

# Groton Daily Independent

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## 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.  
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.

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



## 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.

## Thursday, Sept. 5

School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.  
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, fries.  
Senior Menu... Oven fried chicken, mashed pota-

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# 1440

**Why 1440? The printing press was invented around the year 1440, spreading knowledge to the masses and changing the course of history. More facts: In every day, there are 1,440 minutes. We're here to make each one count.**

## Unrest Over Hostages

Hundreds of thousands of people rallied across cities in Israel for the second day yesterday after Israel's military over the weekend recovered the bodies of six hostages held by Hamas. Demonstrators protested in Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and other cities alongside a separate hourslong nationwide strike from Israel's labor union Histadrut. Protesters want Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to accept a hostage-release deal immediately.

Israeli forces found the six bodies, including that of a 23-year-old Israeli-American citizen, in an underground tunnel in Gaza's southern town of Rafah. The hostages ranged from 23 to 40 years old, with four in their 20s, and were believed to have been shot at close range between 48 and 72 hours before being found, Israel's health ministry said.

The news came less than a week after one hostage was rescued from the underground tunnel network. Roughly 100 hostages remain in Gaza, while at least 40 are believed to have died in the 11-month war.

## Brazil Blocks X

A five-member panel of Brazil's Supreme Court yesterday upheld a ban on social media platform X nationwide. The unanimous vote came after the court's Justice Alexandre de Moraes ordered the ban Friday over X's failure to name a local legal representative as required by law. The decision came amid a monthslong dispute between the justice and the social media platform.

Elon Musk-owned X will remain blocked in the largest South American country until it complies and pays more than \$3M in outstanding fines. Brazil is the world's sixth-largest market for X, with roughly 21 million users; the US has 108 million users. X was shut down over the weekend following the ruling by de Moraes, who called on the court to review his decision. Five-member panels of Brazil's full bench of 11 Supreme Court justices can review any decision made by a single judge.

Four of the judges also voted to uphold a daily \$8.9K fine for people using virtual private networks to access X. Since the ban, at least 500,000 Brazilians have joined rival platform Bluesky.

## Semaglutide Study

One of the largest studies on the effect of a new class of weight-loss drugs on mortality found regular use of semaglutides reduces the risk of death from all causes by almost 20% for patients who are overweight or obese. The results are the latest to suggest the drugs may have wide-ranging health benefits beyond their traditional use in treating diabetes.

Semaglutides like Wegovy and Ozempic (functionally the same drug, w/video) act by mimicking a naturally produced hormone known as GLP-1. The molecule is produced in the gut and prompts the body to produce insulin while dampening cravings for food.

The study administered the drug once a week to patients aged 45 and older. Compared to a placebo group, the recipients showed a 15% drop in cardiovascular death and a 23% drop in COVID-19-related death.

Roughly 40% of US adults are considered clinically obese, a major risk factor for heart disease.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Adnan Syed's murder conviction reinstatement upheld by Maryland Supreme Court; Syed, whose case was featured in the "Serial" podcast, has been free since his release from prison in 2022 after a judge overturned his 2000 conviction.

Johnny Gaudreau, Columbus Blue Jackets winger and NHL All-Star, dies at age 31 while biking after being struck by a suspected drunken driver.

Fatman Scoop, Grammy-winning rapper and DJ, dies at age 53 after collapsing onstage during concert.

World No. 1 golfer Scottie Scheffler wins PGA Tour's FedEx Cup and \$25M bonus.

Defending champ Coco Gauff loses in US Open's fourth round to fellow American Emma Navarro.

Chicago Sky rookie Angel Reese breaks WNBA single-season record for rebounds.

## Science & Technology

NASA successfully deploys prototype "solar sail"; roughly 900-square-foot satellite generates thrust from photons from the sun, similar to wind-driven sailboats.

Archaeologists discover 5,600-year-old stone bridge on the Mediterranean island of Mallorca, suggesting human habitation at least 1,000 years earlier than previously thought.

Engineers develop method to vaporize plastics, creating reusable hydrocarbons that can be turned into new consumer products.

## Business & Markets

Roughly 10,000 hotel workers across 24 hotels in eight US cities begin striking over Labor Day weekend after contract negotiations stall with Marriott International, Hilton Worldwide, and Hyatt Hotels.

US stock markets close higher Friday (S&P 500 +1.0%, Dow +0.6%, Nasdaq +1.1%), with Dow reaching another record high; personal consumption expenditures price index rises as expected in July.

US consumer sentiment index increases in August for first time in five months.

Intel shares rise nearly 10% Friday on reports chipmaker is exploring strategic options with investment bankers to turn itself around, including a potential sale or spin-off of underperforming units.

## Politics & World Affairs

Oregon ends first-in-the-nation, four-year experiment with decriminalizing possession of small amounts of fentanyl, heroin, meth, and other hard drugs.

Russia, Ukraine continue to trade airstrikes; at least 47 people wounded in Ukrainian city of Kharkiv from Russian strikes Sunday.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy fires air force commander after new US-made F-16 fighter jet crashes, killing its pilot.

US seizes plane used by Venezuela's President Nicolás Maduro over sanctions violations.

Helicopter crash that killed Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi and seven others in May caused by weather conditions, final report concludes.

## 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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**Dodie Martin labored on Labor Day pulling weeds and making the bushes look nice around City Hall.**

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## UMC Youth make Washaroos

Groton United Methodist Church vacation bible school made "washaroos" to donate to the Groton pantry. They consisted of a washcloth with a bar of soap tied to look like kangaroos with a message that God is always with you- Believe it!

**Pictured in back, left to right, are Bo Flihs, Rae Flihs, Kaleb Hofer, Graham Rose, Nolan Rose and Hank Flihs; in front, left to right, are Maci Dunbar, Haley Erickson, Calli Wilkinson and Nori Hinman.** (Courtesy Photo)



**Pictured in back, left to right, are Max Erickson, Brielle Dunbar, Paisley Johnson, Kodi Hinman, Vic Flihs, Kaylee Hofer and Beckett Rose; in front, left to right, are Faith Johnson, Mattilynn McCranie, Collyns Dunbar, Ava Rose and Vee Flihs.** (Courtesy Photo)

## Firefighters battling First Thunder Fire near Rapid City

RAPID CITY, S.D. – An interagency effort, led by South Dakota Wildland Fire (SDWF) and assisted by both federal and local resources, is actively working to suppress the First Thunder Fire about 3 miles SW of Rapid City and 2 miles NE of Colonial Pine Hills. The fire was first reported on private property just after 6 pm Monday. There are no structures currently threatened by the fire.

SDWF estimates the fire at more than 40 acres burning primarily in the Black Hills National Forest. There will be a transition of authority from SDWF to a Type 3 Incident Management Team effective this morning at 8 a.m.

Critical fire weather conditions are forecast to continue today with hot temperatures and relative humidity as low as 10 percent.

## Buffalo County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal crash

Where: SD Highway 34, mile marker 271, three miles east of Ft. Thompson, SD

When: 3:01 a.m., Sunday, September 1, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2008 Mercury Mariner

Driver 1: 38-year-old male, fatal injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Passenger 1: 23-year-old male, life-threatening injuries

Seatbelt Use: No

Buffalo County, S.D.- A 38-year-old man died and a passenger sustained life-threatening injuries Sunday, September 1, in a single vehicle crash near Ft. Thompson, SD.

The names of the persons involved have not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver and passenger of a 2008 Mercury Mariner SUV were traveling westbound on SD Highway 34 near mile marker 271 when the vehicle left the roadway where it vaulted over a driveway approach and crashed in the south ditch. Both occupants were not wearing seatbelts. The passenger sustained life-threatening injuries. The driver was pronounced deceased on scene.

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

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

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**Groton Area freshman Ethan Kroll, center in yellow, kicks around Mitchell senior Adam Kampshoff while Mitchell senior Mario Diaz Cordero (No. 4) and junior Sam Mullenmeister (No. 9) look on during Monday's game.**

(Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

**The Groton Area Soccer teams lost to Mitchell yesterday in action played in Groton. The boys lost, 10-0. The girls lost, 1-0, with Mitchell scoring with just 6:18 left in the game.**



**Groton Area goalie junior Gage Sippel prepares to block the shot from Mitchell junior Karsten Flihs as Groton junior Alexier Padilla guards him.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area goalie junior Gage Sippel grabs the ball while Mitchell sophomore Kerim Ical falls next to him. Also seen are other Groton players, including No. 10 Karsten Flihs, No. 22 Liam Lord, No. 12 Donovan Block, No. 14 Ethan Kroll and No. 15 Sam Crank, and Mitchell players No. 19 Alexier Padilla and No. 9 Sam Mullenmeister.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



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**Groton Area freshman Ethan Kroll jumps to get the ball during Monday's game against Mitchell.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

**Groton Area goalie junior Gage Sippel prepares to block the shot from Mitchell junior Alexier Padilla as Groton junior Karsten Fliehs guards him.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area goalie junior Gage Sippel punches the soccer ball while defender Ethan Kroll tries to block the shot during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



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**Groton Area freshman Ethan Kroll jumps to try and stop the ball while Mitchell goalie Evan Mitchell and Mitchell defender Ricardo Gonzales Rodriguez try to gain control during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**From left: Groton Area freshmen Jace Johnson, Ethan Kroll and Karson Zak attempt to block a shot from Mitchell senior Adam Kamshoff during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

**The games were broadcast live on GDILIVE.COM, sponsored by Agtegra, Avantara Groton, Bierman Farm Service, BK Custom T's & More, Blocker Construction, Dacotah Bank, Groton Ag Partners, Groton Chamber, Groton Ford, John Sieh Agency, Jungle Lanes & Lounge, Krueger Brothers, R&M Farms/Rix Farms, The Meathouse in Andover**

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**Groton Area goalie junior Gage Sippel dives for a block during Monday's game against Mitchell.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area senior Liz Flihs races to the ball during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area senior Brooklyn Hansen slides to try and get the ball from Mitchell sophomore Katie Stahl while Groton's senior Gretchen Dinger looks on during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area sophomore McKenna Tietz, Mitchell senior Makenzie Peterson and Mitchell sophomore Katie Stahl battle for the ball during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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**Groton Area senior Gretchen Dinger and Mitchell sophomore Rylee Jennings battle for the ball during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area sophomore McKenna Tietz heads the ball while Mitchell junior Kassedyn Knippling tries to block during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area senior Kennedy Hansen kicks the ball while Mitchell sophomore Emilie Ellis runs with her during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)

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**Groton Area junior Jerica Locke tries to keep the ball in bound while Mitchell senior Makenzie Peterson tries to steal the ball during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Mitchell goalie senior Tenley Peterson blocks a shot from Groton Area sophomore McKenna Tietz, who is guarded by Mitchell sophomore Katie Stahl.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



**Groton Area senior Laila Roberts tries to steal the ball from Mitchell senior Makenzie Peterson during Monday's game.** (Photo by Elizabeth Varin)



## **Southeast SD surges ahead of Black Hills in tourism revenue**

**Bart Pfankuch**

**South Dakota News Watch**

LAKE KAMPESKA, S.D. – As they sat in comfy lawn chairs and sipped cold sodas in a campsite along this lake's shoreline, Cheryl and Mark Okeson didn't look like or feel like trend-setters within the South Dakota tourism industry.

And yet, without realizing it, the couple from Ortonville, Minnesota, perfectly represented a recent shift in how and where visitors to the Rushmore State spend their time and money while on vacation.

The retirees have enjoyed previous visits to the Black Hills region, long the powerhouse in attracting tourist visits and spending in the state. But for the past few years, they have instead decided to visit Watertown, in the northeast corner of the state, for what they said is a quieter, slower-paced vacation that still offers some urban amenities.

"We've camped in the Black Hills many, many times, and it's just so many people and a lot of this and that going on," Cheryl Okeson said in early August as she sat with her husband and dog in their campsite in Stoke-Thomas Lake City Park. "This is just more relaxed and more laid back, and that's why we like coming here."

While visiting Watertown, the Okesons were able to easily land a campsite right on the shores of picturesque Lake Kampeska. And they were also in close proximity to unique restaurants and cultural sites like the Redlin Art Center and the Bramble Park Zoo.

The Okesons are far from alone, however, in their new desire to consider East River destinations as prime vacation options.

### **Southeast region now tops in tourism revenue**

With the exception of the COVID pandemic year of 2020, tourism spending across South Dakota has risen steadily in recent years across its four tourism regions:

- Black Hills and Badlands in the west, which includes the 15 counties around Black Hills National Forest and Badlands National Park, from roughly Belle Fourche to Hot Springs.
- The South Dakota Missouri River region in the center from Mobridge to Pierre to Wagner.
- Glacial Lakes and Prairies in the northeast.
- Southeast, which includes the 14 counties around Sioux Falls.

The Black Hills and Badlands region remains a hot spot for visitor spending, as it has for most of the past century. But in 2022 and again last year, the Southeast tourism market flipped the traditional script and generated greater tourism revenue than the west, with the Glacial Lakes and Prairies region also seeing strong growth.

State data show that in 2022, the Black Hills and Badlands region took in \$1.81 billion in tourism revenue, slightly less than the \$1.86 billion generated in the Southeast region that year. In 2023, the southeast region again topped its West River counterpart to the tune of \$1.96 billion compared to \$1.92 billion. The Glacial Lakes and Prairies saw \$699 million in 2023 revenues, while the Missouri River region had \$386 million.

"They've outpaced us for such a long time, it's good to get above them for a change," Teri Schmidt, CEO of the tourism marketing group Experience Sioux Falls, said with a slight chuckle.

Schmidt was partly joking because while she celebrates the high revenue and visitor counts, she also acknowledged that the sometimes prickly competition that once existed between East River and West River tourism markets has softened into an attitude of cooperation and teamwork.

Now, tourism promoters and operators across the state cross-promote their statewide partners, and they largely agree that a rising tide of spending in one region lifts the entire statewide industry.

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"The reality is that we're all good friends, and what's good for West River is good for East River and vice versa, so at the end of the day, we kind of laugh about it." Schmidt said.

That sentiment is shared by Michelle Thomson, CEO of the Black Hills & Badlands Tourism Association, who said she is glad to see other regions of the state performing so well.

"I think it's great because it's an effort that the four regions are working hard on together," Thomson said. "We're all really trying to maximize the time and the dollars that they spend in our state. So if we can get them to visit all four regions, that's tremendous."

Thomson said spending by tourists is a bit different between the East River and West River areas. While Black Hills and Badlands tourists focus more on the outdoors, established tourism sites and family attractions, the typical Sioux Falls tourist is more likely to spend on weekend stays, driven by frequent events, shows and restaurant visits.

## Tourism remains a growing industry

The new sense of harmony appears to be working well as the state saw a nearly 5% overall increase in tourism spending in 2023 compared to the year prior, with all four designated regions seeing revenue increases of 3% to 6%.

Statewide, South Dakota saw \$4.73 billion in tourism spending in 2022 with a jump to \$4.96 billion in 2023. That year, the latest for which data are complete, 14.7 million visitors came to South Dakota, producing a total economic impact of \$8 billion, fueling almost 58,000 jobs and generating \$384 million in state and local taxes.

The growth in the Southeast has not come at the cost of the Black Hills region, however, as both areas have seen steady growth over time, including 20% increases in both regions over the past five years.

"The one thing I love about our industry is that really, over the last 10 years, this industry is unified like I haven't seen it before," said South Dakota Secretary of Tourism Jim Hagen.

"We know that when people come to the Black Hills, and have an amazing experience, it piques their curiosity about the rest of the state. And we're seeing those visitors now look to other areas of the state and to all the things we can offer."

The state tourism industry, Hagen said, offers a wide diversity of attractions and amenities that has led to steady growth and drawn a new group of tourists.

The West River region benefits from Mount Rushmore National Monument, Badlands National Park, Custer State Park and the pines and parks within the Black Hills, as well as seminal events like the Sturgis Motorcycle Rally, the Buffalo Roundup and the Black Hills Stock Show & Rodeo. And, of course, Wall Drug.

The Missouri River and Glacial Lakes and Prairie regions are attractive to pheasant hunters, walleye anglers, campers, history buffs and fans of author Laura Ingalls Wilder.

## New allure of Sioux Falls

But the Southeast tourism market is evolving quickly, Schmidt said, and developing into a destination for foodies, shoppers and people who come for a steady line-up of cultural, sporting and musical events.

"Events are what draw people because it's something new all the time," she said. "So if you look at the calendar of Sioux Falls for the year, we are an event-driven city, everything from a concert at the Denny Sanford Premier Center to SculptureWalk to a softball tournament or a soccer tournament, to a car show. ... We have one event after another in Sioux Falls, especially in the summer, and that's when we draw the most visitors."

The ability to experience urban amenities in a vibrant, growing city is part of why Iowan Cali Jermier visited Sioux Falls in early August. Jermier, who hails from a Des Moines suburb, was at Falls Park with her son, Bryce Jermier, who has since moved to Sioux Falls.

And while they have visited South Dakota before, sometimes to hunt pheasants, Cali Jermier said she likes how the city has grown but still maintained a freshness and friendliness.

"Sioux Falls has just enough of everything, but not the craziness of a big, big city," she said. "We like to have a little bit of the city and then you can go nearby to get the quiet."

Cali Jermier said she also appreciates that Sioux Falls is clean, pet-friendly and retains a strong sense

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of Western culture and history.

"It seems really really clean in Sioux Falls, like they're cleaning it up and renewing it but also restoring some of the history," she said. "The aesthetics still feel like the Old West a little bit."

While the Black Hills remain a top destination for "leisure travelers" who spend time in their cars, Sioux Falls visitors may have a more condensed travel schedule and a willingness to spend more money in a shorter period of time, Schmidt said.

While still anchored by the sprawling beauty of Falls Park, the economic growth of downtown Sioux Falls has also attracted new visitors who might be willing to spend more to obtain the experiences they seek, she said.

"I think the vibe over here is a vibe of energy. Kind of like, 'We got it going on over here, as far as the arts and the culture and the sports and the food and the shopping,'" Schmidt said.

## **New technology leads to new markets**

Hagen said technology has played a key role in advancing marketing efforts by Travel South Dakota, the state's lead tourism agency. More than half of the department's \$23 million annual budget is spent on marketing, Hagen said.

Tourism marketers can now obtain information that greatly enhances their ability to locate and target people who have the time, money and desire to travel, Hagen said.

Those advancements, coupled with the reduced price of digital marketing, have enabled the state to still present itself as a drivable destination to people in neighboring states. But now, the state is trying to reach potential visitors in cities like Chicago, Kansas City and Dallas-Fort Worth. The state has also begun marketing in coastal states, including California, Florida and the Carolinas, Hagen said.

"The record growth at our airports in Sioux Falls and Rapid City has been phenomenal, and we're seeing more people flying into the state for tourism," he said.

## **A bit flat, but still strong so far in 2024**

Hagen said he expects 2024 will pan out as a year with relatively flat visitor counts but slightly higher revenues due to what he terms as "a return to normal." Hagen said South Dakota saw very strong tourism activity during and since the pandemic, a time when the state and its business community remained mostly open while other states took a more conservative approach to the virus that limited tourism opportunities.

Now, he said, other states are fully open again, which has somewhat diluted the pool of potential visitors to South Dakota.

Hagen and other tourism experts said they have seen generally reduced visitor counts in 2024 and slightly shorter stays but overall higher spending. From January to June, for instance, hotel occupancy was down slightly across the state, but revenues were up almost 6% over the same period in 2023.

One new trend is that occupancy in short-term rental properties skyrocketed during the first half of 2024, up almost 16% in the Black Hills and Badlands and 12% in the Sioux Falls market.

Hagen said the industry welcomes those renters and their money. He also said the move toward higher use of Airbnb and Vrbo rental properties has forced some hotels to improve their facilities or offer new amenities in order to compete.

## **Strong fall season anticipated**

Hagen, Schmidt and Thomson all said they look forward to a very strong fall "shoulder" tourism season in South Dakota.

History has shown that tourism can drop during presidential election years, often due to uncertainty over the national economy and its impact on family finances.

But Thomson said she remains bullish for the coming months as surveys have shown that Americans are still excited about exploring new places.

"Traveler sentiment is pretty high right now, and people are still optimistic about travel," she said. "We're certainly looking at a great fall. And as long as the weather holds out, there are so many great events and things coming up because fall is such a fantastic time to visit the Black Hills or Badlands."

*This story was produced by South Dakota News Watch, an independent, nonprofit news organization.*





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### **SD national park sites attracted 4.6 million visits in '23 and supported 9,000 jobs, report says**

**BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - SEPTEMBER 3, 2024 6:00 AM**

A new National Park Service report shows six national park sites in South Dakota attracted a total of 4.6 million visits in 2023, resulting in \$600 million of spending near those parks that supported nearly 9,000 jobs.

The 2023 National Park Visitor Spending Effects report includes numbers from across the country.

"This report illustrates the significant economic benefits national parks provide to nearby communities and the U.S. economy," said U.S. Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland in a statement, "and the value of our work to safeguard these public lands in the wake of the climate crisis, upgrade visitor experiences and invest in park infrastructure and staff."

The six South Dakota sites in the report include well-known destinations such as Mount Rushmore National Memorial, and lesser-known sites such as the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site near the Badlands and the Missouri National Recreational River, a free-flowing segment of the otherwise dam-controlled river in southeast South Dakota.

The report includes the following 2023 statistics for each site:

Mount Rushmore National Memorial: 2.4 million visits resulted in \$390 million spent, supporting 5,700 jobs and generating \$187 million in worker income.

Badlands National Park: 1 million visits resulted in \$135 million spent, supporting nearly 2,000 jobs and generating \$62 million in worker income.

