

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Sept. 5

School Breakfast: Breakfast sandwich.
School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, fries.
Senior Menu... Oven fried chicken, mashed potatoes and gravy, haavard beets, pineapple tidbits, dinner roll.

Cross Country at Redfield, 10 a.m.
Volleyball at Sisseton: 7th at 4 p.m., 8th/C at 5 p.m.; JV at 6 p.m. with varsity to follow.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m.

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

Friday, Sept. 6

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.
School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.
Senior Menu: BBQ riblet on bun, scalloped potatoes, tomato spoon salad, watermelon, cookie.
Football at Webster Area, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 7

C Volleyball at Matchbox Club, Aberdeen.
Soccer at West Central: Girls at noon, boys at 1:30 p.m.
Airport Fly-In/Drive-In, municipal airport, all day.
Citywide rummage sale, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Common Centers Community Thrift Store open, 209 N Main, 8 a.m. to 3 p.m.
3rd/4th and 5th/6th Football @ Mobridge Jamboree

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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.

Apalachee High School

A 14-year-old shooter killed four people—two students and two teachers—and wounded at least nine others at Apalachee High School in Winder, Georgia, yesterday, roughly 50 miles northeast of Atlanta. The attack is the deadliest school shooting in Georgia's history.

The shooter, a student at the school, was taken into custody alive. Authorities have not publicly identified a motive, though the Georgia Bureau of Investigation says the shooter will be charged with murder and tried as an adult. The attack began before 10:20 am local time and came after a phone call warning to Apalachee and four other schools. Barrow County schools will be closed for the remainder of the week as the investigation continues.

Nippon Steel Deal Scrutiny

President Joe Biden is preparing to block Japanese-based Nippon Steel's \$14.9B purchase of US Steel, according to reports yesterday. US Steel shares closed down 17.5% on the news.

The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States is currently evaluating the national security implications of the merger, which was announced last year. The United Steelworkers union opposes it, maintaining the 123-year-old company—formed by US business icons including Andrew Carnegie and JP Morgan—should remain US-owned and operated. US Steel's CEO said yesterday if the deal were blocked, the company may have to close plants, lay off thousands of employees, and move headquarters out of Pittsburgh. He also asserted Nippon's promised \$3B investment is needed to revitalize US Steel's aging mills. Nippon maintains the company will remain American-run.

If the merger were to go through, the combined company would become the world's third-largest steelmaker, with 86 million tons of annual capacity. The CFIUS review is expected as soon as this month.

Potential Depression Biomarker

A brain network was found to be significantly larger in people living with depression than in people without it, according to a new study released yesterday. The findings suggest the presence of an expanded network could be a risk factor for depression, potentially leading to earlier avenues for diagnosis and treatment for the 20% of US adults affected by the condition.

Researchers analyzed brain activity scans taken of 141 people with depression and 37 without it (see study). The technique, known as precision functional mapping, revealed the size of the frontostriatal salience network—a circuit used for screening external stimuli—to be 73% larger than the controls on average. Scientists believe the network's large size displaces room on the brain's cortex—its outer surface—for other network functions.

A related analysis of brain scans of children who later developed depression showed the abnormal size of the network remained stable over time, indicating it could be used to identify the condition before symptoms develop. Researchers plan to study whether the larger network stems from genetics or experiences.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

2024 NFL regular season kicks off tonight (8:20 pm ET, NBC) with a rematch of last year's AFC Championship game between reigning Super Bowl champs the Kansas City Chiefs and Baltimore Ravens.

"Rust" armorer Hannah Gutierrez-Reed pleads guilty to bringing gun into a New Mexico bar; Gutierrez-Reed is already serving 18-month prison sentence for role in death of the film's cinematographer Halyna Hutchins.

2024 US Open tennis semifinal matchups set

Science & Technology

Social media app X debuts beta version of a television app available on Google TV and Amazon Fire TV; company says it wants to become a "video-first" platform.

Adoption of farming practices forced humans to evolve more efficient digestion of starch beginning roughly 12,000 years ago, study reveals.

Chemists reveal how collagen—a key building block of muscles, bones, and connective tissue—persists in dinosaur fossils nearly 200 million years old; the proteins have a unique bonding structure that protects them from moisture.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq -0.3%) as US job openings fell to 7.67 million in July, the lowest level since January 2021.

Nvidia denies report of allegedly receiving a Justice Department subpoena over antitrust concerns.

Biotechnology startup eGenesis raises \$191M for human-compatible transplants derived from gene-edited pig organs; eGenesis provided the world's first genetically modified pig kidney transplanted into a human in March.

OpenAI cofounder Ilya Sutskever's new venture, Safe Superintelligence, raises \$1B to help develop safe artificial intelligence systems; latest funding round values the startup at \$5B.

Politics & World Affairs

US Justice Department accuses Russian state media network RT of \$10M election interference campaign, including effort to recruit US social media influencers; DOJ indicts two employees and seizes 32 internet domains.

Ukraine's top diplomat Dmytro Kuleba becomes sixth cabinet member to resign in government shake-up.

UK government releases report on 2017 Grenfell Tower fire that killed 72 people in the London social housing unit; report blames multiple administrations and companies, including US-based Arconic, which supplied building's exterior material.

Suspected Boko Haram motorcycle and gun attack kills at least 100 people at a market in northeastern Nigeria; at least 1,500 people have been killed in the region so far this year.

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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Homecoming Candidates

Front: Brooklyn Hansen, Gretchen Dinger, Faith Traphagen, Kennedy Hansen and Liz Fliehs

Back: Korbin Kucker, Christian Ehresmann, Jaegar Kampa, Caden McInerney and Teylor Diegel

**Coronation will be held in the Groton High School Gym on
Monday, September 16, 2024 at 7:30pm**

GDILIVE.COM

GT Groton Area
Tigers

**Text Paul at
605-397-7460**

**Any interest in any of
these basketball games on
GDILIVE.COM?
They are \$25 each.**

Sisseton Volleyball C
Webster Area Volleyball C
Webster Area Volleyball JV
Aberdeen Roncalli Volleyball C
Aberdeen Roncalli Volleyball JV
Clark/Willow Lake Volleyball C
Clark/Willow Lake Volleyball JV
Warner Volleyball C
Warner Volleyball JV
Tiospa Zina Volleyball C
Tiospa Zina Volleyball JV
Florence/Henry Volleyball C
Florence/Henry Volleyball JV

Butte County Fatal Crash

What: Single vehicle fatal motorcycle crash
Where: SD Highway 79, mile marker 157, 24 miles north of Newell, SD
When: 4:29 p.m., Thursday, August 8, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2001 Harley Davidson ISF
Driver 1: 56-year-old female, fatal injuries
Helmet Use: No

Butte County, S.D.- A 56-year-old woman died September 3 from injuries sustained August 8 in a single-vehicle crash near Newell, SD.

The name of the person involved has not been released pending notification of family members.

Preliminary crash information indicates on August 8, 2024, the driver of a 2001 Harley Davidson was traveling southbound on SD Highway 79 near mile marker 157 when the motorcycle drifted off the road to the right and struck a delineator pole, coming to rest in the west ditch. She was transported to a Rapid City hospital with life-threatening injuries. She passed away on September 3 from the injuries sustained in the crash.

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.

Coming up on GDILIVE.COM

GT
Groton Area
Tigers



Thursday, Sept. 5
Volleyball in Sisseton

JV match at 6 p.m.
Sponsored by
Adam & Nicole Wright

Varsity match to follow

**\$5 ticket or
GDI Subscription
required to watch the games.**



Press

The science behind ice baths for recovery

Can ice baths aid in muscle recovery, enhance mental health, support immune system function and improve athletic performance? The evidence is on thin ice.

• **By Alisa Bowman**

We can probably thank the Dutch adventure athlete Wim Hof — also known as “The Iceman” — for elevating icy plunges from a once-a-year New Year’s pastime to a widely popular health and fitness trend.

He and other cold-water enthusiasts rave about the benefits, claiming that frigid showers, baths and swims can speed recovery, numb pain, prevent colds and lift mood. So, is it time to take the plunge? The answer likely depends on your current state of health, along with your goals. Let’s examine the science and cold therapy options.

What is cryotherapy?

“Cryo” comes from the Greek word *krýos*, which means icy cold. Thus, “cryotherapy” and “cold therapy” are interchangeable — and describe several methods for cooling down the body.

Ice application: Apply ice or a cold pack to a part of your body.

Cold showers: Stand in a stream of cold water with the hot water turned off.

Cold water immersion (CWI): Submerge or “cold plunge” yourself into a tub or body of water that’s 60 degrees Fahrenheit (15 degrees Celcius) or colder.

Whole-body cryotherapy (WBC): Use an expensive chamber that blasts you with freezing air — no water required.

The health benefits of ice baths and cold plunges

So, does the science of cryotherapy live up to the hype? For the most part, no. For a study published in *Nature Scientific Reports*, researchers asked study participants to try the Wim Hof method — which involves cold water exposure, breathing exercises and meditation — for 15 days. However, the study revealed no positive changes in blood pressure, heart rate, heart function or mood. In addition, while other scientific evidence seems to point to some benefits of cryotherapy, much of the research is too weak to support many of the claims with confidence. Moreover, consideration must also be given to the lengths you’d need to go to achieve, at best, a modest beneficial effect.

Still, assuming you are using cryotherapy in a safe manner, there’s no reason that you can’t enjoy the practice or feel that it provides you with a measure of fortitude.

Here is where the science stands on several cryotherapy claims and different types of applications:

Ice packs or cold plunges and athletic recovery

For many years, if an athlete was recovering from an injury, experts recommended icing. It was the “I” in the RICE formula, which stood for rest, ice, compression and elevation.

“The science and practical applications of icing have changed during the past two decades,” says Andrew Jagim, Ph.D., a sports medicine specialist with Mayo Clinic.

Instead of always reaching for ice, Jagim recommends a nuanced approach:

Use ice immediately after suffering an acute injury. That’s when it can help reduce swelling and pain.

Avoid or minimize icing after the first few days, as ongoing cold therapy may slow healing and delay recovery.

Similarly, cold therapy may help to reduce pain and soreness after hard training sessions or during periods of back-to-back competitions. When used consistently over time, however, cold therapy could potentially harm performance, says Dr. Jagim.

“If an athlete has an intense two-week period of practice or a three-day tournament and they are struggling with pain or soreness, I may recommend adding ice baths post-workout or throughout the day,” he says. “But I would advise against using them every day throughout an entire season or training cycle as research shows that they may hinder long-term adaptations in athletes, particularly for strength and

muscle growth.”

Cold showers and immunity

It’s said that Thomas Jefferson submerged his feet in cold water each morning. In a letter he wrote to a physician, Jefferson noted the habit helped prevent the common cold.

Many of today’s cold-water enthusiasts make similar claims. The theory is that cold immersion and other short-term stressors — sometimes called “micro stressors” — may help train the immune system to become more resilient and better able to handle more significant stressors like injuries or infections.

In one of the few studies that tested this theory, researchers assigned 3,018 office workers to several intervention groups. Some workers served as a control and made no changes to their morning routines. Other office workers added a 30-, 60-, or 90-second blast of cold water at the end of their typical morning shower. After 60 days, the workers who took cold showers had taken 29 percent fewer sick days and reported increased energy levels.

Though those results seem promising, it’s not clear why the people in the study took fewer sick days. Because the researchers didn’t track markers of immunity, it’s not clear what physiological changes may or may not have occurred or influenced the outcomes. As such, much more research is needed to know with certainty whether cold showers or plunges truly benefit immunity. In the meantime, if you enjoy short cold showers, there’s little reason to avoid them.

Cryotherapy and pain

Icing restricts blood flow, slows nerve signaling and reduces swelling, all of which may turn down the volume of pain.

As mentioned earlier, icing immediately after suffering an injury can offer short-term relief. It’s also OK to reach for an ice pack to soothe the temporary discomfort of a headache or a tendonitis flare-up. However, for long-term treatment of injuries, such as muscle or joint strains, continual icing may delay the healing process. In this case, icing may repetitively reduce the blood flow and signaling mechanisms needed to facilitate tissue healing. Interestingly enough, heat therapy may be more beneficial as it can improve circulation, help promote healing, facilitate recovery from exercise and improve cardiovascular health.

Ice baths and metabolic health

Habitual cold-water immersion may help to reduce or change fat tissue, according to laboratory research done on rodents. These changes theoretically could lead to other downstream health benefits, including reduced cholesterol and improved blood sugar. However, just because rodents become a little leaner doesn’t mean that the same thing will happen in humans, were it to be studied.

Mental benefits of ice baths

Though research remains in its infancy, cold water therapy may help to lift fatigue and mood, possibly by triggering the release of endorphins and noradrenaline in the brain.

Based on one small study of 33 adults, a five-minute dip in cold water boosted feelings of alertness and attentiveness and decreased perceived distress and anxiety.

In another small study, when young adults immersed a hand in cold water for three minutes, they felt less sleepy — despite having awoken in the middle of the night — and could complete math problems more quickly than study participants who immersed a hand in warm water.

These studies are not only small but offer scenarios for achieving benefits that are far from practical — unless you really need to solve math problems at two in the morning. Larger-scale, randomized controlled trials in humans are needed to know whether this effect might extend to more realistic and routine situations.

Is cold plunging dangerous?

Scientists know much more about the dangers of cold temperatures than they know about the benefits.

Sudden submersion in chilly water can trigger a cold shock response that causes you to gasp and hyperventilate. If your head is underwater, this involuntary gasp and disruption to normal ventilation patterns could lead to drowning. The cold shock response also increases breathing, heart rate and blood pressure,

all of which could pose health risks for people who are susceptible to cardiac events. In addition, when exposed to freezing water and frigid ambient conditions, you can develop hypothermia (dangerously low body temperature) or frostbite.

However, these dangers mainly apply to open-water swims and plunges out in nature.

"If someone adds ice to their bathtub and temporarily submerges themselves into water that is only 50 to 60 degrees Fahrenheit, there likely isn't a big level of concern or risk for any adverse effects," says Dr. Jagim. "However, if someone walks across a frozen lake in sub-zero temperatures, cuts a hole in the ice, jumps into 30-degree to 40-degree waters, and then exits the lake into a cold and sub-zero environment while being wet, the risks would be significantly higher."

To minimize the risks:

Consult a healthcare professional to make sure it's safe for you to cold plunge.

Try home-based cryotherapy, such as a 30-second cold shower or short-duration submerges in a bathtub with cool water before opting for open-water swims or ice plunges in the middle of a frozen lake.

If you do try open-water plunging, always do it with others. Bring extra towels and clothes to quickly dry off and rewarm your body.

Are ice baths worth it?

To help people weigh the pros and cons, Dr. Jagim uses the analogy of cooking dinner.

Exercise, a nutritious diet, sleep and stress management are the veggies, whole grains and meat of the main course. Cold plunges and other cryotherapies serve as a potential garnish.

Focus on the entree before worrying about the garnish.

– Andrew Jagim, Ph.D.

If you decide to try cryotherapy, experiment at home with someone nearby — and do so in your shower or bathtub, before trying it in open water.

Start with brief submersions of 30 seconds to a minute. Eventually, if desired, you can work up to 5 to 10 minutes at a time. Similarly, in the beginning, use cold — but not freezing — water.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Judge reduces Forest Service discrimination verdict; legal team seeks nearly \$500K in fees, costs

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - SEPTEMBER 4, 2024 3:58 PM

A federal judge has reduced a former Black Hills National Forest employee's jury award from \$400,000 to \$300,000, and the lawyers who won the verdict are also asking the judge to make the federal government cover nearly \$500,000 in attorney fees, costs and expenses.

The judge also dismissed the defense's effort to seek a reconsideration of the case. The defendant in the case is the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which includes the Forest Service.

The litigation centers around allegations of longstanding gender discrimination within the Black Hills National Forest. It started when District Ranger Ruth Esperance filed a lawsuit claiming a hostile work environment and an unfair reassignment from her district ranger role to a position with less responsibility.

Esperance, who served as a district ranger from 2012 to 2018, argued that her reassignment was driven by gender bias and claimed male colleagues were given preferential treatment. A jury ruled in her favor last September.

Esperance's legal team is led by Washington, D.C.-based attorney Daniel Gebhardt of the Solomon Law Firm. Gebhardt told South Dakota Searchlight that this week's \$100,000 verdict reduction was expected, because federal law limits compensatory damages in cases such as Esperance's to \$300,000.

An updated request last week from Gebhardt and the rest of Esperance's legal team seeks \$494,491.32 from the federal government for attorney's fees, costs and expenses. The judge has not yet ruled on that request.

The U.S. Attorney's Office for South Dakota represents the Ag Department and Forest Service. The office did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

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.

Fears decrease but work remains to control wildfire near Rapid City

BY: SETH TUPPER - SEPTEMBER 4, 2024 12:15 PM

RAPID CITY — A leader in the fight against a wildfire near South Dakota's second largest city said Wednesday morning he's less concerned, even as work to contain the fire continues.

"My comfort level is a lot higher now than it was yesterday," said Brandon Sanchez, the U.S. Forest Service official who serves as incident commander.

The First Thunder Fire began Monday evening in a rocky and forested area cut by deep canyons in the Black Hills, several miles west of Rapid City. Since then, crews of local, state and federal firefighters have worked to keep the flames from spreading toward residential areas on the city's western edge.

Investigators are still working to determine the cause, Sanchez said. The fire is burning an area of the Black Hills National Forest that's mixed with parcels of private land. There have been no reports of injuries

or damaged structures.

Some road closures remained in effect Wednesday morning, as did a flight restriction aimed at preventing drones and other aircraft from interfering with helicopters and tanker planes used by firefighters.

Authorities are asking those who live near the fire to stay prepared in case they're ordered to leave, said Lt. Jason Mitzel of the Pennington County Sheriff's Office.

"Right now we're not doing any evacuations, and it doesn't look like there's going to be a need for any evacuations," he said. "However, whenever there's an incident like this, we always just ask people to be prepared in case that time may come."

The estimate of the fire's size Wednesday morning was 155 acres, only 5 acres larger than Tuesday's estimate. About 150 firefighting personnel were on the scene.

Sanchez said firefighters have established a perimeter around the fire. The perimeter consists of earthen lines dug by hand or bulldozer, and also includes manmade and natural fire breaks such as roads and rocky outcrops. Tanker planes have dropped retardant chemicals ahead of the fire's advance, and helicopters have dropped water.

Despite those efforts, estimated containment of the fire remained at 0%. That's because fire remained close to the lines in some areas, and firefighters were working to knock those flames down. Sanchez said an updated containment estimate would probably be issued later Wednesday.

Weather remains a wild card. Clouds gathering Wednesday over the Black Hills were expected to bring helpful rain, but Sanchez said firefighters were also monitoring potential thunderstorms that could produce fire-fueling wind.

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

COMMENTARY

Ballot petitioner wants South Dakota to fight and fund his religious legal battle

by DANA HESS

SEPTEMBER 4, 2024 8:59 AM

As South Dakota voters get ready to wade through seven ballot issues in November, more are lining up for the 2026 election.

Already turned in to the Secretary of State's Office are two ballot issues. One calls for fair market value for assessed property and another seeks to require that students in kindergarten through grade 12 start each school day with a recited prayer.

The prayer initiated measure is sponsored by Hillel Hellinger of North Miami Beach, Florida. It would require teachers to lead a non-denominational prayer and for students to repeat the teacher's words. Teachers and students who do not want to take part would be able to opt out.

Hellinger's prayer isn't exactly an impressive piece of adoration: "Almighty God, who is aware of His creation, who keeps it going and judges it, please have mercy on us." There's more grace and poetry in a government regulation or a cookie recipe. Trying to offer a prayer where one-size-fits-all, Hellinger leaves us with an ecumenical husk.

The content of his prayer aside, his venue has to be questioned. As society has declined, our schools have been overloaded with tasks. The duties we have assigned to schools include, but are not limited to, combating bullying, offering counseling on a raft of ills, providing lockdown training, handling all manner of special education, monitoring for child abuse and providing two-thirds of students' daily meals.

Prayer is best handled in church or in the home. Attempts to instill a formalized prayer in schools are

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based on the fact that there's no way to control what happens in the home or in the church. Schools can be told what to do because they're dependent on taxpayer funding. We used to ask our schools to educate our children; now we're asking them to raise our children.

According to an interview with Hellinger in *The Dakota Scout*, he knows that passage of his initiated measure would lead to a court fight. That's what he's counting on. Given the current conservative majority on the U.S. Supreme Court, he believes there's a likelihood of a favorable decision. He's not starting with South Dakota because we're raising heathens who desperately need more prayer. He's starting here because he needs just 17,509 signatures to get on the ballot.

"South Dakota is the easiest state to start with," Hellinger told *The Dakota Scout*.

Of course, if Hellinger's initiated measure becomes state law, South Dakota will have to take on the burden and expense of defending it in the courts. In effect, Hellinger has picked South Dakota to fight his battles for him and pick up the tab as well.

Slipping a moment of prayer into schools was tried recently in the South Dakota Legislature. In 2020, the governor's office sponsored House Bill 1015 which would have allowed a moment of silence for all students at the beginning of the school day. A vote of 9-6 in the House Education Committee sent the legislation to the 41st day, killing the bill.

The bill was offered as a way for students to get their thoughts in order at the beginning of the day. They could pray if they wanted or just enjoy a moment of silence.

As might be expected, the bill was opposed by a long line of education lobbyists. The most compelling testimony came from Rob Monson, executive director of the School Administrators of South Dakota. Prior to his testimony, Monson paused for a moment of prayer, noting in his testimony that no one compelled him to pray. He did it because he wanted to. Students, Monson said, are allowed the same prerogative in school.

"Prayer has never been forced out of the public schools," Monson told the committee. He was the first but not the last education lobbyist to ask the committee what the moment of silence bill does to benefit education. The same question should be asked of Hellinger's initiated measure.

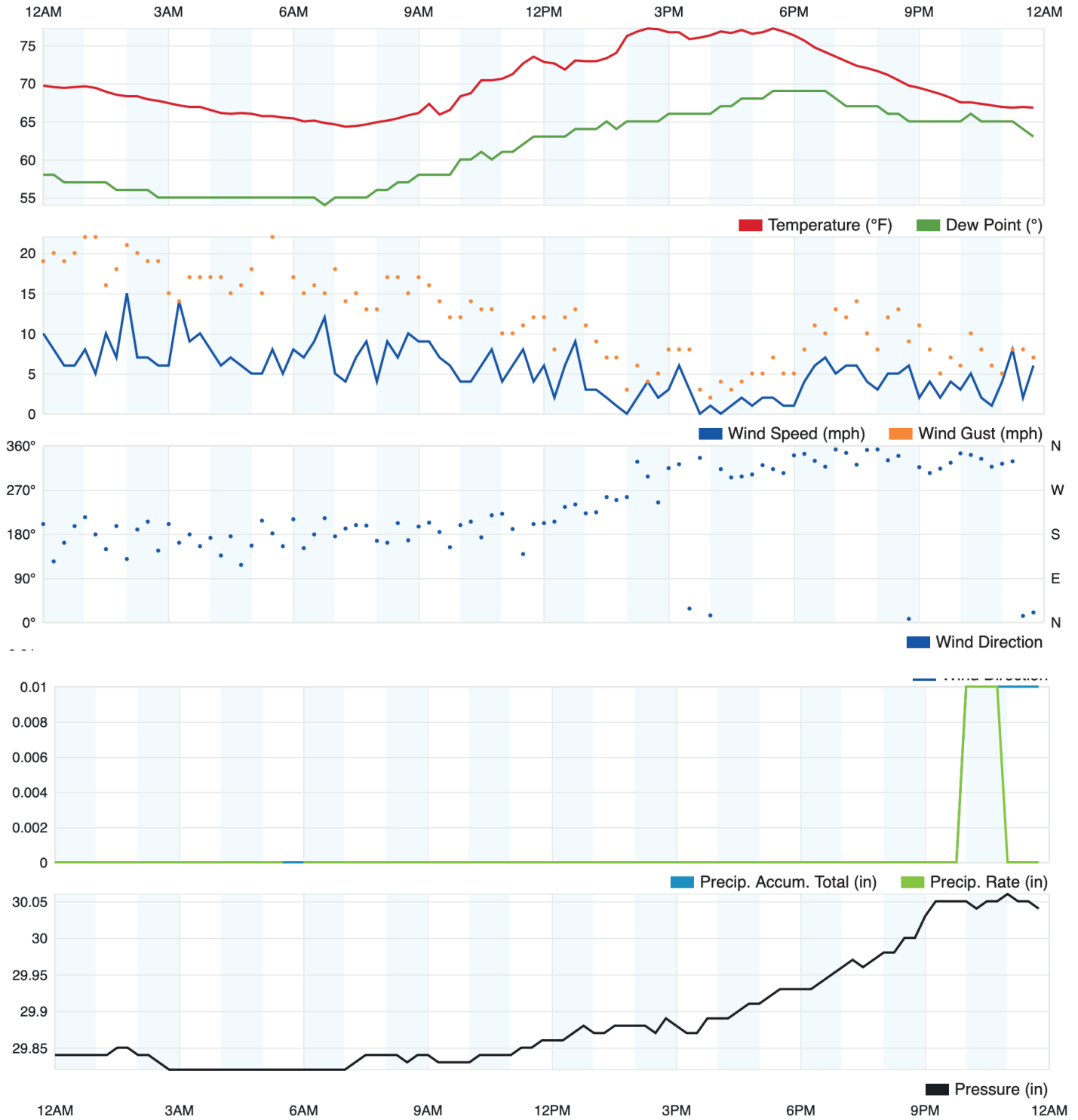
Anyone who thinks there is no praying in school has never suffered through a pop quiz in algebra class. As one lawmaker said of HB 1015, this is a solution in search of a problem. Let someone else fight Hellinger's battles. Our schools have enough to do without taking on religious education, too.

