

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 1 of 71

- [1- Upcoming Events](#)
- [2- 1440 News Headlines](#)
- [3- Dairy Queen Help Wanted](#)
- [4- Mayo Clinic: A holistic approach to integrative medicine](#)
- [6- SoDak Circuit launches free esports event in Sioux Falls on Sept. 21](#)
- [6- Full Circle Ag Propane Ad](#)
- [7- West Nile Virus Update -SD](#)
- [8- GDI Fitness New Program ad](#)
- [8- Full Circle Ag Help Wanted Ad](#)
- [9- Harry Implement Ad](#)
- [9- Name Released in Lawrence County Fatal Crash](#)
- [10- Communities Face \\$51M Budget Shortfall with IM-28](#)
- [11- SD SearchLight: South Dakota attorney general tells lawmakers to consider age verification for porn sites](#)
- [12- SD SearchLight: Justice disparities on South Dakota reservations need attention, US attorney general says](#)
- [14- SD SearchLight: Eight states file court brief challenging California's electric vehicle mandate](#)
- [16- Weather Pages](#)
- [21- Daily Devotional](#)
- [22- Subscription Form](#)
- [23- Lottery Numbers](#)
- [24- Upcoming Groton Events](#)
- [25- News from the Associated Press](#)

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.

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



"Try to be a rainbow in someone's cloud."

- Maya Angelou

Friday, Aug. 16

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

Saturday, Aug. 17

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

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

Sunday, Aug. 18

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

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

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

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 2 of 71

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.

The Battle for Kursk

Russia has reportedly recalled small numbers of troops from Ukraine to its southwestern Kursk region amid the Ukrainian incursion there. The cross-border offensive is Ukraine's largest since the start of the two-and-a-half-year-long war.

Since last week, Ukraine's military says it has captured 400 square miles of Russian territory, encompassing 74 towns and settlements. Yesterday, Ukraine also said it had captured 100 Russian soldiers. Ukrainian officials say they will seek to create a buffer zone in the region, claiming to have been shelled from Kursk 2,000 times this summer. Separately, Ukraine said it launched a smaller-scale attack yesterday on Russia's neighboring Belgorod region, whose regional governor declared a state of emergency yesterday.

Ukraine's sudden offensive streak appears designed to disrupt Russian advances in the strategically important region of Donetsk in Ukraine's southeast. The goal may also be to extract concessions in future negotiations.

Puerto Rico After Ernesto

Hurricane Ernesto left over 730,000 utility customers in Puerto Rico—accounting for roughly half of the territory's 1.4 million customers—without power yesterday.

The storm, which did not make landfall but instead churned north, slammed the territory with tropical storm-level winds and rain before developing into a Category 1 hurricane. An estimated 235,000 people in Puerto Rico were left without access to water, with hundreds of people taking shelter. President Joe Biden has declared a state of emergency, freeing up federal funds for storm recovery efforts. US territories in the region are still at risk for flash flooding, according to warnings from the country's hurricane center.

Ernesto heads north toward Bermuda today and is not on track to make landfall in the continental US. The eastern US coast, however, could experience rip tides and 8-foot-tall waves in the coming days.

Stonehenge Revelation

Stonehenge's central Altar Stone originated from northern Scotland, roughly 450 miles from the ancient England site and over 300 miles farther than previously believed, according to new research yesterday. The discovery suggests significant collaboration among Neolithic peoples inhabiting the British Isles over 4,600 years ago.

The 14,000-pound, 16-foot bluestone lies mostly underground at the center of the sprawling rock complex in Wiltshire in southwest England. For a century, researchers believed the rock was mined from nearby Wales, but research in October cast doubt on that theory. By using a global rock formation database, the researchers matched the Altar Stone to the Orcadian Basin in northeast Scotland.

The monument was erected prior to the invention of the wheel, leading scholars to speculate the Altar Stone may have been transported by sea.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 3 of 71

Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Screen Actors Guild-American Federation of Television and Radio Artists signs deal with AI company Narrativ that will allow actors to license a digital replica of their voice for advertisements.

Wally Amos, founder and iconic spokesperson of Famous Amos cookies, dies at age 88.

Minnesota Vikings rookie quarterback JJ McCarthy, the No. 10 pick of the 2024 NFL Draft, to miss regular season due to a knee injury.

PGA Tour's FedEx Cup playoffs kick off today.

Science & Technology

Humans undergo rapid biological changes around ages 44 and 60, study finds; thousands of molecules and microbes increase or decrease the most around those periods, causing changes to cardiovascular health and immune function.

South African lungfish species sets record for world's largest animal genome to be sequenced, with 90 billion base pairs of DNA, 30 times as many as the human genome.

Mouse study shows experiencing stress sends messages from the brain to the gut, reducing beneficial bacteria responsible for preventing inflammation.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.4%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq +0.0%) after consumer price index rose 2.9% year-over-year in July, the lowest since 2021.

Weekly mortgage applications for US home purchases hit highest level in 19 months; refinance applications hit highest level since May 2022.

Candy giant Mars to acquire snack maker Kellanova in \$36B all-cash deal; Mars owns brands like M&Ms and Snickers, while Kellanova owns brands like Pringles and Cheez-Its.

Activist hedge fund Elliott Investment Management launches proxy fight at Southwest Airlines, seeks to replace 10 of 15 board directors.

Victoria's Secret taps CEO Hillary Super of competitor Savage X Fenty as its next chief.

Politics & World Affairs

World Health Organization declares a global health emergency over the spread of an especially virulent strain of mpox, formerly monkeypox, in Africa.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida announces he will not seek reelection next month amid decade-low approval ratings; announcement follows a series of corruption scandals plaguing the country's ruling party.

Columbia University President Minouche Shafik resigns amid ongoing fallout over the handling of Israel-Hamas war protests on campus.

US judge rules UCLA must ensure Jewish students can access classes and campus amid protests.

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Press

A holistic approach to integrative medicine

As studies continue to reveal the important role the mind plays in healing and in fighting disease, a transformation is taking place in hospitals and clinics across the country.

By Mayo Clinic Press Editors

People who take an active role in their health care experience better health and improved healing. It's a commonsense concept that's been gaining scientific support for several years now.

As studies continue to reveal the important role the mind plays in healing and in fighting disease, a transformation is taking place in hospitals and clinics across the country. Doctors, in partnership with their patients, are turning to practices once considered alternative as they attempt to treat the whole person — mind and spirit, as well as body. This type of approach is known today as integrative medicine.

Incorporate integrative medicine alongside your treatments

Integrative medicine describes an evolution taking place in many health care institutions. This evolution is due in part to a shift in the medical industry as health care professionals focus on wellness as well as on treating disease. This shift offers a new opportunity for integrative therapies.

Integrative medicine is the practice of using conventional medicine alongside evidence-based complementary treatments. The idea behind integrative medicine is not to replace conventional medicine, but to find ways to complement existing treatments.

For example, taking a prescribed medication may not be enough to bring your blood pressure level into a healthy range, but adding meditation to your daily wellness routine may give you the boost you need — and prevent you from needing to take a second medication.

Integrative medicine isn't just about fixing things when they're broken; it's about keeping things from breaking in the first place. And in many cases, it means bringing new therapies and approaches to the table, such as meditation, mindfulness and tai chi. Sometimes, integrative approaches help lead people into a complete lifestyle of wellness.

What types of integrative medicines are available?

What are some of the most promising practices in integrative medicine? Here's a list of 10 treatments that you might consider for your own health and wellness:

Acupuncture is a Chinese practice that involves inserting very thin needles at strategic points on the body.

Guided imagery involves bringing to mind a specific image or a series of memories to produce certain responses in the body.

Hypnotherapy involves a trancelike state where the mind is more open to suggestion.

Massage uses pressure to manipulate the soft tissues of the body. There are many different kinds of massage, and some have specific health goals in mind.

Meditation involves clearing and calming the mind by focusing on your breathing or a word, phrase or sound.

Music therapy can influence both your mental and physical health.

Spinal manipulation, which is also called spinal adjustment, is practiced by chiropractors and physical therapists.

Spirituality has many definitions, but its focus is on an individual's connection to others and to the search for meaning in life.

Tai chi is a graceful exercise in which you move from pose to pose.

Yoga involves a series of postures that often include a focus on breathing. Yoga is commonly practiced to relieve stress, as well as treat heart disease and depression.

Who can integrative medicine help?

A number of surveys focused on the use of integrative medicine by adults in the United States suggest that more than a third of Americans are already using these practices as part of their health care.

These surveys demonstrate that although the United States has the most advanced medical technology in the world, Americans are turning to integrative treatments — and there are several reasons for this trend. Here are three of the top reasons why more and more people are exploring integrative medicine.

Integrative medicine for people engaged in their health

One reason integrative medicine is popular is that people in general are taking a greater, more active role in their own health care. People are more aware of health issues and are more open to trying different treatment approaches.

Internet access is also helping to fuel this trend by playing a significant role in improving patient education. Two decades ago, consumers had little access to research or reliable medical information. Today, clinical trials and pharmaceutical developments are more widely available for public knowledge.

For example, people who have arthritis can find a good deal of information about it online. They may find research showing that glucosamine, for example, helps with joint pain and doesn't appear to have a lot of risks associated with it. With this information in hand, they feel empowered to ask their doctors if glucosamine might work with their current treatment plans.

Integrative medicine for an aging population

A second reason for the wider acceptance of integrative treatments is the influence of the baby boomer generation. This generation is open to a variety of treatments as it explores ways to age well. In addition, baby boomers are often dealing with several medical issues, from weight control to joint pain, high blood pressure and elevated cholesterol. Not everyone wants to start with medication; many prefer to try complementary methods first.

Integrative medicine for the chronically stressed

A third reason for the growth, interest and use of integrative therapies is the degree of chronic stress in the American lifestyle. Workplace stress, long commutes, relationship issues and financial worries are just some of the concerns that make up a long list of stressors.

Although medications can effectively treat short-term stress, they can become just as damaging — and even as life-threatening — as stress itself is when taken long term. Integrative medicine, on the other hand, offers several effective, evidence-based approaches to dealing with stress that don't involve medication. Many otherwise healthy people are learning to manage the stress in their lives successfully by using complementary methods such as yoga, meditation, massage and guided imagery.

Considering that many healthy people are engaging in integrative practices, it isn't surprising to find out that they're turning to these treatments in times of illness, as well. Here are just a few ways integrative medicine is used to help people cope with medical conditions:

Meditation can help manage the anxiety and discomfort of medical procedures.

Massage has been shown to improve recovery rates after heart surgery.

Gentle tai chi or yoga can assist the transition back to an active life after illness or surgery.

Conventional Western medicine doesn't have cures for everything. Many people who have arthritis, back pain, neck pain, fibromyalgia and anxiety look to integrative treatments to help them manage these often-chronic conditions without the need for medications that may have serious side effects or that may be addictive.

The risks and benefits of integrative medicine

As interest in integrative medicine continues to grow, so does the research in this field. Researchers are studying these approaches in an effort to separate evidence-based, effective therapies from those that don't show effectiveness or may be risky. In the process, this research is helping to identify many genuinely beneficial treatments. In essence, both consumer interest and scientific research have led to further review of these therapies within modern medicine.

As evidence showing the safety and efficacy of many of these therapies grows, physicians are starting to integrate aspects of complementary medicine into conventional medical care. Ultimately, this is what has led to the current term integrative medicine.

Ask your healthcare team about integrative medicine and wellness

If you're interested in improving your health, many integrative medicine practices can help. Not only can they speed your recovery from illness or surgery, but they can also help you cope with a chronic condition. In addition, complementary practices such as meditation and yoga can work to keep you healthy and may actually prevent many diseases.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 6 of 71

SoDak Circuit launches free esports event in Sioux Falls on Sept. 21

JVT is partnering with SDN Communications of Sioux Falls and 16 other independent broadband companies to launch the inaugural edition of the SoDak Circuit. This free esports event is designed to bring together gamers of all levels and ages on Saturday, Sept. 21, at the Sioux Falls Convention Center.

Cash prizes will be awarded in the games "Super Smash Bros. Ultimate," "Mario Kart 8 Deluxe," "Valorant," "Fortnite" and "Rocket League" as well as a racing simulator. Registration at sodakcircuit.com is required.

SoDak Circuit runs from 9:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. on Sept. 21, with doors opening at 7:30 a.m. and check-in at 8:30 a.m. There will be seating available for people to watch the matches, which will be shown on large screens. SoDak Circuit will have tournament-style brackets for different age groups and a variety of skill levels.

The event coincides with the South Dakota High School Activities Association adding esports as a sanctioned activity during the 2024-25 school year. In 2023-24, 20 schools across the state participated in the pilot season, with JVT sponsoring teams in their service areas.

Anyone with questions about the SoDak Circuit can contact Hannah Boquet at Hannah.boquet@sdncommunications.com or (605) 978-1085.

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 7 of 71

West Nile Virus Update -SD

SD WNV (as of August 14):

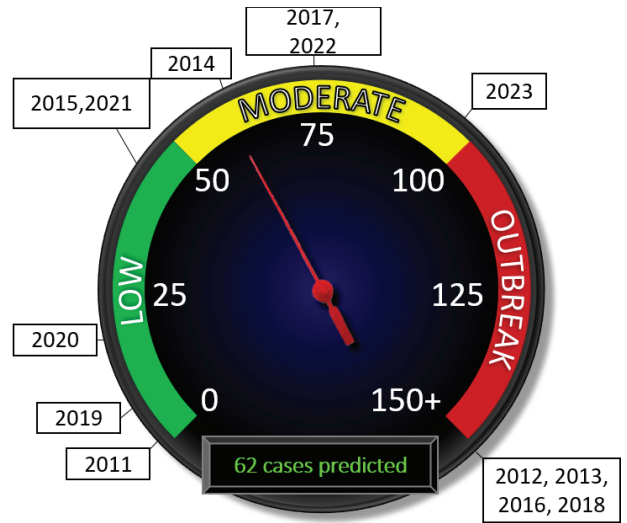
5 human cases (Beadle, Gregory, Kingsbury, Walworth, Ziebach)

2 human viremic blood donors (Brule, Pennington)

9 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Davison, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Pennington)

US WNV (as of August 13): 174 cases (AR, AZ, CA, FL, GA, IL, IN, KS, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, NC, ND, NE, NJ, NV, NY, OK, PA, SD, TN, TX, VA)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2024, South Dakota (as of August 14)



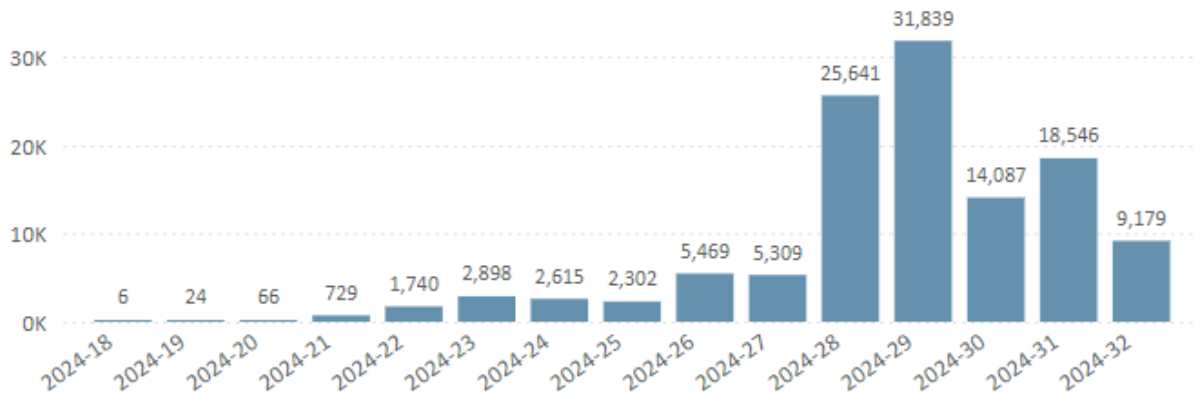
Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2024, South Dakota, Week Ending August 10, 2024 (MMWR Week 32)

Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 76

Total mosquito pools tested: 2,256

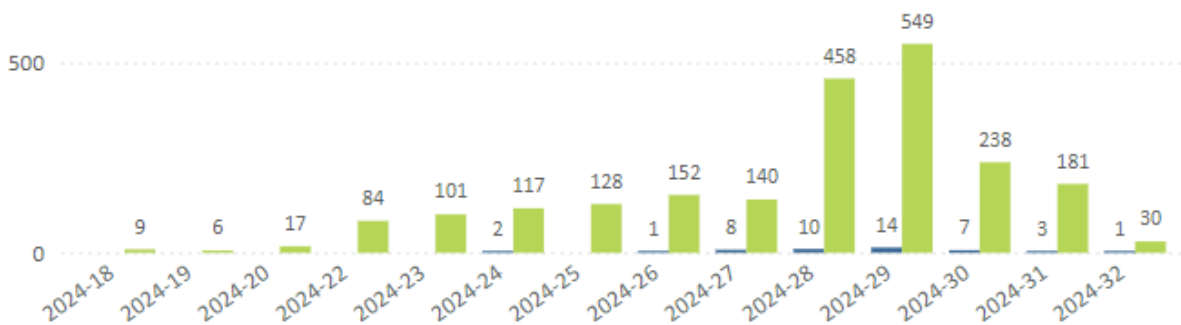
% positivity: 2.04%

Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week



Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 8 of 71

Brand New Program at

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Name Released in Lawrence County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash
Where: US Highway 385, mile marker 120, two miles south of Deadwood, SD
When: 12:09 p.m., Sunday, August 11, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2001 Harley Davidson FLHT
Driver 1: Larry Vincent Koneczny, 68-year-old male from Piedmont, SD, fatal injuries
Helmet Use: No

Lawrence County, S.D.- A 68-year-old man died in a single vehicle motorcycle crash Sunday afternoon two miles south of Deadwood, SD.

Preliminary crash information indicates Larry Vincent Koneczny, the driver of a 2001 Harley Davidson FLHT, was traveling north on US 385 near mile marker 120. Koneczny failed to negotiate the curve and went off the road to the right. The vehicle tripped and rolled, separating the driver from the motorcycle. Koneczny passed away from his injuries. He was not wearing a helmet.

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

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



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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 10 of 71

Communities Face \$51M Budget Shortfall with IM-28

Proposed Initiated Measure A "Disaster" for Cities and Towns

PIERRE, S.D. – A new analysis from the South Dakota Municipal League estimates that if IM-28 passes, cities and towns would lose at least \$51.5 million in sales tax revenue each year. The fiscal analysis includes IM-28's impact on each municipality in the state.

IM-28 would reduce municipal sales tax collections in larger communities like Sioux Falls and Rapid City by more than 8 percent, according to the analysis. Smaller towns like Roslyn, Tulare, White River, and Wolsey would see losses above 40 percent. The highest estimated loss would occur in Bonesteel with a 59 percent reduction. The full analysis with city information is available at nosdincometax.com/impact.

"Local governments directly impact the daily lives of South Dakotans," said Sara Rankin, Executive Director of the Municipal League. "IM-28 would create massive holes in local budgets used for police, roads, parks, and everything residents expect their community to provide. Simply put, IM-28 would be devastating for our daily lives."

The language in IM-28 conflicts with South Dakota Codified Law 10-52-2, which allows cities and towns to impose a sales tax of up to 2 percent on the same items taxed by the state. This means that if the state cannot tax "anything sold for human consumption," neither can a city or town.

The poor drafting of IM-28 is referenced in the Attorney General's explanation of IM-28, which notes that "Judicial or legislative clarification of the measure will be necessary."

An annual loss of \$51.5 million would reduce funding to fix potholes, update infrastructure, staff libraries, operate pools, and maintain parks.

The estimated loss for each municipality was calculated by first aggregating all of the monthly sales tax reports for communities by SIC code from the Department of Revenue for 2023. Then a percentage was assigned to each SIC code to represent how much of the sales tax revenue generated by businesses under that code comes from consumables. Lastly, those percentages were applied to the 2023 tax data for each community in the state to develop the estimate.

"IM-28 would be a disaster for cities and towns," said Harry Weller, Mayor of Kadoka and Municipal League President. "In my town of Kadoka, we'll lose at least 24 percent of our sales tax revenue. Local governments run on lean budgets as it is. If IM-28 passes and we're barred from collecting sales tax, we'll have no choice but to increase property taxes."

IM-28 is on the ballot as an initiated measure in the General Election on Tuesday, November 5, 2024.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

South Dakota attorney general tells lawmakers to consider age verification for porn sites

Jackley says 'narrowly tailored' law could protect kids, pending US Supreme Court ruling

BY: JOHN HULT - AUGUST 14, 2024 4:30 PM

South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley urged lawmakers to pass a bill that would require people to prove their age before accessing adult material online, but he had caveats.

To be enforceable and make a meaningful difference in South Dakota, the state's top prosecutor said, such a law would need to carry criminal penalties and be "narrowly tailored" to target internet companies offering adult content, not the children who might try to access it.

Jackley made his remarks Wednesday in Pierre during the second meeting of the Legislature's Study Committee on Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Regulation of Internet Access by Minors.

His advice came as committee members coalesced around age verification as a prime legislative possibility during the next lawmaking session in January. The committee has heard from experts on AI in medicine, political campaigns and classrooms, and taken testimony on data privacy and protection during its two meetings, but the conversations on age verification grew more pointed and pressing as Wednesday's meeting drew to a close.

Even as lawmakers sparred over the best approach to the issue and when to act, all who spoke on the issue expressed some measure of support for restricting access to pornography by minors.

Lawmakers rejected a bill earlier this year that would have required users to prove their age to access adult material online. Nineteen states have passed similar laws, according to the Free Speech Coalition, a lobbying group for the adult entertainment industry. That coalition is among the plaintiffs in a lawsuit over a Texas age verification law that will be heard by the U.S. Supreme Court this fall.

States with verification laws force adult websites to ask users for some manner of proof – a government-issued ID, for example – that they are 18 years old before accessing adult material.

South Dakota lawmaker efforts

The South Dakota bill, supported by the House but rewritten to create the study committee by the Senate in early March, would have required users to provide a government ID, military ID, bank account or credit card information before accessing pornographic websites.

It would have required platforms to delete that information immediately, and would have held platforms or third-party data brokers liable if the data were retained or sold.

Enforcement would have taken the form of fines, levied through the Attorney General's Office.

The Legislature also punted this year on a bill that would have barred the production of "deepfakes" – images and videos of real people created using artificial intelligence – and another bill that would have required disclosure of AI use in political messaging.

Legislators did pass a bill barring the creation or production of AI-generated child pornography, but shoved the remaining topics onto the docket of the summer study.

On age verification, Jackley said Wednesday, "you could move forward, and I'd encourage you to do that."

"I feel it's important to protect children, and I feel it's a good opportunity to go in that direction," he said.

The Supreme Court's decision – likely to land in 2025 after oral arguments this fall – might bind his hands in terms of enforcement, but Jackley said he'd be willing to help find the language most likely to pass constitutional muster. Specifically, he'd want to make sure it targets companies without creating overly burdensome requirements for adults, who have the right to access adult material under the First Amendment.

The level of proof required could be the difference between a defensible law and an injunction barring enforcement.

"You're going to have to balance in the Legislature, as part of this process, how far you want to go," Jackley said. "And the more you put on that, the more likely you are to see a constitutional challenge."

But he'd prefer that the penalties be criminal, rather than civil. His office has no civil enforcement division charged with filing and enforcing civil penalties, he said, so lawmakers would need to pay for one if it chose to go the route of fining websites.

Lawmakers divided on when to act

Sen. Helene Duhamel, R-Rapid City, is a member of the study group's subcommittee on age verification. Before Jackley spoke, she said lawmakers ought to be careful in approaching the topic in the face of a pending Supreme Court case.

"Our question right now, and it's a big one, is do we wait and see what the Supreme Court rules and maybe not have an answer until the spring of 2025, or do we go?" Duhamel said.

But Rep. Bethany Soye, R-Sioux Falls, who sponsored the 2024 bill, said there's no need to wait. She noted that the state passed a trigger ban in 2005 to overturn legal abortion in the event Roe v. Wade was overturned, which happened in 2022.

Roe v. Wade, she said, "didn't stop the state Legislature from passing laws that they believed were morally correct."

Sen. Jim Mehlhaff, R-Pierre, said any legal fees would be worth the expense.

"We spend a lot of money on lawyers in this state, and protecting our children is something we ought to be willing to step up and spend some money on," he said.

The group's chair, Fort Pierre Republican Rep. Mike Weisgram, said the next meeting in September should be one where committee members "get into the nuts and bolts" of legislation. In addition to age verification, the group has concluded that South Dakota needs a workable definition of artificial intelligence around which to legislate as the technology matures.

Rep. Chris Karr, R-Sioux Falls, is a member of the subcommittee studying that issue and said all signs from that group's research point to Colorado's definition as a sound, inclusive model.

