And the job market has cooled, with the unemployment rate rising about a half-point this year to 4.1%. Fed officials have said that they are seeking to balance the need to keep rates high enough to control inflation without keeping them too high for too long and causing a recession.

Rate cuts — as early as September — could help the Fed achieve a "soft landing," in which high inflation is defeated without an economic downturn. Such an outcome might also affect this year's presidential race, as Republicans have sought to tie Vice President Kamala Harris to the inflation spike of the past three years. Former President Donald Trump said the Fed shouldn't cut rates before the election.

"While I don't believe we have reached our final destination, I do believe we are getting closer to the time when a cut in the policy rate is warranted," Christopher Waller, a member of the Fed's governing board, said earlier this month.

Financial market traders have priced in 100% odds that the central bank will reduce its benchmark rate at its Sept. 17-18 meeting, according to futures markets, so Fed Chair Jerome Powell does not need to provide further guidance to markets Wednesday about the timing of a cut, economists say.

Instead, Powell will have more opportunities in the coming months to illustrate how the Fed is thinking

about inflation and interest rates, particularly in his speech in late August at the annual Fed conference in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. As a result, he may not provide much of a hint Wednesday regarding how quickly the Fed will cut rates after it starts doing so. Economists expect relatively gradual cuts, unless there is evidence the job market is faltering, which would spur the Fed to move faster.

Even so, the Fed could alter several parts of the statement it releases after each meeting to lay the groundwork for a cut in September.

In the statement it released after its June meeting, for example, Fed officials said, "In recent months, there has been modest further progress toward the (Fed's) 2% inflation objective." On Wednesday, the Fed could drop "modest" or alter it in some other way to underscore that additional progress on inflation has been achieved.

In the latest piece of good news on price increases, on Friday the government said that yearly inflation fell to 2.5% in July, according to the Fed's preferred inflation measure. That is down from 2.6% the previous month and the lowest since February 2021, when inflation was just starting to accelerate.

One encouraging sign for the Fed is that rental prices, a key driver of broader inflation, have started to noticeably cool, as new apartment buildings have been completed in many large cities.

Rental inflation was a leading example of what economists call "catch-up" inflation, in which prices were still rising this year because of distortions from the pandemic economy. Many Americans sought more living space or moved out on their own during COVID, pushing up the cost of rents and homes.

The government's rental inflation measures have been rising faster than usual, well into this year, to reflect those increases. This even as rapid apartment building has slowed cost increases for new leases. Other examples of "catch-up" inflation include car insurance, which soared more than 20% earlier this year from a year ago, as insurance companies have charged more to reflect the pandemic-era spike in new-car prices. Yet, even car insurance costs have started to rise more slowly.

Powell has long said the Fed was seeking "greater confidence" that inflation was falling back to the Fed's 2% target. Earlier this month — even before the latest inflation readings — he said that recent inflation data does "add somewhat to confidence" that it is cooling.

Powell and other Fed officials have also worried that strong job growth and rapidly rising paychecks would potentially fuel inflation, as some companies would likely raise prices to offset the higher labor costs.

But hiring and wage growth have slowed in recent months, and Powell this month acknowledged the job market is "not a source of broad inflationary pressures for the economy."

On Friday, the government will release a quarterly measure of wage growth, which is likely to show that paychecks, while still growing at a healthy pace, are not growing as fast as a year ago, adding to evidence that inflationary pressures have eased.

Carter Center unable to verify Venezuela election results, blasts officials for lack of transparency

By JOSHUA GOODMAN, GISELA SALOMON and REGINA GARCIA CANO Associated Press
CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — The Carter Center said it was unable to verify the results of Venezuela's presidential election, blaming authorities for a "complete lack of transparency" in declaring Nicolas Maduro the winner without providing any individual polling tallies.

The statement Tuesday night by the Atlanta-based group is perhaps the harshest rebuke yet of Venezuela's chaotic election process because it comes from one of just a handful of outside groups invited by the Maduro government to observe the vote.

"The electoral authority's failure to announce disaggregated results by polling station constitutes a serious breach of electoral principles," the Carter Center said. The group, which had a technical mission of 17 experts spread out in four cities across Venezuela, added that the election did not meet international standards and "cannot be considered democratic."

The Carter Center's harsh criticism capped a second long day of protests against the results by opponents of Maduro who said their candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez, trounced the incumbent by a more than

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two-to-one margin.

Maduro's government hasn't taken lightly to the criticism and ratcheted up their attacks on their opponents Tuesday, with some allies suggesting the opposition's most influential leader and a presidential candidate be arrested.

A day after Maduro was declared the winner by a National Electoral Council that is loyal to him and the ruling party, the attacks, which were aired on national television, followed the opposition's surprise release of detailed voting data that it said shows that Edmundo González won by a landslide.

The electoral council has not released any results from the polling center level, which come from tally sheets that the more than 30,000 electronic voting machines print after polls close. It is not obligated to do so, but in previous elections it has posted the figures online within hours.

United States President Joe Biden and Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva spoke by phone and agreed that Venezuela must release the data, saying the election's outcome "represents a critical moment for democracy in the hemisphere," according to a White House summary of the call.

Biden and Lula "agreed on the need for immediate release of full, transparent, and detailed voting data at the polling station level by the Venezuelan electoral authorities," it said.

Venezuela has the world's largest proven crude reserves and once boasted Latin America's most advanced economy, but it entered into free fall after Maduro took the helm in 2013. Plummeting oil prices, widespread shortages and hyperinflation that soared past 130,000% led to social unrest and mass emigration.

More than 7.7 million Venezuelans have left the country since 2014, the largest exodus in Latin America's recent history.

As both sides defended their claim to victory, thousands of their supporters took to the streets of the capital, Caracas.

A huge crowd of opposition supporters gathered outside the United Nations' offices. Opposition powerhouse Maria Corina Machado, standing atop a truck, called on the National Electoral Council to release the tally sheets, saying, "Why don't they publish them?"

Machado said the main opposition coalition has obtained more than 84% of the tally sheets, which show González garnered more than twice as many votes as Maduro.

"The only thing we are willing to negotiate is the peaceful transition," Machado said, as the crowd chanted: "We have no fear!"

Opposition supporters elsewhere in the city were met with tear gas Tuesday.

Attorney General Tarek William Saab told reporters that more than 700 protesters were arrested in nationwide demonstrations Monday. He added that one officer was killed.

Machado and González urged their supporters to remain calm and avoid violence.

"And remember this figure, when the tally sheets are counted, yours truly will have more than 8 million votes," González said, flanked by his wife and Machado, whom Maduro's government barred from running for political office for 15 years. "We are going to begin the reconstruction of Venezuela."

Their celebration came hours after the Organization of American States lambasted the government for not releasing the data and suggested a new election that would be monitored by international observers.

"The worst form of repression, the most vile, is to prevent the people from finding solutions through elections," the OAS said in a statement. "The obligation of each institution in Venezuela should be to ensure freedom, justice, and transparency in the electoral process."

Maduro's closest ruling party allies came to his defense. National Assembly President Jorge Rodríguez — his chief negotiator in dialogues with the U.S. and the opposition — insisted Maduro was the indisputable winner and called the opposition violent fascists.

Praising the arrest of the protesters, he said Machado should be jailed and so should González, "because he is the leader of the fascist conspiracy that is trying to impose itself in Venezuela."

Diosdado Cabello, a lawmaker and ruling party leader, later said: "We are going to screw them because these people do not deserve to shed one more drop of blood for fascism."

United Nations Human Rights Chief Volker Türk expressed alarm over the post-election climate.

"Hundreds of people have been arrested, including children. This troubles me deeply," he said in a statement. "I am alarmed by reports of disproportionate use of force by law enforcement officials along with violence by armed individuals supporting the Government."

Long lines of residents started to build Tuesday outside supermarkets and other stores in Caracas in apparent anticipation of a prolonged period of demonstrations that could lead to food shortages.

In the port city of La Guaira, people toppled a statue of Maduro's mentor and predecessor, the late Hugo Chávez, dragged it to the street and set it on fire during Monday's protests. Maduro unveiled the statue in 2017, and by Tuesday all that remained was its base, littered with twisted rebar and broken cement.

The election 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 would take control of an economy recovering from collapse and a population desperate for change.

During a televised meeting of the National Defense Council on Tuesday, Maduro blamed retired diplomat Edmundo González Urrutia for "the criminal violence, the criminals, the wounded, the dead, the destruction."

"You will be directly responsible, Mr. González Urrutia, and you, Mrs. Machado, and justice has to come, in Venezuela there has to be justice because these things cannot happen again."

Later, speaking from the balcony of the presidential palace, Maduro called González a coward and challenged him to face him.

"Come after me!" he yelled. "Show me your face. ... Where are you hiding, mister coward?"

Machado stunned Venezuelans on Monday when she announced that the opposition had acquired the tally sheets, which showed that González received roughly 6.2 million votes compared with 2.7 million for Maduro. Hours earlier, the electoral council reported a count of about 5.1 million for Maduro, against more than 4.4 million for González.

Machado said the opposition created a searchable website with images of each tally sheet.

The number of eligible voters was estimated to be around 17 million. Another 4 million Venezuelans are registered but live abroad, and many did not meet the requirements to register to cast ballots overseas.

As Machado and González stood atop the truck, supporters began chanting "President! President!"

"This gathering smells like triumph," González told them.

At boisterous Georgia rally, Harris dares Trump to 'say it to my face' and show up for their debate

By WILL WEISSERT, BILL BARROW and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris told a cheering, boisterous, packed Atlanta arena on Tuesday that the next 98 days would be a fight, but they'd win come November, as she taunted Donald Trump for wavering on whether he'd show up for their upcoming debate.

"The momentum in this race is shifting," the likely nominee said. "And there are signs Donald Trump is feeling it."

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 Harris is the likely nominee, Democrats are expressing new hopes of an expanded electoral map.

In the state that delivered Biden his narrowest victory margin in 2020, Harris pulled off what has been a signature Trump event: A big, loud rally full of supporters cheering her name, as she mocked her rival and his running mate JD Vance as "just plain weird," and derided their policies as backward, outdated and dangerous.

Trump earlier said he'd debate Harris, but is now questioning the value of a meetup and saying he "probably" will debate her, but he "can also make a case for not doing it."

Harris seized on it. "So he won't debate me, but he and his running mate have a lot to say about me," she said. "And by the way, don't you find some of their stuff to just be plain weird."

"Well Donald," she said, addressing him head-on. "I do hope you'll reconsider. Meet me on the debate

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stage ... because as the saying goes, if you've got something to say, say it to my face." Trump has suggested the Sept. 10 debate on ABC News should be moved to a different network, calling ABC "fake news."

Harris hasn't yet formally seized the Democrat nomination, though she is the only person who met the qualifications to vie for it, the Democratic National Committee announced Tuesday, and will all-but-certainly clinch it come Monday when the party concludes a virtual roll call vote. Her pick of a running mate is also expected by early next week, when Harris plans to begin a seven-stop tour of battleground states to hold rallies alongside her vice presidential nominee.