Wind Cave National Park: 600,000 visits resulted in \$52 million spent, supporting 727 jobs and generating \$23 million in worker income.

Jewel Cave National Monument: 122,000 visits resulted in \$8 million spent, supporting 112 jobs and generating \$3 million in worker income.

Minuteman Missile National Historic Site: 116,000 visits resulted in \$10 million spent, supporting 132 jobs and generating \$4 million in worker income.

Missouri National Recreational River: 116,000 visits resulted in \$6 million spent, supporting 76 jobs and generating \$2 million in worker income.

The National Park Service, as a whole, experienced 325.5 million visits in 2023 and visitor spending of \$26.4 billion near national parks, supporting 415,400 jobs.

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

## The 10 states where voters could decide on abortion directly

BY: ELISHA BROWN - SEPTEMBER 3, 2024 5:30 AM

After legal fights, counter-campaigns and bureaucratic wrangling all year long, as things stand today, abortion questions in 10 states are heading to ballots in November.

After abortion rights were upended federally in June 2022, Kansas voters got a chance to weigh in on a ballot measure that was something of a test balloon just a couple of months later. Defying expectations, nearly 60% of voters rejected an anti-abortion constitutional amendment.

Since then, voters in states with both conservative- and liberal-leaning electorates have either rejected abortion restrictions or secured the right to an abortion. The majority of these successful campaigns were spearheaded by coalitions of doctors, advocates and everyday people who disagreed with the Supreme Court's decision to upend federal abortion rights.

The issue was on the ballot in five states in November 2022. Americans in California, Michigan and Vermont enshrined the right to a host of reproductive health care services into their state constitutions during the midterms, while voters in Montana defeated a measure containing anti-abortion rhetoric and Kentucky voters soundly rejected an amendment seeking to declare that nothing in the state constitution guaranteed abortion rights.

Then, last year, faced with a Republican trifecta in state government where many lawmakers harbored anti-abortion positions, Ohio reproductive rights advocates took matters in their own hands and launched an effort to codify the right to abortion, contraception, fertility treatments, miscarriage management and pregnancy care.

Despite roadblocks thrown up by GOP officials who tried to increase the threshold for an amendment to be added to the Ohio Constitution, Issue 1 succeeded in November. Nearly 57% of Buckeye State voters cast ballots in favor of reproductive rights.

Elected officials elsewhere are playing a role in thwarting abortion ballot petitions, too. Missouri's attorney general tried to push the state auditor to inflate the estimated cost of an initiative, and the secretary of state offered up ballot summaries that judges dismissed as partisan last year. (Abortion-rights proponents are suing again over the same issue, Missouri Independent reported.)

In Arkansas, Republican Secretary of State John Thurston refused to count all of the signatures for an abortion-rights ballot petition, citing technical paperwork errors, according to Arkansas Advocate. After a five-week legal battle — on the day of the deadline for Thurston to distribute certified ballots to counties — the state Supreme Court affirmed his position. Arkansans for Limited Government, the group behind the ballot measure, said the justices' recent 4-3 ruling silenced more than 102,000 people who signed on to the effort, the Advocate reported.

Another strategy being deployed by opponents: "decline-to-sign" campaigns popped up in Arkansas, Arizona, Missouri and South Dakota.

Democrats have pledged to restore the right to an abortion nationally if they retain the White House and gain seats in Congress in the coming election, and Republican leaders have said they don't support a national ban.

Still, as things stand today, 10 states have confirmed abortion-rights questions for Nov. 5 ballots. Lawsuits to invalidate them are pending across the nation.

### Arizona

Abortion is illegal after 15 weeks in Arizona, unless the patient's life is at risk. There are no exceptions for rape, incest or genetic abnormalities.

Proposition 139 will ask voters if they want to allow abortion up to fetal viability with exceptions later in pregnancy for the patient's life, or physical or mental health. The amendment would also prevent any penalties for someone who helps a person get an abortion. Arizona for Abortion Access is behind the initiative.

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## Colorado

Abortion is legal throughout pregnancy in Colorado, but the state enacted a ban on public funds being used for abortions in 1984. Government employees' insurance does not cover abortion care.

Initiative 89, titled "Right to Abortion," could effectively repeal that 40-year-old coverage ban if 55% of voters approve the amendment. Coloradans for Protecting Reproductive Freedom is leading the effort.

## Florida

Abortion is illegal after six weeks in Florida with exceptions for rape, incest and to save the patient's life. Amendment 4 would bar government interference in abortion access before fetal viability or when a provider deems the procedure necessary to save a person's health. Sixty percent of voters have to approve the measure, which wouldn't remove the parental notification requirement for minors seeking abortions. Floridians Protecting Freedom is behind the campaign.

## Maryland

In March 2023, the Democratic-controlled Legislature voted in favor of a referendum that put the "Right to Reproductive Freedom Act" before voters this fall. Abortion is broadly legal in Maryland.

Question 1 would reify the right to "reproductive freedom," including the right to make "decisions to prevent, continue, or end" a pregnancy. The proposed amendment would also prevent the state from interfering in the right for the most part.

## Missouri

Abortion is only permitted in Missouri for medical emergencies. Restrictions on clinics and providers hindered access in the state before the Dobbs decision, Missouri Independent reported.

Amendment 3, if approved by a simple majority, would legalize abortion up to fetal viability with exceptions later in pregnancy to protect the life or physical or mental health of a pregnant person. It also states patients and providers cannot be prosecuted for abortion. Missourians for Constitutional Freedom is the political action committee behind the initiative.

## Montana

A 1999 Montana Supreme Court ruling solidified abortion access based on the state's constitutional right to privacy, and a 2023 decision reaffirmed the precedent, while also ruling that advanced practice nurses can provide abortions. Still, the Republican-controlled legislature advanced abortion restrictions, which are largely blocked by the courts, Daily Montanan reported.

CI-128 asks voters to further enshrine into the state's constitution the right to make decisions about one's pregnancy, including abortion up to fetal viability, without government regulation. The amendment would include exceptions later in pregnancy to protect the life or health of the patients, as determined by providers. Montanans Securing Reproductive Rights headed the ballot effort.

## Nebraska

A 12-week abortion ban was enacted last year. Protect Our Rights launched a campaign in November for an amendment that would expand access up to viability, as determined by a provider, with later exceptions for a mother's health.

Protect Women and Children announced a counter-effort in the spring for a competing constitutional amendment that would ban abortions after the first trimester (12-14 weeks), with later exceptions for rape, incest or the life of a mother. It would allow the legislature to pass stricter bans in the future.

If both questions make it to the ballot and both are approved by voters, the one with the most votes wins, Nebraska Examiner reported.

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## Nevada

In 1990, Nevada voters secured the right to an abortion through 24 weeks of pregnancy, or later if the mother's life is at risk. Question 6 will ask voters to ensure similar rights constitutionally — making them harder for lawmakers to modify. If passed, this amendment would protect abortion access up to fetal viability, or later to protect the life or health of the patient, Nevada Current reported.

The coalition Nevadans for Reproductive Freedom is behind the proposal, which will have to be approved twice — once this year and again in 2026.

## New York

Abortion is legal in New York up to 24 weeks of pregnancy, and abortions after that point must be approved by providers who decide whether a fetus is viable, or if a patient's life or health is at risk.

Proposal 1, a legislatively referred referendum, asks voters if they want to add an equal rights amendment to the constitution. If approved, it would bar discrimination based on sex, including "pregnancy, pregnancy outcomes and reproductive health care and autonomy." Supporters say this would add protection for the right to an abortion.

## South Dakota

Abortion is banned in South Dakota unless it's necessary to save a patient's life. Dakotans for Health led an effort to expand access.

Amendment G asks voters whether to ban legislators from regulating abortion until the end of the first trimester, allow regulations during the second trimester "in ways that are reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman" and let the state prohibit abortion in the third trimester unless the procedure is necessary to save the life or health of a pregnant patient.

*Elisha Brown is the Reproductive Rights Today newsletter author at States Newsroom. She is based in Durham, North Carolina, where she previously worked as a reporter covering reproductive rights, policy, and inequality for Facing South. Her work has appeared in The New York Times, The Daily Beast, The Atlantic, and Vox. She attended American University in Washington, D.C. and was raised in South Carolina.*

## **COMMENTARY**

### **Let's rethink abortion politics that punish patients and doctors**

**Greater focus is needed on prevention of unwanted pregnancies**

by TOM DEAN

SEPTEMBER 3, 2024 5:00 AM

Abortion is among the most, if not the most, emotional, painful and divisive issue our society has struggled with. The two sides are dug in with little to no prospect of compromise. Abortion opponents believe abortion is murder. Abortion rights supporters reject that and believe that decisions in early pregnancy are entirely the prerogative of the individuals directly involved. The discussion has basically devolved into one of hard-nosed power politics. In a society already divided, this promotes further division and, all too often, violent clashes.

Before going further, let me make my perspective clear. Very simply, I believe that decisions about childbearing are intimate, personal decisions that should be made only by the woman, her family and her closest advisers – without the interference of government. In my view, that is actually the conservative position. At the very same time, I believe that every abortion is a tragedy.

Reducing abortion is a noble goal. The task is, however, far more complex and challenging than most people realize.

First of all, abortion bans do not work. They may actually make the situation worse. The Dobbs decision that overturned Roe v. Wade allowed states to put in place a wide range of abortion restrictions, including

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completely banning the procedure. In spite of this, the number of abortions has actually increased. The numbers had steadily declined for several decades and hit a low point in 2017, about five years before Dobbs. Since 2017, in spite of Dobbs, the numbers have been increasing, and in 2023 the numbers were higher than before Dobbs.

Most experts believe the abortion numbers we have underestimate the actual rate, since many abortions go unreported. People borrow abortion meds from neighbors, buy abortion pills over-the-counter in Mexico, etc.

A very serious result of abortion bans is that risks for women with complications of pregnancy have increased. All too often, women hesitate to seek care in early pregnancy for fear of rejection or some other negative consequence.

Many anti-abortion laws call for punishment of physicians who assist in abortions. The problem is that if a woman presents to an emergency room with bleeding or other pregnancy related complications, there is no way for the physician to know if this is a routine miscarriage or a self-induced abortion gone bad. The accepted treatment in most such cases is to empty the uterus (a dilation and curettage or "D&C"), which is, of course, technically an abortion — an illegal procedure in some states. There are multiple reports of women with worrisome symptoms being sent home to wait for the process to "run its course" — an approach with potentially disastrous outcomes.

Most anti-abortion legislation supposedly contains provisions to protect the life of the mother. These provisions are poorly defined, leaving physicians in the nearly impossible position of knowing what needs to be done but not knowing whether they are legally allowed to proceed. Some physicians have chosen to leave states with abortion prohibitions and move to where they are allowed to deliver the care they know is appropriate.

For a variety of reasons, there has been a decline in the overall availability of women's health services, especially in states where abortion has been banned. A consequence of this decline — somewhat indirect, but nonetheless profoundly important — is the very disturbing rise we have seen in U.S. maternal mortality.

Bottom line, I believe the arguments about legalizing or prohibiting abortion are seriously misguided. We should be focusing on the actual underlying problem: unwanted/unexpected pregnancy. It would seem that this is an area where both pro-life and pro-choice forces could find some level of agreement.

If we focus the energy and resources now being expended in battles over abortion toward preventing unwanted pregnancy, I believe we could have a major reduction in the demand for abortion. We could expect to see a real decline in both the physical and psychological trauma associated with unwanted pregnancy.

Unfortunately, we seem to be moving in the opposite direction. There has been a decline in overall women's health services as well as education on pregnancy prevention. Legislation in Congress has proposed an actual cut in federal support for contraceptive assistance/family planning services.

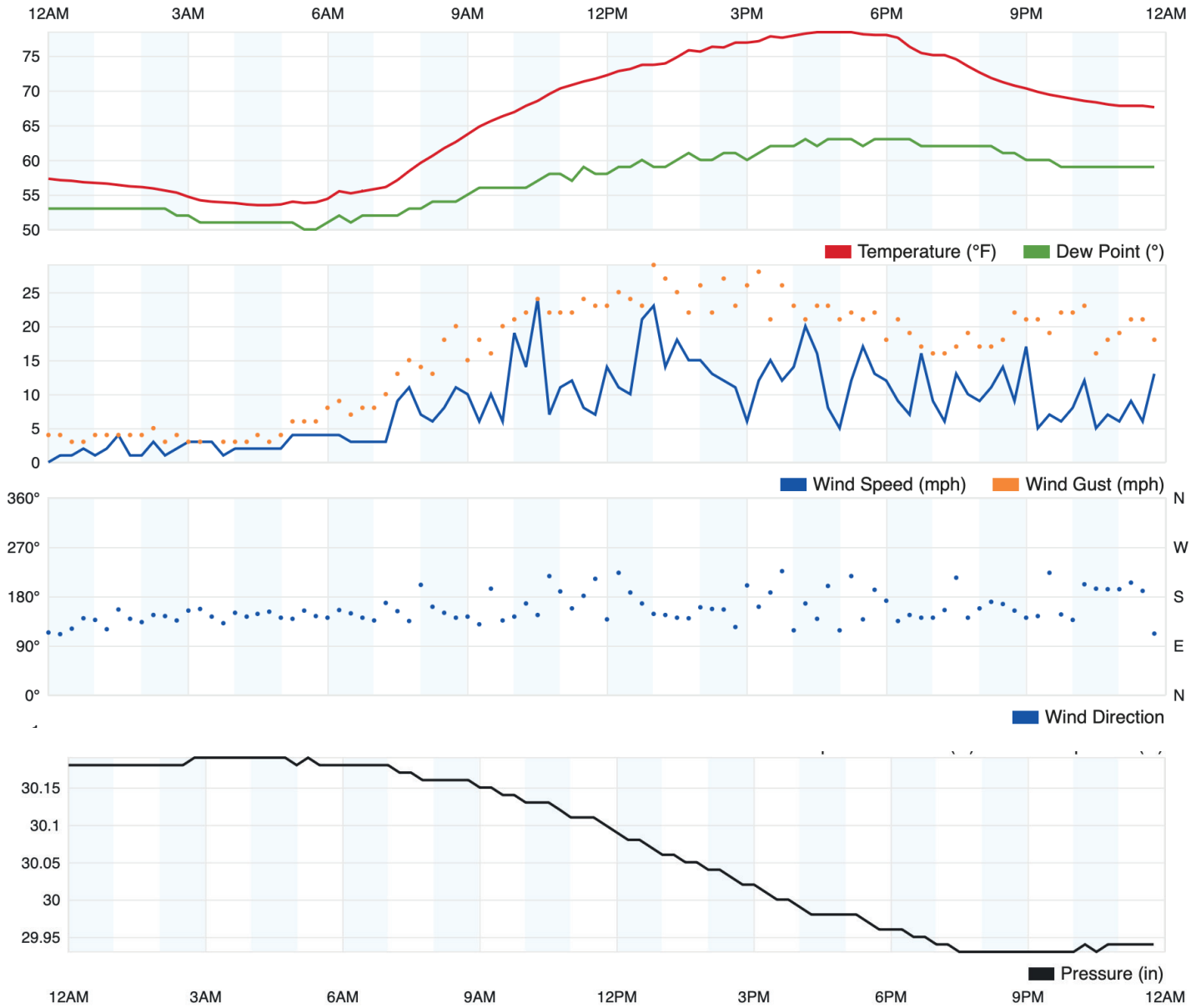
We need to rethink this whole issue and find a better way.

*Tom Dean is a retired family physician who grew up on a farm west of Wessington Springs. He graduated from Wessington Springs High School, Carleton College in Minnesota and medical school in Rochester, New York. He completed a family medicine residency at the University of Washington in Seattle. He returned to Wessington Springs to practice in 1978 along with his wife, Kathy, a certified nurse midwife. He retired after 43 years of practice and still lives in Wessington Springs.*

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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 86 °F

Mostly Sunny  
and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 64 °F

Partly Cloudy  
and Breezy

Wednesday



High: 83 °F

Increasing  
Clouds

Wednesday  
Night



Low: 59 °F

Slight Chance  
T-storms then  
Slight Chance  
Showers

Thursday



High: 72 °F

Mostly Sunny

Today



Highs: 82-98°F

Windy with gusts to  
40 mph

Wednesday



Highs: 82-90°F

15-30% Chance of  
showers/storms late



September 3, 2024  
NWS Aberdeen

Gusty south winds today ahead of an approaching low and cold front. Strong to severe storms are possible with the passing front on Wednesday. Wildfire smoke also moves over the area today into Wednesday.

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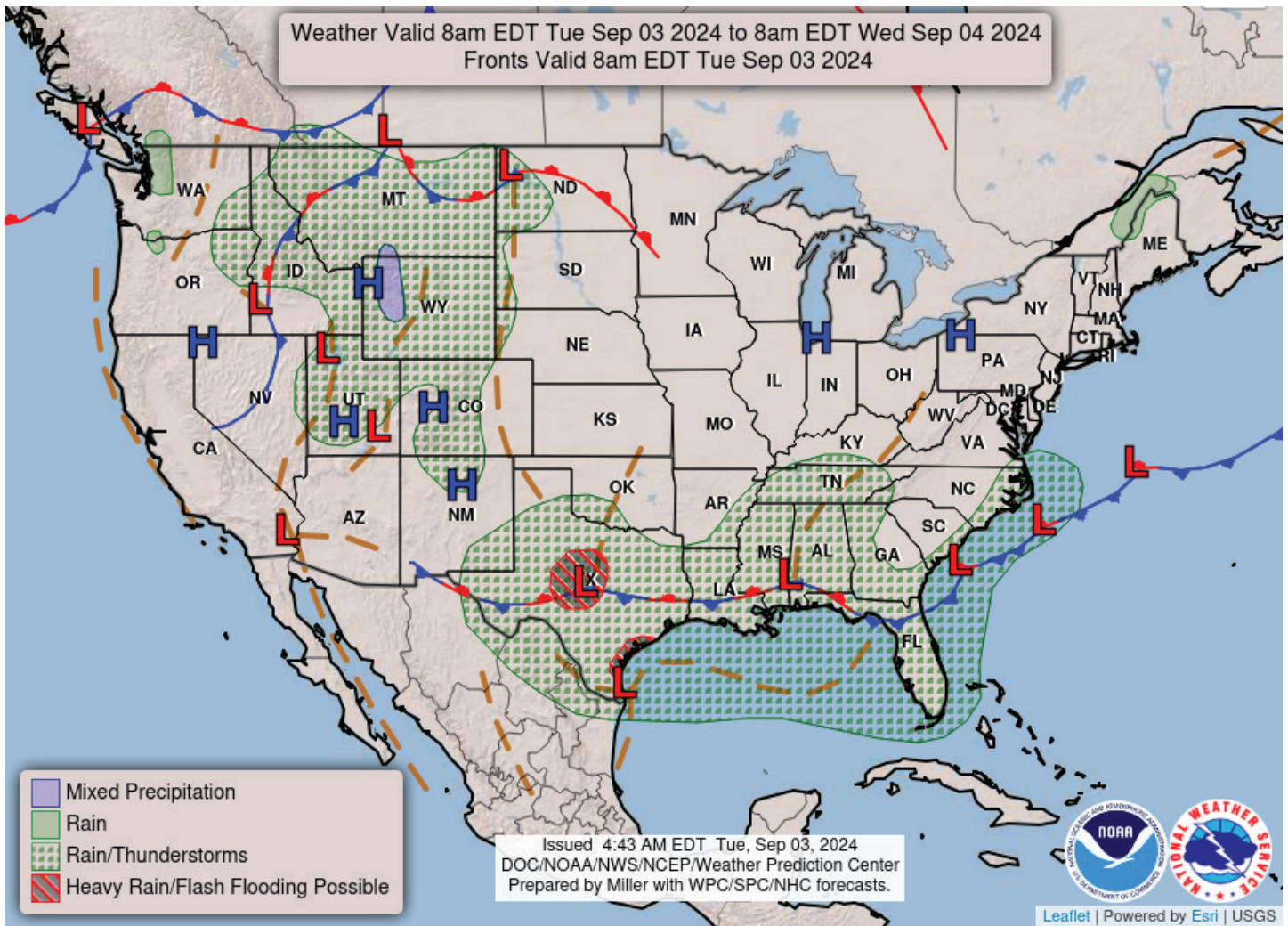
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 79 °F at 4:39 PM**  
**Low Temp: 53 °F at 4:53 AM**  
**Wind: 30 mph at 12:02 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 13 hours, 11 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1897  
Record Low: 31 in 1974  
Average High: 79  
Average Low: 52  
Average Precip in Sept.: 0.21  
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.00  
Average Precip to date: 16.55  
Precip Year to Date: 19.41  
Sunset Tonight: 8:07:10 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:57:02 am





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## Today in Weather History

September 3, 1974: An early freeze occurred across Minnesota and Wisconsin as temperatures fell into the upper 20s to the lower 30s. The cold was the earliest freeze on record in some parts of the state ending the growing season. The most significant damage was to the soybean and corn crop. Damage estimates were more than \$100 million.

