

Groton Daily Independent

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Saturday, Sept. 14

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

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PO Box 34, Groton SD 57445

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



Sunday School Kick-off event, 9 a.m.; Third Graders receive Bibles, 10:30 a.m.; Picnic potluck, 11:30 a.m.

Monday, Sept. 16

School Breakfast: Stuffed bagel.
School Lunch: French bread pizza, cooked carrots.
Senior Menu: Ranch chicken breast, scalloped potatoes, oriental blend vegetables, frosted brownie, fruit, whole wheat bread.
Homecoming Coronation
Cross Country at Webster Area, 2 p.m.
JV Football hosts Milbank, 4 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Bible Study, 6:30 a.m.
Pantry Open, community center, 11 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Senior Citizen meet at the community center, 1 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.
St. John's Lutheran: Christian Literature Circle, 7:30 p.m.
3rd/4th and 5th/6th Football hosts Warner - 6PM

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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.

Boar's Head Takes Action

Boar's Head Provisions announced yesterday it is indefinitely shuttering its southern Virginia facility, which has been the epicenter of a deadly multistate listeria outbreak. The seller of meat, cheeses, and condiments also said it will discontinue the sale of its liverwurst, which was found to be behind the listeria contamination.

The outbreak—reported in July by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention—is considered America's largest listeria outbreak since one linked to cantaloupe in 2011. (That outbreak had led to 147 illnesses and 33 deaths across 28 states.) Roughly 7.2 million pounds of deli meat products produced at the Boar's Head facility in Jarratt, Virginia, were recalled. At least nine people have died from the outbreak, while 57 people have been hospitalized across 18 states, per the CDC.

Inspection records from the Department of Agriculture showed the Virginia facility had 69 instances of noncompliance with federal regulations from August 2023 to August 2024. Findings included mold, insects, and puddles of blood.

Death toll in Vietnam from Typhoon Yagi exceeds 250 people.

More than 800 people have been injured, while at least 82 people remain missing. The typhoon, considered the strongest storm to strike the Asian continent this year, made landfall last weekend on Vietnam's northeastern coast. It triggered flash floods and landslides, sweeping away dozens of homes and blocking access to fresh water and sanitation.

China raises retirement ages for first time since 1950s.

The world's second-largest economy approved a plan Friday to raise its retirement ages over the next 15 years. China's retirement ages are among the world's lowest. The retirement age for men will gradually rise to 63 from 60 by 2040. Women in white-collar jobs will retire by 58 instead of 55, while women in blue-collar jobs will retire by 55 instead of 50. The legislation comes amid China's falling birth rates and an aging workforce.

World Health Organization approves use of mpox vaccine.

The WHO's authorization is the first for a vaccine to combat mpox; the two-dose vaccine made by Bavarian Nordic A/S has been cleared for adults aged 18 and above. Mpox, formerly known as monkeypox, was declared a global health emergency last month following the spread of an especially virulent strain of the virus in Africa. Over 20,000 cases and at least 500 deaths have been recorded across 14 countries in Africa so far this year.

United Airlines to offer free in-flight Wi-Fi with Starlink.

United will begin testing free Wi-Fi in early 2025 under a deal with Elon Musk's SpaceX and its Starlink satellite internet provider. United will introduce the perk across its roughly 1,000 aircraft over the next few years. SpaceX has over 6,000 Starlink satellites orbiting Earth, providing users worldwide with high-speed internet. Separately, Brazil's top court restored nationwide access to X after the Musk-owned social media platform paid a \$3.3M fine to resolve a legal dispute.

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"Karate Kid" actor Chad McQueen dies at age 63.

McQueen starred as "Dutch," a member of Johnny Lawrence's gang, in the 1984 and 1986 "Karate Kid" movies. He died while at his Palm Desert, California, ranch. He was the only son of actor and race car driver Steve McQueen, who died at age 50 in 1980. The younger McQueen is survived by his wife and three children, one of whom is also an actor known for starring in the TV series "The Vampire Diaries."

Humankind(ness)

Today, we're sharing a story from reader Carl G. from Noblesville, Indiana.

"My daughter just got married and was on Southwest Airlines heading to her honeymoon. As they were getting seated, a flight attendant asked the couple to come up to the front of the plane. The flight attendant introduced them and announced their wedding and then asked the passengers to take the napkins they had passed out and write down any advice they had for this newly married couple. They received 45+ responses, all of them positive, not one negative from all these kindhearted passengers."

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Milbank scores last in five touchdown fourth quarter to win

What started out as a defensive struggle in the first half turned into a free for all in the second half as Milbank scored last and posted a 32-28 win over Groton Area.

"It was actually a fun game," said Coach Shaun Wanner. "Both sides played hard and it was a good, hard fought game."

Milbank's first scoring drive started on its second possession with 7:41 left in the first quarter. The Bulldogs had good field position after Groton Area punted on fourth and 13 and Milbank was on the Tiger 47 yard line. Five plays and two first downs later in 80 seconds, Emmett Hanson scored on a 30 yard pass from Brayden Bowsher. The PAT kick by Moises Luna was good and Milbank took a 7-0 lead. That was the first quarter score.

Groton Area had a drive going early in the second quarter, starting on its own 43 yard line. The Tigers got two first downs and were down to the Bulldog 34 yard line. Then things went bad for Groton. It was then second and 25, third and 13 and then Milbank's Braylen Bowsher intercepted the ball.

The Tigers got the ball back with 1:31 left in the half, starting at the Milbank 45 yard line. Groton Area got a first down on third and nine and the ball down to the Milbank 33. Groton Area called time out with 31 seconds left. It was second and six and the Tigers got another first down with 25 seconds left and the ball at the seven yard line. Time was running and the Tigers got the snap off with one second left on the clock. Ryder



Christian Ehresmann

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Korbin Kucker

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Johnson connected

with Korbin Kucker to score. In the excitement, the ball was spiked and the Tigers were access a penalty for the PAT kick. The kick was wide right by Joao Nunes in his first miss of the season; however, there was a penalty on Milbank so the Tigers had another crack at the PAT. The ball hit the uprights and failed to go through and the half time score remained with Milbank on top, 7-6. "I think there was hesitation on Milbank's side - they didn't think we would get the snap off in time. Ryder and Korbin did a good job with the time. We got up to the line and got the snap off with one second left."

Groton Area had the opening possession of the third quarter. The Tigers started on their own 38 yard line. On second and nine, Groton Area got a first down and the ball on the Milbank 47 yard line. On the next play, Korbin Kucker broke free and dash 47 yards for the touchdown. Ryder Johnson ran in the PAT and Groton Area was on top, 14-7. That drive went 67 yards in four plays, two first downs and 1:40.

The Tiger defense held Milbank who was forced to punt on fourth and five.

Groton Area started on its own 45 yard line and got a first down with the ball back in Milbank territory on the 43 yard line. The Tigers were third and 15 with a penalty making it third and 20. Teylor Diegel made a big catch, taking the ball from the Groton

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Brevin Fliehs
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Area 43 down to the Milbank 33. Milbank's defense prevented the Tigers from gaining any ground and the Groton Area gave up the ball on downs at fourth and 10.

On Milbank's first play on its next possession, Sam Rick caught a pass from Brayden Bowsher and went 68 yards to score. The PAT kick by Moises Luna was no good leaving Groton Area with a 14-13 lead with 4:07 left in the third quarter.

Groton Area went the wrong way on its next possession, going second and 13, third and 17 and fourth and 23.

Milbank took over on the Tiger 46 yard line and got down to the 15 yard line as the third quarter ended.

Then a wild fourth quarter was about to begin.

Milbank took the ball down to the one yard line and Braylen Bowsher scored on a one yard run. The two point conversion failed and Milbank took a 19-14 lead.

Groton Area took over on its own 38 yard line. Kucker got two first downs and Groton Area was at the Bulldog 23 yard line. On third and 15, Christian Ehresmann would score on a 28 yard pass play from Korbin Kucker. The PAT pass failed and Groton reclaimed the lead, 20-19, with 9:15 left in the game.

Milbank took over on its own 26 yard line. Then on second and 15, Braylen Bowsher connected with Esteban Abrego for a 79 yard pass play. The PAT pass failed and Milbank took the lead, 25-20, with 8:21 left in the game.

The Tigers took over on its 43 yard line. Kucker got a first down and the ball down to the Milbank 11 yard line. On third and one, Kucker would score on a two yard run. The PAT was good on a pass from Johnson to Ehresmann and the Tigers were back on top, 28-25, with 5:44 left in the game.

Milbank got three straight first downs. A touchdown was negated by a penalty; however, on third and 15, Sam Rick would score on a 32 yard pass play from Bowsher. The PAT kick was good and the Bulldogs were back on top, 32-28, with 2:45 left.

Groton's next possession was stopped on third and 10 when the Emmett Hanson intercepted the ball.

Milbank did not advance and ended up punting on fourth and 11 with 49 seconds left. The punt was blocked and Groton Area

took up shop on the Bulldog 32 yard. It was second and 10 with 36 seconds left. Third and 11 with 30 seconds left. Fourth and 11 with 23 seconds left. Groton could not get a first down on the last play and the Bulldogs would win its homecoming game.

The game concluded at 9:50 p.m. "There was a lot of passing and big plays that stops the clock a lot more," Wanner said. Between the two teams, there were 42 passes with the clock being stopped 17 times for incomplete passes. "I saw more positive things than negative in the game," he said. "Now we need to work on the negative to make them better. We're just starting the big stretch of our schedule."

Both teams had 15 first downs. Groton Area had more yards rushing, 121-93, and Milbank had more yards passing, 288-209. "We have a balanced offense," Wanner said. "I love the balance that we had 121 yards rushing and 209 yards passing."

Groton Area carried the ball 28 times for 121 yards and two touchdowns. (Korbin Kucker 14-84, 2 TD; Ryder Johnson 9-10, Keegen Tracy 2-15, Brevin Fliehs 1-1, Christian Ehresmann 2-1). Milbank carried the

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Karter Moody
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

Schneck had seven tackles.

Both teams are 2-1 on the season. Groton Area will celebrate homecoming by hosting Deuel on Friday.

"Deuel has a young football team. They have a very good sophomore class that is very athletic."

- Paul Kosel

ball 39 times for 93 yards and one touchdown. (Tate Schlueter 13-52, Nollen Shelley 9-47, Braylen Bowsher 12-(-5), Owen Tesch 5-(-1).

Ryder Johnson completed 15 of 27 passes for 181 yards, one touchdown and two interceptions. Korbin Kucker completed one of four passes for 28 yards and one touchdown. Recivers were Korbin Kucker 6-98, 1 TD; Christian Ehresmann 3-41, Teylor Diegel 3-40, Keegen Tracy 3-32, Brevin Fliehs 1-(-2).

Braylen Bowsher completed nine of 11 passes for 288 yards and four touchdowns. Receivers were Sam Rick 4-143, Emmett Hanson 3-61, Esteban Abrego 1-71, 1 TD; Owen Tesch 1-5.

Milbank recovered both of its fumbles.

Groton Area had six penalties for 45 yards while Milbank had eight for 41 yards.

Christian Ehresmann had 17 tackles while Karter Moody had 11, Korbin Kucker and Brevin Fliehs each had 10 tackles.

Milbank was led by Tate Schlueter, Mason Allen and Emmett Hanson eight tackles apiece and Jesse



Ryder Johnson
(Photo by Paul Kosel)

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Keegen Tracy took several hard hits during the game. He is being helped by by his mom, **Carla Keegen** suffered a strained calf muscle.

(Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



Taylor Diegel

(Photo by Paul Kosel)

GHS cheerleaders behind the Tiger football team. (Photo by Jeslyn Kosel)



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Football Scoreboard

From Friday

Aberdeen Roncalli 42, Mobridge-Pollock, 0
Arlington 34, Sioux Falls Lutheran 14
Avon, 54, Corsica-Stickney, 20
Bon Homme 28, Gregory 8
Brandon Valley 27, Sioux Falls O'Gorman 0
Bridgewater-Emery/Ethan, 22, Beresford, 13
Britton-Hecla, 58, Florence-Henry, 6
Brookings, 8, Aberdeen Central, 7
Burke 64, Sunshine Bible 38
Canistota, 20, Garretson, 13
Canton, 45, Vermillion, 31
Dakota Valley, 63, Lakota Tech, 0
Dell Rapids 40, Rapid City Christian 24
Dell Rapids St Mary, 16, Colman, 6
Dupree 56, Potter County, 6
Elkton-Lake Benton, 42, De Smet, SD, 0
Flandreau 47, Sisseton, 0,
Freeman-Marion-Freeman Academy, 68, Gayville-
Volin, 40
Hamlin, 59, Great Plains, SD, 8
Harding County 50, Hill City 43
Harrisburg, 42 Rapid City Central, 8,
Hot Springs 13, Lead-Deadwood 0
Howard, 52, Chester, 0,
Ipswich 66, Northwestern, 14
Kadoka, SD, 40, Bennett County, 16
Kimball-White Lake, 52, Platte-Geddes, 8
Lemmon 30, Herreid-Selby, 24
Leola-Frederick, 60, North Central, 18
Lyman, 64, Jones County, 36
Madison 42, Custer 16
Milbank 32, Groton Area 28
Miller, 26, Chamberlain, 20
Mt Vernon-Plankinton, 36, Wagner, 6
Oldham-Ramona-Rutland, 24, Irene-Wakonda, 14
Parker, 16, Baltic, 6
Parkston, 34, Hanson, 9
Pine Ridge, 46, Little Wound 20
Sioux Falls Christian, 19, Lennox, 8
Sioux Valley, 56, Clark-Willow Lake, 36
Stanley County, 44, Redfield, 8
Sturgis, SD, 24, Rapid City Stevens 16
Sully Buttes, 48, Hitchcock-Tulare, 18
Tea, 41, Huron, 14
Timber Lake, 36, Faith, 8
Tri-Valley, 37, Belle Fourche, 0

Tripp-Delmont/Armour/Andes Central/Dakota
Christian, 64, Scotland/Menno, 14
Viborg-Hurley, 48, Alcester-Hudson, 38
Wall, 59 New Underwood, SD, 6
Warner, 28, Faulkton, SD, 20
Watertown, 28, Riggs, 14,
Waverly-South Shore, 20, Waubay-Summit, 18
West Central, 55, McCook Central-Montrose, 7
Winner, 18, Elk Point-Jefferson, 8
Woonsocket/Wessington Springs/Sanborn Central,
50, Webster, SD, 12
Yankton, 74, Douglas, 6

From Thursday

Cheyenne-Eagle Butte 30, St. Francis 22
Todd County 46, Mahpiya Luca High 8
Lower Bruce 34, White River 0
Marty 42, Crow Creek 0
Winnebago 1, McLaughlin 0

scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

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(RV) Wolves Open Hampton Inn Invite with Two Wins

Kenosha, Wis. – The (RV) Northern State University volleyball team continued their win streak on Friday defeating Ohio Dominican and host Wisconsin Parkside. The Wolves defeated the Panthers in 4-sets and swept the Rangers.

THE QUICK DETAILS

Final Score Match 1: NSU 3, ODU 1
Final Score Match 2: NSU 3, UWP 0
Records: NSU 6-0, ODU 2-3, UWP 3-4
Attendance: 122 / 439

HOW IT HAPPENED VS. OHIO DOMINICAN

The Wolves took the opening set 25-18 and fell in set two 25-14
They then rattled off 25-22 and 25-22 victories to secure the match win
Northern recorded a match leading 72 digs, 46 assists, and six aces, as well as 47 kills and six blocks
The Wolves offense hit .205, while the defense held the Panthers to a .168 attack percentage
Morissen Samuels led the team with 18 kills and a .421 attack percentage, followed by Abby Brooks with eight kills and a .353 attack percentage
Keri Walker notched a double-double leading the team with 19 digs, as well as 39 assists, four kills, and three aces
Abby Meister and Sara Moberg added double figure digs as well with 18 and 11 respectively

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Morissen Samuels: 18 kills, .421 attack%, 5 digs, 1 block
Keri Walker: 39 assists, 19 digs, 4 kills, 3 aces
Abby Meister: 18 digs, 1 assist
Sara Moberg: 11 digs, 1 ace

HOW IT HAPPENED VS. PARKSIDE

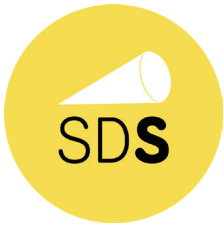
The Wolves opened the night cap with 25-19 and 25-22 victories in sets one and two, and added a 25-20 set-three win
Northern recorded a match high 47 kills, 42 assists, 62 digs, and eight aces
They hit .237, including a match high .283, and held the Rangers to hitting .205
Three Wolves notched double figure kills, led by Natalia Szybinska with 16 kills and a .24 attack percentage
Hanna Thompson and Abby Brooks followed with ten kills apiece, while Brooks led the team with a .643 hitting percentage
Keri Walker dished out 40 assists and added seven digs
Abby Meister and Reese Johnson led the defense with 25 and 14 digs respectively
Victoria Persha and Morissen Samuels led the team at the net with four blocks each

NORTHERN STATE STATISTICAL STANDOUTS

Natalia Szybinska: 16 kills, .324 attack%
Hanna Thompson: 10 kills, 8 digs, 2 blocks
Abby Brooks: 10 kills, .643 attack%, 2 blocks
Keri Walker: 40 assists, 7 digs
Abby Meister: 25 digs, 2 aces
Reese Johnson: 14 digs, 2 aces

UP NEXT

Northern State will face Lake Erie College and Wayne State University tomorrow. Match start times are set for 11 a.m. and 3 p.m. from Kenosha.



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

'It feels like being punished': Cancer survivors, advocates want protection from screening costs

Failed bill expected to return for 2025 legislative session

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - SEPTEMBER 13, 2024 5:31 PM

Cancer took so much from Doris Cardwell. She and her family were uprooted from rural South Dakota in 2007 to treat her aggressive breast cancer diagnosis.

She spent over a year in treatment: enduring radiation, a mastectomy, and a hysterectomy to hold the cancer at bay.

Nearly 17 years since the disease was last found in her body, cancer keeps on taking. Cardwell is paying thousands of dollars out of pocket for breast imaging to ensure her cancer hasn't returned.

And it's not just her. It's also her three daughters.

Cardwell, who lives in Spearfish, was 38 when she was diagnosed, so her daughters started screening when they were 28. Since their mother and grandmother were both diagnosed with breast cancer, they're considered high-risk patients in need of more frequent and intense preventative screening than an annual mammogram. Depending on their age and insurance, their mammogram might be covered, but not other screening methods.

Cardwell feels guilty because her out-of-pocket costs for her semi-annual breast MRIs are between \$3,000 and \$5,000 a visit, and she knows her daughters are saddled with those same costs.

"It feels like being punished for wanting to live a good life and catch things early," Cardwell said. "As a mother, I'm so thankful to be here and for the care I received that kept me alive, yet my heart breaks realizing how my daughters and grandchildren have to be physically and financially concerned."

Cardwell's daughters are among the 15% of women who are classified as high risk for breast cancer. For women in the United States, breast cancer is the most commonly diagnosed cancer and the second leading cause of cancer death.

Cardwell spoke to a legislative committee last winter in support of a bill that would prohibit health insurers from imposing cost-sharing on patients for supplemental and diagnostic breast cancer screenings. The committee rejected the bill, but she plans to speak to lawmakers again this winter since the bill's sponsor, Sioux Falls Democratic Rep. Erin Healy, plans to introduce it during the 2025 session if she is reelected.

South Dakota was one of 23 states where the legislation was introduced this year. Twenty-six states have passed such a law.



Doris Caldwell is a breast cancer survivor and resident of Spearfish. (Mark Watson/Black Hills Pioneer)

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Similar national measures are pending in Congress that would affect federally managed insurers.

The goal of all the bills is to make supplemental screenings as accessible and affordable as mammograms, which are required by the Affordable Care Act to be covered by insurers without cost sharing for women 40 and older.

High deductibles and copays can discourage patients from receiving breast cancer screenings and lead to worse breast cancer outcomes, according to a 2023 research article published in the journal *Radiology*.

Cardwell worked at a cancer treatment center after she went into remission, and she saw women who postponed follow-up testing because it was too expensive, she said.

In addition to high-risk patients, about half of women who are 40 or older have dense breasts, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Women with dense breasts have a higher chance of getting breast cancer, and because it's hard to tell the difference between a tumor and dense breast tissue on a mammogram, a small tumor may be missed or a doctor might recommend a more intensive test such as an ultrasound or MRI.

"The key is early detection reduces costs of treatment, and it increases survivability," Cardwell said. "It just makes sense in my mind, as a cancer survivor, that providing that second line of screening will save money in the long run."

In 2020, 80.5% of South Dakota women between 50 and 74 years old had a mammogram within the last two years, which is slightly higher than the national rate of 78.3%. The percentage of Native American women reporting being up to date on their mammogram screening was 56.3%, according to the state Department of Health.

While there are programs to assist uninsured and underserved women, including in South Dakota, proponents like Cardwell say the programs only reach a fraction of eligible women.

Why last year's bill in South Dakota didn't pass

There was over an hour of testimony and discussion about South Dakota's anti-cost-sharing bill during the last legislative session's committee hearing.

Lobbyists representing insurers spoke in opposition, saying the bill could lead to higher premiums. Kara Kelly, corporate communications manager with Wellmark Blue Cross Blue Shield, told South Dakota Searchlight in a written statement that the insurance company "opposes health insurance coverage mandates" in the Legislature.

"Each added benefit can increase premiums for our members, potentially making it harder for individuals and families to afford the essential care they need," Kelly said. "Our large network of providers allows us to improve access to care and, by working together, we strive to be transparent about costs, ensuring our members are informed and supported in their health care decisions."

Blake Severyn, a lobbyist representing the Independent Insurance Agents of South Dakota, spoke against the bill last legislative session and plans to do so again if it returns.

"We sympathize with those affected by breast cancer, obviously, and this is one of those topics where it's difficult to separate the sentimental aspect from the conversation," Severyn told Searchlight. "Each mandate they consider could raise premiums for everyone statewide and we're trying to avoid that. We're trying to keep premiums down for everybody."

Why is this coming back again?

Sometimes the Legislature needs to "protect the public and protect women," Sioux Falls Democratic Rep. Erin Healy told South Dakota Searchlight. As more women require supplemental annual screenings, "it just makes sense" to cover it as preventative.

"This is a really expensive screening and women can't afford it. Even with insurance it can be expensive," Healy said. "If we know that this is going to prevent serious cancer, or if we know that it's going to help women get the treatment they need sooner, I think it makes sense to intervene."

The bill is a priority for the South Dakota Advocacy Network for Women, a coalition advocating for

women's policy issues. Melissa McCauley is the lobbyist for the organization.

"I think it's important to realize other states have realized this impacts women's health and are saving women's lives," McCauley said.

Healy's mother died of breast cancer when the lawmaker was 19 years old. It's something Healy has had to carry with her as she's started a family with her husband. The 37-year-old will require preventative screening starting next year, based on her family history.

Her insurance will cover at least a portion of her screenings, and she expects she'll be able to cover the rest of the cost.

"My wish is that everyone, regardless of what kind of insurance they have, have the same opportunities people like me have been given," Healy said.

Healy was hesitant to bring the bill back to Pierre if she's reelected to the House of Representatives, until the Women's Advocacy Network prioritized it.

"If it's not the same bill, let's work on a better version so we can have better discussions," Healy said.

Cardwell plans to support the revived bill and continue speaking against barriers to screening and treatment for all cancers.

Cancer took a lot from her, she said, but it gave her things, too: empathy, patience, and most of all, perseverance.

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.

Soil-health group launches website connecting local food producers, consumers

BY: SEARCHLIGHT STAFF - SEPTEMBER 13, 2024 1:43 PM

A farmer- and rancher-led organization committed to promoting soil health recently launched a new online platform to help local food producers and consumers connect.

The South Dakota Soil Health Coalition's Fresh Connect website provides an interface to bridge the gap between farm-fresh goods and local demand.

Through the platform, producers can create free accounts to list available products on an interactive map, allowing consumers and restaurants to search for fresh local meat and produce by location and product type.

"The detailed farm profile allows us to showcase our unique growing practices and the quality of our offerings," said Chris Goldade, who owns and operates Flat Rock Farms near Westport. "By using Fresh Connect, we can introduce new, exciting products to our local residents and support a thriving local food economy."

The website is also designed to benefit small-scale and urban farmers, offering access to educational resources and opportunities for improving soil health, drought resilience and farm sustainability.

The South Dakota Fresh Connect website is made possible with financial assistance from the U.S. Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service.

'Gross negligence': Shortages in USDA food aid for Native Americans blasted in Congress

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - SEPTEMBER 13, 2024 1:22 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. Secretary of Agriculture Tom Vilsack apologized to tribal communities this week for delays in shipments and delivery of expired food during a tense congressional hearing that highlighted widespread failures within the Food Distribution Program on Native American reservations.

Vilsack's comments followed detailed testimony from leaders of the Chickasaw Nation, Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians and Spirit Lake Sioux Nation about the food shortages during a rare joint hearing of the House Appropriations and Agriculture committees.

"This is a dire issue that's evoked a genuine bipartisan and bicameral concern in Congress," said House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, who is a member of the Chickasaw Nation of Oklahoma.

The USDA, he said, had failed in its duty to provide "critical food assistance for tribal members and vulnerable senior citizens" for months, amounting to "gross negligence."

"Missed and delayed deliveries, empty shelves and bare warehouses have become commonplace," Cole said.

House Appropriations ranking member Rosa DeLauro, a Connecticut Democrat, said the food shortage was unacceptable.

"It must be among our government's highest priorities that the most vulnerable communities among us do not suffer from hunger," she said. "But this disruption to food deliveries has risked exactly that."

The Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations provides food to "income-eligible households living on Indian reservations, and to American Indian households residing in approved areas near reservations and in Oklahoma," according to a USDA fact sheet.

The USDA buys and ships food selected from a pre-approved list to state agencies and Indian Tribal Organizations, which in turn store and distribute the food to eligible participants.

Tribal representatives speak out

The three tribal representatives detailed how those bare shelves have affected their communities and how the USDA told tribes — rather than consulting with them — about a major change in the program's contract, leading to distrust and anger.

The three also pressed Congress for much more control over their food supply during the four-hour hearing.

Darrell G. Seki Sr., chairman of the Red Lake Band of Chippewa Indians in Minnesota, said his community's ability to feed people through the FDIR program was "jeopardized" by failures that have persisted throughout the summer.

"We need more consultation with tribes," Seki said. "We are the first Americans here. We should be the priority because of the treaties that were adopted under the U.S. Constitution."



Warehouse worker Robert Paschal stocks a cooler with fresh produce at the Food Distribution Program at Seminole Nation of Oklahoma, Nov. 6, 2018. (Preston

Keres/U.S. Department of Agriculture)

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Seki called on lawmakers to “do the right thing” numerous times during the hearing.

Mary Greene-Trottier, president of the National Association of Food Distribution Programs on Indian Reservations and a member of the Spirit Lake Sioux Nation in North Dakota, said the program is essential for tribal communities that exist in food deserts.

The Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, previously known as food stamps, doesn’t work in some tribal communities, making FDPIR a “critical stopgap,” she said.

“SNAP is an important tool in the feeding program toolbox, but is not meaningful if you lack access to a full-service grocery store or even a convenience store,” Greene-Trottier testified.

She told the committees the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations serves about 55,000 people in Native communities each month.

Greene-Trottier also said the problems that began this spring have led to a lack of trust in USDA throughout her community.

Self-determination project

Marty Wafford, under secretary of support and programs for the Chickasaw Nation Department of Health in Oklahoma, said there is an “urgent need for Congress to expand tribal self-governance.”

She testified that a self-determination demonstration pilot program Congress authorized in 2018, which allows some tribal communities to produce and supply more food, has been “highly successful.”

“This inventory and warehousing crisis is an example of how the locally procured food system works,” Wafford said. “We have not experienced ordering or delivery issues with foods secured with the self-determination project, in which we currently supply a variety of beef, pecans and dried hominy.”

For years, she said, tribal nations have been striving to reestablish food production, including growing crops, raising buffalo and cattle and establishing meat processing facilities and fish and shellfish hatcheries.

Tribal representatives testified that instead of consulting them on the change in contracting — that shifted from two suppliers to just one — USDA officials merely informed them in February and then didn’t take their concerns seriously.

Tribal communities were told they wouldn’t be allowed to order any food through the FDPIR program during the month of April, after which the delays, missing shipments and delivery of expired food began.

The USDA has put in place stopgap measures and short-term solutions, but tribal officials told members of Congress that those didn’t fully alleviate the situation, which they said continues to this day.

Tribal leaders called on Congress to make several changes to food procurement, including a regional sourcing model for food distribution.