On Tuesday, the roughly 8,000-capacity basketball arena at Georgia State University was filled to its rafters with voters waving signs, dancing to the Harris campaign soundtrack and a performance by Megan Thee Stallion. Such an atmosphere would not have been possible just 10 days ago, with the party reeling over whether the 81-year-old Biden would remain in the race after a dismal performance magnified concerns about his age and abilities and ultimately ended his campaign.

"This is like Barack Obama 2008 on steroids for me," said Mildred Hobson Doss, a 59-year-old who came downtown from suburban Lilburn. "I would have voted for President Biden again. But we are ready."

Harris' campaign argues her appeal to young people, working-age women and non-white voters has scrambled the dynamics in Georgia and other states that are demographically similar, from North Carolina to Nevada and Arizona.

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.

"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."

Harris began Tuesday with her days as a prosecutor — setting up the contrast between the law and Trump's many legal problems and misdeeds. But she also aggressively defended the Biden administration's record and said she would work to pass voting rights legislation and restore abortion rights stripped by the fall of *Roe v. Wade*.

"America has tried these failed policies before. And we are not going back. We're not going back," Harris said, shaking her head no as the crowd cheered "we're not going back."

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."

And Trump is not taking chances. Earlier Tuesday, the former president announced that he would come to Atlanta on Saturday for a rally in the same Georgia State arena.

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

In a call with supporters after her speech, Harris thanked them for their work and noted early voting

starts in some states in just 38 days.

"This is a sprint," she said. "And we know what we need to do to cross the finish line."

The fast-growing, diversifying Atlanta suburbs and exurbs 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.

Project 2025 shakes up leadership after criticism from Democrats and Trump, but says work goes on

By ALI SWENSON and LISA MASCARO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The director of the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 vision for a complete overhaul of the federal government stepped down Tuesday after blowback from Donald Trump's campaign, which has tried to disavow the program created by many of the former president's allies and former aides.

Heritage Foundation President Kevin Roberts said Paul Dans' exit comes after the project "completed exactly what it set out to do." Roberts, who has emerged as a chief spokesman for the effort, plans to lead Project 2025 going forward.

"Our collective efforts to build a personnel apparatus for policymakers of all levels — federal, state, and local — will continue," Roberts said.

What started as an obscure far-right wish list is now a focal point in the 2024 campaign. Democrats for the past several months have made Project 2025 a key election-year cudgel, pointing to the ultraconservative policy blueprint as a glimpse into how extreme another Trump administration could be.

The nearly 1,000-page handbook lays out sweeping changes in the federal government, including altering personnel rules to ensure government workers are more loyal to the president. Heritage is building a database of potential new hires to staff a second Trump White House.

Yet Trump has repeatedly disavowed the document, saying on social media he hasn't read it and doesn't know anything about it. At a rally in Michigan earlier this month, he said Project 2025 was written by people on the "severe right" and some of the things in it are "seriously extreme."

"President Trump's campaign has been very clear for over a year that Project 2025 had nothing to do with the campaign, did not speak for the campaign, and should not be associated with the campaign or the President in any way," Trump campaign advisers Susie Wiles and Chris LaCivita said in a statement.

They said, "Reports of Project 2025's demise would be greatly welcomed and should serve as notice to anyone or any group trying to misrepresent their influence with President Trump and his campaign — it will not end well for you."

But Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Trump's running mate, wrote a foreword to a forthcoming book by Roberts in which he lauds the Heritage Foundation's work. A copy of the foreword was obtained by The Associated Press.

"The Heritage Foundation isn't some random outpost on Capitol Hill; it is and has been the most influential engine of ideas for Republicans from Ronald Reagan to Donald Trump," wrote Vance.

Quoting Roberts elsewhere in the book, Vance writes: "We are now all realizing that it's time to circle

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the wagons and load the muskets. In the fights that lay ahead, these ideas are an essential weapon.”

Trump campaign representatives did not respond to messages inquiring about whether the campaign asked or pushed for Dans to step down from the project. The Heritage Foundation said Dans left voluntarily and it was not under pressure from the Trump campaign. Dans didn't immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

Project 2025 has many ties to Trump's orbit

In many ways, Project 2025 served as a potential far-right White House in waiting, a constellation of outside groups that would be ready for action if Trump wins a second term.

The project included not only the detailed policy proposals that Trump could put into place on day one at the White House. Project 2025 was also building a personnel database of resumes for potential hires, drawing Americans to Washington to staff a new Trump administration.

Many Trump allies and former top aides contributed to the project. Dans formerly worked as a personnel official for the Trump administration. And Trump regularly campaigns on many of the same proposals in the Project 2025 book — from mass deportations to upending the Justice Department — though some of its other proposals, including further taxes on tips, conflict with some of what Trump has pledged on the campaign trail.

It was clear that Project 2025 was becoming a liability for Trump and the Republican Party.

Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign and top Democrats have repeatedly tied Trump to Project 2025 as they argue against a second term for the former president.

The Harris campaign said Project 2025 remains linked to Trump's agenda, written by his allies for him to "inflict" on the country.

"Hiding the 920-page blueprint from the American people doesn't make it less real — in fact, it should make voters more concerned about what else Trump and his allies are hiding," said Harris for President Campaign Manager Julie Chavez Rodriguez.

For months Trump's campaign had warned outside groups, and Heritage in particular, that they did not speak for the former president.

In an interview from the Republican convention first published by Politico, LaCivita said Project 2025 was a problem because "the issues that are going to win us this campaign are not the issues that they want to talk about."

It was almost certain than Trump's campaign forced the shakeup, said one former Heritage aide.

Trump's team was well aware it couldn't risk any missteps from Heritage in this final stretch ahead of the election.

By announcing the departure, Roberts appeared to be sending a signal to the Trump campaign that changes were being made at Heritage to tamp down any concerns over Project 2025, said another conservative familiar with the situation.

If Trump wins the White House, he almost certainly will need to rely on Heritage and other outside entities to help quickly staff a new administration, the person said.

That person and the former aide would only talk on condition of anonymity to discuss private conversations.

Heritage says Project 2025 is not going away

Project 2025's website will remain live and the group will continue vetting resumes for its nearly 20,000-person database of potential officials eager to execute its vision for government, the Heritage Foundation said Tuesday.

The group said Dans, who had started the project from scratch more than two years ago, will leave the Heritage Foundation in August. Roberts will now run Project 2025 operations.

Roberts has faced criticism in recent weeks after he said on an episode of former Trump aide Steve Bannon's "War Room" podcast that the country is in the midst of a "second American Revolution" that will be bloodless "if the left allows it to be."

Earlier this month, in an interview before beginning a prison sentence for defying a congressional sub-

poena, Bannon mentioned Roberts as the type of leader who could land a top job in a Trump White House.

Harris is planning a tour of battleground states next week with her yet-to-be-named running mate

By BILL BARROW, STEVE PEOPLES and ZEKE MILLER Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris is set to launch a battleground tour next week with her yet-to-be-named running mate, with stops in seven swing states stretching from Pennsylvania to Nevada, her campaign said Tuesday.

The planned tour is the latest sign of the whirlwind pace at which Harris has gone from President Joe Biden's supportive running mate to likely Democratic nominee ready to identify her No. 2 and take on Republican Donald Trump and Ohio Sen. JD Vance.

Harris said Tuesday she hadn't made a decision yet on whom she will select.

Those who are under consideration have been demonstrating a time-honored tradition: summertime auditions in which vice presidential contenders walk the line between open self-promotion and loyal advocacy for the potential boss.

To that end, Democrat Josh Shapiro told enthusiastic voters in suburban Philadelphia this week that Harris belongs in the White House — and then reminded them of all he's done as governor of battleground Pennsylvania. Kentucky Gov. Andy Beshear, likewise, told voters in Georgia that Harris has the makings of "a great president" — and then highlighted the elections he's won as a Democrat in Republican territory.

Harris' campaign has been vetting about a dozen potential running mates, according to people familiar with the search process. Shapiro and Arizona Sen. Mark Kelly are seen as among the front-runners, according to the people.

The campaign said Harris and her running mate will make stops next week in Philadelphia; western Wisconsin; Detroit; Raleigh, North Carolina; Savannah, Georgia; Phoenix and Las Vegas.

In the meantime, Harris advisers, led by former Attorney General Eric Holder, have been combing through reams of paperwork submitted by potential running mates, while the candidate herself is holding personal conversations with the finalists, according to a person familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss details that haven't been made public.

Harris, according to another person familiar with the matter, is seeking someone with executive experience who can also serve as a governing partner. Notions of a so-called short list have not stopped those on the Democrats' broader national bench from finding the spotlight.

"I'm not going to talk about the interactions I've had with the campaign," Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker declared recently on MSNBC. He added, though, "Let's just say I'm aware that the vetting process is quite an in depth one." Then he listed his accomplishments, offering that he was the only Midwestern governor to raise his state minimum wage to \$15 per hour.

Harris would be the first woman, first Black woman and first person of South Asian descent to serve as president. Many Democrats have argued she should balance her ticket both demographically and politically.

Dems' VP list has notable differences

Shapiro, 51, is among the most popular U.S. governors, winning his 2022 election in a rout over a Trump-endorsed Republican. He's an outspoken supporter of abortion rights who has won three statewide elections in Pennsylvania. His speaking style draws comparisons to former President Barack Obama. But he has taken flak from the left for his support for Israel's war on Hamas, a private school voucher program and natural gas infrastructure.

His allies argue that he would help Harris win Pennsylvania, complicating if not blocking Trump's path to an Electoral College majority.

Like all contenders, Shapiro sidesteps questions about the vetting process and stresses Harris should not be pressured. But he's mentioned more than once that he's known her for nearly two decades.

Beshear stands out in a heavily Republican state. During his weekend stop in Georgia, he talked of winning votes in "tough counties" but emphasized liberal bona fides: "I am a proud pro-union governor. I am a

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proud pro-choice governor. I am a proud public education governor. I am a proud pro-diversity governor.”

Closest in age to JD Vance among the Democrats’ possibilities, Beshear openly mocks Trump’s understudy for presenting himself as a son of Appalachia. “I mean, there’s a county that JD Vance says he’s from in Kentucky – and I won it by 22 points last November,” he said.

Beshear and Shapiro were both state attorneys general, like Harris, before becoming governors. But their tenures did not overlap considerably with Harris’ service in California. She worked more closely with North Carolina Gov. Roy Cooper during his days as an attorney general, but Cooper on Monday said he had opted not to be considered for vice president.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, 60, is a favorite of some progressives. He brings an atypical national political resume: He was a non-commissioned Army officer, public school teacher and state high school championship football coach before entering politics. Before being elected governor, he was one of the last white Democrats in Congress to represent a mostly rural, small-town House district — a notable juxtaposition to Harris, the Bay Area Californian.

“She will make the best choice she’s going to,” Walz said Sunday on CNN, a day after Trump held a mass rally in St. Cloud, Minnesota. “One way or another, she is going to win in November, and that’s going to benefit everyone,” Walz said, including “a lot of those folks who were out in St. Cloud with the (former) president.”

