

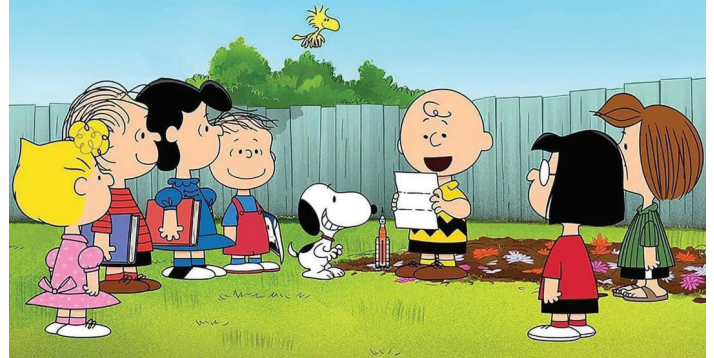
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Groton Daily Independent
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**DOES ANYONE REMEMBER
WHEN A HOLIDAY WAS
JUST A HOLIDAY
AND EVERYTHING
WAS CLOSED
AND SUNDAY WAS
A FAMILY DAY.**



Thursday, Oct. 3

Senior Menu: Macaroni and cheese with Kielbasa, Normandy blend, fruit, whole wheat bread.
School Breakfast: Biscuits.
School Lunch: Taco burgers, tri tators.
Parent/Teacher Conferences (1:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.)
Cross Country at Sisseton Golf Course, 4 p.m.
Emmanuel Lutheran: Nigeria Circle, 2 p.m. (elect officers)

Friday, Oct. 4

Senior Menu: Beef stew, carrots, Waldorf salad, sherbet, buttermilk biscuit.
No School - Faculty Inservice
Football hosts Aberdeen Roncalli, 7 p.m.

Saturday, Oct. 5

Boys Soccer at Dakota Valley.
Girls Soccer at Garrison, 11 a.m.
Common Cents Community Thrift Store, 10 a.m. to 1 p.m., 209 N Main
Pumpkin Fest, 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.
Gypsy Day Parade in Aberdeen
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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.

OpenAI Doubles Valuation

Leading artificial intelligence startup OpenAI raised \$6.6B in the largest venture capital round in history, doubling its market valuation to \$157B. Thrive Capital led the round with \$1B, alongside Microsoft, Nvidia, SoftBank, and more. The funds are contingent upon the company's transition from a nonprofit to a for-profit entity within two years. Investors were also asked to avoid funding major rivals in the industry.

The fundraising round comes amid departures of high-profile executives in recent months and continued tumult over the direction of the company. Launched in 2015 as a nonprofit focused on researching general artificial intelligence, the company has shifted toward designing and launching products since its groundbreaking release of ChatGPT in November 2022. Former employees have cited safety issues with OpenAI's newest AI models as a major source of division within the company.

ChatGPT claims over 250 million monthly users and 10 million paid subscribers at an annualized revenue of \$4B amid billions in losses.

Mouse Brain Aging

Researchers have identified a gene explaining why mouse brains slowly lose the ability to regenerate neurons as they age, according to a new study. The findings raise hopes for potential treatments that rejuvenate brain cells in humans and slow or even halt some forms of neurodegeneration.

As brains age, they may rely on specialized neural stem cells to produce new neurons—a process known as neurogenesis. Over time, these stem cells can become inactive, resulting in cognitive decline and preventing recovery from things like strokes. In the study, researchers used CRISPR gene editing to search through roughly 23,000 genes and probe their impact on brain aging in mice. The group zeroed in on one specific gene, *Slc2a4*, involved in the metabolism of glucose.

The findings suggest the presence of glucose around old neural stem cells may contribute to their inactivity and add to the body of research between metabolism and age-related cognitive decline.

Perry Doctor Pleads Guilty

A California doctor pleaded guilty yesterday to conspiracy to distribute ketamine to the late actor Matthew Perry. Dr. Mark Chavez is one of five people charged in the "Friends" actor's death.

Chavez acknowledges operating a now-defunct ketamine clinic, which he used to sell drug-infused lozenges to Perry's physician. The two allegedly conspired on how much to charge Perry for the hallucinogen, with others—including a friend of the actor and his personal assistant—also charged in the alleged scheme. Ketamine is a Schedule III controlled substance; the levels found in Perry's bloodstream at the time of his death were on par with those used on patients during general anesthesia.

There are an estimated 500-750 ketamine clinics throughout the US, wherein physicians administer the drug to treat depression, anxiety, and pain. Overdose deaths solely from ketamine are rare; most related deaths are attributed to the drug being combined with other substances.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

British rock band Pink Floyd sells entire music catalog and name and likeness rights to Sony Music for \$400M.

Vice presidential debate pulls in 43 million viewers, a 25% decline from the 2020 debate.

Michael Jordan-owned 23XI racing team sues NASCAR over alleged anticompetitive practices.

Olivia Rodrigo concert film tapped for Oct. 29 release on Netflix.

Live-action "Rugrats" film in the works at Paramount.

Science & Technology

Largest brain map ever created for any organism developed by scientists; fruit fly study reveals more than 54 million nerve cell connections, thousands of new types of neural cells.

Researchers discover the vast majority of thunderstorms emit high-energy gamma rays; study carried out with a retrofitted U2 spy plane, findings shed light on the formation of lightning.

Engineered fabric automatically adjusts to body temperature to passively cool or warm the body; material was inspired by color-changing squid skin.

Business & Markets

US stock markets rise slightly (S&P 500 +0.0%, Dow +0.1%, Nasdaq +0.1%) as investors appear wary amid widening Middle East conflict.

Tesla shares close down 3.5% after Q3 electric vehicle deliveries miss analyst expectations.

Humana shares close down nearly 12% to lowest level since 2020 after Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services downgraded health insurer's Medicare star ratings.

General Motors CEO Mary Barra, CVS Health CEO Karen Lynch, and Citigroup CEO Jane Fraser top Fortune's annual list of 100 most powerful women in business.

Politics & World Affairs

Judge unseals Special Counsel Jack Smith's filing in former President Donald Trump's federal 2020 election interference case; redacted brief details argument why Trump's actions shouldn't be immune from criminal charges.

President Joe Biden deploys up to 1,000 soldiers to aid in Hurricane Helene relief efforts as death toll surpasses 181 people.

Undetected World War II-era bomb explodes on the runway at Japan's Miyazaki Airport, causing 80 flight cancellations but no injuries; the 500-pound US-made bomb left a 23-foot-wide crater at the area once used as a kamikaze airfield.

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Groton Chamber of Commerce

October 2, 2024, 12pm City Hall

• Members present: Hannah Hochstetler, Lori Giedt, Katelyn Nehlich, Douglas Heinrich, Ashley Bentz, April Abeln, and Carol Kutter

• Minutes from the previous meeting were approved on a motion by Kutter and seconded by Heinrich. All members present voted aye.

• Treasurer's report was given. Dacotah Bank checking account balance is \$9,759.91 in addition to the \$10,000 CD. The bucks account balance is \$2,244.80. There is an outstanding check that was written to the Groton Lions Club. Abeln will check with the club. The report was approved by Abeln and seconded by Kutter. All members present voted aye.

• A thank you note was received from Ashlynn Sperry for her 2024 scholarship.

• Lori Giedt from Lori's Pharmacy was present to accept her \$50 Chamber Bucks for winning the Homecoming Storefront Decorating Contest.

• Giedt left the meeting at this time.

• Chamber shirt orders are open until November 22nd. 22 orders have been placed so far.

• New tumblers from Rustic Cuts have been received and are for sale at City Hall for \$36. Theresa offered a 15% order discount.

• During the meeting, dues notices were prepared and mailed thereafter. Hochstetler mentioned a Dakota Broadcasting offer of 50 free radio ads for new Chamber members. Information will be posted on Facebook.

• Main Street welcome banners are hung. No update was given for Hwy 12 banners.

• Motion by Nehlich and seconded by Abeln to donate a sweatshirt and tumbler to the Yelduz Shrine FEZtival of Trees event. The city will sponsor the tree and décor. All members present voted aye.

• Motion by Abeln and seconded by Nehlich to provide a Halloween prize basket at City Hall for Downtown Trick or Treat. Basket will include \$25 in Chamber Bucks as well as other seasonal items not to exceed \$25. All members present voted aye.

• Our 2025 window cling design was discussed. It was suggested the 57445-license plate design be used. Abeln will ask for a proof. 75 will be ordered once design is finalized.

• It was mentioned that 2 free ad spots on the Hwy 12 electronic sign will be given away to members that pay dues prior to February 1. All sign contracts will be up in 2026.

• Our donated services application for JVT internet for our Hwy 12 electronic sign was approved until October 2025. Application was completed by Abeln.

• Donations were discussed, none were given.

• New business welcomes were discussed. Welcomes may be planned with Five Star Marine Werx, A Touch Up, The Jungle and possibly Kate's Confections.

• Motion by Abeln and seconded by Heinrich to award three \$500 scholarships to GHS Seniors for the 2024-2025 school year. All members present voted aye. Scholarship meet and greet is scheduled for May 14, 2025, at 1:30pm in the GHS library.

• Next Meeting: November 6th at City Hall at 12:00pm

Upcoming events

• 10/03/2024 Enrich Groton SoDak Inc. Winter Gear Distribution 4-7pm Community Center

• 10/05/2024 Pumpkin Fest at the City Park 10am-3pm

• 10/10/2024 CCCTS 3-Day Sale at the Community Center 2-7pm

• 10/11/2024 CCCTS 3-Day Sale at the Community Center 9am-3pm

• 10/12/2024 CCCTS 3-Day Sale at the Community Center 9am-3pm

• 10/11/2024 Lake Region Marching Band Festival 10am

• 10/12/2024 Lori's Pharmacy Flu Shot Clinic 9am-1pm

• 10/18/2024 Lori's Pharmacy Flu Shot Clinic 8am-6pm

• 10/30/2024 Lori's Pharmacy Flu Shot Clinic 8am-6pm

• 10/31/2024 Downtown Trick or Treat 4-6pm

• 10/31/2024 United Methodist Church Trunk or Treat 5:30-7pm

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West Nile Virus Update -SD

SD WNV (as of October 2):

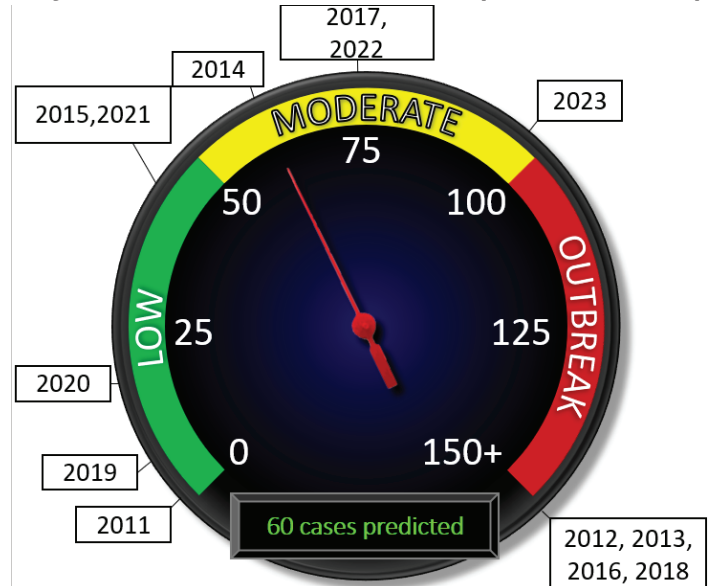
16 human cases (Beadle, Codington, Davison, Dewey, Gregory, Hutchinson, Kingsbury, Lawrence, Pennington, Potter, Roberts, Walworth, Ziebach)

4 human viremic blood donors (Brule, Dewey, Pennington, Sanborn)

9 counties with positive mosquito pools (Beadle, Brookings, Brown, Codington, Davison, Hughes, Lincoln, Minnehaha, Pennington)

US WNV (as of October 1): 880 cases (AL, AR, AZ, CA, CO, CT, DC, DE, FL, GA, IA, ID, IL, IN, KS, LA, MA, MD, ME, MI, MN, MO, MS, MT, NC, ND, NE, NH, NJ, NM, NV, NY, OH, OK, PA, RI, SC, SD, TN, TX, UT, VA, VT, WI, WV, WY)

WNV Prediction Model – Total Number of Cases Projected for 2024, South Dakota (as of October 2)



Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2024, South Dakota, Week Ending September 28, 2024 (MMWR Week 39)

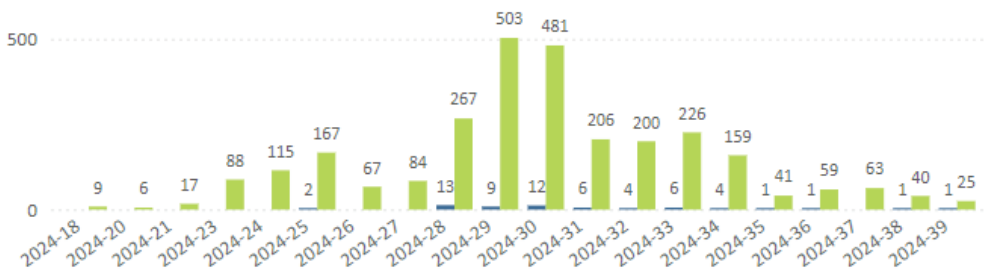
Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 77

Total mosquito pools tested: 2,908

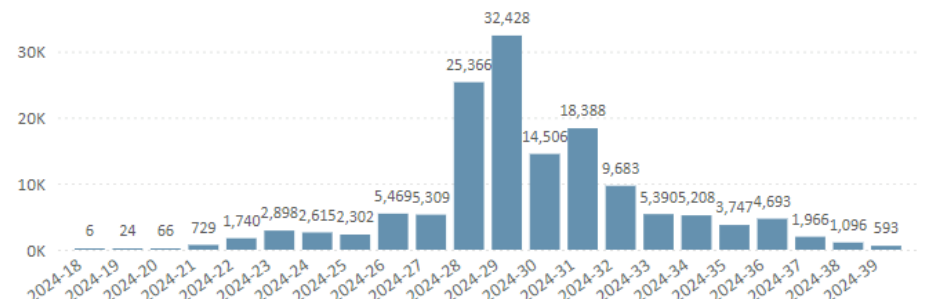
% positivity: 2.06%

Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week



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South Dakota lineman headed to aid Hurricane Helene recovery

PIERRE, S.D. – Linemen from five of South Dakota's rural electric cooperatives left for South Carolina Wednesday to help restore power along Hurricane Helene's path of destruction.

The 18 linemen – eight from Sioux Valley Energy, four from East River Electric Power Cooperative, two from Oahe Electric Cooperative, two from Bon Homme Yankton Electric Association and two from West River Electric Association – will work alongside Blue Ridge Electric Cooperative crews near Pickens to get members' power back online.

The storm, which made landfall last week as a Category 4 hurricane with 140-plus mph winds, ripped through the Southeastern U.S., with high winds and falling trees causing catastrophic damage to power distribution lines. After the storm, Blue Ridge Electric reported over 450 downed utility poles, leaving 90% of its service area, or 64,000 meters, without power.

When Blue Ridge Electric sent out a call for help, South Dakota's cooperatives answered.

"Mutual aid is one of our main principles in the co-op family," said Mark Patterson, Manager of Loss Control Services at South Dakota Rural Electric Association. "When our sister co-ops are in trouble, we're there to assist, and we're sending guys and equipment 1,200-plus miles to get there."

The convoy includes bucket trucks, skid steers, an ATV, and other equipment crews will need to make repairs in the swampy and mountainous terrain.

East River Electric's transmission maintenance superintendent, Wade Bialas, who is coordinating the relief effort, told linemen to expect to stay in tents, work long days, and to prepare for less-than-ideal conditions. The volunteering linemen are prepared to stay in South Carolina between two and four weeks. Despite the challenges, Bialas says the linemen who volunteered are excited to have the opportunity to do some good and help people in the wake of the disaster.

"I have 34 linemen that report under me, and I guarantee you all 34 would have stepped up to go," Bialas said. "Everybody from the Midwest has that willingness to step up and help out any way they can."

One of those linemen stepping up is Zach Hansen from West River Electric, who says going with the crew was an easy decision.

"It's just the co-op way," he said. "There are people in need down there who lost their houses, lost their lives, and this is something we know we can do to help. It's kind of a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity."

SDREA General Manager Steve Barnett extends his best wishes to Hansen and his fellow linemen as they prepare to face the challenges of the coming days.

"Their unwavering dedication and service are an amazing testament of cooperation among cooperatives," Barnett said. "I am praying for their success and safety in the days ahead."

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Chamber Homecoming

Storefront Decorating Contest

Sixteen businesses participating in the Chamber's Homecoming Storefront Decorating Contest! The top 3 businesses were Lori's Pharmacy, Groton Community Transit, and Base Kamp Lodge. Lori's Pharmacy won Groton Chamber Bucks for receiving the most Facebook likes! Owner, Lori Giedt was present at the October Groton Chamber meeting to accept her prize from President Ashley Bentz. Lori is planning a fun lunch for her employees! (Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Lori's Pharmacy



Base Kamp Lodge



Groton Community Transit

McCook County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: SD Highway 42 and 451st Avenue, four miles north of Monroe, SD
When: 6:07 p.m., Thursday, September 19, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2022 GMC Yukon
Driver 1: 72-year-old male from Parkston, SD, minor injuries
Seatbelt Use: No
Passenger 1a: 77-year-old female from Parkston, SD, minor injuries
Seatbelt Use: Yes
Passenger 1b: 43-year-old female from Parkston, SD, minor injuries
Seatbelt Use: Yes
Passenger 1c: 51-year-old female from Parkston, SD, minor injuries
Seatbelt Use: Yes

Vehicle 2: 2002 Ford Ranger
Driver 2: 61-year-old male from Lennox, SD, fatal injuries
Seatbelt Use: No
Passenger 2: 58-year-old female from Lennox, SD, serious, non-life-threatening injuries
Seatbelt Use: Yes

McCook County, S.D.- A Lennox, SD man died yesterday from injuries sustained in a September 19 crash in McCook County.

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

Preliminary crash information indicates the driver of a 2022 GMC Yukon was traveling westbound on SD Highway 42 near the intersection of 451st Avenue. The driver of a 2002 Ford Ranger was southbound on 451st Avenue and stopped at a stop sign at the intersection with SD 42. Upon entering the intersection, the vehicles collided.

The driver and three passengers in the Yukon all sustained minor injuries. The driver of the Ranger sustained life-threatening injuries, and his passenger, serious, non-life-threatening injuries. The driver of the Ranger passed away from his injuries October 1.

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 librarians earn accreditation

PIERRE, S.D. – The South Dakota State Library awarded certification to 38 librarians from 27 libraries at the annual South Dakota Library Association conference on Sept. 26 in Aberdeen, S.D. The voluntary certification program recognizes library directors and staff who have met certain certification standards.

The program's goals are to encourage library workers to develop and sustain skills through continuing education to provide better services to communities. Through this program, the State Library acknowledges public and academic library directors and staff who update their knowledge and skills on a continuing basis.

Congratulations to the following librarians:

Tammy Alexander, Hill City Public Library;
Sherry Bauman, Elkton Community Library;
Stephanie Bents, Siouxland Libraries;
Andrew Buller, Lennox Community Library;
Misti Burns, Tripp County Library Grossenburg Memorial;
Cheyenne Chontos, Harrisburg Community Library;
Sarah Christiansen, Custer County Library;
Taylor Cline, Karl E. Mundt Library, Dakota State University;
Holly Demery, Faulk County Library;
Linda Dobrovolny, Yankton Community Library;
Teri Ewalt, Webster Public Library;
JoAnne Freitag, South Dakota State Library;
Nita Gill, Brookings Public Library;
Jo Helland, Harrisburg Community Library;
Arlene Hicks, Jackson County Library;
Melissa Hutmacher, Cozard Memorial Library;
Danita Jordan, Yankton Community Library;
Cindy Jungers, Grant County Library;
Stephanie Kaitfors, Grace Balloch Memorial Library;
Heather Lee, Hot Springs Public Library;
Lisa Martin, Madison Public Library;
Rachelle McPhillips, Karl E. Mundt Library, Dakota State University;
Brittany Moeller, Dell Rapids Carnegie Library;
Shayna Monnens, Grace Bolloch Memorial Library;
Elizabeth Nedved, Yankton Community Library;
Kelly O'Dea, Yankton Community Library;
Sarah Overvaag, Watertown Regional Library;
Jean Patrick, Mitchell Public Library;
Cassie Pietz, Yankton Community Library;
Barbara Robinson, Grant Community Library;
Cassandra Rodgers, Dells Rapids Carnegie Library;
Lydia Schnaible, Bowdle Public Library;
Nancy Swenson, Brookings Public Library;
Barbara Vander Vorst, Potter County Library;
Lyle Weekly, Parkston Public Library;
Liane Welte, North Sioux City Community Library;
Tammy Wollschlager, Grant County Library; and
Tracey Zylstra, Canton Public Library.

Ten South Dakota public libraries awarded accreditation

PIERRE, S.D. – Ten South Dakota public libraries received accreditation awards at the South Dakota Library Association conference on Sept. 26 in Aberdeen, S.D. Accredited libraries demonstrate that they meet important benchmarks for providing high quality library services to their communities. Public libraries are accredited at one of three levels: Essential, Enhanced, or Exemplary. The accreditation process is a voluntary one.

Accredited libraries must meet the South Dakota Public Library Standards in the areas of governance, administration, access, collections and resources, funding, staffing, technology, and public relations.

The following libraries were awarded accreditation:

Cozard Memorial Library (Chamberlain) – Essential;

Dell Rapids Carnegie Library – Essential;

Grant County Library – Essential;

Gregory Public Library – Essential;

Harrisburg Community Library – Essential;

Hill City Public Library – Exemplary;

Hot Springs Public Library – Essential;

Lennox Community Library – Enhanced;

Potter County Free Library – Enhanced; and

Watertown Regional Library – Exemplary.

“By participating in this voluntary program, the staff and trustees of these libraries prove their commitment to quality library services,” said State Librarian George Seamon. “I invite all who live in these communities to go to your library and experience what they have to offer.”

Accreditation awards are valid for three years. A complete list of all currently accredited libraries is available on the South Dakota State Library’s [website](#).

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Groton Senior Citizens

September 9 Groton Senior met for a meeting and cards. Ten members were present. Vice president Ruby Donovan opened with allegiance to the flag. Minutes and treasure were read and accepted. Cards were played the winners of the games. Pinochle- David Kliensassor and Bev Sombke., Whist- Tony Goldade, Canasta - Eunice McColister. Door prizes David Kliensassor, Ruby Donovan, Bev Sombke. Lunch was served by June Shilhank.

September 17, Senior met to play cards. Eleven members were present. David Kliensassor picked up our president, Sarge Liknes at the Nursing home. Happy Birthday was sung to him when he came in. They played cards. After cards we had some ice cream and cake made by Bev Sombke.

September 14 Groton Seniors met for their pot luck dinner. Thirteen members were present. After dinner we played cards. Flag pledge and table prayers were said before dinner. Bingo was played before cards. Pat Larson won Blackout . After Cards were played we had some ice cream. Door prizes Bev Sombke, Ella Johnson, Elda Stange.

- Elda Stange, secretary

Letter to the Editor

Public Power Week

We all know the benefits of shopping locally – it keeps money in the local economy, which helps support local jobs, services and community development.

Did you know these same benefits apply to buying electricity locally?

If you live in the city of Groton, you are served by a community-owned, customer-focused, locally controlled public power utility committed to ensuring reliable, affordable electric service to the community.

Public power utilities are supported by customer revenues which pay for maintenance and reinvestments in infrastructure needs. They also create local jobs. Decisions are made locally, by elected officials at open meetings where the public has the opportunity to provide feedback.

Public power utilities make decisions with the long-term health and prosperity of the community in mind. As the city's wholesale power supplier, Heartland Energy works hand-in-hand with city officials to provide economic development and energy efficiency incentives to help your community thrive.

Each year, during the first week of October, we celebrate Public Power Week, a time to recognize the many benefits that come with living in a public power community. We also celebrate the hard-working individuals in Groton ensuring you have reliable electricity day in and day out.

From small towns to big cities, over 2,000 public power utilities across the country operate under the same model: local people working together to meet local needs.

Russell Olson, CEO
Heartland Energy

Medical Assisting Program Approved for Build Dakota Scholarship

Scholarship Application Opens Jan. 1, 2025

SIOUX FALLS, SD (10/02/2024) The Medical Assisting diploma program has been approved for the full-ride Build Dakota Scholarship at Southeast Technical College. The Build Dakota Scholarship covers 100% of a recipient's tuition, fees, books and uniforms and is available for 31 of STC's most in-demand careers.

"Our partners in healthcare across the region are constantly in need of medical assistants, and I think STC's 100% job placement rate for this program is indicative of that," said Cory Clasemann, president, STC. "With the option for students to potentially earn this diploma debt-free, the return on investment for a medical assisting diploma is better than ever."

The median salary for medical assistants in the Sioux Falls area is \$51,500.

In exchange for scholarship funds, Build Dakota scholars must commit to working in South Dakota for three years following graduation. For the 2024-25 academic year, Southeast Tech awarded 164 Build Dakota Scholarships, all of which were sponsored by industry.

"Our industry partners have been crucial in the success of the Build Dakota Scholarship at Southeast Tech," said Kelli Rogotzke, Build Dakota Coordinator, STC. "We are thrilled to be working with more sponsors, awarding more students, and filling more critically needed positions in our region."

When a company agrees to become an industry sponsor, they interview and select their scholars and agree to finance half of the scholarship cost. In turn, companies get to hire the scholars they sponsor after the student has earned their credential. To qualify for a Build Dakota Scholarship in the Medical Assisting program, students must have an industry sponsor.

Brittany Armstrong, a 2023 alumna of STC's Medical Assistant program, received a scholarship through STC. Although her scholarship was not a full-ride, she said removing the financial burden allowed her to focus on her studies.

"My scholarship helped me financially and covered my tuition, books and uniform. Because of my scholarship, I could focus more on school and not worry about having enough money to pay for the next semester," Armstrong said.

The scholarship window for the 2025-26 academic year will open Jan. 1, 2025, through March 31, 2025. Learn more at www.southeasttech.edu/scholarships.

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Picking pumpkins for the Groton Pumpkin Fest



The first trailer of pumpkins gets loaded. Pictured are Todd Anderson, Karen Debrine, Harley the dog, Val Baker, Carson Zeck, Gail Zeck, Cody Lindgren, Dylan McGannon and Evan Jacobson. (Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Dylan McGannon, Karen Debrine, Hudson McGannon, Cody Lindgren, and Evan Jacobson all work together to fill trailers with pumpkins for Groton's 9th Annual Pumpkin Fest at the Zeck Farm Tuesday night. (Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Father/Son Combo- Travis & Hudson McGannon work together at the Zeck Farm. The McGannon family has always been a part of Pumpkin Fest. In fact, Travis's father, Dave McGannon was 1 of the original Pumpkineers!

(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)

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Picking pumpkins for the Groton Pumpkin Fest



The first trailer of pumpkins gets loaded. Pictured are Todd Anderson, Karen Debrine, Harley the dog, Val Baker, Carson Zeck, Gail Zeck, Cody Lindgren, Dylan McGannon and Evan Jacobson. (Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Dylan McGannon, Karen Debrine, Hudson McGannon, Cody Lindgren, and Evan Jacobson all work together to fill trailers with pumpkins for Groton's 9th Annual Pumpkin Fest at the Zeck Farm Tuesday night. (Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



Father/Son Combo- Travis & Hudson McGannon work together at the Zeck Farm. The McGannon family has always been a part of Pumpkin Fest. In fact, Travis's father, Dave McGannon was 1 of the original Pumpkineers!

(Courtesy Photo April Abeln)

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John and Gail Zeck donated many pumpkins to this year's event. Pumpkin Fest is so grateful for their contribution and their time spent gardening! (Courtesy Photo April Abel)



Pumkineers loaded 3 trailers full of pumpkins from the Zeck farm to be placed on the Steve Herron Memorial Pumpkin Patch for Saturday's event. (Courtesy Photo April Abel)



Quinton Flores, Hudson McGannon and Jessie Zeck work on loading the front of the trailer as Todd Anderson hands them another pumpkin. In the background, Val Baker and Jaymie Overacker picked more to load. (Courtesy Photo April Abel)



The last of the 3 trailers gets loaded. Pictured here are Cody Lindgren, Val Baker, Joe Foertsch, Carson Zeck, Quinton Flores, and Dylan McGannon. Behind Dylan is Grady Zeck. Grady and Carson are grandsons of the Steve Herron Memorial Pumpkin Patch for John and Gail Zeck. Jessie, who also volunteered again this year, is the boys' mom and Zeck's daughter-in-law. (Courtesy Photo April Abel)

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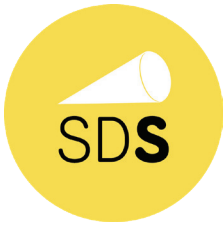
Pumpkiners admired Zeck's yard which was filled with beautiful fall decorations.

Pictured: Front Row- Dog helper, Harley Zeck

Middle Row- Travis McGannon, Topper Tastad, April Abeln, Jaymie Overacker, Cody Lindgren

Back Row- Todd Anderson, Joe Foertsch, Gail Zeck, Val Baker

Other Pumpkiners not pictured included: Karen Debrine, Quinton Flores, Jessie Zeck, Grady Zeck, Carson Zeck, Evan Jacobson, Hudson McGannon, Marc Hanson and Dylan McGannon. (Courtesy Photo April Abeln)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

Lawmaker panel set to back app store and device-based age verification for minors

Committee aims to force app stores, device makers to 'age-gate' online content

BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 2, 2024 7:35 PM

Companies that run app stores or make mobile phones and tablets could be required to verify the age of their users in South Dakota under the terms of legislative proposals presented Wednesday in Pierre.

Lawmakers with the Study Committee on Artificial Intelligence and Regulation of Internet Access by Minors voted unanimously to ask the state Legislative Research Council to draft the two "age gating" bills for presentation during the 2025 legislative session, which starts in January.

Committee members heard testimony for and against the age verification strategy during the seven-hour hearing. A representative from Facebook parent company Meta and online safety advocates were among those to support the ideas; trade group representatives for app developers and other tech companies came out against them.

No state has passed laws for app- or device-based age verification, but Meta is among the players to have signaled support for the idea, and U.S. Rep. John James, R-Michigan, has introduced a bill on app-based verification in Congress.

