

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Sept. 12

School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Hamburgers, fries.
Senior Menu: Chicken tetrazine, green beans, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.
Boys Golf hosts Invitational at Olive Grove Golf Course, 10 a.m.
Volleyball hosts Aberdeen Roncalli: 7th/C at 5 p.m.; 8th/JV at 6 p.m., varsity to follow.
Groton Lions Club Meeting, 104 N Main, 6 p.m.

Friday, Sept. 13

School Breakfast: Breakfast cookie.
School Lunch: Pizza crunchers, peas.
Senior Menu: Taco salad, mexican rice with beans, breadstick, cherry fluff.
Football at Milbank, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Sept. 14

7th/8th at Matchbox Tournament, Aberdeen
Soccer hosts Vermillion: Girls at 1 p.m., Boys at 2:30 p.m.

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

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

Sunday, Sept. 15

Emmanuel Lutheran: Worship with communion, 9 a.m.; Sunday School, 10:15 a.m.; choir, 6 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Worship with communion at St. John's, 9 a.m.; at Zion, 11 a.m.; Sunday School, 9:45 a.m.
Catholic: SEAS Confession, 7:45-8:15 a.m.; SEAS Mass, 8:30 a.m.; Turton Confession, 10:30-10:45 a.m.; Turton Mass, 11 a.m.
First Presbyterian Church: Bible Study, 9:30 a.m.; Worship, 11 a.m.
Groton CM&A: Sunday School, 9:15 a.m.; worship, 10:30 a.m.
United Methodist: Conde Worship, 8:30 a.m.; Groton worship, 10:30 a.m.; Coffee Hour, 9:30 a.m.; Sunday School Kick-off event, 9 a.m.; Third Graders receive Bibles, 10:3 a.m.; Picnic potluck, 11:30 a.m.

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1440

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

Hurricane Francine

Francine made landfall yesterday around 60 miles southwest of New Orleans, Louisiana, as a Category 2 hurricane before weakening to a Category 1. A state of emergency is in effect statewide and in Mississippi, with a shelter-in-place order in effect for New Orleans following the end of evacuation windows.

The storm's center has been traveling north. Officials are also bracing for possible tornadoes and the risk of storm surge. Today, the storm is expected to continue on to Mississippi, with flood warnings extending to Florida. Roughly one-quarter of the Gulf Coast's oil and gas production has been shut down; the region is responsible for 15% of domestic oil production.

Louisiana has witnessed some of the strongest hurricanes in US history. Among 57 documented storms was Hurricane Katrina, which killed more than 1,390 people in 2005 when levee failures left 80% of the city underwater.

Easter Island Genome Study

The people of Easter Island likely did not suffer a population collapse due to "ecological suicide," according to a new genomic study yesterday. The findings instead indicate steady population growth to a peak of 3,000 in the 1860s, far below previous estimates of 15,000.

Known to natives as Rapa Nui, Polynesia's Easter Island is a 63-square-mile special territory of Chile in the southeast Pacific. It is the most isolated inhabited landmass on Earth. For decades, the island—famous for its more than 1,000 massive human-faced stone statues, or moai—was theorized to have suffered a self-imposed population collapse due to resource overuse prior to initial European contact.

Analyzing the genomes of 15 Rapa Nui natives from the last two centuries, researchers revealed no evidence of a genetic bottleneck—or drop in genetic variation—a near certainty had there been a catastrophic collapse. The analysis also revealed Rapa Nui natives mixed with Native Americans as early as the 13th century.

Inflation Cools in August

Inflation continued its downward trend to 2.5% year-over-year in August, the latest consumer price index report showed, reaching the lowest level since February 2021 and approaching the Federal Reserve's 2% target. The data solidified market expectations the Fed will lower interest rates when it meets next week.

The index, which tracks the annual change in prices of goods and services, reached a peak of 9.1% in 2022. It was the final metric the Fed was seen to be waiting on before next week's decision following August's mixed jobs report (see previous write-up). The Fed is now widely expected to cut benchmark rates by a quarter-percentage-point next week, down from the current range of 5.25% to 5.5%.

Notably, while inflation cooled, "core" CPI—excluding volatile food and gas prices—held steady at 3.2% year-over-year and up 0.3% month-over-month. The data reduced traders' expectations the Fed will cut interest rates by a half-percentage point, but benchmark rates are still anticipated to drop to 4.25% to 4.5% by the end of the year.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

MTV Video Music Awards, hosted by rapper Megan Thee Stallion, return for award show's 40th anniversary; see awards list and takeaways.

Frankie Beverly, frontman and founder of soul and funk band Maze, dies at age 77.

NFL hauls in 21 million viewers per game in Week 1, the most-ever for opening week and a 12% increase over last year.

Justin Timberlake agrees to plea deal in drunken driving case; driving while intoxicated charges will be dropped.

Sean "Diddy" Combs accused of sexual battery by former Danity Kane singer Dawn Richard.

Science & Technology

Meta admits to scraping data from every adult Australian Facebook user to train its AI models; says Australian law did not require it to provide an opt-out option for users.

The lateral fabella, a tiny bone in the knee the size of a sesame seed, may have played a key evolutionary role in helping ancient humans walk upright; also linked to arthritis, only two in five modern humans have the structure.

Researchers discover a new species of parasitoid wasp targeting adult flies; the wasp lays eggs inside other insects, ultimately killing the host.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +1.1%, Dow +0.3%, Nasdaq +2.2%) as investors weigh latest US inflation data and buy chipmaker stocks, including Nvidia and AMD, whose shares rose 8% and nearly 5%, respectively.

TD Bank to pay \$28M fine to Consumer Financial Protection Bureau for sharing inaccurate and negative data about the bank's customers with credit reporting agencies since 2015.

PwC's US unit to lay off roughly 1,800 workers amid broader restructuring; marks accounting firm's first formal layoffs since 2009.

Restaurant chain BurgerFi files for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection.

Politics & World Affairs

Mexico's Senate approves anticorruption overhaul requiring country's 7,000 judges run for election; constitutional revision—an initiative driven by the governing, left-leaning Morena party—came despite weeks of protests and strikes, with judicial workers saying the move will politicize the judiciary.

Death toll from Typhoon Yagi and its aftermath rises to more than 155 people amid flash flooding and landslides; the typhoon is the strongest to hit Vietnam in decades.

A man was arrested for arson over the Line Fire in San Bernardino, California.

Airport and Bridge Fires threaten Southern California, two of more than 60 wildfires burning in the US as of this writing,

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The Canadian wildfires are bringing smoke back to South Dakota. Wednesday morning, this photo was taken of the Legion flag at half mast with the red sun and sky. All on Patriot Day. (Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Overgrowth removed

The green bushes around the City Park sign has been removed and grass will be planted in the area this fall. (Photos by Paul Kosel)



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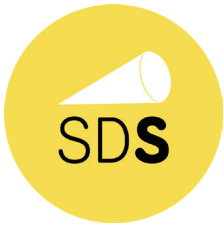
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Avantara-Groton hosts Summer Bash

Avantara-Groton hosted a summer bash and open house on Wednesday. A good crowd showed up for the pulled pork supper and the weather was just right. People came to see the improvements that have been done to the facility. (Photos by Paul Kosel)





SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Tax laws favor cropland over grassland, ranchers and conservation groups tell lawmakers

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 6:12 PM

Current property tax laws penalize the maintenance of grasslands and incentivize their conversion to cropland, ranchers and conservation groups told state lawmakers Wednesday.

Property tax rates are applied to the assessed value of land. A productivity-based assessment model, adopted in 2009 to address rising ag-land taxes and fully implemented in 2019, assesses agricultural land based on the soil's productivity.

Some people who testified to lawmakers Wednesday said that means grassland, which generally brings in less income, could be taxed on the potential of its soil to support crops, which generally bring in more income. And that situation results in unfairly high taxes on some grassland, which can push landowners to convert it to crops.

The Legislature's Study Committee on Property Tax Assessment Methodology heard testimony on the issue during a meeting in Pierre.

The South Dakota Grasslands Initiative is a network of entities and ranchers advocating for grassland conservation. Members submitted a letter explaining the unintended consequences of the productivity model. They said the model fails to consider the actual use of the land, particularly for ranchers who preserve grasslands for ecological and grazing purposes.

"Each year, our South Dakota grassland landowners must choose how they will utilize their lands, and current property tax laws incentivize conversion of grassland to cropland," wrote Laura Kahler, Shauna Kopren, Tony Leif, Jim Faulstich, Lyle Perman and AJ Munger.

The letter points to a South Dakota State University study estimating that between 2006 and 2012, South Dakota lost 1.8 million acres of grasslands, predominantly to cropland conversion.

"When developing the best methodology for property taxes, we urge you to tax agricultural land based on its current use regardless of its soil classifications," the letter continues. "It is important to recognize the valuable role South Dakota native grasslands play in developing our state's healthy soils, and the importance of celebrating landowners who wish to continue to maintain native or restored grasslands."

Munger testified to the committee. He said the federal government's crop programs – like price-loss coverage and flood insurance – make growing corn and soybeans a lower-risk endeavor than raising livestock on grass, which further incentivizes grassland conversion to crops.

Rep. Drew Peterson, R-Salem, asked about federal initiatives like the Wetland Reserve Program, which helps landowners protect, restore and enhance wetlands which have been previously degraded due to agricultural uses. Peterson wanted to know if county assessors are required to factor those kinds of land management arrangements into land values.

"I would just like to note that the assessors in the back of the room are shaking their head no, which I believe that is a difficult situation," Peterson said. "Because it is actually illegal to produce crops on that ground."

Unhappy property taxpayers

The summer committee formed in response to homeowners calling for property tax relief. Wednesday's testimony highlighted the reality that tax relief for one class of property owners can become another's

burden.

Since 2017, the share of statewide property taxes paid by agricultural landowners has dropped from 28% to 22%, while the share paid by residential property owners has risen from 38% to 43%.

Farming advocates defended the ag productivity assessment system on Wednesday, asserting it has stabilized taxes for them.

The summer study committee will hold its final meeting on Oct. 9 in Pierre, where it will discuss ideas. From there, a final report could be published with policy recommendations.

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.

State university enrollment grows by 5% as '2025 cliff' looms

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 2:43 PM

South Dakota public university enrollment grew by 5%, based on enrollment data from the South Dakota Board of Regents released Wednesday.

It's the third consecutive year of enrollment growth, after a decline in enrollment between 2018 and 2021. Enrollment system-wide has not recovered its peak of 36,662 from 2017, standing at 36,091 students this fall.

The South Dakota Board of Regents credits this year's increase to "the value students and families place on the state's high-quality universities," as well as South Dakotans' confidence in higher education.

"Postsecondary attainment continues to be a key driver of career success and personal development," said Executive Director Nathan Lukkes in a news release from the board.

Enrollment grew at five of the six institutions:

Black Hills State University enrollment declined by 3.7% to 3,346 students.

Dakota State University grew by 7.6% to 3,774 students.

Northern State University grew by 5.3% to 3,708 students.

South Dakota Mines grew by 3.4% to 2,579 students.

South Dakota State University grew by 4.9% to 12,065 students.

University of South Dakota grew by 7.6% to 10,619 students.

The increase in enrollment comes a year before the "2025 cliff," in which universities across the country expect enrollment challenges largely attributed to a lower birth rate during the Great Recession of 2007-2009. There will be a 10% decline in high school graduates nationally from 2025 to 2037, Lukkes told lawmakers earlier this year.

The Board of Regents and state officials have been working to make South Dakota higher education appealing to in-state and out-of-state students in preparation.

They've frozen tuition rates for the past three years. The regental system also launched an automatic acceptance pilot program for South Dakota high school students this year, and expanded in-state tuition to more states in the region.

"The commitment to making higher education accessible by our governor, legislature, universities, and Board of Regents is steadfast," said Board President Tim Rave in a news release.

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

Iowa Republicans to file lawsuits against Summit pipeline decision

BY: CAMI KOONS, IOWA CAPITAL DISPATCH - SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 1:19 PM

A group of Iowa Republican lawmakers plans to ask federal and state courts to rule that the Iowa Utilities Commission acted illegally and unconstitutionally in its approval of a controversial pipeline project.

The group of nearly 40 Iowa lawmakers comprising the Republican Legislative Intervenors for Justice announced their plan to sue in a news release Tuesday.

The Summit Carbon Solutions pipeline, "prioritizes corporate interests in tax credits over the safety, property rights, and well-being of Iowa's citizens," according to a statement from the group.

The \$8 billion carbon-capture pipeline project would connect to 57 ethanol plants and stretch across most of Iowa and into Nebraska, Minnesota, South Dakota and North Dakota.

The Iowa Utilities Commission approved the application in June, under the conditions that Summit Carbon Solutions submitted documentation of various regulating requirements, and a hefty insurance policy.

The Iowa-based company met these requirements and was issued a construction permit by the commission at the end of August. However, Iowa construction cannot begin until the project is approved in the Dakotas, where it has also faced pushback from landowners and lawmakers. Summit was denied a permit in South Dakota and has said it plans to reapply.

In addition to the impending legal filings, the opposing group of legislators met to strategize upcoming legislative approaches, like eminent domain reform and adjusting the functions of the Iowa Utilities Commission, to stop the pipeline.

The Iowa House has approved limits on eminent domain for carbon pipelines in recent years but the Senate has not acted.

"We are determined to fight this reckless decision in the courts and in the General Assembly," Rep. Charley Thomson said in the press release. "This isn't just about stopping one pipeline. It's about safeguarding our communities, our land, and our constitutional rights from future overreach."

Cami Koons is an Iowa Capital Dispatch reporter covering agriculture and the environment. She previously worked at publications in Kansas and Missouri, covering rural affairs.

U.S. Education Department to open new financial aid form to more applicants

BY: SHAUNEEN MIRANDA - SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 1:58 PM

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Department of Education named the first six organizations to participate in the phased rollout of the 2025-26 form to apply for federal financial aid Wednesday, and opened up the interest form for high schools, school districts and other entities to get involved in its next three testing periods.

In August, the department said it would take a staggered approach to launching the application period for the Free Application for Federal Student Aid — better known as FAFSA — in an effort to address any problems prior to the updated form opening up to everyone by Dec. 1.

The phased rollout will make the application fully available two months later than usual.

The first testing period beginning Oct. 1 will include six community-based organizations. The department on Wednesday said it selected Alabama Possible; Bridge 2 Life, in Florida; College AIM, in Georgia; Education is Freedom, in Texas; the Scholarship Foundation of Santa Barbara, in California; and the Scholarship Fund of Alexandria, in Virginia; to participate.

The six organizations will provide access to the new form to hundreds of participants in the first testing period. The form will gradually open up to tens of thousands of students in the subsequent testing stages.

"Each of these orgs have committed to recruit 100-plus students and contributors, which will allow us to test the FAFSA system end-to-end from the submissions process, to processing, to ingestion of the

(Institutional Student Information Records) by colleges and possibly even state agencies," FAFSA executive adviser Jeremy Singer said on a call with reporters Wednesday.

Singer said each of the community-based organizations will host an in-person FAFSA event over the first few days of October.

"We will send some of our team members to these sites to observe and learn from our experienced partners, seeing how students and families are interacting with the application, what's working for them, what's challenging, what's clear, what's less clear," said Singer, who heads FAFSA strategy within the department's Office of Federal Student Aid.

Next phases

Singer said the second testing period would launch in mid-October, with the third debuting in early November and the fourth period beginning in mid-November.

Community-based organizations, high schools, school districts and institutions of higher education have from Wednesday until Sept. 20 to submit an interest form to be part of the next three testing periods.

The department said it plans to notify those selected to participate in the second testing period by Sept. 24 and inform those chosen to take part in the third and fourth testing periods shortly afterward.

The department has also worked to close the gap in FAFSA submissions compared to the prior cycle. In March, the department said it received roughly 40% fewer FAFSA applications than the same time last year.

But as of this week, the gap had fallen to approximately 2.3%, the department said.

The department also said that as of early September, roughly 500,000 more FAFSA applicants are eligible for Pell Grants compared to the same time in 2023.

The updates to the rollout of the 2025-26 form come as the department has worked to resolve the 2024-25 form's multiple glitches and errors, which advocates voiced concerns over. The application got a makeover following the December 2020 passage of the FAFSA Simplification Act.

Shauneen Miranda is a reporter for States Newsroom's Washington bureau. An alumna of the University of Maryland, she previously covered breaking news for Axios.

U.S. House speaker withdraws spending bill that would require ID to register to vote

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - SEPTEMBER 11, 2024 11:58 AM

WASHINGTON — U.S. House Speaker Mike Johnson pulled a six-month stopgap spending bill from heading to the floor for a vote Wednesday, scuttling efforts by the GOP to show solidarity behind their plan, which included a provision requiring ID to register to vote in federal elections.

The spending bill, released by House Republicans last week in the heat of a presidential campaign in which immigration is a central focus, had no chance of becoming law amid opposition from Democrats, a cool response from many GOP senators and a veto threat from the Biden administration.

A number of House GOP lawmakers had also come out against the legislation.

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, told reporters that lawmakers plan to work through the weekend to find a path forward on the stopgap spending bill and language that would require proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote.

"No vote today because we are in the consensus-building business here in Congress; with a small majority, that's what you do," he said. "We're having thoughtful conversations, family conversations within the Republican Conference and I believe we'll get there."

Johnson said Congress has "two primary obligations right now."

One is funding the government ahead of the start of the new fiscal year on Oct. 1, thereby avoiding a shutdown.

And he said the other is addressing concerns about the possibility that people who are not citizens could

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vote in the November election, even though that is already illegal.

"We're going to continue to work on this. The whip is going to do the hard work and build consensus. We're going to work through the weekend on that," Johnson told reporters. "And I want any member of Congress, in either party, to explain to the American people why we should not ensure that only U.S. citizens are voting in U.S. elections."

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump posted on social media Tuesday that Republicans should not vote for any short-term spending measure without the sidecar voter ID bill attached.

Connecticut Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democrat on the Appropriations Committee, called for a bipartisan negotiation after news broke of Johnson pulling the vote.

"For the good of the American people, Congress must move on from House Republicans' partisan continuing resolution proposals and begin negotiating a funding bill that can earn the support of both Democrats and Republicans in the House and the Senate," she said in a statement.

"It is past time for Chairman Tom Cole, Chair Patty Murray, Vice Chair Susan Collins, and I to begin good-faith negotiations on a continuing resolution that will keep government programs and services Americans depend on functioning while we complete our work on full-year funding bills before the end of the 118th Congress," DeLauro added.

Senators sound off

Maine Sen. Collins, the top Republican on the spending panel, said she'd like to see a stopgap spending bill that lasts through mid-December to incentivize Congress to finish negotiations on the dozen annual government funding bills this calendar year.

Those talks were supposed to be wrapped up before the end of this month, but neither chamber has begun conference negotiations, leading to the need for the stopgap spending bills.

"I've made clear that I think we need to get our work done as soon as possible, and that the CR should not go beyond mid-December," Collins said. "If it goes beyond mid-December, it places the new administration at a huge disadvantage, because they're going to have to deal with issues that date back to October of this year, rather than focusing on the FY 26 budget, which I would think would be their preference."

West Virginia Sen. Shelley Moore Capito, the top Republican on the Labor-HHS-Education spending subcommittee, said the Senate should wait a bit longer to see if the House can send over a bill, though not indefinitely.

"Obviously they have some struggles, which is not surprising," she said of the House. "We'll just wait. And if it gets to the point where it doesn't look like they can act, then we may have to step in, but I wouldn't say that's the preferred path."

Capito said that talks on the stopgap spending bills, which Congress enacts every year after missing their deadline, "have a tendency to fall into place much more quickly than what you might think."

Montana Democratic Sen. Jon Tester, chairman of the Defense Appropriations subcommittee, said he wants to see a stopgap spending bill that lasts until mid-December, citing concerns from the Department of Defense about a longer continuing resolution.

"Yeah, shit, I'd like to have the appropriations done by the end of September, but yeah, the shorter, the better," he said.

Tester said he supports the legislation that would require proof of U.S. citizenship to register to vote, but disagreed with House GOP leaders' choice to attach it to the stopgap spending bill.

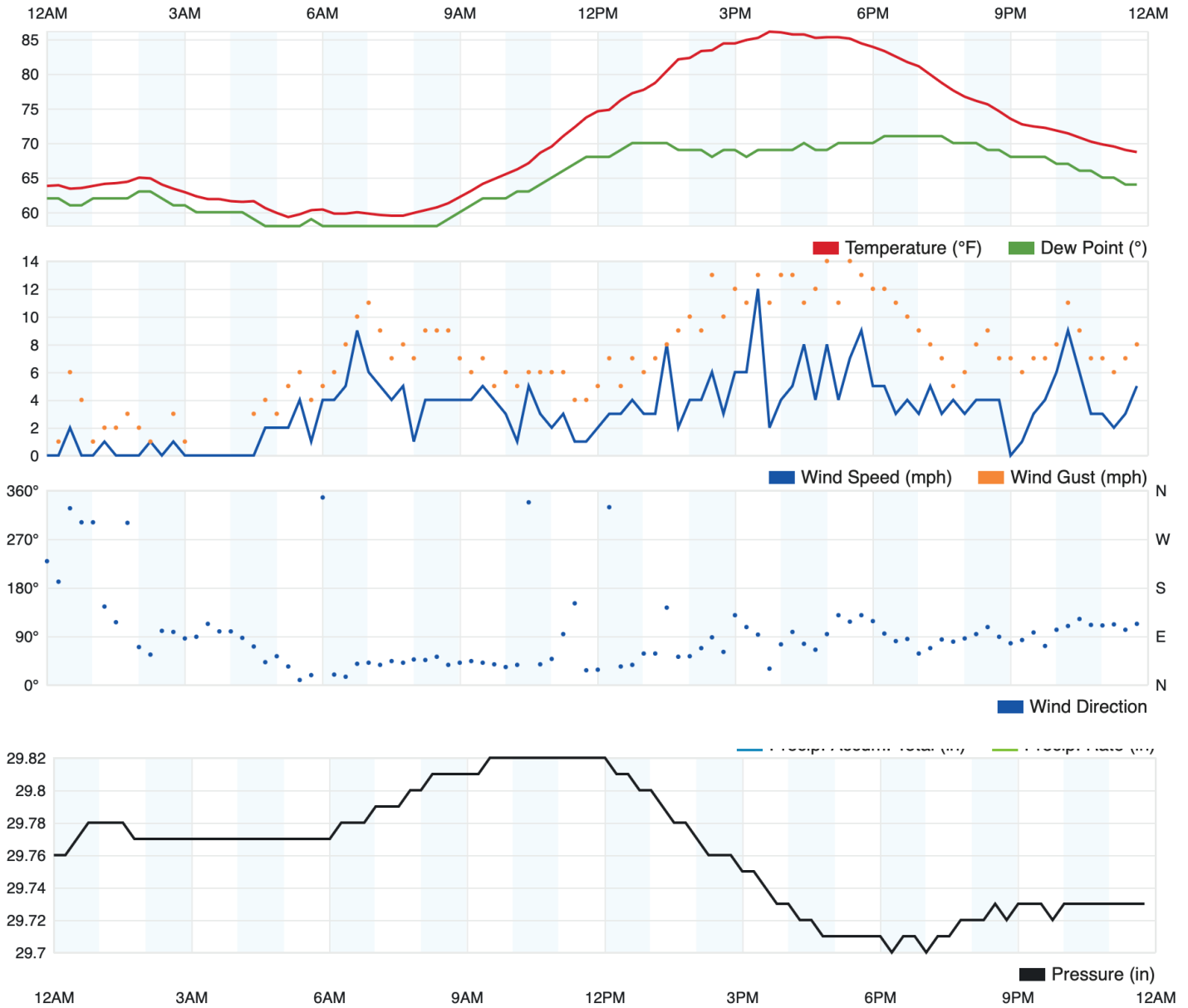
"I don't think it should be on the appropriations bill. It just mucks things up," Tester said. "Let's take it to the floor and debate. I'll vote for it, even though it's not necessary."

Jennifer covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include congressional policy, politics and legal challenges with a focus on health care, unemployment, housing and aid to families.

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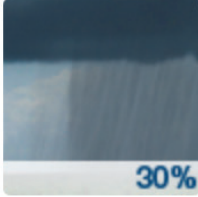
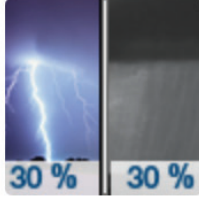

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Wind Advisory		Friday	Friday Night	Saturday
Today	Tonight			
				
High: 86 °F	Low: 67 °F	High: 82 °F	Low: 58 °F	High: 82 °F
Sunny and Windy	Mostly Clear and Breezy	Chance Showers and Breezy	Chance T-storms then Chance Showers	Sunny


RED FLAG WARNING

A Red Flag Warning is issued when **critical fire weather conditions are happening or are about to happen.**


Avoid burning, be careful around open flames, safely dispose of cigarettes. Fires can spark and grow very quickly.

Take Action!

- **High to Very High** fire danger
- Southeast winds 25 to 40 mph with **gusts to 55 mph over central South Dakota**
- Relative Humidity will drop to **25 to 30%** for locations in the warning



Avoid power equipment that creates sparks

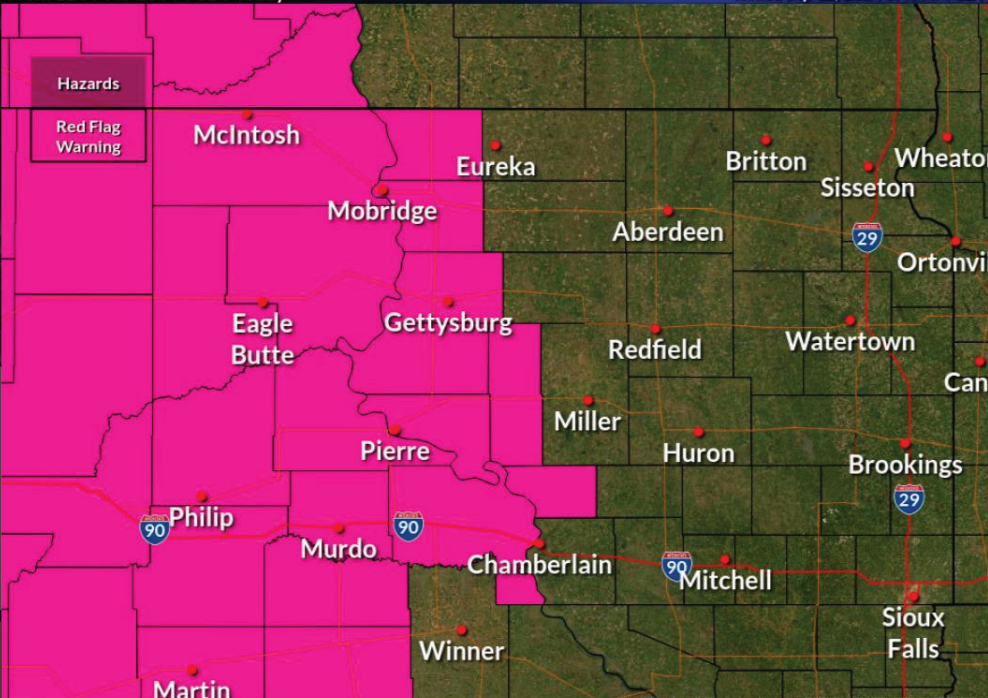





Make sure no vehicle parts drag on the ground, including towing chains

Weather Forecast Office
Aberdeen, SD
Issued Sep 12, 2024 3:45 AM CDT

Red Flag Warning

From 12 PM to 10 PM CDT Today






NWSAberdeen
www.weath

A Red Flag Warning has been issued for today over central South Dakota due to the combination of winds gusting to 55 mph along with low relative humidity values between 25 to 30 percent this afternoon. This can contribute to extreme fire behavior so be careful around open flames and safely dispose of cigarettes as fire can spark and grow quickly!

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 86 °F at 3:44 PM

Low Temp: 59 °F at 5:13 AM

Wind: 14 mph at 4:57 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 13 hours, 43 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 1931

Record Low: 24 in 1902

Average High: 77

Average Low: 48

Average Precip in Sept.: 0.82

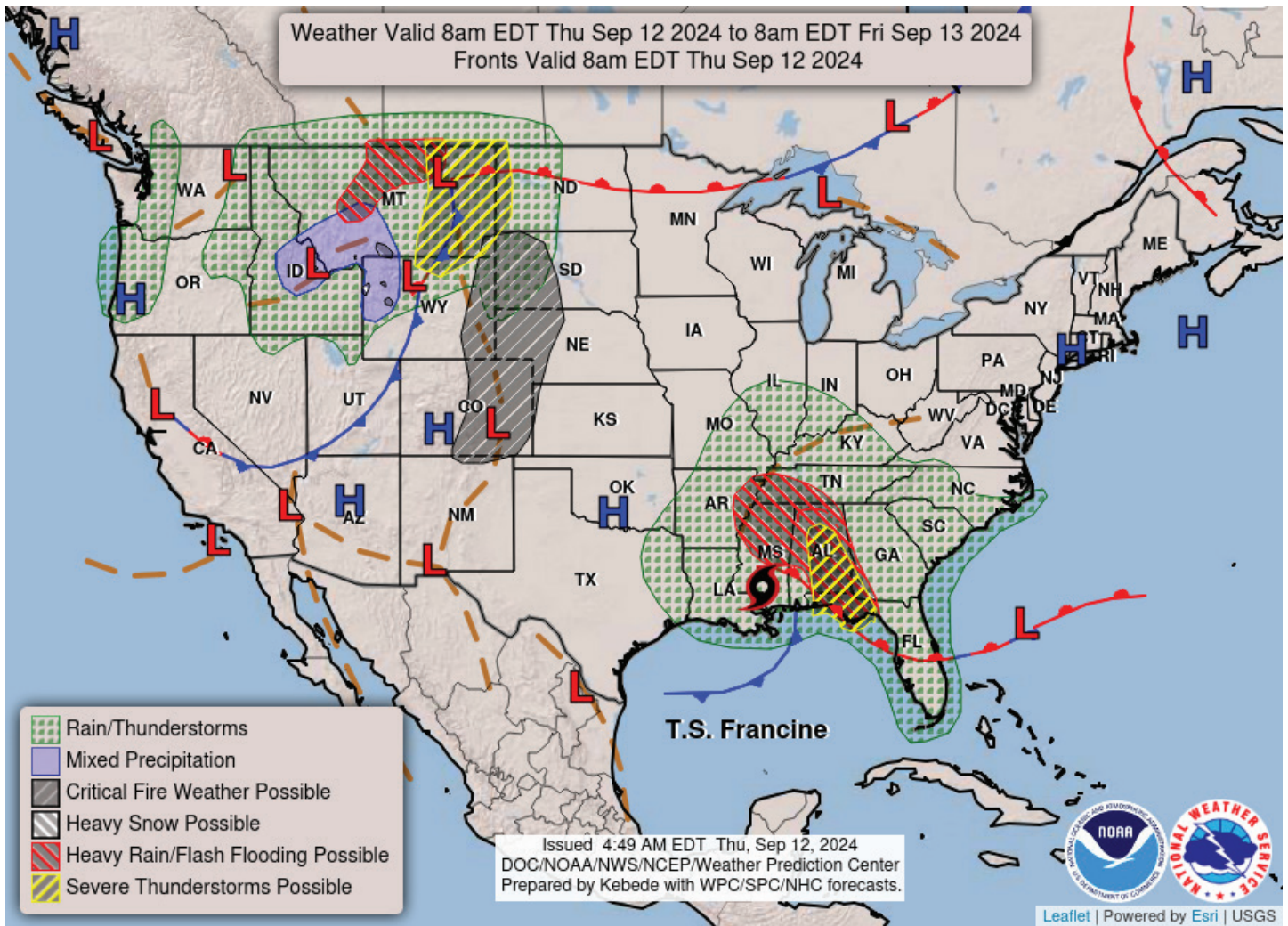
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.01

Average Precip to date: 17.16

Precip Year to Date: 19.42

Sunset Tonight: 7:50:02 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:07:58 am



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Today in Weather History

September 12, 1931: On this day in 1931, near-record or record heat came to an end across central and northeast South Dakota as well as west-central Minnesota. From September 9th through the 12th, many record highs were set at Aberdeen, Kennebec, Mobridge, Timber Lake, Watertown, and Wheaton. High temperatures during these four days ranged from 95 degrees to 109 degrees. Aberdeen rose to 107 degrees on the 10th, Kennebec rose to 109 on the 9th, Mobridge rose to 105 on the 9th, Timber Lake's high was 106 on the 9th, Watertown rose to 104 on the 10th, and Wheaton rose to 108 degrees on the 10th.

