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## Thursday, Sept. 26

School Breakfast: Pancake on stick.  
School Lunch: Ranch parmesan chicken bake, peas.  
Senior Menu: Meatloaf, baked potato with sour cream, creamed peas, honey fruit salad, whole wheat bread.  
Boys golf at Sisseton, 10 a.m.  
Boys Soccer at James Valley Christian, 4 p.m.  
Volleyball hosts Tiospa Zina: 7th at 5 p.m., 8th at 6 p.m., Varsity to follow

## Friday, Sept. 27

School Breakfast: Egg bake.  
School Lunch: Tomato soup, grilled cheese.  
Senior Menu: Chicken strips, tri-tators, carrots, fruit, whole wheat bread.  
Football vs. Clark/Willow Lake at Clark, 7 p.m.  
3rd/4th and 5th/6th Football at Clark - 5PM

## Saturday, Sept. 28

Volleyball at Miller Tournament.(CSD Conference)  
Boys soccer at Freeman Academy, noon  
Common Cents Community Thrift Store open, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main

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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.**

## Senate's Assassination Report

A bipartisan Senate committee report surfaced more revelations about Secret Service failures amid the July 13 assassination attempt of former President Donald Trump. The report comes a day after the Senate passed a bill requiring an equal standard of Secret Service protection for presidents and major party candidates.

The report highlighted the agency's failure to request a surveillance team for the Butler, Pennsylvania, event. The agency's antidrone operator was also found to be inexperienced and unable to deploy the system for hours, preventing notice of the shooter's drone. Two minutes before the gunman fired, Secret Service officials knew he was on the roof.

The committee also recommended an increase in budget. The report coincided with Congress including \$230M in emergency funding for the agency in its latest stopgap bill.

## World's Oldest Cheese

The world's oldest cheese has been discovered in Xinjiang, China. A mix of cow and goat cheese, the sample dates back 3,600 years to the Bronze Age, predating a 3,200-year-old sample buried alongside an ancient Egyptian mayor.

Decades ago, researchers noticed a white substance scattered on the necks of three mummies in a Xiaohe cemetery in western China. Now, after isolating various DNA samples, paleogeneticists confirmed the substance includes goat and cow DNA as well as bacterial and fungal species used in modern-day kefir grains. Like kefir, the cheese was likely soft and tangy at the time, and its burial could suggest how valuable it was. The bacterial strains also tell us more about the history of kefir, suggesting it originated not only in Russia but in Tibet.

## Los Angeles Bus Hijacking

A gunman is in custody after carrying out a Metro bus hijacking in Los Angeles, California, killing one person. Officers have not yet named the suspect or identified a motive.

Yesterday at 12:45 am local time, police responded to reports of a bus hijacking in South Los Angeles. Officials say the bus driver pressed a panic button after the suspect began pointing his gun at passengers. The button triggered a sign on the bus's exterior flashing "Emergency" and "911 Call Police." A subsequent police car chase lasted over an hour, with the driver held at gunpoint and officers using spike strips to stop the bus in downtown LA. The suspect was arrested after a standoff.

The hijacking comes after LA approved more than \$5M in emergency funding this year to add safety barriers protecting bus drivers from passengers, citing an uptick in assaults.

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## Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

Julie Chrisley, star of reality series "Chrisley Knows Best," resented to seven years in prison on tax evasion and bank fraud charges.

Netflix to produce docuseries on Sean "Diddy" Combs' sexual assault allegations spanning decades; 50 Cent-produced project first announced in December.

Federal Emergency Management Agency and NFL announce agreement to allow NFL stadiums to double as disaster shelters during emergencies.

## Science & Technology

Large-scale chatbot study reveals advanced AI models have improved in accuracy, but are more likely to return false information instead of saying an answer couldn't be generated.

OpenAI's Chief Technology Officer Mira Murati to depart role, citing desire to pursue new ventures.

Fossil discovery reveals the lower jaw joint in mammals—one of the few features making mammals unique among vertebrates—evolved independently in an extinct group of animals known as cynodonts.

Engineers demonstrate 3D-printed human brain blood vessels, which will allow for lab testing of new brain tumor treatments; advance would replace the need for invasive study of live patients.

## Business & Markets

US stock markets close mixed (S&P 500 -0.2%, Dow -0.7%, Nasdaq +0.0%).

Weekly mortgage applications for US home purchases up 11% last week, reaching highest level since July 2022; uptick driven primarily by 20% week-over-week rise in homeowners seeking to refinance loans due to declines in interest rates.

Google files antitrust complaint against Microsoft in the European Union, accusing the rival tech giant of using unfair licensing terms to lock customers into using its Azure cloud computing platform.

Southwest Airlines to reduce service to and staffing in Atlanta next year as part of cost-cutting measures; comes amid pressure from Elliott Investment Management for the airline to make changes.

## Politics & World Affairs

Hurricane Helene, a Category 1 storm as of this writing, is set to make landfall, possibly on Florida's Panhandle today as a Category 3 or 4 storm.

Israel's military prepares for possible ground invasion of southern Lebanon after Hezbollah fires at intelligence headquarters in Tel Aviv; Israel said it intercepted the strike, leaving no casualties or damage.

Congress passes short-term bill to fund the government at current levels through Dec. 20 in bid to avoid next week's shutdown deadline; President Joe Biden to sign.

## 'Getting Off the Mountain' the life of Fredric Hensel, WWII's combat quadruple amputee, to be published soon

**Groton native Lee T. Raines' fifth book can be purchased online**

Lee T. Raines' fifth book, "Getting Off the Mountain," the life of Fredric Hensel, WWII's combat quadruple amputee, will be published soon, and can be purchased in paperback or on Kindle on Amazon. All of Raines' books can be found on [leeraines.com](http://leeraines.com).

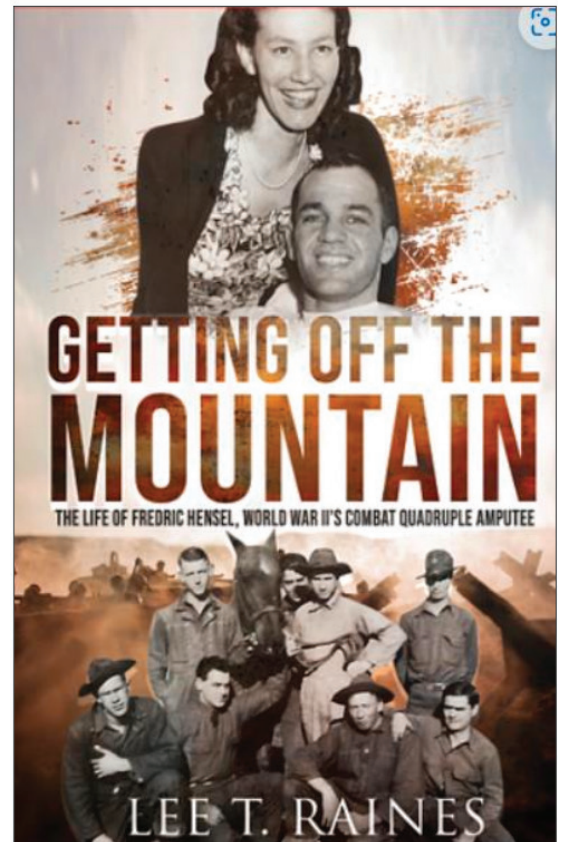
Getting Off the Mountain is Lee T. Raines' fifth book and carries the running theme of service to country, particularly by America's small town young men and women. In this one, Raines follows the life and struggles of Fredric Hensel, the only combat "basket case" of World War II.

During Raines' research on 1940-1945 We Will Remember, he learned about a young soldier, who was called by one veteran the "bravest fighter of this war." Hensel lost all four limbs in varying severity, earning the military term "basket case," as the result of a tank mine explosion during the Battle of Okinawa.

Raines traces Hensel's roots, his life before joining the army, combat experiences and the challenges and victories upon his return to the States.

Getting Off the Mountain is an inspiring story of how one man's optimistic spirit, combined with the devotion of his wife, Jewell, and the support of friends as well as strangers, captured the attention and hearts of the public in post-war America.

Getting Off the Mountain is expected to be published in time for Veterans Day. All of Raines' books are available for purchase on [leeraines.com](http://leeraines.com).



## Northern State University Celebrates Homecoming with 108th Annual Gypsy Day Parade

ABERDEEN, S.D. – Northern State University’s annual homecoming week will be capped off with the 108th Gypsy Day Parade and homecoming football game on Saturday, Oct. 5, 2024. This year’s homecoming theme, “Wolves in Candy Land,” promises a tasteful celebration as the Northern and Aberdeen communities come together for this time-honored tradition.

The parade will begin at 9 a.m. on Main Street, with a wide variety of creative floats, marching bands, and community entries expected to participate. Parade-goers are encouraged to bring chairs and bags for collecting goodies along the route. For everyone’s safety, please remain on the sidewalks and ensure children do not approach the floats.

### Parade Details:

The 2024 Gypsy Day Parade will feature 124 floats and 15 bands, including entries from local businesses, organizations, and schools. The parade will start at the intersection of Main Street and 8th Avenue North, running south along Main Street until 12th Avenue South. To accommodate the parade, there will be no parking along Main Street from 8th Avenue North to 12th Avenue South beginning Friday, Oct. 4.

As the parade marches on, excitement will build for the Gypsy Day football game, where the Northern State Wolves will face off against Bemidji State at 2:30 p.m. in Dacotah Bank Stadium. Tailgating will begin at noon in the Dacotah Bank Stadium parking lot.

### Additional Homecoming Events:

The parade and game are part of a week of homecoming festivities running from Sept. 30 to Oct. 5, 2024. Other key events include the coronation of the 2024 homecoming royalty, which will take place at 6 p.m. on Thursday, Oct. 3 in Krikac Auditorium, followed by a bonfire in the Barnett Center parking lot. The Sideliner’s luncheon, swim meet, volleyball match, women’s soccer game, and the Steps for Shep 5K race are also highlights of the week.

### Homecoming Royalty:

This year’s homecoming king candidates are:

Simon Bickford (Newman Center)  
Jacob Ebeling (SAAC)  
Braden Freeman (Honors Program)  
Michael Grebner (Residence Hall Association)  
Colton Wicks (TRIO Scholar Association)

The homecoming queen candidates are:

Ashlyn Haselhorst (Lumin Ministry)  
Nevaeh Meyer (School of Education Clubs)  
Madison Park (Campus Activities Board)  
Ava Pickard (Music Department)  
Randi Schuster (Honors Program)

Schedule of Events:

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Wednesday, Oct. 2  
6 p.m. – Swim Meet: NSU vs. Jamestown, Aberdeen Family YMCA

Thursday, Oct. 3  
6 p.m. – Queen and King Coronation, Krikac Auditorium. Bonfire to follow at Barnett Center parking lot

Friday, Oct. 4  
12 p.m. – Sideliner’s Luncheon, Kessler’s Champions Room, Barnett Center  
6 p.m. – Volleyball Match: NSU vs. Minnesota State at NSU Wachs Arena  
6 p.m. – Women’s Soccer Game: NSU vs. University of Sioux Falls at Athletic and Recreation Fields

Saturday, Oct. 5  
7 a.m. – Steps for Shep 5K registration, Barnett Center (race starts at 8 a.m.)  
9 a.m. – Gypsy Day Parade  
12 p.m. – Gypsy Day Tailgate, Dacotah Bank Stadium parking lot  
2:30 p.m. – Football Game: Northern State University vs. Bemidji State at Dacotah Bank Stadium

Parade line up:  
Color Guard  
BAND - Northern State University  
NSU Parade Marshal  
NSU President  
NSU Outstanding NSU Faculty: Dr. Marmorstein & Dr. Shortt  
NSU Hall of Fame Inductees – Sasha (Hovind) Gallagher & Hannah Kastigar  
NSU Hall of Fame Inductee – John “Jack” Hurley & Kretchman Coaching Award – Francis Zacher  
NSU Hall of Fame Inductees – 1984-1985 Wrestling Team  
NSU Distinguished Alum/Philanthropist – Ron Rivett & Graduate of the Last Decade – Douglas Wiitala  
NSU Alumni Association  
NSU Athletics Department  
BAND - Aberdeen Central High School  
US Senator John Thune  
Mayor Travis Schaunaman  
Cancelled  
NSU State Cheer  
NSU Dance Team

NSU Queen & Marshal  
NSU Student Homecoming Committee  
BAND - Northwestern Area School  
NSU Nursing  
Newman Center  
NSU Tae Kwon Do and Kumdo Club  
NSU Active Minds  
NSU Honors Program  
SAI Gamma Tau/Aberdeen Area Alumni  
S.D. School for the Blind and Visually Impaired  
NSU International Programs  
BAND - Ipswich Public School  
Legacy Financial Partners  
Pro Ag Supply Inc  
Horton, Inc.  
Pierson Ford-Lincoln  
Sanford Aberdeen  
Hub City Radio  
eXp Realty  
Dacotah Bank  
Plains Commerce Bank  
BAND - Holgate/Simmons Combined Middle School  
Exchange Club of Aberdeen  
FirePlace Glo/ AdiroStyle  
Ziggis Coffee  
Legend’s Liquor & Casino  
Aberdeen Fire Rescue  
My Place Hotels  
Jark/Worlie Auction Service  
Redfield Ford  
Harr Motors  
BAND - Hoven High School  
Crafted Interiors  
North Highland UMC  
Aberdeen Area Convention and Visitors Bureau  
Horizon Health - Aberdeen  
Aberdeen BMX  
Aberdeen Police Department  
Agtegra Cooperative  
BAND - Eureka Public Schools  
Cool Cart Parts LLC  
Aberdeen Gymnastics Association  
RDO Equipment  
Brown County Democrats  
Aberdeen Area Horsemen’s Association  
Aberdeen Family YMCA  
LifeServe Blood Center  
BAND - Aberdeen Roncalli  
Miss Minnesota Scholarship Organization

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Derian Lodge and Derian Place Senior Living  
House Doctors Painting and Restoration  
Hub City Axe Throwing  
Aberdeen Area Girl Scouts  
DAV Chapter 13  
Lighthouse Preschool  
**BAND - Groton Area High School**  
Sidney L Smith Post, The American Legion  
Caleb's Aquatics  
Aberdeen Youth Wrestling Club  
Dakotaland Federal Credit Union  
BAND - Warner High School  
Aberdeen Optimist Club  
Budget Furniture  
Yelduz Shrine Temple  
Miss Aberdeen Committee  
BAND - Leola Public Schools  
Kristie Fiegen for SD Public Utilities Commission  
Brown County Fair and 4-H  
SkateAway  
Miss Rodeo Aberdeen Queens  
Crawford Trucks & Equipment, Inc.  
BAND - Redfield High School  
Midstates\QQP  
Aberdeen Hockey Association  
Pop's Bayou Mamas LLC  
First Interstate Bank  
Aberdeen Rural Firefighters  
BAND - Miller High School  
American Bank & Trust  
Miss South Dakota  
South Dakota Snow Queen Festival  
Miss Hub City Org  
Aberdeen Health & Rehab  
Drift Busters Snowmobile Club  
BAND - Sully Buttes Public Schools  
Marine Corps League Glacial Lakes Detachment

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Roncalli High School  
The Salvation Army - Aberdeen  
Brown County Republicans  
The Aberdeen Aqua Addicts  
C.C. Croal Post 17 Veterans of Foreign Wars  
BAND - Britton Public School  
ReadiTech  
A-1 Sanitation & Recycling LLC  
Kessler's Grocery  
Kore Cares  
Go Green Insulation

TranSource Truck and Equipment  
The Aberdeen Insider  
Tables and Chairs to Go  
First Reformed Church  
Avera  
El Riad Shrine Watertown Unit  
Moose Lodge #590  
Stern Oil  
South Dakota Army National Guard  
Aberdeen Swim Club  
JGE – Bobcat of Aberdeen  
Area Federal Credit Union  
Hub City Athletics  
First Premier Realty  
A+ Realty  
S.D. Property Rights and Local Control Alliance  
Diesel Machinery, Inc.  
Wireless World  
House of Glass, Inc.  
BigIron Auctions  
Butler Machinery Company  
Helm Marine  
Peterson Motorsports  
Aberdeen Christian School  
Titan Machinery

## Names Released in Minnehaha County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash  
Where: Interstate 29, mile marker 77, Sioux Falls, SD  
When: 1:24 a.m., Sunday, September 22, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2013 Victory Cross Country motorcycle  
Driver 1: Zachary Robert Dysart, 39-year-old male, fatal injuries  
Helmet Use: No

Vehicle 2: 2020 Freightliner Cascadia 126  
Driver 2: Ghazi Jan Mangal, 39-year-old male, no injuries  
Seatbelt Use: Yes  
Passenger 1: Namaz Ali Saeedi, 41-year-old male, no injuries  
Seatbelt Use: Yes

Minnehaha County, S.D.- A 39-year-old man died early Sunday morning after colliding with a semi on Interstate 29 in Sioux Falls, SD.

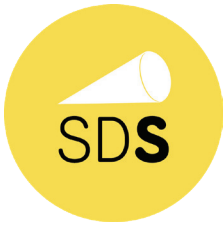
Preliminary crash information indicates Ghazi Jan Mangal, the driver of a 2020 Freightliner Cascadia, was traveling southbound on Interstate 29 near mile marker 77 in the far right lane and slowing down to take the 26th Street exit. Zachary Robert Dysart, the driver of a 2013 Victory Cross Country motorcycle, was traveling the same direction and collided with the rear end of the semi.

Mangal and a passenger in the semi, Namaz Ali Saeedi, were not injured. Dysart sustained fatal injuries.

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

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





## SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

### State court leaders say reforms to public defense will take years, patience, engagement

**Standards for attorney qualifications, training, caseloads among first tasks**

**BY: JOHN HULT - SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 5:16 PM**

Leaders within the state court system asked for patience on Wednesday as they pledged to address deficiencies in South Dakota's system for delivering legal representation to people who can't afford lawyers.

State Supreme Court Chief Justice Steven Jensen and other officials conducted a virtual press conference two days after the release of a report that outlined challenges facing the state's public defense framework.

Despite the sweeping nature of some of the report's recommendations, Jensen said the state Unified Judicial System is committed to following through.

"Honestly, it's going to be difficult, it's going to be a lot of work, and it's going to require some discussions about who will fund that system going forward," Jensen said. "But given our history in South Dakota, the widespread support and recognition of the need for change, I'm optimistic we can get it done."

States are required by the U.S. Constitution's Sixth and 14th Amendments to guarantee the right to an attorney for those who can't pay.



**South Dakota Supreme Court Chief Justice Steven Jensen, left, and USD Knudson School of Law Dean Neil Fulton address the Sioux Falls Downtown Rotary Club on April 29, 2024.** (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

### Researcher highlights issues

The state-sanctioned report from the nonprofit Sixth Amendment Center, however, says South Dakota's practice of delegating public defense funding and management to counties creates what the center's Aditi Goel described Wednesday as "justice by geography."

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"It results in a decentralized patchwork of county funded public defense systems," Goel said. "The problem is that some counties cannot afford to fund public defense services at the levels that are constitutionally required."

The state also lacks oversight mechanisms and has no standards for qualifications, training, supervision, compensation or caseloads specific to attorneys who act as public defenders.

Goel pointed out that public defenders and court-appointed attorneys in South Dakota have heavy case-loads. One private attorney contracted as a public defender had 73 open cases in 20 counties across six judicial circuits at the time the attorney was interviewed by the Sixth Amendment Center's research team.

"Our analysis found that attorneys across the state have cases that exceed the most conservative national standards," Goel said.

The center's report recommends the creation of standards in each area, and for the state to fund the recently formed Commission on Indigent Legal Services at a level high enough to perform oversight.

## How to 'eat this elephant'

Neil Fulton, dean of the University of South Dakota Knudson School of Law, chairs the commission. Fulton also formerly served as the chief public defender for federal cases in the District of South Dakota.

Fulton likened the state's approach for tackling the issues laid out in the report to eating an elephant. According to a truism sometimes attributed to St. Francis of Assisi, the way to complete such a task is "one bite at a time."

"One of the things for us as commission, now that we've all decided we're going to eat this elephant, is to start deciding where we slice off a little bit of elephant and get that done," Fulton said, adding that the work will take "many years."

The first job, Fulton said, will be for the commission and judicial system to throw its full support behind the work of Christopher Miles, the state's first public defender. Miles will be tasked with assembling a team of lawyers and staff to handle criminal appeals for defendants represented by a public defender at the trial level. Counties will remain responsible to provide lawyers for indigent defendants prior to their appeals.

Staffing the state office with attorneys, ideally with attorneys in different geographic areas, will be a priority, as will guidance on how to set up the just-established office's workflow and connecting with court systems across South Dakota.

The second step, Fulton said, will be to tackle issues the commission can attend to on its own. That would include setting standards for things like qualifications and caseloads and settling up a system of data collection to track and compile information on county-level public defense.

Questions on funding from the state and adjustments to practices in local jurisdictions would come later, he said, as those conversations would require buy-in from other entities.

One recommendation in the report was to end some counties' practice of allowing prosecutors to speak to and sometimes secure plea agreements from defendants before they've been appointed a lawyer.

"That is not something the commission can stop today," Fulton said. "Without speaking for other members, I would tell you that there are folks on the commission who would tell you why that can be an efficiency measure. I'm not telling you I agree with them, but I'm definitely telling you that the commission has not wrestled through that yet."

## Funding questions loom, but not in January

Attorney pay and mileage reimbursements for those who work in smaller counties were among the issues that drove the court system to study the public defense system. Finding ways to "meaningfully compensate the attorneys that are willing to take on those cases in those more rural areas" with state funding will be an important discussion, Miles said.

Miles, Jensen and Fulton all said that funding questions will loom large in the coming years as the state moves to help counties stop the bleeding from growing public defense costs.

Those conversations won't happen during the next legislative session, Jensen said. The courts will have

enough work to do in setting standards and building out the state's indigent defense office.

One wrinkle in future funding talks could come on Election Day, when voters will be asked to weigh in on Initiated Measure 28. Backers say the measure would repeal the state's sales tax on groceries, but opponents have argued that the measure's verbiage could also bar grocery sales tax collections by cities and bar sales taxes on a host of other consumer goods.

The exact amount of revenue loss from the measure's passage may be in dispute, but Jensen said the losses would clearly be significant.

All the state court system can do, Jensen said, is present the issues surrounding public defense and make its case to the lawmakers tasked with setting the state budget.

"I'm an eternal optimist. And in my view, I think we'll get the funding we need, because this is a priority," he said.

*John is the senior reporter for South Dakota Searchlight. He has more than 15 years experience covering criminal justice, the environment and public affairs in South Dakota, including more than a decade at the Sioux Falls Argus Leader.*

## Congress poised to race out of D.C. after dodging shutdown with yes votes from SD delegation

BY: JENNIFER SHUTT - SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 3:59 PM

WASHINGTON — Congress overwhelmingly approved a stopgap spending bill Wednesday that will keep the federal government running through Dec. 20, though the divided Congress has a lot of negotiating to do if members want to pass the dozen full-year appropriations bills before their new deadline.

The short-term funding bill, sometimes referred to as a continuing resolution, will avoid a partial government shutdown when the new fiscal year begins on Oct. 1.

The CR is supposed to give lawmakers more time to hash out agreement on the appropriations bills. But Congress regularly uses it as a safety net to push off or entirely avoid making decisions about which departments should get more funding and whether to change policy about how federal tax dollars are spent.

Debate on the CR was broadly bipartisan with Democrats and Republicans voicing support ahead of the 341-82 House vote and the 78-18 Senate vote.

South Dakota Republicans John Thune and Mike Rounds voted in favor of the measure in the Senate, as did South Dakota Republican Dusty Johnson in the House.

President Joe Biden is expected to sign the bill ahead of the Oct. 1 shutdown deadline.



The U.S. Capitol on Jan. 16, 2024. (Jennifer Shutt/States Newsroom)

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## **'Plenty of problems' ahead**

The stopgap bill was the last major legislation considered by Congress before Election Day. A lame-duck session is scheduled to begin Nov. 12.

"In a matter of days, funding for fiscal year 2024 will run out and it's Congress' responsibility to ensure that the government remains open and serving the American people," House Appropriations Chairman Tom Cole, R-Okla., said during floor debate. "We are here to avert harmful disruptions to our national security and vital programs our constituents rely on."

Cole said he hopes Congress can approve the dozen full-year bills later this year.

"The next president and the next Congress should not be forced to do the work of this administration and this Congress," Cole said. "They're going to have plenty of problems ... let's not throw a potential government shutdown in front of them as well."

Connecticut Democratic Rep. Rosa DeLauro, ranking member on the spending panel, said lawmakers must begin conference talks in the days ahead to reach a bipartisan agreement on the full-year spending bills.

"No matter who wins in November, we owe it to the next Congress and the next president to not saddle them with yesterday's problems," DeLauro said.

## **Noncitizen voting bill dropped**

Texas GOP Rep. Chip Roy spoke against the stopgap spending bill and expressed frustration that lawmakers were, once again, relying on a continuing resolution instead of having met the Oct. 1 deadline to pass the full-year spending bills.

"We should not be kicking the can down the road to Dec. 20, a mere five days before Christmas, which is what this town always does," he said.

Roy also criticized House GOP leaders for not sticking with a six-month stopgap spending bill that carried with it a bill to require proof of citizenship to register to vote.

House leaders brought that bill to the floor last week, but didn't garner the votes needed to send it to the Senate. Noncitizen voting in federal elections is already illegal.

## **Secret Service spending**

The 49-page continuing resolution extends the funding levels and policies that Congress approved earlier this year as part of its last appropriations process.

Lawmakers included a provision that will let the Secret Service spend money at a faster rate than what would have otherwise been allowed "for protective operations, including for activities relating to National Special Security Events and the 2024 Presidential Campaign," according to a summary of the bill.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency got a similar provision so it can spend more money that would have otherwise been permitted from its disaster relief fund. The Forest Service's Wildland Fire Management account was also granted a faster spend rate.

The stopgap spending bill extended authorization for the National Flood Insurance Program as well as several other federal programs that were on track to expire at the end of September.

## **November election**

Whether Congress reaches agreement with the Biden administration on the dozen full-year government funding bills later this year will likely depend on the outcome of the November elections.

Voters choosing divided government for another two years will likely incentivize leaders to work out bipartisan, bicameral agreements during the five weeks Congress is in session during November and December.

Republicans or Democrats securing unified control of the House, Senate and White House could result in another stopgap spending bill pushing off decisions until after the next Congress and next president take their oaths of office in January.

## **A new president, a new budget ask**

Regardless of when Congress completes work on the dozen full-year funding bills, the next president will likely submit their first budget request to lawmakers sometime next spring, starting the annual process all over again.

The president is supposed to release the budget request in early February, but that's often delayed during the first year of a new administration.

The House and Senate Appropriations committees will then begin holding hearings with Cabinet secretaries and agency heads to ask about their individual requests and begin assessing whether lawmakers will boost their spending.

The Appropriations Committees in each chamber will likely release their separate slates of full-year appropriations bills next summer, possibly followed by floor debate.

This year the House Appropriations Committee reported all dozen of its bills to the floor, following party-line votes when Democrats objected to both spending levels and policy language.

House Republicans approved five of those bills on the floor.

Senate appropriators took broadly bipartisan votes to approve 11 of their bills in committee, save the Homeland Security measure. None of the bills has gone to the floor for amendment debate and a final vote.

That's not entirely uncommon in the Senate, where floor time is often dedicated to approving judicial nominees and it can take weeks to approve one spending bill.

The House, by contrast, can approve bills in a matter of hours or days if leadership has secured the votes.

*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.*

## **SD attorney general joins letter accusing academy of possible violations over gender-care policies**

### **Idaho official leads request for information about recommendations on puberty blockers**

**BY: CHRISTINA LORDS, IDAHO CAPITAL SUN - SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 3:46 PM**

Idaho Attorney General Raúl Labrador – along with attorneys general and other officials from 20 U.S. states, including South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley – has accused the American Academy of Pediatrics of possible “violations of state consumer protection statutes” over its standards and recommendations for gender dysphoria care for children.

In a letter sent by Labrador on Tuesday, the attorneys general requested information detailing the academy's evidence for its current recommendations for puberty blockers for gender dysphoria-diagnosed youth.

“Most concerning, AAP claims that the use of puberty blockers on children is safe and reversible,” Labrador's office said in a press release. “This assertion is not grounded in evidence and therefore may run afoul of consumer protection laws in most states.”

Children with gender dysphoria “need and deserve love, support, and medical care rooted in biological reality,” Labrador said in the release.

“It is shameful the most basic tenet of medicine – do no harm – has been abandoned by professional associations when politically pressured,” Labrador said. “These organizations are sacrificing the health and well-being of children with medically unproven treatments that leave a wake of permanent damage.”

The American Academy of Pediatrics, an organization made up of 67,000 primary care pediatricians, voted in August to reaffirm its 2018 policy statement on gender-affirming care and authorized development of an expanded set of guidance for pediatricians.

The organization could not immediately be reached for comment. But at the organization's August 2024 leadership conference in Itasca, Illinois, American Academy of Pediatrics CEO and Executive Vice President Mark Del Monte emphasized that the organization is confident that the principles presented in the original policy statement, “Ensuring Comprehensive Care and Support for Transgender and Gender-Diverse Children

and Adolescents,” remain in the best interest of children, according to an Aug. 4 press release from the academy.

The decision to authorize a systematic review reflects the academy’s board’s concerns about restrictions to access to health care with bans on gender-affirming care in more than 20 states, according to the Aug. 4 release.

In Idaho, the Legislature passed House Bill 71, a law banning Idaho youth from receiving gender-affirming care medications and surgeries. It was signed into law by Gov. Brad Little in April 2023.

The law makes it a felony punishable for up to 10 years for doctors to provide surgeries, puberty-blockers and hormones to transgender people under the age of 18. However, gender-affirming surgeries are not and were not performed among Idaho adults or youth before the bill was signed into law, the Idaho Capital Sun previously reported.



**Raúl Labrador, who won his race for Idaho attorney general, talks with attendees at the Idaho GOP election night watch party at the Grove Hotel in Boise, Idaho, on Nov. 8, 2022.** (Otto Kitsinger for Idaho Capital Sun)

## **What is in the American Academy of Pediatrics guidelines for gender-affirming care?**

As outlined in its policy statement, the academy encourages pediatricians to use a gender-affirmative care model when treating young patients. The model encourages pediatricians to recognize that: transgender identities and diverse gender expressions do not constitute a mental disorder; variations in gender identity and expression are normal aspects of human diversity, and binary definitions of gender do not always reflect emerging gender identities; gender identity evolves as an interplay of biology, development, socialization, and culture; and if a mental health issue exists, it most often stems from stigma and negative experiences rather than being intrinsic to the child.