"This is a bipartisan idea, a common sense idea," said John Schweppe, policy director for the Virginia-based American Principles Project, which he described as "a pro-family conservative group. "It's been something that folks have frankly agreed on for a long time, that we should be able to protect kids from harmful material online."

Schweppe pointed to the passage of age verification laws in 19 states that put the burden for verification on websites or social media companies. The South Dakota House of Representatives passed a similar bill this year, but it was killed in a Senate committee.

Other states' bills have faced legal challenges from tech companies, which argue they violate the First Amendment rights of adults. One such law out of Texas currently awaits a hearing from the U.S. Supreme Court.

Proposals pitched as 'one and done' age verification

App-based age verification would require app stores run by companies like Apple or Google to offer parental control features, many of which are already available. App stores would be required to take "commercially reasonable and technically feasible steps" to determine or estimate a user's age and to require those younger than 16 to get a parent's permission before downloading apps to mobile devices.

The law would require app stores to send "a digital signal" to websites, applications or online services to say if a person accessing them is younger than 13 years of age, between 13 and 16, between 16 and 18, or older than 18.

Companies that develop apps, meanwhile, would be required to use that information to "provide readily available features" that would allow parents to limit their child's time on the app, see who their "friends" are on social media apps, to see who their children are messaging with and who their children have blocked.

The device-based age verification proposal would include the same requirements for app stores, but would also require device-makers to try and determine a user's age and send digital signals.

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Some social media apps already offer parental control features similar to those that would be required under such a proposal. Meta recently rolled out a series of updates to Instagram meant to offer more control to parents and more restrictive experiences for teen accounts.

Nicole Lopez, who oversees youth safety policy for Meta, appeared in person at the South Dakota Capitol building Wednesday to outline some of those features and pledge its support for the app-based age verification proposal.

"While Meta has a robust, multi-layered approach to determining one's age, we are only one part of the online ecosystem," Lopez said. "The reality is kids are not only getting smartphones at increasingly younger ages, but they hop from app to app to app to app."

One study from the University of Michigan, Lopez said, found that teens access an average of 40 apps a week. An app-based age control system "will not only make it easier on parents, but it will empower them when it comes to overseeing their teens' experiences online."

Joel Thayer, president of the bipartisan Digital Progress Institute, said an app store-based system could be the simplest way to add guardrails against the ills of social media.

"The evidence is staggering," Thayer said, that "social media is harmful to children. He cited a recent call for a warning label on social media from the U.S. surgeon general and a host of statistics tying depression, body image issues and spikes in suicidal thoughts by teens to spending five or more hours a day on social media.

"The good news is that states like yours can take action," Thayer said.

An app store-based system with digital signals "presents a one-and-done solution for apps.

"You only prove it to the app store once," he said.

Opponents: Free speech concerns, unintended consequences

Kristian Stout of the Portland, Oregon-based nonprofit International Center for Law and Economics testified against the proposal. App store data on user ages can be unreliable, he said, and forcing companies to expend resources to create digital signals could stifle innovation in smaller companies.

Stout also talked through a few of the ways users can bypass digital signals. Users can switch their mobile browser to desktop mode, for example, "which makes a website think you're not on a mobile device," thereby preventing mobile device signals – and their associated age-gating content restrictions – from being sent when a user tries to access adult content from an app like Reddit.

"Smart kids know how to do this," Stout said. "If I know how to do it and I'm 47, my 16-year-old son definitely knows how to do this.

Stout was also among the witnesses to encourage lawmakers to consider an approach that would place a premium on educating parents and children about online safety and the existing tools to track youth behavior.

Justin Hill of NetChoice, a tech company trade association, told lawmakers that it's unnecessary to pass laws that might fail a First Amendment test when so many options already exist for parents.

"The devices already do all the things that were said today," Hill said.

Hill's organization also submitted written testimony opposing app-based age verification, as did the Computer and Communications Industry Association in a letter submitted to the Legislature.

That organization's policy director, Khara Boender, testified that digital literacy is key. She also talked about the bills' assumptions regarding traditional family structures in a country where not all children live with their parents, and how the device-based proposal raises questions about how the law would handle devices that aren't purchased new.

"When a cousin or sibling graduates from college and they get a new phone for a graduation gift, they may be transferring that phone down to a younger sibling, where we need to actually ensure that the protections and device settings that currently exist are turned on correctly," Boender said.

Two proposals garner committee support

Committee members had four versions of the age verification bills to review Wednesday. One focused on app store-based age verification, another on app store- and device-based verification. Each of those would level civil and criminal penalties against non-compliant companies.

Another version of the app store-based proposal only applied civil penalties.

Yet another proposal would revive the 2024 bill that would have required website-based age verification to access adult content. That bill was sponsored by Rep. Bethany Soye, R-Sioux Falls, who is also a committee member. On Wednesday, she voiced concerns that app store-based age-gating would fail to address the issue of minors accessing pornography on web browsers. Others testified along those same lines, arguing that South Dakota's failure to advance that bill was a stain on its reputation as a state that cares about kids.

"I think we need to stop talking about it and start being about it," said Karen McNeal, an independent state Senate candidate from Rapid City.

The committee voted unanimously to send the first two proposals — containing civil and criminal penalties — to the Legislative Research Council for drafting. They also voted to send a bill that would define artificial intelligence under state law to the council.

Committee vice-chairman, Republican Rep. Mike Weisgram of Fort Pierre, said the endorsements wouldn't prevent individual lawmakers from sponsoring the remaining proposals.

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.

State board considers boosting James River pumping rights as yearly flow rises 300%

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 2, 2024 5:18 PM

A state board is reviewing a draft plan to increase water pumping rights on the James River, which has experienced a nearly 300% increase in its annual flow since the late 1990s.

The state Water Management Board discussed a draft of the proposal during a remote conference meeting on Wednesday.

"Climate is the likely dominant force causing the increase in the streamflow," said Brittan Hullinger, a state natural resources engineer. "There have been increases in mean precipitation in every South Dakota county the James River runs through."

She said those precipitation increases range from 8% to 17% when comparing data from 1901 to 1960 with data from 1991 to 2023. The region has multi-decade fluctuations between wet and dry periods, so "this may only be one wet period within a larger cycle, which goes to say the increased streamflow may not continue into the future."

Nevertheless, Hullinger said the state Department of Agriculture and Natural Resources recommends board approval of additional water rights beyond the maximum total of 300 cubic feet per second for all appropriations, established in 1965. The draft does not suggest a new cap on water rights, but recommends the current one should be increased.

The James River originates in North Dakota and flows slowly through eastern South Dakota across mostly flat land to the Missouri River.

There are currently 116 water rights or permits and two future-use permits on the river in South Dakota, appropriating or reserving 298.92 cubic feet per second of the 300 cfs limit. Demand for more agricultural water rights and the increase in mean annual river streamflow prompted the state's Water Rights Program to reassess its James River management plan.

"Is this from global warming?" asked Board Chairman James Hutmacher.

"Generally, yes, but how much of it is human-caused is unknown," Hullinger replied.

Other streams in eastern South Dakota are also experiencing higher annual streamflow, prompting concern among experts who point to climate change and land-use alterations as contributing factors to more severe flooding.

Some researchers attribute the surge to higher precipitation, urban development that sends rainfall running across concrete and asphalt into streams, expanding tile drainage systems under farmland that drain excess moisture into local creeks and rivers, and the conversion of grassland to cropland, which causes higher runoff.

"However, several studies that have associated land-use changes with higher streamflows had flawed methodology and additional analysis has shown that increased precipitation is the main driver of increased streamflows," the draft report reads.

Yet, the draft report goes on to say that "only a handful of counties in eastern South Dakota have a drain tile permit program, meaning there is not a temporal or spatial record of tile drainage in the state and thus difficult to determine the extent to which tiling may have increased flow."

The Water Management Board's authority comes from South Dakota law, which requires that water resources be used for maximum beneficial purposes without waste. The board is responsible for issuing water rights permits and modifying their qualifications as necessary, without jeopardizing the health of water sources.

The draft James River report will soon be shared with the public and opened for comment.

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

\$42,000 lawsuit settlement adds to costs of Noem-ordered border deployments

BY: SETH TUPPER - OCTOBER 2, 2024 9:29 AM

South Dakota Republican Gov. Kristi Noem's troop deployments to the nation's southern border now have another cost: \$42,000 to settle a lawsuit over a watchdog group's document request.

The federal government recently paid the money from funds earmarked for the South Dakota National Guard, according to a National Guard spokesman.

The money went to Citizens for Responsibility and Ethics in Washington, known by the acronym CREW, in Washington, D.C. The nonprofit's work "targets government officials who sacrifice the common good to special interests and personal gain," according to its website.

In 2021, Noem deployed 48 Guard troops to help secure the U.S.-Mexico border, using \$1 million donated by Republican billionaire Willis Johnson, of Tennessee.

CREW submitted a Freedom of Information Act request seeking documents related to the donation and deployment. The South Dakota National Guard denied the request, and CREW filed a lawsuit against the Guard and the U.S. Army.

The nonprofit ultimately obtained records showing the deployment cost the state nearly \$500,000 beyond the \$1 million donation. Email records showed that Jeff Marlette, then the state's adjutant general of the National Guard, was involved in framing Noem's language about the donation and deployment despite saying publicly that he was unaware of the donation until after the deployment was planned.

CREW criticized the donation and deployment in a news release last year.

"The use of the private donation to activate the troops was widely covered in national media not only as unprecedented, but also unethical and legally dubious," CREW said.

CREW's lawsuit sought not only the release of the documents but also payment for the organization's costs and attorney fees. The litigation remained pending until this September, when the parties told a

judge they had reached a settlement. The settlement is not included in the public court file, but South Dakota Searchlight obtained it through a records request to the South Dakota National Guard.

The donation-funded deployment was one of three that Noem ordered to the nation's southern border from 2021 through this year. The state spent \$2.7 million on those deployments through May, according to the state Department of Public Safety.

The Johnson donation covered \$1 million of those costs, and Noem tapped South Dakota's Emergency and Disaster Fund to cover the rest. Although the troops were deployed to assist the state of Texas secure its border, Noem has said she will not ask Texas for reimbursement.

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Special counsel Jack Smith reveals new evidence against Trump in 2020 election case

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY AND JENNIFER SHUTT - OCTOBER 2, 2024 7:50 PM

WASHINGTON — U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan unsealed a lengthy and partly redacted motion Wednesday that charts special counsel Jack Smith's final argument before November that former President Donald Trump acted in a private capacity when he co-conspired to overturn the 2020 election.

Much of the motion concerns Trump's interactions with individuals in Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, as he sought to disrupt election results, Smith alleged.

The document, due on Chutkan's desk late last month, is central to reanimating the case after months of delay as Trump argued for complete criminal immunity from the government's fraud and obstruction charges related to his actions after the 2020 presidential contest, which Joe Biden won.

The U.S. Supreme Court returned Trump's case to Chutkan after ruling that former presidents enjoy criminal immunity for core constitutional acts, presumed immunity for acts on the perimeter of official duties, and no immunity for personal ones. At that point it became clear that the case against the Republican presidential nominee would not be tried prior to Election Day.

Smith's superseding indictment shortly thereafter retained all four felony counts against Trump, and Chutkan is tasked with parsing which allegations can stand in light of the Supreme Court decision.

In his unsealed 165-page motion, Smith outlines Trump's alleged plots with private lawyers and political allies — names redacted — to ultimately deliver false slates of electors to Congress so that he appeared the winner over Biden in the seven states.

"Working with a team of private co-conspirators, the defendant acted as a candidate when he pursued multiple criminal means to disrupt, through fraud and deceit, the government function by which votes are collected and counted — a function in which the defendant, as President, had no official role," Smith wrote.

Trump slammed the court filing on social media in numerous posts, writing in a mix of upper and lowercase letters that "Democrats are Weaponizing the Justice Department against me because they know I am WINNING, and they are desperate to prop up their failing Candidate, Kamala Harris."

"The DOJ pushed out this latest 'hit job' today because JD Vance humiliated Tim Walz last night in the Debate. The DOJ has become nothing more than an extension of Joe's, and now Kamala's, Campaign. This is egregious PROSECUTORIAL MISCONDUCT, and should not have been released right before the Election," he continued in just one of his many reactions on his platform, Truth Social.

Trump's running mate, Ohio GOP Sen. J.D. Vance, faced Harris' running mate, Tim Walz, in a vice presidential debate on Tuesday night.

Here are key arguments from Smith's filing, which alleges efforts by Trump and allies to subvert voters' will during the last presidential election:

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Arizona

Smith detailed calls to and communications with various Arizona officials, including the governor and speaker of the Arizona state House, arguing the interactions were made in Trump's "capacity as a candidate."

"The defendant and his co-conspirators also demonstrated their deliberate disregard for the truth — and thus their knowledge of falsity — when they repeatedly changed the numbers in their baseless fraud allegations from day to day. At trial, the Government will introduce several instances of this pattern, in which the defendant and conspirators' lies were proved by the fact that they made up figures from whole cloth. One example concerns the defendant and conspirators' claims about non-citizen voters in Arizona. The conspirators started with the allegation that 36,000 non-citizens voted in Arizona; five days later, it was 'beyond credulity that a few hundred thousand didn't vote': three weeks later, 'the bare minimum [was] 40 or 50,000. The reality is about 250,000'; days after that, the assertion was 32,000; and ultimately the conspirators landed back where they started at 36,000 — a false figure that they never verified or corroborated."

Georgia

Smith plans to introduce into evidence Trump's communications, in his personal capacity, with Georgia's attorney general, including a call on Dec. 8, 2020, and to the secretary of state.

Trump "had early notice that his claims of election fraud in Georgia were false. Around mid-November, Campaign advisor [redacted] told the defendant that his claim that a large number of dead people had voted in Georgia was false. The defendant continued to press the claim anyway, including in a press appearance on November 29, when he suggested that a large enough number of dead voters had cast ballots to change the outcome of the election in Georgia."

"In the post-election period, [redacted] also took on the role of updating the defendant on a near-daily basis on the Campaign's unsuccessful efforts to support any fraud claims.... He told the defendant that if the Campaign took these claims to court, they would get slaughtered, because the claims are all 'bullshit.' [Redacted] was privy in real time to the findings of the two expert consulting firms the Campaign retained to investigate fraud claims — [redacted] and [redacted] — and discussed with the defendant their debunkings on all major claims. For example, [redacted] told the defendant that Georgia's audit disproved claims that [redacted] had altered votes."

Michigan

The document details an Oval Office meeting Trump held with Michigan's Senate majority leader and speaker of the House on Nov. 20, 2020, during which Trump tried to acquire evidence of voter fraud in Detroit.

"Despite failing to establish any valid fraud claims, [redacted] followed up with [redacted] and [redacted] and attempted to pressure them to use the Michigan legislature to overturn the valid election result."

Michigan and Pennsylvania

The filing said that directly following the 2020 election, Trump and his "private operatives sought to create chaos, rather than seek clarity, at polling places where states were continuing to tabulate votes."

"For example, on November 4, [redacted]—a Campaign employee, agent, and co-conspirator of the defendant—tried to sow confusion when the ongoing vote count at the TCF Center in Detroit, Michigan, looked unfavorable for the defendant."

"When a colleague suggested that there was about to be unrest reminiscent of the Brooks Brothers Riot, a violent effort to stop the vote count in Florida after the 2000 presidential election, [redacted] responded 'Make them riot' and 'Do it!!!' The defendant's Campaign operatives and supporters used similar tactics at other tabulation centers, including in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and the defendant sometimes used the resulting confrontations to falsely claim that his election observers were being denied proper access, thus serving as a predicate to the defendant's claim that fraud must have occurred in the observers' absence."

Michigan voting machines

Smith will argue that Trump, outside his official presidential duties, tried to persuade political allies in Michigan to sway the election in his favor.

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Among the evidence he will introduce: The former president held a meeting, "private in nature," with Michigan legislators at the White House.

Smith also wrote that "In mid-December, the defendant spoke with RNC Chairwoman [redacted] and asked her to publicize and promote a private report that had been related on December 13 that purported to identify flaws in the use of [redacted] machines in Antrim County, Michigan. [Redacted] refused, telling the defendant that she already had discussed this report with [redacted] Michigan's Speaker of the House, who had told her that the report was inaccurate. [Redacted] conveyed to the defendant [redacted] exact assessment: the report was 'f— nuts.'"

Nevada

In Nevada, Trump allegedly ignored warnings about spreading lies about the state's election results. Smith wrote: "Notwithstanding the RNC Chief Counsel's warning, the defendant re-tweeted and amplified news of the lawsuit on November 24, calling it 'Big News!' that a Nevada Court had agreed to hear it. But the defendant did not similarly promote the fact that within two weeks, on December 4, the Nevada District Court dismissed *Law v. Whitmer*, finding in a detailed opinion that 'there is no credible or reliable evidence that the 2020 General Election in Nevada was affected by fraud,' including through the signature-match machines, and that Biden won the election in the state."

Trump continued to repeat false claims in tweets and speeches "as a candidate, not as an office holder," Smith wrote.

Pennsylvania

In the Keystone State, officials warned Trump there was no smoke and no fire related to election fraud in the commonwealth, Smith wrote.

"Two days after the election, on November 6, the defendant called [redacted], the Chairman of the Pennsylvania Republican Party—the entity responsible for supporting Republican candidates in the commonwealth at the federal, state and local level. [Redacted] had a prior relationship with the defendant, including having represented him in litigation in Pennsylvania after the 2016 presidential election. The defendant asked [redacted] how, without fraud, he had gone from winning Pennsylvania on election day to trailing in the day afterward. Consistent with what Campaign staff already had told the defendant, [redacted] confirmed that it was not fraud; it was that there were roughly 1,750,000 mail-in ballots still being counted in Pennsylvania, which were expected to be eighty percent for Biden. Over the following two months, the defendant spread false claims of fraud in Pennsylvania anyway."

"In early November, in a Campaign meeting, when the defendant suggested that more people in Pennsylvania voted than had checked in to vote, Deputy Campaign Manager [redacted] corrected him."

Wisconsin

Smith wrote Trump ignored reality in Wisconsin as well.

"On November 29, a recount that the defendant's campaign had petitioned and paid for confirmed that Biden had won in Wisconsin — and increased the defendant's margin of defeat. On December 14, the Wisconsin Supreme Court rejected the Campaign's election lawsuit there. As a result, on December 21, Wisconsin's Governor signed a certificate of final determination confirming the prior certificate of ascertainment that established Biden's electors as the valid electors for the state."

Trump responded by rebuking the Wisconsin Supreme Court judge who had signed the majority opinion that rejected the lawsuit, forcing the state marshals responsible for the judge's security to enhance protection due to a rise in "threatening communications."

Fake electors

Smith alleged that as Trump and co-conspirators faltered at overturning states' official election results, they turned their attention to fake slates of electors.

As early as December 2020, Trump and his allies "developed a new plan regarding targeted states that the defendant had lost (Arizona, Georgia, Michigan, Nevada, New Mexico, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin): to organize the people who would have served as the defendant's electors had he won the popular vote,

and cause them to sign and send to Pence, as President of the Senate, certificates in which they falsely represent themselves as legitimate electors who had cast electoral votes for the defendant," Smith wrote.

Trump and his allies lied to Vice President Mike Pence heading toward Jan. 6, "telling him that there was substantial election fraud and concealing their orchestration of the plan to manufacture fraudulent elector slates, as well as their intention to use the fake slates to attempt to obstruct the congressional certification."

Trump's alleged lies to Pence and the public "created a tinderbox that he purposely ignited on January 6."

The filing details numerous people, including Trump, pressuring Pence for weeks to use his role overseeing Congress' certification of the Electoral College vote to overturn the election results.

On the morning of Jan. 6, Pence, once again, told Trump he would not go along with the plan.

"So on January 6, the defendant sent to the Capitol a crowd of angry supporters, whom the defendant had called to the city and inundated with false claims of outcome-determinative election fraud, to induce Pence not to certify the legitimate electoral vote and to obstruct the certification."

"Although the attack on the Capitol successfully delayed the certification for approximately six hours, the House and Senate resumed the Joint Session at 11:35 p.m. But the conspirators were not done."

The filing alleges a co-conspirator once again urged Pence to "violate the law" by delaying the certification for 10 days. He refused.

Pressure on Pence

Smith must prove that Trump's pressure on Pence was outside of their official duties together, and therefore can not be considered immune from prosecution.

Smith plans to introduce evidence of private phone calls and conversations between Trump and his VP, including some with campaign staff, essentially tying their interactions to their interests as those seeking office again, "as running mates in the post-election period." Smith also plans to highlight that Pence's role in certifying the election was largely ceremonial and within the realm of the Senate, and strictly outside the bounds of the Oval Office. Among Smith's points made in his motion:

"Because the Vice President's role is and has always been ministerial, rather than substantive or discretionary, it is difficult to imagine an occasion in which a President would have any valid reason to try to influence it. As such, criminalizing a President's efforts to affect the Vice President's role as the President of the Senate overseeing the certification of Electoral College results would not jeopardize an Executive Branch function or authority."

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Trump describes traumatic brain injuries sustained by U.S. troops in Iraq as a 'headache'

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - OCTOBER 2, 2024 3:42 PM

WASHINGTON — Former President Donald Trump said Tuesday that U.S. troops who suffered traumatic brain injuries after Iranian rocket fire in Iraq in 2020 only experienced a "headache," dismissing the experiences of dozens of American soldiers who were later awarded the Purple Heart.

Trump's comments came after a reporter in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, asked whether he should "have been tougher on Iran" after that nation launched ballistic missiles on Al-Asad Air Base in western Iraq in January 2020, during Trump's presidency. A couple thousand U.S. troops remain on an anti-ISIS mission at the Iraqi air base, one of the largest during the U.S. invasion.

"First of all, injured, what does injured mean? Injured means, you mean, because they had a headache because the bombs never hit the fort?" Trump responded.

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"If you were a truthful reporter, which you're not, you would tell the following: None of those very accurate missiles hit our fort. They all hit outside, and there was nobody hurt, other than the sound was loud, and some people said that hurt, and I accept that," Trump continued.

Trump added that Iran did "a very nice thing" by missing the military base. Photographs taken after the attack show extensive damage on the base.

U.S. troops at the base, that housed roughly 2,000 soldiers at the time, were given notice to shelter in bunkers. The missiles carried warheads weighing well over 1,000 pounds, leaving impact craters that spanned several feet wide, according to CBS News' "60 Minutes" and The Washington Post.

While no troops were killed in the attack, hundreds were exposed to blast waves, and many were evacuated to Germany for medical care. Weeks later, more than 100 troops were diagnosed with traumatic brain injuries. Dozens were eventually awarded the Purple Heart, including one retired major interviewed by States Newsroom in May.

Soldiers described lasting effects from those injuries as including chronic migraines, vertigo, short-term memory issues and vision impairment.

Trump's comments Tuesday came as he took questions from the press after delivering wide-ranging remarks at a campaign event at the Discovery World Science Museum on the city's lakefront.

The reporter did not identify herself before asking her question. Trump's remarks were recorded in full by the local Fox affiliate and live streamed by the Trump-focused YouTube channel "Right Side Broadcasting Network."

Details of attack

This is not the first time Trump has downplayed the soldiers' experiences and injuries stemming from that specific attack.

Iran fired 16 ballistic missiles at the air base and another Iraqi military site between Jan. 7 and 8, 2020. Roughly a dozen landed, according to reports. The attack was in retaliation for a U.S. strike days earlier in Baghdad that killed top Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani.

The 2020 attack on the base has been well documented. Images taken by photographers with National Public Radio and The Washington Post showed damaged buildings on the base. The New York Times and The Associated Press compiled video footage and compared satellite images before and after the attack.

CBS News' "60 Minutes" aired drone footage of the attack and first-hand accounts from troops who described the experience in a nearly 14-minute news package for the television magazine program.

The National Institutes of Health collected medical data from nearly 40 soldiers for months after the attack and found persistent symptoms following concussions.

Military installations that still house U.S. troops in Iraq have been the target of Iranian attacks following the outbreak of violence on Oct. 7 when the Hamas militant group, one of Iran's allies, launched a deadly surprise incursion into southern Israel, sparking a year-long war that has also drawn in Iranian-backed Hezbollah militants, according to the Pentagon.

Ashley Murray covers the nation's capital as a senior reporter for States Newsroom. Her coverage areas include domestic policy and appropriations.

Delayed farm bill punted until after election with Congress stuck on how to pay for it

BY: ALLISON WINTER - OCTOBER 2, 2024 12:02 PM

WASHINGTON — Sweeping legislation that would set food and farm policy for the next five years is in limbo, waiting for lawmakers to decide its fate after the election.

The latest deadline for the farm bill passed unceremoniously at midnight on Sept. 30, without a push from lawmakers to pass a new farm bill or an extension.

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Congress will have to scramble in the lame-duck session set to begin Nov. 12 to come up with some agreement on the farm bill before benefits run out at the end of the year — which if allowed to happen eventually would have major consequences.

The law began 90 years ago with various payments to support farmers but now has an impact far beyond the farm, with programs to create wildlife habitat, address climate change and provide the nation's largest federal nutrition program.

Ag coalition in disarray

The omnibus farm bill is more than a year behind schedule, as the bipartisan congressional coalition that has advanced farm bills for the last half century has been teetering on the edge of collapse.

Congress must approve a new federal farm bill every five years. The previous farm bill from 2018 expired a year ago. With no agreement in sight at the time, lawmakers extended the law to Sept. 30, 2024.

The delay creates further uncertainty for farmers, who are facing declining prices for many crops and rising costs for fertilizer and other inputs.

Lawmakers have some buffer before Americans feel the consequences of the expiration.

Most of the key programs have funding through the end of the calendar year, but once a new crop year comes into place in January, they would revert to "permanent law," sending crop supports back to policy from the 1938 and 1949 farm bills.

Those policies are inconsistent with modern farming practices and international trade agreements and could cost the federal government billions, according to a recent analysis from the non-partisan Congressional Research Service.

'Groundhog Day' cited by Vilsack

The stalemate between Democrats and Republicans over the farm bill has centered on how to pay for it and whether to place limits on nutrition and climate programs.

Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack told reporters in a press call on Saturday that the process "feels like Groundhog Day" — because he keeps having the same conversations about it. Vilsack said Republicans "just don't have the votes" on the floor for legislation passed in the House Agriculture Committee, which is why it has sat dormant in the House for four months.

"If they want to pass the farm bill they've got to get practical, and they either have to lower their expectations or raise resources. And if they're going to raise resources, they have to do it in a way where they don't lose votes, where they actually gain votes," Vilsack, a former Iowa governor, said.

The Republican-led committee approved its farm bill proposal largely on party lines at the end of May, amidst complaints from Democrats that the process had not been as bipartisan as in years past.

Partisan division is not uncommon in today's Congress but is notable on the farm bill, which historically brought together lawmakers from both sides of the aisle. Bipartisan support can be necessary for final passage because the size of the \$1.5 trillion farm bill means it inevitably loses some votes from fiscal conservatives and others.

Shutdown threat

Lawmakers are on borrowed time with both the farm bill and the appropriations bills that fund the federal government.

The House and Senate both approved stopgap spending bills at the end of September to avoid a partial government shutdown. The short-term funding bill, sometimes referred to as a continuing resolution, or CR, will keep the federal government running through Dec. 20.

Some agriculture leaders had asked for the continuing resolution to not extend the farm bill, to help push the deadline for them to work on it when they return.

The day after they approved the CR and left the Capitol, 140 Republican House members sent a letter to congressional leadership asking to make the farm bill a priority in the waning weeks of 2024.

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"Farmers and ranchers do not have the luxury of waiting until next Congress for the enactment of an effective farm bill," the letter states, noting rising production costs and falling commodity prices that have put farmers in a tight spot.

House Democrats also say they want to pass a new farm bill this year.

House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries, a New York Democrat, listed the farm bill as one of his top three priorities for the lame duck. Also on his list were appropriations and the National Defense Authorization Act, which sets policy for the Pentagon.

"It will be important to see if we can find a path forward and reauthorize the farm bill in order to make sure that we can meet the needs of farmers, meet the needs from a nutritional standpoint of everyday Americans and also continue the progress we have been able to make in terms of combating climate crisis," Jeffries said in remarks to reporters Sept. 25.

Nearly 300 members of the National Farmers Union visited lawmakers in September to ask for passage of a new five-year farm bill before the end of 2024.

"Family farmers and ranchers can't wait – they need the certainty of a new farm bill this year," National Farmers Union President Rob Larew said in a statement after the meetings. "With net farm income projected at historic lows, growing concentration in the agriculture sector, high input costs and interest rates, and more frequent and devastating natural disasters, Congress can't miss this opportunity to pass a five-year farm bill."

Disagreements over SNAP formula

The key dispute for Democrats this year is a funding calculation that would place limits on the "Thrifty Food Plan" formula that calculates benefits for the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, SNAP.

It would keep SNAP payments at current levels but place a permanent freeze on the ability of future presidents to raise levels of food support. Democrats have characterized it as a sneaky cut to vital support for hungry Americans that makes the bill dead on arrival.

Republicans are using the limits as part of a funding calculation to offset other spending in the bill. The bill would raise price supports for some crops like cotton, peanuts and rice.

"They have to do one of two things," Vilsack said of lawmakers. "They either have to recognize that they can't afford all the things that they would like to be able to afford, if they want to stay within the resources that are in fact available ... Or another alternative would be to find more money."

Vilsack recommended finding other sources of funding outside the farm bill, like changes to the tax code.

"You close a loophole here or there in terms of the taxes or whatever, and you generate more revenue, and you have that revenue directly offset the increase in the farm bill. ... That's the correct way to do it. And that's, frankly, the way Senator Stabenow is approaching the farm bill," Vilsack said, referring to Senate Agriculture Committee Chairwoman Debbie Stabenow, D-Mich.