They told lawmakers the FDPIR program needs a tracking system, so tribal members can see when their food orders have been shipped, instead of being forced to repeatedly call in and hope someone answers the phone.

Review of contracts required

Vilsack told lawmakers, and the tribal representatives who stayed in the room to hear his explanations for the food shortages, that USDA is “committed” to listening to tribal leaders more and keeping Congress better informed of problems with the food distribution program.

He explained that in 2022, USDA began the process of reviewing the contracts for the Food Distribution Program on Indian Reservations, in part because under the federal procurement law, the department wasn’t allowed any additional extensions of the previous contracts.

Following months of meetings and requesting bids from contractors, the USDA received eight proposals in 2023. One wasn’t close to meeting the requirements, leaving a panel with seven to review between September and December.

That group ultimately determined only one application, from Paris Brothers in Kansas City, Mo., met the full list of requirements. That company had been one of the two that USDA contracted with to provide food under the FDPIR program for years.

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Paris Brothers told the USDA at the time they had the capacity to handle the full contract, which Vilsack said later turned out not to be the case. The contract costs \$35 million per year for the five-year term, totaling \$175 million.

Once USDA realized there were mounting problems with the new single-supplier model, Vilsack said staff began working to implement fixes, both at Paris Brothers and for the tribal communities.

For example, the company increased work to seven days a week, boosted the number of shifts per day, hired more temporary and permanent workers and increased training.

The USDA has also signed a \$25 million six-month contract with another company to help alleviate the shortage of food deliveries to tribal communities.

Given Paris Brothers' long record, Vilsack said officials at USDA assumed the issues could be worked out.

But, he said, changes the USDA instituted in August should have taken place sooner and that lower-level staff at the department should have brought the problems to his attention months before he was informed in late July.

'Make sure nothing like this ever happens again'

Members of Congress on the two committees said they still have concerns over Paris Brothers and the USDA's management of the program.

"It's critical that this crisis is resolved quickly and the changes are made in the contracting process to make sure nothing like this ever happens again," Cole said.

House Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee Chairman Andy Harris, a Maryland Republican, said he expects the USDA to fire at least one person for not addressing the problems at Paris Brothers sooner and that the department needs to levy fines against the company.

"If somebody's head doesn't roll over this, the American taxpayer should be furious," Harris said. "This is tens of millions of dollars, and I'm not even talking about what we did to our tribal nations — delivering outdated food, missing shipments."

When the Appropriations panel next meets with USDA officials, Harris said, he expects witnesses to arrive with detailed information about what fines were levied against Paris Brothers and how much the federal government had to spend to ensure food delivery to tribal communities.

Harris expressed "no confidence" Paris Brothers would be able to reestablish on-time, unexpired food deliveries to tribal communities and questioned whether the company was fulfilling other contracts ahead of tribal communities.

"I suspect that they shorted the tribal nations while keeping other commercial contracts whole. And we should never tolerate that," Harris said.

Georgia Rep. Sanford Bishop, Jr., the ranking member on the Agriculture Appropriations Subcommittee, said it was a "shock" to hear of the problems within the FDPIR program after years of it being well run.

Bishop pressed for more funding for the Agricultural Marketing Service, the office within the USDA that handles contracting.

The last full-year government spending bill, which Congress approved earlier this year, provided 12% less in funding for the service than was requested, he said. That represented a \$14.8 million cut to its enacted funding level.

"Congress cannot meet 21st-century needs and challenges with 20th-century budgets," Bishop said.

Georgia Rep. David Scott, the top Democrat on the Agriculture Committee, said lawmakers must bring representatives from Paris Brothers in front of Congress to answer questions about the mismanagement.

Paris Brothers declined to comment in response to a request from States Newsroom, writing that "due to our ongoing work with USDA on this matter we are deferring all inquiries to the USDA communications team."

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.

Abortion rights opponents try to derail ballot initiatives

Measures that would protect abortion access are set for the ballot in 10 states — if challenges doesn't quash them

BY: ANNA CLAIRE VOLLERS, STATELINE - SEPTEMBER 13, 2024 9:48 AM

Measures that would protect abortion access are on track to appear on the ballot in 10 states in November, but abortion opponents are engaged in last-ditch legal maneuvering to try to prevent voters from weighing in on the proposals.

In Republican-dominated Missouri, for example, the state Supreme Court ruled this week that a constitutional amendment to legalize abortion up to the point of fetal viability must be put before voters— issuing its decision less than three hours before a constitutional deadline to finalize the ballot.

The day before, Missouri Republican Secretary of State Jay Ashcroft had decertified the measure in a bid to quash it. Anti-abortion state lawmakers and activists had sued Ashcroft last month, alleging his initial certification of the ballot measure was invalid because it failed to meet all legal requirements.

"This fight was not just about this amendment," Rachel Sweet, campaign manager for Missourians for Constitutional Freedom, said in a statement. Her group led the effort for the ballot measure. "It was about defending the integrity of the initiative petition process and ensuring that Missourians can shape their future directly."

In Nebraska and South Dakota, two other states where Republicans dominate state government, last-minute legal battles have created uncertainty about whether abortion access measures will stand even if voters approve them.

And in Florida, GOP officials used a state website to warn people against voting for a ballot measure that would expand abortion rights, while state police have shown up at the homes of people who signed the ballot measure petition to confirm that they actually signed it. Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis said police are investigating possible fraud, but abortion advocates argue the real goal is to intimidate voters. Republicans also control both chambers of that legislature.

The 10 states with abortion protection measures on the ballot are Arizona, Colorado, Florida, Maryland, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New York and South Dakota. In eight states, the measures were initiated by citizens who had to gather hundreds of thousands of signatures and navigate bureaucratic red tape to get them in front of voters. In two other states, Democratic-controlled Maryland and New York, legislators placed the measures on the ballot.

In several states, anti-abortion activists have tried to remove the measures from the ballot by arguing that they are overly broad, or that the citizen groups behind them didn't fully comply with state requirements.

Missouri state Sen. Mary Elizabeth Coleman and state Rep. Hannah Kelly, both Republicans, along with two other anti-abortion plaintiffs, filed the lawsuit that wound up before the Missouri Supreme Court.

"The Missouri Supreme Court turned a blind eye and ruled Missourians don't have to be fully informed



People associated with the Life Defense Fund protest outside a Sioux Falls library on May 1, 2024, as an abortion-rights group conducts a press conference inside.

(Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

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about the laws their votes may overturn before signing initiative petitions," the plaintiffs said in a joint statement shared by Kelly.

Nebraska voters will see dueling constitutional amendments on the ballot: One would establish the right to abortion up to fetal viability, while the other would ban nearly all abortions in the second and third trimesters of pregnancy.

But whether Nebraskans will get to vote on them depends on three lawsuits currently before the Nebraska Supreme Court, two of which target the abortion rights amendment. The third was filed by abortion rights advocates, asking the court to either allow both amendments on the ballot or neither of them. Nebraska Republican Secretary of State Bob Evnen must decide by today whether to certify the ballot.

A lawsuit over South Dakota's abortion amendment goes to trial later this month, after early voting in the state begins. An anti-abortion rights group sued in June to block the ballot question, challenging the validity of the petition's signatures.

The proposed amendment, which would limit how and when the state can regulate abortion, will appear on South Dakota's ballot regardless of the trial's outcome because the case wasn't decided by the Aug. 13 certification deadline. But if the court later rules the signatures invalid, it would nullify the results of the vote.

"These last-minute efforts are part of a relentless campaign to make it harder for voters to weigh in on an issue they care deeply about and that can permanently alter their lives," said Alice Clapman, senior counsel for voting rights at the Brennan Center for Justice, a voting rights group based at the New York University School of Law, in an email to Stateline.

"In states under one-party control, like Missouri, Nebraska and South Dakota, abortion opponents are trying to close off the only remaining avenue voters have to reform their laws," she wrote.

In Florida, the state health agency launched a "Florida is Protecting Life" website earlier this month that says Florida's abortion amendment "threatens women's safety" and warns voters, "Don't let the fearmongers lie to you." The site makes several other unsubstantiated claims, including that the amendment would lead to unregulated and unsafe abortions.

Asked about accusations that leadership misused public funds to launch the site, the agency defended the website in a statement: "Our new transparency page serves to educate Floridians on the state's current abortion laws and provide information on a proposed policy change that would impact care across the state."

But amendment advocates have decried the use of public money. Natasha Sutherland, communications director for Floridians Protecting Freedom, an organization behind the ballot measure, called it a "state-sponsored and taxpayer-funded political ad."

"Florida politicians are trying to take away our power to decide our future, which is why they are weaponizing a state agency and using taxpayer dollars to undermine the democratic process and threaten the freedoms of every Floridian," she told Stateline in an email.

Florida agency director Jason Weida said in a statement on the social platform X — shared by the agency's account — that the page was launched "to combat the lies and disinformation surrounding Florida's abortion laws." The agency also released a video this week directing people to the site.

Meanwhile, the Florida Department of State is reviewing thousands of signatures that were collected to get the amendment on the ballot, despite the signatures being verified by local supervisors months ago.

Last month, the Florida Supreme Court sided with the state in allowing language on the ballot that abortion-rights activists say improperly inflates the amendment's projected costs.

Since the U.S. Supreme Court dismantled the federal constitutional right to an abortion in June 2022, voters in half a dozen states, including conservative Kansas and Kentucky, have voted to protect abortion access. So far, voters have not defeated any abortion rights ballot measure.

A majority of likely Florida voters said they'd vote for the abortion rights measure there, according to a poll released last week by The Hill and Emerson College Polling. Fifty-five percent said they would vote yes on the amendment, while 26% plan to vote no, with 20% unsure. Nearly two-thirds of Arizona voters said they'd vote for Arizona's constitutional amendment to establish the right to an abortion up to fetal

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viability, according to a Fox News poll in August.

Clapman said chances of passage vary by state, based on factors including public opinion, the state's current abortion policy and how the ballot measures are worded.

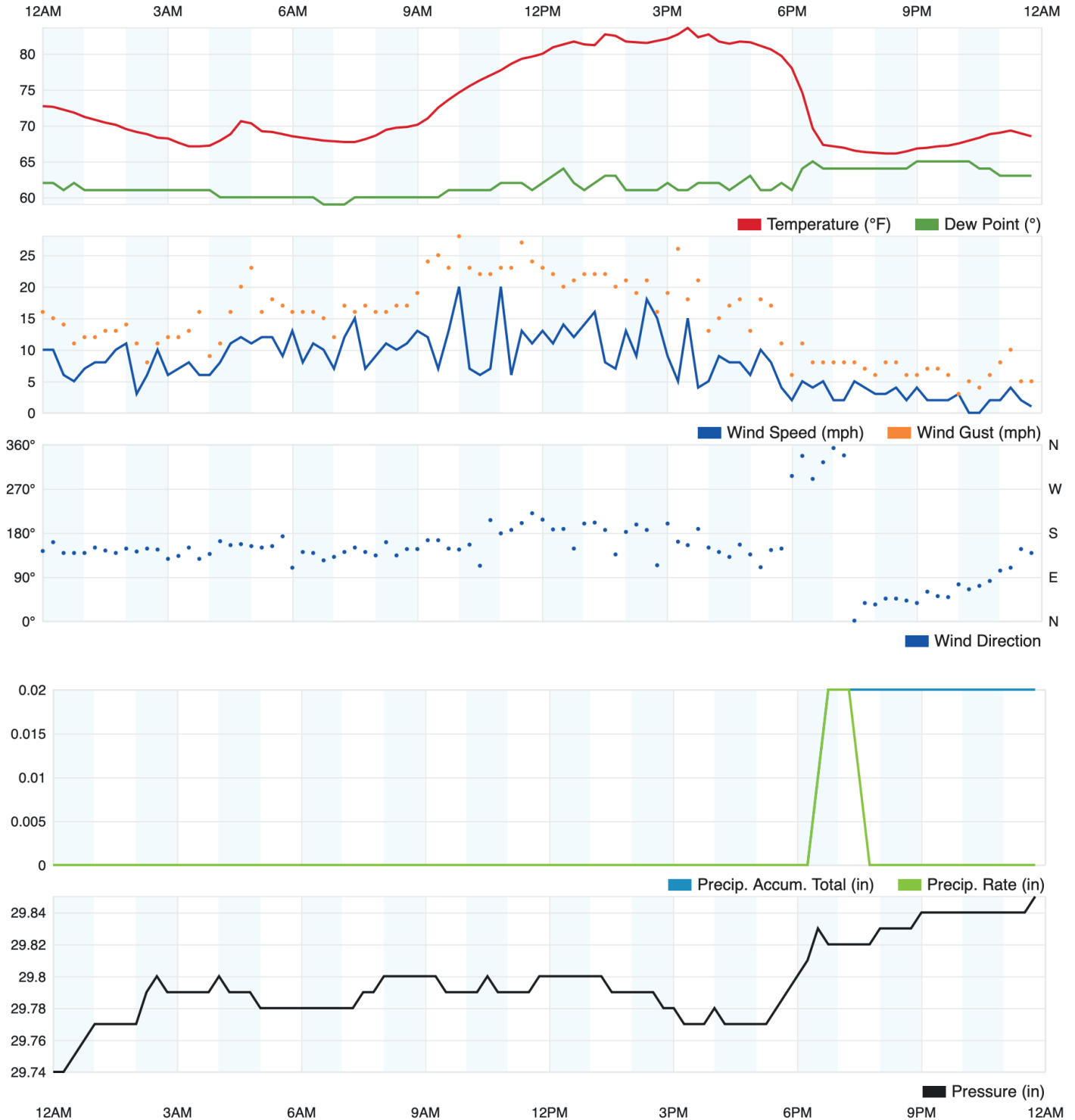
"Although voters in South Dakota, Missouri and Florida tend to be relatively conservative on abortion issues," she said, "they also may be particularly motivated to support abortion rights because they're currently living under abortion bans and are seeing and experiencing the dire effects of these bans."

Anna Claire Vollers covers health care for Stateline. She is based in Huntsville, Alabama.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 85 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 64 °F

Slight Chance
T-storms then
Partly Cloudy

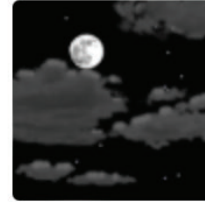
Sunday



High: 87 °F

Sunny

Sunday Night



Low: 66 °F

Partly Cloudy

Monday



High: 85 °F

Mostly Sunny
then Mostly
Sunny and
Breezy



The Weekend Outlook

September 14, 2024
4:59 AM

Today



Highs: 78-88°

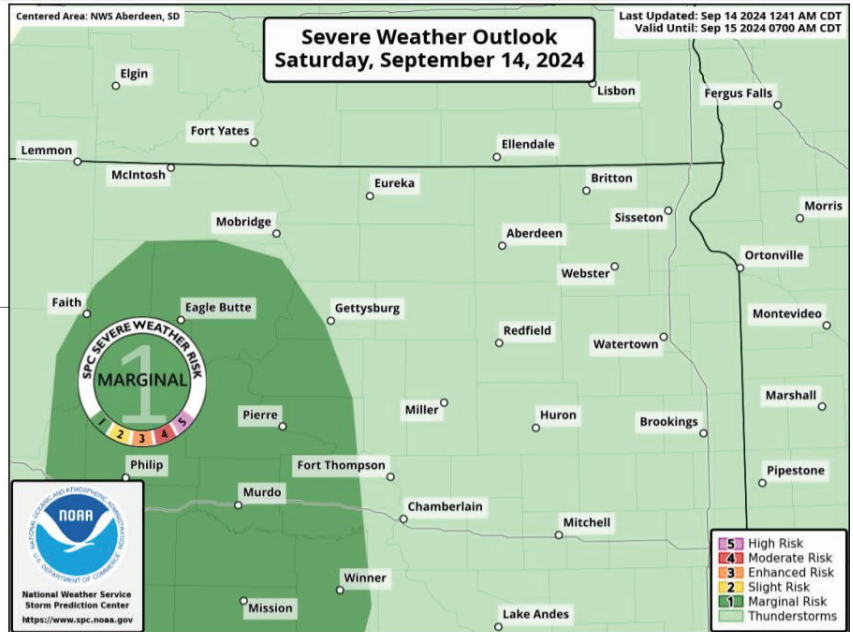
- Mainly afternoon & evening storms across central SD
- Isolated strong wind gusts and large hail

Sunday



Highs: 83-93°

- **Wind:** South 10-20mph with gusts between 20-30mph
- **Normal Highs:** 72-78°



National Weather Service
Aberdeen, SD

After some morning fog today, the area should be left with a mix of sun and clouds. A few late afternoon and evening storms will be possible across central South Dakota. A couple of these could turn strong to severe with large hail and damaging winds the main threats. Drier conditions are expected during the day on Sunday. Warm temperatures will persist not only through this weekend but into next week.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 84 °F at 3:27 PM

Low Temp: 66 °F at 8:23 PM

Wind: 28 mph at 10:01 AM

Precip: : 0.02

Day length: 13 hours, 36 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 102 in 1948

Record Low: 28 in 1949

Average High: 76

Average Low: 48

Average Precip in Sept.: 0.95

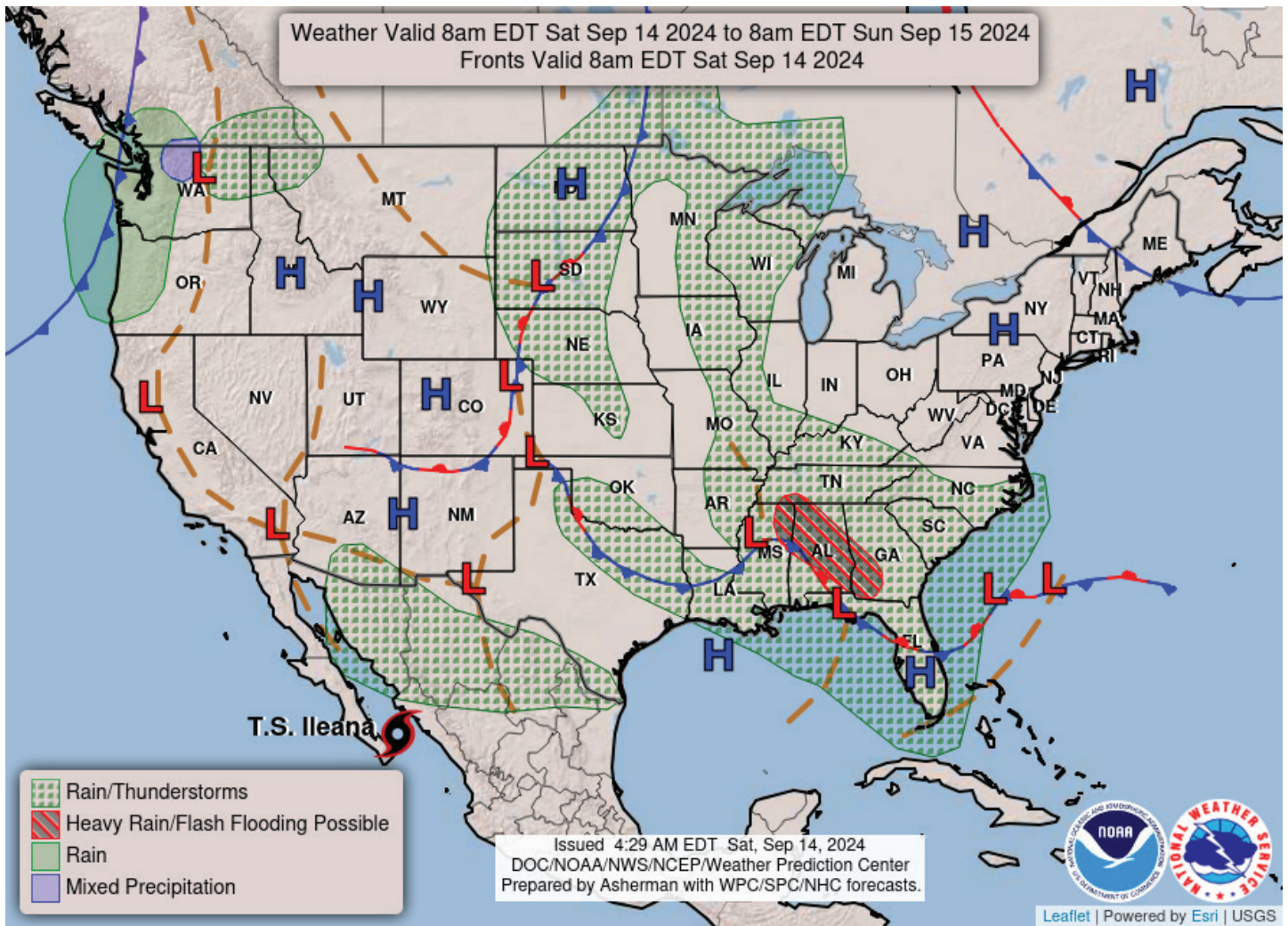
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.03

Average Precip to date: 17.29

Precip Year to Date: 19.45

Sunset Tonight: 7:46:10 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:10:24 am



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Today in Weather History

September 14, 1993: An early freeze and frost hit the state of South Dakota on the 14th and 15th. On the morning of the 14th, some low temperatures included 24 degrees at Rapid City, 19 degrees at Camp Crook and Porcupine, and 31 degrees at Pierre. The 24 degrees low at Rapid City broke the old record for the date by 10 degrees and was the earliest in the season it has ever been that cold. The air mass had moderated some by the time it hit eastern South Dakota early on the 15th. Some low temperatures on the 15th included 28 degrees at Brookings, 30 degrees at Watertown, and 32 at Sioux Falls.

1928: A violent, estimated F4 tornado, with winds of 200 mph, tore across Rockford, Illinois. The tornado first touched down 8 miles south-southwest of Rockford and moved across the southeast part of the city. The tornado was on the ground for 25 miles with a width varying from 200 to 500 feet. A total of 14 people were killed, with around 100 injuries reported in Rockford alone. Two hundred buildings were damaged or destroyed.

1937 - The mercury soared to 92 degrees at Seattle, WA, a record for September. (The Weather Channel)

1944 - A very destructive hurricane swept across Cape Hatteras and Chesapeake Bay, side swiped New Jersey and Long Island, and crossed southeastern Massachusetts. The hurricane killed more than four hundred persons, mainly at sea. The hurricane destroyed the Atlantic City NJ boardwalk. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1970 - The temperature at Fremont, OR, dipped to 2 above zero to equal the state record for September set on the 24th in 1926. (The Weather Channel)

1977: Severe thunderstorms produced several tornadoes in eastern Arkansas, killing one.

1987 - Barrow, AK, received 5.1 inches of snow, a record for September. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders - 1987)

1987 - Thunderstorms developing along a cold front produced severe weather from Minnesota to Texas. Thunderstorms in Iowa produced baseball size hail at Laporte City, and 80 mph winds at Laurens. Hail caused more than ten million dollars damage to crops in Iowa. Thunderstorms in Missouri produced wind gusts to 75 mph at Missouri City and Kansas City. A thunderstorm in Texas deluged the town of Fairlie with two inches of rain in just two hours. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Hurricane Gilbert made the first of its two landfalls on Mexico, producing 170 mph winds at Cozumel. (The Weather Channel)

1988 - Thunderstorms produced severe weather over the Texas panhandle during the evening hours. One thunderstorm spawned a strong (F-2) tornado in the southwest part of Amarillo, and deluged the area with five inches of rain. The heavy rain left roads under as much as five feet of water, and left Lawrence Lake a mile out of its banks. Hurricane Gilbert lost some of its punch crossing the Yucatan Peninsula of Mexico. Its maximum winds diminished to 120 mph. (The National Weather Summary) (Storm Data)

1989 - Unseasonably cool weather prevailed across the south central U.S. Eight cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Raton NM with a reading of 30 degrees. The afternoon high of 59 degrees at Topeka KS marked their third straight record cool maximum temperature. Unseasonably warm weather continued in the Pacific Northwest. Seattle WA reported a record eight days in a row of 80 degree weather in September. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2005: Hurricane Ophelia caused some damage and beach erosion along the United States coastline from Florida to North Carolina. The closest approach occurred on September 14 and 15 with its western eyewall crossing land and the eye remaining just offshore in the Carolinas.

2008: Hurricane Ike became extratropical on this day. The St. Louis Metropolitan Area experienced hurricane conditions, with Ike's remnants inflicting severe damage to homes. Several areas in Illinois and Indiana, already flooded by the frontal boundary to the north, saw significant additional rainfall. Due to flooding in Chicago, a state of emergency was declared for Cook County due to flooding of the Des Plaines River. Hurricane-force wind gusts were reported to the east of the center across parts of Kentucky, Indiana, Ohio, and Pennsylvania with significant wind damage including structural damage to buildings and trees.



MOTION WITHOUT MOVEMENT

Lucy was sitting behind her desk counseling Charlie Brown one sunny afternoon. Looking at him sternly she said, "Try to accomplish something!"

"Accomplish something," he responded quickly, "I thought we were just supposed to be busy."

Peter had some good advice in one of his most powerful sermons. He reminded his audience that "Jesus went around doing good and healing all who were oppressed by the devil, for God was with Him." Peter was reminding his listeners that Jesus lived a life of perfect Servanthood – always looking for and finding ways to accomplish God's work in His world. What is interesting about this sermon is its brevity: within a few sentences he was able to present the life, death on the cross and His resurrection as well as His fulfillment of all that had been written about Him in Scripture.

The effectiveness of our preaching or witnessing for Christ does not depend on the length of time we take to present His message. Rather, the source of the Christians' effectiveness is found in another statement in this sermon. Peter said that "God anointed Jesus with the Holy Spirit and with power."

Our Lord will bless our labors for Him when we become Spirit-filled and Spirit-led. Only then will our witness have His power and accomplish His will.

Prayer: Help us, Lord, to surrender our lives to You and be available to do Your work. May we realize the blessings that may be ours as we serve You today. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Spirit and power, and how he went around doing good and healing all who were under the power of the devil, because God was with him. Acts 10:38

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:
09.13.24

21 55 56 57 66 1

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$31,000,000

NEXT DRAW:

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 DRAW: 14 Hrs 5 Mins 19 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.13.24

14 15 18 33 40 9

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 20 Mins 19 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

1 15 17 21 25

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$29,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 20 Mins 20 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
09.11.24

6 9 15 17 20 3

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT DRAW: 14 Hrs 49 Mins 20 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 DRAW: 14 Hrs 49 Mins 19 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

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News from the **AP** Associated Press

Friday's Scores

The Associated Press

PREP VOLLEYBALL=

White River def. Colome, 25-15, 25-23, 25-11

Rapid City Volleyball Tournament=

Brookings def. Hill City, 25-23, 25-20

Brookings def. Kadoka, 26-28, 25-11, 25-18

Brookings def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-9, 25-14

Dakota Valley def. Belle Fourche, 25-11, 25-11

Dakota Valley def. Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud, 25-5, 25-13

Dakota Valley def. Rapid City Stevens, 23-25, 25-20, 25-15

Douglas def. Custer, 25-23, 25-22

Douglas def. St Thomas More, 7-25, 26-24, 25-23

Hill City def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-12, 25-7

Hot Springs def. Lakota Tech, 25-21, 25-13

Kadoka def. Hill City, 25-21, 25-15

Kadoka def. Lead-Deadwood, 25-17, 25-13

Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud def. Belle Fourche, 24-26, 26-24, 25-22

Rapid City Central def. Custer, 26-24, 25-12

Rapid City Central def. Douglas, 25-18, 27-25

Rapid City Central def. St Thomas More, 25-23, 25-22

Rapid City Christian def. Hot Springs, 25-23, 25-20

Rapid City Christian def. Lakota Tech, 25-14, 25-14

Rapid City Stevens def. Belle Fourche, 25-19, 25-11

Rapid City Stevens def. Mahpiya Luta Red Cloud, 25-9, 25-16

St Thomas More def. Custer, 25-17, 25-22

Some high school volleyball scores provided by Scorestream.com, <https://scorestream.com/>

6 teenage baseball players who took plea deals in South Dakota rape case sentenced

MITCHELL, S.D. (AP) — Six teenage players from a South Dakota American Legion baseball team who were charged as adults in a rape case last summer have been sentenced to fines and community service after accepting plea deals.

A judge on Thursday sentenced the former Mitchell Legion players, Sioux Falls' KELO-TV reported. They each pleaded guilty to accessory to a felony as part of a plea deal earlier this year.

Prosecutors said the teenage defendants, born between the years of 2004 and 2006, raped a teammate during a baseball trip last year in Rapid City.

"What happened to the victim in this case was unacceptable," said Roxanne Hammond of the Pennington County State's Attorney's Office. "It was not just a hazing incident: It was rape."