September 3, 1999: Training thunderstorms resulted in extensive flash flooding in a 30 to 40-mile wide band from Fort Pierre in southeast Stanley County to Hecla in northeast Brown County. Rainfall amounts in this corridor ranged from 3 to 7 inches. As a result, the communities of Blunt in Hughes County and Onida in Sully County were severely flooded. Most of the homes and businesses were inundated throughout Blunt and Onida causing severe damage. Only a few houses in these communities were spared from receiving water in their basements. Most homes also experienced sewer backup. The sewer systems in both Onida and Blunt were flooded and shut down. Many people had to go to temporary shelters as a result of the flooding. Aberdeen and Fort Pierre had a lot of street flooding resulting in road closures and detours. Also, several basements in Aberdeen and Fort Pierre had the sewer backup. The torrential rains flooded many township and county roads along with several state and U.S. highways. Sections of Highways 14, 20, 83, and 1806 along with many other roads in central and northeast South Dakota had to be closed due to the flooding. Many of the township and county roads had massive amounts of gravel washed away. Some bridges received minor damage with some culverts also lost. A few pets and livestock were also lost as a result of the flooding. Many acres of crops were flooded throughout the area. Some rainfall amounts included 3 inches at Fort Pierre, 4 inches at Hecla and in the Aberdeen Area, 5 inches at the Sand Lake Wildlife Refuge and Blunt, 6 inches at Seneca, 7 inches 10 miles southeast of Gettysburg and at Onida.

1821: Known as the 1821 Norfolk Long Island Hurricane, this storm ripped up the Mid-Atlantic and Northeast coast September 3 and 4 – coinciding with Labor Day (before the holiday was established).

1834: A strong hurricane made landfall near Georgetown, South Carolina. On this date in 1834, a strong hurricane made landfall near Georgetown, SC.

1930: A Category 4 hurricane devastates the Dominican Republic on this day. This storm killed more than 8,000 individuals, which is it the fifth deadliest Atlantic hurricane on record.

1935 - Perhaps the most intense hurricane ever to hit the U.S. struck the Florida Keys with 200 mph winds. The hurricane produced a fifteen foot tide and waves thirty feet high. 400 persons perished in the storm on that Labor Day. The barometric pressure at Matecumbe Bay FL hits a record low for the U.S. of 26.35 inches. (David Ludlum)

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)

1970: During the early evening hours, amid a severe hailstorm at Coffeyville, Kansas, a stone 17.5 inches in circumference and nearly two pounds in weight was recovered. Average stone size from the storm was five inches in diameter, with another stone reportedly eight inches in diameter. This hailstone is currently the third-largest hailstone in the U.S.

1979: Hurricane David made landfall in south Florida as a Category 2 storm. It caused 15 deaths in the US. Hurricane David was a Category 5 over the Dominican Republic where over 2,000 people died.

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)



## MISPLACED TRUST

We all inherit the same sinful nature at birth. It is very evident in the way we think and act. We have an "inbred" dependence on our subjective, self-focused, self-centered, or perhaps might we be more honest and say "sinful" selves. We tend to rely on our God-given gifts as something we have accomplished on our own apart from Him. It is as though we took a lump of clay from the ground and fashioned a person, endowed him with skills and abilities and said, "Now, let's do something that we can be proud of!"

"He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe." This statement reminds us of the wisdom contained in another proverb: "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding." Once again in his wisdom and our lack of it, Solomon took time to remind us of how we easily turn to ourselves rather than God. Trusting in ourselves is normal and natural but not without proving to ourselves, others and God that we are fools.

Notice this: "A greedy man stirs up dissension, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper." This theme, flowing throughout Proverbs, is so very important when we relate it to our sinful nature. To "trust in" is difficult because it signals to the world that what we do is not of ourselves but is a gift from God and to God be the glory for that gift!

Greed is who we are. It's not a word that we want to be identified by. It is something most of us try to deny. The solution? Give credit to God for who we are and what we have!

Prayer: Lord, thank You for seeing who we can be in spite of who we think we are. Make us willing to be willing to let go and let God get the glory, honor, and praise! In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe. Proverbs 28:26

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

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## WINNING NUMBERS

### MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:  
08.30.24

10 17 20 24 54 8

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$681,000,000**

NEXT 15 Hrs 58 Mins  
DRAW: 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.02.24

3 6 7 27 39 3

All Star Bonus: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$8,330,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 13  
DRAW: Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.02.24

3 4 8 28 29 5

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$7,000/week**

NEXT 15 Hrs 28 Mins  
DRAW: 14 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
08.31.24

5 9 12 18 30

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$20,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 28  
DRAW: Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.02.24

4 12 13 16 67 7

TOP PRIZE:  
**\$10,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 57  
DRAW: Mins 13 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.02.24

8 42 46 48 53 22

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$93,000,000**

NEXT 1 Days 15 Hrs 57  
DRAW: Mins 13 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

### **Russian leader Putin challenges international warrant for his arrest with visit to Mongolia**

ULAANBAATAR, Mongolia (AP) — Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Mongolia on Tuesday with no sign that the host country would bow to calls to arrest him on an international warrant for alleged war crimes stemming from the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The trip is Putin's first to a member country of the International Criminal Court since it issued the warrant about 18 months ago. Ahead of his visit, Ukraine called on Mongolia to hand Putin over to the court in The Hague, and the European Union expressed concern that Mongolia might not execute the warrant. A spokesperson for Putin said last week that the Kremlin wasn't worried.

The warrant puts the Mongolian government in a difficult position. After decades under communism with close ties to the Soviet Union, it transitioned to democracy in the 1990s and has built relations with the United States, Japan and other new partners. But it remains economically dependent on its two much larger and more powerful neighbors, Russia and China. Russia supplies the landlocked country with most of its fuel and a sizeable amount of its electricity.

The ICC has accused Putin of being responsible for the abductions of children from Ukraine, where the fighting has raged for 2½ years. Member countries are required by the court's founding treaty, the Rome Statute, to detain suspects if an arrest warrant has been issued, but Mongolia needs to maintain good relations with Russia and the court lacks a mechanism to enforce its warrants.

The Russian leader was welcomed in the main square in Ulaanbaatar, the capital, by an honor guard dressed in vivid red and blue uniforms styled on those of the personal guard of 13th century ruler Genghis Khan, the founder of the Mongol Empire.

He and Mongolian President Khurelsukh Ukhnaa walked up the red-carpeted steps of the Government Palace and bowed before a statue of Genghis Khan before entering the building for their meetings.

A small group of protesters who tried to unfurl a Ukrainian flag before the welcome ceremony were taken away by police.

The two governments signed agreements for a feasibility study and the design of an upgrade to a power plant in Ulaanbaatar and to ensure the continuous supply of aviation fuel to Mongolia. Putin also outlined plans to develop the rail system between the two countries.

He invited the Mongolian president to attend a summit of the BRICS nations — a group that includes Russia and China among others — in the Russian city of Kazan in late October. Khurelsukh accepted, according to Russian state news agency RIA Novosti.

On Monday, the EU expressed concern that the ICC warrant might not be executed and said it had shared its concern with Mongolian authorities.

"Mongolia, like all other countries, has the right to develop its international ties according to its own interests," European Commission spokeswoman Nabila Massrali said. But she added, "Mongolia is a state party to the Rome Statute of the ICC since 2002, with the legal obligations that it entails."

More than 50 Russians outside the country have signed an open letter urging the government of Mongolia to "immediately detain Vladimir Putin upon his arrival." The signers include Vladimir Kara-Murza, who was freed from a Russian prison in August in the biggest East-West prisoner swap since the Cold War.

Dmitry Medvedev, the deputy secretary of Russia's Security Council, denounced the warrant against Putin as "illegal" in an online statement Tuesday and those who would try to carry it out as "madmen."

Putin, on his first visit to Mongolia in five years, will join a ceremony to mark the 85th anniversary of a joint Soviet and Mongolian victory over Japan's army that controlled Manchuria in northeast China. Thousands of soldiers on both sides died in 1939 in months of fighting over the border's location between Manchuria and Mongolia.

"I am very delighted about Putin's visit to Mongolia," said Yansanjav Demdendorj, a retired economist,

citing Russia's role against Japan. "If we think of the ... battle, it's Russians who helped free Mongolia."

Putin has made a series of overseas trips in recent months to try to counter the international isolation he faces over the invasion of Ukraine. He visited China in May, made a trip to North Korea and Vietnam in June and went to Kazakhstan in July for a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

But Kenneth Roth, the former longtime director of Human Rights Watch, described Putin's trip to Mongolia as "a sign of weakness," posting on X that the Russian leader "could manage a trip only to a country with a tiny population of 3.4 million that lives in Russia's shadow."

Last year, Putin joined a meeting in Johannesburg by video link after the South African government lobbied against him showing up for the BRICS summit. South Africa, an ICC member, was condemned by activists and its main opposition party in 2015 when it didn't arrest then-Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir during a visit.

Enkhgerel Seded, who studies at a university in Moscow, said that historically, countries with friendly relations don't arrest heads-of-state on official visits.

"Our country has obligations toward the international community," she said. "But ... I think in this case as well, it would not be appropriate to conduct an arrest."

## The Fed welcomes a 'soft landing' even if many Americans don't feel like cheering

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — When Jerome Powell delivered a high-profile speech last month, the Federal Reserve chair came the closest he ever had to declaring that the inflation surge that gripped the nation for three painful years was now essentially defeated.

And not only that. The Fed's high interest rates, Powell said, had managed to achieve that goal without causing a widely predicted recession and high unemployment.

Yet most Americans are not in the same celebratory mood about the plummeting of inflation in the face of the high borrowing rates the Fed engineered. Though consumer sentiment is slowly rising, a majority of Americans in some surveys still complain about elevated prices, given that the costs of such necessities as food, gas and housing remain far above where they were before the pandemic erupted in 2020.

The relatively sour mood of the public is creating challenges for Vice President Kamala Harris as she seeks to succeed President Joe Biden. Despite the fall of inflation and strong job growth, many voters say they're dissatisfied with the Biden-Harris administration's economic record — and especially frustrated by high prices.

That disparity points to a striking gap between how economists and policymakers assess the past several years of the economy and how many ordinary Americans do.

In his remarks last month, given at an annual economic symposium in Jackson Hole, Wyoming, Powell underscored how the Fed's sharp rate hikes succeeded much more than most economists had predicted in taming inflation without hammering the economy — a notoriously difficult feat known as a "soft landing."

"Some argued that getting inflation under control would require a recession and a lengthy period of high unemployment," Powell said.

Ultimately, though, he noted, "the 4-1/2 percentage point decline in inflation from its peak two years ago has occurred in a context of low unemployment — a welcome and historically unusual result."

With high inflation now essentially conquered, Powell and other central bank officials are preparing to cut their key interest rate in mid-September for the first time in more than four years. The Fed is becoming more focused on sustaining the job market with the help of lower interest rates than on continuing to fight inflation.

Many consumers, by contrast, are still preoccupied most by today's price levels.

"From the viewpoint of economists, central bankers, how we think about inflation, it really has been a remarkable success, how inflation went up, has come back, and is around the target," said Kristin Forbes, an economist at MIT and a former official at the United Kingdom's central bank, the Bank of England.

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"But from the viewpoint of households, it has not been so successful," she added. "Many have taken a big hit to their wages. Many of them feel like the basket of goods they buy is now much more expensive."

Two years ago, economists feared that the Fed's ongoing rate hikes — it ultimately raised its benchmark rate more than 5 percentage points to a 23-year high in the fastest pace in four decades — would hammer the economy and cause millions of job losses. After all, that's what happened when the Fed under Chair Paul Volcker sent its benchmark rate to nearly 20% in the early 1980s, ultimately throttling a brutal inflationary spell.

In fact, at Jackson Hole two years ago, Powell himself warned that using high interest rates to defeat the inflation spike "would bring some pain to households and businesses."

Yet now, according to the Fed's preferred measure, inflation is 2.5%, not far above its 2% target. And while a weaker pace of hiring has caused some concerns, the unemployment rate is at a still-low 4.3%, and the economy expanded at a solid 3% annual rate last quarter.

While no Fed official will outright declare victory, some take satisfaction in defying the predictions of doom and gloom.

"2023 was a historic year for inflation falling," said Austan Goolsbee, president of the Chicago Fed. "And there wasn't a recession, and that's unprecedented. And so we will be studying the mechanics of how that happened for a long time."

Measures of consumer sentiment, though, indicate that three years of hurtful inflation have dimmed many Americans' outlook. In addition, high loan rates, along with elevated housing prices, have led many young workers to fear that homeownership is increasingly out of reach.

Last month, the consulting firm McKinsey said that 53% of consumers in its most recent survey "still say that rising prices and inflation are among their concerns." McKinsey's analysts attributed the escalated figure to "an 'inflation overhang.'" That's the belief among analysts that it can take months, if not years, for consumers to adjust emotionally to a much higher level of prices even if their pay is keeping pace.

Economists point to several reasons for the wide gap in perceptions between economists and policymakers on the one hand and everyday consumers and workers on the other.

The first is that the Fed tailors its interest rate policies to manage inflation — the rate of price changes — rather than price levels themselves. So when inflation spikes, the central bank's goal is to return it to a sustainable level, currently defined as 2%, rather than to reverse the price increases. The Fed's policymakers expect average wages to catch up and eventually to allow consumers to afford the higher prices.

"Central bankers think even if inflation gets away from 2% for a period, as long as it comes back, that's fine," Forbes said. "Victory, mission accomplished. But the amount of time inflation is away from 2% can have a major cost."

Research by Stefanie Stantcheva, a Harvard economist, and two colleagues found that most people's views of inflation are very different from those of economists. Economists in general are more likely to regard inflation as a consequence of strong growth. They often describe inflation as a result of an "overheating" economy: Low unemployment, strong job growth and rising wages lead businesses to sharply increase prices without necessarily losing sales.

By contrast, a survey by Stantcheva found, ordinary Americans "view inflation as an unambiguously bad thing and very rarely as a sign of a good economy or as a byproduct of positive developments."

Her survey respondents also said they believed that inflation stems from excessive government spending or greedy businesses. They "do not believe that (central bank) policymakers face trade-offs, such as having to reduce economic activity or increase unemployment to control inflation."

As a result, few consumers probably worried about the potential for a downturn as a result of the Fed's rate hikes. One opinion survey, in fact, found that many consumers believed, incorrectly, that the economy was in a recession because inflation was so high.

At the Jackson Hole conference, Andrew Bailey, governor of the Bank of England, argued that central banks cannot guarantee that high inflation will never appear — only that they will try to drive it back down when it does.



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"I get this question quite often in Parliament," Bailey said. "People say, 'Well you failed to control inflation.' I said no."

The test of a central bank, he continued, "is not that we will never have inflation. The test of the regime is how well, once you get hit by these shocks, you bring it back to target."

Still, Forbes suggested that there are lessons to be learned from the post-COVID inflation spike, including whether inflation was allowed to stay too high for too long, both in the U.S. and the U.K. The Fed has long been criticized for having taken too long to start raising its benchmark rate. Inflation first spiked in the spring of 2021. Yet the Fed, under the mistaken impression that high inflation would prove "transitory," didn't begin raising rates until nearly a year later.

"Maybe should we rethink ... where we seem to be now: 'As long as it comes back four to five years later, that's fine,'" she said. "Maybe four to five years is too long."

"How much unemployment or slowdown in growth should we be willing to accept to shorten the length of time that inflation is too high?"

## The presidential campaigns brace for an intense sprint to Election Day

By STEVE PEOPLES, THOMAS BEAUMONT and AMELIA THOMSON-DEVEAUX Associated Press  
LA CROSSE, Wis. (AP) — After a summer of historic tumult, the path to the presidency for both Kamala Harris and Donald Trump this fall is becoming much clearer.

The Democratic vice president and the Republican former president will devote almost all of their remaining time and resources to just seven states. They will spend hundreds of millions of dollars targeting voters who, in many cases, have just begun to pay attention to the election. And their campaigns will try to focus their messages on three familiar issues — the economy, immigration and abortion — even in the midst of heated debates over character, culture and democracy.

The candidates will debate in one week in what will be their first meeting ever. The nation's premier swing state, Pennsylvania, begins in-person absentee voting the week after. By the end of the month, early voting will be underway in at least four states with a dozen more to follow by mid-October.

In just 63 days, the final votes will be cast to decide which one of them will lead the world's most powerful nation.

Privately, at least, both camps acknowledge that victory is no sure thing as they begin the eight-week sprint to Election Day. Harris and Trump are neck-and-neck in most national polls conducted since President Joe Biden ended his reelection campaign.

The Harris campaign still put out a memo over the weekend casting itself as "the clear underdogs" in the contest.

"There's not a scenario here that's easy," Harris senior adviser David Plouffe said in an interview. "The pathway to beating Donald Trump, the pathway to 270 electoral votes for Kamala Harris, is exceedingly hard, but doable. And that's just a reality."

Trump, meanwhile, rejects any indicators that suggest Harris is ahead even as he lashes out at her in deeply personal and sometimes apocalyptic terms, declaring that "our country is finished" if she wins.

"As we move past Labor Day, we will really get into the time where voters start to harden their opinions," said James Blair, the Trump campaign's political director. "We feel pretty good about things. We feel energized. Our people are energized. But there's certainly plenty of work to be done."

The electoral map settles on seven states

Just over a month ago, Trump allies suggested Democratic-leaning states like Minnesota, Virginia or even New Jersey might be in play. Neither side believes that is still the case on Labor Day weekend.

In replacing Biden as the party's nominee, Harris breathed new life into the Democrats' political prospects, especially across the Sun Belt states of Arizona, Georgia, Nevada and North Carolina. All four states have significant numbers of African Americans and Latinos, traditionally Democratic constituencies who were down nationally on Biden but appear to have come home to rally behind Harris.

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South Carolina Sen. Lindsey Graham was among the senior GOP officials who brokered a peace between Trump and Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, whose feud threatened to undermine the Republican effort in the state. Graham told The Associated Press he was worried about Georgia's shift leftward.

"Trump was up 5 or 6 points, and all over the course of a month it's become much more competitive," he said.

Republican pollster Paul Schumaker, an adviser to North Carolina Sen. Thom Tillis, said even a slight uptick in the Black vote has the potential to give Harris the edge in North Carolina, pointing to Mecklenburg County, the home of the Charlotte metro area, but also fast-growing counties such as Durham and Wake.

"If Kamala Harris could get them to turn out at the rate of Republicans in rural North Carolina, game over for Republicans," Schumaker said of Black voters.

At the same time, Trump remains decidedly on offense in the Midwestern battlegrounds of Michigan, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, which form the so-called Democratic "blue wall" that he narrowly carried in 2016 and barely lost in 2020.

Those seven states — in addition to swing districts in Nebraska and Maine that each award single Electoral College votes — will draw virtually all of the candidates' attention and resources over the next eight weeks.

Trump is investing more advertising dollars in Pennsylvania than any other state through Election Day.

A Trump victory in Pennsylvania alone would make it much more difficult for Harris to earn the 270 electoral votes needed to win the presidency. Harris' team insists she has multiple pathways to victory.

The Democrats' organizing advantage

In the fight to frame the election on the air and reach voters in person, Democrats currently have a decided advantage.

Harris' team is on pace to outspend Trump's camp 2-to-1 in television advertising over the next two months. And even before Biden made way for Harris, the Democrats wielded superior campaign infrastructure in the states that matter most.

Harris' team, which includes her campaign and an allied super PAC, have more than \$280 million in television and radio reservations for the period between Tuesday and Election Day, according to the media tracking firm AdImpact. Trump's team, by contrast, has \$133 million reserved for the final stretch, although that number is expected to grow.

Trump's side is actually narrowly outspending Harris' on the airwaves in Pennsylvania, where both sides will spend more than \$146 million between Tuesday and Election Day, according to AdImpact, a figure that dwarfs that of any other state. Georgia is drawing nearly \$80 million in ad spending over the campaign's final eight weeks.

But in the other five battleground states, Harris largely has the airwaves largely to herself — at least for now.

Trump and his allied super PACs have made only marginal ad reservations in Michigan, Arizona, Wisconsin, North Carolina and Nevada to date. Harris' team, by comparison, is investing no less than \$21 million in each of the five states, according to an AdImpact analysis.

Harris' team also boasts more than 300 coordinated offices and 2,000 staff on the ground in swing states, according to her campaign's weekend memo. Trump's campaign has only a few dozen dedicated offices, relying instead on less experienced outside groups to ensure their supporters show up on Election Day.

Blair, the Trump campaign's political director, disputes that Democrats have as big an organizing advantage as those numbers make it seem. The outside allies that will organize for Trump are well-funded, including a new effort backed by billionaire Elon Musk.

Here's what the polls say

Both candidates are locked in close races across the seven top swing states. Democratic pollster John Anzalone said Harris "put the Democrats back in the game to where it's kind of a toss-up."

But now comes the hard part, Anzalone said.

"Post Labor Day, when the bell rings, there is a battle for a slim universe of — you can call them anything you want: persuasion voters, swing voters, independent voters — and it's pretty small, and that's where

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each side gets a billion dollars," Anzalone said.

Many independents appear to find both candidates unsatisfying, according to an AP-NORC poll conducted in August.

For now, Harris also has a slight advantage on some key traits among independents, while she and Trump are about even on others.

For example, about 3 in 10 independents say that "honest" describes Harris better, while about 2 in 10 say it describes Trump better. About 3 in 10 also say that "committed to democracy" describes Harris better, while less than 2 in 10 say it describes Trump better.

The candidates were about equally likely to be perceived by independents as capable of winning the election, capable of handling a crisis, and "caring about people like you."

Who is the 'change candidate'?

The race may ultimately be decided by whichever candidate can most successfully cast themselves as the "change candidate" given that about 7 in 10 voters say the country is heading in the wrong direction, based on an AP-NORC poll conducted in late July after Biden withdrew from the race.

Trump was the face of change when he won the 2016 election. And even after serving in the White House for four years, he continues to energize millions of frustrated voters who embrace his brash leadership style and unwillingness to follow the traditional rules of politics.

Harris has been Biden's vice president for nearly four years, yet the historic nature of her candidacy — she would be the first woman president — allows her to make a convincing case that she represents a new direction for the country, said veteran Democratic strategist James Carville.

