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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.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



Wednesday, Aug. 14

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

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

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.

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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.

Middle East on Alert

A potential Iranian attack on Israel is expected as soon as this week, US and Israeli intelligence reported yesterday. The attack would come in retaliation for the July 31 assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, which Iran attributes to Israel.

Iran's missile and drone units are especially active, according to US and Israeli assessments, similar to activity seen before Iran launched over 300 projectiles into Israel in April. In response to the heightened threat, the Pentagon has deployed a guided missile submarine to the region and is working to expedite the arrival of an aircraft carrier to help defend Israel. Israel says it has put its military on high alert and has begun offensive and defensive military preparations.

France, Germany, Italy, and the UK have issued a joint statement calling on Iran to refrain from attacks and for a cease-fire between Israel and Hamas. Those talks are scheduled for Thursday, though it is unclear if Hamas will participate.

Mars Water Discovery

An ocean's worth of water may be hidden underneath the surface of Mars, according to research published yesterday. The findings alter hypotheses about Mars' geological evolution and offer a new place to search for possible signs of microbial life, if the reservoir can be accessed.

The research is based on seismic measurements captured by NASA's Mars InSight lander in 2018-22, which suggest the underground reservoir is trapped roughly 7 to 13 miles beneath the red planet's outer crust. Geophysicists estimate the amount of possible groundwater could cover all of Mars to a depth of roughly a mile. However, accessing the liquid water could be challenging, as drilling a hole even half a mile deep on Earth is difficult.

Mars was wet roughly 3 billion years ago—as evidenced by ancient lakes and river channels—until its atmosphere thinned. Scientists previously believed the thinning atmosphere caused much of the water to freeze, escape into space, or be absorbed into minerals.

Athens Wildfire Evacuations

A wildfire near Athens, Greece, has forced thousands to evacuate, including patients and staff from a children's hospital, a military hospital, and two monasteries. At least one person has died from the fire, which ignited Sunday about 20 miles northeast of the capital and remains largely uncontained. The fire has expanded to nearly 20 miles across, with some flames reaching over 80 feet in height. Strong winds, extreme heat, and drought, combined with challenging terrain, have fueled the fire's spread.

The fire is the most severe so far this year in Greece, which has seen dozens of fires this summer amid the country's hottest June and July on record. As of yesterday, over 700 firefighters, supported by aerial units and volunteers, have been deployed to combat the blaze. Several EU countries have also offered assistance in tackling the fire.

In the US, firefighters continued to battle the massive Park Fire, which is currently more than 429,000 acres in size and is 39% contained as of this writing.

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Georgia, Ohio State, and Oregon are Nos. 1, 2, and 3 in college football's AP Top 25 preseason poll; the 2024 season kicks off Aug. 24.

Rachael Lillis, "Pokémon" voice acting star, dies at age 46 of breast cancer.

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Ángel Salazar, actor best known for role in "Scarface," dies at age 68.

Universal Music Group and Meta sign multiyear agreement to expand licensing and monetization opportunities for Universal artists on Facebook, Instagram, and WhatsApp.

Science & Technology

High levels of an enzyme associated with lipid production correlated with higher risk of severe illness and death from flu, COVID-19, and RSV, per new study; may be indicative of overactive immune response.

New mechanism for bacterial cell division discovered; when filaments in the center of a cell bump into obstacles, they begin to dissolve, forming a ring-like structure to kick-start the division process.

Psychopharmacology journal retracts three papers on MDMA's potential for post-traumatic stress disorder following the Food and Drug Administration's rejection of drug application; retraction is attributed to unethical conduct during clinical trial.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 +0.0%, Dow -0.4%, Nasdaq +0.2%) ahead of latest batch of inflation data this week, including July's consumer price index report.

KeyCorp shares close up 9% after the Cleveland-based regional bank announces \$2.8B minority stake sale to Canada's Bank of Nova Scotia.

Equinox-owned Blink Fitness files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy; the low-cost gym has over 100 locations across seven US states, which will remain open.

Politics & World Affairs

Former President Donald Trump interviewed live by Elon Musk on X platform after 40-minute delay; see key takeaways.

Trump seeks \$100M in damages over 2022 Justice Department raid of his Palm Beach, Florida, residence.

New York judge rules Robert F. Kennedy Jr. can't appear on state's ballot because he falsely claimed New York residency.

Ukraine reportedly seizes at least 386 square miles of Russian territory and at least 28 settlements, following Ukrainian force's incursion last week into Russia's southwestern Kursk Oblast.

Trial begins for former Las Vegas, Nevada, official Robert Telles, accused of murdering a local journalist in 2022 who was investigating alleged mismanagement in Telles' office.

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Groton school board priorities include mobile device use, facility planning

by Elizabeth Varin

Technology, facilities and communication sum up some of the priorities the Groton Area School District Board wants to address.

The board approved five goals and priorities discussed at a late July work session.

Priorities include

1. Studying cell phone and mobile device use by students
2. Improving transparent communication in school board operations
3. Improving professional development for staff related to use of technology
4. Developing a long-term facilities plan
5. Improve relationships with all communities within Groton Area School District

Some districts have pushed to make cell phone inaccessible to students during classes. Board members weren't advocating for a particular policy, but rather discussed what some other districts have done recently, including Gettysburg instituting device-free school days.

"The problem would be enforcement," said board member Tigh Fliehs.

Superintendent Joe Schwan said he would like to see increased consistency in enforcing the district's current policy related to mobile devices.

The state government in Minnesota passed legislation earlier this year requiring all school districts and charter schools to adopt a policy related to students' possession and use of cell phones. Schwan said he wouldn't be surprised if something related to the issue comes up in the South Dakota legislative session.

Buses on the horizon for Groton school district

The district is moving forward to purchase a new bus.

The board approved a bus bid from Harlow's School Bus Service to purchase a new vehicle. It would replace bus No. 10, a 2011 IC Corp bus with more than 235,000 miles and a busted engine.

The bus needs to be replaced, and three other buses in the school's fleet have the same engine that may also face problems, said board member TJ Harder. District Transportation Director Damian Bahr received an offer for a new bus that would cost just over \$110,000. It is a 47-seat bus, and the price makes it a no-brainer, Harder said.

The district budget for the current fiscal year didn't include a new bus, but the 2025-2026 capital budget includes a new one, as well as the 2026-2027 fiscal year, said Superintendent Joe Schwan.

More buses are going to be needed in the coming years, said board member Tigh Fliehs. The district's bus fleet includes five buses with more than 200,000 miles.

- The board accepted the resignation of OST Coordinator and paraprofessional Kim Weber and elementary Librarian and RtI paraprofessional Tasha Dunker. Later in the meeting, the board reassigned two staff members to fill those positions. Alison Tvinnereim, elementary school paraprofessional, will be the elementary school librarian and RtI paraprofessional. Jennifer Kunze, who was hired for the upcoming school year, will be the new OST coordinator and paraprofessional.

- Various policy changes were discussed at Monday's meeting. The board held first readings of coaching handbook amendments, a federal grants manual and a handful of other policy changes. Superintendent Joe Schwan pointed out some policies dealing with members of the public challenging curriculum, as other schools throughout the country have faced issues in recent years. The policy sets up the process by which people can challenge specific curriculum issues. It also includes a policy that would allow parents to opt-out of allowing their child to access specific material from the school library.

- Summer maintenance work is still going. Work to replace flooring in a classroom at the middle

school finished Monday morning. Roofing work began at the elementary school Monday as well.

- Four more volunteer coaches were added to the roster at Monday's meeting. Jenna Strom and Carla Tracy were added as volunteer volleyball coaches, and Dalton Locke and Scott Thorson were added as volunteer football coaches. Nearly all of the board members approved the coaches, though board Vice President Nick Strom abstained from the vote.

- Sixth graders will be able to participate in junior high cross country. Those students will be able to practice with the middle schoolers. They can also compete in junior-high specific meets, but they will not be able to compete against high school student-athletes.

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Girls 10U Softball take second at state

The girls 10U softball team took second place at the state tournament. Pictured in back, left to right, are Kinley Sandness, Kendyll Kroll, Mya Moody, Andi Iverson, Ryan Hanson, Brynlee Dunker, Maycee Moody and Halee Perkins; in front, left to right, are head coach Reilly Fuhrman, Charli Jacobsen, Rowan Hanson, Gracie Borg, Libby Johnson, Devan Locke, Avery Roetelle and assistant coach Jackie Iverson. (Courtesy Photo)

SDSU Extension to feature emerald ash borer management at 2024 Dakotafest

BROOKINGS, S.D. – South Dakota State University Extension will return to Dakotafest in 2024 with educational displays and on-site experts showcasing more than 10 topics.

Dakotafest is from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. CDT on Aug. 20-22, 2024, just south of Mitchell at 2300 E. Spruce St. The annual agricultural trade show brings together farmers, ranchers and agricultural industry professionals from across the region. Tickets are \$7 in advance or \$10 at the gate.

SDSU Extension's booth will be at lot 216. One of this year's featured topics is emerald ash borer with John Ball, professor, SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist and South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Forest Health Specialist.

Ball will talk about copycat insects and cost-share options for removing ash trees from shelterbelts starting at 10:30 a.m. CDT on Aug. 20. Ash, a popular tree in South Dakota, are under threat from emerald ash borer.

An insect native to China, emerald ash borer was first discovered in the U.S. in 2002 in Michigan. It was confirmed in South Dakota in 2018 in Minnehaha County and in Brookings in July 2024. It is expected to continue spreading across the state.

"Once detected in a community, it quickly spreads and kills most ash within five to ten years," said John Ball, professor, SDSU Extension Forestry Specialist and South Dakota Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources Forest Health Specialist.

Other topics will include agricultural cybersecurity, precision agronomy, soil health, Beef Quality Assurance and other beef cattle topics, Sustaining the Legacy, land values and weeds. As always, there will be free SDSU ice cream served each day at 1:30 p.m.

"Dakotafest is a great time for SDSU Extension staff to hear from producers," said Heather Gessner, SDSU Extension Livestock Business Management Field Specialist. "We enjoy sharing new research or talking about our upcoming programs, but what I really enjoy is meeting with past participants of our programs and hearing how the information provided is being used."

Visit extension.sdstate.edu/events and search "Dakotafest" for a full schedule and sponsor list.

For more information, contact Heather Gessner, SDSU Extension Livestock Business Management Field Specialist, at 605-782-3290 or Heather.Gessner@sdstate.edu.

Names Released in Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash

Where: Interstate 90, mile marker 387, one mile west of Hartford, SD

When: 5:52 p.m., Friday, August 9, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2017 Harley Davidson Heritage

Driver 1: David Leon Rowe, 67-year-old male from Williamsburg, IA, fatal injuries

Helmet Use: Under investigation

Vehicle 2: 2019 Ford F350

Driver 2: Jeffrey Alphonse Bartscher, 61-year-old male from Sioux Falls, SD, minor injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A motorcyclist died Friday evening in a two-vehicle crash on I-90 near Hartford, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates David L. Rowe, the driver of a 2017 Harley Davidson Heritage, was traveling eastbound on I-90 in a split lane construction zone. Rowe lost control and crossed the center line, colliding head-on into a Ford F350, driven by Jeffrey A. Bartscher, traveling in the westbound lane. Rowe sustained fatal injuries during the crash. Bartscher sustained minor injuries.

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

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

That's Life by Tony Bender: Midsummer's quiz

Wow. There's been enough news in the last month to make your head spin like Linda Blair's in the Exorcist. School's about to start too, so put down those fishing poles, grab a #2 pencil, and let's get to work. Lunch today will be pea soup.

1. Why is Joe Biden no longer running for reelection?
 - A. Couped himself.
 - B. Going full time as mastermind of international prisoner releases.
 - C. Needs to devote full attention to Biden Crime Family.
 - D. Recovering from helicopter crash with Willie Brown.
2. Occasional Governor of North Dakota Doug Burgum disparaged Tim Walz because:
 - A. Walz keeps putting zucchini into Burgum's Prius.
 - B. Smoke from the smoldering ruins of Minneapolis are killing us.
 - C. When he's at his Detroit Lakes getaway, he resents Walz being the boss of him.
 - D. The inflationary price of sour grapes.
3. Why isn't confessed pedophile and former North Dakota legislator Ray Holmberg in jail?
 - A. Trying to wrangle imprisonment with juveniles.
 - B. If you can't break parole once in awhile is this even America anymore?
 - C. Giving it time to see if he'll un-confess.
 - D. It's not like he's got dirt on anyone, that's for sure.
4. Reason Trump is too old to be president.
 - A. Thinks he still is president.
 - B. Thinks he's running against Biden.
 - C. He could turn Black any minute now.
 - D. Insists Hannibal Lecter is his vice president.
5. What the heck was the Olympic opening ceremony all about?
 - A. I dunno, it felt like an acid flashback. Whatever that feels like.
 - B. Reenactment of the food fight in Animal House.
 - C. A blasphemous attack on Republicans. C'mon, is Paris even America, anymore?
 - D. All's I know is we have to invade France.
6. According to a recent Trump speech, the only thing we have to fear is:
 - A. Him.
 - B. Media lies about crowd size.
 - C. Debates.
 - D. Everything.
7. Why you shouldn't worry about the fascist playbook, the Heritage Center 2025 Project?
 - A. Thirty-one Trump associates are involved so it must be OK.
 - B. Trump knows nothing about it so it must be OK.
 - C. If you can't trust fascists, who can you trust?
 - D. Purge Night Wednesdays will be a blast.

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8. Are you better off today than you were four years ago?

- A. No, I died from COVID in 2020.
- B. If only I could get this lightbulb out of my...
- C. Well, we haven't had a good insurrection in a while.
- D. Better since the divorce.

9. What unauthorized song did Trump use at a recent rally?

- A. Theme From Titanic.
- B. Theme From Train Wreck.
- C. Theme From the S.S. Minnow
- D. Wind Beneath My Chair

10. What nickname have MAGAs given Tim Walz?

- A. Trampoline Tim
- B. Tampon Tim
- C. Tiny Tim
- D. Timmy-Timmy-Tim-Bob

BONUS: According to recent polling:

- A. If Robert Kennedy Jr. dumps 10 more bears in Central Park, he could be in the thick of things.
- B. Biden receiving 100% support at Mar-a-Lago.
- C. J.D. Vance has better eyeliner than RuPaul.
- D. Three out of 10 people have shot a man in Reno just to watch him die.

Answers: 1.d; 2. d; 3. a; 4. c; 5. c; 6. d; 7. d; 8. b; 9. d; 10. d; Bonus a. Scoring 11-9 correct: Iranian hacker. 6-8 correct: You should get that checked. 3-5 correct: Devo was right. 0-2 correct: More fake news from enemies of the state.

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For increasing number of immigrants, a 'new life in America' starts in South Dakota

BY MARIIA NOVOSELIA
South Dakota News Watch

South Dakota's increase of foreign-born population over the past 12 years exceeded the national average by three times, according to the American Community Survey Brief of the most recent U.S. Census Bureau report.

The state's population of people born overseas grew by 45.5% between 2010 and 2022, or 10,000 people, compared to 15.6% across the entire United States.

Only North Dakota, where the foreign-born population grew from 17,000 to 38,000 people within the same 12 years, had a larger percentage increase.

Nassir Yemam moved to South Dakota in the early 2000s as a refugee from Ethiopia and lives in Sioux Falls.

"I haven't had any bad experience, the people are good. I like the American way of life," he said. "I'm really happy with the place where I am, that's why I stayed here for a very long time."

Weiwei Zhang, state demographer and South Dakota State University professor, said that despite the increase, the number of foreign-born residents in South Dakota is still low, compared to states like California and New York.

In fact, analysis of the American Community Survey Brief shows that South Dakota has the fifth-lowest share of foreign-born residents in the country. Out of South Dakota's estimated 910,000 residents, nearly 32,000, or 3.5%, are from outside of the United States, according to the brief.

Zhang added that the increase in foreign-born population in South Dakota is an extension of the national trend. What's notable, however, is where foreign-born residents come from, she said.

Before 2000, the largest number of people came to South Dakota from Latin America, which was closely followed by Asia and then Europe. Since 2000, more people have been moving to South Dakota from Asia and Africa, moving Latin America to third place.

In 2018, according to an American Immigration Council report, most foreign-born residents in South Dakota were from Guatemala, the Philippines, Mexico, Sudan and Ethiopia.

Financial impact of immigration in South Dakota

Households led by foreign-born residents paid \$137.7 million in federal, state and local taxes in 2018, the same report said.

Zhang said some of the industries with the most workers from abroad are manufacturing, health care, transportation, and human and social services.

While official statistics do not contain data on why people might be moving to a particular place, Zhang said she speculates job opportunities, housing supply and existing ties with family or friends might be some of the reasons why people move to South Dakota from overseas.

For some people, moving to the United States is caused by "the fear for their lives and the lives of their family," said Rebecca Kiesow-Knudsen, president and CEO at Lutheran Social Services of South Dakota.

Those people are refugees.

"No individual wishes to become a refugee. That's not something that people desire," Kiesow-Knudsen said.

Current affairs affect where people resettle from

As of July 31, more than 280 refugees have resettled in South Dakota in fiscal year 2024, which started

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in October, according to the Refugee Processing Center. This is an increase compared to last year's 206 people.

So far, most people came from the Democratic Republic of Congo. Archives from the Refugee Processing Center show that 509 people from there have resettled in South Dakota since 2012.

Ahead of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in terms of arrivals in South Dakota, are Myanmar, formerly known as Burma, and Bhutan with 821 and 1,085 people, respectively.

Kiesow-Knudsen said countries from which people resettle in the United States tend to change based on conflicts that are happening around the world.

Kiesow-Knudsen added that it is difficult for the center to accurately say how many refugees are in the state. The organization only knows of those people who come to it and seek assistance.

"We know that there are many individuals who arrive, maybe in a different part of the country, and decide to move to South Dakota because it's a good place for their families and never talk to us," Kiesow-Knudsen said.

The process behind the scenes

The decision on how many refugees will relocate to the United States starts in the White House, said Kiesow-Knudsen. In 2023, the U.S. government sponsored more than 60,000 refugees to enter the country, according to the LSS Center for New Americans.

For fiscal year 2024, President Joe Biden authorized the admission of up to 125,000 refugees, according to the Bureau of Population, Refugees, and Migration. As of July 31, the United States has already welcomed more than 74,000 refugees, according to the Refugee Processing Center.

Kiesow-Knudsen said that once the president signs the determination that authorizes refugee admission, the U.S. Department of State begins a "very robust process" of background checks for individuals, registered as refugees, to gain approval status into the country.

LSS's Center for New Americans is an affiliate of Global Refuge, a nonprofit organization, formerly known as Lutheran Immigration and Refugee Service.

Organizations, like the Center for New Americans, start "a back-and-forth conversation" with Global Refuge and local stakeholders about the number of refugees that they can serve, considering factors like employment environment, school situation and housing market, Kiesow-Knudsen said.

"The United States has this wonderful tradition of welcoming refugees and helping to integrate them into the country, and we are just a part of that process to help people become successful," she said.

Center for New Americans consolidated with Multi-Cultural Center

The LSS Center for New Americans began the process of merging with the Multi-Cultural Center of Sioux Falls in October 2022.

Kiesow-Knudsen said the Multi-Cultural Center, which had previously worked with Native American and immigrant populations, was trying to find a new executive director and reached out to the Center for New Americans.

Because the two organizations had been providing similar services and had a lot of synergy, both their boards of directors decided to merge.

"The vision of LSS is that every South Dakotan is healthy, safe and accepted, and that last part is really what the MCC focuses on – that feeling of acceptance in Sioux Falls and in South Dakota, being able to celebrate our community and the diversity that's here," said Valeria Wicker, leading supervisor for the LSS Multi-Cultural Center.

Upon arrival: Community orientation

Kiesow-Knudsen said as a resettlement agency, LSS's Center for New Americans has the responsibility to "make sure that people get integrated into the community."

This means that a few weeks before a refugee lands at the Sioux Falls Regional Airport, the Center for New Americans receives a case file about them. This way, the organization's case management team arranges housing and provides "basic, 'What do I need to have in my home in order to live there?' items," Kiesow-Knudsen said.

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The team then meets the refugee at the airport, provides them with interpretation and translation services, takes them to their new home and welcomes them with a culturally appropriate meal.

Soon afterwards, new arrivals are invited to take part in community orientation, which spans two weeks. Ethiopia native Yemam remembers his orientation as "very, very helpful."

He said the program covered topics like getting a job, doing groceries and "starting a new life in America." To Yemam, this means "depending on yourself."

Yemam said the center paid a lot of attention to preparing refugees to enter the workforce by connecting them with different opportunities and helping them get ready for job interviews.

"Some people who come to the United States get the feeling that when they come here, dreams come true, but life is not easy the way you think," he said. "To make life easy, you need to work hard. That's what the American dream is like."

Yemam works at the African Community Center of Sioux Falls, providing services to African immigrants and their families.

Kiesow-Knudsen said the federal government provides financial assistance to refugees for up to eight months, which is "a quick turnaround."

She added that orientation leaders often invite members of the Sioux Falls community, representatives from law enforcement, Falls Community Health, the school district and more.

One of Yemam's biggest dreams is to send his 17-year-old son to college.

"My whole success is his future," he said. "I tell him that if he works hard on his education after high school, he will have a better life for 40 years."

English 'is the key' to enjoying life in America

Aside from community orientation, the Center for New Americans also provides English classes that can range in length, depending on the student's fluency.

"English here, in this country, is the key," Yemam said. "The more you speak English and the more you understand English, the more you enjoy life."

Kiesow-Knudsen said the process of acquiring a driver's license can be long for refugees, and not speaking English can make it particularly difficult. She said the center offers classes in several languages to help people understand the basics of what they will need to pass the written examination.

Yemam said he had driven a car with a manual transmission before coming to the United States, so he was able to pass the driving exam with ease. He recalls the first vehicle he bought here, a \$300 Nissan.

"It was a big deal for me," he said.

Community keeps culture alive: 'We feel free'

Yemam said one of the traits that American and Ethiopian cultures share is respect.

"Americans are very, very respectful people," he said. "That's why when we come to the United States, we feel free because nobody took away our faith, our culture or our anything. They respect what we have, and we have the right to practice our culture."

Yemam said the community of Ethiopians in Sioux Falls is sizable and vibrant. People tend to gather for church services, celebrations or mourning ceremonies.

For such occasions, Ethiopians usually dress up in traditional clothing, cook authentic food, meet up or call each other, he said.

Because many Orthodox churches use the Julian calendar to set days for religious holidays, some Ethiopian families in the United States celebrate two Easters, for example: one with their American neighbors and another that aligns with fellow Ethiopians, Yemam said.

"I say, 'Thank you, God' for everything that I have," Yemam said. "I always believe that I am blessed, I have no complaints."

This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit news organization. Read more in-depth stories at sdnewswatch.org and sign up for an email every few days to get stories as soon as they're published. Contact us at info@sdnewswatch.org.

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- Hydrostatic transmission

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- 42" stamped twin-blade deck
- Dual Hydro-Gear® EZT-2200™ transmission

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Ultima™ ZTS1 50 ZERO-TURN

- 24 HP†† Kohler® KT7000 V-twin OHV engine
- 50" AeroForce™ fabricated triple-blade deck
- Sealed ball bearing maintenance-free spindles
- 1" - 4.5" cutting height / dial-control knob deck lift w/ 15 quarter-inch height adjustments

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SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota secretary of state now a defendant in abortion rights case

BY: JOHN HULT - AUGUST 12, 2024 5:39 PM

South Dakota Secretary of State Monae Johnson is now a defendant in a lawsuit over an abortion rights ballot measure, but the lawsuit is still unlikely to change the look of the Nov. 5 general election ballot.

If passed, the measure would reinstate legal abortion in spite of a state law that banned the procedure when the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022. The ban has one exception to "preserve the life of the pregnant female."

The anti-abortion group Life Defense Fund first challenged the legality of the signatures gathered to place the measure on the ballot earlier this summer. Minnehaha County Judge John Pekas dismissed the lawsuit because the group failed to name Johnson.

The lawsuit sought to remove the measure from the general election ballot, but only named the measure's sponsor, Dakotans for Health, as a defendant. Only Johnson can do what Life Defense Fund wants, Pekas wrote in a July 17 opinion, so the case could not go forward.

The state Supreme Court sent the case back to Sioux Falls earlier this month, however, which gave Life Defense Fund the chance to amend its complaint and add Johnson.

On Friday, Pekas agreed to allow that, and also denied an effort to dismiss the case by Dakotans for Health. He inked a scheduling order that sets a trial date during the week of Sept. 23-27.

That's after the Wednesday deadline for the secretary of state to certify copies of ballot questions to county auditors, but before the deadline for counties to publish facsimiles of the general election ballot in their legal newspapers. Those facsimiles must be published within two calendar weeks of the general election.

In its amended complaint, Life Defense Fund argues that if it wins, Johnson could issue a statement prior to the election instructing voters to disregard Amendment G, the abortion amendment.

Life Defense Fund argues that it has "mounds of evidence" that petitioners working on behalf of Dakotans for Health were "clearly breaking election law" as they gathered signatures for the measure.

Dakotans for Health has consistently argued that Life Defense Fund's legal efforts are meant to stifle the right of South Dakotans to make the call on abortion rights in the state.

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.

Douglas School District seeks \$15 million in state funding to handle Ellsworth growth

Rising enrollment anticipated as Air Force base prepares for new planes

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - AUGUST 12, 2024 4:53 PM

Douglas School District is again asking the state for help building a new elementary school to accommodate rising enrollment caused by Ellsworth Air Force Base.

The district wants the state to contribute \$15 million toward the \$62 million school construction cost. Legislation that would have provided the money failed during last winter's legislative session. The next

session begins in January.

The district, in Box Elder, is preparing for an influx of young students from military and civilian families. Approximately \$1.5 billion worth of construction is underway at the base to prepare for the arrival of B-21 bombers, which are in development by the Air Force.

The new aircraft will eventually replace the B-1 bombers currently flown at Ellsworth. The base also hosts a squadron that remotely pilots MQ-9 Reaper unmanned aircraft.

Douglas Superintendent Kevin Case made a presentation Monday in Rapid City during a meeting of the Legislature's Select Committee on Legislative Relationships with Ellsworth Air Force Base.

"The Douglas School District serves the vast majority of the dependents connected with Ellsworth Air Force Base," Case said. "The projected exponential student growth of military-connected students far exceeds existing student facility capacity."