“Many medical interventions can be offered to youth who identify as (transgender and gender diverse) and their families,” the academy notes in its policy statement. “The decision of whether and when to initiate gender-affirmative treatment is personal and involves careful consideration of risks, benefits, and other factors unique to each patient and family.”

However, Labrador said treatments that suppress hormones or use puberty blockers may have adverse health effects to the patient, including interfering with neurocognitive development, compromising bone density and interfering with normal puberty experiences. He said the treatments may cause “harm particularly egregious” to children who “grow out” of the condition by the time they are adults.

But the American Academy of Pediatrics in its policy statement says that research shows that children who assert their transgender identity before puberty and who “know their gender as clearly and as consistently” as their cisgender peers benefit from the same level of social acceptance as those peers.

“More robust and current research suggests that, rather than focusing on who a child will become, valu-

ing them for who they are, even at a young age, fosters secure attachment and resilience, not only for the child but also for the whole family,” the academy wrote in its policy statement.

But Labrador and the other state officials say they want more information on how the academy has come to those conclusions, especially when it comes to puberty blockers.

“The letter requests detailed information from the AAP regarding its communications and practices related to youth gender dysphoria and substantiation of the academy’s claims regarding the safety and reversibility of puberty blockers,” the attorney general’s press release says.

Other states joining Idaho in sending the letter to the academy include officials from Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Iowa, Kansas, Louisiana, Mississippi, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas, Utah, Virginia and West Virginia.

Christina Lords is the editor-in-chief of the Idaho Capital Sun and has been a professional journalist covering local and state government since graduating from the University of Idaho in 2009. A Pocatello native, Lords is a fifth-generation Idahoan who served as a reporter at the Moscow-Pullman Daily News and the Post Register in Idaho Falls and served as assistant editor for the Idaho Press in Nampa. She also led the Idaho Statesman in Boise for two years before turning to nonprofit journalism.

## Enrollment grows at South Dakota technical colleges

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 3:29 PM

South Dakota’s four technical colleges have a collective enrollment of 7,407 students this fall, which is a five-year high, according to the state Board of Technical Education.

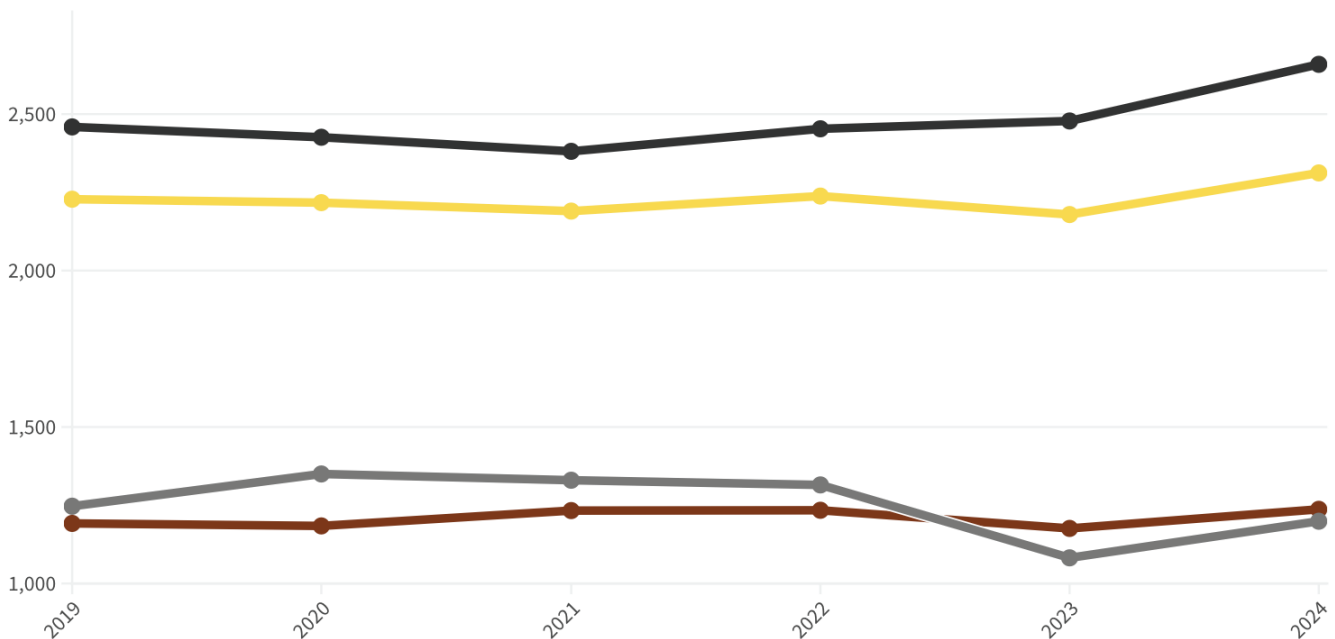
“Technical education leads to high-paying jobs and meaningful careers for our graduates,” said the board’s Executive Director Nick Wendell in a news release. “The industries and communities throughout

### Enrollment at South Dakota's Technical Colleges

2019-2024



Legend: Lake Area Technical College (Yellow), Mitchell Technical College (Brown), Southeast Technical College (Black), Western Dakota Technical College (Grey)



Source: [SD Board of Technical Education report](#), [SD Board of Technical Education news release](#)

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our state benefit from the strength of the technical colleges in South Dakota.”

This year’s enrollment is a 7% increase over last year.

Enrollment grew at all four institutions:

Lake Area Technical College, Watertown: 2,312 students (+6.1%).

Mitchell Technical College: 1,237 students (+5.1%).

Southeast Technical College, Sioux Falls: 2,659 students (+7.3%).

Western Dakota Technical College, Rapid City: 1,199 students (+10.8%).

The state board said the jump in enrollment is attributed to several factors, including a strong influx of first-year students and higher retention rates among returning students. The growth is especially notable in programs related to health care, building trades, public safety and manufacturing.

To further support students, the South Dakota Legislature partnered with the technical college system to freeze tuition and fees over the past three academic years.

“The consistent growth of our system demonstrates the number of South Dakota students and families who recognize technical education as an opportunity to learn here, get an outstanding job, and contribute to the future of our state,” Wendell said.

A past enrollment report available from the Board of Technical Education seems to indicate this year’s enrollment number is the highest since at least 2009, rather than merely a five-year high as reported in the board’s news release. South Dakota Searchlight sought clarification from the board, which has not yet provided it.

Enrollment numbers include students taking classes full-time, part-time and through dual enrollment, such as high school students taking classes for dual credit.

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

## In swing states that once went for Trump, unions organize to prevent a repeat

**BY: ERIK GUNN - SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 12:04 PM**

Wisconsin carpenter Efrain Campos just retired this summer after 30 years, working mostly in commercial multi-story buildings — “from 15 floors and up,” he said. For him the last four years have been a boom period.

On Labor Day, Campos, 68, was among the thousands of union members and their families who turned out for LaborFest on Milwaukee’s festival grounds on the shores of Lake Michigan.

He had planned to vote for President Joe Biden for a second term in office, but when the Democratic Party pivoted to Vice President Kamala Harris as its candidate, he pivoted as well. “We need somebody to help the middle people,” he said, “so they can advance, get a little bit better than what we are now.”

Campos dismisses the notion that the Republican candidate, former President Donald Trump, is a pro-worker candidate despite Trump’s populist appeal that grabbed a slice of the working class electorate in 2016.

“Not at all,” he said. “It’s ignorant. He’s a rich man, he gets his way. That’s not what this country is about.”

As the Nov. 5 presidential election nears, Democrats are counting on union workers to deliver voters, particularly in the swing states of Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Nevada where unions have remained an influential bloc, even as their strength has declined over the decades.

Many labor union leaders say they’re working as hard as they ever have to oppose Republican candidate and former President Donald Trump and elect Vice President Kamala Harris. The AFL-CIO, a federation of 60 unions that range from Major League Baseball players to firefighters to workers in the food industry,



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has endorsed Harris.

A growing share of rank-and-file union members, however, have been less likely to follow their leadership — some of them among Trump's base.

"It has to be recognized that union members are not monolithic in terms of the party they support," said Paul Clark, a professor of labor and employment relations at Penn State University. "Many unions have 30, 40, maybe 50% or more of their members who either are registered Republicans or are going to support Donald Trump in this election."

Last week, International Brotherhood of Teamsters General President Sean O'Brien announced the union's executive council would not endorse either ticket and cited the support of a majority of his members for Trump. (The Teamsters aren't part of the AFL-CIO).

Other union leaders insist that O'Brien is an outlier.

Nick Webber, a political organizer for the North American Building Trades Unions, said, "It's unprecedented the amount of interest in people in getting involved" as he marshals union canvassers this fall for the Democratic national ticket. He said in his conversations he's hearing union members say "not only, 'am I going to be voting,' and [that they're] tuned in, but 'how can I get involved' and 'doing my part.'"



**A youngster holds up a pro-union sign during a break between speeches at the 2024 Labor Fest in Milwaukee.** (Erik Gunn/Wisconsin Examiner)

## Appeals to steel and culinary workers

When Biden dropped out July 21, the national executive council of the 12.5 million-member AFL-CIO endorsed Harris the next day "because we knew that the administration that has been fighting for working people for the last three and a half years, we know what they've delivered, and we knew that her record spoke for itself," said Liz Shuler, national AFL-CIO president, in an interview with NC Newsline.

But the Trump campaign is continuing to try to reach union voters, even as union leaders argue his record as president and his rhetoric — such as suggesting in a conversation with Elon Musk that employers should fire strikers — should make him unacceptable.

In an appeal to United Steelworkers, the most powerful union in western Pennsylvania, Trump said in January he would block a potential acquisition of U.S. Steel by Japan-based Nippon Steel.

Nevertheless the union endorsed Biden, who said in a visit in April he also opposed the sale. Both he and Harris reiterated that stance during a Labor Day visit to Pittsburgh. "I couldn't agree more with President Biden: U.S. Steel should remain in American hands," Harris said.

In Nevada, Trump held a rally in June where he proposed ending federal taxes on tipped income — an appeal aimed at the workers in the state's largest industry, hotel-casinos.

Harris adopted the no-tax-on-tips position as well in a visit in August, a day after the powerful Culinary Workers Local Union 226, endorsed her. The union reports that its 60,000 members are 55% women and

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60% immigrants.

In a return visit in August, Trump suggested his “no tax on tips” position would draw Culinary members’ support — “A lot of them are voting for us, I can tell you that,” he said.

But the union responded by doubling down on its support for Harris, who on a visit months before had celebrated the union’s successful contract negotiations with the Las Vegas Strip’s largest gambling-resort corporations.

“Kamala Harris has promised to raise the minimum wage for all workers — including tipped workers — and eliminate tax on tips,” said Culinary Vice President Leain Vashon. Vashon said Trump didn’t help tipped workers while he was president, so “Why would we trust him? Kamala has a plan, Trump has a slogan.”

## Making the case

For most union leaders, the case for Harris is the stark contrast they see between Trump’s record in the White House from 2016 to 2020 and that of his successor.

“When you talk about the politics of what’s at stake in this election, it’s very clear,” said Kent Miller, president and business manager for the Laborers Union Wisconsin District Council.

The 2021 bipartisan infrastructure law, the 2022 bipartisan CHIPS and Science Act and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act, which passed with only Democratic votes, opened the sluices to fund a range of investments in roads and bridges, clean energy and electric vehicle infrastructure.

The programs include strong incentives for union labor and for the enrollment of new apprentices in training programs operated by unions and their employers.

Larry Davis, a Michigan United Auto Workers local president, said Biden-Harris administration policies helped boost the auto industry.

“I can just go from Detroit-Hamtramck, [which was] on the brink of closing, and now you have over 3,000 almost 4,000 workers in there now,” Davis said.

But the messages unions have been pushing about manufacturing growth, the infrastructure advances and jobs — even unemployment rates that have fallen to just over 4% nationally and 3% or lower in states such as Wisconsin — have been slow to resonate with voters who are focused on higher prices resulting from supply chain shortages.

“Part of that is the investment is still in the works,” said William Jones, a labor historian at the University of Minnesota. “It was slow to be distributed, and it depended largely on state and local government taking it up and creating jobs. It’s possible some people haven’t felt the full impact.”

Jones also suggests there may have been inadequate messaging from the administration — something that unions are trying to make up for in their member outreach.

Beyond what Miller and other union leaders see as those bread-and-butter accomplishments are other policy stakes in who holds the White House, such as the makeup of the National Labor Relations Board and who holds the post of general counsel, the principal architect of the agency’s legal perspective.

Those differences further underscore what most union leaders see as a sharp distinction between the two tickets. “We’ve seen both these movies before,” said Webber of the electrical workers union.

Under the Trump administration the NLRB veered to positions less favorable to unions, Miller observed. Under Biden, it has issued more decisions that have supported union positions.

## How much does Trump appeal?

Can the former president succeed in once again carving out some support among union voters?

Wisconsin, Pennsylvania and Michigan, all previously reliable Democratic states with strong union political involvement, famously flipped to Trump by narrow margins in 2016, leading to Democratic candidate Hillary Clinton’s defeat that year. All three flipped back to help carry Biden to victory against Trump in 2020.

Jones said Trump’s criticism of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) in 2016 — enacted under Democratic President Bill Clinton in 1993 — “helped him among a certain demographic in 2016” — primarily working class white men from rural and small town regions.

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When Teamsters President O'Brien announced the union wouldn't make an endorsement this year, the union released a poll of rank-and-file members that found nearly 60% support for Trump compared to 31% for Harris. The union said the survey was conducted by Lake Research Partners, a Democratic polling firm.

O'Brien's announcement followed his precedent-breaking speech to the Republican National Convention in July, where he called Trump "one tough SOB," proclaimed a willingness to work with either political party and attacked business lobbies and corporations.

"I think he feels that at least half of his members are Trump supporters," said Clark, the Penn State professor, in an interview before the non-endorsement announcement. "And while I think he recognizes that Biden has been very pro-labor, you know, politically, I think he felt a need to sort of send a message to his members that he hears them."

The outcome opened up a rift in the union, however. Within hours of O'Brien's announcement, local, state and regional Teamsters bodies representing at least 500,000 members of the 1.3 million-member union endorsed Harris, including groups in Pennsylvania, Michigan, Wisconsin and Nevada.

The pro-Harris Teamsters highlighted Biden's role in signing legislation, included in the 2021 American Rescue Plan Act, that shored up the union's Central States Pension Fund. The fund faced insolvency by 2026 after years of underfunding.

In a statement, Bill Carroll, president of the union's Council 39, representing about 15,000 Wisconsin Teamsters, said Harris would also build on Biden's pro-union record. "In contrast, Donald Trump tried to gut workers' rights as president by appointing union busters to the NLRB and advocating for national right-to-work," Carroll said. "Trump's project 2025 would go even further, attacking the ability for unions to even have the ability to organize."

The labor-related provisions in the Heritage Foundation's Project 2025 document — billed as a blueprint for the next Republican White House — include proposals that experts have said would eliminate public sector unions nationwide, make forming private sector unions more difficult and allow states to opt out of federal labor laws. Other proposals would reduce federal protections for workers whether unionized or not.

Union messaging to members has emphasized the document and its ties to Trump, despite his repeated disavowal of the agenda and claims of ignorance about its contents.

"It is absolutely his plan," the AFL-CIO's Shuler told NC Newsline. "He's had over 100 former administration officials and the Heritage Foundation basically writing the blueprint for his next term, which would eliminate unions as we know it."

## Reaching out to members

Union leaders say they're trying to make sure their members are seeing the campaign the way they see it. In Nevada, where the Culinary's canvassing and get-out-the-vote effort is regarded as one of the state's most formidable, the union boasts that during the 2022 campaign cycle it knocked on 1 million doors.

This year, UNITE HERE says it is once again mobilizing its members and plans to knock on more than 3 million doors in Nevada, Arizona, Pennsylvania, Ohio, North Carolina and Michigan "to ensure that Kamala Harris wins the presidency."

In Wisconsin, the Laborers are building political messaging into a union project to engage members more closely, "connecting union members with other union members," Miller said, to explain how negotiations affect wages and health and retirement benefits, as well as the importance of increasing union representation.

"We're a jobs club," Miller said. The message to the union members, he adds, is that "at the end of the day it's everybody's right to decide who to vote for — but we want to let you guys know these are the issues at stake in this upcoming election."

Experienced union members are holding one-on-one conversations, particularly with newer and younger members. "We're not just doing phone calls, we're doing job site visits, and member-to-member doing doors," Miller said.

Webber's work with the building trades group is similar. "We've been doing a lot of reaching out and

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making sure to have those conversations," he said — on job sites and during union meetings.

The message: "These jobs don't come out of thin air," Webber says. "There's been strategic, intentional investment for a need in the community."

The communications don't just focus on other union members, either, he said. "You need to be sure people on the periphery of the union hear [the message]," said Webber. "Union household members are a huge part of these conversations — a partner, a spouse or child."

On Monday, the United Auto Workers union unveiled a national YouTube video aimed directly at members who might still see Trump through the lens of his attacks on NAFTA in his first presidential campaign.

The UAW has endorsed Harris. In the 3 1/2-minute video, UAW President Shawn Fain finds both Democrats and Republicans culpable for NAFTA and the factory closings over the quarter-century since it was enacted. In 2016, Fain says, "All of that pain had to go somewhere. And for a lot of working-class people, it went to voting for Donald Trump."

The video, however, portrays Trump as a con man, highlighting his 2017 tax cut as favoring the wealthy and the USMCA, the trade law Trump enacted, as no better than NAFTA, which it replaced.

While emphasizing that "both parties have done harm to the working class," Fain said that under Biden and Harris, "we've seen the tide starting to turn."

Under Biden there's been "more manufacturing investment in this country than at any point in my lifetime," he says, and under Harris, "the Democratic Party is getting back to its roots."

Paula Uhing is president of the local Steelworkers union at a suburban Milwaukee factory. She's another enthusiastic Harris supporter, but said she and other labor leaders "know that we still have a lot of work to do" to pull more union voters behind the vice president.

"We have so many union members that vote against their own interests," Uhing said. "It's just because they're not paying attention, they're not listening to the right people."

She describes herself as "optimistically cautious," though. One reason has been some of the conversations she's had with coworkers.

"There are people at work who are not necessarily turning away from the Republican Party altogether, but they are considering the Democratic ticket," Uhing said. "They're looking at it in a completely different way than they did last cycle, which is a good thing."

*Deputy Editor Erik Gunn reports and writes on work and the economy, health policy and related subjects for the Wisconsin Examiner. He spent 24 years as a freelance writer for Milwaukee Magazine, Isthmus, The Progressive, BNA Inc., and other publications, winning awards for investigative reporting, feature writing, beat coverage, business writing and commentary.*

## When business is booming but daily living is a struggle

**Most voters say the economy is their top issue. A changing city in North Carolina illustrates why.**

**BY: KEVIN HARDY, STATELINE AND CASEY QUINLAN - SEPTEMBER 25, 2024 9:22 AM**

ROCKY MOUNT, N.C. — The signs on the empty historic buildings envision an urban utopia of sorts, complete with street cafes, bustling bike lanes and a grocery co-op.

"IMAGINE What Could Be Here," gushes one sign outside the empty, Neoclassical post office. "IMAGINE! A Vibrant Downtown," reads another mounted on the glass front of a long-ago closed drug store.

In a place like Rocky Mount, North Carolina, it's not such a stretch: Just across the street, white-collar workers peck away at laptops and sip lattes at a bright coffee bar lined with dozens of potted tropical plants. A few blocks away, a mammoth events center routinely brings in thousands of visitors from across the country. And alongside a quiet river nearby, a meticulously redeveloped cotton mill would be the envy of any American city, with its modern breweries, restaurants and loft living.

An industrial community long in decline, Rocky Mount is slowly building itself back. But in this city of about 54,000, sharply divided by race and class, many residents struggle to cover the basic costs of gro-

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ceries, housing and child care.

North Carolina reflects the duality of the American economy: Unemployment is low, jobs are increasing and businesses are opening new factories. But high housing and food costs have squeezed middle-class residents despite the gains of rising wages.

"The economy stinks," said Tameika Horne, who owns an ice cream and dessert shop in Rocky Mount.

Her ingredient prices have skyrocketed, she said, but she can't continuously raise prices on ice cream cones or funnel cakes. She said last month was her slowest ever, with only \$2,000 in sales.

It's not just the slow sales at her store: Only a few years ago, she paid \$700 a month to rent a three-bedroom apartment. Now, her similarly sized rental home costs her \$1,350 a month.

Aside from the ice cream shop, Horne also runs a cleaning business with her family and just started a job delivering packages for FedEx.

"It's just hard right now," she said.

The economy, a top issue for voters during any election, is particularly important this presidential cycle: Prices of necessities such as groceries aren't rising as fast as they were, but years of post-pandemic inflation have soured voter attitudes.

And across the country, millions of families are struggling with rising housing costs. In four of the seven swing states — Arizona, Georgia, Michigan and Nevada — more than half of tenant families spend 30% or more of their income on rent and utilities, according to the 2023 American Community Survey.

In North Carolina, voter anxiety about the soaring rents and grocery bills could tip the scales.

"In terms of its political influence, it's not actually your personal financial situation that is important, it's your vision of the national economy," said Matt Grossmann, a political science professor at Michigan State University. "So if I get a raise, I tend to credit myself. If I see higher prices, I tend to blame the government or the current situation."

Around the corner from Horne's ice cream store in downtown Rocky Mount, Kristie Hilliard greets a steady flow of customers to her new shop, Kristie Kandies. An armed cop, a nurse in scrubs and waist-high kids trickle in to grab a sweet treat.

After getting tired of her manufacturing job at the local Pfizer plant, Hilliard started making confections at home. As her following grew, she got a concession trailer and now has a storefront selling candied grapes, plums, kiwis and pickles.



**Kristie Hilliard opened her new shop, Kristie Kandies, in downtown Rocky Mount, N.C., after getting tired of her factory job at the local Pfizer plant. She's seen a steady flow of customers, but says she doesn't think either Vice President Kamala Harris or former President Donald Trump would change her economic fortunes.** (Kevin Hardy/Stateline)

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Hilliard's treats have attracted attention on social media, causing some buyers to drive in from as far away as Pennsylvania, she said.

A Democrat, she said she still hadn't made up her mind on the presidential race. But she doesn't believe either a Harris or a Trump administration would drastically change much for her business.

"They ain't doing nothing for me now," she said. "So, what would change?"

## **A community divided looks to the future**

About 60 miles northeast of the state capital, Rocky Mount lies between the prosperous Research Triangle area and North Carolina's scenic beach communities.

Railroad tracks and a county line slice through the middle of downtown. On the one side is the majority Black and lower-income Edgecombe County. On the other, the more prosperous and whiter Nash County.

While some officials say long-standing attitudes centered on division are fading, the county line has for decades provided a clear delineation of class, race and politics.

Edgecombe County is a Democratic stronghold, but the more populous Nash County is a bellwether of sorts. It was among the 10 closest of North Carolina's 100 counties in the last presidential election, and one being closely watched this cycle. With 51,774 ballots cast, President Joe Biden took Nash County by 120 votes.

Around Rocky Mount's downtown area, stately red brick churches and banks line the wide streets. But just a few blocks away, weeds overtake vacant lots, glass is smashed out of abandoned buildings, and razor wire tops the fencing of no-credit-needed car lots and used tire shops.

While the nearby Raleigh metro area has experienced explosive suburban growth, Rocky Mount Mayor Sandy Roberson said his community has seen an erosion of its middle class with the loss of corporate headquarters and factory jobs.

But he's optimistic.

Young business owners are investing in downtown. Industries with operations in the Raleigh area are moving east. And both Republicans and Democrats just celebrated the news that Natron Energy plans to build a \$1.4 billion electric vehicle battery plant nearby that will employ more than 1,000 people.

"We've got a lot of great things that are happening," the mayor said. "But the key is, how do you build and retain a middle class? Because that's who does the living and the dying and the investing in a community."

The mayor's position is nonpartisan, but Roberson is a Republican who in 2022 ran in the Republican primary for a congressional seat here. This election, however, is a difficult one for him.

Roberson said the economy and his financial position were unquestionably better during former President Donald Trump's term, but the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection and the chaos of the last Trump presidency make him hard to support. At the same time, Roberson worries about Democratic presidential nominee Vice President Kamala Harris' economic policies; he believes the current administration has accelerated inflation by pumping too much money into the economy.

"At some levels, it feels like I'm voting for somebody who wants to either be a dictator or somebody who wants to create a socialist state," Roberson said. "And I'm not in either place."

## **'Nobody is immune'**

In North Carolina and other swing states, Trump's television ads hammer the vice president over high prices and "Bidenomics."

Nash County Republican Party volunteer Yvonne McLeod said the economy, along with immigration, are the top concerns locally. Businesses still struggle to hire, rents have soared and food prices are still up, she said.

"Economically, we're hurting," she said.

Democrats must be honest about the financial pressures facing voters, said Cassandra Conover, a former Virginia prosecutor who now leads the Nash County Democratic Party. She noted that Harris ads running in North Carolina speak directly to middle-class concerns.

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"Nobody is immune from what's going on," Conover said. "She's telling all of us who are hurting, 'I know, and we're working for you.'"

Polling has shown voters are sour on the economy, with 63% saying the economy was on the wrong track in a Harvard-CAPS-Harris poll released this month. Republicans take a far dimmer view than Democrats.

"From past experience, we would expect Harris to inherit some of the blame or credit for the current economy, but so far in the polls, I would say there has been a surprising willingness of voters to not extend the blame for inflation that they had for Joe Biden onto Kamala Harris," said Grossmann, the Michigan State University professor.

## Housing anxiety

Housing costs have outstripped income gains in the past two decades, but those challenges have intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic, when demand increased, construction costs soared and interest rates spiked.

"It doesn't matter if you're a buyer or a renter," said Molly Boesel, an economist at CoreLogic, a financial services information company. "You're seeing your housing costs increase."

Affordability is "the No. 1 issue" among voters in Nevada this year, said Mario Arias, the Nevada director of the Forward Party, a centrist political party founded by former Democratic presidential hopeful Andrew Yang.

A resident of the Las Vegas area, 30-year-old Arias said housing is his biggest financial concern. Throngs of Californians have moved into Nevada to lower their housing costs, but it's driven up costs for everyone else, he said.

"If you want to get out of being a renter, you have to be in not just a good financial situation, but in a very stable financial situation," he said.

The Federal Reserve cut interest rates last week for the first time in four years, which could open the housing market to more homebuyers as mortgage rates ease in the coming months.

The Biden administration has proposed several housing-related policies, including incentives to loosen zoning regulations and capping rent increases from corporate landlords. Harris has announced a proposal to provide up to \$25,000 in housing assistance for a down payment to some potential first-time homeowners and promised tax incentives that she says would lead to 3 million more housing units by the end of her first term, if she's elected.

Trump has not waded far into the details of how he would address the affordability issue in a second term. He has said he plans to bring down prices by barring immigrants in the country without legal authorization from getting mortgages. But his proposed immigration policies could further reduce the labor force for building homes. Previously, Trump's administration talked about trying to cut state and local housing regulations, and it suspended federal regulations on fair housing.

In North Carolina, more than a quarter of the state's households are cost burdened, meaning they spend more than 30% of their income on housing costs. It's particularly challenging for renters, nearly half of which are cost burdened, according to the North Carolina Housing Coalition, a nonprofit affordable housing organization.

Stephanie Watkins-Cruz, housing policy director at the coalition, noted that the federal government's calculation of fair market rent in North Carolina has shot up 14% in just one year — and 38% over the past five years.

"So unless everybody and their mama's getting 14 to 20 to 38% raises, the math begins to not math," she said.

It's a familiar challenge in every swing state.

Wendy Winston, a middle school math teacher in Grand Rapids Michigan, said that though no one political candidate is responsible for the state of the economy, the cost of groceries and housing is hard to ignore.

"I don't think the economy is terrible. It is sometimes difficult to make ends meet," Winston said. "I don't believe that it's the fault of the government or policies of the government. I feel like it's the individual

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corporations trying to make profit off the backs of the middle class.”

The average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in Grand Rapids is about \$1,550 a month, according to rental site Apartments.com. Though Michigan ranks fairly average compared with other states for rent prices, the state saw some of the steepest rent increases in the country in recent years, and wages have not kept up. Residents unable to rent new, “luxury” apartments find themselves short of options for places they can afford.

“It’s not just cost, it’s availability,” Winston said. “There are a lot of new housing developments. Apartments and condos and things are being built, but I’m priced out of them. And I have a college degree, so I don’t think that’s helping our families.”

## Hoping for revival

Back in North Carolina, near the banks of the Tar River, Rocky Mount Mills has a healthy waiting list for the apartments and the revamped homes it rents.

A former cotton mill built and once operated by slave labor, the campus closed in 1996, reopened in 2015 after a \$75 million renovation, and is now home to breweries, restaurants and dozens of high-end apartments.

Chapel Hill native and entrepreneur Cameron Schulz never had Rocky Mount on his radar. But the development’s brewery incubator helped him launch HopFly Brewing Co., now one of the state’s largest self-distributing breweries.

After outgrowing its original space, HopFly relocated to Charlotte, but still operates a taproom in Rocky Mount. The Mills project has reinvigorated the city, Schulz said.

“Rocky Mount’s got one of the most beautiful, quintessential downtown strips that I’ve ever seen anywhere,” he said. “We’ve just got to fill it up with cool places to go, and people to go into those places.”

Main Street suffered for decades after the arrival of malls and a highway bypass. Over at Davis Furniture Company, two employees keep watch over an empty storeroom of sofas, beds and home decor.

Co-owner Melanie Davis said business has been good, though she believes customers are anxious about the presidential election. Pointing down the sidewalk to new restaurants and some loft apartments overlooking the railroad tracks, Davis said she’s bullish on the trajectory of downtown.

“I do feel like we’re on an upswing,” she said.

