

Groton Daily Independent

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Thursday, Oct. 10

Senior Menu: Meatballs, mashed potatoes with gravy, California blend, fruit cocktail, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Breakfast pizza.

School Lunch: Chicken nuggets, spudsters.

NEC Cross Country at Webster, 1 p.m.

JH Football at Sisseton, 4 p.m.

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



Volleyball at Milbank (7th at elementary, 4 p.m.; 8th at armory, 4 p.m.; C at 5:15, JV at 6 p.m. followed by varsity)

Groton Lions Club meeting, 104 November Main, 6 p.m.

Friday, Oct. 11

Senior Menu: Tuna noodle hot dish with peas, mixed vegetables, apple crisp, whole wheat bread.

School Breakfast: Egg wraps.

School Lunch: Pizza, green beans.

Lake Region Marching Festival in Groton, 10 a.m.

Football at Sisseton, 7 p.m.

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1440

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

Milton Arrives Stateside

Hurricane Milton made landfall on Florida's Gulf Coast last night as a Category 3 storm, bringing wind speeds of 120 mph and over a dozen tornadoes and thunderstorm warnings.

Among the greatest dangers is Milton's storm surge, expected to reach up to 13 feet as of this writing. An estimated 6 million Florida residents were ordered to evacuate ahead of the storm's arrival, including to dozens of emergency shelters; those who did not were directed to shelter in place. More than 1 million people have lost power. Several airports have closed; emergency services in multiple counties have been suspended.

Tampa is among several Florida cities considered most vulnerable to storm surge in the US due to its low elevation and continental shelf acting like a funnel, with water accumulating on the coast. As the storm continues on its projected path into the Atlantic Ocean, it is expected to reshape the state's coastline.

Google Antitrust Remedies

The Justice Department is proposing to break up Google and force it to sell parts of its business. The proposal, one of several recommendations submitted in a late Tuesday court filing, comes after a judge this summer found Google holds a monopoly in online search and text advertising.

Judge Amit Mehta is expected to decide on a final slate of remedies in August 2025, with Google likely to be required to stop paying device makers—including Apple—over \$20B annually to set its search engine as the default. In the event of a breakup, Google warns services will be disrupted for billions of users. Analysts have likened the ruling to the 1999 antitrust case against software giant Microsoft; the last US company to be split by an antitrust ruling was AT&T in 1982.

The ruling on Google's monopoly in search is distinct from a separate DOJ antitrust suit over its ad business. Closing arguments in the trial are expected in November.

Mama Bear Retains Crown

A mother bear known as 128 "Grazer" won this year's Fat Bear Week competition, her second consecutive win. The annual popularity contest, launched in 2014, promotes conservation efforts at Alaska's Katmai National Park, home to an estimated 2,200 brown bears.

Over the course of a week, public participants rank before-and-after photos of roughly a dozen bears working to beef up for winter in a bracket-style competition. This year, reigning champion Grazer's fat-packing evolution was considered especially noteworthy given her calorie-draining care for a young cub, and the recent death of another offspring.

In late summer, bears enter a state known as hyperphagia, in which the appetite-suppressing hormone leptin is turned off, enabling them to eat dozens of salmon daily. The bears consume the fattiest parts of the fish, gaining as much as 4 pounds per day before retreating to a den for winter.

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Sports, Entertainment, & Culture

The 2024 WNBA Finals kick off tonight (8 pm ET, ESPN) with the New York Liberty taking on the Minnesota Lynx in a best-of-five series.

Vogue reveals theme for 2025 Met Gala, "Superfine: Tailoring Black Style," and names co-chairs: Colman Domingo, Lewis Hamilton, A\$AP Rocky, and Pharrell Williams.

Seattle Kraken's Jessica Campbell becomes NHL's first full-time female assistant coach.

Science & Technology

Nobel Prize in Chemistry awarded to trio of researchers for developing AI applications, including Google's DeepMind, to predict protein structure and folding.

Literature prize announced at 7 am ET this morning.

Tesla CEO Elon Musk to unveil company's new driverless robotaxi during live event tonight at 10 pm ET; deployment timeline for the "cybercab" not yet revealed.

Consuming fewer calories linked to increased life span in mice, large-scale study finds; results suggest the benefits of dietary restriction extend to improved immune health, genetics factors, and more.

Business & Markets

US stock markets close higher (S&P 500 +0.7%, Dow +1.0%, Nasdaq +0.6%); S&P 500 and Dow notch fresh records as tech stocks—led by Super Micro Computer—continue to rally.

Mining giant Rio Tinto announces it will acquire lithium miner Arcadium Lithium for \$6.7B; Arcadium shares close up 31% on the news.

Ratan Tata, former chair of India's oldest conglomerate, Tata Sons, dies at age 86; Tata Sons is the holding company for Tata Group, which oversees nearly 100 companies and acquired British Jaguar and Land Rover for \$2.3B from Ford in 2008.

Politics & World Affairs

President Joe Biden holds call with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu amid expectations for Israeli response to Iranian missiles last week.

North Korea announces it will cut off all roads and rail lines to South Korea and "permanently" block the border; announcement comes after months of missile tests, trash balloons.

The Tropicana, Las Vegas' third-oldest hotel-casino, demolished in controlled implosion to make space for \$1.5B Major League Baseball stadium.

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West Nile Virus Update -SD

SD WNV (as of October 9):

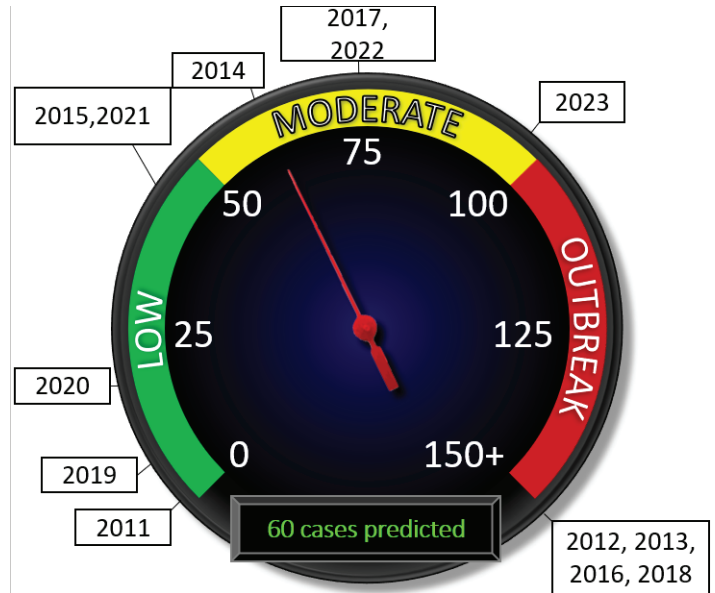
19 human cases (Beadle, Brookings, Codington, Davison, Dewey, Gregory, Hand, Hutchinson, Kingsbury, Lawrence, Pennington, Potter, Roberts, Walworth, Ziebach) and 1 death

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 8): 976 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 9)



Mosquito Surveillance Summary for 2024, South Dakota, Week Ending October 5, 2024 (MMWR Week 40)

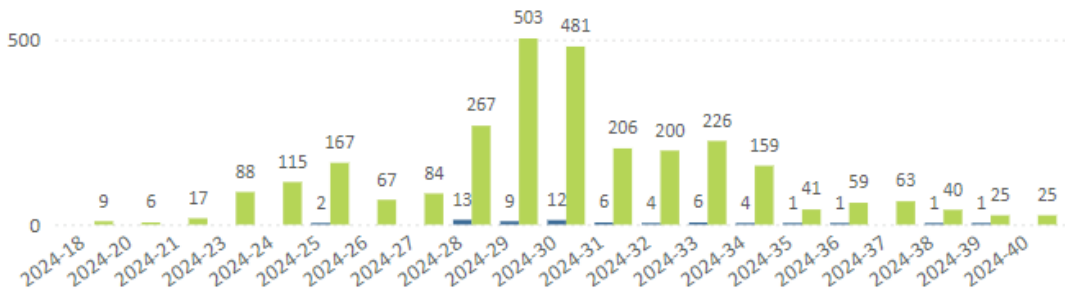
Total sites collecting mosquitoes: 77

Total mosquito pools tested: 2,908

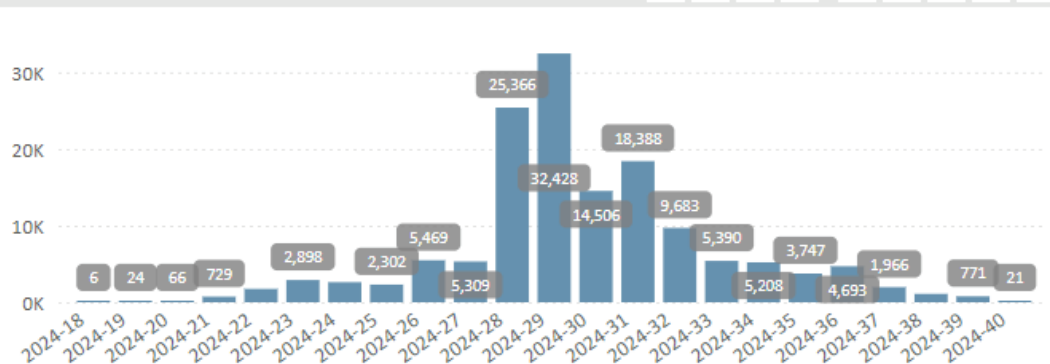
% positivity: 2.06%

Number of Mosquito Pools Tested by MMWR Week and Status

Test Status: ● Positive ● Negative



Culex Mosquitoes Collected by MMWR Week



Working to Protect & Promote Traditional American Values

- Pro Police
- Pro Constitution
- Pro Family



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ManhartForHouse.com



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MANHART

STATE REPRESENTATIVE

DISTRICT 1

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General Election - Nov. 5
Absentee Voting has begun

Names Released in Codington County Fatal Crash

What: Two vehicle fatal crash
Where: US Highway 212 and 450th Avenue, two miles west of Watertown, SD
When: 4:15 p.m., Saturday, September 21, 2024

Vehicle 1: 2012 Chevrolet Impala
Driver 1: Beverly Ann Halfaday, 79-year-old female from Florence, SD, fatal injuries
Seatbelt Use: Yes

Vehicle 2: 1999 Peterbilt
Driver 2: Conrad George Kurth, 59-year-old male from Davenport, ND, no injuries
Seatbelt Use: Yes

Codington County, S.D.- A Florence, SD woman died Thursday, Oct. 3 from injuries sustained in a September 21 crash in Codington County.

Preliminary crash information indicates Conrad G. Kurth, the driver of a 1999 Peterbilt, was traveling eastbound on US Highway 212 near the intersection of 450th Avenue. The driver of a 2012 Chevrolet Impala, Beverly Ann Halfaday, was westbound on US 212, attempting a left turn across the divided highway onto 450th Avenue. The vehicles collided in the eastbound lanes.

Kurth was uninjured. Halfaday suffered life-threatening injuries and was taken to a nearby hospital. She passed away on October 3 from her injuries.

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

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

COMMON CENTS IS MOVING TO THE GROTON COMMUNITY CENTER (109 N 3RD STREET) FOR A 3-DAY \$10 BAG SALE!!

SHOP

THURS, OCT. 10TH 2-7PM

FRI, OCT. 11TH 9AM-3PM

SAT, OCT. 12TH 9AM-3PM



HENRY TOWNSHIP WEED NOTICE

Henry Township owners and tenants of Henry Township are hereby notified and required according to law, to cut all weeds in road ditches adjacent to their property or tenanted by them within said township on or before October 15, 2024, or someone will be hired by the township board and \$250.00 per half mile charged to the abutting property.

By order of the township board.

Darlene Sass, Township Clerk

Power Smart: Keep Your Lithium-Ion Batteries Safe

Laptops, and smartphones, and hoverboards, oh my! Lithium-ion batteries supply power to many of our devices, but they can potentially be a fire hazard. Here are some easy tips to minimize their risks.

By Daniel Anderson, Cy-Fair Fire Department

As our reliance on technology grows, so does the prevalence of lithium-ion batteries in devices such as smartphones, tablets, and e-bikes. While these batteries power our daily lives, they also pose a fire risk if not handled properly.

Lithium-ion batteries have a lot of benefits—like their ability to store more energy than traditional batteries of the same weight—but they also have disadvantages. Their ability to store a lot of energy can also be a problem if they catch on fire or explode.

While lithium-ion batteries are normally safe, they can pose a fire risk if they are damaged, not used correctly, improperly charged, or have any design defects. If they do catch on fire, I have seen firsthand how hard they can be to extinguish.

In honor of Fire Prevention Week (October 6-12), here are some essential tips on buying, charging, storing, and using lithium-ion batteries to help prevent fires.

Purchase safely. Always purchase devices certified by a qualified testing laboratory. Make sure batteries, chargers, and other equipment have been tested.

Follow the instructions. Read the manufacturer's instructions and always follow them for proper storage, usage, and charging.

Control the temperature. Keep batteries at room temperature whenever possible. Avoid exposing them to extreme temperatures, as this can increase the risk of overheating and fires.

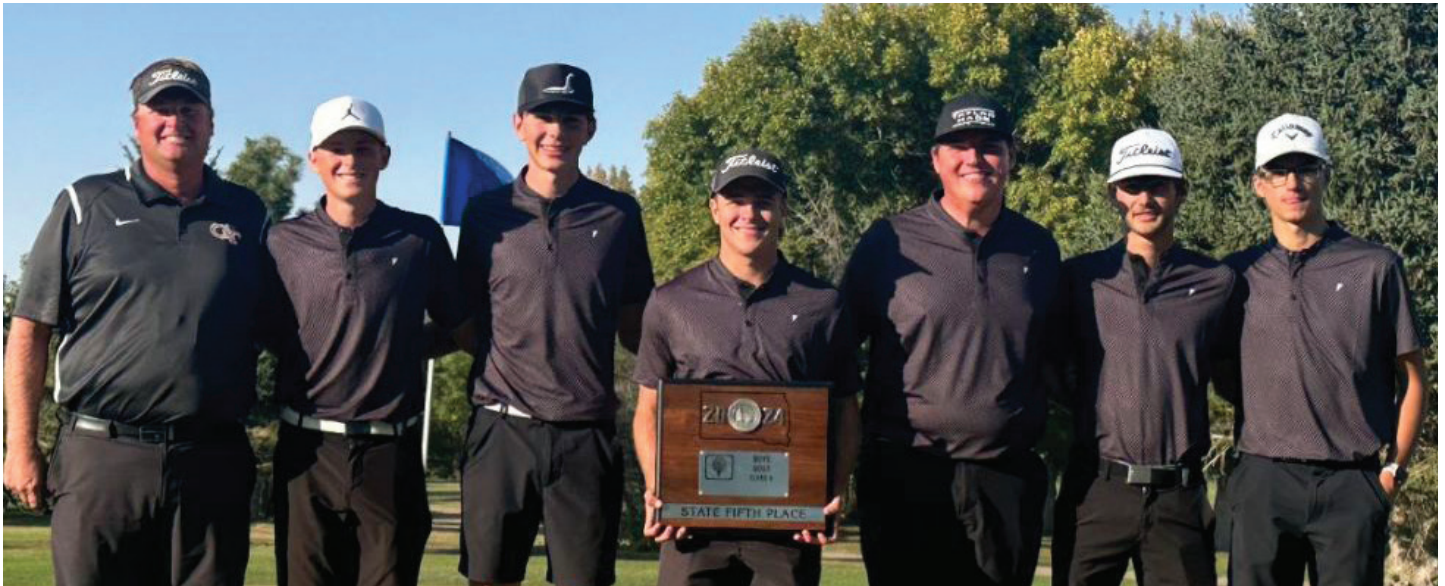
Store (and charge) batteries away from anything flammable. For an e-bike, charge it in a dry area away from direct sunlight. Please don't charge your smartphone, tablet, or laptop on your bed as your bedding or pillow could catch fire.

Use the right equipment. Use only the charging cord that came with your device. If it gets lost or damaged, find out from the manufacturer what replacement cord is compatible with your device. Mixing and matching charging cords with your devices can lead to unsafe conditions. You should also use only the battery that came with your device.

Never overcharge. When your device is fully charged, unplug it from the charger. Don't leave it charging overnight or all day. Unplugging it when it is finished charging prevents overheating and prolongs the life of your battery.

Finally, stop using a battery immediately if you notice any of the following: leaking, weird noises or odor, color changes, swelling, or if it's putting out too much heat. Batteries should also be routinely checked for any changes in appearance or leaking.

You don't need to throw out all your lithium-ion battery-powered devices, but you should be aware of the risks. By practicing safe battery usage, residents can minimize the dangers and prevent fires.



The Groton Area boys golf team placed fifth in the state tournament. Pictured are Coach Joel Guthmiller, Jace Johnson, Carter Simon, Brevin Flihs, Logan Pearson, Jarrett Erdmann and Jayden Schwan. (Courtesy Photo)

Golf Team places fifth at the state tournament

Groton Area's golf team was in seventh place in the first round with a score of 351, and was in third place in the second round with a score of 315. Overall, Groton Area placed fifth in the state with a total score of 666, behind champion Dakota Valley with a 615, Vermillion with a 629 and Aberdeen Roncalli with a 661. This is the highest place that Groton Area has ever placed in the boys golf state tournament.

Brevin Flihs tied for 12th, hitting a score of 83 in the first round and a 73 in the second round for a total score of 156.

Carter Simon tied for 16th, hitting a score of 82 in the first round and a 78 in the second round for a total score of 160.

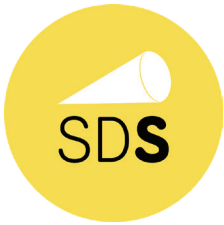
Jace Johnson tied for 37th, hitting a score of 93 in the first round and a 79 in the second round for a total score of 172.

Logan Pearson tied for 50th, hitting a score of 93 in the first round and an 85 in the second round for a total score of 178.

Jarrett Erdmann placed 61st, hitting a score of 93 in the first round and a 92 in the second round for a total score of 185.



Carter Simon and Brevin Flihs placed in the top 20 and medaled at the state golf tournament. (Courtesy Photo)



SOUTH DAKOTA SEARCHLIGHT

<https://southdakotasearchlight.com>

'Quiet giant' of SD politics, Tim Johnson, dies at age 77 **Democrat served 36 years in state and federal office, never lost an election in a Republican-leaning state**

BY: SETH TUPPER - OCTOBER 9, 2024 12:24 PM

Tim Johnson, a former U.S. senator, U.S. representative and state legislator who never lost an election and served longer in state and federal office than any other South Dakotan, has died at age 77.

A former aide, Drey Samuelson, shared the news Wednesday morning on Facebook but did not specify a cause of death. Since 2006, Johnson had dealt with the lingering stroke-like effects of brain bleeding caused by a cerebral arteriovenous malformation.

"He died a few hours ago, surrounded by his family, but also surrounded by the love and admiration that all of us have felt for him for many years," Samuelson wrote.

Johnson served a combined 36 years in the state Legislature, U.S. House and U.S. Senate, a fact made more remarkable by his status as a Democrat in a Republican-leaning state. Since Johnson's retirement in 2014, no Democrat has held a statewide office in South Dakota.

"It's hard to imagine someone living a life more meaningful and impactful than Tim's — and, in the end, impact and meaning are the best that any of us can hope to achieve," Samuelson wrote on Facebook. "Tim succeeded in reaching those goals way beyond what I'm sure were his wildest dreams when he was a young man."



U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson, D-South Dakota, watches as the Base Closure and Realignment Commission votes to save South Dakota's Ellsworth Air Force Base on Aug. 26, 2005, in Arlington, Virginia. (Mark Wilson/Getty Images)

'He always won'

Jon Schaff, a professor of government at Northern State University in Aberdeen, said Johnson showed strong political acumen by picking favorable Democratic election cycles to chase electoral opportunities. Johnson also worked hard to moderate his politics and to help his constituents with project funding and other requests.

"There was an enormous amount of goodwill toward Tim Johnson that allowed him to overcome the partisan makeup of the state," Schaff said. "He was able to get people to vote for the person instead of

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the policy or party, and as a person he was extraordinarily well-liked. That's a testament to his character."

Steve Jarding, who worked for Johnson as a staffer and campaign manager, described Johnson as a humble and hardworking public servant — "a hard man not to respect" — whose humility sometimes caused him to be overlooked and underestimated.

"He was always kind of the unlikeliest candidate, except for the fact that he always won," Jarding said. "You have to give him a lot of credit, and I never thought he got enough credit for his successes."

Johnson was born Dec. 28, 1946, in Canton. After earning bachelor's and master's degrees from the University of South Dakota, he did post-graduate studies at Michigan State University and worked as a budget adviser to the Michigan state Senate. In 1975, he graduated from the law school at USD.

Johnson launched his historic political career in 1978 by winning a seat in the state House of Representatives. He served there from 1979 until 1982, then in the state Senate from 1983 to 1986 while serving a stint in 1985 as Clay County deputy state's attorney.

In 1986, then-U.S. Rep. Tom Daschle, a Democrat, gave up his seat to mount a successful campaign for the Senate. Johnson ran for the House seat and won.

After being reelected four times to the House, Johnson unseated Republican Sen. Larry Pressler in a 1996 Senate race.

On Wednesday, Pressler said he and Johnson later became friends. Pressler described Johnson as "a quiet giant of South Dakota politics."

"Tim Johnson was a great South Dakotan, and I debated him several times, and he was always fair and polite in debates," Pressler said. "South Dakota has lost a great man."

Defeat of Thune, legislative legacy

Johnson's defeat of Pressler set up a challenge from then-U.S. Rep. John Thune, a Republican, in 2002. Johnson won that race by 524 votes — 0.15% of the votes cast.

In 2004, Thune went on to topple Daschle, who'd become a U.S. senator. Thune remains in the chamber, where he's in the running for leader of the Senate Republicans. He issued a statement Wednesday saying he and his wife, Kimberley, "join all South Dakotans in mourning."

"Known for his tenacity and work ethic, Tim was a steadfast leader who dedicated his life to serving the people of South Dakota with integrity and compassion," Thune said. "He fought tirelessly for rural America and leaves a legacy that will have a lasting impact for years to come."

While in the Senate, Johnson rose to the chairmanship of the Banking Committee. Additional highlights of his time in Congress included his work with other South Dakota politicians to remove Ellsworth Air Force Base from a 2005 base closure list; his sponsorship of numerous rural water bills, including legislation supporting major pipelines such as the Mni Wiconi and Lewis & Clark systems; his support for country-of-origin labeling on meat products; and his work to establish the Minuteman Missile National Historic Site near the Badlands.

Johnson split with Democrats at times. He voted for then-President George W. Bush's tax cuts in 2001, and he was among the last Democratic U.S. senators to oppose same-sex marriage until he changed his position to support marriage equality in 2013.

Johnson was a proud user and defender of earmarks — money in legislation that members of Congress obtain for a project in their district. During a visit to Ellsworth Air Force Base near Rapid City in 2014, his staff distributed a list of \$200 million in earmarks he'd obtained for construction at the base in the prior 16 years.

"I'm proud of my earmarks," he said at the time. "No project was unworthy."

Health problem affected career

In 2006, a health problem dealt Johnson the kind of setback no political opponent ever had. He suffered bleeding in the brain from a congenital defect called a cerebral arteriovenous malformation, which resulted in stroke-like symptoms that affected his speech and mobility for the rest of his life.

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After a lengthy recuperation and absence from the Senate, Johnson ran for reelection in 2008 and won easily. Jarding said Johnson's efforts in that race, while struggling just to give a speech, were a "profile in courage."

"It was a testament to his will power, his perseverance, to his dedication to serve the people of South Dakota," Jarding said.

Finally, in 2014, facing a potential challenge from Republican former Gov. Mike Rounds, Johnson chose not to seek reelection and retired. Rounds won the Senate seat and still holds it.

Rounds said Wednesday that Johnson was a "class act," a "fine gentleman" and a "wonderful family man."

"Trying to work across the aisle, I think some people in South Dakota think it doesn't work very well," Rounds said. "But I can tell you with Tim that it did."

Johnson is survived by his wife, Barbara, their three adult children — Brooks Johnson, former U.S. Attorney for South Dakota Brendan Johnson, and Kelsey Billion — and numerous grandchildren.

Republican Gov. Kristi Noem has ordered flags be flown at half-staff statewide until the day of Johnson's burial, which has not yet been announced.

"I worked with Tim Johnson and appreciated that his heart was for the people of South Dakota. He was a true servant," Noem said in a written statement. "On behalf of the State of South Dakota, our prayers go out to his entire family."

EDITOR'S NOTE: This story has been updated with additional information since its initial publication. South Dakota Searchlight's John Hult contributed to this report.

More tributes for Tim Johnson

A sampling of the tributes that flowed from around the state and nation Wednesday for former U.S. Sen. Tim Johnson:

U.S. Sen. Chris Coons, D-Delaware

"Annie and I send our prayers and heartfelt condolences to Tim's family – to Barb, his wife; to his three children, Brooks, Brendan, and Kelsey; and to his many grandchildren. Tim served the people of South Dakota for nearly 30 years with integrity and humility. His bipartisanship and hard work on behalf of his state and our nation made a lasting difference."

U.S. Rep. Dusty Johnson, R-South Dakota

"Senator Tim Johnson worked hard for South Dakota and America for decades. I'm saddened to hear of his passing and am praying for his family and loved ones."

State Rep. Erin Healy, D-Sioux Falls, who worked for Johnson for nearly two years in Washington, D.C., as a legislative correspondent

"I am deeply saddened by the passing of Senator Tim Johnson. He was a dedicated public servant who tirelessly represented South Dakota for nearly three decades in both state and federal government. His steadfast commitment to the people of our state and his unwavering integrity were the hallmarks of his career. Whether it was fighting for farmers, veterans, or supporting critical infrastructure projects, Tim Johnson's leadership left a lasting impact on countless lives. His legacy will continue to inspire generations of South Dakotans to serve with the same humility and resolve. My heartfelt condolences go out to Barb, his family, and loved ones during this difficult time."

South Dakota Democratic Party Chair Shane Merrill

"South Dakota and our country have lost one of the greatest statesmen of all time. His work to make agriculture more fair for farmers and ranchers is a legacy that will last for generations. He was also committed to uplifting our rural communities, helping our smaller towns to thrive. I thank Sen. Johnson for his decades of service to South Dakota and our country. I am sending my love and prayers to his family during this difficult time."

South Dakota Senate Minority Leader Reynold Nesiba, of Sioux Falls, and South Dakota House Minority Leader Oren Lesmeister, of Parade

"On behalf of the South Dakota Democratic House and Senate Caucuses, we offer our sincere condolences to the family and friends of Tim Johnson. Senator Johnson's legacy will endure because of his

decades of public service dedicated to improving the lives of all South Dakotans. He patiently listened to his constituents, authoritatively advocated for them, and worked across the aisle to create bipartisan solutions. He exemplified what a lawmaker could and should be. His passing is a great loss, not only to his family and friends, but also to the state of South Dakota and to our nation. He was truly a great man and will be deeply missed."

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

Legislative committee proposes six property tax ideas, leaves major lifting for later

BY: JOSHUA HAIAR - OCTOBER 9, 2024 5:21 PM

A committee of state lawmakers assigned to review South Dakota's property tax system endorsed draft "concepts" Wednesday in Pierre that are intended to improve the efficiency, accuracy and consistency of property tax assessments.

But don't expect those proposals to make a major impact on property taxes, said Rep. Trish Ladner, R-Hot Springs, who serves on the committee and is one of the Legislature's leading advocates for property tax relief.

She said the committee's focus was narrow, and broader property tax relief proposals will come during the legislation session that starts in January.

"It just isn't coming from the summer study," Ladner said after Wednesday's meeting.

She pledged to introduce legislation next session that she's been working on for over a year, she said, but declined to elaborate.

The Study Committee on Property Tax Assessment Methodology endorsed six ideas. Some could end up as legislation, while others are recommendations. The committee did not determine how the concepts will ultimately be implemented.

Here are the six concepts:

Through legislation or rule, the Department of Revenue could be required to create a compliance audit for all county equalization offices to ensure assessments are consistent with state laws. The frequency and scope of the audits were not determined.

A workgroup would look into a shared software system for property appraisals and tax assessments. This could streamline processes between counties and save money by not making each county buy software that costs up to \$600,000. The workgroup, comprised of local and state officials, would present an initial report within the first year to the House and Senate tax committees.

An education platform would be developed for new directors of equalization, covering appraisal manu-



Clouds gather over the South Dakota Capitol building in Pierre on Sept. 17, 2022. (Seth Tupper/South Dakota Searchlight)

als and other best practices.

Legislation would be proposed to clarify that counties can cooperate, collaborate, and share data related to property tax assessments. It was made clear that there would not be any obligation to do so.

An education platform would be developed for members of county boards of equalization, many of whom have little experience with property assessments, according to Sen. Jean Hunhoff, R-Yankton.

The Department of Revenue would share data on property tax assessments across South Dakota with lawmakers to ensure the fairness and efficiency of assessments. The department welcomed the idea.

During earlier meetings, the committee explored various issues related to property taxes, such as the rising burden on homeowners and the complexities surrounding agricultural land assessments. Testimony from county directors of equalization and others emphasized the need for a better, fairer system, with concerns raised over the growing tax burden on residential property owners in light of increasing home valuations.

The committee is co-chaired by Sen. Randy Deibert, R-Spearfish, and Rep. Drew Peterson, R-Salem. Peterson said the proposals reflect the committee's goal of creating a "fair and equitable process" for property taxes in South Dakota. He said the proposals are largely collaborative efforts between the committee, county officials and the Department of Revenue.

"There's more work to be done that does not apply to assessment methodology, and we intentionally did not get into that tax conversation as much as maybe some of us would have liked to," Peterson said. "That doesn't mean that conversation should not be had. And that conversation will need to be had, as we've all identified."