Colorado defines AI as a "machine-based system that, for any explicit or implicit objective, infers from the inputs the system receives how to generate outputs, including content, decisions, predictions, or recommendations, that can influence physical or virtual environments."

The South Dakota study group will reconvene on Sept. 24, and is expected to have its final legislative package ready for review at its last meeting on Oct. 23.

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.

Justice disparities on South Dakota reservations need attention, US attorney general says

Sen. Rounds and tribal leaders say funding for law enforcement is insufficient

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR, MAKENZIE HUBER AND SETH TUPPER - AUGUST 14, 2024 1:20 PM

U.S. Attorney General Merrick Garland said Wednesday during a visit to South Dakota that national crime rates have declined, but challenges remain on tribal reservations in the state.

"We know that progress in some communities has not been the same," Garland said. "Progress across the country is still uneven. Of course, there is no level of violent crime that's acceptable."

He said that since 2021, the Justice Department has allocated \$19.1 million in grants to support tribal justice initiatives in South Dakota.

"Tribal communities deserve safety and justice," he said.

Garland's visit included a morning meeting in Sioux Falls with Alison Ramsdell, the U.S. attorney for the District of South Dakota, as well as federal, state, local and tribal law enforcement leaders. On Wednesday afternoon, he participated in a roundtable meeting in Wagner with representatives of the nine tribal nations in the state and U.S. Sen. Mike Rounds of South Dakota.

Agreement on insufficiency of funding

In a Q&A with the media in Wagner, Rounds, a Republican, remarked on the significance of working collaboratively with Garland, who is part of the Democratic Biden administration.

"Sometimes he and I won't agree on policies, but one thing we do agree on is that law enforcement and taking care of public safety is something that transcends politics," Rounds said.

One area of agreement is the insufficiency of federal funding for tribal law enforcement. Rounds said "the current system does not work" and "the funding formulas are not fair."

Garland, in remarks after the roundtable, pledged to support more funding for the Department of Interior, which includes the Bureau of Indian Affairs, known as the BIA.

"I well recognize that our department cannot provide the full level of law enforcement assistance and officers that you need on the reservations, and that BIA needs more money for that purpose," Garland said.

Rounds said the roundtable discussion, which was closed to the media, included talk of officer training, possible reforms to the formulas used by the federal government to fund tribal law enforcement, and whether block grants to tribes might be a better way to fund public safety than existing methods.

Training, recruitment concerns aired

John Pettigrew, acting police chief of the Oglala Sioux Tribe, recently told a congressional committee that federal funding for tribal law enforcement — which is required by treaties dating to the 1800s — is "a joke." He said the tribe's Department of Public Safety is funded at 15% of its needs, a shortfall that has led to inadequate staffing levels, longer response times and officer burnout.

Police Chief Edwin Young of the Yankton Sioux Tribe told South Dakota Searchlight prior to Wednesday's meeting in Sioux Falls that the tribe struggles to recruit and retain officers.

"We need competitive pay with the local law enforcement. We don't have a real retirement system. That stuff is pretty much nonexistent in most tribal programs," Young said.

His department currently operates with three officers and needs at least 12 to police the area effectively, he said.

Logistical hurdles in training and recruitment exacerbate the funding challenges.

Traditionally, tribal officers have had to complete their training at a Bureau of Indian Affairs facility in New Mexico, a requirement that has been a barrier to recruiting new officers. But the bureau recently lent its support to a new, state-led summer training session in Pierre, which is providing training closer to home for prospective tribal officers. Rounds has asked for the establishment of a federal tribal law enforcement training facility in the Great Plains region.

Noem not in attendance

Prior to Garland's visit, public safety on reservations in South Dakota had been a longstanding topic of public debate.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem gave a speech in January claiming that Mexican drug cartels are operating on reservations, and she's repeated those claims many times since. Those and other comments led leaders of all nine of the tribes in the state to vote in support of banning her from their reservations. Noem did not attend the meetings Wednesday.

South Dakota Searchlight asked Rounds why Noem wasn't there, and he said Garland's staff wanted a "sovereign nation to sovereign nation" meeting.

"They wanted to do direct government-to-government between the federal government and the tribes,"

Rounds said.

Tribal leaders react

The Oglala Sioux Tribe has sued the federal government, alleging it's failing to adequately uphold its treaty obligation to fund public safety. Concerns about public safety on the tribe's Pine Ridge Reservation have been heightened recently after a 56-year-old man, Tom Thunder Hawk, was fatally shot at a pow-wow earlier this month.

"That just goes to show you the gun violence that still continues throughout Indian Country," said Oglala Sioux Tribe President Frank Star Come Out, who had to skip some of Thunder Hawk's memorial services to attend the event with Garland and Rounds. "How do we control it? How do we control the violence, the crime, the gangs, the meth, fentanyl, the overcrowded jails, everything? Those are a lot of issues that the chairmen today voiced concerns about."

Standing Rock Sioux Tribe Chairwoman Janet Alkire said reservations are dealing with those and other public safety problems on a daily basis.

"Until we have adequate law enforcement and public safety, our people are always going to live in fear," Alkire said.

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

Eight states file court brief challenging California's electric vehicle mandate

BY: JACK O'CONNOR - AUGUST 14, 2024 3:01 PM

Iowa Attorney General Brenna Bird led a coalition of eight state attorneys general, including South Dakota's, in filing a court brief supporting Ohio's lawsuit against the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) over California's electric vehicle mandates.

California's mandate requires all new cars and vehicles sold in California to be electric by 2035. The mandate passed in August 2022 by the California Air Resources Board was intended to improve air quality and reduce greenhouse gas emissions.

Bird and others allege the EPA violated the states' equal sovereignty rights when the agency allowed California to pursue its own regulatory standards while preventing other states from doing so.

Bird said in a press release that California's electric vehicle mandate will also increase costs for consumers in other states and limit options for new cars.

"I will not stand by as American families are forced to pay the price for California's green car mandates," Bird said in a press release. "California and the Biden-Harris EPA are eliminating purchasing options for families across the country and mandating they buy more expensive electric cars at a time when they are already struggling to make ends meet. The law is clear; California does not have the power to mandate the cars Iowans drive."

Bird is joined by the Republican attorneys general from the states of Idaho, New Hampshire, North Dakota, South Dakota, Tennessee, Virginia and Wyoming.

According to the amicus brief, California's extreme market influence leads to its decisions forcing the automotive industry across the nation to change in order to match California regulations.

"That mandate surpasses the current market demand for such vehicles, compelling manufacturers to invest far more resources than they would absent the regulations. Those added expenses are inevitably passed down to consumers, including Petitioner States," the brief reads. "Petitioner States are forced to

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 15 of 71

subsidize California's stringent regulatory framework while also being barred from adopting their own."

This is not the first time Bird has fought against California electric vehicle rules.

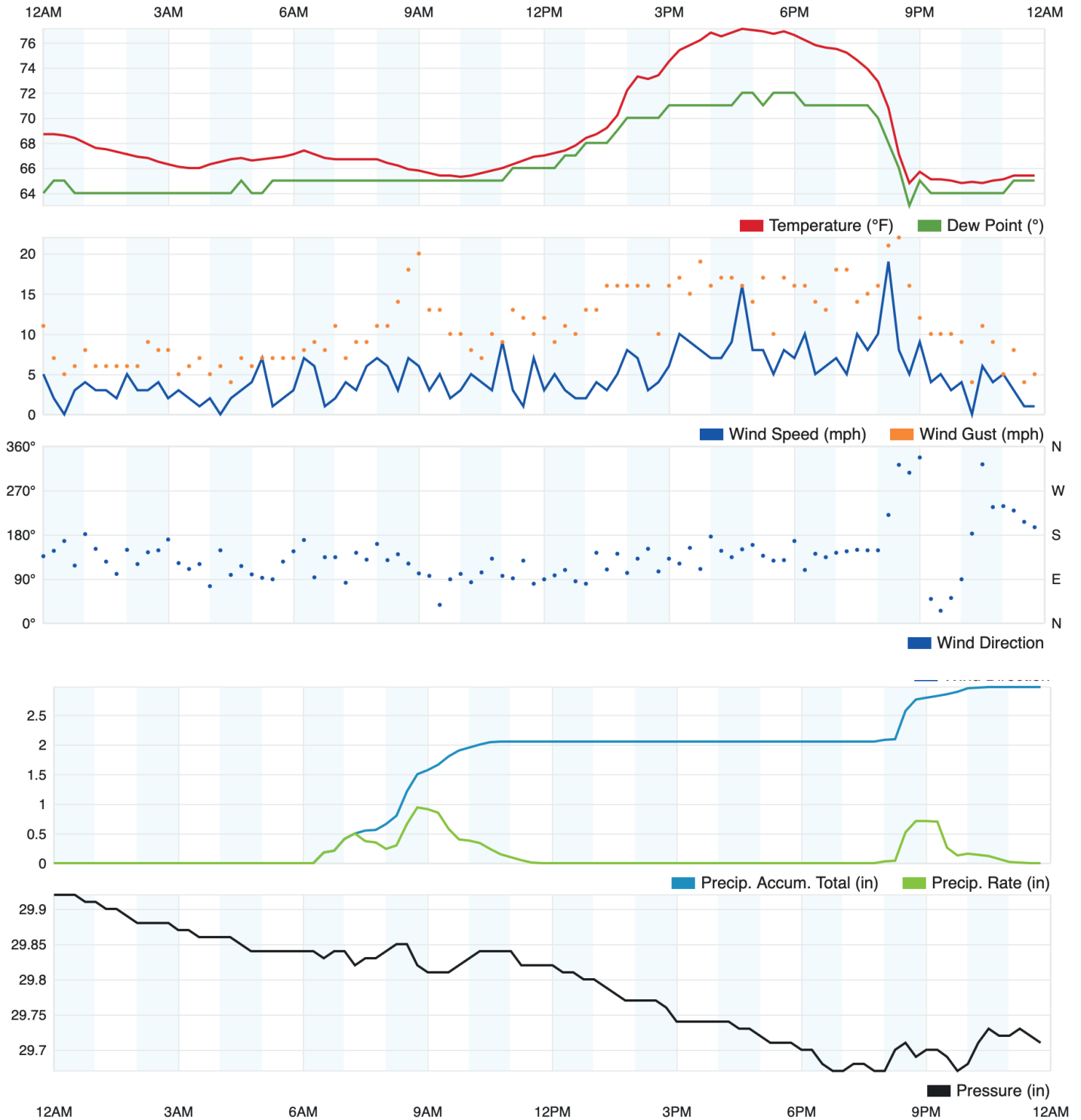
Back in May, Bird joined a lawsuit challenging a California regulation that would have banned internal combustion engines in medium- and heavy-duty vehicles by 2045 and the sale of larger diesel vehicles in 2036.

Jack O'Connor is a States Newsroom Fellow for the summer of 2024. Jack is from California and studies journalism and political science at the University of Minnesota - Twin Cities. His work can be read at The Minnesota Daily, Star Tribune or Park Bugle.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 16 of 71

Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 17 of 71

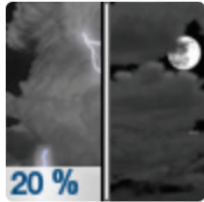
Today



High: 79 °F

Partly Sunny
then Chance
T-storms

Tonight



Low: 62 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Mostly Cloudy

Friday



High: 78 °F

Slight Chance
Showers then
Partly Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 56 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 81 °F

Sunny

More Rain Today



Today



High:
75-86°

Clearing around and west of
the Missouri River

Tonight



Low:
57-63°

Partly cloudy around and
west of the Missouri River

Probability of Precipitation Forecast (%)

	8/15								8/16			
	Thu								Fri			
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm	12am	3am	6am	9am		
Aberdeen	10	10	25	30	35	10	10	10	15	5		
Britton	20	15	30	50	40	20	30	30	25	15		
Clark	5	5	20	35	30	10	5	10	10	5		
Clear Lake	10	5	30	35	25	10	5	10	10	10		
Frederick	15	15	30	35	35	15	15	15	10	5		
Milbank	20	10	30	35	30	10	15	20	20	20		
Redfield	10	5	15	30	15	5	5	5	5	0		
Sisseton	20	15	35	40	35	15	25	35	35	30		
Watertown	10	5	25	30	25	10	5	10	10	10		
Webster	15	10	25	40	40	15	15	20	20	10		
Wheaton	20	15	40	40	30	20	40	40	30	30		

- Wrap around showers and thunderstorms (15-50%) will move back into the area midday/afternoon
 - Mainly for locations along and east of the James River
- Precipitation will diminish tonight into early Friday morning

National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD



Showers and weak thunderstorms (15-50%) will wrap back into northeast South Dakota and western Minnesota this afternoon through early Friday morning. Highs will be seasonal ranging in the mid 70s to the upper 80s, warmest along and west of the Missouri River. Additional precipitation of a few hundredths up to 0.50" possible over northeastern SD into west central MN. Probability of rainfall over 0.50" is 20% or less for this area.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 18 of 71

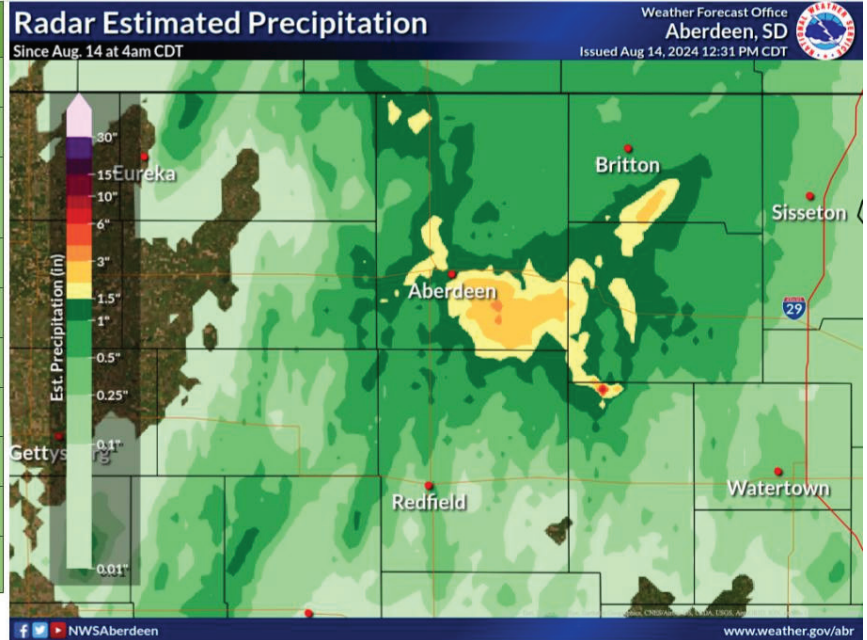


Radar Estimated Precipitation Wed Morning

August 14, 2024
2:44 PM

Location	Amount
2 SE Aberdeen	2.18 inches
1 NNE Aberdeen	2.10 inches
Aberdeen Regional Airport	2.06 inches
Groton	2.04 inches
2 SW Aberdeen	1.79 inches
1 N Westport	1.49 inches
6 SW Columbia	1.11 inches
5 NW Brentford	1.03 inches
12 E Onida	1.02 inches
16 S Seneca	1.00 inches

More rain to come later this evening.



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

This morning a system moved into the greater Aberdeen area, dumping a decent amount of rain. The highest observed reports are shown to the left, with many areas receiving between 1-2 inches of rain. Radar estimates suggest that some areas may have received up to three inches of rain.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 19 of 71

Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 77 °F at 4:39 PM

Low Temp: 65 °F at 8:44 PM

Wind: 26 mph at 8:18 PM

Precip: : 2.97

Day length: 14 hours, 8 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 111 in 1937

Record Low: 42 in 1895

Average High: 83

Average Low: 57

Average Precip in Aug.: 1.08

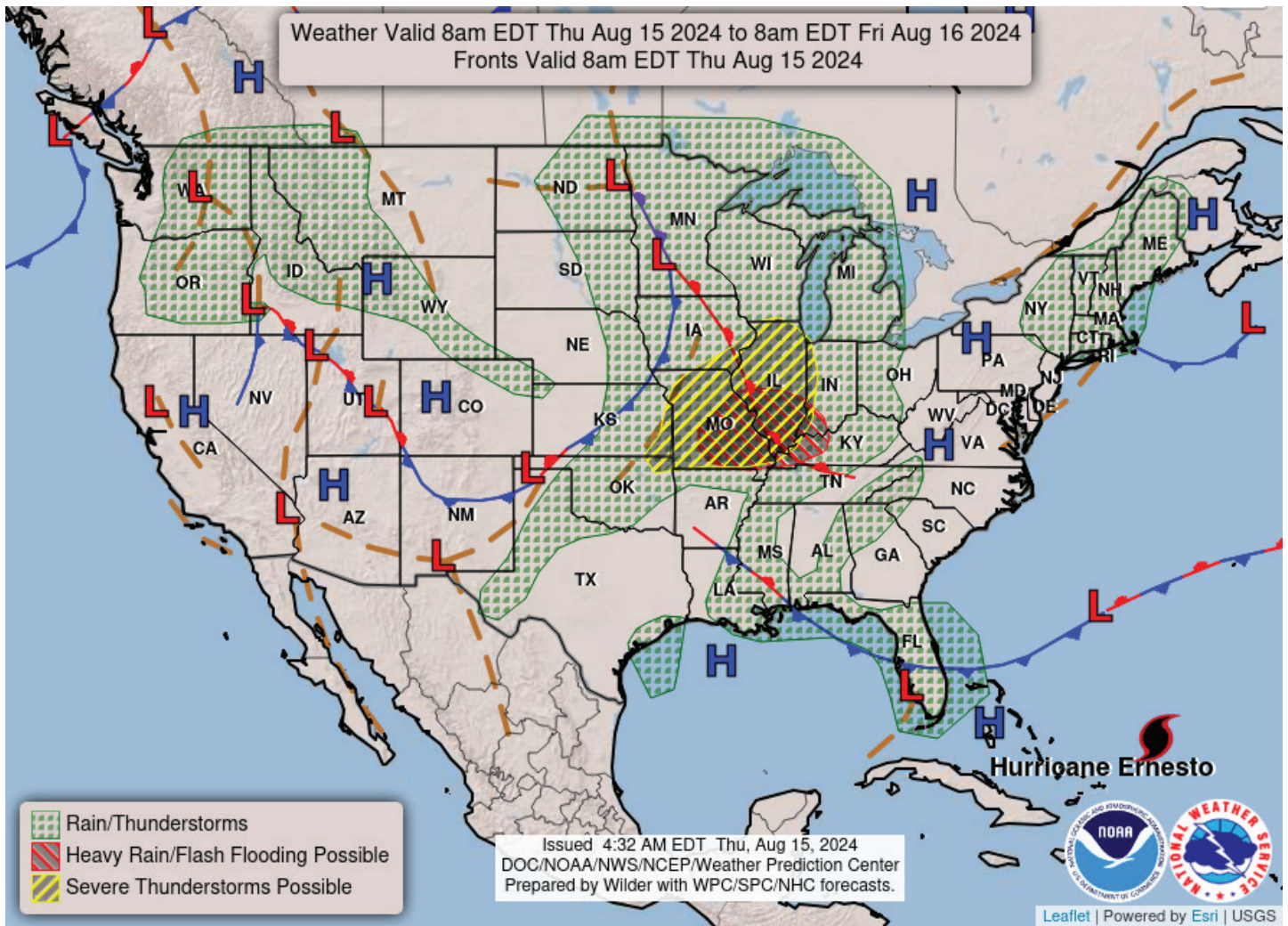
Precip to date in Aug.: 1.16

Average Precip to date: 15.18

Precip Year to Date: 16.05

Sunset Tonight: 8:40:48 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:33:53 am



Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 20 of 71

Today in Weather History

August 15, 1886: A tornado moved northeast from 5 miles southwest of Newark in Marshall County, through town and into North Dakota. Only three buildings were reportedly undamaged at Newark, and a bartender at a saloon was killed. Three people died in two homes on adjoining farms 2 miles southwest of town. A saddle from a Newark stable was carried for a half mile. In North Dakota, houses and barns were damaged along the Wild River. This tornado was estimated as an F3.

August 15, 1987: On this day the largest hailstone was reported in Brown County. The size of the hailstone as 4.5 inches in diameter, and fell on the southwest corner of Warner. This storm also produced F1 tornado that touchdown about 2 miles southwest of Warner. An estimated wind gust of 60 mph was also reported about 2 miles NNW of Stratford.

August 15, 2011: Slow moving thunderstorms across parts of northern Roberts County produced anywhere from 4 to 8 inches of rainfall resulting in flash flooding. The town of New Effington was affected with many roads along with several homes flooded. Sandbagging took place to keep the water from the school. Highway 127 from New Effington to Hammer was flooded in several spots. The floodwaters remained for several days afterward with several roads flooded.

1787: Tornadoes were reported in Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, and New Hampshire. Wethersfield, Connecticut was hard hit by the tornado outbreak. There, a woman and her family were caught in the open. She and her son were killed. Clothes from the family farm were carried three miles away. This event is regarded to be the most significant tornado outbreak in early New England history.

1946 - Saint Louis, MO, was deluged with a record 8.78 inches of rain in 24 hours. (The Weather Channel)

1967 - The sundance fire in northern Idaho was started by lightning. Winds of 50 mph carried firebrands as much as ten miles in advance to ignite new fires, and as a result, the forest fire spread twenty miles across the Selkirk Mountains in just twelve hours, burning 56,000 acres. The heat of the fire produced whirlwinds of flame with winds up to 300 mph which flung giant trees about like matchsticks. (David Ludlum)

1983 - Hurricane Alicia formed on this day and was the costliest tropical cyclone in the Atlantic since Hurricane Agnes in 1972. It struck Galveston and Houston, Texas directly, causing \$2.6 billion (1983 USD) in damage and killing 21 people. This storm was the worst Texas hurricane since Hurricane Carla in 1961. Also, Alicia was the first billion-dollar tropical cyclone in Texas history.

1987 - Thunderstorms developing ahead of a sharp cold front produced severe weather in the Upper Midwest during the afternoon and evening hours, with Minnesota and eastern South Dakota hardest hit. A thunderstorm in west central Minnesota spawned a tornado at Eagle Lake which killed one person and injured eight others. A thunder- storm in eastern South Dakota produced softball size hail at Warner. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Thirty five cities in twenty states in the north central and northeastern U.S. reported record high temperatures for the date, including Lamoni IA and Baltimore MD, where the mercury hit 105 degrees. Temperatures 100 degrees or above were reported in twenty-two states. Pierre SD was the hot spot in the nation with a high of 114 degrees. Bluefield WV reported eight straight days of record heat. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Evening thunderstorms in eastern New Mexico produced wind gusts to 66 mph at Clovis. Evening thunderstorms in West Texas produced baseball size hail around Hereford, Dimmitt, Ware and Dalhart. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)



PRAYER AND PROVIDENCE

An ocean liner was in the midst of a terrible storm while making its way from England to America. The ship was swaying violently from side to side and heaving up and down as the waves washed over the bow.

The captain was trying his best to calm the people and encourage them not to be frightened. Suddenly a lady shouted, "Do something!"

"We're doing our best," said the captain calmly, "and we are trusting in the providence of God."

"Oh my word," she cried. "Is it that bad?"

The word providence comes from two Latin words. One means "before" and the other means "to see." When the Christian speaks of "providence" it conveys the message that God knows the outcome of the events in our lives before they happen. Not only that, He knows and understands how those things which we sometimes resent are working to shape us into the person He wants us to be!

Paul said that whatever happens in the life of the Christian happens for the Christian's best interests. In fact he said that "everything works together for their good who are called according to His purpose." Not that everything that happens to the Christian is good in and of itself. It means that everything that happens is to shape us into the likeness of Christ. As we become more and more like Him, He can use us more and more to do the work He has for us.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, may we not only accept the fact that You are at work in our lives, but really believe it is because You love us and want us to be like Christ. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: And we know that God causes everything to work together[a] for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them. Romans 8:28

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

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 22 of 71

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Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 23 of 71



WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.13.24

34 55 59 65 70 12

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$464,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 1 Days 17 Hrs 28 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.14.24

8 11 15 32 42 6

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$7,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 43 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.14.24

7 19 29 30 39 4

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 16 Hrs 58 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.14.24

20 21 28 29 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$20,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 16 Hrs 58 Mins 12 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.14.24

16 27 34 62 66 22

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS: 08.14.24

8 9 23 29 62 13

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$35,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 2 Days 17 Hrs 27 Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 24 of 71

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

Hurricane Ernesto drops torrential rain on Puerto Rico as it strengthens heading toward Bermuda

By DÁNICA COTO Associated Press

TOA BAJA, Puerto Rico (AP) — Hurricane Ernesto dropped torrential rain on Puerto Rico and knocked out power for nearly half of all customers in the U.S. territory Wednesday as it threatened to strengthen into a major hurricane en route to Bermuda.

