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Monday, Sept. 2

NO SCHOOL - Labor Day
Soccer with Mitchell in Groton: Boys at 1 p.m.,
Girls at 3 p.m.

Tuesday, Sept. 3

School Breakfast; Egg omelet.
School Lunch: Hot dogs, chips.
Senior Menu: Baked pork chops, au gratin potatoes, vegetable capri blend, apple sauce, whole wheat bread.
Boys Golf at Lee Park, Aberdeen, 10 a.m.
JH Football vs. Ellendale/Edgeley-Kulm, 5 p.m., one game in Edgeley.
JV Football vs. Ellendale/Edgeley-Kulm, 6:30 p.m., in Edgeley.
Volleyball: Ipswich in Groton: 7th/C at 5 p.m.; 8th/JV at 6 p.m.; varsity to follow
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 209 N Main, 3 p.m. to 6 p.m.

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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

Pantry open, Community Center, 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.
City Council Meeting, 7 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Ladies Aid LWML, 1:30 p.m.
United Methodist: Bible Study, 10 a.m.

Wednesday, Sept. 4

School Breakfast: Cereal
School Lunch: Chicken leg, mashed potatoes.
Senior Menu: Goulash, green beans, pineapple/strawberry ambrosia, whole wheat bread.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Sarah Circle, 5 p.m.
Groton Chamber meeting, noon, City Hall
Groton C&MA: Kids' Club, Youth Group, Adult Bible Study at 7 pm.
United Methodist: Community coffee hour, 9:30 a.m.

Informational Meeting

Never in 135 years of statehood has a law jeopardized people's Property Rights & Local Control like RL 21

Open Forum

Mon. Sept 9, 2024

6:30 pm Meeting

Ramkota

1400 8TH Ave NW Aberdeen, SD

Speakers:

Curtis Jundt - 40 yr pipeline engineer

Rep Julie Auch: District 18 Rep Jim Eschenbaum: Chair of RL 21

Former Speaker Spencer Gosch District 23

Sen Elect Mark Lapka District 23

Ed Fischbach - Spink County Farmer

Contact for more info:

Jodi Waltman: 605-216-8171

"Pie Auction Fundraiser"

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Weekly Vikings Roundup

By Jordan Wright

Last week, the Minnesota Vikings finalized their 53-man roster. Now, the team will prepare to face off against the New York Giants this Sunday at noon. Here is a look at the finalized roster, followed by a preview of the week one matchup.

Quarterback – Sam Darnold, Nick Mullens, Brett Rypien. With J.J. McCarthy going down with an injury, this is now Darnold's team. It wasn't too long ago he was a top-three pick, and with the coaching staff and playmakers around him, this is his best shot to prove he belongs in the league. The biggest surprise here was the team cutting Jaren Hall and replacing him with Brett Rypien, who was cut by the Chicago Bears. The team hopes to have Hall back on the practice squad.

Running back – Aaron Jones, Ty Chandler, C.J. Ham(FB). The team only kept two RBs on the roster (three if you count C.J. Ham). They plan to call up Myles Gaskin from the practice squad to be the third RB and kick returner, but I wouldn't be surprised to see them bring in another RB at some point in the near future.

Wide receiver – Justin Jefferson, Jordan Addison, Jalen Nailor, Brandon Powell, Trent Sherfield Sr., Trishton Jackson. If they can stay healthy, and stay out of trouble (I'm looking at you, Jordan Addison), the Vikings' WRs are one of the best groups in the league.

Tight end – Josh Oliver, Johnny Mundt, Nick Muse. T.J. Hockenson will be coming back from injury soon, but until then, I expect to see a lot fewer two-TE sets. Oliver is a good blocker, and Mundt and Muse are decent pass catchers, but Hockenson is a top-5 TE in the NFL.

Offensive tackles – Christian Darrisaw, Brian O'Neill, David Quessenberry, Walter Rouse. Darrisaw signed a massive extension this offseason, and if he and O'Neill can stay healthy, the Vikings have yet another group that is one of the best in the NFL.

Inside offensive line – Blake Brandel, Garrett Bradbury, Ed Ingram, Dan Feeney, Michael Jurgens. With Dalton Risner going on injured reserve, the inside of the Vikings' offensive line might be a liability this season.

Defensive line - Harrison Phillips, Jonathan Bullard, Jerry Tillery, Levi Drake Rodriguez, Taki Taimani, Jalen Redmond. Phillips, Bullard, and Tillery will be the starters in week one, but LDR, Taimani, and Redmond all looked very good this preseason and should get plenty of playing time.

Outside Linebackers - Jonathan Greenard, Andrew Van Ginkel, Dallas Turner, Pat Jones II, Jihad Ward. Turner might not be a "starter" to begin the season, but he will see the field a ton. Ward can play OLB or drop down to the DL in passing situations. Gabriel Murphy was placed on IR but should be back in a few weeks.

Inside linebackers - Ivan Pace Jr., Blake Cashman, Kamu Grugier-Hill, Brian Asamoah II. Pace and Cashman will be the starting iLBs, but one of them will likely come off the field when the Vikings go into their nickel and dime formations.

Cornerbacks - Stephon Gilmore, Byron Murphy Jr., Shaq Griffin, Fabian Moreau, Dwight McGlothern, Akayleb Evans, Jay Ward. With the tragic loss of Khyree Jackson and the injury to Mekhi Blackmon, newcomers Gilmore and Griffin will have big roles this year. McGlothern was a pleasant surprise this preseason and looks like a potential starter down the road.

Safeties - Harrison Smith, Camryn Bynum, Josh Metellus, Theo Jackson. The big story here is the Vikings releasing Lewis Cine, who is now on Buffalo's practice squad. It will be interesting to see if Brian Flores plays the top three safeties as much as he did last season.

Specialists - Will Reichard, Ryan Wright, Andrew DePaola. Reichard had a very good preseason and looks to be a dependable kicker with a big leg, something the Vikings haven't had in a long time.

Practice squad – Henry Byrd (G), Andre Carter II (OLB), Dallas Gant (LB), Myles Gaskin (RB), N'Keal Harry (WR/TE), Lucky Jackson (WR), Ricky Lee III (T), Bobby McCain (DB), Sammis Reyes (TE), Bo Richter (OLB), Tyrese Robinson (G), Zavier Scott (RB), Thayer Thomas (WR), Robert Tonyan (TE), Jaylin Williams (CB), Jonah Williams (DL), Nashon Wright (CB)

Looking ahead, the Vikings travel to New York to take on the Giants. This will be a good test for the Vikings, as the Giants are a beatable team but they have a solid defense that will look to make life miserable for Sam Darnold. The key to this game will come down to the interior of the Vikings' offensive line. If they can slow down Dexter Lawrence, and open some run lanes for Aaron Jones and Ty Chandler, the Vikings should win this game. Skol!

"Is It Real or Fake?"

It is miraculous to consider how much access and exposure we have to information through our computers, phones, televisions, radios and newspapers. Unfortunately, we need to be on guard because too much of this buzz can be false information.

Marketing (sales) can be good and important as it moves commerce, and I'm not saying industry doesn't sponsor credible scientific research. However, marketing can be harmful when selling a weight-loss program that gives false hope, when peddling virility pills that are ineffective or when pushing an outrageously expensive drug that should be used only after first-line medicines are tried. Advertisements can and should be based on truth, but my cynical side sees the words "truth in advertising" as an oxymoron, like "seriously funny," "awfully good" or "found missing." Indeed, marketing motives can be as different from evidence-based science as corn syrup is to leafy green vegetables.

Before sharing or relying on information found online ask yourself the following things:

1. What is the purpose of this website/and or advertising and who owns it?
2. Who wrote the information, is supplying the information and reviewed it?
3. When was the information written and updated?
4. Does this website or ad offer quick and easy solutions and/or miracle cures for your health problems?

It has been our desire and goal at Healing Words Foundation to find and help spread health information that is not influenced by marketing or sales. What is known today as Prairie Doc® media started in the 1980s with newspaper articles, expanding in the 1990s with a local talk AM-radio show, in 2003 with a television show. We feel blessed to have such wonderful talents and gifts allowing us to bring our unbiased and credible public health information to the people.

The mission statement of the Healing Words Foundation and all Prairie Doc® programming is enhancing health and diminishing suffering by communicating useful information, based on honest science, provided in a respectful and compassionate manner.

This is a call for all of us to be careful and critical. We don't have to be influenced by false or misleading news but rather need to choose our sources of information carefully. Let this be a time of truth.

The late Dr. Rick Holm and his partner Joanie Holm founded Prairie Doc Programming and continue to follow its mission through the Healing Words Foundation. Follow The Prairie Doc® at www.prairiedoc.org and on Facebook and Instagram featuring On Call with the Prairie Doc®, a medical Q&A show providing health information based on science, built on trust, on SDPB and streaming live on Facebook most Thursdays at 7 p.m. central.



By the late Richard P. Holm, MD

EARTHTALK ™

Dear EarthTalk: You hear a lot about e-bikes these days, but what's being done to make regular old human powered bicycles greener?

-- P.L. Milwaukee, WI

As interest in e-bikes grows, it's important to remember that traditional human-powered bicycles are also evolving towards greater sustainability. Various innovations and practices are making these bikes eco-friendlier, focusing on materials, production processes and end-of-life recycling.

One significant development is the use of sustainable materials for bike frames. Traditionally, bike frames have been made from aluminum, steel or carbon fiber. However, each of these materials has environmental impacts. Aluminum requires substantial energy to produce, while carbon fiber involves complex processes and is challenging to recycle. In contrast, sustainable alternatives are gaining traction. Bamboo, for one, is a fast-growing, renewable material with a low environmental footprint. Bamboo bikes are noted for their durability and natural shock absorption, making them a compelling choice.

Innovative companies are also exploring the potential of recycled materials. A notable example is a bicycle frame made from recycled plastic and produced using renewable energy. This approach not only reduces waste but lessens dependency on virgin materials. Similarly, some brands are repurposing old bicycles or bike parts, extending their life cycle and reducing the need for new resources. The production process itself is another area of focus. Brands are adopting practices that minimize environmental impact: reducing emissions in factories, using renewable energy, and implementing water-saving measures. Additionally, companies are using paints and finishes that avoid harmful chemicals, and are engage in fair trade practices, ensuring that their supply chains are as ethical as they are sustainable.

A crucial aspect of making bicycles greener is ensuring they are durable and easy to repair. High-quality components and thoughtful design contribute to a longer lifespan, which reduces the frequency of replacements and the associated environmental impact. Brands are also increasingly providing repair services and spare parts, which supports a more sustainable lifecycle for each bicycle.



As interest in e-bikes grows, it's important to remember that traditional human-powered bicycles are also evolving towards greater sustainability. Credit: Pexels.com.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Day care loan celebrated as example of federal lending partnership's rural impact

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - SEPTEMBER 1, 2024 12:00 PM

Ages and Stages Daycare is the only child care center in Clear Lake, a town near Watertown with a population of 1,218.

The owner planned to sell, and longtime employee Hailey Freeman was able to buy the center earlier this month with a \$105,000 low-interest loan through GROW South Dakota, the U.S. Department of Agriculture and Interstate Telecommunications.

The USDA showcased the partnership in a press conference Thursday, where the agency also announced a \$750,000 loan to Grow SD to continue such investments in rural areas of the state. USDA Under Secretary for Rural Development Basil Gooden attended the press conference.

Freeman's loan allowed her to purchase the building and plan for improvements to the facility. She told attendees how critical the child care facility is to the community and the children she serves.

"We're like their second homes," she said. The center struggles with staffing, which Freeman hopes to address in order to reach the center's full capacity.

USDA Rural Development State Director Nikki Gronli said the department has helped seven communities in South Dakota through similar lending partnerships. That includes investments in child care centers in Custer, Black Hawk, Tea, Oacoma, Platte, Ipswich and Pierre.

"Child care is economic development," Gronli said. "The beauty of our programs is that we have a lot of flexibility to look at what the critical needs are in rural South Dakota and respond to them."

In total, Grow SD has received around \$22 million in funding from USDA Rural Development over a 30-year partnership for a variety of rural economic development projects. GROW SD CEO Lori Finnesand said the nonprofit has financed over \$49 million in loans to more than 700 small businesses.

Those loans have created or retained more than 4,000 jobs in rural areas of the state, she said. The money has helped businesses such as repair shops and grocery stores, and has allowed people to do business in their own community rather than driving miles away for goods and services.

"Loans like this potentially keep those small communities alive," Finnesand said.

Low-interest loan partnerships like the one between Interstate Telecommunications, GROW SD and the USDA help spread the risk of loans, especially when nonprofits can "be a little more flexible" than traditional lenders might be, Finnesand added.

Communities who aren't served by GROW SD can reach out to other rural nonprofits working with the USDA if they would like to apply for a loan, Gronli added. Or businesses can work directly with the USDA grant program.

Three child care grant investments from the USDA in South Dakota will be announced soon, she said.

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

COMMENTARY

Trump and Harris, with starkly different records on labor issues, are both courting union voters

by ROBERT FORRANT

SEPTEMBER 2, 2024 6:00 AM

Democratic presidential nominee Kamala Harris and Republican nominee Donald Trump are in a tight race for the White House. Every voting bloc will count – including members of labor unions and other people in their households.

The majority of union leaders have over generations endorsed Democratic candidates, and this race is no exception. Although rank-and-file union members have also historically sided with the Democratic Party by large margins, that support has wavered for at least the past 45 years. In 2016, exit polls indicated that voters in union households supported Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton over Trump by only 8 percentage points, down from 18 percentage points in 2012 when Barack Obama was on the ballot.

No Democratic presidential nominee had fared worse with union voters since Ronald Reagan's wins over Jimmy Carter and Walter Mondale in 1980 and 1984.

Union voters are particularly prominent in Michigan, Pennsylvania and Nevada, three swing states where the share of voters who belong to unions is above the national average of 10%.

A late 2023 New York Times/Siena College poll of six swing states that Joe Biden won in 2020 – those three plus Arizona, Georgia and Wisconsin – shows that Biden and Trump were tied at 47% among union voters when they were asked who they'd vote for in 2024. Biden had an 8 percentage point advantage with these same voters in 2020, according to a different survey.

3 key issues

Union voters, like all U.S. citizens, are concerned about many issues. But they are more likely than most people to seriously consider a candidate's record in terms of support for workers and organized labor. Labor historians generally concur that the Biden administration has the second-strongest labor-friendly record, after Franklin D. Roosevelt.

And I find that historian Nelson Lichtenstein, who contends that Trump's years in office were bad for organized labor, is representative of how labor experts see his track record.

In my view as a labor studies scholar, three aspects of the candidates' records are the most likely to sway union members one way or the other.

Federal workers

Trump signed three executive orders in 2018 that restricted the labor rights of approximately 950,000 federal government employees who belong to unions. In 2020, he signed another measure, known as Schedule F, that The Washington Post described as "designed to gut civil service job protections."

Biden rescinded those executive orders. He also established a White House task force charged with making recommendations for how to streamline the procedures for federal worker union organizing, which Harris chaired. The number of federal employees in unions has risen by tens of thousands during the Biden administration.

Union elections

Rules governing how elections are conducted once workers express an interest in forming a union date back to the 1930s, when Roosevelt signed the National Labor Relations Act into law. The National Labor Relations Board, created by that legislation, oversees union elections.

In 2019, when Trump appointees held a majority of the NLRB's five seats, the board overturned an Obama-era NLRB ruling mandating speedy elections. In 2023, when Biden's appointees were in the majority, the board issued a ruling favorable to unions that rolled back that Trump-era ruling.

Today, when a majority of workers in a workplace say they want union representation, an employer must either recognize and bargain with the union or seek an election. If that employer violates labor law in the period before the election, the election is called off and the NLRB may order the employer to recognize

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and bargain with the union.

OSHA

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration, a Labor Department agency, is responsible for U.S. workers' health and safety.

Fewer workplace inspections occurred during the Trump administration than during Obama's second term. This decline is largely attributable to the slow hiring of new OSHA inspectors to replace those who had retired.

The number of inspections is rising again. However, by OSHA's calculations, workplace accidents and fatalities have increased during the Biden administration.

The Trump administration issued no workplace rules about coronavirus safety, leaving hundreds of thousands of people employed in health care, groceries, meatpacking and education at risk.

By comparison, two days after taking office in 2021, Biden issued an executive order that established masking guidelines, and his administration made health and safety protocols on the job during the rest of the COVID-19 pandemic a high priority.

Compared with the inaction by the Trump administration during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Biden administration has been more active in proposing health and safety measures. For example, in July 2024 it proposed rules designed to protect some 36 million workers from health risks associated with extreme heat. After a period for written comments, public hearings will be held on the bill.

When Trump tried cutting OSHA funding for 2018 by approximately US\$10 million, Congress blocked his efforts. The Biden administration is seeking a 3.7% increase in OSHA's budget for the 2025 fiscal year.

Legislative and gubernatorial records

Harris was a U.S. senator before she became vice president; her vice presidential running mate, Tim Walz, is the governor of Minnesota and was a member of Congress before that; and Republican vice presidential candidate JD Vance is currently a U.S. senator as well. The candidates' records in those positions are also indicators of what they might attempt to do in the White House.

The AFL-CIO, the largest umbrella organization for U.S. unions, gave Harris a lifetime score of 98% on her Senate voting record. Walz got a 93% rating for his votes from the AFL-CIO when he served in the House of Representatives. He belonged to the National Education Association, the nation's largest labor union, while working as a high school teacher.

As Minnesota's governor, Walz signed into law paid sick days for the state's workers and a measure that made Minnesota the first state to establish a minimum wage for Uber and Lyft drivers. In 2023, Walz also signed a law that established the Nursing Home Workforce Standards Board to oversee the health and welfare of nursing home workers.

The AFL-CIO has given Vance a 0% rating for his Senate votes as of mid-2024. Among other things, Vance opposed the nominations of several judges and government officials with pro-labor track records.

Addressing auto workers

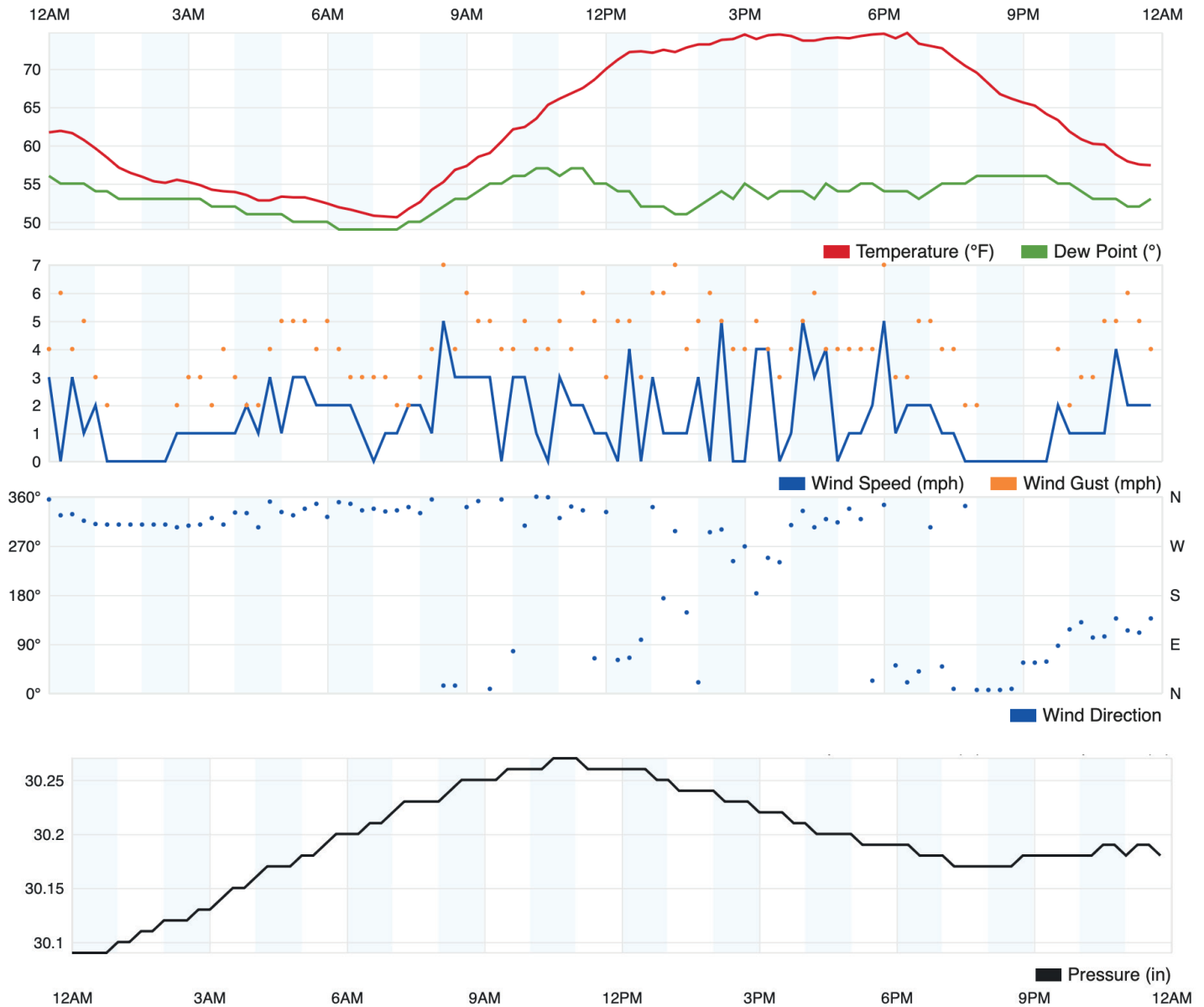
Perhaps the most visible sign of Biden's support for labor unions came when he walked a Michigan picket line with striking members of the United Auto Workers in September 2023. He was the first president to do so. Trump turned up nearby the next day. He gave a speech at a nonunion auto parts plant. More recently, Trump did himself no favors with labor voters and their allies when, in a highly publicized conversation with Tesla, SpaceX and X CEO Elon Musk, he praised Musk for firing employees who spoke out on workplace problems and attempted to unionize. How union households will vote in 2024 is not clear. But there's no doubt that the Harris and Trump campaigns are certain that it will matter, just as it did in 2020, when Biden narrowly won Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania – and in 2016, when Clinton lost those states.