Peterson said the committee invites public comment before it submits the recommendations to lawmakers at the Legislature's Executive Board meeting in November.

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.

Jackley announces charges against state employees, proposes anti-corruption bill

Action comes as charges remain pending against another state employee for theft

BY: JOHN HULT - OCTOBER 9, 2024 11:54 AM

SIOUX FALLS — Two former state employees have been indicted in a fake vehicle title fraud scheme through the state Department of Revenue.

Attorney General Marty Jackley announced the charges at a Wednesday press briefing in Sioux Falls.

Jackley also announced his intention to push for an anti-corruption law during the upcoming legislative session.

The proposal would include requirements for state employee supervisors to report questionable employee behavior to the Attorney General's Office, protections for whistleblowers, stronger protections for the state auditor, and transparency requirements for reporting on allegations of state employee misbehavior.

The proposal would also empower the state auditor to investigate misbehavior without interference.

"I think there needs to be more reliance on the state auditor," Jackley said.

News of the indictments against two more state employees comes on the heels of criminal charges for former Department of Social Services employee Lonna Carroll, who's accused of embezzling \$1.8 million from the state by creating and approving fake child support orders from 2010 through 2023. Carroll's jury trial is currently set to begin Dec. 4 in Pierre.

Shortly after Carroll's alleged behavior came to light, news broke that a now-deceased revenue department employee, Sandra O'Day, had falsified vehicle titles to get bank loans. The new indictments are tied

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to that case.

Lynne Hunsley, 63, and Danielle Degenstein, 51, both of Pierre, were indicted Oct. 1 by a grand jury in Hughes County. The charges are part of the fallout from the investigation into O'Day, whose family reported oddities in her finances they found after her death this year.

Hunsley is accused of falsifying a vehicle title. O'Day was engaged in similar behavior, Jackley's office said, putting false titles in her mother's name to secure loans.

Jackley said Hunsley had purchased a new vehicle, and that she'd created a fake title to claim she had a trade-in vehicle, which allowed her to avoid some excise taxes. Hunsley faces felony forgery, grand theft by deception, failure to pay excise tax and false document charges.

Degenstein allegedly notarized some of the titles for O'Day and Hunsley and "took some action to cover up" what had happened when confronted about the situations by the Attorney General's Office, Jackley said.

Degenstein is charged with one misdemeanor count of misprision of a felony for failure to report the situations and cooperate with law enforcement.

In O'Day's case, Jackley said, the former state employee spent years creating fake titles for campers to secure bank loans. That was purposeful, Jackley said, because camper titles are only logged on the state level and don't appear in a federal database.

The banks involved took financial losses as a result of O'Day's behavior, Jackley said, but taxpayers could also be on the hook if those banks file civil lawsuits against the state. Defending cases like that would fall on the Attorney General's Office, Jackley said, and the state would be financially liable for damages awarded in such a case.

The legislative proposal on corruption has yet to be written. Jackley said he plans to take his framework for the legislation to Auditor Rich Sattgast, Treasurer Josh Haeder and Auditor General Russ Olson "to make sure we put in the right provisions that will be meaningful and will hopefully catch some of this that is going on."

Sattgast told South Dakota Public Broadcasting last month that his office's authority has been limited by various legislative changes over the years. The state is vulnerable to financial malfeasance by employees for that reason, he said, as well as because his office lacks the staff to properly oversee state government operations.

"There's not just one entity that oversees the expenditures of state government," Sattgast said. "We have it all divided up for the checks-and-balance purposes of it."

In addition to auditor authority provisions and mandated reporting by state employee supervisors, Jackley said he'd want to add whistleblower protections for all employees to protect them from retaliation for reporting misdeeds. When asked if the protections would only cover reports of criminal activity, Jackley said, "I would like to see it go beyond that."

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.



South Dakota Attorney General Marty Jackley, flanked by employees of the state Division of Criminal Investigation, speaks to the media during a press conference on Oct. 9, 2024, in Sioux Falls. (John Hult/South Dakota Searchlight)

South Dakota joins multi-state lawsuit seeking to halt federal nursing home staffing rule

BY: WHITNEY DOWNARD, INDIANA CAPITAL CHRONICLE - OCTOBER 9, 2024 6:08 PM

A lawsuit filed Tuesday by 20 states, including South Dakota, challenges a federal rule mandating higher staffing levels in nursing homes and alleges that facilities will be forced to close.

The states are led by Republican attorneys general, including South Dakota's Marty Jackley.

"Rural states like South Dakota are already faced with challenges to meet staffing needs for aging residents," Jackley said in a news release. "These are unnecessary federal mandates that add to the problem, not fix it."

Affiliate organizations also joined the lawsuit, including the South Dakota Association of Healthcare Organizations.

The named defendants include leaders within the federal Health and Human Services agency as well as the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services.

"Although the nursing home industry certainly has had its share of challenges, it fills a vital need in our communities that cannot be replaced," the 66-page filing read. "Instead of addressing the legitimate challenges nursing homes face, the Defendants put forward a heavy-handed mandate ... This Final Rule poses an existential threat to the nursing home industry as many nursing homes that are struggling will have no choice but to go out of business."

The Health and Human Services agency's new requirement would create a nationwide standard for staffing nursing homes. It comes in the wake of COVID-19, which put a spotlight on the institutional setting. Due to the congregational nature of long-term care facilities and the poor overall health of residents, such places saw high infections and deaths throughout the pandemic that may have been exacerbated by low staffing levels.

Such a focus prompted overseeing government agencies to increase staffing levels to better respond to health and safety concerns from residents, many of whom continue to report issues related to poor staffing.

Most of the nation's nursing homes would fail to meet the finalized April rule, which included requirements like having a registered nurse onsite 24/7, having residents receive at least 0.55 hours of care from a registered nurse each day and having residents receive 2.45 hours of care from a nursing aide daily.

Currently, registered nurses only need to be at a facility for eight consecutive hours a day, seven days a week.

States would also need to collect additional information related to staff compensation.



South Dakota joined other states challenging a nursing home federal staffing minimum, saying the overseeing agency overstepped its authority. (Getty Images)

Difficult for nursing homes to implement

Nurses and other health care professionals have been slow to return to the long-term care workforce, which was the last to recover from COVID-19 losses, and the nursing home lobbying industry has fiercely opposed the proposed rule. Some families and residents, on the other hand, say the rule doesn't go far enough.

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The first phase of the rule, which included staffing assessment requirements and not the minimum staffing hours, went into effect on Aug. 8. The minimum staffing hours would go into effect in May 2027, as detailed in a KFF analysis, which found that 19% of facilities would meet the new standards.

Tuesday's lawsuit claimed that an outside study found nursing homes would need to hire more than 100,000 full-time employees at a cost of roughly \$6.8 billion per year. It continued to say that 94% of such long-term care settings would fail to meet at least one of the three requirements, risking the care of hundreds of thousands of residents.

Attorneys general for the states, joined by lobbying organizations as plaintiffs, allege the federal agencies overstepped their authority to institute the new rule — adding that the former staffing standard was set by Congress.

Specific harm to states could include higher nursing home costs, which are primarily paid by state and federal governments through Medicaid since Medicare and many private insurers don't cover such care or only do so in a limited capacity. Facility costs in Indiana could climb by \$10.9 million if required to have a registered nurse onsite 24/7, according to CMS estimates, and complying with all the rules could cost as much as \$151.2 million.

Tuesday's lawsuit went on to question whether stricter staffing standards, rather than the more flexible current rules, would improve the care provided to residents — calling it a "one-size-fits-all approach."

"Troublingly, (CMS' staffing minimum) study disregarded the ongoing 'national health care staff shortages' and 'current hiring challenges' that present barriers to nursing homes — which would make compliance with a new federal staffing requirement impractical," the lawsuit said.

It pointed to the "hardship exemption" set by CMS to allow facilities to bypass requirements, saying it was too high a bar for facilities to meet and only lowered the registered nurse requirements from 24 hours a day to 16 hours a day.

The staff of South Dakota Searchlight contributed to this report.

A native of upstate New York, Whitney previously covered statehouse politics for CNHI's nine Indiana papers, focusing on long-term healthcare facilities and local government. Prior to her foray into Indiana politics, she worked as a general assignment reporter for The Meridian Star in Meridian, Mississippi. Whitney is a graduate of St. Bonaventure University (#GoBonnies!), a community theater enthusiast and cat mom.

Foreign policy: Where do Harris and Trump stand?

BY: ASHLEY MURRAY - OCTOBER 9, 2024 4:44 PM

WASHINGTON — The next U.S. president must steer the nation through crises across the globe, including worsening violence in the Middle East, Russian President Vladimir Putin's refusal to retreat from Ukraine and U.S-China trade relations.

The Democratic nominee, Vice President Kamala Harris, largely built her career as a prosecutor, but once in Washington she sat on the U.S. Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, a position that comes with access to highly classified national security files.

As vice president she's represented the U.S. at high-profile international meetings, including the Munich Security Conference and Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

The Republican nominee, former President Donald Trump, who followed his wealthy father's path into real estate and ascended to the status of celebrity businessman, has already held the elected position of Commander-in-Chief for four years — though high-ranking officials who served under him say he should not occupy that seat again.

Trump and Harris' track records can provide clues on how, if elected, they would handle complex and challenging national and economic security policies.

But overall on the campaign trail, foreign policy "has played a back seat role to domestic politics in the 2024 election," James M. Lindsay, a senior fellow in U.S. foreign policy for the Council on Foreign Relations, told States Newsroom in an interview.

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President of Ukraine Volodymyr Zelenskyy holds an American flag as he addresses a joint meeting of Congress in the House Chamber of the U.S. Capitol on Dec. 21, 2022, in Washington, D.C. (Win McNamee/Getty Images)

That's not unusual, Lindsay said, as presidential year politics generally tend to have a domestic focus.

"This has been more a campaign about personalities than about specific policy prescriptions. It's safe to say that the two candidates have very different world views," Lindsay said.

Relationships with allies

Harris centers relationship building, and promised in her Democratic National Convention acceptance speech to "stand strong" with NATO allies.

In Trump's convention speech he lamented that the U.S. has "long been taken advantage of" by "so-called allies."

Observers say the former president leads with a transactional outlook: In other words, nations must pay for access to U.S. markets and security.

"Trump thinks that U.S. support to allies

is a bad deal for America, whereas Harris realizes that the United States benefits immensely from them," Matthew Waxman, senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and chair of Columbia Law School's National Security Law Program, told States Newsroom.

But predicting how a presidential candidate would act on the global stage, if elected, is tricky. Conflicts continue to evolve, and those in top defense and diplomatic jobs are likely to turn over.

"It's partly because a President Harris or President Trump could face a very different situation in the Middle East or in Ukraine come Inauguration Day, but it's also because in Washington personnel are policy, people are policy," Lindsay said.

Here are some of the serious international situations either administration will face:

Middle East

The deadly Oct. 7, 2023 Hamas attack on Israel, launched from the Palestinian territory of the Gaza Strip, reignited smoldering regional tensions and highlighted the inextricable U.S. role. Hamas militants killed roughly 1,200 in the brutal and unexpected incursion, and took 250 hostages, many of whom still remain in captivity.

President Joe Biden immediately surged weapons and security aid to the key U.S. defense partner, and in April Congress approved his request for \$8.7 billion more in foreign military financing and missile defense.

Israel's year-long campaign to completely eliminate Iranian-allied Hamas militants from the Gaza Strip has resulted in a staggering death toll, now over 41,000, according to Gaza health officials.

Hamas' assault also set in motion attacks from other Iranian-backed militias, opening up a war front between Israel and Hezbollah fighters to the north in Lebanon. And for months, Yemen's Iranian-backed Houthis have terrorized commercial shipping in the Red Sea.

Biden has faced fierce criticism for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's war tactics.

Harris, as early as March, publicly criticized Israel over the humanitarian "catastrophe" in Gaza and called for an immediate six-week cease-fire.

Harris, who became the Democratic presidential nominee in mid-summer after Biden dropped his bid, has repeatedly said she defends Israel's right to defend itself but that "how it does so matters."

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Protesters could be heard in the distance Monday as Harris planted a memorial tree at the vice president's residence to mark the one-year anniversary of the Oct. 7 attack. Pro-Palestinian activists protesting the death toll in Gaza have marched and rallied throughout the U.S. during the past year.

Harris told reporters that the administration is "not giving up" on negotiating a cease-fire deal and release of hostages, an effort that has so far floundered.

"It's one of the most important ways we will be able to end this war and bring any type of stability to the region. It's one of the highest priorities of this administration," she said.

She has not indicated any slowdown or conditions on assistance to Israel if elected — though she continues to advocate for a two-state solution.

"Trump may give Jerusalem less public chastising and criticism, but I'm not sure the policy differences would be that great either," Michael O'Hanlon, senior fellow and foreign policy research director at the Brookings Institution, told States Newsroom. O'Hanlon recently published an article arguing the Trump and Harris defense strategies would at least "partially" converge.

Trump maintains that Oct. 7 "would never have happened" had he been in office, and he accuses the Biden administration of inviting the attack because of its "weak" relationship with Iran.

"What is needed more than ever is a return of unwavering American leadership and unquestioned American strength. We were strong, we were powerful ... That's what I intend to deliver as the 47th president of the United States," he said Monday while in Miami marking one year since the ambush on Israel.

The attack also wrecked any forward progress on the Abraham Accords — Trump's signature Middle East achievement that created full diplomatic relations between Israel and the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Morocco. While those established channels remain steady, the Biden administration's efforts to strike a deal between Israel and Saudi Arabia are now at a standstill.

Trump is increasingly selling himself on the campaign trail as the candidate of stability who can quash Iran's aggression — which is pretty much a "standard approach to campaigning," Lindsay said.

"He is not the first challenger to argue that the incumbent president has been weak."

But Lindsay said, "the important question isn't whether he was tougher, it's whether his policies were more effective."

For example, the Iranian-backed so-called "axis of resistance" militias currently upending the Middle East were also operating during Trump's presidency.

"(They) pre-dated his coming into office but it's not that a Trump administration ended that network of anti-Western, anti-Israeli groups," Lindsay said. "And during the Trump administration it was the case that Iran both underwrote attacks on American troops and actually launched attacks on American troops."

Trump drew attention last week to an early January 2020 barrage on U.S. troops in Iraq when he again described the traumatic brain injuries they suffered as "headaches."

U.S. troops in Iraq and Syria, already a target, have come under increasing fire from Iran-backed militants, with more than 100 attacks on U.S. service members since Israel began its post-Oct. 7 offensive. A drone strike in January killed three U.S. soldiers and injured 30 at an outpost in Jordan on the Syrian border. The U.S. retaliated by launching more than 100 precision rockets at 85 of Iran military sites in Iraq and Syria.

The U.S. assisted Israel twice in 2024 in intercepting rockets fired directly from Iran — once in April following Israel's bombing of the Iranian embassy in Damascus, and again in September after Israel's assassination of Iranian-backed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in Beirut, Lebanon.

"We're in the last months of the Biden presidency, and Biden's own, I think, personal influence here is quite diminished. And you know, I can't predict what Trump policy really would be. I assume he would be less likely to be trying to restrain the Israelis, but so is the Biden administration. And maybe that is a Biden-Harris policy," Elliott Abrams, CFR's senior fellow for Middle Eastern Studies, told reporters on Oct. 2, the day after Iran launched its second direct attack.

Ukraine and NATO

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy met with both Harris and Trump in recent weeks to shore up

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continued U.S. support for his country's ongoing war against Russia's occupation.

Harris' meeting with the Ukrainian leader was her seventh, and she pledged continued aid for the eastern European nation on the principle that Putin would continue marching into Europe if allies relent on Ukraine.

Harris supports continued U.S. assistance, which has totaled roughly \$175 billion since 2022. At the Ukraine peace summit in Switzerland in June, Harris pledged nearly \$2 billion, some new and some redirected, to bolster the country's energy sector and add to humanitarian efforts.

The vice president has represented the U.S. three times at the annual Munich Security Conference in Germany, where she praised the NATO alliance and said the U.S. commitment to its principles is "ironclad."

When facing Harris on the presidential debate stage in September, Trump refused to answer whether he wants Ukraine to be victorious over Russia.

Trump's rhetoric and past behavior "spells bad news for Ukraine," Waxman said.

"He is likely to reduce American support for Ukraine and push Ukraine to make concessions to Russia. Overall, Trump's transactional approach to leader-to-leader diplomacy is likely to benefit Putin," Waxman continued. "Whereas Harris wants to invest in alliances like NATO, Trump is skeptical of them."

That type of leader-to-leader communication was notoriously highlighted in 2019 when U.S. House lawmakers impeached Trump for directly threatening to withhold Ukraine aid if Zelenskyy did not announce an investigation into Biden — Trump's presidential campaign rival at the time. The Senate acquitted Trump.

Like his campaign line on the Israel attack, Trump also repeatedly claims that had he been in office, instead of Biden, Russia would have never launched its February 2022 attack on Ukraine.

"The war in Ukraine did not begin in February of '22, it began back in 2014," Lindsay said, referring to Putin's forced annexation of the Crimean Peninsula.

Trump's own administration expanded Obama-era sanctions meant to punish Russia's actions in Crimea.

"Experts can argue about how to dole out criticism across administrations, but clearly the issue of Russian support for a notionally independent insurrection in eastern Ukraine was not solved during the Trump presidency," Lindsay continued.

China and trade

Foreign trade is a "political hot potato," and neither Harris nor Trump are offering much clarity for U.S. trading partners around the world, Mary E. Lovely, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, told States Newsroom in an interview.

Lovely described the Biden-Harris approach as multipronged, in that they've instituted policies to bring manufacturing back to the U.S. while also aiming to maintain good trade relationships with partner nations.

The tightrope walk becomes even trickier as U.S. policy also disincentivizes materials and components from China — one of the world's largest trading nations — in the final products imported from trading partners. Think: components in solar panels and electric vehicles.

The Biden administration's major legislative accomplishments — the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS and Science Act — provided major subsidies for "reshoring," or returning to the U.S., clean energy and semiconductor production. But the policies were not without risks to U.S. trading partners.

"We had a lot of things (in the legislation), including things that upset the allies — you know, subsidies for American businesses, that they saw potentially as pulling investment out of their economies," Lovely said.

"These are things that the European Union, Japan, Korea were concerned about," Lovely continued. "So we've seen it there — this tension between foreign policy and this idea of economic security."

While Lovely said she worries about how some of the Biden-Harris trade policies might affect competition and the nation's ability to sign timely trade agreements, she said Trump's plans are overall "destabilizing."

"The increased use of tariffs is misguided at best," Lovely said.

Trump's promise to not only increase tariffs on Chinese imports to 60%, but also to slap flat 10% to 20% tariffs on all imports across the board is akin to "starting a trade war with the entire world."

"We're not going to see those kinds of tariffs without retaliation," Lovely said.

If enacted, the tariffs would be particularly challenging for Indo-Pacific countries that rely on U.S. part-

nership in the face of China's regional dominance.

"I mean, you can imagine how this will go down in, say, Japan and Korea, two countries which rely on the U.S. for a security umbrella, which is why Trump thinks that he can do stuff to them. But they also have to protect their own economies," Lovely said. "So it's going to put them in a really terrible position because it's very important for them to maintain their alliance with the U.S., economic as well as military."

But one thing is for sure, Lovely said: "Everybody wants to know what's going to happen. Everybody in every embassy here in Washington."

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

Heart Association launches SD stroke care improvement project with \$4.4M grant

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - OCTOBER 9, 2024 4:17 PM

Health care officials celebrated a charitable trust's \$4.4 million commitment Wednesday in Sioux Falls to expand and improve stroke care across South Dakota.

In 2022, cardiovascular disease was the leading cause of death in South Dakota, according to the Department of Health's vital statistics report. Stroke was the sixth leading cause of death in the state. Cardiovascular disease, including heart and stroke conditions, is the leading cause of death in the United States.

The program, called Mission: Lifeline Stroke, will be operated by the American Heart Association. The organization will collaborate with the state Department of Health, ambulance services and hospitals. The organization said a nearly \$4.4 million grant from The Leona M. and Harry B.

Helmsley Charitable Trust will provide the bulk of the \$5.05 million in funding.

"Congratulations, South Dakota, on the gift you just received," said state Department of Health Secretary Melissa Magstadt during a Wednesday press conference.

The new program aims to improve stroke care by increasing public awareness about stroke symptoms, improving training for emergency responders and hospital staff, coordinating among statewide stroke centers, and creating a statewide data system to analyze data, identify gaps and improve care — especially in rural areas of South Dakota.

Chrissy Meyer, spokesperson for the American Heart Association, said data collections, making recommendations and setting guidelines have been part of the organization's mission for decades. Through Mission: Lifeline, the nonprofit will "be walking alongside" the state Health Department to identify a data collection system to use statewide and better understand stroke care in South Dakota.

"Currently, each hospital is using their own system," Meyer said. "This will allow the state to convene a centralized databank that all hospitals and health systems would contribute to."

A key component to the new program is to implement post-acute stroke care standards in post-acute facilities. Such standards will hopefully improve patient care and outcomes and reduce risk of secondary



(Getty images)

effects from stroke, according to a press release after the conference.

The life expectancy for Americans living in rural areas is three years less than urban areas, said American Heart Association Executive Vice President Kevin Harker, speaking to the need for initiatives such as Mission: lifeline.

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

Amendment G: Supporters seek to restore abortion rights that opponents call extreme

BY: MAKENZIE HUBER - OCTOBER 9, 2024 7:00 AM

Opponents of Amendment G say it's an extreme measure that would allow unrestricted and unregulated access to abortion. Supporters say it would restore broadly supported and safe abortion rights that stood for 49 years prior to 2022.

The state constitutional amendment is one of seven questions on South Dakota's Nov. 5 general election ballot. Two of the most visible people in the Amendment G campaign are anti-abortion activist Caroline Woods and abortion-rights supporter Nancy Turbak Berry.

When they debated last month in Mitchell, Woods argued the amendment's wording would allow abortion up to birth. That's because the amendment would allow the state to enact a third-trimester abortion ban but would require an exception when a physician determines an abortion is necessary to preserve the "life or health of the pregnant woman."

Woods pointed to the U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 decision in *Doe v. Bolton*, which said a physician assessing a pregnant woman's health may take into account all factors relevant to her wellbeing — "physical, emotional, psychological, familial, and the woman's age."

"This means for nearly any reason, an abortion doctor can justify an abortion," Woods said.

Turbak Berry countered that South Dakotans lived under the Supreme Court's definition of health for nearly 50 years until the state banned abortion in 2022.

"Abortion up to birth is a slogan, not a reality," Turbak Berry said. "If a woman is approaching term and for some reason can't continue pregnancy, the doctor doesn't abort the fetus — they deliver the baby."



Caroline Woods, left, and Nancy Turbak Berry participate in a forum about an abortion-rights ballot measure on Sept. 19, 2024, at Dakota Wesleyan University in Mitchell.

(Joshua Haiar/South Dakota Searchlight)

When most abortions occur

Babies are generally considered viable — able to survive outside the womb — as they near the third trimester (27 weeks of gestation), but other factors can impact survivability, leading to earlier or later viability. The U.S. Supreme Court's 1973 *Roe v. Wade* decision that established nationwide abortion rights

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allowed for bans after viability, unless an abortion is necessary to preserve the life or health of the mother.

The vast majority of abortions in the United States, according to the Pew Research Center, occur in the first trimester. In 2020, 93% of abortions occurred in the first trimester. About 1% were performed at 21 weeks or more of gestation. Gestation lasts 40 weeks.

On average, 92.3% of abortions in South Dakota between 2014 and 2022 occurred in the first trimester of pregnancy.

The state Department of Health's annual abortion report did not separate abortions by gestational age in the second and third trimesters. Between 2014 and 2019, an average of 33 women a year terminated a pregnancy after 13 weeks, which is the start of the second trimester.

Former, current and proposed abortion law

The U.S. Supreme Court overturned the national right to an abortion in 2022. When that happened, a trigger law adopted by the South Dakota Legislature in 2005 immediately banned abortion in the state, with one exception to "preserve the life of the pregnant female."

Disputes over the meaning of that exception have caused consternation among some South Dakota physicians who worry they will be charged with a felony if they act too quickly to intervene on behalf of a pregnant patient's life.

The state Department of Health released an informational video in September explaining when a medical provider could perform an abortion within the state's exception. Some doctors said that the video did not address their concerns, and that the advice was not legally binding and they still fear repercussions.

A ballot question committee, Dakotans for Health, gathered petition signatures earlier this year to put Amendment G on the ballot. Turbak Berry leads a group affiliated with Dakotans for Health, the Freedom Amendment Coalition.

An opposing ballot question committee, the Life Defense Fund, for which Woods is a spokeswoman, has filed a lawsuit seeking to invalidate Amendment G. The suit, which is not scheduled to be resolved until after the election, claims Dakotans for Health violated laws that govern the circulation of petitions.

Amendment G would prohibit first-trimester regulations on "a pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation." In the second trimester, it would allow regulations "reasonably related to the physical health of the pregnant woman." In the third trimester, it would allow an abortion ban with a mandatory exception to "preserve the life or health of the pregnant woman."

Proponents say the amendment is supported by voters, citing a Chiesman Center for Democracy and South Dakota News Watch poll showing that 53% of respondents support the amendment. They also point to 2006 and 2008, when South Dakota voters defeated abortion bans with about 55% against a ban each time.

South Dakota is one of 10 states with an abortion-rights measure on the ballot this fall. Voters in six other states have already adopted abortion-rights measures since the 2022 Supreme Court decision.

'Back alley' claims, safety and parental consent

Amendment G opponents highlight language in the measure that says, for example, "the state may not regulate a pregnant woman's abortion decision and its effectuation" in the first trimester.

Woods said such language could prohibit the state from enforcing health and safety protections such as licensing requirements for physicians and parental consent for minors seeking abortions.

"This is going to put a lot of women's health and livelihoods in jeopardy," Woods said. "That's not what South Dakotans want."

That would "take us back to the dark ages," Woods said during the September debate.

"You don't have to be a doctor to perform an abortion," Woods added. "It can be on the black market."

That would legalize "back alley abortions," Woods claimed.

Turbak Berry said general public health laws and administrative rules would still apply, including for safety, licensing and informed consent.

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Abortion is generally considered a medical procedure. It is recognized as such in South Dakota law under the public health and safety title.

Under *Roe v. Wade*, which Amendment G backers say their measure emulates, and in the U.S. Supreme Court decision *Connecticut v. Menillo* (1975), Turbak Berry said, states may require that only a physician licensed by the state can prescribe an abortion. South Dakota law requires physicians to be licensed in the state to practice medicine.

States can require parental consent for a minor's abortion based on the U.S. Supreme Court's decision in *Belotti v. Baird* in 1979, Turbak Berry said. South Dakota law requires unemancipated minors to have parental consent before receiving any medical care, except in emergencies and for sexually transmitted diseases.

During the *Roe* era, South Dakota passed laws restricting abortion in the state, including a mandatory 72-hour waiting period in which a woman seeking an abortion had to receive counseling and material to discourage an abortion before the procedure could be completed. South Dakota law before the abortion ban was triggered in 2022 required a parent of a minor be notified 48 hours before an unemancipated minor or incompetent female received an abortion.

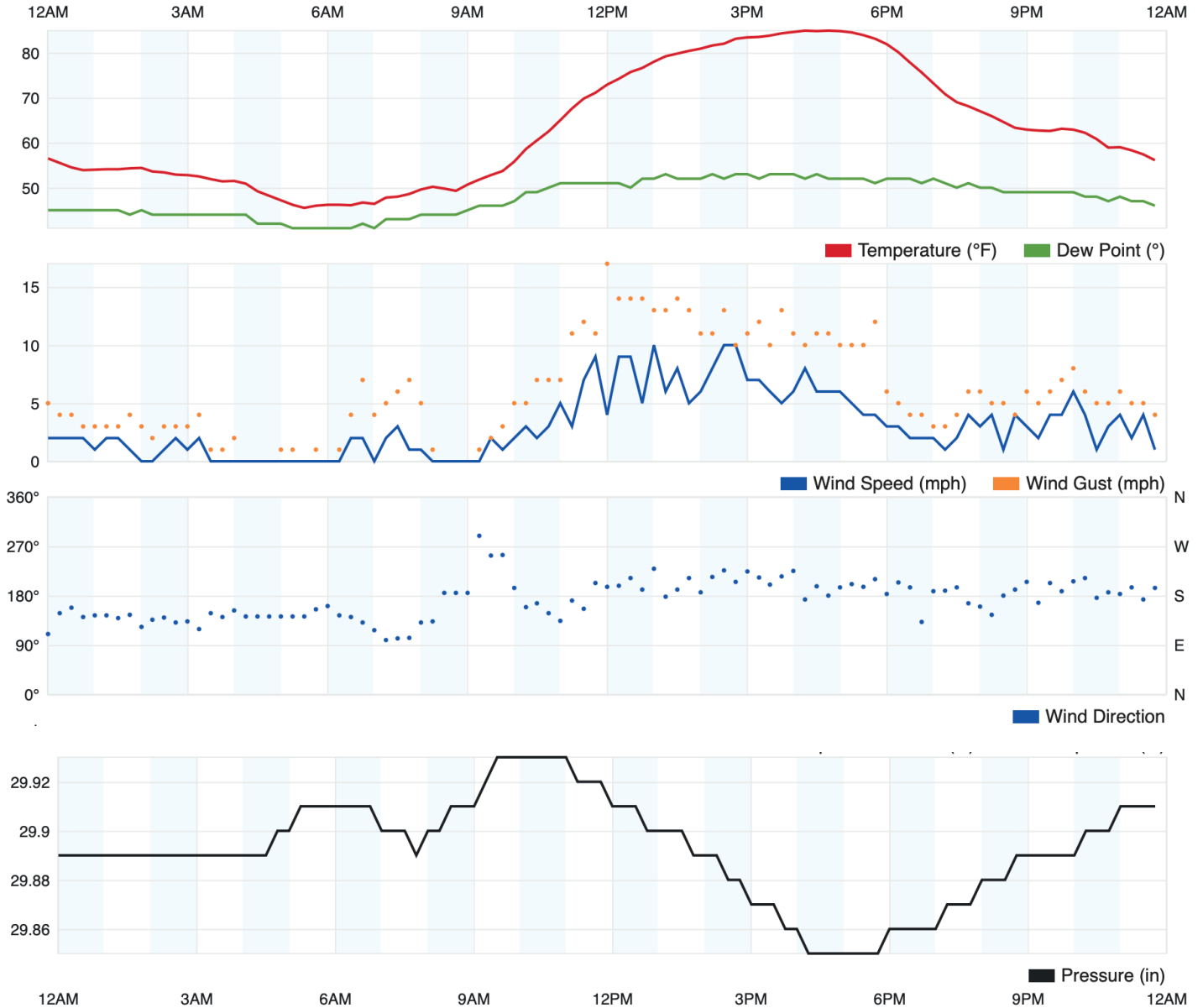
Ultimately, if Amendment G passes and there is a disagreement about what state regulations can be implemented, that would be settled in court. The attorney general wrote in his official ballot explanation that "judicial clarification of the amendment may be necessary."