The storm was over open water about 675 miles (1,085 kilometers) south-southwest of Bermuda early Thursday, with maximum sustained winds of 85 mph (140 kph) and moving northwest at 16 mph (26 kph).

A hurricane watch was issued for Bermuda, where tropical storm conditions were possible Friday and hurricane conditions were possible Saturday. Tropical storm warnings were discontinued for Puerto Rico and its outlying islands of Vieques and Culebra and for the U.S. and British Virgin Islands after the storm passed.

"I know it was a long night listening to that wind howl," U.S. Virgin Islands Gov. Albert Bryan Jr. said at a news conference.

An islandwide blackout was reported on St. Croix, and at least six cellphone towers were offline across the U.S. territory, said Daryl Jaschen, emergency management director.

Schools and government agencies were closed in the U.S. and British Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico, where heavy flooding was reported in several areas, forcing officials to block roads, some of which were strewn with trees. More than 140 flights were canceled to and from Puerto Rico.

"A lot of rain, a lot of rain," Culebra Mayor Edilberto Romero said in a phone interview. "We have trees that have fallen on public roads. There are some roofs that are blown off."

Flash flood warnings remained up because of continuing rain.

In the north coastal town of Toa Baja, which is prone to flooding, dozens of residents moved their cars to higher areas.

"Everyone is worried," Víctor Báez said as he sipped beer with friends and watched the rain fall. He only briefly celebrated that he had power. "It's going to go out again," he predicted.

Ernesto, a Category 1 hurricane, was gradually strengthening and could become a Category 3 hurricane by Friday. Its center was expected to pass near Bermuda on Saturday. Between 3 and 6 inches of rain was forecast, with more possible in isolated places.

"Residents need to prepare now before conditions worsen," Bermuda's National Security Minister Michael Weeks said. "Now is not the time for complacency."

Forecasters also warned of heavy swells along the U.S. East Coast.

"That means that anybody who goes to the beach, even if the weather is beautiful and nice, it could be dangerous ... with those rip currents," said Robbie Berg, warning coordination meteorologist with the National Hurricane Center.

More than 640,000 customers lost power in Puerto Rico, and 23 hospitals were operating on generators, Gov. Pedro Pierluisi said Wednesday. He added that crews were assessing damage and it was too early to tell when electricity would be restored.

"We are trying to get the system up and running as soon as we can," said Juan Saca, president of Luma Energy, the company that operates transmission and distribution of power in Puerto Rico.

Luma Energy said earlier Wednesday that its priority was to restore power to hospitals, the island's water and sewer company and other essential services. More than 300,000 customers were without water as a result of power outages, Pierluisi said.

Puerto Rico's power grid was razed by Hurricane Maria in 2017 as a Category 4 storm, and it remains frail as crews continue to rebuild the system.

"It's just frustrating that this many years later, we continue to see something like a storm cause such

widespread outages in Puerto Rico, particularly given the risk that these outages can cause for vulnerable households in Puerto Rico," said Charlotte Gossett Navarro, the Hispanic Federation's chief director for Puerto Rico.

Not everyone can afford generators on the island of 3.2 million people with a more than 40% poverty rate. "People already prepared themselves with candles," said Lucia Rodríguez, a 31-year-old street vendor.

Rooftop solar systems are scarce but keep growing in Puerto Rico, where fossil fuels generate 94% of the island's electricity. At the time María hit, there were 8,000 rooftop installations, compared with more than 117,000 currently, according to the Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis.

Ernesto is the fifth named storm and the third hurricane of this year's Atlantic hurricane season. Since 1966, only four other years have had three or more hurricanes in the Atlantic by mid-August, according to Philip Klotzbach, Colorado State University hurricane researcher.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted an above-average Atlantic hurricane season this year because of record warm ocean temperatures. It forecast 17 to 25 named storms, with four to seven major hurricanes.

Mediators are set to hold new Gaza cease-fire talks, hoping to head off an even wider war

By ABBY SEWELL and TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — International mediators were set to hold a new round of talks Thursday aimed at halting the Israel-Hamas war and securing the release of scores of hostages, with a potential deal seen as the best hope of heading off an even larger regional conflict.

The United States, Qatar and Egypt were to meet with an Israeli delegation in Qatar as the Palestinian death toll from the 10-month-old war nears 40,000, according to local health authorities. Hamas has not said whether it will participate, accusing Israel of adding new demands to a previous proposal that had U.S. and international support and to which Hamas had agreed in principle.

A cease-fire in Gaza would likely calm tensions across the region. Diplomats hope it would persuade Iran and Lebanon's Hezbollah to hold off on retaliating for the killing of a top Hezbollah commander in an Israeli airstrike in Beirut and of Hamas' top political leader in an explosion in Tehran.

The mediators have spent months trying to hammer out a three-phase plan in which Hamas would release scores of hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack that triggered the war in exchange for a lasting cease-fire, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel.

Both sides have agreed in principle to the plan, which U.S. President Joe Biden announced on May 31. But Hamas has proposed "amendments" and Israel has suggested "clarifications," leading each side to accuse the other of making new demands it cannot accept.

Hamas has rejected Israel's latest demands, which include a lasting military presence along the border with Egypt and a line bisecting Gaza where it would search Palestinians returning to their homes to root out militants. Hamas spokesperson Osama Hamdan told The Associated Press the group is only interested in discussing the implementation of Biden's proposal and not in further negotiations over its content.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu denies Israel has made new demands, but he has also repeatedly raised questions over whether the cease-fire would last, saying Israel remains committed to "total victory" against Hamas and the release of all the hostages.

The two sides are also divided over the details of the hostage-prisoner exchange, including who among the Palestinian prisoners would be eligible for release and whether they would be sent into exile. Hamas has demanded the release of high-profile militants convicted of orchestrating attacks that killed Israelis.

The most intractable dispute has been over the transition from the first phase of the cease-fire — when women, children and other vulnerable hostages would be released -- and the second, when captive Israeli soldiers would be freed and a permanent cease-fire would take hold.

Hamas is concerned that Israel will resume the war after the first batch of hostages is released. Israel worries that Hamas will drag out the talks on releasing the remaining hostages indefinitely. Hamdan pro-

vided documents showing Hamas had agreed to a U.S. bridging proposal under which talks on the transition would begin by the 16th day of the first phase and conclude by the fifth week.

More recently, Hamas has objected to what it says are new Israeli demands to maintain a presence along the Gaza-Egypt border and a road dividing northern and southern Gaza. Israel denies these are new demands, saying it needs a presence along the border to prevent weapons smuggling and that it must search Palestinians returning to northern Gaza to ensure they are not armed.

The demands were only made public recently. Hamas has demanded a full Israeli military withdrawal, which was also part of all previous versions of the cease-fire proposal, according to documents shared with the AP that were verified by officials involved in the negotiations.

The war began when Hamas-led militants stormed across the heavily guarded border on Oct. 7 in an attack that shocked Israel's vaunted security and intelligence services. The fighters rampaged through farming communities and army bases, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians.

They abducted another 250 people. Over 100 were released during a weeklong cease-fire in November, and around 110 are believed to still be inside Gaza, though Israeli authorities believe around a third of them died on Oct. 7 or in captivity. Seven were rescued in military operations.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed nearly 40,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza's Health Ministry, which does not say how many were militants. The offensive has left a swath of destruction across the territory and driven the vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people from their homes, often multiple times.

Successive evacuation orders and military operations have driven hundreds of thousands of people into a so-called humanitarian zone along the coast where they live in crowded tent camps with few services. Aid groups have struggled to deliver food and supplies, prompting warnings of famine.

Hamas has suffered major losses, but its fighters have repeatedly managed to regroup, even in heavily destroyed areas where Israeli forces had previously operated. Its top leader and one of the architects of the Oct. 7 attack, Yahya Sinwar, is still believed to be alive and hiding inside Gaza, likely sheltering in Hamas' vast tunnel network.

Hezbollah has meanwhile traded fire with Israel along the border in what the Lebanese militant group says is a support front for its ally, Hamas. Other Iran-backed groups across the region have attacked Israeli, American and international targets, drawing retaliation.

Iran and Israel traded fire directly for the first time in April, after Iran retaliated for an apparent Israeli strike on its embassy compound in Syria that killed two Iranian generals. Many fear a repeat after the killing of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh, who was visiting Iran for the inauguration of its new president. The explosion was widely blamed on Israel. Israel has not said whether it was involved.

Hezbollah has meanwhile vowed to avenge the killing of its commander, Fouad Shukur, raising fears of an even more devastating sequel to the 2006 war between Israel and the militant group.

Still, Iran and Hezbollah say they do not want a full-blown war, and a cease-fire in Gaza could provide an off-ramp after days of escalating threats and a massive military build-up across the region.

Taliban have deliberately deprived 1.4 million Afghan girls of schooling through bans, says UNESCO

By RIAZAT BUTT The Associated Press

KABUL, Afghanistan (AP) — The Taliban have deliberately deprived 1.4 million Afghan girls of schooling through bans, a United Nations agency said Thursday. Afghanistan is the only country in the world that bans female secondary and higher education.

The Taliban, who took power in 2021, barred education for girls above sixth grade because they said it didn't comply with their interpretation of Sharia, or Islamic law. They didn't stop it for boys and show no sign of taking the steps needed to reopen classrooms and campuses for girls and women.

UNESCO said at least 1.4 million girls have been deliberately denied access to secondary education since the takeover, an increase of 300,000 since its previous count in April 2023, with more girls reaching the age limit of 12 every year.

"If we add the girls who were already out of school before the bans were introduced, there are now almost 2.5 million girls in the country deprived of their right to education, representing 80% of Afghan school-age girls," UNESCO said.

The Taliban did not respond to requests for comment.

Access to primary education has also fallen since the Taliban took power in Aug. 2021, with 1.1 million fewer girls and boys attending school, according to UNESCO data.

The U.N. agency warned that authorities have "almost wiped out" two decades of steady progress for education in Afghanistan. "The future of an entire generation is now in jeopardy," it added.

It said Afghanistan had 5.7 million girls and boys in primary school in 2022, compared with 6.8 million in 2019. The enrollment drop was the result of the Taliban decision to bar female teachers from teaching boys, UNESCO said, but could also be explained by a lack of parental incentive to send their children to school in an increasingly tough economic environment.

"UNESCO is alarmed by the harmful consequences of this increasingly massive drop-out rate, which could lead to a rise in child labor and early marriage," it said.

The Taliban celebrated three years of rule Wednesday at Bagram Air Base, but there was no mention of the country's hardships, nor promises to help the struggling population.

Decades of conflict and instability have left millions of Afghans on the brink of hunger and starvation and unemployment is high.

Ukraine gambled on an incursion deep into Russian territory. The bold move changed the battlefield

By SAMYA KULLAB Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's stunning incursion into Russia's Kursk border region was a bold gamble for the country's military commanders, who committed their limited resources to a risky assault on a nuclear-armed enemy with no assurance of success.

After the first signs of progress, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy broke his silence and spelled out Kyiv's daily advances to his war-weary public. By Wednesday, Ukrainian officials said they controlled 1,000 square kilometers (386 square miles) of enemy territory, including at least 74 settlements and hundreds of Russian prisoners of war.

But a week after it began, the overall aim of the daring operation is still unclear: Will Ukraine dig in and keep the conquered territory, advance further into Russian territory or pull back?

What is clear is that the incursion has changed the battlefield. The shock of Ukraine's thunder run revealed chinks in the armor of its powerful adversary. The attack also risked aggravating Ukraine's own weaknesses by extending the front line and committing new troops at a time when military leaders are short on manpower.

To conduct the Kursk operation, Kyiv deployed battalions drawn from multiple brigades, some of which were pulled from the hottest parts of the front line, where Russia's advance has continued unabated. So far, Moscow's overall strategic advantage is intact.

"The stretching of the front line for us is also stretching the front line for the enemy," said the commander of the 14th Regiment of Unmanned Drones, who uses the call sign Charlie, after he participated in the opening stage of the offensive. "Only we have prepared for this operation in detail. The Russians were not prepared for this operation at all."

As the offensive enters its second week, Ukrainian forces are pushing out in several directions from the Russian town of Sudzha.

Images from the battlefield showing columns of destroyed Russian weaponry are reminiscent of Ukraine's successful counteroffensives in 2022 in Kherson and Kharkiv. The photos are also a boon to national morale that deflated after the failed 2023 summer counteroffensive and months of recent territorial losses in the east.

But some analysts are reserving judgment on whether the Kursk region is the right theater to launch an

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 29 of 71

offensive. Estimates of the number of troops operating there range from 5,000 to 12,000.

Within a week, Ukraine claimed to have captured almost as much Russian land in Kursk as Russian forces took in Ukraine in the last seven months, according to the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

Russian authorities acknowledged the Ukrainian gains but described them as smaller. Even so, they have evacuated about 132,000 people.

Hundreds of Russian prisoners were blindfolded and ferried away in trucks in the opening moments of the lightning advance. They could be used in future prisoner swaps to free thousands of Ukrainian soldiers and civilians in captivity.

On Wednesday, Ukrainian human rights ombudsman Dmytro Lubinets said the fighting in Kursk had led his Russian counterpart, Tatyana Moskalkova, to initiate a conversation about prisoner swaps, the first time such a request has come from Moscow.

Politically, the incursion turned the tables on Russia and reset the terms of a conflict in which Ukraine increasingly seemed doomed to accept unfavorable cease-fire terms. The strike was also a powerful example of Ukrainian determination and a message to Western allies that have dithered on allowing donated weapons to be used for deeper strikes inside Russian territory.

The assault has shown that the fear of crossing Russian "red lines" that could lead to nuclear escalation "is a myth, and that Ukraine's battle-hardened military remains a formidable force," wrote Taras Kuzio, a professor of political science at the National University Kyiv-Mohyla Academy.

Presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak suggested that the incursion may also strengthen Kyiv's hand in future negotiations with Russia. Occupying part of Russian territory ahead of any cease-fire talks may give Ukraine some leverage.

Though the fighting continues, the territory currently under Ukrainian control is, by itself, of little economic or strategic value.

"There is some important gas infrastructure in the area, but its usefulness is likely to be limited other than as a minor bargaining chip. Ukrainians have also cut a railway line running from Lgov to Belgorod," said Pasi Paroinen of the Black Bird Group, a Finland-based open-source intelligence agency that monitors the war.

Major military bases are far from the current area of operations, and Ukrainian advances are expected to slow as Russia sends in more forces.

Ukrainian officials have said they do not intend to occupy Kursk, but they may seek to create a buffer zone to protect settlements in the bordering Sumy region from relentless Russian artillery attacks and to block supply lines to the northeast.

Forcing Russia to deploy reserves intended for other parts of the 1,000-kilometer (620-mile) front line was the minimum aim, said Charlie, the commander. But so far, Moscow's focus in the Donetsk region has not changed.

Some Ukrainian troops were pulled from those very lines, where manpower shortages were a key factor that contributed to territorial losses this year.

In the strategically significant Pokrovsk area, which is the main thrust of Russia's offensive effort, soldiers have seen few improvements since the Kursk incursion.

"Nothing has changed," said a soldier known by the call sign Kyianyn. "If anything, I see the increase in Russian offensive actions."

But the Kursk operation "showed they can't defend their own territory," he said. "All of us are inspired here. Many of our soldiers wanted to go to Kursk and push them straight to the Kremlin."

Targeting Russia's Northern Grouping of Forces, which feeds the Kharkiv front, is a key goal, said Konstantin Mashovets, a Ukrainian military expert. Some Russian units have reportedly moved from Vovchansk in Kharkiv.

In the south, a small number of Russian units were redeployed from the Kherson and Zaporizhzhia regions, said Dmytro Lykhovii, the spokesman of the Tavria operational group. But that hasn't affected

Russian attacks.

"We even see an increase in (Russian) activity," Lykhovii said.

The Kursk operation has also served to draw attention away from the eastern front, where tens of thousands of Ukrainians have been killed and wounded, and where the Ukrainian military has struggled to repair cracks in its defenses.

Most territorial losses in June and July were recorded in the Pokrovsk area, which is near a logistics hub, with fighting intensifying near the towns of Toretsk and Chasiv Yar.

Russian forces dialed up those attacks to capitalize on troop fatigue and shortages. On many occasions, the losses were the result of poorly timed troop rotations and blunders that cast doubt about the overall strategy of the Ukrainian military's General Staff.

"There is no way Russia will stop its actions in the parts of the front line where they are tactically succeeding," Mashovets said. "There, they will push and squeeze until their last man is standing, no matter what." But the push into Kursk might force the Kremlin to pull reserves "from the parts of the front line that are of secondary importance."

Iran police shot a woman while trying to seize her car over hijab law violation, activists say

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — On a darkened road beside the Caspian Sea, Iranian police officers opened fire last month on a 31-year-old woman who had tried to speed away likely knowing they wanted to seize her vehicle.

Police had been ordered to impound her car, activists say, because of an earlier violation of Iran's headscarf law for showing her hair in public while driving.

Now unable to walk and confined to a bed at a police hospital, Arezou Badri — a mother of two — is the latest casualty of Iran's renewed crackdown over headscarves, or hijabs. Her shooting occurred nearly two years after 22-year-old Mahsa Amini died while in police custody over an alleged headscarf violation, sparking nationwide protests over women's rights and against the country's theocracy.

As the Sept. 16 anniversary of Amini's death approaches, Iran's new reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian has promised to ease enforcement of the headscarf law. But the murky details of Badri's shooting and a recent video of a girl being manhandled in the streets of Tehran show the dangers still lurking for those willing to disobey it.

"They have elevated it to the most serious crime, where the police is allowed basically to shoot to kill," said Hadi Ghaemi, executive director of the New York-based Center for Human Rights in Iran. "That's really a war on women."

Badri's shooting occurred around 11 p.m. on July 22 along a coastal road in Iran's northern Mazandaran province as she drove home from a friend's house with her sister, activists say. A brief account published by Iran's state-run IRNA news agency quoted police Col. Ahmad Amini as saying patrol officers had ordered a vehicle with tinted windows to stop, but that it didn't. It made no mention of the hijab violation or impound notice.

Officers appear to have first fired at Badri's car's tires, according to the group Human Rights Activists in Iran, which spoke to people with knowledge of the shooting. As Badri continued driving, officers fired into the vehicle, the group said; the gunfire pierced her lung and damaged her spine.

Under Iranian law, police must fire a warning shot, then aim to wound below the waist before taking a potentially fatal shot at a suspect's head or chest. If the suspect is driving, officers typically aim first for the tires.

Why police initially stopped Badri's car remains unclear, though activists blame it on the impound alert over the hijab violation. It's also unknown whether any police vehicle at the scene had a camera that recorded the shooting or if any officer there wore a body camera.

There are no public statistics of fatal police shootings in Iran. Police firearms training and tactics vary

widely, as some officers face more paramilitary duties in areas like Iran's restive Sistan and Baluchestan provinces.

Iran's Interior Ministry, which oversees the country's police, did not respond to questions about the shooting from The Associated Press.

Authorities are holding Badri at a police hospital in Tehran under tight security, restricting her family's visits and stopping them from taking photographs of her, activists say. Despite that, an image of Badri was published by the BBC this week, highlighting her case.

"She has no sensation from the waist down and doctors have said that it will be clear in the coming months whether she is completely paralyzed," said one activist in Iran, who requested anonymity for fear of reprisal.

The hijab became a focal point of demonstrations after the death of Amini in 2022. She died after being arrested for not wearing her headscarf to the liking of police. A United Nations panel has found that Amini died as a result of "physical violence" used against her by the state.

Amini's death sparked months of protests and a security crackdown that killed more than 500 people and led to the detention of more than 22,000. After the mass demonstrations, police dialed down enforcement of hijab laws, but it ramped up again in April under what authorities called the Noor — or "Light" — Plan.

The hijab crackdown remains widely discussed in Iran, even as police and state media rarely report on it. Many women continue to wear their hijabs loosely or leave them draped around their shoulders while walking in Tehran. Women driving without wearing hijabs are believed to have been tracked via surveillance camera technology provided by Chinese firms, matching their faces against a government-maintained photo database, Ghaemi said.

If they are stopped, that can lead to physical altercations between women and the police.

Surveillance footage published last week by the Iranian reformist news website Ensaf showed a 14-year-old girl manhandled by the morality police in Tehran. Her mother described her daughter's head as being rammed into an electrical box, a female officer pulling her hair and another putting their foot on her neck. Police described the officers' behavior as unprofessional, but also accused the girl of using bad language.

"I saw my daughter with a wounded face, swollen lips, a bruised neck, torn clothes and she couldn't even speak," her mother, Maryam Abbasi, told the website. "Her eyes were so swollen from crying that they wouldn't open."

Turkey's Erdogan meets with Palestinian leader Abbas ahead of speech to parliament

By ANDREW WILKS Associated Press

ISTANBUL (AP) — Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan hosted Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas for talks that focused on the conflict in Gaza, Erdogan's office said, ahead of a planned address to parliament Thursday.

Erdogan's office said late Wednesday that the two discussed "the massacres committed by Israel in Palestinian territories" and "the steps that need to be taken for a permanent cease-fire and peace" at the presidential palace in Ankara.

The statement, released on the social media platform X, said Erdogan pledged continued support to "Palestine's just cause" and to work to "increase the pressure on Israel by the international community ... especially the Islamic world" to deliver humanitarian aid and bring peace.

Abbas arrived Wednesday for a visit that comes as the threat of Iranian retaliation against Israel over the assassination of Hamas official Ismail Haniyeh fueled concerns of the war spreading across the Middle East. Erdogan, a prominent supporter of Hamas and the wider Palestinian cause, invited Abbas after Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu addressed the United States Congress in July. The Palestinian leader is due to speak at a special session of lawmakers Thursday in Ankara.

In contrast to Western nations that have designated Hamas a terrorist organization, Erdogan has commended the group, calling it a liberation movement. He also hosted Haniyeh in Turkey on several occasions.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 32 of 71

Abbas, who is based in Ramallah in the West Bank, is president of the Palestinian Authority, which has largely been sidelined since the war in Gaza started when Hamas-led militants attacked southern Israel in October, killing 1,200 people and taking some 250 hostages.

Abbas is also chair of the Fatah party, which has a long-running rift with Hamas. Electoral success for Hamas in Gaza in 2006 was followed by a brief armed conflict with Fatah fighters.

In addition to backing Hamas, Erdogan has been a leading critic of Israel's military operations in Gaza, accusing the Israeli government of committing genocide and likening Netanyahu to Adolf Hitler.

In May, Turkey suspended trade with Israel, citing its assault on Gaza. On Aug. 7, Turkey filed a request with a United Nations court to join South Africa's genocide lawsuit against Israel.

The Turkish president has criticized Western nations for backing Israel and has called for its leaders to be punished in international courts.

Haniyeh's death two weeks ago in Iran by a presumed Israeli strike, which came shortly after a senior Hezbollah commander was killed in Lebanon, has seen regional tensions soar as leaders watch for an expected Iranian response to the targeting of its allies.

Shortly before Abbas' arrival, U.S. Ambassador to Turkey Jeffery Flake said Washington was seeking the help of Turkey and other governments with friendly ties to Tehran to de-escalate the situation.

"Turkey can talk to groups that we cannot talk to regarding the situation in Gaza," he was reported as saying by the state-run Anadolu news agency late Wednesday. "We encourage our interlocutors and partners here to make an effort to reduce tensions where they can."

Millions of kids are still skipping school. Could the answer be recess — and a little cash?

By JOCELYN GECKER, BIANCA VÁZQUEZ TONESS and SHARON LURYE Associated Press
MEDFORD, Mass. (AP) — Flerentin "Flex" Jean-Baptiste missed so much school he had to repeat his freshman year at Medford High outside Boston. At school, "you do the same thing every day," said Jean-Baptiste, who was absent 30 days his first year. "That gets very frustrating."

Then his principal did something nearly unheard of: She let students play organized sports during lunch — if they attended all their classes. In other words, she offered high schoolers recess.

"It gave me something to look forward to," said Jean-Baptiste, 16. The following year, he cut his absences in half. Schoolwide, the share of chronically absent students declined from 35% in March 2023 to 23% in March 2024 — one of the steepest declines among Massachusetts high schools.

Years after COVID-19 upended American schooling, nearly every state is still struggling with attendance, according to data collected by The Associated Press and Stanford University economist Thomas Dee.

Roughly one in four students in the 2022-23 school year remained chronically absent, meaning they missed at least 10% of the school year. That represents about 12 million children in the 42 states and Washington, D.C., where data is available.

Before the pandemic, only 15% of students missed that much school.

Society may have largely moved on from COVID, but schools say they're still battling the effects of pandemic school closures. After as much as a year at home, school for many kids has felt overwhelming, boring or socially stressful. More than ever, kids and parents are deciding it's OK to stay home, which makes catching up even harder.