Kelly, 60, is the only top contender in Congress. He boasts an impressive military resume and experience as an astronaut. He has strong Latino support locally and solid relationships with Arizona officials along the U.S.-Mexico border. That balance could give him credibility on immigration policy as Republicans frame high numbers of migrant border crossings as a national crisis.

But Kelly has had to shore up his credentials with labor, a key Democratic faction. He took heat from union leaders because he was one of just a handful of Democrats who did not sponsor the Protecting the Right to Organize (PRO) Act, which would make it easier to organize workers. He said at the time he supported the goals but had concerns. Following pressure this month, he now says he would vote for the bill if it came up for a vote.

Everyone has an opinion

While Harris considers her choices, everyone seems to have an opinion.

Steven Benjamin, the White House director of public engagement, laughed as he told reporters on Air Force One on Monday that his office has received thousands of recommendations from around the country.

Donna Brazile, who managed Democrat Al Gore’s presidential campaign in 2000 and was instrumental in urging Biden to pick Harris in 2020, said the selection process involves “a lot of noise” that underplays the complexity of the decision.

“The most important stage is what the lawyers will do to you,” she said, with a laugh and emphasizing the seriousness. “It’s worse than a dental hygiene check. ... Before you get to suitability and other factors, before it gets to political people like me, they’ve done a forensic examination of your life.”

Little-known paper sheets are key to declaring victory in Venezuela’s election

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — Venezuela was tense on Tuesday as incumbent President Nicolás Maduro and the country’s main opposition coalition both claimed that they had won Sunday’s presidential election.

The national electoral authority proclaimed Maduro the winner. The opposition, represented, by Edmundo González said it has evidence to the contrary.

Electoral authorities installed more than 30,000 voting machines, and by law the opposition had the right to have representatives at all voting centers. But not all were allowed in Sunday or were ousted before polls closed.

After the polls close, Venezuela’s electronic voting machines can print sheets tallying all the votes each counted. Experts say the best way to clear up the dispute is to release those sheets. But the National Electoral Council has not done so.

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Here's a look at what has been said and what is known:

The tally sheets

The main discussion is coming down to the sheets. In case of any dispute, one way of solving it is by checking the tallies the government has against what the opposition parties have.

The electronic machines provide every voter a paper receipt that shows which candidate they chose. Voters are supposed to deposit their receipts at ballot boxes before exiting the polls.

After polls close, each machine prints a tally sheet showing the candidates' names and the votes each received. Party representatives stationed at polling sites throughout election day get a copy of the tally sheet, and electoral authorities keep another one.

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 sheets.

Which numbers have the electoral authorities released?

On its website, Venezuela's National Electoral Council traditionally posts vote counts for every machine. It has never posted images of the tally sheets.

The president of the council, Elvis Amoroso, said Monday that Maduro got 51.2% of the votes, or more than 5.1 million votes. González garnered 44%, or more than 4.4 million votes, he said.

Amoroso said the other 8 presidential candidates got a combined total of 4% or more than 462,000 votes.

He said those numbers were based on a review of 80% of the tally sheets. He did not show the sheets. Which numbers have the opposition shared?

Opposition leader María Corina Machado said on Monday that González got more than 6.2 million votes and Maduro got more than 2.7 million votes.

Machado did not offer totals for the other eight candidates.

She said those numbers were based on a review of 73.2% of the tally sheets. She did not show any tally sheet but she directed voters to a website where they can use their ID number to look up an image of the sheet that corresponds to the machine where they voted.

Who has access to the tallies?

The National Electoral Council does not have the obligation to post the tally sheets on its website — which has been down since Monday. But the opposition, electoral experts and some foreign governments disputing the official results are urging the sheets' release.

On Monday, Machado announced the opposition had created a searchable website with images of every tally sheet that opposition poll representatives were able to obtain. Machado said the information was also being shared with the international community.

Acting Secret Service director says he's 'ashamed' after the Trump assassination attempt

By ERIC TUCKER, FARNOUSH AMIRI, REBECCA SANTANA and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press WASHINGTON (AP) — The Secret Service's acting director told lawmakers Tuesday that he considered it indefensible that the roof used by the gunman in the attempted assassination of former President Donald Trump was unsecured and said it was regrettable that local law enforcement had not alerted his agency before the shooting that an armed subject had been spotted on a nearby roof.

Ronald Rowe Jr. also testified that he recently visited the shooting site and laid down on the roof of the building where shots were fired in order to evaluate the gunman's line of sight during the July 13 shooting in Butler, Pennsylvania.

"What I saw made me ashamed. As a career law enforcement officer and a 25-year Secret Service veteran, I cannot defend why that roof was not better secured," he said.

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The testimony was the most detailed catalog to date by the Secret Service of law enforcement failings and miscommunications, with Rowe accepting blame for his own agency's mistakes while also pointedly criticizing local law enforcement for communication breakdowns that resulted in his agency not receiving information that a gunman, later identified as 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks, had been seen on the roof of a building less than 150 yards (135 meters) from the rally stage where Trump was speaking.

"Neither the Secret Service counter sniper teams nor members of the former president's security detail had any knowledge that there was a man on the roof of the building with a firearm," Rowe said. "It is my understanding those personnel were not aware the assailant had a firearm until they heard gunshots."

He said that the shooting amounted to a "failure on multiple levels," including a failure of imagination and a "failure to challenge our assumptions."

"We assumed that the state and locals had it," Rowe said. "We made an assumption that there was going to be uniformed presence out there, that there would be sufficient eyes to cover that, that there was going to be counter-sniper teams" in the building from whose roof Crooks fired shots.

"And I can assure you," Rowe added, "that we're not going to make that mistake again."

He said he had implemented multiple reforms since taking over as acting director last week, including mandating that every event security plan is vetted by multiple experienced supervisors before being implemented, expanding the use of aerial drones to improve visibility of roofs, dedicating more resources to improve communications at events where the Secret Service is operating. He said he's also directed that federal and local counter snipers work together on roofs.

Trump, the 2024 Republican presidential nominee, was struck in the ear by a bullet or a bullet fragment in the assassination attempt, one rallygoer was killed and two others were injured before the gunman was killed by a Secret Service counter-sniper.

The blunt and at times emotional testimony Tuesday, featuring combative exchanges with lawmakers, ensured that an already simmering blame game between federal and local authorities will continue. It also suggested that Rowe, with ready and generally detailed answers, was determined to strike a different posture than that of his predecessor, Kimberly Cheatle, who resigned last week after facing intense criticism from lawmakers from both major political parties following responses at a congressional hearing that were seen as evasive and lacking in specifics.

Tuesday's hearing before the Senate Judiciary and Homeland Security committees was the latest in a series of congressional sessions dedicated to the law enforcement lapses and missed communications that preceded the shooting.

Local law enforcement officers had first observed a suspicious-looking man at the rally site more than an hour before the event and circulated that information, including photographs of a man who turned out to be Crooks. But the officers ultimately lost track of Crooks, who was able to scale the roof of a building at AGR International Inc., a supplier of automation equipment for the glass and plastic packaging industry, and fire an estimated eight shots with an AR-15-style rifle.

Shortly before the shooting, a local officer climbed up to the roof to investigate. Crooks turned and pointed his rifle at the officer, who retreated.

Even though text messages among local snipers revealed anxiety about the man, Rowe said the only thing the Secret Service knew at the time of the shooting was that law enforcement was contending with a suspicious-looking man.

"No information regarding a weapon on a roof was ever passed to our personnel," Rowe said. At another point, he noted, "It is troubling to me that we did not get that information as quickly as we should have. We didn't know that there was this incident going on."

But Rowe's willingness to assign blame to local law enforcement opened him up to harsh criticism from Senate Republicans, who saw him as failing to take sufficient responsibility.

"Isn't the fact that a former president was shot, that a good American is dead, that other Americans were critically wounded — isn't that enough mission failure for you to say to the person who decided that that building should not be in the security perimeter, probably ought to be stepped down?" said Sen. Josh

Hawley, a Missouri Republican.

Rowe, raising his voice, responded that he has "lost sleep over this for the last 17 days" and that he would not be rushed "to judgment" by Congress. He assured lawmakers that "people will be held accountable."

Sen. Lindsey Graham, the top Republican on the Senate Judiciary Committee, said if something like this happened in the military, "a lot of people would be fired. And if a lot of people are not fired, the system failed yet again."

He added: "Nothing's going to change until somebody loses their job."

The FBI, meanwhile, disclosed new details about Crooks, with Deputy Director Paul Abbate saying a social media account believed to be associated with the gunman suspected in the assassination attempt espoused political violence and included antisemitic and anti-immigrant sentiment. The posts were from the 2019-2020 timeframe, when Crooks would have been in high school.

Abbate did not identify the social media platform, saying investigators were still trying to definitively determine that it belonged to Crooks. However, he indicated that it was separate from an account on a different platform called Gab that was active in 2021.

The chief executive of Gab posted on X, formerly known as Twitter, during the Senate hearing that Crooks's presence on that platform was consistent with being "pro-Biden and in particular pro-Biden's immigration policy."

On Monday, the FBI revealed that Crooks had looked online for information about mass shootings, power plants, improvised explosive devices and the May assassination attempt of the Slovakian prime minister Robert Fico.

The FBI also said that Trump has agreed to be interviewed by agents as a crime victim.

Tesla in Seattle-area crash that killed motorcyclist was using self-driving system, authorities say

By TOM KRISHER AP Auto Writer

DETROIT (AP) — Authorities in Washington have determined that a Tesla that hit and killed a motorcyclist near Seattle in April was operating on the company's "Full Self Driving" system at the time of the crash.

Investigators from the Washington State Patrol made the discovery after downloading information from the event-data recorder on the 2022 Tesla Model S, agency spokesman Capt. Deion Glover said Tuesday.

"The investigation is still ongoing in this case," Glover said in an email to The Associated Press. The Snohomish County Prosecutor will determine if any charges are filed in the case, he said.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk said last week that "Full Self Driving" should be able to run without human supervision by the end of this year. He has been promising a fleet of robotaxis for several years. During the company's earnings conference call, he acknowledged that his predictions on the issue "have been overly optimistic in the past."

A message was left Tuesday seeking comment from Tesla.

After the crash in a suburban area about 15 miles (24 kilometers) northeast of Seattle, the driver told a trooper that he was using Tesla's Autopilot system and looked at his cellphone while the Tesla was moving.

"The next thing he knew there was a bang and the vehicle lurched forward as it accelerated and collided with the motorcycle in front of him," the trooper wrote in a probable-cause document.

The 56-year-old driver was arrested for investigation of vehicular homicide "based on the admitted inattention to driving, while on Autopilot mode, and the distraction of the cell phone while moving forward, putting trust in the machine to drive for him," the affidavit said.

The motorcyclist, Jeffrey Nissen, 28, of Stanwood, Washington, was under the car and pronounced dead at the scene, authorities reported.