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

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Yesterday's Groton Weather Graphs



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Today



High: 86 °F

Sunny

Tonight



Low: 53 °F

Mostly Cloudy

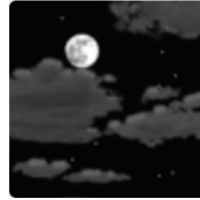
Friday



High: 68 °F

Decreasing
Clouds

Friday Night



Low: 40 °F

Partly Cloudy

Saturday



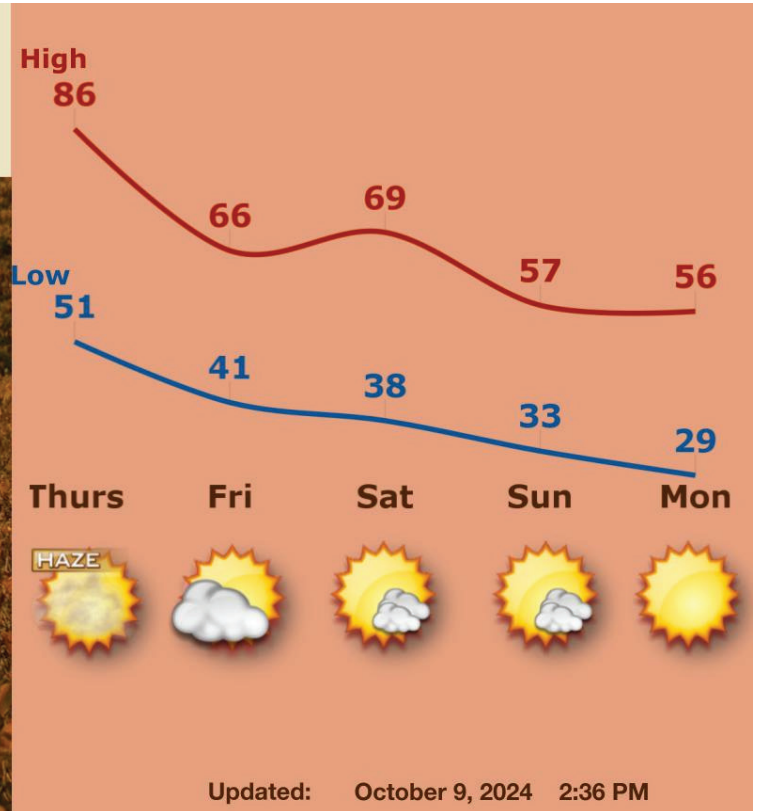
High: 68 °F

Mostly Sunny



Temperature Forecast

North Central and North Eastern South Dakota



Hazy skies from wildfire smoke aloft and warmer temperatures will stay around through the rest of today into Thursday, with temperatures 20 to 25 degrees above normal. Temperatures will start to cool Friday behind a cold front to be around normal for this time of the year, with low temperatures dipping down around freezing by the end of the weekend.

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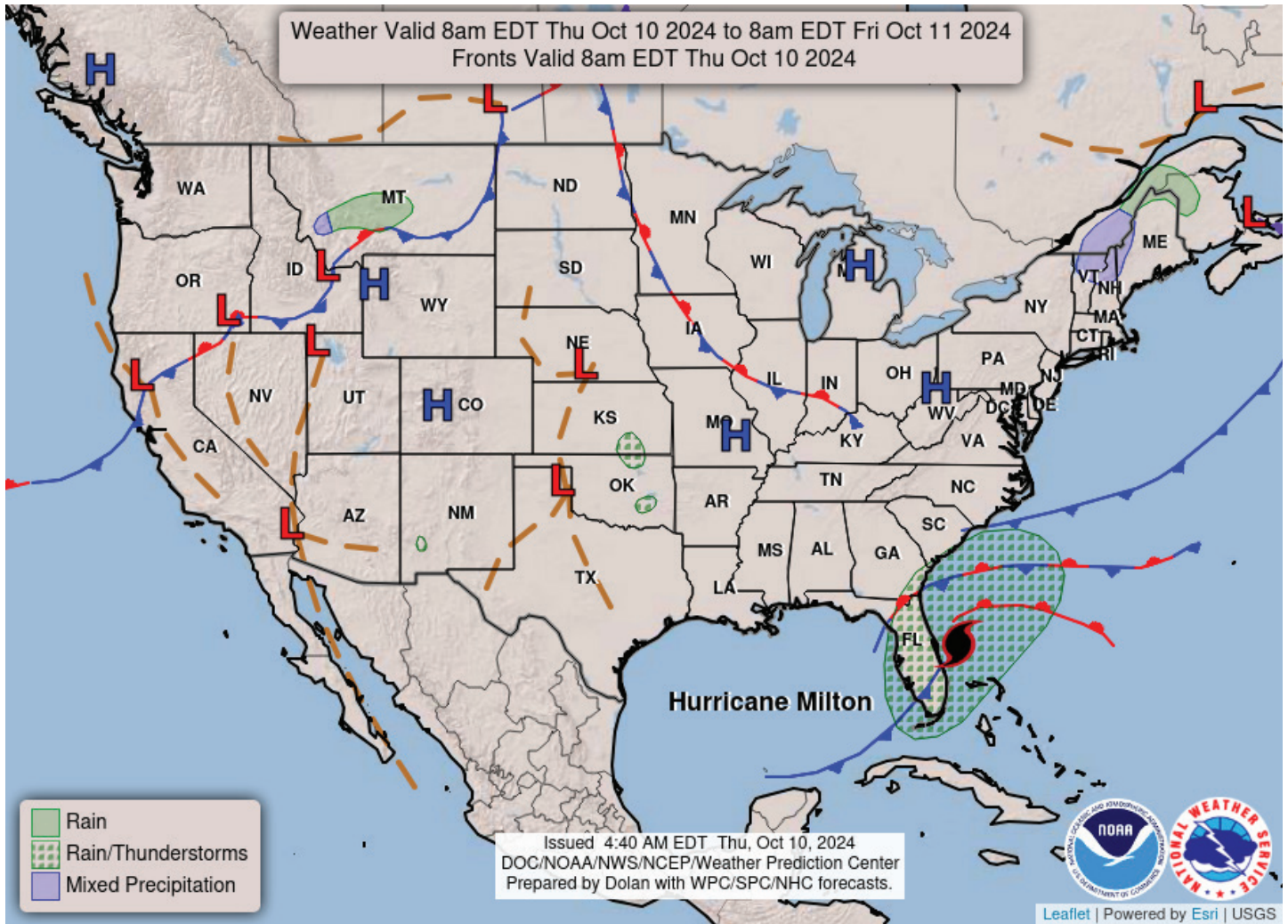
Yesterday's Groton Weather

High Temp: 85 °F at 4:10 PM
Low Temp: 45 °F at 5:30 AM
Wind: 17 mph at 11:58 AM
Precip: : 0.00

Today's Info

Record High: 93 in 2015
Record Low: 10 in 1919
Average High: 63
Average Low: 36
Average Precip in Oct.: 0.75
Precip to date in Oct.: 0.00
Average Precip to date: 19.08
Precip Year to Date: 19.75
Sunset Tonight: 6:56:43 pm
Sunrise Tomorrow: 7:42:57 am

Day length: 11 hours, 15 minutes



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Today in Weather History

October 10, 1928: The temperature reached 90 degrees at Minneapolis, Minnesota, the latest such reading on record.

October 10, 1982: October 8th through October 10th, 1982, record amounts of snow piled up in the northern Black Hills. Not only was the storm an unprecedented breaker because it came so early in the season, but it was also a record snowfall producer for any time of year. Amounts of three to six feet were typical across the northern hills. On October 9th, 1982, thirty-two inches of snow buried Lead. The thirty-two inches that day is the most on record for 24 hours in South Dakota.

1780: The Great Hurricane of 1780 made landfall on the island of Barbados on this day with estimated wind gusts of 200 mph. This hurricane went on to affect the islands of St. Vincent, where only 14 of 600 homes stood at Kings Town. St. Lucia, Martinique, Dominica, and Puerto Rico were all impacted by this hurricane. This storm is the deadliest Atlantic hurricane on record, with between 20,000 and 22,000 deaths.

1804 - A famous snow hurricane occurred. The unusual coastal storm caused northerly gales from Maine to New Jersey. Heavy snow fell across New England, with three feet reported at the crest of the Green Mountains. A foot of snow was reported in the Berkshires of southern New England, at Goshen CT. (David Ludlum)

1846: A major hurricane, likely a Category 5, moved through the Caribbean Sea. This Great Havana Hurricane struck western Cuba on 10 October. It hit the Florida Keys on 11 October, destroying the old Key West Lighthouse and Fort Zachary Taylor.

1928 - The temperature at Minneapolis, MN, reached 90 degrees, their latest such reading of record. (The Weather Channel)

1949: A rapidly deepening area of low pressure produced gale to hurricane-force winds across much of Minnesota, Iowa, Wisconsin, Nebraska, Michigan, and the Dakotas. Sustained 1-minute winds reached 85 mph at Rochester, MN, and 79 mph at La Crosse, WI, during the early afternoon. Winds gusts were as high as 100 mph. This storm produced extensive damage to buildings and power lines. Also, many corn crops were flattened.

1970: A slow-moving tropical depression produced 41.68 inches of rain in Jayuya, Puerto Rico from October 2-10th, 1970.

1973 - Fifteen to 20 inch rains deluged north central Oklahoma in thirteen hours producing record flooding. Enid was drenched with 15.68 inches of rain from the nearly stationary thunderstorms, which established a state 24 hour rainfall record. Dover OK reported 125 of 150 homes damaged by flooding. (David Ludlum) (The Weather Channel)

1979 - A storm blanketed Worcester, MA, with 7.5 inches of snow, a record snowfall total for so early in the season for that location. (The Weather Channel)

1987 - Eleven cities in the north central U.S. reported record low temperatures for the date, including Colorado Springs CO with a reading of 23 degrees, and Havre MT with a low of 11 degrees above zero. Light snow was reported as far south as Kansas. Omaha NE reported their third earliest snow of record. (The National Weather Summary)

2009: Nome, Alaska, experiences its first-ever October thunderstorm with five lightning strikes between 8 and 9 PM ADT.

2009: A band of snow dropped a dusting to over 6 inches of snow in central to western Iowa, into central Nebraska.



GREAT MEN – GREAT GOD

When General Ulysses S. Grant lay dying, he called for his pastor. As his pastor stood by his bedside, Grant asked, "Tell me, will God receive me?"

"Yes," he replied, "for the Lord said, 'him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.'"

General Grant, at that moment came to the Lord. The pastor, both amazed and grateful for this startling conversation said, "God's Kingdom had just gained a great man!"

Quietly, but with great sincerity and dignity Grant said, "God does not need great men, but great men need God."

General Grant put things in the proper perspective. It is not uncommon for those who achieve status and power, prestige and importance to believe that God needs their help. We hear much about the résumés and financial statements of prominent people. We offer our respect and esteem to those who move across the world's stage attempting to control world events. We speak of their efforts and accomplishments as though they keep the planet in orbit and from spinning out of control.

But in the final analysis they still need God's grace, mercy and salvation as we do. God without man is still God. But man without God is nothing and is condemned to spend eternity in hell.

Prayer: Father, we thank You with grateful hearts for Your salvation through Jesus Christ, Your Son. May we recognize Your Lordship and serve You with gladness. In Jesus' Name, Amen.

Scripture For Today All those the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away. John 6:37

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:

10.08.24

3 19 20 22 66 9

MegaPlier: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$150,000,000

NEXT 1 Days 17 Hrs 28

DRAW: Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LOTTO AMERICA

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.09.24

18 28 32 40 51 4

All Star Bonus: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$11,250,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 43

DRAW: Mins 6 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

LUCKY FOR LIFE

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.09.24

11 15 31 36 45 2

TOP PRIZE:

\$7,000/week

NEXT 16 Hrs 58 Mins 7

DRAW: Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

DAKOTA CASH

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.09.24

3 7 10 16 26

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$56,000

NEXT 2 Days 16 Hrs 58

DRAW: Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

DOUBLE PLAY

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.09.24

4 14 29 33 59 17

TOP PRIZE:

\$10,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 27

DRAW: Mins 7 Secs

[PREVIOUS RESULTS](#)

POWERBALL

WINNING NUMBERS:

10.09.24

25 32 43 53 66 10

Power Play: 3x

NEXT ESTIMATED JACKPOT:

\$364,000,000

NEXT 2 Days 17 Hrs 27

DRAW: Mins 7 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

Former Sen. Tim Johnson, the last Democrat to hold statewide office in South Dakota, dies at 77

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. (AP) — Former Sen. Tim Johnson, a centrist who was the last Democrat to hold statewide office in South Dakota and who was adept at securing federal funding for projects back home during his nearly three decades in Washington, has died. He was 77.

Johnson, who was first elected to Congress in 1986 and retired from the Senate in 2015, died Tuesday night of complications from a recent stroke, family friend Steve Hildebrand said in a news release. He was surrounded by family.

"Tim always quipped that neither the left, nor the right, had a monopoly on all of the good ideas, but that working together, we can find common ground for the good of our country," Johnson's family said in the news release. "In his work and life, Tim showed us never to give up."

That resilience was tested in 2006. Just a month after Democrats reclaimed the Senate by a one-vote margin, Johnson became disoriented during a media conference call and underwent emergency brain surgery. He'd suffered a life-threatening brain hemorrhage, sparking what many called an unseemly round of speculation in Washington about which party would control the next Senate.

But he returned to Washington nine months later, physically weaker yet mentally sharp. He later joked by opening his first post-surgery media conference call with: "As I was saying... ."

A fourth-generation South Dakotan, Johnson was known for his steady manner, his unpredictable votes and his ability to secure federal funding for his state, including money that helped pay for the University of South Dakota medical science complex.

Democrats never could take his votes for granted. Johnson bucked his party by backing bans on abortions later in pregnancies and flag desecration. He also voted to confirm U.S. Supreme Court Justice Samuel Alito, who was nominated by Republican President George W. Bush.

And in one of his career's defining moments, Johnson voted in 2002 to authorize the use of force in Iraq, even though he had a deeply personal reason to oppose it. His son, Brooks, was a 32-year-old staff sergeant with the Army's 101st Airborne Division and would be among the first sent to the region.

"I talked to Brooks prior to this vote and his response was, 'Dad, you do what is right for the country and I'll do what is right as a soldier,'" Johnson recalled. "I said on the (Senate) floor that it's very likely I would be sending my own son into combat."

Brooks, who also served in Bosnia, Kosovo and South Korea, returned safely after serving in the Middle East.

Drey Samuelson, who served as Johnson's chief of staff for all 28 years he served in Congress, said Johnson appealed to Republicans and Democrats alike because he worked hard and was willing to listen to both sides.

"He never saw himself as the Democratic member in Congress from South Dakota," Samuelson said. "He saw himself as the congressman or senator from South Dakota, regardless of people's party."

The former senator joked about his reputation for being reserved.

"I know I get a rap as this sort of dour Scandinavian, but I think that we Scandinavians have a sense of humor, too," Johnson told The Associated Press in 2002. "I enjoy life. I think there are a lot of things in life that are fun and we can joke about. It would be a sad life for anybody who can't laugh, and laugh at himself as well."

In December 2006, Johnson suffered bleeding in his brain caused by a congenital malformation. His ailment raised the possibility that, were he to be incapacitated, South Dakota's Republican governor would appoint a Republican successor and return the Senate, then controlled by Democrats 51-49, to GOP control.

Johnson returned to his Senate office in September 2007, using a scooter and with his speaking slow and slurred. Cameras crowded around as he scooted through the door alongside South Dakota Sen. John

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Thune, a Republican, and Rep. Stephanie Herseth Sandlin, a Democrat. Staffers cheered as he entered the office.

He continued to recover and went on to win reelection. But in 2013, as South Dakota turned sharply Republican, he announced he planned to retire.

At the time, he said it had become harder and harder over his 28 years in the House and Senate to strike bipartisan compromise, as winning elections came to overshadow everything else.

"We have lost our way," Johnson lamented in his parting speech on Dec. 11, 2014.

Born in Canton, South Dakota, Johnson earned a bachelor's degree from the University of South Dakota, where he also met his wife, Barbara Brooks of Sioux Falls. Johnson went on to earn a master's degree in public administration and a law degree from the university.

Johnson started a law practice in Vermillion in 1975, and ran for statewide office in 1978. He served for four years in the South Dakota House and another four years in the state Senate before setting his sights on Washington.

He was elected to South Dakota's lone U.S. House seat in 1986, and served five terms before moving to the U.S. Senate in 1996.

Johnson was reelected to the Senate in 2002, narrowly defeating Thune, then a congressman, by just over 500 votes.

"Known for his tenacity and work ethic, Tim was a steadfast leader who dedicated his life to serving the people of South Dakota with integrity and compassion," Thune said in a statement. "He fought tirelessly for rural America and leaves a legacy that will have a lasting impact for years to come."

South Dakota Gov. Kristi Noem ordered flags be flown at half-staff to honor Johnson.

The Johnsons had two sons and a daughter: Brooks, Brendan, a Sioux Falls lawyer, and Kelsey, who works in public service in Washington.

Johnson and his wife fought cancer. The former senator underwent treatment for prostate cancer in 2004, and Barb Johnson survived breast cancer.

The Latest: Hurricane Milton is weaker but still dangerous

By The Associated Press undefined

Hurricane Milton brought powerful winds, a deadly storm surge and flooding to much of Florida after making landfall along the Gulf Coast as a Category 3 storm.

It weakened to a Category 1 storm as it moved through Florida early Thursday. Power outages were widespread and deaths have been reported from severe weather.

The cyclone had maximum sustained winds of 120 mph (205 kph) when it roared ashore in Siesta Key, south of the populated Tampa Bay region, the National Hurricane Center said. The hurricane was bringing deadly storm surge to much of Florida's Gulf Coast, including densely populated areas such as Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota and Fort Myers.

Here's the latest:

Milton moving off the east coast of Florida

The center of Hurricane Milton was moving off the east coast of Florida early Thursday with maximum sustained winds of 85 miles per hour (137 kph), the National Hurricane Center said. Milton was expected to continue to move away from the peninsula and to the north of the Bahamas.

As the storm barreled northeast into the Atlantic Ocean, all hurricane and tropical storm warnings were discontinued for the state's west coast.

Storm surge warnings remained in effect for parts of the Florida west coast, and along the state's east coast to Altamaha Sound, Georgia. Hurricane and tropical storm warnings were also in effect for much of the state's east-central coast.

At least 3 million customers without power due to Milton

Hurricane Milton's tear of destruction across central Florida left more than 3 million homes and businesses without power around 4 a.m. EDT Thursday, according to PowerOutages.us.

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Energy companies serve more than 11.5 million customer accounts across the state, according to the website.

Milton's high winds and intense rains continued into Thursday morning. Florida's central Gulf Coast was hardest hit by the outages, including Hardee, Sarasota, Hillsborough and Manatee counties.

Hurricane Milton weakens to Category 1, but danger remains in Florida

MIAMI — The National Weather Service says the storm's maximum sustained wind speed was 90 mph (145 kph) at about 1 a.m. Thursday as it passed east of Lakeland, Florida, on its way across the central peninsula.

The weather service uses the Saffir-Simpson Hurricane Wind Scale to estimate potential property damage caused by a hurricane's sustained wind speed. A Category 1 hurricane is considered to have very dangerous winds that topple shallow-rooted trees, snap tree limbs and damage the exterior of well-constructed frame homes. They can also cause extensive damage to power lines.

Hurricane Milton was a Category 3 storm when it made landfall Wednesday evening. That rating means devastating damage is expected to occur, including roofs torn from well-constructed homes, trees uprooted, and electricity and water systems unavailable for days to weeks.

High wind speeds are not the only dangers caused by hurricanes. Hurricane Milton spawned several devastating tornadoes that wreaked havoc on Florida communities Wednesday afternoon. Heavy rainfall and storm surges also caused dangerous flooding in some coastal areas.

Milton weakens slightly as flash flood emergency statement is issued in west-central Florida

MIAMI — The hurricane had maximum sustained winds of about 100 mph (160 kph) as it hovered near Fort Meade, about 45 miles (72 kilometers) east of Tampa, early Thursday morning, the National Weather Service said.

The hurricane was expected to continue traveling mostly eastward until it enters the Atlantic Ocean sometime late Thursday, the weather service said.

The damaging winds were accompanied by heavy rainfall, and the weather service issued a flash flood emergency statement for portions of west-central Florida. Flash flood emergency statements generally mean life-threatening catastrophic water rising events are already underway or expected to occur in the immediate future.

St. Petersburg officials warned residents that a broken water main forced the city to temporarily shut off its drinking water service at midnight. The city said residents should boil any water used for drinking, cooking or brushing teeth until the system is restored.

Multiple collapsed cranes reported in St. Petersburg

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — The National Weather Service says it has received reports of multiple collapsed cranes due to high winds in St. Petersburg, about 50 miles (80 kilometers) south of Siesta Key, where Milton made landfall.

St. Petersburg Fire Rescue confirmed one collapse late Wednesday about six blocks from the city's pier. There were no reports of injuries.

The crane was at the site of a 515-foot-tall (157-meter-tall) luxury high-rise building under construction that is being billed as one of the tallest buildings on the west coast of Florida. It was scheduled to be completed in summer 2025.

More than 2 million Florida residents are without power

Over 2 million customers lost power as Hurricane Milton cut a path through central Florida late Wednesday, according to the website PowerOutages.us.

Energy companies serve more than 11.5 million customer accounts statewide, according to the website. The number of people left without electricity continued to grow as hurricane-spawned tornados, sustained tropical winds and flooding inundated the region.

Nearly 100% of customers in Hardee County were without power, and people in Sarasota, Manatee and Pinella counties were also hit hard by outages.

Taylor Swift donates \$5 million to help hurricane relief efforts

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Feeding America CEO Claire Babineaux-Fontenot announced the singer's donation for people impacted by Hurricanes Helene and Milton in an Instagram post Wednesday thanking her for "standing with us in the movement to end hunger and for helping communities in need."

"We're incredibly grateful to Taylor Swift for her generous \$5 million donation to Hurricanes Helene and Milton relief efforts," Babineaux-Fontenot wrote. "This contribution will help communities rebuild and recover, providing essential food, clean water, and supplies to people affected by these devastating storms."

Milton shreds Tropicana Field's roof

ST. PETERSBURG, Fla. — Tropicana Field, the home of the Tampa Bay Rays, appeared to be badly damaged Wednesday night. Television images showed that the fabric that serves as the domed building's roof had been ripped to shreds. It was not immediately clear if there was damage inside the stadium.

The Rays' stadium was not being used as a shelter, but the Tampa Bay Times reported that it was being used as "a staging site for workers" who were brought to the area to deal with the storm's aftermath.

The stadium opened in 1990 and initially cost \$138 million. It was due to be replaced in time for the 2028 season with a \$1.3 billion ballpark.

St. Lucie County sheriff says tornadoes killed residents

Before Milton even made landfall Wednesday evening on Florida's Gulf Coast, tornadoes were touching down across the state. The Spanish Lakes Country Club near Fort Pierce, on Florida's Atlantic Coast, was hit particularly hard, destroying homes and leaving some residents dead.

"We have lost some life," St. Lucie County Sheriff Keith Pearson told WPBF News. He did not say how many were killed.

Rain and wind expected to thrash Florida through Thursday

MIAMI — Hurricane Milton will continue to bring "devastating rains and damaging winds" across the central Florida peninsula throughout Thursday before exiting the state late in the day for the Atlantic Ocean, the National Weather Service said.

The hurricane had maximum sustained winds of about 105 mph (165 kph) at 11 p.m. Wednesday, according to the weather service, and storm surge warnings were in effect for parts of Florida's western and eastern coastlines.

The weather service said Boca Grande, Florida, could see a surge as high as 13 feet (4 meters) above ground if it hits at the same time as high tide.

The service also said tornadoes were possible through early Thursday morning over parts of central and eastern Florida.

Search and rescue efforts underway in Florida, officials say

FORT PIERCE, Fla. — Officials say search and rescue efforts are underway in Florida after dangerous tornadoes ripped through the region.

About 125 homes were destroyed before the hurricane made landfall, many of them mobile homes in communities for senior citizens, said Kevin Guthrie, the director of Florida's Division of Emergency Management.

St. Lucie County Sheriff Keith Pearson posted a video to Facebook showing a 10,000 square-foot (930 square-meters) iron building that had been twisted into a crumpled heap by a tornado. The structure was where the sheriff's office kept its patrol cars, but luckily no one was inside when it fell, Pearson said.

Siesta Key where Milton landed is a prosperous area with picturesque beaches

SIESTA KEY, Fla. — Siesta Key, a barrier island off Sarasota, is a prosperous strip of powdery, white sand beaches and picturesque sunsets, celebrated with a drum circle on Sundays.

Florida International University professor Stephen Leatherman, a.k.a. "Dr. Beach," named Siesta Beach the United States' best beach in 2017, and MTV's "Siesta Key" gave audiences a reality-show view of the place in recent years.

Many of Siesta Key's about 5,500 residents are of retirement age.

Hurricane Milton makes landfall in Florida as a Category 3 storm

Hurricane Milton made landfall Wednesday along Florida's Gulf Coast as a Category 3 storm, bringing

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powerful winds, deadly storm surge and potential flooding to much of the state. Milton drew fuel from exceedingly warm Gulf of Mexico waters, twice reaching Category 5 status.

The cyclone had maximum sustained winds of 120 mph (205 kph) when it roared ashore near Siesta Key, Florida, at 8:30 p.m., the Miami-based National Hurricane Center said. The storm was bringing deadly storm surge to much of Florida's Gulf Coast, including densely populated areas such as Tampa, St. Petersburg, Sarasota and Fort Myers.

Hurricane Milton spawns multiple tornadoes

MIAMI — Multiple tornadoes spawned by the hurricane tore across Florida, the twisters acting as a dangerous harbinger of Milton's approach.

Three Florida offices of the National Weather Service in Miami, Tampa and Melbourne issued more than 130 tornado warnings associated with Hurricane Milton by Wednesday evening.

Videos posted to Reddit and other social media sites showed large funnel clouds over neighborhoods in Palm Beach County and elsewhere in the state.

Luke Culver, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Miami, said he wasn't sure whether Milton had spawned a record number of tornados, but he pointed out that only 64 Florida tornado warnings were associated with Hurricane Ian, which hit the Tampa Bay area as a massive storm in 2022.

Tornadoes produced by hurricanes and tropical storms most often occur in the right-front quadrant of the storm, but sometimes they can also take place near the storm's eyewall, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration.

The heat and humidity present in the atmosphere during such storms and changes in wind direction or speed with height, known as wind shear, contribute to their likelihood.

Pasco County suspends emergency services due to hazardous conditions

PASCO COUNTY, Fla. — Pasco County on Florida's west coast north of Tampa has joined other counties in suspending all emergency services in response to Hurricane Milton's impact, according to an alert sent at 7:46 p.m.

"We're constantly monitoring weather conditions and emergency crews will respond as soon as it is safe to do so. Now is the time to remain sheltered where you are," the alert said.

What has made Hurricane Milton so fierce and unusual?

With its mighty strength and its dangerous path, Hurricane Milton powered into a very rare threat flirting with experts' worst fears.

Warm water fueled amazingly rapid intensification that took Milton from a minimal hurricane to a massive Category 5 in less than 10 hours. It weakened, but quickly bounced back. And when its winds briefly reached 180 mph, its barometric pressure, a key measurement for a storm's overall strength, was among the lowest ever recorded in the Gulf of Mexico this late in the year.

At its most fierce, Milton almost maxed out its potential intensity given the weather factors surrounding it.

"Everything that you would want if you're looking for a storm to go absolutely berserk is what Milton had," Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said.

Milton also grew so potent because it managed to avoid high-level cross winds that often decapitate storms, especially in autumn. As Milton neared Florida it hit those winds, called shear, which ate away at its strength, as meteorologists had forecasted.

Biden blasts Trump for spreading 'onslaught of lies' about the Helene response

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden on Wednesday blasted his predecessor for spreading an "onslaught of lies" about how the federal government is handling the damage from Hurricane Helene as Hurricane Milton was near making landfall in Florida.

"Quite frankly, these lies are un-American," Biden said from the White House. "Former President Trump has led this onslaught of lies."

Biden said that Trump and his allies have misrepresented the response and resources of the Federal Emergency Management Agency. The president singled out Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene, a Georgia Republican, saying she claimed the federal government could control the weather.