In all but one state, Arkansas, absence rates remain higher than they were pre-pandemic. Still, the problem appears to have passed its peak; almost every state saw absenteeism improve at least slightly from 2021-22 to 2022-23.

Schools are working to identify students with slipping attendance, then providing help. They're working to close communication gaps with parents, who often aren't aware their child is missing so much school or why it's problematic.

So far, the solutions that appear to be helping are simple — like postcards to parents that compare a child's attendance with peers. But to make more progress, experts say, schools must get creative to ad-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 33 of 71

dress their students' needs.

Caring adults — and incentives

In Oakland, California, chronic absenteeism skyrocketed from 29% pre-pandemic to 53% in 2022-23 across district and charter schools. Officials asked students what would convince them to come to class.

Money, they replied, and a mentor.

A grant-funded program launched in spring 2023 paid 45 students \$50 weekly for perfect attendance. Students also checked in daily with an assigned adult and completed weekly mental health assessments.

Paying students isn't a permanent or sustainable fix, said Zaia Vera, the district's head of social-emotional learning.

But many absent students lacked stable housing or were helping to support their families. "The money is the hook that got them in the door," Vera said.

More than 60% improved their attendance after taking part, Vera said. The program is expected to continue, along with district-wide efforts aimed at creating a sense of belonging. Oakland's African American Male Achievement project, for example, pairs Black students with Black teachers who offer support.

Kids who identify with their educators are more likely to attend school, said Michael Gottfried, a University of Pennsylvania professor. According to one study led by Gottfried, California students felt "it's important for me to see someone who's like me early on, first thing in the day," he said.

A caring teacher made a difference for Golden Tachiquin, 18, who graduated from Oakland's Skyline High School this spring. When she started 10th grade after a remote freshman year, she felt lost and anxious. She later realized these feelings caused the nausea and dizziness that kept her home sick. She was absent at least 25 days that year.

But she bonded with an Afro-Latina teacher who understood her culturally and made Tachiquin, a straight-A student, feel her poor attendance didn't define her.

"I didn't dread going to her class," Tachiquin said.

Another teacher had the opposite effect. "She would say, 'Wow, guess who decided to come today?'" Tachiquin recalled. "I started skipping her class even more."

In Massachusetts, Medford High School requires administrators to greet and talk with students each morning, especially those with a history of missing school.

But the lunchtime gym sessions have been the biggest driver of improved attendance, Principal Marta Cabral said. High schoolers need freedom and an opportunity to move their bodies, she said. "They're here for seven hours a day. They should have a little fun."

Stubborn circumstances

Chronically absent students are at higher risk of illiteracy and eventually dropping out. They also miss the meals, counseling and socialization provided at school.

Many of the reasons kids missed school early in the pandemic are still firmly in place: financial hardship, transportation problems, mild illness and mental health struggles.

In Alaska, 45% of students missed significant school last year. In Amy Lloyd's high school classes in Juneau, some families now treat attendance as optional. Last term, several of her English students missed school for vacations.

"I don't really know how to reset the expectation that was crushed when we sat in front of the computer for that year," Lloyd said.

Emotional and behavioral problems also have kept kids home from school. Research shared exclusively with AP found absenteeism and poor mental health are "interconnected," said University of Southern California professor Morgan Polikoff.

For example, in the USC study, almost a quarter of chronically absent kids had high levels of emotional or behavioral problems, according to a parent questionnaire, compared with just 7% of kids with good attendance. Emotional symptoms among teen girls were especially linked with missing school.

How sick is too sick?

When chronic absence surged to around 50% in Fresno, California, officials realized they had to remedy

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 34 of 71

pandemic-era mindsets about keeping kids home sick.

"Unless your student has a fever or threw up in the last 24 hours, you are coming to school. That's what we want," said Abigail Arie, director of student support services.

Often, said Noreida Perez, who oversees attendance, parents aren't aware physical symptoms can point to mental health struggles — such as when a child doesn't feel up to leaving their bedroom.

More than a dozen states now let students take mental health days as excused absences. But staying home can become a vicious cycle, said Hedy Chang, of Attendance Works, which works with schools on absenteeism.

"If you continue to stay home from school, you feel more disengaged," she said. "You get farther behind."

Changing the culture around sick days is only part of the problem.

At Fresno's Fort Miller Middle School, where half the students were chronically absent, two reasons kept coming up: dirty laundry and no transportation. The school bought a washer and dryer for families' use, along with a Chevy Suburban to pick up students who missed the bus. Overall, Fresno's chronic absenteeism improved to 35% in 2022-23.

Melinda Gonzalez, 14, missed the school bus about once a week and would call for rides in the Suburban.

"I don't have a car; my parents couldn't drive me to school," Gonzalez said. "Getting that ride made a big difference."

Trump scheduled to hold news conference at his New Jersey golf resort

BEDMINSTER, N.J. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump invited reporters to his New Jersey golf club Thursday for his second news conference in as many weeks as he adjusts to a newly energized Democratic ticket ahead of next week's Democratic National Convention.

Trump will meet the press as he steps up his criticism of Vice President Kamala Harris for not holding a news conference or sitting down for interviews since President Joe Biden ended his reelection campaign and endorsed her to replace him.

The vice president has barely engaged with reporters since becoming the Democratic nominee, though she travels with journalists aboard Air Force Two and sometimes answers shouted questions while boarding or leaving the plane for campaign stops.

In one brief interaction last week, she told reporters she wants "to get an interview together by the end of the month."

Trump on Wednesday made little effort to stay on message at a rally in North Carolina that his campaign billed as a big economic address, mixing pledges to slash energy prices and "unleash economic abundance" with familiar off-script tangents.

He aired his frustration over the Democrats swapping the vice president in place of Biden at the top of their presidential ticket. He repeatedly denigrated San Francisco, where Harris was once the district attorney, as "unlivable" and went after his rival in deeply personal terms, questioning her intelligence, saying she has "the laugh of a crazy person" and musing that Democrats were being "politically correct" in trying to elevate the first Black woman and person of south Asian descent to serve as vice president.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that Americans are more likely to trust Trump over Harris when it comes to handling the economy and immigration, issues that he has put at the center of his case for returning to the White House.

In his news conference last week, Trump taunted his rival, boasted of his crowd on Jan. 6, 2021, and lashed out at questions about the enthusiasm Harris' campaign has been generating. He spoke for more than an hour and made a number of false and misleading claims.

As fallout surges from Venezuela's election crisis, the region fears another mass exodus

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO, ASTRID SUÁREZ and NAYARA BATSCHE Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — President Nicolás Maduro's contested claim of victory in last month's election not only threw Venezuela into uncertainty but also spread anxiety from neighboring Colombia to faraway Chile as the region braced for a new migration surge.

Over the past decade since Maduro became president, the United Nations estimates that a staggering 7.7 million Venezuelans have fled as the economy collapsed, sneaking across porous borders and crowding into nearby countries that increasingly fear they cannot accommodate another mass exodus.

Now, as the crisis over Maduro's widely disputed reelection raises the specter of deeper global isolation in Caracas, pollsters, politicians and members of the diaspora warn that more Venezuelans are packing their bags.

"There were millions of Venezuelans who expected a political change in the country and who are now frustrated," said Jesus Seguias, who leads regional pollster Datincorp. "They're now caught in uncertainty, deciding whether to leave their country and join relatives who have already left."

Along with the millions of Venezuelans who warily watched Maduro's loyalists in the electoral council declare his victory were throngs of listless workers in the biggest open-air apparel market in Peru, which trails Colombia as the main destination for Venezuelan migrants.

"Everyone is worried because migrants are going to increase," said 38-year-old seamstress Diana Yarangá, grumbling as another morning passed in a blur of plunging sales. She blamed her lack of customers on the arrival of Venezuelans, who account for more than 20% of the 100,000 vendors in the market, according to the local union.

"There will be a fight for jobs," she said.

Hand-wringing among street vendors has extended to the highest rungs of government in Peru, Chile and Brazil, where authorities in recent days have increased border security to steel against newcomers as violent protests engulf Caracas.

"It's not that a migratory flow will start now. What can happen is that it may increase and reach a larger scale," said Interior Minister Carolina Tohá in Chile, which has strained to accept hundreds of thousands of Venezuelans in the last five years. "We must prepare."

Chile's interior ministry recently announced the acquisition of thermal cameras to track illegal migrant crossings. Last year the government dispatched armed forces to its border with Bolivia and Peru to curb migration through a perilous Andean pass frequented and is now considering sending reinforcements.

Backlash toward migrants has intensified in Chile, where in 2021 angry mobs torched a Venezuelan tent encampment in the country's north, as well as in Peru and Ecuador, which have similarly tightened requirements for issuing tourist visas to Venezuelans.

Authorities in those countries now oblige most Venezuelans to present a passport and a clean criminal record, along with other hard-to-obtain paperwork.

But attempts to curb legal migration have done little more than encourage illegal migration, experts say.

"The immigrants are coming regardless," said Cristián Doña-Reveco, a Chilean sociologist and immigration expert at the University of Nebraska. "When you're trying to deter immigration by closing borders and by not providing safe ways for immigrants to apply for asylum, you're increasing vulnerability, trafficking, dangers and migrant death."

That's the case farther north as well, where a growing number of Venezuelan migrants have trekked through the dangerous Darién jungle, which connects Colombia and Panama, to reach the United States.

"It's a humanitarian alert, with all the drama that this implies," said Colombian senator Angélica Lozano from the Green Party.

Organized criminal groups — such as Venezuela's largest gang, the Tren de Aragua — have increasingly taken advantage of the migration surge, preying on the desperation of Venezuelan migrants across Latin

America, half of whom cannot afford three meals a day, according to the U.N. refugee agency.

The notorious Tren de Aragua's push into Chile, one of the region's richest and safest countries, has transformed crime in the country and made security a top concern for Chileans.

The nation's homicide rate nearly doubled in 2022 from the year before, shocking the country and prompting leftist President Gabriel Boric to boost security spending and take a harder line on immigration.

"The public perception of Venezuelan migration here has really worsened in the last years, especially as we have seen an increase of violent crime," said Juan Pablo Ramaciotti, executive director of the Migration Policy Center, a Santiago-based think tank. "The most recent arrivals from Venezuela are not integrated into society."

The share of Chileans who say immigration is bad surged to 77% in April 2023, according to Cadem, a pollster, from 31% five years earlier. A Cadem survey published after Venezuela's elections, on Aug. 4, showed that 61% of Chilean respondents opposed the prospect of Venezuelans seeking asylum in their country.

"Chile used to be a very peaceful country and crimes were very minor, not so bloody," said 73-year-old José Parra, a retired Chilean lamenting the unprecedented occurrence of hit jobs, extortion and kidnappings in recent years. "That's why people have become so xenophobic."

With migration a hot issue as Chile's presidential election approaches next year, officials have proposed far-flung solutions like a system of mandatory quotas to share the burden and spread asylum-seekers across Latin America — similar to the European Union's controversial scheme during its 2015 migration crisis.

Chile's lawmakers have floated another idea, bringing a bill to the floor of Parliament last month that seeks to penalize illegal migrant entries with prison sentences of up to 541 days. A heated debate ensued.

"There are families who are going to escape from Venezuela. Will we put them in jail?" asked Manuel Monsalve Benavides, the undersecretary of the interior.

Colombia, a common jumping-off point for Venezuelan migrants, has long been more generous than its neighbors, granting roughly 2 million Venezuelans temporary protected status that allows them to attend school, take formal jobs and receive emergency medical treatment for 10 years.

But that could change in the coming months as authorities struggle to muster the political will to extend the internationally lauded permit program. The visa applies only to Venezuelans who entered the country before November 2023.

"We don't have the regional resources to handle the migration from Venezuela," said Ronal Rodríguez, a researcher at the Migration Observatory, part of Rosario University in Bogotá, Colombia. "The national government no longer prioritizes migration issues."

Rodríguez said he expects the most immediate Venezuelan exodus to include the parents and grandparents of young engineers, accountants and doctors who have already left for cities like Bogotá, Santiago or Lima.

Venezuela's opposition had hoped an electoral victory would draw that young generation back home and reunite the families torn apart by their country's crises.

But as Maduro clings to power, the reverse may be happening.

"People are already bringing over their older relatives to spend the next few months together until the presidential inauguration," Rodríguez said. "But if the situation does not improve, it could become a permanent flow."

A slain teacher loved attending summer camp. His mom is working to give kids the same opportunity

By TERRY SPENCER Associated Press

PIERSON, Fla. (AP) — Linda Beigel Schulman smiled as she watched 25 young campers from Fort Lauderdale and Miami spend an afternoon frolicking in a rural Florida spring. The scene brought back memories of her murdered son, Scott Beigel, who loved attending summer camp.

That's why Beigel Schulman raises money in his name so they and children elsewhere can attend sleep-away camp. It's something she and her husband, Michael Schulman, have done annually since the 2018

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 37 of 71

massacre at Parkland's Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School that left her son, two other staff members and 14 students dead.

The Scott J. Beigel Memorial Fund sent 264 children ages 9 to 16 to seven sleepaway camps this summer in Florida, New York, New Jersey and Massachusetts, most of them underprivileged or touched by gun violence.

"We want to take them out of their environment, send them to camp and let them just be kids," Beigel Schulman said. "Let them leave their woes and their troubles and everything behind. Let them meet new friends. Let them learn how to trust."

Scott Beigel became a geography teacher, in part, so he could keep attending camp and give children the same opportunities he had. He started at 7 as a camper, became a counselor in his teens, and, eventually, an administrator. He loved the sense of community such camps provided and how they helped younger generations appreciate the great outdoors.

He would have kept returning but he was fatally shot at age 35 on Feb. 14, 2018, after heroically herding 31 students to safety inside his classroom.

"Scott loved camp — that was Scott's happy place," his mother said. "I remember him saying, 'I don't quite know what I want to do, Mom.' And I was like, 'Scott, the writing's on the wall. If you want to keep going back to camp, you have to go into teaching, because it's the only profession that's going to let you have summers off.'"

The program started with 54 children in 2018 and has grown steadily since. More than \$360,000 was raised this year — all paying for the campers' enrollment and transportation. Once in the program, children can return each summer if they maintain good grades and stay out of trouble. At 17 and 18, the fund pays for them to be counselor trainees.

Beigel Schulman is not alone in honoring a loved one lost at Stoneman Douglas. Most other victims' families have also started foundations that award scholarships, promote school or gun safety, or fight disease.

It was almost 90 degrees (32 degrees Celsius) and muggy on a recent morning at one of the Florida Sheriffs Youth Ranches, this one cut into the woods an hour's drive north of Orlando. Pushing through the heat, administrators and counselors got their 38 campers outside for archery, biking and working through an obstacle course as a team.

The Beigel fund financed 25 of the campers. The counselors are a mix of volunteer deputies and college students. It's the one camp with a law enforcement theme the foundation sponsors.

"We are showing them who is behind the uniform in this atmosphere where you can feel like you belong and you're out of your own comfort zone," said Elisha Hoggard, the ranches' programs vice president. "It's giving the kids an opportunity to have a genuine positive interaction with a law enforcement officer."

Hoggard said most children attending the ranches' camps are recommended by an officer as needing a boost. Maybe the students are running with the wrong crowd or are new at school and not making friends. Or, perhaps, their parents are divorcing or they had a traumatic experience.

Broward County Deputy Al Hibbert, one of the counselors, said it's important that city kids like those from South Florida get a chance to interact with nature.

"They don't see this kind of life and to know that they can enjoy being away from their community," Hibbert said.

The campers are required to make their beds, clean their cottages, share their food and treat each other with respect. Cursing is not allowed.

Esteban Martinez, 13, conceded he is often shy, so coming to camp for the first time gave him a chance to make new friends.

"Being here is fun, it really changed me. It's good you get to be around other people," Esteban said.

A.J. Kozak, 15, said camp gives him a chance to interact with the police in a way he doesn't back home.

"It makes me think cops aren't that bad. Because in the real world, cops are aggressive," he said. "They are just humans at the end of the day."

A highlight of the Florida camp is the high ropes — while cinched tight into a safety harness, willing camp-

ers walk across a 40-foot (12-meter) pole stretched horizontally that inclines from 15 feet (4.5 meters) to 25 feet (7.6 meters) above the ground. The courageous next climb to a thin cable stretching another 10 feet (3 meters) up, grabbing ropes strung from above to keep their balance as they walk across.

"This is a biggie — I am deathly afraid of heights," screamed Isa Marti, 14, as she edged onto the pole. She felt some pressure after her friend, Hazel Stampler, crossed. A few years ago, an assailant drew a gun on Isa's family during an argument at a park. No shots were fired, but she and her brother took cover.

As Isa inched forward, she repeatedly wanted to quit and be lowered to the ground. Still, she didn't stop, encouraged by other campers. After letting out a mild obscenity, which drew a counselor's admonishment, she made it across — and climbed to the cable above, one of few who did.

"I kinda love this," she yelled as she worked her way across the wire, drawing other girls' cheers.

After being lowered, Isa beamed as Hazel greeted her. They talked about how scared they were but pushed through.

The ropes exercise "helps you overcome your fears, which will help you grow," Hazel said.

The next morning, the campers bused to nearby De Leon Springs State Park, donning life jackets before jumping into the water. Some socialized with kids from other camps or came with their families.

Beigel Schulman looked at the tableau of playing, splashing children and couldn't help but wish her son could see it.

"Isn't this great? All of these kids together — it doesn't matter what ethnicity, what religion, what this, what that. They are all one. If they could only bring this back home, it would be amazing," she said.

Democrats trust Harris slightly more than Biden on climate change, AP-NORC poll finds

By LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As the Democratic National Convention approaches, a recent poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that Democrats have slightly higher trust in Vice President Kamala Harris' ability to address the issue of climate change than President Joe Biden.

The survey found that 85% of Democrats have "a lot" or "some" trust in Harris to address climate change, while about three-quarters say the same about Biden. That's more true of Democrats under 45: about three-quarters of this group say they have "a lot" or "some" trust in Harris to handle climate issues, compared to about 6 in 10 who say that about Biden. Older Democrats are more likely than younger ones to trust either Biden or Harris.

The finding is an early indication that Democrats may be making distinct evaluations of Harris when it comes to key issues, rather than seeing her as interchangeable with Biden on policy, including issues like climate change where many Democrats are anxious and want to see government action. It also reflects the broader satisfaction Democrats have with Harris as their party's standard-bearer, and gives her an opportunity to appeal to younger Democrats, who are particularly likely to be concerned about climate change. Harris faces Republican nominee Donald Trump in the November election.

Aaron Hash, a 43-year-old Democrat and union worker, said he listened to some of Harris' speeches after Biden stepped down and thought, "those are the right words. I'd like to see actions to follow." He believes that the Democratic Party is "still a little bit on the back foot" compared to the Republican Party when it comes to fighting for key causes, including climate change, abortion access and gun control.

But Harris, he thinks, could change that.

"I feel hopeful that we'll see some meaningful protections put back into place," said Hash, who works in chemical manufacturing in Washington state. "I would like to see Democrats hopefully maintain power in the (executive branch) and then take back Congress and pass some protections that were previously protected by Chevron," referring to the Supreme Court's recent decision that reduced the power of agencies like the Environmental Protection Agency.

The problem of climate change is broadly recognized by Democrats. The AP-NORC poll found that 9 in

10 Democrats say climate change is happening, and most say the primary cause is human activities. About 7 in 10 Democrats say they have become more concerned about climate change over the past year. And they want to see government action on the issue: About 8 in 10 Democrats say the federal government is doing too little to reduce climate change, compared to about 6 in 10 independents and about 3 in 10 Republicans.

Younger Democrats are especially likely to feel the emotional weight of climate change. About 6 in 10 Democrats under 45 say "anxious" describes their emotions extremely or very well when they contemplate climate change, compared to about one-third of older Democrats. Younger Democrats are also less likely to say they are feeling motivated or hopeful about climate change. About 7 in 10 younger Democrats say "hopeful" describes their emotions as either "not very" or "not at all" well, compared to 45% of older Democrats.

Alex Campbell, a 29-year-old Democrat in Philadelphia, said there is "a lot of existential dread" among Millennials and Gen Z about what the world will look like in 50 years. Campbell gives Biden credit for passing the Inflation Reduction Act, and he thinks Harris would expand on those efforts. He hopes that by having a younger Democrat at the top of the ticket, she might care more about the importance of addressing climate change immediately.

But Campbell is pessimistic that, even if elected, Harris could make significant progress on climate change without Democratic control of Congress. Like other Democrats, Campbell worries about the role of the Supreme Court in further eroding environmental protections.

"I would probably have more hope with Harris," Campbell said. "Because she is younger, I think she will be more aggressive in her policy proposals. But at the end of the day, if there's no House and Senate that are going to pass these bills, it doesn't really matter."

About half of Americans say the outcome of the presidential election in November will be extremely or very important for the issue of climate change — and the issue of climate change is especially resonant for Democrats. About three-quarters of Democrats say the result of the 2024 election will matter for climate change, compared to 44% of independents and about 2 in 10 Republicans. Older Democrats are slightly more likely than younger ones to say this election is extremely or very important for climate change.

Nikolas Ostergard, a 21-year-old construction worker in Utah, said he thinks Harris is a stronger communicator than Biden is, and he believes that will allow her to make "an even better impact" on issues that matter to Democrats, including climate change. As a Democrat who will participate in his first presidential election in November, Ostergard is still waiting to hear Harris articulate her own environmental policy plans. He is hopeful that she "will listen more" to the public than Biden did.

"At first, I thought it wasn't going to be much better with (Harris) because she was Biden's vice president. But, it does seem like she is taking different approaches, so my hope has gone up," Ostergard said. "My hope for Harris' policies is better than it was for Biden's. And definitely way over my hope for Trump's policies."

The poll of 1,143 adults was conducted July 25-29, 2024, using a sample drawn from NORC's probability-based AmeriSpeak Panel, which is designed to be representative of the U.S. population. The margin of sampling error for all respondents is plus or minus 4.1 percentage points.

Columbia's president resigns after months of turmoil punctuated by clashes over Israel-Hamas war

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Columbia University President Minouche Shafik resigned Wednesday after a brief, tumultuous tenure that saw the head of the prestigious New York university face heavy scrutiny for her handling of protests and campus divisions over the Israel-Hamas war.

The Ivy League school in upper Manhattan was roiled this year by student demonstrations, culminating in scenes of police officers carrying zip ties and riot shields storming a building that had been occupied

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 40 of 71

by pro-Palestinian protesters. Similar protests swept college campuses nationwide, with many leading to violent clashes with police and thousands of arrests.

The announcement also comes just days after the school confirmed that three deans had resigned after officials said they exchanged disparaging texts during a campus discussion about Jewish life and antisemitism.

Shafik was also among the university leaders called for questioning before Congress earlier this year. She was heavily criticized by Republicans who accused her of not doing enough to combat concerns about antisemitism on Columbia's campus.

Shafik, who began the role in July last year, announced her resignation in an emailed letter to the university community just weeks before the start of classes on Sept. 3. The university on Monday began restricting campus access to people with Columbia IDs and registered guests, saying it wanted to curb "potential disruptions" as the new semester nears.

In her letter, Shafik heralded "progress in a number of important areas" but lamented that during her tenure it was "difficult to overcome divergent views across our community."

"This period has taken a considerable toll on my family, as it has for others in the community," she wrote. "Over the summer, I have been able to reflect and have decided that my moving on at this point would best enable Columbia to traverse the challenges ahead."

Columbia's Board of Trustees meanwhile announced that Katrina Armstrong, the CEO of Columbia University Irving Medical Center, will serve as interim president.

"Challenging times present both the opportunity and the responsibility for serious leadership to emerge from every group and individual within a community," said Armstrong, who is also the executive vice president for the university's Health and Biomedical Sciences. "As I step into this role, I am acutely aware of the trials the University has faced over the past year."

Pro-Palestinian protesters first set up tent encampments on Columbia's campus during Shafik's congressional testimony in mid-April, where she denounced antisemitism but faced criticism for how she'd responded to faculty and students accused of bias.

The school sent in police to clear the tents the following day, only for the students to return and inspire a wave of similar protests at campuses across the country, with students calling for schools to cut financial ties with Israel and the companies supporting the war.

As the protest rolled on for weeks, the school was thrust into the national spotlight. Republican House Speaker Mike Johnson showed up to denounce the encampment, while Democratic Rep. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez came to support it.

Eventually, talks between the school and the protesters came to a standstill, and as the school set a deadline for the activists to clear out, a group instead took over Hamilton Hall.

Even after the protests were cleared, Columbia decided to cancel its university-wide commencement ceremony, instead opting for a series of smaller, school-based ceremonies.

The campus was mostly quiet this summer, but a conservative news outlet in June published images of what it said were text messages exchanged by administrators while attending the May 31 panel discussion "Jewish Life on Campus: Past, Present and Future."

The officials were removed from their posts, with Shafik saying in a July 8 letter to the school community that the messages were unprofessional and "disturbingly touched on ancient antisemitic tropes."