Still, he's worried about his party's "severe underperformance" in the so-called "blue wall" states in recent elections.

"I'll feel good after the election," Carville said. "Let's get the hay in the barn. There's still a lot of hay out there in the field."

## Party of one: Restaurants are catering to a growing number of solo diners

By DEE-ANN DURBIN and ANNE D'INNOCENZIO AP Business Writers

NEW YORK (AP) — Parisa Imanirad, a scientist and cancer researcher from San Francisco, is married and has a wide circle of friends. But once or twice a week, she goes to a restaurant by herself.

Imanirad said dining alone gives her time to think or read. She tries not to touch her phone and relishes the silence. "It's like a spa, but a different type," Imanirad said during a recent solo lunch at Spruce, an upscale restaurant in San Francisco.

Imanirad isn't alone in her desire to be alone. In the U.S., solo dining reservations have risen 29% over the last two years, according to OpenTable, the restaurant reservation site. They're up 18% this year in Germany and 14% in the United Kingdom.

Japan even has a special term for solo dining: "ohitorisama," which means "alone" but with honorifics spoken both before and after the word to make parties of one feel less hesitant. In a recent survey, Japan's Hot Pepper Gourmet Eating Out Research Institute found that 23% of Japanese people eat out alone, up from 18% in 2018.

As a result, many restaurants in Japan and elsewhere are redoing their seating, changing their menus and adding other special touches to appeal to solo diners.

"Even so-called family restaurants are increasing counter seats for solitary diners, and restaurants are offering courses with smaller servings so a person eating alone gets a variety of dishes," said Masahiro Inagaki, a senior researcher at the institute.

OpenTable CEO Debby Soo thinks remote work is one reason for the increase, with diners seeking respites from their home offices. But she thinks there are deeper reasons, too.

"I think there's a broader movement of self-love and self-care and really... enjoying your own company," Soo said.

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The pandemic also made social interactions less feasible and therefore less important while eating out, said Anna Mattila, a professor of lodging management at Penn State University who has studied solo dining. And smartphones help some restaurant patrons feel connected to others even when they're by themselves, she said.

"The social norms have changed. People don't look at solo diners anymore and think, 'You must be a loner,'" Mattila said.

The growth comes as more people are living alone. In 2019, the Pew Research Center found that 38% of U.S. adults ages 25 to 54 were living without a partner, up from 29% in 1990. In Japan, single households now make up one-third of the total; that's expected to climb to 40% by 2040, according to government data.

Increasing interest in solo travel – particularly among travelers ages 55 and over – is also leading to more meals alone.

On a recent solo trip to Lucerne, Switzerland, Carolyn Ray was stunned when the hostess led her to a beautiful lake-view table set for one, complete with a small vase of flowers. Ray, the CEO and editor of JourneyWoman, a website for solo women travelers over 50, said other restaurants have tried to seat her toward the back or pointedly asked if someone will be joining her.

Ray counsels women planning to dine alone to go somewhere else if they're treated rudely or given a bad table.

"It's almost like the world hasn't caught up with this idea that we are on our own because we want to be on our own and we're independent and empowered," she said. "We can go into any restaurant we want and have a table for one and feel good about it."

Shawn Singh, a Houston-based content creator and restaurant reviewer, said he eats alone about 70% of the time. If the idea of venturing out for a solitary meal is intimidating, he suggests going to lunch instead of dinner – when tables are usually more crowded with groups – or going early on a weekday.

"The best way to see a restaurant you've been wanting to see for a long time is definitely going solo," Singh said. "If I go at 5 p.m. and alone, I haven't been denied at one place ever."

Restaurants aren't always thrilled to seat a single diner at a table that could fit more. A Michelin-starred London restaurant, Alex Dilling at Hotel Café Royal, caused a stir last year when it started charging solo patrons the same price as two customers. Its eight-course dinner tasting menu, which includes caviar and Cornish squid, costs 215 pounds (\$280) per person.

The restaurant, which has only 34 seats, didn't respond to a request for comment. But its website doesn't allow reservations for less than two people.

Other restaurants say it's worth seating one person at a table made for two because solo diners tend to be loyal, repeat customers.

"While there may be a short-term loss there, I think we're kind of playing the long game and establishing ourselves as a place that's truly special," said Drew Brady, chief operating officer at Overthrow Hospitality, which operates 11 vegan restaurant concepts in New York.

Brady has seen an increase in solo diners since the pandemic, and says they're evenly split between men and women. At the company's flagship restaurant, Avant Garden, they make up as much as 8% of patrons.

In response, the restaurant teamed up with Lightspeed, a restaurant tech and consulting company, to develop a solo dining program. Avant Garden now has a spacious table designed for solo diners, with a \$65 four-course menu fashioned like a passport to enhance the sense of adventure. If solo diners order a cocktail, a bartender mixes it tableside.

Mattila, at Penn State, said restaurants might want to consider additional changes. Her research has found that solo diners prefer angular shapes – in lights, tables or plates, for example – to round ones, which are more associated with the connectedness of groups. They also prefer slow-tempo music.

Jill Weber, the founder of Sojourn Philly, a Philadelphia company that owns two restaurants and a wine bar, said she adds a communal table at special events like wine tastings so individuals have a place to gather. She also doesn't offer specials designed for two.

Weber, who is also an archaeologist, loves dining alone when she's traveling.

"There's something about not having to agree on where to go and everything that goes with that. You have the freedom to stay as long as you want, order what you want and sit with those things," she said. "It also feels brave sometimes."

## Israel-Hamas war latest: Israeli military says it killed Hamas militant in widely viewed Oct 7 video

By The Associated Press undefined

The Israeli military says it has killed a Hamas militant who appeared in a widely viewed video from Oct. 7, where he was seen drinking from a bottle of cola in front of two children wounded in a grenade attack that had just killed their father.

The military on Tuesday identified the militant as Ahmed Fozi Wadia, a commander in a Hamas commando battalion and a member of a paragliding unit. It said Wadia flew into the community of Netiv HaAsara on a paraglider before launching the attack on civilians there.

In a video of the attack on the Taasa family home, which was screened for journalists, diplomats and lawmakers around the world by Israeli officials, Gil Taasa is seen running to a shelter with his two boys when a grenade is thrown in. Taasa jumps on the grenade and was killed, and his sons were wounded. The militant, now identified by the military as Wadia, is then seen standing over the wounded boys and drinking cola from their fridge.

The military said aircraft struck a compound in Gaza City on Saturday where Hamas militants were operating, killing eight militants, including Wadia.

The military said the compound that was hit was near the Al-Ahli hospital but said the hospital itself was not hit. The Health Ministry in Gaza reported a strike on the hospital grounds on Saturday and said it killed three people.

Hamas-led militants killed 1,200 people and took 250 hostage in their Oct. 7 attack, which triggered the war in Gaza which is now in its 11th month and has killed more than 40,000 people, according to Gaza health officials.

Here's the latest:

Netanyahu criticizes decision by UK government to suspend some arms exports to Israel

TEL AVIV, Israel — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Tuesday slammed a decision by the British government to suspend some arms exports to Israel over the risk that they could be used to violate international law.

In a thread on his English account on the social platform X, Netanyahu called the move "shameful" and said it would not "change Israel's determination to defeat Hamas."

"With or without British arms, Israel will win this war," he wrote.

U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government announced the suspension Monday. The move has limited military impact but it is intended to increase pressure by Israel's frustrated allies for an end to the war in Gaza.

The United Kingdom is among a number of Israel's longstanding allies whose governments are under growing pressure to halt weapons exports because of the toll of the nearly 11-month-old conflict in Gaza. More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to the Health Ministry in the Hamas-run territory, which doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians in its toll.

British firms sell a relatively small amount of weapons and components to Israel compared to major suppliers such as the U.S. and Germany. But the U.K. is one of Israel's closest allies, so the decision carries some symbolic significance.

Israel says it closely adheres to international law in its campaign against Hamas, which launched an attack that killed 1,200 people and took 250 hostage on Oct. 7 that sparked the war.

WHO says polio vaccination campaign in Gaza has reached one-quarter of children targeted in 2 days

GENEVA — The World Health Organization says a "wildly complex" polio vaccination campaign in Gaza

has already reached more than one-quarter of all children targeted across the strip in the first two days of its rollout.

Dr. Rik Peepkorn, the WHO representative in the occupied Palestinian territories, said more than 161,000 children have been vaccinated out of the 640,000 targeted under a humanitarian pause that is "area specific" – with the first phase now underway in central Gaza.

"We surpassed the estimated target," he told reporters at a U.N. briefing in Geneva by videoconference from Gaza. "Until now, things are going well ... This is only the third day. We still have 10 days to go at least."

Peepkorn said more than 500 teams had fanned out across Gaza as part of the campaign against an outbreak of vaccine-derived polio in Gaza. WHO has said Israel agreed to limited pauses in the fighting to facilitate the campaign.

Lufthansa will resume flights to Tel Aviv later this week

BERLIN — German airline Lufthansa will resume flights to Tel Aviv in Israel later this week. The company announced Tuesday that it would offer flights to Tel Aviv's Ben Gurion Airport starting on Thursday.

Flights to the Lebanese capital, Beirut, will remain suspended until Sept. 30 for all airlines in the Lufthansa Group, which also includes Swiss, Austrian Airlines, Brussels Airlines and Eurowings.

Flights to Amman in Jordan and Erbil in Iraq resumed on Aug. 27.

Lufthansa had canceled its connections at the beginning of last month due to rising tensions in the region.

## China-linked 'Spamouflage' network mimics Americans online to sway US political debate

By DAVID KLEPPER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — When he first emerged on social media, the user known as Harlan claimed to be a New Yorker and an Army veteran who supported Donald Trump for president. Harlan said he was 29, and his profile picture showed a smiling, handsome young man.

A few months later, Harlan underwent a transformation. Now, he claimed to be 31 and from Florida.

New research into Chinese disinformation networks targeting American voters shows Harlan's claims were as fictitious as his profile picture, which analysts think was created using artificial intelligence.

As voters prepare to cast their ballots this fall, China has been making its own plans, cultivating networks of fake social media users designed to mimic Americans. Whoever or wherever he really is, Harlan is a small part of a larger effort by U.S. adversaries to use social media to influence and upend America's political debate.

The account was traced back to Spamouflage, a Chinese disinformation group, by analysts at Graphika, a New York-based firm that tracks online networks. Known to online researchers for several years, Spamouflage earned its moniker through its habit of spreading large amounts of seemingly unrelated content alongside disinformation.

"One of the world's largest covert online influence operations — an operation run by Chinese state actors — has become more aggressive in its efforts to infiltrate and to sway U.S. political conversations ahead of the election," Jack Stubbs, Graphika's chief intelligence officer, told The Associated Press.

Intelligence and national security officials have said that Russia, China and Iran have all mounted on-line influence operations targeting U.S. voters ahead of the November election. Russia remains the top threat, intelligence officials say, even as Iran has become more aggressive in recent months, covertly supporting U.S. protests against the war in Gaza and attempting to hack into the email systems of the two presidential candidates.

China, however, has taken a more cautious, nuanced approach. Beijing sees little advantage in supporting one presidential candidate over the other, intelligence analysts say. Instead, China's disinformation efforts focus on campaign issues particularly important to Beijing — such as American policy toward Taiwan — while seeking to undermine confidence in elections, voting and the U.S. in general.

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Officials have said it's a longer-term effort that will continue well past Election Day as China and other authoritarian nations try to use the internet to erode support for democracy.

A message left with the Chinese Embassy in Washington was not immediately returned.

Compared with armed conflict or economic sanctions, online influence operations can be a low-cost, low-risk means of flexing geopolitical power. Given the increasing reliance on digital communications, the use of online disinformation and fake information networks is only likely to increase, said Max Lesser, senior analyst for emerging threats at the Foundation for Defense of Democracies, a national security think tank in Washington.

"We're going to see a widening of the playing field when it comes to influence operations, where it's not just Russia, China and Iran but you also see smaller actors getting involved," Lesser said.

That list could include not only nations but also criminal organizations, domestic extremist groups and terrorist organizations, Lesser said.

When analysts first noticed Spamouflage five years ago, the network tended to post generically pro-China, anti-American content. In recent years, the tone sharpened as Spamouflage expanded and began focusing on divisive political topics like gun control, crime, race relations and support for Israel during its war in Gaza. The network also began creating large numbers of fake accounts designed to mimic American users.

Spamouflage accounts don't post much original content, instead using platforms like X or TikTok to recycle and repost content from far-right and far-left users. Some of the accounts seemed designed to appeal to Republicans, while others cater to Democrats.

While Harlan's accounts succeeded in getting traction — one video mocking President Joe Biden was seen 1.5 million times — many of the accounts created by the Spamouflage campaign did not. It's a reminder that online influence operations are often a numbers game: the more accounts, the more content, the better the chance that one specific post goes viral.

Many of the accounts newly linked to Spamouflage took pains to pose as Americans, sometimes in obvious ways. "I am an American," one of the accounts proclaimed. Some of the accounts gave themselves away by using stilted English or strange word choices. Some were clumsier than others: "Broken English, brilliant brain, I love Trump," read the biographical section of one account.

Harlan's profile picture, which Graphika researchers believe was created using AI, was identical to one used in an earlier account linked to Spamouflage. Messages sent to the person operating Harlan's accounts were not returned.

Several of the accounts linked to Spamouflage remain active on TikTok and X.

## Trial expected to focus on shooter's competency in 2021 Colorado supermarket massacre

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A man sitting in his van after fixing a coffee machine inside a supermarket in the college town of Boulder was the first person killed. In just over a minute, nine more people died in a barrage of gunfire inside and outside the store in 2021 as the shooter targeted and pursued people who were moving.

Survivors fled out of the back of the store to escape the bullets. For more than an hour, others hid in shelves, checkout stands and offices.

Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa, then 21, surrendered after being shot in the leg by a police officer in the store, emerging wearing only his underwear and repeatedly asking officers to call his mother. His attorneys don't dispute he was the shooter.

But why he carried out the mass shooting remains unknown as his trial is set to begin this week.

The closest thing to a possible motive revealed so far was when a mental health evaluator testified during a competency hearing last year that Alissa said he bought firearms to carry out a mass shooting and suggested that he wanted police to kill him.

Robert Olds, whose niece 25-year-old Rikki Olds was the manager Alissa fatally shot at close range near the entrance, plans to sit in his usual spot in the front row throughout the trial. While sometimes wishing

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Alissa had just been killed, he has held out hope that he would one day learn why his niece, known for her sense of humor and outgoing personality, and the others were targeted. He has become less hopeful of that but is certain Alissa knew what he was doing.

"I hope he goes to prison for the rest of his life, and then he'll serve the real penalty when he has to meet God and answer for killing 10 people," he said.

The trial is expected to focus largely on Alissa's mental state at the time of the shooting. He was diagnosed with schizophrenia and pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity, and his lawyers argue he should be acquitted because his mental illness prevented him from being able to tell right from wrong.

The defense argued in a court filing that his relatives said he irrationally believed he was being followed by the FBI and would talk to himself as if he was talking to someone who was not there. However, prosecutors point out Alissa was never previously treated for mental illness and was able to work up to 60 hours a week leading up to the shooting, something they say would not have been possible for someone severely mentally ill.

Alissa is charged with 10 counts of first-degree murder, 15 counts of attempted murder and other offenses including having six high-capacity ammunition magazines devices banned in Colorado after previous mass shootings.

Alissa's trial has been delayed because experts repeatedly found he was not able to understand legal proceedings and help his defense. But after Alissa improved after being forcibly medicated, Judge Ingrid Bakke ruled in October that he was mentally competent, allowing proceedings to resume.

Prosecutors will have the burden of proving he was sane, attempting to show Alissa knew what he was doing and intended to kill people in the store.

Authorities have not explained why Alissa bypassed a King Soopers near his home in the Denver suburb of Arvada and drove about 15 miles (24 kilometers) to the chain's store in Boulder, a city he had never visited before the shooting, according to the defense.

Prosecutors have presented evidence that Alissa had researched things like how to move and shoot with an assault rifle and what kinds of bullets are the most deadly in the months before the shooting. One court document noted without elaboration that he searched for information about the "Christ Church attacks", an apparent reference to the livestreamed shooting attacks by a white nationalist on two mosques in Christchurch, New Zealand, that killed 51 people in March 2019.

Alissa immigrated from Syria with his family as a toddler. He lived with his family in Arvada, where they owned a restaurant.

The only known problem Alissa had before the shooting was an incident in high school in 2018 when he was convicted of assaulting a fellow student, according to police documents. A former classmate also told The Associated Press that Alissa was kicked off the wrestling team after yelling he would kill everyone following a loss in a practice match.

A sister-in-law who lived in Alissa's home told police that he had been playing with what she thought was a "machine gun" two days before the shooting before two relatives took it away, according to court documents.

A number of Alissa's relatives are listed as potential witnesses for the defense during the trial. Potential jurors will be questioned starting Tuesday, with opening statements expected before the end of the week.

Both sides will rely on experts to testify about his sanity, possibly including videos of their interviews with Alissa, said defense lawyer Karen Steinhauer, a former prosecutor and University of Denver law professor.

If jurors don't believe Alissa was legally insane, they could also consider whether his mental illness prevented him from being able to act with deliberation and intent and find him guilty of second-degree murder instead, she said.

A sanity evaluation done by experts at the state mental hospital found Alissa was legally sane at the time of the attack, according to details provided by the defense in a court hearing this spring. According to the defense, the evaluators found the attack would not have happened but for Alissa's untreated mental illness, which attorney Sam Dunn said was schizophrenia that included "auditory hallucinations."



Olds said he is bracing himself to learn more horrific details about the shooting, including surveillance video not previously shown in public.

But he said finally having the trial behind him will help him and many of the families to finally grieve what they've lost, he said.

"There's no such thing as moving on. It's finding other ways to live without your loved one," he said.

## **Pope opens Asia odyssey with stop in Indonesia to rally Catholics, hail religious freedom tradition**

By NICOLE WINFIELD and EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Pope Francis arrived in Indonesia on Tuesday at the start of the longest trip of his pontificate, hoping to encourage its Catholic community and celebrate the tradition of interfaith harmony in a country with the world's largest Muslim population.

After an overnight flight from Rome, Francis was wheeled off the plane in his wheelchair and onto the tarmac for a welcoming ceremony under Jakarta's perennial hazy, humid and polluted skies.

Two children wearing traditional clothes handed him a bouquet of vegetables, fruits, spices and flowers.

Francis planned to rest for the remainder of the day, given the rigors of an 11-day voyage zigzagging across time zones that will also take him to Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore. However, the Vatican said the 87-year-old pope met with a group of refugees, migrants and sick people at the Vatican residence in Jakarta.

Outside the residence, he was greeted by well-wishers eager to catch sight of the first pope to visit since St. John Paul II in 1989.

"When I saw him in the car I was so touched, goosebumps," said Fanfan, a 49-year-old housewife from West Jakarta who uses only one name. "I hope he will hopefully appear in front of me to wave his hand again."

Francis' first full day of activities begins Wednesday with visits to the country's political leaders and meetings with Indonesian clergy who are helping to fuel the growth of the Catholic Church in Asia.

Indonesian President Joko Widodo welcomed the pope, saying in a broadcast statement that "Indonesia and the Vatican have the same commitment to fostering peace and brotherhood, as well as ensuring the welfare of humanity."

The highlight of Francis' first stop will be his participation Thursday in an interfaith meeting in Jakarta's iconic Istiqlal mosque with representatives of the six religions that are officially recognized in Indonesia: Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism.

The mosque, the largest in Southeast Asia, sits across a piazza from the capital's main Catholic cathedral, Our Lady of Assumption, and the two are so close to each other that the Muslim call to prayer can be heard during Mass.

Their proximity is not coincidental, but strongly willed as a symbol of religious freedom and tolerance that is enshrined in Indonesia's Constitution. The buildings are also linked by an underground "Tunnel of Friendship" which Francis will visit with the grand imam, Nasaruddin Umar, before they sign a joint declaration.

While Francis will want to highlight Indonesia's tradition of religious tolerance, the country's image as a moderate Muslim nation has been undermined by flare-ups of intolerance. In 2021, a militant Islamic couple blew themselves up outside a packed Catholic cathedral on Indonesia's Sulawesi island during a Palm Sunday Mass, injuring at least 20 people.

"We have no problem with the visit. He's a guest and we will welcome him," said Eldy, a 64-year-old retired government worker who uses one name and was out walking during a car-free day in Jakarta on Sunday. "He wants to visit our Istiqlal mosque, he can do it."

Even though Catholics make up only 3% of Indonesia's population, the sheer number of Indonesians -- 275 million -- makes the archipelago home to the third-largest Christian community in Asia, after the Philippines and China.

As a result, thousands are expected to throng to Francis' events this week, which include a Mass on

Thursday afternoon at Jakarta's main stadium expected to draw some 60,000 people. City authorities have urged residents to work from home that day given roadblocks and crowds.

"It is a joy for our country, especially for us Catholics," said Elisabeth Damanik, a 50-year-old housewife outside a packed Mass on Sunday at Our Lady of the Assumption. "Hopefully the pope's visit can build religious tolerance in our beloved country of Indonesia."

Care for the environment, conflict resolution and ethically minded economic development are the major themes for the trip, and Francis may touch on them during his main speech to Indonesian authorities on Wednesday.

Francis has made caring for the environment a hallmark of his pontificate and has often used his foreign visits to press his agenda on the need to care for God's creation, prevent exploitation of its natural resources and protect poor people who are bearing the brunt of climate extremes and pollution.