The Air Force projects 1,500 additional students for the area, and Douglas School District anticipates 70% of the new students will enroll in the district's schools, with a majority at the elementary level.

Case noted that many existing facilities are already at capacity with 2,775 students in grades K-12.

The district has secured \$40 million to \$42 million in federal funding to build the new elementary school. The district will contribute \$5 million to \$7 million of its own funding.

According to a Monday presentation by the city of Box Elder, its population has already swollen by 22.5% since 2020 to an estimated 14,512, making it the 10th largest city in the state. The city expects to reach 16,000 residents — not including people living on the base — by 2029. The number of military and civilian personnel living on the base could grow by 30% to more than 14,000 people during the transition from B-1s to B-21s, according to the city's presentation.

The committee also discussed broader infrastructure needs related to the base, including transportation improvements such as the Exit 63 and I-90 interchange reconstruction set for 2027.

The committee did not discuss a July report from the Air Force on a \$456 million B-1 crash at Ellsworth in January. The commander of Ellsworth's 28th Operations Group was relieved of command following the release of the report, which identified an undisciplined chain of command and unforeseen weather as the causes of the crash.

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.

Black Hills groups announce \$30 million in federal funding for affordable housing

Money comes from earmark included in congressional spending package

BY: SETH TUPPER - AUGUST 12, 2024 2:15 PM

RAPID CITY — A \$30 million funding award from the federal government will help Black Hills leaders create local trust funds to support affordable housing, officials announced Monday.

Chris Huber is the CEO of the Black Hills Area Community Foundation. He said Rapid City leaders had to scramble to manage growth during the post-World War II boom years, when the city's population tripled between 1940 and 1960.

Now the area is experiencing growth as Ellsworth Air Force Base prepares for B-21 bomber planes, which are in development and expected to arrive sometime this decade. That activity and an influx of other new residents attracted to the region since the pandemic are stressing local housing markets.

"Together, we learned from the past and decided to be proactive partners focused on addressing the housing issues facing the Black Hills Region," Huber said.

The South Dakota Ellsworth Development Authority will route the federal funding to the Black Hills Area

Community Foundation, which will hold the money and work with local communities to establish their own housing trust fund advisory boards.

Board members will vet applications for low-interest loans to assist with affordable housing projects. The trust funds will operate on a revolving basis, making new loans with money paid back by loan recipients.

The Black Hills Area Community Foundation has already used the trust fund model to support the creation of 550 affordable housing units in Rapid City. The federal money will enable the establishment of additional trust funds for the Ellsworth area, along with Belle Fourche, Deadwood-Lead, Spearfish, Sturgis, Hill City, Hot Springs and Custer.

Projects will provide housing at below-market rates. In Rapid City, the goal is to create housing that's affordable for people with incomes in the \$20,000 to \$50,000 annual range.

"It'll be very similar in the rest of those communities," Huber said, "but it'll be dependent on what the advisory board decides is their most pressing need."

The federal money comes from an "earmark" — the term for money that members of Congress direct to projects in their own districts.

South Dakota Republican Senators Mike Rounds and John Thune requested the funding's inclusion in a 1,050-page, \$468 billion congressional spending package that passed in March. The package included approximately 6,600 earmarks totaling \$12.66 billion.

Past abuses led Congress to ban earmarks for roughly a decade until 2021. Rounds, who attended Monday's announcement in Rapid City, said he uses earmarks to fund projects recommended by local communities and endorsed by the state, such as roads, bridges, sewer systems, housing and other economic development and quality-of-life projects.

"Some folks say they would prefer not to tell the executive branch where to spend the money," Rounds said. "I've always taken the position that people from South Dakota should have more of a say in terms of where the money in South Dakota is going to be spent."

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.

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Proposed changes to Indigenous education standards available for public comment

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - AUGUST 12, 2024 6:00 AM

The South Dakota Board of Education Standards will soon review proposed changes to the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings, a set of standards meant to introduce Native American culture, traditions and history into public schools.

The proposed changes are meant to make the standards "more navigable for teachers," Indian Education Advisory Council Director Fred Osborn told council members at their Thursday meeting.

The updates include new appendices for teachers to access resources, a new map of South Dakota reservations, more Indigenous language usage throughout and more Indigenous language pronunciation guides, among other changes.

Osborn told council members that there were not significant changes made to the standards, and that he didn't believe any of the changes detracted from the standards. He said there "was a lot more teacher input" in the standards review.

One change, he added, was to change "resilience" to "strength" throughout the standards, to become more "current" and "empowering" for students.

Advisory council members questioned some extended descriptions in the standards, and questioned the use of photos in the standards. Many of the photos were of landscapes or animals rather than people, said council member Brian Wagner, who is the tribal education director with the Lower Brule Sioux Tribe. Members said they would need more time to adequately review the changes before the Board of Education Standards' next meeting.

The standards are not required to be taught in public schools — something some council members have pushed to change in recent years. A 2023 survey from the state Department of Education said nearly two-thirds of South Dakota educators are teaching the standards, but some members of the council questioned the results since the number of respondents was less than a 2021 survey.

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Lawmakers have introduced bills to require use of the Oceti Sakowin Essential Understandings in classrooms, but those efforts have failed in the Legislature.

The proposed changes are available on the state Department of Education website for public comment ahead of the Board of Education Standards' Sept. 16 meeting.

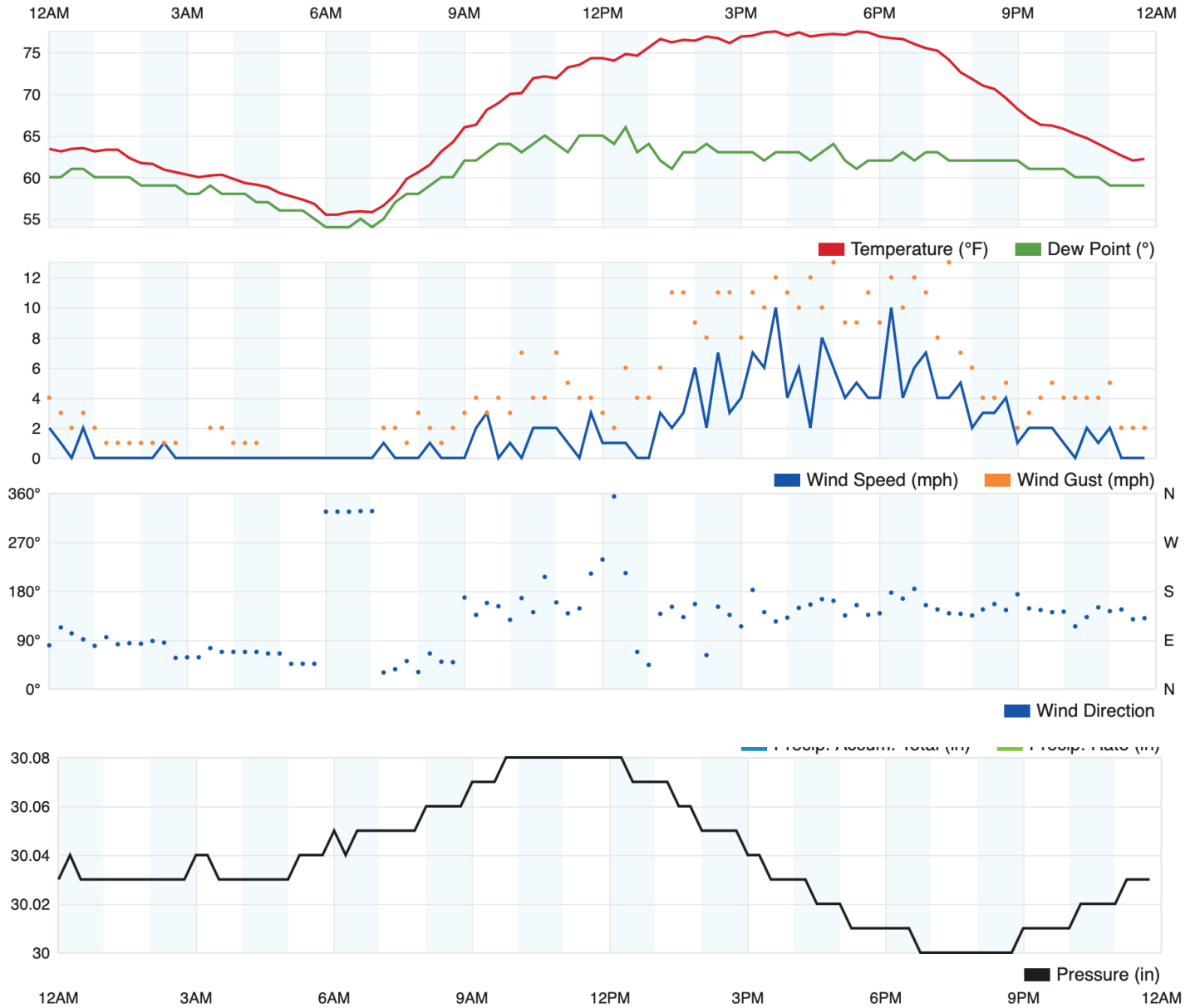
The new standards, if approved, will go into effect during the 2025-2026 school year.

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 83 °F

Partly Sunny

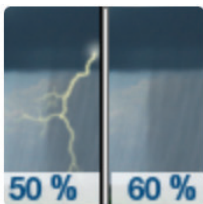
Tonight



Low: 66 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms

Wednesday



High: 75 °F

Chance
T-storms then
Showers
Likely

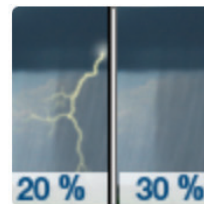
Wednesday
Night



Low: 63 °F

Chance
T-storms

Thursday



High: 77 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Chance
Showers

Today



Highs: 77-85°F

15-25% chance of isolated showers/storms
- Mainly over north central to south
central SD

Tonight



Lows: 64-68°F

15-20% chance of showers and
thunderstorms



NWS Aberdeen, SD

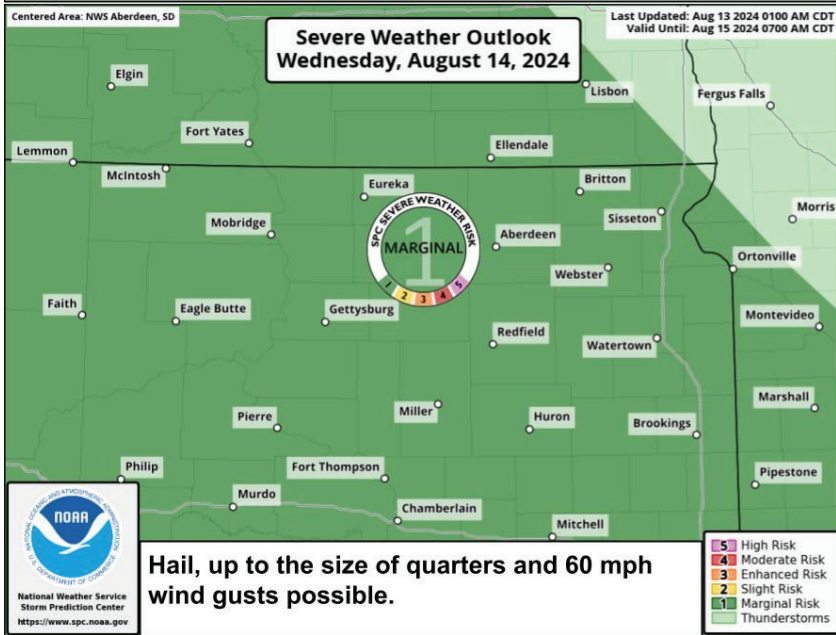


Periods of sun and clouds for today with a 15 to 25% chance of isolated showers and thunderstorms, mainly over central SD through tonight. Highs will range in the upper 70s to the mid 80s, which is around to a few degrees below climatological average.

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- A system is expected to move from northwest to southeast over SD **Wednesday** bringing showers and thunderstorms through Thursday. With slow movement of the thunderstorms, periods of heavy rain are possible.
- There is a marginal risk for storms to become strong to severe **Wednesday afternoon/evening**



	Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)											
	8/14 Wed						8/15 Thu					
	12am	3am	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am
Aberdeen	20	15	30	50	60	60	65	45	45	30	30	15
Britton	10	10	15	35	50	65	65	55	55	40	40	20
Brookings	10	15	25	60	60	50	50	60	60	40	40	10
Chamberlain	30	45	50	50	50	60	60	40	40	15	15	15
Clark	10	15	25	45	50	55	50	50	50	40	40	25
Eagle Butte	20	30	30	50	50	50	50	40	40	20	20	25
Ellendale	20	15	25	50	60	65	75	50	50	30	30	20
Eureka	20	35	45	60	75	70	75	45	45	25	25	25
Gettysburg	20	30	40	45	55	55	65	50	50	20	20	30
Huron	20	35	45	65	65	50	50	45	45	20	20	15
Kennebec	20	30	35	30	35	35	40	35	35	10	10	20
McIntosh	20	25	30	50	65	65	55	40	40	15	15	25
Milbank	5	5	10	25	35	55	55	60	60	50	50	25
Miller	20	25	40	50	55	50	60	40	40	20	20	30
Mobridge	20	25	40	55	65	70	70	35	35	20	20	25
Murdo	25	35	25	10	10	25	25	30	30	5	5	25
Pierre	30	35	35	30	35	45	45	35	35	15	15	25
Redfield	20	25	30	50	55	55	55	40	40	25	25	25
Sisseton	5	5	10	25	35	55	55	60	60	40	40	30
Watertown	5	10	15	40	45	55	50	55	55	35	35	20
Webster	5	10	15	35	45	60	55	60	60	45	45	20
Wheaton	5	5	5	15	25	45	50	70	70	55	55	30

A system will bring showers and thunderstorms across the forecast area through early Thursday. Some of these storms could become strong to severe. Periods of heavy rain is also possible

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 78 °F at 4:22 PM

Low Temp: 55 °F at 6:03 AM

Wind: 13 mph at 1:20 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 14 hours, 13 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 112 in 1965

Record Low: 35 in 1964

Average High: 84

Average Low: 57

Average Precip in Aug.: .94

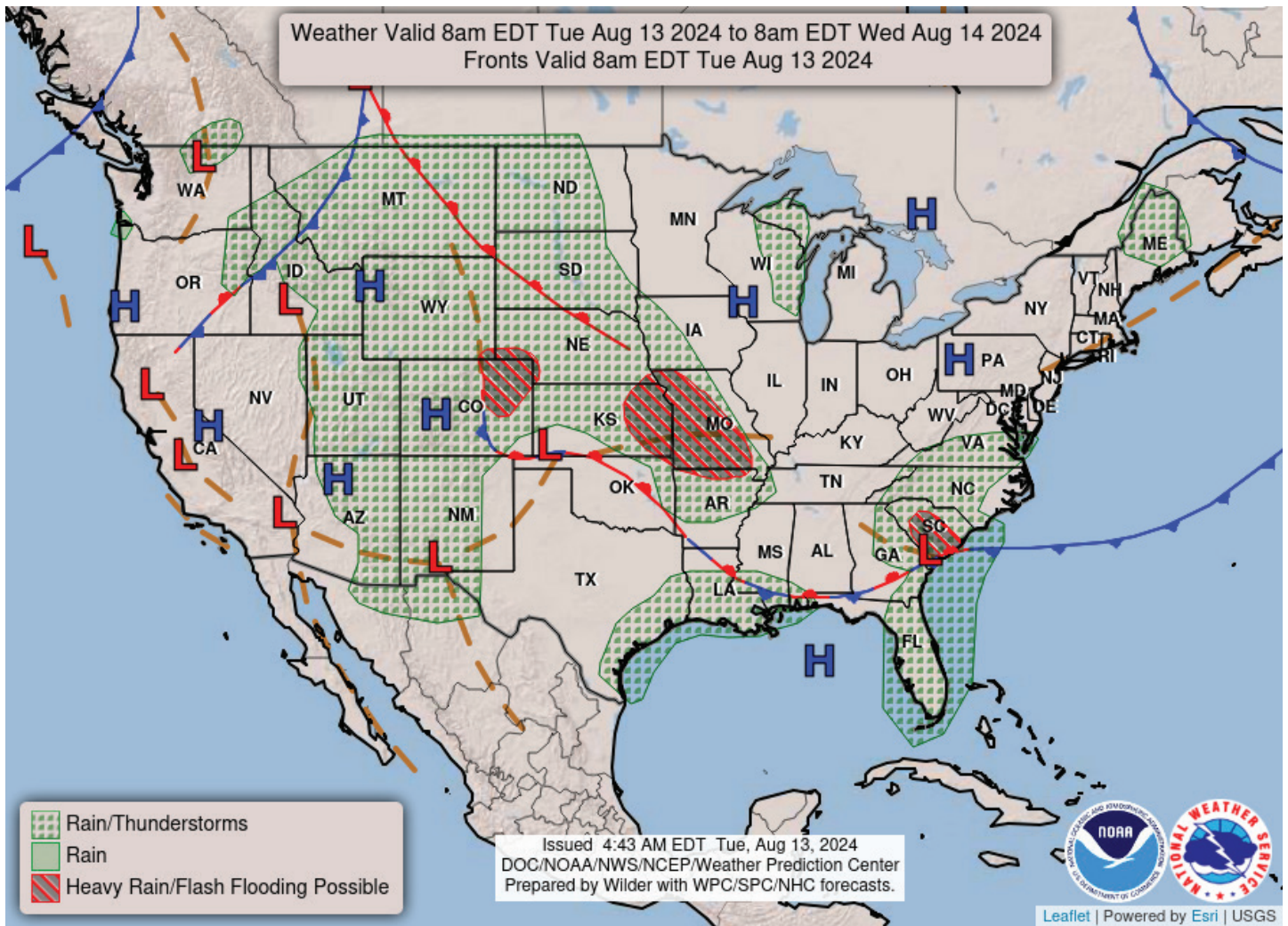
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.16

Average Precip to date: 15.04

Precip Year to Date: 16.05

Sunset Tonight: 8:44:01 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:31:27 am



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Today in Weather History

August 13, 2000: A thunderstorm set numerous prairie fires in Harding County. Over a thousand acres burned by the end of the day.

1831: The Great Barbados Hurricane was an intense Category 4 hurricane that left cataclysmic damage across the Caribbean and Louisiana in 1831. From August 11 through the 13, Bermudians were amazed to see the sun with a decidedly blue appearance, giving off an eerie blue light when it shone into rooms and other enclosed places. Ships at sea as far west as Cape Hatteras reported that "their white sails appeared a light blue colour." A month later it was learned that the astounding blue sunlight had coincided with a terrible hurricane that caused 1,477 people to lose their lives. It was assumed that the hurricane was intensive enough to cause an unusual disturbance in the higher atmospheric strata, and refraction, diffraction or absorption of light rays, to produce the blue reflection. Because the sun appeared bluish-green, Nat Turner took this as the final signal and began a slave rebellion a week later on August 21.

1919 - High winds and heavy rain struck the Middle Atlantic Coast Region. In New Jersey, winds gusted to 60 mph at Atlantic City, and nine inches of rain fell at Tuckerton. The wind and rain leveled crops and stripped trees of fruit causing several million dollars damage. (David Ludlum)

1980 - The afternoon high at New York City was just 89 degrees. But there were fifteen days of 90 degree heat during the month, their hottest August of record. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - Hail larger than golf balls, driven by 70 mph winds, moved down crops, stripped trees, and broke windows, near Logan KS. Road graders cleared three foot drifts of hail on Kansas Highway 9 east of Logan. (The Weather Channel)

1987: A succession of thunderstorms produced rainfall that was unprecedented in 116 years of precipitation records at Chicago, Illinois during an 18 hour period from the evening of the 13th to the early afternoon of the 14th. The resulting flash flood was the worst ever to strike the Chicago metropolitan area, causing three deaths and water damage that amounted to 221 million dollars. O'Hare International Airport received an event total of 9.35 inches of rain in 18 hours, shattering the previous 24-hour record of 6.24 inches. For about 24 hours, the airport was only accessible from the air as all roads were blocked by high water, including the Kennedy Expressway.

1988 - A dozen cities in the northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date. Lansing MI reported a record 35 days of 90 degree weather for the year, Detroit MI reported a record 37 days of 90 degree heat for the year, and Williamsport PA reported a record 38 days of 90 degree weather for the year. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Thunderstorms developing in a tropical airmass over the northeastern U.S. soaked Connecticut and Massachusetts with four to eight inches of rain over the weekend, between the 11th and 13th of the month. Hartford CT received 7.70 inches of rain. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1991: Stockton, California received 0.05 inch of rainfall on this day. Since 1949, this is the only measured rainfall in Stockton on August 13th.

2003: A string of days in Paris France with temperatures from the 4th to the 12th above 95°F ends when the day's high drops to 90°F. During the long, hot summer which began 25 July and has registered several days above 100°F, an estimated 14,800 have died from heat-related causes, the French government admits.

2014 - An official, New York State 24 hour precipitation record was set at Islip, NY on August 12-13 when 13.57" of rain fell.



LOOKING FOR GOD?

A French astronomer speaking to a group of intellectuals proudly declared, "I've swept the universe with my telescope, and I find no God. I've searched the skies for years but can find Him nowhere. Therefore, I have come to the conclusion that there is no God."

Following him a humble, but world-renowned violinist came to the stage and said, "Your statement, dear sir, is just as foolish as for me to say, 'I have searched inside my violin with a microscope to find a musician and I could not find one.' Because there is music, Sir, there must be a musician."

And because there is a creation, he concluded, there must be a Creator!

David declares that God has revealed Himself in and through nature. In nature we learn about His power and greatness and our insignificance and finiteness. As God reveals Himself through Scripture, we learn about His holiness and our sinfulness. As God reveals Himself through our daily experiences, we learn about His grace and graciousness that frees us of our sin and guilt.

We are surrounded by God's greatness that we see in His many magnificent displays in nature. But the greatest display that we see of God is in His work of love, grace, mercy, salvation and hope. What more evidence do we need to have than our salvation or the healing of a loved one?

Prayer: Thank you, Father, for not only making Yourself known to us, but for providing our salvation, the answers to our prayers and the hope of being with You. In the Name of Jesus' Amen.

Scripture For Today: The heavens proclaim the glory of God. The skies display his craftsmanship. Psalms 19:1

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.09.24

12 32 38 40 57 21

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$435,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 17 Hrs 22 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.12.24

9 24 27 28 52 3

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$6,810,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 37 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.12.24

3 6 17 24 35 2

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 52 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.10.24

14 16 23 29 32

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 16 Hrs 52 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.12.24

5 35 49 60 62 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 57 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.12.24

9 22 57 67 68 14

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 21 Mins 57 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

With over 577,000 signatures verified, Arizona will put abortion rights on the ballot

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

Arizona voters will get to decide in November whether to add the right to an abortion to the state constitution.

The Arizona secretary of state's office said Monday that it had certified 577,971 signatures — far above the required number that the coalition supporting the ballot measure had to submit in order to put the question before voters.

The coalition, Arizona for Abortion Access, said it is the most signatures validated for a citizens initiative in state history.

"This is a huge win for Arizona voters who will now get to vote YES on restoring and protecting the right to access abortion care, free from political interference, once and for all," campaign manager Cheryl Bruce said in a statement.

Democrats have made abortion rights a central message since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 — and it is a key part of their efforts in this year's elections.

The issue already is set to go before voters this year in Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Nevada, New York and South Dakota.

Arizona law currently bans abortions after 15 weeks. The ban, which was signed into law in 2022, includes exceptions in cases of medical emergencies but has restrictions on non-surgical abortion. It also requires an ultrasound before an abortion is done, as well as parental consent for minors.

The proposed amendment would allow abortions until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions to save the mother's life or to protect her physical or mental health. It would restrict the state from adopting or enforcing any law that would prohibit access to the procedure.

Organizers said they initially submitted 823,685 signatures, more than double the 383,923 required from registered voters.

Opponents of the measure say it goes too far and could lead to unlimited and unregulated abortions in Arizona.

Supporters, meanwhile, say a constitutional amendment ensures that abortion rights cannot be easily erased by a court decision or legislative vote.

In April, the Arizona Supreme Court upheld an 1864 abortion ban that permitted abortions only to save the mother's life and provided no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest, but the Republican-controlled Legislature voted for a repeal of the Civil War-era ban, and Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs quickly signed it.

The 19th century law had been blocked since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that eliminated constitutional protections for abortion.

North Dakota voters to weigh in again on marijuana legalization

By JACK DURA Associated Press

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A ballot initiative to legalize recreational marijuana in North Dakota has qualified for the November election, the state's top election official said Monday. That sets up another vote on the issue in the conservative state after voters and lawmakers rejected previous efforts in recent years.

North Dakota Secretary of State Michael Howe said nearly 19,000 signatures were accepted after his office's review, several thousand more than was needed to earn placement on the ballot. The group that sponsored the measure, New Economic Frontier, had submitted more than 22,000 signatures in early July.

Measure leader Steve Bakken, a Burleigh County commissioner and former Bismarck mayor, said law enforcement resources would be better directed at opioids and fentanyl than marijuana. The initiative also

is an effort to head off any out-of-state measure that might have unmanageable results, he said.

The 20-page statutory measure would legalize recreational marijuana for people 21 and older to use at their homes and, if permitted, on others' private property. The measure also outlines numerous production and processing regulations, prohibited uses — such as in public or in vehicles — and would allow home cultivation of plants.

The measure would set maximum purchase and possession amounts of 1 ounce of dried leaves or flowers, 4 grams of a cannabinoid concentrate, 1,500 milligrams of total THC in the form of a cannabis product and 300 milligrams of an edible product. It would allow cannabis solutions, capsules, transdermal patches, concentrates, topical and edible products.

Marijuana use by people under 21 is a low-level misdemeanor in North Dakota. Recreational use by anyone older is not a crime — but possessing it is, with penalties varying from an infraction to misdemeanors depending on the amount of marijuana. Delivery of any amount of marijuana is a felony, which can be elevated depending on certain factors, such as if the offense was within 300 feet (91 meters) of a school.

In 2023, 4,451 people statewide were charged with use or possession of marijuana, according to North Dakota Courts data requested by The Associated Press.

North Dakota voters approved medical marijuana in 2016 but rejected recreational initiatives in 2018 and 2022. In 2021, the Republican-led state House of Representatives passed bills to legalize and tax recreational marijuana, which the GOP-majority Senate defeated.

Republican state Rep. Matt Ruby, who was a member of the sponsoring committee, said in a statement that the priority now will be to tell voters about the economic growth opportunities, the more effective approach to regulation and easier access to medical marijuana.