Nissen's death is at least the second in the U.S. involving Tesla's "Full Self-Driving" system. In investigative documents, the U.S. National Highway Traffic Safety Administration said earlier it had found one fatality and 75 crashes while the system was being used. It wasn't clear whether the system was at fault in the fatality.

Tesla has two partially automated driving systems, "Full Self-Driving," which can take on many driving tasks even on city streets, and Autopilot, which can keep a car in its lane and away from objects in front of it. Sometimes the names are confused by Tesla owners and the public.

Tesla says at present neither system can drive itself and that human drivers must be ready to take control at any time.

"Full Self-Driving" is being tested on public roads by selected Tesla owners. The company recently has been calling it FSD Supervised.

Musk said last week that he did not think approval by government regulators would be a limiting factor in deploying robotaxis. "If you've got billions of miles that show that in the future, unsupervised FSD is safer than humans, what regulator could really stand in the way of that?" he asked.

But Phil Koopman, a professor at Carnegie Mellon University who studies autonomous vehicle safety, said he doesn't see Tesla running robotaxis without human drivers on nearly all roads for another decade.

The safety record Musk cites is based on having a human driver supervise the automated system, he said. "Unless you have data showing that the driver never has to supervise the automation, then there's no basis for claiming they're going to be acceptably safe," he said.

Musk has said Tesla will unveil a dedicated robotaxi vehicle at an event on Oct. 10. The event was delayed from Aug. 8 to make changes in the vehicle that Musk wanted.

Musk has been telling investors that Tesla is less of a car company and more of a robotics and artificial intelligence company. Many investors have put money into the company based on long-term prospects for robotics technology.

Musk has been touting self-driving vehicles as a growth catalyst for Tesla since "Full Self Driving" hardware went on sale late in 2015.

Missouri man is free from prison after a judge overturned his 1991 conviction, despite AG's efforts

By JIM SALTER and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

ST. LOUIS (AP) — A Missouri man was freed from prison Tuesday after his murder conviction was overturned after 34 years behind bars, despite the state attorney general's efforts to keep him there.

"I never gave up because my family never gave up," Christopher Dunn said from the steps of the downtown St. Louis courthouse. "It's easy to give up in prison when you lose hope. But when the system throws you away, you have to ask yourself if you wanted to just settle for it or fight for it."

Dunn, 52, reunited with his wife, Kira Dunn, as he was officially released from the St. Louis city jail Tuesday night. As his release drew imminent, he was driven by van from the state prison in Licking, Missouri, to St. Louis, about 140 miles (225 kilometers) away.

A St. Louis circuit judge overturned Dunn's murder conviction on July 22 and ordered his immediate release. But Dunn remained imprisoned amid a chaotic process that began when Missouri Attorney General Andrew Bailey appealed to try and keep Dunn locked up.

When asked about the delay since the judge's ruling, Dunn said, "It was testing. To hear the decision by the judge and then be prepared to leave on Wednesday, only to be brought back to prison. It was torture."

Dunn's release marks the second time in recent weeks that a person was freed from prison despite Bailey's appeals to keep them in custody after a murder conviction was overturned.

Sandra Hemme was freed July 19 from a western Missouri prison after serving 43 years for a murder that a judge deemed there was evidence of her "actual innocence." Bailey's office also opposed Hemme's release while an appellate court reviewed the case. She walked out of the prison only after a judge threatened Bailey with contempt if she wasn't freed.

Political scientists and some attorneys have said Bailey was taking the tough stance to shore up votes in advance of a contested Republican primary. He faces a challenge from Will Scharf, an attorney for former President Donald Trump, in the Aug. 6 primary.

At one point last week, Dunn was minutes away from getting out of prison after the circuit judge, Jason

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Sengheiser, threatened a warden with contempt if he wasn't released. But then the Missouri Supreme Court agreed to consider the case, temporarily halting his freedom.

Then on Tuesday, the state's highest court issued a ruling stating that the St. Louis circuit attorney needed to confirm it had no plans to retry Dunn before he could be freed. Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore immediately filed a memorandum stating he would not seek a new trial, setting in motion the process toward Dunn's freedom.

A statement from the Midwest Innocence Project said Dunn "is coming home."

"We are thrilled that Chris will finally be reunited with his family after 34 years behind bars for a crime he did not commit," the statement read. "We look forward to supporting Chris as he rebuilds his life."

Earlier Tuesday, leaders of the Missouri NAACP and other organizations said that politics and racism were behind Bailey's effort to keep Dunn behind bars. State NAACP President Nimrod Chapel Jr. said at a news conference that Bailey "superseded his jurisdiction and authority" in appealing Sengheiser's ruling.

"What's happening now is another form of lynching," said another speaker, Zaki Baruti of the Universal African People's Organization.

Bailey's office, in an earlier statement, said the effort to keep Dunn in prison was warranted.

"Throughout the appeals process, multiple courts have affirmed Christopher Dunn's murder conviction," the statement read. "We will always fight for the rule of law and to obtain justice for victims."

Dunn was convicted of first-degree murder in the 1990 shooting of 15-year-old Ricco Rogers. St. Louis Circuit Attorney Gabe Gore filed a motion in February seeking to vacate the guilty verdict. A hearing was in May.

Sengheiser wrote in his ruling that Gore "made a clear and convincing showing of 'actual innocence' that undermines the basis for Dunn's convictions because in light of new evidence, no juror, acting reasonably, would have voted to find Dunn guilty of these crimes beyond a reasonable doubt."

The Missouri Attorney General's Office opposed the effort to vacate Dunn's conviction. Lawyers for the state said at the May hearing that initial testimony from two boys at the scene who identified Dunn as the shooter was correct, even though they later recanted as adults.

Rogers was shot May 18, 1990, when a gunman opened fire while he was with a group of other teenage boys outside a home. DeMorris Stepp, 14, and Michael Davis Jr., 12, both initially identified Dunn as the shooter.

In a recorded interview played at the hearing, Davis said he lied because he thought Dunn was affiliated with a rival gang.

Stepp's story has changed a few times over the years, Gore said at the hearing. Most recently he has said he did not see Dunn as the shooter. Gore said another judge previously found Stepp to be a "completely unreliable witness" and urged Sengheiser to discount him altogether.

Dunn has said he was at his mother's home at the time of the shooting. Childhood friend Nicole Bailey testified that she spoke with him by phone that night and he was on a phone at his mother's house.

Tristin Estep, the assistant attorney general, said that alibi could not be trusted and that Dunn's story has shifted multiple times over the years. Dunn did not testify at the hearing.

A Missouri law adopted in 2021 lets prosecutors request hearings when they see evidence of a wrongful conviction. While Bailey's office is not required to oppose such efforts, he also opposed another effort in St. Louis that resulted in Lamar Johnson being freed last year after serving 28 years for a murder case in which a judge ruled he was wrongfully convicted.

The 2021 law has resulted in the release of two men who each spent decades in prison. In addition to Johnson, Kevin Strickland was freed in 2021 after more than 40 years for three killings in Kansas City after a judge ruled he was wrongfully convicted in 1979.

Another hearing is approaching for Marcellus Williams, who narrowly escaped lethal injection and is now facing another execution date.

St. Louis County's prosecutor believes DNA evidence shows that Williams didn't commit the crime that landed him on death row. DNA of someone else — but not Williams — was found on the knife used in the 1998 killing, experts said.

A hearing on Williams' innocence claim begins Aug. 21. His execution is scheduled for Sept. 24. Bailey's office is opposing the challenge to Williams' conviction, too.

Missouri man is free from prison after a judge overturned his 1991 conviction, despite AG's efforts

By JIM SALTER and HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH Associated Press

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Sengheiser wrote in his ruling that Gore “made a clear and convincing showing of ‘actual innocence’ that undermines the basis for Dunn’s convictions because in light of new evidence, no juror, acting reasonably, would have voted to find Dunn guilty of these crimes beyond a reasonable doubt.”

The Missouri Attorney General’s Office opposed the effort to vacate Dunn’s conviction. Lawyers for the state said at the May hearing that initial testimony from two boys at the scene who identified Dunn as the shooter was correct, even though they later recanted as adults.

Rogers was shot May 18, 1990, when a gunman opened fire while he was with a group of other teenage boys outside a home. DeMorris Stepp, 14, and Michael Davis Jr., 12, both initially identified Dunn as the shooter.

In a recorded interview played at the hearing, Davis said he lied because he thought Dunn was affiliated with a rival gang.

Stepp’s story has changed a few times over the years, Gore said at the hearing. Most recently he has said he did not see Dunn as the shooter. Gore said another judge previously found Stepp to be a “completely unreliable witness” and urged Sengheiser to discount him altogether.

Dunn has said he was at his mother’s home at the time of the shooting. Childhood friend Nicole Bailey testified that she spoke with him by phone that night and he was on a phone at his mother’s house.

Tristin Estep, the assistant attorney general, said that alibi could not be trusted and that Dunn’s story has shifted multiple times over the years. Dunn did not testify at the hearing.

A Missouri law adopted in 2021 lets prosecutors request hearings when they see evidence of a wrongful conviction. While Bailey’s office is not required to oppose such efforts, he also opposed another effort in St. Louis that resulted in Lamar Johnson being freed last year after serving 28 years for a murder case in which a judge ruled he was wrongfully convicted.

The 2021 law has resulted in the release of two men who each spent decades in prison. In addition to Johnson, Kevin Strickland was freed in 2021 after more than 40 years for three killings in Kansas City after a judge ruled he was wrongfully convicted in 1979.

Another hearing is approaching for Marcellus Williams, who narrowly escaped lethal injection and is now facing another execution date.

St. Louis County’s prosecutor believes DNA evidence shows that Williams didn’t commit the crime that landed him on death row. DNA of someone else — but not Williams — was found on the knife used in the 1998 killing, experts said.

A hearing on Williams’ innocence claim begins Aug. 21. His execution is scheduled for Sept. 24.

Bailey’s office is opposing the challenge to Williams’ conviction, too.

Police clash with a violent crowd gathered near the site of UK stabbing attack that killed 3 girls

By JILL LAWLESS and BRIAN MELLEY Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Far-right protesters fueled by anger and false online rumors hurled bottles and stones at police, wounding more than 20 officers Tuesday outside a northwest England mosque near where three girls were fatally stabbed a day earlier.

Prime Minister Keir Starmer condemned the “thuggery” and said the crowd had hijacked what had earlier been a peaceful vigil attended by hundreds in the center of Southport to mourn the dead and 10 surviving stabbing victims, seven of whom were in critical condition.

Police said the violent crowd that torched a police van and several cars was believed to be supporters of the English Defence League, a far-right group, and the mayhem was inspired by rumors about the identity of the teenage suspect arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder.

“There has been much speculation and hypothesis around the status of a 17-year-old male who is currently in police custody and some individuals are using this to bring violence and disorder to our streets,” Merseyside Police Assistant Chief Constable Alex Goss said.

Police previously said a suspect’s name circulating on social media was incorrect and the boy was born

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in Britain, contrary to online claims he was an asylum seeker.