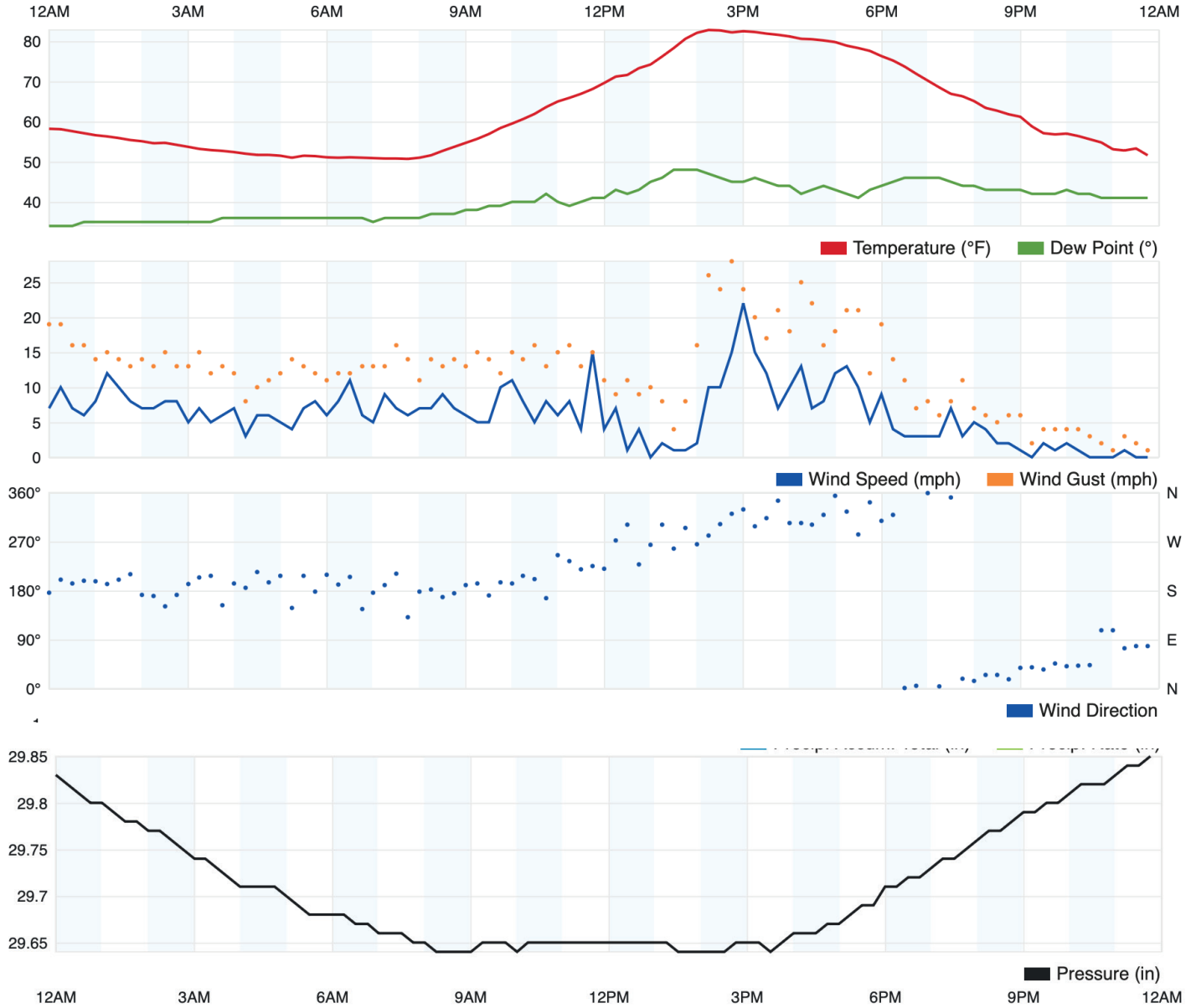
The Senate Agriculture Committee has had no public markup or formal introduction of a bill. But leaders say committee staff have been meeting weekly to discuss a path forward. Stabenow has not publicly disclosed the offsets for the money she says is available to be moved into the bill.

Allison Winter is a Washington D.C. correspondent for States Newsroom, a network of state-based nonprofit news outlets that includes South Dakota Searchlight.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 64 °F

Clearing Late

Tonight



Low: 33 °F

Mostly Clear
then Frost

Friday



High: 70 °F

Frost then
Sunny

Friday Night



Low: 55 °F

Clear and
Breezy

Saturday



High: 76 °F

Mostly Sunny
and Breezy

Upcoming Forecast

October 3, 2024 5:33 AM

Thursday



Highs: 59-67°F

Friday



Highs: 67-77°F

Saturday

WINDY



Highs: 71-79°F
Windy and Dry

Thursday Night



Lows: 34-40°F
Potential for Frost

Friday Night



Lows: 51-58°F
Windy

Today and tomorrow will be slightly cooler, with mostly sunny skies. Tonight there is the potential for frost in eastern SD. Friday evening will see mostly clear skies with winds increasing into Saturday.

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Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 83 °F at 2:10 PM

Low Temp: 51 °F at 7:24 AM

Wind: 28 mph at 2:45 PM

Precip: : 0.00

Day length: 11 hours, 37 minutes

Today's Info

Record High: 95 in 1922

Record Low: 20 in 1894

Average High: 67

Average Low: 39

Average Precip in Oct.: .25

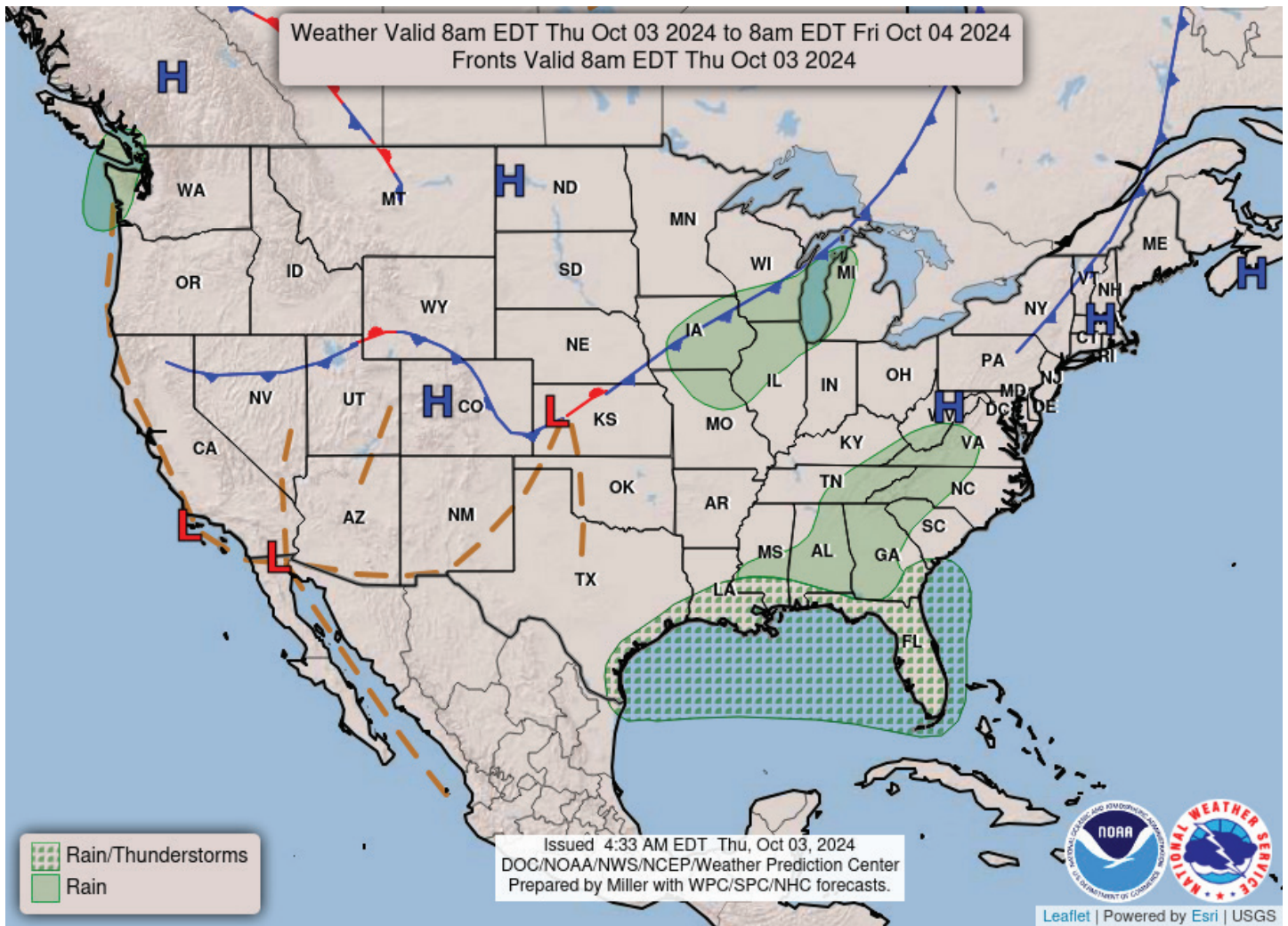
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.00

Average Precip to date: 18.57

Precip Year to Date: 19.75

Sunset Tonight: 7:09:40 pm

Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:33:57 am



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Today in Weather History

October 3, 1985: High winds of 60 to 75 mph occurred across much of western South Dakota from the late afternoon of the 3rd into the early morning hours of the 4th. The winds blew down power lines and caused power outages for many locations in the Black Hills. The strong winds uprooted trees in Rapid City and blew the roof off of a barn near Newell in Butte County.

1780: A hurricane, which formed on October 1st, destroyed the port city of Savanna-la-Mar on the island of Jamaica on this day. By some estimates, this storm caused 3,000 deaths. This storm is documented in the Jamaica Archives and Record Department.

1841 - An October gale, the worst of record for Nantucket, MA, caught the Cap Cod fishing fleet at sea. Forty ships were driven ashore on Cape Cod, and 57 men perished from the town of Truro alone. Heavy snow fell inland, with 18 inches near Middletown, CT. (David Ludlum)

1903: An unusual late-season tornado moved northeast from west of Chatfield, Minnesota, passing through and devastating St. Charles, Minnesota. Seven people were killed, and 30 injured as 50 homes and businesses were damaged or destroyed.

1912 - The longest dry spell of record in the U.S. commenced as Bagdad, CA, went 767 days without rain. (David Ludlum)

1964 - Hurricane Hilda struck Louisiana spawning many tornadoes, and claimed twenty-two lives. (Sandra and TI Richard Sanders)

1979: An F4 tornado struck the towns of Windsor, Windsor Locks, and Suffield in Connecticut, causing an estimated \$400 million in property damage, on this day. The New England Air Museum, which housed more than 20 vintage aircraft, was destroyed. This tornado also caused a United Airlines flight to abort a landing at the Bradley International Airport because the pilot saw the tornado.

1986 - Remnants of Hurricane Paine deluged Oklahoma and southeastern Kansas with 6 to 10 inch overnight rains. Hardy, OK, was drenched with 21.79 inches. Heavy rain between September 26th and October 4th caused 350 million dollars damage in Oklahoma. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Twenty-five cities in the Upper Midwest, including ten in Iowa, reported record low temperatures for the date. Duluth MN, Eau Claire, WI, and Spencer, IA, dipped to 24 degrees. Temperatures warmed into the 80s in the Northern and Central High Plains Region. At Chadron, NE, the mercury soared from a morning low of 29 degrees to an afternoon high of 88 degrees. Temperatures soared above 100 degrees in southern California. The high of 108 degrees at Downtown Los Angeles was a record for October. (The National Weather Summary)

1988 - Cold Canadian air invaded the north central U.S. bringing an end to the growing season across those states. Unseasonably warm weather prevailed in the southwestern U.S. Phoenix, AZ, reported a record high of 105 degrees. (The National Weather Summary)

1989 - Unseasonably cold weather prevailed from the Pacific Northwest to the Upper Mississippi Valley. A dozen cities reported record low temperatures for the date, including Bismarck, ND, and Williston, ND, with readings of 16 degrees above zero. An upper level weather disturbance brought snow to parts of Idaho, Wyoming and Montana, with five inches reported at West Yellowstone, MT. (Storm Data) (The National Weather Summary)

2002: Hurricane Lili made landfall between White Lake and Vermilion Bay, Louisiana as a Category 1 storm.

2015: Unprecedented rainfall fell throughout South Carolina from October 1st — 5th, 2015. Storm total amounts greater than 20" were observed in Columbia and Sumter.

2017: The City of Houston had the wettest year on record with 73.51 inches. The previous wettest year was in 1900 when 72.86 inches were measured.



KNOCK IT OFF!

An artist began working on a large block of marble. A friend watched him as he chipped away, knocking off one piece after another.

Finally the friend asked, "What are you making?"

"A horse," came the reply.

"How do you do that?" he wanted to know.

"By knocking off everything that doesn't look like a horse," said the sculptor.

It is normal to question what God may be doing in our lives from time to time. We often look for meaning or purpose when we enter into a period of suffering or pain, darkness or despair. There are some days when problems pile up, difficulties grow, confusion never ends, and the light never comes on.

Paul said we are "pressed on every side by troubles" – days when we feel like we are being squeezed in a vice. But he quickly adds, "we are not crushed or broken" assuring us of the Great Physician's concern and care. Then he goes on to write that we may feel "perplexed" – as if we were in a state of confusion. Now what? He encourages us not to "give up and quit" – knowing that God can make sense out of nonsense. If we "get knocked down" – we will never get knocked out. God will be there to lift us up, dust us off, and send us on our way. Paul's message: We may be at the end of our rope, but we are not at the end of our hope.

Prayer: Father, help us to grasp the greatness of Your power and value of Your presence no matter the problem or pain. We know You are with us. Help us to trust. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today: We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed. We always carry around in our body the death of Jesus, so that the life of Jesus may also be revealed in our body. 2 Corinthians 4:1-10

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:
10.01.24

27 35 47 50 66 25

MegaPlier: 2x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$108,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 16 Hrs 14
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.02.24

8 10 17 20 28 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$10,510,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 29
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.02.24

6 30 33 42 44 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$7,000/week

NEXT 15 Hrs 44 Mins
DRAW: 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.02.24

4 6 7 22 23

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$49,000

NEXT 2 Days 15 Hrs 44
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.02.24

39 44 45 46 66 13

TOP PRIZE:
\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:
10.02.24

1 2 21 37 43 21

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:
\$295,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 13
DRAW: Mins 46 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

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Upcoming Groton Events

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

Army returns remains of 9 Indigenous children who died at boarding school over a century ago

CARLISLE, Pa. (AP) — The remains of nine more Native American children who died at a notorious government-run boarding school in Pennsylvania over a century ago were disinterred from a small Army cemetery and returned to families, authorities said Wednesday.

The remains were buried on the grounds of the Carlisle Barracks, home of the U.S. Army War College. The children attended the former Carlisle Indian Industrial School, where thousands of Indigenous children were taken from their families and forced to assimilate to white society as a matter of U.S. policy.

The Office of Army Cemeteries said it concluded the remains of nine children found in the graves were “biologically consistent” with information contained in their student and burial records. The remains were transferred to the children’s families. Most have already been reburied on Native lands, Army officials said Wednesday.

Workers also disinterred a grave thought to have belonged to a Wichita tribe child named Alfred Charko, but the remains weren’t consistent with those of a 15-year-old boy, the Army said. The remains were reburied in the same grave, and the grave was marked unknown. Army officials said they would try to locate Alfred’s gravesite.

“The Army team extends our deepest condolences to the Wichita and Affiliated Tribe,” Karen Durham-Aguilera, executive director of the Office of Army Cemeteries, said in a statement. “The Army is committed to seeking all resources that could lead us to more information on where Alfred may be located and to help us identify and return the unknown children in the Carlisle Barracks Post Cemetery.”

The nine children whose remains were returned were identified Wednesday as Fanny Chargingshield, James Cornman and Samuel Flying Horse, from the Oglala Sioux Tribe; Almeda Heavy Hair, Bishop L. Shield and John Bull, from the Gros Ventre Tribe of the Fort Belknap Indian Community; Kati Rosskidwits, from the Wichita and Affiliated Tribes; Albert Mekko, from the Seminole Nation of Oklahoma; and William Norkok, from the Eastern Shoshone Tribe.

The Army declined to release details on one grave disinterment, saying the tribe asked for privacy.

More than 10,000 children from more than 140 tribes passed through the school between 1879 and 1918, including Olympian Jim Thorpe. Founded by an Army officer, the school cut their braids, dressed them in military-style uniforms, punished them for speaking their native languages and gave them European names.

The children — often taken against the will of their parents — endured harsh conditions that sometimes led to death from tuberculosis and other diseases. The remains of some of those who died were returned to their tribes. The rest are buried in Carlisle.

Thousands of shipping containers have been lost at sea. What happens when they burst open?

By CHRISTINA LARSON, HELEN WIEFFERING and MANUEL VALDES Associated Press

LONG BEACH, Wash. (AP) — Russ Lewis has picked up some strange things along the coast of Long Beach Peninsula in Washington state over the years: Hot Wheels bicycle helmets with feather tufts, life-size plastic turkey decoys made for hunters, colorful squirt guns.

And Crocs — so many mismatched Crocs.

If you find a single Croc shoe, you might think somebody lost it out on the beach, he said. “But, if you find two, three, four and they’re different — you know, one’s a big one, one’s a little one — that’s a clue.”

These items aren’t like the used fishing gear and beer cans that Lewis also finds tossed overboard by fishers or partygoers. They’re the detritus of commercial shipping containers lost in the open ocean.

Most of the world’s raw materials and everyday goods that are moved over long distances — from T-shirts

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to televisions, cellphones to hospital beds — are packed in large metal boxes the size of tractor-trailers and stacked on ships. A trade group says some 250 million containers cross the oceans every year — but not everything arrives as planned.

More than 20,000 shipping containers have tumbled overboard in the last decade and a half. Their varied contents have washed onto shorelines, poisoned fisheries and animal habitats, and added to swirling ocean trash vortexes. Most containers eventually sink to the sea floor and are never retrieved.

Cargo ships can lose anywhere from a single container to hundreds at a time in rough seas. Experts disagree on how many are lost each year. The World Shipping Council, an industry group, reports that, on average, about 1,500 were lost annually over the 16 years they've tracked — though fewer in recent years. Others say the real number is much higher, as the shipping council data doesn't include the entire industry and there are no penalties for failing to report losses publicly.

Much of the debris that washed up on Lewis' beach matched items lost off the giant cargo ship ONE Apus in November 2020. When the ship hit heavy swells on a voyage from China to California, nearly 2,000 containers slid into the Pacific.

Court documents and industry reports show the vessel was carrying more than \$100,000 worth of bicycle helmets and thousands of cartons of Crocs, as well as electronics and other more hazardous goods: batteries, ethanol and 54 containers of fireworks.

Researchers mapped the flow of debris to several Pacific coastlines thousands of miles apart, including Lewis' beach and the remote Midway Atoll, a national wildlife refuge for millions of seabirds near the Hawaiian Islands that also received a flood of mismatched Crocs.

Scientists and environmental advocates say more should be done to track losses and prevent container spills.

"Just because it may seem 'out of sight, out of mind,' doesn't mean there aren't vast environmental consequences," said marine biologist Andrew DeVogelaere of California's Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, who has spent more than 15 years studying the environmental impact of a single container that was found in sanctuary waters.

"We are leaving time capsules on the bottom of the sea of everything we buy and sell — sitting down there for maybe hundreds of years," he said.

Nitric acid, plastic pellets and baby seals

This year's summer winds washed thousands of plastic pellets ashore near Colombo, Sri Lanka, three years after a massive fire aboard the X-Press Pearl burned for days and sank the vessel a few miles offshore.

The disaster dumped more than 1,400 damaged shipping containers into the sea — releasing billions of plastic manufacturing pellets known as nurdles as well as thousands of tons of nitric acid, lead, methanol and sodium hydroxide, all toxic to marine life.

Hemantha Withanage remembers how the beach near his home smelled of burnt chemicals. Volunteers soon collected thousands of dead fish, gills stuffed with chemical-laced plastic, and nearly 400 dead endangered sea turtles, more than 40 dolphins and six whales, their mouths jammed with plastic. "It was like a war zone," he said.

Cleanup crews wearing full-body hazmat suits strode into the tide with hand sieves to try to collect the lentil-size plastic pellets.

The waterfront was closed to commercial fishing for three months, and the 12,000 families that depend on fishing for their income have only gotten a fraction of the \$72 million that Withanage, founder of Sri Lanka's nonprofit Centre for Environmental Justice, believes they are owed.

"Just last week, there was a huge wind, and all the beaches were full of plastic again," he said in mid-June.

Lost container contents don't have to be toxic to wreak havoc.

In February, the cargo ship President Eisenhower lost 24 containers off the central California coast. Some held bales of soon-waterlogged cotton and burst open. Debris washed ashore near Monterey Bay National Marine Sanctuary, a federally protected area.

The ship's captain informed the U.S. Coast Guard, which worked with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and California State Parks to remove the debris. Each bale was too heavy to drag

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away — instead they had to be cut up, each filling two dump trucks.

“A rancid soggy mess,” said Eric Hjelstrom, a chief ranger for California State Parks. “If tidal pools get filled with cotton, that can block out sunlight and harm a lot of organisms.”

One bale landed in an elephant seal nursery, surrounded by baby seals. “You have to be careful how to approach it — you don’t want to injure the seals,” Hjelstrom said. A marine mammal specialist gently escorted 10 pups away before the bale was removed.

Although the operators of the President Eisenhower helped pay for cleanup, neither California nor federal authorities have ordered the company to pay any penalties.

As for the metal shipping containers, only one was spotted on a U.S. Coast Guard overflight, and it had vanished from sight by the time a tugboat was sent to retrieve it, said Coast Guard Lt. Chris Payne in San Francisco.

When shipping containers are lost overboard, “Most of them sink. And a lot of times, they’re just in really deep water,” said Jason Rolfe of NOAA’s Marine Debris Program.

Most sunken containers — some still sealed, some damaged and open — are never found or recovered.

The Coast Guard has limited powers to compel shipowners to retrieve containers unless they threaten a marine sanctuary or contain oil or designated hazardous materials. “If it’s outside our jurisdiction,” said Payne, “there’s nothing that we can do as the federal government to basically require a company to retrieve a container.”

The long-term impact of adding on average more than a thousand containers each year to the world’s oceans — by the most conservative estimates — remains unknown.

Scientists at Monterey Bay Aquarium Research Institute in California are studying the cascade of changes wrought by a single container found by chance on the seabed.

Their research team was operating a remote-control vehicle at 4,200 feet (1,280 meters) below the surface to study deep-sea corals in 2004 when they were surprised to encounter a metal box. “It’s just serendipity that we found it,” said marine ecologist Jim Barry. Despite multiple spills in nearby shipping lanes, “It’s the only container that we know exactly where it landed.”

“The first thing that happens is they land and crush everything underneath them,” said DeVogelaere, who studied the sunken container. By changing the flow of water and sediment, the container completely changes the micro-ecosystem around it — impacting seafloor species that scientists are still discovering.

“The animals in the deep have felt our presence before we even knew anything about them,” he said.

Labels showed the container came from the Med Taipei, which had lost two dozen boxes in rough seas on a journey between San Francisco and Los Angeles. In 2006, the ship owners and operators reached a settlement with the U.S. Department of Justice to pay \$3.25 million for estimated damages to the marine environment.

Steering floating skyscrapers at sea

More than 80% of international trade by volume arrives by sea. All this cargo travels on increasingly vast ships.

“On the modern big ships, it’s like a high-rise building,” said Jos Koning, a senior project manager at MARIN, a Netherlands-based maritime research organization that studies shipping risks.

Today’s largest cargo vessels are longer than three football fields, with cranes required to lift containers and stack them in towering columns. When the industry took off some 50 years ago, ships could hold only about a tenth of the freight that today’s behemoths carry. According to the insurer Allianz, container ship capacities have doubled in just the last two decades.

Greater size brings heightened risks. The largest ships are more difficult to maneuver and more prone to rolling in high waves. And there’s a greater chance that any single box could be damaged and crushed — a destabilizing accident that can send an entire stack of containers cascading into the sea.

In February, the marine insurer Gard published a study based on six years of their claims that showed 9% of ultra-large ships had experienced container losses, compared to just 1% of smaller vessels.

Accidents are often linked to cargo that has been inaccurately labeled, weighed or stored. Investigators

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determined that the X-Press Pearl's devastating spill near Sri Lanka, for instance, was the result of a fire that likely started from a poorly stacked container that was leaking nitric acid.

But cargo ship operators don't have the capacity to verify all container weights and contents, and instead must rely on information that shippers provide.

"It's just completely impractical to think that you can open every container," said Ian Lennard, president of the National Cargo Bureau, a nonprofit that works with the U.S. Coast Guard to inspect seagoing cargo.

In a pilot study, the group found that widespread mislabeling and improper stowage meant that nearly 70% of shipping containers arriving in the U.S. with dangerous goods failed the bureau's safety inspection.

"Despite all these problems, most of the time it arrives safely," Lennard said.

But when there is a crisis — a ship hits rough weather, or a container carrying a chemical ignites in summer heat — accidents can have catastrophic impacts.

High seas, high losses, but no definitive counts

How often do shipping container spills happen? There's no clear answer.

Existing tracking efforts are fragmented and incomplete. Although a few shipwrecks and disasters grab headlines, like the March crash of a cargo ship into a Baltimore bridge, much less is known about how often containers are lost piecemeal or away from major ports.

To date, the most widely cited figures on lost shipping containers come from the World Shipping Council. The group's membership, which carries about 90% of global container traffic, self-reports their losses in a survey each year.

Over 16 years of collected data through 2023, the group said an average of 1,480 containers were lost annually. Their recent figures show 650 containers were lost in 2022 and only about 200 last year.

Elisabeth Braw, senior fellow with the Atlantic Council's Transatlantic Security Initiative, said self-reported surveys miss the full picture.

For example, not included in the 2023 tally were 1,300 containers from the cargo ship Angel, which sank near Taiwan's Kaohsiung port. That's because the ship's operators aren't members of the World Shipping Council.

Lloyd's List Intelligence, a maritime intelligence company that's tracked thousands of marine accidents on container ships over the past decade, told AP that underreporting is rampant, saying ship operators and owners want to avoid insurance rate hikes and protect their reputations.

Marine insurers, which are typically on the hook to pay for mishaps, likely have access to more complete data on losses — but no laws require that data to be collected and shared publicly.

World Shipping Council president and CEO Joe Kramek said the industry is researching ways to reduce errors in loading and stacking containers, as well as in navigating ships through turbulent waters.

"We don't like when it (a container loss) happens," said Kramek. "But the maritime environment is one of the most challenging environments to operate in."

Earlier this year, the United Nations' International Maritime Organization adopted amendments to two global ocean treaties aimed at increasing transparency around lost shipping containers. Those changes, expected to take effect in 2026, will require ships to report losses to nearby coastal countries and to authorities where the vessel is registered.

But with no enforceable penalties, it remains to be seen how extensively operators will comply.

Alfredo Parroquín-Ohlson, head of cargo in the IMO's maritime safety division, said, "We just encourage them and tell them how important it is, but we cannot be a police."

What floats above and what lies beneath

It's not just environmentalists who worry. Some lost containers float for days before sinking — endangering boats of all sizes, from commercial vessels to recreational sailboats.

The sporting body World Sailing has reported at least eight instances in which crews had to abandon boats because of collisions with what were believed to be containers. In 2016, sailor Thomas Ruyant was 42 days into a race around the world when his sailboat's hull split from a sudden crash with what appeared to be a floating container.

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"It gives me the shivers just thinking about it," he said in a video dispatch from his damaged boat as he steered toward shore.

In Sri Lanka, the consequences of the X-Press Pearl accident linger, three years after the ship went down. Fishermen have seen stocks of key species shrink, and populations of long-lived, slow-reproducing animals such as sea turtles may take several generations to recover.

For his part, Lewis, the volunteer beach cleaner in Washington state, said he wonders about all the debris he doesn't see wash up on his shores.

"What's going to happen when it gets down deep and, you know, it just ruptures?" he said. "We know we've got a problem on the surface, but I think the bigger problem is what's on the seafloor."

Liz Cheney will campaign with Harris in Wisconsin while Trump holds a rally in Michigan

By CHRIS MEGERIAN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Liz Cheney, one of Donald Trump's fiercest Republican antagonists, will join Democrat Kamala Harris at a campaign event in Wisconsin on Thursday aimed at reaching out to moderate voters and rattling the former president.

Cheney was the top Republican on the House committee that investigated the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection, earning Trump's disdain and effectively exiling herself from her own party.

Cheney lost her Wyoming seat to a Trump-endorsed candidate two years ago and she endorsed Harris, the Democratic nominee, last month. The two women will appear together in a historic white schoolhouse in Ripon, where a series of meetings held in 1854 to oppose slavery's expansion led to the birth of the Republican Party.

Harris is opening a two-day stay in Wisconsin and Michigan, and Trump will be in Michigan on Thursday as the two candidates grapple for wins in the "blue wall" battleground states, which also include Pennsylvania.

Harris' visit to Wisconsin comes one day after a federal judge unsealed a 165-page court filing outlining prosecutors' case against Trump for his attempt to overturn his 2020 election defeat. Trump has pleaded not guilty to charges of conspiracy and obstruction.

It's uncommon, to say the least, for a candidate to give a nod to the origins of the opposing party in the closing weeks of a presidential campaign. Not only that, the Cheney name was once anathema to Democrats who deplored Dick Cheney, Liz's father, for his role as vice president under George W. Bush.

But now both Cheneys are backing Harris, part of a cadre of current and former Republican officials who have broken with the vast majority of their party, which remains in Trump's corner. Harris wants to portray her candidacy as a patriotic choice for independent and conservative voters who were disturbed by Trump's unwillingness to cede power. Trump continues to deny his defeat with false claims of voter fraud.

Harris on Friday will hold a campaign rally in Flint, Michigan, continuing her tour of states that have been critical to Democratic victories. Trump won Pennsylvania, Wisconsin and Michigan in 2016, and Joe Biden won them in 2020.

Trump on Thursday will hold a rally in Saginaw County, a bellwether in the center of the state.

The Republican candidate has ramped up his focus on Michigan, holding two rallies there less than a week ago. In 2020, Biden's win in Saginaw County by a slim 303 votes contributed to his victory in the state.

Rare Israeli strike in central Beirut kills 7 as troops battle Hezbollah in southern Lebanon

By FADI TAWIL and JACK JEFFERY Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — An Israeli airstrike on an apartment in central Beirut killed seven Hezbollah-affiliated civilian first responders. Israel has been pounding areas of the country where the militant group has a strong presence since late September, but has rarely struck in the heart of the capital.

There was no warning before the strike late Wednesday, which hit an apartment in central Beirut not far

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from the United Nations headquarters, the prime minister's office and parliament. Hezbollah's civil defense unit said seven of its members were killed.

In a separate development, the Israeli military ordered the evacuation of villages and towns in southern Lebanon that are north of a United Nations-declared buffer zone established after the 2006 war. The warnings issued Thursday signaled a possible broadening of Israel's incursion into southern Lebanon, which until now has been confined to areas close to the border.

At least eight Israeli soldiers were killed in clashes with Hezbollah in southern Lebanon, where Israel announced the start of what it says is a limited ground incursion earlier this week. The region was meanwhile bracing for Israeli retaliation following an Iranian ballistic missile attack.