Dana Hess spent more than 25 years in South Dakota journalism, editing newspapers in Redfield, Milbank and Pierre. He's retired and lives in Brookings, working occasionally as a freelance writer.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 71 °F

Partly Sunny

Tonight



Low: 46 °F

Mostly Clear

Friday



High: 72 °F

Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 44 °F

Mostly Clear

Saturday



High: 74 °F

Sunny

Thursday



Highs: 70-75°F

Lows: 45-52°F

Hazy skies from patchy smoke during the morning

Friday



Highs: 69-77°F

Lows: 44-49°F

Sunny Skies

NWS Aberdeen, SD



Partly sunny skies with some haze in the morning from Canadian Wildfires tomorrow with high temperatures in the low to mid 70s. Friday will be sunny with high temperatures between the upper 60s and upper 70s.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 78 °F at 2:27 PM

Low Temp: 64 °F at 7:15 AM

Wind: 23 mph at 2:02 AM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 5 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1945

Record Low: 32 in 1962

Average High: 79

Average Low: 51

Average Precip in Sept.: 0.34

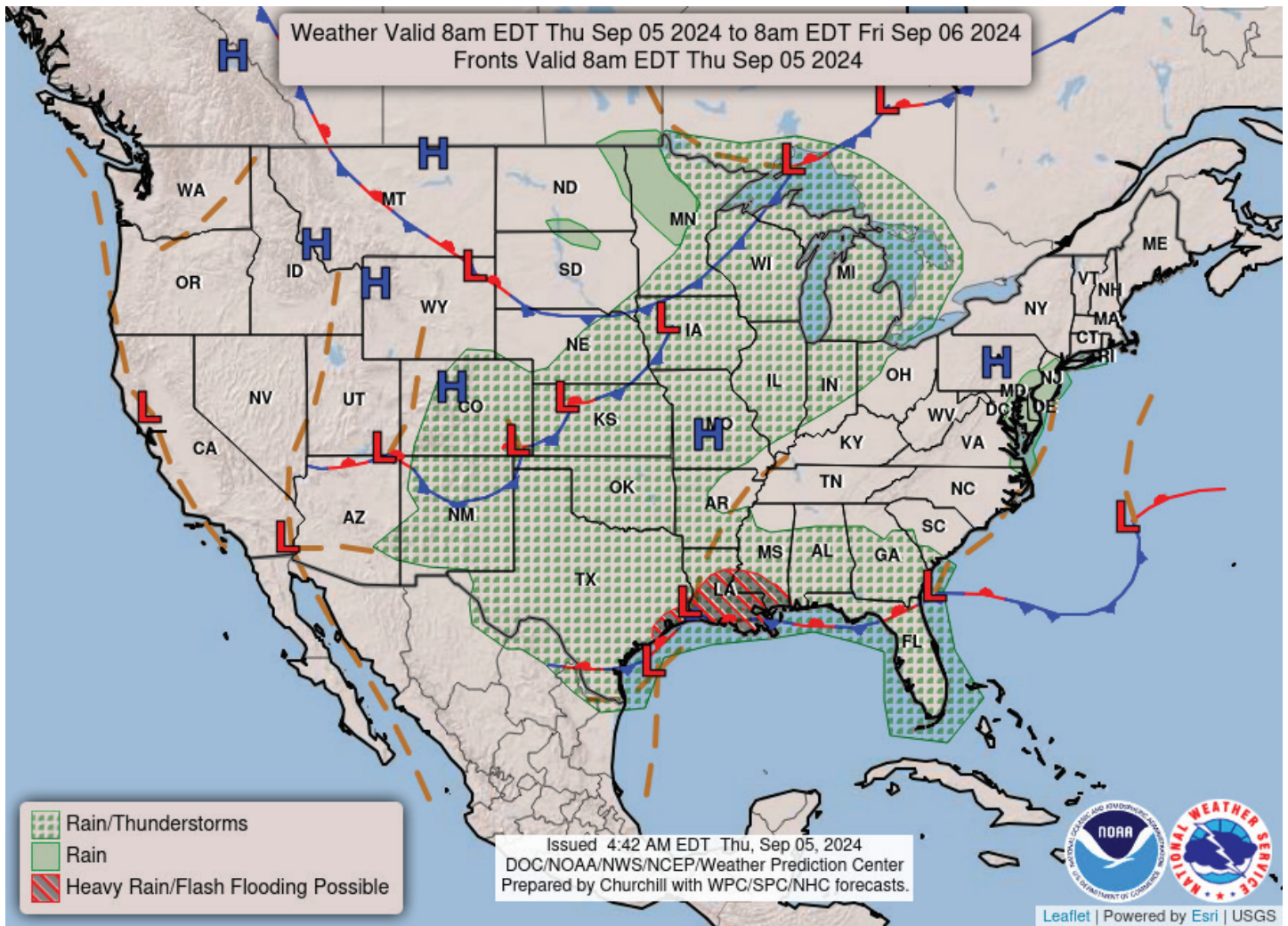
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 16.68

Precip Year to Date: 19.41

Sunset Tonight: 8:03:24 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 6:59:28 am



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Today in Weather History

September 5, 1983: In the late afternoon and early evening, hail up to 2, and ½ inches in diameter pounded crops, trees, buildings, and windows resulting in extensive damage in Spink, Beadle, Turner, and Clay Counties. Trees were stripped of numerous branches broken off.

1666: The Great Fire of London started on September 2nd and continued through September 5th. The fire spread rapidly due to strong westerly winds. This fire consumed 13,200 homes, 87 parish churches, and St. Paul's Cathedral.

1929: Early season snowfall occurred in the mountains of Wyoming and the Black Hills of South Dakota on September 5th and 6th. The highest snowfall amount was 16 inches in Fox Park, Wyoming.

1925 - The temperature at Centerville, AL, soars to 112 degrees to establish a state record. Every reporting station in Alabama was 100 degrees or above that afternoon. (The Weather Channel)

1933: A Category 3 hurricane made landfall on South Padre Island, Texas during the late evening hours on September 4th, or Labor Day. The storm caused 40 fatalities and nearly \$17 million in damages. With the storm making landfall during a holiday weekend, fatalities could have been much higher. The following is from the report of the official in charge at Corpus Christi, Texas: "Probably never before in the history of Texas hurricanes have such widespread and early warnings been given as were received from Washington in advance of this one. The telegram of Saturday, September 2, warning all persons to avoid inaccessible places over the weekend probably saved thousands of lives."

1950: Hurricane Easy was an erratic and unpredictable hurricane that lingered over the Tampa Bay area for days, dropping torrential rains and causing damage especially in Cedar Key, Florida where the storm eventually made landfall. This hurricane dumped 38.7 inches of rain in 24 hours in Yankeetown, a record for the U.S. at the time, and caused \$3.3 million in damage. Total rainfall amounts in Yankeetown was 45.20 inches.

1975 - Strong winds reduced visibilities to near zero in blowing dust resulting in a 22-car chain reaction accident on Interstate 10 near Toltec AZ. Two persons were killed, and 14 others were injured. (The Weather Channel)

1978: Tropical Depression Norman became the most recent tropical system to make landfall in California near Long Beach as an extra-tropical storm.

1987 - Thunderstorms over the Southern and Middle Atlantic Coast States drenched Charleston, SC, with 5.50 inches of rain, and a total of 13.50 inches in two days, flooding homes, and leaving roads and bridges under water. (The National Weather Summary) A tropical storm which formed off the South Atlantic coast was responsible for torrential rains over coastal regions of South Carolina. Between the 30th of August and the 8th of September, Charleston SC received 18.44 inches of rain. The heavy rains caused extensive flooding around the city of Charleston, seriously damaged cotton crops in the eastern part of the state, and resulted in an unusually high number of mosquitos. (Storm Data)

1988 - Five days of heavy rain commenced in west central Florida. Up to 20 inches of rain in four days resulted in extensive urban flooding, and evacuation of 1000 homes. Flooding claimed four lives, and caused more than five million dollars property damage. (The National Weather Summary)(Storm Data)

1989 - Thunderstorms produced six to ten inches of rain in south central Kansas between 6 AM and Noon. Serious flooding was reported around Wichita, with water four feet deep along some roads. A cold front crossing the Northern High Plains Region produced wind gusts to 63 mph at Sheridan WY. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1996: Hurricane Fran made landfall near the tip of Cape Fear, North Carolina with maximum sustained winds near 115 mph on the evening of September 5th. Fran was responsible for 26 deaths and was at the time the most expensive natural disaster ever in North Carolina's history.

2017: Hurricane Irma became a category 5 hurricane with maximum sustained winds of 180 mph. This made Irma one of strongest hurricane ever observed in the open Atlantic Ocean.



EMPTY HANDS

Alexander the Great left an indelible mark on the world. In his early life he was tutored by Aristotle, the great Greek philosopher, which shaped much of his thinking. By the age of thirty he had created one of the largest empires in the ancient world. He was undefeated in battle and to this day is considered to be a military genius and is remembered as one of history's greatest commanders. He established over 30 cities as a result of his conquests and was responsible for spreading the Greek language and culture wherever his victories took him.

When individuals died during that period in history, it was customary for their hands to be wrapped in burial cloth. However, he decided that he would not follow that tradition. He said when he died he wanted people to see that his hands were empty.

When asked why, he replied, "After all, we did not bring any money with us when we came into this world and we can't carry away a single penny."

Paul echoed the same words. He said we brought nothing into the world with us when we came, and we will certainly not take anything with us when we leave. He wants us to understand that one day whatever we have will be left behind when we go to meet our Redeemer. The goal of the Christian is to lay up treasures in heaven by investing in God's Kingdom.

Prayer: Lord, it is natural to want the things of this world. They are attractive and appealing. Enable us to see "things" through Your eyes and use them for Your glory. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. 1 Timothy 6:7

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

Groton Daily Independent

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.03.24

12 41 43 52 55 9

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$740,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 37
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.24

7 9 28 30 31 3

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$8,540,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 52
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.24

4 12 14 40 47 11

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 17 Hrs 7 Mins 53
DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.24

9 21 26 32 33

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$23,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 7
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.24

4 21 34 35 41 9

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.04.24

7 10 21 33 59 20

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$112,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 36
DRAW: Mins 53 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

Groton Daily Independent

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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

Crews slow progress of Sierra wildfire, but evacuations orders remain

By JIM SALTER and CHRISTOPHER WEBER Associated Press

Firefighters battling a California wildfire that has burned through more than 5 square miles (13 square kilometers) of the high Sierra made significant progress slowing its growth on Wednesday, but hundreds of residents whose homes are threatened remained under evacuation orders.

The battle against a wildfire also got a boost in South Dakota thanks to cooler weather and lighter winds. Residents of the state's second-largest city have been on edge, ready to flee if flames from a nearby blaze moved dangerously close.

Estimated containment of the Northern California fire burning about 50 miles (80 kilometers) north of Lake Tahoe remained at 0%. But fire officials said it grew only a few hundred acres on Wednesday as more than 400 firefighters successfully attacked the flames directly on the ground and with retardant drops from the air.

Greg Lowdermilk, a sections operation chief for the inter-agency team, said they were continuing to build new fire lines by hand and with bulldozers and began laying additional hose "so we can continue to increase containment."

The Sierra County sheriff's office said evacuation orders for more than 500 residents of the mountain community of Sierra Brooks, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northwest of Reno, Nevada, would remain in place "until a safe containment level is achieved."

In South Dakota, officials were optimistic homes in Rapid City would remain safe from the First Thunder Fire.

The blaze was reported Monday just a few miles (kilometers) from Rapid City, a community of 80,000 residents near Black Hills National Forest. Mount Rushmore National Memorial, about 25 miles (40 kilometers) away, is far out of harm's way.

The fire burning nearly 160 acres (65 hectares) was fueled by uncommonly hot and dry weather. Tuesday's high in Rapid City was 96 degrees Fahrenheit (35.6 Celsius), well above the normal early-September high of 75 (23.9 Celsius). Winds gusted to 45 mph (72 kph).

As late as Tuesday evening, residents in an evacuation warning area of Rapid City were being told to pack their bags, gather vital belongings and be prepared to leave at a moment's notice. By Wednesday morning, the temperature was far cooler, the winds calmer and the air more humid.

"Firefighters got a good handle on the wildfire last night," an update from the Pennington County Sheriff's Office said. "It's currently at 157 acres. Weather conditions are very favorable today. They are mopping up a large portion on the west side and are hoping to get everything contained and under control today."

Officials don't yet know what caused the fire, which has burned across a steep, rocky area. No structural damage has been reported.

In central California, meanwhile, firefighters working in triple-digit temperatures were battling a blaze that scorched more than 17 square miles (44 square kilometers) of dry brush in mostly open space. A handful of homes were evacuated outside of Coalinga in Fresno County. The Boone Fire was 5% contained Wednesday.

Across the state, red flag warnings for increased wildfire risk were issued. The desert communities of Palm Springs, Twentynine Palms, Needles and Barstow were heating up, with highs of up to 118 F (47.7 Celsius) in Death Valley's Furnace Creek expected at week's end.

In Southern California's Santa Barbara County, officials issued a health alert due to spiking temperatures in inland areas. The health department urged residents to stay indoors during the day and take other measures to avoid heat-related illnesses. Cooling centers were set up across Los Angeles County.

Wildlife trafficking ring killed at least 118 eagles, prosecutors say

By MATTHEW BROWN Associated Press

BILLINGS, Mont. (AP) — A man helped kill at least 118 eagles to sell their feathers and body parts on the black market as part of a long-running wildlife trafficking ring in the western U.S. that authorities allege killed thousands of birds, court filings show.

Travis John Branson is scheduled to be sentenced in federal court on Sept. 18 for his role in the trafficking ring that operated on the Flathead Indian Reservation in Montana and elsewhere.

Prosecutors say the Cusick, Washington man made between \$180,000 and \$360,000 from 2009 to 2021 selling bald and golden eagle parts illegally.

"It was not uncommon for Branson to take upwards of nine eagles at a time," prosecutors with the U.S. Attorney's Office in Montana wrote in a Tuesday court filing. "Not only did Branson kill eagles, but he hacked them into pieces to sell for future profits."

Eagle wings, tails, feathers and other parts are highly sought after by Native Americans who use them in ceremonies.

Prosecutors asked Judge Dana Christensen to sentence Branson to "significant imprisonment" and restitution totaling \$777,250. That includes \$5,000 for every dead eagle and \$1,750 for each of 107 hawks that investigators said he and his co-conspirators killed.

Branson's attorney disputed the prosecutors' claims and said they overstated the number of birds killed. The prosecution's allegation that as many as 3,600 birds died came from a co-defendant, Simon Paul, who remains at large. Branson's attorney suggested in court filings that the stated death toll has fueled public outcry over the case.

"It is notable that Mr. Paul himself went from a 3,600 to 1,000 bird estimate," Federal Defender Andrew Nelson wrote in a Tuesday filing, referring to a statement Paul made to authorities in a March 13, 2021, traffic stop.

Nelson also said restitution for the hawks was not warranted since those killings were not included in last year's grand jury indictment. He said Branson had no prior criminal history and asked for a sentence of probation.

Branson and Paul grew up in the Flathead Reservation area. Since their indictment, Paul has been hiding in Canada to evade justice, according to Nelson.

Paul's defense attorney did not immediately respond to a telephone message seeking comment.

Investigators documented the minimum number of eagles and hawks killed through Branson's text messages, prosecutors said. Two years of his messages were not recovered, leading prosecutors to say the "full scope of Branson's killings is not captured."

Government officials have not revealed any other species of birds killed.

Bald and golden eagles are sacred to many Native Americans. U.S. law prohibits anyone without a permit from killing, wounding or disturbing eagles, or taking their nests or eggs.

Illegal shootings are a leading cause of golden eagle deaths, according to a recent government study.

Members of federally recognized tribes can get feathers and other bird parts legally through from the National Eagle Repository in Colorado and non-government repositories in Oklahoma and Phoenix. There's a yearslong backlog of requests at the national repository.

Branson pleaded guilty in March to conspiracy, wildlife trafficking and two counts of trafficking federally protected bald and golden eagles. He faced a maximum of five years in prison and a \$250,000 fine on the most serious charge, conspiracy. Under a plea deal, prosecutors said they would seek to dismiss additional trafficking charges.

Federal guidelines call for a sentence of roughly three to four years in prison for Branson, they said.

Police exchange fire and shoot an armed man near a museum and the Israeli Consulate in Munich

MUNICH (AP) — Police in Munich exchanged fire with a man in an area near a museum on the city's Nazi-era history and the Israeli Consulate on Thursday. The suspect was wounded.

According to a police spokesperson, officers noticed a person carrying a "long gun" in the Karolinenplatz area, near downtown Munich, at around 9 a.m. There was then an exchange of shots in which the suspect was seriously wounded, but there no was no indication that anyone else was hurt, Andreas Franken told reporters.

Thursday marked the 52nd anniversary of the attack by Palestinian militants on the Israeli delegation at the 1972 Munich Olympics, which ended with the death of 11 Israeli team members, a West German police officer and five of the assailants. It was unclear whether the incident was in any way related to the anniversary.

Police said there was no evidence of any more suspects connected to the incident. They increased their presence in the city, Germany's third-biggest, but said they had no indication of incidents at any other locations or of any other suspects.

Five officers were at the scene at the time; police deployed to the area in force after the shooting. Franken said he had no further details on the suspect or on his firearm.

Israel's Foreign Ministry said the consulate in Munich was closed when the shooting occurred and that no consulate staff had been hurt. The nearby museum also said all of its employees were unharmed.

Speaking at an unrelated news conference in Berlin, German Interior Minister Nancy Faeser described Thursday's shooting as "a serious incident" but said she didn't want to speculate on what had happened. She reiterated that "the protection of Jewish and Israeli facilities has the highest priority."

Ugandan Olympic athlete dies after being severely burned by her partner over a land dispute

By EVELYNE MUSAMBI Associated Press

NAIROBI, Kenya (AP) — Ugandan Olympic athlete Rebecca Cheptegei has died at a Kenyan hospital where she was being treated after 80% of her body was burned in an attack by her partner. She was 33.

A spokesperson at Moi Teaching and Referral Hospital in Eldoret city, Owen Menach, confirmed Cheptegei's death on Thursday. Menach said the long-distance runner died early in the morning after her organs failed. She had been fully sedated on admission at the hospital.

Cheptegei competed in the women's marathon at the Paris Olympics less than a month before the attack. She finished in 44th place.

Her father, Joseph Cheptegei, told journalists at the hospital that he had lost a daughter who was "very supportive" and hopes to get justice.

Trans Nzoia County Police Commander Jeremiah ole Kosiom said Monday that Cheptegei's partner, Dickson Ndiema, bought a can of gasoline, poured it on her and set her ablaze during a disagreement Sunday. Ndiema was also burned and was being treated at the same hospital.

Menach said Ndiema was still in the intensive care unit with burns over 30% of his body but was "improving and stable."

Cheptegei's parents said their daughter bought land in Trans Nzoia to be near the county's many athletic training centers. A report filed by the local chief said the two were heard fighting over the land where her house was built before the attack.

The Uganda Athletics Federation eulogized Cheptegei on the social platform X, writing, "We are deeply saddened to announce the passing of our athlete, Rebecca Cheptegei, early this morning who tragically fell victim to domestic violence. As a federation, we condemn such acts and call for justice. May her soul rest In Peace."

Uganda Olympic Committee President Donald Rukare called the attack "a cowardly and senseless act

that has led to the loss of a great athlete.”

In 2023, Ugandan Olympic runner and steeplechaser Benjamin Kiplagat was found dead with stab wounds. In 2022, Kenyan-born Bahraini athlete Damaris Muthee was found dead and a postmortem report stated that she was strangled. In 2021, long distance runner Agnes Tirop was stabbed to death at her home. Her husband, Ibrahim Rotich, was arrested and charged with murder, the case is ongoing.

Imane Khelif’s Olympic gold inspires Algerian girls to take up boxing

AIN TAYA, Algeria (AP) — In the weeks since Algeria’s Imane Khelif won an Olympic gold medal in women’s boxing, athletes and coaches in the North African nation say national enthusiasm is inspiring newfound interest in the sport, particularly among women.

Khelif’s image is practically everywhere, featured in advertisements at airports, on highway billboards and in boxing gyms. The 25-year-old welterweight’s success in Paris has vaulted her to national hero status, especially after Algerians rallied behind her in the face of uninformed speculation about her gender and eligibility to compete.

Amateur boxer Zougar Amina, a medical student who’s been practicing for a year, called Khelif an idol and role model.

“Since I’ve been boxing, my personality has changed: I’m more confident, less stressed,” she said, describing the sport as “therapy to fight shyness, to learn to defend myself, to gain self-confidence.”

In Ain Taya, the seaside town east of Algiers where Amina boxes, what local media have termed “Khe-lifmania” is on full display.

Behind a door wallpapered with a large photograph of the gold medalist, punching bags hang from the ceiling of the local gym, and young girls warm up near a boxing ring surrounded by shelves of masks, gloves and mouth guards.

The 23 young women and girls who train at the gym — an old converted church — all dream of becoming the next Khelif, their coach Malika Abassi said.

Abassi said the women imitate Khelif’s post-win celebrations, hopping around the boxing ring and saluting fans. She’s worried that the interest in boxing will grow so rapidly that her gym won’t be able to handle it.

“We’re getting calls from parents wanting to sign up their daughters,” she said. “I’m the only coach and our gym is small.”

Algerians from all walks of life flocked to squares in the country’s major cities to watch Khelif’s matches broadcast on projectors. Khelif’s story endeared her to the majority of the conservative country’s population, although a few prominent imams and Islamist politicians have criticized the example she sets by wearing her boxing uniform and not a headscarf.

Still, Amina Abassi, another amateur boxer at the same gym unrelated to her coach, said she believes the deep well of support for Khelif will overwhelm any criticism.

“I’m convinced that even conservative families will allow their daughters to take up boxing,” she said. “Imane has broken through the wall of false modesty and hypocrisy.”

Noureddine Bouteldja, a former amateur boxer and sports journalist, said Khelif has transcended boxing and become a “social phenomenon” throughout Algeria thanks to her personal story and the scrutiny she faced from famous people around the world who — unlike Algerians — saw her advancing in the Olympics as part of the culture war over sex, gender and sport.

Algerians rallied behind Khelif in the face of criticism from Donald Trump, Elon Musk, J.K. Rowling and others who falsely claimed she was transgender. They largely interpreted attacks on her as attacks on their nation itself. And unlike much of the international community that coalesced behind Khelif, on social media most couldn’t register the thought of a transgender athlete from Algeria.

“It’s the victory of a woman who has shown extraordinary resilience and phenomenal strength of character in the face of the campaign to denigrate her gender,” Bouteldja said.

Boxing coaches and administrators said Khelif’s rise from a poor child in rural central Algeria to worldwide

fame has made her an inspirational figure. Mourad Meziane, head of the Algerian Boxing League, expects a huge spike in registration among young women at the start of this school year in mid September.

Algeria currently has 30 regional boxing leagues and 10,000 athletes participating nationwide, he said.

"The impact is inevitable and will only be very positive for women's boxing in Algeria," Meziane said.

Civil society figures and activists said the impact is also sure to reverberate far beyond the boxing ring.

Attorney Aouicha Bakhti said Khelif's story will have a lasting impact on Algerian culture and be a counterweight to strands of society that discourage women's participation in sports.

"This kind of epic helps society, ours in this case, which is in the process of retreating in the face of fundamentalist ideals," said Bakhti, a prominent feminist and political activist.

Israel-Hamas war latest: Israeli strikes kill 5 in occupied West Bank, Palestinian officials say

By The Associated Press undefined

Palestinian health officials say Israeli strikes in the occupied West Bank killed five people, including the son of a prominent jailed militant.

Israel has been carrying out large-scale raids in the territory over the past week that it says are aimed at dismantling militant groups and preventing attacks. The Palestinians fear a widening of the war in Gaza.

The strikes overnight in the northern West Bank town of Tubas killed five people, including Mohammed Zubeidi, the Palestinian Health Ministry said Thursday.

His father, Zakaria Zubeidi, was a well-known militant commander during the second Palestinian uprising in the early 2000s and took part in a rare jail break in 2021 before being arrested and returned to prison days later.

The Israeli military said it conducted three airstrikes in Tubas on militants who threatened its soldiers.

Here's the latest:

Israeli strike on a tent camp kills 4 men and injures 2 children, Palestinian officials say

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip: Palestinian health officials say an Israeli strike on a tent camp killed four men and wounded two children.

The strike early Thursday hit an encampment near the Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central city of Deir al-Balah. Hospital officials confirmed the toll and an Associated Press reporter saw the bodies.

The Israeli military said it carried out a precise strike on a command and control center operated by Hamas and the smaller Islamic Jihad militant group that was embedded in a humanitarian zone.

The nearly 11-month-long war has displaced about 90% of Gaza's 2.3 million people, often multiple times. Israel has ordered mass evacuations into so-called humanitarian zones but occasionally carries out strikes there as well.

A woman who identified herself as Umm Mohammed Wadi said she was staying in a tent close to where the strike occurred.

"What did they do to be struck while sleeping?" she said. "No hospital is safe, nor any school or home."

Israel says it only targets militants and tries to avoid harming civilians.

The Gaza Health Ministry says at least 40,861 Palestinians have been killed and more than 94,000 wounded since the start of the war. It does not differentiate between civilians and fighters in its toll.

The war began after Hamas launched a wide-scale attack into Israel on Oct. 7, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250 people. Around 100 hostages are still inside Gaza, about a third of whom are believed to be dead, after most of the rest were released during a cease-fire in November.

Pope and imam of Southeast Asia's largest mosque make joint call to fight violence, protect planet

By NICOLE WINFIELD and EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Pope Francis and the grand imam of Southeast Asia's largest mosque vowed Thursday to fight religiously inspired violence and protect the environment, issuing a joint call for interfaith friendship and common cause at the heart of Francis' visit to Indonesia.

In an encounter rich with symbolic meaning and personal touches, Francis traveled to Jakarta's iconic Istiqlal Mosque for an interreligious gathering with representatives of the six religions that are officially recognized in Indonesia: Islam, Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Catholicism and Protestantism.

There, he and the grand imam, Nasaruddin Umar, stood at the ground-level entrance to the "Tunnel of Friendship," an underpass which connects the mosque compound with the neighboring Catholic cathedral, Our Lady of the Assumption.

Indonesia, which has the world's largest Muslim population, has held out the tunnel as a tangible sign of its commitment to religious freedom, which is enshrined in the constitution but has been challenged by repeated instances of discrimination and violence against religious minorities.

From January 2021 to July 2024, there were at least 123 cases of intolerance, including rejection, closure or destruction of places of worship and physical attacks, Amnesty International noted on the eve of Francis' visit.

Approaching the elevator to the tunnel, Francis said it was a potent sign of how different religious traditions "have a role to play in helping everyone pass through the tunnels of life with our eyes turned towards the light."

He encouraged Indonesians of every religious tradition to "walk in search of God and contribute to building open societies, founded on reciprocal respect and mutual love, capable of protecting against rigidity, fundamentalism and extremism, which are always dangerous and never justifiable."

Francis traveled to Indonesia, at the start of an 11-day, four-nation trip to Asia and Oceania, to encourage Indonesia to combat religiously inspired violence and pledge the Catholic Church's commitment to greater fraternity.

The meeting at the mosque showed the personal side of that policy, with Francis and Umar — the 87-year-old pope and the 65-year-old imam — showing a clear affinity for one another. As Francis was leaving in his wheelchair, Umar bent down and kissed Francis on the head. Francis then grasped Umar's hand, kissed it and held it to his cheek.

The event began with a similarly moving moment, as a visually impaired Indonesian teenage girl, Kayla Nur Syahwa, chanted verses from the Quran about tolerance among believers of different faiths.

Francis has made improving Catholic-Muslim ties a hallmark of his papacy and prioritizes travel to majority Muslim nations to further the agenda.

During a 2019 visit to the Gulf, Francis and the imam of Al-Azhar, the 1,000-year-old seat of Sunni learning, launched a "Human Fraternity" movement calling for greater Christian-Muslim efforts to promote peace around the world. More recently, Francis traveled to Najaf, Iraq, in 2021 to visit the top Shiite cleric, who delivered a message of peaceful coexistence.