The Liverpool Region Mosque Network posted a statement decrying the "heinous" stabbing as an attack against society that was unconnected to Islam.

"A minority of people are attempting to portray that this inhumane act is somehow related to the Muslim community," the group said on the X social media platform. "Frankly it is not, and we must not let those who seek to divide us and spread hatred use this as an opportunity."

Officers outside the Southport Mosque in riot gear were pelted with bricks torn from garden walls in the residential neighborhood by members of the crowd, some of whom wore masks, amid chants of "No surrender!" and "English till I die!" Firecrackers exploded, sirens wailed and a helicopter hovering overhead added to the chaos.

Twenty-two officers were hurt, with eight suffering from more serious injuries that included fractures, lacerations and a concussion. Two police dogs were wounded by bricks and a third suffered burns.

A day earlier, a short distance from the turmoil, the girls had taken part in a Taylor Swift-themed dance and yoga workshop on the first week of summer vacation when a teen armed with a knife entered the studio and began a vicious attack, police said.

"It's difficult to comprehend or put into words the horror of what happened," Home Secretary Yvette Cooper said while briefing members of Parliament. "What should have been a joyful start to the summer turned into an unspeakable tragedy."

Alice Dasilva Aguiar, 9, Elsie Dot Stancombe, 7, and Bebe King, 6, died from their injuries, police said.

"Keep smiling and dancing like you love to do our princess," Aguiar's parents said in a statement released by police. "Like we said before to you, you're always our princess and no one would change that."

King's family said no words could describe their devastation at the loss "of our little girl Bebe."

Eight children and two adults remained hospitalized after the attack in Southport. Both adults and five of the children were in critical condition.

An emotional crowd that gathered in Southport outside The Atkinson theater and museum in the early evening held a minute of silence for the victims.

June Burns, the mayor of the Sefton region that contains Southport, called for calm and respect and urged people to be good to one another. She said she was overcome with emotion when she visited the scene of the tragedy earlier.

"It's unbelievable that we find ourselves laying flowers for little girls who just wanted to dance," she said.

Swift said earlier on Instagram that 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. "I am at a complete loss for how to ever convey my sympathies to these families."

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 where the beach and pier attract vacationers. They also posted online messages of support for teacher Leanne Lucas, the organizer of the event, who was one of those attacked.

The 17-year-old suspect was arrested on suspicion of murder and attempted murder shortly after the attacks just before noon. 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.

The rampage 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, which are by far the most commonly used instruments in U.K. homicides.

The prime minister was jeered by some as he visited the crime scene and lay a wreath of pink and white flowers with a handwritten note that said: "Our hearts are broken, there are no words for such profound loss. The nation's thoughts are with you."

"How many more children?" one person yelled as Starmer was getting in his car. "Our kids are dead and you're leaving already?"

Starmer told reporters earlier that he is determined to get a grip on high levels of knife crime but said it was not a day for politics.

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

Joel Verite, a window cleaner riding in a van on his lunch break, said his colleague slammed on the brakes and reversed to where a woman was hanging on the side of a car covered in blood.

"She just screamed at me: 'He's killing kids over there. He's killing kids over there,'" Verite told Sky News.

The woman, who was on the phone with police, directed him to where the violence was unfolding and then collapsed. Verite said he ran in the direction she had pointed.

A woman honking the horn of her car caught his attention and he found her with five or six bloody children inside. The woman said she was trying to get the kids to safety.

"It was like a scene you'd see on a disaster film," he said. "I can't explain to you how horrific it is what I saw."

He ran to the dance studio, where he was startled to lock eyes with a man in a hooded tracksuit holding a knife at the top of the stairs.

"All I saw was a knife and I thought: 'There are more people in there,' and I just wanted to hurt him so bad," Verite said. "But I was scared for myself and I wanted to help people. So I came outside and I was screaming because I knew where he was."

Britain's worst attack on children occurred in 1996, when 43-year-old Thomas Hamilton shot 16 kindergartners 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 exceptionally rare in Britain, where knives were used in about 40% of homicides in the year to March 2023.

Mass stabbings are also very rare, according to Iain Overton, executive director of Action on Armed Violence.

"Most knife attacks are one-on-one and personal — either domestic violence or gang related — so this tragedy is very unusual and, accordingly, garners lots of media interest," Overton said. "This offers no comfort to the grieving families, of course."

Israel carries out rare strike on Beirut that it says killed Hezbollah commander

By BASSEM MROUE and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Israel on Tuesday carried out a rare strike on Beirut, which it said killed a top Hezbollah commander who was allegedly behind a weekend rocket attack that killed 12 young people in the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights. The strike in the Lebanese capital killed at least one woman and two children and wounded dozens of people.

Hezbollah did not immediately confirm the commander's death. The strike came amid escalating hostilities with the Lebanese militant group. An Israeli official said the target was Fouad Shukur, a top Hezbollah military commander whom the U.S. blames for planning and launching the deadly 1983 Marine bombing in the Lebanese capital.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to discuss the details of the strike with the media. Shukur is also suspected in other strikes that killed Israeli civilians.

Though Hezbollah issued a rare denial of involvement in the rocket attack Saturday in the town of Majdal Shams, Israel is holding the militant group responsible. "Hezbollah crossed a red line," Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant posted on the platform X shortly after Tuesday's strike.

The two sides have exchanged near-daily strikes for the past 10 months against the backdrop of the war in Gaza, but they have previously kept the conflict at a low level that was unlikely to escalate into full-on war.

Lebanon's public health ministry said Tuesday's strike in a southern suburb of Beirut wounded 74 people, some of them seriously. The wounded were taken to nearby hospitals. Bahman Hospital near the site of the blast called for blood donations.

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Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported that the strike was carried out with a drone that launched three rockets.

"The Israeli enemy has committed a great stupid act in size, timing and circumstances by targeting an entirely civilian area," Hezbollah official Ali Ammar told Al-Manar TV. "The Israeli enemy will pay a price for this sooner or later."

Lebanese caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati condemned the Israeli attack, saying it hit a few meters from one of the largest hospitals in the capital.

The office of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu did not immediately release a statement, but minutes after the strike sent a photo of the prime minister with his national security adviser and other officials.

The airstrike on Beirut's southern suburb of Haret Hreik — a crowded urban neighborhood where Hezbollah has political and security operations but which is also full of small shops and apartment buildings — damaged several buildings.

It was not immediately clear if any Hezbollah official was hit, a Hezbollah official said. A Lebanese military intelligence official said they had no information when asked by The Associated Press whether a senior Hezbollah security official had escaped the airstrike.

Both officials spoke on condition of anonymity in accordance with regulations.

The strike hit an apartment building near to a hospital, collapsing half of the targeted building and severely damaging one next to it. The hospital sustained minor damages, while the surrounding streets were littered with debris and broken glass.

A forklift was in the middle of the street, reaching to the top floors of the destroyed building, while utility crews removed fallen power lines. Crowds gathered to inspect the damage and check on their families. Some of them chanted in support of Hezbollah.

Paramedics could be seen carrying several wounded people out of the damaged buildings.

A resident of the suburb whose home is about 200 meters (yards) away said that dust from the explosion "covered everything," and that the glass in his son's apartment was broken.

"Then people went down on the streets," he said. "Everyone has family. They went to check on them. It was a lot of destruction." He spoke on condition of anonymity out of concern about his security at a tense moment.

Hassan Nouredine said he was riding his motorcycle near the building when he heard the sound of two explosions. "It looked like a strike from a drone and not a jet," Nouredine told the AP near the site of the attack.

Despite fears of escalation and a strike in recent days, Nouredine said that he and other people he knows in the area are not fazed and that their spirits are high.

Talal Hatoum, a local official with the Shiite Amal Movement, Hezbollah's key political ally in Lebanon, said Tuesday's attack marked a shift in the rules of engagement in the conflict because it caused a significant number of civilian casualties.

The last time Israel targeted Beirut was in January, when an airstrike killed a top Hamas official, Saleh Arouri. That strike was the first time Israel had hit Beirut since the 34-day war between Israel and Hezbollah in the summer of 2006.

Israel had been expected to retaliate for the strike in Majdal Shams, but diplomats had said in recent days that they expected the response to stay within the boundaries of the ongoing low-level conflict between Hezbollah and Israel without provoking all-out war.

Many of them had not expected that Israel would hit Beirut, which might elicit a strike by Hezbollah on a major population center in Israel.

The United Nations' special coordinator for Lebanon, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, said in a statement that she was "deeply concerned" by the strike and called for "calm to prevail."

U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris said Israel "has the right to defend itself against the terrorist organization," referring to Hezbollah, but added, "We still must work on a diplomatic solution to end these attacks,

and we will continue to do that work.”

A speaking invitation to Donald Trump splits the most prominent American group for Black journalists

By MATT BROWN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump’s invitation to address the National Association of Black Journalists has sparked an intense debate within the organization and a flurry of arguments online.

Journalism organizations for people of color traditionally invite presidential candidates to address their summer gatherings during election years. But Trump’s acceptance of NABJ’s invitation has led at least one high-profile group member to step down as a convention co-chair and others to argue their convention may become a platform for Trump to make false claims or be seen as winning NABJ’s endorsement.

Trump will be interviewed at 12 p.m. CDT Wednesday in Chicago by three reporters: Kadia Goba of Semafor, Rachel Scott of ABC News and Harris Faulkner of Fox News. Vice President Kamala Harris, the likely Democratic nominee and first Black woman to hold her office, is not currently scheduled to address the convention. A person familiar with her schedule, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Harris campaign was unable to find a time to appear at NABJ in person and claimed the organization turned down an offer for her to appear virtually.

The debate over NABJ’s invite reflects how many journalists are still grappling with how to approach Trump nearly a decade after his first presidential run. Some group members argued journalists should allow newsmakers to be heard, while others pointed to Trump’s demeaning of prominent Black journalists while president and his frequent attacks on the free press, including labeling reporters “the enemy of the people.”

Trump and NABJ also have a tense history over his treatment of Black women journalists. In 2018, NABJ condemned Trump for repeatedly using words such as “stupid,” “loser” and “nasty” to describe Black women journalists including several Black journalists such as Yamiche Alcindor of NBC News; Abby Phillip of CNN; and April Ryan of The Grio.

“The most powerful man in the free world is verbally abusing journalists,” said then-NABJ President Sarah Glover. “His dismissive comments toward journalists April Ryan, Abby Phillip and Yamiche Alcindor are appalling, irresponsible, and should be denounced.”

When Trump told Alcindor “don’t be threatening” during a 2020 press conference, then-NABJ President Dorothy Tucker condemned the remarks as “not only unnecessary but demeaning and inappropriate.”

Former presidents George W. Bush, Bill Clinton and Barack Obama have all attended NABJ. President Biden attended a virtual NABJ panel during his 2020 run for president where he received criticism for saying: “Unlike the African American community, with notable exceptions, the Latino community is an incredibly diverse community.”

