

Floods have left woman in without power — still

BY MADELINE KING AND SOFI ZEMAN
mking@kcstar.com
szeman@kcstar.com

Abigael Lopez was asleep with her two young children when she heard her neighbors calling out that their homes were flooding during the record rainfall two weeks ago. Now, the ground floor units of the Villa Alegre Apartamentos on Freeman Avenue in Kansas City, Kansas, lay completely empty. Their doors are gone, and walls are cut up. An alarm beeps as you walk through the building. Ruined belongings overflow the dumpster and spill onto the lawn. According to a press release from the KCK Fire Department, apartments flooded with waist-high water, and a natural gas leak created a compound in the air that nearly exploded. First responders were able to turn off the gas line and ventilate the building to prevent an explosion. Lopez lives on one of the building’s higher floors, meaning her apartment was spared among those that were devastated by floodwaters that evening. Even so, her family didn’t make it to the other side of the storms unscathed — she hasn’t had electricity in her home in almost two weeks, and she said the local government hasn’t done anything to help her out. “A mi todavia no me han ayudado en eso,” she said, referring to the lack of help she’s received. With two children and another on the way, Lopez said it’s essential that their electricity be restored, especially after days of sultry heat. Daily high temperatures in the Kan-



MADLINE KING

After the July 17 and 18 floods, nine units in the Villa Alegre Apartamentos were left completely destroyed.

sas City area have regularly been in the 90-degree range in recent weeks. Lopez doesn’t have anywhere else to go, she told The Star, so the family has continued living out of their unit. Her neighbor, who has power, and a cousin have let her and the kids stay in their air conditioning during particularly hot days. Some of her neighbors have since gotten power back. And although she’s called the Board of Public Utilities (BPU), the Unified Government and her property manager, she still hasn’t seen results or received much information on when her power will be restored.

NO HELP FROM THE UG

At a press conference early last week, officials from the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and KCK gathered to discuss aid available to

residents in the aftermath of the July 17 and 18 floods. The area received 7 to 11 inches of rain in 12 hours, officials said, causing flooding to a degree not seen in decades. Mayor Tyrone Garner and Unified Government department heads emphasized their efficiency in delivering assistance to affected residents. “I just want to reassure our public again that our team here in the Unified Government is on point,” Garner said at the event. “We’re out there, and we’re going to continue to work to make sure that these resources are put in the areas where they’re needed the most.” Multiple speakers stressed the importance of residents calling 311 with any concerns or assistance needed in wake of the floods. If callers leave their complete contact information, the government will

reach out with help, they said. They said those who call other city or county numbers will be directed to the right place too. “You can call the mayor’s office as well; we can bridge you to the appropriate resources,” Garner said. But Lopez hasn’t had this experience. She called the Unified Government and the BPU for help with returning her power, but so far, no one has reached out to offer assistance. “Ya llamé a la electricidad, a los del apartamento y los de la ciudad,” she said. “Y nada de nada.” **EVACUATING THE APARTMENT** Taped to the building’s entrance facing North 29th Street is a bright pink slip of paper reading “UNFIT FOR HUMAN USE OR HABITATION.” With it, the Unified

Government ordered all those living at 2903-2917 Freeman Ave. to vacate “immediate(ly).” If residents do not, they could face a fine of up to \$2,500 and even a jail sentence of up to six months, according to the notice. The document — posted only in English, a language Lopez is not fluent in — did not specify whether all or only certain units must be evacuated. “As of today, all buildings have been posted unfit for human habitation,” a Unified Government representative said in an email to The Star on Tuesday. In the emailed statement, officials said that the notice was posted July 23 and cited a lack of hot water and gas as uninhabitable conditions. It set a hearing for Aug. 7 to give “the owner, mortgagee, and all parties in interest” the chance to testify about the building’s conditions and future. “Enforcement of this will not be in place until after the unfit hearing,” the statement read. “It is at that time we will have a better idea/understanding of their plans moving forward.” After the hearing, the Unified Government will have the discretion to enforce the notice to vacate or not. It will have the authority to factor in if forcing people to vacate would “place unnecessary hardship on residents and owners” or if tenants’ health and safety is at risk. **BUILDING MANAGERS RESPOND** As of Tuesday, Lopez was not aware of the Unified Government’s notice or the hearing date, she said. Somehow, neither was Axel Cortez, who works for the apartment’s management company as a project and operations manager. “We know there are nine units that are completely unavailable, with some in total disaster unfortunately,” Cortez

said. “We know we can’t have people in there. But the rest of the units are in good condition. They didn’t have any damage from the water.” Cortez conceded that hot water access is an ongoing issue and confirmed that the gas has been shut off since the floods due to a suspected leak. He said it can’t be turned back on until new water heaters are installed next week. The Unified Government’s notice also states that “a written notice listing all repair, reconstruction, alteration, removal or demolition requirements will be mailed to interested parties.” If these conditions are not met, “the Public Officer or his designee shall institute legal proceedings to demolish or bring the property into compliance.” In its statement to The Star, the Unified Government said they sent notices “to the legal owner and the property manager listed.” “This does not include the requirements, but it does mention that all utility services will need to be restored to all buildings and the commercial interior remodeling being done,” the statement read. A representative from Ranger Management, which oversees the apartments, said their team did not originally receive the mailings. Ranger Management bought the building a little over a year ago, she explained, and the Unified Government sent the mailings to the previous owner. “This was definitely unexpected to happen,” Cortez said, adding that he and others are working to have the apartments functional again within the next two months. Ranger Management temporarily moved residents who lost their homes into four vacant units or hotel rooms, Cortez said, until they can sign leases to move into other properties the group oversees.