*Kevin Hardy covers business, labor and rural issues for Stateline from the Midwest.*

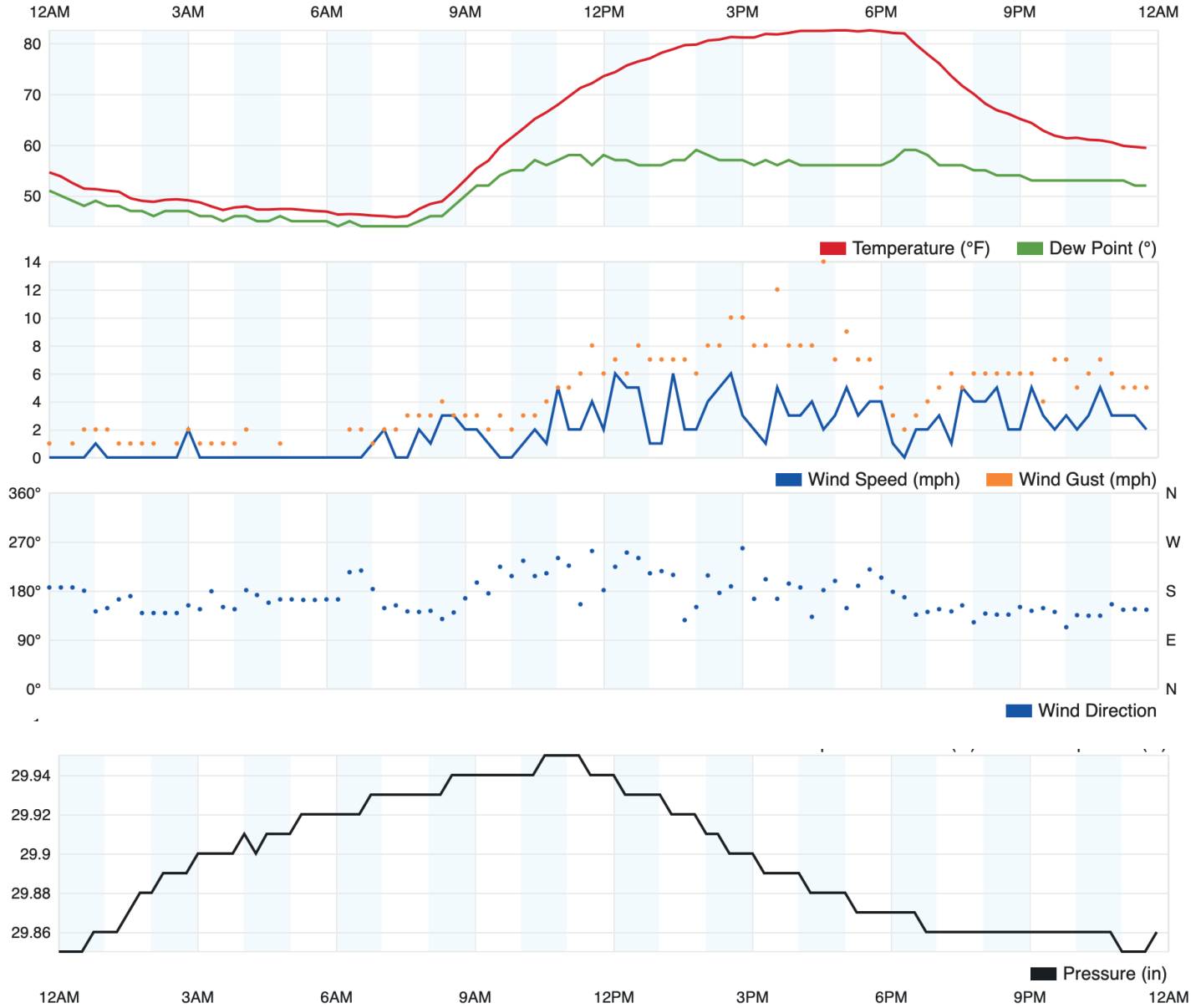
*Casey Quinlan is an economy reporter for States Newsroom, based in Washington, D.C. For the past decade, they have reported on national politics and state politics, LGBTQ rights, abortion access, labor issues, education, Supreme Court news and more for publications including The American Independent, ThinkProgress, New Republic, Rewire News, SCOTUSblog, In These Times and Vox.*



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## Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 85 °F

Sunny and Breezy

Tonight



Low: 54 °F

Clear

Friday



High: 79 °F

Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 48 °F

Clear

Saturday



High: 84 °F

Sunny



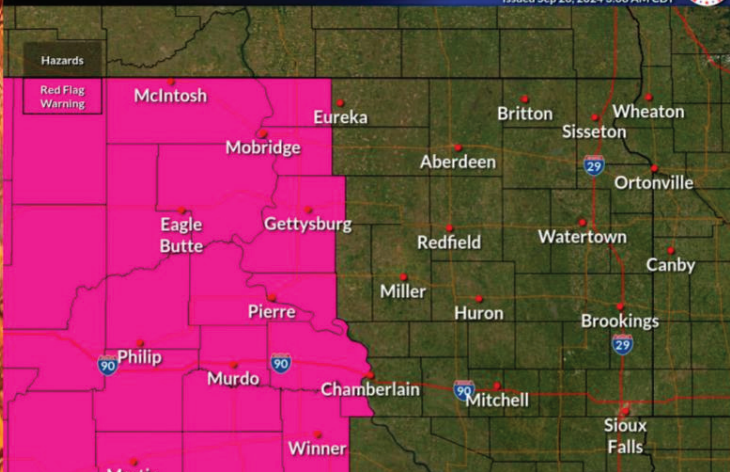
## Warm and Windy Today

September 26, 2024  
3:14 AM

- Dry and gusty conditions will be in place today, mainly over Central South Dakota east of the Missouri River.
- Due to the dry conditions, fires will start more easily.
- Much above normal temperatures in the 90s expected across central South Dakota.

### Red Flag Warning

Weather Forecast Office  
Aberdeen, SD  
Issued Sep 26, 2024 3:08 AM CDT



### Maximum Temperature Forecast (°F)

	9/26 Thu					
	6am	9am	12pm	3pm	6pm	9pm
Aberdeen	58	72	84	87	84	71
Britton	60	72	82	84	82	69
Brookings	53	72	81	82	80	68
Chamberlain	58	77	87	90	88	75
Clark	57	72	79	81	79	68
Eagle Butte	61	73	87	91	89	74
Ellendale	55	73	84	86	83	70
Eureka	59	73	85	87	85	70
Gettysburg	59	73	85	89	87	72
Huron	56	72	83	86	84	73
Kennebec	60	77	90	92	90	75
McIntosh	60	74	88	91	88	72
Milbank	56	75	82	84	82	68
Miller	62	75	86	89	87	74
Mobridge	65	76	88	92	91	76
Murdo	63	77	92	96	94	77
Pierre	62	77	91	95	93	76
Redfield	57	72	84	87	85	72
Sisseton	57	74	83	85	82	69
Watertown	54	72	80	82	80	68
Webster	59	72	80	82	80	68
Wheaton	58	73	82	84	81	69



Created: 2 am CDT Thu 9/26/2024 | Values are maximums over the period beginning at the time shown.

Temperatures are expected to be 15-20+ degrees above average through the end of the work week. Thursday will be the warmest with highs above 90 possible west river.

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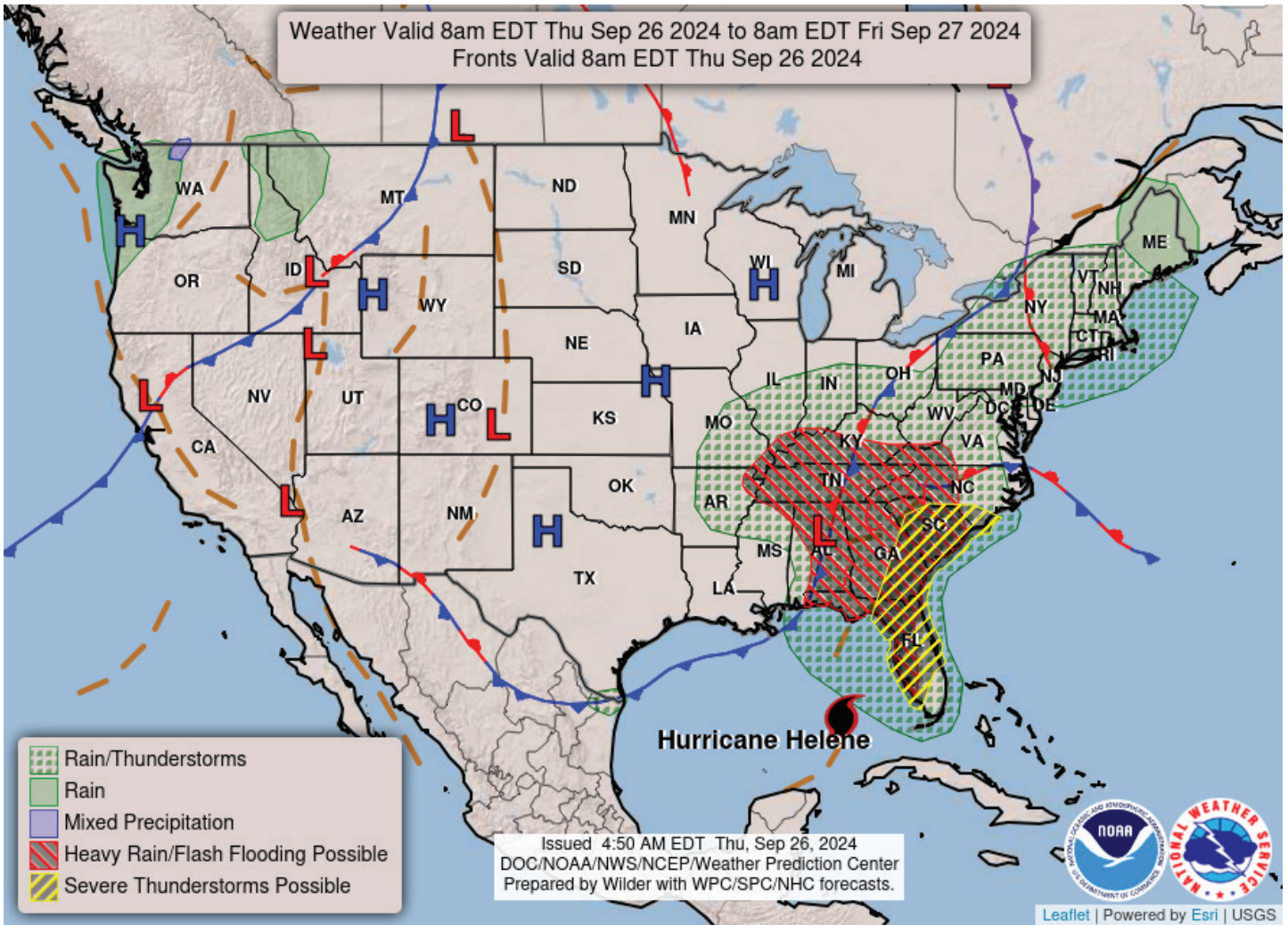
## Yesterday's Groton Weather

**High Temp: 83 °F at 5:12 PM**  
**Low Temp: 46 °F at 7:20 AM**  
**Wind: 14 mph at 4:40 PM**  
**Precip: : 0.00**

Day length: 11 hours, 59 minutes

## Today's Info

Record High: 97 in 1974  
Record Low: 17 in 1939  
Average High: 71  
Average Low: 43  
Average Precip in Sept.: 1.72  
Precip to date in Sept.: 0.33  
Average Precip to date: 18.06  
Precip Year to Date: 19.75  
Sunset Tonight: 7:22:59 pm  
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:25:09 am



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## Today in Weather History

September 26, 1965: A hard freeze hit most of Minnesota in the early morning causing the loss of millions of bushels of corn and soybeans. Temperatures fell below 20 degrees in the northern part of the state.

September 26, 1981: A tornado touched down in the early morning hours several times east of Vermilion. Two barns received extensive damage.

1898: A school teacher saved 32 children from death in Merritton, Ontario, when she spotted an approaching tornado and led her students to a safe corner. Unfortunately, falling debris killed one of the children and injured several others.

1936: A forest fire burned several miles east of the town of Brandon, Oregon. The fire was far enough away that residents were not particularly worried. A sudden shift in the winds drove the flames westward and through town. The fire, caused by summer drought and fueled by the abundant Gorse Weed found in many of the empty spaces between buildings in Brandon, caused so much destruction that only a handful of structures were left standing when the fire finally died down.

1936: The heaviest snowfall ever recorded in September and the heaviest snowfall ever recorded so early in the season dumped a total of 16.5 inches of snow on downtown Denver and 21.3 inches at Denver Municipal Airport. The 15.0 inches of snow measured from 6:00 PM on the 27th to 6:00 PM on the 28th is the greatest 24-hour snowfall ever recorded in September. This was the first snow of the season. The snow was intermittent on the 26th, but continuous from early afternoon on the 27th to around midnight on the 28th, except for a period of rain during the afternoon of the 28th.

1950 - Residents of the northeastern U.S. observed a blue sun and a blue moon, caused by forest fires in British Columbia. (David Ludlum)

1955: On this date, the Atlantic reconnaissance aircraft, "Snowcloud Five" went down while investigating Hurricane Janet and was never heard from again. Lt. Comdr. Windham with a crew of 8 and two newspapermen reported that they were about to begin penetrating the central core of the hurricane. Hurricane Janet made landfall at peak intensity near Chetumal, Mexico on September 29th. Janet's landfall as a Category 5 hurricane on the Yucatán Peninsula was the first recorded instance that a storm of such intensity in the Atlantic made landfall on a continental mainland; prior to Janet, landfalls of Category 5 intensity were only known to have taken place on islands.

1963 - San Diego, CA, reached an all-time record high of 111 degrees. Los Angeles hit 109 degrees. (David Ludlum)

1970 - Santa Ana winds brought fires to Los Angeles County, and to points south and east. Half a million acres were consumed by the fires, as were 1000 structures. Twenty firemen were injured. (25th-29th) (The Weather Channel)

1971: Project Stormfury was an attempt to weaken tropical cyclones by flying aircraft into them and seeding with silver iodide. The project was run by the United States Government from 1962 to 1983. Hurricane Ginger in 1971 was the last hurricane Project Stormfury seeded.

1979 - In the midst of a hot September for Death Valley, California, the afternoon high was 104 degrees for the second of three days, the coolest afternoon highs for the month. (The Weather Channel)

1988 - Unseasonably warm weather prevailed across Florida. Afternoon highs of 92 degrees at Apalachicola and 95 degrees at Fort Myers were records for the date. (The National Weather Summary)

1998: There were four hurricanes were spinning simultaneously in the Atlantic basin: Georges, Ivan, Jeanne, and Karl. That was the first time this had happened since 1893.

2004 - After making its infamous loop east of the Bahamas, Hurricane Jeanne made landfall the night of September 26th, 2004. Jeanne came ashore as a major category 3 hurricane just a few miles away from where Hurricane Frances made landfall a few weeks before. Jeanne produced extensive damage along the east central Florida coast from Volusia County south to Martin County. The highest wind gusts occurred over extreme Southern Brevard County as well as Indian River County with 110 - 120 mph estimates at the peak of the storm. (NWS, Melbourne, FL)



## WHAT'S IN YOUR MIND?

A group of visitors was watching a potter fashion an object from shapeless clay. Intrigued, one of them asked, "What are you making?"

"Something very beautiful," he answered.

"How do you know it's going to be beautiful?" asked the visitor.

"Because I can see it in my mind," he replied.

Isaiah made a profound statement about the potter and his clay. "Lord," he began, "you are our Father. We are the clay, and you are the potter. We are all formed by your hand."

Whenever and wherever pottery is mentioned in Scripture, the story is the same: the potter has power over the clay. He can do with the clay what he will and shape objects that have a wide variety of uses. One may be used as a vessel to carry water or store grain. Another may be used to contain oil for a lamp that will shed light in dark places. Again, the potter may make a bowl for soup or a plate for a feast. The clay has no power or influence over the outcome of the process. The potter has control over the clay and will shape the clay carefully according to his will to fulfill its purpose.

Likewise for the Christian. God has a specific plan in His mind for each of our lives. For us to fulfill His purpose, He must shape us and mold us as a potter does with his clay until we are ready for His use.

Prayer: We thank You, Heavenly Father, that You have a plan and a purpose for each of us. May we be patient and willing to be made into Your likeness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: Yet you, LORD, are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand. Isaiah 64:8

Tags: Isaiah 64:8 thoughts

*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:  
09.24.24

1 6 10 23 27 18

MegaPlier

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$77,000,000**

NEXT 2 Day Draw  
DRAW: Mins 56 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.23.24

13 15 22 23 35 9

All Stars 4x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$7,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 55 Secs  
DRAW: 56 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.24.24

6 9 3 36 38 4

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$7,000,000 PER WEEK**

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 55 Secs  
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.21.24

6 16 26 30 31

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$38,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 3 Mins 55 Secs  
DRAW: Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### FOUNTAIN POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.23.24

23 39 57 61 67 10

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

NEXT 17 Hrs 32 Mins  
DRAW: 56 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

### POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:  
09.23.24

15 21 25 37 45 19

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:  
**\$223,000,000**

NEXT 17 Hrs 32 Mins  
DRAW: 56 Secs

PREVIOUS RESULTS

Not available today!

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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 with Live & Silent Auctions 6pm-close  
04/12/2025 Lion's Club Easter Egg Hunt at the City Park 10am Sharp  
05/03/2025 Lion's Club Spring Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
05/26/2025 Memorial Day Services Groton Union Cemetery with lunch at Legion Post #39, 12pm  
07/04/2025 Firecracker Couples Tourney at Olive Grove Golf Course  
07/09/2025 Legion Auxiliary Salad Luncheon  
07/13/2025 Lion's Club Summer Fest/Car Show at the City Park 9am-4pm  
09/06/2025 Lion's Club Fall Citywide Rummage Sale 8am-3pm  
10/31/2025 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm  
11/27/2025 Community Thanksgiving at the Community Center 11:30am-1pm



## News from the **AP** Associated Press

### **Judge dismisses lawsuit over mine sinkholes in South Dakota**

By JACK DURA Associated Press

A judge in South Dakota has thrown out a lawsuit brought by dozens of neighbors in a Rapid City-area subdivision whose homes were built above an old, underground mine linked to sinkholes in the neighborhood.

Circuit Court Judge Eric J. Strawn in a ruling posted online Wednesday granted the state's motion for summary judgment and dismissed all the claims, ruling that the state has sovereign immunity, a sort of legal protection against lawsuits.

The plaintiffs' attorney, Kathy Barrow, said her Hideaway Hills clients will appeal to the state Supreme Court.

The plaintiffs are arguing that the state's mining activities and the way it ultimately closed the mine created conditions ripe for sinkholes to develop. They also fault the state for failing to disclose the problematic conditions.

The plaintiffs want the Supreme Court to sort out the "blurred lines" of the legal theory behind their claims, Barrow said.

An attorney for the state referred The Associated Press to Ian Fury, spokesman for Gov. Kristi Noem, who didn't reply to The AP's email seeking comment.

The lawsuit was originally filed in 2020. That same year, a giant sinkhole opened in the neighborhood, which later revealed the extent of the mine beneath. About 150 neighbors in 94 homes are seeking \$45 million. Other holes and sinkings have occurred since, imperiling houses, roads and utilities, according to the homeowners.

The former state cement plant mined gypsum for several years in the area decades ago. Attorneys for the state have argued that the cement plant did not mine underground and the collapse would have occurred regardless of the plant's mining activities.

### **The northern lights might again be visible in the US as solar activity increases**

By GENE JOHNSON Associated Press

The aurora borealis is continuing to dazzle viewers across the northern United States and Canada.

It's been a good year for seeing auroras — the colorful sky displays also known as northern lights — even in lower latitudes. That's because of increased electromagnetic activity as the sun is believed to be approaching the height of its 11-year solar cycle.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration says that clear skies permitting, the phenomenon might be visible across parts of the northern U.S. on Wednesday night, including in Washington, Idaho, Montana, the Dakotas, Minnesota, Wisconsin, Michigan and Maine.

Increased solar activity can also interfere with radio transmissions on Earth.

NOAA advises those who hope to see the northern lights to get away from city lights. The best viewing time is usually within an hour or two before or after midnight, and the agency says the best occasions are around the spring and fall equinoxes, due to the way the solar wind interacts with Earth's magnetosphere.

### **Fall kills climber and strands partner on Wyoming's Devils Tower**

HULETT, Wyo. (AP) — A climber fell to his death while rappelling down Devils Tower, leaving his partner stranded without a rope on the face of the Wyoming geological formation.

The stuck climber was rescued unharmed after crying out for help Sunday evening, Devils Tower National Monument Superintendent Doug Crossen said Wednesday.

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The death of Stewart Phillip Porter, 21, of Eau Claire, Wisconsin, on Sunday, was the seventh climbing fatality in the park's 118-year history. Some 6,000 people climb the formation every year.

The two were on a relatively easy climbing route called El Cracko Diablo. They had summited the tower and were headed back down when Porter fell.

How the fall happened was unknown. The accident was still being investigated, Crossen said.

Standing with sheer sides almost 870 feet (265 meters) above the surrounding countryside and a mile (1.6 kilometers) above sea level, Devils Tower is the world's largest example of columnar jointing — fused pillars of igneous rock that formed as underground magma.

Established in 1906, Devils Tower was the first national monument and played a role in the 1977 film, "Close Encounters of the Third Kind."

## Funds are cutting aid for women seeking abortions as costs rise

By GEOFF MULVIHILL Associated Press

Organizations that help pay abortion costs are capping how much they can help as travel costs rise and the wave of "rage giving" that fueled them two years ago has subsided.

Abortion funds, which have operated across the U.S. for decades, in many cases as volunteer groups, ramped up their capacity fast after the Supreme Court overturned Roe v. Wade in 2022, ending a national right to abortion. Donations rolled in from supporters who saw the groups as key to maintaining abortion access as most Republican-controlled states implemented bans.

The expansion of the funds and increasing access to abortion pills are major reasons the number of abortions has risen slightly despite bans on abortion at all stages of pregnancy in 14 states and after about six weeks of pregnancy, before many women know they are pregnant, in another four.

But the funds have found that even with record budgets, it's not enough to fill all the gaps between the cost of obtaining abortions and what women seeking them can afford as they have to travel farther for legal procedures.

The National Abortion Federation, which helps people seeking abortions across the country, used to cover half the cost of the abortion for callers who couldn't afford it. Since July, it's pulled back to 30%. Brittany Fonteno, the organization's president and CEO, said the allocations had to be cut because of the rising demand and costs — even though the fund has a record \$55 million budget this year.

"We're at the point now where we know that people who are most impacted by funding shifts — and by abortion bans which have caused the funding shifts — are the people who can least afford to be kept away from care," Fonteno said. "And that includes people of color, younger people, immigrants and people with lower incomes."

Other groups have also imposed limits on aid to keep from exhausting their funds.

The Blue Ridge Abortion Fund, based in Virginia, hits its budget limit nearly every week and has to put requests on hold until the next week.

The Cobalt Abortion Fund in Colorado has had to cap how much it can spend. Its president, Karen Middleton, said groups like hers are used to being scrappy.

"It's the bake sale of the abortion rights movement," she said.

Abortion funds have existed for decades out of the spotlight. Many were — and some remain — volunteer-run. Nearly all of them ramped up as the abortion landscape shifted.

Cobalt, for instance, spent \$206,000 in 2021. Of that, only about \$6,000 was for travel costs — and much of that came in the form of gas cards to help people in outlying parts of Colorado get to clinics.

This year, the group expects to spend \$2.2 million — 10 times as much as in 2021. In the first six months of this year, it spent more than \$600,000 on travel and other logistical costs. Now they're booking hotel rooms and flights — mostly on short notice.

"We're a travel agency as much as we're an abortion fund," Middleton said.

In Colorado, like other states between the coasts, the influx of patients began late in 2021 when a ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy took effect in Texas. That's since been replaced by a

ban on abortion at all stages of pregnancy.

For the Blue Ridge Abortion Fund, a big change arrived after May 1, when Florida's ban on abortion after the first six weeks of pregnancy took effect. Before that, Florida, the nation's third most populous state, was a destination for people traveling from other Southern states that had stricter limits.

Greene said her fund helped 20 people from Florida from January through April. When the ban took effect, it left Virginia as the nearest state where abortion was available past 12 weeks and without a 72-hour waiting period. Greene said the fund helped about 40 Florida residents from May through August.

Their average travel cost per Floridian has been about \$3,000, she said — more than any other state.

Fonteno said the spike in requests from Florida — six times as many each month since the ban began — was an impetus for its abrupt policy change earlier this year. Blue Ridge and other funds have been trying to make up the difference.

"We're seeing more and more patients with more funding gaps," Greene said.

To try to stick to its weekly aid budget, the fund has cut back when it accepts calls requesting help to two mornings a week instead of two full work days. Greene said her fund collaborates with others to try to cover costs.

The New Jersey Abortion Access Fund responded to the National Abortion Federation's cuts by increasing what it sends every week to a solidarity fund to help people seeking abortions from other states to \$5,000 from \$3,000, said Quadira Coles, the group's president.

The organization also sends block grants to New Jersey abortion clinics to use to help pay for patients who cannot afford their fees. Coles said the group has increased that funding, too, after hearing from clinics that it had been running out halfway through the month.

The groups could see some of their financial pressure eased depending on the outcomes of measures on the November ballots that would add a state constitutional right to abortion in nine states.

In four of the states — Florida, Missouri, Nebraska and South Dakota — passage would overturn current bans and potentially mean that many people could access abortion without traveling.

In other states, the change would be more subtle. For instance, part of the Colorado amendment would allow state government employee health plans to cover abortion — possibly reducing the number of people who would seek help paying.

In the meantime, organizers of some of the funds say that some supporters have been contributing to the ballot measure campaigns, at the expense of the funds.

Joan Lamunyon Sanford, executive director of Faith Roots, which helps pay the costs of people traveling to New Mexico for abortion, said many donors who started around the time of Texas' restrictions, often called Senate Bill 8, or the Supreme Court's 2022 ruling make recurring gifts — though others gave just once.

"For those who felt that, whether it was the righteous anger or compassion, that led them to donate after S.B. 8 and after Dobbs, we're still here, and the need is still here," she said. "We still need them."

## Hurricane Helene threatens 'unsurvivable' storm surge and vast inland damage, forecasters say

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and STEPHEN SMITH Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — Fast-moving Hurricane Helene was advancing Thursday across the Gulf of Mexico toward Florida, threatening an "unsurvivable" storm surge in northwestern parts of the state as well as damaging winds, rains and flash floods hundreds of miles inland across much of the southeastern U.S., forecasters said.

Helene is expected to be a major hurricane — meaning a Category 3 or higher — when it makes landfall on Florida's northwestern coast Thursday evening. As of early Thursday, hurricane warnings and flash flood warnings extended far beyond the coast up into south-central Georgia. The governors of Florida, Georgia, and the Carolinas have all declared emergencies in their states.

The National Weather Service office in Tallahassee forecast storm surges of up to 20 feet (6 meters) and

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warned they could be particularly "catastrophic and unsurvivable" in Florida's Apalachee Bay. It added that high winds and heavy rains also posed risks.

"This forecast, if realized, is a nightmare surge scenario for Apalachee Bay," the office said. "Please, please, please take any evacuation orders seriously!"

In Crawfordville, farther inland and about 25 miles (40 kilometers) northwest of Apalachee Bay, Christine Nazworth stocked up on bottled water, baked goods and premade meals at a Walmart. She said her family would be sheltering in place, despite Wakulla County issuing a mandatory evacuation order.

"I'm prayed up," she said. "Lord have mercy on us. And everybody else that might be in its path."

Wakulla County was one of several to issue evacuation orders. Along Florida's Gulf Coast, school districts and multiple universities have cancelled classes.

Early Thursday, Helene was about 350 miles (560 kilometers) southwest of Tampa and moving north northeast at 12 mph (19 kph) with top sustained winds of 90 mph (150 kph). Forecasters said it should become a Category 3 or higher hurricane, meaning winds would top 110 mph (177 kph).

While Helene will likely weaken as it moves inland, its "fast forward speed will allow strong, damaging winds, especially in gusts, to penetrate well inland across the southeastern United States," including in the southern Appalachian Mountains, the National Hurricane Center said. The center posted lesser tropical storm warnings as far north as North Carolina, and warned that much of the region could experience prolonged power outages, toppled trees and dangerous flooding.

Helene had swamped parts of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula on Wednesday, flooding streets and toppling trees as it passed offshore and brushed the resort city of Cancun.

The storm formed Tuesday in the Caribbean Sea. In Cuba, the government preventively shut off power in some communities as waves as high as 16 feet (5 meters) slammed Cortes Bay. And in the Cayman Islands, schools closed and residents pumped water from flooded homes.

Rain was already falling steadily in Atlanta on Wednesday evening as shoppers emptied shelves of water at a Kroger supermarket east of downtown. The weather service in Atlanta issued flash flood warnings for much of the state.

Charles McComb said he still found it hard to believe Helene would seriously impact the city, which is more than 250 miles (400 kilometers) north of the Gulf of Mexico. "It would be really unique for it to hit so far inland," Charles said as he bought water, bread and lunch meat.

He was, however, worried about losing electricity.

"I do live in an area where it doesn't take so much for the power to go out," he said.

Helene is forecast to be one of the largest storms in breadth in years to hit the region, said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach. He said since 1988, only three Gulf hurricanes were bigger than Helene's predicted size: 2017's Irma, 2005's Wilma and 1995's Opal.

Areas 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of the Georgia-Florida line can expect hurricane conditions. More than half of Georgia's public school districts and several universities canceled classes.

For Atlanta, Helene could be the worst strike on a major Southern inland city in 35 years, said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd.

Landslides were possible in southern Appalachia, and rainfall was expected as far away as Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana.

Federal authorities have positioned generators, food and water, along with search-and-rescue and power restoration teams.

Helene is the eighth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, which began June 1. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted an above-average Atlantic hurricane season this year because of record-warm ocean temperatures.

In further storm activity, Tropical Storm Isaac formed Wednesday in the Atlantic and was expected to strengthen as it moves eastward across the open ocean, possibly becoming a hurricane by the end of the week, forecasters said. Isaac was about 690 miles (1,115 kilometers) northeast of Bermuda with top sustained winds of 50 mph (85 kph), according to the hurricane center, which said its swells and winds

could affect parts of Bermuda and eventually the Azores by the weekend.

In the Pacific, former Hurricane John reformed Wednesday as a tropical storm and was strengthening as it threatened areas of Mexico's western coast. Officials posted hurricane warnings for southwestern Mexico.

John hit the country's southern Pacific coast late Monday, killing at least two people, triggering mudslides, and damaging homes and trees. It grew into a Category 3 hurricane in a matter of hours and made landfall east of Acapulco. It reemerged over the ocean after weakening inland.

## **Lebanese officials say an Israeli strike killed 23 Syrian workers and family members in Lebanon**

By BASSEM MROUE and MELANIE LIDMAN Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — An Israeli airstrike in Lebanon hit a building housing Syrian workers and their families, killing 23 people, Lebanese officials said Thursday. It was one of the deadliest single strikes in an intensified air campaign against the militant Hezbollah group.