1857: The SS Central America sinks during a hurricane, killing 425 lives. Fourteen tons of gold was aboard the ship as well.

1882 - Hot and dry winds caused tree foliage in eastern Kansas to wither and crumble. (David Ludlum)

1950: A hailstorm struck southern parts of Oklahoma City on this day. The storm damaged about 4,000 homes, 300 businesses, and 750 cars, resulting in a loss estimated at \$987,000.

1961: Super Typhoon Nancy was an incredibly powerful tropical cyclone of the 1961 Pacific typhoon season. The system had possibly the strongest winds ever measured in a tropical cyclone and caused extensive damage and at least 173 deaths and thousands of injuries in Japan and elsewhere. A reconnaissance aircraft flying into the typhoon near its peak intensity on September 12 determined Nancy's one-minute sustained winds to be 215 mph. If these values are reliable, they would be the highest wind speeds ever measured in a tropical cyclone. However, it was later discovered that measurements and estimations of wind speeds from the 1940s to 1960s were excessive. Thus, Nancy's winds may be lower than its official best-track value.

1963: President Kennedy gave his, "We choose to go to the moon" speech at Rice University.

1977 - Thunderstorms deluged the Kansas City area with torrential rains in the early morning hours, and then again that evening. Some places were deluged with more than six inches of rain twice that day, with up to 18 inches of rain reported at Independence MO. Flooding claimed the lives of 25 persons. The Country Club Plaza area was hardest hit. 2000 vehicles had to be towed following the storm, 150 of which had to be pulled out of Brush Creek, which runs through the Plaza area. (The Kansas City Weather Almanac)

1979 - Hurricane Frederick smashed into the Mobile Bay area of Alabama packing 132 mph winds. Winds gusts to 145 mph were reported as the eye of the hurricane moved over Dauphin Island AL, just west of Mobile. Frederick produced a fifteen foot storm surge near the mouth of Mobile Bay. The hurricane was the costliest in U.S. history causing 2.3 billion dollars damage. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Showers and thunderstorms produced heavy rain which caused flooding in North Carolina, West Virginia, Virginia and Pennsylvania. Parts of Virginia received 3 to 4 inches of rain in just two hours early in the day. Later in the day, three to five inch rains deluged Cumberland County of south central Pennsylvania. Evening thunderstorms produced seven inches of rain at Marysville PA, most of which fell in three hours time. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1988: An afternoon F1 tornado skipped across sections of Indianapolis, Indiana, damaging roofs and automobiles.

1999: Hurricane Floyd, a Category 4 storm with top winds of 145 mph, was making residents along the U.S. East Coast very nervous as it steamed steadily westward. Floyd was once forecast to strike Florida but turned away. Instead, Floyd hit the Bahamas at peak strength, causing substantial damage. It then paralleled the East Coast of the United States, causing massive evacuations and costly preparations from Florida through the Mid-Atlantic States.

1989 - Snow whitened the mountains and foothills of northeastern Colorado, with eight inches reported at Buckhorn Mountain, west of Fort Collins. Two to three inches fell around Denver, causing great havoc during the evening rush hour. Thunderstorms produced severe weather in the Southern Plains Region between mid afternoon and early the next morning. Thunderstorms produced hail three inches in diameter at Roswell NM, and wind gusts greater than 98 mph at Henryetta OK. Thunderstorms also produced torrential rains, with more than seven inches at Scotland TX, and more than six inches at Yukon OK.

2006: Major flash flooding occurred in a matter of minutes after torrential rain starting pounding the city of Evansville, Indiana. A total of about 250 occupied structures sustained some degree of damage. Over 30 water rescues were conducted from cars stalled in floodwaters.



“MAKE YOUR PLANS LARGE!”

One of my most prized possessions is my mother’s Bible. Shortly after she went to be with the Lord, I was leafing through the well-worn and tear-stained pages. In the margin next to Ephesians 3:20 she had written, “If God is your partner, make your plans large.”

In that passage of Scripture, Paul wrote, “Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us.” What power, Paul?

Here Paul is speaking about the mighty power that raised Christ from the dead: the power that is available to Christians that comes from the living God. This power from God enables us to accomplish not only more than is possible for us to do on our own – but we are enabled to accomplish exceedingly abundantly more than we might even be able to ask or think!

God wants to work in and through the lives of His children – you and me. He wants to make His mighty power that raised His Son, Jesus Christ, from the grave available to each of us. So we must expand how we think.

Exceedingly suggests excessiveness and abundantly means overflowing, or an overabundance of something. But he does not end with those words. He continues by adding more than we can ask or think!

If we sincerely take God at His Word, the only limitations on Christians are the ones we place on God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, it is beyond our abilities to truly understand the “mighty power” that is available to us. Increase our faith so we, in turn, can do more for You. In Jesus’ Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Now unto Him that is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us. Ephesians 3:20

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

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WINNING NUMBERS

MEGA MILLIONS

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.10.24

1 2 16 24 66 6

MegaPlier: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$20,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 19
DRAW: Mins 42 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

2 9 10 12 24 7

All Star Bonus: 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$8,860,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 34
DRAW: Mins 42 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

12 19 37 43 48 1

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 49 Mins
DRAW: 42 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

1 15 17 21 25

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$29,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 49
DRAW: Mins 41 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

6 9 15 17 20 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 18
DRAW: Mins 42 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

10 12 55 65 67 3

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$152,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 18
DRAW: Mins 42 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

A plan to extract gold from mining waste splits a Colorado town with a legacy of pollution

By MATTHEW BROWN, BRITTANY PETERSON and THOMAS PEIPERT Associated Press

LEADVILLE, Colo. (AP) — Rust-colored piles of mine waste and sun-bleached wooden derricks loom above the historic Colorado mountain town of Leadville — a legacy of gold and silver mines polluting the Arkansas River basin more than a century after the city's boom days.

Enter a fledgling company called CJK Milling that wants to "remine" some of the waste piles to squeeze more gold from ore discarded decades ago when it was less valuable. The waste would be trucked to a nearby mill, crushed to powder and bathed in cyanide to extract trace amounts of precious metals.

The proposal comes amid surging global interest in re-processing waste containing discarded minerals that have grown more valuable over time and can now be more readily removed. These include precious metals and minerals used for renewable energy that many countries including the U.S. are scrambling to secure.

Backers say the Leadville proposal would speed cleanup work that's languished for decades under federal oversight with no foreseeable end. They speak in aspirational tones of a "circular economy" for mining where leftovers get repurposed.

Yet for some residents and officials, reviving the city's depressed mining industry and stirring up waste piles harkens to a polluted past, when the Arkansas was harmful to fish and at times ran red with waste from Leadville's mines.

"We're sitting in a river that 20 years ago fish couldn't survive," Brice Karsh, who owns a fishing ranch downstream of the proposed mill, said as he threw fish pellets into a pool teeming with rainbow trout. "Why go backward? Why risk it?"

Leadville — home to about 2,600 people and the National Mining Museum — bills itself as America's highest city at 10,119 feet (3,084 meters) above sea level. That distinction helped the city forge a new identity as a mecca for extreme athletes. Endurance race courses loop through nearby hillsides where millions of tons of discarded mine waste leached lead, arsenic, zinc and other toxic metals into waterways.

The driving force behind CJK Milling is Nick Michael, a 38-year mining veteran who characterizes the project as a way to give back to society. Standing atop a heap of mining waste with Colorado's highest summit, Mount Elbert, in the distance, Michael says the rubble has a higher concentration of gold than many large mines now operating across the U.S.

"In the old days, that wasn't the case," he said, "but the tables have turned and that's what makes this economic ... We're just cleaning up these small piles and moving on to the next one."

City Council member Christian Luna-Leal grew up in Leadville — in a trailer park with poor water quality — after his parents immigrated from Mexico.

Disadvantaged communities have always borne the brunt of the industry's problems, he said, dating to Leadville's early days when mine owners poorly treated Irish immigrants who did much of the work. Almost 1,300 immigrants, most Irish, are buried in paupers graves in a local cemetery.

Stirring up old mine waste could reverse decades of cleanup, Luna-Leal said, again fouling water and threatening the welfare of residents including Latinos, many living in mobile homes on the town's outskirts.

"There is a genuine fear ... by a lot of our community that this is not properly being addressed and our concerns are not being taken as seriously as they should be," Luna-Leal said.

The company's process doesn't get rid of the mine waste. For every ton of ore milled, a ton of waste would remain — minus a few ounces of gold. At 400 tons a day, waste will stack up quickly.

CJK originally planned to use a giant open pit to store the material in a wet slurry. After that was rejected, the company will instead dry waste to putty-like consistency and pile it on a hill behind the mill, Michael said. The open pit downslope would act as an emergency catchment if the pile collapsed.

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The magnitude of mining waste globally is staggering, with tens of thousands of tailings piles containing 245 billion tons (223 billion metric tons), researchers say. And waste generation is increasing as companies build larger mines with lower grades of ore, resulting in a greater ratio of waste to product, according to the nonprofit World Mine Tailings Failures.

This month, gold prices reached record highs, and demand has grown sharply for critical minerals such as lithium used in batteries.

Economically favorable conditions mean re-mining "has caught on like wildfire," said geochemist Ann Maest, who consults for environmental organizations including EarthWorks. The advocacy group is a mining industry critic but has cautiously embraced re-mining as a potential means of hastening cleanups through private investment.

CJK Milling could help do that in Leadville, Maest said, but only if done right. "The rub is they want to use cyanide, and whenever a community hears there's cyanide or mercury they understandably get very concerned," she said.

Overseeing Leadville's water supply is Parkville Water District Manager Greg Teter, who views CJK Milling as potential solution to water quality problems.

Many waste piles sit over the district's water supply, and Teter recalls a blowout of the Resurrection Mine compelled residents to boil their water because the district's treatment plant couldn't handle the dirt and debris.

More constant is the polluted runoff during spring and summer, when snowmelt from the Mosquito mountains washes through mine dumps and drains from abandoned mines.

Every minute, 694 gallons (2,627 liters) on average of contaminated mine water flows from Leadville's Superfund site, according to federal records. Most is stored or funneled to treatment facilities, including one run by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation.

Up to 10% of the water is not treated — tens of millions of gallons annually carrying an estimated six tons of toxic metals, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency records show. By comparison, during Colorado's 2015 Gold King Mine disaster that fouled rivers in three states, an EPA cleanup crew inadvertently triggered release of 3 million gallons (11.4 million liters) of mustard-colored mine waste.

As long as Leadville's piles remain, their potential to pollute continues.

"There are literally thousands of mine claims that overlay each other," Teter said. "We don't want that going into our water supply. As it stands now, all the mine dumps are ... in my watershed, upstream of my watershed, and if they remove them, and take them to the mill, that's going to be below my watershed."

EPA lacks authority over CJKs proposed work, but a spokesperson said it had "potential to improve site conditions" by supplementing cleanup work already being done. Moving the mine waste would eliminate sources of runoff and could reduce the amount of polluted water to treat, said EPA spokesperson Richard Mylott.

Other examples of re-mining in the Rockies are in East Helena and Anaconda, Montana and in Midvale, Utah, Mylott said. Projects are proposed in Gilt Edge, South Dakota and Creede, Colorado, he said.

Despite the mess from Leadville's historic mining, Teter spoke proudly of his industry ties, including working in two now-closed mines. His son in law works in a nearby mine.

"If it were not for mining, Leadville would not be here. I would not be here," the water manager said.

"There are no active mines in our watershed, but I'm confident in what CJK has planned," he said. "And I'll be able to keep an eye on whatever they do."

Could America's divide on marijuana be coming to an end?

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

The U.S. is divided when it comes to state and federal marijuana policy, but recent political developments could move the country toward a greater acceptance of cannabis.

Both major presidential candidates have signaled support for a federal policy change to reclassify marijuana as a less dangerous drug, and voters in several additional states will get a say this fall on legalization.

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Though still illegal under federal law, public approval of marijuana has grown significantly — and so has the number of states where it's legally sold in stores.

What does the law say?

Possessing marijuana is a federal crime punishable by fines and prison time. Selling or cultivating marijuana is a more serious federal crime, punishable by prison sentences of five years to life, depending on the quantity of the drug.

But many states have abolished their own marijuana penalties.

Twenty-four states and the District of Columbia — representing 53% of the nation's population — have legalized marijuana and now tax and regulate sales similar to alcohol, according to the Marijuana Policy Project, which supports legalizing cannabis. An additional seven states have removed jail sentences for possessing small amounts of marijuana. A total of 38 states and the District of Columbia have laws that allow the medical use of marijuana.

What's happening in Washington?

The Justice Department in May proposed to reclassify marijuana from a Schedule I drug to a less dangerous Schedule III drug, which includes such things as ketamine and some anabolic steroids. But that switch involves a lengthy process.

The Drug Enforcement Administration has set a Dec. 2 hearing to take comment on the proposal. That means a final decision could come after President Joe Biden leaves office in January.

Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, backs marijuana decriminalization and has said it's "absurd" that marijuana is classified as a Schedule I drug, alongside heroin and LSD.

Former President Donald Trump, the Republican presidential nominee, also signaled support for the policy change this past week. He posted on his social media platform that he would "continue to focus on research to unlock the medical uses of marijuana to a Schedule 3 drug" and said he would vote "yes" on a Florida ballot proposal to legalize recreational marijuana.

What's on the ballot?

The Florida initiative would allow recreational sales to people over 21 from existing medical marijuana dispensaries, with the potential for the Legislature to license additional retailers. The proposal needs at least a 60% vote to pass and would take effect six months after voter approval.

The campaign has been the costliest of nearly 160 measures on state ballots this year, attracting tens of millions of dollars of contributions primarily from supporters, according to the election tracking organization Ballotpedia. Among the opponents are the Florida Republican Party and Gov. Ron DeSantis, who has said it would reduce quality of life by leaving a marijuana stench in the air.

Voters in North and South Dakota will be asked for the third time whether to legalize marijuana beyond medical use. The measures need a simple majority to pass.

Nebraska Secretary of State Bob Evnen has said initiatives to legalize and regulate medical marijuana appear to have enough petition signatures to qualify for a statewide vote. He faces a Friday deadline to certify measures for the ballot.

What are people saying?

About 70% of American adults said marijuana should be legal in a Gallup poll taken last year, the highest level recorded by the polling firm since it first asked about marijuana policy in 1969. By contrast, only about one-third of respondents supported marijuana legalization 20 years ago.

Last year's Gallup poll showed the highest support for marijuana among young voters, a key demographic in seven presidential battleground states.

An analysis of national survey data published earlier this year found that an estimated 17.7 million people reported using marijuana daily or near-daily in 2022 — up dramatically from less than 1 million people in 1992. Though alcohol is still more widely used, the report marked the first time that the number of Americans who use marijuana just about every day surpassed the number who drink that often.

What's happening with similar drugs?

As legal marijuana becomes more widespread, some state officials are battling the sale of unregulated

products derived from hemp, which is federally classified as distinct from marijuana. Some of those products are sold in packaging similar to common candies or chips and contain delta-8 THC, a synthesized form of CBD that's prevalent in hemp.

Some states have banned or restricted synthetic hemp products, including South Dakota and Wyoming, where new laws took effect July 1. Indiana authorities have warned stores to remove delta-8 THC products that they say also contain illegal amounts of the psychoactive delta-9 THC found in marijuana.

In Missouri, where marijuana was legalized in 2022, Republican Gov. Mike Parson raised concerns that certain hemp-derived products are being marketed to children and ordered a crackdown by the state health department. He joined with Attorney General Andrew Bailey on Tuesday to announce a task force focused on unregulated psychoactive cannabis products.

"We are not the only state facing this issue and not the only state taking action," Parson said.

Hundreds gather on a Seattle beach to remember an American activist killed by the Israeli military

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — For her 26th birthday in July, human rights activist Aysenur Ezgi Eygi gathered friends for a bonfire at one of her favorite places, a sandy beach in Seattle where green-and-white ferries cruise across the dark, flat water and osprey fish overhead.

On Wednesday night, hundreds of people traveled to the same beach in grief, love and anger to mourn her. Eygi was shot and killed by Israeli soldiers last Friday in the occupied West Bank, where she had gone to protest and bear witness to Palestinian suffering.

"I can't imagine what she felt like in her last moments, lying alone under the olive trees," one of her friends, Kelsie Nabass, told the crowd at the vigil. "What did she think of? And did she know all of us would show up here tonight, for her?"

Eygi, who also held Turkish citizenship, was killed while demonstrating against settlements in the West Bank. A witness who was there, Israeli protester Jonathan Pollak, said she posed no threat to Israeli forces and that the shooting came during a moment of calm, following clashes between stone-throwing protesters and Israeli troops firing tear gas and bullets.

The Israeli military said Eygi was likely shot "indirectly and unintentionally" by its soldiers, drawing criticism from American officials, including President Joe Biden, who said he was "outraged and deeply saddened" her killing.

"There must be full accountability," Biden said in a statement released Wednesday. "And Israel must do more to ensure that incidents like this never happen again."

The deaths of American citizens in the West Bank have drawn international attention, such as the fatal shooting of a prominent Palestinian American journalist, Shireen Abu Akleh, in 2022 in the Jenin refugee camp. The deaths of Palestinians who do not have dual nationality rarely receive the same scrutiny.

Eygi's family has demanded an independent investigation.

On Thursday, Turkey's justice minister said his country is investigating Eygi's death. Turkish Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said the Ankara chief prosecutor's office was leading the Turkish probe. Tunc said Turkey would present its findings to a U.N. court overseeing a genocide case against Israel filed by South Africa over the war in Gaza.

"We will take every judicial step for our martyred daughter, Aysenur," Tunc said.

As the sun set Wednesday, turning the sky on the horizon a pale orange, friends recalled Eygi as open, engaging, funny and devoted. The crowd spilled beyond a large rectangle of small black, red, green and white Palestinian flags staked in the sand to mark the venue for the vigil.

Many attendees wore traditional checked scarves — keffiyehs — in support of the Palestinian cause and carried photographs of Eygi in her graduation cap. They laid roses, sunflowers or carnations at a memorial where battery-operated candles spelled out her name in the sand.

Several described becoming fast friends with her last spring during the occupied "Liberated Zone" pro-

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test against the Israel-Hamas war at the University of Washington. Yoseph Ghazal said she introduced herself as "Baklava," a name she sometimes used on messaging apps, reflective of her love of the sweet Mediterranean dessert.

Eygi, who attended Seattle schools and graduated from the University of Washington with a degree in psychology this year, helped negotiate with the administration on behalf of the protesters at the encampment, which was part of a broader campus movement against the Gaza war.

"She felt so strongly and loved humanity, loved people, loved life so much that she just wanted to help as many as she could," Juliette Majid, 26, now a doctoral student at North Carolina State University, said in an interview. "She had such a drive for justice."

Eygi's uncle told a Turkish television station that she had kept her trip a secret from at least some of her family, blocking relatives from her social media posts. Turkish officials have said they are working to repatriate her body for burial, per the family's wishes.

Turkey's foreign ministry says all measures related to bringing the body of Eygi, "who was "intentionally" killed by Israeli soldiers, to Turkey have been completed and she is expected to arrive on Friday. She will be buried in Turkey. It said the case is being followed by the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv and consulate in Jerusalem.

Sue Han, a 26-year-old law student at the University of Washington, only knew Eygi for a few months after meeting her at the university encampment, but they quickly became close, laughing and blasting music in Eygi's beat-up green Subaru. Eygi would pick Han up at the airport after her travels. Most recently, Eygi greeted her with a plastic baggie full of sliced apples and perfectly ripe strawberries.

Han saw Eygi before she left. Eygi was feeling scared and selfish for leaving her loved ones to go to the West Bank with the activist group International Solidarity Movement; Han said she couldn't imagine anyone more selfless.

Eygi loved to connect people, bringing disparate friends together for coffee to see how they mixed, Han said. The same was true when she would bring people together on the beach, and it was true of the vigil, too.

"I was looking around at everybody sharing stories about Aysenur, sharing tears and hugs, and this is exactly what she would have wanted," Han said. "These new relationships all sharing Aysenur as the starting seed — it's the legacy she would have wanted."

Tech billionaire kicks off first private spacewalk from SpaceX capsule

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — A billionaire kicked off the first private spacewalk Thursday, teaming up with SpaceX on the daring endeavor hundreds of miles above Earth.

Tech entrepreneur Jared Isaacman and his crew waited until their capsule was depressurized before popping open the hatch. Isaacman was to be the first one out, aiming to join a small elite group of spacewalkers who until now had included only professional astronauts from a dozen countries.

All four on board donned SpaceX's new spacewalking suits to protect themselves from the harsh vacuum. They launched on Tuesday from Florida, rocketing farther from Earth than anyone since NASA's moonwalkers. The orbit was reduced by half — to 458 miles (737 kilometers) — for the spacewalk.

It was the main focus of the five-day flight financed by Isaacman and Elon Musk's company, and the culmination of years of development geared toward settling Mars and other planets.

This first spacewalking test, expected to last about two hours, involved more stretching than walking. The plan called for Isaacman to emerge from the capsule but keep a hand or foot attached to it the whole time as he flexed his arms and legs to see how the new spacesuit would hold up. The hatch sported a walker-like structure for extra support.

After about 15 minutes outside, Isaacman was to be replaced by SpaceX engineer Sarah Gillis to go

through the same motions.

Each had 12-foot (3.6-meter) tethers but no intention of unfurling them or dangling at the end unlike what happens at the International Space Station, where astronauts routinely float out to do repairs at a much lower orbit.

More and more wealthy passengers are plunking down huge sums for rides aboard private rockets to experience a few minutes of weightlessness. Other have spent tens of millions to stay in space for days or even weeks. Space experts and risk analysts say it's inevitable that some will seek the thrill of spacewalking, deemed one of the most dangerous parts of spaceflight after launch and reentry but also the most soul-stirring.

This operation was planned down to the minute with little room for error. Trying out new spacesuits from a spacecraft new to spacewalking added to the risk. So did the fact that the entire capsule was exposed to the vacuum of space.

Scott "Kidd" Poteet, a former Air Force Thunderbird pilot, and SpaceX engineer Anna Menon stayed strapped to their seats to monitor from inside. All four underwent intensive training before the trip.

Isaacman, 41, CEO and founder of the Shift4 credit card-processing company, has declined to disclose how much he invested in the flight. It was the first of three flights in a program he's dubbed Polaris; this one was called Polaris Dawn. For SpaceX's inaugural private flight in 2021, he took up contest winners and a cancer survivor.

Until Thursday, only 263 people had conducted a spacewalk, representing 12 countries. The Soviet Union's Alexei Leonov kicked it off in 1965, followed a few months later by NASA's Ed White.

Pope marvels at Singapore's skyscrapers and asks that the lowest migrant workers not be forgotten

By NICOLE WINFIELD and EILEEN NG Associated Press

SINGAPORE (AP) — Pope Francis on Thursday praised Singapore's economic strength as a testament to human ingenuity but urged the city-state to look after the weakest, too, especially foreign workers, as he opened the final leg of his tour through some of Asia's poorest countries in one of the world's richest.

Francis marveled at Singapore's modern skyscrapers "that seem to rise from the sea" in both his opening speech to the city-state's leaders and again in the afternoon, when he celebrated Mass before an estimated 50,000 people at Singapore's national stadium.

"The most beautiful building, the most precious treasure, the most profitable investment in God's eyes, is ourselves," he said.

Singapore celebrated Francis' arrival by unveiling a new hybrid orchid named for him, the "Dendrobium His Holiness Pope Francis." Presented during an official welcome ceremony, the orchid "exudes a serene and pure beauty" of ivory white petals with a pink tinge at the center, according to the National Parks Board.

Francis arrived in Singapore from East Timor and began his official program Thursday by meeting with President Tharman Shanmugaratnam and Prime Minister Lawrence Wong before addressing government authorities and the diplomatic corps at the National University of Singapore.

There, Francis praised the government's commitment to sustainable development and providing public housing and quality education and health care to its people. But he urged authorities to look out for the poorest and beware of rewarding excellence at all costs, a reference to Singapore's highly competitive work and educational culture.

"I would like to highlight the risk entailed in focusing solely on pragmatism or placing merit above all things, namely the unintended consequence of justifying the exclusion of those on the margins from benefiting from progress," he said.

In a common appeal from history's first Latin American pope, Francis called especially for dignified pay and conditions for migrant workers, who have helped build Singapore into one of the world's most advanced financial powerhouses.

"These workers contribute a great deal to society and should be guaranteed a fair wage," Francis said.

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Singapore has no minimum wage policy for locals or foreigners.

Singapore was the last stop of Francis' 11-day tour that is the longest and farthest of his papacy after earlier stops in Indonesia, Papua New Guinea and East Timor. The economic disparities were obvious upon arrival Wednesday as Francis landed in Singapore's high-tech airport aboard the lone aircraft belonging to Aero Dili, the national carrier of East Timor, where around 42% of its people live below the poverty line.

Singapore has long touted as a success story its transformation from a colonial port lacking natural resources into a financial and trade power in just a few decades since independence from Malaysia in 1965. The former British colony enjoys one of the highest living standards in the world, and is known for its safety and low crime rate. But it is also one of the most expensive cities to live in and its competitive work environment makes for a stressful, overworked people.

Francis' praise for the country's astonishing economic growth was significant, given he has long been known to bristle at the excesses of capitalism. According to the International Monetary Fund, Singapore's gross domestic product per capita of \$133,740 was the fourth highest in the world, above the U.S. and other developed countries.

Foreigners account for over a third of Singapore's workforce. According to official data, the foreign workforce of 1.5 million includes 286,000 domestic workers and 441,000 people in construction, shipping and maintenance jobs, helping to support Singapore's trade-reliant economy. Many are migrant workers from Pakistan, Bangladesh and other poorer Asian countries.

Human Rights Watch said in a report last year that foreign migrant workers face labor rights abuses and exploitation through exorbitant debts owed to recruitment agents, non-payment of wages, restrictions on movement, confiscation of passports, and sometimes physical and sexual violence. It said domestic workers are excluded from many key labor protections, such as limits on daily work hours, sick leave and annual leave.

Francis is visiting Singapore to encourage its Catholics, who make up about 3.5% of the population of just under 6 million, while highlighting Singapore's tradition of interfaith coexistence. According to a 2020 census, Buddhists make up about 31% of the population, Christians 19% and Muslims 15%, while about a fifth of the population claimed no religious belief whatsoever.

In his remarks to the pope, President Shanmugaratnam highlighted Singapore's commitment to environmental sustainability and interfaith harmony, saying both were the result of hard work and dedication over decades.

"We are a multiracial, multireligious, and multicultural society," he said. "For us, solidarity and harmony have therefore been at the core, and will remain core features in our national development."

He praised Francis' consistent call to care for God's creation, saying Singapore too had made sustainability a priority ever since independence nearly six decades ago. Singapore's greening plan through 2030 envisages greater reliance on solar energy, waste reduction and imposition of carbon taxes to transition to a low-carbon economy.

"As a small city-state, we have sought to balance development with environmental responsibility," he said.

Francis said Singapore's environmental policies were a model for the rest of the world, calling it "a shining example of what humanity can achieve by working together in harmony, with a sense of responsibility and a spirit of inclusiveness and fraternity."

In the afternoon, Francis celebrated Mass before an estimated 50,000 people at the country's national stadium, attended also by church leaders from two Asian regions where the Holy See has delicate relations: the archbishop of Hong Kong, Cardinal Stephen Chow, and the archbishop of Yangon, Myanmar, Cardinal Charles Bo.

Scores of children were allowed to approach Francis' popemobile to receive a coveted papal rosary, and one lucky couple scored a papal autograph on the Vatican parchment they had made commemorating their wedding.

And in the streets of Singapore, dozens of people came out to greet him even just to cheer as his motorcade passed by.

"We just wanted to make sure that we caught his attention, and that we really communicated our love and warm welcome to him here in Singapore," said Lissy Puno, who made posters and bracelets to commemorate the visit.

Francis will visit a center for the elderly Friday and preside over an interfaith youth event before returning to Rome.

Dealers' paradise? How social media became a storefront for deadly fake pills as families struggle

By BARBARA ORTUTAY AP Technology Writer

Coco loved being the life of the party — cracking jokes, doing pranks and making people laugh, her mom, Julianna Arnold, recalled recently.

"Her favorite pastime was fashion," Arnold said. "She didn't like looking at magazines or going to fancy stores, but preferred to make her own creations from used clothing she would find at thrift stores.... And they always looked fabulous on her."

In 2022, two weeks after she turned 17, Coco left home just outside New York City to meet with a dealer she'd messaged through Instagram who promised to sell her Percocet. She never made it home. She was found dead the next day, two blocks from the address that the guy had provided her.

Whatever the dealer gave Coco, her mother said, was not Percocet. It was a fake pill laced with fentanyl, which can be lethal in a dose as small as the tip of a pencil.

Fentanyl overdoses have become a leading cause of death for minors in the last five years or so, even as overall drug use has dropped slightly. In a 2022 analysis of fentanyl-laced prescription pills, the DEA found that six out of 10 contained a potentially lethal dose of the drug.

And social media, where tainted, fake prescription drugs can be obtained with just a few clicks, is a big part of the problem. Experts, law enforcement and children's advocates say companies like Snap, TikTok, Telegram and Meta Platforms, which owns Instagram, are not doing enough to keep children safe.

A few taps away

The stories of these victims often play out similarly: The kids hear you can get pills on social media. A few taps later and then a package arrives. They retreat to the sanctity of their bedroom and take a pill. Fifteen minutes later, they're dead. No one even knows until the next morning.