But for many NABJ members, the decision to host Trump polarizes the organization and threatens the convention’s ethos, which aspires to safeguard and advance Black journalists.

“I understand that the job should put us in tough situations if we’re doing it in a meaningful way,” wrote Tyler J. Davis, an NABJ member and freelance journalist, in The TRiiBE, a local Chicago Black news outlet.

“But this isn’t a story assignment or a news conference or a newsroom. NABJ is a place of learning, networking and feeling supported. It’s a space for Black folks to feel safe and celebrated; for Black media, specifically, to feel safe and celebrated,” Davis wrote.

Ken Lemon, president of NABJ, insisted that the invitation was “absolutely not an endorsement.”

“We invited both of them, we got a yes from one of them,” Lemon said. “We’d love to get a yes from Kamala as well, but in this case this is an important hour.”

Lemon added that the event would be a “great opportunity for us to vet the candidate right here on our ground” and added that the association had worked with both campaigns for “probably for more than a month” and each had given “the inclination that both were interested in being a part of what we’re doing.”

Yet, Lemon and other leaders at NABJ have faced internal backlash and calls to resign since Trump’s

appearance was announced.

Karen Attiah, a global opinions columnist for The Washington Post, stepped down as the co-chair of the 2024 convention in the wake of the announcement of Trump's appearance.

"To the journalists interviewing Trump, I wish them the best of luck," Attiah wrote on social media. "While my decision was influenced by a variety of factors, I was not involved or consulted with in any way with the decision to platform Trump in such a format," she continued.

Some industry leaders pushed back on the claim that Black journalists should not take opportunities to interview Trump, noting that any opportunity to hold powerful figures to account should not be wasted and that NABJ as a forum is especially suited to that mission.

"To suggest they not interview a Presidential candidate on issues relevant to the organization's constituency is outrageous," Rana Cash, the executive editor of the Charlotte Observer and an NABJ member, wrote on X.

Investigation finds at least 973 Native American children died in US government boarding schools

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — At least 973 Native American children died in the U.S. government's abusive boarding school system, according to the results of an investigation released Tuesday by Interior Department officials who called on the government to apologize for the schools.

The investigation commissioned by Interior Secretary Deb Haaland found marked and unmarked graves at 65 of the more than 400 U.S. boarding schools where Native American children were forcibly assimilated into white society. The findings don't specify how each child died, but officials said the causes of death included disease and abuse during a 150-year period that ended in 1969.

Additional children may have died after becoming sick at school and being sent home, officials said.

The findings follow a series of listening sessions held by Haaland over the past two years in which dozens of former students recounted harmful and often degrading treatment they endured at the hands of teachers and administrators while separated from their families.

"The federal government took deliberate and strategic action through boarding school policies to isolate children from their families, deny them their identities, and steal from them the languages, cultures, and connections that are foundational to Native people," Haaland, a member of the Laguna Pueblo tribe in New Mexico and the country's first Native American Cabinet secretary, said in a Tuesday call with reporters.

"Make no mistake," she added, "This was a concerted attempt to eradicate the quote, 'Indian problem' — to either assimilate or destroy native peoples altogether."

In their initial findings two years ago, officials had estimated more than 500 American Indian, Alaska Native and Native Hawaiian children died at the schools. The federal government passed laws and policies in 1819 to support the schools, which were still operating in the 1960s.

The schools gave Native American kids English names, put them through military drills and forced them to perform manual labor, such as farming, brick-making and working on railroads, officials said.

Former students shared tearful recollections of their experience during the listening sessions in Oklahoma, South Dakota, Michigan, Arizona, Alaska and other states. They talked about being punished for speaking their native language, getting locked in basements, and having their hair cut to stamp out their identities. They were sometimes subjected to solitary confinement, beatings and the withholding of food. Many left the schools with only basic vocational skills that gave them few job prospects.

Donovan Archambault, 85, the former chairman of the Fort Belknap Indian Reservation in Montana, said beginning at age 11 he was sent away to boarding schools where he was mistreated, forced to cut his hair and prevented from speaking his native language. He said the experience led him to drink alcohol heavily before he turned his life around more than two decades later. He never talked about his school days with his children until he wrote a book about the experience several years ago.

"An apology is needed. They should apologize," Archambault told The Associated Press by phone Tuesday. "But there also needs to be a broader education about what happened to us. To me, it's part of a forgotten history."

Haaland said she was personally "sorry beyond words," but there should also be a formal apology from the federal government. She didn't say if she would press President Joe Biden to issue one.

Interior Department officials also recommended that the government invest in programs that could help Native American communities heal from the traumas caused by boarding schools. That includes money for education, violence prevention and the revitalization of indigenous languages — on a scale commensurate with government spending on the schools, agency officials said.

The schools, similar institutions and related assimilation programs were funded by \$23.3 billion in inflation-adjusted federal spending, officials determined. Religious and private institutions that ran many of the institutions received federal money as partners in the campaign to "civilize" Indigenous students, according to the new report.

By the 1920s, most Indigenous school-age children — some 60,000 children — were attending boarding schools that were run either by the federal government or religious organizations, according to the National Native American Boarding School Healing Coalition.

"These are stolen generations of children," said Deborah Parker, CEO for the Minnesota-based group. "It's about time the federal government speak so honestly and candidly about the impact."

Haaland said her own grandparents were "stolen from their parents, culture and communities" when they were 8 years old and forced to live in a Catholic boarding school until they were 13. Others who went to schools were as young as 4, she said.

More than 200 schools supported by the government had a religious affiliation, federal officials said. The boarding school coalition has identified more than 100 additional schools not on the government list that were run by churches, with no evidence of federal support.

U.S. Catholic bishops in June apologized for the church's role in trauma the children experienced. And in 2022, Pope Francis apologized for the Catholic Church's cooperation with boarding schools in Canada. He said the forced assimilation of Native peoples into Christian society destroyed their cultures, severed families and marginalized generations.

Legislation pending before Congress would establish a "Truth and Healing Commission" to further document past injustices related to boarding schools. The legislation would give the commission authority to subpoena people for evidence.

But Catholic bishops pushed back against giving that subpoena power in a letter to lawmakers last week. Members of the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops wrote that the commission should "avoid an adversarial posture" since they are willing to cooperate.

More women are ending pregnancies on their own, a new study suggests. Some resort to unsafe methods

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

A growing number of women said they've tried to end their pregnancies on their own by doing things like taking herbs, drinking alcohol or even hitting themselves in the belly, a new study suggests.

Researchers surveyed reproductive-age women in the U.S. before and after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in June 2022. The proportion who reported trying to end pregnancies by themselves rose from 2.4% to 3.3%.

"A lot of people are taking things into their own hands," said Dr. Grace Ferguson, a Pittsburgh OB-GYN and abortion provider who wasn't involved in the research, which was published Tuesday in the journal JAMA Network Open.

Study authors acknowledged that the increase is small. But the data suggests that it could number in the hundreds of thousands of women.

Researchers surveyed about 7,000 women six months before the Supreme Court decision, and then

another group of 7,100 a year after the decision. They asked whether participants had ever taken or done something on their own to end a pregnancy. Those who said yes were asked follow-up questions about their experiences.

"Our data show that making abortion more difficult to access is not going to mean that people want or need an abortion less frequently," said Lauren Ralph, an epidemiologist at the University of California, San Francisco, and one of the study's authors.

Women gave various reasons for handling their own abortions, such as wanting an extra measure of privacy, being concerned about the cost of clinic procedures and preferring to try to end their pregnancies by themselves first.

They reported using a range of methods. Some took medications — including emergency contraception and the abortion pills misoprostol and mifepristone obtained outside the medical system and without a prescription. Others drank alcohol or used drugs. Some resorted to potentially harmful physical methods such as hitting themselves in the abdomen, lifting heavy things or inserting objects into their bodies.

Some respondents said they suffered complications like bleeding and pain and had to seek medical care afterward. Some said they later had an abortion at a clinic. Some said their pregnancies ended after their attempts or from a later miscarriage, while others said they wound up continuing their pregnancies when the method didn't work.

Ralph pointed to some caveats and limits to the research. Respondents may be under-reporting their abortions, she said, because researchers are asking them about "a sensitive and potentially criminalized behavior."

She also cautioned that some women may have understood the question differently after the Dobbs decision, such as believing that getting medication abortion through telehealth is outside the formal health care system when it's not. But Ralph said she and her colleagues tested how people were interpreting the question before each survey was conducted.

The bottom line, Ferguson said, is that the study's findings "confirm the statement we've been saying forever: If you make it hard to get (an abortion) in a formal setting, people will just do it informally."

The research was funded by the David and Lucile Packard Foundation, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation and a third foundation that was listed as anonymous.

Donald Trump says Kamala Harris, who's married to a Jewish man, 'doesn't like Jewish people'

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Former President Donald Trump in an interview on Tuesday claimed Vice President Kamala Harris, who is married to a Jewish man, "doesn't like Jewish people" and seemed to agree with a radio host who called second gentleman Doug Emhoff "a crappy Jew."

Trump, in an interview on WABC radio on Tuesday, claimed Harris looked uncomfortable while meeting last week with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"You can see the disdain," he said, adding, "No. 1, she doesn't like Israel. No. 2, she doesn't like Jewish people. You know it, I know it and everybody knows it and nobody wants to say it."

Trump has tried to capitalize on divisions in the Democratic Party over the Israel-Hamas war and sought to paint his political opponents as antisemitic while overlooking some of his own past comments and behavior, such as dining at his Florida club with a Holocaust-denying white nationalist. With Harris replacing President Joe Biden as the likely Democratic presidential nominee, Trump has escalated his attacks on her.

"America is better than the fear, hate, and despicable insults of Donald Trump," said James Singer, a spokesperson for the Harris campaign. "Vice President Harris believes Americans want a president who unites our country instead of divides it, uses the power of the presidency to help families instead of hurt them, and has a vision for our future, instead of taking us backwards."

In the interview, the Republican former president repeated comments he has made before lashing out at Jewish voters who back Democrats, saying anyone who does "should have their head examined" and

"if you're Jewish, if you vote for a Democrat, you're a fool, an absolute fool. They have let Jewish people down since Obama at a level that nobody could believe."

As Trump continued on, he again said of Harris, "She dislikes Jewish people and Israel even more than Biden did."

The interview host, Sid Rosenberg, then mentioned Harris' husband, second gentleman Doug Emhoff and said, "He's Jewish like Bernie Sanders is Jewish. Are you kidding me?"

"Yeah," Trump said.

"He's a crappy Jew," Rosenberg said, continuing.

"Yeah," Trump said again.

Rosenberg went on, saying of Emhoff, "He's a horrible Jew."

They then moved on to criticizing Harris on other issues.

Trump made a similar claim about Harris disliking Jewish people on Friday while speaking to a Christian group at a Turning Point USA gathering in Florida. He has also ignited blowback in the past for making similar remarks about Jewish people, like when he said in March that Jews who vote for Democrats "hate Israel" and hate "their religion."