"Our goal now is to educate voters on why we believe this to be a great step forward for our state," he said.

The Brighter Future Alliance, an organization opposed to the measure, said in a statement that the supporters "won't take no for an answer" after multiple defeats.

"The people of North Dakota soundly rejected the idea of recreational marijuana in 2018 and 2022, but here they are again," said Patrick Finken, the group's chair.

Burleigh County Sheriff Kelly Leben pointed to "detrimental impacts" in states where recreational marijuana is legal, saying, "Legalized marijuana increases crime, increases DUIs and increases illegal drug trafficking of harder drugs. In fact, with more users, illegal sales increase, not decrease."

Twenty-four states have legalized recreational marijuana for adults. Ohio did so most recently, by initiative in November 2023. Measures will be on the ballot in Florida and South Dakota in November.

In May, the federal government began a process to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug.

Israel-Hamas war latest: Iran rejects European leaders' call to refrain from any retaliatory attacks

By The Associated Press undefined

Iran rejected a call Tuesday by three European countries demanding it to refrain from any retaliatory attacks that would further escalate regional tensions.

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer issued a joint statement Monday endorsing the latest push by mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States to broker an agreement to end the Israel-Hamas war. The European leaders also called for the return of scores of hostages held by Hamas and the "unfettered" delivery of humanitarian aid, and asked that Iran and its allies to refrain from retaliation that would further escalate regional tensions after the late-July killing of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran.

Mediators have spent months trying to get the sides to agree to a three-phase plan in which Hamas would release the remaining hostages captured in its Oct. 7 attack in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel, and Israel would withdraw from Gaza. Talks were expected to resume Thursday.

After more than 10 months of fighting, the Palestinian death toll is nearing 40,000 in Gaza, according

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to the Health Ministry there.

Here's the latest:

Israeli minister Ben-Gvir visits flashpoint holy site. Palestinian Foreign Ministry condemns his behavior as a 'provocative intrusion'

JERUSALEM — Israel's far-right National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir visited Jerusalem's most sensitive holy site Tuesday, in a pilgrimage Palestinians see as provocative.

Tensions over the compound have fueled rounds of violence before. Ben-Gvir, an ultranationalist settler leader, last visited the compound in July, which the Palestinian Foreign Ministry condemned as a "provocative intrusion" that endangered the fragile status quo regarding the Jerusalem compound.

Ben-Gvir visited the flashpoint site Tuesday morning as Jews marked Tisha B'Av, a day of mourning commemorating the destruction of the biblical Temples. Jews revere the site as the Temple Mount, believed to be the location of the First and Second Temples, and it is a holy site for Muslims as Haram al-Sharif or the Noble Sanctuary.

The visit elicited a rebuke from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who said it was a "deviation" from decades-old understandings at the site that prohibit Jewish worship there.

In video released by his office, Ben-Gvir was seen strolling through the compound singing, "The people of Israel live!" while accompanied by dozens of supporters. One supporter yelled a Jewish prayer, which is not permitted under the longstanding arrangement in place at the site meant to ease regional tensions. Ben-Gvir has said he is changing the policy and, despite previous assurances to the contrary by Netanyahu, he repeated the stance Tuesday, adding that "very large progress" had been made to allow Jewish prayer at the site. Netanyahu said there was no change to the policy.

Iran's president tells UK prime minister that retaliation is a nation's right

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran's president told Britain's prime minister that Tehran considers retaliation against Israel over the July killing of Hamas official Ismail Haniyeh a right, and a way to discourage future aggression.

A Tuesday report by the official IRNA news agency said President Masoud Pezeshkian, in a late Monday phone conversation with Prime Minister Keir Starmer, said that a punitive response to an aggressor is "a right of nations and a solution for stopping crimes and aggression."

Pezeshkian said that the West's silence about "unprecedented inhumane crime" in Gaza and Israeli attacks elsewhere in the Middle East was "irresponsible" and encouraged Israel to put regional and global security at risk.

The report said the two leaders discussed ways for restoring peace and stability in the region and the world as well as improving bilateral relations, without elaborating.

Israel has not confirmed nor denied its role in the July killing of Haniyeh, but Israel earlier pledged to kill him and other Hamas leaders over the group's Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel that sparked the war in Gaza. The assassination has sparked fears of a wider regional conflict and of a direct confrontation between Israel and Iran if Tehran retaliates.

Iran does not recognize Israel and supports anti-Israeli militant groups including Hamas and Lebanon's Hezbollah.

Iran rejects European leaders' call to refrain from any retaliatory attacks

TEHRAN, Iran — Iran rejected a call Tuesday by three European countries demanding it to refrain from any retaliatory attacks that would further escalate regional tensions.

French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer issued a joint statement Monday endorsing the latest push by mediators Qatar, Egypt and the United States to broker an agreement to end the Israel-Hamas war. The European leaders also called for the return of scores of hostages held by Hamas and the "unfettered" delivery of humanitarian aid, and asked that Iran and its allies to refrain from retaliation that would further escalate regional tensions after the late-July killings of two senior officials in Beirut and Tehran.

"Such demands lack political logic, are entirely contrary to the principles and rules of international law,

and represent an excessive request," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said.

The country's foreign ministry said Iran is decisive about defending its rights and does not need any permission to retaliate over the killing of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, state-run IRNA news agency reported.

Israeli strikes kill at least 16 people overnight in Gaza

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — Israeli strikes in Gaza killed at least 16 Palestinians, including four women and seven children, and orphaned another four children, Palestinian medical officials said Tuesday.

Ten people were killed in a strike late Monday on a house near the southern city of Khan Younis, where Israel ordered mass evacuations in recent days, saying it must act against Palestinian militants.

Nasser Hospital, where the bodies were brought, said another four children, including a 5-month-old infant, were wounded. The infant's parents and their other five children were among those killed. The parents of the other three wounded children were also killed, according to the hospital's list of casualties. An Associated Press journalist counted the bodies.

A separate strike near Deir al-Balah in central Gaza killed a woman and her twin babies, who were four days old, and their grandmother. Another strike in central Gaza killed a man and his nephew.

An Associated Press reporter counted the bodies at the nearby Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital and spoke to the father of the twins, who had planned to register their birth on Tuesday.

Israel says it tries to avoid harming civilians and blames their deaths on Hamas because its fighters operate in residential areas. The military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children.

A ship in the Red Sea is targeted in a third attack by suspected Houthis

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — A ship in the Red Sea came under attack at least three times Tuesday in an assault that included the use of a bomb-carrying drone boat, likely the latest in a campaign by Yemen's Houthi rebels over the Israel-Hamas war, officials said.

The attacks come as the rebels' main sponsor, Iran, weighs possible retaliation against Israel over the assassination of Hamas official Ismail Haniyeh in July, which has renewed fears of a wider regional war in the Middle East.

Already, the Houthi assaults have disrupted the \$1 trillion annual flow of goods through the maritime route crucial to trade among Asia, Europe and the Middle East, while also sparking the most intense combat for the U.S. Navy since World War II.

The ship was first attacked as an explosive was detonated near it, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center said. Then a small vessel "acting suspiciously" flashed a light near the ship and came close, actions that were followed by a second blast, the UKMTO said.

The private security firm Ambrey similarly reported the attacks, saying the ship saw "two 'close-proximity' explosions."

The third attack happened hours later Tuesday, some 180 kilometers (110 miles) northwest of the Houthi-held port city Hodeida, the UKMTO said. A drone boat attacked the vessel but "was successfully disabled," it added. Armed private security forces on vessels have begun opening fire on the drones to detonate the explosives onboard.

Ambrey said the same ship was targeted in all three attacks.

The Houthis have not claimed the assault, though sometimes they wait days to do so, and other times have claimed attacks that don't appear to have happened.

The Houthis have targeted more than 70 vessels with missiles and drones since the start of the war in Gaza in October. They have seized one vessel and sunk two in the campaign that has killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have been either intercepted by a U.S.-led coalition in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets.

The rebels maintain that they have targeted ships linked to Israel, the United States or the U.K. to force an end to Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza. However, many of the ships attacked have little or no connection to the conflict, including some bound for Iran.

The Houthis have also launched drones and missiles toward Israel, including an attack on July 19 that killed one person and wounded 10 others in Tel Aviv. Israel responded the next day with airstrikes on the Houthi-held port city of Hodeida that hit fuel depots and electrical stations, killing and wounding a number of people, the rebels say.

After the strikes, the Houthis paused their attacks until Aug. 3, when they hit a Liberian-flagged container ship traveling through the Gulf of Aden. A Liberian-flagged oil tanker came under a particularly intense series of attacks beginning Aug. 8 likely carried out by the rebels.

As Iran threatens to retaliate over Haniyeh, the U.S. military has told the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group to sail more quickly to the area. America also has ordered the the USS Georgia guided missile submarine into the Mideast, while the USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier strike group had been in the Gulf of Oman. Additional F-22 fighter jets have flown into the region, while the USS Wasp, a large amphibious assault ship carrying F-35 fighter jets, is in the Mediterranean Sea.

Russian artist released in swap builds a new life in Germany, now free to marry her partner

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

KOBLENZ, Germany (AP) — Sasha Skochilenko and Sofya Subbotina are planning to get married. That wasn't an option in their native Russia, but it's possible now that they live in Germany, which recognizes same-sex weddings.

"We don't know how or in which city we will do it, but that's the plan," Skochilenko, 33, told The Associated Press, looking lovingly at Subbotina, who radiated happiness.

They reunited earlier this month in Germany, shortly after Skochilenko and other Russian prisoners were exchanged in a historic East-West swap — a happy if unlikely ending to an over two-year ordeal.

Skochilenko, an artist and musician, was jailed for speaking out against Russia's war in Ukraine. Subbotina campaigned for her partner's release while also trying to make her life behind bars as tolerable as possible.

They talked about marriage in Russia, too, but same-sex weddings have been effectively banned there. Laws restricting LGBTQ+ rights have been on the books for over a decade and intensified since the war began as part of the Kremlin's campaign for "traditional values," fueled by its anti-Western views and close ties to the Russian Orthodox Church.

Now, "I feel that I'm in a really free country," Subbotina said, as they make plans for a life together in the quiet city of Koblenz in western Germany.

An arrest and separation

Skochilenko was arrested in her native St. Petersburg in 2022, just weeks after the invasion of Ukraine, for replacing price tags in a supermarket with anti-war messages like saying that Russia bombed civilian targets. She was charged with making false statements about the military, part of the massive crackdown on all dissent over the invasion.

She struggled in pre-trial detention, suffering from chronic illness, including celiac disease, requiring gluten-free meals. Subbotina commuted to Skochilenko's jail at least twice a week, bringing food, medicine and other necessities. She and their friends made sure the case, which drew public outrage, stayed in the headlines.

Last year, Subbotina was diagnosed with cancer. "I just felt like I was giving up, and honestly, I was just ready to die," she said.

The couple didn't see each other for a year. Since they weren't married, investigators made Subbotina a witness in the case and refused to allow her visits or to receive phone calls from Skochilenko.

"It is not a small thing, when a person you love can't visit you," Skochilenko said.

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Subbotina added it was “very painful,” noting that she knows many women who married imprisoned men — often with the wedding held in pre-trial detention facilities or in penal colonies.

“It gives them the right for long visits, it gives them the right to get phone calls, short visits, because they have a certain status in the eyes of the authorities,” she said. “We’ve never had this opportunity.”

Subbotina says she eventually was allowed short visits.

They were always very open about their relationship, despite laws against any public endorsement of LGBTQ+ activities, driven by President Vladimir Putin’s close ties with the Russian Orthodox Church.

Skochilenko said it was clear in the early 2010s the Kremlin was headed in a “homophobic direction,” and some of the laws the authorities were adopting drove her to protest back then. In recent years, she said her openness was a form of activism.

People “often have distorted opinions about the LGBTQ+ community because they don’t know anyone” who loves someone of the same sex, and their views often change once they do, she said.

‘Why don’t you hope for a miracle?’

In November 2023, Skochilenko was convicted and sentenced to seven years in prison — an unusually harsh verdict.

This summer, while awaiting an appeal hearing at a detention center in St. Petersburg, she said there was a point when she reached a particular point of desperation about her long sentence. She said she was traumatized by the lack of freedom and privacy, the constant body searches, and the persisting hunger from being unable to eat prison food.

Subbotina visited her in July, and Skochilenko recalls bursting into tears for the first time in months.

“I told her, ‘Sonya, I’m tired of wanting to go home. Please tell me that I won’t have to serve the entire sentence, that some miracle will happen.’ And she said, ‘Yes, why don’t you hope for a miracle?’” Skochilenko said.

That same day, a prison official told Skochilenko to “urgently” apply for a presidential pardon, she said. The artist did not want to admit guilt, but the official said she could simply explain her health problems. She wrote the request and forgot about it, thinking that it would take a long time to even process.

Several days later, she was transferred to Moscow without explanation. In the same van was Andrei Pivovarov, an imprisoned opposition politician that she knew from years earlier. There was hardly any reason for them both to be transferred at the same time, so it suggested that perhaps something good was happening.

Skochilenko spent several long days in Moscow’s notorious Lefortovo Prison, where she was cold and hungry, unable to eat much of the food she was given.

Subbotina learned of the transfer and rushed to Moscow with a care package, visiting every detention center she could think of, without success.

A flight to freedom — and a new life together

The rest became what many Russians critical of the Kremlin describe as the first good news since the start of the war. On Aug. 1, Skochilenko and 15 others were put on a bus, driven to an airport and flown to Ankara, Turkey, where they were exchanged for eight Russians imprisoned in the West.

From Ankara, the former prisoners were flown to Germany, where Chancellor Olaf Scholz greeted them on the tarmac. The next day, Skochilenko was finally able to embrace Subbotina, who flew to Germany when she heard the news.

The days since then have been “euphoric,” Skochilenko said, filled with small pleasures like walking and buying the food she wants — but also spending time with the woman she loves.

Subbotina particularly enjoys being able to hold Skochilenko’s hand and kiss her in public without worry. In Germany, she says, it is something that is “just in the nature of things.”

They’ve settled for now in Koblenz but want to visit other cities in Germany before they decide where to live permanently. They’re eager to learn German and begin their new lives.

Skochilenko plans to return to making art, displaying sketches she drew about the prisoner swap — a moment in history in which she became an unlikely participant. She also said she intends to seek treatment for post-traumatic stress disorder from her time in prison.

Subbotina, a nurse and a pharmacist whose cancer treatment was successful in Russia, hopes to work in the human rights field and help the hundreds of political prisoners in her former country.

Both admit that they never expected to leave Russia in the way they did.

"I don't feel stressed about moving, because I'm very happy. I'm very happy that Sasha is with me," Subbotina said with a smile.

Added Skochilenko: "My relationship with Russia is over. I need to accept that. I'm glad there's a new life."

The violence in Bangladesh after Hasina's ouster stirs fear within the country's Hindu minority

By KRUTIKA PATHI, AL EMRUN GARJON and SHONAL GANGULY Associated Press

KHULNA, Bangladesh (AP) — When a mass uprising forced Bangladesh's longtime prime minister to step down and flee the country last week, a 65-year-old retired auditor who had worked for her political party feared for his life.

Arobinda Mohalder, who is part of Bangladesh's Hindu minority, had just learned that a Hindu official working for the Awami League party in the country's Khulna district escaped after an angry mob set his home on fire.

Mohalder and his wife quickly packed clothes and passports as they fled their home to stay with a relative nearby. Later that evening, they found out their home had been torched. The attackers looted everything, including their television, refrigerator and two air conditioners.

Ever since former Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled to India, her supporters and associates have faced retaliatory attacks by mobs who have been met by little, if any, resistance from authorities. Members of the country's Hindu minority feel the most vulnerable because they have traditionally backed the Awami League — seen as a secular party in the Muslim-majority nation — and because of a history of violence against them during previous upheavals.

In the week since Hasina was ousted on Aug. 5, there have been at least 200 attacks against Hindus and other religious minorities across 52 districts, according to the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council, a minority rights group that has been tracking incidents.

But experts caution it is hard to establish the extent of and motivations for the violence in this South Asian country of 170 million.

"There may be an element of minorities, particularly Hindus, being targeted due to their faith. But many Hindus had links to the Awami League, because historically it has been the party that protected minorities, so they may have been targeted for their political affiliations," said Thomas Kean, a senior consultant on Bangladesh and Myanmar at the Crisis Group.

Hasina's ouster was triggered by student-led protests against a quota system for government jobs. After clashes between protesters and government forces that led to hundreds of deaths, the movement grew into a broader rebellion against the leader and her government.

Mobs rampaged across the country after Hasina fled. Some of the violence was just criminal activity, Kean said, and "we shouldn't assume they are all due to race or religion."

The interim government put in place after Hasina's ouster has condemned the attacks as "heinous" and said it was working with community leaders to ensure Hindus' safety.

Hindus, who make up 8% of the population and are the largest minority group, "are shivering," said Kajal Debnath, a vice president of the Bangladesh Hindu Buddhist Christian Unity Council. "They are closing their doors, they are not opening it without confirming who is knocking. Everybody (in the Hindu minority)... from the Dhaka capital to the remote villages are very scared."

For many, the violence has evoked painful memories of Bangladesh's 1971 war of independence against Pakistan during which Hindus were targeted. Hindus were also attacked during the rise of Islamic groups in the 1990s, which Hasina stamped out.

Hindus have held large protests in the past week drawing thousands, demanding protection and condemning the recent spate of attacks.

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Munni Ghosh, a Hindu housewife in Dhaka, said that attacks have grown since Hasina fled. "The reason (is) because she used to support us," she said.

According to the minority groups organization, the attacks have included vandalizing and looting of Hindu homes and businesses. A few temples have been damaged. But details remain scarce, and police — whose members were also killed during the recent violence — went on strike last week.

Some analysts say many of the attacks against Hindus are politically driven and reflect resentment against Hasina's party.

Hindus have suffered, but most attacks have been "politically motivated because the Awami League has been targeted," said Zillur Rahman, executive director of the Dhaka-based Center for Governance Studies.

In Mohalder's village, dozens of other Hindu homes were unscathed. And his brother-in-law's house, which is attached to his own, was not vandalized. A temple in their family compound was also untouched.

Mohalder believes he was targeted because of his ties to the Awami League. He doesn't know when it will be safe for him to return home. "I want to go back, but goons looted my home and because of that, I am scared."

The issue has become increasingly sensitive for India, where Prime Minister Narendra Modi expressed concern over the reports of attacks last week.

But experts say the lack of credible information and official investigations into violence against Hindus has also fueled misinformation about the attacks, much of it coming from Indian news, social media and leaders, said Kean.

On Aug. 5, the day Hasina fled, a leader belonging to Modi's party in West Bengal state, which borders Bangladesh, claimed without providing evidence that Hindus were being slaughtered. Television news channels ran headlines saying the attacks were "an act of genocide" and a "pogrom." In another example, an Indian outlet claimed a certain temple had been set on fire, but Prothom Alo — a leading Bengali-language daily newspaper — found that false, and reported that an Awami League office behind the temple had been burnt down.

Nahid Islam, one of the leading student protesters who was sworn in as a minister in the interim government last week, said the violence was more politically than religiously motivated and was meant to divide the country, but that Bangladesh would protect them.

"The responsible will be brought to justice... be assured that the people of Bangladesh, the government of Bangladesh will stand by you."

But for many Hindus, the biggest worry has been the lack of police since they went on strike in many parts of the country after Hasina fled.

"Anything can happen at any moment of time because there is no law and order," said Debnath. "There is no place to complain. If they kill me, if they burn my house, there is no one I can complain to."

On Monday, several police stations opened up and many people hope that will help ease tensions. But while police were on strike, students and other volunteers in Dhaka and elsewhere banded together to patrol neighborhoods and keep watch, sometimes carrying sticks and umbrellas.

Tahsim Uzzaman, a 26-year-old student in Dhaka, is one volunteer who has been patrolling Dhaka neighborhoods late at night.

"I no longer feel alright just sitting at home. I've been going out at night to guard places, especially in minority neighborhoods. We took bullets to reclaim our country, it shouldn't be for nothing, we must now keep it safe for all," he said.

Why Trump's and Harris' proposals to end federal taxes on tips would be difficult to enact

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris agree on one thing, at least: Both say they want to eliminate federal taxes on workers' tips.

But experts say there's a reason Congress hasn't made such a change already. It would be complicated,

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not to mention enormously costly to the federal government, to enact. It would encourage many higher-paid workers to restructure their compensation to classify some of it as "tips" and thereby avoid taxes. And, in the end, it likely wouldn't help millions of low-income workers.

"There's no way that it wouldn't be a mess," said James Hines Jr., a professor of law and economics and the research director of the Office of Tax Policy Research at the University of Michigan's Ross School of Business.

Both candidates unveiled their plans in Nevada, a state with one of the highest concentrations of tipped service workers in the country. Trump announced a proposal to exclude tips from federal taxes on June 9. Harris announced a similar proposal on Aug. 10.

Details have been sparse. Neither candidate's team has said whether it would exempt tips only from income taxes, only from payroll taxes or both. The payroll tax funds Social Security and Medicare.

Harris' campaign has said she would work with Congress to draft a proposal that would include an income limit and other provisions to prevent abuses by wealthy individuals who might seek to structure their compensation to classify certain fees as tips.

Her campaign said these requirements, which it did not specify, would be intended "to prevent hedge fund managers and lawyers from structuring their compensation in ways to try to take advantage of the policy." Trump's campaign has not said whether its proposal would include any such requirements.

Even so, Hines suggested that millions of workers — not just wealthy ones — would seek to change their compensation to include tips, and could even do so legally. For example, he said, a company might set up a separate entity that would reward its employees with tips instead of year-end bonuses.

"You will have taxpayers pushing their attorneys to try to characterize their wage and salary income as tips," Hines said. "And some would be successful, inevitably, because it's impossible to write foolproof rules that will cover every situation."

Republican supporters of Trump argue that Hines' concerns are overblown. Darin Miller, a spokesman for Sen. Ted Cruz of Texas, said the Internal Revenue Service has a precise definition for tips and contended that reclassifying wages would be considered fraud.

Miller noted that some Democrats have signed on to co-sponsor a bill Cruz introduced in June that would exempt tips from federal income taxes. A bill exempting tips from payroll and income taxes has also been introduced in the House.

Though supporters say the measures are designed to help low-wage workers, many experts say that making tips tax-free would provide only limited help to those workers.

The Budget Lab at Yale, a non-partisan policy research center, estimates that there were 4 million U.S. workers in tipped occupations in 2023. That amounted to about 2.5% of all employees, including restaurant servers and beauticians.

Tipped workers tend to be younger, with an average age of 31, and of lower income. The Budget Lab said the median weekly pay for tipped workers in 2023 was \$538, compared with roughly \$1,000 for non-tipped workers.

As a result, many tipped workers already bear a lower income-tax burden. In 2022, 37% of tipped workers had incomes low enough that they paid no federal income tax at all, The Budget Lab said.

"If the issue is you're concerned about low-income taxpayers, there are a lot better ways to address that problem, like expanding the Earned Income Tax Credit or changing tax rates or changing deductions," Hines said.

In her speech in Nevada, Harris also called for raising the federal minimum wage. (The platform on Trump's campaign site doesn't mention the minimum wage.)

Changing federal tax policy on tips would also be costly. The Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget, a non-partisan group, estimates that exempting all tip income from federal income and payroll taxes would reduce revenue by \$150 billion to \$250 billion between 2026 and 2035. And it said that amount could rise significantly if the policy changed behavior and more people declared tip income.

Whether Trump or Harris wins the presidential election, tax policy will be high on Congress' agenda

in 2025. That's because Trump-era tax cuts, passed in 2017, are set to expire. But Hines said he thinks Congress will be in no hurry to add "vast amounts of complexity" to the tax code.

"A presidential candidate can say whatever they want, but it's the House and Senate that have to do it," he said.

News outlets were leaked insider material from the Trump campaign. They chose not to print it

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

At least three news outlets were leaked confidential material from inside the Donald Trump campaign, including its report vetting JD Vance as a vice presidential candidate. So far, each has refused to reveal any details about what they received.

Instead, Politico, The New York Times and The Washington Post have written about a potential hack of the campaign and described what they had in broad terms.

Their decisions stand in marked contrast to the 2016 presidential campaign, when a Russian hack exposed emails to and from Hillary Clinton's campaign manager, John Podesta. The website Wikileaks published a trove of these embarrassing missives, and mainstream news organizations covered them avidly.

Politico wrote over the weekend about receiving emails starting July 22 from a person identified as "Robert" that included a 271-page campaign document about Vance and a partial vetting report on Sen. Marco Rubio, who was also considered as a potential vice president. Both Politico and the Post said that two people had independently confirmed that the documents were authentic.

"Like many such vetting documents," The Times wrote of the Vance report, "they contained past statements with the potential to be embarrassing or damaging, such as Mr. Vance's remarks casting aspersions on Mr. Trump."

Whodunit?

What's unclear is who provided the material. Politico said it did not know who "Robert" was and that when it spoke to the supposed leaker, he said, "I suggest you don't be curious about where I got them from."

The Trump campaign said it had been hacked and that Iranians were behind it. While the campaign provided no evidence for the claim, it came a day after a Microsoft report detailed an effort by an Iranian military intelligence unit to compromise the email account of a former senior advisor to a presidential campaign. The report did not specify which campaign.

Steven Cheung, a spokesperson for Trump's campaign, said over the weekend that "any media or news outlet reprinting documents or internal communications are doing the bidding of America's enemies."

The FBI released a brief statement Monday that read: "We can confirm the FBI is investigating this matter."

The Times said it would not discuss why it had decided not to print details of the internal communications. A spokesperson for the Post said: "As with any information we receive, we take into account the authenticity of the materials, any motives of the source and assess the public interest in making decisions about what, if anything, to publish."

Brad Dayspring, a spokesperson for Politico, said editors there judged that "the questions surrounding the origins of the documents and how they came to our attention were more newsworthy than the material that was in those documents."

Indeed, it didn't take long after Vance was announced as Trump's running mate for various news organizations to dig up unflattering statements that the Ohio senator had made about him.

A lesson from 2016?

It's also easy to recall how, in 2016, candidate Trump and his team encouraged coverage of documents on the Clinton campaign that Wikileaks had acquired from hackers. It was widespread: A BBC story promised "18 revelations from Wikileaks' hacked Clinton emails" and Vox even wrote about Podesta's advice for making superb risotto.

Brian Fallon, then a Clinton campaign spokesperson, noted at the time how striking it was that concern about Russian hacking quickly gave way to fascination over what was revealed. "Just like Russia wanted,"

he said.