The Pennington County State's Attorney's Office had asked for 10-day jail sentences for the former players. But Presiding Circuit Judge Robert Gusinsky suspended the imposition of that sentence, instead putting the defendants on probation.

Gusinsky said the victim asked that the defendants not face jail time or be listed as sex offenders.

"They will have the ability to move on from mistakes made as teenagers," Hammond said in a statement posted on Facebook after the sentencing.

The defendants apologized in court, KELO-TV reported. Two cried as they said they were ashamed of the harm they caused, according to the station.

Attorney Matt Kinney represented one of the former players and said his client is pleased with the sentencing.

Lawyers for the other five defendants did not immediately respond to Associated Press phone calls and voice messages requesting comment Friday.

The judge during sentencing also called out parents who he said laughed when they learned of the incident and others who smirked when video of the assault was played in court.

"The fact that I am sitting here today explaining to a courtroom full of people why the video we just watched is a crime makes me sad for my own hometown," Hammond said in court.

Canadian man admits shootings that damaged electrical substations in the Dakotas

BISMARCK, N.D. (AP) — A Canadian man has pleaded guilty to federal crimes for shootings at electrical substations and an oil pipeline in the Dakotas that caused \$1.7 million in damages.

Cameron Monte Smith pleaded guilty Wednesday in U.S. District Court in Bismarck, North Dakota, to two counts of destruction of an energy facility — one in North Dakota and one in South Dakota. He could face up to 20 years in prison and fines of up to \$250,000 on each charge, the Bismarck Tribune reported. Sentencing is in December.

Federal authorities said Smith, 49, was in the U.S. illegally when he fired shots into the Wheelock Substation near Ray, North Dakota, in May 2023, knocking out power for over 240 people and causing \$1.2 million in damage.

Smith also was convicted of firing shots at a transformer and pump station of the Keystone Pipeline near Carpenter, South Dakota, in July 2022. The shooting disrupted operations of the pipeline that moves Canadian oil through parts of the U.S. Damage was estimated at nearly \$500,000.

A plea agreement calls for Smith to pay restitution.

Federal court records don't cite a possible motive. Documents in North Dakota state court, where Smith was initially charged, said officers observed "DAPL" and other unspecified symbols spray-painted near the substation. DAPL references the Dakota Access oil pipeline that was opposed by many Native American tribes and environmentalists.

"This defendant deliberately and very violently attacked our nation's energy infrastructure," North Dakota U.S. Attorney Mac Schneider said in a statement. "Our law enforcement partners put an end to those attacks, and this guilty plea provides a measure of accountability for the defendant's actions and extensive damage he caused."

Defense attorney Kevin Chapman said Smith's plea is conditional, reserving the right to appeal. A judge earlier denied a motion to suppress evidence that the defense maintained was based upon illegal searches and seizures.

Iran says it successfully launched a satellite in its program criticized by West over missile fears

By NASSER KARIMI and JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

TEHRAN, Iran (AP) — Iran launched a satellite into space Saturday with a rocket built by the country's paramilitary Revolutionary Guard, state-run media reported, the latest for a program the West fears helps Tehran advance its ballistic missile program.

Iran described the launch as a success, which would be the second such launch to put a satellite into orbit with the rocket. There was no immediate independent confirmation of the launch's success.

Footage later released by Iranian media showed the rocket blast off from a mobile launcher. The video suggested the launch happened at the Guard's launch pad on the outskirts of the city of Shahroud, some 350 kilometers (215 miles) east of the capital, Tehran.

The launch comes amid heightened tensions gripping the wider Middle East over the ongoing Israel-Hamas

war in the Gaza Strip, during which Tehran launched an unprecedented direct missile-and-drone attack on Israel. Meanwhile, Iran continues to enrich uranium to nearly weapons-grade levels, raising concerns among nonproliferation experts about Tehran's program.

Iran identified the satellite-carrying rocket as the Qaem-100, which the Guard used in January for another successful launch. Qaem means "upright" in Iran's Farsi language. The solid-fuel rocket put the Chamran-1 satellite, weighing 60 kilograms (132 pounds), into a 550-kilometer (340-mile) orbit, state media reported.

The U.S. State Department and the American military did not immediately respond to requests for comment over the Iranian launch.

The United States had previously said Iran's satellite launches defy a U.N. Security Council resolution and called on Tehran to undertake no activity involving ballistic missiles capable of delivering nuclear weapons. U.N. sanctions related to Iran's ballistic missile program expired last October.

Under Iran's relatively moderate former President Hassan Rouhani, the Islamic Republic slowed its space program for fear of raising tensions with the West. Hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi, a protege of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who came to power in 2021, has pushed the program forward. Raisi died in a helicopter crash in May.

It's unclear what Iran's new president, the reformist Masoud Pezeshkian, wants for the program as he was silent on the issue while campaigning.

The U.S. intelligence community's worldwide threat assessment this year said Iran's development of satellite launch vehicles "would shorten the timeline" for Iran to develop an intercontinental ballistic missile because it uses similar technology.

Intercontinental ballistic missiles can be used to deliver nuclear weapons. Iran is now producing uranium close to weapons-grade levels after the collapse of its nuclear deal with world powers. Tehran has enough enriched uranium for "several" nuclear weapons, if it chooses to produce them, the head of the International Atomic Energy Agency repeatedly has warned.

Iran has always denied seeking nuclear weapons and says its space program, like its nuclear activities, is for purely civilian purposes. However, U.S. intelligence agencies and the IAEA say Iran had an organized military nuclear program up until 2003.

The launch also came ahead of the second anniversary of the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini, which sparked nationwide protests against Iran's mandatory headscarf, or hijab, law and the country's Shiite theocracy.

Tropical Storm Ileana heads northward over the southern Gulf of California, bringing heavy rains

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Mexico issued a tropical storm warning Saturday along the coast, from Altata to Huatabampito, and has discontinued all watches and warnings for Baja California Sur after rain from Storm Ileana pounded the resort-studded Los Cabos a day before.

Ileana moved northward over the southern Gulf of California at 7mph (11 kph), according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center. The storm was about 70 miles (110 km) east of La Paz, Mexico with maximum sustained winds of 40 mph (65 kph), the center said.

Tropical storm warnings have been issued for the coasts of northern Sinaloa and extreme southern Sonora.

On Friday, a warning was in effect for portions of the Baja California Peninsula, including Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo.

Juan Manuel Arce Ortega, from Los Cabos Civil Protection, said the municipalities of La Paz and Los Cabos were on red alert at the time and urged residents to avoid crossing rivers, streams, and low areas where they can be swept away by water.

All schools in Los Cabos were also suspended Friday due to the storm.

Oscar Cruces Rodríguez of Mexico's federal Civil Protection said in a statement that residents should avoid leaving their homes until the storm passes and if residents are in an area at risk of flooding to find temporary shelters.

Authorities prepared 20 temporary shelters in San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, according to Los

Cabos Civil Protection.

At the Hacienda Beach Club and Residences in Cabo San Lucas, valet worker Alan Galvan said the rain arrived late Thursday night and has been constant. "The rain isn't very strong right now, but the waves are choppy," he said.

"The guests are very calm and already came down for coffee," Galvan said. "There's some flights canceled but everything is ok at the moment." Galvan said they are awaiting further advisories from authorities.

The rain remained consistent through Los Cabos Friday afternoon, with several roads flooded and some resorts stacking up sandbags on their perimeters. Some people were still walking around boat docks with their umbrellas.

"The priority has to be safety, starting with the workers. We always have to check on our colleagues who live in risk areas," said Lyzzette Liceaga, a tour operator at Los Cabos.

We give them the information shared by the authorities — firefighters in risk areas — so that they can go to the shelters if necessary," she added.

Israel strikes Gaza as an American activist killed by Israeli fire is buried

By WAFAA SHURAFI and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Israeli airstrikes hit central and southern Gaza overnight into Saturday, killing at least 14 people as friends and family members of a Turkish-American activist killed by an Israeli soldier prepared to honor her in a funeral.

The airstrikes in Gaza City hit one home housing 11 people, including three women and four children, and another strike hit a tent in Khan Younis with Palestinians displaced by the Israel-Hamas war, Gaza's Civil Defense said Saturday. They followed airstrikes earlier this week that hit a tent camp on Tuesday and a United Nations school sheltering displaced on Wednesday.

A campaign to inoculate children in Gaza against polio drew down and the World Health Organization said about 559,000 under the age of 10 have recovered from their first dose, seven out of every eight children the campaign aimed to vaccinate. The second doses are expected to begin later this month as part of an effort in which the WHO said parties had already agreed to.

"As we prepare for the next round in four weeks, we're hopeful these pauses will hold, because this campaign has clearly shown the world what's possible when peace is given a chance," Richard Peepkorn, WHO's representative in Gaza and the West Bank, said in a statement on Saturday.

Meanwhile, the body of Aysenur Ezgi Eygi, the Turkish-American activist killed Sept. 6 by an Israeli soldier, was returned to her hometown late Friday accompanied by a police honor guard, the official Turkish news agency reported.

Draped in a Turkish flag, the coffin was carried from a hearse to a hospital in Didim by six officers in a ceremonial uniform. Her funeral is due to be held in the coastal town in western Turkey later Saturday.

The 26-year-old activist from Seattle, who held United States and Turkish citizenship, was killed after a demonstration against Israeli settlements in the occupied West Bank, according to an Israeli protester who witnessed the shooting.

The Israeli military said Tuesday that Eygi was likely shot "indirectly and unintentionally" by Israeli forces. Turkey announced it will conduct its own investigation into her death.

Anadolu Agency reported her body arrived in Didim after an autopsy at the Izmir Forensic Medicine Institute.

As Eygi's family watched the coffin being unloaded, her mother had to be helped by medics, the agency said.

Her death was condemned by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken as the United States, Egypt and Qatar push for a cease-fire and the release of the remaining hostages held by Hamas. Talks have repeatedly bogged down as Israel and Hamas accuse each other of making new and unacceptable demands.

The war began when Hamas-led fighters killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in an Oct. 7 attack on southern Israel. They abducted another 250 people and are still holding around 100 hostages after

releasing most of the rest in exchange for Palestinians imprisoned by Israel during a weeklong cease-fire in November. Around a third of the remaining hostages are believed to be dead.

The war has caused vast destruction and displaced around 90% of Gaza's population of 2.3 million, often multiple times, and plunged the territory into a severe humanitarian crisis. Gaza's Health Ministry says over 41,000 Palestinians have been killed since the war began. The ministry does not distinguish between civilians and militants in its count, but says women and children make up just over half of the dead. Israel says it has killed more than 17,000 militants in the war.

Takeaways from AP's report updating the cult massacre that claimed hundreds of lives in Kenya

By The Associated Press undefined

In one of the deadliest cult-related massacres ever, the remains of more than 430 victims have been recovered since police raided Good News International Church in a forest some 70 kilometers (40 miles) inland from the Kenyan coastal town of Malindi.

Seventeen months later, many in the area are still shaken by what happened despite repeated warnings about the church's leader.

Autopsies on more than 100 bodies showed deaths from starvation, strangulation, suffocation, and injuries sustained from blunt objects. A gravedigger, Shukran Karisa Mangi, said he believed more mass graves were yet to be discovered. At least 600 people are reported missing, according to the Kenya Red Cross.

Here are some details about the case.

The church's leader is on trial

The evangelical leader of Good News, Paul Mackenzie, is accused of instructing his followers to starve to death for the opportunity to meet Jesus. Mackenzie pleaded not guilty to charges in the murders of 191 children, multiple counts of manslaughter and other crimes. If convicted, he would spend the rest of his life in prison.

Some in Malindi who spoke to The Associated Press said Mackenzie's confidence while in custody showed the wide-ranging power some evangelists project even as their teachings undermine government authority, break the law, or harm followers desperate for healing and other miracles.

It's not only Mackenzie, said Thomas Kakala, a self-described bishop with the Malindi-based Jesus Cares Ministry International, referring to questionable pastors he knew in the capital Nairobi. "You look at them. If you are sober and you want to hear the word of God, you wouldn't go to their church. But the place is packed."

A man like Mackenzie, who refused to join the fellowship of pastors in Malindi and rarely quoted Scripture, could thrive in a country like Kenya, said Kakala. Six detectives have been suspended for ignoring multiple warnings about Mackenzie's illegal activities.

Kakala said he felt discouraged in his attempts to discredit Mackenzie years ago. The evangelist had played a tape of Kakala on his TV station and declared him an enemy. Kakala felt threatened.

Mackenzie's ascent to a position of power

Mackenzie, a former street vendor and cab driver with a high-school education, apprenticed with a Malindi preacher in the late 1990s. There, in the laid-back tourist town, he opened his own church in 2003.

A charismatic preacher, he was said to perform miracles and exorcisms, and could be generous with his money. His followers included teachers and police officers. They came to Malindi from across Kenya, giving Mackenzie national prominence that spread the pain of the deaths across the country.

The first complaints against Mackenzie concerned his opposition to formal schooling and vaccination. He was briefly detained in 2019 for opposing the government's efforts to assign national identification numbers to Kenyans, saying the numbers were satanic.

He closed his Malindi church premises later that year and urged his congregation to follow him to Shakahola, where he leased 800 acres of forest inhabited by elephants and big cats.

Church members paid small sums to own plots in Shakahola. They were required to build houses and

live in villages with biblical names like Nazareth, according to survivors. They said Mackenzie grew more demanding, with people from different villages forbidden from communicating or gathering.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which witnesses said strengthened Mackenzie's vision of the end times, the leader ordered more rigorous fasting that became even more stringent by the end of 2022. Parents were forbidden from feeding their children, witnesses said.

Evangelical churches are proliferating in Kenya

Like much of East Africa, Kenya is dominated by Christians. While many are Anglican or Catholic, evangelical Christianity has been spreading widely since the 1980s. Many pastors style their ministries in the manner of successful U.S. televangelists, investing in broadcasting and advertising.

Many of Africa's evangelical churches are run like sole proprietorships, without the guidance of trustee boards or laity. Pastors are often unaccountable, deriving authority from their perceived ability to perform miracles or make prophecies. Some, like Mackenzie, can seem all-powerful.

The church was named Good News. Hundreds of members died in a cult massacre that haunts survivors

By RODNEY MUHUMUZA Associated Press

MALINDI, Kenya (AP) — Shukran Karisa Mangi always showed up drunk at work, where he dug up the bodies of doomsday cult members buried in shallow graves. But the alcohol couldn't numb his shock the morning he found the body of a close friend, whose neck had been twisted so severely that his head and torso faced opposite directions.

This violent death upset Mangi, who had already unearthed children's bodies. The number of bodies kept rising in this community off Kenya's coastline where extremist evangelical leader Paul Mackenzie is accused of instructing his followers to starve to death for the opportunity to meet Jesus.

While he sometimes sees the remains of others when he tries to sleep, Mangi said recently, the recurring image of his friend's mutilated body torments him when he's awake.

"He died in a very cruel manner," said Mangi, one of several gravediggers whose work was suspended earlier in the year as bodies piled up in the morgue. "Most of the time, I still think about how he died."

In one of the deadliest cult-related massacres ever, at least 436 bodies have been recovered since police raided Good News International Church in a forest some 70 kilometers (40 miles) inland from the coastal town of Malindi. Seventeen months later, many in the area are still shaken by what happened despite repeated warnings about the church's leader.

Mackenzie pleaded not guilty to charges in the murders of 191 children, multiple counts of manslaughter and other crimes. If convicted, he would spend the rest of his life in prison.

Some in Malindi who spoke to The Associated Press said Mackenzie's confidence while in custody showed the wide-ranging power some evangelists project even as their teachings undermine government authority, break the law, or harm followers desperate for healing and other miracles.

It's not only Mackenzie, said Thomas Kakala, a self-described bishop with the Malindi-based Jesus Cares Ministry International, referring to questionable pastors he knew in the capital, Nairobi.

"You look at them. If you are sober and you want to hear the word of God, you wouldn't go to their church," he said. "But the place is packed."

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Kakala said he felt discouraged in his attempts to discredit Mackenzie years ago. The evangelist had played a tape of Kakala on his TV station and declared him an enemy. Kakala felt threatened.

"Those were some of his powers, and he was using them," Kakala said.

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A charismatic preacher, he was said to perform miracles and exorcisms, and could be generous with his money. His followers included teachers and police officers. They came to Malindi from across Kenya, giving Mackenzie national prominence that spread the pain of the deaths across the country.

"As a religious leader, I see Mackenzie as a very mysterious man because I can't fathom how he was able to kill all those people in one place," said Famau Mohamed, a sheikh in Malindi. "But one thing that's still puzzling, even at the moment, is he still talks with so much courage. ... He feels like he did nothing wrong."

The first complaints against Mackenzie concerned his opposition to formal schooling and vaccination. He was briefly detained in 2019 for opposing the government's efforts to assign national identification numbers to Kenyans, saying the numbers were satanic.

He closed his Malindi church premises later that year and urged his congregation to follow him to Shakahola, where he leased 800 acres of forest inhabited by elephants and big cats.

Church members paid small sums to own plots in Shakahola, and were required to build houses and live in villages with biblical names like Nazareth, according to survivors. Mackenzie grew more demanding, with people from different villages forbidden from communicating or gathering, said former church member Salama Masha.

"What made me (realize) Mackenzie was not a good person was when he said that the children should fast to die," said Masha, who escaped after witnessing the starvation deaths of two children. "That's when I knew that it's not something I can do."

The grass-thatched house with a solar panel where Mackenzie lived was known as "ikulu," or statehouse. Police found milk and bread in Mackenzie's refrigerator as his followers starved nearby. He had bodyguards. He had informers. And, decisively, he had his aura as the self-proclaimed prophetic "paapa" to thousands of obedient followers.

"(He's) like a chief, because they had a small village and my brother's the elder of that particular village," said Robert Mbatha Mackenzie, speaking of his older brother's authority in Shakahola. "He went there, and, in only two years, he made a big village. And many people followed him there."

Mbatha Mackenzie, a mason who lives with his family and goats in a tin shack in Malindi, said that while Mackenzie was generous to his followers, he never treated his extended family with similar kindness.

"My brother — he seemed like a politician," he said. "They have a sweet tongue, and when he talks something to the people, people believe him."

A former church member who escaped Shakahola said she lost faith in Mackenzie when she saw how his men handled people on the verge of dying from starvation. She said Mackenzie's bodyguards would take the starving person away, never to be seen again.

The woman said it was "like a routine" for the bodyguards to rape women in the villages. She says she, too, was sexually assaulted by four men while she was pregnant with her fourth child. The Associated Press does not identify victims of alleged sexual assault unless they choose to publicly identify themselves.

Those who tried to leave the forest without Mackenzie's permission faced beatings, as did those who were caught breaking fast, according to former church members.

Autopsies on more than 100 bodies showed deaths from starvation, strangulation, suffocation, and injuries sustained from blunt objects. Mangi, the gravedigger, said he believed more mass graves were yet to be discovered in Shakahola. At least 600 people are reported missing, according to the Kenya Red Cross.

Priscillar Riziki, who left Mackenzie's church in 2017 but lost her daughter and three grandchildren in Shakahola, broke down as she remembered Mackenzie as "good at first" but increasingly discourteous to his followers. Her daughter Lorine was not allowed to take her children on family visits without Mackenzie's approval, Riziki said.

One of Riziki's grandchildren was identified through DNA analysis and received a proper burial. Lorine

and two of her children are presumed dead.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, which witnesses said strengthened Mackenzie's vision of the end times, the leader ordered more rigorous fasting that became even more stringent by the end of 2022. Parents were forbidden from feeding their children, witnesses said.

Some church members who escaped Shakahola spread word of suffering there, once causing a fight inside the forest when outsiders riding motorcycles attempted a rescue mission, said village elder Changawa Mangi Yaah.

The rescue party had two of their motorcycles burned in Shakahola, but the police failed to act beyond making brief arrests, Yaah said, adding that he realized "Mackenzie was more powerful than I thought."

Residents of Mexico City suburb are anxious after living over a month in black sewage water

By MARIANA MARTÍNEZ BARBA Associated Press

CHALCO, Mexico (AP) — As 56-year-old Juana Salazar Segundo walked through her home in Chalco, a low-income suburb southeast of Mexico City, she recalled how black, reeking water had reached up to her belly button after flooding early last month.

With the receding liquid now down to her ankles, Salazar waddled into her furniture-less bedroom, where only a water pump hummed in the corner. Large black blotches stained the once white walls.

Sewage-infused floodwaters have invaded streets, homes and businesses in Salazar's Culturas neighborhood of Chalco for over a month.

The low-lying area at the edge of what was once an ancient lake has long been plagued by seasonal flooding, but residents say this year has been worse, a combination of unchecked growth and failing infrastructure.

According to Chalco's government, more than 2,000 homes and over 7,000 residents have been affected. The water was as deep as 5 feet (160 centimeters) in some areas.

Over the past several weeks, Salazar has used four pumps running around the clock to clear water from her home. Her hands and legs are stained with black and gray streaks from coming into contact with the tainted floodwaters.

"Day and night we couldn't sleep, the water just rose and rose," she said.

"I've been saying for years that the drain systems have collapsed," said Salazar. "I haven't been able to work because I have to take care of my things, my daughter hasn't been able to take her son to school ... we're just surviving."

Omar Arellano-Aguilar, a biologist and expert in environmental toxicology at the National Autonomous University of Mexico, said the combination of drainage failures and the geological structure of the area makes it more vulnerable to floods.

"All of these urban areas have grown haphazardly over the last 50 years," he said.

A city of more than 400,000, since the late 1980s Chalco has grown to become one of the largest cities in the State of Mexico, but it still lacks basic water and power infrastructure.

Mexico's President Andrés Manuel López Obrador has downplayed the crisis in Chalco and said he wouldn't pay the disaster zone a visit.

"It's being taken care of," he said during one of his daily press briefings last month. "It's the same reason I didn't go to Acapulco," referring to the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Otis that killed at least 48 people. "It's like vulture season," he said regarding the press asking him about it.

State Gov. Delfina Gómez has visited the neighborhood a handful of times. The governor and Chalco's government did not respond to requests for interviews from The Associated Press.

Local, state and federal officials have been working in the area, using massive pumps to lower the water, vaccinating residents and providing potable water.

Outside of Salazar's home, the sun pounded on the neighborhood as the acidic stench of the sewage water and silt stretched for miles.

A block away, Oscar Martínez Hinojosa, 49, adjusted the hose for one of his water pumps.

Martínez said that when the flooding started they weren't given any boots or protective clothing by the government. "They didn't give us anything, no food, not a single pair of overalls ... and we asked for them," he said.

Martínez lives with his five family members crowded into a top floor room where there is no damage. Downstairs, the courtyard and other bedrooms are swamped with ankle-deep water.

Another resident, Guadalupe Sarai Islas García, 32, said health problems have abounded from the sewage water. Her baby was throwing up and experiencing diarrhea for over a week when the flooding persisted.

"None of the politicians know what it's like to live like this," she said. "They get to go home, have a shower, dine in peace and sleep without a care in the world."

Since her home flooded weeks ago, she sent her kids to stay with her mother so they wouldn't be exposed to any more filth. Other residents have taken similar precautions and even started renting rooms in neighboring Ciudad Nezahualcóyotl.

However, the dozens of trucks from the state and local governments lined up on Chalco's main street pumping tons of water from the neighborhood have helped reduce the water.

Residents who have managed to lower their water levels are now removing debris and silt from their homes.

As of last weekend, authorities reported there were no flooded streets remaining and that they had removed 245 tons of silt. They have also extracted more than 264 million gallons (1 million cubic meters) of water. They also began cleaning and disinfecting 28 streets affected by the flooding.

At a primary school located off the main intersection, Principal Maria Luisa Molina Avila said she felt positive about the latest renovations they had done to the grounds after flood damage to the school. The flooding delayed the start of the school year by two weeks for thousands of students.

"This has been like a rollercoaster, however fortunately many of the streets are now dry," she said. Along with her daughter and son they drained, swept and cleaned the school to prepare for students' arrival.

"It's a relief for the kids they get to go back to school," said resident García. "Now that our stress has been at an all time high."

Back across town, Salazar made her way to a street corner accompanied by her dog "Oso" or "bear" to attend a neighborhood meeting. She gathered with others waiting for further updates about the construction of a drainage pipe that was set to start that morning.

As the afternoon rain started to sprinkle, a crowd of residents grew frustrated at the officials leading the construction. "Where's the solution to this?" one person said. "We want you to start working! Look it's already raining," another yelled.

Standing patiently at the edge of the crowd with "Oso," Salazar took in the scene silently. Like many of her neighbors, she's patient for a solution.

But Arellano-Aguilar doubted retroactive fixes would work in the ever-sinking terrain. "For all the pipes they add, nothing is going to change," he said. "On the contrary, all the infrastructure that's put in now will suffer the effects of subsidence."

Besides investing in more capable drainage systems, Arellano-Aguilar said stakeholders need to think about areas in the basin where they can redirect rainwater.

"We need to start learning how to live alongside the water and accept that there are areas that have to be flooded," he said.

Women in Iran are going without hijabs as the 2nd anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death approaches

By JON GAMBRELL Associated Press

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — On the streets of Iranian cities, it's becoming more common to see a woman passing by without a mandatory headscarf, or hijab, as the second anniversary of the death of Mahsa Amini and the mass protests it sparked approaches.

There's no government official or study acknowledging the phenomenon, which began as Iran entered

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its hot summer months and power cuts in its overburdened electrical system became common. But across social media, videos of people filming neighborhood streets or just talking about a normal day in their life, women and girls can be seen walking past with their long hair out over their shoulders, particularly after sunset.

This defiance comes despite what United Nations investigators describe as “expanded repressive measures and policies” by Iran’s theocracy to punish them — though there’s been no recent catalyzing event like Amini’s death to galvanize demonstrators.

The country’s new reformist President Masoud Pezeshkian campaigned on a promise to halt the harassment of women by morality police. But the country’s ultimate authority remains the 85-year-old Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, who in the past said “unveiling is both religiously forbidden and politically forbidden.”

For some observant Muslim women, the head covering is a sign of piety before God and modesty in front of men outside their families. In Iran, the hijab — and the all-encompassing black chador worn by some — has long been a political symbol as well.

“Meaningful institutional changes and accountability for gross human rights violations and crimes under international law, and crimes against humanity, remains elusive for victims and survivors, especially for women and children,” warned a U.N. fact-finding mission on Iran on Friday.

Amini, 22, died on Sept. 16, 2022, in a hospital after her arrest by the country’s morality police over allegedly not wearing her hijab to the liking of the authorities. The protests that followed Amini’s death started first with the chant “Women, Life, Freedom.” However, the protesters’ cries soon grew into open calls of revolt against Khamenei.

A monthslong security crackdown that followed killed more than 500 people and saw over 22,000 detained.

Today, passersby on the streets of Tehran, whether its tony northern suburbs for the wealthy or the working-class neighborhoods of the capital’s southern reaches, now routinely see women without the hijab. It particularly starts at dusk, though even during the daylight on weekends women can be seen with their hair uncovered at major parks.

Online videos — specifically a sub-genre showing walking tours of city streets for those in rural areas or abroad who want to see life in the bustling neighborhoods of Tehran — include women without the hijab.

Something that would have stopped a person in their tracks in the decades following the 1979 Islamic Revolution now goes unacknowledged.

“My quasi-courage for not wearing scarves is a legacy of Mahsa Amini and we have to protect this as an achievement,” said a 25-year-old student at Tehran Sharif University, who gave only her first name Azadeh out of fear of reprisal. “She could be at my current age if she did not pass away.”

The disobedience still comes with risk. Months after the protests halted, Iranian morality police returned to the streets.

There have been scattered videos of women and young girls being roughed up by officers in the time since. In 2023, a teenage Iranian girl was injured in a mysterious incident on Tehran’s Metro while not wearing a headscarf and later died in hospital. In July, activists say police opened fire on a woman fleeing a checkpoint in an attempt to avoid her car being impounded for her not wearing the hijab.

Meanwhile, the government has targeted private businesses where women are seen without their headscarves. Surveillance cameras search for women uncovered in vehicles to fine and impound their cars. The government has gone as far as use aerial drones to monitor the 2024 Tehran International Book Fair and Kish Island for uncovered women, the U.N. said.

Yet some feel the election of Pezeshkian in July, after a helicopter crash killed Iranian hard-line President Ebrahim Raisi in May, is helping ease tensions over the hijab.

“I think the current peaceful environment is part of the status after Pezeshkian took office,” said Hamid Zarrinjouei, a 38-year-old bookseller. “In some way, Pezeshkian could convince powerful people that more restrictions do not necessarily make women more faithful to the hijab.”

On Wednesday, Iran’s Prosecutor General Mohammad Movahedi Azad warned security forces about starting physical altercations over the hijab.