The new initiative launched Thursday, called The Istiqlal Declaration, now becomes another pillar of Francis' interfaith push. It was signed by Francis and Umar at a formal ceremony in the tent on the Istiqlal Mosque compound. The other religious representatives at the encounter didn't co-sign it but were listed by organizers as having "accompanied" it.

The document said religion should never be abused to justify violence, but should instead be used to resolve conflicts and protect and promote human dignity. It also called for "decisive action" to protect the environment and its resources, blaming humanmade actions for the current climate crisis.

"The human exploitation of creation, our common home, has contributed to climate change, leading to various destructive consequences such as natural disasters, global warming and unpredictable weather patterns," it read. "This ongoing environmental crisis has become an obstacle to the harmonious coexis-

tence of peoples.”

Fighting climate change has been an important priority for the Argentine Jesuit pope, who has issued encyclicals insisting on the moral case for caring for God’s creation. The climate issue is of existential importance to Indonesia, a tropical archipelago stretching across the equator and home to the world’s third-largest rainforest and a variety of endangered wildlife and plants.

Umar, the grand imam, recalled in his remarks to the gathering that Istiqlal Mosque was designed by a Christian architect and is used for a variety of social and educational programs that benefit everyone, not just Muslims.

Calling the mosque “a big house for humanity,” he said the tunnel was a melting pot for people of different faiths. “We hope and have the principle that humanity is one, so anyone can enter and benefit,” he said.

Khanit Sannano, the secretary general of Indonesia’s Council of Buddhist Communities, recognized the value of showing Indonesia’s unity to the leader of the world’s Catholics.

“That’s why on this day we come to support and pay respect to him,” he said on the sidelines of the meeting.

The interfaith gathering was the highlight of Francis’ visit to Indonesia, which concludes later Thursday with a giant Mass in Jakarta’s stadium that’s expected to draw some 60,000 people. Catholics represent about 3% of Indonesia’s population of 275 million, but the country is home to the world’s largest Catholic seminary and has long been a top source of priests and nuns for the Catholic Church.

Francis is seeking to encourage their faith by becoming the third pope to visit Indonesia, after Paul VI in 1970 and John Paul II in 1989.

John Saleh Purwonagoro, a Catholic from Yogyakarta, said Indonesians of all faiths can learn from Francis’ preaching about religious harmony.

“Of course I am hoping for world peace, that there is no World War III,” he said at the morning mosque event.

On Friday, Francis heads to Papua New Guinea for the second leg of his trip, one of the longest and farthest in papal history, which will also take him to East Timor and Singapore before it ends Sept. 13.

Americans who have a job are feeling secure. Not so for many who are looking for one

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Laid off by the music streaming service Spotify last year, Joovay Arias figured he’d land another job as a software engineer fairly soon. His previous job search, in 2019, had been a breeze.

“Back then,” he said, “I had tons of recruiters reaching out to me — to the point where I had to turn them down.”

Arias did find another job recently, but only after an unexpected ordeal.

“I thought it was going to be something like three months,” said Arias, 39. “It turned into a year and three months.”

As Arias and other jobseekers can attest, the American labor market, red-hot for the past few years, has cooled. The job market is now in an unusual place: Jobholders are mostly secure, with layoffs low, historically speaking. Yet the pace of hiring has slowed, and landing a job has become harder. On Friday, the government will report on whether hiring slowed sharply again in August after a much-weaker-than-expected July job gain.

“If you have a job and you’re happy with that job and you want to hold onto that job, things are pretty good right now,” said Nick Bunker, economic research director for North America at the Indeed Hiring Lab. “But if you’re out of work or you have a job and you want to switch to a new one, things aren’t as rosy as they were a couple of years ago.”

Since peaking in March 2022 as the economy accelerated out of the pandemic recession, the number of listed job openings has dropped by more than a third, according to the government’s latest monthly report on openings and hiring.

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Temporary-help firms have reduced jobs for 26 of the past 28 months. That's a telling sign: Economists generally regard temp jobs as a harbinger for where the job market is headed because many employers hire temps before committing to full-time hires.

In a roundup this week of local economic conditions, the Federal Reserve's regional banks reported signs of a decelerating job market. Staffing agencies have said that job gains have slowed "as firms are approaching hiring decisions with greater hesitancy," the New York Fed found. "Job candidates are lingering on the market longer."

The Minneapolis Fed said that a staffing agency reported that "businesses are getting a lot more picky" about whom they hire. And the Atlanta Fed found that "only a few" companies planned to step up hiring.

Job-hopping, so rampant two years ago, has slowed as workers have gradually lost confidence in their ability to find better pay or working conditions somewhere else. Just 3.3 million Americans quit their jobs in July, compared with a peak of 4.5 million in April 2022.

"People are staying put because they're afraid they won't find new jobs," said Aaron Terrazas, chief economist at the employment website Glassdoor.

And the Labor Department has reported, in its annual revised estimates of employment growth, that the economy added 818,000 fewer jobs in the 12 months that ended in March than it had previously estimated.

In one respect, it's not at all surprising that the pace of hiring is now moderating. Job growth in 2021 and 2022, as the economy roared back from the COVID-19 recession, was the most explosive on record. Workers gained leverage they hadn't enjoyed in decades. Companies scrambled to hire fast enough to keep up with surging sales. Many employers had to jack up pay and offer bonuses to keep employees.

It was inevitable — and even healthy, economists say, in the long run — for hiring to slow, thereby easing pressure on wage growth and inflation pressures. Otherwise, the economy could have overheated and forced the Fed to tighten credit so aggressively as to cause a recession.

The post-pandemic jobs boom was a marked contrast to the sluggish recovery from the Great Recession of 2007-2009. Back then, it took more than six years for the economy to recover the jobs that had been lost. By contrast, the breathtaking pandemic job losses of 2020 — 22 million — were reversed in less than 2 1/2 years.

Still, the surging economy ignited inflation, leading the Fed to raise interest rates 11 times in 2022 and 2023 to try to cool the job market and slow inflation. And for a while, the economy and the job market appeared immune from higher borrowing costs. Consumers kept spending, businesses kept expanding and the economy kept growing.

But eventually the continued high rates began leaving their mark. Several high-profile companies, including tech giants like Spotify, announced layoffs last year in the face high interest rates. Outside of the economy's technology sector, though, and, to a lesser extent, finance, most American companies haven't cut jobs. The number of people filing first-time applications for unemployment benefits is barely above where it was before the pandemic struck.

Yet the same companies that are keeping workers aren't necessarily adding more.

"Compared to a year or two ago, it's a lot more difficult, particularly for entry-level folks," Glassdoor's Terrazas said. "Because of the gradual drip of layoffs in tech and finance, in professional services over the past year and a half, there have been a lot of high-skilled, experienced folks on the job market.

"By all evidence, they are finding jobs. But they are also pushing more entry-level folks further and further down the queue... Recent grads, folks without a lot of on-the-job experience are feeling the effects of suddenly competing with people who have two, five, 10 years' experience in the jobs market. When those big fish are in the market, the little fish naturally get squeezed out."

Despite the pressure of the highest interest rates in decades, the economy remains in solid shape, having grown at a healthy 3% annual pace from April through June. Most Americans are enjoying solid job security.

Still, given the growing difficulty of changing jobs, even some of those job holders are feeling the chill.

"The reality is a lot of people, even when they have jobs, are feeling a lot of angst about the economy," Terrazas said. "People are feeling a little bit job insecurity, a lot more pressure in the workplace than they have in a while."

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In an August survey, the New York Fed found that Americans as a whole are more worried about losing their jobs now than at any time since 2014, when people were just beginning to feel the full effects of the recovery from the Great Recession of 2008-2009.

Adding to the anxiety is that memories of the recent job boom are still fresh.

"The reference point for most people is still 2021, 2022, when the job market was very strong, and what looks like for us economists as a normalization (of the job market from unsustainable levels), I think for a lot of people feels like a loss of status," Terrazas said.

Consider Abby Neff, who, since graduating from Ohio University in May 2023, has struggled to find the "old-fashioned writing job" that she hoped to land in journalism.

"It's been pretty tough," she said, "to find a permanent journalism job."

In the meantime, Neff, 23, has joined the government's AmeriCorps agency, which mobilizes Americans to perform community service, in southeastern Ohio. The job doesn't pay much. But it has given her the opportunity to write and to learn about everything from forestry to sustainable agriculture to watershed management.

She hadn't expected to encounter such difficulty in finding a job in her field.

"I feel like I did all the 'right things' in college," Neff said ruefully.

She edited a campus magazine and made contacts in the business. She has landed some interviews, only to learn later that the job was filled without her having heard from the employer.

"I will get 'ghosted,'" she said. "I almost feel like I have to hunt employers down to even get a response to an application or submission."

Arias, the software engineer, started looking for a job "the minute I got laid off" in June 2023. At first, he was casual about it. He took time off to care for his newborn daughter and drew money out of his severance package from Spotify. But when the job hunt proved difficult, he "decided to really ramp it up" early this year.

Arias started driving for a ride-sharing service and getting job leads from passengers. He reached out to a company through which he had taken part in a computer coding bootcamp, seeking contacts. Eventually, the networking paid off with a new job.

Yet the process proved much more frustrating than he had envisioned. Employers he had communicated with would vanish without explanation.

"That's the worst part about the experience," Arias said. "You get that introductory message. Then you send your resume. And then that's it. Communication would end there. Or you'd get an automated response. So you don't know what happened, what you did wrong ... It just feels really demoralizing, really stressful, because you don't know what happened."

Teen charged with killing 4 at Georgia high school had been focus of earlier tips about threats

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

WINDER, Ga. (AP) — More than a year ago, tips about online posts threatening a school shooting led Georgia police to interview a 13-year-old boy, but investigators didn't have enough evidence for an arrest. On Wednesday, that boy opened fire at his high school outside Atlanta and killed four people and wounded nine, officials said.

The teen has been charged as an adult in the deaths of Apalachee High School students Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo, both 14, and instructors Richard Aspinwall, 39, and Christina Irimie, 53, Georgia Bureau of Investigation Director Chris Hosey said at a news conference.

At least nine other people — eight students and one teacher at the school in Winder, about an hour's drive northeast of Atlanta — were taken to hospitals with injuries. All were expected to survive, Barrow County Sheriff Jud Smith said.

The teen, now 14, was to be taken to a regional youth detention facility on Thursday.

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Armed with an assault-style rifle, the teen turned the gun on students in a hallway at the school when classmates refused to open the door for him to return to his algebra classroom, classmate Lyela Sayarath said.

The teen earlier left the second period algebra classroom, and Sayarath figured the quiet student who recently transferred was skipping school again.

But he returned later and wanted back in the classroom. Some students went to open the locked door but instead backed away.

"I'm guessing they saw something, but for some reason they didn't open the door," Sayarath said.

When she looked at him through a window in the door, she saw the student turn and heard a barrage of gunshots.

"It was about 10 or 15 of them at once, back-to-back," she said.

The math students ducked onto the floor and sporadically crawled around, looking for a safe corner to hide.

Two school resource officers encountered the shooter within minutes after a report of shots fired went out, Hosey said. The teen immediately surrendered and was taken into custody.

The teen had been interviewed after the FBI received anonymous tips in May 2023 about online threats to commit an unspecified school shooting, the agency said in a statement.

The FBI narrowed the threats down and referred to the case to the sheriff's department in Jackson County, which is adjacent to Barrow County.

The sheriff's office interviewed the then-13-year-old and his father, who said there were hunting guns in the house but the teen did not have unsupervised access to them. The teen also denied making any online threats.

The sheriff's office alerted local schools for continued monitoring of the teen, but there was no probable cause for arrest or additional action, the FBI said.

Hosey said the state Division of Family and Children's Services also had previous contact with the teen and will investigate whether that has any connection with the shooting. Local news outlets reported that law enforcement on Wednesday searched the teen's family home in Bethlehem, Georgia, east of the high school.

"All the students that had to watch their teachers and their fellow classmates die, the ones that had to walk out of the school limping, that looked traumatized," Sayarath said, "that's the consequence of the action of not taking control."

Authorities were still looking into how the teen obtained the gun used in the shooting and got it into the school with about 1,900 students in Barrow County, a rapidly suburbanizing area on the edge of metro Atlanta's ever-expanding sprawl.

It was the the latest among dozens of school shootings across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut, Parkland, Florida, and Uvalde, Texas. The classroom killings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to active shooter drills in classrooms. But they have done little to move the needle on national gun laws.

Before Wednesday, there had been 29 mass killings in the U.S. so far this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. At least 127 people have died in those killings, which are defined as incidents in which four or more people die within a 24-hour period, not including the killer — the same definition used by the FBI.

On Wednesday evening, hundreds gathered in Jug Tavern Park in downtown Winder for a vigil. Volunteers handed out candles and also water, pizza and tissues. Some knelt as a Methodist minister led the crowd in prayer after a Barrow County commissioner read a Jewish prayer of mourning.

Christopher Vasquez, 15, said he attended the vigil because he needed to feel grounded and be in a safe place.

He was in band practice when the lockdown order was issued. He said it felt like a regular drill as students lined up to hide in the band closet.

"Once we heard banging at the door and the SWAT (team) came to take us out, that's when I knew that it was serious," he said. "I just started shaking and crying."

He finally settled down once he was at the football stadium. "I just was praying that everyone I love was safe," he said.

Students in Bangladesh forced out the country's leader a month ago. Where do things stand now?

By JULHAS ALAM Associated Press

DHAKA, Bangladesh (AP) — A month ago, a student-led movement ousted Bangladesh's prime minister, Sheikh Hasina, after weeks of protests and clashes that killed over 600 people and pushed the country to the brink of chaos.

What began as student protests over government jobs became a large-scale revolt against the country's longest-serving prime minister.

Hasina, 76, fled to India on Aug. 5 as anger against her government swelled. But the ouster triggered more violence. Police went on strike and mobs rampaged across the country until a new interim government led by Nobel Peace Prize laureate Muhammad Yunus was sworn in.

Here is where things stand now, a month after the country was roiled by its worst bloodshed in decades:

What is the interim government focused on?

Since he was sworn in, Yunus declared that his key tasks would be to restore peace and law and order, fight corruption, and prepare for new elections.

His Cabinet, which includes two student leaders who spearheaded the protests, has fixed its sights on overhauling and reforming Bangladesh's institutions, from its courts and police to the Election Commission. To do this, it's also seeking support from the United Nations Development Program.

Reforms have been a key priority as demonstrations against Hasina quickly escalated into anger against her increasingly autocratic rule. Her government had jailed opposition members, curbed independent media and curtailed civil society.

Protesters also accused Hasina's Awami League of corruption and said that public institutions, including the Election Commission, had been eroded under her 15-year rule.

What Yunus needs is time.

The 2006 Nobel Peace Prize laureate who pioneered microcredit to help impoverished people, especially women, asked for patience in an address to the nation. He said his Cabinet has worked hard to curb the violence and lawlessness that set in after Hasina was ousted.

"I request everyone to be patient," he said. "It is one of our objectives that public institutions regain public trust."

What is the mood in Bangladesh?

Unrest persists. Garment workers demanding better wages have forced about 100 factories to shut down and tensions are simmering, with lingering but widespread anger against Hasina and her Awami League.

Hasina, now in self-imposed exile, is facing murder charges in more than 100 cases. Key officials perceived as close to her resigned after mass protests.

Many cases have also been registered against those associated with Hasina, her party or her government — from former ministers and judges to journalists and even a prominent cricket player. They've been attacked, stopped from leaving the country and even jailed. Rights groups have also condemned these lump charges.

Most of the cases are legally weak and politically driven, said Zillur Rahman, executive director of the Center for Governance Studies, a Dhaka-based think tank.

This form of "vigilante justice" has sparked fears that "the system that Hasina perpetuated is still alive, just the victims have changed," Rahman said.

What about the students?

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Within a week of unseating Hasina, the students who drove her out were directing traffic in the capital, Dhaka.

Some schools and universities have since reopened, including Dhaka University, which became the epicenter for the protests against Hasina. But things are not back to normal yet.

Many heads of educational institutions have been forced to resign and in some cases, even though classes have formally restarted, few students are attending them.

Still, many students remain optimistic about the interim government's potential to bring about real change.

Sneha Akter, a student at Dhaka University, believes the removal of those who were previously in power is the first step.

"By replacing them, we are correcting past mistakes," she said. "It is not possible to change the entire country in one month. ... We need to give the government some time."

There are those who say the Yunus-led temporary government should remain in power until meaningful reforms are enacted, "whether that takes three months, three years or even six years," said Hafizur Rahman, another Dhaka University student.

What's next?

There is a sense that normalcy is slowly returning — Dhaka's streets are no longer a battleground between security forces and students. Internet is back on and a nationwide curfew with a shoot-on-sight order has been lifted.

With much of the violence eased, there is hope for a new chapter. Shops, banks, hotels and restaurants are open, and police — who went on strike over fears for their own safety — are back at work.

However, their morale is low. Officers are less visible on the streets and seemingly unwilling to tackle disturbances as their crackdown against the students remains fresh in the minds of many Bangladeshis.

Dozens of police were killed during the uprising, their stations torched and looted.

Another challenge is restoring the economy, which was disrupted by the weeklong shutdown during the uprising, sending prices of food and commodities soaring.

The biggest question is: When will the new elections be held?

Some experts say the interim government doesn't have the mandate to enact major reforms and that it should focus on building consensus among political parties on reforms — and schedule the polls.

Hasina's Awami League has remained under the radar so far.

Yunus is banking on the support he enjoys among the country's youth, but Michael Kugelman, director of the Wilson Center's South Asia Institute, says that support may have an expiration date.

"If security continues to be a problem and economic relief is slow to come ... young people could grow impatient and anxious," Kugelman said.

Hasina's chief opposition — the Bangladesh Nationalist Party, or BNP — is seen as having the greatest chance of winning the polls and has been pushing for the elections to happen soon.

"That raises an unsettling question: What happens if the BNP, which has no formal role in the interim government, doesn't get the elections it wants to see soon?" Kugelman said. "Will it launch a movement? Will it trigger unrest?"

"That could pose new risks to law and order and deepen political uncertainty and volatility," he said.

A 14-year-old student fatally shot 4 people in a rampage at a Georgia high school, officials say

By JEFF AMY Associated Press

WINDER, Ga. (AP) — A 14-year-old student opened fire at a Georgia high school and killed four people on Wednesday, authorities said, sending students scrambling for shelter in their classrooms — and eventually to the football stadium — as officers swarmed the campus and parents raced to find out if their children were safe.

The dead were identified as two students and two teachers at Apalachee High School in Winder, about an hour's drive from Atlanta. Killed were two other 14-year-olds, Mason Schermerhorn and Christian An-

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gulo, and instructors Richard Aspinwall and Christina Irimie, Georgia Bureau of Investigation Director Chris Hosey said in a nighttime news conference.

At least nine other people — eight students and one teacher — were taken to hospitals with injuries. All were expected to survive, Barrow County Sheriff Jud Smith said.

The words “hard lockdown” appeared on a screen in junior Layla Ferrell’s health class and lights began flashing. She and her frightened classmates piled desks and chairs in front of the door to create a barricade, she recalled.

Sophomore Kaylee Abner was in geometry class when she heard the gunshots. She and her classmates ducked behind their teacher’s desk, and then the teacher began flipping the desk in an attempt to barricade the classroom door, Abner said. A classmate beside her was praying, and she held his hand while they all waited for police.

After students poured into the football stadium, Abner saw teachers who had taken off their shirts to help treat gunshot wounds.

Two school resource officers encountered the shooter within minutes after a report of shots fired went out, Hosey said. The suspect, a student at the school, immediately surrendered and was taken into custody. He is being charged as an adult with murder. Authorities said the weapon was an assault-style rifle.

The teen had been interviewed after the FBI received anonymous tips in May 2023 about online threats to commit an unspecified school shooting, the agency said in a statement.

The FBI narrowed the threats down and referred to the case to the sheriff’s department in Jackson County, which is adjacent to Barrow County.

The sheriff’s office interviewed the then-13-year-old and his father, who said there were hunting guns in the house but the teen did not have unsupervised access to them. The teen also denied making any online threats.

The sheriff’s office alerted local schools for continued monitoring of the teen, but there was no probable cause for arrest to additional action, the FBI said.

Hosey said the state Division of Family and Children’s Services also had previous contact with the teen and will investigate whether that has any connection with the shooting.

Authorities were still looking into how the suspect obtained the gun used in the shooting and got it into the school in Barrow County, a rapidly suburbanizing area on the edge of metro Atlanta’s ever-expanding sprawl.

At an afternoon news conference, Smith choked up as he began to speak. He said he was born and raised in the community and his kids are in the school system.

“My heart hurts for these kids. My heart hurts for our community,” he said. “But I want to make it very clear that hate will not prevail in this county. I want that to be very clear and known. Love will prevail over what happened today.”

It was the the latest among dozens of school shootings across the U.S. in recent years, including especially deadly ones in Newtown, Connecticut, Parkland, Florida, and Uvalde, Texas. The classroom killings have set off fervent debates about gun control and frayed the nerves of parents whose children are growing up accustomed to active shooter drills in classrooms. But they have done little to move the needle on national gun laws.

Before Wednesday, there had been 29 mass killings in the U.S. so far this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University. At least 127 people have died in those killings, which are defined as incidents in which four or more people die within a 24-hour period, not including the killer — the same definition used by the FBI.

Last year ended with 217 deaths from 42 mass killings, making 2023 one of the deadliest years on record for such shootings in the country.

On Wednesday in Winder, Landon Culver, an 11th grader, said he had stepped out of his algebra class to get a drink of water when he heard shots and then saw someone wearing a black hoodie with a long gun.

“I didn’t really stick around too long to look,” he said.

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Instead he ran back inside the classroom and locked the door. The class huddled in the back in the dark and waited for the rampage to end. Culver listened as gunshots rang out in the building.

"You're just wondering like, which one of those is going to be somebody that you're best friends with or somebody that you love?" he said.

Later police officers arrived and escorted the students out. As they were leaving the building, Culver saw "multiple people who had been shot."

"You hear about this kind of stuff, but you like never think it's going to happen to you until like it's happening."

When Erin Clark, 42, received a text from her son Ethan, a senior, saying there was an active shooter, she rushed from her job at the Amazon warehouse to the school. The two texted "I love you," and Clark prayed for her him as she drove.

With the main road to the school blocked, she parked and ran with other parents. They were directed to the football field, and amid the chaos, Clark found Ethan sitting on the bleachers.

Clark said her son was writing an essay in class when he first heard gunfire. He worked with his classmates to barricade the door and hide.

"I'm so proud of him for doing that," she said. "He was so brave."

"It makes me scared to send him back," Clark said. "I don't know what I'm going to do."

Traffic going to the school was backed up for more than a mile as parents tried to get to their children. Barrow County schools will be closed for the rest of the week as they cooperate with the investigation, but grief counseling will be available.

"It's just outrageous that every day, in our country, in the United States of America, that parents have to send their children to school worried about whether or not their child will come home alive," Vice President Kamala Harris said during a campaign stop in New Hampshire.

In a message posted to social media, former President Donald Trump said: "These cherished children were taken from us far too soon by a sick and deranged monster."

Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp, who canceled a speech planned for the Republican Jewish Coalition in Las Vegas and returned to the state, said in a statement: "This is a day every parent dreads, and Georgians everywhere will hug their children tighter this evening because of this painful event."

Apalachee High School opened in 2000 and has about 1,900 students, according to records from Georgia education officials.

On Wednesday evening, hundreds gathered in Jug Tavern Park in downtown Winder for a vigil. Volunteers handed out candles and also water, pizza and tissues. Some knelt as a Methodist minister led the crowd in prayer after a Barrow County commissioner read a Jewish prayer of mourning.

Some were clad in athletic gear from Apalachee's crosstown rival, Winder-Barrow High School. At the end of the vigil, someone released balloons in Apalachee's blue, gold and white.

Sophomore Shantal Sanvee, who was in a classroom near the gunshots, said she saw "a whole lot of blood. And it was just, it was just horrible."

"I don't think I want to be here for like a long time now," Sanvee said.

Chinese families seeking to escape a competitive education system have found a haven in Thailand

By HUIZHONG WU Associated Press

CHIANG MAI, Thailand (AP) — The competition started in second grade for DJ Wang's son.

Eight-year-old William was enrolled at a top elementary school in Wuhan, a provincial capital in central China. While kindergarten and first grade were relatively carefree, the homework assignments started piling up in second grade.

By third grade, his son was regularly finishing his day around midnight.

"You went from traveling lightly to carrying a very heavy burden," Wang said. "That sudden switch, it

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was very hard to bear.”

Wang, who traveled often to Chiang Mai in northern Thailand for his job in tourism, decided to make a switch, moving his family to the city that sits at the base of mountains.

The family is among a wave of Chinese flocking to Thailand for its quality international schools and more relaxed lifestyle. While there are no records tracking how many are moving abroad for education, they join other Chinese expats leaving the country, from wealthy entrepreneurs moving to Japan to protect their wealth, to activists unhappy with the political system, to young people who want to opt out of China’s ultra-competitive work culture, at least for a while.

EDITOR’S NOTE: This story is part of the China’s New Migrants package, a look by The Associated Press at the lives of the latest wave of Chinese emigrants to settle overseas.

Jenson Zhang, who runs an education consultancy, Vision Education, for Chinese parents looking to move to Southeast Asia, said many middle-class families choose Thailand because schools are cheaper than private schools in cities like Beijing and Shanghai.

“Southeast Asia, it’s within reach, the visa is convenient and the overall environment, as well as people’s attitude towards Chinese people, it allows Chinese parents to feel more secure,” Zhang said.

A 2023 survey by private education company New Oriental found Chinese families also increasingly considering Singapore and Japan for their children’s overseas study. But tuition and the cost of living are much higher than in Thailand.

Within Thailand, the slow-paced city of Chiang Mai often ends up being the top choice. Other options include Pattaya and Phuket, both popular beach resorts, and Bangkok, though the capital is usually more expensive.

The trend has been ongoing for about a decade, but in recent years it’s gathered pace.

Lanna International School, one of Chiang Mai’s more selective schools, saw a peak of interest in the 2022-2023 academic year, with inquiries doubling from a year earlier.

“Parents were really in a rush, they wanted to quickly change to a new school environment” because of pandemic restrictions, said Grace Hu, an admissions officer at Lanna International, whose position helping Chinese parents through the process was created in 2022.

Du Xuan of Vision Education says parents coming to Chiang Mai fall into two types: Those who planned in advance what education they want for their kids, and those who experienced difficulties with the competitive Chinese education system. The majority are from the second group, she said.

In Chinese society, many value education to the point where one parent may give up their job and rent an apartment near their child’s school to cook and clean for them, and ensure their life runs smoothly. Known as “peidu,” or “accompanied studying,” the goal is academic excellence, often at the expense of the parent’s own life.

That concept has become twisted by the sheer pressure it takes to keep up. Chinese society has come up with popular buzzwords to describe this hyper-competitive environment, from “neijuan” — which roughly translated means the rat race that leads to burnout — or “tang ping,” rejecting it all to drop out, or “lie flat.”