Unlike this year, the Wikileaks material was dumped into the public domain, increasing the pressure on news organizations to publish. That led to some bad decisions: In some cases, outlets misrepresented some of the material to be more damaging to Clinton than it actually was, said Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a University of Pennsylvania communications professor at the University of Pennsylvania who wrote "Cyberwar," a book about the 2016 hacking.

This year, Jamieson said she believed news organizations made the right decision not to publish details of the Trump campaign material because they can't be sure of the source.

"How do you know that you're not being manipulated by the Trump campaign?" Jamieson said. She's conservative about publishing decisions "because we're in the misinformation age," she said.

Thomas Rid, director of the Alperovitch Institute for Cybersecurity Studies at Johns Hopkins, also believes that the news organizations have made the right decision, but for different reasons. He said it appeared that an effort by a foreign agent to influence the 2024 presidential campaign was more newsworthy than the leaked material itself.

But one prominent journalist, Jesse Eisinger, senior reporter and editor at ProPublica, suggested the outlets could have told more than they did. While it's true that past Vance statements about Trump are easily found publicly, the vetting document could have indicated which statements most concerned the campaign, or revealed things the journalists didn't know.

Once it is established that the material is accurate, newsworthiness is a more important consideration than the source, he said.

"I don't think they handled it properly," Eisinger said. "I think they overlearned the lesson of 2016."

Top Ukrainian commander says his forces now control almost 390 square miles of Russia's Kursk region

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's top military commander says his forces now control 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of Russia's neighboring Kursk region, the first time a Ukrainian military official has publicly commented on the gains of the lightning incursion that has embarrassed the Kremlin.

Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi made the statement in a video posted Monday to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Telegram channel. In the video, he briefed the president on the front-line situation.

"The troops are fulfilling their tasks. Fighting continues actually along the entire front line. The situation is under our control," Syrskyi said.

Russian forces are still scrambling to respond to the surprise Ukrainian attack after almost a week of fierce fighting.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said the incursion, which has caused more than 100,000 civilians to flee, is an attempt by Kyiv to stop Moscow's offensive in eastern Ukraine's Donbas region and gain leverage in possible future peace talks.

Zelenskyy confirmed for the first time that the Ukrainian military is inside the Kursk region. On Telegram, he praised his country's soldiers and commanders "for their steadfastness and decisive actions." He did not elaborate.

The Ukrainian operation is under tight secrecy, and its goals remain unclear. The stunning maneuver that caught the Kremlin's forces off guard counters Russia's unrelenting effort in recent months to punch through Ukrainian defenses at selected points along the front line in eastern Ukraine.

Speaking Monday at a meeting with top security and defense officials, Putin said the attack that began Aug. 6 appeared to reflect Kyiv's attempt to achieve a better negotiating position in possible future talks to end the war. He insisted Moscow's army would prevail.

Putin said Ukraine may have hoped the attack would cause public unrest in Russia, but that it has failed to do so, and he claimed the number of volunteers to join the Russian military has increased because of

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the assault. He said Russian forces will carry on with their offensive in eastern Ukraine regardless.

"It's obvious that the enemy will keep trying to destabilize the situation in the border zone to try to destabilize the domestic political situation in our country," Putin said. Russia's main task is to "drive the enemy out of our territories and, together with the border service, to ensure reliable cover of the state border."

Acting Kursk Gov. Alexei Smirnov reported to Putin that Ukrainian forces had pushed 12 kilometers (7.5 miles) into the Kursk region across a 40-kilometer (25-mile) front and currently control 28 Russian settlements.

Smirnov said 12 civilians have been killed and 121 others, including 10 children, have been wounded. About 121,000 people have been evacuated or left the areas affected by fighting on their own, he said.

Tracking down all the Ukrainian units that are roaming the region and creating diversions is difficult, Smirnov said, noting that some are using fake Russian IDs.

The governor of the Belgorod region adjacent to Kursk also announced the evacuation of people from a district near the Ukrainian border.

Zelenskyy said the territory now controlled by Ukrainian forces was used to strike Ukraine's Sumy region many times, adding that it is "absolutely fair to destroy Russian terrorists where they are."

"Russia brought war to others. Now it is coming home," he said in a video posted on Telegram.

Russia has seen previous incursions into its territory during the nearly 2 1/2-year war, but the foray into the Kursk region marked the largest attack on its soil since World War II, constituting a milestone in the hostilities. It was also the first time the Ukrainian army has spearheaded an incursion rather than pro-Ukraine Russian fighters.

The advance delivered a blow to Putin's efforts to pretend that life in Russia has been largely unaffected by the war. State propaganda tried to play down the attack, emphasizing the authorities' efforts to help residents of the region and seeking to distract attention from the military's failure to prepare for the attack and quickly repel it.

Kursk residents recorded videos lamenting that they had to flee the border area, leaving behind their belongings, and pleading with Putin for help. But Russia's state-controlled media kept a tight lid on any expression of discontent.

Retired Gen. Andrei Gurulev, a member of the lower house of the Russian parliament, criticized the military for failing to protect the border.

"Regrettably, the group of forces protecting the border didn't have its own intelligence assets," he said on his messaging app channel. "No one likes to see the truth in reports, everybody just wants to hear that all is good."

The combat inside Russia rekindled questions about whether Ukraine was using weaponry supplied by NATO members. Some Western countries have balked at allowing Ukraine to use their military aid to hit Russian soil, fearing it would fuel an escalation that might drag Russia and NATO into war.

Though it's not clear what weapons Ukraine is using across the border, Russian media widely reported that American Bradley and German Marder armored infantry vehicles were there. The claim could not be independently verified.

Ukraine has already used U.S. weapons to strike inside Russia.

Italian Foreign Minister Antonio Tajani said in an interview published Monday that the weapons provided by his country "cannot be used to attack Russia on its territory."

Meanwhile, German Defense Ministry spokesperson Arne Collatz said Monday that legal experts agree that "international law provides for a state that is defending itself also to defend itself on the territory of the attacker. That is clear from our point of view, too."

Russia's Defense Ministry said Monday that reinforcements sent to the area backed by air forces and artillery had fended off seven attacks by Ukrainian units near Martynovka, Borki and Korenevo during the previous 24 hours.

The ministry said Russian forces also blocked an attempt by Ukrainian mobile groups to forge deep into Russian territory near Kauchuk.

Pasi Paroinen, an analyst with the Finland-based Black Bird Group open-source intelligence agency,

which monitors the war, said the toughest phase of Ukraine's incursion is likely to begin now as Russian reserves enter the fray.

In one region of Senegal, girls can become wrestlers — and win. But only until marriage

By MONIKA PRONCZUK Associated Press

MLOMP, Senegal (AP) — It's almost dusk, and the West African heat is finally faltering. In Mlomp, a village in southern Senegal, dozens of teenagers in colorful jerseys are throwing each other to the ground to the rhythm of Afrobeats against a backdrop of palm trees.

It's a common sight across Senegal, where wrestling is a national sport and wrestlers are celebrated like rock stars. The local variation of wrestling, called laamb in Wolof, one of the national languages, has been part of village life for centuries. Senegalese wrestle for entertainment and to celebrate special occasions. The professional version of the sport draws thousands to stadiums and can be a catapult to international stardom.

But in most of the country, wrestling remains off-limits for women.

There is one exception. In the Casamance region, home to the Jola ethnic group, women traditionally wrestle alongside men. At a recent training session in Mlomp, most teenagers on the sandy ground were girls.

"It's in our blood," said coach Isabelle Sambou, 43, a two-time Olympian and nine-time African wrestling champion. "In our village, girls wrestle. My mum was a wrestler, my aunts were wrestlers."

But once Jola women marry, they are expected to stop practicing and devote themselves to family life, considered the main duty of Senegalese women regardless of ethnicity or religion.

Sambou's aunt, Awa Sy, now in her 80s, was the village champion in her youth, and said she would even take down some men.

"I liked wrestling because it made me feel strong," she said, standing outside her house nestled between rice fields and mangroves. "I stopped when I got married." She didn't question it at the time.

That hasn't been the case for her niece, who, despite her humble demeanor and small size, exudes strength and determination. She defied many barriers to become a professional athlete.

As a teenager, Sambou was noticed by a professional wrestling coach at a competition during the annual Festival of the King of Oussouye, one of the few events accessible to women. The coach suggested that she try Olympic wrestling, which has a female national team. But she only agreed after her older brother convinced her to do it.

Wrestling brought Sambou, who did not finish primary school, to the Olympic Games in London and Rio de Janeiro, where she placed outside the medal contenders. But being a successful professional female athlete in a conservative society comes with a price.

"If you are a female wrestler, people are going to make fun of you," Sambou said, recalling her experiences in parts of Senegal beyond her home region. "When I walked around in shorts, people were saying: 'Look, is it a woman or is it a boy?'"

Others claimed that her body would change and she would no longer look like a woman.

Such things can "get to your head," Sambou said. "But I tell myself: They don't know what they are talking about. It's in my blood, and it brought me where I am today."

In 2016, facing her mid-30s, she decided to retire from professional sport and move back to her village.

"I thought it was the time to stop and think of something else, maybe find a job, start a family," she said. "But that hasn't happened so far."

Instead, she focused on finding "future Isabelles." After not fulfilling her dream of winning an Olympic medal, she hopes a girl she coaches can achieve that.

That mission has been complicated by the lack of resources. Female sport is often underfunded, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Around Sambou's village, there are no gyms where girls can do strength training. They don't have the special shoes used in Olympic wrestling, and instead train barefoot. They don't have mats, so they make do with sandy grounds.

And yet, at Africa's youth championship in wrestling held in June in Senegal's capital, Dakar, Sambou's students won 10 medals, including six golds.

"Despite everything, they did magnificent work," she said.

She has received little in return. Senegal has no pension system for retired professional athletes. Her lack of formal education complicates her career as a coach. She helps to coach the national wrestling team, both men and women, but on a voluntary basis. To get by, she works in a small shop and cleans people's houses.

"I gave everything to wrestling, to my country," she said. "Now I don't have anything. I don't even have my own house. It hurts a bit."

She listed the countries she has visited, including the United States and Switzerland, while sitting outside the home she shares with relatives. Her bedroom is decorated with a picture of Virgin Mary and posters celebrating her participation in championships — the only sign of her glorious past.

"It's difficult to be a professional athlete. You have to leave everything behind," she said. "And then you stop, and you come back here and you sit, without anything to do."

But times are changing, and so is the perception of women in Senegalese society. These days, parents seek out Sambou and ask her to coach their children, regardless of their gender, even if it's still for free.

Sambou's 17-year-old niece, Mame Marie Sambou, recently won a gold medal at the youth championship in Dakar. Her dream is to become a professional wrestler and compete internationally. The big test will come in two years when Senegal hosts the Youth Olympic Games, the first Olympic event ever organized on African soil.

"It's my aunt who encouraged me to start wrestling," she said. "When I started, many people were saying they have never seen a girl wrestle. But I never listened to them. I want to be like her."

Older Americans prepare themselves for a world altered by artificial intelligence

By DAN MERICA Associated Press

NORTHFIELD, Ill. (AP) — The students — most with gray hair, some with canes, all at least in their 60s — couldn't believe what they were hearing.

"Oh, my God," whispered a retired college professor.

"Does it come with viruses?" wondered a bewildered woman scribbling notes in the second row.

A 79-year-old in a black-and-white floral shirt then asked the question on many minds: "How do you know if it is fake or not?"

This is how older adults — many of whom lived through the advent of refrigeration, the transition from radio to television and the invention of the Internet — are grappling with artificial intelligence: taking a class. Sitting in a classroom in an airy senior center in a Chicago suburb, the dozen students were learning about the latest — and possibly greatest — technological leap in their lives.

And they are not alone. Across the country, scores of such classes have sprung up to teach seniors about AI's ability to transform their lives and the threats the technology poses.

"I saw ice boxes turn into refrigerators, that is how long I have been around," said Barbara Winston, 89, who paid to attend the class put on at the North Shore Senior Center in Northfield. "And I think this is probably the greatest technical revolution that I will see in my lifetime."

Older adults find themselves in a unique moment with technology. Artificial intelligence offers significant benefits for seniors, from the ability to curb loneliness to making it easier for them to get to medical appointments.

But it also has drawbacks that are uniquely threatening to this older group of Americans: A series of

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studies have found that senior citizens are more susceptible to both scams perpetrated using artificial intelligence and believing the types of misinformation that are being supercharged by the technology. Experts are particularly concerned about the role deepfakes and other AI-produced misinformation could play in politics.

Winston left the class to start her own AI journey, even if others remained skeptical. When she got home, the retired professor downloaded books on the technology, researched the platforms she wanted to use from her kitchen table and eventually queried ChatGPT about how to treat a personal medical ailment.

"This is the beginning of my education," she said, her floral cup of coffee nearby. "I'm not worried about protecting myself. I'm too old to worry about that."

Classes like these aim to familiarize aging early adopters with the myriad ways the technology could better their lives but also encourage skepticism about how artificial intelligence can distort the truth.

Balanced skepticism, say experts on the technology, is critical for seniors who plan to interact with AI.

"It's tricky," said Michael Gershbein, the instructor of the class in Northfield. "Overall, the suspicion that is there on the part of seniors is good but I don't want them to become paralyzed from their fears and not be willing to do anything online."

The questions in his class outside Chicago ranged from the absurd to the practical to the academic. Why are so many new shoes no longer including shoelaces? Can AI create a multiday itinerary for a visit to Charleston, South Carolina? What are the geopolitical implications of artificial intelligence?

Gershbein, who teaches classes on a range of technological topics, said interest in AI has ballooned in the last nine months. The 52-year-old teaches an AI course once or twice a week, he said, and aims to create a "safe space where (seniors) can come in and we can discuss all the issues they may be hearing bits and pieces of but we can put it all together and they can ask questions."

During a 90-minute-long session on a June Thursday, Gershbein discussed deepfakes — videos that use generative AI to make it appear someone said something they did not. When he played a few deepfakes, the seniors sat agog. They could not believe how real the fakes seemed. There are widespread concerns that such videos could be used to trick voters, especially seniors.

The threats to seniors go beyond politics, however, and range from basic misinformation on social media sites to scams that use voice-cloning technology to trick them. An AARP report published last year that Americans over 60 lose \$28.3 billion annually to financial extortion schemes, some assisted by AI.

Experts from the National Council on Aging, an organization established in 1950 to advocate for seniors, said classes on AI at senior centers have increased in recent years and are at the forefront of digital literacy efforts.

"There's a myth out there that older adults don't use technology. We know that that's not true," said Dianne Stone, associate director at the National Council on Aging who ran a senior center in Connecticut for over two decades. Such courses, she said, are meant to foster a "healthy skepticism" in what the technology can do, arming older Americans with the knowledge "that not everything you hear is true, it's good to get the information, but you have to kind of sort it out for yourself."

Striking that balance, said Siwei Lyu, a University at Buffalo professor, can be difficult, and classes tend to either promote AI's benefits or focus on its dangers.

"We need this kind of education for seniors, but the approach we take has to be very balanced and well-designed," said Lyu, who has lectured to seniors and other groups.

Seniors who have taken such AI classes said they came away with a clear understanding of AI's benefits and pitfalls.

"It's only as good as the people who program it, and the users need to understand that. You really have to question it," said Linda Chipko, a 70-year-old who attended an AI class in June in suburban Atlanta.

Chipko said she took the class because she wanted to "understand" AI, but on her way out said, "It's not for me."

Others have even embraced it. Ruth Schneiderman, 77, used AI to help illustrate a children's book she was writing, and that experience sparked her interest in taking the Northfield class to learn more about the technology.

"My mother lived until she was 90," Schneiderman said, "and I learned from her if you want to survive in this world, you have to adjust to the change otherwise you are left behind."

A conservative gathering provides a safe space for Republicans who aren't on board with Trump

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — At the Republican National Convention and multiple rallies since, former President Donald Trump has been greeted as a hero who narrowly escaped assassination and is destined to lead a new American golden age.

At a recent conservative conference in Georgia, there was a different vibe.

There were few, if any, red hats at "The Gathering," the annual confab hosted by influential syndicated radio host Erick Erickson, and no rousing promises to "Make America Great Again." Instead, Erickson's guests, from rank-and-file voters up to Trump's onetime vice president, spent two days critiquing the GOP's path in the Trump era. And when it came to the November election, many of them spent more time hand-wringing over a Kamala Harris presidency than celebrating the promise of another Trump administration.

The dynamics are particularly problematic for the former president's chances in Georgia, a longtime Republican stronghold that has almost shifted into becoming a genuine two-party state, and a handful of other tossup states. They also serve as a reminder that despite his near-complete takeover of the GOP, Trump still has detractors and skeptics among conservatives whose decisions this fall could help determine whether he returns to the White House.

"I voted for him willingly in 2016, and then I held my nose and did it again in 2020," said Atlanta small business owner Barton McMillan, a four-decade resident of the city who blames Trump for recent Democratic victories in Georgia, which backed Joe Biden for president in 2020 and elected two Democratic U.S. senators.

"This time, I don't know what I'm going to do," McMillan said. "And I'm representative of a lot of the people here."

Indeed, Erickson's assembly featured consternation over federal spending, abortion policy, Trump's proposed tariffs, America's uncertain role in the international order, the former president's penchant for personal attacks, his fixation on the lie that systemic voter fraud was to blame for his 2020 loss and his false contention that his vice president at the time, Mike Pence, had the power to overturn Biden's election.

"I cannot endorse President Trump's continuing assertion that I should have put aside my oath to support the Constitution and act in a way that would have overturned the election," Pence said.

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, who was recently blasted by Trump for not helping overturn the 2020 election, drew a standing ovation when he was introduced, laughter when he compared the former president to a tropical storm and more applause when he called for Republicans to focus on the future.

"We're going to use our political operation to win Georgia despite past grievances," Kemp assured Erickson without mentioning Trump by name. Trump has been indicted for his efforts to overturn the 2020 results in Georgia and elsewhere; those cases are pending.

In his criticisms, Pence pointed to the 2024 Republican platform that fails — for the first time in decades — to call for a national abortion ban and sidesteps the mounting national debt, which ballooned during Trump's four years. Pence bemoaned an increasingly isolationist and protectionist bent among the GOP base — opposition to U.S. aid to Ukraine against Vladimir Putin's invading Russian forces and Trump's promise of sweeping tariffs in a second term.

The Republican Party, Pence said, is under a spell of "populism unmoored to conservative principle."

Walter Michaelis, a 22-year-old getting ready to cast his second presidential ballot, stood and cheered the former vice president and said afterward that Trump's "America First" approach can go too far, especially on tariffs and trade.

"I understand why Trump was needed in 2016," Michaelis said. "But sometimes I do think it would be better now for the party to move on."

Michaelis, who voted for Trump in 2020, said he would not back Harris but had not yet decided whether to vote for the former president again.

Kent Kim, a 30-year-old from Alpharetta, said he has decided to go with Trump. But he added, he's withheld his vote from Trump before and said, "I know people who probably will do that this year."

A key reason for Trump's defeat was underperforming the usual Republican marks in suburban Atlanta, Philadelphia and Phoenix, areas that helped tilt Georgia, Pennsylvania and Arizona to Biden. Those same places also could boost Harris in the fall.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., during his turn on stage with Erickson, tacitly acknowledged the risks as he lamented recent Republican losses in winnable Senate contests. He said that included Georgia, where Trump-backed Herschel Walker lost to Democratic Sen. Raphael Warnock in 2022 despite Republicans winning every other statewide election.

McConnell predicted a GOP Senate majority in the new Congress but sounded less confident about the presidency. Despite blaming Trump for the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol, he has endorsed Trump for president.

"We all know who we hope will be the next administration," he told Erickson. Yet McConnell outlined a conservative agenda without mentioning the former president except to support extending "the Trump tax cuts" of 2017.

And, echoing Pence, McConnell scolded a nameless Republican for turning away from the traditional U.S. role on the world stage.

"We've had occasionally these isolationist moods," he said, noting that the 1930s gave rise to the original "America First" rallying cry. "That stopped after Pearl Harbor," McConnell said, only for some U.S. conservatives to resist the establishment of NATO and the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe after World War II.

McConnell warned that the same mistakes loom with North Korea, China, Russia and Iran "all talking to each other" as "an axis of powerful regimes." McConnell said that demands an assertive international U.S. presence and more robust defense spending across Western democracies.

"If I had a message for the next administration ... take this seriously," McConnell said.

Even some of Trump's full-throated allies offered subtle warnings.

Former Georgia Sen. Kelly Loeffler, who lost a January 2021 runoff to Democrat Raphael Warnock, noted that tens of thousands of Republicans who voted for Trump the previous November stayed home for the runoff after Trump openly questioned the veracity of vote counts. She emphasized this time that Trump is encouraging his backers to take advantage of any voting option: mail, in-person early voting or on Election Day.

Florida Sen. Rick Scott, who is running to succeed McConnell as GOP Senate leader, said in a brief interview that Trump is "going to be fine." But when asked about Trump picking new fights within the party, Scott steered the conversation to his own success in a series of close gubernatorial and Senate contests.

"I try to make sure that, ultimately in my races, that there's a choice, and it's a policy choice. ... Just talk about the issues," he said.

Asked whether he would offer Trump that advice, Scott replied: "Well, I mean, he's going to run the race he likes to run."

Harris cautiously rolls out policy, aiming to outmaneuver Trump and address 2020 liabilities

By ZEKE MILLER AP White House Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris is trying to outmaneuver former President Donald Trump and address old vulnerabilities on her policy positions as she starts to fill in how she would govern if elected in November.

Vice presidents rarely have policy portfolios of their own — and almost always set aside any views that differ from those of the Oval Office occupant. Now, after four years of following President Joe Biden's lead, Harris is taking a cautious approach to unveiling a policy vision in her own right.

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But her surprise ascendance to the top of the ticket after Biden dropped his reelection bid also means her policy platform is being pulled together just as quickly.

When Harris inherited Biden's political operation in late July, the campaign's website was quietly scrubbed of the six-point "issues" page that framed the race against Trump, from expanding voting protections to restoring nationwide access to abortion. Instead, Harris has peppered her speeches — so far heavy on biography for herself and her running mate — with broad goals like "building up the middle class." She has called for federal laws to provide abortion access and ban assault-style weapons, but has been thin on the details of what specifically they would entail or how she would convince Congress to make progress on some of the most hot-button political issues.

Asked by reporters on Saturday when she would unveil her policy platform, Harris promised more details this week and added, "It'll be focused on the economy and what we need to do to bring down costs and also strengthen the economy overall."

Her team has offered few clues of what it will include. But the first major window into her thinking came this past weekend, with a proposal pulled not from the policy backwaters of the Biden administration or the cutting-room floor of the legislative process but from her rival: Trump.

Harris announced that she, like Trump, wants to end federal taxation of tipped earnings for workers — with the added caveat that she would limit the plan to those in the lower- and middle incomes. The idea has drawn bipartisan support in recent months and is particularly salient in service industry-heavy Nevada.

It's also one of the few new ideas embraced by Trump in his 2024 bid to get back into the White House — a bonus in the view of the Harris camp, which has tried to needle the Republican into making unforced errors.

The Republican was none too amused by Harris endorsing the idea, complaining on his social media platform that "This was a TRUMP idea - She has no ideas, she can only steal from me."

Trump continued on the matter in an interview with Elon Musk on Monday night, criticizing Harris for adopting his idea after what he claimed was harassment by the Biden administration of tipped workers.

On Monday, the White House said that Biden backed the plan too, though White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre wouldn't address why Biden and Harris didn't push for it during their first three-and-a-half years in office.

"Obviously, it's a new idea," she said, but added later in response to criticism from Trump, "Why didn't they pass it during the last administration?"

In her first weeks as a candidate, Harris' most pronounced policy moves have been to back away from liberal stances she took in her failed 2020 bid for the White House, including proposals to ban fracking, establish a single-payer healthcare system and decriminalize illegal border crossings. Harris dropped out of that heated race before a single vote had been cast but recognizes that voters now could punish her for those stances if not quickly addressed.

Another complication for Harris comes from her relationship with Biden, who quickly endorsed her and handed her the keys to his political operation after he dropped out.

"The last three and a half years, they've been in sync," said Jean-Pierre. "They have been certainly on the same page. And I presume that that will continue from here."

Biden himself only began outlining detailed policy ideas for a second term during his final, frenzied effort to salvage his candidacy after his disastrous June 27 debate against Trump. He advocated for restoring abortion access, raising the federal minimum wage and passing a new surtax on billionaires. Harris has largely embraced all those priorities, including the incumbent's call for changes to the Supreme Court.

But all those plans would require congressional support, which proved elusive even when Democrats held unified control of Washington during the first two years of the Biden-Harris administration.

Harris' campaign, meanwhile, suggested that her attempted shifts to the center are reflective of how she would try to bring consensus to government.

"While Donald Trump is wedded to the extreme ideas in his Project 2025 agenda, Vice President Harris believes real leadership means bringing all sides together to build consensus," said Harris spokesman Kevin Munoz. "It is that approach that made it possible for the Biden-Harris administration to achieve bipartisan

breakthroughs on everything from infrastructure to gun violence prevention. As President, she will take that same pragmatic approach, focusing on common-sense solutions for the sake of progress."

While Trump in recent weeks has resorted to personal and racially tinged attacks on his new rival, his campaign has been working to put Harris' policy aims front and center, aiming to paint Harris as a radical liberal, pointing to old videos of her discussing policy positions during the 2020 Democratic primary.

"Kamala Harris has flip-flopped on virtually every policy she has supported and lived by for her entire career, from the Border to Tips, and the Fake News Media isn't reporting it," Trump posted Sunday. "She sounds more like Trump than Trump, copying almost everything. She is conning the American public, and will flip right back. I will MAKE AMERICA GREAT AGAIN! There will be no flipping!!!"

How X owner Elon Musk uses his 'free speech' platform to amplify his views worldwide

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

As X's owner and most followed user, Elon Musk has increasingly used the social media platform as a microphone to amplify his political views and, lately, those of right-wing figures he's aligned with. There are few modern parallels to his antics, but then again there are few modern parallels to Elon Musk himself.

Of course, none of this should come as a surprise.

Back in 2022 when he was trying to buy Twitter, Musk said he was doing so because it wasn't living up to its potential as a "platform for free speech." Protecting free speech — not money — was his motivation because, as he put it, "having a public platform that is maximally trusted and broadly inclusive is extremely important to the future of civilization."