Robert Farrant is a professor in the History Department at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, teaching courses on global labor issues, labor history, immigration, and international development.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Labor Day

Tonight

Tuesday

Tuesday Night

Wednesday



High: 81 °F

Sunny and Breezy



Low: 61 °F

Partly Cloudy and Breezy



High: 87 °F

Sunny and Breezy



Low: 65 °F

Partly Cloudy and Breezy



High: 83 °F

Partly Sunny

Today
Red Flag Warning west river; southerly winds to 35 mph.
Highs: 77 - 95°

Tonight
Breezy.
Lows: 58 - 65°

Tuesday
Breezy. Hot.
Highs: 82 - 97°



September 2, 2024

Gusty southerly winds, above normal temperatures, and dry conditions will create elevated fire danger west river this afternoon. Breezy winds and hot temperatures will continue into Tuesday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 75 °F at 2:57 PM

Low Temp: 50 °F at 7:19 AM

Wind: 9 mph at 11:03 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 14 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 104 in 1913

Record Low: 35 in 1896

Average High: 80

Average Low: 52

Average Precip in Sept.: 0.14

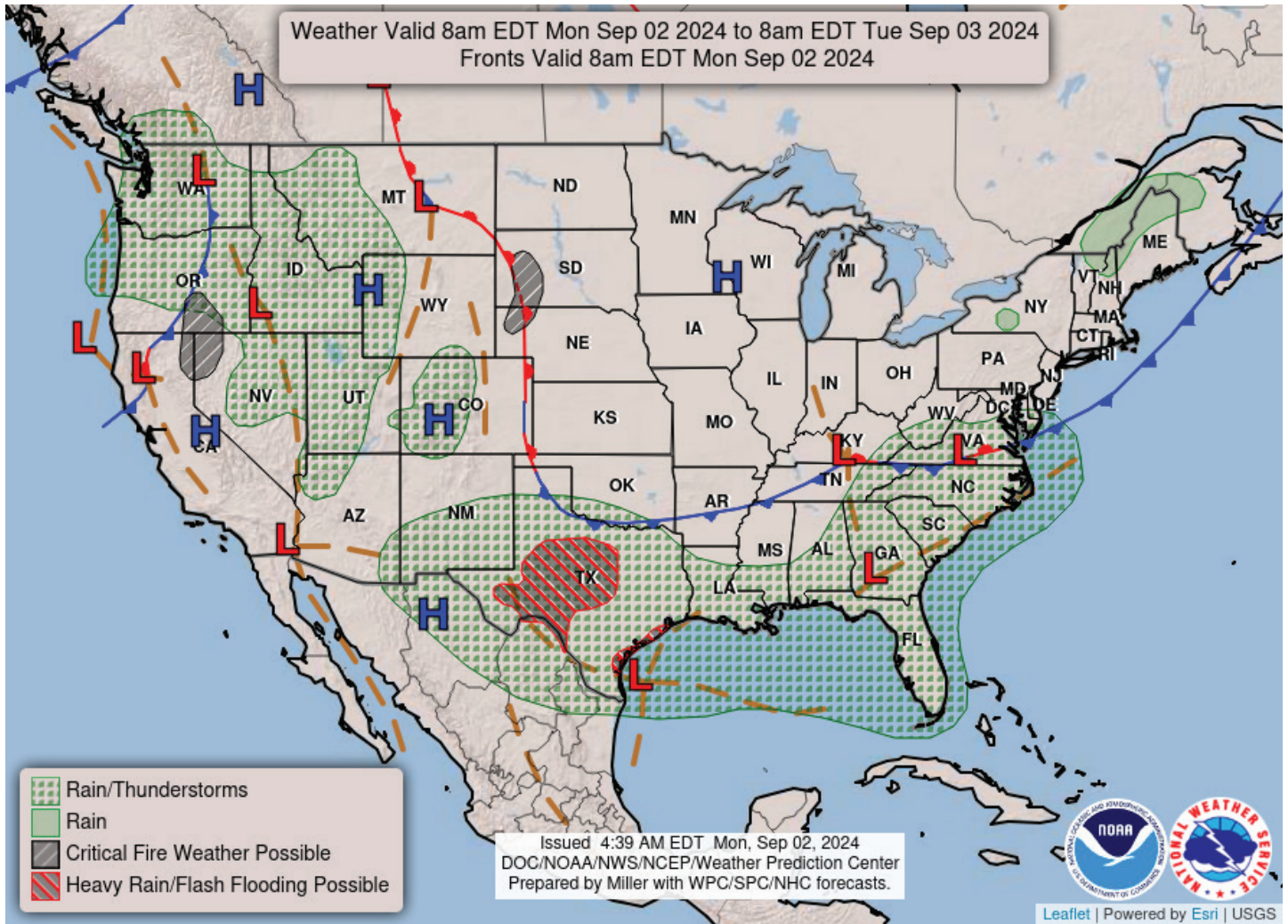
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 16.48

Precip Year to Date: 19.41

Sunset Tonight: 8:09:03 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:55:49 am



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Today in Weather History

September 2, 1962: From 315 to 445 pm, hail fell in and around the Moberly area. The hail ranged from 1 1/2 to 4 inches in diameter. The ground was covered up to 3 inches deep with drifts of 2-3 feet. At this time, the storm was one of the worst in recent history for damage.

September 2, 1983: A tornado touched down in the late afternoon 3 miles west and 1 mile south of Polo in Hand County damaging buildings, machinery, and trees. The roof of a hog house was torn off, and the north side of the building was destroyed. A barn was pulled several inches off of its foundation, and numerous trees were destroyed. At a nearby farm, two outbuildings were damaged, with two cows injured along with two calves killed.

September 2, 1985: Intense thunderstorms moved from south-central South Dakota to northeast South Dakota during the evening. Winds gusted to 60 to 70 mph over the area. Southwest of Presho, three small buildings were destroyed, and barns were damaged. Power lines and other property were damaged near Vayland, Miller, Wessington, Wolsey, Kimball, White Lake, Armour, and Castlewood. Large hail caused considerable damage to crops.

1775: The 1775 Newfoundland hurricane, also known as the Independence Hurricane, was a storm that hit the Colony of Newfoundland. It is believed to have killed at least 4,000 people, making it one of the deadliest Atlantic hurricanes of all time. The death toll in Virginia and North Carolina was 163 lives.

1882: Possibly the first photograph of a lightning strike was taken on this day by William Jennings in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.

1887: The U.S. Army Signal Service station in Greenville, SC reported a minimum temperature of 50°F. This observation at Greenville still stands as the record low for the day. Additional stations across the state recorded low temps in the low 50's.

1935: The 1935 Labor Day Hurricane was the strongest and most intense hurricane to make landfall in the United States and the Atlantic Basin in recorded history. The death toll from this hurricane is between 400 to 600 individuals.

1950 - The temperature at Mecca, CA, soared to 126 degrees to establish a U.S. record for the month of September. The low that morning was 89 degrees. (The Weather Channel)

1985 - After teasing residents along the Gulf of Mexico for two days, Hurricane Elena finally came ashore at Biloxi MS. The hurricane, packing winds of 127 mph, caused more than a billion dollars damage. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Late evening thunderstorms in the Northern Plains Region produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Jordan MT, and a ""hot flash"" at Redig SD. The temperature at Redig rose from 66 degrees at 10 PM to 86 degrees at 11 PM as thunderstorm winds gusted to 36 mph. Nine cities in the Upper Ohio Valley, the Tennessee Valley and the Central Gulf Coast States reported record low temperatures for the date, including Elkins WV with a reading of 38 degrees. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988 - Unseasonably hot weather prevailed in the northwestern U.S. Afternoon highs of 98 degrees at Olympia WA, 98 degrees at Seattle WA, 105 degrees at Portland OR, and 110 degrees at Medford OR, established records for the month of September. Quillayute WA equalled their September record with an afternoon high of 97 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Eight cities in the Gulf Coast Region reported record high temperatures for the date as readings soared into the upper 90s. Houston TX and Port Arthur TX hit 99 degrees. Late evening thunderstorms, developing ahead of a cold front, produced wind gusts to 63 mph at Dickinson ND, and golf ball size hail in North Dakota and Nebraska. Winds along the cold front itself gusted to 62 mph at Buffalo SD. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

2002: An F3 tornado destroyed much of the downtown area of Ladysmith, Wisconsin. Overall damage was estimated at \$20 million, but there were no fatalities.



UNSELFISH SERVICE

Where do service and charity end? Certainly, not in the home. Selfish homes produce selfish children and God's Kingdom and God's world suffers. What can be done to change this condition?

"She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy."

There is an obvious route that travels from the head to the heart to the hands. God's Word enters our lives through our head. We hear the Word preached and taught, and read and meditate on the Word each day. But it must not stop there. It must reach into our hearts – the very center of our lives, and then move outward through our hands in service and charity to others. It's the head, heart, hands conception and connection.

What is in our hearts always comes out in our lives. Noble character is of little good if character is an end in itself. In fact, the sign of our character is seen in what we do in our homes first and then God's world. One pastor said, "A saving faith is always seen in serving others." If we are saved, we will serve.

There can be little doubt that our love for God is always seen in our attitude and actions toward those in need. Proverbs contain many warnings about those who refuse to be charitable, and in fact, reminds us that giving to the poor is the same as lending to God.

"Open arms and extended" hands, however, is much more than giving "things." It is surrendering one's self to serve. It includes time, talents and teaching God's way to others.

Prayer: Father, we owe so much to others because of what You have given us. May we all serve sacrificially by following the example of Your Son, our Savior! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy. Proverbs 31:20

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

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The Groton Independent Printed & Mailed Weekly Edition Subscription Form

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- 12 Months \$53.25

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Mailing Address: _____

City _____

State, Zip Code _____

Phone Number _____

The following will be used for your log-in information.

E-mail _____

Password _____

Pay with Paypal. Type the following into your browser window:

paypal.me/paperpaul

Pay with Venmo: [@paperpaul](https://venmo.com/paperpaul) Phone Number to Confirm: 7460

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.30.24

10 17 20 24 54 8

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$681,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 50
DRAW: Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.31.24

17 18 32 42 51 6

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$8,170,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 5 Mins
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.01.24

17 22 27 35 42 17

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 20 Mins
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.31.24

5 9 12 18 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 20
DRAW: Mins 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.31.24

19 32 43 55 58 12

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 49 Mins
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
08.31.24

4 34 35 38 69 19

Power Play: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$80,000,000

NEXT 15 Hrs 49 Mins
DRAW: 34 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

- 07/04/2024 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/09/2024 FREE SNAP Application Assistance 1-6pm at the Community Center
- 07/14/2024 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 07/17/2024 Legion Auxiliary #39 Salad Buffet & Dessert Bar at the Groton Legion 11am-1pm
- 07/17/2024 Pro Am Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/25/2024 Dairy Queen Miracle Treat Day
- 07/25/2024 Summer Downtown Sip & Shop 5-8pm
- 07/25/2024 Treasures Amidst The Trials 6pm at Emmanuel Lutheran Church
- 07/26/2024 Ferney Open Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 9am Start
- 07/27/2024 1st Annual Celebration in the Park 1-9:30pm
- 08/05/2024 School Supply Drive 4-7pm at the Community Center
- Cancelled:** Wine on 9 at Olive Grove Golf Course 6pm
- 08/08/2024 Family Fun Fest 5:30-7:30pm
- 08/9-11/2024 Jr. Legion State Baseball Tournament
- 08/12/2024 Vitalant Blood Drive at the Community Center 1:15-7pm
- 09/07/2024 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 09/07-08/2024 Groton Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, Groton Municipal Airport
- 09/08/2024 Sunflower Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course 10am
- 10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm
- 10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am
- 10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm
- 11/16/2024 Groton American Legion "Turkey Raffle" 6:30-11:30pm
- 11/28/2024 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm
- 12/01/2024 Groton Snow Queen Contest, 4:30 p.m.
- 12/07/2024 Olive Grove 8th Annual Holiday Party & Tour of Homes with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close
- 04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp
- 05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm
- 07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course
- 07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm
- 09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm
- 10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm
- 11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm

News from the **AP** Associated Press

Israeli labor court orders an end to general strike over hostage crisis, siding with government

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — An Israeli labor court has ruled that a general strike called over the Gaza hostage crisis must end.

The court sided with the government in its ruling on Monday, saying the strike was politically motivated. Israel's largest trade union had called the strike to protest the government's failure to return scores of hostages held in Gaza.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

A rare call for a general strike in Israel to protest the failure to return hostages held in Gaza led to closures and other disruptions around the country on Monday, including at its main international airport. But it was ignored in some areas, reflecting deep political divisions.

Hundreds of thousands of Israelis had poured into the streets late Sunday in grief and anger after six hostages were found dead in Gaza. The families and much of the public blamed Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, saying they could have been returned alive in a deal with Hamas to end the nearly 11-month-old war.

But others support Netanyahu's strategy of maintaining relentless military pressure on Hamas, whose Oct. 7 attack into Israel triggered the war. They say it will eventually force the militants to give in to Israeli demands, potentially facilitate rescue operations and ultimately annihilate the group.

Israel's largest trade union, the Histadrut, called for a general strike on Monday, the first since the start of the war. It aims to shut down or disrupt major sectors of the economy, including banking, health care and the country's main airport.

Airlines at Israel's main international airport, Ben-Gurion, were halting outgoing flights between 8 a.m. and 10 a.m. Those flights either departed early or were slightly delayed, and travelers were seen lining up at check-in counters despite the limited disruption. Arriving flights were continuing as usual during that time, according to the Israel Airports Authority.

The Histadrut said that banks, some large malls and government offices were all joining the strike, as were some public transit services, although there did not appear to be any major disruptions. Intercity trains were not included in the strike, and Egged, a main bus line, said only some drivers were striking.

Municipalities in Israel's populated central area, including Tel Aviv, were participating in the strike, leading to shortened school hours and cancellations for public day cares and kindergartens.

Many municipalities, however, including Jerusalem, were not participating. Israeli media reported that the state appealed to a labor court to cancel the strike, saying it was politically motivated.

The demonstrations on Sunday appeared to be the largest since the start of the war, with organizers estimating that up to 500,000 people joined nationwide events and the main rally held in Tel Aviv. Israeli media estimated that 200,000 to 400,000 took part.

They are demanding that Netanyahu reach a deal to return the remaining roughly 100 hostages held in Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead, even if it means leaving a battered Hamas intact and withdrawing from the territory. Many Israelis support this position, but others prioritize the destruction of the militant group over freedom for the hostages.

Netanyahu has pledged "total victory" over Hamas and blames it for the failure of the negotiations, which have dragged on for much of this year.

Israel said the six hostages found dead in Gaza were killed by Hamas shortly before Israeli forces arrived in the tunnel where they were being held. Three of them were reportedly scheduled to be released in the first phase of a cease-fire proposal discussed in July. The Israeli Health Ministry said autopsies had determined the hostages were shot at close range and died on Thursday or Friday.

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Netanyahu blamed Hamas, saying "whoever murders hostages doesn't want a deal."

Hamas blamed their deaths on Israel and the United States, accusing them of dragging out the talks by issuing new demands, including for lasting Israeli control over two strategic corridors in Gaza. Hamas has offered to release the hostages in return for an end to the war, the complete withdrawal of Israeli forces and the release of a large number of Palestinian prisoners, including high-profile militants.

One of the six hostages was Israeli-American Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, a native of Berkeley, California, who lost part of his left arm to a grenade in the Oct. 7 attack. In April, Hamas issued a video that showed him alive, sparking protests in Israel.

He was one of the best-known hostages, and his parents had led a high-profile campaign for the captives' release, meeting with President Joe Biden, Pope Francis, and addressing the Democratic National Convention last month.

Biden on Sunday said he was "devastated and outraged." The White House said he spoke with Goldberg-Polin's parents and offered condolences.

Some 250 hostages were taken on Oct. 7. More than 100 were freed during a cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Eight have been rescued by Israeli forces. Israeli troops mistakenly killed three Israelis who escaped captivity in December.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, when they stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7. Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed over 40,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not say how many were militants.

The war has displaced the vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple times, and plunged the besieged territory into a humanitarian catastrophe.

AI may not steal many jobs after all. It may just make workers more efficient

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Imagine a customer-service center that speaks your language, no matter what it is.

Alorica, a company in Irvine, California, that runs customer-service centers around the world, has introduced an artificial intelligence translation tool that lets its representatives talk with customers who speak 200 different languages and 75 dialects.

So an Alorica representative who speaks, say, only Spanish can field a complaint about a balky printer or an incorrect bank statement from a Cantonese speaker in Hong Kong. Alorica wouldn't need to hire a rep who speaks Cantonese.

Such is the power of AI. And, potentially, the threat: Perhaps companies won't need as many employees — and will slash some jobs — if chatbots can handle the workload instead. But the thing is, Alorica isn't cutting jobs. It's still hiring aggressively.

The experience at Alorica — and at other companies, including furniture retailer IKEA — suggests that AI may not prove to be the job killer that many people fear. Instead, the technology might turn out to be more like breakthroughs of the past — the steam engine, electricity, the Internet: That is, eliminate some jobs while creating others. And probably making workers more productive in general, to the eventual benefit of themselves, their employers and the economy.

Nick Bunker, an economist at the Indeed Hiring Lab, said he thinks AI "will affect many, many jobs — maybe every job indirectly to some extent. But I don't think it's going to lead to, say, mass unemployment. We have seen other big technological events in our history, and those didn't lead to a large rise in unemployment. Technology destroys but also creates. There will be new jobs that come about."

At its core, artificial intelligence empowers machines to perform tasks previously thought to require human intelligence. The technology has existed in early versions for decades, having emerged with a problem-solving computer program, the Logic Theorist, built in the 1950s at what's now Carnegie Mellon University. More recently, think of voice assistants like Siri and Alexa. Or IBM's chess-playing computer, Deep Blue, which managed to beat the world champion Garry Kasparov in 1997.

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AI really burst into public consciousness in 2022, when OpenAI introduced ChatGPT, the generative AI tool that can conduct conversations, write computer code, compose music, craft essays and supply endless streams of information. The arrival of generative AI has raised worries that chatbots will replace freelance writers, editors, coders, telemarketers, customer-service reps, paralegals and many more.