The terms reflect what success looks like in modern China, from the hours of cramming required for students to succeed on their exams to the money parents spend hiring tutors to give their kids an extra edge in school.

The driving force behind it all is numbers. In a country of 1.4 billion people, success is viewed as graduation from a good college. With a limited number of seats, class rank and test scores matter, especially on the college entrance exams known as the “gaokao.”

“If you have something, it means someone else can’t have that,” said Vision Education’s Du, whose own daughters attend school in Chiang Mai. “We have a saying about the gaokao: ‘One point will topple 10,000 people.’ The competition is that intense.”

Wang said his son William was praised by his second-grade teacher in Wuhan as gifted, but to stand out in a class of 50 kids and continue to get that level of attention would mean giving money and gifts to

the teacher, which other parents were already doing before he was even aware of the need.

Back in Wuhan, parents are expected to know the material covered in extracurricular tutoring classes, as well as what is being taught in school, and ensure their child has mastered it all, Wang said. It's often a full-time job.

In Chiang Mai, freed from China's emphasis on rote memorization and hours of homework, students have time to develop hobbies.

Jiang Wenhui moved from Shanghai to Chiang Mai last summer. In China, she said, she had accepted that her son, Rodney, would get average grades because of his mild attention deficit disorder. But she could not help thinking twice about her decision to move given how competitive every other family was.

"In that environment, you'll still feel anxious," she said. "Should I give it another go?"

In China, her energy was devoted toward helping Rodney keep up in school, shuttling him to tutoring and keeping him on top of his coursework, pushing him along every step of the way.

In Thailand, Rodney, who's about to start 8th grade, has taken up acoustic guitar and piano, and carries around a notebook to learn new English vocabulary — all of it his own choice, Jiang said. "He'd ask me to add an hour of English tutoring. I thought his schedule was too full, and he told me, 'I want to try and see if it's OK.'"

He has time to pursue hobbies and hasn't needed to see a doctor for his attention deficit disorder. After bonding with one of his teachers about snakes, he is raising a pet ball python called Banana.

Wang says his son William, who is now 14 and about to enter high school, finishes his homework well before midnight and has developed outside interests. Wang, too, has changed his perspective on education.

"Here, if he gets a bad grade, I don't think much of it, you just work on it," he said. "Is it the case that if he gets a bad grade, that he will be unable to become a successful adult?"

"Now, I don't think so."

Can Harris prosecute the political case against Trump? Key questions ahead of their debate

By STEVE PEOPLES AP National Political Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Donald Trump and Kamala Harris will debate for the first — and perhaps, last — time on Tuesday night as the presidential candidates fight to sway voters on the biggest stage in U.S. politics.

The meeting comes just 75 days after President Joe Biden's disastrous debate performance triggered a political earthquake that ultimately forced him from the race. Few expect such a transformative result this time, but Trump is on a mission to end Harris' "honeymoon" as polls suggest the Democratic vice president is now even — or slightly ahead — of the Republican former president in some swing states.

Harris, a former courtroom prosecutor, will enter the night with relatively high expectations against a Republican opponent with 34 felony convictions and a penchant for false statements. The question is whether Harris, who did not particularly stand out during primary debates in her 2020 presidential campaign, can prosecute Trump's glaring liabilities in a face-to-face meeting on live television with the world watching.

The 90-minute meeting begins at 9 p.m. ET Tuesday inside Philadelphia's National Constitutional Center. It will be moderated by ABC News anchors David Muir and Linsey Davis. In accordance with rules negotiated by both campaigns, there will be no live audience.

Here's what we're watching for on a historic night:

Can Harris do what Biden could not?

Biden set an incredibly low bar for Harris in the June 27 debate. The president struggled to offer coherent arguments or even finish his sentences. But the anti-Trump coalition was most disappointed that he failed to take advantage of Trump's obvious political liabilities — whether on abortion, the Jan. 6 Capitol attack, character issues or his legal trouble.

Harris is expected to do much better. But even with such fertile terrain, scoring points against Trump on the debate stage is easier said than done. Trump may be the most experienced debater in modern presidential history. As a former reality television star, he knows how to dominate television coverage.

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And he clearly likes to fight.

Harris recently suggested that she may be looking forward to a political brawl. "Donald," she told a cheering audience last month in Atlanta, "if you've got something to say, say it to my face."

Can she back up the tough talk? The world is about to find out.

Can Trump focus?

Trump is not known for his discipline or preparation. His debate performances, like his governing style, are typically fueled much more by instinct than thoughtful analysis.

Therefore, few expect Trump to offer a clear and concise line of attack against Harris on Tuesday night. Still, he needs to do better than the kitchen-sink approach he's been testing on the campaign trail for much of the last month.

Trump has questioned Harris' racial identity. He's falsely called her a communist. He's questioned her strength. He's jabbed her as a San Francisco liberal. And he's reminded voters that she has served in the Biden White House for nearly four years and would presumably continue the president's policies for another four years if she wins.

It is the Biden connection that many Republicans, inside and outside of Trump's campaign, believe is most effective. They want him to evoke Ronald Reagan's 1980 debate-stage jab — "Are you better off?" — early and often.

The question is whether Trump can deliver that message in a way that isn't immediately overshadowed by a much more controversial statement. Recent history offers reasons to be skeptical.

Body language matters

There will, of course, be an obvious gender dynamic on stage Tuesday night.

Fair or not, body language and tone are viewed differently in a debate between a man and a woman. Just ask Hillary Clinton. She said Trump made her "skin crawl" when he stood behind her as she was speaking during a town hall-style debate in 2016.

The candidates will be expected to stay behind their podiums on Tuesday night. But Republicans are hopeful that Trump will avoid any other provocations like pointing, yelling or otherwise approaching Harris in a way that might be off-putting to suburban women or other swing voters.

Harris, too, will face unique challenges related to her race and gender as voters consider whether to make her the nation's first female president. Some voters still say they're not comfortable with the idea. If she comes across as angry, she risks playing into racist tropes about Black women.

While the gender dynamic looms, do not underestimate the significance of their age difference, either.

Harris is almost two decades younger than the 78-year-old Trump. Age was viewed as a political advantage for Trump when he was facing the 81-year-old Biden, but the situation is now reversed against the 59-year-old Harris. If he wins, Trump would be the oldest U.S. president ever elected.

The format will be somewhat different as well, in accordance with a set of rules the candidates agreed upon this week.

There will be no live audience, no opening statements and no props allowed. Candidates' microphones will be muted when their opponent is on the clock, a stipulation that created some controversy in recent days.

Trump reluctantly agreed to the mute function when he faced Biden in June, but after that debate, his team determined it was a net positive if voters did not hear from the Republican former president while his opponent was speaking. Harris' team was pushing to return to a normal format without mute buttons.

Abortion vs Immigration

Policy sometimes plays second to personality in presidential debates, but there are dramatic differences between the candidates on key issues that are on the minds of millions of voters.

Republicans hope Trump makes immigration a defining issue of the debate.

The GOP has effectively condemned the Biden administration's handling of illegal immigration at the U.S.-Mexico border for much of the last four years. Once an issue that appealed mostly to the Republican base, illegal immigration — and related concerns about drugs, crime and national security — is now a top issue for voters across the political spectrum.

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Harris will be eager to remind voters that Trump helped kill a bipartisan immigration bill that would have done much to fix the problem. But overall, Harris is likely to be on the defensive when the issue comes up. Democrats, meanwhile, want to focus on abortion.

Trump, of course, appointed three Supreme Court justices who later overturned the landmark Roe v. Wade decision that protected a woman's right to choose abortion. Trump has repeatedly said he was proud that Roe was defeated. But aware that such a view isn't popular among many women, he has tried to moderate his stance on the divisive issue.

Harris won't make that easy. Stating the obvious, as a woman, she is positioned to be a much more effective messenger on the issue than Biden was. And Trump can't afford to lose many more female voters.

Look out for wild card Trump

If you ask Trump's previous debate opponents what they're watching for on Tuesday night — and we did — many say the same thing: Look out for the thing he says or does that Harris can't possibly prepare for.

Trump is the ultimate wild card who has found tremendous political success by ignoring the traditional rules of politics. He will say or do whatever he thinks is best in the moment. And Harris, who has dedicated several days to debate prep, can't make a plan for everything.

At this point, it's hard to imagine Trump surprising anyone with new material. He has praised dictators, talked about genitalia size, suggested suspending the U.S. Constitution and said that Harris only recently "turned Black."

Trump's own team doesn't know what he'll do or say on any given day. That's incredibly risky for Trump. But it also puts enormous pressure on Harris.

Trump election subversion case back in court as judge holds hearing that could set its path forward

By ERIC TUCKER, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and MICHAEL KUNZELMAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A judge will hear arguments Thursday about potential next steps in the federal election subversion prosecution of Donald Trump in the first hearing since the Supreme Court narrowed the case by ruling that former presidents are entitled to broad immunity from criminal charges.

Prosecutors and defense lawyers submitted dueling proposals late Friday ahead of the status conference before U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan, who is presiding over the case charging Trump with plotting to overturn the results of the 2020 election in the run-up to the Jan. 6, 2021 riot at the U.S. Capitol. Trump is not expected to be present.

Special counsel Jack Smith's team, which filed a new indictment last week to strip out certain allegations against Trump and comply with the Supreme Court ruling, said it could be ready at any time to file a legal brief laying out its position on how to apply the justices' immunity opinion to the case.

Defense lawyers, by contrast, said they intended to file multiple motions to dismiss the case, including one that piggybacks off a Florida judge's ruling that said Smith's appointment was unconstitutional.

Neither side envisions a trial happening before the November election in which Trump is the Republican nominee, especially given the amount of work ahead as Chutkan is tasked with determining which of the acts alleged in the indictment can remain part of the case in light of the Supreme Court opinion.

The court in July ruled that former presidents enjoy absolute immunity for the exercise of their core constitutional duties and are presumptively immune from prosecution for all other official acts.

Smith's team responded to the ruling with a revised indictment last week that removed references to Trump's efforts to use the law enforcement powers of the Justice Department to remain in power, an area of conduct to which the Supreme Court said Trump is immune.

The case is one of two federal prosecutions against Trump. The other, charging him with illegally hoarding classified documents at his Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, was dismissed in July by U.S. District Judge Aileen Cannon, who said Smith's appointment as special counsel was unlawful.

The Smith team has appealed.

Opening statements are scheduled in the trial of a man who killed 10 at a Colorado supermarket

By COLLEEN SLEVIN Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — Opening statements are scheduled Thursday in the trial of a mentally ill man who shot and killed 10 people at a Colorado supermarket in 2021.

Police say Ahmad Al Aliwi Alissa targeted people who were moving, both inside and outside the store in the college town of Boulder, killing most of them in just over a minute.

No one, including Alissa's lawyers, disputes he was the shooter. Alissa, who was diagnosed with schizophrenia after the shooting, has pleaded not guilty by reason of insanity so the three-week trial is expected to focus on whether or not he was legally sane — able to understand the difference between right and wrong — at the time of the shooting.

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

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

Why Alissa carried out the mass shooting remains unknown.

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.

The defense argued in a court filing that his relatives said he irrationally believed that the FBI was following him and that he would talk to himself as if he were 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'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.

Voting-related lawsuits filed in multiple states could be a way to contest the presidential election

By NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press

Before voters even begin casting ballots, Democrats and Republicans are engaged in a sprawling legal fight over how the 2024 election will be run, a series of court disputes that could even run past Election Day if the outcome is close.

Both parties have bulked up their legal teams for the fight. Republicans have filed more than 100 lawsuits challenging various aspects of vote-casting after being chastised repeatedly by judges in 2020 for bringing complaints about how the election was run only after votes were tallied.

After Donald Trump has made "election integrity" a key part of his party's platform following his false claims of widespread voter fraud in 2020, the Republican National Committee says it has more than 165,000 volunteers ready to watch the polls in November.

Democrats are countering with what they are calling "voter protection," rushing to court to fight back against the GOP cases and building their own team with over 100 staffers, several hundred lawyers and what they say are thousands of volunteers for November.

Despite the flurry of litigation, the cases have tended to be fairly small-bore, with few likely impacts for most voters.

"When you have all this money to spend on litigation, you end up litigating less and less important stuff," said Derek Muller, a law professor at Notre Dame University.

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The stakes would increase dramatically should Trump lose the election and then try to overturn the result. That's what he attempted in 2020, but the court system rejected him across the board. Trump and his allies lost more than 60 lawsuits trying to reverse President Joe Biden's win.

Whether they could be successful this year depends on the result of the election, experts said. A gap of about 10,000 votes — roughly the number that separated Biden and Trump in Arizona and Georgia four years ago — is almost impossible to reverse through litigation. A closer one of a few hundred votes, like the 547-vote margin that separated George W. Bush and Al Gore in Florida in 2000, is much more likely to hinge on court rulings about which ballots are legitimate.

"If he loses, he's going to claim that he won. That goes without saying," Rick Hasen, a law professor at the University of California, Los Angeles, said of Trump. "If it looks like what we had last time ... I expect we'll see the same kind of thing."

Trump has done nothing to discourage that expectation as he seeks his return to the White House. He has said he would accept the results of the election only if it's "free and fair," which raises the possibility it would not be, something he continues to falsely contend was the case in 2020. He also continued to insist that he could only lose due to fraud.

"The only way they can beat us is to cheat," Trump said at a Las Vegas rally in June.

To be clear, there was no widespread fraud in 2020 or any election since then. Reviews, recounts and audits in the battleground states where Trump disputed his loss four years ago all affirmed that Biden won, and Trump's own attorney general said there was no evidence that fraud tipped the election.

Trump installed his daughter-in-law, Lara Trump, as co-chair of the Republican National Committee, which then named attorney Christina Bobb as the head of its election integrity division. Bobb is a former reporter for the conservative One America News Network who has been indicted by Arizona's attorney general for being part of an effort to promote a slate of Trump electors in the state, even though Biden won it.

Echoing its presidential candidate, the RNC said it's trying to counter Democratic mischief.

"President Trump's election integrity effort is dedicated to protecting every legal vote, mitigating threats to the voting process and securing the election," RNC spokeswoman Claire Zunk said in a statement. "While Democrats continue their election interference against President Trump and the American people, our operation is confronting their schemes and preparing for November."

This time around, Democrats say they're prepared for whatever Trump and the RNC might do.

"For four years, Donald Trump and his MAGA allies have been scheming to sow distrust in our elections and undermine our democracy so they can cry foul when they lose," Jen O'Malley Dillon, Vice President Kamala Harris' campaign manager, said in a statement. "But also for four years, Democrats have been preparing for this moment, and we are ready for anything."

The highest-profile litigation so far has been in Georgia, over new rules from a Republican-appointed majority on the Georgia State Board of Elections that has echoed the former president's conspiracy theories about 2020. The rules could allow members of local election boards to try to refuse to certify elections, a gambit Trump supporters have tried, unsuccessfully, to reverse losses in 2020 and 2022.

A Trump-aligned group has sued to have courts declare that election board members have that power while Democrats have sued to overturn the new rules. Georgia Secretary of State Brad Raffensperger, a Republican, has questioned the wisdom of the board changing procedures so close to the election. Legal experts say the state board's rules conflict with longstanding Georgia law that certification is not optional.

Whether local boards delay or refuse to certify the results from this year's presidential election has been a growing concern, especially after a handful of local officials took that step during this year's primaries. But election experts say the fears of a certification crisis this fall are overblown, in large part because most state laws are clear that state or local boards must certify the official results brought to them by election offices. The courtroom remains the most important venue for candidates who want to challenge election results.

The litigation to date has often been about relatively esoteric matters, but some cases could have implications after November if Trump loses the election. The RNC has filed lawsuits in Michigan, Nevada and

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North Carolina alleging the states need to remove inactive or ineligible voters from their rolls. Late last month, Republicans sued North Carolina over a favorite issue — the risk of noncitizens voting, which is rare. They contend the state wasn't doing enough to safeguard against it.

So far none of the claims have succeeded. But if Trump loses the election in those states by a narrow margin, that sort of pre-election litigation could pave the way for him to claim in court that the vote was invalid.

The other area that could have ramifications in November and beyond is whether mail ballots arriving after Election Day can be counted. Nineteen states allow that as long as the ballots are sent before polls close. The RNC sued to overturn this provision in Nevada and Mississippi, but both cases were dismissed by judges.

The RNC has appealed those cases, and the first is scheduled to be heard by the 5th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals later this month. It's the sort of issue that could end up before the U.S. Supreme Court. Some Trump allies in 2020 hoped the court would declare him the winner, but the late-arriving mail ballot litigation at the time showed the limits of that tactic.

The Pennsylvania Supreme Court ruled that the state had to count mail ballots that arrived up to four days after Election Day. Republicans then appealed that ruling to the nation's highest court, and late-arriving mail was counted separately in November 2020 while everyone waited for the Supreme Court to weigh in.

In the end, the Supreme Court didn't take up the case. Trump lost Pennsylvania by more than 80,000 votes, so the 10,000 late-arriving mail ballots wouldn't have even made a difference.

US Open: Jessica Pegula upsets No. 1 Iga Swiatek to reach her first Grand Slam semifinal

By HOWARD FENDRICH AP Tennis Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The questions wouldn't stop for Jessica Pegula: Why was she 0-6 in Grand Slam quarterfinals heading into her U.S. Open matchup against No. 1 Iga Swiatek? What could Pegula do to change that?

Came up during her on-court interview after winning in the previous round. And again at the news conference that followed. And again during a brief TV interview right before striding onto the court at Arthur Ashe Stadium on Wednesday night.

If that all weighed on Pegula, the 30-year-old American hid it well, pulling off a big upset by easily beating Swiatek 6-2, 6-4 at Flushing Meadows and earning a debut trip to the semifinals at a major.

"There have been so many freaking times, and I just kept losing," said Pegula, who has won 14 of her past 15 matches, all on hard courts. "I know everyone keeps asking me about it, but I was like, 'I don't know what else to do. I just need to get there again and, like, win the match.' So thank God I was able to do it. And finally — finally! — I can say, 'Semifinalist.'"

She will face unseeded Karolina Muchova of the Czech Republic on Thursday for a berth in the final.

Muchova, the runner-up to Swiatek at the 2023 French Open, made it to the final four in New York for the second consecutive year with a 6-1, 6-4 victory over No. 22 seed Beatriz Haddad Maia earlier Wednesday. Shortly after losing to Coco Gauff in last year's semifinals, Muchova had surgery on her right wrist, then was off the tour for about 10 months until returning this June.

That was the latest in a series of injuries for Muchova, who called it "one of the worst ones that I had."

"Doesn't seem to matter how many matches she's really gotten in; she seems to have good results no matter what. It's cool to kind of see her back, because I think she's really great for the game and the way she plays is really fun," said the No. 6-seeded Pegula, who defeated Muchova at the Cincinnati Open last month. "She's good, so talented, so skilled as a tennis player. Like, so complete. Doesn't have a ton of weaknesses."

The other women's match Thursday night also will feature an American making her major semifinal debut, No. 13 Emma Navarro, against No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka, who won the past two Australian Open titles. Sabalenka lost to Gauff in the 2023 final in New York; Navarro ended Gauff's title defense in the fourth round.

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There are two Americans in the men's semifinals, too, and they'll face each other: No. 12 Taylor Fritz takes on No. 20 Frances Tiafoe on Friday.

This is the first time since the 2003 U.S. Open that multiple Americans reached both the women's and the men's semis.

The other men's semifinal will be No. 1 Jannik Sinner against No. 25 Jack Draper. Sinner defeated 2021 champion Daniil Medvedev 6-2, 1-6, 6-1, 6-4 on Wednesday night to reach the final four at Flushing Meadows for the first time. Draper eliminated Alex de Minaur in straight sets.

The lopsided nature of Pegula's win was surprising, but she did not think this day would never arrive.

"I knew I could do it," she said. "I just had to go out and execute my game and not get frustrated."

Swiatek served poorly in the first set and her forehand was a real problem, with 22 of her 41 unforced errors coming on that side. Pegula made only 22 unforced errors in all and used terrific defense to keep forcing Swiatek to hit an extra shot.

"It's never easy to play against Jess. She has a tricky ball because it's pretty low and pretty flat," Swiatek said. "I just made too many mistakes."

Pegula also kept breaking serve against Swiatek, who counts the 2022 U.S. Open among her five Grand Slam titles and has led the WTA rankings for most of the past 2 1/2 years.

Entering Wednesday, Swiatek had lost just a pair of service games across four matches in the tournament, both in the first round — and she didn't even face a single break point in any of her most recent three contests. That's all part of why the 23-year-old from Poland was listed as a -350 money-line favorite against Pegula, according to BetMGM Sportsbook.

But Pegula, whose parents own the NFL's Buffalo Bills and NHL's Buffalo Sabres, didn't have much trouble in that department, especially at the outset, breaking in each of Swiatek's initial two service games, which both ended with double-faults, and three of the first six.

It helped that Swiatek was unable to properly calibrate her first serves early, putting just 2 of 12 — 16.7% — in play at the start, only 36% for the opening set.

"I didn't really understand why my serve wasn't working," Swiatek said.

Even as the games kept going in her favor, Pegula didn't show much perceptible emotion, whether grabbing a 4-0 lead just 21 minutes in or taking up that set, which was greeted with a slight shake of her left fist as she walked to her sideline seat.

Swiatek didn't hide her thoughts that well. She smacked her racket against the top of the net. She slapped her right thigh after a forehand flew wide to get broken yet again and trail 4-3 in the second set.

Fifteen minutes later, it was over.

"I feel like when I have high expectations, I never perform well," Swiatek said. "(But) it's hard to have low expectations when everybody is expecting something from you."

Israel's Netanyahu demands open-ended control of Gaza's border with Egypt

By JOSEF FEDERMAN Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said Wednesday that Israel must keep open-ended control of Gaza's border with Egypt, digging in on his stance on an issue that has threatened to derail cease-fire efforts.

Netanyahu's comments came as the United States is developing a new proposal for a cease-fire and hostage release, hoping to break a long deadlock and bring an end to the nearly 11-month-old war.

The question of Israeli control of the Philadelphi corridor — a narrow strip of land along Gaza's border with Egypt, seized by troops in May — has become a central obstacle in the talks. Hamas has demanded an eventual full Israeli withdrawal from Gaza in the multi-phase truce deal.

Egypt, a mediator in the talks along with the U.S. and Qatar, has also demanded a concrete timeline for Israeli troops to leave the Philadelphi corridor. And on Wednesday, the United Arab Emirates, which established formal ties with Israel in the 2020 Abraham Accords, also criticized the Israeli stance.

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Speaking to foreign journalists, Netanyahu repeated his stance that Israel must maintain its hold on the border to prevent Hamas from rearming by smuggling weapons into Gaza. He said it was a vital part of the war goal of ensuring Hamas cannot repeat its Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

"Gaza must be demilitarized, and this can only happen if the Philadelphi corridor remains under firm control," he said, claiming Israeli troops had discovered dozens of tunnels under the border.

He said Israel would only consider withdrawing from the corridor when presented with an alternative force to police it.

"Bring me anyone who will actually show us ... that they can actually prevent the recurrence" of smuggling, he said. "I don't see that happening right now. And until that happens, we're there."

Families of remaining hostages have stepped up their demands that he agree to a deal after Hamas killed six hostages last week as Israeli troops appeared to be moving to rescue them. In angry public statements, hostage families have accused Netanyahu of blocking a deal and potentially sacrificing their loved ones' lives for the sake of holding the border strip. Hundreds of thousands of Israelis have taken to the streets in recent days, calling for a deal and saying time is running out to bring home the hostages alive.

Netanyahu pushed back against the pressure, saying his stance was necessary to "ensure Hamas doesn't pose a threat to Israel."

"I can understand the torment of families," he said. "But the responsibility of leaders is not merely to share the sentiment, the emotion, but also to exercise judgment."

Asked by journalists for a timeline on ending the war, he refused to give one. "How long can we do this? As long as it takes to achieve this victory. And I think we're getting a lot closer," he said.

Netanyahu repeatedly insisted holding the border would also pressure Hamas to release hostages. At one point, he erroneously claimed the invasion of Rafah in May forced Hamas' first release of hostages – which took place months earlier in November under a weeklong ceasefire deal. He then said the deal was "the result of our invasion, the military pressure we put on them."

The Palestinian news agency Wafa reported early Thursday that an Israeli drone strike killed five men and wounded another in a car in Tubas in the West Bank.

The Israeli military said in a statement that it carried out "three targeted strikes on armed terrorists that posed a threat on the soldiers," without immediately elaborating. For more than a week, hundreds of Israeli forces have been carrying out the deadliest operation in the occupied West Bank since the Israel-Hamas war began.

Chinese migrants flock to Mexico in search of jobs, a future and, for some, a taste of freedom

By CATERINA MORBIATO Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Despite her well-paying tech job, Li Daijing didn't hesitate when her cousin asked for help running a restaurant in Mexico City. She packed up and left China for the Mexican capital last year, with dreams of a new adventure.

The 30-year-old woman from Chengdu, the Sichuan provincial capital, hopes one day to start an online business importing furniture from her home country.

"I want more," Li said. "I want to be a strong woman. I want independence."

Li is among a new wave of Chinese migrants who are leaving their country in search of opportunities, more freedom or better financial prospects at a time when China's economy has slowed, youth unemployment rates remain high and its relations with the U.S. and its allies have soured.

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story is part of the China's New Migrants package, a look by The Associated Press at the lives of the latest wave of Chinese emigrants to settle overseas.

While the U.S. border patrol arrested tens of thousands of Chinese at the U.S-Mexico border over the past year, thousands are making the Latin American country their final destination. Many have hopes to

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start businesses of their own, taking advantage of Mexico's proximity to the U.S.

Last year, Mexico's government issued 5,070 temporary residency visas to Chinese immigrants, twice as many as the previous year — making China third, behind the United States and Colombia, as the source of migrants granted the permits.

A deep-rooted diaspora that has fostered strong family and business networks over decades makes Mexico appealing for new Chinese arrivals; so does a growing presence of Chinese multinationals in Mexico, which have set up shop to be close to markets in the Americas.

"A lot of Chinese started coming here two years ago — and these people need to eat," said Duan Fan, owner of "Nueve y media," a restaurant in Mexico City's stylish Roma Sur neighborhood that serves the spicy food of Sichuan, his home province.

"I opened a Chinese restaurant so that people can come here and eat like they do at home," he said.

Duan, 27, arrived in Mexico in 2017 to work with an uncle who owns a wholesale business in Tepito, near the capital's historic center, and was later joined by his parents.

Unlike earlier generations of Chinese who came to northern Mexico from the southern Chinese province of Guangdong, the new arrivals are more likely to come from all over China.

Data from the latest 2020 census by Mexico's National Institute of Statistics and Geography show that Chinese immigrants are mainly concentrated in Mexico City. A decade ago, the census recorded the largest concentration of Chinese in the northernmost state of Baja California, on the U.S.-Mexico border across from California.

The arrival of Chinese multinationals is leading an influx of "people from eastern China, more educated and with a broader global background," said Andrei Guerrero, academic coordinator of the Center for China-Baja California Studies.