Shafik's critics were quick to cheer the end of her tenure, which is one of the shortest in school history.

Johnson, the house speaker, said her resignation was "long overdue" and should serve as a cautionary example to other university administrators that "tolerating or protecting antisemites is unacceptable and will have consequences."

The student group Columbia Students for Justice in Palestine wrote in a post on the social media platform X that Shafik "finally got the memo" after months of protests. The campus chapter of Jewish Voice for Peace wrote it will "not be placated by her removal as the university's repression of the pro-Palestinian student movement continues."

Other prominent Ivy League leaders have stepped down in recent months, in large part due to their

response to the volatile protests on campus.

University of Pennsylvania President Liz Magill resigned in December after less than two years on the job amid pressure from donors and criticism over testimony at a congressional hearing where she was unable to say under repeated questioning that calls on campus for the genocide of Jews would violate the school's conduct policy.

And in January, Harvard University President Claudine Gay resigned amid plagiarism accusations and similar criticism over her testimony before Congress.

Shafik said she will return to the United Kingdom to lead an effort by the foreign secretary's office to review the government's approach to international development.

"I am very pleased and appreciative that this will afford me the opportunity to return to work on fighting global poverty and promoting sustainable development, areas of lifelong interest to me," she wrote.

Shafik was the first woman to take on the role, joining several women newly appointed to take the reins at Ivy League institutions.

The Egyptian-born economist previously led the London School of Economics, but had made her mark largely outside academia with roles at the World Bank, the United Kingdom's Department for International Development, the International Monetary Fund and the Bank of England.

At the time of Shafik's appointment, Columbia Board of Trustees chair Jonathan Lavine had described her as a leader with an "unshakable confidence in the vital role institutions of higher education can and must play in solving the world's most complex problems."

Ukraine says it has taken more ground and prisoners during its advance into Russia border region

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukrainian forces pushed on with their major cross-border advance into Russia's Kursk region for a second week Wednesday, claiming that they took more ground, captured more Russian prisoners and destroyed a bomber in attacks on military airfields.

Assault troops advanced 1 to 2 kilometers (about a mile) farther into areas of Kursk on Wednesday, the commander of the Ukrainian military, Gen. Oleksandr Syrskyi, said in a video posted on President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's Telegram channel.

Ukrainian troops also took more than 100 Russian soldiers prisoner, Syrskyi said. Zelenskyy said they would eventually be swapped for Ukrainian prisoners of war.

Additionally, the troops destroyed a Russian Su-34 jet used to launch devastating glide bombs at Ukrainian front-line positions and cities, Ukraine's General Staff said.

The surprise Ukrainian push into the Kursk region that began Aug. 6 has rattled the Kremlin. The daring operation is the largest attack on Russia since World War II and could involve as many as 10,000 Ukrainian troops backed by armor and artillery, military analysts say.

Syrskyi claims Ukrainian forces have advanced into 1,000 square kilometers (about 390 square miles) of the Kursk region, though it was not possible to independently verify that claim.

If true and if Ukraine actually controls all of that territory in the Kursk region, it would have captured in just one week almost as much Ukrainian land as Russian forces took — 1,175 square kilometers (450 square miles) — between January and July this year, according to calculations by the Institute for the Study of War, a Washington-based think tank.

Russian authorities acknowledged the Ukrainian gains in the Kursk region, but they described them as smaller than what Kyiv has claimed. Even so, they have evacuated about 132,000 people from the Kursk and Belgorod regions and have plans to evacuate another 59,000 more.

Ukraine's deputy prime minister, Iryna Vereschuk, said Wednesday that the military plans to open humanitarian corridors that would allow civilians in Ukraine-controlled areas of the Kursk region to head elsewhere in Russia or into Ukraine.

Ukraine also claimed that overnight Tuesday into Wednesday, it conducted its biggest attack on Russian

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 42 of 71

military airfields since the start of the Kremlin's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

A Ukrainian security official told The Associated Press that the aim was to sap Russia's air power advantage. He spoke on condition of anonymity because he was not authorized to speak publicly.

A Ukrainian Foreign Ministry spokesperson said Tuesday that Kyiv has no intention to occupy the Russian territory it controls. Rather, it aims to stop Russia from firing missiles into Ukraine from Kursk, he said.

Analysts say Kyiv's forces targeted the Kursk region because Russia's weak command and control structure there made it vulnerable.

"The situation is still highly fluid, but with clear signs that the Russian command and control of responding units is still coming together, with all-important unity of command not yet achieved," said retired U.S. Vice Adm. Robert Murrett, a professor and deputy director of Syracuse University's Institute for Security Policy and Law. "The next 2-3 days will be critical for both sides."

In AP video shot in Ukraine's Sumy region, which borders Kursk and which analysts say is serving as a staging ground for the cross-border advance, Ukrainian trucks and armored vehicles traveled along roads lined with thick forests.

Meanwhile, Russia's Belgorod border region, which is next to Kursk, declared a regional emergency Wednesday during heavy Ukrainian shelling. A federal emergency was declared in Kursk on Saturday.

Belgorod Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov described the situation there as "extremely difficult and tense," as the attacks destroyed homes and caused civilian casualties, unnerving locals.

Children, in particular, are being moved to safety, Gladkov said on his Telegram channel, adding that about 5,000 children were in camps in safe areas. He said the previous day that roughly 11,000 people had fled their homes, with about 1,000 staying in temporary accommodation centers.

It wasn't clear how, when — or whether — Ukraine would attempt to extricate itself from the ground it has taken. The Ukrainian military claims it controls 74 settlements, believed to be villages or hamlets, in the Kursk region.

Ukraine's 1+1 TV channel published a video report Wednesday that it said was from Sudzha, a Russian town about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border. The report showed burned-out columns of Russian military vehicles, and Ukrainian soldiers handing out humanitarian aid to local residents and removing Russian flags from an administrative building.

Russia's predicament is whether to pull troops from the front line in Ukraine's Donetsk region, where achieving a breakthrough is one of the Kremlin's primary war goals, to defend Kursk and halt the Ukrainian advance.

United States President Joe Biden said Tuesday that the developments in Russia are "creating a real dilemma" for Russian President Vladimir Putin. Biden declined to comment further on the top-secret operation until it is over.

The Institute for the Study of War said the incursion is unlikely to shift the dynamics of the conflict.

"Russian authorities will likely remain extremely averse to pulling Russian military units engaged in combat from (Donetsk) and will likely continue deploying limited numbers of irregular forces to Kursk ... due to concerns about further slowing the tempo of Russian operations in these higher priority directions," it said late Tuesday.

A woman in Belgorod told the AP on Tuesday that the Ukrainian shelling had been more intense for about 10 days until Monday, when it was followed by a lull. The number of people in Belgorod who openly supported the war has decreased since the start of the intensified Ukrainian attacks, she told the AP, speaking on condition of anonymity because of security concerns.

"When explosions started near the city, when people were dying and when all this started happening before our eyes ... and when it affected people personally, they stopped at least openly supporting" the war, the woman said.

In his nightly address Tuesday, Zelenskyy said the Kursk operation is also meant to lift the country's spirits after 900 days of war and to make an emphatic statement about Ukraine's military capabilities.

"Now all of us in Ukraine should act as unitedly and efficiently as we did in the first weeks and months of this war, when Ukraine took the initiative and began to turn the situation to the benefit of our state," Zelenskyy said.

A top Hamas official says the group is losing faith in the US as a mediator in Gaza cease-fire talks

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

DOHA, Qatar (AP) — A top Hamas official said the Palestinian militant group is losing faith in the United States' ability to mediate a cease-fire in Gaza ahead of a new round of talks scheduled for this week amid mounting pressure to bring an end to the 10-month-old war with Israel.

Osama Hamdan told The Associated Press in an interview Tuesday that Hamas will only participate if the talks focus on implementing a proposal detailed by U.S. President Joe Biden in May and endorsed internationally.

The U.S. referred to it as an Israeli proposal and Hamas agreed to it in principle, but Israel said Biden's speech was not entirely consistent with the proposal itself. Both sides later proposed changes, leading each to accuse the other of obstructing a deal.

Hamas is especially resistant to Israel's demand that it maintain a lasting military presence in two strategic areas of Gaza after any cease-fire, conditions only made public in recent weeks.

"We have informed the mediators that ... any meeting should be based on talking about implementation mechanisms and setting deadlines rather than negotiating something new," said Hamdan, who is a member of Hamas' Political Bureau, which includes the group's top political leaders and sets its policies. "Otherwise, Hamas finds no reason to participate."

It was not clear late Wednesday if Hamas would attend the talks beginning Thursday.

Hamdan spoke amid a new push for an end to the war, sparked by the Oct. 7 attack on Israel in which Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and dragged about 250 hostages into Gaza. Israel responded with a devastating bombardment and ground invasion that has killed nearly 40,000 Palestinians and decimated wide swaths of the territory.

There are now fears the conflict could ignite a wider conflagration.

In an hourlong interview, Hamdan accused Israel of not engaging in good faith and said the group does not believe the U.S. can or will apply pressure on Israel to seal a deal.

Hamdan claimed Israel has "either sent a non-voting delegation (to the negotiations) or changed delegations from one round to another, so we would start again, or it has imposed new conditions."

Israeli officials had no immediate comment on the claim, but Israel has denied sabotaging talks and accuses Hamas of doing so.

During the interview, Hamdan provided copies of several iterations of the cease-fire proposal and the group's written responses. A regional official familiar with the talks verified the documents were genuine. The official offered the assessment on condition of anonymity in order to share information not made public.

The documents show that at several points Hamas attempted to add additional guarantors — including Russia, Turkey and the United Nations — but Israel's responses always included only the existing mediators, the U.S., Egypt and Qatar.

In a statement Tuesday, the Israeli prime minister's office said some changes it has asked for were merely "clarifications" adding details, such as to clauses dealing with how Palestinians will return to northern Gaza, how many hostages will be released during specific phases and whether Israel can veto which Palestinian prisoners will be released in exchange for Israeli hostages. It accused Hamas of asking for 29 changes to the proposal.

"The fact is that it is Hamas which is preventing the release of our hostages, and which continues to oppose the outline," Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said earlier this month.

Hamdan, however, claimed that more than once Hamas accepted in whole or in large part a proposal put to them by the mediators only to have Israel reject it out of hand, ignore it, or launch major new military operations in the days that followed.

On one occasion, one day after Hamas accepted a cease-fire proposal, Israel launched a new operation in Rafah in southern Gaza. Israel said the proposal remained far from its demands.

Hamdan said that CIA Director William Burns told Hamas via mediators at the time that Israel would

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 44 of 71

agree to the deal.

But, he said, "the Americans were unable to convince the Israelis. I think they did not pressure the Israelis."

Asked about Hamas' concern about the U.S. role, State Department spokesperson Vedant Patel said: "Well, the United States does not think that Hamas is an honest broker."

As to whether Hamas will attend the talks, Patel said representatives of Qatar had assured them they would.

"We fully expect these talks to move forward as they should. Our point of view is that all negotiators should return to the table," Patel said.

Negotiations have taken on new urgency as the war has threatened to ignite a regional conflict.

Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah are mulling retaliatory strikes against Israel after the killings of Hamas' political leader, Ismail Haniyeh, in Tehran and of top Hezbollah commander Fouad Shukur in Beirut. Israel claimed the latter strike, but has neither confirmed nor denied its role in the blast that killed Haniyeh.

After a brief truce in November that saw the release of more than 100 Israeli hostages, multiple rounds of cease-fire talks have fallen apart. Around 110 people taken captive remain in Gaza, about a third of them believed to be dead.

Hamdan accused Israel of stepping up its attacks on Hamas leaders after the group agreed in principle to the latest proposal put forward by mediators.

Israel said a July 13 operation in Gaza killed Mohammed Deif, the shadowy leader of Hamas' military wing. More than 90 other people also died, local health officials said.

Hamdan insisted Deif is alive.

Two weeks later, Haniyeh was killed, with Hamas and Iran blaming Israel. Hamas then named Yahya Sinwar, its Gaza chief seen as responsible for the Oct. 7 attack, to replace Haniyeh — who had been considered a more moderate figure.

Hamdan acknowledged there are "some difficulties" and delays in communicating with Sinwar, who is believed to be hiding deep in the network of tunnels in the Gaza Strip. But Hamdan insisted this does not pose a major barrier to the negotiations.

The most intractable sticking point in the talks remains whether and how a temporary cease-fire would become permanent.

Israel has been wary of proposals that the initial truce would be extended as long as negotiations continue over a permanent deal. Israel seems concerned Hamas would drag on endlessly with fruitless negotiations.

Hamas has said it is concerned Israel will resume the war once its most vulnerable hostages are returned, a scenario reflected in some of Netanyahu's recent comments.

All versions of the cease-fire proposal shared by Hamdan stipulated that Israeli forces withdraw completely from Gaza in the deal's second phase.

Recently, however, officials with knowledge of the negotiations told the AP that Israel had introduced new demands to maintain a presence in a strip of land on the Gaza-Egypt border known as the Philadelphi corridor, as well as along a highway running across the breadth of the strip, separating Gaza's south and north. Hamas has insisted on a full withdrawal of Israeli forces.

Hamdan said the group had not yet received in writing the new conditions.

Hamdan acknowledged Palestinians have suffered immensely in the war and are yearning for a cease-fire, but insisted the group couldn't simply give up its demands.

"A cease-fire is one thing," he said, "and surrender is something else."

Gena Rowlands, acting powerhouse and star of movies by her director-husband, John Cassavetes, dies

By MARK KENNEDY AP Entertainment Writer

Gena Rowlands, hailed as one of the greatest actors to ever practice the craft and a guiding light in independent cinema as a star in groundbreaking movies by her director husband, John Cassavetes, and who later charmed audiences in her son's tear-jerker "The Notebook," has died. She was 94.

Rowlands' death was confirmed Wednesday by representatives for her son, filmmaker Nick Cassavetes. He revealed earlier this year that his mother had Alzheimer's disease. TMZ reported that Rowlands died Wednesday at her home in Indian Wells, California.

Operating outside the studio system, the husband-and-wife team of John Cassavetes and Rowlands created indelible portraits of working-class strivers and small-timers in such films as "A Woman Under the Influence," "Gloria" and "Faces."

Rowlands made 10 films across four decades with Cassavetes, including "Minnie and Moskowitz" in 1971, "Opening Night" in 1977 and "Love Streams" in 1984.

She earned two Oscar nods for two of them: 1974's "A Woman Under the Influence," in which she played a wife and mother cracking under the burden of domestic harmony, and "Gloria" in 1980, about a woman who helps a young boy escape the mob.

"He had a particular sympathetic interest in women and their problems in society, how they were treated and how they solved and overcame what they needed to, so all his movies have some interesting women, and you don't need many," she told the AP in 2015.

In addition to the Oscar nominations, Rowlands earned three Primetime Emmy Awards, one Daytime Emmy and two Golden Globes. She was awarded an honorary Academy Award in 2015 in recognition of her work and legacy in Hollywood. "You know what's wonderful about being an actress? You don't just live one life," she said at the podium. "You live many lives."

A new generation was introduced to Rowlands in her son's blockbuster "The Notebook," in which she played a woman whose memory is ravaged, looking back on a romance for the ages. Her younger self was portrayed by Rachel McAdams. (She also appeared in Nick Cassavetes' "Unhook the Stars" in 1996.)

In her later years, Rowlands made several appearances in films and TV, including in "The Skeleton Key" and the detective series "Monk." Her last appearance in a movie was in 2014, playing a retiree who befriends her gay dance instructor in "Six Dance Lessons in Six Weeks."

One of her career triumphs was 1974's "Woman Under the Influence," playing a lower middle-class housewife who, the actor said, "was totally vulnerable and giving; she had no sense of her own worth." In "Gloria" (1980) she portrayed a faded showgirl menaced by her ex-boyfriend, a mobster boss. She was Oscar nominated as best actress for both performances.

She and Cassavetes met at the American School of Dramatic Arts when both their careers were beginning. They married four months later. In 1960 Cassavetes used his earnings from the TV series "Johnny Stacatto" to finance his first film, "Shadows." Partly improvised, shot with natural light on New York locations with a \$40,000 budget, it was applauded by critics for its stark realism.

Gena (pronounced Jenna) Rowlands became a seasoned actor through live television drama and tours in "The Seven Year Itch" and "Time for Ginger" as well as off-Broadway.

Her big break came when Josh Logan cast her opposite Edward G. Robinson in Paddy Chayefsky's play "Middle of the Night." Her role as a young woman in love with her much older boss brought reviews hailing her as a new star.

MGM offered her a contract for two pictures a year. Her first film, a comedy directed by and costarring Jose Ferrer, "The High Cost of Loving," brought Rowlands comparisons to one of the great 1930s stars, Carole Lombard.

But she asked to be released from her contract because she was expecting a baby. Often during her career she would absent herself from the screen for long stretches to attend to family matters.

In addition to Nick, she and Cassavetes had two daughters, Alexandra and Zoe, who also pursued act-

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 46 of 71

ing careers.

John Cassavetes died of cirrhosis of the liver in 1989, and Rowlands returned to acting to assuage her grief. Between assignments she sometimes attended film festivals and societies for Cassavetes screenings.

"I want everyone to see his films," she said at the San Sebastian Festival in 1992. "John was one of a kind, the most totally fearless person I've ever known. He had a very specific view of life and the individuality of people."

Virginia Cathryn Rowlands was born in 1930 (some sources give a later date) in Cambria, Wisconsin, where her Welsh ancestors had settled in the early 19th century. Her father was a banker and state senator. She was a withdrawn child who loved books and make-believe. Her mother encouraged the girl's ambition to become an actor.

Rowlands quit the University of Wisconsin in her junior year to pursue an acting career in New York. Like other actors of her generation, she gained invaluable experience in the thriving field of television drama in the 1950s, appearing on all the major series.

After leaving her MGM contract, she was able to choose her film roles. When nothing attracted her, she appeared in TV series such as "Alfred Hitchcock Presents," "Bonanza," "Dr. Kildare" and "The Virginian." One of her career delights was co-starring with her icon Bette Davis on the TV movie "Strangers" in 1979.

Her other movies included "Lonely Are the Brave" with Kirk Douglas, "The Spiral Road" (Rock Hudson), "A Child Is Waiting" (with Burt Lancaster and Judy Garland, directed by Cassavetes), "Two Minute Warning" (Charlton Heston), "Tempest" (co-starring with Cassavetes and Molly Ringwald, in her screen debut) and the mother who wants to do right by her children in Paul Schrader's 1987 study of a blue-collar family "Light of Day."

In middle age and beyond, Rowlands continued playing demanding roles. In Woody Allen's austere drama, "Another Woman," she was cast as a writer whose life has been shielded from emotion until dire incidents force her to deal with her feelings. In the groundbreaking TV movie "An Early Frost," she appeared as a mother confronting her son's AIDS.

Rowlands commented in 1992 that her roles remained in her memory.

"Sometimes, those white nights when I have no sleep and a lot of time to think about everything, I'll examine different possibilities of different characters and what they might be doing now," she said.

Trump's campaign called it an economic address. He made big promises but mostly veered off topic

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (AP) — Donald Trump made little effort to stay on message Wednesday at a rally in North Carolina that his campaign billed as a big economic address, mixing pledges to slash energy prices and "unleash economic abundance" with familiar off-script tangents on Democratic nominee Kamala Harris' laugh, the mechanics of wind energy and President Joe Biden's son.

The 75-minute speech featured a litany of broad policy ideas and even grander promises to end inflation, bolster already record-level U.S. energy production and raise Americans' standard of living. But those pronouncements were often lost in the former president's typically freewheeling, grievance-laden style that has made it difficult for him to answer the enthusiasm of Harris' nascent campaign.

Trump aired his frustration over Democrats swapping the vice president in place of Biden at the top of their presidential ticket. He repeatedly denigrated San Francisco, where Harris was once the district attorney, as "unlivable" and went after his rival in deeply personal terms, questioning her intelligence, saying she has "the laugh of a crazy person" and musing that Democrats were being "politically correct" in trying to elevate the first Black woman and person of South Asian descent to serve as vice president.

"You know why she hasn't done an interview? She's not smart. She's not intelligent. And we've gone through enough of that with this guy, Crooked Joe," Trump said, using the nickname he often uses for Biden.

When he was focusing on policy, Trump pledged to end "job-killing regulations," roll back Biden-era restrictions on fossil fuel production and investments in green energy, instruct Cabinet members to use

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 47 of 71

"every tool" to "defeat inflation" within the first year of a second term and end all taxes on Social Security benefits and income classified as tips.

He promised economic growth so abundant that "we will pay off all our debt," similar to a pledge he made in 2016 before the national debt ballooned during his presidency. He pledged to lower Americans' energy costs by "50 to 70%" within 12 months, or a "maximum 18 months." But he immediately hedged: "If it doesn't work out, you'll say, 'oh well, I voted for him and he still got it down a lot.'"

At one point, Trump seemed even to question the purpose of giving a speech ostensibly devoted to the economy. "They wanted to do a speech on the economy," he rified, apparently referring to his campaign aides. "They say it's the most important subject. I'm not sure it is."

Trump spoke at Harrah's Cherokee Center, an auditorium in downtown Asheville, with his podium flanked by more than a dozen American flags and custom backdrops that read: "No tax on Social Security" and "No tax on tips" — a made-for-TV setup to project the policy heft his campaign wanted Trump to convey.

Republicans had been looking for him to focus more on the economy than the scattershot arguments and attacks he has made on Harris since Democrats shifted to her as their presidential nominee. Twice in the past week, Trump has virtually bypassed such opportunities, first in an hourlong news conference at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, then in a 2 1/2-hour conversation on the social media platform X with CEO Elon Musk.

When he stayed on script Wednesday, Trump contrasted the current economy with his own presidency, asking, "Is anything less expensive under Kamala Harris and Crooked Joe?"

"Kamala has declared that tackling inflation will be a 'Day One priority' for her," Trump said. "But Day One for Kamala was 3 1/2 years ago. Why hasn't she done it?"

Yet throughout his speech, Trump ping-ponged between his prepared remarks and familiar attacks — deviating from the teleprompter in the middle of explaining a new economic promise when something triggered another thought. He ticked through prepared remarks crisply and quickly. The rest was his more freewheeling style, punctuated with hand gestures and hyperbole.

More than once, he jumped from a policy contrast with Harris to taking another swipe at her hometown of San Francisco. He also noted several times that it was Biden, not Harris, who earned votes from Democratic primary voters. During a section of his speech on energy, he slipped in an apparent dig at Hunter Biden, the president's son, and his "laptop from hell."

Trump sought to connect his emphasis on the border and immigration policy to the economy. He repeated his dubious claim that the influx would strain Social Security and Medicare to the point of collapse. He bemoaned the taxpayer money being spent on housing migrants in some U.S. cities, including his native New York. But most of the time he spent on immigration was the same broadsides about immigrants and violent crime that have been a staple of Trump's speeches since 2015.

The latest attempt to reset his campaign comes in the state that delivered Trump his closest statewide margin of victory four years ago and that is once again expected to be a battleground in 2024.

Trump aides have long thought that an inflationary economy was an albatross for Democrats this year. But the event in Asheville only amplifies questions about whether Trump can effectively make it a centerpiece of his matchup against Harris.

The speech came the same day that the Labor Department reported that year-over-year inflation reached its lowest level in more than three years in July, a potential reprieve for Harris in the face of Trump's attacks over inflation. Harris plans to be in North Carolina on Friday to release more details of her promise to make "building up the middle class ... a defining goal of my presidency."

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research finds that Americans are more likely to trust Trump over Harris when it comes to handling the economy, but the difference is slight — 45% for Trump and 38% for Harris.

Some voters who came to hear Trump said they were ready to hear him talk more specifically about his plans, not because they don't already trust him but because they want him to expand his appeal ahead of Election Day.

"He needs to tell people what he's going to do, talk about the issues," said Timothy Vath, a 55-year-old

who drove from Greenville, South Carolina. "He did what he said he was going to do" in his initial term. "Talk about how he'd do that again."

Mona Shope, a 60-year-old from nearby Candler, said Trump, despite his own wealth, "understands working people and wants what's best for us." A recent retiree from a public community college, Shope said she has a state pension but has picked up part-time work to mitigate against inflation. "It's so I can still have vacations and spending money after paying my bills," she said. "Sometimes it feels like there's nothing left to save."

In some of his off-script moments, Trump ventured into familiar misrepresentations of fact, including when he mocked wind energy by suggesting people would face power outages when the wind wasn't blowing.