"We prosecuted violators, and we will," Movahedi Azad said, according to Iranian media. "Nobody has right to have improper attitude even though an individual commits an offense."

While the government isn't directly addressing the increase in women not wearing hijabs, there are other signs of a recognition the political landscape has shifted. In August, authorities dismissed a university teacher a day after he appeared on state television and dismissively referred to Amini as having "croaked."

Meanwhile, the pre-reform newspaper Ham Mihan reported in August on an unpublished survey conducted under the supervision of Iran's Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance that found the hijab had become one of the most important issues in the country — something it hadn't seen previously.

"This issue has been on people's minds more than ever before," sociologist Simin Kazemi told the newspaper.

Hawaii wildfire victims made it just blocks before becoming trapped by flames, report says

By JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER and CLAUDIA LAUER Associated Press

HONOLULU (AP) — The wind pushed flames from house to house as a group of neighbors tried to escape their blazing subdivision, abandoning their cars in a blocked road and running to an industrial outbuilding for safety. All six perished just blocks from their homes.

The group, including an 11-year-old and his parents, was among the victims whose desperate attempts to escape the Lahaina wildfire were detailed for the first time in a report released Friday. The investigation by the Fire Safety Research Institute for the Hawaii attorney general's office delved into the conditions that fed the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century and the attempts to stop its spread and evacuate the town's residents.

It found "no evidence" of Hawaii officials making preparations for the wildfire, despite days of warnings that critical fire weather was coming, and that the lack of planning hindered efforts to evacuate Lahaina before it burned.

At least 102 people died in the Aug. 8, 2023, wildfire that was fueled by bone-dry conditions and strong winds from a hurricane passing to Maui's south.

Joseph Lara, 86, was found outside his purple 2003 Ford Ranger pickup truck at the parking structure of an outlet mall and "could have been trying to go north on Front Street before he was stuck in traffic," according to the report.

His daughter told The Associated Press on Friday that she tries not to think about how he might still be alive if he had taken a different turn to escape.

"He was alone. He didn't have anyone to tell him he should go here, here, here," Misty Lara said. "I can't fathom what his final thoughts were."

The report is a reminder of the trauma experienced by the roughly 17,000 people who survived by driving through fire and blinding smoke, outrunning the flames on foot or bike or huddling in the ocean behind a seawall for hours as propane tanks and car batteries exploded around them.

"I grew up in Lahaina and like many in that community, I lost family on Aug. 8," said Deputy Attorney General Ciara Kahahane. "Through my involvement in this investigation, I tried to humbly serve as a voice for you, the people of Lahaina."

More than 60% of the victims tried to flee, with many discovered inside or outside their cars or huddled against the seawall. Nearly 80% of the fatalities were in the central part of Lahaina, where the fire flared and spread quickly in the afternoon, allowing little time to evacuate.

Many were stuck in traffic jams created by downed power poles, accidents, traffic signals that weren't working and poor visibility. Some back roads that could have provided an alternative escape were blocked by locked gates.

For those who were evacuating, the distance between their home and the locations where they were recovered was on average 800 feet (244 meters), according to the report.

One couple was found in their car after turning onto a dead-end street in the chaos, with the flames

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behind them boxing them in. A man found huddled in the entranceway of a house had abandoned his car, presumably to seek refuge from the heat and smoke. Others took refuge alone in fast food restaurants or furniture stores.

Lahaina's already-deteriorating infrastructure complicated evacuation efforts, the report found. Extended-family living arrangements meant households had multiple vehicles, parked on crowded, narrow streets, which created bottlenecks during the evacuations and blocked fire hydrants.

One road, Kuhua Street, tallied the most fatalities: More than two dozen victims were found on or near the narrow stretch of road that was the only path to safety for many in the densely populated neighborhood.

It was the same street where the report noted a firetruck was overtaken by flames and a company of firefighters nearly lost their lives. And it was the same street where a car accident trapped 10 people whose bodies were found in or around cars.

Joseph Schilling, 67, was found next to a fence on Kuhua Street, less than half a mile (800 meters) from the retirement complex where he lived. Emergency dispatchers had already tried to help multiple people who called 911 to report that the road was becoming impassable.

Six other residents of the independent-living complex who didn't evacuate died inside their apartments. Their average age was 86.

Some older people did try to evacuate, even without reliable transportation.

Claudette Heermance, 68, called 911 to ask what to do and dispatchers told her to evacuate. She left her senior housing complex on a motorized scooter, but it ran out of power as the flames advanced, according to an autopsy report released after her death.

Badly burned, she stayed in hospice for seven months until she died in March.

She was the 102nd — and final — victim to be identified.

Prince Harry's 40th birthday marks the moment the royal scamp moves to middle age

By DANICA KIRKA Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Prince Harry was always something different.

From the moment he first appeared in public, snuggled in Princess Diana's arms outside the London hospital where he was born in 1984, Harry was the ginger-haired scamp who stuck his tongue out at photographers. He grew to be a boisterous adolescent who was roundly criticized for wearing a Nazi uniform to a costume party, and then a young man who gave up the trappings of royal life and moved to Southern California with his American wife.

Through it all, there was a sense that Harry was rebelling against an accident of birth that made him, in the harsh calculus of the House of Windsor, just "the spare." As the second son of the man who is now King Charles III, he was raised as a prince but wouldn't inherit the throne unless brother William came to harm.

Now the angry young man is turning 40, the halfway point in many lives, providing a chance to either dwell on the past or look forward to what might still be achieved.

For the past four years, Harry has focused mainly on the past, making millions of dollars by airing his grievances in a wildly successful memoir and a Netflix docu-series. But he faces the likelihood that the royal aura so critical to his image may be fading, said Sally Bedell Smith, author of "Charles: The Passions and Paradoxes of an Improbable Life."

"He is at a sort of crossroads," Smith told The Associated Press. "And he appears to be struggling with how he wants to proceed."

How did we get here?

It wasn't always this way.

Six years ago, Harry and his wife were among the most popular royals, a glamorous young couple who reflected the multicultural face of modern Britain and were expected to help revitalize the monarchy.

Their wedding on May 19, 2018, united a grandson of Queen Elizabeth II with the former Meghan Markle, a biracial American actress who had starred for seven years in the U.S. television drama "Suits." George Clooney, Serena Williams and Elton John attended their wedding at Windsor Castle, after which the couple

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were formally known as the Duke and Duchess of Sussex.

But the optimism quickly faded amid allegations that Britain's tabloid media and even members of the royal household treated Meghan unfairly because of racism.

By January of 2020, the pressures of life in the gilded cage had become too much, and the couple announced they were giving up royal duties and moving to America, where they hoped to become "financially independent." They signed lucrative deals with Netflix and Spotify as they settled into the wealthy enclave of Montecito, near Santa Barbara, California.

Since then, Harry has missed few opportunities to bare his soul, most famously in his memoir, aptly titled "Spare."

In the ghostwritten book, Harry recounted his grief at the death of Princess Diana, a fight with Prince William and his unease with life in the royal shadow of his elder brother. From accounts of cocaine use and losing his virginity to raw family rifts, the book was rife with damning allegations about the royal family.

Among the most toxic was Harry's description of how some family members leaked unflattering information about other royals in exchange for positive coverage of themselves. The prince singled out his father's second wife, Queen Camilla, accusing her of feeding private conversations to the media as she sought to rehabilitate an image tarnished by her role in the breakup of Charles' marriage to Diana.

The allegations were so venomous that there is little chance of a return to public duty, Smith said.

"He criticized the royal family in such a powerful and damaging way. You can't un-say those things," she said. "And you can't unsee things like Meghan in that Netflix series doing a mock curtsy. It's such a demeaning gesture to the queen."

Harry, who agreed not to use the honorific HRH, or "his royal highness," after he stepped away from front-line royal duties, is now fifth in line to the British throne, behind his brother and William's three children.

While he grew up in a palace and is said to be in line to inherit millions of pounds (dollars) on his 40th birthday from a trust set up by his great-grandmother, applied developmental psychologist Deborah Heiser thinks that, in many ways, Harry is just like the rest of us.

Like anyone turning 40, he is likely to have learned a few lessons and has a good idea of who his real friends are, and that will help him chart the next phase of his life, said Heiser, who writes a blog called "The Right Side of 40" for Psychology Today.

"He has had a very public display of what a lot of people have gone through," Heiser said. "I mean, most people are not princes, but ... they have all kinds of issues within their families. He's not alone. That's why he's so relatable."

Harry's next chapter

Of course, Harry's story isn't just about the drama within the House of Windsor.

If he wants to write a new chapter, Harry can build on his 10 years of service in the British Army. Before retiring as a captain in 2015, the prince earned his wings as a helicopter pilot, served two tours in Afghanistan and shed the hard-partying reputation of his youth.

Harry also won accolades for establishing the Invictus Games in 2014, a Paralympic-style competition to inspire and aid in the rehabilitation of sick and wounded servicemembers and veterans.

Harry and Meghan made headlines this year with their two international trips to promote mental health and internet safety. While some in British media criticized them for accepting royal treatment in Nigeria and Colombia, the couple said they visited at the invitation of local officials.

Will Charles see the grandkids?

Prospects of reconciliation are unclear, though Harry did race home to see his father after Charles' cancer diagnosis. And in what may be seen as a tentative olive branch, the paperback edition of "Spare" slated for October has no additions — so nothing new to stir the pot.

But plainly at this point, Harry is thinking about his family in California. He told the BBC about the importance of his two young children, Archie and Lilibet.

"Being a dad is one of life's greatest joys and has only made me more driven and more committed to making this world a better place," the prince said in a statement released by his spokesperson.

In Belarus, the native language is vanishing as Russian takes prominence

By YURAS KARMANAU Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — When school started this year for Mikalay in Belarus, the 15-year-old discovered that his teachers and administrators no longer called him by that name. Instead, they referred to him as Nikolai, its Russian equivalent.

What's more, classes at his school — one of the country's best — are now taught in Russian, not Belarusian, which he has spoken for most of his life.

Belarusians like Mikalay are experiencing a new wave of Russification as Moscow expands its economic, political and cultural dominance to overtake the identity of its neighbor.

It's not the first time. Russia under the czars and in the era of the Soviet Union imposed its language, symbols and cultural institutions on Belarus. But with the demise of the USSR in 1991, the country began to assert its identity, and Belarusian briefly became the official language, with the white-red-white national flag replacing a version of the red hammer and sickle.

But all that changed in 1994, after Alexander Lukashenko, a former Soviet collective farm official, came to power. The authoritarian leader made Russian an official language, alongside Belarusian, and did away with the nationalist symbols.

Now, with Lukashenko in control of the country for over three decades, he has allowed Russia to dominate all aspects of life in Belarus, a country of 9.5 million people. Belarusian, which like Russian uses the Cyrillic alphabet, is hardly heard on the streets of Minsk and other large cities anymore.

Official business is conducted in Russian, which dominates the majority of the media. Lukashenko speaks only Russian, and government officials often don't use their native tongue.

The country depends on Russian loans and cheap energy and has created a political and military alliance with Moscow, allowing President Vladimir Putin to deploy troops and missiles on its soil, which was used as a staging area for the war in Ukraine.

"I understand that our Belarus is occupied. ... And who is the president there? Not Lukashenko. The president is Putin," said Svetlana Alexievich, who won the 2015 Nobel Prize for literature and lives in Germany in effective exile. "The nation has been humiliated and it will be very difficult for Belarusians to recover from this."

Belarusian cultural figures have been persecuted and hundreds of its nationalist organizations have been closed. Experts say Moscow is seeking to implement in Belarus what the Kremlin intended to do in neighboring Ukraine when the war there began in 2022.

"It is obvious that our children are being deliberately deprived of their native language, history and Belarusian identity, but parents have been strongly advised not to ask questions about Russification," said Mikalay's father, Anatoly, who spoke to The Associated Press on condition his last name not be used, for fear of retribution.

"We were informed about the synchronization of the curriculum with Russia this year and were shown a propaganda film about how the Ukrainian special services are allegedly recruiting our teenagers and forcing them to commit sabotage in Belarus," he said.

Mikalay's school was one of the few where paperwork and some courses were conducted in Belarusian. In recent years, however, dozens of teachers were fired and the Belarusian-language section of its website vanished.

Human rights advocate Ales Bialiatski, convicted in 2023 on charges stemming from his Nobel Peace Prize-winning work, demanded his trial be conducted in Belarusian. The court rejected it and sentenced him to 10 years.

Lukashenko derides his native language, saying "nothing great can be expressed in Belarusian. ... There are only two great languages in the world: Russian and English."

Speaking to Russian state media, Lukashenko recounted how Putin once thanked him for making Rus-

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sian the dominant language in Belarus.

"I said, 'Wait, what are you thanking me for? ... The Russian language is my language, we were part of one empire, and we're taking part in (helping) that language develop,'" Lukashenko said.

Belarus was part of the Russian empire for centuries and became one of 15 Soviet republics after the 1917 Bolshevik Revolution. Daily use of the Belarusian language decreased and continued only in the country's west and north and in rural areas.

In 1994, about 40% of students were taught in Belarusian; it's now down to under 9%.

Although Belarusian, like Russian, is an eastern Slavic language, its vocabulary is considerably different. In 1517, Belarusian publisher Francysk Skaryna was one of the first in eastern Europe to translate the Bible into his native language.

Even speaking Belarusian is seen as a show of opposition to Lukashenko and a declaration of national identity. That played a key role in the mass protests after the disputed 2020 election gave the authoritarian leader a sixth term. In the harsh crackdown that followed, a half-million people fled the country.

"The Belarusian language is increasingly perceived as a sign of political disloyalty and is being abandoned in favor of Russian in the public administration, education, culture and the mass media, upon orders from the hierarchy or out of fear of discrimination," said Anaïs Marin, the United Nations special rapporteur for human rights in Belarus.

At the same time, "more people want to speak Belarusian, which has become one of the symbols of freedom, but they're afraid to do it in public," said Alina Nahornaja, author of "Language 404," a book about Belarusians who experienced discrimination for speaking their native language.

Like Ukraine, Belarusians had a desire for rapprochement with Europe that accompanied their nationalist sentiment, said Belarusian analyst Valery Karbalevich.

"But the Kremlin quickly realized the danger and began the process of creeping Russification in Belarus," he added.

That prompted pro-Russian organizations, joint educational programs and cultural projects to spring up "like mushrooms after the rain — against the backdrop of harsh repressions against everything Belarusian," Karbalevich said.

Censorship and bans affect not only contemporary Belarusian literature but also its classics. In 2023, the prosecutor's office declared as extremist the 19th-century poems of Vincent Dunin-Martsinkyevich, who opposed the Russian Empire.

When the Kremlin began supporting Lukashenko against the anti-government protests in 2020, it ensured his loyalty and received carte blanche in Belarus.

"Today, Lukashenko is paying Putin with our sovereignty," said exiled opposition leader Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya. "Belarusian national identity, cultures and language are our strongest weapons against the Russian world and Russification."

Four cities in Belarus now host a "Russia House" to promote its culture and influence, offering seminars, film clubs, exhibitions and competitions.

"The goal is to plant Russian narratives so that as many Belarusians as possible view Russian as their own," said analyst Alexander Friedman. "The Kremlin spares no expense and acts on a grand scale, which could be especially effective and dangerous in a situation where Belarus has found itself in information isolation, and there is almost no one left inside the country to resist the Russian world."

Almost the entire troupe of the Yanka Kupala Theater, the country's oldest, fled Belarus amid the political crackdown. Its former director, Pavel Latushka, now an opposition figure abroad, said the new management couldn't recruit enough new actors, and had to invite Russians, "but it turned out that no one knew the Belarusian language."

"Putin published an article denying the existence of an independent Ukraine back in 2021, and even then we understood perfectly well that he was pursuing similar goals in Belarus," Latushka said.

"The main course was supposed to be Ukraine," he added, with a Russified Belarus "as a dessert."

Going once, going twice: Google's millisecond ad auctions are the focus of monopoly claim

By MATTHEW BARAKAT AP Business Writer

ALEXANDRIA, Va. (AP) — It happens in milliseconds, ideally, as you browse the web. Networks of computers and software analyze who you are, what you are looking at and buy and sell the advertisements you see on web pages.

The company that most likely determines which ads you get, and how much an advertiser paid to get on your screen, is Google.

In fact, the Justice Department and a coalition of states say Google's dominance over the technology that controls the sale of billions of Internet display ads every day is so thorough that it constitutes an illegal monopoly that should be broken up.

A trial under way in federal court in Alexandria, Virginia, will determine if Google's ad tech stack constitutes an illegal monopoly. The first week has included a deep dive into exactly how Google's products work together to conduct behind-the-scenes electronic auctions that place ads in front of consumers in the blink of an eye.

Online advertising has rapidly evolved. Fifteen or so years ago, if you saw an internet display ad, there was a pretty good chance it featured people dancing over their enthusiasm for low mortgage rates, and those ads were foisted on you whether you were looking at real estate or searching for baseball scores.

Now, the algorithms that match ads to your interests are carefully calibrated, sometimes to an almost creepy extent.

Google, for its part, says it has invested billions of dollars to improve the quality of ads that consumers see, and ensure that advertisers can reach the consumers they're seeking.

The Justice Department contends that what Google has also done over the years is rig the automated auctions of ad sales to favor itself over other would-be players in the industry, and also deprived the publishing industry of hundreds of millions of dollars it would have received if the auctions were truly competitive.

Government witnesses have explained the auction process and how it has evolved over the years in detail at the Virginia trial.

In the government's depiction, there are three distinct tools that interact to sell an ad and place it in front of a consumer. There's the ad servers used by publishers to sell space on their websites, particularly the rectangular ads that appear on the top and right-hand side of a web page. Ad networks are used by advertisers to buy ad space across an array of relevant websites.

And in between is the ad exchange, which matches the website publisher to the would-be advertiser by hosting an instant auction.

Publishers naturally want to receive as high a price as possible for their ad space, but testimony at trial has shown that didn't always happen due to the rules Google imposed.

For years, Google gave its ad exchange, called AdX, the first chance to match a publisher's proposed floor price. For instance, if a publisher wanted to sell a specific ad impression for a minimum of 50 cents, Google's software would give its own ad exchange the first chance to purchase. If Google's ad exchange bid 50 cents, it would win the auction, even if competing ad exchanges down the line were willing to pay more.

Google said the system was necessary to ensure ads loaded quickly. If the computers entertained bids from every ad exchange, it would take too long.

Publishers, dissatisfied with this system, found a workaround to conduct the auctions outside of Google's purview, a process that became known as "header bidding." Internal Google documents introduced at trial described header bidding as an "existential threat" to Google's market share.

Google's response relied on its control of all three components of the process. If publishers conducted an auction outside Google's purview but they still used Google's publisher ad server, called DoubleClick For Publishers, that software forced the winning bid back into Google's Ad Exchange. If Google was willing to match the price that publishers had received under the header-bidding auction, Google would win

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the auction.

Professor Ramamoorthi Ravi, an expert at Carnegie Mellon University, said rules imposed by Google failed to maximize value for publishers and "seem to have been designed to advantage Google's own products."

Publishers could stop using Google's ad exchange entirely, but at trial said they were reluctant to do so because then they would also lose access to Google's huge, exclusive cache of advertisers in its Google Ads network, which was only available through Google's ad exchange.

Google, for its part, says it hasn't run auctions this way since 2019, and that in the last five years Google's share of the display ad market has begun to erode. It says that tying its buy side, sell side and middleman products together helps them run seamlessly and quickly, and minimizes fraudulent ads or malware risks.

Google also says its innovations over the last 15 years fueled the improvements in matching online ads to consumer interests. Google says it was at the forefront of introducing "real-time bidding," which allowed an advertiser selling shoes, for instance, to be paired up with a consumer whose online profile indicated an interest in purchasing shoes.

Those innovations, according to Google, allowed publishers to sell their available ad space at a premium because the advertiser would know that the ad was going to the eyeballs of someone interested in their product or service.

The Justice Department says that even though Google no longer runs its auctions in the ways described, it helped Google maintain its monopoly in the ad tech market in the years leading up to 2019, and that its existing monopoly allows Google to keep up to 36 cents on the dollar of every ad purchase it brokers when the transaction runs through all of its various products.

The Virginia trial comes just a month after a judge in Washington ruling that Google's search engine also constitutes an illegal monopoly. No decision in that case has been made on what, if any, remedies the judge will impose.

Clock is ticking for local governments to use billions of dollars of federal pandemic aid

By DAVID A. LIEB Associated Press

From the looks of it, the Phoenix suburb of Gilbert hasn't done too much with the \$24 million it received in federal pandemic aid.

The site where it plans to spend most of the money for a crime victims center remains an empty plot of dirt. And just one-quarter of its funds are obligated for projects, according to the most recent federal data. But town officials say contracts should be in place soon to spend the rest of it.

For Gilbert and thousands of other local governments across the U.S., the clock is ticking to use their share of \$350 billion in COVID-19 relief funds approved by Congress and President Joe Biden in 2021. Governments must obligate all their American Rescue Plan funds for specific projects by the end of this year or else return the rest to the U.S. Treasury.

About 80% of all funds had been obligated as of March, according to the most recent data reported to the Treasury by more than 26,500 local, state and territorial governments. That's right on pace to finish in time.

But some governments appear to have a lot more work to do than others.

About one in five governments reported obligating less than half their funds as of this spring, according to an Associated Press analysis, and about 3,500 had obligated less than 25%. That includes 2,260 governments that reported no projects, leaving it unclear whether they had any plans for the money. Some of them may have already used the money but failed to describe the purpose to the federal government.

The Treasury Department said it's doing extensive outreach to help communities understand their reporting requirements.

From the beginning, the American Rescue Plan faced criticism from some Republicans and government watchdog groups for allowing unnecessary and excessive spending, including on things hardly connected to the coronavirus pandemic. But some state and local officials say the funding has allowed them to undertake long-sought projects they couldn't otherwise have afforded.

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Gilbert officials decided to devote almost all their American Rescue Plan funds to a single project — a \$43 million facility where victims of sexual assault, child abuse and domestic violence can undergo forensic exams and interviews needed for prosecution while also receiving counseling and therapy services. Officials identified a need for the center several years before the pandemic but didn't have a funding source. The federal money will cover a little over half the cost, with the rest coming from Gilbert's general funds.

The goal is to provide a "comprehensive wrap-around center where a victim of interpersonal violence can come and undergo a really safe and healing journey," Assistant Town Manager Leah Rhineheimer said. It's "one of the most meaningful projects the town could undertake."

Town officials hope to award a construction contract this fall — a step that would satisfy the Treasury's requirement to obligate the money by year's end — though actual construction wouldn't start until next year, Gilbert Police Chief Michael Soelberg said.

Under Treasury rules, an obligation generally requires a government to place an order for services or property, enter into a contract or award a grant to another entity. Governments that meet the obligation deadline then face a second deadline to finish spending the funds by the end of 2026.

Other local officials interviewed by the AP described a mixture of reasons why they hadn't reported obligating much of their funds. Some said they didn't think they needed to detail how the money was used because they categorized it as a replacement for local revenues lost during the pandemic's economic downturn. Others described challenges in figuring out what to do with it.

"There's no question that some of this money was not needed and it's being spent wastefully," said Tom Schatz, president of Citizens Against Government Waste, a Washington, D.C.-based nonprofit.

The Detroit suburb of Dearborn Heights, which received more than \$24 million, listed just one obligation on its spring Treasury report — about \$79,000 for administrative expenses to select and implement projects funded with the federal aid.

Dearborn Heights Mayor Bill Bazzi said the federal funding arrived shortly after he took office, making it challenging to simultaneously "get a grasp of what the city needs" and assemble staff to administer it. The city plans to use the money for stormwater, sewer and water main projects, among other things, and should have most of it obligated soon, Bazzi said.

Progress was delayed because "we had to go through a tedious process" before putting projects out for bids, he said.

As the federal deadline nears, some states and local governments are making backup plans to ensure they use all the money.

This spring, Missouri told the Treasury it had obligated 99% of its nearly \$2.7 billion allotment. But some projects have fallen through or appear unlikely to need their full funding.

So lawmakers and Republican Gov. Mike Parson approved a revised spending plan that eliminated \$49 million intended for COVID-19 response efforts and \$16 million to remodel an old mental health facility for use in a sex offender rehabilitation program, among other things. Those funds were reallocated to dozens of new projects, including a college engineering building and a health care worker training program.

The Missouri Legislature also budgeted \$150 million of American Rescue Plan funds for K-12 public schools as a fallback option if other projects don't get moving. Several lawmakers in the conservative Freedom Caucus voted no, suggesting the federal pandemic aid was driving up federal debt and inflation.

"I'm fine if we were to give it back," Republican state Sen. Rick Brattin, the Freedom Caucus chairman, told the AP. "We could at least hold our head high and say that we didn't continue to contribute to the financial collapse of the American dollar."

Missouri Senate Appropriations Committee Chairman Lincoln Hough, a Republican, said lawmakers don't have to agree with the federal funding to nonetheless use it.

"When we have it, in my opinion, we should invest in our communities and invest in our future workforce," Hough said.

Facing the prospect that some of Connecticut's \$2.8 billion American Rescue Plan allotment could go unused, the state General Assembly this year reallocated \$365 million to new purposes. The legislation also laid out a backup plan, directing Democratic Gov. Ned Lamont's administration to reallocate any funds that

appear unlikely to be obligated as of Oct. 15 to instead go toward budget shortfalls and higher education.

The city of New Orleans reported obligating 55% of its \$387.5 million federal allotment as of this spring. But it's been moving quickly to use the money. As of September, 86% has been obligated, New Orleans Chief Administrative Officer Gilbert Montano said. During the summer, the City Council shifted pandemic relief funds away from a couple of projects that faced timing questions to instead fund homeless shelters and clean up illegal dumps. Other slower-moving projects are on a watch list for potential reallocations before year's end.

"We're not going to give any of that money back," Montano said. "There's too many needs."

Embattled Democratic senators steer clear of Kamala Harris buzz but hope it helps

By MATTHEW BROWN and JULIE CARR SMYTH Associated Press

BOZEMAN, Mont. (AP) — Montana U.S. Sen. Jon Tester has made protecting reproductive freedom for women central to his campaign to remain the sole remaining Democrat to hold statewide elective office in Big Sky Country. He has campaigned with Planned Parenthood officials, advertised heavily in support of abortion rights, and embraced a ballot proposal to make abortion a state constitutional right.

Yet one woman Tester notably isn't talking about much on the campaign trail is Vice President Kamala Harris.

With control of the Senate at stake, the seats held by Tester and Democratic U.S. Sen. Sherrod Brown of Ohio top the list for potential Republican pickups this fall. Former President Donald Trump is expected to win the two reliably red states by wide margins, so the Democratic lawmakers must walk a political tightrope to keep from alienating too many of his supporters.

That includes minimal mention of Harris, with her ties to an administration that's unpopular in their states, even as her trailblazing effort to become the nation's first female president energizes abortion rights supporters.

Tester, in an interview, said the desire to protect abortion access will attract voters "regardless of political ilk."

"I think it appeals to people across the board because it's about freedom, and Montana is a freedom-loving state," he said. "This issue comes up more than any other issue."

Both Tester and Brown could benefit from any momentum Harris' presidential bid injects into key Democratic voting blocs, but if they do it almost certainly will happen quietly. Neither attended the Democratic National Convention in Chicago last month.

At least one observer thinks they're being too careful.

"Democrats are not capitalizing on this very well, not just in Montana but in general," said Paul Pope, a political analyst at Montana State University Billings.

Tester, Pope said, "has not moved the needle much. If he endorses Harris, he has the opportunity to capitalize on the broad support she has, and the excitement."

Republicans in both states, meanwhile, are doing everything they can to knock the incumbent senators off their political tightrope. Staggering amounts of money have been spent by both sides in the two states.

Democrats so far have outspent Republicans in Montana, and Republicans have bet more heavily on Ohio, according to AdImpact, which tracks advertising by campaigns nationwide. Spending by the candidates and outside groups on television, radio and digital advertisements is on track to hit \$636 million, the data show, including almost \$400 million in Ohio and \$240 million in Montana.

That equates to almost \$50 for every registered voter in Ohio and more than \$300 for every registered voter in Montana.

Tester declined to endorse Harris, saying the Senate race shouldn't be about national politics, and used convention week to work on his farm and host a rally in Missoula headlined by the bassist for the rock band Pearl Jam. By contrast, his opponent, former U.S. Navy SEAL Tim Sheehy, secured the GOP nomination following an early Trump endorsement and last month hosted the Republican former president at a rally in Bozeman.

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During his stump speeches and on the airwaves, Sheehy constantly seeks to link Tester with Harris and other Democratic leaders, including President Joe Biden and Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer.