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Asked why he believed his Republican opponents were not talking accurately about the government's response, Biden said, "I don't know."

Residents in St. Petersburg area advised to shelter in place

PINELLAS COUNTY, Fla. — Citing wind gusts of more than 50 mph (80 kph), Pinellas County, where St. Petersburg is located, issued a shelter-in-place advisory just before 6:30 p.m. for anyone who did not evacuate as Hurricane Milton approached Florida's west coast. The county is home to more than 960,000 people, according to U.S. Census Bureau estimates.

Just south, Manatee County announced at about the same time that it had suspended emergency services due to increasingly hazardous conditions. The county alert said "911 emergency calls will be logged and queued based on priority and will be responded to as soon as safe to do so."

Georgia governor warns coastal residents to prepare for hazards from Milton

SAVANNAH, Ga. — Georgia Gov. Brian Kemp on Wednesday urged residents of the state's coastal counties to prepare for falling trees, scattered power outages and potential flooding near the ocean as Hurricane Milton crosses Florida.

All 100 miles (160 kilometers) of the Georgia coast were under a tropical storm warning Wednesday and Thursday. Still, Milton's impacts in the state were expected to be far less severe than those from Hurricane Helene, which killed 34 people in Georgia and inflicted widespread damage statewide two weeks ago.

"We don't think this is going to be a hard hit," Kemp told reporters after meeting with local emergency management officials in Savannah. "But we want to over-prepare and hope this storm, for us at least, under-delivers."

Kemp said about 50,000 Georgia homes and businesses remain without electricity after Helene initially left more than 1.3 million in the dark. He said those still lacking power are in rural areas where customers are more spread out, causing repairs to take longer.

Palestinian officials say the death toll from an Israeli strike on a Gaza shelter has climbed to 21

DEIR AL-BALAH, Gaza Strip (AP) — Palestinian medical officials say the death toll from an Israeli strike on a school-turned-shelter in the Gaza Strip has climbed to 21.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital in the central town of Deir al-Balah confirmed the toll, and an Associated Press reporter counted the bodies.

Witnesses say the strike on Thursday appeared to target a makeshift post manned by Hamas-run police inside the school.

THIS IS A BREAKING NEWS UPDATE. AP's earlier story follows below.

An Israeli strike on a school sheltering displaced people in Gaza killed at least 13 people on Thursday, with the toll likely to rise, Palestinian medical officials said.

Israel has continued to strike at what it says are militant targets across the Palestinian enclave even as attention has shifted to its war against Hezbollah in Lebanon and rising tensions with Iran. Israel has been carrying out a dayslong air and ground operation against Hamas in northern Gaza.

The Al-Aqsa Martyrs Hospital, where the bodies were brought, confirmed the toll from the strike in the central town of Deir al-Balah. An Associated Press reporter saw ambulances arriving at the hospital. Many of the bodies arrived in pieces, and the death toll was expected to rise.

There was no immediate comment from the Israeli military. Witnesses said the strike targeted a makeshift post of the Hamas-run police inside the shelter.

Israel has repeatedly attacked schools-turned-shelters in Gaza, accusing militants of hiding out there.

Hamas has continued to launch attacks on Israeli forces and fire occasional rockets into Israel more than a year after its Oct. 7 attack ignited the war.

More than 3 million without power as Hurricane Milton slams Florida, causes deaths and flooding

By TERRY SPENCER and KATE PAYNE Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Hurricane Milton churned across Florida on Thursday after plowing into the state as a Category 3 storm, bringing misery to a coast still ravaged by Helene, pounding cities with winds of over 100 mph (160 kph) after producing a barrage of tornadoes, but sparing Tampa a direct hit.

The storm tracked to the south in the final hours and made landfall Wednesday night in Siesta Key near Sarasota, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) south of Tampa. The situation in the Tampa area was still a major emergency as St. Petersburg recorded over 16 inches (41 centimeters) of rain, prompting the National Weather Service to warn of flash flooding there as well as other parts of western and central Florida.

Tropicana Field, the home of the Tampa Bay Rays baseball team in St. Petersburg, appeared badly damaged. The fabric that serves as the domed stadium's roof was ripped to shreds by the fierce winds. It was not immediately clear if there was damage inside. Multiple cranes were also toppled in the storm, the weather service said.

St. Petersburg residents also could no longer get water from their household taps because a water main break led the city to shut down service.

The storm knocked out power across a large section of Florida, with more than 3 million homes and businesses without power as of early Thursday, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports.

Before Milton even made landfall, tornadoes were touching down across the state. The Spanish Lakes Country Club near Fort Pierce, on Florida's Atlantic Coast, was hit particularly hard, with homes destroyed and some residents killed.

"We have lost some life," St. Lucie County Sheriff Keith Pearson told WPBF News, though he wouldn't say how many people were killed.

About 125 homes were destroyed before the hurricane came ashore, many of them mobile homes in communities for senior citizens, said Kevin Guthrie, the director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

About 90 minutes after making landfall, Milton was downgraded to a Category 2 storm. By early Thursday, the hurricane was a Category 1 storm with maximum sustained winds of about 85 mph (135 kph) as it moved offshore and was about 35 miles (55 kilometers) east of Orlando.

Heavy rains were also likely to cause flooding inland along rivers and lakes as Milton traverses the Florida Peninsula as a hurricane, eventually to emerge in the Atlantic Ocean on Thursday. It is expected to impact the heavily populated Orlando area.

The storm slammed into a region still reeling two weeks after Hurricane Helene flooded streets and homes in western Florida and left at least 230 people dead across the South. In many places along the coast, municipalities raced to collect and dispose of debris before Milton's winds and storm surge could toss it around and compound any damage.

Officials had issued dire warnings to flee or face grim odds of survival.

"This is it, folks," said Cathie Perkins, emergency management director in Pinellas County, which sits on the peninsula that forms Tampa Bay. "Those of you who were punched during Hurricane Helene, this is going to be a knockout. You need to get out, and you need to get out now."

By late afternoon, some officials said the time had passed for such efforts, suggesting that people who stayed behind hunker down instead. By the evening, some counties announced they had suspended emergency services.

Jackie Curnick said she wrestled with her decision to stay at home in Sarasota, just north of where the storm made landfall. But with a 2-year-old son and a baby girl due Oct. 29, Curnick and her husband thought it was for the best.

Curnick said they started packing Monday to evacuate, but they couldn't find any available hotel rooms, and the few they came by were too expensive.

She said there were too many unanswered questions if they got in the car and left: Where to sleep, if

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they'd be able to fill up their gas tank, and if they could even find a safe route out of the state.

"The thing is it's so difficult to evacuate in a peninsula," she said. "In most other states, you can go in any direction to get out. In Florida there are only so many roads that take you north or south."

At a news conference in Tallahassee, Gov. Ron DeSantis described deployment of a wide range of resources, including 9,000 National Guard members from Florida and other states; over 50,000 utility workers from as far as California; and highway patrol cars with sirens to escort gasoline tankers to replenish supplies so people could fill up their tanks before evacuating.

"Unfortunately, there will be fatalities. I don't think there's any way around that," DeSantis said.

Heavy rain and tornadoes lashed parts of southern Florida starting Wednesday morning, with conditions deteriorating throughout the day. Six to 12 inches (15 to 31 centimeters) of rain, with up to 18 inches (46 centimeters) in some places, was expected well inland, bringing the risk of catastrophic flooding.

One twister touched down Wednesday morning in the lightly populated Everglades and crossed Interstate 75. Another apparent tornado touched down in Fort Myers, snapping tree limbs and tearing a gas station's canopy to shreds.

Authorities issued mandatory evacuation orders across 15 Florida counties with a total population of about 7.2 million people. Officials warned that anyone staying behind must fend for themselves, because first responders were not expected to risk their lives attempting rescues at the height of the storm.

St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch told residents to expect long power outages and the possible shutdown of the sewer system.

In Charlotte Harbor, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) south of Tampa, clouds swirled and winds gusted as Josh Parks packed his Kia sedan with clothes and other belongings. Two weeks ago, Helene's surge brought about 5 feet (1.5 meters) of water to the neighborhood, and its streets remain filled with waterlogged furniture, torn-out drywall and other debris.

Parks, an auto technician, planned to flee to his daughter's home inland and said his roommate already left.

"I told her to pack like you aren't coming back," he said.

By early afternoon, airlines had canceled about 1,900 flights. SeaWorld was closed all day Wednesday, and Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando shut down in the afternoon.

More than 60% of gas stations in Tampa and St. Petersburg were out of gas Wednesday afternoon, according to GasBuddy. DeSantis said the state's overall supply was fine, and highway patrol officers were escorting tanker trucks to replenish the supply.

In the Tampa Bay area's Gulfport, Christian Burke and his mother stayed put in their three-story concrete home overlooking the bay. Burke said his father designed this home with a Category 5 in mind — and now they're going to test it.

As a passing police vehicle blared encouragement to evacuate, Burke acknowledged staying isn't a good idea and said he's "not laughing at this storm one bit."

The Nobel Prize in literature is being awarded in Stockholm

By DANIEL NIEMANN and MIKE CORDER Associated Press

STOCKHOLM (AP) — After three days of Nobel prizes honoring work in the sciences, the literature award is being announced Thursday by the Nobel Committee at the Swedish Academy.

The winner will follow Norwegian writer Jon Fosse, who was honored last year for writing in Nynorsk, one of the two official written versions of the Norwegian language, that prize organizers said gives "voice to the unsayable."

The literature prize has long faced criticism that it is too focused on European and North American writers of style-heavy, story-light prose. It has also been male-dominated, with just 17 women among its 119 laureates. The last woman to win was Annie Ernaux of France, in 2022.

Six days of Nobel announcements opened Monday with Americans Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun winning the medicine prize. Two founding fathers of machine learning — John Hopfield and Geoffrey Hinton

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— won the physics prize on Tuesday. On Wednesday, three scientists who discovered powerful techniques to decode and even design novel proteins were awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry.

The Nobel Peace Prize will be announced Friday and the economics award on Oct. 14.

The prize carries a cash award of 11 million Swedish kronor (\$1 million) from a bequest left by the award's creator, Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel. The laureates are invited to receive their awards at ceremonies on Dec. 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death.

Hurricane Milton spawns destructive, deadly tornadoes before making landfall

By SUMAN NAISHADHAM Associated Press

Multiple powerful tornadoes ripped across Florida hours before Hurricane Milton made landfall Wednesday, tearing off roofs, overturning vehicles and sucking debris into the air as the black V-shaped columns moved through.

Deaths were reported in St. Lucie County on Florida's Atlantic Coast, but local authorities did not specify how many residents had been killed.

By Wednesday evening, more than 130 tornado warnings associated with Milton had been issued by National Weather Services offices in Florida.

The appearance of tornadoes before and during hurricanes isn't unusual, scientists say, but the twisters' ferocity was.

"It's definitely out of the ordinary," said Northern Illinois University meteorology professor Victor Gensini. "Hurricanes do produce tornadoes, but they're usually weak. What we saw today was much closer to what we see in the Great Plains in the spring."

Tornadoes spawned by hurricanes and tropical storms most often occur in the right-front quadrant of the storm, but sometimes they can also take place near the storm's eyewall, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. The heat and humidity present in the atmosphere during such storms and changes in wind direction or speed with height, known as wind shear, contribute to their likelihood.

"There's an incredible amount of swirling going on," Gensini said of the conditions that allowed for the twisters to grow. "Those tornadoes were just in a very favorable environment."

The warming of the oceans by climate change is making hurricanes more intense, but Gensini said he did not know of any connection between human-caused warming and the deadly tornadoes that Floridians experienced with Milton.

Approximately 12.6 million people in the state were facing potential exposure under a National Weather Service tornado advisory in place until Wednesday night.

Videos posted to Reddit and other social media sites showed large funnel clouds over neighborhoods in Palm Beach County and elsewhere in the state.

Luke Culver, a meteorologist with the National Weather Service in Miami, said he wasn't sure whether Milton had spawned a record number of tornados, but he pointed out that only 64 Florida tornado warnings were associated with Hurricane Ian, which hit the Tampa Bay area as a massive storm in 2022.

Florida has more tornadoes per square mile than any other state. But they're usually not as severe as those in Midwest and Plains. However, a big outburst of powerful twisters killed 42 people and injured over 260 in Central Florida in the space of a few hours in February 1998.

Francisco Lindor's grand slam sends Mets into NLCS with 4-1 win over Phillies in Game 4 of NLDS

By MIKE FITZPATRICK AP Baseball Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Francisco Lindor hit a grand slam in the sixth inning, his latest clutch swing in a storybook season full of them, and the New York Mets reached the National League Championship Series

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with a 4-1 victory over the Philadelphia Phillies on Wednesday.

Edwin Díaz struck out Kyle Schwarber with two runners aboard to end it as New York finished off the rival Phillies in Game 4 of their best-of-five Division Series, winning 3-1 to wrap up a postseason series at home for the first time in 24 years.

"I want to win it all. And ours will be a team that will forever be remembered," Lindor said, speaking in the interview room with one of his young daughters on his lap drinking from a Gatorade bottle.

"This will be a team that comes every 10 years and eats for free everywhere they go. And I want to do that. I want to do that. But the job is not done."

With tears in his eyes, outfielder Brandon Nimmo embraced Lindor as the Mets poured onto the field in excitement following the final out.

Then, in a raucous locker room, they enjoyed the team's first champagne-soaked clinching celebration in Citi Field's 16-season history. The last time the Mets won a playoff series in their own ballpark was the 2000 NLCS at Shea Stadium.

"This is the kind of stuff that I was dreaming about," Nimmo said in a clubhouse interview shown on the giant videoboard in center. "This has been a long time coming. We wanted it so bad for our fan base."

After a third bubbly clinching bash in 10 days and then some rest, New York opens the best-of-seven NLCS on Sunday at the San Diego Padres or Los Angeles Dodgers. Those teams are tied 2-all heading into the decisive Game 5 of their NLDS on Friday in Los Angeles.

"Let's keep this thing rolling!" Mets slugger Pete Alonso told reveling fans still in the stands when he popped out of the clubhouse party for an on-field interview with large goggles protecting his eyes. "So proud of this group. We've overcome so much."

New York is chasing its third World Series title and first since 1986.

"I want to slay the negative Met fan perceptions, and we're on our way to doing that," owner Steve Cohen said.

For the NL East champion Phillies, who won 95 games and finished six ahead of the wild-card Mets during the regular season, it was a bitter exit early in the playoffs and a disappointing step backward after they advanced to the 2022 World Series and then lost Games 6 and 7 of the 2023 NLCS at home to Arizona.

After falling short in October again, Bryce Harper and the Phillies are still looking for the franchise's third championship.

"We have a really great group. We got beat in a short series," manager Rob Thomson said.

Perhaps overanxious at the plate with so much on the table, the Mets left the bases loaded in the first and second against Ranger Suárez and stranded eight runners overall through the first five innings.

They put three runners on again in the sixth, this time with nobody out, before No. 9 batter Francisco Alvarez grounded into a force at the plate against All-Star reliever Jeff Hoffman, who had warmed up three times before coming in.

With the season on the line, Thomson then summoned closer Carlos Estévez to face Lindor, who drove a 2-1 fastball clocked at 99 mph into Philadelphia's bullpen in right-center, giving New York a 4-1 lead and sending the sold-out crowd of 44,103 into a delirious, bouncing, throbbing frenzy.

"I knew it right away," Estévez said. "I knew I wanted to go a little bit higher on the pitch. Unfortunately, it was more like middle-away instead of up and away, and as soon as he hit it, I knew he hit it really well."

With his first homer of these playoffs, Lindor joined Shane Victorino and Hall of Fame slugger Jim Thome as the only major leaguers with two postseason grand slams. The star shortstop also connected for Cleveland at Yankee Stadium in Game 2 of a 2017 AL Division Series.

Edgardo Alfonzo hit the only other postseason slam in Mets history, during a 1999 Division Series at Arizona. Robin Ventura's grand slam-single in the NLCS that year doesn't count.

"Got runners on and we couldn't come up with a big hit until finally, who else? The MVP. I keep saying you could write a book. You could make a movie, because this is it right here," Mets rookie manager Carlos Mendoza said.

"And then the whole time the inning is unfolding, Lindor is going to do it again. There's no panic. The way he controls the emotions and he hits that ball. It's unbelievable."

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Fans chanted "MVP! MVP!" as Lindor disappeared into the dugout and again when he took his position on defense in the seventh.

Game 3 on Tuesday was Lindor's first opportunity to play at Citi Field since Sept. 8, after he missed time down the stretch with a back injury.

But few players, if any, have been as valuable to their team this year as Lindor, who has provided a remarkable string of big hits and crucial contributions as the Mets rallied from a 24-35 start to their first NLCS since losing the 2015 World Series to Kansas City.

His tying homer in the ninth inning Sept. 11 at Toronto broke up Bowden Francis' no-hit bid and sparked a critical Mets victory, and his go-ahead homer in the ninth on Sept. 30 in Atlanta clinched a playoff berth.

"It just gets better and better," Cohen said. "In that situation, he just comes through over and over again."

Lindor also fought back from a 1-2 count to draw an eight-pitch walk leading off the ninth against All-Star closer Devin Williams last week in Milwaukee, helping to set up Alonso's go-ahead homer that saved New York's season in the Wild Card Series clincher.

"It's been an uphill fight. It's been tough. But we're still not where we want to be," Lindor said. "This road, it's been, yeah, it's been curvy — but I wouldn't want it any other way."

Mets starter Jose Quintana didn't allow an earned run in five-plus innings of two-hit ball, and David Peterson pitched 2 1/3 scoreless innings for the win.

Díaz walked his first two batters in the ninth, prompting groans in the stands, but retired the next three — two on strikeouts — for the first postseason save of his career.

Shut down at the plate all series besides a late comeback to win Game 2 at home, the Phillies scored their only run on an error by third baseman Mark Vientos in the fourth.

Hoffman took his second loss, the latest flop by a Philadelphia bullpen that failed to deliver throughout the series.

"Some of it's execution, maybe some of it's being familiar with our guys," Thomson said. "I don't know. It should work both ways, though."

UP NEXT

New York went 5-2 against the Padres this season and 2-4 versus the Dodgers.

Mali's traditional theater gives psychiatric patients the stage

By MOUSTAPHA DIALLO and BABA AHMED Associated Press

BAMAKO, Mali (AP) — In the courtyard of a psychiatric ward in Mali's capital, a small group of patients acts out scenes of a village dispute to the beat of a djembe, a traditional West African drum.

One patient, Mamadou Diarra, cries out to another in the Bambara language, mocking: "You don't know anything! Just nonsense!"

But both break into smiles, and Diarra dances as he continues launching insults at his fellow performer.

The group is taking part in koteba, a traditional form of theater practiced by Mali's largest ethnic group, the Bambara. It mixes acting, singing and dancing and is usually performed in villages as an outlet to work through problems and an open space for satire.

But here at Point G, one of the largest hospitals in Bamako, koteba is also a way of offering support and a sense of community to people receiving psychiatric care.

Mali has fewer than 50 mental health professionals for a population of more than 20 million, according to a 2022 report by the World Health Organization. People with mental illnesses are often left without treatment and excluded from society.

Though the use of koteba as therapy hasn't been formally studied, Souleymane Coulibaly, a clinical psychologist at the Point G hospital, said the traditional form of theater is uniquely positioned to help people in the psychiatric ward work through their problems.

"Patients who attend koteba leave the hospital more quickly than those who refuse to attend the theater session," he said.

In the courtyard, Diarra was the star, and other patients gathered as he spoke.

"I've never done any kind of theater before. I've never danced. But once I started, God gave me the knowledge of these things," he said.

Adama Bagayoko, 67, the director of the visiting theater troupe, said the weekly performances at Point G are a rare space where patients feel heard and respected.

"We talk to each other, we dance together, we laugh together," Bagayoko said. "To touch someone shows that we are equal, to listen to them shows that they are important, and what they say is important."

Bagayoko was part of a troupe that brought koteba to the Point G psychiatric ward in 1983, as mental health workers looked for a way to use Mali's cultural practices to help people receiving psychiatric care.

The first performance was so effective that patients asked the doctors if the actors could return the next day, he said.

Patients and actors have been meeting for koteba performances every Friday since then.

The koteba performances at Point G unfold in three phases, Bagayoko said. First, the troupe plays music to invite patients into the courtyard. Then the troupe asks what the topic or theme of that day's performance should be. After the performance, they sit in a circle and give the floor to any patients who wish to speak.

Because the patients feel at ease, they often tell the actors details about their lives they are not comfortable sharing with their family or doctors, which can help doctors get to the core of any issue they might be dealing with, Bagayoko said.

On a recent Friday, the patients acted out a familiar scene in Mali: A man in a village is accused of stealing. The thief screams and claims he hasn't stolen anything, while the villagers ask Diarra, playing the village chief, what punishment he deserves.

"Kill him!" Diarra yells amid the screams. But as the angry mob gathers around the man, he escapes and flees.

Bagayoko said the troupe performs other themes proposed by patients including those about women beaten by their husbands, drug problems and alcoholism.

The hospital at Point G is only a short walk from Mali's political stage — the presidential palace and main military base — where a 2020 military coup has left the country struggling with increased extremist violence and economic hardship. Last month, Islamic militants attacked Bamako for the first time in almost a decade.

But those problems are far away during the koteba performances at the hospital, as Diarra and his fellow patients are immersed in the world they create.

"You know what my problem is? That I see things for what they are," Diarra said, laughing, during a break.

Bagayoko chimed in: "Okay, we'll lighten that load for you."

Takeaways from an AP investigation of Russia recruiting Africans to make drones for use in Ukraine

By EMMA BURROWS and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

About 200 women ages 18-22 from across Africa have been recruited to work in a factory alongside Russian vocational students assembling thousands of Iranian-designed attack drones to be launched into Ukraine.

In interviews with The Associated Press, some of the women said they were misled that it would be a work-study program, describing long hours under constant surveillance, broken promises about wages and areas of study, and working with caustic chemicals that left their skin pockmarked and itching.

The AP analyzed satellite images of the complex in Russia's republic of Tatarstan and its leaked internal documents, spoke to a half-dozen African women who ended up there, and tracked down hundreds of videos in the online recruiting program to piece together life at the plant in what is called the Alabuga Special Economic Zone, about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) east of Moscow.

What to know from AP's reporting:

Plans for making 6,000 drones a year

Russia and Iran signed a \$1.7 billion deal in 2022 after President Vladimir Putin launched his invasion of

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neighboring Ukraine, and Moscow began launching Iranian imports of drones later that year.

Satellite images show the plant at Alabuga quickly expanded.

It is now Russia's main plant for making the one-way, exploding drones, with plans to produce 6,000 a year by 2025, according to the internal documents and the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security.

Facing a wartime labor shortage in Russia, Alabuga has recruited from African countries like Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, as well as the South Asian country of Sri Lanka. The drive is expanding to elsewhere in Asia as well as Latin America.

About 90% of the foreign women recruited via a campaign dubbed "Alabuga Start" manufacture drones, according to David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector now with the Institute for Science and International Security. The documents show the women largely assemble the drones, use chemicals and paint them. The AP has been told some women have left the plant but are discouraged from doing so by management.

Constant surveillance and caustic chemicals

The foreign workers travel by bus from their living quarters to the factory, passing multiple security checkpoints, according to one worker who assembled drones.

They share dormitories and kitchens that are "guarded around the clock," Alabuga's social media posts say.

Foreigners receive local SIM cards upon arrival but cannot bring phones into the factory. Four women indicated they couldn't speak freely to outsiders and one suggested her messages were monitored.

The woman who assembled drones said recruits put them together and coat them with a caustic substance with the consistency of yogurt. Many workers lack protective gear, she said, adding that the chemicals made her face feel like it was being pricked with tiny needles, and "small holes" appeared on her cheeks, making them itch.

Disagreements over pay

Although one woman said she loved working at Alabuga because she was well-paid and enjoyed experiencing a different culture and people, most interviewed by AP disagreed about the compensation and suggested that life there did not meet their expectations.

The program initially promised \$700 a month, but later social media posts put it at "over \$500."

One African woman said she couldn't send money home because of banking sanctions on Russia, but another said she sent up to \$150 a month.

Four women described long shifts of up to 12 hours, with haphazard days off, but some suggested they could tolerate it if they could send money home.

Human rights organizations said they were unaware of what was happening at the factory, although they said it sounded consistent with other actions by Russia in recruiting foreigners.

Russia's actions "could potentially fulfill the criteria of trafficking if the recruitment is fraudulent and the purpose is exploitation," said Ravina Shamdasani, a spokesperson for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, noting that Moscow is a party to the U.N. Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

The AP contacted governments of 22 countries whose citizens Alabuga said it had recruited for the program. Most didn't answer or said they would look into it.

Betty Amongi, Uganda's minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development, told AP that her ministry raised concerns with its embassy in Moscow about the recruitment, particularly on the age of the women, because "female migrant workers are the most vulnerable category."

The ministry said it wanted to ensure the women "do not end up in exploitative employment," and needed to know who was responsible for their welfare while in Russia. Alabuga's Facebook page said 46 Ugandan women were at the complex, although Amongi had said there were none.

How accurate are the drones they make?

Bolstered by the Alabuga recruits, Russia has vastly increased the number of drones it can fire at Ukraine.

Nearly 4,000 were launched at Ukraine from the start of the war in February 2022 through 2023, the Institute for Science and International Security said. In the first seven months of this year, Russia launched

nearly twice that.

An AP analysis of about 2,000 Shahed attacks documented by Ukraine's military since July 29 shows that about 95% of the drones hit no discernible target, instead crashing in Ukraine or flying out of its airspace.

The failure rate could be due to Ukraine's improved air defenses or poor craftsmanship among the low-skilled workforce. Another factor could be because Russia is using a Shahed variant without explosives to overwhelm air defenses.

The social media plan

The "Alabuga Start" recruiting drive relies on a robust social media campaign of slickly edited videos of smiling African women cleaning floors, directing cranes or visiting Tatarstan's cultural sites. They don't mention the plant's role at the heart of Russian drone production.

The program was promoted by education ministries in Uganda and Ethiopia, as well as in African media that portrays it as a way to earn money and learn skills.

Initially advertised as a work-study program, Alabuga Start's newer posts say it "is NOT an educational programme," although one of them still shows young women in plaid school uniforms.

Last month, the social media site said it was "excited to announce that our audience has grown significantly!" That could be due to its hiring of influencers to promote it on TikTok, describing it as an easy way to make money.

Social Security cost-of-living benefits increase announcement coming Thursday

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — More than 70 million Social Security recipients will learn Thursday how big a cost-of-living increase they'll get to their benefits next year.

In advance of the announcement, analysts predicted that the increase would be about 2.5% for 2025, smaller than increases the previous two years. Recipients received a 3.2% increase in their benefits in 2024, after a historically large 8.7% benefit increase in 2023, brought on by record 40-year-high inflation.

The lower COLA for next year reflects the moderating inflation.

About 70.6 million people participate in the Social Security program, with an average benefit of about \$1,920 a month. The AARP estimates that a 2.5% COLA would increase that by \$48 a month.

In advance of the announcement, retirees voiced concern that the increase would not be enough to counter rising costs.

Sherri Myers, an 82-year-old Pensacola City, Florida, retiree, is now hoping to get an hourly job at Walmart to help make ends meet.

"I would like to eat good but I can't. When I'm at the grocery store, I just walk past the vegetables because they are too expensive. I have to be very selective about what I eat — even McDonald's is expensive," she said.

With increased participation and fewer workers contributing, the Social Security program faces a severe financial shortfall in the coming years.

The annual Social Security and Medicare trustees report released in May said the program's trust fund will be unable to pay full benefits beginning in 2035. If the trust fund is depleted, the government will be able to pay only 83% of scheduled benefits, the report said.

The program is financed by payroll taxes collected from workers and their employers. The maximum amount of earnings subject to Social Security payroll taxes was \$168,600 for 2024, up from \$160,200 in 2023. Analysts estimate that the maximum amount will go up to \$174,900 in 2025.

On the presidential campaign trail, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump have presented dueling plans on how they would strengthen Social Security.

Harris, the Democratic nominee, says on her campaign website that she will protect Social Security by "making millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share in taxes."

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Trump, the Republican nominee, promises that he would not cut the social program or make changes to the retirement age. Trump also pledges tax cuts for older Americans, posting on Truth Social in July that "SENIORS SHOULD NOT PAY TAX ON SOCIAL SECURITY!"

AARP conducted interviews with both Harris and Trump in late August, and asked how the candidates would protect the Social Security Trust Fund.

Harris said she would make up for the shortfall by "making billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share in taxes and use that money to protect and strengthen Social Security for the long haul."

Trump said, "We'll protect it with growth. I don't want to do anything having to do with increasing age. I won't do that. As you know, I was there for four years and never even thought about doing it. I'm going to do nothing to Social Security."

More than 2 million without power as Hurricane Milton slams Florida, causes deaths and flooding

By TERRY SPENCER and KATE PAYNE Associated Press

TAMPA, Fla. (AP) — Hurricane Milton plowed into Florida as a Category 3 storm Wednesday, bringing misery to a coast still ravaged by Helene, pounding cities with winds of over 100 mph (160 kph) after producing a barrage of tornadoes, but sparing Tampa a direct hit.

The storm tracked to the south in the final hours and made landfall in Siesta Key near Sarasota, about 70 miles (112 kilometers) south of Tampa. The situation in the Tampa area was still a major emergency as St. Petersburg recorded over 16 inches (41 centimeters) of rain, prompting the National Weather Service to warn of flash flooding.

Tropicana Field, the home of the Tampa Bay Rays in St. Petersburg, appeared to be badly damaged. Television images Wednesday night showed that the fabric that serves as the domed building's roof had been ripped to shreds. It was not immediately clear if there was damage inside the stadium.