Residents reported a sulfur-like smell following strike in Beirut, and Lebanon's state-run National News Agency accused Israel of using phosphorous bombs, without providing evidence. Human rights groups have in the past accused Israel of using white phosphorus incendiary shells on towns and villages in southern Lebanon. The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Hezbollah has an armed wing with tens of thousands of fighters but it also has a political movement and a network of charities staffed by civilians.

In a separate development, Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen said they had launched two drones at Tel Aviv overnight. The military said it identified two drones off the coast of the bustling metropolitan area, shooting one of them down while the other fell in the Mediterranean Sea.

The escalating violence in Lebanon has opened a second front in the war between Israel and Iran-backed militants that began nearly a year ago with Hamas' surprise Oct. 7 attack from the Gaza Strip into Israel.

The Israeli military said Thursday that it killed a senior Hamas leader in an airstrike in the Gaza Strip around three months ago. It said that a strike on an underground compound in northern Gaza killed Rawhi Mushtaha and two other Hamas commanders.

There was no immediate comment from Hamas. Mushtaha was a close associate of Yahya Sinwar, the top leader of Hamas who helped mastermind the Oct. 7 attack. Sinwar is believed to be alive and in hiding inside Gaza.

In recent weeks, Israelis strikes in Lebanon have killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and several of his top commanders. Hundreds more airstrikes across large parts of Lebanon since mid-September have killed at least 1,276 people, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry.

The Israeli military said Thursday that it had struck around 200 Hezbollah targets across Lebanon, including weapons storage facilities and observation posts. It said the strikes killed at least 15 Hezbollah fighters. There was no independent confirmation.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes, as Israel has warned people to evacuate from around 50 villages and towns in the south, telling them to relocate to areas that are around 60 kilometers (36 miles) from the border and considerably farther north than a U.N.-declared buffer zone.

Israel says it is targeting Hezbollah after nearly a year of rocket attacks that began on Oct. 8 and have displaced some 60,000 Israelis from communities in the north. Israel has carried out retaliatory strikes over the past year that have displaced tens of thousands on the Lebanese side.

The vast majority of recent strikes have been in areas where Hezbollah has a strong presence, including the southern suburbs of Beirut known as the Dahiye. But Israel has also carried out strikes in Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon, and a strike in central Beirut earlier this week killed three Palestinian militants.

Hezbollah, Hamas and the Houthis are part of the Iran-led Axis of Resistance, which also includes armed groups in Syria and Iraq. They have launched attacks on Israel in solidarity with the Palestinians, drawing retaliation in a cycle that has repeatedly threatened to set off a wider war.

The region once again appears on the brink of such a conflict after Iran's missile attack on Tuesday, which it said was a response to the killing of Nasrallah, an Iranian Revolutionary Guard general who was with him, and Ismail Haniyeh, the political leader of Hamas, who was killed in an explosion in Tehran in July that was widely blamed on Israel.

Both Israel and the United States have said there will be severe consequences for the missile attack, which lightly wounded two people and killed a Palestinian in the occupied West Bank. The United States

has rushed military assets to the region in support of Israel.

Typhoon Krathon makes landfall in Taiwan, packing fierce winds and torrential rain

By SIMINA MISTREANU Associated Press

KAOHSIUNG, Taiwan (AP) — Typhoon Krathon made landfall Thursday in Taiwan's major port city of Kaohsiung, bringing torrential rains and fierce winds to the island's south. Trees were brought down by high winds and roads were flooded, prompting the closure of schools and businesses.

Krathon made landfall in the industrial Siaogang district of Kaohsiung around 12:40 p.m., the Central Weather Administration said. It packed maximum sustained winds of 126 kph (78 mph) with gusts of 162 kph (101 mph).

The typhoon was forecast to move slowly north and weaken into a tropical depression by Friday before it reaches the capital, Taipei. It was expected to then head across the Taiwan Strait toward the Chinese coast. Winds were strong in Taipei on Thursday, but there was little rain.

Kaohsiung earlier urged its residents to take cover from potentially disastrous winds and rain, which tore down storefronts and flooded car parks but caused no reported loss of life.

The slow-moving typhoon, which approached Taiwan at a speed of about 4 kph (2.5 mph), doused eastern and southern parts of the island over the past five days, forcing thousands to evacuate from mountainous or low-lying areas. Two days of closures are believed to have taken a significant toll on the island's high-tech economy that relies heavily on foreign trade.

Gusts and heavy rains pelted empty streets in Kaohsiung, while life in Taipei, 350 kilometers (215 miles) to the north, was only slightly disrupted.

Many residents woke up Thursday to mobile phone alerts urging them to take shelter from the potentially dangerous winds. The weather administration posted a Facebook message warning Kaohsiung and Pingtung county residents not to go outside when the eye of the storm passes above their area and the weather calms briefly, because the winds would pick up again afterward.

Weather-related events attributed to Krathon injured at least 123 people around the island, according to Taiwan's fire department. Two people died — one after driving into fallen rocks on the road in the southeastern Taitung county, and the other while trimming tree branches in the city of Hualien. Two others remained missing.

A fire at a hospital in Pingtung County killed at least nine people early Thursday. The deaths were attributed to smoke and the cause was under investigation. It was not immediately clear whether the blaze was related to the typhoon.

Thousands were evacuated from areas vulnerable to mudslides and landslides. Almost 40,000 troops were on standby to help with rescue efforts.

Mountainous areas in the island's south have received up to 169 centimeters (5.5 feet) of rain over the past five days.

China's weather agency said some eastern and southern parts of Taiwan are set to receive extremely heavy rains of up to 40 centimeters (1.3 feet) over the next 24 hours.

Typhoons rarely hit Taiwan's west coast, affecting instead the mountainous eastern side of the island.

Kaohsiung officials, in urging residents to be vigilant about the weather, recalled the destruction brought by Typhoon Thelma, which in 1977 badly damaged the city and caused 37 deaths.

Earlier in the week, Typhoon Krathon lashed northern Philippine islands, killing four people and displacing at least 5,000, officials said.

Hurricane Helene brings climate change to forefront of the presidential campaign

By MATTHEW DALY Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — The devastation wrought by Hurricane Helene has brought climate change to the forefront of the presidential campaign after the issue lingered on the margins for months.

Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to Georgia Wednesday to see hard-hit areas, two days after her Republican opponent, former President Donald Trump, was in the state and criticized the federal response to the storm, which has killed at least 180 people. Thousands of people in the Carolinas still lack running water, cellphone service and electricity.

President Joe Biden toured some of the hardest-hit areas by helicopter on Wednesday. Biden, who has frequently been called on to survey damage and console victims after tornadoes, wildfires, tropical storms and other natural disasters, traveled to the Carolinas to get a closer look at the hurricane devastation. He is expected to visit Georgia and Florida later this week.

"Storms are getting stronger and stronger," Biden said after surveying damage near Asheville, North Carolina. At least 70 people died in the state.

"Nobody can deny the impact of the climate crisis any more," Biden said at a briefing in Raleigh, the state capital. "They must be brain dead if they do."

Harris, meanwhile, hugged and huddled with a family in hurricane-ravaged Augusta, Georgia.

"There is real pain and trauma that resulted because of this hurricane" and its aftermath, Harris said outside a storm-damaged house with downed trees in the yard.

"We are here for the long haul," she added.

The focus on the storm — and its link to climate change — was notable after climate change was only lightly mentioned in two presidential debates this year. The candidates instead focused on abortion rights, the economy, immigration and other issues.

The hurricane featured prominently in Tuesday's vice presidential debate as Republican JD Vance and Democrat Tim Walz were asked about the storm and the larger issue of climate change.

Both men called the hurricane a tragedy and agreed on the need for a strong federal response. But it was Walz, the governor of Minnesota, who put the storm in the context of a warming climate.

"There's no doubt this thing roared onto the scene faster and stronger than anything we've seen," he said.

Bob Henson, a meteorologist and writer with Yale Climate Connections, said it was no surprise that Helene is pushing both the federal disaster response and human-caused climate change into the campaign conversation.

"Weather disasters are often overlooked as a factor in big elections," he said. "Helene is a sprawling catastrophe, affecting millions of Americans. And it dovetails with several well-established links between hurricanes and climate change, including rapid intensification and intensified downpours."

More than 40 trillion gallons of rain drenched the Southeast in the last week, an amount that if concentrated in North Carolina would cover the state in 3 1/2 feet of water. "That's an astronomical amount of precipitation," said Ed Clark, head of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's National Water Center in Tuscaloosa, Alabama.

During Tuesday's debate, Walz credited Vance for past statements acknowledging that climate change is a problem. But he noted that Trump has called climate change "a hoax" and joked that rising seas "would make more beachfront property to be able to invest in."

Trump said in a speech Tuesday that "the planet has actually gotten little bit cooler recently," adding: "Climate change covers everything."

In fact, summer 2024 sweltered to Earth's hottest on record, making it likely this year will end up as the warmest humanity has measured, according to the European climate service Copernicus. Global records were shattered just last year as human-caused climate change, with a temporary boost from an El Niño, keeps dialing up temperatures and extreme weather, scientists said.

Vance, an Ohio senator, said he and Trump support clean air, clean water and "want the environment

to be cleaner and safer." However, during Trump's four years in office, he took a series of actions to roll back more than 100 environmental regulations.

Vance sidestepped a question about whether he agrees with Trump's statement that climate change is a hoax. "What the president has said is that if the Democrats — in particular Kamala Harris and her leadership — really believe that climate change is serious, what they would be doing is more manufacturing and more energy production in the United States of America. And that's not what they're doing," he said.

"This idea that carbon (dioxide) emissions drives all of the climate change. Well, let's just say that's true just for the sake of argument. So we're not arguing about weird science. If you believe that, what would you want to do?" Vance asked.

The answer, he said, is to "produce as much energy as possible in the United States of America, because we're the cleanest economy in the entire world."

Vance claimed that policies by Biden and Harris actually help China, because many solar panels, lithium-ion batteries and other materials used in renewable energy and electric vehicles are made in China and imported to the United States.

Walz rebutted that claim, noting that the Inflation Reduction Act, the Democrats' signature climate law approved in 2022, includes the largest-ever investment in domestic clean energy production. The law, for which Harris cast the deciding vote, has created 200,000 jobs across the country, including in Ohio and Minnesota, Walz said. Vance was not in the Senate when the law was approved.

"We are producing more natural gas and more oil (in the United States) than we ever have," Walz said. "We're also producing more clean energy."

The comment echoed a remark by Harris in last month's presidential debate. The Biden-Harris administration has overseen "the largest increase in domestic oil production in history because of an approach that recognizes that we cannot over rely on foreign oil," Harris said then.

While Biden rarely mentions it, domestic fossil fuel production under his administration is at an all-time high. Crude oil production averaged 12.9 million barrels a day last year, eclipsing a previous record set in 2019 under Trump, according to the U.S. Energy Information Administration.

Democrats want to continue investments in renewable energy such as wind and solar power — and not just because supporters of the Green New Deal want that, Walz said.

"My farmers know climate change is real. They've seen 500-year droughts, 500-year floods back to back. But what they're doing is adapting," he said.

"The solution for us is to continue to move forward, (accept) that climate change is real" and reduce reliance on fossil fuels, Walz said, adding that the administration is doing exactly that.

"We are seeing us becoming an energy superpower for the future, not just the current" time, he said.

Former Singapore minister sentenced to a year in prison for receiving illegal gifts

KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia (AP) — A former Singaporean Cabinet minister was sentenced Thursday to a year in prison after he pleaded guilty to charges of receiving illegal gifts, in a rare criminal case involving a minister in the Asian financial hub.

Former Transport Minister S. Iswaran had pleaded guilty last week to one count of obstructing justice and four of accepting gifts from people with whom he had official business. He was the first minister to be charged and imprisoned in nearly half a century.

Justice Vincent Hoong, in his ruling, said holders of high office "must be expected to avoid any perception that they are susceptible to influence by pecuniary benefits."

"I am of the view that it is appropriate to impose a sentence in excess of both parties' positions," Hoong said as he handed down a total of 12 months imprisonment for the five charges. The defense had asked for no more than eight weeks in prison, while the prosecution had pushed for six to seven months imprisonment.

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The court approved Iswaran's request to delay the start of his sentence to Monday, Channel News Asia reported. He remains out on bail for now. It is unclear if he will appeal the sentence.

Iswaran was initially charged with 35 counts, but prosecutors proceeded with only five, while reducing two counts of corruption to receiving illegal gifts. Prosecutors said they will apply for the remaining 30 charges to be taken into consideration for sentencing. No reasons were given for the move.

Iswaran received gifts worth over 74,000 Singapore dollars (\$57,000) from Ong Beng Seng, a Singapore-based Malaysian property tycoon, and businessperson Lum Kok Seng. The gifts included tickets to Singapore's Formula 1 race, wine and whisky and a luxury Brompton bike. Ong owns the right to the local F1 race, and Iswaran was chair of and later adviser to the Grand Prix's steering committee.

The Attorney-General's Chambers said it will decide whether to charge Ong and Lum after the case against Iswaran has been resolved.

Singapore's ministers are among the world's best paid. Although the amount involved in Iswaran's case appeared to be relatively minor, his indictment is an embarrassment to the ruling People's Action Party, which prides itself on a clean image. Singapore was ranked among the world's top five least-corrupt nations, according to Transparency International's corruption perception index.

The last Cabinet minister charged with graft was Wee Toon Boon, who was found guilty in 1975 and jailed for accepting gifts in exchange for helping a businessperson. Another Cabinet minister was investigated for graft in 1986, but died before charges were filed.

Iswaran had resigned just before he was charged. His trial comes just over four months after Singapore installed new Prime Minister Lawrence Wong after Lee Hsien Loong stepped down after 20 years.

How Black leaders in New York are grappling with Eric Adams and representation

By AARON MORRISON and MATT BROWN Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — It wasn't a shock to many Black New Yorkers that Mayor Eric Adams has surrounded himself with African American civil rights leaders, clergy and grassroots activists since his indictment last week on federal bribery charges.

Adams, a Brooklyn native who rose from the city's working class to its highest political office, is seen as more than the city's second Black mayor. To many, he's family.

"Four more years!" chanted a sizeable group of Black clergy leaders that had gathered to pray for the mayor outside City Hall Tuesday evening.

"What I want in your prayer is to continue to lift me up, and this administration, with the strength to move forward," Adams said to the group.

"This is what we fought for and many of you were part of the campaign," the mayor said about when he was elected.

But even the closest of families feud. The five-count indictment has prompted loud calls for Adams' resignation from Black New York activists, elected leaders and residents. It's also sparked debates about whether to stand behind a controversial figure who, for many, represents a milestone for Black representation in government.

Adams' actions have precedent in Black political history; a child raised in the community who rose to the highest echelons of leadership, then faced legal troubles for potential improper conduct, and later returned to voters for support.

Nearly two years ago, New York voters elected Black leaders to a historic number of local and statewide offices. Some Black leaders now fear that Adams' indictment may tarnish the broader political representation that was achieved. That has led many to grapple with newfound representation and the potential loss of it, while also holding folks accountable to the communities they represent.

"I think that as we achieve power, we ought to make sure we handle it in a way that protects the people that helped you achieve it," said the Rev. Al Sharpton, president and CEO of the National Action Network. "But we also shouldn't rush and throw everybody under the bus because of accusations."

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Sharpton, who has known Adams for more than 35 years and counts him as one of the earliest supporters of his civil rights organization, told The Associated Press on Friday that he has "never known him to do anything criminal."

Federal prosecutors have accused Adams of soliciting and accepting illegal campaign contributions and more than \$100,000 in luxury travel perks from Turkish officials and other foreign nationals seeking to buy his influence.

In exchange, they say he performed official favors that benefited Turkey, including pushing through the opening of a consulate building in Manhattan over the objections of fire safety officials who said it was unsafe to occupy.

The charges against Adams come as federal investigators conduct multiple probes linked to several top officials in his administration, including the brother of his former police commissioner; a consulting firm run by another brother of his schools chancellor and deputy mayor for public safety; and one of his top advisers and closest confidantes, Tim Pearson.

Pearson resigned Monday night, weeks after the police commissioner, Edward Caban, and schools chancellor, David Banks, announced they were stepping down. All have denied wrongdoing.

The U.S. attorney who brought the case against Adams, Damian Williams, is also Black.

Michael Blake, a former New York assemblyman and vice chair of the Democratic National Committee, said that the Adams indictment was "a reflective moment" for Black communities in New York and the Black political class that brought Adams to power.

"This cannot be the standard," Blake said. He said the sentiment among elected officials he'd spoken with "is that this is chaotic and unsustainable" and "embarrassing."

Regardless of the result of the criminal prosecution against Adams, Blake said, "I feel pretty confident that come January 1st, 2026, Eric Adams is not going to be the mayor of New York City."

The former assemblyman is considering a run for New York City mayor.

Whether or not Adams should be encouraged to resign is a matter widely debated among Black leaders. Sharpton said he planned to discuss it soon with other top Black leaders in New York. The reverend has previously convened Adams, New York's attorney general, lieutenant governor, city council speaker, the Manhattan and Bronx district attorneys, all of whom are Black, to celebrate the historic representation across state and local government.

The meeting was called last December, in part, because of the perception that Democrats had lost power in the midterm election amid an increase in crime. Sharpton said he would not make a decision on whether to call for Adams' resignation without meeting again with that esteemed group.

"We may feel he's innocent, but can't run the city. We may feel he's innocent and can run the city. We may feel he's guilty," Sharpton said. "We need to talk."

But some are not waiting for Sharpton's meeting.

"I ask the mayor to seriously and honestly consider whether full attention can be given to our deserving New Yorkers who need our government to be sound and stable," said New York City Council Speaker Adrienne E. Adams, who is Black and is of no relation to the mayor.

Last week, she called the charges against the mayor "serious" and said that she was "deeply concerned" about the impact of Adams' legal battle on the city's governance.

She's not alone.

"Each New Yorker deserves a mayor who is dedicated to serving our communities, and who upholds the dignity and integrity this office requires," New York State Senator Zellnor Myrie said. He called the indictment a "sad day for the city, and especially painful for so many Black New Yorkers who put our hope and faith in this mayor."

Still, there are plenty who are defending the mayor.

"I was a little shocked and didn't understand why all of this was happening, quite frankly, to these heroes of ours. And the response that we got from many Black constituents asked, 'Why is the government coming after Black folks,'" said New York Assemblywoman Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn, who represents

parts of Brooklyn and serves as the chair of the Brooklyn Democratic Party.

"We all know that an indictment is not a conviction," said Bichotte Hermelyn. She quoted the adage, first spoken by a New York state chief judge, that prosecutors "can indict a ham sandwich."

"Adams represents a big political and empowered working class of Black neighborhoods, which is the foundation of his electorate," Bichotte Hermelyn said. "When he ran in 2021, it was a very grassroots approach where people of color from all over, immigrants, women," and others came together.

In the meantime, Adams said he is listening to residents who want him to resist the calls to resign, even if some of his fellow Black leaders are waffling in their support.

"Eric, stay the course," the mayor said of social media messages and email he has received since his indictment. "Don't be distracted."

Mormon faith pushes ahead with global temple building boom despite cool reception in Las Vegas

By KEN RITTER and HANNAH SCHOENBAUM Associated Press

LAS VEGAS (AP) — A historic building boom of big, bright Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints temples — beacons to the faithful with steeples pointing heavenward around the world — is meeting resistance in some parts of the U.S., including one place not really known for moderation.

In Las Vegas, just a 30-minute drive from glittery casinos, homeowners in a rural foothills neighborhood complain the size and lighting of a temple that won city approval will forever change the dark-sky environment. Some say they feel trampled, and that church and city officials rushed to approve the project.

"I feel like it soured people's taste, to see how they steamrolled the neighborhood," said Matthew DeLoe, a homeowner who was active against the temple for months.

Most temples built by the faith have been well received, but the Las Vegas fight mirrors objections over construction plans in Texas, Wyoming and even the religion's home state of Utah. The battles are forcing the faith known widely as the Mormon church to explain to non-members why the lavish temples are so vital to their beliefs.

Temples draw the faithful closer to God, they say. They are places for the most sacred ceremonies, such as weddings that seal couples for eternity and baptisms to bring deceased family members or others into the fold. Officials insist they consult with locals and carefully design temples for each environment.

"Our goal is to give more members access to these very precious places that are sacred to us and our religion," said Presiding Bishop Gérald Caussé, a high-ranking official whose duties include overseeing worldwide temple building, during an interview with The Associated Press in Utah in June.

Temples are separate from the church's 20,000 worldwide meetinghouses where anyone is welcome and members gather for Sunday services. At temples, only devout members who follow church rules are allowed inside.

Thousands of supporters and vocal opponents packed planning meetings for months before the Las Vegas City Council unanimously approved a three-story temple in July. Larger in size than the Notre Dame Cathedral in Paris, it's set to have a golden steeple soaring nearly 200 feet (61 meters).

Some want to sue to stop the project. They insist their concerns have nothing to do with the religious teachings of a sometimes misunderstood faith, which is known for its belief in eternal families, tight-knit congregations and bans on alcohol, coffee, gambling and same-sex relationships.

"I don't have a problem with the church being there, and none of the neighbors have a problem with the church being there," said Sue Kristensen, of the Nevada Rural Preservation Alliance. "The size of the building is the problem. It's blocking everyone's views of beautiful Lone Mountain. Monstrosity is the best word that I can think of."

Church officials have another description for the more than 300 temples built in recent years. "They are clean, and beautiful, and quiet, as are the people who will frequent these sacred spaces," said church spokesman Doug Andersen.

New temple projects could be announced at this weekend's twice-a-year church conference, where

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congregants of the 17.2-million-member faith gather in person in Salt Lake City or watch online for guidance and church news.

What the faithful won't hear is how much the elaborately built and lavishly furnished temples cost. The church declines to disclose construction figures, but its investment arm has a portfolio worth nearly \$55 billion, according to its most recent U.S. Securities and Exchange Commission disclosures.

The SEC fined the church and its money management arm \$5 million in February 2023 for using shell companies to obscure the size of church financial holdings. Scrutiny focused on whether the tax-exempt faith sits atop a treasure trove of wealth. The government noted the church was concerned that disclosure of its portfolio would lead to unspecified "negative consequences."

The temple-building push went into hyperdrive after President Russell M. Nelson became head of the church in January 2018. About half of new temples have been built since then. Nelson, who turned 100 in September, named 15 new temple locations during a conference last April, to bring the total that are announced, open or under construction to 350.

It is the biggest building boom in the history of the faith, said Matt Martinich, a researcher and church member who tracks the growth of the global religion. Construction accelerated after 1980, from 19 temples worldwide to 122 by 2005. The 150th temple opened in Provo, Utah, in 2016. The church says five are due to open before the end of 2024 in Honduras; Brazil; Tooele, Utah; Casper, Wyoming; and Tallahassee, Florida.

Just north of Pittsburgh, the non-member public had a rare opportunity in August to tour a temple, the 196th to be completed. Crystal chandeliers, woodwork and framed paintings of idealized biblical scenes adorned the interior.

The Las Vegas temple site is a large undeveloped lot surrounded by single-family homes, schools and parks. At sunset, it's enveloped by the shadow of a rocky natural landmark, Lone Mountain.

Residents note that streetlights and sidewalks are scarce, homes draw water from wells and neighbors ride horses on the dirt shoulders of roads. They worry the temple will bring light pollution, noise and traffic. It will be Las Vegas' second temple. The first opened in 1989 about a 30-minute drive across the city.

Bud Stoddard, a regional church leader in the area, said the palatial structure is intended "to be something that when we see it, our minds, our eyes, are immediately drawn heavenward." He predicted it will be a beacon for the 100,000 church faithful in and around Las Vegas.

"What I believe is that five years from now, this area will be more beautiful, more desirable," Stoddard said at the site. "This will guarantee a place of quiet, a place of solitude."

Far from Sin City, a court fight may also loom in the Texas town of Fairview. Mayor Henry Lessner said church representatives promised legal action after the town council last month unanimously rejected plans for a temple that would be among the largest buildings in a community of 11,000 residents. At 154 feet (47 meters), the spire would be taller than the town's two water towers.

Church officials may argue that not being able to have tall steeples infringes on their right to worship. They point to the federal Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act that since 2000 has banned the use of zoning and landmarking laws to discriminate against "religious assemblies or institutions."

Lessner predicted that his town on the edge of the Dallas-Fort Worth metropolitan area might end up as a test case for religious architectural freedom.

"We want to be good neighbors," Lessner said. "But our community will not be bullied. 'Don't Mess with Texas' includes Fairview."

In Las Vegas, the temple's outdoor lighting plan was modified and the steeple height was lowered 20 feet (6 meters), before winning City Council approval.

Caussé said the church is willing to make adjustments that are reasonable and do not change the "spiritual value or nature" of the temple.

"It is so important to us to be considered as good neighbors, because a temple is not about contention," he said. "It has to create connection between people and with the community to be well received."

Human connections bring hope in North Carolina after devastation of Helene

By JEFF AMY, ERIK VERDUZCO and BRITTANY PETERSON Associated Press

BLACK MOUNTAIN, N.C. (AP) — Sarah Vekasi is a potter who runs a store in Black Mountain, North Carolina, called Sarah Sunshine Pottery, named after her normally bubbly personality. But these days she's struggling with the trauma of Hurricane Helene and uncertainty about the future of her business.

"All I can say is that I'm alive. I'm not doing great. I'm not doing good. But I'm extremely grateful to be alive, especially when so many are not," Vekasi said.

One thing that makes her feel a little better is the fellowship of the daily town meeting at the square.

"It's incredible being able to meet in person," said Vekasi, who was cut off by impassible roads for days. At Wednesday's session more than 150 people gathered as local leaders stood atop a picnic table shouting updates.

In the midst of the devastating destruction left by the deadliest hurricane to hit the mainland U.S. since Katrina, human connections are giving the survivors hope in western North Carolina. While government cargo planes brought food and water into the hardest-hit areas and rescue crews waded through creeks searching for survivors, those who made it through the storm, whose death toll has topped 180, were leaning on one another.

Martha Sullivan, also at the town meeting, was taking careful notes so she could share the information — roads reopened, progress in getting power restored, work on trying to get water flowing again — with others.

Sullivan, who has lived in Black Mountain for 43 years, said her children invited her to come to Charlotte after the storm, but she wants to stay in her community and look after her neighbors.

"I'm going to stay as long as I feel like I'm being useful," Sullivan said.

Helping one another in the hardest-hit areas

In remote mountain areas, helicopters hoisted the stranded to safety while search crews moved toppled trees so they could look door to door for survivors. In some places, homes teetered on hillsides and washed-out riverbanks.

Nearly a week after the storm, more than 1.1 million customers still had no power in the Carolinas and Georgia, where Helene struck after barreling over Florida's Gulf Coast as a Category 4 hurricane. Deaths have been reported in Florida, Georgia, Tennessee and Virginia, in addition to the Carolinas.

Robin Wynn lost power at her Asheville home early Friday and was able to grab a bag of canned goods and water before getting to a shelter despite water up to her knees.

"I didn't know where I was going, didn't know what was going to happen next. But I got out and I'm alive," Wynn said on Wednesday.

Now that she's back home, her neighbors have been watching out for one another. Plenty of people have come around to make sure everyone has a hot meal and water, she said.

Eric Williamson, who works at First Baptist Church in Hendersonville, normally makes home visits to members who can't physically get to church. This week, he's their lifeline, delivering food that meets dietary restrictions and tossing out food that had spoiled.

Beyond checking in on the essentials, he says it's important to just socialize with folks in a moment like this to help them know they aren't alone.

He has a handwritten list of everyone he needs to visit. "They don't have telephone service, even if they have a landline, a lot of that isn't working," Williamson said. "So we're bringing them food and water, but also just bringing them a smile and a prayer with them just to give them comfort."

Volunteers in Asheville gathered on Wednesday before going out to help find people who have been unreachable because of phone and internet outages. They took along boxes of drinking water and instructions to return in person with their results.

Even notifying relatives of people who died in the storm has been difficult.

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"That has been our challenge, quite honestly, is no cell service, no way to reach out to next of kin," said Avril Pinder, an official in Buncombe County where at least 61 people have died. "We have a confirmed body count, but we don't have identifications on everyone or next-of-kin notifications."

Biden and Harris get a firsthand look

President Joe Biden flew over the devastation in North and South Carolina, getting a firsthand look at the mess left by a storm that now has killed at least 189 people.

Speaking afterwards in Raleigh, North Carolina, Biden praised the Democratic governor of North Carolina and the Republican governor of South Carolina for their responses to the storm, saying that in the wake of disasters, "we put politics aside."

"Our job is to help as many people as we can as quickly as we can and as thoroughly as we can," he said.

That includes a commitment from the federal government to foot the bill for debris removal and emergency protective measures for six months. The money will address the impacts of landslides and flooding and will cover costs of first responders, search and rescue teams, shelters, and mass feeding.

"We're not leaving until you're back on your feet completely," Biden said.

Vice President Kamala Harris traveled to neighboring Georgia, where she said the president had approved a request to pick up the tab for similar emergency aid there for three months.

Biden plans on traveling to disaster areas in Florida and Georgia on Thursday.

Devastation from Florida to Tennessee

Employees at a plastics factory in rural Tennessee who kept working last week until water flooded their parking lot and power went out at the plant were among those killed. The floodwaters swept 11 workers away, and only five were rescued. Two are confirmed dead.

Tennessee state authorities said they are investigating the company that owns the factory after some employees said they weren't allowed to leave in time to avoid the storm's impact.

Hospitals and health care organizations in the Southeast mostly stayed open despite dealing with blackouts, wind damage, supply issues and flooding. Many hospitals halted elective procedures, while only a few closed completely.

In Florida, officials were turning to "low-risk" state prisoners to help clear the mountains of debris left behind.

"Department of Corrections, they do prison labor anyways. So they're bringing them to do debris removal," Gov. Ron DeSantis told reporters on Wednesday.

A small town in central Thailand is mourning the 23 who died in a school bus fire

By JINTAMAS SAKSORNCHAI Associated Press

LAN SAK, Thailand (AP) — A small town in central Thailand prepared for a somber mass funeral Thursday for the 23 children and teachers who died in a horrific bus fire while on a school trip.

Some residents and monks waited past midnight at Wat Khao Phraya Sangkharam, the Buddhist temple in Lan Sak town in Uthai Thani province, to receive the bodies of the dead returned from Bangkok. Also arriving back were relatives of the dead who went to the Thai capital to help identify the severely burned victims.

The school the children attended is on the temple grounds, a common location for schools in much of rural Thailand.