The Republican — who faced backlash in recent days after refusing to apologize for derogatory comments he made to supporters about Native Americans — describes Tester as the “deciding vote” on key Democratic legislation over the past several years. That includes the Biden administration’s climate bill and several failed GOP measures to further restrict immigration.

“Tester’s voting record is his endorsement of the failed Harris agenda,” said Sheehy spokesperson Katie Martin. “Every time Montanans needed him to stop the insanity back in Washington, he was the deciding vote to further her progressive liberal agenda.”

Brown also used the convention week to campaign back home, sweeping through rural and urban counties to shake hands with veterans and campaign volunteers. He has said he supports and would campaign with Harris, knowing that her abbreviated campaign is unlikely to set foot in a state so supportive of Trump.

Brown has used campaign events to remind women and young voters he supports abortion rights, while airing ads highlighting union workers, police and Trump’s signature on a border-related bill the senator sponsored.

Brown’s Republican rival, Cleveland area entrepreneur Bernie Moreno, ranks illegal immigration and inflation as bigger concerns for voters. Moreno accused Democrats of misrepresenting his stance on abortion — he says he supports reasonable restrictions after 15 weeks, not a “national abortion ban” — and predicted that the issue would not drive turnout as much as Democrats predict.

Michael Gonidakias, president of Ohio Right to Life, said pocketbook issues are motivating many voters this year, particularly with the passage of a 2023 constitutional amendment protecting abortion rights.

“No matter how hard you try to sway someone that cares about the issue of abortion one way or the other, economic issues will still dominate — in my opinion — how they vote,” he said. “Because things aren’t good right now.”

Katie Paris, founder of Red Wine & Blue, a political group focused on suburban women, said protecting abortion rights is an economic issue, and it remains a huge motivator for people she represents. The Ohio abortion amendment last year guaranteed an individual’s right to make their own reproductive decisions. It won nearly 57% of the vote.

“Issue 1 last year unified Ohio, and Kamala being a candidate who’s put freedom and reproductive freedom at the very center of her campaign, she’s put wind in the sails (of other campaigns) with a message that does have bipartisan agreement,” Paris said.

Both Sheehy and Moreno were endorsed by the leading antiabortion group SBA Pro-Life America. Sheehy said in a June debate that he backs restrictions on abortions with exceptions for rape, incest or to protect the mother’s life.

“That baby has rights too,” Sheehy said.

Tester’s campaign brought in a Planned Parenthood executive for a recent rally in downtown Bozeman, where more than 100 people jammed into a small events space with signs saying “Freedom” and “Tester” plastered on the walls. The rally coincided with a flood of “Republicans for Tester” advertisements on TV across the state.

Montana State University political scientist Jessi Bennion said the dual strategy makes sense.

“There are a lot of Republicans that have nuanced views on abortion. Tester’s trying to find all of those voters and they’re a small group but they’re swing voters, they split their ticket,” she said.

Some people at the rally openly worried about Tester’s prospects — and that if he loses it could drag down the state’s constitutional initiative on abortion.

“I’m nervous. I’m nervous about all of it,” said Leslie Peterson, 61, a retired teacher who said women should be able to decide for themselves if they want an abortion. “The state’s just gone so red in the last couple of years. ... It’s just gone completely Republican.”

Tester took the stage and described how his mother, a daughter of Montana homesteaders, fought for abortion access. The lawmaker declared the Supreme Court decision overturning *Roe v. Wade* “the big-

gest reduction of freedom in my lifetime.”

“We got some things we can do about it,” he said as the crowd cheered. “We’re going to go the polls, we’re going to make sure that initiative passes, right?”

He did not mention Harris.

Funerals to be held for teen boy and math teacher killed in Georgia high school shooting

JEFFERSON, Ga. (AP) — Funeral services for a teenage boy remembered for his endearing smile and a math teacher known for her dedication to students were scheduled for Saturday, 10 days after both were killed by a gunman who opened fire at a Georgia high school.

Family, friends and supporters of 14-year-old Mason Schermerhorn and teacher Christina Irimie, 53, were gathering to say farewell at separate afternoon services.

They were among four people killed Sept. 4 at Apalachee High School by a shooter armed with an assault-style rifle. Another teacher and eight other students were injured.

A large public outpouring was expected at the memorial service for Schermerhorn that is being held at a civic center in Jefferson. A neighbor, Tommy Pickett, recalled watching him grow over the past decade from an inquisitive young boy to a teenager who always seemed to be smiling and laughing.

Irimie immigrated to the U.S. more than 20 years ago from her home country of Romania. She was known for teaching children dance in addition to algebra and stayed active in metro Atlanta’s Romanian expat community.

The service for Irimie, with readings and remembrances in English and Romanian, is set to be held at a funeral home in Buford. Afterward, a memorial meal is planned at Saints Constantine and Helen Romanian Orthodox Church.

The funerals mark another opportunity for students and faculty from the high school of 1,900 to share their grief. Barrow County’s other schools reopened last week. But no date has been set for students to return to Apalachee High School.

A private funeral was held last weekend for Richard Aspinwall, a 39-year-old math teacher and defensive coordinator of the school’s football team. Aspinwall was killed in the attack alongside Schermerhorn, Irimie and 14-year-old student Christian Angulo.

Angulo’s family has scheduled his funeral service at a church for Friday.

Authorities have charged a 14-year-old student, Colt Gray, with murder in the high school killings. His father also has been charged with second-degree murder for furnishing his son with a weapon used to kill children.

Authorities say the teen surrendered to school resource officers who confronted him roughly three minutes after the first shots were fired. The Georgia Bureau of Investigation says the teenager rode the bus to school with the semiautomatic rifle concealed in his backpack.

Trump refuses to criticize Laura Loomer amid concerns from Republican allies about her influence

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, AAMER MADHANI, JILL COLVIN and BILL BARROW Associated Press

RANCHO PALOS VERDES, Calif. (AP) — Donald Trump refused on Friday to condemn recent racist and conspiratorial comments from right-wing provocateur Laura Loomer, who traveled with him earlier this week to Tuesday night’s presidential debate and several 9/11 memorial events.

“Laura’s been a supporter of mine,” Trump told reporters at a press conference near Los Angeles, where he was pressed on concerns from Republican allies about his ongoing association with Loomer, who once declared herself a “proud Islamophobe” and has a long history of promoting ugly and extreme conspiracies.

Trump said Loomer has “strong opinions,” but insisted at the news conference he was unaware of her recent comments, including a post on X in which she played on racist stereotypes by writing that “the White House will smell like curry & White House speeches will be facilitated via a call center” if his Democratic rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, wins in November. Harris is the daughter of Jamaican and Indian

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immigrants.

"I don't control Laura. Laura has to say what she wants," Trump said. "I can't tell Laura what to do."

Yet later, via his Truth Social account, Trump tried to distance himself more clearly from Loomer, saying, "I disagree with the statements she made" and describing her as "a private citizen and longtime supporter" who "doesn't work for the Campaign." Even in that post, though, Trump defended Loomer, writing that "like the many millions of people who support me, she is tired of watching the Radical Left Marxists and Fascists violently attack and smear me."

After the backlash, Trump seemed frustrated in a later post on his social media network in which he lashed out at the news media, and he had more bluster than usual that night onstage at a rally in Las Vegas, frequently shouting.

Loomer's appearances on the campaign trail with Trump have alarmed some top supporters, who have taken the rare move of publicly airing their concerns that he is hurting his chances against Harris, who is driving up Democratic enthusiasm that intensified with her debate performance Tuesday. Harris was campaigning Friday across Pennsylvania.

Republican Marjorie Taylor Greene, the Georgia congresswoman known herself for spreading conspiracies, called the post about curry "appalling and extremely racist" and said it did not represent Trump's "Make America Great Again" movement.

Sen. Thom Tillis, R-N.C., called Loomer "a crazy conspiracy theorist who regularly utters disgusting garbage intended to divide Republicans," and said a Democratic Party "plant couldn't do a better job than she is doing to hurt President Trump's chances of winning re-election."

Trump has a history of association with extremists, including dining in 2022 at his Mar-a-Lago club with Nick Fuentes, a far-right activist who had used his online platform to spew antisemitic and white nationalist rhetoric. Trump had said at the time that he "knew nothing about" Fuentes before his dinner with the rapper formerly known as Kanye West.

Trump makes the campaign about his conspiracies

Harris has not commented publicly on Loomer's ties to Trump. But as has often been the case during his three White House runs, Trump has pulled the presidential campaign this week into a discussion of far-right conspiracies and unsubstantiated rumors with consequences.

He brought up a discredited claim about Haitian immigrants in Springfield, Ohio, hunting and eating pets at Tuesday's presidential debate watched by more than 67 million people, as Harris repeatedly put him on the defensive about the economy and abortion. The claims — which he has also amplified in social media posts — have driven millions of online conversations, and resulted in serious repercussions for the town.

Bomb threats directed at the homes of Springfield's mayor and other city officials, as well as Springfield City Hall and schools, prompted the evacuation of schools and government buildings there for a second day on Friday.

Yet Trump's allies, notably his running mate, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, have repeatedly raised the claims about pets — even as Vance acknowledged they may be false.

Trump, who has promised if elected again to carry out the largest deportation operation in U.S. history, on Friday dismissed concerns from city officials and said his operation would target Springfield.

"The real threat is what's happening at our border," he said.

President Joe Biden on Friday said the Haitian community was "under attack" and the false claims had to stop.

Trump unleashes the attacks his allies expected at the debate

Speaking at a news conference at his Los Angeles-area golf club, Trump unleashed a litany of attacks against Harris and California, as he stood on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean.

"She destroyed San Francisco and she destroyed the state," Trump said of Harris, who represented California in the Senate and also served as the state's attorney general and the district attorney of San Francisco before becoming vice president. He accused her of having been soft on crime in her previous positions — something aides had suggested he would focus on during the debate.

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Trump, who said he wanted to be known as "the border president," also continued to rail against the dangers of illegal immigration, claiming that the country has had "thousands of people being killed by illegal migrants."

In fact, there has been no spike in violent crime nationally or in the major cities where many migrants have settled, and national statistics show violent crime is on the way down.

Harris emphasizes the economy in Pennsylvania

Harris, meanwhile, was in Pennsylvania Friday, where she used stops in two counties Trump won in 2016 and 2020 to frame herself as the candidate for middle-class workers and small-business owners.

In Wilkes-Barre, Harris touted her call for a \$50,000 tax deduction to start a small business and said she would work with the private sector to build 3 million new homes to increase housing stock and decrease costs. She said her overall tax plan, including raising the child tax credit to \$6,000 during the first year of a child's life, would reach 100 million Americans. She pledged to ease requirements for a college degree for certain federal government jobs.

And she compared her upbringing to the billionaire Trump being the son of a wealthy New York developer. "I come from the middle class. I understand where I come from and I'm never going to forget that," she said.

In Johnstown, Harris met with owners and supporters at Classic Elements, a bookstore and cafe, to discuss her plans. "Small businesses are so much part of the fabric of a community," she told the shop owners.

It was her second day of back-to-back events after holding two rallies Thursday in North Carolina. Her campaign is aiming to hit every market in every battleground state over four days, with stops by Harris, her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, and other surrogates in Michigan, Wisconsin, Arizona and Georgia.

Her campaign said she raised \$47 million from 600,000 donors in the 24 hours after her debate with Trump.

After appearing at his golf club in upscale Rancho Palos Verdes, Trump went to a fundraiser in the Bay Area. He then took the stage in Las Vegas on Friday night, where he repeated complaints he made earlier about the debate and attacked Harris. He focused especially on migration into the U.S. and said he wanted to be known as "Mr. Border President."

Alvarez, Nimmo, Bader hit 3 run homers to lead Mets over Phillies 11-3 for 12th win in 14 games

By AARON BRACY Associated Press

PHILADELPHIA (AP) — Francisco Alvarez, Brandon Nimmo and Harrison Bader hit three-run homers, Jose Quintana allowed three hits in seven shutout innings and the New York Mets routed the NL East-leading Philadelphia Phillies 11-3 Friday night for their 12th win in 14 games.

Alvarez and Nimmo homered in a three-run fifth inning off Aaron Nola (12-8), Alvarez's second three-run homer in a span of three at-bats.

"We're playing well," Mets manager Carlos Mendoza said.

Bader homered in the eighth against Tyler Gilbert and Pete Alonso went deep in the ninth off infielder Kody Clemens. It was the first big league homer allowed in 12 career pitching appearances by Clemens. His father, seven-time Cy Young Award winner Roger Clemens, gave up 363 in 24 seasons.

New York All-Star shortstop Francisco Lindor had an RBI double and left in the middle of the seventh inning because of lower back soreness. Mendoza said it was precautionary and Lindor likely would've stayed in the game had the score been closer.

Philadelphia (88-59) leads the NL East by seven games over New York (81-66), which remained one game ahead of Atlanta (80-67) for the last NL wild card. The series opener began a stretch of seven games in 10 days between the rivals.

The Mets' first three home runs were all three-run drives for the first time since Sept. 25, 2015, at Cincinnati, when Lucas Duda hit two and Curtis Granderson one.

Brandon Marsh hit a three-run homer with two outs in the ninth off Alex Young. The Phillies had won

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three in a row and nine of 11.

Quintana (9-9) struck out four, walked none and threw 62 of 94 pitches for strikes.

"Especially when you face a lineup like that, you need to be ahead," Quintana said of the count. "I'm really happy how my stuff has been working."

Before a sellout crowd of 44,607, Nola didn't allow a hit through four innings.

"He was locating the ball well; we were just looking for the mistake," Alvarez said.

Alvarez put the Mets ahead when he drove a hanging curve off the netting on the left-field foul pole.

"I stayed inside the ball," Alvarez said.

Replays showed Jose Iglesias, who was on second, appearing to signal to Alvarez before the pitch.

He's getting to a spot mechanically where he's ready to fire," Mendoza said of Alvarez.

Nimmo also homered on a curveball. The ball ended up in the hands of a young Mets fan after a Phillies fan who caught it decided to give up the souvenir rather than throw an opponent's homer back on the field.

Nola, who allowed six runs and six hits in 4 1/3 innings. was booed on the walk back to the dugout.

"Made some bad pitches," Nola said.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Mets: Reliever Dedniel Núñez will be sidelined for the rest of the season with a right flexor injury, manager Carlos Mendoza said. The 28-year-old rookie right-hander has a 2.31 ERA in 25 appearances but has pitched just once since July 23. Mendoza said Núñez will receive a PRP injection. In 35 innings, the 6-foot-2, 180-pounder struck out 48 and walked eight.

Phillies: 3B Alec Bohm (left hand strain) and INF Edmundo Sosa (back spasms) will begin rehab assignments on Saturday at Triple-A Lehigh Valley. Bohm has been on the injured list since Sept. 3 while Sosa has been on the IL since Sept. 7.

UP NEXT

New York RHP Luis Severino (10-6, 3.74) takes the mound for the Mets against Philadelphia LHP Kolby Allard (2-0, 3.50) in the second contest of the three-game series on Saturday.

Harris says she is different from Biden because 'I offer a new generation of leadership'

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris, who presents herself as the candidate of change as she runs for president against Republican Donald Trump, said Friday that she's different from President Joe Biden because she offers "a new generation of leadership."

In her first solo television interview since she became the Democratic presidential nominee, Harris also criticized the "hate and division that we see coming out of Donald Trump" and said she thinks people are "exhausted" by his style of leadership.

She also said she's a gun owner and doesn't want to take away anyone's guns, but believes a ban on assault-style weapons is necessary and consistent with the Second Amendment.

Anchor Brian Taff of WPVI-TV in Philadelphia asked Harris to describe one or two areas where she's different from the president.

"Well, I'm obviously not Joe Biden" and "I offer a new generation of leadership," Harris said, adding that things once taken for granted cannot be overlooked anymore.

"For example, another plan that I have that is a new approach is to expand the child tax credit to \$6,000 for young families for the first year of their child's life because that is obviously a very critical stage of development of child, and so my approach is about new ideas, new policies that are directed at the current moment," she said. "And also, to be very honest with you, my focus is very much on what we need to do over the next 10, 20 years to catch up to the 21st century around, again, capacity but also challenges."

The interview was conducted in Johnstown, Pennsylvania, as Harris campaigned there Friday.

Trump, his running mate Sen. JD Vance and other Republicans have criticized Harris for largely avoiding media interviews or interacting on the record with reporters who cover her campaign events. She and her running mate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, gave a joint interview to CNN last month. Her campaign

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recently said she will begin to do more local interviews, and the National Association of Black Journalists announced Friday that some of its members will interview Harris on Tuesday in Philadelphia.

Harris used a question about the former president's appeal and how she would speak to his supporters to criticize Trump and his leadership style.

"I also believe that I am accurate in knowing that most Americans want a leader who brings us together as Americans and not someone who professes to be a leader who is trying to have us point our fingers at each other," she said.

The vice president suggested that her support from Republican officials, including former Vice President Dick Cheney and his daughter, former Rep. Liz Cheney, is a result of people being "exhausted" with Trump.

"I think people are more willing now, in light of the hate and division that we see coming out of Donald Trump to say, 'Hey, let's put country first' and I think that just makes us stronger and more healthy as a country," she said.

Trump's campaign did not immediately respond to an emailed request for comment.

The vice president, 59, is a former San Francisco district attorney, California attorney general and U.S. senator. She offered a few answers when asked to share one thing she would like people to know about her they don't yet know.

"Probably it's not very different from anybody watching right now," she said. "I love my family. One of my favorite things that I lately have not been able to do is Sunday family dinner. I love to cook."

Harris also said her best friend from kindergarten "is still my best friend."

Congo court sentences 3 Americans and 34 others to death on coup charges

By JEAN-YVES KAMALE and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

KINSHASA, Congo (AP) — A military court in Congo handed down death sentences Friday to 37 people, including three Americans, after convicting them on charges of participating in a coup attempt.

The defendants, most of them Congolese but also including a Briton, Belgian and Canadian, have five days to appeal the verdict on charges that include attempted coup, terrorism and criminal association. Fourteen people were acquitted in the trial, which opened in June.

The open-air military court in the capital, Kinshasa, convicted the 37 defendants and imposed "the harshest penalty, that of death" in the verdict delivered in French by presiding judge Maj. Freddy Ehuma. The three Americans, wearing blue and yellow prison clothes and sitting in plastic chairs, appeared stoic as a translator explained their sentence.

Richard Bondo, the lawyer who defended the six foreigners, disputed whether the death penalty could currently be imposed in Congo, despite its reinstatement earlier this year, and said his clients had inadequate interpreters during the investigation of the case.

"We will challenge this decision on appeal," Bondo said.

Six people were killed during the botched coup attempt led by the little-known opposition figure Christian Malanga in May that targeted the presidential palace and a close ally of President Felix Tshisekedi. Malanga was fatally shot while resisting arrest soon after live-streaming the attack on his social media, the Congolese army said.

Malanga's 21-year-old son Marcel Malanga, who is a U.S. citizen, and two other Americans were convicted in the coup attempt. He told the court that his father had forced him and his high school friend to take part in the attack.

"Dad had threatened to kill us if we did not follow his orders," Marcel Malanga said.

Other members of the ragtag militia recounted similar threats from the elder Malanga, and some described being duped into believing they were working for a volunteer organization.

Marcel's mother, Brittney Sawyer, maintains that her son is innocent and was simply following his father, who considered himself president of a shadow government in exile. In the months since her son's arrest, Sawyer has focused her energy on fundraising to send him money for food, hygiene products and a bed. He has been sleeping on the floor of his cell at the Ndolo military prison and is suffering from a

liver disease, she said.

The other Americans are Tyler Thompson Jr., 21, who flew to Africa from Utah with the younger Malanga for what his family believed was a free vacation, and Benjamin Reuben Zalman-Polun, 36, who is reported to have known Christian Malanga through a gold mining company. The company was set up in Mozambique in 2022, according to an official journal published by Mozambique's government, and a report by the Africa Intelligence newsletter.

U.S. State Department spokesman Matthew Miller told reporters in Washington on Friday that the federal government was aware of the verdict. The department has not declared the three Americans wrongfully detained, making it unlikely that U.S. officials would try to negotiate their return.

"We understand that the legal process in the DRC allows for defendants to appeal the court's decision," Miller said. "Embassy staff have been attending these proceedings as they've gone through the process. We continue to attend the proceedings and follow the developments closely."

Thompson had been invited on an Africa trip by the younger Malanga, his former high school football teammate in a Salt Lake City suburb. But the itinerary might have included more than sightseeing. Other teammates alleged that Marcel had offered up to \$100,000 to join him on a "security job" in Congo, and they said he seemed desperate to bring along an American friend.

Thompson's family maintains he had no knowledge of the elder Malanga's intentions, no plans for political activism and didn't even plan to enter Congo. He and the Malangas were meant to travel only to South Africa and Eswatini, his stepmother, Miranda Thompson, told The Associated Press.

The Thompsons' lawyer in Utah, Skye Lazaro, said the family is heartbroken over the verdict.

"We urge all who have supported Tyler and the family throughout this process to write to your congressmen and request their assistance in bringing him home," Lazaro said.

Utah's U.S. Sens. Mitt Romney and Mike Lee have not publicly urged the U.S. government to advocate for the Americans' release.

"My thoughts are with the families during this difficult time," Lee told the AP on Friday. "We will continue to work with the State Department to receive updates on this case."

"This is an extremely difficult and frightening situation for the families involved," Romney spokesperson Dilan Maxfield said. "Our office has consistently engaged with the State Department and will continue to do so."

Last month, the military prosecutor, Lt. Col. Innocent Radjabu, called on the judge to sentence all of the defendants to death, except for one who suffers from "psychological problems."

Congo reinstated the death penalty earlier this year, lifting a more than two-decade-old moratorium, as authorities struggle to curb violence and militant attacks in the country. The country's penal code allows the president to designate the method of execution. Past executions of militants in Congo have been carried out by firing squad.

911 calls overwhelmed operators after shooting at Georgia's Apalachee High School

WINDER, Ga. (AP) — A Georgia county's emergency call center was overwhelmed by calls on Sept. 4 about a school shooting at Apalachee High School, records released Friday by Barrow County show.

Local news organizations report many of the 911 phone calls were not released under public record requests because state law exempts from release calls recording the voice of someone younger than 18 years old. That exemption would cover calls from most of the 1,900 students at the school in Winder, northeast of Atlanta.

Calls spiked around 10:20 a.m., when authorities have said that 14-year-old Colt Gray began shooting. Many calls were answered with automated message saying there was a "high call volume," WAGA-TV reported.

One man called 911 after receiving text messages from a girlfriend. He was put on hold for just over 10 minutes because of an influx of calls at the time of the shooting, The Atlanta Journal-Constitution reported.

"She hears people yelling outside, so I don't know if that's officers in the building or that's — I don't know," he said, adding that she was eventually evacuated out of the school.

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Other adults also called 911 after their children contacted them.

"My daughter calling me crying. Somebody go 'boom, boom, boom, boom,'" one mother said. The 911 operator responded: "Ma'am we have officers out there, OK?"

Parents of students at an elementary school and middle school neighboring Apalachee also flooded 911 seeking information.

"Sir, my daughter goes to school next door to Apalachee. Is there a school shooter?" one caller asked.

"We do have an active situation (at) Apalachee High School right now," the operator responded. "We have a lot of calls coming in."

More than 500 radio messages between emergency personnel were also released Friday.

"Active shooter!" an officer yells in one audio clip while speaking with a dispatcher, CNN reported. Another officer responds, "Correct. We have an active shooter at Apalachee High School."

The shooting killed teachers Richard Aspinwall, 39, and Cristina Irimie, 53, as well as students Mason Schermerhorn and Christian Angulo, both 14. Another teacher and eight more students were wounded, with seven of those hit by gunfire.

Colt Gray is charged as an adult with four counts of murder, and District Attorney Brad Smith has said more charges are likely to be filed against him in connection with the wounded. Authorities have also charged his father, Colin Gray, alleging that he gave his son access to the gun when he knew or should have known that the teen was a danger to himself and others.

The 13,000 students at Barrow County's other schools returned to class Tuesday. The 1,900 students who attend Apalachee are supposed to start returning the week of Sept. 23, officials said Friday.

Striking Boeing factory workers say they are ready to hold out for a better contract

By DAVID KOENIG, MANUEL VALDES and LINDSEY WASSON Associated Press

SEATTLE (AP) — Blue-collar workers from Boeing walked picket lines in the Pacific Northwest instead of building airplanes on Friday after they overwhelmingly rejected a proposed contract that would have raised their wages by 25% over four years.

The strike by 33,000 machinists will not disrupt airline flights anytime soon, but it is expected to shut down production of Boeing's best-selling jetliners, marking yet another setback for a company already dealing with billions of dollars in financial losses and a damaged reputation.

The company said it was taking steps to conserve cash while its CEO looks for ways to come up with a contract that the unionized factory workers will accept.

Late Friday, the Federal Mediation and Conciliation Service said it would convene new talks early next week.

"FMCS has been in contact with both IAM and Boeing to support their return to the negotiation table and commends the parties on their willingness to meet and work towards a mutually acceptable resolution," the agency said in a statement.

Boeing stock fell 3.7% Friday, bringing its decline for the year to nearly 40%.

The strike started soon after a regional branch of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers reported that in a Thursday vote, 94.6% of participating members rejected a contract offer that the union's own bargaining committee had endorsed, and 96% voted to strike.

Shortly after midnight, striking workers stood outside the Boeing factory in Renton, Washington, with signs reading, "Have you seen the damn housing prices?" Car horns honked and a boom box played songs including Twisted Sister's "We're Not Gonna Take It" and Taylor Swift's "Look What You Made Me Do."

Many of the workers who spoke to reporters said they considered the wage offer inadequate given how much the cost of living has increase in the Pacific Northwest. John Olson said his pay had increased just 2% during his six years at Boeing.

"The last contract we negotiated was 16 years ago, and the company is basing the wage increases off of wages from 16 years ago," the 45-year-old toolmaker said. "They don't even keep up with the cost of inflation."

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Others said they were unhappy about the company's decision to change the criteria used to calculate annual bonuses.

The machinists make \$75,608 per year on average, not counting overtime, and that would have risen to \$106,350 by the end of the proposed four-year contract, according to Boeing.

Under the rejected contract, workers would have received \$3,000 lump sum payments and a reduced share of health care costs in addition to pay raises. Boeing also met a key union demand by promising to build its next new plane in Washington state.

However, the offer 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 new Boeing contributions to employee 401(k) retirement accounts of up to \$4,160 per worker.

The head of the union local, IAM District 751 President Jon Holden, said the union would survey members to find out which issues they want to stress when negotiations resume. Boeing responded to the strike announcement by saying it was "ready to get back to the table to reach a new agreement."

"The message was clear that the tentative agreement we reached with IAM leadership was not acceptable to the members. We remain committed to resetting our relationship with our employees and the union," the company said in a statement.

Boeing Chief Financial Officer Brian West, speaking Friday at an investor conference in California, said the company was disappointed that it had a deal with union leadership, only to see it rejected by rank-and-file workers.

During the strike, Boeing will lose an important source of cash: Airlines pay most of the purchase price when they take delivery of a new plane. West said Boeing — which has about \$60 billion in total debt — is now looking at ways to conserve cash. He declined to estimate the financial impact of the strike, saying it would depend on how long the walkout lasts.

Before the strike, new CEO Kelly Ortberg gathered feedback from workers during visits to factory floors, and he "is already at work to get an agreement that meets and addresses their concerns," West said.

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said Biden administration officials have contacted Boeing and the union.

"We believe that they need to negotiate in good faith and work towards an agreement that gives employees benefits that they deserve. It would make the company stronger as well," she said.

Very little has gone right for Boeing this year, from a panel blowing out and leaving a gaping hole in one of its passenger jets in January to NASA leaving two astronauts in space rather sending them home on a problem-plagued Boeing spacecraft.

The striking machinists assemble the 737 Max, Boeing's best-selling airliner, along with the 777 jet and the 767 cargo plane. The walkout likely will not stop production of Boeing 787 Dreamliners, which are built by nonunion workers in South Carolina.

The strike is another challenge for Ortberg, who just six weeks ago was given the job of turning around a company that has lost more than \$25 billion in the last six years and fallen behind European rival Airbus.

Ortberg made a last-ditch effort to salvage a deal that had unanimous backing from the union's negotiators. He told machinists Wednesday that "no one wins" in a walkout and a strike would put Boeing's recovery in jeopardy and raise more doubt about the company in the eyes of its airline customers.

"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."

Ortberg faced a difficult position, according to union leader Holden, because machinists were bitter about stagnant wages and concessions they have made since 2008 on pensions and health care to prevent the company from moving jobs elsewhere.