Paul DelPonte, executive director and CEO of the National Crime Prevention Council, likened this crisis to a Johnson & Johnson incident in 1982 when seven people died due to Tylenol bottles that had been tampered with. In that case, J&J recalled all bottles and stopped production until they discovered the source of the problem.

"As a result, we now have tamper-resistant caps on over-the-counter medicines and in other products. That's corporate responsibility," he said. "For years, social media companies have known this has been happening, yet they continue to operate their platforms without any significant changes."

While data on the prevalence of drug sales on social platforms is hard to come by, the National Crime Prevention Council estimates 80% of teen and young adult fentanyl poisoning deaths can be traced to some social media contact.

In a sweeping 2023 report on the problem, Colorado's attorney general called the availability of fentanyl and other illicit substances online "staggering."

"Due to their ubiquity, convenience, and lack of regulation, social media platforms have become a major venue for drug distribution," the report said. "Where once a teen might have had to seek out a street dealer, hassle friends, or learn to navigate the dark web to access illicit drugs, young people can now locate drug dealers using their smartphones — with the relative ease of ordering food delivery or calling a ride-share service."

Accidental overdoses in the U.S. have decreased slightly each year since 2021 according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. DelPonte attributes this in part to more education and awareness about the issue. Among young people ages 0 to 19, there were 1,622 overdose deaths in 2021, then 1,590

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in 2022, and 1,511 last year.

The decline, DelPonte said, is "very small."

A decade ago, people looking to buy illicit drugs online would visit the dark web. But this was quickly eclipsed by social media and messaging platforms' rise. Using popular social media sites, encrypted chats, legitimate payment and shipping services, dealers moved into the light. Social platforms say they are constantly working to address the issue, while law enforcement has made some inroads.

Last May, for instance, the Drug Enforcement Administration's "Operation Last Mile," targeting Mexico's Sinaloa and Jalisco Cartels, led to 3,337 arrests and the seizure of nearly 44 million fentanyl pills and other deadly drugs. More than 1,100 associated cases involved social media apps and encrypted communications platforms, the DEA said.

On Instagram, as recently as this summer, a simple hashtag search for popular prescription drugs brought up numerous results with accounts offering to sell illicit pills to anyone looking. Many accounts directed users to Snapchat or Telegram, where experts say encryption and alleged lax moderation make it even easier to engage in illegal activity. Money is sent through payment platforms and the drugs can be delivered by mail, DelPonte said.

Meta, for its part, has made it more difficult to search for drugs on its platform in recent weeks.

'Never in a million years'

Mikayla Brown lost her son Elijah, who went by Eli, to a suspected fentanyl overdose in 2023, two weeks after his 15th birthday. Eli loved skateboarding, video games and cooking. His favorite was spicy Cajun pasta his mom made and he just started to get into cooking himself.

Eli began experimenting with marijuana in high school and he was going through what seemed like a phase many teenagers go through, his mom said. The family decided he'd go live with his biological father about three hours away in Woodland Hills in Los Angeles, to try to get a handle on what Brown called Eli's "rebellion era."

Brown said the family "never in a million years" would have thought he was getting into anything more dangerous than that. There was one exception, about a year before he passed away, his mom found him acting funny and he admitted to having taken Xanax, a prescription anti-anxiety drug.

On a September evening last year, Eli arrived home from a friend's house, had dinner with his dad and stayed up late to watch a movie.

His father sent him to bed around "2 a.m., I guess," Brown said. "And then when his alarm went off in the morning to wake up Eli for school he found him in his room..."

Eli was unresponsive. His cause of death was accidental fentanyl overdose. But he wasn't trying to buy fentanyl, he was looking for Xanax, and, like Coco, ended up with tainted pills that killed him.

Until recently, a search for #Xanax on Instagram led to a warning page specifying that "This may be associated with the sale of drugs" and that the "sale, purchase or trade of illicit drugs can cause harm to yourself and others and is illegal in most countries." A blue "Get help" link directed users to federal substance abuse resources. Underneath that link, users could click to "see results anyway." After it was pointed out by the AP, the company quickly removed the ability to "see results anyway" for location-specific hashtags such as #xanaxdallas or #xanaxchicago. Later, it also removed the "see results" option for other drugs such as cocaine and Adderall, among others.

Meta also said it investigated accounts shared by The Associated Press and concluded they were not drug dealers, but financial scam artists based in Africa pretending to sell drugs locally.

Meta says it blocks and filters "hundreds" of terms associated with illicit drug sales and links to recovery and substance abuse resources when possible. But drug dealers and other bad actors constantly shift their strategies, coming up with fresh ways to avoid detection.

David Decary-Hetu, a professor at the School of Criminology at the University of Montreal, said Meta, in particular, has been "quite effective" in targeting people who sell drugs on its social platforms. But, he added, "it doesn't mean it's not going to happen."

In a statement, Meta said drug dealers "are criminals who stop at nothing to sell their dangerous prod-

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ucts. This is a challenge that spans across platforms, industries, and communities, and it requires all of us working together to address it.”

The company added that it works with law enforcement and proactively took down 2 million pieces of content, 99.7% before they were reported in the first three months of 2024.

“Our hearts go out to the families suffering at the hands of these criminals and we are committed to working with others to prevent these tragedies,” Meta added.

A persistent problem

Coco’s mother had many discussions with her daughter about being careful online.

The teen was in therapy — social media really affected her and she developed anxiety and depression, Arnold said. She frequently checked Coco’s social media and limited her time on Snapchat to 15 minutes per day.

“She knew about a lot of this stuff. We had talked about it. But then when this came up on Instagram, you know, I wasn’t checking and I couldn’t check all of her direct messages. It’s hard to know as a parent, no matter how on top of it you are,” she said.

Coco’s death is still under investigation, Arnold said.

Arnold said it took five months to remove the dealer’s profile from Instagram. Occasionally, she checks to see if he’s there under another name.

“I typed in something that I thought maybe could work, you know, based on what his previous handle had been. And there he was. He was back up under a different a different handle,” she said. “But I recognized his photo and I reported it to the police. And now again, it’s taking months to get it taken down.”

Experts often single out Snapchat as a particularly dangerous platform, something the company vehemently disagrees with. In October 2022, a group of parents who say their children bought fentanyl from drug dealers they met through Snapchat sued the company for wrongful death and negligence, calling it a “haven for drug trafficking.”

“Despite Snap promoting and portraying Snapchat as a ‘goofy’ app for kids to use to send each other silly pictures, its known common use is as an ‘open-air drug market,’” the lawsuit claims. Snapchat’s role in illicit drug sales to teens, it continues, “was the foreseeable result of the designs, structures, and policies Snap chose to implement to increase its revenues.”

The vast majority of fentanyl deaths among young people, the lawsuit says, involve kids who don’t know they are ingesting fentanyl. Rather, they are buying what they believe is marijuana, MDMA or prescription drugs like OxyContin. In January, a judge ruled that the lawsuit could move to trial.

It’ll be yet another test for Section 230, a 1996 law that generally exempts internet companies from liability for material users post on their networks.

In a statement, Snap said it is “heartbroken by the fentanyl epidemic and are deeply committed to the fight against it.”

“We’ve invested in advanced technology to detect and remove illicit drug-related content, work extensively with law enforcement helping to bring dealers to justice, and continue to raise awareness and evolve our service to help keep our community safe. Criminals have no place on Snapchat,” said Jacqueline Beauchere, Global Head of Platform Safety at the company.

While Snap wouldn’t comment on the lawsuit itself, the company argues its design actually makes it more difficult for bad actors to operate. For instance, the company says, it doesn’t allow people to get messages from people they haven’t added as friends or have a phone contact, and location sharing is off by default.

Regulatory remedies?

Advocates are hoping that regulation of tech companies could help address the problem, as it might help with other dangers kids face on social media. In July, the Senate passed the Kids Online Safety Act, legislation designed to protect children from dangerous online content. It still awaits a vote in the House. Sen. Jeanne Shaheen, D-N.H., and Sen. Roger Marshall, R-Kan., meanwhile, introduced a bill that would require social media companies to report illicit fentanyl, methamphetamine and fake pill activity occurring on their platforms to law enforcement.

“We must do more at the federal level to combat the flow of fentanyl into our communities, and it starts

by holding social media companies accountable for their part in facilitating illicit drug sales," Shaheen said. But for parents like Arnold, Brown and others who already lost their children to overdoses, it is too late. "Social media companies have the ability to make their platforms drug-free zones," DelPonte said. "Instead, they keep evading the meaningful changes to keep the public safe."

Francine weakens moving inland from the Gulf Coast after hurricane winds cause power outages

By JACK BROOK and SARA CLINE Associated Press

MORGAN CITY, La. (AP) — Francine weakened Thursday after striking Louisiana as a Category 2 hurricane that knocked out power to hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses, sent storm surge rushing into coastal communities and raised flood fears in New Orleans and beyond as drenching rains spread over the northern Gulf Coast.

The tropical storm was forecast to be downgraded to a tropical depression as it churned northward over Mississippi, the National Hurricane Center said. Some 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters) of rain were possible in portions of Mississippi and neighboring states, forecasters said, warning of the potential threat of scattered flash flooding as farflung as Jackson, Mississippi; Birmingham, Alabama; Memphis, Tennessee; and Atlanta.

Francine slammed the Louisiana coast Wednesday evening with 100 mph (155 kph) winds in coastal Terrebonne Parish, battering a fragile coastal region that hasn't fully recovered from a series of devastating hurricanes in 2020 and 2021. It then moved at a fast clip toward New Orleans, pounding the city with torrential rains.

There were no immediate reports of deaths or injuries. TV news broadcasts from coastal communities showed waves from nearby lakes, rivers and Gulf waters thrashing sea walls. Water poured into city streets amid blinding downpours. Oak and cypress trees leaned in the high winds, and some utility poles swayed back and forth.

"It's a little bit worse than what I expected to be honest with you," said Alvin Cockerham, fire chief of Morgan City about 30 miles (50 kilometers) from where the storm's center made landfall. "I pulled all my trucks back to the station. It's too dangerous to be out there in this."

Power outages in Louisiana topped 390,000 early Thursday in Louisiana, according to the tracking site poweroutage.us, with an additional 46,000 outages reported in Mississippi.

Sheltering at her mother's home just outside Morgan City, Laura Leftwich said blasts of wind had swept away two large birdhouses outside. She had a generator powering an internet connection so she could video chat with friends, holding her computer to a window to show them water overflowing in the street.

If the storm had been any more intense, "I wouldn't have the guts to look outside," said Leftwich, 40. "It's a little scary."

The sixth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, Francine drew fuel from exceedingly warm Gulf of Mexico waters, strengthening to a Category 2 storm before landfall. It weakened late Wednesday to a tropical storm.

In addition to torrential rains, there was a lingering threat of spin-off tornadoes from the storm Thursday. Much of Louisiana and Mississippi could get 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of rain, with the possibility of 12 inches (30 centimeters) in some spots, said Brad Reinhart, a senior hurricane specialist at the hurricane center.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry said the National Guard would fan out to parishes impacted by Francine. They have food, water, nearly 400 high-water vehicles, about 100 boats and 50 helicopters to respond to the storm, including for possible search-and-rescue operations.

Since the mid-19th century, some 57 hurricanes have tracked over or made landfall in Louisiana, according to The Weather Channel. Among them are some of the strongest, costliest and deadliest storms in U.S. history.

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Morgan City, home to around 11,500 people, sits on the banks of the Atchafalaya River in south Louisiana and is surrounded by lakes and marsh. It's described on the city's website as "gateway to the Gulf of Mexico for the shrimping and oilfield industries."

President Joe Biden granted an emergency declaration to help Louisiana secure expedited federal money and assistance. Landry and Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves also declared states of emergency.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said it distributed more than 100,000 sandbags to the southern part of the state and the Department of Education reported a number of school district closures for Wednesday and Thursday.

Death toll climbs to 199 in Vietnam as typhoon's aftermath brings flash floods and landslides

By HAU DINH and DAVID RISING Associated Press

HANOI, Vietnam (AP) — Nearly 200 people have died in Vietnam in the aftermath of Typhoon Yagi and 128 are missing as flash floods and landslides take their toll, state media reported Thursday.

Vietnam's VNExpress newspaper reported that 199 people have died while more than 800 have been injured.

In the capital, flood waters from the Red River receded slightly but many areas were still inundated with water neck-high in some places.

In Hanoi's Tay Ho district, people waded through muddy brown water above their knees to make their way along one street, some still wearing their bicycle and motorcycle helmets after abandoning their vehicles along the way.

A few paddled along the road in small boats as empty water bottles, a styrofoam cooler and other flotsam drifted by; one man pushed his motorbike toward drier ground in an aluminum sloop.

Pedestrians hiked up their shorts as high as possible to avoid being soaked by the wake caused by a delivery truck powering its way through the water.

Bakery owner Mai Anh evacuated the area with her family to shelter with her parents, but returned Thursday to check on her shop and found more than two feet (half a meter) of water still inside.

"I can't do business with the flood like this," she said. "The goods in my shop are all destroyed."

The flooding in Hanoi has been reportedly the worst in two decades.

Residents started evacuating the area Tuesday as the flood waters rose, and power and drinking water have been cut since Wednesday.

The flood waters damaged the doors to Hoang Anh Tu's home, from which he operates a beer shop. Though he and his family were able to relocate to his parents' house, they have had to take turns guarding the building.

"It's very difficult," he said. "We haven't even been able to assess the damage because the flood came so fast."

Yagi was the strongest typhoon to hit the Southeast Asian country in decades. It made landfall Saturday with winds of up to 149 kph (92 mph). Despite weakening on Sunday, downpours continued and rivers remain dangerously high.

Australia's Foreign Ministry on Thursday said it was providing \$2 million in humanitarian relief, emergency supplies and other essential services in response. It said a Royal Australian Air Force transport aircraft had already delivered essential provisions such as shelters and hygiene kits Wednesday night.

The death toll spiked earlier in the week as a flash flood swept away the entire hamlet of Lang Nu in northern Vietnam's Lao Cai province Tuesday.

Hundreds of rescue personnel worked tirelessly Wednesday to search for survivors, but as of Thursday morning 53 villagers remained missing, VNExpress reported, while seven more bodies were found, bringing the death toll there to 42.

Floods and landslides have caused most of the deaths, many of which have come in the northwestern Lao Cai province, bordering China, where Lang Nu is located. Lao Cai province is also home to the popular

trekking destination of Sapa.

On Monday, a bridge collapsed and a bus was swept away by flooding, killing dozens of people.

The steel bridge in Phu Tho province over the engorged Red River collapsed, sending 10 cars and trucks along with two motorbikes into the river. The bus carrying 20 people was swept into a flooded stream by a landslide in mountainous Cao Bang province.

Experts say storms like Typhoon Yagi are getting stronger due to climate change, as warmer ocean waters provide more energy to fuel them, leading to higher winds and heavier rainfall.

Israel-Hamas war latest: Turkey investigates the killing of Turkish-American activist in West Bank

By The Associated Press undefined

Turkey announced on Thursday its own probe into the death of a Turkish-American activist who was shot and killed by Israeli forces last week while protesting settlements in the occupied West Bank.

Meanwhile, a Syrian pro-government media outlet and an opposition war monitor say an Israeli strike hit a car in southern Syria on Thursday, killing two people.

The developments came a day after Israeli airstrikes across Gaza killed dozens more Palestinians, according to local officials. Strikes on a U.N. school being used as a shelter and two homes killed at least 34 people in the Palestinian territory on Wednesday, including 19 women and children, they said.

The Health Ministry says more than 41,000 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the Israel-Hamas war began. It does not differentiate between fighters and civilians in its count. The war has caused vast destruction and displaced about 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, often multiple times.

Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in their Oct. 7 attack that sparked the war. They abducted another 250 and are still holding around 100. Around a third of them are believed to be dead.

Here's the latest:

Turkey launches its own probe into the killing of Turkish-American activist in the West Bank

ANKARA, Turkey — Turkey's justice minister says his country is investigating the death of a Turkish-American activist shot and killed by Israeli forces last week while protesting settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The 26-year-old activist from Seattle was taking part in a demonstration against settlements in the Palestinian territory when she was fatally shot last Friday. Israel is investigating the killing of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi and its military later said she was likely shot "indirectly and unintentionally" by soldiers.

Turkish Justice Minister Yilmaz Tunc said on Thursday that the Ankara chief prosecutor's office was leading the Turkish probe. He also called on U.N. agencies, including the Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions, to investigate.

Tunc said Turkey would present its findings to a U.N. court overseeing a genocide case against Israel filed by South Africa over the war in Gaza.

"We will take every judicial step for our martyred daughter, Aysenur," Tunc said.

Meanwhile, the Turkish Foreign Ministry said Eygi's body was likely to be brought to Turkey on Friday. Her burial is scheduled to take place in the Aegean coastal town of Didim, in western Turkey, in line with her family's wishes.

An airstrike hits a car in southern Syria, killing 2 people, pro-government media and a war monitor say

BEIRUT — A Syrian pro-government radio and a war-monitoring group say an Israeli strike hit a car in southern Syria, killing two people. The Sham FM didn't give further details on the Thursday morning strike on the village of Khan Arnabeh, near Syria's Israeli-occupied Golan Heights.

The Britain-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, an opposition war monitor, also reported that two people were killed in the airstrike, without giving further details.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which has carried out such airstrikes over the past months

on the edge of the Golan Heights, captured by Israel during the 1967 Mideast war and annexed in 1981. Israel says it is targeting Iran-linked militants.

Israel has vowed to stop Iranian entrenchment in Syria, where thousands of Iran-backed fighters are deployed. Syria is a key route for Iran to send weapons to Lebanon's Hezbollah group.

South Koreans are starkly divided over North Korea's nuclear threat

By FOSTER KLUG, JIWON SONG and JAE C. HONG Associated Press

POHANG, South Korea (AP) — There are two Koreas, North and South. But there's also more than one South Korea, with the nation split into camps with polar opposite views on the danger posed by the nuclear-armed neighbor to the north.

This division in South Korean sentiment has lasted through a tumultuous history of war, dictatorship, poverty and, in recent decades, head-spinning though unevenly distributed economic growth. Differing views on North Korea are now sharper than ever, influenced — or not — by Pyongyang's repeated vows to attack South Korea and its buildup of nuclear-capable weapons.

Spend some time in South Korea and you will see reminders everywhere of North Korea's potential nuclear menace — and the contrasting ways residents read Pyongyang's actions.

Older people and conservatives often have more unease about North Korea than liberals and younger people. But a sweeping generalization isn't possible. Many young people are also afraid. And some older people who have spent their lives hearing angry warnings from North Korea feel no fear at all.

Relations with North Korea often improve with liberal South Korean governments eager for dialogue, and plummet with conservative leaders like the current hard-line president. A tough stance in Seoul usually means Pyongyang stages more weapons tests, as happened on Thursday, and issues more bellicose statements, which leads to frenzied South Korean media coverage. During the previous liberal government, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un had summits with then-South Korean President Moon Jae-in, which set up meetings between Kim and former U.S. President Donald Trump.

Many in South Korea discount the nuclear peril as hollow because of a simple truth: Aside from occasional deadly skirmishes, the North hasn't backed up its vows to use its weapons in a full-scale attack on the South. Still, for South Koreans paying attention to the whiplash speed of North Korea's nuclear and missile development, there is plenty of distress.

The Associated Press interviewed and photographed dozens of South Koreans to explain this unique, fragmented perception of the nation's biggest rival, North Korea.

Out of the blue

"Kim Jong Un might really use a nuke," said Kim Jaehyun, a 22-year-old undergraduate law student. "North Korea could really attack us out of the blue."

He stockpiles a bulletproof vest and other military gear in the event of a war. While many South Koreans his age know little about national defense policies, Kim attends North Korea security seminars and reads articles on war scenarios.

Kim links his worries, in part, to the day in 2022 when, while serving as an infantryman along the border, he heard that Pyongyang had flown a drone into South Korean territory, breaking an inter-Korean military agreement.

"There needs to be at least one person like me who can raise how dangerous" North Korea is, Kim said. "People just take the looming threats too lightly. It's like they see the knife coming closer to them but never think the knife could stab them."

That's not the case for Shin Nari, who can quickly quantify her worry about nuclear war.

"Number-wise, from 1 to 10, I would say 8. ... I take it very seriously," said Shin, 34, a master's student at the University of North Korean Studies in Seoul. A war could happen anytime, she says. "In a few seconds, we could just blow up here."

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Shin's bookshelves are filled with North Korea-related topics, and her goal is to work for her country as a policymaker. She has a small stockpile of bottled water and canned goods in case of a nuclear attack. "It makes me satisfied that I could live at least 14 days, maybe a month."

A decision for war?

South Koreans have long been divided on North Korea.

Here are some facts: The North attacked the South in June 1950, five years after Soviet and American forces split the Korean Peninsula in half at the end of World War II. The end of the Korean War in 1953 resulted in an uneasy cease-fire. This means that the Korean Peninsula, separated by the world's most heavily armed border, is still technically at war.

Much of the unease in the South is linked to the nuclear bombs.

North Korea has been building its nuclear program for decades, but it started in earnest in the 1990s. Over the years, through on-again, off-again disarmament negotiations, the North has conducted a barrage of missile and nuclear tests. The goal is an arsenal of accurate, long-range nuclear-capable missiles.

There are still technical issues the North needs to master, but the development of such an arsenal may only be a matter of time. Pyongyang is estimated by some experts to currently have as many as 60 warheads.

Many believe Kim Jong Un won't risk war because the United States-South Korea military alliance would respond with overwhelming force, obliterating the North's leadership. But there are growing questions in South Korea about the U.S. commitment to back up its "nuclear umbrella" protecting the South, with repeated polls showing that more than half want Seoul to build its own nukes.

Two experts who regularly visited North Korea — former senior U.S. intelligence official Robert Carlin and Siegfried Hecker, former director of the Los Alamos National Laboratory — argued at the beginning of this year that Kim had "made a strategic decision to go to war," creating a situation on the Korean Peninsula that's "more dangerous than it has been at any time since early June 1950."

Like fish in water

"If a fish lives in water, it doesn't think about the water," said the Rev. Chung Joon-hee, a pastor at Younknak Presbyterian Church in Seoul, one of South Korea's biggest and most influential churches, explaining why many South Koreans pay little attention to North Korea.

"This is our world," he said on a busy Sunday at his church, which was set up by a pastor born in what is now North Korea and North Korean refugees. "There is nowhere to hide or go. ... If there is a provocation or anything that happens, we have to accept that as context in our life."

Most people, Chung said, see tensions with North Korea as "just a given."

"The fact that we are divided, the fact that there is a threat up there, the fact that they can do crazy things. ... Other than prayer, there is not much we can be ready for," he said.

A vivid reminder that South Korea — for all its modern, high-tech veneer — is a country technically at war could be seen recently when hundreds of young men gathered at a military base in Pohang to begin 18 months of mandatory military service. The marine band played sentimental songs about parting from loved ones, and the young recruits, still in their civilian clothes and haircuts, knelt with their faces on the ground, to show their gratitude to friends and family in the review stands.

"I feel worried and hope he won't get injured," said Yeon Soo Lee, 55, a kitchenware business owner from Gangneung whose son is becoming a third-generation marine. "But I have no concern that he will be involved in a possible war that North Korea has been implying will happen these days."

Others were also unfazed.

"I cannot say there is a zero percent chance of war, but I just don't think of it at all. I cannot live each day full of worries," said Kim Shin Hwa, 21, another marine recruit.

His father, Kim Jong Soo, a 56-year-old office worker, said South Koreans have become numb to the barrage of news about North Korean provocations. His reaction, when he hears that North Korea has test-fired a missile: "'Oh, they did it again.' We pay more attention to our daily lives."

But even the unworried know worriers.

Kim Jong Soo said his brother-in-law "is more sensitive than me" and has stockpiled bottles of water and instant noodles in case of a war.

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Kwon Young-il, a 28-year-old car seller who completed his active duty in the military in 2021 and is now in the reserves, isn't concerned about war.

What does he worry about? "Whether I should get a lunch box provided by the army or buy my own lunch at the post exchange," he said of his reserve training. "None of my friends seriously think I will have to fight against North Korea."

The fear

Gauging South Korean opinion on the North is notoriously difficult.

Publicly, South Koreans tend to be nonchalant about a danger that has been around their entire lives. Some feel that North Korea is working from a tried-and-true playbook where it repeatedly raises tensions with weapons demonstrations and belligerent rhetoric in order to lay the groundwork for negotiations meant to win concessions. Others have an abiding faith in Washington's rhetoric about its "ironclad alliance" with Seoul. But there is a great deal of apprehension, too.

A 2023 telephone survey of 1,001 adults in South Korea showed that 45% worried about North Korea's nuclear program while 30% said they didn't, according to the state-funded Korea Institute for National Unification, which commissioned the survey.

Alarm spikes after big provocations, like North Korean nuke tests.

In 1994, panicked crowds emptied stores of instant ramen and rice after a North Korean negotiator threatened to turn Seoul into a "sea of fire." South Koreans have since gotten used to that language.

Another thing that plays into North Korean nuclear anxiety in Seoul is Trump.

The former U.S. president repeatedly questioned the decades-long Seoul-Washington alliance. This, along with the North's rapid progress on nuclear-tipped missiles that could hit the U.S. mainland, has raised serious questions in Seoul about whether Washington would fulfill its oft-stated pledge to respond with its own nuclear weapons if the North attacked South Korea.

U.S. officials maintain they would instantly hit back if North Korea attacked. There are nearly 30,000 American troops in South Korea and another 50,000 in nearby Japan.

In a recent speech, South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol laid out a vision that "clearly rejects the legitimacy of the 'Democratic People's Republic of Korea' (North Korea's formal name) and the idea of unification through a gradual process of integration and extensive cross-border cooperation," according to Daniel Sneider, an East Asia expert at Stanford University.

"The warring visions of unification offered by President Yoon and North Korean leader Kim" — who wants a Korea ruled by Pyongyang — "are likely to lead to even greater inter-Korean tensions," Sneider wrote.

The bunker

After North Korea launched a satellite into orbit in November — which Seoul and Washington viewed as a disguised test of long-range missile technology — and the Seoul city government sent out evacuation alerts erroneously, Jung Myungja made a big decision: "It would be such a relief to have a place nearby for my family members to hide."

So the 73-year-old hired a company to dig a bunker, about the size of a medium-sized walk-in closet, below the courtyard of her house on the outskirts of Seoul.

Her son-in-law, Park Seung Tae, a 45-year-old office worker, said the bunker could protect the family for a week or two "if a nuke is ever dropped here."

The company that built the bunker has secured three other such contracts and just started construction on one in eastern Seoul. Similar bunkers take about a month to build and cost up to 40 million Korean won (\$30,000), the company says.

"You never know what the future holds," Jung said. "These days you get local news and (expert) opinions that say there is likely going to be another war in this country. I personally think that can really happen again."

Alberto Fujimori, a former president of Peru who was convicted for human rights abuses, dies at 86

By FRANKLIN BRICEÑO Associated Press

LIMA, Peru (AP) — Alberto Fujimori, whose decade-long presidency began with triumphs righting Peru's economy and defeating a brutal insurgency only to end in autocratic excess that later sent him to prison, has died. He was 86.

His death Wednesday in the capital, Lima, was announced by his daughter Keiko Fujimori in a post on X. Fujimori, who governed with an increasingly authoritarian hand in 1990-2000, was pardoned in December from his convictions for corruption and responsibility for the murder of 25 people. His daughter said in July that he was planning to run for Peru's presidency for the fourth time in 2026.

The former university president and mathematics professor was the consummate political outsider when he emerged from obscurity to win Peru's 1990 election over writer Mario Vargas Llosa. Over a tumultuous political career, he repeatedly made risky, go-for-broke decisions that alternately earned him adoration and reproach.

He took over a country ravaged by runaway inflation and guerrilla violence, mending the economy with bold actions including mass privatizations of state industries. Defeating fanatical Shining Path rebels took a little longer but also won him broad-based support.

His presidency, however, collapsed just as dramatically.

After briefly shutting down Congress and elbowing himself into a controversial third term, he fled the country in disgrace in 2000 when leaked videotapes showed his spy chief, Vladimiro Montesinos, bribing lawmakers. The president went to Japan, the land of his parents, and famously faxed in his resignation.

He stunned supporters and foes alike five years later when he landed in neighboring Chile, where he was arrested and then extradited to Peru. He had hoped to run for Peru's presidency in 2006, but instead wound up in court facing charges of abuse of power.

The high-stakes political gambler would lose miserably. He became the first former president in the world to be tried and convicted in his own country for human rights violations. He was not found to have personally ordered the 25 death-squad killings for which he was convicted, but he was deemed responsible because the crimes were committed in his government's name.

His 25-year sentence did not stop Fujimori from seeking political revindication, which he planned from a prison built in a police academy on the outskirts of Lima, the capital.

His congresswoman daughter Keiko tried in 2011 to restore the family dynasty by running for the presidency but was narrowly defeated in a runoff. She ran again in 2016 and 2021, when she lost by just 44,000 votes after a campaign in which she promised to free her father.

"After a long battle with cancer, our father, Alberto Fujimori, has just departed to meet the Lord," she said on X Wednesday. "We ask those who loved him to accompany us with a prayer for the eternal rest of his soul."

Fujimori's presidency was, in fact, a brash display of outright authoritarianism, known locally as "caudillismo," in a region shakily stepping away from dictatorships toward democracy.

He is survived by his four children. The oldest, Keiko, became first lady in 1996 when his father divorced his mother, Susana Higuchi, in a bitter battle in which she accused Fujimori of having her tortured. The youngest child, Kenji, was elected a congressman.

Fujimori was born July 28, 1938, Peruvian Independence Day, and his immigrant parents picked cotton until they could open a tailor's shop in downtown Lima.

He earned a degree in agricultural engineering in 1956, and then studied in France and the United States, where he received a graduate degree in mathematics from the University of Wisconsin in 1972.

In 1984 he became rector of the Agricultural University in Lima, and six years later, he ran for president without ever having held political office, billing himself as a clean alternative to Peru's corrupt, discredited political class.

He soared from 6% in the polls a month before the 1990 election to finish second out of nine in the

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balloting. He went on to beat Vargas Llosa in a runoff.

The victory, he later said, came from the same frustration that fueled the Shining Path.

"My government is the product of rejection, of being fed up with Peru because of the frivolity, corruption and nonfunctioning of the traditional political class and the bureaucracy," he said.

Once in office, Fujimori's tough talk and hands-on style at first won him only plaudits, as car bombings still ripped through the capital and annual inflation approached 8,000 percent.

He applied the same economic shock therapy that Vargas Llosa had advocated but he had argued against in the campaign.

Privatizing state-owned industries, Fujimori slashed public spending and attracted record foreign investment.

Known affectionately as "El chino," due to his Asian ancestry, Fujimori often donned peasant garb to visit jungle Indigenous communities and highland farmers, while delivering electricity and drinking water to dirt-poor villages. That distinguished him from the patrician, white politicians who typically lacked his commoner's touch.

Fujimori also gave Peru's security forces free rein to take on the Shining Path.