More than 2 million homes and businesses were without power in Florida, according to poweroutage.us, which tracks utility reports. The highest number of outages were in Hardee County, as well as neighboring Sarasota and Manatee counties.

Before Milton even made landfall, tornadoes were touching down across the state. The Spanish Lakes Country Club near Fort Pierce, on Florida's Atlantic Coast, was hit particularly hard, with homes destroyed and some residents killed.

"We have lost some life," St. Lucie County Sheriff Keith Pearson told WPBF News, though he wouldn't say how many people were killed.

About 125 homes were destroyed before the hurricane came ashore, many of them mobile homes in communities for senior citizens, said Kevin Guthrie, the director of the Florida Division of Emergency Management.

About 90 minutes after making landfall, Milton was downgraded to a Category 2 storm. By late Wednesday, the hurricane had maximum sustained winds of about 105 mph (165 kph) and storm surge warnings were in effect for parts of Florida's Gulf and Atlantic coastlines.

Heavy rains were also likely to cause flooding inland along rivers and lakes as Milton traverses the Florida Peninsula as a hurricane, eventually to emerge in the Atlantic Ocean on Thursday. It is expected to impact the heavily populated Orlando area.

The storm slammed into a region still reeling two weeks after Hurricane Helene flooded streets and homes in western Florida and left at least 230 people dead across the South. In many places along the coast, municipalities raced to collect and dispose of debris before Milton's winds and storm surge could toss it around and compound any damage.

Officials had issued dire warnings to flee or face grim odds of survival.

"This is it, folks," said Cathie Perkins, emergency management director in Pinellas County, which sits on the peninsula that forms Tampa Bay. "Those of you who were punched during Hurricane Helene, this is going to be a knockout. You need to get out, and you need to get out now."

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By late afternoon, some officials said the time had passed for such efforts, suggesting that people who stayed behind hunker down instead. By the evening, some counties announced they had suspended emergency services.

Jackie Curnick said she wrestled with her decision to stay at home in Sarasota, just north of where the storm made landfall. But with a 2-year-old son and a baby girl due Oct. 29, Curnick and her husband thought it was for the best.

Curnick said they started packing Monday to evacuate, but they couldn't find any available hotel rooms, and the few they came by were too expensive.

She said there were too many unanswered questions if they got in the car and left: Where to sleep, if they'd be able to fill up their gas tank, and if they could even find a safe route out of the state.

"The thing is it's so difficult to evacuate in a peninsula," she said. "In most other states, you can go in any direction to get out. In Florida there are only so many roads that take you north or south."

At a news conference in Tallahassee, Gov. Ron DeSantis described deployment of a wide range of resources, including 9,000 National Guard members from Florida and other states; over 50,000 utility workers from as far as California; and highway patrol cars with sirens to escort gasoline tankers to replenish supplies so people could fill up their tanks before evacuating.

"Unfortunately, there will be fatalities. I don't think there's any way around that," DeSantis said.

Heavy rain and tornadoes lashed parts of southern Florida starting Wednesday morning, with conditions deteriorating throughout the day. Six to 12 inches (15 to 31 centimeters) of rain, with up to 18 inches (46 centimeters) in some places, was expected well inland, bringing the risk of catastrophic flooding.

One twister touched down Wednesday morning in the lightly populated Everglades and crossed Interstate 75. Another apparent tornado touched down in Fort Myers, snapping tree limbs and tearing a gas station's canopy to shreds.

Authorities issued mandatory evacuation orders across 15 Florida counties with a total population of about 7.2 million people. Officials warned that anyone staying behind must fend for themselves, because first responders were not expected to risk their lives attempting rescues at the height of the storm.

St. Petersburg Mayor Ken Welch told residents to expect long power outages and the possible shutdown of the sewer system.

In Charlotte Harbor, about 100 miles (160 kilometers) south of Tampa, clouds swirled and winds gusted as Josh Parks packed his Kia sedan with clothes and other belongings. Two weeks ago, Helene's surge brought about 5 feet (1.5 meters) of water to the neighborhood, and its streets remain filled with waterlogged furniture, torn-out drywall and other debris.

Parks, an auto technician, planned to flee to his daughter's home inland and said his roommate already left.

"I told her to pack like you aren't coming back," he said.

By early afternoon, airlines had canceled about 1,900 flights. SeaWorld was closed all day Wednesday, and Walt Disney World and Universal Orlando shut down in the afternoon.

More than 60% of gas stations in Tampa and St. Petersburg were out of gas Wednesday afternoon, according to GasBuddy. DeSantis said the state's overall supply was fine, and highway patrol officers were escorting tanker trucks to replenish the supply.

In the Tampa Bay area's Gulfport, Christian Burke and his mother stayed put in their three-story concrete home overlooking the bay. Burke said his father designed this home with a Category 5 in mind — and now they're going to test it.

As a passing police vehicle blared encouragement to evacuate, Burke acknowledged staying isn't a good idea and said he's "not laughing at this storm one bit."

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Trump's small-dollar donor fundraising is beset by confusion and fatigue

By DAN MERICA, AARON KESSLER and RICHARD LARDNER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Donald Trump's contributions from small-dollar donors have plummeted since his last bid for the White House, presenting the former president with a financial challenge as he attempts to keep pace with Democrats' fundraising machine.

Fewer than a third of the Republican's campaign contributions have come from donors who gave less than \$200 — down from nearly half of all donations in his 2020 race, according to an analysis by The Associated Press and OpenSecrets, an organization that tracks political spending.

The total collected from small donors has also declined, according to the analysis. Trump raised \$98 million from such contributors through June, a 40% drop compared to the \$165 million they contributed during a corresponding period in his previous presidential race.

The dip has forced Trump to rely more on wealthy donors and groups backed by them, a shift that cuts into the populist message that first propelled him to the White House. The decline in donations could not come at a worse time for Trump. Democrats have raised massive sums from small-dollar donors this cycle. President Joe Biden and then Vice President Kamala Harris have raised a staggering \$285 million from such donors since April 2023, representing more than 40% of their fundraising, according to data from OpenSecrets.

GOP operatives said the trend could portend trouble for the broader party. Trump's fundraising dip raises questions about the party's ability to continue tapping its aging base for funds. Such voters often live on fixed incomes and don't have the extra cash to contribute to candidates, and polls have consistently found that the Republican base is growing older.

Republicans also engaged in a hyperaggressive — often combative — style of digital fundraising that is alienating voters, the operatives said. Campaigns and committees often share or rent lists of donors to each other, leading to voters being flooded with similar solicitations that can be confusing.

"Republican vendors have so mistreated our donors that many grassroots donors don't want to give to us anymore," said John Hall, a Republican fundraising consultant and partner at Apex Strategies. "If you make a donation to almost any Republican candidate today, within three weeks you are going to start getting 30-50 text messages from other candidates you have never heard of before."

In a poll of thousands of Republican donors earlier this year, Apex Strategies found 72% of Republican donors said they continued to receive text message solicitations after they had requested to be removed from a list.

"Donors feel like they are never thanked, they feel abused, and they don't know how to get off lists," Hall said. "This has a chilling effect on everyone's fundraising."

Small-dollar donors are frustrated

Small-dollar donors echoed Hall's concerns. They told the AP they stopped giving to Trump's campaign because they were tired of being barraged with solicitations for donations from other Republicans, who presumably got the donor information from the Trump campaign. Others said they were being more careful about their political giving due to financial struggles.

"I am sick of them asking for money," said Susan Brito, 51, of Florida, who gave dozens of small donations totaling \$69 in 2022 and 2023 but hasn't contributed this year. "I am disabled, you are sending me text, after text, after text."

Bill Ruggio, 70, donated nearly every month, a total of \$60, to Trump's campaign over 2022 and 2023. He hasn't contributed anything this year, saying he doesn't have the extra cash and is deeply frustrated by a barrage of text messages he receives from the Republican candidates and committees.

"I don't even look at my texts anymore during the political season. It is just so many that I miss personal ones because there are so many of the political ones," Ruggio said. "It kind of sticks in your craw."

Doug Deeken, the Republican Party chair in Wayne County, Ohio, said such complaints are fairly common.

"People get annoyed by the text messages, and the direct mail, and the emails, Deeken said, his phone filled with texts from random conservative groups asking for money. "It is annoying. It annoys me!"

Trump campaign blames Harris for drop-off

Karoline Leavitt, a Trump campaign spokesperson, did not directly respond to the donor drop-off, but blamed the Biden administration and Harris for a bad economy leading people to have less money, something "President Trump completely understands."

Before Trump, Democrats dominated the small-dollar donor playing field, but Trump cut into the advantage in 2016, turning his devoted base into small donations throughout the year. Trump raised \$170 million from small-dollar donors, about 52% of his total, according to OpenSecrets. The candidate's haul from small donors outpaced the \$164 million that Democratic nominee Hillary Clinton raised from such contributors, a figure that represented just under 30% of her total fundraising. In 2020, Trump continued that fundraising prowess.

The problem this year, said Republican officials and activists in key states, is that the persistent fundraising requests from campaigns and committees have led voters to question whether their money is actually going to Trump. One reason for this issue is major email lists being rented out by smaller campaigns. This means that someone who has signed up to receive emails from Trump, could get emails from a host of Republican candidates, raising skepticism about where their money is actually going.

"It's the total number of texts people are getting and fundraising requests that are coming in. That causes the confusion," said Shannon Burns, a top Republican activist in Ohio and vocal Trump supporter. Burns said donors feel "bombarded" by the often breathless outreach from a range of groups, leading to questions from Trump supporters. Those questions were so frequent, he said, that at one point he began giving out the physical mailing address where a Trump supporter could send a check.

Trump's campaign has tried to stop committees from using his name and likeness in fundraising appeals.

In March 2023, the Trump campaign sent Republican digital fundraising vendors a memo that stated the former president "does not consent" to outside groups or candidates using his name or image in fundraising appeals. He also sent a cease and desist letter to the top Republican committees in Washington in 2021, urging them to stop using his name in fundraising appeals.

Still supporting Trump at the ballot box

Trump has experienced spikes in small-dollar fundraising this cycle — like in the days after his felony conviction in May and when a gunman attempted to assassinate the candidate in July. But those jolts have not made up for a steady decline in donations from people like Stephen Buckhalter.

Buckhalter, 78, retired from the insurance industry a year ago and donated \$120 to Trump's campaign in 2022 and 2023. He stopped this year.

"The cost of living has gotten to the point where there is not much left at the end of the month," he said. "When you are paying all this extra money for food and gas and insurance and rent... that doesn't leave a lot of extra money coming in at the end of the month."

When asked if his decision to stop donating indicates he no longer supports Trump, Buckhalter was blunt: "Heck no."

Africans recruited to work in Russia say they were duped into building drones for use in Ukraine

By EMMA BURROWS and LORI HINNANT Associated Press

The social media ads promised the young African women a free plane ticket, money and a faraway adventure in Europe. Just complete a computer game and a 100-word Russian vocabulary test.

But instead of a work-study program in fields like hospitality and catering, some of them learned only after arriving on the steppes of Russia's Tatarstan region that they would be toiling in a factory to make weapons of war, assembling thousands of Iranian-designed attack drones to be launched into Ukraine.

In interviews with The Associated Press, some of the women complained of long hours under constant surveillance, of broken promises about wages and areas of study, and of working with caustic chemicals that left their skin pockmarked and itching.

To fill an urgent labor shortage in wartime Russia, the Kremlin has been recruiting women aged 18-22

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from places like Uganda, Rwanda, Kenya, South Sudan, Sierra Leone and Nigeria, as well as the South Asian country of Sri Lanka. The drive is expanding to elsewhere in Asia as well as Latin America.

That has put some of Moscow's key weapons production in the inexperienced hands of about 200 African women who are working alongside Russian vocational students as young as 16 in the plant in Tatarstan's Alabuga Special Economic Zone, about 1,000 kilometers (600 miles) east of Moscow, according to an AP investigation of the industrial complex.

"I don't really know how to make drones," said one African woman who had abandoned a job at home and took the Russian offer.

The AP analyzed satellite images of the complex and its internal documents, spoke to a half-dozen African women who ended up there, and tracked down hundreds of videos in the online recruiting program dubbed "Alabuga Start" to piece together life at the plant.

A hopeful journey from Africa leads to 'a trap'

The woman who agreed to work in Russia excitedly documented her journey, taking selfies at the airport and shooting video of her airline meal and of the in-flight map, focusing on the word "Europe" and pointing to it with her long, manicured nails.

When she arrived in Alabuga, however, she soon learned what she would be doing and realized it was "a trap."

"The company is all about making drones. Nothing else," said the woman, who assembled airframes. "I regret and I curse the day I started making all those things."

One possible clue about what was in store for the applicants was their vocabulary test that included words like "factory" and the verbs "to hook" and "to unhook."

The workers were under constant surveillance in their dorms and at work, the hours were long and the pay was less than she expected — details corroborated by three other women interviewed by AP, which is not identifying them by name or nationality out of concern for their safety.

Factory management apparently tries to discourage the African women from leaving, and although some reportedly have left or found work elsewhere in Russia, AP was unable to verify that independently.

A drone factory grows in Tatarstan

Russia and Iran signed a \$1.7 billion deal in 2022, after President Vladimir Putin invaded neighboring Ukraine, and Moscow began using Iranian imports of the unmanned aerial vehicles, or UAVs, in battle later that year.

The Alabuga Special Economic Zone was set up in 2006 to attract businesses and investment to Tatarstan. It expanded rapidly after the invasion and parts switched to military production, adding or renovating new buildings, according to satellite images.

Although some private companies still operate there, the plant is referred to as "Alabuga" in leaked documents that detail contracts between Russia and Iran.

The Shahed-136 drones were first shipped disassembled to Russia, but production has shifted to Alabuga and possibly another factory. Alabuga now is Russia's main plant for making the one-way, exploding drones, with plans to produce 6,000 of them a year by 2025, according to the leaked documents and the Washington-based Institute for Science and International Security.

That target is now ahead of schedule, with Alabuga building 4,500, said David Albright, a former U.N. weapons inspector who works at the institute.

Finding workers was a problem. With unemployment at record lows and many Russians already working in military industries, fighting in Ukraine or having fled abroad, plant officials turned to using vocational students and cheap foreign labor.

Alabuga is the only Russian production facility that recruits women from Africa, Asia and South America to make weapons according to experts and the AP investigation.

About 90% of the foreign women recruited via the Alabuga Start program work on making drones, particularly the parts "that don't require much skill," he said.

Documents leaked last year and verified by Albright and another drone expert detail the workforce growing from just under 900 people in 2023 to plans for over 2,600 in 2025. They show that foreign women

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largely assemble the drones, use chemicals and paint them.

In the first half of this year, 182 women were recruited, largely from Central and East African countries, according to a Facebook page promoting the Alabuga Start program. It also recruits in South America and Asia "to help ladies to start their career."

Officials held recruiting events in Uganda, and tried to recruit from its orphanages, according to messages on Alabuga's Telegram channel. Russian officials have also visited more than 26 embassies in Moscow to push the program.

The campaign gave no reasons why it doesn't seek older women or men, but some analysts suggest officials could believe young women are easier to control. One of the leaked documents shows the assembly lines are segregated and uses a derogatory term referring to the African workers.

The factory also draws workers from Alabuga Polytechnic, a nearby vocational boarding school for Russians age 16-18 and Central Asians age 18-22 that bills its graduates as experts in drone production. According to investigative outlets Protokol and Razvorot, some are as young as 15 and have complained of poor working conditions.

Surveillance, caustic chemicals — and a Ukrainian attack

The foreign workers travel by bus from their living quarters to the factory, passing multiple security checkpoints after a license plate scan, while other vehicles are stopped for more stringent checks, according to the woman who assembles drones.

They share dormitories and kitchens that are "guarded around the clock," social media posts say. Entry is controlled via facial recognition, and recruits are watched on surveillance cameras. Pets, alcohol and drugs are not allowed.

The foreigners receive local SIM cards for their phones upon arrival but are forbidden from bringing them into the factory, which is considered a sensitive military site.

One woman said she could only talk to an AP reporter with her manager's permission, another said her "messages are monitored," a third said workers are told not to talk to outsiders about their work, and a fourth said managers encouraged them to inform on co-workers.

The airframe worker told AP the recruits are taught how to assemble the drones and coat them with a caustic substance with the consistency of yogurt.

Many workers lack protective gear, she said, adding that the chemicals made her face feel like it was being pricked with tiny needles, and "small holes" appeared on her cheeks, making them itch severely.

"My God, I could scratch myself! I could never get tired of scratching myself," she said.

"A lot of girls are suffering," she added. A video shared with AP showed another woman wearing an Alabuga uniform with her face similarly affected.

Although AP could not determine what the chemicals were, drone expert Fabian Hinz of the International Institute for Strategic Studies confirmed that caustic substances are used in their manufacture.

In addition to dangers from chemicals, the complex itself was hit by a Ukrainian drone in April, injuring at least 12 people. A video it posted on social media showed a Kenyan woman calling the attackers "barbarians" who "wanted to intimidate us."

"They did not succeed," she said.

Workers 'maltreated like donkeys'

Although one woman said she loved working at Alabuga because she was well-paid and enjoyed meeting new people and experiencing a different culture, most interviewed by AP disagreed about the size of the compensation and suggested that life there did not meet their expectations.

The program initially promised recruits \$700 a month, but later social media posts put it at "over \$500."

The airframe assembly worker said the cost of their accommodation, airfare, medical care and Russian-language classes were deducted from her salary, and she struggled to pay for basics like bus fare with the remainder.

The African women are "maltreated like donkeys, being slaved," she said, indicating banking sanctions on Russia made it difficult to send money home. But another factory worker said she was able to send

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up to \$150 a month to her family.

Four of the women described long shifts of up to 12 hours, with haphazard days off. Still, two of these who said they worked in the kitchen added they were willing to tolerate the pay if they could support their families.

The wages apparently are affecting morale, according to plant documents, with managers urging that the foreign workers be replaced with Russian-speaking staff because "candidates are refusing the low salary."

Russian and Central Asian students at Alabuga Polytechnic are allowed visits home, social media posts suggest. Independent Russian media reported that these vocational students who want to quit the program have been told they must repay tuition costs.

AP contacted the Russian Foreign Ministry and the offices of Tatarstan Gov. Rustam Minnikhanov and Alabuga Special Economic Zone Director General Timur Shagivaleev for a response to the women's complaints but received no reply.

Human rights organizations contacted by AP said they were unaware of what was happening at the factory, although it sounded consistent with other actions by Russia. Human Rights Watch said Russia is actively recruiting foreigners from Africa and India to support its war in Ukraine by promising lucrative jobs without fully explaining the nature of the work.

Russia's actions "could potentially fulfill the criteria of trafficking if the recruitment is fraudulent and the purpose is exploitation," said Ravina Shamdasani, a spokesperson for the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights, noting that Moscow is a party to the U.N. Convention Against Transnational Organized Crime.

The AP contacted governments of 22 countries whose citizens Alabuga said it had recruited for the program. Most didn't answer or said they would look into it.

Betty Amongi, Uganda's Minister for Gender, Labour and Social Development, told AP that her ministry raised concerns with its embassy in Moscow about the Alabuga recruiting effort, particularly over the age of the women, because "female migrant workers are the most vulnerable category."

The ministry said it wanted to ensure the women "do not end up in exploitative employment," and needed to know who would be responsible for the welfare of the Ugandan women while in Russia. Alabuga's Facebook page said 46 Ugandan women were at the complex, although Amongi had said there were none.

How accurate are the drones?

Bolstered by the foreign recruits, Russia has vastly increased the number of drones it can fire at Ukraine.

Nearly 4,000 were launched at Ukraine from the start of the war in February 2022 through 2023, Albright's organization said. In the first seven months of this year, Russia launched nearly twice that.

Although the Alabuga plant's production target is ahead of schedule, there are questions about the quality of the drones and whether manufacturing problems due to the unskilled labor force are causing malfunctions. Some experts also point to Russia's switching to other materials from the original Iranian design as a sign of problems.

An AP analysis of about 2,000 Shahed attacks documented by Ukraine's military since July 29 shows that about 95% of the drones hit no discernible target. Instead, they fall into Ukraine's rivers and fields, stray into NATO-member Latvia and come down in Russia or ally Belarus.

Before July, about 14% of Shaheds hit their targets in Ukraine, according to data analyzed by Albright's team.

The large failure rate could be due to Ukraine's improved air defenses, although Albright said it also could be because of the low-skilled workforce in which "poor craftsmanship is seeping in," he said.

Another factor could be because Russia is using a Shahed variant that doesn't carry a warhead of 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of explosives. Moscow could be launching these dummy drones to overwhelm air defenses and force Ukraine to waste ammunition, allowing other UAVs to hit targets.

Tourism, paintball games and a pitch on TikTok

The Alabuga Start recruiting drive relies on a robust social media campaign of slickly edited videos with upbeat music that show African women visiting Tatarstan's cultural sites or playing sports.

The videos show them working — smiling while cleaning floors, wearing hard hats while directing cranes,

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and donning protective equipment to apply paint or chemicals.

One video depicts the Polytechnic school students in team-building exercises such as paintball matches, even showing the losing side — labeled as “fascists” — digging trenches or being shot with the recreational weapons at close range.

“We are taught patriotism. This unites us. We are ready to repel any provocation,” one student says.

The videos on Alabuga’s social media pages don’t mention the plant’s role at the heart of Russian drone production, but the Special Economic Zone is more open with Russian media.

Konstantin Spiridonov, deputy director of a company that made drones for civilian use before the war, gave a video tour of an Alabuga assembly line in March to a Russian blogger. Pointing out young African women, he did not explicitly link the drones to the war but noted their production is now “very relevant” for Russia.

Alabuga Start’s social media pages are filled with comments from Africans begging for work and saying they applied but have yet to receive an answer.

The program was promoted by education ministries in Uganda and Ethiopia, as well as in African media that portrays it as a way to make money and learn new skills.

Initially advertised as a work-study program, Alabuga Start in recent months is more direct about what it offers foreigners, insisting on newer posts that “is NOT an educational programme,” although one of them still shows young women in plaid school uniforms.

When Sierra Leone Ambassador Mohamed Yongawo visited in May and met with five participants from his country, he appeared to believe it was a study program.

“It would be great if we had 30 students from Sierra Leone studying at Alabuga,” he said afterward.

Last month, the Alabuga Start social media site said it was “excited to announce that our audience has grown significantly!”

That could be due to its hiring of influencers, including Bassie, a South African with almost 800,000 TikTok and Instagram followers. She did not respond to an AP request for comment.

The program, she said, was an easy way to make money, encouraging followers to share her post with job-seeking friends so they could contact Alabuga.

“Where they lack in labor,” she said, “that’s where you come in.”

US inflation likely cooled again last month in latest sign of a healthy economy

By CHRISTOPHER RUGABER AP Economics Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — U.S. inflation last month likely reached its lowest point since February 2021, clearing the way for another Federal Reserve rate cut and adding to the stream of encouraging economic data that has emerged in the final weeks of the presidential campaign.

The consumer price index is expected to have risen just 2.3% in September from 12 months earlier, down from the 2.5% year-over-year increase in August, according to economists surveyed by FactSet, a data provider. A reading that low, likely reflecting lower gas prices and only a slight rise in food costs, would barely exceed the Fed’s 2% inflation target. A little over two years ago, inflation had reached a peak of 9.1%.

Measured month over month, consumer prices are thought to have risen a scant 0.1% from August to September, down from a 0.2% increase the previous month.

The improving inflation data follows a mostly healthy jobs report released last week, which showed that hiring accelerated in September and that the unemployment rate dropped from 4.2% to 4.1%. The government has also reported that the economy expanded at a solid 3% annual rate in the April-June quarter. And growth likely continued at roughly that pace in the just-completed July-September quarter.

Cooling inflation, steady hiring and solid growth could erode former President Donald Trump’s advantage on the economy in the presidential campaign as measured by public opinion polls. In some surveys, Vice President Kamala Harris has pulled even with Trump on the issue of who would best handle the economy,

after Trump had decisively led President Joe Biden on the issue.

At the same time, most voters still give the economy relatively poor marks, mostly because of the cumulative rise in prices over the past three years.

For the Fed, last week's much-stronger-than-expected jobs report fueled some concern that the economy might not be cooling enough to slow inflation sufficiently. The central bank reduced its key rate by an out-sized half-point last month, its first rate cut of any size in four years. The Fed's policymakers also signaled that they envisioned two additional quarter-point rate cuts in November and December.

In remarks this week, a slew of Fed officials have said they're still willing to keep cutting their key rate, but at a deliberate pace, a sign any further half-point cuts are unlikely.

The Fed "should not rush to reduce" its benchmark rate "but rather should proceed gradually," Lorie Logan president of the Federal Reserve's Dallas branch, said in a speech Wednesday.

Inflation in the United States and many countries in Europe and Latin America surged in the economic recovery from the pandemic, as COVID closed factories and clogged supply chains. Russia's invasion of Ukraine worsened energy and food shortages, pushing inflation higher. It peaked at 9.1% in the U.S. in June 2022.

Excluding volatile food and energy costs, so-called core prices likely rose 0.3% from August to September, according to FactSet, and are probably 3.2% above their level a year earlier. Though such a figure would be faster than is consistent with the Fed's 2% target, economists expect core inflation to cool a bit by year's end as rental and housing prices grow more slowly.

Economists at Goldman Sachs, for example, project that core inflation will drop to 3% by December 2024. Few analysts expect inflation to surge again unless conflicts in the Middle East worsen dramatically.

Though higher prices have soured many Americans on the economy, wages and incomes are now rising faster than costs and should make it easier for households to adapt. Last month, the Census Bureau reported that inflation-adjusted median household incomes — the level at which half of households are above and half below — rose 4% in 2023, enough to return incomes back to their pre-pandemic peak.

In response to higher food prices, many consumers have shifted their spending from name brands to private labels or have started shopping more at discount stores. Those changes have put more pressure on packaged foods companies, for example, to slow their price hikes.

This week, PepsiCo reported that its sales volumes fell after it imposed steep price increases on its drinks and snacks.

"The consumer is reassessing patterns," Ramon Laguarta, CEO of PepsiCo, said Tuesday.

Trump lashes out at Harris and 'The View' co-hosts, as Hurricane Milton makes landfall

By MICHELLE L. PRICE, JILL COLVIN and WILL WEISSERT Associated Press

SCRANTON, Pa. (AP) — Former President Donald Trump hurled insults at his rival, Vice President Kamala Harris, and other women Wednesday — saying he had no interest in stopping his attacks even if they turn off female voters — as Hurricane Milton made landfall, lashing Florida with rain, tornadoes and tropical-storm-force winds.

"I don't want to be nice," Trump said at his first of two rallies of the day in the pivotal battleground state of Pennsylvania. "You know, somebody said, 'You should be nicer. Women won't like it.' I said, 'I don't care.'"

He later refuted the idea that his rhetoric was a problem, even as polls show Trump is viewed less favorably by women than by men. "The women want to see our country come back," he said. "They don't care."

Trump was campaigning even as the storm threatened to overshadow the presidential race with fears that it would cause catastrophic damage in Tampa and other parts of Florida's Gulf Coast. Harris flew to Nevada for a Western campaign swing, but first attended a briefing on the storm and the federal response with President Joe Biden at the White House.

Speaking in Scranton, Pennsylvania, Trump lobbed personal insults at Harris — calling her "grossly incompetent" and "totally ill-equipped to do the job of being President of the United States" — and went

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after one of the hosts of ABC's "The View," which Harris appeared on Tuesday.

He called Sunny Hostin, who is Black and Latina, "dumber than Kamala."

"That is one dumb woman. Sorry. I'm sorry, women, she's a dummy," he said of Hostin, who had asked Harris if there was anything she would have done differently than Biden over the last four years. Harris replied: "Not a thing comes to mind."

Later, in Reading, he turned on another host of the program, calling Whoopi Goldberg, who is also Black, "demented" and saying she had a "foul mouth."

"She was so filthy dirty, disgusting," he said. "She was so dirty. Every word was filthy, dirty. What a loser she is."

Trump and his campaign have seized on Harris' response to the Biden question as it tries to paint her as nothing more than a continuation of Biden's unpopular presidency.

In Reading, he called her answer "disqualifying" and listed a series of tragedies that happened on the Biden administration's watch, including Hamas' Oct. 7 attack on Israel and Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

"People are realizing she's a dumb person. And we can't have another dumb president," he railed.

He also went after the Biden administration for its response to Hurricane Helene as Milton made landfall in Florida.

"This administration has not done a proper job at all. Terrible, terrible," he told the crowd. "We just pray for everybody," he went on. "We hope that God will keep them safe."

Harris' campaign, meanwhile, mocked Trump for the unusual number of empty seats in the Reading arena — a sore spot for the crowd-obsessed Trump.

At both stops, he urged the crowd to vote early, and said that if he wins the state, "we win the whole thing."

"When the polls open tomorrow, don't wait. Go immediately. Go as soon as you can," he said in Scranton. Pennsylvanians can fill out mail ballots at their county elections offices but the state does not have the type of early voting that exists in other places. Each county determines when its mail ballots are available.

Milton scrambles campaigns

Hurricane Milton has already disrupted the campaign, just two weeks after Hurricane Helene devastated large swaths of the Southeast. Trump, who moved to Florida after he left the White House, postponed a virtual event Tuesday night focused on health care and postponed a Univision town hall that was supposed to happen in Miami.

Harris has her own Univision town hall planned for Thursday in Las Vegas before returning to Arizona, making her second visit to both states in less than two weeks.

Trump, at his rally in Scranton — Biden's birthplace — said he was praying for those in the hurricane's path and wanted to "send our love to everyone in Florida. They're going through a big one tonight."

"We're praying for them and asking God to keep them all safe, all those people. I've never seen a hurricane like that," he went on. "So often, you know, they talk about it and they talk talk talk because they want you to watch. This is the real deal. This is a bad one."