In the school's assembly hall, florists came early to build a large display of white flowers in front of a line of coffins with portraits of the dead. An elderly woman wept in front of a photo of a 14-year-old boy before limping away, tears streaming down her face and hands tightly clutching a black plastic bag. Relatives put food, snacks and beverages as offerings on top of the coffins — an act of respect symbolically sending nourishment and blessings to those who died.

The afternoon funeral was to be attended by the head of Thailand's Privy Council as a representative of the royal family. King Maha Vajiralongkorn has declared a royal cremation ceremony will be held for

the victims next week.

Six teachers and 39 elementary and junior high school students were on the bus that caught fire Tuesday on a highway in suburban Bangkok. It spread so quickly, only 22 were able to escape.

On social media, parents have expressed nervousness about sending children on school field trips as well as deep outrage about potential safety lapses.

Police were investigating whether the fire was caused by negligence and filed several initial charges against the driver, including reckless driving and failing to stop to help others.

Police have not determined the cause but say the driver told them a front tire malfunctioned and the vehicle then scraped a concrete highway barrier. The sparks from the friction might have set off highly flammable gas canisters on the bus, police said.

The bus had 11 gas canisters inside, but a permit to install only six. Many Thai vehicles use compressed natural gas for fuel.

The bus company owner had told public broadcaster ThaiPBS the gas cylinders had passed safety standards.

Thailand's Department of Land Transport was implementing urgent inspections of all natural gas-fueled buses. The department also will upgrade its safety guidelines to require crisis management training for drivers and safety inspection when such vehicles are to be commissioned by schools, said Seksom Akraphand, the agency's deputy director-general.

In South Korea, deepfake porn wrecks women's lives and deepens gender conflict

By HYUNG-JIN KIM Associated Press

SEOUL, South Korea (AP) — Three years after the 30-year-old South Korean woman received a barrage of online fake images that depicted her nude, she is still being treated for trauma. She struggles to talk with men. Using a mobile phone brings back the nightmare.

"It completely trampled me, even though it wasn't a direct physical attack on my body," she said in a phone interview with The Associated Press. She didn't want her name revealed because of privacy concerns.

Many other South Korean women recently have come forward to share similar stories as South Korea grapples with a deluge of non-consensual, explicit deepfake videos and images that have become much more accessible and easier to create.

It was not until last week that parliament revised a law to make watching or possessing deepfake porn content illegal.

Most suspected perpetrators in South Korea are teenage boys. Observers say the boys target female friends, relatives and acquaintances — also mostly minors — as a prank, out of curiosity or misogyny. The attacks raise serious questions about school programs but also threaten to worsen an already troubled divide between men and women.

Deepfake porn in South Korea gained attention after unconfirmed lists of schools that had victims spread online in August. Many girls and women have hastily removed photos and videos from their Instagram, Facebook and other social media accounts. Thousands of young women have staged protests demanding stronger steps against deepfake porn. Politicians, academics and activists have held forums.

"Teenage (girls) must be feeling uneasy about whether their male classmates are okay. Their mutual trust has been completely shattered," said Shin Kyung-ah, a sociology professor at South Korea's Hallym University.

The school lists have not been formally verified, but officials including President Yoon Suk Yeol have confirmed a surge of explicit deepfake content on social media. Police have launched a seven-month crackdown.

Recent attention to the problem has coincided with France's arrest in August of Pavel Durov, the founder of the messaging app Telegram, over allegations that his platform was used for illicit activities including the distribution of child sexual abuse. South Korea's telecommunications and broadcast watchdog said

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Monday that Telegram has pledged to enforce a zero-tolerance policy on illegal deepfake content.

Police say they've detained 387 people over alleged deepfake crimes this year, more than 80% of them teenagers. Separately, the Education Ministry says about 800 students have informed authorities about intimate deepfake content involving them this year.

Experts say the true scale of deepfake porn in the country is far bigger.

The U.S. cybersecurity firm Security Hero called South Korea "the country most targeted by deepfake pornography" last year. In a report, it said South Korean singers and actresses constitute more than half of the people featured in deepfake pornography worldwide.

The prevalence of deepfake porn in South Korea reflects various factors including heavy use of smart phones; an absence of comprehensive sex and human rights education in schools and inadequate social media regulations for minors as well as a "misogynic culture" and social norms that "sexually objectify women," according to Hong Nam-hee, a research professor at the Institute for Urban Humanities at the University of Seoul.

Victims speak of intense suffering.

In parliament, lawmaker Kim Nam Hee read a letter by an unidentified victim who she said tried to kill herself because she didn't want to suffer any longer from the explicit deepfake videos someone had made of her. Addressing a forum, former opposition party leader Park Ji-hyun read a letter from another victim who said she fainted and was taken to an emergency room after receiving sexually abusive deepfake images and being told by her perpetrators that they were stalking her.

The 30-year-old woman interviewed by The AP said that her doctoral studies in the United States were disrupted for a year. She is receiving treatment after being diagnosed with panic disorder and post-traumatic stress disorder in 2022.

Police said they've detained five men for allegedly producing and spreading fake explicit contents of about 20 women, including her. The victims are all graduates from Seoul National University, the country's top school. Two of the men, including one who allegedly sent her fake nude images in 2021, attended the same university, but she said has no meaningful memory of them.

The woman said the images she received on Telegram used photos she had posted on the local messaging app Kakao Talk, combined with nude photos of strangers. There were also videos showing men masturbating and messages describing her as a promiscuous woman or prostitute. One photo shows a screen shot of a Telegram chatroom with 42 people where her fake images were posted.

The fake images were very crudely made but the woman felt deeply humiliated and shocked because dozens of people — some of whom she likely knows — were sexually harassing her with those photos.

Building trust with men is stressful, she said, because she worries that "normal-looking people could do such things behind my back."

Using a smart phone sometimes revives memories of the fake images.

"These days, people spend more time on their mobile phones than talking face to face with others. So we can't really easily escape the traumatic experience of digital crimes if those happen on our phones," she said. "I was very sociable and really liked to meet new people, but my personality has totally changed since that incident. That made my life really difficult and I'm sad."

Critics say authorities haven't done enough to counter deepfake porn despite an epidemic of online sex crimes in recent years, such as spy cam videos of women in public toilets and other places. In 2020, members of a criminal ring were arrested and convicted of blackmailing dozens of women into filming sexually explicit videos for them to sell.

"The number of male juveniles consuming deepfake porn for fun has increased because authorities have overlooked the voices of women" demanding stronger punishment for digital sex crimes, the monitoring group ReSET said in comments sent to AP.

South Korea has no official records on the extent of deepfake online porn. But Reset said a recent random search of an online chatroom found more than 4,000 sexually exploitive images, videos and other items.

Reviews of district court rulings showed less than a third of the 87 people indicted by prosecutors for

deepfake crimes since 2021 were sent to prison. Nearly 60% avoided jail by receiving suspended terms, fines or not-guilty verdicts, according to lawmaker Kim's office. Judges tended to lighten sentences when those convicted repented for their crimes or were first time offenders.

The deepfake problem has gained urgency given South Korea's serious rifts over gender roles, workplace discrimination, mandatory military service for men and social burdens on men and women.

Kim Chae-won, a 25-year-old office worker, said some of her male friends shunned her after she asked them what they thought about digital sex violence targeting women.

"I feel scared of living as a woman in South Korea," said Kim Haeun, a 17-year-old high school student who recently removed all her photos on Instagram. She said she feels awkward when talking with male friends and tries to distance herself from boys she doesn't know well.

"Most sex crimes target women. And when they happen, I think we are often helpless," she said.

Prosecutors lay out new evidence in Trump election case, accuse him of having 'resorted to crimes'

By ERIC TUCKER and ALANNA DURKIN RICHER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump laid the groundwork to try to overturn the 2020 election even before he lost, knowingly pushed false claims of voter fraud and "resorted to crimes" in his failed bid to cling to power, according to a court filing unsealed Wednesday that offers new evidence from the landmark criminal case against the former president.

The filing from special counsel Jack Smith's team offers the most comprehensive view to date of what prosecutors intend to prove if the case charging Trump with conspiring to overturn the election reaches trial. Although a months-long congressional investigation and the indictment itself have chronicled in stark detail Trump's efforts to undo the election, the filing cites previously unknown accounts offered by Trump's closest aides to paint a portrait of an "increasingly desperate" president who, while losing his grip on the White House, "used deceit to target every stage of the electoral process."

"So what?" the filing quotes Trump as telling an aide after being advised that his vice president, Mike Pence, had been rushed to a secure location after a crowd of violent Trump supporters stormed the U.S. Capitol on Jan. 6, 2021, to try to prevent the counting of electoral votes.

"The details don't matter," Trump said, when told by an adviser that a lawyer who was mounting his legal challenges wouldn't be able to prove the false allegations in court, the filing states.

The brief was made public over the Trump legal team's objections in the final month of a closely contested presidential race in which Democrats have sought to make Trump's refusal to accept the election results four years ago central to their claims that he is unfit for office. The issue flared as recently as Tuesday night's vice presidential debate when Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz, a Democrat, lamented the violence at the Capitol while a Republican opponent, Ohio Sen. JD Vance, refused to directly answer when asked whether Trump had lost the 2020 race.

The filing was submitted, initially under seal, following a Supreme Court opinion that conferred broad immunity on former presidents for official acts they take in office, a decision that narrowed the scope of the prosecution and eliminated the possibility of a trial before next month's election.

The purpose of the brief is to persuade U.S. District Judge Tanya Chutkan that the offenses charged in the indictment were undertaken in Trump's private, rather than presidential, capacity and can therefore remain part of the case as it moves forward. Chutkan permitted a redacted version to be made public, even though Trump's lawyers argued that it was unfair to unseal it so close to the election.

Though the prospects of a trial are uncertain, particularly if Trump wins the presidency and a new attorney general seeks the dismissal of the case, the brief nonetheless functions as a roadmap for the testimony and evidence prosecutors would elicit before a jury. It is now up to Chutkan to decide which of Trump's acts are official conduct for which Trump is immune from prosecution and which are, in the words of Smith's team, "private crimes" on which the case can proceed.

"Although the defendant was the incumbent President during the charged conspiracies, his scheme was

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fundamentally a private one," Smith's team wrote, adding, "When the defendant lost the 2020 presidential election, he resorted to crimes to try to stay in office."

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung called the brief "falsehood-ridden" and "unconstitutional" and repeated oft-stated allegations that Smith and Democrats were "hell-bent on weaponizing the Justice Department." Trump, in a separate post on his Truth Social platform, said the case would end with his "complete victory."

The filing alleges that Trump "laid the groundwork" for rejecting the election results before the contest was over, telling advisers that in the event he held an early lead he would "declare victory before the ballots were counted and any winner was projected."

Immediately after the election, prosecutors say, his advisers sought to sow chaos in the counting of votes. In one instance, a campaign employee described as a Trump co-conspirator was told that results favoring Democrat Joe Biden at a Michigan polling center appeared accurate. The person is alleged to have replied: "find a reason it isn't" and "give me options to file litigation."

Prosecutors also alleged that Trump advanced claims of fraud despite knowing they were false, recounting how he conceded to others that allegations of election irregularities made by attorney Sidney Powell were "crazy" and referenced the science fiction series "Star Trek." Even so, days later, he promoted on Twitter a lawsuit she was about to file.

In demonstrating his apparent indifference to the accuracy of the election fraud claims, prosecutors also cite an account of a White House staffer who after the election overheard Trump telling his wife, daughter and son-in-law on Marine One: "It doesn't matter if you won or lost the election. You still have to fight like hell."

The filing also includes details of conversations between Trump and Pence, including a private lunch on Nov. 12, 2020, in which Pence "reiterated a face-saving option" for Trump, telling him, "Don't concede but recognize the process is over."

In another lunch days later, Pence urged Trump to accept the election results and run again in 2024.

"I don't know, 2024 is so far off," Trump told him, the filing states.

Prosecutors say that by Dec. 5, the defendant was starting to think about Congress' role in the process.

"For the first time, he mentioned to Pence the possibility of challenging the election results in the House of Representatives," it says, citing a phone call.

But, prosecutors wrote, Trump "disregarded" Pence "in the same way he disregarded dozens of court decisions that unanimously rejected his and his allies' legal claims, and that he disregarded officials in the targeted states — including those in his own party — who stated publicly that he had lost and that his specific fraud allegations were false."

Pence chronicled some of his interactions with Trump, and his eventual split with him, in a 2022 book called "So Help Me God." He also was ordered to appear before the grand jury investigating Trump after courts rejected claims of executive privilege.

Prosecutors also argue Trump used his Twitter account to spread false claims of election fraud, attacking "those speaking the truth" about his loss and exhorting his supporters to travel to Washington for the Jan. 6, 2021, certification.

They intend to use "forensic evidence" from Trump's iPhone to provide insight into Trump's actions after the Capitol attack.

Of the more than 1,200 Tweets Trump sent during the weeks detailed in the indictment, prosecutors say, the vast majority were about the 2020 election, including those falsely claiming Pence could reject electors even though the vice president had told Trump that he had no such power.

That "steady stream of disinformation" culminated in his speech at the Ellipse on the morning of Jan. 6, 2021, where Trump "used these lies to inflame and motivate the large and angry crowd of his supporters to march to the Capitol and disrupt the certification proceeding," prosecutors wrote.

His "personal desperation was at its zenith" that morning as he was "only hours from the certification proceeding that spelled the end," prosecutors wrote.

6 migrants shot dead near Guatemalan border when Mexican army troops open fire

By EDGAR H. CLEMENTE TUXTLA GUTIERREZ, Mexico

MEXICO CITY (AP) — Six international migrants are dead after Mexican soldiers opened fire on a truck carrying a group near the border with Guatemala, Mexico's Defense Department said Wednesday.

The department said in a statement that soldiers claimed they heard shots as the trucks and two other vehicles approached their position late Tuesday in the southern state of Chiapas, near the town of Huixtla.

Two soldiers opened fire on the truck, which was carrying migrants from Egypt, Nepal, Cuba, India, Pakistan and at least one other country. Soldiers then approached the truck and found four of the migrants dead, and 12 wounded.

Two of the wounded later died of their injuries. There was no immediate information on the condition of the other 10.

Local prosecutors confirmed all the victims died of gunshot wounds. The Defense Department did not say whether the migrants died as a result of army fire, or whether any weapons were found in the truck.

There were 17 other migrants in the truck who were unharmed. The vehicle was carrying a total of 33 migrants. The area is common route for smuggling migrants, who are often packed into crowded freight trucks.

The department said the two soldiers who opened fire were relieved of duty pending investigations. In Mexico, any incident involving civilians is subject to civilian prosecution, but soldiers can also face military courts martial for those offenses.

It is not the first time Mexican forces have opened fire on vehicles carrying migrants in the area, which is also the object of turf battles between warring drug cartels.

In the same area in 2021, the quasi-military National Guard opened fire on a pickup truck carrying migrants, killing one and wounding four.

Irineo Mujica, a migrant rights activist who has frequently accompanied caravans of migrants in that area of Chiapas, said he doubted the migrants or their smugglers opened fire.

"It is really impossible that these people would have been shooting at the army," Mujica said. "Most of the time, they get through by paying bribes."

The U.N. agency for refugees in Mexico, known as the ACNUR, wrote that it "expresses its concern about the events in Chiapas," noting "people in migration are exposed to great risks during their journey, and that is why it is indispensable they have legal means of access, travel, and integration to avoid tragedies like these."

If the deaths were the result of army fire, as appears likely, it could prove a major embarrassment for President Claudia Sheinbaum, who took office Tuesday.

Sheinbaum has followed the lead of former president Andrés Manuel López Obrador in giving the armed forces extraordinary powers in law enforcement, state-run companies, airports, trains and construction projects.

Southerners stay in touch the old-fashioned way after Helene cuts roads, power, phones

By JEFF AMY, ERIK VERDUZCO and JOHN SEEWER Associated Press

ASHEVILLE, N.C. (AP) — Isolated and without electricity or phone service since Hurricane Helene inflicted devastation across the Southeast nearly a week ago, residents in the mountains of western North Carolina are relying on old-fashioned ways of communicating and coping.

At the town square in Black Mountain, local leaders stood atop a picnic table shouting updates about when power might be restored. One woman took notes to pass along to her neighbors. Alongside a fencerow, a makeshift message board listed the names of people still missing. In other areas, mules delivered medical supplies to mountaintop homes. Residents collected water from creeks and cooked over camp stoves. And

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across the region, people were looking after each other.

President Joe Biden, after surveying the area by helicopter on Wednesday, praised the Democratic governor of North Carolina and the Republican governor of South Carolina for their responses to the storm, saying that in the wake of disasters, "we put politics aside."

While government cargo planes brought food and water into the hardest-hit areas and rescue crews waded through creeks searching for survivors, those who made it through the storm, whose death toll has topped 180, leaned on one another — not technology.

"I didn't know where I was going, didn't know what was going to happen next. But I got out and I'm alive," said Robin Wynn, who lost power at her Asheville home early Friday and was able to grab a bag of canned goods and water before getting to a shelter despite water up to her knees.

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"All I can say is that I'm alive. I'm not doing great. I'm not doing good. But I'm extremely grateful to be alive, especially when so many are not," Vekasi said.

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That includes a commitment from the federal government to foot the bill for debris removal and emergency protective measures for six months. The money will address the impacts of landslides and flooding and will cover costs of first responders, search and rescue teams, shelters, and mass feeding.

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"Department of Corrections, they do prison labor anyways. So they're bringing them to do debris removal," Gov. Ron DeSantis told reporters on Wednesday.

Israel presses forward on two fronts and reports 8 combat deaths as fears of a wider war mount

By KAREEM CHEHAYEB and SAMY MAGDY Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — Israel pressed forward on two fronts Wednesday, pursuing a ground incursion into Lebanon against Hezbollah that left eight Israeli soldiers dead and conducting strikes in Gaza that killed dozens, including children. As Israel vowed to retaliate for Iran's ballistic missile attack a day earlier, the region braced for further escalation.

Iran, which backs both Hezbollah and the Hamas militants who run the Gaza Strip, launched dozens of missiles into Israel on Tuesday night, another escalation in a tit-for-tat cycle that is pushing the Middle East closer to a regional war. Israel warned that the attack would have "repercussions."

The Israeli military said seven soldiers were killed in two Hezbollah attacks in southern Lebanon on Wednesday, without elaborating. The deaths followed an earlier announcement of the first Israeli combat death in Lebanon since the start of the incursion — a 22-year-old captain in a commando brigade. Another seven troops were wounded.

Together, the deaths announced on the eve of Rosh Hashana, the Jewish new year, were some of the biggest casualties sustained by Israeli forces in months.

In Gaza, where the nearly yearlong war that triggered the widening conflict rages with no end in sight, Israeli ground and air operations in the territory's second-largest city of Khan Younis killed at least 51 people, including women and children, Palestinian medical officials said.

And late Wednesday night, an Israeli airstrike hit an apartment building near the Lebanese capital's city center, the second time Israel has struck central Beirut this week. At least six people were killed and seven wounded in the residential Bashoura district.

Residents reported a sulfur-like smell following the attack, and Lebanon's state-run National News Agency accused Israel of using internationally banned phosphorous bombs. Human rights groups have in the past

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accused Israel of using white phosphorus incendiary shells on towns and villages in conflict-hit southern Lebanon.

Multiple strikes were also reported in Beirut's southern suburbs in areas issued evacuation warnings by the Israeli army. The area struck in central Beirut was not covered in those warnings.

The latest actions on multiple fronts have raised fears of a wider conflict that could draw in Iran as well as the United States, which has rushed military assets to the region in support of Israel.

Meanwhile, Syria's state-run SANA news agency said an Israeli airstrike hit a residential building in Damascus on Wednesday evening, killing three people and wounding at least three others. An Associated Press journalist at the scene said the missile appeared to have targeted the bottom floor of a four-story apartment building.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which frequently hits targets linked to Iran or allied groups in Syria, but rarely claims the strikes.

Hezbollah says its fighters clashed with Israeli troops

Hezbollah, widely seen as the most powerful Iranian-armed group in the region, said its fighters clashed with Israeli troops in two places inside Lebanon near the border. The Israeli military said ground forces backed by airstrikes killed militants in "close-range engagements," without saying where.

Israeli media reported infantry and tank units operating in southern Lebanon after the military sent thousands of additional troops and artillery to the border.

The Israeli soldiers' deaths announced Wednesday followed other military losses this year. In June, an explosion in southern Gaza killed eight Israeli soldiers. In January, 21 Israeli troops were killed in a single attack by Palestinian militants in central Gaza, the deadliest single attack on Israeli forces since the Israel-Hamas war erupted almost a year ago.

The Israeli military warned people in 50 Lebanese villages and towns to evacuate north of the Awali River, some 60 kilometers (37 miles) from the border and much farther than the northern edge of a U.N.-declared zone intended to serve as a buffer between Israel and Hezbollah after their 2006 war. Hundreds of thousands have already fled their homes.

Israel has said it will continue striking Hezbollah until it is safe for tens of thousands of its citizens displaced from homes near the Lebanon border to return. Hezbollah has vowed to keep firing rockets into Israel until there is a cease-fire in Gaza.

Israeli strikes have killed more than 1,000 people in Lebanon over the past two weeks, nearly a quarter of them women and children, according to Lebanon's Health Ministry.

Meanwhile, Israel lashed out at the United Nations, declaring Secretary-General António Guterres persona non grata and banned from entering the country. Israeli Foreign Minister Israel Katz accused him of failing to unequivocally condemn Tuesday night's Iranian missile attack. The move deepens an already wide rift between Israel and the United Nations.

Palestinians describe massive raid in Gaza

The Health Ministry in Gaza said at least 51 people were killed and 82 wounded in the operation in Khan Younis that began early Wednesday. Records at the European Hospital showed seven women and 12 children, as young as 22 months old, were among those killed.

Another 23 people, including two children, were killed in separate strikes across Gaza, according to local hospitals.

The Israeli military did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Residents said Israel had carried out heavy airstrikes as its ground forces staged an incursion into three neighborhoods of Khan Younis. Mahmoud al-Razd, whose four relatives were killed, described heavy destruction and said first responders had struggled to reach destroyed homes.

"The explosions and shelling were massive," he told The Associated Press. "Many people are thought to be under the rubble, and no one can retrieve them."

Israel carried out a weeklong offensive earlier this year in Khan Younis that left much of the city in ruins. Israeli forces have repeatedly returned to areas of Gaza as militants have regrouped.

On Oct. 7, Hamas-led militants killed some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, in an attack in southern Israel

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and took around 250 hostage. Some 100 are still held, around 65 of whom are believed to be alive.

Israel's retaliatory offensive has killed over 41,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not differentiate between fighters and civilians but says more than half were women and children. The Israeli military says it has killed over 17,000 militants, without providing evidence.

Iran fires missiles to avenge attacks on militant allies

Iran launched at least 180 missiles into Israel on Tuesday in what it said was retaliation for the devastating blows Israel landed recently against Hezbollah, which has been firing rockets into Israel since the war in Gaza began in solidarity with Hamas.

Israelis scrambled for bomb shelters as air-raid sirens sounded and the orange glow of missiles streaked across the night sky.

The Israeli military said it intercepted many of the incoming Iranian missiles, though some landed in central and southern Israel. Several landed in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, killing a Palestinian man.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu vowed to retaliate, saying Iran "made a big mistake tonight and it will pay for it."

U.S. President Joe Biden said his administration is "fully supportive" of Israel and that he's discussing with aides what the appropriate response should be.

Iran said it would respond to any violation of its sovereignty with even heavier strikes on Israeli infrastructure.

Iran said it fired the missiles as retaliation for attacks that killed leaders of Hezbollah, Hamas and its own paramilitary Revolutionary Guard. It referenced Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and Guard Gen. Abbas Nilforushan, both killed in an Israeli airstrike last week in Beirut. It also mentioned Ismail Haniyeh, a top leader in Hamas who was killed in Tehran in a suspected Israeli attack in July.

Witt gets another big hit to send the Royals into ALDS with a 2-game sweep of the Orioles

By STEPHEN WHYNO AP Sports Writer

BALTIMORE (AP) — Bobby Witt Jr. beat out an infield single to drive in the go-ahead run and send the Kansas City Royals into an AL Division Series with a 2-1 victory over the Baltimore Orioles on Wednesday for a two-game sweep of their Wild Card Series.

With two outs and runners at the corners in sixth inning, Witt hit a grounder to the edge of the dirt behind second base, where Jordan Westburg made a diving stop and throw to first. Witt was already there after zooming 90 feet in 4.14 seconds, allowing Kyle Isbel to score from third.

"I just had to try to run," Witt said.

It was the second consecutive game in which the AL batting champion provided the decisive hit. Witt's RBI single in Tuesday's series opener plated the only run in a 1-0 victory.

"You never know when this opportunity ever is going to happen again, so got to make the most of it while you have it," Witt said. "That's the fun part of this game. This is why we do it, these situations here."

Kansas City, which endured two seven-game losing streaks over the final month of the season, advanced to face the AL East champion New York Yankees. Game 1 is Saturday in the Bronx.

Cedric Mullins homered for the Orioles, who fell to 0-5 during two quick playoff exits the past two years. Baltimore has dropped its last 10 postseason games.

The new-look Royals lost 106 games last season but used a 30-win improvement to get back to October for the first time since winning the 2015 World Series.

Second baseman Michael Massey, who led off the game with a double and scored on a single by Vinnie Pasquantino, said the front office bringing in experienced veterans with playoff experience like Tommy Pham, Yuli Gurriel, Michael Wacha and Will Smith made this possible.

"They've been there before, they've done it, so I think it's helped a lot of guys," Massey said. "It's helped us, for sure me, to be around those guys and just watch them, more than anything, and see how they go about their business, has been — I think that's helped us stay even keel."

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The Royals left 12 runners on base and got through another close game with a razor-thin margin for error thanks to some masterful managing by Matt Quatraro, himself a postseason rookie like Witt, Game 1 winner Cole Ragans and so many others.

Quatraro let starter Seth Lugo get an out after loading the bases with nobody out in the fifth before spinning up bullpen roulette, starting with winning pitcher Angel Zerpa, who got KC out of that jam and then got the first out of the sixth. John Schreiber got three more outs, Sam Long two, Kris Bubic three and Lucas Erceg the final three to earn his second save of the series.

"It's so impressive that they believe in themselves and they trust their stuff and they just come after some of the best hitters in the world," Quatraro said.

Cionel Pérez took the loss.

The Orioles were swept in their only playoff series for a second consecutive year, going 1 for 13 with runners in scoring position this time and 5 for 32 combined. They face numerous offseason questions, from the future of manager Brandon Hyde to the possibility of losing pending free-agent starter Corbin Burnes.

"Especially when you lose like this, there's frustration, there's anger, there's disappointment because you felt like there was opportunities there in those couple games to change the score, and it didn't happen," Hyde said.

TRAINER'S ROOM

Orioles: LF Colton Cowser broke his left hand when it was hit by the ball as he struck out swinging in the fifth. He exited after six innings.

UP NEXT

The Royals face Yankees ace Gerrit Cole in the opener of their ALDS, with any starter but Ragans or Lugo rested and ready to go. Wacha had been in line to start Game 3 against Baltimore.

Gritty Tigers close out playoff sweep of Astros with 5-2 victory in Game 2 of Wild Card Series

By KRISTIE RIEKEN AP Sports Writer

HOUSTON (AP) — Manager A.J. Hinch wanted his Detroit Tigers to embody their home city. Hard-working with a never-give-up attitude, but most of all a team that had grit.

That's how they stormed into October — and just kept going.

Andy Ibáñez hit a tiebreaking three-run double in Detroit's four-run eighth inning, and the Tigers swept the Houston Astros with a 5-2 victory in Game 2 of their AL Wild Card Series on Wednesday.

"Our city is built on grit," a jubilant Hinch said in a prosecco-soaked clubhouse. "That's what it is. I remember saying that I wanted to have a team that this city is proud of. I think the city is pretty proud of what we're doing and how we're doing it and the fight that this team shows."

Parker Meadows homered as Detroit ended Houston's run of seven consecutive appearances in the AL Championship Series. It was a sweet moment for Hinch, who led Houston to a championship in 2017 and was fired in the aftermath of the Astros' sign-stealing scandal.

"This is what you play for," he said. "Baseball's great."

Next up for the wild-card Tigers is a trip to Cleveland to take on the AL Central champions in a best-of-five AL Division Series. Game 1 is on Saturday.

"Regardless that nobody was rooting for us, regardless that nobody was putting us in the playoffs in a good spot, we didn't care," Ibáñez said. "We just put in hard work ... to make the results come."

Kerry Carpenter sparked Detroit's eighth-inning rally with a one-out single off Ryan Pressly (0-1), who converted his first 14 postseason save opportunities. Carpenter advanced to third on a single by Matt Vierling and scored on a wild pitch, tying it at 2.

Pressly departed after Colt Keith reached on a two-out walk, and closer Josh Hader walked Spencer Torkelson to load the bases.

Hinch then sent Ibáñez up to hit for Zach McKinstry, and he lined a 1-2 sinker into the corner in left for a 5-2 lead.

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Ibáñez hadn't driven in a run since Sept. 10. He hit just .167 in September.

"He's had a tough stretch," Hinch said. "But his season restarts in October, and he's showing that."

Vierling, Keith and Torkelson jumped around and high-fived in celebration after scoring on Ibáñez's clutch swing. Ibáñez raised his arms high above his head and smiled as he reached second.

Hader, who signed a \$95 million, five-year contract with Houston in January, allowed three hits and walked two in 1 1/3 innings.

Detroit used seven different pitchers a day after pitching Triple Crown winner Tarik Skubal got the win in the series opener. Sean Guenther pitched 1 2/3 innings for the win in Game 2, and Will Vest handled the ninth for the save.

In the postseason for the first time since 2014, Detroit also got a solo home run from Meadows in the sixth to help the franchise to its first playoff series win since the 2013 ALDS.

Just making it to the playoffs seemed improbable before Detroit went 31-13 down the stretch in the regular season, helped along by the leadership of Hinch — who knows a little something about October success from his time with the Astros.

"They did everything right to win the series," Houston second baseman Jose Altuve said.

Eight of the first nine Wild Card Series since they began in 2002 have been sweeps. It's the fourth sweep in postseason history for the Tigers, who previously swept the AL Championship Series in 1984, 2006 and 2012.

The Astros jumped in front in the seventh, but they lost their seventh straight postseason game at home. Houston's ALCS streak included four World Series appearances and two titles.

"It's tough," manager Joe Espada said. "But I want our guys to be proud of how far we've come. It was a very challenging season, and we reached the postseason — that's our goal every year. We win the division, and then play deep into the playoffs. It didn't happen for us this year, but I want our guys to be proud of their resiliency and how tough this season was."