In September 1992, police captured rebel leader Abimael Guzmán. Deservedly or not, Fujimori took credit.

Taking power just years after much of the region had shed dictatorships, the former university professor ultimately represented a step back. He developed a growing taste for power and resorted to increasingly anti-democratic means to amass more of it.

In April 1992, he shut down Congress and the courts, accusing them of shackling his efforts to defeat the Shining Path and spur economic reforms.

International pressure forced him to call elections for an assembly to replace the Congress. The new legislative body, dominated by his supporters, changed Peru's constitution to allow the president to serve two consecutive five-year terms. Fujimori was swept back into office in 1995, after a brief border war with Ecuador, in an election landslide.

Human rights advocates at home and abroad blasted him for pushing through a general amnesty law forgiving human rights abuses committed by security forces during Peru's "anti-subversive" campaign between 1980 and 1995.

The conflict would claim nearly 70,000 lives, a truth commission found, with the military responsible for more than a third of the deaths. Journalists and businessmen were kidnapped, students disappeared and at least 2,000 highland peasant women were forcibly sterilized.

In 1996, Fujimori's majority bloc in Congress put him on the path for a third term when it approved a law that determined his first five years as president didn't count because the new constitution was not yet in place when he was elected.

A year later, Fujimori's Congress fired three Constitutional Tribunal judges who tried to overturn the legislation, and his foes accused him of imposing a democratically elected dictatorship.

By then, almost daily revelations were showing the monumental scale of corruption around Fujimori. About 1,500 people connected to his government were prosecuted on corruption and other charges, including eight former Cabinet ministers, three former military commanders, an attorney general and a former chief of the Supreme Court.

The accusations against Fujimori led to years of legal wrangling. In December, Peru's Constitutional Court ruled in favor of a humanitarian pardon granted to Fujimori on Christmas Eve in 2017 by then-President Pablo Kuczynski. Wearing a face mask and getting supplemental oxygen, Fujimori walked out of the prison door and got in a sport utility vehicle driven by his daughter-in-law.

The last time he was seen in public was on Sept. 4, leaving a private hospital in a wheelchair. He told the press that he had undergone a CT scan and when asked if his presidential candidacy was still going ahead, he smiled and said "We'll see, we'll see."

Firefighters hope cooler weather will aid their battle against 3 major Southern California fires

By EUGENE GARCIA, ERIC THAYER, AMY TAXIN and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press
WRIGHTWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Firefighters battling three major wildfires in the mountains east of Los Angeles took advantage of cooler weather Wednesday as they slowly gained the upper hand, but not before dozens of homes were destroyed and thousands of people were forced to evacuate.

California is only now heading into the teeth of the wildfire season but already has seen nearly three times as much acreage burn than during all of 2023. The wildfires have threatened tens of thousands of homes and other structures across Southern California since they accelerated during a triple-digit heat wave over the weekend.

No deaths have been reported, but at least a dozen people, mainly firefighters, have been treated for injuries, mostly heat-related, authorities said.

In the small community of Wrightwood, about 90 minutes outside Los Angeles, authorities implored residents to flee the exploding Bridge Fire, which has burned more than a dozen homes in the area.

Resident Erin Arias said she was racing up the mountain when she got the order to leave and did, grabbing her passport and dog. On Wednesday, she and her husband doused water on the roof of their still-standing home. Their cat was missing, she said.

"It's absolutely scary," Arias said, looking at the burned embers of her neighbor's home. "We're really lucky."

UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain said the fire moved extraordinarily fast across complex terrain, likely giving residents less time to evacuate than usual and surprising even seasoned fire officials.

The Bridge Fire "had to go up mountain sides, burn down slope, jump across valleys, burn across new ridges, and then make it down slope again at least two other times in effectively one burning period," he said.

The full extent of the damage caused by the fires remained unclear. The three blazes are:

— The Airport Fire in Orange County, which has burned more than 35 square miles (91 square kilometers). The fire was 5% contained Wednesday night and was reportedly sparked by heavy equipment operating in the area. Orange County Fire Capt. Steve Concialdi said eight firefighters have been treated for injuries, mostly heat-related. One resident suffered smoke inhalation and another burns, he said. Several homes burned in El Cariso Village.

— The Line Fire in the San Bernardino National Forest, which was 18% contained Wednesday and had charred 57 square miles (148 square kilometers). The blaze has injured three firefighters. Authorities said it was caused by arson in Highland. A suspect was arrested Tuesday.

— The Bridge Fire east of Los Angeles, which grew tenfold in a day and has burned 78 square miles (202 square kilometers), torched at least 33 homes and six cabins and forced the evacuation of 10,000 people. The cause of the fire is not yet known. It remained zero percent contained Wednesday night.

Gov. Gavin Newsom sent National Guard troops in to help with evacuations, and the White House said President Joe Biden was monitoring the situation.

In El Cariso Village, a community of 250 people along Highway 74 in Riverside County, an Associated Press photographer saw at least 10 homes and several cars engulfed in flames.

Orange County Fire Authority Incident Commander Kevin Fetterman said the blaze has been difficult to tame because of the terrain and dry conditions and because some areas hadn't burned in decades.

More than 5,500 homes in Riverside County were under evacuation orders, affecting more than 19,000 residents. Several recreational cabins and structures in the Cleveland National Forest have been damaged.

In San Bernardino County, some 65,600 homes and buildings were under threat by the Line Fire, and residents along the southern edge of Big Bear Lake were told to leave Tuesday.

The Line Fire blanketed the area with a thick cloud of dark smoke, which provided shade for firefighters trying to get ahead of winds expected later Wednesday, said Fabian Herrera, a spokesperson for those battling the Line Fire.

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A man from the town of Norco suspected of starting the Line Fire on Sept. 5 was arrested and charged with arson, San Bernardino County Sheriff's Department said. Officials did not specify what was used to start the fire.

Investigators collected evidence from the man's vehicle and home that suggests he could have been involved in starting other fires, San Bernardino County Sheriff Shannon Dicus said Wednesday.

On the Nevada border with California near Reno, the Davis Fire forced thousands of people to evacuate over the weekend, destroyed one home and a dozen structures and charred nearly 9 square miles (23 square kilometers) of timber and brush along the Sierra Nevada's eastern front.

Rich Meyr and Evelyn Kelley were the first arrivals at an evacuation center set up Wednesday at a recreation center in south Reno. Both said they refused to evacuate previous fires but decided to play it safe this time.

"My son's wedding is Saturday. I threw all the flowers and gowns in the RV and we left. It looks like a garden shop inside that RV," Kelley said. "But who wants to burn alive?"

More than 600 firefighters kept the blaze from growing Wednesday despite high winds that grounded all aircraft that had dropped retardant on the flames over the past two days. The fire was about 30% contained Wednesday night.

Two Black women could make US Senate history this election. But they strive to make a difference

By LISA MASCARO AP Congressional Correspondent

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Senate has the potential for history-making this fall, with not one, but two, Black women possibly elected to the chamber, a situation never seen in America since Congress was created more than 200 years ago.

Delaware's Lisa Blunt Rochester marks the milestone by saying that the reason she does this work is not about making history, "but to make a difference, an impact, on people's lives."

Maryland's Angela Alsobrooks said that people like her, and stories like hers, don't usually make it to the U.S. Senate, "but they should."

If the two Democratic candidates prevail in their elections this November, their arrival would double the number of Black women — from two to four — who have ever been elected to the U.S. Senate, whose 100 members have historically been, and continue to be, mostly white men.

Never in the Senate have two Black women served together at the same time.

"I have to pause and think, How is that possible?" asked Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University.

"It's not that white male attorneys' perspective shouldn't be at the table," said Walsh, but "they shouldn't be the only thing at the table."

To be sure, there are a many stairs to climb before Senate history would be made this election, where not only the White House, but control of Congress is being fiercely contested, and essentially a toss-up. The Senate races, in particular, are heated, grueling and costly.

Blunt Rochester is almost assured to defeat the Republican candidate after Tuesday's uncontested primary for the seat held by retiring Democratic Sen. Tom Carper in the small state that is home to President Joe Biden and where she is the at-large representative to the House. But the race in Maryland between Alsobrooks and Republican Larry Hogan, the popular former governor, is expected to be tight to the finish — and it could determine which party takes majority control in the Senate.

Alsobrooks upended conventional wisdom to beat back wealthy David Trone in the primary to replace retiring Democratic Sen. Ben Cardin by amassing deep grass roots and party support, showcased in a notable campaign ad with hundreds of backers. She is the former State's Attorney for sprawling Prince George's County and is now its top County Executive.

On their private text chain Blunt Rochester says they call themselves "sister senator to be," as they run

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down-ballot from Vice President Kamala Harris — a friend and colleague who became the second Black woman ever elected to the Senate when she won in 2016 — in her own historic run for the White House.

The first Black woman elected to the Senate, Democratic Sen. Carol Moseley Braun of Illinois in 1992, served a single term. Harris was the second. And a third Black woman, Sen. Laphonza Butler, was appointed to fill out the term of long-serving California Sen. Dianne Feinstein, who died in 2023.

"People are anxious and excited at the same time," said Glynda C. Carr, the president and CEO of Higher Heights for America, an organization that works to elect Black women to office.

What's striking about their campaigns is the way the two women embrace their own backgrounds but also, like Harris, don't dwell on the historic firsts they would bring to the job, leaving it to the voter to see their Blackness and hear their voices as women.

"The vast majority of us know that we have so much more in common than what separates us," Harris said on the debate stage this week, brushing past Trump as he revived questions about her race.

On the campaign trail Blunt Rochester has shared the story of the Reconstruction Era documents showing her great, great, great-grandfather, who had been enslaved in Georgia, as now having the right to vote.

As she reminisces on that history, "what we've come through as a country," she said she also thinks of what she will pass on to her own new baby granddaughter.

"There isn't a cookie cutter way to run" for office, Blunt Rochester told AP.

Blunt Rochester and Harris are close, both entering Congress the same year and often sitting together at Congressional Black Caucus events. "The most important thing is that we show up as our authentic selves," she said, adding "because it requires all of our different and diverse lived and work experiences."

Alsobrooks launched her campaign for the Senate in a video telling her family's story of leaving South Carolina for Maryland after her great-grandfather was shot and killed by a sheriff's deputy after a traffic stop.

As a young prosecutor she first met Harris, then attorney general in California, a friendship that formed more than a decade ago.

But unlike 2016, when Hillary Clinton ran for president in a white suit symbolic of the suffragettes, the 2024 Senate candidates are positioning themselves more broadly in a way that may appeal to a wider electorate but also signals the cultural shift as the country becomes more diverse and Congress becomes more reflective of the electorate.

"We learned from 2016, we're not going to lead with identity in the same way that Hillary Clinton did," said Aimee Allison, founder of She the People, an organization that supports women of color in American leadership.

Allison said a new generation of candidates is showing you can be "holding multiple identities" at once. "It's demonstrating you have a heart for people who you're not like ... but deserve to be served by government and deserve representation."

The challenges Black women face to get to this point in the campaign are steep, rooted in a two-party political system that has often been slow to support Black women candidates and quick to doubt their ability to win statewide office, despite the qualifications.

Over the years, the parties have not always shared ample resources with Black women candidates who strategists said proved they could have had more success in several close races, creating a Catch-22 loop that reinforces biased attitudes against their electability.

In fact, the Senate may have been poised to swear in another Black woman, Rep. Barbara Lee, who ran for the open seat from California after Feinstein's death but fell short during a multi-candidate primary. Rep. Adam Schiff ran a strong campaign to become the Democratic front-runner with wide party support and is expected to handily win the seat that is now filled temporarily by Butler.

With the Senate heading toward a 50-50 split, tens of millions of dollars are being spent in Maryland, where the popular Hogan was recruited by Senate Republican Leader Mitch McConnell to help the GOP win back the majority.

Hogan and Alsobrooks appear to generally appreciate one another. Alsobrooks said Hogan was a good

governor, but warns that in the Senate he would be a decisive GOP vote.

Hogan's campaign said he greatly respects Alsobrooks, and is proud of the work they did together during his administration.

"Our campaign has been laser-focused on Maryland and Marylanders — their local concerns and priorities, and the opportunity to elect an independent swing vote who will put the best interests of the state above party-line politics," said Hogan campaign spokeswoman Blake Kernen.

During the Democratic National Convention the two women candidates held an event at a historic Black history museum in Chicago with Moseley Braun delivering remarks and Butler introducing them.

Blunt Rochester, noting her own powder blue power suit with its padded foundation, said she's standing on the shoulders of those who came before her and has strong shoulders ready for those who come next.

From Chinese to Italians and beyond, maligning a culture via its foods is a longtime American habit

By DEEPTI HAJELA Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It's a practice that's about as American as apple pie — accusing immigrant and minority communities of engaging in bizarre or disgusting behaviors when it comes to what and how they eat and drink, a kind of shorthand for saying they don't belong.

The latest iteration came at Tuesday's presidential debate, when former President Donald Trump spotlighted a false online tempest around the Haitian immigrant community of Springfield, Ohio. He repeated the groundless claim previously spread by his running mate, JD Vance, that the immigrants were stealing dogs and cats, the precious pets belonging to their American neighbors, and eating them. The furor got enough attention that officials had to step in to refute it, saying there was no credible evidence of any such thing.

But while it might be enough to turn your stomach, such food-based accusations are not new. Far from it.

Food-related scorn and insults were hurled at immigrant Chinese communities on the West Coast in the late 1800s as they started coming to the United States in larger numbers, and in later decades spread to other Asian and Pacific Islander communities like Thai or Vietnamese. As recently as last year, a Thai restaurant in California was hit with the stereotype, which caused such an outpouring of undeserved vitriol that the owner had to close and move to another location.

Behind it is the idea that "you're engaging in something that is not just a matter of taste, but a violation of what it is to be human," says Paul Freedman, a professor of history at Yale University. By tarring Chinese immigrants as those who would eat things Americans would refuse to, it made them the "other."

In the US, foods can be flashpoints

Other communities, while not being accused of eating pets, have been criticized for the perceived strangeness of what they were cooking when they were new arrivals, such as Italians using too much garlic or Indians too much curry powder. Minority groups with a longer presence in the country were and are still not exempt from racist stereotypes — think derogatory references to Mexicans and beans or insulting African Americans with remarks about fried chicken and watermelon.

"There's a slur for every almost every ethnicity based on some kind of food that they eat," says Amy Bentley, professor of nutrition and food Studies at New York University. "And so that's a very good way of disparaging people."

That's because food isn't just sustenance. Embedded in human eating habits are some of the very building blocks of culture — things that make different peoples distinct and can be commandeered as fodder for ethnic hatred or political polemics.

"We need it to survive, but it's also highly ritualized and highly symbolic. So the birthday cake, the anniversary, the things are commemorated and celebrated with food and drink," Bentley says. "It's just so highly integrated in all parts of our lives."

And because "there's specific variations of how humans do those rituals, how they eat, how they have shaped their cuisines, how they eat their food," she adds, "It can be as a theme of commonality ... or it

can be a form of distinct division.”

It’s not just the what. Insults can come from the how as well — eating with hands or chopsticks instead of forks and knives, for example. It can be seen in class-based bias against poorer people who didn’t have the same access to elaborate table settings or couldn’t afford to eat the same way the rich did — and used different, perhaps unfamiliar ingredients out of necessity.

Such disparagement can extend directly into current events. During the Second Gulf War, for example, Americans angry at France’s opposition of the U.S. invasion of Iraq started calling french fries “freedom fries.” And a much-used insulting term in the United States for Germans during the first two world wars was “krauts” — a slam on a culture where sauerkraut was a traditional food.

“Just what was wrong with the way urban immigrants ate?” Donna R. Gabaccia wrote in her 1998 book, “We Are What We Eat: Ethnic Food and the Making of Americans.” In reviewing attitudes of the early 20th century and its demands for “100% Americanism,” she noted that “sauerkraut became ‘victory cabbage’” and one account complained of an Italian family “still eating spaghetti, not yet assimilated.”

The expanding food culture provides continuing fodder

Such stereotypes have persisted despite the fact that the American palate has significantly expanded in recent decades, thanks in part to the influx of those immigrant communities, with grocery stores carrying a wealth of ingredients that would baffle previous generations. The rise of restaurant culture has introduced many diners to authentic examples of cuisines they might have needed a passport to access in other eras.

After all, Bentley says, “when immigrants migrate to a different country, they bring their foodways with them and maintain them as they can. ... It’s so reminiscent of family, community, home. They’re just really material, multisensory manifestations of who we are.”

Haitian food is just one example of that. Communities like those found in New York City have added to the culinary landscape, using ingredients like goat, plantains and cassava.

So when Trump said that immigrants in Springfield — whom he called “the people that came in” — were eating dogs and cats and “the pets of the people that live there,” the echoes of his remarks played into not just food but culture itself.

And even though the American palate has broadened in recent decades, the persistence of food stereotypes — and outright insults, whether based in fact or completely made up — shows that just because Americans eat more broadly, it doesn’t mean that carries over into tolerance or nuance about other groups.

“It’s a fallacy to think that,” Freedman says. “It’s like the tourism fallacy that travel makes us more understanding of diversity. The best example right now is Mexican food. Lots and lots of people like Mexican food AND think that immigration needs to be stopped. There’s no link between enjoyment of a foreigner’s cuisine and that openness.”

How a traveling ‘health train’ has become an essential source of free care in South Africa

By MOGOMOTSI MAGOME Associated Press

JOHANNESBURG (AP) — Thethiwe Mahlangu woke early on a chilly morning and walked through her busy South African township, where minibuses hooted to pick up commuters and smoke from sidewalk breakfast stalls hung in the air.

Her eyes had been troubling her. But instead of going to her nearby health clinic, Mahlangu was headed to the train station for an unusual form of care.

A passenger train known as Phelophepa — or “good, clean, health” in the Sesotho language — had been transformed into a mobile health facility. It circulates throughout South Africa for much of the year, providing medical attention to the sick, young and old who often struggle to receive the care they need at crowded local clinics.

For the past 30 years — ever since South Africa’s break with the former racist system of apartheid — the train has carried doctors, nurses and optometrists on an annual journey that touches even the most rural villages, delivering primary healthcare to about 375,000 people a year.

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The free care it delivers is in contrast to South Africa's overstretched public health care system on which about 84% of people rely.

Health care reflects the deep inequality of the country at large. Just 16% of South Africans are covered by health insurance plans that are beyond the financial reach of many in a nation with unemployment of over 32%.

Earlier this year, the government began to address that gap. President Cyril Ramaphosa in May signed into law the National Health Insurance Act, which aims to provide funding so that millions of South Africans without health insurance can receive care from the better-provisioned private sector.

But the law has been divisive. The government has not said how much it will cost and where the money will come from. Economists say the government will have to raise taxes. Critics say the country can't afford it and warn that the system — yet to be implemented — will be open to abuse by corrupt officials and businessmen. They say the government should fix the public healthcare system instead.

For Mahlangu and others who look to the train for a rare source of free treatment, the situation at local health clinics is one of despair.

Long lines, shortages of medicines and rude nurses are some of the challenges at the clinics that cater for thousands of patients a day in Tembisa, east of Johannesburg.

"There we are not treated well," Mahlangu said. "We are made to sit in the sun for long periods. You can sit there from 7 a.m. until around 4 p.m. when the clinic closes. When you ask, they say we must go ask the president to build us a bigger hospital."

The health train has grown from a single three-carriage operation over the years to two, 16-carriage trains. They are run by the Transnet Foundation, a social responsibility arm of Transnet, the state-owned railway company.

When the train began in 1994, many Black people in South Africa still lived in rural villages with little access to health facilities. It was a period of change in the country. The train began as an eye clinic, but it soon became clear that needs were greater than that.

Now both trains address the booming population of South Africa's capital of Pretoria and nearby Johannesburg, the country's economic hub. One would spend two weeks in Tembisa alone.

"The major metros are really struggling," said Shemona Kendiah, the train's manager.

But the traveling clinic is far from the solution to South Africa's healthcare problems.

Public health expert Alex van den Heever said there have been substantial increases in the healthcare budget and the public sector employment of nurses and doctors since the country's first democratic government in 1994. The health department's budget in Gauteng province, which includes Pretoria and Johannesburg, has grown from 6 billion rand (\$336 million) in 2000 to 65 billion (\$3.6 billion) rand now.

But van den Heever accused the African National Congress, the ruling party since the end of apartheid, of allowing widespread corruption to undermine the public sector, including the health care system.

"This has led to a rapid deterioration of performance," he said.

For South Africans who have witnessed the decline firsthand, it can be a relief when the health train pulls into town.

Mahlangu — with her new pair of glasses — was among hundreds who walked away satisfied with its services and already longing for the train's return next year.

Another patient, Jane Mabuza, got a full health checkup along with dental services. She said she hoped the train would reach many other people.

"Here on the train you never hear that anything has been finished," she said.

Debate was an 'eye opener' in suburban Philadelphia and Harris got a closer look

By MIKE CATALINI Associated Press

BRISTOL, Pa. (AP) — The presidential debate this week was the final affront to Rosie Torres' lifelong Republicanism. She said her allegiance to Donald Trump, already strained by his stand on abortion, snapped in the former president's "eye opener" encounter with Kamala Harris.

It's time to put "country before party," Torres, 60, said Wednesday in Bristol, a riverfront town in suburban Philadelphia. Trump left her frustrated after his appearance recently at Arlington National Cemetery when a member of his staff pushed a cemetery official, she said.

"I still was willing to vote for Donald Trump," Torres said. "But you know, I think that what he did at the cemetery for the veterans — that was very disrespectful. I feel like our country is being disrespected."

In Bucks County, a critical area in a vital swing state, the debate is producing a lot of hard thinking about what to do in November. Millions of Americans elsewhere have made up their minds but in purple Pennsylvania, plenty of voting choices are still in play.

In interviews in Bristol and Langhorne, another longtime Republican came away from the debate intrigued but not sold on Harris, a young first-time voter is going for Trump, and a Democrat is still trying to shake the image in his head of people eating pets after Trump's "moronic" talking point on that subject Tuesday night.

A closer look at what voters in a key part of the country are thinking after what could be the only presidential debate:

She's still shopping

There's Mary Nolan, 70, of Bensalem, a registered Republican for 50 years who voted for Hillary Clinton in 2016 and Trump in 2020. She has more thinking to do after a debate in which Harris both impressed and frustrated her.

"I wasn't happy with Biden-Trump," she said of the options before President Joe Biden abandoned his reelection campaign. "I didn't feel we had any good choices. And I'm still not sure we do. We might. But I still want to see more about Kamala Harris."

She said she and her husband, who's registered as a Democrat, split their party registrations so they could have a say as a family in primary elections. Immigration, the economy (she said she had just paid \$6 for a pound of butter) and the infrastructure bill that Biden signed into law were her top issues.

"I like that Kamala Harris does say I am going to be the president for everyone," Nolan said. "I don't think our politicians say that often."

She figures she'll make her voting decision by the end of October, just days before the election. Meantime, she's aggressive about collecting information.

"I take different opinions from all over. I don't do any blogs. It's simply news. Different interest groups like AARP."

Her political ideology? "I think the world is changing fast, and I'm still in my values from 1960," Nolan said. What values?

"Family, home, morals. You know, our kids don't have the upbringing that you did or I did because the streets are different now. I think if someone would say, you know, this is what I'm going to do to improve life in the United States, I definitely would vote for them."

She said she thought Harris had a good debate, but dodged some things.

"I did not like that she avoided questions. She talked around them when they asked her direct questions about abortion. There was one about abortion. There was another about immigration. And there were a couple that said, hey, you've been here three and a half years, but you haven't done those things that you're saying are so important. Why not? She ran off into her talking points and never gave a direct answer."

But Harris gave her a good impression. Trump did not.

"I think yesterday, definitely Kamala Harris presented herself very well. She's dignified. ... She would be a good representative of our country."

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Trump? "I think his policies are good. I just want a more stable, dignified president." She wants "someone that doesn't yell and scream and call people names."

This Democrat saw history unfold

Terry Culleton, 68, of Langhorne, Pennsylvania, is a retired high school English literature teacher and was reading "Autocracy, Inc." by Anne Applebaum at a cafe Wednesday morning. His support for labor, then for civil rights and human rights, made him a Democrat.

He thought Harris held her own against Trump and articulated her plans well.

But what really stuck with him was Trump's false comments about immigrants in Ohio eating pets.

"So moronic a thing to say and to repeat that I just can't get it out of my head that somebody would go on national TV and state that," he said.

He said he got a sense of history unfolding watching the debate last night.

"I think it's democracy versus something close to totalitarianism. I think it's a matter of supporting democratic governments as opposed to supporting the kind of governments that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin is trying to export, which Trump has no problem with, as far as I can tell."

Inflation led her to Trump

Kelli Surline of Langhorne was at a café with her fiancé and young daughter who wore an Eagles kelly green T-shirt. She described herself as politically unengaged until the pinch of higher prices got to her. She didn't watch the debate, in part, because she's made up her mind.

"I'm 28 years old and I've never seen the country this bad ever," she said. "So I made the choice to get my voter's registration, and I'm definitely voting for Trump."

She talked about how difficult it has been to get ahead.

"We wanted to get a place together," Surline said, motioning to Geoffrey Trush, 40, her fiancé. "We're not able to do that." Instead, she's living with her mom. Unaffordable prices make it "a struggle every week."

He was once a Democrat

Ron Soto, 86, of Levittown, Pennsylvania, is a longtime Trump supporter and retired tractor-trailer driver and Army veteran who left the Democratic Party in the 1990s for the GOP after coming to realize he disagreed with Bill and Hillary Clinton's positions.

He said he tuned into the debate Tuesday, his hound dog, Sam, by his side, after watching the Phillies game.

Illegal immigration is a major issue for him and Harris didn't win him over.

"The biggest issue is I don't like her, and I don't like Joe Biden."

Saying he served in the Army from 1955 to 1963, Soto asked: "What the hell did I stick my neck out for? Why? So you can give it away? The Democrats can open the gates, the floodgates, and tell the whole world. You're welcome. Come on in." He added: "These people have ruined this country."

She had her fill of politics

Christine Desumma, 50, a former Trump voter and the owner of a salon on Bristol's quaint shop-lined street, expressed frustration with both parties and said she won't be voting at all in November. She said her taxes were lower when Trump was in office and recalled the sting of COVID-19 shutdowns.

She got fed up, particularly with social media and Facebook. Online debates, she said, were driving a wedge within her own family, and she's washing her hands of it.

"I just made the decision that I'm not going to vote and I don't want to hear it," she said. "Now I choose to not watch, not pay attention." She's found another pursuit.

"I'm studying yoga," she said. "I got myself back."

Taylor Swift wins big at MTV Video Music Awards, ties Beyoncé's record and thanks Travis Kelce

By MARIA SHERMAN AP Music Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Taylor Swift's dominance continued at the MTV Video Music Awards, where she took home seven awards — including the night's biggest, the trophy for video of the year.

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In her speech Wednesday night, Swift thanked her "boyfriend, Travis" for being on set of the "Fortnight" music video and cheering her on. Fans rewarded the mention of NFL star Travis Kelce with loud screams. "Everything this man touches turns to happiness and fun and magic," she said, before shifting gears to the 2024 presidential election and instructing her fans who are over 18 to register to vote.

Swift did, however, avoid discussing Kamala Harris' presidential bid on stage. On Tuesday night, Swift endorsed the vice president, moments after Harris' debate with former president Donald Trump ended.

Swift's awards haul brings her to a career total of 30, tying her and Beyoncé for the title of most-awarded musician in VMA history. Eminem is now the male artist with the most VMAs, at 14.

Swift and Post Malone also took home the first televised award of the VMAs for best collaboration, for "Fortnight," handed to them by Flavor Flav and Olympian Jordan Chiles.

Swift started that speech by giving remembrance to everyone who lost their lives and loved ones during 9/11, 23 years ago.

"I've just been thinking about what happened 23 years ago, everyone who lost a loved one and everyone that we lost and that is the most important thing about today," she said. "And everything that happens tonight falls behind that."

She then turned to discussing Malone.

"There is a reason Post Malone is everyone in music's favorite person to collaborate with," she shifted her attention to him. "It has taken forever for me to get him to stop calling me ma'am."

Chappell Roan won the MTV Video Music Award for best new artist.

"I dedicate this to all the drag artists who inspire me," she said in her speech, while wearing chain mail, reading from a written speech in her diary. "And I dedicate this to queer and trans people who run pop. ... Thank you for listening."

Women dominated the award show, no example greater than an imaginative, medieval set from Roan.

Drag queen Sasha Colby introduced her with "your favorite drag queen's favorite artist," a reference to Roan's now famous Coachella performance, which in turn was inspired by Colby. Real fans no doubt got a kick out of the hyper-referential tidbit.

Roan appeared in armor, shooting a lit crossbow at castle gates that stood behind her, burning them in the process. Her dancers were knights, battling each other in incredible choreography as she sang her queer pop hit, "Good Luck, Babe."

The other voice of 2024 pop, Sabrina Carpenter, won the trophy for song of the year for "Espresso."

"This is really special," she said in her speech, dedicated to her fans. "And thank you to that me-espresso."

Earlier in the night, she brought her summery-pop to the award show, powering through her hit singles "Please Please Please," "Taste" and "Espresso" while dancing with a moon man and an alien.

Katy Perry received the Video Vanguard Award, performing an eight-song medley spanning her career: "Roar," "E.T.," "California Gurls," "Teenage Dream," "I Kissed a Girl," "Firework," and "Lifetimes."

"I did that all on the first day of my period, can you believe it?" she joked after accepting the honor from her partner, Orlando Bloom. "There are so many things that have to align to have a long and successful career as an artist. There are no decade long accidents."

She also teased a new song, "I'm His, He's Mine," featuring Doechii, which samples the Crystal Waters classic, "Gypsy Woman (La Da Dee La Da Da)."

Previous recipients of the Video Vanguard Award include Shakira, Beyoncé, Minaj, Madonna, Janet Jackson, Jennifer Lopez, Rihanna and Missy Elliott.

An army of Slim Shady-lookalikes followed Eminem as he kicked off the VMAs, launching into a medley of his hits "Houdini" and "Somebody Save Me," featuring a broadcast feed of Jelly Roll. (The song references Jelly Roll's massive country radio hit, "Save Me.")

Megan Thee Stallion welcomed the crowd as a first-time host Wednesday night, who joked that the VMAs now stands for the "voluptuous Megan awards." She later performed.

Earlier in the evening, Karol G took over, for a fiery performance of her hit, "Si Antes Te Hubiera Conocido." Rauw Alejandro brought Puerto Rico to the stage, running through "Touching The Sky," "DILUIVO"

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and "Déjame Entrar."

Tyla won the best Afrobeats award.

LL COOL J celebrated 40 years of Def Jam Records with Public Enemy's Flavor Flav and Chuck D.

Halsey took it to the suburbs for her new single, "Ego," channeling garage bands. GloRilla's "Yeah Glo!" and "TGIF" brought style.

Blackpink's LISA, the best K-pop award winner, made her way to the VMA stage for the first time as a soloist, powering through two of her brand-new singles, "New Woman" and "Rockstar." Shawn Mendes made along-awaited return, debuting a new John Mayer-esq. acoustic number, "Nobody Knows."