Musk often ruminates on the future of civilization. For one, he appears fixated on a coming "population collapse," threatening to wipe out humanity. And he joined prominent scientists and tech leaders last year in warning the world about artificial intelligence doing the same. Musk has framed threats to free speech as yet another existential crisis looming over the world. And he is going to try his best to save it.

"Free speech is the bedrock of a functioning democracy, and Twitter is the digital town square where matters vital to the future of humanity are debated," Musk said in an April 2022 post, adding hearts, stars and rocket emojis to highlight the statement.

Two years on, the platform — now called X — has indeed become a haven for the type of free speech Musk has come to champion. In the U.S., he's spread memes — and sometimes misinformation — about illegal immigration, alleged election fraud and transgender policies, and he formally endorsed former President Donald Trump's presidential bid this summer.

In May 2023, he co-hosted Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis's official presidential bid announcement. That turned out to be a disastrous rollout marred by technical glitches but it underscored Musk's desire to turn X into a "digital town square." After the event was marred by technical difficulties, Musk extended an open invitation to any other presidential candidate who wants to do one. Trump took him up on it, agreeing to an interview with the billionaire Tesla CEO on Monday evening. The conversation started with technical glitches with people unable to join in and began some 42 minutes late.

"I've not been very political before," Musk said during his conversation with Trump.

Overseas — where most X users live — he's feuded with top officials in Australia, Brazil, the European Union and the U.K. over the balance between free speech and the spread of harmful misinformation. And he accused a political party in his native South Africa of "openly pushing for genocide of white people."

"Elon Musk is a master of the media and controls one of the world's largest microphones. Musk understands the power of social media in shaping a political narrative," said Emarketer analyst Jasmine Enberg. "The concern is that as he pushes his own political agenda, X could suppress viewpoints that oppose Musk's own, either intentionally or by nature of the platform becoming more partisan. That could turn off users who feel marginalized on the platform, and disillusion some who may have earlier bought into his free speech mantra."

Musk's political shift playing out on X comes as other social media platforms, notably Meta's Facebook

and Instagram, are shying away from politics. Meta CEO Mark Zuckerberg has never endorsed a presidential candidate — and in February, the world's largest social media company announced it would avoid recommending political content to people who don't already follow such accounts.

Lately, Zuckerberg appears to contrast Musk in other ways too. While as recently as January, the Facebook founder was testifying before Congress about the harm his platform has caused children, he seemed to have embraced a more stylish look that includes gold chains, longer curls and a beaming confidence coupled with slightly self-deprecating humor that seems to embrace his eccentricities. On July 4th, for instance, he posted a video of himself riding an electric surfboard, wearing a tuxedo and holding a can of beer in one hand and an American flag in the other. The online response was far more positive than to a 2021 surfing photo, where he's seen slathered in so much sunscreen it looks like he is wearing a white mask.

Musk, meanwhile, is veering from cool nerd territory into what Kara Swisher, the elder stateswoman of tech journalism, recently called "the Howard Hughes portion" of an inevitable decline. He's sparring with those who disagree with him — be they foreign governments or people infected by what he calls the "woke mind virus." Last week, the British government called on Elon Musk to act more responsibly after the tech billionaire used X to unleash a barrage of posts that risk inflaming violent unrest gripping the country.

Justice Minister Heidi Alexander made the comments after Musk posted a comment saying that "Civil war is inevitable" in the U.K. Musk later doubled down, highlighting complaints that the British criminal justice system treats Muslims more leniently than far-right activists and comparing Britain's crackdown on social media users to the Soviet Union.

Officials at X did not immediately respond to requests for comment

Of course, some of Musk's current battles over free speech are similar to those that the previous Twitter administration was fighting in repressive regimes that have, at times, restricted or blocked access to the platform to suppress dissent. In Venezuela, for instance, President Nicolás Maduro ordered a 10-day block on access to X in the country last week — the latest in a series of efforts by his government to try to suppress information sharing among people voicing doubts about his claim to victory in the July 28 presidential election. Maduro accused X of being used by his opponents to create political unrest, and gave the company 10 days to "present their documents," but he gave no additional details.

Musk's antics are unlike any other Big Tech leader, and while it may be off-putting to a segment of his X user base, it could also attract eyeballs to his platform. Could this all be part of a broader plan? After all, despite publicly criticizing Musk's antics, those on the left continue to use his platform.

"X has remained surprisingly resilient throughout the recent controversy," Enberg said. "That's in no small part due to consumer fascination with conspiracy theories and Elon Musk himself."

Jordan Chiles medal inquiry: USA Gymnastics says arbitration panel won't reconsider decision

By The Associated Press undefined

USA Gymnastics officials say an arbitration panel won't reconsider a decision asking gymnast Jordan Chiles to return the bronze medal she was awarded in the floor exercise at the Paris Olympics.

USA Gymnastics says it will continue efforts to let Chiles keep the medal.

"USA Gymnastics was notified by the Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) on Monday that their rules do not allow for an arbitral award to be reconsidered even when conclusive new evidence is presented," USA Gymnastics said in a statement. "We are deeply disappointed by the notification and will continue to pursue every possible avenue and appeal process, including to the Swiss Federal Tribunal, to ensure the just scoring, placement, and medal award for Jordan."

CAS voided an on-floor appeal from Chiles' coach that vaulted her to third, saying the appeal came 4 seconds beyond the one-minute time limit for scoring inquiries.

USA Gymnastics disputed the timing, saying Sunday that the agency submitted video evidence to CAS that showed Team USA coach Cecile Landi first appealed 13 seconds before the deadline.

The dispute over such minute details sets up what could be a months- or years-long legal battle over the gymnastics scores.

The International Gymnastics Federation (FIG) said Saturday night it would respect the court's decision and elevate Ana Barbosu of Romania to third. The International Olympic Committee confirmed the ruling Sunday, announcing that it was reallocating the medal.

CAS ruled Saturday that Landi's inquiry to have 0.1 added to Chiles' score came outside the one-minute window. The CAS ad hoc committee wrote that Landi's inquiry came 1 minute, 4 seconds after Chiles' initial score was posted.

The IOC said it will be in touch with the USOPC regarding the return of Chiles' bronze and will work with the Romanian Olympic Committee to discuss a reallocation ceremony honoring Barbosu. Rebeca Andrade of Brazil won gold and Simone Biles of the U.S. was the silver medalist.

Any appeal could go to Switzerland's highest court, the Swiss Tribunal, or the European Court of Human Rights.

Late Monday, rapper Flavor Flav — who has been a prominent celebrity supporter of 2024 Olympians, including discus thrower Veronica Fraley — posted on the social media platform X that he had made a bedazzled bronze medal for Chiles as a potential replacement while the U.S. fights "the Powers that be." The replacement is in the manner of a clock, which the rapper has worn for decades, since his days with the group Public Enemy.

"Thank you. Means the world," according to a reply posted on the X account of Gina Charles, the gymnast's mother. "She's not on socials right now as you can imagine. I'll share it with her."

Trump and Musk talk about assassination attempt and deportations during glitchy chat on X

By STEVE PEOPLES and MEG KINNARD Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump recounted his assassination attempt in vivid detail and promised the largest deportation in U.S. history during a high-profile return to the social media platform formerly known as Twitter — a conversation that was plagued by technical glitches.

"If I had not turned my head, I would not be talking to you right now — as much as I like you," Trump told X's owner Elon Musk.

Musk, a former Trump critic, said the Republican nominee's toughness, as demonstrated by his reaction to last month's shooting, was critical for national security.

"There's some real tough characters out there," Musk said. "And if they don't think the American president is tough, they will do what they want to do."

The rare public conversation between Trump and Musk, which spanned more than two hours and was overwhelmingly friendly, revealed little new about Trump's plans for a second term. The former president spent much of the discussion focused on his recent assassination attempt, illegal immigration and his plans to cut government regulations.

Still, the online meeting underscored just how much the U.S. political landscape has changed less than four years after Trump was permanently banned by the social media platform's former leadership for spreading disinformation that sparked the Jan. 6, 2021, attack on Congress and undermined the very foundation of the American democracy.

Such disinformation has thrived at X under Musk's leadership, although it was largely ignored during his conversation with Trump save for a passing Trump reference to a "rigged election."

The session was intended to serve as a way for the former president to reach potentially millions of voters directly. It was also an opportunity for X, a platform that relies heavily on politics, to redeem itself after some struggles.

It did not begin as planned.

With more than 878,000 users connected to the meeting more than 40 minutes after the scheduled start time, the interview had not yet begun. Many users received a message reading, "Details not available."

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Trump's team posted that the "interview on X is being overwhelmed with listeners logging in." And once the meeting began, Musk apologized for the late start and blamed a "massive attack" that overwhelmed the company's system. Trump's voice sounded muffled at times.

Trump supporters were openly frustrated.

"Not available????? I planned my whole day around this," wrote conservative commentator Glenn Beck.

"Please let Elon know we can't join," billionaire hedge fund manager Bill Ackman posted.

Ahead of the event, Musk posted on the platform that X was conducting "some system scaling tests" to handle what was anticipated to be a high volume of participants.

The rocky start was reminiscent of a May 2023 social media conversation between Musk and Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis. The Republican governor was using the social media platform as a way to officially announce his presidential bid, a disastrous rollout marred by technical glitches, overloaded by the more than 400,000 people who tried to dial in.

Trump's Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, noted that Trump mocked DeSantis at the time.

"Wow! The DeSanctus TWITTER launch is a DISASTER! His whole campaign will be a disaster. WATCH!" Trump wrote in a message reposted by Harris' campaign Monday.

Once the interview ended, Harris' campaign responded with a statement saying, "Trump's entire campaign is in service of people like Elon Musk and himself — self-obsessed rich guys who will sell out the middle class and who cannot run a livestream in the year 2024."

Monday's meeting highlighted the evolving personal relationship between Trump and Musk, two of the world's most powerful men, who have shifted from being bitter rivals to unlikely allies over the span of one election season.

Musk, who described himself as a "moderate Democrat" until recently, suggested in 2022 that Trump was too old to be president again. Still, Musk formally endorsed Trump two days after his assassination attempt last month.

During their talk, Trump welcomed the idea of Musk joining his next administration to help cut government waste. Musk volunteered to join a prospective "government efficiency commission."

"You're the greatest cutter," Trump told Musk. "I need an Elon Musk — I need somebody that has a lot of strength and courage and smarts. I want to close up the Department of Education, move education back to the states."

Even before his endorsement, the tech CEO had already been working privately to support a pro-Trump super PAC. The group, known as America PAC, is now under investigation by election officials for alleged misleading attempts to collect data from voters.

Meanwhile, Trump has softened his criticism of electric vehicles, citing Musk's leadership of Tesla. And on Monday, at least, Trump returned to Musk's social media platform in force. The former president made at least eight individual posts in the hours leading up to the Musk interview.

Long before he endorsed Trump, Musk turned increasingly toward the right in his posts and actions on the platform, also using X to try to sway political discourse around the world. He's gotten in a dustup with a Brazilian judge over censorship, railed against what he calls the "woke mind virus" and amplified false claims that Democrats are secretly flying in migrants to vote in U.S. elections.

Musk has also reinstated previously banned accounts such as the conspiracy theorist Alex Jones and Trump, who was kicked off the platform — then known as Twitter — two days after the Jan. 6 violence, with the company citing "the risk of further incitement of violence." By November 2022, Musk had bought the company, and Trump's account was reinstated, although the former president refrained from tweeting until Monday, insisting that he was happier on his own Truth Social site, which he launched during the ban.

Trump's audience on X is legions larger than on Truth Social, which became a publicly traded company earlier this year. Trump has just over 7.5 million followers on Truth Social, while his mostly dormant X account is followed by 88 million. Musk's account, which hosted the interview, has more than 193 million followers.

In a reminder that the world was watching, the chat prompted a preemptive note of caution from Europe.

Thierry Breton, a French business executive and commissioner for internal market of the European Union, warned Musk of possible "amplification of harmful content" by broadcasting his interview with Trump. In a letter posted on X, Breton urged Musk to "ensure X's compliance" with EU law, including the Digital Services Act, adopted in 2022 to address a number of issues including disinformation.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung urged the EU to "mind their own business instead of trying to meddle in the U.S. Presidential election."

Israel-Hamas war latest: Leaders of France, Germany and Britain endorse push for cease-fire in Gaza

By The Associated Press undefined

The leaders of France, Germany and Britain in a joint statement have endorsed the latest push by mediators United States, Qatar and Egypt to broker an agreement to end the 10-month Israel-Hamas war. They also call for the return of scores of hostages held by Hamas and the "unfettered" delivery of humanitarian aid.

Mediators have spent months trying to get the sides to agree to a three-phase plan in which Hamas would release the remaining hostages captured in its Oct. 7 attack in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel and Israel would withdraw from Gaza. Talks have been expected to resume Thursday.

The statement was signed by French President Emmanuel Macron, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer. It also called on Iran and its allies to refrain from any retaliatory attacks that would further escalate regional tensions after the killing of two senior militants last month in Beirut and Tehran.

Here's the latest:

Fitch Ratings downgrades Israel's credit rating and estimates the war in Gaza 'could last well into 2025'
DUBAI, United Arab Emirates — One of the three major credit rating firms has downgraded Israel amid the monthslong Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip, signaling the economic strain the country is under as it awaits a possible retaliatory strike from Iran.

Fitch Ratings in its advisory note downgraded Israel from an "A+" rating to an "A" rating, something that can affect Israel's borrowing rate and its ability to seek cash from international lenders.

Fitch noted that "public finances have been hit" from the war and that it projects Israel to carry a budget deficit of 7.8% of its gross domestic product this year, with its overall debt to remain over 70% of its GDP.

"In our view, the conflict in Gaza could last well into 2025 and there are risks of it broadening to other fronts," Fitch warned in its rating note issued late Monday in the United States. "In addition to human losses, it could result in significant additional military spending, destruction of infrastructure and more sustained damage to economic activity and investment, leading to a further deterioration of Israel's credit metrics."

Fitch added: "Israel is likely to maintain a stronger presence along its borders than in the past, plans to widen mandatory draft and to increase domestic military production, which would also add to spending."

Responding to the rating decision in a post on the social platform X, Israel's hard-line Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich described his nation as being in "the midst of an existential war, the longest and most expensive in its history."

"The downgrade following the war and the geopolitical risks it creates is natural," he wrote. "Israel's economy is strong and we will navigate it correctly and responsibly."

S&P Global Ratings and Moody's Investors Service also lowered Israel's ratings in recent months.

Over the past year, the Israeli shekel has been weighed down by the war, while the Tel Aviv Stock Exchange has seen turbulence as well.

United Nations condemns continued loss of life in Gaza, sets Security Council meeting after Israeli air-strike on school

UNITED NATIONS — The United Nations Security Council is set to meet Tuesday to discuss Gaza in the wake of this weekend's Israeli airstrike on a school that was being used as a shelter, and the world body's

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leader is calling the strike "devastating."

Secretary-General António Guterres made that remark and condemned "the continued loss of life in Gaza" in a post Monday on the social media platform X.

Algeria called for the urgent Security Council meeting after missiles hit the school Saturday. Gaza's Health Ministry said at least 80 people were killed, without saying whether any were fighters. Israel says 31 were militants.

UK Prime Minister speaks by phone to Iran's President, calls on Iran not to attack Israel

LONDON — United Kingdom Prime Minister Keir Starmer on Monday called on Iran not to attack Israel during a 30-minute phone call with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian.

"The Prime Minister said that he was deeply concerned by the situation in the region and called on all parties to de-escalate and avoid further regional confrontation," his office said in a statement. "He called on Iran to refrain from attacking Israel, adding that war was not in anyone's interests."

Starmer also emphasized his commitment to an immediate ceasefire, the release of all hostages and increasing humanitarian aid to Gaza, adding that the parties should focus on diplomatic negotiations to achieve these goals.

He also called on Iran to give necessary medical care to any foreign detainees.

The two leaders agreed that constructive dialogue between the UK and Iran was in both countries' interests. Starmer said this could only happen if Iran stopped "destabilizing actions, including threats against individuals in the UK," and did not provide further aid to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Israel's military shot dead a Palestinian gunman who opened fire in northern West Bank

RAMALLAH, West Bank — Israel's military said its forces shot dead a Palestinian gunman Monday after he opened fire at an Israeli citizen in the northern West Bank, as violence surges in the Israeli-occupied territory.

The military said an Israeli national and two other Palestinians were injured in the gun attack that took place in the West Bank border town of Qalqilya. After a brief pursuit, the attacker was gunned down by Israeli troops and the Israeli national was evacuated to a hospital, it said.

Later Monday, The Palestinian Health Ministry announced that an 18-year-old Palestinian man was shot dead by Israeli forces near the town of Azoun, roughly 9 kilometers (5.6 miles) east of Qalqilya, but did not elaborate on the circumstances of the killing.

No further information was immediately available.

Violence has flared in the West Bank since the Israel-Hamas war erupted last October. Since then, over 620 Palestinians in the territory have been killed by Israeli fire according to the Ramallah-seated Health Ministry, which tracks the deaths.

Israeli nationals are prohibited from entering certain areas of the West Bank that are under the control of the Palestinian Authority, including Qalqilya and other Palestinian cities.

White House says Iran could launch a strike on Israel this week, confirms Israeli intelligence assessment

WASHINGTON — The White House said Monday that it shares the Israeli intelligence assessment that Iran could launch a strike on Israel as soon as this week.

National security spokesperson John Kirby told reporters that "it is difficult to ascertain at this particular time if there's an attack by Iran or its proxies what it could look like," but that the U.S. and its allies were preparing for "a significant set of attacks."

This comes after the Pentagon beefed up the U.S. military posture in the Middle East, and after Biden held a call Monday morning with the leaders of France, Germany, Italy, and the United Kingdom to coordinate their response to tensions in the region.

"The president is confident that we have the capability available to us to help defend Israel should it come to that," Kirby said. "Nobody wants to see it come to that."

The possibility of such an attack coming this week, "is a US assessment as well as an Israeli assessment," Kirby said.

Biden administration warns Iran of 'swift and severe' response if it ships ballistic missiles to Russia

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WASHINGTON — The Biden administration warned Iran of a “swift and severe” response if it ships ballistic missiles to Russia to aid that country’s invasion of Ukraine.

Briefing reporters on Monday, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said the U.S. and its security allies in Europe were discussing a potential response should Tehran transfer the arms to Russia.

“We are deeply concerned by reports that Iran is planning to deliver hundreds of ballistic missiles to Russia and we continue to communicate with our European partners and allies regarding potential measures we may take,” Patel said. “We’ve been warning of the deepening security partnership between Russia and Iran since the onset of Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine. This partnership threatens European security and illustrates how Iran’s destabilizing influence reaches beyond the middle east and around the world.”

The U.S. and its allies have warned for months that Iran could face greater international sanctions if it moves forward with the partnership.

On Monday Patel said the U.S. views the possible transfer of missiles as a “a dramatic escalation in Iran’s support for Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine.”

“Together we are prepared to deliver a swift and severe response if Iran were to move forward with the transfer of ballistic missiles,” Patel said.

German leader speaks with Iran’s new president and appeals against escalation

BERLIN — The German government says Chancellor Olaf Scholz has appealed to Iran’s new president to do everything to prevent a further military escalation in the Middle East.

Scholz spoke by phone Monday with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and “expressed his great concern about the danger of a regional conflagration in the Middle East.” The government did not say who initiated the call. It said Scholz made clear that “the spiral of violence in the Middle East must now be broken.”

Scholz also underlined his call for a cease-fire agreement for Gaza to be finalized. His office said that “would be an important contribution to regional de-escalation.”

Israel’s military says weekend strike on school-turned-shelter killed 31 militants

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military says a strike on a school-turned-shelter over the weekend killed 31 Palestinian militants.

Gaza’s Health Ministry said the pre-dawn strike Saturday in Gaza City killed at least 80 people and wounded dozens more, without saying if any were fighters.

Israel previously released the names of 19 people it said were Hamas and Islamic Jihad militants killed in the strike. On Monday, it released the names of another 12. The military also has disputed the Health Ministry’s toll.

Hamas and Palestinian activists have disputed the military’s account, saying at least two of the people it identified as militants were killed in earlier strikes and that others were civilians.

Northern Gaza, including Gaza City, has been surrounded by Israeli forces and largely isolated. It is not possible to independently confirm the accounts from either side.

Israeli strikes killed 142 people over past 48 hours, Palestinian Health Ministry says

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — The Palestinian Health Ministry in Gaza says Israeli strikes over the past 48 hours have killed 142 people and wounded 150 others.

The fatalities announced on Monday bring the Palestinian death toll in Gaza to 39,897 since the start of the war, according to the ministry. It says over 92,000 people have been wounded.

The ministry does not say how many of the dead and wounded were combatants.

The Health Ministry, part of the Hamas-run government, maintains detailed records and its casualty figures from previous wars have largely matched up with those of independent experts, the United Nations and even Israel’s own figures.

The war began when Hamas launched a surprise attack into Israel on Oct. 7. Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducted around 250 others.

Around 110 hostages are still being held in Gaza after most of the rest were released during a cease-fire in November. Israeli authorities believe around a third of the remaining hostages are dead.

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Hospital in southern Gaza receives bodies of 13 people, including a child
DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — A hospital in southern Gaza has received the bodies of 13 people, including a child, who were killed in apparent Israeli strikes on Khan Younis.

The strikes came as Israel has ordered mass evacuations from Gaza's second-largest city in recent days, saying Palestinian militants are firing rockets from the area. Khan Younis suffered heavy destruction earlier this year during a major Israeli air and ground offensive.

An Associated Press journalist counted the bodies at the nearby Nasser Hospital and saw funeral prayers being held Monday morning.

The dead include a medic who was killed along with two others in a strike on his house, according to the hospital records.

The Israeli military says it tries to avoid harming civilians and accuses Hamas of putting them in danger by fighting in dense, residential areas. The army rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children.

The Vatican calls on Iran to embrace 'dialogue, negotiation and peace'

VATICAN CITY — The Vatican is calling on Iran to refrain "in every way" from fueling the Middle East conflict.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, appealed instead for Tehran to embrace dialogue, negotiation and peace, during a phone call Monday with Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian.

Parolin spoke with Pezeshkian to congratulate him on the start of his mandate.

According to a Vatican statement, Parolin "expressed the Holy See's serious concern about what is happening in the Middle East, reiterating the need to avoid in any way the widening of the very serious conflict underway and preferring instead dialogue, negotiation and peace."

The Vatican has tried to maintain a balanced position on Israel's war in Gaza. It has reaffirmed Israel's right to defend itself and called for Hamas to release hostages taken Oct. 7 but has also demanded a cease-fire, an end to the conflict and for humanitarian aid to reach Palestinians.

Airlines extend flight suspensions to and from the Middle East

BERLIN — Airlines are extending their suspension of flights to and from the Middle East as the region braces for possible Iranian and Hezbollah retaliation for the targeted killing of two top militants that were blamed on Israel.

The Lufthansa Group, which also includes Austrian Airlines and Swiss, said Monday that its flights to Tel Aviv, Tehran, Beirut, Amman and Irbil will remain suspended until Aug. 21 inclusive. Its airlines also won't use Iranian and Iraqi airspace during that time.

The company said passengers who aren't affected by the current suspensions but have flights to or from those five destinations booked through Aug. 31 can cancel without cost.

Air France said it has extended the suspension of its flights between Paris-Charles de Gaulle and Beirut — as well as flights to and from Lebanon operated by its subsidiary, Transavia France — until Wednesday Aug. 14 due to the security situation in Lebanon.

Air France suspended flights to Beirut on July 29 after a rocket attack on the Israeli-controlled Golan Heights killed 12 children and teens.

Irish low-cost carrier Ryanair said it was canceling all flights to and from Ben Gurion International Airport outside of Tel Aviv from Tuesday until Aug. 26 "due to operational restrictions which are beyond our control." The airline did not elaborate.

EU's top diplomat criticizes Israeli minister's call to cut off aid to Gaza

JERUSALEM — The European Union's top diplomat says it should consider sanctions in response to calls by Israel's far-right national security minister to cut off aid to Gaza.

Writing on the X platform late Sunday, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the recent remarks by Itamar Ben-Gvir constitute "incitement to war crimes," adding that "sanctions must be on our EU agenda."

In his own post on X and in media interviews, Ben-Gvir said that instead of agreeing to a potential cease-fire deal, Israel should block the entry of humanitarian aid and fuel to Gaza until Hamas releases all of the hostages, saying that doing so would bring the militant group to its knees.

Ben-Gvir has also repeatedly called for Israel to permanently reoccupy Gaza, rebuild Jewish settlements there and encourage the "voluntary" migration of Palestinians from the territory.

Ben-Gvir, a key member of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's governing coalition, has threatened to bring the government down if it makes too many concessions in the cease-fire talks.

Borrell called on Israel's government to "unequivocally distance itself from these incitements to commit war crimes," and to engage "in good faith" with cease-fire negotiations mediated by the United States, Qatar and Egypt.

The United States and Israel's other Western allies have repeatedly voiced concern about the killing of Palestinian civilians and Israeli restrictions on aid operations in the 10-month-old war. But they continue to provide vital military and diplomatic support for its offensive.

Brazil buries pilot who died in plane crash that killed 62, as questions remain about its cause

By MAURICIO SAVARESE Associated Press

SAO PAULO (AP) — The pilot of the plane that crashed down in Brazil last week was buried Monday in Sao Paulo, becoming the first person laid to rest among the 62 victims, as authorities continue working to determine what exactly caused the accident.

A hearse bearing the casket of Danilo Santos Romano rolled through the streets of Penha, a working class neighborhood of Sao Paulo's east side, en route to the cemetery that lies beneath his apartment. Family members and friends walked behind the vehicle and dozens of shop owners who knew him as a regular customer gathered on the sidewalks to applaud as it passed. Romano was 35.

Clesio Moura, one of the applauding shopkeepers, said he met the pilot two years ago.

"He had lived abroad, worked for foreign companies, but was always humble," Moura said. "We used to chat about soccer, he really wanted to have a child to take to the stadium one day. Danilo was full of life."

The crash Friday killed 58 passengers and four crew members. Footage of the plane plunging while in a flat spin horrified people around the world, and the cause of the accident has yet to be determined. Some experts have pointed to the possibility of severe icing on the wings, which caused pilots to lose control of the plane, but airports minister Silvio Costa Filho told reporters Friday that Romano and his copilot made no calls for an emergency landing, nor did they communicate any adverse weather conditions.