The strike late Wednesday came as the United States and its allies called for an "immediate" 21-day cease-fire to "provide space for diplomacy." Israel has threatened to launch a ground invasion, and the increasingly heavy exchanges of fire could trigger an all-out war.

Lebanon's National News Agency said the strike occurred near the ancient city of Baalbek in Lebanon's northeastern Bekaa Valley, which runs along the Syrian border. It quoted Ali Kassas, mayor of the village of Younine, as saying that the bodies of 23 Syrian citizens were pulled from under the rubble. He said four Syrians and four Lebanese were wounded.

Hussein Salloum, a local official in Younine, said most of the dead were women and children, and that rescue efforts lasted through the night and into Thursday morning.

"We dug through the rubble with our own hands" until a small bulldozer was brought in, Salloum told The Associated Press by telephone. "We had very limited capabilities."

The Lebanese Red Cross said it recovered nine bodies, while others were recovered by the Hezbollah militant group's paramedic service and the Lebanese Civil Defense.

Lebanon, with a population of around 6 million, hosts nearly 780,000 registered Syrian refugees and hundreds of thousands who are unregistered — the world's highest refugee population per capita.

Israel has carried out days of heavy strikes across Lebanon, targeting what it says are Hezbollah rocket launchers and other military infrastructure. The militants have fired hundreds of rockets into Israel and on Wednesday targeted Tel Aviv for the first time with a longer-range missile that was intercepted.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who is traveling to the United States for the U.N. General Assembly, has not yet responded to the cease-fire proposal. But his foreign minister, Israel Katz, said Israel would continue fighting "with full force until victory."

Hezbollah has also not yet responded to the proposal. The militant group has insisted it would only halt its strikes if there is a cease-fire in Gaza, which appears out of reach despite months of negotiations led by the United States, Egypt and Qatar.

Israeli strikes since Monday have killed more than 630 people in Lebanon, according to local health authorities, who say around a quarter were women and children. Several people have been wounded by shrapnel in Israel.

Israel struck 75 sites overnight across southern and eastern Lebanon, the military said. At least 45 projectiles were fired from Lebanon early Thursday, all of which were intercepted or fell in open areas, it said.

Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel after Hamas' Oct. 7 attack ignited the war in Gaza, hoping to pin down Israeli forces. Both Hezbollah and Hamas are close allies of Iran.

The fighting has killed dozens of people in Israel and driven tens of thousands from their homes on both sides of the border.

Israel has vowed to do whatever is necessary to allow its citizens to return, and it has moved thousands of troops to the northern border in preparation for a possible ground operation.

## US and allies call for an immediate 21-day cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah

By AAMER MADHANI, MATTHEW LEE and JENNIFER PELTZ Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — The U.S., France and other allies jointly called Wednesday for an immediate 21-day cease-fire to allow for negotiations in the escalating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that has killed more than 600 people in Lebanon in recent days.

The joint statement, negotiated on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, says the recent fighting is "intolerable and presents an unacceptable risk of a broader regional escalation."

"We call for an immediate 21-day cease-fire across the Lebanon-Israel border to provide space for diplomacy," the statement said. "We call on all parties, including the governments of Israel and Lebanon, to endorse the temporary cease-fire immediately."

There was no immediate reaction from the Israeli or Lebanese governments — or Hezbollah — but senior U.S. officials said all parties were aware of the call for a cease-fire. Earlier, representatives for Israel and Lebanon reiterated their support for a U.N. resolution that ended the 2006 war between Israel and the Iranian-backed militant group.

The U.S. hopes the new deal could lead to longer-term stability along the border between Israel and Lebanon. Months of Israeli and Hezbollah exchanges of fire have driven tens of thousands of people from their homes, and escalated attacks over the past week have rekindled fears of a broader war in the Middle East.

The U.S. officials said Hezbollah would not be a signatory to the cease-fire but believed the Lebanese government would coordinate its acceptance with the group. They said they expected Israel to "welcome" the proposal and perhaps formally accept it when Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu speaks at the General Assembly on Friday.

While the deal applies only to the Israel-Lebanon border, the U.S. officials said they were looking to use a three-week pause in fighting to restart stalled negotiations for a cease-fire and hostage release deal between Israel and Hamas, another Iranian-backed militant group, after nearly a year of war in Gaza.

Netanyahu's Office said that the ceasefire put forward from the United States and France was only a proposal and the Prime Minister, who is currently on a flight en route to the United States for the United Nations General Assembly, has not responded to the proposal.

The U.S., France and other allies jointly called Wednesday for an immediate 21-day cease-fire to allow for negotiations in the escalating conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that has killed more than 600 people in Lebanon in recent days.

Israel's Foreign Minister Israel Katz, who is the acting prime minister during Netanyahu's trip abroad, said that there will be no ceasefire in the north, vowing to continue the fighting in the north "with full force until victory" and returning the tens of thousands of Israeli citizens evacuated from their homes in the north.

The Prime Minister's Office added that the Israeli military was continuing to strike Hezbollah targets in Lebanon and the war in Gaza.

The allies calling for a halt to the Israel-Hezbollah conflict are the United States, Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, the U.K., Germany, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Work on the proposal came together quickly this week with President Joe Biden's national security team, led by Secretary of State Antony Blinken and national security adviser Jake Sullivan, meeting with world leaders in New York and lobbying other countries to support the plan, according to U.S. officials who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic conversations.

Blinken first raised the proposal with the French foreign minister Monday and then broadened his outreach that evening at a dinner with the foreign ministers of all the Group of Seven industrialized democracies.

During a meeting Wednesday morning with Gulf Cooperation Council foreign ministers, Blinken approached Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan to ask their approval and got it. Blinken and senior White House adviser Amos Hochstein then met with

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Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati, who signed off on the deal.

Sullivan, Hochstein and senior adviser Brett McGurk were also in touch with Israeli officials about the proposal, one of the U.S. officials said. McGurk and Hochstein have been the White House's chief interlocutors with Israel and Lebanon since the Oct. 7 attack on Israel by Hamas launched the war in Gaza.

The officials said the deal crystallized by late Wednesday afternoon during a conversation on the sidelines of the U.N. General Assembly between Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron.

Blinken expects to meet Netanyahu's top strategic adviser in New York on Thursday ahead of the prime minister's arrival.

An Israeli official said Netanyahu has given the green light to pursue a possible deal, but only if it includes the return of Israeli civilians to their homes. The official spoke on condition of anonymity because they were discussing behind-the-scenes diplomacy.

French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot told the U.N. Security Council during a special meeting that "we are counting on both parties to accept it without delay" and added that "war is not unavoidable."

At the meeting, Mikati, the Lebanese prime minister, publicly threw his support behind the French-U.S. plan that "enjoys international support and which would put an end to this dirty war."

He called on the Security Council "to guarantee the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Lebanese territories and the violations that are repeated on a daily basis."

Israel's U.N. Ambassador, Danny Danon, told journalists that Israel would like to see a cease-fire and the return of people to their homes near the border: "It will happen, either after a war or before a war. We hope it will be before."

Addressing the Security Council later, he made no mention of a temporary cease-fire but said Israel "does not seek a full-scale war."

Both Danon and Mikati reaffirmed their governments' commitment to a Security Council resolution that ended the 2006 Israeli-Hezbollah war. Never fully implemented, it called for a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah, the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Lebanon to be replaced by Lebanese forces and U.N. peacekeepers, and the disarmament of all armed groups including Hezbollah.

Earlier Wednesday, Biden warned in an appearance on ABC's "The View" that "an all-out war is possible" but said he thinks the opportunity also exists "to have a settlement that can fundamentally change the whole region."

Biden suggested that getting Israel and Hezbollah to agree to a cease-fire could help achieve a cessation of hostilities between Israel and Hamas in Gaza.

That war is approaching the one-year mark after Hamas attacked southern Israel on Oct. 7, killing about 1,200 people and taking hostages. Israel responded with an offensive that has since killed more than 41,000 Palestinians, according to Gaza health officials, who do not provide a breakdown of civilians and fighters in their count.

"It's possible and I'm using every bit of energy I have with my team ... to get this done," Biden said. "There's a desire to see change in the region."

The U.S. government also raised the pressure with additional sanctions targeting more than a dozen ships and other entities it says were involved in illicit shipments of Iranian petroleum for the financial benefit of Iran's Revolutionary Guard and Hezbollah.

## Japan court acquits a former boxer, the longest-serving death row inmate, in a 1966 murder retrial

By MARI YAMAGUCHI Associated Press

TOKYO (AP) — A Japanese court ruled Thursday that an 88-year-old former boxer was not guilty in a retrial for a 1966 quadruple murder, reversing an earlier decision that made him the world's longest-serving death row inmate.

Iwao Hakamada's acquittal by the Shizuoka District Court makes him the fifth death-row convict to be found not guilty in a retrial in postwar Japanese criminal justice. The case could rekindle a debate around

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abolishing the death penalty in Japan.

The court's presiding judge, Koshi Kunii, said the court acknowledged multiple fabrications of evidence and that Hakamada was not the culprit, Hakamada's lawyer said.

After the two-hour full explanation of the ruling that followed the main sentencing, his 91-year-old sister Hideko Hakamada walked out of the courthouse with a big smile, welcomed by burst of cheers and two big bouquets to celebrate the acquittal of her brother after the 58-year legal battle.

"Thank you everyone, (the victory) is thanks to your support," she said. "Thank you very much for supporting us for such a long time."

Hakamada was convicted of murder in the 1966 killing of a company manager and three of his family members, and setting a fire to their central Japan home. He was sentenced to death in 1968, but was not executed due to lengthy appeals and the retrial process in Japan's notoriously slow-paced criminal justice system where prosecutors have 99% conviction rate.

He spent 48 years behind bars — more than 45 of them on death row — making him the world's longest-serving death row inmate, according to the Amnesty International.

It took 27 years for the top court to deny his first appeal for retrial. His second appeal for a retrial was filed in 2008 by his sister. Hakamada was released from prison in 2014 when a court ordered a retrial based on evidence suggesting his conviction was based on fabricated accusations by investigators, but he was not cleared of the conviction. He was allowed to await retrial at home because his frail health and age made him a low risk for escape. Then, in 2023, the court finally ruled in his favor, paving the way for the latest retrial that began in October.

"I have nothing to do with the case ... I am innocent," he wrote in his letter to his mother while on trial in 1967. He apologized for troubling the family and relatives, but expressed confidence in proving his innocence.

After the death sentence, he expressed fear of death and anger at being falsely accused.

"When I go to sleep in soundless solitary cell every night, I sometimes cannot help cursing God. I have not done anything wrong," he wrote to his family. "What a cold-blooded act to give me such cruelty. We don't need such God. I'm tempted to shout this to God," Hakamada wrote in one of his letters.

Hakamada, whose Christian name is Paulo, was invited to a Mass in Tokyo during Pope Francis' visit in 2019, five years after his release.

Supporters say Hakamada's nearly half-century detention took a toll on his mental health. The first two months after Hakamada's release, he kept pacing around inside the apartment, without even trying to go outside, his sister said. Most of his 48 years behind bars was spent in solitary confinement, in fear of execution.

One day, Hakamada's sister asked him to help her with groceries to get him to agree to leave the house. Going out for a walk then became his daily routine, though today he is less able and he goes out by car, assisted by his supporters.

At a final hearing at the Shizuoka court in May before Thursday's decision, prosecutors again demanded the death penalty, triggering criticism from rights groups that prosecutors were trying to prolong the trial.

The extremely high hurdles for retrials have also prompted legal experts to call for a revision to the system.

During the investigation that followed his arrest, Hakamada initially denied the accusations, then confessed. He later said he was forced to confess under violent interrogation by police.

A major point of contention was five pieces of blood-stained clothing that investigators claimed Hakamada wore during the crime and hid in a tank of fermented soybean paste, or miso. The clothes were found more than a year after his arrest.

A Tokyo High Court ruling in 2023 acknowledged scientific experiments that clothing soaked in miso for more than a year turns too dark for bloodstains to be spotted, noting a possible fabrication by investigators.

Defense lawyers and earlier retrial decisions said the blood samples did not match Hakamada's DNA, and trousers that prosecutors submitted as evidence were too small for Hakamada and did not fit when he tried them on.

On Thursday, the Shizuoka court judge concluded that clothing soaked in miso for more than a year



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would never show red blood stains, upholding the experiments submitted by the defense lawyers and calling it an "inhumane investigation" that led to forced confessions.

Ogawa, Hakamada's lawyer, praised the ruling as "groundbreaking" for clearly stating that the prosecution fabricated key evidence at the beginning. "I believe this ruling puts an end to the case. ... Now we must prevent prosecutors from appealing no matter what."

The lawyer said he planned to go to the district prosecutors to demand they not appeal the case, as it is technically possible to do so even though they have nothing left to make the case.

Japan and the United States are the only two countries in the Group of Seven advanced nations that retain capital punishment. A survey by the Japanese government showed an overwhelming majority of the public support executions.

Executions are carried out in secrecy in Japan and prisoners are not informed of their fate until the morning they are hanged. In 2007, Japan began disclosing the names of those executed and some details of their crimes, but disclosures are still limited.

Hideko Hakamada has devoted around half of her life to win her brother's innocence. Before Thursday's ruling, she said she was in a never-ending battle.

"It is so difficult to get a retrial started," She told reporters in Tokyo. "Not just Iwao, but I'm sure there are other people who have been wrongly accused and crying. ... I want the criminal law revised so that retrials are more easily available."

## US suicides held steady in 2023 — at a very high level

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. suicides last year remained at about the highest level in the nation's history, preliminary data suggests.

A little over 49,300 suicide deaths were reported in 2023, according to provisional data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. That number that could grow a little as some death investigations are wrapped up and reported.

Just under 49,500 were reported in 2022, according to final data released Thursday. The numbers are close enough that the suicide rate for the two years are the same, CDC officials said.

EDITOR'S NOTE — This story includes discussion of suicide. If you or someone you know needs help, the national suicide and crisis lifeline in the U.S. is available by calling or texting 988.

U.S. suicide rates have been rising for nearly 20 years, aside from a two-year drop around the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. So "a leveling off of any increase in suicide is cautiously promising news," said Katherine Keyes, a Columbia University public health professor who studies suicide.

Indeed, there's reason for optimism. A 2-year-old national crisis line allows anyone in the U.S. to dial 988 to reach mental health specialists. That and other efforts may be starting to pay off, Keyes said, but it "really remains to be seen."

Experts caution that suicide — the nation's 11th leading cause of death in 2022 — is complicated and that attempts can be driven by a range of factors. Contributors include higher rates of depression, limited availability of mental health services, and the availability of guns. About 55% of all suicide deaths in 2022 involved firearms, according to CDC data.

The CDC's Thursday report said:

—Suicide was the second leading cause of death for people ages 10–14 and 20–34, and the third leading cause for people ages 15–19.

—Deaths continue to be more common among boys and men than girls and women. The highest suicide rate for any group — by far — was in men ages 75 and older, at about 44 suicides per 100,000 men that age.

—Among women, the highest rate was in those who were middle-aged, about 9 per 100,000. But more dramatic increases have been seen in teens and young women, with the rate for that group doubling in the last two decades.

—The overall suicide rate in 2022 and 2023 was 14.2 per 100,000. It also was that high in 2018. Before then, it hadn't been that high since 1941.

## **Zelenskyy is visiting the White House as a partisan divide grows over Ukraine war**

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy is visiting Washington on Thursday as U.S. support for his country's fight against Russia faces a partisan reckoning in this year's presidential election.

Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic nominee for president, has pledged to continue sending military assistance to Ukraine if she's elected, and she'll have her own meeting with Zelenskyy after the Ukrainian leader sits down with President Joe Biden.

However, Zelenskyy's tumultuous relationship with former President Donald Trump, the Republican nominee, continued to deteriorate this week. Instead of meeting with Zelenskyy, Trump has criticized him. As for U.S. support for Ukraine, Trump complained that "we continue to give billions of dollars to a man who refuses to make a deal" to end the war.

It's the most politically treacherous landscape that Zelenskyy has encountered in Washington since the war with Russia began nearly three years ago. Ukrainian officials are anxious to maintain good relations with whoever becomes the next president of the United States, which is its biggest and most important provider of arms, money and other support.

But the effort risks slipping into the political blender of the election, polarizing the discussion around a war that used to be a bipartisan cause célèbre in Washington.

The latest round of sniping started on Sunday, when The New Yorker published an interview with Zelenskyy in which he criticized JD Vance, Trump's running mate, as "too radical" for suggesting that Ukraine needs to give up some territory to end the war. Zelenskyy also dismissed Trump's boasts that he could quickly negotiate a solution, saying "my feeling is that Trump doesn't really know how to stop the war even if he might think he knows how."

On the same day, Zelenskyy toured a Pennsylvania factory producing munitions for the war. He was joined by Democratic Gov. Josh Shapiro, a top surrogate for Harris, and Republicans criticized the visit as a political stunt in a political battleground state.

House Speaker Mike Johnson demanded that Zelenskyy fire the Ukrainian ambassador to the U.S., alleging that the tour was "designed to help Democrats and is clearly election interference."

Johnson, a Louisiana Republican, won't meet with Zelenskyy on Thursday when he makes the rounds on Capitol Hill before heading to the White House. However, Zelenskyy is expected to talk with some House members, including the Republican chairs of several committees. He's also scheduled to meet with senators in a bipartisan session hosted by Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y.

Zelenskyy's trip to Washington coincides with the annual meeting of the U.N. General Assembly in New York, where the Ukrainian leader spoke on Wednesday. Last week, Trump said he would "probably" meet with Zelenskyy while he was in the U.S., but a senior campaign official said there was never a meeting on the books.

The official, who requested anonymity to discuss private conversations, said Trump had told Zelenskyy back in July that it would probably be better not to sit down together until after the election. A Zelenskyy aide did not respond to questions about the potential meeting.

Trump was impeached during his first term over asking Zelenskyy for help investigating Biden, then a candidate for the Democratic presidential nomination, at a time when the Ukrainian leader was seeking support from Washington.

Now there are fears that Trump would cut off or add strings to U.S. military assistance if he returned

to the White House. Trump has also spoken admiringly about Russian President Vladimir Putin, and this week he praised Russia's record of winning wars.

Charles Kupchan, a senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations, said Trump is not wrong to want a negotiated end to the war. However, he said, Trump risks undermining Ukraine by enabling Putin to make more gains on the battlefield.

"Neither Ukraine nor Russia is going to win this war, and the sooner that the parties try to end this, the better," Kupchan said. "Where Trump goes off course, and where Biden and Harris have a much stronger argument, is that we get to that point not by throwing Ukraine under the bus but by giving them sufficient support so they can block further Russian aggression."

Zelenskyy can expect a far different tone from Harris, who met with him in Munich just days before Russia invaded.

During her debate with Trump earlier this month, Harris expressed pride in U.S. support for Ukraine's "righteous defense."

"If Donald Trump were president, Putin would be sitting in Kyiv right now," she said.

## **Georgia's anti-LGBTQ+ measures raise fears of hate crimes in the conservative South Caucasus nation**

By SOPHIKO MEGRELIDZE and DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TBILISI, Georgia (AP) — Dozens of Georgians stood in tearful silence in a central square near parliament last week to mourn Kesaria Abramidze, a transgender actor and model who was stabbed to death the previous day in her apartment.

Alongside flowers and candles, some carried banners that read, "Hate kills."

Some in the conservative South Caucasus nation see a direct line between violent attacks, such as the one on the 37-year-old Abramidze, and a sweeping measure that severely restricted LGBTQ+ rights which was given final approval by parliament a day before the slaying. Activists fear the measure could increase hate crimes.

The bill, introduced by the ruling Georgian Dream party, includes bans on same-sex marriages, adoptions by same-sex couples and public endorsement and depictions of LGBTQ+ relationships and people in the media. It also bans gender-affirming care and changing gender designations in official documents.

The events were a chilling reminder of the vulnerability of LGBTQ+ people in the country of 3.7 million where the Orthodox Church wields significant influence.

"We have been saying all along, all these months, that laws like this are going to cause violence and are going to increase the number of people that are physically attacked," Tamar Jakeli, the head of Tbilisi Pride, told The Associated Press at the vigil.

"We are quite desperate, honestly," Jakeli added. "We don't know how we can survive in this country under this law, under this government."

Concerns about Russian influence

Because the measure echoes similar laws in Russia, some Georgians fear they are being drawn further into Moscow's orbit after more than three decades of independence following the collapse of the USSR.

Authorities in both countries believe the laws protect "traditional family values" from what they call dangerous foreign influence.

Georgian Dream introduced the anti-LGBTQ+ bill shortly after parliament adopted a law in June that requires media and nongovernmental organizations to register with authorities if they get more than 20% of their funding from abroad. This is similar to a Russian measure that the Kremlin uses against its critics and other dissenters.

For years, Moscow has sought to bring Georgia back under its influence, fighting a brief war in 2008 over a breakaway province. The decade-long rule of Georgian Dream — a party created by shadowy billionaire Bidzina Ivanishvili, who made his fortune in Russia — has raised concerns it is acting in concert

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with the Kremlin.

Many ordinary Georgians supported Ukraine as Russian President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion in 2022. But Georgia's government refused to impose sanctions on Moscow, barred Kremlin critics from entering the country, and accused the West of trying to drag Tbilisi into the conflict.

Georgia's "foreign influence" law ignited mass protests, with critics saying it threatened democracy and jeopardized Georgia's bid to join the European Union.

Georgian Dream pressed ahead anyway, approving the anti-LGBTQ+ bill. The measure still could be vetoed by President Salome Zourabichvili, long at odds with the party, but it has enough seats to override her the same way it did with the foreign influence law.

The EU's criticism and Georgia's response

After the foreign influence law passed, the EU halted Georgia's effort to join the bloc that began in 2022 and froze some financial support. The U.S. also imposed sanctions on government officials and parliament members.

The anti-LGBTQ+ measure further deepened that rift. EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said it "will undermine the fundamental rights of the people, increasing discrimination and stigmatization."

Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze replied that such criticism "will not benefit the image of the European Union within Georgian society."

"In our perception, Europe represents transparency, traditional, Christian values. For centuries, Georgians have strived toward Europe because we were united by shared Christian traditions and culture," Kobakhidze said, arguing the measure protects families and minors.

It is seen as a populist step to win conservatives' support in the Oct. 26 parliamentary election in which Georgian Dream seeks to maintain its dominance.

"They are just using the same methods and means and tools Russia is using -- to somehow ... take people's attention (away) from the real problems and create a new enemy somewhere within the society, and then defeat that enemy that doesn't really exist," said Giorgi Davituri of the Institute for Development of Freedom of Information in an AP interview.

A setback for the vulnerable LGBTQ+ community

The sweeping restrictions on LGBTQ+ rights and representation mirror those adopted in Russia over the last decade, packaged into one crippling blow.

Some of them, like the ban on same-sex weddings, cement existing Georgian law that defines marriage as a "voluntary union between a man and a woman." Others, like the ban on gender-affirming medical care or changing one's gender in documents, drives an entire social group, such as trans people, to the fringes.

"Everybody is really under threat, but trans people are the most vulnerable," said Tbilisi Pride's Jakeli, because the legislation bans "any kind of physical intervention which is needed for trans people to continue living."

Giorgi Gogia, associate director of the Europe and Central Asia division at Human Rights Watch, told AP the legislation's impact may be far-reaching, limiting multiple rights, including to health care, peaceful assembly and education.

It's at odds with Georgia's laws that ban discrimination based on gender identity, among other things, Gogia said.

More dangerously, it "perpetuates already existing negative stereotypes about LGBTQ+ people in the country and encourages hate speech, and could lead to further violent incidents," he said.

Gogia pointed to the stabbing death of Abramidze, even though he believed it's unlikely the developments are directly linked. A 26-year-old man was detained, and police opened an investigation on a charge of "premeditated murder committed with particular cruelty and aggravating circumstances on gender grounds."

Abramidze was famous in Georgia as "a symbol of the freedom and fight and a very strong woman," said Taki Mumladze, a director, actor and screenwriter.

Mumladze, who co-wrote and starred in a movie depicting a same-sex relationship and later directed a play about it, told AP the killing shocked Georgians, whatever side of the issue they were on.

Georgia was "very, very homophobic" at one point, she said, recalling anti-gay demonstrations two years

ago on the day her movie premiered.

Such protests are common in the country. Last year, hundreds of opponents of gay rights stormed an LGBTQ+ festival in Tbilisi, forcing its cancellation, and tens of thousands marched in the capital this year to promote "traditional family values."

But Mumladze said attitudes had begun to change in recent years, thanks to NGOs educating society and providing support for the LGBTQ+ community. She says her own conservative, religious parents saw her movie and play, and really liked both.

"So I felt very good. And now with this law ... even my art will be forbidden," she said. "It's crazy that the government is trying to stop this progress."

She and Jakeli are pinning their hopes on the upcoming election.

"We are mobilizing for the elections," Jakeli said. "We are urging everybody to go and vote, go and vote for Georgia's European future, which also includes human rights for all, including us."

Added Mumladze: "I hope with the elections we will change this because if not, we will lose this country for a long, long time."

## Americans are more likely to see Harris' gender as a hurdle than they were for Clinton: AP-NORC poll

By MICHELLE L. PRICE and LINLEY SANDERS Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Americans are more likely to believe that being a woman will hurt Kamala Harris' chances in the November election, compared to eight years ago when Hillary Clinton was running. And they are more likely to believe that Donald Trump's gender will help him.

A new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research indicates a shift in attitudes among U.S. adults in the time between the candidacies of the first and second female major-party nominees. The shift in attitudes is largely driven by Democrats — particularly Democratic men. About 3 in 10 Democratic men thought Clinton's gender would hurt her "somewhat" or "a lot" prior to her loss to Trump. About half now say that about Harris.

"I would say this country doesn't really have an outstanding track record of supporting female candidates," said Julian Zeng, a 34-year-old copy editor and writer from California who is a Democrat.

Democratic women have also grown more likely to say being a woman could be a hurdle for a presidential candidate: About 4 in 10 Democratic women said Clinton's gender would hurt her, and about half say that about Harris now. Republican men only shifted slightly, and Republican women's views remained stable.

Americans are also more likely to see Trump's gender as something that will help his chances of being elected. About 4 in 10 U.S. adults now say that being a man is something that will help him, up from around 3 in 10 when the same question was asked in an AP-NORC poll during his 2016 campaign.

The poll helps explain how both candidates approach gender

The poll's findings seem to bolster arguments for the way both candidates have addressed gender in their campaigns.

Harris focuses less on the history-making potential of her win than Clinton did, even though the possibility of electing a woman president could enthruse her supporters. She does emphasize reproductive rights in her campaign and Trump's nomination of three of the Supreme Court justices who voted to overturn a nationally guaranteed right to abortion.

Trump, who for years has preferred to blast the Village People's song "Macho Man" as he enters and exits his campaign rallies, has courted younger men and promoted a masculine image with appearances at mixed-martial arts events and football games. He has recently started calling himself a "protector" of women.

Carlos Stallworth, a 59-year-old Republican from California, said Trump's gendered appeal comes through in his campaigning, calling the former president "a guy's guy, a man's man kind of guy."

Stallworth, who said he's undecided but leaning toward Trump in November, said he is skeptical that

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Harris can win and feels that she's not coming off as a forceful would-be commander-in-chief by not releasing more detailed plans, particularly on issues like the economy, that will help her overcome attitudes in "a male-chauvinist world."

"It's going to take a little bit more for her than just like the average guy," he said.

Some voters said Trump's persona and rhetoric might help Harris get past baked-in attitudes about women in power.

"Were it not Trump, I think that it would hurt her," said Elizabeth Aguilar, a 48-year-old university professor from Illinois.

Aguilar, a Democrat, said she thinks some voters may still be uncomfortable with the idea of a female president.

"But I think that his comments and his misogynist attitude are so far out that people may be willing to overlook the fact that she's a woman," she said.

Clinton says she's 'really optimistic' about Harris

Only about one-quarter of Americans say Harris' gender "won't make a difference" to her chances of getting elected this fall, down from when one-third said that about Clinton in 2016. Slightly less than half say Trump's gender won't have an impact, down from around 6 in 10 during his first run.

In a recent interview with the AP conducted prior to the poll, Clinton said she's "feeling really optimistic" that Harris will win. She said she also feels Harris will benefit from the fact that the nation has become more accustomed to the image of a female presidential candidate, having seen not only her run eight years ago but also a crowded Democratic presidential primary four years later that included multiple female candidates.

"We now don't just have one image of a person who happens to be a woman who ran for president, namely me," Clinton said. "We've got a broader view, and I think that's all for the good."

Cherene Bates, a 51-year-old Republican from Pocatello, Idaho, said she hasn't decided who she's supporting in November, but she is optimistic that Harris' gender will not be an impediment for other voters.

"I really hope that people wouldn't discredit her because she's a female," Bates said.

She said it's possible gender played a role in Clinton's loss in 2016, but she hopes it didn't.

"As a nation, I think we still were ready to switch gears, to have a different frame of mind and elect a female president," Bates said. "I hope that we're even more so now."

## **A huge Hurricane Helene is expected to hit Florida as a major storm and strike far inland**

By HEATHER HOLLINGSWORTH and STEPHEN SMITH Associated Press

TALLAHASSEE, Fla. (AP) — An enormous Hurricane Helene swamped parts of Mexico on Wednesday as it churned on a path forecasters said would take it to Florida as a potentially catastrophic storm with a surge that could swallow entire homes, a chilling warning that sent residents scrambling for higher ground, closed schools, and led to states of emergency throughout the Southeast.

Helene's center was about 430 miles (735 kilometers) southwest of Tampa, Florida, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said, and the hurricane was expected to intensify and accelerate as it crosses the Gulf of Mexico toward the Big Bend area of Florida's northwestern coast. Landfall was expected sometime Thursday evening, and the hurricane center said by then it could be a major Category 4 storm with winds above 129 mph (208 kph).

Tropical storm conditions were expected in southern Florida Wednesday night, spreading northward and encompassing the rest of Florida as well as Georgia and South Carolina through Thursday night. The storm was moving north at 12 mph (19 kph) with top sustained winds of 85 mph (140 kph) Wednesday evening.

Helene could create a life-threatening storm surge as high as 20 feet (6.1 meters) in parts of the Big Bend region, forecasters said. Its tropical storm-force winds extended as far as 345 miles (555 kilometers) from its center.

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The fast-moving storm's wind and rain also could penetrate far inland: The hurricane center posted hurricane warnings well into Georgia and tropical storm warnings as far north as North Carolina, and it warned that much of the Southeast could experience prolonged power outages, toppled trees and dangerous flooding.

"Just hope and pray that everybody's safe," said Connie Dillard, of Tallahassee, as she shopped at a grocery store with thinning shelves of water and bread before hitting the highway out of town. "That's all you can do."