"This is about respect, this is about the past, and this is about fighting for our future," Holden said in announcing the strike.

The suspension of airplane production could prove costly for beleaguered Boeing, depending on how

long it runs. The last Boeing strike, in 2008, lasted eight weeks and cost the company about \$100 million daily in deferred revenue. A 1995 strike lasted 10 weeks.

Before the tentative agreement was announced Sunday, Jefferies aerospace analyst Sheila Kahyaoglu estimated a strike would cost the company about \$3 billion based on the 2008 strike plus inflation and current airplane-production rates.

A.J. Jones, a quality inspector who has been at Boeing for 10 years, was among the workers picketing on a corner near Boeing's Renton campus. He said he was glad union members had decided to hold out for more pay.

"I'm not sure how long this strike is going to take, but however long it takes, we will be here until we get a better deal," Jones said.

Tropical Storm Ileana heads toward Los Cabos resorts bringing heavy rains

By MARIANA MARTÍNEZ BARBA Associated Press

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Authorities in Mexico's resort-studded Los Cabos area warned tourists and residents alike to stay inside Friday as Tropical Storm Ileana began to pound the southern tip of the Baja California peninsula with rain.

Ileana formed Thursday off the Pacific coast of Mexico and was lumbering north at 7 mph (11 kph), according to the U.S. National Hurricane Center. The forecast path would take it over or near the twin resorts of San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas.

Ileana was centered about 35 miles (55 kilometers) east-northeast of Cabo San Lucas, the center said in a Friday afternoon advisory. Maximum sustained winds were at 40 mph (65 kph), and Ileana is forecast to move near or over the southern portion of the Baja California peninsula Friday evening and over the southern and central Gulf of California this weekend.

A tropical storm warning was in effect for portions of the Baja California Peninsula, including Cabo San Lucas and San Jose del Cabo. Forecasters predicted 4 to 6 inches (10 to 15 centimeters) of rain would fall with Ileana, and up to 12 inches (30 centimeters) was possible for coastal areas of Michoacan, Colima, and Jalisco states through Friday.

Tropical storm conditions are expected to begin in portions of Baja California Sur during the next several hours where Tropical Storm Warnings are in effect. This heavy rainfall will bring a risk of flash flooding and mudslides to portions of western Mexico and southern Baja California.

Juan Manuel Arce Ortega, from Los Cabos Civil Protection, said, "The entire municipalities of La Paz and Los Cabos are already on red alert. This means that efforts are already underway to inform the population, as well as the implementation (of measures) and evacuation to temporary shelters."

They also urged residents to avoid crossing rivers, streams, and low areas where they can be swept away by water.

All schools in Los Cabos were also suspended Friday due to the storm.

Oscar Cruces Rodríguez of Mexico's federal Civil Protection said in a statement that residents should avoid leaving their homes until the storm passes and if residents are in an area at risk of flooding to find temporary shelters.

Authorities prepared 20 temporary shelters in San Jose del Cabo and Cabo San Lucas, according to Los Cabos Civil Protection.

At the Hacienda Beach Club and Residences in Cabo San Lucas, valet worker Alan Galvan said the rain arrived late Thursday night and has been constant. "The rain isn't very strong right now, but the waves are choppy," he said.

"The guests are very calm and already came down for coffee," Galvan said. "There's some flights canceled but everything is ok at the moment." Galvan said they are awaiting further advisories from authorities.

Rain remained consistent through Los Cabos Friday afternoon, with several roads flooded and some resorts stacking up sandbags on their perimeters. Some people were still walking around boat docks with their umbrellas.

"The priority has to be safety, starting with the workers. We always have to check on our colleagues who live in risk areas," said Lyzzette Liceaga, a tour operator at Los Cabos.

We give them the information shared by the authorities — firefighters in risk areas — so that they can go to the shelters if necessary," she added.

Judge frees Colorado paramedic convicted in death of Elijah McClain from prison

By COLLEEN SLEVIN and MEAD GRUVER Associated Press

DENVER (AP) — A Colorado paramedic convicted in the death of Elijah McClain, a Black man whose name became part of the rallying cries for social justice that swept the U.S. in 2020, is being released from prison after a judge reduced his sentence to four years of probation Friday.

Judge Mark Warner said during his ruling that Peter Cichuniec had to make quick decision the night of the arrest as the highest-ranking paramedic at the scene, the Denver Post reported. He also noted a background of no previous criminal history and good character for Cichuniec, who had an 18-year-career as a firefighter and paramedic before he was convicted.

Warner held that the case had "unusual and extenuating circumstances," in reference to a part of Colorado's mandatory sentencing law, which allows a court to modify a sentence after a defendant has served least 119 days in prison if the judge finds such circumstances.

McClain was walking down the street in a Denver suburb in 2019 when police responding to a suspicious person report forcibly restrained him and put him in a neck hold. His final words — "I can't breathe" — foreshadowed those of George Floyd a year later in Minneapolis.

Cichuniec and a fellow paramedic were convicted in December of criminally negligent homicide for injecting McClain with ketamine, a powerful sedative blamed for killing the 23-year-old massage therapist. Cichuniec also was convicted on a more serious charge of second-degree assault for giving a drug without consent or a legitimate medical purpose. The other paramedic avoided prison time, sentenced instead to 14 months in jail with work release and probation.

McClain's death and others have raised questions about the use of ketamine to subdue struggling suspects, and the prosecution sent shock waves through the ranks of paramedics across the U.S.

The case has already achieved a "deterrence effect" to discourage similar crimes, Warner said in the hearing in Denver.

The ruling by Warner, the same judge who handed down the prison sentence in March, will release Cichuniec from a prison on the northeastern Colorado plains, though exactly when was not immediately clear.

"Pete is coming home!" Cichuniec's supporters cried out after Warner reduced the sentence at the hearing, according to the Post. They declined to comment to the newspaper.

Colorado Attorney General Philip Weiser said in a statement that he was disappointed in the reduced sentence but respected the court's decision.

Candice Bailey, a police reform advocate in the Denver suburb of Aurora who helped raise awareness about McClain's death and pushed for charges to be brought, called Cichuniec's sentence reduction "disturbing."

"When you're talking about a life being taken and that this individual was found guilty of that, and then we see something like a sentence being vacated and a person being put on probation — put on probation — it is absolutely mind boggling to me," she said.

The president of the International Association of Fire Fighters, which had warned that Cichuniec's conviction would set a chilling precedent for paramedics and firefighters, said it was relieved by the ruling.

"Pete Cichuniec did not belong behind bars," Edward Kelly said in a statement. "We will always prioritize and advocate for the public's safety and our members' ability to do their jobs without fear of ill-conceived criminal prosecutions."

McClain's mother, Sheneen McClain, declined via email to comment Friday. In March she celebrated the original sentence handed down by the judge as she left the courtroom that day, raising her fist in the air.

After just a few hours, U.S. election bets put on hold by appeals court ruling

By WAYNE PARRY Associated Press

ATLANTIC CITY, N.J. (AP) — Just hours after it began, legal betting on the outcome of U.S. Congressional elections has been put on hold by a federal appeals court.

The Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit issued an order Thursday night temporarily freezing the matter until it can consider and rule on the issue. No timetable was initially given.

The court acted at about 8:30 p.m. Thursday, mere hours after a federal judge cleared the way for the only bets on American elections to be legally sanctioned by a U.S. jurisdiction.

U.S. District Court Judge Jia Cobb permitted New York startup company Kalshi to begin offering what amounts to bets on the outcome of November elections regarding which parties win control of the House and Senate.

The company's markets went live soon afterwards, and Kalshi accepted an unknown amount of bets, which it called "contracts."

The Thursday night order put a halt to any further such bets. What might happen to those already made was unclear Friday.

Neither Kalshi nor the commission immediately responded to messages seeking comment Friday.

The ruling came after the Commodity Futures Trading Commission appealed Cobb's ruling, warning that allowing election bets, even for a short period of time, risked serious harm from people trying to manipulate the election for financial purposes.

Prices on Kalshi's so-called predictive contracts varied during the afternoon and early evening hours during which they were live on Thursday. At one point, a bet on the Republicans to win control of the Senate was priced at 76 cents; a \$100 bet would pay \$129. A bet on the Democrats to win control of the House was priced at 63 cents, with a \$100 bet paying out \$154.

The elections category under which they had been posted Thursday was missing from the company's website Friday afternoon.

A tech company hired a top NYC official's brother. A private meeting and \$1.4M in contracts followed

By JAKE OFFENHARTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — Ahead of the 2022 school year, the education technology company 21stCentEd was seeking to expand its presence in New York City's public schools. So they turned to a man, Terence Banks, whose new consulting firm promised to connect clients with top government stakeholders.

Banks wasn't a registered lobbyist. His day job, at the time, was as a supervisor in the city's subway system. But he had at least one platinum connection: His older brother, David Banks, is New York City's schools chancellor, overseeing the nation's largest school system.

Within a month of the hire, 21stCentEd had secured a private meeting with the schools chancellor. In the two years since that October 2022 meeting, more than \$1.4 million in Education Department funds have flowed to the company, nearly tripling its previous total, records show.

The siblings — along with a third brother, Philip Banks, who serves as New York City's deputy mayor of public safety — are now enmeshed in a sprawling federal probe that has touched several high-ranking members of Mayor Eric Adams' administration.

Federal investigators seized phones last week from all three brothers and at least three other top city officials, including Police Commissioner Edward Caban, who resigned Thursday. Tom Donlon, a retired FBI official, was sworn in Friday as the interim police commissioner.

The exact nature of the investigation — or investigations — has not been disclosed. Among other things, federal authorities are investigating the former police commissioner's twin brother, James Caban, a former police sergeant who runs a nightclub security business.

On Wednesday, a city operations coordinator was fired after a bar owner in Brooklyn told NBC New

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York that he had been pressured by the aide into hiring the police commissioner's brother to make noise complaints against his business go away.

Federal investigators are also scrutinizing whether Terence Banks' consulting firm, the Pearl Alliance, broke the law by leveraging his family connections to help private companies secure city contracts, according to a person familiar with the matter. The person spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity because they were not authorized to disclose information about the investigations.

All three Banks brothers have denied wrongdoing. David and Terence Banks have said they don't believe they are the target of the investigation. But government watchdogs say the family's overlapping work in the private and public sector may have run afoul of conflict of interest guardrails as well as city and state laws on procurement lobbying.

"It has the appearance of Terence Banks using his family connections to help his client and enrich himself," said Susan Lerner, the executive director of Common Cause New York, a good-government group.

Timothy Sini, an attorney for Terence Banks, did not respond to specific questions about the consulting firm. But he wrote in an email, "We have been assured by the Government that Mr. Banks is not a target of this investigation."

Speaking at a news conference Friday, David Banks said FBI agents had not returned his phone, and he declined to answer questions about his relationship to his brother's consulting firm. "We are cooperating with a federal investigation," he said.

City ethics rules ban relatives from lobbying each other. At minimum, David Banks would be required to secure a waiver from the city's Conflicts of Interest Board before meeting with a company represented by his brother, according to John Kaehny, the executive director of the good-government group Reinvent Albany.

"It's surprisingly arrogant or obtuse that David Banks, one of the city's top government officials, would ignore this basic, commonsense, conflict of interest rule," Kaehny said in an email.

Neither the Department of Education nor the Conflicts of Interest Board would say whether a waiver was requested.

A spokesperson for the Department of Education, Nathaniel Styer, said all spending linked to 21stCentEd had come from individual schools and districts, which can make purchases of less than \$25,000 without the agency's approval.

The Utah-based company trains teachers and provides curriculums focused on artificial intelligence, robotics, and automation.

Dylan Howard, a spokesperson for the company, said Terence Banks was hired "to help 21stCentEd present our STEM solutions and services to decision makers within New York City public schools." He said they learned of his consulting firm through a 21stCentEd employee who has since left the company.

The spokesperson could not say how the meeting with the school's chancellor came about or whether Terence Banks attended. He added that Terence Banks had provided "no value" to the company and that his contract was terminated last December.

21stCentEd was one of several companies with city contracts that hired Terence Banks' consulting firm, according to a website for the Pearl Alliance that was taken down after news of the federal investigations emerged last week.

Another listed client, SaferWatch, sells panic buttons to schools and police departments. Since August of 2023, it has been awarded more than \$67,000 in city contracts, according to city records.

The third Banks brother, Philip Banks, maintains wide influence over the NYPD as deputy mayor for public safety. A spokesperson for SaferWatch, Hank Sheinkopf, declined to comment. The NYPD did not respond to email inquiries.

In total, the Pearl Alliance listed nine clients with millions of dollars in city contracts, including a software business, a grocery delivery start-up, and a company that specializes in concrete. At least seven of the companies have past or current contracts with the city.

It wasn't clear whether the federal inquiry into the consulting firm run by Terence Banks was part of the

investigation into the police commissioner's brother.

Ray Martin, the city official who was said to have pressured a bar owner to hire James Caban, was "terminated for cause" Thursday after the mayor's office learned of the allegations, according to Fabien Levy, the deputy mayor for communications.

The bar owner, Shamel Kelly, told WNBC-TV that Martin gave him what felt like an ultimatum last year to either pay James Caban or risk having his business shut down. Kelly said James Caban demanded an upfront fee of \$2,500. He said he had been interviewed Thursday by federal investigators and the city's Department of Investigation. The U.S. attorney's office and the Department of Investigation declined comment.

Attempts to reach Martin were not immediately successful. A cellphone number listed in his name was no longer working.

A lawyer for James Caban said he "unequivocally denies any wrongdoing" and has cooperated fully with law enforcement. Once the investigation is complete, lawyer Sean Hecker said, "it will be clear that these claims are unfounded and lack merit."

Both David and Philip Banks remain in their government positions. An attorney for Philip Banks, Benjamin Brafman, declined to comment.

At a press briefing Tuesday, Adams noted his relationship with the Banks family dates back decades, to when he served in the police department under the brothers' father. He said he never met with Terence Banks about city business.

"I've known the Banks families for years," Adams said. "And my knowing someone, I hold them to the same standard that I hold myself to."

Boar's Head closing Virginia plant linked to deadly listeria outbreak

By DEE-ANN DURBIN AP Business Writer

Boar's Head said Friday it's closing the Virginia plant tied to a deadly listeria outbreak.

The Sarasota, Florida-based company said it will also permanently discontinue production of liverwurst, the product that was linked to the deaths of at least nine people and hospitalizations of about 50 others in 18 states.

Boar's Head expressed regret and deep apologies for the outbreak in a statement on its website.

Boar's Head said an internal investigation at its Jarratt, Virginia, plant found that the contamination was the result of a specific production process. The process only existed at the Jarratt plant and was only used for liverwurst, the company said.

The Jarratt plant hasn't been operational since late July, when Boar's Head recalled more than 7 million pounds of deli meats and other products after tests confirmed listeria bacteria in its products was making people sick.

Listeria infections are caused by a hardy type of bacteria that can survive and even thrive during refrigeration. An estimated 1,600 people get listeria food poisoning each year and about 260 die, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control. Infections can be hard to pinpoint because symptoms may occur up to 10 weeks after eating contaminated food.

The Jarratt plant had a troubled history. Government inspectors found 69 instances of "noncompliance" at the facility over the last year, including instances of mold, insects, liquid dripping from ceilings and meat and fat residue on walls, floors and equipment.

Boar's Head said "hundreds" of employees will be impacted by the closure.

"We do not take lightly our responsibility as one of the area's largest employers," the company said. "But, under these circumstances, we feel that a plant closure is the most prudent course."

The company said it is appointing a new chief food safety officer who will report to its president. It is also establishing a safety council comprised of independent experts, including Mindy Brashears, a former food safety chief at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, and Frank Yiannas, a former deputy commissioner

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for food policy at the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"This is a dark moment in our company's history, but we intend to use this as an opportunity to enhance food safety programs not just for our company, but for the entire industry," the company said.

Stock market today: Wall Street's best week of 2024 closes with indexes near their records

By STAN CHOE AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. stocks closed out their best week of the year with more gains on Friday and climbed to the cusp of their records.

The S&P 500 rose 0.5% for a fifth straight gain and is just 0.7% below its all-time high set in July. Rallies for Microsoft, Broadcom and other big technology stocks helped it claw back almost all its losses from last week, which was its worst in nearly 18 months.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average jumped 297 points, or 0.7%, and at one point got within 30 points of its record set last month. The Nasdaq composite added 0.7%.

Uber Technologies helped drive the market higher with a gain of 6.4% after saying it will bring autonomous ride-hailing to Austin and Atlanta with Waymo early next year.

Stocks also got support from the bond market, where Treasury yields eased ahead of next week's meeting of the Federal Reserve. The unanimous expectation on Wall Street is for the Fed to deliver the first cut to interest rates in more than four years on Wednesday, and traders are rekindling hopes it may offer bigger-than-usual relief.

The Federal Reserve has been keeping its main interest rate at a two-decade high in hopes of slowing the economy enough to stifle high inflation. With inflation having eased substantially from its peak two summers ago, the Fed has said it can turn more focus to bolstering the slowing job market and economy.

How much to cut rates by will be a delicate balancing act for the Fed: Lowering them relieves pressure on the economy but can also give inflation more fuel. Reports earlier this week showed some underlying upward pressure may remain on inflation, which initially pushed traders to ratchet back expectations for the size of the Fed's upcoming move.

On Friday, though, traders were seeing roughly a coin flip's chance that the Fed could deliver a large cut of half of a percentage point, instead of the more traditional quarter of a point, according to data from CME Group. The federal funds rate is currently sitting in a range of 5.25% to 5.50%.

"Right now, the equity market is keying off the toss-up" in the size of the Fed's cut next week "and would probably be fine with either," said Sameer Samana, senior global market strategist at Wells Fargo Investment Institute.

"They care more about direction than magnitude, and rates falling should take pressure" off companies' expenses and stock prices, he said.

The yield on the 10-year Treasury eased to 3.65% from 3.68% late Thursday. The two-year yield, which more closely tracks expectations for Fed action, fell more sharply to 3.58% from 3.65%.

On Wall Street, home-furnishings company RH jumped 25.5% after reporting stronger profit and revenue for the latest quarter than expected. The company said demand has been gaining momentum each month "despite operating in the most challenging housing market in three decades."

The housing market has been contending with high mortgage rates, though they've been easing since the spring on expectations for coming rate cuts. Shoppers have also generally been beaten down as prices continue to rise across the economy, though a preliminary reading on U.S. consumer sentiment on Friday came in better than economists expected.

Oracle pared a big early gain to inch up 0.4% after giving long-term financial forecasts that analysts said topped their expectations. That brought the software company's gain to 14.3% for the week, which it began with a better-than-expected profit report for the latest quarter.

Technology stocks were generally the market's main drivers this week, particularly Nvidia and other big technology stocks that struggled earlier this summer on concerns their prices had shot too high in the frenzy around artificial intelligence. Nvidia rallied 15.8% over the week despite slipping 0.1% on Friday.

On the losing end of Wall Street Friday was Boeing, which lost 3.7% as aircraft assembly workers walked off the job. Union members voted overwhelmingly to go on strike and reject the troubled aerospace giant's tentative contract that would have increased wages by 25% over four years.

Adobe fell 8.5%, even though the company also reported better profit for the latest quarter than expected. Analysts said investors were more focused on its financial forecasts for the current quarter, where some trends looked to be falling short of expectations.

All told, the S&P 500 rose 30.26 points to 5,626.02. The Dow gained 297.01 to 41,393.78, and the Nasdaq composite added 114.30 to 17,683.98.

In stock markets abroad, indexes rose in Europe after finishing mixed in Asia.

Stuck-in-space astronauts reflect on being left behind and adjusting to life in orbit

By MARCIA DUNN AP Aerospace Writer

CAPE CANAVERAL, Fla. (AP) — Stuck-in-space astronauts Butch Wilmore and Suni Williams said Friday it's been tough dealing with their Boeing ride leaving without them and the prospect of spending several extra months in orbit.

It was their first public comments since last week's return of the Boeing Starliner capsule that took them to the International Space Station in June. They remained behind after NASA determined the problem-plagued capsule posed too much risk for them to ride back in. Their eight-day mission is now expected to last more than eight months.

"It was trying at times. There were some tough times all the way through," Wilmore said from 260 miles (420 kilometers) up. As spacecraft pilots, "you don't want to see it go off without you, but that's where we wound up."

While they never expected to be up there nearly a year, as Starliner's first test pilots, they knew there could be problems that might delay their return. "That's how things go in this business," Williams said.

Wilmore and Williams are now full-fledged station crew members, chipping in on routine maintenance and experiments. Williams will take over command of the space station in a few more weeks, Wilmore told reporters during a news conference — only their second since blasting off from Florida on June 5.

The duo, along with seven others on board, welcomed a Soyuz spacecraft carrying two Russians and an American earlier this week, temporarily raising the station population to 12, a near record. And two more astronauts will fly up on SpaceX later this month; two capsule seats will be left empty for Wilmore and Williams for the return leg.

The transition to station life was "not that hard" since both had previous stints there, said Williams, who logged two long space station stays years ago.

"This is my happy place. I love being up here in space," she said.

Wilmore noted that if his adjustment wasn't instantaneous, it was "pretty close."

The astronauts said they appreciate all the prayers and well wishes from strangers back home, and that it's helped them cope with everything they'll miss out on back home.

Williams couldn't help but fret for a while over losing precious face-to-face time with her mother. Wilmore won't be around for his youngest daughter's final year of high school. He just requested an absentee ballot on Friday so he can vote in the November election from orbit. Both stressed the importance of carrying out their civic duties as their mission goes on.

Their Starliner capsule marked the first Boeing spaceflight with astronauts. It endured a series of thruster failures and helium leaks before arriving at the space station on June 6. It landed safely in the New Mexico desert earlier this month, but Boeing's path forward in NASA's commercial crew program remains uncertain.

The space agency hired SpaceX and Boeing as an orbital taxi service a decade ago after the shuttles retired. SpaceX has been flying astronauts since 2020.

Williams said she's excited to fly two different spacecraft on the same mission. "We're testers, that's what we do," she said.

"We wanted to take Starliner to the completion and land it back on land at home," she added. "But you have to turn the page and look at the next opportunity."

A review of some of Pope Francis' most memorable quotes over his papacy

By The Associated Press undefined

On Friday, flying back to Rome from a lengthy trip to Asia, Pope Francis criticized both U.S. presidential candidates for what he called anti-life policies on abortion and migration. He advised American Catholics to choose who they think is the "lesser evil" in the upcoming U.S. elections.

"Both are against life, be it the one who kicks out migrants, or be it the one who kills babies," Francis said. Neither Republican candidate Donald Trump nor the Democratic candidate, Kamala Harris, was mentioned by name.

It was the latest in a long string of memorable — and sometimes controversial — comments from the pope, who throughout his 11-year papacy has often been willing to speak out in impromptu fashion.

Several of the most noteworthy comments related to LGBTQ+ issues — a matter of keen public interest given official Catholic teaching that condemns same-sex marriage and sexual relations. Some examples:

— July 30, 2013. During his first press conference, says "Who am I to judge?" when asked about a purportedly gay priest, signaling a more welcoming approach to LGBTQ+ Catholics.

— May 21, 2018: Tells a gay man "God made you like this and he loves you."

— Jan. 24, 2023: Declares in an Associated Press interview that "Being homosexual is not a crime."

— Jan. 28, 2023: Clarifies his comments to AP which implied that while homosexual activity was not a crime it is a sin in the eyes of the church. "When I said it is a sin, I was simply referring to Catholic moral teaching, which says that every sexual act outside of marriage is a sin."

— Aug. 24, 2023: During World Youth Day in Lisbon, Portugal, the pope led a crowd of a half-million young people chanting "todos, todos, todos" (everyone, everyone, everyone) to emphasize that all are welcome in the Catholic Church.

— May 20, 2024: Francis reportedly says "there is already an air of faggotness" in seminaries, in closed-door comments to Italian bishops in reaffirming the church's ban on gay priests. He later apologized for causing offense.

Among other notable quotes:

— Jan. 19, 2015: Francis, while firmly upholding church teaching banning contraception, said Catholics don't have to breed "like rabbits" and should instead practice "responsible parenting."

— February 2015: The pope referred to the possible "Mexicanization" of his native Argentina from drug trafficking. It created a stir, prompting the Vatican to send a diplomatic note to Mexico's ambassador insisting that Francis "absolutely did not intend to offend the Mexican people" with the remark.

— Feb. 18, 2016: Flying back to Rome from a pilgrimage that included Mass at the Mexican side of the border with the U.S., Pope Francis, answering a reporter's question, said a person who advocates building walls is "not Christian." A spokesperson later insisted the pope was not singling out Donald Trump.

— May 25, 2019: Addressing a Vatican-sponsored conference, the pope said abortion can never be condoned, even when the fetus is gravely sick or likely to die. "Is it licit to throw away a life to resolve a problem?" he asked. "Is it licit to hire a hitman to resolve a problem?"

— July 26, 2022: The pope issued a historic apology for the Catholic Church's cooperation with Canada's "catastrophic" policy of Indigenous residential schools. "I humbly beg forgiveness for the evil committed by so many Christians against the Indigenous peoples," he said.

— May 12, 2023: Blasting couples who have pets instead of children, Francis called for resources to be dedicated to helping couples grow their families, saying it was necessary to "plant the future" with hope.

— February 2024: The pope said in an interview that Ukraine, facing a possible defeat, should have the courage to negotiate an end to the war with Russia. "I think that the strongest one is the one who looks at the situation, thinks about the people and has the courage of the white flag, and negotiates," he said.

Vatican spokesman Matteo Bruni said Francis picked up the "white flag" term that had been used by the

interviewer. He issued a statement of clarification after the pope's "white flag" comments sparked criticism that he was siding with Russia in the conflict.

Pope slams both Harris and Trump as 'against life' and urges Catholics to vote for 'lesser evil'

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

ABOARD THE PAPAL PLANE (AP) — Pope Francis on Friday slammed both U.S. presidential candidates for what he called anti-life policies on abortion and migration, and he advised American Catholics to choose who they think is the "lesser evil" in the upcoming U.S. elections.

"Both are against life, be it the one who kicks out migrants, or be it the one who kills babies," Francis said.

The Argentine Jesuit was asked to provide counsel to American Catholic voters during an airborne news conference while he flew back to Rome from his four-nation tour through Asia. Francis stressed that he is not an American and would not be voting.

Neither Republican candidate Donald Trump nor the Democratic candidate, Kamala Harris, was mentioned by name.

But Francis nevertheless expressed himself in stark terms when asked to weigh in on their positions on two hot-button issues in the U.S. election — abortion and migration — that are also of major concern to the Catholic Church.

Francis has made the plight of migrants a priority of his pontificate and speaks out emphatically and frequently about it. While strongly upholding church teaching forbidding abortion, Francis has not emphasized church doctrine as much as his predecessors.

Francis said migration is a right described in Scripture and that anyone who does not follow the Biblical call to welcome the stranger is committing a "grave sin."

He was also blunt in speaking about abortion. "To have an abortion is to kill a human being. You may like the word or not, but it's killing," he said. "We have to see this clearly."

Asked what voters should do at the polls, Francis recalled the civic duty to vote.

"One should vote, and choose the lesser evil," he said. "Who is the lesser evil, the woman or man? I don't know.

"Everyone in their conscience should think and do it," he said.

The Harris and Trump campaigns did not immediately respond to requests for comment from The Associated Press.

U.S. President Joe Biden, an observant Catholic, shares Harris' strong support for abortion rights, a stance that prompted some Catholic bishops and other conservatives to call for him to be denied access to Communion.

After meeting Francis in person at the Vatican in October 2021, Biden came away saying the pope told him he was a "good Catholic" and should continue receiving Communion.

Francis, asked on previous occasions about some U.S. bishops who want to deny Communion to Biden over his support for abortion rights, has said bishops should be pastors, not politicians.

Friday's news conference was not the first time Francis has weighed in on a U.S. election. In the run-up to the 2016 election, Francis was asked about Trump's plan to build a wall at the U.S.-Mexico border. Francis declared then that anyone who builds a wall to keep out migrants "is not Christian."

In responding Friday, Francis recalled that he celebrated Mass at the U.S.-Mexico border and "there were so many shoes of the migrants who ended up badly there."

Trump pledges massive deportations, just as he did in his first White House bid, when there was a vast gulf between his ambitions and the legal, financial and political realities of such an undertaking.

The U.S. bishops conference, for its part, has called abortion the "preeminent priority" for American Catholics in its published voter advice. Harris has strongly defended abortion rights and has emphasized support for reinstating a federal right to abortion.

In his comments, the pope added: "On abortion, science says that a month from conception, all the organs of a human being are already there, all of them. Performing an abortion is killing a human being.