Anitta performed "Paradise," "Alegria," and "Savage Funk," joined by DJ Khaled, Fat Joe and Tiago PZK and won the award for best Latin. Camilla Cabello performed in a panopticon. Benson Boone seemed as stoked as ever to perform his viral hit "Beautiful Things" on the VMAs stage. Lenny Kravitz proved rock isn't dead with "Are You Gonna Go My Way," "Human" and finally "Fly," in which he was joined by Quavo.

The 40th VMAs were held at the UBS Arena on New York's Long Island.

The night was stacked with celebrities and featured plenty of Swift, who arrived at the award show wearing a green tartan corset with a matching train and long black leather gloves.

Throughout the night, MTV flashed back to history-making across the VMAs' 40-year-run, including Britney Spears' albino python and Madonna's performance of "Like A Virgin."

Harris and Trump are jockeying for battleground states after their debate faceoff

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, JONATHAN J. COOPER and GARY D. ROBERTSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump are making a beeline for swing states that they hope to flip in their favor this year, both of them trying to expand their narrow paths to victory in a closely fought presidential campaign.

Harris has her sights set on North Carolina, where she's scheduled to hold rallies in Charlotte and Greensboro on Thursday, her first political event after she buoyed supporters with her commanding performance in Tuesday's debate.

Trump is heading west to Tucson, Arizona, as he looks to stabilize his campaign, which continues to struggle to recalibrate nearly two months after Harris replaced President Joe Biden at the top of the Democratic ticket. Although Harris' team said she's willing to do another debate, the Republican candidate has waffled.

"Are we going to do a rematch?" Trump said Wednesday. "I just don't know."

The candidates are barnstorming one day after they marked the anniversary of the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, a somber occasion that provided little respite from partisan politics in a high-speed campaign season.

At a fire station in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, close to where United Airlines Flight 93 crashed after passengers fought back against their hijackers, Trump posed for photos with children who wore campaign shirts. One of the shirts proclaimed former House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, Biden and Harris were "dumb and dumber and dumbest."

Biden and Harris visited the same fire station earlier in the day. Someone there offered Biden a red-white-and-blue baseball hat that said "Trump 2024," and suggested the president put it on to demonstrate his commitment to bipartisan unity. Biden briefly put it on and flashed a wide grin.

Only a handful of battleground states will decide the outcome of the election.

Democrats haven't won North Carolina's electoral votes since 2008, when President Barack Obama was elected for the first time. However, Trump's 2020 margin of victory of 1.3 percentage points was his narrowest win of any state that year, and Democrats hope that North Carolina's growing and diversifying population will give them an edge this time.

Harris's campaign said Thursday's trip will be her ninth to the state this year, and recent polls show a tight race. More than two dozen combined campaign offices — supporting Harris and the rest of the party's candidates — have been opened, and popular Democratic Gov. Roy Cooper is one of her top surrogates.

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Republicans have been confident about Trump's chances in the state, and the former president held rallies there in August.

Registered independents — known in North Carolina as unaffiliated — are the state's largest voting bloc and are usually key to determining outcomes in statewide elections. A state Supreme Court ruling this week affirming that Robert F. Kennedy Jr. must be removed from North Carolina ballots could bring additional votes Trump's way given Kennedy's endorsement.

The state's Republican Party has dismissed concerns that a poor showing by its gubernatorial nominee, Lt. Gov. Mark Robinson, could harm the electoral chances of other party candidates, including Trump.

Democratic nominee Josh Stein and his allies have hammered Robinson for months on the airwaves and social media for his past harsh comments on abortion and LGBTQ+ rights. Stein, the state attorney general, had a lead over Robinson in several recent polls of North Carolina voters.

Arizona is another state where the presidential race could be shaped, at least in part, by down-ballot races. Kari Lake, a prominent Republican election denier who lost her campaign for governor in 2020, is running for the U.S. Senate seat that's being vacated by Kyrsten Sinema.

Lake exemplifies the rightward shift of the state party in the Trump era. She's opposed by Democratic Rep. Ruben Gallego, who was leading in several recent polls, although the race was close in another.

Republicans have won Arizona in nearly every presidential election since World War II, but Biden eked out a narrow victory in 2020.

The rise of Arizona Democrats has been driven by the arrival of transplants from blue states and a political realignment that has seen suburban voters — particularly college-educated women — shift away from Republicans.

Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, Harris' running mate, held a rally in the state on Tuesday ahead of the debate, and the Democratic ticket campaigned together there last month.

Republicans still outnumber Democrats in Arizona, but a third of voters are independent. Ohio Sen. JD Vance, Trump's running mate, appeared last week in a heavily Republican area of metro Phoenix with Charlie Kirk, the founder of an influential conservative youth group.

Trump was last in Arizona two weeks ago for a news conference along the U.S.-Mexico border, where he drove one of his most effective attacks on Harris over the number of people crossing the border to seek asylum, followed by a rally at a former hockey arena in the Phoenix area.

Boeing factory workers are voting whether to strike and shut down aircraft production

By DAVID KOENIG AP Airlines Writer

Boeing is preparing to learn Thursday whether 33,000 aircraft assembly workers, most of them in the Seattle area, are going on strike and shutting down production of the company's best-selling planes.

Members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers plan to vote on whether to approve a contract offer that includes 25% pay raises over four years. If the factory workers reject the contract and two-thirds of them vote to strike, a work stoppage would begin Friday at 12:01 a.m. PDT.

A walkout would not cause flight cancellations or directly affect airline passengers, but it would be another blow to Boeing's reputation and finances in a year marked by problems in its airplane, defense and space operations.

New CEO Kelly Ortberg made a last-ditch effort to avert a strike, telling machinists Wednesday that "no one wins" in a walkout.

"For Boeing, it is no secret that our business is in a difficult period, in part due to our own mistakes in the past," he said. "Working together, I know that we can get back on track, but a strike would put our shared recovery in jeopardy, further eroding trust with our customers and hurting our ability to determine our future together."

Although the bargaining committee that negotiated the contract recommended ratification, IAM District 751 President Jon Holden predicted earlier this week that workers would vote to strike. Many of them have

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posted complaints about the deal on social media.

Voting will take place at union halls in Washington state, Portland, Oregon, and a smattering of other locations, with results expected to be released Thursday night.

A strike would stop production of the 737 Max, the company's best-selling airliner, along with the 777 or "triple-seven" jet and the 767 cargo plane at factories in Everett and Renton, Washington, near Seattle. It likely would not affect Boeing 787 Dreamliners, which are built by nonunion workers in South Carolina.

TD Cowen aerospace analyst Cai von Rumohr said it is realistic based on the history of strikes at Boeing to figure that a walkout would last into mid-November, when workers' \$150 weekly payments from the union's strike fund might seem low going into the holidays.

A strike that long would cost Boeing up to \$3.5 billion in cash flow because the company gets about 60% of the sale price when it delivers a plane to the buyer, von Rumohr said.

Union negotiators unanimously recommended that workers approve the tentative contract reached over the weekend.

Boeing promised to build its next new plane in the Puget Sound area. That plane — not expected until sometime in the 2030s — would replace the 737 Max. That was a key win for union leaders, who want to avoid a repeat of Boeing moving production of Dreamliners from Everett to South Carolina.

However, the deal fell short of the union's initial demand for pay raises of 40% over three years. The union also wanted to restore traditional pensions that were axed a decade ago but settled for an increase in Boeing contributions to employee's 401(k) retirement accounts.

Holden told members Monday the union got everything it could in bargaining and recommended approval of the deal "because we can't guarantee we can achieve more in a strike."

Many union members, however, are still bitter about previous concessions on pensions, health care and pay.

"They are upset. They have a lot of things they want. I think Boeing understands that and wants to satisfy a fair number of them," aerospace analyst von Rumohr said. "The question is, are they going to do enough?"

Boeing has seen its reputation battered since two 737 Max airliners crashed in 2018 and 2019, killing 346 people. The safety of its products came under renewed scrutiny after a panel blew out of a Max during a flight in January.

Most Americans don't trust AI-powered election information: AP-NORC/USAFacts survey

By ALI SWENSON and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Jim Duggan uses ChatGPT almost daily to draft marketing emails for his carbon removal credit business in Huntsville, Alabama. But he'd never trust an artificial intelligence chatbot with any questions about the upcoming presidential election.

"I just don't think AI produces truth," the 68-year-old political conservative said in an interview. "Grammar and words, that's something that's concrete. Political thought, judgment, opinions aren't."

Duggan is part of the majority of Americans who don't trust artificial intelligence, chatbots or search results to give them accurate answers, according to a new survey from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research and USAFacts. About two-thirds of U.S. adults say they're not very or not at all confident that these tools provide reliable and factual information, the poll shows.

The findings reveal that even as Americans have started using generative AI-fueled chatbots and search engines in their personal and work lives, most have remained skeptical of these rapidly advancing technologies. That's particularly true when it comes to information about high-stakes events such as elections.

Earlier this year, a gathering of election officials and AI researchers found that AI tools did poorly when asked relatively basic questions, such as where to find the nearest polling place. Last month, several secretaries of state warned that the AI chatbot developed for the social media platform X was spreading bogus election information, prompting X to tweak the tool so it would first direct users to a federal government

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website for reliable information.

Large AI models that can generate text, images, videos or audio clips at the click of a button are poorly understood and minimally regulated. Their ability to predict the most plausible next word in a sentence based on vast pools of data allows them to provide sophisticated responses on almost any topic — but it also makes them vulnerable to errors.

Americans are split on whether they think the use of AI will make it more difficult to find accurate information about the 2024 election. About 4 in 10 Americans say the use of AI will make it “much more difficult” or “somewhat more difficult” to find factual information, while another 4 in 10 aren’t sure — saying it won’t make it easier or more challenging, according to the poll. A distinct minority, 16%, say AI will make it easier to find accurate information about the election.

Griffin Ryan, a 21-year-old college student at Tulane University in New Orleans, said he doesn’t know anyone on his campus who uses AI chatbots to find information about candidates or voting. He doesn’t use them either, since he’s noticed that it’s possible to “basically just bully AI tools into giving you the answers that you want.”

The Democrat from Texas said he gets most of his news from mainstream outlets such as CNN, the BBC, NPR, The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal. When it comes to misinformation in the upcoming election, he’s more worried that AI-generated deepfakes and AI-fueled bot accounts on social media will sway voter opinions.

“I’ve seen videos of people doing AI deepfakes of politicians and stuff, and these have all been obvious jokes,” Ryan said. “But it does worry me when I see those that maybe someone’s going to make something serious and actually disseminate it.”

A relatively small portion of Americans — 8% — think results produced by AI chatbots such as OpenAI’s ChatGPT or Anthropic’s Claude are always or often based on factual information, according to the poll. They have a similar level of trust in AI-assisted search engines such as Bing or Google, with 12% believing their results are always or often based on facts.

There already have been attempts to influence U.S. voter opinions through AI deepfakes, including AI-generated robocalls that imitated President Joe Biden’s voice to convince voters in New Hampshire’s January primary to stay home from the polls.

More commonly, AI tools have been used to create fake images of prominent candidates that aim to reinforce particular negative narratives — from Vice President Kamala Harris in a communist uniform to former President Donald Trump in handcuffs.

Ryan, the Tulane student, said his family is fairly media literate, but he has some older relatives who heeded false information about COVID-19 vaccines on Facebook during the pandemic. He said that makes him concerned that they might be susceptible to false or misleading information during the election cycle.

Bevellie Harris, a 71-year-old Democrat from Bakersfield, California, said she prefers getting election information from official government sources, such as the voter pamphlet she receives in the mail ahead of every election.

“I believe it to be more informative,” she said, adding that she also likes to look up candidate ads to hear their positions in their own words.

US and UK pledge almost \$1.5 billion to help Ukraine during diplomats’ visit to Kyiv

By MATTHEW LEE and ILLIA NOVIKOV Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The United States and Britain pledged nearly \$1.5 billion in additional aid to Ukraine on Wednesday during a visit to Kyiv by their top diplomats as Ukrainian officials renewed their pleas to use Western-provided missiles against targets deeper inside Russia.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced more than \$700 million in humanitarian aid, while British Foreign Secretary David Lammy confirmed that his country would provide another \$782 million in assistance and loan guarantees. Much of the effort was aimed at bolstering the energy grid that Russia

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has repeatedly pounded ahead of an expected difficult winter.

Blinken and Lammy traveled together to the Ukrainian capital on a rare joint tour to underscore their commitment to the country in its war. Air-raid sirens sounded repeatedly during the visit, causing delays in their schedule and forcing them to cancel a wreath-laying ceremony.

Blinken said he would bring the discussion with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy about the missiles "back to Washington to brief the president." Blinken said U.S. President Joe Biden and British Prime Minister Keir Starmer will "no doubt" talk about the issue when they meet Friday in Washington.

"Speaking for the United States, we have adjusted and adapted as needs have changed, as the battlefield has changed. And I have no doubt that we'll continue to do that as this evolves," Blinken told a news conference.

The diplomatic visit unfolded as Russia's bigger and better-equipped army bears down on Ukraine's eastern Donetsk region and conducts aerial attacks on cities across the country using missiles, glide bombs and drones that claim many civilian casualties.

Lammy said the 2 1/2-year conflict is at a "critical" juncture following Ukraine's daring incursion last month into Russia's Kursk region.

"We convey the deepest condolences for the shocking attacks that we have seen, over the loss of civilian life, particularly women and children — horrific, barbaric, unbelievable," Lammy said.

But relations between Ukraine and its Western partners have been increasingly strained by Kyiv's repeated appeals for the West's authorization to use long-range weapons from the United States and other allies to strike targets deeper inside Russia.

That issue took on added urgency after Russia's latest reported acquisition of ballistic missiles from Iran, but Western leaders have so far balked at Ukraine's request, fearing that, if granted, it could escalate the war.

Biden has allowed Ukraine to fire U.S.-provided missiles across the border into Russia in self-defense, but has largely limited the distance they can be fired.

Zelenskyy said he hoped for changes to those limitations.

"Let's count on some strong decisions, at least," he said. "For us, it's very important."

He said he hoped to speak to Biden later this month, noting that U.S. military and financial support is crucial.

"We rely heavily on it, and frankly, we can't prevail without it," Zelenskyy said.

However, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin last week pushed back on the idea that long-range strikes would be a game-changer.

"I don't believe one capability is going to be decisive, and I stand by that comment," Austin said at a meeting of allied military leaders in Germany. The Ukrainians have other means to strike long-range targets, he added.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal told Lammy he hoped an agreement on using long-range assets "for strikes on the territory of our enemy" could be reached. "We hope for your help and support in this issue."

A hard winter likely lies ahead for Ukraine. Its power grid is under severe strain after Russian missiles and drones knocked out around 70% of the country's generation capacity.

Kyiv officials will also have to navigate the outcome of the U.S. election in November, which could produce important policy shifts in Washington. Former President Donald Trump said in a presidential debate Tuesday that he wants the war to end but did not clearly say he wants Ukraine to win.

"We remain committed to Ukraine's victory," Blinken said. "The bottom line is this: We want Ukraine to win."

Ukrainian officials politely sidestepped making any comment on the debate. Zelenskyy said he did not watch it, while Ukraine's foreign minister, Andrii Sybiha, insisted U.S. policy was ultimately unlikely to change.

"Yes, it's clear that there will be a new president. But we believe, and are convinced, in the strong support of the American people," Sybiha said. "We are firmly, firmly convinced that this support will continue."

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The latest American aid package includes \$325 million in energy support to help repair and restore Ukraine's power generation facilities, provide emergency backup power for critical services and strengthen the physical security of energy infrastructure.

Some \$290 million will fund food, water, shelter, health care and education programs for Ukrainians in need in the country and refugees outside the country. The remaining \$102 million will be used for mine-removal work.

Late last week, the U.S. announced it would send \$250 million more in weapons to Ukraine, including air-defense missiles and artillery.

Wednesday's visit was, unusually, announced in advance — a public signal of American and British support for Ukraine.

The British diplomats reached the Ukrainian capital by train from Poland. Blinken traveled from London, where he accused Iran of providing Russia with Fath-360 short-range ballistic missiles, calling the move a "dramatic escalation" of the war.

Referring to those missiles, Shmyhal added: "Russia's use of weapons from its terrorist allies to strike at Ukraine continues their genocidal war and terrorism on our territory. We must be able to respond to such terrorism in kind by destroying military targets on their territory to ensure greater safety for our citizens."

Wildfires in Southern California torch dozens of homes and force thousands to evacuate

By EUGENE GARCIA, ERIC THAYER, AMY TAXIN and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press WRIGHTWOOD, Calif. (AP) — Three major wildfires in Southern California's mountains east of Los Angeles torched dozens of homes and forced thousands of people to evacuate, officials said Wednesday.

At least a dozen people, mainly firefighters, were treated for injuries that were mostly heat-related, authorities said. One person from Orange County was burned. No deaths have been reported.

The wildfires have been endangering tens of thousands of homes and other structures across the region after they sprung to life during a triple-digit heat wave over the weekend. Other major fires were burning in Idaho, Oregon and Nevada, where about 20,000 people had to flee a blaze outside Reno.

In the tight-knit community of Wrightwood that sits on the Pacific Crest Trail, authorities implored residents to evacuate the exploding Bridge Fire, which burned more than a dozen homes in the area.

Resident Erin Arias said she was racing up the mountain when she got the sudden order to leave and did, grabbing her passport and dog. On Wednesday, she and her husband doused water on the roof of their still-standing home. Their cat was missing, she said.

"It's absolutely scary," Arias said, looking at the burned embers of her neighbor's home. "We're really lucky."

UCLA climate scientist Daniel Swain said the fire moved extraordinarily fast across complex terrain, likely giving Wrightwood residents less time to evacuate than usual and surprising even seasoned fire officials.

The Bridge Fire "had to go up mountain sides, burn down slope, jump across valleys, burn across new ridges, and then make it down slope again at least two other times in effectively one burning period," he said.

California is only now heading into the teeth of the wildfire season but already has seen nearly three times as much acreage burn than during all of 2023. The White House said President Joe Biden was monitoring the wildfires in the West and urged residents to heed state and local evacuation orders.

Cooler temperatures were expected to potentially start tempering fire activity as the week progresses. The full extent of the damage was not immediately known as firefighters battled multiple fires simultaneously. The three blazes include:

— The Airport Fire in Orange County that burned over 35 square miles (91 square kilometers). The fire was 5% contained Wednesday night and was reportedly sparked by heavy equipment operating in the area. Orange County Fire Capt. Steve Concialdi said eight firefighters were injured, mostly heat-related. One

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resident suffered smoke inhalation and another burns, he said. Several homes burned in El Cariso Village.

— The Line Fire in the San Bernardino National Forest that was 18% contained Wednesday and charred 57 square miles (148 square kilometers). The blaze injured three firefighters. Authorities said it was caused by arson in Highland. A suspect was arrested Tuesday.

— The Bridge Fire east of Los Angeles that grew tenfold in a day, burning 78 square miles (202 square kilometers) and torching at least 33 homes and six cabins and forcing the evacuation of 10,000 people. The cause of the fire was not immediately known. It was zero percent contained Wednesday night.

With so many fires raging at once, crews were at their limits, Los Angeles County Fire Chief Anthony Marrone said.

“As a region, we’re currently at drawdown for fire personnel and resources,” he said, adding that authorities have requested assistance from Northern California and nearby states.

Gov. Gavin Newsom sent National Guard troops in to help with evacuations.

In El Cariso Village, a community of 250 along Highway 74 in Riverside County, an Associated Press photographer saw at least 10 homes and several cars engulfed in flames.

Kevin Fetterman, Orange County Fire Authority Incident Commander, said the blaze has been difficult to tame because of the terrain and dry conditions and because some areas hadn’t burned in decades.

More than 5,500 homes in Riverside County were under evacuation orders, affecting more than 19,000 residents. Several recreational cabins and structures in the Cleveland National Forest were damaged.

In San Bernardino County, some 65,600 homes and buildings were under threat by the Line Fire, and residents along the southern edge of Big Bear Lake were told to leave Tuesday.

The Line Fire blanketed the area with a thick cloud of dark smoke, which provided shade for firefighters trying to get ahead of winds expected later Wednesday, said Fabian Herrera, a spokesperson for the Line Fire.

A man from the town of Norco suspected of starting the Line Fire on Sept. 5 was arrested and charged with arson, San Bernardino County Sheriff’s Department said. Officials did not specify what was used to start the fire.

Investigators collected evidence from the delivery driver’s vehicle and home that suggests he could have been involved in starting other fires, San Bernardino County Sheriff Shannon Dicus said Wednesday.

On the Nevada border with California near Reno, the Davis Fire forced thousands of people to evacuate over the weekend, destroyed one home and a dozen structures and charred nearly 9 square miles (23 square kilometers) of timber and brush along the Sierra Nevada’s eastern front.

Rich Meyr and Evelyn Kelley were the first arrivals at an evacuation center set up Wednesday at a recreation center in south Reno. Both said they refused to evacuate previous fires but decided to play it safe this time.

“My son’s wedding is Saturday. I threw all the flowers and gowns in the RV and we left. It looks like a garden shop inside that RV,” Kelley said. “But who wants to burn alive?”

More than 600 firefighters kept the blaze from growing Wednesday despite high winds that grounded all aircraft that had dropped retardant on the flames over the past two days. The fire was about 30% contained Wednesday night.

Elsewhere, a Colorado man was charged with arson after an investigation into a wildfire this summer that destroyed 29 homes and caused more than \$30 million in property damage near Loveland, Colorado.

Thousands in the dark as Hurricane Francine strikes Louisiana, raising flood fears

By JACK BROOK and SARA CLINE Associated Press

MORGAN CITY, La. (AP) — Hurricane Francine slammed into the Louisiana coast Wednesday evening as a dangerous Category 2 storm that knocked out electricity to more than a quarter-million customers and threatened widespread flooding as it sent a potentially deadly storm surge rushing inland along the Gulf Coast.

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Francine crashed ashore in Terrebonne Parish, about 30 miles (50 kilometers) southwest of Morgan City, the National Hurricane Center announced at 4 p.m. CDT. Packing top sustained winds near 100 mph (155 kph), the hurricane then battered a fragile coastal region that hasn't fully recovered from a series of devastating hurricanes in 2020 and 2021.

Morgan City Fire Chief Alvin Cockerham said the hurricane quickly flooded streets, snapped power lines and sent tree limbs crashing down.

"It's a little bit worse than what I expected to be honest with you," Cockerham said of the onslaught. "I pulled all my trucks back to the station. It's too dangerous to be out there in this."

There were no immediate reports of deaths or injuries.

TV news broadcasts from coastal communities showed waves from nearby lakes, rivers and Gulf waters thrashing sea walls. Water poured into city streets amid blinding downpours. Oak and cypress trees leaned in the high winds, and some utility poles swayed back and forth. As Francine continued its trek inland, it spread drenching rains over New Orleans and surrounding areas, raising flooding fears.

Power outages in Louisiana topped 261,000 hours after landfall, spread widely across southeast Louisiana. Blackouts affected the majority of homes and businesses in coastal parishes nearest where the storm came ashore as well as their inland neighbors, according to the tracking site poweroutage.us.

Sheltering at her mother's home just outside Morgan City, Laura Leftwich said blasts of wind had swept away two large birdhouses outside. She had a generator powering an internet connection so she could video chat with friends, holding her computer to a window to show them water overflowing in the street.

If the storm had been any more intense, "I wouldn't have the guts to look outside," said Leftwich, 40. "It's a little scary."

The National Hurricane Center urged residents to stay sheltered overnight as the weakening hurricane churned inland. The storm's projected path included New Orleans, where forecasters said the storm's eye could pass through.

The sixth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, Francine drew fuel from exceedingly warm Gulf of Mexico waters, strengthening to a Category 2 storm with winds exceeding 96 mph (155 kph) hours in the hours before landfall.

Still dangerous, the storm began weakening as it rushed inland. Three hours after landfall it barely remained a hurricane, with top sustained winds down to 75 mph (120 kph). Francine was moving northeast at a fast clip of 17 mph (28 kph) on a path toward New Orleans, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) away.

It was forecast to weaken further while pushing northward through Mississippi on Thursday, with widespread rains in the coming days bringing potential flash flooding to cities including Jackson, Mississippi; Birmingham, Alabama; Memphis, Tennessee; and Atlanta. It also raised the threat of spin-off tornadoes.

Much of Louisiana and Mississippi could get 4 to 8 inches (10 to 20 centimeters) of rain, with the possibility of 12 inches (30 centimeters) in some spots, said Brad Reinhart, a senior hurricane specialist at the hurricane center.

Louisiana Gov. Jeff Landry said the National Guard would fan out to parishes impacted by Francine. They have food, water, nearly 400 high-water vehicles, about 100 boats and 50 helicopters to respond to the storm, including for possible search-and-rescue operations.

Since the mid-19th century, some 57 hurricanes have tracked over or made landfall in Louisiana, according to The Weather Channel. Among them are some of the strongest, costliest and deadliest storms in U.S. history.

Morgan City, home to around 11,500 people, sits on the banks of the Atchafalaya River in south Louisiana and is surrounded by lakes and marsh. It's described on the city's website as "gateway to the Gulf of Mexico for the shrimping and oilfield industries."

Luis Morfin, 26, left his RV camper outside Morgan City's levee to hunker down at a friend's home Wednesday night. Winds lashed the windows as they watched a TV powered by a generator. The power was out, but they were prepared to cook with steaks and potatoes on a propane stove.

"We knew what we were expecting," Morfin said. "I don't know how good my camper is, but we'll figure

that out tomorrow.”

President Joe Biden granted an emergency declaration to help Louisiana secure expedited federal money and assistance. Landry and Mississippi Gov. Tate Reeves also declared states of emergency.

The Mississippi Emergency Management Agency said it distributed more than 100,000 sandbags to the southern part of the state and the Department of Education reported a number of school district closures for Wednesday and Thursday amid expectations the storm would cross the state.

Francine had prompted storm surge warnings on the Louisiana coast of as much as 10 feet (3 meters) from Cameron to Port Fourchon and into Vermilion Bay.

9/11 anniversary brings Biden, Harris and Trump together at ground zero

By JENNIFER PELTZ and KAREN MATTHEWS Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — With presidential candidates looking on, some 9/11 victims’ relatives appealed to them Wednesday for accountability as the U.S. marked an anniversary laced with election-season politics.

In a remarkable tableau, President Joe Biden, former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris stood together at ground zero just hours after Trump and Harris faced off in their first-ever debate. Trump and Biden — the successor whose inauguration Trump skipped — shook hands, and former New York Mayor Michael Bloomberg appeared to facilitate a handshake between Harris and Trump.

Then the campaign rivals stood only a few feet (meters) apart, Biden and Bloomberg between them, as the hourslong reading of victims’ names began. At Trump’s side was his running mate, Sen. JD Vance.

The image was one of putting politics aside at this year’s solemn commemoration of the hijacked-plane attacks that killed nearly 3,000 people on Sept. 11, 2001. But some victims’ relatives, after reading out names, delivered political messages of their own.

“We are pleading for your help, but you ignore us,” Allison Walsh-DiMarzio said, directly challenging Trump and Harris to press Saudi Arabia about any official involvement in the attacks. Most of the 19 hijackers were Saudi, but the kingdom denies it was behind their plot.

“Which one of you will have the courage to be our hero? We deserve better,” Walsh-DiMarzio said. She’s a daughter of 9/11 victim Barbara P. Walsh, an administrative assistant.

Joanne Barbara was one of multiple readers who spoke out against a now-revoked plea deal that military prosecutors struck with alleged 9/11 mastermind Khalid Sheikh Mohammed and two fellow defendants.

“It has been 23 years, and the families deserve justice and accountability,” said the widow of Assistant Fire Chief Gerard A. Barbara.

Biden, on his last Sept. 11 in office, and Harris paid respects Wednesday at all three 9/11 attack sites: ground zero, the Pentagon and a rural part of Pennsylvania.

The president, vice president — and, separately, Trump — laid wreaths Wednesday afternoon at the Flight 93 National Memorial near Shanksville, Pennsylvania. Biden and Harris spoke with victims’ relatives and visited the local fire department; Trump and Vance went to a New York City firehouse earlier in the day.

The Flight 93 memorial stands where one of the hijacked planes crashed after crew members and passengers tried to storm the cockpit. Trump described the site as an “incredible place” in brief remarks from afar to reporters.

The attacks killed 2,977 people and left thousands of bereaved relatives and scarred survivors. The planes took down the World Trade Center’s twin towers and carved a gash in the Pentagon, the U.S. military headquarters, where Biden and Harris laid a red, white and blue wreath Wednesday afternoon.

While many Americans may not observe 9/11 anniversaries anymore, “the men and women of the Department of Defense remember,” Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said earlier in the day.

The attacks altered U.S. foreign policy, domestic security practices and the mindset of many Americans who had not previously felt vulnerable to foreign extremists.

Effects rippled around the world. Victims came from more than 90 different countries, and the U.S. responded to the attacks with a “Global War on Terrorism.” U.S.-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq killed

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hundreds of thousands of Afghans and Iraqis and thousands of American troops.

Communities around the country hold events on the anniversary, which Congress has titled both Patriot Day and a National Day of Service and Remembrance.

Thousands of Americans commemorate it with volunteer work — among them Harris' running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz. He packed meals in St. Paul for people in need.

During early anniversaries at ground zero, presidents and other officeholders read poems, parts of the Declaration of Independence and other texts.

But the National Sept. 11 Memorial and Museum decided in 2012 to limit the ceremony to relatives reading victims' names.

If politicians "care about what's actually going on, great. Be here," said Korryn Bishop, who attended Wednesday to remember her cousin John F. McDowell Jr., who worked in finance. "If they're just here for political clout, that upsets me."

Brandon Jones was glad politicians weren't on the podium.

"This should be a site for coming together to find feasible solutions and peace. This should not be a place to score political points to get brownie points to round up your base," said Jones. He's a cousin of victim Jon Richard Grabowski, an insurance firm technology executive.

In 2008, then-senators and presidential campaign rivals John McCain and Barack Obama jointly paid their respects at ground zero.

Eight years later, the Democratic nominee, former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, abruptly left the trade center ceremony, stumbled while awaiting her motorcade and later disclosed that she had been diagnosed with pneumonia. The episode stirred fresh attention to her health, which her Republican opponent — Trump, who was also at that observance — had been questioning for months.

Over the years, some victims' relatives have used the forum to exhort leaders to prioritize national security, acknowledge the casualties of the war on terror, complain that officials are politicizing 9/11 and even criticize individual officeholders. Others bemoan Americans' divisions or decry violence.

"It's my prayer that this wicked act called terrorism will never occur again," Jacob Afuakwah said Wednesday. He lost his brother, Emmanuel Akwasi Afuakwah, a restaurant worker.

But many family members stick to tributes and personal reflections. Increasingly they come from children and young adults born after the attacks killed one of their relatives.

Thirteen-year-old twins Brady and Emily Henry read names to honor their uncle, firefighter Joseph Patrick Henry.