In Jakarta, he will find a metropolis of 11.3 million people choking under gray clouds of air pollution caused by coal-fired power plants, vehicle exhaust, trash burning and factories. Jakarta's air pollution regularly registers eight to nine times above World Health Organization limits.

"Indonesia has the worst air pollution in Southeast Asia," said Piotr Jakubowski, an air pollution expert and co-founder of Indonesian air quality monitoring company Nafas. "The visit of the pope is great because it provides a sounding board ... from another, very well-respected world leader."

Residents, too, hope Francis will speak out about the issue.

"The pollution in Jakarta is at an alarming level. That's why the presence of the pope can provide a benefit with the discussion of environmental issues," said government worker Erik Sebastian Naibaho, 26.

Francis is the third pope to visit Indonesia after Pope Paul VI in 1970 and St. John Paul II in 1989. Their attention underscores Indonesia's importance to the Vatican both in terms of Christian-Muslim dialogue and Catholic vocations, since it is home to the world's largest seminary and produces hundreds of priests and nuns a year.

"Indonesia is trying to grow in the faith," said Cardinal Ignatius Suharyo Hardjoatmodjo, the archbishop of Jakarta whom Francis made a cardinal in 2019.

At a briefing last week, he said Francis wanted to express his appreciation for Indonesia's interfaith tradition "and encourage this kind of brotherhood to continue to be maintained and developed."

## **Congo says at least 129 people died during an attempted jailbreak, most of them in a stampede**

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — An attempted jailbreak in Congo's main prison in the capital left at least 129 people dead, most of them in a stampede, authorities said Tuesday.

A provisional assessment showed that 24 inmates were shot dead by "warning" gunshots as they tried to escape from the overcrowded Makala Central Prison in Kinshasa early Monday, Congolese Interior Minister Jacquemin Shabani said on the social platform X.

"There are also 59 injured people taken into care by the government, as well as some cases of women raped," he said, adding that order has been restored at the prison, part of which was burned in the attack.

Makala, Congo's largest penitentiary with a capacity for 1,500 people, holds over 12,000 inmates, most of whom are awaiting trial, Amnesty International said in its latest country report. The facility has recorded previous jailbreaks, including in 2017 when an attack by a religious sect freed dozens.

Gunfire inside the prison started around midnight on Sunday into Monday morning, residents said. A senior government official earlier said only two deaths were confirmed during the incident, a figure disputed by rights activists.

Videos that appeared to be from the prison showed bodies lying on the ground, many of them with visible injuries. Another video showed inmates carrying people who appeared to be dead into a vehicle.

There were no signs of forced entry into the prison, which is located in the city center, 5 kilometers (3

miles) from the presidential palace.

The attempted escape was plotted from inside the prison by inmates in one of the wings, Mbemba Kabuya, the deputy justice minister, told the local Top Congo FM radio.

In the hours that followed the attack, the road to the prison was cordoned off while authorities convened a panel to investigate the incident.

Makala — among other prisons in Congo — is so overcrowded that people often die from starvation, activists say. Scores of inmates have been released this year as part of efforts to decongest the prisons.

Justice Minister Constant Mutamba called the attack a “premeditated act of sabotage,” adding that those who “instigated these acts of sabotage ... will receive a stern response.”

He also announced a ban on the transfer of inmates from the prison and said authorities will build a new prison, among other efforts to reduce overcrowding.

## **As Iran threatens Israel, the danger of Tehran’s long-vaunted missile program remains in question**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As Iran threatens to attack Israel over the assassination of a Hamas leader in the Iranian capital, its long-vaunted missile program offers one of the few ways for Tehran to strike back directly, but questions loom over just how much of a danger it poses.

The program was behind Iran’s unprecedented drone-and-missile assault on Israel in April, when Iran became the first nation to launch such a barrage since Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein lobbed Scud missiles at Israel in the 1991 Gulf War.

But few of the Iranian projectiles reached their targets. Many were shot down by a U.S.-led coalition, while others apparently failed at launch or crashed while in flight. Even those that reached Israel appeared to miss their marks.

Now a new report by experts shared exclusively with The Associated Press suggests one of Tehran’s most advanced missiles is far less accurate than previously thought.

The April assault showed “some ability to strike Israel,” said Sam Lair, a research associate at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies who worked on the analysis. But “if I were supreme leader, I would probably be a little disappointed.”

If Iranian missiles are not able to hit targets precisely “that recasts their role,” Lair added. “They’re no longer as valuable for conducting conventional military operations. They may be more valuable simply as terror weapons.”

As an example, he recalled the harassing missile fire seen on cities in the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, when Iran could fire a variety of missiles at a large city and hope some got through.

Iran has repeatedly said it will retaliate for the killing of Ismail Haniyeh. Israel is widely suspected of carrying out the assassination, though it has not claimed it.

The Iranian mission to the United Nations did not respond to a request for comment. But Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei tacitly acknowledged the country’s failure to strike anything of importance in Israel.

“Debates by the other party about how many missiles were fired, how many of them hit the target and how many didn’t, these are of secondary importance,” Khamenei said. “The main issue is the emergence of the Iranian nation” and the Iranian military “in an important international arena. This is what matters.”

A fusillade of missiles and drones

Retaliation had been expected for days after a suspected Israeli strike on April 1 hit an Iranian diplomatic compound in Damascus, Syria, killing two Iranian generals and five officers, as well as a member of the Lebanese Shiite militia Hezbollah.

Footage aired on state television showed that Iran’s April 13 assault began with Revolutionary Guard commander Gen. Hossein Salami speaking by telephone with Brig. Gen. Amir Ali Hajizadeh, the commander of the Guard’s aerospace division.

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"Start the 'True Promise' operation against Zionist regime's bases," he ordered.

As the missiles headed skyward, people across Iran stopped what they were doing and pointed their mobile phones at the launch noise from their cars and the balconies of their homes. Videos analyzed by the AP showed multiple launch sites, including on the outskirts of Arak, Hamadan, Isfahan, Kermanshah, Shiraz, Tabriz and Tehran.

Grainy footage later released through pro-Iranian military social media accounts showed missiles thundering off truck-based mobile launchers. Iran's bomb-carrying Shahed drones, widely used by Russia in its war on Ukraine, leaped off metal stands, their engines whirring like lawnmowers through the night sky. Some were launched by pickup trucks racing down runways.

The triangle-shaped drones went first, taking hours to reach their targets. Then came the Paveh cruise missiles, taking a shorter time, and finally the Emad, Ghadr and Kheibar Shekan ballistic missiles, which needed only minutes, according to an analysis by the Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control. Drones and missiles also came from Yemen, likely fired by the Iranian-backed Houthi rebels.

Israeli officials estimated that Iran launched 170 drones, 30 cruise missiles and 120 ballistic missiles. In Jordan, an AP journalist filmed what appeared to be a ballistic missile being intercepted above the Earth's atmosphere, likely by an Israeli Arrow 3 missile, with the blast radiating out like a circle.

The U.S., the United Kingdom, France and Jordan all shot down incoming fire. The Americans claimed to have downed 80 bomb-carrying drones and at least six ballistic missiles. Israeli missile defenses were also activated, though their initial claim of intercepting 99% of the projectiles appeared to be an exaggeration.

The attack "was very clearly not something symbolic and not something trying to avoid damage," said Fabian Hinz, a missile expert and research fellow at the International Institute for Strategic Studies who studies Iran. It was "a major attempt to overcome Israeli defenses."

U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, told the AP they assessed that 50% of the Iranian missiles failed at launch or crashed before reaching their target.

Strike on air bases suggests poor accuracy

In the aftermath, analysts at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies examined the strike on the Nevatim Air Base some 65 kilometers (40 miles) south of Jerusalem in the Negev Desert. The center's experts long have studied Iran and its ballistic missile program.

The base came into immediate focus after the suspected Israeli strike on the Iranian diplomatic mission in Syria. Iran's ambassador to Syria, Hossein Akbari, claimed that the strike was conducted by Israeli F-35Is, which are based at Nevatim.

The air base also figured into Iranian military propaganda. Iranian state television aired footage in February of a Revolutionary Guard test that targeted a mock-up resembling F-35I hangars at Nevatim. Ballistic missiles, including some of the kinds used in the April attack on Israel, destroyed the mock-up.

In the attack, at least four Iranian missiles struck Nevatim, as seen in satellite images and footage released by the Israeli military.

The only debris found in the area — collected from the Dead Sea — suggests Iran used Emad missiles to target Nevatim, the analysts said. The liquid-fueled Emad, or "pillar" in Farsi, is a variant of Iran's Shahab-3 missile built from a North Korean design with a reported range of 2,000 kilometers (1,240 miles). That indicates the Emads were likely fired from the Shiraz area, which is within the estimated limits of the missile's likely capabilities, the analysts said.

Based on Iran's focus on the F-35I, the James Martin analysts assumed the likely target point for the Iranian fire would be a cluster of aircraft hangars. The position also serves as a near-central point within the Nevatim base itself.

That offers "a much more valuable target" than just "poking holes in the runway," Lair said. But none of the Iranian missiles directly hit those hangars.

Assuming Iran targeted the hangars, the James Martin analysts measured the distance between the hangars and the impact zones of the missiles. That gave an average of about 1.2 kilometers (0.75 miles) for the "circular error probable" — a measurement used by experts to determine a weapon's accuracy based on the radius of a circle that encompasses 50% of where the missiles landed.

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That's far worse than a 500-meter (1,640-foot) error circle first estimated by experts for the Emad. After a U.N. weapons ban on Iran ended in 2020, Iran separately advertised the Emad to potential international buyers as having a 50-meter (164-foot) circle — a figure that is in line with top missile specifications for systems deployed elsewhere, said Hinz, the IISS missile expert.

The results from April's attack were nowhere near that precise.

"This means the Emad is much less accurate than previous estimates indicated," Lair said. "This indicates the Iranians are a generation behind where previous assessments thought they were in accuracy."

The poor performance may be attributable to electronic warfare measures designed to confuse the missile's guidance system, as well as potential sabotage, poor missile design and the distances involved in the attack.

What's next

In the past, Iranian threats to retaliate against Israel generally took the form of either attacks by Iranian-backed forces in the Mideast or assaults aimed at Israeli targets elsewhere, such as embassies or tourists aboard.

Geography limits the options for a direct Iranian military attack. Iran shares no border with Israel, and the two countries are some 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) apart at the shortest distance.

Iran's air force has an aging fleet led by F-14 Tomcats and Mikoyan MiG-29 fighter jets from the Cold War, but they would be no match for Israel's F-35Is and its air defenses. That means Iran again would need to rely on missiles and long-range drones.

It could also enlist help from allied militias such as Lebanon's Hezbollah and Yemen's Houthi rebels to overwhelm Israel's defenses. Israel and Hezbollah exchanged heavy fire on Aug. 25.

Always present in the background is the risk that Tehran could develop a nuclear weapon, a threat that Iranian officials have repeated in recent months. While Iran insists its nuclear program is peaceful, Western intelligence agencies and the International Atomic Energy Agency say Tehran had an organized military nuclear program until 2003.

U.S. intelligence agencies said in a report in July that Iran has "undertaken activities that better position it to produce a nuclear device, if it chooses to do so." However, building a weapon and miniaturizing it to put on a ballistic missile could take years.

"Iran has the largest inventory of ballistic missiles in the region and continues to emphasize improving the accuracy, lethality and reliability of these systems," the report from the director of national intelligence said. "Iran probably is incorporating lessons learned" from the April attack.

## Takeaways from a report that questions the accuracy of Iran's ballistic missiles

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — As Iran threatens to retaliate against Israel over the assassination of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh in Tehran, the accuracy of the Islamic Republic's long-vaunted missile program has been called into question.

A new report by experts shared exclusively with The Associated Press suggests one of the advanced missiles Tehran would use in any future attack against Israel is far less accurate than previously thought.

The finding comes months after a U.S.-led coalition shot down many drones and missiles launched by Iran in an April attack on Israel. Other projectiles apparently failed at launch or crashed while in flight.

Here are some takeaways about Iran's ballistic missile threat:

Iranian missile had poor accuracy

Analysts at the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies examined the Iranian strike on the Nevatim Air Base some 65 kilometers (40 miles) south of Jerusalem in the Negev Desert. They believe Iran used its Emad missile, a variant of the country's Shahab-3 missile built from a North Korean design.

Assuming Iran targeted Israeli F-35I fighter jet hangars, the James Martin analysts measured the distance between the hangars and the impact zones of the missiles. That gave an average of about 1.2 kilometers

(0.75 miles) for the “circular error probable” — a measurement used by experts to determine a weapon’s accuracy based on the radius of a circle that encompasses 50% of where the missiles landed.

That’s far worse than a 500-meter (1,640-foot) error circle first estimated by experts for the Emad. Iran separately advertised the Emad to potential international buyers as having a 50-meter (164-foot) circle.

Many projectiles were shot down in attack

The U.S., the United Kingdom, France and Jordan all shot down incoming fire. The Americans claimed to have downed 80 bomb-carrying drones and at least six ballistic missiles. Israeli missile defenses were also activated, though their initial claim of intercepting 99% of the projectiles appeared to be an exaggeration.

U.S. officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss intelligence matters, told the AP they assessed that 50% of the Iranian missiles failed at launch or crashed before reaching their target. That raises further doubts about the abilities of Iran’s missile arsenal.

Questions about any future strike by Iran

Iran shares no border with Israel, and the two countries are some 1,000 kilometers (620 miles) apart at the shortest distance. That makes Iran’s missile program vital in any direct military attack. The longer the distances, the greater any slight errors in the missile’s guidance system become, along with the effects of wind and other weather.

Iran could also enlist help from allied militias such as Lebanon’s Hezbollah and Yemen’s Houthi rebels to overwhelm Israel’s defenses. Israel and Hezbollah exchanged heavy fire on Aug. 25.

However, Iran’s poor performance in April and yearslong sabotage campaigns targeting its ballistic missile program raise questions about whether Tehran would be able to accurately strike targets at that distance.

Meanwhile, Iran continues to make threats about its ability to potentially build a nuclear weapon. Pressure over its inability to deter Israel could see it weaponize a program it has long insisted is peaceful.

## **Bus crashes into students and parents in eastern China, killing 11 and injuring 13, police say**

BEIJING (AP) — A bus crashed into a group of students and their parents at a school in eastern China early Tuesday, killing 11 people and injuring 13, police said.

The students and parents were at the gate of a middle school in Tai’an city in the eastern province of Shandong just before 7:30 a.m., the Dongping county police department said in a posting on social media.

Six parents and five students were killed, it said. One of the injured was in serious condition while the others were listed as stable, the department said.

The driver was in police custody and the incident was under investigation, it said.

The bus was specially customized for transporting students, it said. It did not say who was responsible for operating the bus. Many schools contract out such services to private companies or individuals.

School safety, including overloaded school buses and poorly designed buildings, has long been a problem in China.

In 2017, a dozen people, including 11 kindergarten pupils, were killed when a school bus crashed and burst into flames in a tunnel in the eastern Chinese city of Weihai, also in Shandong province. The driver, six Chinese children and five South Korean children were killed. It remains unclear whether the crash was deliberate or the result of unsafe driving.

China has cracked down heavily on transportation dangers, adding training and vehicle inspections.

China also has suffered numerous cases in recent years of attacks on school children, often using knives or homemade explosives. The suspects were generally found to be bearing grudges and seeking revenge over personal matters or against society more generally.

## A decision on a major policy shift on marijuana won't come until after the presidential election

By LINDSAY WHITEHURST and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A decision on whether to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug in the U.S. won't come until after the November presidential election, a timeline that raises the chances it could be a potent political issue in the closely contested race.

The U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration last week set a hearing date to take comment on the proposed historic change in federal drug policy for Dec. 2.

The hearing date means a final decision could well come in the next administration. While it's possible it could precede the end of President Joe Biden's term, issuing it before Inauguration Day "would be pretty expedited," said cannabis lawyer Brian Vicente.

That could put a new spotlight on the presidential candidates' positions on marijuana. Vice President Kamala Harris has backed decriminalizing the drug and said it's "absurd" to have it in the DEA's Schedule I category alongside heroin and LSD. The Democratic nominee's position has shifted over the years; she once oversaw the enforcement of cannabis laws and opposed legalized recreational use for adults in California while running for attorney general in 2010.

Former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, signaled support for a Florida legalization measure on Saturday, following earlier comments that he increasingly agrees that people shouldn't be jailed for the drug now legal in multiple states, "whether that's a good thing or a bad thing."

During his run for president in 2016, Trump said that he backed medical marijuana and that pot should be left up to the states. But during his first term, then-Attorney General Jeff Sessions lifted an Obama-era policy that kept federal authorities from cracking down on the pot trade in states where the drug is legal.

Trump's campaign didn't immediately respond to a query about his position on rescheduling the drug.

The Justice Department proposed reclassifying it in May, saying the change would recognize marijuana's medical uses and acknowledge it has less potential for abuse than some of the nation's most dangerous drugs. The proposal, which would not legalize marijuana for recreational use, came after a call for review from Biden, who has called the change "monumental."

The DEA has said it doesn't yet have a position on whether to go through with the change, stating in a memo that it would keep weighing the issue as the federal rulemaking process plays out.

The new classification would be the most significant shift in U.S. drug policy in 50 years and could be a potent political issue, especially with younger voters. But it faces opposition from groups such as Smart Approaches to Marijuana.

Its president, Kevin Sabet, argues there isn't enough data to move cannabis to the less-dangerous Schedule III category, alongside ketamine and some anabolic steroids. The DEA's move to hold the hearing is "a huge win in our fight to have this decision guided by medical science, not politics," he said in a statement, adding that 18 states' attorneys general are backing his opposition.

The hearing sparked some consternation among pot industry players, though little surprise about the DEA decision to hold one.

"While the result ultimately may be better, I think we're so used to seeing delays that it's just a little disappointing," said Stephen Abraham, chief financial officer at The Blinc Group, supplier of cartridges and other hardware used in pot vapes. "Every time you slow down or hold resources from the legal market, it's to the benefit of the illicit market."

The proposal, which was signed by Attorney General Merrick Garland rather than DEA Administrator Anne Milgram, followed a recommendation from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services.

Federal drug policy has lagged behind that of many states in recent years, with 38 having already legalized medical marijuana and 24 legalizing its recreational use.

Lawmakers from both major political parties have pushed for the change as marijuana has become increasingly decriminalized and accepted. A Gallup poll last year found 70% of adults support legalization, the highest level yet recorded by the polling firm and more than double the roughly three in 10 who

backed it in 2000.

The marijuana industry has also grown quickly, and state-licensed pot companies are keen on rescheduling partly because it could enable them to take federal business-expense tax deductions that aren't available to enterprises involved in "trafficking" any Schedule I or II drug. For some of Vicente's clients, the change would effectively reduce the tax rate from 75% to 25%.

Some legalization advocates also hope rescheduling could help persuade Congress to pass legislation aimed at opening banks' doors to cannabis companies. Currently, the drug's legal status means many federally regulated banks are reluctant to lend to such businesses, or sometimes even provide checking or other basic services.

Rescheduling could also make it easier to research marijuana, since it's difficult to conduct authorized clinical studies on Schedule I substances. Some medical marijuana patient advocates fear that the discussion has already become deeply politicized and that the focus on rescheduling's potential effect on the industry has shifted attention from the people who could benefit.

"It was our hope that we could finally take the next step and create the national medical cannabis program that we need," said Steph Sherer, founder and president of Americans for Safe Access. The organization advocates for putting cannabis in a drug category all its own and for creating a medical cannabis office within DHS.

The immediate effect of rescheduling on the nation's criminal justice system, though, would likely be more muted, since federal prosecutions for simple possession have been fairly rare in recent years.

## Could mass protests in Israel over the hostages persuade Netanyahu to agree to a cease-fire deal?

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israelis were plunged into grief and anger this weekend after the military said six hostages were killed by their captors in Gaza just as troops were closing in on their location. The rage sparked massive protests and a general strike — the most intense domestic pressure on Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu since the start of the war nearly 11 months ago.

Many Israelis blame Netanyahu for the mounting number of dead hostages and are calling for a cease-fire agreement to free the remaining roughly 100 captives — even if that means ending the conflict. Sunday's demonstrations were the largest show of support for a hostage deal since Oct. 7, when Hamas-led militants stormed into Israel and kidnapped 250 people.

But Netanyahu has faced fierce pressure to reach a cease-fire agreement before, from key governing partners to top security officials and even Israel's most important international ally, the U.S. Yet a deal to wind down the war in Gaza remains elusive.

Here's a look at how the public outcry in Israel could affect Netanyahu's next moves in the war:

Netanyahu's position

Throughout the war, critics have claimed Netanyahu has put his political survival above all else, including the fate of the hostages. His rule relies on support from two ultranationalist parties that were once at the fringes of Israeli politics but now hold key positions in government.

Headed by Finance Minister Bezalel Smotrich and National Security Minister Itamar Ben-Gvir, they oppose any deal that ends the war or sets free Palestinian prisoners convicted of killing Israelis. They have vowed to topple the government should Netanyahu agree to a cease-fire — a step that would trigger elections that could remove Netanyahu from office.

"What he cares about is his political survival," said Reuven Hazan, a political scientist at Jerusalem's Hebrew University. "His political survival with Ben-Gvir and Smotrich doesn't allow him to end the war and bring back the hostages."

Netanyahu blames Hamas for the lack of a deal.

Looming over the prime minister is also his ongoing trial on corruption charges. If Netanyahu is voted out of power, he will lose his platform to rail against the judicial system, which he accuses of being biased.