Emhoff, the first Jewish person to serve as the spouse of a nationally elected U.S. leader, has been one of the most visible members of the Biden administration speaking about combating antisemitism. He hung mezuzahs on the doorposts of the vice president's residence and led Passover celebrations at the White House.

Emhoff's office declined to comment Tuesday.

Trump's campaign has also criticized Emhoff's adult daughter Ella for posting on her social media account a fundraising link for the U.N. Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees. Israel has sought to ban the group and suggests it supports terrorists. European leaders have said that is a baseless accusation.

Rosenberg, who is Jewish, is a longtime conservative New York City radio personality who hosts "Sid and Friends in the Morning," on 77 WABC. Guests on his show have included Trump-world figures like Rudy Giuliani and Donald Trump Jr.

Rosenberg came to prominence as a sidekick and sports anchor on Don Imus' long-running morning radio show. He drew backlash in 2001 for making racist comments calling tennis star Venus Williams an "animal" and saying that she and her sister Serena should pose for National Geographic magazine. He was fired from Imus' show over those remarks but re-appeared on the show later and was involved in the incident that got Imus fired in 2007, in which Imus made a racist and misogynist remark about the mostly black Rutgers University women's basketball team.

William Calley, who led the My Lai massacre that shamed US military in Vietnam, has died

GAINESVILLE, Fla. (AP) — William Laws Calley Jr., who as an Army lieutenant led the U.S. soldiers who killed hundreds of Vietnamese civilians in the My Lai massacre, the most notorious war crime in modern American military history, has died. He was 80.

Calley died on April 28, according to his Florida death record, which said he had been living in an apartment in Gainesville. His death was first reported by The Washington Post on Monday, citing his death certificate.

Calley had lived in obscurity in the decades since he was court-martialed and convicted in 1971, the only one of 25 men originally charged to be found guilty in the massacre that helped turn American opinion against the war in Vietnam.

On March 16, 1968, Calley led American soldiers of the Charlie Company on a mission to confront a crack outfit of Vietcong enemies. Instead, over several hours, the soldiers killed 504 unresisting civilians, mostly women, children and elderly men, in My Lai and a neighboring community.

The men were angry: Two days earlier, a booby trap had killed a sergeant, blinded a GI and wounded several others while Charlie Company was on patrol.

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Soldiers eventually testified to the U.S. Army investigating commission that the murders began soon after Calley led Charlie Company's first platoon into My Lai that morning. Some were bayoneted to death. Families were herded into bomb shelters and killed with hand grenades. Other civilians slaughtered in a drainage ditch. Women and girls were gang-raped.

It wasn't until more than a year later that news of the massacre became public. And while My Lai was the most notorious massacre in modern U.S. military history, it was not an aberration: Estimates of civilians killed during the U.S. ground war in Vietnam from 1965 to 1973 range from 1 million to 2 million.

The U.S. military's own records, filed away for three decades, described 300 other cases of what could fairly be described as war crimes. My Lai stood out because of the shocking one-day death toll, stomach-churning photographs and gruesome details exposed by a high-level U.S. Army inquiry.

Investigations into the massacre and allegations of a Pentagon coverup were launched after a complaint by a helicopter pilot, Hugh Thompson Jr., who saved 16 Vietnamese children in the village and later testified against Calley.

Multiple other soldiers at the scene also spoke out after the scandal broke. Some said civilian deaths were inevitable in a war where the enemy could be anywhere. Others said Calley, who was charged with killing 109 civilians, shouldn't have been singled out.

"Calley, he didn't kill the 109 all by himself. There was a company there," said Herbert Carter, a soldier from Houston. "We went through the village. We didn't see any VC (Viet Cong). People came out of their hootches (huts) and the guys shot them down and then burned the hootches, or burned the hootches and then shot the people when they came out. ... It went on like this all day. Some of the guys seemed to be having a lot of fun doing it."

Calley was convicted in 1971 for the murders of 22 people during the rampage. He was sentenced to life in prison but served only three days because President Richard Nixon ordered his sentence reduced. He served three years of house arrest.

Without apologizing, much less admitting guilt, Calley mused about the massacre's legacy in an exclusive Associated Press interview as he waited for the verdict.

"I can't say I'm proud of ever being in My Lai or ever participating in war. But I would be extremely proud if My Lai shows the world what war is and that the world needs to do something about stopping wars," he said. "I hope My Lai isn't a tragedy but an eye opener ... My Lai has happened in every war. It's not an isolated incident, even in Vietnam."

After his release, Calley got married, settled into a job at his father-in-law's jewelry store in Columbus, Georgia, and had a son. He later got divorced and moved to Atlanta, where he avoided publicity and routinely turned down journalists' requests for interviews.

Calley broke his silence in 2009, at the urging of a friend, when he spoke to the Kiwanis Club in Columbus near Fort Benning, where he had been court-martialed.

"There is not a day that goes by that I do not feel remorse for what happened that day in My Lai," Calley said, according to the Columbus Ledger-Enquirer. "I feel remorse for the Vietnamese who were killed, for their families, for the American soldiers involved and their families. I am very sorry."

He said his mistake was following orders, which had been his defense when he was tried. His superior officer was acquitted.

John Partin, the assistant prosecutor at the court-martial, learned of Calley's death in a phone call from an AP reporter Tuesday. He recalled being disappointed in Nixon's response to Calley's conviction, and rejected the notion that Calley was simply a scapegoat for command decisions or U.S. policy failures.

"He was acting essentially on his own, although he, like the others, said it was following orders," Partin said. "His responsibility as an officer was to not obey unlawful orders, and the order he says they got was illegal."

Partin said one of most important outcomes of the My Lai massacre was the recognition that U.S. troops needed to be better trained in the rules of engagement and the legal implications of combat actions.

"It became the standard to have better education for our troops," he said.

In a 1976 AP interview, the former Army colonel who presided over Calley's court-martial said he believed

that Calley thought he was doing the right thing at My Lai, but he was still guilty, and others who knew of and participated in the killings should have been convicted as well.

Calley was born in June 8, 1943 in South Florida, where friends called him "Rusty" growing up. He eventually dropped out of Palm Beach Junior College, and worked as a dishwasher, bellhop, railroad switchman, salesman and insurance appraiser before joining the Army in 1966.

At about 5-foot, 3-inches tall and 120 pounds when he was in the Army, Calley didn't stand out. Fellow officer candidates told the AP in 1969 that there was nothing unusual about him. But his military career was advancing until the scandal. Months after the massacre, he returned home, then re-upped for another tour. Eventually, he was wounded, awarded the Purple Heart, and won two Bronze Star medals.

His sister Dawn was living with their father in a mobile home in Hialeah when she told reporters during the trial that her brother was a "sweet, sensitive guy."

Messages left for his son and ex-wife on Tuesday were not immediately returned.

Hugo Chávez statues targeted across Venezuela in post-election unrest

By JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

LA GUAIRA, Venezuela (AP) — Anti-government activists across Venezuela are toppling giant statues of Hugo Chávez to express their anger over the alleged stealing of an election by the late president's hand-picked successor, Nicolás Maduro.

In the seaside city of La Guaira, outside the capital Caracas, twisted rebar and chunks of concrete lie below a pedestal where a group of protesters Monday night ripped down one likeness of Chávez that was dedicated by Maduro in 2017.

A video provided to The Associated Press from one protester shows the moment when the 3.5 meter (12 feet) statue of the leader known as El Comandante was pulled down to raucous shouts of "this government is going to fall." Once removed, the statue was dragged by motorcycles across the plaza, doused in gasoline and set on fire, the protester said.

"This is a powerful symbol to them," said the protester, who asked not to be identified for fear she could be arrested. "Every time we tackle one of their symbols, we're taking away some of their strength."

This isn't the first time monuments honoring the creator of the so-called Bolivarian Revolution have been attacked by angry mobs. The same phenomenon occurred during waves of anti-government unrest in 2017 and 2019.

But the simultaneous nature and high number of attacks — five in the last 24 hours — underscores the depth of anger many Venezuelans feel after the National Electoral Council declared Maduro the winner in Sunday's presidential election. The opposition says its candidate, Edmundo Gonzalez, more than doubled the incumbent's vote count.

A plainclothes military intelligence officer stopped journalists trying to take photos of what remains of the destroyed statue in La Guaira. The officer, who didn't identify himself, said the country is "at war" and that any effort to disrespect Chávez was offensive to millions of Venezuelans who revered the former army paratrooper and anti-imperialist icon.

Maduro said several people had been arrested in the attacks, which he likened to the images from revolutions pushed by the U.S. in post-Soviet states including Ukraine and Georgia.

"What do these people have in their head? In the heart?" Maduro asked in a televised address Monday night in which he broadcast images of some of the attacks. "Just imagine if they one day gain power here, what they would be capable of doing."

Men's Olympic triathlon postponed in Paris over Seine water quality concerns

By PAT GRAHAM and KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

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PARIS (AP) — Olympics organizers are banking on the sun and scorching temperatures to improve the water quality of the Seine River enough for triathletes to swim in it.

Otherwise, they could be feeling the heat.

Concerns about the Paris river's cleanliness postponed the men's triathlon on Tuesday, with officials hoping the swimming portion of the race will soon be able to go forward in the long-polluted waterway 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 happen if water tests show acceptable levels of E. coli and other bacteria. Friday is also planned as a backup date.

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

"It's disappointing that there's this negative aspect now with the delay," American triathlete Seth Rider said. "But I hope we can have a triathlon and I can accomplish this dream that I've had since I was a little kid."

Aurélie Merle, the Paris 2024 director of sports, told reporters Tuesday that water samples are taken 21 and a half hours before decisions are made about the swim, leaving uncertainty about its accuracy the day of the race.

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.

Organizers were asked if they put the aesthetics of the triathlon over the best interests of athletes.

"We're living in the 21st century where, unfortunately, there are far more meteorological events that happen that are beyond the control of the organizers," Merle said. "We've seen that we go from heavy rain to extreme heat like today in very few days. So it's actually hard to control how it can affect the quality of a river."

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.

Organizers 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. The sun's ultraviolet rays can kill the bacteria and lower levels, and the early part of the week has been hot and sunny.

The sport's governing body, World Triathlon, its medical team, the IOC and city officials met early Tuesday and decided to postpone.

Rider, the triathlete, was on a 4 a.m. run when the delay was announced. A fellow triathlete also out running waved him down.

"We had a little chat there in the pitch black, at 4 a.m., in the middle of the street, no one around," Rider said. "I just went back to the room and went back to bed."

Paris Deputy Mayor Pierre Rabadan said "the trend is improving" but 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 the fecal bacteria E. coli. World Triathlon's water safety guidelines and a 2006 European Union directive give a range of E. coli levels from "excellent" to "sufficient." Anything beyond 900 colony-forming units per 100 milliliters is not considered safe or "sufficient."

But experts stressed that these numbers are simply guidelines used to assess risk. "There's nothing magic about 900," said Dr. Nicole Iovine, an infectious diseases specialist at the University of Florida.