Campaigning in Arizona, where early voting kicked off Wednesday, Democratic vice presidential nominee Tim Walz called on the country to come together to support those who will be impacted.

"Those are Americans. Those are our neighbors. Those are our family members. Those are our friends," he said, calling unity across party lines in the face of natural disasters "critical."

"It's not about politics. It's about basic human decency," Walz said. "It's about leadership and character."

Milton is approaching just days after Hurricane Helene killed more than 220 people in six Southeastern states and left behind a swath of destruction that federal, state and local authorities are trying to alleviate even as they brace for the new storm.

'Reckless' hurricane misinformation

Both Biden, who postponed a trip to Germany and Angola due to the storm, and Harris have denounced the misinformation and disinformation surrounding the federal response to Helene, including the false assertion that there is a cap on assistance funding families can receive.

They also denounced the false notion that funding is being diverted away from Republican-heavy areas and to people in the country illegally, as well as the claim that federal authorities offering aid could eventually steal property from its owners. Both singled out Trump as driving much of the falsehoods.

"I want to be clear about something. Over the last few weeks, there's been a reckless, irresponsible and relentless promotion of disinformation and outright lies that are disturbing people," Biden said during the Milton briefing. "It's undermining confidence in the incredible rescue and recovery work that has already been taken and will continue to be taken. And it's harmful to those who need help the most."

"What a ridiculous thing to say," Biden said of the false rumors that funding is being diverted to migrants in the country illegally. Biden also referenced Georgia Republican Rep. Marjorie Taylor Greene's false suggestion that "I control the weather," he said, calling her comments like something "out of a comic book." "It's beyond ridiculous," Biden said. "It's got to stop."

Harris said that once the hurricane passes, "We will be there to help folks rebuild."

Addressing Florida residents, Harris added: "Many of you, I know are tough, and you've ridden out these hurricanes before. This one is going to be different."

Outside the arena in Reading before Trump spoke, financial consultant Zimri Rivera said he didn't have an issue with candidates holding events as the hurricane approached Florida.

"I feel like both politicians are politicking," said Rivera, 30. "I do hope that the government in general does respond and provides relief to those affected."

Trump has faced numerous other distractions to his campaign, including the criminal cases against him, said Joey Inmon, 63, of Reading.

"As far as the hurricane goes, and managing that — that's not Trump's job," Inmon said.

Washington state woman calls 911 after being hounded by up to 100 raccoons

By BECKY BOHRER Associated Press

Sheriff's deputies in Washington's Kitsap County frequently get calls about animals — loose livestock, problem dogs. But the 911 call they received recently from a woman being hounded by dozens of raccoons swarming her home near Poulsbo stood out.

The woman reported having had to flee her property after 50 to 100 raccoons descended upon it and were acting aggressively, said Kevin McCarty, a spokesperson for the sheriff's office. She told deputies she started feeding a family of raccoons decades ago and it was fine until about six weeks earlier, when the number showing up went from a handful to around 100.

"She said those raccoons were becoming increasingly more aggressive, demanding food, that they would hound her day and night — scratching at the outside of her home, at the door. If she pulled up her car, they would surround the car, scratch at the car, surround her if she went from her front door to her car or went outside at all," McCarty said. "They saw this as a food source now, so they kept coming back to it and they kept expecting food."

It was not clear what caused their numbers to balloon suddenly. Both the sheriff's office and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife determined no laws were broken, McCarty said.

"This is a nuisance problem kind of of her own making that she has to deal with," he said. Video from



This image made from a video provided by the Kitsap County Sheriff's Office shows a large group of raccoons on a woman's property in Poulsbo, Wash. (Kitsap County Sheriff's Office via AP)

the sheriff's office shows raccoons milling around trees, and deputies who responded to the call observed 50 to 100 of them, he added.

Bridget Mire, a spokesperson with the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, said by email that under state law it is illegal to feed large carnivores, such as bears or cougars. While municipalities or counties may have local statutes forbidding the feeding of other wildlife, it is currently not against state law to do so, she said.

Regardless, the agency discourages people from feeding wildlife. Raccoons, for example, can carry diseases, and food can also attract predators such as coyotes and bears, according to Mire.

Mire said an agency wildlife conflict specialist has met with the woman, who has stopped feeding the critters.

"The raccoons appear to have started dispersing now that they are no longer being fed, and we are glad for a positive outcome to this case," Mire wrote.

Poulsbo is about a 90-minute car and ferry ride northwest of Seattle.

Polluted waste from Florida's fertilizer industry is in the path of Milton's fury

By MICHAEL BIESECKER and JASON DEAREN Associated Press

As Hurricane Milton pummeled Florida's west coast with powerful winds and flooding rain, environmentalists worry it could scatter the polluted leftovers of the state's phosphate fertilizer mining industry and other hazardous waste across the peninsula and into vulnerable waterways.

More than 1 billion tons of slightly radioactive phosphogypsum waste is stored in "stacks" that resemble enormous ponds at risk for leaks during major storms. Florida has 25 such stacks, most concentrated around enormous phosphate mines and fertilizer processing plants in the central part of the state, and environmentalists say nearly all of them are in Milton's projected path.

"Placing vulnerable sites so close on major waterways that are at risk of damage from storms is a recipe for disaster," said Ragan Whitlock, a staff attorney at the environmental group Center for Biological Diversity. "These are ticking time bombs."

Phosphogypsum, a solid waste byproduct from processing phosphate ore to make chemical fertilizer, contains radium, which decays to form radon gas. Both radium and radon are radioactive and can cause cancer. Phosphogypsum may also contain toxic heavy metals and other carcinogens, such as arsenic, cadmium, chromium, lead, mercury and nickel.

That waste is even more troublesome because there is no easy way to dispose of it, leaving it to pile up and become an ever-growing target for such storms as the monster Milton, which made landfall in central Florida late Wednesday as a Category 3 storm, with sustained winds of about 120 mph (193 kph), a towering storm surge and 18 inches (46 centimeters) of rain.

A lesser storm, Hurricane Frances, which hit the state's eastern coast as a Category 2 and churned across central Florida in 2004, sent 65 million gallons of acidic wastewater from phosphogypsum stacks into nearby waterways, killing thousands of fish and other marine life.

Of particular concern from Milton is the Piney Point wastewater reservoir, which sits on the shore of Tampa Bay and has had structural issues that have caused regular leaks over the years.

A March 2021 leak resulted in the release of an estimated 215 million gallons of polluted water into the bay and caused massive fish kills. Another leak in August 2022 unleashed another 4.5 million gallons of wastewater. Compounding the problem is the bankruptcy filing of the site's former owner, HRC Holdings, leaving it to be managed by a court-appointed receiver.

The nation's largest phosphate producer, The Mosaic Company, owns two stacks at its Riverview facility that sit on the shore of Tampa Bay, as well as several farther inland. In 2016 a sinkhole opened beneath the company's New Wales Gypstack, sending millions of gallons of contaminated sludge into the state's main drinking water aquifer. The company said tests showed there were no offsite impacts from the incident, but the site is at risk of further damage from a storm as powerful as Milton.

Asked about its preparations for the coming storm, Mosaic pointed to a statement on its website: "Preparations for hurricane season include reviewing lessons learned from the previous year, updating our preparedness and response plans ... and completing inspections to ensure all test pumps, generators and other equipment needed in the event of severe weather are onsite and in proper working order."

Florida and North Carolina are responsible for mining 80% of the U.S. supply of phosphorous, which is important not only to agriculture but to munitions production.

"At this time we are preparing locally for the storm, both professionally and personally," Mosaic spokesperson Ashleigh Gallant said. "If there are impacts, we will release those publicly after the storm."

Beyond the mine stacks, the Tampa Bay area is also home to old toxic waste sites that are considered among the worst in the nation. A former pesticide production site, the Stauffer Chemical Co., has polluted the Anclote River, groundwater and soil. Today it is an EPA Superfund site undergoing years of cleanup.

The EPA posted on the website that it is "ensuring that this site is secured for potential impacts from Hurricane Milton."

The Florida Department of Environmental Protection said Tuesday it is preparing all available resources critical to the facilities it regulates, as well as securing state parks and aquatic preserves to minimize storm effects.

Nobel Prize in chemistry honors 3 scientists who used AI to design proteins — life's building blocks

By CHRISTINA LARSON, KELVIN CHAN and MANUEL VALDES Associated Press

LONDON (AP) — Three scientists who discovered powerful techniques to decode and even design novel proteins — the building blocks of life — were awarded the Nobel Prize in chemistry Wednesday. Their work used advanced technologies, including artificial intelligence, and holds the potential to transform how new drugs and other materials are made.

The prize was awarded to David Baker, a biochemist at the University of Washington in Seattle, and to Demis Hassabis and John Jumper, computer scientists at Google DeepMind, a British-American artificial intelligence research laboratory based in London.

Heiner Linke, chair of the Nobel Committee for Chemistry, said the award honored research that unraveled "a grand challenge in chemistry, and in particular in biochemistry, for decades."

"It's that breakthrough that gets awarded today," he said.

What is the 2024 Nobel Prize in Chemistry for?

Proteins are complex molecules with thousands of atoms that twist, turn, loop and spiral in a countless array of shapes that determine their biological function. For decades, scientists have dreamed of being able to efficiently design and build new proteins.

Baker, 62, whose work has received funding from the National Institutes of Health since the 1990s, created a computer program called Rosetta that helped analyze information about existing proteins in comprehensive databases to build new proteins that don't exist in nature.

"It seems that you can almost construct any type of protein now with this technology," said Johan Åqvist of the Nobel committee.

Hassabis, 48, and Jumper, 39, created an artificial intelligence model that has predicted the structure of virtually all the 200 million proteins that researchers have ever identified.

The duo "managed to crack the code. With skillful use of artificial intelligence, they made it possible to predict the complex structure of essentially any known protein in nature," Linke said.

Why does this work matter?

The ability to custom design new proteins — and better understand existing proteins — could enable researchers to create new kinds of medicines and vaccines.

It could also allow scientists to design new enzymes to break down plastics or other waste materials that would neutralize pollution, Baker told a news conference, or even come up with entirely new material for semi conductors.

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"I think there's fantastic prospects for making better medicines — medicines that are smarter, that only work in the right time and place in the body," Baker told The Associated Press.

One example is a potential nasal spray that could slow or stop the rapid spread of specific viruses, such as COVID-19, he said. Another is a medicine to disrupt the cascade of symptoms known as cytokine storm.

"That was always the holy grail. If you could figure out how protein sequences folded into their particular structures, then it might be possible to design protein sequences to fold into previously never seen structures that might be useful for us," said Jon Lorsch, a director at the NIH.

How did the winners react?

Baker told the AP he found out he won the Nobel during the early hours of the morning alongside his wife, who immediately started screaming.

"So it was a little deafening, too," he said.

Hassabis said he was just having a "normal morning" at home when he eventually got the call.

The Nobel committee didn't initially have his number and first managed to get hold of his wife, but she hung up on them a few times, he told an online news briefing.

"They kept persisting and then I think she realized it was a Swedish number and then they asked for my number," he said.

"It's so incredible. It's so unreal at this moment," said Jumper, a researcher and director at Google DeepMind. "And it's wonderful."

What was the role of AI?

One of Britain's leading tech figures, Hassabis co-founded the AI research lab DeepMind in 2010, which was acquired by Google in 2014. Among its past breakthroughs was developing an AI system that mastered the Chinese game Go and defeated the game's human world champion.

In the past researchers labored for months or years to decode the structure of a single complex protein.

But the AI model created by the DeepMind researchers, called AlphaFold, "can determine the structure of a protein pretty accurately within a few seconds or minutes," Hassabis told the AP in an interview, adding that this saves researchers "years of potentially painstaking experimental work."

The two research groups learned from each other's work.

Baker said Hassabis and Jumper's artificial intelligence work gave his team a huge boost.

"The breakthroughs made by Demis and John on protein structure prediction really highlighted to us the power that AI could have," said Baker. "And that led us to apply these AI methods to protein design."

Science has sped up, said Jumper. "It is a key demonstration that AI will make science faster"

It's the second Nobel prize this year awarded to someone with links to artificial intelligence research at Google.

Nobel physics prize winner Geoffrey Hinton, 76, often called the "godfather of AI," also worked at the California-based tech company until quitting so he could speak more openly about the potential downsides of AI.

"I'm hoping AI will lead to tremendous benefits," Hinton told a news conference Tuesday. "I'm convinced that it will do that in health care."

"My worry is that it may also lead to bad things. And in particular, when we get things more intelligent than ourselves, no one really knows whether we're going to be able to control them."

More about the Nobels

Wednesday's chemistry prize winners represent a younger generation taking forward the work of the AI pioneers honored for physics, said Michael Kearns, a computer scientist at the University of Pennsylvania.

They are making AI models "scalable and practical and applying it to very important scientific problems."

Baker gets half of the 11 million Swedish Kronor (\$1 million) prize money, while Hassabis and Jumper share the other half.

The Nobel announcements opened Monday with medical researchers Victor Ambros and Gary Ruvkun winning the medicine prize. Hinton and fellow AI pioneer John Hopfield, 91, won the physics prize.

The awards continue with the literature prize Thursday, the Nobel Peace Prize Friday and the economics award on Oct. 14.

The prize money comes from a bequest by the award's creator, Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel. The laureates are invited to receive their awards at ceremonies on Dec. 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death.

Alaska's Fat Bear Contest winner finishes ahead of the bear that killed her cub

By MARK THIESSEN Associated Press

ANCHORAGE, Alaska (AP) — In a storyline better befitting a melodrama than a popularity vote, Grazer won her second Fat Bear Contest Tuesday by defeating the male behemoth that killed her cub this summer.

Grazer beat Chunk by more than 40,000 votes cast by fans watching live cameras at explore.org of Alaska's Katmai National Park and Preserve.

Fans cast votes online for their favorite chunky competitor in tournament-style brackets that begins with 12 bears. They picked the bear they believe best exemplifies winter preparedness by the fat they have accumulated over the summer feeding on the sockeye salmon that return to Brooks River.

The bears often perch at the top of a falls in the river, grabbing leaping salmon out of the air as the fish attempt to hurdle the waterfall to spawn upstream.

This is where Grazer's cub died after it slipped over the waterfall and was killed by Chunk, perhaps the most dominant brown bear on the river. Grazer fought Chunk in an effort to save the cub, but it later died. The death was captured on the live cameras.

Another death was captured live by the cameras just last week, delaying the release of the tournament bracket for a day. Bear 402, a female bear that was supposed to be a contestant in this year's contest, was killed by a male brown bear the day the brackets were expected to be released.

Grazer has conspicuously blond ears and a long, straight muzzle, according to her bio page at explore.org. "She is a formidable presence on Brooks River. Her fearlessness and strength have earned her respect, with most bears avoiding confrontation," it says.

Her other surviving cub from her third litter placed second two weeks ago in the Fat Bear Junior contest.

Chunk is perhaps the largest bear on the river, with narrow-set eyes, dark brown fur and a distinctive scar across his muzzle, his bio says. He used his size to rise to the top of the river hierarchy this year and secured the prime fishing spots.

"Chunk's confidence and aggression paid off, allowing him to feast on 42 salmon in 10 hours," it says. "His physical success is evident in his bulky form."

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.

The annual contest, which drew more than 1.3 million votes last year, is a way to celebrate 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.

In addition to the live cameras, Katmai has become a bucket list tourist destination and viewing stands have been built on the river to allow people to watch the brown bears fish for salmon.

Here's what has made Hurricane Milton so fierce and unusual

By SETH BORENSTEIN AP Science Writer

With its mighty strength and its dangerous path, Hurricane Milton powered into a very rare threat flirting with experts' worst fears.

Warm water fueled amazingly rapid intensification that took Milton from a minimal hurricane to a massive Category 5 in less than 10 hours. It weakened, but quickly bounced back, and when its winds briefly reached 180 mph, its barometric pressure, a key measurement for a storm's overall strength, was among the lowest recorded in the Gulf of Mexico this late in the year.

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At its most fierce, Milton almost maxed out its potential intensity given the weather factors surrounding it. "Everything that you would want if you're looking for a storm to go absolutely berserk is what Milton had," Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said.

That's not all. Milton's eastward path through the Gulf is so infrequent the most recent comparable storm was in 1848. Tampa — the most populous metro area in its general path — hasn't had a direct hit from a major storm in more than 100 years, making this week the worst-case scenario for many experts.

The track "is not unprecedented but it's quite rare," said University of Miami hurricane researcher Brian McNoldy. "And of those that did that track, this is by far the most intense."

"It is unusual in a number of ways," Princeton University climate scientist and hurricane expert Gabriel Vecchi said. "This storm is probably going to be very unlike any storm anyone has experienced on the west coast of Florida."

But it might be getting less rare, and the U.S. is already on a particularly unlucky streak. When Helene plowed through Florida less than two weeks ago, it was the seventh Category 4 or stronger storm to make landfall in the continental U.S. in eight years. That's more than triple the average annual rate of such monster landfalls in the U.S. since 1950, according to a data analysis by The Associated Press.

If Milton somehow hits as a Category 4 storm at landfall it will be only the second time the nation was struck twice in a year by hurricanes so powerful. This is after an unusual 12-year period when no Category 4 or higher storms hit the mainland between 2005 and 2016.

University of Albany atmospheric scientist and hurricane expert Kristen Corbosiero said Milton's threat now, compared to that 12-year quiet period, is probably a combination of luck — that those previous big storms didn't make landfall — and climate change that is steering big storms differently than before.

"With more and stronger storms, the chances of a major hurricane hitting the U.S. increase," she said.

So much of what makes Milton nasty is rooted in the warmer water of its birth and in human-caused climate change, Vecchi, Corbosiero and others said.

Milton formed in the Bay of Campeche in the southwestern Gulf of Mexico. For awhile, forecasters didn't give the unstable air mass much of a chance to develop into a tropical storm, let alone a monster hurricane. But once it defied the odds, it took off because of warm water and it managed to avoid high-level cross winds that often decapitate storms, especially in autumn. As Milton neared Florida it hit those winds, called shear, which ate away at its strength, as meteorologists had forecasted.

Warm water fuels hurricanes. It's crucial that the surface water be at least 79 degrees (26 degrees Celsius) and it helps incredibly when there's deep warm water.

The water at Milton's birth and along its path was around 87 degrees (30.5 degrees Celsius). That's almost 2 degrees (1 degree Celsius) warmer than normal and near record levels, both on the surface and deep, McNoldy said.

"Part of the reason it was so warm is because of global warming," Vecchi said, though he added that last year's El Nino — a natural warming of ocean waters that influences weather worldwide — and other natural factors played a role. "Now the storm has a lot more energy to draw on."

That water became an all-you-can eat buffet for Milton.

Much like an ice skater spinning with her arms close in rather than outstretched, Milton's small size and pinhole eye — which became as small as 4 miles across — also made it easier to supercharge.

And then there's the track. Corbosiero couldn't think of a similar track for such a powerful storm, especially in October when there are fewer strong storms in the Gulf and the nastiest storms are more in the Caribbean.

Klotzbach found one in 1848, before good records were kept, unearthing a storm other experts weren't quite familiar with.

Usually storms in the Gulf of Mexico start in the east and go west or just go north, but Milton is heading east-northeast, Vecchi said. That's because of a weather system in Canada and the U.S. East Coast that is pushing the westerly winds that are common in mid-latitudes down to where Milton is, where autumn wind from the west is less common.

With water piling up with storm surge in this "very, very rare direction," Corbosiero said Milton "has the

potential to be a worst-case scenario" if it directly hits Tampa, where the last major hurricane direct hit was in 1921.

"It's extraordinarily bad," McNoldy said.

What to know about Israel's ground invasion in southern Lebanon

By MELANIE LIDMAN and KAREEM CHEHAYEB Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's ground invasion in Lebanon stretched into its second week, as the Hezbollah militant group fired hundreds of rockets deep into Israel — with no end in sight to the escalating conflict.

More than 1,400 people have been killed in Lebanon - mostly in airstrikes - and over a million displaced since the fighting intensified in mid-September. At least 15 Israeli soldiers and two civilians have been killed since the ground operation began, and more than 60,000 people have been displaced from towns along the border for more than a year.

Hezbollah began firing rockets into Israel on Oct. 8, 2023, a day after Hamas, the Palestinian militant group, attacked southern Israel, which sparked the war in Gaza. Israel and Hezbollah have exchanged fire almost every day since, coming close to a full-fledged war on several occasions but stepping back from the brink until this month.

Here's what to know about the current ground incursion in southern Lebanon:

What is the aim of Israeli military's ground invasion?

The Israeli military began what they called a "limited, localized and targeted ground raids" in southern Lebanon on Oct. 1. The same day, the military said that it had carried out dozens of secretive cross-border operations to destroy Hezbollah infrastructure over the past year. The aim, Israel says, is to allow its displaced residents to return home.

A military official said that thousands of Israeli troops are currently operating along the roughly 100-kilometer-long (62-mile) border, clearing the area just along the border to try to remove the launch pads where Hezbollah fires rocket-propelled grenades and anti-tank missiles into Israeli towns, as well as infrastructure they say would allow for an Oct. 7-style invasion of Israel.

The official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss the military's strategy, said the troops haven't ventured deep inside Lebanon so far, and have conducted operations from distances of a few hundred meters (yards) up to 2 to 3 kilometers (1.5 to 2 miles) into Lebanese territory.

The Israeli military has shared videos of what it says are underground tunnels chiseled into rock used by Hezbollah. The tunnels are used to store weapons and stage attacks. One tunnel stretched from Lebanon into Israeli territory, according to the military.

The goal is not to destroy Hezbollah, and the army is aware that this will not remove the threat of longer-range rockets and missiles, the official said.

Elijah Magnier, a Brussels-based military and counterterrorism analyst, said Israeli forces haven't seized any ground positions yet.

"They need to go in, harass, test and come out," Magnier said. In order to hold ground positions, Israel would need tanks to come in and take high critical ground overlooking territory, he said. He estimates it would require clearing some 10 kilometers of Hezbollah presence, which is still a long way off.

It is not clear how long the operation will last or how long Israel will maintain a presence in these towns. The official said the hope is that this can lead to a diplomatic arrangement pushing Hezbollah away from the border. But the plans could change. A previous Israeli invasion of Lebanon in 1982, initially intended to push back Palestinian militants, turned into an 18-year occupation.

What is Hezbollah's strategy?

Hezbollah officials, including assassinated leader Hassan Nasrallah, have conceded that the Israeli military has the superior air force and intelligence. But Hezbollah has the advantage in direct confrontations on Lebanese turf.

Hezbollah forces have better equipment and training compared to Hamas, which Israel has been battling for more than a year in Gaza. Hezbollah forces gained experience in wars in Syria and Iraq. Lebanon's

terrain is also more rugged and challenging than the Palestinian enclave, which is mostly flat and sandy.

Hezbollah's strategy, led by its elite Radwan Forces, has been drawing in and ambushing incoming Israeli troops, detonating explosive devices or firing rockets at them, and firing artillery and rockets at Israeli border towns. Although Hezbollah has lost many of its top officials and commanders in recent weeks, militants have continued to fire rockets deeper into Israel, including heavy barrages on the city of Haifa.

Former Lebanese Army General Hassan Jouni said that he assessed Israel is still conducting reconnaissance ahead of its main attack, but that it had already suffered heavy losses in the smaller operations. Jouni said Hezbollah had dug many tunnels in the south and were well equipped with weapons caches and ammunition.

"The land always works in the favor of those who own it," he said.

How does this compare to the 2006 war between Israel and Hezbollah?

Israel and Hezbollah last went to war in 2006, a 34-day conflict that ended with the United Nations Resolution 1701, which was supposed to push Hezbollah further north and keep the border region exclusively under the control of the Lebanese army and UN peacekeepers.

Israeli leaders say they want Lebanon to implement the resolution. Hezbollah says Israel hasn't held up its part of the treaty and will stop firing rockets when there is a ceasefire in the Gaza Strip.

Israel's searing air campaign in southern Lebanon and Beirut in recent weeks is similar to the 2006 war, though this time, better intelligence has enabled Israel to kill several of Hezbollah's top leadership.

"The Air Force is better and is using all kinds of methods to penetrate deeper into the ground, like dropping bomb after bomb after bomb," said Yoel Guzansky, a senior researcher at the Institute for National Security Studies in Tel Aviv. Israel killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah in September by dropping more than 80 bombs on an apartment complex built over an underground compound in quick succession.

In the 2006 war, Israel sent ground troops into Lebanon after 10 days of airstrikes and withdrew them about four weeks later, just after the cease-fire went into effect. Troops went all the way to the Litani River, about 30 kilometers (18.5 miles) north of the border, but suffered heavy losses.

Could there be a diplomatic solution?

Hezbollah's acting leader signaled Tuesday that the group is open to a cease-fire. Guzansky believes Israeli troops will stay on the ground in southern Lebanon until there is an internationally enforced diplomatic solution that's stronger than the current UN peacekeeping force. If Israeli troops retreat, he said, they risk the same situation as 2006, where Hezbollah simply rearmed and resumed operations.

But former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who was Israel's leader during the 2006 war, said that war served as a lesson that immediate diplomacy, rather than military force, is the only way to keep the border quiet.

"Why not try and make a deal now rather than to fight for half a year?" he asked in an interview with The Associated Press.. "You lose how many soldiers, kill how many innocent people? And then in the end we'll make a deal which may have been made in advance."

Israeli defense minister warns an attack on Iran would be 'lethal' and 'surprising'

By TIA GOLDENBERG, SAMY MAGDY and WAFAA SHURAFU Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's defense minister warned on Wednesday that his country's retaliation for a recent Iranian missile attack will be "lethal" and "surprising," while the Israeli military pushed ahead with a large-scale operation in northern Gaza and a ground offensive in Lebanon against Hezbollah militants.

On the diplomatic front, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and President Joe Biden held their first call in seven weeks, with a White House press secretary saying the call included discussions on Israel's deliberations over how it will respond to Iran's attack.

The continuing cycle of destruction and death in Gaza, unleashed by Hamas' Oct. 7, 2023, attack on southern Israel, comes as Israel expands a weeklong ground offensive against Hezbollah in Lebanon and considers a major retaliatory strike on Iran following Iran's Oct. 1 missile barrage.

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"Our strike will be lethal, precise and above all, surprising. They won't understand what happened and how. They will see the results," Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said during a speech to troops. "Whoever strikes us will be harmed and pay a price."

Iran fired dozens of missiles at Israel on Oct. 1 which the United States helped fend off. Biden has said he would not support a retaliatory strike on sites related to Tehran's nuclear program.

On Wednesday, Hezbollah claimed a rocket attack that killed two people in the northern Israeli town of Kiryat Shmona. The town's acting mayor, Ofir Yehezkeili, said the two killed were a couple walking their dogs.

Dozens killed in Gaza and survivors fear displacement

In northern Gaza, there was heavy fighting in Jabaliya, an urban refugee camp dating back to the 1948 war surrounding Israel's creation, where Israeli forces have carried out several major operations over the course of the war and then returned as militants regroup. The entire north, including Gaza City, has suffered heavy destruction and has been largely isolated by Israeli forces since late last year.

In Gaza, Jabaliya residents said thousands of people have been trapped in their homes since the operation began Sunday, as Israeli jets and drones buzz overhead and troops battle militants in the streets.

"It's like hell. We can't get out," said Mohamed Awda, who lives with his parents and six siblings. He said there were three bodies in the street outside his home that could not be retrieved because of the fighting.

"The quadcopters are everywhere, and they fire at anyone. You can't even open the window," he told The Associated Press by phone, speaking over the sound of explosions.

Gaza's Health Ministry said it recovered 40 bodies from Jabaliya from Sunday until Tuesday, and another 14 from communities farther north. There are likely more bodies under rubble and in areas that can't be accessed, it said.

Jabaliya residents fear Israel aims to depopulate the north and turn it into a closed military zone or a Jewish settlement. Israel has blocked all roads except for the main highway leading south from Jabaliya, according to residents.

"People here say clearly that they will die here in northern Gaza and won't go to southern Gaza," Ahmed Qamar, who lives in Jabaliya with his wife, children and parents, said in a text message.

Hospitals are under threat

Fadel Naeem, the director of Al-Ahly Hospital in Gaza City, said it had received dozens of wounded people and bodies from the north. "We declared a state of emergency, suspended scheduled surgeries, and discharged patients whose conditions are stable," he told AP in a text message.

Israel's offensive has gutted Gaza's health sector, forcing most hospitals to shut down and leaving the rest only partially functioning.

Naeem said three hospitals farther north — Kamal Adwan, Awda and the Indonesian Hospital - have become almost inaccessible because of the fighting. The Gaza Health Ministry says the Israeli army has ordered all three to evacuate staff and patients. Meanwhile, no humanitarian aid has entered the north since Oct. 1, according to U.N. data.

Israel's authority coordinating humanitarian affairs in Palestinian territories said Israel "has not halted the entry or coordination of humanitarian aid entering from its territory into the northern Gaza Strip."

Israel says it only targets militants and blames civilian deaths on Hamas because it fights in residential areas.

Israel ordered the wholesale evacuation of northern Gaza, including Gaza City, in the opening weeks of the war, but hundreds of thousands of people are believed to have remained there. Israel reiterated those instructions over the weekend, telling people to flee south to a humanitarian zone where hundreds of thousands are already crammed into squalid tent camps.

The war began just over a year ago, when Hamas-led militants stormed into southern Israel, killing some 1,200 people, mostly civilians, and abducting around 250. They still hold around 100 hostages, a third of whom are believed to be dead.

Israel's offensive has killed over 42,000 Palestinians, according to the Gaza Health Ministry, which does not say how many were fighters. It has said women and children make up over half of the dead. The

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offensive has also caused staggering destruction across the territory and displaced around 90% of the population of 2.3 million people, often multiple times.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has vowed to keep fighting until "total victory" over Hamas and the return of all hostages.