Trump again insisted that inflation would not have spiked had he been reelected in 2020, a claim that ignores the global supply chain interruptions during the COVID-19 pandemic, COVID-19 spending boosts that included a massive aid package Trump signed as president, and the global energy price effects of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

A Harris aide said Wednesday that the vice president welcomes any comparison Trump is able to make. "No matter what he says, one thing is certain: Trump has no plan, no vision, and no meaningful interest in helping build up the middle class," communications director Michael Tyler wrote in a campaign memo. Tyler pointed to the economic slowdown of the pandemic and 2017 tax cuts that were tilted to corporations and wealthy individual households, and predicted Trump's proposals on trade, taxation and reversing Biden-era policies would "send inflation skyrocketing and cost our economy millions of jobs – all to benefit the ultra-wealthy and special interests."

Ruling: Fetus can be referred to as 'unborn human being' in Arizona abortion measure voter pamphlet

By SEJAL GOVINDARAO Associated Press

PHOENIX (AP) — An informational pamphlet for Arizona voters, who will decide in the fall whether to guarantee a constitutional right to an abortion, can refer to an embryo or fetus as an "unborn human being," the state's highest court ruled Wednesday.

The Arizona Supreme Court justices sided with Republican lawmakers, who drafted the language sent to all voters in the state, over proponents of the ballot measure on abortion rights.

The ruling comes as abortion foes have long worked to give embryos and fetuses the same legal and constitutional protections on par with those of the women carrying them. The issue was highlighted recently when the Alabama Supreme Court ruled that frozen embryos are legally protected children, forcing lawmakers to scramble to enact protections for in vitro fertilization.

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. They hope the ballot measure in Arizona, one of a handful of battleground states that will determine which party controls the presidency and the U.S. Senate, will drive sympathetic voters to cast a ballot.

The ruling drew swift criticism from the ballot measure's backers, who argued the phrase "unborn human being" is neither impartial nor objective. They said they were concerned that Arizonans would be subjected to biased and politically charged words.

"We are deeply disappointed in this ruling, but will not be deterred from doing everything in our power to communicate to voters the truth of the Arizona Abortion Access Act and why it's critical to vote YES to restore and protect access to abortion care this fall," the group, Arizona for Abortion Access, said in a statement.

The ballot measure would allow abortions until an embryo or fetus could survive outside the womb, typically around 24 weeks, with exceptions allowing later-term abortions 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.

Arizona House Speaker Ben Toma, a Republican who co-chairs the legislative council, the panel that

drafted the disputed language, said it's intended to help voters understand the current law.

"The Arizona Supreme Court's ruling is correct," Toma said.

Arizona for Abortion Access sued the majority-Republican legislative council for including what the group called politicized language. The Superior Court agreed, finding that the GOP-favored language was "packed with emotion and partisan meaning." That ruling was overturned by the Supreme Court, whose seven justices were appointed by Republican governors.

The brief ruling, signed by Vice Chief Justice John Lopez, did not explain the justices' rationale, saying a full opinion would be released later. Justice Clint Bolick, whose wife is a Republican lawmaker on the legislative council, recused himself from the case.

The language describing an embryo or fetus as an "unborn human being" will go in a pamphlet that gives voters information on candidates and ballot measures to help inform their choices. The secretary of state's office, which determines what gets printed on the ballot itself, said "unborn human being" would not appear there.

The secretary of state's office said Monday that it had certified 577,971 signatures, far above the number required to put the question before voters.

As anti-abortion groups and Republican allies reel from a string of defeats at the ballot box, many have used an array of strategies to keep abortion rights off the ballot, including through monthslong legal battles over ballot initiative language.

In Missouri, for example, Republican Attorney General Andrew Bailey stonewalled the abortion-rights campaign for months before the secretary of state, Republican Jay Ashcroft, tried to describe the proposal to voters as allowing "dangerous and unregulated abortions until live birth." A state appeals court last year ruled that Ashcroft's wording was politically partisan and tossed it out. In Florida, language was at the center of attempts by the state's Republican attorney general to keep a proposed abortion rights amendment off the ballot. Many of these strategies build off of those seen last year in Ohio, where voters overwhelmingly passed a state constitutional amendment protecting abortion rights.

Other tactics to thwart abortion ballot measure efforts have included attempts to remove signatures from petitions, legislative pushes for competing ballot measures that could confuse voters, and attempts to raise the thresholds for ballot initiatives or ban residents from placing abortion initiatives on the state-wide ballot altogether.

The State Fair of Texas is banning firearms, drawing threats of legal action from Republican AG

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

DALLAS (AP) — The State Fair of Texas is laying down a new rule before millions of visitors flock through the gates for corn dogs, deep-fried delights and a friendly wave from a five-story cowboy named Big Tex: No guns allowed.

But that decision by fair organizers — which comes after a shooting last year on the 277-acre (112-hectare) fairgrounds in the heart of Dallas — has drawn outrage from Republican lawmakers, who in recent years have proudly expanded gun rights in Texas. On Wednesday, the state's attorney general threatened a lawsuit unless the fair reversed course.

"Dallas has fifteen days to fix the issue," Republican Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton said in a statement, "otherwise I will see them in court."

Tensions over where and how gun owners can carry firearms in public are frequent in Texas, but the standoff with one of the state's most beloved institutions has moved the fight onto unusual turf. The fair has not backed down since cowboy hat-wearing organizers announced the new policy at a news conference last week.

The fair, which reopens in September and lasts for nearly a month, dates back to 1886. In addition to a maze of midway games, car shows and the Texas Star Ferris wheel — one of the tallest in the U.S. — the fairgrounds are also home to the annual college football rivalry between the University of Texas and

University of Oklahoma. And after Big Tex, the towering cowboy that greets fairgoers, went up in flames in 2012 due to an electrical short, the fair mascot was met with great fanfare upon its return.

But a shooting near the rows of food booths last year dampened the revelry.

Investigators said one man opened fire on another, injuring three people and resulting in police clearing the fairgrounds. Videos posted on social media showed groups of people running along sidewalks and climbing barriers as they fled.

Defending the new policy Wednesday, fair spokesperson Karissa Condoianis acknowledged it has attracted "both criticism and praise." She noted that the fair previously allowed gun owners to carry concealed weapons "even after virtually all other public events ceased to allow the same."

"This is the right decision moving forward to ensure a safe environment and family-friendly atmosphere," Condoianis said.

Republicans lawmakers urged the fair to reconsider in a letter signed by more than 70 legislators, arguing that the ban made the fairgrounds less safe and was "anything but a celebration of Texas."

In a separate letter to the City of Dallas, Paxton argued that the ban infringes on the rights of Texas gun owners. The city owns Fair Park, where the annual fair takes place; Paxton argued that gun owners can carry on property owned or leased by the government unless otherwise prohibited by state law.

A city spokesperson said in a statement Wednesday that they were reviewing Paxton's letter "and will respond accordingly."

Condoianis said Wednesday that the fair, which is a private, not-for-profit organization, "is not a government entity nor is it controlled by a government entity." She said they are aware of Paxton's letter to the city, and that it appears he's "seeking clarification" on the city's relationship with the fair and its use of Fair Park under the long-term lease agreement between the two parties.

Condoianis also disagreed that the ban makes the fair less safe, saying the policy is similar to rules at large community gatherings such as sporting events and concerts. She also noted that 200 uniformed and armed Dallas police officers and fair safety team members will be patrolling the fairgrounds. The fair said on its website that attendees go through a screening process before entering.

The fair is a "microcosm of the kind of mystique that comes with Texas," said Brian Franklin, associate director of the Center for Presidential History at Southern Methodist University in Dallas. The fair, he said, speaks to Texans' desire to emphasize the state's rural cowboy heritage and being on the cutting edge of technology.

"You can go to the hall where it's all the most amazing new cars and maybe other exhibits about technology," he said, "and then you can also go and see the show cows."

Stonehenge's 'altar stone' originally came from Scotland and not Wales, new research shows

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The ancient ritual meaning of Stonehenge is still a mystery, but researchers are one step closer to understanding how the famous stone circle was created.

The unique stone lying flat at the center of the monument was brought to the site in southern England from near the tip of northeast Scotland, researchers reported Wednesday in the journal *Nature*. It's not clear whether the 16-foot (5-meter) stone was carried by boat or across land — a journey of more than 460 miles (740 kilometers).

"It's a surprise that it's come from so far away," said University of Exeter archaeologist Susan Greaney, who was not involved in the study.

For more than a hundred years, scientists believed that Stonehenge's central sandstone slab — long called the "altar stone" — came from much closer Wales. But a study last year by some of the same researchers showed that the stone didn't match the geology of Wales' sandstone formations. The actual source of the stone remained unknown until now.

For the study, the team was not permitted to chip away rocks at the site, but instead analyzed miner-

als in bits of rock that had been collected in previous digs, some dating back to the 1840s. They found a match in the sandstone formations of Orcadian Basin in northeast Scotland, a region that includes parts of the tip of the Scottish peninsula as well as the Orkney Islands.

"That geological 'fingerprint' isn't repeated in any other area of sediment in the U.K.," said Aberystwyth University geologist Nick Pearce, a study co-author.

Greaney said the difficult logistics of moving the stone such a long distance show a high level of coordination and cultural connection between these two regions of ancient Britain.

Stonehenge was constructed around 5,000 years ago, with stones forming different circles brought to the site at different times. The placement of stones allows for the sun to rise through a stone "window" during summer solstice. The ancient purpose of the altar stone — which lies flat at the heart of Stonehenge, now beneath other rocks — remains a mystery.

"Stonehenge isn't a settlement site, but a place of ceremony or ritual," said Heather Sebire, senior curator at English Heritage, who was not involved in the study. She said that past archaeological excavations had not uncovered evidence of feasting or daily living at the site.

Previous research has shown cultural connections — such as similarities in pottery styles — between the area around Stonehenge and Scotland's Orkney Islands. Other stones at Stonehenge came from western Wales.

While Britain is dotted with other Neolithic stone circles, "the thing that's unique about Stonehenge is the distance from which the stones have been sourced," said Aberystwyth University's Richard Bevins, a study co-author.

Vikings rookie QB J.J. McCarthy to miss season following right knee surgery to repair torn meniscus

By TOM WITHERS AP Sports Writer

BEREA, Ohio (AP) — J.J. McCarthy's rookie year with the Minnesota Vikings is already over.

The former Michigan star quarterback and first-round NFL draft pick will miss the season after undergoing surgery to repair torn meniscus in his right knee, which he injured in his preseason debut last week.

McCarthy had the operation on Wednesday after suffering the injury at some point against Las Vegas. McCarthy had been having a solid training camp and was pushing starter Sam Darnold, who signed a one-year, \$10 million contract with Minnesota in March.

Vikings coach Kevin O'Connell delivered the news about McCarthy shortly after the team arrived for two days of joint practices with the Browns.

McCarthy's loss was especially tough for a franchise looking for a fresh start after letting Kirk Cousins go as a free agent.

While some may have doubted Minnesota's decision to take McCarthy with the 10th overall pick, the 21-year-old, who led the Wolverines to a national title last season, checked all the boxes over the past few months.

"I really believe that J.J. has kind of confirmed to me and a lot of our coaches and players that we got the right guy in the building for the future," O'Connell said. "And he did it in a short amount of time. That's what makes this news hard.

"Because you know just how exciting it would have been as a daily, minute-to-minute process moving forward. But I think that optimism should be felt by anybody in our building and hopefully our fans."

McCarthy went 11 of 17 for 188 yards with two touchdowns and one interception in the 24-23 win over the Raiders — a performance that may have led to him getting more reps with the starters.

Following the game, he told the Vikings his knee was sore and imaging tests confirmed the meniscus tear. The Vikings initially hoped McCarthy would only miss a month while acknowledging they wouldn't know for certain until he had surgery.

"I'm the most crushed for J.J.," O'Connell said.

According to Sportradar, there have been 135 quarterbacks drafted in the first round since 1967, and

McCarthy will be just the eighth not to play as a rookie. The most recent to sit out his whole rookie year was Green Bay's Jordan Love in 2020.

With McCarthy no longer in the mix, Nick Mullens will be Minnesota's No. 2 quarterback. Jaren Hall is No. 3 on the depth chart.

The 29-year-old Mullens started three games for Minnesota last year, when the Vikings' season was derailed by an injury to Cousins and the team cycled through multiple backups.

"He's not just another capable guy in that quarterback room," O'Connell said. "He is providing context, experience and understanding of our offense on a daily basis. His experience last year was critical. I think he learned that he could be an explosive driver of our offense and also had some lessons of taking care of the football and trying to make sure we're playing aggressively but not over the line by putting the ball at risk of being turned over.

"The team is excited about Nick because like many of us we've gone through the ups and downs but he's in a position to really be a guy we can rely on and be a snap away."

Sweet and salty deal worth \$30 billion would put M&M's and Snickers alongside Cheez-It and Pringles

By DEE-ANN DURBIN and MICHELLE CHAPMAN AP Business Writers

M&M's maker Mars is buying Kellanova, the maker of Cheez-Its and Pop-Tarts, for nearly \$30 billion in an effort to broaden its snacking portfolio and expand globally.

Kellanova was created last year when the Kellogg Co. split into two companies. Chicago-based Kellanova sells many of the former company's most profitable brands, including Pringles, Eggo, Town House, MorningStar Farms and Rice Krispies Treats. It had net sales of more than \$13 billion last year and has about 23,000 employees.

Mars Inc. said Wednesday that it will pay \$83.50 per share in cash. The company put the total value of the transaction at \$35.9 billion, including debt.

The deal will give Mars significantly more buying power from suppliers and selling power in negotiations with grocers and other retailers, said Randal Kenworthy, a senior partner specializing in consumer products at the consulting firm West Monroe.

Mars and Kellanova combined would control around 8% of the U.S. snack market, he said, compared to a 9% share for PepsiCo, which owns Frito-Lay.

Kellanova also has a bigger international footprint, which will help Mars expand overseas, Kenworthy said. And Mars has made a lot of improvements in its organizational efficiency that it can apply to Kellanova, he said.

"Strategically it makes a lot of sense," Kenworthy said.

It is the biggest deal in the sector since J.M. Smucker bought Hostess for \$5.6 billion last year, and among the largest of 2024 behind Exxon Mobil's \$60 billion acquisition of Pioneer Natural Resources and Capital One Financial's \$35 billion acquisition of Discover Financial Services.

Steve Cahillane, Kellanova's CEO, president and chairman, said Mars approached Kellanova a few months ago to discuss the deal. Cahillane noted that Kellanova posted higher-than-expected revenue in the last few quarters and reaffirmed its full-year guidance despite challenging economic conditions.

"I suspect that Mars — watching that momentum — led them to come forward and say, 'You know, now's the time, we ought to talk to these guys,'" Cahillane told The Associated Press in an interview. "So it was really that simple."

Mars' purchase of Kellanova is expected to close in the first half of next year. Once it's complete, Kellanova will become part of Mars Snacking, which is also based in Chicago.

Cahillane said that while some corporate functions might be consolidated, he expects most Kellanova employees to be folded into Mars.

"They have chewing gum plants, they have pet food plants, we have Pringles plants and Cheez-It plants. You can't make our food at their plants," he said. Cahillane said he will run Kellanova until the deal closes.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 53 of 71

Mars, headquartered in McLean, Virginia, is one of the largest privately held companies in the U.S. Mars said it had net sales of \$50 billion last year and has 150,000 employees.

"The Kellanova brands significantly expand our snacking platform, allowing us to even more effectively meet consumer needs and drive profitable business growth," Andrew Clarke, global president of Mars Snacking, said in a statement.

Arun Sundaram, an analyst with investment research company CFRA, said he expects U.S. anti-trust regulators to scrutinize the deal given the current backdrop of high food prices. He believes the deal will ultimately go through because there is so little overlap between the portfolios of the two companies.

Kenworthy said regulators might be concerned about the overlap in healthier snacks at the two companies. Kellanova owns the RxBar and NutriGrain brands while Mars owns Kind and Nature's Bakery. But Cahillane said the overlap is very small in the large and fragmented health bar category.

The acquisition would expand Mars' reach into the salty snack category. The company owns brands like Combos and Ben's Original, but it's primarily known for its chocolates, candies and pet food. Mars makes M&M's, Lifesavers, Juicy Fruit gum and Skittles as well as Pedigree and Royal Canin pet foods, among other products.

Sales of some of Mars' products, like gum, have sputtered in recent years as snacking habits shift. And chocolate sales have been declining in the U.S. as younger customers look for other flavors, like sour candy. Unit sales of chocolate in the U.S. have fallen 5.5% over the last year, according to Nielsen IQ.

Other companies have also been adding salty snacks to their lineup in pursuit of changing American tastes. In 2017, candy bar maker Hershey acquired Amplify, the maker of Skinny Pop popcorn, for \$1.2 billion. Four years later, Hershey spent another \$1.2 billion for Dot's Homestyle Pretzels.

The acquisition would also open the door to potentially lucrative product combinations like Skittles-flavored Pop-Tarts or Snickers-flavored Pringles. Such limited-time offers which have been showing up more frequently as food companies try to grab consumers' attention and win space on store shelves.

Kenworthy said the timing is ideal because easing inflation and prices will make name-brand snacks more appealing to customers who have been migrating to cheaper store brands. Economists say that many consumers appear to be returning to pre-pandemic norms, when most companies felt they couldn't raise prices very much without losing business. Kellanova lowered its prices by 1% in North America in the second quarter and saw its sales volumes rise 2%.

The other company formed in the Kellogg split, WK Kellogg Co., retained cereal brands like Raisin Bran, Frosted Flakes and Froot Loops, which have struggled with slowing sales in recent years. It is not involved in the deal.

"Mars is getting the crown jewels in term of the spinoff components," Kenworthy said.

Mars got its start in 1911, when founder Frank Mars started making and selling butter cream candy from his home in Tacoma, Washington. The company moved to Chicago in 1929 and introduced the Snickers bar the following year.

Mars has steadily grown through acquisitions. It entered the pet food business in 1935 with the purchase of a U.K. dog food brand and bought the Dove ice cream brand in 1986. In 2008, it purchased the Wrigley chewing gum business for \$23 billion.

Shares of Kellanova rose nearly 8% to close at \$80.28 on Wednesday.

Hunter Biden reportedly sought US government help for Ukrainian gas company Burisma

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hunter Biden asked the U.S. ambassador to Italy for help regarding an energy project a Ukrainian gas company was pursuing while his father was vice president, according to The New York Times.

Hunter Biden, son of President Joe Biden, wrote a letter to the ambassador in 2016 seeking assistance for Burisma, which had been working on a geothermal project in Italy, the newspaper reported, citing newly released records and interviews.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 54 of 71

At the time, Hunter Biden sat on the board of Burisma, which was having trouble getting regulatory approval for the project, a businessman involved in the project told the newspaper.

The revelation is likely to fuel Republican criticism of Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings, which have been the center of GOP investigations into the president's family. The report comes weeks before Hunter Biden is set to stand trial on federal charges alleging he failed to pay taxes on money he received from Burisma and other foreign businesses.

Prosecutors indicated last week in court papers they want to introduce evidence at trial about Hunter Biden's other business dealings, including 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 lawyer said his client's outreach to the ambassador on behalf of Burisma was a "proper request" and that he had asked "various people" to help arrange an introduction between Burisma and the president of Italy's Tuscany region.

"No meeting occurred, no project materialized, no request for anything in the U.S. was ever sought and only an introduction in Italy was requested," attorney Abbe Lowell said.

The records suggest that embassy officials were uneasy about Hunter Biden's request, according to the newspaper. One official wrote: "I want to be careful about promising too much."

A White House spokesperson told The Times that the president was not aware when he was vice president that his son had reached out to the embassy on Burisma's behalf.

"He's not in business with his son," White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Wednesday of the president. "He's certainly not aware of this and this is something that Hunter Biden has to speak to. He's a private citizen, it is something for him to focus on."

Pressed on whether Biden was satisfied with how his son conducted himself, Jean-Pierre told reporters: "I can't speak to this. This is something that is an ongoing process."

John R. Phillips, the U.S. ambassador to Italy at the time, said he received a lot of letters and did not remember Hunter Biden reaching out to him.

"I certainly would pay attention to it" if the younger Biden had contacted him, Phillips told the newspaper. "Out of courtesy, I'd probably make sure he got a response of some sort, but not necessarily from me. And I wouldn't even want to encourage it, because I wouldn't get us involved in something like that."

Burisma's project never materialized, and it's not clear whether the embassy ever agreed to help the company.

Hunter Biden's trial set to begin in Los Angeles in September alleges a four-year scheme to avoid paying at least \$1.4 million in taxes during a time in which the president's son has acknowledged struggling with a drug addiction.

Hunter Biden's lawyers have indicated they will argue at trial that drug use affected his decision-making and judgment to the point that he was "unable to form the requisite intent to commit the crimes he has been charged with."

He was convicted of three felony charges in a separate case alleging he lied on a mandatory gun-purchase form in 2018 by saying he was not illegally using or addicted to drugs. He could face up to 25 years in prison at sentencing set for Nov. 13 in Wilmington, Delaware, but as a first-time offender, he is likely to get far less time or avoid prison entirely.

Ruling that bounced Kennedy from New York ballot could challenge him in other states

By MICHAEL HILL and SEAN MURPHY Associated Press

ALBANY, N.Y. (AP) — Robert F. Kennedy Jr.'s independent presidential campaign suffered a blow this week when a judge in New York invalidated his petition to put his name on the state ballot, a ruling that could potentially create problems for the candidate as he faces challenges elsewhere.

Kennedy's attorneys filed an appeal Wednesday to a ruling this week from Justice Christina Ryba, who said the residence listed on his nominating petitions was a "sham" address he used to maintain his voter

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 55 of 71

registration and to further his political aspirations. The judge ruled in favor of the challengers, who argued Kennedy's actual residence was the home in Los Angeles he shares with his wife, the "Curb Your Enthusiasm" actor Cheryl Hines.

New York is just one of more than a half-dozen states where challenges have been made to Kennedy's petitions from Democrats and their allies. Some of the challenges allege he falsely listed the same New York address that was the subject of litigation in that state, or that there were problems with petition signatures.

In Pennsylvania, challengers contend that papers filed by Kennedy list an incorrect address in New York and that he and his running mate demonstrated "at best, a fundamental disregard" of state law and the process by which signatures are gathered. An attorney for Kennedy said the challenge contained specious allegations. A court will conduct an evidentiary hearing next Tuesday in Harrisburg.

Kennedy's campaign says it has collected enough signatures for ballot access in all 50 states and that it is officially on the ballot in 17 states.

His candidacy has at various times drawn concerns from both Democrats and Republicans who think he could siphon votes from their candidates.

National Democrats in particular have been active in trying to undercut his candidacy, while former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, has alternated between criticizing Kennedy as liberal and courting his endorsement or the backing of some of his supporters.

Here's a look at what is happening in New York, what it might mean and other ballot access challenges Kennedy faces.

What happened in New York? What's next?

The ruling Monday followed a short trial in state court over whether Kennedy falsely listed a New York residence on his state nominating petitions.

The candidate listed a residence in the well-off suburb of Katonah, where he said he rents a bedroom in a friend's house. Kennedy testified that he moved to California a decade ago so he could be with his wife, and that he always planned to return to New York, where he is registered to vote.

The lawsuit bought by several voters and backed by Democrat-aligned Clear Choice Action claimed Kennedy's actual residence is in Los Angeles.

Days after the non-jury trial ended, Ryba ruled that 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."

In announcing the appeal Wednesday, the environmental lawyer and scion of a famous political family said the current Democratic Party was unrecognizable to him.

"The party of my father and uncle's time was committed to expanding voters' rights and understood that competition at the ballot box is an essential part of American Democracy," he said in a statement.

Kennedy's legal team also promised to seek injunctive relief in federal court in New York City. They argue that the U.S. Constitution's 12th Amendment governs the residency of presidential and vice presidential candidates, not state law.

If upheld, will the New York decision affect challenges in other states?

Experts say officials in other states might pay attention to the ultimate ruling from New York courts about Kennedy's residency.

The U.S. Constitution gives broad authority to individual states to oversee elections, said Keith Gaddie, a political science professor at Texas Christian University. He said many states have laws that outline strict signature-gathering details or other requirements for candidates to get on the ballot as an independent.

"The question is whether or not in other states where they have similar criteria (as New York), it could be used to disqualify RFK Jr. from the ballot," Gaddie said. "It may not happen everywhere, but it will happen somewhere else."

Speaking to reporters after court in Albany last week, Kennedy acknowledged that a loss in New York could lead to lawsuits in other states.

Clear Choice Action said Kennedy has listed the same New York address on nominating petitions in 17 other states.

"It's up to each state to determine whether Mr. Kennedy violated their laws and statutes by providing a false residence and deceiving voters," Clear Choice Action founder Pete Kavanaugh said in a prepared statement.

Richard Winger, the editor of Ballot Access News and an activist who supports ballot access for minor parties, said while some state-level challenges to Kennedy's candidacy already have focused on the issue of his address, he doubted that new challenges will emerge because of the New York ruling.

"I don't think they can just all of a sudden willy nilly change the basis of their objection," he said. "I think generally it's too late."