One insurance firm, Gallagher Re, is expecting billions of dollars in damage in the U.S. Around 18,000 linemen from out of state staged in Florida, ready to help restore power. Airports in St. Petersburg, Tallahassee and Tampa were planning to close on Thursday, and 62 hospitals, nursing homes and assisted living facilities evacuated their residents Wednesday.

Georgia activated 250 National Guard soldiers for rapid deployment. State game wardens, foresters and Department of Correction teams will help provide swift-water rescues and other emergency responses.

State meteorologist Will Lanxton said tropical storm-force winds are expected throughout Georgia. Lanxton said metro Atlanta hasn't seen sustained tropical storm winds since Hurricane Irma in 2017.

"I think we're going to see some significant power outages, probably nothing like we've seen, because it's 159 counties wide," said James Stallings, director of the Georgia Emergency Management and Homeland Security Agency.

In Tallahassee, where stations started to run out of gas, 19-year-old Florida A&M student Kameron Benjamin filled sandbags with his roommate to protect their apartment before evacuating. Their school and Florida State shut down.

"This hurricane is heading straight to Tallahassee, so I really don't know what to expect," Benjamin said.

As Big Bend residents battened down their homes, many saw the ghost of 2018's Hurricane Michael. That storm rapidly intensified and crashed ashore as a Category 5 that laid waste to Panama City and parts of the rural Panhandle. On Wednesday, the National Weather Service posted an urgent warning for residents along Apalachee Bay:

"There is a danger of catastrophic and unsurvivable storm surge for Apalachee Bay," it said. "Storm surge may begin to arrive as early as late Wednesday night ahead of the winds. This forecast, if realized, is a nightmare surge scenario for Apalachee Bay. Please, please, please take any evacuation orders seriously!"

"People are taking heed and hightailing it out of there for higher ground," said Kristin Korinko, a Tallahassee resident who serves as the commodore of the Shell Point Sailboard Club, on the Gulf Coast about 30 miles (48 kilometers) south of Tallahassee.

For toughened Floridians who are used to hurricanes, Robbie Berg, a national warning coordinator for the hurricane center, advised: "Please do not compare it to other storms you may have experienced over the past year or two."

Helene is forecast to be one of the largest storms in breadth in years to hit the region, said Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach. He said since 1988, only three Gulf hurricanes were bigger than Helene's predicted size: 2017's Irma, 2005's Wilma and 1995's Opal.

Areas 100 miles (160 kilometers) north of the Georgia-Florida line can expect hurricane conditions. More than half of Georgia's public school districts and several universities canceled classes.

And for Atlanta, which is under a tropical storm watch, Helene could be the worst strike on a major Southern inland city in 35 years, said University of Georgia meteorology professor Marshall Shepherd.

"It's going to be a lot like Hugo in Charlotte," Shepherd said of the 1989 storm that struck the North Carolina city, knocking out power to 85% of customers as winds gusted above hurricane force.

Landslides were possible in southern Appalachia, with catastrophic flooding predicted in the Carolinas and Georgia, where all three governors declared emergencies. Rainfall is possible as far away as Tennessee, Kentucky and Indiana.

Parts of Mexico's Yucatan Peninsula were under hurricane warnings as Helene wound between it and the western tip of Cuba and into the Gulf of Mexico. The storm formed Tuesday in the Caribbean, and it flooded streets and toppled trees as it passed offshore and brushed the resort city of Cancun.

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In Cuba, authorities moved cattle to higher ground and medical brigades went to communities often cut off by storms. The government preventively shut off power in some communities as waves as high as 16 feet (5 meters) slammed Cortes Bay. In the Cayman Islands, schools remained closed as residents pumped water from flooded homes.

In the U.S., federal authorities positioned generators, food and water, along with search-and-rescue and power restoration teams.

Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis warned that Helene could be as strong as a Category 4 hurricane when it makes landfall. The state was providing buses to evacuate people in the Big Bend region and taking them to shelters in Tallahassee.

But near Florida's center, outside Orlando, Walt Disney World said its only closures Thursday would be the Typhoon Lagoon water park and its miniature golf courses.

Helene is the eighth named storm of the Atlantic hurricane season, which began June 1. The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has predicted an above-average Atlantic hurricane season this year because of record-warm ocean temperatures.

The Atlantic's ninth named storm of the season Tropical Storm Isaac formed Wednesday night in the Atlantic Ocean. It was expected to strengthen as it moves eastward, possibly becoming a hurricane by the end of the week, forecasters said, the U.S. National Hurricane Center said.

In the Pacific, former Hurricane John reformed Wednesday as a tropical storm and was strengthening as it threatened areas of Mexico's western coast. Officials posted hurricane warnings for southwestern Mexico.

John hit the country's southern Pacific coast late Monday, killing at least two people, triggering mudslides, and damaging homes and trees. It grew into a Category 3 hurricane in a matter of hours and made landfall east of Acapulco. It reemerged over the ocean after weakening inland.

## **Trump says Ukraine is 'demolished' and dismisses its defense against Russia's invasion**

By JONATHAN J. COOPER Associated Press

Former President Donald Trump described Ukraine in bleak and mournful terms Wednesday, referring to its people as "dead" and the country itself as "demolished," and further raising questions about how much the former president would be willing if elected again to concede in a negotiation over the country's future.

Trump argued Ukraine should have made concessions to Russian President Vladimir Putin in the months before Russia's February 2022 attack, declaring that even "the worst deal would've been better than what we have now."

Trump, who has long been critical of U.S. aid to Ukraine, frequently claims that Russia never would have invaded if he was president and that he would put an end to the war if he returned to the White House. But rarely has he discussed the conflict in such detail.

His remarks, at a North Carolina event billed as an economic speech, come on the heels of a debate this month in which he pointedly refused to say whether he wanted Ukraine to win the war. On Tuesday, Trump touted the prowess of Russia and its predecessor Soviet Union, saying that wars are "what they do."

The Republican former president, notoriously attuned to slights, began his denunciation of Ukraine by alluding to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's recent criticism of Trump and running mate JD Vance.

Zelenskyy, who is visiting the U.S. this week to attend the U.N. General Assembly, told The New Yorker that Vance was "too radical" for proposing that Ukraine surrender territories under Russian control and that Trump "doesn't really know how to stop the war even if he might think he knows how."

Said Trump, "It's something we have to have a quick discussion about because the president of Ukraine is in our country and he's making little nasty aspersions toward your favorite president, me."

Trump painted Ukraine as a country in ruins outside its capital, Kyiv, short on soldiers and losing population to war deaths and neighboring countries. He questioned whether the country has any bargaining chips left to negotiate an end to the war.

"Any deal — the worst deal — would've been better than what we have now," Trump said. "If they made



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a bad deal it would've been much better. They would've given up a little bit and everybody would be living and every building would be built and every tower would be aging for another 2,000 years."

"What deal can we make? It's demolished," he added. "The people are dead. The country is in rubble."

Zelenskyy is pitching the White House on what he calls a victory plan for the war, expected to include an ask to use long-range Western weapons to strike Russian targets.

While Ukraine outperformed many expectations that it would fall quickly to Russia, outnumbered Ukrainian forces face grinding battles against one of the world's most powerful armies in the country's east. Ukraine has lost a fifth of its territory and tens of thousands of lives in the conflict.

Trump laid blame for the conflict on President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, his Democratic rival in November. He said Biden "egged it all on" by pledging to help Ukraine defend itself rather than pushing it to cede territory to Russia.

"Biden and Kamala allowed this to happen by feeding Zelenskyy money and munitions like no country has ever seen before," Trump said.

Notably, Trump did not attack Putin's reasoning for launching the invasion, only suggesting Putin would not have started the war had Trump been in office. He did say of Putin, "He's no angel."

## Israel tells its troops to prepare for a possible ground operation in Lebanon

By MELANIE LIDMAN, TIA GOLDENBERG and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

TEL AVIV, Israel (AP) — Israel is preparing for a possible ground operation in Lebanon, its army chief said Wednesday as Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets across the border and a missile aimed at Tel Aviv that was the militant group's deepest strike yet.

Addressing troops on the northern border, Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzi Halevi said Israel's punishing airstrikes this week were designed to "prepare the ground for your possible entry and to continue degrading Hezbollah."

The U.S., France and other allies jointly called for an "immediate" 21-day cease-fire in the conflict that has killed more than 600 people to "provide space for diplomacy."

Their joint statement, negotiated on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, said the fighting was "intolerable and presents an unacceptable risk of a broader regional escalation." Other signatories include the European Union, Japan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

Israel says it targeted Hezbollah weapons and rocket launchers. In an apparent reference to the missile fired at Tel Aviv, Halevi told troops: "Today, Hezbollah expanded its range of fire, and later today, they will receive a very strong response. Prepare yourselves."

It was not clear whether he was referring to a ground operation, airstrikes or some other form of retaliation against Hezbollah, which is Lebanon's strongest political force and, with backing from Iran, is widely considered the top paramilitary group in the Arab world.

The Israeli military has said in recent days it had no immediate plans for a ground invasion, but Halevi's comments were the strongest yet suggesting troops could move in. Israeli said Wednesday it would activate two reserve brigades for missions in the north — another sign that Israel plans tougher action.

Tensions between Israel and Hezbollah have steadily escalated since war broke out 11 months ago between Israel and Hamas, another Iran-backed militant group. Hezbollah has been firing rockets, missiles and drones into northern Israel in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza and Hamas. Israel has responded with increasingly heavy airstrikes and the targeted killing of Hezbollah commanders while threatening a wider operation.

Nearly a year of fighting had already displaced tens of thousands of people on both sides of the border before the recent escalation.

Israel has vowed to do whatever it takes to ensure its citizens can return to their homes in the north, while Hezbollah has said it will keep up its rocket attacks until there is a cease-fire in Gaza, something that appears increasingly remote.

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U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken urged Israel and Hezbollah to step back, saying all-out war would be disastrous for the region and its people.

Lebanon's Prime Minister Najib Mikati called on the U.N. Security Council to act immediately "to guarantee the withdrawal of Israel from all the occupied Lebanese territories and the violations that are repeated on a daily basis."

Israel's U.N. Ambassador Danny Danon told reporters at the U.N. that Israel welcomes initiatives to broker a cease-fire and is "open to ideas." But if diplomacy doesn't stop Hezbollah attacks so residents of northern Israel can return home, he said, his country would "use all means at our disposal, in accordance with international law, to achieve our aims."

Lebanon's health ministry said 72 people were killed Wednesday in the continuing Israeli strikes, raising the death toll from the past three days to 636, with more than 2,000 wounded. At least a quarter of those killed have been women and children, according to Lebanese health officials.

At Dar Al Amal hospital in the eastern city of Baalbek, Soumaya Moussawi lay in bed with her head bandaged and face bruised.

She had been sitting outside with relatives when warplanes started striking in the distance, she said. "Then suddenly it hit next to us. We were all thrown in different directions," she said. Two cousins and her father were killed, and another cousin was badly wounded.

This week has been the deadliest in Lebanon since the bruising 2006 monthlong war between Israel and Hezbollah.

Hezbollah said it fired a Qader 1 ballistic missile targeting the headquarters of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, which it blames for a recent string of targeted killings of its top commanders and for an attack last week in which explosives hidden in pagers and walkie-talkies killed dozens of people and wounded thousands, including many Hezbollah members.

Israeli military officials said they intercepted a surface-to-surface missile that set off air-raid sirens in Tel Aviv and across central Israel. There were no reports of casualties or damage. The military said it struck the launch site in southern Lebanon.

Israeli military spokesman Lt. Col. Nadav Shoshani said the missile fired Wednesday had a "heavy war-head" but declined to elaborate or confirm it was the type described by Hezbollah. He dismissed Hezbollah's claim of targeting the Mossad headquarters just north of Tel Aviv as "psychological warfare."

The Israeli military said it was the first time a projectile fired from Lebanon had reached central Israel. Hezbollah claimed to have targeted an intelligence base near Tel Aviv last month in an aerial attack, but there was no confirmation. Hamas repeatedly targeted Tel Aviv in the opening months of the war in Gaza.

The launch ratcheted up hostilities in a region that appeared to be teetering toward another all-out war, even as Israel continues to battle Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Israel said Wednesday its air force had struck some 280 Hezbollah targets across Lebanon by early afternoon, including launchers used to fire rockets on the northern Israeli cities of Safed and Nahariya.

In the southern Israeli city of Eilat, a building at the port was struck by a drone, an attack that injured two people and was claimed by an umbrella group for Iranian-backed militias in Iraq. A second drone was intercepted, the Israeli military said.

Fleeing families have flocked to Beirut and the coastal city of Sidon, sleeping in schools turned into shelters, as well as in cars, parks and along the beach. Some sought to leave the country, causing a traffic jam at the border with Syria.

The United Nations said more than 90,000 people have been displaced by five days of Israeli strikes. In all, 200,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon since Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel nearly a year ago, drawing Israeli retaliation, according to the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

Hezbollah's latest strikes included dozens of rockets fired Wednesday into northern Israel, the military said.

Rocket fire over the past week has disrupted life for more than 1 million people across northern Israel, with schools closed and public gatherings restricted. Many restaurants and other businesses are shut in the coastal city of Haifa, and there are fewer people on the streets. Some who fled from communities

near the border are coming under rocket fire again.

Israel has moved thousands of troops who had been serving in Gaza to the northern border. It says Hezbollah has some 150,000 rockets and missiles, including some capable of striking anywhere in Israel.

Cross-border fire began ramping up Sunday after pagers and walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah were attacked remotely, killing 39 people and wounded nearly 3,000, many of them civilians. Lebanon blamed Israel, which has not confirmed or denied responsibility.

The next day, Israel said its warplanes struck 1,600 Hezbollah targets, destroying cruise missiles, long- and short-range rockets and attack drones, including weapons concealed in private homes. The strikes racked up the highest one-day death toll in Lebanon since Israel and Hezbollah fought a bruising month-long war in 2006.

## **Pope expels a bishop and 9 other people from a Peru movement over 'sadistic' abuses**

By NICOLE WINFIELD Associated Press

VATICAN CITY (AP) — Pope Francis took the unusual decision Wednesday to expel 10 people — a bishop, priests and laypeople — from a troubled Catholic movement in Peru after a Vatican investigation uncovered "sadistic" abuses of power, authority and spirituality.

The move against the leadership of the Sodalitium Christianae Vitae, or Sodalitium of Christian Life, followed Francis' decision last month to expel the group's founder, Luis Figari, after he was found to have sodomized his recruits.

It was announced by the Peruvian Bishops Conference, which posted a statement from the Vatican embassy on its website that attributed the expulsions to a "special" decision taken by Francis.

The statement was astonishing because it listed abuses uncovered by the Vatican investigation that have rarely if ever been punished canonically — such as hacking someone's communications — and cited the people the pope held responsible.

According to the statement, the Vatican investigators uncovered physical abuses "including with sadism and violence," sect-like abuses of conscience, spiritual abuse, abuses of authority, economic abuses in administering church money and the "abuse in the exercise of the apostolate of journalism."

The latter was presumably aimed at a Sodalitium journalist who has attacked critics of the movement on social media.

Figari founded the SCV, as it is known, in 1971 as a lay community to recruit "soldiers for God," one of several Catholic societies born as a conservative reaction to the left-leaning liberation theology movement that swept through Latin America, starting in the 1960s. At its height, the group counted about 20,000 members across South America and the United States. It was enormously influential in Peru.

Victims of Figari's abuses complained to the Lima archdiocese in 2011, though other claims against him reportedly date to 2000. But neither the local church nor the Holy See took concrete action until one of the victims, Pedro Salinas, wrote a book along with journalist Paola Ugaz detailing the twisted practices of the Sodalitium in 2015, entitled "Half Monks, Half Soldiers."

An outside investigation ordered by Sodalitium later determined that Figari was "narcissistic, paranoid, demeaning, vulgar, vindictive, manipulative, racist, sexist, elitist and obsessed with sexual issues and the sexual orientation" of Sodalitium's members.

The investigation, published in 2017, found that Figari sodomized his recruits and forced them to fondle him and one another. He liked to watch them "experience pain, discomfort and fear," and humiliated them in front of others to enhance his control over them, the report found.

Still, the Holy See declined to expel Figari from the movement in 2017 and merely ordered him to live apart from the Sodalitium community in Rome and cease all contact with it. The Vatican was seemingly tied in knots by canon law that did not foresee such punishments for founders of religious communities who weren't priests. Victims were outraged.

But according to the findings of the latest Vatican investigation, the abuses went beyond Figari. They

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included Sodalitium clergy and also involved harassing and hacking the communications of their victims, all while covering up crimes committed as part of their official duties, according to the statement.

The investigation was carried out by the Vatican's top sex crimes investigators, Maltese Archbishop Charles Scicluna and Monsignor Jordi Bertomeu, from the Dicastery for the Doctrine of the Faith, who travelled to Lima last year to take testimony from victims.

The highest-ranking person ordered expelled was Archbishop Jose Antonio Eguren, whom Francis already forced to resign as bishop of Piura in April over his record, after he sued Salinas and Ugaz for their reporting.

In addition to Figari's own abuses, their reporting had exposed the alleged forced eviction of peasants on lands in Eguren's diocese by a Sodalitium-linked real estate developer.

Ugaz, the journalist, welcomed the expulsions and said the reference to Sodalitium hacking referred to her: She said her communications had been hacked in 2023 after she reported on the Sodalitium's off-shore holdings and other financial dealings, and said she believed the group was trying to identify her sources.

"It is a demonstration that in Peru, the survivors would never have found justice and reparation (without Bertomeo and Scicluna) because the Sodalitium is an organization with a lot of political, social and economic power," she said in a statement to The Associated Press.

Salinas, for his part, repeated that the group should be dissolved entirely and that some key figures were not included on the list.

"It's very good news after 24 years of impunity," he said in a message to AP. "It is to be hoped that this historic and memorable news is only the first of more, perhaps more impactful than what we know today."

The release of such detailed information by the Vatican was highly unusual for an institution that is known more for secrecy, opacity and turning a blind eye to even obvious church crimes.

It is unclear how exactly the expulsions can be enforced or what they will mean in practical terms, especially for the laypeople involved. But at a minimum, the very public announcement would suggest that at least for this particular group, Francis was willing to take an unorthodox approach to interpreting the church's in-house laws to send a message.

"To take such a disciplinary decision, consideration was given to the scandal that was produced by the number and gravity of the abuses that were denounced by victims, which are particularly contrary to the balanced and liberating experience of the evangelical councils," the Vatican embassy statement said in explaining the rationale for the punishments.

The Vatican statement said the Peruvian bishops joined Francis in "seeking the forgiveness of the victims" while calling on the troubled movement to initiate a journey of justice and reparation.

There was no immediate response to a request for comment from the Sodalitium.

Sodalitium had a large presence in Denver, as reflected in a statement from the Archdiocese of Denver saying it was "shocked and saddened by the news of expulsions."

"While the Archdiocese is actively working to understand the full extent of the Vatican's investigation, we are unable to comment on specifics," it said. "This news is inconsistent with our longstanding experience of the men who have served within the Archdiocese of Denver."

The statement said one of the expelled priests, Daniel Cardó "has served nobly and faithfully in Colorado for 17 years."

"During his time here, Fr. Cardó has not faced a single disciplinary action against him. He is beloved by his parishioners and well-respected in the community."

## Israel-Hamas war latest: Israel threatens ground operation after long-range Hezbollah missile attack

By The Associated Press undefined

The Israeli military is preparing for a possible ground operation in Lebanon, the Israeli army chief said Wednesday as Hezbollah launched dozens of rockets into Israel, including a longer-range projectile that set off air raid sirens in Tel Aviv and across central Israel. It was the group's farthest strike yet. Israel said

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it intercepted the projectile, and there were no reports of casualties or damage.

Addressing troops on the northern border, Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Herzl Halevi said the latest airstrikes were designed to "prepare the ground for your possible entry and to continue degrading Hezbollah."

It was not clear whether Halevi was referring to a ground operation, airstrikes or some other form of retaliation against Hezbollah, which is Lebanon's strongest political force and, with backing from Iran, is widely considered the top paramilitary group in the Arab world.

The Israeli military has said in recent days it had no immediate plans for a ground invasion. Halevi's comments were the strongest yet suggesting troops could move in.

With hostilities intensifying, the Israeli military said Wednesday it would activate two reserve brigades for missions in the north — another sign that Israel plans tougher action.

Late Wednesday, the U.S., France and other allies jointly called for an "immediate" 21-day cease-fire to allow for negotiations in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah. The statement was negotiated on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York.

Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander Tuesday as part of a two-day bombing campaign.

The Lebanese health minister said Israeli strikes on Wednesday killed more than 72 people. That raised the death toll from the past three days to 636, with more than 2,000 people wounded, prompting thousands in southern Lebanon to seek refuge from the widening conflict.

Israel and Hezbollah have been trading fire since the Israel-Hamas war began.

Also on Wednesday, a drone hit the port of the southern Israeli city of Eilat an Iran-backed militia in Iraq claimed responsibility.

Here's the latest:

US, France and other allies call for an 'immediate' 21-day cease-fire between Israel, Hezbollah

The U.S., France and other allies called Wednesday for an "immediate" 21-day cease-fire to allow for negotiations in the conflict between Israel and Hezbollah that has killed more than 600 people in Lebanon in recent days.

The joint statement, negotiated on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York, says the recent fighting is "intolerable and presents an unacceptable risk of a broader regional escalation."

"We call for an immediate 21-day cease-fire across the Lebanon-Israel border to provide space for diplomacy," the statement reads. "We call on all parties, including the Governments of Israel and Lebanon, to endorse the temporary cease-fire immediately."

The signatories include the United States, Australia, Canada, the European Union, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Qatar.

French citizen living near Lebanon's coastal city Tyre is killed in building collapse after powerful explosion

BEIRUT — The French embassy in Lebanon said in a statement that an 87-year-old French citizen living near the coastal city of Tyre was killed on Monday after the building in which he was living collapsed following a "powerful explosion" nearby.

More than 600 people have been killed by Israeli strikes in Lebanon over the past three days, the highest death toll since the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah.

The statement said no other French citizens were known to have been killed.

Lebanese official says aim of talks is to reach a deal that begins with a 4-week cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah

A Lebanese official said that there are serious efforts, led by the United States, to end fighting between Israel and Hezbollah.

The official, who has knowledge of the negotiations and who spoke on condition of anonymity because he is not permitted to speak to the press on the matter, said the aim of negotiations is to reach a temporary four-week cease-fire.

Talks are ongoing in New York where Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati is attending the UN General Assembly.

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A new deal will be based on implementing U.N. Security Council resolution 1701 that ended the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, he said.

Local media have reported that if reached, the deal will begin with a four-week cease-fire during which there will be talks for on further issues including land border demarcation, boosting Lebanese army presences along the border area.

By BASSEM MROUE

President of France urges both Israel and Hezbollah to cease launching missiles

UNITED NATIONS — President Emmanuel Macron told the U.N. General Assembly on Wednesday that, "Hezbollah for too long has been running an untenable risk of dragging Lebanon into a war," and that "Israel cannot, without consequence, just expand its operations to Lebanon."

"France demands that everyone respect their obligations along the Blue Line," he said. "We will therefore act to ensure a diplomatic voice can be heard."

"There cannot be a war in Lebanon. This is why we urge Israel to cease this escalation in Lebanon, and to Hezbollah to cease missile launches to Israel," he added. "We urge all of those who provide them with the means to do so, to stop doing so."

Umbrella group for Iranian-backed Iraqi militias claims the attack on the port of Israel's southern city Eilat

BAGHDAD — A group calling itself the Islamic Resistance in Iraq, an umbrella group for Iranian-backed Iraqi militias, claimed the attack on the port of Israel's southern city of Eilat. The group has frequently claimed launching strikes on Israel.

Israel's rescue services said two people suffered light injuries. The attack caused minimal damage.

Israeli military says a drone hit the port of the southern Israeli city of Eilat, causing minimal damage

JERUSALEM — A drone hit the port of the southern Israeli city of Eilat on Wednesday, and a second one was intercepted by the Israeli Navy, the Israeli military said.

Israel's rescue services said two people suffered light injuries.

Footage aired on Israeli media showed a plume of smoke in the area of the port and at least one damaged building.

The army said the drones were identified "approaching from the East."

U.S. is floating a proposal for a temporary Israel-Hezbollah cease-fire, officials say

The Biden administration has been floating a proposal for a temporary cease-fire between Israel and Hezbollah to calm the escalating conflict that has driven tens of thousands of people from their homes in northern Israel and southern Lebanon, U.S. officials said Wednesday.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken and other U.S. officials have spent the past three days at and on the sidelines of the annual U.N. General Assembly meeting of world leaders in New York lobbying other countries to support the plan, which they hope could lead to longer-term stability along the border, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss sensitive diplomatic conversations.

However, they said the specifics of the proposal were not yet complete.

One official said Israel is supportive of U.S. efforts to deescalate the situation.

ON THE SCENE: Lebanese who were injured in bombings describe the attacks

BAALBEK, Lebanon — At Dar Al Amal hospital in the city of Baalbek in Lebanon's Bekaa valley, Soumaya Moussawi was lying in bed with her head bandaged and face bruised Wednesday.

She had been sitting outside with family members when warplanes started striking in the distance, she said.

"Then suddenly it hit next to us - we were all thrown in different directions," she said. "My two cousins and my father were killed, and my other cousin is in a dangerous condition."

Moussawi insisted that there was no military site near them. She said she is trying to "remain strong" in her father's memory.

Ali Moussawi, a farmer from the town of Nabi Chit who is not related to Soumaya, said "it was a normal day and we were working on our land" when a strike hit a house next to it. A missile fragment hit him in the stomach.

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"Thank God it wasn't too bad this time," he said. "All the guys who were killed, we're no better than them." Blinken and GCC foreign ministers urge diplomatic process in Lebanon to avoid full-blown war  
UNITED NATIONS — U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken at a meeting with GCC foreign ministers at the United Nations General Assembly said that "With regard to Lebanon, we've been working tirelessly with partners to avoid a full-blown war and to move to a diplomatic process that would allow Israelis and Lebanese alike to go back to their homes."

Qatari Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani at the same meeting said: "I believe it's getting more and more dangerous and worrying, and we believe that all of us, we have a responsibility to stop this, and just to stand up and to step up and to say enough is enough, and we need to find a solution.

GCC Secretary General Jasem Mohamed Al-Budaiwi at the same meeting said that the council is calling on the international community to take urgent measures to halt provocative actions by Israel in Lebanon territory, and to work towards lasting stability in the region.

"The Gulf Cooperation Council reaffirms its steadfast position in supporting Lebanon's sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and stability. The council also expresses deep concern regarding the recent Israeli violations in Lebanon territory, which poses serious threat of escalating the region," he said.

Netanyahu says Israel will continue 'inflicting blows on Hezbollah' until displaced Israelis can return to their homes

JERUSALEM — Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu says Israel will continue "inflicting blows on Hezbollah" until displaced Israeli citizens can return to their homes.

In a video statement released by his office on Wednesday, Netanyahu said "I cannot detail everything we are doing, but I can tell you one thing: we are determined to return our residents in the north safely to their homes."

He added, "we will not rest until they come home."

Earlier on Wednesday the Israeli army's Chief of Staff said the military was preparing for the possibility of a ground offensive in Lebanon, after days of extensive Israeli strikes on the country.

Biden says all-out war is still possible as fighting between Israel and Hezbollah escalates

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden said Wednesday that "all-out war" is still possible as fighting between Israel and Hezbollah escalates, but he's hopeful an off-ramp can be found to prevent further bloodshed.

Biden spoke during an interview on ABC's "The View." His comments come after days of back and forth between Israel and Iran-backed Hezbollah militants in Lebanon that have killed hundreds and rekindled fears of a broader war in the Middle East.

Blinken urges Israel and Hezbollah to step back from conflict

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken is urging both Israel and Hezbollah to step back from their intensifying conflict, saying that an all-out war would be disastrous for the region and its people.

In New York for the annual UN General Assembly, Blinken said Wednesday the U.S. was working on a plan to de-escalate tensions and allow tens of thousands of Israelis and Lebanese to return to homes they have had to evacuate in border areas.

"The best way to get that is not through war, not through escalation," he said in an interview with CBS news. "It would be through a diplomatic agreement that has forces pulled back from the border, create a secure environment, people return home."

U.S. officials say they are floating a number of ideas to calm the situation but they have not been specific. Some of those ideas may be discussed at a special UN Security Council meeting on Lebanon that France called for later Wednesday.

"What we're focused on now, including with many partners here in New York at the UN General Assembly, the Arab world, Europeans and others, is a plan to de-escalate," Blinken said. "If there were to be a full-scale war — which we don't have and which we're working to avoid — that's actually not going to solve the problem."

IDF says troops preparing for possible ground operation in Lebanon

The Israel Defense Force's chief of staff says the military is preparing for a possible ground operation in Lebanon.

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Addressing troops on Israel's northern border, the IDF Chief of Staff, LT. Gen. Herzl Halevi, said: "You hear the jets overhead; we have been striking all day. This is both to prepare the ground for your possible entry and to continue degrading Hezbollah."

He added: "Today, Hezbollah expanded its range of fire, and later today, they will receive a very strong response. Prepare yourselves."

Halevi said that to achieve the goal of returning displaced citizens of northern Israel to their homes, "we are preparing the process of a maneuver."

Lebanon says 51 killed and 223 injured in Israeli strikes on Wednesday

Lebanon's health minister says 51 people were killed and 223 injured in Israeli strikes Wednesday.

The death toll comes on top of 564 who were killed and more than 1,800 injured in the previous two days, including around 150 women and children.

This week has been the deadliest in Lebanon since the bruising monthlong war between Israel and Hezbollah in 2006. In the current conflict, Israel has said it is targeting Hezbollah fighters and weapons storage, while Lebanese officials say it has targeted civilian sites.

Human Rights Watch calls for UN probe into strikes in Lebanon and Israel

Human Rights Watch says Israel's ongoing aerial bombardment in Lebanon has put civilians "across the country at grave risk," and called for a United Nations investigation into strikes in Lebanon and rocket fire by Hezbollah militants into northern Israel.

The global rights group documented over a thousand Israeli strikes across Lebanon since the Israeli military announced a new phase in its conflict with Hezbollah, which has launched over 200 rockets into northern Israeli towns.

The organization added that Israel's warnings for thousands of civilians in Lebanon to evacuate from southern and eastern towns with only two hours' notice did not give them adequate time to flee and could amount to violations of international law.

Israel says it struck 280 Hezbollah targets across Lebanon

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military says its air force has struck some 280 Hezbollah targets across Lebanon so far on Wednesday.