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He also wouldn't be able to move ahead with his government's planned changes to the legal system that critics say could affect the trial and help him avoid a conviction.

Netanyahu says he has the country's best interests in mind and insists that the military operation in Gaza is the best way to bring about the hostages' freedom. He also wants any deal to keep Israeli troops in two strips of land in Gaza, and reaffirmed his insistence that he will never agree to a withdrawal from one of those areas on Monday.

Hamas has rejected those demands as dealbreakers — and the condition has prompted clashes with Netanyahu's own defense minister, who says a deal that frees the hostages should be a priority.

As the toll of the war in Gaza has mounted — with tens of thousands killed and whole swaths of the territory decimated — Israel has become increasingly isolated internationally. On Monday, when asked if Netanyahu was doing enough to negotiate a deal, U.S. President Joe Biden responded, "No."

Biden, who has never seen eye to eye with the Israeli leader even though their nations are close allies, has grown increasingly critical of his counterpart's leadership. But the timing on Monday's remark was particularly pointed, coming as it did after the demonstrations and outpouring of grief for the hostages.

The largest show of support for a hostage deal

Many Israelis accuse Netanyahu of obstructing a deal to stay in power and say that by not ending the war, he is putting the lives of the hostages in danger.

" Hamas was the one that pulled the trigger, but Netanyahu is the one who sentenced (the hostages) to death," said an editorial Sunday in the liberal daily Haaretz.

Israel has seen weekly protests in solidarity with the hostages since the start of the war. But over time, as Israelis have tried to return to a semblance of normalcy or have been preoccupied by fears of a regional war with Iran or the militant group Hezbollah, the protests have dwindled in size. That has eased pressure on Netanyahu and talks toward a deal have repeatedly fizzled.

But on Sunday, hundreds of thousands of people poured into central Tel Aviv, banging drums and chanting "Deal, now!" About 100 hostages remain in captivity in Gaza, roughly a third of them said to be dead. Israel and Hamas have been mulling a three-phased proposal that would set them free and end the war.

It was the largest demonstration Israel has seen at least since before the war, when Israelis took the streets weekly to protest a plan by Netanyahu to overhaul the judiciary. While the protests coupled with a general strike prompted Netanyahu and his government to walk back or soften some decisions, the overhaul was only put on hold when the war broke out.

The limits of public pressure

The current public outcry has its limits. Sunday's protest failed to break longstanding political boundaries and appeared to be largely made up of the same liberal, secular Israelis who protested the overhaul and against Netanyahu's leadership while on trial for alleged corruption. Many of Netanyahu's supporters say relenting on any position in talks now after the deaths of the six hostages would signal to Hamas that it can reap rewards from such violence.

Similarly, Monday's strike reflected those same political divisions. Liberal municipalities in central Israel, including Tel Aviv, joined the strike, leading to public daycares and kindergartens closing as well as other services. But other cities, mostly with conservative and religious populations that tend to support Netanyahu, including Jerusalem, did not join the strike. And a labor court cut the strike short by several hours, hobbling its efficacy.

Without large sustained protests across a broader swath of society, it's hard to see how Netanyahu will feel enough pressure to change his approach, said Hazan, the political scientist. And so long as his government is stable, he may stick to his demands in the negotiations to appease his coalition and ignore the protests entirely.

Still, relatives of the hostages found killed in Gaza expressed hope that the protests marked a turning point in the war that might force progress on a deal.

In a eulogy for Hersh Goldberg-Polin, an Israeli-American who became one of the most high-profile captives, his father spoke of the emotional resonance the deaths might have.

"For 330 days, mama and I sought the proverbial stone that we could turn over to save you," Jon Polin said. "Maybe, just maybe, your death is the stone, the fuel, that will bring home the remaining" hostages.

## Venezuelan judge issues arrest warrant for opposition's former presidential candidate

By REGINA GARCIA CANO and JORGE RUEDA Associated Press

CARACAS, Venezuela (AP) — A Venezuelan judge on Monday issued an arrest warrant for the opposition's former presidential candidate Edmundo González as part of a criminal investigation into the results of the highly anticipated July election that both the ruling party and its opponents claim to have won.

The warrant was issued at the request of authorities who accuse González, a former diplomat, of various crimes including conspiracy, falsifying documents and usurpation of powers. The move is the latest escalation of repression against the opposition in the month after election officials declared President Nicolás Maduro had won a third six-year term in office.

Authorities sought the warrant after González failed to appear three times to answer questions from prosecutors. González, 75, has not made any public appearances since the day after the election. His campaign did not immediately respond to a request for comment from The Associated Press.

Prosecutors have zeroed in on thousands of tally sheets known as actas — printouts measuring several feet that resemble shopping receipts — that have long been considered the ultimate proof of election results in Venezuela. Each of the 30,000 electronic voting machines used in the July 28 election printed several copies of the sheets, whose information was also transmitted to the National Electoral Council.

Ruling party-loyal electoral authorities declared Maduro the victor hours after polls closed, but they did not publish results broken down by voting machine as they had done in previous presidential elections. The National Electoral Council claimed it could not release the detailed information because its website was hacked.

By law, each party participating in the election has the right to a tally sheet from every machine. Government supporters attempted to block opposition representatives from obtaining copies of the crucial documents, but it managed to secure them from more than 80% of machines.

González and opposition leader María Corina Machado then stunned supporters and adversaries alike by announcing the documents showed Maduro lost by a wide margin against the former diplomat and publishing the records online.

As international pressure grew to release a breakdown of results, Maduro asked the country's high court to audit the electoral process, drawing immediate criticism from foreign observers who said the court is too close to the government to produce an independent review. The magistrates of the Supreme Tribunal of Justice are proposed by federal officials and ratified by the National Assembly, which is dominated by Maduro sympathizers.

The court concluded on Aug. 22 that the vote counts published by the opposition were false and certified Maduro's victory.

Maduro's United Socialist Party of Venezuela refused to publish its copies of tally sheets.

González, who represented the Unitary Platform opposition coalition, was summoned to the prosecutor's office as recently as Friday.

He has questioned the prosecutors' actions for lack of due process guarantees and accused Attorney General Tarek William Saab, a longtime Maduro ally, of being a "political accuser" who "condemns in advance." González rejected the interview summons arguing, among other issues, that they did not specify the condition under which he was expected to appear.

"Maduro has lost all touch with reality," Machado wrote on X after the warrant was issued. "The arrest warrant issued by the regime to threaten President-Elect Edmundo González crosses a new line that only strengthens the resolve of our movement. Venezuelans and democracies around the world are more united than ever in our quest for freedom."

An AP review of the tally sheets released by the opposition indicates that González won significantly

more votes than the government has claimed. The analysis casts serious doubt on the official declaration that Maduro won.

The AP processed almost 24,000 images representing the results from 79% of voting machines, resulting in tabulations of 10.26 million votes. The processed tally sheets also showed González receiving more votes on 20,476 receipts compared to only 3,157 for Maduro.

The lack of transparency over the results, coupled with widespread arrests that followed anti-government protests in the days after the election, has drawn global condemnation against Maduro and his allies. Among those who have been detained are Machado's lawyer, opposition leaders, journalists, political organizers and poll workers.

The Chilean government on Monday decried the arrest warrant for González and reiterated its "condemnation of any form of repression against opponents of the dictatorial regime in Venezuela."

"The Chilean government calls for respect for democratic principles, as well as human rights and fundamental freedoms of all Venezuelans," the foreign ministry said in a statement.

## **Yemen's Houthi rebels target oil tanker in the Red Sea. US says rebels also hit Saudi-flagged tanker**

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — An attack by Yemen's Houthi rebels targeted a Panama-flagged oil tanker in the Red Sea on Monday, authorities said, as a nearby Saudi-flagged tanker ship also allegedly came under fire from the group.

The attacks are believed to be the latest in the Iranian-backed rebels' campaign that has disrupted the \$1 trillion in goods that pass through the Red Sea each year over the Israel-Hamas war in the Gaza Strip and has halted some aid shipments to conflict-ravaged Sudan and Yemen.

The new attacks on oil tankers also come amid efforts to salvage the still-burning Sounion oil tanker earlier hit by the Houthis, seeking to head off the potential ecological disaster posed by its cargo of 1 million barrels of crude oil.

In Monday's first assault, two ballistic missiles hit the oil tanker Blue Lagoon I and a third exploded near the ship, the multinational Joint Maritime Information Center overseen by the U.S. Navy said.

"All crew on board are safe (no injury reported)," the center said. "The vessel sustained minimal damage but does not require assistance."

Houthi military spokesman Brig. Gen. Yahya Saree claimed responsibility for the attack on the Blue Lagoon I late Monday night.

The Blue Lagoon I is traveling south through the Red Sea to an unlisted destination. The vessel was coming from Russia's port of Ust-Luga on the Baltic Sea and had been broadcasting that it had Russian-origin cargo on board.

In recent months, the Blue Lagoon I traveled to India, which gets more than 40% of its oil imports from Russia despite Moscow's ongoing war on Ukraine and the international sanctions it faces over it.

The Greek-based firm operating the ship could not be reached. The Joint Maritime Information Center said it assessed that the ship "was targeted due to other vessels within its company structure making recent port calls in Israel." Saree also cited that as the reason the Houthis attacked the vessel.

Later on Monday morning, the British military's United Kingdom Maritime Trade Operations center reported a second attack off the Houthi-controlled port city of Hodeida. The private security firm Ambrey said an aerial drone hit a merchant ship, though no damage or injuries were reported. The attack happened only a few kilometers (miles) from where the Blue Lagoon I attack occurred, Ambrey said.

The U.S. military's Central Command, which oversees American operations in the Mideast, identified the second vessel as the Saudi-flagged oil tanker Amjad and blamed the attack on the Houthis. The Amjad carried 2 million barrels of oil, it said.

"These reckless acts of terrorism by the Houthis continue to destabilize regional and global commerce, as well as put the lives of civilian mariners and maritime ecosystems at risk," Central Command said.

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The U.S. military also destroyed two Houthi missile systems in strikes on Monday, the command added. The Houthi group did not immediately claim responsibility for the attack on the Amjad. However, it can take the rebels hours or even days to acknowledge their assaults.

In the case of the Amjad attack, the Houthis likely did not claim it given a yearslong, de facto cease-fire in which the group has not attacked Saudi Arabia as the kingdom tries to reach a peace deal with the rebels. Saudi Arabia also reached a Chinese-mediated detente with Iran, the Houthis' main benefactor, last year that's still holding.

Saudi Arabia launched a war against the Houthis in March 2015 in support of Yemen's exiled government, which earlier had been thrown out of the capital, Sanaa, by the rebels.

Saudi Arabia similarly did not acknowledge the attack on the Amjad, possibly to lower any pressure on it to respond militarily. Yemen's war has killed more than 150,000 people, including fighters and civilians, and created one of the world's worst humanitarian disasters, killing tens of thousands more.

The Houthis have targeted more than 80 vessels with missiles and drones since the war in Gaza started in October. They seized one vessel and sank two in the campaign that also killed four sailors. Other missiles and drones have either been intercepted by a United States-led coalition in the Red Sea or failed to reach their targets.

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

Meanwhile on Monday, a salvage effort appeared to be underway to tow away the Sounion oil tanker, which was earlier hit by the Houthis and abandoned by its crew. Jamel Amer, an official with the Houthis, wrote online Saturday that tugboats assigned to pull the Sounion away should arrive Sunday.

However, NASA fire satellites showed a blaze at the site where the Sounion had been abandoned on Monday morning. Later photos published by the European Union's Operation Aspides naval mission in the Red Sea of the Sounion taken on Monday showed no tugboats near the still-burning vessel.

"Private companies are involved in the salvage operation that is about to start," the operation said. "Upon their request, EUNAVFOR ASPIDES will provide protection to the tugboats, that will deal with the salvage operation and facilitate their efforts to prevent an environmental disaster."

It added: "Currently, several fires continue to burn on the vessel's main deck. The vessel remains anchored without drifting, and there are no visible signs of an oil spill."

The Sounion was carrying about 1 million barrels of oil when the Houthis initially attacked it on Aug. 21 with small arms fire, projectiles and a drone boat. A French destroyer operating as part of Operation Aspides rescued the Sounion's crew of 25 Filipinos and Russians, as well as four private security personnel, after they abandoned the vessel and took them to nearby Djibouti.

Last week, the Houthis released footage showing they planted explosives on board the Sounion and ignited them in a propaganda video, something the rebels have done before in their campaign.

## **UK says it's suspending some arms exports to Israel over the risk of breaking international law**

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — U.K. Prime Minister Keir Starmer's government said Monday that it's suspending exports of some weapons to Israel because they could be used to break international law — a move with limited military impact intended to increase pressure by Israel's frustrated allies for an end to the war in Gaza.

Foreign Secretary David Lammy said the U.K. government had concluded there is a "clear risk" some items could be used to "commit or facilitate a serious violation of international humanitarian law."

He told lawmakers the decision related to about 30 of 350 existing export licenses for equipment "that we assess is for use in the current conflict in Gaza," including parts for military planes, helicopters and drones, along with items used for ground targeting.

The decision wasn't "a determination of innocence or guilt" about whether Israel had broken international

law, and wasn't an arms embargo, he said.

Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said on X: "Deeply disheartened to learn of the sanctions placed by the U.K. Government on export licenses to Israel's defense establishment.

The United Kingdom is among a number of Israel's longstanding allies whose governments are under growing pressure to halt weapons exports because of the toll of the nearly 11-month-old conflict in Gaza. More than 40,000 Palestinians have been killed, according to the health ministry in the Hamas-run territory, which doesn't distinguish between militants and civilians in its toll.

The war broke out on Oct. 7 after Hamas militants and others stormed into Israel and killed about 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took about 250 people hostage. Roughly 100 hostages remain in Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

British firms sell a relatively small amount of weapons and components to Israel compared to major suppliers such as the U.S. and Germany. Earlier this year, the government said military exports to Israel amounted to 42 million pounds (\$53 million) in 2022.

But the U.K. is one of Israel's closest allies, so the decision carries some symbolic significance. The military affairs correspondent for Israel's Channel 13 TV said that the move could become more serious if other allies follow suit.

Sam Perlo-Freeman, research coordinator for the group Campaign Against Arms Trade, said that the announcement was "a belated, but welcome move." But he said that it was "outrageous and unjustifiable" that parts for F-35 fighter jets weren't among the exports being suspended.

The government move comes after two groups, Palestinian human rights organization Al-Haq and the U.K.-based Global Legal Action Network, filed a legal challenge aimed at forcing the U.K. to stop granting any licenses for arms exports to Israel. The case has yet to go to a full court hearing.

Dearbhla Minogue, senior lawyer for the Global Legal Action Network, said the government's "momentous decision vindicates everything Palestinians have been saying for months."

The U.K.'s center-left Labour government under Starmer, elected in July, has faced pressure from some of its own members and lawmakers to apply more pressure on Israel to stop the violence. In the election, the party lost several seats it had been expected to win to pro-Palestinian independents after Starmer initially refused to call for a cease-fire following Israel's retaliation after Oct. 7.

In a departure from the stance of its Conservative predecessor, Starmer's government said in July that the U.K. will not intervene in the International Criminal Court's request for an arrest warrant against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

Starmer also restored funding for U.N. Palestinian relief agency UNRWA, which had been suspended by Conservative Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's government in January.

Lammy, who has visited Israel twice in the past two months as part of Western efforts to push for a cease-fire, said that he was a Zionist and "friend of Israel," but called the violence in Gaza "horrifying."

"Israel's actions in Gaza continue to lead to immense loss of civilian life, widespread destruction to civilian infrastructure, and immense suffering," he said.

## **Netanyahu pushes back against new pressure over Gaza and hostages: 'No one will preach to me'**

By TIA GOLDENBERG Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Monday pushed back against a new wave of pressure to reach a cease-fire deal in Gaza after hundreds of thousands of Israelis protested and went on strike and U.S. President Joe Biden said he needed to do more after nearly 11 months of fighting.

In his first public address since Sunday's mass protests showed many Israelis' furious response to the discovery of six more dead hostages, Netanyahu said he will continue to insist on a demand that has emerged as a major sticking point in talks — continued Israeli control of the Philadelphi corridor, a narrow band along Gaza's border with Egypt where Israel contends Hamas smuggles weapons into Gaza. Egypt and Hamas deny it.

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Netanyahu called the corridor vital to ensuring Hamas cannot rearm via tunnels. "This is the oxygen of Hamas," he said.

And he added: "No one is more committed to freeing the hostages than me. ... No one will preach to me on this issue."

Israelis had poured into the streets late Sunday in grief and anger in what appeared to be the largest protest since the start of the war. The families and much of the public blamed Netanyahu, saying the hostages could have been returned alive in a deal with Hamas. A rare general strike was held across the country on Monday.

Late Monday, several thousand demonstrators gathered outside Netanyahu's private home in central Jerusalem, chanting, "Deal. Now." and carrying coffins draped in the Israeli flag. Scuffles broke out when police snatched away the coffins, and several protesters were arrested. Thousands more marched outside Netanyahu's Likud party in Tel Aviv, according to Israeli media.

But others support Netanyahu's drive to continue the campaign in Gaza, which was triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel and has killed tens of thousands of Palestinians in the territory. Netanyahu says the assault will force militants to give in to Israeli demands, potentially facilitate rescue operations and ultimately annihilate the group.

Key ally the United States is showing impatience. Biden spoke to reporters as he arrived at the White House for a Situation Room meeting with the U.S. mediation team in the negotiations. Asked if Netanyahu was doing enough, Biden responded, "No."

He insisted that negotiators remain "very close" to a deal, adding, "Hope springs eternal."

Hamas has accused Israel of dragging out months of negotiations by issuing new demands, including for lasting Israeli control over the Philadelphi corridor and a second corridor running across Gaza. Hamas has offered to release all 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 — broadly the terms called for under an outline for a deal put forward by Biden in July.

Netanyahu has pledged "total victory" over Hamas and blames it for the failure of the negotiations. On Monday, he said he is ready to carry out the first phase of the cease-fire — a plan that would include the release of some hostages, a partial pullout of Israeli troops and the release of some prisoners held by Israel. But he rejected a full withdrawal from Gaza, saying he saw no other party that could control Gaza's borders.

Israeli media have reported deep differences between Netanyahu and top security officials, including Defense Minister Yoav Gallant, who say the time is ripe for a cease-fire.

An official confirmed a shouting match between Gallant and Netanyahu at a security cabinet meeting Thursday, where Netanyahu held a vote in favor of maintaining control over the Philadelphi corridor.

Gallant cast the lone vote against the proposal, saying Netanyahu was favoring border arrangements over the lives of hostages. The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the closed-door meeting. Gallant on Sunday called on the security cabinet to overturn the decision.

Khalil al-Hayya, the Hamas official leading the negotiations, told the Qatari network Al Jazeera late Sunday that Netanyahu had deemed keeping the Philadelphi corridor "more important" than winning the hostages' release.

Al-Hayya also said Hamas had offered "great flexibility," including reducing its demand for 500 Palestinian prisoners to be released in exchange for each captive Israeli soldier to 50, and from 250 Palestinian prisoners or each Israeli civilian hostage to 30. He accused Israel of introducing new conditions including increasing the number of prisoners who would be deported upon release and banning the release of elderly or ill prisoners serving life sentences.

Israel said the six hostages found dead in Gaza were killed by Hamas shortly before Israeli forces arrived in the tunnel where they were held.

Hamas' armed wing, the al-Qassam Brigades, appeared to say in a statement Monday that it now had a policy of killing any hostages that Israel tries to rescue. It said that after Israeli troops rescued four

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hostages in a deadly raid in June, it issued new orders to its fighters guarding hostages on how to deal with them if Israeli troops approach. It said that Netanyahu's insistence on using military pressure instead of reaching a deal "will mean they (hostages) will return to their families in coffins."

Three of the slain hostages were reportedly among those who would have been released in the first phase of the cease-fire proposal outlined by Biden in July.

Thousands attended the funeral Monday for one of the six, Israeli-American Hersh Goldberg-Polin. He was one of the best-known hostages, with his parents leading a high-profile campaign for the captives' release, meeting with Biden and Pope Francis and addressing the Democratic National Convention last month.

The general strike, called by Israel's largest trade union, the Histadrut, ended early after a labor court accepted a petition from the government calling it politically motivated.

It was the first such strike since the start of the war, aiming to shut down or disrupt major sectors of the economy, including banking and health care. Some flights at Israel's main international airport, Ben-Gurion, either departed early or were slightly delayed.

"There's no need to punish the whole state of Israel because of what is happening, overall, it is a victory for Hamas," said one passenger, Amrani Yigal.

But in Jerusalem, resident Avi Lavi said that "I think this is fair, the time has come to stand and to wake up, to do everything for the hostages to come back alive."

Municipalities in Israel's populated central area, including Tel Aviv, participated. Others, including Jerusalem, did not.

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.

Roughly 100 hostages remain in Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

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, including new fears of a polio outbreak.

Meanwhile, Israel continued its six-day raid on the Jenin refugee camp in the Israeli-occupied West Bank. AP reporters saw bulldozers tearing up roads. The Palestinian Red Crescent said Israeli forces were blocking their ambulances from reaching the wounded.

Palestinians in a town outside Jenin held a funeral for a 58-year-old man, Ayman Abed, who was arrested the day before and died in Israeli custody. The Israeli military said he died from a "cardiac event," but did not provide details. Human rights groups have reported abuses of Palestinians detained by Israel, and the military has confirmed the deaths of at least 36 Palestinians in its detention centers since October.

Israel says it has killed 14 militants in Jenin and arrested 25 militants. Palestinian health officials say at least 29 people have been killed, including five children.