"AI is going to eliminate a lot of current jobs, and this is going to change the way that a lot of current jobs function," Sam Altman, the CEO of OpenAI, said in a discussion at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in May.

Yet the widespread assumption that AI chatbots will inevitably replace service workers, the way physical robots took many factory and warehouse jobs, isn't becoming reality in any widespread way — not yet, anyway. And maybe it never will.

The White House Council of Economic Advisers said last month that it found "little evidence that AI will negatively impact overall employment." The advisers noted that history shows technology typically makes companies more productive, speeding economic growth and creating new types of jobs in unexpected ways.

They cited a study this year led by David Autor, a leading MIT economist: It concluded that 60% of the jobs Americans held in 2018 didn't even exist in 1940, having been created by technologies that emerged only later.

The outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, which tracks job cuts, said it has yet to see much evidence of layoffs that can be attributed to labor-saving AI.

"I don't think we've started seeing companies saying they've saved lots of money or cut jobs they no longer need because of this," said Andy Challenger, who leads the firm's sales team. "That may come in the future. But it hasn't played out yet."

At the same time, the fear that AI poses a serious threat to some categories of jobs isn't unfounded.

Consider Suumit Shah, an Indian entrepreneur who caused a uproar last year by boasting that he had replaced 90% of his customer support staff with a chatbot named Lina. The move at Shah's company, Dukaan, which helps customers set up e-commerce sites, shrank the response time to an inquiry from 1 minute, 44 seconds to "instant." It also cut the typical time needed to resolve problems from more than two hours to just over three minutes.

"It's all about AI's ability to handle complex queries with precision," Shah said by email.

The cost of providing customer support, he said, fell by 85%.

"Tough? Yes. Necessary? Absolutely," Shah posted on X.

Dukaan has expanded its use of AI to sales and analytics. The tools, Shah said, keep growing more powerful.

"It's like upgrading from a Corolla to a Tesla," he said. "What used to take hours now takes minutes. And the accuracy is on a whole new level."

Similarly, researchers at Harvard Business School, the German Institute for Economic Research and London's Imperial College Business School found in a study last year that job postings for writers, coders and artists tumbled within eight months of the arrival of ChatGPT.

A 2023 study by researchers at Princeton University, the University of Pennsylvania and New York University concluded that telemarketers and teachers of English and foreign languages held the jobs most exposed to ChatGPT-like language models. But being exposed to AI doesn't necessarily mean losing your job to it. AI can also do the drudge work, freeing up people to do more creative tasks.

The Swedish furniture retailer IKEA, for example, introduced a customer-service chatbot in 2021 to handle simple inquiries. Instead of cutting jobs, IKEA retrained 8,500 customer-service workers to handle such tasks as advising customers on interior design and fielding complicated customer calls.

Chatbots can also be deployed to make workers more efficient, complementing their work rather than eliminating it. A study by Erik Brynjolfsson of Stanford University and Danielle Li and Lindsey Raymond of MIT tracked 5,200 customer-support agents at a Fortune 500 company who used a generative AI-based assistant. The AI tool provided valuable suggestions for handling customers. It also supplied links to relevant internal documents.

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Those who used the chatbot, the study found, proved 14% more productive than colleagues who didn't. They handled more calls and completed them faster. The biggest productivity gains — 34% — came from the least-experienced, least-skilled workers.

At an Alorica call center in Albuquerque, New Mexico, one customer-service rep had been struggling to gain access to the information she needed to quickly handle calls. After Alorica trained her to use AI tools, her "handle time" — how long it takes to resolve customer calls — fell in four months by an average of 14 minutes a call to just over seven minutes.

Over a period of six months, the AI tools helped one group of 850 Alorica reps reduce their average handle time to six minutes, from just over eight minutes. They can now field 10 calls an hour instead of eight — an additional 16 calls in an eight-hour day.

Alorica agents can use AI tools to quickly access information about the customers who call in — to check their order history, say, or determine whether they had called earlier and hung up in frustration.

Suppose, said Mike Clifton, Alorica's co-CEO, a customer complains that she received the wrong product. The agent can "hit replace, and the product will be there tomorrow," he said. "Anything else I can help you with? No?" Click. Done. Thirty seconds in and out."

Now the company is beginning to use its Real-time Voice Language Translation tool, which lets customers and Alorica agents speak and hear each other in their own languages.

"It allows (Alorica reps) to handle every call they get," said Rene Paiz, a vice president of customer service. "I don't have to hire externally" just to find someone who speaks a specific language.

Yet Alorica isn't cutting jobs. It continues to seek hires — increasingly, those who are comfortable with new technology.

"We are still actively hiring," Paiz says. "We have a lot that needs to be done out there."

Russia fires a barrage of drones, cruise and ballistic missiles at Kyiv as children return to school

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and VASILISA STEPANENKO Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched an overnight barrage of drones and cruise and ballistic missiles at Kyiv, officials said Monday, as children prepared their return to school across the country after the summer vacation and some found classes canceled due to damage from the attack.

Several series of explosions rocked the Ukrainian capital in the early hours. Debris from intercepted missiles and drones fell in every district of Kyiv, injuring three people and damaging two kindergartens, Ukraine's Interior Ministry said. City authorities reported multiple fires.

After more than 900 days of war, the two sides show no sign of letting up in the fight or moving closer to the negotiating table. The two sides are pursuing ambitious ground offensives, with the Ukrainians driving into Russia's Kursk region and the Russian army pushing deeper into the Donetsk region of eastern Ukraine that is part of the industrial Donbas region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin said Monday that Ukraine's Kursk assault will not prevent Russian forces from advancing in eastern Ukraine. Ukrainian forces have not achieved their goal of diverting Russian troops from the fighting there, he said.

"The main task that the enemy set for themselves — to stop our offensive in Donbas — they haven't achieved it," Putin told school students during a trip to southern Siberia.

Putin predicted that Ukraine's Kursk offensive will fail and that subsequently Kyiv officials will want "to move to peace talks."

Russia launched 35 missiles of various types and 26 Shahed drones at Ukraine on the night from Sunday to Monday, the Ukrainian air force said. Nine ballistic missiles, 13 cruise missiles and 20 drones were downed, it said.

Residents of the capital hurried into the city's bomb shelters.

Oksana Argunova, an 18-year-old student at a Kyiv high school, said she was still shaking after the nighttime scare.

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"I woke up, my neighbor was shouting: 'Let's go down (to the shelter), there are big explosions.' We all ran," Argunova told The Associated Press.

The first day of school in Ukraine involves ceremonies and rituals. Students of all ages and often teachers or parents wear traditional costumes. Celebrations include concerts and dances.

Small groups of children and parents gathered outside a damaged Kyiv school as firefighters put out flames and removed rubble.

One 39-year-old mother turned up at the school with her 7-year-old daughter, Sophia, unaware it had been hit. It was Sophia's first day at what for her was a new school, her mother said, after a frightening night.

"Of course, the child was scared. We hid in the bathroom, where it was relatively safe," said the mother, who provided only her first name, Olena.

"Today is one of the most important days of the year for millions of our Ukrainian children, families and teachers," Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said on his Telegram channel.

"Ukraine is doing everything to give children as many opportunities as possible. And all our schools, all higher education institutions that are working today are proof of the resilience of our people and the strength of Ukraine," he said.

Both sides are battering each other with regular long-range drone and missile strikes, sometimes launching more than 100 weapons in aerial attacks that suggest they are still pouring resources into weapon production.

Russian air defenses intercepted 158 Ukrainian drones during the night from Saturday to Sunday, including two over Moscow and nine over the surrounding region, the Defense Ministry said.

Elsewhere, 18 people were injured in a Sunday evening strike on a center for social and psychological rehabilitation of children and an orphanage in Ukraine's northeastern city of Sumy, regional authorities said.

The regional prosecutor's office said there were no children in the facility when the strike hit, but people in surrounding residential buildings suffered injuries, including six children.

The educational center was partially destroyed and caught fire, and the buildings around it were damaged by the shockwave, State Emergency Services said.

An explosion also rang out in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, according to Ukrainian media. Oleh Syniehubov, head of the Kharkiv region, confirmed an early morning strike on Kharkiv's Industrialnyi district and said it set a residential building and several others on fire.

The U.K. Defense Ministry said Sunday that Russian forces accelerated their advance on their key Donetsk stronghold Pokrovsk over the past week and are likely within 10 kilometers (6 miles) of the city.

Elsewhere along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line there have been no significant changes, it said.

Three Ukrainian teens begin their final year of high school holding onto hopes for the future

By HANNA ARHIROVA Associated Press

UZHHOROD, Ukraine (AP) — This week marks the start of the school year in Ukraine, a pivotal time for any student, especially for teenagers in their final year of high school. Ukrainian teens have more than just grades and university choices on their minds — they are grappling with the realities of war.

One student, still haunted by memories of his hometown in the Luhansk region, nearly all under Russian control, struggles to adapt to life in the Kyiv area after surviving the Russian occupation. Homesickness lingers, a constant reminder of what he left behind. Two other teens agonize over choosing their future professions: They make plans for the future while navigating daily threats from Russian-guided bombs and missiles in their front-line cities.

Just before the school year started, the three found a time of peace and healing at a summer camp on the opposite side of the country. The camp for children affected by the war was created and organized by the Voices of Children charity foundation and sponsored by the Olena Zelenska Foundation, the charity set up by the wife of Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy.

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For the three teens, it was a rare chance to socialize with other young people from around Ukraine who faced war trauma and to take a much-needed break to find further strength.

'I am confident that I will have a future'

What 16-year-old Oleksandr Hryshchenko liked most about the summer camp in Uzhhorod, near the western border with Slovakia, was that "there was no focus on the war."

"You relax, talk about what's been weighing on you during the day," he said. His village, Vorozhba, is located at the other end of the country, less than 10 kilometers (6 miles) from the Russian border, in the northern Sumy region.

For him, the camp was a rare opportunity to escape the relentless explosions and danger, especially after the Ukrainian military advanced into Russia's Kursk region, about 50 kilometers (30 miles) away.

"People who are farther from the border are still enjoying, celebrating the capture of new villages, but they don't understand, don't feel, don't know what's happening in the border area," he said. "The Russians have started striking towns much more aggressively."

Shelling has fluctuated in intensity throughout the war, but this summer has been particularly challenging. While the Russians previously relied on artillery, they now target Vorozhba with far more terrifying glide bombs, which he describes as "much worse."

While Oleksandr had the opportunity to work with psychologists at the camp and communicate with other children there, he remains in constant contact with his family. During a recent strike, his house was shaken by blast waves from a bomb, causing a light fixture to fall from the ceiling.

His final year at his hometown school will largely be online. Many people left the village this summer, but Oleksandr said his family isn't planning to leave just yet.

"We know that if we leave now, there might be nothing left to return to," he said. His entire family, including his grandparents, still lives there, while his father has been serving on the front lines since the early days of Russia's full-scale invasion in February 2022.

"For me, my father is the bravest person in my life," Oleksandr said. The war has changed him, he said: He used to have a softer character, but now he's more reserved.

The impact of the war is a constant worry, he said. "You think about it every night before bed. You mull over it all day, wondering what comes next."

Despite the turmoil, Oleksandr feels he is taking control of his destiny, concentrating on his final year of school, preparing for entrance exams and choosing a university.

"I am confident that Ukraine will have a future, I will have a future, and I know that everything will be fine, but we need to get through these times," he said.

A community of witnesses to war

Sixteen-year-old Valerii Soldatenko still has visions of his hometown in the Luhansk region which he fled on Aug. 29, 2022, after living under Russian occupation for about six months.

"There are moments when I almost see it before my eyes. I see familiar faces, I see those beautiful white hills," Valerii said. His native village, Bilokurakyne, in the northern part of the Luhansk region, is occupied by Russian forces.

For him, education was a crucial factor in his decision to leave. In August 2022, just before the new school year began, he fled because the Russian curriculum had been imposed.

"I really didn't want to conform to the Russian education system," he said. "So it was clear that I was at the greatest risk and could put my family in the most danger."

His family settled near Kyiv, but Valerii still struggles to adjust. He longs for his friends, the familiar landscapes of Luhansk and his old house — a crafted building of clay, hay, and chalk with a blue facade and white columns.

Among the few belongings he brought with him is a walnut shell from a friend, a cherished reminder as time and distance make it harder to stay in touch.

"Before we left, we hoped to be home by November or December, celebrating Christmas and New Year with family," Valerii said. "But as you can see, I'm sitting here, not in my native village."

He came to the camp to connect with other "witnesses of war," seeking both reflection and insight into

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how his peers in front-line areas are coping.

As he prepares to start his final year of high school, he is finalizing his choice of university, although he is still unsure whether to pursue a career as a journalist or a history teacher.

"I would say that (the war) took away my childhood, especially after I fled," he said.

'Being a teenager in wartime is hard'

Kseniia Kucher, 16, dreams of her graduation day, envisioning a celebration or a trip with her classmates. But with schooling in the northeastern city of Kharkiv mostly online due to routine Russian strikes, that may not be feasible.

Her family has packed its "emergency bags" with essential items and documents but currently has no plans to leave.

"It's really hard to go through, especially when the strikes happen at night. You literally wake up from being jolted in bed because of the explosions," she said. "And yet, it's easier because you're still at home. You're with your loved ones and not in a foreign environment."

At camp, hundreds of kilometers (miles) from Kharkiv, Kseniia found a rare chance to decompress. "I even started having some dreams here," she said.

She particularly cherished the late-night conversations with peers, in which they shared their experiences and connected personally.

"I don't have many friends in general, in life. And now they've all scattered," she reflected. When she's at home, she tries not to dwell on her prewar life but instead focuses on the present.

"I live in the moment and don't make big plans for the future because, understanding the current situation ... I don't know what will happen in a year," she said.

She lives with her mother and younger brother, while her father serves on the front lines. Kseniia sees him once every few months.

While she spoke, the distant sounds of thunderstorms kept distracting her with their resemblance to explosions.

"Being a teenager during war is hard," she said. "You don't fully understand your emotions, and everything affects you — from a hurtful word to a barrage of missiles. It's hard to live with that."

Far-right success in German votes piles new pressure on Scholz's coalition

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — The Alternative for Germany party's success in two state elections piled new pressure on Chancellor Olaf Scholz's fractious government and left the country's main opposition party facing political contortions on Monday to find a way to govern a pair of eastern regions without involving the far-right party.

Alternative for Germany, or AfD, became the first far-right party to win a state election in post-World War II Germany in Thuringia on Sunday under one of its hardest-right figures, Björn Höcke. In neighboring Saxony, it finished only just behind the mainstream conservative Christian Democratic Union, which leads the national opposition. Voters punished the three parties in Scholz's governing coalition, which took well under 15% of the vote between them.

Deep discontent with a national government notorious for infighting, inflation and a weak economy, anti-immigration sentiment and skepticism toward German military aid for Ukraine are among the factors that contributed to support for populist parties in the formerly communist east, which is less prosperous than western Germany. A new party founded by a prominent leftist was the second big winner on Sunday — and will probably be needed to form state governments since no one is prepared to govern with AfD.

The debacle for the governing parties added to awful performances in the European Parliament election in June for Scholz's coalition, and it's not obvious that they have any recipe to turn things around with Germany's next national election due in a bit over a year. Another state election on Sept. 22 in an eastern region — Brandenburg, which unlike the two that voted Sunday is currently led by Scholz's center-left Social Democrats — could add to their embarrassment.

Voters “wanted to send a signal to Berlin above all,” Jens Spahn, a senior CDU lawmaker, told ZDF television. “They want to send a signal to the (coalition) that the chancellor no longer has their confidence. Olaf Scholz is the face of failure in Thuringia and Saxony too.”

But the two elections also bring difficult decisions for the CDU, which leads national polls. AfD holds now more than a third of the seats, at least in Thuringia’s state legislature — which would, for example, allow it to block appointments of judges to the regional constitutional court — and that will make it hard to build workable governments.

AFD’s strength in the east has pushed other parties into unconventional coalitions as far back as 2016, but Sunday’s results took that to a new level.

In Thuringia, even a previously improbable combination of the CDU, Scholz’s party and the new leftist Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance lacks a majority; to get one, the conservatives would also need help from the Left Party, which is descended from East Germany’s communist rulers and led the outgoing state government. So far, they have refused to work with it.

Linda Deutsch, AP trial writer who had front row to courtroom history, dies at 80

By JOHN ROGERS Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — Linda Deutsch, a special correspondent for The Associated Press who for nearly 50 years wrote glittering first drafts of history from many of the nation’s most significant criminal and civil trials — Charles Manson, O.J. Simpson, Michael Jackson, among others — died Sunday. She was 80.

Deutsch was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer in 2022 and underwent successful treatment, but the cancer returned this summer. She died at her Los Angeles home, surrounded by family and friends, said nurse Narek Petrosian of Olympia Hospice Care.

AP chief United Nations correspondent Edith Lederer was among those with Deutsch at the end. They were friends for more than 50 years and trailblazing female reporters when they joined AP in the late 1960s.

“She was an incomparable friend to hundreds of people who will miss her wit, wisdom, charm and constant inquisitiveness,” Lederer said.

One of America’s best-known trial reporters when she retired in 2015, Deutsch’s courts career began with the 1969 trial and conviction of Sen. Robert F. Kennedy’s assassin, Sirhan Sirhan. She went on to cover a who’s who of criminal defendants — Manson, Simpson, Jackson, Patty Hearst, Phil Spector, the Menendez Brothers, “Night Stalker” Richard Ramirez, “Unabomber” Ted Kaczynski and the police officers charged in the beating of motorist Rodney King.

She was in a Los Angeles courtroom in 1995 for the conclusion of “The Trial of the Century” that saw Simpson, an NFL Hall of Famer, acquitted of killing his ex-wife and her friend. Thirteen years later, Deutsch was in a Las Vegas courtroom when Simpson was convicted of kidnapping and robbery and sentenced to prison.

“When a big trial loomed, AP’s assignment editors didn’t have to ask who should get the assignment. No, the instant question was, ‘Is Linda available?’” recalled Louis D. Boccardi, who served as AP’s executive editor for a decade and as president and CEO for 18 years. “She mastered the art of celebrity trial coverage and, in the process, became something of a media celebrity herself.”

For decades, Deutsch covered every appeal and parole hearing of each convicted Manson Family member. Other historic moments included witnessing the 1976 conviction of Hearst, the newspaper heiress found guilty on bank robbery and other charges; the 2005 acquittal of Jackson on child molestation charges; and the 2009 murder conviction of Spector, the famed music producer.

“Linda was a fearless reporter who loved being on a big story — and she indeed covered some of the biggest,” said Julie Pace, AP’s executive editor and senior vice president. “She was a true trailblazer whose command of her beat and tireless work ethic made her an inspiration to so many journalists at the AP and across our industry.”

Her work, always written with verve, was not limited to celebrity — other trials involved fraud, conspiracy,

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environmental disasters and immigration — and eventually earned her the title of special correspondent, the most prestigious byline for an AP reporter.

Defense attorney Thomas Mesereau, who represented Jackson, called Deutsch “the epitome of ethics and professionalism in journalism.”

“I can’t think of anybody who rises to her level,” he said of Deutsch when she retired.

Deutsch was just 25 when she covered the conviction of Sirhan. She then turned to the bizarre case of Charles Manson, a career criminal who had reinvented himself as a hippie guru, proselytizing and furnishing psychedelic drugs to a group of disaffected youth.

The Manson Family, as they came to be known, terrorized Los Angeles on successive summer nights in 1969, breaking into homes in two wealthy neighborhoods and killing seven people, including pregnant actress Sharon Tate. Most victims were stabbed multiple times, and their blood was used to scrawl “pig” and other words on the walls of the homes.

When Manson and three of his young female followers went on trial for murder in 1970, they turned the monthslong legal proceeding into a “surreal spectacle,” as Deutsch would write when Manson died in 2017.

“People were having LSD flashbacks in the courtroom and at one point Charlie is leaping across the counsel table at the judge with a pencil in his hand and the girls are jumping up and down singing,” Deutsch recalled during a 2014 interview.

With only one significant trial under Deutsch’s belt, the AP initially sent a more experienced reporter from New York to lead its Manson trial coverage. After a month of witnessing such antics, he returned home in disgust, leaving Deutsch in charge.