The AL West champions failed to get the big hits they relied on in the regular season, but manufactured a pair of runs with hustle plays in the seventh.

Mauricio Dubón hit a bunt single to load the bases with no outs. Pinch-hitter Jon Singleton hit a chopper that was fielded by first baseman Torkelson, who threw home from his knees. The throw was in front of the plate and not in time to beat Victor Caratini.

Torkelson, who was given an error on the play, smacked the ground in disgust after Caratini touched home, tying it at 1.

Altuve then hit a flyball that Vierling caught in foul territory in right, but his throw home wasn't in time to beat the speedy Jeremy Peña.

Houston designated hitter Yordan Alvarez returned for this series after sitting out since spraining his right knee Sept. 22. He had two hits Tuesday, but he went 0 for 3 with a walk in Game 2 while clearly still struggling with the injury.

Asked if he would have played if these were regular-season games, he said: "That's a really good question, I don't know."

Houston starter Hunter Brown had allowed just one hit on a double in the second when Meadows smacked his home run off the foul pole in right field to start the sixth.

Brown struck out nine in 5 1/3 innings in his eighth postseason game and first start.

US school-entry vaccination rates fall as exemptions keep rising

By MIKE STOBBE AP Medical Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — U.S. kindergarten vaccination rates dipped last year and the proportion of children with exemptions rose to an all-time high, according to federal data posted Wednesday.

The share of kids exempted from vaccine requirements rose to 3.3%, up from 3% the year before. Meanwhile, 92.7% of kindergartners got their required shots, which is a little lower than the previous two years. Before the COVID-19 pandemic the vaccination rate was 95%, the coverage level that makes it

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unlikely that a single infection will spark a disease cluster or outbreak.

The changes may seem slight but are significant, translating to about 80,000 kids not getting vaccinated, health officials say.

The rates help explain a worrisome creep in cases of whooping cough, measles and other vaccine-preventable diseases, said Dr. Raynard Washington, chair of the Big Cities Health Coalition, which represents 35 large metropolitan public health departments.

"We all have been challenged with emerging outbreaks ... across the country," said Washington, the director of the health department serving Charlotte, North Carolina.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention data show that coverage with MMR, DTaP, polio and chickenpox vaccines decreased in more than 30 states among kindergartners for the 2023-2024 school year, Washington noted.

Public health officials focus on vaccination rates for kindergartners because schools can be cauldrons for germs and launching pads for community outbreaks.

For years, those rates were high, thanks largely to school attendance mandates that required key vaccinations. All U.S. states and territories require that children attending child care centers and schools be vaccinated against a number of diseases, including, measles, mumps, polio, tetanus, whooping cough and chickenpox.

All states allow exemptions for children with medical conditions that prevent them from receiving certain vaccines. And most also permit exemptions for religious or other nonmedical reasons.

In the last decade, the percentage of kindergartners with medical exemptions has held steady, at about 0.2%. But the percentage with nonmedical exemptions has inched up, lifting the overall exemption rate from 1.6% in the 2011-2012 school year to more than twice that last year.

The rates can be influenced by state laws or policies that make it harder or easier to obtain exemptions, and by local attitudes among families and doctors about the need to get children vaccinated. For example, according to the CDC data, 14.3% of kindergartners had an exemption to one or more vaccines in Idaho. But fewer than 1% did in Connecticut and Mississippi.

Within states, clustering of unvaccinated kids can be even more concentrated in particular communities or schools, said Noel Brewer, a University of North Carolina professor of health behavior.

"People who are skeptical (about vaccinees) tend to live close to one another and create the conditions for a breakthrough of measles and other diseases," he said.

The slide in vaccination rates was not unexpected. Online misinformation and the political schism that emerged around COVID-19 vaccines have led more parents to question the routine childhood vaccinations that they used to automatically accept, experts say.

A decrease has already been reported in Louisville, Kentucky — a city that has been celebrated as a vaccination success story. And a CDC report last week noted a decline in vaccination rates for 2-year-olds.

Measles and whooping cough cases are at their highest levels since 2019, and there are still three months left in the year. And 200 flu-associated pediatric deaths were reported in the 2023-2024 season, the most since 2009.

Charlotte's Mecklenburg County this year saw North Carolina's first measles case since 2018. Mecklenburg also saw 19 whooping cough infections and three people with mumps earlier this year, said Washington, who noted the county usually sees none.

Increases in international travel and people moving to the Charlotte area from other countries raises the risk of introduction of vaccine-preventable diseases, "so it's concerning when you start to lose coverage of vaccines among your population," Washington said.

Harris hands out meals, consoles families as she surveys Hurricane Helene devastation in Georgia

By CHRIS MEGERIAN, COLLEEN LONG and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

AUGUSTA, Ga. (AP) — Vice President Kamala Harris handed out meals, embraced a shaken family and surveyed Hurricane Helene's "extraordinary" path of destruction through Georgia on Wednesday as she left the campaign trail to pledge federal help and personally take in scenes of toppled trees, damaged homes and lives upended.

She visited Augusta, where power lines stretched along the sidewalk and utility poles lay cracked and broken. The vice president spoke from a lectern erected in front of a house with a fallen tree teetering on its roof, acknowledging those who had died in the disaster while also trying to project a tone of unity and hope for communities now facing long and expensive rebuilds.

Harris and President Joe Biden, who visited the Carolinas on Wednesday, were seeking to demonstrate commitment and competence in helping devastated communities after Republican former President Donald Trump's false claims about their administration's response.

Harris said she wanted to "personally take a look at the devastation, which is extraordinary." She expressed admiration for how "people are coming together. People are helping perfect strangers."

The Democratic presidential nominee said that shows "the vast majority of us have so much more in common than what separates us," an echo of a line she frequently uses on the campaign trail.

Before delivering her remarks, Harris could be seen embracing and huddling with a family of five grappling with the storm's aftermath.

"We are here for the long haul," she said.

Harris also toured a Red Cross relief center and received a briefing from local officials, praising those working to "meet the needs of people who must be seen and must be heard."

"I am now listening," she said.

Brittany Smith, an Augusta resident, walked away from the distribution center with Styrofoam boxes of food and some fruit cups, beaming that she got a photo with the vice president. She said there's a hole in her roof and she had to send her kids elsewhere to live because it wasn't safe.

Harris' visit, she said, "made it better" despite the hardship.

Smith said she was encouraged that Harris traveled to the town instead of just appearing on television. "She's a person. She's not just a voice."

About 200 miles north in the Carolinas, Biden was also surveying the storm's aftermath. With many of the area's roads inaccessible, he flew by helicopter over toppled trees, twisted metal and towering piles of debris in the normally tourist-friendly downtown of Asheville.

From the air, Biden saw flooded roads, piles of shredded lumber and displaced sandbags, emergency trucks and downed power lines. In one area, homes were partly underwater, and it was hard to distinguish between lake and land.

Visits to disaster zones are a familiar responsibility for Biden, who has frequently been called on to survey damage and comfort victims after tornadoes, wildfires and tropical storms. But this was Harris' first visit to a disaster area as vice president.

Because of the destruction where Biden was on Wednesday, he was unable to walk around and personally comfort people as Harris did in Georgia.

Biden wore a vest and boots and, before his air tour, he hugged and grabbed the hand of Asheville Mayor Esther Manheimer, who was at the airport in Greenville, South Carolina, to meet him. The mayor, with visible emotion, said they could not close down the area's one operable road for Biden's motorcade.

Biden will be back in the region Thursday to visit Florida and Georgia, and Harris plans her own North Carolina trip in coming days — as Helene's aftermath continues to pose a political and humanitarian test for the administration.

Before leaving Washington, Biden made a point of mentioning how an ongoing dockworkers strike could make getting supplies to hard-hit areas more difficult.

"Natural disasters are incredibly consequential. The last thing we need on top of that is a man-made disaster that's going on at the ports," he said. "We're getting pushback already, we're hearing from the folks regionally that they're having trouble getting product that they need because of the port strike."

Harris is being especially watched as her bid for the White House enters its closing stretch, and Helene's path included the battleground states of Georgia and North Carolina.

The vice president last visited scenes of natural disasters as a California senator, including when she went to Puerto Rico after Hurricane Maria in 2017 and when she walked through charred wreckage in Paradise, California, after the Camp Fire in 2018.

Julie Chavez Rodriguez, Harris' campaign manager and former state director in her Senate office, said the vice president uses her experience consoling victims as a courtroom prosecutor to connect with people after tragedies.

She said the trip to Georgia was a chance for Harris "to continue to show her leadership and her ability to get things done, versus Donald Trump and JD Vance who want to dismantle the basic services and the role that the government should play."

Trump, the Republican nominee, traveled to Valdosta, Georgia, on Monday with a Christian charity organization that brought trucks of fuel, food, water and other supplies. The former president accused Biden of "sleeping" and not responding to calls from Georgia Republican Gov. Brian Kemp. However, Kemp had spoken with Biden the previous day, and the governor said the state was getting everything it needed.

Biden was infuriated by Trump's claim, saying Trump was "lying, and the governor told him he was lying."

The storm's death toll climbed to at least 178 people, and power, running water and cellular service remained unavailable in some places. Later Wednesday, Biden flew to Raleigh, North Carolina, for a briefing with officials and called Helene a "storm of historic proportions."

"The nation has your back," Biden said.

The tone of both Harris and Biden was far different than Trump, who claimed without evidence that Democratic leaders were withholding help from Republican areas. He recently threatened that he would withhold wildfire assistance from California because of disagreements with Democratic Gov. Gavin Newsom.

When Trump was president, Puerto Rico was devastated by Hurricane Maria, which killed 3,000 people. His administration waited until fall 2020, just weeks before the presidential election, to release \$13 billion in assistance for Puerto Rico's recovery. A federal government watchdog also found that Trump administration officials hampered an investigation into delays in the aid delivery.

Deadly Maui fire erupted from earlier blaze believed to have been extinguished, investigation finds

By REBECCA BOONE, ALANNA DURKIN RICHER and JENNIFER SINCO KELLEHER Associated Press HONOLULU (AP) — The wildfire that killed at least 102 people on Maui last year erupted from an earlier brushfire, sparked by downed power lines, that firefighters believed they had extinguished, officials confirmed Wednesday as they presented their findings on the cause.

The Aug. 8, 2023, blaze — the deadliest U.S. wildfire in more than a century — emerged in the afternoon in the same area as the blaze that began earlier that morning. Driven by strong, erratic winds, the fire raced through the historic town of Lahaina, destroying thousands of buildings, overcoming people trapped in their cars and forcing some residents to flee into the ocean.

It had been unclear whether the blaze was a separate fire or a rekindling of the morning fire, and whether firefighters should have left the scene after they spent hours dousing it. The answers could prove significant to questions about liability for the destruction, though a tentative \$4 billion settlement has been reached.

In presenting their findings, officials with the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives and the Maui Fire Department did not address liability but found that the wildfire was clearly a rekindling of the morning fire — most likely from winds blowing an undetected ember into a dry, overgrown gully nearby.

"We deeply regret that our operations contributed to the fire that ignited in the morning," Hawaiian

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Electric Co., the company whose power lines sparked the earlier fire, said in a statement Wednesday. "Confronted by an extraordinary weather event and a chaotic situation, our employees brought their best efforts to their jobs, as they do every day."

The officials stressed that Maui firefighters had done all they could to put out the morning fire before leaving to address other calls for service on a day when other fires were burning around the island.

"They deployed countless resources, spent an extensive amount of time on the scene, and observed the scene after they believed it was extinguished," Jonathan Blais, the ATF's special agent in charge of the Seattle Field Division, which includes Hawaii, told a news conference. "So, yes, I do believe they did everything possible."

While wind was the most likely cause of the fire's rekindling, the ATF's report said investigators could not rule out another possibility: that the operator of a bulldozer, trying to help firefighters contain the blaze, could have unwittingly pushed smoldering debris to the gully's edge, only to have it erupt in flames hours later.

"The close proximity of the freshly cut firebreak to the western edge of the gully does not afford investigators the ability to rule out the possibility that while cutting the firebreak, the operator unknowingly moved still burning vegetation or smoldering debris into the gully," the report said.

The owner of the company that provided the bulldozer told ATF investigators less than two weeks after the fire that he had shown up because a friend who lived nearby asked for help. The owner did not respond to several requests for a follow-up interview, the report said. Neither the owner nor members of his crew were identified in the report.

Video from inside the bulldozer showed it piling loose soil and burned vegetation at the edge of the gully, the report said.

Bulldozers driven by volunteers and contractors are frequently used to protect towns and farms from wildfires across the western U.S., though some groups have questioned their effectiveness in extreme weather conditions.

The ATF report was included as an appendix in a report from the Maui Fire Department, which asked the agency last year to help determine how the fire started. Several other agencies have also investigated the fire and the response to it, detailing the poor conditions — including emergency response missteps — that contributed to the tragic outcome.

Communication between the police and fire departments was spotty, cellphone networks were down and emergency officials did not activate the emergency sirens that might have warned residents to evacuate. Power lines and poles had fallen in many locations throughout town, and police blocked some roads to protect residents from potentially dangerous lines. First responders also had trouble getting a firm answer from Hawaiian Electric representatives if the power had been cut to the area.

The blocked roads contributed to gridlock that left fleeing people trapped in their cars as the flames advanced. Others died in their homes or outside as they tried to escape. The death toll surpassed that of the 2018 Camp Fire in northern California, which left 85 dead and destroyed the town of Paradise.

Thousands of Lahaina residents have sued various parties they believe to be at fault for the fire, including Hawaiian Electric, Maui County and the state of Hawaii. The defendants have often tried to point fingers at each other, with Hawaiian Electric saying the county shouldn't have left the first fire unattended, and Maui County contending the electric utility failed to take proper care with the power grid. Exactly who was responsible for clearing brush and maintaining area has also been a point of contention among the defendants, along with the utility's lack of a public safety power shut-off program.

A few days before the one-year anniversary of the wildfires, Hawaii Gov. Josh Green announced a \$4 billion settlement. That's the amount the defendants — including Hawaiian Electric, the state, Maui County, large landowners and others — have agreed to pay to settle claims.

But the deal is tied up in court, awaiting a decision from Hawaii Supreme Court on whether insurance companies can go after the defendants separately to recoup what they've paid to policyholders. Lawyers for people seeking compensation fear allowing insurance companies to sue Hawaiian Electric and others will subvert the deal, drain what is available to pay fire victims and lead to prolonged litigation.

Jake Lowenthal, an attorney representing people suing over fire, said the report didn't provide any information that would change their theory of liability in the case: that firefighters left the scene, that the utility didn't maintain their equipment or have a power shutoff program, and that some large landowners left their properties untended with dry, overgrown vegetation that provided ample fuel for the blaze.

"Every piece of additional information allows the community to continue to heal," Lowenthal said, "and allows us to move forward with how the fire was caused and how we can continue to protect the community to make sure this doesn't happen again."

Boone reported from Boise, Idaho, and Durkin Richer from Washington.

The fate of Nibi the beaver lands in court as rescuers try to stop her release into the wild

By JAMIE STENGLE Associated Press

Whether a 2-year-old beaver named Nibi gets to stay with the rescuers she has known since she was a baby or must be released into the wild as winter approaches in Massachusetts has ended up in court — and caused such an uproar that even the governor has weighed in.

"To literally see people from around the world come together to protect this beaver is one of the most amazing things I have ever seen in my life," said Adam Teper, an attorney representing Nibi's rescuers.

A judge on Tuesday said that for now, Nibi will be allowed to stay in her home at Newhouse Wildlife Rescue in Chelmsford, located northwest of Boston. A hearing has been set for Friday in the case the rescuers filed against MassWildlife, the state's division of fisheries and wildlife, to stop the release.

Nibi has been a hit on the rescue group's social media since she was a baby, and posts about her impending release garnered thousands of comments. An online petition to save Nibi from being released has received over 25,000 signatures, lawmakers have weighed in as well, and this week Gov. Maura Healey pledged to make sure Nibi is protected.

Jane Newhouse, the rescue group's founder and president, said that after Nibi was found on the side of the road, they tried to reunite her with nearby beavers who could have been her parents but were unsuccessful. After that, attempts to get her to bond with other beavers also didn't work.

"It's very difficult to consider releasing her when she only seems to like people and seems to have no interest in being wild or bonding with any of her own species," Newhouse said.

Nibi has a large enclosure with a pool at the rescue operation, and will also wander in its yard and rehabilitation space, Newhouse said. "She pretty much has full run of the place. Everybody on my team is in love with her," she said.

Newhouse said she had asked MassWildlife if she could get a permit for Nibi to become an educational beaver, allowing her to take the beaver to schools, libraries and town halls. But, she said, with the recent denial of that permission came the ordered release of Nibi.

MassWildlife did not reply immediately Wednesday to a request for comment.

Newhouse said that her fear is that a release would mean certain death for her beloved "diva" beaver, who doesn't know how to live in the wild right now.

"It doesn't give her much time how to figure out how to build a lodge for the first time, how to build dams for the first time, how to store all of her food before winter sets in," she said.

Newhouse said that beavers usually leave their parents between the ages of 2 and 3, so it's possible that over the next year Nibi will show more interest in wanting to be in the wild. But unless that happens, she wants to keep her safe.

"She loves her life here," Newhouse said. "She's spoiled rotten, and she's got lots of room to run around and her own little pond, all the food, fruit, veggies, nuts, berries she wants."

Online voting in Alaska's Fat Bear Week contest starts after an attack killed 1 contestant

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — Let the chunk-off begin.

Voting started Wednesday in the annual Fat Bear Week contest at Alaska's Katmai National Park and Preserve, with viewers picking their favorite among a dozen brown bears fattened up to survive the winter.

The contest, which is in its 10th year, celebrates the resiliency of the 2,200 brown bears that live in the preserve on the Alaska Peninsula, which extends from the state's southwest corner toward the Aleutian Islands. The animals gorge on the abundant sockeye salmon that return to the Brooks River, sometimes chomping the fish in midair as they try to hurdle a small waterfall and make their way upstream to spawn.

A bear's death delays the contest

Organizers introduced this year's contestants on Tuesday — a day late — because one anticipated participant, a female known as Bear 402, was killed by a male bear during a fight on Monday. Cameras set up in the park to livestream footage of the bears all summer captured the killing, as they also captured a male bear killing a cub that slipped over the waterfall in late July.

"National parks like Katmai protect not only the wonders of nature, but also the harsh realities," park spokesperson Matt Johnson said in a statement. "Each bear seen on the webcams is competing with others to survive."

The nonprofit explore.org, which streams the uncensored bear cameras and helps organize Fat Bear Week, on Monday hosted a live conversation about the death. Katmai National Park ranger Sarah Bruce said it wasn't known why the bears started fighting.

"We love to celebrate the success of bears with full stomachs and ample body fat, but the ferocity of bears is real," said Mike Fitz, explore.org's resident naturalist. "The risks that they face are real. Their lives can be hard, and their deaths can be painful."

Packing on the pounds for survival

The bracket this year features 12 bears, with eight facing off against each other in the first round and four receiving byes to the second round. They've been packing on the pounds all summer.

Adult male brown bears typically weigh 600 to 900 pounds (about 270 to 410 kilograms) in mid-summer. By the time they are ready to hibernate after feasting on migrating and spawning salmon — each eats as many as 30 fish per day — large males can weigh well over 1,000 pounds (454 kilograms). Females are about one-third smaller.

When fans vote in each round, they shouldn't only consider the bear with the biggest belly. Bear fans are instructed to vote on the ursine that they believe "best exemplifies fatness and success in brown bears."

A taste for seagulls and a bear named after a jumbo jet

Bear 909 Jr., who last week won the Fat Bear Junior competition for the second time, will face Bear 519, a young female, in the first round. The winner will face the defending champion, Grazer, described as one of the most formidable bears on the river.

Another first-round match pits Bear 903, an 8-year-old male who was given the nickname Gully after he developed a taste for seagulls, against Bear 909, the mother of Bear 909 Jr. The winner faces a two-time champion, a bear so large he was given the number of the equally massive airplane, Bear 747.

One of the biggest bears ate 42 salmon

In the other half of the bracket, the first-round match has Bear 856, an older male and one of the most recognizable bears on the river because of his large body, challenging a newcomer, Bear 504, a mother bear raising her second known litter. The winner will face perhaps the largest bear on the river, 32 Chunk, a 20-year-old male who once devoured 42 salmon in 10 hours. He's estimated to weigh more than 1,200 pounds.

The last first-round match has Bear 151, a once-playful young bear nicknamed Walker now showing more dominance, versus Bear 901, a solo female who has returned to the river after her first litter did

not survive. The winner will face Bear 164, called Bucky Dent because of an indentation in his forehead. Voting in this year's tournament-style bracket is open through Oct. 8. More than 1.3 million votes were cast last year.

Things to know about the investigations into the deadly wildfire that destroyed a Maui town

HONOLULU (AP) — Drought, a lack of preparation, poor communication — a handful of reports from research organizations and government agencies have detailed some of what went wrong when a catastrophic wildfire burned through the historic Maui town of Lahaina last year, killing 102 people.

Now a new report from the Maui Fire Department and the U.S. Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives attempts to answer perhaps the biggest question of all: Exactly where and how did the Aug. 8, 2023, wildfire — the deadliest in the U.S. in over a century — begin?

The Maui Fire Department's Cause and Origin report, with a summary of the ATF investigation's findings included as an appendix, was released Wednesday. The agencies did not address liability, but both found that the fire that destroyed much of the town was a rekindling of a blaze that began earlier that morning when a broken power line hit the ground, igniting brush near a large subdivision.

Here's what to know:

What happened leading up to the fire?

Many things went wrong before and during the disaster. In the months before, no significant steps were taken to mitigate wildfire risk, though in previous years other brush fires destroyed homes after starting in the same area. In the weeks before, the landscape went from lush to bone-dry from a flash drought.

The National Weather Service predicted high winds days in advance of the disaster, issuing a "red flag warning" on the fire danger. A forecaster even emailed fire managers an "unprecedented advance warning" on Aug. 4, 2023, of the danger that would develop four days later. Investigators reviewing the emergency response said they found "no evidence" that Hawaii officials made preparations for it.

How did the fire start?

Fire broke out near Lahaina early Aug. 8 after a live power line fell and hit overgrown brush near the edge of town. A Maui Fire Department crew responded, staying at the scene for several hours until they believed the fire was extinguished.

After they left, flames were spotted again. Firefighters rushed back, but this time they were were no match for the wind and flames.

The ATF investigators could not determine exactly how the fire rekindled but said wind was the most likely explanation. It could have rekindled from burning material blown into a gully, or the burning material could have been inadvertently pushed there by heavy equipment that was being used to create a firebreak, according to the investigation. The wind also could have simply ignited smoldering material that was initially hidden beneath dirt and ash.

Either way, the catastrophe was the result of one fire, which originated when Hawaiian Electric utility equipment failed and ignited overgrown brush, both agencies said.

What happened when people tried to evacuate?

The high winds knocked out electricity and cellphone networks went down, leaving people without phones, internet, television and radio — and no way to receive emergency alerts or reach loved ones. Police and fire crews delivered warnings door to door, but Maui County officials failed to sound emergency sirens telling residents to flee.

Many residents decided to leave on their own when they saw flames or smelled smoke. But police closed key routes out of town to protect people from downed lines toppled by the wind. Most of the traffic was routed along the same downtown street, gridlocking the town.

Meanwhile, 911 operators and emergency dispatchers were overwhelmed with calls from those able to get service.

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One family made it out by swerving around a barricade blocking Honoapiilani Highway, the main coastal road leading in and out of Lahaina.

How many people died?

The Maui Police Department said 102 people between the ages of 7 and 97 died, and two more remain missing and unaccounted for. More than two-thirds of the victims were in their 60s or older. Some died in their vehicles. Others died in burning buildings or outside as they tried to flee.

Those who were close enough jumped into the ocean while others huddled behind a seawall, fighting to survive the choppy, wind-whipped waters while choking on acrid smoke and dodging flaming debris. Many of those in the ocean survived, but some bodies were recovered along the seawall and in the water.

The toll surpassed that of the 2018 Camp Fire in northern California, which left 85 dead and destroyed the town of Paradise. A century earlier, the 1918 Cloquet Fire broke out in drought-stricken northern Minnesota, destroying thousands of homes and killing hundreds.

Who has been sued?

Thousands of Lahaina residents have sued various parties they believe to be at fault for the fire, including Hawaiian Electric, Maui County and the state of Hawaii.

A few days before the one-year anniversary of the wildfires, Hawaii Gov. Josh Green announced a \$4 billion settlement. That's the amount the defendants — including Hawaiian Electric, the state, Maui County, large landowners and others — have agreed to pay to settle claims.

But the deal is tied up in court. The Hawaii Supreme Court agreed last week to weigh in on whether insurance companies can go after the defendants separately to recoup what they've paid to policyholders. Lawyers for people seeking compensation fear allowing insurance companies to sue Hawaiian Electric and others will subvert the deal, drain what is available to pay fire victims and lead to prolonged litigation.

If the court rules that the insurance companies do have an independent right to pursue their own suits against the same defendants, the settlement agreement falls apart. If the Supreme Court says insurance companies can't do that, then lawyers say the process to get money to victims will begin.

What other reports have been released?

The Hawaii Attorney General's office tasked the Fire Safety Research Institute with conducting a three-phase investigation of the fire. The first phase included a detailed timeline of the fire. The second phase report found that key agencies including the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency, the Maui Fire Department, Maui Police and others failed to develop plans for dealing with severe wildfire risk. The third report is expected to include recommendations for avoiding future disasters. It has not yet been released.

The Maui Fire Department released an after-action report produced by the Western Fire Chiefs Association, detailing the challenges the agency faced including poorly stocked equipment. It also showed the many ways firefighters risked their lives to rescue residents, including some who carried victims piggyback over downed powerlines.

The Maui Police Department also released an after-action report that detailed the agency's response and included 32 recommendations, many focused on improving communications, obtaining better equipment and upgrading technology.

The Insurance Institute for Business & Home Safety examined the Lahaina disaster to determine steps communities can take to reduce the likelihood that similar conflagrations will occur. That report found that establishing fuel breaks around communities, using fire-resistant materials and reducing flammable connections between homes can help prevent the spread of flames.

Cybersecurity head says there's no chance a foreign adversary can change US election results

By CHRISTINA A. CASSIDY and ALI SWENSON Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Nearly a month out from Election Day, the head of the nation's cybersecurity agency is forcefully reassuring Americans who have been swept into the chaotic churn of election disinformation and distrust that they will be able to feel confident in the outcome.

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State and local election officials have made so much progress in securing voting, ballot-counting and other election infrastructure that the system is more robust than it has ever been, said Jen Easterly, director of the U.S. Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency. As a result, she said, there is no way Russia, Iran or any other foreign adversary will be able to alter the results.

"Malicious actors, even if they tried, could not have an impact at scale such that there would be a material effect on the outcome of the election," Easterly told The Associated Press in an interview Wednesday.

Easterly's trust in the election process comes as intelligence officials have warned of escalating efforts by foreign adversaries to influence voters, deepen partisan divides and undermine faith in U.S. elections.

Her comments stand in contrast to the doubts millions of Americans, especially Republicans, have held since the 2020 election when former President Donald Trump refused to accept his loss. He has built on his false claims of vote rigging since then, setting the stage to claim the election has been stolen if he loses again this November.

Easterly touched on a range of election-related concerns — including misinformation, her agency's role in interacting with social media companies and ongoing threats to election workers — during the 40-minute interview, which came as mail ballots are being sent out and some states have started early in-person voting. She also said her agency is in touch with election officials throughout the regions of the Southeast that have been ravaged by Hurricane Helene, and praised those workers for "displaying enormous and admirable resilience" as they try to ensure that voters are able to cast their ballots despite the devastation.

Recognizing that many Americans' confidence in elections "has been shaken," Easterly emphasized how prepared election officials are for emergencies, simple mistakes and attacks — and how motivated they are to protect Americans' votes.

Election officials have worked in recent years to boost cybersecurity defenses around the nation's voting systems, implementing procedures ranging from access controls to regular testing to identify potential vulnerabilities. Officials also test voting equipment before every election to ensure it works properly.

Easterly pointed to layers of security and transparency — such as the paper record of votes in more than 97% of voting jurisdictions — as protections that will help verify the results.

"Things will go wrong. There could be another storm. There could be a ransomware attack, a distributed denial of service attack," she said. "These disruptions will create effects, but they will not impact the ability and the votes being cast or those votes being counted."

U.S. officials have spent recent months warning through criminal charges, sanctions and public advisories that foreign adversaries are ramping up their efforts to influence voters in the race for the White House.

The Biden administration last month seized more than two dozen Kremlin-run fake websites and charged two Russian state media employees in a scheme to covertly fund right-wing influencers. Last week, three Iranian operatives were charged with hacking Trump's campaign.

Intelligence agencies and tech companies have tracked both Russian and Iranian actors using fake websites and social media profiles to spread misinformation, stoke division and potentially sway American voters. Iran and Russia have sought to influence past U.S. elections through online disinformation and hacking. Easterly noted that China also was "very interested" in influencing the 2024 election.

Beyond the influence campaigns, she said her agency had not detected any activity targeting election systems.

"We have not seen specific cyber activity designed to interfere with actual election infrastructure or processes," Easterly said.

The prevalence of election misinformation has become a widespread concern. One consequence is what Easterly described as a troubling uptick in physical threats against election officials of both parties and, in some cases, their families, often based on false claims about the 2020 election. She called it "corrosive" to democracy and said it's something the public needs to collectively fight.

"Those election officials, they are not faceless bureaucrats," Easterly said. "They're folks we see in the community every single day. And they're not doing this for pay. They're not doing it for glory. They are doing it because they believe in the process of democracy."

Many secretaries of state and some larger local election offices have established specific efforts to combat the misinformation.

U.S. Sen. Mark Warner of Virginia, a Democrat who leads the Senate Intelligence Committee, last week wrote a letter to Easterly that urged the agency to take further steps against election misinformation and disinformation, including coordinating with social media platforms to combat false claims.

In the interview, Easterly acknowledged "a very convoluted, very confusing information environment," and said her agency works with election officials to promote accurate information. However, she also made it clear that her agency does not monitor social media sites or attempt to moderate their content.

"That is not our role," she said.

On the heels of Trump's running mate, Sen. JD Vance, accusing the federal government of "censorship" in Tuesday night's debate between the vice presidential candidates, Easterly strongly defended her agency, known as CISA.

"CISA does not censor, has never censored," she said. "And allegations against CISA are riddled with factual inaccuracies."