They were flying the ATR 72 twin-engine turboprop for local airline Voepass, headed for the Guarulhos international airport, but the plane plunged from the sky in the nearby city of Vinhedo. Romano had just finished his first full year as commander for Voepass, which hired him as a copilot in November 2022, the airline told the AP in a statement. It added Romano had logged 5,202 hours flying for Voepass, all in ATRs. It is the only type of plane the company owns.

Romano's widow, Thalita Valente Machado, didn't speak to journalists gathered outside the ceremony, but provided a letter with a list of the people and organizations she wished to thank.

"We want to give a very special thanks to his flight partner Humberto de Campos Alencar e Silva, who fought together with Danilo," her letter said. "We are sure they did everything possible and that they are heroes."

Romano's burial followed a wake at a basilica Monday morning. One of the pilot's heroes, the former goalkeeper for Brazil's national soccer team and World Cup winner Marcos, was in attendance. Two of Romano's friends told the AP that during the ceremony his 30-year-old widow repeatedly said "I lost a part of myself."

Romano's body was the first to be released by Sao Paulo's morgue after the crash. The morgue began receiving corpses Friday evening, and asked victims' relatives to bring in medical, X-ray and dental records to help identify them. As of Monday evening, forensic experts had identified 17 bodies and returned eight to victims' relatives, Sao Paulo state's government said.

Meanwhile in Cascavel, the city from which the doomed flight departed, more than a dozen families are awaiting the remains of their loved ones. Mayor Leonaldo Paranhos said on his social media channels that

the city will make a conference center available should anyone wish to hold a collective wake in the space.

"We are still waiting for information from Sao Paulo's morgue, which is still working to identify the bodies and communicate with the families," Paranhos said. "Voepass will be responsible for sending the remains to their destinations."

Authorities recovered both the plane's "black boxes" — one with flight data and the other with cockpit audio — that are key to determining what exactly went awry. The air force's center for the investigation and prevention of air accidents began analyzing them at its laboratory in the nation's capital, Brasilia, and said it will issue a preliminary report within 30 days. Minister Costa Filho said the center was also opening a criminal probe.

Voepass and French-Italian plane manufacturer ATR are collaborating with the investigations, they said in separate statements.

Former Colorado clerk Tina Peters, one-time hero to election deniers, convicted in computer breach

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Former Colorado clerk Tina Peters, the first local election official to be charged with a security breach after the 2020 election as unfounded conspiracy theories swirled, was found guilty by a jury on most charges Monday.

Peters, a one-time hero to election deniers, was accused of using someone else's security badge to give an expert affiliated with My Pillow chief executive Mike Lindell access to the Mesa County election system and deceiving other officials about that person's identity.

Lindell is a prominent promoter of false claims that voting machines were manipulated to steal the election from Donald Trump. His online broadcasting site has been showing a livestream of Peters' trial and sending out daily email updates, sometimes asking for prayers for Peters and including statements from her.

Prosecutors said Peters was seeking fame and became "fixated" on voting problems after becoming involved with those who had questioned the accuracy of the 2020 presidential election results.

The breach Peters was charged of orchestrating heightened concerns over potential insider threats, in which rogue election workers sympathetic to partisan lies could use their access and knowledge to launch an attack from within.

Peters was convicted of three counts of attempting to influence a public servant, one count of conspiracy to commit criminal impersonation, first-degree official misconduct, violation of duty and failing to comply with the secretary of state.

She was found not guilty of identity theft, one count of conspiracy to commit criminal impersonation and one count of criminal impersonation, rejecting that in those instances Peters had used the identity of the security badge's owner, a local man named Gerald Wood, without his permission.

Peters stood next to one of her attorneys at the defense table as the verdict was read in a quiet courtroom. Judge Matthew Barrett had warned those in the courtroom that he would not tolerate any outbursts.

She will be sentenced Oct. 3.

In a post on the social media platform X after the verdict, Peters accused Colorado-based Dominion Voting Systems, which made her county's election system, as well as lawyers for state election officials of stealing votes.

"I will continue to fight until the Truth is revealed that was not allowed to be brought during this trial. This is a sad day for our nation and the world. But we WILL win in the end," she said.

Colorado Secretary of State Jena Griswold, whose office helped launch the investigation into Peters, said she will now face the consequences for compromising her own election equipment "trying to prove Trump's Big Lie."

Colorado Attorney General Phil Weiser said the verdict sent a message.

"Today's verdict is a warning to others that they will face serious consequences if they attempt to illegally tamper with our voting processes or election systems. I want to be clear—our elections are safe

and fair," he said in a statement.

The verdict came just hours after prosecutors urged jurors to convict Peters, saying she deceived government employees so she could work with outsiders affiliated with Lindell.

In closing trial arguments, prosecutor Janet Drake argued that the former clerk allowed a man posing as a county employee to take images of the election system's hard drive before and after a software upgrade in May 2021.

Drake said Peters observed the update so she could become the "hero" and appear at Lindell's symposium on the 2020 presidential election a few months later.

"The defendant was a fox guarding the henhouse. It was her job to protect the election equipment, and she turned on it and used her power for her own advantage," said Drake, a lawyer from the Colorado Attorney General's Office.

Drake has been working for the district attorney in Mesa County, a largely Republican county near the Utah border, to prosecute the case.

Before jurors had begun deliberating Monday, the defense told them that Peters had not committed any crimes and only wanted to preserve election records after the county would not allow her to have one of its technology experts present at the software update.

Defense lawyer John Case said Peters had to preserve records to access the voting system to find out things like whether anyone from "China or Canada" had accessed the machine while ballots were being counted.

"And thank God she did. Otherwise we really wouldn't know what happened," he said.

Peters allowed a former surfer from California affiliated with Lindell, Conan Hayes, to observe the software update and make copies of the hard drive using Wood's security badge. Peters told visiting officials that Hayes, posing as Wood, worked for her. But while prosecutors said Peters committed identity theft by taking Wood's security badge and giving it to Hayes to conceal his identity, the defense said Wood was in on the scheme so Peters did not commit a crime by doing that.

Wood denied that when he testified during the trial.

Political activist Sherronna Bishop, who helped introduce Peters to people working with Lindell, testified that Wood knew his identity would be used based on a Signal chat between her, Wood and Peters. No agreement was spelled out in the chat.

The day after the first image of the hard drive was taken, Bishop testified that she posted a voice recording in the chat. The content of that recording was not included in screenshots of the chat introduced by the defense. The person identified as Wood responded to that unknown message by saying "I was glad to help out. I do hope the effort proved fruitful," according to the screenshots.

Prosecutor Robert Shapiro told jurors that Bishop was not credible.

Judge rules against RFK Jr. in fight to be on New York's ballot, says he is not a state resident

By MICHAEL HILL and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — A judge ruled Monday that independent presidential candidate Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s name should not appear on New York's ballot, saying that he falsely claimed a New York residence on nominating petitions despite living in California.

The scion of the famed Democratic political dynasty vowed to appeal, dismissing the ruling as partisan. If the judge's decision is upheld, it would not only keep Kennedy off the ballot in New York but could also lead to challenges in other states where he used an address in New York City's suburbs to gather signatures.

"The Democrats are showing contempt for democracy," Kennedy said in a statement, noting the ruling judge is a Democrat. "They aren't confident they can win at the ballot box, so they are trying to stop voters from having a choice. We will appeal and we will win."

The ruling came after a North Carolina judge decided earlier Monday that Kennedy can remain on that state's ballot following a separate challenge on different grounds.

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In New York, Judge Christina Ryba concluded in her 34-page decision that the rented bedroom Kennedy claimed as his residence in New York wasn't a "bona fide and legitimate residence, but merely a 'sham' address that he assumed for the purpose of maintaining his voter registration" and furthering his political candidacy.

"Given the size and appearance of the spare bedroom as shown in the photographs admitted into evidence, the Court finds Kennedy's testimony that he may return to that bedroom to reside with his wife, family members, multiple pets, and all of his personal belongings to be highly improbable, if not preposterous," the judge wrote.

Ryba said evidence submitted in trial showed Kennedy had a "long-standing pattern" of borrowing addresses from friends and relatives so he could maintain his voter registration in New York state while actually residing in California, where he has a home with his wife, "Curb Your Enthusiasm" actor Cheryl Hines.

"Using a friend's address for political and voting purposes, while barely stepping foot on the premises, does not equate to residency under the Election Law," the judge wrote. "To hold otherwise would establish a dangerous precedent and open the door to the fraud and political mischief that the Election Law residency rules were designed to prevent."

Clear Choice Action, the Democrat-aligned political action committee that backed the legal challenge on behalf of several voters in the state, said the ruling shows Kennedy intentionally misled election officials and betrayed voters' trust.

"The Kennedy team will undoubtedly file desperate lawsuit after desperate lawsuit in the coming days and weeks; they will fail, and it will not change the simple truth: he lied, and he's being held accountable," the organization said.

Kennedy, who led a New York-based environmental group for decades and whose namesake father was a New York senator, argued during the trial that he has lifelong ties to New York and intends to move back.

Kennedy said he currently rents a room in a friend's home in Katonah, about 40 miles (65 kilometers) north of midtown Manhattan, though has only slept in that room once due to his constant campaign travel.

The 70-year-old candidate testified that his move to California a decade ago was so he could be with his wife, and that he always planned to return to New York.

Barbara Moss, who rents the room to Kennedy, testified that he pays her \$500 a month. But she acknowledged there is no written lease and that Kennedy's first payment wasn't made until after the New York Post published a story casting doubt on Kennedy's claim that he lived at that address.

The judge also heard from a longtime friend of Kennedy's who said the candidate had regularly been an overnight guest at his own Westchester home from 2014 through 2017, but was not a tenant there as Kennedy had claimed.

Attorneys representing several New York voters grilled Kennedy in often heated exchanges as they sought to make their case, pointing to government documents including a federal statement of candidacy with a California address, and even a social media video in which Kennedy talks about training ravens at his Los Angeles home.

Ryba said that his testimony that none of the furniture or decor in the room belonged to him — while Hines and his "wide assortment of domestic and exotic pets" remained across the country — was compelling evidence that he didn't intend to remain at the Katonah address.

Kennedy, in his statement after the ruling, reiterated that he provided evidence New York has been his primary residence since 1964, including that he pays state taxes, has a law practice in the state and holds a driver's license, falconry license and other recreational licenses in New York.

Ryba had dismissed such arguments in her ruling as "immaterial" without proof of physical presence at a specific address where he intends to live permanently.

Kennedy has the potential to do better than any independent presidential candidate in decades thanks to his famous name and a loyal base. Both Democrat and Republican strategists have expressed concerns that he could affect their candidate's chances.

Kennedy's campaign has said he has enough signatures to qualify in a majority of states, but his ballot drive has faced challenges and lawsuits in several.

Kennedy has told reporters that getting knocked off the ballot in New York could lead to lawsuits in other states where his campaign listed the same address.

With over 577,000 signatures verified, Arizona will put abortion rights on the ballot

By RIO YAMAT Associated Press

Arizona voters will get to decide in November whether to add the right to an abortion to the state constitution.

The Arizona secretary of state's office said Monday that it had certified 577,971 signatures — far above the required number that the coalition supporting the ballot measure had to submit in order to put the question before voters.

The coalition, Arizona for Abortion Access, said it is the most signatures validated for a citizens initiative in state history.

"This is a huge win for Arizona voters who will now get to vote YES on restoring and protecting the right to access abortion care, free from political interference, once and for all," campaign manager Cheryl Bruce said in a statement.

Democrats have made abortion rights a central message since the U.S. Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* in 2022 — and it is a key part of their efforts in this year's elections.

The issue already is set to go before voters this year in Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Nevada, New York and South Dakota.

Arizona law currently bans abortions after 15 weeks. The ban, which was signed into law in 2022, includes exceptions in cases of medical emergencies but has restrictions on non-surgical abortion. It also requires an ultrasound before an abortion is done, as well as parental consent for minors.

The proposed amendment would allow abortions until a fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions to save the mother's life or to protect her physical or mental health. It would restrict the state from adopting or enforcing any law that would prohibit access to the procedure.

Organizers said they initially submitted 823,685 signatures, more than double the 383,923 required from registered voters.

Opponents of the measure say it goes too far and could lead to unlimited and unregulated abortions in Arizona.

Supporters, meanwhile, say a constitutional amendment ensures that abortion rights cannot be easily erased by a court decision or legislative vote.

In April, the Arizona Supreme Court upheld an 1864 abortion ban that permitted abortions only to save the mother's life and provided no exceptions for survivors of rape or incest, but the Republican-controlled Legislature voted for a repeal of the Civil War-era ban, and Democratic Gov. Katie Hobbs quickly signed it.

The 19th century law had been blocked since the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization* that eliminated constitutional protections for abortion.

FBI says it is investigating after Trump campaign said sensitive documents were hacked by Iran

By ZEKE MILLER and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The FBI is investigating allegations that sensitive documents from Donald Trump's presidential campaign were stolen in a cyber intrusion, as well as attempts to gain access to Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign, days after the Trump campaign declared it had been hacked by Iran.

The FBI released a brief statement on the Trump matter reading, "We can confirm the FBI is investigating this matter."

The Trump campaign provided no specific evidence of Iran's involvement, but the claim came shortly after Microsoft issued a report detailing foreign agents' attempts to interfere in the U.S. election in 2024.

The report cited an instance of an Iranian military intelligence unit in June sending “a spear-phishing email to a high-ranking official of a presidential campaign from a compromised email account of a former senior advisor.”

Two people familiar with the matter said the Biden-Harris campaign was also targeted in the suspected Iranian cyber intrusion that is under FBI investigation. The people spoke on the condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to discuss the details of the investigation.

Politico reported Saturday that it began receiving emails on July 22 from an anonymous account. The source — an AOL email account identified only as “Robert” — passed along what appeared to be a research dossier the campaign had apparently done on the Republican vice presidential nominee, Ohio Sen. JD Vance. The document was dated Feb. 23, almost five months before Trump selected Vance as his running mate.

“These documents were obtained illegally” and “intended to interfere with the 2024 election and sow chaos throughout our Democratic process,” Trump campaign spokesperson Steven Cheung said.

At least three staffers in the Biden-Harris campaign were targeted with phishing emails, but investigators have uncovered no evidence the attempt was successful, one of the people said. The attempts came before President Joe Biden dropped out of the race.

The FBI began investigating that cyber incident in June and intelligence officials believe Iran was behind the attempts, that person said. Officials have also been in touch with tech companies in recent months about the possibility that people linked to the Trump and Biden-Harris campaigns were being targeted through email.

Harris’ campaign said in a statement, “Our campaign vigilantly monitors and protects against cyber threats, and we are not aware of any security breaches of our systems.” It declined to address whether it had identified any state-based intrusion attempts.

Iran’s mission to the United Nations, when asked about the claim of the Trump campaign, denied being involved.

However, Iran long has been suspected of running hacking campaigns targeting its enemies in the Middle East and beyond. Tehran also long has threatened to retaliate against Trump over the 2020 drone strike he ordered that killed prominent Revolutionary Guard Gen. Qassem Soleimani.

In its report, Microsoft stated that “foreign malign influence concerning the 2024 US election started off slowly but has steadily picked up pace over the last six months due initially to Russian operations, but more recently from Iranian activity.”

The analysis continued: “Iranian cyber-enabled influence operations have been a consistent feature of at least the last three U.S. election cycles. Iran’s operations have been notable and distinguishable from Russian campaigns for appearing later in the election season and employing cyberattacks more geared toward election conduct than swaying voters.”

“Recent activity suggests the Iranian regime — along with the Kremlin — may be equally engaged in election 2024,” Microsoft concluded.

New Mars study suggests an ocean’s worth of water may be hiding beneath the red dusty surface

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Mars may be drenched beneath its surface, with enough water hiding in the cracks of underground rocks to form a global ocean, new research suggests.

The findings released Monday are based on seismic measurements from NASA’s Mars InSight lander, which detected more than 1,300 marsquakes before shutting down two years ago.

This water — believed to be seven miles to 12 miles (11.5 kilometers to 20 kilometers) down in the Martian crust — most likely would have seeped from the surface billions of years ago when Mars harbored rivers, lakes and possibly oceans, according to the lead scientist, Vashan Wright of the University of California San Diego’s Scripps Institution of Oceanography.

Just because water still may be sloshing around inside Mars does not mean it holds life, Wright said. "Instead, our findings mean that there are environments that could possibly be habitable," he said in an email.

His team combined computer models with InSight readings including the quakes' velocity in determining underground water was the most likely explanation. The results appeared Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences.

If InSight's location at Elysium Planitia near Mars' equator is representative of the rest of the red planet, the underground water would be enough to fill a global ocean a mile or so (1 kilometer to 2 kilometers) deep, Wright said.

It would take drills and other equipment to confirm the presence of water and seek out any potential signs of microbial life.

Although the InSight lander is no longer working, scientists continue to analyze the data collected from 2018 through 2022, in search of more information about Mars' interior.

Wet almost all over more than 3 billion years ago, Mars is thought to have lost its surface water as its atmosphere thinned, turning the planet into the dry, dusty world known today. Scientists theorize much of this ancient water escaped out into space or remained buried below.

Dozens of pregnant women, some bleeding or in labor, are turned away from ERs despite federal law

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Bleeding and in pain, Kyleigh Thurman didn't know her doomed pregnancy could kill her.

Emergency room doctors at Ascension Seton Williamson in Texas handed her a pamphlet on miscarriage and told her to "let nature take its course" before discharging her without treatment for her ectopic pregnancy.

When the 25-year-old returned three days later, still bleeding, doctors finally agreed to give her an injection to end the pregnancy. It was too late. The fertilized egg growing on Thurman's fallopian tube ruptured it, destroying part of her reproductive system.

That's according to a complaint Thurman and the Center for Reproductive Rights filed last week asking the government to investigate whether the hospital violated federal law when staff failed to treat her initially in February 2023.

"I was left to flail," Thurman said. "It was nothing short of being misled."

The Biden administration says hospitals must offer abortions when needed to save a woman's life, despite state bans enacted after the Supreme Court overturned the constitutional right to an abortion more than two years ago. Texas is challenging that guidance and, earlier this summer, the Supreme Court declined to resolve the issue.

More than 100 pregnant women in medical distress who sought help from emergency rooms were turned away or negligently treated since 2022, an Associated Press analysis of federal hospital investigations found.

Two women — one in Florida and one in Texas — were left to miscarry in public restrooms. In Arkansas, a woman went into septic shock and her fetus died after an emergency room sent her home. At least four other women with ectopic pregnancies had trouble getting treatment, including one in California who needed a blood transfusion after she sat for nine hours in an emergency waiting room.

Abortion bans complicate risky pregnancy care

In Texas, where doctors face up to 99 years of prison if convicted of performing an illegal abortion, medical and legal experts say the law is complicating decision-making around emergency pregnancy care.

Although the state law says termination of ectopic pregnancies isn't considered abortion, the draconian penalties scare Texas doctors from treating those patients, the Center for Reproductive Rights argues.

"As fearful as hospitals and doctors are of running afoul of these state abortion bans, they also need to

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be concerned about running afoul of federal law," said Marc Haddon, a center attorney. Hospitals face a federal investigation, hefty penalties and threats to their Medicare funding if they violate the federal law.

The organization filed complaints last week with the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service alleging that different Texas emergency rooms failed to treat two patients, including Thurman, with ectopic pregnancies.

One complaint says Kelsie Norris-De La Cruz, 25, lost a fallopian tube and most of an ovary after an Arlington, Texas, hospital sent her home without treating her ectopic pregnancy, even after a doctor said discharge was "not in her best interest."

"The doctors knew I needed an abortion, but these bans are making it nearly impossible to get basic emergency healthcare," she said in a statement. "I'm filing this complaint because women like me deserve justice and accountability from those that hurt us."

Conclusively diagnosing an ectopic pregnancy can be difficult. Doctors cannot always find the pregnancy's location on an ultrasound, three doctors consulted for this article explained. Hormone levels, bleeding, a positive pregnancy test and an ultrasound of an empty uterus all indicate an ectopic pregnancy.

"You can't be 100% — that's the tricky part," said Kate Arnold, an OB-GYN in Washington. "They're literally time bombs. It's a pregnancy growing in this thing that can only grow so much."

Texas Right to Life Director John Seago said state law protects doctors from prosecution for terminating ectopic pregnancies, even if a doctor "makes a mistake" in diagnosing it.

"Sending a woman back home is completely unnecessary, completely dangerous," Seago said.

But the state law has "absolutely" made doctors afraid of treating pregnant patients, said Hannah Gordon, an emergency medicine physician who worked in a Dallas hospital until last year.

She recalled a patient with signs of an ectopic pregnancy at her Dallas emergency room. Because OB-GYNs said they couldn't definitively diagnose the problem, they waited to end the pregnancy until she came back the next day.

"It left a bad taste in my mouth," said Gordon, who left Texas hoping to become pregnant and worried about the care she'd receive there.

"Oh my God, I'm dying"

When Thurman returned to Ascension Seton Williamson a third time, her OB-GYN told her she'd need surgery to remove the fallopian tube, which had ruptured. Thurman, still heavily bleeding, balked. Losing the tube would jeopardize her fertility.

Her doctor told her she risked death if she waited any longer.

"She came in and she's like, you're either going to have to have a blood transfusion, or you're going to have to have surgery or you're going to bleed out," Thurman said, through tears. "That's when I just kind of was like, 'Oh my God, I'm, I'm dying.'"

The hospital declined to comment on Thurman's case, but said in a statement it "is committed to providing high-quality care to all who seek our services."

In Florida, a 15-week pregnant woman leaked amniotic fluid for an hour in Broward Health Coral Springs' emergency wait room, according to federal documents. An ultrasound revealed the patient had no amniotic fluid surrounding the fetus, a dangerous situation that can cause serious infection.

The woman miscarried in a public bathroom that day, after the emergency room doctor listed her condition as "improved" and discharged her, without consulting the hospital's OB-GYN.

Emergency crews rushed her to another hospital, where she was placed on a ventilator and discharged after six days.

Abortions after 15 weeks were banned in Florida at the time. Broward Health Coral Springs' obstetrics medical director told an investigator that inducing labor for anyone who presents with pre-viable premature rupture of membranes is "the standard of care, has been a while, regardless of heartbeat, due to the risk to the mother."

The hospital declined comment.

In another Florida case, a doctor admitted state law had complicated emergency pregnancy care.

"Because of the new laws ... staff cannot intervene unless there is a danger to the patient's health,"

a doctor at Memorial Regional Hospital in Hollywood, Florida, told an investigator who was probing the hospital's failure to offer an abortion to a woman whose water broke at 15 weeks, well before the fetus could survive.

Troubles extend beyond abortion ban states

Serious violations that jeopardized a mother or her fetus' health occurred in states with and without abortion bans, the AP's review found.

Two short-staffed hospitals — in Idaho and Washington — admitted to investigators they routinely directed pregnant patients to other hospitals.

A pregnant patient at a Bakersfield, California, emergency room was quickly triaged, but staff failed to realize the urgency of her condition, a uterine rupture. The delay, an investigator concluded, may have contributed to the baby's death.

Doctors at emergency rooms in California, Nebraska, Arkansas and South Carolina failed to check for fetal heartbeats or discharged patients who were in active labor, leaving them to deliver at home or in ambulances, according to the documents.

Nursing and doctor shortages, trouble staffing ultrasounds around-the-clock and new abortion laws are making the emergency room a dangerous place for pregnant women, warned Dara Kass, an emergency medicine doctor and former U.S. Health and Human Services official.

"It is increasingly less safe to be pregnant and seeking emergency care in an emergency department," she said.

Trump and his allies once cheered hacked materials. No longer, now that they say he's a target

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Donald Trump was once a cheerleader of publicizing hacked materials. "Russia, if you're listening," Trump said during a press conference in his 2016 presidential run, when Hillary Clinton's deleted personal emails were a hot topic, "I hope you are able to find the 30,000 emails that are missing."

"I think you will probably be rewarded mightily by our press," he said back then.

That changed when Trump's latest presidential campaign declared this weekend it had been hacked by Iran. "Any media or news outlet reprinting documents or internal communications are doing the bidding of America's enemies and doing exactly what they want," Steven Cheung, the campaign's communications director, said in a statement on Saturday announcing that the campaign had been hacked.

The campaign has not responded to questions about why its view on hacking changed, including a query on Monday from The Associated Press. But its new position is a striking change from 2016, when Trump heartily embraced the Russian hacking of his opponent Clinton's aides and the Democratic National Committee.

The current hack, so far, is murky.

On Friday, Microsoft issued a report stating that Iranian hackers tried to penetrate the account of an official with one of the presidential campaigns, but did not disclose additional details. On Saturday, the Trump campaign announced it had been hacked, though it also did not identify the individual whose account was breached. It did so after Politico said it had been contacted by an unknown source peddling what was represented to be internal documents from the campaign.

Iran has denied being involved in any hack. The U.S. government has not confirmed that any breach has occurred. On Monday, the FBI said in a statement it was investigating the matter.

In 2016, intelligence officials said Russian hackers obtained thousands of emails from the Democratic National Committee, the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, and the personal account of Clinton's campaign chairman, John Podesta. The initial batches came out in the summer, as Clinton clinched the Democratic nomination.

That was when Trump encouraged Russia to find his rival's personal emails. He later argued he was joking.

The hacked material was released through third parties, including the online site Wikileaks, which began to publish daily tranches of Democratic documents in October, just after a videotape of Trump bragging about how he'd sexually assaulted women was disclosed.

Trump routinely touted the Democratic leaks at his campaign rallies, including declaring at one: "I love Wikileaks."

The leaked documents received ample news coverage, and Kathleen Hall Jamieson, a communications professor at the University of Pennsylvania who wrote the book "Cyberwar" on the 2016 hacking, said she found that coverage was what won the election for Trump.

"2016 was not an instance of which journalists should be proud," Jamieson said in an interview Monday, adding that the greatest question is how news organizations apply their standards to whatever material finds itself in the public domain.

"That Trump is saying what is electorally convenient is not a surprise," Jamieson said. "This is not a person for whom inconsistency is a concern."

Nick Merrill was a spokesman for Clinton's 2016 campaign and pushed back against publication of the hacked documents at the time. On Monday, he noted the Trump campaign was in a similar role this time.

"In addition to the characteristic hypocrisy, they just spent three weeks trying to explain they're not weird," Merrill said via text. "And I'd imagine that sharing their internal correspondence is going to help dispel that notion."

Asked if that meant he now thought hacked materials should be published, Merrill replied: "A precedent has been set here. I'm not passing judgment on it."