He also doubted other laws in other states "make such a big deal" out of a candidate's address.

Where else has Kennedy been challenged?

Winger said there have been challenges to Kennedy's candidacy in states including Hawaii, Nebraska, New Jersey and Washington based on a variety of claims, such as problems with his address and the signatures needed to qualify him for the ballot.

The Democratic National Committee is backing challenges to Kennedy's petitions in Nevada, Delaware and Georgia, according to a spokesperson. The committee is backing a separate lawsuit in New York.

Hearings will begin Monday in Georgia on challenges to ballot petitions filed by Kennedy and other-third party and independent candidates. Among other things, Democrats allege that Kennedy's petitions are invalid because they are wrongly or incompletely filled out. The Kennedy campaign disputes those claims.

Outside of New York, Clear Choice Action is backing challenges to Kennedy's petitions in Illinois, Pennsylvania and Texas. In Texas, an attorney for the group told state officials Kennedy's listed New York address doesn't comply with state election laws and that his candidacy should be invalidated.

WHO declares mpox outbreaks in Africa a global health emergency as a new form of the virus spreads

By MARIA CHENG AP Medical Writer

LONDON (AP) — The World Health Organization declared the mpox outbreaks in Congo and elsewhere in Africa a global emergency on Wednesday, with cases confirmed among children and adults in more than a dozen countries and a new form of the virus spreading. Few vaccine doses are available on the continent.

Earlier this week, the Africa Centers for Disease Control and Prevention announced that the mpox outbreaks were a public health emergency, with more than 500 deaths, and called for international help to stop the virus' spread.

"This is something that should concern us all ... The potential for further spread within Africa and beyond is very worrying," said WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

The Africa CDC previously said mpox, also known as monkeypox, has been detected in 13 countries this year, and more than 96% of all cases and deaths are in Congo. Cases are up 160% and deaths are up 19% compared with the same period last year. So far, there have been more than 14,000 cases and 524 people have died.

"We are now in a situation where (mpox) poses a risk to many more neighbors in and around central Africa," said Salim Abdool Karim, a South African infectious diseases expert who chairs the Africa CDC emergency group. He said the new version of mpox spreading from Congo appears to have a death rate of about 3-4%.

In 2022, WHO declared mpox to be a global emergency after it spread to more than 70 countries that had not previously reported mpox, mostly affecting gay and bisexual men. In that outbreak, fewer than 1% of people died.

Michael Marks, a professor of medicine at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said declaring these latest mpox outbreaks in Africa an emergency is warranted if that might lead to more support to contain them.

"It's a failure of the global community that things had to get this bad to release the resources needed,"

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 57 of 71

he said.

Officials at the Africa CDC said nearly 70% of cases in Congo are in children younger than 15, who also accounted for 85% of deaths.

Jacques Alonda, an epidemiologist working in Congo with international charities, said he and other experts were particularly worried about the spread of mpox in camps for refugees in the country's conflict-ridden east.

"The worst case I've seen is that of a six-week-old baby who was just two weeks old when he contracted mpox," Alonda said, adding the baby has been in their care for a month. "He got infected because hospital overcrowding meant he and his mother were forced to share a room with someone else who had the virus, which was undiagnosed."

Save the Children said Congo's health system already had been "collapsing" under the strain of malnutrition, measles and cholera.

The U.N. health agency said mpox was recently identified for the first time in four East African countries: Burundi, Kenya, Rwanda and Uganda. All of those outbreaks are linked to the one in Congo. In Ivory Coast and South Africa, health authorities have reported outbreaks of a different and less dangerous version of mpox that spread worldwide in 2022.

Earlier this year, scientists reported the emergence of a new form of the deadlier form of mpox, which can kill up to 10% of people, in a Congolese mining town that they feared might spread more easily. Mpox mostly spreads via close contact with infected people, including through sex.

Unlike in previous mpox outbreaks, where lesions were mostly seen on the chest, hands and feet, the new form causes milder symptoms and lesions on the genitals. That makes it harder to spot, meaning people might also sicken others without knowing they're infected.

Before the 2022 outbreak, the disease had mostly been seen in sporadic outbreaks in central and West Africa when people came into close contact with infected wild animals.

Western countries during the 2022 outbreak mostly shut down the spread of mpox with the help of vaccines and treatments, but very few of those have been available in Africa.

Marks of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine said that in the absence of mpox vaccines licensed in the West, officials could consider inoculating people against smallpox, a related disease. "We need a large supply of vaccine so that we can vaccinate populations most at risk," he said, adding that would mean sex workers, children and adults living in outbreak regions.

Congo hasn't received any of the mpox vaccines it has requested.

Congolese authorities said they have asked for 4 million doses, Cris Kacita Osako, coordinator of Congo's Monkeypox Response Committee, told The Associated Press. Kacita Osako said those would mostly be used for children under 18.

"The United States and Japan are the two countries that positioned themselves to give vaccines to our country," Kacita Osako said.

Dr. Dimie Ogoina, a Nigerian mpox expert who chaired WHO's emergency committee, said there were still significant gaps in understanding how mpox is spreading in Africa. He called for stronger surveillance to track the outbreaks.

"We're working blindly when we're not able to test all suspected cases," Ogoina said.

Although WHO's emergency declaration is meant to spur donor agencies and countries into action, the global response to previous declarations has been mixed.

Dr. Boghuma Titanji, an infectious diseases expert at Emory University, said the last WHO emergency declaration for mpox "did very little to move the needle" on getting things like diagnostic tests, medicines and vaccines to Africa.

"The world has a real opportunity here to act in a decisive manner and not repeat past mistakes, (but) that will take more than an (emergency) declaration," Titanji said.

Annual US inflation falls to 3-year low, clearing the way for the Fed to begin cutting rates

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Year-over-year inflation reached its lowest level in more than three years in July, the latest sign that the worst price spike in four decades is fading and setting up the Federal Reserve for an interest rate cut in September.

Wednesday's report from the Labor Department showed that consumer prices rose just 0.2% from June to July after dropping slightly the previous month. Measured from a year earlier, prices rose 2.9%, down from 3% in June. It was the mildest gain since March 2021.

The ongoing inflation slowdown could affect the presidential campaign, given that former President Donald Trump has highlighted rampant inflation as a key failing of the Biden administration and its energy policies. Vice President Kamala Harris has said she would soon unveil new proposals to "bring down costs and also strengthen the economy overall."

The government said nearly all of July's inflation reflected higher rental prices and other housing costs, a trend that, according to real-time data, is easing. As a result, housing costs should rise more slowly in the coming months, contributing to lower inflation.

The report showed that inflation is steadily falling closer to the Fed's 2% target — though not too quickly, which might suggest that the economy is weakening, said Tara Sinclair, an economist at George Washington University and a former Treasury Department official.

"It's a comforting report, both because it is going in the right direction and because it is not doing anything too dramatic," Sinclair said. "It is exactly what we wanted to see."

In July, grocery prices rose just 0.1% and are a scant 1.1% higher than they were a year earlier, a much slower pace of growth than in previous years. Yet many Americans are still struggling with food prices, which remain 21% above where they were three years ago.

Gas prices were unchanged from June to July and have actually fallen 2.2% in the past year. Clothing prices also dropped last month; they're nearly unchanged from 12 months earlier. New and used car prices fell in July, too. Used car prices, which had skyrocketed during the pandemic, have tumbled nearly 11% in the past year.

Some food prices, including for meat, fish and eggs, are still increasing faster than before the pandemic. Dairy and fruit and vegetable prices, though, fell in July.

Even as inflation — the rate of price increases — keeps slowing, many people are still struggling with daily costs that, on average, are still about 20% higher than they were three years ago. That's true even though average U.S. wages have surpassed inflation for more than a year.

Ariel Borchuk, who lives in the Harlem area of New York City, complained that the government's inflation reports don't mean anything to "regular people" like himself.

"Everything," he said, "is expensive. What more do you need to know?"

Borchuk, 48, who works in the catering business, had just grabbed a hot fried chicken sandwich for \$7.99 at a grocery store on Manhattan's Upper East Side. It's something he says he really can't afford.

Borchuk said he's been cooking more at home and eating out less and buying more of his groceries at Costco, where he said he can get good deals.

Austan Goolsbee, president of the Federal Reserve's Chicago branch, said Wednesday in an interview with The Associated Press that the July data shows that inflation is clearly on track to return to the central bank's 2% target. He also noted that there are signs that the job market is weakening even while the Fed's key rate remains at its highest level in decades.

Goolsbee's remarks suggested that he would support a series of rate cuts in the coming months.

At a White House event Wednesday, President Joe Biden was asked whether the nation had defeated inflation.

"Yes, yes, yes," he said. "I've told you we're going to have a soft landing," he added, referring to an economy in which inflation is tamed without a steep recession.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 59 of 71

For nearly a year, cooling inflation has provided gradual relief to America's consumers, who were stung by the price surges that erupted three years ago. Inflation peaked two years ago at 9.1%, the highest level in four decades.

In July, excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices climbed a mild 0.2% from June, after a 0.1% increase the previous month. And compared with a year earlier, core inflation slowed from 3.3% to 3.2% — the lowest level since April 2021. Core prices are closely watched by economists because they typically provide a better read of where inflation is headed.

Fed Chair Jerome Powell has said he is seeking additional evidence of slowing inflation before the Fed begins cutting its key interest rate. Economists widely expect the Fed's first rate cut to occur in mid-September, and will be followed by additional cuts in November and December. Investors are betting that at least one of those cuts will be a half-point, according to future prices.

When the central bank lowers its benchmark rate, over time it tends to reduce the cost of borrowing for consumers and businesses. Mortgage rates have already declined in anticipation of the Fed's first rate reduction.

Many companies have slowed their price increases as consumers have become more resistant to paying more. Mark Barrocas, CEO of SharkNinja, a small appliance-maker in Needham, Massachusetts, said the company raised its prices 5% to 7% in 2021 and 2022 but hasn't done so since. For some items, it recently reduced prices to where they were before the earlier hikes took effect.

Inflation has eased substantially in the past two years as global supply chains have been repaired, a spate of apartment construction in many large cities has cooled rental costs and higher interest rates have slowed auto sales, forcing dealers to offer better deals to potential car buyers.

Consumers, particularly lower-income ones, are also becoming more price-sensitive, forgoing high-priced items or shifting to cheaper alternatives. This has forced many companies to rein in price hikes or even offer lower prices.

What we know about Ukraine's surprise push into Russian territory

By JIM HEINTZ and ANDREW MELDRUM Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — For more than a week, Ukrainian troops have pushed into the Kursk region of Russia, just north of their border, in the most extensive incursion by Kyiv's forces in the 2½-year-old war. The advance has showed significant weaknesses in Russia's border defense and embarrassed the Kremlin.

What we know about the operation:

When and where did the attack begin?

The surprise attack by Ukrainian troops in tanks and other armored vehicles began Aug. 6 and came from several directions into Russia's Kursk region. Although Russia has seen previous incursions of its territory in the war, the Kursk raid is notable for its size, speed, the reported involvement of battle-hardened Ukrainian brigades, and the length of time they have stayed inside Russia. As many as 10,000 Ukrainian troops are involved, according to Western military analysts. It's the first time foreign troops have invaded and held the territory since Nazi Germany did it in World War II against the Soviet Union.

This month's stunning attack met little resistance at the Russian border. Although the Kursk region has been subject to Ukrainian drone attacks, the border was relatively lightly guarded, mostly by poorly trained conscripts and national guard units. More than 120,000 residents have been evacuated, according to Russian officials.

Ukraine hid its preparations for the attack. It also did not inform its supporters, like the U.S. or Poland, of its plan, according to leaders of those countries. U.S. officials have not objected to the use of American-donated weapons in the Kursk region.

What's the situation now?

Ukraine's military claims to hold 74 towns and settlements in the area, encompassing about 1,000 square kilometers (400 square miles) of territory. It said its troops took more than 100 Russian soldiers prisoner and destroyed a Russian Su-34 jet used to bomb Ukrainian front-line positions and cities.

The Russian Defense Ministry reports clashes with Ukrainian forces near settlements about 25 kilometers (15 miles) from the border. A Russian commander claims fighting is continuing in Sudzha, the administrative center of the incursion area, about 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the border.

No independently confirmed casualty figures for either side are available. Russia has been slow to send in enough reinforcements to turn back the Ukrainian advance. It has launched air and rocket strikes along with artillery fire.

What are Ukraine's goals?

Ukrainian officials say it wants to establish a buffer zone to inhibit shelling of its territory from the Kursk region; President Volodymyr Zelenskyy says Ukraine has been shelled by Russia more than 2,000 times from the area this summer.

The operation also could be aimed at siphoning Russian troops from battles in the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine, where Moscow has been making slow but steady advances.

The operation also demonstrates Ukraine's determined resistance against a much larger Russian army. Zelenskyy adviser Mykhailo Podolyak suggested the push into Russian territory could strengthen Ukraine's hand in any eventual negotiations to end the war.

What has been the response by Russia?

There appears to be a strong sense of shock in Russia over the speed and size of Ukraine's operation, which has highlighted weaknesses in protecting the country and shattered the Kremlin's narrative that Russia has largely been unscathed by the war.

President Vladimir Putin denounced it as a "large-scale provocation" and conducted nationally televised meetings with top security officials for reports on the operation.

Russia has redeployed some troops to Kursk from the strategically significant region near Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv. Russia is unlikely to pull entire fighting units from eastern Ukraine but could redirect troops that were meant to reinforce the front lines in Donetsk, according to The Institute for the Study of War analytic group.

3 years into a life sentence, Alex Murdaugh to get his day before the South Carolina Supreme Court

By JEFFREY COLLINS Associated Press

COLUMBIA, S.C. (AP) — The appeals are just beginning for disgraced former South Carolina attorney Alex Murdaugh, who is almost three years into a life sentence without parole for killing his wife and son.

The South Carolina Supreme Court has agreed to hear Murdaugh's appeal of his murder convictions. His lawyers said they resulted from jury tampering by the clerk of court who watched over jurors during his six-week trial.

And in federal court, Murdaugh is appealing the 40-year sentence he was given after pleading guilty to stealing nearly \$11 million from clients and his law firm.

Defense attorneys said that punishment — 10 years longer than the maximum recommended by sentencing guidelines — is too harsh under the U.S. Constitution. Prosecutors said it is a backstop in case Murdaugh, now 56, ever manages to get his murder conviction overturned.

His appeals will continue for years. Courts haven't even begun hearing the meat of Murdaugh's argument that the judge in his murder trial made mistakes, for example by allowing his money thefts into evidence. That was critical to the prosecution's argument that the killings were meant to buy sympathy and time to keep the thefts from being discovered.

The defense said that evidence unfairly made jurors angry, when all they were supposed to consider was the killings.

Jury tampering appeal

The state court appeal on jury tampering is fairly straightforward.

A lower court judge refused to toss out Murdaugh conviction after his lawyers argued that as Colleton County Clerk of Court, Becky Hill told jurors at his murder trial not to trust Murdaugh when he testified,

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 61 of 71

had private discussions with the jury foreperson and pressured jurors to come to a quick verdict. Hill later resigned amid an ethics investigation.

Judge Jean Toal, a retired state Supreme Court Chief Justice assigned to this appeal, cited the standard set by a previous South Carolina high court ruling, that to overturn a verdict on jury tampering, there has to be a determination that a juror changed their mind as a result of the improper influence.

Murdaugh's lawyers argued that instead, a federal judge's ruling in an unrelated case should apply — that defendant must only prove the conduct had the potential to influence a juror.

The state Supreme Court's one-paragraph order Tuesday accepting the appeal gave Murdaugh's lawyers 30 days to file arguments, and set no date for a hearing.

Federal appeal on 40-year theft sentence

In the federal case, Murdaugh's lawyers said his right against cruel and unusual punishment under the U.S. Constitution was violated because Judge Richard Gergel ignored the 17 1/2 years to just under 22 years in prison recommended by federal agents and sentenced Murdaugh to 40 years.

The trial prosecutors had asked for 30 years, so that Murdaugh would be in prison for the rest of his life no matter what happened to his murder conviction.

In response to his appeal, federal prosecutors noted simply that when Murdaugh agreed to plead guilty, he signed a document saying he wouldn't appeal unless prosecutors lied or his defense attorneys were inadequate.

Murdaugh stole from his clients in wrongful death and injury cases. In handing down the stiff sentence, Gergel said Murdaugh stole from "the most needy, vulnerable people," including a client who became a quadriplegic after a crash, a state trooper who was injured on the job, and a trust fund intended for children whose parents were killed in a wreck.

And those people "placed all their problems and all their hopes" with their lawyer, Gergel said.

In arguing for a lighter sentence, Murdaugh's attorneys compared his case to the 25 years in prison for crypto entrepreneur Sam Bankman-Fried or the 11-year sentence handed down to Theranos CEO Elizabeth Holmes, saying they stole billions while Murdaugh's thefts were in millions.

But the victims in those cases were investors, whereas Murdaugh stole from vulnerable people who trusted him to protect their legal interests.

Murdaugh's lawyers want the sentence overturned and a new judge to thoroughly review the case to decide if the 40-year sentence is fair.

Prosecutors said that has almost never happened in the U.S. They said the only relevant review they could find involved a life sentence for passing a \$100 bad check.

The U.S. 4th Circuit of Appeals in Richmond, Virginia, has randomly assigned a three-judge panel to hear the case.

The Murdaugh case in brief

Investigators said Murdaugh was addicted to opioids and his complex schemes to steal money from clients and his family's law firm were starting to unravel when he shot his younger son, Paul, with a shotgun and his wife, Maggie, with a rifle, at their home in Colleton County in 2021.

Murdaugh told investigators he hadn't seen them for an hour or so before he discovered their bodies, but his voice was recorded in a video on his son's phone made about five minutes before the killing. Testifying in his own defense during his six-week trial, Murdaugh said he was scared and lied to police about some details because he was a drug addict, but he adamantly denied killing his wife and son.

The weapons used in the killings have not been found and prosecutors did not present any clothes with DNA or blood evidence.

Murdaugh's family controlled much of the legal system in tiny Hampton County. His father, grandfather and great-grandfather were elected prosecutors for 87 straight years. The family also founded the county's biggest private law firm.

Murdaugh paid his lawyers \$600,000 at the beginning of his legal troubles, and while it's unclear whether they have been given any additional money, he has vowed to fight the convictions as long as he can.

Meanwhile, his case remains an obsession in the true crime world. In their appeal of the theft sentence, Murdaugh's lawyers cited the trade publication NextTV, a trade publication that covers streaming, which reported that CourtTV set a record with nearly 5 million hours of viewing of his trial.

Judge rejects Donald Trump's latest demand to step aside from hush money criminal case

By MICHAEL R. SISAK and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump has lost his latest bid for a new judge in his New York hush money criminal case as it heads toward a key ruling and potential sentencing next month.

In a decision posted Wednesday, Judge Juan M. Merchan declined to step aside and said Trump's demand was a rehash "rife with inaccuracies and unsubstantiated claims" about his ability to remain impartial.

It is the third time that Merchan has rejected such a request from lawyers for the former president and current Republican nominee. They contend the judge has a conflict of interest because his daughter works as a political consultant for prominent Democrats, including Kamala Harris when she sought the Democrats' 2020 presidential nomination. Harris is now the party's nominee against Trump.

The judge's daughter, Loren Merchan, met Harris occasionally in 2019 but never "developed an individual relationship" with her, consulting firm founder Mike Nellis told the chairman of the U.S. House Judiciary Committee, Rep. Jim Jordan, R-Ohio, in a letter Tuesday. The firm, Authentic Campaigns Inc., has not worked for Harris' campaign, President Joe Biden's now-ended reelection bid or the Democratic National Committee in the 2024 election cycle, Nellis said.

A state court ethics panel said last year that Merchan could continue as the judge on Trump's case. The panel wrote that a relative's independent political activities are not "a reasonable basis to question the judge's impartiality."

Merchan, a state court judge in Manhattan, acknowledged last year that he made several small donations to Democratic causes during the 2020 campaign, including \$15 to Biden. But Merchan has repeatedly said he is certain he can handle Trump's case fairly and impartially. In his ruling, Merchan wrote he will continue to base decisions "on the evidence and the law, without fear or favor, casting aside undue influence."

"With these fundamental principles in mind, this Court now reiterates for the third time, that which should already be clear — innuendo and mischaracterizations do not a conflict create," Merchan wrote in his three-page decision. "Recusal is therefore not necessary, much less required."

But with Harris now Trump's opponent, Trump lawyer Todd Blanche argued in a letter to the judge last month that the defense's concerns have become "even more concrete."

Prosecutors called the claims "a vexatious and frivolous attempt to relitigate" the issue.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung, citing Merchan's donation to Biden and Loren Merchan's consulting work, slammed him as a "highly-conflicted judge" who "should have long ago recused himself from this case."

Merchan "has proved to be biased against President Trump and beholden to not only Democrat partisan interests, but also to the glaring financial interests of an immediate family member," Cheung said.

Trump railed against Merchan on his Truth Social platform for continuing to keep him under a partial gag order — an issue that was not part of the recusal decision. Earlier this month, a state appeals court upheld the gag order, which bars Trump from making public comments about the prosecution team, court staffers or their families, including Merchan's daughter.

The Manhattan district attorney's office, which prosecuted the case, declined to comment.

Trump was convicted in May of falsifying his business' records to conceal a 2016 deal to pay off porn actor Stormy Daniels to stay quiet about her alleged 2006 sexual encounter with him. Prosecutors cast the payout as part of a Trump-driven effort to keep voters from hearing salacious stories about him during his first campaign.

Trump says all the stories were false, the business records were not and the case was a political maneuver meant to damage his current campaign. Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg is a Democrat.

Trump has pledged to appeal, but that can't happen until he is sentenced.

In the meantime, his lawyers have taken other steps to try to derail the case. Besides the recusal request, they've asked Merchan to overturn the verdict and dismiss the case because of the U.S. Supreme Court's July presidential immunity ruling.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 63 of 71

That decision reins in prosecutions of ex-presidents for official acts and restricts prosecutors in pointing to official acts as evidence that a president's unofficial actions were illegal. Trump's lawyers argue that in light of the ruling, jurors in the hush money case should not have heard such evidence as former White House staffers describing how the then-president reacted to news coverage of the Daniels deal.

Merchan has said he will rule on the immunity claim on Sept. 16 and set Sept. 18 for "the imposition of sentence or other proceedings as appropriate."

Jordan, the House committee chairman, sent a letter to Loren Merchan on Aug. 1 demanding she turn over any documents pertaining to the Harris and Biden campaigns, any discussions she or her firm may have had about Trump's hush money prosecution, and any conversations she may have had with her father about the case.

Jordan suggested that because some Authentic clients have mentioned Trump's case in fundraising solicitations, there was at least "a perception" that Loren Merchan and the firm could profit from it. But Nellis, the firm's founder, said it does not get a percentage of any money its clients raise and that "neither Authentic nor Ms. Merchan benefits financially from any rulings in Donald Trump's criminal or civil trials."

The judge's daughter, who became a partner in the firm after 2019, has had only "minimal input or contact with any political clients" this cycle and wasn't aware of any client communications that mentioned Trump's trial, Nellis added.

Anything she may have said to her father about the criminal case would have been "for the purpose of confirming her and her family's well-being and safety," Nellis wrote. He noted that she had faced death threats and that law enforcement had advised her and her family to leave their home several times "for their own safety."

The hush money case is one of four criminal prosecutions brought against Trump last year.

One federal case, accusing Trump of illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida, was dismissed last month. The Justice Department is appealing.

The others — federal and Georgia state cases concerning Trump's efforts to overturn his 2020 election loss — are not positioned to go to trial before the November election.

Takeaways: Harris' approach to migration was more nuanced than critics or allies portray it

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI, CHRIS MEGERIAN and DAN MERICA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As thousands of immigrants approached the U.S. border in early 2021, President Joe Biden tapped his second-in-command to address the influx. The decision has exposed Vice President Kamala Harris to one of her biggest political liabilities.

Harris' assignment was to tackle the "root causes" of migration from three Central American nations — El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras — that were responsible for a significant share of border crossings. The vice president took a long-term approach to an immediate problem, helping convince multinational corporations and Latin American businesses to invest in the region. That, she argued, would create jobs and give locals more reasons to stay at home rather than take the arduous trek north.

Migration from those three Central American countries did gradually drop, though experts say it's unlikely that Harris' plan was a major factor. The decrease was swamped by a surge in migration from elsewhere in Latin America, and Republicans now blame Harris for all the myriad problems that plagued the U.S. southern border during the administration's term.

Here are some things to know about Harris' record on migration as vice president.

She was never the "border czar"

The GOP and even some media outlets called Harris the "border czar" after she got her assignment from Biden, but that was never her actual job. She had no special responsibilities at the border. Those involved in the hottest issue there — negotiations over whether to continue former President Donald Trump's pandemic immigration policy known as Title 42 — say the vice president was not involved in that debate.