It said the targets included launchers used to fire rockets on the northern Israeli cities of Safed and Nahariya.

Also among the targets were Hezbollah militants, buildings used to store weapons, and ready-to-use launchers, as well as some 60 targets belonging to Hezbollah's intelligence unit, the army said.

The military says its strikes in Lebanon are continuing.

UN: Over 90,000 displaced by Israeli strikes on Lebanon

The U.N. says over 90,000 people have been displaced by five days of Israeli strikes on Lebanon.

The U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs said Wednesday that a total of 200,000 people have been displaced in Lebanon since Hezbollah began firing rockets into northern Israel nearly a year ago, drawing Israeli retaliation.

UN calls for a unified Gaza-West Bank administration

RAMALLAH, West Bank — The United Nations have called for the Palestinian Authority to have a postwar role in Gaza and for it to be united with the West Bank.

The appeal came in a postwar recovery strategy released Wednesday that provided few details on how the war-ravaged territory would be governed or rebuilt.

It said Gaza and the West Bank should be "unified politically, economically and administratively." It said there should be no lasting Israeli military presence in the territory but that "Israel's legitimate security concerns must be addressed."

The nearly yearlong war, ignited by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel, is still raging with no end in sight.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has ruled out any role for the Palestinian Authority in Gaza and is opposed to the creation of a Palestinian state.

He has suggested that postwar Gaza be governed by local Palestinians with no ties to Hamas or the PA,



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with Israel maintaining lasting security control.

The World Bank in January estimated that the war has caused some \$18.5 billion in damage in Gaza, and that was before several months of large-scale Israeli military operations and bombardment.

Gulf Arab countries have said they will only contribute to Gaza's reconstruction and postwar governance as part of a plan for an eventual Palestinian state.

Israeli military activates reserve troops as conflict with Hezbollah escalates

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military says it is activating reserve troops in response to rising tensions with the Hezbollah militant group.

The announcement Wednesday indicates that Israel is planning even tougher action against the Lebanese group. It comes hours after Hezbollah fired a missile toward Tel Aviv for the first time.

The army said it was calling up "two reserve brigades for operational missions in the northern arena."

"This will enable the continuation of combat against the Hezbollah terrorist organization," it said.

2 wounded by rocket fire in northern Israel

First responders say two people were wounded by a rocket fired into northern Israel from Lebanon.

The Magen David Adom rescue service said a 32-year-old man was seriously wounded and a 52-year-old was moderately wounded by shrapnel in the agricultural village of Kibbutz Saar.

Hezbollah fired dozens of rockets into northern Israel on Wednesday as Israel carried out heavy strikes against the militant group in Lebanon.

Pregnant woman and her 4 children killed in Gaza, officials say

An Israeli airstrike in central Gaza has killed a pregnant woman and her four children, Palestinian medical officials say.

The strike on Wednesday hit a house in the urban Bureij refugee camp, according to the Al-Aqsa Martyrs hospital in the nearby town of Deir al-Balah.

An Associated Press journalist saw the bodies. Hospital records showed that the 35-year-old woman was 6 months pregnant. Her four children were aged between 8 and 18.

Israel says it tries to avoid harming civilians and accuses Hamas of putting them in danger by operating in crowded residential areas. The military rarely comments on individual strikes, which often kill women and children.

Gaza adds 28 people to the war's death toll, bringing the total to nearly 41,500

CAIRO — The bodies of 28 people killed in Israeli airstrikes were brought to local hospitals over the past day and another 85 people were wounded, the Gaza Health Ministry said Wednesday.

A total of 41,495 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since the start of the Israel-Hamas war nearly a year ago, according to the ministry, which says another 96,006 have been wounded.

The ministry does not distinguish between fighters and civilians in its count. It says women and children make up slightly more than half of those killed.

The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

The war began with Hamas' Oct. 7 attack into Israel, in which Palestinian militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and took around 250 hostages. Around 100 captives are still being held in Gaza, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Pope Francis asks the international community to help stop escalating tensions in Lebanon

Pope Francis called for a stop to escalating tensions in Lebanon, calling it "unacceptable."

"I am saddened by the news coming from Lebanon, where intense bombing in recent days has caused much death and destruction," the pope said Wednesday during a regular audience at the Vatican. "I hope that the international community will make every effort to stop this terrible escalation. It is unacceptable. I express my closeness to the Lebanese people, who have already suffered too much in the recent past."

Hezbollah launches dozens of rockets into northern Israel

JERUSALEM — Hezbollah has launched dozens of rockets into northern Israel following days of heavy Israeli airstrikes across large parts of Lebanon.

The Israeli military said that at one point on Wednesday, more than 40 projectiles were launched simul-

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taneously, though most were intercepted.

The municipality in the northern city of Safed said a projectile hit a home, causing a fire. There were no injuries as the residents were not there, it said. Safed has been a frequent target for Hezbollah due to military infrastructure in the area.

Earlier on Wednesday, Hezbollah fired a missile at Tel Aviv, triggering air raid sirens. The military said it intercepted the projectile, and there were no casualties or damage.

The military said it was launching "extensive strikes" across southern and eastern Lebanon.

An Israeli airstrike on Beirut killed a top Hezbollah commander Tuesday, part of a two-day bombing campaign that has killed hundreds of people and prompted thousands in southern Lebanon to seek refuge from the widening conflict.

Israeli warplanes pound southern and eastern Lebanon for a third day

BEIRUT — Israeli strikes Wednesday hit a town near the northern coastal town of Byblos, Lebanon's state-run National News Agency reported.

There were no immediate reported casualties, as Israeli warplanes pound southern and eastern Lebanon for a third day in a new phase of their ongoing conflict with the Hezbollah militant group.

A photo circulated by the NNA and local media shows large plumes of smoke between the houses and green fields of the town of Maisara, a stone's throw away from the Mediterranean Sea.

The renewed strikes come hours after Hezbollah announced it launched a missile toward Tel Aviv, targeting the headquarters of the Mossad intelligence agency that it blames for a string of assassinations of its top commanders and for the explosion of hundreds of pagers and walkie-talkies belonging to members of the group and its civilian institutions that wounded thousands and killed dozens of people.

As thousands of Lebanese flee the airstrikes from the country's southern and eastern provinces, NNA said Israel launched three strikes over the northeastern city of Hermel, the town of Labweh, and a handful of towns and villages across the country's southern province.

The Israeli army says it will continue its strikes until it can return the tens of thousands of residents who were displaced from Israel's north, near its border with Lebanon. Israel maintains that Hezbollah is launching rocket attacks in and near civilian areas.

While Lebanon's north has mostly been spared from the strikes, Israel has launched rare strikes near the northern town of Mayrooba and in the outskirts of Qartaba.

The days of strikes have killed over 560 people, in some of Lebanon's deadliest days since Israel's war with Hezbollah in 2006.

Israel is pushing the Middle East into an all-out war, neighboring countries say

CAIRO — Egypt, Jordan and Iraq say Israel is pushing the Middle East into an all-out war and are calling on the United Nations Security Council to intervene.

In a joint statement Wednesday, the three countries' foreign ministers affirmed that averting a regional war requires the cessation of "the Israeli aggression on Gaza." The ministers also condemned the Israeli aggression on Lebanon, and said that "Israel is pushing the region into an all-out war."

Egypt and Jordan were the first two Arab countries to make peace with Israel. But relations have been strained since the war began in Gaza, triggered by Hamas' Oct. 7 attack.

Iraq has close ties to Iran, which supports both Hamas and the Lebanese militant group. Hezbollah has traded heavy fire with Israel in recent days.

Thousands seek refuge from fighting around the Lebanon-Israel border

BEIRUT — Thousands of Lebanese and Syrians have fled from Lebanon across the border to Syria following heavy Israeli bombardment, a United Nations refugee agency official said Wednesday.

Rula Amin, Middle East and North Africa spokesperson for the agency known as UNHCR, said that families were "arriving in buses and cars, but also travelling by foot."

"Crowds of people — many of whom are women, young children and even infants — continue to await processing for entry," she said. "Many will have to spend the night outdoors waiting their turn."

Amin said that UNHCR teams, along with the Syrian Red Crescent, were providing water, mattresses, blankets and food. She noted that the team has "also seen people, including children, bearing injuries

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suffered from the recent attacks on Lebanon.”

Some 775,000 Syrians are registered with the U.N. Refugee Agency in Lebanon, and hundreds of thousands more are believed to be unregistered in the country.

A wave of Israeli strikes on Monday and Tuesday killed more than 560 people in Lebanon, including around 150 women and children. It was the highest death toll in nearly a year of clashes between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah, and the deadliest Lebanon has seen since a bruising monthlong war in 2006 between Israel and Hezbollah.

A central Gaza hospital receives 3 more bodies from an Israeli strike

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip — A hospital in the central Gaza Strip said Wednesday it received the bodies of three people who were killed in an Israeli strike the previous day.

The Awda hospital in the Nuseirat refugee camp said the strike late Tuesday hit a civilian vehicle northeast of the camp, and three bodies were recovered Wednesday morning.

The death toll from Tuesday’s strike on a house in the Nuseirat camp reached 11 after the body of a woman arrived at the hospital early Wednesday, the facility said. The dead included at least four children, according to the hospital records. The house strikes also wounded 11 people, the hospital said.

Israel intercepts Hezbollah’s farthest strike in 11 months of exchanges

JERUSALEM — The Israeli military intercepted a missile launched from Lebanon into central Israel on Wednesday morning in the latest escalation of hostilities between Israel and Hezbollah.

Israel Rescue Services said there were no injuries or damage reported from the missile, which triggered sirens in Tel Aviv and Netanya, two large cities in central Israel. It was Hezbollah’s farthest strike yet in nearly a year of exchanges.

Hezbollah said it had fired a ballistic missile at the headquarters of Israel’s Mossad intelligence agency, which it said was responsible for the targeted killing of its senior leaders. Israel said it struck the site the missile was launched from in southern Lebanon.

Tensions between Israel and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah have steadily escalated over the past 11 months. Hezbollah has been firing rockets, missiles and drones into northern Israel in solidarity with Palestinians in Gaza and its ally Hamas, a fellow Iran-backed militant group.

Israel killed a top Hezbollah commander Tuesday as part of a two-day bombing campaign that left more than 560 people dead and prompted thousands in southern Lebanon to seek refuge from the widening conflict. Hezbollah has launched hundreds of projectiles towards Israel, causing some damage to buildings and homes and lightly injuring a number of people.

Britain sends troops to prepare for possible evacuation of its citizens from Lebanon

LONDON — Britain will send 700 troops to the eastern Mediterranean island of Cyprus as it prepares for the possible evacuation of its citizens from Lebanon.

Cyprus is located across a strip of water from Lebanon, and Beirut harbor has been used before to evacuate foreign nationals by sea from Lebanon. During the 2006 Israel-Hezbollah war, tens of thousands of foreigners were evacuated by sea to Cyprus in a fleet of commercial and military vessels, many supplied by American, British, European and other naval forces.

The British troops and members of the Border Force were to arrive Wednesday, even as the government made repeated appeals for its nationals to immediately evacuate Lebanon. Britain retains sovereign military base areas in Cyprus, which are considered its territory.

“We continue to urge all sides to step back from conflict to prevent further tragic loss of life. Our government is ensuring all preparations are in place to support British Nationals should the situation deteriorate,” said British Defense Secretary John Healey.

“The Royal Air Force also have aircraft and transport helicopters on standby to provide support if necessary,” Healey said.

## California Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoes bill to help Black families reclaim taken land

By SOPHIE AUSTIN Associated Press/Report for America

SACRAMENTO, Calif. (AP) — California Gov. Gavin Newsom vetoed a bill Wednesday that would have helped Black families reclaim or be compensated for property that was unjustly taken by the government.

The bill would have created a process for families to file a claim with the state if they believe the government seized their property through eminent domain due to discriminatory motives and without providing fair compensation.

The proposal by itself would not have been able to take full effect because lawmakers blocked another bill to create a reparations agency that would have reviewed claims.

"I thank the author for his commitment to redressing past racial injustices," Newsom said in a statement. "However, this bill tasks a nonexistent state agency to carry out its various provisions and requirements, making it impossible to implement."

The veto dealt a blow to a key part of a package of reparations bills the California Legislative Black Caucus backed this year in an effort to help the state atone for decades of policies that drove racial disparities for Black Americans. The caucus sent other proposals to Newsom's desk that would require the state to formally apologize for slavery and its lingering impacts, improve protections against hair discrimination for athletes and combat the banning of books in state prisons.

Democratic state Sen. Steven Bradford introduced the eminent domain bill after Los Angeles-area officials in 2022 returned a beachfront property to a Black couple a century after it was taken from their ancestors through eminent domain. Bradford said in a statement earlier this year that his proposal was part of a crucial "framework for reparations and correcting a historic wrong."

Bradford also introduced a bill this year to create an agency to help Black families research their family lineage and implement reparations programs that become law, and a measure to create a fund for reparations legislation.

But Black caucus members blocked the reparations agency and fund bills from receiving a final vote in the Assembly during the last week of the legislative session last month. The caucus cited concerns that the Legislature would not have oversight over the agency's operations and declined to comment further on the reparations fund bill because it wasn't part of the caucus' reparations priority package.

The move came after the Newsom administration pushed for the agency bill to be turned into legislation allocating \$6 million for California State University to study how to implement the reparations task force's recommendations, according to a document with proposed amendments shared by Bradford's office.

Newsom's office declined to comment to The Associated Press last month on the reparations agency and fund proposals, saying it doesn't typically weigh in publicly on pending legislation.

The administration's Department of Finance said earlier this year it opposed the eminent domain bill because it was not specifically included in the budget. The agency said the cost to implement it was unknown but could have ranged "from hundreds of thousands of dollars to low millions of dollars annually, depending on the workload required to accept, review, and investigate applications."

## Judge approves \$600 million settlement for residents near fiery Ohio derailment

By JOSH FUNK Associated Press

A federal judge on Wednesday approved a \$600 million class-action settlement Wednesday that Norfolk Southern railroad offered to everyone who lived within 20 miles (32 kilometers) of last year's disastrous derailment in East Palestine, Ohio.

Judge Benita Pearson gave the deal final approval after a hearing where the lawyers who negotiated it with the railroad argued that residents overwhelmingly supported it, attorneys for the residents and railroad spokesperson Heather Garcia told The Associated Press. Roughly 55,000 claims were filed. Only

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370 households and 47 businesses opted out.

Those who did object to the deal were vocal in their concerns that the settlement won't provide enough and that the deal was rushed through so quickly that they can't possibly know what the potential health impact from the derailment will be. They say it's hard to know all the risks, given the way test results have been reported by the EPA and the fact that the lawyers haven't disclosed everything they learned in their investigation.

The objectors had hoped the judge would order the plaintiff's lawyers to release the tests their own expert did after the derailment and address their concerns about a toxicologist who told them at one of the lawyers' town meetings that they shouldn't worry because he doesn't think anyone will develop cancer. That angered residents who have been complaining about unexplained ailments since the derailment and talking with doctors who are conducting studies to try and determine what the health impacts will be. Experts say it's too soon to know the health impacts.

"These attorneys were bullying people and telling them they were never going to get any money if they didn't take this. People felt backed into a corner," resident Jami Wallace said.

The judge's approval clears the way for payments to start going out quickly. The lawyers had previously said they hoped to get the first checks in the mail before the end of the year.

As part of the settlement, any aid residents received from the railroad will be deducted from their final payments. Wallace and others who had to relocate for an extended period while the railroad paid for hotels or rental homes likely won't get anything.

Anyone who lived within 2 miles (3.2 kilometers) of the derailment can get up to \$70,000 per household for property damage plus up to \$25,000 per person for health problems. The payments drop off the farther people lived from the derailment down to as little as a few hundred dollars at the outer edges.

"This outcome would not have been possible without the resilience and support of the East Palestine community and the broader class of impacted residents and business owners," the plaintiffs' attorneys said in a statement. "We look forward to beginning the distribution of funds in the coming weeks to help this community rebuild and move forward."

When the train derailed late on Feb. 3, 2023, tank cars full of hazardous chemicals ruptured and spilled their contents that caught fire just outside the small town on the Ohio-Pennsylvania border. Then three days later officials decided to needlessly blow open five tank cars of vinyl chloride and burn the toxic plastic ingredient inside because they feared they would explode.

Since the derailment, the railroad has offered residents and the community \$108 million in assistance and paid for the massive cleanup that has cost more than \$1 billion.

"We made a promise to make things right and this is just one piece of that commitment," the railroad said in a statement. "We remain committed to this community for the long haul and look forward to continuing our relationship with the Village as we work to help the area recover and thrive."

Tamara Lynn Freeze said she and her husband ultimately decided to accept the deal despite their concerns about giving up the right to ever sue even if someone eventually develops cancer. She said the idea of having to go it alone against the railroad's army of lawyers one day is daunting.

"It seems like everybody kind of just wanted it to be over with. Like the attorneys and obviously Norfolk," Freeze said.

She and her husband live in his childhood home, which is some 175 yards (160 meters) from the derailment site. They will now decide whether to give up that house that's paid for or find somewhere they can feel comfortable planting a garden and living their lives normally again.

## What to know from the UN: Ukraine doesn't want the world to forget, and attention turns to Lebanon

By JENNIFER PELTZ and EDITH M. LEDERER Associated Press

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Sometimes the issues brought forward at the United Nations signature annual meeting may feel a bit familiar. Climate change is always in focus, especially in the past few years.

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There are regular disputes about who is on the security council. Pleas to stop wars and address hunger. But this year, it's what's not getting as much attention that has Ukraine concerned.

The war in Ukraine was center stage the last two times that world leaders convened for the high-level meeting of the General Assembly. But this year, the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and the escalating developments along the Israeli-Lebanese border have gotten much of the spotlight.

Ukraine president VOLODYMYR ZELENSKY, at the podium, implored world leaders not to give in to calls for a ceasefire that doesn't guarantee Ukraine's sovereignty. "When some propose alternatives, half-hearted settlement plans, so-called sets of principles, it not only ignores the interests and suffering of Ukrainians who are affected by the war the most, it not only ignores reality, but also gives Putin the political space to continue the war," Zelenskyy said.

Here's your daily guide to what's going on at the United Nations this week, day by day:

From the podium

French President EMMANUEL MACRON told the U.N. General Assembly that "Israel cannot, without consequence, just expand its operations to Lebanon." He urged Israel to cease the escalation, and Hezbollah to cease missile launches to Israel.

Panama President JOSE RAUL MULINO drew attention to the humanitarian crisis playing out in his country. More than half a million migrants crossed the Darien jungle last year that joins Colombia and Panama. "Panama today is the new border of the United States," Mulino said, noting that the migrants crossing his country are seeking a better life in the U.S. "I ask you to see the magnitude of what is happening because we feel like we don't have the international support we are due."

On the sidelines

The chance of a ceasefire proposal to try to stop fighting between Israel and Lebanon took up a lot of oxygen behind the scenes on Wednesday. Rumors floated through the halls, and France called a last-minute session to discuss the conflict. At the session, French Foreign Minister JEAN-NOEL BARROT said later in a meeting of the Security Council that France was working with the U.S. on a proposal for a 21-day ceasefire.

Climate moment

In a special high-level summit to address the impacts of rising seas, small island nations pleaded for the survival and insisted on their sovereignty despite overflowing oceans. Sea level rise "threatens the well-being of our peoples' cultures, food security and livelihoods," said Samoan Prime Minister FIAME NAOMI MATA'AFA, speaking for 39 small island nations. Marshall Islands President HILDA HEINE and others said even if their lands are submerged, their nations should still be recognized, asking the world not to "rig the map and try to erase us with a pencil... sovereignty ultimately rests with our people, not in distant diplomatic centers." U.S. Secretary of State ANTONY BLINKEN said the United States is committed to counter — or at least adapt to — rising sea levels that pose an existential threat to many coastal communities around the world. Blinken also said that the Biden administration would oppose any effort to limit or curtail the rights of any countries affected by it.

Voices you might have missed

"Globalization has failed in its mission to bring prosperity to people."

—XIOMARA CASTRO, president of Honduras

"In this emerging global order, we must ensure the United Nations remains at the forefront of global governance. If multilateralism is to trump unilateralism, the UN's role, as the world's foremost multilateral organization, is pivotal. With the necessary resources and resolve, the UN can ensure a future of peace, sustainable development, and human dignity."

—MOHAMED IRFAAN ALI, president of Guyana

Island nation leaders warned about sea level rise in the most dire and personal terms. "Our future is uncertain," Fiji President WILIAME KATONVIERE said. "Will our children and their children have a place to call home?" And Maldives President MOHAMED MUIZZU said: "An emergency is upon us, threatening our way of life. Our fight to live on will survive."

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Something you might not know

Leaders' speeches take a variety of forms and are delivered in a variety of languages -- some rendered on plain paper, others on elaborate letterhead. Taken collectively, they represent the words and ideas of an entire governed world — and the politics and maneuverings that come with leading, or helping to lead, one of the nations of Earth. In photos, you can sometimes see the speech on the lectern, including one of Zelenskyy from Wednesday.

One notable number

Number of speakers scheduled at a last-minute, evening Security Council session on conflict between Israel and Lebanon: 24

Quotable

"Colleagues, I'm often asked which one issue keeps me up at night. What I always say is this: We can't afford to limit our attention to just one issue."

— U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations LINDA THOMAS-GREENFIELD, speaking to the Security Council

"Annihilation may bring military success but not political or moral victory. If security systems take over every political decision you forfeit your option to negotiate."

—MIRJANA SPOLJARIC EGGER, president of the International Committee of the Red Cross

"Rising seas mean a rising tide of misery. Communities swamped, fresh water contaminated, crops ruined, infrastructure damaged, biodiversity destroyed, and economies decimated — with sectors such as fisheries, agriculture, and tourism pummeled. The poorest and most vulnerable are hardest hit."

—U.N. Secretary-General ANTONIO GUTERRES

"Do not divide the world. Be united nations. And that will bring us peace."

—Ukraine's Zelenskyy, to leaders at the General Assembly

Up next

Palestinian President MAHMOUD ABBAS is scheduled to speak Thursday morning and Israel's Prime Minister BENJAMIN NETANYAHU on Friday.

## Harris will campaign on Arizona's border with Mexico in attempted show of strength on immigration

By ZEKE MILLER and COLLEEN LONG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris will visit the U.S.-Mexico border in Arizona on Friday as her campaign tries to turn the larger issue of immigration from a liability into a strength and hopes to counter a line of frequent, searing political attacks from former President Donald Trump.

Her campaign announced Wednesday that Harris will be in Douglas, Arizona, across the border from Agua Prieta, Mexico.

A Harris aide, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss a trip that was still being planned, said the vice president plans to speak about border security and how, as a former attorney general of California, she took on international gangs and criminal organizations who traffic drugs, guns, and human beings. She also has long believed that the country needs an immigration system that is secure, fair, orderly and humane, the aide said.

Trump has built his campaign partly around calling for cracking down on immigration and the southern border, even endorsing using police and the military to carry out mass deportations should he be elected in November. Harris has increasingly tried to seize on the issue and turn it back against her opponent, though polls show voters continue to trust Trump more on it.

Just how important immigration and the border are ahead of Election Day was evidenced by Trump wasting little time reacting to word of Harris' trip. He told a rally crowd in Mint Hill, North Carolina, that Harris was going to the border "for political reasons" and because "their polls are tanking."

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"When Kamala speaks about the border, her credibility is less than zero," Trump said. "I hope you're going to remember that on Friday. When she tells you about the border, ask her just one simple question: "Why didn't you do it four years ago?"

That picks up on a theme Trump mentions at nearly all of his campaign rallies, scoffing at Harris as a former Biden administration "border czar," arguing that she oversaw softer federal policies that allowed millions of people into the country illegally.

President Joe Biden tasked Harris with working to address the root causes of immigration patterns that have caused many people fleeing violence and drug gangs in Central America to head to the U.S. border and seek asylum, though she was not called border czar.

Since taking over for Biden at the top of the Democratic presidential ticket, Harris has lamented the collapse of a bipartisan border security deal in Congress that most Republican lawmakers rejected at Trump's behest. Her campaign aide said she will use Friday's border stop to push for reviving that package, which was the toughest in a generation.

In an interview with MSNBC that aired Wednesday evening, Harris talked about reviving that legislative effort, but also helping some people in the country illegally get U.S. citizenship.

"We need a comprehensive plan," she said, "that includes what we need to do to fortify not only our border, but deal with the fact that we also need to create pathways for people to earn citizenship."

The stop is part of Harris' larger effort to make immigration an issue that can help her win supporters, saying that Trump would rather play politics with the issue than seek solutions, while also promising more humane treatment of immigrants should she win the White House.

In June, Biden announced rules that bar migrants from being granted asylum when U.S. officials deem that the southern border is overwhelmed. Since then, arrests for illegal border crossings have fallen.

Despite that, a new poll by The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research released this month found that Trump has an advantage over Harris on whom voters trust to better handle immigration. This issue was a problem for Biden, as well: Illegal immigration and crossings at the U.S. border with Mexico have been a challenge during much of his administration. The poll also found that Republicans are more likely to care about immigration.

## **A Black student punished for his hairstyle wants to return to the Texas school he left**

By JUAN A. LOZANO Associated Press

HOUSTON (AP) — A Black high school student in Texas who was punished for nearly all of his junior year over his hairstyle has left his school district rather than spend another year of in-school suspension, according to his attorney.

But Darryl George, 18, would like to return to his Houston-area high school in the Barbers Hill school district for his senior year and has asked a federal judge to issue a temporary restraining order that would prevent district officials from further punishing him for not cutting his hair. It would allow him to return to school while a federal lawsuit he filed proceeds.

George's request comes after U.S. District Judge Jeffrey Brown in August dismissed most of the claims the student and his mother had filed in the federal lawsuit alleging school district officials committed racial and gender discrimination when they punished him.

The judge only let the gender discrimination claim stand and questioned whether the school district's hair length rule causes more harm than good.

"Judge Brown please help us so that I can attend school like a normal teenage student during the pendency of this litigation," George said in an affidavit filed last month.

Brown has scheduled an Oct. 3 court hearing in Galveston on George's request.

In court documents filed last week, attorneys for the school district said the judge does not have jurisdiction to issue the restraining order because George is no longer a student in the district.



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"And George's withdrawal from the district does not deprive him of standing to seek past damages, although the district maintains that George has not suffered a constitutional injury and is not entitled to recover damages," attorneys for the school district said.

The district defends its dress code, which says its policies for students are meant to "teach grooming and hygiene, instill discipline, prevent disruption, avoid safety hazards and teach respect for authority."

In court documents filed last week, Allie Booker, one of George's attorneys, said the student was "forced to unenroll" from Barbers Hill High School in Mont Belvieu and transfer to another high school in a different Houston area district because Barbers Hill officials placed him on in-school suspension on the first and second day of the new school year, which began last month.

This "caused him significant emotional distress, ultimately leading to a nervous breakdown. As a result, we had no choice but to remove him from the school environment," Booker said.

George's departure "was not a matter of choice but of survival" but he wishes to return, as his mother moved to the area because of the quality of the district's schools, Booker said.

George was kept out of his regular high school classes for most of the 2023-24 school year, when he was a junior, because the school district said his hair length violated its dress code. George was forced to either serve in-school suspension or spend time at an off-site disciplinary program.

The district has argued that George's long hair, which he wears to school in tied and twisted locs on top of his head, violates its policy because if let down, it would fall below his shirt collar, eyebrows or earlobes. The district has said other students with locs comply with the length policy.

George's federal lawsuit also alleged that his punishment violates the CROWN Act, a recent state law prohibiting race-based discrimination of hair. The CROWN Act, which was being discussed before the dispute over George's hair and which took effect in September 2023, bars employers and schools from penalizing people because of hair texture or protective hairstyles including Afros, braids, locs, twists or Bantu knots.

In February, a state judge ruled in a lawsuit filed by the school district that its punishment does not violate the CROWN Act.

Barbers Hill's hair policy was also challenged in a May 2020 federal lawsuit filed by two other students. Both withdrew from the high school, but one returned after a federal judge granted a temporary injunction, saying there was "a substantial likelihood" that his rights to free speech and to be free from racial discrimination would be violated if he was barred. That lawsuit is still pending.

## **10 homes have collapsed into the Carolina surf. Their destruction was decades in the making**

By BEN FINLEY Associated Press

NORFOLK, Va. (AP) — A slow-motion catastrophe has been playing out in the coastal North Carolina village of Rodanthe, where 10 houses have fallen into the Atlantic since 2020. Three have been lost since Friday.

The most recent collapse was Tuesday afternoon, when the wooden pilings of a home nicknamed "Front Row Seats" buckled in the surf. The structure bumped against another house before it bobbed in the waves, prompting now familiar warnings about splintered wood and nail-riddled debris.

The destruction was decades in the making as beach erosion and climate change slowly edged the Atlantic closer to homes in the somewhat out-of-the-way vacation spot. The threat is more insidious than a hurricane, while the possible solutions won't be easy or cheap, either in Rodanthe or other parts of the U.S.

Barrier islands aren't ideal for building

Rodanthe is a village of about 200 people on the Outer Banks, a strip of narrow barrier islands that protrude into the Atlantic like a flexed arm.

Barrier islands were never an ideal place for development, according to experts. They typically form as waves deposit sediment off the mainland. And they move based on weather patterns and other ocean forces. Some even disappear.

David Hallac, superintendent of the Cape Hatteras National Seashore, along which Rodanthe is located,

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said it was more common in previous decades for homeowners to move their houses from the encroaching surf.

"Perhaps it was more well understood in the past that the barrier island was dynamic, that it was moving," Hallac said. "And if you built something on the beachfront it may not be there forever or it may need to be moved."

The beach is rapidly eroding

Rodanthe is one of many communities on Hatteras Island, which is roughly 50 miles (80 kilometers) long and has been experiencing beach erosion for decades.

The Cape Hatteras Lighthouse was 1,500 feet (457 meters) from the ocean when it was built in 1870, Hallac said. By 1919, the Atlantic was 300 feet away. The lighthouse was later moved to a more protected location.

The erosion has been measured to be as much as 10 to 15 feet (3 to 4.5 meters) a year or more in some places.

"And so every year, 10 to 15 feet of that white sandy beach is gone," Hallac said. "And then the dunes and then the back-dune area. And then all of a sudden, the foreshore, that area between low water and high water, is right up next to somebody's backyard. And then the erosion continues."

'Like a toothpick into wet sand'

Ocean waves eventually lap at the wooden pilings that hold up the beach houses. The supports could be 15 feet deep. But the surf slowly takes away the sand that is packed around them.