CISA, along with other federal agencies, was part of a lawsuit filed by Republican-led states claiming the federal government had applied "unrelenting pressure" to coerce changes in online content on social media platforms. In a 6-3 vote, the U.S. Supreme Court said the states did not have a legal right to sue.

Easterly encouraged voters who question how elections are run to contact their local election office and even volunteer to serve as poll workers so they understand the process and the safeguards already in place. She also warned that foreign adversaries almost certainly will seek to take advantage of the vote-counting process after Election Day as a way to undermine confidence in the results. She urged voters to be patient, emphasizing that it could take several days for a presidential winner to be determined.

"We need to come together as Americans to protect and preserve what is most precious," she said. "And that is the foundation of our democracy — fair, free, safe and secure elections."

The Associated Press receives support from several private foundations to enhance its explanatory coverage of elections and democracy. See more about AP's democracy initiative here. The AP is solely responsible for all content.

Condoms aren't a fact of life for young Americans. They're an afterthought

By DEVNA BOSE AP Health Writer

OXFORD, Miss. (AP) — It's hard to miss the overflowing bowl of condoms at the entrance of the gym.

Some University of Mississippi students walking past after their workout snicker and point, and the few who step forward to consider grabbing a condom rethink it when their friends catch up, laughter trailing behind them. Almost no one actually reaches in to take one.

Though officials say they refill the bowl multiple times a day, and condoms are available at multiple places on campus, Ole Miss students say the disinterest is indicative of changing attitudes.

Fewer young people are having sex, but the teens and young adults who are sexually active aren't using condoms as regularly, if at all. And people ages 15 to 24 made up half of new chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis cases in 2022.

The downward trend in condom usage is due to a few things: medical advancements like long-term birth control options and drugs that prevent sexually transmitted infections; a fading fear of contracting HIV; and widely varying degrees of sex education in high schools.

Is this the end of condoms? Not exactly. But it does have some public health experts thinking about how to help younger generations have safe sex, be aware of their options — condoms included — and get tested for STIs regularly.

"Old condom ads were meant to scare you, and all of us were scared for the longest time," said Dr. Joseph Cherabie, medical director of the St. Louis HIV Prevention Training Center. "Now we're trying to

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move away from that and focus more on what works for you.”

A shift in attitudes

Downtown Oxford was thrumming the day before the first football game of the season. The fall semester had just started.

Lines of college students with tequila-soda breath waited to be let in dim bars with loud music. Hands wandered, drifting into back pockets of jeans, and they leaned on one another.

It’s likely that many of those students didn’t use a condom, said Magan Perry, president of the college’s Public Health Student Association.

“Using a condom is just a big, ‘uh, no,’” the senior said.

Young women often have to initiate using condoms with men, she said, adding that she’s heard of men who tell a sexual partner they’ll just buy emergency contraception the next day instead.

“I’ve had friends who go home with a guy and say they’re not having sex unless they use a condom, and immediately the reaction is either a reluctant, ‘OK, fine,’ or ‘If you don’t trust me, then I shouldn’t even be here,’” Perry said. “They’re like, ‘Well, I’m not dirty, so why would I use them?’”

Women have long had the onus of preventing pregnancy or STIs, Cherabie said, and buying condoms or emergency contraceptives — which are often in a locked cabinet or behind a counter — can be an uncomfortable experience and “inserts a certain amount of shame.”

Annie Loomis, 25, a student at the University of Washington, said dating apps and casual sex are making it hard for people to know what a “healthy sexual relationship” looks like when it comes to intimacy and respect.

“If you say, ‘Hey, I want you to wear a condom’ and they say, ‘no, I don’t,’ you’re not having sex. It should be that simple,” Loomis said. “But it’s not.”

If pregnancy risk has been the driving factor for condom usage among heterosexual couples, the fear of contracting HIV was the motivation for condom use among men who have sex with men.

But as that fear has subsided, so has condom use, according to a recent study that focused on a population of HIV-negative men who have sex with men.

Grindr, a popular gay dating app, even lists condom use under “kinks” instead of “health.” Things like that make Steven Goodreau, an HIV expert at the University of Washington who led the study, worry that the change in attitudes toward condoms is trickling down to younger generations.

Goodreau believes the promotion of pre-exposure prophylaxis (PrEP), a drug that prevents HIV, is overshadowing condoms as a prevention strategy. A strategic plan for federal HIV research through 2025 doesn’t mention condoms, and neither does the national Ending the HIV Epidemic plan.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention acknowledges that condoms are still an effective tool that can be used “alongside newer prevention strategies.”

“We know that condom use has declined among some groups, but they still have an important role to play in STI prevention,” said Dr. Bradley Stoner, director of the CDC’s Division of STD Prevention. “Condoms can be accessed without navigating the health care system, can be used on-demand, are generally affordable and most importantly — they are effective at preventing HIV and STIs when used consistently and correctly.”

Medical advances allow for more options

Pleasure — for both men and women — has long been an undeniable factor for the lack of condom use, according to Dr. Cynthia Graham, a member of the Kinsey Institute team that studies condoms.

But more so, advances in medicine have expanded the options for both STI and pregnancy prevention.

Young cisgender women have been turning to contraceptive implants like intrauterine devices and birth control pills to keep from getting pregnant. And researchers say that once women are in committed relationships or have one sexual partner for a significant amount of time, they often switch to longer-term birth control methods.

Ole Miss junior Madeline Webb said she and her partner seem like outliers — they have been seeing each other for four years, but still use condoms. They also share the responsibility of buying condoms.

“People see condoms as an inconvenience ... but they do serve a purpose even if you’re on birth control

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because there is always a chance of an STD," Webb said.

A new drug on the market could mean even more STI prevention options for men and possibly women. Doxycycline post-exposure prophylaxis, or doxy PEP, can be taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex and can help prevent chlamydia, gonorrhea and syphilis. It has to be prescribed by a doctor. Trials are still being conducted for women, but the drug is gaining traction among men who have sex with men and transgender women.

With widespread uptake, the drug has the potential to make a significant impact in STI prevention strategies.

"When PrEP came out, everyone was excited because it was one less thing to worry about in terms of HIV acquisition," Cherabie said. "With another thing on board that can help decrease our likelihood of getting other STIs, on top of not having to worry about HIV, it gives our community and patients a little less anxiety about their sex lives."

And in just a decade, PrEP has become a main preventive measure against HIV and other STIs for men who have sex with men – though it is disproportionately used by white men.

Condom use now is "pretty much a thing of the past" for men who have sex with men compared to the 1980s and early 1990s during the AIDS epidemic, said Andres Acosta Ardilla, a community outreach director at an Orlando-based nonprofit primary care clinic that focuses on Latinos with HIV.

"Part of what we have to talk about is that there is something enticing about having condomless sex," Acosta Ardilla said. "And we have to, as people who are working in public health, plan for the fact that people will choose to have condomless sex."

The fight over sex ed

Despite the relentless Southern sun, a handful of people representing various student organizations sat at tables in the heart of Ole Miss' campus. Students walked past and grabbed buttons, wristbands and fidget toys. One table offered gold-packaged condoms – for cups to prevent drinks from being spiked.

Actual condoms are noticeably absent. They're also absent in the state's public schools.

Condom demonstrations are banned in Mississippi classrooms, and school districts can provide abstinence-only or "abstinence-plus" sexual education — both of which can involve discussing condoms and contraceptives.

Focus on the Family, a Christian organization that advocates for teaching abstinence until marriage, is concerned that comprehensive sex education "exposes students to explicit materials." Abstinence-centered education is "age-appropriate" and keeps students safe and healthy, Focus on the Family analyst Jeff Johnston said in an emailed statement.

But Josh McCawley, deputy director of Teen Health Mississippi, an organization that works with youth to increase access to health resources, said the effects are clear.

"The obvious consequence is the rise of sexually transmitted infections, which is what we're seeing right now, which can be a burden on the health care system," he said, "but also there could be long-term consequences for young people in terms of thinking about what it means to be healthy and how to protect themselves, and that goes beyond a person's sexual health."

The latest CDC data from 2022 shows Mississippi has the highest teen birth rate in the country.

Scott Clements, who oversees health information for the state education department, was hesitant to criticize Mississippi's sex education standards because they're "legislatively mandated."

"If the legislature wants to make changes to this, we will certainly follow their lead," he added — though attempts to pass more advanced sexual education standards have died repeatedly in the Mississippi statehouse over the past eight years.

Nationally, there is no set standard for sex education, according to Michelle Slaybaugh, the director of social impact and strategic communication for the Sexuality Information and Education Council for the United States, which advocates for comprehensive sex ed.

Not every state mandates sex education. Some states emphasize abstinence. Less than half of states require information on contraception.

"There is no definitive way to describe what sex ed looks like from classroom to classroom, even in

the same state, even in the same district," Slaybaugh said, "because it will really be determined by who teaches it."

Compare Mississippi to Oregon, which has extensive state standards that require all public school districts to teach medically accurate and comprehensive sexual education. Students in Portland are shown how to put on a condom on a wooden model of a penis starting in middle school and have access to free condoms at most high schools.

Lori Kuykendall of Dallas, who helped write abstinence-focused standards, said condom demonstrations like those in Portland "normalize sexual activity in a classroom full of young people who the majority of are not sexually active." She also points to increasingly easy access to pornography — in which people typically do not wear condoms — is a contributing factor to the decline in condom use among young people.

Jenny Withycombe, the assistant director for health and physical education at Portland Public Schools, acknowledged the standards see pushback in the more conservative and rural parts of Oregon. But the idea is to prepare students for future interactions.

"Our job is to hopefully build the skills so that even if it's been a while since the (condom) demo ... the person has the skills to go seek out that information, whether it's from the health center or other reliable and reputable resources," Withycombe said.

Those standards seem to contribute to a more progressive view of condoms and sex in young adults, said Gavin Leonard, a senior at Reed College in Portland and a former peer advocate for the school's sexual health and relationship program.

Leonard, who grew up in Memphis — not far from Oxford, Mississippi, said his peers at Reed may not consistently use condoms, but, in his experience, better understand the consequences of not doing so. They know their options, and they know how to access them.

Slaybaugh wants that level of education for Mississippi students — and the rest of the country.

"We would never send a soldier into war without training or the resources they need to keep themselves safe," she said. "We would not send them into a battle without a helmet or a bulletproof vest. So why is it OK for us to send young people off to college without the information that they need to protect themselves?"

Dockworkers join other unions in trying to fend off automation, or minimize the impact

By CATHY BUSSEWITZ AP Business Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — The massive port workers' strike that has shut down all the major dockyards on the Eastern seaboard of the U.S. and the Gulf coast is highlighting a fear held by many workers: Eventually, we will be replaced by machines.

The International Longshoremen's Association, which represents the approximately 45,000 dock workers who walked off the job Tuesday, is testing whether it's possible to fight back.

The union is demanding, along with hefty pay raises, a total ban on the automation of gates, cranes and container-moving trucks in its ports. But it's unclear whether they'll be able to stave off a trend that has seeped into virtually every workspace.

The growth of automation and technological advances have created tension between workers and management since the Industrial Revolution, when machines first began to manufacture goods that had previously been made by hand. And with the growing use of artificial intelligence, the group of jobs workers perceive as threatened with disruption is ever-widening.

"You cannot bet against the march of technology," said Yossi Sheffi, director of the MIT Center for Transportation & Logistics. "You cannot ban automation, because it will creep up in other places."

History of pushback against automation

It's not the first time that port workers have resisted automation. In 1960, as ports on the West Coast introduced machinery to move cargo once moved by hand, the union representing longshoremen negotiated protections for workers, including assurances that the current workforce would not be laid off, according

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to the International Longshore & Warehouse Union.

Harry Bridges, who led the union at the time, negotiated pay increases and job security arrangements for some of the workers, said Adam Seth Litwin, associate professor of industrial and labor relations at Cornell University.

"He saw that this was going to become potentially a real problem if he didn't try to get ahead of it," Litwin said. "Essentially what he was saying was, 'I recognize the reality of what's happening here, and the way to best represent my members is to make sure that they are protected.'"

The downside was that as port machinery became more common, the size of the union eroded precipitously over the years.

The coal industry went through a similar reckoning as conveyor belts and other machines displaced laborers. Union leader John Lewis negotiated for job security and pay increases for existing workers, but the encroachment of machines led to fewer hires, and over time the workforce and union ranks shrunk.

"Amongst coal miners today, he isn't necessarily a big hero, but he knew what he was doing. And I think he also recognized that fighting automation rarely makes a whole lot of economic sense, particularly if you're talking about a market that's at all competitive," Litwin said.

Some dockyards outside the U.S are far more automated and efficient, especially ports in Dubai, Singapore and Rotterdam, Sheffi said. Mexico is building a highly automated port that could compete with U.S. ports.

"They're going to start running trains from the port to the heartland of the United States. And who is going to lose?" Sheffi asked. "There'll be less work for these people."

How to protect workers

There are ways unions and employers can protect workers. Some unions have negotiated that employees must receive guaranteed employment protection if companies bring in technologies that could make their jobs obsolete. Others have bargained for employers to provide tuition reimbursement or retraining programs so workers can shift into other roles when machines come in.

"The trick is to make it over time, not to do it haphazardly," Sheffi said.

In its current contract, the ILA has a provision that requires the union's agreement if the ports add any automation, essentially giving the ILA veto power. But ILA President Harold Daggett has said the union wants a stronger ban.

When health care giant Kaiser Permanente switched from paper to digital medical records a decade ago, dozens of unions bargained together to ensure workers wouldn't lose jobs or face wage reductions as a result of the technology deployment. Drivers who moved boxes of medical records to warehouses and librarians who retrieved paper files who were trained and reassigned to roles such as medical librarians or coders, Litwin said.

"They ultimately all got pay increases because they ended up being in jobs that ended up being more highly skilled," Litwin said.

AI is starting to disrupt white collar jobs

Workers such as cashiers or file clerks who perform routine tasks and have lower levels of education face the greatest risks of their jobs being automated, according to Dawn Locke, a director at the U.S. Government Accountability Office. But the growth of artificial intelligence is increasingly threatening high-skilled jobs as well.

In the months after the launch of ChatGPT, a generative AI tool that can compose essays, write computer code and engage in conversations, job postings for writers, coders and artists plummeted.

"Now we see law firms putting AI to use and cutting the number of junior associates," Sheffi said. "But it's a problem. How do you become a senior associate arguing before the Supreme Court if you don't start as a junior associate?"

When companies embrace artificial intelligence, it doesn't always result in workers losing jobs. In some cases the productivity gains enabled by automation or AI make workplaces more profitable, enabling them to hire even more workers.

But unions aren't taking any chances. In September, video game performers reached an agreement after striking with 80 games that provided protections around exploitative uses of artificial intelligence.

Last year, Hollywood screenwriters concerned that scripts would soon be written by artificial intelligence won protections against the use of AI after a five-month strike.

"More and more people who thought they were immune from automation are probably looking to groups like the longshoremen and thinking, 'Wait a second, actually, I may not be that far removed from this,'" Litwin said.

Hurricane Helene victims include young siblings killed by falling tree as they slept

By STEPHANY MATAT and OLGA R. RODRIGUEZ Associated Press

Falling trees and raging floods from Hurricane Helene killed more than 150 people when it struck Florida late last week and then plowed through the Southeast as one of the deadliest storms in U.S. history.

People died in six states: Florida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia.

Among them were two young siblings who died when the family's oak tree crashed into their bedroom, a man and his great-grandson, who died similarly to the children, and a sheriff's deputy who drowned after a dam broke.

Here are some of the stories of the victims:

Georgia siblings killed by falling tree

Seven-year-old Harmony Taylor and her 4-year-old brother, Derrick, were inseparable, their parents Herbert and Crystal Taylor told The Atlanta Journal-Constitution. They played together, sang Muni Long's hit R&B ballad "Made for Me" together and slept together, her arm always wrapped around him.

They died together early Friday when Helene's wind and rain toppled the family's giant oak tree and it crashed into their bedroom in Sandersville, a town of 6,000 in central Georgia.

Harmony, nicknamed "Tootbug" by her grandfather, loved to dance and wear dresses and tutus. Her father would take her for rides in his pickup, sometimes to McDonald's for Chicken McNuggets and sweet tea. She would roll down the window and stick her arm into the wind. She would beg her uncle for peppermint Orbit chewing gum.

Derrick loved his Hot Wheel cars and watching "Peppa Pig," "Blippi" and "Bluey." He went to gymnastics class, where he would bounce on the trampoline. Autistic, he usually would only eat graham crackers and occasionally grapes or apple sauce.

They will be buried together Sunday in one coffin, a pack of graham crackers and Orbit gum with them. Harmony's arm will be wrapped around her little brother.

Family swept away in North Carolina

Michael and Nora Drye and their seven-year-old grandson Micah Drye died after their home in Asheville, North Carolina, collapsed and they were swept away by the currents.

Megan Drye, the couple's daughter and the boy's mother, said the family was stranded on the roof for hours as Hurricane Helene battered the region. She, too, was swept by the currents and survived.

She told FoxWeather on Tuesday that she thought the family was safe after reaching their roof but that after hours of waiting to be rescued, the house broke apart and collapsed.

"My grief is unfathomable," she said crying, adding that her faith in God and the prayers her family has been receiving are holding her up.

Drye said she was wearing a Deadpool T-shirt in honor of her son who had planned to dress as the superhero for Halloween.

Couple swept away as they drove to safety in Tennessee

Mike and Jean Obrist tried to drive to safety on the night of Sept. 27 when they were hit by a wall of turbulent water that rolled over them, their neighbor Gene Poland said.

The couple's daughter, Maureen, was able to climb out the window as the water rushed in and survived, but the Obrists couldn't make it, said Poland, who helped save people from the rising Nolichucky River in rural east Tennessee.

Maureen Obrist said she and her parents had received a call to evacuate but resisted initially. They

reasoned that they had lived there for 40 years and the water usually comes up to the bottom step and then recedes, so it should be fine, he said, recalling her story.

But when the water started rising fast and high, it really scared them, he said.

Rescue teams were still looking for the car the next morning, Poland said. The water was about 10 feet (3 meters) above the cars, so some time passed before they located it.

Great-grandfather and great-grandson die in a home in Georgia

Besides first responders, Helene also took the lives of members of the same family, as in the case of Stephen Donehoo, 72, and Izaak Donehoo, his 10-year-old great-grandson. They were pronounced dead after a tree fell on a home in Augusta, according to Richmond County Coroner Mark Bowen.

"Our family lost two wonderful souls to the storm," Michelle Donehoo, Stephen's daughter and Izaak's grandmother, posted on Facebook. She posted a link to a GoFundMe to help with funeral expenses.

Sam Carlton said via Facebook that she lost her "little nephew" and "Pops." She said Izaak would have been 11 in November, and he grew up with her son.

"Aaron grew up with his cousin Izaak ... and those of you who knew Steve knew how amazing his soul was," Carlton said.

Coach praises Tim Walz's son for helping protect other kids after shooting

By STEVE KARNOWSKI Associated Press

MINNEAPOLIS (AP) — When the issue of gun violence came up at the vice presidential debate, Minnesota Gov. Tim Walz had a personal story to tell: His teenage son, Gus, had been at a sports center last year when a shooting took place.

Gus Walz was at volleyball practice at the Jimmy Lee Recreation Center in St. Paul the afternoon of Jan. 18, 2023, when a 16-year-old was shot and seriously wounded outside.

It wasn't the first time Tim Walz had spoken about his son's brush with gun violence, and the shooting itself was widely publicized locally. But the Democrat's remarks Tuesday night at his debate with Republican JD Vance, as the public is still getting to know both vice presidential candidates, offered the biggest stage yet to personalize an issue that has deeply affected many American families.

On Wednesday, the youth's volleyball coach, David Albornoz, praised Gus in an interview with The Associated Press for how he helped get other kids to safety and keep them calm amid the chaotic scene.

"I was impressed by Gus and the kids in general, and how they handled it," Albornoz said. "Gus stayed with the kids as he was supposed to do."

The shooting came up as Walz and Vance were debating gun violence.

"Well, I think all the parents watching tonight, this is your biggest nightmare," Walz said. "Look, I've got a 17-year-old and he witnessed a shooting at a community center playing volleyball. Those things don't leave you."

Gus didn't actually see the shooting itself, but he did witness the aftermath, said Albornoz, who is also aquatics facilities supervisor for St. Paul Parks. Among other things, he said, Gus saw Albornoz with blood on his hands from performing first aid on the victim.

Walz briefly brought up the shooting at a campaign rally in Grand Rapids, Michigan, on Sept. 12, when he accused Vance and his running mate, former President Donald Trump, of minimizing gun violence at schools.

"My own son was in a location where someone was shot in the head. Too many of us have this," the governor told the crowd.

Walz also mentioned it in an interview with Minnesota Public Radio in March, when he said Gus was still dealing with his feelings a year later.

"He was there with little kids, littler kids. He was kind of supervising. He shuffled them under the bleachers," Walz told MPR.

Albornoz broadly backed up the governor's version, although his memory was that Gus took the kids

back to the pool area, where they waited behind locked doors until they got the all clear.

Gus got national attention during his father's speech at the Democratic National Convention in August, when he was caught on camera standing up, tears streaming down his face. In a viral moment, Gus pointed to his father and exclaimed, "That's my dad!"

After Gus got some derision for that, Albornoz posted a tribute on Facebook, saying they met when the teen sought him out to lead a volleyball team. He called Gus a "kid thrown into the fray and turmoil of our current divided and divisive political landscape, deserving of love and respect as he navigates his senior year." He recalled how they and other kids would often go out for tacos after games.

"I also know him from when a kid got shot in the parking lot and he helped keeping everyone safe and calm, looking after the kids in the gym with us as I rushed out," he wrote in August.

On Wednesday, Albornoz said Gus is just a regular teen who has suddenly been thrust into the national spotlight.

"He's a normal kid in extraordinary circumstances," the coach said.

In February, a judge sentenced Exavir Binford Jr., a rec center employee, to more than 10 years for shooting JuVaughn Turner. Binford pleaded guilty to first-degree assault in exchange for prosecutors dropping an attempted murder charge. Prosecutors say Binford shot Turner in the head during an altercation involving them and other teens. Turner's family is now suing the city, saying he suffered permanent brain damage. They allege the city knew he had a history of violent conduct and threats to minors. The city has moved to dismiss the lawsuit, saying Binford was not acting within his official duties and had no police powers when he shot Turner.

On Tuesday night, after Walz brought up the shooting, Vance expressed his empathy.

"Tim, first of all, I didn't know that your 17-year-old witnessed a shooting, and I'm sorry about that. Christ, have mercy. It is awful," Vance said.

"I appreciate that," Walz replied.

The president could invoke a 1947 law to try to suspend the dockworkers' strike. Here's how

By PAUL WISEMAN AP Business Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — Some manufacturers and retailers are urging President Joe Biden to invoke a 1947 law as a way to suspend a strike by 45,000 dockworkers that has shut down 36 U.S. ports from Maine to Texas.

At issue is Section 206 of the Labor Management Relations Act of 1947, better known as the Taft-Hartley Act. The law authorizes a president to seek a court order for an 80-day cooling-off period for companies and unions to try to resolve their differences.

Biden has said, though, that he won't intervene in the strike.

Taft-Hartley was meant to curb the power of unions

The law was introduced by two Republicans — Sen. Robert Taft of Ohio and Rep. Fred Hartley Jr. of New Jersey — in the aftermath of World War II. It followed a series of strikes in 1945 and 1946 by workers who demanded better pay and working conditions after the privations of wartime.

President Harry Truman opposed Taft-Hartley, but his veto was overridden by Congress.

In addition to authorizing a president to intervene in strikes, the law banned "closed shops," which require employers to hire only union workers. The ban allowed workers to refuse to join a union.

Taft-Hartley also barred "secondary boycotts," thereby making it illegal for unions to pressure neutral companies to stop doing business with an employer that was targeted in a strike.

It also required union leaders to sign affidavits declaring that they did not support the Communist Party.

Presidents can target a strike that may "imperil the national health and safety"

The president can appoint a board of inquiry to review and write a report on the labor dispute — and then direct the attorney general to ask a federal court to suspend a strike by workers or a lockout by management.

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If the court issues an injunction, an 80-day cooling-off period would begin. During this period, management and unions must "make every effort to adjust and settle their differences."

Still, the law cannot actually force union members to accept a contract offer.

Presidents have invoked Taft-Hartley 37 times in labor disputes

According to the Congressional Research Service, about half the time that presidents have invoked Section 206 of Taft-Hartley, the parties worked out their differences. But nine times, according to the research service, the workers went ahead with a strike.

President George W. Bush invoked Taft-Hartley in 2002 after 29 West Coast ports locked out members of the International Longshore and Warehouse Union in a standoff. (The two sides ended up reaching a contract.)

Biden has said he won't use Taft-Hartley to intervene

Despite lobbying by the National Association of Manufacturers and the National Retail Federation, the president has maintained that he has no plans to try to suspend the dockworkers' strike against ports on the East and Gulf coasts.

On Wednesday, before leaving Joint Base Andrews for an air tour of North Carolina to see the devastation from Hurricane Helene, Biden said the port strike was hampering efforts to provide emergency items for the relief effort.

"This natural disaster is incredibly consequential," the president said. "The last thing we need on top of that is a man-made disaster — what's going on at the ports."

Biden noted that the companies that control East and Gulf coast ports have made huge profits since the pandemic.

"It's time for them to sit at the table and get this strike done," he said.

Though many ports are publicly owned, private companies often run operations that load and unload cargo.

William Brucher, a labor relations expert at Rutgers University, notes that Taft-Hartley injunctions are "widely despised, if not universally despised, by labor unions in the United States."

And Vice President Kamala Harris is relying on support from organized labor in her presidential campaign against Donald Trump.

If the longshoremen's strike drags on long enough and causes shortages that antagonize American consumers, pressure could grow on Biden to change course and intervene. But experts like Brucher suggest that most voters have already made up their minds and that the election outcome is "really more about turnout" now.

Which means, Brucher said, that "Democrats really can't afford to alienate organized labor."

4 Russian journalists accused of working for a Navalny group go on trial in Moscow

By DASHA LITVINOVA Associated Press

TALLINN, Estonia (AP) — Four Russian journalists went on trial in Moscow on Wednesday after being accused of working for an anti-corruption group founded by the late Russian opposition politician Alexei Navalny, which was designated by authorities as an extremist organization in 2021.

Antonina Favorskaya, Artyom Kriger, Sergey Karelin and Konstantin Gabov were arrested earlier this year and charged with involvement with an extremist group, a criminal offense punishable by up to six years in prison. All four have rejected the charges.

The trial, which is being held behind closed doors, is the latest step in the Kremlin's unrelenting crackdown on dissent that has reached unprecedented levels after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine more than two years ago. The authorities have targeted opposition figures, independent journalists, rights activists and ordinary Russians critical of the Kremlin with criminal and misdemeanor charges, jailing hundreds and prompting thousands to leave the country, fearing prosecution.

The four journalists were accused of working with Navalny's Foundation for Fighting Corruption, which

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was designated as extremist and outlawed by the Russian authorities in 2021. That designation has been widely seen as politically motivated.

Navalny was President Vladimir Putin's fiercest and most prominent foe and relentlessly campaigned against official corruption in Russia. In February, Navalny died in a remote Arctic prison while serving a 19-year sentence on a number of charges, including running an extremist group, which he had rejected as politically driven.

Favorskaya and Kriger worked with SotaVision, an independent Russian news outlet that covers protests and political trials. Gabov is a freelance producer who has worked for multiple organizations, including Reuters. Karelin is a freelance video journalist, he has done work for Western media outlets, including The Associated Press.

As they were led into the courtroom on Wednesday, a crowd of supporters greeted them with applause. In the courtroom, the four smiled at their loved ones from a glass defendant's cage.

Addressing reporters from behind the glass, Kriger cast the case against him and his fellow journalists as a cautionary tale and urged journalists still in Russia to leave the country: "It is not a joke, any person can be charged with anything."

Favorskaya, in turn, spoke about hope: "Everything that is happening now, the darkness that surrounds us, it is not forever, and we will definitely see the country that Alexei (Navalny) dreamed of, we will definitely live in a country where rights and freedoms will be (respected) and journalists and other people will not be jailed for their views."

Shortly after the hearing began, the judge ordered to hold the proceedings behind closed doors upon a request from the prosecution, even though the defense objected to it.

There was more applause and cheering for the four defendants two hours later, as they were escorted out of the courtroom, even as the bailiff ordered those waiting for the defendants in the hallway to stay silent.

"My life right now revolves around Seryozha (Karelin) and sorting out his life (behind bars)," Karelin's sister, Olga Karelina, told the AP in court on Wednesday. She is sending him care packages, sorting out paperwork, exchanging letters with him and helping others send him letters, she said. Karelin, who was arrested in April and initially "petrified," is now feeling much better, according to his sister: "He developed a healthy anger, which is good."

Letters of support make a difference, Gabov's lawyer Irina Biryukova told AP earlier this week, adding that her client "is getting a lot of letters from people he filmed once for his stories." They tell him they remember him filming them and are stunned by what happened to him, Biryukova said. He is really grateful for all the support he is getting, she said.

SotaVision founder Alexandra Ageyeva views the case as a continuation of the unabating pressure on the outlet, which was last year designated by the authorities as a "foreign agent" — a label that brings about additional government scrutiny and aims at discrediting the recipient. In an interview with the AP, she said that her journalists are regularly detained while working in the field, and recalled instances when Kriger, who actively covered various protests, and Favorskaya, who in the months leading up to her arrest focused Navalny's multiple court cases and lawsuits, were being followed.

So when it comes to the trial, "we expect the worst," she said. "And we expect a further crackdown on our news outlet. Of course, we're not violating any laws, we're working completely openly. But, apparently, independent journalism is too dangerous for the current regime," Ageyeva said.

More than 100 people missing after boat capsizes in northern Nigeria

By DYEPKAZAH SHIBAYAN. Associated Press

ABUJA, Nigeria (AP) — More than 100 people, mostly women and children, were missing after an overloaded boat bringing them back from an Islamic festival at night capsized in northwestern Nigeria, authorities said Wednesday.

The locally made boat, whose capacity was 100 passengers, had about 300 people onboard along the Niger River when it overturned in Niger state's Mokwa district on Monday night, according to the Niger

State Emergency Management Agency.

Such boat disasters are common in Nigeria, especially in remote communities where the lack of good roads leaves many with no alternative routes. This is the fourth tragedy involving more than 100 passengers in northern Nigeria since mid-2023, many of them never accounted for.