Mohannad Hajj Hussein, a Jenin resident, said electricity and water were cut off. "We are ready to live by candlelight and we will feed our children from our bodies and teach them resistance and steadfastness in this land," he said. "We will rebuild what the occupation destroyed and we will not kneel."

## Fierce storm blows out of northern Philippines after leaving 14 dead in landslides and floods

MANILA, Philippines (AP) — A fierce storm was blowing out of the northern Philippines Tuesday after leaving at least 14 people dead in landslides, floods and swollen rivers, disaster-response officials said.

Tropical Storm Yagi swept past Paoay town in Ilocos Norte province into the South China Sea with sustained winds of up to 75 kilometers (47 miles) per hour and gusts of up to 125 kph (78 mph), according to the weather bureau.

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It was forecast to strengthen into a typhoon as it barrels northwestward over the sea toward southern China.

Storm warnings remained in most northern Philippine provinces, where residents were warned of the lingering danger of landslides in rain-soaked mountain villages and floodings in the farming lowlands of Luzon, the country's most populous region.

Locally called Enteng, Yagi enhanced seasonal monsoon rains and unleashed downpours across Luzon, including in the densely populated capital region, metropolitan Manila, where classes and government work remained suspended Tuesday.

At least 14 people died in landslides, floods and swollen rivers in northern and central provinces, including in Antipolo, a popular Roman Catholic pilgrimage city and tourism destination west of Manila where at least three residents, including a pregnant woman, died in a hillside landslide that buried shanties and four others drowned in creeks and rivers, Antipolo's disaster-mitigation officer Enrilito Bernardo Jr. told The Associated Press by telephone.

Four other villagers remained missing after their house was swept away in the deluge, Bernardo said.

Thousands of travelers were stranded on Monday after sea travel was temporarily halted in several ports and 34 domestic flights were suspended due to the stormy weather.

A training ship, M/V Kamilla — which was anchored in Manila Bay off the Navotas port in the capital — was hit by another vessel that veered out of control due to rough waves. Kamilla's bridge was damaged and it later caught fire, prompting its 18 cadets and crewmembers to abandon the ship, the Philippine coast guard said.

A passing tugboat rescued 17 of those who abandoned the ship and one swam to safety, the coast guard said.

About 20 typhoons and storms batter the Philippines each year. The archipelago lies in the so-called "Pacific Ring of Fire," a region along most of the Pacific Ocean rim where many volcanic eruptions and earthquakes occur, making the Southeast Asian nation one of the world's most disaster-prone.

## Harris opposes US Steel's sale to a Japanese firm during joint Pennsylvania event with Biden

By COLLEEN LONG, ERIN B. LOGAN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris used a joint campaign appearance with President Joe Biden in the critical swing state of Pennsylvania on Monday to say that U.S. Steel should remain domestically owned — concurring with the White House's monthslong opposition to the company's planned sale to Japan's Nippon Steel.

Her comments came during a rally before cheering union members marking Labor Day in the industrial city of Pittsburgh, where Harris said U.S. Steel was "an historic American company and it is vital for our country to maintain strong American steel companies."

"U.S. Steel should remain American-owned and American-operated, and I will always have the backs of America's steelworkers," she said.

That echoes Biden, who repeated Monday what he's said since March — that he opposes U.S. Steel's would-be sale to Nippon, believing it would hurt the country's steelworkers. It also overlaps with Republican former President Donald Trump. It's little surprise that Harris would agree with Biden on the issue, but it nonetheless constitutes a major policy position for the vice president, who has offered relatively few of them since Biden abandoned his reelection bid and endorsed his vice president in July.

Biden took the stage first and was met with chants of "Thank You, Joe" as he and Harris appeared in an International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers hall.

The president called Harris the only "rational" choice for president in November. He said choosing her to be vice president was the "single best" decision of his presidency and told the union members that electing her will be "the best decision you will ever make."

Biden also started to say, "Kamala Harris and I are going to build on this" as if he were still running and



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she was his running mate — but he corrected himself. It underscored just how much the race has changed and how Harris has been careful to balance presenting herself as “a new way forward” while remaining intensely loyal to Biden and the policies he has pushed.

Her delivery is very different — and in some cases she’s pushed to move faster than Biden’s administration — but the overall goal of expanding government programs to buoy the middle class is the same. “We know this is going to be a tight race till the very end,” Harris told the Pittsburgh crowd.

The joint rally with Biden was Harris’ second of the day and followed Pittsburgh’s Labor Day parade, one of the country’s largest. It was their first joint appearance at a campaign event since the election shakeup six weeks ago.

Harris opened her Labor Day campaigning solo with an event in Detroit, where hundreds of audience members wore bright yellow union shirts and hoisted “Union strong” signs. The vice president said “every person in our nation has benefited” from unions’ work.

“Everywhere I go, I tell people, ‘Look, you may not be a union member, you’d better thank a union member,’” Harris said, noting that collective bargaining by organized labor helped secure the five-day work week, sick pay and other key benefits and solidify safer working conditions.

“When unions are strong, America is strong,” she said.

The 81-year-old Biden has spent most of his lengthy political career forging close ties with organized labor. The White House said he asked to introduce Harris in Pittsburgh — instead of the usual other way around — because he wanted to highlight her record of supporting union workers.

In addition to opposing the Nippon Steel sale, Biden has endorsed expanding tariffs on imported Chinese steel — another area of policy agreement with Trump, who has cheered steeper foreign tariffs on many imports. Still, in a statement Monday, U.S. Steel said it remains “committed to the transaction with Nippon Steel, which is the best deal for our employees, shareholders, communities, and customers.”

“The partnership with Nippon Steel, a long-standing investor in the United States from our close ally Japan, will strengthen the American steel industry, American jobs, and American supply chains, and enhance the U.S. steel industry’s competitiveness and resilience against China,” the company said, noting that it employs nearly 4,000 people in Pennsylvania alone.

Nippon Steel reacted to Harris’ comments by saying it was confident that its “acquisition of U. S. Steel will revitalize the American steel rust belt, benefit American workers, local communities, and national security in a way no other alternative can.” The Harris campaign released a statement countering that sentiment from David McCall, president of the United Steelworkers union, who said Harris’ opposition to the sale “once again made it clear that she will always stand up for steelworkers.”

The 59-year-old Harris has sought to appeal to voters by positioning herself as a break from former president Trump’s acerbic rhetoric while also looking to move beyond the Biden era. Harris events feel very different from Biden’s, which usually featured small crowds. But the vice president’s agenda includes the same issues he’s championed: capping the cost of prescription drugs, defending the Affordable Care Act, growing the economy, helping families afford child care — and now her position on the sale of U.S. Steel.

The vice president has promised to work to lower grocery store costs to help fight inflation. She’s moved faster than Biden in some cases, calling for using tax cuts and incentives to encourage home ownership and ending federal taxes on tips for service industry employees. But she’s also offered relatively few specifics on major policies, instead continuing to side with Biden on top issues.

Harris appeared onstage with Biden after the president addressed the opening night of last month’s Democratic National Convention, but they had not shared a microphone at a political event since Biden himself was running against Trump. 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*.

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.

Although the vice president has appeared more forceful in speaking about the plight of civilians in Gaza,

as Israel's war against Hamas there nears the 11-month mark, she also has endorsed Biden's efforts to arm Israel and bring about a hostage deal and ceasefire. Before she left Washington for Detroit, Biden and Harris met in the White House Situation Room earlier Monday with the U.S. hostage deal negotiating team.

"History will show what we here know: Joe Biden has been one of the most transformative presidents," Harris said in Pittsburgh. "And as we know Joe still has a lot of work to do."

When that event was over, Biden and Harris rode back to the airport together in the presidential limo. Air Force One and Air Force Two subsequently took off within moments of each other to return to suburban Washington — though the president and vice president never travel on the same plane for continuity of government reasons, just in case of an air emergency.

## US government seizes plane used by Venezuelan president, citing sanctions violations

By ERIC TUCKER, REGINA GARCIA CANO and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The U.S. government has seized a luxury jet used by Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro that officials say was illegally purchased through a shell company and smuggled out of the United States in violation of sanctions and export control laws.

The Dassault Falcon 900EX was seized in the Dominican Republic and transferred to the custody of federal officials in Florida, the Justice Department said Monday. The plane landed at Ft. Lauderdale Executive Airport shortly before noon Monday, according to flight tracking websites.

U.S. officials say associates of the Venezuelan leader in late 2022 and early 2023 used a Caribbean-based shell company to hide their involvement in the purchase of the plane, valued at the time at \$13 million, from a company in Florida. The plane was then exported from the U.S. to Venezuela, through the Caribbean, in April 2023 in a transaction meant to circumvent an executive order that bars U.S. persons from business transactions with representatives of Maduro's government.

The plane, registered to San Marino, was widely used by Maduro for foreign travel, including in trips earlier this year to Guyana and Cuba. It was also involved in a December swap on a Caribbean airstrip of several Americans jailed in Venezuela for a close Maduro ally, Alex Saab, imprisoned in the U.S. on money laundering charges.

Attorney General Merrick Garland said in a statement the aircraft had been smuggled out of the U.S. for use by "Maduro and his cronies."

Venezuela's government acknowledged the seizure in a statement Monday. It characterized the U.S. government's move as "a repeated criminal practice that cannot be described as anything other than piracy."

State media footage from a December visit to Saint Vincent and the Grenadines shows Maduro, First Lady Cilia Flores and senior officials getting off the airplane ahead of a day of discussions over a territory dispute between Venezuela and neighboring Guyana.

"Let this seizure send a clear message: aircraft illegally acquired from the United States for the benefit of sanctioned Venezuelan officials cannot just fly off into the sunset," Matthew Axelrod, an assistant secretary for export enforcement in the Commerce Department, said in a statement.

CNN first reported the plane seizure.

The seizure announcement comes just over a month after ruling party-loyal electoral authorities declared Maduro the victor in presidential elections without showing any detailed results to back up their claim. The lack of transparency has drawn international condemnation. Meanwhile, the opposition managed to obtain more than 80% of vote tally sheets showing Maduro lost by a wide margin against former diplomat Edmundo González.

Late Monday, a Venezuelan judge issued an arrest warrant for González as part of a criminal investigation into the results of the disputed July election. The warrant was issued at the request of authorities who accuse González of various crimes including conspiracy, falsifying documents and usurpation of powers.

The plane was previously registered in the U.S. and owned by Lorida, Florida-based Six G Aviation, a broker that buys and sells used aircraft. FAA records indicate it was exported to St. Vincent and the

Grenadines and de-registered in the U.S. in January 2023.

Gary Gwynn, owner of Six G, declined to comment. "I've been instructed by the FBI not to speak to anyone," he said when contacted by The Associated Press.

In March, it flew to the Dominican Republic, along with a Venezuelan-registered plane, for what was believed to be maintenance, never to leave again.

Monday's action follows the U.S. government's earlier seizure in Argentina of a Boeing 747-300 cargo plane transferred from Iran to a subsidiary of Venezuela's state-owned airlines.

Federal prosecutors have also have seized several private jets belonging to top government officials and insiders who have been either sanctioned or indicted in the U.S.

The U.S. has sanctioned 55 Venezuelan-registered planes, mostly belonging to state-owned oil giant PDVSA. It has also offered a \$15 million bounty for the arrest of Maduro to face federal drug trafficking charges in New York.

"There is an overarching body of work and continued body of work, looking at the corrupt practices of the Venezuelan government," Anthony Salisbury, special agent in charge of Homeland Security Investigations in Miami, told the AP. "Obviously, we are not done yet."

## **Labor Day hotel strikes reflect the frustrations of a workforce largely made up of women of color**

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

More than 10,000 workers at 25 hotels across the U.S. were on strike Monday after choosing Labor Day weekend to amplify their demands for higher pay, fairer workloads and the reversal of COVID-era cuts.

The UNITE HERE union, which represents the striking housekeepers and other hospitality workers, said 200 workers at the Hilton Baltimore Inner Harbor were the latest to walk off the job.

Nearly half of the striking workers – or 5,000 – are in Honolulu. That includes Briana Canencia, a food server for over a decade at a Marriott property who said she was on the picket line fighting for not only higher wages, but also respect amid reduced hours and increased workloads.

Canencia, who is Native Hawaiian, said she works a second job in order to provide for her two kids, and yet they live paycheck-to-paycheck. She said she worries that her family will soon be "priced out of paradise."

"It's very important to me to be able to raise my children here and get them familiar with their ancestral home, because our blood is here, our family is here," she said. "We deserve to be here."

Thousands of workers are also on strike in Boston, San Francisco, Seattle, San Diego and San Jose, California. The strikes targeting Marriott, Hilton and Hyatt hotels were set to last one to three days.

UNITE HERE said a total of 15,000 workers have voted to authorize strikes, which could soon spread to other cities, including New Haven, Connecticut; Oakland, California; and Providence, Rhode Island.

Union President Gwen Mills says the strikes are 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.

Alma Navarro, 60, has worked as a banquet server in San Jose for more than half of her life. These days, her body moves slower than it used to. It's part of the reason she says she wasn't afraid to walk off the job this weekend.

"To tell you the truth, it was not hard because I know that we need change," she said. For Navarro, who works at a Hilton property, that means improved health care coverage, a living wage and higher employer contributions to her pension.

Without those changes addressed in a new contract, she said she fears she won't be able to retire or even visit a doctor if she's sick or injured, which has been the case a few times in recent years. If Navarro isn't scheduled to work at least 80 hours in a month, she loses her health insurance coverage.

"Whenever I don't have coverage," she said, "I just pray to God: Please don't let me get sick this month."

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Unionized housekeepers want to reinstate 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. Many hotels cut services during the coronavirus pandemic and never restored them.

But hotels say guests are no longer asking for daily room cleaning and some other services.

Hyatt and Hilton both said Monday that they have contingency plans in place to minimize the impact of the strikes at their hotels. Marriott didn't respond to a request for comment.

Michael D'Angelo, the head of labor relations for Hyatt in the Americas, said in a statement Monday that the chain offers competitive wages and benefits, including in the markets where workers are striking.

"We are disappointed that UNITE HERE has chosen to strike while Hyatt remains willing to negotiate," D'Angelo said. "We look forward to continuing to negotiate fair contracts and recognize the contributions of Hyatt employees."

Hilton said through a spokesperson that it remains "committed to negotiating in good faith to reach fair and reasonable agreements that are beneficial to both our valued team members and to our hotels."

UNITE HERE hopes to replicate 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.

Those wins also follow what the Culinary Workers Union, UNITE HERE's affiliate in Nevada, has described as the "best contracts ever" for tens of thousands of hotel and casino workers on the Las Vegas Strip that include a 32% pay increase over five years, housekeeping workload reductions and improved job security amid advancements in technology and artificial intelligence.

## **Mexico finds the devil is in the details with laws against gender-based attacks on women politicians**

MEXICO CITY (AP) — In a U.S. electoral campaign punctuated by jibes about "childless cat ladies," some might wish there were rules against mocking candidates based on their gender. Mexico — which just elected its first female president — has such a law but, surprise, it's not that easy.

The debate centers around a hard-fought race between two female candidates for a Mexico City borough presidency. An electoral court overturned an opposition candidate's victory, ruling that she had committed "gender-based political violence" against the losing, ruling-party candidate.

Outgoing President Andrés Manuel López Obrador suggested Monday the ruling could create a dangerous precedent, even though the losing candidate belonged to his own Morena party.

"We should be careful about this," López Obrador said. "When insults, real or imagined, can be cause, or could be a cause, for overturning or nullifying a victory, that is something else altogether."

The dispute arose after opposition candidate Alessandra Rojo won a narrow victory over Morena's Caty Monreal in the race for the borough that includes downtown Mexico City. During the campaign, Rojo brought up the fact that Monreal's father, Ricardo Monreal, is a leading Morena party politician, suggesting she may have been the candidate because of her dad's influence.

The court ruled last week that the comment violated a Mexican electoral law that prohibits "slandering, insulting or seeking to disqualify a female candidate based on gender stereotypes," in this case, beliefs that women succeed in politics based on their husbands' or fathers' political power.

It brings up obvious comparisons to U.S. politics, and the digs by Ohio Sen. JD Vance, the Republican vice presidential candidate, about "childless cat ladies" with allegedly no stake in America's future. It is unclear whether that could be perceived as a dig at Vice President Kamala Harris.

But critics say the fact that Caty Monreal had little political experience, or that her father appears to treat politics as a family business (his brother now holds the Zacatecas state governorship that Ricardo Monreal once held) could be legitimate points to make.

It also brought up uncomfortable aspects of limits on free speech, or how one female can be accused of committing gender violence against another.

Rojo has vowed to appeal the ruling, saying she is fighting "so that never again can the struggle and fight against gender-based political violence be used as a weapon against the very thing they are trying to protect, the rights of all women who participate" in politics.

Caty Monreal wrote in her social media accounts that "saying that I'm a puppet ... violence cannot be disguised as freedom of expression."

Julia Zulver, a Mexico-based expert on gender violence for the Swedish Defence University, said a much-needed law may have become politicized, noting exclusion and repression of women is "a vast and serious problem in Mexico, and should be taken seriously."

"The way gendered violence is being spoken about and politically mobilized here is a little concerning," Zulver said. "It dilutes the power of a law to protect against a real problem."

It's not that the Mexican law doesn't have its place or use.

Mexico has long been plagued by "machismo" and violence against women, which can range from comments on the street to, in its most extreme form, acid attacks and brutal slayings of women. Critics say dismissive speech about female candidates perpetuates harmful narratives that can turn deadly in real life.

López Obrador was himself accused of gender-based political violence during the run-up to this year's presidential campaign by opposition candidate Xóchitl Gálvez, after the president claimed she had been chosen by a group of conservative men who propped her up.

In that case, an electoral court ruled that López Obrador had in fact violated the law, but said he couldn't be punished for it because the rules prevent courts from sanctioning the president. Another female candidate, former Mexico City Mayor Claudia Sheinbaum, of López Obrador's Morena party, went on to win the June 2 elections by a large margin and will take office on Oct. 1.

## **Q&A: Ian McKellen is his own harshest critic as he discusses his stage fall and new thriller**

By HILARY FOX Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Ian McKellen is listening to his inner critic.

It's beating him up for not finishing out his latest theater role after he fell off the stage during a June performance of "Player Kings" and spent three nights in the hospital.

"Emotionally, I feel guilty and ashamed, you know, quite irrational because it was an accident. And it could have happened to anybody," he says.

The actor, 85, says it could have been a "great deal worse" if he hadn't been wearing padding to portray the rotund Sir John Falstaff during the adaptation of Shakespeare's "Henry IV" plays at London's Noel Coward Theatre. While his fractures and chipped vertebrae are healing well, though, McKellen can't shake the negativity of leaving the production early.

"You suddenly abandon all your mates who are putting on the show and you feel something's come to an end prematurely," he says.

But, he says, rumors of his imminent demise were definitely premature.

"I got the impression that dozens of friends wanted to come and say hello that, actually, they wanted to say goodbye. They thought I was on the way out," McKellen tells The Associated Press, adding with a laugh: "So I very determinedly always open the front door and run up the stairs and show that I'm not going anywhere!"

Although he's not onstage, McKellen can be spotted at the theater in "The Critic," a thriller set in the West End of 1930s London that's in cinemas Sept. 13. This time, he's in the audience, as gay newspaper writer James Erskine, who can make or break a career with a wicked turn of phrase in an era when homosexuality is illegal. Written by Patrick Marber and based on Anthony Quinn's novel "Curtain Call," it co-stars a host of British talent like Gemma Arterton, Mark Strong, Romola Garai, Ben Barnes and Lesley Manville.

McKellen spoke to the AP recently about his love of the theater, relationship with critics, the future of Gandalf and going back to work. The conversation has been edited for brevity and clarity.

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AP: Do you miss being on the stage?

McKELLEN: I miss the routine. When I first started out, it was a great joy to me that when everybody else was taking time off at the end of a busy day, the actors were gearing up, ready to start theirs — that there was something about being an actor that was separate from the rest of the population. But that was probably because I was hiding the fact that I was gay or not talking about the fact that I was gay. It felt good to be different.

Acting, particularly in the theater, is totally satisfying. And if I'm not doing it, like at the moment. I think, "Well, what is life all about?" 85 is a bit late to be asking that question, because I settled with the fact that life for me was acting a long, long time ago. And so the idea of retiring or not being able to work fills me with dread really.

AP: Have you been able to go and see other productions?

McKELLEN: I haven't. I've been nervous about going out. But I think this next month or two I shall get back to what I enjoy doing: going to the theater and see everything that's on in the West End that I hear people talking about.

AP: This film, "The Critic," celebrates theater but you're offstage for a change, in the audience.

McKELLEN: It's the murky side of theater. A corrupt senior drama critic was prepared to give someone a series of good reviews if she will agree to help him out with the problem he's got. I don't think these days any critic has that sort of power but in the 1930s, before social media and when newspapers were everyone's source of the truth, theater critics could be extremely powerful.

AP: What did you think of his ruthlessness?

McKELLEN: I think the source of it might be: How do you survive as a bon vivant and social person, who likes the limelight, when you're having to be discreet, if not secret, about what you really are? That's most likely to curdle the brain somewhat, isn't it?

AP: What has your relationship been like with critics over the years?

McKELLEN: They began very well when I was at Cambridge University in a play. It was "Henry IV, Part 2," which is part of the play that I've been doing when I played Falstaff. But this was 70 years ago, nearly. The Marlowe Society, that were putting this play on, didn't put the names of the actors in the program — everyone was anonymous. And the critic from the now-defunct News Chronicle said he wishes that he'd known my name because it might well become a name to be remembered.