"It's like a toothpick in wet sand or even a beach umbrella," Hallac said. "The deeper you put it, the more likely it is to stand up straight and resist leaning over. But if you only put it down a few inches, it doesn't take much wind for that umbrella to start leaning. And it starts to tip over."

A single home collapse can shed debris up to fifteen miles along the coast, according to an August report from a group of federal, state and local officials who are studying threatened oceanfront structures in North Carolina. Collapses can injure beachgoers and lead to potential contamination from septic tanks, among other environmental concerns.

Collapsed houses were likely in compliance

Rules that govern coastal development in North Carolina have been in place since the 1970s, before many of the collapsed houses were constructed and when there was a lot more beach, said Noah Gillam, Dare County's planning director.

"At the time they were built, they were likely in compliance with all of the set-back requirements," Gillam said. "And they were set back, in many situations, hundreds of yards from the dune line, let alone the ocean."

Since then, the rate of erosion has sped up, swallowing swaths of sand. Storms also have become more frequent and more intense, pounding the shoreline of a community that is acutely exposed to the ocean.

'This is a national issue'

Meanwhile, officials and experts have been focused on solutions or at least ways to address the problem. The report on threatened oceanfront homes noted that 750 of nearly 8,800 oceanfront structures in North Carolina are considered at risk from erosion.

Among the possible solutions is hauling dredged sand to eroding beaches, something that is already being done in other communities on the Outer Banks and East Coast. But it could cost \$40 million or more in Rodanthe, posing a major financial challenge for its small tax base, said Gillam, of Dare County.

Other ideas include buying out threatened properties, moving or demolishing them. But those options are also very expensive. And funding is limited.

U.S. Rep. Greg Murphy, a North Carolina Republican, recently introduced a bill in Congress that would make some money available. For example, the legislation would authorize federal flood insurance dollars to help demolish or relocate erosion-plagued homes before they collapse.

Braxton Davis, executive director of the North Carolina Coastal Federation, a nonprofit, said the problem isn't limited to Rodanthe or even to North Carolina. He pointed to erosion issues along California's coast, the Great Lakes and some of the nation's rivers.

"This is a national issue," Davis said, adding that sea levels are rising and "the situation is only going to become worse."

## **Congress passes temporary bill to avoid shutdown as lawmakers punt spending decisions to December**

By KEVIN FREKING Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Congress on Wednesday passed a temporary measure that keeps government agencies funded into December, avoiding a shutdown for now while punting final spending decisions until after the Nov. 5 election.

The Senate approved the measure by a vote of 78-18 shortly after the House easily approved it. The bill generally funds agencies at current levels through Dec. 20. But an additional \$231 million was included to bolster the Secret Service after the two assassination attempts against Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump. Money was also added to aid with the presidential transition, among other things.

The bill now goes to President Joe Biden's desk to be signed into law.

"This bipartisanship is a good outcome for America," Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer said moments before the vote. "I hope it sets the tone for more constructive, bipartisan work when we return in the fall."

House Speaker Mike Johnson, R-La., billed the measure as doing "only what's absolutely necessary," a statement directed at members of his own conference concerned about spending levels.

Still, it was a no-go for some Republicans, which forced House GOP leadership to rely on Democratic votes to pass the bill through a process that requires at least two-thirds support from voting members. The final vote was 341-82, with Republicans supplying all the no votes in both chambers. Johnson said the only alternative to the continuing resolution at this stage would have been a government shutdown.

"It would be political malpractice to shut the government down," Johnson said. "I think everyone understands that."

The House floor was largely empty during debate on the measure. Rep. Chip Roy, R-Texas, was the lone critic among the speakers, saying, "We end up in a vicious circle every year, the same vicious circle."

Lawmakers in both chambers are anxious to return to their home states and districts to campaign, smoothing the path for passage of the temporary funding fix. But more arduous fiscal negotiations await them at the end of the year.

Under terms of a previous deal to avoid a federal default and allow the government to continue paying its bills, spending for defense and nondefense programs would rise 1% next year.

The Senate has been charting a course to go above that level, while House Republicans have been voting for steep cuts to many nondefense programs, and they have attached policy mandates to the spending bills that Democrats overwhelmingly oppose. So a final agreement will be difficult to reach.

In the meantime, the temporary bill will mostly fund the government at current levels, with a few exceptions like the funding infusion for the Secret Service.

The \$231 million for the Secret Service does come with strings attached. It's contingent upon the agency complying with congressional oversight. The bill also allows the Secret Service to spend its allocations faster if needed.

"Everybody understands that's critically important right now," Johnson said of the Secret Service money.

Trump thanked lawmakers for the extra Secret Service funding at a campaign event Wednesday. He had earlier called on Republicans not to move forward on a spending bill without also including a requirement that people provide proof of citizenship when registering to vote. That legislation failed in the House last week.

In a recent letter, the Secret Service told lawmakers that a funding shortfall was not the reason for lapses in Trump's security when a gunman climbed onto an unsecured roof on July 13 at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, and opened fire. But acting Secret Service Director Ronald Rowe Jr., also made clear the agency had "immediate needs" and that he's talking to Congress.

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"The Secret Service has asked for this additional funding. It's absolutely essential as they deal with the increased threat environment," said Sen. Susan Collins, the top Republican on the Senate Appropriations Committee.

The continuing resolution is needed because Congress is nowhere close to completing work on the dozen annual appropriations bills that fund much of the federal government. The House has passed five of the 12 bills, mostly along party lines. The Senate has passed zero.

Republicans blame the impasse on Senate Democrats for not putting the dozen appropriations bills on the Senate floor for a vote, where they then could be reconciled with the House bills during negotiations. But Democrats counter that House Republicans are acting in bad faith, bogging the process down by undercutting the agreement that former Speaker Kevin McCarthy negotiated with the White House over spending caps for the 2024 and 2025 budget years.

Rep. Rosa DeLauro, the top Democratic member of the House Appropriations Committee, said her party will accept nothing less than the 1% increase specified in that agreement. Also, if Republicans seek more than that for defense, there must be "dollar for dollar parity for nondefense," she said.

The White House called on both chambers to pass the stopgap bill, while cautioning that it did not provide adequate funding to help communities recover from natural disasters and failed to include enough funding for health care provided through the Department of Veterans Affairs.

Johnson warned that when the temporary extension expires in December, he will not support a massive, catchall bill to fund the government, referred to as an omnibus, so another stopgap may be needed that would allow the new president and Congress to have the final say on fiscal year 2025 spending levels.

"I have no intention of going back to that terrible tradition," Johnson said.

Sen. Patty Murray, the Democratic chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, urged House Republicans not to "follow the loudest voices on the far right" in the negotiations for the full-year bill.

"You cannot strike a deal to govern with people who do not really want to govern," Murray said.

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"You cannot strike a deal to govern with people who do not really want to govern," Murray said.

## Harris is making a 'capitalist' pitch to boost the economy as Trump pushes deeper into populism

By ZEKE MILLER, STEVE PEOPLES and JOSH BOAK Associated Press

PITTSBURGH (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris on Wednesday pledged to build an economy that is both pro-business and helps the middle class as she pushed back against Republican nominee Donald Trump's claims that she's advancing "communist" ideas.

The Democratic nominee said in remarks at the Economic Club of Pittsburgh in battleground Pennsylvania that she "would take good ideas from wherever they come" as she promised to double the number of people being trained in registered apprenticeships and outlined her support for more home ownership.

"As president, I will be grounded in my fundamental values of fairness, dignity and opportunity," Harris said. "And I promise you, I will be pragmatic in my approach."

Little more than a hour before her speech, Trump offered his own competing vision of the economy while visiting a furnituremaker in Mint Hill, North Carolina. He defended his idea for a special lower tax rate for U.S. manufacturers and pledged to impose tariffs high enough that there would be an "exodus" of auto factory jobs from Japan, Germany and South Korea.

"I'm imposing tariffs on your competition from foreign countries, all these foreign countries that have ripped us off, which stole all of your businesses and all of your jobs years ago," Trump said.

The dueling speeches by the two candidates reflected how they're honing their economic messages for voters in battleground states. Both are trying to counter criticism while laying out their best cases for a public that still worries about the economy's health. Trump is focused on the idea of U.S. dominance over foreign competitors, while Harris is stressing the importance of supporting the middle class and entrepreneurs.

Harris later sat down for an interview with MSNBC and reacted to Trump's calls for tariffs, saying, "You don't just throw around the idea of, just tariffs across the board." She added of her opponent: "He's just not serious about very many of these issues."

In the interview, the vice president also renewed her calls for raising corporate tax rates, saying, "I'm not mad at anyone for achieving success, but everyone should pay their fair share."

Those remarks came after Harris' speech focused on her broader philosophy and what she's trying to achieve for the economy. That was in contrast to Trump's, which was more freestyle, including insinuations about Iranian connection to the two assassination attempts against him.

The former president said the corporate tax rate would drop from 21% to 15% for companies that make their products domestically if he were elected. The Republican nominee suggested that his support for broad tariffs as high as 20% have made him an international target.

"This is why people in countries want to kill me," he said. "They're not happy with me."

The candidates are each emphasizing the economy at a time when polls show that it is one of the most important issues for voters as they consider who to support. A recent AP-NORC poll found that neither candidate has a decisive edge with the public on the issue.

Both say their own approach will do more to ensure that the U.S. economy — and not China's — leads the world in this century. Both are eager to embrace an image as a tax cutter and are accusing the other of backing massive tax hikes on the middle class. It's a meaningful shift in messaging as inflation concerns have ebbed somewhat with the Federal Reserve cutting its benchmark interest rates last week.

Harris rebutted Trump by saying that she is a capitalist who believes in an "active partnership between government and the private sector." She said Trump has "no intention to grow our middle class — he's only interested in making life better for himself and people like himself."

The Democratic nominee plans to provide \$100 billion worth of tax breaks and other incentives to build up U.S. manufacturing and emerging technologies, according to a person familiar with her plans who provided details on the condition of anonymity. She has a forthcoming brochure to outline her vision for the economy.

Elsewhere, billionaire Mark Cuban said business leaders like him are backing Harris because she has taken considered stances that companies can understand even when they have a different perspective.

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"I want a president that for business goes into details and has a policy team that understands all the ramifications of what's been proposed," Cuban said on a Tuesday call with reporters set up by the Harris campaign.

The Harris campaign's efforts to show business support have overlapped with Trump's in offering a host of populist ideas. In addition to wanting no taxes on tips, Social Security or overtime pay, Trump wants to limit the interest rate on credit cards to 10% and set up low-tax zones on federal lands to lure employers. Trump also wants to ditch the cap on the deduction of state and local taxes that he put into the tax code in 2017 while president.

Both candidates see an opportunity to trash the other's tax ideas. Trump recently dubbed Harris the "tax queen." She wants to raise the corporate tax rate to 28% from 21%, as well as tax the unrealized capital gains of people worth more than \$100 million. She would use the revenue from that and other policies to sustain tax cuts for the middle class that are set to expire after 2025 as well as offer new tax breaks to parents and entrepreneurs. Many of her policies build on ideas initially proposed by President Joe Biden.

Trump claims her tax hikes would ultimately trickle down to the middle class.

"She's coming for your money," he told an audience on Monday. "She's coming for your pensions, and she's coming for your savings."

Harris has shown that two can play that game. She labeled his call for tariffs a "national sales tax," as it could increase the cost of coffee, clothes, electronics, autos and almost anything that gets imported or depends on imported parts.

Her campaign likes to cite an analysis that originated with Brendan Duke of the Center for American Progress that estimated a 20% universal tariff would cost a typical family almost \$4,000 a year. For taxpayers in the middle-income range, that sum would effectively increase their total federal taxes by 50%, according to calculations based on Treasury Department data.

Trump has long portrayed himself as someone who will slash regulations, but Harris said Wednesday that she would do likewise because "whether it's a new housing development, a new factory or a new bridge, projects take too long to go from concept to reality."

"China is not moving slowly," Harris said. She added that she would reform permitting and cut red tape because "patience may be a virtue, but not when it comes to job creation or America's competitiveness."

## Thousands are pouring into Syria, fleeing worsening conflict in Lebanon

By ABBY SEWELL and ALBERT AJI Associated Press

JDEIDET YABOUS, Syria (AP) — Families fleeing the escalating conflict in Lebanon poured into Syria in growing numbers on Wednesday, waiting for hours in heavy traffic to reach the relative safety of another war-torn country.

U.N. officials estimated that thousands of Lebanese and Syrian families had already made the journey. Those numbers are expected to grow as Israel targets southern and eastern Lebanon in an aerial bombardment that local officials say has killed more than 600 people this week, at least a quarter of them women and children. Israel says it is targeting Hezbollah fighters and weapons.

Lines of buses and cars extended for several kilometers (miles) from the Syria border beginning on Monday, and some families were seen making the journey on foot. Once in Syria, people waited hours more to be processed by overwhelmed border officials, and relief workers handed out food, water, mattresses and blankets.

"Many will have to spend the night outdoors waiting their turn," Rula Amin, a spokesperson for the U.N.'s refugee agency, said in a statement.

Amin said some of the people arriving from Lebanon had visible injuries suffered from recent attacks.

The cross-border flow was a striking reversal in fortunes given that Lebanon is still hosting more than one million Syrian refugees who fled the war in their country that began in 2011. That's when an initially peaceful anti-government uprising was met by a brutal government crackdown and spiraled into an ongo-

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ing civil war.

In the Syrian border town of Jdeidet Yabous, some families sat glumly on the side of the road when Associated Press journalists visited the area. Some used their bags as seats, waiting for taxis, buses or relatives to pick them up. Many said they had spent eight or nine hours in traffic just to get into Syria.

Before crossing the border, crowds packed into a government office to be processed by immigration officers and, in the case of Syrian citizens, to change \$100 to Syrian pounds before entering — a measure imposed in an attempt to prop up the local currency by bringing more dollars into the country. Due to the sudden spike in demand, the supply of Syrian pounds at the border ran short.

Some were returning refugees, like Emad al-Salim, who had fled Aleppo in 2014. He was living in the southern coastal city of Tyre when Monday's bombardment began. He gathered his wife and six children and fled again.

"There were houses destroyed in front of me as we were coming out," he said. "It took us three days to get here."

Nada Hamid al-Lajji returned with her family after seven years in Lebanon with her husband. They are from eastern Syria, but al-Lajji said she doesn't know if they will return there.

"Where am I going to go?" she said. "I don't even have a house anymore. I don't know where I will go."

Many Lebanese families were also fleeing. Mahmoud Ahmad Tawbeh from the village of Arnoun in the country's south had come with an extended family of 35 people, planning to stay in a rented house in a Damascus suburb.

"We left with difficulty, there were a lot of bombs dropping above our heads," he said. Five or six houses in the village were destroyed and several neighbors were killed, he said.

For many in Lebanon, particularly those living in the Bekaa Valley in the east, Syria appeared to be the quickest route to safety. Israeli strikes across the country this week have wounded more than 2,000.

Many of the Lebanese arriving at the border refused to speak to journalists or would not give their full names because of the sensitivity of the situation. One woman from the town of Harouf in southern Lebanon, who gave her family name, Matouk, said she had come with her brother's wife, who is Syrian, to stay with in-laws.

Several families near where they lived were killed, she said, and she was worried about her father and siblings who she had left behind.

While the war in Syria is ongoing, active fighting has long been frozen in much of the country. Lebanese citizens, who can cross the border without a visa, regularly visit Damascus. And renting an apartment is significantly cheaper in Syria than in Lebanon. Even before the latest escalation, some Lebanese had rented in Syria as a Plan B in case they needed to flee.

Apart from those who fled the war, many Syrians come to Lebanon for work or family reasons, and regularly cross the border.

However, many of those who came as refugees have been reluctant to return out of fear they could be arrested for real or perceived ties to the opposition to Syrian President Bashar Assad or forcibly conscripted to the army. If they leave Lebanon they could also lose their refugee status.

Earlier this week, Assad issued an amnesty for crimes committed before Sept. 22, including those who dodged compulsory military service.

He had issued similar amnesties over the past years, but they largely failed to convince refugees to return, as have efforts by Lebanese authorities to organize "voluntary return" trips.



## Fluoride in drinking water poses enough risk to merit new EPA action, judge says

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — A federal judge has ordered the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency to further regulate fluoride in drinking water because high levels could pose a risk to the intellectual development of children.

U.S. District Judge Edward Chen cautioned that it's not certain that the amount of fluoride typically added to water is causing lower IQ in kids, but he concluded that mounting research points to an unreasonable risk that it could be. He ordered the EPA to take steps to lower that risk, but didn't say what those measures should be.

It's the first time a federal judge has made a determination about the neurodevelopmental risks to children of the recommended U.S. water fluoride level, said Ashley Malin, a University of Florida researcher who has studied the effect of higher fluoride levels in pregnant women.

She called it "the most historic ruling in the U.S. fluoridation debate that we've ever seen."

The judge's ruling is another striking dissent to a practice that has been hailed as one of the greatest public health achievements of the last century. Fluoride strengthens teeth and reduces cavities by replacing minerals lost during normal wear and tear, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Last month, a federal agency determined "with moderate confidence" that there is a link between higher levels of fluoride exposure and lower IQ in kids. The National Toxicology Program based its conclusion on studies involving fluoride levels at about twice the recommended limit for drinking water.

The EPA — a defendant in the lawsuit — argued that it wasn't clear what impact fluoride exposure might have at lower levels. But the agency is required to make sure there is a margin between the hazard level and exposure level. And "if there is an insufficient margin, then the chemical poses a risk," Chen wrote in his 80-page ruling Tuesday.

"Simply put, the risk to health at exposure levels in United States drinking water is sufficiently high to trigger regulatory response by the EPA" under federal law, he wrote.

An EPA spokesperson, Jeff Landis, said the agency was reviewing the decision but offered no further comment.

In 1950, federal officials endorsed water fluoridation to prevent tooth decay, and they continued to promote it even after fluoride toothpaste brands hit the market several years later.

Fluoride can come from a number of sources, but drinking water is the main source for Americans, researchers say. Nearly two-thirds of the U.S. population currently gets fluoridated drinking water, according to CDC data.

Since 2015, federal health officials have recommended a fluoridation level of 0.7 milligrams per liter of water. For five decades before that, the recommended upper range was 1.2. The World Health Organization has set a safe limit for fluoride in drinking water of 1.5.

Separately, the EPA has a longstanding requirement that water systems cannot have more than 4 milligrams of fluoride per liter of water. That standard is designed to prevent skeletal fluorosis, a potentially crippling disorder which causes weaker bones, stiffness and pain.

But in the last two decades, studies have suggested a different problem: a link between fluoride and brain development. Researchers wondered about the impact on developing fetuses and very young children who might ingest water with baby formula. Studies in animals showed fluoride could impact neurochemistry cell function in brain regions responsible for learning, memory, executive function and behavior.

The court case, argued in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, started in 2017. The lead plaintiff was Food & Water Watch, a not-for-profit environmental advocacy organization. Chen paused the proceedings in 2020 to await the results of the National Toxicology Program report, but he heard lawyers' arguments about the case earlier this year.

"In our view, the only effective way to eliminate the risk from adding fluoride chemicals to water is to stop adding them," said Michael Connett, the plaintiffs' lead attorney, in an email Wednesday.

## **The Secret Service is investigating a report that an agent groped a Harris staff member**

By ZEKE MILLER, COLLEEN LONG and MICHAEL BALSAMO Associated Press  
PITTSBURGH (AP) — A U.S. Secret Service agent has been accused of groping and sexually harassing a member of Vice President Kamala Harris' official staff during a trip last week, according to three people familiar with the matter.

The Secret Service office of professional responsibility is investigating a misconduct allegation involving an employee, according to the law enforcement agency that is tasked with protecting the president, vice president, candidates and some members of Congress. "The Secret Service holds its personnel to the highest standards," according to the statement released Wednesday.

Harris' office said in a statement that "we have zero tolerance for sexual misconduct," and that the office takes "safety of staff seriously."

The agent was on a trip with Harris staff members last week in Wisconsin to scout possible locations for a visit from the Democratic presidential nominee when the group went out for dinner and drinks. The agent, who appeared to be drunk, is accused of groping the woman in the presence of others after they went back to the hotel, according to the people who spoke to The Associated Press on condition of anonymity to talk about an ongoing investigation.

The employee was taken off his detail and placed on administrative leave pending the results of the investigation, the Secret Service said.

The news comes as the agency is facing a mountain of criticism over two attempted assassinations of Republican nominee Donald Trump. On July 13, Trump suffered a graze wound to his ear when a shooter targeted him at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania. A second failed assassination attempt was made on Sept. 16 at Trump's golf club in West Palm Beach, Florida.

A scathing bipartisan congressional report out Wednesday on the first attempted assassination found that there was no clear chain of command among the Secret Service and other security agencies and no plan for coverage of the building where the shooter positioned himself on the roof to fire the shots in Butler. The shooter was killed by the Secret Service.

## **It's time to roll up sleeves for new COVID, flu shots**

By LAURAN NEERGAARD AP Medical Writer  
WASHINGTON (AP) — Fall means it's time for just about everybody to get up to date on their flu and COVID-19 vaccines — and a lot of older adults also need protection against another risky winter virus, RSV. Yes, you can get your flu and COVID-19 shots at the same time. Don't call them boosters — they're not just another dose of last year's protection. The coronavirus and influenza are escape artists that constantly mutate to evade your body's immune defenses, so both vaccines are reformulated annually to target newer strains.

"Right now is the best time" to get all the recommended fall vaccinations, said Dr. Mandy Cohen, director of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, as she got her flu shot Wednesday. She has an appointment for her COVID-19 shot, too. It's "the single most effective thing you can do to protect yourself, your family, your community."

While they're not perfect, vaccinations offer strong protection against a bad case of flu or COVID-19 — or dying from it.

"It may not prevent every infection but those infections are going to be less severe," said CDC's Dr. Demetre Daskalakis. "I would rather have my grandmother or my great-grandmother have a sniffle than have to go to the emergency room on Thanksgiving."

The challenge: Getting more Americans to roll up their sleeves. Last year, just 45% of adults got a flu vaccination and even fewer, 23%, got a COVID-19 shot. A survey released Wednesday by the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases shows an equally low number intend to this fall.

And the coronavirus still killed more Americans than flu last year.

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"Maybe we believe that it's not going to be me but let's not take a chance," said Dr. Michael Knight of George Washington University. "Why not get a vaccine that's going to help you reduce that risk?"

Who needs a fall COVID-19 or flu vaccination?

The CDC urges both an updated COVID-19 shot and yearly flu vaccine for everyone ages 6 months and older. If you recently had COVID-19, you can wait two or three months but still should get an updated vaccination because of the expected winter surge.

Both viruses can be especially dangerous to certain groups including older people and those with weak immune systems and lung or heart disease. Young children also are more vulnerable. The CDC counted 199 child deaths from flu last year.

Pregnancy also increases the chances of serious COVID-19 or flu – and vaccination guards mom plus ensures the newborn has some protection, too.

What's new about the COVID-19 shots?

Last fall's shots targeted a coronavirus strain that's no longer spreading while this year's are tailored to a new section of the coronavirus family tree. The Pfizer and Moderna shots are formulated against a virus subtype called KP.2 while the Novavax vaccine targets its parent strain, JN.1. Daskalakis said all should offer good cross protection to other subtypes now spreading.

The Pfizer and Moderna mRNA vaccines can be used by adults and children as young as 6 months. The Novavax shot is a more traditional protein vaccine combined with an immune booster, and open to anyone 12 and older.

Which flu vaccine to choose?

High-dose shots and one with a special immune booster are designed for people 65 and older, but if they can't find one easily they can choose a regular all-ages flu shot.

For the shot-averse, the nasal spray FluMist is available for ages 2 to 49 at pharmacies and clinics — although next year it's set to be available for use at home.

All flu vaccinations this year will guard against two Type A flu strains and one Type B strain. Another once-common form of Type B flu quit spreading a few years ago and was removed from the vaccine.

What about that other virus, RSV?

RSV, or respiratory syncytial virus, is a coldlike nuisance for most people but it, too, packs hospitals every winter and can be deadly for children under 5, the elderly and people with certain high-risk health problems.

The CDC recommends an RSV vaccination for everyone 75 and older, and for people 60 to 74 who are at increased risk. This is a one-time shot, not a yearly vaccination – but only 24% of seniors got it last year. It's also recommended late in pregnancy to protect babies born during the fall and winter.

And while "your arm may hurt and you may feel crummy for a day," it's also fine to get the RSV, flu and COVID-19 vaccines at the same time, Daskalakis said.

What will it cost?

The vaccines are supposed to be free under Medicare, Medicaid and most private insurance plans if people use an in-network provider.

About 1.5 million uninsured adults got free COVID-19 vaccinations through a federal program last year but that has ended. Instead, the CDC is providing \$62 million to health departments to help improve access -- and states and large cities are starting to roll out their plans.

Call your local health department to ask about options because in many areas, "availability of vaccine at lower or no cost is expected to trickle in over the next couple of weeks," advised Dr. Raynard Washington, who heads the Mecklenburg County, North Carolina, health department.

Check the government website, [vaccines.gov](https://www.vaccines.gov), for availability at local pharmacies.

## Putin lowers threshold of nuclear response as he issues new warnings to the West over Ukraine

MOSCOW (AP) — In a strong, new warning to the West, President Vladimir Putin said Wednesday that any nation's conventional attack on Russia that is supported by a nuclear power will be considered a joint attack on his country.

The threat, outlined in a revision of Moscow's nuclear doctrine, was clearly aimed at discouraging the West from allowing Ukraine to strike Russia with longer-range weapons and appears to significantly lower the threshold for the possible use of Russia's nuclear arsenal.

Speaking at a meeting of Russia's Security Council that considered changes in the doctrine, Putin announced that a revised version of the document states that an attack against his country by a nonnuclear power with the "participation or support of a nuclear power" will be seen as their "joint attack on the Russian Federation."

Putin didn't specify whether the modified document envisages a nuclear response to such an attack, but he emphasized that Russia could use nuclear weapons in response to a conventional attack posing a "critical threat to our sovereignty," a vague formulation that leaves broad room for interpretation.

Russia is making slow but steady gains in Ukraine as the conflict grinds through its third year, and the Kremlin is seeking to discourage stronger Western support for Kyiv.

The change in the doctrine follows Putin's warning to the U.S. and other NATO allies that allowing Ukraine to use Western-supplied longer-range weapons to hit Russian territory would mean that Russia and NATO are at war.

Since Putin sent troops into Ukraine in 2022, he and other Kremlin voices have frequently threatened the West with Russia's nuclear arsenal to discourage it from ramping up support for Kyiv.

The current doctrine says Moscow could use its nuclear arsenal "in response to the use of nuclear and other types of weapons of mass destruction against it and/or its allies, as well as in the event of aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons when the very existence of the state is in jeopardy."

Russia's hawks have been calling for toughening the doctrine for months, criticizing the current version as too vague and weak. They argue it has failed to deter the West from increasing aid to Ukraine and has created the impression that Moscow won't ever resort to nuclear weapons.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has said he will seek permission from his allies in the U.S. and Europe to use the longer-range weapons to strike deep inside Russian territory, another red line for some of Ukraine's supporters. The Biden administration has said it hasn't given Kyiv permission for strikes with U.S. weapons deep inside Russia.

Putin emphasized that the revised doctrine spells out conditions for using nuclear weapons in greater detail, noting they could be used in case of a massive air attack.

"Conditions for Russia's move to use nuclear weapons are clearly stated" in the revisions, he said.

"We will consider such a possibility when we receive reliable information about a massive launch of air and space attack assets and them crossing our state border," Putin added, citing "strategic and tactical aircraft, cruise missiles, drones, hypersonic and other flying vehicles."

The broad formulation appears to significantly broaden the triggers for possible nuclear weapons use, compared with the current version of the document, which states Russia could tap its atomic arsenal if its receives "reliable information is received about the launch of ballistic missiles targeting the territory of Russia or its allies."

Ukraine has repeatedly struck Russian territory with missiles and drones in response to Moscow's attacks.

The new phrasing holds the door open to a potential nuclear response to any aerial attack -- a deliberate ambiguity intended to make the West more reluctant to allow longer-range strikes.

"Regardless of whether you think this is a bluff or not, it's never good when a major nuclear power loosens the conditions for nuclear use in its declaratory policy," said Samuel Charap, senior political scientist at RAND, in a post on X.

Putin also said the revised doctrine envisages that Russia could use nuclear weapons in response to an aggression against its ally Belarus, adding that he has agreed on the issue with Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Lukashenko, who has ruled Belarus with an iron hand for more than 30 years, has relied on Russia's subsidies and support. He has let Russia to use his country's territory to send troops into Ukraine and allowed the Kremlin to deploy some of Russia's tactical nuclear weapons in Belarus.

## **A tale of crushing security lapses and missed chances to stop the man who shot Trump**

By COLLEEN LONG and CALVIN WOODWARD Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The acting director of the Secret Service was incensed at what had happened that July evening. "What I saw made me ashamed," Ronald Rowe Jr. said. "I cannot defend why that roof was not better secured."

The unguarded roof, easily within shooting distance of the rally stage, is just one of the myriad questions behind the worst Secret Service security failure in decades. The more that investigators unpack from that day, the more missed opportunities that could have prevented the attack are revealed.

As the United States grapples with a second attempt on Donald Trump's life, in Florida, there remains a reckoning to be done from the Pennsylvania shooting on July 13 that killed one man and wounded three — the ex-president among them.

The Secret Service is a well-funded, historically elite force with a mission to keep presidents and other higher-ups safe — whether they're out for a bicycle ride, attending a world summit, visiting a war zone or campaigning.

But at the farm show grounds, a young nursing home aide with a rifle he borrowed from his dad outmaneuvered authorities for more than 90 minutes before firing the shots that came millimeters from killing Trump. More than two months later, everyone still wants to know:

—When rallygoers reported a man skittering on the squat rooftop of a nearby building, why didn't anyone in law enforcement move faster?

—Why did the Secret Service exclude that building from its security perimeter, leaving it to local police, and why did the local force not station someone on the roof?

—Why could local law enforcement agencies not communicate in real time with Secret Service agents when they're supposed to be working together?

—Why did the Secret Service decline offers by local police to use their surveillance drone at the site? And why did Secret Service agents not deploy a system that would have told them an unauthorized drone was aloft — the gunman's — until it was too late?

One overarching question may never be answered. And in these poisonous times, with the November presidential election closing in and a second attempt on Trump's life just days in the past, it is urgent: What possessed 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks to try to kill the former president? The public is no closer to that answer than in the immediate aftermath.

This anatomy of an attempted assassination is based on an AP review of dozens of documents, text messages and video, a congressional report and a Secret Service report on the failures, plus interviews on the record and from law enforcement officials who spoke to AP on condition of anonymity to discuss investigations that are still getting going.