Trump falsely claims a crowd photo from Harris' campaign rally in Detroit was created using AI

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump has been spreading false claims that an image of thousands of people waiting at Detroit's airport as Democrat Kamala Harris arrived for a campaign rally was fabricated with the help of artificial intelligence.

Reporters, photographers and video journalists representing The Associated Press and other news organizations who either traveled with Vice President Harris or were on the airport tarmac documented the crowd size last Wednesday as she arrived on Air Force Two. Harris' campaign also denied the photo in question was manipulated and posted about it on social media.

Fifteen thousand people attended the Detroit airport rally, Harris' campaign said. Harris and Walz spoke from inside a hangar where people were packed in. The crowd also spilled out onto the tarmac. The Wayne County Airport Authority, which oversees the airport, referred questions about the size of the crowd to Harris' campaign.

Thousands of people have been showing up at her campaign rallies.

By the Harris campaign's count, 12,000 people turned out for rallies in Philadelphia and Eau Claire, Wisconsin, last week, followed by 15,000 in Glendale, Arizona. In Las Vegas on Saturday, more than 12,000 people were inside a university arena when law enforcement halted admission because people were getting ill waiting outside in the extreme 109-degree heat. About 4,000 people were waiting in line when the doors were closed.

An Associated Press reporter who covered the Harris events in Wisconsin, Michigan, Arizona and Nevada, witnessed the throngs of people in attendance.

Trump pushed his false claims in back-to-back posts on his social media site on Sunday.

"Has anyone noticed that Kamala CHEATED at the airport? There was nobody at the plane, and she 'A.I.'d' it, and showed a massive 'crowd' of so-called followers, BUT THEY DIDN'T EXIST!" he wrote. He included a post from another individual who made similar allegations about photo manipulation.

A minute later Trump posted, "Look, we caught her with a fake 'crowd.' There was nobody there!" He included a photo of the crowd that was partly shaded and partly exposed to the sun.

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Harris' campaign confirmed on Monday that the photo being questioned was taken by a staff member and was not in any way modified using AI.

Hany Farid, a University of California, Berkeley, professor who focuses on digital forensics and misinformation, analyzed the photo using two models trained to detect patterns of generative AI and found no evidence of manipulation. The models were developed by GetReal Labs, a company Farid co-founded.

Farid, responding Monday in an email, said he compared several versions of the photo and the only alteration he detected was some simple change to brightness or contrast, and perhaps sharpening. He said many other images and videos from the event last Wednesday show the same basic scene.

Trump started pushing false theories about the Harris campaign photo a few days after he held a news conference at his Florida estate on Thursday and was asked about the crowds at his Democratic rival's rallies. Trump said no one draws crowds as big as he does.

"I've spoken to the biggest crowds. Nobody's spoken to crowds bigger than me," Trump claimed at the news conference, his first since Harris became the Democratic presidential nominee.

He went on to falsely compare the crowd at his speech in front of the White House on Jan. 6, 2021, to the crowd at Martin Luther King Jr.'s famous "I Have a Dream" speech on Aug. 28, 1963, at the Lincoln Memorial.

But King drew far more people. Approximately 250,000 people attended the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, at which King gave his speech, according to the National Park Service. The Associated Press reported in 2021 that there were at least 10,000 people at Trump's address.

Some of Trump's top advisers and supporters have been urging the former president to focus his criticisms on Harris' policies and talk more about the border and the economy.

"Stop questioning the size of her crowds," was the advice former House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, R-Calif., offered during a Fox News appearance on Monday.

The Harris campaign needled Trump on a variety of issues in an email Monday titled "9 Days Since Trump's Last Swing State Event." The note included a bullet point that said, "he's very mad about crowd sizes, claiming it's all fake and AI-generated. (Maybe if he campaigned he'd get crowds too?)"

Harris is pushing joy. Trump paints a darker picture. Will mismatched moods matter?

By WILL WEISSERT and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — At the top of his first speech as her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz turned to Vice President Kamala Harris and declared, "Thank you for bringing back the joy." The next day, Harris took the theme a step further, branding the Democratic ticket "joyful warriors."

Contrast that with former President Donald Trump, who opened a news conference at his Mar-a-Lago club in Florida a few days later by saying, "We have a lot of bad things coming up," and predicting the U.S. could fall into an economic depression unseen since the dark days of 1929 or even another world war.

"I think that our country is, right now, in the most dangerous position it's ever been in, from an economic standpoint, from a safety standpoint," Trump said Thursday.

Democrats are playing up their sunnier outlook, promoting the idea that voters can be inspired to support someone and not just cast their ballot against the other side. The Trump campaign argues their candidate is reflecting the dour mood of the country and dismisses the idea that a growing contrast in tone and upbeat attitude will decide the presidency.

Two-thirds of Americans reported feeling very or somewhat pessimistic about the state of politics, according to polling by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research from last month. Roughly 7 in 10 said things in the country are heading in the wrong direction.

Jason Miller, a senior adviser to the former president, said people don't care about "vibe checks."

"That's not making gas or food or housing less expensive," Miller said.

Walz promotes positivity

Still, just how hard Harris is betting on the opposite approach is evident in her decision to pick Walz,

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whose personal story includes being on the coaching staff of a high school football team that had gone winless just a few years earlier to clinching a state championship in 1999.

The Minnesota governor's relentless positivity is meant to give supporters a jolt of new energy and keep the momentum that Harris has built after President Joe Biden — facing mounting pressure from within his own party and increasingly pessimistic views about his chances in November — stepped aside and endorsed his vice president.

Walz spent his first week as Harris' running mate traveling to swing states with Harris and underscored the point during a rally in Eau Claire, Wisconsin, celebrating what he said was "the ability to talk about what can be good."

"This idea of caring for our neighbor and kindness, and a hand up when somebody needs it. And just the sense that people go through things and to be able to be there when they need it, that's who we are," he said. "It's not about mocking. It's not name-calling."

Biden often ended his speeches saying he'd never been more optimistic. But he built his now-shuttered reelection bid around branding Trump an existential threat to democracy. The president offered dire predictions about the former president, suggesting he'd dismantle the nation's founding principles should he retake the White House.

Harris' campaign still relies on many of the same themes, decrying Trump as a threat to democracy, warning that he'll impose draconian limits to abortion and voting and that he will follow Project 2025, a plan championed by top conservatives to remake large swaths of the federal government.

And despite Walz insisting that smiles were more powerful than insults, he and Harris have continued their share of denunciations, decrying Trump's conviction in New York on 34 felony counts in a hush-money case and his being found liable for fraudulent business practices and sexual abuse in civil court.

Still, even before she named Walz her running mate, Harris was suggesting that she could help make politics fun again.

"We love our country. And I believe it is the highest form of patriotism to fight for the ideals of our country," Harris declared in campaign speeches before picking Walz. She now tells crowds that she and her running mate "both believe in lifting people up, not knocking them down."

Paula Montagna, who went to see Harris and Walz at a rally outside Detroit last week, highlighted the shift in messaging since Harris took over from Biden.

"Kamala is so positive, and it's nice to hear positive instead of negative," Montagna said.

Trump team says their candidate is reflecting reality

Trump's senior campaign advisers counter that the mood of the country right now is sour over the economy, the state of the U.S.-Mexico border and turmoil in the Middle East and beyond. They see their candidate as reflecting that reality rather than what they believe is a temporary exuberance igniting the Democratic base after months of discouragement over their ticket.

Trump has tried to harness that with his repeated predictions of stock market crashes and war. His campaign appearances have included a long list of other warnings that have veered into the apocalyptic, saying that if he's not elected, "we're not going to have a country anymore," that "the only thing standing between you and its obliteration is me," and that under a Harris administration, "Social Security will buckle and collapse" and "the suburbs will be overrun with violent crime and savage foreign gangs."

During his Republican National Convention speech last month, where his advisers said Trump would seem changed and more personal after surviving an attempted assassination, the former president did strike a different tone — at least to start.

He said early on that he had "a message of confidence, strength and hope" and sought to "launch a new era of safety, prosperity and freedom for citizens of every race, religion, color and creed."

But by the end, Trump had returned to predictions of doom, twice warning, "Bad things are going to happen."

Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Trump's running mate, has drawn a sharp contrast with Walz. Vance has been cheered on the right for being an aggressive fighter on behalf of the former president, particularly when engaging with reporters.

"Right now, I am angry about what Kamala Harris has done to this country and done to the American southern border," Vance said at a campaign stop in Michigan. "And I think most people in our country, they can be happy-go-lucky sometimes, they can enjoy things sometimes, and they can turn on the news and recognize that what's going on in this country is a disgrace."

Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell, not himself known for a sunny disposition, offered much the same assessment Friday at a conservative conference in Atlanta hosted by radio host Erick Erickson.

"The country is obviously in a bad mood," McConnell said.

Trump supporters waiting to see him at a rally in Bozeman, Montana, said they felt the former president's campaign made them feel positive — even if his message often isn't.

"Just looking at the state of the country now, I don't think Kamala Harris' campaign is one of joy and hope. I think that's Trump's campaign," said Alex Lustig, a 23-year-old from Billings, Montana.

Fred Scarlett, a 63-year-old retiree from Condon, Montana, said that "everyone understands that we need to be here to support Trump because he has never let us down."

"They shoot at him," Scarlett said, "and he still keeps firing back."

US beefs up posture in Middle East, warns an Iran-backed attack on Israel could come this week

By LOLITA C. BALDOR Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin has ordered a guided missile submarine to the Middle East and is telling the USS Abraham Lincoln aircraft carrier strike group to sail more quickly to the area, as the U.S. on Monday said it believes Iran or its proxies may launch a strike against Israel as soon as this week.

The moves, announced by the Defense Department Sunday, come as the U.S. and other allies push for Israel and Hamas to achieve a cease-fire agreement that could help calm soaring tensions in the region following the assassination of Hamas political leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran and a senior Hezbollah commander in Beirut.

Officials have been on the lookout for retaliatory strikes by both Iran and Hezbollah for the killings, and the U.S. has been beefing up its presence in the region.

John Kirby, the White House national security spokesman, said Iran's response to the killings "could be this week," but that "it is difficult to ascertain at this particular time if there's an attack by Iran or its proxies what it could look like." He said the U.S. and its allies were preparing for a "significant set of attacks."

"The president is confident that we have the capability available to us to help defend Israel should it come to that," Kirby said, adding, "Nobody wants to see it come to that."

Maj. Gen. Pat Ryder, Pentagon press secretary, said in a statement that Austin spoke with Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant earlier in the day, and reiterated America's commitment "to take every possible step to defend Israel and noted the strengthening of U.S. military force posture and capabilities throughout the Middle East in light of escalating regional tensions."

A joint statement from the leaders of the United States, Britain, France, Germany and Italy "called on Iran to stand down its ongoing threats of a military attack against Israel and discussed the serious consequences for regional security should such an attack take place."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz spoke by phone Monday with Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian and "expressed his great concern about the danger of a regional conflagration in the Middle East," the German government said.

British Prime Minister Keir Starmer spoke to Pezeshkian and called on him to refrain from carrying out an attack, the Prime Minister's office said.

The Vatican secretary of state, Cardinal Pietro Parolin, also spoke with Pezeshkian on Monday, "reiterating the need to avoid in any way the widening of the very serious conflict underway," according to a Vatican statement.

The Lincoln, which has been in the Asia Pacific, had already been ordered to the region to replace the

USS Theodore Roosevelt aircraft carrier strike group, which is scheduled to begin heading home from the Middle East. Last week, Austin said the Lincoln would arrive in the Central Command area by the end of the month.

It wasn't clear Sunday what his latest order means, or how much more quickly the Lincoln will steam to the Middle East. The carrier has F-35 fighter jets aboard, along with the F/A-18 fighter aircraft that are also on carriers.

Ryder also did not say how quickly the USS Georgia guided missile submarine would get to the region. He said Austin and Gallant also discussed Israel's military operations in Gaza and the importance of mitigating civilian harm.

The call comes a day after an Israeli airstrike hit a school-turned-shelter in Gaza early Saturday, killing at least 80 people and wounding nearly 50 others, Palestinian health authorities said, in one of the deadliest attacks of the 10-month Israel-Hamas war.

Americans' refusal to keep paying higher prices may be dealing a final blow to US inflation spike

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The great inflation spike of the past three years is nearly spent — and economists credit American consumers for helping slay it.

Some of America's largest companies, from Amazon to Disney to Yum Brands, say their customers are increasingly seeking cheaper alternative products and services, searching for bargains or just avoiding items they deem too expensive. Consumers aren't cutting back enough to cause an economic downturn. Rather, economists say, they appear to be returning to pre-pandemic norms, when most companies felt they couldn't raise prices very much without losing business.

"While inflation is down, prices are still high, and I think consumers have gotten to the point where they're just not accepting it," Tom Barkin, president of the Federal Reserve Bank of Richmond, said last week at a conference of business economists. "And that's what you want: The solution to high prices is high prices."

A more price-sensitive consumer helps explain why inflation has appeared to be steadily falling toward the Federal Reserve's 2% target, ending a period of painfully high prices that strained many people's budgets and darkened their outlooks on the economy. It also assumed a central place in the presidential election, with inflation leading many Americans to turn sour on the Biden-Harris administration's handling of the economy.

The reluctance of consumers to keep paying more has forced companies to slow their price increases — or even to cut them. The result is a cooling of inflation pressures.

On Monday, the Federal Reserve Bank of New York reported that Americans' expectations of how much they'll spend in the next 12 months has declined — and so has their outlook for inflation. Consumers expect their spending to grow 4.9% in the coming year, according to a survey by the New York Fed. That is the lowest such reading since April 2021, when inflation was beginning to surge.

And they expect inflation to average just 2.3% over the next three years, the survey found, the lowest such figure since the survey began in 2013. Consumer expectations for inflation can be self-fulfilling: When households expect low inflation, they tend to delay some purchases in the expectation that prices won't rise much in the near future — and might even decline in some cases. This trend can keep price pressures down.

Other factors have also helped tame inflation, including the healing of supply chains, which has boosted the availability of cars, trucks, meats and furniture, among other items, and the high interest rates engineered by the Fed, which slowed sales of homes, cars and appliances and other interest rate-sensitive purchases.

Still, a key question now is whether shoppers will pull back so much as to put the economy at risk. Consumer spending makes up more than two-thirds of economic activity. With evidence emerging that the job market is cooling, a drop in spending could potentially derail the economy. Such fears caused stock

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prices to plummet a week ago, though markets have since rebounded.

This week, the government will provide updates on both inflation and the health of the American consumer. On Wednesday, it will release the consumer price index for July. It's expected to show that prices — excluding volatile food and energy costs — rose just 3.2% from a year earlier. That would be down from 3.3% in June and would be the lowest such year-over-year inflation figure since April 2021.

And on Thursday, the government will report last month's retail sales, which are expected to have climbed a decent 0.3% from June. Such a gain would suggest that while Americans have become vigilant about their money, they are still willing to spend.

Many businesses have noticed.

"We're seeing lower average selling prices ... right now because customers continue to trade down on price when they can," said Andrew Jassy, CEO of Amazon.

David Gibbs, CEO of Yum Brands, which owns Taco Bell, KFC and Pizza Hut, told investors that a more cost-conscious consumer has slowed its sales, which slipped 1% in the April-June quarter at stores open for at least a year.

"Ensuring we provide consumers affordable options," Gibbs said, "has been an area of greater focus for us since last year."

Other companies are cutting prices outright. Dormify, an online retailer that sells dorm supplies, is offering comforters starting at \$69, down from \$99 a year ago.

According to the Fed's "Beige Book," an anecdotal collection of business reports from around the country that is released eight times a year, companies in nearly all 12 Fed districts have described similar experiences.

"Almost every district mentioned retailers discounting items or price-sensitive consumers only purchasing essentials, trading down in quality, buying fewer items or shopping around for the best deals," the Beige Book said last month.

Most economists say consumers are still spending enough to sustain the economy consistently. Barkin said most of the businesses in his district — which covers Virginia, West Virginia, Maryland and North and South Carolina — report that demand remains solid, at least at the right price.

"The way I'd put it is, consumers are still spending, but they're choosing," Barkin said.

In a speech a couple of weeks ago, Jared Bernstein, who leads the Biden administration's Council of Economic Advisers, mentioned consumer caution as a reason why inflation is nearing the end of a "round trip" back to the Fed's 2% target level.

Emerging from the pandemic, Bernstein noted, consumers were flush with cash after receiving several rounds of stimulus checks and having slashed their spending on in-person services. Their improved finances "gave certain firms the ability to flex a pricing power that was much less prevalent pre-pandemic." After COVID, consumers were "less responsive to price increases," Bernstein said.

As a result, "the old adage that the cure for high prices is high prices (was) temporarily disengaged," Bernstein said.

So some companies raised prices even more than was needed to cover their higher input costs, thereby boosting their profits. Limited competition in some industries, Bernstein added, made it easier for companies to charge more.

Barkin noted that before the pandemic, inflation remained low as online shopping, which makes price comparisons easy, became increasingly prevalent. Major retailers also held down costs, and increased U.S. oil production brought down gas prices.

"A price increase was so rare," Barkin said, "that if someone came to you with a 5% or 10% price increase, you almost just threw them out, like, 'How could you possibly do it?'"

That changed in 2021.

"There are labor shortages, Barkin said. "Supply chain shortages. And the price increases are coming to you from everywhere. Your gardener is raising your prices, and you don't have the capacity to do anything other than accept them."

The economist Isabella Weber at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, dubbed this phenomenon

"sellers' inflation" in 2023. In an influential paper, she wrote that "publicly reported supply chain bottlenecks" can "create legitimacy for price hikes" and "create acceptance on the part of consumers to pay higher prices."

Consumers are no longer so accepting, Barkin said.

"People have a little bit more time to stop and say, 'How do I feel about paying \$9.89 for a 12-pack of Diet Coke when I used to pay \$5.99?' They don't like it that much, and so people are making choices."

Barkin said he expects this trend to continue to slow price increases and cool inflation.

"I'm actually pretty optimistic that over the next few months, we're going to see good readings on the inflation side," he said. "All the elements of inflation seem to be settling down."

Their job was saving lives. They lost their own in Brazil's horrifying plane crash

By ELÉONORE HUGHES Associated Press

RIO DE JANEIRO (AP) — Arianne Risso worked every day to help her patients battle cancer. That made it all the more heart wrenching when her life — along with that of seven other doctors — ended abruptly after a plane tumbled from the sky in Brazil.

She boarded the ill-fated flight Friday in the city of Cascavel, in Parana state, bound for Sao Paulo's Guarulhos international airport. It crashed in the city of Vinhedo, and footage of the ATR 72 twin-engine turboprop plunging while in a flat spin horrified people across Brazil.

It smashed into the backyard of a home inside a gated community and transformed into a fiery wreck. All 62 people aboard were killed, among them the eight doctors, according to a statement from Parana's Medical Council. Risso and at least one colleague were headed for an oncology conference to sharpen their knowledge about a disease that kills tens of thousands of Brazilians every year.

"They were people used to saving lives, and now they lost theirs in such tragic circumstances," Parana Gov. Ratinho Júnior told journalists in Vinhedo on Friday, adding that he had friends on the doomed plane. "It is a sad day."

Risso's cousin, Stephany Albuquerque, recalled in a phone interview that the two often played together when she was young. Even then, Risso wanted to become a doctor and, as she grew older, applied herself so intensively to her studies that she rarely went out on the town. Medicine was her calling.

"Arianne treated people who were terminally ill at a time in their lives when they were struggling. But Arianne was always available and did everything with a lot of love," Albuquerque told The Associated Press by phone from Florida, where she now lives. "She wasn't the kind of doctor who would tell the patient, 'This is your illness, take this.' No, Arianne took care of people. ... She would give out her personal phone number to patients."

Risso, 34, was flying with her colleague Mariana Belim, 31. The two had been in residencies at Cascavel's cancer hospital, and a statement from the institution praised them for the conscientiousness, care and respect with which they treated their patients.

"It's no wonder that praise for them both would often reach us. Their love of the profession was very clear," the hospital said.

William Rodrigo Feistler, a general practitioner who grew up in Cascavel, knew six people who died in the crash and was particularly close to Belim, with whom he studied and had maintained a 15-year friendship.

"Mariana was serene with a melancholic temperament, but very intelligent, empathetic and devoted to her profession," Feistler said by phone from Cascavel. "She dedicated much of her life to studies and medical training. She had already specialized in clinical medicine and was completing her specialization in clinical oncology."

José Roberto Leonel Ferreira, a recently retired doctor who also died in the fiery wreck, was one of Feistler's teachers during his undergraduate studies. He had a radiology clinic in Cascavel.

"I went over cases with him on several occasions. He was a receptive person who helped other doctors in the discussion of cases to reach diagnoses," Feistler said.

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Brazil's Federal Council of Medicine said the loss of the doctors left Brazil's medical world in mourning, and expressed its solidarity for the victims' friends and relatives. They were venturing forth from Cascavel in search of knowledge as a means to better treat their patients, its statement said.

For now, there are more questions about the crash than answers. Metsul, one of Brazil's most respected meteorological companies, said Friday that there were reports of severe icing in Sao Paulo state around the time of the crash. Local media cited experts pointing to that as a potential cause, although others cautioned against jumping to a conclusion.

Both the plane's "black boxes" — one with flight data and the other with cockpit audio — were recovered. The air force's center for the investigation and prevention of air accidents began analyzing them at its laboratory in the nation's capital, Brasilia. Airports Minister Silvio Costa Filho said the center was also opening a criminal probe. The airline Voepass and the French-Italian ATR manufacturer are assisting investigations, they said in statements.

All of Brazil — but in particular victims' loved ones — are eager to learn why these people were ripped from this world.

"It wasn't God who took my daughter; it wasn't God, because he chose her to save lives," Risso's mother, Fatima Albuquerque, told reporters Sunday. She said she blamed the crash on profit-hungry capitalists and authorities' neglect.

Stephany Albuquerque echoed her indignation.

"I only hope that the prosecutors will investigate," she said. "I hope justice is done, because that's the least my cousin and the other 61 people deserve."

Georgia No. 1 in preseason AP Top 25 and Ohio State No. 2 as expanded SEC, Big Ten flex muscles

By RALPH D. RUSSO AP College Football Writer

Georgia is No. 1 in The Associated Press Top 25 preseason college football poll for the second straight year as the superconference era begins with the SEC and Big Ten dominating the top 10 of the rankings.

The Bulldogs received 46 first-place votes and 1,532 points in the Top 25 released Monday and the SEC powerhouse finished comfortably ahead of No. 2 Ohio State (15 first-place votes and 1,490 points) of the Big Ten.

New Big Ten member Oregon is No. 3, receiving one first-place vote from the panel of 62 media members who cover college football. Texas, which joins Georgia in the Southeastern Conference this season, is fourth.

The Big Ten and SEC each have four teams in the top 10.

Conference realignment has reduced the Power Five to the Power Four, with the Pac-12 whittled to just two schools. The Big Ten now has 18 schools. The Atlantic Coast Conference has 17 football teams, and the SEC and Big 12 each have 16.

All the movement created an unprecedented preseason poll with just four conferences represented: The SEC leads with nine ranked teams. The Big Ten has six, the Big 12 has five and the ACC has four.

Alabama, in its first season without coach Nick Saban since 2006, starts No. 5. No. 6 Mississippi gives the SEC half the top preseason top six.

Independent Notre Dame is the highest ranked team from outside the SEC and Big Ten at No. 7.

No. 8 Penn State and No. 9 Michigan give the Big Ten four top 10 teams. Florida State from the ACC is No. 10.

Title game finalists

The defending national champion Wolverines said goodbye to coach Jim Harbaugh, quarterback J.J. McCarthy and 12 other players who were selected in April's NFL draft. All that attrition led to Michigan receiving the lowest preseason ranking for a defending national champion since 2011, when Auburn was No. 23 after the departure of Cam Newton.

Before that, the last time a defending national champion was ranked worse than No. 7 in the following

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preseason poll was Colorado at No. 13 in 1991.

Washington, which lost to Michigan in the College Football Playoff championship game, took an even bigger fall after losing its head coach (Kalen DeBoer replaced Saban at Alabama), star quarterback and a mountain of talent to the draft and transfer portal. The Huskies are the first team to reach the CFP and be unranked the following season, and the first team to be unranked after finishing the previous season No. 2 in the AP poll since Army in 1951. The rankings were a Top 20 then.

The only team to finish No. 1 and start the next season unranked was Minnesota in 1961, but the AP poll was only a Top 10 then.

Top-ranked 'Dawgs

Georgia started last season at No. 1 in pursuit of a record third straight national championship. Coach Kirby Smart's Bulldogs stayed there the whole regular season, and then missed the four-team playoff by losing the SEC title game to Alabama.

"We're dealing with new challenges this year," Smart said at SEC media days. "We don't have a chip on our shoulder in terms of people trying to use that as motivation. I've never used a failure from the previous year as motivation and never used the success of a previous year as motivation; we won't do that this year. That's not who we are. We want to recreate ourselves to stay in the best light we can."

There will be more room for error this season with the playoff expanding from four to 12 teams.

The Bulldogs are 42-2 over the last three seasons and loaded again. Quarterback Carson Beck leads the offense and edge rusher Mykel Williams is in line to be the next defensive star at Georgia.

Beck is a rarity in college football these days, a star quarterback in his fifth season with the same school who waited three years to become starter. Beck completed 72% of his passes last year, with 24 touchdowns and six interceptions.

"He is a great elder for us and great example of resiliency in college football," Smart said.

Repeating as preseason No. 1 is a recent trend. Going back eight seasons, Alabama had separate streaks of three (2016-18) and two (2021-22) years as preseason No. 1. Clemson was top-ranked in the 2019 and '20 preseason rankings.

Georgia will try to become the 12th team since the AP preseason poll started in 1950 to start No. 1 and finish No. 1. The last was Alabama in 2017.

Pacific Northwest tribes are battered by climate change but fight to get money meant to help them

By HALLIE GOLDEN Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Coastal tribes in the Pacific Northwest experience some of the most severe effects of climate change — from rising seas to severe heat — but face an array of bureaucratic barriers to access government funds meant to help them adapt, a report released Monday found.

The tribes are leaders in combatting climate change in their region, but as they seek money for specific projects to address its repercussions, such as relocating a village threatened by rising waters, they often can't provide the matching funds that many grants require or the necessary staff or struggle with stringent application requirements, according to the report by the Northwest Climate Resilience Collaborative. If they do get funding, it's often a small amount that can only be used for very specific projects when this work is typically much more holistic, the report found.