“I thought, ‘Oh, this is really something,’” Deutsch remembered with a laugh. “I didn’t know trials could be like this.”

Nonetheless, she was hooked, forming tight bonds with the journalists who showed up every day for nine months.

But an even bigger trial, born in the modern television era, would eclipse Manson more than two decades later. When Simpson, one of America’s most beloved celebrities and sports figures, was charged with fatally stabbing Nicole Brown Simpson and Ron Goldman in a fit of rage, news outlets from all over the world sent reporters to cover the case.

The judge made Deutsch, by then a familiar face around the courthouse, the only reporter to cover jury selection. She became ubiquitous on television, telling a worldwide audience what was going on in the courtroom.

After Simpson was acquitted 11 months later, he called to thank her for what he considered fair and objective coverage. The conversation led to what would be the first of a number of exclusive interviews he gave her over the years.

Not all her trials involved celebrities. Deutsch spent five months in Alaska covering the trial of Joseph Hazelwood, the captain of the Exxon Valdez oil tanker that caused one of the worst U.S. environmental disasters when it spilled 11 million gallons (41 million liters) of crude oil in 1989.

She was also at the 1973 espionage trial of Daniel Ellsberg, who leaked to The New York Times the top secret Pentagon Papers that revealed unsavory details about U.S. involvement in Vietnam. The Times published a series of articles about the contents that helped turn the public against the Vietnam War.

Deutsch covered the trial of Ramirez, the “Night Stalker” serial murderer, listening to testimony so gruesome it brought tears to the eyes of reporters. But it was the 1992 trial of four Los Angeles police officers who were videotaped beating King that shook Deutsch the most. Their acquittals triggered rioting in Los Angeles that killed 55 people and caused \$1 billion in property damage.

“That almost destroyed my belief in the justice system,” she said in 2014. “I feel a jury usually gets it right, but in that case, no. It was the wrong conclusion. It was the wrong verdict and it nearly destroyed my city.”

Like so many others, Deutsch fell in love with Los Angeles after moving there from somewhere else. Born and raised in New Jersey, she traced her interest in journalism to age 12, when she founded an

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international Elvis Presley fan club newsletter in her hometown of Perth Amboy. The lifelong Presley fan traveled to the musician's Graceland home in Memphis, Tennessee, in 2002 to cover the 25th anniversary of his death.

By her sophomore year at New Jersey's Monmouth College — now Monmouth University — she had landed a part-time job at her hometown newspaper, where she persuaded her editor to allow her to travel to Washington, D.C., in 1963 to cover the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr.'s historic "I Have a Dream" speech.

Arriving in Southern California after graduation, she worked briefly for the San Bernardino Sun before joining the AP in 1967. Deutsch initially aspired to be an entertainment reporter and, for years, would take time off from the court beat to help cover the Academy Awards.

In 1975, after the fall of Saigon ended U.S. involvement in Vietnam, she was sent to the Pacific island of Guam to interview evacuees and help get locally hired AP staffers safely to the United States.

But it was always the drama of the courtroom that called her home.

"It's as old as Shakespeare and as old as Socrates," she said in a 2007 interview. "It's an extremely powerful theater that tells us about ourselves and about the people on trial. And I think it's ever fascinating."

Deutsch's survivors include Marvin Sosna, an uncle Deutsch credited with influencing her to become a journalist; cousins Elaine Deutsch, Lisa Deutsch and Lana Sternberg; and godson Luke Rattray.

Funeral arrangements were pending.

Large-scale polio vaccinations begin in war-ravaged Gaza after first case in 25 years

By WAFSA SHURAF and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinian health authorities and United Nations agencies on Sunday began a large-scale campaign of vaccinations against polio in the Gaza Strip, hoping to prevent an outbreak in the territory that has been ravaged by the Israel-Hamas war.

Authorities plan to vaccinate children in central Gaza until Wednesday before moving on to the more devastated northern and southern parts of the strip. The campaign began with a small number of vaccinations on Saturday and aims to reach about 640,000 children.

Gaza's Health Ministry said more than 72,600 children received vaccines Sunday.

The World Health Organization has said Israel agreed to limited pauses in the fighting to facilitate the campaign. There were initial reports of Israeli strikes in central Gaza early Sunday, but it was not immediately known if anyone was killed or wounded. The pause ended Sunday afternoon, according to a schedule released by Israel.

Israel has said the vaccination program will continue through Sept. 9 and last eight hours a day.

Gaza recently reported its first polio case in 25 years — a 10-month-old boy, now paralyzed in a leg. The World Health Organization says the presence of a paralysis case indicates there could be hundreds more who have been infected but aren't showing symptoms.

Most people who have polio do not experience symptoms, and those who do usually recover in a week or so. But there is no cure, and when polio causes paralysis, it is usually permanent. If the paralysis affects breathing muscles, the disease can be fatal.

The vaccination campaign faces challenges, from ongoing fighting to devastated roads and hospitals shut down by the war. Around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million people have been displaced within the besieged territory, with hundreds of thousands crammed into squalid tent camps.

Health officials have expressed alarm about disease outbreaks as uncollected garbage has piled up and the bombing of critical infrastructure has sent putrid water flowing through the streets. Polio is spread through fecal matter. Widespread hunger has left people even more vulnerable to illness.

"We escaped death with our children, and fled from place to place for the sake of our children, and now we have these diseases," said Wafaa Obaid, who brought her three children to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in Deir al-Balah to get the vaccinations.

Ammar Ammar, a spokesperson for the U.N. children's agency, said it hopes both parties adhere to a

temporary truce in designated areas to enable families to reach health facilities.

"This is a first step," he told The Associated Press. "But there is no alternative to a cease-fire because it's not only polio that threatens children in Gaza, but also other factors, including malnutrition and the inhuman conditions they are living in."

The vaccinations will be administered at roughly 160 sites across the territory, including medical centers and schools. Children under 10 will receive two drops of oral polio vaccine in two rounds, the second to be administered four weeks after the first.

Israel allowed around 1.3 million doses to be brought into the territory last month, which are now being held in refrigerated storage in a warehouse in Deir al-Balah. Another shipment of 400,000 doses is set to be delivered to Gaza soon.

The polio virus that triggered this latest outbreak is a mutated virus from an oral polio vaccine. The oral polio vaccine contains weakened live virus and in very rare cases, that virus is shed by those who are vaccinated and can evolve into a new form capable of starting new epidemics.

The war in Gaza began when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 hostages. Around 100 remain in captivity, about a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 40,000 Palestinians, according to the Health Ministry, which does not say whether those killed were fighters or civilians. The war has caused vast destruction across the territory, with entire neighborhoods wiped out and critical infrastructure heavily damaged.

The United States, Egypt and Qatar have spent months trying to broker a cease-fire and the release of the remaining hostages, but the talks have repeatedly stalled and a number of sticking points remain.

How do you get a grumpy 4-ton elephant to a new home 120 miles away? Call the elephant movers

By GERALD IMRAY Associated Press

CAPE TOWN, South Africa (AP) — When it comes to the niche business of moving elephants, Dr. Amir Khalil and his team might be the best.

The Egyptian veterinarian's résumé includes possibly the most famous elephant relocation on the planet. In 2020, Khalil's team saved Kaavan, an Asian elephant, from years of loneliness at a Pakistan zoo and flew him to a better life with other elephants at a sanctuary in Cambodia.

Kaavan was dubbed the "world's loneliest elephant" at the time, and the project was a great success. But he was not the only one that needed help.

Next up was the last captive elephant in South Africa.

Charley, an aging four-ton African elephant, had outlived his fellow elephants at a zoo in the capital, Pretoria, where he'd stayed for more than 20 years. Elephants are sensitive animals, wildlife experts say, and Charley was showing signs of being deeply unhappy in his enclosure since his partner, Landa, died in 2020.

Zoo officials decided he should be "retired" to a place more fitting for a big old tusker — a large private game reserve some 200 kilometers (120 miles) away where there's a chance he might make some new elephant friends.

How to get him there? Khalil, an animal rescue specialist at the Four Paws wildlife welfare organization, was an obvious choice for this latest mammoth job.

If ever an elephant deserved to enjoy his twilight years, it's Charley.

Captured as a young calf in western Zimbabwe in the 1980s and taken from his herd, he spent 16 years in a South African circus and 23 years as the prime attraction at Pretoria's National Zoological Garden. He's thought to be 42 years old now and spent 40 of them in captivity.

"I don't know how many hundreds of thousands of people and children witnessed and enjoyed Charley," said Khalil. "I think it's time for him to also enjoy life and to live as an elephant."

The mechanics of moving an elephant to a new life are complex. Khalil doesn't dart and tranquilize

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elephants, mainly because it's not good for such a big animal. Also, four tons of tranquilized elephant is hardly any easier to move.

And so, a process began of training an occasionally grumpy old elephant to step willingly into a large metal transport container that would be loaded onto a truck. Khalil and fellow vets Dr. Marina Ivanova and Dr. Frank Göritz — who were also part of the Kaavan relocation team — first began interacting with Charley two years ago.

That was to assess how ready he was to move and, crucially, to earn his trust. The interaction was carefully controlled, but it involved teaching Charley to respond to calls to walk up to a "training wall" that has gaps in it for the team to offer him a food reward. In Charley's case, pumpkins, papaya and beetroot are his favorites.

The same process was ultimately used to entice Charley into the transport container. It was thought that it might take months and months for Charley to step happily into the container when that was introduced, but he was ready to go in less than two weeks of crate training last month.

"He was curious, and thinking, what is this new toy?" said Ivanova.

After an hourslong road trip on the back of a truck, Charley was introduced to his new home at the Shambala private game reserve in late August.

He'll be held in an area separate from the main park for a few weeks to allow him to settle, the team said, given such a huge change for an old elephant. The park contains wild elephant herds that Charley may join up with.

Khalil said it is still very rare for captive elephants to be reintroduced to a wild setting and praised officials at the Pretoria zoo and South Africa's environment ministry for allowing this project to go ahead. "It's a great message from South Africa that even an old elephant deserves a new chance," he said.

Khalil's team has another elephant move in Pakistan planned for October.

Elephants are highly intelligent, highly social animals, Khalil said, and while Charley was unhappy, he could also be mischievous and playful and show glimpses of delight. Khalil compared Charley's last few unfulfilling years at the zoo without any companions to someone watching the same movie every day, alone.

At Shambala, Charley will have the freedom to take a mud bath, roam the bush and be a wild elephant for the first time in four decades with thousands of hectares (acres) to explore. Some of his early memories as a calf before he was captured may still be there. It is true, the vets said, that elephants have incredible memories.

Charley is already making contact with the other elephants out in the park from his holding pen, Ivanova said. Elephants have deep rumbles that can be heard 3 miles (5 kilometers) away that they use to communicate.

"I hear him rumbling," said Ivanova, delighted. "We'll help him turn into a wild elephant again."

How do you get a grumpy 4-ton elephant to a new home 120 miles away? Call the elephant movers

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Some Lebanese who fear war is coming have an unusual backup plan: Moving to Syria

By ABBY SEWELL Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Residents of Beirut's southern suburbs have been scrambling to make contingency plans since an Israeli airstrike on an apartment building in a busy neighborhood killed a top Hezbollah commander and touched off fears of a full-scale war.

For most, that means moving in with relatives or renting homes in Christian, Druze or Sunni-majority areas of Lebanon that are generally considered safer than the Shiite-majority areas where the Hezbollah militant group has its main operations and base of support.

But for a small number, plan B is a move to neighboring Syria.

Although Syria is in its 14th year of civil war, active fighting has long been frozen in much of the country. Lebanese citizens, who can cross the border without a visa, regularly visit Damascus. And renting an apartment is significantly cheaper in Syria than in Lebanon.

Zahra Ghaddar said she and her family were shaken when they saw an apartment building reduced to rubble by the July 30 drone strike in her area, known as Dahiyeh. Along with Hezbollah commander Fouad Shukur, two children and three women were killed and dozens more were injured in the targeted Israeli attack.

Previously, the Lebanese capital had been largely untouched by the near-daily cross-border clashes that have displaced around 100,000 people from southern Lebanon and tens of thousands more in Israel since Oct. 8. That's when Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel in support of its ally Hamas, which a day earlier led a deadly raid in Israel that killed some 1,200 people and took another 250 hostage. Israel responded with an aerial bombardment and ground offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 40,000 Palestinians.

In recent weeks, the conflict in Lebanon appeared on the brink of spiraling out of control.

Ghaddar said her family first considered moving within Lebanon but were discouraged by social media posts blaming displaced civilians, along with Hezbollah, for the threat of all-out war. Also, surging demand prompted steep rent hikes.

"We found the rents started at \$700, and that's for a house we wouldn't be too comfortable in," she said. That amount is more than many Lebanese earn in a month.

So they looked across the border.

Ghaddar's family found a four-bedroom apartment in Aleppo, a city in northwestern Syria, for \$150 a month. They paid six months' rent in advance and returned to Lebanon.

Israel periodically launches airstrikes on Syria, usually targeting Iranian-linked military sites or militants, but Bashar Assad's government has largely stood on the sidelines of the current regional conflict.

Israel and Hezbollah fought a bruising monthlong war in 2006 that demolished much of southern Lebanon and Beirut's southern suburbs. At the time, some 180,000 Lebanese took refuge in Syria, many taking shelter in schools, mosques and empty factories. Those who could afford it rented houses. Some put down permanent roots.

Rawad Issa, then a teenager, fled to Syria with his parents. They returned to Lebanon when the war ended, but Issa's father used some of his savings to buy a house in Syria's Hama province, just in case.

"That way, if another war happened, we would already have a house ready," Issa said.

The house and surrounding area were untouched by Syria's civil war, he said. A few weeks ago, his sister and her husband went to get the house ready for the family to return, in case the situation in Lebanon deteriorated.

Issa, who works in video production, said he initially planned to rent an apartment in Lebanon if the conflict expanded, rather than joining his family in Syria.

But in "safe" areas of Beirut, "they are asking for fantastic prices," he said. One landlord was charging \$900 for a room in a shared apartment. "And outside of Beirut, it's not much better."

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Azzam Ali, a Syrian journalist in Damascus, told The Associated Press that in the first few days after the strike in Dahiye, he saw an influx of Lebanese renting hotel rooms and houses in the city. A Lebanese family — friends of a friend — stayed in his house for a few days, he said.

In a Facebook post, he welcomed the Lebanese, saying they “made the old city of Damascus more beautiful.”

After the situation appeared to calm down, “some went back and some stayed here, but most of them stayed,” he said.

No agency has recorded how many people have moved from Lebanon to Syria in recent months. They are spread across the country and are not registered as refugees, making tracking the migration difficult. Anecdotal evidence suggests the numbers are small.

Of 80 people displaced from southern Lebanon living in greater Beirut — including Lebanese, Syrians and Palestinian refugees — at least 20 said they were considering taking refuge in Syria if the war in Lebanon escalated, according to interviews conducted by researchers overseen by Jasmin Lilian Diab, director of the Institute for Migration Studies at the Lebanese American University.

Diab noted that the Lebanese considering this route were a niche group who had “existing networks in Syria, either business networks, family or friends.”

The threat of war has also not prompted a mass reverse migration of Syrians from Lebanon. Some 775,000 Syrians are registered with the U.N. Refugee Agency in Lebanon, and hundreds of thousands more are believed to be unregistered in the country.

While fighting in Syria has died down, many refugees fear that if they return they could be arrested for real or perceived ties to the opposition to Assad or forcibly conscripted to the army. If they leave Lebanon to escape war they could lose their refugee status, although some cross back and forth via smuggler routes without their movements being recorded.

Many residents of Dahiye breathed a sigh of relief when an intense exchange of strikes between Israel and Hezbollah on July 25 turned out to be short-lived. But Ghaddar said she still worries the situation will deteriorate, forcing her family to flee.

“It’s necessary to have a backup plan in any case,” she said.

Harris looks to Biden for a boost in Pennsylvania as the two are set to attend a Labor Day parade

By COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris and President Joe Biden are co-headlining a campaign event Monday in the marquee battleground state of Pennsylvania as Harris balances presenting herself as “a new way forward” while remaining intensely loyal to Biden and the policies he has pushed.

The pair will attend Pittsburgh’s Labor Day parade and offer some remarks, the first time the two have shared a speaking slot on the political stage together since the surprising election shakeup that provided a fresh jolt of Democratic enthusiasm to the 2024 election.

Harris’ campaign has said Pennsylvania voters are newly energized since Harris moved to the top of the ticket six weeks ago, with tens of thousands of new volunteers signed up to canvass for her and Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, the Democratic vice presidential nominee. Harris’ and Biden’s appearance at the parade, one of the largest such gatherings in the country, is part of a battleground state blitz with just over two months until Election Day.

Harris, 59, has sought to appeal to voters by positioning herself as a break from poisonous politics, rejecting the acerbic rhetoric of her Republican opponent, former President Donald Trump, while looking to move beyond the Biden era as well. Yet while her delivery may be very different from Biden’s, Harris’ agenda is chock-full of the same issues he has championed: capping the cost of prescription drugs, the Affordable Care Act, the economy and helping families afford child care.

“We fight for a future where we build what I call an opportunity economy, so that every American has the opportunity to own a home, start a business and to build wealth and intergenerational wealth. And a

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future where we lower the cost of living for America," she said at a recent rally, echoing Biden's calls to grow the economy "from the bottom out and the middle up."

Harris briefly appeared on stage with Biden after the president delivered his remarks on the opening night of last month's Democratic National Convention, but the two haven't shared a microphone at a political event since Biden himself was running for office. At that time, the campaign was using Harris mostly as its chief spokeswoman for abortion rights, an issue they believe can help them win in November as restrictions grow and health care worsens for women following the fall of *Roe v. Wade*.

The pair have appeared at official events and met together at the White House since the ticket-swap.

For more than 3 1/2 years, Harris has been one of Biden's chief validators. Now the tables are turned, as Harris looks to lean on Biden — a native of Scranton, Pennsylvania — to help win the potentially decisive state. Biden, for his part, has laid low since ending his reelection bid. He was last at the White House on Aug. 19 and has since been vacationing in Southern California and Delaware.

But even as she's taken on the mantle of leading the Democratic Party, Harris has stood steadfastly at Biden's side. In her first sit-down interview of her candidacy, Harris delivered an impassioned defense of Biden's record and ability to do the job, even despite the events of the past two months that ended with her running for the Oval Office and Biden a lame duck.

The 81-year-old president stepped aside in July following a disastrous debate performance with Trump and a growing chorus within his own party for him to make room for a new generation. Harris and Trump will debate on Sept. 10.

"He cares so deeply about the American people. He is so smart and — and loyal to the American people. And I have spent hours upon hours with him, be it in the Oval Office or the Situation Room. He has the intelligence, the commitment, and the judgment and disposition that I think the American people rightly deserve in their president," she said in last week's interview.

She added of Trump: "By contrast, the former president has none of that."

Harris said during the CNN interview that serving with Biden was "one of the greatest honors of my career," and she recounted the moment he called to tell her he was stepping down.

"He told me what he had decided to do and ... I asked him, 'Are you sure?' and he said, 'Yes,' and that's how I learned about it."

The vice president said she didn't need to ask Biden for his support because "he was very clear that he was going to endorse me."

Harris has also defended the administration's record on the southern border and immigration, one of the administration's most persistent and vexing problems. She notes that she was tasked with trying to address the "root causes" in other countries that were driving the border crossings, though Republicans have tagged her as the "border czar."

"We have laws that have to be followed and enforced, that address and deal with people who cross our border illegally, and there should be consequences," Harris said.

Although Harris has appeared more forceful in speaking about the plight of civilians in Gaza, as Israel's war against Hamas there nears the 11th month mark, the vice president has also endorsed Biden's efforts to arm Israel and bring about a hostage deal and ceasefire.

Israel said early Sunday that it had recovered the bodies of six hostages captured during Hamas' Oct. 7 attack that ignited the Gaza war, including Israeli-American Hersh Goldberg-Polin. The revelation prompted tens of thousands of Israelis to demonstrate in the streets demanding a ceasefire deal.

Harris will join Biden on Monday in the Situation Room to meet with the U.S. hostage deal negotiating team to discuss their continuing efforts on a deal that would secure the release of the remaining hostages.