In a middle-class Mexico City neighborhood, Viaducto-Piedad, near the city's historic Chinatown, a new Chinese community has been growing since the late 1990s. Chinese immigrants have not only opened businesses, but have created community spaces for religious events and children's recreation.

Viaducto-Piedad is recognized by the Chinese themselves as Mexico City's true "Chinatown," said Monica Cinco, a specialist in Chinese migration and general director of the EDUCA Mexico Foundation.

"When I asked them why, they would tell me because we live here. We have stores for Chinese consumption, beauty shops and restaurants just for Chinese," she said. "They live there, there is a community and several public schools in the area have a significant Chinese population."

In downtown Mexico City, Chinese entrepreneurs have not only opened new wholesale stores but have also taken over dozens of buildings. At times, they have become a source of tension with local businesses and residents, who say the expansion of Chinese-owned enterprises is displacing them.

At a mini-market in a bustling downtown neighborhood selling Chinese products such as dried wood ear mushrooms and vacuum-packed spicy duck wings, 33-year-old Dong Shengli said he moved to Mexico City from Beijing a few months ago to help manage the shop for some friends.

Dong — who has since found a job with a wholesaler importing knockoff designer sneakers and clothing — said he had worked at China's National Energy Commission, but was persuaded by his friends to come here.

He plans to explore business possibilities in Mexico, but China still has a pull for him. "My wife and my parents are in China. My mother is elderly, she needs me," he said.

Others are leaving China in search of greater freedoms. That's the case for 50-year-old Tan, who gave only his surname out of concern for the safety of his family, who remain in China. He arrived in Mexico this year from the southern province of Guangdong and got a job for a few months at a Sam's Club. Back home, he got by doing various jobs, including at a chemical plant and writing magazine articles during the pandemic.

But he chafed under what he described as a repressive atmosphere in China.

"It's not just the oppression in the workplace, it's the mentality," he said. "I can feel the political regression, the retreat of freedom and democracy. The implications of that truly make people feel twisted and

sick. So, life is very painful.”

What caught his attention in Mexico City were the protests that often pack the city’s main avenues — proof, he said, that the freedom of expression he longs for exists in this country.

At the restaurant where she still helps out in the trendy Juárez neighborhood, Li said Mexico stands out as a land of opportunity for her and other Chinese who don’t have relatives in the U.S. to help them settle there. She said she left China partly because of the competitive workplace culture and high home prices.

“In China, everyone saves money to buy a house, but it’s really expensive to get one,” she said.

Self-confident with a contagious smile, Li said she’s hopeful her skills working as a sales promoter for Chinese tech giant Tencent Games will help her get ahead in Mexico.

She says she has not met many Chinese women like herself in Mexico City: newcomers, young and single.

Most are married and are moving to Mexico to reunite with their husbands.

“To come here is to face something unknown,” she said.

Li doesn’t know when she’ll be able to carry out her ambitious business plans, but she has ideas: For example, she imagines that in Henan province she could get chairs, tables and other furniture at a good price. Meanwhile, she is selling furniture imported to Mexico by a Chinese friend on the e-commerce platform Mercado Libre.

“I’m not married, I don’t have a boyfriend, it’s just myself,” she said, “so I’ll work hard and struggle.”

With charges and sanctions, US takes aim at Russian disinformation ahead of November election

By ERIC TUCKER, DAVID KLEPPER and MATTHEW LEE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration seized Kremlin-run websites and charged two Russian state media employees in its most sweeping effort yet to push back against what it says are Russian attempts to spread disinformation ahead of the November presidential election.

The measures, which in addition to indictments also included sanctions and visa restrictions, represented a U.S. government effort just weeks before the November election to disrupt a persistent threat from Russia that American officials have long warned has the potential to sow discord and create confusion among voters.

Washington has said that Moscow, which intelligence officials have said has a preference for Republican Donald Trump, remains the primary threat to elections even as the FBI continues to investigate a hack by Iran this year that targeted the presidential campaigns of both political parties.

“The Justice Department’s message is clear: We will have no tolerance for attempts by authoritarian regimes to exploit our democratic systems of government,” Attorney General Merrick Garland said.

One criminal case disclosed by the Justice Department accuses two employees of RT, a Russian state media company, of covertly funding a Tennessee-based content creation company with nearly \$10 million to publish English-language videos on social media platforms including TikTok and YouTube with messages in favor of the Russia government’s interests and agenda, including about the war in Ukraine.

The nearly 2,000 videos posted by the company have gotten more than 16 million views on YouTube alone, prosecutors said.

The two defendants, Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva, are charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering and violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act. They are at large. It was not immediately clear if they had lawyers.

The Justice Department says the company did not disclose that it was funded by RT and that neither it nor its founders registered as required by law as an agent of a foreign principal.

Though the indictment does not name the company, it describes it as a Tennessee-based content creation firm with six commentators and with a website identifying itself as “a network of heterodox commentators that focus on Western political and cultural issues.”

That description exactly matches Tenet Media, an online company that hosts videos made by well-known conservative influencers Tim Pool, Benny Johnson and others.

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Johnson and Pool both responded with posts on X, the platform formerly known as Twitter, calling themselves "victims." Calling Russian President Vladimir Putin a "scumbag," Pool wrote that "should these allegations prove true, I as well as the other personalities and commentators were deceived."

In his post, Johnson wrote that he had been asked a year ago to provide content to a "media startup." He said his lawyers negotiated a "standard, arms length deal, which was later terminated."

Tenet Media's shows in recent months have featured high-profile conservative guests, including RNC co-chair Lara Trump, former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy and U.S. Senate candidate Kari Lake.

In the other action, officials announced the seizure of 32 internet domains that were used by the Kremlin to spread Russian propaganda and weaken international support for Ukraine. The websites were designed to look like authentic news sites but were actually fake, with bogus social media personas manufactured to appear as if they belonged to American users.

The Justice Department did not identify which candidate in particular the propaganda campaign was meant to boost. But internal strategy notes from participants in the effort released Wednesday by the Justice Department make clear that Trump was the intended beneficiary, even though the names of the candidates were blacked out.

The proposal for one propaganda project, for instance, states that one of its objectives was to secure a victory for a candidate who is currently out of power and to increase the percentage of Americans who believe the U.S. has been doing too much to support Ukraine. President Joe Biden has strongly supported Ukraine during the invasion by Russia.

Intelligence agencies have previously charged that Russia, which during the 2016 election launched a massive campaign of foreign influence and interference on Trump's behalf, was using disinformation to try to meddle in this year's election. The new steps show the depth of those concerns.

"Today's announcement highlights the lengths some foreign governments go to undermine American democratic institutions," the State Department said. "But these foreign governments should also know that we will not tolerate foreign malign actors intentionally interfering and undermining free and fair elections."

The State Department announced it was taking action against several employees of Russian state-owned media outlets, designating them as "foreign missions," and offering a cash reward for information provided to the U.S. government about foreign election interference.

It also said it was adding media company Rossiya Segodnya and its subsidiaries RIA Novosti, RT, TV-Novosti, Ruptly, and Sputnik to its list of foreign missions. That will require them to register with the U.S. government and disclose their properties and personnel in the U.S.

In a speech last month, Deputy Attorney General Lisa Monaco said Russia remained the biggest threat to election integrity, accusing Putin and his proxies of "targeting specific voter demographics and swing-state voters to in an effort to manipulate presidential and congressional election outcomes." Russia, she said was "intent on co-opting unwitting Americans on social media to push narratives advancing Russian interests."

She struck a similar note Thursday, saying at an Aspen Institute event that the foreign influence threat is more diverse and aggressive than in past years.

"More diverse and aggressive because they involve more actors from more countries than we have ever seen before, operating in a more polarized world than we have ever seen before, all fueled by more technology and accelerated by technology, like AI, and that is what we have exposed in the law enforcement actions we took today," she said.

Much of the concern around Russia centers on cyberattacks and disinformation campaigns designed to influence the November vote.

The tactics include using state media like RT to advance anti-U.S. messages and content, as well as networks of fake websites and social media accounts that amplify the claims and inject them into Americans' online conversations. Typically, these networks seize on polarizing political topics such as immigration, crime or the war in Gaza.

In many cases, Americans may have no idea that the content they see online either originated or was amplified by the Kremlin.

Groups linked to the Kremlin are increasingly hiring marketing and communications firms within Russia to outsource some of the work of creating digital propaganda while also covering their tracks, the officials said during the briefing with reporters.

Two such firms were the subject of new U.S. sanctions announced in March. Authorities say the two Russian companies created fake websites and social media profiles to spread Kremlin disinformation.

The ultimate goal, however, is to get Americans to spread Russian disinformation without questioning its origin. People are far more likely to trust and repost information that they believe is coming from a domestic source, officials said. Fake websites designed to mimic U.S. news outlets and AI-generated social media profiles are just two methods.

Messages left with the Russian Embassy were not immediately returned.

Harris accepts rules for Sept. 10 debate with Trump on ABC, including microphone muting

By MEG KINNARD and MICHELLE L. PRICE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris has accepted the rules set forth for next week's debate with former President Donald Trump, although the Democratic nominee says the decision not to keep both candidates' microphones live throughout the matchup will be to her disadvantage.

The development, which came Wednesday by way of a letter from Harris' campaign to host network ABC News, seemed to mark a conclusion to the debate over microphone muting, which had for a time threatened to derail the Sept. 10 presidential debate at the National Constitution Center in Philadelphia.

Harris' acceptance of the debate rules came as Trump — using a night he had proposed as a debate with Harris on Fox News Channel — instead participated in a solo town hall with host Sean Hannity in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, a version of debate preparation with a longtime ally who queried him about his plans to take on the Democratic nominee.

President Joe Biden's campaign had made the muting of microphones, except for the candidate whose turn it is to speak, a condition of his decision to accept any debates this year. Some aides have said they now regret that decision, saying voters were shielded from hearing Trump's outbursts during the June debate. A disastrous performance for the incumbent Democrat fueled his exit from the campaign.

Once Harris rose in Biden's stead and became their party's pick for president, her campaign had advocated for live microphones for the whole debate, saying previously that the practice would "fully allow for substantive exchanges between the candidates."

But on Wednesday, in a letter obtained by The Associated Press, Harris' advisers wrote that the former prosecutor will be "fundamentally disadvantaged by this format, which will serve to shield Donald Trump from direct exchanges with the Vice President."

"We suspect this is the primary reason for his campaign's insistence on muted microphones," her campaign added.

Despite those concerns, Harris' campaign wrote, "we understand that Donald Trump is a risk to skip the debate altogether, as he has threatened to do previously, if we do not accede to his preferred format." So as not to "jeopardize the debate," Harris' campaign wrote, "we accepted the full set of rules proposed by ABC, including muted microphones."

According to an official with Harris' campaign, a pool of journalists will be on hand to hear what the muted candidate may be trying to say when his or her microphone is turned off. That detail was not in the full debate rules, also released Wednesday by ABC, which are essentially the same as they were for the June debate between Trump and Biden.

The network laid out parameters from the basic format — 90 minutes, with two commercial breaks — to specifications that moderators David Muir and Linsey Davis "will be the only people asking questions," perhaps hoping to avert a free-for-all between the candidates.

"Moderators will seek to enforce timing agreements and ensure a civilized discussion," the network noted.

The Harris campaign official, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss planning around the

debate, said a candidate who repeatedly interrupts will receive a warning from a moderator, and both candidates' microphones may be unmuted if there is significant crosstalk so the audience can understand what's happening.

After a virtual coin flip held Tuesday and won by Trump, the GOP nominee opted to offer the final closing statement, while Harris chose the podium on the right side of viewers' screens. There will be no audience, written notes or any topics or questions shared with campaigns or candidates in advance, the network said.

In the town hall on Wednesday, Hannity steered Trump through many of the topics typical of the GOP nominee's campaign events, with a heavy focus on immigration, and posed questions after showing video clips of Harris in media interviews and other appearances.

Trump also repeatedly returned his focus from Harris to Biden, calling Democrats' substitution of their top candidate "a coup" and saying he would have preferred a debate with Harris, rather than the town hall.

Asked about next week's debate, Trump repeated his former criticism of ABC as a "dishonest" and "unfair" network, also reiterating his previous claims that Harris' campaign is "going to get the questions in advance."

The location of Trump's town hall, coupled with next week's debate in Philadelphia, highlights the importance of battleground Pennsylvania, where 19 Electoral College votes are up for grabs in the November election.

Right-wing influencers were duped to work for covert Russian influence operation, US says

By ALAN SUDERMAN and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — They have millions of followers online. They have been major players in right-wing political discourse since Donald Trump was president. And they worked unknowingly for a company that was a front for a Russian influence operation, U.S. prosecutors say.

An indictment filed Wednesday alleges a media company linked to six conservative influencers — including well-known personalities Tim Pool, Dave Rubin and Benny Johnson — was secretly funded by Russian state media employees to churn out English-language videos that were "often consistent" with the Kremlin's "interest in amplifying U.S. domestic divisions in order to weaken U.S. opposition" to Russian interests, like its war in Ukraine.

In addition to marking the third straight presidential election in which U.S. authorities have unveiled politically charged details about Russia's attempted interference in U.S. politics, an indictment indicates how Moscow may be attempting to capitalize on the skyrocketing popularity of right-wing podcasters, livestreamers and other content creators who have found successful careers on social media in the years since Trump was in office.

The U.S. Justice Department doesn't allege any wrongdoing by the influencers, some of whom it says were given false information about the source of the company's funding. Instead, it accuses two employees of RT, a Russian state media company, of funneling nearly \$10 million to a Tennessee-based content creation company for Russia-friendly content.

After the indictments were announced, both Pool and Johnson issued statements on social media, which Rubin retweeted, saying they were victims of the alleged crimes and had done nothing wrong.

"We still do not know what is true as these are only allegations," Pool said. "Putin is a scumbag."

In his post, Johnson wrote that he had been asked a year ago to provide content to a "media startup." He said his lawyers negotiated a "standard, arms length deal, which was later terminated."

Kostiantyn Kalashnikov and Elena Afanasyeva are charged with conspiracy to commit money laundering and violating the Foreign Agents Registration Act. They are at large, and it was not immediately clear if they had lawyers.

U.S. officials have previously warned of Russia's use of unwitting Americans to further influence operations in the 2024 election, but Wednesday's indictment is the most detailed description of those efforts to date. Intelligence officials have said Moscow has a preference for Trump.

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Russian President Vladimir Putin authorized influence operations to help Trump in the 2020 election, while his 2016 campaign benefited from hacking by Russian intelligence officers and a covert social media effort, according to U.S. law enforcement and intelligence officials.

With the decline of traditional media like newspapers and limits on direct advertising on social media platforms, influencers are increasingly playing a key role in politics and shaping public opinion. Both the Republican and Democratic parties invited scores of influencers to their respective national conventions this summer. But with little to no disclosure requirements about who is funding influencers' work, the public is largely in the dark about who is powering the messaging online.

Though the indictment does not name the Tennessee-based company, the details match up exactly with Tenet Media, an online media company that boasts of hosting "a network of heterodox commentators that focus on Western political and cultural issues." Tenet's website lists six influencers who provide content, including Pool, Johnson, Rubin, Lauren Southern, Tayler Hansen and Matt Christiansen.

Tenet Media's six main influencers have more than 7 million subscribers on YouTube and more than 7 million followers on X.

Fueled by public outrage and online fandom, the influencers who make up the bench of talent at Tenet Media have amassed millions of loyal followers who agree with their staunch conservatism and brazen willingness to voice controversial opinions. Their channels also have created communities for conservative Americans who have lost trust in mainstream media sources through Trump's 2020 loss and the COVID-19 pandemic. Several of them have faced criticism for spreading political misinformation.

The indictment shows that some of the influencers were paid handsomely for their work. One unidentified influencer's contract included a \$400,000 monthly fee, a \$100,000 signing bonus and an additional performance bonus.

Tenet Media's shows in recent months have featured high-profile conservative guests, including Republican National Committee co-chair Lara Trump, former Republican presidential candidate Vivek Ramaswamy and U.S. Senate candidate Kari Lake. The nearly 2,000 videos posted by the company have gotten more than 16 million views on YouTube alone, prosecutors said.

Pool, a journalist-turned-YouTuber who first gained public attention for livestreaming the Occupy Wall Street protests, hosted Trump on his podcast earlier this year.

Johnson is an outspoken Trump supporter and internet personality who was fired from BuzzFeed after the company found evidence he'd plagiarized other works.

Rubin was previously part of the liberal news commentary show "The Young Turks" but has since identified as a libertarian. He boasts the largest YouTube following of Tenet's influencer roster and hosts a show called "The Rubin Report."

Tenet Media President Liam Donovan is the husband of Lauren Chen, a Canadian influencer who has appeared as a guest in several Tenet Media videos. Chen is affiliated with the conservative youth organization Turning Point USA and has hosted shows for the right-wing network Blaze Media. RT's website also lists her as a contributor of several opinion articles from 2021 and 2022.

Harris visits New Hampshire to tout her small business tax plan

By WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris used a campaign stop in New Hampshire on Wednesday to propose an expansion of tax incentives for small businesses, a pro-entrepreneur plan that may soften her previous calls for wealthy Americans and large corporations to pay higher taxes.

Describing small businesses as "an essential foundation to our entire economy," Harris said she wants to expand from \$5,000 to \$50,000 tax incentives for startup expenses, with the goal of eventually spurring 25 million new small business applications over four years.

The speech was part of Harris' effort to strengthen her economic credentials with only two months until the end of the election.

"You're not only leaders in business. You're civic leaders," Harris said. She added, "You are part of the

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glue and the fabric that holds communities together.”

The vice president spoke at the Throwback Brewery in North Hampton, outside Portsmouth, and met with co-founders Annette Lee and Nicole Carrier. Their brewery got support to open its current location through a small business credit and installed solar panels using federal programs championed by the Biden administration.

After that, Harris visited another women-owned small business, Port City Pretzels, which was founded in 2015 and had expanded out of its original, 500-foot facility into a larger location. One of the co-owners, Suzanne Foley, led Harris around brown boxes bearing the company’s logo, some stacked head-high and waiting to be shipped to customers around the country.

“Thank you for visiting our little company,” said Foley, who beamed and chatted with Harris as the pair walked around the facility. At one point, the vice president asked of the pretzels “Is it a family recipe?” When the answer came back yes, she offered, “Is it a secret family recipe?” Foley responded, “It’s not really, no.”

Meanwhile, the campaign of Donald Trump, the former president and current Republican nominee, dismissed Harris’ small business plan, noting that the vice president has promised to eliminate a package of tax cuts approved during his administration that are set to expire next year. Trump’s campaign said those cuts “allowed business owners to deduct up to 20% of qualified business income,” reduced taxes on new equipment purchases and took steps to bolster small businesses as compared to larger ones.

Before talking about her small business plan, Harris addressed Wednesday’s school shooting in Georgia. “It’s just outrageous that every day, in our country, in the United States of America, that parents have to send their children to school worried about whether or not their child will come home alive.”

She added: “We’ve got to stop it. It doesn’t have to be this way.”

Harris’ New Hampshire trip is a rare deviation for a candidate who is spending most of her time in Midwest and Sun Belt states with pivotal roles in November’s election.

Since President Joe Biden dropped his reelection bid and endorsed Harris, the vice president has focused on Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania, which have been the centerpiece of successful Democratic campaigns. She also has frequently visited Arizona, Nevada and Georgia, all of which Biden narrowly won in 2020, and North Carolina, which she hopes to flip from Trump.

Wednesday’s stop came after Harris marked Labor Day with rallies in Detroit and Pittsburgh and before she heads back to Pittsburgh on Thursday — marking her 10th visit to Pennsylvania in 2024.

Trump has called for lowering the corporate tax rate to 15% — a break with Biden, who in his budget proposal in March suggested setting the corporate tax rate at 28%. Harris has released relatively few major policy proposals in the roughly six weeks since taking over the top of the Democratic ticket, but has not suggested she’s planning to deviate greatly from Biden on tax policy.

The small business plan Harris presented has lots that the business community would like. But that contrasts with another proposal Harris unveiled last month, where she promised to help fight inflation by working to combat “price gouging” from food producers that she suggests have driven grocery store prices up unnecessarily.

Harris has built her campaign around calls to grow and strengthen the nation’s middle class — and suggested that rich Americans and large corporations should pay higher taxes. She repeated that message Wednesday, saying “billionaires and big corporations must pay their fair share in taxes.”

“It’s just not right that those who can most afford it are often paying a lower tax rate than our teachers and our nurses and our firefighters,” she told the New Hampshire crowd.

Both nominees are using the week before their debate to sharpen their economic messages about who could do more for the middle class. Trump will address the Economic Club of New York on Thursday. They square off on the debate stage next week in Philadelphia.

Biden, who built his campaign around promoting the middle class, won New Hampshire by 7 percentage points in 2020, but Trump came much closer to winning it against Hillary Clinton in 2016. The Harris campaign says it has 17 field offices operating in coordination with the state Democratic party across New Hampshire, compared to one for Trump’s campaign.

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Some of the state's Democrats were angry that Biden directed the Democratic National Committee to make South Carolina the first state to vote in the party's presidential primary this year — displacing Iowa's caucus and a first-in-the-nation primary New Hampshire held for more than a century.

Despite that, New Hampshire pressed ahead with an unsanctioned primary. Though Biden didn't campaign in it, or appear on the ballot, he still easily won via a write-in drive.

Trump has seized on the primary calendar change, posting on his social media account that Harris "sees there are problems for her campaign in New Hampshire because of the fact that they disrespected it in their primary and never showed up."

"Additionally, the cost of living in New Hampshire is through the roof, their energy bills are some of highest in the country, and their housing market is the most unaffordable in history," the former president wrote.

A list of mass killings in the United States this year

By The Associated Press undefined

The latest mass killing in the U.S. happened Wednesday in Winder, Georgia, where four people were fatally shot at Apalachee High School.

Students ran for safety in the football stadium. While officers swarmed the campus near Atlanta, parents raced to find out if their children were safe.

It was the country's 30th mass killing this year, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

At least 131 people have died this year in those killings, which are defined as incidents in which four or more people die within a 24-hour period, not including the killer — the same definition used by the FBI.

Last year ended with 217 deaths from 42 mass killings in the U.S., making 2023 one of the deadliest years on record.

Here is a look at other U.S. mass killings this year:

FOREST PARK, ILLINOIS: Sept. 2

Four people sleeping on a Chicago-area train were fatally shot on Labor Day morning. Police were called to a Chicago Transit Authority station just outside the city. A 30-year-old man was arrested. The victims were a woman and three men. A motive wasn't immediately disclosed.

IRONDEQUOIT, N.Y.: Aug. 31

Four people were found dead after firefighters extinguished multiple blazes at a home in upstate New York, though authorities said they likely were killed by something else. Firefighters found the bodies of two adults, a 2-year-old boy and a 4-year-old girl.

DALTON, GEORGIA: Aug. 24

Four males, ages 17 to 21, were shot to death at a park. A teenager was charged with murder in what police said was a robbery that turned violent. Multiple weapons were involved.

PLANT CITY, FLORIDA: July 31

Police said an intentional fire killed four people near Tampa. A 25-year-old man who lived in the house was charged with murder while engaged in arson. Three dogs also died.

NEW YORK CITY: July 19

A grandmother, a mother and her two children, ages 5 and 4, were fatally stabbed at an apartment in Brooklyn. A 24-year-old man who knew the four was arrested.

WEST BLOCTON, ALABAMA: July 18

A man was charged with killing his wife and four children, ages 2 to 9, in a rural community in Bibb County. The man didn't say anything about a motive when taken into custody. "Even seasoned officers told me it is the worst thing they've ever seen," Sheriff Jody Wade said.

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: July 13

The victims were shot at a nightclub. One man died on a sidewalk while two women were killed inside the club. Another man was pronounced dead at a hospital. Investigators believed some shots were fired from outside the club.

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ALAMEDA, CALIFORNIA: July 10

Police arrested a man in the shootings of his wife, two children and his wife's parents in the San Francisco Bay area. The man's father-in-law went to a neighbor for help and spoke to police before he died.

FLORENCE, KENTUCKY: July 6

A birthday party turned deadly in the wee hours when four people were shot. The 21-year-old suspected gunman crashed his car in a ditch during a police chase and was found dead from a self-inflicted gunshot.

NORTH LAS VEGAS, NEVADA: June 24

A 48-year-old man barred from possessing guns because of a criminal record killed himself after fatally shooting five people, police said. The violence began after the man had an argument with a former girlfriend. The victims at the apartment complex included a neighbor who tried to help and the neighbor's mother and grandmother.

FORDYCE, ARKANSAS: June 21

A 44-year-old man shot people in the parking lot before shooting more inside the Mad Butcher grocery store, killing four. Police said he did not appear to have a connection to the victims. The shooting occurred in the middle of the day in Fordyce, about 65 miles (105 kilometers) south of Little Rock.

HUDSON, FLORIDA: June 12

A landlord was accused of killing a family of four and burning their bodies. The two children were ages 6 and 5. The family was reported missing by relatives. Police say a backyard fire pit was smoldering when they searched the property in Pasco County.

MARION, IOWA: June 5

Police said a metal pipe was used to kill four people in an outbuilding of a rural home near Cedar Rapids.

CHARLOTTE, NORTH CAROLINA: April 29

Four officers were shot in the deadliest attack on U.S. law enforcement since 2016. They were killed when a task force of officers from different agencies tried to capture a 39-year-old man for illegally possessing a firearm and fleeing to elude in a different county.

YUKON, OKLAHOMA: April 22

A 10-year-old boy awoke to find his parents and three brothers dead in their home near Oklahoma City, all fatally shot by his father, police said. Authorities believe the 42-year-old man killed his wife and three sons — ages 18, 14 and 12 — then turned the gun on himself. Police said they did not immediately know why the fourth child was spared or have a motive for the shootings.

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS: March 27

A frenzied stabbing and beating rampage left four people dead in a matter of minutes and at least seven people injured. Authorities said a 22-year-old man was charged. Police didn't immediately know his motive. Rockford's mayor said the victims were 63, 23, 49 and 15.

IRELAND, WEST VIRGINIA: March 11

The bodies of four people, ages 3 months to 90 years, were found inside the remains of a burning home. A fifth person with an apparent gunshot wound was discovered dead behind a chicken coop nearby, authorities said. A 45-year-old male suspect was found dead by suicide about 110 miles (180 kilometers) away, parked in a vehicle outside his relatives' home. Authorities did not immediately share details about a motive.

HONOLULU, HAWAII: March 10

Authorities said a woman and three children ages 10, 12 and 17 were fatally stabbed in a Manoa home. The woman's husband was also found dead. Police said a preliminary investigation shows the husband fatally stabbed his wife and children. Authorities did not immediately share a motive. Police said the five deaths mark the state's worst mass killing since 1999. They said there was no history of domestic calls to the residence.

KING CITY, CALIFORNIA: March 3

Police said three men with dark masks got out of a silver Kia and opened fire at an outdoor party in central California, killing three men and a woman and wounding seven others. The shooting happened

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on a street with modest homes facing a commercial district in King City, close to Pinnacles National Park.
FERGUSON, MISSOURI: Feb. 19

Authorities said a 39-year-old woman intentionally set a fire at home to kill herself and her four children, ages 2, 5, 9 and 9. Investigators believe the mother set fire to a mattress, and left a note saying she intended to kill herself and her children, police said. Responding firefighters found the home engulfed in flames. Neighbors tried to save the family, but the fire was too intense.