Israel warns Lebanon it could end up like Gaza

On Tuesday, Netanyahu said Lebanon would meet the same fate as Gaza if its people did not rise up against Hezbollah.

In recent weeks Israel has waged a heavy air campaign across large parts of Lebanon, targeting what it says are Hezbollah rocket launchers and other militant sites. A series of strikes had killed Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah and most of his top commanders.

An Israeli airstrike on Wednesday hit a Lebanese Civil Defense center in the town of Dardghaya in southern Lebanon, killing five members who were stationed there, civil defense spokesperson Elie Khairallah told The Associated Press. Among the victims was Abdullah Al-Moussawi, head of the Tyre Regional Center in the Lebanese Civil Defense, Khairallah said.

Just last week, Al-Moussawi spoke with the Associated Press, saying the Israeli airstrikes had made his team increasingly nervous, but that they were hopeful that the international protection guaranteed to medics will extend to them as well.

There was no immediate statement from the Israeli military. As of last Thursday, the Lebanese Health Ministry reported that over 100 paramedics had been killed by Israeli airstrikes.

Another strike on Wednesday killed four people and wounded another 10 at a hotel sheltering displaced people in the southern Lebanese town of Wardaniyeh, Lebanon's Health Ministry said.

An Associated Press reporter in a nearby town heard two sonic booms from Israeli jets before the strike. Plumes of smoke rose from the building after the explosion.

The Israeli military said Wednesday that Hezbollah has fired more than 12,000 rockets, missiles and drones at Israel in the past year.

Video verified by The Associated Press also shows what appears to be a group of Israeli soldiers raising an Israeli flag in a village in southern Lebanon.

In the video, which appears to have been filmed in Maroun A-Ras, three soldiers are seen hoisting up a flag atop a pile of debris. A soldier off camera speaks in Hebrew and refers to the nearby Israeli village of Avivim. The date it was filmed wasn't immediately known.

The video follows other similar acts that took place throughout Israel's ground offensive in Gaza. The Israeli military had no immediate comment.

Biden and Netanyahu hold their first conversation in weeks. Trump recently called the Israeli leader

By ZEKE MILLER, TIA GOLDENBERG and AAMER MADHANI Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — President Joe Biden and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Wednesday held their first call in seven weeks, a conversation that comes as Israel expands its ground incursion into Lebanon and considers how to respond to Iran's recent ballistic missile attack.

Vice President Kamala Harris also joined the 30-minute call, according to the White House.

"It was direct, it was productive," said White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre, who added that the leaders discussed a long list of issues on the call, including Israel's deliberations on how it will respond to Iran.

Netanyahu's office, meantime, confirmed that the prime minister had recently spoken with former President Donald Trump. The Republican, who is in the midst of a close White House race against Harris, called Netanyahu last week and "congratulated him on the intense and determined operations that Israel carried out against Hezbollah," according to Netanyahu's office.

The Biden-Netanyahu conversation comes at a moment of Biden's growing frustration with the prime minister and as the growing conflict in the Middle East is adding a layer of complexity to the American

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election next month.

Netanyahu has repeatedly looked past the Biden administration's calls for cease-fires. They would at least temporarily pause the fighting in Gaza, facilitate the release of some 100 hostages, who have been held by Hamas since the Oct. 7, 2023, attack on Israel, and stem the growing conflict between the Israel and Hezbollah militants in Lebanon.

The spreading conflict across the Mideast is looming over Harris in the final weeks of the White House campaign.

Some Arab-American voters in closely contested Michigan, and elsewhere, are threatening to withhold their support for the Democrat over their dissatisfaction with the administration's handling of the war in Gaza. Trump has increasingly criticized Harris and Biden for their foreign policy decisions as he makes his case to American voters to return him to the White House.

The Trump campaign said it should not be surprising that Netanyahu held talks with the former president. "World leaders want to speak and meet with President Trump because they know he will soon be returning to the White House and will restore peace around the globe," Trump campaign spokesperson Karoline Leavitt said in a statement about that call, which a Trump ally, Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., joined.

"As we know, it's one president at a time here," Jean-Pierre when asked about Trump's call with Netanyahu. Following the call with Netanyahu, Biden and top aides joined a call with American rabbis to belatedly mark the Jewish high holidays. They underscored the administration fully supports Israel's right to defend itself against Iran and its proxies.

"We're also committed to holding Iran fully accountable for that attack, and we will continue to do so," said Brett McGurk, the White House coordinator for the Middle East and North Africa.

Biden told reporters last week that he did not know whether Netanyahu was holding up a Mideast peace deal in order to influence the outcome of the U.S. election.

"No administration has helped Israel more than I have. None. None. None. And I think Bibi should remember that," he said, referring to the Israeli leader by his nickname. "And whether he's trying to influence the election, I don't know, but I'm not counting on that."

Israel has been discussing how to respond to the Iranian missile barrage from Oct. 1, which the United States helped to fend off. Biden last week said he would not support a retaliatory Israeli strike on sites related to Tehran's nuclear program.

Biden has urged Israel to consider alternatives to hitting Iran's oil sector. Such a strike could affect the global oil market and boost pump prices, developments that would not help Harris' efforts to win over the shrinking number of undecided voters.

Netanyahu's other choices range from a largely symbolic strike — similar to how Israel responded after Iran launched missiles and attack drones in April at Israel.

"Our attack will be lethal, precise and above all surprising," Israeli Defense Minister Yoav Gallant said during a speech to Israeli troops on Wednesday. "They will not understand what happened and how it happened."

Since the leaders' last call on Aug. 21, Israel has carried out a brazen sabotage and assassination campaign against Iran-backed Hezbollah in Lebanon, where the militant group has continued to fire missiles, rockets and drones at Israel.

Israel is now undertaking what it has described as limited ground operations across its northern border with Lebanon to dig out Hezbollah. Airstrikes killed the group's leader, Hassan Nasrallah, and decimated its leadership.

Last month, thousands of explosives hidden in pagers and walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah detonated, killing dozens of people and maiming thousands, including many civilians. Israel is widely believed to be behind the attack.

The U.S. has maintained a stepped-up troop presence in the region, to defend Israel and American interests in the Middle East. Washington has grown increasingly vocal with Israeli officials about the need to be kept in the loop on their decision-making to ensure the protection of U.S. forces.

Gallant had been scheduled to meet with Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin on Wednesday, but the Israelis postponed the visit, according to Pentagon spokeswoman Sabrina Singh.

The Biden-Netanyahu call took place one day after disclosures from journalist Bob Woodward's new book, "War" that Biden has privately made his frustration and distrust of the Israeli leader known.

The president privately unleashed a profanity-laden tirade, calling him a "son of a bitch" and a "bad f—— guy," according to the book.

Biden said he felt, in Woodward's accounting, that Netanyahu "had been lying to him regularly," with Netanyahu "continuing to say he was going to kill every last member of Hamas." Woodward wrote, "Biden had told him that was impossible, threatening both privately and publicly to withhold offensive U.S. weapons shipment."

The White House declined to comment.

Trump-Putin ties are back in the spotlight after new book describes calls

By ERIC TUCKER Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — A new book's assertion that former President Donald Trump may have had as many as seven private phone calls with Russian President Vladimir Putin since leaving the White House has refocused attention on their politically fraught relationship and on Trump's sustained dialogue with world leaders as he seeks a return to power.

It's not surprising in and of itself that an ex-president would preserve ties with foreign counterparts. But the detail in journalist Bob Woodward's book "War" raised eyebrows in light of a special counsel investigation during Trump's presidency that examined potential ties between Russia and the Republican's 2016 campaign as well as Trump's more recent criticism of U.S. aid to Ukraine as it fends off Russia's invasion — statements that have hinted at a possible U.S. policy overhaul if he's elected.

"I would caution any world leader about trusting Vladimir Putin with anything," said Emily Harding, who led the Senate Intelligence Committee's investigation into 2016 Russian election interference and is now a national security expert at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

Both Trump campaign and the Kremlin, which U.S. officials have said is working to influence the 2024 election in favor of Trump, denied the reporting.

Asked at a press briefing Wednesday, White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre said the administration would have "serious concerns" if the reported calls were true.

"We're not aware of those calls. I certainly can't confirm any of those calls from here," she said. "But, if it is indeed true, are we (concerned)? Do we have serious concerns? Yes."

It's no secret that Trump has held multiple meetings over the last year with major world leaders: hosting Hungary's nationalist prime minister, Viktor Orban, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, sitting down in New York last April with Polish President Andrzej Duda and meeting Volodymyr Zelenskyy during the Ukrainian president's trip to the U.S. last month.

The meetings offer Trump an opportunity to differentiate his foreign policy approach from that of President Joe Biden and Vice President Kamala Harris, the Democratic presidential nominee, and to shore up connections if he reclaims the White House. During Netanyahu's visit in July, Trump boasted of a "great relationship," drawing a tacit contrast with the more strained dynamic between the Israeli leader and Biden.

While those meetings were known publicly, Woodward's book cites an unnamed aide as saying Trump and Putin had as many as seven private calls. That adds to long-running questions about their relationship and what Trump may be trying to achieve, said Robert Ortung, a professor of international affairs at George Washington University.

As president, "We never really understood why he liked Putin so much and why he was trying to develop such a close relationship with someone who is clearly an adversary and against everything the United States stands for," Ortung said.

Some claims about ties between Trump and allies and Russia have proved overheated or fizzled over

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time, but the subject continues to draw considerable public scrutiny, including after Trump left office.

The FBI and special counsel Robert Mueller spent several years investigating whether Russia had colluded with the 2016 Trump campaign to tip the outcome of the election. Though investigators did not establish a criminal conspiracy, they did find the Trump campaign actively welcomed Russia's help during the election and that the Russian government perceived it would benefit from a Trump presidency.

In 2018, after meeting Putin in Helsinki, Trump memorably and publicly questioned his own intelligence agencies' conclusion that Russia meddled in the election.

"I have great confidence in my intelligence people, but I will tell you that President Putin was extremely strong and powerful in his denial today," Trump said at the time. He added: "He just said it's not Russia. I will say this: I don't see any reason why it would be."

More recently, Trump called Putin "pretty smart" for invading Ukraine and has praised Russia's military record in historical conflicts, saying last month: "As somebody told me the other day, they beat Hitler, they beat Napoleon. That's what they do. They fight. And it's not pleasant."

The book, which also says Trump secretly sent Putin COVID-19 test machines during the height of the pandemic, does not describe the content of their conversations.

Trump campaign spokesman Steven Cheung denied they occurred, calling the book by the famed Watergate journalist the "work of a truly demented and deranged man who suffers from a debilitating case of Trump Derangement Syndrome." Trump complained at a campaign event on Wednesday that "I had to go through years of Russia, Russia, Russia, and they knew it was fake."

A Kremlin spokesman also denied the calls happened.

The book's details revived discussion about the Logan Act, a 1799 statute that bars private American citizens from trying to intervene in "disputes or controversies" between the United States and foreign powers without government approval.

The statute has produced just two criminal cases, none since the 1850s and neither resulting in a criminal conviction. Former presidents from Richard Nixon to Jimmy Carter to Bill Clinton have held talks with international figures after leaving the White House.

"Trump could be technically liable just as I think dozens of prominent figures have been technically liable," said Daniel Rice, a University of Arkansas law professor and constitutional law expert.

Among the possible reasons for the law's dormancy, Rice said, is a disinclination by prosecutors to "turn violators into martyrs" or to be seen as targeting a sitting president's political adversaries.

Trump himself was briefed by then-White House counsel Don McGahn about the Logan Act following a well-publicized episode involving his first national security adviser. In a phone call during the presidential transition period in 2016, Michael Flynn urged Russia's ambassador to the U.S. to be "even-keeled" in response to Obama administration penalties imposed for election interference and assured him that "we can have a better conversation" after Trump became president.

Flynn was interviewed by the FBI about that conversation and pleaded guilty to lying to agents about it, though Trump pardoned Flynn in the final weeks of his presidency.

Trump later called for former Secretary of State John Kerry to be prosecuted for violating the Logan Act over his conversations with Iran after he left the Obama administration. Kerry was never charged.

Scientists recreate the head of this ancient 9-foot-long bug

By CHRISTINA LARSON AP Science Writer

WASHINGTON (AP) — As if the largest bug to ever live — a monster nearly 9 feet long with several dozen legs — wasn't terrifying enough, scientists could only just imagine what the extinct beast's head looked like.

That's because many of the fossils of these creatures are headless shells that were left behind when they molted, squirming out of their exoskeletons through the head opening as they grew ever bigger — up to 8 to 9 feet (2.6 meters) and more than 100 pounds (50 kilograms).

Now, scientists have produced a mug shot after studying fossils of juveniles that were complete and very well preserved, if not quite cute.

The giant bug's topper was a round bulb with two short bell-shaped antennae, two protruding eyes like a crab, and a rather small mouth adapted for grinding leaves and bark, according to new research published Wednesday in Science Advances.

Called Arthropleura, these were arthropods -- the group that includes crabs, spiders and insects -- with features of modern-day centipedes and millipedes. But some of them were much, much bigger, and this one was a surprising mix.

"We discovered that it had the body of a millipede, but head of a centipede," said study co-author and paleobiologist Mickael Lheritier at the University Claude Bernard Lyon in Villeurbanne, France.

The largest Arthropleura may have been the biggest bugs to ever live, although there is still a debate. They may be a close second to an extinct giant sea scorpion.

Researchers in Europe and North America have been collecting fragments and footprints of the huge bugs since the late 1800s.

"We have been wanting to see what the head of this animal looked like for a really long time," said James Lamsdell, a paleobiologist at West Virginia University, who was not involved in the study.

To produce a model of the head, researchers first used CT scans to study fossil specimens of fully intact juveniles embedded in rocks found in a French coal field in the 1980s.

This technique allowed the researchers to scrutinize "hidden details like bits of the head that are still embedded in the rock" without marring the fossil, Lamsdell said.

"When you chip away at rock, you don't know what part of a delicate fossil may have been lost or damaged," he said.

The juvenile fossil specimens only measured about 2 inches (6 centimeters) and it's possible they were a type of Arthropleura that didn't grow to enormous sizes. But even if so, the researchers said they are close enough kin to provide a glimpse of what adults looked like -- whether giant or of a less nightmarish size -- when they were alive 300 million years ago.

Head of international shipping regulator says industry must do more to cut carbon pollution

By PETER PRENGAMAN Associated Press

HAMBURG, Germany (AP) — For years, the international shipping industry has been criticized for making little progress in reducing the carbon-belching pollution released from the fuels that vessels use in moving most of the cargo that people use every day, such as food, cars and clothing.

Now, the new head of the International Maritime Organization, charged with regulating international shipping, is subtly calling out inaction and nudging companies to work harder. "What I'm finding is that there is more that can be done," said Arsenio Dominguez, who gave a wide-ranging interview on the sidelines of the Hamburg Sustainability Conference in Germany this week. "The low hanging fruit is there."

Dominguez, who took over as secretary general at the beginning of this year, said that includes using satellites to chart routes according to weather, to waste less fuel, cleaning the hulls of ships to reduce friction in the water and what is often referred to as slow steaming, reducing ship speed, which also uses less fuel and thus pollutes less.

Dominguez was careful to note that many companies are working to cut greenhouse gas emissions, which cause climate change. But getting to the IMO's goal of a 30% reduction in emissions by 2030 will require immediate implementation of every possibility.

A focus on the fuels that power ships

Ultimately, major decarbonizing will mean an overhaul of shipping fuel, said Dominguez, a point industry leaders agree on.

Today, most ships run on heavy fuel oil, which releases carbon dioxide along with sulfur, nitrogen and other pollutants. Much cleaner fuels already exist, and many more are being developed, such as hydrogen, ammonia and biofuels. But they are more expensive, not yet available at scale and only better for the planet when made in clean ways. For example, hydrogen can be made from water and clean energy via a

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process called electrolysis, and that does not release greenhouse gases. It's considered "green" hydrogen. However, nearly all hydrogen today is made out of methane, meaning natural gas, using steam-methane reforming, which releases carbon dioxide.

"Fuels, fuels, fuels," Bud Darr, executive vice president for maritime policy and government affairs for MSC Mediterranean Shipping Company, said when asked during a panel at the sustainability conference on Monday what the biggest challenges were to decarbonizing.

"We need a massive scaling up of both production and shoreside infrastructure in order to deliver what we will need to operate the new generation of ships and equipment that we are investing in," Darr said in a followup email.

Currently, the shipping industry is responsible for about 3% of global greenhouse gas emissions. Their total emissions are expected to go up sharply in future decades unless major changes are made.

Other parts of the world economy have made strides in decarbonizing, including electricity and ground transportation, thanks to electrification. Comparatively little has happened in shipping.

"The IMO has been very slow," said Bastien Bonnet-Cantalloube, an expert on shipping and aviation decarbonization with non-profit Carbon Market Watch. "There was no progress in 10 or 15 years. Now things are starting to pick up."

Last year, the IMO set a target to reach net zero emissions by or around 2050, a goal that is a potential catalyst while also putting a spotlight on just how far the industry has to go.

The IMO is being pushed to move toward a carbon tax in part to be in line with what is already happening in some places, like the European Union.

Starting this year, large ships coming in and out of European ports pay taxes on their carbon dioxide emissions. In 2026, they will also pay for emissions of the greenhouse gases methane and nitrous oxide. Some industry leaders hope that a carbon levy from the IMO, which would effectively be the world's first global carbon tax, could allow shipping companies to simply pay one carbon tax, instead of taxes in multiple jurisdictions.

Still, there is wide disagreement, both among countries and shipping companies over a tax, how much it should be and what revenue would be used for.

IMO moving toward potentially big decisions next year

During meetings earlier this month in London, the IMO's Marine Environment Protection Committee continued drafting text on mandates to phase in cleaner fuels and set a greenhouse gas pricing mechanism. But what those principles will translate into is far from clear.

"I don't call it a tax. I know that is a way of referring to it," said Dominguez, underscoring the sensitivity of the issue.

Dominguez said delegates, member countries of the IMO, considered multiple scenarios for rating the carbon efficiency of ships, setting fuel standards and gathering revenue for emissions.

The committee next meets in April, when it's expected to approve the measures. Formal adoption would take place in the fall, and whatever is decided wouldn't take effect until 2027, giving countries and companies time to adjust.

In the meantime, Dominguez said that shipping companies needed to do all they could to cut emissions, which for some included using liquid natural gas as a fuel.

Ship engine manufacturers had shown that using LNG in engines increased efficiency, which led to lower emissions, he said.

"If we stop LNG right now without an alternative, then we go back to Square 1," he said, adding that he knew it "was a divisive point."

Indeed, scientific studies have shown that leaks of LNG, which is mostly methane, itself a potent greenhouse gas, can cancel out any advantage gained from burning more cleanly compared to other fossil fuels. Environmentalists have long argued that using LNG is simply a way for major oil and gas producers to continue business as usual, thus postponing a major transition to renewable energies.

Yes, voter fraud happens.

But it's rare and election offices have safeguards to catch it

By ALI SWENSON Associated Press

NEW YORK (AP) — You've heard the horror stories: Someone casting multiple ballots, people voting in the name of dead relatives, mail-in ballots being intercepted.

Voter fraud does happen occasionally. When it does, we tend to hear a lot about it. It also gets caught and prosecuted.

The nation's multilayered election processes provide many safeguards that keep voter fraud generally detectable and rare, according to current and former election administrators of both parties.

America's elections are decentralized, with thousands of independent voting jurisdictions. That makes it virtually impossible to pull off a large-scale vote-rigging operation that could tip a presidential race — or most any other race.

"You're probably not going to have a perfect election system," said Republican Trey Grayson, a former Kentucky secretary of state and the advisory board chair of the Secure Elections Project. "But if you're looking for one that you should have confidence in, you should feel good about that here in America."

What's stopping people from committing voter fraud?

Voting more than once, tampering with ballots, lying about your residence to vote somewhere else or casting someone else's ballot are crimes that can be punished with hefty fines and prison time. Non-U.S. citizens who break election laws can be deported.

For anyone still motivated to cheat, election systems in the United States are designed with multiple layers of protection and transparency intended to stand in the way.

For in-person voting, most states either require or request voters provide some sort of ID at the polls. Others require voters to verify who they are in another way, such as stating their name and address, signing a poll book or signing an affidavit.

People who try to vote in the name of a recently deceased friend or family member can be caught when election officials update voter lists with death records and obituaries, said Gail Pellerin, a Democratic in the California Assembly who ran elections in Santa Cruz County for more than 27 years.

Those who try to impersonate someone else run the risk that someone at the polls knows that person or that the person will later try to cast their own ballot, she said.

What protections exist for absentee voting?

For absentee voting, different states have different ballot verification protocols. All states require a voter's signature. Many states have further precautions, such as having bipartisan teams compare the signature with other signatures on file, requiring the signature to be notarized or requiring a witness to sign.

That means even if a ballot is erroneously sent to someone's past address and the current resident mails it in, there are checks to alert election workers to the foul play.

A growing number of states offer online or text-based ballot tracking tools as an extra layer of protection, allowing voters to see when their ballot has been sent out, returned and counted.

Federal law requires voter list maintenance, and election officials do that through a variety of methods, from checking state and federal databases to collaborating with other states to track voters who have moved.

Ballot drop boxes have security protocols, too, said Tammy Patrick, chief executive officer for programs at the National Association of Election Officials.

She explained the boxes are often designed to stop hands from stealing ballots and are surveilled by camera, bolted to the ground and constructed with fire-retardant chambers, so if someone threw in a lit match, it wouldn't destroy the ballots inside.

Sometimes, alleged voter fraud isn't what it seems

After the 2020 election, social media surged with claims of dead people casting ballots, double voting or destroyed piles of ballots on the side of the road.

Former President Donald Trump promoted and has continued to amplify these claims. But the vast ma-

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jectory of them were found to be untrue.

An Associated Press investigation that explored every potential case of voter fraud in the six battleground states disputed by Trump found there were fewer than 475 out of millions of votes cast. That was not nearly enough to tip the outcome. Democrat Joe Biden won the six states by a combined 311,257 votes.

The review also showed no collusion intended to rig the voting. Virtually every case was based on an individual acting alone to cast additional ballots. In one case, a man mistakenly thought he could vote while on parole. In another, a woman was suspected of sending in a ballot for her dead mother.

Former election officials say that even more often, allegations of voter fraud turn out to result from a clerical error or a misunderstanding.

Pellerin said she remembered when a political candidate in her county raised suspicion about many people being registered to vote at the same address. It turned out the voters were nuns who all lived in the same home.

Patrick said that when she worked in elections in Maricopa County, Arizona, mismatched signatures were sometimes explained by a broken arm or a recent stroke. In other cases, an elderly person tried to vote twice because they forgot they had already submitted a mail ballot.

"You really have to think about the intent of the voter," Patrick said. "It isn't always intuitive."

Why voter fraud is unlikely to affect the presidential race

It would be wrong to suggest that voter fraud never happens.

With millions of votes cast in an election year, it's almost guaranteed there will be a few cases of someone trying to game the system. There also have been more insidious efforts, such as a vote-buying scheme in 2006 in Kentucky.

In that case, Grayson said, voters complained and an investigation ensued. Then participants admitted what they had done.

He said the example shows how important it is for election officials to stay vigilant and constantly improve security in order to help voters feel confident.

But, he said, it would be hard to make any such scheme work on a larger scale. Fraudsters would have to navigate onerous nuances in each county's election system. They also would have to keep a large number of people quiet about a crime that could be caught at any moment by officials or observers.

"This decentralized nature of the elections is itself a deterrent," Grayson said.

Bakery that makes Sara Lee and Entenmann's pushes back on FDA sesame warning

By JONEL ALECCIA AP Health Writer

A top U.S. commercial bakery is pushing back on a Food and Drug Administration warning to stop using labels that say its products contain sesame — a potentially dangerous allergen — when they don't.

Bimbo Bakeries USA, which includes brands such as Sara Lee, Entenmann's and Ball Park buns and rolls, appears to be defying an FDA warning sent in June that said the several of the company's products are "misbranded" because the labels list sesame or tree nuts even though those ingredients aren't in the foods.

In a response to the FDA, Bimbo officials said they wouldn't change their sesame labeling. The company said it has plants where some products are made with sesame and some are not. But when it came to labeling, the company said it declares sesame as an ingredient and uses the same packaging for all of the products to prevent people from inadvertently eating foods that can trigger potentially life-threatening reactions.

"We think our approach is the most protective of sesame-allergic consumers," the company wrote in a July 1 letter obtained by the advocacy group Center for Science in the Public Interest and shared with The Associated Press.

Bimbo officials confirmed their position in an email to the AP on Wednesday, calling it a "conservative approach" for consistent labeling of nationally distributed products.

FDA officials declined to comment, saying they would respond directly to the company. By law, the

agency can take actions ranging from recalls to civil fines and criminal charges against companies that fail to heed warning letters.

But CSPI and other food safety advocates said the standoff continues a practice that misleads the estimated 33 million Americans with food allergies and results in limited choices for the more than 1.6 million who are allergic to sesame.

"We depend on accurate food labeling to feel safe," said Sung Poblete, chief executive of the nonprofit group FARE, Food Allergy Research & Education. "We depend on accurate labeling to make the food choices that we make."

The impasse follows a 2023 federal law that requires that all foods made and sold in the U.S. to be labeled if they contain sesame.

Bimbo Bakeries, which bills itself as the nation's largest commercial baking company, was among several food producers and restaurant chains that began adding small amounts of sesame to foods that didn't have it previously — and then listing it as an ingredient.

Several companies said they did that because it was too difficult and expensive to keep sesame used in one part of a baking plant out of another and they wanted to avoid liability and cost. The FDA has said that such actions are legal, although they violate the spirit of the law.

While Bimbo hasn't changed sesame labeling, company officials told the agency they did change labels for certain breads that said they included tree nuts when they did not. The new labels now say the breads include hazelnut, the only tree nut used in the products, the company indicated.

CSPI had petitioned FDA in 2023 to halt the practice of adding sesame to foods to prevent risks of cross-contamination. It's not clear what action the agency will take over Bimbo's refusal to heed a warning letter, said Sarah Sorscher, CSPI's director of regulatory affairs.

"It's so unusual to see a big company like Bimbo calling the FDA's bluff," she added.

Wisconsin Supreme Court grapples with governor's 400-year veto, calling it 'crazy'

By SCOTT BAUER Associated Press

MADISON, Wis. (AP) — Justices on the Wisconsin Supreme Court said Wednesday that Gov. Tony Evers' creative use of his expansive veto power in an attempt to lock in a school funding increase for 400 years appeared to be "extreme" and "crazy" but questioned whether and how it should be reined in.

"It does feel like the sky is the limit, the stratosphere is the limit," Justice Jill Karofsky said during oral arguments, referring to the governor's veto powers. "Perhaps today we are at the fork in the road ... I think we're trying to think should we, today in 2024, start to look at this differently."

The case, supported by the Republican-controlled Legislature, is the latest flashpoint in a decades-long fight over just how broad Wisconsin's governor's partial veto powers should be. The issue has crossed party lines, with Republicans and Democrats pushing for more limitations on the governor's veto over the years.

In this case, Evers made the veto in question in 2023. His partial veto increased how much revenue K-12 public schools can raise per student by \$325 a year until 2425. Evers took language that originally applied the \$325 increase for the 2023-24 and 2024-25 school years and instead vetoed the "20" and the hyphen to make the end date 2425, more than four centuries from now.

"The veto here approaches the absurd and exceeds any reasonable understanding of legislative or voter intent in adopting the partial veto or subsequent limits," attorneys for legal scholar Richard Briffault, of Columbia Law School, said in a filing with the court ahead of arguments.

That argument was cited throughout the oral arguments by justices and Scott Rosenow, attorney for Wisconsin Manufacturers & Commerce Litigation Center, which handles lawsuits for the state's largest business lobbying group and brought the case.

The court should strike down Evers' partial veto and declare that the state constitution forbids the governor from striking digits to create a new year or to remove language to create a longer duration than the one approved by the Legislature, Rosenow argued.

Finding otherwise would give governors unlimited power to alter numbers in a budget bill, Rosenow argued.

Justices appeared to agree that limits were needed, but they grappled with where to draw the line.

When legal scholars and others look at what Wisconsin courts have allowed relative to partial vetoes, "they think it's crazy because it is crazy," said Justice Brian Hagedorn. "We allow governors to unilaterally create law that has not been proposed to them at all. It is a mess of this court's making."

The initial reaction from anyone would be that a 400-year veto is "extreme," said Justice Rebecca Dallet, but the question is whether it's within the governor's authority to use the partial veto to extend the duration of dates.

"The governor is becoming the most powerful person in the state, arguably, to just make the law whatever he declares," said Justice Rebecca Bradley.

Evers, his attorney Colin Roth argued Wednesday, was simply using a longstanding partial veto process that is allowed under the law.

The court, controlled 4-3 by liberals, will issue a written ruling in the coming months.

Wisconsin's partial veto power was created by a 1930 constitutional amendment, but it's been weakened over the years, including in reaction to vetoes made by former governors, both Republicans and Democrats.

Voters adopted constitutional amendments in 1990 and 2008 that removed the ability to strike individual letters to make new words — the "Vanna White" veto — and the power to eliminate words and numbers in two or more sentences to create a new sentence — the "Frankenstein" veto.

The lawsuit before the court on Wednesday contends that Evers' partial veto is barred under the 1990 constitutional amendment prohibiting the "Vanna White" veto, named the co-host of the game show Wheel of Fortune who flips letters to reveal word phrases.

But Evers argued that the "Vanna White" veto ban applies only to striking individual letters to create new words, not vetoing digits to create new numbers.

Reshaping state budgets through the partial veto is a longstanding act of gamesmanship in Wisconsin between the governor and Legislature, as lawmakers try to craft bills in a way that is largely immune from creative vetoes.