Federal workers around nation's capital worry over Trump's plans to send some of them elsewhere

BY OLIVIA DIAZ and BRIAN WITTE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Worries of being uprooted from their jobs have returned for Laura Dodson and other federal workers, who have long been the economic backbone of the nation's capital and its suburbs.

During former President Donald Trump's administration, her office under the U.S. Department of Agriculture was told it would be moving. About 75 people were going to be relocated to Kansas City, Missouri, Dodson said, but less than 40 actually moved. A rushed process that failed to consider the need to find homes, jobs for spouses and schools for children prompted some retirements, she said, and some took other federal jobs, hurting the agency in the end.

Now, with Trump proposing the relocation of up to 100,000 federal jobs from Virginia, Maryland and the District of Columbia under his Agenda 47 plan, concerns about being abruptly moved are again troubling federal workers. The Republican's proposals stir anxiety in the midst of an unusually competitive U.S. Senate race in heavily Democratic Maryland that could determine control of the Senate, with even the Republican candidate calling the plans "crazy." The proposals also could hinder Trump's chances to win Virginia, a state he lost in 2016 and 2020, where a U.S. Senate seat widely seen as safely Democratic is also on the ballot.

"It's causing a lot of anxiety, a lot of discomfort within the workforce, as you are faced with these strong, negative, anti-federal worker stances and this uncertainty of what might happen to your job, your home and your livelihood," said Dodson, who is acting vice president of American Federation of Government Employees local 3403, which represents the USDA's Economic Research Service.

And concerns don't end there. Federal workers also are worried about "Project 2025," a proposed overhaul of the federal government crafted by longtime Trump allies that would eliminate thousands of jobs and remove civil service protections for some federal workers. The former president has repeatedly distanced himself from the proposal this summer.

But the plan still worries Michael Knowles. He said it calls for making the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services' D.C. presence "skeletal, and agency employees with operational or security roles should be rotated out to offices throughout the United States."

Knowles, who is president of AFGE local 1924, said most of his members took an oath to uphold the Constitution and faithfully administer the laws of the United States. He said the members, who all work in the National Capital Region, are committed to the mission of government service.

"And they would do what they need to do to carry out that mission," Knowles said. "But I think the employees would look dimly on arbitrary or capricious decisions that didn't seem to make any business or operational sense."

Trump's campaign did not return requests for comment.

The District of Columbia has the largest number of federal civilian employees, with about 160,700 jobs, according to the Congressional Research Service. Maryland and Virginia are in the top four jurisdictions, with about 138,940 in Maryland and 140,400 in Virginia. California has about 142,040.

The proposals to move a large number of federal workers infuriate local leaders in the suburbs of Washington in both Maryland and Virginia. In Maryland, a heavily blue state where Trump is deeply unpopular, it's viewed by many as retaliation by the former president, who received only 32% of the vote there in 2020.

Trump made headlines while he was in office when he denigrated Baltimore, Maryland's largest city, as a "disgusting, rat and rodent infested mess."

Angela Alsobrooks, the chief executive of Prince George's County who is the Democratic nominee in the Maryland U.S. Senate race, described Trump's positions on the federal workforce "as yet another reason that we absolutely must put Donald Trump in the rearview mirror."

"Former President Trump is a ruthless leader, retaliatory in all his ways, and what he talks about in terms of really harming federal workers is evil," Alsobrooks said after returning from the Democratic National Convention last month.

Former Gov. Larry Hogan, her Republican opponent, condemned the relocation proposals as "crazy." He

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said they "would be devastating to the region, the state of Maryland and bad for the federal government."

"It's like, you know, Trump trying to turn the federal government into one of his failed casinos, where he thinks he can do whatever he wants," Hogan, who has long been one of the GOP's fiercest Trump critics, said in an interview. "I think it would undermine our entire democracy."

Businesses that provide services to the thousands of federal workers fear the ripple-effect threat of the proposed changes. At Census Auto Repair & Sales, for example, across the street from the U.S. Census Bureau's headquarters in Suitland, Maryland, service manager Tay Gibson says his shop would feel the impact directly.

"I would hate to see the federal workers leave," Gibson said. "That would be business leaving as well, and that would affect small businesses like myself."

Libby Garvey, chair of the Arlington County Board in the Virginia suburbs of Washington, emphasized the potential hit on the local economy.

"If a large proportion of (tax payers) suddenly lose their jobs (or have to) move away, that takes a terrible, major hit to our local budget, which impacts our ability to pave the roads, make sure the water is clean, provide public safety, fire, police, emergency personnel and provide good schools," Garvey said.

Karen Hult, a political science professor at Virginia Tech, said the move could harm Trump's chances in Virginia.

"Federal workers around Northern Virginia, and in the D.C. metro area generally, are, in fact, a bit of a voting bloc," Hult said "The other thing, of course, are all the contractors — the beltway bandits. They make a big difference, too."

But Hult also said the idea of relocating federal workers could resonate with Virginians outside of the northern part of the state, who may feel a distrust of the D.C. bureaucracy.

Filipe Campante, a Bloomberg Distinguished professor at Johns Hopkins University who focuses on political economy and urban and regional issues, noted that there's a reason why capital cities exist, with the presence of federal employees nearby. Physical presence, he said, is necessary for face-to-face interactions that are important to maintaining accountability.

While Trump and his supporters see the relocation as a positive in terms of moving the "deep state" away from the seat of government, Campante said it also has a downside.

"I think it is a positive factor for accountability that you have civil servants also operating as a check on political appointees, and this would be weakened by moving these people away from where the center of the government is, so I think from that perspective it would reduce accountability," Campante said. "Obviously, then, it depends on whether you think this accountability is good or not."

Russia launches a barrage of drones, cruise and ballistic missiles at Kyiv, Ukraine's military says

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Russia launched a barrage of drones, cruise and ballistic missiles at Kyiv and possibly other cities, Ukraine's air force said early Monday.

Several series of explosions rocked the Ukrainian capital in the early hours of Monday, sending residents into bomb shelters.

Kyiv Mayor Vitalii Klitschko said emergency services were called to the Holiivskiyi and Solomianskyi districts of Kyiv. One person was reportedly injured by falling debris in Shevchenkivskiyi district, Klitschko said.

"There will be an answer for everything. The enemy will feel it," the head of the Presidential Office, Andrii Yermak, posted on his Telegram page following the attack.

According to the air force, Russia fired several groups of cruise missiles accompanied by ballistic missile launches and a few drones, targeting Kyiv.

An explosion also rang out in Kharkiv, Ukraine's second largest city, according to Ukrainian media.

The barrage comes a day after Russia's military reported intercepting and destroying 158 Ukrainian drones targeting multiple Russian regions in one of the biggest attacks of the war that has raged for about 2 1/2 years.

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Forty-six of the drones were over the Kursk region, where Ukraine has sent its forces in recent weeks in the largest incursion on Russian soil since World War II. A further 34 were shot over the Bryansk region, 28 over the Voronezh region, and 14 over the Belgorod region — all of which border Ukraine.

Drones were also shot down deeper into Russia, including one each in the Tver region, northwest of Moscow, and the Ivanovo region, northeast of the Russian capital. Russia's Defense Ministry said drones were intercepted over 15 regions, while one other governor said a drone was shot down over his region, too.

Moscow Mayor Sergei Sobyenin said that falling debris from one of the two drones shot down over the city caused a fire at an oil refinery.

Ukrainian drone strikes have brought the fight far from the front line into the heart of Russia. Since the beginning of the year, Ukraine has stepped up aerial assaults on Russian soil, targeting refineries and oil terminals to slow down the Kremlin's assault.

Also in Russia, regional Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov said 11 people were wounded in Ukrainian aerial missile attacks in the Russian border region of Belgorod on Sunday. These included eight in the regional capital, also called Belgorod.

Meanwhile, Russia's Defense Ministry said Sunday it had taken control of the towns of Pivnichne and Vyimka, in Ukraine's Donetsk region. The Associated Press could not independently verify the claim.

Russian forces have been driving deeper into the partly occupied eastern region, the total capture of which is one of the Kremlin's primary ambitions. Russia's army is closing in on Pokrovsk, a critical logistics hub for the Ukrainian defense in the area.

At least three people were killed and nine wounded on Sunday in Russian shelling in the town of Kurakhove, some 20 miles (33 kilometers) south of Pokrovsk, Donetsk regional Gov. Vadym Filashkin said.

Also on Sunday, 44 people were wounded when Russia attacked the Kharkiv regional capital, also called Kharkiv, Mayor Ihor Terekhov said. The city was struck by 10 missiles, with a shopping center, a sports facility and residential buildings among those damaged.

Elsewhere in Ukraine overnight, eight drones were shot down out of 11 launched by Russia, according to the Ukrainian air force.

One person was killed and four wounded in shelling overnight in the Sumy region, local officials said, while Kharkiv Gov. Oleh Syniehubov said five other people had been wounded in his region.

ESPN networks, ABC and Disney channels go dark on DirecTV on a busy night for sports

By JOE REEDY AP Sports Writer

ESPN has gone off the air on a major carrier for the second straight year during the U.S. Open tennis tournament and in the midst of the first full weekend of college football.

Disney Entertainment channels went dark on DirecTV Sunday night after the sides were unable to reach a new carriage agreement.

The move angered some sports fans, who posted their displeasure on social media. And the U.S. Tennis Association wasn't pleased with another carriage dispute.

ESPN was showing the fourth round of the U.S. Open when it went off the air on DirecTV at 7:20 p.m. EDT.

That was a half-hour before the start of the match between Frances Tiafoe, an American who reached the 2022 U.S. Open semifinals, and Alexei Popyrin, an Australian who eliminated defending champion Novak Djokovic on Friday.

"It is disappointing that fans and viewers around the country will not have the opportunity to watch the greatest athletes in our sport take part in the 2024 U.S. Open due to an unresolved negotiation between DirecTV and Disney, resulting in the loss of access to ESPN. We are hopeful that this dispute can be resolved as quickly as possible," the USTA said in a statement.

It also happened 10 minutes before the start of the college football game between No. 13 LSU and 23rd-ranked Southern California in Las Vegas.

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ABC-owned stations in Los Angeles; the San Francisco Bay Area; Fresno, California; New York; Chicago; Philadelphia; Houston; and Raleigh, North Carolina, also went off DirecTV.

Last year, Disney and Spectrum — the nation's second-largest cable TV provider — were involved in a nearly 12-day impasse until coming to an agreement hours before the first Monday night NFL game of the season.

DirecTV said Disney offered an extension to keep the channels on the air in exchange for DirecTV having to waive all future legal claims that its behavior is anti-competitive.

"The Walt Disney Co. is once again refusing any accountability to consumers, distribution partners, and now the American judicial system," said Rob Thun, DirecTV's chief content officer, in a statement. "Disney is in the business of creating alternate realities, but this is the real world where we believe you earn your way and must answer for your own actions. They want to continue to chase maximum profits and dominant control at the expense of consumers — making it harder for them to select the shows and sports they want at a reasonable price."

DirecTV has 11.3 million subscribers, according to Leichtman Research Group, making it the nation's third-largest pay TV provider.

Dana Walden and Alan Bergman, co-chairmen of Disney Entertainment, and ESPN chairman Jimmy Pitaro issued a joint statement urging DirecTV to finalize a deal.

The statement added that "while we're open to offering DirecTV flexibility and terms which we've extended to other distributors, we will not enter into an agreement that undervalues our portfolio of television channels and programs. We invest significantly to deliver the No. 1 brands in entertainment, news and sports because that's what our viewers expect and deserve."

The impasse comes as networks and distributors continue to be at odds over content. Distributors and subscribers would like to see a model where they can buy channels a la carte instead of subscribing to a bundling package.

Distributors are also frustrated with production companies putting some of their premium programming on direct-to-consumer platforms before they show up on channels. DirecTV cited the miniseries "Shogun" appearing on Hulu before FX.

"Consumer frustration is at an all-time high as Disney shifts its best producers, most innovative shows, top teams, conferences, and entire leagues to their direct-to-consumer services while making customers pay more than once for the same programming on multiple Disney platforms," Thun said. "Disney's only magic is forcing prices to go up while simultaneously making its content disappear."

Besides all ESPN network channels and ABC-owned stations, Disney-branded channels Freeform, FX and National Geographic channel went dark on DirecTV.

Trump issues statement from Gold Star families defending Arlington Cemetery visit and ripping Harris

By BILL BARROW Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — Donald Trump's campaign issued a statement Sunday from the Gold Star military families who invited him to Arlington National Cemetery as they defended the Republican presidential nominee and insisted that Vice President Kamala Harris is the candidate politicizing fallen U.S. service members.

It's the latest volley in an extended back and forth as Trump tries to saddle Harris with the Biden administration's handling of the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021, including a suicide bombing that killed 13 U.S. service members.

Harris on Saturday accused Trump of staging a "political stunt" that "disrespected sacred ground" where many Afghanistan war dead are buried. Trump and the families of some of those killed in the bombing blame Harris, as they did President Joe Biden before he ended his reelection bid, for their loved ones' deaths. The families say the former president was honoring their loved ones when he came to Arlington.

His campaign later distributed images of the visit despite the cemetery's prohibition on partisan activity

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on the grounds.

"President Trump was invited by us, the Gold Star families, to attend the solemn ceremonies commemorating the three-year anniversary of our children's deaths," said the relatives' joint statement. "He was there to honor their sacrifice, yet Vice President Harris has disgracefully twisted this sacred moment into a political ploy."

Gold Star families have lost a loved one in military service.

Trump laid wreaths last Monday in honor of Sgt. Nicole Gee, Staff Sgt. Darin Hoover and Staff Sgt. Ryan Knauss. They were among 13 U.S. service members and more than 100 Afghans who died in an Aug. 26, 2021, bombing at Hamid Karzai International Airport as U.S. forces withdrew from Afghanistan.

Trump thanked the family members for their statement via social media. "Thank you for saying you wanted me to stand with you ... and take pictures, that it was your request, not mine," he wrote.

Throughout the weekend, Trump has used his social media accounts to distribute video testimonials from some relatives who signed the statement.

Christy Shamblin, Gee's mother-in-law, said in a 90-second message that Trump and his aides were "respectful" and a "a comfort" to the families who gathered at Arlington. Then she directly addressed her remarks to Harris.

"Why won't you return a call and explain how you call my daughter-in-law's death a success?" Shamblin said. "Why would you take a day where we celebrated the deaths of our loved ones and use it to disparage not only them, but us?"

Biden and first lady Jill Biden went to Dover Air Force Base in 2021 for the ceremony returning the service members' remains to U.S. soil. The Bidens met privately with family members at Dover. The Bidens were joined at the ceremony by several top aides in the administration, including Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin, then-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley and Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Shamblin was among the several family members who also spoke at the Republican National Convention in July on Trump's behalf. Several family members have joined Trump's running mate, Sen. JD Vance of Ohio, on a conference call with media.

Trump's appearance ballooned into controversy after defense officials said his campaign was warned about not taking photographs and that there was an altercation between Trump aides and a cemetery employee. Officials have said since that an employee whom two Trump campaign staff members allegedly "verbally abused and pushed" aside has declined to press charges.

The Trump campaign has since lashed out at Pentagon officials, with a top campaign adviser, Chris LaCivita, referring to military spokespersons as "hacks." Trump campaign officials say the campaign had permission to bring someone to take video.

Since Biden ended his reelection bid in July, Trump has been zeroing in on Harris and her roles in foreign policy decisions. He has highlighted the vice president's statements that she was the last person in the room before Biden made the decision to withdraw from Afghanistan.

Biden's administration was following a withdrawal commitment and timeline that the Trump administration had negotiated with the Taliban in 2020. A 2022 review by a government-appointed special investigator concluded decisions made by both Trump and Biden were the key factors leading to the rapid collapse of Afghanistan's military and the Taliban takeover.

Campaigning this year, Trump has said that leaving was the right thing to do but that the Biden administration's execution was poor.

"I was getting out, but we were going to get out through dignity and strength," he said in a Fox News interview that was taped after his visit to Arlington and broadcast Sunday evening. "They should have done so much different. ... They should have had the soldiers taken out last."

Israelis erupt in protest to demand a cease-fire after 6 more hostages die in Gaza

By JOSEF FEDERMAN and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Tens of thousands of grieving and angry Israelis surged into the streets Sunday night after six more hostages were found dead in Gaza, chanting “Now! Now!” as they demanded that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu reach a cease-fire with Hamas to bring the remaining captives home.

The mass outpouring appeared to be the largest such demonstration in 11 months of war and protesters said it felt like a possible turning point, although the country is deeply divided.

Israel’s largest trade union, the Histadrut, further pressured the government by calling a general strike for Monday, the first since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack that started the war. It aims to shut down or disrupt major sectors of the economy, including banking, health care and the country’s main airport.

Cease-fire negotiations have dragged on for months. Many blame Netanyahu for failing to reach a deal, which opinion polls show a majority of Israelis favor. But the prime minister also has significant support for his strategy of “total victory” against Hamas, even if a deal for the hostages has to wait.

Thousands of people, some of them weeping, gathered Sunday night outside Netanyahu’s office in Jerusalem. In Tel Aviv, hostages’ relatives marched with coffins to symbolize the toll.

“We really think that the government is making these decisions for its own conservation and not for the lives of the hostages, and we need to tell them, ‘Stop!’” said Shlomit Hacohen, a Tel Aviv resident.

Three of the six hostages found dead — including an Israeli-American — were reportedly scheduled to be released in the first phase of a cease-fire proposal discussed in July. This fueled fury and frustration among the protesters.

“Nothing is worse than knowing that they could have been saved,” said Dana Loutaly. “Sometimes it takes something so awful to shake people up and get them out into the streets.”

The military said all six hostages were killed shortly before Israeli forces arrived. “Whoever murders hostages doesn’t want a deal,” Netanyahu said, blaming the Hamas for the stalled negotiations.

One hostage was Israeli-American Hersh Goldberg-Polin, 23, a native of Berkeley, California, who lost part of his left arm to a grenade in the attack. In April, Hamas issued a video that showed him alive, sparking protests in Israel.

The army identified the others as Ori Danino, 25; Eden Yerushalmi, 24; Almog Sarusi, 27; Alexander Lobanov, 33; and Carmel Gat, 40.

The Israeli Health Ministry said autopsies had determined the hostages were shot at close range and died on Thursday or Friday. The army said the bodies were recovered from a tunnel in the southern Gaza city of Rafah, around a kilometer (half a mile) from where another hostage was rescued alive last week.

Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani, a military spokesperson, said Israeli forces found the bodies several dozen meters (yards) underground as “ongoing combat” was underway, but that there was no firefight in the tunnel itself. He said there was no doubt Hamas had killed them.

Hamas has offered to release the hostages in return for an end to the war, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza and the release of a large number of Palestinian prisoners, including high-profile militants.

Izzat al-Rishq, a senior Hamas official, said the hostages would still be alive if Israel had accepted a U.S.-backed cease-fire proposal that Hamas said it had agreed to in July.

Funerals began, with more outrage. Sarusi’s body was wrapped in an Israeli flag. “You were abandoned on and on, daily, hour after hour, 331 days,” his mother, Nira, said. “You and so many beautiful and pure souls.”

Divisions in Israel, and in the government

Netanyahu has vowed to continue the fighting until Hamas is destroyed.

Top security officials say the intense pressure on Hamas has created favorable conditions for a cease-fire deal. The army, noting the difficulty of rescue operations, has acknowledged that a deal is the only way to bring home large numbers of hostages safely.

But critics have accused the prime minister of putting his personal interests over those of the hostages.

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The war's end likely will lead to an investigation into his government's failures in the Oct. 7 attacks, the government's collapse and early elections.

Some analysts said the public outcry over the six hostages who died could signal a new level of political pressure on Netanyahu.

"I think this is an earthquake. This isn't just one more step in the war," said Nomi Bar-Yaacov, associate fellow in the International Security Program at Chatham House, shortly before Sunday's protests.

Divisions also have been exposed within the government. Senior military and security officials, including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, have warned that time is running out.

Israel's Channel 12 reported that Netanyahu got into a shouting match at a security Cabinet meeting Thursday with Gallant, who accused him of prioritizing control of a strategic corridor along the Gaza-Egypt border — a major sticking point in the talks — over the lives of the hostages.