Now, when you read that in the national newspaper, and you're 18 and you're just an amateur actor, enjoying himself, it does pull you up short. That day I decided I'd become an actor. I wrote to him 20, 30 years later and said, look, I've always been meaning to thank you for this. Said he couldn't, alas, remember the performance (laughs).

AP: Do you still read all your reviews?

McKELLEN: I do, but with a wary eye. I like to know what the word in the streets is and if you've had a lot of bad reviews, or good ones. But the whole business of acting in the theater is, at 7:30, curtain goes up. All the lights turn on and you get on with the job for that night's audience. And what happened on the first night? Irrelevant. And it should be no secret that actors get better or can get better. And if you do 100 performances of something, you're likely to be better on the 100th performance than you were on the first night.

AP: I wanted to check in on "The Lord of the Rings," because you said that you are still Gandalf's physical representative on Earth. So with the upcoming film "The Hunt for Gollum"...

McKELLEN: I'm told Gandalf is in it and I haven't read a script and there are no plans yet just to filming dates. But if it all worked out, I'd be very happy. It means I could go back to New Zealand for a spell, particularly in the summer. That would be lovely. But there's other work going on and I'm not going to get too upset if these are false hopes.

AP: So you'll be back at work next year? Are you already lining stuff up?

McKELLEN: Yes, I've agreed to do a film in January and then I hope, another one a little later on. And then, be good, wouldn't it? Go back and play Falstaff again and finish that job off? It's partly why I'm a bit

emotionally unsettled. It didn't end properly. So if we went back and did it again, did a bit more touring, perhaps went to the States...

## **4 people fatally shot on Chicago-area train, police say**

FOREST PARK, Ill. (AP) — A shooting on a commuter train outside Chicago on Labor Day morning left four people dead, police said.

Three people were pronounced dead at the Forest Park station, an above-ground stop on the Chicago Transit Authority's Blue Line. The fourth victim died at a hospital.

The suspect got away but was subsequently arrested on a train on a different route, Forest Park police said.

"A weapon was recovered," Forest Park Deputy Chief Chris Chin told reporters. "There is no immediate threat. This appears to be an isolated incident on this unfortunate day."

Police were called around 5:30 a.m. Chin said he had no immediate information to disclose about the victims. He called the shooting "shocking" and "horrible."

"This heinous and egregious act of violence should never have occurred, nonetheless on a public transit train," the Chicago Transit Authority, known as CTA, said.

CTA said security camera video "proved to be vital" in helping investigators.

Forest Park Mayor Rory Hoskins said his community, population 14,000, is the only Chicago suburb in Cook County where two major train lines end.

"It's a horrible tragedy that four people are dead on Labor Day weekend," Hoskins said. "Our police department and our fire department respond to this location probably more than any other location in our jurisdiction."

A regular rider, Sean McNulty, had to take a bus Monday because of service interruptions related to the shooting. He said criminal activity sometimes is a reality on the train.

"You just kind of get used to it," McNulty told the Chicago Tribune. "I keep my eyes open because I want to know what's going on around me at all times."

## **'We all failed you.' Heartbreak at funeral for Israeli-American hostage in Jerusalem**

By MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — An Israeli-American family that became an international symbol in the struggle to free hostages from Hamas captivity in Gaza laid their son to rest on Monday after the discovery of his body and those of five others brought a fresh outpouring of grief.

Tens of thousands of people thronged a Jerusalem cemetery to pay their respects to Hersh Goldberg-Polin, who became one of the most recognizable faces of the nearly year-old hostage crisis. Hundreds of others lined a major thoroughfare in Jerusalem, holding Israeli flags.

Many sobbed as his mother, Rachel Goldberg-Polin, said goodbye to her son and told him, "My sweet boy, finally, finally, finally you are free!"

She and her husband, Jon, shared stories of their 23-year-old son, who they called funny, curious and relentless in the pursuit of justice. They said they hoped his death might be a turning point in drawn-out negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage release.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin said the past 330 days had been "such torment that closed my throat and made my soul burn with third-degree burns." She told her son: "I no longer need to worry about you, you are no longer in danger."

His father added: "We failed you, we all failed you. ... Maybe your death is the stone, the fuel, that will bring home the 101 other hostages."

Israel's military announced Sunday that the bodies of Goldberg-Polin and the five others had been discovered in an underground tunnel in the southern Gaza Strip. Israeli forensics experts said they had

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been shot at close range and died on Thursday or Friday, shortly before Israeli troops reached the tunnel in southern Gaza where they were held.

Their deaths sparked protests by hundreds of thousands of people in Israel, with many saying the hostages could have been returned alive if a cease-fire deal had been reached.

Three of the six hostages, including Goldberg-Polin, were reportedly scheduled to be released in the first phase of a cease-fire proposal discussed in July.

"I apologize on behalf of the state of Israel that we failed to protect you in the terrible disaster of Oct. 7, that we failed to bring you home safely," Israel's President Isaac Herzog said in a eulogy.

Goldberg-Polin, a native of Berkeley, California, was attending a music festival when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people and taking 250 others hostage. He lost part of his left arm to a grenade blast during the attack. In April, a Hamas-issued video, showed him speaking under duress with his left hand missing, sparking new protests in Israel.

Hamas accuses Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of dragging out cease-fire talks by issuing new demands, including for lasting Israeli control over two strategic corridors in Gaza. Netanyahu claimed on Monday night he has accepted Biden's previous proposals and blamed Hamas for the lack of progress.

Netanyahu also has blamed Hamas for the deaths of Goldberg-Polin and the five others, saying "whoever murders hostages doesn't want a deal."

Smaller protests continued in Israel on Monday, and Israel's largest trade union held a general strike, the first since the Oct. 7 Hamas attack, to pressure the government for a deal.

Goldberg-Polin's U.S.-born parents became two of the most high-profile relatives of hostages on the international stage. They met with U.S. President Joe Biden, Pope Francis and others. They addressed the United Nations and the Democratic National Convention, urging the release of all hostages.

Rachel Goldberg-Polin ended many speeches with a message for her son: "We love you, stay strong, survive."

At the funeral, she echoed the plea she had made for months in the hope that somehow he could hear.

"And Hersh, there's one last thing I need you to do for us," she said. "Now, I need you to help us stay strong, and I need you to help us survive."

## Howard University's capstone moment: Kamala Harris at top of the ticket

By AYANNA ALEXANDER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — As a young college student, Kamala Harris made the nearly 3-mile trip from Howard University to the National Mall to protest against apartheid in South Africa.

In 2017, as a senator, she returned to her alma mater to deliver the commencement address.

In July, when she received word that she would be likely be the Democratic presidential nominee, she was wearing her Howard sweatshirt in the vice president's residence.

Howard, one of the nation's best known historically Black colleges, has been central to Harris' origin story, and now, as she seeks to become the first woman elected president, the university is having a capstone moment.

The school has produced luminaries like Supreme Court Justice Thurgood Marshall, whose legacy inspired Harris to attend Howard, and author Toni Morrison, among others. Some at the university see Harris' elevation as vice president as another validation of one of the school's core missions of service.

"There's clearly a direct relationship between Howard and its relationship to democracy and the democracy that we envision, one that is practiced in a way that includes all of us," said Melanie Carter, the founding director of the Howard University Center for HBCU Research, Leadership and Policy.

If Harris won the White House, she would be the first woman elected president and the first graduate of a historically Black college to hold that office. With many HBCUs, like a number of liberal arts colleges, struggling financially, her ascent has bathed Howard in a positive light.



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"It empowers students to reach farther than what they thought was possible," said Nikkya Taliaferro, a senior at Howard University from Honolulu who said the 2024 presidential election will be her first time voting. "Even if she doesn't win, she's already made such a big impact and I know for all of us, that alone, is unforgettable."

To Stefanie Brown James, a Howard alumna and co-founder of The Collective PAC, which is working to increase Black political representation, said that for Howard, the rise of Harris underscores "all the pieces fitting together. At this moment, she is the personification of the leadership, the excellence, the global responsibility to service, that Howard represents."

In her 2017 commencement address, Harris said Howard taught her to reject false choices and steered her to public service. In her memoir, she wrote that Howard taught that there is an expectation that students and graduates would "use our talents to take on roles of leadership and have an impact on other people, on our country and maybe even on the world."

In an Instagram post where she looked back on her time at Howard, she wrote, "Along the way, Howard taught me that while you will often find that you're the only one in the room who looks like you, or who has had the experiences you've had, you must remember: you are never alone."

Earlier this year, she wrote in a Facebook post that the investment in HBCUs is an investment "in the strength of our nation for years to come," when she welcomed Howard's men's basketball team to the White House as the Mid-Eastern Athletic Conference champions. HBCUs have historically struggled to generate investment, despite recent influxes in funding and donations, causing them to flounder financially.

Rep. Summer Lee, D-Pa., a Howard Law graduate, said Howard's "each one, teach one camaraderie" shaped how many alums in politics tackle the job. "It allowed us to root for each other in ways that I would not have gotten at another institution," Lee said. "Those guidelines of being a social engineer, not being on the sidelines, and creating public policy, that's rooted in the experiences of the most marginalized people. That is a Howard trait."

The Howard network is also providing some financial and organizational support to Harris' campaign. The Collective PAC utilized its HU Bison PAC, which held a virtual call for graduates with more than 4,000 attendees and raised over \$150,000, according to James. The Bison PAC plans another call on Wednesday.

On campus, a group called Herd for Harris is campaigning to support her. Other student-led organizations are mobilizing students to register to vote and be engaged around presidential debates and policies that could most affect them.

"It was instantaneous and that's just Howard," James said. "Something's happening, we need to respond to it, so we get to work. It's simply a Howard thing."

Even though Harris enjoys broad support on campus, there are students who are challenging Harris over policy, notably the war in Gaza.

"What we expect of Kamala Harris in this election is really derived from the morals that Howard instilled in us, that we are an oppressed people, and that we also need to advocate for oppressed people abroad," said Courtney McClain, a student senator at Howard who met Harris in 2020. She said she plans to support Harris, while holding her accountable.

With the November election drawing near, Harris has been on extensive campaign travel and prepping for her first debate against Republican Donald Trump — including a mock session at Howard — on Sept. 10. Still, she made time to speak to crowd of Howard's largest incoming first-year class in front of Cramton Auditorium.

Using a bullhorn, she told them that she was proud of them and urged that they enjoy this moment. "You might be running for the president of the United States," she said to roaring cheers.

## **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.

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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.

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.

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"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.

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."

## Linda Deutsch, AP trial writer who had a front row seat 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, 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.

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"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.

Deutsch also 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 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.

## **A far-right German party's win has some fearing for the future. Others worry of a return to the past**

By STEFANIE DAZIO and KIRSTEN GRIESHABER Associated Press

BERLIN (AP) — Nicki Kämpf watched her daughter toddle across the sand in a Berlin playground and wondered whether she and her wife should move their 1 1/2-year-old west, after Alternative for Germany became the first far-right party to win a state election in post-World War II Germany.

Kämpf, 29, and her wife discussed a backup plan as Sunday's election results came in. They're concerned that a gay couple and their child might not be safe in the future if parties like Alternative for Germany, or AfD, gain more power in the formerly communist and less prosperous eastern states.

Even though they live in the liberal city of Berlin, Kämpf was scared the far-right's power could spread. She's especially worried because the paperwork to formally adopt her daughter is still pending — and could be for another year or more.

"I don't think I would be able to adopt her if they're in power," Kämpf told The Associated Press on Monday. "I don't want to bring her up in a hostile environment."

The couple talked about a possible move west to Cologne — "people there are really open-minded" — but Kämpf is reluctant to take their daughter far from the toddler's 91-year-old great-great-grandmother and other family in Thuringia and neighboring Saxony.

AfD won its state election in Thuringia on Sunday under one of its hardest-right figures, Björn Höcke. In Saxony, the party finished only just behind the mainstream conservative Christian Democratic Union, which leads the national opposition.

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. 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.

AfD is at its strongest in the 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. Höcke has been convicted of knowingly using a Nazi slogan at political events, but is appealing.

Höcke bristled Sunday 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."

Voters went to the polls on the 85th anniversary of Nazi Germany's invasion of Poland at the start of World War II. Some far-left protesters demonstrated against AfD in Hamburg, Dresden and Leipzig.

Lukas Meister said his sons, 6 and 3 years old, are too young to understand elections. But as the 3-year-old played with sand toys Monday, the 38-year-old father thought about how his eldest child will have to learn about it someday.

"We don't talk much about politics so far. He's more into 'Paw Patrol,'" Meister said. "It's hard to explain. How is it that people are so proud to vote for a party that is so bad for everyone?"

Older Germans who lived through the Nazi reign of terror are frightened. Many believed their country had developed an immunity to nationalism and assertions of racial superiority after confronting the horrors of its past through education and laws to outlaw persecution.

But Holocaust survivor Charlotte Knobloch, president of the Jewish Community of Munich and Upper Bavaria, cautioned against labeling AfD's successes as an aberration.

"Nobody should now speak of 'protest' or look for other excuses," Knobloch said in a statement. "The numerous voters made their decision consciously, many wanted to make the extremists on the fringes responsible."

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Knobloch was 6 years old when she saw the synagogues of Munich burning and watched helplessly as two Nazi officers marched away a beloved friend of her father on Nov. 9, 1938, or Kristallnacht — the “Night of Broken Glass” — when Nazis terrorized Jews throughout Germany and Austria.

Gudrun Pfeifer and Ursula Klute, two retirees from the northwestern city of Osnabrueck who are visiting Berlin this week, said Sunday’s vote also brought back grim memories from their early childhood days during and after World War II.

“I know what this can all lead to,” Pfeifer, 83, said Monday as her voice broke, recalling how her family was separated during the last months of the war and beyond. She was stranded in Berlin for more than a year.

“The city was in ruins, we were all starving. I was very ill — my sister thought I was going to die,” Pfeifer added.

Thorsten Faas, a political scientist from Berlin’s Free University, called AfD’s popularity for younger voters “very worrying.” In Thuringia, 38% of people aged between 18-24 gave their vote to the far-right party — compared to 33% overall, according to public broadcaster ARD’s Tagesschau election analysis.

“These first voting experiences are very formative and you can assume that this will also affect future voting decisions of this generation,” Faas said.

Klute, 78, also said she was distressed by AfD’s successes among the younger population.

“People always forget the lessons from history,” she said.

## Ukraine’s children return to school as Russia launches drones and ballistic missiles at Kyiv

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 were returning to school across Ukraine. Some pupils found classes canceled because of damage from the attack.

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

After more than 900 days of war, Russia and Ukraine show no sign of letting up in the fight or moving closer to the negotiating table. Both sides are pursuing ambitious ground offensives, with the Ukrainians driving into Russia’s Kursk region and the Russians 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 won’t prevent Russian forces from advancing in eastern Ukraine.

“The main task that the enemy set for themselves — to stop our offensive in Donbas — they haven’t achieved it,” Putin told students during a trip to Siberia. He predicted that the Kursk offensive will fail and that Kyiv officials will want “to move to peace talks.”

Speaking in the southern city of Zaporizhzhia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said his country’s operation in Kursk had drawn Russian troops away from southern Ukraine, but acknowledged that it had not yet succeeded in diverting Russian forces from the eastern frontlines, where the city of Pokrovsk is at risk of falling.

“We see that it is difficult there, and the most combat-ready Russian brigades have been concentrated in this area because it has always been their main target — Donbas. The complete, total occupation of Donbas: Donetsk and Luhansk regions,” Zelenskyy said.

He said last month that the aim of the Kursk incursion is to create a buffer zone that might prevent further attacks by Moscow across the border.

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

Kyiv residents hurried into bomb shelters.

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Oksana Argunova, an 18-year-old student, said she was still shaking after the scare.

"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.

Monday was the first day back at school after the summer vacation. In Ukraine, the day involves ceremonies and rituals, with students and often teachers wearing traditional costumes.

But the massive air assaults have taken a toll. In one last week, an F-16 warplane that Ukraine received from Western partners crashed. The pilot, one of the few Ukrainians trained to fly the jets, was killed.

Dutch Prime Minister Dick Schoof, visiting Ukraine for the first time since taking office, traveled with Zelenskyy to Zaporizhzhia, 40 kilometers (25 miles) from the front line.

They visited an underground school, and Schoof announced his government would give Ukraine 200 million euros (\$221 million) to help protect and repair the electricity infrastructure targeted almost daily by Russian bombs.

"It must never be normal for children to have to go to school underground. It must never become normal for people's homes to be cold because power plants have been bombed," Schoof said.

He said the Netherlands would continue providing F-16 fighter jets and munitions to Ukraine and noted a plan floated last month by Republican U.S. Sen. Lindsay Graham to let retired F-16 pilots from other countries join the fight in Ukraine.

"That would be an interesting idea, because then you can just speed up the process of deploying the F-16s. But we have to look into those things, with all the countries involved with the F-16 coalition," Schoof said.

In Kyiv, children and parents gathered outside a damaged school as firefighters put out flames and removed rubble.

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

"We hid in the bathroom, where it was relatively safe," said the mother, who gave only her first name, Olena.

Ukraine and Russia 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 overnight, including two over Moscow and nine over the surrounding region, the Defense Ministry said.

The Ukrainian headquarters of the Danish humanitarian organization DanChurchAid was destroyed by missile fragments, its head Jonas Nøddekær 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, and the injured included people in nearby homes.

## Titanic expedition yields lost bronze statue, high-resolution photos and other discoveries

By PATRICK WHITTLE Associated Press

A bronze statue from the Titanic — not seen in decades and feared to be lost for good — is among the discoveries made by the company with salvage rights to the wreck site on its first expedition there in many years.

RMS Titanic Inc., a Georgia-based company that holds the legal rights to the 112-year-old wreck, has completed its first trip since 2010 and released images from the expedition on Monday. The pictures show a site that continues to change more than a century later.

The trip to the remote corner of the North Atlantic Ocean where the Titanic sank happened as the U.S. Coast Guard investigates the June 2023 implosion of the Titan, an experimental submersible owned by a different company. The Titan submersible disaster killed all five people on board, including Paul-Henri



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Nargeolet, who was director of underwater research for RMS Titanic.

The findings from this summer's trip "showcase a bittersweet mix of preservation and loss," RMS Titanic said in a statement. A highlight was the rediscovery of the statue "Diana of Versaille," last seen in 1986, and the statue now has a clear and updated image, the company said.

On a sadder note, a significant section of the railing that surrounds the ship bow's forecastle deck has fallen, RMS Titanic said. The railing still stood as recently as 2022, the company said.

"The discovery of the statue of Diana was an exciting moment. But we are saddened by the loss of the iconic Bow railing and other evidence of decay which has only strengthened our commitment to preserving Titanic's legacy," said Tomasina Ray, director of collections for RMS Titanic.

The crew spent 20 days at the site and returned to Providence, Rhode Island, on Aug. 9. They captured more than 2 million of the highest resolution pictures of the site ever to exist, the company said.

The team also fully mapped the wreck and its debris field with equipment that should improve understanding of the site, RMS Titanic said. The next step is to process the data so it can be shared with the scientific community, and so "historically significant and at-risk artifacts can be identified for safe recovery in future expeditions," the company said in a statement.

The company said prior to the expedition that it had an especially important mission in the wake of Nargeolet's death.

The Coast Guard's investigation will be the subject of a public hearing later in September.

Nargeolet's family filed a wrongful death lawsuit against the Titan sub's operator OceanGate, which suspended operations after the implosion. OceanGate has not commented publicly on the lawsuit, which was filed in a Washington state court.

## Today in History: September 3 Treaty of Paris ends Revolutionary War

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Tuesday, Sept. 3, the 247th day of 2024. There are 119 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 3, 1783, representatives of the United States and Britain signed the Treaty of Paris, which officially ended the Revolutionary War and recognized U.S. sovereignty.

Also on this date:

In 1861, during the Civil War, Confederate forces invaded the border state of Kentucky, which had declared its neutrality in the conflict.

In 1894, the United States celebrated the first federal Labor Day holiday.

In 1935, Sir Malcolm Campbell became the first person to drive an automobile more than 300 miles-per-hour, speeding across the Bonneville Salt Flats in Utah.

In 1939, Britain, France, Australia and New Zealand declared war on Germany, two days after the Nazi invasion of Poland; in a radio address, Britain's King George VI said, "With God's help, we shall prevail."

In 1943, Allied forces invaded Italy during World War II, the same day Italian officials signed a secret armistice with the Allies.

In 1976, America's Viking 2 lander touched down on Mars to take the first close-up, color photographs of the red planet's surface.

In 1999, a French judge closed a two-year inquiry into the car crash that killed Princess Diana, dismissing all charges against nine photographers and a press motorcyclist, and concluding the accident was caused by an inebriated driver.

In 2019, Walmart said it would stop selling ammunition for handguns and short-barrel rifles, and the store chain requested that customers not openly carry firearms in its stores; the announcement followed a shooting at a Walmart store in Texas that left 22 people dead.

Today's Birthdays: Singer-musician Al Jardine (The Beach Boys) is 81. Actor Valerie Perrine is 81. Film-

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maker Jean-Pierre Jeunet is 71. Rock guitarist Steve Jones (The Sex Pistols) is 69. Actor Steve Schirripa (TV: "The Sopranos") is 66. Author Malcolm Gladwell is 61. Actor Charlie Sheen is 59. Filmmaker Noah Baumbach is 55. Dance-rock musician Redfoo (LMFAO) is 49. Actor Garrett Hedlund is 40. Olympic gold medal snowboarder Shaun White is 38. Model-actor Kaia Gerber is 23. Actor Jack Dylan Grazer is 21.