"We promise to continue telling your stories," Emily Henry said, "and we'll never let anyone forget all those lost on Sept. 11."

An Ohio city reshaped by Haitian immigrants lands in an unwelcome spotlight

By PATRICK AFTOORA ORSAGOS, JULIE CARR SMYTH AND ELLIOT SPAGAT Associated Press
SPRINGFIELD, Ohio (AP) — Many cities have been reshaped by immigrants in the last few years without attracting much notice. Not Springfield, Ohio.

Its story of economic renewal and related growing pains has been thrust into the national conversation in a presidential election year — and maliciously distorted by false rumors that Haitian immigrants are eating their neighbors' pets. Donald Trump amplified those lies during Tuesday's nationally televised debate, exacerbating some residents' fears about growing divisiveness in the predominantly white, blue-collar city of about 60,000.

At the city's Haitian Community Help and Support Center on Wednesday, Rose-Thamar Joseph said many of the roughly 15,000 immigrants who arrived in the past few years were drawn by good jobs and the city's relative affordability. But a rising sense of unease has crept in as longtime residents increasingly bristle at newcomers taking jobs at factories, driving up housing costs, worsening traffic and straining city services.

"Some of them are talking about living in fear. Some of them are scared for their life," Joseph said.

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A "Welcome To Our City" sign hangs from a parking garage downtown, where a coffee shop, bakery and boutique line Springfield's main drag, North Fountain Street. A flag advertising "CultureFest," the city's annual celebration of unity through diversity, waves from a pole nearby.

Melanie Flax Wilt, a Republican commissioner in the county where Springfield is located, said she has been pushing for community and political leaders to "stop feeding the fear."

"After the election and everybody's done using Springfield, Ohio, as a talking point for immigration reform, we are going to be the ones here still living through the challenges and coming up with the solutions," she said.

Ariel Dominique, executive director of the Haitian American Foundation for Democracy, said she laughed at first at the absurdity of the false claims. But seeing the comments repeated on national television by the former president was painful.

"It is so unfair and unjust and completely contrary to what we have contributed to the world, what we have contributed to this nation for so long," Dominique said.

The falsehoods about Springfield's Haitian immigrants were spread online by Trump's running mate, JD Vance, on the eve of Tuesday's debate between Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris. It's part of a timeworn American political tradition of casting immigrants as outsiders.

"This is what's happening in our country. And it's a shame," Trump said at the debate after repeating the falsehoods. When challenged by ABC News moderator David Muir over the false claims, Trump held firm, saying "people on television" said their dogs were eaten, but he offered no evidence.

Officials in Springfield have tried to tamp down the misinformation by saying there have been no credible or detailed reports of any pets being abducted or eaten. State leaders are trying to help address some of the real challenges facing the city.

Ohio Gov. Mike DeWine, a Republican, said Tuesday he would add more law enforcement and health care resources to an aid package the state has already provided to Springfield.

Many Haitians have come to the U.S. to flee poverty and violence. They have embraced President Joe Biden's new and expanded legal pathways to enter, and have shunned illegal crossings, accounting for only 92 border arrests out of more than 56,000 in July, the latest data available.

The Biden administration recently announced an estimated 300,000 Haitians in the U.S. could remain in the country at least through February 2026, with eligibility for work authorization, under a law called Temporary Protected Status. The goal is to spare people from being deported to countries in turmoil.

Springfield, about 45 miles from the state capital of Columbus, suffered a steep decline in its manufacturing sector toward the end of the last century, and its population shrank as a result. But its downtown has been revitalized in recent years as more Haitians arrived and helped meet the rising demand for labor as the economy emerged from the pandemic. Officials say Haitians now account for about 15% of the population.

The city was shaken last year when a minivan slammed into a school bus, killing an 11-year-old boy. The driver was a Haitian man who recently settled in the area and was driving without a valid license. During a city commission meeting on Tuesday, the boy's parents condemned politicians' use of their son's death to stoke hatred.

Last week, a post on the social media platform X shared what looked like a screengrab of a social media post apparently out of Springfield. The post claimed without evidence that the person's "neighbor's daughter's friend" saw a cat hanging from a tree to be butchered and eaten, outside a house where it claimed Haitians lived. It was accompanied by a photo of a Black man carrying what appeared to be a goose by its feet.

On Monday, Vance posted on X: "Reports now show that people have had their pets abducted and eaten by people who shouldn't be in this country." The next day, he posted again, saying his office had received inquiries from Springfield residents who said "their neighbors' pets or local wildlife were abducted by Haitian migrants."

Long-time Springfield resident Chris Hazel, who knows the park and neighborhood where the pet and goose abductions were purported to have happened, called the claims "preposterous."

"It reminds me of when people used to accuse others and outsiders as cannibals. It's dehumanizing a community," he said of the accusations against the city's Haitian residents.

Sophia Pierrilus, the daughter of a former Haitian diplomat who moved to the Ohio capital of Columbus 15 years ago and is now an immigrant advocate, agreed, calling it all political.

"My view is that's their way to use Haitians as a scapegoat to bring some kind of chaos in America," she said.

With its rising population of immigrants, Springfield is hardly an outlier. So far this decade, immigration has accounted for almost three-quarters of U.S. population growth, with 2.5 million immigrants arriving in the United States between 2020 and 2023, according to the U.S. Census Bureau. Population growth is an important driver of economic growth.

"The Haitian immigrants who started moving to Springfield the last few years are the reason why the economy and the labor force has been revitalized there," said Guerline Jozef, executive director of the Haitian Bridge Alliance, which provides legal and social services to immigrants across the U.S.

Now, she said, Haitians in Springfield have told her that, out of fear, they are considering leaving the city.

Tyreek Hill says he could have handled his traffic stop better but he still wants the officer fired

By TIM REYNOLDS and ALANIS THAMES AP Sports Writers

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Miami Dolphins wide receiver Tyreek Hill acknowledged Wednesday that he could have handled himself better in the initial moments of a weekend traffic stop that left him handcuffed and pulled out of his car by police officers near the team's stadium.

Hill also said he wants one of the officers involved in the incident dismissed from the police force.

Hill said he wishes he did some things "a bit differently" on Sunday morning, including leaving the window of his car down when officers instructed him to do so. He rolled up the window instead. The incident escalated quickly from there.

"I will say I could have been better," Hill said. "I could have let down my window in that instant. But the thing about me is, I don't want attention. I don't want to be cameras-out, phones-on-you in that moment. But at the end of the day, I'm human. I've got to follow rules. I've got to do what everyone else would do.

"Now, does that give them the right to literally beat the dog out of me? Absolutely not," Hill continued. "But at the end of the day, I wish I could go back and do things a bit differently."

Miami-Dade Police Director Stephanie Daniels launched an internal affairs investigation on Sunday afternoon and one officer was transferred to administrative duties. That officer, Danny Torres, wants to be immediately reinstated, his attorney said this week. Meanwhile, the Dolphins have said they want "swift and strong action" against all the officers involved.

Hill did not mince words when detailing what action he thinks should be taken against the officer.

"Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. Gone. He's gotta go, man," Hill said. "In that instant right there, not only did he treat me bad, but he also treated my teammates with disrespect. He had some crazy words towards them and they didn't even do nothing. Like, what did they do to you?"

Hill was pulled from his car near the team's stadium less than three hours before kickoff of Miami's Week 1 game. He was placed on the ground and handcuffed, and teammate Calais Campbell — who drove by the scene and stopped in an effort to play peacemaker — also was handcuffed by police during the incident.

Hill was cited for careless driving and failing to wear a seatbelt.

The Dolphins play the Buffalo Bills on Thursday night, and Hill said he would use the game as therapy, an escape from thinking about the incident. He said he would not take a knee — a move many players have used in recent years to protest police brutality — or call for the defunding of police. Hill has said several times in recent days that he has respect for police officers, and he intends to pursue work in law enforcement when his playing days end.

Body camera footage of the incident, released by the Miami-Dade Police Department on Monday evening, showed that the traffic stop escalated quickly after Hill put up the window of his car.

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Hill rolled down the driver's side window and handed his license to an officer who had been knocking on the window. Hill — an eight-time Pro Bowl selection who led the NFL with 1,799 receiving yards last season — then told the officer repeatedly to stop knocking before rolling the darkly tinted window back up.

After a back and forth about the window, the bodycam video shows an officer pull Hill out of his car by his arm and head and then force him face-first onto the ground. Officers handcuffed Hill and one put a knee in the middle of his back.

Hill can be heard in the footage yelling repeatedly that he'd just had surgery on his knee as officers forced him to the ground. The receiver said Wednesday he had a minor stem cell procedure on his knee this offseason in Antigua. Dolphins coach Mike McDaniel called it a procedure that Hill "makes sure that he takes care of."

Hill said he was inside a movie theater Monday night when he received word that the footage was released. He left the theater to watch it and said he hopes people seeing the video — both civilians and law enforcement — use it as a means to learn and get better, even drawing the parallel to the way that football players improve when they watch game film.

"It's shell-shocking, man," Hill said. "It's really crazy to know that you have officers in this world that would literally do that with bodycams on. It's sad. It's really sad. Which brings up another conversation and leads into 'What would they do if they didn't have bodycams?' Which is even crazier."

Lloyd Howell Jr., the executive director of the NFL Players Association, said the organization has reached out to Hill and Campbell to provide them with "necessary support," though he didn't specify what that support was.

"I think on a go forward basis, it's a function of communication," Howell said. "No matter what your circumstances are, is take care of yourself, your family and hopefully that'll translate to the field. That's where things are now."

NBA player Bam Adebayo said he believes Hill should have adhered to the officers' demands and left his window down when instructed. He also said it was difficult to watch what happened next.

"For me, it's the yanking him out of the car, throwing him on the ground, the knee on the back and you can kind of hear him speak but because the officer has such weight on his back he can barely speak," the Miami Heat captain said. "I don't ever want to get pulled over and catch a cop on a bad day. It's a reminder that they don't care who you are. Some of it escalated to a point where it could have gotten ugly for him. We've seen this story a lot, countless times."

The altercation, and what was seen on the six officers' bodycam videos, has again brought to the forefront conversations surrounding the experience of Black people with police — something that has been a national talking point for some time.

Hill has been involved in off-field incidents before, though teammates spoke out this week to condemn those who used Hill's past allegations of violence to justify any excessive use of force. McDaniel said Wednesday that Hill continues to grow as a person, and that he has spoken to him on multiple occasions about why that matters. He also acknowledged that Hill could have handled the incident differently, without revealing specifics.

"A conversation about what provoked unnecessary," McDaniel said, "is trivial to the unnecessary."

Election officials warn that widespread problems with the US mail system could disrupt voting

By JOHN HANNA and CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY Associated Press

TOPEKA, Kan. (AP) — State and local election officials from across the country on Wednesday warned that problems with the nation's mail delivery system threaten to disenfranchise voters in the upcoming presidential election, telling the head of the U.S. Postal Service that it hasn't fixed persistent deficiencies.

In an alarming letter, the officials said that over the past year, including the just-concluded primary season, mailed ballots that were postmarked on time were received by local election offices days after the deadline to be counted. They also noted that properly addressed election mail was being returned to

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them as undeliverable, a problem that could automatically send voters to inactive status through no fault of their own, potentially creating chaos when those voters show up to cast a ballot.

The officials also said that repeated outreach to the Postal Service to resolve the issues had failed and that the widespread nature of the problems made it clear these were "not one-off mistakes or a problem with specific facilities. Instead, it demonstrates a pervasive lack of understanding and enforcement of USPS policies among its employees."

The letter to U.S. Postmaster General Louis DeJoy came from two groups that represent top election administrators in all 50 states. They told DeJoy, "We have not seen improvement or concerted efforts to remediate our concerns."

"We implore you to take immediate and tangible corrective action to address the ongoing performance issues with USPS election mail service," they added. "Failure to do so will risk limiting voter participation and trust in the election process."

The Postal Service on Wednesday reiterated DeJoy's assurances that it's well positioned to swiftly deliver election mail despite being in the midst of a network modernization that has caused some delivery hiccups. Mail is currently being delivered in 2.7 days on average, officials said, but the Postal Service is still urging voters not to procrastinate.

"We are ready to deliver. We were successful in 2020 delivering a historic volume of mail in ballots; also in 2022 and will do so again in November 2024," Adrienne Marshall, director of Election Mail and Government Services, said in a statement.

The two groups, the National Association of Secretaries of State and the National Association of State Election Directors, said local election officials "in nearly every state" are receiving timely postmarked ballots after Election Day and outside the three to five business days USPS claims as the standard for first-class mail.

The letter comes less than two weeks after DeJoy said in an interview that the Postal Service was ready to handle a flood of mail ballots expected as part of this November's presidential election and as former President Donald Trump continues to sow doubts about U.S. elections by falsely claiming he won in 2020.

That year, amid the global pandemic, election officials reported sending just over 69 million ballots in the mail, a substantial increase from four years earlier.

While it's likely that number will be smaller now, many voters have embraced mail voting and come to rely on it. And both Democrats and Republicans have launched efforts to push supporters to vote early, either in person or by mail to "bank" their votes before Election Day on Nov. 5.

The letter went out on the day the first mailed ballots of this year's general election were being sent, to absentee voters in Alabama.

Postal Service officials told reporters last month that almost 98% of ballots were returned to election officials within three days in 2020, and in 2022, the figure was nearly 99%. DeJoy said he would like to inch closer to 100% this election cycle and that the Postal Service is better positioned to handle ballots than four years ago.

But officials in rural states have been critical of the Postal Service for years as it has consolidated mail-processing centers to cut its costs and financial losses.

In addition to being signed by the current and incoming presidents for both groups of election officials, the leaders of groups that represent local election officials in 25 states were listed.

The election officials warned that any election mail returned to an election office as undeliverable could trigger a process outlined in federal law for maintaining accurate lists of registered voters. That means a voter could be moved to "inactive" status and be required to take additional action to verify their address to participate in the election, the officials said in the letter.

Kansas Secretary of State Scott Schwab, the recent past president of the National Association of Secretaries of State, sent his own letter in recent days to DeJoy. He said nearly 1,000 ballots from his state's Aug. 6 primary election couldn't be counted because they arrived too late or without postmarks — and more continue to come in.

"The Pony Express is more efficient at this point," Schwab posted on the social media platform X in late

August.

Schwab and other Kansas election officials also have said some ballots arrive on time but without postmarks, which keeps them from being counted under Kansas law. What's more, Schwab told DeJoy, local postal clerks have told election officials that they can't add postmarks later even if it's clear that the Postal Service handled the ballot ahead of the mail-in deadline.

Kansas will count ballots postmarked on or before Election Day if they arrive within three days. The Republican-controlled Legislature created that grace period in 2017 over concerns that mail delivery had slowed after the Postal Service shut down seven mail-processing centers in the state. That left much of the state's mail handled through larger centers in Denver, Amarillo, Texas, and Kansas City, Missouri.

Schwab has promoted the use of local ballot drop boxes for voting in advance, breaking with other Republicans who have suggested without evidence that they can be sources of fraud. Schwab has long said the boxes are more secure than the U.S. mail.

"Keep your ballot out of the hands of the federal government!" he advised voters in a post on X after the August primary.

In their letter Wednesday, election officials said colleagues across the U.S. have reported that Postal Service staff, from managers to mail carriers, are uninformed about the service's policies for handling election-related mail, give them inconsistent guidance and misdeliver ballots.

"There is no amount of proactive communication election officials can do to account for USPS's inability to meet their own service delivery timelines," the officials wrote. "State and local election officials need a committed partner in USPS."

More than 67 million people watched Donald Trump and Kamala Harris debate. That's way up from June

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

An estimated 67.1 million people watched the presidential debate between Kamala Harris and Donald Trump, a sharp increase from the June debate that eventually led to President Joe Biden dropping out of the race.

The debate was run by ABC News but shown on 17 different networks, the Nielsen company said. The Trump-Biden debate in June was seen by 51.3 million people.

Tuesday's count was short of the record viewership for a presidential debate, when 84 million people saw Trump's and Hillary Clinton's first faceoff in 2016. The first debate between Biden and Trump in 2020 reached 73.1 million people.

With Harris widely perceived to have outperformed Trump on Tuesday night, the former president and his supporters are sharply criticizing ABC moderators David Muir and Linsey Davis. The journalists waded into on-the-fly fact checks during the debate, correcting four statements by Trump.

No other debates are currently scheduled between the two presidential candidates, although there's been some talk about it and Fox News Channel has publicly offered alternatives. CBS will host a vice presidential debate between Tim Walz and JD Vance.

Tuesday's debate stakes were high to begin with, not only because of the impending election itself but because the last presidential debate uncorked a series of events that ended several weeks later with Biden's withdrawal from the race after his performance was widely panned.

Opinions on how ABC handled the latest debate Tuesday were, in a large sense, a Rorschach test on how supporters of both sides felt about how it went. MSNBC commentator Chris Hayes sent a message on X that the ABC moderators were doing an "excellent" job — only to be answered by conservative commentator Ben Shapiro, who said, "this is how you know they're complete s—."

While CNN chose not to correct any misstatements by the candidates during Trump's debate with Biden in June, ABC instead challenged statements that Trump made about abortion, immigration, the 2020 election and violent crime.

Speaker Johnson postpones vote on a bill to avoid a partial government shutdown

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Speaker Mike Johnson postponed a vote Wednesday on a temporary spending bill that would keep federal agencies and programs funded for six months as opposition from both parties thwarted his first attempt at avoiding a partial government shutdown in three weeks.

The legislation to continue government funding when the new budget year begins on Oct. 1 includes a requirement that people registering to vote must provide proof of citizenship. Johnson, R-La., signaled that he was not backing off linking the two main components of the bill.

"No vote today because we're in the consensus building business here in Congress. With small majorities, that's what you do," Johnson told reporters. "We're having thoughtful conversations, family conversations within the Republican conference and I believe we'll get there."

Congress needs to pass a stopgap spending bill before Oct. 1 to avoid a federal shutdown just weeks before the election. The measure had been teed up for a vote on Wednesday afternoon, but Democrats are overwhelmingly opposed and enough Republicans had voiced opposition to raise serious doubts about whether the measure would pass.

The stopgap bill would generally continue existing funding through March 28. The GOP opponents of the bill argue that it continues spending at levels they consider excessive. And some Republicans simply won't vote for any continuing resolution, arguing that Congress must return to passing its 12 annual spending bills separately rather than through the one or two catchall bills that have become the norm in recent decades.

Despite the dim prospects for the bill, Johnson had said just the day before he would push ahead with the vote. He has embraced concerns that some of the migrants who have entered the country at the U.S.-Mexico border in recent years could swing the elections, though it's illegal for noncitizens to vote and research has shown that such voting is extremely rare.

"Congress has a lot of responsibilities, but two primary obligations — responsibly fund the government and make sure that our elections are free and fair and secure," Johnson said. "And that's what we're working on."

The House approved a bill with the proof of citizenship mandate back in July. Republicans believe there is value in revisiting the issue and making Democrats in competitive swing districts vote again.

Democrats are calling on Johnson to "stop wasting time" on a bill that will not become law and to work with them on a short-term spending measure that has support from both parties. At the end of the day, they say no spending bill can pass without bipartisan support and buy-in from a Democratic-led Senate and White House.

"Speaker Johnson, scrap your plan. Don't just delay the vote. Find a better one that can pass in a bipartisan way," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said in response to Johnson's announcement.

But Johnson wasn't giving up on his proposal yet, saying House leadership would work on building support over the weekend. He said that ensuring that only U.S. citizens vote in federal elections is "the most pressing issue right now and we're going to get this job done."

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump on Tuesday seemingly encouraged a government shutdown if Republicans in the House and Senate "don't get assurances on Election Security." He said on the social media platform Truth Social that they should not go forward with a stopgap bill without such assurances.

Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., disagreed when asked about Trump's post.

"Shutting down the government is always a bad idea, no matter what time of the year it is," McConnell said.

With an election in just a few weeks, lawmakers are wanting to avoid flirting with a partial government shutdown. They're anxious to get home and campaign, which would indicate the two sides will work out a spending deal before the end of the month.

In addition to the proof of citizenship question, the other sticking point is how long to extend fund-

ing while negotiating terms of a full-year bill. Some House Republicans want to continue funding for six months in the belief that Trump will become president and give them a better chance at passing their priorities in the full-year bill. But others don't want to saddle the next president, regardless of party, with the spending battle.

Rep. Tom Cole, the Republican chairman of the House Appropriations Committee, said Johnson "fought the fight he needed to fight."

"I think it reassures people on the right. He said, 'look, I'm trying to do what you want. You just didn't give me the votes that I needed,'" Cole said.

Cole also suggested that the GOP's failure to rally around Johnson's proposal will result in a shorter extension. That's what Democrats are seeking. Many Republicans, including Cole, also prefer going that route, saying the next president, regardless of party, already has enough work to do.

"They've got plenty on the table. They've got to get their team in place. They've got a budget. They have to deal with all the taxes," Cole said. "Why should we give them a chance of a government shutdown in a matter of weeks after they're inaugurated?"

Israeli airstrikes hit UN school and homes in Gaza and kill at least 34 people, hospitals say

WAFAA SHURAFa undefined

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes across Gaza overnight and Wednesday hit a U.N. school sheltering displaced Palestinian families as well as two homes, killing at least 34 people, including 19 women and children, hospital officials said. A U.N. official said six staffers were among the dead.

The war in Gaza is now into its 11th month, with tens of thousands of people dead, and international efforts to mediate a cease-fire between Israel and the Hamas militant group have repeatedly stalled as they accuse each other of making additional and unacceptable demands.

In the occupied West Bank, Israeli troops launched raids in several towns backed by airstrikes, continuing a crackdown across the territory that the military says is targeting militants but has wrecked neighborhoods and killed civilians. One airstrike killed five people the military said were militants threatening its troops. A second strike on a car killed at least three people, the Palestinian Health Ministry said.

An attacker crashed a fuel truck into a West Bank bus stop near the Israeli settlement of Givat Assaf, killing an Israeli soldier, the military said. Officials said soldiers and an armed civilian "neutralized" the attacker.

The strike on the U.N.'s al-Jaouni Preparatory Boys School in the Nuseirat refugee camp killed at least 14, including two children and a woman, officials from Awda and al-Aqsa Martyrs hospitals said. At least 18 other people were wounded, they said.

The Israeli military said it was targeting Hamas militants planning attacks from inside the school. The claim could not be independently confirmed.

One of the children killed was the daughter of Momin Selmi, a member of Gaza's civil defense agency, which rescues wounded and retrieves bodies after strikes, the agency said.

Gaza's schools are packed with tens of thousands of Palestinians driven from their homes by Israeli offensives and evacuation orders. The al-Jaouni school, one of many in Gaza run by the U.N. agency for Palestinians, or UNWRA, has been hit by multiple strikes during the war.

UNRWA said six staffers aiding the displaced, including the manager of the shelter, were killed. "Humanitarian staff, premises & operations have been blatantly & unabatedly disregarded since the beginning of the war," the agency's director, Philippe Lazzarini, wrote on X.

Israel frequently bombs schools, saying they are being used by Hamas militants. It blames Hamas for civilian casualties from its strikes, saying its fighters base themselves and operate within dense residential neighborhoods.

More than 90% of Gaza's school buildings have been severely or partially damaged in strikes, and more than half the schools housing displaced people have been hit, according to a survey in July by the Educa-

tion Cluster, a collection of aid groups led by UNICEF and Save the Children.

Israel's offensive in Gaza has killed at least 41,084 Palestinians and wounded another 95,029, the territory's Health Ministry said. The ministry's count does not differentiate between civilians and militants. Israel launched its campaign vowing to destroy Hamas after the Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel in which militants killed some 1,200 people and abducted 250 others.

Earlier Wednesday, a strike hit a home near the southern Gaza city of Khan Younis, killing 11 people, including six brothers and sisters ranging from 21 months to 21 years old, according to the European Hospital, which received the casualties.

A strike late Tuesday on a home in the urban Jabaliya refugee camp in northern Gaza killed nine people, including six women and children, according to the Health Ministry and the civil defense. The civil defense said the home belonged to Akram al-Najjar, a professor at the al-Quds Open University, who survived.

The Israeli military said two soldiers died and seven were injured when their helicopter crashed in southern Gaza as they evacuated wounded troops. It said the overnight crash was not the result of enemy fire and is under investigation. There have been 340 Israeli soldiers killed since the ground operation began in Gaza in late October, at least 50 of whom died in accidents, according to the military.

The West Bank also has seen a surge in violence. Israel has stepped up its military raids there, saying it is working to dismantle militant groups and prevent increasing militant attacks on Israelis. Palestinians say such operations are aimed at cementing Israel's seemingly open-ended military rule over the territory. At the same time, Jewish settlers have accelerated attacks on Palestinians.

The military on Wednesday said it launched assaults around the West Bank town of Tulkarem and in two northern towns. It said it dismantled an explosives lab, a weapons manufacturing workshop and an explosives-rigged vehicle. The military said an airstrike backing troops operating in the town of Tubas killed five militants. The Palestinian Health Ministry confirmed five were killed but did not specify if they were militants or civilians.

The Red Crescent said three people were killed in a strike on a car in a village outside Tulkarem. The military confirmed it carried out a strike there but had no immediate details.

Donald Trump faces his own debate fallout just months after benefiting from Joe Biden's

By BILL BARROW, MARY CLARE JALONICK, MICHELLE L. PRICE, ZEKE MILLER and ADRIANA GOMEZ
LICON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump emerged Wednesday from a rocky debate against Kamala Harris looking to regain his footing with 55 days until Election Day, the first ballots already going out in Alabama and other states on the cusp of early voting.

Not even three months ago, Trump stepped off the debate stage in Atlanta having watched President Joe Biden deliver a disjointed, whispery performance that led the 81-year-old Democrat to end his reelection bid and endorse Harris, his vice president. By the end of Tuesday night, it was the 78-year-old Trump on the defensive after the 59-year-old Harris controlled much of the debate, repeatedly baiting the Republican former president into agitated answers replete with exaggerations and mistruths.

The performance left many Republicans scrambling to pick apart Harris' performance and insist that Trump still has time to refocus on the economy, immigration and other issues that could sway a closely divided electorate.

"I think the contrast could have been drawn more sharply on what her policies have done over the last three and a half years," said Republican Sen. Shelley Moore Capito of West Virginia in a critique of the former president's approach. "That's what I would have focused on."

Harris' campaign immediately pitched the idea of a second debate. Fox News has proposed an October matchup but with moderators that Trump has indicated he does not prefer. And he said via his Truth Social account Wednesday that there is no need for a second round,

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"In the World of Boxing or UFC, when a Fighter gets beaten or knocked out, they get up and scream, "I DEMAND A REMATCH, I DEMAND A REMATCH!" Well, it's no different with a Debate," Trump wrote, as he claimed victory. "She was beaten badly last night ... so why would I do a Rematch?"

Trump and Harris were together briefly Wednesday in New York, where they joined President Biden and other dignitaries to mark the 23rd anniversary of the Sept. 11 attacks on the World Trade Center. They shook hands for the second time in 12 hours, with the first coming when Harris approached Trump on the debate stage to introduce herself in the first sign of the aggressive approach she would take during the event.

The former president, who flouted convention with a surprise appearance late Tuesday in the post-debate spin room, insisted he won the night, though he also blasted ABC moderators as unfair. It was a tacit acknowledgement that he did not accomplish what he wanted against Harris. Trump and some of his allies in online posts speculated about punishing ABC by taking away its broadcast license — the network doesn't need a license to operate but individual stations do — or denying access to its reporters.

"We had a great night. We won the debate. We had a terrible, a terrible network," Trump said Wednesday on Fox News. "They should be embarrassed. I mean they kept correcting me and what I said was largely right or I hope it was right."

Harris was jubilant late Tuesday, telling late-night rallygoers in Philadelphia that it was a "great night," even as she repeated that she sees Democrats as "underdogs" against Trump.

She won the endorsement of music and cultural star Taylor Swift as a range of political commentators and strategists on both sides of the political aisle expressed a broad consensus that she bested Trump. Still, there was no evidence the debate yielded immediate broad shifts toward Harris among people who watched, and the Trump campaign pointed to news reports featuring voices of undecided voters not being swayed for her.

His campaign was not considering any strategy or staffing changes, said an official who was not authorized to speak publicly by name. Trump hit the points he needed to hit, the official said, and the debate felt lopsided because Harris was not pressed by the moderators, especially on her moving away from her earlier, more liberal positions on some issues.

Harris senior campaign aides were pleased with her performance but still see a 50-50 race. The debate in their view was a maximized opportunity: Harris communicated her priorities and held Trump accountable in front of a national audience, including voters who were first tuning into the campaign. Their job over the next eight weeks, they say, is to capitalize on the performance by reaching and organizing their targeted coalition.

About 6 in 10 debate-watchers said that Harris outperformed Trump, while about 4 in 10 said that Trump did a better job, according to a flash poll conducted by CNN. Before the debate, the same voters were evenly split on whether Trump or Harris would win.

The vast majority of interviewed debate-watchers — who do not reflect the views of the full voting public — also said that the event wouldn't affect their votes in the election. Perceptions of the two candidates remain largely unchanged.

"He says a lot of stuff. And he's said so many things over the years. And if you want to internalize that in a way that you think is any different from the past — my point is, that doesn't make much difference," insisted Sen. Mike Braun, R-Ind.

Nonetheless, with pending battles for control of the House and Senate, Republicans on Capitol Hill found themselves answering for Trump's most outlandish statements, notably his claim that Haitian immigrants in Ohio are eating domestic cats and dogs..

When Florida Sen. Rick Scott was asked about the appropriateness of Trump's comments, he deferred questions to Hung Cao, the Republican Senate nominee in Virginia. "President Trump is President Trump, and you've got to admire him for that," said Cao.

Republican Gov. Chris Sununu of New Hampshire allowed that Harris won by traditional debate standards but fell short in convincing swing voters focused on their economic conditions.

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"The majority of those swing voters are still results driven," Sununu said on CNN, adding that Trump still has opportunities to sway voters if he concentrates on the economy, immigration and, especially, foreign policy.

Yet even when talking policy, Trump handed Democrats a cudgel with his answers on health care. After twice running for president on promises of repealing and replacing the Affordable Care Act, commonly called "Obamacare," Trump falsely insisted that he saved the 2010 law. At the same time, Trump stood by his long-standing promises to replace the law with something better but when pressed acknowledged that he still had no specific proposal.

"I have concepts of a plan," Trump said in a remark that became quick fodder for online memes and merchandise.

Braun promised those voters will hear more about GOP accomplishments and proposals, but acknowledged that it may not be Trump leading that effort: "Whether he does it or the rest of us have to do it, the case will be made between now and November 5th."

US inflation reaches a 3-year low as Federal Reserve prepares to cut interest rates

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — The post-pandemic spike in U.S. inflation eased further last month as year-over-year price increases reached a three-year low, clearing the way for the Federal Reserve to cut interest rates and likely shaping the economic debate in the final weeks of the presidential race.