An Israeli official confirmed the report and said three of the hostages — Goldberg-Polin, Yerushalmi and Gat — had been slated to be released in the first phase of a cease-fire proposal discussed in July. The official was not authorized to brief media about the negotiations and spoke on condition of anonymity.

"In the name of the state of Israel, I hold their families close to my heart and ask forgiveness," Gallant said Sunday. The Cabinet was meeting Sunday night.

A forum of hostage families has demanded a "complete halt of the country" to push for a cease-fire and hostage release.

Even a mass outpouring of anger would not immediately threaten Netanyahu or his far right government. He still controls a majority in parliament. But he has caved in to public pressure before. A general strike last year helped lead to a delay in his controversial judicial overhaul.

A family's high-profile campaign

Goldberg-Polin's parents, U.S.-born immigrants to Israel, became perhaps the most high-profile relatives of hostages on the international stage. They met with U.S. President Joe Biden and Pope Francis and on Aug. 21, they addressed the Democratic National Convention — after sustained applause and chants of "bring him home."

Biden on Sunday said he was "devastated and outraged." The White House said he spoke with Goldberg-Polin's parents and offered condolences.

Some 250 hostages were taken on Oct. 7. Israel now believes 101 remain in captivity, including 35 who are thought to be dead. More than 100 were freed during a cease-fire in November in exchange for the release of Palestinians imprisoned by Israel. Eight have been rescued by Israeli forces. Israeli troops mistakenly killed three Israelis who escaped captivity in December.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, when they stormed into southern Israel on Oct. 7. Israel's retaliatory offensive in Gaza has killed over 40,000 Palestinians, according to local health officials, who do not say how many were militants.

On Sunday, an Israeli strike hit a car on a road in southern Gaza and killed four Palestinians, according to Aqsa Martyrs Hospital officials and an AP journalist who counted the bodies.

The war has displaced the vast majority of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple times, and plunged the besieged territory into a humanitarian catastrophe.

Strikes start at top hotel chains as housekeepers seek higher wages and daily room cleaning work

By ALEXANDRA OLSON AP Business Writer

With up to 17 rooms to clean each shift, Fatima Amahmoud's job at the Moxy hotel in downtown Boston sometimes feels impossible.

There was the time she found three days worth of blond dog fur clinging to the curtains, the bedspread and the carpet. She knew she wouldn't finish in the 30 minutes she is supposed to spend on each room. The dog owner had declined daily room cleaning, an option that many hotels have encouraged as environmentally friendly but is a way for them to cut labor costs and cope with worker shortages since the

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COVID-19 pandemic.

Unionized housekeepers, however, have waged a fierce fight to restore automatic daily room cleaning at major hotel chains, saying they have been saddled with unmanageable workloads, or in many cases, fewer hours and a decline in income.

The dispute has become emblematic of the frustration over working conditions among hotel workers, who were put out of their jobs for months during pandemic shutdowns and returned to an industry grappling with chronic staffing shortages and evolving travel trends.

Some 10,000 hotel workers represented by the UNITE HERE union walked off the job Sunday at 24 hotels in eight cities, including Honolulu, Boston, San Francisco, San Jose, San Diego and Seattle. Hotel workers in other cities could strike in the coming days, as contract talks stall over demands for higher wages and a reversal of service and staffing cuts. At total of 15,000 workers have voted to authorize strikes.

"We said many times to the manager that it is too much for us," said Amahmoud, whose hotel was among those where workers have authorized a strike but have not yet walked out.

Michael D'Angelo, Hyatt's head of labor relations for the Americas, said the company's hotels have contingency plans to minimize the impact of the strikes. "We are disappointed that UNITE HERE has chosen to strike while Hyatt remains willing to negotiate," he said.

In a statement before the strikes began, Hilton said it was "committed to negotiating in good faith to reach fair and reasonable agreements." Marriott and Omni did not return requests for comments.

The labor unrest serves as a reminder of the pandemic's lingering toll on low-wage women, especially Black and Hispanic women who are overrepresented in front-facing service jobs. Although women have largely returned to the workforce since bearing the brunt of pandemic-era furloughs — or dropping out to take on caregiving responsibilities — that recovery has masked a gap in employment rates between women with college degrees and those without.

The U.S. hotel industry employs about 1.9 million people, some 196,000 fewer workers than in February 2019, according to Bureau of Labor Statistics. Nearly 90% of building housekeepers are women, according to federal statistics.

It's a workforce that relies overwhelmingly on women of color, many of them immigrants, and which skews older, according to UNITE HERE.

Union President Gwen Mills characterizes the contract negotiations as part of long-standing battle to secure family-sustaining compensation for service workers on par with more traditionally male-dominated industries.

"Hospitality work overall is undervalued, and it's not a coincidence that it's disproportionately women and people of color doing the work," Mills said.

The union hopes to build on its recent success in southern California, where after repeated strikes it won significant wage hikes, increased employer contributions to pensions, and fair workload guarantees in a new contract with 34 hotels. Under the contract, housekeepers at most hotels will earn \$35 an hour by July 2027.

The American Hotel And Lodging Association says 80% of its member hotels report staffing shortages, and 50% cite housekeeping as their most critical hiring need.

Kevin Carey, the association's interim president and CEO, says hotels are doing all they can to attract workers. According to the association's surveys, 86% of hoteliers have increased wages over the past six months.

"Now is a fantastic time to be a hotel employee," Carey said in an emailed statement to The Associated Press.

Hotel workers say the reality on the ground is more complicated.

Maria Mata, 61, a housekeeper at the W Hotel in San Francisco, said she earns \$2,190 every two weeks if she gets to work full time. But some weeks, she only gets called in one or two days, causing her to max out her credit card to pay for household expenses

"It's hard to look for a new job at my age. I just have to keep the faith that we will work this out," Mata

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said.

Guests at the Hilton Hawaiian Village often tell Nely Reinante they don't need their rooms cleaned because they don't want her to work too hard. She said she seizes every opportunity to explain that refusing her services creates more work for housekeepers.

Since the pandemic, UNITE HERE has won back automatic daily room cleans at some hotels in Honolulu and other cities, either through contract negotiations, grievance filings or local government ordinances.

But the issue is back on the table at many hotels where contracts are expiring. Mills said UNITE HERE is striving for language to make it difficult for hotels to quietly encourage guests to opt out of daily housekeeping.

The U.S. hotel industry has rebounded from the pandemic despite average occupancy rates that remain shy of 2019 levels, largely due to higher room rates and record guest spending per room. Average revenue per available room, a key metric, is expected to reach a record high of \$101.84 in 2024, according to the hotel association.

David Sherwyn, the director of the Cornell University Center for Innovative Hospitality Labor & Employment Relations, said UNITE HERE is a strong union but faces a tough fight over daily room cleaning because hotels consider reducing services part of a long-term budget and staffing strategy.

"The hotels are saying the guests don't want it, I can't find the people and it's a huge expense," Sherwyn said. "That's the battle."

Workers bristle at what they see as moves to squeeze more out of them as they cope with erratic schedules and low pay. While unionized housekeepers tend to make higher wages, pay varies widely between cities.

Chandra Anderson, 53, makes \$16.20 an hour as a housekeeper at the Hyatt Regency Baltimore Inner Harbor, where workers have not yet voted to strike. She is hoping for a contract that will raise her hourly pay to \$20 but says the company came back with a counteroffer that "felt like a slap in the face."

Anderson, who has been her household's sole breadwinner since her husband went on dialysis, said they had to move to a smaller house a year ago in part because she wasn't able to get enough hours at her job. Things have improved since the hotel reinstated daily room cleaning earlier this year, but she still struggles to afford basics like groceries.

Tracy Lingo, president of UNITE HERE Local 7, said the Baltimore members are seeking pensions for the first time but the biggest priority is bringing hourly wages closer to those in other cities.

"That's how far behind we are," Lingo said.

US border policy spurred migrant camps hundreds of miles away in Mexico's capital

By MARIANA MARTÍNEZ BARBA and CATERINA MORBIATO Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — "That's it, dude! Done!" exclaimed Eliezer López as he jumped up and down, throwing his arms to the sky and drawing a sign of the cross across his chest. His joy was so contagious, his friends started to emerge from nearby tents to celebrate with him.

López, a 20-year-old Venezuelan migrant in Mexico City, had reason to rejoice: after several frustrating attempts, he was able to secure an appointment to seek asylum in the U.S.

He is one of thousands of migrants whose U.S.-bound journey has landed them in the Mexican capital, the southernmost point until recently from which migrants can register to request an appointment to seek asylum through the U.S. Customs and Border Protection's mobile app known as CBP One.

Since June, when the Biden administration announced significant restrictions on migrants seeking asylum, the app became one of the only ways to request asylum at the Southwest border.

This U.S. asylum policy and its geographic limits are a driving force behind the emergence of migrant encampments throughout the Mexican capital where thousands of migrants wait weeks — even months — in limbo, living in crowded, makeshift camps with poor sanitation and grim living conditions.

From point of transit to temporary destination

Historically, Mexico City has not been a stop for northbound migrants. They try to cross the country

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quickly to reach the northern border. But the delays in securing an appointment, coupled with the danger that plagues cartel-controlled northern Mexico border cities and the increased crackdown by Mexican authorities on migrants have combined to turn Mexico City from a point of transit to a temporary destination for thousands.

Some migrant camps have been dismantled by immigration authorities or abandoned over time. Others, like the one where López has lived for the past few months, remain.

Like López, many migrants have opted to wait for their appointment in the somewhat safer capital, but Mexico City presents its own challenges.

Shelter capacity is limited, and unlike large U.S. cities like Chicago and New York, which rushed last winter to find housing for arriving migrants, in Mexico City, they are mainly left to their own devices.

Andrew Bahena, coordinator of the Coalition for Humane Immigrant Rights of Los Angeles, or CHIRLA, said that up until late 2023 many migrants were contained in southern Mexican cities like Tapachula, near the border with Guatemala. Many tried to disguise their location to defeat CBP One's geographic limits, but when U.S. authorities took notice, more migrants began aiming for Mexico City to make their appointments from there, he said.

As a result, there has been an increase in the migrant population living in the Mexico City camps.

"We talk about this as border externalization and it's something the United States and Mexico have been jointly implementing for years," said Bahena. "The CBP One app is probably one of the best examples of that today."

"These folks are asylum seekers, they're not homeless people living in Mexico," he added.

A maze of tents and tarps

When López first arrived in Mexico City at the end of April, he thought about renting a room only to realize it was not an option.

He earned 450 pesos (\$23) a day working three times a week at a market. Rent was 3,000 pesos a week (\$157) per person to share a room with strangers, an arrangement that has become commonplace in Mexican cities with migrant populations.

"The camp is like a refuge," said López. Migrants can share space with people they know, avoid the curfews and strict rules of shelters and potentially stay longer if necessary.

The camps are a maze of tents and tarps. Some call their space "ranchito," or small ranch, assembled from wood, cardboard, plastic sheets, blankets and whatever they can find to protect them from the chilly mountain air and intense summer rains that pound the city.

At another camp in La Merced neighborhood, hundreds of blue, yellow and red tents fill a plaza in front of a church. It's one of the capital's largest camps and just a 20-minute walk from the city center.

"This is a place where up to 2,000 migrants have been living in the last year," said Bahena. "About 40% are children."

Migrants in La Merced have organized themselves, building an impromptu pump that moves water from the public system and distributes it on a fixed schedule, with every tent receiving four buckets of water every day.

"At the beginning there were a lot of problems, lots of trash and people in Mexico didn't like that," said Héctor Javier Magallanes, a Venezuelan migrant, who has been waiting nine months for a CBP One appointment. "We made sure to fix those problems little by little."

As more migrants kept arriving at the camp, he set up a task force of 15 people to oversee security and infrastructure.

Despite efforts to keep the camp clean and organized, residents haven't been able to avoid outbreaks of illnesses, exacerbated by drastic weather changes.

Keilin Mendoza, a 27-year-old Honduran migrant, said her kids constantly get colds, especially her 1-year-old daughter.

"She's the one that worries me the most, because she takes the longest to recover," she said. Mendoza has tried accessing the free medical attention from humanitarian organizations at the camp, but resources are limited.

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Israel Resendiz, coordinator of Doctors Without Borders' mobile team, said the uncertainty of life in the camps weighs heavily on migrants' mental health. "It's not the same when a person waiting for their appointment (...) can get a hotel, rent a room or have money for food. The majority of people don't have these resources."

The secretary of inclusion and social welfare and the secretary of the interior in Mexico City didn't respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press about the camps. Press representatives of Clara Brugada, the incoming mayor of Mexico City, said the issue must first be discussed at the federal level.

Meanwhile, tensions between camp residents and neighbors have increased, sometimes leading to mass evictions of the camps.

In late April, neighbors from the trendy and central Juárez neighborhood blocked some of the city's busiest streets, chanting, "The street is not a shelter!"

Eduardo Ramírez, one of the protest organizers, said it's the government's job to "help these poor people that come from their countries in search of something better and have the bad luck of traveling through Mexico."

"They sleep on the streets because the government has abandoned them," he said.

In a camp hosting about 200 families in the northern neighborhood of Vallejo, tensions — and fear — run rampant.

"One day they threw chlorinated water on a kid and hot water on another," recalled 50-year-old Salvadoran Sonia Rodríguez, a resident of the camp.

Despite making her "ranchito" as dignified as possible — she has a grill for cooking, bunk beds and a television — her gaze turns somber when she remembers she's been living for 10 months in an improvised camp that is not her home, without her things, far from her normal life. ____

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Investigators gather evidence at scene of Mississippi bus crash that killed 7, injured dozens more

BOVINA, Miss. (AP) — Investigators with the National Transportation Safety Board were collecting evidence Sunday at the scene of a commercial bus crash in Mississippi that killed seven people and injured dozens of others.

The 2018 Volvo bus was traveling westbound on Interstate 20 near Bovina early Saturday when a left front tire failed and the vehicle veered onto an embankment and overturned onto its left side, NTSB member Todd Inman said at a news conference Sunday.

Six people aboard were pronounced dead at the scene and another died at a hospital, according to the Mississippi Highway Patrol. Thirty-six people were taken by ambulance to hospitals.

The highway patrol did not immediately have an update on their conditions Sunday.

The dead included a 6-year-old boy and his 16-year-old sister, according to Warren County Coroner Doug Huskey. They were identified by their mother. Authorities were working to identify the other victims, he said.

The bus was traveling from Atlanta to Dallas with 41 passengers and two drivers, the highway patrol said. No other vehicles were involved in the crash.

Inman said investigators will look at the vehicle's condition, including how well the tires were maintained. The investigation will also focus on road conditions, the driver's experience, the carrier's safety record and what protections were provided for bus occupants, he said.

Inman asked any potential witnesses to call Mississippi authorities.

A preliminary report was expected within 30 days and the full investigation could take up to two years, the NTSB said.

The bus was operated by Autobuses Regiomontanos. A woman who answered the phone at its Laredo, Texas, office said it was aware of the crash, but she didn't answer questions or provide her name.

The transit company says it has 20 years of experience providing cross-border trips between 100 destinations in Mexico and the U.S. Its website promotes "a modern fleet of buses that receive daily maintenance,"

and offers "trips with a special price for workers."

A German far-right party wins its first state election and is very close in a second

By GEIR MOULSON Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — A far-right party won a state election for the first time in post-World War II Germany in the country's east on Sunday, and looked set to finish a very close second to mainstream conservatives in a second vote.

A new party founded by a prominent leftist also made a strong impact, while the parties in Chancellor Olaf Scholz's unpopular national government obtained extremely weak results.

The far-right Alternative for Germany, or AfD, won 32.8% of the vote in Thuringia — well ahead of the center-right Christian Democratic Union, the main national opposition party, with 23.6%.

In neighboring Saxony, projections for ARD and ZDF public television with the count well advanced put support for the CDU, which has led the state since German reunification in 1990, at 31.9% and AfD on 30.6-30.7%. AfD made substantial gains in Thuringia and smaller ones in Saxony compared with the last state elections in 2019.

"An openly right-wing extremist party has become the strongest force in a state parliament for the first time since 1949, and that causes many people very deep concern and fear," said Omid Nouripour, a leader of the Greens, one of the national governing parties.

Other parties say they won't put AfD in power by joining it in a coalition. Even so, its strength is likely to make it extremely difficult to form new state governments, forcing other parties into exotic new coalitions. The new Sahra Wagenknecht Alliance, or BSW, took 15.8% of the vote in Thuringia and nearly 12% in Saxony, adding another level of complication.

"This is a historic success for us," Alice Weidel, a national co-leader of AfD, told ARD. She described the result as a "requiem" for Scholz's coalition.

The CDU's national general secretary, Carsten Linnemann, said that "voters in both states knew that we wouldn't form a coalition with AfD, and it will stay that way — we are very, very clear on this."

Weidel denounced that as "pure ignorance" and said that "voters want AfD to participate in a government."

Deep discontent with a national government notorious for infighting, anti-immigration sentiment and skepticism toward German military aid for Ukraine are among the factors that have contributed to support for populist parties in the region, which is less prosperous than western Germany.

AfD is at its strongest in the formerly communist east, and the domestic intelligence agency has the party's branches in both Saxony and Thuringia under official surveillance as "proven right-wing extremist" groups. Its leader in Thuringia, Björn Höcke, has been convicted of knowingly using a Nazi slogan at political events, but is appealing.

Höcke bristled when an ARD interviewer mentioned the intelligence agency's assessment, responding: "Please stop stigmatizing me. We are the No. 1 party in Thuringia. You don't want to classify one-third of the voters in Thuringia as right-wing extremist."

He said he felt "a great, great deal of pride" in Sunday's result for his 11-year-old party and "the old parties should show humility."

Scholz's center-left Social Democrats at least stayed in the two state legislatures with single-digit support, but the environmentalist Greens lost their seats in Thuringia. The two parties were the junior coalition partners in both outgoing state governments. The third party in the national government, the pro-business Free Democrats, also lost its seats in Thuringia. It already had no representation in Saxony.

A third state election follows Sept. 22 in another eastern state, Brandenburg, currently led by Scholz's party. Germany's next national election is due in a little over a year.

Thuringia's politics are particularly complicated because the Left Party of outgoing governor Bodo Ramelow has slumped into electoral insignificance nationally. It lost more than half its support compared with five years ago, dropping to 13.1%.

Sahra Wagenknecht, long one of its best-known figures, left last year to form her own party, which is now outperforming the Left. Wagenknecht celebrated that party's success, underlined its refusal to work with AfD's Höcke and said she hopes it can form "a good government" with the CDU.

The CDU has long refused to work with the Left Party, descended from East Germany's ruling communists. It hasn't ruled out working with Wagenknecht's BSW, which also is at its strongest in the east. But the result means the CDU can't put together a coalition that has a majority in Thuringia's legislature without the Left Party.

AfD has tapped into high anti-immigration sentiment in the region. The Aug. 23 knife attack in the western city of Solingen in which a suspected extremist from Syria is accused of killing three people helped push the issue back to the top of Germany's political agenda, and prompted Scholz's government to announce new restrictions on knives and new measures to ease deportations.

Wagenknecht's BSW combines left-wing economic policy with an immigration-skeptic agenda. The CDU has also stepped up pressure on the national government for a tougher stance on immigration.

Germany's stance toward Russia's war in Ukraine is also a sensitive issue in the east. Berlin is Ukraine's second-biggest weapons supplier after the United States; those weapons deliveries are something both AfD and BSW oppose. Wagenknecht has also assailed a recent decision by the German government and the U.S. to begin deployments of long-range missiles to Germany in 2026.

Arlington cemetery controversy shines spotlight on Utah Gov. Spencer Cox's sudden embrace of Trump

By HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

SALT LAKE CITY (AP) — A few months ago, Utah Gov. Spencer Cox was one of the few prominent Republicans consistently keeping his distance from Donald Trump, whose brash style seemed to be the antithesis of a brand of politics Cox had carefully cultivated that centered on unity and respect.

Cox did not vote for Trump in 2016 or 2020, and told CNN in July that he would not vote for him this year. The governor said the then-president's role in inciting the Jan. 6, 2021, riot at the U.S. Capitol went too far.