Whether you like the word or not, this is killing. You can't say the church is closed because it does not allow abortion. The church does not allow abortion because it's killing. It is murder."

However, cells are only beginning the process of developing into organs in the earliest weeks of pregnancy. For example, cardiac tissue starts to form in the first two months — initially a tube that only later evolves into the four chambers that define a heart. The American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists says that by 13 weeks, all major organs have formed.

In other comments, Francis:

— denied a French media report that he would travel to Paris for the December inauguration of the restored Notre Dame Cathedral, saying flat-out he would not be there. But he confirmed he would like to go to the Canary Islands to highlight the plight of migrants.

— tamped down renewed speculation that he might finally return to Argentina later this year, saying he wants to go but that nothing had been decided. He added: "There are various things to resolve first." Francis has not been home since before the 2013 conclave that elected him pope.

— declared that China was "a promise and a hope" for the Catholic Church and hoped to one day visit.

— called sexual abuse "demonic" and weighed on the latest revelations of assault against a legendary French priest, Abbe Pierre.

Fani Willis skips a Georgia state Senate hearing while challenging subpoena

By KATE BRUMBACK Associated Press

ATLANTA (AP) — A special Georgia state Senate committee that had subpoenaed Fulton County District Attorney Fani Willis with plans to question her Friday about "alleged misconduct" related to her election case against former President Donald Trump was unable to do so because she didn't show up.

The Republican-led committee was formed earlier this year to look into allegations of "various forms of misconduct" against Willis, an elected Democrat, with regard to her prosecution of Trump and others over their efforts to overturn the former president's 2020 election loss in Georgia. The committee last month sent subpoenas to Willis ordering her to appear and to produce piles of documents.

Willis last week filed a petition asking a judge to declare the subpoenas void and to keep the committee from enforcing them, but that challenge wasn't heard before Friday's hearing. Her campaign sent out an email Friday inviting supporters to a fundraising reception in Washington that afternoon.

In Willis' absence, the committee heard from a lawyer in the office of legislative counsel and a former secretary of the state Senate, both of whom said the committee does have the power to use subpoenas to compel witnesses to appear and to produce documents.

Committee chairman Sen. Bill Cowsert noted at the beginning of the hearing that Willis was not present. As it drew to a close, he asked a staffer to check the hallway outside the committee room in the state Capitol to make sure she wasn't waiting out there.

"Let's please note for the record that Ms. Willis has failed to appear in compliance with the subpoena and has failed to produce documents requested," Cowsert said. He added that the committee has hired outside legal counsel to assist in the enforcement of the subpoena.

The committee went into executive session to meet with its lawyer after the hearing was over. Then Cowsert and other Republican members of the committee left without addressing reporters.

Democratic committee member Sen. Harold Jones II told reporters that the committee is politically motivated and is "basically trying to serve the interests of former President Trump." He said lawmakers should instead be spending their time on issues that are important to Georgians.

Among the alleged misconduct the committee is investigating is Willis' hiring of special prosecutor Nathan Wade, with whom she had a romantic relationship, to lead the prosecution against Trump and others. The resolution creating the committee says the romantic relationship amounted to a "clear conflict of interest and a fraud upon the taxpayers" of the county and state.

Willis and Wade have acknowledged the relationship but have said it began after he was hired and ended before the indictment against Trump was filed.

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Trump and other defendants argued that the relationship created a conflict of interest that should disqualify Willis and her office from continuing with her prosecution of the case. Fulton County Superior Court Judge Scott McAfee in March ruled that Willis' actions showed a "tremendous lapse in judgment," but he did not find a conflict of interest that would disqualify Willis. He said she could continue her prosecution as long as Wade stepped aside, which he did.

Trump and others have appealed that ruling to the Georgia Court of Appeals, which has scheduled arguments for December.

One of the committee's subpoenas orders Willis to produce documents related to Wade, including documents related to his hiring and payment, documents related to money or items of value that Wade and Willis may have exchanged, text messages and emails between the two, and their phone records.

The committee also requested any documents her office sent in response to requests from the U.S. House, as well as communications Willis and her office had with the White House, the U.S. Justice Department and the House relating to the 2020 presidential election. And they asked for documents related to federal grant money Willis' office has received.

Willis' lawyers — including former Democratic Georgia Gov. Roy Barnes — argued in a court filing that the subpoenas are "overbroad and not reasonably tailored to a legitimate legislative need" and that they "seek confidential and privileged information, as well as private and personal information that is not the legitimate target of a legislative subpoena."

They asked Fulton County Superior Court Judge Shukura Ingram to declare the subpoenas void because they fall outside of legislative subpoena power, because they were issued after the legislative session ended and because they violate the separation of powers provided for in the state Constitution. They also asked that the subpoenas be declared void because they seek privileged and confidential information. Finally, they asked that a judge permanently prohibit the committee members from pursuing or enforcing the subpoenas.

In the meantime, they have asked the judge to file a temporary restraining order to keep the committee from trying to enforce the subpoenas while she considers their petition.

Lawyers for the committee wrote in a filing that Willis used the wrong legal avenue to challenge her subpoenas, and that she should have filed a motion to quash them. They also noted that neither Willis nor her attorneys ever approached the committee to ask that the scope of the subpoenas be narrowed or to ask for more time to respond or a postponement of the committee hearing.

They argued that the subpoenas are well within the committee's authority and that they want to seek the court's help to enforce them, so they asked the judge not to issue a temporary restraining order.

Ingram indicated during a hearing Friday afternoon that she would rule as soon as possible. Either way, the fight over the subpoenas seems set to continue in court.

Justin Timberlake pleads guilty to impaired driving in New York

By PHILIP MARCELO Associated Press

SAG HARBOR, N.Y. (AP) — Justin Timberlake urged drivers not to get behind the wheel of a car after even a single alcoholic drink on Friday, shortly after pleading guilty to driving while impaired in New York's Hamptons earlier this year.

The public safety announcement in front of the Sag Harbor police department was part of the plea deal that knocked down the misdemeanor charge he'd faced to a non-criminal traffic violation. The boy band singer-turned-solo star and actor was also sentenced to a \$500 fine with a \$260 surcharge, 25 hours of community service at the nonprofit of his choosing and a 90-day suspension of his license.

"I try to hold myself to a very high standard, for myself, and this was not that," Timberlake told the news media and other onlookers after the hearing in the adjacent Sag Harbor Village Court.

"Even if you've had one drink, don't get behind the wheel of a car," he said. "There's so many alternatives. Call a friend. Take an Uber. There's many travel apps. Still, take a taxi. This is a mistake that I made, but I'm hoping that whoever is watching and listening right now can learn from this mistake. I know that I certainly have."

The NSYNC star made similar comments during the court hearing and said he grew up in a small town

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and appreciated the kind of strain his arrest has made on a community like Sag Harbor.

The one-time whaling village, which is mentioned in Herman Melville's classic novel "Moby-Dick," is nestled amid the Hamptons, an area of seaside communities around 100 miles (160 kilometers) east of New York City.

Timberlake was arrested there a little after midnight on June 18 after police said he ran a stop sign in the village center, veered out of his lane and got out of his BMW smelling of alcohol.

Police said the 43-year-old Tennessee native told the officer he had had one martini and was following some friends home. He originally pleaded not guilty to a misdemeanor charge of driving while intoxicated.

Timberlake told the court he's had a lot of time to reflect on his actions and was "grateful for the opportunity to move forward" and use his platform to hopefully help others make "better decisions."

"I should have had better judgment," he said to the judge. "I understand the seriousness of this."

Judge Carl Irace said he did not oppose reducing the charge Timberlake faced since he was a first time offender and thanked him for speaking sincerely and "from the heart." But he questioned the appropriateness of the proposed sentence, dismissing the public announcement Timberlake intended to make shortly after the court proceedings as "unsatisfactory."

Irace said imposing an additional requirement of community service would give the singer more time to reflect on his actions.

"My experience is that these conditions can prove helpful and even gratifying for the accused," he said.

Prosecutor Patrick O'Connell told the judge they had weighed recommending community service, but thought a statement from Timberlake would be a more valuable public service because of its potential to influence a younger generation worldwide.

He also said Timberlake's remarks would hopefully show that "no one is above the law," not even the wealthy and famous.

"Mr. Timberlake received the same treatment as any other defendant," Suffolk County District Attorney Ray Tierney added in a statement after the hearing. "Justice should be applied equally to all individuals, regardless of their wealth or celebrity status."

Among those in the courtroom Friday was a local mother whose 12-year-old son was killed by a drunk driver in 2018.

Alisa McMorris, who now runs a foundation in her son Andrew's memory, said she hoped Timberlake's remarks would help bring more awareness to the dangers of driving under the influence.

"Justin has such a huge platform to the next generation. People listen to him," she said alongside her daughter after the singer had departed. "Five words I tell the kids when I go to the high schools is 'How are we getting home?' and he spoke about that. Make a plan. I don't want another sister or a family to have to go through what we did."

Edward Burke Jr., Timberlake's attorney, maintained outside the court after Friday's hearing that his client only had one drink in two hours at the American Hotel before his arrest.

"Contrary to what was reported, he wasn't drinking other peoples' drinks, or warned in advance not to drive," said Burke, adding that the lesser charge Timberlake pleaded to is "consistent with these facts."

At one point in the hearing, Timberlake promised Judge Irace he wouldn't "go back" to driving after having a drink again. The judge, who had otherwise been serious in tone, playfully interjected: "But come back to Sag Harbor! It's a great place."

Feds rarely punish hospitals for turning away pregnant patients

By AMANDA SEITZ Associated Press

As the pregnant woman's contractions rolled in every two minutes, staff at Our Lady of the Lake Regional Medical Center in Baton Rouge, Louisiana, dispatched an ambulance to send her elsewhere.

Just two minutes later, she gave birth to a 6-pound baby girl in the cab of the ambulance down the road from the 900-bed hospital.

The incident, government investigators concluded last year, was a violation of a federal law that requires emergency rooms to stabilize patients in medical distress before discharging or transferring them.

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Yet, Our Lady of the Lake has never been penalized for that incident or any of its other violations of the law. Few emergency rooms ever are.

Just a dozen hospitals have been fined for refusing to treat patients — pregnant or not — over the past two years, an Associated Press analysis of civil monetary penalties issued by the U.S. Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General found. It took years for the government to decide those penalties.

Not one of the more than 100 emergency rooms that mistreated or turned away pregnant women since 2022, when the Biden administration pledged to toughen enforcement of the law, has been fined.

“What little we know about the investigations have yielded very rare results,” said Sara Rosenbaum, a George Washington University health law and policy professor.

At Our Lady of the Lake, which did not provide comment for this article, inspectors determined the emergency room’s staff members violated the federal mandate seven times since 2017, when they refused a needed surgery to a Medicaid patient with a broken spine, left a suicidal teenager unattended in the lobby and failed to examine another pregnant woman before sending her to another hospital, federal records show.

Other emergency rooms denied care to pregnant women, sometimes leaving them to miscarry in bathrooms, deliver babies in cars or develop risky infections. Some repeatedly flouted the mandate without consequence, including one Tennessee emergency room with such long wait times that a pregnant woman had to be hospitalized for a week after an 8-hour wait and a man with chest pain collapsed in the lobby, then died.

HHS does not demand fines from hospitals that violate the law except in unusual cases where they refuse to improve their practices, agency officials said.

“Because the consequences are so real, we have seen hospitals work with us almost every single time,” HHS Secretary Xavier Becerra said in a statement to the AP. “We have been and will continue to be forward leaning here, communicating our intent directly and very seriously to hospital executives and provider associations which is, in part, why we have seen such good cooperation.”

After the Supreme Court overturned the nationwide right to an abortion, the Biden administration turned to a longstanding federal law, the Emergency Medical Treatment and Active Labor Act, in a frantic effort to ensure abortion access for women in dire medical circumstances. The White House has argued that to comply with the law, hospitals must provide emergency abortions for pregnant women who need them to save their lives or reproductive organs, despite state abortion bans.

Asked about the AP’s findings on Friday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre put blame on former President Donald Trump for appointing three Supreme Court justices who ruled to upend U.S. abortion rights.

The Biden administration has sent letters to hospitals repeatedly reminding them of that law and the penalties — up to \$129,232 per violation or loss of Medicare funding — for flouting it.

It also has rolled out a new website making it easier for patients to file a complaint if they are rejected, and it promised to expediate those investigations.

Last year, for example, HHS announced that two facilities — Freeman Health System in Joplin, Missouri, and University of Kansas Health System in Kansas City, Kansas — ran afoul of the federal law after refusing an emergency abortion to Mylissa Farmer.

Doctors at both hospitals told the 41-year old Missouri woman that her baby had no chance of surviving after her water broke at 17 weeks but because a fetal heartbeat was still detectable, her condition needed to worsen before they’d be willing to terminate her pregnancy.

Neither hospital has been fined.

“It would be welcomed if the federal government took a stronger enforcement role in those cases,” said Alison Tanner, an attorney for National Women’s Law Center who represents Farmer. “We have a maternal health crisis in this country and in states with bans on abortion care, it is far worse and more dangerous.”

Tanner said the HHS Office of Inspector General, which is responsible for issuing fines for violations of the law, is investigating Farmer’s case. The office declined to comment on cases under review.

The government’s most recent fines against hospitals that turned away pregnant patients were cases

from years ago.

A Tennessee hospital agreed to pay a \$100,000 fine for a 2018 case involving a pregnant patient who was discharged and gave birth in a car at 42 weeks pregnant. A Kentucky hospital was fined \$90,000 for refusing to help a patient with an ectopic pregnancy in 2021.

After a complaint against a hospital is filed, a state surveyor investigates the hospital. A physician and the federal government review the findings to determine whether or not a patient received inadequate treatment. If an emergency room violated the federal law, the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services may refer the case to the HHS inspector general to consider penalties.

Those investigations are "slow, insufficiently staffed, with a lot of pushback tolerated from hospitals," Rosenbaum, an expert on the law, said.

Emergency rooms were supposed to stop turning away patients in medical crisis decades ago, when Congress passed bipartisan legislation designed to prohibit patient dumping that then-Republican President Ronald Reagan signed in 1986.

The law requires facilities that accept Medicare funding to provide a medical screening exam to anyone who shows up at or near their door and offer stabilizing treatment, if needed. Emergency rooms without the resources or staff to properly treat that patient are required to arrange a medical transfer to another hospital, after they've confirmed the facility can accept the patient.

The law, Sen. David Durenberger promised nearly 40 years ago as he rallied for its passage, would be a warning to private hospitals that had been dumping pregnant patients and gunshot victims on the doorsteps of public hospitals.

"This amendment is to send a clear signal to the hospital community," he said on the floor of Congress. "That all Americans, regardless of wealth or status, should know that a hospital will provide what services it can when they are truly in distress."

But a decade ago, a report published by the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights concluded there was "insufficient regulatory oversight of the law," and that hospitals were not properly training staff to follow the mandate nor did they have proper funding to comply with it.

Tua Tagovailoa is dealing with another concussion. What we know and what happens next

By TIM REYNOLDS AP Sports Writer

MIAMI GARDENS, Fla. (AP) — Tua Tagovailoa is now dealing with the third diagnosed concussion of his NFL career, all of them coming in the last 24 months.

And there are now questions about his future — both short-term and long-term.

The Miami Dolphins quarterback was hurt in his team's 31-10 loss to the Buffalo Bills on Thursday night, sustaining the injury on a play where he collided into Bills defensive back Damar Hamlin. Tagovailoa, who was rushing successfully for a first down, initiated the contact by lowering his shoulder into Hamlin instead of sliding as many quarterbacks do on a scramble.

Players from both teams immediately began gesturing that Tagovailoa needed medical attention as he lay on the turf and exhibited some signs typically associated with a traumatic brain injury. He remained down on the field for a couple of minutes, got to his feet and walked to the sideline after the play in the third quarter.

He made his way to the tunnel not long afterward, looking into the stands before smiling and departing toward the locker room. The Dolphins needed only a few minutes to announce that he would not return to the game.

What do we know about Tagovailoa's concussion?

All anyone really could say with certainty late Thursday and early Friday was that he was concussed. The process of the Dolphins evaluating his condition was beginning in earnest on Friday and there is no timetable for how long that will take.

He has been placed into the NFL's concussion protocol and will have to successfully complete a series of tests and assessments before he or the Dolphins can even think of him returning to the field. The Dolphins

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will bring in another quarterback, coach Mike McDaniel said Friday, simply because they know they'll be without Tagovailoa for an undetermined period of time.

"Each player and each concussion is unique," the NFL says in the introduction to the protocol rules. "Therefore, there is no set timeframe for return to participation or for the progression through the steps of the graduated exertion program set forth below. Recovery time will vary from player to player."

What is Tagovailoa's injury history?

He was diagnosed with two concussions in 2022, as well as one when he played at Alabama.

There have been many other issues, including some in college that were serious. At Alabama, he had a procedure for a high ankle sprain in October 2019, which caused him to miss one game. A month later, Tagovailoa dislocated his right hip against Mississippi State, which prematurely ended his college career.

In his pro career, Tagovailoa has dealt with rib fractures, a thumb injury and a fractured middle finger on his throwing hand, along with the concussions.

In April 2023, he revealed that he discussed with his family whether it was wise to continue playing after the two concussions in the 2022 season.

What are players saying about Tagovailoa?

There are a mix of reactions, as would be expected, though many former players who have since become analysts are suggesting that he take a hard look at his long-term health and ask if it's wise to continue playing football.

Former linebacker Manti Te'o, who has known Tagovailoa for years and calls him his "little brother," said he hoped to see him leave the game after the concussion at Cincinnati in 2022. He said he's thinking of his parents, what they had to have gone through on Thursday night, as well as Tagovailoa's long-term ability to parent his own children.

"After he suffered the one against the Bengals, I wanted him to walk," Te'o said on NFL Network's "Good Morning Football" on Friday, appearing to choke back tears after he said that. "What people have to understand is this is just a game. And then there's life."

Added former NFL quarterback Robert Griffin III, on social media: "Think of the person not just the player," a sentiment shared by countless others.

And former receiver Dez Bryant was even more direct, saying it's time for the league to intervene. "That's it... NFL go ahead and do the right thing," Bryant posted. "Tua has had entirely way too many concussions ... He need to retire for his longevity health concerns."

That stance was echoed later by Las Vegas Raiders coach Antonio Pierce, who said he believes Tagovailoa should take care of his family and not risk further injury.

McDaniel made clear on Friday that he simply wants Tagovailoa to recover and wanted no part of speculating on his future. Tagovailoa has signed a four-year, \$212 million extension that begins in the 2025 season.

Have players retired because of concussions?

Retirements over concussion concerns have happened on a handful of known occasions, with players at varying stages of their career when they made the decision to walk away.

— Carolina Panthers linebacker Luke Kuechly is perhaps the most prominent example. He was 28 when he retired at the peak of his game, a perennial All-Pro but one who had three concussions in the span of three seasons. Among those concussions: one in a game in 2016 when he cried on the field. He has since been an advocate for awareness and safety.

— Frank Wycheck, the Tennessee Titans star who famously threw the lateral on the "Music City Miracle" play, left the game after 11 seasons citing the "lingering effects" of the "physical stuff," including two concussions in the 2003 season. He retired after that season, said in a television interview in 2017 that he was certain he had CTE, and died last December after a fall at his home.

— Jordan Reed was 30 when he retired in 2021 after seven seasons as a tight end for Washington and San Francisco, citing concussions. He said doctors advised him continuing to play would not be wise.

— Kylie Fitts was 27 when he retired in 2022. The former Arizona linebacker said at the time "due to too many concussions ... it is no longer safe for me to continue to play."

— Chris Borland was only 24 when he retired after just one season in the NFL, citing concerns about

head trauma.

All welcome: Advocates fight to ensure citizens not fluent in English have equal access to elections

By CELIA FRAZIER/News 21 News21

LAS VEGAS (AP) — In the heart of Las Vegas' Chinatown, on the second floor of a sprawling shopping plaza that serves as a hub for the city's Asian community, residents gather for a celebration of the annual Dragon Boat Festival.

Some stop in to grab shiny, red packages of premade zongzi, a rice dish wrapped in bamboo leaves often eaten during the Chinese holiday.

Others talk with advocates who are on hand to educate people about the importance of elections. They grab flyers decorated with a colorful dragon boat and something else: a QR code taking them to information about how to vote – all translated into Chinese.

Longtime community leader Vida Lin walks in and flashes her own "I Voted" sticker, having already cast her early ballot in the state primary. Nine years ago, Lin founded the Asian Community Development Council, and since then, she has fought for the very information attendees are getting today: details about how to register to vote and cast a ballot on Election Day, translated into their primary language.

For Lin, these resources help increase civic engagement among one of the fastest-growing demographic groups in the state and nation. That, she says, is the only way her community can gain power.

"If you don't come out to vote, you don't get your voices heard, you're not going to get these issues that we have taken care of," Lin says. "It'll be like what happened 30 years ago when I came here with no services, no help, nowhere to go. We'll be stuck there."

Nevada, like the nation, is growing ever more diverse. These population shifts bring their own challenges to ensuring democracy is open and available to all American citizens, no matter what language they speak.

This November, under a provision of the federal Voting Rights Act, some 24 million citizens are entitled to assistance that will allow them to vote in their primary language. Section 203 of the act requires communities meeting certain population thresholds and other requirements to provide language assistance to groups that have "suffered a history of exclusion from the political process" – specifically Spanish-speaking, Asian and Indigenous populations.

"This is a way of compensating for past and ongoing discrimination that does occur in the electoral process," says Angelo Ancheta, a California lawyer and expert on the federal language provisions.

"We're trying to figure out, not just in voting but in a larger sense, how we incorporate immigrants into the American population. And what do we do as a country for new immigrants, and immigrants who've been here for a long time, whose language skills are still not where they might need to be to participate fully in the process?"

But in an ever-changing America, some question whether the federal law is doing its job.

Compliance varies from place to place. Some officials argue it's too expensive to provide such assistance, or they point to a lack of qualified translators. Others may be caught off guard if sudden shifts in demographics trigger the mandate.

"I remember talking with a county clerk ... and as soon as I mentioned my colleagues and I are looking at bilingual ballots, it was almost like he wanted to throw salt over his shoulder – like, 'Don't bring that up,'" says Matthew May, who researched Section 203 as part of his work at the Idaho Policy Institute at Boise State University. "He's thinking about it from an administrative side. ... 'That's a nightmare to implement as I'm already trying to implement new voter security systems or upgrade the ballot systems.'"

Many argue the federal law doesn't go far enough and leaves out tens of thousands who may need translations in Arabic, Farsi or other languages not covered by the Voting Rights Act.

And there are places that barely miss the federal government's threshold to force a community to provide language assistance. Those places include Clark County, Nevada, which fell just 434 citizens short of requiring officials to provide election materials this year in Chinese.

In such places, local groups like Lin's are stepping in to push for change on their own. "What we love

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about our community: If there's a need, we all come together," Lin says.

'Turnout does go up'

Congress added Section 203 to the Voting Rights Act in 1975 after determining that citizens belonging to certain language groups had been excluded from participating in elections.

The mandate requires towns, cities and counties to provide assistance in a certain language if the population of that language group meets the following requirements: more than 5% of voting-age citizens, or at least 10,000 people, have limited English proficiency, and the illiteracy rate among those individuals exceeds the national rate.

At the state level, the mandate applies if more than 5% of voting-age citizens statewide have limited English proficiency and the illiteracy rate among those individuals exceeds the national rate. California, Texas and Florida are required to provide voting assistance in Spanish.

Additionally, any city or county containing even part of a Native American reservation must provide language assistance if the population and illiteracy thresholds are met.

Under the law, any election information provided in English must also be provided in the specified language. Generally, that means providing bilingual poll workers on Election Day and translated ballots, sample ballots, voter registration forms and voter information pamphlets.

Every five years, the U.S. Census Bureau releases a list of jurisdictions that must provide language assistance. The latest list came out in 2021 and requires 331 jurisdictions in 30 states to provide language aid through 2026.

From 2000 to 2019, the number of people who speak a language other than English at home went from 44 million to about 68 million. The latter figure is nearly 22% of the entire U.S. population.

During the same period, the number of people who speak Spanish at home grew by more than 15 million. And the number of people who speak Chinese at home increased by more than 1 million. Chinese is now the third most-spoken language in the country, behind English and Spanish.

Many of those covered by the federal language provisions live in battleground states, including Arizona and Georgia, which have seen razor-thin election margins in recent years, Ancheta points out.

"It's not conclusive, but there's a fair amount of research that says turnout does go up and registration goes up when you have materials available in another language," he says.

Another battleground state, Wisconsin, saw the largest increase in covered jurisdictions on the current Census Bureau list, going from three to 50. Forty-four of those must provide assistance in the language of the Ho-Chunk Nation.

But not all such communities adhere to the requirements. In at least 50 cases since 1978, the U.S. Department of Justice has sued counties or cities to enforce the language requirements.

In one of the latest cases, the department alleged that Pawtucket, Rhode Island, had failed to provide required translations and enough bilingual poll workers to assist Spanish-speaking voters. The Hispanic population in Rhode Island grew by 4 percentage points in the 2010s, and in 2020, it made up nearly a quarter of the population of Pawtucket, the state's fourth-largest city.

Under a tentative agreement, the city has pledged to use a certified translator, provide all election information in both English and Spanish, and assign at least one bilingual election official to each of its 28 precincts. City officials did not return messages from News21.

In other instances, advocacy organizations have sued to ensure communities provide the required help. In Alaska, groups have sought to enforce Section 203 in sprawling rural areas that are home mostly to Alaska Natives, many of whom still speak their native languages.

In 2007, the American Civil Liberties Union of Alaska and the Native American Rights Fund sued the state and the city of Bethel on behalf of four elders whose primary language was Yup'ik, arguing officials had failed to provide the required materials or bilingual poll workers. The population in the Bethel region is 84% Indigenous.

Elders are the most consistent voters in Alaska Native communities, says Michelle Sparck, Alaska director of Get Out the Native Vote, a nonpartisan voter education group.

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"We should move mountains to make it easier for them," Sparck says.

Alaska settled the case and agreed to follow the law, but the fight didn't end there. A few years later, Alaska Native voters in three neighboring communities claimed the state had again failed to provide the required language assistance, including a translated version of the state's voter guide.

"Alaska Native language speakers were only receiving a small subset of the information," says Megan Condon, an attorney with the Native American Rights Fund. "They might get a notice about when and where the election was going to be, but there wouldn't be the same information regarding questions on the ballot."

A settlement, reached in 2015, required election observers at polling locations and established a list of language assistance requirements to ensure the state meets its obligations.

"Since then, we have been ... working really hard to provide all these materials," says Wild Iris Anderson, the state's language assistance compliance manager. "It really just kind of kick-started Alaska's language accessibility."

Last year, a state district court determined officials have still failed to provide effective language assistance and extended the agreement through 2026.

Some election officials say funding shortages make it difficult to meet the federal requirements. Gila County, Arizona, which contains parts of the Fort Apache, San Carlos Apache and Tonto Apache reservations, is required to provide assistance in the Apache language, but the county has operated without a translator and outreach worker for about two years.

"We just simply don't have deep pockets to provide the pay commensurate with positions," said county Elections Director Eric Mariscal.

Other officials reject the idea of providing translation help, arguing that voters in America should vote in English only.

Several years ago in Elko County, Nevada, a Democratic official asked the all-Republican County Commission to consider providing Spanish ballots even though federal law doesn't require it in the county, where nearly 11% of voting-age citizens speak Spanish at home. The commissioners rejected the idea. Most cited budget concerns, but Commissioner Rex Steninger had other reasons.

"This is America; we speak English," he said in the meeting. "The immigrants to this country need to assimilate and join us."

In an email to News21, Steninger says, "I still feel that English is our official language and voters should be able to read a ballot printed in English."

For more than 20 years now, Iowans have been locked in a battle over whether the state can provide voter registration forms in both English and Spanish.

At issue is a 2002 law that requires all official documents to be produced in English. The law provided an exception to protect citizens' constitutional rights; despite that, a judge in 2008 prohibited the state from using languages other than English on voter registration forms.

In 2021, the League of United Latin American Citizens of Iowa filed a lawsuit challenging the directive. The case is still pending with the state Supreme Court. The state argues providing materials "in a language other than English is not necessary to secure the right to vote."

Ancheta, the California lawyer, says that argument is shortsighted.

"There are plenty of folks who are U.S. citizens who came in as seniors, or they're older, and their ability to acquire English skills is more challenging," he says, particularly when trying to navigate something like a complicated ballot initiative.

"They're Americans, just like everybody else," Ancheta adds. "Giving them a fair shake because they need a little bit of help ... is a relatively minor governmental burden."