Wednesday's report from the Labor Department showed that consumer prices rose 2.5% in August from a year earlier, down from 2.9% in July. It was the fifth straight annual drop and the smallest since February 2021. From July to August, prices rose just 0.2%.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices rose 3.2% in August from a year ago, the same as in July. On a month-to-month basis, core prices rose 0.3%, a slight pickup from July's 0.2% increase. Economists closely watch core prices, which typically provide a better read of future inflation trends.

"Today's report will add to confidence within the Fed that inflation is indeed on a sustainable path towards 2%," the Fed's target level, Carl Weinberg, chief economist at High Frequency Economics, wrote in a note to clients.

For months, cooling inflation has provided gradual relief to America's consumers, who were stung by the price surges that erupted three years ago, particularly for food, gas, rent and other necessities. Inflation peaked in mid-2022 at 9.1%, the highest rate in four decades.

And Americans' paychecks have risen steadily for the past three years. Overall incomes have even outpaced inflation for roughly the past 18 months, helping more households handle elevated prices. On Tuesday, the Census Bureau reported that the median inflation-adjusted household income rose 4% last year to above \$80,000, essentially matching the 2019 peak.

Wednesday's inflation figures followed a presidential debate Tuesday night in which former President Donald Trump attacked Vice President Kamala Harris for the price spikes that began a few months after the Biden-Harris administration took office, when global supply chains seized up and caused severe shortages of parts and labor.

During the debate, Trump falsely characterized the scope of the inflation surge when he claimed, "They had the highest inflation perhaps in the history of our country." In 1980, inflation reached 14.6% — much higher than the 2022 peak.

A key reason for last month's drop in overall inflation was the third drop in gas prices in the past four months: Average gas prices fell 0.6% from July to August and are down 10.6% from a year ago. And used cars fell 1% last month. Measured from a year earlier, used car prices have tumbled 10.4%.

Grocery prices were unchanged from July to August, extending a cool-down in food costs even though

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they remain much higher than they were three years ago. Over the past year, grocery prices have ticked up just 0.9%, similar to the pace of pre-pandemic food inflation.

Still, many Americans are taking steps to try to stretch their budgets. Kelsey Aubrey, who lives in North Palm Beach, Florida, and was shopping at the discount grocer Aldi on Tuesday, said she typically visits up to four or five stores in her search for the lowest grocery prices.

"We hop from store to store, trying to save where we can," she said. "Our bills are still pretty high. And we're working a ton to pay the bills."

The tick-up in core inflation from July to August reflected an acceleration in housing costs and some spikes in the prices of air fares and hotel rooms, which are likely to prove temporary. Airline fares jumped 3.9% just from July to August after having dropped the previous five months. Hotel room prices climbed 1.8% last month; they had fallen in two of the previous three months.

Fed officials, who are watching housing costs closely, expect them to cool more consistently. According to the real estate brokerage Redfin, the median rent for a new lease rose just 0.9% in August from a year earlier, to \$1,645 a month. But the government's measure includes all rents, including those for people who have been in their apartments for years. It takes time for the slowdown in new rents to show up in the government's data. Last month, rental costs rose 5.2% from a year ago, according to the government's consumer price index.

The Fed's policymakers have signaled that they're increasingly confident that inflation is falling back to their 2% target and are now shifting their focus to supporting the job market, which is steadily cooling. As a result, they are poised to begin cutting their benchmark interest rate next week from its 23-year high in hopes of bolstering growth and hiring.

A modest quarter-point cut is widely expected. The pickup in core inflation makes it unlikely that the Fed would consider cutting its key rate by a larger-than-usual half-point next week, as some Wall Street traders had hoped. Stock prices slid as a result, with the broad S&P 500 index falling about 1.6% in mid-morning trading.

Still, over time, a series of Fed rate cuts should reduce the cost of borrowing across the economy, including for mortgages, auto loans and credit cards.

During the presidential campaign, Harris has proposed subsidies for home buyers and builders in an effort to ease housing costs. She also backs a federal ban on price-gouging for groceries. Trump has said he would boost energy production to try to reduce overall inflation.

A number of trends suggest that inflation will keep slowing. Those signs include a drop in oil prices to roughly \$67 a barrel early Wednesday, down from a high of \$80 last month.

Americans' paychecks are also growing more slowly — an average of about 3.5% annually, still a solid pace — which reduces inflationary pressures. Two years ago, wage growth was topping 5%, a level that can force businesses to sharply raise prices to cover their higher labor costs.

In a high-profile speech last month, Fed Chair Jerome Powell noted that inflation was coming under control and suggested that the job market was unlikely to be a source of inflationary pressure.

What to know about fracking, false claims and other climate issues mentioned during the debate

By ALEXA ST. JOHN and MELINA WALLING Associated Press

Amid a barrage of climate-infused weather disasters such as flooding and hurricanes, along with the shattering of heat records, wildfires and many Americans growing concerned about the planet's warming, climate change was barely discussed during the presidential debate.

When asked the sole debate question on climate Tuesday night, Vice President Kamala Harris said, "young people of America care deeply about this issue," and added that the United States has increased domestic production of oil to historic highs, a fact that will contribute to global warming. Harris' opponent, former President Donald Trump, didn't answer the question, instead saying incorrectly that the administration

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of President Joe Biden and Harris is "building big auto plants in Mexico, in many cases owned by China."

While climate was not front and center, statements made by both candidates — on fracking, energy policy and renewables, provided windows into major climate policy issues. What to know about key climate topics covered — and not covered — during Tuesday's debate.

Fracking

Fracking, or hydraulic fracturing, is a drilling method used to extract oil and natural gas from deep underground bedrock using a highly pressurized liquid. The technique is part of what allowed the U.S. to become the world's top producer of oil. As of March, the country produced more crude oil than any nation ever for the past six years, according to the Energy Information Administration.

On Tuesday, Trump falsely said about Harris: "If she won the election, fracking in Pennsylvania will end on Day 1," arguing that her administration would harm the state and nation's economy. Without a law approved by Congress, a president can only ban fracking on federal lands, which make up about 2% of the state of Pennsylvania, where the debate took place.

Harris said during her 2020 campaign for president that she opposed fracking. But lately, including during the debate, Harris said she would not ban the practice if she is elected. Though Harris said her values have not changed, the discussion of fracking was notable because the drilling method does not align with efforts to switch to clean energy, which Harris also says she champions.

Oil and natural gas are fossil fuels, the burning of which produce greenhouse gases such as carbon dioxide and methane that warm the planet.

Energy policy

During the debate, Harris also called for investment in "diverse" sources of energy, "so we reduce our reliance on foreign oil."

After Trump pulled the U.S. from the Paris Agreement on climate change during his first term, the Biden-Harris administration reentered the global pact aimed at reducing emissions. The administration also set a target to slash U.S. emissions 50% by 2030 and put forth policy to accelerate clean energy projects and shift away from fossil fuels.

The Bipartisan Infrastructure Law, passed in 2021, has provisions related to climate change, and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act is the most sweeping climate law in the nation's history, pouring billions of dollars into the clean energy workforce that has prompted a massive buildout of manufacturing facilities. It includes production tax credits for electricity produced from renewables, including wind and solar.

But these policies alone won't be enough for the U.S. to reach its goal of cutting carbon pollution in half, nor do they stop the fossil fuel industry from having opportunities to expand on federal lands before renewables can be built.

Renewable energies

During the debate, Trump falsely claimed that under Harris there would "be no fossil fuels" and the country would "go back to windmills." At one point, Trump called himself a "fan" of solar but then criticized solar farms that take up large plots of land.

Solar power can be generated on a large or small scale, but even the largest solar farms use a tiny fraction of the land used for agriculture in the U.S. Experts say wind and solar, both clean energies, will be key to tackling the greenhouse gas emissions that are fueling the climate crisis, causing substantial damages to humans and ecosystems alike.

Last year, 30% of the world's electricity was produced with renewables and the U.S. has committed to tripling renewables by 2030 in order to do its part in addressing climate change.

Some key issues not discussed

Permitting of new energy projects in the U.S. has not gotten much attention throughout the election cycle, but it's important because it can make or break the nation's ability to meet clean energy targets.

Wind and solar power can contribute millions of dollars in tax revenue per year to rural communities, an Associated Press analysis found. But first those projects have to get approved in local governments, a process out of the federal government's control. Misinformation runs rampant, and communities can turn

against those projects.

For instance, wind developers told the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory in a January report at least a quarter of applications to build wind projects were canceled in the last five years, with local rules and community opposition cited as some of the leading reasons.

Meanwhile, during the debate, insurance only got a brief mention by Harris, as part of a dig at Trump. "The former president has said that climate change is a hoax," she said. "And what we know is that it is very real. You ask anyone who lives in a state who has experienced these extreme weather occurrences, who now is either being denied home insurance or it's being jacked up."

Residents living in areas prone to disasters like flooding and wildfires are having a hard time getting insurance at all, and federal policies may force people to pay more, an AP review found.

Electric vehicles also got little attention Tuesday, though Trump raised the idea of all critical minerals coming from China, which would include lithium and nickel. China currently dominates global EV battery production. Though EVs can run on clean electricity, mining for their batteries is an environmental and human rights concern.

Biden has created U.S. tax credits for EV purchases. While Trump has said the current administration's efforts have resulted in an EV "mandate," that is not true. Automakers do have to sell some electric vehicles to meet Environmental Protection Agency standards, but those regulations can also be met with more fuel-efficient gasoline-powered cars.

For Harris and Trump, facial expressions did much of the talking during presidential debate

By The Associated Press undefined

WASHINGTON (AP) — Kamala Harris and Donald Trump said as much with their faces as they did with their words during Tuesday's debate.

With their microphones muted unless it was their turn to speak, according to the debate rules, body language took on outsized importance for Harris and Trump.

Harris in particular leaned into the nonverbal communication, keenly aware that her every reaction was being broadcast to the world, "speaking" to the audience even while Trump ostensibly had the floor. Networks showed a split screen with both candidates for most of the debate.

At various points she looked amused or befuddled by whatever Trump was saying, as if wordlessly saying he was lying. A few times she dramatically put her fingers under her chin, eyes wide, head tilted. Other times she laughed.

Trump sometimes scowled, sometimes smiled curtly. His eyes flashed anger or annoyance, perhaps even boredom at times. He rarely looked at Harris while she spoke, instead pointing his face forward toward the cameras or ABC News moderators.

When the candidates did have the floor, Trump and Harris both gesticulated with their hands, mannerisms that are by now familiar to Americans who've spent a lot of time watching them.

CLIMATE GLIMPSE: Wildfires plague U.S. West and Brazil, Yagi rampages in Vietnam

Extreme weather is striking multiple places around the world, including wildfires in California, a hurricane that threatens Louisiana, drought and wildfires in the Amazon, flooding in Nigeria and a lethal typhoon in Vietnam.

The death toll from Typhoon Yagi reached at least 155 after flash flooding tore through a hamlet in northern Vietnam. Homes were buried in mud and debris and dozens more people were missing. Much of the damage was in Lao Cai province, a tourism-dependent region known to some trekkers for the destination of Sapa. One expert said storms like Yagi are getting stronger due to climate change.

In the U.S., Hurricane Francine's path toward the Louisiana coast had residents there making trips to

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stock up on supplies and harden their homes for possible damage. Forecasters were warning of high winds and a storm surge that could mean widespread flooding. The storm was headed for a fragile coastal region hit by hurricanes as recently as 2020 and 2021.

Here is a look and some other extreme weather events related to climate:

— Wildfires are burning across the American West, including Idaho, Oregon and Nevada. Some of the most intense fires were in California, where firefighters battled major blazes east of Los Angeles in the San Gabriel mountains. Tens of thousands of homes and other structures were threatened and thousands of people were being evacuated from communities under threat.

— A dam collapse in Nigeria caused severe flooding that forced evacuations and swept deadly reptiles from a zoo into communities in the area. Unusually high rains had filled the Alau dam to capacity before its collapse caused some of the worst flooding in northeastern Nigeria in 30 years.

— Most of Brazil has been under a thick layer of smoke from wildfires in the Amazon, with millions of people affected in faraway cities including Sao Paulo and Brasilia. Brazil's wildfires have come on as the nation suffers through its worst drought on record. Amid the hardship, President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva pledged to finish paving a road that experts say threatens to vastly increase destruction of the rainforest.

QUOTABLE:

"Without the forest, there is no water, it's interconnected," said Suely Araújo, a public policy coordinator with the Climate Observatory, criticizing plans by Brazil's president to finish paving a road that experts say could speed up deforestation in the Amazon.

Spacewalking is the new domain of the rich as billionaire attempts first private spacewalk

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — First came space tourism. Now comes an even bigger thrill for the monied masses: spacewalking.

The stage is set for the first private spacewalk Thursday. Tech billionaire Jared Isaacman will pop out of the hatch of his orbiting SpaceX capsule, two days after blasting off from Florida on a chartered flight that lifted him and his crew higher than anyone since NASA's moonwalkers. He partnered with SpaceX CEO Elon Musk to buy a series of rocket rides and help develop brand new spacesuits.

SpaceX is the first private company to attempt a spacewalk, until now the domain of just 12 countries. There's a reason why it's such a niche and elite group: Spacewalking is considered the most dangerous part of any flight after launch and reentry, and demands extensive training.

"Spacewalks are a whole different entire ballgame than just strapping into a rocket and riding it, getting some zero-g time and coming back," said retired NASA astronaut Chris Cassidy.

Cassidy knows firsthand about the dangers of spacewalking: He was working outside the International Space Station in 2013 when his partner, Italian astronaut Luca Parmitano, almost drowned. Parmitano's helmet filled with water from his cooling garment, and he barely made it back inside in time. Another 30 minutes that day and "the answer might be different," Cassidy said.

Cassidy worries there's "a slippery slope" where the wealthy could try to jump to the front of a spacewalking line with minimal training.

Risk and disaster analyst Ilan Kelman of University College London said it's "appropriate and inevitable" that non-professionals will end up performing spacewalks. But he anticipates fatalities along the way.

"We can and should do plenty to reduce the risk," said Kelman. "We must be entirely honest with anyone participating, especially the low chance of rescue when something major goes wrong."

This spacewalk attempt won't be like what routinely happens at the International Space Station where astronauts float out to do repairs. Isaacman and SpaceX engineer Sarah Gillis will venture just barely outside the capsule as they soar about 450 miles (more than 700 kilometers) above Earth. Their orbit was

initially twice that high, but reduced for the spacewalk.

Besides being new to spacewalking, the crew of four will test suits fresh off the factory floor. All will be exposed to the vacuum of space since the Dragon capsule, unlike larger space vehicles, lacks an airlock.

For Isaacman, throwing away the cabin atmosphere and then restoring it is the riskiest part of the endeavor.

"You can't afford to get anything wrong along that journey or you sidetrack it," Isaacman said. "We're going out just long enough to do what we need to do to get the data."

The bulk of their training over the past two years has focused on the spacewalk, the highlight of their planned five-day flight. SpaceX put considerable preparation and testing into the capsule and suits, said SpaceX's Bill Gerstenmaier, a former NASA manager.

For safety, Isaacman and Gillis will always keep a foot or hand on the capsule or the ladder-like support that they'll position above the hatch. They will be tethered to 12-foot (3.6-meter) lines, but there will be no dangling at the end of them.

The duo will take turns emerging from the hatch, each spending 15 to 20 minutes outside as they flex and test their suits. Their crewmates — SpaceX engineer Anna Menon and former Air Force Thunderbird pilot Scott "Kidd" Poteet — will monitor the spacewalk from inside.

The entire spacewalk should last no more than two hours. Isaacman has refused to say how much he invested in the flight.

To date, 263 individuals representing a dozen countries have performed spacewalks, according to NASA statistics, led by Soviet cosmonaut Alexei Leonov in 1965 with NASA's Ed White close behind.

China, the only other country to launch its own citizens into space, joined the spacewalking club in 2008. Europe, Japan, Canada and the United Arab Emirates also have seen their astronauts float outside, but always in NASA or Russian garb and under NASA or Russian control.

With SpaceX intent on getting people to the moon and Mars, "we need to start somewhere and the first step is what we're doing on this mission," Gillis said.

Harvard reports slight decline in Black students in wake of affirmative action ruling

By MICHAEL CASEY Associated Press

BOSTON (AP) — There was a slight decline in the number of Black students in Harvard University's freshman class, the first admitted since a Supreme Court ruling struck down affirmative action in higher education.

The impact of the ruling is still coming into focus at selective universities around the country, with some reporting significant swings in the numbers of students of color and others seeing little change.

In a case sparked by challenges to admissions plans at Harvard and the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, the court's conservative majority last year barred colleges from considering race, leaving many searching for new ways to promote student diversity.

Data released Wednesday by Harvard showed 14% of incoming students identified as Black, a drop of 4% from the class before it. Latino students made up 16% of the freshman class, an increase of 2% while Asian-American numbers remained the same at 37%.

"We have worked very hard for many decades to ensure that students from every background come to Harvard and make a difference to their fellow classmates, the nation, and the world," William Fitzsimmons, dean of admissions and financial aid, said in a statement. "We will continue to fulfill our mission, even as we continue to follow the law with great care."

For students of color, drops in their numbers can dramatically affect the campus environment, said Jeanie Park, the co-founder and a board member of Coalition for a Diverse Harvard.

"Harvard must address why it fell short, especially compared to other colleges," Park said in a statement. "Practices such as reinstating test-optional applications and ending legacy and donor preferences — and much more — must be instituted asap."

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Richard Kahlenberg, director of the American Identity Project at the Progressive Policy Institute, said he welcomed the preservation of "robust levels" of racial diversity and questioned how Harvard adapted its admissions practices.

"The million dollar question is whether Harvard achieved racial diversity legally, by giving a boost to economically disadvantaged students of all races or by cheating and employing covert racial preferences," said Kahlenberg, who testified as an expert witness for the plaintiffs in the Harvard trial, Students for Fair Admissions.

The enrollment changes at Harvard mirror what has been seen at some other colleges, although the declines in the number of Black students have been sharper at some other schools.

Massachusetts Institute of Technology saw the percentage of Black students drop from 15% to 5% while Amherst College saw a decline from 11% to 3%. At Tufts University, the drop in the share of Black students was closer to Harvard's data, falling from 7.3% to 4.7%.

UNC reported drops in enrollment among Black, Hispanic and Native American students in its incoming class. At Yale, the University of Virginia and Princeton, the change in the number of Black students year-over-year was less than a percentage point.

Many colleges did not share the demographics of applicants, making it impossible to know whether fewer students of color applied, or were admitted but chose not to attend.

Experts say the end of affirmative action is one of several factors that have shaped the makeup of freshman classes. Some colleges are changing standardized test requirements. And the federal government's botched rollout of a new financial aid form complicated decisions of students nationwide on where and whether to attend college.

To pumped-up Democrats, Harris was everything Biden was not in confronting Trump in debate

By CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — To many Democrats, Kamala Harris was everything Joe Biden was not in confronting Donald Trump on the debate stage: forceful, fleet of foot, relentless in going after her opponent.

In a pivot from Biden's debate meltdown in June, Democrats who gathered in bars, watch parties and other venues Tuesday night found lots to cheer in her drive to rattle the Republican.

In a race for the White House that surveys say is exceptionally close, with both sides looking for an edge, it was the Democrats who came away more exuberant after the nationally televised debate.

"She prosecuted Donald Trump tonight," said Alina Taylor, 51, a high school special education teacher who joined hundreds of people on a football field of the historically Black Salem Baptist Church of Abington in a suburb of Philadelphia, where people watched on a 33-foot (10 meter) screen.

As for Trump, she said, "I was appalled" by his performance. "People were laughing at him because he wasn't making very much sense."

In Seattle, people gathered at Massive, a queer nightclub where scores watched the debate on a projector set up in front of the club's large disco ball. The crowd laughed and cheered when Trump branded Harris a Marxist. More cheers when the debate moderator called out Trump's false claim that some states legalize the killing of babies after birth.

"He's getting smoked," one said.

But in Brentwood, Tennessee, Sarah Frances Morris heard nothing at her watch party to shake her support of Trump.

"I think he beat her on the border," she said. "I think he also beat her on actually having plans and letting the American people know what those are. And I think that Kamala Harris likes to mention that she has plans for things, but she doesn't actually ever elaborate on what those plans are."

Morris conceded she was watching history being made, "because we have our first Black woman running for president." But, she added, "I don't think she delivered to get her to that place she needed to be."

Harris supporter Dushant Puri, 19, a UC Berkeley student, said the vice president took command before

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the first words were spoken — when she crossed the stage to shake Trump's hand. "I thought that was pretty significant," Puri said. "It was their first interaction, and I thought Harris was asserting herself."

At the same watch party, fellow student Angel Aldaco, 21, said that, unlike Biden, Harris "came in with a plan and was more concise."

Aldaco was struck by one of the night's oddest moments, when Trump "went on that rampage about eating pets." That's when Trump endorsed a baseless conspiracy theory that immigrants were stealing and eating people's dogs and cats. Harris was incredulous. "That was good," the student said.

It's questionable how much viewers learned about what Harris would do as president or whether she won over independents or wavering Republicans. But for some Democrats, despondent if not panicked after Biden's fumbling debate performance, it was enough to see a Democratic candidate getting seriously under Trump's skin.

"He is pretty incapable when he is riled up," said Ikenna Amilo, an accountant at a Democratic watch party in a small concert venue in downtown Portland, Maine.

"When you poke him, he is really reactive and he doesn't show the temperament you want in a president, so I think Kamala has shown she's doing a good job."

Annetta Clark, 50, a Harris supporter from Vallejo, California, watched at a party hosted by the Oakland Bay Area chapter of the National Coalition of 100 Black Women. To her, the second presidential debate was a mighty relief from the one in June.

"I couldn't stomach the first one, if I'm being honest," Clark said. "I tried to watch it and it was a little too much. This one I was able to enjoy." On Trump's performance: "It was almost like talking to a child with him." Harris? "Fabulous job."

Democrat Natasha Salas, 63, of Highland, Indiana, saw the debate from an Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority watch party at a bistro in Markham, Illinois, and welcomed Harris' call to cool the political temperature — even as the vice president denounced Trump at every turn.

"We all want the same things, Democrats and Republicans," Salas said. "We are more alike than different. I want to see the country move forward and less divisiveness."

Interest in the debate transcended national borders. From a shelter for migrants in Tijuana, Mexico, where dozens watched a translated version of the debates on a television, Rakan al Muhana, 40, an asylum-seeker from Gaza, became animated when the candidates discussed Israel and Palestine.

"We are running from the war," he said. "We are running from the Israeli bombs. He (Trump) doesn't see us as human. My daughter, who is four months — for him, she's a terrorist."

Al Muhana has been on a four-month journey from Gaza to this border city, with his wife and four children. They left when both his mother and father were killed in a bombing.

New CIA workplace assault case emerges as spy agency shields extent of sexual misconduct in ranks

By JIM MUSTIAN and JOSHUA GOODMAN Associated Press

LEESBURG, Va. (AP) — At an impromptu party in the office to celebrate his 50th birthday, a veteran CIA officer got drunk, reached up a colleague's skirt and forcibly kissed her in front of stunned co-workers, prosecutors alleged in the latest case of sexual misconduct to spill from the spy agency into a public court.

An Associated Press investigation found Donald Asquith's alleged assault last year happened just days after the CIA promised to crack down on sexual misconduct in its ranks — even as the agency has refused to disclose details on the extent of the problem. A recent 648-page internal watchdog report that found systemic shortcomings in the CIA's handling of such complaints was classified as "secret," shielded as a potential threat to national security.

"It is inconceivable that sexual misconduct could be considered a state secret," said Kevin Carroll, an attorney who represents several women in the agency who have made complaints.

The watchdog report followed an earlier AP investigation that found at least two dozen women in the

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CIA came forward to authorities and Congress with accounts of sexual assaults, unwanted touching and what they described as a campaign to silence them.

Many were emboldened by a CIA officer trainee who went to police in 2022 after the agency failed to take action against a colleague she accused of assaulting her with a scarf in a stairwell at CIA headquarters. Some of those women now say they have faced retaliation, including the victim of the stairwell attack, who was terminated less than six months after suing the agency.

"I believed in the institution implicitly and I also believed all of the things the agency said it was doing to rectify what I saw as an epidemic," said one of those women, who was not named because the AP does not typically identify people who say they are victims of sexual assault. "I realize now that was just lip service."

Asquith's case could prove even more embarrassing to the CIA given his lengthy clandestine service overseas and the brazenness of the alleged conduct. It also happened in June 2023, less than a month after CIA Director William Burns announced sweeping reforms intended to keep women safe, streamline claims and more quickly discipline offenders. "We must get this right," he said.

Asquith was charged in April in suburban Washington's Loudoun County, Virginia, with misdemeanor assault and battery following a monthslong sheriff's probe into the boozy party in an off-site CIA office attended by at least a dozen people.

His accuser, a CIA contractor, told authorities that she repeatedly rebuffed Asquith's advances but that he kept pulling closer, rubbing her leg without her consent and making a series of inappropriate sexual comments, as well as "grunting noises and thrusting motions."

Asquith then "placed his hand up her skirt to her thigh numerous times causing her skirt to lift up, possibly exposing her underwear," said court documents.

The woman told investigators she slapped Asquith's hand away and got up to leave, but that he intervened as she approached the door and asked for a "booby hug" before grabbing her with both hands around her back and rubbing his groin and chest on her. She said Asquith then "forcibly hugged her and kissed all over her face and mouth without her consent."

Asquith did not respond to repeated requests for comment. His lawyer, Jon Katz, hung up when called by the AP.

"CIA takes allegations of sexual assault and harassment extremely seriously," the agency said in a statement, adding that within days of the incident it restricted Asquith's contact with the alleged victim and he retired three months later.

Asquith's case comes amid a flurry of activity surrounding sexual misconduct accusations at the CIA, including ongoing state and federal criminal investigations into an undercover officer in Europe suspected of knowingly infecting at least three CIA colleagues with an incurable sexually transmitted disease. The agency has not explained why that officer remains overseas.

Just a week before Asquith's trial begins this month, a federal judge in Washington will sentence another former CIA officer who drugged and sexually abused at least two dozen women he met on Tinder and other dating apps. Prosecutors are seeking a 30-year sentence for Brian Jeffrey Raymond, calling him a serial predator who caused "immeasurable" harm during various overseas postings between 2006 and 2020.

And next month, a now-former CIA officer trainee faces a second trial on charges stemming from the 2022 stairwell attack in the agency's headquarters in Langley, Virginia. Ashkan Bayatpour has admitted wrapping a scarf around the woman's neck but says it was intended as a joke. The woman says it was an attack in which he also attempted to kiss her against her will.

"He made a face like he was trying to really hurt me," the woman testified last year during a bench trial in which Bayatpour was convicted of misdemeanor assault and battery. Under Virginia law, the former Navy intelligence officer is entitled to a jury trial after appealing that conviction.

Former CIA case officer Lindsay Moran, author of a 2005 memoir on her life as a spy, said sexual misconduct has long been a problem in the male-dominated agency and became worse after the Sept. 11, 2001, attacks, when the agency's focus shifted to deploying clandestine combat units to Afghanistan and Iraq.

"They brought their own brand of male toxicity that was like gasoline on the old-boys network that already existed," Moran said. "National security is used as an excuse to brush these concerns under the carpet."

When asked why the watchdog report was classified, keeping secret an accounting of the problem and case histories, CIA said that decision was made by its inspector general, which conducted the inquiry and did not respond to a request for comment.

Also, the CIA has yet to fulfill AP's longstanding Freedom of Information Act request seeking internal records detailing its response to the Raymond scandal, and why it took so long to uncover assaults he documented in nearly 500 videos and photos that in some instances showed him groping or straddling naked, unconscious victims.

Florida Republican Marco Rubio, vice chairman of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, told AP that lawmakers will continue to "hold agency leaders accountable" after pushing for reforms in the CIA's misconduct reporting process.

"How far does someone have to go before the agency will step in and say enough is enough?" Barbara Gray, a former CIA officer, told AP last year after making an internal complaint accusing her manager of getting into her hotel bed as she slept during a work trip.

CIA assured Gray the supervisor was being "appropriately punished," she said, but then promoted him and featured him in a career development video shown to junior officers. Gray, meanwhile, resigned after her career "seemed to grind to a halt."

"What culture is CIA nurturing when it promotes some of its most egregious offenders?" she said. "I believe the agency is making an effort to improve its reporting processes and procedures, but my question is: What comes next?"

As Trump and Harris spar, ABC's moderators grapple with conducting a debate in a polarized country

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

The ABC News moderators were great. No, actually they were a "disgraceful failure." They cut off Kamala Harris too much. No, actually they corrected Donald Trump unfairly.

Such is the contentious tenor of the times in 2024's campaign season. And so it went Tuesday night at Trump's and Harris' first — and possibly only — debate.

In an illustration of how difficult it is to conduct a presidential debate in a polarized country, ABC News moderators David Muir and Linsey Davis fact-checked and corrected Trump four times Tuesday and were attacked angrily by the former president and his supporters. The moderators asked about economic policy, the war in Ukraine, abortion, the Jan. 6 U.S. Capitol insurrection and changes in Harris' stances since her 2020 presidential run.

It was the only scheduled debate between the two candidates, although Fox News Channel has proposed another one. Trump, following Tuesday's session, said he'd be "less inclined to because we had a great night." On social media, Trump echoed many of his supporters in criticizing ABC, saying the debate was essentially three on one.

In the end, Trump logged 43 minutes and 3 seconds of time talking, while Harris had 37 minutes and 41 seconds, according to a count by The New York Times.

Opinions on the coverage were a political litmus test

The debate's stakes were high to begin with, not only because of the impending election itself but because the last presidential debate in June — between Trump and sitting President Joe Biden, whose performance was roundly panned — uncorked a series of events that ended several weeks later with Biden's withdrawal from the race and Harris stepping in.

Opinions on how ABC handled the latest debate Tuesday were, in a large sense, a Rorschach test on how supporters of both sides felt about how it went. MSNBC commentator Chris Hayes sent a message on X that the ABC moderators were doing an "excellent" job — only to be answered by conservative com-

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mentator Ben Shapiro, who said, "this is how you know they're complete s—."

While CNN chose not to correct any misstatements by the candidates during Trump's debate with Biden in June, ABC instead challenged statements that Trump made about abortion, immigration, the 2020 election and violent crime.

During a discussion of abortion, Trump made his oft-repeated claim that Democrats supported killing babies after they were born. Said Davis: "There is no state in the country where it is legal to kill a baby after it was born."

Muir pointed out that Trump, after years of publicly not admitting to his defeat to Biden in the 2020 election, had recently on three separate occasions conceded he had lost. Trump replied that he had been sarcastic in making those recent statements.

"I didn't detect the sarcasm," Muir said.

After suggesting that crime had gone up during the Biden administration, Muir pointed out that violent crime had gone down during that period, prompting an argument with the former president. ABC also noted, after Trump had repeated a debunked report that immigrants were killing and eating pets in Ohio, that there had been no evidence that had happened.

ABC moderators did not correct any statements made by Harris.

"Could they have done more? Yes," said Angie Drodnic Holan, director of the international fact-checking network at the Poynter Institute, said in an interview. "Did they do enough? I would say yes. The alternative was none."