Biden tasked Harris with working with the Central American nations "to accept returnees and enhance

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 64 of 71

migration enforcement at their borders." Some critics contend she dodged that assignment and mainly focused on long-term investments.

Harris took two trips to Mexico and Central America in 2021 and 2022, including a visit to Guatemala in June 2021 where she told would-be migrants "don't come" to the U.S. During that trip she also defended the fact she had not been to the U.S.-Mexico border during an interview with NBC's Lester Holt by saying she hadn't "been to Europe. And I mean, I don't ... understand the point that you're making."

That line became part of Trump's first ad against Harris, which blames her for hundreds of thousands of deaths from fentanyl and crimes committed by people who entered the country illegally.

Harris has defended her record. Her campaign began running a television ad on Friday that said Harris would "hire thousands more border agents and crack down on fentanyl and human trafficking" as president. Democrats have also blasted Trump for helping tank a bipartisan immigration bill earlier this year that would have increased funding for border security, including new Customs and Border Protection personnel.

Harris focused on business investments

The vice president's most prominent achievement was tapping into a network of business and nonprofit executives to invest in El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras, which are known as the Northern Triangle nations.

The work linked multinational companies — like Visa, Nestle and Meta — with smaller nonprofits and Latin American businesses, all of which pledged to increase their investments or bolster their work with at-risk communities.

The Associated Press contacted all of the nearly two dozen companies the White House touted as participants in Harris' effort. Some, like AgroAmerica, a sustainable food corporation that pledged to invest more than \$100 million in six new projects, reported their work had begun and they were on track to meet their investment goals. Others, including Columbia Sportswear Company, said they would likely surpass their goals.

Most companies, however, either declined to comment or did not respond when asked about the work they have done to meet their pledges.

The vice president's office has said that Harris' outreach has generated more than \$5.2 billion in investment promises. In an illustration of how long it takes the promises to translate into concrete spending, the State Department reported that companies have plowed nearly \$1.3 billion in the region as of June 2024, the bulk of it in Guatemala and Honduras.

Katie Tobin, who worked as the top migration adviser at the National Security Council for three years, credited Harris' focus with spurring investment in reducing these numbers, arguing that Harris "was able to leverage her credibility" and the power of the White House to convince companies to invest in "a risky investment environment."

"That was very much Kamala Harris," she added. "I have never seen something like that done before in this space, and it made a real impact."

Republican Sen. Rick Scott, a critic of the administration on Latin American issues, questioned whether the White House should really be credited for business investments. He argued they would have happened without Harris.

The companies are "not doing it because someone asked them to," said Scott, who co-founded a major medical company, "they're doing it because it makes economic sense."

Did it work?

While the Harris campaign and White House have pointed to statistics that show migration from Northern Triangle countries has dropped substantially since early 2021, there is debate over what is behind the decrease.

Sen. Chris Murphy, a Connecticut Democrat, said Harris and the administration deserve credit for the reduction because their efforts "worked," adding that Harris' contribution has been overlooked.

Independent analysts, however, said they were skeptical that Harris' approach played much of a role. They said the decrease was likely driven by other regional factors, including the ascension of El Salvador's new president and his aggressive drive to combat violent crime. His government reported a 70% drop in

homicides in 2023.

Julia Gelatt, associate director of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, said investment can take years to alter migration patterns — if it ever does.

“Even a whole lot of economic development doesn’t curb immigration in the way countries hope it will,” Gelatt said.

Presented with rise in border crossings, Kamala Harris chose a long-term approach to the problem

By DAN MERICA, NICHOLAS RICCARDI and CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden, watching tens of thousands of migrants from Central America reach the U.S.-Mexico border just a few months into his administration, tapped his second-in-command to help address the influx — a decision that has exposed Vice President Kamala Harris to one of her biggest political liabilities.

In grappling with migration, Harris proceeded cautiously. She focused her time and prestige on boosting private investment in El Salvador, Honduras and Guatemala, the so-called Northern Triangle; her goal was to help create jobs to bolster economies and dissuade migrants from making the perilous journey to the United States.

It was a decidedly long-term — and limited — approach to a humanitarian crisis, and it has allowed Republicans to tie her to the broader fight over the border. While migration from the Northern Triangle ebbed, it surged from other nations, sparking an emergency at the U.S.-Mexico border, one that Republicans have aggressively sought to exploit at Harris’ expense.

A review of Harris’ work on immigration reveals a record that is more nuanced than the one presented by her critics or allies. It also provides insights into how Harris — who took over as the Democratic standard-bearer when Biden dropped out of the presidential race last month — might tackle one of the nation’s most vexing concerns.

Harris was never the “border czar,” or put in charge of border security or halting illegal border crossings, as former President Donald Trump, Republicans and even the occasional media outlet have claimed. Instead, she was tasked in March 2021 with tackling the “root causes” of migration from the Northern Triangle and pushing its leaders — along with Mexico’s — to enforce immigration laws, administration officials said.

Harris’ backers say she demonstrated leadership by leveraging her stature to win investments that might curb migration years down the road.

“She felt — and I think she was right — that what she could do the most was help basically lead the effort to draw in investment, using the confidence that a relationship with the White House would give to investors,” said Ricardo Zúniga, a former State Department official who specialized in the Northern Triangle and who traveled with Harris to the region.

Critics contend that she could have done far more but chose a less risky path, ensuring the problem only worsened.

“She was like, ‘nope, I’m just root causes,’” said Mark Krikorian, executive director of the Center for Immigration Studies, which advocates for less immigration. “Even if it worked, it’s the sort of thing that takes generations, not one term.”

He also said there was no evidence that Harris pushed Mexico and the Northern Triangle nations to enforce immigration laws.

Harris has defended her work, and her campaign began running a television ad Friday that said Harris as president would “hire thousands more border agents and crack down on fentanyl and human trafficking.” Democrats have also blasted Trump for helping tank a bipartisan immigration bill earlier this year that would have increased funding for border security, including the hiring of new Customs and Border Protection personnel.

Trump “has been talking a big game on securing the border, but he does not walk the walk,” the vice president said last month in Atlanta. Later, she added, “Donald Trump does not care about border security.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 66 of 71

He only cares about himself.”

Immigration becomes a big political issue

Immigration has long been an issue that motivates Trump and his base of supporters, and polls show it is among the most important issues on the minds of voters. As a presidential candidate in 2016, Trump said he would build a wall along the border between the United States and Mexico and get Mexico to pay for it. Trump was not able to complete the project, and Mexico did not fund the part of the barrier that was constructed. The former president also used explosive language to describe immigrants, launching his campaign by suggesting Mexico was sending its “rapists” and criminals to the United States.

While in office, Trump sought to tightly restrict asylum, which was challenged in the courts. This time around, Trump has promised to oversee a “mass deportation” of migrants who have committed crimes in the United States.

Migration numbers have spiked and dropped during both presidencies. Border Patrol arrests on the southern border fell in Trump’s first year in office, then shot back up his next two, rising to more than 850,000 in 2019. The numbers plunged in 2020 during the coronavirus pandemic before rising even higher during Biden’s presidency, reaching a peak of more than 250,000 encounters in December 2023, before falling below 84,000 in June of 2024, federal statistics show.

When Biden took office, he reversed dozens of Trump’s moves on immigration even as apprehension numbers began to rise.

Harris was put in a ‘difficult spot’

Harris received the migration assignment when border crossings were rising, garnering considerable attention and leading to bipartisan calls for action.

Chris Newman, an immigration rights advocate in Los Angeles, said Harris was put in a difficult spot.

“She was tasked with developing a long-term policy framework rather than creating a short-term political performance project,” said Newman, the legal director of the National Day Laborer Organizing Network.

Biden and Harris had taken office only two months before, and Harris was under pressure to build her policy portfolio. When he was vice president, Biden had taken on a similar role on immigration. In 2021, though, Harris was dealing with an especially challenging situation given the lack of governing partners in the region. El Salvador’s new president, Nayib Bukele, had a fraught relationship with the administration due to human rights questions raised by his crackdown on crime in his nation. The man who was then president of Honduras has since been convicted of drug trafficking.

The headaches for Harris began almost immediately, validating the concerns of some on her team that it was a no-win assignment.

Harris traveled to Mexico and Guatemala in June 2021, where she defended the fact she had not been to the U.S.-Mexico border during an interview with NBC’s Lester Holt by saying she hadn’t “been to Europe. And I mean, I don’t ... understand the point that you’re making.”

She also drew criticism on that trip for warning migrants bluntly: “Don’t come” to the U.S.

Harris decided to focus on bringing private investment to the region, tapping into a network of business and nonprofit executives and using the prestige of the White House to signal the Biden administration was backing this effort.

The work linked multinational companies — like Visa, Nestle and Meta — with smaller nonprofits and Latin American businesses, all of which pledged to increase their investments or bolster their work with at-risk communities.

Focused on private investment

The Associated Press contacted all the nearly two dozen companies the White House touted as participants in the outreach effort. Some, like AgroAmerica, a sustainable food corporation, that pledged to invest more than \$100 million in six new projects, reported their work had begun and they were on track to meet their investment goals. Others, including Columbia Sportswear Company, said they would likely surpass their pledges.

Most companies, however, either declined to comment or did not respond when asked about their efforts.

The vice president’s office has said Harris’ efforts have generated more than \$5.2 billion in investment

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 67 of 71

promises. In an illustration of how long it takes the promises to translate into concrete spending, the State Department reported that companies have plowed nearly \$1.3 billion in the region as of June 2024, the bulk of it in Guatemala and Honduras.

"We are on track to exceed our commitments," Peter Bragdon, a top executive at Columbia Sportswear Company, said of their promise to purchase up to \$200 million in products from the region. That pledge would create nearly 7,000 jobs over five years, the company said. The executive called Harris' efforts a "work in progress" but "a smart approach."

Katie Tobin, who worked as the top migration adviser at the National Security Council for three years, credited Harris' focus with spurring investment in reducing these numbers, arguing that Harris "was able to leverage her credibility" and the power of the White House to persuade companies to invest in "a risky investment environment."

"That was very much Kamala Harris," she added. "I have never seen something like that done before in this space and it made a real impact."

Republican Sen. Rick Scott of Florida, a sharp critic of Harris, said the vice president and White House were taking credit for investments that would have been made anyway.

The companies are "not doing it because someone asked them to," said Scott, who co-founded a major medical company. "They're doing it because it makes economic sense."

Addressed corruption

Harris also sought to address endemic corruption that has fueled migration from Central America. Before her 2021 trip to Guatemala, Harris met with a group of exiled Guatemalan prosecutors and judges in Washington.

Among them was Thelma Aldana, a former chief prosecutor who fled her country after what she said were politically motivated corruption charges.

"I came out of it convinced that she has a genuine interest in seeing things change in Central America," Aldana said.

The vice president also deserves credit for helping stop Guatemala's former president, Alejandro Giammattei, from overturning the 2023 election of his successor, Bernardo Arévalo, according to Luis Von Ahn, a U.S.-based technology entrepreneur from Guatemala.

"Giammattei didn't want to leave power, the administration of Kamala Harris came and told him 'stop (messing) around,'" said Von Ahn, the founder of the language app Duolingo. "That's a big help to Guatemala. If an extremely corrupt president doesn't want to leave it's terrible and (his exit) lets us be a better country."

Verdict is out on Harris' approach

While the Harris campaign and White House have pointed to statistics that show migration from Northern Triangle countries has dropped substantially since early 2021, there is debate over what is responsible for that drop.

Sen. Chris Murphy, D-Conn., said Harris and the administration deserve credit for the reduction because their efforts "worked."

Independent analysts, however, said they were skeptical that Harris' approach was responsible for the dip. They said the decrease was likely driven by regional factors, including the ascension of El Salvador's new president and his aggressive drive to combat violent crime. His government reported a 70% drop in homicides in 2023.

Julia Gelatt, associate director of the Migration Policy Institute in Washington, said investment can take years to alter migration patterns — if it ever does.

"Even a whole lot of economic development doesn't curb immigration in the way countries hope it will," Gelatt said.

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 68 of 71

Rocked by cancellation of Vienna concerts, Swifties shake it off and flock to London

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — For Herve Tram, being a Taylor Swift fan isn't just about the music.

The 28-year-old computer network engineer from Paris sees himself as part of a community, one of the Swifties as they are known. So when the pop superstar's shows in Vienna were canceled last week because of a terror threat, Tram took a small personal step: He gave away two extra tickets to her upcoming concerts in London to two fans who missed the chance to see their guiding light in the Austrian capital.

"That's the power of this fandom," Tram said. "We look (out) for each other."

The community of Swift fans, who have flocked to stadiums around the world to see the 3 1/2-hour shows on her Eras Tour and sing along with songs they know by heart, have been shaken in recent days.

First, a knife-wielding attacker murdered three little girls at a Swift-themed dance class in northern England, touching off a week of anti-immigrant unrest across the U.K. after right-wing activists spread misinformation about the suspect. Then the shows in Vienna were canceled after police arrested three Islamic State-inspired extremists they believed were planning to attack the concert venue.

But none of that has dampened fans' enthusiasm to see Swift during five shows Thursday through Tuesday at London's Wembley Stadium that will close out the European leg of the Eras Tour. The fans want to wear Swift-inspired outfits, swap handmade friendship bracelets and, of course, dance.

Take Meagan Berneaud, 30, of Columbus, Ohio, who has been a Swift fan since she was 13.

Berneaud had second thoughts about traveling to London after recent events reminded her of the 2 1/2 hours she spent locked down during a 2016 terror attack at Ohio State University. But she decided to go and even set up a thread on X, formerly known as Twitter, to connect fans who missed the Vienna shows with people who were willing to sell or give away tickets to the London concerts. She's had more than 3,000 views.

"I just have to tell myself not to live in fear," she said. "I have to put my trust ... that law enforcement can do their best to keep us safe."

Some fans who had planned to see the show in Vienna were willing to overcome their anxieties to try to attend another show, taking encouragement from Swift's song, "Fearless."

"And I don't know why.

But with you I'd dance in a storm.

In my best dress.

Fearless."

It's a number that she belts out while swirling and twirling in an assortment of sparkly frocks in the song's music video.

Presila Koleva, 26, a design engineer from Cambridge, England, had been looking forward to seeing Swift in Vienna for more than a year, buying a copy of a green dress that Swift wears during the Folklore set on the Eras tour and making 30 bracelets to trade with other fans. She was heartbroken when the shows were canceled.

But then she connected with Tram, who gave her one of his tickets. That dress will be worn.

"There (are) good people that will do something nice for someone that they don't know, just because they've seen that they've been through this really awful situation," she said. "It could have ended in such a bad way."

The enthusiasm of Swift's fans and a set list that includes more than 40 songs from all phases of her career have helped make the Eras Tour the biggest revenue earner of all time, with more than \$1 billion in ticket sales last year, according to Pollstar Boxoffice, which collects data on the live music industry. The tour is expected to push that record to more than \$2 billion before it ends later this year in Indianapolis.

Demand for the London concerts shows no signs of slacking, with ticket prices hitting thousands of pounds on unregulated sites.

With Swift's tour coming to an end in Europe and youthful fans who have flexible schedules, especially

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 69 of 71

during the summer, recent events won't hurt demand for tickets to the London shows, said Rafi Mohamed, an expert on pricing strategies and founder of the Cambridge, Massachusetts-based consultancy Culture of Profit.

"If anything, you have three sold out concerts in Vienna that were canceled. This coupled with the end of the tour, you'll likely see extra demand," he said.

Even so, security is a concern.

London's Metropolitan Police Service has tried to offer assurances, pointing out that it has learned lessons from the 2017 attack on an Ariana Grande concert at Manchester Arena that killed 22 people and injured hundreds more.

Organizers have promised "additional ticket checks" at the 90,000-seat Wembley Stadium, which prohibits concert goers from bringing anything much bigger than a tiny bag into the venue. Those without tickets will be moved away from the stadium.

"London is a big city. We're used to putting on all of these events," said Tracy Halliwell, the head of tourism for Visit London. "You'll see there is a higher police presence on the ground and that's really just to make sure that everything ... runs smoothly."

For his part, Tram is focused on what the fans can do, recalling how Parisians responded after the attack on the Bataclan theater in 2015 to show that terror would not succeed.

"We saw hundreds of thousands of people go out into the streets to show they are not afraid, and I think that we (will) also see that in London," he said. "Fans will show they are not afraid. And like Taylor said, we are fearless."

US Rep. Ilhan Omar, a member of the progressive 'Squad,' wins Democratic primary in Minnesota

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — Democratic U.S. Rep. Ilhan Omar, one of the progressive House members known as the "Squad" and a sharp critic of how Israel has conducted the war in Gaza, has won her primary race in Minnesota.

Omar successfully defended her Minneapolis-area 5th District seat against a repeat challenge from former Minneapolis City Council member Don Samuels, a more centrist liberal whom she only narrowly defeated in the 2022 primary.

Speaking to supporters in Minneapolis, Omar echoed some of the themes of the Harris-Walz presidential campaign.

"We run the politics of joy," she said. "Because we know it is joyful to fight for your neighbors. ... We know it is joyful to make sure housing is a human right. We know it is joyful to fight for health care to be a human right. We know it is joyful to want to live in a peaceful and equitable world."

Omar avoided the fate of two fellow Squad members. Rep. Cori Bush lost the Democratic nomination in her Missouri district last week, and Rep. Jamaal Bowman of New York lost his primary in June. Both faced well-funded challengers and millions of dollars in spending by the United Democracy Project, a super political action committee affiliated with the American Israel Public Affairs Committee, which appeared to sit out the Minnesota race.

Samuels had criticized Omar's condemnation of the Israeli government's handling of the Israel-Hamas war. While Omar has also criticized Hamas for attacking Israel and taking hostages, Samuels said she's one-sided and divisive. He also stressed public safety issues in Minneapolis, where a former police officer murdered George Floyd in 2020.

Samuels said he was "very disappointed" with his loss.

"What I was hoping is that a strong ground game and an attention to the details of folks who felt left out would trump an overwhelming superiority in dollars," he said in an interview. "Clearly money matters a little more in politics than I had hoped."

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 70 of 71

Omar reported raising about \$6.2 million. Samuels raised about \$1.4 million.

Omar will face Republican Dalia Al-Aqidi, an Iraqi American journalist and self-described secular Muslim who calls Omar pro-Hamas.

Meanwhile, conservative populist and former NBA player Royce White defeated Navy veteran Joe Fraser in Minnesota's primary election for the Republican nomination to challenge Democratic U.S. Sen. Amy Klobuchar in November.

And former federal prosecutor Joe Teirab, supported by former President Donald Trump, House Speaker Mike Johnson and the National Republican Congressional Committee, won a contested GOP primary for Minnesota's 2nd District seat held by Democratic Rep. Angie Craig.

His opponent, defense attorney Tayler Rahm, won the endorsement at the district convention with support from grassroots conservatives.

While Rahm announced in July that he was suspending his campaign and would instead serve as a senior adviser for Trump's Minnesota campaign, he remained on the ballot.

Teirab will face Craig in what's expected to be Minnesota's most competitive House race in November. "Tonight's definitive results send a clear message that Republicans are united and ready for change," Teirab said in a statement. "We are ready to support candidates who will strengthen our economy, secure the border, and restore safety in our communities."

Craig issued a statement calling him "a guy who recently moved to the district because he saw a political opportunity."

"He's a guy who has spent months doing anything to win the support of Washington Republicans," Craig said. "And he's a guy who has made it his life's mission to take away reproductive freedoms from families and give those decisions to politicians."

In the U.S. Senate race, White — an ally of imprisoned former Trump aide Steve Bannon and conspiracy theorist Alex Jones — shocked many political observers when he defeated Fraser at the party convention for the GOP endorsement.

White's social media comments have been denounced as misogynistic, homophobic, antisemitic and profane. His legal and financial problems include unpaid child support and questionable campaign spending, including \$1,200 spent at a Florida strip club after he lost his primary challenge to Omar in 2022. He argues that, as a Black man, he can broaden the party's base by appealing to voters of color in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and others disillusioned with establishment politics.

Following his win, White said in a post on the social platform X: "Bring it on commies... The People Are Coming."

Democratic leaders denounced him as a far-right extremist.

"While Royce White's language and policies seek to divide Minnesotans, Senator Amy Klobuchar is focused on bringing people together to get things done, and she is consistently ranked as one of the most bipartisan and effective legislators in the Senate," Ken Martin, the state Democratic Party chair, said in a statement. "The choice this November could not be more clear."

Fraser said earlier that White's confrontational style and message won't attract the moderates and independents needed for a competitive challenge against Klobuchar, who's seeking a fourth term. He said he offered a more mainstream approach, stressing fiscal conservatism, a strong defense, world leadership and small government. Fraser has also highlighted his 26 years in the Navy, where he was an intelligence officer and served a combat tour in Iraq.

Neither had anywhere near the resources that Klobuchar has. White last reported raising \$133,000, while Fraser took in \$68,000. Klobuchar, meanwhile, has collected about \$19 million this cycle and has more than \$6 million available to spend on the general election campaign. She faced only nominal primary opposition.

Another clash between establishment and grassroots Republicans played out in western Minnesota's 7th District. Trump-backed GOP Rep. Michelle Fischbach, considered one of the most conservative members of Congress, defeated small businessman Steve Boyd. Boyd ran to her right on a religious platform and blocked her from getting endorsement at the district convention. Boyd reported spending \$170,000, while

Groton Daily Independent

Thursday, August 15, 2024 ~ Vol. 32 - No. 051 ~ 71 of 71

Fischbach spent over \$1 million.

Among the legislative primaries on the ballot Tuesday, Democrats picked former state Sen. Ann Johnson Stewart to face Republican Kathleen Fowke in a high-stakes race that will determine not only which party controls the state Senate, but whether Democrats maintain their narrow "trifecta" control of both chambers and the governor's office. Democrats used that power to pass an ambitious agenda over the last two years that helped put Gov. Tim Walz on the radar of Vice President Kamala Harris before she picked him to be her running mate.

It will be the only state Senate seat in the November ballot. The seat in the western Minneapolis suburbs had been held by Democrat Kelly Morrison, who will face Republican Tad Jude for Minnesota's 3rd Congressional District seat.

Today in History: August 15, Woodstock music festival begins

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Aug. 15, the 228th day of 2024. There are 138 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Aug. 15, 1969, the Woodstock Music and Art Fair opened in upstate New York; more than 460,000 people attended the three-day festival, which would become a watershed event in American music and culture.

Also on this date:

In 1057, Macbeth, King of Scots, was killed in battle by Malcolm, the eldest son of King Duncan, whom Macbeth had slain.

In 1914, the Panama Canal officially opened as the SS Ancon crossed the just-completed waterway between the Pacific and Atlantic oceans.

In 1935, humorist Will Rogers and aviator Wiley Post were killed when their airplane crashed near Point Barrow in the Alaska Territory.

In 1947, India gained independence after nearly 200 years of British rule.

In 1961, as workers began constructing a Berlin Wall made of concrete, East German soldier Conrad Schumann leapt to freedom over a tangle of barbed wire.

In 1989, F.W. de Klerk was sworn in as acting president of South Africa, one day after P.W. Botha resigned as the result of a power struggle within the National Party.

In 1998, 29 people were killed by a car bomb that tore apart the center of Omagh (OH'-mah), Northern Ireland; a splinter group calling itself the Real IRA claimed responsibility.

In 2003, bouncing back from the largest blackout in U.S. history, cities from the Midwest to Manhattan restored power to tens of millions of people.

In 2017, President Donald Trump, who'd faced harsh criticism for initially blaming deadly violence in Charlottesville, Virginia on "many sides," told reporters that there were "very fine people on both sides" of the confrontation and that groups protesting against the white supremacists were "also very violent." (In between those statements, at the urging of aides, Trump had offered a more direct condemnation of white supremacists.)

In 2021, the Taliban regained control of the Afghan capital of Kabul after the withdrawal of U.S. forces from the country.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Jim Dale is 89. Retired Supreme Court Justice Stephen Breyer is 86. U.S. Rep. Maxine Waters, D-Calif., is 86. Author-journalist Linda Ellerbee is 80. Songwriter Jimmy Webb is 78. Actor Phyllis Smith is 75. Britain's Princess Anne is 74. Actor Tess Harper is 74. Actor Zeljko Ivanek (ZEHL'-koh eh-VAHN'-ehk) is 67. Celebrity chef Tom Colicchio is 62. Film director Alejandro Gonzalez Inarritu (ihn-YAH'-ee-tu) is 61. Philanthropist Melinda French Gates is 60. Actor Debra Messing is 56. Actor Anthony Anderson is 54. Actor Ben Affleck is 52. Olympic gold medal beach volleyball player Kerri Walsh Jennings is 46. Rock singer Joe Jonas (The Jonas Brothers) is 35. Actor Jennifer Lawrence is 34.