BIRMINGHAM, ALABAMA: Feb. 16

Officials said four men were killed in a drive-by shooting. Dozens of shots were fired outside a Birmingham home, police said. People were standing outside a house as they got their cars washed when someone drove by and opened fire. No arrests were immediately reported.

HUNTINGTON PARK, CALIFORNIA: Feb. 11

Shootings over several hours left four people dead: a man in Bell, a man in a Los Angeles shopping center parking lot, a 14-year-old boy in Cudahy, and a homeless man in Huntington Park, authorities said. At least one other juvenile was wounded. Two suspected gang members were arrested in connection with the shootings, authorities said.

EAST LANSDOWNE, PENNSYLVANIA: Feb. 7

Six sets of human remains were recovered from the ashes of a fire that destroyed a home near Philadelphia, according to the county district attorney's office. Authorities suspect those who died — including three children — were killed by a 43-year-old male relative who also died after shooting and wounding two police officers, the office said. A motive was not immediately identified.

EL MIRAGE, CALIFORNIA: Jan. 23

Authorities found the bodies of six men in the Mojave Desert outside the sparsely populated community of El Mirage after someone called 911 and said he had been shot, according to sheriff's officials. The men were likely shot to death in a dispute over marijuana, authorities said. The bodies were found about 50 miles (80 kilometers) northeast of Los Angeles in an area known for illegal cannabis operations. Five men were arrested and charged with murder.

JOLIET, ILLINOIS: Jan. 21

Authorities said a 23-year-old man shot eight people — including seven of his relatives — and injuring a ninth person in a Chicago suburb. He fatally shot himself later during a confrontation with law enforcement in Texas. Authorities believe he was trying to reach Mexico. Police said the victims included his mother, siblings, aunt, uncle and two men he might not have known. They were found in two homes, outside an apartment building and on a residential street.

TINLEY PARK, ILLINOIS: Jan. 21

A 63-year-old man in suburban Chicago killed his wife and three adult daughters a domestic-related shooting, police said. The man allegedly shot the four family members — ages 53, 24 and two 25-year-old twins — after an argument at their home. He was charged with four counts of first-degree murder.

RICHMOND, TEXAS: Jan. 13

A 46-year-old man fatally shot his estranged wife and three other relatives, including his 8-year-old niece, at a home in suburban Houston before killing himself, authorities said. Authorities said the man had told his estranged wife that he wanted to reunite but she refused. In addition to killing his niece and estranged wife, he also killed her brother and sister, ages 43 and 46.

REEDLEY, CALIFORNIA: Jan. 6

A 17-year-old boy was charged with killing four members of a neighboring family in central California. He lived next door to the victims — ages 81, 61, 44 and 43 — in Reedley, a small town near Fresno. Three bodies were found in their backyard, including one buried in a shallow grave, while another was found in the detached garage of the teenager's home, police said.

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The world is pumping out 57 million tons of plastic pollution a year

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

The world creates 57 million tons of plastic pollution every year and spreads it from the deepest oceans to the highest mountaintop to the inside of people's bodies, according to a new study that also said more than two-thirds of it comes from the Global South.

It's enough pollution each year — about 52 million metric tons — to fill New York City's Central Park with plastic waste as high as the Empire State Building, according to researchers at the University of Leeds in the United Kingdom. They examined waste produced on the local level at more than 50,000 cities and towns across the world for a study in Wednesday's journal *Nature*.

The study examined plastic that goes into the open environment, not plastic that goes into landfills or is properly burned. For 15% of the world's population, government fails to collect and dispose of waste, the study's authors said — a big reason Southeast Asia and Sub-Saharan Africa produce the most plastic waste. That includes 255 million people in India, the study said.

Lagos, Nigeria, emitted the most plastic pollution of any city, according to study author Costas Velis, a Leeds environmental engineering professor. The other biggest plastic polluting cities are New Delhi; Luanda, Angola; Karachi, Pakistan and Al Qahirah, Egypt.

India leads the world in generating plastic pollution, producing 10.2 million tons a year (9.3 million metric tons), far more than double the next big-polluting nations, Nigeria and Indonesia. China, often villainized for pollution, ranks fourth but is making tremendous strides in reducing waste, Velis said. Other top plastic polluters are Pakistan, Bangladesh, Russia and Brazil. Those eight nations are responsible for more than half of the globe's plastic pollution, according to the study's data.

The United States ranks 90th in plastic pollution with more than 52,500 tons (47,600 metric tons) and the United Kingdom ranks 135th with nearly 5,100 tons (4,600 metric tons), according to the study.

In 2022, most of the world's nations agreed to make the first legally binding treaty on plastics pollution, including in the oceans. Final treaty negotiations take place in South Korea in November.

The study used artificial intelligence to concentrate on plastics that were improperly burned — about 57% of the pollution — or just dumped. In both cases incredibly tiny microplastics, or nanoplastics, are what turn the problem from a visual annoyance at beaches and a marine life problem to a human health threat, Velis said.

Several studies this year have looked at how prevalent microplastics are in our drinking water and in people's tissue, such as hearts, brains and testicles, with doctors and scientists still not quite sure what it means in terms of human health threats.

"The big time bomb of microplastics are these microplastics released in the Global South mainly," Velis said. "We already have a huge dispersal problem. They are in the most remote places ... the peaks of Everest, in the Mariana Trench in the ocean, in what we breathe and what we eat and what we drink."

He called it "everybody's problem" and one that will haunt future generations.

"We shouldn't put the blame, any blame, on the Global South," Velis said. "And we shouldn't praise ourselves about what we do in the Global North in any way."

It's just a lack of resources and ability of government to provide the necessary services to citizens, Velis said.

Outside experts worried that the study's focus on pollution, rather than overall production, lets the plastics industry off the hook. Making plastics emits large amounts of greenhouse gas that contribute to climate change.

"These guys have defined plastic pollution in a much narrower way, as really just macroplastics that are emitted into the environment after the consumer, and it risks us losing our focus on the upstream and saying, hey now all we need to do is manage the waste better," said Neil Tangri, senior director of science and policy at GAIA, a global network of advocacy organizations working on zero waste and environmental justice initiatives. "It's necessary but it's not the whole story."

Theresa Karlsson, science and technical advisor to International Pollutants Elimination Network, another

coalition of advocacy groups on environment, health and waste issues, called the volume of pollution identified by the study “alarming” and said it shows the amount of plastics being produced today is “unmanageable.”

But she said the study misses the significance of the global trade in plastic waste that has rich countries sending it to poor ones. The study said plastic waste trade is decreasing, with China banning waste imports. But Karlsson said overall waste trade is actually increasing and likely plastics with it. She cited EU waste exports going from 110,000 tons (100,000 metric tons) in 2004 to 1.4 million tons (1.3 million metric tons) in 2021.

Velis said the amount of plastic waste traded is small. Kara Lavender Law, an oceanography professor at the Sea Education Association who wasn't involved in the study, agreed, based on U.S. plastic waste trends. She said this was otherwise one of the more comprehensive studies on plastic waste.

Officials in the plastics industry praised the study.

“This study underscores that uncollected and unmanaged plastic waste is the largest contributor to plastic pollution and that prioritizing adequate waste management is critical to ending plastic pollution,” Chris Jahn, council secretary of the International Council on Chemical Associations, said in a statement. In treaty negotiations, the industry opposes a cap on plastic production.

The United Nations projects that plastics production is likely to rise from about 440 million tons (400 million metric tons) a year to more than 1,200 million tons (1,100 million metric tons), saying “our planet is choking in plastic.”

JD Vance's Catholicism helped shape his views. So did this little-known group of Catholic thinkers

By PETER SMITH and MICHELLE R. SMITH Associated Press

By his own account, Ohio Sen. JD Vance's 2019 conversion to Catholicism provided a spiritual fulfillment he couldn't find in his Yale education or career success.

It also amounted to a political conversion.

Catholicism provided him a new way of looking at the addictions, family breakdowns and other social ills he described in his 2016 bestselling memoir, “Hillbilly Elegy.”

“I felt desperate for a worldview that understood our bad behavior as simultaneously social and individual, structural and moral; that recognized that we are products of our environment; that we have a responsibility to change that environment, but that we are still moral beings with individual duties,” he wrote in a 2020 essay.

His conversion also put Vance in close touch with a Catholic intellectual movement, viewed by some critics as having reactionary or authoritarian leanings, that has been little known to the American public until Vance's rise to the national stage as the Republican vice presidential nominee.

These are not your father's Catholic conservatives.

The professors and media personalities in this network don't all agree on everything — even on what to call themselves — but most go by “postliberal.” Vance has used that term to describe himself, though the Trump-Vance campaign did not respond to questions about where Vance sees himself in the movement and whether he shares some of the beliefs promoted by many postliberals.

Postliberals do share some longstanding Catholic conservative views, such as opposition to abortion and LGBTQ+ rights.

But where Catholic conservatives of the past have seen big government as a problem rather than a solution, the postliberals want a muscular government — one that they control.

They envision a counterrevolution in which they would take over government bureaucracy and institutions like universities from within, replacing entrenched “elites” with their own and acting upon their vision of the “common good.”

“What is needed ... is regime change — the peaceful but vigorous overthrow of a corrupt and corrupting

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liberal ruling class and the creation of a postliberal order," wrote Patrick Deneen, a prominent author in the movement, in his 2023 book, "Regime Change."

Vance has signaled his alignment with some of what Catholic postliberals advocate. He's said the next time his allies control the presidency or Congress, "we really need to be really ruthless when it comes to the exercise of power" and said Republicans should seize institutions, including universities "to make them work for our people." He's advocated for government policies to spur childbearing, a notion reflected in his digs at "childless cat ladies" with allegedly no stake in America's future.

Scholars who study this movement caution that Vance does his own thinking and doesn't necessarily embrace everything proposed by postliberals — or by a subset of them known as integralists, who want a state working in tandem with the Catholic Church. The latter is not a label Vance has used for himself.

But Vance has spoken alongside prominent postliberals at public events and praised some of their work.

At an Ohio conference featuring a who's who of Catholic postliberals in 2022, he told fellow speakers he has "admired a lot of you from afar" as "some of the people who I think are most interesting about what's going on in this country."

Vance praised Deneen's book at a 2023 panel discussion with the author, a professor of political science at the University of Notre Dame.

Vance has also met privately with leading postliberals, who have posted photos of their gatherings on social media and cheered his vice presidential nomination.

Catholic journals for years have bristled with debates about postliberalism, but with little public attention — in part because its adherents are few and its views are far from mainstream.

But now, postliberals have an avid listener in Donald Trump's running mate.

"You can go from people writing on an unusual Catholic theology blog to the vice presidential candidate in the course of less than a decade," said James Patterson, professor of politics at Ave Maria University in Florida.

Vance's preoccupations show an influence from the movement, he said, citing his remarks about the childless.

"Most ordinary American Catholics would not treat a childless single woman with cats with this kind of contempt," Patterson said. Even if Vance is not steeped in the philosophy, Patterson added, "he is picking up on the postliberal vibe."

Some Catholics, including conservatives, have raised alarms about the company Vance has kept, saying postliberalism has historical connections to 20th century European movements that are associated with authoritarian regimes like Francisco Franco's in Spain.

"We're talking about people that prefer right-wing authoritarian regimes," Patterson said.

In a postliberal society, Patterson wrote in an August commentary in the online journal *The Dispatch*, citizens become "subjects" and personal liberties subjected to "administrative despotism."

Vance has recently tried to downplay his Catholicism's impact on policy-making.

Trump's Supreme Court appointees provided the crucial majority to overturn *Roe v. Wade*, which had legalized abortion nationwide. But the issue has become a political liability, with voters in several states rejecting abortion restrictions.

Vance had strongly opposed abortion, in the runup to his 2022 senatorial win, saying at one point that "two wrongs don't make a right" when referring to exceptions for rape and incest. The campaign said in an email Wednesday that he supports "reasonable" exceptions for rape, incest, and life of the mother.

But Vance has aligned with the Republicans' first post-Roe platform in 2024, in which it backed off from its longstanding support for nationwide abortion restrictions. He pledged he could "absolutely commit" that a Trump-Vance administration would not impose such an abortion ban.

Trump has spoken inconsistently about a ballot measure repealing Florida's ban on abortions after six weeks of pregnancy.

After facing backlash from anti-abortion activists for seeming to indicate he would support the measure, Trump said he would oppose it.

The Catholic Church's U.S. bishops declared opposing abortion "our pre-eminent priority."

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Vance told the New York Post in August that Catholic social teaching “certainly influences how I think about issues.” But he acknowledged “there are a lot of things the Catholic Church teaches that frankly, Americans would just never go for.”

He added that in a democracy, “you have to give people their ability to have their own moral views reflected in public policy. There are a lot of non-Catholics in America and I accept that.”

Julian Waller, a political science professor at George Washington University, said Vance has numerous influences outside of Catholic postliberalism — from Trump-style populists to his mentor, tech billionaire Peter Thiel.

It remains to be seen whether Catholic postliberals would get prominent appointments in a Trump-Vance administration — or even how often they’d get their calls returned.

“Someone like JD Vance can read them, be interested in them, attend talks, know them personally, get insights from them,” Waller said. “But he’s not on the hook to obey them.”

For an example of what an administration using state power for postliberal ends might look like, Waller pointed to Florida and Gov. Ron DeSantis’ efforts to rid public higher education of diversity initiatives and critical race theory.

“If you want the model for what someone like JD Vance is really interested in, it’s probably the Florida model, forcefully changing institutions, capturing institutions,” Waller said.

Postliberals’ ideas vary, but there are common themes, said Kevin Vallier, author of “All the Kingdoms of the World,” a 2023 book on the modern postliberal and integralist movements and their centuries-old roots.

Depending on who’s talking, a postliberal regime change could involve encouraging childbearing, easing or removing church-state separation, banning pornography for adults and children alike, reimposing laws limiting business on the Sabbath, supporting private-sector unions and strengthening safety nets for the middle class.

It’s common to hear postliberals praising Hungary’s nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban, particularly for his use of financial incentives for families that have more babies. Orban has championed an “illiberal democracy,” which includes restrictions on immigration and LGBTQ+ rights.

Vance has praised Orban for Hungary’s subsidies to married couples with children and for “smart decisions” in seizing control of universities.

Vance has echoed the regime-change rhetoric of using government, staffed by likeminded officials, for postliberal goals.

“You need to have a functional state that accomplishes some of the things that we care about. You need good people to go and work in that functional state,” Vance said a 2022 conference at Franciscan University of Steubenville, Ohio. It featured prominent postliberals like Deneen and Harvard Law School professor Adrian Vermeule.

Vermeule has advocated for “common-good constitutionalism,” in which the government enacts “strong rule in the interest of attaining the common good.”

Deneen and Vermeule declined requests for interviews.

Vance’s choice to speak at Steubenville underscored his affinity with postliberals, Vallier said.

“He could have given that talk anywhere,” said Vallier, a professor at the Institute of American Constitutional Thought and Leadership at the University of Toledo in Ohio. “Why is he appearing with these intellectuals if he’s not sympathetic to their ideas?”

Vance’s religious journey began in a family that rarely went to church when he was young, he wrote in “Hillbilly Elegy.” But he said his grandmother — the most stable adult in his turbulent household — regularly read the Bible and taught a Christianity that demanded hard work, forgiveness and hope.

For a time, the young JD embraced the strict biblical literalism of his father’s Pentecostal church, crediting it as a stabilizing force, he wrote.

But in college, Vance embraced what he later viewed as an arrogant and fashionable atheism.

Eventually, he wrote in a 2020 essay for the Catholic journal *The Lamp*, he concluded he “needed grace” to provide him the virtues to be a good husband and father.

“I needed, in other words, to become Catholic,” he wrote.

About 20 migrants are reported missing after their boat capsized off Italy

ROME (AP) — About 20 migrants are believed to be missing after their boat capsized in the Mediterranean this week, the U.N. refugee agency and the Italian coast guard said Wednesday.

Seven Syrians were rescued and taken to the southern Italian island of Lampedusa, Italian rescuers said. The coast guard said local officials had spotted the sinking boat around 10 miles (16 kilometers) southwest of the island.

The seven survivors were "in critical condition and many have lost their relatives," Chiara Cardoletti, the UNHCR representative to Italy, said on X.

Survivors said 28 people had left Libya on Sept. 1, the coast guard said in a statement. Twenty-one of them, including three children, "fell into the sea due to adverse weather conditions," it added. The children were missing.

Naval units and a coast guard aircraft were searching.

The central Mediterranean is one of the world's deadliest migration routes. According to the U.N. migration agency, more than 2,500 migrants died or went missing attempting the crossing last year, and 1,047 this year.

Can the city of Savannah fine or jail people for leaving guns in unlocked cars? A judge weighs in

By RUSS BYNUM Associated Press

SAVANNAH, Ga. (AP) — A Georgia gun owner's attorney asked a judge Wednesday to halt enforcement of a Savannah city ordinance that imposes fines and possibly jail time for people who leave guns inside unlocked cars.

The lawsuit by Clarence Belt could ultimately determine whether city officials successfully found a niche where they can legally regulate gun safety in a state where Republican lawmakers have widely abolished restrictions on owning and carrying firearms.

Savannah's mayor and city council voted unanimously in April to outlaw keeping firearms in unlocked vehicles, with maximum penalties of a \$1,000 fine and 30 days in jail. They said the law would make it harder for criminals to steal guns, and cited local police statistics showing more than 200 guns reported stolen last year from vehicles that weren't locked.

Belt filed suit in May. He lives in Jesup, Georgia, about 66 miles (106 kilometers) southwest of Savannah, but says he frequently visits the coastal city for shopping, eating and doctor appointments. His lawyer, John Monroe, says Belt carries a gun in his vehicle and fears being cited.

"He's disabled and it's difficult for him to comply with the ordinance," said Monroe, who gave no further details about Belt's disability during a court hearing Wednesday. "He also doesn't want to comply with the ordinance."

Chatham County Superior Court Judge Benjamin Karpf didn't rule Wednesday on Belt's motion to halt enforcement of the Savannah ordinance while considering his underlying lawsuit that seeks to have it thrown out permanently.

Monroe said Savannah's ordinance should be voided because it violates a state law prohibiting local governments from regulating "the possession, ownership, transport, (or) carrying" of firearms.

Georgia Attorney General Chris Carr, a Republican, made the same argument in a May letter to Savannah officials stating that "no local ordinance can regulate firearms." City officials ignored Carr's warning that they could face civil liability for enforcing the ordinance.

Savannah Mayor Van Johnson, a Democrat and a former police officer, has supported the city's ordinance as a way to make gun owners act responsibly without infringing on their rights to own or carry firearms.

Bates Lovett, Savannah's city government attorney, noted in court Wednesday that the state law cited by Belt's lawyer and Carr doesn't expressly say local governments can't regulate gun storage.

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Lovett also argued that Savannah's ordinance isn't primarily about guns.

"We're regulating the vehicle, not the firearm," Lovett told the judge, adding that it's perfectly legal in Savannah to store a gun in a car. "But once you leave the vehicle, you must lock that vehicle."

Monroe said Georgia courts have struck down attempts by other local governments to "indirectly" regulate guns, and that any limitations on gun storage by cities should be considered illegal restrictions on possession and ownership.

Savannah police had only issued three citations and one warning for guns left in unlocked cars as of Aug. 15, the Savannah Morning News reported. The police department did not immediately provide an updated total Wednesday to The Associated Press.

Before deciding whether to block Savannah's gun ordinance, the judge said he first has questions about whether Belt has legal standing to sue the city because he's not a resident. He gave the lawyers until Sept. 16 to file written briefs on the issue.

Monroe said his client's residency shouldn't matter because Savannah's ordinance applies to residents and visitors. Belt did not attend the court hearing Wednesday.

If Karpf allows Belt's lawsuit to move forward, the judge predicted a protracted legal battle that could wind through multiple Georgia courts.

"I don't have any illusion about having the final word on this," Karpf said.

There's no X in Brazil. Celebrity fandom worldwide is in disarray

By MALLIKA SEN Associated Press

It was a rapture and a revelation all at the same time.

En masse, celebrity stan accounts posted tearful farewells over the weekend as X was suspended in Brazil amid a showdown between Elon Musk and a Supreme Court justice. Many of their hundreds of thousands of followers learned only then that their favorite celebrity's most dedicated English-language fan accounts had actually been run by Brazilians.

It shouldn't have necessarily been a surprise — "Come to Brazil" is a stalwart meme. Brazil's CCXP bills itself as the Americas' largest comic-con, drawing A-list Hollywood talent. The stars of the long-ended show "Everybody Hates Chris" are beloved. Brazil does fandom like no other, the avalanche of goodbyes unearthing a wide array of accounts for Taylor Swift, C-list celebrities and the long-dead alike.

"I came to realize how strong our digital power is in this last minute, because we tweet in English so people don't know that we are Brazilians. But we are a lot, we are everywhere," said Aianne Amado, a University of Sao Paulo doctoral candidate who studies Brazilian fandoms. "I think that we will be missed and it's not going to be the same network."

Meet the fans

Paola Strabelli didn't care much for reading. A few years ago, though, she saw "Vita and Virginia" and became entranced — not with its lead actors, but with Virginia Woolf herself.

She started to read Woolf voraciously, and created @botvirginia to share Woolf's quotes, amassing 115,000 followers.

Strabelli, 26, told The Associated Press that, growing up, she didn't have many friends. In some ways, she said, her life began with online fandom — first, through Katy Perry and the show "Once Upon A Time," and then Woolf. Online friendships translated into real life, and, for a year, she dated a girl she met through their shared passion.

The law student behind @agron_updates, dedicated to "Glee" actor Dianna Agron, never reckoned on disclosing her nationality. The 32-year-old from Brazil's center-west region requested anonymity for privacy, as she pursues government jobs. She was drawn to Agron because she thought the actor seemed "so kind." By 2016, annoyed with how Agron's fan accounts operated — cropping out boyfriends, for example — she co-founded an X account that grew to more than 7,600 followers.

All along, she's been careful to maintain a separation between her own feelings and the account's.

"Sometimes I will watch a movie and I think it's terrible, but I'll go on the account and say, 'Guys, it's amazing,'" she said. "I wasn't hoping to have to come out as a Brazilian."

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Then there's @21metgala, run by two 18-year-old college students, Maria and Tamara. In three years, it's gained more than 175,000 followers and, unlike many stan accounts, covers general celebrity news (though they have a soft spot for Rihanna). Maria, who cited privacy in not wanting to publish her surname, said via WhatsApp that she was taken aback by the response to their departure.

"Most of our followers didn't know we were Brazilian, so it was a huge shock when we announced it," she wrote. Even Cardi B responded with distraught emojis.

Amado attributed Brazil's fervor for foreign entertainment to both its colonial history and the country's sheer diversity, noting its high consumption of Japanese otaku culture and its large population of Japanese descent.

Fandom is hard work

Fandom can often be derided with a condescension that belies the sheer amount of work that goes into maintaining these accounts.

"At first, I thought that fans were crazy. And, like, psychologically, I don't know, sick? ... And now, I've come to see that it's all about passion and effect and it's a very human behavior. Everybody's interested in something," be it cooking or canines, Amado said. "But for some reason, when you're interested in something in pop culture, people tend to think that is less than."

An academic from Belo Horizonte, Samira Spolidorio has studied fansubbing — where devoted viewers come together to subtitle. She has a simple theory for why Brazilians are such engines of fandom, using a word that came up in interview after interview: Brazilians are just "passionate." They're also looking for a sense of belonging, she said.

Despite being grassroots efforts that drew no profit, fansubbing groups had "very strict rules" requiring volunteers to work overnight, Spolidorio said. A 40-minute episode required at least four people to subtitle and two to review — there were style guides, too.

That commitment can exact a price. Before X's suspension, @agron_updates had an expiration date of Dec. 31. Running it was affecting its administrator's entire life, even leading to a breakup.

"One of the reasons was I was always on the phone, always checking for content," she told the AP. "It's kind of like a drug, it seizes something in your brain. You want to be first to post it."

"I've been unemployed for the past two years, and I have to study, I have to do something with my life," she added. "There's no way I can keep my life revolving around keeping a Twitter account for someone who — I love Dianna, but she doesn't work."

What's next

In the past week, X alternative Bluesky has boosted its base by one-third, adding 2 million users, CEO Jay Graber told the AP. Around 90% are Brazilian and most activity is in Portuguese, she said Monday.

Brazilians using virtual private networks to bypass the suspension face steep fines, but @21metgala has been able to continue posting sporadically.

"Some Wi-Fi providers haven't fully blocked access yet, but it's very unstable," Maria wrote Monday. While they are on other platforms, @21metgala will certainly be back if X is unsuspended.

"Twitter was faster for posting photos, and Bluesky doesn't allow video posts yet, which is a bit of a challenge. We're not huge fans of Instagram because accounts can be easily taken down due to copyright issues," she wrote. (Video is coming to Bluesky, Graber says, "definitely sooner than months.")

For CCXP, the suspension doesn't pose much of a threat to the convention's success. In a statement, vice president for content Beto Fabri said they'd already "focused on valuing and building relationships with the geek community" on WhatsApp, Telegram, Facebook and their own platforms.

Not everyone plans to pivot. Despite having nearly 16,000 followers at @GALITZINEFOX, 23-year-old Alana Souza is relatively new to stanning actor Nicholas Galitzine. The advertising student from Recife became devoted after watching "Red, White & Royal Blue" last year. Given the amount of time she's spent on X, she's doesn't want to start over.

"If X doesn't get unsuspended in Brazil then that's gonna be the end of it," she wrote in an email, later adding that her absence "gives me the feeling of being disconnected from what's going on in the world."

Since Musk bought X, Strabelli has found it less fun. But it still had a cachet that, for her, can't be rep-

licated. While she appreciates Instagram for letting her start over — she can reuse quotes instead of scouring the internet for lesser-known scraps of Woolf's writing — she finds it impersonal. There are many things she will miss about X, including her "gringo friends that are tweeting."

"I felt famous and wanted," she said. "And when I saw the replies, I don't know, I'm not going to lie, this ego bump was really nice."

The War on Drugs announces a live album ahead of its tour with The National

By KRYSTA FAURIA Associated Press

LOS ANGELES (AP) — For many musicians, a live album is an afterthought — a way to quickly appease insatiable fans or make some easy money.

But when Adam Granduciel, the frontman of the anthemic rock band The War on Drugs, set out to make their newest live album announced Wednesday, it was a labor of love that is anything but quick or easy.

For "Live Drugs Again," out Sept. 13, Granduciel wanted to do justice to the ways in which the band has grown, both literally (they've added a member since their first live album was released in 2020) and figuratively as musicians who have honed their sound. So he combed through about 100 hours of recordings from their shows and even spliced different parts of the same songs together.