Toward the end of the debate, CNN fact checker Daniel Dale said on social media that "Trump has been staggeringly dishonest and Harris has been overwhelmingly (though not entirely) factual."

Both candidates didn't answer some questions

As is often the case in debates, the moderators often saw specific questions go unanswered. Harris, for example, was asked to address Trump's criticism that the U.S. Justice Department has been weaponized against him. She did not. She also skirted questions about changes to some of her past positions on issues. Muir twice asked Trump whether he wanted Ukraine to win its war against Russia, and he didn't answer.

The split screen views of both candidates onscreen told different stories. Trump often looked angry or smiled at some of Harris' statements, while avoiding eye contact with his opponent. Harris looked over at her opponents several times, often in bemusement, sometimes in open amusement, sometimes shaking her head.

Online anger toward how ABC handled the evening began while the debate was ongoing, and quickly became a talking point.

"These moderators are a disgraceful failure, and this is one of the most biased, unfair debates I have ever seen," conservative commentator Megyn Kelly posted on X. "Shame on ABC."

Answering online critics who complained ABC stacked the deck in Harris' favor, Atlantic writer James Surowiecki wrote that "the way they 'rigged' the debate is by letting (Trump) hang himself with his own stream of consciousness rambles."

"It was like a 4Chan post come to life," CNN's Jake Tapper said.

On Fox News Channel, anchor Martha MacCallum said after the debate that Harris "was never really held to the fire." Commentator Brit Hume agreed with her, but said something else was at play.

"Make no mistake about it," Hume said. "Trump had a bad night."

FACT FOCUS: A look at false and misleading claims made during Trump and Harris' debate

The Associated Press undefined

In their first and perhaps only debate, former President Donald Trump and Vice President Kamala Harris described the state of the country in distinctly different ways. As the two traded jabs, some old false and misleading claims emerged along with some new ones.

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Here's a look.

Trump overstates his economic record

TRUMP: "I created one of the greatest economies in the history of our country. ... They've destroyed the economy."

THE FACTS: This is an exaggeration. The economy grew much faster under Presidents Bill Clinton and Ronald Reagan than it did under Trump. The broadest measure of economic growth, gross domestic product, rose 4% a year for four straight years under Clinton. The fastest growth under Trump was 3% in 2018. The economy shrank 2.2% in 2020, at the end of Trump's presidency. And a higher proportion of American adults had jobs under Clinton than under Trump. During the Biden-Harris administration, the economy expanded 5.8% in 2021, though much of that reflected a bounce-back from COVID.

Trump's record on manufacturing jobs examined

HARRIS: "We have created over 800,000 manufacturing jobs. ... Donald Trump said he was going to create manufacturing jobs. He lost manufacturing jobs."

THE FACTS: Those statements are missing context.

There were 12,188,000 manufacturing employees in the U.S. when Biden took office in January 2021, according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics. Preliminary numbers for August 2024 put that number at 12,927,000. That's a difference of 739,000 — close to the 800,000 number Harris has cited.

Also of note is the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. The number of manufacturing employees dropped steeply in April 2020, by more than 1.3 million. Discounting that decline, there were only 206,000 more manufacturing employees in August than there were in March 2020, prior to the pandemic.

Inflation has gone down

TRUMP: "They had the highest inflation perhaps in the history of our country, because I've never seen a worse period of time."

THE FACTS: While praising the strength of the economy under his presidency, Donald Trump misstated the inflation rate under Biden. Inflation peaked at 9.1% in June 2022 after rising steadily in the first 17 months of Biden's presidency from a low of 0.1% in May 2020. It's now seeing a downward trend. The most recent data shows that as of July it had fallen to 2.9%. Other historical periods have seen higher inflation, which hit more than 14% in 1980, according to the Federal Reserve.

Trump has distanced himself from Project 2025

HARRIS: "What you're going to hear tonight is a detailed and dangerous plan called Project 2025 that the former president intends on implementing if he were elected again."

THE FACTS: Trump has said he doesn't know about Project 2025, a controversial blueprint for another Republican presidential administration.

The plan was written up by many of his former aides and allies, but Trump has never said he'll implement the roughly 900-page guide if he's elected again. He has said it's not related to his campaign.

Trump on abortions 'after birth'

TRUMP: "Her vice presidential pick says abortion in the ninth month is absolutely fine. He also says execution after birth, it's execution, no longer abortion, because the baby is born, is okay."

THE FACTS: Walz has said no such thing. Infanticide is criminalized in every state, and no state has passed a law that allows killing a baby after birth.

Abortion rights advocates say terms like "late-term abortions" attempt to stigmatize abortions later in pregnancy. Abortions later in pregnancy are exceedingly rare. In 2020, less than 1% of abortions in the United States were performed at or after 21 weeks, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Trump's taxing and spending plan examined

HARRIS: "What the Wharton School has said is Donald Trump's plan would actually explode the deficit."

THE TRUTH: The Penn-Wharton Budget Model did find that Trump's tax and spending plans would significantly expand the deficit by \$5.8 trillion over ten years. But it also found that Harris' plans would increase the deficit by \$1.2 trillion over the same period.

Harris' record on fracking examined

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TRUMP: "If she won the election, fracking in Pennsylvania will end on Day 1."

THE FACTS: Trump's statement ignores the fact that without a law approved by Congress, a president can only ban fracking on federal lands.

The federal government owns about 2% of Pennsylvania's total land, and it is not clear how much of that is suitable for oil or gas drilling.

Republicans have criticized Harris for "flip-flopping" on the issue, noting that Harris said in the 2020 campaign that she opposed fracking, a drilling technique that is widely used in Pennsylvania and other states.

Harris has since said repeatedly that she won't ban fracking if elected, and she reiterated that in Tuesday's debate.

Trump shares inflated numbers around migrants and crime

TRUMP: "When you look at these millions and millions of people that are pouring into our country monthly — whereas, I believe, 21 million people, not the 15 people say, and I think it's a lot higher than the 21 — that's bigger than New York State ... and just look at what they're doing to our country. They're criminals, many of these people are criminals, and that's bad for our economy too."

FACTS: Trump's figures are wildly inflated. The Border Patrol made 56,408 arrests of people crossing the border illegally from Mexico in July, the latest monthly figure available. Since Biden took office, the Border Patrol made about 7.1 million border arrests, though the number of people is considerably lower because many of those arrests were repeat crossers.

The Biden administration also permitted legal entry for about 765,000 people on an online app called CBP One at land crossings in Mexico through July. It allowed another 520,000 from Cuba, Haiti, Nicaragua and Venezuela to come by air with financial sponsors. Additionally, an unknown number of people crossed the border illegally and eluded capture.

That doesn't come close to "millions and millions of people" monthly. It is also unproven that "many of these people are criminals."

There have been high-profile, heinous crimes committed by immigrants. But FBI statistics do not separate out crimes by the immigration status of the assailant, nor is there any evidence of a spike in crime perpetrated by migrants. In 1931, the Wickersham Commission did not find any evidence supporting a connection between immigration and increased crime, and many studies since then have reached similar conclusions.

Trump repeats false claims that noncitizens are being sought to vote

TRUMP: "A lot of these illegal immigrants coming in, they're trying to get them to vote. They can't even speak English. They don't even know what country they're in practically and these people are trying to get them to vote, and that's why they're allowing them to come into our country."

THE FACTS: In recent months, Trump and other Republicans have been repeating the baseless claim that Democrats want migrants to come into the country illegally so they will vote.

There's no evidence for this, nor is there any evidence that noncitizens illegally vote in significant numbers in this country.

Voting by people who are not U.S. citizens already is illegal in federal elections. It can be punishable by fines, prison time and even deportation. While noncitizens have cast ballots, studies show it's incredibly rare, and states regularly audit their voter lists to remove ineligible voters from the rolls.

Trump's comments suggest that not speaking English is somehow prohibitive for voting in the U.S. — and that's also not the case. In fact, the Voting Rights Act requires certain states to provide election materials in other languages depending on the voting-age population's needs.

Trump misrepresents crime statistics

TRUMP, criticizing the Biden administration: "Crime is through the roof."

THE FACTS: In fact, FBI data has shown a downward trend in violent crime since a coronavirus pandemic spike. Violent crime surged during the pandemic, with homicides increasing nearly 30% in 2020 over the previous year — the largest one-year jump since the FBI began keeping records

Violent crime was down 6% in the last three months of 2023 compared with the same period the year before, according to FBI data released in March. Murders were down 13%. New FBI statistics released in

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June show the overall violent crime rate declined 15% in the first three months of 2024 compared to the same period last year. One expert has cautioned, however, that those 2024 figures are preliminary and may overstate the actual reduction in crime.

Trump endorses false rumor about immigrants eating pets

TRUMP: "In Springfield, they're eating the dogs, the people that came in, they're eating the cats... They're eating the pets of the people that live there."

THE FACTS: There's no evidence to support the claim, which Trump and his campaign have used to argue immigrants are committing crimes at a higher rate than others.

Authorities in Ohio have said there are no credible or detailed reports to support Trump's claim.

Jobs created under the Biden administration

"TRUMP: "Just like their number of 818,000 jobs that they said they created turned out to be a fraud."

THE FACTS: This is a mischaracterization of the government's process of counting jobs. Every year the Labor Department issues a revision of the number of jobs added in a 12-month period from April through March in the previous year. The adjustment is made because the government's initial job counts are based on surveys of businesses. The revision is then based on actual job counts from unemployment insurance files that are compiled later. The revision is compiled by career government employees with little involvement by politically appointed officials.

National Guard soldiers on Jan. 6

TRUMP, speaking about the Jan. 6 insurrection: "I said I'd like to give you 10,000 National Guard or soldiers. They rejected me. Nancy Pelosi rejected me."

THE FACTS: That's false. Pelosi does not direct the National Guard.

Further, as the Capitol came under attack, she and then-Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell called for military assistance, including from the National Guard.

The Capitol Police Board makes the decision on whether to call National Guard troops to the Capitol. It is made up of the House Sergeant at Arms, the Senate Sergeant at Arms and the Architect of the Capitol.

The board decided not to call the guard ahead of the insurrection but did eventually request assistance after the rioting had already begun, and the troops arrived several hours later.

There is no evidence that either Pelosi or McConnell directed the security officials not to call the guard beforehand.

Trump falsely claims China is building 'massive' auto plants in Mexico

TRUMP: "They're building big auto plants in Mexico, in many cases owned by China."

THE FACTS: It's not the first time Trump has claimed the Biden administration is allowing Chinese automakers to build factories just across the border in Mexico.

At present, though, industry experts say they know of no such plants under construction, and there's only one small Chinese auto assembly factory operating in Mexico. It's run by a company called JAC that builds inexpensive vehicles from kits for sale in that country.

Trump falsely claims evidence shows he won in 2020

TRUMP: "There's so much proof. All you have to do is look at it."

THE FACTS: The election was not stolen. The authorities who have reviewed the election — including Trump's own attorney general — have concluded the election was fair.

Biden's victory over Trump in 2020 was not particularly close. He won the Electoral College with 306 votes to Trump's 232, and the popular vote by more than 7 million ballots. Recounts in key states affirmed Biden's victory, and lawsuits challenging the results were unsuccessful.

Trump claims Putin endorsed Harris

TRUMP: "Putin endorsed her last week, said 'I hope she wins.'"

THE FACTS: Russian President Vladimir Putin did wryly claim last week that Harris was his preferred candidate, but intelligence officials have dismissed the comment as not serious.

U.S. intelligence agencies have said Russia favors Trump, who has openly praised Putin, suggested cutting funds to Ukraine and repeatedly criticized the NATO military alliance.

Harris takes Trump's 'bloodbath' comment out of context

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HARRIS: "Donald Trump, the candidate, has said in this election there will be a bloodbath if this and the outcome of this election is not to his liking. Let's turn the page on that."

THE FACTS: Trump delivered the line at a speech in March in Ohio in which he was talking about the impact of offshoring on the American auto industry and his plans to increase tariffs on foreign-made cars. It was in reference to the auto industry that he warned of a "bloodbath" if his proposals aren't enacted.

"If I don't get elected, it's going to be a bloodbath for the whole — that's going to be the least of it. It's going to be a bloodbath for the country," Trump said.

Trump inflates numbers around new military equipment left in Afghanistan

TRUMP, on the U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan: "We wouldn't have left \$85 billion worth of brand new, beautiful military equipment behind."

THE FACTS: That number is significantly inflated, according to reports from the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction, or SIGAR, which oversees American taxpayer money spent on the conflict.

The \$85 billion figure resembles a number from a July 30 quarterly report from SIGAR, which outlined that the U.S. has invested about \$83 billion to build, train and equip Afghan security forces since 2001. That funding included troop pay, training, operations and infrastructure along with equipment and transportation over two decades, according to SIGAR reports and Dan Grazier, a defense policy analyst at the Project on Government Oversight.

Only about \$18 billion of that sum went toward equipping Afghan forces between 2002 and 2018, a June 2019 SIGAR report showed.

No one knows the exact value of the U.S.-supplied Afghan equipment the Taliban have secured, defense officials have confirmed it is significant.

Trump misrepresents key facts of the Central Park Five case

TRUMP: "They admitted, they said they pled guilty and I said, 'well, if they pled guilty they badly hurt a person, killed a person ultimately ... And they pled guilty, then they pled not guilty.'"

THE FACTS: Trump misstated key details of the case while defending a newspaper ad he placed about two weeks after the April 1989 attack in which he called for bringing back the death penalty. Trump wrongly stated that the victim was killed and that the wrongly accused suspects had pleaded guilty.

Trump appeared to be confusing guilty pleas with confessions that the men — teenagers at the time — said they made to police under duress. They later recanted, pleaded not guilty in court and were convicted after jury trials. Their convictions were vacated in 2002 after another person confessed to the crime.

The victim, Trisha Meili, was in a coma for 12 days after the attack but ultimately survived. She testified in court against the wrongly accused suspects, who are now known as the Exonerated Five. In 2002, Matias Reyes confessed to the crime and said he was the lone assailant. DNA testing matched Reyes to the attack, but because of the statute of limitations he could not be charged in connection with it.

Trump repeats false claims over 2020 election loss, deflects responsibility for Jan. 6

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Former President Donald Trump persisted in saying during the presidential debate that he won the 2020 election and took no responsibility for any of the mayhem that unfolded at the Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, when his supporters stormed the building to block the peaceful transfer of power.

The comments Tuesday night underscored the Republican's refusal, even four years later, to accept the reality of his defeat and his unwillingness to admit the extent to which his falsehoods about his election loss emboldened the mob that rushed the Capitol, resulting in violent clashes with law enforcement. Trump's grievances about that election are central to his 2024 campaign against Democrat Kamala Harris, as he professes allegiance to the rioters.

In 2020, Democrat Joe Biden won 306 electoral votes to Trump's 232, and there was no widespread fraud, as election officials across the country, including Trump's then-attorney general, William Barr, have

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confirmed. Republican governors in Arizona and Georgia, crucial to Biden's victory, vouched for the integrity of the elections in their states. Nearly all the legal challenges from Trump and his allies were dismissed by judges, including two tossed by the Supreme Court, which includes three Trump-nominated justices.

An Associated Press review of every potential case of voter fraud in the six battleground states disputed by Trump found fewer than 475. Biden took Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin and their 79 electoral votes by a combined 311,257 votes out of 25.5 million ballots cast for president. The disputed ballots represent just 0.15% of his victory margin in those states.

In the ABC debate, Trump was asked twice if he regretted anything he did on Jan. 6, when he told his supporters to march to the Capitol and exhorted them to "fight like hell." On the Philadelphia stage, Trump first responded by complaining that the questioner had failed to note that he had encouraged the crowd to behave "peacefully and patriotically." Trump also noted that one of his backers, Ashli Babbitt, was fatally shot inside the building by a Capitol Police officer.

Trump suggested that protesters who committed crimes during the 2020 racial injustice protests were not prosecuted. But an AP review in 2021 of documents in more than 300 federal cases stemming from the protests sparked by George Floyd's death found that more than 120 defendants across U.S. pleaded guilty or were convicted at trial of federal crimes including rioting, arson and conspiracy.

When the question about his actions on Jan. 6 arose again, Trump replied: "I had nothing to do with that other than they asked me to make a speech. I showed up for a speech."

But he ignored other incendiary language he used throughout the speech, during which he urged the crowd to march to the Capitol, where Congress was meeting to certify Biden's victory. Trump told the crowd: "If you don't fight like hell, you're not going to have a country anymore." That's after his lawyer, Rudy Giuliani, declared: "Let's have trial by combat."

Trump didn't appeal for the rioters to leave the Capitol until more than three hours after the assault began. He then released a video telling the rioters it was time to "go home," but added: "We love you. You're very special people."

He also repeated an oft-stated false claim that then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., "rejected" his offer to send "10,000 National Guard or soldiers" to the Capitol. Pelosi does not direct the National Guard. As the Capitol came under attack, she and then-Senate Majority leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky. called for military assistance, including from the National Guard.

Harris pledged to "turn the page" from Jan. 6, when she was in the Capitol as democracy came under attack.

"So for everyone watching, who remembers what January 6th was, I say, 'We don't have to go back. Let's not go back. We're not going back. It's time to turn the page.'"

Though Trump had seemed to acknowledge in a recent podcast interview that he had indeed "lost by a whisker," he insisted Tuesday night that that was a sarcastic remark and resumed his boasts about the election.

"I'll show you Georgia, and I'll show you Wisconsin, and I'll show you Pennsylvania," he said in rattling off states where he claimed, falsely, that he had won. "We have so many facts and statistics."

Key takeaways from a debate that featured tense clashes and closed with a Taylor Swift endorsement

By STEVE PEOPLES, JONATHAN J. COOPER and NICHOLAS RICCARDI Associated Press
WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump and Kamala Harris faced each other on the debate stage for the first — and possibly the last — time.

The Democratic vice president opened Tuesday night's faceoff with a power move, marching across the stage to Trump's lectern to shake his hand.

"Kamala Harris," she said, introducing herself as the pair met for the first time ever. "Let's have a good debate."

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"Nice to see you. Have fun," the former Republican president responded.

The exchange set the tone for the 90-minute debate to come: Harris controlled the conversation at times, baiting Trump with jabs at his economic policy, his refusal to concede his 2020 election loss and even his performance at his rallies.

Trump, while measured early on, grew more annoyed as the night went on. And one significant moment played out after the two candidates left the stage, when megastar Taylor Swift said she'll vote for Harris.

Some takeaways on a historic debate:

Harris took the fight to Trump in a way that Biden could not

In her first answer, the former prosecutor said Trump's tariffs would effectively create a sales tax on the middle class. She soon accused Trump of presiding over the worst attack on American democracy since the Civil War — the Capitol riot on Jan. 6, 2021. She charged him with telling women what they could do with their bodies. And she mocked Trump's praise of dictators "who would eat you for lunch."

Harris effectively controlled much of the conversation with such attacks and baited Trump into responses that were at times vents, and at others, reminders of his wild rhetoric and fixation on the past.

"You did in fact lose that election," Harris said of the 2020 race that Trump lost to Democrat Joe Biden but still insists he won. "Donald Trump was fired by 81 million people," she said, referring to Biden's winning vote total.

But Harris may have got under her opponent's skin the most when she went after his performance at his rallies, noting that people often leave early.

Growing visibly irritated, Trump insisted that his rallies were larger than hers.

A smiling Harris frequently shifted her message from Trump back to the American people.

"You will not hear him talk about your needs, your dreams and your needs and your desires," Harris said. "And I'll tell you, I believe you deserve a president who actually puts you first."

Trump had a label for Harris: 'She is Biden'

Trump was often on defense, but he did drive the core message of his campaign: Inflation and immigration are hammering Americans.

Immigrants, Trump said, have "destroyed the fabric of our country."

He repeatedly tied Harris to Biden.

"She is Biden," he said.

"The worst inflation we've ever had," Trump added. "A horrible economy because inflation has made it so bad. And she can't get away with that."

Harris responded: "Clearly, I am not Joe Biden and I am certainly not Donald Trump. And what I do offer is a new generation of leadership for our country."

Trump also went after Harris for moving away from some of the progressive positions she took in the 2020 Democratic presidential primary, urging voters not to believe the more moderate tone she's striking in this campaign.

"She's going to my philosophy now. In fact, I was going to send her a MAGA hat," he said, referring to the red "Make America Great Again" baseball caps that many of his supporters wear. "But if she ever got elected, she'd change it."

Swift sings a praise for Harris

One of the most consequential moments came in a post on one of the most followed accounts on Instagram moments after the debate ended.

Swift has a loyal following among young women, a demographic Harris needs to turn out in big numbers. She called Harris a "gifted leader," telling her fans to do their research and make their own decisions, but "I've done my research, and I've made my choice."

Trump on race and Harris on the attack

ABC moderator David Muir asked Trump point-blank about his allegation last month that Harris had be-latedly "turned Black." Harris is Black and South Asian and a graduate of Howard University, a historically Black school in Washington.

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Trump tried to play down the matter. "I don't care what she is, you make a big deal out of something, I couldn't care less," Trump said.

Harris, however, had her opening and she rattled off a long list of Trump's racial controversies: his legal settlement for discrimination against prospective Black tenants at his New York apartment buildings in the 1970s; his ad calling for the execution of Black and Latino teenagers — who were wrongly arrested — in the Central Park jogger case in the 1980s; and his false claims that former President Barack Obama was not born in the United States.

"I think the American people want something better than that, want better than this," Harris said.

Trump accused Harris of trying to "divide" people and dismissed her claims as dated and irrelevant.

"This is a person that has to stretch back 40, 50 years ago because there's nothing now," he said.

Harris and Trump dug in on abortion positions

Harris came out swinging in defense of abortion rights, perhaps the strongest issue for Democrats since Trump's nominees created a Supreme Court majority to overturn the constitutional right to an abortion. Her sharp arguments provided a vivid contrast to President Joe Biden's rambling comments on the issue during his June debate with Trump.

"The government, and Donald Trump, certainly should not be telling a woman what to do with her body," Harris said. She painted a vivid picture of women facing medical complications, gut-wrenching decisions and the need to travel out of state for an abortion.

Trump was just as fierce in defense, saying he returned the issue to the states, an outcome he said many Americans wanted. He struggled with accuracy, however, repeating the false claim that Democrats support abortion even after babies are born. He stuck to that even after he was corrected by moderator Linsey Davis.

"I did a great service in doing that. It took courage to do it," Trump said of the overturning of *Roe v. Wade* and its constitutional protections for abortion. "And the Supreme Court had great courage in doing it. And I give tremendous credit to those six justices."

Polls has shown significant opposition to overturning *Roe* and voters have punished Republicans in recent elections for it.

Trump traded on a Harris talking point

Trump took a Harris talking point and directed it right back at her. It happened when he objected after Harris interrupted him.

"Wait a minute, I'm talking now," Trump said. "Sound familiar?"

He was putting his own spin on a line Harris used famously against Mike Pence in the 2020 vice presidential debate when she rebuked Pence for interrupting, saying, "Mr. Vice President, I'm speaking."

Harris made a pitch to Republican voters

In a divided nation, the election will ultimately be decided by a small slice of swing voters in only a handful of states. And in a nod toward that fact, Harris made an explicit appeal to voters across the political spectrum — including Republicans.

She noted that she is a gun owner. She cited the "late, great John McCain," a reference to the Arizona Republican senator and war hero whom Trump criticized for being captured by enemy soldiers. And she listed the many Republicans who formerly served in the Trump administration who have now endorsed her campaign.

Trump, meanwhile, offered little outreach to voters in the middle, ignoring the calls for unity that framed his summertime convention speech.

Harris seized on the Jan. 6 attack on the Capitol to make another explicit appeal to undecided voters.

"It's time to turn the page," she said. "And if that was a bridge too far for you, well, there is a place in our campaign for you."

Trump was restrained, except when he wasn't

Democrats hoped and Republicans feared that Trump would lose his cool on stage. At first he didn't, but as Harris increasingly got under his skin, he went to some dark places.

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Trump amplified false rumors that Haitian immigrants in Ohio are eating pets — ABC's Muir noted that local officials say that is not happening — as he argued that the Biden-Harris administration was admitting dangerous immigrants.

When Harris pressed him on the array of criminal and civil cases against him, Trump similarly fumed. He accused Harris and Biden of planting all the cases.

"I probably took a bullet to the head because of the things they said about me," Trump said, referencing the assassination attempt in July by a gunman whose motives are unknown.

When pressed on whether he had any responsibility for Capitol riot, Trump raised his voice, blaming both Democratic Rep. Nancy Pelosi of California, who was the House speaker at the time, and the Democratic mayor of Washington. He said the rioters have "been treated so badly" and once again denied he lost the 2020 election.

Harris replied, "Donald Trump was fired by 81 million people, let's be clear about that, and clearly he's having a very difficult time processing that."

There was an in-the-weeds exchange on the economy

The debate opened with an unexpectedly wonky exchange on the economy: Harris took on Trump for his plan to put in place sweeping tariffs and for the trade deficit he ran as president; Trump slammed Harris for inflation that he incorrectly said was the worst in the country's history.

Trump said people look back on his presidency's economy fondly. "I created one of the greatest economies in the history of our country," he said. Harris flatly told viewers, "Donald Trump has no plan for you."

Americans are slightly more likely to trust Trump over Harris when it comes to handling the economy, according to an Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs poll from August.

Gender was an afterthought in the back-and-forth

Harris would be the nation's first female president. But her gender was an afterthought during the debate. She made no references to the historic nature of her candidacy. Neither did Trump.

And there were no performative moments in which gender was an issue. Who could forget Trump's decision to stand behind his last female opponent, Hillary Clinton, during a 2016 debate? He also called Clinton a "nasty woman." Afterward, Clinton said she was creeped out.

But on Tuesday night, both candidates stayed behind their podiums as instructed and there were no explicit jabs regarding gender.

Taylor Swift endorses Kamala Harris for president after debate ends

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Taylor Swift, one of the music industry's biggest stars, endorsed Kamala Harris for president shortly after the presidential debate ended.

"I think she is a steady-handed, gifted leader and I believe we can accomplish so much more in this country if we are led by calm and not chaos," Swift wrote late Tuesday in an Instagram post, which included a link to a voter registration website.

Swift has a dedicated following among young women, a key demographic in the November election, and her latest tour has generated more than \$1 billion in ticket sales. In a half hour, the post received more than 2.3 million likes.

She included a picture of herself holding her cat Benjamin Button, and she signed the message "Childless Cat Lady." The remark is a reference to three-year-old comments made by JD Vance, Donald Trump's running mate, about women without children not having an equal stake in the country's future.

A Harris senior campaign official said the endorsement was not coordinated with the campaign. Tim Walz, Harris' running mate, appeared to learn about the endorsement in the middle of a live interview on MSNBC. As Rachel Maddow read the text, Walz broke into a smile and patted his chest.

"That was eloquent. And it was clear," Walz said. "And that's the kind of courage we need in America to stand up."

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Swift wrote that her endorsement was partially prompted by Trump's decision to post artificial intelligence-generated pictures suggesting that she had endorsed him. One showed Swift dressed as Uncle Sam, and the text said "Taylor wants YOU to VOTE for DONALD TRUMP."

Trump's posts "brought me to the conclusion that I need to be very transparent about my actual plans for this election as a voter," Swift wrote. She added that "I've done my research, and I've made my choice."

Trump said Wednesday that Swift's move "was just a question of time." He told "Fox & Friends" that Swift is "a very liberal person" who "seems to always endorse a Democrat and she'll probably pay a price in the marketplace."

In 2020, she supported Democrat Joe Biden, and she cheered for Harris in her debate against then-Vice President Mike Pence. She also was openly critical of Trump, saying he had stoked "the fires of white supremacy and racism."

Swift is a popular figure nationwide, but especially among Democrats. An October 2023 Fox News poll found that 55% of voters overall, including 68% of Democrats, said they had a favorable view of Swift. Republicans were divided, with 43% having a favorable opinion and 45% an unfavorable one.

AP VoteCast suggests that a partisan divide on Swift was apparent as early as 2018. That's the year Swift made her first political endorsement, supporting Tennessee Democrat Phil Bredesen for Senate over Republican Marsha Blackburn.

VoteCast found that among Tennessee voters that year, 55% of Democrats and just 19% of Republicans said they had a favorable opinion of Swift. Blackburn won by a comfortable margin in the deep red state.

Swift is the leading nominee at Wednesday's MTV Video Music Awards. While it's unclear whether Swift will attend the show in New York, she could use any acceptance speeches to elaborate on her support of Harris.

The event was shifted a day later to accommodate Tuesday's debate. MTV has a long history of encouraging voter participation.

Today in History: September 12, Voyager 1 leaves the solar system

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Thursday, Sept. 12, the 256th day of 2024. There are 110 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 12, 2013, Voyager 1, launched 36 years earlier, became the first man-made spacecraft ever to leave the solar system.

Also on this date:

In 1857, the S.S. Central America (also known as the "Ship of Gold") sank off the coast of South Carolina after sailing into a hurricane in one of the worst maritime disasters in American history; 425 people were killed and thousands of pounds of gold sank with the ship to the bottom of the ocean.

In 1940, the Lascaux cave paintings, estimated to be 17,000 years old, were discovered in southwestern France.

In 1958, the U.S. Supreme Court, in *Cooper v. Aaron*, unanimously ruled that Arkansas officials who were resisting public school desegregation orders could not disregard the high court's rulings.

In 1959, the Soviet Union launched its Luna 2 space probe, which made a crash landing on the moon.

In 1962, in a speech at Rice University in Houston, President John F. Kennedy reaffirmed his support for the manned space program, declaring: "We choose to go to the moon in this decade and do the other things, not because they are easy, but because they are hard."

In 1977, South African Black student leader and anti-apartheid activist Steve Biko, 30, died while in police custody, triggering an international outcry.

In 1994, truck driver Frank Eugene Corder piloted a stolen single-engine Cessna airplane into restricted airspace in Washington, D.C., and crashed it into the South Lawn of the White House.

In 2003, in the Iraqi city of Fallujah, U.S. forces mistakenly opened fire on vehicles carrying police, kill-

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ing eight of them.

In 2008, a Metrolink commuter train struck a freight train head-on in Los Angeles, killing 25 people.

In 2011, Novak Djokovic beat Rafael Nadal to win his first U.S. Open championship.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Linda Gray is 84. Singer Maria Muldaur is 82. Author Michael Ondaatje is 81. Actor Joe Pantoliano is 73. Photographer Nan Goldin is 71. Composer Hans Zimmer is 67. Actor Rachel Ward is 67. TV host-commentator Greg Gutfeld is 60. Actor-comedian Louis (loo-ee) C.K. is 57. Golfer Angel Cabrera is 55. Country singer Jennifer Nettles (Sugarland) is 50. Rapper 2 Chainz is 47. Singer Ruben Studdard is 46. Basketball Hall of Famer Yao Ming is 44. Singer-actor Jennifer Hudson is 43. Actor Alfie Allen is 38. Actor Emmy Rossum is 38. Los Angeles Dodgers first baseman Freddie Freeman is 35. Country singer-songwriter Kelsea Ballerini is 31. Actor Sydney Sweeney is 27.