The Wisconsin Supreme Court, then controlled by conservatives, undid three of Evers' partial vetoes in 2020, but a majority of justices did not issue clear guidance on what was allowed. Two justices did say that partial vetoes can't be used to create new policies.

Social Security's scheduled cost of living increase 'won't make a dent' for some retirees

By FATIMA HUSSEIN Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Sherri Myers, an 82-year-old resident of Pensacola City, Florida, says the Social Security cost-of-living increase she'll receive in January "won't make a dent" in helping her meet her day-to-day expenses.

"Inflation has eaten up my savings," she said. "I don't have anything to fall back on — the cushion is gone." So even with the anticipated increase she's looking for work to supplement her retirement income, which consists of a small pension and her Social Security benefits.

About 70.6 million Social Security recipients are expected to receive a smaller cost of living increase for 2025 than in recent years, as inflation has moderated. The Social Security Administration makes the official COLA announcement Thursday, and analysts predicted in advance it would be 2.5% for 2025. Recipients received a 3.2% increase in their benefits in 2024, after a historically large 8.7% benefit increase in 2023, brought on by record 40-year-high inflation.

The AARP estimates that a 2.5 percent COLA would increase the average benefit for a retiree who receives about \$1,920 a month by \$48 a month starting in January 2025.

"I think a lot of seniors are going to say that this is not really enough to keep up with prices," said AARP Senior Vice President of Government Affairs Bill Sweeney.

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The silver lining is that it's an indication that inflation is moderating, he said.

The announcement comes as the national social insurance plan faces a severe financial shortfall in the coming years.

The annual Social Security and Medicare trustees report released in May said the program's trust fund will be unable to pay full benefits beginning in 2035. If the trust fund is depleted, the government will be able to pay only 83% of scheduled benefits, the report said.

The program is financed by payroll taxes collected from workers and their employers. The maximum amount of earnings subject to Social Security payroll taxes was \$168,600 for 2024, up from \$160,200 in 2023. Analysts estimate that the maximum amount will go up to \$174,900 in 2025.

On the presidential campaign trail, Vice President Kamala Harris and former President Donald Trump have presented dueling plans on how they would strengthen Social Security.

Harris says on her campaign website that she will protect Social Security by "making millionaires and billionaires pay their fair share in taxes."

Trump promises that he would not cut the social program or make changes to the retirement age. Trump also pledges tax cuts for older Americans, posting on Truth Social in July that "SENIORS SHOULD NOT PAY TAX ON SOCIAL SECURITY!"

AARP conducted interviews with both Harris and Trump in late August, and asked how the candidates would protect the Social Security Trust Fund.

Harris said she would make up for the shortfall by "making billionaires and big corporations pay their fair share in taxes and use that money to protect and strengthen Social Security for the long haul."

Trump said "we'll protect it with growth. I don't want to do anything having to do with increasing age. I won't do that. As you know, I was there for four years and never even thought about doing it. I'm going to do nothing to Social Security."

Lawmakers have proposed a variety of solutions to deal with the funding shortfall.

The Republican Study Committee's Fiscal Year 2025 plan has proposed cutting Social Security costs by raising the retirement age and reducing the annual COLA. Trump has not endorsed the plan.

Linda Benesch, a spokeswoman for Social Security Works, an advocacy group for the social insurance program, said "we are concerned about this Republican Study Committee budget, and the provisions in it that would cut benefits for retirees."

Social Security Works endorsed Harris for president in July, in part for her decision as a California senator, to co-sponsor a bill that called on the Social Security Administration to use a different index to calculate cost of living increase: the CPI-E, which measures price changes based on the spending patterns of the elderly, like health care, food and medicine costs.

The COLA is currently calculated according to the Bureau of Labor Statistics' Consumer Price Index, or CPI.

Sanewashing? The banality of crazy? A decade into the Trump era, media hasn't figured him out

By DAVID BAUDER AP Media Writer

NEW YORK (AP) — Nearly a decade into the Trump Era of politics, less than a month from his third Election Day as the Republican candidate for president and there is still remarkably little consensus within the media about how best to cover Donald Trump.

Are reporters "sanewashing" Trump, or are they succumbing to the "banality of crazy?" Should his rallies be aired at length, or not at all? To fact-check or not fact-check?

"If it wasn't so serious, I would just be fascinated by all of it," said Parker Molloy, media critic and author of The Present Age column on Substack. "If it didn't have to do with who is going to be president, I would watch this and marvel at how difficult it is to cover one person who seems to challenge all of the rules of journalism."

Books and studies will be written about Trump and the press long after he is gone. He's always been press-conscious and press-savvy, even as a celebrity builder in Manhattan who took a keen interest in

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what tabloid gossip columns said about him. Most issues stem from Trump's disdain for constraints, his willingness to say the outrageous and provably untrue, and for his fans to believe him instead of those reporting on him.

It has even come full circle, where some experts now think the best way to cover him is to give people a greater opportunity to hear what he says — the opposite of what was once conventional wisdom.

'Sanewashing' creates an alternative narrative, some say

Molloy first used the phrase "sanewashing" this fall to describe a tendency among journalists to launder some of Trump's wilder or barely coherent statements to make them seem like the cogent pronouncements of a typical politician. One example she cites: CNN distilling a Trump post on Truth Social that rambled on about the "radical left" and "fake news" into a straight news lead about the former president agreeing to debate his Democratic opponent, Vice President Kamala Harris.

At its best, polishing Trump creates an alternative narrative, she said. At its worst, it's misinformation.

During a Wisconsin rally the last weekend of September, Trump talked of danger from criminals allowed in the country illegally. "They will walk into your kitchen, they'll cut your throat," he said. The New Republic writer Michael Tomasky was surprised not to find the quote in The New York Times' and Washington Post's coverage, although The Times noted that Trump vilified undocumented immigrants, and there were other media references to what Trump himself called a dark speech.

"Trump constantly saying extreme, racist violent stuff can't always be new," Tomasky wrote. "But it is always reality. Is the press justified in ignoring reality just because it isn't new?"

One likely reason the remark didn't get that much attention is because Trump — at the same rally — referred to Harris without evidence as "mentally disabled."

That comment merited quick mention on the ABC and CBS evening newscasts the next day, in the context of criticism from two fellow Republicans, and after stories about Hurricane Helene's devastation and war in the Middle East. NBC's "Nightly News" didn't bring it up at all.

In other words, Trump said something wild. What's new? More than sanewashing, political scientist Brian Klaas calls that the banality of crazy, where journalists become accustomed to things Trump says that would be shocking coming from other candidates simply because they're numbed to it.

It's a hard fit for a daily news cycle

Illuminating reporting on Trump rarely fits the model of quick news stories that sum up daily developments. "This really serves the small group of news consumers that we would call news junkies, who follow the campaign day to day," said Kelly McBride, senior vice president of the Poynter Institute, a journalism think tank. "But it doesn't help people decide how to vote, or understand the candidate better."

Trump critics often complain about how the nation's leading news outlets cover him. But they sometimes overlook attempts to bring perspective to issues they're concerned with. The Times, for example, used a computer to compare his speeches now with older ones in a story Sunday, and similarly had a Sept. 9 examination of questions about Trump's age and mental capacity. The Post has written about how Trump doesn't mention his father's Alzheimer's Disease as he attacks others about mental capacity, and distortions about a cognitive test he took. The Associated Press wrote of Trump's Wisconsin rally that he "shifted from topic to topic so quickly that it was hard to keep track of what he meant at times."

"Trump is a really difficult figure to cover because he challenges news media processes every day, has for years," The Times' Maggie Haberman, one of Trump's best-known chroniclers, told NPR last month. "The systems ... were not built to deal with somebody who says things that are not true as often as he does or speaks as incoherently as he often does. I think the media has actually done a good job showing people who he is, what he says, what he does."

Press critics may instead be frustrated that the work doesn't have the impact they seek. "The people who don't like or are infuriated by him cannot believe his success and would like the press to somehow persuade the people who do like him that they are wrong," said Tom Rosenstiel, a journalism professor at the University of Maryland. "And the press can't do that."

Fact-checking is a bone of contention

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One of the central issues surrounding the three general election debates was how, or whether, the television networks would fact-check the candidates in real time on the air.

CNN didn't during Trump's debate with President Joe Biden last spring. When ABC's moderators corrected Trump four times during his September debate with Harris, the former president's supporters were infuriated. CBS News sought a middle ground during the vice presidential debate, and learned how hard it is to satisfy everyone.

"F you CBS — how DARE YOU," Megyn Kelly posted on X when CBS briefly cut JD Vance's microphone after correcting him on a comment about immigrants. Salon media critic Melanie McFarland wrote that the people best equipped to point out truth "barely rose to that duty."

The fact-check industry flourished during Trump's years in office, the number of such websites devoted to that duty jumping from 63 in 2016 to 79 in 2020, according to the Duke Reporters' Lab. Yet limitations were also exposed: Republicans demonized the practice, to the point where many Trump supporters either don't believe those who try to referee what's true or false, or don't bother reading. In day-to-day reporting, it's not enough to point out when a politician is wrong, Rosenstiel said. They must clearly explain why.

Journalists, who rarely win popularity contests to begin with, saw their collective reputations plummet under withering attacks from Trump.

In the heady days of 2015, television news networks like CNN showed Trump campaign rallies at length. It was entertaining. It drove ratings. What harm could be done?

Many later regretted that decision. Throughout his presidency and beyond, television outlets that are not Trump-friendly have grappled with the question of how much to show Trump unfiltered, and still haven't fully settled on an answer. CNN shows Trump at rallies on occasion, rarely at length.

But in a back-to-the-future move, some experts now say it's best to let people hear what Trump says. Poynter's McBride praised The 19th for a story on child care when, frustrated by an attempt to clarify Trump's positions with his campaign, the website simply printed a baffling 365-word direct quote from Trump when he was asked about the issue.

While fact checks and context have their place, there's value in presenting Trump in the raw. "Showing Trump at length is not sanewashing," Rosenstiel said.

Molloy admitted to some surprise at how much traction her original column on sanewashing received. It may reflect a desire to define the undefinable, to figure out what the news media still hasn't been able to after all this time. She notes the politicians who try to emulate Trump but fail.

"They don't have what makes him Donald Trump," she said. "People can look at it as part of his brilliance and people can look at it as him being crazy. It's probably a little of both."

Trump has long blasted China's trade practices. His 'God Bless the USA' Bibles were printed there

By RICHARD LARDNER and DAKE KANG Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Thousands of copies of Donald Trump's "God Bless the USA" Bible were printed in a country that the former president has repeatedly accused of stealing American jobs and engaging in unfair trade practices: China.

Global trade records reviewed by The Associated Press show a printing company in China's eastern city of Hangzhou shipped close to 120,000 of the Bibles to the United States earlier this year.

The estimated value of the three separate shipments was \$342,000, or less than \$3 per Bible, according to databases that track exports and imports. The minimum price for the Trump-backed Bible is \$59.99, putting the potential sales revenue at about \$7 million.

The Trump Bible's connection to China reveals a deep divide between the former president's harsh anti-China rhetoric and his efforts to raise cash while campaigning.

The Trump campaign did not respond to emails and calls seeking comment.

In a March 26 video posted on his Truth Social platform, Trump announced a partnership with country

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singer Lee Greenwood to hawk the Bibles, inspired by Greenwood's "God Bless the USA" hit song.

In the video, Trump blended religion with his campaign message as he urged viewers to buy the Bible, which includes copies of the U.S. Constitution, Declaration of Independence, Bill of Rights and Pledge of Allegiance.

"This Bible is a reminder that the biggest thing we have to bring back in America, and to make America great again, is our religion," Trump said.

Trump didn't say where the "God Bless the USA" Bibles are printed, what they cost or how much he earns per sale. A version of the \$59.99 Bible memorializes the July 13 assassination attempt on the former president in Pennsylvania. Trump's name is stamped on the cover above the phrase, "The Day God Intervened."

The Bibles are sold exclusively through a website that states it is not affiliated with any political campaign nor is it owned or controlled by Trump.

The website states that Trump's name and image are used under a paid license from CIC Ventures, a company Trump reported owning in a financial disclosure released in August. CIC Ventures earned \$300,000 in Bible sales royalties, according to the disclosure. It's unclear if Trump has received additional payments.

AP received no response to questions sent to the Bible website and to a publicist for Greenwood.

For years, Trump has castigated Beijing as an obstacle to America's economic success, slapping hefty tariffs on Chinese imports while president and threatening even more stringent measures if he's elected again. He blamed China for the COVID-19 outbreak and recently suggested, without evidence, that Chinese immigrants are flooding the U.S. to build an "army" and attack America.

But Trump also has an eye on his personal finances. Pitching Bibles is one of a dizzying number of for-profit ventures he's launched or promoted, including diamond-encrusted watches, sneakers, photo books, cryptocurrency and digital trading cards.

The web of enterprises has stoked conflict of interest concerns. Selling products at prices that exceed their value may be considered a campaign contribution, said Claire Finkelstein, founder of the nonpartisan Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law and a law professor at the University of Pennsylvania.

"You have to assume that everything that the individual does is being done as a candidate and so that any money that flows through to him benefits him as a candidate," Finkelstein said. "Suppose Vladimir Putin were to buy a Trump watch. Is that a campaign finance violation? I would think so."

There's a potentially lucrative opportunity for Trump to sell 55,000 of the Bibles to Oklahoma after the state's education department ordered public schools to incorporate Scripture into lessons. Oklahoma plans to buy Bibles that initially matched Trump's edition: a King James Version that contains the U.S. founding documents. The request was revised Monday to allow the U.S. historical documents to be bound with the Bible or provided separately.

The first delivery of Trump Bibles was labeled "God Bless USA," according to the information from the Panjiva and Import Genius databases. The other two were described as "Bibles." All the books were shipped by New Ade Cultural Media, a printing company in Hangzhou, to Freedom Park Design, a company in Alabama that databases identified as the importer of the Bibles.

Tammy Tang, a sales representative for New Ade, told AP all three shipments were "God Bless the USA" Bibles. She said New Ade received the orders from Freedom Park Design via the WhatsApp messaging service. The books were printed on presses near the company's office, she said.

Freedom Park Design was incorporated in Florida on March 1. An aspiring country singer named Jared Ashley is the company's president. He also co-founded 16 Creative, a marketing firm that uses the same Gulf Shores address and processes online orders for branded merchandise.

Ashley hung up on a reporter who called to ask about the Bibles. Greenwood is a client of 16 Creative, according to the firm's website. He launched the American-flag emblazoned Bible in 2021.

Religious scholars have denounced the merger of Scripture and government documents as a "toxic mix" that would fuel Christian nationalism, a movement that fuses American and Christian values, symbols and identity and seeks to privilege Christianity in public life. Other critics have called the Trump Bible blasphemous.

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Tim Wildsmith, a Baptist minister who reviews Bibles on his YouTube channel, said he quickly noticed the signs of a cheaply made book when his "God Bless the USA" Bible arrived in the mail.

It had a faux leather cover, and words were jammed together on the pages, making it hard to read. He also found sticky pages that ripped when pulled apart, and there was no copyright page or information about who printed the Bible, or where.

"I was shocked by how poor the quality of it was," Wildsmith said. "It says to me that it's more about the love of money than it is the love of our country."

Kirk Cousins joined the 500-yard club but couldn't top Norm Van Brocklin's 73-year-old record

By JOSH DUBOW AP Pro Football Writer

Inside the Numbers dives into NFL statistics, streaks and trends each week. For more Inside the Numbers, head here.

Kirk Cousins delivered a signature moment to his career last Thursday night with 509 yards passing capped by a game-ending TD pass in overtime in Atlanta's 36-30 victory over Tampa Bay.

It still fell short of one of the NFL's most surprisingly enduring records, with Norm Van Brocklin's 554-yard performance in 1951 remaining as the single-game passing record even as production has spiked in the modern era.

While the single-game records for yards rushing, yards receiving, TD passes, runs and catches, field goals, interceptions and almost every other noteworthy stat have been set or matched in more recent years, Van Brocklin's mark stands.

It was an improbable record, with Van Brocklin getting the nod to start for the Los Angeles Rams only days before the game because Bob Waterfield was injured. Van Brocklin had never thrown for 300 yards in a game before he carved up a New York Yanks team that was in its final season as an NFL franchise.

Van Brocklin, who broke Johnny Lujack's 1949 record of 468 yards for the Bears, had 27 completions — 15 fewer than Cousins had in his 500-yard game — with nine of them going to Elroy "Crazylegs" Hirsch for 173 yards.

Van Brocklin had only five other games with at least 300 yards passing in his Hall of Fame career and only four other players hit that mark in 1951, when teams averaged 183.9 yards passing per game. There were six seasons in the past 10 years when teams averaged more than 250 yards passing a game, but no one has topped Van Brocklin's mark.

The closest anyone has come since 1951 was Matt Schaub, who threw for 527 yards for Houston against Jacksonville on Nov. 18, 2012.

Most other key single-game records have been set or matched in modern times, with Adrian Peterson setting the rushing record with 296 yards in 2007, Flipper Anderson setting the receiving record with 336 yards in 1989 and the record for rushing TDs getting matched in 2020 by Alvin Kamara and TD passes getting matched most recently by Drew Brees in 2020.

One of the only major single-game records to predate Van Brocklin's mark was the 40 points scored by Ernie Nevers on six TDs and four extra points in the Cardinals' 40-6 win over the Bears on Nov. 28, 1929.

Coaching carousel

The coaching carousel is off to another early start with Robert Saleh getting fired by the New York Jets just five games into the season.

Early season coaching changes are becoming more of the norm in recent years, with the Jets becoming the sixth team in the last six seasons to make a change after five games or fewer. There had been only six coaching changes that early in the season in a 27-season span from 1992-2018.

There have been 10 early season coaching changes since the start of the 2008 season, with the Raid-

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ers responsible for three of them. Lane Kiffin (2008) and Dennis Allen (2014) were each fired after four games, and Jon Gruden resigned after five games in 2021 following the release of offensive emails he had sent before being hired.

Gruden was replaced that season by Rich Bisaccia, who helped lead Las Vegas to the playoffs. Bisaccia is one of two coaches who took over during a season and guided a team into the playoffs, with Wally Lemm leading the 1961 Houston Oilers to an AFL title after replacing Lou Rymkus following five games.

Interim coach Jeff Ulbrich will try to match that performance this season for the Jets.

Happy returns

Sunday was a big day for returns, with Seattle's Rayshawn Jenkins returning a fumble 102 yards for a TD against the New York Giants and Denver's Pat Surtain II taking back an interception 100 yards for a score against the Raiders.

This marked the first week in NFL history with two defensive touchdowns scored on returns of at least 100 yards.

Special teams also got into the mix, with two blocked field goals getting returned for touchdowns on Sunday with Bryce Ford-Wheaton of the Giants sealing the win in Seattle with his 60-yard return and San Francisco's Deommodore Lenoir having a 61-yarder against Arizona.

This was the seventh week in NFL history and the first since Week 16 in 2012 with two blocked field goal returns for a touchdown.

Old man Flacco

There's a surprising name at the top of the NFL's passer rating chart, with 39-year-old Joe Flacco besting everyone else with his 115.6 mark for Indianapolis.

Flacco has never had a rating higher than 93.6 in a season when he threw at least 50 passes, but has he had a late-career renaissance with Cleveland last season and now the Colts.

Flacco is the oldest player ever with five straight starts in the regular season with at least 300 yards passing and two TD passes dating to the end of last season, when he helped the Browns reach the playoffs.

Flacco's streak of seven straight games with at least two TD passes is the longest of his career and tied with Green Bay's Jordan Love for the longest active streak. The only players age 38 or older with a longer streak with at least two TD passes are Tom Brady, who had two nine-game streaks, Peyton Manning, who had nine straight once, and Warren Moon, who did it eight games in a row.

Flacco also showed off his legs on an 18-yard scramble that was his longest run since 2016. He reached 18.76 mph, according to NFL Next Gen Stats, for his fastest speed in the NGS era that started in 2016. The run was the third-longest by a player age 39 or older since at least 1975, trailing only a 27-yarder by Brett Favre in 2008 and a 23-yarder by Vince Evans in 1994.

Climate change boosted Helene's deadly rain and wind and scientists say same is likely for Milton

By ALEXA ST. JOHN Associated Press

Human-caused climate change boosted a devastating Hurricane Helene's rainfall by about 10% and intensified its winds by about 11%, scientists said in a new flash study released just as a strengthening Hurricane Milton threatens the Florida coast less than two weeks later.

The warming climate boosted Helene's wind speeds by about 13 miles per hour (20.92 kilometers per hour), and made the high sea temperatures that fueled the storm 200 to 500 times more likely, World Weather Attribution calculated Wednesday from Europe. Ocean temperatures in the Gulf of Mexico were about 3.6 degrees Fahrenheit (2 degrees Celsius) above average, WWA said.

"Hurricane Helene and the storms that were happening in the region anyway have all been amplified by the fact that the air is warmer and can hold more moisture, which meant that the rainfall totals — which, even without climate change, would have been incredibly high given the circumstances — were even higher," Ben Clarke, a study co-author and a climate researcher at Imperial College London, said in an interview.

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Milton will likely be similarly juiced, the authors said.

The scientists warned that continued burning of fossil fuels will lead to more hurricanes like Helene, with "unimaginable" floods well inland, not just on coasts. Many of those who died in Helene fell victim to massive inland flooding, rather than high winds.

Helene made landfall in Florida with record storm surge 15 feet (4.57 meters) high and catastrophic sustained winds reaching 140 miles per hour (225.31 kilometers per hour), pummeling Georgia, the Carolinas, Tennessee and Virginia. It decimated remote towns throughout the Appalachians, left millions without power, cellular service and supplies and killed over 230 people. Search crews in the days following continued to look for bodies. Helene was the deadliest hurricane to hit the mainland U.S. since Katrina in 2005.

Helene dumped more than 40 trillion gallons of rain — an unprecedented amount of water — onto the region, meteorologists estimated. That rainfall would have been much less intense if humans hadn't warmed the climate, according to WWA, an international scientist collaborative that runs rapid climate attribution studies.

"When you start talking about the volumes involved, when you add even just a few percent on top of that, it makes it even much more destructive," Clarke said.

Hurricanes as intense as Helene were once expected every 130 years on average, but today are about 2.5 times more likely in the region, the scientists calculated.

The WWA launched in 2015 to assess the extent which extreme weather events could be attributed to climate change. The organization's rapid studies aren't peer-reviewed but use peer-reviewed methods. The team of scientists tested the influence of climate change on Helene by analyzing weather data and climate models including the Imperial College Storm Model, the Climate Shift Index for oceans and the standard WWA approach, which compares an actual event with what might have been expected in a world that hasn't warmed about 1.3 degrees Celsius since pre-industrial times.

A separate analysis of Helene last week by Department of Energy Lawrence Berkeley National Lab scientists determined that climate change caused 50% more rainfall in some parts of Georgia and the Carolinas, and that observed rainfall was "made up to 20 times more likely in these areas because of global warming." That study was also not peer-reviewed but used a method published in a study about Hurricane Harvey.

Kim Cobb, director of the Institute at Brown for Environment and Society, wasn't involved in either study. She said there are uncertainties in exactly how much climate change is supercharging storms like Helene, but "we know that it's increasing the power and devastation of these storms."

She said Helene and Milton should serve "as a wake up call" for emergency preparedness, resilience planning and the increased use of fossil fuels.

"Going forward, additional warming that we know will occur over the next 10 or 20 years will even worsen the statistics of hurricanes," she said, "and we will break new records."

Analysis is already indicating climate change made possible the warmed sea temperatures that also rapidly intensified Milton. Clarke said the two massive storms in quick succession illustrates the potential future of climate change if humans don't stop it.

"As we go into the future and our results show this as well, we still have control over what trajectory this goes in as to what risks we face in the future, what costs we pay in the future," he said. "That just hinges on how we change our energy systems and how many more fossil fuels we burn."

US considers asking court to break up Google as it weighs remedies in the antitrust case

By SHAWN CHEN AP Technology Writer

The U.S. Department of Justice is considering asking a federal judge to break up Google after its ubiquitous search engine was declared an illegal monopoly, but it is just one of many possible remedies under review, according to a court filing.

In court papers filed late Tuesday, government lawyers outlined a series of potential remedies it may

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pursue, including restrictions on how Google's artificial intelligence mines other websites to deliver search results, and blocking Google from paying companies like Apple billions of dollars annually to ensure that Google is the default search engine presented to consumers on gadgets like iPhones.

Tuesday's filing is the first step in a monthslong legal process to come up with remedies that could reshape a company that's long been synonymous with online search.

"For more than a decade, Google has controlled the most popular distribution channels, leaving rivals with little-to-no incentive to compete for users," the antitrust enforcers wrote in the filing. "Fully remedying these harms requires not only ending Google's control of distribution today, but also ensuring Google cannot control the distribution of tomorrow."

U.S. District Judge Amit Mehta ruled in August that Google's search engine has been illegally exploiting the dominance of its search engine to squash competition and stifle innovation. He has outlined a timeline for a trial on the proposed remedies next spring and plans to issue a decision by August 2025.

The court filing is the first time that the government has given any indication of the types of remedies it will pursue, but under the meticulous approach ordered by Mehta, the government may ultimately opt not to pursue remedies like divestiture.

The Justice Department will conduct discovery over the coming weeks and put forth a more detailed proposal next month.

Lee-Anne Mulholland, Google's vice president of regulatory affairs, said in response to the filing that the Department of Justice was "already signaling requests that go far beyond the specific legal issues" in this case. "Government overreach in a fast-moving industry may have negative unintended consequences for American innovation and America's consumers."

Google has already said it plans to appeal Mehta's ruling, but the tech giant must wait until he finalizes a remedy before doing so. The appeals process could take as long as five years, predicts George Hay, a law professor at Cornell University who was the chief economist for the Justice Department's antitrust division for most of the 1970s.

During a lengthy trial in Washington, much of the evidence centered on deals Google made with other tech companies to ensure that Google is the default search engine on consumer technology. In 2021 alone, Google spent more than \$26 billion to lock in those default agreements, according to trial testimony.

As a result, much of the speculation about potential remedies has focused on whether Google would be barred from making such deals. In Tuesday's filing, lawyers referred to those distribution deals as a "starting point for addressing Google's unlawful conduct."

To that end, the department said it is also considering asking for structural changes to stop Google from leveraging products such as its Chrome browser, Android operating system, AI products or app store to benefit its search business.

"We've invested billions of dollars in Chrome and Android," Mulholland wrote. "Breaking them off would change their business models, raise the cost of devices, and undermine Android and Google Play in their robust competition with Apple's iPhone and App Store."

Another proposal floated by the government allowing companies to opt out of having their information used by Google when it delivers AI-enhanced responses to consumers' search queries.

"Google's ability to leverage its monopoly power to feed artificial intelligence features is an emerging barrier to competition and risks further entrenching Google's dominance," government lawyers wrote.

Google's blog post response noted that artificial intelligence is a rapidly emerging technology that is the subject of fierce competition in the commercial market.

"There are enormous risks to the government putting its thumb on the scale of this vital industry," Mulholland wrote.

After the government submits its more detailed proposal next month for how to tackle Google's anticompetitive practices. Google in turn will offer its own ideas for how to make fixes in December. Prosecutors will then make their final proposal in March 2025.

Google has been facing intensifying regulatory pressure on both sides of the Atlantic, with European

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Union antitrust enforcers also suggesting that breaking up the company is the only way to satisfy competition concerns about its digital ad business.

On Monday a federal judge ordered Google to open up its Android app store to competition as punishment for maintaining an illegal monopoly in that market. And a federal judge in Virginia is weighing whether Google holds an illegal monopoly in the online advertising technology.

Today in History: October 10, Vice President Spiro Agnew resigns

By The Associated Press undefined

Today is Thursday, Oct. 10, the 284th day of 2024. There are 82 days left in the year.

Today in history:

On Oct. 10, 1973, Vice President Spiro T. Agnew, accused of accepting bribes, resigned his office and pleaded no contest to one count of federal income tax evasion.

Also on this date:

In 1845, the U.S. Naval Academy was established in Annapolis, Maryland, with an inaugural class of 50 students.

In 1911, Chinese revolutionaries launched an uprising that led to the collapse of the Qing (or Manchu) Dynasty and the establishment of the Republic of China.

In 1935, the George Gershwin opera "Porgy and Bess," featuring an all-Black cast, opened on Broadway, beginning a run of 124 performances.

In 1964, the Summer Olympics began in Tokyo, the first Summer Games to be telecast around the world.

In 1966, the Beach Boys' single "Good Vibrations," written by Brian Wilson and Mike Love, was released by Capitol Records.

In 2001, a month after the Sept. 11 attacks, U.S. jets pounded the Afghan capital of Kabul while President George W. Bush unveiled a list of 22 most-wanted terrorists, including Osama bin Laden.

In 2014, Malala Yousafzai (mah-LAH'-lah YOO'-suhf-zeye), a 17-year-old Pakistani girl, and Kailash Satyarthi (KY'-lash saht-YAHR'-thee), a 60-year-old Indian man, were jointly awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for risking their lives for the right of children to receive an education and to live free from abuse.

In 2018, Hurricane Michael, the first to strike the U.S. mainland as a Category 5 hurricane in 26 years, made landfall in Florida.

Today's Birthdays: Actor Peter Coyote is 83. Entertainer Ben Vereen is 78. Actor Charles Dance is 78. Author Nora Roberts is 74. Rock singer David Lee Roth is 70. Country singer Tanya Tucker is 66. Actor Julia Sweeney is 65. Actor Bradley Whitford is 65. Football Hall of Famer Brett Favre is 55. Actor/TV host Mario Lopez is 51. NASCAR Hall of Famer Dale Earnhardt Jr. is 50. Hockey Hall of Famer Chris Pronger is 50.