The album comes in tandem with the start of their co-headlining tour with The National, which kicks off Sept. 12 in New Hampshire. Granduciel spoke with The Associated Press about how performing a song live changes it, whether the band has new music in the pipeline and how he came to play guitar on Beyoncé's "II Most Wanted."

The interview has been edited for clarity and brevity.

AP: Talk about what went into making this live record.

GRANDUCIEL: I think we used maybe like 50 shows total. There are a few songs where it's four shows spliced together, and part of that too is just having fun with the process. You know, you go into it remembering specific nights, like there are a few songs from a show in Bentonville, Arkansas, which is a town we had never been to in 20 years of being a band. And we kind of rolled into this town and it was this really beautiful little young artist student community. It was incredible. We had an amazing day and the show at night was outdoors, and it was just one of those memorable nights.

You kind of start there, and then you get so deep into the process of mixing versions and maybe doing a little post-production, like all great live records do. I just wanted to put as much work into it as myself and the band put into our live show, you know, just the amount of time it takes to sort of hone a set, it's years really. And we wanted to kind of put that into the record.

AP: You're a bit of a gearhead. Did you use anything interesting for this album?

GRANDUCIEL: Well, unlike our first live record, we used a lot of the actual ambient mics that we recorded. Sometimes it can be tricky with phase and all this stuff. But for this one, we used a lot of the actual just source ambient mics so all the crowds are real to that moment. I think most live records these days are just going to be sort of put into digital spaces. You just have more control over everything. But this one, I think we had like 12 different ambient mics throughout the stage and the venues.

AP: Does the anticipation of performing your music inform your songwriting process at all? Do you factor in how it will sound live or do you just think about that part after?

GRANDUCIEL: Definitely after. I think things just naturally progress. And they sort of end up in a whole new place once the audience is part of the equation, you know? I mean, if we went back and made a re-recorded "Under the Pressure" the way we play it, it probably wouldn't be the same thing on a record. But whenever you come off a touring cycle and things reach that next tier from the band dynamically, it always informs the next thing you do.

AP: Do you have new music in the works?

GRANDUCIEL: In theory there is new music.

It's nice to be home for a bit and sort of get into the flow of everything when you start making a new

one. We're always working, whether it's mixing live stuff or recording a new song or whatever.

AP: How did you end up playing guitar for "II Most Wanted," the Beyoncé and Miley Cyrus duet?

GRANDUCIEL: I worked on my last two records with Shawn Everett. And he's producing Miley's new album. And he called me one day, and I was taking my kid and his friend to an indoor playground in North Hollywood. And he was like, "Do you want to come over tonight and play on this Miley song?" And I was like, "Yeah, definitely." And then on the way over, he was like, "I think it may be a Beyoncé thing too. I'm not really sure."

But it was very quick and I played on two songs. But I kind of thought it was gonna be submitted as a song, and then they would redo my parts or whatever, you know? And then literally five weeks later, I saw that it was like a Beyoncé-Miley song. And I was in the parking lot on a Saturday night on Hollywood Boulevard at the studio, and it was like really loud. And I was like listening on my phone. I was like, "Is that the song?" And I was like, "Wait, that is the song I played on." And I texted Shawn and I was like, "Did they redo my guitar?" He's like, "No, that's your guitar." And I listened to it on the way home in my car and I was like, "This is amazing." I couldn't believe it.

What to know about Israel's major weeklong raid in the West Bank city of Jenin

By JACK JEFFERY and JULIA FRANKEL Associated Press

For more than a week, hundreds of Israeli forces have carried out the deadliest operation in the occupied West Bank since the war in Gaza began. Their focus has been the Jenin refugee camp — a bastion of Palestinian militancy that has grown more fervent since the Hamas attack on Israel that launched the war.

The fighting in Jenin accounts for 18 of the 33 Palestinians health officials say have been killed, most of whom the military says have been militants. Israel says its soldiers are dug in for battle with Hamas and other groups, meaning the death toll is likely to rise.

Israeli military officials say the operation targeting militants in Jenin, Tulkarem and the Al-Faraa refugee camp is necessary to curb recent attacks against Israeli civilians they say have become more sophisticated and deadly. One Israeli soldier has been killed in the operation.

The Jenin raid has been devastating for Palestinian civilians, too. Water and electric service have been cut, families have been confined to their homes and ambulances evacuating the wounded have been slowed on their way to nearby hospitals, as Israeli soldiers search for militants.

Here's what we know about the raid on Jenin:

A troubled city in the West Bank

Jenin has long been a flashpoint in the decades-old Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

It was originally established to house Palestinians who fled or were forced from their homes during the war surrounding Israel's creation in 1948. But over time the refugee camp morphed into a crowded, urban neighborhood that — like the rest of the West Bank — has been under Israeli military occupation since 1967.

In 2002, during the height of the second intifada, or uprising, Israeli forces flattened large sections of the impoverished city. The gunfighting that ensued killed 52 Palestinians and 23 Israeli soldiers, according to the United Nations.

In recent years, the Palestinian Authority, which administers urban pockets of the West Bank, has had a diminishing influence in Jenin. It is seen by many Jenin residents as a subcontractor of the occupation because it coordinates with Israel on security matters. On occasion, the authority's forces have clashed and exchanged fire with Palestinian militants.

The militant groups Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas operate freely across Jenin, and fight together in Gaza, too. Jenin's streets are regularly lined with posters depicting slain fighters as martyrs to the Palestinian struggle, while young men carrying walkie-talkies patrol the alleys.

Since war broke out on Oct. 7, Israeli forces have stepped up their raids on Jenin, often launching drone strikes on targets there. But until the most recent raid, most had only lasted several hours, or at most a few days.

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Also since Oct. 7, there has been a surge of violence by settlers against Palestinians in the West Bank, and an increase in the construction of settlements in the occupied territory.

More than 680 Palestinians in the West Bank have been killed since October, most by Israeli troops and some by settlers, according to local health officials. The Israeli army did not immediately respond to a query seeking the number of Israelis killed in the West Bank over the same period.

A longer Israeli raid, not a new strategy

In Jenin, armored vehicles have blocked entrances and exits, and bulldozers have plowed roads. Soldiers set up positions inside abandoned buildings, searched homes and traded fire with militants. Israeli forces surrounded hospitals, stopping ambulances carrying in waves of wounded to check if they were sheltering militants.

Israeli aims in Jenin are more modest than in Gaza, where it publicly pledged to wipe out Hamas' military capabilities in the enclave for good through a months-long campaign

In the West Bank, Israel is not aiming to entirely wipe out the militant activity concentrated in several of the territory's refugee camp's, said a military official who spoke on the condition of anonymity in line with military restrictions. Instead, the raids are intended to thwart pending attacks on Israeli civilians — such as an attempted bombing in Tel Aviv claimed by Hamas in August and a shooting of an Israeli civilian in the Palestinian town of Qalqilya in June.

The military official said the operation across the West Bank involves fewer soldiers than a major raid on the Jenin camp before the war that killed 12. But he could not say when the raid would end.

Some analysts are skeptical the latest raid in Jenin would have any dramatic long-term impact, in terms of making Israel less vulnerable to West Bank militancy.

"The current escalation relies on intense efforts of Hamas and Iran and deep weakness of the PA — which are not going to be changed," said Michael Milshtein, a former Israeli army intelligence officer who is now an analyst of Palestinian affairs at Tel Aviv University. "Another operation is a matter of time."

Ambulances inspected and hospitals surrounded

Jenin's residents have described scenes of destruction. They said some Israeli soldiers are moving from house to house, while others are digging up roads with armored bulldozers.

When asked, the army said its troops are clearing militant command centers scattered across the city and uprooting explosive devices buried underneath streets.

"They cut off the water, they cut off the electricity, they cut off the internet. We are ready to live by candlelight," said Jenin resident Mohannad Hajj Hussein.

Oroba al-Shalabi said she fled her family home in the heart of Jenin last Saturday after being briefly detained by Israeli forces and separated from her male relatives.

"They (the Israeli soldiers) locked us in a room at the beginning, and when we went out (of the room) the men were tied to the floor," she said. Soon after she was allowed to leave, but without her male family members.

The Israeli military official said there is no curfew in Jenin and that the army is allowing civilians to leave different areas of the city if they wish.

But many districts of the city remain near impossible to access, said Nebal Farsakh, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Red Crescent, whose ambulances must coordinate with Israeli authorities before they can be dispatched. Over the past week, she said the humanitarian organization has received hundreds of calls from residents in Jenin asking for food, medications and baby formula.

"People are trapped now in Jenin refugee camp.....we're still getting dozens of calls," she said.

Hunter Biden's tax trial carries less political weight but heavy emotional toll for the president

By ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Hunter Biden's continued legal problems may no longer be a political concern for the president, but they're still very much a personal concern.

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President Joe Biden's son is already facing the prospect of prison time after his conviction on felony gun charges and is now confronting a second criminal trial in the case accusing him of dodging taxes on millions of dollars in income from foreign business entities.

The trial could put a spotlight on Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings that Republicans have spent years scrutinizing to accuse the Democratic president — without evidence — of corruption in connection with his son's work overseas.

The potential political ramifications of the trial just weeks before the presidential election may have faded somewhat since President Biden's July decision to drop out of the 2024 race. But the president is deeply concerned with the well-being of his son, so the trial is likely to weigh heavily on him in the final months of his five-decade political career.

It's unclear whether the Biden family will attend the trial, which begins Thursday with jury selection in a Los Angeles federal court. First lady Jill Biden sat in the courtroom nearly every day of Hunter Biden's trial in Delaware, flying home from France to be there only to turn around and return for an elaborate state visit at Élysée Palace.

The Bidens watched some of Hunter's darkest moments relived in public during that trial, which ended with his conviction on three felony gun charges in June. The tax case could air more salacious evidence about what prosecutors say was lavish spending on things like escorts, drugs and exotic cars in the years Hunter Biden is accused of failing to pay at least \$1.4 million in taxes.

President Biden, for his part, has said he will not pardon his son nor commute any sentence. But the 81-year-old made those pledges while he was still actively campaigning. It's not clear whether his mindset has changed now that he has only a few more months in the White House.

The gun case

Neither trial was supposed to happen in the first place.

Hunter Biden had agreed last year to plead guilty to misdemeanor tax charges in a deal with special counsel David Weiss, the Delaware U.S. attorney who began investigating him during President Donald Trump's administration.

Under the deal, Hunter Biden could have avoided prosecution in the gun case if he stayed out of trouble for two years. But the deal blew up after the Delaware judge raised concerns about unusual aspects of it, and Weiss subsequently indicted him on the gun charges in Delaware and tax charges in California.

The gun case resurfaced tawdry and embarrassing details surrounding Hunter Biden's spiral into a crack cocaine addiction before becoming sober in 2019. Jurors saw personal text messages and photos of Hunter Biden with drug paraphernalia or partially clothed as prosecutors worked to convince them that he lied when he swore on a federal form to buy a gun in 2018 that he wasn't a drug user.

It took just about three hours of deliberations for jurors to find him guilty on all three counts. The first lady clutched Hunter Biden's hand as they strode from the courthouse, got into the waiting SUVs and drove off.

Weiss' team has not yet said whether it will seek prison time when Hunter is sentenced in that case on Nov. 13 — the week after the election. The charges call for up to 25 years in prison, though as a first-time offender he would likely receive far less or potentially no prison time at all.

Family support

President Biden stayed away from the courthouse during the Delaware trial and said little about the case while it was ongoing to avoid the appearance that he was interfering in a criminal matter brought by his own Justice Department.

Shortly after Hunter's conviction, the president and first lady issued a statement expressing love for their son and pride in his addiction recovery. Hours later, the president landed in Wilmington to spend the night at his Delaware home and embraced Hunter, who was waiting for him on the tarmac.

Hunter has remained by his father's side in the months since the gun trial. He and other relatives watched from the Oval Office as the president gave his address to the nation explaining why he decided to quit the presidential race. And he joined his father on stage last month at the Democratic National Convention after the president's speech endorsing Vice President Kamala Harris.

More legal peril

The tax indictment brought last year details what prosecutors allege was a four-year scheme to avoid paying taxes while spending wildly on things like drugs, strippers and luxury hotels. The back taxes have since been paid.

Hunter Biden's lawyers have indicated they will make the case that he did not act "willfully," or with the intention to break the law, arguing that alcohol and drug abuse impaired his decision-making and judgment.

Prosecutors have pressed the judge to allow them to tell jurors about Hunter's spending habits, including payments to people to clean up drug paraphernalia for him, so they can evaluate whether he intentionally or mistakenly listed those items as business expenses.

"He's not on trial because he hired people to clean out drug paraphernalia," prosecutor Leo Wise said during a recent court hearing. "But then he went on and claimed it was a business expense."

It's unclear how many of the lurid details jurors will hear. U.S. District Judge Mark Scarsi said he will maintain "strict control" over the presentation of potentially salacious evidence after the defense pressed the judge to keep it out of the case.

"They want the character assassination," Mark Geragos, a celebrity lawyer leading Hunter's defense in the California case, said during the hearing last month. "They want to slime him because that is the whole purpose."

Prosecutors have also said they want to bring in evidence about Hunter Biden's foreign business dealings to prove his state of mind during the years at issue in the case.

That includes testimony about a Romanian businessman who prosecutors say hired Hunter Biden and a business associate to influence the U.S. government while his father was vice president. The Romanian was under criminal investigation in his home country at the time and had hoped the U.S. government could help end his legal woes, according to prosecutors.

Defense lawyers have accused prosecutors of trying to insert "politically-charged" and irrelevant details about his foreign business affairs into the trial. The judge deferred a ruling on the matter until trial but warned lawyers last month to keep focused on the tax allegations.

"We're not going to talk about any improper government conduct of any administration," the judge said.

House Republicans subpoena Secretary Blinken for testimony on US withdrawal from Afghanistan

By FARNOUSH AMIRI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — House Republicans have issued a subpoena demanding testimony from Secretary of State Antony Blinken as they wrap up a sprawling yearslong investigation into the chaotic U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021.

Rep. Michael McCaul, the chairman of the House Foreign Affairs Committee, sent a subpoena letter late Tuesday ordering Blinken to appear before the committee by Sept. 19 or face a contempt of Congress charge.

"You served as the final decision maker for the department on the withdrawal and evacuation," McCaul wrote.

He added that three years later, Blinken is "in a position to inform the Committee's consideration of potential legislation aimed at helping prevent the catastrophic mistakes of the withdrawal, including potential reforms to the Department's legislative authorization."

Matthew Miller, a State Department spokesman, said Blinken is unable to testify on the dates proposed by the committee as he will be traveling for diplomatic work the majority of September. He claimed the committee denied "reasonable alternatives" to the subpoena date.

"The Secretary has testified before the Congress on Afghanistan more than 14 times — more than any other Cabinet-level official," Miller said, adding that four of those times were directly before the Foreign Affairs committee at the request of McCaul. "It is disappointing that instead of continuing to engage with

the Department in good faith, the Committee instead has issued yet another unnecessary subpoena.”

The subpoena for Blinken’s testimony is the latest in a series of moves by McCaul and other House Republicans over the last 18 months to hold the Biden administration accountable for what they have called a “stunning failure of leadership” after Taliban forces seized the Afghan capital of Kabul, far more rapidly than U.S. intelligence had foreseen as American forces pulled out.

The committee is expected to summarize its work in an investigative report to be released Monday, amid the contentious presidential election where Republican nominee Donald Trump has tried to elevate the withdrawal from Afghanistan as a campaign issue.

While the GOP report is expected to place blame on President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, who is now the Democratic nominee for president, independent watchdog reports over the last three years have documented a much more nuanced and bipartisan case for which administration was at fault.

A 2022 report by the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, concluded it was decisions made by both President Donald Trump and Biden to pull all U.S. troops out of Afghanistan that were key factors in the collapse of that nation’s military.

That report mirrors assertions made by senior Pentagon and military leaders in the aftermath of the withdrawal. Military leaders have made clear that their recommendation was to leave about 2,500 U.S. troops in the country, but that plan was not approved.

Ukrainian foreign minister resigns ahead of expected reshuffling of government leaders

By ILLIA NOVIKOV and EMMA BURROWS Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba, one of Ukraine’s most recognizable faces on the international stage, resigned Wednesday ahead of an expected reshuffling of government leaders. Russian strikes, meanwhile, killed seven people in a western city, a day after one of the deadliest missile attacks since the war began.

Kuleba, 43, gave no reason for stepping down. Four other Cabinet ministers tendered their resignations late Tuesday, likely making this reshuffle the biggest since Russia’s invasion in February 2022.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy indicated last week that the reshuffling was imminent, with the war poised to enter a critical stage and to mark its 1,000th day in November.

He said Wednesday that Ukraine needs “new energy, and that includes in diplomacy.” He said during a Kyiv news conference with visiting Irish Prime Minister Simon Harris that he could not announce any replacements yet because he did not know whether the candidates would accept his invitation to join the government.

Zelenskyy needs to keep up Ukraine’s morale amid the grinding war of attrition with its bigger neighbor and to steel the country’s resolve for what will be another hard winter. Russia has been smashing Ukraine’s power grid, knocking out some 70% of generation capacity and rupturing heat and water supplies.

Wednesday’s deadly attack on Lviv — a city near the border with NATO member Poland and far from the front lines — underscored how all of Ukraine is at the mercy of Moscow’s long-range capabilities.

The Ukrainian army’s risky incursion almost a month ago into Russia’s Kursk border region raised Ukrainian spirits and countered months of grim news from the front line in eastern Ukraine. The incursion’s ultimate goals are unclear, though Zelenskyy says Ukraine wants to create a buffer zone there that would prevent cross-border Russian attacks.

Russian President Vladimir Putin remains bent on pushing his army deeper into eastern Ukraine. The Kremlin’s onslaught in Donetsk, where Ukraine is short of troops and air defenses, and long-range missile strikes that repeatedly hit civilian areas of Ukraine, signal that Putin will remain uncompromising and unrelenting in his efforts to crush Ukrainian resistance.

The Institute for the Study of War, a Washington think tank, said late Tuesday that Putin believes Russia “can slowly and indefinitely subsume Ukraine through grinding advances” and “by outlasting Western

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support" for Kyiv.

Zelenskyy is also keeping in mind the U.S. presidential election in November, which could bring a shift in key U.S. military support for his country.

During the war, Kuleba has been second only to Zelenskyy in carrying Ukraine's message and needs to an international audience, whether through social media posts or meetings with foreign dignitaries. In July, Kuleba became the highest-ranking Ukrainian official to visit China since Russia's invasion. He has been foreign minister since March 2020.

Kuleba's successor is not yet known but is expected to be announced Thursday. Several Ukrainian media outlets, citing unnamed sources, said Kuleba's deputy, Andrii Sybiha, would become the country's chief diplomat.

The new foreign minister will likely accompany Zelenskyy next week to the U.N. General Assembly in New York, which is an opportunity to lobby global leaders for their support.

Kuleba's resignation will be discussed by lawmakers at their next session, parliamentary Speaker Ruslan Stefanchuk said on his Facebook page.

More than half the current Cabinet will undergo changes, said Davyd Arakhamiia, a leader of Zelenskyy's party in the parliament. Ministers will resign Wednesday, and new appointments will be made Thursday, he said.

Zelenskyy's five-year mandate expired in May. He remains in power under the provisions of martial law.

Elsewhere, the nighttime strike on Lviv wounded 52 people as well as killing seven, Ukraine's rescue service said. The strike was carried out with a Kinzhal missile and drones and targeted defense industry enterprises, Russian news agency Tass said, citing the Russian Defense Ministry.

Local officials disputed the targeting claim. Lviv Mayor Andrii Sadovyi and the Ukrainian Catholic University published a photo of a family whose mother and three daughters were killed in the attack that struck their home. The father survived but was in critical condition, Sadovyi said.

The eldest daughter, 21-year-old Yaryna, was a program manager at the European Youth Forum, a platform of the continent's youth organizations, her colleagues wrote on Facebook. "We will neither forget nor forgive" the attack, they said in the post.

Another Russian attack wounded five people in Kryvyi Rih, Zelenskyy's hometown, regional head Serhii Lysak said.

Kuleba said the Lviv and Kryvyi Rih attacks showed Ukraine's need for more Western support.

"To put an end to this terror, Ukraine's partners must promptly deliver the promised air defense systems and ammunition, as well as strengthen Ukraine's defense capabilities and allow us to launch long-range strikes on all legitimate military targets in Russia," he wrote on X.

Zelenskyy reacted to the attacks by urging Ukraine's allies to give Kyiv "more range" to use Western weapons to strike deeper into Russian territory.

The attack happened a day after two ballistic missiles blasted a military academy and nearby hospital in Poltava in eastern-central Ukraine, killing 53 people and wounding almost 300 others, Ukrainian officials said.

The missiles tore into the heart of the Poltava Military Institute of Communication's main building, causing several stories to collapse.

Poltava is about 350 kilometers (200 miles) southeast of Kyiv, on the main highway and rail route between Kyiv and Ukraine's second-largest city, Kharkiv, which is close to the Russian border.

In other developments, the head of the United Nations' nuclear watchdog agency, Rafael Grossi, visited the Zaporizhzhia nuclear plant in southern Ukraine, a day after describing the situation at Europe's largest atomic energy facility as "very fragile."

The International Atomic Energy Agency published a report Wednesday saying that since Grossi's last visit there in February, the plant has been struck by drones, lost power lines and seen "significant damage" to one of its two cooling towers by fire.

Takeaways from AP's report on government programs tackling the US maternal death crisis

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

Across the U.S., programs at all levels of government — federal, state and local — are striving to reduce maternal mortality and erase the racial gap.

Many are making headway in their communities and paving the way for other places.

The Associated Press examined efforts that are focused on individual patient needs and efforts seeking to improve medical care generally. Here are key takeaways.

Guiding vulnerable women through pregnancy helps keep them healthy

Healthy Start is a federal program that has worked with vulnerable populations for decades. This year, the federal government gave out \$105 million in grants to fund local projects. Officials say it's essential part of the Biden administration's plan for addressing maternal health.

It "manages women through their pregnancy," said Corrina Jackson, who heads up a local Healthy Start project in Tulsa, Oklahoma. "You try to get them in their first trimester and then work with them to delivery day, and then we also work with the babies to make sure that they reach their milestones."

Healthy Start programs coordinate prenatal and postpartum care, as well as educate moms on health and parenting; provide referrals to services for things like depression or domestic violence; and help with transportation.

In Jackson's more than 25-year tenure in Tulsa, she said there have been no maternal deaths among clients. The maternal death rate for Oklahoma as a whole, meanwhile, is currently higher than the national average.

Improving medical care can lower maternal mortality dramatically

California, by contrast, has the lowest maternal mortality in the nation at 10.5 per 100,000 live births. That wasn't the case before it created a "maternal quality care collaborative" in 2006.

The partnership founded at Stanford University's medical school brings together people from every hospital with a maternity unit to share best practices on problems that could lead to maternal injury or death, such as high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and sepsis.

"When you look at the rate of maternal death in the United States compared to California, they basically ran neck-and-neck until it was established," said Dr. Amanda Williams, clinical innovation adviser for the collaborative. "At that time they totally separated and California started going down. The rest of the country started going up."

The hospitals get toolkits that describe what to do, how to set up medical teams and what supplies to keep on the unit. The collaborative also looks to improve obstetric care by integrating midwives and doulas — whose services are covered by the state's Medicaid program.

Experts: Tailoring solutions to individual communities works best

New York City has a goal of reducing maternal mortality overall and achieving a 10% drop in Black maternal mortality by 2030. The city is targeting low-income residents, those living in public housing and others with its New Family Home Visits Initiative, which supports pregnant and new parents by offering visits from nurses, midwives, doulas and lactation consultants.

Jackson's Healthy Start project in Tulsa is also grounded in her community. She and her staff understand the lingering effects of the city's 1921 race massacre, which is estimated to have killed 100-300 people and destroyed homes, churches, schools and businesses. Jackson said all sorts of health disparities persist, and added that many Black women also distrust the health care system, so being relatable is valuable.

The pope urges Indonesia to live up to its promise of 'harmony in diversity'

By NICOLE WINFIELD and EDNA TARIGAN Associated Press

JAKARTA, Indonesia (AP) — Pope Francis urged Indonesia to live up to its promise of "harmony in diversity" and fight religious intolerance on Wednesday, as he set a rigorous pace for an 11-day, four-nation trip through tropical Southeast Asia and Oceania that will test his stamina and health.

Despite the grueling itinerary, an energetic Francis joked and laughed his way through a packed first full day in Indonesia, meeting with outgoing President Joko Widodo and other Indonesian officials at the presidential palace and then greeting Catholic priests, nuns and seminarians at Jakarta's main cathedral in the afternoon.

Cannons boomed as Francis joined Widodo on the veranda of the palace along with President-elect Prabowo Subianto. A marching band, stiff-legged troops and children in traditional Indonesian dress welcomed the first pope to visit in 35 years.

In his remarks to officials, Francis compared Indonesia's human diversity to the archipelago's 17,000 islands. He said each one contributes something specific to form "a magnificent mosaic, in which each tile is an irreplaceable element in creating a great original and precious work."

And yet, Francis warned that such diversity in a country with the world's largest Muslim population can also become a source of conflict — an apparent reference to episodes of intolerance that have flared in recent years in Indonesia as well as a broader concern about conflicts raging around the world.

"This wise and delicate balance, between the multiplicity of cultures and different ideological visions, and the ideals that cement unity, must be continuously defended against imbalances," Francis said. Political leaders, he said, had a particular role to play but he also assured Widodo of the Catholic Church's commitment to increasing interreligious dialogue.

"This is indispensable for meeting common challenges, including that of countering extremism and intolerance, which through the distortion of religion attempt to impose their views by using deception and violence," he said.

Regionally, the internal conflict in Myanmar has forced more than 700,000 Rohingya to flee to Bangladesh, where thousands have fled overcrowded, violent camps to countries including Indonesia. Farther afield, Indonesia has regularly condemned Israel's war with the militant Hamas group in Gaza and Widodo thanked Francis for the Vatican's support for Palestinian civilians.

"War will not benefit anyone, war will only bring suffering and misery to the common people," Widodo said. "Therefore let us celebrate the differences that we have. Let us accept each other and strengthen tolerance to realize peace, to realize a better world for all humanity."

Francis arrived in Jakarta on Tuesday to kick off the longest, farthest and most difficult trip of his pontificate, given his myriad health problems. At 87, he uses a wheelchair, has regular bouts of bronchitis and has had multiple surgeries for intestinal problems.

By the trip's end on Sept. 13, Francis will have flown 32,814 kilometers (20,390 miles) and visited Indonesia, Papua New Guinea, East Timor and Singapore — one of the longest papal trips ever in terms of days on the road and distances traveled.

Francis appeared in good form Wednesday, showing his trademark sense of humor even as he had to stand for long periods and had multiple transfers from his wheelchair to chairs and the car.

His dry wit never let up: To Widodo and Indonesian dignitaries, he praised Indonesia's relatively high birthrate while lamenting that in the West, "some prefer a cat or a little dog." To a private meeting with his fellow Jesuits he quipped at the end that "The police have come to take me away." To priests and nuns he warned against greed, saying "the devil enters through your pockets."