"Trying to do projects by piecing together grants that all have different requirements and different strings attached, without staff capacity is a challenge," Robert Knapp, environmental planning manager at the Jamestown S'Klallam Tribe in northwest Washington, said in the report.

The collaborative, funded by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, spent two years holding listening sessions with 13 tribes along the Pacific Coast of Oregon and Washington, the Strait of Juan de Fuca and the Puget Sound. The communities face significant challenges from coastal flooding and erosion, rising stream temperatures, declining snowpack, severe heat events and increasing wildfire risk.

In addition to funding challenges, those interviewed also described not having enough staff to adequately

respond to climate change as well as sometimes not being able to partner with state and local governments and universities in this work because of their remote locations. They also said it can be hard to explain the impact climate change is having to people who don't live in their communities.

But as they work to restore salmon habitats affected by warming waters or move their homes, funding gaps and complications were key concerns.

A representative from one anonymous tribe in the report said it was not able to hire a grant writer and had to rely on its biology department to navigate the maze of funding applications. Another talked about depending on 15 separate funders just to build a marina.

"This is a time of historic state and federal investment in climate action, and tribal priorities really need to be considered when making decisions around how we're going to be directing this investment," said Meade Krosby, senior author of the report. "Hopefully this will help to inform how this work is being done, how these funds are being directed, so that they are actually responsive to the barriers that tribes are facing and helping to remove some of those barriers so the tribes can get the good work done."

The Bureau of Indian Affairs did not immediately respond to an email requesting comment.

Most of the tribes included in the report had completed publicly available reports on the impacts of climate change, and some had developed detailed plans for relocation as rising waters threaten buildings, or even entire villages.

The Quinault Indian Nation, in Washington's Olympic Peninsula, has a plan for relocating its largest village. The multimillion-dollar effort has relied on a piecemeal of federal and state grants and the constraints that come with them, Gary Morishima, Quinault's natural resources technical adviser, explained in the report.

Other tribes brought up concerns about competing against other tribal nations for funding when collaboration is such a vital part of responding to climate change. Tribal lands share borders and coastlines, and the impacts of climate change on those lands do not stop at any border, the report pointed out.

Amelia Marchand, citizen of the Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation and another author of the report, explained that it comes down to the federal government fulfilling its trust responsibility to tribes.

"The treaty is supposed to support and uplift and ensure that what the tribes need for continued existence is maintained," she said. "And that's one of the issues with not having this coordinated federal response because different federal agencies are doing different things."

Millions of dollars have gone to coastal tribes, and the report said much more is needed. It referenced a 2020 Bureau of Indian Affairs report that estimated that tribes in the lower 48 states would need \$1.9 billion over the next half-century for infrastructure needs related to climate change.

Amid all the challenges, Pacific Northwest tribes are still leaders in climate adaptation and have plenty to teach other communities, Marchand said.

"Finding ways to make their progress happen for their nations and their communities despite those odds is one of the most inspiring and hopeful resilient stories," she said.

Mini farm animals are adorable. There's also a growing demand for them

By HALELUYA HADERO and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers
NEW YORK (AP) — They're adorable. They require less food and space. And without much coaxing, they might help cut the grass.

Americans are showing more interest in owning miniature cows, goats, donkeys and other diminutive farm animals, a trend driven by hobby farmers looking for easy-to-manage livestock and homesteaders who like the idea of having a petite pig or a scaled-down sheep as a pet.

Animal breeders say sales of pint-sized farm animals have grown since the COVID-19 pandemic, when more people started raising backyard chickens for fun and fresh eggs. Like chickens, mini farm animals appeal to beginners who want the taste of a rugged, agrarian lifestyle.

"A lot of people don't have access to several acres, but if they have a one-acre plot, they can keep a

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miniature cow or a few miniature goats," said Brian Gazda, who has a small farm in East Idaho and with two friends runs a YouTube channel called "Hobby Farm Guys."

Platforms like YouTube and especially TikTok have played an important part in raising the profile of mini farm animals, said Martin Fysh, a vice president and divisional merchandising manager for rural lifestyle retailer Tractor Supply Co. On any given day, TikTok users put cuteness on parade with videos of tiny blue-eyed goats and 2-foot-tall horses that have received millions of views.

But Fysh thinks the trend also reflects a natural progression among customers who started out with a backyard hen coop. In response, Tractor Supply has increased its selection of treats for both mini and regular sized pigs, and goats.

"They're seen as part of the extended family," Fysh said.

While some people buy small farm animals as a stepping stone to owning larger ones, others don't have a desire to expand. Some owners of mini farm animals turn their hobbies into side hustles by giving visitor tours, breeding animals, and blogging about their pastoral experiences.

But before playing Old Macdonald, newcomers need to weigh the pros and cons, Gazda and other hobby farmers said.

Among the challenges: the volatile nature of prices for each of the types of miniature farm animals. And while they're cute, they can also be aggressive.

Mini goats

Brittany Snow, a high school English teacher in Florida, owns several small-sized Nigerian Dwarf goats. She realized her dream of living on a farm three years ago when her family moved from the Jacksonville suburb of Middleburg to nearby Melrose.

She said her family wanted to be more self-sustaining after the pandemic and now sources its own dairy products, such as milk and eggs. She sticks mostly with miniature animals because they're easier to take care of and cost less to acquire and feed.

Snow, 32, started with four Nigerian Dwarf goats: Buttercup, Snowflake, Cash and Peanut. The herd has since expanded to include Pancake and Oreo, the kids of Peanut and Buttercup.

Snow purchased the Nigerian Dwarf goats intending to milk them to make cheese and products like soap and lotion. But that hasn't worked yet because goats only lactate after giving birth, and Buttercup only recently had her kids.

"The past few years have been a learning curve," Snow said.

Mini goats are one of the most popular entry-level mini animals. In the past year, animal breeders have registered roughly 8,330 mini goats with the Miniature Dairy Goat Association. That's a 73% jump from the 12 months before July 2021, when registrations — mostly for newborn females sought after by breeders — totaled just under 4,800, said Angelia Alden, a business operations manager for the North Carolina-based organization.

Many folks who favor mini goats, however, tend to sell them after a few years because it can be challenging — and expensive — to take care of them, Alden said. Rising animal feed costs can be a headache, as is finding adequate medical care due to a shortage of farm veterinarians.

Mini cows and donkeys

A farm animal can be both mini and mighty. Some of the four-legged stars on social media are furry cows that can weigh 500-600 pounds. The smallest, which stand under 3 feet in height, are known as micro-miniatures. The slightly bigger miniatures can be as tall as 42 inches, according to Allie Sine, a TikTok creator with more than 737,000 followers on the platform. Videos showcasing some of her mini cows have gotten millions of views.

Sine, 28, launched her own business breeding and selling mini cows in 2020 after reselling a sick mini cow that cost \$350 for \$5,000. Last year, she sold about 190 calves through her Missouri-based business, Mini Moos LLC. The calves were roughly split between mini and micromini cows that can cost from \$2,000 to \$30,000.

"Everything just skyrocketed," Sine said.

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Others report a similar boom.

Kim Furches, who owns a farm with her husband, Ken, in West Jefferson, North Carolina, said the couple bred mini donkeys for about 20 years and currently own dozens of Mediterranean miniature donkeys, which stand 3 feet high or less.

Before the pandemic, they would typically sell about eight donkeys per year and count themselves lucky if they received a couple thousand dollars for one. They now sell about 20 per year. The last mini donkey sold for \$7,500, Furches said. There are some she's only willing to sell for \$9,000 or more.

New types of 'exotic' pets

Though some of their customers plan to breed and sell mini animals, too, many say many are just looking for "exotic" pets, Gazda said.

Earlier this year, Jamie Campion, 41, and her husband, Jeff, bought two Southdown Babydoll sheep from a local breeder near their home in Thompson's Station, Tennessee, for \$800 each. The couple moved from Chicago in March 2022 after the pandemic made them rethink their lifestyle. They now live in a modern-style farmhouse built on an acre of land.

While Biscuit and Buttermilk have become excellent lawn trimmers, Jamie Campion said she considers the animals — which weigh about 70 pounds and stand 20 inches high — similar to a dog or a cat.

"They eat the grass, so we don't even have to buy food (for the sheep) on a weekly basis," said Campion who discovered the breed on Instagram.

But it can be challenging.

One time, Jeff Campion tried to inject one of sheep with oral medication to treat parasites, and it tore his bicep.

But more often, the sheep give her joy. Jamie Campion recalls taking them out on a snowy day for a walk in the neighborhood, without a leash.

"They just followed right behind," she said. "There's a whole sheep and shepherd relationship. "

Miniature animals offer therapy

Others see therapeutic benefits.

Lisa Moad, who is the owner of Seven Oaks Farm in Hamilton, Ohio and has 13 miniature horses and three regular size horses, operates a therapy farm for older people and others. She also used to take the miniature horses to local nursing homes and hospitals. But since the pandemic, she has spent most of her time conducting online training for those looking to embrace the same mission.

That includes teaching horses how to maneuver around wheelchairs and into elevators of hospitals. She said her miniature versions still weigh 175 to 200 pounds, though much less than her regular horses, which range from 1,200 to 1,500 pounds.

"They're docile, but they can get frightened easily, " she said. "You just can't walk into a hospital with a horse."

Hunter Biden's lawyers say claims about foreign business dealing have no place in upcoming tax trial

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hunter Biden's lawyers say prosecutors are inappropriately trying to insert "politically-charged" allegations about his foreign business dealings into the upcoming federal tax trial against the president's son.

Special counsel David Weiss' team told the judge last week that they plan to call to the witness stand a business associate of Hunter Biden's to testify about an arrangement with a Romanian businessman who was trying to "influence U.S. government policy" during Joe Biden's term as vice president.

Hunter Biden's lawyers responded in court papers filed Sunday that such matters are irrelevant in the case headed for trial next month in Los Angeles over at least \$1.4 million in taxes he owed between 2016 and 2019.

Furthermore, defense lawyers allowing such testimony would confuse jurors, and slammed prosecutors for showcasing “these matters on the eve of Mr. Biden’s trial—when there is no mention of political influence in the 56-page Indictment.”

“The Special Counsel’s unnecessary change of tactic merely echoes the baseless and false allegations of foreign wrongdoing which have been touted by House Republicans to use Mr. Biden’s proper business activities in Romania and elsewhere to attack him and his father,” the defense wrote.

Prosecutors said they want to bring in evidence of the arrangement with the Romanian businessman to rebut arguments from the defense that Hunter Biden’s drug use during the years in which he’s accused of failing to pay his taxes affected his decision-making and judgement.

The evidence shows his actions “do not reflect someone with a diminished capacity, given that he agreed to attempt to influence U.S. public policy and receive millions of dollars” as part of the arrangement, prosecutors wrote.

The Romanian businessman, Gabriel Popoviciu, wanted U.S. government agencies to probe a bribery investigation he was facing in his home country in the hopes that would end his legal trouble, according to prosecutors.

Prosecutors say Hunter Biden agreed with his business associate to help Popoviciu fight the criminal charges against him. But prosecutors say they were concerned that “lobbying work might cause political ramifications” for Joe Biden, so the arrangement was structured in a way that “concealed the true nature of the work” for Popoviciu, prosecutors alleged.

Hunter Biden’s business associate and Popoviciu signed an agreement to make it look like Popoviciu’s payments were for “management services to real estate prosperities in Romania.”

In fact, Popoviciu and Hunter’s business associate agreed that they would be paid for their work to “attempt to influence U.S. government agencies to investigate the Romanian investigation,” prosecutors said. Hunter Biden’s business associate was paid more than \$3 million, which was split with Hunter and another business partner, prosecutors say.

The tax trial comes months after Hunter Biden was convicted of three felony gun charges over the purchase of a gun in 2018. He was found guilty of lying on a mandatory gun-purchase form by saying he was not illegally using or addicted to drugs.

French authorities investigate British man who climbed the Eiffel Tower before Olympics closing show

PARIS (AP) — A British man, who was seen climbing the Eiffel Tower on the last day of the Paris Olympics, has been released from police custody, but remains under investigation for trespassing at a historical site, French prosecutors said on Monday.

Police evacuated the area around the Eiffel Tower on Sunday afternoon after a shirtless man was seen scaling the 330-meter (1,083-foot) tall landmark hours before closing ceremony of the 2024 Summer Games.

It’s unclear where he began his ascent, but he was spotted above the Olympic rings adorning the second section of the monument, just above the first viewing deck. Police intervened and arrested the man.

Prosecutors opened an investigation on charges of “endangering the lives of other people and trespassing at a historical or cultural site,” according to a statement from the Paris public prosecutor’s office. The police custody order for the suspect was lifted on Monday, the also statement said. It did not name the man, but said he is a British national.

The Eiffel Tower was the centerpiece of the lavish opening ceremony on the River Seine, with Celine Dion serenading the city from one of its viewing areas. It featured prominently during the two and a half extraordinary weeks of Olympic competition, but was not part of the closing ceremony, which was staged at Stade de France stadium in the northern suburb of Saint-Denis.

More than 30,000 police officers and other security personnel were deployed around Paris on Sunday to ensure safety on the last day of the Olympics and the star-studded final show in France’s national stadium.

From Biden to Gabbard, here's what Harris' past debates show before a faceoff with Trump

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris has repeatedly taunted her opponent's seeming reluctance to debate, telling a series of raucous audiences about Donald Trump's criticisms of her: "As the saying goes, if you've got something to say, say it to my face."

After first backing out of an agreement, Trump reversed himself and said he'd meet Harris on Sept. 10 for an event hosted by ABC. That sets up a long-anticipated faceoff between the Democratic and Republican nominees — and, indeed, the chance for both of them to deliver their attack lines directly at one another.

Sharing a stage with Trump presents a critical chance for Harris to define herself and her opponent in a truncated campaign, with many open questions about her policy positions. But it also sets up a major test — one that President Joe Biden failed badly enough that he ended his campaign and made way for her.

A former San Francisco district attorney and California attorney general, Harris has long presented her debating prowess as a strength, and her sharp questioning of opponents has produced many a career highlight. But she has also had testy exchanges that didn't play as well.

"She's certainly had a good rollout in the past few weeks and that will naturally translate to expectations on the debate stage," said Aaron Kall, director of the University of Michigan's debate program. "Part of the problem is, President Biden did so poorly in the first one, there's no way she could do worse, and so that comparison is not going to help. But her debate history is a mixed bag."

Trump faces high expectations too. And Biden's disastrous performance helped obscure that the former president delivered many falsehoods — from lies about the Jan. 6 riot to misleading claims about abortion and immigration — that went unchecked during the debate.

Two Democratic primary moments offer insight into how Harris debates

Perhaps the pinnacle of Harris' short-lived 2020 presidential campaign was a broadside against then-candidate Biden, who later made her his running mate anyway. She seized on Biden opposing busing to integrate public schools in the 1970s by describing a young girl who boarded such buses before offering, "That little girl was me."

It was memorable but also planned. Harris' campaign then posted the same phrase on social media over a picture of its candidate as a school-aged girl in pigtails.

But a low moment of Harris' same campaign came at a subsequent debate. Another rival, former Rep. Tulsi Gabbard of Hawaii, launched a lengthy attack on Harris' prosecutorial record.

Gabbard said Harris "put over 1,500 people in jail for marijuana violations and then laughed about it when she was asked if she ever smoked marijuana." With the audience roaring, Gabbard further accused Harris of having "blocked evidence that would have freed an innocent man from death row until the courts forced her to do so."

Gabbard now says she was surprised that Harris' record hadn't been more carefully scrutinized during the primary. She said she uncovered the issues she raised not with opposition research, but by using Google.

"I was surprised at how unprepared she was to respond to them. Just from, you know, I would imagine that you'd prepare before going into a debate," Gabbard said in an interview. "And also that she made no attempt to deny them or frankly justify them, if she was proud of those decisions."

"Ultimately this is disrespectful to voters, if she's not responding to, or addressing, questions about a record that she claims to be proud of," she added.

In her response on the debate stage, Harris attempted to dismiss Gabbard, saying, "I am proud of making a decision to not just give fancy speeches, or be in a legislative body and give speeches on the floor, but actually doing the work."

She got even more personal after the debate, calling herself a "top-tier candidate" while suggesting that Gabbard was polling at "0 or 1% or whatever she might be at." At a subsequent debate, Harris hit back,

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saying Gabbard had spent years "full time on Fox News criticizing President Obama."

Ironically, Gabbard, who has served as a Fox News contributor, remained in the presidential race long after Harris had dropped out.

Harris can show defiance in confrontational moments

Sometimes flashing a touch of defiance can work.

Harris first established a national reputation as being especially verbally nimble while questioning Trump's nominee for attorney general, William Barr, and his pick for the Supreme Court, Brett Kavanaugh.

After Kavanaugh repeatedly sidestepped abortion questions, Harris demanded to know if he could think of "any laws that give the government the power to make decisions about the male body?" forcing Kavanaugh to concede, "I am not thinking of any right now."

Kall, of the University of Michigan, said Harris' 2020 debate performance against Republican Vice President Mike Pence was also well-received. Her most memorable line then was probably rebuking Pence's interruptions by retorting, "Mr. Vice President, I am speaking."

She used that line again when protesters decrying the Biden administration's support for Israel's war with Hamas in Gaza interrupted Harris at a rally this past week near Detroit's airport. The vice president was at first accommodating, saying, "I am here because I believe in democracy, and everybody's voice matters."

But she then continued, "I am speaking now," drawing sustained applause from rallygoers before adding, "If you want Donald Trump to win, then say that. Otherwise, I'm speaking."

"Abandon Biden," a progressive group that has opposed the president's now-defunct reelection bid over his Israel policy, bristled at Harris' "disdain for citizens of this country who are pleading for an end to a genocide."

Cullen Tiernan, who was a spokesperson for Gabbard's 2020 campaign, spent hours in debate prep with the then-congresswoman before the on-stage exchange with Harris. He played one of her other primary rivals, Tim Ryan, and laughed about "coastal elites starting being a big problem for me," latching onto one of Ryan's catchphrases.

Now a political activist based in New Hampshire, Tiernan said he saw parallels between Harris' debate stage reaction to Gabbard's criticisms and the interruption in Michigan — but not in a good way.

"As a progressive person, I'm looking for change and empathy, and understanding about what's happening," he said. "Not gaslighting, and feeling like the reality that is being discussed never existed."

Gabbard said she hoped a Trump-Harris debate would showcase for voters the huge differences between the candidates.

"Given the history of many presidential elections, unfortunately, political theater is the norm," she said. "But that substantive debate is really what we need and what we deserve right now."

Released Palestinians describe worsening abuses in Israeli prisons

By JACK JEFFERY and JALAL BWAITEL Associated Press

OUTSIDE OFER PRISON, West Bank (AP) — Frequent beatings, overcrowding, withholding of basic rations. Released Palestinians have described to The Associated Press worsening abuses in Israeli prisons crammed with thousands detained since the war in Gaza began 10 months ago.

Israeli officials have acknowledged that they have made conditions harsher for Palestinians in prisons, with hard-line National Security Minister Itamar Ben Gvir boasting that prisons will no longer be "summer camps" under his watch.

Four released Palestinians told the AP that treatment had dramatically worsened in prisons run by the ministry since the Oct. 7 attacks that triggered the latest war between Israel and Hamas in Gaza. Some emerged from months of captivity emaciated and emotionally scarred.

A fifth prisoner, Muazzaz Abayat, was too weakened to detail his experience soon after his release in July following six months at southern Israel's Naqab prison. Frail-looking and unable to focus, he could only muster the strength to speak for several minutes, saying he was regularly beaten.

Now at home outside Bethlehem, the 37-year-old can hardly leave his armchair.

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"At night, he hallucinates and stands in the middle of the house, in shock or remembering the torment and pain he went through," said his cousin, Aya Abayat. Like many of the detained, he was put under administrative detention, a procedure that allows Israel to detain people indefinitely without charge.

The AP cannot independently verify the accounts of the prisoners. But they described similar conditions, even though they were held separately. While Abayat was only able to speak briefly, the other four spoke to the AP at length, and one requested anonymity for fear of being rearrested. Their accounts match reports from human rights groups that have documented alleged abuse in Israeli detention facilities.

Alarm among rights groups over abuses of Palestinian prisoners has mainly focused on military facilities, particularly Sde Teiman, a desert base where Israeli military police have arrested 10 soldiers on suspicion of sodomizing a Palestinian detainee. The detention facility at the base has held most of the Palestinians seized in raids in the Gaza Strip since the war began.

The soldiers, five of whom have since been released, deny the sodomy allegation. Their defense lawyer has said that they used force to defend themselves against a detainee who attacked them during a search, but did not sexually abuse him.

The Israeli army says 36 Palestinian prisoners have died in military-run detention centers since October. It said some of them had "previous illnesses or injuries caused to them as a result of the ongoing hostilities," without elaborating further.

According to autopsy reports for five of the detainees, two bore signs of physical trauma such as broken ribs, while the death of a third "could have been avoided if there had been greater care for his medical needs." The reports were provided to the AP by Physicians for Human Rights-Israel, an Israeli rights organization whose doctors observed the autopsies.

Facing calls to shut down the Sde Teiman facility, the military has been transferring hundreds of Palestinians from the base to the prisons run by Ben Gvir's ministry.

But according to Abayat and the others who spoke to the AP, conditions in those facilities are traumatic as well.

Munthir Amira, a West Bank political activist who was held in Ofer Prison, said guards regularly beat detainees for punishment or often for no reason at all.

He said he and 12 others shared a cell with only six beds and a few thin blankets, freezing during the winter months. When prisoners had to go to the bathroom, they were handcuffed and bent over, and they were let outside for only 15 minutes twice a week, he said. Amira was held in administrative detention, apparently over his Facebook posts critical of Israel.

He said he lost 33 kilograms (72 pounds) during his three months in detention because of minimal food.

The treatment drove some to the edge: Amira recounted a day when he and his cellmates watched through their cell window as another inmate tried to kill himself by jumping off a high fence. He said they banged on their door to get help. Instead, he said, soldiers with two large dogs entered their cell, bound their hands, lined them up in the corridor and beat them, including on their genitals.

He said that when he was first arrested in December, guards ordered him to strip naked and spread his legs, then beat him into submission when he refused. During the ensuing examination, one guard prodded his genitalia with a metal detector, he said.

The National Security Ministry said in a statement to the AP that it was not aware of the claims of abuse from the five released men. It said it follows "all basic rights required" for prisoners, and that detainees can file complaints that will be "fully examined."

But it said it has intentionally "reduced conditions" for Palestinian detainees "to the minimum required by law" since Oct. 7. The purpose, it said, "is to deter ... terror activities."

Since the war began, the Palestinian prison population has nearly doubled to almost 10,000, including detainees from Gaza and several thousand people seized from the West Bank and east Jerusalem, according to HaMoked, an Israeli rights group that gathers figures from prison authorities.

Those detained include alleged militants seized in raids in the West Bank and Palestinians suspected in attacks on soldiers or settlers. But others also have apparently been detained for social media posts critical

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of Israel or past activism, according to a report from the United Nations human rights office.

All four former detainees who spoke at length said hunger was perhaps their greatest challenge.

Breakfast was 250 grams (9 ounces) of yogurt and a single tomato or pepper shared among five people, said Omar Assaf, a Ramallah-based retired Arabic language professor, also held at Ofer. He, too, said he was interrogated over his social media posts.

For lunch and dinner, he said, each person received two-thirds of a cup of rice and a bowl of soup shared with others.

"You didn't see the color of fruit ... not a piece of meat," he said.

Harsher conditions were imposed immediately after Oct. 7, according to Mohamed al-Salhi, who at the time was serving a 23-year sentence in a Jerusalem prison for forming an armed group.

Days after the attack, he said, guards stripped his cell of everything, including radios, televisions and clothing. Eventually, the number of inmates in the cell grew from a half-dozen to 14, and curtains in the communal showers were removed, leaving them to wash exposed, he said. Al-Salhi was released in June after completing his sentence.

A half-dozen Palestinian families gathered outside Ofer one day earlier this month to await their relatives' release. As the gate slid open, several emaciated-looking men, with unkempt hair and rough beards, walked out before dropping to the ground to pray.

Mutasim Swalim embraced his father. He said he spent a year in prison over a Facebook post.

"The taste of freedom is very nice," he said.

Others declined to speak.

"I just spent two months in prison," one said as he staggered by. "I don't want to go back."

Today in History: August 13, East Germany closes Berlin border

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Tuesday, Aug. 13, the 226th day of 2024. There are 140 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 13, 1961, on what would become known as Barbed Wire Sunday, East Germany sealed the border between Berlin's eastern and western sectors before building a wall that would divide the city for the next 28 years.

Also on this date:

In 1521, Spanish conqueror Hernando Cortez captured Tenochtitlan (teh-natch-teet-LAHN'), present-day Mexico City, from the Aztecs.

In 1792, French revolutionaries arrested and imprisoned King Louis XVI; he would be executed by guillotine the following January.

In 1889, William Gray of Hartford, Connecticut, received a patent for the first coin-operated telephone.

In 1918, Opha May Johnson became the first woman to join the U.S. Marine Corps.

In 1952, Big Mama Thornton first recorded the song "Hound Dog," four years before Elvis Presley's famous version was released.

In 1969, New York City held a ticket-tape parade for Apollo 11 astronauts Neil Armstrong, Edwin "Buzz" Aldrin and Michael Collins.

In 1995, Baseball Hall of Famer Mickey Mantle died at a Dallas hospital of rapidly spreading liver cancer at age 63.

In 2011, seven people were killed when a stage collapsed at the Indiana State Fair during a powerful storm just before a concert was to begin.

In 2020, in an interview on Fox Business Network, President Donald Trump acknowledged that he was starving the U.S. Postal Service of money in order to make it harder to process an expected surge of mail-in ballots.

Today's Birthdays: Former U.S. Surgeon General Joycelyn Elders is 91. U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen is 78. Opera singer Kathleen Battle is 76. High wire aerialist Philippe Petit is 75. Hockey Hall of Famer

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Bobby Clarke is 75. Golf Hall of Famer Betsy King is 69. Movie director Paul Greengrass is 69. Actor Danny Bonaduce is 65. TV weatherman Sam Champion is 63. Actor Dawnn Lewis is 63. Actor John Slattery is 62. Actor Debi Mazar is 60. Figure skater Midori Ito is 55. Country singer Andy Griggs is 51. White House Press Secretary Karine Jean-Pierre is 50. Arkansas Governor Sarah Huckabee Sanders is 42. Actor Sebastian Stan is 42. Actor Lennon Stella is 25.