Days later, after an assassination attempt on Trump at a Pennsylvania rally, Cox changed his mind.

Cox sent a letter to Trump explaining that his defiant response at the moment of the shooting had spurred a sudden reassessment and switch for Cox.

His turnabout bewildered political observers who, for the past decade, have watched Cox methodically build a persona as a moderate in the manner of Mitt Romney, the Utah senator who was the Republican presidential nominee in 2012, while climbing the ranks of state leadership.

Cox, 49, said in his note that he believed Trump could save the country "by emphasizing unity rather than hate."

"You probably don't like me much," Cox wrote. "But I want you to know that I pledge my support."

Trump has not in turn endorsed Cox for reelection.

The pair's puzzling relationship was thrust into the spotlight again this past week when they put themselves at the center of a controversy at Arlington National Cemetery. After Trump's staff had an altercation with a cemetery official, Cox broke rules — and likely federal law — in using a graveside photo with Trump in a campaign fundraising email.

Federal law prohibits campaign or election-related activities within the Army's national cemeteries, and officials at Arlington said that rule had been shared widely before Monday's ceremony honoring 13 service members, including one from Utah, who died in an airport bombing during the Afghanistan withdrawal three years ago.

Cox's campaign issued a swift apology for politicizing the ceremony; Trump's has insisted it had permission to film in a restricted area. A TikTok video of the visit shared by Trump includes scenes of him and Cox at the cemetery with a voiceover of the former president blaming the Biden administration for the "disaster" of the withdrawal.

The opposing responses highlight the disconnect between their political styles and reignite questions

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as to why Cox has chosen to stand by Trump, who said after the assassination attempt that he had no plans to change his ways.

"I'm confident that he was there to support a Utah family, and that's a laudable goal, but in being there with Donald Trump, he got pulled into something that creates some ethical challenges," said Chris Karpowitz, a political science professor at Brigham Young University. "He allowed himself to compromise his values, and he's not the first politician aligning with Donald Trump to have found himself in that position."

The sudden embrace by Cox, who is up for reelection in a race not expected to be close, is not sitting well with some of the Utah moderates he had worked to win over.

Kyle Douglas of Orem said he lost his trust in Cox when the governor chose to back a presidential candidate who does not share his values.

"I used to be proud that my governor was still one of the good guys," Douglas said. "It's so disappointing to see him sell out."

Lucy Wright of Provo put her disgust more bluntly.

"Trump is a big orange stain on his legacy," she said.

Karpowitz said he, too, was surprised by Cox's switch, and recalled thinking the governor's notion that Trump could be a unifying figure for the nation was "somewhat naive." Like many in Utah, the professor said he found himself struggling to understand why Cox might have thought backing Trump would help the governor politically.

The decision risks Cox's reputation with his moderate voting base while likely doing little to win over followers of Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement, many of whom booed Cox at the state GOP convention this year.

Aligning with Trump has been known to bolster the political profiles of some Republicans, but the former president has not been quite as influential in Utah.

The state is a rare Republican stronghold that has half-heartedly embraced Trump, whose divisive rhetoric and comments about refugees and immigrants do not sit well with many members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. About half of Utah's 3.4 million residents belong to the faith known widely as the Mormon church.

Cox, a Latter-day Saint, said he believes God had a hand in saving Trump's life, even calling it a miracle.

At the time of the July 13 shooting, President Joe Biden was clinging to his party's nomination in the face of unrelenting pressure from many Democrats to drop out as they feared he might be unable to win reelection after his disastrous debate against Trump in June.

Cox said in his letter to Trump that he was not looking for a Cabinet position or a role on the team, but the governor told *The Atlantic* he had come to realize he could not have broader influence within the party if he wasn't on Trump's side.

Cox has not publicly expressed a desire to run for national office, but he has worked to raise his profile beyond Utah by chairing the National Governors Association. His initiative as chairman, "Disagree Better," focused on restoring civility in politics.

The governor's endorsement of Trump came a month after Cox breezed to victory in the primary over ardent Trump supporter Phil Lyman, who espoused false claims of election fraud after the 2020 presidential election. Lyman remained defiant and encouraged his supporters to write his name on the November ballot instead of voting for Cox, who is expected to defeat his Democratic opponent even without the support of the state's MAGA faction.

Cox is not the first moderate Republican, nor even the first from Utah, to be lured closer to Trump despite previous opposition.

Romney had been one of Trump's most strident critics in the 2016 election, calling him a phony and a fraud. But after Trump's victory, Romney met the president for dinner to discuss a top diplomatic job in Trump's administration. After the meeting, he even praised Trump but has since reverted to being one of Trump's fiercest Republican critics.

GOP network props up liberal third-party candidates in key states, hoping to siphon off Harris votes

By BRIAN SLODYSKO and DAN MERICA Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Italo Medelius was leading a volunteer drive to put Cornel West on North Carolina's presidential ballot last spring when he received an unexpected call from a man named Paul who said he wanted to help.

Though Medelius, co-chairman of West's "Justice for All Party," welcomed the assistance, the offer would complicate his life, provoking threats and drawing him into a state election board investigation of the motivations, backgrounds and suspect tactics of his new allies.

His is not an isolated case.

Across the country, a network of Republican political operatives, lawyers and their allies is trying to shape November's election in ways that favor former President Donald Trump. Their goal is to prop up third-party candidates such as West who offer liberal voters an alternative that could siphon away support from Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee.

It is not clear who is paying for the effort, but it could be impactful in states that were decided by minuscule margins in the 2020 election won by Democrat Joe Biden.

This is money West's campaign does not have, and he has encouraged the effort. Last month the academic told The Associated Press that "American politics is highly gangster-like activity" and he "just wanted to get on that ballot."

Trump has offered praise for West, calling him "one of my favorite candidates." Another is Green Party candidate Jill Stein. Trump favors both for the same reason. "I like her very much. You know why? She takes 100% from them. He takes 100%."

Democrats are exploring ways to lift Randall Terry, an anti-abortion presidential candidate for the Constitution Party, believing he could draw voters from Trump.

But the GOP effort appears to be more far-reaching. After years of Trump accusing Democrats of "rigging" elections, it is his allies who are now mounting a sprawling and at times deceptive campaign to tilt the vote in his favor.

"The fact that either of the two major parties would attempt financially and otherwise to support a third-party spoiler candidate as part of its effort to win is an unfortunate byproduct" of current election laws "that facilitate spoilers," said Edward B. Foley, a law professor who leads Ohio State University's election law program. "This phenomenon is equally problematic whichever of the two major party engages in it."

One key figure in the push is Paul Hamrick, the man on the other end of the call with Medelius in North Carolina.

Hamrick serves as counsel for the Virginia-based nonprofit People Over Party, which has pushed to get West on the ballot in Arizona, Maine, Minnesota, Pennsylvania and Virginia, as well as North Carolina, records show.

In an interview, Hamrick declined to say who else besides him was orchestrating the effort and he would not divulge who was funding it. He vigorously disputed any suggestion that he was a Republican, but acknowledged that he was not a Democrat, either.

His history is complex.

Hamrick was chief of staff to former Alabama Gov. Don Siegelman, a one-term Democrat who was booted from office in 2003 and later was convicted and sentenced to prison on federal bribery, conspiracy and mail fraud charges. Hamrick was charged alongside his former boss in two separate cases. One was dismissed and he was acquitted in the other.

Though he insists he is not a Republican, Hamrick voted in Alabama's Republican primary in 2002, 2006 and 2010, according to state voting records maintained by the political data firm L2. He was tapped briefly in 2011 to work for the Alabama state Senate's Republican majority. And since 2015, according to federal campaign finance disclosures, he has contributed only to GOP causes, including \$2,500 to the Alabama Republican Party and \$3,300 to Georgia Rep. Mike Collins, a Republican who has trafficked in conspiracy

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theories.

Hamrick denied that he voted in any Republican primaries, suggesting that the voting data was inaccurate. For years, he was a consultant for Matrix LLC, an Alabama firm known for its hardball approach.

Matrix LLC was part of an effort in Florida to run "ghost candidates" against elected officials who had raised the ire of executives for Florida Power & Light, the state's largest utility.

Daniella Levine Cava, the current mayor of Miami-Dade County, was a target. As a county commissioner, Levine Cava had fought with FPL. When she ran for reelection in 2018, Matrix covertly financed a third-party candidate they hoped would siphon enough votes to tip her seat to a Republican challenger, The Miami Herald reported in 2022.

Hamrick was deeply involved. A company he created paid the spoiler candidate a \$60,000 salary and rented a \$2,300-a-month home for him, according to the newspaper and business filings made in Alabama. Hamrick said the candidate worked for him to help recruit business. Hamrick denied having anything to do with the man's campaign.

Either way, it did not work. Levine Cava was reelected before winning the mayor's seat in 2020.

Now Hamrick is playing a prominent role to place West's name on the ballot in competitive states. Hamrick surfaced in Arizona two weeks ago after a woman told the AP that a document was fraudulently submitted in her name to Arizona's secretary of state in which she purportedly agreed to serve as an elector for West. She said her signature was forged and she never agreed to be an elector.

After the AP published her account, Hamrick said he spoke to the woman's husband, trying to rectify the situation and "gave some information." Hamrick declined to say what information was shared. He also tried to persuade another elector who backed out to recommit to West, according to interviews and voicemails.

The next day, with the deadline to qualify for the Arizona ballot just hours away, Brett Johnson, a prominent Republican lawyer, and Amanda Reeve, a former GOP state lawmaker, made house visits to each as they tried to persuade both to sign new paperwork to serve as West electors.

Johnson and Reeve work for Snell & Wilmer, which has done \$257,000 worth of business for the Republican National Committee over the past two years, campaign finance disclosures show.

Hamrick declined to comment on the role of Johnson and Reeve. They did not respond to requests for comment.

West did not qualify for the Arizona ballot.

Other Republican-aligned law firms also have been involved in the national push, opposing Democrat-backed challenges to West's placement on the ballot:

— In Georgia, Bryan Tyson, a partner at the Election Law Group, represented the state Republican Party as it tried to keep West on the ballot. The firm has collected \$60,000 in payments from the RNC since April, campaign finance records show. Tyson did not respond to a request for comment.

On Thursday, Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger overruled an administrative law judge and placed West, Stein and Party for Socialism and Liberation nominee Claudia De la Cruz on the ballot. Tyson did not respond to a message seeking comment.

— In North Carolina, Phil Strach, a member of the Republican National Lawyers Association, successfully challenged in court a North Carolina State Board of Elections decision to bar West from the ballot. Strach did not respond to a message left for him.

— In Michigan, John Bursch, a senior lawyer for the Alliance Defending Freedom, the conservative legal group that helped overturn Roe v. Wade, successfully fended off a challenge to West's placement on the ballot. Bursch's firm, Bursch Law PLLC, was paid \$25,000 by Trump's campaign in November 2020 for "RECOUNT: LEGAL CONSULTING," according to campaign finance disclosures. Bursch did not respond to a request for comment.

— In Pennsylvania, a lawyer with long-standing ties to Republican candidates and causes, unsuccessfully argued in August for West to stay on the ballot. The attorney, Matt Haverstick, declined to say in an interview who hired him or why. People Over Party, the group Hamrick is affiliated with, had tried to get West on the ballot.

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None of these actions was funded by West's campaign, though he and his "Justice for All" party have coordinated at times with Hamrick's People Over Party, according to legal filings, a news release and social media posts.

In North Carolina, People Over Party, worked with Blitz Canvassing and Campaign & Petition Management — two firms that routinely work for the GOP — to gather signatures for West. Hamrick later responded in writing on behalf of workers for the two companies after the state election board opened its inquiry.

Jefferson Thomas, a longtime Republican operative from Colorado, submitted petition signatures that his firm, The Synapse Group, gathered on behalf of Stein in New Hampshire, records show. He did not respond to requests for comment.

In Wisconsin, Blair Group Consulting oversaw West's petition signature drive to qualify for the ballot, as previously reported by USA Today. David Blair, the firm's president, was a the national director of Youth for Trump during the 2016 campaign and was a spokesman in the Trump administration. Blair declined to comment.

Mark Jacoby, whose signature gathering firm Let the Voters Decide often works for Republicans, was involved in the failed Arizona push to get West on the ballot. The California operative has been convicted in 2009 of voter registration fraud, court records show. Jacoby did not respond to a message left at a phone number listed to him.

Medelius, the North Carolina co-chairman of West's "Justice for All Party," said the partisan battles over third-party candidates amounted to a "gang war."

"If they want to use us for cannon fodder, there's not much I can do about it," he said.

Pope embarks on longest, farthest and most challenging trip to Asia, with China in the background

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — If any evidence were needed to underscore that Pope Francis' upcoming trip to Asia and Oceania is the longest, farthest and most challenging of his pontificate, it's that he's bringing along his secretaries to help him navigate the four-country program while keeping up with work back home.

Francis will clock 32,814 kilometers (20,390 miles) by air during his Sept. 2-13 visit to Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore, far surpassing any of his previous 44 foreign trips and notching one of the longest papal trips ever, both in terms of days on the road and distances traveled.

That's no small feat for a pope who turns 88 in December, uses a wheelchair, lost part of a lung to a respiratory infection as a young man and had to cancel his last foreign trip at the last minute (to Dubai in November to participate in the U.N. climate conference) on doctors' orders.

But Francis is pushing ahead with this trip, originally planned for 2020 but postponed because of COVID-19. He's bringing along his medical team of a doctor and two nurses and taking the usual health precautions on the ground. But in a novelty, he's adding his personal secretaries into the traditional Vatican delegation of cardinals, bishops and security.

The long trip recalls the globetrotting travels of St. John Paul II, who visited all four destinations during his quarter-century pontificate, though East Timor was an occupied part of Indonesia at the time of his landmark 1989 trip.

By retracing John Paul's steps, Francis is reinforcing the importance that Asia has for the Catholic Church, since it's one of the few places where the church is growing in terms of baptized faithful and religious vocations. And he is highlighting that the complex region also embodies some of his core priorities as pope — an emphasis on interreligious and intercultural dialogue, care for the environment and insistence on the spiritual component of economic development.

Here is a look at the trip and some of the issues that are likely to come up, with the Vatican's relations with China ever-present in the background in a region where Beijing wields enormous influence.

Indonesia

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Francis loves gestures of interfaith fraternity and harmony, and there could be no better symbol of religious tolerance at the start of his trip than the underground "Tunnel of Friendship" linking Indonesia's main Istiqlal mosque to the country's Catholic cathedral.

Francis will visit the underpass in central Jakarta with the grand imam, Nasaruddin Umar, before both partake in an interfaith gathering and sign a joint declaration.

Francis has made improving Christian-Muslim relations a priority, and has often used his foreign travels to promote his agenda of committing religious leaders to work for peace and tolerance, and renounce violence in God's name.

Indonesia is home to the world's largest Muslim population and has enshrined religious freedom in its constitution, officially recognizing six religions -- Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Protestantism and Catholicism. Francis is likely to highlight this tradition of religious tolerance and celebrate it as a message for the broader world.

"If we are able to create a kind of collaboration between each other, that could be a great strength of the Indonesian nation," the imam said in an interview.

Papua New Guinea

Francis was elected pope in 2013 largely on the strength of an extemporaneous speech he delivered to his fellow cardinals in which he said the Catholic Church needed to go to the "peripheries" to reach those who need God's comfort the most. When Francis travels deep into the jungles of Papua New Guinea, he will be fulfilling one of the marching orders he set out for the future pope on the eve of his own election.

Few places are as remote, peripheral and poverty-wracked as Vanimo, a northern coastal town on the main island of New Guinea. There Francis will meet with missionaries from his native Argentina who are working to bring Christianity to a largely tribal people who still practice pagan traditions alongside the Catholic faith.

"If we suspend our preconceptions, even in tribal cultures we can find human values close to Christian ideals," Cardinal Luis Antonio Tagle, who heads the Vatican's missionary evangelization office and is part of the Vatican delegation, told the Fides missionary news agency.

Francis will likely reflect on the environmental threats to vulnerable and poor places like Papua New Guinea, such as deep sea mining and climate change, while also pointing to the diversity of its estimated 10 million people who speak some 800 languages but are prone to tribal conflicts.

East Timor

When John Paul visited East Timor in 1989, he sought to console its overwhelmingly Catholic population who had suffered under Indonesia's brutal and bloody occupation for 15 years already.

"For many years now, you have experienced destruction and death as a result of conflict; You have known what it means to be the victims of hatred and struggle," John Paul told the faithful during a seaside Mass in Tasi-Toli, near Dili.

"I pray that those who have responsibility for life in East Timor will act with wisdom and good will towards all, as they search for a just and peaceful resolution of present difficulties," he said then in a direct challenge to Indonesia.

It would take another decade for the United Nations to organize a referendum on Timor's independence, after which Indonesia responded with a scorched-earth campaign that left the former Portuguese colony devastated. East Timor emerged as an independent country in 2002, but still bears the trauma and scars of an occupation that left as many as 200,000 people dead — nearly a quarter of the population.

Francis will literally walk in John Paul's footsteps when he celebrates Mass on the same seaside esplanade as that 1989 liturgy, which some see as a key date in the Timorese independence movement.

"That Mass with the pope was a very strong, very important moment for Timor's identity," said Giorgio Bernardelli, editor of AsiaNews, the missionary news agency. "It also in many ways put the spotlight on the drama that Timor was living for the international community."

Another legacy that will confront Francis is that of the clergy sexual abuse scandal: Revered independence hero and Nobel Peace Prize winner Bishop Carlos Felipe Ximenes Belo was secretly sanctioned by the Vatican in 2020 for sexually abusing young boys.

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There is no word on whether Francis will refer to Belo, who is still revered in East Timor but has been barred by the Vatican from ever returning.

Singapore

Francis has used several of his foreign trips to send messages to China, be they direct telegrams of greetings when he flies through Chinese airspace or more indirect gestures of esteem, friendship and fraternity to the Chinese people when nearby.

Francis' visit to Singapore, where three-quarters of the population is ethnically Chinese and Mandarin is an official language, will give him yet another opportunity to reach out to Beijing as the Vatican seeks improved ties for the sake of China's estimated 12 million Catholics.

"It's a faithful people, who lived through a lot and remained faithful," Francis told the Chinese province of his Jesuit order in a recent interview.

The trip comes a month before the Vatican is set to renew a landmark 2018 agreement governing bishop nominations.

Just last week, the Vatican reported its "satisfaction" that China had officially recognized Tianjin Bishop Melchior Shi Hongzhen, who as far as the Vatican is concerned had actually taken over as bishop in 2019. The Holy See said China's official recognition of him under civil law now was "a positive fruit of the dialogue established over the years between the Holy See and the Chinese government."

But by arriving in Singapore, a regional economic powerhouse which maintains good relations with both China and the United States, Francis is also stepping into a protracted maritime dispute as China has grown increasingly assertive with its presence in the South China Sea.

Youth football safety debate is rekindled by the same-day deaths of 2 young players

By JOHN RABY and SAFIYAH RIDDLE Associated Press

HEWETT, W.Va. (AP) — Ryan Craddock had seen his share of tragedy during two decades as a coal miner and firefighter.

Then came the toughest heartbreak of all: his own.

Craddock and his family are mourning the loss of his 13-year-old son, Cohen, who died from brain trauma last month after making a tackle during football practice at his middle school.

Cohen's death, and the death of a 16-year-old Alabama high school player from a brain injury on the same day, have sparked renewed debate about whether the safety risks of youths playing football outweigh the benefits that the sport brings to a community.

"I don't think we need to do away with football," Craddock said. "A lot of people enjoy football, including myself. I just think we need to maybe put more safety measures out there to protect our kids."

Craddock is among those who believe that some concrete actions need to be taken to prevent more deaths.

Proposals in individual states to ban tackle football for younger children during a critical period of their brain development have gotten little traction. At the same time, youth participation in tackle football has been declining for years, and efforts to steer young boys into flag football are growing.

In 2023, three young football players died of head injuries and 10 players died of other causes, such as heat stroke, according to the National Center for Catastrophic Sports Injury Research at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. Dr. Robert Cantu, medical director of the organization, which has been tracking football-related deaths for more than 40 years, calls that a "typical" year.

"So I would not be particularly alarmed about two deaths in a week," he said. "But I would be very alarmed if we had two deaths per week for four or five weeks in a row. Because we've never had that before."