One of four test sites was below the threshold for E. coli on Tuesday, said Merle of Paris 2024. 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.

Paris Mayor Anne Hidalgo very publicly took a swim in the river two weeks ago, along with Paris 2024 chief Tony Estanguet. 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 threshold.

The men's triathlon is now scheduled to start at 10:45 a.m. Wednesday, which may make heat more of a factor with the event finishing at the hottest part of the day. World Triathlon is planning to provide ice and water stations along the course for the athletes. The women's race is set to go forward at 8 a.m. as originally planned.

If the river isn't safe for swimming after delays, that part of the race would be scrapped and only the cycling and running portions would go forward. That happened last year at the European Championships when the triathlon format was switched because of water quality issues.

"It's just another situation of the competition," said World Triathlon president Marisol Casado, pushing back against the idea that a switch would be unfair to triathletes who excel in the water.

Other swimming events planned in the Seine are the triathlon mixed relay on Monday and the women's and men's marathon swimming events on Aug. 8 and Aug. 9. Marathon swimming could be relocated, if needed, to the Vaires-sur-Marne Nautical Stadium in the greater Paris region, which already hosts rowing and canoeing competitions and can accommodate up to 15,000 spectators.

But it's a logistical challenge for triathlon to switch swimming locations given that routes are already set up for cycling and running.

"We are sympathetic," Merle said. "Let's see how it goes."

A cratered field, a mangled fence. Clues emerge from strike that killed 12 children in Golan Heights

By JULIA FRANKEL and SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Two days after a rocket slammed into a soccer field 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 the Lebanese militant group quickly issued a rare denial of any responsibility for the attack.

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

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

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 bikes with their batteries melted. Walls of a nearby tent and shelter were pockmarked from shrapnel.

The Israeli military's Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi 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 the site on Monday.

The Israeli military was investigating why its renowned missile defense system called Iron Dome did not intercept the rocket.

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 the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity to discuss the matter.

The military said the flight time may have been too brief. The rocket was fired from just north of the Lebanese town of Chebaa, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from Majdal Shams, it said. Hezbollah has ex-

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perimented with launching rockets from a shorter distance.

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. It's nearly impossible to intercept rockets fired from within 5 kilometers (3 miles) that take 2-3 seconds to reach their destination, 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, the most powerful paramilitary and political force in Lebanon, 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, where the government in Damascus is a Hezbollah 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 an Israeli military base on Mount Hermon, about 3 kilometers (2 miles) north of Majdal Shams.

A small militant faction allied with Hezbollah that also operates from southern Lebanon, often from near Chebaa, also denied responsibility for the attack. Hezbollah-allied media questioned whether Israel was looking for an excuse to widen the war amid the most serious push yet to reach a cease-fire in Gaza.

Was it an error?

From satellite images, pictures and videos from the scene and analysis of previous launches, experts said the evidence fits with a rocket attack.

"The evidence that we can see from the ground ... 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 warhead would explode on impact with a deadly high explosive load, spraying irregular-shaped fragments.

Dr. Ran Steinberg, chief of Pediatric Surgery at Rambam Hospital who took part in treating children wounded in the blast, told the AP that irregular, jagged pieces of shrapnel were removed from their bodies.

Weir said the damage did not appear consistent with the scenario of a hit by an air defense missile that malfunctioned. Such missiles are designed to disperse 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 that 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 blamed Hezbollah 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. 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 paramedic from the town who rushed to the scene of the attack on Saturday.

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

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.”

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."

Landslides caused by heavy rains kill 93 and bury many others in southern India

By SHEIKH SAALIQ Associated Press

NEW DELHI (AP) — Multiple landslides in southern India have killed 93 people and many others are feared trapped under the debris, officials said Tuesday, after torrential rains triggered torrents of mud and water that swept through tea estates and villages.

The landslides hit hilly areas in Kerala state's Wayanad district early Tuesday, flattening houses, uprooting trees and destroying bridges. Rescuers were working to pull out people stuck under mud and debris, but their efforts were hampered by blocked roads and unstable terrain. Authorities have yet to determine the full scope of the disaster.

Kerala's chief minister, Pinarayi Vijayan, said the landslides had killed at least 93 people and more than 100 people were receiving treatment for injuries. He said more than 3,000 people have been moved to relief camps.

Vijayan did not specify how many people were missing or trapped under the debris.

Local media reported that most of the victims were tea estate workers. Television footage showed res-

cue workers making their way through mud and uprooted trees to reach those who had been stranded. Vehicles swept off the roads were seen stuck in a swollen river. Local TV news channels also aired phone calls of stranded people asking for help.

Authorities mobilized helicopters to help with rescue efforts and the Indian army was roped in to build a temporary bridge.

"We are trying every way to rescue our people," state Health Minister Veena George said.

In a post on social media platform X, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said he was "distressed by the landslides in parts of Wayanad," a hilly district which is part of the Western Ghats mountain range.

"My thoughts are with all those who have lost their loved ones and prayers with those injured," Modi wrote. He announced compensation of 200,000 rupees (\$2,388) to the victims' families.

India's weather department has put Kerala on alert as the state has been lashed by incessant rains. Downpours have disrupted life for many, and authorities closed schools in some parts Tuesday. More rains are predicted through the day.

Kerala, one of India's most popular tourist destinations, is prone to heavy rains, flooding and landslides. Nearly 500 people were killed in the state in 2018 in one of the worst floods.

The Indian Meteorological Department said the state has had heavy rainfall over its northern and central regions, with Wayanad district recording up to 28 centimeters (11 inches) of rain in the past 24 hours.

"Monsoon patterns are increasingly erratic and the quantum of rainfall that we receive in a short spell of time has increased. As a result, we see frequent instances of landslides and floods along the Western Ghats," said Roxy Mathew Koll, a climate scientist at the Pune-based Indian Institute of Tropical Meteorology.

Koll also said authorities must check on rapid construction activities happening over landslide areas.

"Often landslides and flash floods occur over regions where the impact of both climate change and direct human intervention in terms of land use changes are evident," he said.

A 2013 report by a federal government-appointed committee said that 37% of the total area of the Western Ghats mountains should be declared an ecosensitive area and proposed restrictions on any form of construction. The report's recommendations have not been implemented so far because state governments and residents opposed it.

India regularly has severe floods during the monsoon season, which runs between June and September and brings most of South Asia's annual rainfall. The rains are crucial for rain-fed crops planted during the season, but often cause extensive damage.

Scientists say monsoons are becoming more erratic because of climate change and global warming.

Why Harris and Democrats keep calling Trump and Vance 'weird'

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.

The "weird" message appears to have given Democrats a narrative advantage that they 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.

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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 having 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.

Trump says he ‘probably’ will debate Harris but can ‘make a case for not.’ Her team says he’s scared

By MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump seems to be backing 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” — prompting her campaign to say he’s “scared.”

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 willing to debate President Joe Biden when Biden was the Democratic nominee after months of suggesting that the president 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 he 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.

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 he 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.

Harris campaign spokesperson Ammar Moussa accused Trump of continuing to dodge a face-off with his likely opponent.

“It’s clear from tonight’s question-dodging: He’s scared he’ll have to defend his running mate’s weird attacks on women or his own calls to end elections in America in a debate against the vice president,” Moussa said.

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 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.

Trump's campaign and supporters offered various explanations for his 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 OK," 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.

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 new military funding Tuesday to boost the Philippines' external defense 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 modernize 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 and elsewhere," including "coercive methods," Blinken said in a joint news conference.

He and Austin 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.

"Every peso or dollar spent on hardening Philippine capabilities to defend itself and to deter unlawful aggression will be a plus against any threat actor, whether it be China or anyone," Philippine Defense Secretary Gilberto Teodoro said.

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.

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The U.S. along with Japan, Australia, South Korea, New Zealand and Singapore, have welcomed the arrangement to deescalate tensions, Philippine Foreign Secretary Enrique Manalo said.

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 concluded 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 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, Blinken said U.S. support to the Philippines would 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.

"That doesn't change from election to election," Blinken said. "That commitment will endure, again, irrespective of administrations and this has been a long and powerful story in our history."

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. Beijing has 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.

Today in History: July 31, Phelps sets Olympic medal record

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Wednesday, July 31, the 213th day of 2024. There are 153 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On July 31, 2012, at the Summer Olympics in London, swimmer Michael Phelps won his 19th Olympic medal, becoming the most decorated Olympian of all time. (He would finish his career with 28 total Olympic medals, 23 of them gold.)

Also on this date:

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In 1715, a fleet of Spanish ships carrying gold, silver and jewelry sank during a hurricane off the east Florida coast; of some 2,500 crew members, more than 1,000 died.

In 1777, the 19-year-old Marquis de Lafayette received a commission as major general in the Continental Army by the Second Continental Congress.

In 1919, Germany's Weimar Constitution was adopted by the republic's National Assembly.

In 1945, Pierre Laval, premier of the pro-Nazi Vichy government in France, surrendered to U.S. authorities in Austria; he was turned over to France, which later tried and executed him.

In 1957, the Distant Early Warning Line, a system of radar stations designed to detect Soviet bombers approaching North America, went into operation.

In 1964, the U.S. lunar probe Ranger 7 took the first close-up images of the moon's surface.

In 1971, Apollo 15 crew members David Scott and James Irwin became the first astronauts to use a lunar rover on the surface of the moon.

In 1972, vice-presidential candidate Thomas Eagleton withdrew from the Democratic ticket with George McGovern following disclosures that Eagleton had received electroshock therapy to treat clinical depression.

In 1991, President George H.W. Bush and Soviet President Mikhail S. Gorbachev signed the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START I) in Moscow.

In 2020, a federal appeals court overturned the death sentence of Dzhokhar Tsarnaev in the 2013 Boston Marathon bombing, saying the judge who oversaw the case didn't adequately screen jurors for potential biases. (The Supreme Court later reimposed the sentence.)

Today's Birthdays: Jazz composer-musician Kenny Burrell is 93. Actor Geraldine Chaplin is 80. Former movie studio executive Sherry Lansing is 80. Singer Gary Lewis is 78. International Tennis Hall of Famer Evonne Goolagong Cawley is 73. Actor Michael Biehn is 68. Rock singer-musician Daniel Ash (Love and Rockets) is 67. Entrepreneur Mark Cuban is 66. Rock musician Bill Berry (R.E.M.) is 66. Jazz guitarist Stanley Jordan is 65. Actor Wesley Snipes is 62. Musician Fatboy Slim is 61. Author J.K. Rowling is 59. Actor Dean Cain is 58. Actor Jim True-Frost is 58. Actor Ben Chaplin is 55. Actor Eve Best is 53. Football Hall of Famer Jonathan Ogden is 50. Country singer-musician Zac Brown is 46. Actor-producer-writer B.J. Novak is 45. Football Hall of Famer DeMarcus Ware is 42. NHL center Evgeni Malkin is 38. NASCAR driver Kyle Larson is 32. Hip-hop artist Lil Uzi Vert is 29. Actor Rico Rodriguez (TV: "Modern Family") is 26.