'We welcome you all'

Those whose first language is not English say the importance of voting in their primary language goes beyond ensuring they feel comfortable at the polls; it's about helping them belong in a country that too often leaves them feeling like outsiders.

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Voting rights advocate Lin was born in California after her parents moved to the U.S. from China for a better life. Her father was a dishwasher; her mother worked long days in a sewing sweatshop to make ends meet.

Lin moved to Las Vegas 30 years ago to help her extended family through a hard time. She began selling insurance, and to get to know the Asian community, she joined several groups. It was then, she says, that she saw how Asian people were excluded from civic participation.

Growing up, Lin's family had received support from a San Francisco Asian community center. In Las Vegas, she noticed a lack of such support. So in 2015, after Lin sold her insurance agency, she started the Asian Community Development Council. The same year, she obtained a small grant to fund voter registration drives.

"What we did changed the dynamic of Nevada for our Asian population," she says. "We helped our community build power."

In Nevada, the portion of residents who speak a language other than English at home grew by nearly 26% in the 2010s. Today, more than 16,000 households have at least one person who speaks Chinese at home; in more than 5,000 of those, no one older than 13 speaks English well. Nearly 94% of the limited-English households are in Clark County, the state's largest and home to Las Vegas.

The Voting Rights Act requires Clark County to provide election materials only in Spanish and Filipino. So, local organizations stepped up to fill the gap.

In 2022, All Voting is Local, a nonpartisan voting rights organization, partnered with the Asian Community Development Council to produce a voting guide in Chinese. Translated by members of Lin's organization, the guide provided information on statewide races and ballot initiatives, along with information about how to vote. The group distributed about 10,000 copies.

Last year, All Voting is Local partnered with Lin's group again to advocate for a bill that would have lowered the population threshold for counties to provide translated materials to 5,000, a level the Chinese-speaking population in Clark County far exceeds. The bill proposed setting aside nearly \$450,000 in state funding for the effort.

There are laws that set a lower threshold for language assistance in states such as California and Colorado, but in Nevada, Gov. Joe Lombardo vetoed the bill, saying state laws "sufficiently accomplish the goal of ensuring language accessibility in accordance with federal law."

The two groups then sought help at the local level, pushing Clark County to provide materials in Chinese voluntarily. The county agreed, and in January, ahead of the state's presidential primaries, the county released voter resources in Chinese on its website.

Now that Chinese speakers can access voter information in their language, Lin's group is working to ensure they know such resources exist. From registering people to vote at casinos or hip-hop clubs to educating the community at celebrations such as the Dragon Boat Festival, Lin has one message for hesitant voters.

"I ask them: Why did you come to America?" she says. "Or why did your parents come to America? Or your ancestor, right? For a better life. And if you don't have your voice heard, what's the point?"

Now, Lin hopes to expand the services available to her community and continue advocating for more languages to be available, both for voting and on items such as prescription bottles.

"Tell us how much it costs to do something, and we will put it together ourselves," she says.

Lin wants to remind people in her community that democracy means a "sense of belonging, being part of America."

"For us to be really American, we have to open up and say, 'We welcome you all,'" she says. "That is the reason why this country is so strong."

Biden is taking on cheap products from China. It could mean higher prices

By JOSH BOAK and DIDI TANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration is cracking down on cheap products sold out of China,

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expanding a push to reduce U.S. dependence on Beijing and bolster homegrown industry, but that could trigger higher prices for U.S. consumers who flock to popular shopping sites like Temu and Shein.

President Joe Biden's proposed rule says foreign companies can't avoid tariffs simply by shipping goods that they claim to be worth \$800 or less. Sellers mainly from China have used the so-called de minimis exemption to flood the U.S. market, shipping dresses, shoes, toys and bags directly to American shoppers in small packages.

The number of these shipments has jumped from 140 million annually to over 1 billion last year, according to a White House statement. The U.S. government says the exemption also makes it harder to block banned imports like fentanyl and synthetic drug content, raising fears that unsafe and unlawful products are slipping through.

The White House move comes at a delicate moment for the world's two largest economies. The United States has tried to lessen its reliance on Chinese products, protect emerging industries such as electric vehicles from Chinese competition and restrict China's access to advanced computer chips.

For its part, China has seen manufacturing and exports as essential for driving economic growth as it has struggled with deflation following pandemic-related lockdowns.

Biden's proposal comes the same week that the U.S. House targeted China in a largely bipartisan series of bills, showing the breadth of Washington's efforts to compete with Beijing in a global race for dominance and the effects that can have on everyday Americans in areas from health care to shopping.

The House was not able to bring a bill to meaningfully narrow the de minimis exemption to the floor this week, prompting 126 House Democrats to call on Biden to use his executive authority to close a loophole that they say poses growing dangers to American workers, manufacturers and retailers and "threatens our health and safety."

Democratic Reps. Earl Blumenauer and Rosa DeLauro said Friday they welcomed Biden's announcement but called it just a first step that "does not negate the need for Congress to act on a comprehensive solution." The White House called for legislative action.

China is the biggest source of retail packages entering the U.S., accounting for the bulk of parcels worth \$800 and less, according to Customs and Border Protection data.

Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas has acknowledged that it is impossible to screen the 4 million packages that enter the U.S. every day under the tariff exception, which he said is "built on a false premise that low value means low risk."

At a talk at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in July, Mayorkas said customs workers have seized narcotics, ghost guns and other contraband from these small packages. He signaled that legislative changes could give Homeland Security greater authority to address the issue.

Leah DeVere, a Georgia mother, has been campaigning against the exception since her son Cory was shipped a counterfeit pill laced with fentanyl two years ago. He died after taking the drug, she said.

"By tracing the package in which the pill was delivered, my family learned that the shipment originated abroad and breezed past U.S. Customs enforcement without so much as a second glance," she wrote in an opinion column in May for the Atlanta Journal-Constitution. "My son's life was worth more than \$800."

Such concerns led several U.S. groups — from law enforcement to manufacturing — to form a coalition to lobby lawmakers and the administration to act.

But the National Foreign Trade Council — whose members include international shippers FedEx, UPS and DHL as well as retailers Amazon and Walmart — has defended the exception, arguing it is "an essential component of America's economic health and supply chain efficiency."

Without the exemption, costs would go up for American consumers and small businesses, it says.

The U.S. government stressed that Chinese e-commerce sites have abused the exemption to sell cheap clothing and textiles to Americans, possibly harming domestic workers and companies.

Ending it could be a blow to Chinese-founded companies such as Temu and Shein that compete by keeping their prices low and might now have to face additional scrutiny. The government said its tariffs cover about 40% of U.S. imports, including 70% of textile and apparel imports from China.

Temu said it was reviewing the proposal. The company has managed to sell its products at affordable prices "through an efficient business model that cuts out unnecessary middlemen, allowing us to pass savings directly to our customers," a Temu statement said. "Temu's growth does not depend on the de minimis policy."

Shein said it complies with all import requirements, including for de minimis parcels. The company also said it supports "responsible reform" of the exemption rule to create "a level, transparent playing field," where the same rules are applied, "regardless of where a company is based or ships from."

The proposed regulatory changes also would include new standards for smaller shipments, such as a 10-digit tariffs classification number and details on the person claiming the exemption.

Biden's forthcoming proposed rule will undergo a public comment period before being finalized, a process that the Biden administration would likely need to complete before its term ends.

Ferguson activist raised in the Black Church showed pastors how to aid young protesters

By DARREN SANDS Associated Press

As twilight descended on Ferguson, Missouri, for a third consecutive night after the killing of Michael Brown Jr. by a police officer, Gwendolyn DeLoach Packnett could no longer hold her peace.

Each day since the killing on Aug. 9, 2014, she had watched her daughter, Brittany, leave the safety of home to protest the grotesque manner in which the 18-year-old Brown had been treated, his body lying in the street for hours, as if in a warning to the community.

The previous night had been particularly brutal: Officers hurled tear gas which Brittany had inhaled. Police officers atop tanks pointed their rifles at protesters. Gwendolyn DeLoach Packnett had seen enough.

"My mom was, like, 'I just really would rather you stay home,'" Brittany recalled. "She was, 'I know that you're passionate about this, I know that you're angry, but I need you to stay home tonight.'"

"And I remember thinking to myself, 'I don't even know how to stay home.'"

The decision to leave that night against her mother's wishes, and subsequent decisions she made to become a national leader in the movement for police accountability for Brown's death, reflects not just the story of one activist fulfilling her purpose and finding her voice.

In its own way, Packnett's rise to be one of her generation's best-known racial justice activists also reflects the promise and power of the ministry of her late father, the Rev. Ronald B. Packnett, who was senior pastor of St. Louis' historic Central Baptist Church.

The Rev. Packnett's organizing and activism extended into the street, said his friends and family interviewed for this story.

He organized the St. Louis community in the wake of the Rodney King verdict. He defied the religious establishment when he committed to attending the Louis Farrakhan-led Million Man March in 1994, when that kind of activity was frowned upon in the conservative circles that Packnett used to run in.

Packnett died in December 1996 after a long illness. He was just 45.

Matthew V. Johnson, senior pastor of the Mount Moriah Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama, knew Packnett -- part of a new generation of progressive preachers who began thinking theologically about the social situation of the 1980s.

In 1982, Packnett was named to the executive board of the 7-million-member National Baptist Convention -- a key post from which to push for a more socially aware and dynamic version of the country's largest Black denomination.

"The understanding was that the civil rights-era religious awareness finally arrived at the National Baptist Convention," said Johnson. The leadership wanted young, progressive reformers and Packnett fell into that group, he said.

Throughout her childhood, until her father died, Brittany was often in tow.

"I tell people that I was really raised in this tradition," Packnett told The Associated Press. "The formal politics, the informal politics, boardroom presence, speaking at the high-level institutions, the street work,

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the protests, the community building.”

“Our collective commitment as a church to issues of justice was always as much of a part of ministry as anything else,” she said. “There was an intentional orientation around the beauty and value of Blackness within my spiritual upbringing at all times.”

Ferguson marked a new phase in the freedom struggle. For perhaps the first time, a mass protest movement for justice for a single victim was born organically — not convened by members of the clergy or centered in the church.

Many of the participants were unchurched, and tension boiled over numerous times as nationally prominent clergy and the hip-hop community encountered contrasting receptions as they converged on Ferguson. It demonstrated how the 40-year-old musical genre had joined, and in some cases supplanted, the Black church as the conscience of young Black America.

Brittany -- who married and now identifies as Brittany Packnett-Cunningham – is a self-avowed police abolitionist.

She brought to the social-justice movement a uniquely prophetic voice deeply influenced by the cadences, rhymes and beats of hip-hop. It was a legacy from the early days of her father’s ministry, when the hip-hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five depicted the deterioration of Black communities and the horrors of police brutality.

Brittany recalls asking herself, “What’s happening?”

“Some of the other pastors wanted the rallies to be in their churches and not in their streets,” she said. She concluded that this message was oblivious to the ongoing changes.

“It didn’t happen inside of a church house. It didn’t happen inside the church parking lot. It did not happen in vacation Bible school. It did not happen in the choir stand,” she said. “It happened in the street.”

Those asking “What’s happening” deserved an answer and an apology, said the Rev. Traci Blackmon, who in 2014 was senior pastor of Christ the King United Church of Christ, a church near Ferguson. She issued that apology into a bullhorn, to a youthful crowd of protesters outraged by Brown’s killing.

“I felt I needed to apologize to those children because you could see that we didn’t know them and they didn’t know us, and that breakdown was on us as clergy,” she said.

Brown’s killing, and the culture of fear it ignited, was the latest iteration of an all-too familiar scene, said the Rev. Angela Sims, president of the Crozer Colgate Rochester Divinity School and author of “Lynched: The Tragic Legacy of Lynching in America.”

Long before Brown was killed, white Missourians lynched 60 people, the most lynchings from 1877-1950, Sims said.

Brown’s body lying on the ground, Sims said, sparked such outrage because it mirrored a tactic by white people to leave the body hanging in public as a warning. One difference, she said, was that technology allowed the event to be seen around the globe within minutes.

“I see that in relation to an aspect of a culture of lynching that not so subtly communicates that if it happen to them it can also happen to you, so govern yourselves accordingly,” Sims said.

Blackmon was among a handful of clergy who made it onto the Ferguson Commission, appointed by then-Gov. Jay Nixon to investigate the social and economic conditions contributing to inequalities and tensions in the St. Louis region.

Those conditions were deeply entrenched – firmly in place by the time Ronald B. Packnett took over as senior pastor at Central Baptist in St. Louis.

He was born in Chicago and matriculated at Illinois State University. After graduating, he went to Yale Divinity School, then took at the pastorate at St. James Baptist Church in New Britain, Connecticut.

While attending the National Baptist Congress of Christian Education in St. Louis, he decided to correct the way of one of the young women presiding pronounced “entrepreneur” in order to get her attention. Her name was Gwendolyn DeLoach. “He was much more likable over dinner,” she said. Soon, they fell in love, marrying in 1981.

In the winter of 1982, the Rev. T.J. Jemison of Baton Rouge, Louisiana, was elected president of the

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National Baptist Convention. Packnett – who had worked on housing and workforce issues -- joined the collective leadership.

“Ron was a gentleman, and he was a radical thinker,” the Rev. Boise Kimber, the NBC’s new president, said in an interview.

Two years after his appointment, the Packnetts had their first child, a baby girl they named Brittany.

The new father soon got a call from Central in St. Louis. Would he be interested in applying to be pastor there?

For Gwendolyn DeLoach Packnett, a young mother, the opportunity to return to her family home was too attractive to pass up.

Packnett sprang into action as Central’s new pastor, leading a congregation proud of a history that had triumphed over slavery and Jim Crow segregation. But his vibrant tenure was soon clouded by health problems. On the day he died, in December 1996, Brittany was only 12.

At Central, a series of ministers aided the family. Gwendolyn DeLoach Packnett eventually remarried. Brittany enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis, and after graduation joined Teach for America.

She felt she was doing good work, but not her best work. “I was coming of age and trying to figure out what I believe,” she said. When Brown was killed, she found herself feeling like a little girl again.

“I definitely brought his spirit out there with me,” she said.

Amid the tear gas and rubber bullets, her late father’s former clergy colleagues summoned her, asking a question.

They did not yet know that she and other young activists had the ability to organize an international movement from their phones. They lived in a world in which hip-hop had become their religion, giving them the spiritual sustenance to stand up against the police amid the protests. _____

This story is part of an AP ongoing series exploring the impact, legacy and ripples of what is widely called the “Ferguson uprising,” which has sparked nationwide outcries over police violence and calls for broader solutions to entrenched racial injustices.

Harris supported the Green New Deal. Now, she’s promoting domestic oil drilling

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Even as she promoted her efforts to boost clean energy, Vice President Kamala Harris said in Tuesday’s debate that the Biden-Harris administration has overseen “the largest increase in domestic oil production in history because of an approach that recognizes that we cannot over rely on foreign oil.”

The comment by Harris, a longtime climate hawk who backed the original Green New Deal, surprised supporters and opponents alike — and conflicted with frequent boasts by Harris and President Joe Biden that they are champions in the fight to slow global warming.

After former President Donald Trump withdrew the U.S. from the Paris Agreement on climate change, the Biden-Harris administration reentered the global pact aimed at reducing emissions. The administration also set a target to slash U.S. greenhouse gas emissions by 50% by 2030 and moved to accelerate renewable energy projects and shift away from fossil fuels.

Liam Donovan, a Republican strategist, said it was notable that at a debate in energy-rich Pennsylvania, Harris chose to “brag about something that President Biden has barely acknowledged — that domestic fossil fuel production under the Biden administration is at an all-time high.” Crude production averaged 12.9 million barrels a day last year, eclipsing a previous record set in 2019 under Trump, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

The statement was “another sign of Harris’ sprint to the middle” on energy policy and other issues, said Donovan, who works with energy industry clients at the Bracewell law and lobbying firm.

Harris went one step further, rebranding the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act — the administration’s signature climate law — as a boon to fracking and other drilling, thanks to lease-sale requirements inserted

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into the bill by independent West Virginia Sen. Joe Manchin, a key swing vote in the Senate and a strong supporter of the fossil fuel industry.

Harris's comments disappointed some in the environmental community.

"Harris missed a critical opportunity to lay out a stark contrast with Trump and show young voters that she will stand up to Big Oil and stop the climate crisis," said Stevie O'Hanlon, a spokesperson for the Sunrise Movement, one of the groups behind the Green New Deal.

"Harris spent more time promoting fracking than laying out a bold vision for a clean energy future," O'Hanlon said. "Young voters want more from Harris" on climate change, she added. "We want to see a real plan that meets the scale and urgency of this crisis."

Her group is working to turn out young voters, "but we hear people asking every day, 'What are Democrats going to do for us?'" O'Hanlon said. "To win, Harris needs to show young people she will fight for us."

Other environmental groups were less critical, citing the looming threat to climate action posed by Trump, who rolled back more than 100 environmental protections during his term as president.

"There is only one presidential candidate who is a champion for climate action and that is Kamala Harris," said Alex Glass, speaking for Climate Power, a liberal advocacy group. Harris "laid out a clear vision to invest in clean energy jobs and lower costs for working families," Glass said.

By comparison, she said, Trump "will do the bidding of his Big Oil donors."

Glass cited the conservative Project 2025, written by Trump allies, saying it will put millions of clean-energy jobs at risk and let oil companies "profiteer and pollute." Trump has denied a direct connection to Project 2025 but has endorsed some of its key ideas.

Mike Sommers, president and CEO of the American Petroleum Institute, the oil and gas industry's top lobbying group, said Harris' comment in support of fracking reflected political reality in the closely contested election. "You have to be for fracking to be elected president in 2024," he said. "That's good news for our industry and great news for American consumers."

Asked why he was so confident about the need to support fracking, Sommers offered a one-word answer: "Pennsylvania."

Not only is it a key swing state in the election, Pennsylvania also "is the beating heart of the natural gas industry in this country," Sommers said, second only to Texas in total production.

"You don't win Pennsylvania without supporting fracking, and you don't win the presidency without Pennsylvania," Sommers said.

In the debate, Trump disputed Harris's claim that she will not try to ban fracking, but Sommers said he takes Harris at her word and welcomes her support for fracking and oil drilling more generally.

Asked if he was concerned about Harris' past actions suing oil companies, Sommers said no. The oil and gas industry supports 11 million jobs, he said, and the price of gasoline "is determined by economics — supply and demand. There is no man behind the curtain" rigging prices.

As California attorney general, Harris "won tens of millions in settlements against Big Oil and held polluters accountable," her campaign says. Her platform includes a promise to "hold polluters accountable to secure clean air and water for all."

Trump, meanwhile, has vowed to rescind unspent funds from the climate law and other programs, and said he will target offshore wind projects. He said Harris would move to restrict onshore oil and gas production if elected.

"They'll go back to destroying our country, and oil will be dead, fossil fuel will be dead," Trump said.

A president's power to restrict fracking, even on federal lands, is limited, and barring the practice on private land would require an act of Congress.

Jamie Henn, director of the activist group Fossil Free Media, supports a fracking ban, but said he was "not particularly worried about Harris having to thread the needle on fracking and other energy issues."

"Her job right now is to get elected," Henn wrote on the social media site X. "That's the most important 'policy' on climate and everything else. They'll be plenty of time to push her when she's in office."

Takeaways from AP's story about a Ferguson protester who became a prominent racial-justice activist

The Associated Press undefined

After Michael Brown Jr. was killed by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri, in 2014, several nationally prominent Black religious leaders arrived, thinking they could help lead the protest movement that had surfaced. But the religion-focused ideas they were proposing didn't mesh with the energy and the pent-up frustrations of the mostly youthful protesters. To a large extent, their spiritual inspiration came from hip-hop music and African drums. One of those protesters, Brittany Packnett, was the daughter of a prominent Black pastor, and served as a translator — trying to bridge the disconnect.

Who is Brittany Packnett?

At the time of Brown's killing, she was living in greater St. Louis with her mother. Her father, the Rev. Ronald Barrington Packnett, had been senior pastor of St. Louis' historic Central Baptist Church. He died in 1996, at the age of 45, when Brittany was 12.

The daughter — now married and named Brittany Packnett-Cunningham — became a leader of the protests that flared after Brown's death.

Earlier, she had enrolled at Washington University in St. Louis, and after graduation joined Teach for America.

She felt she was doing good work, but not her best work. "I was coming of age and trying to figure out what I believe," she said. When Brown was killed, she found herself feeling like a little girl again, and she went on to become a national leader in the movement for police accountability and racial justice.

A father's legacy

Britany's rise to prominence reflected the promise and power of the ministry of her father, whose organizing and activism in the 1980s and '90s also extended into the street.

He organized the St. Louis community in the wake of the Rodney King verdict, when four Los Angeles police officers were acquitted of the brutal beating of a Black man. He defied the religious establishment when he committed to attending the Louis Farrakhan-led Million Man March in 1994, when that kind of activity was frowned upon in the circles that Packnett used to run in.

In 1982, Packnett was named to the executive board of the 7-million-member National Baptist Convention — a key post from which to push for a more socially aware and dynamic version of the country's largest Black denomination.

"I tell people that I was really raised in this tradition," his daughter told The Associated Press. "The formal politics, the informal politics, boardroom presence, speaking at the high-level institutions, the street work, the protests, the community building."

A new phase in the racial-justice struggle

The events in Ferguson marked a new phase in the fight for racial justice. For the first time, a mass protest movement for justice for a single victim was born organically, and not convened by members of the clergy or centered in the church.

Many of the participants were unchurched, and tension boiled over numerous times as prominent clergy and the hip-hop community encountered contrasting receptions after converging on Ferguson. It demonstrated how the 40-year-old musical genre had joined, and in some cases supplanted, the Black Church as the conscience of young Black America.

Packnett-Cunningham brought to the social-justice movement a uniquely prophetic voice deeply influenced by the cadences, rhymes and beats of hip-hop. It was a legacy from the early days of her father's ministry, when the hip-hop group Grandmaster Flash and the Furious Five depicted the deterioration of Black communities and the horrors of police brutality.

China is raising its retirement age, now among the youngest in the world's major economies

By HUIZHONG WU and EMILY WANG FUJIYAMA Associated Press

BEIJING (AP) — Starting next year, China will raise its retirement age for workers, which is now among the youngest in the world's major economies, in an effort to address its shrinking population and aging work force.

The Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, the country's legislature, passed the new policy Friday after a sudden announcement earlier in the week that it was reviewing the measure, state broadcaster CCTV announced.

The policy change will be carried out over 15 years, with the retirement age for men raised to 63 years, and for women to 55 or 58 years depending on their jobs. The current retirement age is 60 for men and 50 for women in blue-collar jobs and 55 for women doing white-collar work.

"We have more people coming into the retirement age, and so the pension fund is (facing) high pressure. That's why I think it's now time to act seriously," said Xiujian Peng, a senior research fellow at Victoria University in Australia who studies China's population and its ties to the economy.

The previous retirement ages were set in the 1950's, when life expectancy was only around 40 years, Peng said.

The policy will be implemented starting in January, according to the announcement from China's legislature. The change will take effect progressively based on people's birthdates.

For example, a man born in January 1971 could retire at the age of 61 years and 7 months in August 2032, according to a chart released along with the policy. A man born in May 1971 could retire at the age of 61 years and 8 months in January 2033.

Demographic pressures made the move long overdue, experts say. By the end of 2023, China counted nearly 300 million people over the age of 60. By 2035, that figure is projected to be 400 million, larger than the population of the U.S. The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences had previously projected that the public pension fund will run out of money by that year.

Pressure on social benefits such as pensions and social security is hardly a China-specific problem. The U.S. also faces the issue as analysis shows that currently, the Social Security fund won't be able to pay out full benefits to people by 2033.

"This is happening everywhere," said Yanzhong Huang, senior fellow for global health at the Council on Foreign Relations. "But in China with its large elderly population, the challenge is much larger."

That is on top of fewer births, as younger people opt out of having children, citing high costs. In 2022, China's National Bureau of Statistics reported that for the first time the country had 850,000 fewer people at the end of the year than the previous year, a turning point from population growth to decline. In 2023, the population shrank further, by 2 million people.

What that means is that the burden of funding elderly people's pensions will be divided among a smaller group of younger workers, as pension payments are largely funded by deductions from people who are currently working.

Researchers measure that pressure by looking at a number called the dependency ratio, which counts the number of people over the age of 65 compared to the number of workers under 65. That number was 21.8% in 2022, according to government statistics, meaning that roughly five workers would support one retiree. The percentage is expected to rise, meaning fewer workers will be shouldering the burden of one retiree.

The necessary course correction will cause short-term pain, experts say, coming at a time of already high youth unemployment and a soft economy.

A 52-year-old Beijing resident, who gave his family name as Lu and will now retire at age 61 instead of 60, was positive about the change. "I view this as a good thing, because our society's getting older, and in developed countries, the retirement age is higher," he said.

Li Bin, 35, who works in the event planning industry, said she was a bit sad.

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"It's three years less of play time. I had originally planned to travel around after retirement," she said. But she said it was better than expected because the retirement age was only raised three years for women in white-collar jobs.

Some of the comments on social media when the policy review was announced earlier in the week reflected anxiety.

But of the 13,000 comments on the Xinhua news post announcing the news, only a few dozen were visible, suggesting that many others had been censored.

Solar storms may cause faint auroras overnight in parts of Northern Hemisphere

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Solar storms may bring faint but visible auroras to the Northern Hemisphere starting late Thursday and extending into early Friday morning.

But, experts say, don't expect power grids and communications to be disrupted much.

People in Canada and northern U.S. states including Alaska, Washington, Montana, North Dakota and Minnesota may be able to see faint colorful displays, according to the current space weather forecast.

If the moderate solar storms become more intense as nighttime approaches, people as far south as Illinois and New York might be able to glimpse the phenomenon.

"All the stars have to align" for that to happen, said Erica Grow Cei, spokesperson for the U.S. National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

To spy the spectacle, wait for skies to get dark and then go outside, ideally away from bright city lights. Taking a picture with a smartphone camera may also reveal hints of the aurora that aren't visible to the naked eye.

The sun's magnetic field is at the peak of its 11-year cycle, making storms and aurora displays more frequent. Unusually strong solar storms in May produced vibrant aurora displays across the Northern Hemisphere.

The night storms are expected to be less intense, but could cause brief disruptions to precision GPS machinery like what farmers use to harvest crops, Grow Cei said.

Today in History: September 14, Roosevelt becomes youngest US president

By The Associated Press undefined

Today in History

Today is Saturday, Sept. 14, the 258th day of 2024. There are 108 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 14, 1901, President William McKinley died in Buffalo, New York, of gunshot wounds inflicted by an assassin eight days prior; Vice President Theodore Roosevelt succeeded him, becoming the youngest-ever U.S. president at age 42.

Also on this date:

In 1847, during the Mexican-American War, U.S. forces under Gen. Winfield Scott took control of Mexico City.

In 1861, the first naval engagement of the Civil War took place as the USS Colorado attacked and sank the Confederate private schooner Judah off the coast of Pensacola, Florida.

In 1927, modern dance pioneer Isadora Duncan died in Nice, France, when her scarf became entangled in a wheel of the sports car in which she was riding.

In 1982, Princess Grace of Monaco, formerly film star Grace Kelly, died at age 52 of injuries from a car crash the day before.

In 1991, the government of South Africa, the African National Congress and the Inkatha (in-KAH'-tah) Freedom Party signed a national peace pact.

In 1994, on the 34th day of a strike by players, Acting Baseball Commissioner Bud Selig announced the

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1994 season was over.

In 2001, Americans packed churches and public squares on a day of remembrance for the victims of the Sept. 11 attacks. President George W. Bush prayed with his Cabinet and attended services at Washington National Cathedral, then flew to New York, where he waded into the ruins of the World Trade Center and addressed rescue workers in a show of resolve.

In 2012, fury over an anti-Muslim film ridiculing the Prophet Muhammad sparked violent clashes across the Muslim world.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Walter Koenig (KAY'-nihg) ("Star Trek") is 88. Architect Renzo Piano is 87. Basketball Hall of Fame coach Larry Brown is 84. Actor Sam Neill is 77. Country singer John Berry is 65. Actor Melissa Leo is 64. Actor Faith Ford is 60. Film director Bong Joon-Ho is 55. Supreme Court justice Ketanji Brown Jackson is 54. Actor Kimberly Williams-Paisley is 53. Actor Andrew Lincoln is 51. Rapper Nas is 51. Olympic gold medal middle-distance runner Hicham El Guerrouj is 50. Florida Governor Ron DeSantis is 46. Chef/TV personality Katie Lee is 43. Actor Jessica Brown Findlay is 37. NBA All-Star Jimmy Butler is 35. Golfer Tony Finau is 35. Actor Emma Kenney is 25.