Investigation opens into former special prosecutor Smith

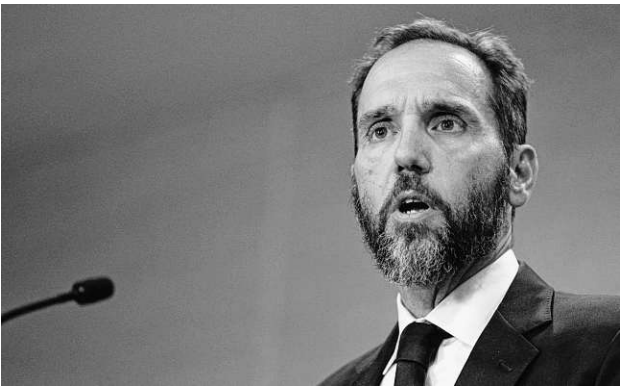
BY SIMON CORLETT
UPI

Officials with the Office of Special Counsel are launching an investigation into Jack Smith, who oversaw criminal probes into President Donald Trump related to the Jan. 6, 2021 insurrection at the U.S. Capitol. The investigation into Smith is related to alleged violations of the Hatch Act, NBC News reported, citing sources within the agency.

Investigators have not yet disclosed any specific evidence against Smith, who headed two criminal investigations, one into Trump’s role in the Jan. 6 insurrection and a second into his handling of classified documents following his first term in the White House. “I appreciate the Office of Special Counsel taking this seriously and launching an investigation into Jack Smith’s conduct. No one is above the law. “Jack Smith’s actions

were clearly driven to hurt President Trump’s election, and Smith should be held fully accountable,” said Senate Intelligence Committee chair Sen. Tom Cotton, R-Ark., told the New York Post in a statement. The U.S. Office of Special Counsel is an independent federal investigative and prosecutorial agency, which also operates as a secure channel for federal whistleblowers. The Hatch Act was passed in 1939 and “limits

certain political activities of federal employees,” while ensuring “that federal programs are administered in a nonpartisan fashion.” Smith’s role as special prosecutor is not related to the Office of Special Counsel. Smith in January resigned from the Justice Department, days before Trump took office for his second term as president. He initially announced his intention to resign following Trump’s victory in the November 2024 election. Last month, Attorney General Pam Bondi fired nine former members of Smith’s former team of



BONNIE CASH UPI

Officials with the Office of Special Counsel are launching an investigation into Jack Smith, who oversaw criminal probes into President Donald Trump related to the Jan. 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol.

federal prosecutors and assistance. That brought the number of firings of employees involved in prosecutorial efforts of Trump to 20.

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TRUMP

The carmaker, American’s largest, is investing \$900 million to manufacture V-8 engines near Buffalo, New York. Vehicles that run on gasoline or diesel now have “a longer runway,” Mary T. Barra, GM’s CEO, said last month. But carmakers cannot give up on electric models. U.S. electric vehicle sales rose just 1.5% in the first six months, according to Cox Automotive. But globally sales rose 28% to

9.1 million vehicles, according to Rho Motion, another research firm. That figure includes the United States and Canada as well as China and the European Union. Carmakers that ignore this fast-growing market may not be in business 10 years from now. Barra acknowledged as much. “Despite slower EV industry growth, we believe the long-term future is profitable electric vehicle production,” she said. The growth of auto-

mous driving technology favors electric vehicles because it is much easier to integrate self-driving software into a car where all the systems are electronic. **EVs are getting better and cheaper.** Tesla’s sales have been declining since last year, falling 14% in the April to June quarter. But the decline stems, in part, from the company’s reliance on two older designs, the Model 3 and Model Y. It is pretty clear that there is strong demand for electric vehicles if they are affordable, stylish and able to travel 300 miles or more between charges.

GM more than doubled its sales of electric vehicles in the second quarter, helped by the Chevrolet Equinox, which has a starting price of around \$35,000. Electric vehicles typically cost thousands of dollars more than cars fueled by gasoline, but the tariffs that Trump has imposed on imported vehicles and parts could narrow the gap. Six of the 10 most American-made cars are electric, according to Cars.com, an online car buying site. The top four are Tesla. Volkswagen’s ID.4 and Kia’s EV6, which roll out of U.S. factories, also made the list.

BIRTHDAYS: AUGUST 4



Britannica

Biographical information from August 4 is from Encyclopaedia Britannica. Explore more at britannica.com.
Barack Obama, president of United States (b. 1961).
Billy Bob Thornton, American actor, director, and writer (b. 1955).
Kishore Kumar, Indian actor, singer, composer, and director (b. 1929).
Louis Armstrong, American musician (b. 1901).
Elizabeth, queen consort of United Kingdom (b. 1900).
Percy Bysshe Shelley, English poet (b. 1792).

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The Kansas City Star

Executive Editor
Greg Farmer
816-234-4321 | gfarmer@kcstar.com
Vice President, Opinion Editor
Yvette Walker
816-234-4079 | ywalker@kcstar.com
VP/Advertising
Stephanie Boggins
816-234-4069 | sboggins@kcstar.com
VP/Advertising Operations
Jane Howard
816-234-4896 | jhoward@kcstar.com