Local media reported that 11 bodies, nine men and two women, have been recovered from the river so far. At least 150 people had been rescued by Wednesday morning amid a frantic search operation that is being supported by local divers and volunteers, according to Abdullahi Baba-Arah, head of Niger state's emergency services.

"The boat was not supposed to carry more than 100 persons, but there were almost 300 people on it. And that was what resulted in the breakage of the boat," said Salihu Garba, director of relief and rehabilitation at the state emergency services.

Experts say most of the boat disasters in Nigeria in recent years increasingly point to regulatory failures and are often attributed to overloading or poorly maintained boats.

NASA switches off instrument on Voyager 2 spacecraft to save power

By ADITHI RAMAKRISHNAN AP Science Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — To save power, NASA has switched off another scientific instrument on its long-running Voyager 2 spacecraft.

The space agency said Tuesday that Voyager 2's plasma science instrument — designed to measure the flow of charged atoms — was powered down in late September so the spacecraft can keep exploring for as long as possible, expected into the 2030s.

NASA turned off a suite of instruments on Voyager 2 and its twin Voyager 1 after they explored the gas giant planets in the 1980s. Both are currently in interstellar space, or the space between stars. The plasma instrument on Voyager 1 stopped working long ago and was finally shut down in 2007.

Four remaining instruments on Voyager 2 will continue collecting information about magnetic fields and particles. Its goal is to study the swaths of space beyond the sun's protective bubble.

Launched in 1977, Voyager 2 is the only spacecraft to visit Uranus and Neptune. It's currently more than 12 billion miles (19.31 billion kilometers) from Earth. Voyager 1 is over 15 billion miles (24.14 billion kilometers) from Earth.

Hurricanes like Helene are deadly when they strike and keep killing for years to come

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

Hurricanes in the United States end up hundreds of times deadlier than the government calculates, contributing to more American deaths than car accidents or all the nation's wars, a new study said.

The average storm hitting the U.S. contributes to the early deaths of 7,000 to 11,000 people over a 15-year period, which dwarfs the average of 24 immediate and direct deaths that the government counts in a hurricane's aftermath, the study in Wednesday's journal *Nature* concluded. Study authors said even with Hurricane Helene's growing triple digit direct death count, many more people will die partly because of that storm in future years.

"Watching what's happened here makes you think that this is going to be a decade of hardship on tap, not just what's happening over the next couple of weeks," said Stanford University climate economist Solomon Hsiang, a study co-author and a former White House science and technology official.

"After each storm there is sort of this surge of additional mortality in a state that's been impacted that has not been previously documented or associated with hurricanes in any way," Hsiang said.

Hsiang and University of California Berkeley researcher Rachel Young looked at hurricane deaths in a different way than previous studies, opting for a more long-term public health and economics-oriented analysis of what's called excess mortality. They looked at states' death rates after 501 different storms

hitting the United States between 1930 and 2015. And what they found is that after each storm there's a "bump" in death rates.

It's a statistical signature that they see over and over, Hsiang said. Similar analyses are done for heat waves and other health threats like pollution and disease, he said. They compare to pre-storm times and adjust for other factors that could be causing changes in death rates, he said. Complicating everything is that the same places keep getting hit by multiple storms so there are death bumps upon death bumps.

Just how storms contribute to people's deaths after the immediate impact is something that needs further study, Hsiang said. But he theorized it includes the health effects of stress, changes in the environment including toxins, people not being able to afford health care and other necessities because of storm costs, infrastructure damage and government changes in spending.

"When someone dies a few years after a hurricane hit them, the cause will be recorded as a heart attack, stroke or respiratory failure," said Texas A&M University climate scientist Andrew Dessler, who wasn't part of the study but has done similar studies on heat and cold deaths. "The doctor can't possibly know that a hurricane contributed/triggered the illness. You can only see it in a statistical analysis like this."

Initially Hsiang and Young figured the storm death bump would go away in a matter of months, but they were surprised when they examined hundreds of bumps and found they stretch out, slowly, over 15 years, Hsiang said.

It's "almost like a trickle of mortality, like each month we're talking about five to 10 individuals who are dying earlier than they would have otherwise," Hsiang said.

These people don't realize that 10 or 15 years later their health issues are associated with a storm in some way, but Hsiang said it shows up in the data: "They would not have died at those times had the storm not arrived. And so essentially, these storms are accelerating people's deaths."

The numbers proved so high that the researchers kept looking for mistakes or complicating factors they had missed. "It took years for us to really fully accept that this was happening," Hsiang said.

How big are the numbers?

Storms are a factor in between 55,000 to 88,000 excess deaths a year, the study concluded. So for the 85 years studied, the team calculated between 3.6 and 5.2 million people died with storms being a factor. That's more than the 2 million car accident deaths over that period, the study said.

Before now the public looked at storms "as an inconvenience that is tragic for a small number of community members," Hsiang said. But they really are "a major threat to public health," he said.

Hsiang said he and Young saw a trend of increasing hurricane-connected deaths, predominantly because of population growth. Starting in 2000, there's been a big jump in the total volume of storms hitting large population, he said.

Three outside scientists said the study made sense.

"It seems like what they're doing is reasonable," said University of Albany hurricane expert Kristen Corbosiero, who wasn't part of the research. "The numbers are really staggering."

Texas A&M's Dessler said this is an important study because it brings home the deadly nature of climate change and extreme weather. He said he and his fellow climate scientists have been accurate in their warnings of the physics of what climate change would mean, but failed to emphasize enough how it would hurt people.

"Reading this, it's clear that humanity is very vulnerable to weather shocks, even in an incredibly rich country like ours," Dessler said in an email.

Lebanon's rescuers struggle to respond to Israeli offensive while under fire and using old equipment

By SARAH EL DEEB Associated Press

BEIRUT (AP) — When Israel bombed buildings outside the southern Lebanese city of Sidon, Mohamed Arkadan and his team rushed to an emergency unlike anything they had ever seen.

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About a dozen apartments had collapsed onto the hillside they once overlooked, burying more than 100 people. Even after 17 years with the civil defense forces of one of the world's most war-torn nations, Arkadan was shocked at the destruction. By Monday afternoon — about 24 hours after the bombing — his team had pulled more than 40 bodies, including children's, from the rubble, along with 60 survivors.

The children's bodies broke his heart, said Arkadan, 38, but his team of over 30 first responders' inability to help further pained him more. Firetrucks and ambulances haven't been replaced in years. Rescue tools and equipment are in short supply. His team has to buy their uniforms out of pocket.

An economic crisis that began in 2019 and a massive 2020 port explosion have left Lebanon struggling to provide basic services such as electricity and medical care. Political divisions have left the country of 6 million without a president or functioning government for more than two years, deepening a national sense of abandonment reaching down to the people the country depends on in emergencies.

"We have zero capabilities, zero logistics," Arkadan said. "We have no gloves, no personal protection gear."

War has upended Lebanon again

Israel's intensified air campaign against Hezbollah has upended the country. Over 1,000 people have been killed in Israeli strikes since Sept. 17, nearly a quarter of them women and children, according to the Health Ministry.

On Wednesday, two Israeli strikes hit an Islamic rescue center, affiliated with Hezbollah, in Lebanon's south, killing six medics and destroying the building, according to Lebanon's National News agency. Before those deaths were reported, the ministry said it had documented the deaths of over 40 medics and rescuers.

Hundreds of thousands of people have fled their homes, sleeping on beaches and streets.

The World Health Organization said over 30 primary health care centers around Lebanon's affected areas have been closed.

On Tuesday, Israel said it began a limited ground operation against Hezbollah and warned people to evacuate several southern communities, promising further escalation.

Lebanon is "grappling with multiple crises, which have overwhelmed the country's capacity to cope," said Imran Riza, the U.N.'s humanitarian coordinator for Lebanon, who said the U.N. had allocated \$24 million in emergency funding for people affected by the fighting.

Exhausted medical staff are struggling to cope with the daily influx of new patients. Under government emergency plans, hospitals and medical workers have halted non-urgent operations.

Government shelters are full

In the southern province of Tyre, many doctors have fled along with residents. In Nabatiyeh, the largest province in southern Lebanon, first responders say they have been working around the clock since last week to reach hundreds of people wounded in bombings that hit dozens of villages and towns, often many on the same day.

After the bombing in Sidon nearly 250 first responders joined Arkadan's team, including a specialized search-and-rescue unit from Beirut, some 45 kilometers (28 miles) to the north. His team didn't have the modern equipment needed to pull people from a disaster.

"We used traditional tools, like scissors, cables, shovels," Arkadan said.

"Anyone here?" rescuers shouted through the gaps in mounds of rubble, searching for survivors buried deeper underground. One excavator removed the debris slowly, to avoid shaking the heaps of bricks and mangled steel.

Many sought refuge in the ancient city of Tyre, 20 kilometers (12 miles) north of the border with Israel, thinking it was likely to be spared bombardment. More than 8,000 people arrived, said Hassan Dbouk, the head of its disaster management unit.

He said that there were no pre-positioned supplies, such as food parcels, hygiene kits and mattresses, and moving trucks now is fraught with danger. Farmers have been denied access to their land because of the bombings and the municipality is struggling to pay salaries.

The humanitarian situation is catastrophic

Meanwhile, garbage is piling up on the streets. The number of municipal workers has shrunk from 160

to 10.

"The humanitarian situation is catastrophic," Dbouk said.

Wissam Ghazal, the health ministry official in Tyre, said in one hospital, only five of 35 doctors have remained. In Tyre province, eight medics, including three with a medical organization affiliated with Hezbollah, were killed over two days, he said.

Over the weekend, the city itself became a focus of attacks.

Israeli warplanes struck near the port city's famed ruins, along its beaches and in residential and commercial areas, forcing thousands of residents to flee. At least 15 civilians were killed Saturday and Sunday, including two municipal workers, a soldier and several children, all but one from two families.

It took rescuers two days to comb through the rubble of a home in the Kharab neighborhood in the city's center, where a bomb had killed nine members of the al-Samra family.

Six premature babies in incubators around the city were moved to Beirut. The city's only doctor, who looked after them, couldn't move between hospitals under fire, Ghazal said.

One of the district's four hospitals shut after sustaining damage from a strike that affected its electricity supply and damaged the operations room. In two other hospitals, glass windows were broken. For now, the city's hospitals are receiving more killed than wounded.

"But you don't know what will happen when the intensity of attacks increases. We will definitely need more."

Making do with what they have

Hosein Faqih, head of civil defense in the Nabatiyeh province, said that "we are working in very difficult and critical circumstances because the strikes are random. We have no protection. We have no shields, no helmets, no extra hoses. The newest vehicle is 25 years old. We are still working despite all that."

At least three of his firefighters' team were killed in early September. Ten have been injured since then. Of 45 vehicles, six were hit and are now out of service.

Faqih said he is limiting his team's search-and-rescue missions to residential areas, keeping them away from forests or open areas where they used to put out fires.

"These days, there is something difficult every day. Body parts are everywhere, children, civilians and bodies under rubble," Faqih said. Still, he said, he considers his job to be the safety net for the people.

"We serve the people, and we will work with what we have."

The fall of Vuhledar is a microcosm of Ukraine's wartime predicament

By SAMYA KULLAB and VOLODYMYR YURCHUK Associated Press

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — The fall of a front-line town nestled atop a tactically significant hill is unlikely to change the course of Ukraine's war against Russia. But the loss underscores Kyiv's worsening position, in part the result of firm Western red lines, military officials and analysts said.

Vuhledar, a town Ukrainian forces fought tooth and nail to keep for two years, is the latest urban settlement to fall to the Russians. It follows a vicious summer campaign along the eastern front that saw Kyiv cede several thousand square kilometers (miles) of territory.

Ukraine's military said they were withdrawing their troops from Vuhledar to "protect the military personnel and equipment" in a statement on Wednesday.

Vuhledar's fall is a microcosm of Ukraine's predicament in this chapter of the nearly three-year war. It reflects the U.S.'s refusal to grant Ukraine permission to strike targets deep inside Russian territory, preventing Kyiv from degrading Moscow's capabilities. Meanwhile, Russia's dominance of the skies allows it to develop and advance devastating aerial glide bombs for which Ukraine has no effective response, while a controversial mobilization drive has failed to produce a new class of Ukrainian fighters capable of holding the line.

The Ukrainians' retreat from the town comes after a much-anticipated visit by Ukrainian President Volody-

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myr Zelenskyy to the U.S. last week. The Biden administration so far has refused Kyiv's request to use Army Tactical Missile Systems, or ATACMS, to strike Russian airfields and other key targets, and Zelenskyy's "victory plan," was dismissed by some as more of a wish list than a plan of action.

In the meantime, Russian fighter jets continued to drop aerial bombs on Vuhledar, which precipitated the retreat, soldiers there said.

"(The Russians') main tactic was to encircle us from the flanks, and they did this constantly for six to seven months with constant aerial attacks — due to this tactic they managed to exhaust our resources, because we don't have as much as they have," said Arsenii Prylipka, the head of the press office of the 72nd Brigade, which had been defending Vuhledar since August 2022.

The fight for Vuhledar

After two years of failed attempts to capture Vuhledar, Russian forces switched tactics earlier this year. The town's pre-war population of 14,000 dwindled to less than 100 during the heat of the fighting.

Russian soldiers began mounting sophisticated attacks from the north and southern flanks, powered by superior electronic warfare capabilities and an array of infantrymen on motorcycles, artillery fire, drones and aerial glide bombs. Moscow suffered heavy casualties.

Ukrainians have been pressuring the U.S. to relax restrictions on the use of Western weapons to strike targets deep inside Russia. Lawmakers said they expected a green light from the U.S. months ago, but it didn't come: The Biden administration refused to waver on this red line.

It has meant that Russian command and control centers, logistics hubs and airfields from which Russian fighter jets carry deadly aerial glide bombs, are out of reach of Ukrainian forces.

Russia fires nearly 120 aerial bombs a day on average, about 3,000 a month. The bombs are Soviet-era weapons refitted with navigational technology.

"We cannot change the dynamics, and the Russians are pushing," said Pavel Narozhnyi, founder of the non-profit Reactive Post, which sources spare parts for artillery.

Month after month of constant attacks eventually eroded Ukrainian defenses.

After two years of intense fighting, the 72nd Brigade — which never rotated out due to the intensity of the fight and the lack of a demobilization strategy from Ukrainian military leaders — withdrew from the patch of land many of their comrades died to defend.

Prylipka had said the brigade would stay until the very last moment when defending Vuhledar became impossible. That scenario unfolded this week.

"The Russians searched for weak spots in our defenses, a constant probe to find routes to penetrate the town and as they advanced they tried to destroy the entire town. All the time we are under fire," said Prylipka.

Vuhledar served as a defensive stronghold, a fortress town atop a hill surrounded by open fields and near two major roads. From there, Ukrainian soldiers were able to observe approaching Russian forces at a distance. From that vantage point, it was easy to coordinate counter-attacks. That advantage now falls to Russian forces.

While tactically significant, Vuhledar isn't a crucial logistics hub for Kyiv, and Russian forces already controlled most of the main roads through the town before capturing it, the U.S.-based Institute for the Study of War said. Ukraine's access to other critical supply lines remains intact.

The road to Pokrovsk

The capture of Vuhledar is part of Moscow's pursuit of the strategic logistics hub of Pokrovsk, just 30 kilometers (19 miles) north. Its fall would severely compromise Ukrainian defenses.

The next step for Russian forces will be to drive Ukrainian forces out of the nearby city of Kurakhove.

"This line is interconnected and the enemy will not be able to enter Pokrovsk and come close to Pokrovsk unless it can drive our troops out of Kurakhove," said Ivan Tymochko, chairman of the Council of Reservists of Ukraine's ground forces. "Otherwise, (the Russians) would have exposed their fronts to the flanks and would have received a serious blow to the side."

"On the other hand, the enemy understands that if it does not take Kurakhove, it will not be able to seriously influence the course of events around Vuhledar," he added.

Pennsylvania town grapples with Trump assassination attempt ahead of his return

By MARK SCOLFORO Associated Press

BUTLER, Pa. (AP) — Donald Trump is going back to Butler, where the world last saw him pump his fist and beseech followers to “fight,” even as blood streaked his face from a would-be assassin’s bullet.

In announcing his return, the former president and current Republican nominee said he planned to “celebrate a unifying vision for America’s future in an event like the world has never seen before.”

The question is: Is Butler ready?

While many are predicting a large crowd to hear Trump speak back at the very Farm Show property where a bullet grazed his right ear on July 13, there is also apprehension in town, along with a sense that Butler is still healing.

“I’ve consulted with, at least, like 500 people since this has happened,” said registered nurse Shanea Clancy, who runs a mental health consulting service in Butler County and has seen people more anxious since the shooting. Some show signs of post-traumatic stress disorder.

“The big theme, if you will, is just, ‘How did something like that happen in our backyard?’” Clancy said. “People don’t expect trauma to show up at their door on any given day.”

The assassination attempt has resonated deeply in the mountainous community north of Pittsburgh. Trump enjoys wide support there, having easily doubled Hillary Clinton’s vote total on his way to winning the White House in 2016. He nearly did so again against Joe Biden in 2020. But Butler County was better for Democrats two years ago, when the party’s gubernatorial nominee, Josh Shapiro, took about 43% of the vote there.

To claim the pivotal swing state of Pennsylvania in November, Trump needs to drive up voter turnout in conservative strongholds like Butler County, an overwhelmingly white, rural-suburban community with a record of voting for Republicans.

Banking on better security

On Saturday, the former president will speak where thousands of people, including children, witnessed him and the others get shot. Former Buffalo Township Fire Company Chief Corey Comperatore was killed, while David Dutch and James Copenhaver were both hospitalized with injuries. U.S. Secret Service killed the gunman, 20-year-old Thomas Matthew Crooks.

Stunned in the aftermath, some rally goers held impromptu prayer groups as they walked back to their cars. It seems just about everyone in Butler County was either at the rally or knows someone who was.

Last weekend, retired food service worker Sally Sarvey was picking up Trump signs and a T-shirt from a Republican Party tent at a street festival in nearby Slippery Rock. She said she will “make it a point” to witness Trump’s return this Saturday, but she’s mindful of what happened in July.

“Hopefully they’ll have more security that acts faster,” Sarvey said.

There are visible signs of the tension left behind. “Fight” graffiti — echoing Trump’s words in the immediate aftermath of the shooting — began showing up around Butler County in the ensuing two weeks. In some places, the word “fight” on roadways was countered by another spray painted message: “love.”

The assassination attempt has been the “No. 1 topic” of conversation since July 13, said Jim Hulings, chairman of the Butler County Republican Committee. He has so many lingering questions about the shooting and consequent investigations that he keeps a running list.

“There’s a lot of activity going on right now, people wanting answers,” Hulings said. “I am not in a minority there at all. There’s a lot of people asking questions.”

The shooting was ‘a burden on all of us’

Police and emergency officials have faced questions from investigators looking into the shootings from the state police, FBI and Congress. The county government has fielded some 300 open records requests, five times what it normally gets in a year. Many are bracing for litigation that could extend for years.

“I’m not going to lie — it’s a burden on all of us,” said Butler Emergency Services Director Steve Bicehouse. “It wears on you. And it’s been a trying time the last several months.”

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County Commissioner Kevin Boozel, the only Democrat holding countywide elected office in Butler, said what happened two months ago has some concerned about Saturday's rally. The previous security failure is the major issue, but authorities at the July event also contended with extreme heat and humidity that kept emergency responders busy treating people in distress even before the shooting. Several people required hospital treatment.

Boozel has fielded "plenty of emails saying, 'Don't let him back here,'" he said of Trump. "Because emotionally, we're not ready for that."

Retired librarian Kathy Kline, who lives in Butler, said she supports Vice President Kamala Harris in the presidential race and feels there has been insufficient consideration for those who oppose Trump returning. Kline belongs to a Facebook group, "Butler PA Women for Kamala Harris," that's grown to some 1,500 members in recent months.

"I personally am never opposed to any political figure coming into our community and sharing their policies," Kline said. "That's the American way. But you know, you need to come in with some respect and integrity and leave all of that chaos and ugliness out of it."

Barry Cummings' coffee shop near the Farm Show property where the shooting occurred was closed briefly after the shooting. In the immediate aftermath, he said, he was determined to reach out to people who don't share his political views.

"I tended to try to listen more than speak," said Cummings, a registered Democrat. He wanted to hear "the feelings on the other side, you know, and I think that brought us a little closer together."

Moving forward while memorializing the past

Kim Geyer, a Republican Butler County commissioner, plans to attend the rally Saturday, just as she did in July when she sat behind Trump.

"I kind of have mixed feelings about it, but I'm resolved to moving forward," Geyer said. "I think that the people that may be affected more negatively are going to just stay home. And the people that want to feel the inspiration and the energy from the Trump movement are going to attend to support President Trump and let him finish what he began."

Some Trump supporters have been looking for ways to memorialize the attempted assassination. One artist is working on a 9-foot-high sculpture of Trump in Butler, although it's unclear where it might be installed. Another artist, Butler metal worker and Trump supporter Bill Secunda, spent two weeks reworking an existing life-sized Trump sculpture to better reflect his response after being shot, with his right arm raised and fist clenched.

Secunda and a friend quietly installed it in a tent at the Butler Farm Show in August, where it became popular for selfies. He's already had a \$50,000 offer for the sculpture.

"I don't even think I saw a sour look, which was kind of surprising because, you know, I've lost customers over doing a piece like that," Secunda said.

Meanwhile, the Butler Historical Society has put on hold until spring, at least, its plans to collect local residents' stories about the shooting. The organization is looking into how it would keep the stories sealed for 75 years, as had been the plan.

Geyer said she expects Butlerites will find more ways to pay tribute to the victims.

"It was a tragic day and nobody wishes it happened or occurred in their county," Geyer said. "I believe that the people who live and work here are resilient people. We're going to move forward."

Pennsylvania Republican in key swing-state Senate race backs using military to fight fentanyl

By MARC LEVY Associated Press

STEELTON, Pa. (AP) — The Republican challenger trying to flip the U.S. Senate seat in swing-state Pennsylvania said he'll press for U.S. military action in Mexico to target fentanyl trafficking networks, a controversial and complicated idea that seemed to originate with former President Donald Trump.

David McCormick, who is challenging third-term Democratic Sen. Bob Casey of Pennsylvania, is making

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the idea part of his plan for fighting the fentanyl scourge, which is playing a big role in the campaign and has been central to dueling TV ads in the race.

The idea of using the military garnered attention in last year's GOP primaries before Trump emerged as his party's presidential nominee for the third consecutive time.

But now, McCormick — a decorated Army combat veteran and ex- hedge fund CEO who served on Trump's Defense Advisory Board — is testing the message of unilateral U.S. military action in Mexico in a state that could be decisive in determining which party wins the White House and a Senate majority in November's election.

McCormick envisions using the U.S. military's drones and special operations teams in Mexico to destroy fentanyl trafficking cartels, though he stresses that the military should be used "selectively and thoughtfully."

"I'm not saying we're going to send the 82nd Airborne Division to do a jump into Mexico," McCormick said. "What I'm saying is the combination of special operations and drones, I think, could eradicate the manufacturing facilities, kill the distribution networks and do a real dent in what is a terrorist activity."

Military action is justified, McCormick says, by what he calls "the biggest killer in our country." The U.S. shouldn't wait for a blessing from a Mexican government that has failed to address its problem with fentanyl production and trafficking, he said.

"So the time for negotiating with the Mexican government to get their DEA on this is gone," McCormick told one audience in September. "We've got to get tough on it. And that's what I would do."

The idea received high-profile attention when Trump's former defense secretary, Mark Esper, said in 2022 that Trump had asked him about firing missiles into Mexico, a precedent-setting notion that Esper and other defense officials quickly rejected.

The idea gained cachet among some Republican lawmakers last year and Trump embraced it, saying "it's now time for America to wage war on the cartels."

Trump's then-competitors on the Republican presidential primary campaign trail also embraced the idea, but that talk has quieted. Legislation to provide military authorization hasn't received a committee vote in the Republican-controlled House and, while McCormick's proposal lacks specifics and echoes an idea Trump broached, it goes further than what most—if not all—other Senate candidates are saying across the U.S.

Critics of using the U.S. military in Mexico say such operations would do little to hurt the cartels or stem the flow of fentanyl, while raising delicate questions about sovereignty.

They could, for example, destroy the relationship with the U.S.' largest trade partner, whose just-departed President Andres Manuel López Obrador repeatedly denied Mexico is producing the synthetic opioid despite considerable evidence to the contrary.

Casey has neither criticized nor backed the idea of using the U.S. military in Mexico. Instead, he has pointed to his support for measures in Congress to strengthen screening at border checkpoints.

The vast majority of fentanyl seized is brought into the United States by American citizens at the southern border, according to the U.S. Department of Homeland Security.

McCormick and other Republicans compare fentanyl deaths to combat losses in the Vietnam War: Roughly 110,000 drug overdose deaths each of the last two years in which fentanyl was the primary culprit two-thirds of the time, compared to 58,000 reported U.S. casualties in the war.

"What we're in is unprecedented," he said. "The numbers are beyond imagination in terms of what we're experiencing right now."

McCormick says the closest model for what he has in mind is the U.S. military's cocaine interdiction work with the cooperation of the Colombian government against the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia. McCormick called that effort "incredibly successful."

But Justin Logan, director of defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute, said the Colombian operation failed to stop the flow of cocaine.

It's true that Colombia became more stable, its governance improved and cartel activity receded, Logan said. But the price of cocaine in the U.S. dropped significantly, which he called an indication that cocaine had become more widely available.

"And I think that is the first reason to be skeptical of the claim that using the U.S. military against the

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cartels in Mexico is going to have an effect in the United States on the amount and abundance of fentanyl in the United States," Logan said.

Analysts say it seems unlikely that Mexico would agree to U.S. military operations on its territory.

Vanda Felbab-Brown, director of the Brookings Institution's Initiative on Nonstate Armed Actors, said a sustained military and law enforcement effort by Mexico over months or years would be necessary to shut down labs and round up a trafficking network's management.

But unilateral U.S. military strikes will have little long-term effect, because the labs and cartel commanders that get taken out are easily replaced, she said.

"And meanwhile you would incur very large costs," she said. "You could imagine the complete rupture in the relationship that has many consequences."

Mexico, for example, could end its cooperation of stemming the flow of migrants to its border with the United States, she said.

In Congress, bipartisan agreement has revolved around hiring more Customs and Border Patrol personnel at the southern border and expanding the capacity to screen vehicles coming from Mexico.

In April, President Joe Biden signed bipartisan legislation to expand the use of sanctions to disrupt trafficking networks and money laundering.

Democrats, meanwhile, have accused Trump and Republicans of hypocrisy after they sank a sweeping immigration reform bill this year that carried hundreds of millions of dollars to hire more customs agents and bolster investigations into fentanyl trafficking.

Trump said the attached immigration measures weren't tough enough.

If he wins in November, congressional authorization may not matter. Trump has said he intends to act with or without congressional approval.

The Biden administration, meanwhile, has suggested it already has the legal authority to strike cartels in Mexico, if it wanted to.

Presidents will always assert that they have the inherent authority to use the armed forces to protect the national security of the United States, said Geoffrey S. Corn, director of the Center for Military Law and Policy at Texas Tech's School of Law.

Congress in 1973 passed a law requiring their approval for taking such action, but presidents have assumed the authority to strike at non-state enemies in other countries that they deem to be either unwilling or unable to rein them in, Corn said.

It's a gray area of international law that has been tested by presidents of both parties.

"It's the same rationale that Obama used when he ordered a raid into Pakistan to kill Osama Bin Laden," Corn said. "As far as we know, we didn't have consent from the Pakistanis to do that."

The question, then, may be whether the flow of fentanyl into the United States warrants military action, Corn said.

"It's a hard question," Corn said. "It is killing millions of people, but it's not like they're flying drones across the border and dropping this stuff."

Today in History: October 3, Germany reunifies after 45 years

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Oct. 3, the 277th day of 2024. There are 89 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Oct. 3, 1990, West Germany and East Germany ended 45 years of postwar division, declaring the creation of a reunified country.

Also on this date:

In 1944, during World War II, U.S. Army troops cracked the Siegfried Line north of Aachen, Germany.

In 1951, the New York Giants captured the National League pennant by a score of 5-4 as Bobby Thomson hit a three-run homer off Ralph Branca of the Brooklyn Dodgers, which became known as the "Shot Heard 'Round the World."

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In 1974, Frank Robinson was named the American League's first Black manager after he was hired by the Cleveland Indians.

In 1993, 18 U.S. service members and hundreds of Somalis were killed in the Battle of Mogadishu — the deadliest battle for U.S. troops since the Vietnam War, and inspired the film "Black Hawk Down."

In 1995, the jury in the O.J. Simpson murder trial in Los Angeles found the former football star not guilty of the 1994 slayings of his former wife, Nicole Brown Simpson, and Ronald Goldman.

In 2008, O.J. Simpson was found guilty of robbing two sports-memorabilia dealers at gunpoint in a Las Vegas hotel room. (Simpson was later sentenced to nine to 33 years in prison; he was granted parole in July 2017 and released from prison in October of that year.)

In 2011, an Italian appeals court freed Amanda Knox of Seattle after four years in prison, tossing murder convictions against Knox and an ex-boyfriend in the stabbing of their British roommate, Meredith Kercher.

In 2013, a smugglers' ship packed with African migrants sank off the coast of a southern Italian island, killing more than 365 people.

In 2023, the U.S. House of Representatives voted to remove House Speaker Kevin McCarthy — the first time in U.S. history a Speaker had been ousted from the position.

Today's Birthdays: Composer Steve Reich is 88. Rock and roll star Chubby Checker is 83. Musician Lindsey Buckingham (Fleetwood Mac) is 75. Blues musician Keb' Mo' is 73. Baseball Hall of Famer Dave Winfield is 73. Baseball Hall of Famer Dennis Eckersley is 70. Golf Hall of Famer Fred Couples is 65. Rock drummer Tommy Lee is 62. Actor Clive Owen is 60. Film director Denis Villeneuve is 57. Singer-TV personality Gwen Stefani is 55. Pop singer Kevin Richardson (Backstreet Boys) is 53. Actor Neve Campbell is 51. Actor Lena Headey is 51. Singer India.Arie is 49. Rapper Talib Kweli is 49. Actor Seann William Scott is 48. Soccer player Zlatan Ibrahimović is 43. Actor Tessa Thompson is 41. Actor-singer Ashlee Simpson is 40. Actor Alicia Vikander is 36. Rapper A\$AP Rocky is 36. Actor Ayo Edebiri is 29. Actor Noah Schnapp (TV: "Stranger Things") is 20.