That said, Francis' prepared remarks were shorter than usual in a possible bid to spare him the strain of speaking for long periods.

In the afternoon, Francis met with Indonesian clergy and nuns in Jakarta's Our Lady of the Assumption Cathedral for his traditional pep talk to the local church.

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Catholics make up just 3% of Indonesia's population of 275 million, but the country is home to the world's largest Catholic seminary and has long been a top source of priests and nuns for the Catholic Church.

Addressing the priests, nuns and lay church leaders, Francis continued the theme of encouraging greater fraternity among people of different faiths and cultures.

"This is important, because proclaiming the Gospel does not mean imposing our faith or placing it in opposition to that of others, but giving and sharing the joy of encountering Christ always with great respect and fraternal affection for everyone," he said.

Sister Rina Rosalina was chosen to address the pope, and offered some constructive criticism of the inordinate amount of time it takes for the Vatican to approve Indonesian-language translations of his official texts.

"Holy Father, we are always trying to learn from you. Unfortunately, due to distance and language barriers, sometimes we have difficulties studying the documents issued from Rome," she said, drawing knowing nods from the pope.

Outside the cathedral, several hundred well-wishers gathered to greet the pope, including at least one boy dressed as a tiny pope. They waved Indonesian and Holy See flags and children played traditional bamboo instruments.

The location of the cathedral is symbolically important for Indonesia's push for interfaith and intercultural harmony — it is located across from the country's main Istiqlal mosque and connected to it by an underground "Tunnel of Friendship," which Francis is to visit on Thursday with the mosque's grand imam.

While Francis wants 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.

Amnesty International said it hoped Francis' visit would encourage an end to acts of intolerance and discrimination against minority groups and truly promote a respect for religious freedom that is enshrined in the country's constitution.

In a statement, Amnesty noted that from January 2021 to July 2024, there were at least 123 cases of intolerance, including rejection, closure or destruction of places of worship and physical attacks.

"The pope's visit has an important role to play in encouraging Indonesia to end intolerance and discrimination against all minority groups," said Usman Hamid, executive director of Amnesty International Indonesia.

Grenfell Tower was a 'death trap' after failures by UK government and industry, inquiry says

By JILL LAWLESS Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — A damning report on a deadly London high-rise fire concluded Wednesday that decades of failures by government, regulators and industry turned Grenfell Tower into a "death trap" where 72 people lost their lives.

The public inquiry into the 2017 blaze found no "single cause" of the tragedy, but said a combination of dishonest companies, weak or incompetent regulators and complacent government led the building to be covered in combustible cladding that turned a small apartment fire into the deadliest blaze on British soil since World War II.

The inquiry's head, retired judge Martin Moore-Bick, said the deaths were avoidable and "all contributed to it in one way or another, in most cases through incompetence but in some cases through dishonesty and greed."

Prime Minister Keir Starmer apologized on behalf of the British state, saying the tragedy "should never have happened" and promising to act on the report's recommendations.

"Today is a long-awaited day for truth but it must now lead to a day of justice," he told Parliament.

While the report may give survivors some of the answers they have long sought, they must wait to see

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whether anyone responsible will be prosecuted. Police will examine the inquiry's conclusions before deciding on charges, which could include corporate or individual manslaughter.

They say prosecutions are unlikely before late 2026.

Natasha Elcock of the group Grenfell United urged authorities to deliver justice.

"We paid the price for systematic dishonesty, institutional indifference and neglect," said Elcock, a survivor who lost her uncle in the fire.

The fire broke out in the early hours of June 14, 2017, in a fourth-floor apartment and raced up the 25-story building like a lit fuse, fueled by flammable cladding panels on the exterior walls.

The tragedy horrified the nation and posed one central question, the report said: "How was it possible in 21st century London for a reinforced concrete building, itself structurally impervious to fire, to be turned into a death trap?"

The search for answers focused on a refurbishment completed in 2016 that covered the 1970s building in aluminum and polyethylene cladding — a layer of foam insulation topped by two sheets of aluminum sandwiched around a layer of polyethylene, a combustible plastic polymer that melts and drips on exposure to heat.

The report was highly critical of companies that made the cladding. It said they engaged in "systematic dishonesty," manipulating safety tests and misrepresenting the results to claim the material was safe.

It said insulation manufacturer Celotex was unscrupulous, and another insulation firm, Kingspan, "cynically exploited the industry's lack of detailed knowledge." Cladding panel maker Arconic "concealed from the market the true extent of the danger," the report said.

The three companies expressed sympathies to the bereaved, but all denied responsibility for the deaths. Arconic said its products were not unsafe. Kingspan said its "historical failings" were not "causative of the tragedy." Celotex said the decision to combine its insulation with combustible cladding panels had been made by others.

The inquiry said the combustible cladding was used because it was cheap and because of "incompetence of the organizations and individuals involved in the refurbishment" — including architects, engineers and contractors — who all thought safety was someone else's responsibility.

It concluded the failures multiplied because bodies in charge of enforcing building standards were weak, the local authority was uninterested and the "complacent" U.K. government — led in the seven years before the fire by the Conservative Party — ignored safety warnings because of a commitment to deregulation.

The inquiry has held more than 300 public hearings and examined around 1,600 witness statements.

An initial report published in 2019 criticized the fire department for initially telling residents to stay put and await rescue. By the time the advice was changed, it was too late for many on the upper floors to escape.

London Fire Brigade came in for further criticism for a "chronic lack of effective management and leadership," poor training in high-rise fires and outdated communications equipment.

The Grenfell tragedy prompted soul-searching about inequality in Britain. Grenfell was a public housing building set in one of London's richest neighborhoods, near the pricey boutiques and elegant houses of Notting Hill. The victims, largely people of color, came from 23 countries and included taxi drivers and architects, a poet, an acclaimed young artist, retirees and 18 children.

The report said the inquiry had "seen no evidence that any of the decisions that resulted in the creation of a dangerous building or the calamitous spread of fire were affected by racial or social prejudice," though it said the public body that managed Grenfell had failed to treat residents with "understanding and respect."

The prime minister said the tragedy "poses fundamental questions about the kind of country we are, a country where the voices of working class people and of those of color have been repeatedly ignored and dismissed."

After the fire, the U.K. government banned metal composite cladding panels for new buildings and ordered similar combustible cladding to be removed from hundreds of tower blocks across the country. But the work hasn't been carried out on some apartment buildings because of wrangling over who should pay.

Starmer said the work had been "far, far too slow."

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The report made multiple recommendations, including tougher fire safety rules, a national fire and rescue college and a single independent regulator for the construction industry to replace the current mishmash of bodies.

The ruined tower, which stood for months after the fire like a black tombstone on the west London skyline, still stands, covered in white sheeting. A green heart and the words "Grenfell forever in our hearts" are emblazoned at the top.

Sandra Ruiz, whose 12-year-old niece, Jessica Urbano Ramirez, died in the fire, said that "for me, there's no justice without people going behind bars."

"Our lives were shattered on that night. People need to be held accountable," she said. "People who have made decisions putting profit above people's safety need to be behind bars."

NFL rookie QBs Caleb Williams, Jayden Daniels and Bo Nix set to start in Week 1

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Inside the Numbers dives into NFL statistics, streaks and trends each week. For more Inside the Numbers, head here.

The days of rookie quarterbacks waiting their turns before taking over teams is long gone. For the third time in four years there will be three rookie quarterbacks starting the season opener.

No. 1 draft pick Caleb Williams got the nod for Chicago, No. 2 pick Jayden Daniels for Washington and No. 12 pick Bo Nix for Denver, meaning half of the record-tying six QBs selected in the first round in April became immediate starters.

That follows Trevor Lawrence, Zach Wilson and Mac Jones in 2021, and Bryce Young, C.J. Stroud and Anthony Richardson last season as years with three rookie QBs starting in Week 1. It happened only once before since the 1970 merger, with five rookie quarterbacks starting the season opener in 2012.

After this week, 32 of the 55 rookie quarterbacks to start the opener will have done it in the past 19 seasons, with only 23 doing it in the first 38 years following the AFL-NFL merger.

The rookie QBs have a 16-35-1 record in openers, including a 0-7-1 mark the past five seasons. The last rookie QB to win a Week 1 start was Sam Darnold for the New York Jets against Detroit in 2018.

Williams will try to become the first No. 1 overall quarterback pick to win a season opener as a rookie since David Carr did it for the expansion Houston Texans in 2002 against Dallas. No. 1 pick QBs are 0-8-1 in Week 1 since then, with Kyler Murray getting the tie for Arizona in 2019.

The only other No. 1 pick QBs to win an opener as a rookie were Jim Plunkett for New England in 1971 and John Elway for Denver in 1983.

Williams also will aim this season to give the Bears something the franchise has never had in its storied history — a 4,000-yard passer.

Chicago is the only franchise without a player to throw for at least 4,000 yards in a season. Erik Kramer's 3,838 yards in 1995 stand as the Bears' single-season record.

Twenty-eight of the other teams have had at least one 4,000-yard passer in the past 13 seasons as the 17th game and a pass-happy era have made reaching that milestone more routine. Of the 227 4,000-yard seasons in history, 189 (more than 83%) have come since 2000.

The only other franchises without a 4,000-yard passer since 2011 are the Titans, who last did it in 1991 with Warren Moon when they were known as the Houston Oilers, the Browns (Brian Sipe, 1980) and the Jets (Joe Namath, 1967).

Revolving door

Daniels will be the eighth different Week 1 starting QB for Washington in the past eight seasons, setting a record for the Super Bowl era.

Indianapolis' streak of seven Week 1 starters in seven seasons will end with Richardson set to get the nod for a second straight year. The Commanders hope Daniels will bring an end to their streak that started

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with Kirk Cousins in 2017, followed by Alex Smith, Case Keenum, Dwayne Haskins, Ryan Fitzpatrick, Carson Wentz and Sam Howell.

The only other teams to do it seven years in a row were Cleveland (2013-19), Baltimore (1997-2003) and the Chargers (1987-93).

Week 1 fixture

Matthew Stafford has never sat out an opener in his career and is scheduled to make his 16th Week 1 start in 16 seasons when the Los Angeles Rams face Detroit on Sunday night.

The only other QB to start the opener in his first 16 seasons since starts began being tracked in 1950 was John Elway. Only two other QBs made more than 16 straight starts in openers at any point in their career, with Brett Favre doing it 18 straight years from 1993-2010 and Fran Tarkenton for 17 straight years from 1962-78.

Russell Wilson is set to make his 13th straight Week 1 start when Pittsburgh plays Atlanta, which would tie Peyton Manning and Warren Moon for the fifth-longest streak.

Division doings

Teams going from last to first in the division are far from rare in the NFL. Houston pulled off the feat last season, marking the 19th time in the past 21 seasons that at least one team did it.

The teams looking to go from the worst record in a division to champion this season are New England, Cincinnati, Tennessee, the Chargers, Washington, Carolina, Arizona, Minnesota and Chicago.

Kansas City heads into the season having won eight straight AFC West titles — three shy of the record set by New England from 2009-19. The only other teams to repeat as division champs headed into this season are Buffalo (four straight), Tampa Bay (three straight) and San Francisco (two straight).

The NFC East hasn't had a repeat division champion in two decades, with Philadelphia the last to do it from 2001-04. Dallas will try to end that streak this season after finishing first a year ago.

Opening thoughts

Coach Jim Harbaugh is back in the NFL with the Los Angeles Chargers after a nine-year stint in college at Michigan, capped by a national championship last season.

Harbaugh's .695 winning percentage in four seasons with San Francisco from 2011-14 ranks second best to John Madden among the 163 coaches with at least 50 games since the merger. Harbaugh will try to join Jimmy Johnson, Barry Switzer and Pete Carroll as the only coaches to win both a Super Bowl and a college championship; he lost the NFL title game to his brother John's Ravens following the 2002 season.

Harbaugh is 4-0 in season openers and can tie Raymond Berry as the only coaches to be 5-0 or better in season openers. Berry won all five in New England from 1985-89.

As for current streaks, the Saints come into the year having won five straight openers for the longest active run. Tennessee and New England have both lost three straight openers for the longest current droughts.

America is trying to fix its maternal mortality crisis with federal, state and local programs

By LAURA UNGAR AP Science Writer

TULSA, Okla. (AP) — At the site of a race massacre that reduced neighborhoods to ashes a century ago, where murals memorialize a once-thriving "Black Wall Street," one African American mother strives to keep others from dying as they try to bring new life into the world.

Black women are more than three times as likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth as white women in Oklahoma, which consistently ranks among the worst states in the nation for maternal mortality.

"Tulsa is suffering," said Corrina Jackson, who heads up a local version of the federal Healthy Start program, coordinating needed care and helping women through their pregnancies. "We're talking about lives here."

Across the nation, programs at all levels of government — federal, state and local — have the same goals to reduce maternal mortality and erase the race gap. None has all the answers, but many are making headway in their communities and paving the way for other places.

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Jackson's project is one of more than 100 funded through Healthy Start, which gave out \$105 million nationally in grants this year. Officials call Healthy Start an essential part of the Biden administration's plan for addressing maternal health.

Other approaches to the crisis include California halving its maternal mortality rate through an organization that shares the best ways to treat common causes of maternal death and New York City expanding access to midwives and doulas two years ago. Several states passed laws this year aiming to improve maternal health, including a sweeping measure in Massachusetts. And last week, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services announced more than \$568 million in funding to improve maternal health through efforts such as home visiting services and better identifying and preventing pregnancy-related deaths.

Locally and nationally, "we need to really identify the birthing people who are at potentially the greatest risk," New York City health commissioner Dr. Ashwin Vasan said, "and then wrap our arms around them throughout their pregnancies."

A Healthy Start in Tulsa

Besides coordinating prenatal and postpartum care — which experts say is crucial for keeping moms alive — local Healthy Start projects provide pregnancy and parenting education and referrals to services for things like depression or domestic violence. The local efforts also involve women's partners and kids up to 18 months. And they focus on issues that influence health, such as getting transportation to appointments.

"You try to get them in their first trimester and then work with them to delivery day, and then we also work with the babies to make sure that they reach their milestones," Jackson said.

Jackson got help from the local Urban League as a single mom, and felt called to give back to her community. She's been with Healthy Start for more than 25 years, first through Tulsa's health department and recently through a nonprofit she started that received about \$1 million in federal funds this fiscal year.

"I'm just like a mom to this program," Jackson said.

Oklahoma overall has a maternal mortality rate of about 30 per 100,000 live births, significantly higher than the national average of about 23. But in Jackson's quarter-century tenure, she said, there have been no maternal deaths among clients.

Pivotal to Healthy Start's success are care coordinators like Krystal Keener, a social worker based at Oklahoma State University's obstetrics and gynecology clinic, where clients get prenatal care. One of her responsibilities is to educate clients about health issues, like how to spot the signs of preeclampsia or how much bleeding is too much after delivery.

She also helps with practical matters: Many clients don't have cars, so they call Keener when they need a ride to a prenatal visit, and she assists in scheduling one.

With doctors, Keener serves as a patient advocate. On a recent afternoon, Keener sat in on a prenatal appointment for Areana Coles. A single mom, Coles was joined by her 5-year-old daughter, who was born prematurely and spent time in intensive care.

Coles, 25, said Healthy Start is "probably the best thing that's happened in this pregnancy." She called Keener "an angel."

Together they navigated several recent medical concerns, including dehydration and low potassium levels that put Coles in the hospital.

With Coles' due date approaching, Keener talked about what to watch for around delivery and shortly after, like blood clots and postpartum depression. She advised Coles to take care of herself and "give yourself credit for small things you do."

During an ultrasound a few minutes later, Coles watched Dr. Jacob Lenz point to her unborn baby's eyes, mouth, hand and heart. He printed an image of the scan, which Coles immediately showed her daughter.

Keener said she's gratified that Coles would not be giving birth prematurely this time.

"You made it to term – yay!" she told her client.

Coles smiled. "My body can do it!"

Improving medical care

While programs like Healthy Start focus on individual patient needs, other efforts manage the overall

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quality of medical care.

California has the lowest maternal mortality in the nation — 10.5 per 100,000 live births, less than half the national rate. But that wasn't the case before it created a "maternal quality care collaborative" in 2006.

Founded at Stanford University's medical school in partnership with the state, it brings together people from every hospital with a maternity unit to share best practices on how to deal with issues that could lead to maternal injury or death, like high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease and sepsis.

"When you look at the rate of maternal death in the United States compared to California, they basically ran neck-and-neck until it was established," said Dr. Amanda Williams, clinical innovation adviser for the collaborative. "At that time they totally separated and California started going down. The rest of the country started going up."

In the collaborative, hospitals get toolkits full of materials such as care guidelines in multiple formats, articles on best practices and slide sets that spell out what to do in medical emergencies, how to set up medical teams and what supplies to keep on the unit. The collaborative also tackles issues such as improving obstetric care by integrating midwives and doulas — whose services are covered by the state's Medicaid program.

At first, some doctors resisted the effort, figuring they knew best, Williams said, but there's much less pushback now that the collaborative has proven its value.

MemorialCare Miller Children's & Women's Hospital Long Beach started participating around 2010. The collaborative helps "vet through all the research that's out there," said Shari Kelly, executive director of perinatal services. "It's just so important to really understand how we as health care providers can make a difference."

For example, if a woman loses a certain amount of blood after a vaginal delivery, "we know to activate what we call here a 'code crimson,' which brings blood to the bedside," Kelly said. "We can act fast and stop any potential hemorrhage."

She said the collaborative has also helped reduce racial inequities — bringing down the rate of cesarean sections among Black moms, for example.

In July, U.S. Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services proposed a similar initiative to California's, focused on the quality of maternal care nationwide: the first baseline health and safety requirements for maternal emergency and obstetric services in hospitals.

A community perspective

Experts said getting maternal mortality under control at a national level requires tailoring solutions to individual communities, which is easier when programs are locally run.

New York City has a goal of reducing maternal mortality overall — and specifically achieving a 10% drop in Black maternal mortality by 2030. Statewide, Black residents are about four times more likely to die from pregnancy or childbirth than white residents.

The city is starting with, among others, low-income residents and those living in public housing. The New Family Home Visits Initiative gives pregnant people and those who've given birth visits from professionals such as nurses, midwives, doulas and lactation consultants. Vasan said more than 12,000 families have gotten visits since 2022.

Nurse Shinda Cover-Bowen works for the initiative's Nurse Family Partnership, which has her visiting some families for 2 1/2 years, well beyond the pregnancy and birth. She said "that consistency of someone being there for you and listening to you and guiding you on your mother's journey is priceless."

Being grounded in the local community — and its history — is also crucial for Healthy Start projects. The lingering effects of racism are evident in Tulsa, where in 1921, white residents are estimated to have killed 100-300 Black people and destroyed homes, churches, schools and businesses in the Greenwood section. That's where Jackson lives now, and where health disparities persist.

Being relatable is valuable for Black women, who may distrust the health care system, Jackson said. Plus, knowing the community makes it possible to work closely with other local agencies to meet people's needs.

Denise Jones, who enrolled in Healthy Start in February, has struggled with anxiety, depression and drug

addiction, but has been sober since April.

In mid-July, baby items filled her room — a crib, a bassinet, tiny clothes hanging neatly in a closet — in anticipation of her child's arrival. Jones, 32, flipped through a baby book, pointing to a sonogram of her son Levi, who would be born within a couple of weeks.

She said she feels healthy and blessed by the help she's gotten from Healthy Start and Madonna House, a transitional living program run by Catholic Charities of Eastern Oklahoma.

"I have professionals that are working with me and give me support. I didn't have that with my other pregnancies," she said. "I'm at one with my baby and I'm able to focus."

The AP Interview: East Timor's president says the pope's visit isn't time to dwell on past sins

By ADAM SCHRECK Associated Press

DILI, East Timor (AP) — The president of East Timor sees Pope Francis' upcoming visit as a prime opportunity to promote Asia's youngest country on the world stage, not a time to confront the legacy of abuse by influential members of the clergy in the deeply Catholic nation.

During an interview Wednesday with The Associated Press, President José Ramos-Horta also predicted progress soon on a major energy project with Australia, and urged China and the United States to act as "benevolent superpowers" as they compete for influence in the Southeast Asian country.

The 74-year-old former independence fighter and Nobel laureate returned to the presidency in 2022 with campaign pledges that included tackling poverty, creating jobs and improving political stability.

Francis is due to arrive Monday in the impoverished and youthful nation of 1.3 million people, also known as Timor-Leste, following visits to Indonesia and Papua New Guinea. Walls are still being dabbed with fresh paint and banners and billboards seemingly everywhere have been hoisted to welcome the pope.

An estimated 700,000 people are expected to participate in a papal Mass the following day in the seaside capital, Dili, and many others are likely to line the streets try to catch a glimpse of the pope.

The visit is a "reward" for the depth of faith shown by Timorese, some 98% of whom identify as Catholic, and recognition of the progress toward peace the country has shown in recent years, Ramos-Horta said.

There's another benefit for the little-known nation, a former Portuguese colony wedged between Indonesia and Australia: "The pope's visit is the biggest, the best marketing anyone can aspire to to promote the country, to put the country on the tourist map," he said.

The visit comes just days after the president and Prime Minister Xanana Gusmão, a fellow former resistance leader, hosted United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres to mark the 25th anniversary of a U.N.-backed referendum that led to East Timor's independence from neighboring Indonesia in 2002.

It will be the first time Pope Francis has encountered the Timorese faithful since the Vatican acknowledged in 2022 that Bishop Carlos Ximenes Belo, another hero in the country's struggle for independence, had sexually abused young boys.

Meanwhile, a popular American missionary priest revered for his role saving lives in the liberation fight, Richard Daschbach, is serving a 12-year sentence in a Timorese prison for molesting disadvantaged girls.

The pope has met with abuse victims in other countries, but it's not clear if he will do so or address the matter publicly in East Timor.

Belo and Ramos-Horta shared the 1996 Nobel Peace Prize for their efforts toward "a just and peaceful solution to the conflict in East Timor," which was deeply scarred by a brutal Indonesian occupation and bloody liberation struggle that followed the country's break from Portugal in 1975.

Both men still command respect, alongside other independence heroes, given their and the church's resistance to the occupation, in which as many as 200,000 people were killed. Many Timorese doubt or are willing to look past the serious charges involving Belo, who was secretly sanctioned by the church and is banned from voluntary contact with minors.

"We leave it entirely to the pope and the people around him on how to manage this," Ramos-Horta said

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when asked whether Francis should address the history of sex abuse during his visit, adding that he knows that "the Vatican takes it seriously."

"What is a concept of justice is fairness. People, yes, continue to deeply respect Bishop Belo for his courage, his contribution to their struggle. He sheltered people, he saved people and people don't just forget that ... or castigate him, ostracize him," the president said.

No further condemnation is needed because the Vatican has already taken action, Ramos-Horta said. Having the pope raise the matter during his visit "would be like trying someone twice."

East Timor struggles with high levels of unemployment and malnutrition, and 42% of the population lives below the national poverty line. Nearly two-thirds of the country's citizens are under 30 years old, making youth job creation a high priority.

The oil and gas industry is the bedrock of the economy and the main source of government revenues. But a major offshore site is tapped out and the country needs new reserves to come online to fill the gap.

Ramos-Horta said he is hopeful a breakthrough could come "very soon," possibly in the next three months, on plans for the exploration of a natural gas field that is key to East Timor's financial future.

Development of the promising offshore Greater Sunrise gas field, shared between Australia and East Timor, has been stalled for more than two decades — mainly over the question of which country the fuel should be piped to.

Australia's Woodside Energy, which has the largest stake in the project after East Timor's national oil company, said in response to questions Wednesday that the companies and governments "have continued to make progress" on various aspects of the negotiations.

It added that it remains committed to developing the field if "there is fiscal and regulatory certainty necessary for a commercially viable development to proceed."

Timorese officials believe that piping gas into their country would deliver more benefits for their people despite the added logistical challenges. That remains the aim, Ramos-Horta said, adding that any alternative would have to be "a very persuasive proposal."

The presidential palace where the interview took place and several other key government buildings were constructed with help from China, which wants to deepen its influence among Pacific island nations.

China is one of East Timor's top trading partners. In 2023, the two countries boosted their ties by reaching a "comprehensive strategic partnership."

"I understand the suspicion on the part of the United States, their fears, in relation to China," he said. "But I do not see China as a threat to anyone," he added later.

Ramos-Horta said he welcomed Beijing's help in areas such as improving agriculture, water management and food security, but saw "no need" for closer security ties with China.

He did, however, highlight the positive role played by the United States Peace Corps in East Timor and said he would welcome additional help from U.S. military engineers on the ground. U.S. Navy Seabees construction personnel are continuously based in East Timor, building and renovating schools and clinics.

"The U.S. might fear China. We don't fear (them) and we don't fear also the U.S. I see the two superpowers as benevolent superpowers. Or they should be benevolent superpowers," he said.

Today in History: September 5, Munich Olympics massacre

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 5, the 249th day of 2024. There are 117 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 5, 1972, Palestinian militants attacked the Israeli Olympic delegation at the Munich Games, killing two and taking nine others hostage; five of the militants, a German police officer and all nine hostages were killed in the following 24 hours.

Also on this date:

In 1774, the first Continental Congress assembled in Philadelphia.

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In 1836, Sam Houston won the first presidential election in the newly established Republic of Texas.

In 1905, the Treaty of Portsmouth was signed, ending the Russo-Japanese war; for his efforts in mediating the peace negotiations, U.S. President Theodore Roosevelt was awarded the Noble Peace Prize the following year.

In 1957, Jack Kerouac's novel "On the Road" was published.

In 1960, Muhammad Ali (as Cassius Clay) won the gold medal in the light heavyweight boxing division at the Olympic Games in Rome.

In 1975, President Gerald R. Ford survived an assassination attempt by Lynette "Squeaky" Fromme, a disciple of Charles Manson, in Sacramento, California.

In 1986, four hijackers who had seized a Pan Am jumbo jet on the ground in Karachi, Pakistan, opened fire on the jet's passengers; a total of 20 passengers and crew members were killed before Pakistani commandos stormed the jetliner.

In 1991, the 35th annual Naval Aviation Symposium held by the Tailhook Association opened in Las Vegas; during the four-day gathering, there were reports that as many as 90 people, most of them women, were sexually assaulted or otherwise harassed. (The episode triggered the resignation of Navy Secretary Henry L. Garrett III.)

Today's Birthdays: Actor Lucille Soong (TV: "Fresh Off the Boat") is 89. Baseball Hall of Famer Bill Mazeroski is 88. Actor William Devane is 85. Actor George Lazenby is 85. Film director Werner Herzog is 82. Singer Al Stewart is 79. "Cathy" cartoonist Cathy Guisewite (GYZ'-wyt) is 74. Actor Michael Keaton is 73. Actor Rose McGowan is 51. Olympic gold medal gymnast Tatiana Gutsu is 48. Actor Carice Van Houten is 48. Mixed martial artist Francis Ngannou is 38. Olympic gold medal figure skater Yuna Kim is 34. Soccer player Bukayo Saka is 23.