Cantu also subscribes to another philosophy: "No hits to the head are good," he says.

In the past, Cantu has recommended that for kids under 14 there be no tackling in football, no heading in soccer and no full-body-checking in hockey.

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In football practices, at least, most helmet-to-helmet contact can be eliminated by using noncollision methods such as tackling dummies, said Cantu, who is also co-founder of the Boston-based Concussion Legacy Foundation, which supports patients and families struggling with brain-trauma symptoms. He suggests children play flag football until they enter high school.

Flag football is already wildly popular among girls and is sanctioned as an Olympic sport for men and women at the 2028 Los Angeles Games. About 500,000 girls ages 6 to 17 played flag football in 2023, according to the National Federation of State High School Associations.

Whether that popularity transfers to boys remains to be seen. The Concussion Legacy Foundation has a "Flag Football under 14" initiative and has compiled a list of Pro Football Hall of Famers who waited until high school to play tackle football, including Tom Brady, Jerry Rice, Jim Brown and Walter Payton.

"I suggest age 12 would be a good place to start the conversation," said Dr. Chris Nowinski, the foundation's CEO and a former WWE wrestler who retired due to a concussion. "But any minimum age requirement that takes into consideration brain health for children would be welcome."

Nowinski said even the NFL has limited full-contact practices during the regular season and recently changed kickoff rules aimed at preventing concussions and chronic traumatic encephalopathy, a degenerative brain disease that medical studies have linked to the head trauma of NFL players.

"Yet middle and high school football has made neither change," he said.

Efforts to ban tackling in youth football have met strong resistance. A New York lawmaker fought unsuccessfully for 10 years to enact such a rule. In January, California Gov. Gavin Newsom said he would not sign a similar bill if it were to reach his desk.

There has been some progress, however. For instance, all 50 states have some form of sports-related concussion laws, mostly requiring athletes to leave a game or practice if a concussion is suspected and be cleared by a medical professional before they can return.

An increase in reported concussions from 2005-06 through 2017-18 was likely due to that additional education and awareness, said Christy Collins, president of the Indianapolis-based Datalys Center for Sports Injury Research and Prevention. The center uses a sampling of high schools nationwide to calculate injury rates involving football practices and games combined.

"Athletes (and their parents) may have been more likely to recognize symptoms of concussion and report those symptoms to medical professionals," Collins said.

Loren Montgomery, who has won nine Oklahoma state championships in 14 seasons as the head coach at Bixby High School, believes football is "safer than ever." He cites efforts to minimize injury risk such as penalizing helmet-to-helmet contact and certain types of blocks, along with technology including cognitive tests for concussion assessment and protective soft-shell helmet covers known as Guardian caps.

"Obviously there is inherent risk in all contact sports, but the values of teamwork, hard work and overcoming adversity far outweigh the risk involved," Montgomery said. He allowed his son to play football starting in the fourth grade, "and I believe it has made him a more well-rounded young man."

Guardian caps are used from the NFL on down to the youth level. One cap made by Guardian Sports sells on Amazon for \$75. But the caps have only a six-month limited warranty from the date of purchase, meaning they could be pricey for a school district to have to replace every season.

Guardian Sports also warns on its website that no helmet, helmet pad or practice apparatus prevents or eliminates the risk of concussions or other serious head injuries while playing sports.

Still, Craddock has vowed to look into the caps' use at Madison Middle School in Cohen's memory.

On Wednesday, several days before his son was to be laid to rest, Craddock found the strength to speak with Cohen's teammates.

"I told them that this was a bad accident, to move forward," he said. "I didn't want them to have the weight of my son on their shoulders. But I wanted them to play for him. I wanted them to play 'Cohen strong.'"

Giving up pets to seek rehab can worsen trauma. A Colorado group intends to end that

By THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Simon Rubick had lost almost everything to decades of alcoholism and drug addiction. In 2022, he found himself without a vehicle and without a home, which forced his two teenage children to move in with friends. He had burned bridges with friends and family and it took a drug-induced stint in the hospital for him to realize his cocaine addiction was going to be a “death sentence.”

Rubick, who lives in the Denver suburb of Arvada, Colorado, knew he needed help. But first he had to figure out what to do with one of the only sources of unconditional love and support he had left: his beloved German shepherd rescue, Tonks.

Most residential rehab centers in the United States don’t allow patients to bring their pets along, said Rubick, 51. So when his brother could no longer help care for the dog, Rubick thought he would have to make the excruciating decision to give up Tonks.

“It basically came down to being able to take care of my dog or being able to take care of myself,” he said.

Rubick — who has been sober for more than two years and is now an addiction recovery coach — was connected to the group PAWsitive Recovery, which fosters animals while their owners receive treatment for drug and alcohol abuse, and for people dealing with domestic violence or mental health crises.

“People that are trying to get into recovery sometimes have lost their families, their children, any kind of support system that they have had,” said Serena Saunders, the organization’s program manager. “You’re not going to compound trauma that you’ve already had by giving up the one thing that hasn’t given up on you, and that’s people’s animals.”

Saunders founded PAWsitive Recovery in Denver three years ago. Since then, it’s helped more than 180 people and their pets, and Saunders said the group has looked to expand nationally after it became a part of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals International. The organization, whose largest foster network is in Colorado but accepts applications nationwide, is one of just a few programs in the U.S. that cares for the pets of people seeking treatment for substance abuse.

Saunders’ own experience with drug and alcohol addiction has helped her tailor the program. She said she had a “pretty broken childhood,” with her mother being schizophrenic and addicted to methamphetamine and her father also struggling with addiction. She sought comfort in alcohol when she was about 12 and was using hard drugs by the time she was 14.

“Addiction just gave me trauma after trauma,” said Saunders, now 41.

Saunders was seeing a therapist for her depression and PTSD when a fortuitous session planted the seed of PAWsitive Recovery. With a background in veterinary and shelter medicine, which focuses on caring for homeless animals, she told her therapist she wanted to incorporate her love of dogs in her recovery.

“And that’s what we did,” said Saunders, who fostered Tonks for several months while Rubick was in treatment and facilitated visits between the two best friends.

“To see a broken person when we’re meeting them in a parking lot, when they have nothing left to live for but their animal. And to see how broken and how desperate they are in that moment, and then to circle back around six months later and see them completely turn their lives around is just so special. It’s amazing,” said Saunders, who has been sober for 3 1/2 years.

That sentiment is echoed by the organization’s volunteer foster families, some of whom are drawn to the program because of their own experiences with addiction.

Denver resident Ben Cochell, 41, who has been sober from alcohol for more than seven years, has two dogs of his own and has fostered several more.

“One of my favorite parts about fostering in this program is the ability to teach my kids some life lessons in how to help others and how to care for animals and be kind, be loving. And to just give of yourself,” he said. “That’s what you have. Your time and your energy. And you can give that away freely.”

If not for PAWsitive Recovery, Rubick said he probably would have ended up living on the streets with his dog and trying to figure out recovery on his own. But as it turned out, by being able to keep his rescue

dog, Tonks ended up rescuing Rubick, he said.

"It's that connection, caring for another creature and having something else care for you the way that animals do," Rubick said. "It's just unconditional, and sometimes that's one of the things that people in recovery really need to be able to feel."

Companies are crafting new ways to grow cocoa, and chocolate alternatives, to keep up with demand

By AMY TAXIN and TERRY CHEA Associated Press

WEST SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — Climate change is stressing rainforests where the highly sensitive cocoa bean grows, but chocolate lovers need not despair, say companies that are researching other ways to grow cocoa or develop cocoa substitutes.

Scientists and entrepreneurs are working on ways to make more cocoa that stretch well beyond the tropics, from Northern California to Israel.

California Cultured, a plant cell culture company, is growing cocoa from cell cultures at a facility in West Sacramento, California, with plans to start selling its products next year. It puts cocoa bean cells in a vat with sugar water so they reproduce quickly and reach maturity in a week rather than the six to eight months a traditional harvest takes, said Alan Perlstein, the company's chief executive. The process also no longer requires as much water or arduous labor.

"We see just the demand of chocolate monstrously outstripping what is going to be available," Perlstein said. "There's really no other way that we see that the world could significantly increase the supply of cocoa or still keep it at affordable levels without extensive either environmental degradation or some significant other cost."

Cocoa trees grow about 20 degrees north and south of the equator in regions with warm weather and abundant rain, including West Africa and South America. Climate change is expected to dry out the land under the additional heat. So scientists, entrepreneurs and chocolate-lovers are coming up with ways to grow cocoa and make the crop more resilient and more resistant to pests — as well as craft chocolatey-tasting cocoa alternatives to meet demand.

The market for chocolate is massive with sales in the United States surpassing \$25 billion in 2023, according to the National Confectioners Association. Many entrepreneurs are betting on demand growing faster than the supply of cocoa. Companies are looking at either bolstering the supply with cell-based cocoa or offering alternatives made from products ranging from oats to carob that are roasted and flavored to produce a chocolatey taste for chips or filling.

The price of cocoa soared earlier this year because of demand and troubles with the crop in West Africa due to plant disease and changes in weather. The region produces the bulk of the world's cocoa.

"All of this contributes to a potential instability in supply, so it is attractive to these lab-grown or cocoa substitute companies to think of ways to replace that ingredient that we know of as chocolatey-flavored," said Carla D. Martin, executive director of the Fine Cacao and Chocolate Institute and a lecturer in African and African American Studies at Harvard University.

The innovation is largely driven by demand for chocolate in the U.S. and Europe, Martin said. While three-quarters of the world's cocoa is grown in West and Central Africa, only 4% is consumed there, she said.

The push to produce cocoa indoors in the U.S. comes after other products, such as chicken meat, have already been grown in labs. It also comes as supermarket shelves fill with evolving snack options — something that developers of cocoa alternatives say shows people are ready to try what looks and tastes like a chocolate chip cookie even if the chip contains a cocoa substitute.

They said they also are hoping to tap into rising consciousness among consumers about where their food comes from and what it takes to grow it, particularly the use of child labor in the cocoa industry.

Planet A Foods in Planegg, Germany, contends the taste of mass market chocolate is derived largely from the fermentation and roasting in making it, not the cocoa bean itself. The company's founders tested out ingredients ranging from olives to seaweed and settled on a mix of oats and sunflower seeds as the best

tasting chocolate alternative, said Jessica Karch, a company spokesperson. They called it “ChoViva” and it can be subbed into baked goods, she said.

“The idea is not to replace the high quality, 80% dark chocolate, but really to have a lot of different products in the mass market,” Karch said.

Yet while some are seeking to create alternative cocoa sources and substitutes, others are trying to bolster the supply of cocoa where it naturally grows. Mars, which makes M&Ms and Snickers, has a research facility at University of California, Davis aimed at making cocoa plants more resilient, said Joanna Hwu, the company’s senior director of cocoa plant science. The facility hosts a living collection of cocoa trees so scientists can study what makes them disease-resistant to help farmers in producing countries and ensure a stable supply of beans.

“We see it as an opportunity, and our responsibility,” Hwu said.

In Israel, efforts to expand the supply of cocoa are also under way. Celleste Bio is taking cocoa bean cells and growing them indoors to produce cocoa powder and cocoa butter, said co-founder Hanne Volpin. In a few years, the company expects to be able to produce cocoa regardless of the impact of climate change and disease — an effort that has drawn interest from Mondelez, the maker of Cadbury chocolate.

“We only have a small field, but eventually, we will have a farm of bioreactors,” Volpin said.

That’s similar to the effort under way at California Cultured, which plans to seek permission from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration to call its product chocolate, because, according to Perlstein, that’s what it is.

It might wind up being called brewery chocolate, or local chocolate, but chocolate no less, he said, because it’s genetically identical though not harvested from a tree.

“We basically see that we’re growing cocoa — just in a different way,” Perlstein said.

Illegal voting by noncitizens is rare, yet Republicans are making it a major issue this election

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

Only U.S. citizens are eligible to vote in this fall’s election for president and other top offices. While that is nothing new, the potential for noncitizens to register or vote has been receiving a lot of attention lately.

Citing an influx of immigrants in recent years at the U.S.-Mexico border, Republicans have raised concerns about the possibility that noncitizens will be voting and they have taken steps in numerous states to address that prospect, even though cases of noncitizens actually voting are rare.

GOP officials have undertaken reviews of voter rolls, issued executive orders and placed constitutional amendments on state ballots as part of an emphasis on thwarting noncitizen voting. Some Democrats contend the measures could create hurdles for legal voters, are unnecessary and lead people to believe the problem of noncitizens voting is bigger than it really is.

What does the law say?

A 1996 U.S. law makes it illegal for noncitizens to vote in elections for president or members of Congress. Violators can be fined and imprisoned for up to a year. They can also be deported.

When people register to vote, they confirm under penalty of perjury that they are U.S. citizens. Federal law requires states to regularly maintain their voter rolls and remove anyone who is ineligible, a process that could identify immigrants living in the country illegally.

No state constitutions explicitly allow noncitizens to vote, and many states have laws that prohibit noncitizens from voting for state offices such as governor or attorney general. But some municipalities in California, Maryland and Vermont, as well as the District of Columbia, do allow voting by noncitizens in some local elections such as for school board and city council.

What does the data say?

Voting by noncitizens is rare. Yet Republican officials have highlighted voter registration reviews that turned up potential noncitizens.

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott, a Republican, said this past week that more than 6,500 potential noncitizens have been removed from Texas voter rolls since 2021, including 1,930 with “a voter history” who have been

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referred for investigation by the attorney general's office. Texas has almost 18 million registered voters. Ohio Secretary of State Frank LaRose, a Republican, said in August that he referred for potential prosecution 138 apparent noncitizens found to have voted in a recent election and 459 more who registered but did not vote. Those figures were higher than reviews from previous years but a small fraction of the more than 8 million registered voters in Ohio.

Alabama Secretary of State Wes Allen, a Republican, recently announced that 3,251 people previously identified as noncitizens by the federal government are being switched to inactive status on the state's voter registration rolls. They will be required to provide proof of citizenship and fill out a form to vote in November. Alabama has more than 3 million registered voters.

In Georgia, Republican Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger found that 1,634 potential noncitizens tried to register to vote between 1997 and 2022, though election officials flagged them and none was registered. Georgia registered millions of other voters during that time.

Some election administration experts have said the voter roll reviews show that current tools to flag noncitizen voters are working.

What do the courts say?

Arizona provides a case study for the long-running attempts by Republicans to prohibit noncitizen voting.

Under a 2004 voter-approved initiative, Arizona required a driver's license, birth certificate, passport or other similar document to approve a federal voter registration application. But the U.S. Supreme Court ruled in 2013 that Arizona cannot require documentary proof of citizenship for people to vote in federal elections.

The state responded by creating two classes of voters. For state and local elections, voters must provide proof of citizenship when they register or have it on file with the state. But because that cannot be required in presidential and congressional elections, tens of thousands of voters who have not provided proof of citizenship are registered only for federal elections.

An August order by a divided U.S. Supreme Court will allow voter registration forms submitted without "documentary proof of citizenship" to be rejected by Arizona counties while litigation over the law continues. People will be able to register to vote in presidential and congressional elections using a different federal form that requires people to swear they are citizens under penalty of perjury, without requiring proof.

What's on the ballot?

Republican-led legislatures in eight states have proposed constitutional amendments on their November ballots declaring that only citizens can vote.

Proposals in Iowa, Missouri, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina and Wisconsin would replace existing constitutional provisions stating that "every" citizen or "all" citizens can vote with new wording saying "only" citizens can vote. Supporters contend the current wording does not necessarily bar noncitizens from voting.

In Idaho and Kentucky, the proposed amendments would explicitly state: "No person who is not a citizen of the United States" can vote. Similar wording won approval from Louisiana voters two years ago.

Voters in North Dakota, Colorado, Alabama, Florida and Ohio passed amendments between 2018 and 2022 restricting voting to "only" citizens.

What else are states doing?

Although noncitizen voting already is prohibited in the state constitution, Republican Gov. Jeff Landry of Louisiana is continuing to draw attention to the issue. He recently signed an executive order requiring state agencies that provide voter registration forms to include a written disclaimer that noncitizens are prohibited from voting.

In Georgia, Raffensperger last week required every polling place to post a sign in English and Spanish warning noncitizens that it is illegal to vote.

Republican Attorney General Ken Paxton of Texas, citing "significant growth of the noncitizen population" in the state, set up a special email account Wednesday to report suspected violations of election laws.

In Wisconsin, Republicans have filed a pair of similar lawsuits in recent weeks that challenge the state's process for verifying whether a registered voter is a citizen. The lawsuits seek court orders requiring the

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elections commission to perform checks to ensure there are no registered voters who are noncitizens.

North Carolina Republicans have sued the state election board, alleging it is not enforcing a new law aimed at removing people from voter rolls who seek jury duty exclusions because they are not citizens.

Tennessee's top election office sent letters in June asking for proof of citizenship from more than 14,000 registered voters, though those who failed to respond will not be barred from voting. The list was based on data from the state Department of Safety and Homeland Security, which has information about whether residents were U.S. citizens when they first interacted with that department.

What has Congress done?

Republicans in Congress are pushing a bill, known as the Safeguard American Voter Eligibility Act, that would require proof of citizenship to register to vote. During a news conference about the legislation this year, House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., did not provide specific examples of noncitizens voting but insisted it is a concern.

"We all know, intuitively, that a lot of illegals are voting in federal elections," he said, "but it's not been something that is easily provable."

The legislation passed the Republican-led House in July largely along partisan lines but has not come to a vote in the Democratic-led Senate. The Biden administration said it is strongly opposed and that laws against noncitizen voting are working.

"This bill would do nothing to safeguard our elections, but it would make it much harder for all eligible Americans to register to vote and increase the risk that eligible voters are purged from voter rolls," the White House said in a statement.

Today in History

September 2, Japan surrenders to end World War II

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Monday, Sept. 2, the 246th day of 2024. There are 120 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 2, 1945, Japan formally surrendered in ceremonies aboard the USS Missouri in Tokyo Bay, ending World War II.

Also on this date:

In 1666, the Great Fire of London began, which would destroy more than 13,000 homes and hundreds of additional structures, including St Paul's Cathedral, over the ensuing three days.

In 1789, the United States Treasury Department was established.

In 1864, during the Civil War, Union Gen. William T. Sherman's forces occupied Atlanta.

In 1935, a Category 5 hurricane slammed into the Florida Keys on Labor Day, claiming more than 400 lives.

In 1958, President Dwight D. Eisenhower signed the National Defense Education Act, which provided aid to public and private education to promote learning in such fields as math and science.

In 1963, Alabama Gov. George C. Wallace prevented the integration of Tuskegee High School by encircling the building with state troopers.

In 1969, in what some regard as the birth of the Internet, two connected computers at the University of California, Los Angeles, passed test data through a 15-foot cable.

In 1998, a Swissair MD-11 jetliner crashed off Nova Scotia, killing all 229 people aboard.

In 2005, a National Guard convoy packed with food, water and medicine rolled into New Orleans four days after Hurricane Katrina.

In 2013, on her fifth attempt, U.S. endurance swimmer Diana Nyad became the first person to swim from Cuba to Florida without the help of a shark cage.

In 2018, a huge fire engulfed Brazil's 200-year-old National Museum in Rio de Janeiro, as firefighters and museum workers raced to save historical relics.

In 2019, a fire swept a boat carrying recreational scuba divers that was anchored near an island off the

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Southern California coast; the captain and four other crew members were able to escape the flames, but 34 people who were trapped below died.

Today's Birthdays: Former Sen. Alan K. Simpson, R-Wyo., is 93. Horse trainer D. Wayne Lukas is 89. Former United States Olympic Committee Chairman and former Major League Baseball commissioner Peter Ueberroth is 87. Football Hall of Famer Terry Bradshaw is 76. Basketball Hall of Famer Nate Archibald is 76. Actor Mark Harmon is 73. Tennis Hall of Famer Jimmy Connors is 72. Football Hall of Famer Eric Dickerson is 64. British Prime Minister Keir Starmer is 62. Actor Keanu Reeves is 60. Boxing Hall of Famer Lennox Lewis is 59. Actor Salma Hayek is 58. R&B singer K-Ci is 55. Electronic music DJ/producer Zedd is 35.