The Secret Service faces a reckoning

Rowe sat there under the bright lights, his mouth pressed into a thin line. His voice was thick with anger as senators laid into him and his agents — questioning how on Earth some guy was able to get on top of a nearby roof as the rally was going on and fire off eight rounds, grazing Trump's ear and ripping into three others, killing one of them.

Rowe's voice grew louder at the July 30 Senate hearing as he squared off with lawmakers who wanted

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him to fire somebody — anybody — who had been on the ground that day. It wasn't enough for them that the agency's chief, Kim Cheatle, had resigned a week earlier. But Rowe dug in.

"I will not rush to judgment," he said, snapping at a senator. "People will be held accountable, and I will do so with integrity."

He wasn't blaming anyone in particular, though he did throw some not-so-subtle shade at the Pennsylvania police officers who were supposed to be guarding the building complex in question.

But he also wasn't trying to play down his agency's epic failure as it became slowly clearer to local officers that Crooks wasn't just an oddball with a backpack. Local police did finger-pointing of their own, citing communications breakdowns that began when the face-to-face meeting the Secret Service said would happen with them before the event never did.

Secret Service agents in the line of duty have been equipped since the 1940s with various gadgets enabling them to communicate remotely in real time. Back when everyday people had to find a phone booth, these agents could be seen wearing wired earbuds or talking up their sleeves.

Yet when a man outside the perimeter of metal detectors and Secret Service scrutiny raised suspicions, then fears, then his rifle on the roof, the agency's local police backups could not get word directly to the agents closest to Trump or the federal snipers on other rooftops in time to hustle him off the stage or take down the gunman.

Last week, the Secret Service released a five-page document summarizing conclusions in a report not yet completed. Among the findings: The Secret Service did not give clear guidance to local law enforcement partners at the rally. It did not correct line-of-sight problems that left Trump open to sniper fire. And some of the agents on duty that day were complacent.

A bipartisan report from the Senate Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs Committee made public Wednesday was more blunt if not scathing. It found "USSS failures in planning, communications, security, and allocation of resources for the July 13, 2024, Butler rally were foreseeable, preventable, and directly related to the events resulting in the assassination attempt that day."

Before the shooting, everything felt typical

It was designed to be a typical Trump rally — outdoors at the Butler Farm Show grounds with big red barns, wide-open fields and bleacher seating.

Butler County, on the western edge of a presidential swing state, is a Trump stronghold. In a place where turnout hovers around an impressive 80%, Trump won with about 66% of the vote in both 2016 and 2020. The rural area north of Pittsburgh has notoriously bad cell service, which made police communications even worse in the crisis to come. The Secret Service did not bring a system to boost device signals in such places.

Three days after the rally was announced, Crooks registered to attend. He also searched online for "how far away was Oswald from Kennedy?"

Lee Harvey Oswald shot and killed President John F. Kennedy in Dallas on Nov. 22, 1963, while he was riding in an open convertible. Oswald concealed himself on the sixth floor of the Texas School Book Depository. The Warren Commission determined he was 265.3 feet from Kennedy when he fired the fatal shot.

Crooks would fire from about double that distance. But guns have evolved since then, and the AR-style weapon Crooks borrowed from his father shoots faster and more easily than anything Oswald had on him.

On July 7, Crooks made the trip from his Bethel Park home, just south of Pittsburgh, to the Butler Farm Show grounds, and was there for about 20 minutes. FBI investigators say he was casing the area. The day before the rally, he practiced shooting at a local sports club.

On July 13, he returned to the grounds and stayed for about 70 minutes before going home. At 1:30 p.m., his dad gave him the rifle, thinking his son was headed back to the club to practice shooting. Twenty-five minutes later Crooks was buying 50 rounds of ammunition.

He parked at a gas station lot about a third of a mile from the rally, dressed in camo shorts, a black belt and a gray T-shirt with the logo of a YouTube channel dedicated to firearms. He rode a bicycle to the grounds and carried a big backpack.

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Agents have cracked into his phone, searched his laptop and interviewed hundreds of people. Yet the FBI says his motive remains unknown.

Crooks was described by classmates at Bethel Park High School as smart but standoffish, often seen wearing headphones and sitting alone at lunch looking at his phone. Some said he was often mocked by other students for the clothes he wore, which included hunting outfits, and for wearing a mask even after the COVID-19 pandemic had subsided.

"He sat by himself, didn't talk to anyone, didn't even try to make conversation," said 17-year-old Liam Campbell, echoing the comments of classmates who remembered the shooter. "He was an odd kid," but nothing about him seemed dangerous, he added. "Just a normal person who seemed like he didn't like talking to people."

After graduating high school in 2022, Crooks went on to the Community College of Allegheny County, earning an associate's degree with honors in engineering science this past May. He also worked at a nursing home as a dietary aide.

Crooks had been registered as a Republican voter, according to state records. But there was also a \$15 donation to a progressive group recorded under "Thomas Crooks" in January 2021.

Authorities received many reports beforehand

There were roughly 155 law enforcement officers at the rally that day. That included a Secret Service counter-sniper team, a Butler County SWAT team and uniformed officers. Hundreds of Trump supporters gathered to hear him speak.

The FBI says that after Crooks turned up at the site on that sunny Saturday afternoon, he flew a drone for about 11 minutes up and around the area and was getting the view directly on the controller he used. The Secret Service did not deploy its drone-detection system until later in the afternoon. And the advance team that scouts the venue ahead of time requested additional technology before the rally, but those requests were denied.

The first reported sighting of Crooks was at 4:26 p.m., more than 1½ hours before Trump would begin speaking. A Beaver County sniper team member noticed Crooks at a picnic table, thought he was acting suspiciously, and alerted other local snipers who were posted inside the AGR building complex. "He knows you guys are up there," the sniper texted the others. "He's sitting to the direct right on a picnic table about 50 yards from the exit."

At 5:38 p.m., a Beaver County sniper, stationed inside the building where Crooks would later shoot from the roof, sent photos of Crooks to the local team's group chat. "I did see him with a rangefinder looking towards the stage. If you wanna notify SS snipers to look out. I lost sight of him." He also said there was a bike with a backpack nearby that wasn't seen earlier.

Secret Service sniper teams were posted on the roof closest to where Trump was to speak, but officials say the teams were never notified.

At 5:45 p.m., a local sniper recommended that the command post, where team leaders were stationed, be alerted about Crooks. There were two posts; the Secret Service agents were only in one.

"They're asking for a direction of travel," one local sniper says.

"Not sure," Beaver County SWAT sniper Gregory Nicol responded in a message at 6 p.m., about 11 minutes before Crooks would fire. "He was up against the building. If I had to guess toward the back. Away from the event."

"I assumed that there would be somebody coming out to — you know, to speak with this individual or, you know, find out what's going on," Nicol later told ABC News.

The AGR (American Glass Research) complex is a warren of buildings, and Crooks eventually got to the roof of the building closest to the rally site. Nicol was trying to shadow Crooks from within the buildings but lost sight of him.

Footage shows Crooks walking back to his car, parked near where the other local snipers were parked. There were improvised explosive devices inside the car, but no one knew.

Bystanders saw Crooks again shortly after. They took mobile phone video of him pulling himself up to

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the top of the roof and slithering into position. They called the cops. These rally-goers were on alert for what the authorities either hadn't noticed or hadn't treated with the urgency that might have made a difference. You could say security in this moment was crowdsourced.

By 6:08 p.m., law enforcement had eyes on Crooks again. A Secret Service counter sniper saw local officers running toward the building with their guns drawn, but he didn't think to alert Trump's protective detail to pull the GOP candidate from the stage.

Three minutes later, a local officer was hoisted up the squat roof by another officer, who saw Crooks with the rifle, laying down and pointing the weapon toward him. "He's armed," the officer radioed to his squad. "He's got a long gun."

That message did not make it to key Secret Service officials. The shots were fired 30 seconds later.

Trump changed — and didn't — after the attack

Days after the shooting, Trump spent more than 10 minutes of his speech to the Republican National Convention giving vivid detail of what happened to him on the "warm, beautiful day in the early evening in Butler Township in the great Commonwealth of Pennsylvania."

The crowd was rapt. Some in it would later don ear bandages like his in a show of support. Even some of Trump's fiercest critics conceded his turn on the stage in Butler had been masterful — raising his fist as blood trickled down his face, mouthing "fight" as he was hustled away.

That episode joins the history books on pages inhabited by Teddy Roosevelt, who was shot in the chest on his way to a campaign address in Milwaukee in 1912 and insisted on giving his 90-minute speech before going to the hospital — an audacious display of Bull Mooseness.

In another 90-minute speech in Milwaukee more than a century later, Trump told his convention "the assassin's bullet came within a quarter of an inch of taking my life." It was not an exaggeration, or at least not much of one.

Those who tuned in at the start of his speech saw a man trying, for once, to reach a wider audience than his MAGA millions. "The discord and division in our society must be healed," Trump said. "We must heal it quickly."

He proclaimed: "I am running to be president for all of America, not half of America, because there is no victory in winning for half of America."

That didn't last long. Most of the rest of his speech returned to standard operating procedure — the bombast, the falsehoods, the depictions of a United States rotting under Democrats.

President Joe Biden, who often cast Trump as a threat to democracy given his refusal to accept his 2020 election loss and his stoking of supporters who rampaged at the Capitol, asked Americans to turn the temperature down.

"Disagreement is inevitable in American democracy," Biden said from the Oval Office, but politics should never devolve into a "killing field."

"While we may disagree, we are not enemies," Biden went on.

The temperature has not cooled since. After the episode at the golf course, Trump and his allies now are trying to lay blame directly on Democratic rhetoric for making him a literal target.

In that case, officials said, the suspect did not get off any shots, never had Trump in his line of sight and fled from the scene after a Secret Service agent spotted and fired at him. He was later captured.

By those measures, it was a more successful security operation than in Butler. Yet the Secret Service, once again, has much to answer for. The man was able to lurk on the perimeter of Trump's property for nearly 12 hours, police said, evading detection as he lay in wait with a rifle, scope, video camera and food.

The investigation goes on

Investigators have done more than 1,000 interviews. They've fielded more than 2,000 tips. In addition to getting into Crooks' phone, they've searched his home and sent the explosive devices found in his car to a lab for testing.

Yet deputy FBI Director Paul Abbate says authorities have had to grapple with a "general absence of other information to date." That means no motive has been identified, no co-conspirators found. The



Secret Service shot and killed the gunman on the scene.

Law enforcement officers are trained to look for and assess suspicious-looking people. But they don't arrest everyone they deem suspicious; most are harmless. On the day of the rally, they were tracking other people as well.

Crooks' behavior didn't rise to the level of alarm at first. Secret Service officers only were told about a suspicious person the local authorities were worried about. The counter sniper who saw the officers running with guns drawn never make the connection to get Trump off the stage. In these moments, officers are listening for escalatory words like "threat" or "gun."

Such words came later, in the final seconds, but the message didn't land. There was no one radio frequency all the multi-agency officers could hop on. Instead, local officers had to radio the joint command center, where the Secret Service would relay messages to Trump's detail.

Even that failed, Rowe told lawmakers. "None of that information ever made it over our net."

Jason Woods, team leader for Beaver County's Emergency Services Unit and SWAT sniper section, told ABC News his people had no contact with the agents on Trump's security detail. "We were supposed to get a face-to-face briefing with the Secret Service members whenever they arrived, and that never happened," Woods said. "So I think that was probably a pivotal point, where I started thinking things were wrong because it never happened. We had no communication — not until after the shooting."

The Senate committee report is only preliminary and promises more details, but plainly states the massive Secret Service failures.

Congressional inquiries are bound to escalate in the hothouse of the presidential campaign and as law enforcement learns more. At the first one, Rowe, the acting Secret Service chief, implied that the local officers might bear some responsibility for the failure, too.

"Controlling high ground is something that's a must for us whenever we go into a location," Rowe said. "We made an assumption" that local teams were covering the AGR building.

"If they had just held their post and looked left," Rowe said, his voice trailing off. "Maybe."

He didn't press the point much. Later, he told a news conference: "This was a Secret Service failure."

## Ukraine urges world leaders not to seek 'lull' in Russia's war instead of true peace

By JENNIFER PELTZ undefined

UNITED NATIONS (AP) — Ukraine's president urged global leaders Wednesday to stand with his country and not seek "a lull" instead of a "real, just peace" more than two years into Russia's war.

At a time when he faces growing pressure from Western allies and some of his fellow Ukrainians to negotiate a cease-fire, President Volodymyr Zelenskyy told the U.N. General Assembly there's no alternative to the peace formula he presented two years ago. It seeks the expulsion of all Russian forces from Ukraine, accountability for war crimes, release of prisoners of war and deportees, nuclear safety, energy and food security and more.

"Any parallel or alternative attempts to seek peace are, in fact, efforts to achieve a lull instead of an end to the war," Zelenskyy said, urging nations to "put pressure on" Russia.

"Do not divide the world. Be united nations," he implored. "And that will bring us peace."

Russia hasn't yet had its turn to speak at the assembly's annual gathering of presidents, prime ministers, monarchs and other high officials. Low-level Russian diplomats occupied the country's seats in the huge assembly hall during Zelenskyy's speech.

President Vladimir Putin is not attending this year's high-level meetings at the General Assembly; Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov is expected to give the nation's address instead, on Saturday.

In Moscow on Wednesday, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov lambasted remarks that Zelenskyy made the day before, when the Ukrainian president told the U.N. Security Council that Russia needs to "be forced into peace." Dmitry Peskov called that position "a fatal mistake" and "a profound misconception,

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which, of course, will inevitably have consequences for the Kyiv regime.”

The war in Ukraine was center stage the last two times that world leaders convened for the U.N.’s signature annual meeting. But this year, the Israel-Hamas war in Gaza and the escalating developments along the Israeli-Lebanese border have gotten much of the spotlight.

Ukraine and Russia, with one of the world’s most potent armies, are locked in a grinding fight along a 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line.

The war began when Russia invaded in February 2022, claiming among other explanations that it was safeguarding Russian speakers in Ukraine.

During the fighting, Russia has gained momentum in Ukraine’s east. Ukraine, meanwhile, startled Russia by sending troops across the border in a daring incursion last month.

Ukrainian officials have rejected a Chinese and Brazilian peace plan, believing it would just buy Moscow time.

“When some propose alternatives, half-hearted settlement plans, so-called sets of principles, it not only ignores the interests and suffering of Ukrainians who are affected by the war the most, it not only ignores reality, but also gives Putin the political space to continue the war,” Zelenskyy told the assembly Wednesday.

To proponents of alternative plans, he chided: “You will not boost your power at Ukraine’s expense.”

Zelenskyy is expected to present a victory plan this week to U.S. President Joe Biden. While the plan haven’t been released, it’s aimed at laying out what Ukraine believes it needs — fast — from Western allies to win.

## **Israel has landed heavy blows on Hezbollah. The victory it seeks could prove elusive**

By JOSEPH KRAUSS Associated Press

It has been a devastating week for Hezbollah and the people of Lebanon.

Bombs hidden in the group’s pagers and walkie-talkies killed dozens of people and wounded thousands — many of them Hezbollah members. Israeli strikes on Beirut killed two of Hezbollah’s top commanders. And Israel has bombed what it said were 1,600 militant sites across large parts of Lebanon, killing hundreds of people and displacing thousands.

Israel says its objective is to secure its northern border so that tens of thousands of people who fled under Hezbollah fire nearly a year ago can return to their homes. But it’s far from clear that its recent operations — as tactically successful as they were — will bring that about.

“No one either in or out of the defense establishment has any clue as to how to translate these brilliant operational achievements into political benefit, into a real victory that will stop the war in the north,” columnist Nadav Eyal wrote in Israel’s Yediot Ahronot newspaper.

“As long as Hezbollah retains any firepower, the northern border will not be able to return to normal,” Eyal said.

Hezbollah began firing into Israel the day after Hamas’ Oct. 7 attack triggered the war in Gaza. Its stated aim was to pin down Israeli forces in the north to help its ally Hamas, which — like Hezbollah — is backed by Iran. The Lebanese militant group has said it would halt the attacks if there is a cease-fire in Gaza, which appears increasingly unlikely.

Hezbollah’s response to the past week’s escalation has seemed meager. The hundreds of rockets and drones it has fired into northern Israel — including areas much farther from the border than it hit previously — have caused few casualties and only scattered damage.

Early Wednesday, Hezbollah fired a longer-range missile that targeted Tel Aviv for the first time, marking a clear escalation. The Israeli military said it intercepted the projectile, and there were no reports of casualties or damage.

Experts say Hezbollah is holding more such weapons in reserve.

Israeli air power has its limits

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Monday's footage of Israeli strikes sending up plumes of dust and smoke seemed grimly familiar.

The American-led invasion of Iraq in 2003, the NATO campaign in Libya in 2011, and the U.S.-led war against the Islamic State group in 2014 all began with massive airstrikes lighting up the sky. In each case, the war dragged on for months or years, and ground forces played a crucial role.

Israel's war against Hamas in Gaza began with nearly three weeks of heavy airstrikes across the territory, followed by a full-scale ground invasion. Nearly a year later, Hamas is still putting up a fight and holding scores of hostages captured in the Oct. 7 attack on Israel.

With Hezbollah, Israel has so far adopted narrower objectives — not the disarmament or defeat of the Lebanese group, but a new arrangement in which militants retreat from the border and halt their attacks.

But even that may not be possible without a ground invasion.

There's also the risk of mission-creep, as America discovered after its wars in Iraq and Afghanistan ground on for years after the toppling of Saddam Hussein and the Taliban. NATO airstrikes initially aimed at preventing a feared massacre in Libya's Benghazi, morphed into a seven-month campaign of regime change from which Libya has yet to fully recover.

Hezbollah likely has capabilities we haven't seen yet

Israel's Defense Minister Yoav Gallant boasted that Monday's strikes alone had taken out tens of thousands of Hezbollah's rockets and missiles.

"This is the most difficult week for Hezbollah since its establishment," he added. "A blow has been dealt to the chain of command, to the terrorists themselves on different levels, to their shooting capabilities and to their morale."

The Israeli strikes on Monday and Tuesday killed at least 560 people, including some 150 women and children, according to Lebanese authorities. Hezbollah has not said how many of its fighters were killed.

Even if Gallant's assessment is correct, Hezbollah still has considerable resources.

"The rocket unit is still active, Hezbollah has absorbed the initial shock, and the battle has only begun," said Qassim Qassir, a former Hezbollah member who wrote a book about the group. "Hezbollah has only used a small part of its capabilities."

The militant group was established with the help of Iran following Israel's 1982 invasion and occupation of Lebanon, and it seeks Israel's destruction. It has survived countless battles with Israeli forces, replaced several slain commanders over the years and rearmed after a monthlong war in 2006.

Hezbollah claims to have some 100,000 fighters. Before the latest hostilities, it was believed to have some 150,000 rockets and missiles, including long-range projectiles capable of hitting anywhere inside Israel, and some precision-guided missiles.

Its more sophisticated weapons are likely being held in reserve as it seeks to avoid triggering an all-out war.

Sarit Zehavi, a former Israeli military intelligence analyst and founder of the Alma Research and Education Center, a think tank focused on the northern border, said Hezbollah has concealed its weapons in different parts of the country, including in areas close to Beirut where it has a strong presence.

"Hezbollah was building redundancy, so they spread their munitions and infrastructure all over, and that's why that many targets are being attacked, because it's everywhere," she said.

Hezbollah is far more advanced militarily than Hamas. Hezbollah also has a far larger area in which to operate, extensive supply lines linking it more directly to Iran, and networks of tunnels potentially even more extensive than those in Gaza.

In the event of a ground invasion, Hezbollah fighters could be joined by thousands from fellow Iran-backed groups from Iraq, Yemen and elsewhere in the region.

Neither side has good options

Israel says it has no immediate plans for a ground invasion but is prepared for one, and has sent thousands of battle-hardened forces from Gaza to the northern border. If the air campaign fails to bring Hezbollah to heel, Israeli leaders will be tempted to send them in.

Even if the goal is only to carve out a buffer zone to better secure the north, the risks are great.

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Most Israelis are insulated from the air war by distance and Israel's missile defense systems, but a ground invasion would mean more casualties and protracted fighting for soldiers and reservists already weary from a year of war in Gaza.

Hezbollah waged an 18-year-long insurgency against Israel the last time it occupied Lebanon, eventually forcing it to withdraw, and another prolonged occupation could be similarly costly.

Israel has already faced international outrage over the war in Gaza, including ongoing investigations by top world courts, and risks even greater isolation if it launches a similar campaign in Lebanon.

Hezbollah also has few good options.

Halting its rocket fire on the north in the face of Israeli pressure would likely be seen by its supporters — and its patron Iran — as a humiliating capitulation and an abandonment of the Palestinians.

Escalating its attacks, either by launching more sophisticated rockets or targeting major cities like Tel Aviv, could bring an even more crushing Israeli response or an all-out war that devastates Lebanon — with Hezbollah at risk of being blamed.

Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah already faces criticism from many Lebanese who accuse him of tying their country's fate to Iran and inviting war at a time of financial ruin.

That leaves it stuck with the status quo, in which Israel carries out increasingly heavy strikes while Hezbollah makes do with a relatively restrained response.

For Hezbollah, and the Lebanese people, that might make the coming weeks even worse.

## C'mon get happy, Joker is back (this time with Lady Gaga)

By LINDSEY BAHR AP Film Writer

VENICE, Italy (AP) — "Joker" is a hard act to follow. Todd Phillips' dark, Scorsese-inspired character study about the Batman villain made over a billion dollars at the box office, won Joaquin Phoenix his first Oscar, dominated the cultural discourse for months and created a new movie landmark.

It wasn't for everyone, but it got under people's skin.

Knowing that it was a fool's errand to try to do it again, Phillips and Phoenix pivoted, or rather, pirouetted into what would become "Joker: Folie à Deux." The dark and fantastical musical journey goes deeper into the mind of Arthur Fleck as he awaits trial for murder and falls in love with a fellow Arkham inmate, Lee, played by Lady Gaga. There is singing, dancing and mayhem.

If Phillips and Phoenix have learned anything over the years, it's that the scarier something is, the better. So once again they rebelled against expectations and went for broke with something that's already sharply divided critics.

As with the first, audiences will get to decide for themselves when it opens in theaters on Oct. 4.

"HOW ARE YOU GOING TO GET JOAQUIN PHOENIX TO DO A SEQUEL?"

Any comic book movie that makes a billion dollars is going to have the sequel talk. But with "Joker" it was never a given that it would go anywhere: Joaquin Phoenix doesn't do sequels. Yet it turned out, Phoenix wasn't quite done with Arthur Fleck yet either.

During the first, the actor wondered what this character would look like in different situations. He and the on-set photographer mocked up classic movie posters, like "One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest" and "Yentl" with the Joker in them and showed them to Phillips.

"Sometimes you're just done with something and other times you have an ongoing interest," Phoenix said. "There was just more to explore. ... I just felt like we weren't done."

So Phillips and his co-writer Scott Silver got to work on a new script, one that leaned into the music in Arthur Fleck's head. Then his dreary Arkham life turns to Technicolor when he meets and falls for Lee, a Joker superfan.

"Joaquin Phoenix is not going to do a line drive. He's not going to do something that's fan service," Phillips said. "He wanted to be as scared as he was with the first movie. So, we tried to make something that is as audacious and out there and hopefully people get it."

LADY GAGA FINDS LEE'S VOICE, AND LOSES HER OWN

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One decision that's already sparking debate is casting someone with a voice like Lady Gaga's and not using that instrument to its full power. Phillips, who was a producer on "A Star is Born," wanted someone who "brought music with them." But Lee isn't a singer.

"Singing is so second nature to me, and making music and performing on stage is so inside of me. Especially this music," Gaga said. "I worked extensively on untraining myself for this movie and throwing away as much as I could all the time to make sure I was never locking into what I do. I had to really kind of erase it all."

Phoenix, who wasn't quite sure what it would be like working with someone who has such a larger-than-life superstar persona, found Gaga to be refreshingly unpretentious and available. And as an actor, he admired her commitment to the character.

"Her power is in singing and singing a particular way," he said. "For her to sacrifice that through character, to do something that people would call a musical, but to not be performing it in the way that would sound best as a singer but to approach it from the character was a very difficult process. I was really impressed with her willingness to do that."

In addition to writing a "waltz that falls apart" for the film, Gaga is releasing a companion album, "Harlequin" on Friday with song titles including "Oh, When the Saints," "World on a String," "If My Friends Could See Me Now" and "That's Life."

## SORRY PUDDIN', THIS AIN'T MARGOT ROBBIE'S HARLEY QUINN

Much like Phoenix's Joker isn't Heath Ledger's or Jack Nicholson's, Gaga's Lee is not the Harley Quinn of "Birds of Prey."

"We're never going to outdo what Margot Robbie did," Phillips said. "You have to do something 180 degrees in the other direction."

Sure, Lee will still casually light something on fire to get some time alone with Joker, but the tumult is more internal. And Gaga threw herself into making Lee something new: A real person, grounded in a reality that came before her.

"I spent a lot of my time on developing her inner life (which) for me had a lot to do with her storm and what thing was always making her about to explode," Gaga said. "There's a particular kind of danger that she carries with her, but it's inside and it's kind of explosive."

## "DO YOU JUST WANT A BRUTE?"

Brendan Gleeson didn't have much hesitation about joining the ensemble. He'd worked with Phoenix before on "The Village" and was in awe of what he'd done on the first movie.

"He has an absolute relentless integrity and curiosity and drive," Gleeson said. "He won't just plough the same furrow for its own sake."

But he also didn't want to play the simple version of an Arkham prison guard.

"I said, look, do you just want a brute? Because I'm not sure I just want to do a brute," Gleeson said. "He wanted something more. We tried to find layers in this guy."

## CREATING MAYHEM

Anyone who has worked with Phoenix knows that he likes to keep things fresh. That may mean something as small as changing the location of a prop or as big as throwing out choreography that you've been rehearsing for months at the last minute.

"I think we both love mayhem and not just in movies but on the set," Phillips said. "It had to feel like anything can happen."

With the crew 95% the same as the first, everyone was ready to be flexible. Gaga, too, dove right in, suggesting that they sing live on camera.

"It changed the whole making of the film," Phillips said. "We were not only singing live, we were singing live differently every take."

## THAT'S ENTERTAINMENT?

Since Arthur killed Robert De Niro's talk show host Murray Franklin on live television in the first film, he's become a kind of icon and curiosity thanks in no small part to an oft referenced, but never seen, television movie that was made about him. Now, the trial is going to be televised as well.

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"Underneath it all, there's this idea of corruption and how everything is corrupt in the system, from the prison system to the judicial system to the idea of entertainment, quite frankly," Phillips said. "This idea that in the States at least, everything is entertainment. A court trial could be entertainment, and a presidential election can be entertainment. So, if that's true, what is entertainment?"

NO LONGER A COMPLETE WILD CARD

It's easier to be the insurgent, not the incumbent, Phillips said. Although a Joker film is never going to fly completely under the radar, the spotlight is undoubtedly more intense this time around.

"You do feel like you have a larger target on your back," Phillips said.

While much of the film was made on Warner Bros. soundstages in Los Angeles, the production did go back to New York to film again on the Bronx staircase (which now come up on Google Maps as the Joker Stairs) and outside a Manhattan courthouse. The production staged a massive protest scene, with Gaga, almost concurrently with the media frenzy around the Donald Trump hush money trial as if there weren't enough eyes on them already.

Some are also handwringing about the sequel's bigger budget and whether it can match the success of the first. But Phillips has learned to take it in stride.

"There's a different amount of pressure, but that just comes with making movies," he said. "You can't please everybody and you just kind of go for it."

Gleeson has an even sunnier outlook.

"It has kind of arthouse movie integrity on a blockbuster scale. It's great news for cinema, is the way I look on it," Gleeson said. "If these event movies can continue to have depth and can be so conflicting like this one, is we needn't worry about the future of cinema."

SO, IS IT A MUSICAL?

One thing Phillips didn't mean to do was ignite a discourse about what is and isn't a musical. He's just trying to manage expectations.

"People go, 'what do you mean it's not a musical?' And it is a musical. It has all the elements of a musical. But I guess what I mean by it is all the musicals I've seen leave me happy at the end for the most part, 'Umbrellas of Cherbourg' not being one of them. This has so much sadness in it that I just didn't want to be misleading to people."

## Today in History: September 26, Kennedy-Nixon presidential debate

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Sept. 26, the 270th day of 2024. There are 96 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Sept. 26, 1960, the first-ever debate between presidential nominees took place as Democrat John F. Kennedy and Republican Richard M. Nixon faced off before a national TV audience from Chicago.

Also on this date:

In 1777, British troops occupied Philadelphia during the American Revolution.

In 1954, the Japanese commercial ferry Toya Maru sank during a typhoon in the Tsugaru Strait, claiming more than 1,150 lives.

In 1986, William H. Rehnquist was sworn in as the 16th chief justice of the United States, while Antonin Scalia joined the Supreme Court as its 103rd member.

In 1990, the Motion Picture Association of America announced it had created a new rating, NC-17, to replace the X rating.

In 1991, four men and four women began a two-year stay inside a sealed-off structure in Oracle, Arizona, called Biosphere 2; they emerged from Biosphere 2 on this date in 1993.

In 2000, thousands of anti-globalization protesters clashed with police during demonstrations against an International Monetary Fund/World Bank summit in Prague.

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In 2005, Army Pfc. Lynndie England was convicted by a military jury in Fort Hood, Texas, on six of seven counts stemming from the Abu Ghraib prison abuse scandal.

In 2020, President Donald Trump nominated Judge Amy Coney Barrett, a former clerk to the late Justice Antonin Scalia, to the Supreme Court, to fill the seat left vacant by the death of Ruth Bader Ginsburg. (Barrett would be confirmed the following month.)

In 2022, the NASA spacecraft Dart rammed an asteroid at blistering speed in an unprecedented dress rehearsal for the day a killer rock menaces Earth.

Today's Birthdays: Country singer David Frizzell is 83. Television host Anne Robinson is 80. Singer Bryan Ferry is 79. Author Jane Smiley is 75. Singer-guitarist Cesar Rosas (Los Lobos) is 70. Actor Linda Hamilton is 68. Actor Melissa Sue Anderson is 62. Actor Jim Caviezel (kuh-VEE'-zuhl) is 56. Singer Shawn Stockman (Boyz II Men) is 52. Hockey Hall of Famers Daniel and Henrik Sedin are 44. Tennis player Serena Williams is 43. Singer-actor Christina Milian (MIHL'-ee-ahn) is 43. Actor Zoe Perry is 41.